Negative experiences and out-group trust: The formation of natives' trust toward immigrants

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A B S T R A C T

The steady flow of immigrants from all over the world challenges the social cohesion of states in a variety of ways. Against this backdrop, we extend previous research on attitudes toward immigrants by evaluating the formation of trust toward this group. Using a representative sample of the Swiss population, our results indicate that the violation of trust by negative experiences in the workplace is associated with lower levels of trust toward immigrants accordingly. However, we show that the relationship between negative experiences and trust toward immigrants is more powerful among those individuals who place high levels of trust in their own national group than for individuals who do not even trust their fellow group members.

Introduction

The steady flow of immigrants from all over the world has contributed to increasing ethnic and cultural conflicts, thus challenging the social cohesion in several states. This development is reflected in the spread of antiforeigner rhetoric in the media, popular support for restrictive policy initiatives, and by the growing visibility of xenophobic right-wing political parties (Ceobanu & Escandell, 2010; Gundelach, 2014). Regarding the impact of citizens' attitudes toward immigration and immigrants on electoral outcomes and laws, policies, and legislation aimed at regulating the flow of immigrants, it comes as no surprise that there is increasing interest among scholars to address the foundations of dispositions and attitudes toward immigrants and immigration in Europe (Freitag & Rapp, 2015). Against this backdrop, this study evaluates the roots of a cornerstone of social cohesion, i.e. the trust of natives toward immigrants, focusing on *whether* and *how* negative experiences of contact with immigrants in the workplace undermine such out-group trust.

We argue that negative experiences with immigrants at work erode the trust of natives toward this out-group. We study negative experiences because such experiences are argued to have a stronger impact on individuals than positive ones (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenhauer, & Vohs, 2001). According to the literature, contact with other groups generally enhances intergroup relations (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998). Negative experiences, however, are argued to have the opposite effect, undermining intergroup relations. This occurs especially in work environments (Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew, Tropp, Wagner & Christ, 2011, p. 277).

However, we do not assume a universal relationship between negative experiences and trust toward immigrants; rather, we test whether the relationship between negative experiences and trust toward immigrants depends on individuals' trust in their own national in-group. Hardly any policy area demarcates so starkly the difference between "us" and "them" as the relationship between natives and immigrants (Crepaz, Polk, Bakker, & Singh, 2014, pp. 938 & 939). In this vein, regarding in-group trust as centered on the "us first" idea and skepticism toward the out-group, then negative experiences with immigrants should, especially for natives with

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high in-group trust, be related to their fear that immigrants will undermine their traditional way of life, thus reducing trust toward them.

Our study is conducted in Switzerland. According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development OECD (2014), Switzerland was the country with the largest number of permanent immigrants per capita in 2012.[1] Moreover, in the percentage of the population that is foreign born, Switzerland placed second, with 27.9%, topped by Luxemburg with 42.6% and followed by Australia with 27.3%. Switzerland therefore represents an adequate context to examine the determinants of trust toward immigrants, as the large size of the group of immigrants implies a certain level of presence and visibility of immigrants in the society as well as higher probabilities of having experiences with members of this group. Although we acknowledge that immigrants are not a homogeneous group, and most likely is not perceived as such either, our data unfortunately does not allow us to differentiate between different groups of immigrants.

Nevertheless, the scope of our ISSP-data allows us to make *three important contributions* to the understanding of how trust toward immigrants is formed. First, research on anti-immigrant attitudes is en vogue. During the last decade, scholars have examined how attitudes towards immigrants are shaped by cultural or economic concerns, national identity, personal predispositions as well as intergroup contact (Dinesen, Klemmensen, Nørgaard 2014; Esses, Wagner, Wolf, Preiser, & Wilbur, 2006; Mayda, 2006; Hainmueller & Hopkins, 2014). By focusing on a specific outcome of intergroup relations, i.e., out-group trust, we contribute to this growing literature and to the scholarly work on how immigration-related trust issues are shaped in societies (Dinesen, 2012; Gundelach & Freitag, 2014; Putnam, 2007; Stolle & Harell, 2013; Uslaner, 2012). In particular, we extend previous research on the (positive) impact of contact on out-group attitudes (Pettigrew, 1998) by examining the impact of negative experiences of contact on out-group trust. In addition, by evaluating how experiences made in the workplace affect out-group trust of natives, this study contributes to an emerging literature that places the workplace at the center of analyses that examine dimensions of social capital including trust and intergroup relations. Evidence consistently points to the workplace as a key context for cross-cutting social interactions (Mutz & Mondak, 2006). Further, the workplace has been argued to be one of the social contexts in which self-selection is the lowest, both in terms of the choice of colleagues, but also in terms of choosing with whom to interact (Mutz & Mondak, 2006; Powers & Ellison, 1995). Finally, although we are not the first to investigate whether experiences of contact influence trust, we are among the first to examine the nexus between experiences of contact and in-group trust in predicting out-group trust as well as doing this with a specific item referring to the frequency of such experiences beyond pure convenience samples.

The dependent variable: trust toward immigrants

Whereas a large literature on attitudes toward immigrants has emerged over the course of recent decades, research specifically examining trust toward immigrants remains quite scarce. This is quite astonishing, considering findings indicating trust to be a stronger predictor of intergroup behavior than other intergroup attitudes (Tam, Hewstone, Kenworthy, & Cairns, 2009). Trust can be regarded as a more demanding criterion for intergroup behavior than other attitudes, because of the potential risk to the self or the in-group involved with trust (Tam et al., 2009). In general, trust is defined as the expectation that other individuals will contribute to the wellbeing of a person or a group, honor their commitments and avoid harming others (Gambetta, 1988; Glanville & Paxton, 2007; p. 231; Offe, 1999). It expands the base of people with whom we interact. The trusting person seeks cooperation rather than confrontation, which is important to solve the increasing ethnic and cultural conflicts induced by the growing number of immigrants. But how to conceptualize trust in immigrants?

Within the realm of interpersonal trust, the literature mainly agrees on two distinct kinds of trust. Here, various terminologies have been proposed, such as the distinction between "thick" and "thin" trust (Putnam, 2000) or "particularized" and "generalized" trust (Freitag & Traunmüller, 2009; Stolle, 2002). Particularized or thick trust is trust at close social range and exhibited toward people the individual knows from everyday interactions (e.g., family members, friends, neighbors, and co-workers); generalized or thin trust is a rather abstract attitude toward people in general, encompassing those beyond immediate familiarity, including strangers. In a similar vein, Yamagishi and Yamagishi distinguish between knowledge-based trust as trust "in closely related people" and general trust as trust "in people in general" (1994, pp. 139 et seq.) (Yamagishi & Yamagishi, 1994).

Drawing from the social identity theory developed by Tajfel (1974) and Tajfel and Turner (1979), another conception is based on identification and social categorization. In general, people tend to trust those with whom they share a group identity or a membership in a given category more than people with whom they do not (Simpson, McGrimmon, & Irvin, 2007). A shared identity could include behavioral similarities, geographical proximities, common fate, mores, ethnicity, or traditions (Brewer, 1979; Brewer, 1979; Stolle, 2002). Cognitive processes of such social categorization lead to a dichotomy between "us" and "them". By and large, social identity theory posits that the self-esteem of in-group members rises when the category to which they belong is positively evaluated. This could be accompanied by a negative assessment of out-group members. Additionally, in-group bias is also reinforced when members perceive a threat from an out-group (Crepaz et al., 2014). In-group trust extends to people with whom one has some familiarity, be it on the basis of kinship, acquaintance, or neighborhood, including strangers with whom one shares some kind of group membership. Out-group trust relates to people whom one does not know or who differs in origin, like national or religious origin (Welzel & Delhey, 2015; p. 876). In this vein, with regard to the former, trust toward immigrants is out-group trust, which in this case specifically refers

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[1] These numbers refer to foreign nationals that include status changes, i.e. people who have a temporary status that obtain a right to stay on a longer-term basis (OECD, 2014, p. 20). Switzerland's annual immigration flow represented 1.7% of the population, showing an annual growth in arriving migrants of 8% (OECD, 2014, p. 19).