

# Discrimination against Roma: Evidence from two survey experiments in Norway

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## Abstract

Norway has a history of tough assimilation of the first migration of Roma people, known as the Tater/Romani people. The state introduced laws that discriminated against the Tater/Romani people. This article traces the international and national developments from discriminatory laws to laws against discrimination in Norway. With the recent appearance of immigrant Roma from Eastern Europe, Roma are once again on the political agenda of West European countries. Despite the many laws against discrimination that are now in place, this article demonstrates that the public still discriminates against Roma people. Two survey experiments reveal that the Roma are being directly discriminated against within the Norwegian society and indirectly discriminated against compared to other European Economic Area (EEA) immigrants. The article suggests that this could be related to a history of antiziganism in society. Furthermore, it appears that such attitudes are not easily changed by laws but demands broad social mobilisation.

**Keywords:** Tater/Romani people, Roma, antiziganism, social mobilisation, survey experiment

## 1. Introduction

From the mid-1800s to the 1980s, the Norwegian government tried to assimilate the Tater/Romani people through measures that would be considered unacceptable today (NOU 2015: 7, 10). In 1998, the Norwegian authorities officially apologised for the way in which the Tater/Romani people had been treated, and in 1999, the Tater/Romani people received status as a national minority (St. meld. nr. 15 (2000–1)). In recent years, since the accession of Romania to the EU, renewed attention has been given to the Roma population in Norway. This time, the public eye is on the marginalised segments of Romanian society, in particular Roma, who come to make a living through begging, and other types of informal street work (Djuve et al. 2015: 7).

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There have been substantial changes in legislation between the time of assimilation policies against the Tater/Romani people and today's debate about immigrant Roma. The laws have developed from being discriminatory to being against discrimination. However, the heated political debate and hatred towards Roma in social media and comment sections (Djuve et al. 2015: 7) following the recent increase of Roma immigrants demonstrate the need for more studies on the relationship between the Norwegian state and society, on the one hand, and the Roma minority on the other. The question remains to what extent citizens' attitudes towards Roma reflect the ideals embedded in the laws against discrimination. To shed light on this research question, the present article will trace the international and national developments that led to the policy changes. Furthermore, contemporary discrimination against Roma will be measured through two survey experiments. The results demonstrate a remaining gap between the non-discrimination ideals embedded in the laws and the Norwegian citizens' attitudes as revealed through survey experiments.

## 2. Historical background

The historical context is crucial to understand the situation of Roma today. It is also a likely explanation for why the attitudes towards Roma would not reflect the ideals embedded in the laws against discrimination. This introductory section provides a brief overview of the Roma populations in Norway. The next part moves on to describe the assimilation policies against the Tater/Romani people, followed by a synthesis of the political changes that replaced the discriminatory laws with laws against discrimination. Finally, the section on the historical background ends with a description of the social mobilisation for Roma rights in Norway.

### 2.1 Roma in Norway

The history of Roma is not well-documented. What we know about their history is primarily based on linguistic studies, which have traced the origin of the Romani language back to India (Greenberg 2010: 924; Bunescu 2014: 25). The Roma descend from groups who emigrated from India to Europe at least 1,000 years ago (European Commission 2004: 7). They reached the Balkans somewhere between the 13th century (Hancock 1992: 40) and 14th century (St. meld. nr. 15 (2000–1): 32).

Previous scholars (Hancock 1992; Minken 2009; Karoly 2015; Pedersen 2016) have distinguished between different migrations or diasporas of Romani populations, depending on when they moved from the Balkans. The first migration immediately moved further into northern and western Europe (Hancock 1992: 40). Those who stayed were enslaved in Wallachia and Moldavia, parts of present-day Romania, between the 14th and 19th centuries. When slavery was finally abolished in 1855 (Greenberg 2010: 924), the second migration of Roma fled from Romania and settled everywhere the first migration had settled (Hancock 1992: 40). The third migration of Roma from Eastern to Western Europe took place in the second half of the 20th century. It was caused by war and political changes, in addition to racism and discrimination (Karoly 2015: 1). In Norway, the Romani populations consist of all three migrations. The Tater/Romani people belong to

the first migration, Norwegian Roma are the second migration, while immigrant Roma can be regarded as part of the third migration. This article is primarily concerned with the Tater/Romani people and the immigrant Roma.

The Tater/Romani people have lived in Norway since the 16th century (*St. meld. nr. 15 (2000–1)*: 32). Today, there are probably a few thousand people who belong to the Tater/Romani people (*St. meld. nr. 15 (2000–1)*: 45). There are no statistics on this minority's conditions in Norway. However, an unrepresentative study has documented high mortality rates and low educational levels among the Tater/Romani people compared to the Norwegian population (*Ellingsen and Lilleaas 2015*). Regarding immigrant Roma, this group has increased its presence in Norway since the accession of Romania to the European Union (EU) (*Rosvoll and Bielenberg 2012*: 46; *Djuve et al. 2015*: 7). Other factors that have been pointed out as contributing to this increase are the economic crisis in Europe (*Djuve et al. 2015*: 7) and the abolition of the ban on begging in Norway in 2006 (*Rosvoll and Bielenberg 2012*: 46). Yet, immigrant Roma had come to Norway already in 2004 (*Brattvåg 2007*: 28), previous to all the mentioned events. The living conditions in Romania among the migrants to the Scandinavian countries and their families are frequently very poor as a result of limited sources of income, poor housing, low education, and illiteracy, especially for the Roma (*Djuve et al. 2015*: 53), who make up 65 per cent of the Romanian street workers in Oslo (*Djuve et al. 2015*: 20).

## 2.2 Assimilation of the Tater/Romani people

The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance state that the Tater/Romani people in Norway were in the past subject to assimilation policies and systematic serious human rights violations (*ECRI 2000*: 14). According to *Liégeois (2007*: 111), measures enacted in 1687 stipulated that 'Gypsies' and Tater/Romani people were to be arrested, their property was to be seized, their leaders were to be executed and all the rest were to leave the territory. These measures remained in force up to 1845 (*Liégeois 2007*: 111). However, the discrimination continued. An official Norwegian report (*NOU 2015*: 7) investigates the Norwegian policies towards the Tater/Romani people from 1850 to today. It states that the state introduced laws and regulations with discriminatory effects and reinforced negative prejudices against the Tater/Romani people (*NOU 2015*: 7, 7).

There were primarily two policy means of assimilation. The first was to remove children from their parents and place them in orphanages or foster care. The second was forced settlement (*NOU 2015*: 7, 40). The government delegated the implementation of these policies for the Tater/Romani people to the private, Christian organisation Norwegian Mission among the Homeless, often just called 'The Mission' (*NOU 2015*: 7, 5). The Mission was established in 1897 and received subsidies from the state for its work with the Tater/Romani people until 1986 (*NOU 2015*: 7, 11). The organisation ran orphanages (*NOU 2015*: 7, 57) and labour colonies (*NOU 2015*: 7, 44).

The state introduced several laws that had partly discriminatory intentions and clearly discriminatory consequences (*NOU 2015*: 7, 5). The Child Protection Act of 1896 enabled the authorities to take children from parents if the children were considered to be at risk of being neglected by their parents (*NOU 2015*: 7, 45). The emphasis on parents' character was essential for the use of this law on Tater/Romani people, as their lifestyle was generally

disapproved of (Thorsnes 2015: 383). Until 1986, the Mission took approximately 1,500 children from parents with Tater/Romani background and placed them in orphanages or foster care. This is estimated to be almost one-third of the Tater/Romani population. Many of the children were neglected and exposed to physical and psychological abuse. The Mission in most cases made sure that contact between the child and the biological parents was broken. This did not happen with other groups and was a deliberate policy by the Mission (NOU 2015: 7, 40–1).

The Vagrancy Act of 1900 opened up for forced settlement of ‘Vagrants’ without a legal job (NOU 2015: 7, 47). In the settlement policy, the Svanviken labour colony, run by the Mission, played an important role (NOU 2015: 7, 41). In total, 990 Tater/Romani people stayed at Svanviken labour colony between its establishment in 1908 and the closure in 1989 (NOU 2015: 7, 44). Under the threat of having their children taken away from them, Tater/Romani families were prohibited from speaking their language, wearing traditional clothes, and practicing traditional handicrafts. They were not permitted to receive visits from relatives (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training 2015: 39).

The Sterilisation Act of 1934 allowed forced sterilisation of those who were assumed not to be able to provide for their children or to have ‘defect genes’ (NOU 2015: 7, 48). Many Tater/Romani people were sterilised, and central employees in the Mission seem to have contributed to these sterilisations. The Mission’s original aim was to make good, settled Christians of the Tater/Romani people but with sterilisation, the aim moved towards reducing the number of descendants (Hvinden 2000: 25). In the period 1950–70, 40 per cent of the women who stayed at Svanviken labour colony were sterilised (NOU 2015: 7, 5). Tater/Romani women were more likely to be sterilised by force than other women in Norway. The youngest Tater/Romani girl was only 14 years old when she was sterilised at the end of the 1940s (Haave 2000: 52). The sterilisations occurred in the period 1934–77 (Aas and Vestgården 2014: 53).

In addition, the Trade Act of 1907 forbade ‘Vagrants’ to trade goods that were brought from place to place (NOU 2015: 7, 47). To travel from place to place to trade and do handicrafts had traditionally been an important aspect of the Tater/Romani lifestyle (NOU 2015: 7, 10). Kaveh (2016) specifies that the aim of this law was not to eliminate the Tater/Romani people’s trade but to regulate it. Some police nevertheless used the law in a discriminatory manner (Kaveh 2016: 14). On the other hand, the Animal Welfare Act of 1951, which specifically prohibited Vagrants’ use of horses (Kaveh 2016: 199), was in theory made with animal welfare in mind but was in practice intended to prevent Tater/Romani people from practising their traditional traveling lifestyle (NOU 2015: 7, 48). However, this discriminatory penal provision does not appear to have been extensively practiced, so essentially this law did not have discriminatory effects (Kaveh 2015: 300–2).

### 2.3 Political developments

After World War II, the state’s policies towards minorities gradually changed (Kommunal- og moderniseringsdepartementet 2018), probably because the international ideological stream had turned (St. meld. nr. 15 (2000–1): 30). However, the development was slow and not in line with all the attention human rights received in Norway from the

1950s onwards. Svanviken labour colony continued its activities and was possibly at its most damaging in the 1950s and 1960s (NOU 2015: 7, 73).

Norway ratified the European Convention on Human Rights in 1952 (European Court of Human Rights 2019), the UN's International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination in 1970, and the UN's International Covenant on the Civil and Political Rights in 1972 (OHCHR 2019). In 1954, the Child Protection Act was replaced with a law that emphasised preventive measures in the home rather than care order (NOU 2015: 7, 46). In the 1970s, the assimilation policies in Norway slowly discontinued (NOU 2015: 7, 72). The Animal Welfare Act was abolished in 1974 (NOU 2015: 7, 48) and the Sterilisation Act in 1978 (NOU 2015: 7, 49). The Trade Act was replaced in 1980, and the regulations of door sales were removed in 1999 (Ot.prp. nr. 61 (1998–9)). In 1986, the government ended the financial support of the Mission's work with Tater/Romani people (NOU 2015: 7, 11). However, Svanviken labour colony remained a fixed post on the State budget until 1989 (NOU 2015: 7, 77), when also the activities here were discontinued (NOU 2015: 7, 44).

In the period 1996–2000, on request from representatives of the Tater/Romani people, the Norwegian Research Council prioritised research on the assimilation policy and its consequences. The violations documented in these research projects lay the foundation for the Norwegian government's official apology in 1998 for how the Tater/Romani people had been treated (NOU 2015: 7, 10). A year later, Norway ratified the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, which gave the Tater/Romani people status as a national minority (St. meld. nr. 15 (2000–1)). In 1998, the centre against ethnic discrimination was established (Ot.prp. nr. 34 (2004–2005): 16). It later merged with the equality centre and the equality ombudsman and became the equality and anti-discrimination ombudsman (SNL 2019). The ombudsman's main task is to promote equality and combat discrimination based on sex, ethnicity, religion, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and age (LDO 2020).

In 2004, the Norwegian parliament opened up for economic compensation for Tater/Romani people who had experienced bullying because of their origin, forced sterilisation, and/or had stayed at the Svanviken labour colony. More than 1,200 people with Tater/Romani people background have obtained gratia payments on these grounds in the period 2005–14. In addition, an unknown number of people with Tater/Romani background have obtained gratia payments because of abuse and/or neglect in orphanages (NOU 2015: 7, 10). The Anti-Discrimination Act was introduced in 2005 and replaced by the Anti-Discrimination Act on Ethnicity in 2013 (Ik Dahl 2019). Finally, the Vagrancy Act was abolished in 2006, after most of its articles had already been removed (NOU 2015: 7, 46).

## 2.4 Social mobilisation

Early in the 1970s, director Vibeke Løkkeberg created a documentary about the Svanviken labour colony (St. meld. nr. 15 (2000–1): 34), where she pointed to the Mission's activities and asked critical questions. According to Gotaas (2000: 402–3), the documentary sent shock waves through the nation when it aired on national TV in prime time. The debate

in the wake of Løkkeberg's documentary broke the seeming public consensus about the special care for the Tater/Romani people (Hvinden 2000: 12). Subsequently, the situation of the Tater/Romani people was brought up in parliament by Torild Skard from the Socialist Left Party (Haave 2015: 27) and an Official Norwegian Report was written about Vagrants (NOU 1980: 42). This was the beginning of the end to the special treatment of the Tater/Romani people in the 1980s (St. meld. nr. 15 (2000–1): 35).

In the 1990s and early 2000s, several Tater/Romani people organisations were established. Organisations based on a national minority can receive economic support from the state. There are four Tater/Romani people organisations who receive such support today. Although the organisations are only a small part of the Tater/Romani people, they are important agenda setters (NOU 2015: 7, 25). As far as I am aware, there are no similar organisations for immigrant Roma in Norway today. However, Bjønnulv Evenrud, manager of the ideal organisation Folk Er Folk, received a price from the Norwegian magazine *Ny Tid* in 2012 for his work with the immigrant Roma (Heinesen 2012). Evenrud (email, 1 December 2016) explains that Folk Er Folk was established in 2012. They distributed a poster in Oslo, handed out flyers with information, collected money to buy tents, and taught people how to use 'Oslomarka', where it is legal to go camping. Folk Er Folk has taken part in the public debate, reported offences against the street workers by the Norwegian government, and given the Romanian street workers a voice in the Norwegian society. The organisation is led by two Norwegians and has one full-time employee who is a non-Roma Romanian. Evenrud remarks that although the organisation is known for its work with Roma, their aim is to combat racism and poverty in general (email with Evenrud, 1 December 2016).

### 3. Theoretical expectations

Should this history of political changes lead us to expect that Norwegians' attitudes towards Roma reflect the ideals embedded in the laws against discrimination? Before proceeding to examine discrimination against Roma in Norway today, I will discuss the theories on why we would think the ideals may or may not yet have been met.

#### 3.1 Antiziganism

Antiziganism is also known as anti-Gypsyism, romaphobia, and gypsophobia (for a discussion of the term, see End 2015). The first official text to speak of «Anti-Gypsyism/Romaphobia» was a resolution adopted by the European Parliament in 2005. Since then, references to antiziganism have become increasingly common at the international level (Liégeois 2007: 298). As noted by Wippermann (2015: 3), the term antiziganism refers not only to the hostility against the Roma but also against those who have been labeled 'Gypsies' by the majority society, even if they are not of Roma ethnicity. Both Roma and Tater/Romani people are exposed to antiziganism and the same mechanisms of exclusion (Wippermann 2015: 3). Moreover, the stereotypes about Roma and the Tater/Romani people are often the same. In the 18th century, the government did not even distinguish between Roma and Tater/Romani people (Rosvoll and Bielenberg 2012: 14).

According to Liégeois (2007: 159), Roma are regarded as thieves, rowdy, dirty and immoral people, tricksters, social misfits, and layabouts. This repellent caricature is admittedly blended with the romantic image of the folklore ‘Gypsy’. However, the commonest reflex is to call up the most negative aspects (Liégeois 2007: 159–60). A YouGov survey confirms that negative impressions of Roma/Gypsies are indeed present in western European countries and also Norway (Dahlgreen 2015). Lein (2016) examines stereotypes against Roma in contemporary Norway and finds that the most widespread stereotype is that Roma people are family-oriented. Fifteen per cent of the Norwegian population believe that Roma people are criminals and 23 per cent believe they do not want to work (Lein 2016: 50).

### 3.2 Top-down or bottom-up

Different scholars maintain different perspectives on the importance of international treaties. While some accentuate the positive effect of treaties on human rights (Kymlicka 2007; Simmons 2009), others pay particular attention to the role of social movements in transforming society (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 1996a; Keck and Sikkink 1998; Sikkink 2011; Tarrow 2011). Simmons (2009) suggests that treaties might have positive effects in domestic politics through three mechanisms. First, treaties influence the national policy agenda. Secondly, they influence the legal decisions. Thirdly, they influence the propensity of groups to mobilise (Simmons 2009: 114). This latter effect has a bottom-up aspect, and Simmons (2009: 138–9) acknowledges the crucial role of citizens in the diffusion of values. In a similar vein, Kymlicka (2007: 41) claims that, despite the many examples of disjunction between official rhetoric and actual practice, the development of international norms for minority rights has made a difference. Even if international norms only exist on article, Kymlicka argues, they nonetheless legitimise minorities’ attempts to mobilise politically to claim these rights (2007: 43–44). This view is consistent with Hvinden’s (2000: 11) observation that the international streams in favour of minority rights facilitated Tater/Romani people’s opportunities to share their opinions with the public. Recent evidence (Blinder, Ford and Ivarsflaten 2019) also suggests that multicultural politics may help mitigate discriminatory behaviour.

Ultimately, anti-discrimination is not only about whether a country complies but also whether the citizens do. There is also a substantial literature on the bottom-up perspective. Movement scholars emphasise three broad sets of factors in analysing the emergence and development of social movements/revolutions. These are the political opportunities, mobilising structures, and framing processes (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 1996b: 2). Tarrow (2011: 6) notes that social movements have often succeeded, and even when they failed, their actions set in motion important political, cultural, and international changes. In the case of the Tater/Romani people in Norway, the formation of Tater/Romani organisations and the group’s increasing activism was an important background for why the people were given the status as a national minority in 1999 (NOU 2015: 7, 24). Halvorsen (2000: 222) states that the Tater/Romani organisations have contributed to political welfare measures, public attention, and providing information.

Keck and Sikkink (1998) describe how transnational advocacy networks bring new ideas and help set agendas. Transnational advocacy networks promote norm

implementation, by pressuring states and international organisations to support international declarations or to change stated domestic policy positions (Keck and Sikkink 1998: 25). Sikkink (2011) coined the term ‘justice cascade’ to describe the shift in the legitimacy of the norm of individual accountability for human rights violations. This norm started as ideas held by a few individuals. These so-called ‘norm entrepreneurs’ who try to turn their favoured ideas into norms mostly fail. Sometimes they succeed, however, and norms spread rapidly, leading to a norms cascade (Sikkink 2011: 11). Vibeke Løkkeberg and Torild Skard could be considered ‘norm entrepreneurs’ for the Tater/Romani people case in Norway.

## 4. Methods and data

The data in this study come from two target group survey experiments with a between-subjects design. As far as I know, this approach has never been used to examine attitudes towards immigrant Roma in Norway before, despite scholarly agreement that survey experiments are a valuable tool for research on attitudes and discrimination. As noted by Sniderman (2018: 261), survey experiments move ‘beyond the measurement of prejudice to the assessment of discrimination’. They combine the causal power (internal validity) of experiments with the representativeness (external validity) of the population survey (Gilens 2002: 232; Gaines, Kuklinski and Quirk 2007: 2; Mutz 2011: 5) although external validity can of course still be an issue (Gilens 2002: 248; Barabas and Jerit 2010; Sniderman 2011: 112; Bol 2019: 173). However, compared to regular lab experiments, which are often conducted on a student population, survey data collected from a random sample will, despite its biases, be based on a broader and more composed population and thus be more representative.

When measuring sensitive topics such as discrimination, respondents tend to under-report undesirable attitudes (Krumpal, 2013; Cea D’Ancona 2014). Survey experiments can reduce these social desirability effects (Gilens 2002: 233; Gaines, Kuklinski and Quirk 2007: 4). However, such effects would primarily be a concern if the results showed little discrimination against any of the groups in question, which would indicate under-reporting. This is not the case in this study. If there were any social desirability effects, this would mean that the discrimination is actually stronger than what this study has documented.

The data were collected in March 2015 through the Norwegian Citizen Panel Wave 4 (2015). (The data applied in the analysis in this publication are based on ‘Norwegian Citizen Panel Wave 4, 2015’. The survey was financed by the University of Bergen (UiB), Norwegian Research Centre (NORCE), and Bergen Research Foundation. The data are provided by UiB, prepared and made available by Ideas2Evidence, and distributed by Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD). Neither UiB, NORCE, nor NSD are responsible for the analyses/interpretation of the data presented here.) This is an online survey based on a probability sample of the general Norwegian population above the age of 18 years. Panel members were recruited in Waves 1 and 3. For both recruitments, 25,000 individuals were randomly drawn from Norway’s ‘National Registry’, a list of all individuals who either are or have been a resident in Norway, maintained by the official Tax



Administration. The total recruitment rate was 20 per cent in the first wave and 23 per cent in the third wave (Skjervheim and Høgestøl 2015: 2). The fourth wave was emailed to 10,509 members of the panel and received 6,297 answers in total (Skjervheim and Høgestøl 2015: 3). A randomly selected subsample of these respondents was presented with the current study's experimental design. The sample is representative of the Norwegian population on most indicators (The data documentation reports are available from the Norwegian Citizen Panel website, <http://www.uib.no/en/citizen>. Reports, code-books, and data sets can be downloaded from the NSD. See [Supplementary Table A1](#) for summary statistics of the survey sample compared to the Norwegian population.), although there was a systematic under-representation of respondents with low education and younger age groups, particularly young men (Skjervheim and Høgestøl 2015: 6). In a report on negative attitudes towards minorities in Norway, low education and being male was associated with more negative attitudes, while young age was associated with less negative attitudes (Hoffmann and Moe 2017: 93). The under-representation of respondents with low education thus indicates that this sample will demonstrate weaker discriminatory behaviour, while the under-representation of young respondents should pull in the opposite direction. However, the randomisation of respondents into treatment groups ensures that the groups of respondents will be identical in all other characteristics that may confound a comparison across groups (Gilens 2002: 248). Accordingly, the relative differences in discrimination between groups will be the same independent of the original biases in the sample. Furthermore, as the different treatment groups are perfectly similar, there is no need to control for other variables in the analysis, as they cannot influence the difference in outcome between the groups (Bol 2019: 172). In the graphs presented here, there are therefore no control variables included in the analyses. However, as an extra robustness check, [Supplementary Tables A2–A10](#) in the appendix demonstrate that controlling for age, gender, and education did not affect the experimental results.

The two survey experiments in this study were designed to measure discrimination against the Roma minority in two different situations. The first experiment is a typical situation for studying direct discrimination and compares the Roma minority to a wide range of other groups within the Norwegian society. The second experiment is about support for a policy change that would limit the possibility to immigrate to Norway and is a more indirect measure of discrimination. It compares the Roma to other EEA immigrants. Together, these experiments make up different parts of the puzzle. My question is whether Roma people are discriminated against. All other target groups in the experiments are there to illustrate the extent of discrimination. By randomly varying the group on behalf of which the claim was made, one can determine the extent to which a majority treats a minority differently (Sniderman 2018: 261). It is the strength of this study that the survey experiments compare Roma to a wide range of groups in our society. When only using one kind of target group, one risks confounding one effect with the other (Sullivan, Piereson and Marcus 1979).

The rental of apartment experiment has a 5-point Likert-like response set, while the immigration experiment has a 7-point Likert response set. Although in technical terms, these response formats are at the ordinal level of measurement; researchers traditionally have used parametric statistics (Lavrakas 2008). I have followed this tradition and treated the outcome as a continuous variable. While endorsed by some (Norman 2010), this practice

is generally regarded as problematic (Jamieson 2004; Carifio and Perla 2008). The assumption that all respondents perceive the intervals between the scale values as equal is a tenuous one (Lavrakas 2008). Alternative specifications of the models are therefore included in the [Supplementary appendix](#). [Supplementary Tables A3, A6, and A9](#) show coefficients from logistic regression models, while [Supplementary Tables A4, A7, and A10](#) show coefficients from ordered logistic regression models.

## 5. Rental of apartment experiment

The first experiment is based on Schuman and Bobo's (1988) classic study, where they asked whether the respondents would 'personally mind a black neighbour'. They experimentally varied the question so that in half the cases 'Japanese-American' was substituted for 'black'. Their results showed significantly less objection to a Japanese-American neighbour than to a black neighbour (Schuman and Bobo 1988: 291). In the current experiment, respondents were randomly allocated to six groups of approximately equal size and presented with one of six versions of a survey question:

Imagine that you own a flat and that you want to rent it out. [A young Muslim/a young Roma person/a young Progress Party politician/a young member of the Hells Angels/a young member of the fundamentalist group the Prophet's Ummah/a young nursing student] calls you expressing interest. How likely is it that you would invite the person concerned to come and view it?

Respondents were asked to rate their likelihood of inviting the group to view their apartment with the following range of responses: very likely, likely, somewhat likely, not very likely, and not likely at all.

According to Sniderman (2018: 262), within-category comparison, that is, to compare groups that are similarly situated, is a necessary condition for discrimination designs. However, the use of across-category comparisons opens the door to more striking discoveries (Sniderman 2018: 262). To compare the group in question to both similar and different groups enables us to examine the extent of discrimination. The experiment is well-anchored on both sides with groups that probably are very attractive tenants and groups that probably are unattractive tenants. [Table 1](#) presents how the target groups included in this experiment can be divided between in-groups that I expect to be popular tenants, minority groups who are likely not to be favoured, and out-groups with especially negative associations.

I have placed the nursing student and the progress party politician in the uncontroversial groups. Progress party politicians represent a party that is controversial among some (Eidheim 2017: 3) but which is nevertheless one of Norway's most popular parties and was in government when the survey was fielded (Regjeringen.no 2018). The controversial groups in this experiment are Hell's Angels and the Muslim fundamentalist group the Prophet's Ummah. Both of these groups are associated with extremism and crime (Morselli 2009; Linge 2013), and one can expect that people do not want to rent out their apartments to them. Muslims and Roma are minorities in Norway. Both are perceived to be at the bottom of the ethnic hierarchy in Norwegian society (Bye et al. 2014). The

**Table 1.** Categories of tenants

Uncontroversial groups	Minority groups	Controversial groups
Nursing student (438 respondents)	Muslim (425 respondents)	Member of the Hells Angels (419 respondents)
Progress party politician (437 respondents)	Roma person (425 respondents)	Member of the fundamentalist group Prophet's Ummah (477 respondents)

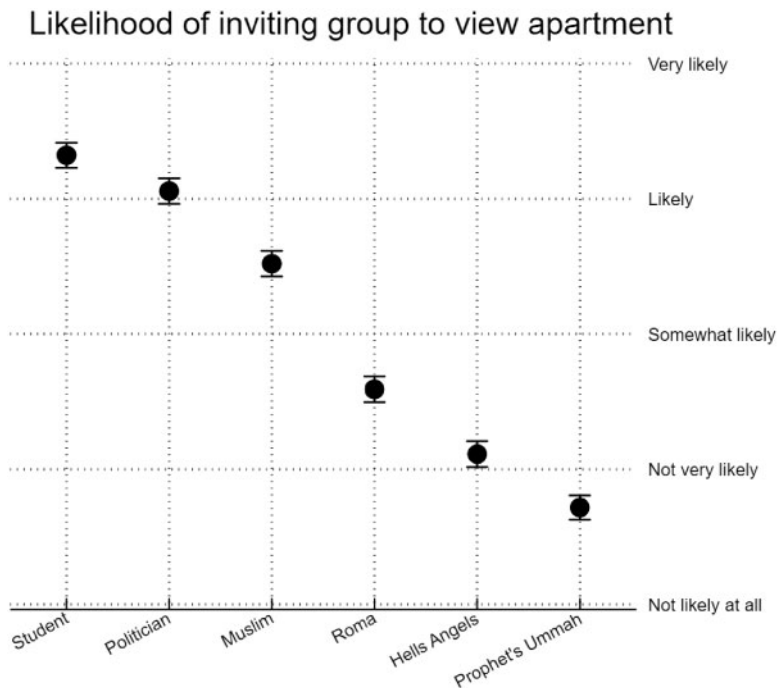
question wording does not specify whether Roma refers to Norwegian Roma or immigrant Roma. However, many Norwegians associate the word 'Roma people' with begging (Lein 2016: 54–7) and the terms 'Roma' and 'beggar' have been used almost synonymously in Norwegian media between 2008 and 2013 (Adolfsson 2014: 23). This strongly indicates that respondents were thinking of immigrant Roma.

We know that there is a history of discrimination and antiziganism in Norway. On the other hand, we also know that there has been a political change. The state no longer discriminates against Roma, and the Tenancy Act specifically forbids discrimination in connection with the letting of property. The question is whether these ideals have reached the citizens. History and antiziganism suggest that this group is still subject to discrimination, while the political efforts for equal treatment of all groups indicate that Norwegians should no longer discriminate against ethnic groups. Based on this information, I have formulated two expectations, E1 and E2. If E1 is supported, then we have evidence that citizens' attitudes are in line with the non-discrimination norms. If E2 is supported, then we have evidence of a negative gap between citizens' attitudes and the ideal embedded in the non-discrimination norms.

E1: A young Roma is as likely to be invited to view the apartment as any other group.

E2: A young Roma is less likely to be invited to view the apartment than the other groups.

Evidence presented in Figure 1 shows substantial differences between the groups in the apartment experiment. The nursing student is most likely to receive an invitation to view the apartment. People are also likely to invite the progress party politician. A Muslim is notably less likely to be invited, but still more likely than unlikely. The Roma, however, is significantly less likely to be invited to view the apartment. Indeed, the Roma is in the 'no'-group, together with the members of Hell's Angels and the Prophet's Ummah. There seems to be a penalty related to being associated with Roma. Even more than for Muslims, which is another exposed group in our society (Dahlgreen 2015; Hoffman, Kopperud and Moe 2012). To find a gap between the Roma and the Muslims in the apartment, experiment indicates that the negative differential treatment of Roma is substantial. There is a remarkable discrepancy between norms and the experimental result.



Norwegian Citizen Panel, wave 4 (2015). N=2621.

**FIGURE 1.** Likelihood of inviting the group to view apartment. *Notes:* Main effects of the experiment. The figure is based on ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analysis with 95 per cent confidence intervals.

Why are the Roma so unpopular tenants? [Diskrimineringsombudsmannen \(2011: 48\)](#) explains the discrimination of Roma in the Swedish housing market with antiziganism and racist attitudes. This could be the case for Norway as well. According to [Søholt and Astrup \(2009: 93\)](#), landlords prefer tenants who are not drug abusers, social clients, and families with many children, especially when these tenants have an immigrant background and/or are on welfare. These negative tenant characteristics fit well with stereotypes about Roma that [Lein \(2016: 50\)](#) found, namely, that Roma are perceived by many as family-oriented people who do not want to work.

Since 2004, there have been provisions against discrimination in the housing market through the Tenancy Act ([Søholt and Astrup 2009: 29](#)). In addition, the right to housing is enshrined in several international conventions, including the UN Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights and the European Social Charter ([Diskrimineringsombudsmannen 2011: 48](#)), to which Norway is a party ([Council of Europe 2018; United Nations 2019](#)). [Søholt and Astrup \(2009: 20\)](#) state that it is direct discrimination when people with an immigrant background are instantly rejected as possible tenants when they first encounter the landlord. The experimental result shows

Norwegian citizens discriminate against the Roma people. The attitudes are evidently not as one would wish according to international ideals.

## 6. Immigration experiment

The second experiment is about policy support and is a more indirect situation of discrimination. While the apartment experiment demonstrates discrimination against Roma in a context with a relatively wide variety of societal cross-sections, this next experiment examines the immigrant status of Roma, by comparing them to other poor EEA immigrants. If there is a difference in how people regard these groups, it would indicate that the reluctance to let out apartments to Roma people would not purely be based on their status as immigrants. Respondents were randomly allocated to six groups of approximately equal size and presented with one of six versions of the following survey question:

The financial crisis has caused considerable poverty in Europe. Some of the poorest Europeans are [from Spain/from Poland/the Roma people from Romania] and some of them come to Norway to [seek work/beg] so that their families can have a better life. To what extent do you agree or disagree that Norway should introduce agreements designed to limit this?

The survey item had the following range of responses: strongly agree, agree, agree somewhat, neither agree nor disagree, disagree somewhat, disagree, and strongly disagree.

Table 2 provides an overview of possible wording combinations and the number of respondents for each treatment.

Under EU/EEA regulations, all citizens of member countries have the right to enter Norway and stay for up to three months. As long as they are able to support themselves, they are in principle allowed to stay (Djuve et al. 2015: 9). The question specifies that the group is poor to reduce the possibility that potential differences in outcomes are caused by preferences for affluent or high-skilled immigrants. However, being poor is often defined in relative terms within countries, so it is still possible that people will think of poor Roma differently to a poor Spaniard in terms of their wealth or education level. The free movement of poor migrants who travel to other countries within the EU is an issue that has featured on the political agendas of most European countries over the past decade (Djuve et al. 2015: 7). This experiment will reveal whether support for a certain immigration policy depends on the target group. Recent evidence (Lein 2016) suggests that among these three groups, Norwegians want to have most social distance to Roma, followed by Poles and Spaniards (Lein 2016: 59–61).

The experimental treatment here includes not only the target group but also the activity immigrants come to do. Some of the respondents were asked about immigrants who come to beg, while others were asked about immigrants who come to seek work. The notion that begging is rooted in traditional Roma culture is found in public discourse as well as in parts of the academic literature (Friberg 2020: 230). To beg is the stereotypical activity for Roma, while to seek work is a counter-stereotypical activity. Perhaps, the Roma will be welcomed more on equal terms as the other immigrants when it is specified that they come to seek work rather than to beg?

**Table 2.** Immigrants and activities

Beg	Seek work
Roma from Romania (261 respondents)	Roma from Romania (247 respondents)
From Spain (262 respondents)	From Spain (278 respondents)
From Poland (263 respondents)	From Poland (249 respondents)

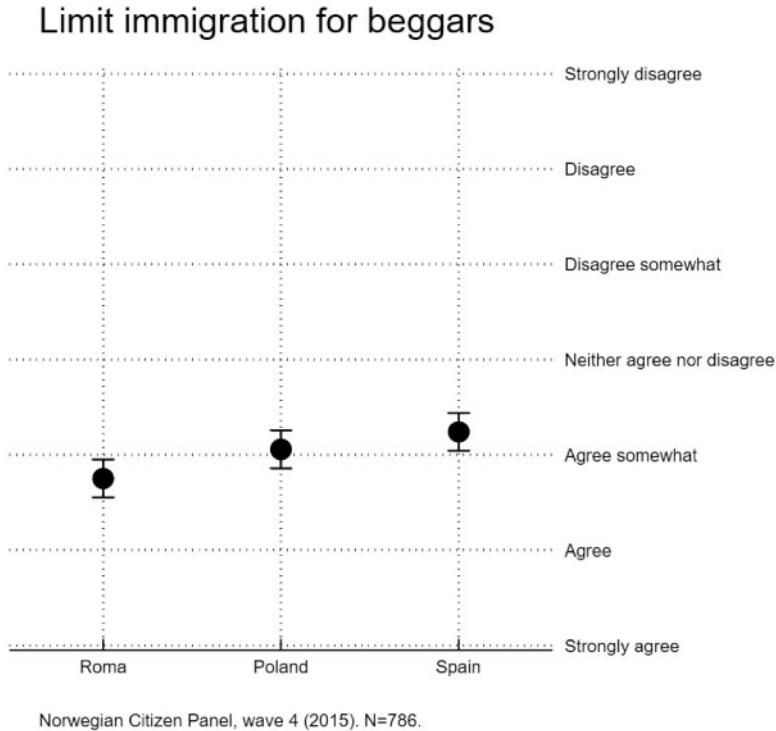
If the ideals embedded in the laws against discrimination are reflected in Norwegian citizens' attitudes, one can expect that citizens will not respond differently when asked about Roma from Romania than about other poor immigrants. However, Roma people have historically been discriminated against in Norway. This leads us to expect that people will be more likely to agree that Norway should limit immigration when they are asked about Roma from Romania than when they are asked about other groups. I have, therefore, formulated two competing expectations, E3 and E4. If E3 is supported, there is evidence that citizens' attitudes are in line with the non-discrimination norms. If E4 is supported, the evidence shows a negative gap between citizens' attitudes and the ideal embedded in the non-discrimination norms.

E3: People are not more likely to agree that Norway should introduce agreements designed to limit immigration when they are asked about Roma from Romania than when they are asked about other groups.

E4: People are more likely to agree that Norway should introduce agreements designed to limit immigration when they are asked about Roma from Romania than when they are asked about other groups.

Figure 2 provides the results of this experiment when asked about immigrants who come to Norway to beg. The findings show that Norwegians are generally not supportive of immigrants who come to beg. The differences between the target groups are not statistically significant, with the exception of Roma being less welcome than Spaniards. This result mostly supports E3. When respondents are asked about immigrants who come to Norway to beg, the differential treatment is very small. Poles and Spaniards, who are otherwise more positively regarded, are considered in a negative way when they come to beg. In this case, we find some evidence of equal treatment.

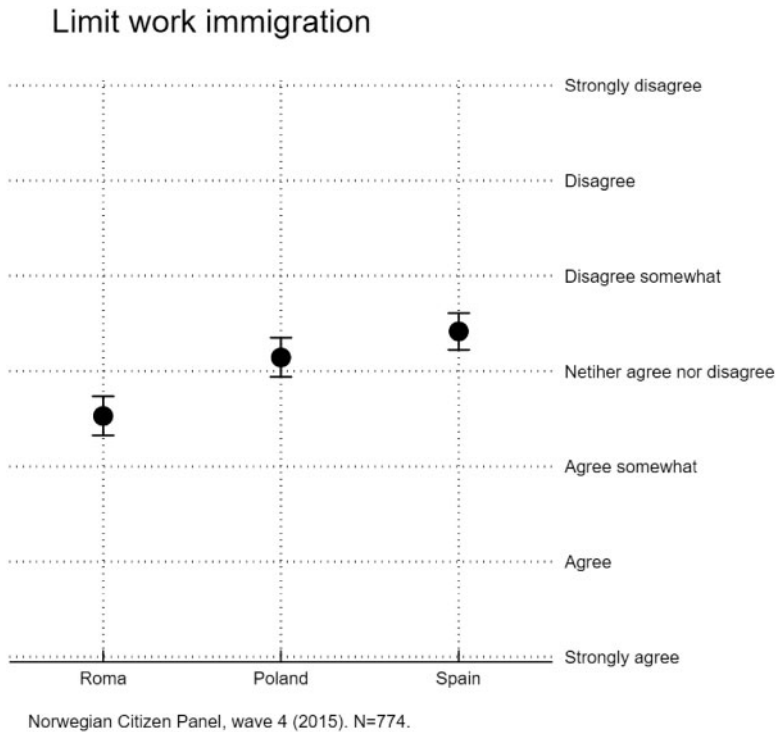
Figure 3 shows that the support for agreements designed to limit the immigration of people from EU countries decreases when people are asked about poor people seeking work instead of begging. The pattern, however, is still the same as in the beggar experiment. People agree more to limit immigration when asked about Roma from Romania than when asked about Poles or Spaniards. This time, the difference is statistically significant between Roma and Poles as well. People also disagree more to limit immigration when asked about the Spaniards than when asked about Poles, but this difference is not statistically significant. Moreover, citizens tend to disagree with work immigration limitations when asked about Poles and Spaniards but tend to agree when asked about Roma from Romania. One explanation for the differences between Figures 2 and 3 could be that Norwegians have a general aversion towards beggars and on top of that a smaller aversion towards Roma. This would explain the strong support for restricting immigration of



**FIGURE 2.** Limit immigration for beggars. *Notes:* Main effects of the experiment. The figure is based on OLS regression analysis with 95 per cent confidence intervals.

people coming to beg but only small differences between the groups. Respondents might think that immigrants who do not find work will turn to begging instead. Due to prejudice against Roma, Norwegians may consider them more likely to become beggars than immigrants from Spain or Poland and hence have a stronger preference to restrict immigration against them. It is troubling that the disadvantage for Roma from Romania is even more substantial when the question specifies that they come to do a counter-stereotypical activity. Contrary to the begging part of the experiment, the Roma receive a penalty. Because they are related to a group with which there are strong negative associations, they meet negative attitudes even when it is explicitly stated that they come to work. This supports E4 and suggests negative stereotypes about the Roma minority do not change easily. There is persistent prejudice even in the face of counter-stereotypical information, which strongly suggests that the support for limiting immigration of Roma is not only about begging.

The results show that respondents were more likely to support anti-immigration policies when they were asked about Roma people, particularly in the case of labour immigration. Although limiting immigration would imply renegotiation of the EEA agreement, the respondents were probably not aware of this. Still, when the UK voted to leave the EU,



**FIGURE 3.** Limit immigration for work seekers. *Notes:* Main effects of the experiment. The figure is based on OLS regression analysis with 95 per cent confidence intervals.

concerns over immigration were a central explanation (Goodwin and Milazzo 2017). One cannot disregard the possibility of similar political consequences of negative attitudes towards EU immigrants, specifically of Roma immigrants, in Norway.

## 7. Why have the anti-discrimination ideals not yet been met?

Both experiments show a considerable disadvantage for the Roma minority. The historical context is relevant to comprehend why it has been so difficult to spread the ideals embedded in the laws against discrimination to the individual citizens. I argue that there are particularly two reasons for this. First, the antiziganist ideas from the past are persistent and difficult to eliminate. Secondly, the way the political changes happened has affected the degree to which citizens' attitudes reflect the ideals embedded in the law.



## 7.1 Antiziganism in contemporary Norway

The Swedish Equality Ombudsman states that although discriminatory legislation directed at Roma is no longer found in Sweden, negative perceptions and attitudes, known as antiziganism, still affect the Roma's situation (*Diskrimineringsombudsmannen* 2011: 46). The prevalence of antiziganism limits Roma's access to rights in areas of public life such as housing, social services, and education. This highlights the question of whether Sweden has made sufficient effort to follow up on international conventions (*Diskrimineringsombudsmannen* 2011: 47). There is no reason to believe that the situation should be much different in Norway, although a similar report does not exist. The Tater/Romani people and immigrant Roma are different groups who are both exposed to antiziganism. Most Norwegians are probably unaware of the connection and do not think about the Tater/Romani people when they evaluate the immigrant Roma negatively.

*Kaveh* (2015) nevertheless demonstrates how the historical antiziganism makes its reappearance in the present debates on begging. The Vagrancy Act issued in 1900, which prohibited begging, was abolished by a unanimous Norwegian Parliament in 2006 (*Kaveh* 2015: 29). The main argument was that harmless actions should not be criminalised (*Ot.prp. nr. 113 (2004–5)*: 84). In addition, it was pointed out that most of the people who beg are in a difficult life situation, such as drug addicts who finance their drug abuse through begging (*Ot.prp. nr. 113 (2004–5)*: 19). As the composition of beggars changed from being primarily drug addicts to also including immigrant Roma, a debate was initiated on whether Norway should reintroduce the ban on begging (*Ørstavik and Einarsen* 2014). *Kaveh* (2015: 29) points out that even though the immigrant beggars are not all Roma, the debate has been carried out as a 'Gypsy problem'. Support for a ban on begging in Norway was strongly influenced by negative stereotypes about the Roma (*Lein* 2016). Eventually, a municipal ban on begging was introduced in 2014. The government withdrew their proposal for a national ban in 2015 when they lost the necessary support from the Centre party (*Sund, Eriksen and Rydland* 2015).

*Kaveh* (2015: 35) notes that the current arguments which are put forward on begging as a cover for criminal activities are a repetition of the interwar context, with immigrant Roma replacing 'tramps' as the source of irritation. The assertion that the beggars are actually 'organised gangs' has been refuted by several reports (*Brattvåg* 2007; *Djuve et al.* 2015; *Engebriktsen* 2012) but is nevertheless repeated in the media and on the Internet (*Kaveh* 2015: 36). The debate was renewed in April 2017 when the main Norwegian public television broadcaster, NRK, aired the documentary 'Lykkelandet' about a Romanian network that organises begging, prostitution, theft, and possibly drug sales in Bergen (*Knudssøn, Bakke and Kumano-Ensby* 2017). Negative stereotypes are confirmed from time to time, such as with 'Lykkelandet' (although it was unclear whether these Romanians were also Roma). Still, that does not make it acceptable to discriminate against an entire ethnic group.

## 7.2 Policy implementation

The second reason why the history of discrimination against Tater/Romani people is relevant to understand the discrimination against immigrant Roma is that we can draw

lessons from how the anti-discrimination policies have been implemented. Political developments in the past century would lead us to think that Roma are met with broader acceptance today. It is possible that the anti-discrimination values have not spread sufficiently to Norwegian citizens because the implementation has been mostly top-down and not bottom-up. Social mobilisation may prove necessary for the values of non-discrimination to take hold in the population at large.

While there are certainly anti-discrimination laws in place, the social mobilisation has been more limited. Tater/Romani people have organised themselves since the 1990s. Although one should not underestimate the role of these organisations, this is relatively recent, and after many of the international treaties protecting minority rights had already been introduced. Besides, immigrant Roma are not organised in a similar way. Folk Er Folk is one of the most prominent organisations fighting for immigrant Roma's rights in Norway today. Although the organisation has made its presence felt, it does not represent a broad political mobilisation and is not led by the minority itself.

It is possible that, despite the extensive anti-discrimination policies in Norway, citizens have not played a central enough role. The top-down measures are in place, but for the values for the protection of minority rights to diffuse, citizens or activists must probably play a larger role than they have so far. When the aim is to prosecute war criminals (Sikkink 2011), agreement between states serves the purpose. To eliminate discrimination, on the other hand, requires something of the population as well. Perhaps, for the population to react, there has to be some form of social mobilisation that makes the discriminated group visible in the society. This can be achieved through demonstrations, marches, and popular movements but not through international agreements. This does not imply that such agreements are insignificant but for an attitude change to happen they are not sufficient.

## 8. Conclusion

In spite of the many laws against discrimination, it appears evident that an individual perceived to be affiliated with the Roma minority is still likely to be at a considerable disadvantage in Norwegian society today. To my knowledge, this is the first time survey experiments have been used to explore discrimination against Roma in Norway. This study has shown that the prevalence of antiziganism limits Roma's access to housing and it has political consequences for the way citizens think about borders. The findings in this article are strengthened by the fact that two different experiments both show the same tendency in the result for Roma people. This makes it possible to be confident in the finding that there is widespread discrimination against Roma in Norway today. The current findings add to a growing body of literature on Roma as a vulnerable minority in our society. The survey experiments do not examine development in attitudes over time. It is likely that the political changes in the past century have affected public attitudes in a positive way.

Based on this study, it is safe to conclude that the treatment of the Roma minority in Norway today falls short of the non-discrimination ideals. A simple explanation for this could be that prejudices take a long time to change. The present article demonstrates that

there have been many laws and treaties but less social movements. The evidence from this study suggests that this top-down approach can have affected the diffusion of the values of minority rights in Norway. Future research should concentrate on the investigation of obstacles and facilitators related to the diffusion of anti-discrimination norms and the connection between social movements and attitudinal change.

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## Conflict of interest statement

None declared.

## Supplementary data

[Supplementary data](#) is available at *Migration Studies* online.

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