

The rural-urban divide in GAL-TAN values

Christopher Claassen¹ and Kevin Brookes²

¹University of Glasgow

²Sciences Po Grenoble UGA

March 2026

1. Introduction

Classically, politics is about “who gets what”: the familiar left-right dimension of economic conflict and redistribution. Yet political scientists have long recognized that political contestation extends beyond distributive issues. Questions of individual freedom versus authority and tradition, of diversity and immigration and their implications for national identity, and of newer “alternative” arenas of conflict such as climate change and environmental protection have all become politically salient.

Many scholars group such “new politics” issues into a second dimension of European politics, in which “green,” “alternative,” and “libertarian” (GAL) positions are opposed to “traditional,” “authoritarian,” and “nationalist” (TAN) ones (Hooghe, Marks, and Wilson 2002). Originally developed to distinguish parties advancing libertarian and post-materialist programmes from those emphasizing tradition, order, and authority (Bakker et al. 2015; Kriesi et al. 2006), the GAL-TAN distinction has also proved useful for describing the attitudes and beliefs of citizens (Kurella and Rapp 2026; Van Der Brug and Van Spanje 2009).

This dimension has become one of the main fault lines of contemporary European politics. It captures much of what has been described as an emerging “transnational cleavage,” dividing those who embrace globalization from those who regard it as culturally, economically, or politically threatening (Dassonneville, Hooghe, and Marks 2024; Hooghe and Dassonneville 2018). These conflicts have become a major source of polarization in European politics in recent years (e.g., Dickson and Hobolt 2025). They are also politically consequential because the TAN pole is closely associated with authoritarian-populist parties, which have often been at the forefront of democratic backsliding in Europe and beyond (Haggard and Kaufman 2021). For these reasons, understanding how GAL-TAN attitudes are structured socially and geographically is important not only for the study of public opinion, but also for understanding the terrain on which challenges to democracy take place.

Given the growing importance of GAL-TAN issues in European politics, it is important to ask whether a rural-urban divide has emerged on these questions and, if so, whether it is linked to rural and urban identities and resentments. Despite a rapidly expanding literature on the rural-urban divide in Western democracies, most work has focused on electoral behaviour and system support (Gimpel et al. 2020). Studies of GAL-TAN attitudes themselves remain comparatively limited, especially in Europe, and those that do exist have tended to focus on only one part of this broader policy space, most often immigration (Ford and Goodwin 2014; Jennings and Stoker 2016; Maxwell 2019; Huijsmans et al. 2021; Bréchon 2020). Moreover, with some notable exceptions (Huijsmans et al. 2021; Hyland, Mascherini, and Lamont 2024; Claassen et al. 2025), this literature has largely neglected place-based consciousness, even though work by Cramer (2016) and others suggests that rural identity and rural resentment may be central to understanding why rural and urban areas diverge politically.

This chapter therefore examines evidence of a rural-urban divide in five cases: Britain, France, Germany, Spain, and Switzerland. We focus on three distinct issue domains within the broader GAL-TAN space: ethnic nationalist beliefs, evaluations of immigration, and support for taxing fossil fuels. In addition to assessing whether rural-urban divides exist on these issues, we

incorporate place-based consciousness into the analysis. More specifically, we examine how place-based identities and resentments differ between ruralites and urbanites, and whether these attitudes help account for any rural-urban gaps that we observe.

We find significant rural-urban divides across these socio-cultural attitudes, especially in Switzerland, Germany, and France. These divides are not merely reflections of the different demographic composition of rural and urban populations, but appear to be more deeply rooted in place-based contexts. At the same time, the relationship between place-based consciousness and these attitudes varies across countries: identity and resentment are strongly linked to them in France and Germany, but much less so in Spain and Britain. We also find little evidence – France being the main exception – that place-based consciousness substantially reduces the association between place of residence and these attitudes.

2. The role of socio-cultural values in challenges to democracy

Much of the focus on the study of rural-urban political divides has been on electoral behavior (Gimpel et al. 2020; Rodden 2019; Huijismans and Rodden 2024) and system support (e.g., political trust; del Horno, Rico, and Hernández 2023; Kenny and Luca 2021; Zumbrunn 2024). Fewer studies have considered rural-urban divides in socio-cultural values. This appears to be an unfortunate oversight, because values (and value change) have long played an important role in European and comparative politics. For example, Inglehart's (1977; 1997) classic work on post-materialist (and later self-expressive) values posits that as societies become more economically secure, they experience a shift from traditional to post-materialist values, leading to greater emphasis on self-expression and quality of life rather than tradition and order. He proposes that such value change accumulates generationally, in what he describes as a "silent revolution". Although gradual and "silent", it has dramatic effects, as Inglehart links the revolution with the emergence of the green and feminist movements half a century ago as well as the third wave of democratization that took place in the 1980s and 1990s.

In more recent years, values have again been used to account for the changing political

landscape of Western democracies. In particular, Norris and Inglehart (2019) identify what they describe as a “cultural backlash” against the overall liberalizing trajectory of public policies. They argue that rapid political and societal changes have provoked a reaction from those who feel their traditional way of life is under threat, resulting in support for authoritarian-populist parties that promise to restore traditional values. This backlash is strongest among older, more conservative cohorts who find themselves at odds with the increasingly liberal younger generations. Rather than values driving policy change, it is policy change, in their view, that now drives value change.

As such, the significance of socio-cultural values extends beyond the emergence of alternative political movements and the democratization of authoritarian regimes; it is also intricately linked to the rise of populism today. Values are therefore not only a reflection of policy change but also a driving force in political behavior, shaping the discourse and direction of modern democracies. Moreover, the GAL-TAN dimension, which – as we have previously discussed – categorizes political ideologies along a spectrum from Green, Alternative, Libertarian to Traditional, Authoritarian, Nationalist, serves as a useful framework for understanding these value shifts. It encapsulates the tension between progressive and conservative forces, reflecting the broader societal debates on topics such as environmentalism, immigration, and nationalism.

3. The rural-urban divide in GAL-TAN issues

Nationalism, immigration, and environmentalism are the three aspects of socio-cultural values that we consider in this chapter. In this section we examine existing research into rural-urban divides on these issues, beginning with nationalism, or more specifically, ethnic nationalism: the belief that membership in the nation is inherited and marked by ancestry and shared culture (Smith 1991). There is little work that directly examines how ethnic nationalism varies across the rural-urban divide. In the United Kingdom, people living in “backwater” places tend to identify more as English than residents of more prosperous towns and cities (Jennings and Stoker 2016) and in Switzerland people from less dense areas tend to be less cosmopolitan in their attitude (e.g., less willing to join the EU; Maxwell 2020). The study closest to our first research question is Bréchon

(2020), who shows that French ruralites are more likely than urbanites to agree that having French roots is important for being French.

A larger body of research has looked into rural-urban divides in immigration attitudes, the second issue we consider. These studies generally find that rural residents are more skeptical about the benefits of immigration than urban dwellers and more likely to desire a reduction in immigration; such evidence exists in Britain (Ford and Goodwin 2014; Jennings and Stoker 2016), Switzerland (Maxwell 2019), the Netherlands (Huijsmans et al. 2021), and France (Bréchon 2020). This trend has, if anything, increased throughout time and holds even after controlling for socio-demographic composition Huijsmans et al. (2021). These differences likely vary across countries: Maxwell finds the largest rural-urban divide in Switzerland and France and the smallest in Germany (Maxwell 2020). Such divides are, however, largely attributable to compositional effects, i.e., the distribution of socio-demographic groups across the territory (Maxwell 2019).

Turning to our final issue area, green or environmental policy preferences, we see a mixed picture. While earlier studies (generally fielded in the United States and Canada) found urban residents to be more concerned about the environment, more recent studies have found little difference between rural and urban dwellers on these issues (Arcury and Christianson 1993; Huddart-Kennedy et al. 2009). This shift is believed to be the result of several factors: the declining economic dependency of rural areas on natural resource industries, the availability of community environmental services, and the influx of better-educated urban dwellers in the countryside as a result of suburbanization (Huddart-Kennedy et al. 2009; Dąbrowski et al. 2022). Recent European work suggests that support for climate policy does have a distinct rural geography (Tallent 2025), possibly because of the territorial distribution of the costs of decarbonization (Rodríguez-Pose and Bartalucci 2023). However, green or environmental politics includes a wide array of different policies, some of which may appeal more to urbanites (e.g., vehicle emissions standards) and others that may be more salient to ruralites (e.g., clean rivers).

In sum, there is relatively little research on European rural-urban differences in ethnic nationalism, evaluations of immigration, and support for climate policy. Immigration is the only

one of these issues to have received sustained attention, and the existing evidence suggests that ruralites are generally less supportive of immigration than urbanites. There is little direct research on the rural-urban divide in nationalism. Finally, rural-urban differences in environmental and climate-policy preferences are mixed, perhaps reflecting the different incentives, exposures, and policy bundles at stake across issue areas.

Importantly, given the focus of the present volume, there is little research examining the role of place-based consciousness, including rural identity and rural resentment, in accounting for any rural urban differences in these socio-cultural values. Since the work of Cramer (2016) in the United States, attention has turned to the political psychology of the urban rural divide (epitomised by this volume). Existing studies have shown that rural consciousness is associated with populist attitudes (Trujillo 2022) and the symbolic dimension of resentment to the support for Donald Trump (Trujillo and Crowley 2022). Place-based resentment is linked with support for radical right parties in Germany (Hegewald and Schraff 2022). More closely related to the socio-cultural values of interest in this chapter, Huijismans (2023) show that rural (and suburban) individuals with higher place resentment are more hostile to immigration, while Salomo (2019) shows that geographical perceived deprivation is associated with ethnocentrism and radical right-wing attitudes.

4. Research Design and Methods

Our data come from the Rural-Urban Divide in Europe survey of Switzerland, Germany, Spain, France and Britain, as described in chapter 1 of this volume.

4.1. Dependent variables

Our dependent variables are (1) ethnic nationalism, (2) immigration beliefs, and (3) “green” policy preferences. The first of these, ethnic nationalism, is measured using two items drawn from the International Social Survey Programme, with a single scale created using the mean of these two items:

- Some people say that the following things are important for being truly [nationality]. Others say they are not important. How important do you think it is...
 - to have [country] ancestry?
 - to share [my nation] culture?
 (0 very important – 10 not important at all.)

Next, is our immigration opinion question, which is drawn from the European Social Survey:

- Is [country] made a worse or a better place to live by people coming to live here from other countries? Where would you place your views on this scale?
 - (0 worse place to live – 10 better place to live)

This question captures respondents' beliefs about the impacts of immigration on their society rather than, e.g., preferences regarding immigration policies. As such, it measures core values more than downstream policy preferences.

Finally, our measure of green policy attitudes asks respondents if they would support taxing fossil fuels. This is the most specific and policy-oriented of our three questions, and should be interpreted as a measure of support for a particular climate-policy instrument rather than as a broad measure of environmental concern:

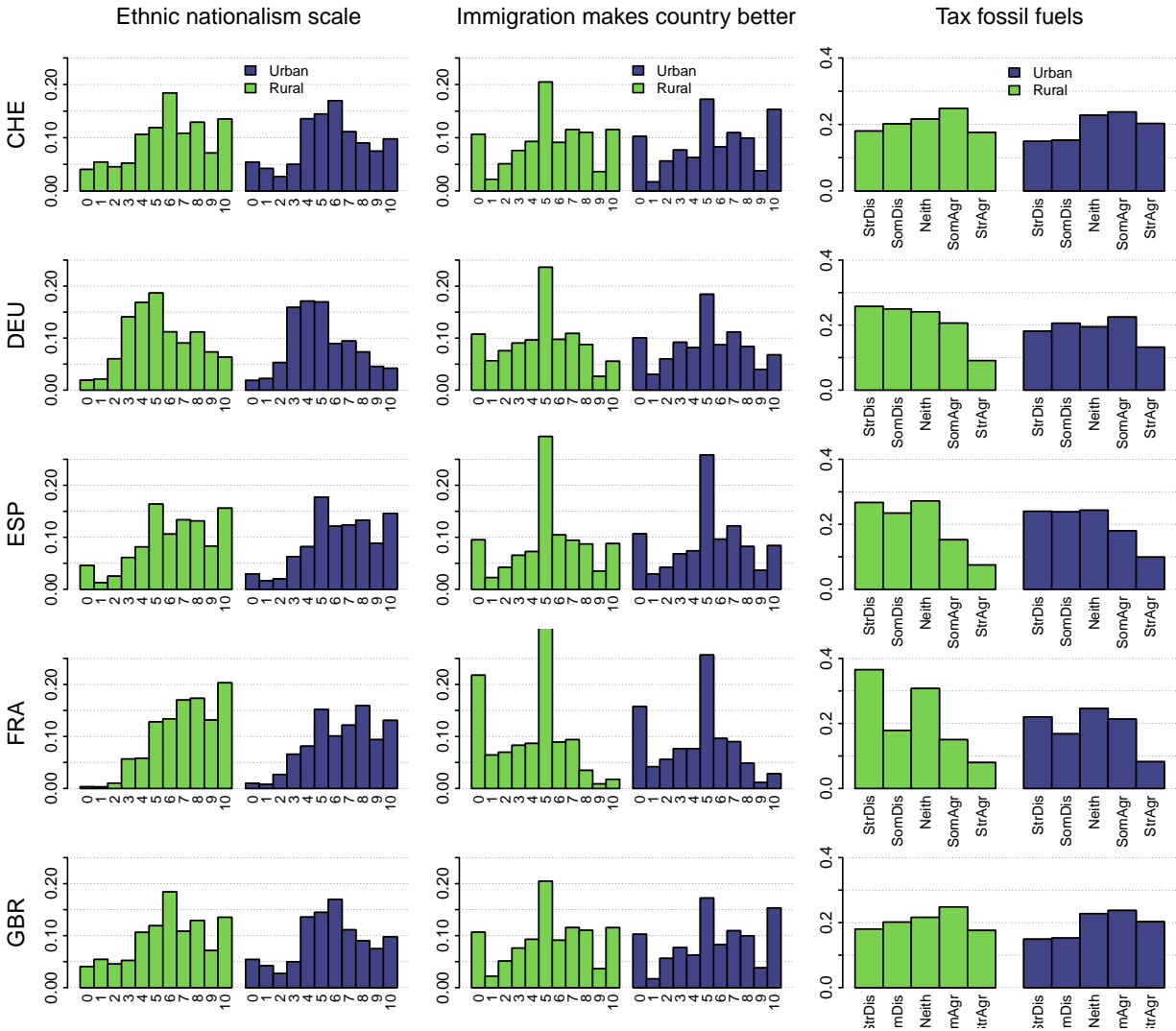
- To what extent, if at all, do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
 - To reduce climate change, taxes on fossil fuels such as oil, gas and coal should be increased.
 (1 Strongly agree, 2 somewhat agree, 3 neither agree nor disagree, 4 somewhat disagree, 5 strongly disagree)

The distributions of these dependent variables are displayed in Figure 1 (note that we have reversed the order of the response options for the ethnic nationalism and fossil-fuel-tax questions such that increasing levels of agreement with the question have higher values). We show the results separately for rural and urban subsamples. We see that respondents in all five of our samples are divided on these socio-cultural questions. All groups, except for urban Germans, have mean

scores above the midpoint on our ethnic nationalism scale. And in most cases rural residents tend to support ethnic nationalism to a greater degree than urban residents, with the exception of Spain, where rural and urban residents have similar views. Although the median, neutral response attracts by far the most agreement on our immigration question, respondents exhibit opinions across this scale. However, while more respondents express favorable views of immigration in Switzerland, Spain and Britain, more express negative views in France and roughly the same number express positive and negative views in Germany. Rural residents are generally less supportive of immigration, except in Spain, where they hold similar attitudes to their urban counterparts. Finally, we see substantial variation within each sample in support for taxing fossil fuels. Respondents in Switzerland and Britain are in favor on average, with respondents in Germany, Spain and France tending to oppose the proposal. In all cases, rural residents are less supportive of taxing fossil fuels than urban residents, sometimes substantially so.

In Table 1 we examine the correlations among the three dependent variables across our countries. Post-materialist issues have long included varied and sometimes quite distinct political attitudes and policy preferences; indeed, the somewhat awkward acronym GAL-TAN betrays this very heterogeneity. Nevertheless, correlations among our three variables are moderate to strong, indicating a common core of socio-cultural values, and one that is fairly constant across our five national contexts. Ethnic nationalism and approval of immigration are strongly related, with the correlation varying from $-.31$ (Spain) to $-.53$ (Britain). This is likely a results of both variables being related to beliefs around the identity of the ingroup and evaluations of outgroups. The fossil fuel tax question shows modest negative correlations with ethnic nationalism, ranging from $-.19$ (France) to $-.33$ (Germany), and stronger positive correlations with approval of immigration, ranging from $.28$ (Switzerland) to $.50$ (Germany). These patterns are consistent with the view that these attitudes belong to a broader GAL-TAN family while remaining analytically distinct from one another (Kurella and Rapp 2026).

Figure 1. Distributions of dependent variables by national and rural vs urban sample



Notes: Histograms showing the distributions of each dependent variable (columns) by country (rows) and urban-rural locality (colors). The response options for ethnic nationalism and green policy preferences are reversed in this figure such that higher values indicate more agreement with the question/scale. analyzes are weighted using the survey weights.

4.2. Other variables and empirical strategy

We analyze the rural-urban divide in our three dependent variables using the following strategy. First, we consider whether a gap in opinion exists between rural and urban respondents. There are a number of ways of defining rural and urban residence; to align our analyses we focus here on a rural vs. urban self-categorization question. These questions vary somewhat across the five national

Table 1. Correlations between the dependent variables by sample country

	CHE		DEU		ESP		FRA		GBR	
	E.N.	Imm.	E.N.	Immig.	E.N.	Imm.	E.N.	Imm.	E.N.	Imm.
Immigration	-.38		-.48		-.31		-.46		-.53	
Fossil fuel tax	-.22	.28	-.33	.50	-.20	.33	-.19	.29	-.26	.38

E.N. = Ethnic nationalism; Imm = Immigration. Cell entries show bivariate Pearson's correlations between the row and column variables with the relevant sample country. analyses are unweighted.

surveys, as discussed in Chapter 1 in this volume. Specifically, the French and Swiss teams used questions that allowed respondents to categorize themselves as residents of an intermediate area, in addition to residents of rural or urban areas. In France, this intermediate area is “peri-urban”; in Switzerland, it is “suburban”. Accordingly, the place categories are substantively comparable but not perfectly identical across the five cases, and results should be interpreted with that measurement caveat in mind. We furthermore consider urban-rural (and urban-suburban, etc.) gaps both with and without adjusting for the effects of various control variables. These demographic controls are as follows: gender, education (high, medium, or low), income (upper, middle, and lower tertiles, as well as a category for income not reported), religion (Catholic, Protestant, other Christian, other, and none), age (18-29, 30-44, 45-64, and 65 and over), as well as fixed effects for subnational regions.

Our second step is to examine the effects of place-based identity and resentment (as discussed in the first chapter in this volume). We add these two variables to the regression models. Since these measures are designed to vary depending on respondents’ self-defined areas of residence (i.e., they are content-controlled measures), we interact self-categorized place with place-based identity and place-based resentment.

Finally, we briefly consider several additional specifications in our analysis and discussion. In France and Switzerland, we examine the effects of identity and resentment among peri-urbanites and suburbanites respectively. We also consider the effects of splitting place-based resentment into the three components of resource, power, and cultural resentment (Cramer 2016; Claassen et al.

2025).

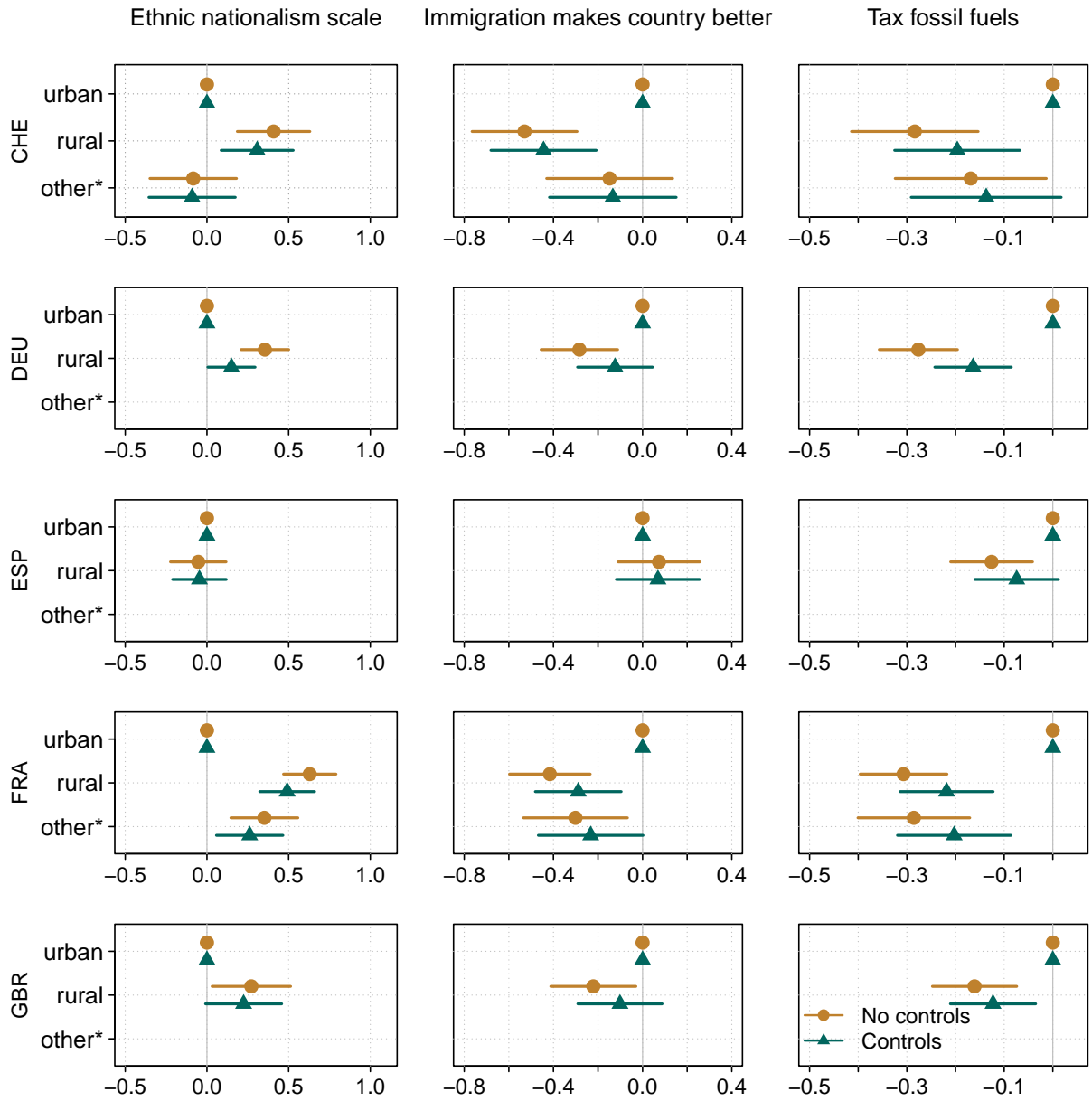
5. The presence of rural-urban divides

We begin with our investigation into the presence and extent of rural-urban divides in opinion regarding ethnic nationalism, immigration, and support for taxing fossil fuels. In other words, we examine whether there are any effects of place across our three dependent variables and five countries. To reduce the proliferation of regression results tables, we display these effects of place in Figure 2, with dependent variables in columns and national samples in rows (please refer to the online appendix for the tables of regression results). Each plot shows the effects of respondents' self-categorization as residents of urban areas, rural area, and – in France and Switzerland – intermediate places such as peri-urban and suburban areas. Results without controls are displayed using the lighter tan-colored circles and lines, and results with controls are shown using the darker teal-colored triangles and lines.

We find that ruralites are generally more supportive of an ethnic notion of nationality, with significant rural-urban gaps on this issue emerging in Switzerland, Germany, France, and Britain. After adjusting for the different demographic profiles of urbanites and ruralites, the effects of rurality are reduced but remain significant in France and Switzerland (they are no longer significant in Germany and Britain). As such, although part of the rural-urban gap in beliefs about nationality can be attributed to the different demographic profiles of urbanites and ruralites, there remains a rural effect in two of our five cases beyond that predicted by demographics alone. This finding echoes recent research showing that rural areas are more supportive of populist-authoritarian political movements (Harteveld et al. 2022; Scala and Johnson 2017), which are particularly likely to espouse ethnic nationalist ideologies. Swiss suburbanites appear similar to urbanites in their ethnic nationalist beliefs, while French peri-urbanites lie somewhere between ruralites and urbanites in their attitudes.

Considering immigration opinion (middle column of Figure 2), we see effects that are similar to those just discussed (although now in the opposite direction since the question at hand

Figure 2. Regression Results of Place categorization on GAL-TAN Opinions



Notes: Each point shows the regression coefficient for the variable listed in the rows from a model predicting the dependent variable listed in the columns. “Urban” is the reference category and is therefore omitted from all models. Horizontal bars indicate 95% confidence intervals. The “other” category is “suburbanites” in Switzerland and “peri-urbanites” in France; it is not used in the other three cases.

concerns whether or not immigration makes the country a better place). Once again, we see little effect of place in Spain. In Switzerland, Germany, France, and Britain, ruralites have more negative opinions of immigration than urbanites, i.e., they are less inclined to agree that immigration makes

their country better. The British and German effects are again not particularly robust (or large) and are rendered insignificant once controls are introduced. Nevertheless, there the general pattern here amounts to further evidence that rurality is associated with a more traditional and nativist mindset. Swiss suburbanites are once again similar to urbanites, while French peri-urbanites appear closer to ruralites than urbanites in their immigration opinions.

Finally, we analyze our measure of green policy opinion. We generally see strong effects of rurality, with ruralites being less in favor than urbanites of taxing fossil fuels to tackle climate change. Including controls reduces the negative effects of rurality in all cases (in Spain, including controls renders the rural effect insignificant). Although we find some evidence that demographic differences explain the rural urban gap in climate policy preferences (e.g., Huddart-Kennedy et al. 2009), we find that a substantial rural effect remains in four of our five cases. We note that Swiss suburbanites are less in favor of taxing fossil fuels than urbanites, but the effect is not robust when controls are included. French peri-urbanites appear very similar to ruralites, being significantly and robustly more opposed to the policy proposal than French urbanites.

We suggest that the widespread rural opposition to taxing fossil fuels, which we have observed, may be driven by self-interest. Ruralites (and possibly also suburbanites / peri-urbanites) are more reliant on personal cars for transport, e.g., in 2022, only 7% of British ruralites do not own a car, compared to 35% of urbanites. They are therefore more exposed to the costs of higher petrol prices that would be induced by fuel tax. Indeed, support for the *Gilet Jaune* movement in France in 2022 – which emerged as a protest against a rise of a carbon tax – was associated with dependency on a car for transport (Wagner-Egger et al. 2022). More broadly, the green transition has generated territorially uneven burdens and discontents (Rodríguez-Pose and Bartalucci 2023).

In sum, our analysis of self-categorized place of residence has revealed two main findings. First, we find that ruralites in three of the five cases (Switzerland, Germany, and France) exhibit a more traditional, nativist worldview than urbanites, being more supportive of ethnic definitions of nationality and less supportive of immigration. These effects go beyond the demographic profiles of typical rural and urban residents, suggesting that rural context matters over and above measured

demographic composition (e.g., Cramer 2016). Second, we find strong rural effects regarding the policy of taxing fossil fuels, which may partly reflect greater rural exposure to fuel prices. This points to another dimension of the rural-urban divide, one tied more closely to material exposure and policy costs than to nationalism or immigration. We now turn to a more careful consideration of the role played by rural consciousness in these issues.

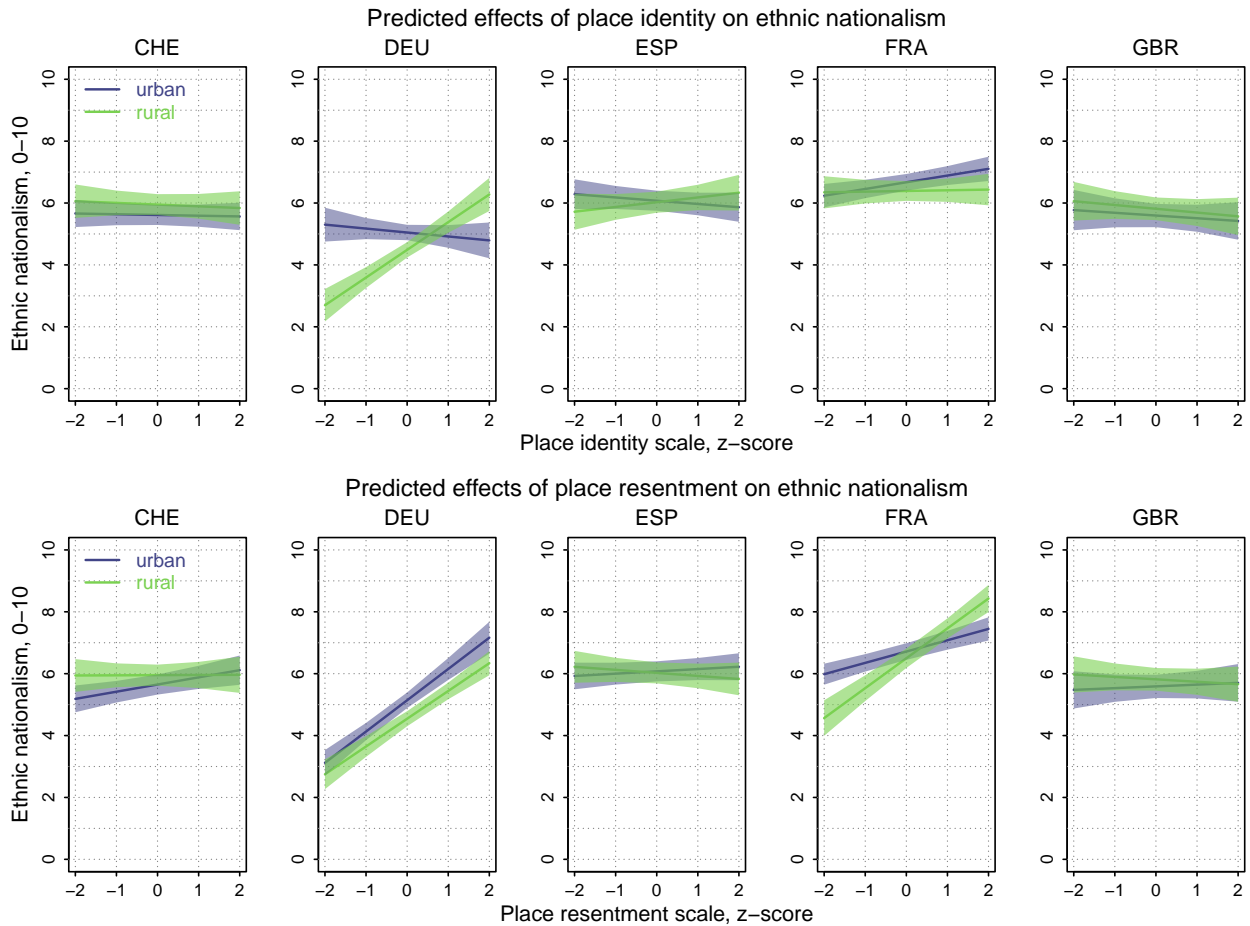
6. The role of place-based identity and resentment

Having established that place matters for GAL-TAN opinions, we now add our measures of place-based identity and place-based resentment into the mix. Specifically, we consider how these identities and beliefs are linked with our three dependent variables. Once again, to avoid numerous tables, we report results using figures. We use predicted effects plots showing how support for each dependent variable varies across our measures of identity, resentment and rural vs. urban categorizations. In other words, the underlying models include interactions between self-categorized place and both place identity and place resentment. These models also include the control variables we discussed earlier and used in the previous section.

Results for our first dependent variable, the ethnic nationalism scale, are shown in Figure 3. Looking first at place identity (top row of Figure 3), it is apparent that the strength of place-based identity generally has little effect on the strength of ethnic nationalist beliefs. The one major exception is rural Germans, who are much more likely to endorse ethnic definitions of nationality when they identify as ruralites. However, even at high levels of identity, German ruralites are no more supportive of ethnic nationalism than urbanites. In other words, identity has a compensating rather than intensifying effect on German ruralites' ethnic nationalism.

We see more heterogeneous marginal effects when we turn to place-based resentment (bottom row of Figure 3). Germany stands out again however, with very pronounced positive effects of place-based resentment on ethnic nationalism for both ruralites and urbanites. In France, place-based resentment also associated with greater ethnic nationalism for both ruralites and urbanites, although the effect is less strong. In the other three cases, place-based resentments have smaller

Figure 3. Predicted effects of place identity and resentment on ethnic nationalist beliefs



Notes: Lines show predicted effects of place-based identity (top row) and resentment on the ethnic nationalist scale (which ranges from 0 to 10) by rural (light green) and urban (darker purple) categorization. Shaded regions are 95% confidence intervals. Estimates based on regression model including place and resentment by urban vs. rural interactions and controls. analyzes are weighted.

and/or insignificant associations with ethnic nationalism.

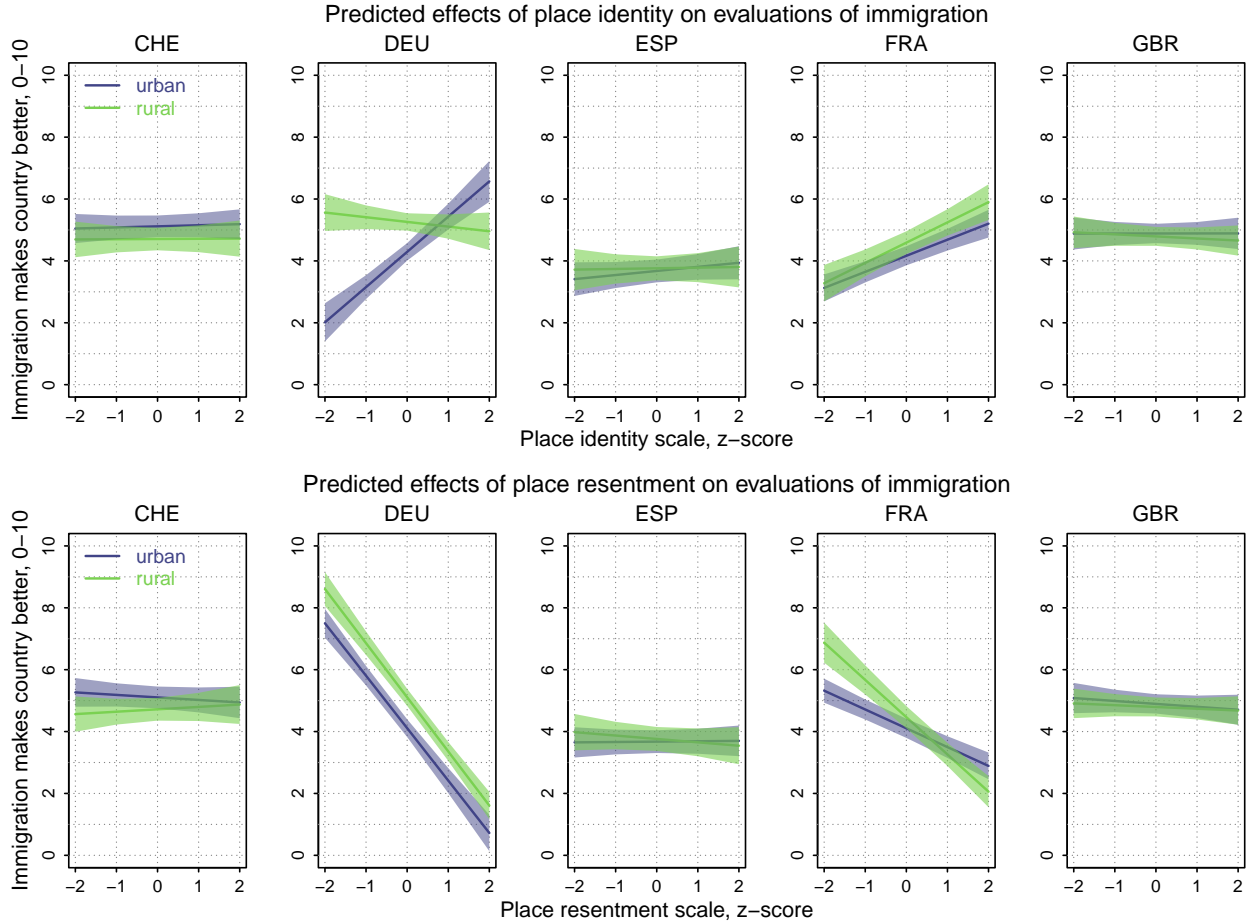
In supplementary analyses (see online appendix), we split place-based resentment into the three components identified in Cramer, finding that the single resentment scale partially obscures some interesting patterns in Germany and France. For German urbanites, the variety of place-based resentment that translates into ethnic nationalist beliefs is primarily representational, while for ruralites, it is cultural resentment that plays this role. For both French urbanites and ruralites, ethnic nationalism appears motivated by cultural resentment, with French ruralites additionally being motivated by redistributive resentment.

Figure 4 shows the effects of identity and resentment for our second dependent variable, evaluations of immigration. We see similar effects of place-based identity (top row) to those we observed in our previous analysis of ethnic nationalism. In Switzerland, Spain, and Britain, place-based identity plays little to no role in immigration approval. In Germany and France, it does. Previously we saw that place-based identity increased German ruralites' ethnic nationalist beliefs. Here we see that identity has the opposite effect: increasing German urbanites' evaluations of immigration (consistent with previous research by Hegewald and Schraff (2022)). In France, place-based identity increases positive opinions about immigration among both ruralites and urbanites. The effect of place-based identity is once again modest, but to the extent that it has an effect, it is the opposite effect than observed with respect to ethnic nationalism, i.e., stronger identities are associated with the GAL pole of the GAL-TAN dimension.

Turning to place-based resentment (Figure 4, bottom row), we see varied effects across cases, which mirror the effects we observed with respect to ethnic nationalism. In Switzerland, Spain, and Britain, there is little to no association between evaluations of immigration and resentment. In Germany and France there are notable effects. For both urban and rural Germans, place-based resentment has a very strong negative association with approval of immigration: a standard deviation increase in the former is associated with more than a unit's change in the latter (on a 0-10 scale). Together with the results from our analysis of ethnic nationalism, it seems clear that place-based resentment is strongly associated with a more nativist worldview among both rural and urban Germans. In France, place-based resentment is connected with disapproval of immigration (and an ethnic understanding of nationalism), particularly among ruralites. Although place-based resentment clearly offers a powerful explanation for nativist attitudes, this effect varies considerably across cases. Moreover, it tends to differ little across rural and urban areas, suggesting that a more general form of political resentment (i.e., one that is not tied to place per se) may underpin the results we have examined thus far.

When we split place-based resentment into redistributive, representational, and cultural components (results in the online appendix), we find that different components exert different ef-

Figure 4. Predicted effects of place identity and resentment on immigration evaluations

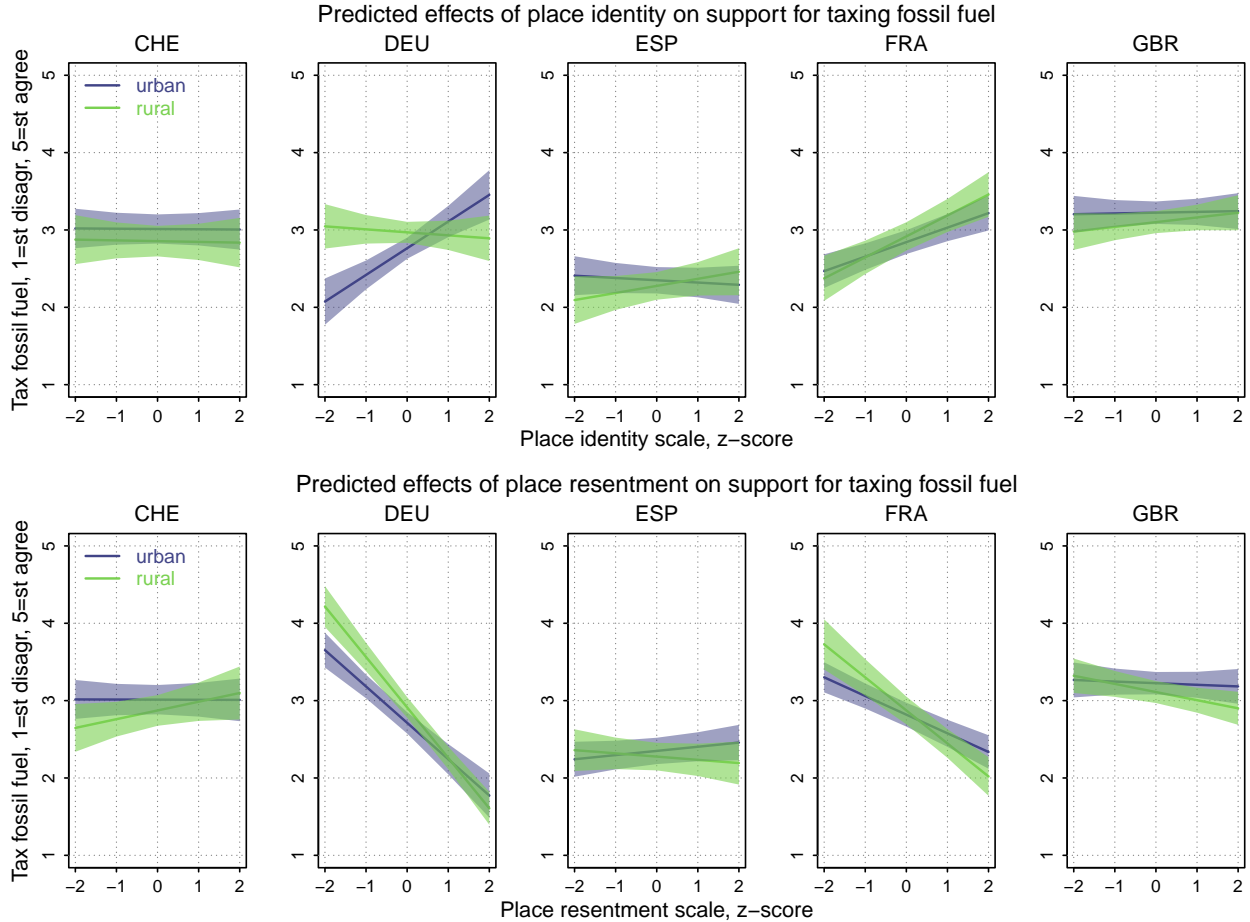


fects among urbanites and ruralites. For German and French urbanites, representational resentment drives antipathy to immigration. For German and French ruralites, cultural and redistributive resentment, respectively, are the primary sources of such antipathy.

Finally, we examine support for taxing fossil fuels, our green policy preference (Figure 5). Place-based identities (top row) generally show weak or null relationships with support for taxing fossil fuels. Germany and France are again the major exceptions, with French and German urbanites, as well as French ruralites, more likely to support taxing fossil fuels to the extent that they identify as urbanites (or ruralites).

More heterogeneous and pronounced place-based resentment effects (bottom row) are evident. Despite the somewhat idiosyncratic nature of these climate policy opinions (i.e., in compar-

Figure 5. Predicted effects of place identity and resentment on green policy preferences



ison with the more culturally-rooted ethnic nationalism and immigration evaluations), we observe a similar pattern of associations compared to the results we have observed for our other dependent variables. In Germany, there are very pronounced negative effects of place-based resentment, where more resentful individuals (urban or rural) are more opposed to taxing fossil fuels. In France, a weaker negative effect is evident, but this again varies across the rural and urban divide, with resentment having a more powerful negative effect among ruralites. In the other three cases, effects vary but are weak if not entirely insignificant.

When we examine the effects of the three separate components of placed-based resentment (results in the online appendix), we find that opposition to fossil fuel taxation is most associated with representational resentment among German and French urbanites. For ruralites in these coun-

tries redistributive resentment (and in Germany, cultural resentment) is more important.

7. Discussion and Conclusion

In this chapter, we examine three issue domains within the broader GAL-TAN space for evidence of a rural-urban divide: ethnic nationalist beliefs, evaluations of immigration, and support for taxing fossil fuels. We first consider whether there is a divide – or opinion gap – between urbanites and ruralites in our five countries before analyzing the role of place-based identities and resentment. We have four main findings.

First, we find significant and substantial opinion gaps on all three issues: ethnic nationalist beliefs, evaluations of immigration, and support for taxing fossil fuels. As one would expect, ruralites' opinions were generally located more toward the conservative, TAN pole of the GAL-TAN space: they were more favorable than urbanites to ethnic definitions of nationality, less positive about immigration, and less supportive of taxing fossil fuels. These rural effects were most pronounced in Switzerland, Germany, and France, and least pronounced (indeed, often not evident at all) in Spain and Britain. Although these rural effects are partially a product of the different demographic profiles of rural and urban areas, a robust contextual effect of rural areas remains even after adjusting for these demographic differences, especially in Switzerland, Germany, and France.

Second, we find that a place-based consciousness (and place-based resentment in particular) is strongly linked with TAN opinions (e.g., ethnic nationalism and opposition to immigration) in France and Germany. But only in France does consciousness actually appear to mediate the effects of rurality itself, since including place-based consciousness reduces the effects of rurality. In Germany, by contrast, including these measures increases the effects of rurality. As such, place-based consciousness operates more like a negative suppressor variable in Germany than mediator of place-based effects. In this way, and because place-based resentment has such similar effects for German urbanites and ruralites, it would appear to capture the effects of general political alienation or resentment rather than place-based resentment per se. Moreover, place-based identity could also play the role of inhibitor of TAN attitudes, because our indicates capture the effects of satisfaction

with place of living which is in turn associated with satisfaction with life.

Third, we find substantial differences across the five cases we examine. As discussed, rural effects are most pronounced in Switzerland, Germany, and France. And only in Germany and France does place-based consciousness appear to play a substantial role in shaping opinions towards GAL-TAN issues such as immigration and green policies. Despite a rapidly growing literature on the emergence of a rural-urban divide in Western democracies, it seems plausible that while this divide is important in some cases (France and Germany), it remains relatively insignificant in others (Spain and Britain; see Claassen, Carman, and Bankov 2025).

Fourth, we find that our measures of place-based consciousness do not constitute a “coherent” attitude since place-based identity and place-based resentment do not have the same association with political values. In most cases (Spain, Britain, Switzerland), place-based identity does not seem to have a direct link with political values, or be a moderating variable between place of living and those attitudes. In the case of France and Germany, place-based identity is negatively associated with traditional and authoritarian attitudes, while place-based resentment is positively associated with them.

Our findings suggest that rural urban divides – where they exist – pose a potential challenge to democracy. The pronounced opinion gaps we observe between rural and urban populations, particularly in countries like Switzerland, Germany, and France, amount to a significant chasm in attitudes towards nationalism, immigration, and environmental policies. This divide is not merely a reflection of demographic differences but also a manifestation of place-based identities and resentments that influence political opinions. In democracies, divisions such as these can lead to increased polarization, where rural areas become strongholds of conservative, TAN-aligned parties, while urban areas lean towards progressive, GAL-aligned parties.

Nevertheless, the lack of a consistent relationship between place-based consciousness and GAL-TAN attitudes across the examined countries indicates that the relationship between place and political life is complex and context-dependent. While in some cases, such as France and Germany, place-based identity and resentment are closely tied to GAL-TAN attitudes, in others,

like Spain and Britain, they are not. Ultimately, more research on the contextual moderators that determine when and where rural-urban divides open up is clearly needed.

References

- Arcury, Thomas A., and Eric Howard Christianson. 1993. "Rural-Urban Differences in Environmental Knowledge and Actions." *The Journal of Environmental Education* 25(1): 19–25.
- Bakker, Ryan, Catherine de Vries, Erica Edwards, Liesbet Hooghe, Seth Jolly, Gary Marks, Jonathan Polk, Jan Rovny, Marco Steenbergen, and Milada Anna Vachudova. 2015. "Measuring Party Positions in Europe: The Chapel Hill Expert Survey Trend File, 1999–2010." *Party Politics* 21(1): 143–152.
- Bréchon, Pierre. 2020. "Urbains et ruraux: de faibles différences de valeurs." *Revue Politique et Parlementaire*, <https://www.revuepolitique.fr/urbains-et-ruraux-de-faibles-differences-de-valeurs> 1093.
- Claassen, Christopher, Christopher Carman, and Petar Bankov. 2025. "Is There a Rural-Urban Political Divide in Britain?" *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties* 35(4): 661–689.
- Claassen, Christopher, Sascha Göbel, Antonia Lang, Kathrin Ackermann, Petar Bankov, Kevin Brookes, Bartolomeo Cappellina, Christopher Carman, Markus Freitag, Rubén García Del Horno, Enrique Hernández, Guillem Rico, Sigrid Rossteutscher, Richard Traunmüller, Michael Webb, Sonja Zmerli, and Alina Zumbunn. 2025. "Measuring Place-Based Consciousness in Europe." *Electoral Studies* 95: 102912.
- Cramer, Katherine J. 2016. *The Politics of Resentment. Rural Consciousness in Wisconsin and the Rise of Scott Walker*. University of Chicago Press.
- Dassonneville, Ruth, Liesbet Hooghe, and Gary Marks. 2024. "Transformation of the Political Space: A Citizens' Perspective." *European Journal of Political Research* 63(1): 45–65.
- del Horno, Rubén García, Guillem Rico, and Enrique Hernández. 2023. "Do They Feel like They Don't Matter? The Rural-Urban Divide in External Political Efficacy." *West European Politics*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2023.2261085>. Forthcoming.
- Dickson, Zachary P., and Sara B. Hobolt. 2025. "Going Against the Grain: Climate Change as a Wedge Issue for the Radical Right." *Comparative Political Studies* 58(8): 1733–1759.
- Dąbrowski, Leszek S., Stefania Środa Murawska, Paweł Smoliński, and Jadwiga Biegańska. 2022. "Rural–Urban Divide: Generation Z and Pro-Environmental Behaviour." *Sustainability* 14(23).
- Ford, Robert, and Matthew Goodwin. 2014. "Understanding UKIP: Identity, Social Change and the Left Behind." *The Political Quarterly* 85(3): 277–284.
- Gimpel, James G., Nathan Lovin, Bryant Moy, and Andrew Reeves. 2020. "The Urban–Rural Gulf in American Political Behavior." *Political Behavior* 42: 1343–68.
- Haggard, Stephan, and Robert Kaufman. 2021. "The Anatomy of Democratic Backsliding." *Journal of Democracy* 32(3): 27–41.
- Harteveld, Eelco, Wouter Van Der Brug, Sarah De Lange, and Tom Van Der Meer. 2022. "Multiple Roots of the Populist Radical Right: Support for the Dutch Pvv in Cities and the Countryside." *European Journal of Political Research* 61(2): 440–461.

- Hegewald, Sven, and Dominik Schraff. 2022. Place-Based Affect and the Cosmopolitan-Nationalist Divide. Technical report OSF Preprints, <https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/ab3dg>.
- Hooghe, Liesbet, Gary Marks, and Carole J. Wilson. 2002. "Does Left/Right Structure Party Positions on European Integration?" *Comparative Political Studies* 35(8): 965–989.
- Hooghe, Marc, and Ruth Dassonneville. 2018. "A Spiral of Distrust: A Panel Study on the Relation between Political Distrust and Protest Voting in Belgium." *Government and Opposition* 53(1): 104–30.
- Huddart-Kennedy, Emily, Thomas M. Beckley, Bonita L. McFarlane, and Solange Nadeau. 2009. "Rural-Urban Differences in Environmental Concern in Canada." *Rural Sociology* 74(3): 309–329.
- Huijismans, Twan. 2023. "Place Resentment in 'The Places that Don't Matter': Explaining the Geographic Divide in Populist and Anti-Immigration Attitudes." *Acta Politica* 58(2): 285–305.
- Huijismans, Twan, and Jonathan Rodden. 2024. "The Great Global Divider? A Comparison of Urban-Rural Partisan Polarization in Western Democracies." *Comparative Political Studies*, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00104140241237458>. Forthcoming.
- Huijismans, Twan, Eelco Harteveld, Wouter van der Brug, and Bram Lancee. 2021. "Are Cities Ever More Cosmopolitan? Studying Trends in Urban-Rural Divergence of Cultural Attitudes." *Political Geography* 86(102353): 1–15.
- Hyland, Marie, Massimiliano Mascherini, and Michèle Lamont. 2024. "Feeling Overlooked: A Rural-Urban Divide in Recognition." *Global Policy* 15(5): 807–822.
- Inglehart, Ronald. 1977. *The Silent Revolution: Changing Values and Political Styles Among Western Publics*. Princeton University Press.
- Inglehart, Ronald. 1997. *Modernization and Postmodernization: Cultural, Economic, and Political Change in 43 Societies*. Princeton University Press.
- Jennings, Will, and Gerry Stoker. 2016. "The Bifurcation of Politics: Two Englands." *The Political Quarterly* 87: 372–82.
- Kenny, Michael, and Davide Luca. 2021. "The Urban-Rural Polarisation of Political Disenchantment: An Investigation of Social and Political Attitudes in 30 European Countries." *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society* 14(3): 565–82.
- Kriesi, Hanspeter, Edgar Grande, Romain Lachat, Martin Dolezal, Simon Bornschier, and Timotheos Frey. 2006. "Globalization and the Transformation of the National Political Space: Six European Countries Compared." *European Journal of Political Research* 45(6): 921–956.
- Kurella, Anna-Sophie, and Milena Rapp. 2026. "Unfolding Gal-Tan: The Multi-Dimensional Nature of Public Opinion in Western Europe." *West European Politics* 49(3): 841–866.
- Maxwell, Rahsaan. 2019. "Cosmopolitan Immigration Attitudes in Large European Cities: Contextual or Compositional Effects?" *American Political Science Review* 113(2): 1–19.
- Maxwell, Rahsaan. 2020. "Geographic Divides and Cosmopolitanism: Evidence From Switzerland." *Comparative Political Studies* 53(13): 2061–90.
- Norris, Pippa, and Ronald Inglehart. 2019. *Cultural Backlash: Trump, Brexit and Authoritarian-Populism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rodden, Jonathan A. 2019. *Why Cities Lose: The Deep Roots of the Urban-Rural Political Divide*. Basic Books.

- Rodríguez-Pose, Andrés, and Federico Bartalucci. 2023. "The Green Transition and Its Potential Territorial Discontents." *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society* 17(2): 339–358.
- Salomo, Katja. 2019. "The Residential Context As Source of Deprivation: Impacts on the Local Political Culture. Evidence from the East German State Thuringia." *Political Geography* 69: 103–117.
- Scala, Dante J., and Kenneth M. Johnson. 2017. "Political Polarization along the Rural-Urban Continuum? The Geography of the Presidential Vote, 2000–2016." *Annals of The American Academy of Political and Social Science* 672(1): 162–84.
- Smith, Anthony D. 1991. *National Identity*. University of Nevada Press.
- Tallent, Theodore. 2025. "A Green Divide? Climate Policy Support and Its Rural Geography in Europe." *West European Politics* 0(0): 1–31.
- Trujillo, Kristin Lunz. 2022. "Rural Identity as a Contributing Factor to Anti-Intellectualism in the U.S." *Political Behavior* 44(3): 1509–1532.
- Trujillo, Kristin Lunz, and Zack Crowley. 2022. "Symbolic Versus Material Concerns of Rural Consciousness in the United States." *Political Geography* 96: 102658.
- Van Der Brug, Wouter, and Joost Van Spanje. 2009. "Immigration, Europe and the 'new' Cultural Dimension." *European Journal of Political Research* 48(3): 309–334.
- Wagner-Egger, Pascal, Adam-Troian Jais, Cordonier Laurent, Cafiero Florian, and BronnerGérald. 2022. "The Yellow Vests in France: Psychosocial Determinants and Consequences of the Adherence to a Social Movement in a Representative Sample of the Population." *International Review of Social Psychology* 35(1): <https://doi.org/10.5334/irsp.556>.
- Zumbrunn, Alina. 2024. "Confidence Across Cleavage: The Swiss Rural–Urban Divide, Place-Based Identity and Political Trust." *Swiss Political Science Review* 30(1): 46–65.