

Immigrants as a perceived threat: attitudes in Germany and Russia

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The problem statement

Over a couple of recent decades Russian think tanks report a high level of xenophobia among the population of Russia. Experts unanimously point out the existence of three robust patterns in Russian public consciousness: (1) negative stereotyping of immigrants; (2) solid belief in rather negative than positive consequences of immigration for society; and (3) unwillingness to accept immigrants in the majority of employment sectors (Levada-center, 2014; Pipiia, 2016; Pipiia, 2017; Muhametshina, 2018; VCIOM, 2018).

Russia started receiving transnational migrants from the very end of the XX century. Given historical bonds, the country became a “migration magnet” for citizens of former soviet republics of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan. “New” central Asian immigrants have differed from the vast majority of Russians in terms of ethnicity and language that inevitably led to cultural and religious diversity in the country. It is generally assumed, that increasing complexity and diversity always bring new challenges to societies and often go together with intergroup anxiety and social tension. In this context, maybe a high level of xenophobic sentiments in Russia is consistent? Maybe it just follows the common European trend for the rise of right-wing preferences in concert with xenophobia?

For a proper evaluation of indicators of negative attitudes toward immigrants among Russian public over the course of time and for understanding whether they are really high, in my research I compare Russia with Germany, the country which has been the sought-after destination for immigrants from Muslim-majority countries since the mid-20th century and which experienced a sudden influx of about a million of refugees from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan in 2015-16 (Knight, 2019).

On the grounds of citizenship and migration laws which exist in contemporary Germany and Russia, these countries can be considered as strong examples of nation states. For instance, they both have state-run programs for the return of compatriots living abroad which are based on the so-called right of blood and the principle of ethnicity. Meanwhile, Germany has been a part of the process of global migrations for a relatively long period of time (at least since the middle of the XX century) while Russia has become integrated into the system just recently. Nevertheless, in both countries the process of immigration is determined by the need for continuous and massive inflow of migrant workers caused by decline in birth rates on the one hand, and labour market demands on the other. All this put Germany and Russia into the group of major receiving countries which are currently experiencing rapid changes in ethnic and religious composition of its population since a predominance of immigrants are transnational (Rozanova, 2016).

Taking into account distinctiveness (differences in cultural values prevailed, in the level of subjective wellbeing, etc.) and commonalties (the need to manage transnational migration flows)

between two countries, I aim to compare the perception of immigrants by their publics and investigate factors which determine differences between them.

Theoretical framework. Hypotheses. Data

The theoretical and methodological framework of my study is the concept of *Intergroup Threat* developed by Stephan, Ybarra, Martinez, Schwarzwald & Tur-Kaspa (1998) which argue that real or perceived intergroup threats inevitably activate a variety of powerful negative emotions, attitudes and cognitions which, in their turn, can materialise into respective behavioural responses. Stephan, Ybarra & Rios (2016, p. 258) conceptualise intergroup threats through four basic types based on the nature of threat (realistic or symbolic) and the level of threat (group or individual).

Although there is a great deal of research which supports the essential ideas of the intergroup threat theory, there are questions which still require clarification: What is the perception of threat in groups which represent different facets of national identity? How both realistic and symbolic threats are perceived in different not only national but also cultural contexts? Is there difference in perception of intergroup threats in different cultures? Do people who have the same cognitive attitudes towards immigrants in different countries/cultures have the same perception of threats posed by them or not?

In my research I hypothesise that: (H1) Different facets of national identity determine differences in the perception of intergroup threats and through it influence the prevalence of xenophobic attitudes in the society; and (H2) The perception of immigrants as an intergroup threat is different not only *between* tolerant and xenophobic respondents but also *among* tolerant or xenophobic respondents in case these groups comprise of people of different cultures.

To check these hypotheses I utilise the data of the recent 7th wave of the European Value Study (EVS) project collected in 2017 on Germany and Russia.

Methods of analysis. Findings

Running descriptive statistics analyses I found that people who are classified as either 'tolerant' or 'xenophobic' according to their disagreement or agreement with the question concerning treatment of immigrants in the labour market are in fact significantly different in their perception of intergroup threats in Germany and Russia. Those who are considered as having tolerant attitudes in Russia are closer to those who are ascribed to have xenophobic attitudes towards immigrants in Germany. To answer the question about factors which drive these discrepancies I ran factor analysis for set of variables that measure perception of immigrants as a threat as well as respondents' vision of bases for national and European identification. Again, I found very different results for Germany and Russia and on the basis of this analysis I deduce that the low level of xenophobia towards immigrants in Germany in comparison with Russia is determined by the following factors: (1) clear separation between ethnic and civic national identity; (2) the prevalence of those who do not have 'ethnic identity' cognitive pattern; (3) counterbalance of 'perception of immigrants as a threat' by universal western/European values such as human rights (of immigrants) and openness (enlargement of

Europe). On the contrary, in Russia the prevalence of xenophobic attitudes towards foreign migrants is caused by (1) absence of 'civic national identity' as a separate pattern, whereas (2) presence of patterns that correlate with xenophobia such as 'ethnic national identity', 'multiple national identity' and 'perception of immigrants' as a cultural, security and economic threat.

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