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**Many Immigrants Endowed With
Equal Rights, a Recipe Against
Xenophobia Despite High Immigrant
Presence?**

in a nutshell #21, January 2022



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Messages for Decision-Makers

Natives express less prejudice in high-immigration contexts when policies render immigrants more equal to natives.

Formulating inclusive policies that render immigrants more equal to natives are the path to social cohesion in diverse societies.

What is meant by ...

... xenophobia

Prejudice against immigrants.

... integration policies

Through policies, authorities in countries, regions or institutions grant equal or restricted rights to immigrants compared to native citizens. Such integration policies regulate many areas of life.

... inclusive socioeconomic policies

When socioeconomic policies are inclusive, laws and regulations of the receiving society bestow equal rights on immigrants, providing access to education, health-care, housing or the labor market comparable to natives.

... inclusive legal-political policies

Legal-political integration policies, in turn, can grant immigrants more rights to participate politically, protect them from discrimination, extend voting rights, or ease the acquisition of citizenship. Inclusive socioeconomic and legal-political integration policies thus allow immigrants to enhance their societal position.

Migration is increasing around the world and a major challenge in our times is to understand how people from different backgrounds can live together in harmony.

This policy brief presents the findings of a vast study that showed that natives express less prejudice in high-immigration contexts when policies render immigrants more equal to natives. We analyzed surveys of over 140'000 participants across 66 different countries, 20 Swiss cantons and 64 Flemish-Belgian schools.

More people than ever are migrating around the world today. In this era of mass migration, a major societal challenge is to understand when people from different backgrounds can live together without hatred and conflict. Native citizens, that is, citizens who were born in the country where they live, react to the presence of immigrants in different ways. Some natives resist immigration and react to immigrants with hostility and xenophobia, while others embrace migration-related diversity and welcome immigrants. More prejudiced natives often discriminate against immigrants, restricting immigrant opportunities and exacerbating intergroup tensions.

Unequal Diversity and Xenophobia

Since the question of diversity and xenophobia has such societal and political importance, hundreds of studies have investigated the relationship between immigrant presence and natives' attitudes. Some social scientists and politicians alike have claimed that higher numbers of

immigrants inevitably fuel prejudice. Research evidence is mixed, though. Some studies conclude that higher immigrant presence is linked to more xenophobia, yet other studies relate it to less xenophobia, and still others find no relation. Two sociologists, Portes and Vickstrom, proposed in 2011 that it is "not diversity per se but *unequal* diversity that makes a difference". Our study examined their proposal and tested it empirically for the first time.

Equality Is the Game-Changer for Xenophobia

Diversity is not inherently unequal, but equality depends largely on policy responses to immigration. Authorities in countries, regions or institutions grant equal or restricted rights to immigrants compared to native citizens. We examined anti-immigrant prejudice in diverse contexts and at different levels of governance, focusing on socioeconomic and legal-political integration policies to capture the potential empowerment of immigrants.

Figure 1: Prejudice as a function of immigrant presence and integration policies – predicted values from the statistical analysis

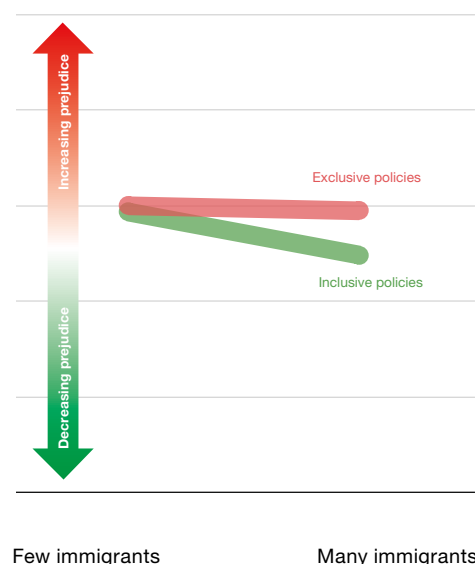


Figure 1 illustrates our results from one study that used data from 19 countries with close to 20'000 participants (International Social Survey Program). We plotted the results of the statistical analysis. The red line illustrates that when policies are exclusive and restrict immigrant rights, natives' prejudice levels are higher. The green line depicts prejudice levels when policies are inclusive and grant equal rights to immigrants. This green line shows that prejudice levels are the lowest when there are many immigrants in a country and policies are inclusive.

Source: [Visualization](#) "International Social Survey Program, 2013", in Kende et al. 2021.

More specifically, we conducted comprehensive cross-national analyses covering altogether 66 countries and over 140'000 respondents in 6 studies. As diversity is governed at different levels, we also investigated the effect of subnational policies across 20 Swiss cantons and 64 Flemish-Belgian schools with altogether approximately 2'400 respondents.

In short, we found that inclusive policies were related to lower anti-immigrant prejudice in high-immigration settings at all levels of governance and across a broad range of contexts. Xenophobia was high in high-immigration contexts only when immigrant rights are restricted. Conversely, xenophobia was low when there were many immigrants but immigrants are endowed with equal rights.

Why Do Inclusive Integration Policies Make a Difference?

Why would natives hold less xenophobic attitudes towards immigrants when immigrant presence is high, and immigrants are empowered by inclusive integration policies?

Previous research shows that when immigrants have equal rights they have more equal educational qualifications, occupations, and earnings. Thus, with inclusive integration policies, immigrants are more present in all walks of life and in more equal positions in society compared to natives. More specifically, inclusive integration policies increase

opportunities for contact among immigrants and natives. In addition, natives more often meet immigrants as equals, for example as their colleagues or neighbors. Furthermore, natives will see representations of immigrants in the media or elsewhere that challenge negative stereotypes and portray immigrants as equal and active members of society.

Over seventy years of social science research has shown that natives have less negative attitudes towards immigrants especially when they interact with them, or see them as equals. Contact with immigrants lowers prejudice as demonstrated by hundreds of social psychological studies. Beyond contact in general, equal contact is especially beneficial to reducing prejudice. Finally, seeing representations of immigrants as equals also lessens xenophobia. High immigrant presence coupled with inclusive integration policies provides more opportunities for all these forms of egalitarian encounters with immigrants, explaining why we find that xenophobia is lower in inclusive high-immigration contexts.

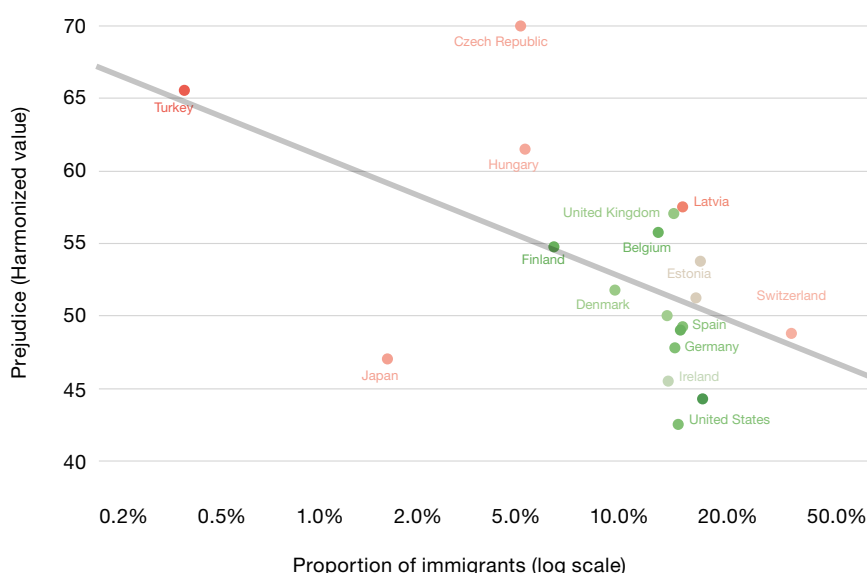
A Call for Inclusive Integration Policies

Based on our studies we conclude that at high immigrant presence inclusive integration policies relate to reduced anti-immigrant prejudice. Moreover, our results also show that inclusive policies make a difference in high-immigration contexts even

over other socio-political factors that could induce hostility towards immigrants such as unemployment, low GDP, income inequality, or pervasive anti-immigrant discourses.

Taken together, the results of our comprehensive analyses identify the key condition for low anti-immigrant prejudice in high-immigration contexts: inclusive legal and socio-economic integration policies that render immigrants more equal to natives. While exclusive integration policies might seem like a useful tool for policymakers to placate natives' supposed concerns and right-populist parties' demands, our findings show that implementing exclusive policies exacerbates immigrant-native tensions in diverse societies. Instead, formulating inclusive policies could feed a virtuous circle as inclusive policies reduce xenophobia among natives. Less xenophobic natives in turn discriminate less against immigrants thus providing more equal opportunities for immigrants. In parallel, inclusive policies translate into more equality between natives and immigrants, thus further contributing to this virtuous circle. All in all, to strive for social cohesion and harmonious relations, our findings urge authorities in countries, regions and, institutions to equalize immigrant-native relations through inclusive integration policies.

Figure 2: Prejudice as a function of immigrant presence and integration policies – observed values in 19 countries, in 2013



On figure 2, we plotted the values for each country in the same study. Green points depict the countries with inclusive policies. Conveying the same message as the statistical analysis, these green points also demonstrate that prejudice levels are lowest when policies are inclusive and there are many immigrants in a country. In contrast, red points represent countries with exclusive policies, and we can see that in these countries prejudice is higher.

Source: Visualization "International Social Survey Program, 2013", in Kende et al. 2021.

Further Reading

Green, E. G. T. and Staerklé, C. (2013). **Migration and Multiculturalism**. In: L. Huddy, D. O. Sears, and J. S. Levy (Eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology*. Oxford University Press, 852–889.

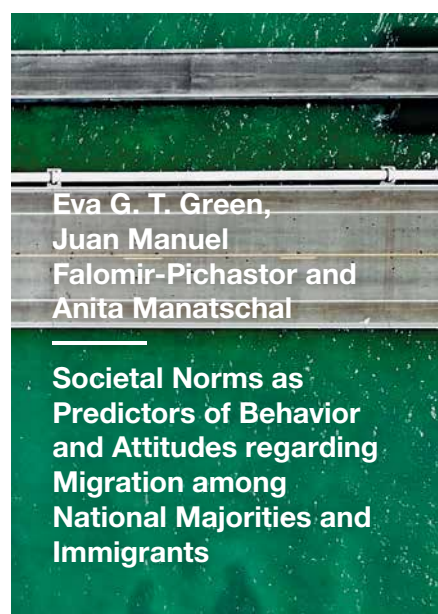
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Portes, A. and Vickstrom, E. (2011). **Diversity, Social Capital, and Cohesion**. *Annual Review of Sociology* 37, 461–479.

In this **interactive visualization** you can explore the results of a series of studies on xenophobia, immigrant presence and integration policies: <https://tabsoft.co/2X7O7jg>.



Societal Norms as Predictors of Behavior and Attitudes regarding Migration among National Majorities and Immigrants

Eva G. T. Green, Juan Manuel Falomir-Pichastor and Anita Manatschal

A project of the nccr – on the move

Increasing global migration streams have multiplied the landscape of possible identities, and can raise fear and opposition as well as compassion and support. Understanding the ways both national majorities in destination countries and immigrants react to these social transformations remains a challenge. The project addresses thus the following overarching research question within Switzerland and in an international comparative perspective: How and under which circumstances do societal norms of inclusion or exclusion affect attitudes and behavior related to migration among national majorities and immigrants?

in a nutshell #21 is based on the subproject “Migration Policies and Shared Majority Representations as Antecedents of Immigration Attitudes across Nations and in Switzerland” of Eva G. T. Green

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The nccr – on the move is the National Center of Competence in Research (NCCR) for migration and mobility studies. It aims to enhance the understanding of contemporary phenomena related to migration and mobility in Switzerland and beyond. Connecting disciplines, the NCCR brings together research from the social sciences, economics and law. Managed from the University of Neuchâtel, the network comprises 17 research projects at eleven universities in Switzerland: The Universities of Basel, Fribourg, Geneva, Lausanne, Lucerne, Neuchâtel, Zurich, ETH Zurich, the Graduate Institute Geneva, the University of Applied Sciences and Arts of Western Switzerland, and the University of Applied Sciences and Arts of Northwestern Switzerland.

“in a nutshell” provides answers to current questions on migration and mobility – based on research findings, which have been elaborated within the nccr – on the move. The authors assume responsibility for their analyses and arguments.

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