

Determinants of Attitudes Toward Immigration

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When measuring attitudes toward immigrants and immigration policy in the United States, extant scholarship relies mainly on demographic traits and economic arguments as explanatory variables (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014, 2015). There is solid support for sociotropic explanations of support for immigration, such as perceptions of highly skilled immigrants' potential contributions to society at large (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014, 2015), as well as ethnocentric reasons for resistance (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2015; Valentino, Brader, and Jardina 2012). The literature is less favorable to labor market theories (Hainmueller and Hopkins), though sufficient evidence of the influence of household economic conditions exists to preclude their exclusion (Wilkinson 2015).

Although scholars have documented determinants of attitudes toward documented and undocumented foreign nationals, side-by-side comparisons are absent from the literature. Rouse, Cutaia Wilkinson, and Garand (2010) and the Pew Hispanic Center (2005) address potential differences in attitudes toward the two groups, but their analyses are limited to how Latinos view authorized versus unauthorized migrants. More recently, Hainmueller and Hopkins (2015) identified traits Americans look upon favorably when evaluating immigrants, but they do not include immigration status among their list of attributes.

Our preliminary analyses using 2015 CCES data (See Tables 1 and 2, Figures 1 and 2, and Figures 19-24), including a unique module with separate questions about legal and illegal immigration, show strong support for a more nuanced approach to measuring attitudes toward immigration. Though limited in scope (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014), for instance, there is a correlation between party identification and attitude toward immigrants (Hawley 2011). That correlation changed once we split immigrants into documented and undocumented. Whereas Republicans view unauthorized migrants less favorably than do Democrats, there is no difference in how members of either party view documented immigrants. Moreover, while nativity, generation status, and general view of Hispanics were the strongest indicators of support for immigration, we find different determinants of attitudes toward those who entered the country legally versus unauthorized migrants.

Proposed Items

We propose the inclusion of a unique module with separate questions about legal and illegal immigration in the 2016 ANES. Specifically, we advocate for the use of feeling thermometers to measure differences in attitudes toward authorized and unauthorized migrants, and perceptions of group ideology and partisanship. We further recommend inserting an immigration policy scale that identifies predictors of support for changing immigration levels through legal channels. These items will allow scholars to discern which factors influence attitudes toward documented and undocumented migrants, and correlate those attitudes to broader themes within the ANES. In addition to analyzing ideological and partisan differences, the data make intraracial and panethnic generational comparisons possible for the first time.

Specific Items

Group Feeling Thermometers

Now we would like to ask you how you evaluate or feel about these various groups on a “feeling thermometer.” The thermometer ranges from 0 to 100. A rating of 0 means that you feel very negatively or cold toward a person or group, and a rating of 100 means that you feel very favorable or warm toward the group. If you do not feel particularly warm or cold, you would give a rating of 50. You can choose any point on the scale to reflect how you feel about the groups.

Where would you place the [Group Name] on this scale from 0 to 100:

Please put endpoints only: 0 (Unfavorable, cold), 100 (Favorable, warm)

Group Ideology

Please put endpoints only: 0 (Extremely liberal), 100 (Extremely conservative)

Group Party

Please put endpoints only: 0 (Strong Democrat), 100 (Strong Republican)

Randomize order of objects

Objects:

Blacks or African Americans,

Whites,

Latinos or Hispanics

Asian-Americans

Women

Men

Immigrants who are in the U.S. legally

Immigrants who are not in the U.S. legally

Republicans*

Democrats*

Tea Party Supporters*

Yourself*

* Note: These objects will only appear in the Group Ideology and Group Party thermometers.

Federal Spending

Now I would like to ask you about federal spending on various programs. Please tell me if you would like to see spending by the national government increased or decreased for each of the programs listed below.

Grid (Randomize list)

Rows:

Welfare programs

Women's health care

Science and technology

Food stamps

Childcare

Aid to the poor

Protecting the environment

Defense and military preparedness

Border security

Aid to urban areas

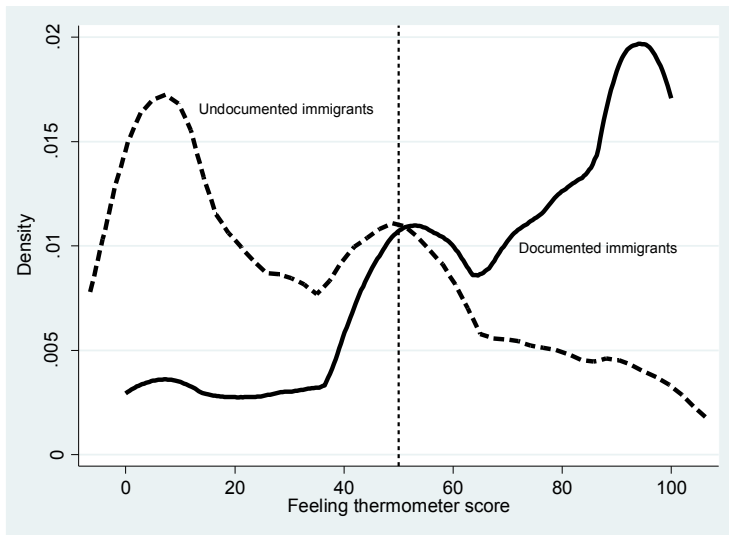
Columns:

1. Decreased a lot
2. Decreased a little,
3. Increased a little
4. Increased a lot

Insights From Preliminary Analyses

In preliminary analyses, the authors find that different factors shape attitudes toward documented and undocumented immigrants. Most notably, nativity and generational status are the strongest factors driving Latinos' attitudes toward migrants. Among the general population, individuals' overall view of Hispanics is the strongest indicator of support for immigration. The first figure shows the distribution of scores for the feeling thermometers for documented and undocumented immigrations. The first table shows the regression models for documented and undocumented immigrant feeling thermometers. Note that the variables that are significant predictors of one are not significant predictors of the other. The second table shows that how Americans think about undocumented immigrants has a much stronger effect on support for immigration policy conservatism than how Americans think about documented immigrants. This is then shown graphically in Figure 2.

Figure 1. Distribution of feeling thermometers for Americans' attitudes toward documented and undocumented immigrants.



Mean (documented immigrants) 69.67
 Mean (undocumented immigrants) 35.68

Figure 2. Predicted probabilities for effects of feeling thermometers for documented / undocumented immigrants on support for immigration policy conservatism

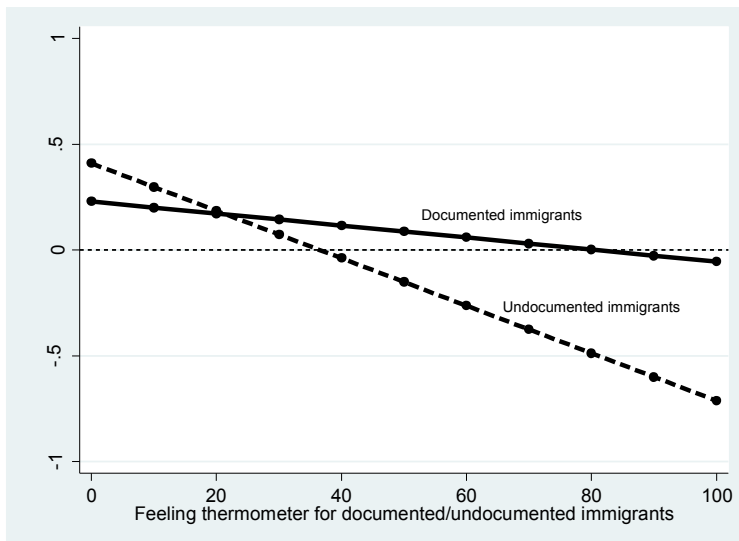


Table 1. OLS estimates for models of affect toward documented and undocumented immigrants

	Documented Immigrants		Undocumented Immigrants	
	b	z	b	z
Partisan identification	0.342	0.69	-1.204	-2.12*
Liberal-conservative ideology	0.023	0.60	-0.042	-0.91
Tea Party support	1.346	1.66*	-0.943	-0.99
Absolute ideological distance	-0.113	-3.09***	-0.195	-4.83***
National economy in past year	1.886	1.99*	2.120	1.92*
Household income increased	-0.084	-0.10	2.070	2.17*
Unemployed	6.658	1.92	5.856	1.46
Support for defense spending	-0.068	-0.10	-1.893	-2.39**
Send troops to destroy terror bases	1.231	0.76	-3.211	-1.71*
Gender	-0.697	-0.46	2.340	1.32
Black	-0.678	-0.27	5.498	1.83*
Hispanic	-3.906	-1.38	4.026	1.26
Asian	7.068	1.31	-3.652	-0.58
Age	0.064	1.25	-0.083	-1.41
Education	1.744	3.21***	1.439	2.28**
Family income	0.311	1.22	-0.032	-0.11
Feeling thermometer: Hispanics	0.294	7.11***	0.344	7.08***
Feeling thermometer: Asians	0.426	9.49***	0.000	0.00
Foreign born	3.868	1.19	6.558	1.73*
Parents foreign born	6.118	2.07*	1.758	0.51
Grandparents foreign born	8.104	4.27***	2.552	1.16
Intercept	7.302	1.41	19.523	3.32***
N	820		785	
R ²	0.456		0.409	
F	31.79***		25.15***	

***p < 0.001 **p < 0.01 *p < .05

Table 2. OLS estimates for model of immigration policy conservatism scale

	b	z
Feeling thermometer: documented immigrants	-0.003	-2.27*
Feeling thermometer: undocumented immigrants	-0.011	-9.49***
Absolute ideological distance: documented immigrants	-0.003	-2.13*
Absolute ideological distance: undocumented immigrants	0.003	2.11*
Feeling thermometer: Hispanics	-0.003	-2.19*
Feeling thermometer: Asians	0.006	3.85***
Partisan identification	0.034	1.96*
Liberal-conservative ideology	0.003	2.30*
Tea Party support	0.085	2.97**
National economy in past year	-0.086	-2.55**
Household income increased	-0.014	-0.49
Unemployed	-0.051	-0.41
Support for defense spending	0.043	1.79*
Support troops to defeat terrorism	0.214	3.76***
Gender	-0.065	-1.20
Black	-0.120	-1.34
Hispanic	-0.200	-2.05*
Asian	0.258	1.38
Education	-0.036	-1.88*
Family income	0.012	1.33
Age	0.006	3.08***
Foreign born	0.075	0.65
Parents foreign born	-0.110	-1.05
Grandparents foreign born	0.104	1.55
Intercept	-0.147	-0.82
N		754
R ²		0.539
F		35.54***

***p < 0.001 **p < 0.01 *p < .05

Our findings have significant policy implications, as the figures below illustrate. Individuals' feelings toward documented versus undocumented persons impact their immigration policy conservatism (Figure 19), opposition to legal status for undocumented immigrants (Figure 20), support for increasing the number of border patrols on the U.S.-Mexico border (Figure 21), support for allowing police to question potential undocumented immigrants (Figure 22), support for businesses that hire undocumented immigrants (Figure 23), and support for identifying and deporting undocumented immigrants (Figure 24).

Figure 19: Estimated effect of feeling thermometers for documented and undocumented immigrants on immigration policy conservatism scale

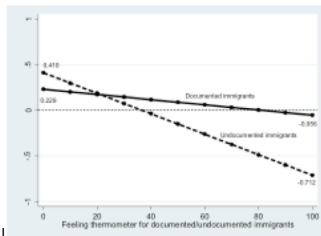


Figure 20: Estimated effect of feeling thermometers for documented and undocumented immigrants on opposition to legal status for undocumented immigrants

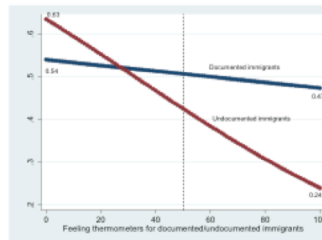


Figure 21: Estimated effect of feeling thermometers for documented and undocumented immigrants on support for increasing the number of border patrols on the U.S.-Mexico border

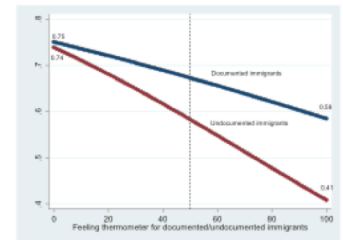


Figure 22: Estimated effect of feeling thermometers for documented and undocumented immigrants on support for allowing police to question potential undocumented immigrants

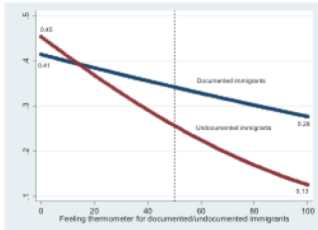


Figure 23: Estimated effect of feeling thermometers for documented and undocumented immigrants on support for fines for businesses that hire undocumented immigrants

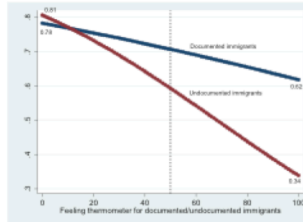
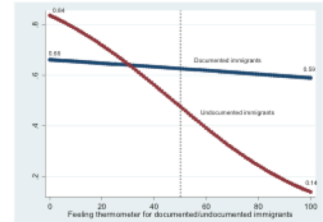


Figure 24: Estimated effect of feeling thermometers for documented and undocumented immigrants on support for identifying and deporting undocumented immigrants



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