

Social dominance orientation and prejudice against Chinese-Indonesian: Examining the role of realistic threat as mediator

Orientasi dominasi sosial dan prasangka terhadap etnis Tionghoa-Indonesia: Peran ancaman realistik sebagai mediator

Audi Ahmad Rikardi^{1,2}, Haidar Buldan Thontowi²

¹Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta
Jl. A. Yani, Mendungan, Pabelan, Sukoharjo, Central Java 57169, Indonesia

²Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Sleman, Indonesia
Bulaksumur, Caturtunggal, Depok, Sleman, Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta 55281, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Prejudice toward Chinese Indonesians persists in the post-Reformation era. This study examined the role of realistic threat as a mediator between social dominance orientation and prejudice toward Chinese Indonesians. A total of 241 participants (Mage = 31.88, SD = 12.56), comprising Indonesian citizens of Javanese, Sundanese, Betawi, Madurese, Bugis, Malay, and Minangkabau ethnicity, were participated online using convenience sampling. All three variables were measured using validated scales and analyzed through bootstrapped mediation with 5,000 iterations using Jamovi software. Results indicated that realistic threat significantly mediated the relationship between social dominance orientation and prejudice toward Chinese Indonesians ($B = 0.03$, 95% CI [0.01, 0.05], $p = .023$). The direct effect of social dominance orientation on prejudice remained significant after controlling for the mediator ($B = 0.07$, 95% CI [0.03, 0.12], $p < .001$). These findings imply a necessity for policymakers to initiate intervention programs aimed at minimizing realistic threat perceptions toward Chinese Indonesians, as part of broader efforts to mitigate intergroup prejudice in Indonesia.

ABSTRAK

Prasangka terhadap etnis Tionghoa di Indonesia masih terjadi di era pascareformasi. Penelitian ini bertujuan menguji peran ancaman realistik sebagai mediator hubungan orientasi dominasi sosial dan prasangka terhadap etnis Tionghoa. Sebanyak 241 partisipan ($M = 31,88$, $SD = 12,56$) yang merupakan Warga Negara Indonesia beretnis Jawa, Sunda, Betawi, Madura, Bugis, Melayu, dan Minangkabau direkrut secara daring menggunakan teknik convenience sampling. Ketiga variabel diukur menggunakan skala yang telah tervalidasi dan dianalisis menggunakan pendekatan bootstrapped mediation sebanyak 5.000 iterasi melalui perangkat lunak Jamovi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan ancaman realistik secara signifikan memediasi hubungan antara orientasi dominasi sosial dan prasangka terhadap etnis Tionghoa ($B = 0,03$, 95% CI [0,01–0,05], $p = .023$). Efek langsung orientasi dominasi sosial terhadap prasangka tetap signifikan setelah mediator dikontrol ($B = 0,07$, CI[0,03-0,12], $p < .001$). Temuan ini mengimplikasikan bahwa pengambil kebijakan perlu membuat program intervensi yang mereduksi persepsi ancaman realistik terhadap etnis Tionghoa perlu dipertimbangkan dalam upaya mengurangi prasangka antarkelompok di Indonesia.

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✉ Corresponding Author: **Audi Ahmad Rikardi** | E-mail: aar318@ums.ac.id

1. INTRODUCTION

Prejudice referred as negative attitudes toward outgroup or member of outgroup (Stangor, 2016). Chinese Indonesians are among the outgroups that have experienced persistent prejudice in Indonesia since the New Order era. At the time, they were perceived as being involved in the G30S event because of alleged connections between the Chinese Indonesian community and the Communist Party of China (Syavira & Amindoni, 2021; Zhou, 2014). In addition, Chinese Indonesians, who are part of an ethnic minority, were also suspected of controlling 70 percent of Indonesia's economy (Chua, 2004). Right at the end of the New Order era in 1998, Chinese Indonesians experienced physical assaults from other ethnic groups, while their properties were plundered and damaged (Panggabean & Smith, 2011). Chinese Indonesian women also became victims of sexual violence (Andajani-Sutjahjo et al., 2018; Mydans, 1998; Suryadinata, 2008).

During the New Order era, it was mandatory for Chinese Indonesians to follow assimilation policies, such as changing their Chinese names into Indonesian names, being prohibited from celebrating Chinese New Year, and facing difficulties in accessing public administration (Chua, 2004; Kuntjara & Hoon, 2020). In contrast, the policies toward Chinese Indonesians gradually changed during the Reformation era. The government allowed Chinese Indonesians to celebrate Chinese New Year, permitted socio-cultural activities, and recognized Confucianism as one of the official religions in Indonesia (Freedman, 2003; Kuntjara & Hoon, 2020). Chinese Indonesians were officially recorded as one of the ethnic groups in Indonesia through Law Number 2 of 2006 on Indonesian Citizenship (Trisnanto, 2007).

However, a survey by Fossati et al. (2017) reported that 46.3 percent of respondents still believed that Chinese Indonesians are too greedy and overly ambitious. In addition, 48.4 percent of respondents still assumed that Chinese Indonesians remain highly loyal to China. Furthermore, 48.6 percent of respondents agreed that Chinese Indonesians do not care about the fate of other ethnic groups except their own. In other words, negative attitudes toward Chinese Indonesians still occur in the Reformation era, even though Chinese Indonesians are legally recognized as part of Indonesia's ethnic groups.

Negative attitudes toward Chinese Indonesians also appeared during the Jakarta gubernatorial election. Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, a Chinese Indonesian gubernatorial candidate, faced rejection as the Governor of Jakarta. The rejection was based on reluctance to be led by a Chinese Indonesian leader (Herlijanto, 2019; Setijadi, 2017; Tarahita & Rahmat, 2019). Although Chinese Indonesians identify themselves as Indonesians (Putra et al., 2013), some groups in society still perceive them as not fully Indonesian, but rather as foreigners or non-natives (Putra, 2016). In addition, rejection of Chinese Indonesians is associated with income level and occurs among individuals across different income groups. Rejection may also vary by ethnic background, with the Malay ethnic group showing the highest level of rejection (Setijadi, 2017).

At the same time, negative sentiments toward Chinese Indonesians have become stronger especially on social media (Soderborg & Muhtadi, 2021). Social media, which can provide users with a degree of anonymity, has become a platform for expressing hate speech toward Chinese Indonesians. Facebook is one example of a social media platform where such expressions occur. When posts about Chinese Indonesians are uploaded, many responses from users are negative and include stereotypes that Chinese Indonesians are stingy, untrustworthy, difficult to integrate with other ethnic groups, ambitious to control

the country, and not legitimate heirs capable of maintaining the continuity of the Indonesian nation (Lie & Sandel, 2020).

Studies by Fossati et al. (2017), Herlijanto (2019), Kuntjara & Hoon (2020), Lie & Sandel (2020), and Putra (2016) explain that prejudice toward Chinese Indonesians has persisted throughout the Reformation era. In other words, prejudice toward Chinese Indonesians has continued to occur over a long period of time.

One variable that can predict prejudice is social dominance orientation (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Social dominance orientation refers to an individual's tendency to dominate other groups and maintain hierarchy in social status. It also reflects a preference for social inequality and opposition to equality between social groups (Ho et al., 2015; Sidanius & Pratto, 2004).

Social dominance orientation is a part of social dominance theory (Sidanius & Pratto, 2004). According to social dominance theory, the social structure of society tends to be based on group hierarchy, consisting of dominant and submissive groups. The settled hierarchy can be based on the age system, the gender system, and the arbitrary-set system. Hierarchy based on the age system means that adults have more power than younger people. Hierarchy based on the gender system indicates that men have more power than women. Meanwhile, hierarchy based on the arbitrary-set system is formed by social constructs based on group characteristics, such as clan, ethnicity, nationality, religious sect, and other social constructs (Sidanius & Pratto, 2004).

In social dominance theory, individuals with high social dominance orientation tend to maintain unequal social hierarchy (Sidanius & Pratto, 2001). A hierarchical social structure is considered natural and is favored by the dominant group (Pratto et al., 1994). One way to maintain an unequal social hierarchy is by holding prejudice toward other groups (Pratto & Shih, 2000). A study by Brubacher et al. (2022) conducted in South Africa explains that individuals who agree with unequal social structures and desire to dominate other groups tend to hold prejudice toward other groups.

Another model related to social dominance orientation and prejudice is the Dual-Process Model (DPM) proposed by Duckitt (2006). The DPM explains that social dominance orientation can be related to intergroup prejudice through the mediation of competitive feelings. Individuals with high social dominance orientation tend to perceive the world as full of competition for resources. Therefore, individuals with social dominance orientation will hold prejudice toward groups that are considered competitors in the pursuit of resources, even when the competitor group is a subordinate group with minority status and weaker power. The DPM is similar to the study by Jackson & Esses (2000), which explains that individuals with social dominance orientation hold negative attitudes toward immigrants when they perceive immigrants as rival groups in economic success.

Threat consists of realistic threat and symbolic threat. Realistic threat refers to something that threatens life, existence, and resources, while symbolic threat refers to something that threatens values, norms, and worldviews. Individuals can hold prejudice toward groups or group members who are perceived as threatening (Stephan et al., 2009; Stephan & Stephan, 2000). The antecedents of threat can differ depending on the underlying motive. The antecedent of symbolic threat can be right-wing authoritarian personality, whereas the antecedent of realistic threat is social dominance orientation (Stephan et al., 2009).

Threat is an antecedent of intergroup prejudice (Riek et al., 2016; Stephan et al., 2009). One group that is often perceived as a threat is minority groups, such as immigrants or Muslim groups in Europe. Immigrants are perceived by locals as a threatening group, both symbolically and realistically, making them a target of prejudice (Croucher, 2013). In addition, a study by Jedinger & Eisentraut (2020) conducted in Germany explains that threat is an antecedent of prejudice toward different minority groups. Minority groups such as Muslims, refugees, Sinti people, and Romani people become targets of prejudice because they are perceived as a threat to German culture, the German economy, and public safety.

In addition, previous studies explain that threat can act as a mediating variable in explaining intergroup prejudice with different predictors (Burhan & Sani, 2013; Makashvili et al., 2018; Uenal, 2016; Velasco González et al., 2008; Vezzali & Giovannini, 2010). One type of threat that can explain intergroup prejudice, particularly prejudice caused by economic competition, is realistic threat (Maddux et al., 2008). Furthermore, according to Stephan et al. (2009), realistic threat can be caused by social dominance orientation. Meanwhile, in Indonesia, it is assumed that Chinese Indonesians, as a minority group that holds economic power, become competitors of the native population in achieving economic success and thus become targets of prejudice (Burhan & Sani, 2013; Chua, 2004; Fossati et al., 2017; Herlijanto, 2019; Suryaningtyas & Weningtyastuti, 2018). Therefore, realistic threat may act as a mediator in explaining the role of social dominance orientation in prejudice toward Chinese Indonesians.

Previous studies have shown that social dominance orientation can explain intergroup prejudice through different mediators. For example, a study by Jackson & Esses (2000) explains that individuals with social dominance orientation can feel threatened by competition with immigrants for economic resources. In addition, Duckitt (2006) and Duckitt & Sibley (2007) explain that competitive feelings toward other groups act as a mediator between social dominance orientation and prejudice. Social dominance orientation generates a sense of intergroup competition, and the group perceived as a competitor becomes the target of prejudice.

According to Riek et al. (2016) and Vezzali & Giovannini (2010), competitive feelings over economic resources can be considered a form of realistic threat. Another study that used realistic threat as a mediator between social dominance orientation and prejudice was conducted by Uenal (2016). This study, while conducted in Germany, explains that individuals with high social dominance orientation scores tend to hold negative attitudes toward Muslim groups, mediated by realistic threat. In other words, individuals who tend to dominate other groups and support unequal social relations will hold prejudice toward Muslim groups when they perceive Muslim groups as a realistic threat.

This study clarifies the role of realistic threat as a mediator between social dominance orientation and prejudice toward other groups. Previous studies have mainly examined immigrants or Muslims as outgroups with relatively weak social positioning. In contrast, this study focuses on Chinese Indonesians, a minority group legally recognized as part of the Indonesian ingroup yet often perceived as economically powerful. This context addresses a gap in understanding whether the same mechanism applies to a group that occupies an inverse position: numerically a minority but perceived as economically dominant.

Based on the explanation above, social dominance orientation can act as a predictor of prejudice. In addition, realistic threat also acts as a predictor of prejudice. Social dominance orientation also leads to realistic threat, which subsequently leads to prejudice. Therefore,

it is hypothesized in this study that realistic threat mediates the relationship between social dominance orientation and prejudice toward Chinese Indonesians.

2. METHODS

Design

This study aims to examine realistic threat as mediator between social dominance orientation and prejudice. Therefore, a quantitative cross-sectional survey design is employed. Social dominance orientation is used as a predictor variable, while prejudice toward Chinese Indonesian as a dependent variable, and realistic threat as a mediator.

Participants

Based on a Monte Carlo power analysis (Schoemann et al., 2017), this study required a minimum of 220 participants to achieve a statistical power of 0.80. A total of 246 participants were recruited, of whom 241 met the inclusion criteria. The final sample consisted of Indonesian citizens aged 18 years and above who belonged to one of the following ethnic groups: Javanese, Sundanese, Betawi, Madurese, Bugis, Malay, or Minangkabau. Participants were recruited online using convenience sampling, with recruitment posters distributed through social media platforms.

Instruments

The predictor variable was measured using the Indonesian version of the SDO7 scale by Arifianto (2017), consisting of 16 items (e.g. "Certain groups should remain in their respective social statuses.") with responses ranging from 1 to 7 (1 = strongly oppose, 7 = strongly favor). Higher scores indicate greater support for unequal social structures and a stronger desire to dominate other groups. Construct validation using Confirmatory Factor Analysis revealed CFI = 0.92, TLI = 0.91, and SRMR = 0.06, indicating that the measurement model fit the data well. The scale's reliability, assessed using Cronbach's alpha, was 0.83, indicating that the scale used was reliable.

Prejudice toward Chinese Indonesians was measured using a scale developed by Burhan and Sani (2013). This scale consists of 5 items (e.g., "Ethnic Chinese are too demanding of equality.") with responses ranging from 1 to 5 (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Higher scores indicate a higher level of negative attitude toward Chinese Indonesians. Construct validation using Confirmatory Factor Analysis revealed CFI = 0.99, TLI = 0.99, and SRMR = 0.05, indicating that the measurement model fit the data well. The scale's reliability, assessed using Cronbach's alpha, was 0.76, indicating that the scale used was reliable.

Realistic threat was measured using a scale developed by Croucher et al. (2020). This scale was adapted from English into Bahasa Indonesia using the forward-backward translation method. Indonesians who have psychometric background, social psychology publication, and proficient in English were involved as translators. Expert review conducted by Indonesian who has stayed in United Kingdom and published similar articles. The scale consists of three items (e.g., "Because of the presence of Chinese, unemployment will increase") with response options ranged from 1 to 5 (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Higher scores indicate a higher level of realistic threat perceived by the participants. Content validation using Aiken's V produced values ranging from 0.9 to 0.95. Construct validation using Confirmatory Factor

Analysis revealed CFI = 1.00, TLI = 1.00, and SRMR = 0.00, indicating that the measurement model fit the data well. The Cronbach's alpha value of the realistic threat scale in this study was 0.91, indicating that the scale used was reliable.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using Jamovi software version 2.3 with the medmod module (The Jamovi Project, 2022). The data analysis produced descriptive statistics and hypothesis testing results. The mediation hypothesis was tested using a bootstrapped mediation approach with 5,000 sample iterations. The mediation test results explain the indirect effect, direct effect, and total effect. The determination of whether a variable was considered to function as a mediator when its confidence interval did not include zero (Efron, 2003; Hayes, 2018).

Ethical Clearance

Data collection began after obtaining ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Gadjah Mada, with reference number 3923/UN1/FPSi.1.3/SD/PT.01.04/2022.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This study involved 241 participants (Mage = 31.88, SD = 12.56), the majority of whom were female (N = 152), held a bachelor's degree as their highest level of education (N = 144), and were of Javanese ethnicity (N = 149), with ages ranging from 18 to 62 years.

Descriptive statistics revealed the mean and standard deviation of each variable. Social dominance orientation had a mean score of 37.55 (SD = 13.08), prejudice had a mean score of 15.54 (SD = 4.36), and realistic threat had a mean score of 8.24 (SD = 3.58). The correlation analysis among variables also showed that all variables were significantly and positively correlated. Social dominance orientation was correlated with prejudice ($r = 0.30, p < .001$) and with realistic threat ($r = 0.19, p = .004$), while realistic threat was correlated with prejudice ($r = 0.46, p < .001$). These results indicated that higher social dominance orientation is associated with higher prejudice and higher realistic threat. In addition, higher realistic threat is associated with higher prejudice.

Hypothesis testing using bootstrapped mediation with 5,000 sample iterations revealed that realistic threat mediated the relationship between social dominance orientation and prejudice toward Chinese Indonesians ($B = 0.03, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.01, 0.05], p = .023$). After controlling the mediator, the direct effect of social dominance orientation on prejudice toward Chinese Indonesians remained significant ($B = 0.07, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.03, 0.12], p < .001$). The confidence interval for the indirect effect did not include zero and therefore realistic threat mediates the relationship between social dominance orientation and prejudice toward Chinese Indonesians.

Path analysis showed that, on path a, social dominance orientation was significantly related to realistic threat ($B = 0.05, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.01, 0.09], p = .010$); on path b, realistic threat was significantly related to prejudice toward Chinese Indonesians ($B = 0.52, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.35, 0.68], p < .001$); and on path c2, social dominance orientation was significantly related to prejudice toward Chinese Indonesians ($B = 0.07, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.03, 0.12], p < .001$).

Table 1. Participant demographics

Variables	N	Percentage
Gender		
Male	89	37
Female	152	63
Total	241	100
Educational Level		
Senior High School	63	26
Diploma	15	6
Bachelor's Degree	144	60
Postgraduate	19	8
Total	241	100
Ethnicity		
Javanese	149	62
Sundanese	49	20
Bugis	13	5
Malay	12	5
Minangkabau	9	4
Madurese	5	2
Betawi	4	2
Total	241	100

Table 2. Mediation test results

Effect	B	SE	LLCI	ULCI	p
Indirect	0.03	0.01	0.01	0.05	.023
Direct	0.07	0.02	0.03	0.12	<.001
Total	0.10	0.02	0.06	0.14	<.001

Table 3. Path analysis

Path	B	SE	LLCI	ULCI	p
a	0.05	0.02	0.01	0.09	0.010
b	0.52	0.08	0.35	0.68	<.001
c ¹	0.07	0.02	0.03	0.12	<.001

Discussion

This study aimed to examine the role of realistic threat as a mediator between social dominance orientation and prejudice toward Chinese Indonesians. The results of this study found that realistic threat has a significant role as a mediator. Realistic threat as a mediator between social dominance orientation and prejudice has also been found in the context of Islamophobia (Uenal, 2016). Previous similar study also revealed that threat is a significant mediator between suspicious attitudes and prejudice toward immigrants in South Korea (Yuk & Shin, 2024). However, a study conducted in Eastern Europe including Albania, Russia, and Ukraine, found a different result, showing that realistic threat was not a significant mediator between social dominance orientation and pro-war attitudes (Voca et al., 2024).

The mediation results indicate that social dominance orientation increases cognitive sensitivity toward intergroup competition, which heightens the perception that Chinese Indonesians are a threatening group, thereby encouraging negative attitudes toward Chinese Indonesians. Vezzali & Giovannini (2010) found similar results in the context of prejudice toward immigrants in Italy. Therefore, this mediation mechanism appears to occur across various contexts, including both Western and Eastern countries.

However, based on path b, the role of realistic threat as a mediator was smaller than its role as a direct predictor of prejudice. This finding is consistent with a previous study conducted in Indonesia, which explained that both realistic threat and symbolic threat predict prejudice toward Chinese Indonesians (Burhan & Sani, 2013). The perception of realistic threat arises from the view that Chinese Indonesians control the economy, thereby threatening the existence of “local” Indonesians. This perception has been historically passed down across generations, particularly during the New Order era, in shaping the view of Chinese Indonesians as economic powerholders (Kuntjara & Hoon, 2020). The economic dominance of Chinese Indonesians is also reflected in Danantara through the Patriot Bond (Suryadinata & Negara, 2026). Another study also revealed that, compared to other types of threat, realistic threat is the strongest predictor of prejudice toward Chinese Indonesians (Yotes & Croucher, 2024).

Another finding of this study is that social dominance orientation predicts prejudice toward Chinese Indonesians. In other words, individuals who tend to favor unequal social hierarchies tend to hold more negative attitudes toward Chinese Indonesians, consistent with the findings of Sujatmika & Probowati (2016). In contrast, The and Tondok (2023) reported that social dominance orientation did not significantly predict attitudes toward Islamic fundamentalists among Christian participants.

The mechanism by which social dominance orientation predicts prejudice toward Chinese Indonesians can also be explained through the concept of legitimizing myths in social dominance theory (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). The myths that are maintained, such as the belief that Chinese Indonesians control the Indonesian economy (Setijadi, 2019), remain loyal to China (Fossati et al., 2017), and are not considered “true Indonesian” (Kuntjara & Hoon, 2020; Lie & Sandel, 2020; Yulianto & Harmoko, 2025), can further explain prejudice toward Chinese Indonesians.

In addition, social dominance orientation can act as a predictor of realistic threat. This is consistent with the view of Stephan et al. (2009), who stated that social dominance orientation is a predictor of realistic threat. High social dominance orientation leads to feelings of being threatened by other groups. According to Duckitt (2006), individuals with high social dominance orientation view the world as a competitive place, leading them to perceive competitor groups as threatening. In this study, Chinese Indonesians were perceived as competitors in employment and housing.

While Indonesia is a multicultural country consisting of diverse ethnic groups, the tendency to support unequal social hierarchy and to dominate other groups has the potential to endanger this diverse social structure. A study by Lee & Kim (2024) found that individuals with higher levels of social dominance orientation tend to hold more negative attitudes toward multiculturalism. Consequently, intervention is needed to address existing levels of social dominance orientation in order to mitigate the potential harm to existing social structure.

This study contributes to the understanding of prejudice toward Chinese Indonesians in Indonesia by examining the mechanism through which social dominance orientation is associated with prejudice through realistic threat. The findings indicate that realistic threat plays a greater role as a direct predictor of prejudice than as a mediator. Future research may therefore consider examining realistic threat as a predictor of prejudice.

In addition, this study found that social dominance orientation directly predicts prejudice toward Chinese Indonesians. In other words, individuals who prefer hierarchical social structures and seek to dominate other groups tend to hold more negative attitudes toward Chinese Indonesians. Given Indonesia's ethnic diversity, education that promotes equality among social groups may help reduce negative intergroup attitudes.

Several limitations have been observed in this study. First, the design was cross-sectional, which does not allow for causal inference. Therefore, future research should add an experimental design to further examine causal relationships in the context of intergroup relations. Second, the majority of participants were of Javanese ethnicity; future research should recruit a sample with a more balanced distribution of ethnic groups. The sampling technique used could also be changed from convenience sampling to stratified random sampling or quota sampling.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study aimed to examine the role of realistic threat as a mediator between social dominance orientation and prejudice toward Chinese Indonesians. The results showed that realistic threat plays a role in mediating the relationship between the two variables. However, the role of realistic threat as a direct predictor of prejudice toward Chinese Indonesians was found to be greater than its role as a mediator. The implication of this study is that it provides further evidence that prejudice toward Chinese Indonesians still exists in the post-Reformation era. Although Chinese Indonesians are legally recognized as part of Indonesia's diverse population, perceptions of them as foreigners persist and may have intensified in the social media. Therefore, policymakers are suggested to conduct necessary social intervention regarding ethnic diversity in order to mitigate a prolonged social problem.

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