

# From Internalized Equality to Tolerance Towards Others: Self-Respect Predicts Tolerance for Minority Groups in Serbia and Syria

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**Supplementary Materials:** Code, Data, Materials [see [Index of Supplementary Materials](#)]



## Abstract

Prior research has shown that self-respect (i.e., a person's belief of possessing the same rights as others) predicted concern for others' rights (in terms of positive attitudes towards human rights) and a generally tolerant attitude towards dissenting others. In this research, we go beyond prior research and investigate whether self-respect is associated with tolerance towards minority groups in countries where socio-political (and religious) tensions existing between majority and minority groups are relatively high. For this purpose, we asked Serbians ( $N = 194$ ) and Syrians ( $N = 313$ ) to fill out questionnaires including measures of self-respect, tolerance towards three different minority groups (an ethnic, a religious, and a sexual minority) and respective disapproval measures, and tested a hypothesized structural equation model. We found that self-respect predicted tolerance towards Roma, Muslims, and homosexuals in Serbia and towards Palestinian refugees and Christians in Syria. In Syria, no relation was found with tolerance for homosexuals, but statistical variance was limited. We discuss our findings and the limits of self-respect as a predictor of tolerance in the context of highly disapproved outgroups and highlight the overall potential of self-respect for fostering a concern for own and others' rights and duties.

## Keywords

self-respect, equal rights, tolerance, minority groups, Serbia, Syria



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## Non-Technical Summary

### Background

In many societies around the world, people differ in how they think about and treat minority groups. These groups can be defined by ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation. In some countries, tensions between majority and minority groups are particularly strong due to historical, political, or religious factors. Understanding what makes people more tolerant and accepting of others is therefore an important question for both researchers and society. One factor that may play a role is self-respect. Self-respect refers to the belief that one deserves the same rights and dignity as others. Previous research has shown that people with higher self-respect are more likely to support equal rights and show concern for others. However, it is less clear whether self-respect also promotes tolerance in more challenging contexts—especially in societies where some minority groups are viewed negatively.

### Why was this study done?

This study aimed to better understand whether self-respect can encourage tolerance towards minority groups in countries where social and political tensions are relatively high. We focused on two countries: Serbia and Syria. In both contexts, certain minority groups face strong prejudice or social disapproval. This raises an important question: Is self-respect still linked to tolerance when negative attitudes towards minorities are widespread? Or are there limits to how much self-respect can promote tolerance in these situations? By examining these questions, the study seeks to identify whether strengthening self-respect could be a useful approach for promoting more tolerant and inclusive societies.

### What did the researchers do and find?

To answer these questions, we conducted surveys with participants from Serbia (194 people) and Syria (313 people). Participants were asked to complete questionnaires that measured their level of self-respect as well as their attitudes towards different minority groups.

In Serbia, we focused on attitudes towards Roma (an ethnic minority), Muslims (a religious minority), and homosexuals (a sexual minority). In Syria, we examined attitudes towards Palestinian refugees, Christians, and homosexuals. The results showed a clear pattern: In general, people who reported higher levels of self-respect were also more tolerant towards minority groups. In Serbia, self-respect was associated with greater tolerance towards all three groups studied—Roma, Muslims, and homosexuals. In Syria, self-respect was linked to more tolerance towards Palestinian refugees and Christians. However, no clear relationship was found between self-respect and tolerance towards homosexuals in Syria. This may be because negative attitudes towards this group are particularly strong, leaving little variation in responses.

### What do these findings mean?

These findings suggest that self-respect can play an important role in promoting tolerance, even in societies where tensions between groups are high. People who believe that they

themselves deserve equal rights may be more likely to extend those same rights and respect to others. However, the results also show that there are limits. In contexts where certain minority groups are strongly rejected by society, self-respect alone may not be enough to increase tolerance. This means that additional factors—such as cultural norms, laws, and education—also play a crucial role. From a practical perspective, the findings highlight the potential value of promoting self-respect through education, social programs, and public policy. Encouraging individuals to see themselves as equal and deserving of rights may help foster a broader culture of fairness and inclusion. At the same time, efforts to improve tolerance should also address wider social attitudes and structural barriers. Together, these approaches may contribute to building more open and respectful societies.

In many democratic and non-democratic countries around the world, people of different ethnicities, religions, and lifestyles live together. Since the end of the last century, all the countries among the Western democracies (e.g., Italy, Germany) have seen large-scale immigration from poorer countries and countries affected by conflicts, which has contributed to an increase in multi-ethnic and multicultural societies (Moghaddam & Hendricks, 2022). This phenomenon has also been observed in countries hitherto classified as non-democratic (<https://freedomhouse.org/>). For example, in Syria, which is categorized as Not Free with a score of 5 out of 100 in 2026 by Freedom House, people of different religious backgrounds live together, with Christians representing the largest non-Muslim religious minority in the mainly Muslim country (European Union Agency for Asylum, 2022; Khatib, 2023). In addition, ethnic diversity has also increased through Palestinian refugees (e.g., European Union Agency for Asylum, 2022).

In countries composed of diverse populations, tolerance towards minority groups has proven to be beneficial for social cohesion (e.g., Forst, 2016). In this article, we examine whether self-respect – i.e. a person's belief of possessing the same rights as others – is a predictor of tolerance, focusing on Serbia and Syria, countries where majority–minority tensions are high (e.g., Amnesty International, 2024). We begin by providing an overview of research on the negative consequences of group boundaries (e.g., in post-conflict countries) and how these can be reduced by the salience of superordinate categories. After defining tolerance, we present research on self-respect and argue that self-respect should predict tolerance toward minority groups in Syria and Serbia.

## The Psychology of Group Boundaries

From a social psychological perspective (see Reimer et al., 2022), living in a context together with people and groups who are different from oneself makes people perceive social situations and interactions through the process of social categorization, which in this case may lead to simplification and division of the social world into ingroups and

outgroups. This categorization usually leads to the emergence of prejudicial attitudes and even intergroup conflicts and violence (Gaertner et al., 2010). Indeed, as research in the context of social identity theory (SIT, Tajfel & Turner, 1986) has shown, in order to preserve one's own self-esteem, people tend to view and value the ingroup positively, while outgroups are devalued and disapproved of. This process can be even stronger when outgroups are seen as a threat to the values and culture of one's own group (Gaertner et al., 2010), particularly in conflict and post-conflict settings. In such contexts, group identities become highly salient and polarized, shaping normative and moral boundaries that legitimize exclusion and hostility toward outgroups (Al Ramiah et al., 2011; Oren & Bar-Tal, 2014). Moreover, research indicates that the content of social identities is crucial for intergroup relations in heterogeneous, conflict and post-conflict societies (Livingstone & Haslam, 2008; Žeželj & Pratto, 2017). Identity constructions emphasizing exclusivity or victimhood tend to sustain prejudice (Oren & Bar-Tal, 2014), whereas more inclusive or superordinate identity representations may foster more positive intergroup orientations and social cohesion (Žeželj & Pratto, 2017).

As Gaertner and Dovidio (2000) have shown, connecting SIT with SCT (self-categorization theory, Turner et al., 1987), intergroup prejudice can be reduced when individuals shift their social self-categorization from a lower social identity level to a more shared and inclusive level (i.e., human identity in its most abstract form), redefining outgroup members as part of the self. Extending categorization to a universal human identity allows individuals to overcome rigid divisions between ingroups and outgroups, thereby reducing prejudice and hostility between groups and broadening the inclusion of other groups (e.g., minorities) in the application of ethical and human rights.

## Tolerance Towards Outgroups

Psychological research suggests that outgroup disapproval generally leads to lower tolerance (i.e., allowing others to live their lives as they wish; cf. Simon & Schäfer, 2018; Simon et al., 2019), thereby undermining social life and social cohesion. Traditional approaches to tolerance have viewed tolerance as an asymmetrical relationship between a majority that grants permission to a minority to live their life as they wish as long as they do not question the higher status of the majority (referred to as permission conception, see Forst, 2016). In contrast, the respect conception of tolerance, that we use in the present work, views this notion as based on respect for others “as autonomous persons or as equally entitled members of a political community” (Forst, 2016, p. 29). Recent psychological approaches also considered disapproval as a definitional component of tolerance (Adelman et al., 2022; Simon, 2023; Verkuyten & Yogeeswaran, 2017). These approaches assume that it makes little sense to speak of tolerance towards a person or group if one agrees with their views and lifestyles (as earlier psychological approaches had defined it; cf. Mummendey & Wenzel, 1999). If one disapproves of others' opinions and lifestyles, tolerance is defined as respect for this person or group as different equal(s)

(cf. [Simon, 2023](#), Figure 1, p. 733). Such respect is founded on a common categorization as group members on a superordinate level (for example, as society members, [Simon, 2023](#); or as a member of the human group, [Turner et al., 1987](#)). Tolerance is thus enabled on this level, while disapproval on a lower social identity level might remain. This represents an important first step for dialogue, discourse, and social cohesion because social categorizations and the resulting rejection of those who are different are fundamental psychological mechanisms ([Turner et al., 1987](#)) that are difficult to eliminate. In order to tolerate a minority member, which one might reject at a lower identity level, a self-categorization on a superordinate level is required. In this research, we investigate whether self-respect can trigger the effects of seeing others as different equals.

## Self-Respect and Concern for Others' Rights

Self-respect has been defined as belief in possessing the same basic rights as others ([Honneth, 1995](#); [Renger, 2018](#); [Su et al., 2025](#)). Self-respect as a sense of equal entitlement has been shown to predict assertive behavior in response to unfair treatment, but is not related to aggressive behavior towards interaction partners in everyday life ([Renger, 2018](#)). Similarly, normative (e.g., participating in a demonstration, signing a petition) but not non-normative (i.e., participation in violent actions or demonstrations) collective action intentions have been positively linked to the self-respect of disadvantaged group members ([Renger, Eschert, et al., 2020](#)). At the same time, self-respect is related to social responsibility, support for human rights, and concern for the rights of future generations ([Renger & Passini, 2024](#)). Research in Western countries revealed that high self-respect (i.e., the belief in possessing the same basic rights as others) leads to a generally tolerant attitude toward dissenting others, i.e., toward persons whom one doesn't like or who have contradicting attitudes and ideas ([Renger & Passini, 2025](#)). Thus, self-respect stands in contrast to over-entitlement beliefs. Thus, self-respect appears to be connected to both a concern for one's own and others' rights as it is linked to both individual assertiveness and respect and tolerance for others ([Renger, 2018](#); [Renger & Passini, 2024, 2025](#)). This consideration of others makes sense against the background that self-respect represents the internalization of self-experienced equal treatment and consideration ([Honneth, 1995](#); [Renger et al., 2026](#)). The internalized experience of others treating a person as an equal is reciprocally passed on or returned by the individual in turn preserving the rights of others ([Honneth, 1995](#)).

Self-identification with one's ingroup at a lower identity level is associated with personal self-esteem and preference for one's own group ([Tajfel & Turner, 1986](#)). Self-respect, on the other hand, should rather be associated with identification at a higher level of categorization (e.g., human identification) and therefore be positively associated with tolerance towards others.

## The Present Research

In the present study, we aim to extend existing research in two important ways. First, while [Renger and Passini \(2025\)](#) examined the relationship between self-respect and a generally tolerant attitude toward unspecified, dissenting others, we examine self-respect as a predictor of tolerance toward concrete and socially salient outgroups (i.e., relevant ethnic, religious, and sexual minorities in each country). Psychological research has consistently shown that individuals quickly devalue members of other social groups and hold prejudices against them (e.g., [Tajfel & Turner, 1986](#)). Such prejudices are particularly evident along central identity dimensions (especially race/ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation), as these areas are often perceived as a threat to one's own identity (e.g., [Jones & McEwen, 2000](#)). Accordingly, research on tolerance has frequently focused on these three types of groups, demonstrating substantial and persistent levels of disapproval and low tolerance (e.g., [Simon & Schäfer, 2016, 2018](#); [Simon et al., 2019](#); [Verkuyten et al., 2023](#); [Zitzmann et al., 2022](#)).

Second, we selected countries where socio-political tensions between majorities and minorities are relatively high (e.g., [Amnesty International, 2024](#)). Since we had access to Syria and Serbia, and these criteria apply to those countries, we decided to collect data in these two countries in 2022. In Syria, the majority's treatment of Palestinian refugees is now even more topical due to the war between Israel and Gaza (with some institutions classifying it as genocide; e.g., [Amnesty International, 2025, May](#)). In Serbia, a state that was newly founded in 2006 after bitter ethnic conflicts with other former Yugoslavian states, the treatment of Roma people is an ongoing issue of conflict (e.g., [Amnesty International, 2024](#)).

For Western countries, it has been demonstrated that the more individuals perceive themselves as persons with equal rights (i.e., have high self-respect), the more tolerant they are towards those who think differently (e.g., [Renger & Passini, 2025](#)). However, the principle of equality and a focus on individual rights play a different role in many non-Western cultures (e.g., [Adeate, 2022](#)), which means that it needs to be demonstrated whether it works similarly psychologically in countries such as Syria or Serbia. We hypothesize that self-respect opens up a new way to enable people to strike a balance between individual rights and the rights of others ([Renger & Renger, 2025](#)). Such a self-regard of simultaneous autonomy and connectedness has been proposed by [Kagitçibasi \(1996, 2005\)](#) as appropriate for non-Western cultures.

We selected relevant ethnic, religious, and sexual minorities in each country and asked about tolerance toward these groups. We propose the following hypotheses: among majority members in Serbia, self-respect (i.e., a person's belief of possessing the same rights as others) is a positive predictor of tolerance toward Roma people (H1a), toward Muslims (H1b), and toward homosexuals (H1c). Likewise, we assume that among majority members in Syria, self-respect is a positive predictor of tolerance toward Palestinian refugees (H2a), toward Christians (H2b), and toward homosexuals (H2c). In

previous research, disapproval of groups turned out as a significant negative predictor of tolerance (Simon et al., 2019). Age has been positively associated with tolerance (van Doorn, 2014), while for gender different results have been observed (with men or women being more tolerant depending on the target group, e.g., Elsinbawi & Wolosin, 2023; Golebiowska, 1999). Consequently, we included disapproval of the respective groups, gender and age as control variables to show that self-respect predicts tolerance over and above these variables.

## Study 1

In Study 1, we collected data in Serbia. Serbia is a parliamentary republic with a democratic constitution; however, external observers have described some democratic restrictions in recent years. Among these, restrictions of freedom of speech and press, freedom of assembly, and unjust treatment of minorities (such as the Roma) were reported (e.g., Amnesty International, 2024). Serbia is ranked 54th out of 163 in the 2024 Global Peace Index GPI (cf. Institute for Economics & Peace, 2024), thus being assigned a medium state of peace. In the World Press Freedom Index, Serbia is listed as 98th out of 180 countries (Reporters Without Borders, 2024). Freedom House (<https://freedomhouse.org/>) categorizes it as Partly Free with a score of 56 out of 100.

We decided to take highly relevant (most often the largest) ethnic, religious, and sexual minority as target groups, respectively. As ethnic minority in Serbia, we chose Roma people. Officially, in 2022, there were about 130,000 Roma in Serbia (cf. EU in Serbia, 2023). However, as many Roma do not identify as such in censuses for fear of discrimination, the actual number is estimated to be around 300,000-460,000 people (Minority Rights Group, 2015), which would mean that Roma are the largest ethnic minority in Serbia. According to the country's 2022 census, Muslims are the largest religious minority with 278,212 people (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2022). Muslims are regularly discriminated (e.g., Perovic, 2016; U.S. Department of State, 2023). Regarding sexual minorities, Serbia is given 49/100 in the LGBT Equality Index (with 100 being the most equal), which means rank 78 out of 197 countries (e.g., LGBT Equality Index, 2024).

## Method

All data, syntax and materials are available at the Open Science Framework (<https://osf.io/8wck7/>).

## Participants

Data were collected in 2022 in Serbia. The questionnaire was drafted in Serbian. Participants were recruited via social networks and via Clickworker, invited to the survey in

Serbian, and invited to participate in a lottery for 15 online vouchers worth 1000 Dinars each (8.50 € approx.). In total, 194 participants (91 men and 103 women,  $M_{\text{age}} = 33.19$ ,  $SD = 9.66$ ) fully completed the survey. With regard to participants' level of education, 1.6% declared they had no school qualifications, 1% had completed primary school, 3.1% had completed middle school, 37.2% had earned a high school diploma, 23% had a Bachelor's degree, and 34% a Master's or Ph.D. qualification. Job-wise, 67.8% stated they were employed, 16.7% students, 15% unemployed, and finally 0.6% retired. The majority of participants were originally from Serbia 93.3%, and 99.5% declared they currently lived in Serbia (one person stated not to). As concerns religion, 70.6% declared to be Orthodox, 1.5% declared they followed Islam, 1% Christianity, 0.5% Evangelism, 17.5% stated they were atheist, and 8.8% provided no information. Data collection was approved by the Ethics Committee at the first author's university. Participants gave their informed consent prior to participation and agreed to data protection declarations concerning collection, storage, and publication of their data.

## Measures

If not otherwise indicated, all measures employed a seven-point response scale (ranging from 1 = not true at all to 7 = completely true).

**Self-Respect** – Participants' belief of possessing the same basic rights as others was measured with Renger's (2018) four-item self-respect scale ( $\alpha = .92$ ; e.g., "In everyday life I always see myself as a person with equal rights," "I am always aware that I have the same dignity as all other human beings.")

**Tolerance Towards Minority Groups** – Items were based on Simon et al. (2019) and van der Noll et al. (2010) and adapted for the minority groups relevant in the Serbian context. For each minority group (Roma; Muslims; homosexuals), participants indicated their tolerance on the following five items: "I support members of this group being able to live their lives the way they want to," "I support allowing members of this group to speak in public," "I support members of this group running as candidates for public office," "I support members of this group teaching in schools as teachers," and "I support having members of this group help shape society" (Tolerance for Roma  $\alpha = .90$ ; Tolerance for Muslims  $\alpha = .90$ ; Tolerance for homosexuals  $\alpha = .94$ ).

**Disapproval of Minority Groups** – To control for disapproval of the respective minority groups we asked participants to indicate for all three groups whether they "consider the beliefs and practices of the following groups as something bad or something good" on a scale from -3 (something bad) to +3 (something good) (see Simon et al., 2019). Items were recoded to 1-7.

**Demographics** — At the end, participants indicated their age, gender, religion, country of origin (Serbia/not Serbia), country of residence (Serbia/not Serbia), whether they belong to the Roma group, and sexual orientation (heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, other).

### Data Analysis

First, means and Pearson's bivariate correlations were computed. Second, we used structural equation modelling (SEM) to test the hypothesis. The SEMs to test the proposed models were estimated using the Mplus 8 software program (Muthén & Muthén, 2012) and were conducted with latent variable modelling. Model fit was assessed using the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Standardized Root Mean Squared Residual (SRMR). Consistent with the recommendations of Hu and Bentler (1999), goodness-of-fit criteria were used to quantify acceptable (CFI and TLI > 0.90, SRMR < 0.10, RMSEA < 0.08), and excellent fit (CFI and TLI > 0.95, SRMR < 0.08, RMSEA < 0.06).

### Results

As can be seen in Table 1, participants appeared to have relatively high and comparable levels of tolerance for both Roma and Muslims [ $t(193) = 1.63, p = .10$ ], but less tolerance for homosexuals, which differed statistically from the other two:  $t(193) = 6.08, p < .001, t(193) = 4.78, p < .001$ , respectively. As concerns disapproval, means were lower towards Roma and homosexuals than towards Muslims:  $t(193) = 4.55, p < .001, t(193) = 4.55, p < .001$ , respectively. Bivariate correlations (see Table 1) showed that self-respect was positively related to all tolerance measures, and negatively to disapproval of all the three minorities considered.

**Table 1**

*Means, Standard Deviations, Pearson Correlation Coefficients and Cronbach's Alpha for all Scales in Study 1*

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Self-Respect	5.37	1.46	.92								
2. Tolerance for Roma	5.90	1.50	.27**	.90							
3. Tolerance for Muslims	5.98	1.41	.30**	.89**	.90						
4. Tolerance for Homosexuals	5.34	2.03	.29**	.60**	.69**	.94					
5. Disapproval of Roma	3.96	1.42	-.19**	-.48**	-.39**	-.13	–				
6. Disapproval of Muslims	3.49	1.54	-.18*	-.30**	-.46**	-.20**	.53**	–			
7. Disapproval of Homosexuals	4.11	1.87	-.29**	-.28**	-.38**	-.68**	.23**	.40**	–		
8. Gender	1.53	0.50	.11	.14	.20**	.24**	-.08	-.07	-.27**	–	
9. Age	33.19	9.66	.14*	.13	.04	-.09	-.20**	-.03	.11	-.07	–

*Note.* All the variables extended from 1 to 7 except for gender (1 = male, 2 = female) and age (from 18 to 81). Cronbach's  $\alpha$  in italics on the diagonal.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Before computing the SEMs, we performed distinct CFA on self-respect and each tolerance measure, comparing one-factor and two-factor solutions, respectively. In all three cases, the two-factor solution was significantly better than the one-factor solution (see [Supplementary Material – Section 1](#)), as an indication that the two variables are distinct.

We then regressed the three tolerance measures (tolerance towards three minority groups) on self-respect, with gender and age as control variables. To isolate the effect of self-respect on tolerance, disapproval of minority groups were also put as a covariate for each for the corresponding tolerance measure (disapproval of Roma for tolerance towards Roma, and so on). Predictor variables as well as outcome variables were allowed to correlate, respectively. We ran separate analyses for each minority group, respectively. The three models were tested excluding participants who could be potential targets for our tolerance measures. Specifically, we excluded either Muslim participants ( $n = 3$ ), Roma participants ( $n = 2$ ), or people who self-declared to be homosexual ( $n = 1$ ).

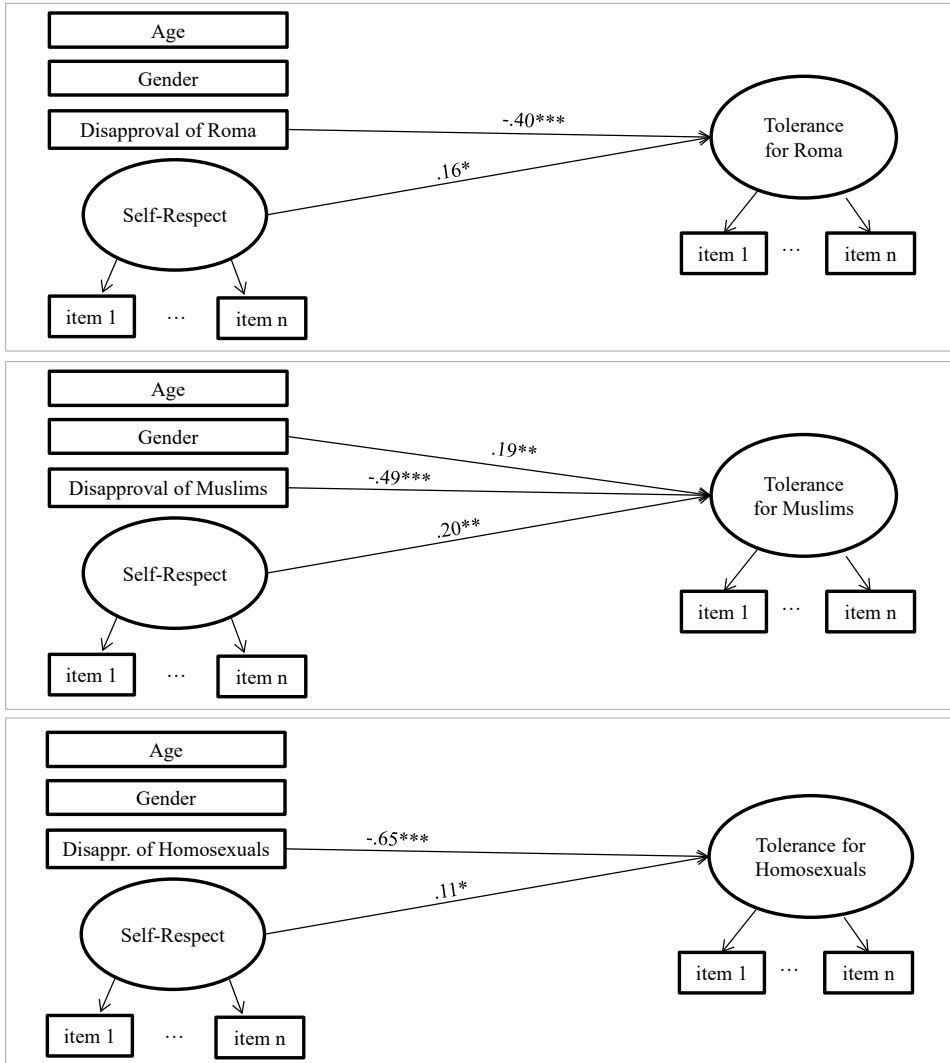
As concerns tolerance towards Roma, the model acceptably fit the data:  $\chi^2(50) = 99.37$ , CFI = 0.961, TLI = 0.951, RMSEA = 0.072, SRMR = 0.052. Modification indices suggested a correlation between two error terms of tolerance for Roma (specifically between Items 3 and 5:  $\beta = .47$ , 95% CI [.23, .74],  $p < .001$ ). All items loaded on the intended latent variable with significant factor loadings,  $p < .001$  (for all the loadings see [Supplementary Material – Section 2](#)). All analyses are summarized in [Figure 1](#). Path coefficients revealed that self-respect positively predicted tolerance for Roma ( $\beta = .16$ , 95% CI [.08, .32],  $p = .02$ ), while disapproval of Roma negatively predicted tolerance ( $\beta = -.40$ , 95% CI [-.52, -.31],  $p < .001$ ). Control variables did not predict tolerance.

As concerns tolerance towards Muslims, the SEM acceptably fit the data:  $\chi^2(50) = 102.809$ , CFI = 0.957, TLI = 0.946, RMSEA = 0.077, SRMR = 0.052. Modification indices suggested a correlation between two error terms of tolerance for Muslims (specifically between Items 3 and 5:  $\beta = .48$ , 95% CI [.23, .74],  $p < .001$ ). All items loaded on the intended latent variable with significant factor loadings,  $p < .001$ . Path coefficients revealed that self-respect positively predicted tolerance for Muslims ( $\beta = .20$ , 95% CI [.09, .32],  $p = .003$ ) and disapproval of Muslims negatively predicted tolerance ( $\beta = -.49$ , 95% CI [-.60, -.39],  $p < .001$ ). Gender positively predicted tolerance ( $\beta = .19$ , 95% CI [.09, .30],  $p = .003$ ), meaning that females were more tolerant than men. Age was not a significant predictor.

Finally, as concerns tolerance towards homosexuals, the SEM acceptably fit the data:  $\chi^2(51) = 96.959$ , CFI = 0.973, TLI = 0.967, RMSEA = 0.068, SRMR = 0.069. All items loaded on the intended latent variable with significant factor loadings,  $p < .001$ . Path coefficients revealed that self-respect positively predicted tolerance for homosexuals ( $\beta = .11$ , 95% CI [.01, .22],  $p = .05$ ) and disapproval of homosexuals negatively predicted tolerance ( $\beta = -.65$ , 95% CI [-.73, -.57],  $p < .001$ ). Control variables did not predict tolerance.

**Figure 1**

*Illustration of the Three Structural Equation Models Regarding the Relationships Between Self-Respect as Predictor, and Tolerance Towards Three Minority Groups as Outcome Variables, Controlling for Outgroup Disapproval, Gender, and Age in Study 1*



*Note.* Reported coefficients are standardized.  
 $*p < .05$ .  $**p < .01$ .  $***p < .001$ . Only significant paths are depicted.

The same models were tested without the control variables. All the significant paths remained, and no paths either gained or lost statistical significance. We also conducted a sensitivity power analysis via Monte Carlo simulation in MPLUS (1,000 replications;  $N = 193$ ). Using our final SEM specifications and our observed measurement parameters as population values, we varied the self-respect-tolerance-path. The study achieved 80% power to detect a standardized effect of  $\beta \approx .22$  (two-tailed  $\alpha = .05$ ).

## Discussion

All three hypotheses were supported. Self-respect was positively associated with tolerance toward Roma (H1a), toward Muslims (H1b), and toward homosexuals (H1c) (while controlling for disapproval and demographics).

## Study 2

In Study 2, we collected data in Syria. Before the war, Syria had a population of more than 22 million people; however, due to the civil war, unfolding over the last two decades, more than 350,000 people have died and at least six million people have fled the country in recent years (Kešeljević & Spruk, 2024; Mahmoud et al., 2020). Until recently, the country had an autocratic regime (Khamis et al., 2013). Ranked 156th out of 163 in the 2024 GPI (cf. Institute for Economics & Peace, 2024) and second from last (179th out of 180) in the World Press Freedom Index, Syria has been one of the most dangerous places for journalists and free speech in recent years (Enab Baladi, 2024; Reporters Without Borders, 2024). Freedom House (<https://freedomhouse.org/>) categorizes it as Not Free with a score of 5 out of 100 in 2026. In Syria, minority rights are at stake and members of some groups, for example, homosexual minorities are prosecuted (Abboud et al., 2023; Kivilcim, 2017; Rehman & Polymenopoulou, 2013).

As one of the largest ethnic minority group, we investigated Palestinian Refugees. There have been several waves of refugees in the past, as Palestinians were expelled, for example, during the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 (also known as the Nakba) and fled to Syria (Hakim et al., 2023). In 2022, before the start of the Israel-Palestinian war, there were more than half a million Palestinian refugees living in Syria (European Union Agency for Asylum, 2022; Minority Rights Group, 2018; United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, 2022). Palestinian refugees are among those most impacted by the country's brutal conflict; among other things they suffer from forced displacement inside the country (European Union Agency for Asylum, 2022, 2023b; Rollins, 2021). Secondly, as the largest non-Muslim religious minority group, we looked at Christians (about 10%, cf. European Union Agency for Asylum, 2022; Khatib, 2023) in Muslim-dominated Syria (European Parliament, 2016; European Union Agency for Asylum, 2023a). Thirdly, as the largest sexual minority,

we looked at homosexuals. Homosexuality is disapproved of and persecuted in Syria, as in many Muslim countries (European Union Agency for Asylum, 2022; Rehman & Polymenopoulou, 2013). There are no reliable figures as to how many homosexuals actually live in Syria, but many have fled the country (Abboud et al., 2023). Syria is given 17/100 in the LGBT Equality Index (with 100 being the most equal), which means it ranks 149 out of 197 countries (e.g., LGBT Equality Index, 2024).

## Method

All data, syntax and materials are available at the Open Science Framework (<https://osf.io/8wck7/>).

## Participants

Data were collected in 2022 in Syria. The questionnaire was drafted in Arabic. Following Schönbrodt and Perugini (2013), we again aimed to recruit at least 250 participants. Participants were recruited via online social networks, invited to the survey in Arabic, and 250 persons were reimbursed 3.50 Euro each to cover costs for cell phone usage. In total, 313 participants (146 men and 167 women,  $M_{\text{age}} = 30.40$ ,  $SD = 10.10$ ) fully completed the survey. As regards their level of education, 1.3% declared they had no school qualifications, 2.6% had completed primary school, 7.3% had completed middle school, 21.4% had earned a high school diploma, 53.9% had a Bachelor's degree, and 13.4% a Master's or Ph.D. qualification. Job-wise, 46.3% stated they were employed, 10.5% in training, 15.7% students, 16.6% unemployed, 3.8% retired and finally, 7% chose other. Participants originally from Syria were 93.3%, and 99% declared they currently lived in Syria (three people stated they did not). As concerns religion, 78% declared they followed Islam, 5.8% Judaism, 4.5% Christianity, 1.9% stated they were atheist, 9.6% declared other religion, and 0.3% provided no information. Data collection was approved by the police department for cybercrime in Damascus (Syria) and by the Ethics Committee at the first author's university. Participants gave their informed consent prior to participation and agreed to data protection declarations concerning collection, storage, and publication of their data.

## Measures

Unless otherwise indicated, all measures employed a seven-point response scale (ranging from 1 = not true at all to 7 = completely true).

**Self-Respect** — We used the same scale as in Study 1 ( $\alpha = .90$ ).

**Tolerance Towards Minority Groups** — We used the same five items as in Study 1 adapted for the minority groups relevant in the Syrian context (Palestinian refugees;

Christians; homosexuals). Tolerance for Palestinian refugees  $\alpha = .93$ ; Tolerance for Christians  $\alpha = .94$ ; Tolerance for homosexuals  $\alpha = .90$ .

**Disapproval of Minority Groups** — As in Study 1, we controlled for disapproval of the respective minority groups. Items were recoded to 1-7.

**Demographics** — At the end, participants indicated their age, gender, religion, country of origin (Syria/not Syria), and country of residence (Syria/not Syria).

## Data Analysis

We ran the same analyses as in Study 1.

## Results

Descriptive data (see Table 2) showed that participants attached relatively high levels of tolerance for both Palestinian refugees and Christians (slightly different:  $t(312) = 1.97$ ,  $p = .05$ ). Tolerance towards homosexuals was instead very low and statistically lower than the other two:  $t(312) = 34.88$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $t(312) = 35.99$ ,  $p < .001$ , respectively. Similarly, means for disapproval were higher towards homosexuals than towards Palestinian refugees and Christians:  $t(312) = 4.55$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $t(312) = 4.55$ ,  $p < .001$ , respectively. Bivariate correlations (see Table 2) showed that self-respect was positively related to all tolerance measures (except tolerance for homosexuals), and negatively to disapproval of Palestinian refugees and Christians. Disapproval of homosexuals was not related to self-respect.

**Table 2**

*Means, Standard Deviations, Pearson Correlation Coefficients and Cronbach's Alpha for all Scales in Study 2*

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Self-Respect	5.68	1.34	.90								
2. Tolerance for Palestinian Refugees	5.61	1.60	.57***	.93							
3. Tolerance for Christians	5.76	1.62	.49***	.64***	.94						
4. Tolerance for Homosexuals	1.74	1.32	.04	.11	.11*	.90					
5. Disapproval of Palestinian Refugees	2.05	1.51	-.61***	-.74***	-.52***	-.02	–				
6. Disapproval of Christians	2.24	1.73	-.45***	-.43***	-.69***	-.10	.45***	–			
7. Disapproval of Homosexuals	6.20	1.53	.01	.03	-.03	-.63***	-.10	-.04	–		
8. Gender	1.53	0.50	-.05	-.14*	-.09	-.12*	.11	.05	.04	–	
9. Age	30.40	10.10	.02	-.03	-.01	.07	.06	.02	.02	-.18**	–

*Note.* All the variables extended from 1 to 7 except for gender (1 = male, 2 = female), and age (from 18 to 81). Cronbach's  $\alpha$  in italics on the diagonal.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

As in Study 1, we performed distinct CFAs on self-respect and each tolerance measure, comparing one-factor and two-factor solutions. In all three cases, the two-factor solution was significantly better than the one-factor solution (see [Supplementary Material – Section 4](#)).

We then ran separate analyses for each target minority group, with gender and age as control variables. The three models were tested excluding participants who could be potential targets for our tolerance measures. Specifically, we excluded either participants not originally from Syria, who could potentially be Palestinian refugees ( $n = 3$ ) or Christian participants ( $n = 11$ ). As in Study 1, the corresponding measure of disapproval was put as a covariate for the corresponding tolerance measure.

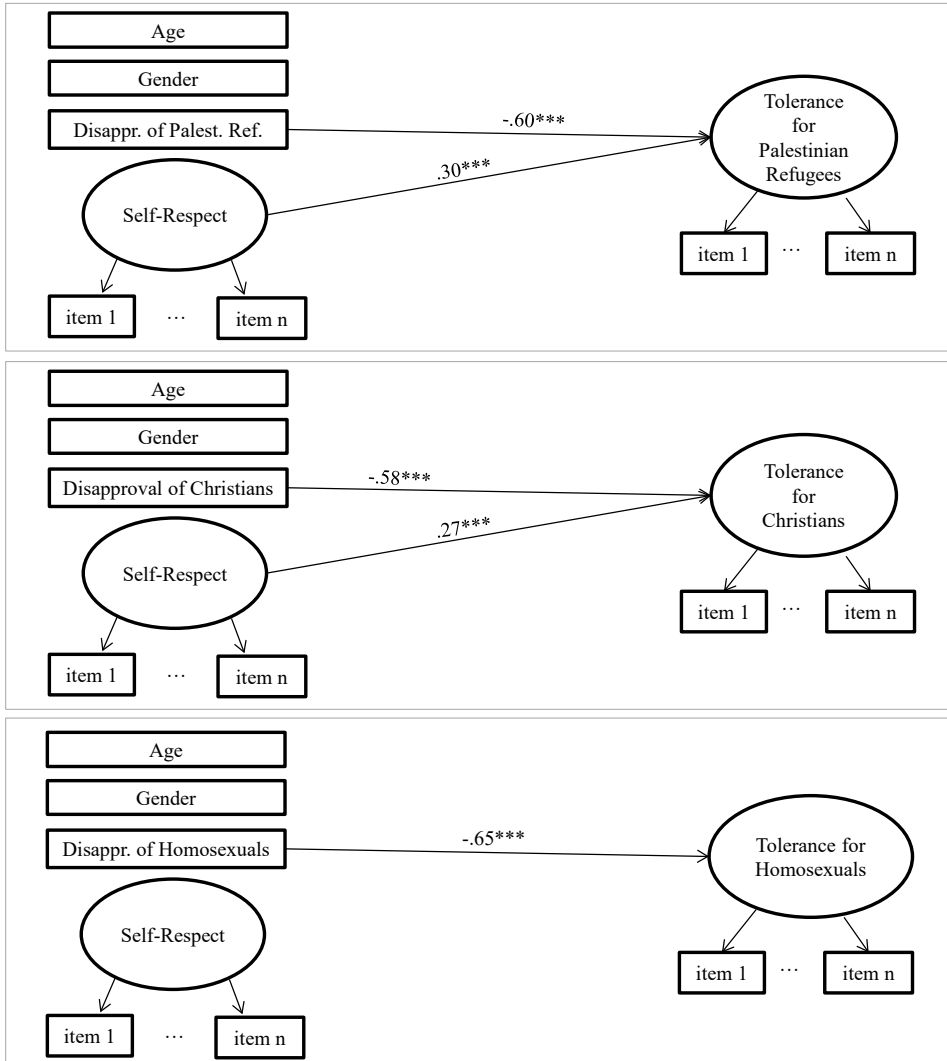
As concerns tolerance for Palestinian refugees, the SEM acceptably fit the data:  $\chi^2(50) = 60.46$ , CFI = 0.996, TLI = 0.995, RMSEA = 0.027, SRMR = 0.038. Modification indices suggested a correlation between two error terms of tolerance for Palestinian refugees (specifically between Items 2 and 3:  $\beta = .56$ , 95% CI [.44, .77],  $p < .001$ ). All items loaded on the intended latent variable with significant factor loadings,  $p < .001$  (for all the loadings see [Supplementary Material – Section 2](#)). All analyses are summarized in [Figure 2](#). Path coefficients revealed that self-respect positively predicted tolerance for Palestinian refugees ( $\beta = .30$ , 95% CI [.17, .42],  $p < .001$ ) and disapproval of Palestinian refugees negatively predicted tolerance ( $\beta = -.60$ , 95% CI [-.71, -.49],  $p < .001$ ). Control variables did not predict tolerance.

As concerns tolerance towards Christians, the SEM acceptably fit the data:  $\chi^2(51) = 105.649$ , CFI = 0.977, TLI = 0.971, RMSEA = 0.060, SRMR = 0.030. All items loaded on the intended latent variable with significant factor loadings,  $p < .001$ . Path coefficients revealed that self-respect positively predicted tolerance for Christians ( $\beta = .27$ , 95% CI [.13, .41],  $p < .001$ ) and disapproval of Christians negatively predicted tolerance ( $\beta = -.58$ , 95% CI [-.70, -.46],  $p < .001$ ). Control variables did not predict tolerance.

Finally, as concerns tolerance towards homosexuals, the SEM acceptably fit the data:  $\chi^2(49) = 71.837$ , CFI = 0.987, TLI = 0.983, RMSEA = 0.040, SRMR = 0.035. All items loaded on the intended latent variable with significant factor loadings,  $p < .001$ . Path coefficients revealed that self-respect did not significantly predict tolerance for homosexuals ( $\beta = .04$ , 95% CI [-.03, .11],  $p = .30$ ), while disapproval of homosexuals negatively predicted tolerance ( $\beta = -.65$ , 95% CI [-.76, -.55],  $p < .001$ ). Control variables did not predict tolerance. The same model was tested without the control variables. All the significant paths remained, and no paths either gained or lost statistical significance. Sensitivity power analysis achieved 80% power to detect a standardized effect of self-respect on tolerance of  $\beta \approx .19$  (two-tailed  $\alpha = .05$ ).

**Figure 2**

*Illustration of the Three Structural Equation Models Regarding the Relationships Between Self-Respect as Predictor, and Tolerance Towards Three Minority Groups as Outcome Variables, Controlling for Outgroup Disapproval, Gender, and Age in Study 2*



*Note.* Reported coefficients are standardized.  
 $**p < .01$ .  $***p < .001$ . Only significant paths are depicted.

## Discussion

Our hypotheses were partly supported. Self-respect was positively associated with tolerance toward Palestinian refugees (H2a) and toward Christians (H2b), but not with tolerance toward homosexuals (H2c) (while controlling for disapproval and demographics).

## General Discussion

Going beyond the prior research that showed that self-respect (i.e., a person's belief of possessing the same rights as others) is positively associated with concern for others' rights (Renger & Passini, 2024) and a general tolerant attitude towards dissenting others (Renger & Passini, 2025), in this research, we hypothesized and found that self-respect also predicts tolerance towards minority groups in contexts of socio-political tensions and conflict. More specifically, we assessed tolerance towards relevant ethnic, religious, and sexual minorities, respectively, and collected data in Serbia and Syria, countries which have not been researched much by psychologists (Henrich et al., 2010).

In Serbia, as hypothesized, we found that self-respect predicted tolerance towards all three minority groups considered even controlling for disapproval of the respective groups. In other words, the more people felt self-entitled as equals (in terms of equal basic rights), the more they were willing to tolerate Roma people (an ethnic minority), Muslims (a religious minority), and homosexuals (a sexual minority), e.g., allowing them to hold public speeches, to run for public office, or to teach as teachers at schools. In our data, tolerance for Roma and tolerance for Muslims were highly correlated which confirmed our choice to run separate analyses. In fact, a considerable percentage of Roma living in the Balkans is Muslim (see Crowe, 2000), although exact numbers do not exist. This might explain the high correlation. Regarding demographics, only gender was related to tolerance toward Muslims, indicating that women were more tolerant than men, which is in line with Elsinbawi and Wolosin's (2023) findings.

In Syria, we found that self-respect predicted tolerance for Palestinian refugees (one of the largest ethnic minority groups, after the Kurds) and Christians (the largest non-Muslim religious minorities). These relationships remained stable when controlling for disapproval of the respective groups. In contrast, tolerance for homosexuals (a sexual minority) was not predicted by self-respect. It should be noted that the mean for tolerance for homosexuals was very low ( $M = 1.74$  as compared to 5.61 for Palestinian refugees and 5.76 for Christians) and the mean for disapproval was very high ( $M = 6.20$  as compared to 2.05 for Palestinian refugees and 2.24 for Christians), showing that homosexuality was strongly rejected by the majority of the participants, and that statistical variance was limited. In addition, it could also play a role that people in Syria do not dare to express a positive attitude towards a socially despised group in a survey. Demographic variables played no predictive role in the tested models.

Looking at the differences in the two contexts investigated in a descriptive manner, it can be seen that the correlations between self-respect (i.e., a person's belief of possessing the same rights as others) on the one hand, and the three tolerance and disapproval measures on the other hand, showed higher values in Syria in contrast to Serbia. This could be due to statistical reasons (Warne, 2020), for example, as the variance of the relevant variables differs between countries – it is higher in Syria. However, they could also be explained by national or cultural differences (cf. Smith & Bond, 2019). More specifically, in a country like Syria where rights are less respected by institutions, and consequently by people, having a high awareness of self-respect might act as an even greater trigger for increasing one's level of tolerance.

Another difference concerns tolerance towards homosexuals, which in the Syrian context is not predicted by self-respect. The finding that in Syria tolerance towards sexual minorities has a different quality as compared with tolerance towards religious or ethnic minorities is in line with prior research conducted in Muslim countries like Turkey (Ergin & Gökşen, 2023). Whereas some researchers consider religion to be the cause – because homosexuality is not seen as God's will and is thus regarded as a sin by religious people (Hoffarth et al., 2018) – others highlight the role of public morality in the exclusion of sexual minorities from the moral and cultural basis of society (Ergin & Gökşen, 2023) or even from humanity (see Monroe & Plant, 2019). If sexual minorities are normatively not considered equal members of society, then it makes sense that self-respect is not related to tolerance for this group. We suppose that as long as the rights of homosexuals are not an actual political topic of debate and homosexuality is even against the law (punished with imprisonment) in Syria (European Union Agency for Asylum, 2022), it does not lead people to feel more tolerant for that minority even if they are aware of the issue of rights and the rights they possess. It might be interesting to see how this connection changes the moment the rights of this minority are being discussed more. The recent upheaval in Syria, with the former leader Assad fleeing the country, might trigger such a transformation and probably allow for more tolerance toward (sexual) minorities in the future (see e.g., Alsford, 2024).

While the results for tolerance towards homosexuals need to be interpreted with caution for the reasons described above, the findings on tolerance towards Palestinian refugees and Christians are clear: the more people believe that they are an equal person themselves, the better they can pass this on to (disapproved) outgroups. The group of Palestinian refugees is a very topical one, as the war involving Israel in 2023 has further increased the number of refugees from Palestine, and people in many countries are confronted with refugees from this social group. Currently, many countries and organizations classify the situation in Gaza as amounting to genocide (e.g., Amnesty International, 2025). Therefore, researching how people deal with Palestinian refugees is a highly relevant topic for the future, as it can be assumed that there will be further waves of refugees. The ability of people with high self-respect to perceive unity and

equality at a higher level, transcending divisive group boundaries at lower levels of identity, could be used to facilitate the humane integration of refugees.

## Limitations and a Critical Reflection of a Western Perspective

This study has some limitations that should be borne in mind for future research. In particular, the analyses presented in this article are based on correlational data and should thus be interpreted with caution. In addition, when interpreting the findings, one needs to keep in mind that the samples were quite well educated, because Internet access in these countries (which was necessary to fill out the online questionnaires) is more available to more highly educated people. In addition, the sample size of Study 1 was smaller than planned which might have led to a lower statistical power. For Study 2, the power was sufficiently high, but we still recommend future research to replicate the correlations found in longitudinal research designs and with larger, representative samples.

When interpreting our results, it should be borne in mind that both the psychological concepts and the scales are influenced by a Western perspective (e.g., [Adams et al., 2015](#)). From a decolonial perspective, it is important to critically reflect on the cultural specificity of the scales used. The scales used to measure self-respect and tolerance were developed in Western contexts and are based on normative assumptions about individual rights and interpersonal relationships. Although our translation and adaptation process were designed to ensure linguistic and conceptual equivalence, culturally specific dimensions of these constructs may still have been overlooked in Serbia and Syria. Particularly in countries such as Serbia and Syria, whose cultural traditions are strongly influenced by community-oriented values, self-respect could be understood primarily in relational terms—that is, as an obligation within social networks rather than as an individual right. Future studies should therefore consider developing scales that better reflect culturally embedded understandings of these constructs.

Moreover, there may also be different understandings of the underlying concepts (e.g., equal rights) due to religious or cultural backgrounds (e.g., [Adeate, 2022](#); [Markus & Kitayama, 1991](#); [Nagamia, 2002](#)). However, there are good reasons to assume that such an equality-based self-respect concept could be suitable for Western and non-Western cultures, as it enables a balance between rights and duties and between egoism and altruism (e.g., [Renger & Renger, 2025](#)). Such a self-regard of simultaneous autonomy and connectedness has been proposed by [Kagitçibasi \(1996, 2005\)](#) as appropriate for non-Western cultures. In addition, high self-respect has been linked to better mental health in Western and non-Western countries. More specifically, people with high self-respect are less prone to depression, as evidenced by data from European countries, Iran, South Korea and Indonesia ([Renger et al., 2023](#)). In our view, this suggests that self-respect as internalization of fundamental equal rights is also relevant and beneficial for people in non-Western countries (see also a recent investigation of equality-based self-respect

in China, [Su et al., 2025](#)). Nevertheless, future research should further elaborate on the concepts of equality and tolerance in these countries.

In the future, it might be helpful to look into how other pertinent identity dynamics of the participants, such as religiosity or political orientation, might affect how tolerant or disapproving people are towards different groups. In addition, in this article we assumed that – in contrast to self-esteem – self-respect increases the accessibility of identification with all humans. While self-esteem, i.e. people's assessment of having a positive rather than a negative overall view of themselves, which in SIT is related to ingroup identity on lower categorization levels and has not been linked to tolerance (e.g., [Avery et al., 1992](#)) but sometimes to aggressive and egoistic behaviors ([Bushman et al., 2009](#); [Krueger et al., 2008](#)), self-respect enables people to move beyond narrow group boundaries. Future research should thus test empirically whether the relationship between self-respect and tolerance is mediated via human identification.

## How Self-Respect Can Be Fostered

Broadly speaking, self-respect is fostered through experiences of equality-based respect, that is being treated as an equal counterpart and being taken seriously ([Honneth, 1995](#); [Martiny et al., 2024](#); [Möller & Danermark, 2007](#); [Presbey, 2003](#); [Renger, Eschert, et al., 2020](#)). Three different paths can be observed here (cf. [Renger & Renger, 2025](#), Figure 2): First, structural factors such as legal rights and freedoms determine how easy it is to develop self-respect. Second, interpersonal factors, e.g., equal treatment by other people or groups, influence the self-respect of individuals. And third, intrapersonal factors (e.g., self-reflection) affect self-respect development. In non-democratic countries or countries with restricted democracy, the structural path is likely to be weaker than in Western countries. Not all social groups possess equal rights before the law, which could be internalized in self-respect. This is why the interpersonal path plays an important role in such contexts. Members of families, close relationships, peer groups, or work groups can affect an individual's self-respect by taking them seriously as a human being ([Renger et al., 2016](#); [Renger, Miché, et al., 2020](#)). This is illustrated by the example of Malala Yousafzai, who as a Pakistan woman was not equal before the law ([Yousafzai & McCormick, 2014](#)) but who was treated as an equal by her family, especially by her father, which laid the foundation for her belief that she had equal rights (cf. [Yousafzai, 2018](#)). As a consequence, she stood up for her rights and fought for education for girls.

In addition, schools and educational institutions should implement interventions to make young generations discuss the relevance and limits of their own rights in close connection with respect for the freedoms and rights of others (e.g., [Shani et al., 2023](#); [Sirlopú & Renger, 2020](#)). This should enable people to recognize the importance of respecting rights and push for the claiming of those rights that are still denied in some contexts.

Finally, on the intrapersonal level, self-respect might be influenced through introspection and self-reflection (Renger & Renger, 2025). For example, reading about (human) rights and reflecting on their meaning can change the perception of one's own rights and one's rights consciousness (Perry-Hazan et al., 2024). In this context, people might also start reflecting on potential rights restrictions due to disadvantaged positions in society, such as low socioeconomic status (e.g., Diemer et al., 2017).

In summary, we conclude that an individual's belief in their equal basic rights predicts tolerance toward ethnic, religious, and sexual minority groups in Serbia and, with the exception of tolerance toward homosexuals, also in Syria, even when controlling for disapproval of the respective groups. Although the concept of equality-based self-respect should be discussed critically and developed further for non-Western contexts, the results give hope that self-respect, with its balance between egoism and altruism or between rights and duties, could also be a promising concept for non-Western countries.

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**Competing Interests:** The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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**Data Availability:** All data, syntax and materials are available at the Open Science Framework (<https://osf.io/8wck7/>).

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## Supplementary Materials

The Supplementary Materials include the following items:

- All data, syntax and materials to replicate the findings (Renger, 2026S)
- Additional contents (Renger et al., 2026S):
  - model fit indices for the structural models tested in Study 1;
  - the full list of items and standardized factor loadings in the SEMs of Studies 1 and 2;
  - standardized correlational coefficients for the SEM predictor variables in Studies 1 and 2;
  - model fit indices for the confirmatory factor analyses tested in Study 2.

### Index of Supplementary Materials

Renger, D. (2026S). *Data, syntax and materials for "From internalized equality to tolerance towards others: Self-respect predicts tolerance for minority groups in Serbia and Syria"*. OSF.  
<https://osf.io/8wck7/>

Renger, D., Mosa, A., & Passini, S. (2026S). *Supplementary materials to "From internalized equality to tolerance towards others: Self-respect predicts tolerance for minority groups in Serbia and Syria"* [Additional contents]. PsychOpen GOLD. <https://doi.org/10.23668/psycharchives.22140>

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