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Valuing diversity in Spain and Canada: The role of multicultural ideology in intergroup attitudes and intentions to reduce inequalities



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ABSTRACT

Multicultural ideology proposes that group memberships should be not just acknowledged but also valued in order to accommodate diversity and attain equality. In three studies conducted in Spain and Canada we analyzed, using different measures, the relationship between multicultural ideology on the one hand and prejudice, support for social policies, and motivation for social change on the other hand. In Spain we focused on responses to *Gitanos* (Spanish Roma) and, in Canada, on First Nations people. Results showed that multicultural ideology was related in both cases to lower prejudice and higher support for social policies to support the minority group and motivation for social change. The internal motivation to control prejudice was an important mediator of this relationship in both countries. In contrast, the way in which social identities are represented played a different role as a function of country: whereas a dual identity representation played a mediating role in Canada, a common identity representation was the mediator in Spain. These results support the importance of valuing cultural diversity to harmonize intergroup relations and to reduce inequalities between majorities and minority groups.

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Diversity refers to those things that make us different from others. However, speaking about diversity means referring not just to “any difference”, but to those social differences that are important in our context, that determine the social position of individuals, and that influence daily experiences (Jones, Dovidio, & Vietze, 2014).

Cultural diversity is increasing in most countries, and the presence of multiculturalism is becoming common (Stevens, Plaut, & Sanchez-Burks, 2008). Nowadays there is an intense debate in workplaces, schools, universities, and political and legal arenas about how diversity ideologies can contribute to improving the harmony of intergroup relations and reduce prejudice toward minority groups: Is it better to ignore or acknowledge group differences? From a multicultural perspective, recognizing and valuing cultural diversity would generate a positive diversity climate and would reduce disparities between majority and minority groups (Plaut, Thomas, & Goren, 2009).

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According to [Guimond, de la Sablonnière, and Nugier \(2014\)](#), the main diversity ideologies are assimilation, colorblindness, and multiculturalism. The ideology of assimilation (*sensu stricto* an anti-diversity ideology) is based on homogeneity and involves an orientation to reduce or eliminate differences between groups ([Schalk-Soekar & Van De Vijver, 2008](#)); the colorblind perspective holds that equality among groups is best gained by downplaying group distinctions and treating people as unique individuals ([Rosenthal & Levy, 2010](#)); the multicultural ideology contends that group memberships and identities are a positive and valuable source of difference between people, something to be acknowledged and celebrated rather than ignored in order to attain equality ([Plaut, 2010; Rosenthal & Levy, 2010](#)).

In practice, assimilation has usually implied an unidirectional process in which cultural minorities experienced pressures to conform to the majority cultural standards ([Rattan & Ambady, 2013](#)). A colorblind perspective generally leads to less stereotyping but greater prejudice toward outgroups ([Richeson & Nussbaum, 2004](#)). A multicultural perspective, in contrast, would encourage inclusive politics and behaviors and decreases prejudice (e.g., [Richeson & Nussbaum, 2004; Wolsko, Park & Judd, 2006](#)). In this vein, [Wolsko et al. \(2006\)](#) showed that endorsement of multiculturalism was associated with greater support for affirmative action, more lenient immigration policy (i.e., allowing greater number of immigrants into the United States), and more lenient English-speaking standards (i.e., allowing bilingual classrooms), whereas endorsement of assimilation was negatively correlated with all of these policies.

In the present research, three studies were conducted in two different countries that have different pro-diversity policy and social norms: Spain and Canada (see [Banting & Kymlicka, 2003; Guimond et al., 2013; Multiculturalism Policy Index, 2016](#)). We analyzed the role of multicultural ideology in prejudice and intentions to reduce inequalities in relation to *Gitanos* (Spanish Roma) in Spain and First Nations people in Canada.

1. Diversity and intergroup relations in two different contexts: Spain and Canada

Countries differ in pro-diversity policies and social norms related to diversity, as they also differ in the presence of cultural and ethnic diversity in their populations and public discourse.

Presence of cultural diversity in Canada and its reference in public discourses has been well documented (see Canada's policy of multiculturalism: [Government of Canada, 2012](#)). In Spain, until some decades ago, *Gitanos* were almost the only ethnic minority, but cultural diversity has increased considerably in the last 20 years due to the increase in immigration, so that Spain is an emergent multicultural society ([Briones, 2007](#)). As a result of these structural changes, Spain has had to confront how to manage diversity. The limited research on this topic shows that Spaniards tend to prefer assimilation—or a position between assimilation and integration in some private domains—as an acculturation process ([Rojas, Sayans-Jimenez, & Navas, 2012](#)).

The classification of the Multiculturalism Policy Index (MPI), developed by [Banting and Kymlicka \(2003\)](#), uses different criteria to categorize the diversity policy of each country (e.g., the promotion of cultural diversity, adoption of multiculturalism in the school curriculum, etc.). According to this classification, although in Spain the latest available data show that has slightly increased the proportion of policies that promote the maintenance and value of ethnic and cultural minorities, Canada has been a high-diversity country and Spain a low-diversity country.

[Guimond et al. \(2013\)](#) argue that the extent to which diversity policy is an important element of the sociopolitical context can influence intergroup relations and prejudice toward minority groups. Thus, prejudice will be lower when pro-diversity policy is high. However, even in countries with a strong pro-diversity policy, such as Canada, it is possible to find prejudice or the existence of an ethnic hierarchy with the dominant majority enjoying more prestige than ethnic minorities and immigrants (see [Berry, 2006; Guimond et al., 2013](#)). In addition, multicultural policies can differently influence attitudes toward minority groups, depending on the target group. In Canada, although the link between multicultural policies and attitudes toward immigrants is well established, the relationship between multicultural policies and attitudes toward other groups, particularly aboriginal people, needs to be addressed ([Banting & Kymlicka, 2010](#)). Therefore, although the difference in pro-diversity policies may influence absolute levels of prejudice and discriminative behaviors in different countries, the pattern of relations between personal endorsement of multicultural ideology and prejudice or discriminative behaviors may be similar or not, in different countries, and would partially depend on which minority groups are evaluated as a target of prejudice.

In Canada, First Nations people (aboriginal people who are neither Inuit nor Métis) are a major target of prejudice and discrimination and this treatment has had a profound impact on their health, cultures, and languages ([Morrison, Morrison, Harriman, & Jewell, 2008](#)). Moreover, [Statistics Canada \(2010\)](#) reported that, in comparison to non-aboriginal persons, aboriginal people in Canada are more likely to live in homes in need of major repairs and are more likely to be unemployed or to be the victim of a violent crime.

In Spain, there are between 500,000 and 1,000,000 *Gitanos* ([Laparra & García, 2011](#)). The exact figure is difficult to estimate because there is no census or survey that inquires about this membership. According to various studies, *Gitanos* are one of the most discriminated and prejudiced against groups in Spain ([Díez Nicolás, 2005](#)). This is supported by data: for example, non-*Gitano* Spaniards would be more upset to have *Gitanos* as neighbors compared to any other minority group, such as immigrants, Muslims, people with AIDS, etc. ([CIS, 2013](#)); in terms of inequality, two thirds of *Gitanos* live below the poverty line ([FSG, 2013](#)).

Although *Gitanos* and First Nations people suffer intense discrimination, and both groups have had a lengthy pursuit of identity and cultural recognition, these two groups are not commonly studied in diversity research.

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