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Between Two Worlds: Examining the Impact of Local and EU Values on Immigrant Attitudes in Croatia: A Quantitative Approach on the Effect of Local Values and EU Values on Attitudes Towards Immigrants in Croatia

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**Between Two Worlds: Examining the Impact of Local and EU Values on
Immigrant Attitudes in Croatia**

*A Quantitative Approach on the Effect of Local Values and EU Values on Attitudes Towards
Immigrants in Croatia*

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction	4
2. Literature Review	7
2.1 The European Union	7
2.2 The Relationship between Croatia and the EU	7
2.3 Migration in Croatia	8
2.4 The Impact of EU Membership on Irregular Migration: The Western Balkan Route	9
2.5 Immigrant Attitudes	9
2.6 Values	10
3. Theoretical Framework	11
3.1 The Relationship between Values and Immigrant Attitudes	11
3.1 Conceptualisation of Values and Immigrant Attitudes	12
3.1.1 Local Values in Croatia	12
3.1.2 EU Values	13
3.4 Assumptions and Hypotheses	14
4. Methodology	16
4.1 Methodological Approach and Data Collection	16
4.2 Variables	16
4.2.1 Independent Variable: Local Values	16
4.2.2 Independent Variable: EU Values	17
4.2.3 Dependent Variable: Immigrant Attitudes	17
4.2.4 Control Variables: Age and Years of Education	18
4.3 Analysis and Assumptions	18
4.5 Reliability and Validity	19
4.6 Limitations	20
5. Results	21
5.1 Descriptive Results	21
5.2 Multinomial Logistic Regression Results	24
5.3 Relative Effect Size Results	25
6. Discussion	27
7. Conclusion	29
7.1 Implications, Limitations and Recommendations	29

Abstract

Because of the Croatia's appeal as transit and destination country at the corner of the European Union (EU), irregular migrants make up a significant portion of the immigrant population in the country. With Croatia's recent Schengen admission, the arrival of irregular migrants is expected to advance further, which highlights the need for a well-integrated immigration strategy. However, reports of xenophobia, discrimination and maltreatment suggest there is a disconnect between EU values and the way in which Croatian society treats immigrants. Nonetheless, the role of values as a determinant of immigrant attitudes in Croatia, has lacked the necessary societal and academic attention.

This quantitative study ($N = 1409$) explores the influence of local and EU values on immigrant attitudes in Croatia. With the use of the European Social Survey, local values (tradition, nationalism, community) and EU values (human rights, equality, diversity, social justice) are tested to determine to what extent they result in positive or negative immigrant attitudes in Croatia.

It was found that local and EU values both significantly predict immigrant attitudes in Croatia. Whereas local values cause negative immigrant attitudes, EU values result in positive immigrant attitudes. Although social identity theory suggests that local values have a stronger effect on immigrant attitudes compared to EU values, this finding could not be confirmed. Lastly, it was found that negative immigrant attitudes have become less extreme in recent years, which leaves the recent examples of violence against immigrants and immigrant pushbacks unanswered. Recommendations for future research include investigating alternative explanations for the maltreatment of immigrants in Croatia, measuring immigrant attitudes that are specific to irregular migrants, and adding qualitative research to develop a deeper understanding of the topic.

1. Introduction

On January 1, 2023, Croatia became the 27th European country to join the Schengen area (Hughes, 2022). With its border-free design, the Schengen area permits free travel between its member countries for tourists, students, and economic migrants from both inside and outside of the European Union (EU) (De Somer, 2020). Since Croatia's accession to the EU in 2013, the country has experienced a decline in its local population with many Croatians emigrating to Western European countries for better economic opportunities (Abikova & Piotrowicz, 2021). Simultaneously, the labour shortages as result of the local emigration, the relatively lower cost of living compared to other EU countries and the geographical position of the country on the corner of the EU, have turned Croatia into an desirable destination for asylum seekers and refugees looking for a better life (De Somer, 2020). Consequently, irregular migrants, such as asylum seekers and refugees who cross borders without official permission, make up a large share of the immigrants in Croatia (Abikova & Piotrowicz, 2021). With Croatia's recent admission to the Schengen area, which provides opportunities for further travel into the EU, the arrival of irregular migrants in Croatia is likely to advance. This emphasises the importance of a well-integrated strategy towards immigration in Croatia.

To regulate migration flows and uphold the integrity of migrants, the EU prioritises a comprehensive and human rights-based approach to immigration, which is based on the EU's values for freedom, human dignity and equity (European Parliament et al., 2016). Nevertheless, evidence shows that the behaviour of Croatian society towards immigrants does not consistently align with the EU's values on immigration (Danish Refugee Council, 2022). In recent years, a rise of xenophobic beliefs in Croatia has been observed at both the societal and governmental levels (Jurlina & Vidovic, 2018). Gregurović and Bogadi (2022) highlight how immigrants are regularly socially excluded and exposed to insults by Croatian locals, making it difficult for them to integrate into Croatian society. On a governmental level, the Border Violence Monitoring Network (2019) addresses that Croatia is annually involved in over 25.000 immigrant pushbacks to neighbouring non-EU countries. Pushbacks refer to forcibly sending back unauthorized migrants without performing sufficient screenings or determining if they need protection (Costello et al., 2021). Besides that pushbacks are against European and international law, multiple testimonies have brought to light that during these pushbacks, immigrants are frequently humiliated, beaten or have their personal property destroyed by Croatian border guards (Nielsen, 2022). For these reasons, Amnesty International (2021) claims

that Croatia is systemically involved in international human rights violations and advocates for immigrant attitudes among Croatian society to be addressed.

According to scholars Homer and Kahle (1988), immigrant attitudes are intrinsically shaped by values. Values namely sculpt the perception of information, which consequently influences the way in which people evaluate the conditions around them. Although Croatian politics and migration in the EU are highly salient topics, the role of values on immigrant attitudes in Croatia have escaped academic attention. Only Gregurović et al. (2016) have addressed values as a determinant of immigrant attitudes in Croatia, but solely focused on values that identify whether someone is individually or socially oriented. Because the negative behaviour towards immigrants happens on both the societal and governmental levels in Croatia, suggests however that the values influencing immigrant attitudes in Croatia go beyond individual or social orientation and are rather linked to the Croatian identity (Jurlina & Vidovic, 2018). From a societal perspective, the apparent behaviour towards immigrants in Croatia is destructive for their integration into European society (Gregurović & Bogadi, 2022). The social exclusion, violence against immigrants and immigrant pushbacks in Croatia, jeopardise the equal and humane treatment of immigrants that is inherent to the fundamental rights of EU and international law (Danish Refugee Council, 2022). Studying how local values play a role in the formation of immigrant attitudes, ensures a deeper understanding of why Croatians perceive immigrants the way they do. Consequently, this can aid public policy to enhance the social integration and immigration policy in Croatia (Nielsen, 2022).

Additionally, the behaviour of Croatian society towards immigrants majorly contradicts the EU's human-rights based approach on immigration, which raises questions regarding the integration of EU values in Croatian society (Danish Refugee Council, 2022). Nonetheless, the extent to which EU values are present among Croatian society is also understudied. Baloban (2022) has addressed the transformations in Croatian values since the country's EU membership, but only included the change in universal democratic values. The author therefore disregards the local integration of the specific EU values that are written in the Treaty of the European Union and which legally apply to EU member states. Because it identifies the impact of EU integration, this topic is also of societal relevance (Sedelmeier, 2011). Considering that Croatia is the EU's newest member and has not been part of its institutional framework for a long time, it is essential to diagnose the integration of EU values at the local level (Sedelmeier, 2011). Value harmonisation between the EU and its member states is specifically relevant for a subject that is sensitive to the violation of human rights, such as immigration (Danish Refugee Council, 2022). Addressing this topic thus stresses the importance of monitoring EU

compliance for current member states as well as highlights the relevance of effective integration procedures for candidate countries (De Somer, 2010). Considering the above reasons, the research question of this study is the following:

How do local and EU values influence attitudes towards immigrants in Croatia?

Following this introduction, the literature review discusses the relevant theory. Additionally, the theoretical framework addresses the main concepts and forms the hypotheses that guide this research. Consequently, the quantitative methods of this study are conferred, after which the results are discussed. This study ends with a discussion and conclusion, where the main findings are highlighted and the limitations and recommendations are presented.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The European Union

The European Union (EU) is a political and economic union of 27 European member states. Its purpose stems from the aftermath of World War II, when the goal of creating a peaceful and prosperous Europe became a priority (Hooghe & Marks, 2008). This resulted in the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1951, followed by the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1957, which together marked the first steps towards European integration (Hooghe & Marks, 2008). Since then, the EU has continued to evolve with the addition of new member states and the adoption of new policies and institutions. The EU's main goal is creating a better future for its citizens, which includes peace, stability and prosperity in Europe (Hooghe & Marks, 2008). It aims to achieve this by creating a single market, protecting its citizens' rights, and strengthening the EU's role in the world (Hooghe & Marks, 2008).

2.2 The Relationship between Croatia and the EU

Before its EU membership, Croatia became closely familiar with the EU during the Balkan War, which took place between 1991 and 1995. The EU played an important role in ending the war by supporting peacekeeping missions and promoting diplomatic negotiations (Blockmans, 2007). Furthermore, the EU offered humanitarian aid to war fugitives and displaced persons during the conflict, which resulted in positive attitudes towards the EU among the local populations (Blockmans, 2007). Nonetheless, others, including Franjo Tudjman who was Croatia's president at the time, blamed the EU for not intervening soon enough to stop the violence and killings during the conflict (Blockmans, 2007). Additionally, some Croatians believe that the financial sanctions that the EU imposed against Serbia and Montenegro during the Balkan War, controversially escalated the conflict due to the economic instability it brought to the region (Blockmans, 2007). After the war, the EU aided the post-war reconstruction in Croatia by providing financial assistance and supporting political reforms (Maldini, 2019). This strengthened the ties between Croatia and the EU and laid the foundation for Croatia's future EU membership.

Although Croatia applied for EU membership in 2003, the country was only accepted as a member state on July 1, 2013. The lengthy negotiations and the conditions that Croatia needed to fulfil to become a member state led to discontent among Croatian society, who experienced the integration process as being too demanding (Boduszyński, 2014). Nonetheless,

because the EU integration process motivated the country to reform its economy and modernise its institutions, the relationship between Croatia and the EU eventually strengthened (Maldini, 2019).

EU membership has provided Croatia with a number of advantages over the years, including expanded trade opportunities, access to the single market, and funding for infrastructure projects (Maldini, 2019). Some Croatians view EU membership as beneficial to the country's development and regard it as a haven for economic prosperity and stability (Maldini, 2019). However, others question the EU's intervention in domestic affairs and criticise how EU policies affect their country, particularly in areas like agriculture and fisheries (Boduszyński, 2014). Additionally, some Croatians think that the EU poses a threat to the Croatian identity because they believe that local opinions are not sufficiently represented in EU decision-making bodies (Boduszyński, 2014).

2.3 Migration in Croatia

Croatia has a complex history with migration, influenced by various political and economic factors (Kuti et al., 2014). Due to poverty and political unrest in the late 19th century, Croatia experienced significant emigration to North and South America. Furthermore, while Croatia was occupied by Nazi Germany during World War II, many Croatian Jews were deported to concentration camps (Kuti et al., 2014). After the war, Croatia became part of socialist Yugoslavia, which because of its labour migration policy, resulted in an influx of workers from other Yugoslav republics. Nonetheless, the combination of ethnic tensions, the rise of nationalism and an unstable economy resulted in the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the beginning of the Balkan War (Kuti et al., 2014). Consequently, migration in the Balkan area was significantly impacted as bloodshed in Bosnia & Herzegovina, Serbia, and Kosovo caused their inhabitants to flee to Croatia. Because of this, Croatia experienced a substantial influx of refugees in the 1990s (Abikova & Piotrowicz, 2021). Many Croatians were also displaced as a result of the Balkan War, especially in areas with the highest levels of violence (Abikova & Piotrowicz, 2021). When Croatia was in recovery after the war, many Croatians left the country in search of better employment prospects abroad, which resulted in a phase of economic emigration (Kuti et al., 2014). Although the local population has been in decline ever since, the country's accession to the EU in 2013 and the subsequent popularity of the Western Balkan Route resulted in Croatia becoming an attractive destination for irregular migrants, who make up a large share of the immigrants in the country today (Abikova & Piotrowicz, 2021).

2.4 The Impact of EU Membership on Irregular Migration: The Western Balkan Route

Irregular migration to the EU through Eastern Europe became prominent in 2012 when the EU relaxed visa restrictions for most countries in the Balkan area (Cocco, 2017). Although irregular migrants coming from the Middle East and Africa initially used Hungary as an entry point to the EU, the country constructed a border fence to prevent the admission of irregular migrants in 2015, forcing many to seek out alternative routes across the Balkans (Abikova & Piotrowicz, 2021). Because of this, together with Croatia becoming an EU country in 2013, irregular migrants initiated the use of the Western Balkan Route. Starting in Greece, the road passes through North Macedonia, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina before entering Croatia and other EU countries. This route has been taken by thousands of irregular migrants, many of them fleeing war and persecution in their home countries (Abikova & Piotrowicz, 2021). On the one hand, the increased influx of immigrants through the Western Balkan Route has ensured the growth of new talent and cultural diversity in Croatia (Gregurović et al., 2016). Furthermore, it has benefited the economy as immigrants were able to fill labour shortages in the construction and agriculture industries. Nonetheless, the arrival of many immigrants also increased job competition, constrained economic resources and caused social instability (Gregurović et al., 2016). Consequently, these developments have impacted the immigrant attitudes in Croatia.

2.5 Immigrant Attitudes

The extent to which an individual of the host community holds positive or negative attitudes towards immigrants, is influenced by a diverse set of factors. A first factor is personal experience with immigrants. When evaluating a positive or negative experience with someone, individuals are common to generalise that experience to the cultural or national group that that person belongs to (Prentice & Miller, 2007). For the host community, a first impression of an immigrant therefore often results in the immediate social categorisation of the entire immigrant group. This consequently affects the immigrant attitudes in a country (Prentice & Miller, 2007). Secondly, media representation impacts immigrant attitudes. Through the use of framing and stereotypes, the media can emphasise the positive or negative effects of immigration in a country, which subsequently affects host community attitudes towards immigrants (Albada et al., 2021). Thirdly, education affects immigrant attitudes according to Albada et al. (2021). Because education is linked to social status, it can determine the extent to which an individual feels secure about their position in society. Generally, people who are less educated are threatened by newcomers to a greater extent, which emphasises the role of education in the

attitudinal formation towards immigrants (Albada et al., 2021). Lastly, Homer and Kahle (1998) specifically stress the importance of values as a determinant of immigrant attitudes. Because values shape one's perception of information, they influence the way in which certain conditions are evaluated. Consequently, values form the basis for one's attitudes and behaviour even before personal experience, media representation or education (Homer & Kahle, 1998).

2.6 Values

According to Schwartz (2012), values are shaped by various factors, including socialisation, cultural standards and life experiences. They are fundamental to human psychology and have a significant impact on both the psychological health of the individual and the community as a whole (Schwartz, 2012). Sagiv et al. (2017) stress that values may alter throughout time when people are exposed to new experiences, concepts, and points of view. For instance, exposure to various cultures, ideas, or social movements may question and alter a person's values (Sagiv et al., 2017). Additionally, self-reflection can lead to changes in values as people become more aware of who they are and what they believe (Sagiv et al., 2017). People's value systems are likely to undergo significant changes over time, even while some values, such as deeply ingrained cultural or religious values, may be more resistant to change than others (Schwartz, 2012). Apart from values being able to change over time, it is also possible for different values to co-exist at the same time. The co-existence and prioritisation of different sets of values is explained through social identity theory, which explains how one's attachment to values is based on the level of socialisation and historical affiliation (Cinnirella, 1997). Because deeply embedded cultural values form a part of the social norms and expectations of a society, individuals tend to adhere to these rules to acquire social acceptance and prevent rejection. Furthermore, cultural values frequently cause individuals to form deep emotional attachments, as they give them a feeling of direction, meaning, and continuity in their life (Cinnirella, 1997). Social identity theory therefore suggests that values which are more deeply socialised and culturally ingrained, are generally held at a higher standard compared to values of less cultural depth (Cinnirella, 1997).

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 The Relationship between Values and Immigrant Attitudes

Whether someone holds positive or negative immigrant attitudes, is dependent on the type of values that that person holds. For instance, strong values for universalism and benevolence are typically related to positive immigrant attitudes (Arikan & Ben-Nun Bloom, 2012). Under the umbrella of universalism and benevolence, more specific values are recognised (Beierlein et al., 2016). The first of which is the value for human rights. When individuals value human rights, they are more likely to perceive immigrants as people worthy of the same fundamental rights and freedoms as anyone else. As a result, the recognition of immigrants' inherent worth as people, ensures a greater capacity for empathy towards immigrants (Beierlein et al., 2016). Additionally, the value for equality also promotes positive immigrants attitudes as individuals perceive immigrants as equals, regardless of nationality, race or ethnicity. In this sense, this value favours the idea that immigrants should have access to the same resources and opportunities as the local community (Beierlein et al., 2016). Thirdly, the value for diversity allows the host community to acknowledge the distinctive experiences and opinions of immigrants, which creates greater understanding and essentially enhances positive attitudes (Beierlein et al., 2016). Finally, the value for social justice relates to positive immigrant attitudes as it cherishes justice and equity for all members of society, including immigrants (Beierlein et al., 2016).

Simultaneously, several values typically relate to negative immigrant attitudes. Firstly, a high value for nationalism can enhance anti-immigrant attitudes. Nationalistic beliefs place the interest of a person's own country above those of other countries or groups (Gu et al., 2021). This may cause the rejection of outsiders, based on the conviction that outsiders do not possess the same rights and benefits as nationals. Furthermore, nationalism highlights the importance of a common cultural identity and past. Under this notion, immigrants can be perceived as a danger to this identity (Gu et al., 2021). Secondly, the need of maintaining cultural and social norms is frequently emphasized by traditional values (Bohman, 2011). The host community can perceive immigrants as a threat to these values, particularly if they originate from cultures that are very different from the host community (Bohman, 2011). Thirdly, immigration is often believed to put established gender roles or family structures at risk. According to Lee and Ottati (2002), this is explained through in-group and out-group theory, which refers to whether a person identifies with a group or not. Individuals with strong communal or family values, which represent the in-group, are more likely to discriminate against out-groups, such as immigrants.

Consequently, in-group prejudice towards out-groups can lead to negative immigrant attitudes (Lee & Ottati, 2002).

Strong religious values are worthy to be addressed separately, as they can ensure both positive or negative attitudes. On the one hand, religion highlights the importance of compassion and caring for others. It holds the assumption that humans should be kind to each other, which naturally contributes to a more welcoming attitude towards immigrants (Arikan & Ben-Nun Bloom, 2012). On the other hand, religion also emphasizes cultural identity and tradition. Since immigration can threaten these, individuals with strong religious values may also hold negative immigrant attitudes (Gu et al., 2021).

3.1 Conceptualisation of Values and Immigrant Attitudes

In this study, immigrant attitudes refer to the attitudes that a host community holds towards the immigrants in their country (Albada et al., 2021). Following the definition of Schwartz (2012), values are the guiding ideals and beliefs that shape a person's attitudes, behaviour and decision-making. To address the influence of local and EU values on immigrant attitudes in Croatia, these distinct values are further specified.

3.1.1 Local Values in Croatia

Over the years, historical events and cultural influences have shaped the values that are present in Croatia today. Although the Ottoman rule between the 15th and 19th centuries questioned religious ideals in Croatia with the introduction of the Islam, this only reaffirmed the significance of Catholicism in Croatian society, which is still the country's dominant religion to this day (Baloban, 2022). Not only has Catholicism stressed the importance of family and community, the religion has reinforced virtues of loyalty, respect, and a solid work ethic among Croatian society (Baloban, 2022). Moreover, because of Tito's Yugoslavian rule after World War II, Croatian society adopted socialist and communist values, which include the necessity for justice, economic control, and social cohesion (Bellamy, 2003). These values were used to work towards a more equitable society, by putting the welfare and empowerment of the common people first. In the 1990s, during the Balkan War, values of family and community were reemphasised as Croatian society united in the struggle for their independence (Baloban, 2022). As a result of the desire to establish cultural and political independence, values of patriotism and strong national sentiments took priority in Croatia (Baloban, 2022; Bellamy, 2003).

3.1.2 EU Values

Throughout the history of the EU, values have changed alongside the development of the Union. Initially, the EU was founded on the values of cooperation, democracy, and profitable trade (Foret & Calligaro, 2018). These principles were included in the 1957 Rome Treaty, which established the EEC after World War II (Schulz-Forberg and Stråth, 2010). With the expansion of the EU through time, additional values including social justice, environmental sustainability, and respect for human rights were also incorporated into the EU's framework. The Maastricht Treaty of 1992, which integrated social and political dimensions to the EU's mandate that previously focused on economic cooperation exclusively, embraced these concepts (Schulz-Forberg and Stråth, 2010). Since the 2000s, the EU's values have continued to evolve in response to changing domestic and global circumstances, such as the financial crisis of 2008 and the refugee crisis of 2015 (Foret & Calligaro, 2018). Due to threats to these principles in some member states, the fundamental concepts of democracy, the rule of law, and human rights have attracted renewed attention (Foret & Calligaro, 2018). Currently, the fundamental values of the EU, which are outlined in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union, encompass the respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and respect for human rights, including those of people who identify as members of minorities (European Parliament et al., 2016). These principles serve as the cornerstone for both the internal and exterior policies of the EU, with the goal of fostering a peaceful, prosperous, and inclusive Europe (Foret & Calligaro, 2018).

Although the EU is dedicated to the above goals, there have been cases where the EU has not upheld its values. For example, a decline of democracy and the rule of law have been recognised in some of the EU's member states (Zgut, 2022). In Hungary for instance, the independence of the judiciary, press freedom, and the treatment of minorities have been questioned, while in Poland the government has carried out legal changes that depreciate the independence of the court (Zgut, 2022). Most importantly, and central to this study, are the value breaches regarding EU migration and asylum policy. The European migrant crisis of 2015 challenged the development of a cohesive EU response due to the large influx of migrants and refugees (Radjenovic, 2020). While some EU member states opposed the distribution of refugees throughout Europe, such as Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic, others implemented laws that limit the ability for refugees to request asylum, among which are Austria and Denmark (Radjenovic, 2020). Together with the treatment of immigrants in Croatia and the pushbacks happening at the Croatian border, the above examples show that in order for the EU

to remain a powerful democratic actor, it should address the preservation of its values amongst its member states (Amnesty International, 2021).

3.4 Assumptions and Hypotheses

In relation to the above theory, several assumptions can be made. These assumptions guide the formulation of the hypotheses, which aim to answer the question how local and EU values influence immigrant attitudes in Croatia.

Firstly, the theories by Balaban (2022) and Bellamy (2003) highlight the local values in Croatia, which involve respect for tradition and nationalism but also emphasize the role of family and community. According to Bohman (2011) and Gu et al. (2021), these values tend to relate to negative immigrant attitudes. The strong religious values that are present in Croatia can result in either positive or negative immigrant attitudes (Arikan & Ben-Nun Bloom, 2012). However, taking in consideration the other local values in Croatia, they overall align with theory on negative immigrant attitudes. The first hypothesis is therefore the following:

H1: Local values are likely to cause negative attitudes towards immigrants in Croatia.

On the other hand, the fundamental values of the EU that are stated in Article 2 of the TEU, align with values of universalism and benevolence (human rights, equality, diversity and social justice) (European Parliament et al., 2016). According to Beierlein et al. (2016) these values tend to cause positive immigrant attitudes. Therefore, the second hypothesis is the following:

H2: EU values are likely to cause positive attitudes towards immigrants in Croatia.

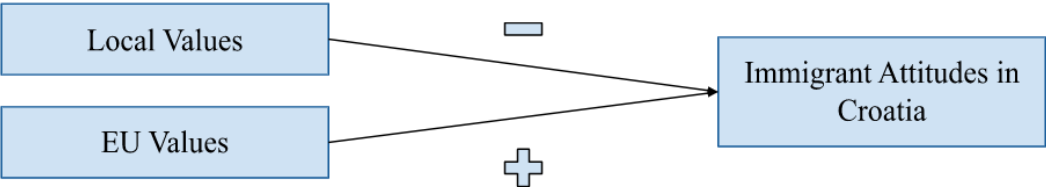
Additionally, social identity theory highlights that values which are deeply culturally and socially ingrained, are prioritised when multiple sets of values co-exist (Cinnirella, 1997). Although this theory suggests that local values are held at a high standard, it is important to notice that this does not apply to EU values. Because the EU is a relatively young bureaucratic institution, it falls short in such cultural and social depth (Cinnirella, 1997). Consequently, the last hypothesis is the following:

H3: Local values are likely to have a stronger effect on immigrant attitudes in Croatia, compared to EU values.

Figure 1 below provides a visual representation of the relationship between the key concepts of this study.

Figure 1

Conceptual Model



4. Methodology

4.1 Methodological Approach and Data Collection

Because the aim of this study is to test a causal effect, a quantitative approach was used (Field, 2018). The theoretical discussions addressed in the previous sections, which laid the foundation for the hypotheses, highlight the deductive nature of the study. For the analysis, the European Social Survey (ESS) was consulted, which implies the use of secondary data. The ESS is a suitable source for this study, as the survey specialises in measuring attitudes, beliefs and values in European countries, which aligns with this study's purpose of examining the effect of local and EU values on immigrant attitudes in Croatia (European Social Survey, 2022). To analyse this causal relationship, data from the most recent survey was used, ESS round 10 (2020). This dataset was consulted as the latest research on immigrant attitudes was conducted on ESS round 9 (2018), and it gives the most recent representation of values and immigrant attitudes in Croatia (Gregurović et al., 2016). Additionally, descriptive data from ESS rounds 4 (2008), 5 (2010), and 9 (2018) was used to show how local and EU values, as well as immigrant attitudes, have evolved over time. These specific ESS rounds were used, as they were the only years in which Croatia participated. With regards to case selection from the ESS rounds, all cases that indicated 'HR (Croatia)' as country of residence were used. This was done to enhance the generalisability and statistical power of this study (Field, 2018).

4.2 Variables

4.2.1 Independent Variable: Local Values

In this study, 'Local Values' acts as the first independent variable. This variable was measured through the construction of four indicators from the ESS, which together formed a scale to assess to what extent a respondent holds local values. The selection of these indicators was based on the theories by Baloban (2022) and Bellamy (2003). Considering that Croatians value justice, economic control and social cohesion as a result of Tito's communist rule of Yugoslavia, the indicator "Important to do what is told and follow rules (ipfrule)" was chosen (Baloban, 2022; Bellamy, 2003). Additionally, Baloban (2022) explains how Croatia's affiliation with Catholic religion has emphasised values of respect and loyalty, as well as stressed the importance of family and community. Therefore the indicators "Important to get respect from others (iprspt)" and "Important to be loyal to friends and devote to people close (iplyfr)" were included. Lastly, Baloban (2022) and Bellamy (2003) address how Croatia's

patriotic character involves sentiments of national pride and value for tradition. Consequently, the indicator “Important to follow traditions and customs (imptrad)” was selected.

4.2.2 Independent Variable: EU Values

The second independent variable ‘EU Values’, was also constructed of four indicators from the ESS, which together formed a scale to assess to what extent a respondent holds EU values. The selection of indicators was based on the EU’s fundamental values mentioned in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union. Based on the EU’s values for equality and democracy, the indicator “Important that people are treated equally and have equal opportunities (ipeqopt)” was selected (European Parliament et al., 2016). Furthermore the indicator “Important to help people and care for others well-being (iphlppl)” was used, as this reflects the EU’s values for human dignity and human rights (European Parliament et al., 2016). Thirdly, the EU’s value for the rule of law, motivated the inclusion of the indicator “Important to live in secure and safe surroundings (impsafe)”. Lastly, authors Foret and Calligaro (2018) highlight the EU’s goal of achieving an inclusive and diverse Europe. Therefore, the last indicator that was selected was “Important to understand different people (ipudrst)”.

For both ‘Local Values’ and ‘EU Values’, the indicators that were used to construct the variables, were measured through a 6-point Likert scale where respondents indicated their affiliation with a statement between 1 (*Very much like me*) and 6 (*Not like me at all*) (Norman, 2010). Because of the order in the categories, these indicators are ordinal in nature (Norman, 2010). To construct the variables, the averages of the combined indicators for ‘Local Values’ and ‘EU Values’ were taken. This method was chosen because the indicators are considered equally important in the analysis and an average score highlights the central tendency of the indicators (Field, 2018). Consequently, this makes it easier to interpret the combined variable. Because an average score was computed, the variables were both treated as a continuous, despite the ordinal nature of the separate indicators (Norman, 2010). During the construction of the variable, all indicators were reverse recoded so a higher score would indicate stronger local or EU values (Field, 2018).

4.2.3 Dependent Variable: Immigrant Attitudes

The dependent variable of this study is ‘Immigrant Attitudes’. It was measured through a single indicator from the ESS, which asked: “To what extent do you think Croatia should allow people

of a different race or ethnic group from most Croatian people to come and live here? (imdfetn)”. This indicator was selected because measuring one’s acceptance of immigrants in their country, gives a good representation of the attitudes towards immigrants (Albada et al., 2021). The variable was treated as ordinal due to its ordered categories, which included the following: 1 (*Allow many*), 2 (*Allow some*), 3 (*Allow a few*) and 4 (*Allow none*). Here, a lower category indicated positive attitudes towards immigrants in Croatia, and a higher category indicated negative immigrant attitudes.

4.2.4 Control Variables: Age and Years of Education

To increase internal validity and reduce the effects of external factors on the relationship between the independent and dependent variables, two socio-demographic control variables were added in the analysis. Both variables, ‘Age’ and ‘Years of Education’ were measured as continuous variables. Their relationship to immigrant attitudes is described below.

Firstly, age is known to have an effect on immigrant attitudes. Schotte and Winkler (2018) address how older people have a more thorough understanding of social norms compared to younger people, which increases the likelihood that they oppose people who deviate from the status quo. Moreover, older generations are generally more exposed to competition from newcomers, as they are more involved and integrated into the labour market compared to younger people. Consequently, older people are likely to hold more negative immigrant attitudes compared to younger people (Schotte & Winkler, 2018).

Secondly, years of education influences immigrant attitudes. According to Albada et al. (2021), education is linked to social status. As a result, individuals who are less educated may become more concerned with their social status and experience rivalry as immigrants enter their society. Sentiments of xenophobia are therefore more common amongst individuals who have experienced less education, which results in negative immigrant attitudes (Hainmueller & Hiscox, 2007).

4.3 Analysis and Assumptions

To analyse the effect of multiple independent variables on an ordinal dependent variable, an ordinal logistic regression is the most appropriate test (Norman, 2010). After checking the assumptions for this test, it was however found that the proportional odds assumption was violated as the test of parallel lines showed a significant result ($p = .000$). In case of such violation, Field (2018) suggests the use of a multinomial logistic regression for more accurate

results. This regression was therefore conducted through the use of SPSS 27, where ‘Allow many’ was entered as the reference category for the dependent variable ‘Immigrant Attitudes’. As for assumptions, the dataset was checked for multicollinearity. Considering that the independent variables showed VIF values of lower than five, no multicollinearity was found (Field, 2018). Additionally, the dataset was checked for outliers and influential cases. A total of 39 cases were found to have a standard deviation greater than two and were therefore excluded from the analysis (Field, 2018). No influential cases were found as none of the cases trespassed the maximum Cook’s distance value of one (Field, 2018). After excluding the outliers, the dataset was left with 1409 valid cases for the regression analysis. Since the minimum age of participating in the survey is 16, this was automatically the lowest age category in this study. The oldest participants indicated to be 89 years old and the average respondent was 50 years old. Additionally, responses for years of education ranged between zero and 26 years. The average for years of education was 12 years.

Although a logistic regression provides results on the significance and direction of a relationship, it cannot accurately show the relative effect size of an independent variable on the dependent variable (Field, 2018). Reason for this is that the unstandardised results in a logistic regression are predictor scale-dependent. To be able to answer the third hypothesis which investigates the relative effect size of ‘Local Values’ compared to ‘EU Values’, a separate approach was taken that involves standardisation (Crowson, 2021). According to Crowson (2021), standardisation of the odds ratios allows for an accurate representation of the relative effect size of the independent variables in a logistic regression model. To do this, dummy variables were created for the dependent variable and entered into a binary logistic regression separately. The results of each dummy regression were subsequently entered into Crowson’s calculator (2021) to standardise the odds ratios and calculate the percentage change in standardised odds ratios. The latter result was used to accurately portray the relative effect size of the independent variables on the dependent variable per dummy category.

4.5 Reliability and Validity

To ensure consistency of the measures over time, the reliability was checked for the independent variables ‘Local Values’ and ‘EU Values’. These variables were checked for internal consistency specifically, as they consist of theory-based, but self-constructed scales (Norman, 2010). The Cronbach’s alpha for the independent variable ‘Local Values’ showed a score of $\alpha = 0.55$. Although this score shows poor internal consistency, this can be caused due

to the low number of indicators (four) that compute the scale (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). After adding and removing certain indicators, the initial combination of indicators still showed the highest internal consistency score. For this reason, in combination with the score lying very close to the acceptable Cronbach's alpha threshold of $\alpha = 0.6$, this variable was still used in this study (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). For 'EU Values', the Cronbach's alpha showed a score of $\alpha = 0.73$, which indicates an acceptable internal consistency (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). Besides checking for reliability, the internal validity was ensured with the inclusion of control variables in the analysis (Field, 2018). Lastly, because the ESS-constructed variables used in this study can be replicated and generalised with the use of the ESS as a data source, the methodological approach is of external validity (Field, 2018).

4.6 Limitations

Some methodological limitations were recognised. Firstly, considering that this study measures values and immigrant attitudes, there is a chance of social desirability bias amongst survey respondents (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Because values and attitudes are generally sensitive topics, this could pressure respondents to answer in a socially desirable way. Consequently, they might inaccurately report their values and attitudes on purpose (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Although this limitation might result in less accurate findings, this is a common limitation within social science research. Secondly, a study on values and attitudes is sensitive to self-report bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Even though respondents might think they hold a certain value or attitude, this might not be accurate or representative of their values in real life. Reason for this is that values or attitudes can be intrinsically attached to emotional, cultural or historical contexts, which makes it difficult for individuals to grasp what they actually believe (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Chances of self-report bias within data is reduced by analysing a larger sample, which this study aimed to do by using the ESS dataset (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Lastly, as values and attitudes are deeply ingrained in one's socialisation, they can be influenced by a multitude of factors, which can result in problems with causality. To limit this problem, control variables were added to the study (Field, 2018).

5. Results

5.1 Descriptive Results

In tables 1, 2 and 3 below, the descriptive statistics of the independent and dependent variables are discussed for the ESS rounds 4 (2008), 5 (2010), 9 (2018) and 10 (2020). Firstly, table 1 highlights the independent variable ‘Local Values’ in Croatia. Compared to 2018, where a minimum value of 2 indicates that all respondents of that year hold local values to some extent, 2020 shows that at least one respondent indicated to have the weakest local values with a minimum of 1. For all years, 6 was indicated as the maximum, which entails at least one person indicated to hold the highest level of local values. Additionally, the means for all four years are relatively high (4.29 - 4.53), which shows that the respondents generally hold strong local values. The results also show that the average in local values increased between 2008 and 2010, with 2010 having the highest overall mean (4.53). Since then, local values have decreased as 2020 shows the lowest average score for local values (4.29) compared to previous years. Nonetheless, the larger difference and decrease in local values between 2018 and 2020 could be affected by the lower sample size of ESS 2020 (1538) compared to ESS 2018 (1752). Since the mean is greater than the median (3.5) in all cases, the distribution of local values in all these ESS rounds is positively skewed (Field, 2018). Additionally, the standard deviations are relatively low for all ESS rounds, which means there is little variation in the data (Field, 2018).

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Local Values in Croatia

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation	<i>N</i>
Local Values					
2008	1.25	6	4.38	.86	1399
2010	1.25	6	4.53	.79	1554
2018	2	6	4.46	.83	1752
2020	1	6	4.29	.85	1538

Table 2 below presents the descriptive statistics for the independent variable ‘EU Values’ in Croatia. For 2008 and 2010, the scores show a minimum of 1.5 and 1.25 respectively, indicating at least some EU values. For both 2018 and 2020 however, the minimum given score for EU values was 1. Considering that Croatia entered the EU in 2013, this means that the minimum indicated score for EU values turned out lower after Croatia’s EU accession. For all years, the maximum indicated score for EU values was 6. The means show an increase in EU values between 2008 and 2018 (4.77 – 4.97), which simultaneously present the lowest and highest average for all years, respectively. The most recent data of 2020 shows a decrease in EU values compared to 2018. It should be mentioned that the lower sample size of 2020 (1547) compared to 2018 (1762) could have affected this result. Nonetheless, considering that the maximum given score is 6, the means for all ESS rounds are relatively high, which entails that the respondents generally hold strong EU values. Since all means are greater than the median (3.5), the distribution of EU values for these years is positively skewed (Field, 2018). Furthermore, the standard deviations for all ESS rounds is relatively low, which shows little variability in the data (Field, 2018).

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for EU Values in Croatia

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation	N
EU Values					
2008	1.5	6	4.77	.77	1434
2010	1.25	6	4.82	.77	1581
2018	1	6	4.97	.77	1762
2020	1	6	4.88	.82	1547

Lastly, table 3 presents the descriptive statistics of the dependent variable ‘Immigrant Attitudes’ in Croatia. Because of the ordinal nature of this variable, the statistics are expressed in frequencies. For all years, the highest amount of responses were found for ‘Allow some’. This means that the immigrant attitudes in Croatia between 2008 and 2020 were most frequently

found to be somewhat positive. Additionally, the least indicated category for all years was ‘Allow none’, which portrays the most negative immigrant attitudes.

Table 3

Frequencies for Immigrant Attitudes in Croatia

	Allow many	Allow some	Allow few	Allow none	N
Immigrant Attitudes					
2008	345 (24.9%)	510 (36.9%)	311 (22.5%)	217 (15.7%)	1383
2010	421 (27.4%)	462 (30.1%)	400 (26%)	254 (16.5%)	1537
2018	362 (20.6%)	639 (36.4%)	536 (30.5%)	219 (12.5%)	1756
2020	374 (24.2%)	576 (37.3%)	435 (28.2%)	159 (10.3%)	1544

Note. Percentages in brackets.

To make relative comparisons between the years, the percentage frequencies are discussed. Looking at these results per answer category, ‘Allow many’ displays a peak in 2010 (27.4%), after which frequencies decline again in 2018 (20.6%). A possible explanation could be the aftermath of the 2015 European migrant crisis, which presumably decreased positive immigrant attitudes in Croatia (Abikova & Piotrowicz, 2021). Furthermore, Covid-19 could be an explanation for the increase in ‘Allow many’ between 2018 (20.6%) and 2020 (24.2%), which because of less immigration around that time, resulted in more positive immigrant attitudes (Abikova & Piotrowicz, 2021). Despite a lower outlier in 2010, the percentage frequencies for the category ‘Allow some’, has stayed relatively the same over the years. Furthermore, the percentage frequencies for ‘Allow few’, which indicates somewhat negative immigrant attitudes, show an increase over the years despite a slight deviation in 2020. This result matches the observations of a rise in xenophobic beliefs and recent examples of social exclusion and maltreatment of immigrants in Croatia (Jurlina & Vidovic, 2018). Nonetheless, the percentage frequencies for the category ‘Allow none’, which portrays the most negative immigrant attitudes, have been declining since 2008 with a slight deviation in 2010. This result highlights that the negative immigrant attitudes in Croatia, which have increased in recent years according to Jurlina and Vidovic (2018), might be of less negative extremity than expected.

5.2 Multinomial Logistic Regression Results

Table 4 below shows the results of the multinomial logistic regression. The model shows the effect of local values and EU values on immigrant attitudes while controlling for age and years of education. A significant regression equation was found for this model ($X^2(12) = 207.770$, $p < .001$), meaning the independent variables significantly predict the dependent variable. Additionally, the independent variables in the model explain 14.9% (Nagelkerke's R^2) of the variance in the dependent variable.

Table 4

Multinomial Logistic Regression Model for Predicting Immigrant Attitudes in Croatia (2020)

	Allow some vs. many	Allow few vs. many	Allow none vs. many
(Constant)	1.435 (.576)	.587 (.620)	.844 (.902)
Local Values	.351** (.096)	.525*** (.104)	1.102*** (.181)
EU Values	-.510** (.103)	-.526*** (.112)	-1.265*** (.172)
Age	.005 (.004)	.014*** (.004)	.034*** (.007)
Years of Education	-.014 (.022)	-.061* (.024)	-.227*** (.038)

Model Fit:

-2LL	3353.399
Cox and Snell's R^2	.137
Nagelkerke's R^2	.149

Note. $N = 1409$; Multinomial logistic regression coefficients with standard errors in brackets.

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$.

The variable 'Local Values' shows highly significant and positive coefficients for the categories 'Allow some', 'Allow few' and 'Allow none'. This means local values increase the likelihood that a respondent identifies with these categories rather than with the reference category 'Allow

many'. In other words, local values increase the probability that a respondent holds negative immigrant attitudes. Therefore, the first hypothesis of this study is accepted: *Local values are likely to cause negative attitudes towards immigrants in Croatia.*

Secondly, the variable 'EU Values' shows highly significant and negative coefficients for the categories 'Allow some', 'Allow few' and 'Allow none'. This means that EU values decrease the likelihood that a respondent identifies with a category other than the reference category 'Allow many'. Considering that 'Allow many' represents positive immigrant attitudes, EU values increase the probability that a respondent holds positive immigrant attitudes. The second hypothesis is also accepted: *EU values are likely to cause positive attitudes towards immigrants in Croatia.*

Additionally, the control variable 'Age' portrays positive coefficients for all categories, but only shows significant results for 'Allow few' and 'Allow none'. This entails that age increases the probability that a respondent holds negative immigrant attitudes, which confirms that older respondents tend to hold negative immigrant attitudes (Hainmueller & Hiscox, 2007). Lastly, the control variable 'Years of Education' portrays negative coefficients for all categories, but only shows significant results for 'Allow few' and 'Allow none'. Because a negative relationship with these categories is associated with positive immigrant attitudes, this result confirms that more years of education cause positive immigrant attitudes (Schotte & Winkler, 2018).

5.3 Relative Effect Size Results

Table 5 below displays the effect size of the independent variables on the four categories of 'Immigrant Attitudes'. These results are shown in percentage change in odds ratios per standard deviation increase on the independent variables (Crowson, 2021).

Looking at 'Allow many' and 'Allow some', it can be concluded that 'EU Values' has a stronger effect on these categories compared to 'Local Values' due to the higher percentage change in standardised odds ratios. This means that EU values have a stronger effect on immigrant attitudes in Croatia, when these attitudes tend to be positive. For the categories 'Allow few' and 'Allow none', 'Local Values' shows a higher score of percentage change in the standardised odds ratios compared to 'EU Values'. Consequently, local values have a stronger effect on immigrant attitudes in Croatia when attitudes tend to be negative. Because of these mixed results, the third hypothesis (*Local values are likely to have a stronger effect on*

immigrant attitudes in Croatia, compared to EU values) can only be partially accepted, as this effect only applies to negative attitudes.

Table 4

Percentage Change in Standardised Odds Ratios for Predicting Immigrant Attitudes in Croatia (2020)

	Allow many	Allow some	Allow few	Allow none
Local Values	-32.28	0.34	20.09	88.7
EU Values	61.78	-9.19	-6.78	-49.98
Age	-18.58	-10.61	13.98	65.62
Years of Education	17.22	15.3	-6.41	-47.73

6. Discussion

Overall, local and EU values were found to have significant effects on immigrant attitudes in Croatia. Firstly, the findings confirmed that local values cause negative immigrant attitudes in Croatia. This was expected as the values that make up the local values in Croatia, such as tradition, nationalism, and community, create the belief that newcomers put the status quo at risk (Baloban, 2022; Bellamy, 2003). Secondly, the findings found that EU values cause positive immigrant attitudes in Croatia. Considering that EU values, such as human rights, equality, diversity, and social justice, fall under values for universalism and benevolence which tend to cause openness towards immigration, this effect was expected (Beierlein et al., 2016). Lastly, age and years of education were also found to have significant effects on immigrant attitudes in Croatia. The findings confirmed that older respondents tend to have negative immigrant attitudes and that more years of education is associated with positive immigrant attitudes in Croatia (Hainmueller & Hiscox, 2007; Schotte & Winkler, 2018). Although it was expected that local values have a stronger effect on immigrant attitudes in Croatia compared to EU values on the basis of social identity theory, the findings showed that this is not fully the case. Local values only have a stronger effect when immigrant attitudes tend to be negative, whereas EU values have a stronger effect when immigrant attitudes are positive. For this study, social identity theory can therefore not explain the prioritisation between local and EU values when it comes to their relative effect on immigrant attitudes in Croatia (Cinnirella, 1997). This finding suggests that besides social and cultural embeddedness, there are alternative factors that influence the prioritisation of certain values in the formation of attitudes and beliefs, which provides incentives for future research (Cinnirella, 1997).

What is interesting is that although Jurlina and Vidovic (2018) highlight the rise in xenophobic beliefs in Croatia, and the Danish Refugee Council (2022) showed recent examples of social exclusion and maltreatment of immigrants in Croatia, in this study, negative immigrant attitudes ('Allow none') were reported the least frequent by the respondents and have even seen an overall decrease between 2008 and 2020. At the same time, less extreme negative attitudes ('Allow few') have become more popular, which suggests that the rise in negative immigrant attitudes in Croatia as observed by Jurlina and Vidovic (2018), might be of less negative extremity than expected. According to the findings of this study, it is possible that the decrease in local values between 2008 and 2020 has weakened the negative effect on immigrant attitudes, while the simultaneous increase in EU values has contributed to more welcoming immigrant attitudes in Croatia. Consequently, negative attitudes have become less extreme in Croatia

recently. Nonetheless, this also means that the violence against immigrants and the pushbacks happening at the Croatian borders, which are paired with extreme forms of negative immigrant attitudes, cannot be explained for with the findings of this study and require further attention (Norman, 2010).

7. Conclusion

Croatia's recent admission to the Schengen area highlights the significance of a well-integrated immigration strategy, due to its appeal to irregular migrants. While Croatia has been experiencing major local emigration to other EU countries over the past decades, irregular migrants have become a large share of the immigrants in the country (Abikova & Piotrowicz, 2021). Although Croatia is bound by the EU's human rights-based approach to immigration, evidence of xenophobia, social exclusion, maltreatment and pushbacks have emphasised a disconnect between EU values and the treatment of immigrants by Croatian society (Danish Refugee Council, 2022). Considering the crucial role of values in the formation of attitudes towards immigrants and the lack of academic attention this topic has received, this study investigated the impact of local and EU values on immigrant attitudes in Croatia (Homer & Kahle, 1998).

The findings revealed that local and EU values significantly influence immigrant attitudes in Croatia. Whereas local values generate negative immigrant attitudes, EU values cause positive immigrant attitudes. Age and years of education also play a role, with older individuals displaying more negative attitudes and more years of education correlating with more positive attitudes. Surprisingly, the impact of local values is not consistently stronger than that of EU values. The study therefore suggests that factors beyond social identity theory shape the prioritization of values (Cinnirella, 1997). Notably, negative attitudes have become less extreme in Croatia, possibly due to a decline in local values and an increase in EU values between 2008 and 2020. Although this finding suggests that the treatment of immigrants in Croatia has improved, this study cannot explain the recent incidents of violence against immigrants, highlighting the need for further investigation (Amnesty International, 2021).

7.1 Implications, Limitations and Recommendations

The findings of this study have a number of implications for the improvement of Croatia's immigration policy and EU compliance. To foster a more accepting society that values diversity and social fairness, focus should be put on reducing xenophobic beliefs that are caused by the local values in Croatia. Simultaneously, efforts should be made to further promote EU principles such as human rights, equality, diversity, and social justice to create a more inclusive and welcoming environment for immigrants. Furthermore, the findings suggest that policy interventions to improve immigrant attitudes in Croatia, should be tailored to demographic groups. Whereas raising awareness among older individuals enhances positive immigrant

attitudes in Croatia, promoting education about immigration can counter negative stereotypes and ensure a better understanding among Croatian society (Albada et al., 2021). Lastly, the overall discrepancy between local values and EU values that is visible in their opposite effect on immigrant attitudes, raises questions about the successful integration of EU values in Croatian society. This study stresses the significance of alignment between local and EU values and emphasises the importance of monitoring EU member state compliance to ensure conformity on the EU's approach to immigration (Cinnirella, 1997).

Because this study found that negative immigrant attitudes in Croatia have become less extreme in recent years, the violent pushbacks of immigrants in Croatia cannot be fully explained by this study (Norman, 2010). This suggests that other factors than local and EU values, such as policy implementation, socio-political dynamics, or experience with refugees may contribute to these issues (Albada et al., 2021). Future research should therefore include these additional factors to find an explanation for the maltreatment of immigrants in Croatia. Furthermore, although the immigrant maltreatment in Croatia which highlights the relevance of this study specifically applies to irregular migrants, this study used measurements for attitudes towards all immigrants, including regular migrants. Reason for this is that data on the acceptance of irregular migrants specifically, is simply not available in European social science databases. Because irregular migrants still form a large share of the immigrants in Croatia, this study still allows for conclusions about the attitudes of Croatian society towards them. Nonetheless, this study advocates for more irregular migrant-specific measurements to be produced and used in social science research, considering that this immigrant group is particularly sensitive to the violation of human rights (Amnesty International, 2021). Lastly, the quantitative nature of this study, although providing evidence for the causal relationship between local and EU values and the immigrant attitudes in Croatia, does not provide an in-depth understanding of why this is the case. Therefore, a recommendation for future researchers is to dedicate a qualitative study on the topic.

In conclusion, this study emphasises the significant influence of local and EU values on immigrant attitudes in Croatia. It stresses the importance of putting into place effective immigration policies that align these values to create an inclusive environment for immigrants in Croatia.

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