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Ripple Effects: An Exclusive Host National Context Produces More Perceived Discrimination among Immigrants

Kristina Bakkær Simonsen

ABSTRACT

This article examines the perceived discrimination of immigrants; a group for whom experiences of discrimination can be damaging for their long-term commitment and identification with the national core group. Taking its point of departure in the literature on national identity, the article argues that perceived discrimination should be strongest among immigrants in host national societies with an exclusive self-image. This hypothesis is examined by use of multilevel regressions on cross-national survey data from 18 Western European countries. It is found that where exclusive attitudes are widespread in the host population, the percentage of immigrants who perceive themselves to be part of a group discriminated against is significantly greater, all else being equal. In addition, there is a cross-level interaction effect of host national inclusivity and ethnic minority identity which suggests that individual-level determinants of perceived discrimination do not ‘work’ in the same way in normatively different contexts. Discussing the implications of these findings, the article points to the importance of contextualising individual-level focused accounts of perceived discrimination, with particular focus on the power of the society’s attitudinal milieu to affect individual feelings of in- and exclusion.

Keywords: perceived discrimination, national identity, exclusivity, context effects, multilevel analysis

INTRODUCTION

Within the last decades, Western Europe has received an increasing number of immigrants. These great inflows of newcomers not only entail a crossing of physical borders, they also trigger debates about the symbolic boundaries of the receiving national communities. In some countries, these debates have been rather sharp with large segments of the native population expressing negative opinions about newcomers and refusing to accept 'them' as part of 'us'. When such negative attitudes and stereotypes are widespread, they form a bias against immigrants which is likely to be experienced as a form of social exclusion. In this article, I focus on one of the most severe expressions of such feelings of exclusion; immigrants' perceived discrimination, i.e. the perception of being denied recognition and treatment as a fellow national.

Perceptions of exclusion and discrimination are important to study because they are associated with very negative outcomes for both the individual and society at large. In the psychological literature, it is a repeated finding that individual experiences with discrimination damage mental health. Discrimination is painful and can result in anxiety, depression, anger, loneliness and even suicide (see Sellers & Shelton 2003 for a short overview; also Baumeister & Leary 1995; Schmitt & Branscombe 2002). More basically, social rejection is found to erode self-worth and, in turn, to produce meaninglessness (Stillman et al. 2009; Lambert et al. 2013); one's life is simply less worth living when one feels rejected from a larger social community. The desperation associated with such feelings of meaninglessness and fundamental uncertainty is an often proposed trigger of extremism and radicalisation (Döring 2007; Hogg 2012: 19–35; Lindekilde & Bertelsen 2015).

At the societal level, discrimination is both a symptom and an enhancer of intergroup divisions (Jetten et al. 2001: 1205). Perceived discrimination is found to weaken national identification (Branscombe et al. 1999; Verkuyten & Yildiz 2007; Jasinskaja-Lahti et al. 2009; Molina et al. 2015), and through lower national identification (or even hostility towards the national in-group) to erode overarching social cohesion. Thus, by refusing some members of society from gaining a real sense of belonging, discrimination hampers an important aspect of what makes a society successful, namely social inclusion (Lamont 2009: 151; Maxwell 2015: 342).

This article looks at the discrimination that immigrants in some European societies feel, and puts forth the argument that immigrants' perceptions of discrimination are dependent on the degree of

exclusivity they meet from members of the host population.¹ This entails moving beyond accounts of perceived discrimination which look only at individual-level factors (the focus of most existing social psychological studies), and giving attention to the social context, understood as the attitudinal milieu in the receiving society. I argue that exclusive attitudes in the host population spread like ripples expanding across water, creating feelings of exclusion and marginalisation among immigrants.

THE THEORETICAL ARGUMENT

Placing discrimination in its social context

Discrimination is defined as '[negatively] biased behaviour toward, and treatment of, a group or its members' (Dovidio et al. 2010: 5). Its motivation and justification lies in the prejudice of the discriminator, i.e. in the belief that the victim's group is inferior to the discriminator's group and that differential treatment can therefore be justified. On the 'receiving end', perceived discrimination is the subjective experience that one is treated unfairly because of one's group membership (Brondolo et al. 2005; Coutinho & Koinis-Mitchell 2014: 523). As such, perceptions of discrimination always involve attributions to the (supposed) discriminator's prejudice; the perpetrator is seen as representative of a whole group thought to hold negatively biased opinions about the victim's group. Thus, discrimination is, in essence, an intergroup phenomenon – both motivated and received through a group membership lens. The conditions for a discriminatory intergroup relationship involve the idea that the boundary between the two groups is sharp (clearly demarcating an 'us' and a 'them') and asymmetric (with one group having the symbolic and/or material resources to dominate the other). These two properties are normally summarised in the terms 'in-group' and 'out-group', capturing both the divide and the power differential between the two groups. Additionally, the two groups must hold negatively stereotyped opinions and expectations of each other. This additional criterion is what justifies the in-group's negatively

¹ I use the terms 'host nationals' and 'host population' to denote the members of a country's population who have native ancestry. With the term 'hosts', I seek to highlight the paper's basic argument; that the 'warmth of the welcome' (Reitz 1998) given by the receiving population is an important factor shaping immigrants' experiences of in- and exclusion. Defining host nationals with reference to native ancestry has as an additional consequence that the term 'immigrant' refers to both migrants themselves and to their children. This is in line with both academic and popular understandings in which the so-called 'second generation' is still not considered absolutely, indisputably 'national'.

biased behaviour towards the out-group and inspires the out-group to view in-group members as discriminators.

Discrimination has been a central topic of interest in social psychology. The dominance of social psychology in the study of discrimination is reflected e.g. in the fact that the major handbooks on the topic are edited by researchers in psychology (Nelson 2009; Dovidio et. al. 2010). The predominant empirical focus has been on the Black-White divide in the US, leaving the perceived discrimination of immigrants in Western Europe a largely understudied subject in this literature (Dovidio & Esses 2001; Zick et al. 2008). While the study of Afro-Americans has contributed importantly to our knowledge about potential drivers of perceived discrimination, the rather one-sided focus on this very particular intergroup divide is unfortunate for at least two reasons. First, in order to judge their explanatory scope, the theories developed about the drivers of perceived discrimination for one out-group need to be examined on other potentially negatively stereotyped out-groups as well. Second, the strong focus on one particular context – the North American one – seems to have come at the expense of discussing and analysing how *different* social contexts shape discrimination (Lamont 2009: 161; Wagner et al. 2010: 368–369). While it is clearly true that Afro-Americans constitute a negatively stereotyped out-group in the US, other social contexts may be more inclusive to ethno-racially distinct groups. Given social psychology's concern with how social influences affect individuals, it is all the more surprising that research in the field has often neglected the normative social context as a factor potentially shaping out-group members' perceptions of discrimination.

In a more general discussion of this blind spot of social psychology, Pettigrew (2006: 615–617) argues that 'placing social psychological insights within their macro-contexts is essential' because 'the macro-level can supply information about the norms that shape the individual results in a particular social context'. As discussed above, for an intergroup relationship to develop into a discriminatory relationship, it is a necessary condition that the norms and attitudes dominating in the in-group are exclusionary and negatively biased towards the out-group (and that the out-group experiences them as such). Any analysis of the perceived discrimination of a potential out-group should therefore also always examine the other side of the coin, namely the normative conceptions of the intergroup relationship dominating in the in-group. In the study of immigrants' perceived discrimination, I therefore introduce the attitudes of host nationals as a factor expected to shape immigrants' discrimination experiences.

Inclusive and exclusive nations

More specifically, I draw on the national identity literature to argue the case for expecting cross-national variation in whether immigrants experience themselves as excluded and discriminated against. The national identity literature holds that attitudes to immigrants, in particular ideas about how welcome immigrants are to join the nation, are rooted in the national self-image (cf. Anderson's (1991) definition of the nation as an imagined community). For its members to be able to imagine the nation as a distinct community marked by a common identity which unites them, it is necessary that they also mark out who is not a member. In other words, all national communities must demarcate a boundary between nationals and non-nationals; between those who belong and those who do not belong (Barth 1969). Empirically, the properties of this boundary vary across nations (Bail 2008; Wimmer 2013) with some nations defining the national 'us' as a closed community in which foreigners will forever stay foreign, and other nations seeing their community as one which can be joined by newcomers who want to be part of it.

The national identity literature has mostly studied cross-national variations in the in-group's exclusivity and devoted less attention to the cross-national study of the effects of exclusionary attitudes on the supposed targets: the immigrants. I suggest that the national identity literature can be utilised to contextualise individual-level focused accounts of immigrants' perceived discrimination.

Similar efforts at contextualising immigrant integration outcomes have recently been pursued within the more political science-related literature on migration and integration, formulated most explicitly in the 'comparative integration context theory' by Crul and Schneider (2010). Studies have examined the potential effects (e.g. in terms of employment, residential segregation, political participation, and citizenship acquisition) of different migration and integration policies and have reported mixed or ambiguous results.² While the topic of this article is less studied within this literature, a recent contribution by Goodman & Wright (2015) finds no effect of civic integration policies on immigrants' perceived discrimination. This echoes Ziller (2014) who also cannot find statistical evidence in support of the hypothesis that anti-discrimination policy affects experienced and perceived discrimination. Goodman & Wright speculate that the null-finding might be due to

² E.g. Vink & Dronkers (2012) and Vink et. al. (2013) find an effect of citizenship policy on the probability of having destination country citizenship, but the effect is not big, and it varies across different immigrant groups. Also, Ersanilli & Koopmans (2010) conclude from their study of Turks in France, Germany and the Netherlands that 'there is little support for the assumption that low barriers to naturalisation promote socio-cultural integration' (787).

the fact that minimised perceptions of discrimination and other ‘deep’ forms of social integration do not come about from formal, institutional regulations but from a tolerant and welcoming atmosphere in the host society (Goodman & Wright 2015: 16–17).

It is against this background that the present study aims to contribute with a focus on host national attitudes rather than policies. The argument put forward thus relates back to the social psychological starting point of the article by hypothesising that immigrants are influenced by how they are talked of in the host population. In this view, immigrants’ feelings of in- and exclusion are assumed to be formed by the signals that they pick from the broader public discourse. In sum, the study’s first hypothesis states:

H1: All else being equal, the level of perceived discrimination is higher among immigrants in nations where the host population draws exclusive boundaries compared to immigrants in nations where the host population is more inclusive.

Minorities are not always negatively stereotyped

H1 applies to immigrants in general, but it is likely that immigrants with particular characteristics are more vulnerable to experience themselves as discriminated against. A recent advancement within social psychological studies of discrimination is to look at the effect of group identification on perceived discrimination. This perspective takes into account the idea that discrimination is experienced through a group membership lens. It thus states that whether an individual understands herself to be member of a group discriminated against should depend on the degree to which she identifies with the marginalised out-group. It is indeed a repeated finding that people who are strong identifiers are more prone to attribute negative incidents to prejudice than people who do not identify with the minority group (Schmitt & Branscombe 2002; Sellers & Shelton 2003; Brondolo et al. 2005; Molina et al. 2015). This applies to people with the same objective group membership, the difference being how salient the group is for their personal identity. The explanation typically given is that identification with a group increases awareness and sensitivity to information related to

that group (Operario & Fiske 2001: 552). The salience of the group membership, so to say, primes these individuals to be more vigilant to signs of prejudice from the in-group.³

I argue, however, that out-group identification is not a sufficient condition for people to attribute negative incidents to prejudice. As already discussed in the definition of discrimination, widespread negative stereotyping is the additional criterion necessary for an intergroup relationship to be characterised by discrimination. Understanding oneself as a member of a minority group may not trigger perceptions of discrimination if the host nation has an inclusive national self-image in which people of different ethnicity are appreciated. As formulated by Verkuyten and Martinovic (2012: 103), ‘the possibility of a harmonious dual [i.e. minority ethnic *and* national] identity depends on the way in which the national category is defined and understood’. In nations where the two categories are seen as compatible, immigrants who identify as members of a minority group might not feel more discriminated against than other immigrants. Thus, in addition to affecting the *level* of perceived discrimination, the inclusivity of the national self-image should also affect the *degree* to which identification with a minority group increases perceived discrimination. This makes for the study’s second hypothesis:

H2: The effect of minority identification on perceived discrimination is conditional on the inclusivity of the national self-image. In nations where the host population is inclusive, immigrants identifying with a minority group will be less prone to perceive discrimination compared to minority group identifiers in nations where the host population is more exclusive.

While empirical support of H1 implies that individual-level accounts of perceived discrimination should be added a factor (to ‘control’ for the influence of the attitudinal milieu in the host nation), empirical support of H2 is more critical. The association between perceived discrimination and minority identification has hitherto been understood as a universal one, but finding an interaction effect implies that this relationship cannot any longer be taken for granted. Existing theories would

³ It is possible to formulate a reverse hypothesis, as strong minority identification may lead to fewer contacts with the host population, in turn creating fewer opportunities to experience discrimination. However, as the positive relationship between minority identification and perceived discrimination is an established finding in the social psychological literature, I maintain this expectation. In addition, as the perception that one’s group is discriminated against does not necessarily require personal experiences of discrimination, the contact-argument seems less strong than the salience-argument.

thus need to incorporate considerations about social context to account for the possibility that individual-level factors work differently in different contexts.

DATA AND MEASURES

Data for the study stems from the European Social Survey (ESS); a survey program conducted in most European countries every second year (beginning in year 2002). I restrict the sample to Western European countries (defined as EU-15, Norway, Switzerland and Iceland) because they are receivers of great numbers of non-European immigrants. Eastern European countries are excluded from the study because many of the ‘immigrants’ in these countries are defined as such because of the still rather recent divisions of their initial home countries (Dinesen 2013: 118). As such, they are not immigrants in the sense of having migrated from one country to another, and they will most likely not understand themselves in that way.

The questions of interest to this study have been asked in all six rounds of the survey from 2002 to 2012, meaning that it is possible to pool the samples. This makes for a large immigrant sample – something which is otherwise difficult to acquire across so many countries. While the ESS was not constructed with the specific purpose of studying immigrants, I utilise answers to questions about the respondent’s birthplace and that of her parents to construct an immigrant sample (see e.g. Wimmer & Soehl 2014 for a similar approach). The respondent is considered to be an immigrant if she was not born in the country of residence, and a second-generation immigrant if she is born in the country but neither parent was. The total immigrant sample consists of over 19,500 respondents.

The dependent variable, perceived discrimination, is a dichotomous measure constructed from a battery of questions. The first question asks the respondent whether she is member of a group being discriminated against in the country. Respondents agreeing to this statement are then asked to specify, from a number of options, the grounds of this discrimination (with no limit on the possible number of grounds to be mentioned). For the purposes of this study, I focus on the discrimination grounds of colour/race, ethnicity, nationality, religion and/or language. As mentioned, the ESS also has other categories of discrimination grounds (age, gender, sexuality and disability), but the above-mentioned five categories are chosen to get at that kind of discrimination which is linked primarily to the respondent’s immigrant background, i.e. to feelings of exclusion from the host *national*

community.⁴ Note that the measure captures perceived rather than ‘factual’ discrimination. This means that I am not able to conclude anything about the extent to which immigrants are in fact treated wrongly and unfairly in a way that would qualify as discrimination in the legal sense of the term (although I suspect that there is an association between ‘real’ and perceived discrimination). However, what I am interested in is learning whether immigrants’ *subjective* perceptions of being in a discriminated group are affected by the degree to which there is room for them in the host nation’s self-image. This focus is particularly important considering the fact that the negative mental health and national identification effects (referred in the introduction) of discrimination go through perceptions.

Moreover, note that the question asks the respondent to give a general statement about perceived discrimination. One aspect of this concerns the fact that the respondent is asked to evaluate the status of her *group*, not whether she herself has had any discrimination experiences. As such, the question taps identification with a marginalised/undervalued group in society. For some purposes of study, such a wording might not be ideal. For the present study, however, it is the group lens aspect of discrimination which I am interested in capturing, and it is this lens which is activated by the question wording. Agreeing to the statement that she is member of a group discriminated against, no matter whether the respondent thinks she has had personal experiences with discrimination, reflects very basic feelings of exclusion and marginalisation from the host society attached to the status as a newcomer/non-national. Another aspect of the general question wording concerns the fact that respondents are asked about an overall feeling rather than about the degree or frequency of discrimination experiences. This gives reason to think that only immigrants for whom discrimination is a permeating feeling will give a positive answer to the question. As such, the analysis has a conservative bias in that it will not capture feelings of discrimination that are less evasive. For the purpose of the study, this is ideal because it will capture only those immigrants who feel excluded from the host nation on a very fundamental level.

⁴ Analyses have been run for the all-encompassing discrimination measure (not distinguishing between grounds for discrimination) as well, and results are roughly similar to those for the nationalist discrimination measure.

Figure 1. Percentage of immigrant sample perceiving discrimination

Figure 1 presents the percentage of the immigrant sample in each country who perceive themselves to belong to a discriminated group, displayed for each round of the survey (note that some countries did not take part in all ESS rounds and therefore have fewer than six observations in the figure). The percentage of immigrants feeling discriminated against ranges between five (Luxembourg 2004) and 26 percent (the Netherlands 2008). Since the variable is dichotomous, the model chosen to test the study's hypotheses is a logistic model.

For the main independent variable, inclusivity of the national self-image, I rely on the ESS data again, but I now aggregate answers given by host national respondents (i.e. respondents who are not part of the immigrant sample as defined above) ($N = 149,473$). The index consists of three questions which each ask the respondent to indicate on an eleven-point scale whether immigrants have a positive or a negative effect on the country's economy; the country's cultural life; and on how it is to live in the country. The three items are highly correlated (correlations varying between 0.63 and 0.69), and they are therefore collapsed in an index of attitudes to immigrants (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.85$). Country means are constructed for each year. The index ranges from 0–1 with higher scores indicating greater appreciation of immigrants. Observed scores range between 0.29 (Greece 2010) and 0.65 (Sweden 2010). The items constituting the index do not ask directly about boundary definitions (e.g. whether immigrants can come to be seen as nationals), but they do tap attitudes to

whether newcomers contribute positively or negatively to society. As such, I consider the index to reflect the general attitudinal milieu that immigrants face in their country of residence. In other words, the host population's willingness to include immigrants in the host society is tapped in the index as a matter of whether immigrants are seen as valuable members of society or not. The variation across countries is therefore considered to capture variations in the inclusivity of national self-images. Figure 2 displays country scores on the measure for each round of the survey. As can be seen, there is a tendency in all countries (i.e. the ranking of countries is rather stable across ESS rounds) with some within-country variation over time. Previous studies (Meuleman & Billiet 2011; Billiet et. al. 2014) have shown that the index obtains quasi-scalar (and metric) invariance, meaning that it can be used for making valid cross-national comparisons.

Figure 2. Inclusivity of national self-image

To test H2, I make use of a question which asks the respondent to indicate whether she considers herself to belong to a minority ethnic group in the country of residence. Approximately 24 percent of the immigrant sample self-identify with an ethnic minority group.

I also include two religious individual-level variables which may be related to perceiving oneself as belonging to a minority group in Western European societies. These two variables are included to

test other potential minority identity markers, in addition to self-identification with a minority ethnicity.

Concerning religiosity, very religious people may consider themselves to be a minority in highly secular Europe (Phalet et al. 2012: 341). In addition, Verkuyten & Martinovic (2012: 89) suggest that religious group identification may even have stronger influences on the individual's interpretation of her social world than identification with other social groups (among these one's ethnic group) because 'religious group identification offers a distinctively "sacred" and unfalsifiable worldview'. Religiosity is measured via self-placement on an eleven-point scale (ranging 0–1), with higher scores indicating greater religiosity. The immigrant sample has a mean of 0.53 on this scale.

The second individual characteristic related to religion is a dummy for whether the respondent is Muslim. As with religiosity, Muslim identity is included as a potential marker of minority belonging because of the specific geocultural context of the study. Namely, several authors suggest that Islam constitutes a particularly sharp boundary in Western Europe (Zolberg & Long 1999; Alba 2005; Foner & Alba 2008; Bertossi et al. 2013; Karlsen & Nazroo 2013), leading to the expectation that Muslim immigrants in Western Europe are more prone than immigrants of other religions to perceive themselves as members of a group discriminated against. Of the immigrant sample, 12 percent indicate that they are Muslim.

As controls, I include two country-level variables which may affect both the general appreciation of immigrants in the country (the independent variable) and immigrants' perceived discrimination (the dependent variable). To make sure that the coefficient estimate for inclusivity of national self-image is unbiased, such confounders should be controlled. The first potential confounder is the immigrant population as a percentage out of the total population. One may speculate that in countries with more immigrants, citizens are more accustomed to different ways of life and are therefore less hostile (/more appreciative) towards immigrants. In a similar vein, newcomers may feel more included and less marginalised in such countries because there is potential for identification with many different groups. The UN Population Division provides data for all countries in the study. Scores range from three (Finland 2000) to 43 (Luxembourg 2012) percent.

The second country-level control is the employment rate for each of the six surveyed years. In countries under economic strain, people may be more hostile to newcomers because they fear that newcomers will take 'national' jobs (Zick et al. 2008: 239). On the immigrant-side, difficulties with

getting employment may be understood as a mark of exclusion and may therefore lead immigrants to perceive more discrimination. I use Eurostat's annually averaged employment rate in the analyses. Scores range between 56 (Italy 2002) and 82 percent (Iceland 2004).

I also include a number of individual-level controls. The issue of control at the individual level relates to two separate issues which, when not controlled, could bias the results of my analyses. First of all, it is necessary to account for the potential problem that immigrant groups with certain characteristics may cluster in some countries, e.g. as a function of different destination preferences. If immigrants who are prone to perceive themselves as discriminated against typically migrate to country A rather than country B, what looks like country effects are in fact produced by individual-level factors. The second issue requiring individual-level controls is the potential existence of a causal (or feedback) arrow running in reverse direction of the hypothesised relationship, i.e. from immigrants' perceived discrimination to the host population's inclusivity. Such a relationship could exist if higher levels of perceived discrimination in the immigrant population make immigrants engage less in the host society, in turn making host nationals more exclusive towards immigrants. Controlling for measures of engagement in society (e.g. employment status and voting behaviour) serves to minimise the disturbance of such a reverse causal arrow and leave back primarily the effect running in the 'right direction'. Some control variables deal with both issues; others deal with only one. I will comment on this below.

Relating to the clustering issue, I include the demographic characteristics of gender (47 percent men in the sample), age (sample mean of 43 years), and whether the immigrant is of the first or second generation (18 percent second-generation immigrants in the sample). Concerning gender and age, there are indications that men and young people are more prone to perceive discrimination because they react more strongly to negative group cues than women and the elderly (Bech 2014: 221). With respect to generation, one can imagine first-generation immigrants to feel that they are in a more marginal position in the host society as they have not always been part of it and do not know the social codes. A reverse perspective, however, is that the second-generation is more prone to perceive the host country's injustices precisely because they – as native-born – expect to be treated as fellow nationals and are therefore more disappointed than their parents when this does not happen.

I also include the socioeconomic variables of education and employment status. The control for education mainly has to do with the clustering issue (although for second-generation immigrants

and for immigrants who have come to the host country early in life, the reverse causality issue may also be at play). It is possible that better educated immigrants experience less discrimination because of their better prospects for being incorporated in different domains of society, e.g. the labour market. On the other hand, the ‘integration paradox’ states that the most successful immigrants in terms of schooling achievements are also more likely to feel less accepted by the majority (Verkuyten & Martinovic 2012: 94–96). The reasoning is that highly educated immigrants focus much on equality and ethnic acceptance and therefore get more easily disappointed when this fails. The mean number of years of education is 13 in the immigrant sample.

Since employment is one way of being incorporated in society, the control for employment status mainly concerns the reverse causality problem. The measure for employment status contains nine categories: full-time employment, in education, unemployed jobseeker, unemployed not jobseeker, permanently sick or disabled, retired, community/military service, housework, and other. Of the immigrant sample, 53 percent are in full-time employment with the other half of the sample spread across the other categories (13 percent retired, 11 percent doing housework, 10 percent under education, 6 percent unemployed jobseekers, and under 5 percent in each of the remaining categories).

Finally, I include citizenship status and voting behaviour. Both are included mainly to control for reverse causality as immigrants who perceive themselves to be discriminated against may opt out of applying for citizenship and, even if citizenship is secured, may abstain from voting. In the sample, 58 percent are citizens of their country of residence, 42 percent of the sample voted at the last national election, 28 percent did not vote, and 30 percent were not eligible to vote.

The theoretical discussion above motivates the random effects multilevel model. By introducing a higher-level residual term, this model is designed to handle the expected issue that immigrants within the same country will tend to have correlated outcomes (i.e. systematically higher or lower levels of perceived discrimination). In addition, it allows for estimating effects pertaining to the country-level (i.e. the hypotheses about inclusivity of national self-image). To evaluate whether the choice of the multilevel model is appropriate, I test it against a logistic model with only one residual term (i.e. not accounting for the multilevel nature of the data). The test shows that there is significant variation on the dependent variable across countries. This implies that, all individual-level variables being equal, immigrants’ probability of perceiving discrimination varies across

countries. The following analyses will test whether this variation (or at least some of it) is caused by inclusivity of national self-image.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 presents the results from the study's analyses. Both models in Table 1 contain all control variables (individual- and country-level), including ESS round to control for trend effects (not reported). Model 1 tests H1 about the effect of host national inclusivity on perceived discrimination. Model 2 tests the hypothesised interaction of host national inclusivity and self-identifying as member of a minority ethnic group (H2).

From model 1, we see that host national inclusivity has a statistically significant effect with the expected negative sign. On average, relatively more inclusive host nations reduce immigrants' probability of perceiving discrimination. In other words; the majority's immigrant-positive attitudes do translate into real effects on the lives of immigrants by making them feel more included than they would have if they had lived in a host nation with more negative attitudes to immigrants. Of all the variables in the model, inclusivity of national self-image has the largest substantial effect, underscoring the potency of the society's attitudinal milieu in terms of influencing individual feelings of in- and exclusion.

Table 1. Regression models for perceived discrimination

	Model 1	Model 2
Male	0.06 (0.05)	0.06 (0.05)
Age	-0.02*** (0.00)	-0.02*** (0.00)
Second-generation immigrant	0.03 (0.07)	0.03 (0.07)
Minority ethnic identity	1.59*** (0.05)	2.48*** (0.33)
Religiosity	0.31*** (0.08)	0.31*** (0.08)
Muslim	0.58*** (0.06)	0.59*** (0.06)
Years of education	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)
Employment status		
Full-time employment	Reference	Reference
In education	-0.21* (0.08)	-0.20* (0.08)
Unemployed, looking for job	0.17* (0.09)	0.18* (0.09)
Unemployed, not looking for job	0.28* (0.13)	0.29* (0.13)
Permanently sick or disabled	0.21 (0.15)	0.22 (0.15)
Retired	-0.51*** (0.12)	-0.51*** (0.12)
Community or military service	1.09 (0.74)	1.07 (0.74)
Housework	-0.04 (0.08)	-0.04 (0.08)
Other	-0.19 (0.18)	-0.18 (0.18)
Citizen of country	-0.15* (0.06)	-0.14* (0.06)
Voting behaviour (last national election)		
Voted	Reference	Reference
Did not vote	0.09 (0.06)	0.09 (0.07)
Not eligible to vote	0.16* (0.08)	0.16* (0.08)
Immigrant population	-0.03** (0.01)	-0.03** (0.01)
Employment rate in country	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)
Inclusivity of national self-image	-2.55** (0.91)	-1.78 (0.96)
Minority ethnic identity*inclusivity		-1.76** (0.64)
Constant	-0.87 (0.63)	-1.27 (0.65)

Note: Random effects multilevel logistic regressions, N = 19,540

*:p<0.05; **:p<0.01; ***:p<0.001. Unstandardised coefficients, standard errors in parentheses.

Control for survey round not reported (no statistically significant differences between survey rounds).

Since the interpretation of substantial effects based on coefficient estimates in the logistic model are not straight-forward, Figure 3 displays the average predicted probability of perceived discrimination as a function of inclusivity of national self-image (only observed range displayed). In the most exclusive nation observed (Greece 2010), the average predicted probability of perceiving oneself as a member of a group being discriminated against is as much as 20 percent. Thus, we would expect around a fifth of the immigrant population in such a country to feel discriminated against. In the most inclusive nation observed in this sample (Sweden 2010), the average predicted probability of perceived discrimination is 10 percent. In other words, there is a difference of 10 percentage points in the average probability of feeling discriminated against when comparing immigrants in the least and most inclusive nations observed, all else being equal.

Figure 3. Average predicted probability of perceived discrimination as a function of inclusivity of national self-image

Model 2 tests the expectation of H2 that inclusivity of the national self-image may also moderate the individual-level effect of self-identifying with a minority ethnic group. The interaction term is statistically significant, indicating that the ethnic minority identity effect on perceived discrimination is not uniform across countries. The sign of the interaction term is, as expected, negative. The more inclusive the host nation, the less of an obstacle is self-identification with an ethnic minority when it comes to developing a sense of being an equal and valued member of the national community. Figure 4 displays this with two lines, one for immigrants who do not identify with a minority ethnic group, and one for immigrants who do.

Figure 4. Average predicted probability of perceived discrimination as a function of inclusivity of national self-image, for ethnic minority identifiers and non-identifiers

The most interesting result is obviously the one for immigrants who self-identify with a minority ethnic group because for immigrants who do not think of themselves as ethnically distinct from the majority population, the effect of host national inclusivity on perceived discrimination is much smaller (though statistically significant across the observed range of the continuum). This – and the fact that the difference in the average predicted probability between the two groups gets smaller at higher levels of inclusivity – suggests that negative attitudes in the host population are primarily experienced as targeted against ethnically distinct immigrants. This observation fits well with recent theoretical work which suggests that a new form of racism is flourishing in some European countries (Zick et al. 2008). This form of racism is more subtle than older forms as it appears to be colour-blind. It no longer refers explicitly to skin-color and racial stereotypes when negative treatment of a certain group is to be justified. Instead, it refers to ‘deep (ethno-)cultural cleavages’. As such, it still puts those people who are visibly different (e.g. in terms of dress, traditions and lifestyle) from the majority in a marginalised position.

The rather sharp downward slope exhibited for minority identifiers implies that it matters a great deal which type of host nation these immigrants live in. While the average predicted probability of perceiving discrimination is 45 percent in the most exclusive nation observed in the sample, this drops to 20 percent in the most inclusive nation observed. Such a difference (25 percentage points) is substantial and remarkable. It suggests that ethnic minority identifiers are greatly affected by how

they are categorised by the receiving society. When that society draws a sharp boundary immersed with negative biases, ethnic identity seriously curbs the feeling of being included. In other words, the experienced compatibility of one's ethnic minority identity with inclusion in the national majority group is conditional on the way the national category is defined. When the national category has an inclusive definition, immigrants who self-identify with an ethnic minority group are significantly less prone to perceive their group as excluded and marginalised, i.e. as being subject to discrimination.

The finding of an interaction effect suggests the need for attending to the social context in theories about the determinants of perceived discrimination. This not only relates to the conceptual point that discrimination is by definition an intergroup phenomenon. The present results suggest that individual characteristics do not 'work' in the same way in normatively different social contexts. More studies are needed to understand this 'ripple effect' – i.e. the *mechanism* through which the in-group's boundary drawing comes to be experienced in the out-group as exclusion and discrimination. Steps in this direction include more cross-national studies and better empirical measures of both the in-group's boundary constructions and the out-group's boundary perceptions.

Note that I also tested whether the two religious variables had similar interaction effects with the inclusivity measure, but none was found. Thus, it appears that minority ethnicity is a special individual characteristic in that only this has variable effects on perceived discrimination across Western European nations. One potential reason that the effects of being very religious and of being Muslim are not variable across levels of host national inclusivity may be that while religion is something that in principle can be hidden, the same cannot be said for minority ethnicity (cf. the discussion above that ethnicity is associated with looks and visible differences). In addition, we may speculate that the religious variables might have had interaction effects with the inclusivity measure if the empirical universe had been larger. That is; although being a Muslim is equally negative across Western European nation-states, it might have variable effects if countries outside this region – where Islam is more accepted – were included in the analyses. Once again, these considerations underscore the context-specificity of intergroup relationships and suggest the need for further cross-national studies.

CONCLUSION

Focusing on the perceived discrimination of immigrants in Western Europe, the present study has shown that the symbolic boundaries drawn by host nationals have real and serious consequences for the intergroup-relations between newcomers and the national majority. This is evidenced in the findings that the more exclusive the host nation, the higher the level of perceived discrimination and the greater the extent to which ethnic minority identification increases the probability of perceiving discrimination.

As I have argued, these results point to the importance of contextualising studies of intergroup relations rather than assuming minority group members to experience their social worlds in the same way across widely different normative environments. Although having looked narrowly at perceptions of discrimination, the study places itself within a growing field of research which advocates that a focus on boundaries gives analytical leverage in understanding the different integration outcomes we see across countries (Crul & Schneider 2010; Wimmer 2013). In particular, I suggest that research would benefit from attending to the attitudinal milieu in the host society in addition to the dominating focus on policy and institutions. In the study of the more identity-related aspects of integration, such a focus seems prudent.

Moving beyond the implications for research, the study's results stand as a warning in light of the observation that citizens in several Western European countries are getting increasingly immigrant-sceptical and that right-wing parties advocating exclusive national self-images are on the rise. If this trend continues, this study suggests that ever more immigrants will feel excluded from the societies in which they live. Conversely, the positive implication of the study is that an inclusive national self-image can downplay individual factors otherwise associated with being prone to experiencing discrimination. As such, there is basis for both negative and positive ripple effects.

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