

UNU-GCM Policy Reports

Migration, Media and Intercultural Dialogue

POLICY REPORT UNU-GCM 01/10

Attitudes towards immigrants in European Societies. A comparison between the Perceived Group Threats Theory and the Intercultural Values Theory through a multi-level analysis

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This is a report of the United Nations University Institute on Globalization, Culture and Mobility. It forms part of the series, *Migration, Media and Intercultural Dialogue*. It should be cited as:

Bello, Valeria. *Attitudes towards immigrants in European Societies. A comparison between the Perceived Group Threats Theory and the Intercultural Values Theory through a multi-level analysis*. Policy Report No. 01/10. Barcelona: United Nations University Institute on Globalization, Culture and Mobility (UNU-GCM), 2013.

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This research programme focuses on a range of issues, theoretical and practical, related to cultural diversity and difference. Migration and media are twin facets of globalization, the one demographic, with crucial spatio-temporal consequences, and the other cultural and technological. While migration often poses the question of cultural difference, diverse forms of media play a key role in enabling representation, thus forging modes of communication. Through a focus on the role of media, this research programme explores the extent to which the latter bridges cultural differences in contexts of migration and facilitates intercultural dialogue. Of interest too are the ways in which media can mobilize societies and cultures. Also relevant is the role of media in triggering migration, as well as in connecting migrants to their homelands.

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Summary

The emergence of prejudice and attitudes towards immigrants more generally is not only a domestic issue but is now entering the field of international relations. The way immigrants are received, integrated into and regarded in host countries and societies has also become an object of discussion within the UN Security Council. UN Member States recognize complications in these questions as root causes of terrorism and other problems arising in the field of international security. This report investigates attitudes towards immigrants by comparing the Perceived Group Threats Theory with the Intercultural Values Theory. It will first introduce the theories developed in the scientific debate and then summarize the findings of a multilevel analysis carried out on the data pertaining to the European countries most affected by the economic crisis.

Aims and Objectives

The aim of this work is to understand if intercultural values act as intervening variables and, as such, if they are able to modify the effects economic factors exert on prejudice. Both theories of economic factors (such as the Theory of Group Conflict or that of the Perceived Group Threats) and theories of intercultural values have been employed in sociological literature to explain individuals' dispositions towards outsiders and both have proved correct. The main objective is to identify whether the kinds of values instilled within societies play a stronger role compared to other variables, and particularly compared to economic factors. Following the findings, this report formulates policy recommendations in order to smooth relations between parties involved in Intercultural Dialogue currently taking place, within and outside the UN.

Previous Studies

Individual-level theories of attitudes towards immigrants

The continuous rise in immigration which has been taking place in Europe since the end of the Second World War has meant the transformation of Western European countries into net immigrant recipients since the mid- 1970s. This explains the great interest scholars of sociology have in the phenomenon. Indeed, immigration raises several issues, from how to integrate immigrants, to responding to the emergence of racist/xenophobic incidents and prejudice and discriminatory attitudes towards out-groups. The latter are also objects of discussion within the UN Security Council, as they are recognized as root causes of terrorism and other problems arising in the field of international security (Bello 2013, report 1).

Until now research has primarily focused on individual characteristics that affect people's attitudes towards out-group populations. This has led to studies of demographic, socio-economic, political, socio-psychological and cultural factors.

Since the mid '90s, a number of authors have investigated group-level sources of prejudice, mainly following Quillian's application (1995) of Blumer's theory of prejudice as a sense of group position (1958). This theory, like the one of group conflict, also focuses on the role which economic variables play for prejudice, even though it combines them with identity factors. Both approaches have contributed to today's greater understanding of the issue.

Among the first theories of socio-psychological components of prejudice, Adorno et al.'s (1950) model of the "authoritarian personality" explains how certain personal attributes are linked to negative attitudes towards foreigners. According to this theoretical framework, older, right-wing males (all three attributes related to the authoritarian personality) are more likely to be more prejudiced against immigrants. This model has also allowed scholars to link individuals' alienation with prejudice (Bobo and Hutchings 1996; Quillian 1995). Instead, Allport's model (1954) focused on the irrational component of prejudice. He was the first to consider the role of both ignorance about members of out-groups and faulty generalizations in affecting attitudes towards immigrants. According to this perspective, education and social interactions have always been correlated to more positive attitudes towards immigrants. Thus, Allport's model¹ has inspired both the socio-psychological approach (Kats 1991) and the social networks approach (i.e. Baerveldt et al. 2004; Takács 2007) to the study of individual dispositions towards immigrants. Allport's model of prejudice also connects personal trauma, negative affective behaviours, life satisfaction, and socially learned feelings of dislike and aversion in general to negative attitudes towards immigrants.

The Self-interest Model, on the other hand, associates individuals' vulnerabilities with prejudice, by emphasizing the role of economic interests in determining hostility towards out-groups. According to this perspective, immigrants are seen as competitors both in the job market and for the receipt of welfare and social services. Therefore, low-skilled workers, people in lower income groups and people in low-status jobs are more likely to show negative attitudes towards immigrants (Bobo and Hutchings 1996; Quillian 1995; Semyonov, Rajzman and Gorodzeisky 2006).

¹ Bogardus' (1928) concept of social distance was also important in the development of these theories, as Bobo and Hutchings testify (1996).

Bobo and Hutchings test these three different perspectives (Blumer's Sense of Group Position; the Socio-psychological Approach and the Self-Interest Model) on data pertaining to the US, and extend Blumer's Theory of Group Position to a multiracial context. Their findings confirm that different determinants apply for different groups (Blacks, Latinos or Asians). For Blacks, social distance matters and income does not, but the opposite is true for the other two groups (Bobo and Hutchings 1996).

Lastly, some scholars focus on the role that values play in conditioning negative or positive attitudes towards immigrants (Davidov and Meulemann 2012; Dandy and Pe-Pua 2010; Ward and Masgoret 2008). In particular, Ward and Masgoret (2008) identify multicultural ideology and intercultural contacts as factors that contribute to a decreased perception of threat and which lead to positive attitudes towards immigrants and immigration policies. Similarly, Dandy and Pe-Pua (2010), investigating the role of multiculturalism and cultural diversity in dominant and non-dominant groups in three Australian States find that dominant groups' collective identity is linked to immigration attitudes and that, in particular, multiculturalism and inter-cultural contacts help the development of positive feelings towards out-groups. Davidov *et al.* (2008, but see also Davidov and Meuleman 2012), focusing on the role of values in European countries, distinguish between self-transcendent and conservative individuals. Their results show that self-transcendent values – which include understanding, appreciation, tolerance and protectiveness towards people and nature (also identified as universalism) – are promoted by the arrival of immigrants (Davidov *et al.* 2008) and correlated with individuals' positive dispositions towards immigration policies in the European countries included in their analysis (Davidov and Meuleman 2012).

Despite the importance of this literature on individual determinants of attitudes towards immigrants, substantial questions, particularly across countries, remain unexplored (Quillian 1995, Davidov and Meuleman 2012; Semyonov *et al.* 2006). This gap has prompted scholars, since the mid-'90s, to investigate context level sources of prejudice, influencing prejudice simultaneously with individual level variables.

Context-level theories of attitudes towards immigrants

Quillian, following the work of Blumer (1958), started a new trend in the middle of the '90s, which examines structural sources of prejudice towards out-groups, and in particular "prejudice as a response to perceived group-threat" (Quillian 1995). This branch of research applies multi-level (or hierarchical) regression methods to the social sciences. This specific statistical analysis enables scholars to investigate the mutual influence between individuals and society (Hox 2010). Several scholars have attempted to explain the effects of context variables on attitudes towards immigrants (Quillian 1995; Scheepers *et al.* 2002; Coenders *et al.* 2004; Semyonov *et al.* 2006; Strabac and Listhaug 2008, Green 2009, Staerke *et al.* 2010, Davidov and Meuleman 2012). All these studies confirm that part of the variance in people's negative feelings about foreigners is at the context level. Other authors attempt to explain context variation through different cross-country comparative techniques (O'Rourke and Sinnot 2006; Green 2007, Bail 2008, Davidov *et al.* 2008).

Quillian (1995) combines Blumer's suggestions with Blalock's (1956) and Lieberson's (1980) theoretical ideas. His findings prove that prejudice is a response to perceived group threats. These are determined by the interaction of two factors: the size of immigrant communities and worsening economic conditions (Quillian 1995). Variations of Quillian's approach have been applied in a few studies, most of which confirm that the size of out-group populations combined with the economic

condition of the country affects attitudes towards immigrants (Semyonov et al. 2006). O'Rourke and Sinnott (2006) confirmed Quillian's findings that the size of a country's GDP alone is not relevant, while its interactions with immigrant percentages is significant, thus confirming the role played by the sense of group position. This is also reflected by results showing that GDP per capita alone has little (Davidov and Meuleman 2012) or no impact (Davidov et al 2008; Strabach and Listhaug 2008). Another interesting finding is that, while the self-interest theory proves correct for most vulnerabilities in the labour force within a country (low-skills, low status, low income), the expectations on people not in the labour force are not confirmed. That is, the unemployed are not more prejudiced against immigrants than are the employed (O'Rourke and Sinnott 2006).

Blumer's Theory of the Sense of Group Position has therefore so far proved to be one of the most appropriate at explaining some of the group-level sources of prejudice, particularly in the light of Quillian's interpretation (1995).

Results

This report examines a context in which economic factors had already proven influential on attitudes towards immigrants in society. However, it challenges the suggestion that only economic factors are relevant. Indeed, it demonstrates that even in the context of economic crisis, existing intercultural values in society have a stronger effect than economic ones on attitudes towards immigrants. This hypothesis is based on the fact that an analysis of intercultural dialogue in the context of economic crisis would lead to results that were robust. Therefore, the European countries most touched by the economic crisis² were included in a sample and it was checked through a statistic analysis (an ANOVA test of the means³ of attitudes towards immigrants) if the economic crisis was indeed relevant in changing individuals' attitudes towards immigrants. The data were taken from the European Social Survey (ESS)⁴ database (round 1 to 5). The analysis tested whether the time period 2002-2006 (time period 1 in Tables 1 and 2) was statistically significantly different from the time period 2008-2010 (time period 2 in Tables 1 and 2).

² As they result from OECD and IFM statistics, they are Ireland, Portugal, Greece, Italy and Spain. Italy is not included from the ESS rounds 3 and following. For this reason, this country was not included in the analysis.

³ Average.

⁴ For details on this Survey, please see <<http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/>> (lastly retrieved on 05 July, 2013).

Table 1: Findings of the ANOVA test on the means of individual attitudes towards immigrants in the countries mostly affected by the economic crisis.

Time period	N	Mean	St.dev	Std Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Min.	Max.
					Lower bound	Upper bound		
1,00	20981	4,52	2,350	,016	4,49	4,56	0	10
2,00	17482	4,33	2,374	,018	4,30	4,37	0	10
Total	38463	4,44	2,363	,012	4,41	4,46	0	10
Levene Stat.	df1	df2	Sig.	ANOVA	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F
10,016	1	38461	,002	Between-groups	359,331	1	359,331	64,461 (Sig. .000)
				Within-groups	214397,948	38461	5,574	
				Total	214757,279	38462		

Table 2: Findings of the ANOVA test on the means of individual attitudes towards immigrants in the 25 countries included in the ESS database.

Time period	N	Mean	St.dev	Std Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Min.	Max.
					Lower bound	Upper bound		
1,00	126220	4,73	2,291	,006	4,71	4,74	0	10
2,00	97629	4,74	2,344	,008	4,73	4,76	0	10
Total	223849	4,73	2,315	,005	4,72	4,74	0	10
Levene Stat.	df1	df2	Sig.	ANOVA	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F
110,346	1	223847	,000	Between-groups	13,036	1	13,036	2433 (Sig. .119)
				Within-groups	1,199,315 ,698	223847	5,358	
				Total	1,199,328 ,734	223848		

Dependent Variable: Immigrants make country a worse (0) or a better (10) place.. Factor: 1= years 2002-2006; 2= 2008-2010. ESS Database(round 1-5).

As in Table 1 the ANOVA test shows, the economic crisis indeed played a role in increasing prejudice in these countries. The F value of between-groups sum of squares of the means is significant. Instead, in the total sample made of the 25 European countries included in the ESS database (see Table 2), the between-groups difference is not significant. Therefore, the economic crisis indeed increased prejudice in the most affected countries but there is no evidence of this for all 25 European countries.

Consequently, as these results allow to go in this direction, the analysis employed a multilevel analysis on this group of countries to understand the magnitude of the role played by the different determinants identified in the literature as sources of prejudice.

Table 3: Multilevel analysis for the dependent variable "Immigrants make [country] a worse (0) or a better (10) place to live".

	Modelo Nulo	Modelo 1	Mod. 2a	Mod. 2b	Mod. 2c	Modelo 3
Parameter	Coef.	Coef.	Coef.	Coef.	Coef.	Coef.
Intercept	4,549***	-,31798 (No Sig)	-2,0299 (No Sig)	,185944 (No Sig)	-1,860830 (No Sig)	4,1104
[gndr=1 man; 2 female]		,227867	,227140	,228835	,228454	0,2289
[trauma=1 si; 2 no]		-,062538 (No Sig)	-,06241 (No sig)	-,07883*	-,079424*	-0,0798*
Age (year born)		,001688 (No Sig)	,001699 (No Sig)	,001345 (No sig)	,001380 (No sig)	0,0014 (No sig)
education		,040283	,039714	,037361	,036927	0,0370
domicile		-,061218	-,061993	-,065637	-,066449	-0,0666
Life satisfaction		,051742	,051354	,044184	,043737	0,0441
Income		-,116601	-,116400	-,128376	-,127372	-0,1273
Job (0 no skilled; 4 elite)		,045199	,045437	,055214	,055491	0,0554
Left-right scale		-,057239	-,057375	-,060162	-,060131	-0,0600
Religiosity		-,014001*	-,01422*	-,011386 (No sig)	-,011220 (No sig)	-0,0109 (No sig)
Authoritarian personality		-,065113***	-,065230	-,073765	-,073816	-0,0737
Social contacts		-,021150*	-,01967*	-,02514*	-,024211*	-0,0248*
Social activities		,063981***	,0633***	,0654***	,06517***	0,0654***
Self-transcendence		,337131	,336887	,378907	,378603	0,3786
Conservatism		-,233781	-,234265	-,246474	-,247451	-0,2469
Alienation		,222641	,222440	,226394	,226028	0,2258
GDP per capita			,068241 (No sig)		,032051 (No sig)	0,0001
GDP annual growth			5,7E+00**		9,32E+00**	
Short-term immigrant percentages				2,212838 (No sig)	-10,506275 (No sig)	-14,588**
Long-term foreign resident numbers				2,81E+00 (No sig)	,000161*	,00024***
GDP per cap * imm. percentage						,001242*

<i>Covariance</i>						
Residuals	4,669589	4,191767	4,191763	4,176588	4,176583	4,17658
Intercept (context= country)	0,840766**	0,368612**	0,192844**	0,425493**	0,168979*	0,10829*
Total	5,510355	4,560379	4,384607	4,602081	4,345562	4,28487
Intra-class correlation	0,152579	0,080829	0,043982	0,092457	0,038885	0,025272
<i>Explained Variance</i>						
Individual level (residuals)		0,102326	0,102327	0,105577	0,105578	0,10558
Context level (intercept)		0,561576**	0,770633**	0,493922	0,799018	0,8712
Difference with empty model			0,209057	-0,067654	0,237442	0,30963

Dependent variable: Immigrants make Country a worse (o) or better (10) place to live. ESS (round 1-5).

All the values are fully significant (sig. .000) with the exception of * sig. .05; ** Sig. .01; *** Sig. .005

The empty model provides us with the estimates of covariance parameters from which the intra-class correlation (ρ) is calculated, revealing the proportion of variance explained at the highest level. As Table 3 shows, the intra-class correlation confirms that a high proportion of the variance is at the country level, with $\rho > .10$, which is considered to be the minimum level of variance at context level needed to make sense of a multilevel analysis. In particular, for the first dependent variable $\rho = .15$. As this means that there is a high proportion of variance at context level, a multilevel regression analysis is a suitable statistical tool; it is able to clarify how the country level affects attitudes towards immigrants. I start by employing a model with random intercept and individual variables only as fixed effects (model 1). The findings confirm my expectations about individual level variables. The introduction of individual level variables explained 10% of the variance at the individual level and 56% at the context level (Model 1 in Table 3). In other words, the different composition of countries in terms of individuals explains a substantial part of country level variation.

The inclusion of context variables in model 2, other 21% of variance is explained at context level. By including only percentages of immigrants in the model, the model shows a worse fit of goodness. Instead, when the model adds to immigrants' numbers, also economic variable among context factors, 80% of the variance is explained at context level. For this reason, Qullian's theory of perceived group position is the correct one to explain context level determinants of prejudice.

Table 4: Impact of significant independent variables on the dependent variable (a)

Parameter	Coefficient	Scale points	Change in the dependent variable scale
[Gender=1 man; 2 female]	,228870	2	0,46
[Trauma=1 yes; 2 no]	-,079842	2	-0,16
Education	,037045	30	1,11
Domicile	-,066614	5	-0,33
Life satisfaction	,044054	11	0,48
Income	-,127321	4	-0,51
Job (0 no skilled; 4 elite]	,055433	5	0,28
Left-right Scale	-,060030	11	-0,66
Authoritarian personality	-,073677	7	-0,52
Social contacts	-,024803	7	-0,17
Social activities	,065353	7	0,45
Self-transcendence	,378560	6	2,27
Conservatism	-,246923	6	-1,48
Alienation	,225810	10	2,26
GDP pro capita	,000110	18539	2,04
Long term foreign residents	,000238	5511,37	1,31
Short-term immigrants percentages	-14,5881	0,11	-1,46

(a) Immigrants make Country a worse (o) or better (10) place to live.

As Table 4 shows, at context level, between the worst performing country and the best performing country, when GDP per capita is taken into account, there is a 2.04-point difference in the scale of the dependent variable. Other important variables at context level are the numbers of immigrants, both in terms of long-term foreigner resident and short-term ones. But while the higher the number of long-term immigrants, the better individuals' attitudes towards them, in contrast, the higher the number of short-term outsiders, the worse individuals' attitudes towards all migrants.

Importantly, at the individual level, the most powerful determinants are those represented by the intercultural values (called "self-transcendence", following Davidov et al 2008). Other important factors are: alienation – among the socio-psychological determinants – conservatism and education. These variables are the most powerful determinants of attitudes towards immigrants, after controlling for all other factors included in the model. This means that, when the effects of all other variables comprised by the model (age, gender, political orientations, role of trauma, domicile, education, life satisfaction, income, job, authoritarian personality, social contacts, social activities, intercultural

values, conservatism, and alienation at individual level, plus GDP and number of immigrants at context level) are already taken into account -controlled⁵-, the most important factors influencing prejudice are: intercultural values, alienation, countries' GDP per capita, long-term foreign residents, conservatism and education. However, education does not have a particularly strong effect, if we consider the scale of the variable. In my model, 25 years of education lead to an increase of 1.11 points on the 10-point scale of the dependent variable. All the other individual level variables move less than one point on the dependent variable scale between the worst and the best performers. The self-interest theories in particular have quite a weak impact on attitudes towards immigrants compared to other variables at individual level.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings confirm that the perceived group threats strongly affect individuals' attitudes towards immigrants. The self-interest theory instead plays a weak role in determining attitudes towards immigrants at individual level. Cultural aspects play a much greater role, as the findings confirm. Education shows a moderate effect. As the strongest effects of cultural values are produced by self-transcendence and conservatism, it is clear that not education per se, but rather the kind of education provided to individuals, has a crucial impact on people's attitudes towards immigrants. Particularly, self-transcendent values (Davidov et al 2008) seem to be the strongest determinants of positive attitudes towards immigrants. This concept can be related with the concept of intercultural dialogue.

Taking into account the most powerful variable in influencing attitudes towards immigrants, it is strongly recommended that:

- States push forward education policies embracing intercultural values;
- Local governments help implement measures preventing alienation locally;
- Governments create opportunities for allowing migrants to settle in the country for longer time frames.

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⁵ Statistically, the analyses does this by centering them around the mean and simultaneously applying its coefficient in the regression.

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Design and layout: Regina Salanova

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