



# Do national identification and interethnic friendships affect one another? A longitudinal test with adolescents of Turkish origin in Germany

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## ABSTRACT

Previous research has repeatedly found a positive association between immigrants' identification with the receiving society and their share of interethnic friends. That is, immigrants with a low level of national identification have relatively little contact with natives, and vice versa. Earlier cross-sectional studies, however, were not able to draw firm causal conclusions about the direction of causality. Theoretically, four different scenarios exist: The causal arrow might run from identification to friends (A), but also from friends to identification (B) or in both directions (C). Finally, the relationship might be spurious, caused by unobserved joint determinants (D). Using three-wave panel data for adolescents of Turkish origin in Germany, I examine these four scenarios. First-difference models with lagged independent variables that account for both time-invariant unobserved heterogeneity and potential reverse causality provide no evidence of reciprocal effects between national identification and interethnic friendships. This finding contradicts common interpretations of cross-sectional studies.

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## 1. Introduction

As a result of immigration to Western Europe in the second half of the 20th century, most Western European societies nowadays are ethnically and culturally diverse. This diversity poses individual as well as collective challenges, both for immigrants themselves and for the receiving societies at large.<sup>1</sup> Individually, immigrants and their descendants struggle with the question of combining ethnic and national identities (see, e.g., Phinney et al., 2006; Portes and Rumbaut, 2001; Verkuyten and Yildiz, 2007). Ethnic and national identities are not mutually exclusive (e.g., Verkuyten, 2005), but in most countries immigrants show lower levels of identification with the receiving society than natives do (Elkins and Sides, 2007; Staerklé et al., 2010). This also holds true for immigrants' descendants who are born in the receiving country (Phinney et al., 2006). Collectively, Western European nation states that had formerly been rather homogeneous in terms of ethnicity and culture are now confronted with the complex issue of coexistence among different groups within their borders (see, e.g., Azzi et al., 2011; Ersanilli and Saharso, 2011). In most ethnically diverse societies, ethnicity still plays a major role in shaping social relations such as friendships or marriages (see Kalmijn, 1998; McPherson et al., 2001). Again, this pattern still holds true for the children of immigrants, that is the second generation (see, e.g., Diehl and Schnell, 2006; Kao and Joyner, 2004; Sears et al., 2003).

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<sup>1</sup> In this article, I use the term "immigrant" in a broader sense, including not only people who themselves have migrated but also their descendants who might actually have been born in the receiving society.

But while these patterns of a relatively low level of national identification and relatively few interethnic friendships are well-known, how they relate to each other is far from clear.<sup>2</sup> Previous research has proposed an impressive list of potential determinants of national identification (see Verkuyten and Martinovic, 2012 for a review), ranging from educational segregation (Agirdag et al., 2011) over family socialization (Sabatier, 2008) to perceived discrimination or group rejection (Badea et al., 2011; Jasinskaja-Lahti et al., 2009; Verkuyten and Yildiz, 2007). Most notably, interethnic friendships, i.e., friendships between immigrants and natives, are assumed to play an important role in the development of national identification. Cross-sectional studies have consistently revealed a positive association between national identification and interethnic friends (e.g., Agirdag et al., 2011; Lubbers et al., 2007; Phinney et al., 2006; Sabatier, 2008; Tolsma et al., 2012; Walters et al., 2007; de Vroome et al., 2011). But as most authors concede, no firm conclusions about the direction of causality can be drawn based on cross-sectional data.

While there are theoretical reasons why having interethnic friends might strengthen one's national identification, there are plausible alternative explanations for these findings as well. Four competing theoretical scenarios for the association between national identification and interethnic friends can be offered. First, as suggested by earlier studies, a high share of interethnic friends might indeed foster the development of national identification. Second, the causal arrow might run the other way around, and immigrants might rarely form interethnic friendships because of their own weak national identification. Third, given that there are theoretical arguments for both directions, a genuine reciprocal causal relationship between national identification and interethnic friends might exist. If this were the case, cross-sectional studies would have overestimated the effect of interethnic friendships on national identification because this effect would also include the reciprocal effect. Finally, national identification and interethnic friends might not be causally related at all, but both be affected by unobserved factors that simultaneously drive the development of identification and the formation of friendships. If the correlation between national identification and interethnic friends were spurious, this would question previous results that report, and often causally interpret, such a correlation.

In this article, I use longitudinal data to investigate the four scenarios. I rely on three-wave panel data for adolescent descendants of Turkish immigrants in Germany. Turks are not only the largest, but also the most disadvantaged immigrant group in Germany, as in several other Western European countries (see Crul and Vermeulen, 2003; Heath et al., 2008). Compared to descendants of other immigrant groups, the children of Turkish immigrants in Germany struggle in the educational system and in the labor market (see Kristen and Granato, 2007; Worbs, 2003). They show low levels of host national identification and have relatively little contact with natives (see Brüß, 2005; Diehl and Schnell, 2006; Ersanilli and Saharso, 2011; Haug, 2003; Nauck, 2001). Turks in Germany are therefore a good case in point for examining the four scenarios.

Disentangling the relationship between national identification and interethnic friends is important for two reasons. First, weak national identification and a lack of interethnic friendships are often considered to be problems in and of themselves, because they threaten social cohesion and intensify interethnic conflict (see Huntington, 2004; Verkuyten and Martinovic, 2012). Further, there is strong support for Allport's (Allport, 1954) contact hypothesis in that interethnic friends reduce prejudices and improve interethnic attitudes (e.g., Binder et al., 2009). National identification is similarly seen as a means to reduce negative feelings between groups (see, e.g., Gaertner and Dovidio, 2000; Verkuyten and Martinovic, 2012). Second, it is crucial to learn more about the determinants of national identification and interethnic friendships because each has meaningful consequences for other dimensions of integration as well. They contribute, for instance, to the explanation of ethnic inequalities in the labor market and in the educational system (see, e.g., Altschul et al., 2006; Kalter, 2006; Kanas et al., 2011; Nekby and Rödin, 2010). Interethnic friends are also beneficial to immigrants to learn the language of the receiving country (e.g., Chiswick and Miller, 2001; Espinosa and Massey, 1997). Examining the relationship between national identification and interethnic friends therefore helps to gain a better understanding of the integration process at large.

The article is structured as follows. I first discuss the four different theoretical scenarios for the relationship between national identification and interethnic friends. Then I introduce data and methods. After presenting the results, the article closes with a discussion of the main findings and their implications for future research.

## 2. Four competing theoretical scenarios for the relationship between national identification and interethnic friendships

Previous research has repeatedly documented a positive association between immigrants' national identification and interethnic friends (e.g., Agirdag et al., 2011; Hochman, 2010; Lubbers et al., 2007; Phinney et al., 2006; Sabatier, 2008; Tolsma et al., 2012; Walters et al., 2007; de Vroome et al., 2011).<sup>3</sup> Immigrants with many native friends tend to identify more strongly with the receiving society than do immigrants with few or no native friends, and vice versa. Theoretically, four different scenarios exist that might account for this association. Fig. 1 illustrates these four scenarios. In *scenario A*, the causal arrow runs from interethnic friends to national identification. In *scenario B*, it is the other way around, and national identification affects interethnic friends. *Scenario C* describes a genuine reciprocal causal relationship in which both causal paths operate. Finally, in *scenario D*, there is no causal relationship between national identification and interethnic friendships at all; instead, the

<sup>2</sup> As in other studies (e.g., Agirdag et al., 2011; Martinovic et al., 2009), the term "interethnic friendships" in this article refers to friendships between immigrants and natives.

<sup>3</sup> In line with this finding, studies that focus on ethnic identity report a positive relationship between ethnic identity and co-ethnic friends (e.g., Alba, 1990; Ono, 2002; Phinney et al., 2001; Phinney et al., 2006; Sears et al., 2003).

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