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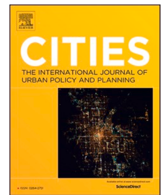

Misanthropolis: Do cities promote misanthropy?

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ABSTRACT

We use pooled US General Social Survey (GSS, 1972–2016) data to study the effect of urbanism on misanthropy (distrust and dislike of humankind). Evolution (small group living), homophily or ingroup preference, and classic urban sociological theory suggest that misanthropy should develop in the most dense and heterogeneous places, such as large cities. Our results mostly agree: misanthropy is highest in cities with a population larger than several hundred thousand people, and the effect size of urbanicity is about half of that of income. Yet, the rural advantage is disappearing—from 1990 to 2010, misanthropy has increased fastest in the smallest places (<10k). One possible reason is that smaller places have been left behind, and rural resentment has increased. This is only the second quantitative study on the urbanicity-misanthropy nexus and more research is needed. Results may not be generalized outside of the US.

> "*Real misanthropes are not found in solitude, but in the world; since it is experience of life, and not philosophy, which produces real hatred of mankind.*"
>
> Giacomo Leopardi

> "*Whenever I tell people I'm a misanthrope they react as though that's a bad thing […] I live in London, for God's sake. Have you walked down Oxford Street recently? Misanthropy's the only thing that gets you through it. It's not a personality flaw, it's a skill.*"
>
> Charlie Brooker

1. Introduction

As urbanization rampantly adds tens of millions of people to cities every year, it is important to understand how the urban way of life affects the human condition, particularly as it relates to social interactions. Urbanism is not only a built environment, but also a way of life with profound social consequences. The concern is longstanding—the effect of urbanism on the human condition has been studied since Aristotle (Jowett et al., 1920), by many intellectuals such as Thomas Jefferson and Henry David Thoreau (White & White, 1977). The classic urban sociology, in particular, has produced significant insight into this subject (Wirth, 1938; Tönnies, [1887] 2002; Simmel, 1903). Yet, the topic of misanthropy remains largely unexplored. This study is inspired by Amin (2006) and Thrift (2005), whose sharp observation of the urban way of life suggests the existence of urban misanthropy.

Misanthropy—from *misos*(n.), "dislike or hate," and *anthropos*(n.), "humans"—refers to the lack of faith in others and the dislike of people in general. Misanthropy is a critical judgment on human life caused by failings that are "ubiquitous, pronounced, and entrenched" (Cooper, 2018, p. 7). Socrates (cited in Melgar et al., 2013) argued that misanthropy develops when one puts complete trust in someone, thinking the person to be absolutely true, sound, and reliable, only to later discover that the person is deceitful, untrustworthy, and fake—when this happens frequently, misanthropy develops. Notably, Thrift (2005) proposes that "misanthropy is a natural condition of cities, one which cannot be avoided and will not go away" (p. 140).

Thus, using novel data we conduct empirical quantitative analyses over the years of 1972–2016 to test this urban misanthropy thesis. The paper is structured as follows: We start with a brief overview of how urbanicity has impacted different aspects of life. Next we present the underlying theory, the urbanism-misanthropy pathways, by bringing together human evolutionary history (small group living), homophily or ingroup preference, and classic urban sociological theory suggesting that misanthropy should be observed in the most dense and heterogeneous places, such as large cities. We end the literature review by pointing to gaps in the literature and pro-urban proclivity: remarkably, there is only one substantive quantitative study on urbanicity-

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misanthropy conducted thirty seven years ago, in a literature that is dominated by pro-urban scholarship. Our empirical analysis follows and we conclude with a discussion of results and takeaways for policy and practice.

2. Literature

2.1. Advantages of city life (pro-urbanism)

Much of the recent urban scholarship has emphasized the positive aspects of cities (Amin, 2006; Okulicz-Kozaryn, 2015b; Peck, 2016; Thrift, 2005), a case in point being the bestselling book, the "Triumph of the City: How Our Greatest Invention Makes Us Richer, Smarter, Greener, Healthier, and Happier" (Glaeser, 2011). Studies have highlighted how metropolitan areas facilitate different aspects of life by providing freedom, amenities, research and innovation, economic growth, and higher wages (Tönnies, [1887] 2002; O'Sullivan, 2009; Meyer, 2013; Rosenthal & Strange, 2002; Bettencourt et al., 2010; Stansel, 2019; Ahlfeldt & Barr, 2022; Liu et al., 2020; Smith & Blizard, 2021). According to Park et al. ([1925] 1984), "City air makes men free (Stadt Luft macht frei)" (Park et al. [1925] 1984, p. 12)—the diversity and heterogeneity found in urban centers can translate into increased tolerance and acceptance of others (Tuch, 1987; Wirth, 1938; Stephan and McMullin, 1982; Okulicz-Kozaryn & Valente, 2020). Similarly, studies point to how urban heterogeneity and diversity can benefit the economy by creating technological innovations, increasing productivity levels, and enhancing the supply and the quality of goods and services (Rodríguez-Pose and Von Berlepsch, 2019; Rodríguez-Pose & Lee, 2020; Mulligan, 2020). Returns from education are greater in cities than smaller places, and urbanites have more economic opportunities than rural dwellers (Berry & Glaeser, 2005; Florida et al., 2013; Roca & Puga, 2017; Storper & Scott, 2009). Cities can be seen as engines of economic growth (O'Sullivan, 2009; Carvalho & van den Berg, 2016; Glaeser, 2011).

Cities can also improve some aspects of community (Chavis & Wandersman, 2002; Macke et al., 2019). Although city life is related to impersonal social relations, particularly when it comes to neighborly relations, urbanites have higher levels of social interaction, participation in religious groups, and volunteering than residents of suburban areas (Mazumdar et al., 2018; Mouratidis, 2017; Nguyen, 2010). Cities increase chances of interaction, in-person communication, and face-to-face contact (Carvalho & van den Berg, 2016; Storper & Venables, 2004), which in turn may create more opportunities for socialization (Mouratidis, 2017). Thus, urbanites can have larger social networks and socialize more frequently than low-density suburban residents, while having more opportunities to meet new friends or partners (Mouratidis, 2018, 2017). Concurrently, urbanites are able to more easily create their own communities and social bubbles in cities by choosing from an array of possibilities (e.g., shop in a particular bodega, use a specific laundromat, attend a well-liked place of worship, frequent a preferred gym). If trust is broken, it's easier to find another bodega, another laundromat, and so forth. In rural and small communities, on the other hand, if trust is broken, it is more difficult to find a replacement, and life can become cumbersome.

2.2. Urbanism-misanthropy pathways

Few studies have focused on urban misanthropy (Thrift, 2005; Melgar et al., 2013; Keeling, 2013; Smith, 1997; Bloch & Ferguson, 1987; Wilson, 1985; Ray, 1981; Gibson, 2017; Rosenberg, 1957, 1956). What are the mechanisms through which cities can induce misanthropy? First, living in large, dense, and heterogeneous settlements (city living) is, at least in some ways, incompatible with human nature (Haidt, 2012). Throughout our evolutionary history, for thousands of years, humans have lived in small, low-density homogeneous groups. As hunter gatherers, humans lived in small bands of 50 to 80 people; later, they formed simple horticultural groups of 100 to 150 people, finally clustering in groups as large as 5000–6000 people as they evolved into more advanced societies (Maryanski & Turner, 1992). Similarly, humans tend to have ingroup preference or homophily, and accordingly, usually lack preference for or dislike heterogeneity (Smith et al., 2014; McPherson et al., 2001; Bleidorn et al., 2016; Putnam, 2007), which is a characteristic feature of cities (Amin, 2006; Thrift, 2005; Wirth, 1938) and is related to lower trust and less social participation (Alesina & Weder, 2002; Alesina & Ferrara, 2000; Luttmer, 2001; Alesina & La Ferrara, 2002; Rodríguez-Pose and Von Berlepsch, 2019).

Early sociologists proposed that urbanization can create malaise due to three core characteristics of cities: size, density, and heterogeneity. They asserted that an increased population size creates anonymity and impersonality, density creates sensory overload and withdrawal from social life, and heterogeneity leads to anomie, deviance, and lower trust and wellbeing (Park et al., [1925] 1984; Simmel, 1903; Tönnies, [1887] 2002; Wirth, 1938; Putnam, 2007; Okulicz-Kozaryn, 2015a; Herbst and Lucio, 2014; Postmes and Branscombe, 2002; Vogt Yuan, 2007; Smelser and Alexander, 1999). City life can cause cognitive overload, stress, and coping (Lederbogen et al., 2011; Milgram, 1970; Simmel, 1903). An overloaded system can suppress stimuli resulting in a *blasé* attitude (Simmel, 1903)—city life can cause withdrawal, impersonality, alienation, superficiality, transitiveness, and shallowness (Wirth, 1938). Furthermore, city life may intensify cunning and calculated behavior (Tönnies, [1887] 2002), estrangement, antagonism, disorder, vice, and crime (Milgram, 1970; Park, 1915; Park et al., [1925] 1984; Bettencourt & West, 2010), which can lead to negative responses when interacting with others. Urbanism can also exert a negative influence on the quality of social relationships (Wilson, 1985), and urbanites are often depicted by the social imaginary as ill-mannered and unreliable, which can lead to misanthropy (e.g., Okulicz-Kozaryn, 2015b; Okulicz-Kozaryn & Valente, 2017). These attributes of city living can be long lasting—growing up in a city is also associated with negative consequences later in life regardless of current urbanicity (Lederbogen et al., 2011; Okulicz-Kozaryn & Valente, 2020).

Of the many urban challenges, next to crime, crowding may be especially conducive to misanthropy. Crowding can be a significant problem in large cities, which forces a large number of people to live in close proximity (household crowding) and in a small amount of space (residential crowding). Crowding is associated not only with higher levels of stress and depression, but also with aggression (Calhoun, 1962; Regoeczi, 2008). There are striking examples of crowding in the largest and densest cities around the world. New York City, for example, offers 250, or even 100 square feet apartments to its residents (Charlesworth, 2014; Weichselbaum, 2013; Yoneda, 2012). Some "cubbyholes," are yet smaller at 40 ft^2 (Velsey, 2016). In other dense cities, like Hong Kong, crowding can be even worse (Stevenson & Wu, 2019). To be sure, the majority of the urban population does not live in such extreme crowding conditions, and crowding is also an issue in smaller areas—some people crowd in houses in small towns or villages. While high density is not the same as crowding, the two concepts are often correlated (Meyer, 2013), and urban crowding is probably becoming more common as cities are becoming less affordable (e.g., Florida & Schneider, 2018; Kotkin, 2013; Misra, 2015; Schuetz, 2019; Solari, 2019; Weinberg, 2011). While urbanization faces many challenges, notably in the global South (Hong et al., 2021), there are strategies and best practices for sustainable urbanization (Bauduceau et al., 2015; Organization et al., 2016; Ochoa et al., 2018; Tan et al., 2016) to address many potential drivers of crowding such as uneven urban development, gentrification and displacement, as well as inequality in large globalizing cities.

In sum, city life can make people become more distant from or hostile toward other human beings. For many, urban life is being "lonely in the midst of a million" (Twain), "lonesome together" (Thoreau), alienated (Nettler, 1957; Wirth, 1938), "awash in a sea of strangers" (Merry cited in Wilson, 1985, p. 99) in a "mosaic of little worlds which touch, but do not interpenetrate" (Park et al., [1925] 1984, p. 40). Thus, we

hypothesize:

Urbanicity contributes to increased levels of misanthropy.

2.3. Gaps in the literature and study's main contribution

The gap in the literature is two-fold. First, the current urban literature tends to avoid the negative side of urbanism (Amin, 2006; Okulicz-Kozaryn, 2015b; Peck, 2016; Thrift, 2005). Second, there is only one quantitative study focused on the urbanicity-misanthropy relationship (Wilson, 1985).

Academic thinking about cities has for the most part swung in a pro-urban direction for many decades not only in the US (Hanson, 2015), but also in world development generally (Lipton et al., 1977). The classic sociological urban theory (Wirth, 1938; Milgram, 1970; Park, 1915; Park et al., [1925] 1984; Simmel, 1903; Tönnies, [1887] 2002) gave way to sub-cultural theory (Fischer, 1975, 1995; Palisi & Canning, 1983; Wilson, 1985), while debates about the optimal size of a city (Alonso, 1960, 1971; Capello & Camagni, 2000; Elgin, 1975; Richardson, 1972; Singell, 1974) emerged in the-bigger-the-better ideology (Glaeser, 2011). As a result, there is no recent research on the urbanicity-misanthropy relationship—only two studies examined this relationship employing quantitative methods (Smith, 1997; Wilson, 1985). Smith (1997) lists a simple bivariate correlation between urbanicity and misanthropy among dozens of other bivariate correlations in a General Social Survey technical report without discussing the topic. Therefore, Wilson (1985) is the only quantitative study solely focusing on the urbanicity-misanthropy nexus.

Wilson (1985) used the 1972–1980 GSS dataset in his analysis—he does not show trends over time and only controlled for a handful of variables. Arguably, like other contemporary social scientists such as Veenhoven (1994), Meyer (2013) and Fischer (1982), Wilson has a slight pro-urban proclivity—under-emphasizing and discounting the negative side of urbanism.

The lack of research on the link between urbanicity and misanthropy in urban studies seems to emerge from an avoidance to focus on the darker and misanthropic side of cities. As Nigel Thrift aptly observed, there is "a more deep-seated sense of misanthropy which urban commentators have been loath to acknowledge, a sense of misanthropy which is too often treated as though it were a dirty secret" (Thrift, 2005, p. 134). Therefore, the aim of this paper is to fill this gap in the literature by bringing together a largely overlooked literature from across different fields and by providing an up to date quantitative analysis of the relationship between urbanicity and misanthropy. Building on and extending Wilson (1985), we control for an extensive set of variables, examine trends over the last four decades, and provide a much broader and interdisciplinary perspective on the relationship between urbanicity and misanthropy.

3. Method

3.1. Data

We use unique misanthropy measure from the 1972–2016 US General Social Survey (GSS; http://gss.norc.org). The GSS is a cross-sectional, nationally representative survey, administered annually since 1972 until 1994 when it became biennial. The unit of analysis is at the individual level and data are collected in face-to-face in-person interviews (Davis et al., 2007). The full dataset contains about 60 thousand observations pooled over 1972–2016. All variables were recoded in such a way that a higher value means more.

Marsden et al. (2020) provides a useful overview of the GSS, one of the most widely used datasets in contemporary social science. The GSS has a wide range of attitude and behavior data, together with a wide and detailed body of background information including socioeconomic status, social mobility, social control, the family, civil liberties, and morality.

The misanthropy scale items and urbanicity measures have been part of GSS since its first wave in 1972. The GSS takes care to ensure the over-time comparability of measures for trend analyses (Marsden et al., 2020), which we utilized in this study to examine the relationship between urbanicity and misanthropy over 4 decades. According to Marsden et al. (2020), the GSS prioritizes survey quality, maintaining response rates above the survey industry standard.

3.2. Research design and model

The research design is ex post facto (Mohr, 1995). Our study is observational or correlational—data used are secondary, without any experimental manipulation.[1]

As explained in the next subsection, the dependent variable, 'misanthropy,' is continuous. Hence, we use ordinary least squares (OLS) to analyze the relationship between urbanicity and misanthropy. Multilevel techniques are not applicable as the GSS is only representative of large census regions, and we do not have the restricted GSS data with finer geographical information. GSS is a repeated cross-sections dataset with different persons in each wave, hence panel data techniques are not applicable either.

3.3. Misanthropy

We measure misanthropy, the distrust and dislike of humankind, with a three item Rosenberg's misanthropy index (Rosenberg, 1956; Smith, 1997):

> TRUST. "Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?" 1 = "cannot trust," 2 = "depends," 3 = "can trust."
> FAIR. "Do you think most people would try to take advantage of you if they got a chance, or would they try to be fair?" 1 = "take advantage," 2 = "depends," 3 = "fair."
> HELPFUL. "Would you say that most of the time people try to be helpful, or that they are mostly just looking out for themselves?" 1 = "lookout for self," 2 = "depends," 3 = "helpful."

Rosenberg defines misanthropy as a general uneasiness, dislike, and apprehensiveness toward strangers (Rosenberg, 1956). Using the three items, we utilized factor analysis with varimax rotation to produce an index, and we reversed it so that it measures misanthropy. Cronbach's alpha is 0.67. The distributions of these items, as well as the descriptive statistics for all other variables, are in the Supplementary online material (SOM).

Although, much controversy about the assessment of misanthropy exists in the literature, the Rosenberg scale has become the standard measure for self-reported misanthropy and was designed to assess one's degree of confidence in the trustworthiness, goodness, honesty, generosity and brotherliness of people in general (Rosenberg, 1956). The measurement encompasses "faith in people," "attitudes towards human nature," and an "individual's view of humanity." The Rosenberg misanthropy scale has been a cornerstone on the GSS since 1972, and the measurement is not contaminated by social desirability bias (Ray, 1981). The Rosenberg misanthropy scale is the most popular and widely cited measurement of misanthropy. Some authors (e.g., Wuensch et al.,

[1] Observational or correlational studies are not without merit—many scientific breakthroughs were first discovered in observational studies—for instance that smoking is related to cancer (e.g., Blanchflower & Oswald, 2011; Oswald, 2014). Furthermore, experimental data suffer from many critical problems that are not inherent in observational data such as lack of external validity, small sample size, and artificial laboratory setting. For a discussion see Pawson and Tilley (1997).

2002) have used other scales, but their approaches are disjoint from the mainstream literature, and there is not much discussion of the concept or measurement that they used in their research.

Strictly speaking, the Rosenberg scale does not measure the dislike of "all people," but "most people." Wilson (1985) suggests it is dislike of strangers, specifically. Likewise, Delhey et al. (2011) have recently argued that "most people" predominantly connotes outgroups. Note that this relates to the homophily/ingroup theory—a dislike for an outgroup typically means relative preference for the ingroup.

3.4. Urbanicity

Urbanicity is measured in three ways to show that the results are robust to the definition. First, it is measured using deciles of population size (SIZE). Deciles are used to investigate if there are any nonlinear effects on misanthropy. Two other variables are used to measure urbanism under their original GSS names: XNORCSIZ and SRCBELT.

Wilson (1985) uses these two variables in his study. One technical problem, however, is that he assumes that these variables are continuous. Wilson (1985) explicitly states that XNORCSIZ is an ordinal variable, and we disagree: one cannot really say whether a suburb is larger than an unincorporated large area and smaller than an area of 50 thousand people.

Both XNORCSIZ and the SRCBELT variables categorize places into metropolitan areas, big cities, suburbs, and unincorporated areas. The advantage of SIZE is that it allows us to calculate a misanthropy gradient by the exact size of settlement. XNORCSIZ and SRCBELT take into account the fact that populations cluster at different densities (e.g., suburbs are less dense than cities). The GSS does not provide a density variable.

The SRCBELT measurement is arguably the best fitting to illustrate the urban vs. rural divide: the divide is between metropolitan areas vs. smaller areas (Hanson, 2015), and the SRCBELT variable identifies the metropolitan areas (as Metropolitan Statistical Areas) and it classifies metros by their rank and size: small rur, small urb, 13–100 sub, 1–12 sub, 13–100 msa, 1–12 msa. The GSS detailed codebook descriptions are in the SOM.

3.5. Controls

In the choice of control variables, we follow Welch et al. (2007) and Smith (1997). The higher the social standing, the more favorable view of others—we control for income, education, and race. The social class literature suggests that individuals' social class should be assessed using both objective (e.g., income and education) and subjective indicators (e.g., Kraus et al., 2009). Thus, we control for person's perceived social class as well.

Negative experiences are likely to increase misanthropy, therefore we control for fear of crime (there is no adequate measurement of actual victimization in the GSS). Crime is relevant because the larger the place, the more crime (Bettencourt & West, 2010; White & White, 1977; Wirth, 1938), and the more crime, the more misanthropy (Wilson, 1985). As explained by Glaeser and Sacerdote (1999), cities may create greater returns to crime because urban areas provide criminals more access to the wealthy and to a greater range of victims. Likewise, the lower likelihood of arrest, and the lower probability of recognition are features of urban life that make crime more frequent (Glaeser & Sacerdote, 1999). Fear of crime can result in social problems such as lower interpersonal and institutional trust, change in behavioral patterns and lifestyle, and integration into society (see Krulichová et al. (2018)) being therefore an important control.

We also control for unemployment, self-reported health, and age. We control for divorce, a predictor of misanthropy. Misanthropy should be higher among cultural groups and minorities that have been discriminated against—we control for race, being born in the US, and religious denomination. Religious belief may reduce misanthropy—religions commonly promote philanthropy and altruism. This is especially true of social religiosity (services attendance, church membership), but individual religiosity or believing (prayer, closeness, and belief in God) may actually increase misanthropy (Valente & Okulicz-Kozaryn, 2020). Misanthropy may be lower among older people, and there may be a curvilinear relationship, therefore we control for age and age^2. Men tend to be more misanthropic—we control for gender. Recent movers may be more misanthropic and although there is not an adequate measure in the GSS indicating whether someone moved recently, we use a proxy for international relocation by controlling for being born in the US.

In addition, we control for subjective wellbeing—the goal is to alleviate a potential problem of spuriousness. It may not be the size of a place that causes higher misanthropy, but poor quality of life or unhappiness (Okulicz-Kozaryn & Valente, 2021) that correlates with both urbanicity and misanthropy. In addition, we control for health which may vary across urbanicity (e.g., Chen et al., 2019), and possibly, unhealthy persons are more likely to be misanthropic. Concurrently, liberals and immigrants are more likely to live in cities and both groups are less satisfied with their lives (Berry & Okulicz-Kozaryn, 2011; Okulicz-Kozaryn et al., 2014) and potentially more misanthropic. Thus, we control for political ideology and immigration status.

Data were pooled over 1972–2016, and hence we include year dummies. Also, there are substantial regional differences across the US—we include a "South" dummy variable. All variables are defined along with their survey questions in the SOM.

4. Results

This section reports the empirical results of our hypothesis test: *urbanicity contributes to increased levels of misanthropy*.

Tables 1, 2, and 3 show the regression results of misanthropy. We use three measures of urbanicity, one in each table, and each urbanicity measure is entered as a set of dummy variables to explore nonlinearities. The base case is the smallest place in the case of SIZE and SRCBELT, and the second smallest category on XNORCSIZ: "<2.5k, but not countryside." Coefficients of interest are those on the largest places such as the second largest category "192-618k," and especially the largest one "618k-" in Table 1, and corresponding the second largest and the very largest places in Tables 2 and 3.

The first column of each table (a1, b1, c1) shows coefficients from a basic regression of misanthropy on a set of dummy variables for a given urbanicity measure without any control variables, except for South and year dummies (not shown). The largest negative effect of urbanicity on misanthropy is observed for the largest places, as expected. In the case of SIZE and SRCBELT, the second largest effects tend to be on the second largest place, also as expected. In the case of XNORCSIZ, in addition to the largest cities, the countryside is quite misanthropic. This is an unexpected result—we had not hypothesized that the countryside would be misanthropic. Perhaps countrymen are not used to swarms of people, or perhaps they are countrymen because they are misanthropic and distrust and dislike people. The second columns (a2, b2, c2) in the tables add controls following Welch et al. (2007) and Smith (1997). The change in estimates is substantial across all three urbanicity measures—midsize places become much more misanthropic—now they are about half or third as misanthropic as the largest place (all urbanicity estimates are relative to the base category). In Table 2, an interesting result on the XNORCSIZ dummies is that of misanthropic suburbs, the so called "places of nowhere" (Kunstler, 2012). These results seem to support studies documenting the existence of a poor social fabric in American suburbia (Duany et al., 2001; Kay, 1997; Kunstler, 2012). Overall, we find that having controlled for a standard set of misanthropy predictors, midsize places are more misanthropic, and still the largest places are the most misanthropic in comparison to the smallest places (the base case for all estimates). Thus, the larger the place, the more misanthropy.

The addition of marital status in Model 3 does not change the estimates, and the addition of extra controls in Model 4 attenuates the slopes only slightly across all three measures of urbanicity. While the

Table 1
OLS regressions of misanthropy. Beta (fully standardized) coefficients reported. All models include year dummies. Size deciles (base: <2k).

	a1	a2	a3	a4	a4a	a4b	a4c
2-4k	0.01	0.02**	0.01**	0.01*	0.02	0.01*	0.01
4-8k	0.02***	0.03***	0.03***	0.03***	0.02**	0.02***	0.02
8-14k	0.01**	0.04***	0.03***	0.03***	0.03***	0.02***	0.02**
14-24k	0.00	0.03***	0.03***	0.02***	0.02*	0.02**	0.01
24-41k	0.01	0.04***	0.03***	0.02***	0.02**	0.02**	0.02*
41-79k	0.01*	0.04***	0.04***	0.03***	0.02*	0.02**	0.01
79-192k	0.03***	0.04***	0.04***	0.03***	0.01	0.02**	−0.00
192-618k	0.04***	0.05***	0.05***	0.04***	0.02**	0.02***	0.01
618k-	0.09***	0.09***	0.09***	0.07***	0.05***	0.05***	0.02**
South	0.12***	0.10***	0.09***	0.10***	0.09***	0.09***	0.07***
Subjective class identification		−0.10***	−0.10***	−0.09***	−0.09***	−0.08***	−0.08***
Family income in $1986, millions		−0.08***	−0.07***	−0.05***	−0.04***	−0.05***	−0.04***
Protestant		−0.01	−0.01	0.00	0.00	−0.01	−0.01
Catholic		−0.02***	−0.02***	−0.01	−0.02*	−0.01	−0.02
Unemployed		0.01**	0.01**	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Age		−0.32***	−0.34***	−0.39***	−0.47***	−0.41***	−0.50***
Age squared		0.13***	0.14***	0.18***	0.25***	0.20***	0.28***
Highest year of school completed		−0.24***	−0.24***	−0.22***	−0.21***	−0.22***	−0.20***
Male		0.03***	0.03***	0.02***	0.04***	0.03***	0.05***
Married			0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Widowed			0.02***	0.01	−0.01	0.00	−0.01
Divorced			0.04***	0.02***	0.02*	0.02***	0.02*
Separated			0.04***	0.03***	0.02***	0.02***	0.02**
Never married			0.01	−0.01	−0.02**	−0.02**	−0.03***
Conservative				0.00	0.01	0.01	0.01
Liberal				−0.03***	−0.02**	−0.03***	−0.02***
Born in the U.S.				−0.02***	−0.02**	−0.00	−0.00
SWB				−0.13***	−0.14***	−0.12***	−0.13***
Afraid to walk at night in neighborhood					0.09***		0.09***
White household						−0.12***	−0.12***
N	38,236	33,549	33,545	27,522	14,034	27,082	13,799

Robust std err.
*** $p < 0.01$.
** $p < 0.05$.
* $p < 0.1$.

fullest specifications are the least biased in terms of omitted variables, the sample size is much smaller than the more basic models due to missing observations on additional variables. These more elaborate specifications are rather over-saturated models with collinearity and too many non-essential controls. These models rather serve as a robustness check, and are not the most final or appropriate models. Note that Wilson (1985) did not control for variables added in Model 4 and beyond.

Model 4a adds "afraid to walk at night in neighborhood" to Model 4, and Model 4b adds a "white household" dummy to Model 4, and finally Model 4c adds both variables. The rationale for the three models 4a, 4b, and 4c is that the sample size drops by about half due to missing data when adding "afraid to walk at night in neighborhood" to the model. Furthermore, race is likely to play a role not only with respect to urbanicity and misanthropy, but it may also correlate with being "afraid to walk at night in neighborhood," e.g., whites may be more afraid than others. We use the three models 4a, 4b, and 4c with different combinations of the two variables to test robustness of the results.

In Table 1, Model a4c and Table 2, Model b4c, the largest places remain significantly more misanthropic than the base case. Yet, the magnitude of the effect on the largest places is not greater than that for mid-sized places, suburbs, and even the countryside. Such result could be puzzling. But as argued earlier, srcbelt is the variable that probably best captures the urban-rural divide, and when using srcbelt in Table 3, we find that even the oversaturated Model c4c shows that it is the largest places (both 1–12 msa, and 1–12 sub) that are markedly more misanthropic than all other places vs. the base case, the smallest places.

The overall conclusion is that the places housing up to a few thousand people (except for the countryside) are the most liking and trusting of humankind (the least misanthropic). In other words, there is misanthropy in larger places, especially in the largest places—places that have a population bigger than several hundred thousand people versus the smallest places (up to a few thousand people, and not the countryside).

The effect sizes are considerable—all tables report beta coefficients and the effect size of the largest place is at least about as large as half of the effect of income. To summarize, we find a weak to moderate support for our initial hypothesis that urbanicity is related to increased misanthropy. The results are only weak to moderate, and not strong, because the effect sizes are small to moderate, and not large. In addition, there are caveats to the results as elaborated in the discussion section.

4.1. Analysis over time

We complement our pooled data analysis with an investigation of over-time change in the relationship between urbanicity and misanthropy—again, the advantage of the GSS is a long time span of 1972–2016. Fig. 1 plots misanthropy by size of place over time.

Overall, misanthropy remained highest in the large cities until about 2005. Around 2000, the trends have changed—misanthropy for the largest cities (>250k) started to decline, and misanthropy for the smallest places (<10k) started to increase steeply. Misanthropy for medium sized places (10-250k) has been mostly increasing over 1972–2016. Hence, the finding of urban misanthropy for the largest places is due to the pre-2005 period. These patterns are similar when controlling for predictors of misanthropy. Predicted values from the regression Model a3a in Table 6 in the SOM are plotted in Fig. 2.

There is convergence in misanthropy across urbanicity over time, with the smallest places increasing their level of misanthropy the most. Misanthropy has increased across all urbanicity levels in the US over 1972–2016, but it has increased the most in the smallest places. Note that the interactive regression specification used to produce the predicted values plotted in Fig. 2 is a time-linear model, which does not

Table 2
OLS regressions of misanthropy. Beta (fully standardized) coefficients reported. All models include year dummies. XNORCSIZ (base: <2.5k, but not countryside).

	b1	b2	b3	b4	b4a	b4b	b4c
Countryside	0.03***	0.03***	0.03***	0.04***	0.05***	0.04***	0.04***
2.5-10k	0.02***	0.02***	0.02***	0.02***	0.02**	0.02**	0.02
10-50k	0.03***	0.03***	0.03***	0.03***	0.03***	0.03***	0.02**
Uninc med	0.00	0.02***	0.02***	0.03***	0.03**	0.03***	0.03**
Uninc lrg	0.00	0.03***	0.03***	0.03***	0.03**	0.02***	0.02*
Med sub	0.02**	0.04***	0.04***	0.05***	0.05***	0.04***	0.04***
lrg sub	0.03***	0.08***	0.08***	0.08***	0.07***	0.06***	0.05***
50-250k	0.04***	0.05***	0.05***	0.05***	0.03**	0.03***	0.01
Gt 250k	0.10***	0.10***	0.10***	0.09***	0.07***	0.07***	0.04***
South	0.12***	0.10***	0.09***	0.10***	0.09***	0.09***	0.07***
Subjective class identification		−0.10***	−0.10***	−0.09***	−0.09***	−0.08***	−0.08***
Family income in $1986, millions		−0.08***	−0.07***	−0.06***	−0.05***	−0.05***	−0.04***
Protestant		−0.01	−0.01	0.00	0.00	−0.01	−0.01
Catholic		−0.02***	−0.02***	−0.01	−0.02*	−0.01	−0.02
Unemployed		0.01**	0.01**	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Age		−0.32***	−0.34***	−0.39***	−0.47***	−0.41***	−0.50***
Age squared		0.12***	0.13***	0.17***	0.25***	0.20***	0.28***
Highest year of school completed		−0.24***	−0.24***	−0.22***	−0.21***	−0.22***	−0.20***
Male		0.03***	0.03***	0.02***	0.04***	0.03***	0.05***
Married			0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Widowed			0.02***	0.01	−0.01	0.00	−0.01
Divorced			0.04***	0.02***	0.02*	0.02***	0.02*
Separated			0.04***	0.03***	0.02***	0.02***	0.02**
Never married			0.01	−0.01	−0.02**	−0.02**	−0.03***
Conservative				0.00	0.01	0.01	0.01
Liberal				−0.03***	−0.02**	−0.03***	−0.03***
Born in the U.S.				−0.02***	−0.02**	−0.00	−0.00
SWB				−0.13***	−0.14***	−0.12***	−0.13***
Afraid to walk at night in neighborhood					0.09***		0.09***
White household						−0.12***	−0.12***
N	38,236	33,549	33,545	27,522	14,034	27,082	13,799

Robust std err.
*** $p < 0.01$.
** $p < 0.05$.
* $p < 0.1$.

Table 3
OLS regressions of misanthropy. Beta (fully standardized) coefficients reported. All models include year dummies. SRCBELT (base: small rur).

	c1	c2	c3	c4	c4a	c4b	c4c
Small urb	−0.01	0.02**	0.02*	0.01*	0.02*	0.01	0.02
13–100 sub	−0.01	0.04***	0.04***	0.03***	0.02*	0.02***	0.02
1–12 sub	−0.00	0.06***	0.05***	0.04***	0.04***	0.03***	0.03***
13–100 msa	0.03***	0.04***	0.04***	0.04***	0.02	0.02***	−0.00
1–12 msa	0.08***	0.09***	0.08***	0.07***	0.05***	0.05***	0.03***
South	0.12***	0.10***	0.10***	0.10***	0.09***	0.09***	0.08***
Subjective class identification		−0.10***	−0.10***	−0.09***	−0.09***	−0.08***	−0.08***
Family income in $1986, millions		−0.08***	−0.07***	−0.06***	−0.05***	−0.05***	−0.04***
Protestant		−0.01	−0.00	0.00	0.01	−0.01	−0.01
Catholic		−0.02***	−0.02***	−0.01*	−0.02*	−0.01	−0.02
Unemployed		0.01**	0.01**	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Age		−0.33***	−0.35***	−0.39***	−0.47***	−0.41***	−0.50***
Age squared		0.13***	0.14***	0.18***	0.25***	0.21***	0.29***
Highest year of school completed		−0.24***	−0.24***	−0.22***	−0.21***	−0.22***	−0.20***
Male		0.03***	0.03***	0.02***	0.04***	0.03***	0.05***
Married			0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Widowed			0.02***	0.01	−0.01	0.00	−0.01
Divorced			0.04***	0.02***	0.02*	0.02***	0.02*
Separated			0.04***	0.03***	0.02***	0.02***	0.02*
Never married			0.01	−0.01	−0.02**	−0.02***	−0.03***
Conservative				0.00	0.01	0.01	0.01
Liberal				−0.03***	−0.02**	−0.03***	−0.03***
Born in the U.S.				−0.02***	−0.01*	−0.00	0.00
SWB				−0.13***	−0.14***	−0.12***	−0.13***
Afraid to walk at night in neighborhood					0.09***		0.09***
White household						−0.12***	−0.12***
N	38,236	33,549	33,545	27,522	14,034	27,082	13,799

Robust std err.
*** $p < 0.01$.
** $p < 0.05$.
* $p < 0.1$.

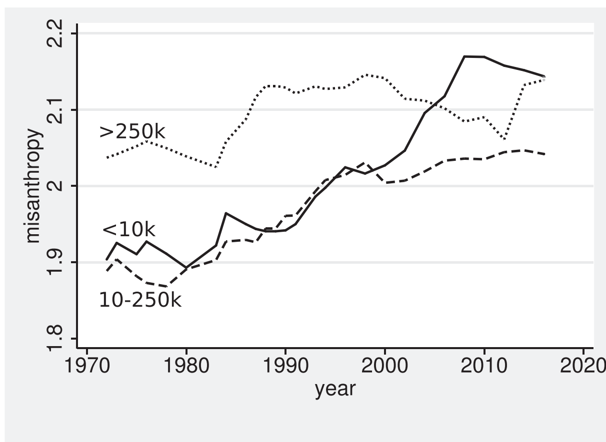

Fig. 1. Misanthropy by size of population over time. Smoothed with moving average filter using 3 lagged, current, and 3 forward terms.

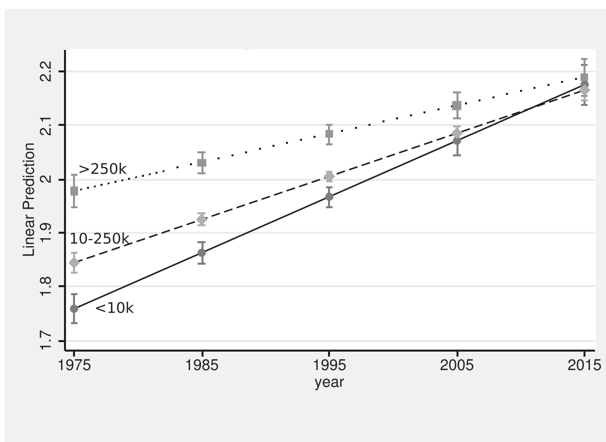

Fig. 2. Misanthropy by size of population over time. Predicted values from the regression in column a3a from Table 6 in the SOM. 95 % CI shown.

allow for nonlinearities observed for the raw values in Fig. 1.

5. Conclusion and discussion

This study seeks to spark debate on an overlooked area of urban studies. Our results suggest the existence of Misanthropolis—misanthropic metropolis, where distrust and dislike for humankind abound.[2]

In this article we have focused on a novel area, the urbanicity-misanthropy nexus. Evolution (small group living), homophily or ingroup preference, and classic urban sociological theory suggest that human dislike for other humans should be observed in the largest, most dense and heterogeneous places such as large cities and metropolitan areas. Our results mostly agree: misanthropy is highest in cities larger than several hundred thousand people. There are caveats, however.

First, the effect sizes are small to moderate, about half of the effect of income. Second, it is only the second study (after Wilson, 1985) on the topic and more data and research are needed to form reliable conclusions. Third, the urban misanthropy thesis holds up relatively robustly only for the largest cities or metropolitan areas (larger than several hundred thousand people). Some places in between, such as larger towns or suburbs, are not misanthropic depending on the model specification. Fourth, the level of misanthropy in smaller areas is now reaching about the same level as in large cities. In addition, our study uses US data only, and the conclusions may not generalize outside of the United States. Finally, this is a correlational study, and causality may not be present.

For these reasons, the evidence in support of our urban misanthropy thesis is weak to moderate. We would like to stress, however, that we do find strong evidence that, overall, cities are not less misanthropic than smaller places, and this in itself is a counter-intuitive finding worth of reporting and future investigation. In addition, even the small to moderate effect size of urbanicity on misanthropy as found in this study, has an enormous practical combined effect size due to the sheer scale of urbanism—half of the world population is urban and growing by tens of millions every year. Hence, the small to moderate effect size found in the present study translates into large or very large effect in the aggregate.

Our study fills a gap in the urban studies literature by improving and extending the research by Wilson (1985). Our analysis uses much more data spanning four decades, a larger set of control variables, and levels of size variables without forcing untenable assumption of interval/ratio scale and linear effects. Our results do not necessarily contradict, but rather extend Wilson (1985): there is misanthropy in the largest places and we find more robust evidence than Wilson (1985) in this regard. Concurrently, we confirm the finding by Fischer (1981) of a relatively strong relationship between community size and distrust. Notably, we find that rural misanthropy is on the rise.

As in any correlational study, we cannot claim causality. There are, however, reasons to believe that urbanicity can cause misanthropy. Size, density, and heterogeneity are theoretically linked to many negative emotions (Wirth, 1938), and make general dislike for humankind likely. Homophily and evolutionary arguments discussed earlier also support this reasoning. Furthermore, there is neurological and experimental evidence that city living is unhealthy to the human brain (Lederbogen et al., 2011) and causes lower trust (Milgram, 1970).

Reverse causality would not make sense: misanthropy or distrust/dislike of people, should not lead someone to live in close proximity to many people, in a city. This rationale should also exclude self-selection—if anything, people who love to be among people, not misanthropes, would choose to move to and/or stay in cities. Perhaps, this reasoning can explain the results showing that while misanthropy is high in the largest cities, it is also high in the countryside. Arguably, many people tired of urban crowds move to the countryside (e.g., Dewey, 2017). On the other hand, a potential reason for a misanthrope, or any non-conformist type, to live in a city (or wilderness; but not in a village or small town), is anonymity.

Can the relationship between urbanicity and misanthropy be spurious? Cities have many problems: notably urban poverty and urban crime which can intensify misanthropy. We cannot control for all urban problems, but we have controlled for the key urban problem leading to misanthropy: fear of crime, and we also accounted for poverty by controlling for family income. Still, would there be urban misanthropy if there were no urban problems? Should we expect misanthropy in a city with low crime rates, low levels of inequality, plentiful affordable amenities, parks, public spaces, and so forth? Urban areas devoid of urban problems may arguably experience less misanthropy. However, substantial urban misanthropy could still be present even in the absence of urban problems because, at least to some degree, it is the city itself, its core characteristics that lead to misanthropy as discussed in the literature review earlier. All large cities have large population, moderate-high or high density, and usually moderate or high heterogeneity as compared to smaller places. Some degree of misanthropy is a natural state of urban life—we concur with Thrift that: "misanthropy is a natural condition of cities, one which cannot be avoided and will not go away" (Thrift, 2005).

Two apparently important missing variables are measures of discontent and inequality. However, both inequality (e.g., Daley, 2020) and arguably discontent, especially recently (e.g., Case & Deaton, 2015;

[2] The term misanthropolis was coined by one of the authors, Rubia Valente.

Fuller, 2017; Hanson, 2015) are higher in rural areas. Therefore, potential left out variable bias actually makes our results conservative—our pooled results would have been stronger, had we controlled for these variables. And our over-time analysis would possibly have indicated a smaller increase (if any) in rural misanthropy, had we controlled for inequality and especially discontent. In addition, Americans are quite resilient to inequality, at least as compared to Europeans (Alesina et al., 2004), and hence inequality may not matter much for misanthropy in the US. Still, future research should test whether inequality and discontent affect these results.

Future research should also control for numerous urban amenities (e.g., parks, public spaces) affecting quality of life in cities, and examine the urbanity-misanthropy nexus of specific metropolitan areas in the United States. The GSS public version of the dataset used here does not allow for identification of municipalities. Another venue for future research is to examine the effect of urbanicity during one's childhood: does urban upbringing affect one's misanthropy later in life? We know that urban upbringing has negative consequences on neural processing and subjective wellbeing (SWB) later in life (Lederbogen et al., 2011; Okulicz-Kozaryn & Valente, 2020).

Why are smaller places becoming more misanthropic? One possible explanation is that rural folks and smaller places are being left behind (Fuller, 2017; Hanson, 2015; Okulicz-Kozaryn, 2015b; Okulicz-Kozaryn, 2018; Okulicz-Kozaryn & Valente, 2018)—rural areas are economically disadvantaged (Glaeser, 2011; O'Sullivan, 2009; Florida, 2021)—economic and educational opportunities, as well as other social benefits tend to abound in cities as previously discussed. It's possible that rural resentment could lead to increasing rural misanthropy, which we observed in this study, particularly as rural folks feel that they are being governed by an urbanized elite (Fuller, 2017; Wuthnow, 2018).

Smith (1997) argued that the more subordinate a group is, and the more isolated the members of the group are, the greater the level of misanthropy. This could help explain increasing rural misanthropy. Although, the rural resentment may be more against cities or urbanites, rather than people in general.[3] More research is needed to better understand this phenomenon in rural areas.

5.1. Takeaway for policy and practice

It is undeniable that there are multiple economic, environmental, and social advantages to cities. Cities are largely necessary, and so is perhaps urban misanthropy—to survive and function in a city. This echoes Simmel's *blasé* attitude comment when describing an urbanite—in order to survive and function in a city, one must withdraw (Simmel, 1903). Or as put commonsensically by Charlie Brooker: "I live in London […] Misanthropy's the only thing that gets you through it. It's not a personality flaw, it's a skill." Neurological (Lederbogen et al., 2011) and experimental (Milgram, 1970) evidence confirms Simmel's observations. There are serious disadvantages to urban life, and they should be taken into account by planners and practitioners.

More consideration should be given to smaller areas that have been left behind, as lamented by some (e.g., Fuller, 2017; Hanson, 2015), but not heard by most. An alarming emergency is the so called "deaths of despair"—Americans killing themselves out of despair—and the problem is more rural than urban or suburban (Case & Deaton, 2015, 2020). Denying resources to smaller places should be given more thought and consideration.

Although heterogeneity can contribute to misanthropy in cities, if mechanisms are in place to facilitate dialogue across different groups and if people are encouraged to interact with each other, that is, if the "melting pot" really happens, and the "other" becomes a fellow human being, then diversity can yield important social and economic benefits (Rodríguez-Pose and Von Berlepsch, 2019). Thus, there is a case to be made in favor of more recreational opportunities and events, community services, and social spaces in the largest cities to promote social connections and create a sense of community. Future research should determine whether these recommendations can curtail misanthropy in cities. Auxiliary evidence already exists—distrust and dislike are largely about strangers and outgroups (Delhey et al., 2011; Wilson, 1985), and interventions can turn outgroups into ingroups, e.g., a new group such as a sports team can be formed to turn strangers into an ingroup (e.g., Smith et al., 2010).

Misanthropy may not seem tangible or meaningful for urban planners and practitioners at a first glance. When consideration is given to how misanthropy can cause negative outcomes, however, there are reasons to be concerned. Misanthropy reduces people's desire to invest and to be involved in their communities and may remove social bonds that deter people from harming others (Fafchamps & Minten, 2006; Hirschi & Gottfredson, 1993; Walters & DeLisi, 2013; Weaver, 2006). Furthermore, misanthropy is correlated with dysfunctional and animus behaviors such as homophobia, sexism, racism, and ageism (Cattacin et al., 2006). Overall, misanthropy can arguably contribute to isolation and loneliness—urban problems with serious consequences that city planners have to grapple with.

Given our findings, it is impossible to overlook the current COVID-19 pandemic effects—large cities in general experience the worst infectious diseases spread (Bettencourt et al., 2010). This health crisis will arguably further exacerbate misanthropy in the largest metropolitan areas, as fear and suspicion of the 'other' increases—many people have fled New York City, for example, to stay away from other people. The avoidance and distrust of 'others' due to fear of infection, particularly in the largest and densest cities, may have intensified misanthropy and should be considered as well.

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CRediT authorship contribution statement

Adam Okulicz-Kozaryn: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Writing – review & editing, Data curation, Software, Visualization, Writing – original draft. **Rubia R. Valente:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

Declaration of competing interest

Authors declare no conflict of interest

Data availability

data are public

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2022.103945.

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[3] We thank an anonymous reviewer for this point. More discussion is available in the Supplementary online material (SOM).

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