

The Triad, Right–Wing Authoritarianism, and Social Dominance Orientation as Predictors of Immigrant Persecution

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Summary

Various studies have examined concepts and measures related to anti-immigrant attitudes, but few have directly explored the psychological roots of immigrant persecution. Due to limited research on the social psychological factors behind this persecution, this study aims to analyze how specific personality traits and ideological beliefs predict support for persecuting immigrants, especially when endorsed as official government policies. Our approach is based on the cognitive–motivational theory of prejudice. We focus on whether components of the Triad, along with right–wing authoritarianism and social dominance orientation, serve as key predictors. The study used a convenience sample of Croatian adults (N = 558). A two–step hierarchical regression analysis was performed. In the first step, Machiavellianism, primary psychopathy, and secondary psychopathy were significant predictors, explaining 15% of the support for immigrant persecution. The second step added more explanatory power, increasing the explained variance by 13%. This step identified Machiavellianism, primary psychopathy, right–wing authoritarianism, and social dominance orientation as significant predictors, accounting for a total of 28% of the variance. The influence of personality traits and ideological beliefs in supporting immigrant persecution aligns with the dual–process cognitive–motivational theory of prejudice.

Keywords: *the Triad; right–wing authoritarianism; social dominance orientation; the dual–process model; Croats*

Introduction

There are various concepts and constructs related to anti-immigrant attitudes, as well as different methods used to measure them in social prejudice research (Duckitt & Sibley, 2017, 180–221; Šram & Bara, 2025, 110–111). Multiple

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individual and contextual factors influence the expression of prejudice against immigrants, including support for policies that defend and justify immigrant persecution (Albareello et al., 2024, 2). To our knowledge, few studies have directly examined anti-immigrant attitudes as a tendency to persecute immigrants or their organizations. Arnold K. Hu and colleagues introduced the variable and developed the “immigrant persecution” scale, linking it to the concept of “orientation towards social dominance” (Ho et al., 2012, 602). In our study, building on their idea of “immigrant persecution,” we frame this concept within a political context where the government may pass laws banning immigrant organization activities in Croatia. Such laws would rely on strict enforcement at all local levels to be effective. Supporting immigrant persecution includes endorsing these laws, reporting organizations to authorities, helping arrest members of immigrant groups, expressing willingness to attack immigrant headquarters if organized by the state, using physical force to identify other members of the immigrant community, and supporting the death penalty for leaders of immigrant organizations if the government deems it necessary to safeguard national security.

In this study, we aimed to examine whether and how specific personality traits and ideological patterns predict immigrant persecution. The lack of research on social-psychological factors behind such persecution may come from viewing this attitude as a form of public repression against immigrants, who are often implicitly seen as potential terrorists. However, it is important to clarify that studying this attitude does not mean endorsing repressive laws against immigrants. Instead, it focuses on indicators of how respondents might behave within the framework of assumed government policies toward immigrants. Additionally, the concept of “immigrant persecution” does not distinguish between legal and illegal immigrants; it generally refers to immigrants overall. Therefore, the social-psychological approach to studying “immigrant persecution” carries significant political and psychological implications.

Different personality traits and ideological attitudes are evident in societies that harbor certain prejudices and intergroup hostility (Duckitt & Sibley, 2017, 190–191). This understanding is based on the two-process cognitive-motivational theory of prejudice, also known as the dual process model (DPM). This framework helps us analyze how personality traits and ideological patterns shape the willingness to persecute immigrants (Dinesen et al., 2016, 57–58). The dual process model has proven to be a reliable theoretical approach for studying anti-immigrant attitudes. Specifically, individual differences affecting attitudes toward immigrant persecution are linked to the triad of personality traits (Petrović, 2019, 117–118), right-wing authoritarianism, and social dominance orientation.

From an individual differences perspective, two dimensions explain support for immigrant persecution: right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) and social dominance orientation (SDO). According to the two-process cognitive-motivational theory (Duckitt & Sibley, 2009, 190–191), RWA and SDO are two aspects of the cognitive-motivational system that drive different types of biases. This dual

process model (DPM) suggests that traits from the triad of personality, RWA, and SDO may help predict anti-immigrant attitudes that explicitly endorse immigrant persecution. Specifically, we hypothesize that Triad traits, RWA, and SDO will significantly predict support for immigrant persecution (Cichocka et al., 2017, 371–372). Next, we will briefly discuss the content and significance of the predictor variables related to supporting immigrant persecution.

1. The Triad

The Triad of personality includes three socially harmful and destructive traits: Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy (Neumann et al., 2022, 651–652). Machiavellianism describes a highly manipulative person who is dishonest in social relationships, tends to distrust others, engages in immoral manipulation, seeks to increase personal status, and strives to maintain interpersonal control (Dahling et al., 2009, 227–228). In other words, this trait is characterized by a cynical disregard for morality and a strong focus on self-interest and personal gain (Jones & Paulhus, 2009, 97–98). An inflated sense of self-importance, dominance, and superiority marks narcissism. It combines vanity with self-centered admiration for one's traits (Muris et al., 2017, 186–188). Psychopathy involves antisocial behavior, vindictiveness, a lack of empathy and remorse, a high need for stimulation, impulsiveness, and emotional detachment (Neumann & Hare, 2008, 893–894). In this research, we did not use existing scales to measure the Triad because prior models often treated psychopathy as a one-dimensional trait.

In this study, we used different measurement tools for each dimension of the Triad. The scale used to assess psychopathy is designed as a two-dimensional construct, consisting of primary and secondary psychopathy (Levenson et al., 1995, 152). Primary and secondary psychopathy closely align with the two-factor structure of Robert Hare's revised psychopathy checklist (PCL-R) (Hare & Neumann, 2008, 893–894).

In the PCL-R, Factor 1 relates to interpersonal and affective traits, while Factor 2 covers personality features and behaviors that indicate various forms of social deviance and risky actions. According to Levenson's theory of psychopathy, primary psychopathy includes interpersonal and affective traits such as a grandiose sense of self-worth, a tendency to lie, manipulate others, lack of guilt or remorse, selfishness, shallow emotions, irresponsibility, emotional coldness, and lack of empathy. In contrast, secondary psychopathy is characterized by personality traits and behavioral patterns like antisocial behavior, impulsivity, and aggressiveness. Primary psychopathy is generally considered hereditary, whereas secondary psychopathy results from external circumstances (Furtner et al., 2017, 77–78).

2. *Right-Wing Authoritarianism and Social Dominance Orientation*

Right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) and Social dominance orientation (SDO) have traditionally been seen as stable personality traits. However, the dual process model argues that these are not fixed traits but rather ideological attitudes—broader ideological frameworks (Duckitt & Sibley, 2009, 217). Although these ideological dimensions (RWA and SDO) are positively related, they are separate attitudinal constructs with different underlying motivations. RWA is based on the need for social cohesion and collective security, whereas SDO aims for group dominance and superiority. Right-wing authoritarianism involves beliefs in social control, obedience to authority, and adherence to traditional values and morals. In contrast, Social dominance orientation signifies beliefs in social and economic inequality, as well as the idea that powerful groups have the right to dominate weaker ones (Duckitt & Sibley, 2010, 585). The Dual Process Model (DPM) suggests that right-wing authoritarianism develops from a world-view that sees the world as dangerous, threatening, and unpredictable.

3. *Research Goal and Hypothesis*

Based on the principles of the two-process cognitive-motivational theory, or the dual process model (DPM), we aimed to determine whether and to what extent Machiavellianism, narcissism, psychopathy, right-wing authoritarianism, and social dominance orientation contribute to the internalization of political attitudes, as reflected in the willingness to persecute immigrants within a specific state policy context. We hypothesize that certain aspects of the Triad personalities and ideological patterns, such as right-wing orientation and social dominance orientation, will significantly influence support for immigrant persecution.

4. *Method*

4.1. *Participants and procedure*

The study involved a sample of 558 adult Croats. Of these participants, 46% were male. The average age was 43.30 years, with a standard deviation of 16.20 years. Regarding educational backgrounds, 6.6% finished primary school, 15.2% attended a three-year vocational secondary school, 40.5% graduated from a four-year secondary school, 12% pursued post-secondary education, and 25.6% held a university degree. The distribution of educational attainment leans toward higher levels, which is understandable given the nature of the questionnaires. Participants were asked to complete the questionnaire independently, and interviewers collected the completed forms the following day, ensuring a thorough and reliable data collection process.

4.2. Measures

Immigrant persecution. A six-item scale was created by Ho et al. (2012, 602). Respondents received the following instruction: “Now, suppose that the Croatian government (žAmerican government’ in the original format) at some point in the future passed a law banning immigrant organizations. Croatian government officials then stated that the law would only be effective if enforced vigorously at the local level and called on every Croatian to help fight these organizations.” Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale: (1) disagree strongly, (2) disagree, (3) neither agree nor disagree, (4) agree, (5) strongly agree. To evaluate the construct validity of the scale, we conducted an exploratory factor analysis based on the intercorrelation matrix of the six items. Using the component model with Varimax rotation, the analysis revealed a one-factor solution that explained 67.61 percent of the variance, with a KMO of 0.86 (Table 1). This shows that approval of laws targeting immigrants, cooperation with law enforcement, willingness to use physical force against immigrants and their organizations, and supporting the death penalty for immigrants if the government deemed it necessary to protect the country are potential behavioral patterns of the immigrant persecution scale. Factor analysis demonstrated good construct validity for this scale.

Table 1. Factor analysis of the migration persecution scale

Tablica 1. Faktorska analiza skale progona imigranata

Variable	Loadings
I would support the use of physical force to make the members of the immigrant organizations reveal the identity of other members	0.88
If asked by the police, I would help hunt down and arrest members of immigrant organizations	0.84
I would participate in attacks on the immigrant headquarters organized by the proper authorities	0.83
I would tell the police about any immigrant organizations that I knew	0.80
I would support the execution of the leaders of immigrant organizations if the government insisted it was necessary to protect our country	0.79
I would tell my friends and neighbours that it was a good law	0.76

Machiavellianism. A 16-item new Machiavellianism scale developed by Dahling, Whitaker, and Levy (2009, 251) was used to measure Machiavellianism. The scale represented the existence of amoral manipulation (5 items), distrust of others (5 items), desire for status (3 items), and desire for control (3 items). On the Likert scale format from 1 = disagree strongly to 5 = strongly agree,

participants were asked to indicate how much they agree or disagree with the statements that comprise the scale.

Narcissism was measured by a 16-item Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI-16) developed by Ames, Rose, & Anderson (2006, 449).

Psychopathy was measured by Levenson's self-reporting psychopathy scale (LSRP), developed by Levenson, Kiehl & Fitzpatrick (1995, 153).

Right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) was assessed using a 22-item scale developed by Altemeyer (2006, 10–15). This version of the RWA scale includes twelve positive items and ten reverse items, measuring authoritarian submission, authoritarian aggression, and conventionalism. In the original version of the RWA measurement, respondents rated their reactions to each statement on a Likert scale from –4 to +4. Instead of using Altemeyer's original Likert scale format, we adopted a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) to align with the response options of other attitude measures. This enabled respondents to express their level of agreement or disagreement with the statements included in the RWA measure.

The social dominance orientation (SDO) was measured using a 16-item scale created by Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, and Malle (1994), which assesses how much a person wants their in-group to dominate and be superior to the out-group. Initially, the items were answered on a 7-point Likert scale, with 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree. In this study, we used a 5-point Likert scale from 1 = disagree strongly to 5 = strongly agree, asking participants to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with the statements measuring SDO.

5. Results

5.1. Descriptive statistics and correlations between tested variables

Table 2 shows the statistical relationships among the tested variables. Statistically significant correlations were observed between immigrant persecution and all predictor variables. Machiavellianism, narcissism, and primary psychopathy are closely linked, indicating the presence of the Triad, while secondary psychopathy has a minor influence in forming it. Additionally, a strong correlation exists between RWA and SDO. All measurement tools demonstrated high or acceptable reliability and internal consistency. Based on skewness values, which should range between –1 and +1 for symmetrical distributions (Hair et al., 2022, 66), the results on the measurement scales mostly suggest a normal distribution.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and correlations between tested variables

Tablica 2. Deskriptivna statistika i korelacije između ispitivanih varijabli

Variable	Immigrant persecution	Mach	Narc	Psych I	Psych II	RWA	SDO
1. Immigrant persecution	1.00						
2. Machiavellianism	0.34***	1.00					
3. Narcissism	0.22***	0.58***	1.00				
4. Psychopathy I	0.32***	0.68***	0.49***	1.00			
5. Psychopathy II	0.28***	0.43***	0.22***	0.54***	1.00		
6. RWA	0.34***	0.06	0.07	0.06	0.14**	1.00	
7. SDO	0.32***	0.20***	0.21***	0.22***	0.11*	0.43***	1.00
M	12.43	35.77	40.32	30.23	19.57	60.78	41.44
SD	5.67	11.35	12.53	7.32	4.29	12.79	8.76
a	0.90	0.9	0.93	0.81	0.65	0.86	0.81
Skewness	0.79	0.35	0.19	0.27	0.12	–0.33	–0.27
Kurtosis	–0.10	0.14	0.22	–0.32	–0.15	0.38	0.27
*p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001 Notes: Psychopathy I Primary psychopathy Psychopathy II = Secondary psychopathy							

5.2. The Triad, RWA, and SDO as predictors of immigrant persecution

Our study used a two-step hierarchical regression analysis to explore the relationships between the triad, right-wing authoritarianism (RWA), and Social dominance orientation (SDO) in predicting support for immigrant persecution. In the first step, we examined the triad personality traits as predictors, which explained 15% of the variance in immigrant persecution. Machiavellianism, primary psychopathy, and secondary psychopathy emerged as significant predictors of immigrant persecution (Table 3).

In the second step, we added RWA and SDO to the model. This addition maintained the significance of Machiavellianism, primary psychopathy, RWA, and SDO in predicting immigrant persecution, explaining 28% of the variance. Machiavellianism proved to be a stronger predictor than primary psychopathy, and RWA was a stronger predictor than SDO for immigrant persecution. The second model showed a significant improvement over the first, increasing the explained variance by 13% ($\Delta R^2 = 0.13$) (Table 3).

Table 3. Results of hierarchical regression analysis with triad, RWA, and SDO as predictors on immigrant persecution as the criterion of the variable

Tablica 3. Rezultati hijerarhijske regresijske analize mračne trijade ličnosti, desne autoritarnosti i orijentacije na socijalnu dominaciju na progonu imigranata kao kriterijske varijable

Immigrant persecution	Step 1	Step 2
Predictors	β	β
Machiavellianism	0.17**	0.20**
Narcissism	0.03	–0.01
Primary psychopathy	0.14*	0.13*
Secondary psychopathy	0.13*	0.07
RWA		0.25***
SDO		0.15**
	$R^2 = 0.15$	$R^2 = 0.28$
	$R = 0.38$	$\Delta R^2 = 0.13$
		$R = 0.53$
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$		

6. Discussion

Support for actions against immigrants continually reflects attitudes and behaviors. Such support may include endorsing anti-immigrant laws, backing violence against immigrants, expressing willingness to participate in physical attacks, assisting law enforcement in enforcing anti-immigrant policies, and supporting the death penalty for immigrants when authorities deem it necessary. These anti-immigrant sentiments reveal a mindset inclined toward government-backed repression and suggest a personal readiness to engage in violence if encouraged by the government. If political backing and legal systems for immigrant persecution were in place, some individuals would likely endorse these policies and participate socially. This raises an important question: what is the social psychological profile of those willing to carry out government-led immigrant persecution?

We hypothesized that specific aspects of the Triad traits and ideological patterns, such as right-wing orientation and social dominance, would significantly influence support for immigrant persecution. Our results showed a connection between immigrant persecution and traits like Machiavellianism, narcissism, and both primary and secondary psychopathy. Among these, Machiavellianism and primary psychopathy appeared more strongly linked to persecution. In the initial phase of hierarchical regression analysis, only Machiavellianism, primary psychopathy, and secondary psychopathy were significant predictors. Narcissism, however, was not statistically significant. This suggests that, regarding immigrant

persecution, the entire Triad model is less relevant; instead, Machiavellianism and both types of psychopathy are key, explaining about 15% of the variance. Correlations between these traits and persecution were modest (ranging from 0.22 to 0.34) but statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). Overall, our hypothesis that certain Triad traits contribute to support for immigrant persecution was confirmed.

Including ideological patterns such as Right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) and Social dominance orientation (SDO) in the second hierarchical regression model significantly increased the explained variance of immigrant persecution, rising to 28% compared to the first model. The results show that Machiavellianism, primary psychopathy, RWA, and SDO are important predictors of immigrant persecution, consistent with previous research (Albarelo et al., 2024, 2; Dienesen et al., 2016, 57–58; Duckitt & Sibley, 2017, 190–191; Neumann et al., 2022, 651–652). Notably, Machiavellianism and RWA were the strongest predictors, while primary psychopathy and SDO also contributed, but less significantly.

We can see that a person who supports immigrant persecution is highly manipulative, dishonest in social relationships, tends to distrust others, engages in immoral manipulation, and holds a cynical view of human nature. They also demonstrate a disregard for conventional morality, seek to increase personal status, and strive to maintain control over others (Dahling et al., 2009, 227–228; Muris et al., 2017, 186–188). Additionally, to a lesser extent, such a person may have a grandiose sense of self-worth, a tendency to lie and manipulate others, a lack of guilt and remorse, selfishness, shallow emotions, irresponsible behavior, emotional coldness, and a lack of empathy. In summary, distrust of others, amoral manipulation, desire for status and control, along with interpersonal and emotional dysfunction, form the core social-psychological traits behind immigrant persecution. Given that childhood psychological maltreatment is linked to Machiavellianism in adulthood (Láng & Lénárd, 2015, 81–85) and that primary psychopathy is considered hereditary (Furtner et al., 2017, 77–78), it is reasonable to suggest that a combination of environmental and genetic factors contributes to immigrant persecution syndrome.

Besides personality traits, various ideological factors shape attitudes toward immigration persecution. The most influential of these is right-wing authoritarianism, while social dominance orientation has a minimal impact. People inclined to persecute immigrants often seek social cohesion and collective security. This perspective generally involves beliefs in social control, obedience to authority, and adherence to traditional values and morals (Duckitt & Sibley, 2009, 217). To a lesser extent, these individuals may also accept social and economic inequalities and the idea that powerful groups have the right to dominate weaker ones (Duckitt & Sibley, 2010, 585). According to the dual process model, people prone to persecuting immigrants tend to view the world as a dangerous and threatening place. They may also see it as a competitive environment marked by intergroup struggles for dominance and superiority, though to a lesser degree (Perry et al., 2013, 117). In summary, those who strongly lean toward immigrant persecution

often see the world as risky and feel a need for dominance and superiority over others.

It is interesting to note that Machiavellianism and right-wing authoritarianism do not show a significant linear correlation ($r = 0.06$). However, a notable correlation appears in individuals who exhibit extreme hostility toward immigrants, particularly when such hostility is endorsed as an official governmental policy. In other words, those who exhibit Machiavellian traits alongside right-wing authoritarian tendencies—often characterized by callousness, slight aggressiveness, and a need for dominance and superiority—are more likely to participate in the persecution of immigrants and potentially other groups targeted by the state as enemies.

Our hypothesis that certain aspects of the Triad personality traits and ideological patterns significantly influence support for immigrant persecution has been confirmed. This supports the two-process cognitive-motivational theory of prejudice (Duckitt & Sibley, 2017, 190–191; Šram & Bara, 2025, 110–111). We have demonstrated that specific personality traits and ideological patterns contribute to the willingness to actively participate in persecuting immigrants (Diensen et al., 2016, 67–68).

Conclusion

In conclusion, certain aspects of the Triad, right-wing authoritarianism (RWA), and social dominance orientation (SDO) may form a core social-psychological foundation that drives severe persecution of any social or ethnic group if it becomes official state policy. Individuals with these traits often develop a psychological defense mechanism characterized by simultaneous urges to seek protection from others and feelings of being compelled to attack them. This internal conflict, situated within the interaction of personality, ideology, and culture, can lead to aggressive and hostile political attitudes when supported by official state policies. Our study has several limitations. First, our data were collected from a homogeneous culture, which might limit the applicability of our findings. Additionally, we did not employ specific measures designed to assess the Triad traits. Furthermore, our research was cross-sectional, providing only a snapshot in time. Future research should aim to replicate our results and examine other forms of extreme, hostile social attitudes that could represent different types of prejudice.

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Mračna trijada, desna autoritarnost i orijentacija prema socijalnoj dominaciji kao prediktori progona imigranata

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Sažetak

U ovom smo istraživanju nastojali utvrditi doprinose li i u kojoj mjeri osobine ličnosti i ideološka vjerovanja internalizaciji političkoga stava koji ukazuje na mentalnu spremnost na progon imigranata u slučaju da to bude dio državne politike. Na temelju kognitivno-motivacijske teorije predrasuda pretpostavili smo da će neke dimenzije mračne trijade ličnosti (makijavelizam, narcizam, psihopatija), desna autoritarnost i orijentacija na socijalnu dominaciju biti značajni prediktori progona imigranata. Istraživanje je provedeno na prigodnom uzorku punoljetnih ispitanika hrvatske nacionalnosti ($N = 558$). Izvršili smo hijerarhijsku regresijsku analizu u dva koraka. U prvom koraku su se makijavelizam, primarna i sekundarna psihopatija pokazali značajnim prediktorima progona imigranata. Tim je modelom objašnjeno 15% varijance davanja potpore progonu imigranata. U drugom koraku hijerarhijske regresijske analize dodane su desna autoritarnost i orijentacija na socijalnu dominaciju. Drugi korak je imao znatno veću eksplanatornu snagu. U drugom koraku povećan je postotak objašnjene varijance za 13%. Makijavelizam, primarna psihopatija, desna autoritarnost i orijentacija na socijalnu dominaciju pokazali su se značajnim prediktorima progona imigranata. Tim je prediktorima objašnjeno 28% varijance progona imigranata. Doprinos tih osobina ličnosti i ideoloških obrazaca u skladu je s propozicijama dvoprocenke kognitivno-motivacijske teorije predrasuda.

Ključne riječi: mračna trijada; desna autoritarnost; socijalna dominacija; dualni procesni model; Hrvati

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