

Attitudes Toward Immigrants: Test of Protestant Work Ethic,  
Egalitarianism, Social Contact, and Ethnic Origin

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## **Abstract**

Americans' attitudes toward immigrants can be described as ambivalent. While some attitudes toward immigrants have been antagonistic, Americans have also espoused beliefs that the United States is a nation of immigrants and that cultural diversity is one of America's foremost strengths. These ambivalent attitudes toward immigrants might be explained by egalitarianism, which is characterized by social equality and social justice, and the Protestant Work Ethic (PWE), which is characterized by self-discipline and individual achievement. Using data collected from a major metropolitan area in the Midwest (n=382), this study explored two questions: 1) are there any differences in attitudes toward immigrants of differing ethnic origins? and 2) what are the roles of egalitarianism, PWE, personal, and impersonal contact in people's attitude toward immigrants? The results of repeated measures ANOVA indicated a significant effect of ethnic origin, with European immigrants perceived most positively and Middle Eastern immigrants least positively. The results of regression analyses also revealed that egalitarianism was associated with positive general attitudes toward immigrants and PWE with negative attitudes. Further, close contact was associated with positive attitudes toward immigrants, whereas impersonal contact did not impact general attitudes toward immigrants. Implications for intercultural education are discussed.

*Keywords:* attitudes toward immigrants, contact theory, Protestant

Work Ethic, egalitarianism, immigrants' race

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According to the 2010 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics (Office of Immigration Statistics, 2011), between 2001 and 2010, close to a million individuals on average have obtained legal permanent residency status per year in the United States. While the numbers of immigrants have increased substantially over the years, so has the country of origin of these individuals (Office of Immigration Statistics, 2011), resulting in diverse cultures, customs, and ideologies. Although the U.S. is a nation of immigrants, out-group negativity and in-group favoritism have led to undesirable outcomes for some racial and ethnic minority groups. Such outcomes include the Chinese Immigrant Exclusion Law, the harassment of Irish and Italian immigrants at the turn of last century, and the internment of Japanese immigrants during World War II. More recently, following the events surrounding 9/11 and an increased negative sentiment toward undocumented workers, there has been a rise in discriminatory sentiments toward Middle Eastern and Latino immigrants, respectively (Kivisto and Faist, 2010; Leonard, 2003; Matsuo, 2005). Furthermore, there is a consistent pattern of findings in the literature indicating that a large proportion of Americans hold prejudicial views toward immigrants. With these negative views toward immigration, the possible consequence of increased competition for resources, a realistic threat, as well as increased threats of one's worldview emerge (Stephan et al., 1999).

Although discriminatory actions toward immigrants are well-recognized, there is a convincing body of literature that indicates that attitudes toward these individuals, as well as racial and ethnic out-group members more generally, may be best characterized as

ambivalent (Biernat, Vescio, Theno, & Crandall, 1996; Crandall & Eshleman, 2003; Katz & Haas, 1988; Katz, Wackenhut, & Hass, 1986; Maio, Bell, & Esses, 1996). Ambivalent, in this context, indicates that both positive and negative attitudes toward immigrants are simultaneously present. Positive elements may originate from feelings of sympathy based on out-group's social disadvantages (e.g., low economic status; difficulties with language; presence of stereotypes), whereas the negative elements may originate from feelings of antipathy, based on the symbolic or real threats that out-groups pose (e.g., competition for jobs; differences in religious beliefs).

Prior theorization suggests that these elements have developed from the presence of two conflicting values, egalitarianism and the Protestant Work Ethic (PWE), which are both frequently endorsed in American society (Biernat et al, 1996; Katz & Haas, 1988). Egalitarianism is characterized by valuing social equality in a manner that is consistent with concern for social justice and help for others in need (Katz & Haas, 1988; Katz, Wackenhut, & Hass, 1986). PWE, on the other hand, is a core American value that was first identified in 1904 by Max Weber in his seminal work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. PWE is an individualistic ideal, characterized by hard work, self-discipline, and individual achievement (Katz & Haas, 1988; Katz, Wackenhut, & Hass, 1986). Regardless of religious affiliation, people who tend to endorse PWE are generally unsympathetic toward out-groups, believing that they should be able to “pull themselves up by their bootstraps” and overcome social inequality without the need for social welfare programs. Thus, whereas egalitarianism is viewed as more collectivistic, PWE is viewed as more individualistic, and in this sense, may be viewed as potentially conflicting. This conflict between core values is often described by national figures, such as President Obama who said in 2008, “That's the promise of

America, the idea that we are responsible for ourselves, but that we also rise or fall as one nation, the fundamental belief that I am my brother's keeper, I am my sister's keeper.“

As one would expect, egalitarianism has been shown to be negatively associated with racial prejudice (Biernat et al, 1996; Swim, Aikin, Hall, & Hunter, 1995) and sexism (Swim, Aikin, Hall, & Hunter, 1995). Conversely, endorsing PWE is positively associated with modern and old-fashioned forms of racism, as well as sexism within men (Swim et al, 1995), and is especially predictive of prejudice toward those out-groups who are stereotypically perceived as behaving or holding values incompatible with PWE (Biernat et al, 1996). For this reason, it is possible that immigrants are perceived differently, and this may be due to how some ethnic origins are viewed generally as holding values consistent with PWE whereas others may be viewed as violating PWE.

While personal values may play a role in how one perceives immigrants, social relationships may also impact these perceptions. This notion is grounded in the idea that negative attitudes stem from unfamiliarity with out-group members. That is, when individuals do not have personal contact with members of other cultural groups, the only knowledge they may have of those groups is likely to be comprised of social stereotypes. Consequently, when individuals get the opportunity to form close relationships across group boundaries, they may learn that prevalent stereotypes are untrue or exaggerated, and thus form many more favorable views of those groups. This idea is the basis for the contact hypothesis, which states that increased social interactions lead to increased positive attitudes toward out-group members (Allport, 1954; Brewer & Gaertner, 2001). Overall, the contact hypothesis has received considerable empirical support (Hewstone & Brown, 1986; Pettigrew, 1997; 1998; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). For example, Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) conducted a meta-

analysis of 515 empirical studies on the contact hypothesis and found that overall higher levels of contact are associated with lower levels of prejudice (mean  $r = -.215$ ).

However, all contact may not be considered equal. For instance, Allport (1954) identified four key conditions for contact to have optimal effects on reducing prejudice: equal group status, common goals, intergroup cooperation, and support of authorities. Similarly, Pettigrew (1998) argued that intergroup friendships are key forms of contact that should result in the reduction of prejudice. Conversely, when individuals have only impersonal contact, or passive and superficial relationships, this may not yield similar results and in fact may lead to more negative attitudes toward out-group members. This may occur because interactions may be challenging. Individuals may speak different languages, and thus make these interactions difficult (Crandall & Eshleman, 2003; Hewstone & Brown, 1986). Thus, while we predict that personal forms of intergroup contact should be negatively correlated with prejudicial attitudes of immigrants, impersonal contact may be positively correlated.

In sum, the goals of this paper are to explore the relationships between egalitarian and PWE beliefs as well as attitudes toward immigrants of differing ethnic origins. Furthermore, the roles of personal and impersonal social contact are examined. Major questions that we address in this study are: 1) are there any differences in attitudes toward immigrants of differing ethnic origins? and 2) what are the roles of egalitarianism, PWE, personal, and impersonal contact in people's attitudes toward immigrants?

## **Method**

### **Sampling and Sample**

The setting for this study was St. Louis, Missouri. The number of immigrants living in St. Louis has spiked in the last two decades after St. Louis was designated as a preferred community for refugees of the genocide in Bosnia-Herzegovina. In addition, immigrants from Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and Africa have continued to migrate to St. Louis in large numbers (International Institute of St. Louis, 2005). It is estimated that the number of immigrants living in the city of St. Louis, including people from Eastern Europe, Middle East, Asia, Africa, and their American-born children is close to 100,000. This is about one-third of the population of the city, making the area one of the most ethnically diverse cities in the Midwest.

The sampling frame for the current study was limited to individuals (age  $\geq 18$  years old) residing in St. Louis, Missouri. St. Louis County was divided into four regions: north, central, south, and suburbs to ensure adequate racial compositions and median family incomes within the sample. Four zip codes were then randomly selected from within each of these four regions. Selected zip codes were then given to Americalist, a company which provided lists of names, addresses, and telephone numbers. Within each of the sixteen zip codes, 125 addresses were randomly selected to receive a survey packet by mail (for a total of 2,000). A total of 382 people responded the survey without a follow-up letter (174 male, 202 female, 6 missing). While the Total Design Method (TDM) developed by Dillman in the mid 1970's yielded high response rates a few decades ago, this method has some shortcomings in the current age (Dillman, 2000). In order to maximize the available resource, we chose not to use TDM. The sample comprised of 288 Whites, 42 Blacks, 40 participants from other racial

minority groups, and 12 missing information in racial background. The mean age of the sample was 50.10 ( $SD = 13.82$ ) and with 94% ( $n=360$ ) born in the United States.

### **Measures**

**Attitudes toward specific ethnic groups.** Participants reported their attitudes toward Asian, African, Middle Eastern, Bosnian, and European immigrants by completing semantic differential items. Participants were asked to make bipolar ratings for each ethnic group on 7-point scales for the following dimensions: *cold-warm*, *negative-positive*, *unfriendly-friendly*, *disrespectful-respectful*, *uncomfortable-comfortable*, *unwelcoming-welcoming* (modified from Voci & Hewstone, 2003). The six items were summed to form overall attitudes toward specific ethnic group scores, where higher scores indicate more favorable attitudes.

**Social contact.** Participants completed an 11-item social contact scale based on a revision of a previous scale devised by the first author (Matsuo, 1992). This scale was intended to measure personal (e.g., “How many of your close friends are immigrants?”) and impersonal contact (e.g., “How many immigrants do you encounter at work or school?”). Cronbach’s alphas for the present sample were 0.863 and 0.778, respectively.

**General attitudes toward immigrants.** Participants were asked to report their attitudes toward immigrants in general by completing a modified version of the 10-item scale used by Starr and Roberts (1982). The original scale was modified to measure attitudes toward immigrants living in St. Louis. Examples of items include “St. Louis has too many immigrants” and “It would be better if immigrants settle in another city or country.” Responses to each item were made on a 5-point scale with endpoints ranging from 1



(*Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly Agree*). Items were summed to form a General Attitudes toward Immigrants scale. Cronbach's alpha for the present sample was 0.890.

**Humanitarianism / Protestant Work Ethic scale.** This 21-item scale was developed by Katz & Haas (1988) and was designed to measure humanitarian/egalitarian beliefs and beliefs that correspond to the Protestant Work Ethic. Responses to each item were made on a 6-point scale, ranging from -3 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 3 (*Strongly Agree*). Items were then summed to form an Egalitarian Scale and a Protestant Work Ethic scale (see Katz & Haas, 1988). Cronbach's alphas for the present sample were 0.757 and 0.707, respectively.

## Results

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See Table 1  
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We first tested the assumption that perceptions toward refugees varied by ethnic origin of immigrants. Repeated measures ANOVAs were used to compare attitudes toward each of the ethnic groups on each bipolar dimension. Since the assumption of sphericity was violated for all repeated measures models, F-statistics were evaluated using Greenhouse-Geisser corrections. Pairwise comparisons were made using Bonferroni corrections. Analyses were performed on samples with complete data available, thus, sample sizes varied due to missing data. Mean ratings with associated standard deviations, along with the ANOVA results, are reported in Table 1. All repeated measures ANOVAs were significant and pairwise comparisons indicated that Middle Eastern immigrants were rated more negatively than the other groups on all six dimensions. Furthermore, Asians were rated as being more respectful

than the other groups and higher on the positive dimension compared with Africans and Bosnians.

We next conducted a series of regression analyses to test the effects of several demographic variables, American values (egalitarianism vs. PWE), and social contact on attitudes toward refugees. We tested these variables first on general attitudes toward immigrants, and then separately on each different ethnic group. The results are shown in Table 2.

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See Table 2  
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In the model of general attitudes, race and gender had a positive significant impact on attitude ( $B = 4.173, p < 0.001$  and  $B = 2.698, p < 0.001$  respectively), meaning that Whites and males were more likely to show favorable general attitudes toward immigrants than non-Whites or females. As hypothesized, egalitarianism had a significant positive impact on both the general attitudes ( $B = 0.586, p < 0.001$ ) and on attitudes toward each ethnic group ( $B = 0.633, p < 0.001$  for Asians,  $B = 0.737, p < 0.001$  for Africans,  $B = 0.741, p < 0.001$  for Bosnians,  $B = 0.878, p < 0.001$  for Middle Easterners, and  $B = 0.368, p < 0.001$  for European, and  $B = 0.592, p < 0.001$  for Latino immigrants). In other words, the stronger egalitarianism beliefs a person had, the more positive attitudes he/she tends to hold toward immigrants. Further, PWE had a significant negative impact on general attitudes ( $B = -0.231, p < 0.001$ ) and on attitudes toward Africans ( $B = -0.229, p < 0.05$ ). In general, a greater adherence to PWE was associated with more negative attitudes toward Africans and immigrants. However, PWE was positively associated with attitudes toward European immigrants ( $B = 0.222, p < 0.01$ ). Finally, while personal contact had a significant positive impact on general attitudes ( $B = 0.241, p < 0.001$ ), impersonal contact did not. Regarding specific ethnic groups, there was evidence that

personal contact had a positive association with perceptions toward Middle Eastern ( $B=0.325$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) and Latino immigrants ( $B=0.235$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). Impersonal contact was significantly positively associated with attitudes only toward Africans ( $B=0.319$ ,  $p<.01$ ).

The results indicated that general attitudes toward immigrants are, as hypothesized, dependent upon egalitarian beliefs, such that increases in egalitarianism are associated with more positive attitudes, PWE, such that greater adherence to the PWE is associated with more negative attitudes, and primary social contact, such that increased personal contact is associated with more positive attitudes. When considering distinct ethnic origins of immigrants, similarities across groups were found for egalitarian beliefs, but with differences noted for PWE and primary social contact.

### **Discussion**

This study provides initial evidence that people in St. Louis hold ambivalent attitudes toward immigrants and that these attitudes may be based upon the maintenance of dual conflicting values of egalitarianism and PWE. Egalitarianism had a positive association with attitudes for each group, suggesting that this factor may be associated with broad attitudes toward immigrants, and possibly more generally toward other persons. This finding is consistent with work by Biernat et al. (1996), who suggested that egalitarianism is associated with lower levels of all forms of prejudice.

PWE, on the other hand, while negatively associated with general attitudes toward immigrants, did not show a consistent pattern across ethnic groups. For instance, PWE was significantly associated with attitudes toward Africans and Europeans, but not for the remaining groups. Furthermore, the significant relationships between PWE were not the same, suggesting that groups may be evaluated as adhering to different standards related to

PWE. The negative association with Africans may indicate that these individuals may be viewed as more strongly incompatible with PWE values, whereas Europeans may be viewed as more strongly compatible. These findings are not surprising given that the majority of the sample was White, i.e., European decent, and may reflect simply in-group favoritism and out-group bias. However, this explanation does not hold when the lack of significant association between PWE and attitudes toward Asians, Middle Eastern, Latino, and Bosnian immigrants is considered. While there is a large concentration of Bosnians in St. Louis, they are considered Caucasian and therefore their racial membership may negate some out-group biases. On the other hand, the lack of association between PWE and attitudes toward Asian, Middle Eastern, and Latino immigrants may reflect the relatively small numbers of these individuals in the community. Therefore, the compatibility of PWE with these groups may have been indeterminable by the respondents due to low degree of exposure to these groups.

The present study also shows that personal contact with out-group members plays an important role in determining attitudes toward immigrants in general, but in particular for Asian, Middle Eastern, and Latino groups. These are groups that have relatively smaller representation as ethnic and racial groups compared with Bosnian and Africans (and African Americans). This pattern of results, along with the ethnic group specific results with PWE, suggests that it is possible that when PWE is indeterminable, that degree of personal contact would impact attitudes toward immigrants. With African immigrants, however, it should be noted that impersonal contact, but not personal contact, was an important factor in positive attitudes. This finding may reflect the larger, complex black-white racial relationships in the St. Louis region and warrants further investigation.

Taken together, the findings from this study suggest that attitudes toward immigrants are related to the delicate interplay between egalitarianism, PWE, personal contact, and social context that varies by ethnic group. This finding provides a preliminary explanation for why prejudice toward some ethnic groups has diminished substantially over the last fifty years, while prejudice toward other groups remains unchanged. For example, although attitudes toward Asian and European immigrants have become more positive over time, attitudes toward other ethnic groups have become more negative (e.g., Middle Eastern immigrants). Further research that takes into account historical and immediate and global context variables is needed to explore this assertion more explicitly.

There are several limitations in this study worth noting. The rapid pace by which individuals are exposed to one another is changing the way we interact. The nature of impersonal interactions, for instance, now may be affected by increased participation in the global economy, which often involves telephone and tele-video interactions and email correspondence. Furthermore, there is increased coverage of global current events through the media. Thus information is becoming increasingly accessible on-demand through means, such as the internet, and thus increasing individuals' exposure to the global community. The extent to which these impersonal interactions and increased exposure may impact attitudes is not known and is worth considering in future research. Additionally, although the sampling method was applied in earnest to reflect the St. Louis population, the final composition of the sample included mostly Whites. While it was noted previously that St. Louis is among the most diverse cities in the Midwest region, our sample did not reflect this and therefore the generalizability of our results is limited. Furthermore, while the numbers of individuals who responded was reasonable considering the absence of reminders to participants and for the analyses at hand, the response rate was less than ideal. Future research that includes oversampling underrepresented populations would prove fruitful.

The results of this study also have practical implications. One implication is that clearly a one-size-fits-all approach to reducing negative attitudes toward different ethnic groups may not be the most productive. Instead, recognition of how the value systems of the audience (e.g., PWE) may affect the perceptions of specific out-group members would help inform the best approaches for reducing negative attitudes. This study also suggests that programs designed to reduce prejudice, such as diversity training at higher educational institutions, need to be prepared to deliver programs tailored not only to the out-group members who are the targets of the negative attitudes, but also for the value systems held by audience members. Another implication is that, social contact, alone, may not be sufficient in reducing prejudice. Instead, increasing opportunities for individuals from different groups to have positive and personally meaningful social contact may be worth considering, particularly among groups where negative biases already exist. There are many examples of activities that rely on cooperative engagement, such as Aronson's Jigsaw Classroom or Desforges and colleagues' (1991) Structured Cooperative Contact.

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Table 1

*Perceptions of immigrants by ethnic origin: results from repeated measures ANOVA and Bonferroni-adjusted paired comparisons.*

	Asian	African	Bosnian	European	Middle Eastern	Latino
Cold-Warm (N=156; F(3.7, 577.5)=14.559, p<.001, partial eta <sup>2</sup> =0.09)						
M	4.59	4.74	4.39	4.63	3.87 <sup>a</sup>	4.82
SD	1.52	1.54	1.58	1.52	1.75	1.60
Negative-Positive (N=154; F(4.20, 623.99)=14.693, p < .001, partial eta <sup>2</sup> = 0.09)						
M	5.03 <sup>b,c</sup>	4.58	4.47	4.73	3.96 <sup>a</sup>	4.75
SD	1.57	1.54	1.63	1.55	1.72	1.52
Unfriendly-Friendly (N=154; F(3.80, 581.21)=15.753, p<.001, partial eta <sup>2</sup> = 0.09)						
M	4.94	4.74	4.74	4.74	3.88 <sup>a</sup>	4.92
SD	1.62	1.64	1.45	1.48	1.94	1.47
Disrespectful-Respectful (N=154; F(4.09, 626.45)=17.703, p<.001, partial eta <sup>2</sup> = 0.10)						
M	5.32 <sup>a</sup>	4.73	4.62	4.66	4.08 <sup>a</sup>	4.73
SD	1.51	1.48	1.48	1.42	1.85	1.61
Uncomfortable-Comfortable (N=146; F(4.27, 619.32)=15.369, p<.001, partial eta <sup>2</sup> = 0.10)						
M	4.82	4.68	4.52	4.70	3.81 <sup>a</sup>	4.68
SD	1.67	1.48	1.48	1.42	1.80	1.55
Unwelcome-Welcome (N=150; F(4.08, 607.32)=15.919, p<.001, partial eta <sup>2</sup> = 0.10)						
M	4.80	4.72	4.57	4.63	3.81 <sup>a</sup>	4.83
SD	1.66	1.43	1.47	1.47	1.71	1.56

*Note:* Larger values indicate perceptions that are more positive

<sup>a</sup> vs. all groups, <sup>b</sup>vs. African, <sup>c</sup>vs. Bosnian

Table 2

*Attitudes Toward Immigrants by Race, Age, Gender, American Values and Social Contact*

	<b>General</b>	<b>Asian</b>	<b>African</b>	<b>Bosnian</b>	<b>Middle Eastern</b>	<b>European</b>	<b>Latino</b>
<i>N</i>	288	216	198	166	192	210	214
<b>Race</b> (1 = White, 0 = Non-White)	4.173*** (.212)	2.106 (.089)	.853 (.037)	1.528 (.065)	3.015 (.109)	2.174 (.108)	-1.734 (-.082)
<b>Age</b>	-.034 (-.062)	-.005 (-.008)	-.006 (-.009)	.035 (.048)	.120* (.155)	.062 (.110)	.034 (.051)
<b>Gender</b> (1 = Male, 0= Female)	2.698** (.173)	4.361*** (.261)	.229 (.012)	2.315 (.127)	2.663 (.124)	-.326 (-.023)	1.350 (.084)
<b>Religion</b> (1=Christian, 0=non-Christian)	-.717 (-.041)	-1.663 (-.087)	-.964 (-.047)	-3.369* (-.161)	-4.810** (-.199)	-3.879** (-.226)	-2.924** (-.163)
<b>Egalitarianism</b>	.586*** (.406)	.633*** (.409)	.737*** (.443)	.741*** (.435)	.878*** (.443)	.368*** (.278)	.592*** (.395)
<b>Protestant Work Ethic</b>	-.231*** (-.229)	.083 (.075)	-.229* (-.176)	.170 (.133)	-.033 (-.021)	.222** (.227)	.051 (.044)
<b>Personal Contact</b>	.241** (.161)	.265* (.172)	.049 (.030)	-.230 (-.145)	.325* (.172)	.049 (.037)	.235* (.159)
<b>Impersonal Contact</b>	-.010 (-.007)	-.139 (-.087)	.319** (.184)	.287 (.167)	.168 (.084)	.121 (.086)	.108 (.066)
<b>Constant</b>	30.288***	20.929***	21.075***	19.315***	7.830*	22.714***	23.808***
<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	.328	.261	.316	.211	.304	.161	.283
<b>F Statistic</b>	17.003***	9.153***	10.908***	5.258***	10.010***	4.804***	10.132***

Note: Standardized Beta coefficients are reported in parentheses. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$  (two-tailed)