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# Immigrants' Attitude Toward Immigration

Aflatun Kaeser

## **Abstract**

This study analyzed the relationship between immigration attitudes and demographic and socioeconomic factors. It examined the difference in attitudes toward immigration in the immigrant population using General Social Survey 2021 data. The analysis with an ordered probit model reveals significant relationships between immigration attitude with several socioeconomic and demographic factors and how that differ between natives and immigrants. As age increases, support for limiting immigration increases, but this is not true for immigrants. With the increase of years of education, support for limiting immigration decreases; however, in the immigrant population, support for limiting immigration increases as the education level increases. Individuals who identify as Republican favor limiting immigration; on the contrary, Republican immigrants do not exhibit such attitudes. Furthermore, higher income is associated with opposing limiting immigration; however, this is not necessarily true for immigrants.

# 1 Introduction

Various socioeconomic and demographic factors have influenced attitudes toward immigration and immigrants. Numerous studies have investigated the relationship between different socioeconomic factors and attitudes toward immigration. However, how attitudes toward immigration vary between natives and immigrants is under-researched.

Using General Social Survey (GSS) 2021 data, a University of Chicago-based NORC initiative that aims to collect information on social trends and changes in attitudes and behaviors through time, this study assessed the relationship between immigration attitudes and socioeconomic and demographic factors. It examined the difference in immigration attitudes between natives and immigrants.

This research suggests that age and education significantly impact immigration attitudes. With the increase in age, people become more anti-immigrant, though this is not necessarily true for immigrants. Education increases pro-immigration attitudes. However, more educated immigrants are more anti-immigrant. Moreover, political identification has a significant impact on support for limiting immigration. Individuals with Republican ideologies are more likely to support limiting immigration to protect the national way of life—however, immigrants who identify as Republican do not support limiting immigration. Though higher-income people pose a more positive attitude toward immigration, this is not necessarily true for immigrants.

We will organize the rest of the paper as follows: We will review existing literature on attitudes toward immigration, followed by the description of the data and methodology for the study. Then we will present the results with some discussion, followed by the conclusion.

# 2 Literature Review

The United States is known as a country of immigrants, as less than two percent of US citizens have native ancestors. However, perceptions about immigrants among the native population vary.

A person's perception is formed by the cognitive interaction with his/her surroundings (Efron, 1969). Information and beliefs about immigrants shape the perception of them and attitudes toward them, regardless of whether they hold these attitudes consciously or unconsciously. According to realistic group conflict theory, negative attitudes of one group towards other groups result from the perception that the groups in question are competing for scarce resources, leading to conflict and discrimination (Esses et al., 2001). Researchers widely use this theory to explain anti-immigration prejudice.

In the history of immigrants in the US, there is a contradictory view about immigration. Historically, anti-immigration attitudes, driven by economic (Timmer Williams, 1998) and cultural factors (O’rourke Sinnott, 2006), have preceded restrictive immigration policy—for example, the Chinese Exclusion Act in the US. While most people respond that they do not hold discriminatory attitudes towards people from different races and nationalities when directly asked in surveys, unconscious bias exists. It may occur as people focus on individual features when looking at the members of an in-group but fail to notice these details in out-group people (Levinson et al., 2010). Hence, negative perceptions about immigrants persist and prevent the realization of similar levels of empathy for immigrants (Winkler, 2009; Rutland et al., 2005).

research suggests that immigration attitudes, such as labor market competition, are partly rooted in self-interest (Hainmueller Hopkins, 2014). Notwithstanding that immigration tends to raise natives’ wages (Niyimbanira and Madziva-handila, 2016), native workers are more likely to oppose immigrants with similar skills (Scheve Slaughter, 2001; Facchini Mayda, 2012) and favor immigrants with complementary characteristics (Mayda, 2006). Research suggests that unemployed people are less in favor of immigration (Malchow-Møller Skaksen, 2008; Gorodzeisky Semyonov, 2009). Individual income and pro-immigration policy preferences negatively correlate (Facchini Mayda, 2012). In addition, there is a negative relationship between an individual’s level of education and an anti-immigration attitude (Scheve Slaughter, 2001; Dustmann Preston, 2006; Mayda, 2006).

Attitudes toward immigration differ according to demographic and socioeconomic status. In the US, white people have more negative views about immigration and refugees than people of other racial backgrounds (Bodvarsson Van den Berg, 2013; McKeever et al., 2012; Valentino et al., 2013). As for gender differences, women have more positive attitudes toward immigration than men (Rocha et al., 2015; Watson Riffe, 2013), and Republican and conservative ideologies tend to be associated with negative views toward immigrants (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012).

Immigration researchers conducted very little research on immigrants’ attitudes toward other immigrants and immigration. To shed light on the topic, recent research has shown that people in occupations with a higher immigrant ratio than natives are more likely to oppose immigration (Mayda, 2006). Anderson (2015) also argues that two competing motivations shape immigrants’ attitudes toward immigration. On the one hand, kinship, solidarity, and shared experiences with other immigrants lead to positive attitudes toward immigration. On the other hand, allegiance to their host societies creates the opposite effect (Just and Anderson, 2015).

## **Experimental Work on Immigration Attitude**

Immigration researchers have not widely used experimental methods to measure attitudes toward immigration and immigration policy preferences.

Several experimental research studies on immigration opinions and policy preferences suggest that exposure to various information and framing can greatly impact people's attitudes. For instance, a survey experiment in the United States by Hainmueller et al. (2017) investigated the impact of a pro-immigration message on attitudes toward immigration and discovered that pro-immigration messages were more successful at influencing liberals' sentiments than conservatives.

More laboratory and field experiments can be used to determine the factors shaping pro and anti-immigration attitudes.

## **Statistical Discrimination and Anti-Immigration Attitude**

By analyzing the world value survey, Kaeser and Tani (2022) found that immigrants in the highest socioeconomic group strongly oppose immigration in the United States; however, this is not necessarily true for other developed countries like Australia, Canada, and New Zealand. They argued that statistical discrimination could be a potential reason for the anti-immigration attitude of immigrants.

Statistical discrimination is an economic concept that uses observable characteristics, such as race, gender, or age, to make decisions about individuals or groups based on statistical generalizations. Arrow and Phelps pioneered the theory of statistical discrimination and argued that it arises because of information asymmetry in the labor market (Arrow, 1998). Workplaces, housing markets, and the criminal justice system are just a few places where this discrimination can occur. Labor market statistical discrimination occurs when employers use aggregate statistics to make decisions based on incomplete worker productivity information (Sattinger, 1998).

Despite having the same qualifications, African-American job candidates are less likely than White job applicants to receive a call for an interview, according to a 2004 study by Bertrand and Mullainathan. In a study on the effect of stereotypes on global trade, Bursztyn et al. (2017) discovered that more trustworthy nations get more advantageous trade deals.

More rigorous experimental work can help to understand whether the presence of statistical discrimination in the labor market leads immigrants to develop an anti-immigration attitude.  
researches

### 3 Data

The General Social Survey (GSS) is a University of Chicago-based NORC initiative that aims to collect information on social trends and changes in attitudes and behaviors through time. At a pivotal juncture in American history, the 2021 GSS offers crucial data on opinions to the scholarly community. The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated extensive methodological adjustments to protect both interviewers and participants in what is known as the 2021 GSS, which collected data from December 2020 to May 2021. Since the GSS’s founding, in-person interviews have been used as its main data-gathering method. The pandemic compelled the GSS to modify its plan, switching from in-person to address-based sampling and a push-to-web methodology, with most of the data being collected online.

The cleaned dataset consists of 1545 observations with seven variables. The variables are named `born`, `educ`, `sex` (gender), `relig`, `partyid`, `income`, and `immlimit`. The variable “`born`” takes values 1 (yes) or 2 (no), which represents whether the individual was born in the United States or not. The variable “`educ`” represents the years of education completed by each individual. The variable “`sex`” takes values 1 or 2, representing male or female gender, respectively. The variable “`partyid`” represents the political ideology of each individual ranging from 0 to 6, where 0 represents strong Democrat and 6 represents strong Republican. The variable “`income`” represents the self-reported income level of each individual. The variable “`immlimit`” represents the individual’s response to “America should limit immigration in order to protect our national way of life,” ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). Summary statistics of the key variables from the original GSS 2021 dataset used in the analysis are described in more detail in the Appendix section.

The descriptive statistics show each variable’s count, mean, standard deviation, minimum, 25th percentile, 50th percentile (median), 75th percentile, and maximum values. The mean age is 52.71 years, the mean years of education completed is 15, and the mean income level is 11.27. Note that income is a categorical variable with different income ranges (low to high). Most individuals are female (with a mean value of 1.54). The mean value of `immlimit` is 3.09, which suggests that, on average, individuals in this dataset have a moderate opinion about limiting immigration in the US. The range and standard deviation of the `relig` and `partyid` variables indicate a diverse range of religious and political affiliations among the individuals in this dataset.

	count	mean	std	min	25%	50%	75%	max
born	1545	1.10032	0.300528	1	1	1	1	2
age	1545	52.7126	16.7874	19	39	53	66	89
educ	1545	15.0104	2.79894	0	13	16	17	20
gender	1545	1.54239	0.498361	1	1	2	2	2
relig	1545	2.67249	2.22216	1	1	2	4	13
partyid	1545	2.70227	2.17633	0	1	3	5	7
income	1545	11.2718	2.29183	1	12	12	12	13
immlimit	1545	3.09773	1.20562	1	2	3	4	5

## 4 Methodology

Ordered Probit Model has been used for Regression Analysis. Following is the regression equation.

$$\hat{Y} = \hat{\beta}_0 + \hat{\beta}_1 age + \hat{\beta}_2 educ + \hat{\beta}_3 partyid + \hat{\beta}_4 gender + \hat{\beta}_5 immigrant + \hat{\beta}_6 income + \hat{\beta}_7 immigrant \cdot income + \hat{\beta}_8 immigrant \cdot age + \hat{\beta}_9 immigrant \cdot educ + \hat{\beta}_{10} immigrant \cdot partyid + \hat{\beta}_{11} immigrant \cdot gender$$

In this equation,  $\hat{Y}$  represents the predicted value of the dependent variable, "immlimit". Note that variable "immlimit" represents the individual's response to "America should limit immigration in order to protect our national way of life", ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree).

$\beta_0$  is the intercept term, and  $\hat{\beta}_1$  through  $\hat{\beta}_6$  are the coefficients associated with each independent variable, which are *age*, *educ*, *partyid*, *gender* (sex), *immigrant* and *income*, respectively. The coefficients  $\hat{\beta}_1$  through  $\hat{\beta}_6$  represent the expected change in the dependent variable, "immlimit", for each associated variable holding all other variables constant.

The coefficients  $\hat{\beta}_7$  through  $\hat{\beta}_{11}$  represent the expected change in the dependent variable associated with one-unit increases in the interaction between the immigrant and each of the other independent variables keeping all other independent variables constant.

## 5 Result and Discussion

We used an ordered probit model as the categorical dependent variable has a defined order. Here immlimit, the response to the statement "America should limit immigration to protect the national way of life" ranges from strongly agree to disagree strongly. The ordered probit model measures the association between the dependent variable and several independent factors, such as age, education, party identification, gender, income, and immigration status. The model's output shows the coefficients for each independent variable, which indicate the degree and direction of the relationship with the dependent variable.

The p-values connected to each coefficient reflect the relationship's statistical significance. The results of the ordered probit model for both native-born and immigrant people provide insight into the factors that influence attitudes toward immigration.

### **Regression with Ordered Probit Model**

Table 1 shows the results of an Ordered Probit Model for the dependent variable "immlimit", which corresponds to the response to the statement- "America should limit immigration to protect our national way of life" on a scale of 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree) to the statement. The model contains various demographic and socioeconomic parameters as independent variables, such as age, education, party affiliation, gender, immigration status, and income.

Age significantly negatively affects immlimit (coef: -0.016, p-value: 0.01), suggesting that as age increases, the predicted value for supporting limiting immigration increases.

Education has a positive and significant effect on immlimit (coef: 0.101, p-value: 0.01), suggesting that for an increase in education, the predicted value of immlimit rises, meaning that support for limiting immigration decreases. Party affiliation has a negative and significant effect on immlimit (coef: -0.255, p-value: 0.01), showing that Republicans have a lower expected value of immlimit than Democrats. Income has a significant positive effect on immlimit (coef: 0.029, p-value: 0.05), implying that as income increases, people are likely to oppose limiting immigration.

Gender does not significantly affect immlimit (coef: -0.064, p-value:  $> 0.1$ ); there is no difference in support for limiting immigration between males and females. Furthermore, the immigrant variable is not statistically significant (coef: 0.895, p-value:  $> 0.1$ ), indicating no overall significant relationship between variables immigrant and immlimit.

The interaction term between education and immigrant is negatively significant (coef: -0.061, p-value: 0.05), suggesting that in the immigrant population, with an increase in the number of years in education, support for limiting immigration increases. The interaction term between party affiliation and immigrant is statistically significant (coef: 0.120, p-value: 0.05), showing that immigrants who identified as Republican oppose limiting immigration.

**Key findings from the regression analysis can be summarized as follows:**

The findings show that age, education, political party identity, and income substantially affect support for limiting immigration. However, the impact of age, education, income, and party identification on immigration at-



Table 1:

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>
	Y
age	-0.016*** (0.002)
educ	0.101*** (0.011)
partyid	-0.255*** (0.014)
gender	-0.064 (0.058)
immigrant	0.895 (0.714)
income	0.029** (0.013)
age:immigrant	0.004 (0.006)
educ:immigrant	-0.061** (0.027)
immigrant:income	-0.009 (0.036)
partyid:immigrant	0.120** (0.052)
gender:immigrant	-0.016 (0.188)
Observations	1,545
<i>Note:</i>	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

titudes differ between natives and immigrants. Despite previous research suggesting that women show more positive attitudes toward immigration than men, this study found no significant difference in immigration attitudes between men and women.

With the increase in age, people exhibit more support for limiting immigration. A recent Pew Research Center survey analysis suggests the same (Pew Research Center 2019). Similarly, collectively as education and income level increases, support for limiting immigration decreases. Conversely, individuals who identify as Republicans (higher values of partyid) are more likely to support limiting immigration. Most of the existing research suggests the same.

The impact of education and party affiliation on support for limiting immigration varies between natives and immigrants. Though education increases people's pro-immigration attitudes, more educated immigrants show more anti-immigration attitudes. Individuals who identify themselves as Republican are more supportive of limiting immigration in general; however, Republican immigrants are not supportive of limiting immigration. On the contrary, no substantial differences in immigration attitudes exist for immigrants based on wealth, age, or gender. Though support for limiting immigration grows as people age, immigrants do not exhibit such attitudes. Moreover, an increase in income pro-immigration attitude does not necessarily increase the immigrant population.

Though the regression suggests no significant difference in immigration attitudes between natives and immigrants, keeping only income in the regression equation suggests that the variable 'immigrants' is marginally significant, indicating a difference in immigration attitudes between natives and immigrants.

**Regression with only one interaction term between Income and Immigrant:**

This regression output (Table 2) is almost identical, except the variable immigrant is statistically significant at a marginal level, suggesting a significant difference in immigration attitude for immigrants.

Table 2:

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>
	Y
age	-0.016*** (0.002)
educ	0.092*** (0.010)
partyid	-0.248*** (0.013)
gender	-0.062 (0.055)
immigrant	0.744* (0.389)
income	0.031** (0.013)
immigrant:income	-0.041 (0.034)
Observations	1,545
<i>Note:</i>	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

## 6 Conclusion

This study adds value to the existing immigration literature by analyzing the impact of socioeconomic and demographic factors on immigration attitudes and examining the differences in immigration attitudes between natives and immigrants.

This research findings suggest that pro-immigration attitude increases as the number of years in education increases. However, the opposite effect is found in the immigrant population. Though overall income positively affects pro-immigration attitudes, it is not necessarily true for immigrants. Individuals with Republican ideologies are in favor of limiting immigration to protect the national way of life; however, immigrants who identify themselves as Republicans do not support limiting immigration.

The research findings emphasize the difference in immigration attitudes in the immigrant population based on different demographic and socioeconomic factors, which has significant implications for informed policy making.

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## APPENDIX

### Summary Statistics of Key Variables from Original Dataset

Table 3: Variable: BORN, Type: Numeric, Label: Were you born in this country?

Value	Count	Percentage
1 (yes)	3,516	87.2%
2 (no)	444	11.0%
D (CAN'T CHOOSE)	16	0.4%
I (NOT APPLICABLE)	47	1.2%
S (SKIPPED ON WEB)	9	0.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,032</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Table 4: Variable: IMMLIMIT, Type: Numeric, Label: America should limit immigration in order to protect our national way of life.

Label	Value	Count	Percentage
STRONGLY AGREE	1	194	4.8%
AGREE	2	433	10.7%
NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	3	471	11.7%
DISAGREE	4	484	12.0%
STRONGLY DISAGREE	5	231	5.7%
SUBTOTALS:		1,813	45.0%
RESERVED CODES:			
CAN'T CHOOSE D		56	1.4%
NO ANSWER N		151	3.7%
NOT APPLICABLE I		2,003	49.7%
SKIPPED ON WEB S		9	0.2%
TOTALS:		4,032	100.0%

Table 5: Variable: EDUC, Type: Numeric, Label: RESPONDENT'S EDUCATION

Label	Value	Count	Percentage
6 YEARS OF COLLEGE	18	351	8.9%
7 YEARS OF COLLEGE	19	113	2.8%
8 YEARS OF COLLEGE	20	216	5.4%
SUBTOTALS:		3,966	100.0%
RESERVED CODES:			
DON'T KNOW	D	18	0.4 %
NO ANSWER	N	48	1.2 %
TOTALS:		4,032	100.0%

Table 6: Variable: PARTYID, Type: Numeric, Label: Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, Democrat, Independent, or what?

Label	Value	Count	Percentage
STRONG DEMOCRAT	0	822	20.4%
NOT VERY STRONG DEMOCRAT	1	541	13.4%
INDEPENDENT, CLOSE TO DEMOCRAT	2	471	11.7%
INDEPENDENT (NEITHER, NO RESPONSE)	3	817	20.3%
INDEPENDENT, CLOSE TO REPUBLICAN	4	327	8.1%
NOT VERY STRONG REPUBLICAN	5	384	9.5%
STRONG REPUBLICAN	6	524	13.0%
OTHER PARTY	7	114	2.8 %
SUBTOTALS:		4,000	99.2%
RESERVED CODES:			
NO ANSWER	N	32	0.8 %
TOTALS:		4,032	100.0%

Table 7: Variable: SEX, Type: Numeric, Label: CODE RESPONDENT'S SEX

Label	Value	Count	Percentage
MALE	1	1,736	43.1%
FEMALE	2	2,204	54.7%
SUBTOTALS:		3,940	97.7%
RESERVED CODES:			
NO ANSWER	N	71	1.8%
NOT APPLICABLE	I	19	0.5%
SKIPPED ON WEB	S	2	0.0%
TOTALS:		4,032	100.0%



Table 8: Variable: RELIG, Type: Numeric, Label: What is your religious preference? Is it Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, some other religion, or no religion?

<b>Label</b>	<b>Value</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
PROTESTANT	1	1,589	39.4%
CATHOLIC	2	824	20.4%
JEWISH	3	75	1.9%
NONE	4	1,121	27.8%
OTHER	5	55	1.4%
BUDDHISM	6	47	1.2%
HINDUISM	7	30	0.7%
OTHER EASTERN RELIGIONS	8	2	0.0%
MUSLIM/ISLAM	9	25	0.6%
ORTHODOX-CHRISTIAN	10	37	0.9%
CHRISTIAN	11	124	3.1%
NATIVE AMERICAN	12	3	0.1%
INTER-NONDENOMINATIONAL	13	19	0.5%
SUBTOTALS:		3,951	98.0%
RESERVED CODES:			
DON'T KNOW	D	5	0.1 %
NO ANSWER	N	44	1.1 %
SKIPPED ON WEB	S	22	0.8%
TOTALS:		4,032	100.0%

Table 9: Variable: INCOME, Type: Numeric, Label: In which of these groups did your total family income, from all sources, fall last year? That is, before taxes.

<b>Label</b>	<b>Value</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
UNDER 1,000	1	64	1.6 %
1,000–2,999	2	50	1.2 %
3,000–3,999	3	19	0.5 %
4,000–4,999	4	11	0.3 %
5,000–5,999	5	17	0.4 %
6,000–6,999	6	12	0.3 %
7,000–7,999	7	18	0.4 %
8,000–9,999	8	54	1.3 %
10,000–12,499	9	87	2.2 %
12,500–14,999	10	80	2.0 %
15,000–17,499	11	74	1.8 %
17,500–19,999	12	66	1.6 %
20,000–22,499	13	80	2.0 %
22,500–24,999	14	69	1.7 %
25,000–29,999	15	131	3.2 %
30,000–34,999	16	155	3.8 %
35,000–39,999	17	136	3.4 %
40,000–49,999	18	266	6.6 %
50,000–59,999	19	253	6.3 %
60,000–74,999	20	367	9.1 %
75,000–89,999	21	314	7.8 %
90,000–109,999	22	326	8.1 %
110,000–129,999	23	207	5.1 %
130,000–149,999	24	141	3.5 %
150,000–169,999	25	140	3.5 %
170,000 – <i>OVER</i>	26	372	9.2 %
REFUSED	27	80	2.0%
SUBTOTALS:		3,589	89.0 %
RESERVED CODES:			
DON'T KNOW	D	335	8.3 %
SKIPPED ON WEB	S	108	2.7%
TOTALS:		4,032	100.0%