

## **What do National Flags Stand For? An Exploration of Value Associations across 11 Nations**

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### Abstract

We examined the attributes and emotions people associate with their national flag and how these associations are related to nationalism and patriotism across 11 nations. Positive emotions and democratic values were associated with national flags across most nations in our sample. However, notable differences between nations were found due to current and historical politics. In societies known for their peaceful politics (e.g., Canada, New Zealand) or nations that were currently involved in struggles for independence (e.g., Northern Ireland, Scotland), democratic associations were particularly important; in nations with a negative past (i.e., Germany), the primary association was sports; in imperialist nations (the U.S., the United Kingdom), the flag was associated with power as well as democratic values; in nations with disruption due to separatist or extremist movements (e.g., Northern Ireland, Turkey), associations referring to aggression were not fully rejected; in nations that emphasize hierarchies (India, Singapore, Turkey), obedience was an important association. In addition, positive concepts (such as democratic and biospheric values) are ironically associated with the flag by nationalists (and patriots) in all nations, whereas power-related concepts were associated with the flag by nationalists only. Implications of these findings are discussed.

National flags are assumed to be imbued with psychological meaning, paramount in conceptually representing the nation's core values, condensing the history and memories associated with one's nation and embodying what the nation stands for (e.g., Butz, 2009; Schatz & Lavine, 2007). Some even say that the flag represents the soul of a society in terms of symbolic representation of national consciousness. This can lead to people's willingness to sacrifice their life for it (Sibley, Hoverd, & Duckitt, 2011). Thus, national flags represent group memberships and strong emotional attachments felt for one's nation (Butz, 2009).

National symbols (i.e., flags) can evoke specific national values or attributes, because they are frequently paired with core values and ideological concepts espoused by the nation (Becker, Enders-Comberg, Wagner, Christ & Schmidt, 2012; Butz, Plant & Doerr, 2007; Sibley et al., 2011). For instance, the U.S. pledge of allegiance states: "*I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.*" Likewise, flags are often appropriated to achieve the aim of one's group or as a collective nationalistic response to outgroups (Butz, 2009). For example, in a campaign to ban minarets in Switzerland, the campaign poster depicted a Swiss flag sprouting black, missile-shaped minarets alongside a person shrouded in a niqab (a head-to-toe veil that shows only the eyes; Cumming-Bruce & Erlanger, 2009). Moreover, after threatening events like the terrorist attacks of 9/11 or the Gulf War of 1991, an increase in U.S. flag display was observed (Schatz & Lavine, 2007, Skitka, 2005).

Yet, despite this crucial meaning that national flags embody, the psychology of national symbols remains largely unexplored (Geisler, 2005; Schatz & Lavine, 2007; Skitka, 2005; Sibley et al. 2011). The scarce research that has been conducted in this area has examined what national flags stand for. The findings are contradictory: Whereas exposure to the New Zealand and U.S. flag activates egalitarian concepts (Butz et al., 2007; Sibley et al., 2011) and leads to reduced levels of anti-immigrant prejudice among individuals high in nationalism (Butz et al., 2007), exposure to the German flag *increases* levels of anti-

immigrant prejudice among individuals high in nationalism (Becker et al., 2012). These contradictory findings show that national flags seem to activate very different concepts in different nations. It is unclear, however, what national flags stand for in different nations at a more general level. This important baseline information is needed if we are to understand more subtle differences in the priming effects of flags in different nations. Thus, despite several important insights of prior studies, three major shortcomings can be identified. First, it seems that exposure to different national flags activate different concepts and associations depending on the unique history and culture of a given nation. Second, prior work was mainly conducted in the U.S. (e.g., Butz et al., 2007; Butz, 2009; Ferguson & Hassin, 2007; Kimmelmeier & Winter, 2008 – for exceptions see Becker et al., 2012; Hassin, Ferguson, Shidlovski & Gross, 2007; Sibley et al., 2011). Third, each study focused on one or two aspects only, for instance, on egalitarianism (in Butz et al., 2007; Sibley et al., 2012) or on aggression (in Ferguson & Hassin, 2007).

The present research aims to fill these gaps by examining which values and emotions individuals in 11 nations associate with their national flag. Moreover, as an ancillary research question, we also investigated whether flag associations are related to indicators of intergroup relations (nationalism and patriotism). First, we provide a review of prior research on nationalism, patriotism and concepts activated by exposure to national flags. Next, we present hypotheses regarding what the 11 flags examined in this paper may stand for and possible relations between flag associations, nationalism and patriotism.

## **PRIOR WORK ON NATIONALISM, PATRIOTISM AND CONCEPTS ACTIVATED BY FLAG EXPOSURE**

Feelings of national attachment can fulfill one's basic psychological need for belongingness (e.g., Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Indeed, several studies indicated positive effects of ingroup identification on well-being (e.g., Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999). However, other work showed that ingroup identification (for instance, a strong national

attachment) can also have negative consequences. Specifically, Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) presents a strong theoretical foundation for the argument that increased national identification (potentially heightened by exposure to nationalist cues such as the national flag) can, under certain circumstances, be a source of outgroup hostility.

Social Identity Theory states that individuals are motivated to maintain or enhance a positive social identity. A positive social identity can be achieved by positively differentiating one's own group from relevant outgroups. Thus, a salient social identity can (but does not necessarily) lead to increased prejudice against outgroups not belonging to the (national) ingroup (Brewer, 1999). The link between ingroup identification and outgroup derogation becomes stronger when the groups are interwoven in a conflict of interest or supported by ideologies of moral superiority (Brewer, 1999; Brown & Zagefka, 2005). An example of a fusion of national identification and moral superiority is nationalism. Nationalism is based on national pride (i.e., patriotism) accompanied with ideologies of national dominance and superiority (Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989; see also Schatz, Staub & Lavine, 1999). Several studies indicated that nationalism is positively related to outgroup rejection, whereas patriotism (the love of one's country) is either negatively related (e.g., Blank & Schmidt, 2003), or unrelated to prejudice (e.g., Citrin, Wong & Duff, 2001; Karasawa, 2002). Subcomponents of patriotism can also be positively related to acceptance of right-wing ideology (Cohrs et al., 2004). When controlling for the shared variance between nationalism and patriotism, nationalism predicts prejudice, whereas patriotism is unrelated to prejudice (Wagner, Becker, Christ, Pettigrew & Schmidt, 2012).

In line with the reasoning that flags represent markers of ingroups and outgroups, it has been shown that exposure to the U.S. flag increased patriotic and nationalistic identification among Americans (Kimmelmeier & Winter, 2008, but see Butz et al., 2007) and increased the activation of aggressive concepts among people who frequently watch the news (Ferguson & Hassin, 2007). In addition, exposure to the Israeli flag increased unity

among Israelis (Hassin et al., 2007). Furthermore, nationalism was associated with the individual's perceived importance of symbols that represent the nation (symbolic involvement; Schatz & Lavine, 2009). In addition, research in the German context illustrated that exposure to the German flag increased outgroup prejudice among nationalistic Germans (Becker, et al., 2012). In direct contradiction to this, research in the U.S. and New Zealand context revealed that subliminal exposure to the flags of the U.S. and New Zealand activated egalitarian concepts (Butz et al., 2007; Sibley et al., 2011) and *decreased* outgroup prejudice among nationalistic Americans (Butz et al., 2007).

Hence, there is conflicting evidence regarding implications of exposure to national flags: exposure to one's national flag can entail negative consequences (as shown by Becker et al., Ferguson & Hassin, 2007; Kemmelmeier & Winter, 2008) as well as positive consequences (as shown by Butz et al., 2007; Sibley et al., 2011). Moreover, even exposure to the very same flag can sometimes be positive (Butz et al., 2007) and sometimes be negative (Ferguson & Hassin, 2007). We argue that the emotional and ideological content activated through flag exposure provides the key explanation of these diverging findings. Thus, it is crucial to know more about the meaning of national flags. For instance, Becker et al. (2012) have argued that Germans may associate other contents with the German flag than New Zealanders associate with the flag of New Zealand and Americans associate with the U.S. flag. Whereas New Zealanders and Americans might think about egalitarianism, the German flag may trigger memories regarding the holocaust (negative emotions) or dominance-related concepts such as power. In the following, we describe what national flags may stand for.

### **WHAT DO NATIONAL FLAGS STAND FOR?**

All group identities are the product of human social activity and their meanings are contestable (Reicher & Hopkins, 2000). Thus, what national flags stand for should vary – not only between nations – but also depending on time and circumstances. If a nation has won a sporting competition, pride associated with the flag should be high. If a nation is involved in

military conflicts, violence, war and aggression could be associated with the flag. If a nation fights for its independence, the flag should be associated with freedom. However, although the content of the flag is anything but fixed, the flag's meaning should not be totally arbitrary. In contrast, it is likely that historical processes formed relatively stable profiles (that are, in turn, affected by the situational context). In the following, we describe which more or less stable associations might be linked with the national flags examined in this project. We use values based on Schwartz (1999) and additional associations that are highly relevant in a flag-related context. We selected 11 heterogeneous nations (Australia, Canada, Germany, India, New Zealand, Northern Ireland Irish sample, Northern Ireland British sample, Scotland, Singapore, Turkey, and the U.S.). When selecting the nations, we aimed to include a diverse mix comprising "Western" and "Asian" nations as studied by Schwartz (1999).

Looking at differences in individual value endorsement across nations, Schwartz (1999) found that individuals in *English speaking nations* (e.g., Canada, U.S., New Zealand, Australia, England) tend to emphasize mastery values (getting ahead through self-assertion, e.g., ambition, success) and affective autonomy values (e.g., pleasure, exciting life) at the expense of conservatism (social order, respect for tradition, family security) and harmony values (emphasis on fitting harmoniously into the environment, e.g., unity with nature, protecting the environment). A closer look at the specific nations (figure 4, p. 39, Schwartz, 1999) reveals that the U.S. and Canada particularly emphasize mastery values (at the expense of harmony values), whereas New Zealand and England particularly emphasize affective autonomy (at the expense of conservatism). Australia lies in between. *Asian nations*, in contrast, tend to emphasize conservatism (e.g., in Singapore) and hierarchy values (e.g., in India; emphasis on the legitimacy of an unequal distribution of power, roles, and resources, e.g., social power, authority) at the expense of egalitarianism (equality, social justice, freedom) and affective/intellectual autonomy (intellectual autonomy is an emphasis on the desirability of individuals independently pursuing their own ideas, e.g., curiosity,

broadmindedness, Schwartz, 1999). However, other research indicated that Singaporeans have relatively high scores on achievement, self-direction and benevolence (Soh & Leong, 2002). Similarly, they report relatively high levels of ambition and politeness (Lau, 1992). Nations in *Western Europe* (e.g., Germany) tend to emphasize egalitarianism and intellectual autonomy at the expense of conservatism and hierarchy values. Moreover, *Islamic nations* (e.g., Turkey) score relatively high on conservatism at the expense of autonomy (Schwartz, 1999).

If associations with one's national flag reflect the personal endorsement of values, our hypotheses could be straightforwardly derived from Schwartz's (1999) findings. For instance, we would expect that hierarchy-related concepts (i.e., power) are likely to be associated with the Indian and Singaporean flag and that egalitarian concepts (e.g., equality, justice, freedom) are particularly associated with the German flag, but not with the Indian, Singaporean and Turkish flag. However, personal endorsement of values cannot be equated with values associated with national flags. Whereas a person can endorse egalitarian concepts in general, the very same person may not associate egalitarian concepts with her or his national flag. One reason is (for additional reasons see below) that it is important to take historical and current political issues into account. For instance, hierarchy-related values (e.g., power) should be strongly associated with the flag in powerful nations, like in the U.S. In contrast, democratic values (particularly freedom) should be associated with flags of recent colonies and countries seeking independence. Thus, in addition to the characteristics identified by Schwartz (1999), it is important to take politics into account that affect what national flags stand for. Thus, our selection of nations was also based on those characteristics reflecting historical and current political issues that we identify as paramount in the context of national flags. In the following, we will outline our hypotheses of what individuals are likely to associate with their national flag in different nations.

### **Specific Hypotheses Regarding the 11 National Flags Examined in this Study**



One caveat is important at the outset. Given that there is very little research on contents associated with national flags, some aspects of the present work are exploratory. In this sense, our study aims to provide the first comprehensive cross-cultural corpus of information on the social values which people in different nations associate with their national flag. Documenting this information is in itself important, given the use of flags and other related symbols for mobilizing groups and swaying public opinion, as history has repeatedly shown us. Indeed, Hanke et al. (2015) have made a similar call for the need for cross-cultural research to document the values people place in symbolic representations more generally in their work on perceptions of national and international historical figures. That said, whenever possible, we try to derive hypotheses based on theory and prior work.

Based on Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), we predict that individuals associate positive but not negative emotions with their flag in order to maintain a positive social identity. Moreover, since democracy is a highly valued concept in most nations, we also predict that individuals in all nations associate democratic concepts with their national flag. However, we also predict that the flag's meaning will differ in key aspects between nations. These specific hypotheses are outlined below.

***Australia.*** The Australian National Flag consists of three elements on a blue background: the Union Jack, the Commonwealth Star and the Southern Cross. The Australian flag is commonly displayed - albeit for varying reasons. It is waved as a symbol of national pride at sporting matches (e.g., Australian Government, 2014), and thus we propose it will be strongly associated with sports. The flag is also increasingly seen as symbolic of Whiteness, however (Bliuc, McGarty, Hartley & Hendres, 2012; Fozdar, Spittles & Hartley, 2014). In general, the Australian national identity is implicitly linked to being White (rather than Aboriginal), at least for White Australians (Sibley & Barlow, 2009). In addition, tattoos of the Southern Cross, and to some extent the flag itself, are often used as exclusory symbols - indicating support for a White Australia that rejects, for example, Muslim people (Fozdar et

al., 2014). People who wave flags from their cars on Australia Day report more patriotism and nationalism than those who choose not to (Fozdar et al., 2014). Due to this implicit link to Whiteness, we expect that the Australian flag might not be strongly associated with positive concepts such as justice and equality, but more with the neutral association of sports.

**Canada.** The Canadian Flag consists of a red field with a white square at its center, in the middle of which is featured a red maple leaf. We selected Canada as the prototype of an open-minded immigration country (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2010). Specifically, Canada has a clearly stated policy of multiculturalism and in recent polls, as many as 84% of Canadians agree that multiculturalism in Canada is “one of the best things about this country” (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2010). In addition, multiculturalism and tolerance have been and continue to be a key theme in the political messages and are part of the school curriculum (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2008; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). Like in Australia, aboriginal people have been discriminated against in Canada. However, the Canadian flag is relatively young – introduced in 1965. Thus, the flag should not necessarily bring to mind past colonial discrimination against Aboriginal Canadians. Instead, the colonial past of Canadians may be more associated with the "old" British Union Jack which was the Canadian flag until 1965. Thus, although the inequality faced by Aboriginal communities remains very real, it seems like most Canadians associate the modern Canadian flag with Canada’s multiculturalism and openness. We consequently expect that Canadians reject negative attributes (e.g., aggression), power-related values or negative emotions as concepts associated with their flag, and, in contrast, associate positive attributes (i.e., equality, justice). Finally, since Canada is known for its nature and a maple leaf is in the center of the flag, we expect that Canadians also associate biospheric values with their flag.

**Germany.** The flag of Germany is a tricolor consisting of three equal horizontal bands in black, red and gold. The flag was first adopted as the national flag in 1919. During World War II, the Nazis used a different flag (Hakenkreuz). After World War II in 1949, the tricolor

was used as the flag of West and East Germany. The two flags were identical until 1959, when the coat of arms of East Germany was added to the East German flag. Since the reunification of Germany in 1990, the black-red-gold tricolor has become the flag of a reunified Germany. We selected Germany as a nation with a very negative past. In light of the cruelties acted out by German Nazis, Germans are still less proud of their country compared to people in other nations (e.g., Smith & Kim, 2006). Although Germans used a different flag during WW II, the German flag should still remind people of the holocaust. We therefore predict that the flag is not primarily associated with positive emotions. It is important to note that before 2006, the German flag was displayed very rarely and those who waved the flag were viewed as nationalists. However, since the 2006 football championship was held in Germany, Germans have started enthusiastically displaying their flag during sport events (New York Times, 2006). Thus, we predict that the German flag should be primarily associated with sports and football. Finally, because the German chancellor was very popular in times of data collection and was perceived as a competent leader of the Euro debt crisis (Globalpost, 2012), the flag should also be associated with democratic concepts.

**India.** The national flag of India consists of a horizontal rectangular tricolor of deep saffron, white and India green; with the *Ashoka Chakra*, a 24-spoke wheel, in navy blue at its center. The flag was created during the fight for India's independence in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was adopted in 1947 when India became independent from the United Kingdom. The Indian flag represents very heterogeneous aspects (Virmani, 2008, Know India, 2015). It was adopted to represent the unity of the many religions, traditions and people of India as good as possible. The saffron in the flag represents courage and sacrifice, but did in fact represent the Hindu population of India, or arguably all religious traditions adhering to dharma, in a previous version of the flag. White represents peace and truth. Green represents faith and chivalry but did represent the Muslim population of India in previous versions of the flag. The Chakra represents the eternal wheel of dharma (law). In sum, we expect that the

Indian flag elicits a diverse and heterogeneous pattern of associations. We do not expect, though, that Indians associate aggression with their flag.

***New Zealand.*** The flag of New Zealand consists of a defaced Blue Ensign with the Union Flag in the canton, and four red stars with white borders to the right. The stars represent the constellation of the Southern Cross, visible in New Zealand's night sky and used for navigation. New Zealand has used this flag since 1902. Prior research indicates that the New Zealand flag activates egalitarian concepts in New Zealanders (Sibley et al., 2011). These findings are also consistent with related work on New Zealand national identity, which indicates that tolerance, support for equality, and related attitudes form a core factor of New Zealand national character (Sibley et al., 2011; Sibley & Liu, 2007; Sibley & Wilson, 2007). Thus, we predict that New Zealanders are very likely to associate democratic values such as justice, freedom and equality with the flag. That said, it should be noted that there have been calls for a referendum in recent years to change the New Zealand flag, with anecdotal evidence indicating that most people may prefer the Silver Fern (another of New Zealand's national symbols commonly used in sports). Such calls, by some, have been made on the grounds that the symbolism of the New Zealand flag may not be fully reaching its potential to represent a modern New Zealand. Thus, while the flag should certainly represent or be imbued with a sense of equality and tolerance for many New Zealanders, it may be that some other New Zealand symbols might come to better represent these values in the future.

***Northern Ireland.*** Studying the meaning of national flags in the Northern Irish context is particularly intriguing because two main ethno-political communities hold conflicting aspirations concerning national sovereignty, so no national flag enjoys general consensual support. The Irish Tricolor is the official flag of the Republic of Ireland but has no official status in Northern Ireland. It consists of a vertical tricolor of green, white and orange, which is supposed to symbolize the Gaelic tradition of Ireland (green), the followers of William of Orange in Ireland (orange) and the aspiration for peace (white). The Union Flag, or Union

Jack, is the flag of the United Kingdom, and therefore does have official status in Northern Ireland. It integrates three older national flags: the red cross of St George of the Kingdom of England, the white saltire of St Andrew for Scotland and the red saltire of St Patrick to represent Ireland. Both flags are connected to the expression of respective identities, but also to controversy, conflict and intimidation (Bryan et al., 2010). Controversies surrounding the display of flags have played a key role in the conflict from the 1960s right up to the present (Bryan, Stevenson, Gillespie & Bell, 2010; Butz, 2009; Nolan, Bryan, Dwyer, Hayward, Radford & Shirlow, 2014). Catholic Republicans perceive the Union flag as a symbol of British domination, whereas Protestant Unionists regard the Irish Tricolor as a foreign flag, or even as symbol of a violent threat given its association with paramilitary groups (Bryan et al., 2010), although it was originally designed to symbolize peace between Catholics and Protestants (Butz, 2009). For many Irish nationalists, it symbolizes a more or less successful collective struggle against discrimination. Thus, we expect that the Irish Tricolor is associated with democratic values (freedom, equality and justice) and it might also be associated with aggression. In contrast, the British flag still has associations with a sense of past imperial greatness. Thus, we expect that the British Union flag is associated with imperialistic values such as power and dominance, but also with democratic values (e.g., freedom). In general, the Irish Tricolor might be perceived as more positively by nationalists than the British Union flag is by unionists (i.e., more positive emotions are attached to the Tricolor than the British flag), because there is a sense among unionists that they have not benefitted as much from the peace process than nationalists have (as the dominant group, the unionists had more to lose, e.g., Mac Ginty & du Toit, 2007).

**Scotland.** The flag of Scotland consists of the White St. Andrew's Cross on a blue background. The Scots can separate their identity (and related symbols) from the British identity and should therefore be clearly positive about their flag. In light of the current struggle for independence from the British which was salient during the time of data

collection, we expect that the Scottish flag is strongly associated with democratic values such as freedom, equality and justice. Moreover, it is important to note that Scots define their national culture and characteristics in relation to their English counterpart, which they characterize as being aggressive and arrogant, and themselves as relatively peaceful people, both historically and contemporarily (e.g., Reicher & Hopkins, 2000). For instance, prior work shows that making English stereotypes of Scottish people (as being mean) salient increases both generosity and prosocial tendencies amongst Scots (Hopkins et al., 2007). Thus, we predict that concepts such as aggression and obedience should be strongly negatively associated with the flag of Scotland.

*Singapore.* The national flag of Singapore was adopted in 1959, the year Singapore achieved self-governance from the United Kingdom. It consists of a horizontal bicolor of red above white, overlaid in the upper-left quadrant by a white crescent moon facing a pentagon of five small white five-pointed stars. Red symbolizes universal brotherhood and equality; white symbolizes purity and virtue; the crescent moon symbolizes a young nation on the ascendant; and the five stars stand for democracy, peace, progress, justice and equality (Victoria school, 2014). Therefore, we predict that the Singaporean flag is likely to be associated with democratic values. In line with this, multiculturalism is one aspect defining the Singaporean society (e.g., Chander, 2003; Leong, 2014). Singapore is commonly regarded as an “authoritarian democracy” in political science. It has free elections but it de facto is a one-party state with a high degree of influence on socio-economic and political activities (Freedom House, 2012; Lim, Yang, Leong, & Hong, 2014). Surveys on values consistently show that Singaporeans endorse conservative and hierarchical principles (Schwartz, 1999). Accordingly, it is likely that concepts such as obedience and conformity as well as power-related values are associated with the Singaporean flag. In contrast to other nations, sports is not a popular activity in Singapore; 54% of the population do not engage in any sport

(Singapore Sports Council, 2011). It is thus unlikely that Singaporeans associate sports with their flag.

**Turkey.** The Turkish flag is red featuring a crescent with a star. It is frequently displayed together with Atatürk (the founder of the Republic of Turkey). The flag is often accompanied by the sentence „ne mutlu Türküm diyene" (*How happy is the one who says I am a Turk*, Hermann, 2008). It is frequently displayed at public buildings, in schools, restaurants and offices. The flag symbolizes Kemalism, nationalism, the “elevated” Turkish nation (Yegen, 2009) and the distinction of Turks from other minorities living in Turkey (e.g., the Kurds). Although Turkey is a multicultural society, the Turks do not accept minorities that do not assimilate to the Turkish nationalism (Smith, 2005). Consequently, minorities in Turkey do not feel represented by the Turkish flag. In 2005, there were some incidents where Kurds burned the Turkish flag (Yegen, 2009). Instead, the Kurds have their own flag, which they are not allowed to show (Hermann, 2008). The frequent display of the Turkish flag accompanied by a picture of Atatürk, and the elevation of Turks as being distinct from minorities represent dominance. In support of this, Schwartz (1999) found that conservative and hierarchical values are strongly endorsed in Turkey. Therefore, we predict that the Turkish flag is primarily associated with power and dominance. Secondly, given the political struggles with minorities within Turkey (e.g., the PKK), the Turkish flag might be associated with aggression. A well-known Turkish poet said “What makes the flag a real flag is the blood on it. If someone died for the country it is homeland” (“Bayraklari bayrak yapan ustundeki kandir. Toprak eger ugrunda olen varsa vatandir”). Furthermore, we expect that Turks associate positive emotions with their flag (e.g., pride), because Turkish children are educated to be patriots from an early age (e.g., Robert, Schlicht, & Saleem, 2010). Finally, although football is popular in Turkey, it is more important on a regional level. Thus, during football games, flags of football clubs are more prevalent than the national flag.

*U.S.* The flag of the U.S. consists of thirteen equal horizontal stripes of red alternating with white, with a blue rectangle in the upper left bearing fifty small, white, five-pointed stars. The 50 stars represent the 50 states of the U.S.; the 13 stripes represent the thirteen British colonies that declared independence from the United Kingdom. Katz and Hass (1998) argue that there are two independent and conflicting core value orientations in the American society: humanitarianism-egalitarianism as pro-social values and individualism/the Protestant work ethic as an emphasis on personal freedom, discipline, devotion to work and achievement. In line with this and as outlined above, the U.S. flag activates egalitarian concepts (Butz et al., 2007), as well as aggressive concepts (only for those who frequently follow the U.S. news, Ferguson & Hassin, 2007). Thus, we predict that the U.S. flag is associated with mixed attributes: first, it is likely that individuals associate equality, justice and freedom with the flag (as marker of humanitarianism-egalitarianism, see also Butz et al., 2007); second, it is likely that individuals associate power and dominance with the U.S. flag given that the U.S. is ranked as the most powerful nation of the world (FNSR, 2012); third, it is possible that the U.S. flag does also elicit associations like war and aggression (e.g., Ferguson & Hassin, 2007), because the U.S. is a country that often participates in military operations (e.g., the war against terrorism; Operation Odyssey Dawn in Libya in the year of data collection).

### **Relations of Flag Associations with Nationalism and Patriotism**

What do nationalists and patriots think about their flag? First, in light of the distinction between nationalism and patriotism, nationalists should primarily associate power and dominance with their national flag, because feelings of superiority is one core element of nationalism (e.g., Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989). In contrast, patriots should not associate power-related concepts with their national flag. As the love of one's country is the core element of patriotism, it is rather likely that patriots are particularly reluctant to associate negative emotions and negative concepts such as aggression with their national flag.



However, some associations might be similar for nationalists and patriots, because nationalism and patriotism share the element of a strong national identification (e.g., Cohrs et al., 2004; Wagner et al., 2012). Specifically, we predict that concepts that can be regarded as positive (such as democracy and equality) might ironically also be associated with the flag by both nationalists and patriots. Imagine a person for whom equality and justice are really important. Given that there is no country in the world which could be considered as totally democratic, this person should be motivated to critically observe her or his country's politics. This person would see that egalitarian concepts are not fully realized in her or his society and, thus, would not associate egalitarian concepts with her or his national flag (for this argument see Cohrs et al., 2004). For instance, Cohrs et al. (2004) illustrated that the belief that democracy has been fully achieved in one's society is correlated with right-wing authoritarianism. This finding suggests that individuals who strongly believe in egalitarianism might be those who are more likely to see instances where their own country failed to act according to justice and equality. Based on this argument, we hypothesize that the uncritical (and more nationalistic and patriotic) individuals, rather than the critical ones, associate particularly positive concepts with their national flag (such as equality and justice). In line with this argument, research conducted in the U.S. revealed that personal regard for national symbols is closely related to one's level of nationalism (Schatz & Lavine, 2007). Therefore, we predict that positive concepts associated with the flag (democratic concepts, positive emotions) go along with both nationalism and patriotism.

Finally, it is interesting to ask how values related to our biosphere correlate with nationalism and patriotism. At first glance, biospheric values might be associated by those with low scores on nationalism, because they represent "green ideas" (respecting the earth and protecting the environment). We predict, in contrast, that biospheric values are associated with the flag among those endorsing nationalistic and patriotic ideas. The first argument follows the logic described above: individuals who associate biospheric values with the flag

might be uncritical, because they glorify their flag and do not see that their country's politics may actually harm the nature. Secondly, research illustrates that there is a positive relation between bioregionalism and right-wing ecology (Olsen, 2000). Right-wing ecology deals with the concern to defend unique social and ecological communities against impulses of mixing them and of homogenizing them. For instance, there is a significant "green" and "ecological" element in much of the discourse of the European Far Right parties. This green element was also part in the thoughts and practices of the Nazis in Germany (Gröning & Wolschke-Bulmahn, 1983; Dominick, 1992). Also, in the U.S., ecological ideas have been taken up by various groups of the Far Right (Olsen, 2000). Therefore, we predict that individuals who associate biospheric values with the flag are also more likely to endorse nationalism.

We predict that all relations described in this paragraph (relations between democratic and biospheric associations, nationalism and patriotism) are consistent across nations. In the following, we test our hypotheses by asking students in 11 nations which concepts and emotions they associate with their national flag. We further explore how these associations are related to nationalism and patriotism.

## **METHOD**

### **Procedure**

All participants completed an online survey, except Singaporeans, who completed a printed version. All participants completed the survey in English, except for Germans who completed the survey in German. First, participants saw an image of their national flag and were asked what they associated with the flag (attributes, Schwartz values, emotions). Then, participants completed measures of nationalism and patriotism. In the Northern Ireland sample, participants saw the Irish Tricolor as well as the British Union flag and were asked to select the flag they identify with. Subsequent questions then referred to the flag they had selected. We refer to those who selected the Irish Tricolor as the "Irish sample" and to those

who selected the Union Flag as the “British sample”. Data collection started at the end of 2011 and continued in 2012 in some nations.

### **Participants**

Data was initially collected from 1881 university students who were inhabitants of 11 nations (Australia, Canada, Germany, India, New Zealand, Northern Ireland – an Irish and a British sample, Scotland, Singapore, Turkey, and the United States). We collected data from university students only in order to have comparable samples. We excluded five participants with missing values in important variables. Moreover, we excluded 287 participants (18.8%) who were non-citizens (with non-citizens ranging from 51.4% in Scotland to 0% in India). We excluded these participants, because prior work illustrated that national symbols do not activate the same concepts in citizens and non-citizens (Sibley et al., 2011). Thus, participants were in total 1588 university students (70.6% were female, 24.4% were male, 5% did not indicate their gender). Participants’ age ranged from 17 to 78 ( $M = 21.63$ ,  $SD = 1.26$ ), with nation means ranging from 19.5 (U.S.) to 27.8 (Australia). Sample sizes ranged from 68 (Australia) to 375 (Canada) with a mean sample size of 144. Interestingly, regarding the Northern Ireland sample, not all participants who selected the Irish flag were Catholics (instead, the Irish sample consisted of 94 Catholics, three Protestants and three participants who did not select a religion). Likewise, not all participants who selected the Union flag were Protestants (instead, the British sample consisted of 49 Protestants, eight Catholics and 18 participants who did not select a religion). However, because they identified with their respective flag, we did not drop any participant from the Northern Ireland samples.

### **Measures**

**General associations (attributes and values).** We used a shortened version of the Schwartz value inventory as well as additional attributes that were relevant in the particular context of national flags. All items are displayed in Table 1. The shortened version of the Schwartz value inventory comprises 15 items mapping the four second-order dimensions

(Stern, Dietz & Guagnano, 1998): biospheric/altruistic values were measured with six items (e.g., Unity with nature, fitting into nature), tradition was measured with three items (e.g., honoring parents and elders, showing respect), self-enhancement was measured with three items (e.g., influence, having an impact on people and events) and openness was measured with three items (e.g., an exciting life, stimulating experiences). Additional 27 associations were slightly adapted and extended from Butz and Kunstman (2012). These items contained one word attributes (e.g., justice, freedom, equality, aggression, violence; all attributes are displayed in Table 1). The instruction for all items was “Please describe what you think of when you see the xxx flag” (xxx stands for the 11 nations, e.g., Scottish/Canadian/German). All items were answered on a 9-point rating scale ranging from 1(not at all) to 9(very much). In total, participants completed 42 items.

As a first step, we examined whether the scales measured the same concepts in all nations. For this purpose, we factor-analyzed all 42 general associations for all nations together using an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with promax rotation. Six factors with Eigenvalues > 1 emerged (13.4, 4.63, 2.17, 2.03, 1.57, 1.39, 0.99...) explaining 59.94% of the variance (see Table 1). The six factors were meaningful and represented the contents summarized in our hypotheses. The first factor constituted 11 items measuring *democratic concepts* (such as equality, democracy, tolerance, freedom). The second factor consisted of 11 items from three *Schwartz clusters* biospheric/altruistic values, openness, and – against expectations – tradition. The three biospheric values were the top-loading items and are thus representative for this factor. The third factor consisted of 12 items presenting *power-related values* (e.g., power, dominance, prestige, strength, honor). The fourth factor consisted of two items representing *conformity/obedience*. The fifth factor contained three items representing *aggression-related associations* (violence, aggression, war). The sixth factor is based on two items representing *sports* (sports, football). Thus, the factor analysis confirms that democratic concepts, power, obedience, aggression and sports are important and separable attributes

associated with national flags. Surprisingly, however, the three distinct Schwartz values loaded together on one factor and, thus, did not form an interpretable scale.

We repeated the factor analysis eleven times including all 42 items, separately for each nation. Results revealed that the factor structures differed between nations. When extracting six factors in each nation, we did not find the same factor solutions across nations. In Canada, Scotland, Singapore and the U.S., we basically found the six factors described above. In other nations, we found different structures. To give some examples, the biospheric values in Scotland, the biospheric, altruistic and openness values in Australia and Germany (and in New Zealand and Turkey almost all Schwartz values) load on the egalitarianism factor. Moreover, in Australia, dominance and power load on the factor “aggression”. In Germany, both obedience and conformity load on the power factor. In Turkey, obedience loads together with violence and dominance. In the U.S., obedience and conformity load on different factors. In India, morality, fairness and kindness load together with obedience, conformity and self-enhancement values. Moreover, in India, democracy and freedom load together with dominance and prestige. Similarly, in Turkey, freedom and humanity load together with power and prestige. Among the Northern Ireland Irish sample, power and strength load on the equality factor, whereas among the Northern Ireland Unionists, football and sports load together with Schwartz values. Similarly, in Singapore, kindness, humanity and tradition load together with sports and football. Full factor structures can be obtained from the first author.

We also calculated confirmatory factor analyses based on the two to five items with the strongest loading which mirrored the diverse pattern found in the EFA. Although acceptable fit indices were found in most nations, problems occurred in India, Northern Ireland (Irish sample) and Turkey. In sum, these analyses suggest that we cannot establish construct equivalence across nations, because the factor structures are clearly different. As a last attempt (given that we preferred to create scales rather than running the analysis using single items), we identified those items with the most substantive loadings per factor across

nations, correlated these items or conducted reliability analyses for those scales with more than two items. This approach was successful in identifying scales that directly map the six factors extracted above and support our theoretical reasoning: **Democratic values** contained the items democracy, equality, freedom and justice ( $\alpha = .83$ , ranging  $\alpha = .76$  in Scotland to  $\alpha = .92$  Australia). **Power-related associations** contained the items power and dominance ( $r = .59$ , ranging from  $r = .37$  in India to  $r = .67$  in Germany). **Obedience-related associations** contained the items obedience and conformity ( $r = .63$ , ranging from  $r = .18$  in Turkey to  $r = .77$  in Scotland). **Aggression-related associations** contained the items aggression and violence ( $r = .59$ , ranging from  $r = .25$  in India to  $r = .78$  in Germany). **Sports-related associations** contained the items sports and football ( $r = .49$ , ranging from  $r = .23$  in Canada to  $r = .74$  in Northern Ireland, Irish sample). **Biospheric values** included all three biospheric items ( $\alpha = .91$ , ranging from  $\alpha = .83$  in Singapore to  $\alpha = .95$  in Australia). Given the lack of construct invariance, we decided to compare these six associations *within* (instead of between) nations. That is, we compare nations in terms of the relative importance ascribed to each flag association.

**Emotions.** We included 13 emotions which were answered on the same 9-point rating scale described above. An EFA with promax rotation using data from all nations resulted in a two factor solution (Eigenvalues: 5.45; 2.76; 0.82;...), separating the nine negative (shame, fear, disgust, contempt, anger, guilt, anxiety, hate, fury) from the four positive emotions (hope, pride, joy, happiness). Reliabilities were good (negative emotions:  $\alpha = .91$ , ranging from  $\alpha = .81$  in Northern Ireland – Irish sample to  $\alpha = .93$  in Australia; positive emotions:  $\alpha = .88$ , ranging from  $\alpha = .81$  in India to  $\alpha = .93$  in Northern Ireland, British sample).

**Patriotism.** Patriotism was measured with six items on a 7-point rating scale ranging from 1(*strongly disagree*) to 7(*strongly agree*). Two items were deleted to improve reliability (“I am proud of xxx's democracy”, “I feel great pride in xxx's development over time“). The remaining four items were indicators of national pride and taken from Kosterman and

Feshbach (1989; “I love my country”; “I am proud to be a xxx”; “I feel a great pride in the land that is our xxx”; “The fact that I am a xxx is an important part of my identity”).

Patriotism was reliable across nations (ranging from  $\alpha = .86$  in Turkey to  $\alpha = .94$  in Northern Ireland (Irish sample), Singapore, U.S.).

**Nationalism.** Nationalism was measured with six items on a 7-point rating scale ranging from 1(*strongly disagree*) to 7(*strongly agree*). Four items were taken from Kosterman & Feshbach (1989): “Other nations should try to make their government as much like ours as possible”; “Generally, the more influence xxx has on other nations, the better off they are”; “Foreign nations have done some very fine things but it takes xxx to do things in a big way”; “It is important that xxx win in international sporting competition like the Olympics”(this last item had to be deleted to improve reliabilities) and two were adapted from Becker et al. (2012); “xxx is better than most other nations”; “xxx is the best country in the world”. The five-item nationalism scale was reliable across nations (ranging from  $\alpha = .77$  in India to  $\alpha = .90$  in the US. In addition, we measured prejudice towards immigrants but do not discuss this variable any further, because it was not the main focus of the paper.

## RESULTS

We first report mean differences in attributes and emotions associated with the flag within nations. That is, we compare nations in terms of the relative importance ascribed to each flag association (see Table 2). Second, we analyze (again within nations) how the reported associations and emotions are related to nationalism and patriotism.

### Profiles of Flag Associations for each Nation

In the following, we test for the relative importance of associations within nations. That is, we put the six associations in each nation in order and conduct five within-nation comparisons. In order to control for alpha-inflation, we use the Bonferroni correction (.05/5 comparisons) and define differences smaller than  $p < .01$  as significant. Moreover, we interpret all attributes having a mean significantly above the neutral scale midpoint ( $ps < .01$ )

as associated with the flag. Likewise, all attributes with a mean significantly below the scale midpoint are interpreted as negatively associated with the flag ( $ps < .01$ ), meaning that individuals intend to keep their flag at a distance from this attribute (for a parallel construction of identification and disidentification, see Becker & Tausch, 2014). Attributes that do not differ from the neutral midpoint (5) are neither positively nor negatively associated with the flag and will not be mentioned below.

***Australia.*** The order of associations in Australia was as follows: sports, democracy, power, obedience, biospheric values, and aggression. Given the relatively small sample size, the five comparisons between the six associations did not reveal any difference. Regarding differences from the midpoint, only sports was significantly associated with the Australian flag. Biospheric values and aggression were negatively associated with the flag. All other concepts did not differ from the midpoint of the scale.

***Canada:*** The order of associations in Canada was as follows: democratic values, biospheric values, obedience, power, sports, and aggression. All of these six associations differed significantly from each other. Regarding difference from the midpoint, two attributes were associated with the Canadian flag: Democracy and biospheric values. As expected, power and aggression (but also sports) were negatively associated with the Canadian flag.

***Germany.*** The order of associations in Germany was as follows: Sports, democratic values, power, obedience, aggression, biospheric values. All of these associations differed significantly from each other except for the difference between democratic values and power and the difference between obedience and aggression. Regarding differences from the midpoint, as expected, sports and democratic values were associated with the German flag, whereas aggression and biospheric values were negatively associated.

***India.*** The order of associations in India was as follows: Sports, democratic values, biospheric values, power, obedience and aggression. The means were, however, close to each other. Only the difference between obedience and aggression was significant. Regarding



differences from the midpoint, all concepts were associated with the flag except aggression, which was significantly negatively associated.

***New Zealand.*** The order of associations in New Zealand was as follows: Democratic values, biospheric values, obedience, sports, power, and aggression. The difference between democratic values and biospheric values and between power and aggression was significant. Regarding differences from the midpoint, only democratic values were significantly associated with the flag, whereas aggression was negatively associated with the flag.

***Northern Ireland Irish sample.*** The order of associations with the Irish Tricolor was as follows: Sports, democratic values, biospheric values, aggression, power, obedience. Only the difference between democratic and biospheric values was significant. Regarding differences from the midpoint, sports and democratic values were associated with the Irish Tricolor, all other associations did not differ from the scale midpoint.

***Northern Ireland British sample.*** The order of associations with the Union Jack was as follows: power, democratic values, sports, biospheric values, obedience, and aggression. Differences between democratic values and sports, sports and biospheric values, obedience and aggression were significant. Regarding differences from the scale midpoint, as expected, power and democratic values were associated with the flag, whereas aggression was negatively associated.

***Scotland.*** The order of associations with the Scottish flag was as follows: democratic values, sports, power, biospheric values, aggression, and obedience. Democratic values and sports differed from each other as well as biospheric values and aggression. Regarding differences from the scale midpoint, democratic values and sports were associated with the flag, whereas aggression and obedience were negatively associated. Thus, as expected, democratic associations were most important.

***Singapore.*** The order of associations in Singapore was as follows: Obedience, democratic values, power, biospheric values, sports, and aggression. The following

associations differed from each other: democratic values and power, power and biospheric values, biospheric values and sports, sports and aggression. All associations differed significantly from the scale midpoint: Obedience, democratic values, and power were associated with the flag, whereas biospheric values, sports and aggression were negatively associated. Thus, as expected, Singaporeans are more likely than people from other nations to associate obedience with their flag but less likely to associate sports with their flag.

*Turkey.* The order of associations in Turkey was as follows: power, democratic values, obedience, aggression, sports, and biospheric values. The difference between power and democratic values was significant. Thus, as expected, Turks are more likely to associate power than any other concept with the Turkish flag. Regarding differences from the scale midpoint, power, democratic values and obedience were significantly associated with the flag. All other associations did not differ from the neutral midpoint.

*U.S.* The order of associations in the U.S. was as follows: Democratic values, power, obedience, biospheric values, sports, aggression. The difference between power and obedience was significant. All associations were significantly different from the midpoint except obedience. Democratic values and power were associated with the flag, whereas biospheric values, sports and aggression were negatively associated.

### **Emotional Associations with National Flags**

In terms of emotions, as expected, negative emotions were not associated with the flag in all nations, whereas positive emotions were associated with the flag in all nations except Germany (see Table 2). Thus, as predicted, Germans are reluctant to associate positive emotions with their national flag.

### **Relations between Flag Associations, Nationalism and Patriotism**

Finally, we present correlational analyses to examine whether individuals' high nationalism and patriotism were more likely to associate certain values and emotions with the flag compared to individuals lower in nationalism (Table 3) and patriotism (Table 4).

Comparisons from the neutral scale midpoint (4) within nations (using a conservative  $p < .001$  level of significance) revealed that individuals were patriotic in all nations except Germany. In terms of nationalism, Singapore differed significantly in the positive direction from the scale midpoint, whereas Germany, both Northern Ireland samples, Scotland and Turkey differed significantly in the negative direction from the scale midpoint. Replicating prior work, nationalism and patriotism were significantly positively correlated in all nations (ranging from  $r = .32$  in New Zealand to  $r = .75$  in Turkey, all  $ps < .05$ ). Thus, given the overlap between nationalism and patriotism, we also report partial correlations.

Results of the bivariate and partial correlations reveal a quite homogeneous picture across nations for several variables: as expected, the more individuals endorse nationalism and patriotism, the more they associate democratic values, positive emotions, and biospheric values with the flag in almost all nations (see Table 3 and 4). In those few nations where the relations were not significant, they were at least positive (all  $rs > .09$ ). Importantly, as expected, the partial correlations revealed that nationalists associated power with their flag in almost all nations (in those three nations where the correlation was not significant, the coefficients were all positive  $> .11$ ), whereas patriots do not associate power with their national flag (except in Northern Ireland, British sample). There were other notable differences in partial correlations. First, the obedience association was unrelated to patriotism in all nations except for Scotland. In Scotland, patriots rejected to associate obedience with their flag. However, the obedience association was unrelated (in six nations) or positively related (in five nations) with nationalism. The aggression association was unrelated to nationalism in eight out of the eleven nations, whereas it was unrelated (in five) or negatively related (in six nations) with patriotism. A similar result occurred for negative emotions. In most nations, negative emotional associations were unrelated to nationalism (they were positively associated in three and negatively associated in two nations), whereas negative emotional associations were negatively associated with patriotism in more than half of the

nations. That is, as expected, patriots seem to be motivated, at least in the majority of the examined nations, to keep concepts of aggression and negative emotions at a distance from their national flag. Finally, the partial correlations suggest a similar pattern for nationalism and patriotism in terms of the sports association: It was either unrelated (in six/seven nations) or positively related (in four nations) with nationalism and patriotism.

## **DISCUSSION**

This research presents an important contribution to the literature on national symbols. So far, the meaning and content of national flags has been largely unexplored. Moreover, almost all research that has been conducted on national symbolism refers to the U.S. flag. The present work provides a first illustration of what people associated with their national flag in 11 diverse nations. In addition, our research shows that specific associations with the flag are related to nationalism and patriotism and, thus, have important implications for intergroup relations. In the following, we will first outline similarities and differences across nations. Then, we will briefly present the most important nation-specific findings and comment on patterns that are prevalent across groups of nations. Finally, we will discuss the implications of the finding that certain flag associations are related to nationalism.

### **Flag Associations within the 11 Nations**

As expected, sports was the most important flag association in *Australia*. This reflects that national sports play a major role in Australia and that the Australian flag is frequently displayed at sports events and that Australians see themselves as a sporting nation (Phillips & Smith, 2000). Moreover, possibly due to the fact that the Australian flag is linked to Whiteness and thus implies discrimination of non-White people (Fozdar et al., 2014), democratic values were not strongly associated with the flag of Australia. As expected, in *Canada*, democratic values were most important, followed by biospheric values. This result mirrors that Canada stands for tolerance and values its nature (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2010; Ipsos Reid, 2013). The maple leaf in the center of the Canadian flag could in

itself be perceived as a symbol presenting unity with nature. Moreover, given the strong emphasis on tolerance, Canadians did not associate power or aggression with their flag. It is conceivable that these positive associations result from Canada standing for openness.

However, national flags do not define the national ingroup in isolation, but in relation to other nations. It is thus possible that the Canadian flag may also evoke a comparison to the U.S. flag (Canadians evaluate Canada much more positive than the U.S.) and therefore may activate a direct contrast to the Canadian image of the USA (Bow, 2008). Although Canadians have a peaceful relationship with the U.S., there is a strong interest in Canada in maintaining an image that is distinct from (and where possible superior to) their more powerful southern neighbor. Thus, because the U.S. flag may be strongly associated with power (especially military power) for many Canadians, this may have inspired a comparison of the two nations and contributed to the finding that power was not associated with the Canadian flag.

In *Germany*, as expected, sports was by far the most important concept associated with the German flag. Moreover, specific for Germany was the finding that positive emotions were not associated with the flag and that Germans did not endorse patriotism. Together, these findings strongly support the assumption that the German history of the Holocaust is still prevalent in people's minds and people are neither proud of Germany nor do they associate positive feelings with their flag. However, since the world championship was held in Germany in 2006, Germans were "allowed" to show the flag at football games. Therefore, the first association that comes to mind when seeing the flag is sports – an unbiased and value-free association.

In *India*, it was remarkable that individuals associated different values with the flag to the same degree. As outlined in the introduction, the Indian flag represents very heterogeneous aspects. This is mirrored in the empirical findings. That is, India was the only nation in which all examined associations were linked to the flag except aggression and negative emotions, illustrating the heterogeneous and complex meaning of the Indian flag. In

general, the Indian flag was evaluated in very positive terms. Interestingly, besides biospheric values and obedience, all attributes associated with the Indian flag were typically ascribed to individualistic nations. However, as argued above, in light of India's long struggle for independence, it makes much sense that Indians associate these values (particularly freedom) with their flag. In addition, this finding nicely illustrates that personal endorsement of values (e.g., Schwartz, 1999) cannot be equated with values associated with one's national flag.

In contrast to India, in *New Zealand* most individuals responded rather neutrally. That is, most values were neither associated nor not associated with the flag. Only democratic values were associated with the flag of New Zealand. This finding could be due to the fact that in New Zealand, people are less frequently exposed to the flag, because the placement of flags outside residential homes is extremely uncommon (Sibley et al., 2011). This finding could also support the notion that the symbolic power of the current New Zealand flag is waning. Indeed, there have been calls for a referendum to be held on changing the New Zealand flag, with the most preferred option being a variant based on the Silver Fern (a native fern). Future research is needed to compare what New Zealanders associate with the Silver Fern compared to the flag of New Zealand. If the Silver Fern represent the "true" flag of New Zealand, it should elicit much more positive emotions and positive associations compared to the official flag of New Zealand.

In *Northern Ireland*, as expected, democratic values (but also sports) were strongly associated with the Irish Tricolor. Moreover, although we had expected that individuals would associate aggression with the Irish Tricolor, we found that at least aggression was not negatively associated as in almost all other nations. In contrast to the Irish Tricolor, power and democratic values were strongly associated with the Union Jack supporting the argument that the British flag still has some associations with a sense of past imperial greatness.

In *Scotland*, democratic values and sports were the most important associations, and, as expected, aggression and obedience were rejected as flag associations. This is fully in line

with research suggesting that Scots evaluate themselves as peaceful (at least compared to the English), but not obedient (e.g., Reicher & Hopkins, 2000).

In *Singapore*, individuals associated obedience, democratic values and power with the flag. Thus, as expected, whereas obedience was not associated with most of the other national flags, it is an important association in Singapore. It is a core value for the island state and a reflection on the social compact between the citizenry and the “authoritarian democracy”.

In *Turkey*, as expected, power was the most important flag association. This mirrors that Turks present their flag in combination with Atatürk, who symbolizes the empowerment of the Turkish ethnicity over the other ethnicities living in Turkey (e.g., Kurds). Moreover, like in Northern Ireland (Irish Tricolor), aggression as flag association was not fully rejected.

Finally, in the *U.S.*, as expected, individuals associate democratic concepts and power with the flag. These findings nicely mirror that the U.S. is perceived as the most powerful nation in the world, but also stands for freedom and democracy. Interestingly, although the U.S. is involved in armed conflicts, aggression was not associated with the U.S. flag. As discussed below, it would be interesting to conduct a future study on attributes individuals associate with the national flags of other nations. Based on Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), it is likely that individuals from other nations are more likely to associate aggression and violence with the U.S. flag than do U.S. Americans.

### **Similarities within Groups of Nations**

In sum, several similarities across nations can be identified: In line with Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), in all examined nations, negative emotions were not associated with the flag, whereas positive emotions were associated with the flag except in Germany. Moreover, almost all nations significantly associated democratic values with their flag. A closer look, however, reveals that some nations have a more similar pattern of results compared to others. We describe these “*profiles*” in the following.

First, we found that democratic values were endorsed more likely than any other attribute in three nations only (Canada, New Zealand, and Scotland). Two of these nations are known for their multiculturalism, openness and peacefulness (Canada, New Zealand) – principles for which democratic concepts are very important. Scotland, on the other hand, is currently involved in a struggle for independence from the United Kingdom (Reicher & Hopkins, 2000). Similarly to Scotland, in Northern Ireland, individuals were also very likely to associate democratic concepts with their flag. Thus, it seems that values such as democracy, equality, freedom and justice are very important in nations that are either known for its open-mindedness or involved in struggles for independence. In line with this, democratic values were also very important in nations that recently have been colonies (e.g., India), underlining the important link between independence and democratic associations.

Secondly, in nations with an admitted negative past (i.e., Germany) or in nations in which the flag is linked to Whiteness (and thus, signals exclusion), sports – as a neutral and value-free association – was the primary association people thought of when seeing their national flag. This finding supports our reasoning that the Australian flag may remind people of discrimination of Aboriginal people, Muslims and Middle-Easterners and that the German flag may remind people of the holocaust. Obviously, there are important differences between Germany and Australia. This can be also seen in the finding that positive emotions (that are associated with all national flags, including the Australian flag) were not associated with the German flag. Thus, at least in Germany, it seems that the association with sports and in fact the massive display of flags during football games reflects a neutral substitute for a difficult national identity that lacks an unburdened relation to their national flag. Support for this argument is provided by a recent speech given by the federal president of Germany, Joachim Gauck, who commemorated the victims of National Socialism in a ceremony 70 years since the liberation of the Auschwitz concentration camp by saying that there is “no German identity without Auschwitz” (Federal Foreign Office, 2015).



Third, in imperialist nations (the U.S., the United Kingdom), the flag was associated with power as well as democratic values. This is in line with research showing that dominant groups favor group-based inequality and thus connect “hierarchy-enhancing” concepts (Sidanius & Pratto, 2001) with their flag. Moreover, the U.S. is perceived as the most powerful nation and the United Kingdom established the powerful “British empire”. This sense of past imperial greatness resonates particularly strongly in the Northern Irish context.

Fourth, in nations in which there is disruption due to separatist or extremist movements (e.g., Northern Ireland, Turkey), associations referring to aggression were not fully rejected. That is, in all nations, individuals kept their flag at a distance from an association with aggression, whereas aggression was neither associated nor not associated with the Irish Tricolor and Turkish flag. However, besides this similarity, the Irish Tricolor and Turkish flag do not have much in common: the majority of attributes associated with the Turkish flag reflects mastery values and military associations (power, aggression), whereas more democratic associations were primarily linked to the Irish Tricolor.

Fifth, in nations that emphasize hierarchies (India, Singapore, Turkey), obedience was associated with the respective national flag, whereas obedience was not important in almost all other nations (or even negatively associated with the flag like in Scotland). This finding is in line with the results obtained by Schwartz (1999). Moreover, in terms of Singapore, Singaporeans’ acceptance of the state’s authoritarianism, and hence internalized obedience and hierarchy is regarded as a price in exchange for individual and national economic prosperity (Kampfner, 2009; Ortmann, 2011).

It is interesting to note that on a general level, results illustrate that people endorse more “positive” than “negative” attributes and emotions with their flag. This is not surprising. First, the flag represents people’s national identity and if people identify with their nation, they are interested in a positive national identity (e.g., Butz, 2009; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Therefore, most people are likely to be generally supportive and positive about their flag. In

line with this, research indicated that people condemn the mistreatment of national symbols. For instance, they perceive the cleaning of one's toilet with a national flag as morally reprehensible (Haidt, Koller, & Dias, 1993) or – even children – condemn the burning of national flags (Helwig & Prencipe, 1999). Second, system justification theory argues that people are motivated to perceive the general system to be fair and just (Jost & Banaji, 1994). Given that the flag represents the general societal system, the flag should be rather liked and supported than condemned. Third, Butz (2009) argues that people may perceive their nation as an extension of family. Thus, a positive view of one's family may translate into a positive view of one's nation and a description of the national flag in positive terms.

### **Flag Associations, Nationalism and Patriotism**

As expected, we found stable correlations between nationalism, patriotism and positive flag associations across nations: the more people feel nationalistic and patriotic about their nation, the more they associate positive attributes (democratic and biospheric values) and positive emotions with their flag. This is an intriguing finding. Prior work indicated that personal endorsement of positive values is related to positive intergroup attitudes (Sagiv & Schwartz, 1995). For instance, Schwartz (1994; Sagiv & Schwartz, 1995) correlated endorsement of values among Israeli Jews with readiness for intergroup contact with Israeli Arabs and found that the self-transcendence scales (universalism, benevolence) and openness to change scales were positively correlated with readiness for contact. In contrast, conservation values (security, tradition, conformity) were negatively correlated with readiness for intergroup contact. In contrast, we found that democratic values associated with the flag were related to nationalism – an important determinant of negative intergroup attitudes (e.g., Wagner et al., 2012). Several studies indicated that nationalism is positively related to outgroup rejection and prejudice and thus is rather undemocratic (e.g., Blank & Schmidt, 2003; Wagner et al., 2012). In fact, it has been argued that nationalism turns into outgroup rejection under conditions of intergroup threat (Mummendey, Kessler, Klink & Mielke,

1999). Thus, in times of political instability and threat, it seems particularly problematic to uncritically associate attributes such as democracy, equality, freedom and justice with one's national flag, because it is possible that these associations are interwoven with beliefs of national superiority and could turn into outgroup hostility.

The second interesting finding refers to the differences in flag associations between nationalists and patriots. We illustrated that nationalists, but not patriots, associate power-related values with their national flag. This is in line with prior work indicating that feelings of power, dominance and superiority are important aspects of nationalism (e.g., Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989). Furthermore, patriots, but not nationalists, were reluctant to associate negative constructs such as aggression and negative emotions with their national flag in the majority of nations. On the one hand, this finding makes a lot of sense: those who love their country do not have negative emotions and do not think about aggression when they see their national flag. On the other hand, this finding speaks against the interpretation of patriots as “constructive and critical citizens” who identify with their nation but clearly see their nation's problems and shortcomings and try to improve it in constructive ways (Blank & Schmidt, 2003). If patriots were critical about their country, we should have found positive correlations between patriotism and concepts such as aggression at least in those nations that are currently involved in conflicts (e.g., the U.S., Turkey).

### **Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

This research faces problems that are common in cross-cultural research. Given that we have not been able to establish construct invariance, we selected specific associations that worked across nations and created two-item scales for most constructs. We admit that this is not an optimal solution. However, the cross-culturally consistent results regarding flag associations, nationalism and patriotism provide support for the reliability and meaningfulness of the short scales. Nevertheless, it is still possible that the diverse attributes and values presented do not have the same meaning in all nations. For example, in most nations,

individuals associate democratic values such as freedom with their national flag. It might be, however, that freedom may have not the same meaning across nations. For instance, in Northern Ireland, freedom would be very much tied to the recent armed conflict and particularly the Irish Republican Army. This makes it quite different from the meaning of freedom in the U.S., where the idea of the flag representing freedom is mainstream, endorsed by the establishment, and more about individual liberty. Thus, future research could investigate the meaning of democratic values such as freedom and equality in different nations more carefully. The results are also not comparable regarding the frequency of flag display in each nation. For example, many school children in the U.S. are exposed to the U.S. flag in public classrooms on a daily basis, whereas in New Zealand, the placement of flags outside of residential homes is extremely uncommon (Sibley et al., 2011). Thus, it is possible that the association between concepts and the flag is looser and more uncertain in nations with infrequent flag display (e.g., New Zealand) compared to nations with frequent flag display (e.g., the U.S.). Future research could take the frequency of flag display, association strength and association certainty into account.

Moreover, a majority of individuals in our sample came from English-speaking nations (Australia, Canada, Scotland, New Zealand, Northern Ireland, Ireland, and the U.S.). Except for one nation (Germany), we used English versions of our questionnaire in all other nations (India, Singapore, Turkey). In India and Singapore, but not in Turkey, English is an official language and participants are formerly educated in English. Research has indicated that the use of English encourages individuals to respond in ways that they have learned are typical of native English speakers rather than in ways that are more typical for their nation (Harzing et al., 2005). Thus, results may change slightly when asking people in non-English speaking nations in their own language. The second limitation refers to the selection of nations. We included a diverse range of nations from America, Europe, Australia and Asia, but did not include nations from Latin America and Africa. Thus, it would be an important

avenue for future research to build on the present work and extend it by examining flag associations in Latin America and Africa. Third, the situational context needs to be considered. The meaning of every national flag is contestable and can be manipulated for different political and ideological purposes in any given nation. As Butz (2009) argued, raising the U.S. flag over Iwo Jima in 1945 may evoke feelings of national pride and dominance, whereas flags in classrooms, where this symbol is often paired with recitations of the Pledge of Allegiance, may lead to egalitarian responses. Moreover, research demonstrated that national identification increases as a response to a terrorist threat (e.g., 9/11, Gerstenfeld, 2002; Moskalenko, McCauley & Rozin, 2006). Similarly, it is likely that after external threats, individuals are more likely to associate power, pride and freedom with their flag as a collective nationalistic response (e.g., Schatz & Lavine, 2007, Skitka, 2005).

As noted above, positive flag associations accompanied with a belief in national superiority seem to be very problematic as it can turn into “colonialist thinking” and outgroup derogation. In line with this, future research could also investigate whether the attributes, values and ideologies associated with the national flag correspond with the personal endorsement of the same attributes, values and ideologies. As noted above, it is likely that those who associate power with the flag and personally endorse power-related values are more likely to respond with outgroup hostility than those who associate power with the national flag, but reject power personally. Furthermore, it would be interesting to study why some people associate egalitarian concepts with their flag, whereas others think about aggression. Our research gives preliminary hints, namely that the associations seem to mirror a critical vs. uncritical understanding of history. However, this is just a preliminary assumption and it will be important to complement this work with additional research that directly addresses this idea. In sum, it needs to be considered that the results presented in this manuscript are clearly context-dependent and refer to the specific situation faced during data collection. Finally, in a context of national flags, two further issues are interesting to examine

in future research. First, it would be intriguing to investigate attitudes toward national outgroups. For instance, it would be interesting to see whether individuals who are particularly positive about their own national flag, are rather hostile towards their direct neighbors (e.g., Indians towards Pakistani; Canadians towards U.S. Americans; Turks towards Syrians, etc.). One way to subtly examine markers of intergroup relations would be to ask individuals to evaluate their own and the outgroup's national flag. We would expect that a glorification of one's own national flag corresponds with a derogation of the outgroup's national flag. Second, it would be helpful to study the attributes that individuals associate with national flags of other nations. It is likely that those who associate negative concepts with the flags of other nations (e.g., dominance, aggression) are more likely to report prejudice towards these national outgroups.

### **Conclusion**

This study presents an important step forward in the literature by analyzing what individuals associate with their national flag in 11 diverse nations. Positive emotions and democratic concepts were associated with almost all examined national flags. However, there were notable differences between nations that were strongly influenced by the nation's current and historical politics. In multicultural societies and nations involved in struggles for independence, democratic values were quite important; in nations with a negative past, the unbiased and "value-neutral" association of sports was connected with the flag; in imperialist nations, the flag was associated with power and democratic concepts; and in nations that frequently participate in armed conflicts or in which there is disruption due to separatist or extremist movements, ambivalent attributes were prevalent (aggression was not rejected). Moreover, the present work makes a second important contribution to the literature by illustrating that the more individuals associate positive values with their national flag (such as democratic and biospheric values) the more they endorse nationalism – an ideology not compatible with democratic concepts.

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**Table 1: Pattern matrix of factor loadings based on the entire sample**

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Equality	.75		.12			-.12
Peace	.72		-.11	.21	-.21	
Democracy	.70	-.11	.11			.12
Justice	.69	-.11	.25			
Humanity	.63	.11				
Tolerance	.63	.12	-.15			
Kindness	.63	.25	-.11			
Freedom	.56		.16	-.28	.13	
equal opportunity for all	.53	.34		-.16		-.11
Morality	.52		.17	.20	.13	
Concern	.35			.34	.22	
Unity with nature (biospheric)		.85	-.13			
Respecting the earth (biospheric)		.82	-.12			
Protecting the environment (biospheric)	.13	.77	-.13			
Curiosity (openness)		.70				.16
An exciting life (openness)		.62	.20	-.15		.15
Family security (tradition)	.19	.47	.18			
A varied life (openness)		.47	.23			
Self-discipline (tradition)		.44	.30	.18		
Social justice (altruism)	.37	.43				
A world at peace (altruism)	.40	.42	-.12	.12	-.18	
Honoring of parents and elders (tradition)		.41	.37		.15	-.17
Power		-.14	.78	.18		
Dominance	-.19		.71	.33		
Prestige	.24		.67		-.12	
Authority (self-enhancement)	-.24	.34	.62	.12		-.18
Honor	.32		.60	-.11		
Strength	.36		.60	-.12		
Achievement	.21		.58			
Weakness	.11	.12	-.47	.40	.29	
Influence (self-enhancement)		.45	.46			
Tradition		.22	.35	-.19	.24	
Wealth (self-enhancement)	-.17	.31	.32	.25	-.18	.18
Competitiveness		-.12	.31	.29		.28
Obedience			.21	.72		-.18
Conformity				.65		
Violence					.77	
War					.68	
Aggression				.26	.60	
Sports		.16	-.10	-.14		.74
Football					.16	.66

**Table 2: Mean differences in Flag Associations and Nationalism and Patriotism**

	Australia	Canada	Germany	India	New Zealand	NI Irish	NI British	Scotland	Singapore	Turkey	U.S.
Democratic values	5.64 (2.30)	7.11 (1.48)	5.57 (1.91)	6.46 (1.74)	5.66 (1.74)	6.13 (1.73)	6.40 (1.85)	6.32 (1.48)	6.17 (1.38)	5.60 (1.95)	7.13 (1.61)
Biospheric values	4.06 (2.39)	6.56 (1.97)	3.59 (1.88)	6.34 (2.18)	5.21 (2.21)	5.27 (2.00)	4.44 (1.93)	5.12 (1.96)	4.31 (1.32)	4.48 (2.26)	4.43 (2.34)
Power	5.23 (2.10)	4.50 (1.87)	5.27 (2.01)	6.19 (1.77)	4.60 (1.93)	4.88 (1.66)	6.60 (1.85)	5.16 (1.82)	5.82 (1.63)	6.68 (1.89)	6.78 (1.76)
Obedience	5.05 (2.16)	4.84 (1.99)	4.68 (1.88)	5.64 (2.09)	5.19 (2.08)	4.63 (1.91)	4.95 (1.91)	4.06 (1.93)	6.22 (1.84)	5.51 (1.68)	4.94 (2.06)
Aggression	3.90 (2.24)	2.32 (1.43)	4.35 (1.75)	4.15 (2.01)	3.13 (1.79)	5.09 (2.00)	3.95 (1.79)	4.36 (2.04)	3.09 (1.61)	5.01 (2.09)	4.40 (2.04)
Sports	6.19 (2.23)	4.11 (1.73)	7.55 (1.65)	6.73 (2.02)	4.97 (1.86)	6.49 (2.38)	5.32 (2.36)	5.60 (2.33)	3.47 (1.78)	4.70 (2.37)	4.40 (2.56)
Positive emotions	5.66 (2.42)	6.83 (1.79)	4.42 (2.10)	7.42 (1.61)	5.70 (1.89)	7.05 (1.82)	5.79 (2.05)	6.59 (1.75)	6.09 (1.50)	5.71 (1.95)	6.76 (1.98)
Negative emotions	2.42 (1.64)	1.71 (.92)	2.35 (1.48)	2.16 (1.26)	1.99 (1.15)	1.88 (1.06)	1.80 (.96)	1.54 (.78)	2.27 (1.29)	2.27 (1.34)	2.47 (1.47)
Nationalism	3.76 (1.38)	4.17 (1.43)	2.42 (1.10)	4.36 (1.31)	3.89 (1.06)	3.26 (1.37)	3.36 (1.30)	3.17 (1.14)	4.50 (1.16)	3.32 (1.56)	3.87 (1.55)
Patriotism	5.76 (1.35)	6.03 (1.17)	3.78 (1.54)	6.36 (1.14)	6.03 (.98)	6.01 (1.34)	5.31 (1.33)	6.02 (1.05)	5.50 (1.20)	5.18 (1.51)	5.87 (1.34)



**Table 3: Correlations of attributes associated with one's national flag and nationalism (partial correlations controlling for patriotism after the slash)**

	Australia	Canada	Germany	India	New Zealand	NI Irish	NI British	Scotland	Singapore	Turkey	U.S.
Democratic values	.63**/.48**	.42**/.19**	.40**/.09	.55**/.40**	.16*/.10	.30**/.19*	.48**/.35**	.31**/.21**	.52**/.24**	.64**/.34*	.44**/.10
Biospheric values	.47**/.35**	.45**/.31**	.36**/.16*	.64**/.47**	.16/.11	.48**/.32*	.42*/.32*	.36**/.27*	.38**/.22*	.70**/.47**	.46**/.27*
Power	.18/.11	.44**/.36**	.24**/.17*	.55**/.44**	.25*/.27*	.43**/.35**	.30**/.18	.33**/.25**	.26**/.15*	.37**/.26*	.18*/.12
Obedience	-.08/-.01	.14**/.19**	.07/.09	.45**/.37*	.002/-.003	-.12/-.14	.20*/.18	.27**/.38**	.05/-.04	.33**/.26*	.18*/.22*
Aggression	-.12/.07	.05/.18*	-.01/.09	.12/.06	.03/.13	-.22*/-.20*	-.11/.00	.09/.21*	-.03/-.02	-.14/.02	-.06/.05
Sports	.18/.03	.27**/.20**	.03/.01	.22*/.28*	.16*/.14	.23*/.07	.28*/.20*	.23**/.25**	.16*/.01	-.07/-.22*	.15*/.14
Positive emotions	.62**/.44**	.53**/.28**	.55**/.20*	.58**/.39*	.40**/.31*	.55**/.24*	.34**/.10	.43**/.25*	.51**/.47**	.57**/.06	.55**/.16*
Negative emotions	-.39**/-.25*	-.03/.11*	-.21**/.04	-.11/-.11	.11/.15	-.02/.06	.02/.16	.04/.25*	-.16*/-.21*	-.13/.13	-.02/.26*

**Table 4: Correlations of attributes associated with one's national flag and patriotism (partial correlations controlling for nationalism after the slash)**

	Australia	Canada	Germany	India	New Zealand	NI Irish	NI British	Scotland	Singapore	Turkey	U.S.
Democratic values	.57**/.37**	.54**/.42**	.60**/.49**	.43**/.18	.22*/.18+	.28**/.14	.52**/.41**	.30**/.20*	.47**/.33**	.62**/.28*	.63**/.50**
Biospheric values	.37**/.18	.40**/.22**	.42**/.54**	.55**/.30*	.19+/.14	.44**/.25*	.39**/.27*	.33**/.22*	.39**/.19*	.60**/.16	.44**/.23*
Power	.16/.09	.27**/.06	.17*/.04	.40**/.12	-.04/-.13	.29**/.08	.35**/.26*	.26**/.14+	.28**/.12+	.27*/-.01	.14+/.03
Obedience	-.14/-.11	-.04/-.13	-.01/-.10	.28*/.04	.02/.02	-.004/.07	.14/.08	-.19*/-.34**	.00/.06	.21+/.06	.01/-.13
Aggression	-.13/-.08	-.20/-.26**	-.14+/.16*	.12/.06	-.29**/-.31**	-.10/.02	-.26*/-.23*	-.22**/-.28**	-.03/-.01	-.21+/.15	-.16+/.16+
Sports	.29*/.24+	.19**/.06	.08/.01	-.01/-.18	.09/.04	.33*/.25*	.27*/.18	.02/-.08	.10/.12+	.09/.23*	.06/-.05
Positive emotions	.64**/.48**	.72**/.55**	.77**/.70**	.55**/.32*	.46**/.32**	.81**/.73**	.71**/.66**	.62**/.54**	.63**/.21*	.71**/.53**	.79**/.69**
Negative emotions	-.38**/-.23+	-.23**/.11*	-.42**/-.35**	-.03/.04	-.10/-.14	-.12/-.13	-.24*/-.27*	-.41**/-.47**	-.26**/.00	-.29**/-.29*	-.37**/-.45**