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Cross-country comparisons of the connection between political discourse, intergroup attitudes, and collective action. PolRom Project, Workpackage 2: Report on Survey results for Ireland

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D2.9 Country report



Cross-country comparisons of the connection between political discourse, intergroup attitudes, and collective action

Report on Survey results for Ireland

Report prepared by Ashley O'Connor, Árpád Völgyesi and Anca Minescu

Executive summary of survey results

- People who recognize Travellers as a distinct cultural group find political statements suggesting that the majority population should offer help and stand up against discrimination more acceptable.
- Politicians' statements that are hostile towards Travellers are more acceptable to people who have negative stereotypes towards Travellers.
- People who openly accept negative stereotypes about Travellers are more likely to participate in activities that exclude Travellers.
- Accepting politicians' statements that are hostile towards Travellers increases the possibility to participate in activities that exclude Travellers.
- Feeling empathy and sympathy for Travellers, anger at their treatment and hopefulness for their future, is linked to intentions to join social movements in the interest of Traveller integration and against discrimination.
- Irish people who view Travellers as a threat to what they consider to be Irishness expressed intentions to engage in anti-Traveller movements.

Aim of Project

Travellers are a traditionally itinerant, indigenous ethnic group in Ireland. The Travelling community in Ireland is the target of systemic and social prejudice and discrimination. The aim of the 2019 national representative survey was to understand the relationships between prejudice towards Travellers, acceptance of different types of political discourse (commentaries made by politicians) and intentions to join anti-Traveller movements as well intentions to join social movements in the interest of Traveller integration and against discrimination.

Method

Using surveys, Irish data were collected in July 2019 by an opinion poll company (Coyne Research) using an on-line participation pool. Quota sampling was used, which means an attempt was made to gather equal samples from people categorized according to age, gender, type of settlement, region

and diversity in educational attainment, representative of the Irish population. All participants were over 18 and our sample was demographically mirrored the general Irish population. There were no Traveller participants among the 1000 who answered the survey.

Sample size	1000
Gender (male, female)	49% ,51%
Age (M, SD)	45 (16) years
Education	Primary+VET: 10% Secondary: 27% Post-secondary: 25% University: 38%
Settlement	Village: 30% Small town: 21% Suburban: 21% City: 28%

We measured anti-Traveller attitudes by adapting Attitudes towards Roma Scale (ATRS; Kende, Hadarics, & Láštiová, 2017) to the Irish Traveller context. The scale measures three dimensions of anti-Traveller attitudes: 1. **recognition of cultural differences and cultural heritage of Travellers** (e.g. “Traveller people have rich artistic traditions.”), 2. **belief that Travellers receive too many and undeserved benefits** (e.g. “Traveller people in this country are given preferential treatment in certain aspects.”) and 3. **blatant negative stereotyping** (e.g. participants could express agreement with the following statement: “There are very few proper or reasonable Traveller people.”),

We measured and compared the acceptance of three types of political discourses that are prevalent when it comes to Travellers: (1) **hostile political discourse**, stressing commonly held negative stereotypes about the Travelling community; (2) **paternalistic political discourse**, emphasizing the need from the settled population to help the Travelling community and also focusing on their lack of Traveller agency; (3) **ally political discourse**, proposing that people who are not members of the Travelling community should stand up against discrimination alongside members of the Travelling community.

Lastly, we measured intentions (1) to join Anti-Traveller movements, (2) to help the Traveller community by donations and volunteering and (3) intentions to engage in pro-Traveller collective action. We did this by asking participants if they were willing to engage in activities such as donating, volunteering or signing a petition in defence of or against Traveller rights.

Results

A third of our participants (33.5%) recognized the Traveller culture and cultural heritage, which is encouraging, yet another third (29.8%) did not recognize Travellers as different. Over one third of the sample (36,7%) did not consider any difference between Traveller and non-Traveller culture. The results here show that over half the participants did not acknowledge the uniqueness of Traveller culture.

While more people (33.9%) disagreed with negative statements about Traveller people, nearly one in four agreed with these negative statements (24.1%), which is still a relatively high proportion of participants. Almost half of the sample neither agreed nor disagreed (42%) indicating moderate levels of endorsing anti-Traveller stereotypes and a lack of condemnation of endorsement of stereotypes.

Almost half of the sample (46%) agreed that "Travellers get more government money than they deserve", while only 17% disagreed. Almost one third of the people think the real damage is caused by the organisations which give an undeserved advantage to Traveller people, whereas similarly one third disagrees with this.

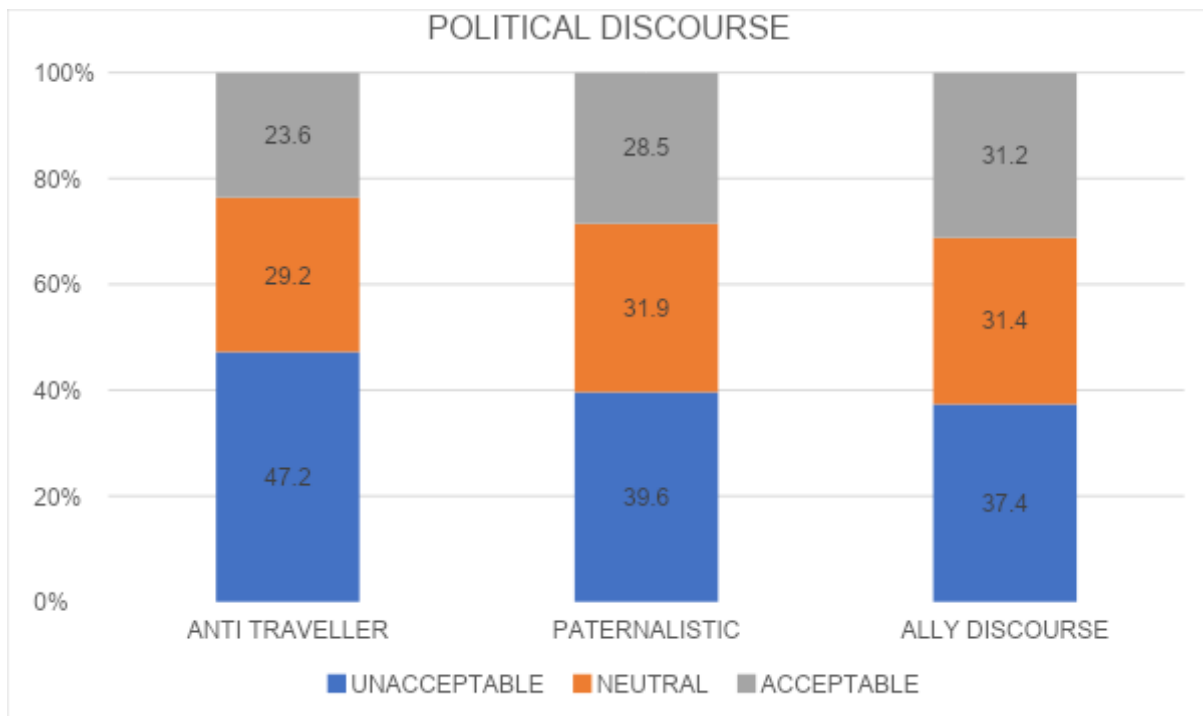
Participant perception of Travellers as a threat to their National Identity (person's identity or sense of belonging to a state or nation) was measured and only 17.4% agreed that it was, while 61.8% disagreed and 20.8% neither agreed nor disagreed.

How comfortable people are in the company of members of the Travelling community was also measured using the following statements '*how comfortable you would feel if one of your colleagues at work was a Traveller person?*' and '*how comfortable you would feel if one of your children was in a love relationship with a Traveller person?*'. Although only 17.6% of people would be uncomfortable with having a Traveller as a colleague, many of the same participants did not want a Traveller in a relationship with a family member (43.2%).

While the majority of people would not engage in Anti-Traveller political movements (63.6%) almost half also stated they would not engage in any action in favour of Traveller people, either in the form of political movements (50.8%) or in offering donations and volunteer work (48.7%).

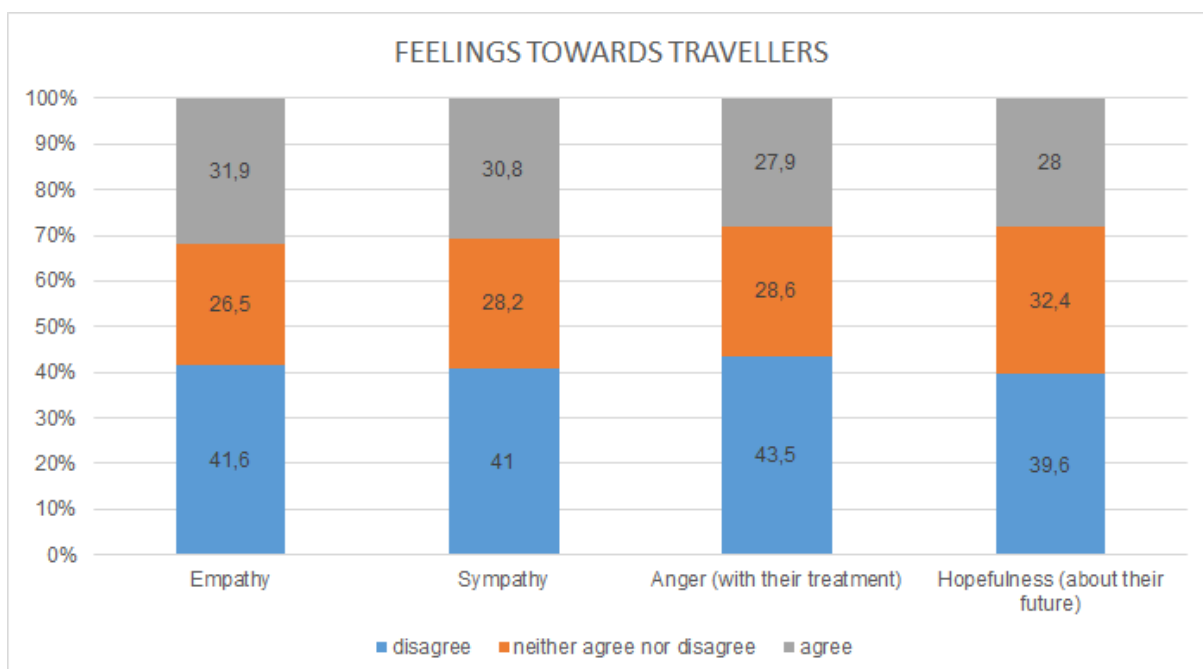
As shown below in Figure 1, more participants found it personally acceptable when politicians spoke about standing up against the discrimination of the Travelling Community, as allies. This was just one third of the sample (31.2%), which was a similar proportion (28.5%) as those who found paternalistic statements made by politicians acceptable. Also, a quarter of our sample (23.6%) endorsed hostile, anti-Traveller political discourse.

Figure 1 – Acceptance of the different types of Political Discourse



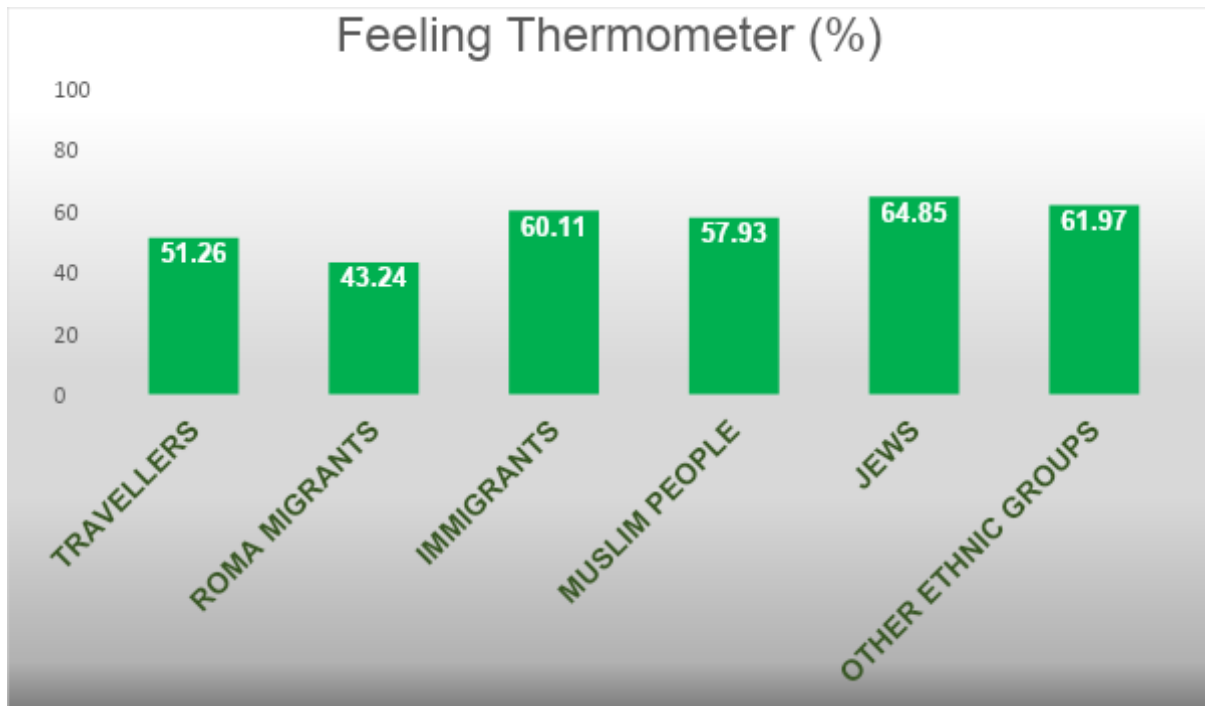
People’s emotional response can be an important element in how they treat members of other groups, therefore we investigated different emotions towards Travellers, including empathy, sympathy, anger at their treatment and hopefulness regarding their future. As evident in Figure 2 a large percentage of people (around 40%) do not feel these emotions toward Traveller people or close to one third are uncertain whether they feel these emotions or not. Less than 30% feel any positive emotions or feel angry and hopeful when they think of the situation of Traveller people. These numbers suggest that about two thirds of the people are rather indifferent toward Travellers and therefore unlikely to do anything to improve their situation.

Figure 2 – Prosocial Emotions towards Travellers



Lastly, we compared feelings towards Travellers to feelings towards other groups, Roma Migrants from Eastern Europe, Immigrants, Muslim people, Jews and Other ethnic groups. The lower end of the scale (0) indicates the most unlikeable and 100 degree indicates the most likeable. 42,4% considered Travellers rather dislikeable, while 48,4% of people said they were rather likeable, with 9,2% giving a medial 50%. As can be seen in figure 3, Traveller are the second least likeable group measured, second only to Roma migrants, who share similar characteristics with the Travelling community.

Figure 3 – Feelings towards Travellers.

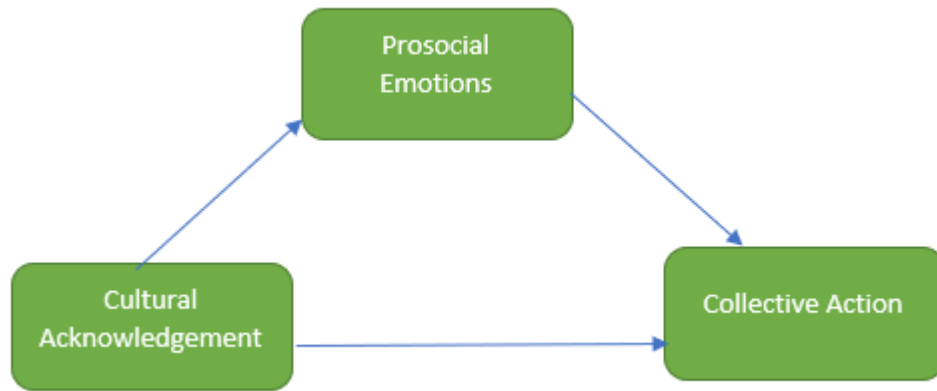


Relationships between measures.

Pro-social Emotions

A strong relationship was found between intentions to engage in pro-Traveller activities and acceptance of cultural differences; this indicates that people who recognize Travellers as a distinct cultural group and respect these cultural differences, develop more positive attitudes towards Travellers and this leads to a higher likelihood of engaging in pro-Traveller activities such as volunteering, promotion of inclusion and action against discrimination.

The measures of different feelings (empathy, sympathy anger with their situation and hope in relation to Travellers) are all highly related indicating that together they measure a type of prosocial emotional tendency *(sense of responsibility for other individuals). There is also a strong link between an individual's preference to keep Travellers at a distance in social situations and the probability they will see themselves and their group as superior to Travellers leading to belittling, marginalizing, excluding of Travellers (moral exclusion)



Acceptance of different types of political discourse

When people felt emotions such as empathy, sympathy, anger with Travellers' treatment, hopefulness about their situation, they were more likely to accept political statements about the majority population offering help and standing up against discrimination. In contrast, a lack of these emotions did not affect the acceptance of hostile political statements towards Travellers. We found that there is a strong relationship between an individual's likelihood to accept political statements emphasizing the need from the settled population to help the Travelling community and the idea that people who are not members of the Travelling community should stand up against discrimination alongside members of the Travelling community(ally). This was also true for statements about Travellers' lack of agency (paternalistic discourse). Acceptance of both types of statements (ally and paternalistic) also related very similarly to every other measure. This indicates that in the context of this research project both measures may reflect a tendency to accept all types of pro-Traveller political statements rather than two distinct types.

We found the type of political statements an individual accepted would influence their attitudes towards Travellers; when hostile political statements are accepted individuals tend to have more prejudiced attitudes towards Travellers and when political statements suggesting that the majority population should offer help and stand up against discrimination more are accepted individuals are less prejudiced towards Travellers.

People who accepted obviously negative stereotypes about Travellers, openly hostile political statements about Travellers, and perceived them as a threat to national identity were the people with the highest possibility of having intentions to engaging Anti-Traveller actions. On the other hand, people with empathy, anger with the Traveller's situation and acceptance of Pro-Traveller political statements had a high probability to engage in activities to reduce discrimination, promote inclusion and help Travellers.

Intentions to Engage in Pro/Anti- Traveller Activity.

There is a strong link between individuals' likelihood to help the Traveller community by donations and volunteering and their intentions to engage activities to promote Traveller rights and stand up against discrimination against Travellers. This link shows that both types of actions are related and that we may be measuring the same thing: an intention to engage in Pro-Traveller Actions.

The presence of emotions such as empathy, sympathy, anger with Travellers' treatment, hopefulness about their situation can lead to intentions to engage in Pro Traveller Activities. Individuals who do not hold negative stereotypes towards Travellers are also more likely to engage in activities to help Travellers and reduce discrimination. A lack of these emotions can lead to engagement in activities against Traveller rights and inclusion. We found that individuals who saw Travellers as a threat to Irish national identity and who accepted hostile political statements were the most likely individuals to express intentions to engage in Anti-Traveller activities.

Accepted Discourse and links to behaviour.

Additionally, we examined whether the type of political statements an individual found appropriate would be reflected by the social actions regarding Travellers which people would engage in. We found that accepting hostile political statements was connected to the likelihood to engage in anti-Traveller action along with other factors (perceived threat and stereotyping). In terms of intentions to engage in activities to help Travellers, we expected to find that accepting paternalistic statements would primarily indicate intention to donate (actions without the aim of social change), and ally statement would primarily indicate intentions to engage pro-Travellers political action (with the aim of social change). However, we found that acceptance of both types of pro-Traveller political statements increased the likelihood of intentions to engage in pro-Traveller activities with no clear-cut difference between the perception of the different action tendencies or the two forms of political statements. To sum; those who have low levels of prejudice towards Travellers tend to accept both types of pro-Traveller political statements more strongly and in turn exhibit strong intentions to engage in activities which will help the Travellers and promote their inclusions.

The results of this study show that intentions to engage in activities to help Travellers and promote inclusion or promote exclusion of Travellers are heavily influenced by statements made by political figures about Travellers, this influence is stronger than any other measures examined in this study. This demonstrates the power of the political norms in Ireland. We also found there was no clear distinction between paternalistic and ally political discourse, this may reflect a general prosocial* (as defined above) tendency by those participants. The results indicate polarization within the populations with those willing to accept hostile political statements and negative stereotypes being vastly different from those who are willing to accept pro-Traveller political statements and reject stereotypes.

Policy suggestions

While we cannot infer any causal relationship based on the current survey data, our results can be used to inform the creation of interventions combating prejudice in Ireland and guide policy change:

- The results show the importance of prosocial feelings such as empathy and sympathy for the Travelling community in accepting 'pro-Traveller discourse'. It is clear from these results that interventions aimed to reduce prejudice towards Travellers and promote engagement in pro-Traveller collective action should focus
- on these emotions along with stressing the value of Traveller culture.
- It is clear from the results that participants do not distinguish between ally and paternalistic political discourse. It is important however that there is an awareness that these are different from one another, while ally discourse suggests that non-Traveller members of society need

to stand up against discrimination together with the Travelling community, paternalistic discourse suggests that the Travelling community needs help from the majority because of their lack of agency. Any policies and interventions regarding prejudice reduction should make this distinction evident.