

**Title: With or without you? Perceived indispensability and
opposition to separatist movements**

Short title: Perceived indispensability and opposition to separatist movements

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Abstract

Positive intergroup relations are shown to be related to the perception that, despite mutual differences, all subgroups are indispensable for the identity or functioning of the overall society. Yet, so far, the research on identity and functional indispensability is concerned with minorities that strive for inclusion in the larger nation-state (e.g., immigrants). In contrast, we examined the roles of identity and functional indispensability in the context of separatist movements. In Study 1 ($N = 397$), we found that Han Chinese' perceptions of identity and functional indispensability of Tibetans and Uyghurs were associated with higher willingness to engage in collective action against these groups' separatist movements. We replicated these findings in Study 2a and 2b among a diverse sample of the Dutch concerning the Brexit ($N = 378$) and Frexit ($N = 279$). In experimental Study 3, again among the Dutch ($N = 405$), we found that indispensability increased anti-Frexit action intentions. We conclude that, in the context of separatist movements, perceived indispensability can make attitudes towards separatist movements more antagonistic. The findings contribute to a better understanding of intergroup relations when subgroups' interests clash.

Keywords: identity indispensability, functional indispensability, separatist movements, protest intentions

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With or Without You? Perceived Indispensability and Opposition to Separatist Movements

The term indispensability was introduced in the intergroup literature (Ng Tseung-Wong & Verkuyten, 2010) for the perception that subgroups (e.g., ethnic minorities) are necessary parts of a superordinate category (e.g., a nation-state). This superordinate category can be considered to be made up of different but complementary parts, similar to separate pieces of a mosaic or jigsaw puzzle whereby one piece missing results in an incomplete picture. Subgroup indispensability can relate not only to the cultural identity of the superordinate category but also to its (economic) functioning (Guerra et al., 2016). Findings from different contexts, such as the Netherlands (Mephram & Verkuyten, 2017; Verkuyten et al., 2014), the United States (Guerra et al., 2016), Mauritius (Ng Tseung-Wong & Verkuyten, 2010), Malaysia (Verkuyten & Khan, 2012), and Portugal (Guerra et al., 2015) demonstrate that majority members' stronger perceptions of minorities being indispensable for the identity and for the functioning of society go together with lower outgroup prejudice and a stronger endorsement of minority rights (see also Rosa et al., 2020).

The current research aims to go beyond these findings and test for the first time whether perceived indispensability also plays a role in majority members' evaluation of changing intergroup relations in real-life separatist conflicts. Specifically, we want to examine whether perceived subgroup indispensability has antagonistic implications for subgroups that want to change the relational status quo by separation. Previous indispensability research has examined situations in which minority outgroups try to integrate into society (immigrants) or consider themselves to belong to the nation (ethnic minorities). However, there are also intergroup situations where regional minorities strive for more autonomy or even separation from the nation-state or a superordinate category (e.g., the European Union; EU) rather than strengthening

their entitlements and rights within its boundaries (Welhengama, 1999). These situations tend to create intergroup tensions, with regional groups wanting more independence and the majority opposing it and trying to prevent separation from happening (Castillo & Edwards, 2017; Gurr, 2000). Since the 1980s, an increasing number of regional minorities across the globe have (re-)expressed their wish for greater autonomy or to have their own nation-state, and recent examples are Catalonia in Spain, Scotland in the United Kingdom (UK), Quebec in Canada, and West Papua in Indonesia.

Research has shown that for majority members calls for separation by ethnic or religious minority subgroups can heighten national identity threat that fosters a tendency for intergroup reconciliation, especially if majority wrongdoings are recognized (Mashuri, van Leeuwen, & Hanurawan, 2018; Mashuri, van Leeuwen, & van Vugt, 2018; Mashuri & van Leeuwen, 2021). Reconciliation tendencies are less likely, however, when the focus is on the minority subgroup that seeks independence while being considered indispensable for the superordinate category. In that case the indispensable subgroup wants to change the intergroup status quo which makes dissatisfaction with the change and behavioural intentions to oppose the separation, more likely. The more indispensable a subgroup is considered to be, the stronger its perceived disruptive impact is on the superordinate category if it is missing, which can fuel actions to try to prevent the separation from happening.

With three survey studies and one experimental study, we examined whether majority members are more dissatisfied with the separation of subgroups when they perceive them to be more indispensable and whether this dissatisfaction translates into higher intentions to engage in collective action aimed at preventing the separation (e.g., protesting or voting in a referendum). We consider whether identity indispensability and functional indispensability are two

understandings that are independently related to feelings of dissatisfaction and antagonistic collective action tendencies. In Study 1, we tested the associations among Han Chinese participants concerning Uyghurs and Tibetans' separatism in China. In Study 2, we focused on Dutch participants in relation to the UK's departure from the EU (Brexit; Study 2a) and the possibility of France leaving the EU (Frexit; Study 2b). In Study 3, we examined Dutch participants' attitudes towards the possibility of a Frexit using an experimental design that enables us to test the expectation that both identity and functional indispensability (vs. a control condition) lead to higher dissatisfaction with separation and therefore stronger anti-Frexit protest intentions.

Identity and Functional Indispensability

The perception that a minority subgroup is indispensable for the superordinate category implies that the identity of that category cannot be fully represented by the dominant subgroup or that the overarching category cannot function properly without the minority subgroup (Ng Tseung-Wong & Verkuyten, 2010). A minority subgroup that is considered necessary and needed for the overarching whole is part of a common category and therefore can benefit from the positive ingroup orientation that people tend to have (Dovidio et al., 2007; Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000).

However, a subgroup that is considered indispensable for a common category also implies that this subgroup cannot be missed, making the possibility of distancing and leaving threatening to the identity continuity and functioning of the overarching whole. Subgroups can be considered indispensable in a symbolic (i.e., for the identity) and a functional (i.e., economic) sense, and both types of indispensability are expected to be important for how these subgroups are perceived and evaluated.

First, a minority subgroup that is considered indispensable for the common identity and that wants to 'break away' implies a threat to the meaning and continuity of the common identity. From the perspective of many Spaniards, Catalonia is a renegade region that is an indispensable component of the national identity. And Scotland can be considered an intrinsic and indispensable part of the United Kingdom, similar to Māori in New Zealand, meaning that the country would no longer be the same without them (Sibley & Liu, 2007). Separation of an indispensable subgroup implies a disruption of the common identity, and consequently, might lead to wanting to prevent the identity discontinuity to take place (Smeekes & Verkuyten, 2018). Therefore, we expect that higher perceived identity indispensability of the subgroup is for majority members associated with stronger dissatisfaction with and more opposition to subgroup separation.

Second, a subgroup can be considered indispensable for functional, economic reasons (Guerra et al., 2016). Separation can imply economic losses and people can be expected to express dissatisfaction with the subgroup's separation wish for wanting to maintain a well-functioning economy and society (Shamir & Sagiv-Schifter, 2006). Compared to the current situation where the subgroup is still part of the common category, a separation would result in worsening economic conditions which are likely to fuel feelings of dissatisfaction and anger (van Zomeren et al., 2012). Therefore, we expect that higher perceived functional indispensability of the subgroup is for majority members also related to stronger dissatisfaction with and more opposition to subgroup separation.

Dissatisfaction with Separation and Anti-Separation Collective Action

Dissatisfaction with separation and the intentions to engage in collective action against separation are two possible outcomes of perceived indispensability. The former represents an

attitude and the latter a behavioural intention. People who are dissatisfied with the possible separation of a subgroup that is considered indispensable for the common identity or the functioning of the overarching category can be expected to be more likely to protest against the separation (Gurr, 1993). The separation of an indispensable subgroup from, for example, the nation-state changes the intergroup status quo and leaves the other groups in that society short-handed by depriving them of cherished resources, be it symbolic or tangible. Accordingly, people who are more dissatisfied with the situation are more likely to want to protest against the separation and thereby prevent it from actually taking place (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977; Green & Seher, 2003).

There is a substantial body of literature on the relationship between attitude and behaviour indicating that people's behaviour is influenced by their attitudes (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2005; Eagly & Chaiken, 2007; Talaska et al., 2008). However, whereas some of the research finds a close and direct relationship between the two, others find a weak or non-significant relation (for a review, see Ajzen & Fishbein, 2005). The different findings are due to many factors including the level of specificity at which the attitude and the behaviour are measured (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977), the strength of the attitude (Howe & Krosnick, 2017), whether people are conscious of their attitude and their behaviour (Ajzen & Dasgupta, 2015), and whether the focus is on behavioural intentions or actual behaviour (Kim & Hunter, 1993). Regarding the latter distinction, for behavioural *intentions*, the relation with attitudes tends to be stronger because actual behaviour typically also depends on individual goals, needs, and personality characteristics, as well as on social norms and situational opportunities (Ajzen, 2005; Conner & Armitage, 1998). Further, research on collective action suggests that attitudes of dissatisfaction are an important driver of the tendency to protest (Dalton et al., 2010; Gurr, 1968). Combining

the different aspects, we expected that higher perceived identity indispensability and higher perceived functional indispensability are both associated with stronger dissatisfaction with the subgroup's separation, which, in turn, is related to stronger intentions to protest against separation. Hence, we expected dissatisfaction to mediate the relation between perceived subgroup indispensability (identity and functional) and protest intention.

Study 1

In Study 1, we considered the role of perceived identity and functional indispensability for Han Chinese participants' dissatisfaction with and willingness to engage in protests against separatist movements in the regions of Tibet and Xinjiang.¹ Since their incorporation in 1949 and 1950 respectively, both Tibet and Xinjiang have been treated as administrative autonomous regions within the People's Republic of China (Elmer, 2011). Yet, the Chinese government has an active policy to relocate Han Chinese – the ethnic majority – to the regions of Tibet and Xinjiang in order to “integrate” these regions in the rest of China (Van Wie Davis, 2008). According to the National Bureau of Statistics of China (2021), Xinjiang and especially Tibet are among the poorest regions of China in terms of Gross Regional Product. In both regions, there are separatist movements (Uyghurs and Tibetans) and there have been various violent incidents between the Chinese military and the inhabitants of the respective regions (Topgyal, 2011).

¹ In the original research design, questions about Taiwan were also included. As the topic of Taiwan is sensitive, with China and many other countries not recognizing it as an independent state, whereas the Taiwanese themselves and several other countries do so, we decided not to focus on Han Chinese' attitudes towards the Taiwanese “separation”. However, we did run the models of Study 1 including Taiwan and there were no notable differences in results.

Method

Data and Participants

Using snowball sampling, we collected data in 2016 among Han Chinese via an online questionnaire in the Mandarin language. The questionnaire was distributed through personal contacts of two Chinese students and these contacts forwarded the survey to Chinese adults who did not live in the two separatist regions. We excluded two participants who were younger than 18, as well as 34 non-Han Chinese participants and 31 participants who did not indicate their ethnicity. Further, four participants with missing values on all main constructs were not used for the analyses resulting in $N = 397$ Han Chinese adult respondents.² Fourteen percent resided outside of China. Even though not representative of Han Chinese, the participants were diverse in terms of age, gender, and educational level. Their age varied between 18 and 78 ($M = 33.7$, $S.D. = 11.9$) and women made up 68.3 percent. Further, 2 percent was low educated (up to lower secondary school), 33 percent had a medium level of education (high school or higher vocational training), and 64 percent had a university degree (ranging from bachelor to Ph.D.).

Measures

Participants answered all questions about the core constructs separately regarding Tibet (first) and Xinjiang (second). The order in which the measures were presented to the participants followed our hypothesized path model, with identity indispensability assessed directly before functional indispensability. All variables were normally distributed according to established standards (Curran et al., 1996), which allowed us (see Enders, 2001) to account for the missing values (1.5% on the indispensability measures, 6.5% on dissatisfaction and protest intentions) using Full Information Maximum Likelihood (FIML).

² Study 1 models including all participants ($N = 462$) yielded similar albeit weaker effects of identity and functional indispensability on dissatisfaction and action intentions.

Identity indispensability was measured with an item that asked about the importance of the regional minorities of Tibet and Xinjiang for the identity of China (see Guerra et al., 2016; Ng Tseung-Wong & Verkuyten, 2010). “Some people might say that without certain ethnic subgroups the Chinese identity would not be the same anymore. Others might say that some ethnic subgroups are not an important part of the Chinese identity. To what extent is, according to you, each of the following groups [Tibet, Xinjiang] an *indispensable (that is, necessary)* part of the *cultural identity* of China?” (italics as in original). The answer categories ranged from 1 “not necessary at all” to 5 “very necessary”. A higher score on this variable indicated higher identity indispensability.

Functional indispensability was measured with an item that tapped into the importance of a regional minority of Tibet and Xinjiang for the functioning of the economy of China (see Guerra et al., 2016). “Some people might say that without the contribution of certain ethnic subgroups the Chinese economy would not be as successful as it is. Others might say that some ethnic subgroups do not really contribute to the prosperity of the Chinese economy. To what extent is, according to you, each of the following groups [Tibet, Xinjiang] *indispensable (that is, necessary)* for the *strength of the Chinese economy*?” (italics as in original). The answer categories ranged from 1 “not necessary at all” to 5 “very necessary”. A higher score indicated higher functional indispensability.

Attitude of dissatisfaction with separation was assessed with five items using 7-point scales. Participants were asked to indicate how strongly they would feel “sad”, “angry” and “upset” if [Tibet, Xinjiang] were to separate from China, whether they were negative about [Tibet, Xinjiang] becoming a separate country, and whether they would not mind if [Tibet,

Xinjiang] gained independence from China (reversed). A higher score on these five items indicated a stronger attitude of dissatisfaction with separation.

Anti-separation action intentions were measured by the willingness to engage in four types of behaviour (see Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2015). The question was: “People are sometimes willing to engage in actions to express their attitude towards social issues. Such actions include protests, campaigns, and commenting or discussing the issues on WeChat, Weibo, Facebook, or other social media. Thinking of your potential actions against separatism, how much would you be willing to do the following?”. For each of the following activities the participants answered on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 “completely unwilling” to 7 “completely willing”: ‘Attend a conference or a seminar in my town or neighbourhood to discuss why [Tibet, Xinjiang] should not separate’, ‘Volunteer for anti-[Tibet, Xinjiang] separation campaigns’, ‘Participate in a protest, march or demonstration against [Tibet, Xinjiang] independence’, and ‘Share statuses, news articles, or videos on social media (Weibo, WeChat) with anti-[Tibet, Xinjiang] independence contents’. A higher score indicated a higher willingness to act against separation.

We controlled for *gender* (0 = male, 1 = female), *age* (in years), and *educational level* as these might affect responses on our dependent variable *anti-separation action intentions* and were likely to correlate with the independent variables (e.g., Hillygus, 2005; Kanas & Martinovic, 2017; Saha, 2000; Verba, Burns, & Schlozman, 1997; Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2015; Verkuyten et al., 2014). The scale for education ranged from (1) “no education” to (8) “Ph.D.” and was treated as continuous.

Results

Measurement Model

To test whether identity indispensability, functional indispensability, dissatisfaction with separation, and anti-separation action intentions formed separate factors, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) with repeated measures was performed with a Maximum Likelihood (ML) estimator in *Mplus* version 8.5 (Muthén & Muthén, 2017). As participants answered all the questions with respect to two target groups (Tibet and Xinjiang), the observations were dependent on each other. This interdependency violates the assumptions of structural equation modelling (SEM) so we included the correlated uniqueness of repeated measures design (Kline, 2016). This means that we allowed for the correlations between the error terms of the comparable items across the target groups (e.g., anti-separation action intentions item 1 regarding Tibet with anti-separation action intentions item 1 regarding Xinjiang) and for the correlations between the error terms of the items on a specific target group (e.g., between all four action intention items regarding Tibet). As for the aggregation of the Tibet and Xinjiang items, the anchor item of the latent constructs was always related to Tibet and the other items' factor loadings were freely estimated. Our proposed 4-factor measurement model fitted the data relatively well and we used this measurement model to fit our mediation analyses. We tested for an alternative 3-factor model with dissatisfaction and actions against separation combined but this model demonstrated to have a considerably worse fit (see Table A1, Study 1 in the Supplementary Material).

Descriptive Findings

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics, including composite reliability (ρ) scores. The measurement of all constructs was reliable. On average, participants were rather dissatisfied with

separation and were willing to act against it. In addition, participants thought that the regional minorities were indispensable both in terms of identity and functional contributions, with identity indispensability being higher than functional indispensability ($Wald(1) = 79.64, p < .001$). All constructs were positively and significantly correlated with each other.

[TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Mediation Model

We fitted a mediation model in *Mplus* version 8.5 regressing intentions to act against separation on dissatisfaction with separation, identity indispensability, and functional indispensability, and regressing dissatisfaction on the two types of indispensability.³ We controlled for gender, age, and education in relation to the mediator and the dependent variable. As expected, we found that identity indispensability was positively and significantly related to dissatisfaction with separation: the more majority members perceived Tibet and Xinjiang to be an inherent part of the Chinese identity, the more dissatisfied they were with their separation (see Figure 1). Dissatisfaction with separation was, in turn, positively and significantly related to anti-separation action intentions. We found a positive indirect effect of identity indispensability on anti-separation action intentions via dissatisfaction with separation, 95% CI [0.067, 0.225] (see also Table A2 in the Supplementary Material).

However, functional indispensability was neither directly, nor indirectly, 95% CI [-0.035, 0.095], related to anti-separation action intentions. Given the high correlation between the two types of indispensability ($r = .73, p < .001$), we tested a second mediation model without identity indispensability and found that functional indispensability was both directly and indirectly, 95% CI [.079, .205], related to higher willingness to act against separation (see also Table A2).

³ We requested confidence intervals (CIs) for the indirect effects based on bootstrapping with 5,000 replacement samples (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). A 95 percent CI that does not include zero indicates an indirect effect.

[FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Discussion

In the context of China and in relation to Tibet and Xinjiang, Study 1 showed that for Han Chinese participants perceived identity indispensability was related to more dissatisfaction with separation, and indirectly, to more willingness to protest against the separation. However, perceived economic contribution of the two regions (functional indispensability) was not independently related to dissatisfaction and opposition to separation. This might be due to the limited number of items that we used, the fact that identity indispensability was measured first, or the high correlation between the two indispensability measures. The aim of Study 2 was to conceptually replicate the findings in a different context (the EU), in relation to two countries (Britain and France), with more extensive measures of indispensability.

Study 2

We tested the same prediction in the context of the UK's departure from the EU, the so-called Brexit (Study 2a) and the possibility of France leaving the EU (Frexit, Study 2b). The administrative and legal processes regarding Brexit were set in motion after a referendum held in 2016 (see Sampson, 2017), with 52 percent of the Brits voting 'leave', and was completed in early 2021. We collected the data in 2018 and focused on the perspective of Dutch people, given that the Netherlands is one of the founding members of the EU where at the time a heated debate took place about Brexit (Bijsmans et al., 2018). The possibility of a Frexit was discussed around the May 2022 French presidential election campaigns and we collected our data in September 2022. One opinion poll showed that 63% of the French wanted a referendum on a possible Frexit and some presidential candidates were responsive to this.⁴ These candidates did not win the

⁴ https://www.ifop.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/118885_Rapport_FREXIT_2022.02.14.pdf

elections, but according to French research agencies, a Frexit is indeed possible in the near future.

In both studies, we expected that the more the Dutch perceived Great Britain or France to be indispensable for the identity and for the economic functioning of the EU, the more they would express dissatisfaction with the Brexit or a Frexit, respectively. In turn, dissatisfaction with Brexit/Frexit was expected to be positively associated with anti-Brexit/Frexit action tendencies.

Method

Data and Participants

Study 2a

We collected survey data among adult Dutch participants in the Netherlands and used an online questionnaire administered by the research agency Kantar. Participants answered questions on various socio-political developments in Europe and the Netherlands. The Brexit related questions were asked directly after each other in the order of our theoretical model: identity and functional indispensability (again in this order) were followed by dissatisfaction, and finally, willingness to engage in action. The sample ($N = 378$) was diverse in terms of age, gender, and education. 52.1 percent were women and participants' age varied between 18 and 91 ($M = 50.4$, $S.D. = 17.7$). Further, 20 percent was low educated (up to lower secondary school), 37 percent had a medium level of education (high school or higher vocational training), and 43 percent had a university degree (ranging from bachelor to Ph.D.). There were no missing values.

Study 2b

We collected survey data among 279 Dutch adults using an online questionnaire administered by the research agency Motivaction and that only focused on a possible Frexit. In

contrast to Study 2a, the questions on identity indispensability and functional indispensability were presented in a randomized order. The two identity and two functional indispensability were presented in blocks which randomly differed in order. In other words, a random half of the participants received the identity indispensability questions first and the other half the functional indispensability questions first. All four indispensability items were again followed by the dissatisfaction items, and then the willingness to engage in action items. The sample was diverse in terms of age, gender, and education. 54.8 percent were women and participants' age varied between 19 and 80 ($M = 49.1$, $S.D. = 15.6$). Further, 22.0 percent was low educated (up to lower secondary school), 40.9 percent had a medium level of education (high school or higher vocational training), and 36.9 percent had a university degree (ranging from bachelor to Ph.D.). There were only four missing values, and these were accounted for with FIML.

Measures

All constructs were measured on a Likert scale ranging from 1 'strongly disagree' to 7 'strongly agree', unless indicated otherwise.

We measured identity indispensability and functional indispensability with four items each, based on previous research (Guerra et al., 2016; Ng Tseung-Wong & Verkuyten, 2010; Verkuyten & Kahn, 2012). *Identity indispensability* captured the importance of Great Britain⁵ [France] for the European identity: 'Great Britain [France] is an indispensable part of the European identity', 'The European Union would not be the same anymore without Great Britain [France]', 'The British [French] are an indispensable piece of a jigsaw puzzle in the cultural mosaic of the European Union', and 'The meaning of the European Union will change without

⁵ In Dutch, it is more common to talk about Great Britain ('Groot-Brittannië') than about the United Kingdom ('het Verenigd Koninkrijk'), and the word Britain is linguistically (also in English) more associated with the term Brexit, which is why the items referred to Great Britain.

Great Britain [France]'. *Functional indispensability* tapped into the importance of Great Britain [France] for the functioning of the economy of the European Union: 'Great Britain [France] is indispensable for the economic power of the European Union', 'The European Union will perform economically way worse without the contribution of Great Britain [France]', 'The British [French] have an indispensable contribution to the economy of the European Union', and 'Great Britain [France] is indispensable for the strong market position of the European Union'.

Attitude of dissatisfaction with the Brexit/Frexit was assessed with a set of three statements: 'It's a pity Great Britain [France] is going to leave the EU', 'It's a shame the EU has to continue without Great Britain [France]', and 'I am against the Brexit [Frexit]'.

Anti-Brexit/Frexit action intentions were measured by the willingness to engage in four types of protest actions (see Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2015). The question read: 'Great Britain [France] has not officially left the European Union and some people are willing to engage in actions to prevent this. Such actions include (online) protests and sharing messages, photos, or videos on social media, like Facebook or Twitter. Imagine it were still possible to do something against the Brexit [Frexit], which of the following activities would you consider?'. For each of the activities the participants answered on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 'definitely not' to 5 'definitely yes': 'Sign a petition against the Brexit [Frexit]', 'Share anti-Brexit [Frexit] messages on social media', 'Vote in an EU-wide referendum against the Brexit [Frexit]', and 'Participate in a protest march or demonstration against the Brexit [Frexit]'.

We again controlled for *gender* (0 = male, 1 = female), *age* (in years), and *educational level*. We treated education as a continuous variable, using a 7-point scale ranging from 'primary education or less' to 'master's degree or Ph.D' (see Table 1).

Results

Study 2a: Brexit

Measurement Model

With a CFA using the ML estimator in *Mplus* version 8.5, we tested whether identity indispensability, functional indispensability, dissatisfaction with the Brexit, and anti-Brexit behaviour represented separate latent factors (see Table A1, Study 2a, model 1 in the Supplementary Material). This 4-factor solution fitted the data well. Additional analyses showed that forcing dissatisfaction and action intentions (model 2), or the items for the two types of indispensability (model 3) on the same factor had a considerably worse fit. Therefore, we used the four factors as distinct empirical constructs.

Descriptive Findings

Table 1 shows the means and standard deviations for the latent constructs, their intercorrelations, and their composite reliabilities (ρ). Participants perceived Great Britain to be rather indispensable in terms of identity. Functional indispensability did not differ from the neutral midpoint of the scale and was again significantly lower than identity indispensability ($\Delta M = 0.55$ on a 7-point scale, $Wald(1) = 57.28, p < .001$). On average, participants were quite dissatisfied with the Brexit, yet anti-Brexit behavioural intentions were significantly below the mid-point of the scale. The different constructs were positively and significantly correlated with each other.

Mediation Model

To test the hypothesized relations, we fitted a bootstrapped mediation model in which we regressed anti-Brexit action intentions on dissatisfaction with Brexit, identity indispensability, functional indispensability, and the control variables. Dissatisfaction with Brexit was further

regressed on the two indispensability measures and the control variables. In line with our expectations, we found both a positive indirect effect of identity indispensability, 95% CI [0.260, 0.523], and functional indispensability, 95% CI [0.002, 0.218], on action intentions against Brexit via dissatisfaction with separation (see Figure 2 and Table A3 in the Supplementary Material). Thus, our mediation hypotheses were supported. Comparing the strength of the two indirect effects, we found that the effect of identity indispensability was stronger than that of functional indispensability ($\Delta b = 0.25$ on a 7-point scale, $Wald(1) = 9.10$, $p < .001$).

[FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]

Study 2b: Frexit

Measurement Model

With a CFA using the ML estimator, we tested whether identity indispensability, functional indispensability, dissatisfaction with the Frexit, and anti-Frexit action intentions represented separate latent factors. This 4-factor solution fitted the data well (see Table A1, Study 2b).

Descriptive Findings

Table 1 shows the means and standard deviations for the latent constructs, their intercorrelations, and their composite reliabilities (ρ). Participants perceived France to be rather indispensable in terms of identity and economic functioning, and there was no significant difference between these ($\Delta M = 0.05$ on a 7-point scale, $Wald(1) = 0.88$, $p = .348$). On average, participants were quite dissatisfied with a Frexit, yet they again felt not strongly about undertaking anti-Frexit actions. The different constructs were positively and significantly correlated with each other.

Mediation Model

We again fitted a bootstrapped mediation model in which we regressed anti-Frexit actions on dissatisfaction with Frexit, identity indispensability, functional indispensability, and the control variables. Dissatisfaction with Frexit was further regressed on the two indispensability measures and the control variables. In line with our expectations and similar to Study 2a, we found a positive indirect effect of identity indispensability, 95% CI [0.173, 0.480], and functional indispensability, 95% CI [0.098, 0.357], on action intentions against Frexit via dissatisfaction (see Figure 3 and Table A4 in the Supplementary Material). However, in Study 2b the two indirect effects were equally strong ($\Delta b = 0.04$ on a 7-point scale, $Wald(1) = 0.215$, $p = .642$).

[FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE]

Discussion

In the context of the EU and in relation to the Brexit and Frexit, Study 2 supported the expectation that identity indispensability and functional indispensability are two separate empirical constructs. Furthermore, both types of indispensability were related to more dissatisfaction with Brexit/Frexit, and indirectly, to higher willingness to engage in anti-Brexit/Frexit actions. Using more extensive measures of indispensability than in Study 1, we found that both types of indispensability matter for separation-related dissatisfaction and protest intentions. However, in relation to Brexit, identity indispensability seemed to matter more than functional indispensability, whereas this was not found in relation to Frexit in which the two indispensability measures were presented in a randomized order.

Study 3

In Study 3, we used an experimental design to test the effect of indispensability on dissatisfaction with a possible Frexit, and indirectly, on the willingness to engage in actions

against Frexit. We tested the effects of identity indispensability and functional indispensability in comparison to a control condition on dissatisfaction with a Frexit and the relationship of dissatisfaction with anti-Frexit action tendency. Study 3 was preregistered on the Open Science Framework, please see <https://osf.io/9x834/>.

Method

Data and Participants

Data were collected among Dutch adults by the research agency Motivaction. The final sample comprised of 405 individuals. More information on the sample size rationale can be found in the Supplementary Information for Study 3.

The participants were diverse in terms of gender, age, and education. Women made up 47.9 percent and participants' age varied between 19 and 79 ($M = 49.4$, $S.D. = 16.2$). 28.2 percent of the sample was low educated (up to lower secondary school), 42.0 percent had a medium level of education (high school or higher vocational training) and 30.9 percent had a university degree (ranging from bachelor to Ph.D.). Three missing values were accounted for by FIML.

Experimental Procedure and Design

Following informed consent, participants were randomly allocated to one of three experimental conditions: identity indispensability ($N = 140$), functional indispensability ($N = 128$), or a control condition ($N = 137$). The participants were asked to carefully read a recent article supposedly taken from a Dutch quality newspaper in which a report published by a Dutch university was discussed. For instance, in the 'France is indispensable for the European identity' condition, it was stated that the report stressed that it was very likely that the European culture would change after a Frexit because France was an indispensable part of the EU identity (see the

supplementary material for the full text of this and the other manipulations). In the control condition participants read an equally long but neutral text about the procedures for joining the EU (see Nijs et al., 2022). Furthermore, the experimental manipulation included a picture: in the control version a picture of the EU flag was shown, in the identity indispensability condition a picture of the Eiffel tower in the colours of the French flag, and in the functional indispensability condition participants saw a picture of a Renault car sales location.

Measures

Dissatisfaction with the Frexit and action intentions against Frexit were measured in the same way as in Study 2b. The randomization of the experiment was successful for age, gender, and education ($ps > .22$), so we did not include these as control variables. Directly after having read the text, participants received four manipulation check questions in a randomized order, two related to functional and two to identity indispensability. The questions were: 1) ‘To what extent does Europe rely on France’s strength?’, 2) ‘To what extent is France indispensable to the economic functioning of the EU?’, 3) ‘To what extent is France a typical European country?’, and 4) ‘To what extent is France indispensable for the cultural identity of the EU?’. Answers options ranged from 1 ‘not at all’ to 5 ‘very much’.

Results

Descriptive Results

First, we ran a CFA in *Mplus* version 8.5 with an ML estimator which showed that a 2-factor model distinguishing between dissatisfaction and anti-Frexit action intentions had a good fit (see Table A1). Both constructs were found to be reliably measured ($\rho_{\text{action intentions}} = .82$, $\rho_{\text{dissatisfaction}} = .95$) and positively correlated with each other ($r = .78$, $p < .001$). Again, participants were on average quite dissatisfied with a Frexit, but not very keen to engage in actions against it.

Experiment Results

A CFA in *Mplus* confirmed that the two identity indispensability manipulation check items and the two functional indispensability manipulation check items loaded on two separate factors (loadings > .55). We computed a mean score for each, and they correlated moderately ($r = .53, p < .001$) with each other. To test whether our manipulation was successful, we ran one-way ANOVAs in SPSS with these mean scores (see Table 2). We found significant overall effects on both identity, $F(2) = 5.93, p = .003, \eta^2 = 0.029$, and functional indispensability, $F(2) = 15.67, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.072$. Post-hoc comparisons revealed that, on the identity indispensability manipulation check items, participants in the identity indispensable condition, $p = .006$, as well as the functionally indispensable condition scored significantly higher than in the control condition, $p = .016$, but not significantly different from each other. Similarly, functional indispensability was significantly higher both in the functional and in the identity indispensability condition, compared to the control condition, both $ps < .001$. The scores however did not differ between the two indispensability conditions, $p = .447$. Thus, irrespective of which type of indispensability was made salient, both seemed to elicit higher identity and functional indispensability compared to the control condition.

Dissatisfaction and anti-Frexit action intentions also differed across the conditions, $F(2) = 7.59, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.036$ and $F(2) = 4.51, p = .012, \eta^2 = 0.022$. Dissatisfaction was significantly stronger in the identity, $p < .001$, and functional conditions, $p = .014$, compared to the control condition. The two experimental conditions again did not differ from each other. For action intentions, only the participants in the functional indispensability condition scored significantly higher than in the control condition, $p = .01$. Those in the identity indispensability condition fell

in-between but were not statistically different from the other two conditions, $p = .950$ and $p = .143$.

We tested our hypotheses in *Mplus* using two contrasts: identity indispensability (1) and functional indispensability (1) versus control (-2); identity indispensability (1) versus functional indispensability (-1; control = 0). In line with our expectations, we found for the first contrast a positive indirect effect of indispensability on action intention against Frexit, 95% CI [0.060, 0.208], via dissatisfaction with separation (see Figure 4 and Table A5 in the Supplementary Material). The total effect of indispensability on action intentions was also significant, 95% CI [0.074, 0.277]. The second contrast showed neither significant direct effects on action intentions ($B = -0.04$, $p = .379$), nor on dissatisfaction ($B = 0.03$, $p = .465$), nor indirect effects, 95% CI [-0.040, 0.086], indicating that identity and functional indispensability mattered equally.

[TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

[FIGURE 4 ABOUT HERE]

Discussion

Study 3 supports the expectation that compared to a control condition, both identity indispensability and functional indispensability increase dissatisfaction with a possible Frexit, and indirectly, the willingness to engage in anti-Frexit actions. However, no difference between identity and functional indispensability was found. The manipulation check items showed that participants, again, made an empirical distinction between identity and functional indispensability but the two experimental conditions elicited similar levels of identity and functional indispensability, and the effects of both conditions on dissatisfaction and action tendencies were also similar.

General Discussion

Indispensability is a relatively novel concept in social psychological research and perceived outgroup indispensability has been found to be related to positive intergroup relations in different multi-ethnic contexts (e.g., Guerra et al., 2015, 2016; Mepham & Verkuyten, 2017). Majority members who perceive minority groups as indispensable for the identity or for the functioning of society tend to have more positive feelings towards these minority groups and are more willing to grant these minorities rights. However, what has not been considered are the potential antagonistic intergroup implications of indispensability perceptions in situations where a change in the intergroup relations is being pursued (i.e., a subgroup separation). There are various regions in the world in which the possibility of subgroup separation and independence is discussed (e.g., Catalonia, Scotland, Quebec, West Papua) and we focused on perceived indispensability and the opposition towards possible separation in real-life settings, namely, two regions in China (Study 1), and the UK and France in the context of the EU (Study 2 and Study 3).

In all three studies, and in line with Guerra and colleagues (2016), we found that people make a conceptual distinction between identity indispensability and functional indispensability. Furthermore, in the intergroup context of China (Study 1) and Britain-EU (Study 2a), perceived identity indispensability was higher than functional indispensability and identity indispensability mattered more for the degree of dissatisfaction and the action tendency against the possible separation. Han Chinese people were particularly more willing to protest against the separation of Tibet and Xinjiang and Dutch people against Brexit when they more strongly felt that these groups were an irreplaceable part of the overarching national or European identity. Whereas in the Britain-EU context functional indispensability also mattered but to a lesser extent, in the

Chinese context functional indispensability was not independently of identity indispensability related to these outcomes.

This could indicate that an instrumental orientation towards outgroup indispensability can be less important than a symbolic orientation, similar to the many studies that have found that symbolic threat can be more important for negative outgroup attitudes than a realistic threat (e.g., Smeekes & Verkuyten, 2014; Sniderman et al., 2004; Van der Noll et al., 2010; Velasco González et al., 2008). The feeling that the overarching common identity is disrupted by the separation of an indispensable subgroup can be seen as a missing piece that makes the picture of a mosaic or jigsaw puzzle incomplete. It implies a form of identity subversion whereby the overarching identity is transformed into something different from what it used to be and what it is meant to be (Smeekes et al., 2018).

Yet, we must be careful with this theoretical interpretation because in the context of Frexit (Study 2b and Study 3), no difference was found in the effect sizes of identity and functional indispensability. A methodological reason for these different findings between the studies could be that in Study 1 and Study 2a, the identity indispensability items were assessed before the functional indispensability items and this could have made participants more responsive to identity indispensability. A more substantial reason might be that the context of France within the EU is perceived differently than that of Britain, or of Tibet and Xinjiang in China. In experimental Study 3, we found evidence that both types of indispensability equally strongly lead to higher dissatisfaction, and indirectly to higher willingness to engage in protest against a Frexit.

Limitations

The study's strengths include the replication of the findings in distinct, real-life contexts of China and the EU. We examined perceived indispensability in a national and an international context and we considered situations in which the subgroup wanted to separate from instead of being included in the overarching category. Moreover, the research in China addressed two distinct regional minorities and in the EU two (former) member states, which made it possible to replicate the findings in two contexts within China and within the EU.

Yet, the results have to be interpreted in light of three limitations. First, we focused on identity and functional indispensability, and although these were empirically distinct constructs, they were positively related. In Study 1, it was difficult to disentangle the effects of both on dissatisfaction and protest intentions, and in Study 3 both experimental conditions triggered identity as well as functional indispensability perceptions. It is likely that in some contexts the difference between identity and functional indispensability is more pronounced than in other contexts, similar to symbolic and realistic threats being more or less strongly related depending, for example, on rapid social changes (Esses et al., 2005) or economic conditions (Meuleman et al., 2009). This means that it would be useful to consider conditions that make both forms of perceived indispensability less or more similar. Furthermore, it might be interesting to examine the ways in which individuals combine identity and functional indispensability perceptions, for example by using latent profile analysis (Osborne & Sibley, 2017). For some individuals, high identity indispensability might go together with high functional indispensability whereas other individuals might consider the two more independently.

Second, we focused on dissatisfaction as the mechanism between perceived indispensability and anti-separation intentions. However, there might be other reasons for people

to mobilize against separation when subgroups are perceived to be indispensable. For example, higher identity indispensability could trigger stronger feelings of symbolic threat leading to an increased motivation to maintain the overarching identity. Such a finding would indicate that perceived threat does not have to lead to outgroup exclusion but rather to trying to keep the outgroup included. These type of reactions would be in line with research that has found that calls for separatism by ethnic or religious sub-groups in Indonesia did not foster the majority's intention to engage in action against the separation, but rather to a stronger willingness to engage in reconciliation with the sub-group because of heightened national identity concerns (Mashuri et al., 2018; Mashuri & van Leeuwen, 2021).

Third, the same pattern of findings existed in China and the EU, but future research might want to focus on different national, international, and non-ethnic contexts to further examine the generality of the proposed processes. Further research might also examine perceived indispensability in organizational contexts, in settings in which there are different factions, and for possible schisms in groups (e.g., Sani & Reicher, 2000).

Conclusion

In conclusion, we have contributed to the emerging research on the novel concept of indispensability of (ethnic) minorities by considering for the first time the distinction between perceived identity and functional indispensability in contexts of separatist movements in China and the EU. In these different contexts, we found that both identity and functional indispensability were associated with a higher willingness to take action against the separation, in part due to being dissatisfied with the separation which would change the relational status quo between the different groups. The present research provides a new perspective on the processes of perceived indispensability for changing intergroup relations. This should be examined in

future research and help us to understand situations in which the existing intergroup setting is changing because of breakaway group members.

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Tables and Figures

Table 1

Pearson's Correlations, Sample Descriptives, and Reliability Measure for Main Constructs, Studies 1 and 2

Measure	Study 1 (<i>N</i> = 397)							Wald test(df) against midpoint
	1	2	3	No of items	Reliability ρ	Range	<i>M</i> (<i>S.D.</i>)	
1. Anti-separation action intentions	-			8	.97	1-7	4.30 (1.67)	12.35(1), <i>p</i> < .001
2. Dissatisfaction	.47	-		10	.89	1-7	4.45 (1.12)	63.73(1), <i>p</i> < .001
3. Identity indispensability	.34	.41	-	2	.94	1-5	4.00 (0.96)	436.25(1), <i>p</i> < .001
4. Functional indispensability	.29	.35	.73	2	.95	1-5	3.66 (1.04)	160.08(1), <i>p</i> < .001
Measure	Study 2a (<i>N</i> = 378)							Wald test(df) against midpoint
	1	2	3	No of items	Reliability ρ	Range	<i>M</i> (<i>S.D.</i>)	
1. Anti-Brexit action intentions	-			4	.83	1-5	2.26 (1.24)	134.16(1), <i>p</i> < .001
2. Dissatisfaction with the Brexit	.73	-		3	.93	1-7	4.96 (2.06)	81.42(1), <i>p</i> < .001
3. Identity indispensability	.63	.77	-	4	.88	1-7	4.52 (1.92)	27.23(1), <i>p</i> < .001
4. Functional indispensability	.52	.66	.79	4	.92	1-7	3.97 (1.91)	.10(1), <i>p</i> = .755
Measure	Study 2b (<i>N</i> = 279)							Wald test(df) against midpoint
	1	2	3	No of items	Reliability ρ	Range	<i>M</i> (<i>S.D.</i>)	
1. Anti-Frexit action intentions	-			4	.84	1-5	2.29 (0.97)	143.86(1), <i>p</i> < .001
2. Dissatisfaction with the Frexit	.73	-		3	.96	1-7	4.90 (1.69)	78.29(1), <i>p</i> < .001
3. Identity indispensability	.64	.79	-	4	.94	1-7	4.67 (1.37)	65.83(1), <i>p</i> < .001
4. Functional indispensability	.57	.76	.83	4	.94	1-7	4.62 (1.17)	76.75(1), <i>p</i> < .001

Note. Means and standard deviations were obtained via effect coding in *Mplus* (Little et al., 2006).

All correlations were significant, *p* < .001.

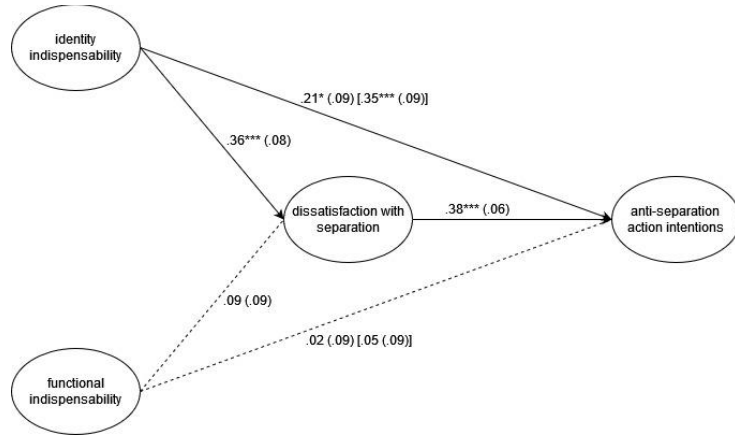
Table 2Differences in means across the three conditions, Study 3 ($N = 405$)

	Identity indispensability	Functional indispensability	Control condition
	Mean (S.D.)	Mean (S.D.)	Mean (S.D.)
II manipulation check	3.81 (0.84) ^a	3.78 (0.82) ^a	3.51 (0.69) ^b
FI manipulation check	3.60 (0.74) ^a	3.73 (0.84) ^a	3.22 (0.76) ^b
Dissatisfaction with Frexit	5.41 (1.26) ^a	5.26 (1.64) ^a	4.68 (1.94) ^b
Anti-Frexit action intentions	2.38 (0.89) ^{ab}	2.50 (0.95) ^a	2.16 (0.92) ^b

Note. Means with the same superscripts do not differ significantly from each other.

Figure 1

Standardized Parameters of the Mediation Model Predicting Anti-Separation Action Intentions and Dissatisfaction with Separation, Study 1 ($N = 397$)



Note. Total effect in square brackets, standard errors in brackets. Dashed lines are insignificant.

Control variables were included in the model but are not shown in the figure.

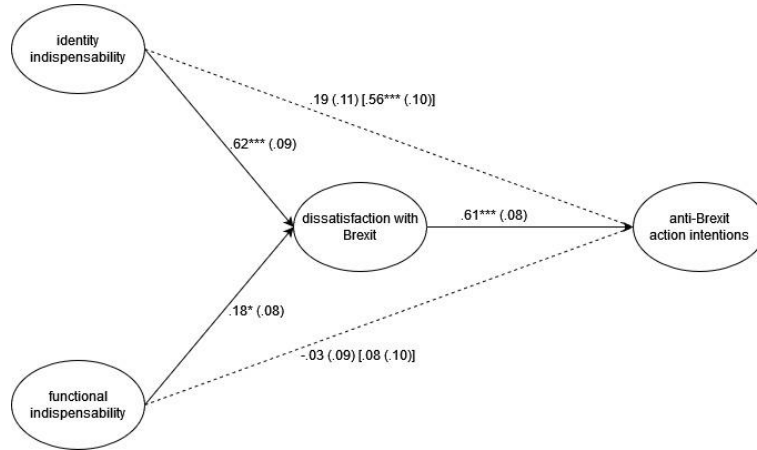
Bootstrapped results.

* $p < .05$, *** $p < .001$.

Latent constructs are indicated with ovals.

Figure 2

Standardized Parameters of the Mediation Model Predicting Anti-Brexit Action Intentions and Dissatisfaction with Brexit, Study 2a ($N = 378$)



Note. Total effect in square brackets, standard errors in brackets. Dashed lines are insignificant.

Control variables were included in the model but are not shown in the figure.

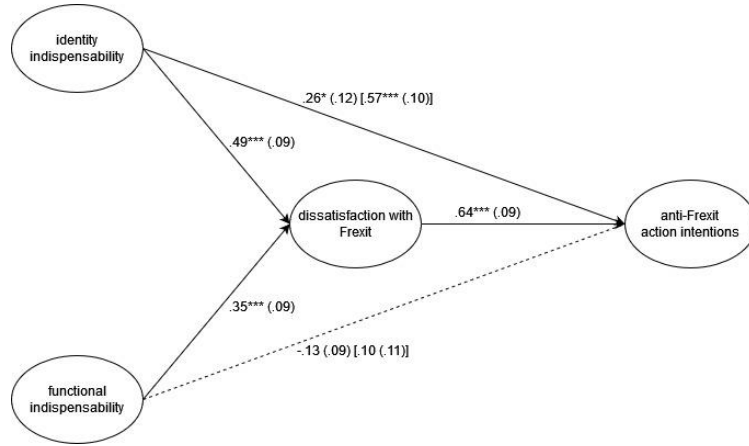
Bootstrapped results.

* $p < .05$, *** $p < .001$.

Latent constructs are indicated with ovals.

Figure 3

Standardized Parameters of the Mediation Model Predicting Anti-Frexit Action Intentions and Dissatisfaction with Frexit, Study 2b ($N = 279$)



Note. Total effect in square brackets, standard errors in brackets. Dashed line is insignificant.

Control variables were included in the model but are not shown in the figure.

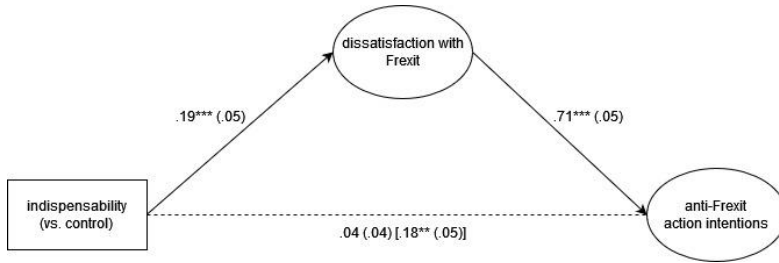
Bootstrapped results.

* $p < .05$, *** $p < .001$.

Latent constructs are indicated with ovals.

Figure 4

Standardized Parameters of the Mediation Model, Predicting Anti-Frexit Action Intentions and Dissatisfaction with Brexit, Study 3 ($N = 405$)



Note. Total effect in square brackets, standard errors in brackets. Dashed line is insignificant.

Type of indispensability (identity vs. functional) was included the model but is not shown in the figure.

Bootstrapped results.

** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Latent constructs are indicated with ovals and the manifest variable with a square.