

## Attitudes Towards Immigrants: Evidence from Veterans of Colonial Wars in Africa

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**Abstract :** Anti-minority discrimination is a persistent phenomenon with long-run effects. While there is a vast literature in economics and psychology that shows that personality and beliefs are not fixed and can be altered by experience, particularly in the so-called impressionable years in early adulthood, less is known about the long-lasting impacts of major events occurring during this time on minority attitudes. In this paper, we study the impact of serving in the military on long-term attitudes towards minorities. For many, military conscription and serving in war are unique life-shaping events. In the context of military service, individuals from different socioeconomic backgrounds interact and learn with each other, potentially changing their views and attitudes in a persistent manner. A prominent theory about the change of attitudes is the contact theory. It suggests that prejudice can be decreased if members of the groups interact with one another. The present paper adds to the literature by providing evidence from a more complicated setting involving the exposure to combat. We study the attitudes of veterans of the Portuguese Colonial War between 1961 and 1974, what was the latest war between African independence movements and Europeans. More than 70 percent of military age Portuguese men were drafted every year and sent to fight in Africa in the widest draft in post-World War II Western Europe. The contact between Portuguese and African soldiers was both cooperative as well as adversarial. Portuguese fought against but also alongside locally recruited African men, who represented half of the Portuguese contingent for substantial periods. We use data from the European Social Survey to identify Portuguese citizens likely to have been drafted and were sent to fight in the former Portuguese colonies in Africa. We show that men likely to have fought in African wars are more accepting of immigrants than women of their same cohort, as well as than males from younger and older cohorts. The use of corresponding cohorts from Spain as placebo tests confirms our results. Our findings also hold in a regression discontinuity design setting.

**Keywords :** attitudes, immigration, war in Africa, veterans, Portugal

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