

Regional and cross-national Prevalence of Racist attitudes in Europe. Evidence from Online Search Behavior

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Discriminatory attitudes against racial and ethnic minorities are a key fault line for political and social divisions across and within countries. Accordingly, norms and laws sanction expressing such attitudes, which radical right parties (RRP) use to allege opinion suppression. Despite this plausible theoretical link between discriminatory attitudes and RRP electoral success, our understanding of the relationship is hampered by limitations inherent in the prevalent survey methodologies.

This paper proposes an innovative approach to address this. We use digital trace data, namely online searches, to evaluate the prevalence of discriminatory attitudes within and across 11 European countries. We first outline the promise of an indicator of discriminatory attitudes from online search data. Then, we describe the process of constructing and aligning it with survey data from two waves of the European and World Values Study and eight waves of the European Social Survey. Finally, we assess the regional prevalence of discriminatory attitudes with survey- and search-based measures and their association with RRP vote shares based on EU-NED and Manifesto Project data, using Eurostat data for regional sociodemographic indicators.

Preliminary results indicate marked differences in discriminatory attitudes between and within countries. However, the survey- and search-based measures reveal different distributions. This result, we argue, may be driven by country-specific desirability bias levels. We close by showing the search-based measure's superior ability to predict RRP vote shares.

This paper illustrates an innovative sensitive-attitude measure, emphasizing its predictive potential, and contributes to our understanding of the role of discriminatory attitudes in RRP electoral successes.