

Psychoeconomic Approaches to the Study of Hostile Attitudes Toward Minority Groups: A Study Among Israeli Jews*

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Objective. We aspired to reexamine the well-established assumption according to which low socioeconomic status, as a comprehensive concept, leads to prejudice and hostile attitudes toward minorities. Hence, we focused on examining the differential effect of each component of SES on one of the most important behavioral aspects of hostile attitudes—social distance. Just as importantly, we examined the assumption according to which threat perception mediates the influence of SES factors on those attitudes. *Methods.* In field research that took place in Israel in May 2003, attitudes of 383 participants toward three distinct minority groups were tested according to their ascription to four different “socioeconomic status” groups. *Results.* Contrary to most previous findings, we found that employment status and relative income have very little influence on social distance toward minorities. On the other hand, we found that level of education has a significant effect on social distance and that this effect is mostly mediated by the perception of cultural and economic threat. *Conclusions.* The subjective perception of threat was found to be a critical mediating “junction” in the evolutionary process of the influence of socioeconomic factors on hostile attitudes. Therefore, only specific SES components that influence the perception of threat have an effect on hostile attitudes toward minorities.

In recent years, with the expansion of waves of immigration and the rise of right-wing extremism in western Europe, prejudice, hostile attitudes, and xenophobia toward minority groups seems to draw much more attention in both the political arena and the social science literature (Watts, 1996;

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Boehnke, Hagan, and Heffler, 1998; Mudde, 1999). For many years, the basis for numerous studies, mainly within the sociological sphere, was the assumption according to which intergroup relations are a function of the social position (status) of each group, and therefore prejudice and hostile attitudes would be more common among low “socioeconomic status” (SES) group members (Glazer and Moynihan, 1970). Correspondingly, with the development of the SES/sociological framework, an alternative psychological theoretical approach has gained wide empirical support. Instead of the objective SES variable, this theoretical approach puts forward the subjective “threat perception” of an individual as the main factor in predicting negative attitudes toward minority groups, (Bobo, 1983; Sullivan et al., 1985; Stephan and Stephan, 2001; Scheepers, Gijssberts, and Coenders, 2002).

Both the pure SES (objective) and pure “threat perception” (subjective) theories have been the object of a certain degree of theoretical and empirical criticism over the years. Moreover, back in the late 1960s, Blalock was one of the first scholars to propose a fine-grained theoretical framework, integrating subjective and objective determinants of negative attitudes (Blalock, 1967). More recently, Thomas Pettigrew argued that scholars who seek to deeply investigate the causes and nature of prejudice and hostile attitudes must combine the many “mini theories” into a more integrated one: “Those models can use social variables as distal predictors and individual variables as proximal predictors” (Pettigrew, 2000:300).

Therefore, in the current study, we shall follow Blalock’s and Pettigrew’s way of thinking and present and examine an approach that combines the subjective perceptions of threat and the objective SES in order to explain prejudice and hostile attitudes toward minorities. This approach was empirically evaluated by means of a field study, which was conducted within the special environment of the diverse Israeli society. The examination of the approach within that specific society enabled us to comparatively evaluate the predictors of prejudice and hostile attitudes toward three distinct minority groups—Palestinian citizens of Israel, immigrants from the former Soviet Union, and labor migrants—and hence to contribute to the general theory of the development of prejudice.

Conceptualization and Measurement of Hostile Attitudes

Over the course of years, social scientists have used different concepts to describe and understand intergroup hostility and negative attitudes (Duckitt, 2003). The concept of prejudice is typically defined in a relatively general way as a negative attitude toward the members of a specific social group (Allport, 1954; Ashmore and Del-Boca, 1981). More contemporary concepts like “symbolic racism” (Sears, 1988), “modern racism” (McConahay, 1986), “xenophobia” (Mudde, 1995, 1999), and others usually focus on more specific aspects of intergroup relations and attitudes.

Yet, regardless of the controversies over conceptualization, in the long run, there has been a wide range of agreement among social scientists regarding the three basic components that construct prejudice and hostility:¹ negative stereotypes (cognitive), negative feelings (affective), and negative behavioral inclinations toward outgroups (for a more elaborated explanation, see Dukitt, 2003).

Due to our particular interest in the behavioral implications of prejudice and hostile attitudes, in the current study we examine these phenomena using the empirical, well-established concept of *social distance* (Bogardus, 1928, 1959).² According to Dukitt, social distance has probably been the most studied behavioral expression of prejudice (Dukitt, 2003:565; see also Triandis, 1964). Social distance is defined as the extent to which people wish to avoid increasing levels of intimate contact between themselves and members of different social, racial ethnic, or national groups (Bogardus, 1928, 1959; for reviews, see Owen, Eisner, and McFaul, 1981; Dovidio et al., 1996).

Theoretical Background

SES Approach (Objective)

As mentioned earlier, many scholars claim that among other factors, the objective social class or SES condition of an individual (level of education, relative income, and employment status) has a strong influence on his or her attitudes toward minorities (Glazer and Moynihan, 1970; Cummings, 1980; Boswell, 1986; Baumgartl and Favell, 1995; Espenshade and Hampstead, 1996; Hjerm, 1998; Fetzer, 2000). Semyonov and his colleagues claim that the “conflict paradigm focuses exclusively on economic processes and class structure as the main determinants of ethnic antagonism” (Semyonov, Raijman, and Yom-Tov, 2002:417). The same core principles find expression in the “labor market competition theory” (Espenshade and Hampstead, 1996; Semyonov, Raijman, and Yom-Tov, 2002), according to which attitudes toward immigrants and minorities are highly dependent on the contemporary labor-market status of an individual.

According to that approach, the connection between economic circumstances and prejudice (mainly among low SES individuals) derives from the “direct” competition between groups over scarce and valuable resources (Cummings, 1980; Boswell, 1986). In those cases, prejudice and hostile attitudes may also be a consequence of a socialization process within the

¹A different approach, summarized by Susan Fiske (1998), suggests that prejudice reflects only the affective aspect of negative attitudes, while stereotypes reflect the cognitive aspect and discrimination reflects the behavioral one.

²Due to theoretical as well as practical reasons, from now on, we use the terms “prejudice,” “hostile and negative attitudes,” and “social distance” interchangeably.

“lower-status society,” which includes aspects of frustration, anger, and rage (Selznick and Steinberg, 1969; Gayilin, 2003).³ This socialization includes a simplification of social reality (Coenders and Scheepers, 2003), which leads to a blaming of the minority group for all the significant problems of everyday life (Quillian, 1995).

However, in recent years, a number of studies have challenged the centrality of a person’s objective SES as a whole in predicting negative attitudes. According to these studies, for example, levels of xenophobic attitudes have not been higher during periods of economic recession or high unemployment (Wimmer, 1997; Knigge, 1998). From a theoretical point of view, the fluidity of some of the SES factors vis-à-vis the relative stability of prejudice cloud the explanatory capability of the pure SES approach. Moreover, scholars who examined the relationship between different SES components and negative attitudes toward minorities did not obtain homogenous findings.

Whereas most studies indicate level of education as the factor that has the highest effect on prejudice and hostile attitudes in comparison to other SES factors (Hjerm, 2001; Miller, Polinard, and Wrinkle, 1984; Espenshade and Hampstead, 1996; Bohenske, Hagan, and Helfer, 1998; Coenders and Scheepers, 2003),⁴ findings about the influence of employment status and relative income on hostile attitudes are not unequivocal. Although some studies find that unemployed people and blue-collar workers exhibit higher levels of prejudice and xenophobic attitudes (Espenshade and Hampstead, 1996; Palmer, 1996, 1998; Scheepers, Gijsberts, and Coenders, 2002), other studies do not find a clear relation between these variables (Hoskin, 1985; Linder, 1993; Wimmer, 1997; Fetzer, 2000; Campbell, 2003; Golder, 2003). Moreover, scholars who examined the combined influence of all SES factors on negative attitudes found that when holding the level of education constant, other SES factors (i.e., employment status, relative income) have only a marginal effect on these attitudes (Korman, 1975; Nunn, 1978).⁵

In line with the theoretical framework and empirical findings regarding the relations between SES factors and hostile attitudes we expect to find:

³The “socialization theory” is strengthened by recent findings that show that living in the proximity of other racist people contributes to the development of racist attitudes (Oliver and Mendelberg, 2000).

⁴Several studies even emphasize academic education as the factor that has the largest effect on preventing negative attitudes toward minorities (Sullivan et al., 1985). In our view, that aspect of level of education is closely related to the concept of SES due to the relation between economic welfare and access to higher education.

⁵Based on empirical findings that distinguish between the substantial effect of education on prejudice and the minor effect of other SES factors, and due to practical difficulties in obtaining accurate self-reports about income level, we chose to concentrate in the current study on examining the impact of education level vis-à-vis employment status. Nevertheless, in order to optimally control the relative income variable, we propose to use it as a background variable in the statistical analysis.

- H₁: *Negative attitudes (social distance) toward members of minority groups will be more common among less educated people.*
- H₂: *Negative attitudes (social distance) toward members of minority groups will be more common among unemployed persons than employed persons.*
- H₃: *The influence of employment status on negative attitudes (social distance) will be minor in comparison with the influence of the level of education.*

Threat Perception Approach (Subjective)

As noted, over the years, social psychologists have opposed the pure SES approach and concentrated on the phenomenon of perceived threat as a determinant of hostile attitudes. According to this approach, objective reality may indeed change and contribute to a worsening of the ingroup's perspective, but it is the symbolic mediation of reality that provides the link to prejudice and hostile attitudes (Blalock, 1967; Olzak, 1992; Watts, 1996).⁶ In these cases, the individual's attitudes and emotions are driven mainly by his or her perception of the ways in which outgroup members interfere with his or her desire to achieve his or her goals (Fiske and Ruscher, 1993). The perception of competition often leads members of both groups to view each other as "enemies" and their own group as morally superior. It may also inspire them to more firmly draw the boundaries between groups and, in extreme cases, even view the opponent group as not human and develop emotional prejudices toward its members (Bar-Tal, 1990).

The important role of threat, fear, and the desire to maintain one's group status in forming negative attitudes and prejudice toward outgroups has been empirically well established (e.g., Adorno et al., 1950; Allport, 1954; Levine and Campbell, 1972; Smith, 1993; Stephan et al., 1998; Stephan and Stephan, 2001; Esses et al., 2001). Hence, we expect that:

- H₄: *Negative attitudes (social distance) toward members of minority groups will be more common among those who present higher levels of threat perception.*

A Combined Approach—Threat Perception Mediating Model

Although the SES and the threat perception approaches derive from two distinct disciplines (sociology and psychology), it seems that their integration is essential if one wishes to reliably reflect the development of prejudice and negative attitudes. From a theoretical perspective, this integration is well rooted in the "realistic group conflict theory"⁷ (Campbell, 1965; Sherif,

⁶In the 1960s, Blalock (1967) was one of the first scholars to make a distinction between "actual competition" and "perceived competition."

⁷As well as in a number of later subjective "socioeconomic competition" theories, such as the "power theory" (Legge, 1996; Olzak, 1992) or the "instrumental model of group conflict" (Esses et al., 2001).

1967), in which the conflict between groups consists of situational-objective conditions in addition to the subjective evaluation of the threat posed by outgroups (Bobo, 1983). Moreover, contemporary psychological theories like the “integrated threat theory,” which originally concentrated exclusively on various sources of threat as predictors of prejudice (Stephan et al., 1994), have been extended recently to include some objective variables as antecedents as well (Stephan and Stephan, 2001; Stephan and Renfro, 2003). Hence, according to these theories, people with a low socioeconomic status might feel stronger competition coming from outgroups and, therefore, develop significant “perceptions of threat” that ultimately lead to hostile attitudes (Quillian, 1995; Espenshade and Hampstead, 1996; Dustmann and Preston, 2000; Esses et al., 2001).

In line with this approach, most of the effect of SES factors on hostile attitudes takes place via the mediation of the subjective perception of threat. Therefore, we assume that only certain aspects of SES, which have the capability to successfully influence subjective perceptions of threat, will manage to affect the formation of prejudice and hostile attitudes toward minority groups.

Nevertheless, in spite of the fact that, theoretically speaking, almost all scholars consider the integration of objective and subjective factors as the best predictor of prejudice and negative attitudes, only a few studies (e.g., Scheepers, Gijsberts, and Coenders, 2002; Verberk, Scheepers, and Felling, 2002; Raijman, Semyonov, and Schmidt, 2003)⁸ have empirically examined this theory by analyzing threat perception as a mediator between SES and hostile attitudes toward minorities.

The few studies that have indeed examined the combined effect of specific SES factors and threat perception on negative attitudes toward minorities have usually found that most of the effect of education level on negative attitudes is produced via the mediation of the perception of threat (Scheepers, Gijsberts, and Coenders, 2002; Semyonov, Raijman, and Yom-Tov, 2002). Findings on the mediating influence of employment status on negative attitudes are at odds. Just as with direct associations, the indirect effect of employment status on the inclination to discriminate against outgroups is rather minor in comparison to the effect of level of education (Verberk et al., 2002; Scheepers, Gijsberts, and Coenders, 2002; Semyonov, Raijman, and Yom-Tov, 2002).

Hence, our main goal was to examine the assumption according to which threat perception plays a crucial role in determining which SES factors may encourage or discourage prejudice and negative attitudes. In corollary with

⁸Although they did not make reference to the objective particular SES of an individual, Esses and her colleagues (2001) claimed that the combination of resource stress and the presence of a potentially competitive outgroup leads to perceived group competition, which then leads to negative attitudes toward immigrant groups.

this goal and in line with the theoretical views and empirical findings reviewed, we expect to find that:

- H₅: *Most of the effect of the level of education on negative attitudes (social distance) toward minorities will be mediated by the perception of threat.*
- H₆: *Most of the (minor) influence of employment status on negative attitudes (social distance) will be mediated by the perception of threat.*

“Foreigners in the Israeli Arena”

Pedahzur and Yishai described the relatively widespread phenomenon of xenophobic attitudes among Jews, the majority group in Israel, as “a case of hatred by one of the most hated peoples in human society” (1999:102). But, in contrast to relatively homogeneous societies where negative attitudes are almost exclusively aimed at labor migrants, Israeli society itself was formed by Jews, who had been dispersed throughout the Diaspora over the years and immigrated to Israel (Horowitz and Lissak, 1990), in addition to a large Palestinian minority. In the current study, we chose to examine attitudes among majority group members (Jews who were born in Israel) toward three minority groups that might lead to a perception of economic and cultural threat.

The Palestinian citizens of Israel (19 percent of Israel’s population) constitute the largest minority group to be targeted by hostile attitudes in Israel over the years (Shamir and Sullivan, 1985; Moore, 2000). The uniqueness of this group derives from the fact that, under the special circumstances of the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Arab world, most Jews perceive the Palestinian citizens of Israel to be a hostile minority as well as a group that has national, religious, and cultural relations with the enemy (Smooha, 2002).

The largest Jewish minority group in Israel consists of immigrants from the former Soviet Union (around 15 percent of the population). This massive wave of immigration was made possible by the Israeli “Law of Return,” which grants immediate citizenship status and economic assistance to all immigrants of Jewish origin (Horowitz, 1999). This immigrant community is characterized by high social heterogeneity, high levels of education, and by the fact that they are in no hurry to blend into Israeli society (Al-Haj, 2002). Moreover, in recent years, reports about large numbers of “non-Jews” among immigrants from the FSU (approximately 250,000) have fueled perceptions of religious and cultural threat among the majority group of “veteran” Israelis.

The last official estimate of the number of “labor migrants”⁹ residing in Israel was 189,000, while only 40 percent were regarded as legal and the rest

⁹In Israel, both in official documents as well as in the vernacular, labor migrants are referred to as “foreign workers” (Kemp and Raijman, 2003). As opposed to the situation in some European countries, they are seen as people who are foreigners in every sense of the

were considered illegal (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2003). In comparison to their local colleagues, labor migrants hold the least desirable jobs and occupations, they earn the lowest salaries (many times below the minimum wage), suffer the worst working conditions, and generally do not benefit from the welfare system and union protection accorded to Israeli citizens (Rajman and Semyonov, 2004; Canetti-Nisim and Pedahzur, 2003).

We believe that applying the same model to three distinct minority groups might be of importance to the establishment of the theoretical relationships between the different variables. Hence, although we expect to find different levels of threat and social distance exhibited toward each of the three minority groups, we do not expect to find major differences between the three explanatory models in relation to each one of these groups.

Method and Data

Based on the premise that SES represents a specific combination of several different socioeconomic factors (Oliver and Mendelberg, 2000), we have used a relatively unique study design that combines face-to-face interviews with a preliminary division of participants into four groups according to their specific SES. This “target design,” which is based on a goal sample chosen by the researchers in order to adequately serve the specific research goals (Kahn and Lambert, 1998), enables an evaluation that provides insight into the distinct effects of each SES factor—level of education, employment status—on social distance.

In June 2003, interviews were conducted among 412 Israelis who were (potential) participants in the Israeli labor market. Participation in the survey was voluntary but since most respondents were approached in public or private institutions, they were considered a “half-captive audience” (*vis-à-vis* a “captive audience,” such as university students). Following this study’s rationale, potential participants were divided into four research groups: (1) academic-employed; (2) academic-unemployed; (3) nonacademic-employed; and (4) nonacademic-unemployed. Questionnaires were then dispensed to subjects in their “natural environment” in accordance with the specifications of each socioeconomic group (e.g., employment agencies, manpower agencies, universities, private businesses). For reasons elaborated above, in the final sample, we included only Israeli-born Jews ($N = 383$). Fifty-three percent of participants were men, 73.9 percent defined themselves as secular, and 62.6 percent earned above the average income.¹⁰

word and who have arrived in Israel for a short period of time in order to work and then return to their countries of origin. They are not on their way to becoming citizens, and only in rare cases are actually granted Israeli citizenship. Yet, we chose to employ the term “labor migrants” because it is common among scholars studying this phenomenon.

¹⁰As a consequence of the study design, approximately 50 percent of participants were academic.

Dependent Variable

SOCIAL DISTANCE toward the three minority groups was measured by the classic “social distance scale” (Bogardus, 1959).¹¹ The variable was adjusted to the Israeli context and tested by Pedahzur and Yishai (1999). It consisted of four items measured on a 1–6 scale.¹² Negatively worded items were reversed, with 1 denoting the least agreement with the item and 6 the most; agreement indicates a high amount of social distance. The unidimensionality of the scale was confirmed by principal component analysis and the index was thus constructed on the basis of the mean scores of the measure. The total scale of social distance yielded a satisfactory reliability of 0.87 (coefficient Cronbach’s alpha).

Mediating Variable

To measure the mediating variable, THREAT PERCEPTION, we used Watts’s scale (1996) for “combined economic-cultural threat perception.”¹³ It should be noted that security and physical threats are of great importance in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; however, due to our focus on the socioeconomic realm, we specifically chose an economic-cultural threat scale and not a threat scale based on security components. The scale consisted of six items measuring from 1–6, with 1 denoting the least agreement with the item and 6 the most; agreement indicates a high amount of perceived threat. The unidimensionality of the scale was confirmed by principal component analysis and the index was thus constructed on the basis of the mean scores of the measure. The number 1 denotes the lack of threat perception and 6 denotes high levels of threat perception. The scale was

¹¹All measures were based on established scales and adapted to the political culture in Israel. They were tested in a pilot study and, when necessary, modifications were performed.

¹²The scale consisted of the following four items: 1. Are you willing to invite (a Palestinian citizen of Israel, an immigrant from the FSU, or a labor migrant) to a social event at your home? 2. Are you willing to accept (a Palestinian citizen of Israel, an immigrant from the FSU, or a labor migrant) as your boss? 3. Would you approve a member of your family becoming romantically involved with (a Palestinian citizen of Israel, an immigrant from the FSU, or a labor migrant)? 4. Would you agree to live in the same neighborhood with (a Palestinian citizen of Israel, an immigrant from the FSU, or a labor migrant)?

¹³The scale consisted of the following six items: 1. (Palestinian citizens of Israel, immigrants from the FSU, or labor migrants) cost us more money than they bring in themselves. 2. Where qualifications are equal, (Palestinian citizens of Israel, immigrants from the FSU, or labor migrants) should have the same chance in the job market as Israelis (reversed). 3. (Palestinian citizens of Israel, immigrants from the FSU, or a labor migrant) are a burden to the already stressed job market in Israel. 4. (Palestinian citizens of Israel, immigrants from the FSU, or a labor migrant) should adopt the Israeli way of life. 5. (Palestinian citizens of Israel, immigrants from the FSU, or a labor migrant) enrich the cultural diversity of our everyday life (reversed). 6. (Palestinian citizens of Israel, immigrants from the FSU, or labor migrants) lead to the decline of Israeli culture and everyday life.

composed of the items' means and yielded a satisfactory Cronbach's alpha of 0.68 with no item below this level of reliability. Yet, following the rationale presented by Loewenthal (2001), we used item-rest correlations and none of them obtained item-rest-of-test values lower than accepted. In addition, although the reliability was above the acceptable cut-off point (Krosnick and Fabrigar, 2001), and because the scale was revised and adapted for the purpose of this study and its reliability may be considered modest, the scale's external validity was examined and proved to be adequate. In view of Rajman, Semyonov, and Schmidt's (2003) argument (and corresponding analysis) that hostile attitudes and threat perception are related yet separate factors, and given the correlation found in this study ($r = 0.48, p < 0.001$), we tested whether these two concepts were indeed distinct. To this end, a factor analysis was conducted¹⁴ yielding two distinct factors—one for each scale. Overall, this procedure lends credence to the argument that the constructs at hand measure two different dimensions.

Independent and Control Variables

The two main socioeconomic variables, LEVEL OF EDUCATION and EMPLOYMENT STATUS, were measured by a preliminary distribution of the groups, and confirmed in the questionnaire. Both the main SES variables were defined dichotomously—employed or unemployed, academic or non-academic.¹⁵ The reason for the dichotomous distribution between academics and nonacademics is our assumption that academic education is a critical factor in its effect on negative attitudes (Sullivan et al., 1985). As for employment status, our distribution followed a common method of using this variable dichotomously (e.g., Fetzer, 2000); in this study, 0 denotes unemployment and 1 denotes employment.

Relative income per family was measured as a control variable and was defined as income per family in comparison to the average ranging from 1 (much below average) to 5 (much above average). Other sociodemographic variables, which, according to the literature, seemed to be important to the current study, were SELF-DEFINITION OF RELIGIOSITY (from secular (1) to ultra-orthodox (4)) and POLITICAL STAND (from extreme right-wing (1) to extreme left-wing (5)).

¹⁴We attempted both component analysis (preferred as a method to reduce items) and factor analysis (preferred as a method to detect structure), but we eventually decided to use the factor analysis, which accounts for measurement errors. This analysis (promax rotation) indicated that items indeed belonged to two distinct factors. Loadings of SD items on the SD factor were higher than 0.78. Loadings of threat perception items on the threat perception factor were higher than 0.60. On the other hand, loadings of SD items on the threat perception factor were lower than 0.47. In addition, loadings of threat perception items on the SD factor were lower than 0.39. Total explained variance was 69.97 percent.

¹⁵Academic education = university or college BA degree and up.

Findings

Descriptive Overview

Before displaying the advanced analysis, we present descriptive characteristics for the two main endogenous variables of the research in regard to the three minority groups in Table 1. By and large, the means of social distance ranged from 1.87 toward immigrants from the FSU to 3.39 toward Palestinian citizens of Israel. It is interesting to note that, in contrast to the results regarding social distance, in the field of threat perception, the highest levels of cultural-economic threat ($M = 3.33$) were attributed to labor migrants and not to the Palestinian citizens of Israel ($M = 3.10$). Similar to the social distance results, the lowest threat ($M = 2.5$) was attributed to the large minority of immigrants from the FSU.

SES and Social Distance

To shed light on the first question of this study, regarding the specific effect of SES factors on prejudice and hostile attitudes, we conducted an analysis of variance between academics and nonacademics, and between employed and unemployed persons. In general, we expected to find that the higher the SES of a person (educational aspects or employment aspect), the lower his or her social distance toward all minorities (Hypotheses 1 and 2). The results shown in Table 2 exhibit only partial support for this assumption.

Academics are significantly less prejudiced (low social distance) than nonacademics toward the three minority groups (Hypothesis 1). The highest differentiation was found in social distance toward labor migrants (academics: $M = 2.38$, nonacademics: $M = 3.18$, $t = 5.92$, $p < 0.001$). In contrast, no significant differences were found between employed and

TABLE 1
Psychometric Characteristics—Main Research Variables

CV	Mean	Standard Deviation	N	Range	Relia- bility	Number of Items	Variable
27.63%	3.33	.92	383	4.83	0.58	6	Threat perception foreigners
49.10%	2.79	1.37	383	5	0.84	4	SD foreigners*
38%	2.50	0.95	382	4.50	0.68	6	Threat perception FSU
62.03%	1.87	1.16	383	5	0.88	4	SD FSU*
36.77%	3.10	1.14	381	5	0.79	6	Threat perception Palestinians
46.02%	3.39	1.56	382	5	0.89	4	SD Palestinians*

*SD = Social distance.

TABLE 2
Differences (*t* Test) on Social Distance by SES Variables

<i>t</i> -test	Nonacademic <i>N</i> = 197		Academic <i>N</i> = 186		
	<i>SD</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	Mean	
Academics vs. nonacademics					
5.92***	1.41	3.18	1.21	2.38	SD labor migrants
5.29***	1.33	2.16	0.84	1.56	SD FSU
6.94***	1.49	3.90	1.46	2.85	SD Palestinians
Employed vs. unemployed	Unemployed <i>N</i> = 179		Employed <i>N</i> = 204		
- 1.34	1.47	2.90	1.30	2.70	SD labor migrants
- 2.52*	1.29	2.03	1.01	1.73	SD FSU
- 0.69	1.73	3.34	1.40	3.45	SD Palestinians

*Statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

***Statistically significant at the 0.001 level.

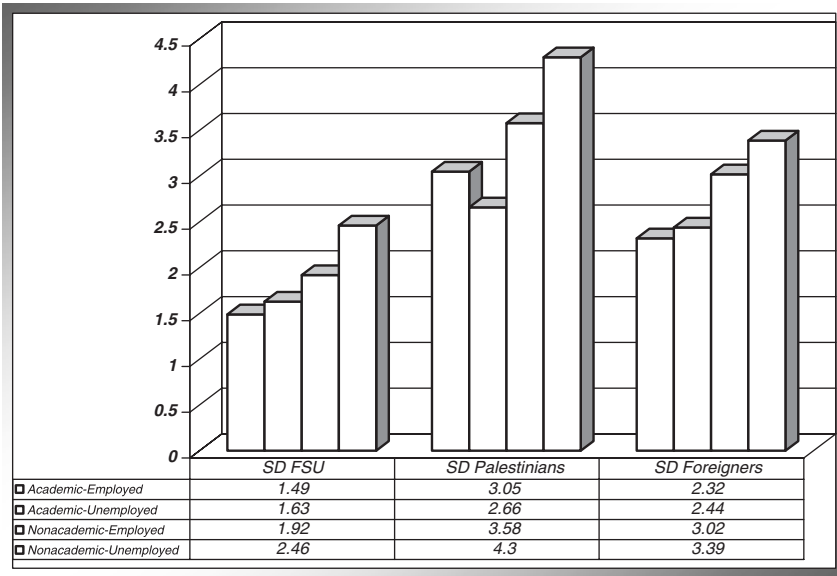
NOTE: SD = Social distance.

unemployed persons (Hypothesis 2) regarding attitudes toward Palestinian citizens of Israel (employed: $M = 3.45$, unemployed: $M = 3.34$, $t = -0.69$) or labor migrants (employed: $M = 3.34$, unemployed: $M = 3.34$, $t = -0.03$). Moreover, differences in attitudes toward immigrants from the FSU were found to be significant, but low (employed: $M = 1.73$, unemployed: $M = 2.03$, $t = -2.52$, $p < 0.05$).

To further clarify the subject, we used our preliminary four-group study design as a basis for advanced analysis. In Figure 1, the levels of social distance toward the three minority groups are presented, according to the specific SES of each group. In general, with the exception of two cases, the analysis revealed a constant ascending order: the academic-employed are the least prejudiced (lowest social distance), followed by the academic-unemployed, next, the nonacademic employed, and, finally, the most prejudiced are nonacademic unemployed group members. Evidently, our main interest focused on the two groups that combined two nonhomogeneous SES characteristics (low level of education with high-employment status or vice versa). A close comparative evaluation of these groups' attitudes strengthens former findings, that is, the influence of level of education on social distance is much higher than the influence of employment status (Hypothesis 3).

Social distance toward labor migrants was significantly higher ($t = -3.01$, $p < 0.01$) in the nonacademic employed group ($M = 3.03$) than in the academic unemployed one ($M = 2.44$). The same findings were obtained regarding differences ($t = -4.49$, $p < 0.001$) between social dis-

FIGURE 1
Social Distance by Socioeconomic-Status Groups



NOTE: SD = Social distance.

tance attitudes of the nonacademic employed ($M = 3.58$) and academic unemployed ($M = 2.66$) toward Palestinian citizens of Israel. On the other hand, no significant differences between these two groups were found regarding attitudes toward immigrants from the FSU.

In sum, according to the two clusters of analysis of variance performed, we may argue that, as expected, after the deduction of the joint effect of the SES factors, the influence of employment status on social distance is negligible. In contrast, the level of education (academic or not) is a crucial aspect in the evolvement of these attitudes. To learn the origins of these differences and provide a deeper understanding of the developmental model of prejudice and hostile attitudes, we will investigate the exact position of the perception of threat in the model.

SES Variables, Threat Perception, and Social Distance

To examine the extent to which the perception of threat mediates the effect of SES variables on social distance (Hypotheses 5 and 6), we conducted three steps of regression equations for every model, one model for each minority group. The three equations follow—step-by-step—the three

conditions suggested by Baron and Kenny (1986)¹⁶ for the testing of mediating influence. In the first equations (Column 1, Table 3), the perception of threat is predicted as a function of the level of education, employment status, relative income, and other major control variables. The second column, with regard to each group, presents a prediction of social distance as a function of the same set of independent variables. In Equation 3 (Column 3), the perception of cultural-economic threats is added to the set of predictors of social distance.

The coefficients displayed in Column 1 of Table 3 suggest that threat perception is affected, in all cases, by the level of education in the expected direction, that is, threat is likely to decrease with the increase in the level of education. On the other hand, no relation was found between employment status and the perception of threat from either one of the minority groups. These findings mean that there are no significant differences between people who work and those who are unemployed in their perception of competition and threat. This may be a very important and meaningful argument in the effort to understand the logic of the potential influence of SES factors on social distance.

The integration of Columns 2 and 3 of each model aims to test the hypothesis according to which the perceived threat mediates between an individual's SES and his or her social distance attitudes (Raijman, Semyonov, and Schmidt, 2003). The results in Column 2 reveal that education levels, political stand, and religiosity have a significant effect on the exhibition of social distance toward all minority groups. In contrast, employment status and relative income level (compared to the average) do not affect social distance with respect to either of the minority group models. It should be noted that these two variables are known in the literature (Ben-Porat, 1989) as the natural "partners" of level of education—all together, they comprise the main components of the socioeconomic-status variable. Therefore, the findings in Column 2 reinforce the importance of the current study.

The first and most preliminary understanding that may be considered on the basis of the figures of Column 3 is that the perception of threat highly affects social distance in reference to all three minority groups (Hypothesis 4). The impact of threat perception is significantly higher regarding attitudes toward Palestinian citizens of Israel ($b = 0.57$) and immigrants from FSU ($b = 0.55$) than toward labor migrants ($b = 0.34$). However, similar to findings in other studies, the impact of the perception of threat on social

¹⁶According to Baron and Kenny (1986), a variable serves as a mediator only if the following three conditions take place. First, the variance of the "potential" mediating variable is explained by the independent variable. Second, the "potential" mediating variable significantly explains the variance in the dependent variable. And third, when the "potential" mediating variable is imported into the regression equation of the dependent-independent variable, the effect of the independent on the dependent disappears (full mediation) or it moderates (partial mediation).

TABLE 3
Regression Equations Coefficients Predicting Threat Perception and Social Distance Toward the Three Minority Groups

	Labor Migrants			Immigrants from the FSU			Palestinian Citizens of Israel		
	1 Threat	2 SD	3 SD	1 Threat	2 SD	3 SD	1 Threat	2 SD	3 SD
Education level	-0.175** (-3.30)	-0.20*** (-3.94)	-0.14** (-2.91)	-0.17** (-3.30)	-0.23*** (-4.28)	-0.13** (-2.96)	-0.15** (-3.10)	-0.22*** (-4.61)	-0.13** (-3.42)
Employment status	-0.01 (-0.20)	-0.00 (-0.04)	0.00 (0.04)	0.05 (1.01)	0.06 (1.21)	0.03 (0.68)	0.03 (0.59)	-0.03 (-0.71)	-0.05 (-1.26)
Religiosity	0.07 (1.22)	0.16** (3.13)	0.14** (2.87)	0.14** (2.71)	0.13* (2.45)	0.05 (1.19)	0.08 (1.63)	0.11* (2.22)	0.06 (1.56)
Political stand	-0.30*** (-5.43)	-0.31*** (-5.98)	-0.21*** (-4.16)	-0.21*** (-4.01)	-0.16** (-3.01)	-0.04 (-0.95)	-0.42*** (-8.40)	-0.44*** (-9.21)	-0.20*** (-4.73)
Income	0.07 (1.25)	-0.01 (-0.11)	-0.03 (-0.59)	-0.11* (-2.00)	-0.05 (-0.86)	0.01 (0.18)	-0.02 (-0.37)	0.03 (0.62)	0.04 (1.05)
Threat perception			0.34*** (7.13)			0.55*** (12.12)			0.57*** (13.81)
R ²	0.17	0.25	0.35	0.20	0.17	0.42	0.29	0.35	0.58
N	361	361	361	360	360	360	359	359	359

*Statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

**Statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

***Statistically significant at the 0.001 level.

NOTE: SD = Social distance.

distance is stronger than all other SES variables tested (Ashmore and Del-Boca, 1976; Stephan and Stephan, 2001; Quillian, 1995; Scheepers, Gijsberts, and Coenders, 2002; Raijman, Semyonov, and Schmidt, 2003).

As for the hypotheses regarding the mediating model, Column 3 reveals that the perception of threat partially mediates the influence of the level of education on social distance (Hypothesis 5). Therefore, the results suggest that expressions of social distance toward Palestinian citizens of Israel, labor migrants, and immigrants from FSU are produced via two parallel paths—the direct influence of the level of education on social distance and the influence of the level of education on perceptions of economic-cultural threat that intensify social distance. It is needless to say that employment status, which did not have any impact on social distance attitudes in the direct path, has no effect in the mediating path either (Hypothesis 6).¹⁷

Discussion

The primary objective of this study was to provide an integrative perspective on the relation among socioeconomic status, threat perception, and prejudice/social distance. The main assumption of this perspective addressed the integrative role of the objective SES and the subjective threat perception in the development of prejudice/social distance. The unique Israeli arena, which is composed of several (and very different) minority groups, enabled us to elaborate the perspective of the study into a more theoretical and general one.

On the basis of previous prominent scholars (Blalock, 1967; Bobo, 1983; Pettigrew, 2000), and contemporary empirical studies (Semyonov, Raijman, and Yom-Tov, 2002; Scheepers, Gijsberts, and Coenders, 2002; Raijman, Semyonov, and Schmidt, 2003), the main theoretical argument, which this study challenges, asserts that in general a low socioeconomic status leads directly to greater levels of prejudice/social distance toward minority groups. According to our main findings, only very specific factors among the complex of SES variables that influence the perception of an individual's threat manage to have an effect on prejudice/social distance. Consequently, it would be quite accurate to claim that the impact of the subjective-psychological factor on prejudice/social distance is at least as important as the objective SES one. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that the subjective situation (threat perception) is constantly influenced at least by some of the objective factors (level of education).

More specifically, the data indicate that, regarding attitudes toward all three of the minority groups included in this research, the most important determinant of social distance is the economic-cultural perception of threat. The greater the perception of threat, the more participants are likely to

¹⁷As predicted, the pattern of minor (or no) influence via both paths (direct and mediated) is similar between employment status and relative income.

express social distance. Furthermore, the effects of threat perception are above and beyond the effects of all SES variables. Hence, these findings are of major support for the argument according to which most intergroup conflicts begin with a perception of contrasting interests between two groups (Bar-Tal, 1990).

The four-group study design enabled us to conduct a more focused analysis of the impact of level of education and employment status on social distance. The data indicate that, as anticipated, formal education (academic or not) was found to be highly related to levels of social distance. Furthermore, the impact of the level of education on all groups was much higher than that of other SES variables (employment status, relative income), and holds true even after controlling for political stance and religiosity.¹⁸

The findings regarding the close relationship between education and prejudice can be attributed to three main explanations: (1) individual differences in beliefs and values between citizens who aspire to higher education and those who do not (Hjerm, 2001); (2) messages and values of democracy and tolerance that are inculcated in all Western educational systems (Schleicher, 1993; Coenders and Scheepers, 2003); and (3) the "labor-market competition theory," according to which "persons at the bottom end of the education and income distribution are least likely to support higher immigration levels" (Espenshade and Hampstead, 1996:555). The main reason for this claim is that these "uneducated" people understand that their qualifications are identical to those of the minority group's members.

These three different explanations for the influence of education levels on prejudice/social distance may help in the interpretation of the findings in relation to two parallel paths of impact. Although the first two explanations (individual differences and democratic values) express a direct relationship between educational or academic systems and prejudice, the third one (labor-market competition) emphasizes the role of perceived threat and competition in the development of those attitudes.

In contrast to the significant findings associated with level of education, employment status was found to be unrelated to prejudice/social distance in almost all of the analyses we conducted. We believe that the factorization of the typical combination of employment status with other equivalent SES factors, which is also a product of the four-group research design, reveal the irrelevancy of the "pure" employment-status variable in predicting prejudice/social distance.

From the point of view of this study, the irrelevancy of employment status, as well as the major impact of level of education, can be best explained by the mediation of the perception of threat in the formation of prejudice/social distance. As demonstrated by the findings, much of the

¹⁸By and large, in the Israeli arena, political stance and religiosity are important determinants of attitudes toward minorities (Pedahzur and Yishai, 1999; Rajman, Semyonov, and Schmidt, 2003).

impact of SES variables on prejudice/social distance occurs via the mediation of threat perception. As noted above, the perception of threat and competition basically relies on a similarity of skills and qualifications (Quillian, 1995) among members of outgroup and ingroup, which depends mainly on the person's level of education and not on his or her present, temporary employment status.

It appears that there are no substantial differences between the threat perceptions of unemployed persons and "nonskilled" employed workers. In some situations, the latter might even feel more threatened due to the lack of the stability of his or her position in the labor market. Therefore, it is not surprising to find that employment status alone affects neither perception of threat nor prejudice/social distance. In this case, the mediating variable, that is, "threat perception," serves as a critical "junction" that determines which variables affect or do not affect prejudice/social distance.

The current study uncovers some very specific, but important, insights regarding the sociopsychological development of prejudice. The similar results of the general integrative model in relation to three very different minority groups within the Israeli arena further strengthen the credibility of the model. However, it must be noted that the study design, whose qualitative advantages we have repeatedly mentioned, also limits the external validity of the findings to some extent due to the disproportion of the tested groups in relation to their ratio in the general population. Hence, the current study suggests some specific answers to some modest questions and therefore does not aspire to create a comprehensive or all-inclusive model of the development of prejudice.

In a more practical sense, the findings of this study might have an optimistic future impact on our social lives. It may be quite difficult to drastically change socioeconomic polarization; however, as indicated by our findings, it is not necessarily the objective socioeconomic situation that impacts prejudice, but more the subjective perceptions of threat. Hence, in order to moderate the degree of prejudice toward minorities in a certain society, one should concentrate on dissolving the close relations between legitimate perceptions of competition and morally problematic feelings of hatred toward the minority group. We are not suggesting that changing perceptions is easy, but it is definitely worth a try.

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