

Cultural and individual values determine whether people see immigration as a threat

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People with conservative values have a higher perception of threat from immigration than people with universalistic values, confirms research by the University of Cologne.

The research, conducted by Professor Eldad Davidov and Dr. Daniel Seddig together with international experts, examined the relationship of conservative values, such as conformity and tradition, and universalistic values with perceived threat from immigration and attitudes to immigration.

The term 'values' is used in public and political discourses in many ways. The researchers refer to values as desirable goals that serve as guiding principles in the life of a person or social group.

The study found that those who held conservative values expressed a higher perception of threat due to immigration and more negative views towards immigration. By way of contrast, those who held universalistic values expressed a lower perception of threat from immigration and more positive views towards immigration.

The researchers analysed data from the European Social Survey, a comparative study that asked for opinions on social and political issues, which contained more than 35,000 respondents from 19 European countries.

Although the general findings of the study were relatively similar across these countries, there were notable differences across countries. The country-specific cultural context affected the association between peoples' conservative and universalistic values and perceptions of threat and attitudes to immigration.

In more autonomous societies, such as those in Western Europe, individual values are very important so people follow their own motivations and worldviews, whereas in more collectivistic societies, people are deeply embedded in the collective of society, therefore individual values are less important.

"The associations between values, perceived threat, and attitudes towards immigration were stronger in countries characterized by higher levels of intellectual and affective autonomy and weaker in countries characterized by higher levels of embeddedness," says Professor Davidov.

The research was published in the journal of Ethnic and Migration studies.
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For more information, a copy of the report, or to speak to Professor Davidov or Dr. Seddig, contact Katie Hurley at BlueSky PR on khurley@bluesky-pr.com or call +44 (0) 7538 412793