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Social Science Research

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/ssresearch

Universalism, conservation and attitudes toward minority groups



Constanze Beierlein ^{a, b}, Anabel Kuntz ^c, Eldad Davidov ^{c, *}

^a *GESIS – Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences, Germany*

^b *Hamm-Lippstadt University of Applied Sciences, Germany*

^c *University of Zurich, Switzerland*

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 10 December 2014

Received in revised form 28 January 2016

Accepted 10 February 2016

Available online 17 February 2016

Keywords:

Universalism values

Conservation values

Attitudes toward minority groups

Group-focused enmity (GFE)

Structural equation modeling

ABSTRACT

Findings from previous studies corroborate the hypothesis that universalism and conservation values are associated with negative attitudes toward immigration. In the current study we examine whether universalism and conservation values also play a critical role in the explanation of attitudes toward other minority groups. Drawing on previous research on group-focused enmity, we explore its relations with universalism and conservation values in a German sample. Employing structural equation modeling, we find that individuals who prioritize universalism values approve of various minorities more whereas those who prioritize conservation values exhibit more disapproval.

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1. Introduction

In the recent elections of the European Parliament in 2014, right-wing populist parties gained a considerable number of votes in many countries (e.g., the French Front National, the Freedom Party of Austria, and the United Kingdom Independent Party).¹ During the election campaigns, political issues such as immigration (e.g., of refugees or of Sinti and Roma from Romania and Bulgaria) or the legal rights of gays and lesbians have been singled out as key topics by a number of European right-wing populist parties (Langenbacher and Schellenberg, 2011). By doing so, these parties appealed to voters' negative attitudes toward several specific outgroups in society. Indeed, these developments corroborate recent findings suggesting that European citizens disapprove of several different social outgroups at the same time (Zick et al., 2011).

The observed co-occurrence of negative attitudes toward different outgroups has long been discussed in social psychological and sociological prejudice research. As Allport (1954, p. 68) stated more than 60 years ago, "one of the facts of which we are most certain is that people who reject one outgroup will tend to reject other outgroups." For example, people who oppose Muslims are also expected to oppose homosexuals. Building on Allport's assumption, the phenomenon has commonly been described as group-focused enmity (GFE; Zick et al., 2010). It implies that prejudices toward different outgroups (e.g., foreigners, homeless people, Jews, women, gays and lesbians; Zick et al., 2008) can be described as being substantially

Abbreviations: GFE, group-focused enmity.

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: Constanze.Beierlein@hshl.de (C. Beierlein), Kuntz@soziologie.uzh.ch (A. Kuntz), Davidov@soziologie.uzh.ch (E. Davidov).

¹ Retrieved from <http://www.results-elections2014.eu/en/country-introduction-2014.html> as well as from <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/aboutparliament/en/00082fcd21/Results-by-country-%282009%29.html?tab=26> (June 20, 2014).

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2016.02.002>

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interrelated (Zick et al., 2008), and share a common underlying motivational core – an ideology of inequality (Allport, 1954). Several elements of GFE have already been identified (e.g., devaluation of homeless people, anti-foreigner attitudes, anti-Semitism, sexism, support for the rights of the established; Zick et al., 2008). Indeed, “any feature that differentiates outgroups from the normative consensus of a dominant group can serve to indicate deviance, while also confirming the normality of the ingroup” (Asbrock et al., 2007, p. 7).

In order to scrutinize the sources and reasons for negative attitudes toward minority groups, researchers have often drawn on value research (Feldman, 2003; Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz, 1992). Several studies demonstrate that individual value priorities, particularly universalism and conservation, are strongly associated with negative attitudes toward immigration. Individuals who prioritize universalism values approve of immigration more whereas those who prioritize values of conservation exhibit more disapproval (Davidov et al., 2008a; Davidov and Meuleman, 2012; Davidov et al., 2014). However, the scope of these studies is generally limited to immigrants, and other minority groups are not taken into consideration. In the current study we are going to address this gap by examining whether universalism and conservation values also play an important role in the prediction of attitudes toward *other* minority groups.

2. Previous research

To date, there are numerous empirical studies which reinforce Allport's thesis by demonstrating that prejudice generalizes across different target groups (e.g., Akrami et al., 2011; Altemeyer, 1998; Ekehammar and Akrami, 2003; Zick et al., 2008). Indeed, one of the rare longitudinal studies on group-focused enmity revealed that the level and longitudinal change pattern of negative attitudes toward different minority groups are similar (Davidov et al., 2011). In addition, generalized negative attitudes toward different minority groups were found to transfer to behavior (Asbrock et al., 2007). Most importantly, previous research suggests that the aforementioned negative attitudes toward different minority groups share similar predictors and outcomes (McFarland, 2010; Zick et al., 2008). Indeed, a recent study on right-wing extremism in Germany conducted by the German Friedrich Ebert Foundation demonstrates that negative attitudes towards *several* outgroups are not widespread only among marginal societal groups but also common among the majority population (Zick and Klein, 2014).²

Yet the focus of the present study is on human values as a potential explanation of negative attitudes toward minorities. Empirical studies have provided comprehensive evidence that social and political attitudes such as prejudices are strongly associated with individual value priorities (Sagiv and Schwartz, 1995; Schwartz, 2010; Schwartz et al., 2010; Vecchione et al., 2015; for a review on the predictive potential of values, see Datler et al., 2013). Yet to date, most studies have focused on the role of values for explaining attitudes toward immigration or foreigners (Beckers et al., 2012; Davidov et al., 2008a; Davidov and Meuleman, 2012; Davidov et al., 2014; Schiefer, 2013) with a few explaining attitudes toward other minority groups (Muslims: Helbling, 2014; gays and lesbians: Beckers et al., 2012; Kuntz et al., 2015; for a review see also Sibley and Duckitt, 2008). As a consequence, these studies concentrated solely on attitudes toward these specific outgroups. This approach is accompanied by important limitations. First, despite the fact that several studies support the idea that negative attitudes to different minority groups are strongly related with each other and reflect a general prejudice factor, only a few researchers have empirically investigated the relations between attitudes toward *different* outgroups (e.g., Zick et al., 2008; Asbrock et al., 2007). Second, to the best of our knowledge, the relation between human values and attitudes toward *various* minority groups has not yet been explored within a single research framework (Zick et al., 2011). Therefore, it remains to be clarified whether this relation varies depending on the type of minority group.

3. Aims of the current research

The current study aims at extending the current knowledge base by exploring the relations of group-focused enmity and attitudes toward different minority groups with universalism and conservation values:

- 1) We test a higher-order factor model in which group-focused enmity is specified as a general, higher-order factor which represents prejudice toward six different minority groups (sexism, anti-Semitism, anti-foreigner attitudes, devaluation of homosexual people, devaluation of homeless people, anti-Muslim attitudes) (Zick et al., 2008).
- 2) We test whether and to what extent universalism and conservation are associated with negative attitudes toward *different* minority groups. In other words, we examine whether these values are relevant in shaping attitudes toward *various* minority groups. For this purpose, we utilize the basic human values model of Schwartz et al. (2012). Hence, we

² Cuddy et al. (2008) distinguish reactions to different social groups by referring to the Stereotype Content Model. According to this model, attitudes towards different groups encompassed in the GFE framework can be differentiated by two underlying fundamental dimensions of social perception: warmth and competence. In other words, groups and group members are evaluated on the basis of their perceived intentions and capabilities. Warmth judgments (e.g., trustworthy, kind, friendly) are influenced by the perception of outgroup members as competitors or allies. Competence judgments (e.g., efficacious, skilled, intelligent), however, are affected by the perceived social status of the group (low or high). The two dimensions are independent: Attitudes toward outgroup members may thus be univalent or ambivalent in character. For example, a recent study in the German context (Asbrock, 2010) shows that homeless people are perceived as cold and incompetent, people with physical disabilities are regarded as warm but incompetent, Muslims and Turks are perceived as cold and medium competent, housewives were judged as warm but medium competent.

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