

# Support for multiculturalism in contemporary Bulgaria: The beneficial effects of national identity and minority presence.

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## Introduction

Bulgaria is historically a multicultural society with established ethnic minorities. The population of 7,364,570 is composed of the **Bulgarian (ethnic) majority** (84.8%, 2011 census) and a number of **ethnic minority communities** among which **Bulgarian Turks** (8.9 %) and **Roma** (4.8%) are the largest. Despite a long-lived cohabitation of ethnic communities in Bulgaria, discrimination, prejudice, and scarce contacts among different communities are observed.

Bulgarian constitution recognizes equal rights of all Bulgarian citizens, regardless of their ethnic, gender, religious, etc. belonging/affiliation and the right of ethnic minorities to preserve their culture and religion and to study and practice their mother tongue. Nevertheless, **multicultural requests** by the ethnic minorities have faced **harsh resistance** by the national majority.

## Aim of the study

The aim of the study was to investigate **individual- and contextual-level predictors** of support for multicultural rights of ethnic minorities, considering the point of view of the ethnic Bulgarian majority. We analysed data from International Social Survey Programme **ISSP 2003**. The contextual-level units of analysis were the **28 Bulgarian districts**.

## Individual-level predictions

**Ethnic identification** should be negatively related to support for multicultural rights (**H1**).

**Ethnic conception of the nation** - belief that the national group has an essentialist core that is determined by ancestry and ethnic belonging (e.g., Brubaker, 1992) – should be negatively related to support for multiculturalism (**H2**).

**National identification** – representing identification with a common ingroup (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000) – should be positively associated with support for multicultural rights (**H3**).

**Anti-Roma symbolic prejudice** – belief that Roma are responsible for their disadvantaged position and denial of ongoing discrimination (e.g., Sears & Henry, 2005) – should be negatively associated with support for multiculturalism (**H4**).

## Contextual-level predictions

Two main approaches on the effects of ethnic diversity on intergroup attitudes:

• **Ethnic competition theory** (e.g., Scheepers, Gijsberts, & Coenders, 2002) and **intergroup threat theory** (e.g., Stephan, Ybarra, & Morrison, 2009): large ethnic diversity elicits competition for resources and negative intergroup attitudes.

• **Intergroup contact theory** (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2011): ethnic diversity offers opportunities for contact and, consequently, reduces prejudice.

Factors favouring contact or threat effects:

• **Temporal dimension**: higher probability of threat effects when intergroup cohabitation is recent.

• **Proximal vs. distal context**: more chances to have contact effects in contexts where members of different communities have the possibility to meet and get to know personally.

The fact that ethnic minorities are historically part of Bulgaria (cohabitation not recent) and the relatively small unit of analysis (proximal context) suggest to expect **contact effects**: the presence of ethnic minorities within Bulgarian districts should promote support for multiculturalism (**H5**).

**Ethnic diversity** – more ethnic communities living in the same area – may be particularly beneficial for intergroup attitudes, and thus lead to support for multiculturalism (**H6**). Demographical multiculturalism may thus favour ideological multiculturalism (see Berry & Sam, 2013).

## Method

### Multilevel regression analysis

**Participants**: 920 ethnic Bulgarian respondents (50.4% females, mean age = 50.84).

**Dependent variable**: support for multicultural rights of ethnic minorities (7 items, KR-20 = .81).

**Individual-level predictors**: ethnic identification (1 item), ethnic conception of the nation (3 items,  $\alpha = .63$ ), national identification (1 item), anti-Roma symbolic prejudice (3 items,  $\alpha = .66$ ).

Individual-level control variables: gender, age, educational level, perception of own economic status.

**Contextual-level predictors**: within districts percentage of Bulgarian Turks and of Roma.

Contextual-level control variables: within districts percentage of immigrants, of unemployment, and of right wing voters.

Support for multiculturalism varies across districts: ICC = .126.

## Results

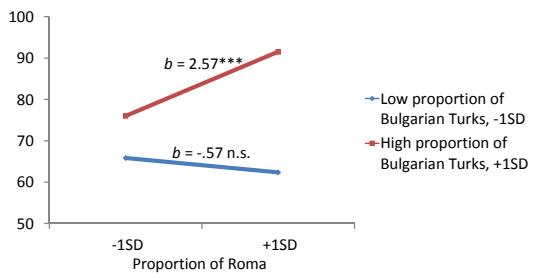
	Model 1 Individual-level predictors	Model 2 Individual- and contextual-level predictors	Model 3 Level 2 interaction
<b>Individual-level predictors</b>			
Gender	-1.60 (1.81)	-1.33 (1.80)	-1.58 (1.77)
Age	.02 (.07)	.04 (.07)	.03 (.07)
Economic situation	8.08 (4.64) <sup>a</sup>	11.03 (4.83)*	10.11 (4.72)*
Educational level	.03 (1.43)	.08 (1.44)	-.14 (1.47)
National identification	4.67 (2.09)*	4.78 (2.08)*	4.74 (2.09)*
Ethnic identification	1.22 (1.67)	1.48 (1.70)	1.31 (1.71)
Ethnic conception of nation	-5.28 (1.72)**	-5.09 (1.75)**	-5.64 (1.79)**
Anti-Roma prejudice	-9.31 (1.22)***	-9.31 (1.20)***	-9.46 (1.20)***
<b>Contextual-level predictors</b>			
Proportion of Roma		.81 (.59)	.00 (.57) <sup>a</sup>
Proportion of Turks		.50 (.15)***	.66 (.14)***
Proportion of Turks x Proportion of Roma			.11 (.04)**
Individual-level explained variance	11.47%		
Contextual-level explained variance	6.64%	40.40%	50.08%
Deviance change	84.97***	11.91**	4.29*

Notes. Model 0: Intercept only. Unstandardized coefficients are reported. Standard errors are in parenthesis. <sup>a</sup>  $p < .10$ .

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Contextual-level control variables, added one by one to Model 3, had no effect on support for multiculturalism.

### Decomposition of contextual-level interaction: Support for multiculturalism as a function of proportion of Bulgarian Turks and of proportion of Roma within districts.



## Conclusions

- National identification was positively and ethnic conception of the nation was negatively related to support for multiculturalism: importance of building an **inclusive national identity**, where ethnic minorities are considered part of the nation, without discrimination based on ethnic belonging.
- Anti-Roma symbolic prejudice was negatively related to support for multiculturalism: importance of **reducing modern forms of prejudice**.
- The percentage of Bulgarian Turks (the ethnic minority toward which attitudes are less negative) within Bulgarian districts favored support for multicultural rights.
- Support for multiculturalism** was particularly **high** in districts with high proportions of both Bulgarian Turks and of Roma: beneficial effects for intergroup attitudes of living in **ethnic diverse areas**.
- District-level findings suggest **support for contact theory** rather than for ethnic competition and threat approaches.
- Demographical multiculturalism** favored ideological multiculturalism.

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