

**The Impact of Claimant Immigration Status and Observer Political Ideology on
Perceptions of Workplace Exclusion**

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Abstract

The current study examined how a harm claimant's immigration status and an observer's political ideology influence perceived severity of workplace exclusion. Grounded in moral typecasting theory and political psychology, it tested whether immigrant claimants are seen as experiencing more severe harm than local claimants and how this varies across the ideological spectrum. In a vignette-based online experiment, participants ($N = 145$) were randomly assigned to read about either an immigrant or local employee reporting exclusion due to their group membership. I first predicted that immigration status would significantly influence perceived harm severity, such that immigrant claimants would be viewed as experiencing more severe harm. To explore the potential moderating role of political ideology, I tested both its main effect and its interaction with immigration status. Supporting Hypothesis 1, exclusion claims in the immigrant condition were rated as significantly more severe than those in the local condition. Hypothesis 2 was not supported: there was no significant difference in perceived harm severity between liberal and conservative participants. Hypothesis 3 was also not supported: political ideology did not moderate the relationship between claimant identity and perceived harm. These findings suggest that people may attribute greater moral weight to the experiences of vulnerable groups, consistent with moral typecasting. However, the anticipated ideological effects were not confirmed. Study limitations, including sample characteristics and scenario framing, are discussed. Overall, the findings underscore the role of social identity in shaping harm perceptions, with implications for understanding bias in moral judgments in workplace settings.

Keywords: harm perception, workplace exclusion, moral typecasting, moral foundations, political ideology, immigrants

The Impact of Claimant Immigration Status and Observer Political Ideology on Perceptions of Workplace Exclusion

Nowadays, managers are widely expected to act impartially, not only in formal decisions like hiring and promotion but also in how they respond to employees' psychological and emotional well-being. When these expectations are violated, particularly when outcomes appear influenced by an employee's social identity, accusations of bias often follow. Despite a general recognition of the importance of fairness in administering justice to employees, evidence from organizational justice literature suggests that impartiality remains difficult to achieve in practice (Leventhal, 1980). Because of this, it is essential that researchers investigate how and why managerial decision-making may deviate from impartiality.

This difficulty stems largely from cognitive biases, which are mental shortcuts that facilitate efficiency in moral reasoning but often lead to systematic deviations from fairness (Kahneman, 2011; Thaler, 2015). Even well-intentioned managers may develop moral “blind spots”, particularly when confronted with ambiguous claims of harm (Bazerman & Tenbrunsel, 2011). While some acts are widely acknowledged as harmful, judgments about whether someone is a legitimate victim often rely on subjective perceptions rather than objective facts (Gray & Kubin, 2024). This is especially true in morally ambiguous situations, such as those involving psychological harm, accusations from the distant past, or “my word against yours” allegations, which are typically characterized by limited evidence and high uncertainty (Baumeister et al., 1990; Inman & Baron, 1996; Johnson et al., 2022).

A particularly relevant example of such ambiguity is *workplace exclusion*. It represents a form of harm involving subtle, often unverifiable behaviors, such as being left out of meetings, ignored, or excluded from informal communication (Robinson et al., 2013). Importantly,

workplace exclusion does not necessarily involve overt hostility but rather, it may reflect indifference or neglect. That is, instead of inflicting an unpleasant experience, it denies the target a desired social interaction (O'Reilly et al., 2015). Yet, despite its subtlety, exclusion can seriously undermine an employee's sense of belonging and recognition (O'Reilly & Banki, 2016). Because exclusion hinges on subjective experience and typically lacks visible evidence, it presents a unique challenge for managers, requiring them to act with empathy and care in evaluating and addressing such cases. When mishandled, such situations may signal to others that exclusionary behavior is tolerated, fostering a toxic or unsafe work environment.

Therefore, it is essential to understand the factors that contribute to these failures in impartiality. One such factor is social identity, which plays a significant role in shaping how harm is perceived, both by those assessing a situation involving alleged harm (e.g., managers) and by those experiencing it (e.g., employees). In the context of workplace exclusion, the social identity of the alleged target can influence whether observers view their experience as severe or not. For example, an immigrant employee might be seen as a more credible target due to common associations with marginalization and vulnerability. However, this same identity can also provoke skepticism, as stereotypes or biases may cause observers to question the validity or severity of the situation. As Hester and Gray (2020) argue, judgments of harm are rarely identity-neutral and are shaped by both the identity of the target and the observer.

This study investigates how perceived harm severity is influenced by the interaction between a claimant¹'s immigration status and the political ideology of the observer. By examining this interplay, the research aims to reveal how perceptions of harm, specifically

¹ Although the present study presents scenarios in which workplace exclusion appears to occur, the term *claimant* is used throughout this paper to refer to the employee described as experiencing the exclusion. While "claimant" typically denotes someone who has formally filed a complaint, it is employed here for the sake of consistency and to avoid redundancy.

workplace exclusion, are shaped not only by the nature of the act itself but also by the social and ideological identities of those involved. In doing so, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the subjective and socially embedded nature of harm perception in organizational contexts.

Theoretical Foundations

Immigration Status as a Predictor of Perceived Harm Severity

Research reveals that perceptions of harm are not determined solely by the act itself, but by how well an alleged victim fits observers' mental prototypes of what a legitimate victim looks like (Graso et al., 2022; Reynolds et al., 2020). Intergroup relations literature suggests that people are more likely to validate harm claims when the claimant belongs to a lower-status or historically disadvantaged group (Inman & Baron, 1996; Rodin et al., 1990). For example, observers are more likely to perceive mistreatment as discriminatory when it involves a lower-status individual being harmed by someone from a higher-status group, rather than the other way around. This prototype-based reasoning is especially relevant in ambiguous cases of harm, such as workplace exclusion, particularly when exclusion is perceived as stemming from group membership. Allegations of exclusion based on social identity may signal experienced discrimination, as they involve harm targeted at individuals because of their group affiliation (Schmitt et al., 2014). However, the extent to which observers recognize such exclusion as harm can vary, especially when identity cues are salient and when explicit evidence of intent is absent.

On one hand, there is reason to believe that immigrants may be perceived as more vulnerable victim groups compared to local citizens, who, as members of the dominant group, might be seen as more powerful. As a result, participants may perceive exclusion targeting immigrants as more severe. Several theoretical perspectives support this possibility.

Firstly, one framework that helps explain how such judgments are formed is *moral typecasting* (Gray & Wegner, 2009). Moral typecasting refers to the tendency to categorize individuals as either moral agents (those who inflict harm) or moral patients (those who experience harm), but not both (Gray & Wegner, 2009). These roles are often stable across contexts: once an individual is assigned to one category, they are likely to be perceived through that lens in various situations. Individuals seen as moral patients are more likely to evoke sympathy and have their experiences of harm taken seriously (Gray & Wegner, 2011). Indeed, research shows that foreign-born individuals across the EU report higher levels of workplace discrimination (Eurostat, 2022) and face systemic obstacles such as reduced job satisfaction, exclusion, and lower rates of promotion (Andriessen et al., 2012; Hofhuis et al., 2012; Rivera, 2012). Consequently, these patterns could make observers more attuned to potential exclusion experienced by immigrants, even in ambiguous cases, thus increasing the perceived severity of exclusion.

Secondly, research indicates that immigrants are frequently stereotyped as low in competence (Fiske, 2018; Froehlich et al., 2019), a trait closely associated with perceptions of low agency. According to moral typecasting theory, individuals perceived as having less agency are simultaneously seen as more capable of suffering (Gray & Wegner, 2009). As a result, immigrant employees may be viewed as more credible victims in ambiguous exclusion scenarios. This, in turn, may lead observers to perceive greater harm severity when workplace exclusion targets an immigrant employee compared to a local employee. It is worth mentioning, however, that this study treats immigrants as a single group. While this simplifies the manipulation, research shows that different immigrant groups may elicit different responses from observers (Lee & Fiske, 2006) and that in real life, immigrants may not be treated as a

homogenous group (Savaş, 2021). Although of great importance, exploring whether specific origins affect observer responses is outside the scope of this thesis but may be a useful direction for future research.

On the other hand, it is also possible that the opposite effect may be observed. A substantial body of research on altruism, empathy, and cooperation reveals that individuals are more likely to help and trust those they perceive as similar to themselves (Kruger, 2001; Montoya et al., 2008; Rushton, 1989). Conversely, according to Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1982), people are less likely to trust and cooperate with others who exhibit dissimilar traits and more likely to see them as potential threats. If the social category of “immigrant” activates such perceptions of dissimilarity, observers may be less inclined to believe immigrant employees, thereby lowering the perceived severity of their claims. Given that the present study examines perceptions of workplace exclusion within the Dutch labour market, this insider-outsider dynamic may be particularly pronounced if the sample consists predominantly of Dutch participants, but due to data minimization procedures, participants’ countries of origin will not be recorded. However, this may offer a plausible explanation should an effect in the opposite direction emerge.

Building on the premise that stereotypes shape moral typecasting (Hester & Gray, 2020) and informed by the research conducted by Graso and colleagues (2022), I propose that observers will evaluate alleged experiences of workplace exclusion through the lens of *prototypicality*. Specifically, when an immigrant employee reports exclusion, their perceived lower social status and stereotypical associations with vulnerability may make it easier for observers to assign them to the role of a moral patient or victim. This alignment with familiar victim-perpetrator templates, such as a marginalized individual harmed by someone in a more

dominant position (e.g., non-immigrant employees), renders the experience more prototypical and may increase the perceived severity of harm. In contrast, when the claimant is a local citizen, the absence of these salient vulnerability cues may lead observers to perceive the claim as less prototypical, requiring more cognitive effort to interpret the situation and potentially eliciting more skepticism.

Hypothesis 1. Participants will rate the severity of harm as higher when the claimant is described as an immigrant, compared to when the claimant is described as a local.

So far, this discussion has emphasized the social identity of the claimant as a key determinant of how harm is perceived. However, as already previewed, an equally important factor is the identity of the observer. Specifically, I consider *political ideology* as a potential moderator that may shape how observers interpret and respond to alleged harm. In the next section, I first examine how political ideology might affect general sensitivity to harm and then, I explore how it might interact with the claimant's immigration status to shape perceptions of workplace exclusion.

Political Ideology

In recent years, researchers have identified political ideology as a meaningful predictor of a wide range of social and psychological outcomes (e.g., Swigart et al., 2020), highlighting a need to investigate how it may influence judgments and behaviors across diverse contexts. One area where this influence might be especially pronounced is in perceptions of harm. The persistent controversy surrounding victimhood and its apparent alignment with political views suggests that individual differences in harm perception may stem from underlying ideological differences.

Political ideology refers to a set of beliefs about how society should be organized and governed (Erikson & Tedin, 2019), shaping shared values and worldviews within groups and guiding how people interpret the present and envision social, political, and economic change (Freedman, 2001; Jost et al., 2009). The terms “liberal” and “conservative” are increasingly used interchangeably with “the left” and “the right”, reflecting a long-standing ideological divide centered on preferences for change versus stability. This left-right distinction typically encompasses two key dimensions: (a) support for versus resistance to social change and (b) rejection versus acceptance of social inequality (Jost et al., 2003). Thus, political ideology is more than a reflection of policy preferences, but is linked to differences in how people perceive social issues, evaluate fairness, and assign responsibility.

In particular, liberal and conservative ideologies are associated with distinct patterns of moral reasoning that shape responses to harm. The growing emphasis on recognizing and validating victims has been associated with a liberal agenda, both in public discourse and in scientific literature (Duarte et al., 2015; Haslam, 2016). In contrast, a focus on scrutinizing victims’ responsibilities or questioning the legitimacy of their experiences is more commonly linked to conservatism (e.g., Anderson et al., 1997). These ideological tendencies may shape how observers interpret ambiguous harm scenarios, especially when the alleged victim belongs to a stigmatized group, such as immigrants.

There are various perspectives that try to explain where these differences in moral reasoning stem from. Some scholars argue that these moral disagreements arise due to reliance on different sets of moral mechanisms (Graham et al., 2009; Haidt, 2012), while others argue that moral judgements heavily depend on context, and more specifically on the parties involved (Hester & Gray, 2020; Schein & Gray, 2015, 2018). In this paper, I examine political ideology

both as a main effect and as a moderator of responses to workplace exclusion. First, I consider how political orientation may independently predict perceived harm severity. Second, I investigate how political ideology might interact with a claimant's immigrant status to influence observers' judgments.

According to Moral Foundations Theory (Haidt & Graham, 2007), moral judgments are based on five domains: Harm/care, Fairness/reciprocity (individualizing foundations) and Ingroup/loyalty, Authority/respect, and Purity/sanctity (binding foundations). There is evidence suggesting that individuals differ in the importance they place on each foundation and that one such differentiating factor may be political ideology (Graham et al., 2009; Haidt et al., 2009). Graham and colleagues (2009) found that, when making judgements about harm, liberals tend to prioritize the harm and fairness foundations, while conservatives tend to value all five conditions more equally, placing a greater emphasis on loyalty, authority, and purity. Building from this, Niemi and Young (2016) found that individualizing values predict greater support for victims and attribution of blame to perpetrators, while binding values correlate with skepticism toward victims and a focus on shared or personal responsibility.

This reasoning is consistent with previous research showing that conservatives and liberals differ in the way they respond to victims of harm, suggesting that victim-blaming is a right-wing tendency (Anderson et al., 1997; Williams, 1984). The just world theory (Lerner, 1980) which holds that people are motivated to think the world is fair and that people usually receive what they deserve, provides one explanation for this tendency. Findings suggest that there is a higher endorsement of such beliefs among conservatives (Jost et al., 2003), leading to a greater tendency to see victims as contributing to or deserving of the harm they are alleging.

Hypothesis 2: Liberal participants will perceive harm as more severe than conservative participants, regardless of the social identity of the claimant.

However, scholars have questioned the predictive power of Moral Foundations Theory, particularly when it comes to harm perceptions. Recent critiques suggest that moral judgements cannot be consistently predicted by stable moral foundations, but instead they are highly sensitive to contextual influences, such as the parties involved and the type of harm that is being assessed (Schein & Gray, 2015, 2018). According to the Theory of Dyadic Morality (TDM), moral transgressions are typically evaluated through an intuitive harm-based template, in which an intentional agent inflicts harm on a vulnerable moral patient (Gray et al., 2012; Schein & Gray, 2018). This line of reasoning was already used to theorize that an immigrant employee may be more readily cast as a moral patient due to perceptions of vulnerability. However, TDM also helps explain why responses may vary based on individuals' political ideology. While both liberals and conservatives use this harm-based template, they differ in how broadly and to whom they apply it (Schein & Gray, 2015). In politically charged contexts like immigration, this can lead to divergent judgments about whether harm occurred, even when the situation is the same. Thus, TDM provides a dynamic framework for understanding how political ideology might interact with an alleged victim's social identity in shaping responses to harm.

Recent research supports this, suggesting that differences in moral judgment between liberals and conservatives are partly driven by differing assumptions about vulnerability, which refer to intuitive beliefs about who is most susceptible to harm, mistreatment, and victimization (Womick et al., 2024). Liberals tend to amplify group-based differences in vulnerability, often perceiving marginalized groups, such as immigrants, as particularly vulnerable and deserving of protection. Conservatives, by contrast, tend to see all individuals as equally vulnerable, thereby

downplaying group-based disparities and, in some cases, viewing marginalized groups not as victims but as potential threats (Womick et al., 2024). These assumptions influence moral judgments by altering the perceived severity of harm depending on the victim's perceived vulnerability (Gray & Wegner, 2009; Womick et al., 2024). For example, liberals may view harm against an immigrant claimant as more severe than against a local one, while conservatives may see both similarly, or may even attribute less severity to the harm experienced by an immigrant claimant.

Group competition theory helps further contextualize variation in perceived harm severity as a result of different political orientation. It posits that members of dominant social groups may perceive immigrants as threats to their cultural and economic status, particularly when the immigrant population is growing or is seen as equally competent (Blumer, 1958; Bobo & Hutchings, 1996; Quillian, 1995; Schlueter & Davidov, 2013). These threat perceptions are more common among conservatives, who exhibit higher needs for order, structure, and security (Jost et al., 2003). As a result, conservatives may be less likely to see immigrants as vulnerable moral patients and more likely to view them as outgroup members whose harm claims are less credible or deserving of concern. In contrast, liberals tend to express lower threat sensitivity and greater openness to diversity (Inbar et al., 2009; Jost et al., 2009), and are more likely to extend concerns about harm and fairness to outgroup members (Stewart & Morris, 2021). These tendencies should facilitate more consistent moral concern for disadvantaged or marginalized groups, such as immigrants. For example, research by Brooks et al. (2016) found that liberals rated immigrants positively regardless of cultural background, while conservatives rated immigrants favorably only when they conformed to dominant norms. This pattern aligns with broader evidence showing that conservatives tend to hold stronger anti-immigrant sentiments (Ceballos

& Yakushko, 2014; Kiehne & Ayón, 2016) and often interpret immigration through the lens of law and order, while liberals tend to frame it in terms of civil rights and social inequality (Hopkins, 2010).

Thus, although both liberals and conservatives rely on harm-based moral reasoning, they differ in whom they perceive as legitimate victims. Conservatives' heightened ingroup loyalty and threat sensitivity may reduce the likelihood that they perceive exclusion claims made by an immigrant employee as severe. Liberals, on the other hand, are more likely to perceive immigrants as vulnerable and disadvantaged, thereby increasing the perceived severity of harm in such cases.

Hypothesis 3: Political ideology will moderate the effect of the target employee's group membership on perceived severity of harm, such that more liberal participants will rate exclusion of an immigrant employee as more severe than exclusion of a local employee, whereas more conservative participants will not.

Methods

Participants

Before making the survey available to the public, ethical approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Behavioural and Social Sciences at the University of Groningen. Participants were recruited through convenience sampling using student networks, social media platforms, and student group chats. A standardized recruitment message including the link that provided access to the survey was used across all channels, briefly outlining the topic of the study and its estimated duration.

Upon accessing the survey, participants were first presented with an information page explaining the study's objectives, procedures, data handling practices, and their rights as

participants, including the right to withdraw at any point. Written informed consent was required before participation could begin. After providing consent, participants first completed a brief demographics questionnaire, which included measures such as gender, immigration status, and political orientation. To reduce the likelihood of hypothesis guessing, they were also presented with several distractor measures unrelated to the current thesis.

We were able to recruit a total of $N = 234$ participants by means of convenience sampling. To be eligible, participants were required to be at least sixteen years old and demonstrate sufficient English proficiency to complete the survey. To ensure data quality, certain responses were excluded from the final dataset. This resulted in a final sample size of 146 participants, consisting of 68% female participants ($N = 98$), 31% male ($N = 46$) and 1.3% gender-diverse participants ($N = 2$).

Procedures

The aim of this study was to examine whether the perceived severity of workplace exclusion is influenced by the immigration status of the claimant and whether participants' political ideology moderates this effect. To investigate this, we employed a between-subjects design where the identity of the claimant was systematically varied. The study was conducted online using a Qualtrics survey and employed a one-time, vignette-based experimental design. Completion time ranged between 10 and 15 minutes.

Participants were randomly assigned to read and then evaluate one of two versions of a brief vignette, describing an employee's alleged experience of being the target of workplace exclusion².

²This study was conducted as part of a broader research project involving multiple student researchers. Participants were asked to evaluate five different vignettes, each presenting an ambiguous scenario involving a claim of non-physical harm. For the purposes of this thesis, only the variables and vignettes relevant to my specific research question will be addressed.

Social Identity Manipulation

The experimental manipulation of the independent variable, immigration status, involved two versions of a short invented scenario describing a man named Sam reporting experiences of exclusion in a multinational Dutch company. In the immigrant condition, Sam was portrayed as an international employee whose global insights were increasingly dismissed as the company shifted focus toward local ties, began hiring more Dutch employees, and emphasized Dutch as the primary workplace language. In contrast, the local condition depicted Sam as a local Dutch employee who felt excluded after the company turned toward internationalization, prioritized hiring foreign workers, and increasingly used English.

This manipulation was carefully designed to ensure that the form and severity of harm remained constant across both conditions. In each case, Sam experienced subtle but repeated workplace exclusion. Only the perceived social identity of the person making the claim (immigrant vs. local) was varied, allowing for an isolated test of whether participants differ in how they assessed otherwise identical harm allegations. By holding all other aspects of the vignette constant, the design controls for content-related confounds and ensures that differences in participants' responses can be attributed to the manipulated variable of immigration status.

In the “immigrant condition”, participants read the following:

“ Sam has worked for several years at a multinational company in the Netherlands. Recently, the company began prioritizing ties with local businesses and communities, hiring more Dutch employees and increasingly using Dutch as the main language. During meetings, Sam feels that his international insights are frequently overlooked or dismissed. Informal networking, which is important for professional advancement, predominantly takes place in Dutch, so Sam now feels excluded from establishing connections.”

Although the company officially promotes inclusion, Sam increasingly feels unwelcome and excluded from everyday workplace interactions.”

In the “local citizen” condition, participants read the following:

“ Sam has worked for several years at a multinational company in the Netherlands. Recently, the company began prioritizing ties with international businesses and communities, hiring more international employees and increasingly using English as the main language.

During meetings, Sam feels that his local insights are frequently overlooked or dismissed. Informal networking, which is important for professional advancement, predominantly takes place in English, so Sam now feels excluded from establishing connections.

Although the company officially promotes inclusion, Sam increasingly feels unwelcome and excluded from everyday workplace interactions.”

The framing of the vignettes reflects broader trends in the Dutch labour market. The immigrant-as-target condition was informed by evidence that non-Dutch employees in the Netherlands are more likely to encounter subtle forms of exclusion in the workplace. Research suggests that despite formal inclusion policies, immigrant workers often report feeling overlooked and unwelcome (Andriessen et al., 2012; Geurts et al., 2020). Additionally, to focus specifically on perceptions of immigrant status, the identity of the immigrant employee was intentionally kept neutral. No specific nationality, ethnicity, or cultural background was mentioned to avoid triggering group-specific stereotypes and to ensure that participants' judgments were guided by general attitudes toward immigrants, rather than particular associations.

Measures

Perceived Harm Severity

To assess perceived harm severity, after reading one of the two scenario conditions, participants had to complete a harm severity scale. The 3-item scale, adapted from prior research on harm perception (Haslam, 2020; Reynolds et al., 2020), was meant to capture participants' evaluations of how severe the described exclusion was. Items included: *“The behaviour Sam is describing is severe”*, *“The behaviour Sam is describing is concerning”*, and *“The behaviour Sam is describing is harmful”*. Responses were recorded on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly*

disagree; 7 = *strongly agree*), with higher scores indicating greater perceived harm severity. This scale demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .85$).

Political Ideology

To examine potential moderating effects, participants were asked to self-report their political ideology on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 = *very liberal/left-wing* to 7 = *very conservative/right-wing*. This variable was used to assess whether political orientation influenced perceptions of harm in response to the scenarios.

Results

To test whether immigrant status, political ideology, and their interaction predict the perceived validity of harm in a workplace exclusion scenario, a non-clinical sample of participants ($N = 145$) was analyzed using multiple linear regression. The analysis consisted of two phases: preliminary assumptions check followed by hypothesis testing.

Preliminary Assumptions Check

Prior to conducting the moderation analysis, the key assumptions of multiple linear regression were evaluated. Firstly, the assumption of independence of observations was met, as data were collected via an anonymous online questionnaire completed individually by participants. Secondly, the assumption of normality was assessed by examining the standardized residuals, which were approximately normally distributed. Although minor deviations were observed at the tails, they were not deemed problematic given the sample size (see Appendix, Figure 1). No extreme outliers were detected (Cook's distance < 1) and no standardized residuals exceeded an absolute value of 3, suggesting there were no overly influential observations. Thirdly, the assumptions of linearity and homoscedasticity were evaluated through visual inspection and I concluded that there was no clear evidence of severe violations of the

assumptions (see Appendix, Figure 2). Lastly, multicollinearity was not a concern, as all Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values were well below the commonly accepted threshold (VIF < 2) and only weak correlations were observed among predictors.

Taken together, the preliminary analysis suggests that the data do not show any significant violations of the assumptions and that the analysis can proceed.

Hypothesis Testing

To test the study hypotheses, a single linear regression analysis was conducted using the PROCESS macro for SPSS (Model 1; Hayes, 2022, version 4.2). The model included immigration status (coded 0 = immigrant, 1 = local), political ideology³, and their interaction term (immigration status \times political ideology) as predictors of perceived severity of the harm allegation. This approach allowed simultaneous testing of all three hypotheses: the main effect of immigration status (Hypothesis 1), the main effect of political ideology (Hypothesis 2), and the interaction between the two variables (Hypothesis 3), indicating whether political ideology moderated the relationship between immigration status and perceived harm severity.

Overall, the regression model was statistically significant, $F(3, 141) = 5.21, p = .0019$, $MSE = 1.87$, indicating that the predictors, namely immigration status, political ideology and their interaction, collectively accounted for a significant proportion in the variance in the perceived harm severity. Approximately 10% of the variance in perceived harm severity was explained by the predictors in the model ($R^2 = .09$).

In support of Hypothesis 1, there was a significant main effect of immigration status on perceived harm severity ($B = -0.903, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [-1.37, -0.43]$), indicating that

³ Political ideology was entered as a continuous predictor and mean-centered prior to analysis, which is standard practice to aid interpretation of interaction effects.

participants in the immigrant condition evaluated harm claims as more severe ($M = 4.95$, $SD = 1.45$) compared to participants in the local condition ($M = 4.14$, $SD = 1.29$).

In contrast to Hypothesis 2, the main effect of political ideology was not statistically significant ($B = -0.207$, $p = .090$, 95% CI $[-0.45, 0.03]$), indicating that political ideology did not significantly predict perceived harm severity. However, the direction of the effect was consistent with the hypothesis, with more conservative participants tending to rate harm claims as less severe.

Finally, in contrast to Hypothesis 3, the interaction between immigration status and political ideology was nonsignificant ($B = 0.129$, $p = .510$, 95% CI $[-0.25, 0.51]$). Adding the interaction term as a predictor did not significantly improve the model fit ($\Delta F(1,141) = 0.43$, $p = .51$, $\Delta R^2 \approx 0$). Therefore, political ideology did not significantly moderate the relationship between immigration status and perceived harm severity.

In sum, the results suggest that immigration status was the only significant predictor of perceived harm severity and that this effect was not conditional on participant's political ideology.

Discussion

This thesis investigates how immigration status and political ideology jointly influence perceptions of alleged harm in the context of workplace exclusion. While existing research on moral judgement shows that individuals tend to validate harm claims made by those who fit stereotypical victim profiles (Reynolds et al., 2020; Graso et al., 2022), to date, no studies – at least to my knowledge – have specifically examined how political ideology and immigration status interact to shape perceptions of harm.

To address this gap, a sample of individuals aged sixteen and older was assessed on their political ideology and randomly assigned to read a scenario describing an employee's experience of workplace exclusion based on group membership, with the claimant identified either as an immigrant or a local. When the claimant was described as an immigrant, participants reported greater perceived harm severity compared to when the claimant was described as a local. This suggests that, irrespective of political orientation, participants were more inclined to validate harm allegations when the claimant was described as an immigrant. Political ideology did not significantly predict perceived harm severity, suggesting that liberal and conservative participants evaluated the claims as similarly severe. Contrary to expectations, political ideology did not significantly moderate the relationship between immigration status and perceived harm severity. The anticipated interaction, whereby more liberal participants would evaluate claims in the immigrant condition as more severe than claims in the local condition, was not supported. Instead, the main effect of immigration status remained stable across the ideological spectrum, challenging assumptions about the polarizing influence of political orientation on perceptions of harm.

Theoretical Implications

What do these results tell us about how people make moral judgments in ambiguous situations? To answer this question, we must return to the theoretical models that underpinned this study and explore how they help explain, or fall short in explaining the current findings.

First, the main effect observed (i.e., that the immigrant claimant was perceived as having experienced more severe harm than the local claimant) is consistent with existing literature indicating that individuals perceived as being members of vulnerable groups are more readily assigned the role of victim. This aligns with the moral typecasting theory (Gray & Wegner,

2009), which suggest that individuals perceived as having less agency are more likely to be cast as moral patients and thus elicit greater empathy and support. While the current study did not directly test this underlying mechanism, it is possible that immigrant status functioned as a heuristic cue for vulnerability, prompting participants to infer greater severity of harm. In this sense, moral typecasting may offer a useful framework for interpreting the elevated harm ratings observed in the immigrant condition.

However, while these findings appear to support the logic of moral typecasting, they may also reflect characteristics of the participant sample. Although these demographic data were not formally collected, it is reasonable to assume that the sample consisted predominantly of higher-educated young adults, given that participants were recruited primarily from the researchers' social circles. This is noteworthy given prior research showing that education is positively, and age negatively, associated with more favorable attitudes toward immigrants (Dražanová et al., 2023; Margaryan et al., 2018), potentially inflating support for immigrant claimants in this context. Additionally, the sample was predominantly liberal, with over three-quarters of participants identifying with the political left. Previous research has shown that liberals are more likely than conservatives to perceive immigrants as more vulnerable and in need of protection (Wockmic et al., 2024) and that liberal ideology is linked to increased empathic concern and moral outrage in response to perceived injustice (Jost et al., 2004). In this light, participants may have been more inclined to interpret the immigrant employee's experience as a form of discriminatory exclusion and, as a result, rate the severity of the harm more highly.

Therefore, while the observed pattern may suggest that immigrant employees are more readily typecast as moral patients, caution is warranted in drawing strong conclusions. The findings could equally reflect the influence of participant characteristics (i.e., political ideology,

education, age) rather than a universal tendency to assign victimhood based on immigrant status. In short, the results may indicate either a) a general tendency to perceive immigrants as more vulnerable and thus more likely to be harmed, or b) a context-specific effect driven by liberal, highly educated young adults who are predisposed to support marginalized groups.

Secondly, the limited representation of conservative political ideology in the sample limits the ability to make sensible comparisons between the left and the right. Nevertheless, the results offer tentative insights into factors that may influence ideological divergence in moral judgment, particularly within harm-based contexts. Drawing on the framework of dyadic morality (Schein & Gray, 2018), it is possible that both liberals and conservatives applied a similar harm-based template in this scenario, identifying a clear moral dyad between a perpetrator (i.e., the workplace) and a victim (i.e., the employee). The vignette's neutral framing, which excluded indicators of cultural distinctiveness, socioeconomic status, or symbolic threat, may have played a key role in the nonsignificant interaction effect. Prior research has shown that conservatives, who tend to exhibit greater skepticism toward out-group members, often withhold moral concern from individuals perceived as low-status or structurally disadvantaged (Jost & Banaji, 1994; Jost et al., 2003). However, such responses may be context-dependent. For example, Brooks et al. (2016) found that conservatives evaluated immigrants more negatively when they were depicted as culturally dissimilar or low-skilled, whereas liberals maintained consistently favorable attitudes regardless of contextual cues. In the current study, the portrayal of the immigrant employee in a neutral manner may have mitigated perceptions of threat, thereby reducing ideological differences in evaluation of perceived severity of harm.

Finally, although the small sample of conservative participants makes it difficult to draw definitive conclusions, the findings suggest that when immigrant identity is presented in a

non-threatening and neutral manner, conservatives may interpret alleged harm more similarly to liberals, potentially perceiving comparable levels of severity. While Moral Foundations Theory (Haidt & Graham, 2007; Graham et al., 2009) posits that political ideology corresponds to different moral priorities, the present findings raise questions about the consistency of these patterns across contexts. Although participants' endorsement of specific moral foundations was not assessed directly, the absence of significant ideological variation in how the allegations were evaluated across conditions supports the view that moral judgements are highly context-dependent (Gray & Keeney, 2015).

Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of the present study. First, the generalizability of the results is limited. The sample was relatively small ($N = 145$) and recruited through convenience sampling, resulting in a homogeneous group primarily composed of university students and acquaintances of the researchers. Age and education level were not formally measured due to data minimization, but the sample likely consisted mostly of higher-educated young adults. Additionally, the survey was only available in English, further narrowing the participant pool. These aspects raise concerns about representativeness, as participants likely shared similar cultural and educational backgrounds. Second, the sample lacked ideological diversity. Only eleven participants identified as conservative, which restricts the ability to draw firm conclusions about ideological differences. This imbalance may have also contributed to the nonsignificant moderation effect. Third, the study did not examine the role of ethnic or racial cues in shaping perceptions of immigrant claimants. While immigration status was manipulated, the scenario remained deliberately neutral and did not include identity markers such as names or nationalities. This limits ecological validity, as prior research shows that

perceptions of immigrants vary depending on perceived group characteristics, such as ethnicity, legal status, or skill level (Brooks et al., 2016; Lee & Fiske, 2006; Savaş et al., 2021)

Future research should address these limitations using several targeted strategies. First, recruitment efforts should strive for larger, more diverse samples in terms of age, education, ethnicity, and political ideology. This could be achieved by using stratified or quota sampling methods, as well as recruitment through nationally representative panels. Future research should include formal measurements of demographic variables such as age, education, and language competence to better understand how these factors influence attitudes towards immigrants. To evaluate ideological effects, researchers could pre-screen participants to achieve a more balanced ideological distribution. Experimental designs could potentially manipulate ideology-relevant terminology (e.g., economic threat vs. humanitarian concern) to see how framing influences harm perception. Finally, to improve ecological validity, future studies should include ethnic, national, and language cues in the immigrant scenarios. Researchers could achieve this by using ethnic names and by varying the portrayed skill level or motivation for migrating (e.g., refugee vs. economic migrant).

Conclusions

While the adverse effects of workplace exclusion on individual well-being, group cohesion, and organizational functioning are well-documented (Baumeister et al., 2013; Hitlan et al., 2006; Williams, 2007; Williams & Nida, 2016), this study suggests that not all exclusion claims are judged equally. Specifically, the findings indicate that perceptions of harm are shaped by the claimant's social identity and that, in some cases at least, immigrant status may amplify the perceived severity of exclusion.

Taken together, these results underscore the importance of examining not only whether exclusion occurs but also how it is interpreted and validated. As Otten and Jansen (2015) emphasize, true inclusion entails more than the mere absence of exclusion: it involves cultivating environments in which all members, regardless of background, feel a genuine sense of belonging and are recognized as legitimate contributors. This process begins not only with structural changes in workplace practices but also with a critical examination of how we respond to reports of harm, especially when the individuals affected do not conform to our default assumptions about who qualifies as a victim.

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Appendix

Figure 1

Q-Q Plot for Checking the Normality of the Residuals

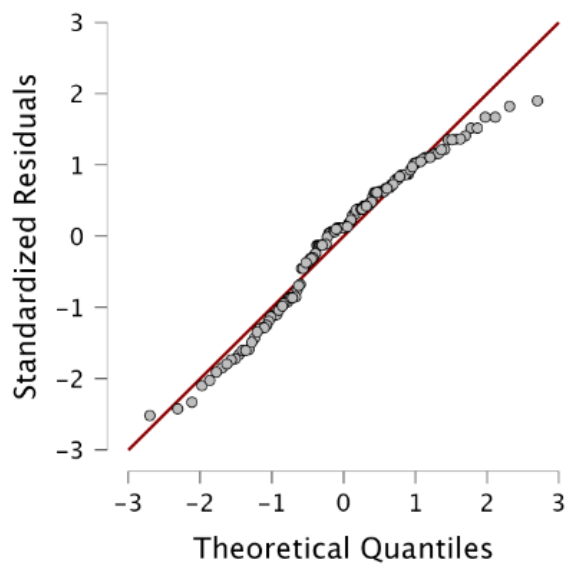


Figure 2

Scatterplot of Residuals Versus Predicted Values of the Response Variable to Examine the Homoscedasticity Assumption

