

Conflicting Cultural Identities May Foster Political Radicalism

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New research suggests that dual-identity immigrants — first-generation immigrants and their descendants who identify with both their cultural minority group and the society they now live in — may be more prone to political radicalism if they perceive their two cultural identities to be incompatible.

The new research is published in [Psychological Science](#), a journal of the [Association for Psychological Science](#).

Psychological scientist Bernd Simon from Kiel University in Germany and colleagues hypothesized that perceived incompatibility between the two cultural identities may pave the way for controversial or even destructive forms of politicization, such as political radicalism.

Simon and colleagues surveyed 341 university students from two of the largest immigrant groups in Germany — Turkish and Russian immigrants — asking questions about which cultures they identified with and whether they perceived any identity incompatibility. The researchers also gauged the participants' sympathy for political radicalism, asking them whether they would show understanding for people who participated in radical activities, including participating in an illegal or violent demonstration, blocking the road, and occupying or damaging other people's property.

The researchers found that dual-identity immigrants who perceived their two cultural identities to be incompatible were more likely to sympathize with radical political action, even after taking many other factors into account (such as age, citizenship, percentage of lifetime spent in Germany, and past radical activity). This finding was true for both Turkish and Russian immigrants.

While previous research has suggested that dual-identity immigrants are more likely to demonstrate their politics in more “legitimate” ways, such as nonviolent protest, the results of this study indicate that dual identity, coupled with identity incompatibility, can also foster political radicalism among immigrants.

The authors emphasize that society plays a significant role in contributing to this “aura of identity incompatibility.” As such, it is the responsibility of both immigrant groups and society as a whole not to exaggerate identity incompatibility and undermine the otherwise positive aspects of dual identity. Rather, dual-identity immigrants should be recognized as “different equals.”

Interestingly, Simon and colleagues also asked participants questions about religion and found no evidence to suggest that religious identity fosters political radicalism. In fact, a strong religious identity seemed to counteract political radicalism, particularly among Muslim Turkish immigrants.

Co-authors on the research include Frank Reichert from the University of Bamberg and Olga Grabow from Kiel University. This research was supported by a German Research Foundation Grant.