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## Citizenship representations, group indispensability and attitudes towards immigrants' rights



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### ABSTRACT

Social psychological research has distinguished between ethnic and civic conceptions of citizenship and examined the differential associations of these conceptions with perceived out-group competition and threats to explain attitudes towards immigrants. In contrast, the current study examines two dimensions of group indispensability: functional indispensability and identity indispensability. In a survey study conducted among a national sample of native Dutch we found that the endorsement of ethnic citizenship is related to weaker support for immigrants' social rights because of a lower sense of functional indispensability and of identity indispensability. In contrast, the endorsement of civic citizenship was associated with higher acceptance of immigrant rights because of a stronger sense of functional and identity indispensability of immigrants.

Survey research in different national contexts has shown that ethnic and civic representations of citizenship emerge side by side as contrasting normative images among the public (e.g., Hjern, 1998; Levanon & Lewin-Epstein, 2010; Reeskens & Hooghe, 2010). There is quite some empirical evidence that an emphasis on ethnic representation of citizenship (i.e., rooted in ancestry or descent) has negative consequences for attitudes towards immigrants, whereas a civic representation (i.e., rooted in equal political rights and responsibilities) tends to have more positive consequences (e.g., Hjern, 1998; Reijerse, Van Acker, Vanbeselaere, Phalet, & Duriez, 2013; Wakefield et al., 2011; Wright, Citrin, & Wand, 2012; Yogeewaran & Dasgupta, 2014). Yet, the precise underlying social psychological reasons for why the endorsement of ethnic and civic representations differently affect attitudes towards immigrants has not been examined empirically (but see Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2015). The aim of the current research is to consider identity indispensability and functional indispensability as two possible mediating constructs in the relationship between the endorsement of ethnic and civic citizenship representations and the acceptance of immigrants' social rights.

Social psychological research typically examines people's attitude toward immigrants from the perspective of perceived (zero-sum) competition for scarce resources, perceived threats to the welfare state, and perceived threats to the national culture and identity (see Esses, Jackson, & Bennett-AbuAyyash, 2010; Hainmueller & Hopkins, 2014; Wagner, Christ, & Heitmeyer, 2010). In contrast, there is very little research that focuses on people's attitudes in relation to the perceived contributions to society that immigrants make. Based on the social identity perspective (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987; Wenzel, Mummendey, & Waldzus, 2007), recent research has proposed a novel understanding of majority members' reactions to immigrants by focusing on immigrants' perceived indispensability to the functioning of society (functional indispensability; Guerra, Gaertner, António, & Deegan, 2015) and for defining the national social identity (category or identity indispensability; Ng Tseung-Wong & Verkuyten, 2010; Verkuyten & Khan, 2012).

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In a large-scale survey study conducted among a national sample of native Dutch we tested the proposition that the endorsement of ethnic citizenship is related to lower acceptance of immigrants' social rights because of a weaker sense of immigrants' indispensability for the national identity and for the functioning of society. In contrast, the endorsement of civic citizenship was expected to be associated with higher acceptance of immigrant rights because of a stronger sense of identity indispensability and functional indispensability. So we propose that these two types of indispensability constitute two separate reasons for why the endorsement of ethnic and civic representations of national belonging are related to the support for immigrants' social rights.

### Ethnic and civic representations

The distinction between ethnic and civic citizenship is widely used in the literature to differentiate between policies and legislation of nation-states (e.g., Brubaker, 1992; Koning, 2011). And although the distinction has been challenged (e.g., Janmaat, 2006) it has been quite useful for understanding differences in psychological representations of nationhood (see Yogeewaran & Dasgupta, 2014).

Ethnic citizenship defines the nation as a community of people of shared descent. The implication is that immigrants who do not have native ancestry cannot fulfill the ascribed, fixed citizenship criteria and therefore do not (fully) belong. Research has consistently found that an ethnic citizenship understanding is associated with negative attitudes towards immigrants, immigration policies, minority rights and multiculturalism (e.g., Kunovich, 2009; Pehrson, Vignoles, & Brown, 2009; Reijerse et al., 2013; Wright, 2011; Wright et al., 2012). In contrast, a civic representation emphasizes that national belonging depends on fulfilling one's citizenship obligations and respecting the basic civic principles of society. This makes it relatively easy for immigrants to be included. Although there are some exceptions (e.g., Kunovich, 2009; Schildkraut, 2007), research in the European and the US context has found that a civic understanding is related to positive attitudes towards immigrants, minority rights and multiculturalism (e.g., Meeus, Duriez, Vanbeselaere, & Boon, 2010; Reijerse et al., 2013; Wakefield et al., 2011; Wright et al., 2012).

Ethnic and civic representations imply specific normative beliefs that provide a justification for the acceptance or rejection of immigrants. For example, ethnic citizenship tends to emphasize a national representation that prioritizes the native majority with a preference for cultural homogeneity and assimilation to the majority. In contrast, within a civic representation there is the possibility of a normative sense of common belonging whereby cultural group differences are acknowledged and accepted in the context of a shared national identity. In two studies in the Netherlands, Verkuyten and Martinovic (2015) found that endorsement of ethnic citizenship was related to lower acceptance of immigrant rights because of a weaker normative sense of common national belonging, whereas stronger endorsement of civic citizenship was associated with higher acceptance of immigrant rights through stronger common belonging.

Furthermore, those who consider citizenship in terms of ancestry are more likely to agree with the notion that the native majority group historically owns the country with the related ownership entitlements, including the right to exclude newcomers (Ceuppens & Geschiere, 2005; Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2017). In contrast, civic citizenship emphasizes the adherence to a social contract that considers society an interdependent community. The voluntaristic and liberal nature of civic citizenship goes against historical ownership claims with their related negative attitudes towards immigrants and their rights. Evidence for this reasoning was found in two studies in the Netherlands (Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2015).

The current study extends this previous theoretical thinking and empirical research on what is behind the ethnic-civic distinction by using the relatively novel theoretical lens of group indispensability (Ng Tseung-Wong & Verkuyten, 2010). The previous research on the ethnic-civic distinction focused on the role of common belonging and historical entitlement of the native majority and did not consider the perception of immigrants or minority target groups. Research, however, has demonstrated that a civic compared to an ethnic conception of national identity leads to perceiving ethnic minority members as more strongly fitting the nation and being a 'true' national (higher prototypicality), which increases their inclusion (Wakefield et al., 2011; Yogeewaran & Dasgupta, 2014). Complementing and extending this work on perceived out-group prototypicality we focus on the related but distinct notion of out-group indispensability (Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2016; Verkuyten, Martinovic, & Smeekes, 2014).

### Group indispensability

Immigrants can be considered less or more indispensable for society because of the perceived economic and social contributions that they make. Social psychology has a long tradition of studying functional relations between individuals and groups, and the concept of social indispensability as described by Hertel, Niemeyer and Clauss (2008; see also Wittchen, Schlereth, & Hertel, 2007) indicates a situation in which the separate parts are highly instrumental for the gains of the whole. This means that the performance of each single individual is important for the overall group's success. Applied to relations between groups, the notion of functional indispensability relates to the perceived instrumentality of a group's contribution for a superordinate outcome (Guerra et al., 2015). Groups can be regarded as indispensable in a functionally advantageous way and perceiving immigrants as being more indispensable for the functioning of society reflects more valuable views about immigrants which fosters more positive attitudes. Empirical evidence for this association has been found in the context of Portugal (Guerra et al., 2015) and the United States (Guerra, Rodrigues, Gaertner, Deegan, & António, 2016).

Immigrants can be regarded as indispensable in contributing to the society's economy without necessarily being perceived to be a complementary part of the host society's national identity (identity indispensability). An example is the perception of Turkish and Moroccan migrant laborers in Western Europe. In an interview study (Verkuyten, 1997) one of the interviewees said: 'we might need them to do the cleaning and so on, but that doesn't make them one of us, that doesn't make them Dutch'. Perceived identity

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