

Population Aging and Individual Attitudes towards Immigration: Disentangling Age, Cohort and Time Effects

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Abstract

In the face of rising old-age dependency ratios in industrialized countries like Germany, politicians and their electorates discuss the loosening of immigration policies as one policy option. The question arises whether this policy option is feasible in aging countries. Older individuals are typically found to be more averse to immigration. However, there is evidence that electorates in general and old individuals in particular are less averse to immigration if they live in areas with very low local birth rates. This paper uses the 1999-2008 waves of the German Socio-Economic Panel to separate the effect of individuals' age on their attitudes towards immigration from cohort and time effects. The effect of age on immigration attitudes is actually found to be nonlinear: individuals become more critical about immigration as they grow older, but only up to an age of about 60. As they approach retirement they become again less critical. This nonlinear effect is found both over individuals' life-cycle and between cohorts. Time dummies are also significant, with individuals most worried about immigration when unemployment is high.

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