WHO DO YOU PREFER NOT TO HAVE AS A NEIGHBOUR?
AN “IMMIGRANT” OR A “FOREIGN WORKER”?
Evidence from a survey experiment in the Italian edition of the European Values Study - World Values Survey 2017

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Social distance: Concept and Dimensions

• “an attempt to reduce to something like measurable terms the grades and degrees of understanding and intimacy which characterize personal and social relations generally” (Park 1924: 339)

• “the degree of unwillingness and closure towards others perceived and recognized as different” (Introini 2007: 25)

• Objective (status) and subjective social distance

• Social distance toward whom? Originally, etno-racial minorities (Bogardus 1925), then also political extremists, religious groups, deviants ...
The measurement of social distance

Bogardus scale (1925): subjective social distance

I am willing to accept members of [racial groups]:

1. To close kinship by marriage
2. To my club as personal chums
3. To my street as neighbours
4. To employment in my occupation in my country
5. As citizens in my country
6. As visitors only to my country
7. Would exclude from my country
The measurement of social distance

In EVS and WVS from 1981

EVS-WVS 2017

On this list are various groups of people. Could you please identify any that you would not like to have as neighbours?

- People of a different race
- Heavy drinkers
- Immigrants/Foreign workers
- Drug addicted
- Homosexuals
- [Christians]
- Muslims
- Jews
- Gypsies
EVS/WVS Italy 2017: Info

• Sampling: multi-stage on electoral lists
  - Combination of different sampling modes for the selection of units: stratified, simple random, systematic
  - Number of interviews: 2,277
  - Gross sample size: 5,002
  - Response rate: 46%
  - Net response rate: 49%

• Average duration of the interview: 53’
• CAPI on tablets
• Fieldwork period: September 24, 2018 - January 30, 2019
• Data publication: EVS Second Release
Social distance in Italy - 2017

Percentages of individuals not wanting as neighbours...
Italy 2017 (N=2,277)
Social distance towards immigrants/foreign workers, Italy over time

Percentages of individuals not wanting as neighbours "Immigrants/Foreign workers" - Italy 1981-2017

- 1981: 3.1%
- 1990: 13.4%
- 1999: 16.5%
- 2008: 15.1%
- 2017: 16.4%
Social distance towards immigrants/foreign workers in Europe - 2017

Percentages of individuals not wanting as neighbours "Immigrants/foreign workers" - Europe 2017 (EVS 2nd release)
Item on immigrants/foreign workers: Formulation and criticisms

‘On this list are various groups of people. Could you please identify any that you would not like to have as neighbours?’

Immigrants/Foreign workers

- **Item ambiguity**: semantic overlapping between immigrants and foreign workers
- What does the respondents refer to when answering the question? To immigrants? To Foreign workers? To both?
- In recent times, public opinion tends to identify the immigrant with the refugee
  - Migrant Crisis: more than 600,000 arrivals in Italy from 2014 to 2017
  - Increasing salience of immigration issue: first or second most important problem for 4% of Italians in 2013, for 23% in 2018 (Itanes data, Vezzoni 2018)
- Relevant question especially in the actual social context

Test: Survey experiment in EVS/WVS Italy 2017
Item on immigrants/foreign workers: The experimental design

‘Could you please identify any that you would not like to have as neighbours? (Item list)’

- **Randomization** of one item: 3 experimental groups
  - **Immigrants/foreign workers** (70% of the sample)
  - **Immigrants** (15% of the sample)
  - **Foreign workers** (15% of the sample)

- **Research questions:**
  - Are there substantial differences in the proportions of answers to the different items?
  - Are differences in proportions between the original item and the experimental one similar? If not, there is a ‘**semantic prevalence**’ of one category over the other.
  - Possible implications: Do associations with other social distance variables vary by item formulation?
Experimental findings

Percentages of individuals not wanting as neighbours...

- Foreign Workers: N=324, 8.0%
- Immigrants/Foreign workers: N=1,596, 16.4%
- Immigrants: N=357, 18.2%
Social distance in Italy

Percentages of individuals mentioning "Immigrants/foreign workers" - Italy 2017 (N=2,277)
Do associations with other social distance items vary by item formulation?

- Measures of association:
  Phi coefficients = Pearson’s correlations in 2 x 2 tables

- Two-tailed Z-test for Differences in pairwise correlations between the ‘control group’ and each of the experimental ones using r-to-z Fisher’s transformation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correlations</th>
<th>Immigrant/Foreign workers (N=1596)</th>
<th>Foreign Workers (N=324)</th>
<th>Immigrants (N=357)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People of a different race</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>0.60*</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslims</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.40*</td>
<td>0.56*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jews</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.60***</td>
<td>0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homosexuals</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>0.46*</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p<0.10; ** p<0.05; ***p<0.01
The impact of the different item formulations in the measurement of social distance

- Exploratory factor analysis with tetrachoric correlations (varimax rotation)
- Two factors identified: social distance toward deviant groups (gypsies, heavy drinkers, drug addicts), social distance toward minorities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor loadings between the item and ‘minority’ factor</th>
<th>Immigrant/Foreign workers (N=1596)</th>
<th>Foreign Workers (N=324)</th>
<th>Immigrants (N=357)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People of a different race</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslims</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jews</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homosexuals</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manipulated item</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cronbach’s Alpha</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusion

- A methodological contribution aimed at reflecting on the item wording in well-established surveys and providing a contribution in survey research on immigrants
  - An experiment in a CAPI survey: internal and external validity
  - ‘Immigrants’ and ‘Foreign workers’: non-equivalent items
  - Respondents provide a different meaning to the two items, since immigrants ‘overweighs’ foreign workers: semantic prevalence

- EVS-WVS Implications:
  - testing the experiments in other contexts (CRONOS?)
  - suggestion to reflect on the possibility of modifying (or splitting) the item in future rounds
Discussion

- Other directions to take?
- More refined measurement strategies?
- Looking to the relationships between the item in its different formulations and other individual characteristics?
THANKS FOR YOUR ATTENTION!