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Community-level drivers of attitudes towards immigration in Ireland

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Abstract

International research has shown that community-level characteristics can affect host-country attitudes, in addition to both national-level and individual-level characteristics, and much recent debate in Ireland has centred on challenges communities face in integrating migrants. While we know that Irish attitudes to immigration vary depending on people's personal situation and concerns, the impact of community-level factors has never been explored in Ireland. In this research, we match a 2023 Irish survey on attitudes to immigrants and immigration to small area data on communities from the 2022 census. Drawing on competing theories of group threat and intergroup contact, we examine how community-level factors are associated with attitudes. We find that the proportion of migrants in a community and recent change in that share is not associated with immigration attitudes. However, consistent with international findings, we find that attitudes to immigration are more negative in disadvantaged communities. This is particularly the case in disadvantaged communities where the proportion of migrants has increased since 2011, consistent with theories of intergroup threat. We also find that rural communities tend to be more negative than urban communities on average, but that an increasing proportion of migrants in rural communities has a positive impact on attitudes, to the extent that rural communities with high proportions of migrants show almost no difference in attitudes with urban communities. This is supportive of contact theory. The paper also considers levels of segregation. Higher residential segregation of migrants is associated with more negative attitudes, consistent with previous international research. This may be because of more limited opportunities for contact in segregated communities, or inflated perceptions of the size of migrant communities and the potential threat they pose. Overall, the results imply that it is important to consider the characteristics of communities for understanding attitudes to immigration in Ireland.

1. Introduction and Motivation

Irish attitudes towards immigration have generally remained positive compared with European countries, despite rapidly shifting from a country of emigration to one in which 20% of the population was born abroad, according to the 2022 census. However, the recent arrival of historically high numbers of people seeking protection – both refugees from Ukraine and asylum seekers – has significantly raised the salience of immigration in Irish society (Laurence, McGinnity & Murphy, 2024). Initially, protests occurred at the opening of individual reception centres. However, this has also led to more general anti-immigrant protests, and the emergence of anti-immigrant candidates in recent elections. Protests against reception centres have also become more violent, with an estimated 16 arson attacks on centres that were designated or rumoured to be designated to house asylum seekers (Gilmartin & Murphy, 2024). Polling data also indicates that a majority may support more closed immigration policies.[1]

People's attitudes towards immigration can be shaped by their personal situation and views, as explored in Laurence, McGinnity and Murphy (2024), as well as their broader national social and economic context. However, the local environments in which they live can also play a key role in shaping their attitudes. In other countries, significant research has been conducted to understand how attitudes are influenced by social contexts at various spatial units, such as the region or city people live in, even down to neighbourhood level (Kawalerowicz 2021; Mitchell, 2021). For example, change in neighbourhood composition appears to lead to negative attitudes, as does higher residential segregation (Kawalerowicz, 2021; Bjanesoy, 2019; Mitchell, 2021; Laurence et al., 2019). To date, however, no research has been undertaken on the topic in Ireland, as, until now, data was not available. This paper thus makes the following contributions. Firstly, it enhances our understanding of what kinds of communities in Ireland may be more/less likely to experience anti-immigrant sentiment at a time of potential rising anxiety around immigration. Secondly, it will contribute to the wider literature of the drivers of immigration attitudes by exploring how community-level factors operate in a novel context, that has recently and rapidly shifted from homogeneity to diversity.

2. Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses

2.1 Group Threat and Contact Hypotheses

Studies exploring how immigration is linked with immigration attitudes generally draw on two key theories: the contact and threat hypotheses. The threat hypothesis draws on ethnic competition theory, based on the idea that groups compete over scarce resources in society. The threat hypothesis posits that non-migrants may perceive the out-group (immigrants) to be a threat to their material resources - jobs, housing, welfare or to their cultural values, such as religious beliefs or cultural traditions (Quillian, 1995; Hainmeuller and Hopkins, 2014). Either type of threat (material or cultural) can be real or imagined, but both perceived and real threat has the potential to affect attitudes (Coenbanu and Escandell, 2010). Where such perceived threats are high, anti-immigrant sentiment is predicted to increase. The contact hypothesis, meanwhile, posits that intergroup contact between migrants and non-migrants is likely to reduce anti-immigrant sentiment. Widespread evidence demonstrates that positive contact can counteract negative out-group attitudes, especially under particular conditions (such as voluntary, cooperative, common-goal-orientated contact) (Allport 1954; Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006). Studies have drawn on these theories to explore what roles communities might play in shaping people's immigration attitudes.

The share of migrants in an area has been predicted to have opposing effects on immigration attitudes. On one hand, studies suggest a larger share of migrants in an area is likely to trigger great perceived threat among residents, as they increasingly feel either their resources or values (or both) are under threat from migrants (Quillian, 1995; Schlueter and Scheepers, 2010). This leads to **hypothesis 1a: a** higher migrant-share will be linked to more negative immigration attitudes (threat). On the other hand, studies also suggest that larger shares of migrants may increase opportunities for positive intergroup contact between groups, which should

[1] Loscher, D. (2024) 'Why is Ireland no longer taking immigration in its stride and what does it mean for the next election?' (Irish Times, 10 February).

reduce prejudice and improve outgroup attitudes (Hjerm, 2009; Wagner et al., 2003). This leads to the parallel **hypothesis 1b**: higher migrant-share will be linked to more positive immigration attitudes (contact).

Other work, however, argues that it is not the share of immigrants in an area but the rate at which the share of migrants is increasing (Kawalerowicz, 2021; Bjanesoy, 2019; Mitchell, 2021; Deiss-Helbig and Remer, 2022). Here, larger, recent increases in the share of migrants in an area is posited to trigger perceptions of threat, as residents see their environments rapidly changing around them and away from their expected neighbourhood composition (Banjesoy, 2019; Kawalerowicz, 2021; Deiss-Helbig and Remer, 2022). In this context, Kawalerowicz (2021) theorises that the prejudice-reducing mechanisms of interpersonal contact cannot keep up with threat responses when there is rapid growth. This leads to **hypothesis 2**: larger recent increases in the share of migrants will be linked with more negative immigration attitudes (threat).

Some research has found that the impact of a change in migrant share may depend on the proportion of migrants initially. Kawalerowicz (2021), for example, found that attitudes were most positive in constituencies with high base levels of non-white population and little change in this population. However, when there were high base levels of non-white population and increases in this population, attitudes were more negative. Other research has found the opposite, that change in migrant share had most impact in areas with few migrants initially (Newman, 2013). This leads to **hypothesis 3**: the impact of change in migrant share will differ based on the initial share of migrants (the acculturating contexts hypothesis).

Other factors may also play a role, but could not be analysed here. Those that are likely important that we don't look at are national salience of immigration (which can increase the threat perception of increased immigration; Hopkins, 2010) and the countries of origin or ethnicities of migrants (i.e. cultural distance or out-group categorisation), which previous research has found to be important for attitudes (Hood and Morris, 1997; Ha, 2010; Steele and Abdelaaty, 2019).

2.2 Neighbourhood Characteristics

Community disadvantage and urban/rural location

Of course, communities differ in other ways, so other neighbourhood characteristics also matter for attitudes to immigrants and integration. Two factors have emerged from the literature as potentially playing a key role. Firstly, areas that are more socio-economically disadvantaged are believed to trigger greater perceived resource threat among residents, given people in areas with more economically precarious individuals are likely to feel immigration is most likely to affect their position and resources (perceived threat) (Oliver and Wong 2003). In addition, resources such as health, housing and other supports may indeed be scarcer in disadvantaged areas (real threat). This leads to **hypothesis 4**: higher socio-economic disadvantage in an area will be linked with more negative immigration attitudes (threat). Secondly, studies have identified an urban/rural divide (Crawley et al 2019; Drazanova et al, 2023; Schmidt et al, 2023), suggesting urban inhabitants may have more positive immigration attitudes. This may be due, for example, to higher density increasing interaction and exposure, or given urban areas tend to have more migrants, increasing opportunities for contact but also influencing the expected neighbourhood composition. Or it may because urban residents have more cosmopolitan values (Luca et al. 2023). Higher concentration of migrants in urban areas has also been found in Ireland (Fahey et al., 2019). **Hypothesis 5** is therefore: residents of urban areas have more positive immigration attitudes than those living in rural areas.

Community-level drivers of immigration attitudes are unlikely to operate in isolation. Instead, different features of the community may interact with each other to affect attitudes towards immigration. For example, diversity may have a more negative impact in disadvantaged areas, where economically precarious residents may be more likely to view migrants as a threat to their resources. Or diversity may have no effect in urban areas where residents may already be used to experiencing difference in their everyday life, or where cosmopolitan values are already higher and diverse neighbourhoods are the expectation. The effects of immigrant composition may therefore be conditional on other community-level characteristics. This leads to **hypothesis 6:** the impacts of migrant share or change in migrant share on attitudes will have different impacts in communities with different characteristics (e.g. disadvantage, urban/rural).

2.3 Residential Segregation

- Alongside the size of the migrant group in an area, studies have suggested that how groups are spread out across an area may also matter for intergroup attitudes (Kawalerowicz, 2021; Laurence et al 2019). In segregated communities, where migrant and non-migrants are clustered in separate neighbourhoods, there are likely to be fewer opportunities for intergroup contact, and threat perception may be higher. In addition, community segregation may also exaggerate the difference between the in-groups and out-groups, and lead to the perception that the group is larger than it is (Allport, 1954). Thus, integration may seem more uncertain if areas take on strong out-group characteristics- where shops and schools serving minority communities may foster a sense of exclusion of the majority population (Laurence et al., 2019). A crucial point in this research (and indeed all the literature in this area) is that it is not the actual number of migrants living in an area that matters for attitudes, but the *perceived* number of migrants (Crawley et al., 2019).

However, in integrated communities, where neighbourhoods (the smaller areas within the community) are highly mixed, groups are likely to have more contact opportunities. This contact could be in their neighbourhoods, but also through sharing services and amenities, such as schools, civic groups, social spaces such as parks, beaches and libraries. From this literature we derive **Hypothesis 7**: higher segregation will be linked to more negative immigration attitudes.

3. Data and Methods

3.1 Data sources and sample

The paper combines individual-level data on Irish attitudes towards immigration from the 2023 Equality Attitudes Survey, run by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) with 2022 Irish Census data on the characteristics of the communities in which survey respondents live. Several sample restrictions are in place. We restrict the analysis to the sample who completed the attitude survey via Computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI) (excluding telephone interviews) because of the higher degree of missing information on respondents' addresses in the telephone interviews (56%) compared to the in-person interviews (0%). Given processes of contact and threat stemming from community-level processes are predicted to be more salient for the majority group, we restrict our sample to Irish born individuals, who compose 82 per cent of the CAPI sample (Oliver and Wong 2003). Missing within-case data is very low in the CAPI survey (2 per cent of the Irish-born sample) and weights are applied for representativeness. This results in a final analytical sample of n=1,210.

3.2 Scale of analysis

The spatial scale at which most community-level drivers are measured is the Small Area level (circa 65-90 households). Such a fine grained, micro-level measure of the characteristics of people's community will increase our confidence that respondents will be exposed to, for example, migrants in their community, which is important for linking people's spatial context to processes of contact and threat. This becomes somewhat more difficult to infer at larger spatial scales. As previous research has shown, the association between the ethnic composition of respondents' spatial context and their outcomes is stronger at the smallest spatial scales (~80m radius from respondents' homes) and often becomes weaker and non-significant at higher spatial scales (Dinesen and Sønderskov 2015). However, we will also test measure census characteristics at larger spatial scales to examine the relative importance of scale in the findings.

The exceptions to the measurement of variables at the Small Area level are the measure of segregation which is measured at the Local Electoral Area (average population n=27,800), given segregation measures compare the distribution of groups across a larger spatial scale.

To be able to measure change over time in the share of migrants in an area, a key prerequisite is that the shape of Small Areas does not change over time (so that any change can be attributed to migration in/out of the area). There was a small number of Small Areas that were resized between the 2011/2016 and 2022 censuses. We therefore match all Small Area 2022 census data to their equivalent 2011/2016 Small Areas for consistency

3.3 Key variables and communities

3.3.1 Outcomes

The main measure applied to capture people's attitudes towards immigration is an index generated from three key variables, asked in one survey question of the Equality Survey:

> *'For each of the following, please tell me if you are very positive, fairly positive, fairly negative or very negative? So how positive or negative are you...?'*
>
> 1. *'About immigration of people from other EU Member States'*
> 2. *'About immigration of people from the Ukraine', and*
> 3. *'About immigration of people from outside the EU or Ukraine'.*

Applying factor analysis, these three indicators load strongly on to one another (minimum loading .74) and have an alpha score above .84. We therefore generate an index of positivity towards immigration. In the analytic sample, the scale varies from -3.1 to +1, with a mean of -0.15 (see Appendix Table A1).[3]

3.3.2 Independent variables

To explore the migrant composition of communities, we measure the share of migrants in a Small Area in 2022, as well as a percentage point change in the share of migrants between 2011 and 2022. To capture disadvantage, we generate an index of socio-economic disadvantage in 2022 (combining proportion with semi-/unskilled occupations, proportion of households headed by lone-parents, proportion with low education, and proportion unemployed).[4] We also include an indicator of whether a respondent lives in an urban or rural area.[5] We also include a measure of residential segregation (Index of Dissimilarity between migrants and non-migrants) (Massey and Denton, 1988), which captures the degree of evenness with which groups are distributed across an environment.[6] This looks at how (un)evenly migrants are spread out across the Small Areas within an individual's larger Local Electoral Area.

Models also adjust estimates using a full range of individual-level covariates- respondents' gender, highest educational attainment, age, perceived financial situation, principal economic status, social class, housing tenure, gender, parental status, ethnicity, wellbeing, whether they volunteered in the past 12 months, voted at the last election, and whether they live in Dublin. These results are not presented in this paper, but see Laurence, McGinnity and Murphy (2024) for details of measurement and associations with attitudes. Appendix Table A1 presents details of the individual and community-level covariates in the analytic sample.

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[2] To explore whether this approach affected our findings we also ran all our analyses using 2022 census data at the 2022 Small Area level and found results highly consistent with the results reported here. The only variable for which we could not replicate analysis at the 2022 Small Area level was the urban/rural identifier as the definition substantially changed across censuses. In this sensitivity analysis we therefore continued to use the 2016 measure of urban/rural location.

[3] The reason the index of immigration attitudes has positive/negative values is because factor analysis creates an index, based on the common variance, where the mean of the factor is 0. Negative values are values less than mean and positive values are values greater than the mean.

[4] Minimum loading .63; Alpha score .77. An alternative measure of disadvantage in an area commonly used in Ireland is the HP index of disadvantage (http://trutzhaase.eu/services/hp_deprivation_index/). This includes similar community characteristics, but also demographic characteristics, which are not so relevant for this analysis. We tested both our own constructed index and the HP Index, and the results were substantively identical. Results are available from the authors.

[5] These follow the 2016 census definitions for small areas, aggregated to two categories. **Urban areas** are Cities, Satellite Urban Towns, Independent urban towns. **Rural areas** are: Rural areas with high urban influence; Rural areas with moderate urban influence and highly rural/remote areas. See https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-urli/urbanandrurallifeinireland2019/introduction/ In the analytic sample around one third or respondents (35 per cent) live in rural areas.

[6] See also Fahey et al., 2019 for an application of this measure to investigate residential patterns of migrants in Ireland using the 2016 Census.

Table 1: Summary of hypotheses, measures and sources

Hypotheses	Indicators	Spatial Scale?	Source
1a Higher migrant-share = more negative immigration attitudes (threat) 1b Increasing migrant-share = more positive immigration attitudes (contact)	Proportion of migrants (2022)	Small Area	Census 2022
2 Larger recent increases in the migrant-share = more negative immigration attitudes 3: the impact of change in migrant share will differ based on the initial share of migrants.	Change in proportion of migrants (2011-2022)	Small Area	Census 2022
4 Higher socio-economic disadvantages in an area = more negative immigration attitudes	Combined index of prop with semi-/unskilled occupations, prop lone parent hhs, prop low educ, prop unemployed). [also test HP index]	Small Area	Census 2022
5 Urban residencies = more positive immigration attitudes	Urban/Rural using 2016 definitions	Small Area	Census 2016
6 The effects of immigrant composition of an area (its level or change) will be conditional on urban/rural status of a neighbourhood or its socio-economic disadvantage	See above	Small Area	Census 2016 and 2022
7 Higher residential segregation = more negative immigration attitudes	Index of dissimilarity (captures clustering)	SA v Local Electoral Area	Census 2022

3.4 Methodology and Analytic Approach

As survey respondents are clustered within space, we correct standard errors for the clustering of individuals within communities. We therefore estimate random-intercept multilevel linear models, with individuals nested in Small Areas and, where higher-level spatial measures are used, in Local Electoral Areas as well[7]. All models are weighted to be nationally representative. We build up our models in a stepwise fashion (all models contain full individual-level controls), beginning with (1) migrant-share, then adding in (2) change in migrant share (2011-2022), (3) community disadvantage and urban/rural identifier, then (4) segregation.

Given the small spatial size of the Small Area-level in Ireland (the primary geographic level of analysis), many Small Areas linked into the survey data contain only one respondent ('singleton' communities) while average levels of clustering in Small Areas is low. There is debate as to whether applying multi-level models requires a minimum amount of clustering. However, research suggests this depends on the aims of the analysis. Given we have a large n of level-2 units in our sample, we are not studying level-1 random coefficients, and the primary of aim of the study is to examine the relationship between community (level-2) characteristics and individual (level-1) outcomes, then under such conditions multi-level models are deemed appropriate (Bell et al., 2008; Snijders, 2005).

4. Results

4.1 Migrant share and change in migrant share

To assess whether local context is important for attitudes in Ireland, we calculated the intraclass correlation

(ICC). In the null model, the ICC shows that around 20% of total variance in attitudes is attributable to differences between small areas, with the remaining 80% attributed to individual differences. Table 1 shows the results of a series of random intercept two-level multilevel models (individuals nested in small areas), with full individual-level controls listed in section 3.3.2 (although not shown in the table, as these are not the focus of this analysis).[8] Model 1 demonstrates there is no overall association between the share of migrants in a Small Area and people's positivity towards immigration. The percentage point change in migrant share (between 2011-2022) also has no overall association with immigration attitudes (Model 2). In Model 3 we test the acculturating contexts hypothesis to see whether the impact of change (2011-2022) in migrant share depends on the share of migrant population residing in the area in 2011 (substituting the 2022 migrant share measure with the 2011 migrant share), via an interaction term between the two. However, there is no significant difference (Model 3).

Table 2: Association between immigrant attitudes and migrant composition, change in migrant composition.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
	Immigration positivity	Immigration positivity	Immigration positivity
FULL INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL CONTROLS (see notes)			
Migrant share 2022 (SA: 2022 Census - % born outside of Ireland)	0.272 (0.290)	0.321 (0.306)	
Change in migrant share (SA: 2022 % non-Irish born minus 2011 % non-Irish born)		-0.322 (0.533)	0.549 (1.145)
Migrant share 2011 (SA: 2011 Census - % born outside of Ireland)			0.307 (0.316)
Migrant share 2011 # change in migrant share (SA: 2011 Census - % born outside of Ireland # SA: 2022 % non-Irish born minus 2011 % non-Irish born)			-2.219 (4.719)
Constant	-1.040***	-1.050***	-1.053***
	(0.238)	(0.239)	(0.241)
Observations	1210	1210	1210
AIC	3137.860	3139.442	3141.070
BIC	3290.811	3297.492	3304.218

Note: Standard errors in parentheses; p values= + p<0.10; * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001. Sample restricted to Irish-born CAPI respondents. Models are weighted and also control for respondents' gender, highest educational attainment, age, perceived financial situation, principal economic status, social class, housing tenure, gender, parental status, ethnicity, wellbeing, and whether they live in Dublin.

4.2 Other community characteristics and interactions: disadvantage, urban/rural, residential segregation

To better understand how other community characteristics impact upon attitudes, we next add in community disadvantage and the urban/rural indicator (Model 4). We find that residents in communities with higher levels of socio-economic disadvantage are less positive about immigration. We also see that people living in rural areas report less positivity towards immigration than urban dwellers.

Lastly, we explore whether any relationship between the migrant composition of an area and immigration attitudes may depend on other characteristics of the community. Model 5 demonstrates there is a significant, negative interaction between the change in migrant share and disadvantage, suggesting larger recent increases in the share of migrants in an area (from 2011-2022) has a more negative effect on immigration

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[8] Detailed results of individual-level factors are available from the authors on request. In large part they replicate the results in Laurence, McGinnity and Murphy (2024).

attitudes in more disadvantaged communities. There is also a significant, positive interaction between living in a rural (compared to urban) area and the share of migrants in the area. This suggests that migrant share has a more positive impact on immigration attitudes in rural areas.[9]

Figures 1 and 2 explore these interactions in more detail. Turning first to the interaction between change in migrant share and disadvantage, Figure 1 plots the predicted marginal scores of people's positivity towards immigration, looking at the relationship between change in the share of migrants and people's attitudes. It shows this relationship for low disadvantage areas (5th percentile) and high disadvantage areas (95th percentile). We see that in more advantaged areas (see Figure 1), larger increases in the migrant share (between 2011-2022) are associated with somewhat more positive attitudes towards immigration. However, residents in more disadvantaged communities that experience larger increases in migrant-share (2011-2022) have much more negative views. In other words, community-level disadvantage affects how people react to changes in the share of migrants in their communities, in addition to any personal or household financial strain.

Are migrants more likely to have moved into disadvantaged communities? In these data this is not the case – in fact the migrant share has tended to increase more between 2011 and 2022 in areas that are less disadvantaged.[10] This is consistent with Fahey et al. (2019), in their analysis of the full population of Ireland using 2016 Census data. They found migrants were not more likely to be living in disadvantaged areas in the country as a whole. What these authors did find is that migrants were more likely to be living in areas with a high concentration of rental properties.

Figure 1 Attitudes to immigration following a change in migrant share in disadvantaged communities (dotted line) and advantaged communities (solid line)
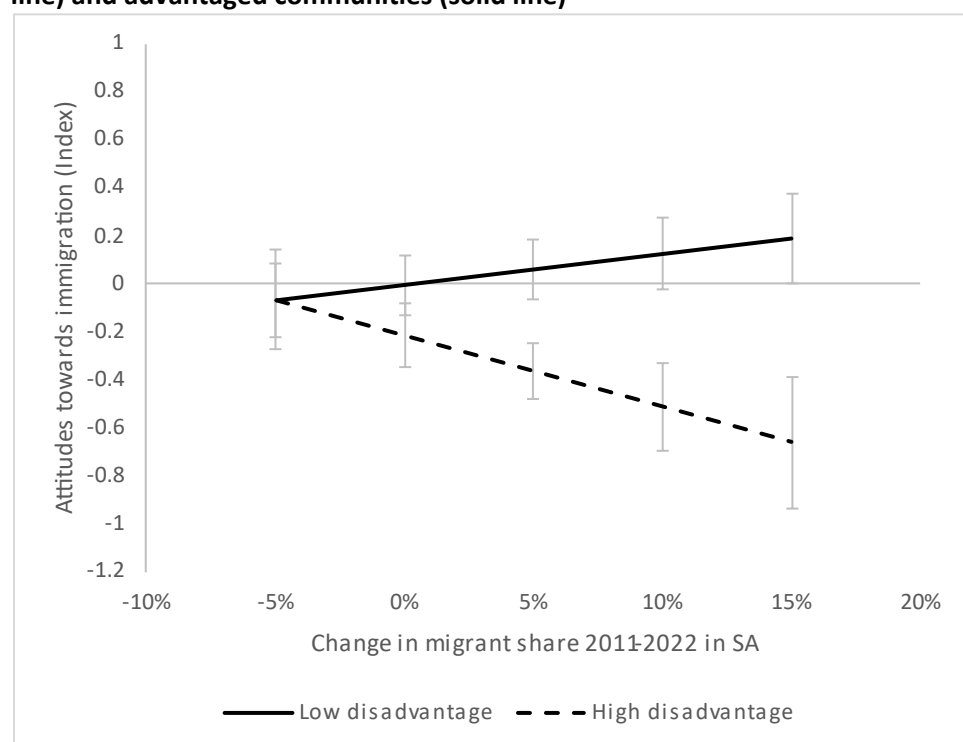
Notes: Maximum and minimum values of 'change in migrant share' are set at the 5th and 95th percentiles.

Figure 2 also plots the predicted marginal scores of people's positivity towards immigration. However, this time it looks at the relationship between the share of in an area and people's attitudes. It subdivides this relationship by urban and rural status. To prevent predicting immigration attitudes of people in communities for which we only have a few cases in our data, we also only look at attitudes in communities between the 5th and 95th percentiles of share of non-Ireland born in urban and rural areas. In urban areas this is communities

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[9] We tested a full range if interaction models between all the community-level variables in Table 1 but only the two outlined were significant, therefore the others were excluded.

[10] The correlation between area-level disadvantage and change in migrant share is -0.06, p=0.48 in the analytic sample, indicating a small but statistically significant negative correlation. Results from the authors are available on request.

with between 5 per cent and 50 per cent non-Ireland born, while in rural areas this is communities with between 5 per cent and 25 per cent non-Ireland born.

We find that the share of migrants in urban areas has no association with people's immigration attitudes. In rural areas, we see that residents living among a low share of migrants report more negative attitudes towards immigration compared to urban dwellers. However, as the share of migrants increases in rural areas people's attitudes towards immigration are increasingly positive, and in rural communities with 25 per cent migrant share there is essentially no difference in attitudes between urban and rural areas. Migrant-share therefore has a positive relationship with immigration attitudes but only in rural areas.

Figure 2 Attitudes to immigration following a change in migrant share in rural communities (dotted line) and urban areas (solid line)
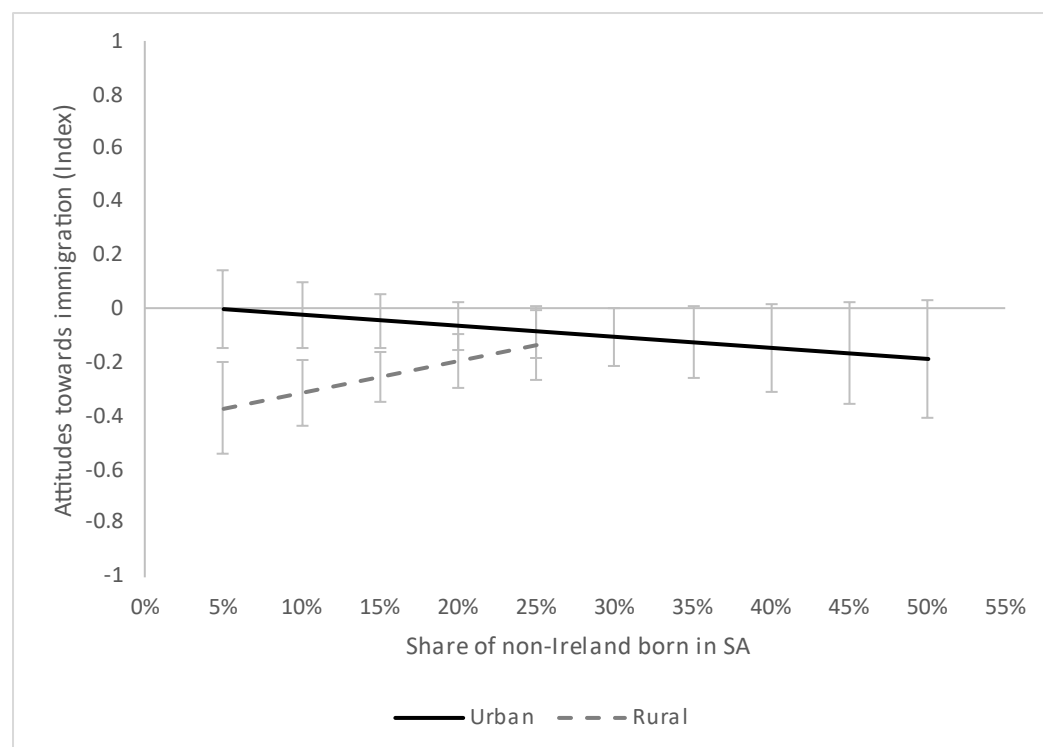
Note – Maximum and minimum values of share of non-Ireland born are set at the 5th and 95th percentiles for urban and rural separately.

In this next section, we analyse the impact of residential segregation on immigration attitudes. Table 2 shows the results from a three-level multilevel linear regression model (with individuals nested within Small Areas nested within Local Electoral Areas), with full individual-level controls (although not shown in the table – see Supplementary Appendix A.2). Model 6 (Table 2) adds residential segregation into the model. We find that individuals living in Local Electoral Areas in which migrants and non-migrants are more unevenly spread across the area (segregated), report more negative attitudes towards immigration[11].

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[11] We also tested whether measuring migrant composition, migrant change and socio-economic disadvantage at larger spatial scales (the ED and LEA) lead to differing findings. However, both migrant composition and change remained non-significant at larger spatial scales and disadvantage was non-significant when measured at larger scales.

Table 3 Other community characteristics and interactions: community disadvantage, rural/urban, residential segregation

	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
	Immigration positivity	Immigration positivity	Immigration positivity
FULL INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL CONTROLS (see notes)			
Migrant share 2022 (SA: 2022 Census - % born outside of Ireland)	0.030 (0.319)	-0.376 (0.345)	-0.408 (0.356)
Change in migrant share (SA: 2022 % non-Irish born minus 2011 % non-Irish born)	-0.248 (0.542)	-0.374 (0.475)	-0.446 (0.402)
Migrant share 2011 (SA: 2011 Census - % born outside of Ireland)			
Community disadvantage	-0.131*** (0.034)	-0.098** (0.036)	-0.071+ (0.038)
Rural (ref.: urban)	-0.171* (0.071)	-0.399** (0.138)	-0.447** (0.149)
Rural # migrant share 2022 (SA: 2022 Census - % born outside of Ireland)		1.492* (0.728)	1.575* (0.696)
Community disadvantage # change in migrant share (SA: 2022 % non-Irish born minus 2011 % non-Irish born)		-1.585** (0.518)	-1.447** (0.502)
Residential segregation (INDEX DISSIMILARITY: 2022: SA v LEA: Irish-born v non-Irish-born)			-1.333* (0.678)
Constant	-0.855***	-0.769**	-0.433+
	(0.248)	(0.245)	(0.241)
Observations	1210	1210	1210
AIC	3129.388	3121.927	3104.056
BIC	3297.634	3300.370	3292.696

Note: Standard errors in parentheses; p values= + p<0.10; * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001.   Sample restricted to Irish-born CAPI respondents. Models are weighted and also control for respondents' gender, highest educational attainment, age, perceived financial situation, principal economic status, social class, housing tenure, parental status, ethnicity, wellbeing, whether they volunteered in the past 12 months, voted at the last election, and whether they live in Dublin.

5 Discussion and Implications

This paper considers, for the first time, the role of community characteristics in shaping immigration attitudes in Ireland, a new immigration country which experienced a recent rapid increase in asylum seekers and refugees in the year prior to the survey. In line with much of the literature, residents living in areas with higher levels of socio-economic disadvantage report more negative attitudes towards immigration (evidence for hypothesis 6) while those living in more urban areas report more positive attitudes (evidence for hypothesis 6). At the same time, contrary to some studies, there is little evidence of an overall association between the immigrant composition of people's local areas and their immigration attitudes. Firstly, there is no evidence that the share of immigrants in people's neighbourhoods, in and of itself, has a positive or negative association with immigration attitudes (evidence against hypothesis H1a or H1b). Secondly, there is also no evidence that a larger increase in the share of migrants between 2011 and 2022 in an area, in and of itself, is associated with more negative attitudes towards immigration (evidence against hypothesis 2). We also found no evidence for the acculturating contexts hypothesis, whereby the impact of change in migrant share is different depending on the initial share of migrants in the area (hypothesis 3).

What we do observe, however, is that how the immigrant composition of an area is associated with people's immigration attitudes depends on other characteristics of the area (evidence for hypothesis 6). Larger recent

changes in the share of migrants (2011-2021) appear to be positively related to immigration attitudes in more socioeconomically advantaged areas but negatively related to immigration attitudes in areas with higher disadvantage (as shown in model 5 and figure 2). Regarding the share of migrants in an area, in urban areas, migrant-share has no association with immigration attitudes shown by the interaction in Model 5. In rural areas with a low migrant-share, immigration attitudes are more negative than among urban residents. However, an increasing migrant-share has a positive association with immigration attitudes in rural areas, and in rural communities composed of 25 per cent migrants there is essentially no difference in attitudes between urban and rural areas.

These results provide mixed support for the theoretical framework of contact and threat as applied to Ireland. The results show no support for negative processes of threat linked to larger shares of migrants in local areas (hypothesis 1a). The results do find conditional support for positive processes of contact linked to a larger migrant-share but only in rural areas (hypothesis 1b). This could be because urban residents have less neighbourhood-centric lives, with greater spatial mobility (e.g., more access to public transport), and are more likely to encounter people from a wider spatial area than rural residents. As such, even residents of neighbourhoods with low migrant-shares in urban areas may be more familiar with ethnic diversity if such diversity exists across their urban area. They may also have opportunities for intergroup contact in their wider spatial lives, such as in workplaces, social settings, their children's schools, and amenities. Rural areas, however, are generally less diverse than urban areas and residents tend to be distributed over a wider geographical area (Crawley et al., 2019). Accordingly, the share of migrants in their neighbourhoods may be a better determinant of their exposure to ethnic difference as well as their contact opportunities. Therefore, a larger share of migrants in rural neighbourhoods may be a key driver of opportunities for contact, yielding the observed positive association. At the same time, research suggests that that people with more liberal attitudes tend to move to urban areas (Drazanová et al. 2022). Therefore, the lack of an association for migrant share in urban areas may partly be driven by some urban residents already having more positive attitudes towards immigration, and thus being unaffected by the share of migrants.

The results also find conditional support for negative processes of threat linked to experiencing larger recent increases in the share of migrants in one's neighbourhood (hypothesis 2) but only in more disadvantaged areas. This suggests that whether residents perceive recent increases in the local share of migrants as a threat depends on the socio-economic status of their communities. Prior work suggests that rapid changes in the share of immigrants can stimulate perceptions of threat when residents are suddenly exposed to a 'more unfamiliar and culturally diverse social landscape', and before longer-term processes of contact have had a chance to operate (Newman 2013: 378, Kawalerowicz 2021). Research also suggests that disadvantaged environments can lead residents to view immigrants as a threat to their social and economic positions given their greater precarity in society (Oliver and Mendelberg 2000). Together, these findings suggest that threat-generating processes of disadvantaged environments can exacerbate the posited threat-generating processes of rapid changes in immigration, leading to incoming migrants being viewed as a particular threat, relative both to those experiencing change in less disadvantaged areas, or those in disadvantaged areas experiencing less change.

The positive association between recent increases in migrant-share and immigration attitudes in less disadvantaged areas is more of a puzzle. While it provides evidence in favour of the contact hypothesis, prior work suggests processes of contact take longer to emerge (Newman 2013; Laurence and Kim 2023). One possibility is that the type of immigrants who can move into more advantaged areas have different characteristics to those who move into more disadvantaged areas, differentially affecting residents' perceived threat. For example, research has shown how different types of migrants may affect attitudes differently (Ha 2010; Hood and Morris 1997). An alternative possibility is that intergroup contact may emerge faster in more advantaged areas, which may have more amenities, such as parks or social spaces, or community groups, which lead to more opportunities for contact.

The findings show that immigration attitudes are more negative in areas with higher levels of residential segregation (evidence in support of hypothesis 7), in line with other studies showing more negative attitudes towards immigration and ethnic outgroups in more segregated areas (Kawalerowicz, 2021; Laurence et al 2019). This conforms to the posited obstacles segregated environments may impose on opportunities for positive contact between migrants and non-migrants, and potential perceptions of the size of migrant groups or the threat they pose, undermining immigration attitudes.

In spite of these insights, there are some limitations to this research. Firstly, the main limitation is that the data are cross-sectional, preventing stronger tests against endogeneity bias. For example, processes of neighbourhood selection, whereby residents more averse to immigrants select out of areas with larger migrant populations may bias the observed relationships or whereby people with more liberal attitudes move to urban areas (Drazanová et al., 2022). Secondly, we know from previous research in Ireland that people may overstate their support for immigration in a socially desirable way (Creighton et al., 2022), particularly in face-to-face surveys (Laurence, McGinnity and Murphy, 2024). Nonetheless, as the primary focus of this research is on the impact of community-level characteristics, after controlling for personal situation, unless social desirability bias is systematically related to community characteristics, our key findings will not be affected.

Thirdly, the current study focuses on the overall share of migrants in an area. However, previous research indicates that migrants from different countries of origin may have different effects on people's immigration attitudes (Mitchell, 2021). A promising avenue for future research would be to use Census 2022 data to examine whether the share of migrants from different regions (for example EU/non-EU) or people of different ethnicity has different associations with residents' attitudes. In particular, given the content of media debates in Ireland about the housing of people seeking protection, future research could consider whether the presence of accommodation for either Ukrainian refugees or asylum seekers in the local area at the time of the survey was associated with attitudes to immigration, or attitudes to particular immigrant groups. This would require matching additional information as those seeking protection are not separately identified in the Census. It would also require a sufficient number of residents of these areas to provide robust estimates of the association.

Lastly, we are only able to test the study's relationships at a single point in time, when the survey was conducted (April 2023). Prior research shows how the effects of local immigration can depend on the salience of immigration related issues in the wider society (Hopkins 2010). Recent research shows significant increases in immigration salience in Ireland over the period of the survey, and as such, the current findings could be contingent on the period of analysis (Laurence, McGinnity & Murphy, 2024). As no previous surveys of attitudes to immigration in Ireland have indicators of where the respondent lives, this would require that this or a similar survey is fielded in the future, to allow comparison over time of community-level drivers or attitudes are related to the salience of immigration.

A key contribution of this paper is to show how characteristics of the community's migrants live in are associated with attitudes to immigration of Irish people living there. One implication is that communities may need more support to integrate migrants, particularly disadvantaged communities. Ideally this would be part of long-term integration planning, ensuring the investment is made to meet the needs of host communities (Banulescu-Bogdan et al., 2024). A second implication, drawing on previous findings of the beneficial effect of positive contact between migrants and host communities in Ireland (McGinnity et al., 2023), would be to facilitate that contact. One area for this is in schools or workplaces, but another is community or civic engagement. Laurence (2020) found that volunteering in the community can provide opportunities for interaction across groups.

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Table A1 descriptive statistics of individual and community-level variables used

INDIVIDUAL LEVEL	Categories	N of cases	Proportion
Categorical individual-level variables			
A. GENDER	Male	582	(48.1%)
	Female	628	(51.9%)
Age categories	16-19	50	(4.1%)
	20-24	84	(6.9%)
	25-34	157	(13.0%)
	35-44	229	(18.9%)
	45-54	223	(18.4%)
	55-64	200	(16.5%)
	65+	267	(22.1%)
Highest education qualifications	Primary	77	(6.4%)
	Secondary	460	(38.0%)
	Post-Secondary	269	(22.2%)
	Tertiary	404	(33.4%)
Current employment situation	In work	654	(54.0%)
	Unemployed/seeking work	47	(3.9%)
	Looking after family	122	(10.1%)
	Retired	273	(22.6%)
	LLTI/Student/Other	114	(9.4%)
Subjective social class	Working class	587	(48.5%)
	Middle class	545	(45.0%)
	Don't know	78	(6.4%)
Housing tenure	Owns	867	(71.7%)
	Social housing	168	(13.9%)
	Rent privately	108	(8.9%)
	Live rent-free/Other/Refused	67	(5.5%)
Family status	No children	400	(33.1%)
	Only children 18+	421	(34.8%)
	Has children under 18	389	(32.1%)
Ethnicity	White Irish	1,202	(99.3%)
	Irish Traveller	5	(0.4%)
	Any other white background	1	(0.1%)
	Other background	2	(0.2%)
Lives in Dublin	No	912	(75.4%)
	Yes	298	(24.6%)
Voted in last election?	No	229	(18.9%)
	Yes	976	(80.7%)
	Not sure	5	(0.4%)
Volunteered in last 12 months?	No	789	(65.2%)
	Yes	418	(34.5%)
	Not sure	3	(0.2%)

	Mean	Min	Max	SD
Continuous individual-level variables				
Index: general attitudes towards immigration	-0.13	-2.968	0.936	0.925
Financial difficulty (Scale)	3.672	1	6	1.199
Subjective well-being index	0.077	-3.68	1.295	0.878
COMMUNITY LEVEL				
Community disadvantage (SA)	0.11	-1.85	3.89	0.95
Migrant share (2022) (SA)	0.18	0.02	0.63	0.11
Migrant share (2011) (SA)	0.16	0.01	0.72	0.11
Change in migrant share (2011-2022) (SA)	0.02	-0.33	0.33	0.06
Segregation (LEA)	0.26	0.14	0.39	0.06
Ratio of demand and supply for primary schools (ED)	1.34	0.54	3.24	0.38
Number of people per GP (ED)	1343.43	352.00	5160.00	733.13
Percentage of Tenants who Pay 40% or More of Their Disposable Income on Rent (LEA)	19.12	6.50	30.70	5.36
Ratio: 2021 Median (buyers) income to median purchase price (LEA)	0.27	0.17	0.42	0.05
% Volunteers (SA)	0.14	0.03	0.28	0.05
General election turnout (2020) (CONST)	64.93	52.44	71.60	3.87
Arrivals from Ukraine as percentage of the population (LEA)	1.42	0.17	10.58	1.41
Number of IP applicants in an area (SA)	1.82	0.00	319.00	16.83
Asylum seekers in IP accommodation as a percentage of population in a small area (SA)	0.01	0.00	0.79	0.07
Asylum seekers in IP accommodation as a percentage of population in a small area (SA): Men	0.01	0.00	0.70	0.06
Asylum seekers in IP accommodation as a percentage of population in a small area (SA): women	0.00	0.00	0.14	0.01

IP accommodation in Small Area	N	Proportion		
No	1,185	97.90%		
Yes - IP accommodation	25	2.10%		
Urban	790	65.30%		
Rural	420	34.70%		
N (unweighted) Individuals	1,210			
N (small areas)	503			
N (Electoral Divisions)	285			
N (Local Electoral areas)	111			

Note: CAPI sample with Irish-born only and those not missing on any covariates. Unweighted.