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The Determinants of Individual Attitudes towards Immigrants in South Korea

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The Determinants of Individual Attitudes towards Immigrants in South Korea

Abstract

This study empirically explores the economic, political and cultural, and socio-demographic determinants of Koreans' attitudes toward immigrants. Employing waves 6 and 7 of World Values Survey (WVS), our descriptive statistics show that Koreans, on average, are becoming more acceptable to foreigners living in Korea. Our results show that economic determinants, as well as educational attainment, were consistently playing a significant role in shaping Koreans' perception of immigrants. Socio-demographic factors and only a few political variables were significant in the period 2017-2020. We discuss this result and argue that, despite the looming demographic crisis, Koreans' attitude towards immigration is based on economic underpinnings rather than on political ones.

JEL-Codes: F220, J150, J610.

Keywords: immigration, South Korea, World Values Survey, attitudes.

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1. Introduction

South Korea is rapidly becoming a multicultural society, as it has been experiencing a rapid increase in the inflow of immigrants over the last few decades. South Korea's total foreign population has increased around fourteen-fold from less than 180,000 in 1995 to approximately 2.02 million, accounting for 3.9% of the total population (Chung, 2021; Statistic Korea, 2022). Since 2006, the number of immigrants to Korea has been growing by 9.7% on an annual basis (Jang, 2015). In 2019, around 1.5 million foreigners in Korea had a visa for staying in the country for one year or longer (KOSTAT, 2021). It is estimated that immigrants would make up around 7% of the total population in Korea by 2040 (Lee, K.M., 2020).

According to Draudt (2015), Koreans, on average, are becoming more accepting of foreign-born residents—the number of respondents in World Values Survey (WVS) who responded negatively to living next to immigrants, halved since 1990. A 2014 national survey by the Asan Institute for Policy Studies (2014) shows that most respondents (79.2%), answered that they do not feel inimical to foreigners. Also, the majority were favorable to the sentence “a diversification of the human population will contribute to national competitiveness”.

On the other hand, certain segments of the population have grown increasingly wary of the impact immigrants have on society, especially when it comes to the notion of multicultural families. The latter survey shows that, whereas positive attitudes toward “multicultural families” (families wherein one parent is Korean, and one parent is non-Korean) were at 67.5%, that figure has dropped 7 percentage points from two years prior (The Asan Institute for Policy Studies, 2014). Negative attitudes toward multicultural families were highest among those in their 20s and 30s and among females. This result can be explained by the considerable high level of unemployment faced by those two groups (Baek, 2015). Around 60% of Koreans were in support of becoming a multiethnic/multicultural country in 2010, but that number dropped to 44.4% in 2020 (Cho, 2020).

This study aims to empirically explore the economic, political, cultural and socio-demographic determinants of Koreans' attitudes toward immigrants. Employing WVS waves 6 and 7, we use a logit regression model, controlling for both individual and macro level variables. Our results show that economic determinants, as well as educational attainment, were consistently playing a significant role in shaping Koreans' perception of immigrants. Socio-demographic factors and only a few political variables were significant in the period 2017-2020, represented by wave 7. We run a seemingly unrelated regression to test for robustness and find that our model hardly changes. We discuss our findings and argue that, despite the looming demographic crisis and the efforts of the Korean government to implement policies that are favorable to migrants, as well as refugees (i.e., the 2013 Refugee Act and the Basic Plans for Immigration Policies), Koreans' attitude towards immigration is becoming based more on economic underpinnings than on political ones. Implications are discussed, referring to the unique socio-cultural context of South Korea.

We contribute to the relevant literature in two ways: first, to our knowledge, our study is the first to use WVS data to investigate the determinants of Koreans' attitude empirically and extensively towards immigrants. Relevant (empirical) studies use either WVS to examine the determinants of individual attitudes toward immigrants across many countries, not specifically tackling the complex issue of immigration in Korea *per se* (Cooray, Marfouk, & Nazir, 2018; Dennison & Geddes, 2021; Kaya & Karakoç, 2012; Mayda, 2006), or the Korean General Social Survey (KGSS) data, which was collected annually between 2003-2018. The last KGSS wave that focused on immigration was conducted in 2013, whereas our latest data is coming from WVS wave 7 (2017-2020) (Ha & Jang, 2015; Hundt, 2016; Kim et al., 2019). Second, we empirically examine the *change* in attitude towards immigration into Korea, as we examine the differences in factors affecting Koreans' attitude towards immigrants using the latest two WVS waves. As far as we know, no other article has been published on such an empirical study.

The next section briefly provides an overview on immigration into Korea in the last three decades. Section 3 reviews the relevant (empirical) literature on Koreans' attitude towards immigration. The subsequent two sections explain variables used for empirical analyses, addressing estimation methods and reporting results from those analyses. The final section concludes by discussing empirical findings and implications.

2. An overview of immigration status in Korea

An aging population and one of the lowest fertility rates in the world indicate that South Korea's economic development requires an inflow of immigrant workforce (Chung, 2021; Watson, 2010), especially in so-called 3-D industries (dirty, demeaning and dangerous), where many South Koreans are unwilling to work (Stokes, 2021). A report issued by the Korea Economic Research Institute concludes that continued and increased immigration is the only viable way to maintain an adequate labor force and economic growth, and estimates the number of needed labor immigrants to reach 4.3 million in 2030; 11.8 million in 2050 and 15.3 million in 2060 (Jun, 2014). The Korea National Statistical Office projects that the country's working-age population will represent 51% of the total population by 2050, whereas the population aged sixty-five or older is expected to reach 40% in the same year (Chung, 2021).

Given this looming demographic crisis, South Korean governments have been trying to ease processes of entry and settlement for migrant labor (Hundt, 2016; Kim, 2014). In 2006, South Korea began to formulate policies to accommodate not only migrant workers but also international families. According to Ahn (2012), this was the first integrated governmental plan for Korea to become a multicultural society. Nevertheless, Chung (2010) argues that Korea has not fully embraced its foreign population. Instead of encouraging mutual coexistence between a dominant culture and a foreign population, newcomers are required to assimilate smoothly into the otherwise homogenous society. Korea's first Basic Plan for Immigration Policy (2008–2012) helped in the persistence of this problem, as it emphasized the economic nature of immigration. In other words, whereas the goals of the immigration policy considerably influenced social policies,

they were ultimately servicing an economic objective of supplying short-term labor to help maintain Korea's global economic competitiveness (Draudt, 2015).

Perhaps the biggest change in Korea's immigration policy was the introduction of the Second Basic Plan for Immigration Policy (2013-2017), whose vision was a "vibrant Korea growing with immigrants" and which mainly aimed at improving previous policies (Renzaho, 2016). This plan extended the First Basic Plan's emphasis on human rights, multiculturalism and civil affairs, so that the involved ministries could "reflect public awareness focusing on social order and safety as well as the responsibilities and contributions of the immigrants" (Draudt, 2015).

The Second Plan was simultaneously implemented with another major relevant legislation, the Refugee Act of 2013, making Korea the first East Asian country to have such a law (Soh & Lund, 2014). The 2013 refugee act increases access to refugee's status determination by easing procedures and shortening the period of determining refugee status to six months. The numbers of refugees surged after the enactment of the 2013 Refugee Act. The country had 1,574 refugee applicants in 2013, 9,942 in 2017, 16,173 in 2018 and 15,142 in 2019 (Lee, H. J., 2020).

Nevertheless, the refugee acceptance rate has been steadily decreasing over the years. In 2013, around 11% of the refugee claims were accepted, but the proportion dropped to 6% in 2014, 3.8% in 2015 and 1.7% in 2016. South Korea's refugee approval reached an all-time low between January and October 2020, as refugee status was granted to 44 only, putting the proportion of refugee claims accepted during the period at 0.8% (Ock, 2021). Perhaps this reflects the significantly low rate of refugee acceptance among Koreans. A joint survey conducted by UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, and Korea Research in 2020 showed that 53% of South Korean adults were opposed to receiving refugees, while 33% were in favor (UNHCR, 2020) .

Thus, it becomes imperative to understand and analyze the determinants of acceptance of foreigners in Korea. The next section provides a review of literature that attempted such a feat.

3. Literature review

A considerable body of (mostly descriptive) literature examines the perception of South Koreans towards immigrants. This body of literature remains inconclusive (Denney & Green, 2021, p. 2). Through surveying 27 countries in 2018, Boyon (2018) finds that South Koreans generally have an open and tolerant attitude towards immigrants, in many instances not significantly different to that shown by the French or the Germans. A recent Pew report shows that 68% of South Koreans think that increasing diversity in their country is a positive change, placing Korea in second place among Asian countries surveyed (Pew Research Center, 2019). This observation coincides with an earlier survey, conducted by the Asan Institute of Policy Studies in 2013, which showed that Korean attitudes towards foreigners generally were positive, as most Koreans (79.2%) answered that they had "no repulsion against foreigners" (Kim, Kang, & Lee, 2014).

Other studies show conflicting results. Through surveying the acceptance of Korean society towards ethnic Korean Chinese citizens, moving to South Korea, Seol and Skrentny (2009) show that these immigrants are considered members of Korean society but were assigned a subaltern position. This conclusion resonates with that of Kim (2008) who argues that immigration policies in South Korea have been largely based on preferential treatment of ethnic Koreans abroad over other non-coethnic foreigners.

Few empirical studies investigate the determinants of Koreans' attitude towards immigrants. Employing a multitude of surveys (including WVS and KGSS) that covers Korea till the year 2010, Hundt (2016) shows that younger, better-educated Koreans are representative of a majority that has a largely positive view of immigrants and immigration in general. A sizeable minority of older and less well-educated citizens, however, is skeptical of immigration and its long-lasting effects on South Korean society. Men were more likely than women to have a positive view of immigration, but the differences along gender lines were minimal.

Rich et al. (2021) find significantly greater support for accepting North Korean arrivals compared to both non-ethnic Korean refugees, as well as Muslim refugees. They also show that most Koreans view Islam as incompatible with Korean values. They argue that this general attitude affects immigration policy in Korea.

Using an experimental research design, Denney and Green (2021) show that broad socio-tropic concerns play a major and significant role in shaping the attitudes of Koreans towards immigrants. Respondents from their sample assess prospective newcomers to Korea primarily on the grounds of language capacity and employment plans, and not on grounds of ethnicity. These findings are largely in line with findings from similar studies conducted in Canada (Donnelly, 2017) and the United States (Hainmueller & Hopkins, 2014).

Our study is methodologically closest to Ha and Jang (2015) and Chang (2019). Ha and Jang (2015) examine how perceived threats from immigration in South Korea are associated with individuals' definition of national identity. Using KGSS data for the year 2010, the authors find that South Koreans' reactions to immigration are basically cultural: those who believe immigrants undermine the longstanding cultural homogeneity of South Korea are likely to adopt more exclusive definitions of a national in-group. Social threats turn out to be another important factor that defines national identity. The authors do not find evidence that threats regarding the national economy are positively associated with nationalist sentiments. In other words, these results suggest that increasing levels of immigrant diversity in Korea can produce an ethnocentric response by heightening noneconomic—either cultural or social—concerns.

Using the same KGSS dataset employed by the aforementioned study, Chang (2019) challenges the findings of Ha and Jang (2015) and shows that socio-psychological concerns and expectations of the impact of immigration on the Korean economy, determine anti-immigration attitudes, a finding that is arguably consistent with empirical results from immigration studies examining public attitudes towards immigration in Europe and North America. Chang (2019) also

finds that the negative relationship between the ethno-cultural views of Korean identity and anti-immigration attitudes does not appear when immigration policies are targeted toward a particular immigrant group.

It is clear, to sum up, that empirical research on Korean' attitudes towards immigration has so far delivered inconclusive and even contradictory findings. The next section presents data and estimation strategy.

4. Data and Estimation Strategy

4.1. Data

We use survey data provided by the World Value Survey (Haerpfer et al., 2021) to explore Koreans' attitudes towards immigrants. Because our study is focusing on the period after the enactment of the 2013 Refugee Act and the implementation of the second Basic Plan for Immigration Policy (2013-2017), we focus on the latest two waves, wave 6 (2010-2014) and wave 7 (2017-2020). Approximately 1,200 and 1,245 Koreans were surveyed in waves 6 and 7, respectively.

Dependent variable

We capture negative attitudes towards immigrants using the WVS question, “*would you not like to have immigrants/foreign workers as neighbors?*”. Responses were measured with a binary option: 0 (no) and 1 (yes). This question has been widely used in many related studies (e.g., Cooray, Marfouk, & Nazir, 2018; Crepaz, 2010, p. 66; Evans & Kelley, 2019; Klein, 2021; Mayda, 2006). Quillian (1995) and Wagner et al. (2006) use the same question in their attempt to construct a variable that measures prejudice towards immigrants. Investigating the impact of globalization on anti-immigration sentiments, Kaya and Karakoc (2012) use this question as their main dependent variable since it is “straightforward and directly measures how people feel about members of other nationalities who immigrate permanently or stay temporarily because of largely economic reasons” (Kaya & Karakoc, 2012, p. 29).

Exploratory variables

We divide the exploratory variables into four factors to explore the determinants of Koreans' attitudes towards immigrants: economic, political, cultural and socio-demographic factors. Regarding the economic factors, we examine whether *financial satisfaction*, being *unemployed* (benchmark: employed), as well as *worries of losing /not finding a job* are associated with viewing immigrants unfavorably. Some studies have also shown that those unemployed tend to be less in favor of immigration (e.g., Hanson et al., 2007; Malchow-Møller et al., 2008; Gorodzeisky & Semyonov, 2009). Potential personal economic threats pose a risk of losing one's job. McLaren (2003) indicates that individuals who are afraid of losing their jobs are more likely to become intimidated by the presence of immigrants.

Political factors are demonstrated by three WVS variables, *political stance*, *importance of democracy* and *national pride*. Bohman and Hjrem (2016) argue that the parliamentary presence of radical right parties may significantly affect anti-immigration attitudes over time. Orcés (2009) finds that support for democratic values has potential benefits for the reduction of social conflict

that can stem from increasing immigration. Mayda (2006) shows that an individual's high level of national pride is usually associated with an unfavorable attitude towards immigration.

Cultural factors are measured through several WVS questions. We use the question on *trust in another nationality*, which is used by Cooray et al. (2018) as a proxy for racism. The authors find that people who have trust in another nationality are less probable to support discriminatory practices towards immigrants.

We employ two WVS variables as proxies for religiosity; *religion is important in life*, and *the only acceptable religion is my religion*. We also include the *religious affiliation* of the respondents, taking *Buddhists* as our benchmark group. Scheepers et al. (2002) find that religious beliefs are associated with more negative views of immigration. They find that Catholics and Protestants, in particular, advocate prejudice against minorities rather than nonreligious individuals. Through examining the relationship between religiosity and attitudes to immigration in Western Europe, Storm (2011) finds that a Christian affiliation, in general, is positively associated with viewing immigrants as a threat. In Korea's case, Ha (2020) finds that Koreans with high levels of "religiocentrism" are more likely to be prejudiced against other religious groups and immigrants.

We include a set of socio-demographic factors (Dustmann & Preston, 2007): *age*, *gender* and *education attainment*. Regional controls are applied, and we set the Busan region as the benchmark. The variable list is displayed in Appendix Table A1.

4.2. Estimations

For our main model, we use binary logistic regression because our dependent variable is dichotomous. A binary-response model is a mean-regression model in which the dependent variable takes only the values 1 and 0. The most common approaches, the logit and probit models, have been used almost exclusively when the dependent variable is binary (Horowitz & Savin, 2001).

The logistic regression analysis provides results that can be easily interpreted by using odds ratios, which are directly derived from regression coefficients in a logistic model (Peng et al., 2002). Odds ratios greater than 1 indicate a positive association between the dependent and independent variables, whereas odds ratios below 1 indicate a negative association. Logistic regression is noted to be less prone to over-fitting due to linear, noncomplex decision boundaries (Gudivada et al., 2016). However, overfitting could occur in high dimensional datasets. Since the data in our paper is not a high-dimensional dataset, there is no issue with overfitting. All regressions are conducted using robust standard errors specification.

5. Results

5.1. Descriptive statistics

Figure 1 illustrates the change in Koreans' negative attitudes towards immigrants over two waves. The results indicate a significant shift in attitudes between waves 6 and 7. More specifically, Koreans' negative attitudes towards immigrants were reduced by almost half from wave 6 to wave 7, suggesting that Koreans may perceive immigrants less negatively over time. Descriptive statistics are presented in Appendix Table A2. We also present two correlation matrices for waves

6 and 7 to check for multicollinearity (Appendix, Tables A3 and A4). It is clear from both tables that explanatory variables are not highly correlated.

<Figure 1 here>

5.2. Logistic Regression analysis

Four models are constructed using both logistic regression and SUR estimation methods. Model 1 introduces the economic factors, while Model 2 adds the political factors. Models 3 and 4 include the cultural and religious factors, respectively.

Wave 6

Table 1 presents the results of the logistic regression estimation examining negative attitude towards immigrants in wave 6. Regarding the economic factors, *financial satisfaction* is associated with a decrease in negative attitudes towards immigrants in models 1 (OR = 0.91 $p < .01$) and 2 (OR = 0.93, $p < .05$). This variable becomes nonsignificant in models 3 and 4. The variable *Worries of losing/not finding job* is statistically significant in all models (model 1, OR = 1.45, $p < .05$; model 2, OR = 1.48, $p < .05$; model 3, OR = 1.50, $p < .05$; model 4, OR = 1.56, $p < .05$). This finding suggests that Koreans worried about job security are more likely to exhibit negative attitudes towards immigrants. In contrast, *unemployed* is not statistically significant in all models.

Regarding the political dimension, the variable *importance of democracy* is associated with a decrease in negative attitudes towards immigrants (model 2, OR = 0.83, $p < .01$; model 3, OR = 0.83, $p < .01$; model 4, OR = 0.84, $p < .01$). The results shows that Koreans who consider democracy important tend to be less likely to exhibit negative attitudes towards immigrants. In contrast, *political stance* and *national pride* are insignificant in all models.

Regarding the cultural factor, *trust in another nationality* is also associated with a decrease in negative attitudes towards immigrants in model 3 (OR = 0.36, $p < .01$) and 4 (OR = 0.38, $p < .01$). This finding suggests that Koreans who trust individuals from other nationalities are less likely to exhibit negative attitudes towards immigrants.

Our proxies for religiosity (*religion is important in life*, and *the only acceptable religion is my religion*) are both insignificant. Regarding religious affiliation, we find that *Protestants* are less likely to perceive immigrants negatively as compared to *Buddhists* (benchmark group), which is consistent with earlier findings of Jung (2017). Among socio-demographic factors, *education attainment* is associated with a decrease in negative attitudes towards immigrants in all models. In other words, Koreans who achieve high levels of education are less likely to perceive immigrants negatively. Conversely, *age* and *male* are not significant in all models.

With respect to region, residents of the Seoul capital area³ are less likely to exhibit negative attitudes towards immigrants compared to the benchmark region of *Busan*. Similarly, *Gangwon* and *Gwangju* areas tend to be less likely to perceive immigrants negatively compared to *Busan*. Seoul capital area, *Gangwon* and *Gwangju* regions tend to be more likely to have liberal characteristics as well as experience in interacting with immigrants. In particular, 60% of foreigners are distributed in the Seoul capital area such as Seoul, Incheon and Gyeonggi (The Migration Research and Training Centre, 2020).

<Table 1 here>

Wave 7

Table 2 presents the results of the logistic regression models examining negative attitude towards immigrants in wave 7. Regarding the economic factors, *financial satisfaction* consistently emerges as a significant predictor of negative attitudes towards immigrants across all models (model 1, OR = 1.14, $p < .05$; model 2, OR = 1.14, $p < .05$; model 3, OR = 1.15, $p < .05$; model 4, OR = 1.15, $p < .01$). This finding suggests that experiencing greater feelings of financial satisfaction increases the negative attitudes towards immigrants. Similarly, *unemployed* appears to be a significant predictor of negative attitude towards immigrants in wave 7 (model 1, OR = 1.66, $p < .01$; model 2, OR = 1.67, $p < .01$; model 3, OR = 1.68, $p < .01$; model 4, OR = 1.69, $p < .01$). This result suggests that unemployed Koreans are more likely to exhibit negative attitudes towards immigrants compared to their employed counterparts. *Worries of losing/not finding job* is statistically significant in all models (model 1, OR = 1.40, $p < .1$; model 2, OR = 1.40, $p < .1$; model 3, OR = 1.35, $p < .1$; model 4, OR = 1.37, $p < .1$).

Regarding the political factors, *political stance* appears to be a significant predictor of negative attitudes towards immigrants in wave 7 (model 1, OR = 0.90, $p < .1$; model 2, OR = 0.88, $p < .05$; model 3, OR = 0.88, $p < .01$; model 4, OR = 0.88, $p < .05$). This finding suggests that Koreans with right-wing tendencies are less likely to tend to exhibit negative attitudes towards immigrants compared to their left-wing counterparts. *Importance of democracy* is also associated with a decrease in negative attitudes towards immigrants (model 2, OR = 0.91, $p < .1$; model 3, OR = 0.91, $p < .1$; model 4, OR = 0.91, $p < .1$). In contrast, *national pride* is statistically not significant in all models.

Regarding the cultural factor, *trust in another nationality* is also associated with a decrease in negative attitudes towards immigrants in model 3 (OR = 0.54, $p < .01$) and 4 (OR = 0.55, $p < .01$). The proxy for religiosity (*religion is important in life*, and *the only acceptable religion is my religion*) and religious affiliations, all of the variables are not statistically significant in all models. Among socio-demographic factors, *age* and *education attainment* is associated with an increase in negative attitudes towards immigrants. In contrast, *male* is less likely to perceive immigrants negatively in all models.

³ The Seoul Capital Area (SCA) consists of the metropolitan area of Seoul, Incheon, and Gyeonggi province.

Regarding regional controls, our results show that the Seoul capital area is not statistically significant in wave 7. *Chuncheong* and *Gwangju* regions tend to exhibit lesser negative attitudes towards immigrants than the *Busan* region, whereas the *South Gyeongsang* and *Ulsan* regions tend to exhibit more negative attitudes towards immigrants than the *Busan* region. Interestingly, the magnitude of *Ulsan* region has been considerably decreased to around 2.7 in all models compared to wave 6 where odds ratio was 8.7 in model 4. Koreans' antipathy toward foreigners can be seen as closer to xenophobia, because of the absolute lack of contact experience, rather than racism (Um & Lee, 2006). Using Ulsan as a representative example, compared to 2007, the number of foreigners per 1,000 people in Ulsan increased by 51.3% in 2017 (Korea Research Institute for Local Administration, 2019). As shown in the above results, anti-immigration sentiment was halved in wave 7 compared to wave 6.

<Table 2 here>

5.3. Robustness check: Seemingly Unrelated Regression (SUR) analysis

As we suspect cross-equation correlation between the error terms from waves 6 and 7, we conduct a Breusch-Pagan test between the errors of the separate equations of models 1-4. Null hypothesis is rejected at the 1% significance level in all models, indicating that errors are correlated. (Model 1, $\chi^2 = 21.96$, $p < 0.001$; Model 2, $\chi^2 = 25.76$, $p < 0.001$; Model 3, $\chi^2 = 34.63$, $p < 0.001$; Model 4, $\chi^2 = 49.06$, $p < 0.001$). We can thus reject the null hypothesis and conclude that heteroscedasticity is present in the data. Thus, we use the seemingly unrelated regression (SUR) model. Results are shown in Table 3. Results of wave 6 show that *worries of losing /not finding job*, *importance of democracy*, *trust in another nationality*, *protestant*, *education attainment*, and Seoul capital area (*Gyeonggi* and *Incheon*) are statistically significant in all models. The variable *worries of losing /not finding job* is associated with an increase in negative attitudes towards immigrants, which means that when worries of losing or not finding jobs increase 1-unit, negative attitude towards immigrants increases by about 0.08 points ($p < .05$), whereas *importance of democracy*, *trust in another nationality*, *protestant*, *education attainment*, Seoul capital area (*Gyeonggi* and *Incheon*) are associated with a decrease in negative attitudes towards immigrants. This finding is consistent with the results of the logistic model in wave 6 (table 1).

Regarding the results of wave 7, *financial satisfaction*, *worries of losing /not finding job*, *unemployed*, *political stance*, *trust in another nationality*, *age* and *education attainment* are statistically significant in all models, which is consistent with the results of the logistic model in wave 7 (Table 2). Men exhibit lower negative attitudes towards immigrants by 0.06 units ($p < 0.05$), compared to women in model 3. *Gyeonggi region* also exhibits lower negative attitudes towards immigrants by 0.12 units ($p < 0.05$), compared to *Busan* in model 4. There are only few differences in the results compared to the logistic model in wave 7. The coefficients of *importance of democracy* and *education attainment* variables are insignificant in model 4, compared to the logistic model in wave 7. On the other hand, the *male* and *Gyeonggi* variable is significant in model 3 and model 4 respectively compared to Table 2 (models 3 and 4). Overall, the results of the SUR regression are almost identical to that of the logistic regressions in tables 1 and 2, showing that our findings are robust.

<Table 3 here>

6. Conclusion

Although literature on the public's attitudes toward immigration has grown extensively (Hainmueller & Hopkins, 2014), few studies have tackled this important issue in the Korean context. This study empirically explores the economic, political, cultural and socio-demographic determinants of Koreans' attitudes toward immigrants. Additionally, we analyze the changes in Koreans' perception between two recent time periods.

Our study demonstrates that immigration into South Korea remains a divisive issue. Descriptive statistics show that the ratio of Koreans' negative attitudes towards immigrants has halved from wave 6 to wave 7. Our empirical model provides a more nuanced picture, as a notable shift emerged in the predictors of negative attitudes towards immigrants among Koreans between wave 6 and 7. *Education attainment* and *financial satisfaction* are associated with a decrease in negative attitudes towards immigrants in wave 6, whereas they are associated with an increase in negative attitudes towards immigrants in wave 7. The results are consistent with the findings of Kim et al. (2011). and may be demonstrating difficulties in finding employment as well, since highly educated Koreans might be more prone to unemployment coupled with financial difficulties (Lim & Lee, 2019; Korea Institute of Public Finance, 2005). This finding is consistent with the study of Cooray, Marfouk, & Nazir (2018), which shows that individuals who are less satisfied with their household financial situation and those unable to find employment during economic downturns are more likely to exhibit hostility towards foreigners.

Regarding the political factors, we find that individuals with right-wing tendencies exhibit lesser negative attitudes towards immigrants in all models in wave 7. This corresponds with earlier findings (Min-ho, 2018; 2024). Ha and Jang (2015) show that individuals with left-wing ideology preference tend to have higher national pride. Since labor unions tend to be associated with left wing, Park (2014) states that "the voices of (Korean) labor unions, especially in the manufacturing and construction sectors, warned about the unforeseeable effects of cheap immigrant workers on the blue-collar labor market" (p. 1577). Although *political stance* is only significant in WVS latest wave, our study shows that *importance of democracy* is consistently significant in both WVS waves employed. This finding is consistent with the literature (Azad, 2020; Orcés, 2009; Scheepers, Gijssberts, & Hello, 2002).

Despite the looming demographic crisis and the efforts of the Korean government to implement policies that are favorable to both migrants and refugees (i.e., the 2013 Refugee Act and the Basic Plans for Immigration Policies), Koreans' negative attitudes towards immigrants is becoming more based on economic underpinnings rather than on political ones. This is clearly indicated when we consider how variables like *worries of losing /not finding job* and *financial satisfaction* are consistently significant in both waves. These results resonate with earlier findings (Cooray, Marfouk, & Nazir, 2018; Poutvaara & Steinhardt, 2018; Semyonov, Rajman, & Gorodzeisky, 2006). We also find that, whereas *unemployed* did not influence negative attitudes towards immigrants in wave 6, it emerged as a significant predictor in wave 7. This is consistent with considerable literature (Gorodzeisky & Semyonov, 2009; 2018; Malchow-Møller, Munch, Schroll,

& Skaksen, 2008), as well as with recent research on unemployment and sentiments towards migration in Korea (Heo et al., 2020).

The variables *Age* and *male* have no significant impact on Koreans' attitudes in wave 6, whereas they both have a significant impact in wave 7, as our results show that elders and females have a negative attitude towards immigrants. Regarding the former group, Jeong (2013, p.1468) argues that the effect of age on attitudes towards immigrants is inconsistent, as some literature finds age to be insignificant (Chandler and Tsai 2001; McDaniel et al. 2011). Nevertheless, considerable literature finds a negative relationship between age and acceptance of immigrants (Abdelaaty & Steele, 2022; Cooray, Marfouk, & Nazir, 2018; García-Muñoz & Milgram-Baleix, 2021; Kaya & Karakoç, 2012). As for the Korean context, Jang (2010) finds that older Koreans have less acceptance towards the social integration of foreigners within Korean society, compared to younger Koreans. Regarding the latter group, it is unusual to find that females have a more negative attitude towards immigrants than males. In a sample of 13 cross-national studies investigating gender effects on anti-immigration attitudes, Ponce (2017) finds that ten of the selected studies show that males are more likely to view immigrants negatively than females. Interestingly, earlier studies by Hundt (2016) and Rich et al. (2021) show that Korean females are significantly less welcoming to refugees than males. Still, Fertig and Brenner (2006) argue that the empirical results on the impact of gender on attitudes towards immigrants remains ambiguous (p. 15).

As for the regions, the number of foreigners residing in Korea exceeded 1 million in the early 2000s, and has been significantly increasing year by year, reaching 2.5 million in December 2023 (Park, 2024). The increase in the number of foreigners has a positive relationship with foreign contact. This contact experience could have played a role in decreasing the probability of negative attitudes toward immigrants or foreigners (Song, 2013). The significance of the Seoul Capital Area diminished by Wave 7, with new patterns emerging, including fewer negative attitudes in *Chuncheon* and *Gwangju* and a decrease in negative attitudes previously seen in *Ulsan*. This finding may reflect that Koreans' negative attitudes towards immigrants stems from a lack of contact experience, rather than racism (Um & Lee, 2006). For example, the number of foreigners per 1,000 people in *Ulsan* increased by 51.3% in 2017 compared to 2007 (Korea Research Institute for Local Administration, 2019). As shown in the above results, negative attitudes towards immigrants in this region were halved in wave 7 compared to wave 6.

Our study shows that economic factors, as well as educational attainment, play the most significant role in shaping negative attitudes towards immigrants in Korea. Interestingly, our result contradicts earlier findings by Barceló (2016), as well as Ha and Jang (2015) who find that economic determinants do not affect Koreans' attitudes towards immigrants. We find no significant evidence that racism is embedded in the Korean culture and/or that political and religious affiliations, in general, matter much in influencing Koreans' attitude towards immigrants. This carries a positive signal as it indicates that better economic development and growth may allow for more acceptance of immigrants in South Korea.

We note some limitations with the findings of the current study. First, the results are based on Koreans' attitudes towards immigrants, based on WVS questions, testing whether Koreans generally would not like to have immigrants or foreign workers as neighbors. Unfortunately, this question does not consider the ethnicity or nationality of immigrants and/or foreign workers. Considerable studies show that Koreans' perceptions of foreigners differ according to the latter's ethnicity. Koreans' social distance toward foreigners varies depending on the ethnic group (Min & Kim, 2013).

Moreover, foreign workers' classifications should be noted as well. Koreans prefer wealthy and highly skilled foreigners (Hundt, 2016). Foreign workers from advanced countries with professional and high skilled jobs enjoy various social and cultural rights. On the other hand, foreign workers with simple skills and who are colored are limited with respect to various basic rights and live poorly in both workplaces and daily life with discriminatory prejudices (Suh, 2011). Since WVS has not classified the type of foreign workers, there is a limitation to discrimination by specific groups.

Although the Korean government implements policies that are favorable to migrants and refugees, discrimination against immigrants or foreign workers is still prevalent. Currently, the government has implemented the third Basic Plan for Immigration Policy (2018-2022). This plan's new agendas, such as preventing discrimination against foreigners, protecting rights and interests, and guaranteeing foreign human rights in the protection process (The 3rd Basic Plan for Immigration Policy, 2020), may be able to positively change Koreans' attitudes toward immigrants in the future.

Conflict of Interest/ Competing Interest Statement:

The Authors declare that there is no Conflict of Interest or Competing interest.

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Figures and Tables

Figure 1. Change in Koreans' attitudes towards immigrants/labor workers between WVS waves 6 and 7 (%)

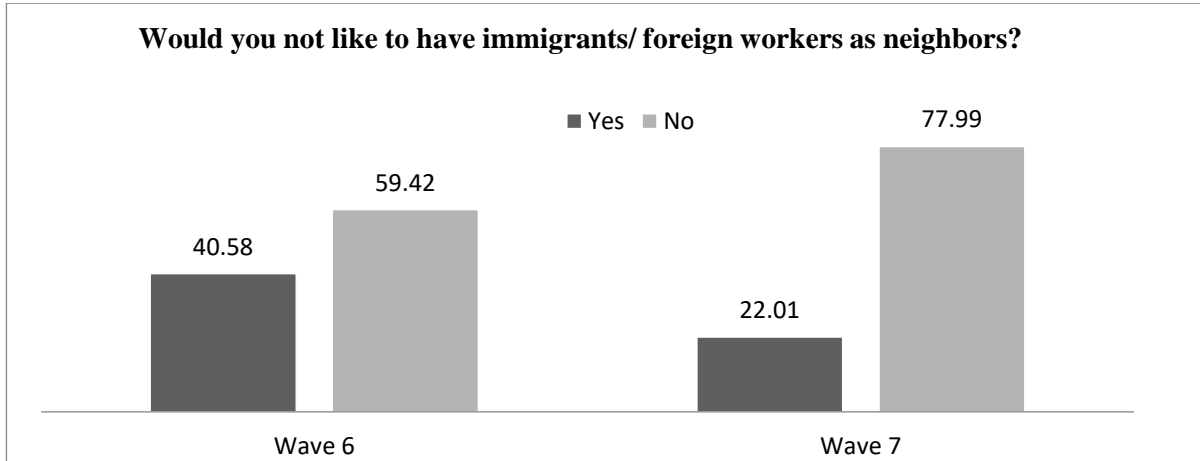


Table 1. Logistic Regression, DV: Would not like immigrants/foreign workers as neighbors
(Wave 6)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Intercept	10.00*** (6.71)	35.47*** (29.51)	37.16*** (30.89)	15.26*** (14.58)
Financial Satisfaction	0.91*** (0.03)	0.93** (0.03)	0.95 (0.04)	0.98 (0.04)
Unemployed	0.89 (0.13)	0.91 (0.14)	0.97 (0.15)	1.03 (0.18)
Worries of losing /not finding job	1.45** (0.26)	1.48** (0.27)	1.50** (0.28)	1.56** (0.33)
Political Stance	1.01 (0.03)	0.99 (0.03)	0.98 (0.04)	0.99 (0.04)
Importance of Democracy		0.83*** (0.04)	0.83*** (0.04)	0.84*** (0.04)
National Pride		0.95 (0.12)	0.96 (0.12)	0.83 (0.12)
Trust in another Nationality			0.36*** (0.06)	0.38*** (0.06)
Religion is Important in Life				1.05 (0.22)
Only Acceptable Religion is My Religion				1.39 (0.32)
Religion Affiliation				
Catholic				1.04 (0.27)
Nonreligious				1.17 (0.28)
Protestant				0.54** (0.15)
Age	0.99 (0.01)	1.00 (0.01)	1.00 (0.01)	1.01 (0.01)
Male	1.12 (0.15)	1.12 (0.16)	1.10 (0.16)	0.97 (0.16)
Education Attainment	0.82*** (0.04)	0.84*** (0.04)	0.85*** (0.04)	0.89* (0.05)
Region				
Seoul	0.54**	0.59*	0.68	0.94

	(0.15)	(0.16)	(0.19)	(0.31)
Gyeonggi	0.39***	0.44***	0.46***	0.52**
	(0.11)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.17)
Incheon	0.30***	0.32***	0.34***	0.30***
	(0.11)	(0.12)	(0.13)	(0.14)
Nchungcheong	0.30***	0.29***	0.30***	0.58
	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.29)
SChungcheong	0.58	0.65	0.75	1.06
	(0.23)	(0.28)	(0.33)	(0.52)
NJeolla	0.49*	0.55	0.53	0.61
	(0.20)	(0.23)	(0.22)	(0.28)
SJeolla	0.40**	0.41**	0.43**	0.63
	(0.15)	(0.16)	(0.17)	(0.29)
NGyeongsang	0.67	0.71	0.69	0.78
	(0.24)	(0.26)	(0.24)	(0.33)
SGyeongsang	0.44**	0.45**	0.52*	0.66
	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.19)	(0.29)
Gangwon	0.30***	0.34**	0.33***	0.34**
	(0.13)	(0.15)	(0.14)	(0.17)
Daejeon	0.98	1.13	1.19	1.32
	(0.46)	(0.54)	(0.58)	(0.70)
Daegu	0.34***	0.37***	0.36***	0.53
	(0.13)	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.23)
Ulsan	4.20**	5.86**	4.37*	8.71**
	(2.53)	(4.79)	(3.55)	(9.56)
Gwangju	0.22***	0.26***	0.24***	0.28**
	(0.11)	(0.14)	(0.13)	(0.16)
N	1,077	1,049	1,043	866
pseudo R^2	0.067	0.076	0.111	0.116
chi2	80.65***	85.35***	122.80***	119.24***

Odds ratio reported. Robust standard errors in parentheses. ***=significant at 1%, **= significant at 5%, *= significant at 10%

Table 2. Logistic Regression, DV: Would not like immigrants/foreign workers as neighbors
(Wave 7)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Intercept	0.07*** (0.05)	0.15** (0.13)	0.15** (0.12)	0.14** (0.12)
Financial Satisfaction	1.14** (0.06)	1.14** (0.06)	1.15** (0.06)	1.15*** (0.06)
Unemployed	1.66*** (0.28)	1.67*** (0.28)	1.68*** (0.29)	1.69*** (0.29)
Worries of losing /not finding job	1.40* (0.24)	1.40* (0.24)	1.35* (0.24)	1.37* (0.24)
Political Stance	0.90* (0.04)	0.88** (0.04)	0.88*** (0.04)	0.88** (0.04)
Importance of Democracy		0.91* (0.05)	0.91* (0.05)	0.91* (0.05)
National Pride		0.99 (0.14)	0.99 (0.14)	0.98 (0.14)
Trust in another Nationality			0.54*** (0.11)	0.55*** (0.12)
Religion is Important in Life				1.11 (0.30)
Only Acceptable Religion is My Religion				0.80 (0.16)
Religion Affiliation				
Catholic				1.08 (0.38)
Nonreligious				1.07 (0.25)
Protestant				0.76 (0.23)
Age	1.01* (0.01)	1.01** (0.01)	1.01** (0.01)	1.02** (0.01)
Male	0.77* (0.12)	0.77* (0.12)	0.78 (0.12)	0.73* (0.12)
Education Attainment	1.11* (0.06)	1.11** (0.06)	1.13** (0.06)	1.13** (0.06)
Region				
Seoul	1.14	1.18	1.21	1.26

	(0.35)	(0.36)	(0.38)	(0.41)
Gyeonggi	0.85	0.85	0.83	0.85
	(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.28)
Incheon	0.91	0.96	0.93	1.01
	(0.36)	(0.37)	(0.37)	(0.41)
Nchungcheong	0.17**	0.17**	0.20**	0.19**
	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.16)	(0.15)
SChungcheong	0.25**	0.24**	0.24**	0.24**
	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.14)
NJeolla	0.48	0.54	0.61	0.62
	(0.24)	(0.27)	(0.30)	(0.32)
SJeolla	0.60	0.64	0.59	0.61
	(0.29)	(0.31)	(0.29)	(0.31)
NGyeongsang	0.81	0.82	0.87	0.90
	(0.34)	(0.35)	(0.37)	(0.39)
SGyeongsang	1.73	1.83*	1.83*	1.84*
	(0.62)	(0.66)	(0.66)	(0.66)
Gangwon	0.57	0.62	0.68	0.66
	(0.30)	(0.32)	(0.36)	(0.36)
Daejeon	0.52	0.50	0.48	0.47
	(0.29)	(0.29)	(0.28)	(0.28)
Daegu	1.16	1.09	1.04	1.07
	(0.46)	(0.43)	(0.42)	(0.44)
Ulsan	2.81**	2.84**	2.61**	2.70**
	(1.34)	(1.36)	(1.26)	(1.32)
Gwangju	0.28*	0.29*	0.26**	0.27*
	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.18)	(0.18)
N	1,245	1,245	1,245	1,241
pseudo R^2	0.057	0.059	0.066	0.070
chi2	64.70***	67.21***	75.25***	81.88***

Odds ratio reported. Robust standard errors in parentheses. ***=significant at 1%, **= significant at 5%, *= significant at 10%

Table 3. Seemingly unrelated regression model, DV: Would not like immigrants/foreign workers as neighbors

	Wave 6				Wave 7			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Intercept	1.02*** (0.15)	1.30*** (0.17)	1.27*** (0.17)	1.08*** (0.19)	0.07 (0.11)	0.25* (0.14)	0.23 (0.14)	0.23 (0.16)
Financial Satisfaction	-0.02*** (0.01)	-0.02** (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	0.02** (0.01)	0.02** (0.01)	0.02** (0.01)	0.02* (0.01)
Unemployed	-0.03 (0.03)	-0.02 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.03)	0.01 (0.03)	0.08*** (0.03)	0.08*** (0.03)	0.08*** (0.03)	0.06* (0.03)
Worries of losing /not finding job	0.08** (0.04)	0.08** (0.04)	0.08** (0.04)	0.08** (0.04)	0.05* (0.03)	0.06** (0.03)	0.05* (0.03)	0.06* (0.03)
Political Stance	0.00 (0.01)	-0.00 (0.01)	-0.00 (0.01)	-0.00 (0.01)	-0.02*** (0.01)	-0.02*** (0.01)	-0.02*** (0.01)	-0.02** (0.01)
Importance of Democracy		-0.04*** (0.01)	-0.04*** (0.01)	-0.04*** (0.01)		-0.02** (0.01)	-0.02* (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)
National Pride		-0.01 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.03)	-0.04 (0.03)		-0.01 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.02)	-0.00 (0.03)
Trust in another Nationality			-0.21*** (0.03)	-0.20*** (0.03)			-0.09*** (0.03)	-0.08** (0.04)
Religion is Important in Life				0.00 (0.04)				-0.03 (0.05)
Only Acceptable Religion is My Religion				0.06 (0.05)				-0.02 (0.04)
Religion Affiliation								
Catholic				-0.00 (0.05)				0.04 (0.07)

Nonreligious				0.02				0.04
				(0.05)				(0.04)
Protestant				-0.12**				-0.02
				(0.05)				(0.05)
Age	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00	0.00	0.00**	0.00*	0.00**	0.00*
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Male	0.03	0.02	0.02	-0.01	-0.07**	-0.07**	-0.06**	-0.08***
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Education Attainment	-0.05***	-0.04***	-0.03***	-0.02*	0.02**	0.02**	0.02**	0.02
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Region								
Seoul	-0.15**	-0.13**	-0.09	-0.02	-0.05	-0.05	-0.03	-0.06
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.07)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Gyeonggi	-0.22***	-0.19***	-0.18***	-0.15**	-0.08	-0.08	-0.07	-0.12**
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.07)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.06)
Incheon	-0.28***	-0.26***	-0.24***	-0.24***	-0.08	-0.08	-0.07	-0.09
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.09)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.08)
Nchungcheong	-0.28***	-0.28***	-0.26***	-0.13	-0.21***	-0.22***	-0.19**	-0.21**
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.10)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.10)
SChungcheong	-0.13	-0.10	-0.07	-0.00	-0.20***	-0.20***	-0.19**	-0.29***
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.10)	(0.07)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
NJeolla	-0.17*	-0.14	-0.15	-0.12	-0.17**	-0.15*	-0.12	-0.14
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.10)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.09)
SJeolla	-0.22**	-0.21**	-0.19**	-0.12	-0.04	-0.02	-0.01	-0.03
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.11)
NGyeongsang	-0.09	-0.08	-0.08	-0.06	-0.05	-0.04	-0.02	-0.07

	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.10)	(0.07)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
SGyeongsang	-0.20**	-0.19**	-0.15*	-0.12	0.04	0.04	0.05	-0.01
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.09)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Gangwon	-0.28***	-0.24***	-0.25***	-0.23**	-0.14*	-0.11	-0.09	-0.09
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.10)	(0.08)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.10)
Daejeon	-0.00	0.03	0.04	0.05	-0.23**	-0.24***	-0.23**	-0.28***
	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.12)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.10)
Daegu	-0.25***	-0.23***	-0.22***	-0.15	-0.04	-0.08	-0.07	-0.12
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.09)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.08)
Ulsan	0.26**	0.30**	0.24**	0.33**	0.18*	0.18*	0.17*	0.14
	(0.10)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.14)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)
Gwangju	-0.34***	-0.30***	-0.31***	-0.27**	-0.22**	-0.23***	-0.23**	-0.26***
	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)
N	1,077	1,049	1,043	862	1,077	1,049	1,043	862
R ²	0.087	0.01	0.14	0.146	0.064	0.067	0.072	0.074
chi2	103.16***	114.92***	169.94***	146.89***	73.39***	75.01***	81.03***	68.83***

Standard errors in parentheses. ***=significant at 1%, **= significant at 5%, *= significant at 10%

APPENDIX

Table A1. List of variables

Variable	WVS Question (Wave 6/Wave 7)	Description
Neighbor: Immigrants/foreign workers	V39/Q21	Would not like to have as neighbors: Immigrants or foreign workers? 1: Yes, 0: No
Financial Satisfaction	V59/Q50	Satisfaction with financial situation of household: Ranges from 1 to 10, with 1: Dissatisfied, 10: Satisfied
Unemployed	V229/Q279	Employment status: 1: Unemployed, Housewife, Student, Retired, 0: Full-time, Part-time, Self employed
Worries of losing /not finding job	V181/Q142	Worries: Losing my job or not finding a job: 1: Worries, 0: No worries
Political Stance	V95/Q240	Self-positioning in political scale: Ranges from 1 to 10, with 1: Left, 10: Right
Importance of Democracy	V140/Q250	Importance of democracy
National Pride	V211/Q254	National pride
Trust in another Nationality	V107/Q63	Trust: People of another nationality 1: Trust, 0: Not trust
Religion is Important in Life	V9/Q6	Important in life: Religion: 1: Religion is Very Important, 0: Otherwise
Only Acceptable Religion is Mine	V154/Q170	The only acceptable religion is my religion: 1: yes, 0: no
Religion	V144/Q289CS9	Religious denomination - detailed list: Buddhist, Catholic, Protestant, Non-religious

Variable	WVS Question (Wave 6/Wave 7)	Description
Age	V242/Q262	Age
Sex	V240/Q260	Sex: 1: Male, 0: Female
Education Attainment	V248/Q275	Highest educational level Respondent: Wave 6: Ranges from 0 to 8, Wave 7: 1 to 9
Region	N_REGION_ISO: Region (ISO)/N_REGION_ ISO	REGION_ISO

Table A2. Descriptive statistics

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.
	Wave 6			Wave 7		
Neighbor: Immigrants/foreign workers (DV)	1,200	0.406	0.491	1,245	0.220	0.414
Financial Satisfaction	1,184	5.861	1.965	1,245	6.082	1.465
Unemployed	1,120	0.367	0.482	1,245	0.295	0.456
Worries of losing /not finding job	1,165	0.821	0.383	1,245	0.732	0.443
Political Stance	1,197	5.336	2.066	1,245	5.258	1.754
Importance of Democracy	1,197	8.462	1.678	1,245	7.900	1.489
National Pride	1,173	3.1	0.587	1,245	2.905	0.549
Trust in another Nationality	1,194	0.35	0.477	1,245	0.191	0.393
Religion is Important in Life	1,191	0.55	0.498	1,245	0.103	0.304
Only Acceptable Religion is My Religion	1,001	0.168	0.374	1,245	0.215	0.411
Catholic	1,178	0.171	0.376	1,241	0.068	0.253
Nonreligious	1,178	0.415	0.493	1,241	0.642	0.480
Protestant	1,178	0.233	0.423	1,241	0.149	0.356
Age	1,200	43.17	14.943	1,245	45.630	15.035
Male	1,200	0.493	0.500	1,245	0.488	0.500
Education Attainment	1,200	7.558	1.776	1,245	4.118	1.606

Table A3. Correlation matrix (Wave 6)

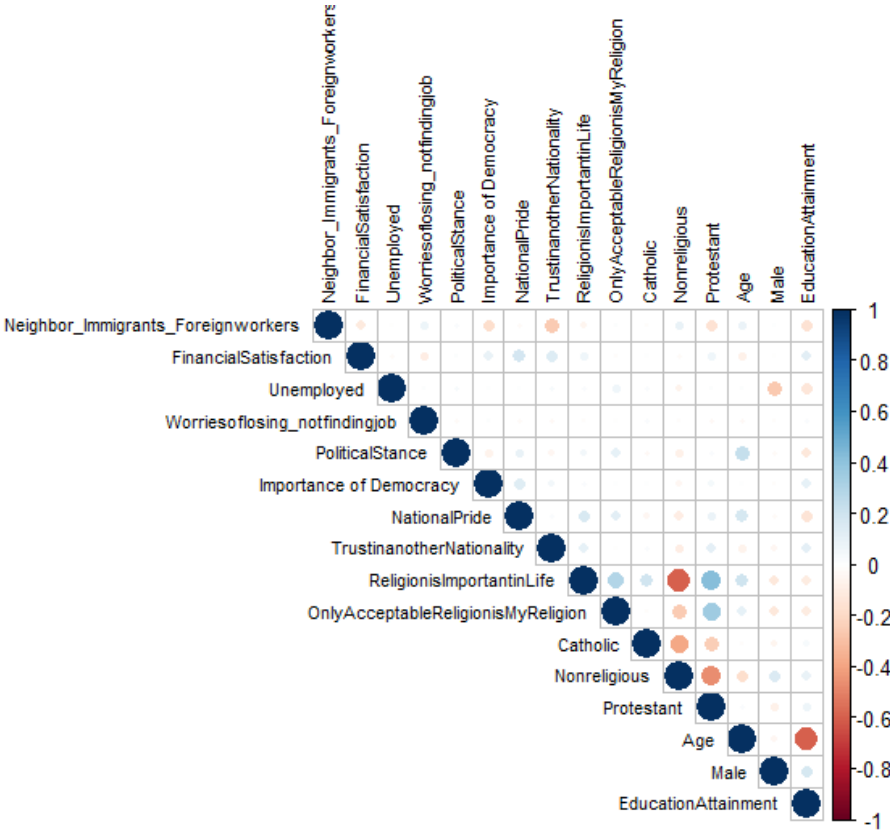


Table A4. Correlation matrix (wave 7)

