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The Urban–Rural Divide in People's Minds: Stereotypes of Urbanites and Ruralites in Nine European Countries

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Abstract

Recent scholarship increasingly views the reemergence of the urban–rural divide in political behavior through the lens of social identity theory. Given this understanding of political divisions between cities and the countryside, it is crucial to investigate how urban and rural social groups are perceived, specifically, to what extent these groups are associated with entrenched stereotypes. Examining the urban–rural divide in people's minds through a conjoint experiment, this paper sheds light on stereotypes of urbanites and ruralites in nine European countries. The results indicate that rural residents are typically viewed as Eurosceptic, anti-immigrant, working-class, older, and less educated. By contrast, typical urbanites are perceived as Europhile, pro-immigrant, upper-middle-class, younger, and university-educated. These perceptions are not held uniformly, however. Individuals tend to project their own characteristics onto others, perceiving those similar to themselves as more typical members of their place-based in-group. Likewise, a similar logic emerges regarding the relationship between urban–rural stereotypes and affect. While individuals tend to express warmer feelings toward those they perceive as typical members of their place-based in-group, these affective evaluations critically depend on whether individuals themselves align with the stereotypes in question. Overall, these findings provide systematic evidence on stereotyping along the urban–rural divide. By way of that, they further underscore the importance of a social identity perspective to political divisions between urban and rural residents.

Keywords Urban–rural divide · Stereotypes · Place-based identity · Affective polarization · Cleavage politics

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Introduction

After decades of absence, several recent studies have diagnosed a return of the urban–rural divide. In the United States, voters for the Republican party typically live in rural areas, while Democrats are more likely to live in cities (e.g., Gimpel et al. 2020; Rodden 2019; Scala and Johnson 2017; Taylor et al. 2024). Likewise, recent comparative evidence documents growing differences in voting behavior between cities and the countryside in Europe (Huijsmans and Rodden 2025). Besides this, urbanites are also often found to hold much more cosmopolitan policy positions than ruralites (e.g., Huijsmans et al. 2021; Jennings and Stoker 2016; Maxwell 2019, 2020), and tend to exhibit higher levels of trust in political institutions, satisfaction with democracy, and political efficacy (e.g., del Horno Rico and Hernández 2023; Hegewald 2024; Lago 2022; McKay Jennings and Stoker 2021; Mitsch et al. 2021; Stein et al. 2021; Zumbrunn 2024a).

One prominent explanation of these divisions views the urban–rural divide through the framework of social identity theory. Within this literature, some studies focus on the political effects of place-based identities, specifically on support for radical right and new left parties (e.g., Bornschier et al. 2021; Fitzgerald 2018; Zollinger 2024b). Other works, in particular in American politics, highlight the importance of place-based resentment as an explanation for the urban–rural divide (e.g., Claassen et al. 2025; Cramer 2016; Huijsmans 2023a, b; Jacobs and Munis 2023; Lunz Trujillo and Crowley 2022; Munis 2022). Lastly, a third set of studies documents a pronounced degree of affective polarization between urbanites and ruralites, arguing that antagonisms between both groups structure political behavior (e.g., Hegewald and Schraff 2025; Lyons and Utych 2023; Zumbrunn 2026). Nevertheless, despite these conceptual differences, all of these studies essentially frame urban–rural divisions as an "us-versus-them" conflict, where urbanites and ruralites are pitted against one another on the basis of their group memberships.

Given this understanding of the urban–rural divide, it is crucial to examine how "us" and "them" are defined in people's minds. If political conflict between cities and the countryside is indeed grounded in place-based group memberships, these should be accompanied by clear perceptions of what constitutes stereotypical urbanites and ruralites. After all, stereotypes play a crucial role in the development of social identities, acting as cognitive shortcuts that help people make sense of themselves and others (e.g., Abrams and Hogg 2001; Bordalo et al. 2016; McGarty 2018; Oakes 1996; Oakes et al. 1994; Turner 1987). Moreover, specifically the literature on partisanship has singled out partisan stereotypes as a central component of partisan identities and as a key driver of affective polarization (for overviews, see Busby et al. 2021; Myers 2023). However, despite this, there is little systematic knowledge about stereotyping along the urban–rural divide or how such stereotypes might influence affective polarization between place-based groups. In light of this, I propose that a pronounced set of stereotypes should accompany urban and rural group memberships. These perceptions, I suggest, are related to both the political attitudes of urbanites and ruralites, as well as the demographic composition of both groups. Finally, these stereotypes can also underpin a sense of heightened affective polarization.

I test these arguments by relying on data from a pre-registered conjoint experiment fielded among 9,000 respondents in nine European countries (Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Poland, and Spain). I find that urban and rural residents are commonly viewed in terms of stereotypical groups. Typical ruralites are often perceived as Eurosceptic, anti-immigrant, working-class, less educated, and older. By contrast, typical urbanites are regarded as Europhiles, pro-immigrants, upper-middle-class, university-educated, and younger. These stereotypes, in turn, tend to be shaped by respondents' own background characteristics. In line with the notion of social projection, individuals often view others through the lens of their own attributes, perceiving those who are similar to them as more typical members of their place-based in-group. This logic further extends to people's affective evaluations. Generally speaking, individuals exhibit higher levels of affect toward others when perceiving them as typical members of their in-group. However, these affective evaluations tend to be contingent on individuals' own attributes. Critically, individuals harbor higher levels of affect toward stereotypical members of their place-based in-group only when they themselves fit these stereotypes. Overall, these findings provide clear evidence of stereotyping along the urban–rural divide, and some first evidence that these stereotypes might sustain elevated levels of affective polarization between urbanites and ruralites.

The remainder of this paper proceeds as follows. I begin by reviewing the literature that takes a social identity perspective on the urban–rural divide. After this, I outline how stereotypes of urbanites and ruralites correspond to various cleavages characterizing contemporary European politics and how these stereotypes underpin affective polarization. I then present the experimental setup of the conjoint, my analytical approach, and my results. I conclude by summarizing my central findings and the study's main limitations.

A Social Identity Perspective on the Urban–Rural Divide

Originally conceptualized as a conflict between agrarian landowners and an emerging urban entrepreneurial class, the urban–rural divide had its heyday during the Industrial Revolution (Lipset and Rokkan 1967). However, after this peak in the late 19th and early 20th century, it largely fell dormant, failing to materialize into a lasting political cleavage (Gallagher et al. 2020). Nevertheless, recent research highlights an apparent urban–rural divide in many Western democracies. For instance, in the United States, it is well documented that Republicans tend to overwhelmingly live in rural areas, while Democrats are concentrated in cities (e.g., Gimpel et al. 2020; Rodden 2019; Scala and Johnson 2017; Taylor et al. 2024). A similar pattern has also emerged in Europe, where urban residents tend to be more cosmopolitan in their political outlooks as well as report greater trust in institutions, satisfaction with democracy, and political efficacy than their rural counterparts (e.g., Huijsmans et al. 2021; Hegewald 2024; del Horno et al. 2023; Huijsmans and Rodden 2025; Jennings and Stoker 2016; Lago 2022; Maxwell 2019, 2020; McKay et al. 2021; Mitsch et al. 2021; Stein et al. 2021; Zumbrunn 2024a).

Grappling with explanations for these divisions, a growing body of studies views this urban–rural divide through the lens of social identity theory. Initially developed

in social psychology, this theoretical approach has become an increasingly popular framework to explain political attitudes and behavior (for an overview, see Brewer 2019). According to social identity theory, the development of a social identity commonly involves three interrelated processes (e.g., Tajfel 1974, 1981; Tajfel and Turner 1979). The first is social categorization, where individuals classify themselves and their surrounding world into in-groups and out-groups. The second is social identification, which refers to individuals incorporating their group membership into their concept of self. The third process, finally, is social comparison, in which individuals evaluate their in-group positively relative to an out-group.

Using this theoretical framework as a common point of departure, some studies that apply social identity theory to the urban–rural divide tend to focus on social categorization and identification, while others also incorporate the aspect of social comparison (Zumbrunn 2024b). For instance, research on the political effects of place-based identities tends to emphasize the former two processes in social identity development (Zumbrunn 2024b). Following the tradition of early works in environmental psychology (e.g., Proshansky 1978; Proshansky et al. 1983), studies in this stream of the literature view the places where people live as "imbued with personal, social, and cultural meanings" that can fundamentally influence an individual's political behavior (Cuba and Hummon 1993, p.112). In line with this, Fitzgerald (2018) finds that strong local attachments are associated with greater support for radical right parties. Similarly, Bornschier et al. (2021) and Zollinger (2024b) document that in Switzerland, attachment to urban people correlates with support for new left parties while rural attachment is linked to higher levels of support for the radical right. In this sense, studies in this current of the literature conceptualize place of residence as an integral part of a person's self-concept that has the potential to profoundly shape how people think about politics (Lalli 1992).

By contrast, studies on place-based resentment connect to all three processes described in social identity theory. Originating from the pathbreaking ethnographic work by Cramer (2016), place-based resentment denotes a pronounced attachment to place, which intersects with a perception that the place where one lives is shortchanged of its fair share of resources, representation in politics, and respect (Huijsmans 2023a, b; Munis 2022). In particular, studies in American politics underline the importance of place-based resentment as an explanation for the urban–rural divide. Lunz Trujillo and Crowley (2022) find that rural residents who perceive their place as lacking political representation and respect are especially adamant supporters of Donald Trump. Related to this, Jacobs and Munis (2023) demonstrate that place-based resentment strongly predicts support for the Republican Party in recent elections. Tentative evidence further suggests that ruralites, with strong feelings of place-based resentment, are more likely to approve of violence against the government (Munis et al. 2024). Likewise, outside of the United States, research shows that place-based resentment also plays a significant role in European politics (Claassen et al. 2025). For example, in the case of the Netherlands, Huijsmans (2023a, b) finds that place-based resentment mediates the effect of people's place of residence on their attitudes toward populism and immigration. Overall, each of these studies highlights the importance of a combination of place-based identity and geographic grievances in understanding political behavior, where the place-based identity component relates

to social categorization and identification, and the place-based grievance component relates to social comparison (Zumbrunn 2024b).

Similar to place-based resentment, place-based affective polarization also encompasses each of the three processes outlined in social identity theory (Hegewald and Schraff 2025; Lyons and Utych 2023; Zumbrunn 2026). However, unlike place-based resentment, it does not conflate place-based grievances with place-based identities (Hegewald and Schraff 2025). Taking inspiration from the literature on partisanship (e.g., Iyengar et al. 2012, 2019), place-based affective polarization can be formally defined as "*an individual's propensity to like people from their own place more than people from a respective geographic out-group*" (Hegewald and Schraff 2025, p. 10, emphasis in original). Akin to affective polarization between supporters of different political parties, research from the United States finds that urban and rural residents often discriminate against their place-based out-group when asked to distribute government resources or select between hypothetical candidates for a job (Lyons and Utych 2023). Likewise, there is also evidence of strong levels of place-based affective polarization along the urban–rural divide in several European countries, which appears to shape support for the far-right among ruralites and the new left among urbanites (Hegewald and Schraff 2025; Zumbrunn 2026). Against this backdrop, studies in this stream of the literature relate to social categorization, identification, and comparison, with a particular emphasis on the latter as an explanation for urban–rural divisions.

Although studies in each of these three branches employ different concepts and concentrate on different aspects of social identity theory, they all share the view that the urban–rural divide essentially constitutes an "us-versus-them" conflict. At their core, these studies suggest that place-based group memberships form the basis of a social identity that pits urbanites and ruralites against one another. However, despite this focus on place as a social identity, relatively little attention has been paid to how these place-based groups are actually perceived. Yet understanding what defines "us" and "them" is critical for assessing whether political conflicts between cities and the countryside are indeed rooted in place-based group memberships. While existing works that apply a social identity lens to the urban–rural divide often imply that individuals hold pronounced stereotypes about what it means to be an urbanite or a ruralite, they frequently fall short of systematically testing this core assumption.

The Urban–Rural Divide in People's Minds: Stereotypes of Urbanites and Ruralites

At the most basic level, stereotypes can be understood as "*qualities perceived to be associated with particular groups or categories of people*" (Schneider 2004, p. 24, emphasis in original). Beyond this simple definition, the concept of stereotypes is contested, particularly in terms of their valence and accuracy. While stereotypes are often regarded as necessarily comprising negative beliefs about a given group, which are exaggerated by default, more agnostic definitions explicitly allow for stereotypes to also involve accurate beliefs and favorable characteristics (Jussim et al. 2009; for an overview, see Bodenhausen and Cheryan 2025). In light of this, stereotypes can incorporate a wide range of different qualities relating to a group's demographic composition, personality traits, or political attitudes (e.g., Myers et al. 2024).

Importantly, stereotypes play a crucial role in the formation of social identities. Most fundamentally, they help individuals to make sense of others (McGarty 2018). As cognitive shortcuts, stereotypes can help reduce social complexity (Bordalo et al. 2016), allowing people to effectively distinguish between in-groups and out-groups (Abrams and Hogg 2001; Oakes 1996; Oakes et al. 1994). Furthermore, stereotypes also influence how individuals perceive themselves. While stereotyping usually involves making generalizations about a specific out-group, self-stereotyping occurs when individuals view themselves through the lens of the stereotypical characteristics of their in-group (Turner 1987). In this sense, stereotypes allow individuals to define their perceptions of "us" and "them," thereby serving a critical function in social identity development.

Given the foundational role of stereotypes in shaping how individuals perceive both themselves and others, an emerging body of political science research has begun to examine how these perceptions contribute to the formation of partisanship as a social identity. Building on the premise that entrenched partisan stereotypes accompany strong partisan identities, this literature presents three main conceptions of stereotype content (for overviews, see Busby et al. 2021; Myers 2023). While some studies suggest that partisan stereotypes largely mirror the social groups comprising each party's support base (e.g., Ahler and Sood 2018; Claassen et al. 2021; Green et al. 2004; Kane et al. 2021; Mason and Wronski 2018), others emphasize distinctive personality traits (e.g., Busby et al. 2021; Clifford 2020; Rothschild et al. 2019) or issue positions commonly attributed to typical partisans (e.g., Goggin et al. 2020; Goggin and Theodoridis 2017; Myers 2023). However, despite these differences in emphasis, this literature converges on the idea that partisan stereotypes represent a central component of partisanship as a social identity.

In the same vein, I argue that stereotypes of urban and rural residents are critical to understanding the urban–rural divide from a social identity perspective. Given the centrality of stereotypes in the formation of social identities and the importance ascribed to them in the literature on partisanship, I suggest that individuals should have a clear mental image of what typical urbanites and ruralites look like. After all, if the social identity perspective on the urban–rural divide is correct, urban and rural group membership should come with a set of entrenched stereotypes. These stereotypes, I propose, may pertain not only to the perceived demographic composition of urban and rural residents but also to their political attitudes. In this sense, I suggest that perceptions of urban–rural typicality should correspond to a number of different cleavages characterizing European politics today (for overviews, see Dassonneville 2022; Ford and Jennings 2020).

One of the most fundamental divisions in contemporary European politics concerns an intensifying conflict over transnationalism (for an overview, see Marks et al. 2021). Essentially, this divide relates to "the defense of national political, social and economic ways of life against external actors who penetrate the state by migrating, exchanging goods or exerting rule" (Hooghe and Marks 2018, p. 110). It thus describes a deeply-seated division where one side favors open, multicultural societies, while the other embraces an agenda of nationalist retraction (e.g., Dassonneville et al. 2024; Hooghe and Marks 2018; Hooghe et al. 2025, 2002). Although the transnational cleavage comes with many alternative labels, including "integration-demar-

cation" (Kriesi et al. 2006), "cosmopolitan-communitarian" (Teney et al. 2013), "cosmopolitan-parochial" (de Vries 2018), or "universalist-particularist" (Häusermann and Kriesi 2015), two of the most central policy issues connected to this divide concern European integration and immigration. In this respect, many urbanites tend to hold more cosmopolitan political orientations, while ruralites are typically more Eurosceptic and opposed to immigration (e.g., Huijsmans et al. 2021; Kenny and Luca 2021; Maxwell 2019). Considering these differences, I expect that individuals perceive typical urban and rural residents as occupying opposing positions on both of these issues.

Besides this, class could be another important division that structures stereotypes along the urban–rural divide. Notwithstanding the debate on the extent to which class voting is still as relevant as it was decades ago (e.g., Ares 2022; Best 2011; Clark et al. 1993; Elff 2007; Evans 2000; Oesch and Rennwald 2018), urban areas are now often home to a new group of creative professionals (e.g., Rodden 2019). Cities, Florida (2003) proposes, particularly attract individuals working in tech, the sciences, or entertainment, who choose to live in places that are characterized by "*technology*, *talent*, and *tolerance*" (p.10, emphasis in original). Similarly, Iversen and Soskice (2019) argue that the emergence of the knowledge economy has triggered a concentration of wealth and high-skilled jobs in urban areas. Both of these arguments, therefore, suggest a critical intersection between the urban–rural divide and class. While a new upper-middle class lives in cities, an increasingly impoverished working class is left behind in the countryside. This should make individuals more likely to perceive members of the working class as typical ruralites and upper-middle-class individuals as typically urban.

Closely related to these class-based divisions is an increasingly powerful educational cleavage (e.g., Stubager 2008, 2009, 2010; see also Ford and Jennings 2020). Individuals with lower levels of education have been repeatedly shown to hold less cosmopolitan political positions than those with higher levels of education (e.g., Hakhverdian et al. 2013; Kunst Kuhn and van de Werfhorst 2020; Langsæther and Stubager 2019; Stubager 2013). Considering the clustering of high-skilled jobs that increasingly attract well-educated professionals to large cities (e.g., Florida 2002, 2003; Iversen and Soskice 2019), I expect individuals with a university education to be regarded as typical urbanites, while those without a university education should be viewed as typical ruralites.

Lastly, some studies suggest that age is gradually becoming a more important explanation for voting behavior. However, existing evidence for the emergence of an age-based divide is mixed. While some research finds stark differences in vote choice between younger and older voters (e.g., Orriols and Cordero 2016; Sloam et al. 2018), other studies do not (e.g., Wagner and Kritzinger 2012). Furthermore, although there is some evidence that younger voters are more cosmopolitan in their policy positions than older voters, these differences have remained rather constant over the last decades (e.g., Lancaster 2022; Lauterbach and de Vries 2020; O'Grady 2023; Rekker 2018). Nevertheless, there is first evidence of an interaction between the urban–rural and an age-based divide. At least in Germany, political divisions between cities and the countryside seem to be much more pronounced among younger voters than among older voters (Haffert and Mitteregger 2023). Moreover, considering

that younger people tend to relocate to cities for work or studying (e.g., Iversen and Soskice 2019; Storper 2018), an age-based political division could also underpin stereotypes along the urban–rural divide, where younger individuals should be more likely to be categorized as typically urban and older individuals as typically rural.

Overall, these theoretical considerations can be summarized in the following hypothesis:

H_1: Individuals are more likely to categorize others as stereotypically rural when they are Eurosceptic, anti-immigrant, working class, older, and lack a university education, and as stereotypically urban when they are Europhile, pro-immigrant, upper-middle class, younger, and university educated.

However, how strongly these stereotypes are applied should depend on a person's own political and demographic background. Critically, a large body of research in social psychology has documented that individuals frequently engage in social projection, leading them to believe that others are similar to themselves (for an overview, see Krueger 2007). As a result, a Eurosceptic ruralite may be more likely to view a Eurosceptic individual as typically rural, whereas a Europhile ruralite may be less likely to do so. Conversely, the Europhile ruralite may be more inclined to perceive a Europhile individual as typically rural than the Eurosceptic ruralite would. In short, the extent to which an individual stereotypes along the urban–rural divide may depend on the degree to which that individual aligns with the stereotypical attributes of their place-based in-group.

H_2: Aligned individuals are more likely to stereotype others than unaligned individuals.

Tentative evidence from existing research already points toward a certain degree of stereotyping along the urban–rural divide. Investigating perceptions of urbanites and ruralites in Spain, Breitenstein et al. (2025) show that rural residents associate urban group membership with stress and cosmopolitanism, whereas urbanites view rural life as simple and tied to traditional values. Furthermore, relying on comparative data from France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Switzerland, Bornschier et al. (2024) find that voters perceive urbanites and ruralites to differ with regard to class, level of education, leisure activities, and values (see also Zollinger 2024b). They also document that urban residents are often viewed as new left voters, while ruralites tend to be regarded as either voting for radical or mainstream right parties. Using open-ended survey questions, Zollinger (2024a) further shows that radical-right voters in Switzerland often describe their political in-groups as rural and their out-groups as urban. Finally, Sczepanski (2024) finds that people in Austria and Italy view ruralites as generally more supportive of leaving the European Union, whereas urbanites are commonly seen as more in favor of remaining. While these findings increase my confidence in the plausibility of my hypotheses, most of these works do not systematically examine stereotyping along the urban–rural divide. Furthermore, they also do not test how these stereotypes might underpin affect toward urban and rural group members.

Stereotyping Along the Urban–Rural Divide and Place-Based Affective Polarization

Departing from the premise that urban and rural residents tend to be perceived in terms of stereotypical groups, these perceptions could also have the potential to heighten a sense of place-based affective polarization (Hegewald and Schraff 2025; Lyons and Utych 2023; Zumbrunn 2026). By helping individuals define how they perceive themselves and others, stereotypes play a key role in shaping affect toward different social groups (Bodenhausen et al. 2012). In line with this, several recent studies have documented a strong link between entrenched stereotypes and affective polarization between partisans (e.g., Ahler and Sood 2018; Busby et al. 2021; Claassen et al. 2021; Kane et al. 2021; Mason and Wronski 2018). Against this backdrop, stereotypes along the urban–rural divide could underpin affective polarization between urbanites and rural residents in a similar way.

A key mechanism connecting stereotypes to affect can be found in the concept of social identity complexity (e.g., Brewer 1999; Brewer and Pierce 2005; Roccas and Brewer 2002). This framework suggests that individuals exhibit stronger in-group favoritism and negative affect toward out-groups when social categories are tightly aligned, while cross-cutting group memberships are believed to foster tolerance and reduce intergroup conflict. The reason for this is that aligned group memberships tend to heighten the perceived distinctiveness of groups, thereby diminishing the common ground that unites rather than divides them (Roccas and Brewer 2002). As a result, when individuals are neatly sorted into stereotypical social groups, the perceived distance between these groups increases, intensifying conflict between them.

In light of this, social sorting is often seen as a central explanation for affective polarization between Democrats and Republicans in the United States. According to Mason (2015, 2016, 2018), the growing alignment between partisanship and other social identities, such as ideology, race, or religion, breeds a strong sense of mutual animosity between supporters of both parties. Social sorting has both an objective and a subjective component (Mason and Wronski 2018). While objective social sorting relates to the degree to which an individual's actual social and political attributes (e.g., race, religion, ideology, class) align with the characteristics stereotypically associated with their primary group (e.g., being a Republican), subjective social sorting relates to an individual's perception of how strongly social and political identities are aligned. Drawing on these ideas, I argue that both objective and subjective social sorting are relevant to the relationship between urban–rural stereotypes and place-based affective polarization.

The notion of objective social sorting implies that individuals' affective evaluations of stereotypical urbanites and ruralites should depend on the degree to which an individual's own characteristics align with those of stereotypical group members. In this regard, respondents who fit the stereotypes of their place-based in-group should feel warmer toward typical group members than respondents who do not fit these stereotypes. For instance, a Eurosceptic ruralite might harbor higher levels of affect toward a Eurosceptic individual than a Europhile ruralite. By contrast, the Europhile ruralite should exhibit higher levels of affect toward a Europhile individual than the Eurosceptic ruralite.

H_3: Aligned individuals exhibit higher levels of affect toward stereotypical members of their place-based in-group than unaligned individuals.

This mechanism, in turn, should be grounded in individuals' perceptions of these alignments. Following the idea of subjective social sorting, individuals should feel warmer toward others when they perceive them as aligned with their in-group. This implies that individuals should exhibit lower levels of affect toward those they perceive as typical members of their place-based out-group, and higher levels of affect toward perceived members of their in-group. Accordingly, ruralites should exhibit higher affect toward individuals they perceive as typically rural, whereas urbanites should express warmer feelings toward individuals they perceive as typically urban.

H_4: Individuals exhibit higher levels of affect toward others they perceive as stereotypical members of their place-based in-group, and lower levels of affect toward those they perceive as stereotypical members of their place-based out-group.

Experimental Design

Following the theoretical discussion from above, stereotyping can be broadly conceived as a classification exercise, in which individuals place others and themselves into different social categories (McGarty 2018). In this regard, conjoint experiments offer an ideal strategy to capture stereotypes by closely mimicking this basic cognitive process. While conjoint experiments are commonly used in political science to study multidimensional policy preferences or choices between different political candidates (for an overview, see Bansak et al. 2021), several studies have begun to use these designs to better understand how individuals perceive the opinions and demographic composition of different social groups (e.g., Bor et al. 2023; Carlson and Hill 2022; Goggin et al. 2020; Myers 2023; Myers et al. 2024; Titelman and Lauderdale 2023). Typically, these studies present respondents with a set of fictitious person profiles and ask them to indicate whether they think the person belongs to one social group or another, thereby closely approximating the categorization process that underlies stereotyping in real life (Myers et al. 2024).

In addition to this, conjoint experiments also offer other critical advantages over traditional measures of stereotypes, such as open-ended survey questions (Busby et al. 2021; Rothschild et al. 2019) or trait-rating batteries (Iyengar et al. 2019). On the one hand, their ability to isolate the relative importance of each attribute enables researchers to make causal claims about which characteristics most strongly shape stereotypes about a given social group (Myers 2023; Myers et al. 2024). On the other hand, and perhaps even more important, emerging evidence also suggests that conjoint designs may help mitigate social desirability bias, which is a crucial consideration when studying sensitive topics such as stereotyping (Horiuchi et al. 2022).

For these reasons, I conducted a pre-registered conjoint experiment in nine European countries (Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Poland, and Spain).[1] The data were collected by the survey company Bilendi through

[1] For the pre-analysis plan, see the project's OSF page: https://osf.io/ft5n6/. H_1 was pre-registered as separate hypotheses for each attribute. For the sake of simplicity, I have opted to present them as a single combined hypothesis. H_2 to H_4 were not pre-registered.

online access panels between February and March 2023. In each country, respondents were sampled using nationally representative quotas based on age, gender, education, and NUTS-2 region. The target sample size was 1,000 participants per country, yielding a total of approximately 9,000 respondents.[2]

Similar to other works using conjoint experiments to study stereotyping, I employed a single-profile conjoint, where respondents were shown a set of fictitious person profiles that varied randomly across five attributes, as presented in Table 1.[3] Each of these attributes corresponds to either different demographic groups or political attitudes, reflecting the different cleavages underpinning stereotypes along the urban–rural divide. Each respondent viewed four different profiles, drawn independently from a uniform distribution. The order of the attributes listed was randomized by the respondent and then held constant across all four tasks.

After viewing each profile, respondents were asked to indicate if they think that the person shown "typically lives in an urban area" or "typically lives in a rural area". This urban–rural typicality variable serves as a direct measure of stereotyping along the urban–rural divide. An alternative measure could have asked respondents to indicate how likely they think it is that the person shown lives in a city or the countryside, using two sliders that range from 0 to 100 percent, ensuring that both percentages sum up to 100 percent (Carlson and Hill 2022). While this variable would have allowed respondents to indicate uncertainty by choosing probabilities around 50 percent, it also requires a rudimentary understanding of probabilities, which could pose a challenge for respondents, especially those with lower levels of education, thereby distorting the results. Furthermore, the binary variable employed in this study aligns more closely with the classification exercise that stereotyping involves. Ultimately,

Table 1 Overview of attributes and levels in conjoint experiment

Attributes	Levels
European integration	Believes that *country denominator*'s membership of the European Union is a good thing
	Believes that *country denominator*'s membership of the European Union is a bad thing
Immigration attitudes	Believes that immigrants make *country denominator* a better place to live
	Believes that immigrants make *country denominator* a worse place to live
Class	Identifies as upper middle class
	Identifies as working class
Education	Holds a university degree
	Does not hold a university degree
Age	Is 25 years old
	Is 65 years old

[2] To determine the optimal sample size, I conducted an a priori power analysis for conjoint experiments as proposed by Schuessler and Freitag (2020) (see Appendix A for details).

[3] For an example interface of a random conjoint task, see Appendix B.

stereotypes are a simplification of social reality, where individuals are assigned to bounded social categories (Bordalo et al. 2016).[4]

Besides the outcome related to perceptions of urban–rural typicality, another item asked respondents how warm or cold they felt toward each profile using a feeling thermometer. This item is a common measure of affect, and as such, is often employed in studies on affective partisan polarization (e.g., Iyengar et al. 2012, 2019). I rely on the standard feeling thermometer from the American National Election Study, which prompts respondents to indicate their warmth towards a profile on a scale ranging from 0 to 100 degrees. Here, respondents were instructed that scores between 50 and 100 denote warm feelings, while scores between 0 and 50 denote cold feelings. A score of 50 means neither warm nor cold feelings. In this regard, this specific version of the feeling thermometer may be suboptimal in the European context, as it implies an underlying temperature scale measured in Fahrenheit rather than Celsius. However, recent research has validated these feeling thermometers in various European countries, documenting a strong correlation between them and alternative measures of affect that rely on 0 to 10 like-dislike scales instead (Russo et al. 2024).

I analyze the conjoint data by estimating average marginal component effects (AMCEs) and marginal means (MMs). AMCEs represent the marginal effect of each attribute level on a given outcome relative to a reference category, averaged over the joint distribution of the remaining attributes. Since the attributes of each profile are randomly drawn, it captures the causal effect of a given attribute level relative to the base level of the attribute (Hainmueller et al. 2014). By contrast, MMs are a simple descriptive measure summarizing the average outcome for all profiles featuring a specific attribute level. MMs are especially useful when analyzing conjoint data across subgroups, because they are not sensitive to the choice of a specific reference category (Leeper et al. 2020). For this reason, I always rely on MMs instead of AMCEs when comparing outcomes among respondent subgroups. Both quantities are estimated by relying on OLS regressions with clustered standard errors at the respondent level and country fixed effects, whenever the pooled sample is used.[5]

Mapping Urban–Rural Stereotypes

As stated in H_1, respondents are expected to hold clear mental images of what typical urbanites and ruralites look like. These stereotypes should reflect both the demographic composition and the political orientations of each group, corresponding to several key cleavages in contemporary European politics. Figure 1 provides an overview of these stereotypes. The left panel reports the AMCEs of the profile attributes

[4] Nevertheless, after classifying each profile as either typically urban or typically rural, respondents were also asked how certain they were about their choice. As shown in Figure C1 in Appendix C, respondents tend to be fairly certain.

[5] Given that the urban–rural typicality variable is binary, relying on a simple OLS estimator introduces heteroskedasticity. As a robustness check, I replicate the main results using a logistic regression. As shown in Appendix D, my substantive findings remain the same.

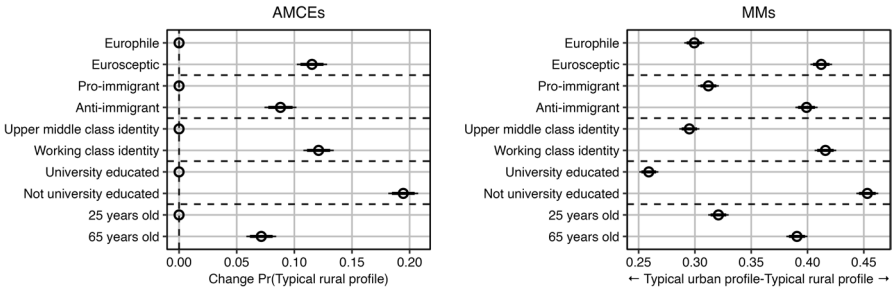

Fig. 1 Effects of profile attributes on urban–rural typicality (AMCEs and MMs): Estimates are based on OLS regressions with country fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the respondent level. AMCEs are estimated relative to the reference category shown without error bars. MMs are estimated using the R package cregg (Leeper et al. 2020). The urban–rural typicality variable is coded 0 = "Typically lives in an urban area" and 1 = "Typically lives in a rural area". The AMCEs represent the marginal effect of each attribute level on the probability that a respondent categorizes the person shown as typically rural relative to the base level of the attribute. The MMs denote the share of profiles classified as typically rural for a given attribute level, with higher values indicating a greater share of typically rural profiles and lower values indicating a greater share of typically urban profiles. Thick and thin lines are 95% and 99% confidence intervals, respectively

in the conjoint experiment.[6] The plotted estimates represent the marginal effect of each attribute level on the probability that a respondent categorizes the person shown as typically rural relative to the base level of the attribute. In line with H_1, Eurosceptic, anti-immigrant, working-class, not university-educated, and older profiles are, on average, more likely to be viewed as typically rural. Among all attributes, education stands out as the most influential factor for structuring urban–rural stereotypes. Profiles of individuals without a university degree are 19 percentage points more likely to be categorized as stereotypically rural than those with a degree. Euroscepticism and working-class identity increase the likelihood of rural categorization by approximately 12 percentage points each, while anti-immigrant attitudes increase perceptions of rural typicality by nine points. In this sense, respondents associate rural group membership slightly more with Eurosceptic individuals than with people holding anti-immigrant views. Older age is least associated with rurality, making respondents only seven percentage points more likely to classify a profile as stereotypically rural.

As an alternative to the AMCEs, the right panel of Fig. 1 shows the MMs of the urban–rural typicality variable. Each MM denotes the share of profiles classified as typically rural when a given attribute level is included in the profile. Since the urban–rural typicality variable is binary, this means that higher MMs indicate a higher share of typically rural profiles, while lower values indicate a higher share of typically urban profiles. In this regard, the MMs illustrate that the effects of the attributes

[6] As a robustness check, to account for the possibility that some profiles might be more difficult to categorize as typically rural or typically urban, following Goggin et al. (2020), I create an alternative outcome variable, where I weigh respondents' answers on the urban–rural typicality variable with their answers on the uncertainty of choice variable. My substantive findings remain the same when using the weighted variable as an alternative outcome (see Appendix C).

are symmetric, with a higher share of Europhile, pro-immigrant, upper-middle-class, university-educated, and younger profiles being classified as typically urban.

Furthermore, urbanites and ruralites tend to be stereotyped in similar ways across countries. As illustrated in Fig. 2, which displays the AMCEs by country, respondents perceive the same attributes as stereotypically rural in nearly all cases. Some exceptions include anti-immigrant profiles in Greece, Italy, and Spain, as well as older profiles in Poland and Italy, where the AMCEs do not reach conventional levels of statistical significance. These patterns fit well with recent evidence documenting weaker urban–rural divides in Southern European countries (Hegewald and Schraff 2025). Nevertheless, the consistency in direction and magnitude of urban–rural stereotyping across different contexts provides strong cross-national support for H_1.

However, as stipulated in H_2, the degree to which respondents stereotype should be shaped by the extent to which they align with the stereotypical attributes of their place-based in-group. I test this expectation by constructing an alignment indicator for each attribute of the conjoint, capturing whether rural respondents align with stereotypical rural attributes and urban respondents with stereotypical urban ones. I first split the sample based on a question asking respondents whether they live in a "very rural," "rather rural," "rather urban," or "very urban" area. Respondents who selected "very rural" or "rather rural" are assigned to the rural subsample, while all others are coded as urban. Within each subsample, respondents are then coded as

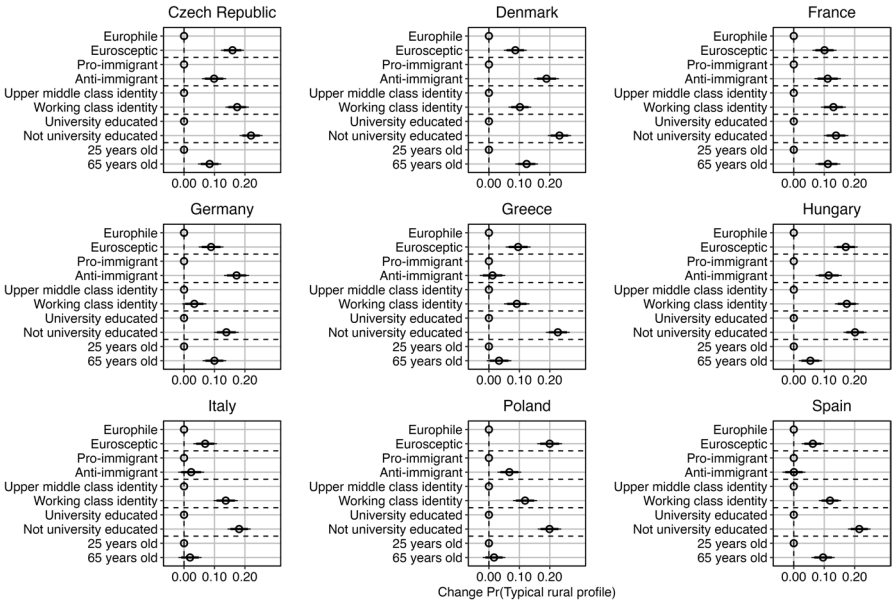

Fig. 2 Effects of profile attributes on urban–rural typicality per country (AMCEs): Estimates are based on OLS regressions with country fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the respondent level. AMCEs are estimated relative to the reference category shown without error bars. The urban–rural typicality variable is coded 0 = "Typically lives in an urban area" and 1 = "Typically lives in a rural area". The AMCEs represent the marginal effect of each attribute level on the probability that a respondent categorizes the person shown as typically rural relative to the base level of the attribute. Thick and thin lines are 95% and 99% confidence intervals, respectively

aligned when their own characteristic matches the stereotypical level of the corresponding conjoint attribute for their in-group, and as unaligned when it does not. For example, in the urban subsample, a respondent is coded as aligned on the European integration attribute if they are Europhile, whereas a Eurosceptic urbanite is coded as unaligned. Conversely, within the rural subsample, a Eurosceptic ruralite is coded as aligned, while a Europhile ruralite is coded as unaligned. In turn, for the immigration attribute, anti-immigrant ruralites are coded as aligned and pro-immigrant ruralites as unaligned. By contrast, within the urban subsample, pro-immigrant urbanites are coded as aligned and anti-immigrant urbanites as unaligned. Applying this rule to all conjoint attributes yields five separate alignment indicators for each respondent, capturing whether the respondent's own background matches the stereotypical attribute of their place-based in-group. For details on the coding of these alignment variables, please consult Appendix E.

Relying on these alignment indicators, I then estimate MMs for aligned and unaligned respondents for each conjoint attribute. Specifically, for each attribute, I compute MMs conditional on the corresponding alignment indicator. These compare how respondents who are aligned with the stereotypical attribute of their place-based in-group classify profiles relative to those respondents who are unaligned. For instance, for the European integration attribute, I estimate MMs conditional on the alignment indicator based on respondents' attitudes toward European integration. Within the urban subsample, the resulting MMs therefore capture how the share of profiles classified as typically rural or typically urban differs between Europhile (aligned) and Eurosceptic (unaligned) respondents. By contrast, within the rural subsample, the MMs analogously show how these shares differ between Eurosceptics (aligned) and Europhiles (unaligned). For the immigration attribute, in turn, within the urban subsample, the MMs illustrate the difference between pro-immigrant (aligned) and anti-immigrant (unaligned) respondents, whereas in the rural subsample, they compare respondents with anti-immigrant (aligned) and pro-immigrant (unaligned) views.

Figure 3 plots the results of this analysis, providing some evidence in favor of H_2. As shown in the left panel, within the urban subsample, Europhile urbanites (aligned) are more likely to say that a Eurosceptic profile is typically rural than Eurosceptic urbanites (unaligned). Furthermore, pro-immigrant urbanites (aligned) tend to view pro-immigrant profiles as more typically urban than do anti-immigrant urbanites (unaligned). Conversely, anti-immigrant urbanites (unaligned) are more likely to view anti-immigrant profiles as typically urban than pro-immigrant urbanites (aligned). A similar pattern emerges with regard to education: urbanites without a university degree (unaligned) are more likely to view profiles without a university education as typically urban, compared to university-educated urbanites (aligned).

Rural residents respond in much the same way, as shown in the right panel of Fig. 3. Europhile ruralites (unaligned) are more likely to view profiles in favor of European integration as typical members of their place-based in-group than Eurosceptic ruralites (aligned). Likewise, pro-immigrant ruralites (unaligned) tend to view pro-immigrant profiles as more typically rural than anti-immigrant ruralites (aligned).[7]

[7] All differences discussed are statistically significant at a $p < 0.05$ level (Appendix F).

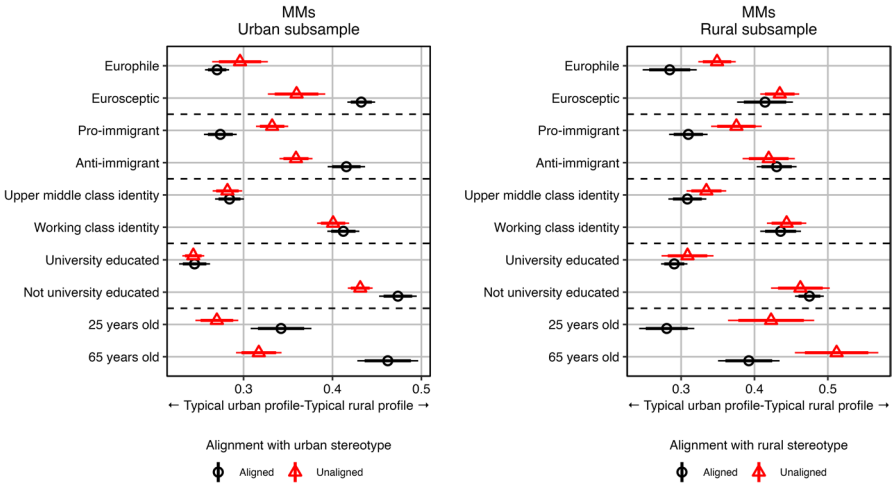

Fig. 3 Effects of profile attributes on urban–rural typicality by respondent alignment (MMs): Estimates are based on OLS regressions with country fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the respondent level. MMs are estimated using the R package cregg (Leeper et al. 2020). The urban–rural typicality variable is coded 0 = "Typically lives in an urban area" and 1 = "Typically lives in a rural area". The MMs denote the share of profiles classified as typically rural for a given attribute level, with higher values indicating a greater share of typically rural profiles and lower values indicating a greater share of typically urban profiles. Alignment is defined separately for each conjoint attribute: respondents are coded as aligned when their own background matches the stereotypical level of the corresponding conjoint attribute for their place-based in-group, and as unaligned otherwise (see Appendix E). Thick and thin lines are 95% and 99% confidence intervals, respectively

Overall, these results support the notion of social projection, as proposed by H_2, where individuals tend to evaluate others through the lens of their own characteristics, perceiving those who resemble themselves as more typical in-group members. In this regard, the extent to which urban and rural individuals are viewed in stereotypical terms critically depends on whether respondents themselves align with the stereotypes of their place-based in-group. Notably, with the exception of education in the urban subsample, this tendency appears to be driven mainly by attributes related to European integration and immigration rather than by demographic characteristics.

Taken together, these results illustrate the pronounced stereotypes that people hold about urbanites and ruralites. Urban and rural residents are commonly viewed in terms of stereotypical groups, relating to both their political attitudes and demographic composition. In light of the fundamental role that stereotypes play in the development of social identities, this supports a core assumption of existing studies that view the urban–rural divide from a social identity perspective. However, to what extent these stereotypes also underpin people's affective evaluations still remains an open question.

Affective Reactions to Urban–Rural Stereotypes

Having established that individuals harbor clear perceptions of what it means to live in an urban or a rural place, I now test whether these stereotypes influence individu-

als' affect toward these groups. Building on the idea of objective social sorting, H_3 states that the affective evaluations of stereotypical urban and rural individuals are contingent on respondents' alignments with the characteristics of stereotypical group members. In short, respondents who themselves fit the stereotypes of their place-based in-group should exhibit higher levels of affect toward stereotypical members of that group than respondents who do not align with these stereotypes.

Given that, as shown above, perceptions of urban–rural typicality depend on respondents' alignments with urban–rural stereotypes, this already suggests that these alignments might also be critical for respondents' levels of affect. I test this in Fig. 4, using the same approach as before. However, rather than showing the share of typically rural profiles, the MMs can now be interpreted as the average thermometer rating of a profile including a given attribute. The left panel again shows the MMs for aligned and unaligned respondents in the urban subsample, while the right panel focuses on rural respondents. Clearly, aligned respondents exhibit higher levels of affect toward stereotypical members of their place-based in-group than unaligned respondents. For example, Europhile urbanites (aligned) feel more than 10 degrees warmer toward Europhile profiles than Eurosceptic urbanites (unaligned). Likewise, pro-immigration urbanites (aligned) exhibit significantly higher levels of affect toward pro-immigrant profiles than anti-immigrant urbanites (unaligned). Again, the same pattern is observed among rural residents: those rural residents who are Eurosceptic or anti-immigrant (aligned) feel considerably warmer toward profiles

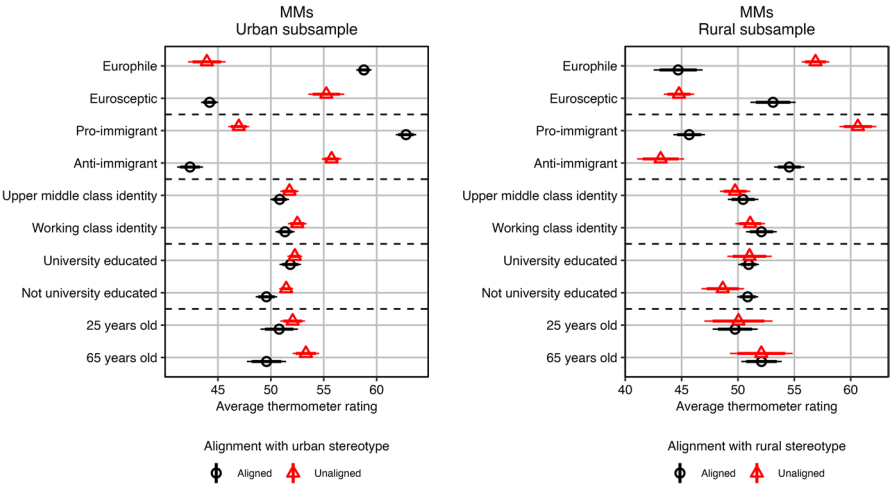

Fig. 4 Effects of profile attributes on thermometer ratings by respondent alignment (MMs): Estimates are based on OLS regressions with country fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the respondent level. MMs are estimated using the R package cregg (Leeper et al. 2020). The thermometer rating variable ranges from 0 to 100. Scores between 50 and 100 denote warm feelings, while scores between 0 and 50 denote cold feelings. A score of 50 means neither warm nor cold feelings. The MMs denote the average thermometer rating of a profile including a given attribute. Alignment is defined separately for each conjoint attribute: respondents are coded as aligned when their own background matches the stereotypical level of the corresponding conjoint attribute for their place-based in-group, and as unaligned otherwise (see Appendix E). Thick and thin lines are 95% and 99% confidence intervals, respectively

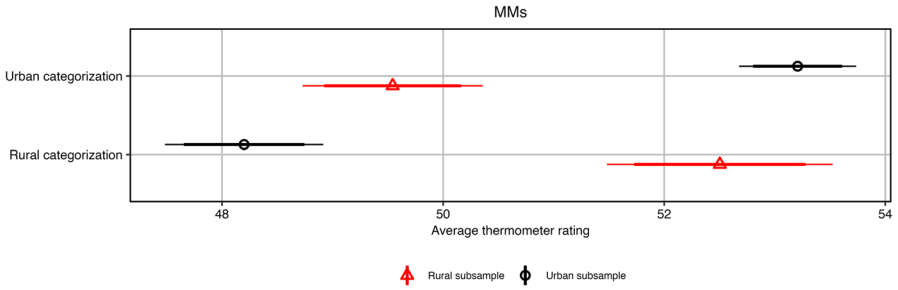

Fig. 5 Effects of urban–rural typicality on thermometer ratings by urban–rural residence of respondents (MMs): Estimates are based on OLS regressions with country fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the respondent level. MMs are estimated using the R package cregg (Leeper et al. 2020). The thermometer rating variable ranges from 0 to 100. Scores between 50 and 100 denote warm feelings, while scores between 0 and 50 denote cold feelings. A score of 50 means neither warm nor cold feelings. The MMs denote the average thermometer rating of a profile. Thick and thin lines are 95% and 99% confidence intervals, respectively

that match their views than do rural respondents with opposing positions on these issues (unaligned).[8]

In sum, these results support H_3. Respondents express greater affect toward stereotypical members of their place-based in-group, but only when they themselves fit these stereotypes. This tendency is again mainly driven by stereotypes relating to political attitudes, rather than demographic composition. Nevertheless, for this mechanism to work as expected, the perceptions of these alignments should also matter directly for the respondents' affect. According to H_4, following the notion of subjective social sorting, individuals are expected to exhibit higher levels of affect toward profiles they perceive as stereotypical members of their in-group and lower levels of affect toward those they perceive as stereotypical members of their out-group. To test this, I regress respondents' thermometer ratings for each profile on their categorizations of urban–rural typicality. Figure 5 plots the results of this regression in terms of MMs for urban and rural respondents. In line with H_4, urban respondents tend to feel warmer toward profiles they regard as typical urbanites, and colder toward typically rural profiles. Likewise, ruralites exhibit higher levels of affect toward profiles they classify as typically rural, and lower levels of affect toward those they regard as typically urban.[9] As expected, when perceiving a given individual as typical of their place-based in-group, respondents tend to feel warmer toward this individual, while they feel colder toward those they regard as stereotypical members of their place-based out-group.

Overall, these findings provide some first evidence that urban–rural stereotypes underpin affective polarization between urbanites and ruralites. Similar to studies

[8] All differences discussed are statistically significant at a $p < 0.05$ level (Appendix G).

[9] Importantly, the observed relationship is not an artefact of a spillover effect in which respondents evaluate profiles primarily based on their attributes (e.g., Euroscepticism, immigration attitudes, class, education, or age) rather than on their urban–rural categorization. To test for this possibility, I re-estimate the models including all five profile attributes as covariates alongside the perceived urban–rural typicality of the profile. As shown in Appendix H, the results remain virtually unchanged, indicating that the effect of urban–rural typicality is not simply capturing preferences for specific attributes.

highlighting the role of stereotypes for affective polarization between partisans, people's mental images of urbanites and ruralites appear to be crucial in shaping their affect toward these groups. Given the importance of these affective evaluations for voting behavior (e.g., Hegewald and Schraff 2025), how people perceive "us" and "them" along the urban–rural divide seems to be an important piece of evidence to explain political divisions between cities and the countryside.

Conclusion

Recently, the urban–rural divide has reemerged as a significant cleavage in Europe's political landscape. Various studies have documented pronounced differences in political attitudes and behavior between urban and rural residents in many European countries (e.g., Huijsmans et al. 2021; Huijsmans and Rodden 2025; Jennings and Stoker 2016; Maxwell 2019; Mitsch et al. 2021). In response to this, a growing body of literature explains these divisions by taking a social identity perspective. While some studies focus on place-based identities (e.g., Bornschier et al. 2021; Fitzgerald 2018; Zollinger 2024b), others highlight the importance of place-based resentment (e.g., Claassen et al. 2025; Cramer 2016; Huijsmans 2023a, b; Jacobs and Munis 2023; Lunz Trujillo and Crowley 2022; Munis 2022), or place-based affective polarization (e.g., Hegewald and Schraff 2025; Lyons and Utych 2023; Zumbrunn 2026). However, what all of these studies have in common is that they tend to view the urban–rural divide as an "us-versus-them" conflict between urbanites and ruralites.

Against this backdrop, it is important to explore how urban and rural residents are perceived as social groups. Shedding light on the extent to which urbanites and ruralites are viewed in terms of entrenched stereotypes promises to significantly advance the social identity perspective on the urban–rural divide, which often falls short of systematically investigating how "us" and "them" are defined in the context of place-based groups. Accordingly, I have suggested that urban–rural stereotypes can relate to the political attitudes of urbanites and ruralites on the one hand and the demographic composition of both groups on the other hand. Furthermore, I argued that stereotypes of urban and rural residents should also play an important role in explaining place-based affective polarization.

Relying on data from a pre-registered conjoint experiment fielded in nine European countries (Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Poland, and Spain) among 9,000 respondents, I have presented evidence supporting these arguments. Rural individuals are commonly perceived as Eurosceptic, anti-immigrant, working-class, older, and less educated. By contrast, urban individuals are typically regarded as Europhile, pro-immigration, university-educated, upper-middle-class, and younger. The extent to which respondents view others in these stereotypical terms is, in turn, shaped by their own background characteristics. Consistent with the idea of social projection, individuals are more likely to view others who share their own attributes as members of their place-based in-group. The same logic also applies to individuals' affective evaluations. In general, respondents feel warmer toward others when classifying them as typical of their place-based in-group. However, such affective evaluations also tend to be dependent on respondents' own

attributes. Specifically, individuals show greater affect toward stereotypical members of their place-based in-group only when they themselves align with those stereotypes.

Although this study represents an important step toward a better understanding of the urban–rural divide in people's minds, it does not come without limitations. Importantly, when measuring stereotypes with the help of conjoint experiments, it is ultimately up to the researcher to define some important dimensions a priori. In this regard, it is likely that the conjoint experiment used in this study does not capture all relevant dimensions of stereotyping along the urban–rural divide. For instance, other interesting cleavages to include could relate to religion (e.g., Duncan 2015; Marcinkiewicz and Dassonneville 2022; Raymond 2011; Tilley 2014) or migrant background (Heath et al. 2011; Martin 2019). In this regard, urbanites may not only be perceived as pro-immigration, but also as literal non-Christian immigrants. Likewise, because partisanship was not included as an attribute in the conjoint design, the role of political parties remains an open question. However, given that perceptions of urbanity and rurality appear closely linked to positions along the transnational cleavage, it is plausible that similar associations extend to party cues as well. Emerging evidence already points in this direction, with urbanites being perceived as more likely supporters of the new left, and ruralites as aligned with the radical right (Bornschier et al. 2021; Zollinger 2024b). Yet, further investigating the role of partisanship in the context of place-based stereotyping seems crucial.

Besides this, another central limitation is the study's focus on stereotypes of urban and rural residents, leaving out people from suburban areas as another potentially relevant social group. More broadly, the question of whether a distinct suburban social identity exists remains an important and underexplored gap in the literature on urban–rural divides. In light of this, understanding how suburbanites are perceived and to what extent they are viewed in similar terms to the stereotypes shown here presents a fruitful area for future studies.

Overall, the findings of this study provide critical evidence in favor of the social identity perspective on the urban–rural divide. Given that stereotypes play a crucial role in the development of social identities (e.g., Abrams and Hogg 2001; Bordalo et al. 2016; McGarty 2018; Oakes 1996; Oakes et al. 1994; Turner 1987), the stereotypes of urbanites and ruralites uncovered here, give reason to believe that political conflict between cities and the countryside is indeed rooted in place-based group memberships that give rise to place as a social identity. These tendencies might be a cause for concern. Similar to sustained levels of affective polarization between partisans, affective divisions along the urban–rural divide could ultimately undermine people's ability to compromise, putting the viability of democratic political systems in jeopardy altogether (e.g., Hetherington and Rudolph 2015; Kingzette et al. 2021). Moreover, given the increasing clustering of similar people in urban and rural areas (e.g., Bishop 2008; Brown and Enos 2021; Maxwell 2019), the finding that stereotyping and affective evaluations hinge on whether individuals align with the stereotypical attributes of their place-based in-group suggests that such dynamics may further deepen urban–rural polarization. Therefore, the urban–rural divide in people's minds may also have broader implications for democracy at large.

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Data Availability The code and data to reproduce the article's analyses are available on the *Political Behavior* Dataverse page: https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/8F5FQB.

Declarations

Competing Interests No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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