The urban-rural polarisation of political disenchantment: An investigation of social and political attitudes in 30 European countries

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Michael Kenny* and Davide Luca**

Abstract

Despite the prevalent focus upon increasing political divisions between urban and rural Europe, relatively little research has explored whether there is a systemic urban-rural divide in the political and socioeconomic attitudes of citizens across the entire continent. This paper aims to fill this gap. Drawing on individual-level data from the European Social Survey, it explores potential linkages between place of residence and individual attitudes. Our results show that there are strong, and statistically significant, differences between the populations in these different settings. On average, rural dwellers show stronger levels of dissatisfaction with democracy and lower trust in the political system. Yet, while we uncover stark differences in attitudes towards migration and globalisation, we do not find significant variation on some social and economic issues traditionally at the core of left-right cleavages. And our analysis suggests that this spatial divide does not operate in a binary fashion. It is more of a continuum, running on a gradient from inner cities to metropolitan suburbs, towns, and the countryside. The differences are explained by both composition and contextual effects, and underscore the importance of moving beyond 'standard' trade-offs between so-called 'people-based' versus 'place-based' policy approaches to territorial inequality.

Keywords: urban-rural divide; regional inequality; geography of discontent; Europe

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1. Introduction

While, for much of the Twentieth Century, political scientists tended to assume that political cleavages in western democracies revolved around differences in class position and attitudes towards distributional questions and the role of the state, in recent decades there has been a growing emphasis on those associated with various kinds of group identity, and, latterly, with the importance of place (Glaeser and Ward 2006; Kenny 2014; Kriesi 2010). In the US, a large body of work has documented how political differences are increasingly driven by a distinctive – and deepening – geographical cleavage, with almost all large cities being Democratic strongholds and rural counties being a cornerstone for the Republicans (Gimpel and Hui 2015; McKee 2008; Monnat and Brown 2017; Morrill, Knopp, and Brown 2007; Scala and Johnson 2017; Tam Cho, Gimpel, and Hui 2013).

Across Europe too, notable recent political events, such as the UK 2016 Brexit vote, and the 2018 *Gilet Jaunes* protests in France have shed light on marked political divergences between urban and rural places. Yet, despite growing evidence from individual countries such as the UK (Becker, Fetzer, and Novy 2017; Carreras, Irepoglu Carreras, and Bowler 2019; Garretsen et al. 2018; Goodwin and Heath 2016; Jennings and Stoker

2016; Lee, Morris, and Kemeny 2018; MacLeod and Jones 2018), France (Eribon 2013; Guilluy 2016; Ivaldi and Gombin 2015) and Italy (Agnew and Shin 2017, 2020; Rossi 2018), relatively little research has explored in a systematic way whether the growing political divide between urban and rural areas mapped in some countries is apparent across the whole continent. Indeed, given the prevalent focus upon Anglo-American comparisons within the Anglophone literature, there is a pressing need to consider whether the same phenomena are discernible across Europe.

The current paper aims to fill this gap. Drawing on individual-level data from the European Social Survey (ESS), it provides systematic comparative evidence across 30 European countries over the period 2002-2018. We explore links between place of residence and attitudes on a range of different socioeconomic and political issues. To anticipate our conclusion, we find that there is a strong and significant divide between the political outlooks of urban and rural Europe. But this divergence is not best seen in binary terms, and is better understood as a gradient running from inner cities to metropolitan suburbs, towns, and the countryside (as anticipated by Scala and Johnson, 2017). We show how, compared to dwellers in inner urban cores, respondents living in suburbs, towns and rural areas are more likely to be conservative in their orientation, dissatisfied with the functioning of democracy in their country, and less likely to trust the political system, even though they are – strikingly -- more likely to participate in it, especially by voting. However, while our analysis highlights some stark geographical variances in attitudes towards migration and globalisation, we do not find significant variation on issues which have traditionally been at the core of left-right cleavages, such as support for welfare state redistribution. And, finally, we show that these differences are explained by compositional *and* contextual effects.

This article contributes to the growing literatures in the neighbouring disciplinary fields of geography and political science devoted to the spatial dimensions of political disenchantment in three distinctive ways. First, in line with a growing emphasis in much social scientific research on a widening 'cosmopolitan-nationalist' polarization, we show how differences associated with the urban/rural continuum are significant

across a range of attitudinal dimensions. Most recent studies of the 'geography of discontent' (McCann 2019; Rodríguez-Pose 2018) consider the evidence supplied by voting patterns in elections and referendums. Yet, such events may well be linked to candidate-related factors and contingent political developments, and may relate only indirectly to underlying shifts in popular attitudes (Abrams and Fiorina 2012; Ford and Jennings 2019). In fact, many political scientists suggest that electoral campaigns do not change public opinion that much but, rather, 'activate' some considerations over others (Mutz 2018), increasing the extent to which particular issues matter for voters when they choose a candidate. It is, therefore, important to understand in more depth the factors explaining the underlying dynamics of public opinion. We seek to address this challenge using attitudinal data, and our findings suggest that the linkage between place of residence and political attitudes is not confined to attitudes towards iconic and contentious questions such as the EU (Dijkstra, Poelman, and Rodríguez-Pose 2019) or migration (Maxwell 2019). Instead, we conclude, it encompasses a wider range of political and socioeconomic issues including perceptions of political behaviour and trust in political institutions. There are intimations in these results, we suggest, of distinct worldviews that are manifested by spatially segmented parts of the population of many developed democracies.

Second, in line with the work of Scala & Johnson (2017) on the US, we show that the geographical divide in European political attitudes should not be thought of as a dichotomy between urban and rural places – as suggested for instance by Cramer (2016) in relation to the US – but conceived instead as a gradient. This finding is in line with some recent analyses which underline the importance of inequalities within urban places (Baum-Snow, Freedman, and Pavan 2018) and suggest that, as a result, residential segregation between inner urban areas and suburbs is on the rise across many European cities (Musterd et al. 2017). We point to the merits of applying a more finely grained geographical lens to the contemporary urban-rural divide in Europe, arguing in particular for more nuanced, place-sensitive typologies.

The urban-rural polarisation

Third, we provide a preliminary analysis of the factors that may be most significant in explaining the differences along the urban/rural continuum. In his analysis of attitudes to immigration, Maxwell (2019) argues that differences between urban and rural areas are more strongly driven by sociodemographic characteristics – that is, by compositional effects and the geographical sorting of people with different attributes and outlooks – than by the influence of place of residence over individual outlooks. In contrast, we underline how attitudes vary across sociodemographic *and* geographical dimensions. We show that while people's attitudes are heavily stratified by key individual observable characteristics, such as age, education, and occupational status, there is a non-negligible correlation between places and their inhabitants' attitudes towards various political and social issues (Agnew 1987). This conclusion has important implications for the ongoing debate about what kinds of policy solutions are best equipped to address growing territorial inequalities, and whether these should be place-sensitive or not (cf. Barca, McCann, & Rodríguez-Pose, 2012; Crescenzi & Giua, 2019; Iammarino, Rodriguez-Pose, & Storper, 2019).

Further research, we suggest, is needed to disentangle potential compositional effects based on unobservable – rather than observable – characteristics such as intrinsic 'cognitive underpinnings' (cf., for example, Lee et al., 2018; Zmigrod, Rentfrow, & Robbins, 2018). And analysts should also explore in more depth the mechanisms through which the kinds of setting in which people live can influence the development of individual traits, especially during early-age socialisation (Bosquet and Overman 2019; Hackman and Farah 2009; Rentfrow, Gosling, and Potter 2008). Yet, irrespective of whether divides in attitudes are driven by compositional effects or by the contextual influence of places on people, marked demographic sorting and the overlapping of territorial and attitudinal cleavages signal a deepening geographical fracture in European societies which, in the long term, may have significant implications for the challenges of generating social cohesion (Wilkinson 2018) and addressing the implications of rising disenchantment with democracy (Foa et al. 2020).

The paper is structured as follows. Section two reviews the existing literature on the urban-rural polarisation, and develops our main, empirical hypotheses. Section three describes the data and the analytical strategy that we have employed. We then present the key results in section four, and discuss the implications of our findings in section five. In the final section, we offer some discussion of their implications in relation to ongoing policy debates, and suggest areas where further research would be profitable.

2. Political polarisation along the urban-rural divide

The polarization of electorates across the urban-rural divide is by no means a new, or recent, phenomenon. At the peak of the industrial revolution, between the end of the Nineteenth Century and the beginning of the Twentieth, many European and North American countries were divided politically between the interests of rural and small-town dwellers, engaged in agricultural production, and those of urban residents, experiencing rapid technological and socioeconomic change and a new spatial economic order dominated by manufacturing in large urban agglomerations (cf. Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Vidal de la Blache 1913).

In the second half of the Twentieth Century this stark divide faded partially, as sharper political cleavages, which reflected economic issues, class divisions and the role of the state in society, emerged (Lipset and Rokkan 1967). Yet, across many advanced economies, the processes of economic globalisation over the last three decades have generated new socio-economic divides (Ford and Jennings 2019) and contributed to the emergence of a new dimension of political conflict, cutting across these older divisions. Although the extent and nature of this divide remains contested among social scientists (Norris and Inglehart 2019), a growing number of studies show that the classic class-based Left-Right cleavage in party competition is today overlaid by a new division based on education and cultural attitudes. Scholars support this claim with reference to survey data (Tabellini and Gennaioli 2018), the positioning of

political parties (Inglehart and Norris 2016), and the composition of party supporters (Piketty 2018).

Three accounts figure prominently in this debate, each proposing a distinct explanatory framework to explain this new cleavage: "materialism" as opposed to "post-materialism" (Inglehart 1977, 1990, 1997); the divide between "winners" and "losers" of globalisation (Kriesi 1998, 2010); and a "transnational" conflict of values between "liberals" and "conservatives, authoritarians, and/or nationalists" (Hooghe and Marks 2018; De Vries 2018). While each approach emphasizes a specific trigger, the literature overall points to the increasing salience of geography in relation to this new attitudinal cleavage, and to growing political disagreements between cosmopolitan, highly educated, and socially progressive urbanites, and nationalist and socially conservative residents of 'hinterland' areas. The determinants of the recent rise in populism and anti-establishment sentiments across many established democracies are numerous and interlinked.[1] Support for right-wing populist parties relates to a number of variables including age, ethnicity, education and employment. Yet, these fault lines are characterised by many commentators as linked to a distinctive geographical divide, with political differences among inhabitants in urban and rural places becoming increasingly marked.

In the US, a significant amount of work has documented how electoral politics falls increasingly into distinctive spatial patterns, with almost all large cities being Democratic strongholds and rural counties being the cornerstone for the Republicans (Gimpel and Hui 2015; Monnat and Brown 2017; Morrill, Knopp, and Brown 2007; Rodden 2019; Scala and Johnson 2017). While a broad division between 'blue' and 'red'

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[1] In the last years the literature on populism has thrived. See, inter alia: Akkerman, Mudde, & Zaslove, 2013; Ford & Goodwin, 2014; Guiso, Herrera, Morelli, & Sonno, 2019; Inglehart & Norris, 2016; Jens Rydgren, 2010; Kriesi, 2014; Rodrik, 2018; Rooduijn, van der Brug, & de Lange, 2016; Van Gent, Jansen, & Smits, 2014; Zaslove, 2008.

America has been observed for some decades (Abramowitz and Saunders 2008),[2] the emergence of a salient divide between urban and rural areas has become more palpable over time, and was particularly clear during the 2016 presidential campaign (McKee 2008; Wilkinson 2018). Analysing recent opinion polls and the latest US presidential elections, Scala and Johnson (2017) for example identify a consistent gradient of conservative sentiment from the most urban to the most rural counties on a wide range of socioeconomic issues. Their results show that differences in outlook remain statistically significant even after controlling for factors such as education, income, age, ethnicity, and religion.

Across Europe too, there are signs that many different political systems are adapting to this new cleavage, and an increasingly spatially divided electoral geography is emerging (Agnew and Shin 2020; Hooghe and Marks 2018). France is a much-cited exemplar of this trend. There is a growing political divide between the large urban centres – 'globalised', 'gentrified', and increasingly inhabited by cosmopolitans and 'bobos' (bourgeois bohemians) – and the *banlieues* populated by immigrants of recent arrival, and the remaining medium and small-sized cities and rural areas, where long-time immigrants and the 'white' working classes experience economic decline and are increasingly disaffected with the political system (Bacqué et al. 2016; Cusin, Lefebvre, and Sigaud 2016; Eribon 2013; Foa et al. 2020; Guilluy 2016; Ivaldi and Gombin 2015).

Similarly, England has witnessed a gradual 'bifurcation' (Jennings and Stoker 2016) in political terms between people with higher education and good employment opportunities who live in metropolitan areas and those living in 'backwater' areas associated with economic decline, hostility to immigration and the EU, and a stronger sense of English identity (Garretsen et al. 2019; Kenny 2014, 2015). While there is a

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[2] Some scholars have challenged the view of America as a country divided into two clearly distinct and politically homogeneous areas (cf. Fiorina & Abrams, 2008; Fiorina, Abrams, & Pope, 2010; Glaeser & Ward, 2006).

strong regional dimension to the geography of discontent in Britain (Garretsen et al. 2018; McCann 2016, 2019; Tyler et al. 2017), in the UK and elsewhere, the urban-rural fault-line has become increasingly prominent.

Some research into the causes of these spatialized political patterns suggests that the urban-rural political divide has become more intense in recent decades. Exploring a rich dataset on referendum results at the municipal level, Mantegazzi (2018)'s work on Switzerland for example provides a compelling picture of the growing geographical polarisation which, since the 1970s, characterises Swiss politics. This increasingly leads to a distinctive pattern, with voters in large cities positioning themselves in a 'Left-liberal' space as opposed to 'Right-conservative' municipalities that are increasingly clustered in rural areas.

But whilst many commentators observe this pattern in a few, paradigmatic countries, little research has explored whether there is a systemically rooted urban-rural divide in political and socioeconomic attitudes across the whole European continent. And there is still considerable disagreement about the causal dynamics and processes underpinning this division. Two broad explanatory accounts of his deepening divide, respectively focused on composition and contextual effects, are most notable within current academic literature.

The first of these relates to the spatially heterogenous distribution of individuals with different characteristics (composition effects). Research on political disenchantment and populism primarily identifies the archetype of the anti-system supporter based on age, education, and income (Becker, Fetzer, and Novy 2017; Dijkstra, Poelman, and Rodríguez-Pose 2019; Essletzbichler, Disslbacher, and Moser 2018; Ford and Goodwin 2014; Goodwin and Heath 2016). As an example, 'typical' 'left-behind' Brexit supporters have been described as "older, working-class, white voters […] who live on low incomes and lack the skills that are required to adapt and prosper amid the modern, post-industrial economy" (Goodwin and Heath, 2016, p. 325).

Composition effects may be amplified because of increasing demographic 'sorting' among voters along spatial lines (Bishop 2009) – which occurs primarily through the dynamic self-selection of younger, more educated and socially liberal individuals in large, urban cores. While the extent of demographic sorting dynamics and their influence on political outcomes is debated (cf. Abrams & Fiorina, 2012), recent research has established that voters relocating across different US counties are influenced by the partisan composition of their destinations (McDonald 2011; Tam Cho, Gimpel, and Hui 2013). Some researchers contend that this pattern reflects a hardwired preference for homophily – the tendency to favour the presence of others with similar tastes and preferences (Gimpel and Hui 2015; Motyl et al. 2014; Schelling 1971). Others highlight the dramatic transformations that have occurred in the last decades in the technical structure of the economy, and the increased returns which these have brought to those with higher levels of human capital as key factors (Keuschnigg 2019; Moretti 2012). In this changing social landscape, large urban areas incubate more economic opportunities and attract those with greater skills, while, conversely, smaller towns, rural areas and cities with an outdated industrial mix become increasingly 'left behind', losing their younger, more skilled populations and facing economic stagnation or decline (Lee and Luca 2019; Wilkinson 2018). The increased wage bonuses and productivity associated with high skills and education (Baum-Snow, Freedman, and Pavan 2018) may have amplified the geographical self-selection of the highly educated and more liberal-minded into larger urban cores. Driven by these deeply rooted economic dynamics, spatial sorting effects can lead to a growing urban-rural divergence in values and attitudes.

The second explanation focuses on the socio-economic trajectory of places and their contextual role in shaping individual attitudes. Across Europe, there is increasing economic divergence between core cities and areas that are lagging behind in economic terms (Iammarino, Rodriguez-Pose, and Storper 2019). Commentators hence point to an emerging 'geography of discontent', reflecting the unhappiness of people

living in places which are stagnating or facing comparative economic decline (Garretsen et al. 2018; Los et al. 2017; McCann 2019). Rodríguez-Pose (2018, p. 201) for example shows how "[i]t has been thus the places that don't matter, not the 'people that don't matter', that have reacted". Rising opportunities and growth in thriving urban cores not only attracts younger, more educated and more liberal individuals, but also contributes to shifting urban dwellers towards more progressive social values (Friedman 2005) and cosmopolitan preferences (Vertovec and Cohen 2002). Conversely, declining or stagnant material prospects in peripheral towns and rural places tend to generate a growing sense of disaffection, anxiety and resentment, driving citizens to adopt a more protective, "zero-sum, 'us or them' frame of mind" (Wilkinson, 2018, p. 5). Lee et al. (2018), for instance, show that in the Brexit referendum, support for Leave was notably higher for those living in the same county in which they were born than those who had left their county of birth. Importantly, the correlation between residential immobility and Leave voting was only strong in peripheral places where wages had stagnated after the 2008 crisis (Crescenzi, Luca, and Milio 2016), or in areas which had experienced steep recent increases in the number of immigrants moving to them. In times of growing economic inequality, residents of rural areas and small towns seem to have moved towards increasingly socially conservative and anti-liberal positions.

Place-dependent grievances are not confined to economic issues. The differences between urban and rural life, and feelings among rural and town dwellers that their places have been neglected by economic and political elites, have led to growing resentment based on cultural-identity issues which shape a growing sense of mutual alienation (Lichter and Ziliak 2017). As Cramer (2016) argues, what may look like disagreements over specific policy preferences can often be traced back to this more fundamental difference of worldview, which is rooted in questions about identity and contending "ideas about who gets what, who has power, what people are like, and who is to blame" (Cramer, 2016, p 5). In her (ibid.) account, 'rural consciousness' develops out as an attachment to place, and is linked to a sense that politicians and

decision-makers systematically ignore peripheral places, failing to provide them with their fair share of resources, and to acknowledge their distinct lifestyles and values. Identities rooted in peripheral places seem to have, at least partly, come to shape the political preferences of a much larger group of people.

In summary, there is considerable evidence within a wide-ranging body of literature to support the contention that there is a clear political fracture between metropolitan and rural (and semi-urban) communities. But, as yet, it remains unclear whether this pattern works similarly across the European continent. One study – Maxwell (2019) – has provided a body of comparative evidence about popular attitudes towards immigration in European countries. Our analysis builds on his work, seeing to explore a broader range of socioeconomic and political issues, and testing whether differences on these are also reflective of spatial differences. Drawing on the existing literature, our first research hypothesis is the following:

H.1 = There are discernible differences in the collective outlooks of people who live in urban and rural places.

But, as Scala & Johnson (2017) suggest in relation to the US case, it may be misleading to think of the urban/rural divide in dichotomous terms. 'Rural America' is an elusive and deceptive term, incorporating a great diversity of types of place (ibid.). Similarly, even within metropolitan areas, there are significant differences between urban cores and suburbs (Baum-Snow, Freedman, and Pavan 2018; Musterd et al. 2017). Drawing on such insights, our second research hypothesis is the following:

H.2 = the urban/rural divide is best understood as a continuum rather than a dichotomy.

In addition, we aim to provide a preliminary exploration on the determinants of attitudinal differences across places, distinguishing between composition and place effects, based on our attitudinal data. We test whether differences in attitudes across

the urban/rural continuum might not be exclusively explained by compositional effects – that is, by the sorting of younger, more educated and economically better off individuals in large urban centres. Our last two hypotheses are the following:

H.3 = differences in attitudes across the urban/rural continuum are explained by compositional effects.

H.4 = differences in attitudes across the urban/rural continuum are not exclusively explained by composition effects and, hence, are linked to some of the intrinsic characteristics of places.

3. Research design

3.1 Data

We analyse pooled, cross-sectional individual-level data from the European Social Survey. Since its inception in 2002, the Survey has conducted, every other year, face-to-face interviews across most participating countries. We exploit data on the EU27 Member States plus the UK, Norway and Switzerland from all the nine available waves, covering the period 2002-2018. The Survey is representative of all persons aged 15 and over, regardless of their nationality or language (we exclude respondents below 18). Individuals are selected through a multi-stage random probability sampling procedure. The ESS uses sampling designs where some groups or regions have higher probabilities of selection. To reduce sampling errors and potential non-response bias, we apply country-specific ESS post-stratification weights constructed using information on age, gender, education, and region. [3] Furthermore, we also apply country population size weights to account for the fact that countries participating in the ESS have relatively similar net sample sizes (roughly between 900 and 2700 individuals per country) even if the size of their general population varies

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[3] Cf. https://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/methodology, accessed on 5 July 2019.

considerably (e.g. from 1.1 million residents in Estonia to 71 million in Germany during ESS wave 8). These weights ensure that each country is represented in proportion to its actual population size.

3.2 Model and Estimation strategy

To test our research hypotheses, we estimate the following equation:

$$Y^J_{i,t} = \beta_1 U_{i,t} + \beta_2 X^L_{i,t} + \alpha_c + d_t + \varepsilon_{i,c,t} \qquad (1)$$

Where Y is a vector of ordinal variables measuring individual attitudes on each issue j of person i in the ESS wave t. U is our main regressor of interest, and represents a categorical variable indicating whether each respondent resides in a big city (the baseline category), in the suburbs/outskirts of a big city, in a town/small city, in a country village, or in a farm/home in the countryside. Alas, due to the nature of the data we cannot control for more fine-grained geographical determinants. While this is a potential limitation of the analysis, in our approach we follow earlier work on the urban/rural divide (Maxwell 2019) and aim to maximise the cross-country coverage offered by the ESS.

X is a vector of sociodemographic controls L which may affect individual attitudes. European countries are highly unequal in many geographical (e.g. land size) and socioeconomic aspects. We hence add state fixed-effects (FE) α_c, which are included to absorb any country-specific idiosyncrasies. We also add ESS wave fixed-effects d_t, to account for cross-sectional common shocks throughout the years. $\varepsilon_{i,c,t}$ is the error term. We adopt robust standard errors in all regressions.

Each of the dependent variables J included in the vector Y is either a dummy or ordinal categorical. In these cases, adopting a linear regression model (cf., for instance, Maxwell, 2019) would be inappropriate because the assumptions of OLS are violated. We hence estimate model (1) by means of a logit estimator when the outcome is binary,

or by means of a proportional odds estimator (ordinal logit) when the outcome is ordinal categorical. In the second case, we assume that, for each outcome j, there is only one model and one set of coefficients, and the only dependent variable parameter to change across the values of the explanatory ordinal variable are the specific intercepts α (the cut-off points) – what is called the proportional odds assumption. Brant tests, available on request, confirm the assumption is not violated (significant at the 1% confidence level).

It is important to bear in mind that this analysis does not claim to provide a causal interpretation of the link between place of residence and political attitudes. Instead, it seeks to present a broad and systematic analysis of a set of quantitative, stylised facts, which might well be explored in more depth, with the use of more advanced causal-inference tools, in future research.

3.3   Variables and definitions

Y is a vector of either binary or ordinal categorical variables measuring individual attitudes on each issue j of person i in the ESS wave t. We consider ten issues, grouped along two main dimensions:

Attitudes towards the political system and political engagement. We are, first, interested in the link between place of residence and individual attitudes towards the political system, as well as the ways in which people engage with politics. We focus on attitudinal responses and views of modes of political behaviour as these are also revealing expressions of deeper-lying attitudes towards the political system. We explore, specifically, the extent to which people engage via conventional political channels, such as voting, and the extent to which respondents evince trust in political parties, since recent research has identified a close correlation between discontent with the parties and a deeper mistrust of the political system (Bromley-Davenport, MacLeavy, and Manley 2019; Cramer 2016). Relatedly, we explore the extent to which people feel satisfied with the way in which democracy functions in their country. To provide a comparison, we also present evidence on how people feel satisfied about

their life more generally, in order to help us understand better the nature and extent of individual satisfaction and dissatisfaction with politics.

Attitudes towards specific issues. We are also interested in exploring how people in different places along the urban/rural continuum respond to specific socioeconomic questions. We first consider people's self-placement along the left-right political spectrum, and then explore their attitudes in three areas: welfare state support, which is conventionally treated as integral to the left/right divide; law and order, and trust in the police, drawing on the extensive literature on the rise of 'authoritarian values' (Foa and Mounk 2016); and attitudes towards globalisation, which we consider via perceptions of immigrants and attitudes towards the EU, where we draw from an emerging literature on a new 'transnational cleavage' in politics (Ford and Jennings 2019; Hooghe and Marks 2018). Political disenchantment has been widely interpreted as an essentially populist reaction against elite politicians who are perceived as being increasingly globalist in their orientation by those more inclined to identify with national identities and social traditions (Goodhart 2017; Inglehart and Norris 2016, 2017), and our findings shed light on the geographically rooted nature of these beliefs.

As anticipated, *U* represents a categorical variable indicating whether each respondent resides in the inner part of a large city (the baseline category), the suburbs/outskirts of a big city, a town/small city, a country village, or a farm/home in the countryside. Out of the total pooled sample, 19.46% of respondents report that they live in a big inner city, 12.04% in suburbs, 30.59% in towns or small cities, 31.41% in a country village, and 6.5% in a farm or isolated home in the countryside.

X is a vector of individual sociodemographic controls *L* which may affect attitudes, and for which micro-level information is available. In particular, *X* includes the following covariates:

Age. Following a pattern clearly established in the literature, we may expect attitudes to be highly stratified by age groups, with younger generations being more likely to

embrace cosmopolitan and progressive views (inter alia: Goodwin & Heath, 2016; Harris & Charlton, 2016) and, at the same time, being less engaged in electoral politics, given their familiarity with social media and less conventional forms of political engagement (Foa et al. 2020). The variable is expressed in Ln.

Gender. As customary, we control for the gender of the respondent.

Educational attainment. Some contributions to the growing literature on political discontent have established a positive association between lower degrees of education and higher levels of anti-establishment feeling, as well as more nationalistic/inward-looking sentiments (inter alia: Becker et al., 2017; Dijkstra et al., 2019). We hence control for respondents' highest level of education attainment by including dummy variables for each of the ISCED (International Standard Classification of Education) levels.

Native. We add a dummy for people born in the country of residence, as we may expect this variable to affect our outcomes.

Employment status. We similarly include dummy variables for each of the following statuses: employed in paid work, education, unemployed - looking for job, unemployed – not looking for job, permanently sick or disabled, retired, in community or military service, housework or looking after children, and other.

Occupation. The literature on political discontent has linked growing resentment with economic insecurity in sectors and occupations under higher threat from automation and trade competition (Autor et al. 2016; Ballard-Rosa et al. 2017; Colantone and Stanig 2018). We hence additionally include dummies for each different type of occupation. We follow the International Labour Office's (ILO) two-digit ISCO-08 (International Standard Classification of Occupations) codes, distinguishing between each of the 50 different categories (out of the 96 codes) represented in the ESS sample.

Unemployment spells. While employment status captures current unemployment, we include a dummy for respondents who, in previous years, have been unemployed for more than three months.[4]

Partner's unemployment. We also include a dummy if a respondent's partner is unemployed.

Benefits. We control for whether the main source of household income claims state benefits. We include this variable, as well as the following ones, to account for potential divides between "winners" and "losers" in the contemporary economy.

Household income feelings. We create a dummy capturing whether respondents feel that life with their present household income is difficult or very difficult.

General economic satisfaction. The variable captures the overall level of individual satisfaction towards the national economy.

Research on the "geography of discontent" has pointed to a link between political disenchantment and relative regional economic status and decline (McCann 2019; Rodríguez-Pose 2018). In the final part of the analysis we will hence also include three regional-level economic indicators which may affect individual attitudes. (While for most countries the ESS matches respondents to their NUTS2 level region, in some cases persons are matched with either NUTS1 or NUTS3 regional identifiers. See Appendix A.1 for more details.) The variables we consider are:

Average regional per-capita GDP. This is included to account for the overall economic development of the region where respondents live.

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[4] Data on long-term unemployment is unfortunately missing for the majority of respondents.

Regional per-capita GDP growth. We control for changes in GDP levels over the previous four years.[5]

% ratio regional per-capita GDP / national average. We add a measure of relative regional economic wealth.

Appendix A.2 reports key weighted summary statistics, while Appendix A.3 provides a detailed description for each variable.

4. Results

4.1 Baseline results

This section presents the baseline results of our analysis. In Table 1, we explore the overall differences in attitudes that we find along the urban/rural continuum, when not controlling for composition effects. For each issue j, the table presents the proportional odds ratios (i.e. the exponentiation of the 'raw' logit/ordinal logit coefficients) of respondents living in each of the geographical categories compared to respondents residing in large urban cores, the baseline category. In all models, we include country and year fixed-effects.

The first four columns of Table 1 report outputs for attitudes towards modes of political engagement and the political system, and illuminate the extent to which people engage via 'traditional' political channels such as voting (column one), whether they trust political parties (column two), or whether they are satisfied with democracy in their country (column three). And, as a point of comparison, we also report respondents' satisfaction with life (column four). Column five provides insights into people's self-placement on the left-right spectrum, while the last five models focus on specific socioeconomic issues. Models six and seven, respectively, focus on attitudes

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5 We calculate variations over an even-numbered interval of years so that the measure coincides with ESS waves.

towards welfare state support and trust in the police. Finally, the last three models report results relating to the 'transnational cleavage', namely perceptions towards immigrants (columns eight and nine) and attitudes towards the EU (trust in the European Parliament, column ten). The results broadly confirm our prior assumptions, and provide strong evidence in support of hypothesis H.1. Across most issues covered, there are stark and statistically significant differences between urban and rural places. Besides, in line with hypothesis H.2, Table 1 shows that the divide in attitudes is a gradient linked to urban density, running on a continuum from inner cities to suburbs, towns, villages, and isolated rural houses.

Table 1. Place of residence and individual attitudes: robust logit / ordinal logit estimates.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
	Attitudes towards the political system				Attitudes towards specific issues					
	Voted in elections	Trust in parties	Satisfaction with democracy	Satisfaction with life	L-R placement	Welfare state support	Trust in police	Migration good for economy	Migration good for culture	Trust in EU Parl.
Suburbs	1.102***	0.902***	0.961*	1.049**	1.169***	1.012	1.016	0.837***	0.806***	0.830***
	(0.038)	(0.021)	(0.022)	(0.024)	(0.026)	(0.024)	(0.023)	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.018)
Town	1.029	0.884***	0.895***	1.038**	1.180***	0.941***	1.035**	0.716***	0.701***	0.802***
	(0.027)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.018)	(0.021)	(0.017)	(0.018)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.014)
Village	1.150***	0.821***	0.849***	1.169***	1.366***	0.937***	1.063***	0.633***	0.602***	0.710***
	(0.030)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.020)	(0.024)	(0.017)	(0.018)	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.012)
Rur. house	1.335***	0.838***	0.829***	1.271***	1.572***	0.967	1.075**	0.619***	0.544***	0.649***
	(0.069)	(0.027)	(0.026)	(0.041)	(0.051)	(0.032)	(0.033)	(0.020)	(0.018)	(0.020)
Observations	244,690	222,293#	244,690	244,690	244,690	244,690	244,690	244,690	244,690	244,690
Country FE	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Year FE	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Ind. ctrls	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no
Econ. status	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no

Robust standard errors in parentheses *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. # Not available for ESS wave 1.

Controlling for country and year idiosyncrasies, respondents living outside large inner cities are, on average, significantly more likely to vote. At the same time, however, they tend to show less trust towards the political system. For instance, the odds of somebody voting, or reporting a one-unit higher level of trust in parties (which is measured on a scale 0-10), if they live on a farm or in an isolated rural area (the last category), are, respectively, 33.5% higher and 16.2% lower than those of an average resident of a large urban core. These results suggest that, while levels of trust in the

political system are lower in rural areas, in these places traditional modes of political engagement are more prevalent. [6] Our results, more generally, confirm that the residents of these places are far less likely to engage in non-conventional political behaviours, like signing petitions and boycotting products. [7] But they are also, paradoxically, more sceptical than their urban counterparts about the political system and the choices it presents them with.

In line with characterisations of a cosmopolitan/conservative divide between large urban centres and elsewhere (Guilluy 2016), the results of column five show that people living in urban fringes, towns and the countryside are significantly more likely to identify as conservatives, tending to place themselves on the right of the political spectrum. As an example, the odds of a person living in a country house feeling one-unit closer to the political right on the left-right spectrum (which is measured on a scale 0-10, where zero is left and 10 is right) is 57.2% higher.[8]

Interestingly, however, we do not find any substantial difference in support for the welfare state (model six), an issue which has traditionally played an important role in left-right political cleavages in western democracies, or, indeed, in the trust they place in the police. It may well be that in the era of populism, worries about welfare and law and order are no longer a source of significant divergence between those who live in different parts of a country.

By contrast, results from the last three models provide clear evidence of a stark urban/rural divide on issues associated with the new 'transnational cleavage' (Hooghe and Marks 2018; Kriesi 2010). The results of columns eight and nine show significant

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[6] Levels of trust in parties are virtually identical to levels of trust in politicians. By contrast, levels of trust in the national parliament are slightly lower, consistent with the hypothesis that disenchanted rural dwellers may be more trustful of individuals or specific political parties that the political system overall. These additional results are available on request.

[7] These additional results are available on request.

[8] Results not presented but available on request equally show statistically significant differences on matters such as family issues and women rights.

differences in attitudes towards international immigration. As an example, compared to an inner-city dweller, the odds for a rural home resident reporting a one-unit higher level of belief in the positive role of migration in enriching the national culture (measured on a scale 0-10) are more than 55% lower. A very similar picture emerges with respect to attitudes towards the EU (column ten).

In Appendix B.1 we plot the predicted probabilities for models three and eight from Table 1. The graphs provide visual evidence of the differences in attitudes across the urban/rural continuum.

In table 2 we test hypotheses H.3 and H.4, and present the results, controlling for individual observable characteristics. We are unable to control for unobservable factors such as cognitive traits and personality types. Nevertheless, we work from the assumption that any residual correlation between place of residence and attitudes that is not explained by personal socioeconomic characteristics might well be related to places, and their contextual effects. With the exception of life satisfaction and, partially, also for trust in the police, for all other outcomes the differences across places

Table 2. Place of residence and individual attitudes: robust logit / ordinal logit estimates controlling for sociodemographic and economic individual characteristics.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
	Attitudes towards the political system				Attitudes towards specific issues					
	Voted in elections	Trust in parties	Satisfaction with democracy	Satisfaction with life	L-R placement	Welfare state support	Trust in police	Migration good for economy	Migration good for culture	Trust in EU Parl.
Suburbs	1.068*	0.934***	0.994	1.064***	1.129***	1.043*	1.021	0.905***	0.882***	0.888***
	(0.038)	(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.024)	(0.025)	(0.025)	(0.023)	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.020)
Town	1.058**	0.947***	0.971*	1.110***	1.144***	1.019	1.071***	0.841***	0.824***	0.893***
	(0.029)	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.020)	(0.021)	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.016)
Village	1.189***	0.882***	0.919***	1.252***	1.272***	1.022	1.094***	0.793***	0.769***	0.811***
	(0.033)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.022)	(0.023)	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.015)
Rur. house	1.262***	0.903***	0.897***	1.392***	1.389***	1.051	1.094***	0.800***	0.738***	0.768***
	(0.068)	(0.030)	(0.029)	(0.046)	(0.046)	(0.035)	(0.035)	(0.026)	(0.024)	(0.025)
Observations	244,690	222,293#	244,690	244,690	244,690	244,690	244,690	244,690	244,690	244,690
Country FE	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Year FE	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Ind. ctrls	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Econ. status	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes

Robust standard errors in parentheses *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. # Not available for ESS wave 1.

after conditioning on individual covariates reduce in magnitude and significance, lending support to hypothesis H.3.

In Appendices A.4 and A.5 we break down the results of Table 2, respectively controlling for only sociodemographic or only economic observables, to explore the extent to which composition effects are linked to demographic factors such as education, age, and indigeneity, as opposed to labour market and economic factors. The results suggest that both groups of regressors are important in explaining attitudinal differences along the urban/rural continuum (in fact, including either group leads to relatively similar reductions in the size of the urban/rural coefficients). Among the economic regressors, additional tests we ran suggest that only employment status and sector of occupation play a role in mediating the link between place of residence and individual attitudes, while proxies for individual deprivation such as being dependent on public benefits, anxiety about household income and overall satisfaction with the economy, have a very minor mediating effects.[9]

In Appendices A.6 and A.7 we stratify the sample of Table 2 respectively distinguishing between Western European countries (EU14 Member States plus UK, Norway, and Switzerland) and the 13 countries which joined the EU in the 2004/07 enlargements, most of which were formerly part of the Eastern Bloc. The outputs suggest how attitudinal heterogeneity along the urban/rural continuum is particularly pronounced across all the countries of Western Europe. By contrast, EU13 Members show significantly less marked differences.

In Appendices B.2, B.3, and B.4 we then plot the predicted probabilities for models three and eight of Table 2. In each of the appendices we plot probabilities distinguishing between age groups, educational attainments, and occupation, and holding other variables constant at their means. As the results suggest, the role of age, education and occupation in explaining variation in attitudes is significantly larger

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[9] These additional results are available on request.

than the residual variation attributable to idiosyncratic place effects. Hence, the findings from Table 2 suggest that attitudes are significantly stratified by sociodemographic measures, as suggested, for instance, by Maxwell (2019).

Nevertheless, we underscore how, even after controlling for individual observable characteristics, places still have a non-negligible correlation with people's political attitudes, especially on issues such as voting behaviours (column 1 of Table 2), left-right placement (column 5), and migration and globalization (i.e. the dimensions relating to the 'new transnational cleavage, columns 8 to 10). For instance, compared to an inner-city dweller, even after controlling for individual observables, the odds for a rural home resident reporting a one-unit higher level of satisfaction with democracy in their country (measured on a scale 0-10) are more than 10% lower, while the odds of them reporting a one-unit higher level of belief in the positive role of migration in enriching the national culture (measured on a scale 0-10) are more than 26% lower. In other words, we do not fully reject hypothesis H.4, but instead conclude that, while compositional effects are very important in shaping attitudes, they are not sufficient to explain the urban/rural divide in political views in these European countries.

To understand what may explain the link between place and individual attitudes, we finally estimate equation (1) controlling for sociodemographic observables and economic status while also adding regional economic characteristics. Before wave 4 the ESS did not report respondents' region of residence. Besides, not all individuals are matched with a regional identifier, while we do not have regional economic data for the latest ESS wave 9. We are hence able to merge regional-level characteristics to only waves 4-8 and a sub-set of respondents. (For comparison, Appendix A.8 re-estimates the regressions of Table 2 on the restricted sample. With the exception of 'Satisfaction with democracy', which loses significance, results are overall similar to those from the full sample.) Results, reported in Appendix A.9, suggest that controlling for regional economic dynamics has only a minor effect on the link between place of residence and individual socio-political attitudes. Additional tests we ran

equally suggest that the regional economic variables do not act as moderators, as their interactions with place of residence are statistically insignificant.[10] While some recent analyses of the "revenge of places that don't matter" (Dijkstra, Poelman, and Rodríguez-Pose 2019; Rodríguez-Pose 2018) have underlined a link between contemporary political grievances and territorial economic stagnation and decline, we conclude that differences in attitudes along the urban-rural continuum are primarily linked to cultural-identity issues, as highlighted for example by Cramer (2016).

5. Discussion and implications for policy

These findings carry significance for debates prevalent in both academic and policy circles in relation to two broad, related phenomena. One is the growth of political disenchantment in many non-metropolitan locations across Europe, and the fertile soil this provides for nationalist and populist parties and causes. The other is the growing debate across Europe and other mature democracies about what kinds of policy agenda and political response are required in order to re-engage the inhabitants of what are commonly termed 'left-behind' places.

In relation to current debates about the underpinnings and scope of political disenchantment, our findings suggest the importance of a place-sensitive conception of this phenomenon, and simultaneously serve to undermine overly generalised characterisations of 'rural consciousness' or 'left-behind' disillusion – concepts that have become staples of media commentary and figure in academic analysis (Cramer 2016; Harris and Charlton 2016). The clear gradient that we identify in terms of political attitudes and social values, and their correlation with different spatial scales and kinds of community – ranging from metropolitan centres at one end of the spectrum through to more remote, rural areas at the other – suggest the need for a more detailed and contextual understanding of the geography of disillusion (see also Rossi 2018). These findings also underscore the importance of a deep appreciation of

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[10] They are available on request.

the underpinning economic and cultural dynamics which are generating such disparate and rivalrous social outlooks in different parts of these countries. While our study is not designed to resolve the question of causality, its main findings lend support to the contention that composition effects are necessary, but not sufficient, to explain differences in attitudes across the urban/rural continuum. Even though attitudes are highly stratified by individual characteristics such as age, educational attainments, and occupation, place still appears to have a non-negligible correlation with the values and outlook of a large number of citizens. More work is needed to understand better the mechanism through which this relationship works. Recent research has shown how place of birth and the context where individuals spend their "impressionable years" – i.e. the period of late adolescence and early adulthood during which people form durable political attitudes (Jeannet and Drazanova 2019) – have a significant influence in moulding both observable characteristics such as education (Bosquet and Overman 2019) and unobservable cognitive characteristics and capacities (Rentfrow, Gosling, and Potter 2008). Even in some of the most dynamic and developed economies in the world, it appears that where you are born and grow up is one of the most important facts about the life of any citizen, and this should give policy-makers food for thought. There are large numbers of people resident in areas where trust in politics and the political system is low, and where socially liberal values have only a thin presence. Yet, successful majoritarian politics require that parties of the political mainstream find ways to win the support of many of these voters, while also pursuing policies – in areas like climate change or migration – which may well be anathema to many of them.

This challenge connects with the second main implication of these results. This concerns the growing political focus upon the 'left behind' – a category that is both ubiquitous and contested. Our analysis suggests that there are degrees of 'left behindness' in terms of political worldviews, and that a firmer appreciation of the geographical specificities of different rural areas, towns and cities is integral to a more

contextually informed and tailored policy responses to the challenges posed by inter- and intra-regional inequality (Iammarino, Rodriguez-Pose, and Storper 2019; Rossi 2018). For instance, research has shown how the European Cohesion Policy has contributed to generating economic growth in rural areas close to urban agglomerations, but not in those farther away from cities (Gagliardi and Percoco 2016). Hence, 'place-sensitive' development policies require a deeper and more contextual appreciation of the different patterns of economic development apparent in different places (Dijkstra, Garcilazo, and McCann 2013; Iammarino, Rodriguez-Pose, and Storper 2019). And, following recent debates about how best to tackle inter-territorial inequalities, our findings underscore the importance of moving beyond 'standard' trade-offs between so-called 'people-based' and 'place-based' policy approaches (Barca, McCann, and Rodríguez-Pose 2012; Kline and Moretti 2014) and support the idea of integrated policy frameworks that bring together individual (micro) and territorial (meso) logics (Iammarino, Rodriguez-Pose, and Storper 2019).

Finally, this paper offers a challenge to the ingrained tendency in the worlds of Anglophone scholarship and media punditry to foreground the UK and the US as the leading exemplars of the political disruption associated with rapid techno-economic change in the contemporary period. Our results lead instead to the conclusion that there are important trends and dynamics at work across nearly all developed European economies that are exercising a powerful impact upon the public attitudes and social orientations of people resident in these different contexts. Of course, there are still key differences of political economy, history and institutional structure at work in these different countries and regions, and these need to be given due analytical consideration. But the common patterning of these results, and the close linkages they suggest between the size and kinds of community in which many people live, and how they feel about their country and its politics, lead us to conclude that the Anglo-American bias inherent in much discourse on the 'left behind' needs to be challenged. Understood as a wider phenomenon, we are much more likely to grasp the underlying

economic and cultural dynamics that are driving and perpetuating these spatially embedded patters of political disillusion.

6. Conclusion

Drawing on individual-level data from the European Social Survey (ESS), this paper explores linkages between place of residence and attitudes on a range of different socioeconomic and political issues, providing systematic comparative evidence across 30 European countries over the period 2002-2018. We find both that there is a strong and significant divide between urban and rural Europe, and that this is not best seen in binary terms but as a gradient running from inner cities to metropolitan suburbs, towns, and the countryside. We also show that these differences are best explained by a mixture of composition and contextual effects, rather than through an emphasis on either of these kinds of factor alone.

Our analysis shows how the link between place of residence and political attitudes is not confined to attitudes towards iconic and contentious questions such as the EU (Dijkstra, Poelman, and Rodríguez-Pose 2019) or migration (Maxwell 2019). Instead, we conclude, it encompasses a wider range of political and socioeconomic issues. In particular, we show how, compared to dwellers in inner urban cores, respondents living in suburbs, towns and rural areas are systematically more likely to identify as right-wing, dissatisfied with the functioning of democracy in their country, and less likely to trust the political system. But they still tend to be more likely to vote, a finding which has an important bearing on current debates about the future of democratic politics (Runciman 2018). And, while we uncover stark differences in attitudes towards migration and globalisation along geographical lines, we do not find significant variation on issues which have traditionally been at the core of left-right cleavages, such as support for welfare state redistribution. This too is an important finding which may add weight to the claims of those analysts who maintain that the emergence of new cleavages – around age, identity and place – in democratic politics

has resulted in the depoliticisation of some of the questions which were pivotal to the political alignments and identities of earlier periods (Ford and Jennings 2019; Kriesi 2010; De Vries 2018).

Second, in line with the work of Scala & Johnson (2017) on the US, we show that the geographical divide in European political attitudes should not be thought of as a dichotomy between urban vs. rural places but, instead, as a gradient. Our analysis suggests that there are degrees of 'left behindness' in terms of political worldviews, and that a firmer appreciation of the geographical specificities of different rural areas, towns and cities is integral to a more contextually informed and tailored policy responses to the challenges posed by inter- and intra-regional inequality (Iammarino, Rodriguez-Pose, and Storper 2019; Rossi 2018).

Finally, we provide a preliminary analysis of the factors that may be most significant in explaining differences along the urban/rural continuum. We contribute to an on-going debate about whether these are driven by sociodemographic characteristics – that is, by compositional effects and the geographical sorting of people with different attributes and outlooks – or by place effects (Abreu and Öner 2020; Maxwell 2019). On the basis of our finding, we underline how attitudes vary across both sociodemographic and geographical dimensions. And, we show that while people's attitudes are heavily stratified by key individual observable characteristics, such as age, education, and occupational status, places still have a non-negligible correlation with people's attitudes on a variety of political and social issues. This conclusion, we suggest, carries implications for ongoing debates about what kinds of policy programmes are best equipped to address growing territorial inequalities. Moreover, place-sensitive development policies will have to be developed in a way that integrates an understanding of the different levels of economic development of places, but also their degree of urbanisation and proximity to urban agglomerations. Gagliardi and Percoco (2016), for instance, show how the EU Cohesion Policy has benefitted rural areas close to large cities but not more remote areas, which hence need to be the target of specific policy measures. Additionally, we observe the importance of moving

beyond 'standard' trade-offs between so-called 'people-based' versus 'place-based' policy approaches (Barca, McCann, and Rodríguez-Pose 2012; Kline and Moretti 2014) and, by contrast, point to the need to develop integrated frameworks combining both individual (micro) and territorial (meso) logics (Iammarino, Rodriguez-Pose, and Storper 2019).

The paper does not claim to provide a causal interpretation of the link between place of residence and political attitudes, but, instead, seeks to present a broad and systematic analysis of a set of quantitative, stylised facts. Each of these could be explored in more depth, and with the use of more advanced causal-inference tools. Future research could in particular explore how and why the kinds of setting where people live can influence the development of individual traits, especially during early-age socialisation (Bosquet and Overman 2019; Hackman and Farah 2009; Rentfrow, Gosling, and Potter 2008). Besides, further work is needed to disentangle potential compositional effects based on unobservable – rather than observable – characteristics such as intrinsic 'cognitive underpinnings' (cf., for example, Lee et al., 2018; Zmigrod, Rentfrow, & Robbins, 2018).

Overall, we find that, irrespective of whether divides in attitudes are driven by compositional effects or the contextual influence of places on people, marked demographic sorting and the overlapping of territorial and attitudinal cleavages signal a deepening geographical fracture in European societies which, in the long term, may have significant implications for the challenges of generating social cohesion and renewing the legitimacy of democratic politics (Wilkinson 2018).

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Annex

Table A1. Regional levels of the ESS microdata (available for waves 4 to 8).

Country	ESS4	ESS5	ESS6	ESS7	ESS8
Austria				Nuts 2	Nuts 2
Belgium	Nuts 1	Nuts 2	Nuts 2	Nuts 2	Nuts 2
Bulgaria	Nuts 3	Nuts 3	Nuts 3		
Croatia	Nuts 2	Nuts 2			
Cyprus	Lau	Nuts 1	Nuts 1		
Czechia	Nuts 2	Nuts 3	Nuts 3	Nuts 3	Nuts 3
Denmark	Nuts 2	Nuts 2	Nuts 2	Nuts 2	
Estonia	Nuts 3	Nuts 3	Nuts 3	Nuts 3	Nuts 3
Finland	Nuts 2	Nuts 3	Nuts 3	Nuts 3	Nuts 3
France	Nuts 1	Nuts 2	Nuts 2	Nuts 2	Nuts 2
Germany	Nuts 1	Nuts 1	Nuts 1	Nuts 1	Nuts 1
Greece	Nuts 2	Nuts 2			
Hungary	Nuts 2	Nuts 3	Nuts 3	Nuts 3	Nuts 3
Iceland			Nuts 3		Nuts 3
Ireland	Nuts 2	Nuts 3	Nuts 3	Nuts 3	Nuts 3
Italy			Nuts 2		Nuts 2
Latvia	Nuts 3				
Lithuania		Nuts 3	Nuts 3	Nuts 3	Nuts 3
Netherlands	Nuts 3	Nuts 2	Nuts 2	Nuts 2	Nuts 2
Norway	Nuts 2	Nuts 2	Nuts 2	Nuts 2	Nuts 2
Poland	Nuts 2	Nuts 2	Nuts 2	Nuts 2	Nuts 2
Portugal	Nuts 2	Nuts 2	Nuts 2	Nuts 2	Nuts 2
Romania	Nuts 2				
Slovakia	Nuts 3	Nuts 3	Nuts 3		
Slovenia	Nuts 3	Nuts 3	Nuts 3	Nuts 3	Nuts 3
Spain	Nuts 2	Nuts 2	Nuts 2	Nuts 2	Nuts 2
Sweden	Nuts 2	Nuts 3	Nuts 3	Nuts 3	Nuts 3
Switzerland	Nuts 2	Nuts 2	Nuts 2	Nuts 2	Nuts 2
United Kingdom	Nuts 1	Nuts 1	Nuts 1	Nuts 1	Nuts 1

Table A2. Weighted descriptive statistics

Variable	Obs.	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Domicile: inner city	246,467	0.198	0.398	0	1
Domicile: suburbs	246,467	0.124	0.329	0	1
Domicile: town	246,467	0.310	0.462	0	1
Domicile: village	246,467	0.302	0.459	0	1
Domicile: rural house	246,467	0.066	0.249	0	1
Age	246,467	2.008	0.783	1	3
Gender	246,467	1.498	0.500	1	2
Education attainment	246,467	3.438	2.191	0	7
Employment status	246,467	3.003	2.574	1	9
Occupation ISCO code	246,467	47.743	24.744	0	96
Native	246,467	1.061	0.240	1	2
Unemployment spells	246,467	1.716	0.451	1	2
Partner's unemployment	246,467	0.019	0.137	0	1
Benefits	246,467	0.040	0.196	0	1
Household income satisfaction	246,467	0.208	0.406	0	1
General economic outlook	246,467	4.743	2.469	0	10
Regional per-capita GDP (Ln)	103,816	9.928	0.723	7.580	11.219
Change in regional per-capita GDP	103,816	1.982	0.806	1	3
Regional/national per-capita GDP % ratio	103,816	97.196	29.001	42.814	231.282
Voted in elections	246,467	1.819	0.385	1	2
Trust in parties	224,067	3.665	2.316	0	10
Satisfaction with democracy	246,467	5.347	2.447	0	10
Satisfaction with life	246,467	7.086	2.137	0	10
L-R placement	246,467	5.104	2.186	0	10
Welfare state support	246,467	2.168	1.046	1	5
Trust in the police	246,467	6.233	2.418	0	10
Migration good for economy	246,467	5.049	2.394	0	10
Migration good for culture	246,467	5.653	2.500	0	10
Trust in the EP	246,467	4.493	2.389	0	10

Table A3. Detailed description of variables

Variable	Type, range	ESS question / data source
Domicile	Discrete, categorical	"Which phrase on this card best describes the area where you live? A big city; suburbs or outskirts of a big city; town or small city; country village; farm or home in the countryside."
Age	Categorical	Age group of respondents: 18-39; 40-59; over-60.
Education attainment	Discrete, categorical	"What is the highest level of education you have successfully completed? [Coded according to ISCED levels.]"
Employment status	Discrete, categorical	"Using this card, which of these descriptions applies to what you have been doing for the last 7 days? Paid work; education; unemployed looking for job; unemployed not looking for job; permanently sick or disabled; retired; community or military service; housework or looking after children; other."
Gender	Discrete, categorical	Gender of respondent.
Native	Discrete, categorical	"Were you born in [country]?"
Occupation	Discrete, categorical	"What is/was the name or title of your main job? In your main job, what kind of work do/did you do most of the time? What training or qualifications are/were needed for the job? [Coded according to two-digit ISCO08 codes.]"
Unemployment spells	Discrete, 0/1	"Have you ever been unemployed and seeking work for a period of more than three months?"
Partner's unemployment	Discrete, 0/1	"Which of the descriptions on this card applies to what he/she has been doing for the last 7 days? Unemployed and actively looking for a job".
Benefits	Discrete, 0/1	"Please consider the income of all household members and any income which may be received by the household as a whole. What is the main source of income in your household?" [Unemployment, redundancy benefits, any other social benefits or grants].
Household income satisfaction	Discrete, 0/1	"Which of the descriptions on this card comes closest to how you feel about your household's income nowadays?" [Difficult / very difficult on present income].
General economic outlook	Discrete, 0/10	"On the whole how satisfied are you with the present state of the economy in [your country]?"
Regional per-capita GDP	Continuous	Ln average regional per-capita GDP. Data from Cambridge Econometrics.
Change in regional per-capita GDP	Continuous	Overall percent variation over the previous 4 years of the regional per-capita GDP, divided by three terciles (below 1.33%, between 1.34 and 7.17%, above 7.18%). Own calculation on data from Cambridge Econometrics.

Regional/national per-capita GDP % ratio	Continuous	% ratio of average regional-per capita GDP over national average. Own calculation on data from Cambridge Econometrics.
Voted in elections	Discrete, 0/1	"Some people don't vote nowadays for one reason or another. Did you vote in the last [country] national election in [month/year]?"
Satisfaction with democracy	Discrete, 0/10	"On the whole, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in [your country].
Satisfaction with life	Discrete, 0/10	"All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole nowadays?"
Trust in political parties	Discrete, 0/10	Using this card, please tell me on a score of 0-10 how much you personally trust each of the institutions I read out. 0 means you do not trust an institution at all, and 10 means you have complete trust…. Political parties?
L-R placement	Discrete, 0/10	"In politics people sometimes talk of "left" and "right". Using this card, where would you place yourself on this scale, where 0 means the left and 10 means the right?"
Trust in the police	Discrete, 0/10	"Using this card, please tell me on a score of 0-10 how much you personally trust each of the institutions I read out. 0 means you do not trust an institution at all, and 10 means you have complete trust… The police?"
Welfare state support	Discrete, 0/5	"Using this card, please say to what extent you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. The government should take measures to reduce differences in income levels".
Migration good for economy	Discrete, 0/10	"Would you say it is generally bad or good for [country]'s economy that people come to live here from other countries?"
Migration good for culture	Discrete, 0/10	"And, using this card, would you say that [country]'s cultural life is generally undermined or enriched by people coming to live here from other countries?"
Trust in European Parliament	Discrete, 0/10	"Using this card, please tell me on a score of 0-10 how much you personally trust each of the institutions I read out. 0 means you do not trust an institution at all, and 10 means you have complete trust… The European Parliament?"

Table A4. Place of residence and individual attitudes: robust logit / ordinal logit estimates controlling for only individual demographic characteristics (and not individual economic status variables).

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
	Attitudes towards the political system				**Attitudes towards specific issues**					
	Voted in elections	Trust in parties	Satisfaction with democracy	Satisfaction with life	L-R placement	Welfare state support	Trust in police	Migration good for economy	Migration good for culture	Trust in EU Parl.
Suburbs	1.080**	0.937***	0.999	1.078***	1.141***	1.048**	1.028	0.901***	0.873***	0.889***
	(0.038)	(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.024)	(0.026)	(0.025)	(0.023)	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.019)
Town	1.043	0.942***	0.966**	1.098***	1.148***	1.003	1.066***	0.819***	0.802***	0.884***
	(0.028)	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.019)	(0.021)	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.016)
Village	1.194***	0.907***	0.957**	1.284***	1.310***	1.028	1.116***	0.779***	0.744***	0.823***
	(0.032)	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.023)	(0.024)	(0.019)	(0.020)	(0.014)	(0.013)	(0.015)
Rur. house	1.272***	0.936**	0.940*	1.410***	1.493***	1.068**	1.123***	0.773***	0.691***	0.777***
	(0.067)	(0.031)	(0.030)	(0.046)	(0.049)	(0.035)	(0.035)	(0.025)	(0.022)	(0.024)
Observations	244,690	222,293#	244,690	244,690	244,690	244,690	244,690	244,690	244,690	244,690
Country FE	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Year FE	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Ind. dem. ctrls	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Ind.econ. status	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no

Robust standard errors in parentheses *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. # Not available for ESS wave 1.

Table A5. Place of residence and individual attitudes: robust logit / ordinal logit estimates controlling for only individual economic status variables (and not demographic characteristics).

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
	Attitudes towards the political system				**Attitudes towards specific issues**					
	Voted in elections	Trust in parties	Satisfaction with democracy	Satisfaction with life	L-R placement	Welfare state support	Trust in police	Migration good for economy	Migration good for culture	Trust in EU Parl.
Suburbs	1.101***	0.916***	0.971	1.055**	1.141***	1.030	1.015	0.877***	0.851***	0.859***
	(0.038)	(0.021)	(0.022)	(0.024)	(0.025)	(0.025)	(0.023)	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.019)
Town	1.095***	0.924***	0.936***	1.098***	1.160***	0.998	1.060***	0.793***	0.779***	0.855***
	(0.029)	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.019)	(0.021)	(0.019)	(0.018)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.015)
Village	1.242***	0.850***	0.872***	1.234***	1.301***	0.993	1.076***	0.721***	0.702***	0.763***
	(0.034)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.022)	(0.024)	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.014)
Rur. house	1.415***	0.866***	0.847***	1.365***	1.420***	1.019	1.079**	0.727***	0.670***	0.710***
	(0.075)	(0.028)	(0.028)	(0.045)	(0.047)	(0.034)	(0.035)	(0.024)	(0.022)	(0.023)
Observations	244,690	222,293#	244,690	244,690	244,690	244,690	244,690	244,690	244,690	244,690
Country FE	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Year FE	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Ind. dem. ctrls	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no
Ind.econ.status	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes

Robust standard errors in parentheses *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. # Available for ESS waves 4 to 8.

Table A6. Place of residence and individual attitudes: robust logit / ordinal logit estimates for EU13 Countries, controlling for sociodemographic and economic individual characteristics.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
	Attitudes towards the political system				Attitudes towards specific issues					
	Voted in elections	Trust in parties	Satisfaction with democracy	Satisfaction with life	L-R placement	Welfare state support	Trust in police	Migration good for economy	Migration good for culture	Trust in EU Parl.
Suburbs	1.022	1.066	1.003	1.017	0.994	0.993	0.955	1.011	1.040	0.926
	(0.000)	(0.056)	(0.047)	(0.050)	(0.053)	(0.053)	(0.046)	(0.049)	(0.050)	(0.045)
Town	1.178	1.023	1.026	1.107***	0.973	0.845***	1.052*	1.032	0.994	1.006
	(0.000)	(0.030)	(0.029)	(0.031)	(0.028)	(0.026)	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.029)
Village	1.260	1.098***	1.029	1.212***	1.061**	0.794***	1.122***	0.959	0.893***	0.951*
	(0.000)	(0.034)	(0.031)	(0.036)	(0.031)	(0.025)	(0.032)	(0.028)	(0.027)	(0.028)
Rur. house	1.204	1.201	1.097	0.932	1.062	0.917	1.130	0.950	1.063	1.112
	(0.000)	(0.135)	(0.122)	(0.103)	(0.108)	(0.102)	(0.125)	(0.107)	(0.115)	(0.121)
Observations	68,727	65,203#	68,727	68,727	68,727	68,727	68,727	68,727	68,727	68,727
Country FE	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Year FE	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Ind. ctrls	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Econ. status	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes

Robust standard errors in parentheses *** $p<0.01$, ** $p<0.05$, * $p<0.1$. # Not available for ESS wave 1.

Table A7. Place of residence and individual attitudes: robust logit / ordinal logit estimates for EU14 Countries plus UK, Norway and Switzerland, controlling for sociodemographic and economic individual characteristics.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
	Attitudes towards the political system				Attitudes towards specific issues					
	Voted in elections	Trust in parties	Satisfaction with democracy	Satisfaction with life	L-R placement	Welfare state support	Trust in police	Migration good for economy	Migration good for culture	Trust in EU Parl.
Suburbs	1.048	0.899***	0.976	1.068***	1.176***	1.091***	1.027	0.852***	0.832***	0.863***
	(0.043)	(0.023)	(0.024)	(0.027)	(0.030)	(0.029)	(0.026)	(0.021)	(0.021)	(0.021)
Town	1.019	0.920***	0.952**	1.113***	1.198***	1.077***	1.076***	0.785***	0.774***	0.862***
	(0.034)	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.023)	(0.026)	(0.024)	(0.023)	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.018)
Village	1.151***	0.832***	0.889***	1.258***	1.340***	1.094***	1.089***	0.737***	0.724***	0.780***
	(0.040)	(0.018)	(0.019)	(0.027)	(0.029)	(0.025)	(0.023)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.017)
Rur. house	1.226***	0.874***	0.877***	1.419***	1.444***	1.095**	1.099***	0.760***	0.700***	0.738***
	(0.072)	(0.031)	(0.030)	(0.051)	(0.052)	(0.040)	(0.038)	(0.027)	(0.025)	(0.025)
Observations	175,963	157,090	175,963	175,963	175,963	175,963	175,963	175,963	175,963	175,963
Country FE	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Year FE	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Ind. ctrls	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Econ. status	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes

Robust standard errors in parentheses *** $p<0.01$, ** $p<0.05$, * $p<0.1$. # Not available for ESS wave 1.

Table A8. Place of residence and individual attitudes: robust logit / ordinal logit estimates replicating the results of Table 2 on the restricted sample used in Appendix A.8 (ESS waves 4 to 8 only).

|	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
	Attitudes towards the political system				Attitudes towards specific issues					
	Voted in elections	Trust in parties	Satisfaction with dem.	Satisfaction with life	L-R placement	Welfare state support	Trust in police	Migration good for economy	Migration good for culture	Trust in EU Parl.
Suburbs	1.008	0.974	1.015	1.065*	1.113***	1.051	0.988	0.918**	0.925**	#
	(0.056)	(0.033)	(0.036)	(0.037)	(0.038)	(0.038)	(0.034)	(0.032)	(0.032)	
Town	0.977	0.955*	0.957*	1.093***	1.177***	1.023	1.043	0.836***	0.807***	#
	(0.040)	(0.025)	(0.026)	(0.029)	(0.032)	(0.029)	(0.028)	(0.023)	(0.022)	
Village	1.113**	0.894***	0.910***	1.210***	1.289***	1.046	1.057**	0.799***	0.775***	#
	(0.047)	(0.024)	(0.024)	(0.033)	(0.035)	(0.029)	(0.028)	(0.022)	(0.021)	
Rur. house	1.231***	0.949	0.913*	1.405***	1.412***	1.102*	1.082*	0.780***	0.765***	#
	(0.098)	(0.044)	(0.045)	(0.070)	(0.070)	(0.056)	(0.051)	(0.038)	(0.038)	
Observations	103,816	103,511	103,816	103,816	103,816	103,816	103,816	103,816	103,816	#
Country FE	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	#
Year FE	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	#
Ind. dem. ctrls	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	#
Ind. econ. status	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	#

Robust standard errors in parentheses *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. # The model does not converge.

Table A9. Place of residence and individual attitudes: robust logit / ordinal logit estimates adding regional economic variables among the regressors (data available for ESS waves 4 to 8 only).

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
	Attitudes towards the political system				Attitudes towards specific issues					
	Voted in elections	Trust in parties	Satisfaction with dem.	Satisfaction with life	L-R placement	Welfare state support	Trust in police	Migration good for economy	Migration good for culture	Trust in EU Parl.
Suburbs	1.008	0.972	1.007	1.071*	1.116***	1.064*	0.984	0.910***	0.917**	#
	(0.056)	(0.033)	(0.035)	(0.037)	(0.038)	(0.039)	(0.034)	(0.032)	(0.032)	
Town	0.997	0.975	0.971	1.106***	1.191***	1.047	1.029	0.863***	0.826***	#
	(0.042)	(0.026)	(0.026)	(0.030)	(0.032)	(0.030)	(0.028)	(0.024)	(0.023)	
Village	1.134***	0.911***	0.921***	1.224***	1.304***	1.071**	1.043	0.821***	0.789***	#
	(0.048)	(0.025)	(0.025)	(0.034)	(0.036)	(0.031)	(0.028)	(0.023)	(0.022)	
Rur. house	1.265***	0.974	0.934	1.419***	1.430***	1.124**	1.068	0.820***	0.795***	#
	(0.101)	(0.046)	(0.046)	(0.071)	(0.072)	(0.058)	(0.050)	(0.040)	(0.040)	
Observations	103,816	103,511	103,816	103,816	103,816	103,816	103,816	103,816	103,816	#
Country FE	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	#
Year FE	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	#
Ind. dem. ctrls	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	#
Ind. econ. status	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	#
Reg. ec. ctrls	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	#

Robust standard errors in parentheses *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, *p<0.1. # The model does not converge
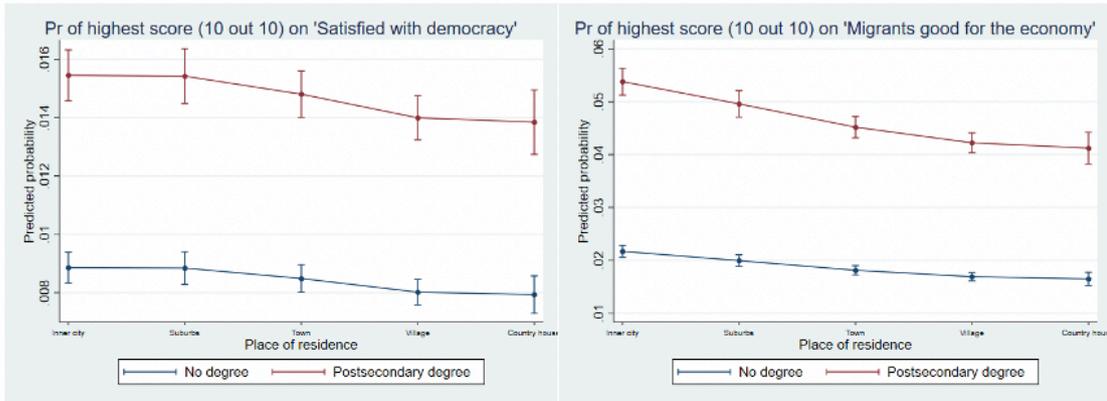
Figure A1. Place of residence and individual attitudes: Adjusted predicted probabilities for 'Satisfaction with democracy' and 'Migration good for the economy' (based on columns three and eight of Table 1).
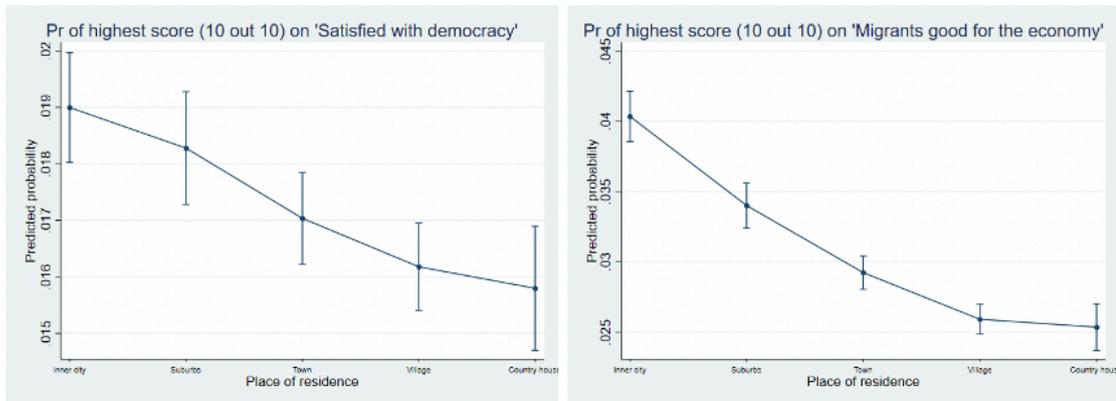

Figure A2. Place of residence and individual attitudes: Adjusted predicted probabilities for 'Satisfaction with democracy' and 'Migration good for the economy' controlling for individual observable characteristics (based on columns three and eight of Table 2). The plots show predictions distinguishing between three age groups (group 1: 18-39; group 2: 40-59; group 3: over-60), while holding other covariates at their means.
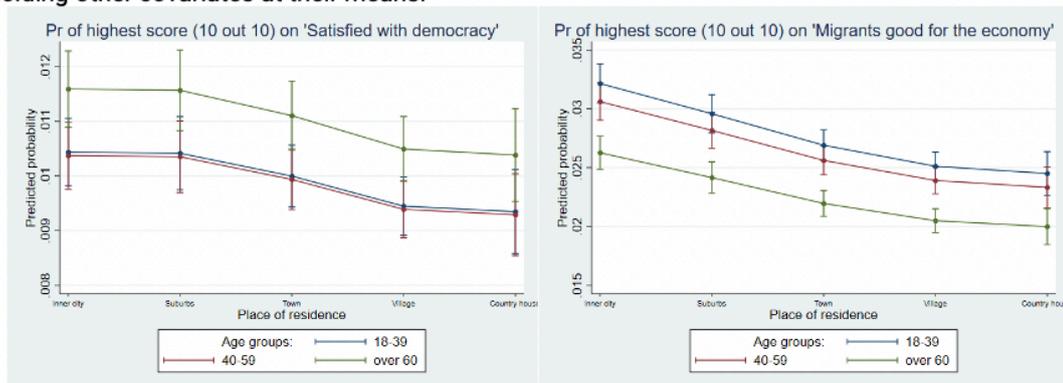
Figure A3. Place of residence and individual attitudes: Adjusted predicted probabilities for 'Satisfaction with democracy' and 'Migration good for the economy' controlling for individual observable characteristics (based on columns three and eight of Table 2). The plots show predictions distinguishing between university graduates and non-graduates, while holding other covariates at their means.

Figure A4. Place of residence and individual attitudes: Adjusted predicted probabilities for 'Satisfaction with democracy' and 'Migration good for the economy' controlling for individual observable characteristics (based on columns three and eight of Table 2). The plots show predictions distinguishing between manual and non-manual occupations, while holding other covariates at their means.
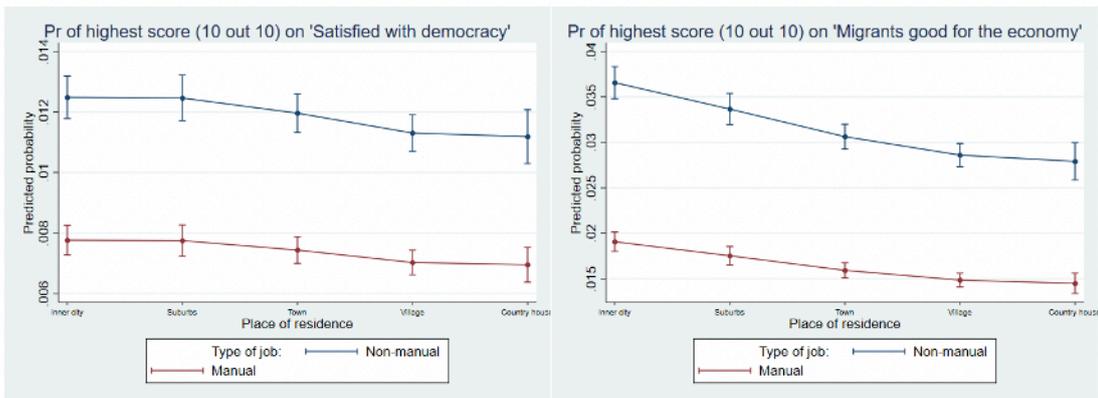
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