

Perceived threat, Social Distance and Exclusion of Asylum Seekers from Sudan and Eritrea in Israel

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Abstract

In recent years policy makers in Israel have established an exclusionist policy on asylum seekers, which includes, among other things, their detention at a detention center and their being deprived of their right to work, health and welfare. In this context, the current study investigates what the attitudes of the public are to asylum seekers, and to what extent these attitudes reflect the current policy: specifically whether the Israeli public supports the exclusionist policy on asylum seekers, and the role played by perceptions of socio-economic threat and social distance in acceptance or rejection of this policy. To measure the latter construct respondents were asked how far they agreed or disagreed with the need to grant asylum seekers rights and humanitarian support. In addition to perceptions of threat and social distance I controlled for the respondents' ethno-national origin, socio-economic status, levels of religiosity, their political identification, and whether or not they came in contact with asylum seekers from Sudan and Eritrea in their everyday lives. The findings indicate that as levels of perceived threat and social distance rise, so do respondents' levels of disagreement with the provision of rights and humanitarian support to asylum seekers. The findings additionally demonstrate that net of perceptions of threat and social distance, respondents of the Israeli-Arab minority are less exclusionist than respondents of the Jewish majority. Finally, the correlation between perceived socio-economic threat and rejection of the provision of rights and humanitarian support to asylum seekers is partially mediated by perceived social distance.