

Pre-analysis plan for:
The effects of status perceptions on immigration
attitudes

Biljana Meiske*

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Abstract

This work focuses on studying the dynamics of inter-minority relations and attempts to uncover the influence of the minority-group's status position in the host country on its members' attitudes towards other minorities. I hypothesize that relative status deprivation, that is the negative difference in status between own ethnic/national group and that of the native majority, has a negative impact on group members' attitudes toward an even lower ranked status group (such as refugees). In order to test these predictions, an online experiment (N=1000) is implemented, where participants with migration background residing in Germany receive either a positive or a negative evaluation of their own ethnic/national ingroup, as evaluated by a group of ethnic German participants, while fixing the evaluations of other immigrant groups. Thereafter, multiple attitudinal and one quasi-behavioral measure of position towards immigration of refugees are elicited. I test for the possible channels of the effect, including the change in perceived norm, indirect reciprocity, and preference for equality of treatment.

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*Max Planck Institute for Tax Law and Public Finance, Munich biljana.meiske@tax.mpg.de

1 Introduction

The indications that AfD, an Euro-sceptic right-wing party in Germany, that based the core of its platform on opposing immigration, had reached higher electoral support in 2017 federal election among the so-called Russian-speaking German community compared to the national average ([Goerres et al. \(2020\)](#)), attracted a lot of media attention in Germany. Indeed, this is seemingly counter-intuitive – why would groups who themselves have a history of immigration and are also largely perceived by natives as immigrants support anti-immigration platforms? This is however not a sole example of such dynamics. Cases of negative immigration attitudes expressed by the groups of immigrants were also found for example in Switzerland ([Strijbis and Polavieja \(2018\)](#)), Belgium ([Meeusen et al. \(2019\)](#)) and Austria ([Neuhold \(2020\)](#)).

The question that arises in this context is that of the expected position of established immigrants, that is those who already have resided in the host countries for longer time, toward new flows of immigration, and the drivers behind these positions. This work focuses on studying the dynamics of inter-minority relations and attempts to uncover the influence of the minority-group’s status position in the host country on it’s members’ attitudes towards other minorities. I hypothesize that relative status deprivation, that is the negative difference in status between own ethnic/national group and that of the native majority (or other, more favorably perceived minorities), has a negative impact on group’s members’ attitudes toward an even lower ranked status group (e.g., such as refugees).

Tendency of individuals to classify themselves and others into in- and out-groups as well as the competition for status is a well documented and seemingly universal characteristic of human societies. In the context of a country populated by high-status majority and some immigrant minority groups, an appearance of a new immigrant group can trigger the redistribution of status, and open a possibility for the groups to be re-positioned in the hierarchy. For example, the results of [Fouka et al. \(2021\)](#) and [Fouka et al. \(2020\)](#) show, on two separate examples, how an influx

of a new and salient immigration groups (African Americans during the Great Migration and Mexicans in the nineties) in the U.S. led native whites to improve attitudes towards minorities that were present prior to the influx (European immigrants and African Americans respectively). It is argued that the appearance of the new group, that was perceived to be more distant from the majority than the existing minorities, led the with the majority to perceive a lower social distance to established immigrants and re-categorize them as in-group. What remains unanswered is whether the established minorities also perceive the appearance of a new group as a possibility for improving own status and respond to it by assigning higher value to the characteristic that they share with the majority group (e.g., common religion) and lower value to the the characteristics that they share with the new group (e.g. being immigrant), specifically if the majority shows scepticism towards the newcomers. Furthermore, one could hypothesize that the minorities residing in contexts with particularly salient ethnic/national hierarchies, as well as those occupying lower positions in such a hierarchy would have more to gain from an upward move, and would thus be particularly eager to engage in inter-minority competition. Even in absence of strategic behavior on the part of established immigrants, it could be hypothesized that the groups that were socialized in the presence of a steep ethnic hierarchy, and were exposed to unfavorable treatment in the course of their integration, grow to normalize inter-ethnic competition and hostility as legitimate social dynamics, and are thus more likely to apply it towards the lower ranked groups once they encounter them. In a certain sense, requesting newcomers to have it at least as difficult as one had it themselves would amount to a request for a perverse version of procedural fairness.

To test this idea, I use a survey-experiment with a sample of participants with immigration background residing in Germany and experimentally vary the status of the participants' in-group. In a separate pre-study a smaller group of participants from majority population, that is those with no immigration background, is asked to assess to which degree they see different immigrant groups (structured along the

region of their origin) to contribute or undermine the socio-economic and cultural life in their country. Participants in this phase can evaluate any of the suggested groups positively or negatively, so that the hierarchy among immigrant groups is not implied per construction of the design. In the second and main part of the experiment, a sample of participants with migration background is presented a subset of answers elicited in the first phase. Thereby, participants are randomly chosen to be presented a subset of answers that evaluates their in-group either positively or negatively, while holding the evaluation of other out-groups constant. The main outcome of interest, captured by respondents' willingness to forgo some part of their experimental earnings in order to secure a donation to a refugee supporting program is elicited thereafter. Additionally, several attitudinal measures of participants' position towards refugees (as well as some other immigrant groups) are also elicited.

While a considerable body of scientific literature studied the determinants of attitudes of the majority population toward migration (for a survey of this literature see e.g., [Hainmueller and Hopkins \(2014\)](#)), significantly less attention was paid to the political positions of immigrants, and specifically to their positions toward the new flows of immigration. On the one hand, considering the shared experience of immigration and that of being exposed to immigration policies, one might expect that people with migration background create a sense of "common fate" and have more favourable attitudes towards other immigrants than the native population. Some of the empirical studies indeed confirm this expectation (e.g. [Van der Zwan et al. \(2017\)](#), [Just and Anderson \(2015\)](#), [Hjerm and Nagayoshi \(2011\)](#)).

On the other hand, in most environments with substantial immigrant population, the group of immigrants is itself very heterogeneous, consisting of subgroups stemming from different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, and with different history of immigration and integration in the host country's society. Thus, factors as diverse as those that have been found to impact the immigration attitudes of majority population, and pertaining to both host country and country of origin could be affecting the immigration attitudes of immigrants. If for example

a given immigrant group is in the host country over-represented in an employment sector that is perceived to be particularly affected by inflow of new immigrants, this could rationalize their support for anti-immigration policies. Additionally, political characteristics of sending country could also be relevant. Weak democratic institutions and lack of democratic tradition in a sending country could lead people immigrating from there to be particularly democracy-demanding, but could also instead increase their tolerance towards authoritarianism. Furthermore, people immigrating from a country with a history of conflict with some national or religious groups could hold more negative views of these groups and oppose them as potential immigrants.

Notwithstanding the importance of these group-specific factors, I explore an alternative and complementary mechanism based on group status. Establishing causality using empirical and observation data has challenges as several unobservables are correlated. Particularly, it is difficult to disentangle the effects of the host country's characteristics from the characteristics of a given immigrant group on the status position assigned to this group. On the other hand, comparing the outcomes of the same immigrant group in different host countries, or in different regions, suffers from the self-selection bias. Furthermore, the self-selection into immigration represents an issue not only across geography, but also over time, as changing immigration regulations (and other contextual factors) might lead to migration of different socio-economic strata from the same sending country. Running an experiment provides a unique opportunity to circumvent these challenges.

The literature in social psychology provided some theoretical insights that appear to offer relevant insights for the proposed hypothesis. For example, in their seminal paper, [Jost and Banaji \(1994\)](#) laid out the concept of system justification theory that builds upon the social identity theory and extends it in a way that rationalizes the negative in-group bias, as well as the positive bias toward the high status out-group. The theory proposes that the need to reduce the feelings of uncertainty, threat,

and social discord tends to lead people, living in the environment with pronounced social inequalities to adopt beliefs and stereotypes that help to rationalize (and thus justify) the inequalities inherent to the societal status quo. Thereby, the societal status quo refers to the broad set of existing social, economic and political systems, institutions, and arrangements, including also racial and ethnical status hierarchies. Importantly, the theory and the experimental works that followed (surveyed in [Jost \(2019\)](#)), demonstrated the readiness of the disadvantaged groups in the society to adopt negative stereotypes of their own in-group (and positive stereotypes of the advantaged out-groups) in order to explain the prevailing hierarchy. Moreover, as [Jost et al. \(2003\)](#) demonstrated in a correlational study, and [Van der Toorn et al. \(2015\)](#) confirmed with the experimental evidence, the groups that are more disadvantaged in the social hierarchy, are more dependent and powerless, are particularly susceptible for developing system justifying beliefs. This theory would thus suggest that the inequality in status (along the lines of ethnic identification), as experienced by the disadvantaged groups (in this case earlier arriving immigrants), could have led them to accept and share the stereotypes that justify such ethnic group based inequalities, perceive them as legitimate, and apply the same principles on the even lower ranked groups once they become salient.

The mechanism proposed here to explain the opposition of established immigrants toward newcomers, namely that the previous experience of being categorized into a low-status group would increase this opposition, resembles closely the idea developed in the research of the so-called Queen-Bee phenomenon. The term, as described in [Ellemers et al. \(2004\)](#), should designate women occupying positions in male-dominated environments, who express a gender bias in evaluating their lower ranked female subordinates, sometimes even more so than their male colleagues, while at the same time distancing themselves from own gender by expressing masculine self-descriptions. The subsequent work in this literature (for review, see e.g. [Derks et al. \(2016\)](#)) has relied on both social identity theory and the system justification theory to argue that rather than being a behavioral trait

specific to women, the Queen-Bee behavior is in itself a response to the gender bias and identity threat in the male dominated environments. Drawing a parallel with the question considered here, one might wonder if there exists a Queen-Bee-Immigrant phenomenon. That is, do the established immigrants, in an environment that is skeptical toward immigrants, distance themselves from the immigrant status and express negative bias toward other immigrants. If the identity threat is indeed the channel leading to such behavior, we could expect that particularly immigrants from the groups that were assigned a lower status are susceptible to react in the predicted way. Whereas the Queen-Bee literature considers a bias of females toward other females, that is toward own in-group, reacting by being more suspicious of the other out-group should arguably be even less psychologically costly, and thus more likely strategy.

2 Experimental Design

The experiment is run on a target sample size of 1000 individuals with migration background residing in Germany. A participant is considered to have a migration background if they or at least one of their parents was born in a country different than their country of residence. The experiment was programmed in Qualtrics and the distribution of the link to the experiment was delegated to a panel company.

The experiment is split into two phases, that will here be referred to as pre-study and main experiment respectively. In the following I provide the description of both phases.

2.1 Pre-study

The pre-study is conducted with the purpose of collecting the responses from the majority population regarding their position towards different immigration groups that would later be used in the main experiment. The pre-study involves a small sample of participants (target sample size of 150 individuals) residing in Germany

with no migration background.

Phase 1: Demographics At the beginning of the survey, information about the respondents' gender, age, state of residence (within Germany), education level and family income is collected. Importantly, participants are also asked to state their own and parental country of birth, which is used to ensure that only participants from majority population, that is those with no migration background, participate in the pre-study.

Phase 2: Elicitation of immigration attitudes In the next phase participants are told that they would be asked to evaluate each of several immigration groups defined on the basis of their country/region of origin (including among others Western Europeans, Eastern Europeans, South Americans, Turkish etc.). In order to facilitate attitudes elicitation, and to reduce ambiguity of the request to evaluate immigrant groups, two of the questions used in the European Value Survey are reformulated into statements. Particularly, participants are told:

Some people residing in Germany have migration background, that is, either they or their parents were born in a different country. People coming to live in Germany come from a number of different countries and regions.

Data collected as a part of European Values Survey, a large-scale, cross-national study, show that people vary widely in whether they see that it is generally good or generally bad for Germany's economy and cultural life that people from other countries come to live here.

Thereafter, for each of the several immigration-origin regions/countries, participants are asked to evaluate whether they believe that Germany's socio-economic and cultural life is generally undermined or enriched by people immigrating from this region. To avoid confusion in terms of which countries are encompassed by a given region, with each question participants are shown a simple political map of the part of the world with clearly indicated region of interest and corresponding countries within this region. Participants in the pre-study are paid

only the participation fee, thus their answers are not incentivized.

2.2 Main experiment

The main part of the experiment is conducted with a sample of 1.000 participants with migration background residing in Germany. The main aim of this study is to analyze the effect of the relative position of established immigrant group in the status-hierarchy of the host country on their attitudes towards a relatively lower ranked status groups. In order to facilitate this aim, participants for this phase of the experiment were selected to be first or second generation immigrants.

Phase 1: Demographics At the very beginning of the session, participants answered the questions regarding their demographic characteristics. As in the pre-study, this included information about participant's gender, age, state of residence (within Germany), education level and family income. In addition to this participants are asked about their and parental country of birth.

Phase 2: Experimental treatments and receiving the information In this phase participants are told that, in a study that took place at an earlier point of time¹, a group of participants from Germany with no migration background were asked to evaluate whether they believed that Germany's socio-economic and cultural life is generally undermined or enriched by people immigrating from several different regions or countries. They are then informed that they would be presented with the subset of collected answers pertaining to some immigrant groups. Participants are randomly divided into two treatment groups. Participants in both treatments are presented with the evaluation of three groups - one representing their own in-group and the other two representing two out-groups. In both treatments the answers from the pre-study are selected so that one out-group is always evaluated positively and the other one negatively, where positive and negative always refer to the group contributing and respectively undermining the socio-economic and cultural life of the host country. The only difference between the treatments is the evaluation of the own in-group. In the

¹The month and year in which the responses in the pre-study were collected is shown to the participants.

Positive status treatment, participants are shown an elicited answer that evaluates own in-group (as immigrants) positively, whereas in the **Negative status** treatment participants are shown an answer that evaluates own in-group negatively.

Including the other two out-groups that are consistently evaluated positively and negatively eliminates the danger that receiving the information with negative evaluation of the own in-group leads to a more negative view of immigration in general through reminding participants of the difficulties of some groups to integrate in the host society, rather than through targeting their own in-group. In this way, the presence of one positively and one negatively evaluated group fixes the hierarchy, and the only element that changes is the position of participant's in-group.

Phase 3: Elicitation of attitudes towards refugees In this phase participants are asked to provide their views on refugees in their country of residence. Multiple attitudinal and one quasi-behavioral measure of support for refugees was elicited. Following the approach of [Dinas et al. \(2021\)](#), participants are asked to provide answers to six questions targeting attitudes towards refugees that arrived to Germany in the last refugee influx, fleeing wars in the Middle East. The first six questions shown below are the same as used in [Dinas et al. \(2021\)](#):

1. *Do you think Germany should increase or decrease the number of people it grants asylum to? (1 = Greatly increase; 5 = Greatly decrease)*
2. *Refugees are a burden on our country because they take our jobs and social benefits. (1 = Completely agree; 5 = Completely disagree)*
3. *The money spent on the accommodation of refugees in our country could have been spent better to cover the needs of Germans. (1 = Completely agree; 5 = Completely disagree)*
4. *Refugees will increase the likelihood of a terrorist attack in our country. (1 = Completely agree; 5 = Completely disagree)*

5. *Refugees in our country are more to blame for crime than other groups. (1 = Completely agree; 5 = Completely disagree)*
6. *Among the following options, which one do you think best explains why refugees from Syria and other countries leave their country? (1 = To flee war; 2 = To improve their economic conditions; 3 = To avoid political persecution; 4 = To gain access to host country's social benefits.)*
7. *Is Germany made a worse or a better place to live by refugees who are granted asylum in Germany (0 = Worse place to live, to 10 = Better place to live)*

In the next step participants were informed that, as a part of the survey, a lottery will be administered whereby one randomly selected participant will be awarded 100 Euros and all participants have the same chance of winning the prize. They are then asked if, in the case that they win the lottery, they would like to dedicate some percentage of the prize to help refugees. Participants are informed that, if they decide to dedicate some amount to refugees-support, this amount will be automatically deducted from their 100 Euro prize in the case they win, and a donation in the same value will be made to an organization supporting refugees.

In order to capture the potential spillover effects of the treatment on the attitudes towards immigration groups other than refugees, participants are also asked to evaluate several other groups of immigrants. Participants are asked to state for immigrants originating from each of the indicated countries/regions whether they see it as generally bad or good for Germany's economy and cultural life that people from this country come to live in Germany.

Phase 4: Mood elicitation In this part of the experiment a self reported measure of participants' mood is elicited via Self-Assessment Manikin questionnaire [Bradley and Lang \(1994\)](#).

Phase 5: Indirect upstream reciprocity In this part of the experiment aims to elicit the measure of participants' upstream reciprocity, which captures the tendency of individuals to reciprocate the treatment received from one individual in

the interaction with another individual. All participants are assigned the role of either person A, person B or person C, and in these roles take part in a modified version of dictator game. Person A is given a certain budget, and can decide to send some amount from this budget to person B. The amount that person A sends is multiplied by a factor of either 2 or 4, and the resulting sum is paid out to person B. Person B can in turn decide to send some amount from the received sum to person C. The amount that person B sends is paid out to person C (without multiplication). Person B observes only the received amount, but they don't know the value of the multiplication factor. After participant B learns the total amount they received from person A, they are asked to decide for each of the two scenarios defined by the value of the multiplication factor, whether they want to send some amount from the received sum to person C, and if so, how much. The roles are allocated unequally, so that most of participants are assigned the role of person B. At the end of the experiment, one triplet of participants (person A, person B and person C) is randomly selected, and considering their decisions, the payments are made accordingly.

Phase 6: Process fairness The aim of this part of the experiment is to test participants' preference for equity of treatment, that is, whether participants, after being exposed to a relatively unfavorable conditions, would find it unfair if the conditions for other participants are improved. Participants are asked to provide an answer to one logical-mathematical question. Providing correct answer is rewarded by additional earnings. Participants answer the question by selecting one of the 6 offered answers, whereby only one of those is correct. Additionally, participants are given the possibility to use the help through a "hint" button. Participants are informed that clicking "hint" button deletes 1 of the incorrect answers, so that participants are left to choose among remaining 5. After providing the answer, participants are asked to provide their opinion on the question. Particularly, participants are told that those who take part in the same survey after them will also face the same question and under same conditions. They are asked if they find

that for the future participants the help provided by the "hint" option should be increased, such that clicking on it would delete 3 (instead of only 1) incorrect answers. Furthermore, participants are told that at a certain (not specified) cutoff time, we will look at the provided opinions, and if the majority of the participants by that time has voted to increase the help provided by the "hint", we will change it accordingly for all participants who will fill the survey after this moment.

Phase 7: Attitudes under observation This part of the experiment has the aim to capture a potential difference in attitudes expressed by established immigrants when they expect these attitudes to be observed by a majority population, as compared to when this is not the case. In this part, participants are reminded that all previously provided answers will be delivered only to the researchers in anonymized form. The participants are then informed that only in this part of the experiment they are asked to provide an answer that can be used in a study that might be conducted in the future. Furthermore, they are told that if their answer is used for the future study, it will be used to inform participants in that study regarding participant's views on immigration. Finally the instruction clarifies that, if the future study is conducted, it will be run "in Germany, thus your answers will be used to inform German participants on your views".

Participants are informed that participants in the future study will see only the filled out form as displayed on the screen. The form reads:

Participants in one previously conducted study were asked to answer the following question: Is Germany made a worse or a better place to live by refugees who are granted asylum in Germany? Participant whose answer is shown below resides in Germany and has migration background in (region/country): [participant's (parental) region country of origin]

The answer provided by this participant is shown below.

Participants are asked to fill the form by providing the answer on a scale ranging from 0 (worse place to live) to 10 (a better place to live).

Phase 8: Perceived norm elicitation and debriefing After having collected the main outcome variables, in the next phase of the experiment participants are asked to guess what proportion of all (150) participants in the pre-study evaluated positively each of the several immigration groups. The evaluated immigrant groups (for which the guess is elicited) include refugees from the Middle East, participants own in-group region, one high-status immigrant group (immigrants from western EU countries) and two lower-status immigrant groups.

Participants are told that the participant who provides the guess closest to the truly collected answers would receive an additional monetary reward. one of these immigrant groups will be randomly selected and if their estimate lies close enough to the true percentage ($\pm 5\%$), they would receive an additional monetary reward.

Collecting this information allows for the check of effectiveness of the treatment with respect to the evaluation of own in-group. Additionally, conditional on the treatment being effective in shifting participants beliefs of evaluation of the own in-group, it allows for checking a potential spillover of this effect into beliefs regarding evaluation of another (previously not mentioned) out-group.

At the end of the survey participants are shown the true percentages of participants in the pre-study who evaluated positively and negatively each of the mentioned groups. Informing participants about the true percentage of answers with positive evaluations regarding each of the groups eliminates the possibility that participants form false beliefs based on the prime provided to them.

3 Hypotheses

. **Hypothesis 1** Being assigned to the Negative status treatment leads to a decrease in amount donated to UNHCR and a more negative evaluation of refugees as measured by the attitudinal questions (as described in Phase 3).

Hypothesis 2 Being assigned to the Negative status treatment leads participants to expect a higher percentage of negative evaluation of refugees' impact on socio-economic and cultural life in Germany among majority participants (in the pre-study).

Furthermore, assignment to the Negative status treatment leads participants to expect a higher percentage of negative evaluation of own in-group as well as of the other low-status groups among majority participants.

Hypothesis 3 Participants with higher indirect reciprocity react more strongly to being assigned to Negative status treatment, that is, express more negative evaluations of refugees.

Hypothesis 4 The distribution of answers provided to question 7 in Phase 3 differs from the distribution of answers provided to the same question (but under potential observation) in Phase 6. Furthermore, being assigned to the Negative status treatment leads participants to provide a less favorable opinion towards refugees in Phase 6.

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