



Identification and ethnic diversity underlie support for multicultural rights: A multilevel analysis in Bulgaria



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ABSTRACT

Bulgaria is historically a multicultural society, composed of the Bulgarian (ethnic) majority and a number of ethnic minorities among which Bulgarian Turks and Roma are the largest. Both minority communities are stigmatized in contemporary Bulgaria, though to different degrees and for different reasons. Ethnic minorities' rights to preserve their culture, customs, and language are a topic of contentious debate. The purpose of this study was to examine individual- and context-level antecedents of the ethnic Bulgarian majority's support for multicultural rights of ethnic minorities. Multilevel regression analyses were conducted with International Social Survey Programme ISSP 2003 data ($N=920$ in 28 Bulgarian districts). At the individual-level, an ethnic conception of the nation and anti-Roma symbolic prejudice were negatively related to support for multicultural rights, whereas national identification was positively related to the support of these rights. Over and above individual-level effects, and in line with recent extensions of intergroup contact theory, the percentage of Bulgarian Turks within districts was positively related to support for multicultural rights. Importantly, support for multicultural rights was particularly high in districts characterized by ethnic diversity, that is, in districts with high proportions of both Bulgarian Turks and Roma. The beneficial effects of ethnic diversity and theoretical implications of findings are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Bulgaria is historically a multicultural society with established ethnic minorities. The population of almost 7.5 million of this South East European country is composed of the Bulgarian (ethnic) majority (84.8%, 2011 Census) and a number of ethnic minority communities among which Bulgarian Turks (8.9%) and Roma (4.8%) are the largest. The presence of the minorities varies strongly across the 28 districts of Bulgaria, for example in some districts there are no Bulgarians Turks whereas in others they are the numeric majority. The Bulgarian constitution forbids discrimination recognizing the right of ethnic minorities to preserve their culture and religion and to study and practice their mother tongue. Nevertheless, both ethnic minorities, but in particular the Roma, are discriminated against (ECRI, 2009; Mudde, 2005; Pamporov, 2009; Vassilev, 2004, 2010; Zografova & Andreev, 2014). Indeed, representatives of the ethnic Bulgarian majority and of Bulgarian governmental

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institutions have been opposed to claims put forward by ethnic minorities for the preservation of their culture (e.g., building monuments commemorating their history), to public religious displays by ethnic minorities and to broadcasting news in ethnic minorities' languages (see [Naxidou, 2012](#)). Thus, while Bulgaria is multicultural in demographic terms and according to the constitution, multicultural rights do not necessarily receive support from the national majority.

It is thus urgent to study factors that underlie support for multicultural rights in Bulgaria. Multicultural rights refer to rights of ethnic minorities to preserve their culture, practice their language, receive state support to preserve their traditions, and have state representatives and associations (see [Verkuyten, 2009](#)). As the antecedents of support for multicultural rights remain understudied, we build our rationales by drawing on literature examining support for related concepts such as multiculturalism as an ideology (the acceptance and support of cultural diversity; [van de Vijver, Breugelmans, & Schalk-Soekar, 2008](#)), integration expectations (the belief that minorities should maintain their culture of origin but also endorse some aspects of the majority's culture; [Bourhis, Barrette, El-Geledi, & Schmidt Sr., 2009](#)), and assimilation expectations (the belief that minorities should abandon their culture of origin for the sake of the majority culture; [Bourhis et al., 2009](#)).

In this study, we examine the role of ethnic and national identification as well as prejudice as predictors of support for multicultural rights of ethnic minorities. Moreover, we investigate how embeddedness in ethnically diverse contexts, where everyday interactions with Roma and Bulgarian Turks occur, shape support for multicultural rights. Thus we analyze how support for multicultural rights differs between districts as a function of the presence of ethnic minorities. Using 2003 International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) data, we adopt a multilevel approach to examine individual- and contextual-level antecedents of support for multicultural rights.

This study makes several novel contributions to the knowledge on interethnic relations in Bulgaria and to the literature on intergroup relations and support for multiculturalism. First, we investigate an understudied intergroup context (i.e., Bulgaria) where ethnic minorities have historically suffered prejudice, discrimination, and oppression, with the aim of detecting factors promoting support for multicultural rights of harshly stigmatized ethnic minorities (e.g., Roma and Bulgarian Turks). Research on intergroup relations has mainly been conducted in Western Europe and North America. Though attitudes toward ethnic minorities are frequently negative in post-socialist countries, these countries have received scant attention in mainstream social psychological literature (for exceptions, see e.g., [Lebedeva & Tatarko, 2013](#)). Second, we focus on antecedents of support for multicultural rights rather than on multiculturalism as an ideology, analyzing endorsement of *tangible* rights that are topics of societal debate. Third, we use a multilevel approach to account for how the presence of ethnic minorities within districts relates to support for multicultural rights. Indeed, the presence of ethnic minorities varies massively between districts, making Bulgaria an exciting context for examining within-country variation in support for multicultural rights. On the one hand, ethnic diversity has been shown to promote intergroup contact (e.g., [Schmid, Al Ramiah, & Hewstone, 2014](#)) and therefore it should also relate to support for multicultural rights. On the other hand, ethnic diversity can elicit threat perceptions (e.g., [Scheepers, Gijberts, & Coenders, 2002](#)) and therefore be negatively associated with support for multicultural rights. We will assess whether in the Bulgarian intergroup context the presence of ethnic minorities within districts relates positively or negatively to support for multicultural rights. Furthermore, we investigate the effects of *ethnic diversity* by operationalizing it as the *joint presence* of two ethnic minority groups, rather than just the presence of one ethnic minority as frequently done in research.

1.1. Ingroup identification and symbolic prejudice as individual-level antecedents of support for multicultural rights

A number of studies have demonstrated that support for multiculturalism is related to ingroup identification. For national majorities, ethnic identification – a sense of belonging based on one's ancestry, cultural heritage, values, traditions, rituals, and often language and religion – engenders willingness to protect the ingroup's interests and advantaged position, and therefore negative attitudes toward multiculturalism (e.g., [Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2006](#); [Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002](#)). Similarly, an ethnic conception of the nation implies that the national group has an essentialist core that is determined by ancestry and ethnic belonging ([Brubaker, 1992](#); [Kohn, 1944](#)). Endorsing an ethnic conception of the nation also underlies negative attitudes toward immigrants and ethnic minorities (e.g., [Pehrson, Brown, & Zagefka, 2009](#); [Wakefield et al., 2011](#)). For example, among British citizens an ethnic conception of the nation was related to lower support for multiculturalism ([Heath & Tilley, 2005](#)). Thus, both ethnic identification and ethnic conception of the nation should relate to opposition to multicultural rights.

National identification should relate to support for multicultural rights too (e.g., [Verkuyten, 2009](#)). To understand this relationship, it is necessary to distinguish between countries with a predominantly civic conception of the nation, where adherence to national laws, customs, and values are the core features that define citizenship, and countries with a predominantly ethnic conception of the nation, where citizenship is based on ancestry and belonging to the same ethnic group ([Brubaker, 1992, 1996](#)). In so-called ethnic nations, then, national identification is associated with negative intergroup attitudes ([Pehrson, Vignoles, & Brown, 2009](#)), and consequently with low support for multicultural rights.

Support for multicultural rights is also influenced by attitudes toward the outgroups that are the target of these policies. Indeed positive outgroup attitudes have been shown to predict support for multiculturalism among the majority group (e.g., [Verkuyten, 2005](#); [Wolsko, Park, & Judd, 2006](#)). Contemporary forms of prejudice ([Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995](#); [Sears & Henry, 2005](#)) are based on beliefs that ethnic minorities are responsible for their disadvantaged position and ask for unfair advantageous benefits together with the denial of ongoing discrimination. Such prejudice consequently underlies opposition to multicultural rights (e.g., [Berg, 2013](#); [Sears, Citrin, Cheleden, & van Laar, 1999](#)). For example, in the United States anti-Black

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