



# Political affiliation, collective self-esteem and perceived employability of immigrants: Inducing national identity polarizes host-nation employers



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## ABSTRACT

Host-nation employers' political affiliation and national identity both may be relevant to seeing immigrant job-seekers as employable. However, whether national identity alters differences in links between political affiliation and evaluations of immigrants is not well articulated, and this includes a potential for national identity to either bolster or lessen harshness toward immigrant job-seekers. Moreover, research has yet to identify psychological mechanisms that could transmit a conjoint effect of political affiliation and national identity. In this study, we examined the capacity of national identity to accentuate links between political affiliation and perceived employability of immigrants. Liberal and conservative employment experts (human resource professionals and managers) were experimentally primed to elicit either a personal or national (U.S.) identity, and measures of attitudes toward immigrant job-seekers were collected. Results suggested a polarizing effect of national identity: conservative employers viewed immigrants as less employable when primed with national identity, while liberal employers rated immigrants as more employable. Among conservatives, priming national identity also resulted in greater collective self-esteem – feelings of self-worth derived from group membership. Moreover, increases in collective self-esteem mediated the link between primed national identity and less perceived employability among conservatives. Overall, this research contributes to emerging literature by suggesting that the capacity of national identity to either bolster or lessen harshness toward immigrants may depend on political affiliation. In addition, we suggest that transient changes in collective self-esteem can result from priming national identity, and that such changes may transmit links between national identity and evaluations of immigrants among conservatives.

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## 1. Introduction

Immigrants encounter numerous hardships as they resettle into new nations. One important and especially difficult challenge for immigrants involves obtaining employment (Alarcón, 1999; De Vries & Pettigrew, 1998; Evers, Te Nijenhuis, &

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van der Flier, 2005; Harcourt, Lam, Harcourt, & Flynn, 2008). Immigrants' capacity to gain employment in a host-nation may be affected by numerous factors that include their a priori skill sets, training, and other experiences that occur upon settling in a new nation (e.g., Kanas, van Tubergen, & van der Lippe, 2009). Although pre and post migration training and policy factors are important to successful integration, psychological perspectives emphasize that immigrant employment can also be affected by host-nation employers' willingness to hire immigrant workers (e.g., Grant, 2007; Grant & Nadin, 2007). In turn, securing employment in a host-nation may depend on the capacity of prospective employers to view immigrant job-seekers as competent, productive, and deserving.

Of particular relevance to employment, support for immigrants may be linked to the social and psychological characteristics of host-nation citizens, and political conservatism in particular may bolster exclusionary treatment of immigrants (e.g., Hitlan, Carillo, Zárate, & Aikman, 2007; Sniderman, Hagendoorn, & Prior, 2004). In parallel, psychological theory and research emphasize that discriminatory treatment of immigrants may be accentuated by a strong national identity (e.g., Esses, Dovidio, Jackson, & Armstrong, 2001; Huntington, 2004; Jackson, Brown, Brown, & Marks, 2001; Joppke, 2004; Verkuyten, 2009). Although political affiliation and national identity are both important in guiding evaluations of immigrants, relatively little attention has been given to their effect on employment-related outcomes, including evaluations of immigrant job-seekers. In parallel, there have been few attempts to jointly examine these perspectives, and to consider whether group differences in links between political affiliation and evaluations of immigrants are accentuated by national identity (e.g., Ferguson & Hassin, 2007). Further still, little is known about psychological mechanisms that could transmit a combined effect of political affiliation and national identity on evaluations of immigrants. In the present research, we sought to determine if a momentary activation of national identity would polarize links between host-nation employers' political affiliation and their perceived employability of immigrants. Specifically, we consider whether national identity accentuates tendencies to treat immigrants favorably or sternly that exist among liberals and conservatives. In addition, we aimed to determine if national identity would alter links between political affiliation and collective self-esteem, and whether collective self-esteem encompasses a psychological mechanism linking an interactive effect of political affiliation and national identity to harsher evaluations of immigrant job-seekers.

### 1.1. *Political affiliation and attitudes toward immigrants*

A sizable literature supports the notion that social and psychological tendencies of host-nation citizens' play a fundamental role in determining treatment accorded to immigrants. Increasingly, research has emphasized links to political ideology that especially include conservatism (for review, Jost, Federico, & Napier, 2009). According to contemporary theories, political conservatism embodies a motivated social cognition that includes both resistance to change and support for inequality (e.g., Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003). In parallel, research overwhelmingly suggests that individuals possess enduring tendencies toward either conservatism or liberalism, and that political affiliation provides a valuable means for connecting the psychological basis of political ideology to intergroup relations (Jost et al., 2009).

Of current interest, political attitudes have been well connected to both inclusive and exclusionary intergroup attitudes. For example, while liberalism may be associated with a desire for social harmony and tolerance of others (e.g., Braithwaite, 1998; Skitka & Tetlock, 1993), a conservative political affiliation is often linked to greater hostility toward a wide variety of stigmatized outgroups (e.g., Duckitt, Wagner, Plessiss, & Birum, 2002; Federico & Sidanius, 2002; Napier & Jost, 2008). In turn, research highlights that a conservative political ideology may be especially associated with harshness toward immigrants (e.g., Hitlan et al., 2007; Sniderman et al., 2004). Links to exclusionary treatment of immigrants coincide with research that suggests tendencies closely related to conservatism such as authoritarianism (Oyamot, Borgida, & Fisher, 2006; Quinton, Cowan, & Watson, 1996), social dominance orientation (e.g., Costello & Hodson, 2010; Esses, Jackson, & Armstrong, 1998; Thomsen, Green, & Sidanius, 2008), and belief in a just world (Bierbrauer & Klinger, 2002; Montada & Schneider, 1989) also predict diminished support for immigrants. Although evidence linking liberal and conservative group affiliations to the treatment of immigrants is compelling, research thus far has not well attended to whether political affiliation also influences willingness to hire immigrant workers. Of current interest, the extent to which conservatism among host-nation employers might sustain hostility toward immigrant job-seekers remains unclear.

### 1.2. *National identity and attitudes toward immigrants*

According to social identity theory, individuals possess a personal identity – which includes beliefs about one's own skills, abilities, or attributes – and also social identities that define the self in terms of membership in various social groups (e.g., Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner, 1982). Social identities can provide individuals with valuable information about how to feel, think, and act toward others. Although sometimes prescribing benevolence (e.g., Tarrant, Dazeley, & Cottom, 2009), theory and research have largely emphasized the potential for social identity to produce ingroup favoritism, and to promote callousness toward outgroup members (for review, Hornsey, 2008). Attempts to link group-level identity to harsh treatment of others have increasingly attended to exclusionary treatment of immigrants. Of current interest, theory and research support that national identity – the extent to which host-nation citizens' embrace their status as a member of their nation – can bolster harshness toward immigrants (e.g., Esses et al., 2001; Huntington, 2004; Jackson et al., 2001; Joppke, 2004; Sniderman & Hagendoorn, 2007; Verkuyten, 2009). Links between national identity and diminished support for immigrants have been observed in many nations, suggesting that the discriminatory effects of national identity are not

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