



AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

Understanding Attitudes toward Recent Arrivals to the United States

Belonging to a group provides us with many benefits, but can also lead to negative attitudes toward people we deem outsiders. This can be seen in the United States, where there exists a long history of negative views of people perceived to be non-American.ⁱ The consequences of these negative attitudes can be harmful for recent arrivals to the U.S. and for the communities that host them. Fortunately, there are ways policymakers and citizens can intervene to mitigate these negative attitudes.

We naturally form groups, and prefer the groups to which we belong

Belonging to groups and identifying as a member of those groups provides psychological benefits.

- We feel more certain of our place in society and gain social support from others, leading to better self-esteem.^{ii,iii,iv}
- We have a system of roles, norms, values, and beliefs that unite us and guide our behavior.^v

Belonging to a group leads us to notice group differences and fear non-members

Belonging to groups relies on creating boundaries; this can lead us to fear people outside of those boundaries.

- Research shows that even strangers who are *randomly assigned* to different groups begin to financially favor in-group members and discriminate against out-group members, even though they do not benefit themselves.^{vi,vii,viii}
 - This phenomenon has been demonstrated across people of different races, ages, genders, and educational levels.
- Because we are motivated to favor and protect the interests of our groups, we fear and dislike people we perceive as different and as potentially harming us. Although research shows the benefits of immigration, many Americans perceive recent arrivals to be detrimental to society's wellbeing.
 - In 2015, 41% of U.S.-born Americans described immigrants as a burden on the country, taking away jobs, housing, and health care.^{ix}
 - In another national poll, 37% of respondents said immigrants are worsening the U.S. overall. 50% believed they are worsening the economy; 50% believed they are worsening crime; and 34% believed they are negatively changing social and moral values.^x

When we see others as threats, this can lead to prejudice and discrimination

When we perceive immigrants as threats, this can lead to anti-immigrant attitudes and harmful behaviors.^{xi}

- We experience negative *emotions* – fear, anxiety, anger – which undermine our empathy.^{xii,xiii}
- We develop harmful *thoughts* – we stereotype recent arrivals to the U.S.^{i,xiv}
- We take hurtful *actions* – we withdraw from or are aggressive toward recent arrivals to the U.S., leading to discrimination, harassment, and violence.^{xv} Recently, hate crimes toward Hispanics and Muslims have increased alongside negative rhetoric.^{xvi,xvii}

Prejudice and discrimination harm all of us

- Recent arrivals who experience prejudice can suffer negative psychological (e.g., stress, depression), physical (e.g., assaults, health consequences of stress), economic (e.g., lower pay, poorer conditions), and social (e.g., segregation, limited support) consequences.^{xviii,xix}
- Prejudice can also hinder integration, making it more difficult for receiving communities to reap the benefits of immigration:

- In the long term, immigrants create more jobs than they take, lowering unemployment.^{xx}
- Immigration is strongly associated with increased productivity.^{xxi}
- Cultural diversity is linked to increased wages and innovation.^{xxii}
- Children of immigrants are equally or more civically engaged than those of US-born parents.^{xxiii}
- Immigration is generally not associated with crime.^{xxiv}

There are many ways to change attitudes toward recent arrivals to the United States

Decades of psychological research shows that we can reduce prejudice through expanded contact between groups.^{xxv}

- Research indicates that optimal contact to decrease prejudice and discrimination involves ensuring that the individuals from the two groups share equal status, they cooperate to achieve common goals, and they benefit from supportive social and institutional policies.^{xxvi}
 - For example, the “Jigsaw Classroom” is a cooperative learning technique in which students are given a project that requires them to independently complete smaller sub-tasks, each of which are necessary to the group’s success. Outcomes of the technique include: reduced racial and ethnic conflict, improved test performance, better attendance, and greater liking for school.^{xxvi}
 - In the United States, friendship with Latina/o immigrants has been associated with more positive attitudes toward Latinos as a group.^{xxvii}
- Although, positive experiences are common, some negative interactions may occur when people from different groups come into contact while they compete for scarce resources or lack opportunities for communication.^{xxviii}

Communities can focus on the creation of inclusive groups. We all belong to many collectives— religions, ethnicities, careers, interests – so can stress our membership in broader groups encompassing both US-born Americans and more recent arrivals.^{xxix}

- Research shows that the same conditions that facilitate positive contact – equal status, common goals, and supportive policies – aid in the formation of inclusive in-group identities. Additionally, people are more likely to feel part of a broader collective if that group identity is important to them.^{xxx}
 - For example, the fans of the 2014 U.S. Men’s World Cup soccer team passionately cheered on their diverse team who were members of one cohesive unit. The team hailed from 3 different countries by nationality (Germany, Norway, U.S.), and the players’ parents were from 7 different countries (Colombia, Germany, Haiti, Hungary, Iceland, Mexico, and the U.S.).

-
- ⁱ Yakushko, O. (2009). Xenophobia: Understanding the roots and consequences of negative attitudes toward immigrants. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 37, 36-66.
- ⁱⁱ Abrams, D., & Hogg, M. A. (1988). Comments on the motivational status of self-esteem in social identity and intergroup discrimination. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 18, 317-334.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Crocker, J., & Luhtanen, R. (1990). Collective self-esteem and ingroup bias. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 58, 60-67.
- ^{iv} Hogg, M. A. (2003). Social identity. In M. R. Leary, J. P. Tangney, M. R. Leary, & J. P. Tangney (Eds.), *Handbook of self and identity* (pp. 462-479). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- ^v Tajfel, H. C., & Turner, J. C. (1986). The social identity theory of intergroup behavior. In S. Worchel & W. G. Austin (Eds.), *Psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 7-24). Chicago, IL: Nelson-Hall.
- ^{vi} Tajfel, H., Billig, M. G., Bundy, R. P., & Flament, C. (1971). Social categorization and intergroup behaviour. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 1, 149-178.
- ^{vii} Ashforth, B. E., & Mael, F. (1989). Social identity theory and the organization. *The Academy of Management Review*, 14, 20-29.
- ^{viii} Gaertner, L., & Insko, C. A. (2000). Intergroup discrimination in the minimal group paradigm: Categorization, reciprocation, or fear? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 79, 77-94.
- ^{ix} Goo, S. K. (2015). *What Americans want to do about illegal immigration*. Retrieved from <http://www.pewresearch.org/>.
- ^x Pew Research Center (2015). *Modern immigration wave brings 59 million to U.S., driving population growth and change through 2065: Views of immigration's impact on U.S. society mixed*. Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center.
- ^{xi} Stephan, W. G., Diaz-Loving, R., & Duran, A. (2000). Integrated threat theory and intercultural attitudes: Mexico and the United States. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 31, 240-249.
- ^{xii} Renfro, C. L., Duran, A., & Stephan, W. G., & Clason, D. L. (2006). The role of threat in attitudes toward affirmative action and its beneficiaries. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 36, 41-74.
- ^{xiii} Mackie, D. M., Devos, T., & Smith, E. R. (2000). Intergroup emotions: Explaining offensive action tendencies in an intergroup context. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 79, 602-616.
- ^{xiv} Rothgerber, H. (1997). External intergroup threat as an antecedent to perceptions of in-group and out-group homogeneity. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 73, 1206-1212.
- ^{xv} Stephan, W. G., Ybarra, O., & Rios, K. (2016). Intergroup threat theory. In T. D. Nelson, T. D. Nelson (Eds.), *Handbook of prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination* (pp. 255-278). New York, NY: Psychology Press.
- ^{xvi} Federal Bureau of Investigation. (2015). *Hate crime statistics, 2014*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice.
- ^{xvii} Shively, M., Subramaniam, R., Drucker, O., Edgerton, J., McDevitt, J., Farrell, A., & Iwama, J. (2014). *Understanding trends in hate crimes against immigrants and Hispanic-Americans*. Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Justice.
- ^{xviii} Yakushko, O. (2009). Xenophobia: Understanding the roots and consequences of negative attitudes toward immigrants. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 37, 36-66.
- ^{xix} Suárez-Orozco, C., Birman, D., Casas, J. M., Nakamura, N., Tummala-Narra, P., & Zárate, M. (2012). *Crossroads: Psychology of immigration in the new century*. Retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/topics/immigration/>.
- ^{xx} Okkerse, L. (2008). How to measure labor market effects of immigration. *Journal of Economic Surveys*, 22, 1-30.
- ^{xxi} Peri, G. (2012). The effect of immigration on productivity: Evidence from U.S. states. *Review of Economics & Statistics*, 94, 348-358.
- ^{xxii} Ottaviano, G. P., & Peri, G. (2006). The economic value of cultural diversity: Evidence from US Cities. *Journal of Economic Geography*, 6, 9-44.
- ^{xxiii} Lopez, M. H., & Marcelo, K. B. (2008). The civic engagement of immigrant youth: New evidence from the 2006 civic and political health of the nation survey. *Applied Developmental Science*, 12, 66-73.
- ^{xxiv} Martínez, R., & Lee, M. T. (2000). On immigration and crime. *The nature of crime: Continuity and change*. Retrieved from https://www.ncjrs.gov/criminal_justice2000/vol1_2000.html.
- ^{xxv} Pettigrew, T. F. & Tropp, L. R. (2006). A meta-analytic test of intergroup contact theory. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 90(5), 751-783.
- ^{xxvi} Aronson, E., & Patnoe, S. (2011). *Cooperation in the classroom: The jigsaw method* (3rd ed.). London: Pinter & Martin.
- ^{xxvii} Ellison, C. L. (2011). The contact hypothesis and attitudes toward Latinos in the United States. *Social Science Quarterly*, 92, 938-958.
- ^{xxviii} Graf, S., Paolini, S., & Rubin, M. (2014). Negative intergroup contact is more influential, but positive intergroup contact is more common. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 44(6), 536-547.
- ^{xxix} Gaertner, S. L., & Dovidio, J. F. (2005). Understanding and addressing contemporary racism: From aversive racism to the common ingroup identity model. *Journal of Social Issues*, 61(3), 615-639.
- ^{xxx} Gaertner, S. L., Dovidio, J. F., & Bachman, B. A. (1996). Revisiting the contact hypothesis: The induction of a common ingroup identity. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 20, 271-290.