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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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Norms of equality reduce prejudice towards migrants, but only among conservatives

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Abstract

People are sensitive to norms, but under what conditions promoting anti-prejudice norms reduce prejudice remains unclear. Three studies among Dutch participants (total $N = 700$) examined the effects of (in)equality norms on prejudice towards migrants. To gain greater clarity, we also examined how potential boundary conditions—namely economic and social ideologies—moderate this relationship. A norm of equality was measured (Study 1) or manipulated (Studies 2a and 2b). In Study 1, a perceived norm of equality predicted lower prejudice towards migrants, operationalised as cold feelings, social distance, and perceived outgroup threat, through the increased personal endorsement of equality, particularly among (economic) rightists. In two experiments (Studies 2a and 2b), as well as in a joint analysis of both studies, we found that inducing an equality norm (vs. not) mitigated prejudice towards migrants, but only among (social) rightists. These findings highlight the positive role of social norms promoting equality in combating prejudice and the importance of considering boundary conditions for this role, such as ideology. We discuss the implications for theory and practice regarding prejudice (reduction). Please refer to the Supplementary Material section to find this article's [Community and Social Impact Statement](#).

KEYWORDS

ideology, prejudice, social norms

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1 | INTRODUCTION

Individuals emigrate for a variety of reasons, for example, fleeing from war or improving one's prospects. While many find a better place to live, members of host societies may not always welcome them. Indeed, prejudice towards migrants constitutes a major challenge for social cohesion in contemporary democracies (Esses, 2021; Rios, Sosa, & Osborn, 2018). Social norms have received increasing attention for their potential to mitigate such prejudice (e.g., Borinca, Andrighetto, Valsecchi, & Berent, 2022; Falomir-Pichastor, Mugny, & Berent, 2017; Gabarrot & Falomir-Pichastor, 2017; Meleady, 2021; Visintin, Green, Falomir-Pichastor, & Berent, 2020), but some crucial conditions under which people might conform to or resist anti-prejudice norms remain unclear.

Social norms convey shared standards of accepted or expected attitudes and behaviours by individuals belonging to a group (Lapinski & Rimal, 2005), depicting what is commonly done by group members and what *should be* done as a group member (Cialdini, Reno, & Kallgren, 1990). In the context of migration, norms of equality, which stress equal treatment of people regardless of their (migration) background, have been recognised for their potential role in prejudice reduction (Pereira, Monteiro, & Camino, 2009). Indeed, promising findings on norm-based interventions for prejudice reduction show a positive role of anti-prejudice norms in reducing prejudice (e.g., Borinca, Andrighetto, et al., 2022; Crandall, Eshleman, & O'Brien, 2002; Meleady, 2021; Wyer, 2010). Nonetheless, some studies reveal a potential boomerang effect, with prejudice increasing as a response to anti-prejudice norms (e.g., Falomir-Pichastor et al., 2017; Kauff, Asbrock, Thörner, & Wagner, 2013; Legault, Gutsell, & Inzlicht, 2011; see also our recent working paper, Long & Çakmak, 2024). In the current work, we recognise such complexities in the relations between norms and prejudice reduction and aim to disentangle them by looking at the possible moderating role of ideology.

1.1 | Social norms and prejudice

Classic social-psychological research has recognised social norms as powerful drivers of attitudes and behaviour. Accordingly, norms frequently serve as a basis for attitude- and behaviour-change interventions (Dempsey, McAlaney, & Bewick, 2018). Social norms are acquired in contact with ingroup members and endure as standards for how individuals should behave towards specific social groups, categories, and situations (Sherif & Sherif, 1953). People are strongly motivated to be accepted by ingroup members, and thus adapt to what most ingroup members agree with; this process is usually referred to as normative social influence (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004; Latané, 1981; McCauley, 1989). Therefore, when most ingroup members support anti-prejudice norms, for example, by valuing equality, inclusion, and multiculturalism, the expression of prejudice towards an outgroup will be restrained (Crandall et al., 2002).

Accordingly, researchers have proposed that norms can help reduce prejudice (Crandall et al., 2002). In this vein, cross-sectional and experimental evidence has shown that both “direct” social disapproval of prejudice expressions and “indirect” forms of anti-prejudice norms like stressing equality, egalitarianism, and multiculturalism can decrease prejudice and promote positive intergroup interactions (e.g., Crandall et al., 2002; Meleady, 2021; Wyer, 2010). These effects have also been found in field experiments (e.g., Paluck, 2009). Following this, the main hypothesis guiding the current work is that anti-prejudice norms reduce prejudice towards migrants (Hypothesis 1). Nonetheless, we acknowledge that this influence could be conditioned by various factors, including one's political ideology.

1.2 | How ideology shapes the impact of social norms on prejudice

Despite the rather intuitive nature of the relationship between ingroup norms and prejudice, some researchers have pointed to important boundary conditions and moderators of this relationship, such as intergroup threat (Falomir-Pichastor, Muñoz-Rojas, Invernizzi, & Mugny, 2004), existing prejudice (Valsecchi, Berent, Borinca, Green, & Falomir-Pichastor, 2024), held values (Oyamot Jr., Fisher, Deason, & Borgida, 2012), and different forms of intergroup

contact (Valsecchi et al., 2024; Visintin et al., 2020; White et al., 2021). A particularly relevant individual difference to consider is political ideology, defined as a set of “socially shared but competing philosophies of life and how it should be lived (and how society should be governed)” (Jost, Federico, & Napier, 2009, p. 309). That said, ideology may not be monolithic, so it is important to draw distinctions among its different dimensions (Costello & Lilienfeld, 2021; Crawford, Brandt, Inbar, Chambers, & Motyl, 2017; Johnston & Ollerenshaw, 2020; Stenner, 2009). For example, rightist ideology may denote a preference for a free market and the resulting hierarchies (i.e., economic rightist ideology) or a preference for conformity and sameness over freedom and social pluralism (i.e., social rightist ideology). In the current work, we examined both the economic and social dimensions of ideology.

Ideology is a likely moderator of the relationship between equality norms and prejudice for at least three reasons. First, a rightist ideology is strongly related to prejudice towards an array of target groups, including migrants (Crawford & Brandt, 2020; Duckitt, Wagner, du Plessis, & Birum, 2002; Federico & Sidanius, 2002). Second, divergence on anti-prejudice values such as social equality, egalitarianism and multiculturalism constitutes one of the most central differences between left- and right-leaning individuals, with the former endorsing these more than the latter (Arneson, 2015; Jost et al., 2009). Finally, rightist ideology is associated with values like traditionalism and submissiveness, as well as with a need for affiliation (Altemeyer, 1998; Michaud, Carlisle, & Smith, 2009; Stenner, 2009)—all implicated in conformity to social norms. Therefore, we believe one reason for past inconsistencies in findings regarding the effectiveness of anti-prejudice norms in prejudice reduction (for supportive evidence, see Crandall et al., 2002; Meleady, 2021; Wyer, 2010; for countering evidence, see Falomir-Pichastor et al., 2017; Kauff et al., 2013; Legault et al., 2011) could be ideological differences across sampled populations masking the effects.

Despite the abundant evidence for the links between ideology and both prejudice and norms (e.g., Crawford & Brandt, 2020; Duckitt et al., 2002; Federico & Sidanius, 2002), the specific ways in which ideology might shape the relationship between anti-prejudice norms and individual prejudice are less straightforward. On the one hand, the literature on confirmation bias suggests that individuals would attend to and accept new information mostly when it was consistent with their initial beliefs or values (Nickerson, 1998). Accordingly, anti-prejudice norms regarding migrants, which match leftists' goals of social equality (Jost et al., 2009) and lower prejudice towards migrants (Crawford & Brandt, 2020; Jost, Stern, Rule, & Sterling, 2017), should be more attended to and accepted by leftists than by rightists. Empirical evidence from research on normative influence provides support for this argument, with norms more strongly influencing prejudice towards, for example, migrants (Falomir-Pichastor et al., 2004) and homosexual people (Pereira, Pereira, & Monteiro, 2016) among people who initially held already more positive beliefs about these groups. It follows that when confronted with anti-prejudice norms, prejudice should be reduced more among leftists than among rightists (Hypothesis 2a).

However, a case can also be made for the opposite hypothesis for at least two reasons. For example, there is evidence that imagined contact increased support for migrants only among conservative individuals who previously dehumanised migrants (Borinca, Çelik, & Storme, 2022). We provide two possible explanations for why equality norms may reduce prejudice, in particular for conservatives. First, a rightist ideology is related to general obedience and conformity to social norms (Schwartz, Caprara, & Vecchione, 2010; Wilson & Patterson, 1968), since rightists respect authority more than leftists and are more motivated to preserve group uniformity (Bettache & Chiu, 2019; Stern, West, Jost, & Rule, 2014). This suggests that rightists may be more susceptible to norms in general, even in the case of anti-prejudice norms. Particularly relevant in this context is work indicating that anti-prejudice norms have a greater impact on prejudice reduction among right-wing authoritarians than among non-authoritarians (Asbrock, Christ, Duckitt, & Sibley, 2012; Dhont & Van Hiel, 2009; but see Kauff et al., 2013). This hypothesis may specifically apply to the social dimension of ideology, as it is particularly social rightists who favour conformity and a uniform ingroup (Crawford et al., 2017; Johnston & Ollerenshaw, 2020; Stenner, 2009). A second reason to expect less normative influence among leftists than among rightists is that leftists' often-lower initial levels of prejudice towards migrants allow less room for further prejudice reduction (Crawford & Brandt, 2020; Duckitt et al., 2002; Federico & Sidanius, 2002). Accordingly, one could also predict that when confronted with anti-prejudice norms, rightists' prejudice towards migrants should be reduced more than leftists' prejudice (Hypothesis 2b).

1.3 | Overview of the present research

In one correlational study (Study 1) and two experiments (Studies 2a and 2b), we tested our basic hypothesis that anti-prejudice norms can reduce prejudice towards the outgroup (Hypothesis 1). In addition, and per the above review of the literature, we tested two competing hypotheses regarding the moderating role of ideology in this relationship: Either leftists' prejudice will be reduced by anti-prejudice norms more than rightists' (Hypothesis 2a) or rightists' prejudice will be reduced by anti-prejudice norms more than leftists' (Hypothesis 2b).

Across studies, we operationalised anti-prejudice norms as norms of (in)equality and tested the hypotheses in the context of native-Dutch people's prejudice towards migrants in the Netherlands. Specifically, in Study 1, we measured participants' norm perceptions, and in Studies 2a and 2b, we manipulated norms by providing contrived information on public opinion. In each experimental study, we manipulated the norm of inequality in addition to the norm of equality, aiming to additionally explore the direction of an equality norm. For both Studies 2a and 2b, we conducted additional analyses for the manipulation check by including economic and social ideologies as moderators for the relationship between the norm manipulation and the perceived norm of equality (see Appendix A). Additionally, we conducted additional analyses testing the main effect of the norm of equality (vs. inequality) on outcome variables as well as the moderating role of economic and social ideologies in these relationships (see Appendix B).

1.4 | Open practice

In the current paper and Appendix C, Supporting Information, we report all studies, conditions, measures, and data exclusions. In Appendix D, Supporting Information, we report additional descriptive statistics, such as cell means and standard errors.

The materials and raw data used in the current studies are accessible at https://osf.io/d3vpy/?view_only=10d3d3783df442bd9d7a75503edffef. Study 2a was preregistered at https://osf.io/8d6ew/?view_only=4ecce9c702e647aab3cd7b95757ed93e and https://osf.io/cv8ez/?view_only=486f11196974404e879c1f1039f2d798 (additional data collection); Study 2b was preregistered at https://osf.io/vaxrd/?view_only=43269a246ef14151a77d02d30797c5dc. Study 1 was not preregistered.

All studies were reviewed and approved by the Psychology Research Ethics Committee at Leiden University.

2 | STUDY 1

We designed Study 1 as a correlational study to explore how a perceived norm of equality relates to prejudice towards migrants. We expected a stronger perceived norm of equality to be associated with lower prejudice (Hypothesis 1). Moreover, we tested the moderating roles of both the economic and social dimensions of political ideology (Hypotheses 2a and 2b).

2.1 | Method

2.1.1 | Participants

Sample size was determined before data collection using an a priori analysis on G*Power 3.1 (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007). The analysis suggested that we needed a minimum sample size of 191 to provide a power of 0.95 to detect a medium-size effect ($f^2 = 0.10$) in a regression model with four predictors. A sample of 251 native Dutch residents submitted responses through Prolific (www.prolific.co). We excluded 29 participants, of whom 8 failed at least one attention check and 21 reported a migration background (i.e., at least one parent was born outside the

Netherlands), yielding 222 valid cases (77 women; ages 18–72, $M = 29.31$, $SD = 9.16$). This sample size was able to yield sufficient power for our analyses.

2.1.2 | Procedure and materials

After providing informed consent, participants responded, in the following order, to measures assessing their perceived norm of equality, possible threats posed by migrants, prejudice towards migrants, and personal endorsement of equality, before completing demographic questions, which included measures of political ideology. Each participant responded to measures of perceived threat from, and prejudice towards, migrants from the Middle East, who are common targets of prejudice in the Netherlands (Verkuyten & Kinket, 2000).

2.1.3 | Measures

Unless indicated otherwise, responses to all measures—across studies—were provided on seven-point scales anchored at 1 = “strongly disagree” and 7 = “strongly agree.”

Perceived norms and personal endorsement of equality

Perceived norm of equality was measured with five items tapping into descriptive norms (e.g., “Most Dutch people support equally allocating income to all people in the Netherlands, regardless of what they contribute”) and five items tapping into prescriptive norms (e.g., “In the Netherlands people are expected to support equality, in the sense that income should be equally allocated to all people in our society regardless of what they contribute”), asking about participants' perceptions of the majority's support for the equal allocation of income, social benefits, social services, job opportunities and natural resources. Exploratory factor analysis including all items indicated only one component (based on eigenvalues greater than 1), leading us to compute a single composite score ($\alpha = .73$).

Personal endorsement of equality was measured with five items adapted from the items measuring the perceived norm of equality (e.g., “I believe that income should be equally allocated to all people in our society regardless of what they contribute”; $\alpha = .72$).

Prejudice

Prejudice was operationalised as *cold feelings*, *social distance* and *perceived outgroup threat*. The first two measures have been commonly used to operationalise prejudice (Crawford et al., 2017; Martinovic & Verkuyten, 2013; Stephan, Ybarra, & Bachman, 1999), while perceived outgroup threat captures a more subtle aspect of prejudice since individuals who want to look unbiased outwardly can justify their prejudice towards an outgroup by perceiving them as threatening (Bahns, 2017).

First, we employed a single-item feeling thermometer adapted from Stephan et al. (1999) to capture cold feelings: “In general, on the following scale, how coldly or warmly do you feel towards migrants from the Middle East,” anchored at 0 (“very cold”) and 100 (“very warm”). The scores were reverse-coded such that higher scores represent colder feelings and thus greater prejudice.

We also assessed social distance (Crawford et al., 2017). Specifically, each participant reported the extent to which they would be happy to establish social relations with a migrant from the Middle East, for example, “I would be happy to work with a migrant from the Middle East” ($\alpha = .91$). The scores for all statements were reverse-coded, such that higher scores indicate higher prejudice.

In addition, perceived outgroup threat was assessed using nine items adapted from past research (Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005; Stephan et al., 1999; Velasco González, Verkuyten, Weesie, & Poppe, 2008). The statements tapped into the extent to which the participants perceived migrants from the Middle East as threatening Dutch people's

access to economic resources, safety and culture, for example, “Because of the presence of migrants from the Middle East, Dutch people have more difficulties in finding a job” ($\alpha = .96$).

Ideology

As a common way to measure political ideology (Borinca, Çelik, & Storme, 2022; Kteily, Hodson, & Bruneau, 2016), we employed single-item measures for *economic ideology* (“On the following scale, how social or liberal are your economic views”; anchored at 1 = “very social” and 7 = “very liberal”) and *social ideology* (“On the following scale, how progressive or conservative are your views on social issues”; anchored at 1 = “very progressive” and 7 = “very conservative”).¹

Attention checks

We embedded five instructional manipulation checks (IMCs, Oppenheimer, Meyvis, & Davidenko, 2009) as attention checks in the questionnaire, as online studies are known to be more sensitive to inattentive responding. Specifically, we instructed participants to select a specific answer (1 or 7) for each attention check item. Participants who did not respond as instructed to one of these questions were excluded from the study.

2.2 | Results

We first examined correlations among all study variables (see Table 1), finding that a perceived norm of equality did not correlate with any prejudice measure (cold feelings: $r = -.07$; social distance: $r = -.06$; perceived outgroup threat: $r = .02$), although personal endorsement of equality did (cold feelings: $r = -.27$; social distance: $r = -.35$; perceived outgroup threat: $r = -.36$). Moreover, perceived norm of equality was positively associated with personal endorsement, $r = .33$.

To test Hypotheses 2a and 2b, that ideology moderates the relationship between the perceived norm and prejudice, we regressed each prejudice variable on perceived norm of equality, ideology, and the perceived norm of equality $\times$ ideology interaction. The moderating roles of economic ideology and social ideology were tested in separate models. The interactive effect of perceived norm and economic ideology on prejudice was not significant (cold feelings: $b = 0.42$, $SE = 1.12$, $t = 0.38$, $p = .706$, confidence interval (CI) = $[-1.79, 2.64]$; social distance: $b = 0.02$, $SE = 0.08$, $t = 0.29$, $p = .770$, CI = $[-0.14, 0.19]$; perceived outgroup threat: $b = 0.12$, $SE = 0.09$, $t = 1.29$, $p = .198$, CI = $[-0.06, 0.29]$), and neither was that of perceived norm and social ideology (cold feelings: $b = -1.48$, $SE = 0.99$, $t = -1.50$, $p = .136$, CI = $[-3.43, 0.47]$; social distance: $b = -0.06$, $SE = 0.07$, $t = -0.90$, $p = .367$, CI = $[-0.21, 0.08]$; perceived outgroup threat: $b = -0.00$, $SE = 0.08$, $t = -0.04$, $p = .966$, CI = $[-0.15, 0.15]$).

TABLE 1 Bi-variate correlations in Study 1.

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Perceived norm of equality	4.44	0.79	—					
2. Personal endorsement of equality	4.38	1.31	.33***	—				
3. Cold feelings	45.45	18.63	-.07	-.27***	—			
4. Social distance	2.89	1.36	-.06	-.35***	.66***	—		
5. Perceived outgroup threat	3.22	1.47	.02	-.36***	.61***	.62***	—	
6. Ideology on economic issues	3.89	1.31	.00	-.43***	.20**	.22**	.37***	—
7. Ideology on social issues	3.03	1.44	.04	-.34***	.35***	.38***	.53***	.39***

Note: Entries are Pearson's r .

** $p < .010$; *** $p < .001$.

To account for the possibility of an indirect relationship between norms and prejudice, we examined personal endorsement of equality as a potential mediator. An analysis using Hayes' (2013) PROCESS command in SPSS (Model 4) with 5,000 iterations uncovered indirect dampening effects of the perceived norm of equality through personal endorsement of equality on all prejudice measures, that is, cold feelings, $a \times b = -2.14$, $SE = 0.76$, $CI = [-3.80, -0.82]$, social distance, $a \times b = -0.21$, $SE = 0.06$, $CI = [-0.35, -0.11]$, and perceived outgroup threat, $a \times b = -0.28$, $SE = 0.08$, $CI = [-0.44, -0.14]$. However, the total effects of the perceived norm of equality on the prejudice variables were nonsignificant (cold feelings: $b = -1.65$, $SE = 1.59$, $t = -1.04$, $p = .300$, $CI = [-4.78, 1.48]$; social distance: $b = -0.11$, $SE = 0.12$, $t = -0.93$, $p = .351$, $CI = [-0.34, 0.12]$; perceived outgroup threat: $b = 0.05$, $SE = 0.13$, $t = 0.33$, $p = .739$, $CI = [-0.22, 0.31]$). Figure 1 summarises the path coefficients of the mediation model, as well as the coefficients for the total and direct effects.

We also performed a conditional indirect effect analysis using PROCESS Model 7 to test if the indirect effects reported above are moderated by economic or social ideology. The term "index" in all results below refers to the index of moderated mediation (Hayes, 2015). Results showed that economic ideology conditioned the indirect effects of a perceived norm of equality on cold feelings (index = -0.54 , $SE = 0.30$, $CI = [-1.22, -0.03]$), social distance (index = -0.05 , $SE = 0.03$, $CI = [-0.11, -0.01]$), and perceived outgroup threat (index = -0.07 , $SE = 0.04$, $CI = [-0.15, -0.01]$), but that social ideology did not have such a moderating role (cold feelings: index = -0.45 , $SE = 0.32$, $CI = [-1.16, 0.07]$; social distance: index = -0.04 , $SE = 0.03$, $CI = [-0.11, 0.01]$; perceived outgroup threat: index = -0.06 , $SE = 0.04$, $CI = [-0.14, 0.01]$). Specifically, the dampening indirect effects of the perceived norm of equality on prejudice variables were stronger for economic rightists (cold feelings: $a \times b = -2.86$, $SE = 0.98$, $CI = [-5.05, -1.20]$; social distance: -0.28 , $SE = 0.08$, $CI = [-0.45, -0.15]$; perceived outgroup threat: -0.37 , $SE = 0.10$, $CI = [-0.59, -0.20]$) than economic leftists (cold feelings: $a \times b = -1.46$, $SE = 0.68$, $CI = [-2.97, -0.34]$; social distance: -0.14 , $SE = 0.06$, $CI = [-0.27, -0.04]$; perceived outgroup threat: -0.19 , $SE = 0.07$, $CI = [-0.35, -0.06]$).

2.3 | Discussion

Study 1 provided partial support for Hypotheses 1 and 2b, since the perceived norm of equality was indirectly related to lower prejudice and this association was stronger for economic rightists than leftists. It is noteworthy that

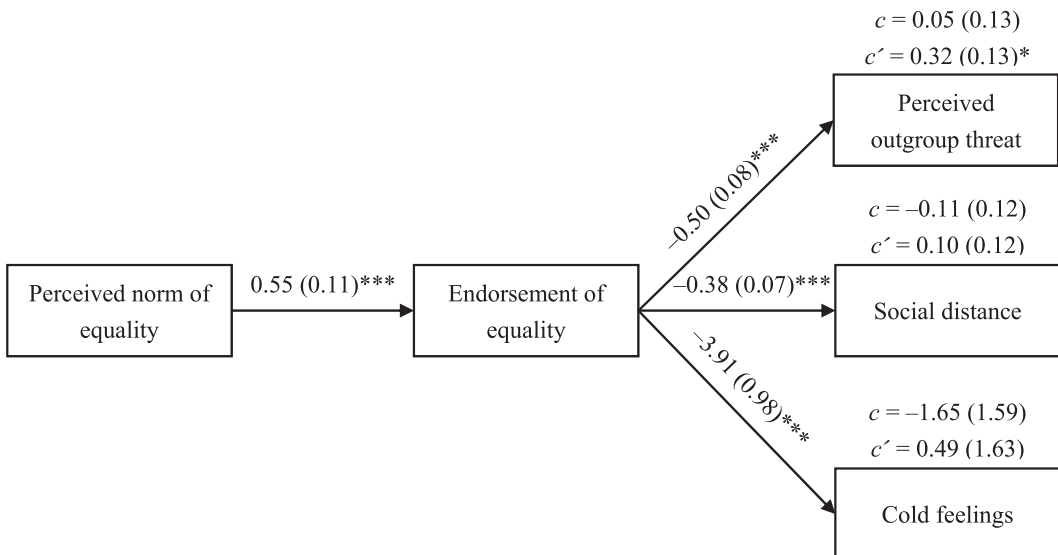


FIGURE 1 Mediation model examining the indirect effects of perceived norm of equality on prejudice in Study 1. Coefficients presented are unstandardized linear regression coefficients and in parentheses are standard errors. c : total effect; c' : direct effect. $*p < .050$; $***p < .001$.

we found moderation of perceived groups norms by economic and not social ideology. This may be explained by a fit between economic ideology and the content of the norm of equality that we made salient, which referred specifically to equality in terms of the allocation of resources (e.g., income and social benefits). One may reason that people's economic, but not necessarily social, political ideology makes people more or less sensitive to norms relating to economic (rather than sociocultural) issues.

However, this evidence was indirect and correlational, meaning it cannot inform causality. For example, a perceived norm of equality may be coloured by individuals' existing beliefs regarding equality, for example, due to a false consensus effect whereby people assume that their own beliefs are commonly endorsed by others (Ross, Greene, & House, 1977). With this limitation in mind, we conducted two experimental studies, allowing us to avoid relying on participants' self-reported norm perceptions and pre-existing endorsement of equality.

3 | STUDY 2a

Study 2a aimed to provide initial evidence for the causal relationship between norms of (in)equality and prejudice by employing a controlled experimental design. Specifically, we manipulated norms of equality and inequality, and compared both to an "empty" control condition in which no information on norms was presented. Per Hypothesis 1, we expected a norm of equality to reduce prejudice towards migrants, compared to an absence of normative information (i.e., an empty control condition). Moreover, we again aimed to test the competing Hypotheses 2a and 2b regarding the moderating role of different types of ideology.

3.1 | Participants

As preregistered, an a priori power analysis using G*Power 3.1 (Faul et al., 2007) suggested that a sample consisting of 207 participants was able to yield a power of 0.95 to detect a medium-size effect ($f^2 = 0.10$) in the regression analysis with five predictors. We recruited 312 Dutch participants without a migration background on Samplify (www.samplify.dynata.com), of whom 102 (equality norm: 31, inequality norm: 53, and control: 18) were excluded for failing at least one attention check, yielding a final sample of 210 (88 women; ages 18–79, $M = 52.25$, $SD = 15.25$). This sample size was sufficiently powered to detect the pre-determined effect size.

3.2 | Procedure and materials

After giving informed consent, participants in the experimental conditions first read the manipulation text and responded to a manipulation check, while those in the control condition skipped this part. All participants then responded to the prejudice measures and demographic items, including the political ideology measures. Finally, participants were thanked and debriefed.

3.2.1 | Manipulation

Participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions (social norm: equality vs. inequality vs. control). Participants in the two treatment conditions read about (contrived) results from the recent European Social Survey (ESS) indicating that most (around 63%) ESS respondents agreed (norm of equality) or disagreed (norm of inequality) with several statements favouring increased equality for migrants, for example, "Employers should do more to ensure equal job opportunities for Dutch people with and without a migration background." Those who were assigned to the control condition received no information.²

3.2.2 | Measures

As the *manipulation check*, a one-item measure of participants' perceived norm of equality was included, asking participants to indicate their perceptions of what percentage of Dutch people supports efforts to increase equality for people in the Netherlands, regardless of migration background. In addition, *cold feelings*, *social distance*, *perceived out-group threat*, *economic ideology*, and *social ideology* were assessed using identical items to those used in Study 1.³

We included three attention checks in the questionnaire. One for which we explicitly asked participants to indicate if they read that the majority of Dutch people supported more efforts to increase equality between Dutch people with and without a migration background, with choices “yes” and “no.” The other two were again IMCs, instructing participants to select answer 2 or 7 for each item. Participants who failed to respond as instructed to one of these questions were excluded from the study.

3.3 | Results

3.3.1 | Manipulation check

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed that the manipulation significantly affected the perceived norm of equality, $F(2, 207) = 11.53$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .10$. Pairwise comparisons showed that—as expected—perceived norm of equality was higher in the equality-norm condition ($M = 50.41$, $SD = 17.53$, $n = 69$) than in the inequality-norm condition ($M = 35.95$, $SD = 15.18$, $n = 63$), $t = 4.80$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.88$, and also than in the control condition ($M = 43.38$, $SD = 18.58$, $n = 78$), $t = 2.46$, $p = .015$, $d = 0.39$. Moreover, as expected, the perceived norm of equality was also lower in the inequality-norm condition than in the control condition, $t = 2.54$, $p = .012$, $d = 0.43$. These results indicated that we successfully manipulated norms of equality and inequality.

3.3.2 | Prejudice

To test how our manipulation affected prejudice,⁴ we first specified the control condition as the reference group and generated two dummy contrasts: D1, comparing the norm of equality and control conditions, and D2, comparing the norm of inequality and control conditions. We regressed each prejudice measure on D1 and D2 to examine the main effects of norms, finding that neither an equality norm nor an inequality norm (vs. control) significantly affected cold feelings (D1: $b = 1.15$, $SE = 3.99$, $t = 0.29$, $p = .773$, $CI = [-6.70, 9.01]$; D2: $b = 7.67$, $SE = 4.08$, $t = 1.88$, $p = .062$, $CI = [-0.38, 15.72]$), social distance (D1: $b = -0.19$, $SE = 0.25$, $t = -0.74$, $p = .462$, $CI = [-0.69, 0.31]$; D2: $b = -0.05$, $SE = 0.26$, $t = -0.21$, $p = .836$, $CI = [-0.57, 0.46]$), or perceived outgroup threat (D1: $b = 0.10$, $SE = 0.27$, $t = 0.39$, $p = .698$, $CI = [-0.42, 0.63]$; D2: $b = 0.21$, $SE = 0.27$, $t = 0.76$, $p = .447$, $CI = [-0.33, 0.74]$).

In addition, to test whether and how ideology moderated the relationship between norms and prejudice, we regressed each prejudice variable on D1, D2, ideology, as well as the $D1 \times$ ideology and $D2 \times$ ideology dummy contrasts. Again, we tested the moderating effects of both economic ideology and social ideology in separate regression models. As shown in Table 2, there was only a marginal trend that a norm of equality (vs. control) and social ideology interacted in affecting social distance, $b = -0.40$, $SE = 0.22$, $t = -1.82$, $p = .071$, $CI = [-0.83, 0.03]$, suggesting that the norm of equality (vs. control) decreased social distance to migrants among social rightists, $b = -0.83$, $SE = 0.37$, $t = -2.25$, $p = .025$, $CI = [-1.56, -0.10]$, but not among social leftists, $b = 0.12$, $SE = 0.35$, $t = 0.34$, $p = .733$, $CI = [-0.57, 0.81]$. In addition, Table 3 suggests a significant interactive effect of the norm of equality (vs. control) and social ideology on perceived outgroup threat, $b = -0.57$, $SE = 0.21$, $t = -2.76$, $p = .006$, $CI = [-0.97, -0.16]$, in the sense that the norm of equality (vs. control) decreased perceived threat from migrants among social rightists, $b = -0.91$, $SE = 0.35$, $t = -2.62$, $p = .009$, $CI = [-1.60, -0.23]$, but not among social leftists, $b = 0.45$, $SE = 0.33$,

TABLE 2 The interactive effect of social norm and ideology on social distance in Studies 2a and 2b.

Interaction term	Ideology	
	Economic ideology	Social ideology
Study 2a		
D1 × ideology	$b = 0.10, SE = 0.22, t = 0.44,$ $p = .658, CI = [-0.34, 0.54]$	$b = -0.40, SE = 0.22, t = -1.82,$ $p = .071, CI = [-0.83, 0.03]$
D2 × ideology	$b = -0.11, SE = 0.21, t = -0.51,$ $p = .609, CI = [-0.51, 0.30]$	$b = -0.15, SE = 0.21, t = -0.70,$ $p = .487, CI = [-0.56, 0.27]$
Study 2b		
D1 × ideology	$b = 0.23, SE = 0.14, t = 1.61,$ $p = .108, CI = [-0.05, 0.51]$	$b = -0.13, SE = 0.16, t = -0.83,$ $p = .408, CI = [-0.44, 0.18]$
D2 × ideology	$b = 0.21, SE = 0.16, t = 1.32,$ $p = .188, CI = [-0.10, 0.52]$	$b = 0.20, SE = 0.16, t = 1.30,$ $p = .196, CI = [-0.11, 0.51]$
D3 × ideology	$b = 0.16, SE = 0.14, t = 1.09,$ $p = .275, CI = [-0.12, 0.44]$	$b = 0.04, SE = 0.14, t = 0.29,$ $p = .769, CI = [-0.24, 0.32]$

$t = 1.35, p = .177, CI = [-0.21, 1.10]$. Moreover, the norm of inequality (vs. control) also interacted with social ideology in affecting perceived outgroup threat, $b = -0.58, SE = 0.20, t = -2.91, p = .004, CI = [-0.98, -0.19]$, revealing that the norm of inequality (vs. control) reduced perceived outgroup threat among social rightists, $b = -0.81, SE = 0.35, t = -2.31, p = .022, CI = [-1.50, -0.12]$, rather than social leftists, $b = 0.59, SE = 0.33, t = 1.81, p = .072, CI = [-0.05, 1.23]$. Nonetheless, norms of equality and inequality did not interact with ideologies in affecting cold feelings (see Table 4).

3.4 | Discussion

By manipulating social norms in terms of the majority's support for practices promoting equality, Study 2a provided some evidence to support our hypotheses. On the one hand, the results yielded support for Hypothesis 2b, since a norm of *equality* (vs. control) reduced prejudice only among socially conservative individuals and not among socially progressive individuals. On the other hand, social rightists' prejudice was also mitigated by a norm of *inequality* (vs. control). A possible reason for the latter, somewhat surprising, finding might be that we unintentionally primed participants with an extra, *prescriptive* norm (e.g., “employers *should* do more to ensure equal job opportunities for Dutch people with and without a migration background”) in the manipulation of both equality and inequality norms. Additionally, and unlike Study 1, Study 2b indicated a role for *social* ideology in moderating the norms-prejudice relationship. This may be because our manipulation was less geared towards economic issues than the measurement in Study 1, but the finding nonetheless requires replication. In order to address both of these issues, we designed Study 2b as a replication of Study 1, but also adjusted slightly the way we manipulated norms and added an additional control condition to ensure the mention of equality in describing the ESS questions did not in itself influence participants' norm perception.

4 | STUDY 2b

The current study aimed to replicate the finding of Study 2a that a norm of equality (vs. control) reduces social rightists' prejudice towards migrants. An additional goal of Study 2b was to improve the manipulation of norms in light of the limitations of Study 2a.

TABLE 3 The interactive effect of norm and ideology on perceived outgroup threat in Studies 2a and 2b.

Interaction term	Ideology	
	Economic ideology	Social ideology
Study 2a		
D1 × ideology	$b = 0.04, SE = 0.23, t = 0.16, p = .873, CI = [-0.42, 0.49]$	$b = -0.57, SE = 0.21, t = -2.76, p = .006, CI = [-0.97, -0.16]$
D2 × ideology	$b = 0.11, SE = 0.21, t = 0.53, p = .595, CI = [-0.31, 0.53]$	$b = -0.58, SE = 0.20, t = -2.91, p = .004, CI = [-0.98, -0.19]$
Study 2b		
D1 × ideology	$b = 0.09, SE = 0.15, t = 0.61, p = .545, CI = [-0.21, 0.39]$	$b = -0.42, SE = 0.15, t = -2.77, p = .006, CI = [-0.72, -0.12]$
D2 × ideology	$b = 0.00, SE = 0.17, t = 0.03, p = .977, CI = [-0.32, 0.33]$	$b = -0.05, SE = 0.15, t = -0.32, p = .748, CI = [-0.34, 0.25]$
D3 × ideology	$b = 0.17, SE = 0.15, t = 1.13, p = .260, CI = [-0.13, 0.47]$	$b = -0.36, SE = 0.14, t = -2.62, p = .009, CI = [-0.62, -0.09]$

TABLE 4 The interactive effect of norm and ideology on cold feelings in Studies 2a and 2b.

Interaction term	Ideology	
	Economic ideology	Social ideology
Study 2a		
D1 × ideology	$b = 3.55, SE = 3.50, t = 1.02, p = .311, CI = [-3.35, 10.46]$	$b = -5.20, SE = 3.38, t = -1.54, p = .125, CI = [-11.85, 1.46]$
D2 × ideology	$b = -0.03, SE = 3.23, t = -0.01, p = .993, CI = [-6.39, 6.34]$	$b = -2.39, SE = 3.28, t = -0.73, p = .467, CI = [-8.85, 4.07]$
Study 2b		
D1 × ideology	$b = -0.06, SE = 2.21, t = -0.03, p = .979, CI = [-4.40, 4.29]$	$b = -5.35, SE = 2.46, t = -2.17, p = .031, CI = [-10.20, -0.49]$
D2 × ideology	$b = 0.50, SE = 2.43, t = 0.21, p = .837, CI = [-4.28, 5.28]$	$b = 0.55, SE = 2.44, t = 0.23, p = .821, CI = [-4.24, 5.35]$
D3 × ideology	$b = 0.99, SE = 2.19, t = 0.45, p = .652, CI = [-3.33, 5.31]$	$b = -2.25, SE = 2.21, t = -1.02, p = .311, CI = [-6.60, 2.11]$

4.1 | Participants

As preregistered, an a priori power analysis using G*Power 3.1 (Faul et al., 2007) suggested that a sample consisting of 285 participants was able to yield a power of 0.95 to detect a medium-size effect ($f^2 = 0.10$) in the regression analysis with 14 predictors. We recruited 315 Dutch participants on Prolific. After excluding 47 participants (equality norm: 12, inequality norm: 21, empty control: 5, and background-only control: 9) for failing at least one attention check, having already participated in a similar study, or having a migration background, we obtained final samples of 268. The final sample was not sufficiently powered. However, as we eventually decided not to include 14 predictors in the regression analysis to test any three-way interactive effect,⁵ regression analyses testing two-way interactive effects were sufficiently powered to detect effects larger than $f^2 = 0.08$, according to a sensitivity power analysis.

4.2 | Procedure and materials

The procedure was similar to that of Study 2a, except for several small changes to the manipulation, detailed below, designed to overcome the shortcomings of Study 2a.

4.2.1 | Manipulation

Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions (norm: equality vs. inequality vs. empty control vs. background-only control). Again, participants in the two treatment conditions read about (contrived) results from the recent ESS, but we changed the wording of the bogus survey questions used in Study 2a to avoid the use of the word “should,” which we suspected may have primed prescriptive norms. Accordingly, participants in the experimental conditions read responses to a modified set of questions (e.g., “To what extent do you support or oppose employers doing more to increase equality in job opportunities for migrants and native Dutch?”) but the response percentages they read were identical to those in Study 2a. Participants assigned to the empty control condition skipped this part, as in Study 2a. Since migration is a politicised topic, mentioning the bogus survey and questions may already remind participants of the attitudes of people around them regarding this issue and thus already elicit some norm perception. To examine and potentially rule out this possibility, we included an additional, background-only control condition, in which participants read about the questions in the ESS survey, but not about the survey results.

4.2.2 | Measures

The manipulation check item as well as the measures of *cold feelings*, *social distance*, *perceived outgroup threat*, *economic ideology* and *social ideology* were the same as those used in Study 2a.⁶ We included four attention checks similar to those used in Study 2a, of which three were again IMCs. Participants who failed to respond as instructed to one of these questions were excluded from the study.

4.3 | Results

4.3.1 | Manipulation check

A one-way ANOVA revealed that the manipulation significantly affected the perceived norm of equality, $F(3, 264) = 14.37, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.14$. As expected, the perceived norm of equality was higher in the equality-norm condition ($M = 55.39, SD = 12.10, n = 67$) than in the inequality-norm condition ($M = 38.46, SD = 13.95, n = 57$), $t = 6.31, p < .001, d = 1.30$, and the background-only condition ($M = 48.09, SD = 16.69, n = 74$), $t = 2.87, p = .004, d = 0.50$. Moreover, the perceived norm of equality was lower in the inequality-norm condition than in the background-only control condition, $t = 3.62, p < .001, d = 0.62$, and the empty control condition ($M = 51.47, SD = 16.06, n = 70$), $t = 4.96, p < .001, d = 0.86$. However, the perceived norm of equality did not significantly differ between the empty control condition and equality-norm condition, $t = 1.56, p = .120, d = 0.27$, or between the two control conditions, $t = 1.36, p = .174, d = 0.21$.

4.3.2 | Prejudice

To test whether norms can influence prejudice and how ideology might moderate this relationship, we repeated the analyses used in Study 2a, but including an additional dummy variable, D3, comparing the two control conditions.

First, regarding the main effects of norms, we found that the equality-norm, inequality-norm and background-only conditions (vs. the empty control condition) did not significantly influenced cold feelings (D1: $b = -2.98$, $SE = 3.38$, $t = -0.88$, $p = .379$, $CI = [-9.63, 3.68]$; D2: $b = 5.01$, $SE = 3.53$, $t = 1.42$, $p = .157$, $CI = [-1.94, 11.97]$; D3: $b = 2.08$, $SE = 3.34$, $t = 0.62$, $p = .534$, $CI = [-4.50, 8.66]$), social distance (D1: $b = -0.14$, $SE = 0.21$, $t = -0.65$, $p = .515$, $CI = [-0.56, 0.28]$; D2: $b = 0.27$, $SE = 0.22$, $t = 1.21$, $p = .228$, $CI = [-0.17, 0.71]$; D3: $b = 0.29$, $SE = 0.21$, $t = 1.37$, $p = .170$, $CI = [-0.13, 0.71]$), or perceived outgroup threat (D1: $b = -0.10$, $SE = 0.24$, $t = -0.40$, $p = .688$, $CI = [-0.56, 0.37]$; D2: $b = 0.36$, $SE = 0.25$, $t = 1.44$, $p = .152$, $CI = [-0.13, 0.85]$; D3: $b = 0.14$, $SE = 0.24$, $t = 0.59$, $p = .557$, $CI = [-0.33, 0.60]$).

Nonetheless, as shown in Table 4, we found that the norm of equality (vs. empty control) interacted with social ideology in affecting cold feelings, $b = -5.35$, $SE = 2.46$, $t = -2.17$, $p = .031$, $CI = [-10.20, -0.49]$. Decomposition of the interaction showed that the norm of equality (vs. empty control) decreased cold feelings towards migrants among social rightists, $b = -10.24$, $SE = 4.72$, $t = -2.17$, $p = .031$, $CI = [-19.54, -0.95]$, but not among social leftists, $b = 3.91$, $SE = 4.15$, $t = 0.94$, $p = .348$, $CI = [-4.27, 12.08]$.

In terms of perceived outgroup threat as another prejudice measure, as shown in Table 3, there was a significant interactive effect of the norm of equality (vs. empty control) and social ideology on perceived outgroup threat, $b = -0.42$, $SE = 0.15$, $t = -2.77$, $p = .006$, $CI = [-0.72, -0.12]$, as the norm of equality reduced perceived threat from migrants among social rightists, $b = -0.64$, $SE = 0.29$, $t = -2.22$, $p = .027$, $CI = [-1.22, -0.07]$, but not among social leftists, $b = 0.47$, $SE = 0.25$, $t = 1.82$, $p = .069$, $CI = [-0.04, 0.97]$. The background-only (vs. empty control) condition also interacted with social ideology in affecting perceived outgroup threat, $b = -0.36$, $SE = 0.14$, $t = -2.62$, $p = .009$, $CI = [-0.62, -0.09]$, suggesting that it reduced perceived outgroup threat among social rightists, $b = -0.55$, $SE = 0.25$, $t = -2.18$, $p = .031$, $CI = [-1.04, -0.05]$, but not among social leftists, $b = 0.39$, $SE = 0.26$, $t = 1.51$, $p = .133$, $CI = [-0.12, 0.91]$.

Finally, regarding social distance, none of the interactive effects of the norm manipulation and the ideology dimensions on it reached significance (see Table 2).

4.4 | Discussion

Consistent with Hypothesis 2b and Study 2a, Study 2b revealed that a norm of equality (vs. empty control) reduced perceived threat from migrants and cold feelings towards migrants, but only among social rightists. As mentioned before, we attributed this particular prejudice-reduction effect among social rightists to values such as submissiveness to norms and a high need for affiliation (Altemeyer, 1998; Michaud et al., 2009; Stenner, 2009). These social-conservative values and needs, together, can drive social rightists to accept anti-prejudice norms supported by the majority of their ingroup members, with the desire to be accepted and liked by them. In contrast, although social leftists may still be somewhat sensitive to anti-prejudice norms, their prejudice towards migrants was already low (Crawford & Brandt, 2020; Duckitt et al., 2002; Federico & Sidanius, 2002), potentially creating a floor effect.

5 | JOINT ANALYSIS OF STUDIES 2A AND 2B

Given the highly similar methodologies of Studies 2a and 2b, as well as the slight inconsistency between them regarding the effects of norm manipulation, we combined the data of both studies and conducted a joint analysis of each outcome variable aimed at identifying the pattern of the most reliable findings. Since the background-only control condition was not included in Study 2a, we removed the data for this condition from the joint analysis.

Employing mixed linear modelling with study (2a vs. 2b) as the cluster variable, we first examined the main effects of the norm of equality (vs. empty control) and the norm of inequality (vs. empty control) on each outcome variable. First, we found that the norm of equality (vs. empty control) did not significantly influence prejudice (cold

feelings: $b = -0.87$, $SE = 2.60$, $t = -0.34$, $p = .738$, $CI = [-5.97, 4.22]$; social distance: $b = -0.16$, $SE = 0.16$, $t = -1.00$, $p = .318$, $CI = [-0.49, 0.16]$; perceived outgroup threat: $b = 0.01$, $SE = 0.18$, $t = 0.03$, $p = .977$, $CI = [-0.34, 0.35]$). In contrast, the norm of inequality (vs. empty control) significantly increased cold feelings ($b = 6.39$, $SE = 2.69$, $t = 2.37$, $p = .018$, $CI = [1.11, 11.66]$) but did not influence social distance ($b = 0.10$, $SE = 0.17$, $t = 0.60$, $p = .550$, $CI = [-0.23, 0.44]$) and perceived outgroup threat distance ($b = 0.28$, $SE = 0.18$, $t = 1.52$, $p = .129$, $CI = [-0.08, 0.64]$).

Additionally, to test the moderating role of ideology, we added economic/social ideology as a moderator to the above model. As shown in Table 5, the interactive effects of the norm of equality (vs. empty control) and social ideology on cold feelings and social distance were significant. Unpacking this effect showed that the norm of equality (vs. empty control) reduced cold feelings and social distance among social rightists (cold feelings: $b = -7.00$, $SE = 3.52$, $t = -1.99$, $p = .047$, $CI = [-13.91, -0.08]$; social distance: $b = -0.55$, $SE = 0.23$, $t = -2.44$, $p = .015$, $CI = [-1.00, -0.11]$) but not among social leftists (cold feelings: $b = 2.68$, $SE = 3.36$, $t = 0.80$, $p = .425$, $CI = [-3.29, 9.28]$; social distance: $b = 0.07$, $SE = 0.22$, $t = 0.33$, $p = .738$, $CI = [-0.35, 0.50]$). Additionally, the effects of both the norm of equality (vs. empty control) and the norm of inequality (vs. empty control) on perceived outgroup threat were conditioned by social ideology. Specifically, the norm of equality (vs. empty control) decreased perceived outgroup threat among social rightists ($b = -0.65$, $SE = 0.21$, $t = -3.07$, $p = .002$, $CI = [-1.07, -0.23]$) but not among social leftists ($b = 0.39$, $SE = 0.20$, $t = 1.92$, $p = .056$, $CI = [-0.01, 0.79]$), whereas the norm of inequality (vs. empty control) increased perceived outgroup threat among social leftists ($b = 0.48$, $SE = 0.22$, $t = 2.24$, $p = .025$, $CI = [0.06, 0.91]$) but not among social rightists ($b = -0.34$, $SE = 0.21$, $t = -1.61$, $p = .108$, $CI = [-0.77, 0.08]$). Finally, the interactive effects of the norm of inequality (vs. empty control) and social ideology on cold feelings and social distance were not significant, and, economic ideology did not moderate the effects of the norm of equality (vs. empty control) and the norm of inequality (vs. empty control) on any prejudice measure.

6 | GENERAL DISCUSSION

Across three studies, we tested the overarching hypothesis that a norm of equality can reduce prejudice towards migrants, as well as two competing hypotheses regarding the role of ideology in shaping this relationship. That is, we

TABLE 5 The interactive effect of norm and ideology on prejudice in the joint analysis of Studies 2a and 2b.

Interaction term	Prejudice		
	Cold feelings	Social distance	Perceived outgroup threat
Moderator: Economic ideology			
Norm of equality (vs. empty control) $\times$ ideology	$b = 1.61$, $SE = 1.92$, $t = 0.84$, $p = .403$, $CI = [-2.15, 5.37]$	$b = 0.17$, $SE = 0.12$, $t = 1.41$, $p = .158$, $CI = [-0.07, 0.41]$	$b = 0.09$, $SE = 0.13$, $t = 0.66$, $p = .509$, $CI = [-0.17, 0.34]$
Norm of inequality (vs. empty control) $\times$ ideology	$b = 0.22$, $SE = 1.94$, $t = 0.11$, $p = .912$, $CI = [-3.59, 4.02]$	$b = 0.05$, $SE = 0.12$, $t = 0.41$, $p = .683$, $CI = [-0.19, 0.29]$	$b = 0.05$, $SE = 0.13$, $t = 0.41$, $p = .680$, $CI = [-0.20, 0.31]$
Moderator: Social ideology			
Norm of equality (vs. empty control) $\times$ ideology	$b = -3.27$, $SE = 1.66$, $t = -1.96$, $p = .050$, $CI = [-6.53, -0.01]$	$b = -0.21$, $SE = 0.11$, $t = -1.97$, $p = .050$, $CI = [-0.42, -0.00]$	$b = -0.35$, $SE = 0.10$, $t = -3.49$, $p < .001$, $CI = [-0.55, -0.15]$
Norm of inequality (vs. empty control) $\times$ ideology	$b = -0.47$, $SE = 1.71$, $t = -0.28$, $p = .783$, $CI = [-3.81, 2.87]$	$b = -0.05$, $SE = 0.11$, $t = -0.45$, $p = .653$, $CI = [-0.26, 0.17]$	$b = -0.28$, $SE = 0.10$, $t = -2.71$, $p = .007$, $CI = [-0.48, -0.08]$

proposed that individuals with either a more rightist or leftist ideology would be particularly susceptible to a norm of equality. Study 1 showed that a norm of equality predicted reduced prejudice towards migrants through increased personal endorsement of equality, and this association was stronger for economic rightists than leftists. Studies 2a and 2b, along with a joint analysis of them, additionally suggested that a norm of equality reduced such prejudice only among social rightists.

6.1 | Implications

First, our research contributes to the literature on prejudice and prejudice reduction. Promoting anti-prejudice social norms has received increased attention as a promising approach to prejudice reduction (e.g., Borinca, Andrighetto, et al., 2022; Crandall et al., 2002; Meleady, 2021; Wyer, 2010), but its effectiveness remains a complex and even somewhat controversial issue (Falomir-Pichastor et al., 2017; Kauff et al., 2013; Legault et al., 2011). Our results further highlight this complexity, but also make steps towards resolving it by identifying possible boundary conditions (i.e., political ideology). By introducing ideology as a moderator of the norm-prejudice relationship, the current research demonstrates that not all people are impacted by equality norms similarly. In Studies 2a and 2b, a norm of equality reduced prejudice towards migrants only among social rightists. The presence of prejudice-reduction effects mostly among social rightists rather than social leftists may stem from already-low anti-migrant prejudice among leftists (Crawford & Brandt, 2020). These findings are largely consistent with previous evidence that ideological rightists are more susceptible to normative conformity (Crawford et al., 2017; Stenner, 2009) and point to the importance of considering individual differences in the understanding of normative influence.

The present research is also relevant to the literature on the relationship between ideology and prejudice. In the introduction, we proposed two reasons why anti-prejudice norms may be more effective in reducing prejudice among rightists. First, rightists (and especially social conservatives) are more sensitive to norms due to their general tendency towards submissiveness and a high need for affiliation (Altemeyer, 1998; Michaud et al., 2009; Stenner, 2009). Second, there may be more room for reducing prejudice among rightists (both economic and social conservatives) because rightists usually hold more (initial) prejudice towards migrant groups than leftists (Crawford & Brandt, 2020; Duckitt et al., 2002; Federico & Sidanius, 2002). The results of Studies 2a and 2b seem to speak in favour of the first explanation, since they revealed significant prejudice reduction due to an equality norm only among social rightists. However, in Study 1, we found the (indirect) relationship between a perceived norm of equality and reduced prejudice also among *economic* rightists. The second reason above may explain this: considering that rightist participants in our studies had moderate baseline levels of prejudice, anti-prejudice norms may impact how they view immigrants; in contrast, there is little room for leftists to reduce their already-low levels of prejudice. We find the second explanation more plausible, because we found prejudice reduction due to a norm on equality both for economic rightists (Study 1) and for social rightists (Studies 2a and 2b).

We suspect that the reason we found evidence for economic ideology as a moderator in Study 1 but for social ideology in Studies 2a and 2b was the content of norms. Specifically, in Study 1, we measured the perceived norm of equality in terms of equal allocation of resources (e.g., income and social benefits) that is directly related to economic ideology, advantaging it as a potential moderator. In Studies 2a and 2b, we addressed this by manipulating norms of equality with respect to non-discrimination practices of employers, schools, and the government, thus relating the norms to both the economic and social dimensions of ideology.

6.2 | Limitations

The present study has several methodological and theoretical limitations that should be taken into consideration. First, the cross-sectional mediation analysis we conducted in Study 1 does not allow for too strong conclusions

regarding the relationship between the norm of equality and prejudice towards migrants, as neither causality nor the order of elements can be inferred from it. This limitation is put into perspective, however, by the two follow-up experimental studies that we subsequently conducted.

As indicated, the norm manipulations yielded somewhat inconsistent results across Studies 2a and 2b, where we adopted similar operationalisation of norms. That is, either a norm of equality (in both studies) and/or a norm of inequality (only in Study 2a) reduced perceived outgroup threat among social rightists. One possibility is that the finding of Study 2a stemmed from the fact that the manipulation included the word “should” in the statements about equality, thus inducing a *prescriptive* norm of equality across both experimental treatments. We addressed this issue then in Study 2b by using interrogative sentences (e.g., “To what extent do you support or oppose employers doing more to increase equality in job opportunities for migrants and native Dutch?”) to provide normative information that is not necessarily prescriptive. However, a novel issue that emerged in this particular study is that, based on the manipulation check, participants in the equality-norm condition did not perceive a significantly stronger norm of equality than participants in the empty control condition.

Another issue that should be noted concerns the unexpected finding that perceived outgroup threat was *lower* among social rightists in the “background-only” condition than in the “empty” control condition in Study 2b. One possible explanation, albeit speculative, is that the topic of migration is in itself threatening for social rightists upon first mention, but that this threat is down-regulated as time passes. Accordingly, in the “background-only” condition, the initial threat was induced when reading the information, but then slightly reduced by the time they responded to the threat measure. Conversely, in the “empty” control condition, the threat measure constituted the first mention of migration, possibly eliciting the (stronger) initial threat reaction. An additional factor may be the mere mention of the word “equality” in the “background-only” control condition, which may have made salient the social default in the Netherlands, that is, tolerance and equality—thus already serving as a (mild) norm manipulation.

It is also important to consider the limitation that we did neither examine the mechanism of the moderator nor consider alternative moderators. Despite our assumptions regarding the mechanism through which a norm of equality reduces prejudice among social rightists, we did not test this mechanism in the current studies. Future research needs to test the idea of conformity motivations being at play and perhaps additional mechanisms involved in the effects we found. Additionally, we investigated only one boundary condition for the impact of norms on prejudice (i.e., ideology) but ignored others that may also explain past inconsistent findings on the relationship between anti-prejudice norms and prejudice (e.g., identification with the majority group). Nonetheless, we were able to address such controversies at least partially by underscoring the importance of ideological differences in understanding the norm–prejudice relationship.

Moreover, we acknowledge the need to address further complexities of norm dynamics in prejudice towards migrants in community settings. Our findings were exclusively based on cross-sectional surveys and survey experiments, which have value but should be complemented by field studies. We recognise that in our studies we may have oversimplified the norm of equality and the diverse experiences people have when coming into contact with migrant populations. Nonetheless, at the current stage, a basic understanding of intergroup dynamics and psychological mechanisms underlying prejudice towards migrants is needed, and our experimental studies serve as the first step to figuring out the complexities in these dynamics and mechanisms. In this sense, our findings could inform the future development of interventions by highlighting the sociopsychological factors and individual differences that may influence the effectiveness of these practices. That said, the field could benefit from follow-up research addressing a diverse set of contexts, migrant groups and group norms.

Finally, it is important to note that a focus on equality may exacerbate the majority group's prejudice towards minorities under certain circumstances. That is, the notion of treating everyone equally can be misused to justify the dismantlement of welfare systems and initiatives specifically targeting marginalised groups. Related to equality, the majority groups' endorsement of colourblindness and tolerance has also been found to justify prejudice (Apfelbaum, Pauker, Sommers, & Ambady, 2010). For example, in our recent work, norms that stressed the need to tolerate migrants ironically reduced Dutch people's support for migrants from Turkey (Long & Çakmak, 2024).

7 | CONCLUSION

The present work provides evidence for a positive role of anti-prejudice norms in prejudice reduction, albeit one qualified by ideology. Beyond the theoretical contribution, we discussed above and the many opportunities to expand on these findings in future research, these findings hold promise for the actual betterment of intergroup relations. By better understanding how, why and for whom norms of equality can reduce prejudice, we may be able to inform real-world interventions to combat prejudice and improve intergroup relations, for the betterment of society at large.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

ETHICS STATEMENT

This research adheres to the ethical guidelines specified in the APA Code of Conduct as well as the Netherlands Code of Conduct for Research Integrity, and was reviewed and approved by the Psychology Research Ethics Committee of Leiden University.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in OSF at <https://osf.io/d3vpy/>.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ Study 1 included additional operationalisations of prejudice, namely political intolerance and negative emotions, as well as an additional operationalisation of ideology, namely general ideology. In addition, we also assessed prejudice towards migrants from Eastern Europe in Study 1. Details can be found in Appendix C, Supporting Information.
- ² The development of the manipulation was informed by an unsuccessful but informative study (see Appendix C, Supporting Information), which we repurposed as a pilot study due to its faulty manipulation. In the pilot study, data showed that information about a norm countering equality that we presented in the inequality norm condition appeared to be less credible to participants. A reason might be that Dutch participants had prior knowledge of normative attitudes in support of equality and inclusion prevailing in Dutch society. To address this shortcoming, we developed the current manipulation of (in)equality norms based on the trajectory of norms instead of their absolute value.
- ³ We also assessed general ideology and the need for social approval in Study 2a (see Appendix C, Supporting Information).
- ⁴ Because perceived threat is often seen as an antecedent of prejudice, we also examined it as a potential mediator for the relations between norms and prejudice in Studies 2a and 2b. The results of these analyses can be found in Appendix C, Supporting Information.
- ⁵ Initially, we aimed to test the three-way interactive effect of norms, ideology and need for social approval in Study 2b, but finally, we did not perform this analysis due to obviously insufficient power.
- ⁶ We also assessed general ideology, status-quo ideology, and need for social approval and the threat of social change in Study 2b (see Appendix C, Supporting Information).

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

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