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Out of Control, Out of Favor?
How Induced Helplessness Shapes Implicit and Explicit Reactions to Migration

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BACKGROUND

Support for right-wing parties has **increased** in Germany in recent years (Bundeswahlleiterin, 2024). Beyond economic and cultural explanations, **psychological experiences,** such as **reduced perceived control** may also play a role and contribute to the appeal of political messages promising order, stability, authority, and reduced complexity (Heinisch & Jansesberger, 2024)**.** Since **lower** perceived **control** has been linked **to higher anti-immigrant attitudes** (Harell et al., 2017), this study builds on **learned helplessness theory** and tests whether **experimentally induced helplessness** increases **negative** implicit and explicit **reactions to migration**-related content. **Learned helplessness** is also relevant for **depression**, as uncontrollability can foster negative expectations (Maier & Seligman, 1976). Here, this idea is applied to migration-related evaluations.

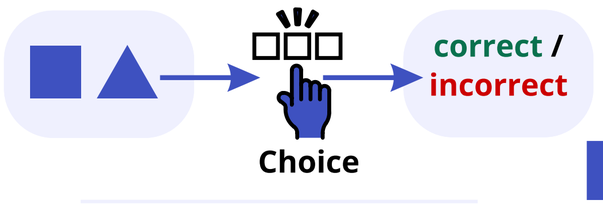
RESEARCH QUESTION

Does experimentally **induced helplessness** lead to more negative implicit and explicit **reactions to migration**-related content, and is this effect stronger when a migration-related context is activated?

STUDY PROCEDURE

INDUCED HELPLESSNESS
CONCEPT FORMATION TASK

infer the hidden rule



Helplessness:
- unsolvable
- no stable rule
- random feedback

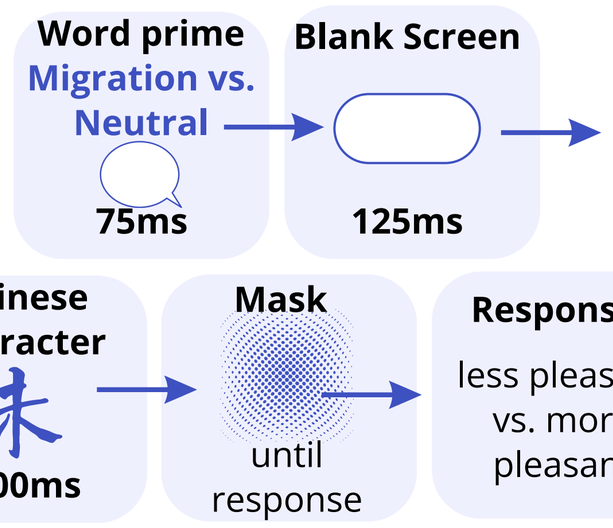
Control:
- solvable
- stable rule
- contingent feedback (depends on choice)

Check: state helplessness after the task

CONTEXT MANIPULATION

- **Migration-related:** local integration and migration-related tasks
- **Neutral**: modernization of administrative procedures
- ***key idea:*** *activates a specific context before the prime measures*

AFFECT MISSATTRIBUTION PROCEDURE (AMP)



- 28 trials
- ***key idea:*** *the prime word may influence the evaluation of the character*

EXPLICIT ATTITUDES
European Social Survey (ESS) Items

- seif report ratings on immigration attitudes
- 5 items
- 0–10 response scales
- higher scores = more positive attitudes toward immigration

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES | **DEPENDENT VARIABLES**

DESIGN

2 x 2 x 2 mixed design

Between-subjects

Task Condition:
- Helplessness vs. Control

Context:
- Migration vs. Neutral

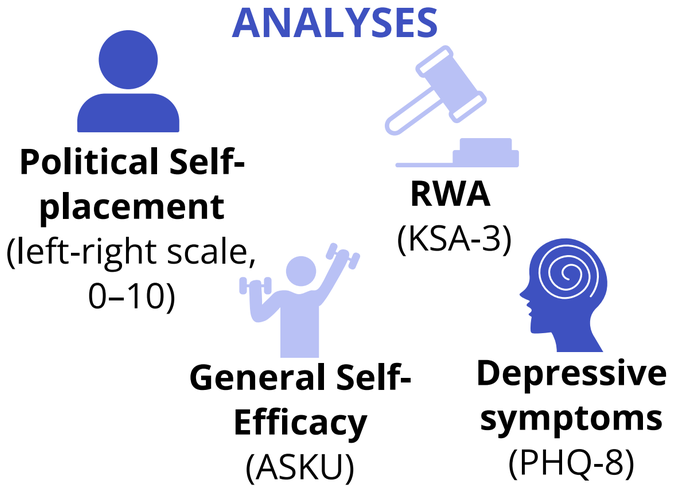
Within-subjects

AMP Prime Type:
Migration-related vs. Neutral Primes

4 Experimental Conditions

- **Helplessness + Migration**
- **Helplessness + Neutral**
- **Control + Migration**
- **Control + Neutral**

COVARIATES - SECONDARY ANALYSES



OUTCOMES

Implicit - AMP contrast
- mean rating after migration primes − mean rating after neutral primes
- 0 = less pleasant, 1 = more pleasant → more negative = more negative implicit reactions
- mixed-effects logistic regression

Explicit - ESS
- mean of 5 immigration items → higher = more positive attitudes
- 2 × 2 ANOVA / regression

HYPOTHESES

Implicit evaluations (AMP)

H1: Helplessness will make the migration-vs.-neutral AMP contrast more negative.

H2: A migration-related context will make the migration-vs.-neutral AMP contrast more negative

H3: This contrast will be most negative when helplessness and migration-related context are combined.

Explicit attitudes (ESS)

H4: Helplessness will lead to less positive explicit attitudes toward immigrants.

H5: A migration-related context will lead to less positive explicit attitudes toward immigrants.

H6: Explicit attitudes will be least positive when helplessness and a migration-related context are combined.

Key References

Andersen et al. (2025); Beierlein et al. (2013, 2014); Bundeswahlleiterin (2024); Harell et al. (2017); Heath & Richards (2016); Heinisch & Jansesberger (2024); Kroenke et al. (2009); Maier & Seligman (1976); Payne et al. (2005); Soral et al. (2021)