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Xenophobia and Anti-Europeanism: The Relevance of National and European Identities for Explaining Tolerance Towards Immigrants



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Theoretical framework

Traditionally, theories that have attempted to explain why prejudices towards immigrants develop have focused on **individual characteristics** (Quillian, 1995):

- ❖ **Socio-psychological theory** (Allport, 1954) considers prejudice as the result of individual emotional and/or cognitive processes that are outside conscious control. Prejudice comes from the displacement of fear or anxiety about others. Both ignorance about members of outgroups and faulty generalizations promote prejudice, whereas education and social interaction correlate with positive attitudes towards immigrants.
- ❖ **The self-interest model** (Bobo and Hutchings, 1996) argues that individuals develop negative feelings and rigid stereotypes towards people with whom they compete and are in conflict.

Quillian (1995) indicates **that these theories do not explain the change in prejudices in different regions of the same country or in different time periods**. Quillian (1995) proposes **group threat theory**, starting from Blumer's definition of prejudice as being a response to threats to the privileges of the group (1958). This theory postulates that the collective threat is based on two factors: **the size** of the subordinate group relative to that of the dominant one, and **economic circumstances**. When the relative size of the immigrant population increases, an economic crisis exists, or a combination of both, natives will increase their perception of collective threat and will develop negative attitudes towards immigrants.

Theoretical framework

Another academic line of research developed in recent years uses **individuals' values** as a factor that predicts the formation of prejudice:

- ❖ According to **Schwartz's theory**, we expect people who hold **values of conservation** to develop negative attitudes towards immigration because immigration usually brings changes in traditions and norms. In contrast, people with **values related to universalism** (tolerance, understanding and concern for the well-being of all human beings) hold positive attitudes towards immigration. **Davidov and his colleagues** (2008, 2012) find these values are **strong predictors of attitudes towards immigration**.
- ❖ Another highly influential theory of values is **value change theory**, developed by Inglehart (1990, 1997). Inglehart proposes that economic development after World War II caused a process of value change in the Western world. The new generations, socialized in an environment of economic and physical security, developed **postmaterialist values, or self-expression values**, in contrast to older generations, who had grown up in an environment of deprivation and held materialist or survival values. People with postmaterialist values hold a **positive attitude towards ethnocultural differences** (Janmaal and Braun, 2009).
- ❖ Finally, some authors have analyzed **the more or less exclusive character of national identity** that an individual holds in order to explain his or her attitudes towards immigrants. **O'Rourke and Sinnott** (2006) find two underlying dimensions of nationalist attitudes. They call the first "**patriotism**", includes preference for one's own country and a sense of its superiority over others. The second, which they call "**chauvinism**," involves a narrow or exclusive sense of nationality, combined with staunch defence of country, right or wrong. The results show that both dimensions, particularly the second, have a **strong positive effect on anti-immigrant feeling**.

Theoretical framework

The association between exclusive national identities and anti-immigrant feeling has its parallelism with the link between these identities and anti-europeanist feeling.

- ❖ It follows from **social identity theory** (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Tajfel, 1981) that, in order to develop, **European identity must contribute to positive aspects of people's social identity**. Many authors have stressed the importance of national context for understanding the greater or lesser difficulty of developing European identity and of pro-European attitudes in general. The compatibility between European and national identities depends, however, on the way people think about their identities and whether they are afraid that European integration could mean loss of their national identities, their culture and their language (Carey, 2002; Citrin and Sides, 2004; Díez Medrano 2003; Duchesne and Frogner, 1995; McLaren, 2004). **The incompatibility between British and European identities partly explained the Brexit process.**
- ❖ The association found between identities and tolerance in previous studies could be related to the concept of **"Social Identity Complexity"** proposed by Roccas and Brewer (2002). This concept defines **how individuals combine multiple in-group identities**. When a person perceives a small overlapping membership between various in-groups, "the boundaries of each in-group are defined in such a way that they include members who do not share the other identities. In this case, the combined group identities are larger and more inclusive than any of the in-groups alone" (Brewer et al., 2012:530). According to Roccas and Brewer (2002), **higher social identity complexity is associated with higher openness and with tolerance towards out-groups.**
- ❖ Following this reasoning, **we could expect that people who hold simultaneous various social identities which do not overlap show a greater social identity complexity and they are more inclusive and more tolerant with immigrants.**

Hypotheses:

The main objective of this study is to analyze **the impact of values and political identities on the development of positive attitudes towards immigrants**. The study also tests group threat theory, socio-psychological theory and self-interest theory.

Hypotheses:

- H1) **Socio-demographic variables** are poorer predictors of attitudes towards immigration than values, attitudes and contextual variables.
- H2) **Broader and more complex identities** which do not overlap (like feeling European and feeling like a citizen of the world) are associated with more positive attitudes towards immigrants.
- H3) **National contexts** are important factors for explaining prejudice towards immigrants.

H3a. **According to perceived group threat theory**, we expect attitudes towards immigrants to be less positive in countries that have suffered the economic crisis more intensely or where the GDP per capita is lower.

H3b. **In contrast to perceived group threat theory**, we believe that the size of the immigrant community in a country has no direct correlation to the prejudice towards its members, even if we consider economic circumstances, because one should take into account historical and cultural factors, both of the host society and the immigrants who live within it. One of these variables is **cultural proximity of immigrant population** to host society: positive attitudes increased when immigrant population is more similar to the national majority, irrespective of the size of the immigrant population.

H3c. Finally, we expect that **taking into account national contexts individually** could better explain attitudes towards immigrants than a model that only includes economic and demographic factors.

Database and methodology:

• **Source of data:**

- Eurobarometer 71.3 (2009). Our analysis includes only the national samples of countries forming part of the Eurozone in 2009, since these states maintain stronger ties with each other and are more interdependent in economic terms. This is a total of eleven countries: Spain, Portugal, Greece, Ireland and Italy (who have suffered more deeply the economic crisis), and Germany, France, the Netherlands, Austria, Belgium and Finland.
- This Eurobarometer includes both items related to attitudes towards immigrants and to the components of National and European identities.

Dependent variable:

It was created through a categorical component analysis (CAPTCA). The scores for the first component were used as the scale of positive attitudes towards immigrants.

Independent variables:

Four groups related to different theoretical approaches (socio-demographic, values, attitudes towards the EU, macro-level variables).

Results:

- ❖ Our findings do not confirm self-interest model, whereas support socio-psychological theory (relevance of education) and perceived group theory (relevance of economic circumstances and size of immigrant community).
- ❖ As expected, results have shown the relevance of attitudes towards the EU and post-materialist values for understanding the development of positive attitudes towards immigrants. Feeling European is associated with positive attitude towards immigrants. This pattern explains why extreme-right parties have adopted an anti-European and anti-immigrant discourse.

To know more...

- García-Faroldi, Livia (2017). Determinants of Attitudes towards Immigration: Testing the Influence of Interculturalism, Group Threat Theory and National Contexts in Time of Crisis. *International Migration*, 55 (2), 10-22.