

## UNDERSTANDING ATTITUDES TOWARDS IMMIGRANTS

The double edge of heterogeneous national identities and egalitarian norms on attitudes towards immigrants

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### RESUMEN

En este trabajo analizamos las actitudes de los nacionales hacia los inmigrantes en función de dos características de las categorías nacionales de orden superior: su diversidad y su contexto normativo igualitario. Este análisis se basa en las funciones instrumentales e identitarias ejercidas por la pertenencia grupal y, más concretamente, sobre la amenaza que la diversidad y la igualdad pueden suponer para el mantenimiento de una identidad nacional positiva y distintiva. Para ello describimos investigaciones realizadas en el contexto federal suizo en las que se analizan los efectos paradójicos negativos de la heterogeneidad de la identidad nacional y la norma igualitaria en las actitudes de los nacionales hacia los inmigrantes. Estos efectos están moderados por la percepción de la capacidad de los inmigrantes a adaptarse a su país de acogida, las actitudes iniciales hacia los inmigrantes, y la fuerza de la identificación nacional.

### ABSTRACT

In the present paper we analyze nationals' attitudes towards immigrants as a function of two characteristics of superordinate national categories: their diversity and their egalitarian normative context. This analysis is based on the instrumental and identity functions fulfilled by group membership and more specifically on the threat diversity and equality may introduce to the maintaining of a positive and distinctive national identity. We describe research in the Swiss federal context investigating the paradoxical negative effects of the heterogeneity of national identity and the egalitarian norm on nationals' attitudes towards immigrants. These effects appear to be moderated by the perception of immigrants' ability to adapt to their host country, initial attitudes towards immigrants, and the strength of national identification.

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**Key words:** identidad nacional, normas intragrupo, inmigración, prejuicio, discriminación [National identity, ingroup norms, immigration, prejudice, discrimination]

Immigration constitutes one of the most important issues in Europe. Immigration rates are high, and public opinion surveys have shown that attitudes towards immigration and immigrants are fairly negative and relatively constant (e.g., Fetzer, 2011). Population's concerns with this issue often appear to be related to economic factors (e.g., job loss and cost of

social programs), but these attitudes also vary as a function of nationalist feelings and identity-related processes. Indeed, both the migration flow and the integration of national identities within superordinate categories (e.g., federal states) often result in societies characterized by a tension between the need for stable national identities and the integration of new identity parameters. In order to increase our understanding of attitudes towards immigration and immigrants, we wish to describe in this paper our research investigating the consequences of these identity processes that take place within superordinate national categories (hereafter, SNC) such as the European Union (EU) or Switzerland.

Two characteristics of SNC are of particular relevance for the present purpose: their diversity and the normative context. *Diversity* is the corner stone of SNC, and is twofold. First, SNC are by definition heterogeneous. They are made up of different nations or states, with a common past but with continuing strong differences and tensions at linguistic, socio-cultural, economical and political levels. Second, and more importantly, this diversity is also the result of two types of migration flows: the mobility of citizens from different nations or sub-groups within the SNC and the increase of immigrants coming from countries outside the superordinate category. The *normative context* is more often than not the oil in the gear allowing SNC to deal with this diversity and therefore avoiding intergroup conflict. Indeed, social surveys have shown that in Europe, individuals overall accept values such as democracy, freedom, equality, peace, tolerance, and respect of human rights (e.g., Eurobarometer, 2007). This overall humanitarian normative context (hereafter, the cultural *egalitarian norm*) promotes equality between individuals and sub-groups within a superordinate category, and is consequently expected to promote harmonious intergroup relations and to prevent intergroup discrimination.

The obvious question that arises is whether the diversity and the egalitarian normative context that characterize SNC in places such as Europe result in more positive intergroup relations and improve attitudes towards immigrants in particular. From a social psychological perspective there is no simple answer to this question. On the one hand, research suggests that both diversity and egalitarian norms indeed do contribute to improve attitudes towards immigration and immigrants. First, social diversity makes social structure more complex, and increases either the number of social groups to which individuals belong or the possibilities that citizens feel as individuals rather than as group members. As a consequence, both the presence of multiple categorizations and individualization processes contribute to improving relations between groups (e.g., Crisp, Turner, and Hewstone,

2010). Second, an overall egalitarian norm appears to be in force in Western societies (e.g., Doise, 2002; Dovidio and Gaertner, 1986), and we know that individual's attitudes towards social minorities, including immigrants, are strongly influenced by social norms (e.g., Crandall, Eshleman, and O'Brien, 2002).

On the other hand, however, there are reasons to believe that diversity and the egalitarian norm may also have a negative impact on attitudes towards immigrants. This perspective is based on an analysis of the instrumental and identity functions fulfilled by group membership. In the present article we wish to describe a line of research that has been conducted in Switzerland in recent years that investigated some of the paradoxes of diversity and egalitarian norms regarding their impact on attitudes towards immigrants. First we will look at the functions accomplished by overall group membership, and how SNC may fulfill them or not. Next we will briefly describe a series of researches illustrating such paradoxical effects and the underlying processes.

### **Group functions and identity threats**

Realistic group conflict theory (Sherif, 1966) and social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1986) provide a fruitful way to derive specific hypotheses concerning the reasons why and under which conditions people discriminate outgroups such as immigrants. Both theories assume intergroup prejudice and discrimination to be the result of a perception of intergroup relations in terms of competition, either over material (e.g., competition for scarce resources, threats to well-being) or symbolic (e.g., value violation, identity threat) resources, respectively. Accordingly, attitudes towards immigrants become more negative when dispositional and situational factors contribute to perceiving them as threatening not only nationals' prerogatives and well-being, but also a clear, stable and differentiated national identity (e.g., Stephan and Stephan, 2000). Furthermore, those nationals who identified highly with their group are the most likely to reaffirm the value and the boundaries of social identity when the group is perceived as threatened (e.g., Branscombe and Wann, 1994; Brewer, 1991; Jetten and Spears, 2003).

The question we wish to examine here is whether SNC such as the EU or Switzerland contribute to fulfilling these basic group members' needs, and what the consequences are in terms of attitudes towards immigrants. Regarding the diversity of SNC, they may differ in the extent to which they are perceived as being more or less heterogeneous, i.e., complex, diverse and multicultural. However, one of the main aspects that first comes to

mind about SNC with strong national or regional interests like the EU or Switzerland is their lack of a clear-cut and a representative definition that serves as a reference for its citizens. Indeed, Europe is still under construction, not only at political and economic levels where national interests challenge a European vision, but also in terms of identity, given that the development of a European identity is challenged by the Europe's immense cultural diversity (e.g., Schlenker-Fischer, 2010). Despite the fact that Switzerland is a federal state and has been a political nation for centuries, whether it constitutes a mono-national or multi-national state is highly debated (e.g., Eugster and Strijbis, 2010). In sum, the EU and Switzerland are challenged by a heterogeneous and unrepresentative definition of their cultural and national identity. Furthermore, the perceived heterogeneity of these identities may also vary as a function of whether this heterogeneity is emphasized by relevant actors (e.g., political parties, media), as well as in response to ingroup threat (Hutchison, Jetten, Christian, and Haycraft, 2006).

Investigating the consequences of the perceived heterogeneity on intergroup relations is of theoretical and social relevance, even if this issue remains to date relatively understudied, and different lines of research suggest contrasting predictions. On the one hand, some research suggests that ingroup heterogeneity can improve intergroup relations because heterogeneity tends to blur ingroup-outgroup distinctions (Tajfel and Turner, 1986). Indeed, positive intergroup attitudes appear when both ingroup (multiple categorization; e.g., Miller, Brewer, and Ar buckle, 2009; Schmid, Hewstone, Tausch, Cairns, and Hughes, 2009) and outgroup (e.g., Brauer and Er-rafiy, 2011) heterogeneity is high. Furthermore, according to the relevant ingroup projection model (Mummendey and Wenzel, 1999; Waldzus and Mummendey, 2004), more positive intergroup attitudes also may appear when the superordinate category allows social diversity and integrates ingroup and outgroups.

Nevertheless, social identity theory also helps to understand the opposite prediction. Indeed, group membership provides a protective and stable reference for group members by offering and upholding a positive and distinctive social identity, as groups need to provide their members with clear and representative prototypes. Consequently, because ingroup heterogeneity may easily lead to an unclear and non-representative definition of group identity, SNC may provide ingroup members with a weak and vulnerable social identity that challenges the functions of group membership (e.g., Doosje, Ellemers, and Spears, 1995; Hogg, 2000). Accordingly, perceived heterogeneity of SNC may increase intergroup differentiation and therefore

result in more negative intergroup attitudes. This prediction is in agreement with past research showing that ingroup heterogeneity may be related to higher intergroup differentiation (Deschamps and Doise, 1978). This also concurs with research suggesting that multiculturalism, despite its frequent association with positive intergroup relations, may be seen as a 'failure' in managing cultural diversity when majority groups may feel that their identity is unacknowledged and therefore not enough attention is paid to their needs and aspirations (e.g., Verkuyten, 2006; Vorauer and Sasaki, 2011).

With regards to the normative level, social norms are perceived as rules that define appropriate attitudes and behaviors towards what people should do and what is socially approved (e.g., Cialdini, Kallgren, and Reno, 1991). A huge amount of research has suggested that intentions and behaviors follow social norms (e.g., Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975), particularly when they are salient (Cialdini et al., 1991), when individual-norm discrepancies are highlighted (e.g., Muñoz, Falomir, Invernizzi, and Leuenberger, 2000), and when social identity is an important basis for self-definition (e.g., Hogg and Terry, 2000). Indeed, prejudice and discrimination have been explained as depending on social norms (e.g., Sherif and Sherif, 1964), and recent studies have confirmed such a normative explanation (e.g., Crandall and Eshleman, 2003; Louis, Duck, Terry, Schuller, and Lalonde, 2007).

However, contradicting predictions can be advanced again. Several studies suggest the limitations of an egalitarian norm in influencing intergroup attitudes, which indicates that recognition of the right to equality for immigrants may constitute a potential threat to the national group. First, intergroup equality means that all people should enjoy the same rights regardless of their social characteristics, and that institutional and personal discrimination should be condemned. Increasing equality therefore challenges the ideology according to which it is legitimate and normative that ingroup members (e.g., nationals) have an advantage over out-group members (e.g., immigrants; Tajfel, 1970; Montoya and Pitinsky, 2013). Second, intergroup equality challenges the desired ingroup distinctiveness, which ideologies such as color-blindness and assimilation may do (e.g., Richeson and Nussbaum, 2004; Wolsko, Park, Judd, and Wittenbrink, 2000). Accordingly, under certain conditions an egalitarian norm can lead ingroup members to *reactively* assert distinct group boundaries between their ingroup and a lower status out-group (i.e., reactive distinctiveness; Jetten and Spears, 2003), namely because this norm challenges both the privileges that ingroup members may perceive as exclusive and the positive and distinctive ingroup identity. As a result, nationals' attitudes towards immigrants

can paradoxically become more negative when egalitarian norms promote the equal treatment of nationals and immigrants (Falomir, Gabarrot, and Mugny, 2009a, 2009b; Gabarrot, Falomir, and Mugny, 2009; Sanchez-Mazas, Roux, and Mugny, 1994).

In brief, the EU and Switzerland are SNC characterized by both a heterogeneous identity and an egalitarian normative context. Whereas these factors often contribute to improving intergroup relations in general, and attitudes towards immigrants in particular, there are also reasons to think that they may result in more negative attitudes. In the next sections we will describe research investigating when and why identity heterogeneity and egalitarian norms may have negative consequences towards immigrants, and showing that this is especially the case when they are perceived as threatening nationals' identity or welfare.

### **The paradoxical effect of heterogeneous national identities**

Despite the fact that SNC are by definition heterogeneous, only a few studies have directly examined the possibility that such heterogeneity may result in negative intergroup relations. For instance, Roccas and Amit (2011) showed that perceived ingroup heterogeneity can increase negative attitudes towards ingroup deviants and outgroups especially among people with high conservation values. These authors assume that ingroup heterogeneity by its nature defines a complex and unpredictable social environment that increases the risk of norm violation and therefore prevents clear and unambiguous distinctions between an ingroup and an outgroup.

Steffens, Reese, Ehrke, and Jonas (2012) also examined whether complex SNC may increase perceptions of the threat posed by other subgroups. In line with Mummendey and Wenzel (1999), they postulated that a diverse superordinate category may decrease intergroup discrimination, provided that the perceived relative prototypicality of groups within the superordinate category (ingroup projection in the superordinate category) is reduced. However, they also reasoned that activating a complex representation of the superordinate category including different subgroups may question the status of highly prototypical groups within the superordinate category, which may therefore elicit threat and intergroup bias. They found consistent support for these predictions in various experiments. The activation of a complex superordinate category decreases ingroup projection and intergroup bias for those participants who are members of a numerical minority (i.e., members of industrial societies within the world population, East Germans as Germans), but increases ingroup projection and bias for

those participants who belong to highly prototypical ingroups (West Germans as Germans, university students as students, and heterosexuals as men).

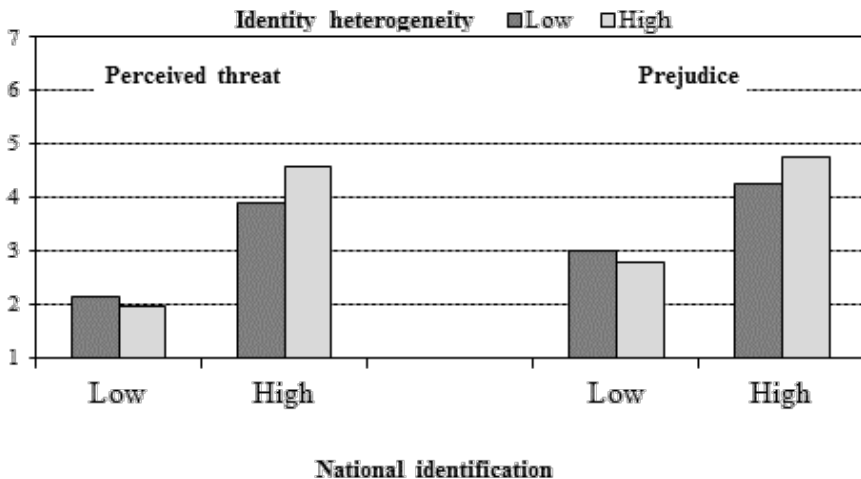
In line with these researches, we conducted a study examining as to whether the perceived heterogeneity of Swiss national identity influences nationals' reactions towards immigrants, and whether national identification moderates this effect. According to social identity theory, the functions a group accomplishes for its members increases as group identification increases (Tajfel and Turner, 1986), and we therefore assumed that group identification increases the desire for a narrower and clearer social identity. Indeed, group identification increases both the ingroup conformity and intergroup bias, especially in threatening intergroup contexts (e.g., Jetten, Postmes, and McAuliffe, 2002; Wohl, Giguère, Branscombe, and McVicar, 2011). High identifiers are also particularly motivated to increase ingroup homogeneity as a collective response to a threat (Castano and Yzerbyt, 1998; Doosje, Spears, Ellemers, and Koomen, 1999; Simon and Klandermans, 2001). In sum, assuming that group heterogeneity may constitute a likely threat to the group's function of providing a clear and protective definition of identity, we predicted perceived ingroup heterogeneity to increase the perception of ingroup threat especially for high group identifiers.

We carried out two studies in which we asked Swiss nationals to indicate how strongly they identified with their national group and to read information depicting the Swiss national identity as either heterogeneous or homogeneous (Falomir and Frederic, 2013). Just as the European identity, the Swiss national identity provides an excellent context for this type of study because Switzerland's strong federalism allows the national identity to be depicted as either homogeneous or heterogeneous depending on whether the spotlight is placed on the similarities between cantons or on their differences. In the *low* [high] heterogeneity condition, the title of the report was "The Swiss identity: an example of cultural *singularity* [diversity]". The report stated: "A recent survey of a representative sample of Swiss citizens showed that the Swiss identity is characterized by cultural *singularity* [diversity]. *Despite* [Because of] the existence of different political regions and languages, Switzerland constitutes a *homogeneous entity* [heterogeneous conglomerate] in which there *is a single way* [are different ways] of feeling Swiss. These findings are in line with the opinions of numerous researchers (sociologists, economists, psychologists, and political scientists). We talk about the Swiss identity in the *singular* [plural] for a number of reasons." The report then provided four arguments in support of low versus high heterogeneity of the Swiss identity.

Finally, participants responded to the Stephan, Ybarra and Bachman's (1999) scale of perceived ingroup threat posed by immigrants and to the Akrami, Ekehammer and Araya's (2000) modern-prejudice scale towards them, which we adapted to the Swiss context. The results (Figure 1) showed that national identification increased both the perceived threat and prejudice. More importantly, results also supported the hypothesis that national identification moderates the effect of induced identity heterogeneity on the perceptions of ingroup threat and outgroup prejudice. They showed that heterogeneity increased perceived threat and prejudice among high identifiers, but not among low identifiers.

**Figure 1**

Perceived threat and prejudice towards immigrants as a function of national identification and national identity heterogeneity (adapted from Falomir and Frederic, 2013, Study 3)



These results suggest that the effects of social diversity and multiculturalism on intergroup relations are complex, and not always positive. For instance, group heterogeneity can result in more tolerant (Hutchison, Jetten, and Gutierrez, 2011) or intolerant (Roccas and Amit, 2011) attitudes towards group deviants. The present results show that the heterogeneity of a SNC can also result in more negative attitudes towards outgroups that do not actually belong to the SNC, such as immigrants in the EU. However further research should examine whether this effect appeared because im-



migrants are perceived as having the potential to increase national heterogeneity in the future (e.g., when they become nationals; see Roccas and Amit, 2011).

Furthermore, and given that heterogeneous national identities hardly mirror a mono-ethnic definition of national identity, these results may also be of relevance for research on different definitions of national identity. For instance, heterogeneous civic (as opposed to ethnic) identities may be associated with more intolerant outgroup attitudes if they are perceived as a challenge to an exclusive and representative national identity, in particular for specific sub-groups of nationals such as high identifiers. However, since civic identities may also result in more inclusive national identities and tolerant attitudes (Diez Medrano and Koenig, 2005; Wakefield et al., 2011), the moderators of these complex relations need to be identified.

### **The paradoxical effect of the egalitarian norm**

Our starting point in this line of research was that individuals do not follow social norms blindly; group members do not always conform. Rather they show conformity as a function of their understanding of the norm and the situation (Pérez and Mugny, 1996). Group norms are more influential when they are perceived as legitimate, that is when they provide guiding principles adapted to the context and to the perceptions, values and motives of group members (Zelditch, 2001). People behave in accordance to their attitudes when the normative climate of their group supports their attitude (Terry and Hogg, 1996), and are more likely to follow the norm when it matches culturally accepted values (e.g., Blanchard, Crandall, Brigham, and Vaughn, 1994). Indeed, a counter-conformity effect may even appear when the norm mismatches individuals' personal values (Hornsey, Majkut, Terry, and McKimmie, 2003). Accordingly, group members adopt normative principles more easily when these principles fit their perceptions of the intergroup context, and may even reject them when they appear incongruent.

Accordingly, we advanced the general prediction that nationals will reduce prejudice and discrimination towards immigrants when the egalitarian norm is perceived as legitimate. However, they will resist this norm, and even show counter-conformity, when this norm is not attuned to their expectations regarding the intergroup context. Put differently, the egalitarian norm would be perceived as illegitimate when the social and political context of immigration and nationals' perceptions of nationals-immigrants relations tend to legitimate nationals' favoritism over immigrants. We thus predicted that the nationals' representation of the intergroup context—e.g.,

as legitimizing or not the priority of nationals—would moderate the influence of an egalitarian norm on attitudes towards immigrants.

### **The moderating role of perceived threat**

We started to investigate this hypothesis by focusing on the threat that immigrants may introduce to nationals' identity and prerogatives. As mentioned before, both realistic and symbolic threats are characterized by a representation of intergroup relationships in competitive terms. In particular, negative interdependence between ingroup and out-group implies that what is good for the out-group is bad for the ingroup and vice versa (Mugny, Sanchez-Mazas, Roux, and Pérez, 1991; Mummendey and Schreiber, 1983). The instrumental model of group conflict (Esses, Jackson, and Armstrong, 1998) posits that two factors determine the ingroup members' perception of group competition: resource stress (resource scarcity, unequal distribution or desire for unequal distribution) and the salience of a potentially competitive out-group potentially threatening ingroup resources. Accordingly, previous research showed that the extent to which individuals perceive an outgroup such as immigrants as threatening or not will determine a change in outgroup discrimination (e.g., Quillian, 1995).

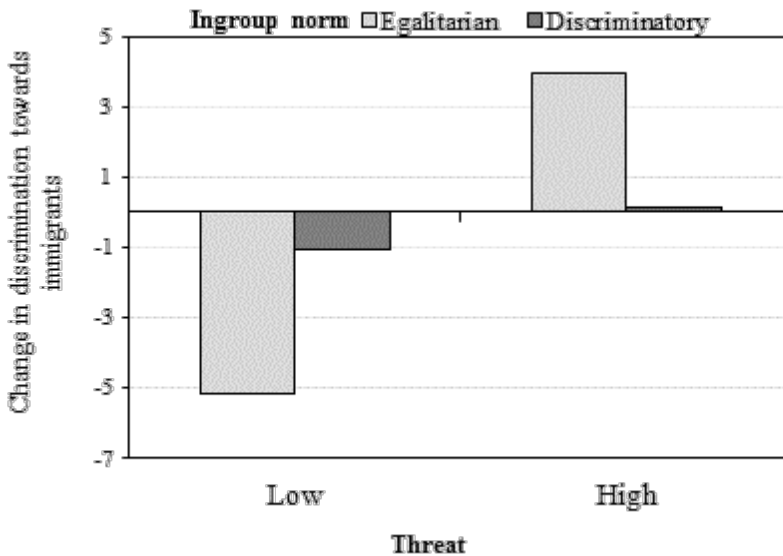
However, our analysis of the conformity processes goes beyond the prediction of this main effect for the effect of perceived threat. We consider that the perceived threat would also moderate conformity effects in such a way that perceiving a threatening intergroup context should contribute to decreasing the legitimacy of an egalitarian ingroup norm and its impact. Accordingly, we predicted that ingroup threat is a moderator of the influence of an egalitarian norm. In a series of experimental studies we examined changes in Swiss nationals' discrimination against immigrants as a function of ingroup norm and induced ingroup threat (Falomir, Muñoz-Rojas, Invernizzi, and Mugny, 2004). The threat to the ingroup was manipulated in line with the perception that immigrants do or do not take away employment from nationals. In low threat conditions, a negative relationship between the increasing proportion of immigrants in Switzerland and the unemployment rate of Swiss nationals was illustrated, whereas a positive relationship was depicted in the high threat conditions. The ingroup norm was manipulated by informing participants about the results of a poll carried out within a representative ingroup (Swiss nationals) sample. The results were said to indicate that a huge majority of the Swiss nationals valued positively (egalitarian norm condition) versus negatively (discriminatory norm condition) a person who favors Swiss people over immigrants. The main dependent variable was the change in discrimination against im-

migrants measured before and after this experimental induction by the allowance of various economic resources to Swiss nationals and immigrants.

No influence of the discrimination ingroup norm was observed in these studies<sup>1</sup>. As regards the influence of the egalitarian norm (Figure 2), the expected conformity effect was observed when immigrants were not perceived as being threatening, i.e., participants decreased their level of discrimination. However, a kind of counter-conformity effect tended to appear when immigrants were perceived as threatening: participants resisted the norm and even increased their level of discrimination.

**Figure 2**

Change in discrimination towards immigrants as a function of induced threat and ingroup norm (adapted from Falomir et al., 2004, Study 2).



These findings confirmed that perceived threat moderates the influence of the egalitarian ingroup norm on discrimination towards immigrants. Not only an egalitarian norm can lose its influence when the intergroup context does not legitimate equal treatment (i.e., high induced threat); it can even increase discrimination. The threat in these studies was a realistic

<sup>1</sup> We will no further consider this norm as it does not constitute the focus of the present paper.

threat in which immigrants were perceived as taking the jobs of nationals. However, similar findings were observed when using a threat to the positive identity in which immigrants were described as inducing a depreciation of Swiss values and customs and as impairing Swiss identity (Falomir and Mugny, 2009; Falomir et al., 2009b), or a threat to ingroup distinctiveness in which immigrants were perceived as 'too' similar to nationals (Gabarrot et al., 2009).

These dynamics were hypothesized according to the notion that threat decreases the perceived legitimacy of an egalitarian norm, but these studies only indirectly addressed these legitimizing processes. In order to provide evidence for such processes, further research investigated the possible dispositional moderators of this process. If the moderating role of threat relies on the perceived legitimacy attributed to the egalitarian norm, we reasoned that these dynamics should depend on individual differences providing or not legitimacy to this norm. Accordingly, we examined how factors such as nationals' perception of immigrants' ability to adapt to the host country, their attitudes towards immigrants and national identification moderate the investigated processes.

### **Perception of immigrants' ability to assimilate**

Two dimensions are often of relevance for studying relations between natives and immigrants (acculturation processes): the desire to maintain or not their proper culture and the desire to establish a contact or not with the other group (or whether to adopt the culture of the other group; Berry, 1991). Several studies have focused not only on the attitude of both groups with respect to the processes of acculturation, but also on expectations regarding the attitude of the other group (e.g., Montreuil and Bourhis, 2001). In general these attitudes and expectations largely determine the attitude towards immigrants.

With respect to the (native) host group, integration (adaptation of immigrants in the host country while maintaining aspects of their culture of origin) is the preferred modality (e.g., Ward and Masgoret, 2006), although in some instances assimilation (i.e., adaptation to the host country without maintaining aspects of their own culture; Zick, Wagner, van Dick, and Petzel, 2001) is preferred. In Spain for example, social support for the integration of immigrants is relatively low as compared with its support for assimilation (Cea D'Ancona, 2004). Integration is the preferred processes when immigrants are similar and socially valued, while assimilation is preferred when they are seen as different and less valued (Montreuil and Bourhis, 2001). In sum, similar and valued immigrants who easily assimilate

late are perceived as less threatening, and prompt more favorable attitudes towards them (e.g., Iatridis, 2003; Rohmann, Florack, and Piontkowski, 2006; van Oudenhoven and Eisses, 1998). Accordingly, we hypothesized that the perceived ability of immigrants to assimilate can moderate the normative processes studied in this paper. The perception that immigrants can easily adapt to the host culture should enhance support for policies that favor such adaptation, and therefore increase the perceived legitimacy of the egalitarian norm. Conversely, a perceived difficulty or inability of adaptation should increase the perceived legitimacy of discrimination towards them.

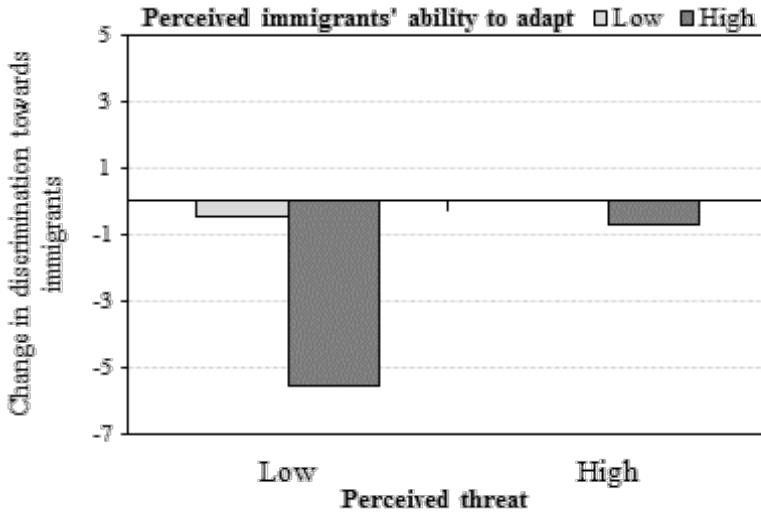
In two studies we tested the hypothesis that an egalitarian norm reduces discrimination against immigrants when the perceived threat introduced by immigrants is low and the perceived ability of immigrants to adapt to the host country is high (Falomir and Mugny, 2009; Falomir, Gabarrot, Mugny, and Nurra, 2007). For instance, we recruited a sample of Swiss nationals with moderate discriminatory attitudes towards immigrants and assessed their perception of the ability of immigrants to adapt to Switzerland (Falomir and Mugny, 2009). Then we experimentally manipulated the perception of intergroup threat, this time by informing participants about a previous study on how tourists and foreign workers perceived Switzerland and Swiss nationals. This study was said to have revealed a positive versus a negative perception of Swiss people and identity as a result of the number of immigrants in the targeted cities, i.e., participants learned that immigrants either threatened (high threat) or not (low threat) the Swiss image and identity. Finally, we manipulated experimentally the ingroup norm as in Falomir et al.'s (2004) studies.

The results showed that the egalitarian norm decreased discrimination when the threat was low and the immigrants were perceived as highly adaptable in Switzerland (Figure 3), but not when threat was high and/or immigrants' adaptability was low. These findings provided support to the hypothesis that conformity appears when both dispositional (i.e., immigrants adaptability) and situational (i.e. threat to national identity) factors support legitimacy to the egalitarian norm, but disappears when one of these two factors makes this norm illegitimate in the eyes of the participants. Furthermore, these findings were also consistent with those observed in our previous studies manipulating a threat relative to ingroup economic resources, and then allow generalizing to threaten national identity. Finally, they appeared whilst perceived immigrants adaptability was operationalized in general, but future research should examine the influence of the egalitar-

ian norm as a function of more specific perceptions of immigrants' ability of adaptation (see Navas, García, and Square, 2003).

**Figure 3**

Change in discrimination towards immigrants as a function of perceived threat and immigrant's ability to adapt to the host country (adapted from Falomir and Mugny, 2009, egalitarian norm condition).



**Individuals' attitudes towards immigrants**

The second moderator that we have investigated was nationals' attitude towards immigrants. Given that the moderating role of threat relies on the perceived legitimacy attributed to the egalitarian norm, we reasoned that these conformity processes should additionally be moderated by the extent to which attitudes towards immigrants provided legitimacy to this norm. Indeed, people's attitudes and values influence the perceived legitimacy of social norms, and attitudes would constitute a more direct operationalization of the legitimacy processes we are examining. Past research suggests that those nationals with negative attitudes towards immigrants consider ingroup favoritism as legitimate, and then will consequently perceive the egalitarian norm as relatively illegitimate. For instance, nationals with higher prejudice towards immigrants show greater preference for discriminatory principles (Sanchez-Mazas, Mugny, and Jovanovic, 1996), which best reflect their understanding of intergroup relations (Mugny et al., 1991), and feel less honest about dividing resources in an independent rather than

in a competitive way (negative interdependence; cf. Mummendey and Schreiber, 1983). These findings suggest that highly prejudiced nationals consider more legitimate group precedence than egalitarian principles. Accordingly, we predicted that nationals with high prejudice towards immigrants will show a counter-conformity effect as a reaction to the perceived illegitimacy of the equal treatment between nationals and immigrants that is fostered by the egalitarian norm.

In two studies we examined the influence of an egalitarian norm on Swiss nationals' discrimination against immigrants as a function of initial attitude (pro-immigrant versus anti-immigrant) and ingroup threat (i.e., whether or not immigrants are perceived as taking nationals' jobs; Falomir, Chatard, Selimbegovic, Konan, and Mugny, *in press*). Participants indicated their attitude towards immigrants at the beginning of their participation. Perceived ingroup threat was experimentally manipulated following the procedure used in previous research (Falomir et al., 2004), and the salience of the egalitarian norm was kept constant. First, we expected anti-immigrants to be more influenced by the egalitarian norm than pro-immigrants, given that they would perceive themselves as deviating from the social norm (Pérez and Mugny, 1996). However, given that personal attitudes lead anti-immigrants to consider an egalitarian norm as rather illegitimate, this norm would result in a conformity effect only when the social context contributes to reinforcing the legitimacy of this norm (i.e., in the absence of threat), but not when it legitimates ingroup favoritism (i.e., in the presence of threat). Finally, we reasoned that pro-immigrants should be less sensitive to the legitimacy of an egalitarian norm provided by the social context, since they personally perceive this norm as legitimate.

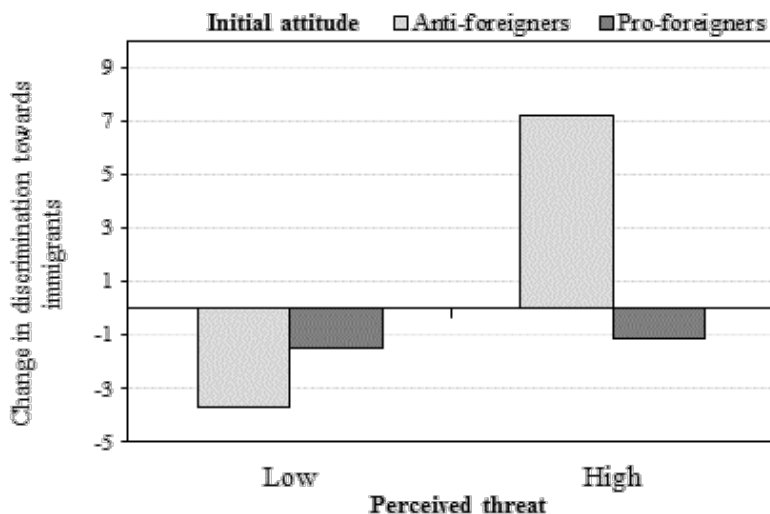
Overall, results provided support for our predictions. In both studies intergroup discrimination was reduced among anti-immigrants when perceived threat was low. When ingroup threat was high, however, no influence was observed in Study 1 where intergroup comparisons were independent, whereas a counter-conformity effect was observed in Study 2 where perceived threat was enhanced by the use of negatively interdependent intergroup comparisons (Figure 4). Whereas the greater influence of the egalitarian norm when ingroup threat was low replicated the findings already reported, the present results extend them by showing that this effect is observed specifically among anti-immigrants participants.

Put in another way, individual-norm discrepancy could motivate conformity as well as counter-conformity. Indeed, pro-immigrants (low individual-norm discrepancy) appeared not to be sensitive to the legitimacy of the egalitarian norm provided by the social context, as they already show

positive attitudes towards immigrants, seeing this norm as legitimate, and perceiving themselves as already in agreement with such a norm. Conversely, anti-immigrants (high individual-norm discrepancy) were influenced by the egalitarian norm, given that they would perceive themselves as deviating from this norm (Muñoz et al., 2000). This was true only when perceived threat was low; however when threat was high, they even displayed a counter-conformity effect.

**Figure 4**

Change in discrimination towards immigrants as a function of perceived threat and participants' initial attitude (adapted from Falomir et al., in press, Study 2).



### **The moderating role of ingroup identification**

In other research we investigated whether ingroup identification also constitutes a reliable moderator of the effect of perceived threat on the influence of ingroup norms. Indeed, group identification increases ingroup favoritism (Tajfel and Turner, 1986), in particular when the outgroup is perceived as threatening (e.g., Branscombe and Wann, 1994; Ellemers, Spears, and Doosje, 2002; Voci, 2006). Accordingly, high identifiers appear to show greater concern about ingroup benefits, which means that they perceive an egalitarian norm as illegitimate specifically in contexts of where perceived threat is high.

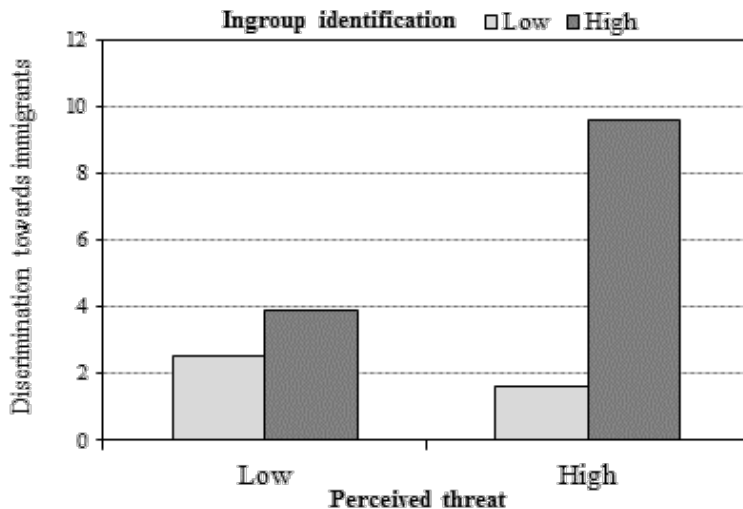
We tested this hypothesis in a series of studies in which we first assessed Swiss nationals' identification (Falomir et al., 2009a, 2009b; Gabar-



rot et al., 2009). We then informed them for instance about the results of a sociological study that revealed the extent to which foreigners' presence in Switzerland affected the preservation of four dimensions of Swiss identity (i.e., national values, customs, Swiss identity, and the image of the Swiss people; Falomir et al., 2009b, Study 2). In the low threat condition, data showed that scores for each identity dimension were maintained even in cities containing the highest rates of foreigners. Foreigners were, therefore, depicted as people contributing as much as Swiss citizens to the maintenance of Swiss values and customs, as well as to a positive Swiss identity. In the high threat condition, participants were informed that scores for each identity dimension decreased as the percentage of foreigners in the cities increased. Foreigners were thus described as inducing depreciation of Swiss values and customs and to impairing Swiss identity. We then experimentally manipulated the ingroup norm (egalitarian or discriminatory) and assessed discrimination towards immigrants as in the previous studies.

**Figure 5**

Discrimination towards immigrants as a function of perceived threat and participants' ingroup identification (adapted from Falomir et al., 2009b, St. 2, egalitarian norm condition).



Results for the egalitarian norm conditions (Figure 5) confirmed that group identification moderates the influence of the egalitarian norm. Swiss nationals' identification with their country resulted in a greater conformity when ingroup threat was low, but in a counter-conformity effect (i.e., an

increase in discrimination) when ingroup threat was high. High identifiers, contrarily to low identifiers, appear to be motivated to protect their group against the ingroup threat, even if this means they may appear normatively deviants. These results of national identification were replicated in other studies in which we manipulated a threat to ingroup distinctiveness (Gabarrot et al., 2009) or to ingroup prerogatives (Falomir et al., 2009a).

### **The loyalty conflict**

The previous findings suggest that, in threatening conditions, high identifiers increase discrimination in response to the egalitarian ingroup norm because their group does not act in an adaptive manner towards immigrants. However, this counter-conformity may appear at odds with other research indicating that greater identification increases members' endorsement of normative principles (e.g., Christensen, Rothgerber, Wood, and Matz, 2004), specifically when ingroup threat is high (e.g., Jetten et al., 2002, Study 3). Indeed, strong ingroup attachment increases motivation for both group defense and conformity, but conformity towards an egalitarian norm works against defensive motivation activated in face of ingroup threat. We advanced the notion of *loyalty conflict* in order to account for this particular conflict that high identifiers could feel in high threatening conditions (Falomir et al., 2009b): when ingroup threat is high, conformity to an egalitarian ingroup norm and ingroup defense are opposed group tendencies, and high identifiers should feel more loyalty conflict than low identifiers.

The remaining question is how do high identifiers resolve this loyalty conflict? There is consistent evidence that high identifiers feel more committed to their group and show more group-level responses when their group is threatened, whereas low identifiers are more likely to show individual-level responses (Ellemers et al., 2002). Put differently, high identifiers will act according to the best interests for their group. Accordingly, high identifiers should be more concerned with group stakes and challenges than with individually matching group norms, and should therefore watch more carefully whether normative principles are beneficial to the group or not. Indeed, our research described previously consistently showed that when group-related motives such as conformity to egalitarian norms and group protection against threatening intergroup contexts are in conflict, high identifiers would show a tendency to oppose the egalitarian norm.

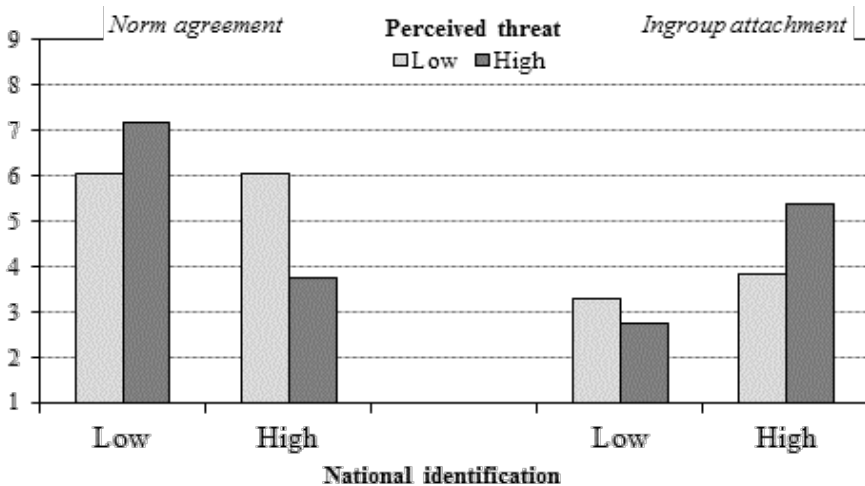
However, does the high identifiers' counter-conformity effect mean that these nationals distance themselves from the group or 'betray' their group? Given that overall high identifiers are more committed to their group, we

reasoned that the observed counter-conformity effects did not mean they actually reject their group but rather to the contrary: they reject the egalitarian norm of the group in order to protect the group, which means a greater commitment to their group. Accordingly, the counter-conformity effect should paradoxically be related to an increased attachment to the group.

We conducted a study in order to test these hypotheses (Falomir et al., 2009a). Swiss nationals indicated their national identification at the pre-test. Ingroup threat and ingroup norm were manipulated as in Falomir et al. (2004). We focus here on the results regarding the participants' agreement with the norm (e.g., 'Do you think the opinion of the Swiss majority is legitimate?') and attachment to Swiss identity and values as opposed to more general values unrepresentative of the Swiss group (e.g., 'To what extent do you identify 'to humanity' vs. 'to Swiss people'?).

**Figure 6**

Norm agreement and ingroup attachment as a function of perceived threat and ingroup identification (adapted from Falomir et al., 2009a, egalitarian norm condition)



Results (Figure 6) showed that high identifiers disagreed more with the egalitarian norm when perceived threat was high, providing support for the already described counter-conformity effect (see Figure 4). However, and as expected, high identifiers also showed greater attachment to the ingroup at the same time, in such a condition. In addition, mediation analyses showed that in high threat conditions norm agreement mediated the effect

of identification to ingroup attachment: the lower the norm agreement, the higher the group attachment. Despite the fact that participants were university students and generally overtly against discrimination, when the threat was high, their agreement with the egalitarian norm was lower, suggesting that even overall egalitarian individuals can show counter-conformity to an egalitarian ingroup norm when perceived threat is high .

These findings provide further evidence for the hypothesis that high identifiers actively oppose, rather than disregard, the egalitarian norm when this norm is considered inappropriate for coping with the threat introduced by the outgroup, thereby confirming the existence of a counter-conformity effect. In other words, high identifiers were, to some extent, obliged to be disloyal to their group (i.e., to act against the egalitarian norm) but for a 'good' reason (i.e., in order to protect the group against the threat). However, this lack of normative conformity does not have to be considered as a genuine disengagement with the group. First, high identifiers solve the conflict in the interest of the ingroup. Furthermore, they compensate for such an apparent lack of conformity by strongly affirming their attachment to the group.

## **Conclusion**

We started our reasoning by suggesting that two of the most important characteristics of SNC such as the EU or Switzerland are their diversity and their overall endorsement of egalitarian values. Whereas past research showed that these two factors often resulted in more positive intergroup attitudes, we have suggested that in some circumstances they can also increase negative attitudes. This prediction was based on individuals' motivation to maintain a positive and distinctive ingroup identity, which can be threatened by either the heterogeneity of the SNC or a salient norm promoting undifferentiated treatment of social groups. The attitude of Swiss nationals towards immigrants served to demonstrate these paradoxical effects.

A first line of research showed that the heterogeneity of the national identity may increase negative intergroup attitudes among individuals who perceive their group as highly prototypical of the superordinate category (Steffens et al., 2012), among people with high conservation values (Roccas and Amit, 2011) and people with high ingroup identification (Falomir and Frederic, 2013). In all these cases we can assume that the heterogeneity of a SNC defines a complex and unpredictable social context that prevents a clear and unambiguous ingroup identity definition and a clear ingroup/outgroup distinction. As a consequence, negative attitudes towards immigrants will provide nationals with a clearer and less ambiguous defini-

tion of their national identity, which in turn contributes to preventing this threat.

A second line of research examined the interactive effect of ingroup norm and ingroup threat and showed that this effect differed depending on the Swiss nationals' perception of immigrants' ability to adapt to the host country, their attitude towards immigrants, and their ingroup identification. Overall the results regarding these different moderators of the conformity effects provided evidence to the hypothesis that conformity is not a universal drive, but rather an adaptive mechanism activated as a consequence of individual and group needs. Indeed, conformity does not appear unless the norm constitutes a group adaptive answer to the threat introduced by the intergroup context. The case is that in some circumstances superordinate national categories such as the EU or Switzerland may not induce conformity to egalitarian norms, but rather opposition or even counter-conformity.

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