

# THE INFLUENCE OF THREAT NARRATIVES ON ATTITUDES TOWARD IMMIGRATION: THE ROLE OF OPEN-MINDEDNESS AND INTELLECTUAL HUMILITY

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## Abstract

Public attitudes toward immigration are significantly influenced by perceptions of threat posed by immigrant groups. The present study examined how different narratives about immigrant groups influence attitudes toward immigration and whether individual differences in open-mindedness and intellectual humility are associated with these attitudes. A stratified sample of 374 participants from Georgia was randomly assigned to one of four experimental conditions describing a fictitious immigrant group: economic competition, social threat, disadvantaged group, or neutral control. The participants evaluated the group and expressed their attitudes toward its potential immigration to Georgia. In addition, measures of open-mindedness and intellectual humility were administered. The results of a one-way analysis of variance revealed significant differences in attitudes across conditions,  $F(3, 370) = 19.59, p < .001, \eta^2p = .14$ . Participants exposed to economic competition and cultural threat narratives exhibited a markedly stronger opposition to immigration than those in the control or disadvantaged conditions. The results of the correlational analyses indicated that open-mindedness was negatively associated with opposition to immigration in several experimental conditions. However, intellectual humility was not significantly related to immigration attitudes. The findings underscore the significance of threat framing in influencing public responses to immigration and posit that open-minded cognitive dispositions may serve as a mitigating factor against exclusionary reactions. The implications of these findings for intergroup relations and public discourse about immigration are discussed.

**Keywords:** *Prejudice, immigration attitudes, intellectual humility, open-mindedness, intergroup threat.*

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## 1. Introduction

In the contemporary era, marked by the advent of the twenty-first century, migration has emerged as a matter of profound political and social significance across a multitude of societies. Public attitudes toward immigration have been demonstrated to exert a substantial influence on the development of immigration policies, the nature of political discourse, and the dynamics of intergroup relations within receiving societies. While some individuals regard immigration as a catalyst for cultural diversity and economic development, others perceive it as a potential threat to economic stability, cultural identity, or social cohesion (Hainmueller & Hopkins, 2014). One of the most influential frameworks explaining prejudice toward immigrants is Integrated Threat Theory (ITT) (Stephan & Stephan, 2000; Stephan et al., 2009). According to this theory, prejudice emanates primarily from perceived threats to the ingroup posed by outgroups. These threats can manifest in a variety of forms. Threats of a realistic nature encompass concerns regarding the competition for material resources, including but not limited to employment opportunities, residential accommodations, social welfare programs, and political authority. The economic explanations of anti-immigrant attitudes are closely related to Group Conflict Theory, which suggests that intergroup hostility increases when groups compete for scarce resources (Blalock, 1967; Esses et al., 2001). Within the domain of immigration, such competition may encompass employment prospects, remuneration, or access to social services. Research across multiple countries has demonstrated that individuals who perceive immigrants as competitors in the labor market tend to express stronger opposition to immigration (Gorodzeisky & Semyonov, 2020). The manner in which immigrant groups are depicted in media and political discourse can exert a substantial influence on the public's perception of them (Esses et al., 2017). In contrast, *symbolic threats* are perceived challenges to the cultural values, norms, and identity of the host society. A substantial corpus of empirical studies has demonstrated that both realistic and symbolic threats serve as robust predictors of adverse attitudes toward immigrants (Meuleman et al., 2009). Symbolic threat

has been identified as a significant predictor of anti-immigrant attitudes in numerous studies (Stephan et al., 2009). The perception of immigrants as threatening outgroups can also be understood through the lens of Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). *Open-mindedness* is defined as the willingness to consider alternative perspectives and to revise beliefs in light of new evidence (Stanovich & West, 1997). Individuals who exhibit a high degree of open-mindedness tend to demonstrate a greater tolerance for diversity and a lower propensity for rigid ideological thinking. *Intellectual humility* refers to recognizing the limits of one's knowledge and being open to the possibility that one's beliefs may be incorrect (Leary et al., 2017). Individuals high in intellectual humility are more willing to engage with opposing viewpoints and less likely to exhibit dogmatic thinking. Another important factor influencing attitudes toward immigrants is the social context in which individuals encounter immigrants. Intergroup contact theory suggests that direct interactions with immigrants may reduce prejudice under appropriate conditions (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Cross-national research also suggests that immigrants' political participation and integration into host societies may positively influence majority attitudes toward immigration (Green & Sarrasin, 2018). These findings underscore the pivotal role of social context in shaping immigration attitudes.

## 2. The present study

The present study examines how different descriptions of immigrant groups influence attitudes toward their potential immigration to Georgia. The present study investigates whether portrayals of immigrants as economic competitors, culturally different groups, or disadvantaged populations result in varying levels of acceptance or opposition. Furthermore, the study investigates the association between individual differences in open-mindedness and intellectual humility and attitudes toward immigration within these narrative contexts.

### 2.1. Method

The study employed a between-subjects experimental design to examine how different narratives describing an immigrant group influence attitudes toward immigration. The present study employed the research procedure developed by Duckitt and Sibley (2009), encompassing four experimental conditions that varied in the nature of information provided regarding the immigrant group. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four experimental conditions, each involving a fictitious immigrant group described using different narrative frames. The independent variable was the type of narrative description (economic competition, social threat, disadvantaged group, or neutral control), while the dependent variable was attitude toward immigration of the described group.

In addition to the experimental manipulation, the study examined the relationship between immigration attitudes and two individual difference variables: open-mindedness and intellectual humility. The participants completed the survey individually. Following the provision of informed consent, each participant was randomly assigned to one of four experimental conditions. The subjects were provided with a concise portrayal of a hypothetical immigrant group that was anticipated to potentially settle in Georgia. The participants were explicitly informed that the immigrant group described in the scenario was a hypothetical construct, not a real-world group, and that the description had been created solely for the purposes of the research. The participants were instructed to imagine that the information presented in the description represented a realistic situation and to evaluate the group accordingly. Following a thorough review of the aforementioned description, the participants proceeded to complete a series of questionnaire items. These items were designed to evaluate the immigrant group and to ascertain their attitudes regarding the potential immigration of the group to Georgia. Subsequently, the participants completed additional scales measuring open-mindedness and intellectual humility, along with demographic questions.

### 2.2. Measures

**Intellectual Humility:** The assessment of intellectual humility was conducted using the Comprehensive Intellectual Humility Scale, a tool developed by Elizabeth J. Krumrei-Mancuso and Shane V. Rouse (2016). The CIHS is a 22-item multidimensional self-report measure designed to assess dispositional intellectual humility as an epistemic orientation toward one's own knowledge and beliefs. The scale encompasses four theoretically derived subscales: The concept of intellectual autonomy encompasses a range of attributes, including independence of intellect and ego, openness to revision of one's viewpoint, respect for others' perspectives, and a lack of intellectual overconfidence. Participants are instructed to indicate their degree of agreement with each statement using a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Negatively worded items are reverse-scored prior to analysis. Subscale scores are calculated by averaging the corresponding items, and a total intellectual humility score can be computed by averaging across all items, with higher scores indicating greater intellectual humility.

In the original validation study, the scale demonstrated adequate to good internal consistency across subscales ( $\alpha = .73-.84$ ) and evidence of construct, convergent, and discriminant validity.

**Actively Open-Minded Thinking:** The disposition toward actively open-minded thinking was measured using the Actively Open-Minded Thinking Scale, which was developed by Annika M. Svedholm-Häkkinen and Marjaana Lindeman (2018). The AOT-17 is a 17-item self-report scale designed to measure individuals' willingness to consider alternative viewpoints, evaluate evidence that contradicts their beliefs, and revise opinions when warranted. The instrument is a condensed version of earlier measures of open-mindedness that were introduced by Keith E. Stanovich and Richard F. West. Participants indicate their agreement with each item on a Likert-type response scale, with several items reverse-scored prior to analysis. Item responses are then averaged to compute a composite score, with higher values reflecting a stronger disposition toward actively open-minded thinking. According to the extant research, the AOT-17 demonstrates adequate psychometric properties, exhibiting robust correlations with the original, more extensive AOT scale and theoretically congruent associations with reflective reasoning and epistemic attitudes.

### 2.3. Participants

A stratified sample of adult residents of Georgia participated in the study. The final sample consisted of 374 participants aged 18 to 70 years. The gender distribution of the sample was 66.5% female and 33.5% male. A concerted effort was made to ensure a diverse array of participants, with the objective of encompassing individuals across a broad spectrum of demographic strata, including age and educational background. Approximately 18% of the participants reported having lived abroad for a minimum of six months, indicating a certain degree of direct exposure to intercultural environments. Participation in the study was voluntary, and respondents were informed that the research concerned attitudes toward social groups and public opinion. The participants were assured that their responses would be kept anonymous.

### 2.4. Results

**2.4.1. Effects of experimental manipulation.** A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to examine the presence of any variation in attitudes toward immigration across the various experimental conditions. A one-way analysis of variance revealed a significant effect of experimental condition on opposition to immigration,  $F(3, 370) = 19.59$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2p = .14$ , indicating a large effect of the manipulation. Participants in both the control condition and the disadvantaged condition exhibited a slight tendency to disagree with the statement that they would oppose immigration of the described group. Conversely, participants in the economic competition and social threat conditions exhibited a moderate degree of agreement with the statement denoting opposition to immigration.

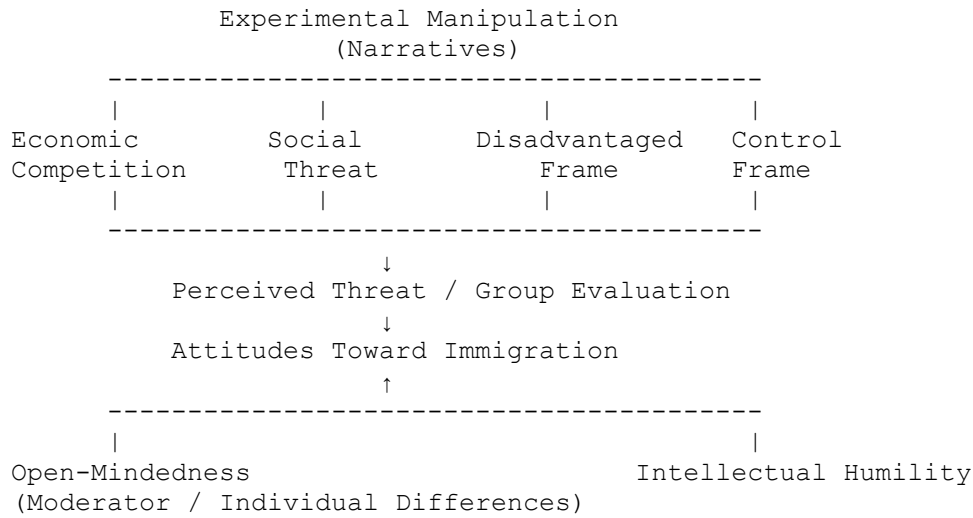
Figure 1.

<i>I would completely oppose immigration of the described group in my country</i>	
Agree	Disagree
Economic Competition Condition	Control Condition
Social Threat Condition	Disadvantaged Condition

These findings suggest that narratives emphasizing economic or cultural threats significantly increase resistance toward immigrant groups.

**2.4.2. Correlations with open-mindedness and intellectual humility.** The following essay will explore the notion of opposition to immigration. The statement "I would completely oppose immigration of the described group in my country" demonstrated a negative correlation with open-mindedness in two conditions: the control condition ( $\rho = -.448$ ,  $p < .002$ ) and the social threat condition ( $\rho = -.542$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This finding suggests that individuals who exhibit higher levels of open-mindedness are less inclined to oppose immigration. No statistically significant correlations were identified in the remaining conditions. The following position is endorsed with regard to the subject of immigration: The statement "I would be completely in favor of immigration of the described group in my country" demonstrated a negative correlation with open-mindedness in the social threat condition ( $\rho = -.486$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and a positive correlation with open-mindedness in the disadvantaged condition ( $\rho = .300$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

**2.4.3. Conceptual model of the study.** The conceptual model of the study was originally designed with the consideration of open-mindedness and intellectual humility as moderators in the relationship between experimental conditions and attitudes toward immigrant groups.



Interpretation:

- **Narrative framing** → **influences perceived threat**
- **Perceived threat** → **influences immigration attitudes**
- **Open-mindedness and intellectual humility** → **moderate interpretation of narratives**

### 3. Interpretation of findings

The findings of the present study demonstrate that narratives depicting immigrant groups have a substantial impact on attitudes toward immigration. Participants exposed to descriptions emphasizing economic competition or cultural differences expressed significantly greater opposition to immigration compared to participants who read neutral descriptions or narratives portraying the group as disadvantaged. These findings are consistent with the Integrated Threat Theory, which posits that perceived realistic and symbolic threats are central drivers of prejudice toward outgroups (Stephan & Stephan, 2000). The findings also support Group Conflict Theory, which suggests that perceived competition for scarce resources increases intergroup hostility (Esses et al., 2001). A notable finding of the study was that individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds exhibited significantly lower levels of opposition to immigration. This suggests that portraying immigrants as vulnerable or economically marginalized may reduce perceptions of threat and instead evoke sympathetic responses. These findings align with the extant research indicating that humanitarian narratives about migrants can increase support for immigration policies (Esses et al., 2017). A salient implication of the study pertains to the potency of narrative framing in influencing public attitudes toward immigration. The findings suggest a negative correlation between open-mindedness and opposition to immigration, particularly in contexts involving social threat. Individuals who exhibit higher levels of open-mindedness may be less susceptible to threat-based narratives concerning immigrants. Individuals who are characterized by an openness to new ideas and perspectives tend to exhibit a greater capacity for flexible cognitive processing. Consequently, they may be more predisposed to challenge stereotypical or oversimplified narratives concerning outgroups. Consequently, they may exhibit a reluctance to engage in automatic defensive responses that are typically elicited by threat-related information. From a psychological vantage point, open-mindedness functions as a protective factor against prejudice, enabling individuals to evaluate social information more critically and maintain an openness toward cultural diversity. Another noteworthy result pertains to the relationship between intellectual humility and pro-immigration attitudes. The Independence of Intellect and Ego dimension, as defined by Mark Leary et al. (2017), reflects an individual's capacity to disassociate their sense of self-worth from their beliefs and opinions. Individuals with elevated scores on this dimension are more likely to revise their beliefs when confronted with new evidence, as their sense of self is less firmly rooted in the defense of specific viewpoints. Upon initial observation, the negative correlation between this facet of intellectual humility and robust endorsement of immigration might appear to defy rational expectation. However, this pattern may be indicative of a diminished propensity toward extreme attitudinal positions among individuals who exhibit higher levels of intellectual humility. In contrast to individuals who explicitly advocate for

immigration, those who embody intellectual humility may adopt a more nuanced or cautious stance, recognizing the intricacies and the limitations of their own understanding. This interpretation aligns with the broader literature on intellectual humility, which posits that individuals who embody intellectual humility are less inclined to articulate unwavering conviction regarding contentious social or political matters (Leary et al., 2017). Conversely, they may favor evaluations that are more balanced, taking into account uncertainty or conditional support.

Taken together, these findings suggest that different cognitive dispositions influence immigration attitudes through distinct mechanisms. A propensity for open-mindedness, marked by a reduction in dogmatic tendencies, has been observed to diminish vehement opposition to immigration. This phenomenon is theorized to emerge from the promotion of cognitive flexibility and an increased tolerance for diverse viewpoints. Conversely, intellectual humility—defined as the independence of intellect and ego—has been shown to reduce the likelihood of adopting strongly polarized positions, whether positive or negative.

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