

Conflict and Consensus in American Public Opinion on Immigration

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Context: Immigration Reform

- ⌘ Comprehensive immigration reform has eluded U.S. lawmakers since IRCA(1986)/IA(1990) despite “system broken” consensus
 - ⌘ On the **legal** side, preference system (skills over family reunif.)
 - ⌘ What to do about ~11 million immigrants in U.S. **illegally**?
- ⌘ GOP rout in 2012 and broader demographic change spurred a move towards compromise.
 - ⌘ But, “Gang of Eight” legislation fails to clear Congress
- ⌘ 11/20/14, President unilaterally orders 3-year protection for up to 5 million undocumented parents of U.S. Citizens and L.P.R.s
 - ⌘ “I want to work with both parties to pass a more permanent legislative solution. And the day I sign that bill into law, the actions I take will no longer be necessary. “
 - ⌘ Unprecedented in scope and, to many, unconstitutional: “If, in fact, I could solve all these problems without passing laws in Congress, then I would do so. But we’re also a nation of laws.” (Obama, in *WSJ* 7/29/14)
- ⌘ Question: Prospects for reform from the standpoint of *native* public opinion?

Research Design

↳ Data

- ↳ Two National Internet Surveys, conducted by SSI over 2012-2013
 - ↳ Study 1: Emphasis on pathway issue specifically (n=810)
 - ↳ Study 2: Emphasis on cross-domain framing effects (n=2,654)

↳ Design

- ↳ Fully experimental
- ↳ Based on **conjoint analysis**, modified to identify both categorical and attribute-based reasoning simultaneously

↳ How conjoint works:

- ↳ Each native-born subject sees 5 pairs of **randomly-generated** immigrant profiles in sequence
- ↳ For each pair, asked whether either, both, or neither immigrant should be allowed to live in the U.S. permanently

Research Design

Question prompt, randomly assigned to vary policy domain:

- 1) **Legal Admission:** There are different opinions about what sorts of people from other countries should be given official permission to come to the United States **legally** and live here permanently. We'd like to know your opinion. For each pair of people you see, please indicate which of the two you would prefer be given official permission to come to the United States **legally** and live here permanently, or whether you would prefer that neither or both be given permission.
- 2) **Illegal:** There are different opinions about what sorts of people from other countries who are living in the United States **illegally** should be given official permission to live here permanently. We'd like to know your opinion. For each pair of people you see, both of whom are living in the United States **illegally**, please indicate which of the two you would prefer be given official permission to live here permanently, or whether you would prefer that neither or both be given permission.
- 3) **Dreamer:** There are different opinions about what sorts of people from other countries who were **brought here as children** and are living in the United States **illegally** should be given official permission to live here permanently. We'd like to know your opinion. For each pair of people you see, all of whom were **brought here as children** and are living in the United States **illegally**, please indicate which of the two you would prefer be given official permission to live here permanently, or whether you would prefer that neither or both be given permission.

Research Design

Please consider a program that would allow immigrants living in the U.S. illegally to get legal status and eventually qualify for U.S. citizenship, as long as they meet certain requirements, like paying back taxes and passing background checks. We'd like your opinion about which sorts of individuals, if any, should qualify for this program.

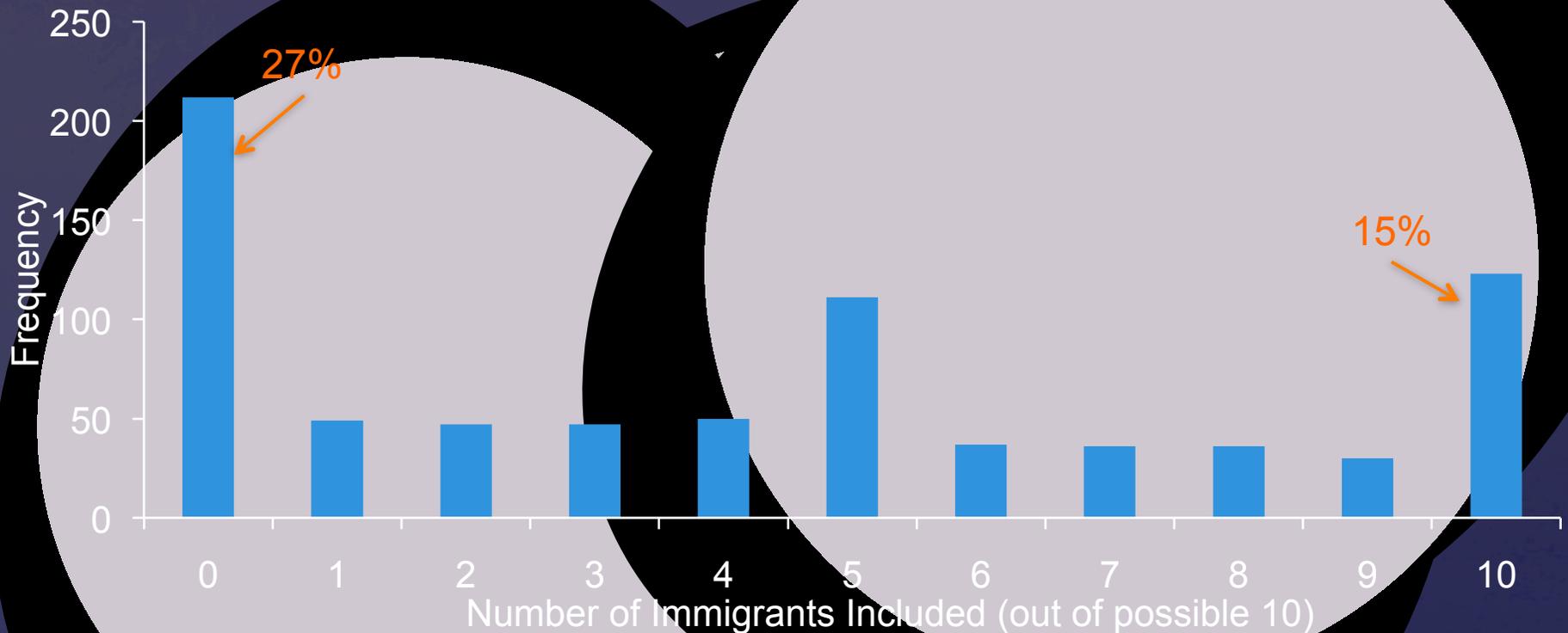
	Immigrant 1	Immigrant 2
Years in US	5+	5+
Religion	Christian	No Religion
English Ability	Broken English	Fluent
Country of Origin	Slovakia	Germany
Job History in US	Continuously Employed	Continuously Employed
Work Clientele	Mostly U.S. Natives	Mostly U.S. Natives
Family Status	Single	Married, Single born Kids
Education	College Degree	College Degree

“Which of these two individuals, both of whom are illegal immigrants, do you think should be granted legal status in the United States with an opportunity eventually to become a citizen?”

1) Immigrant 1 2) Immigrant 2 3) Neither 4) Both

Results: Categorical Opinion on Pathway

Number of Illegal Immigrants Subjects Included in a Path to Citizenship



- ⌘ **Modal** response is categorical, where immigrant attributes are (by definition and by design) irrelevant.
- ⌘ Strong relationship between this and support for pathway in the abstract

Results (2): Cross-Domain Categorical Response

	Legal	Illegal	Dreamer	Total
Categorical Inclusion	99	62	124	285
%	12.1	7.5	15.2	11.6
Attribute-Based	626	491	504	1,621
%	76.3	59.1	61.8	65.7
Categorical Exclusion	95	278	188	561
%	11.6	33.5	23.0	22.7
Total	820	831	816	2,467
%	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

- ⌘ Always some categorical response
- ⌘ Substantially more prevalent in illegal frames (40%) than legal (22%)
- ⌘ 3X categorical rejection in “Legalization” v. “Legal”, slightly more categorical acceptance in “Dreamer” v. “Legal”
- ⌘ Presumably caused by different sets of moral considerations invoked.

Results (3): Categorical Opinion and Aggregate Exclusion Rates

	Legal	Illegal	Dreamer	Total
<u>All Subjects</u>				
# Excluded	4,538	5,603	4,702	14,843
%	55.3	67.4	57.6	60.2
<u>Non-Categoricals</u>				
# Excluded	3,588	2,823	2,822	9,233
%	57.3	57.5	56.0	57.0

- ⌘ Difference in exclusion rate disappears entirely once categoricals are eliminated
- ⌘ It lies **entirely** in the asymmetry between categorical “rejectors” and “accepters” in the sample.
- ⌘ Aggregate differences in attributes not a factor, controlled by the experiment

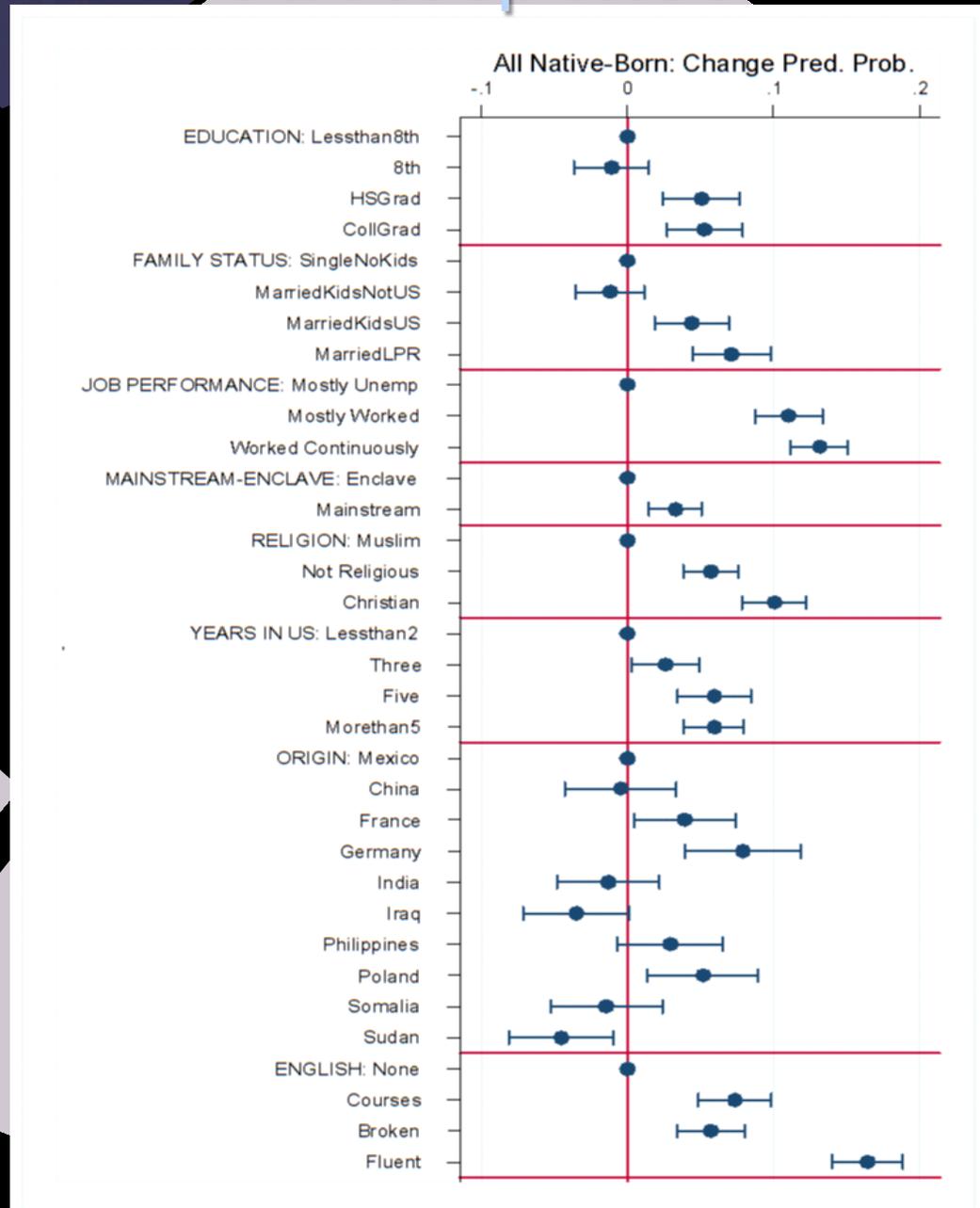
Results (4): Attribute-Based Response

Attribute Effects on Probability of Inclusion

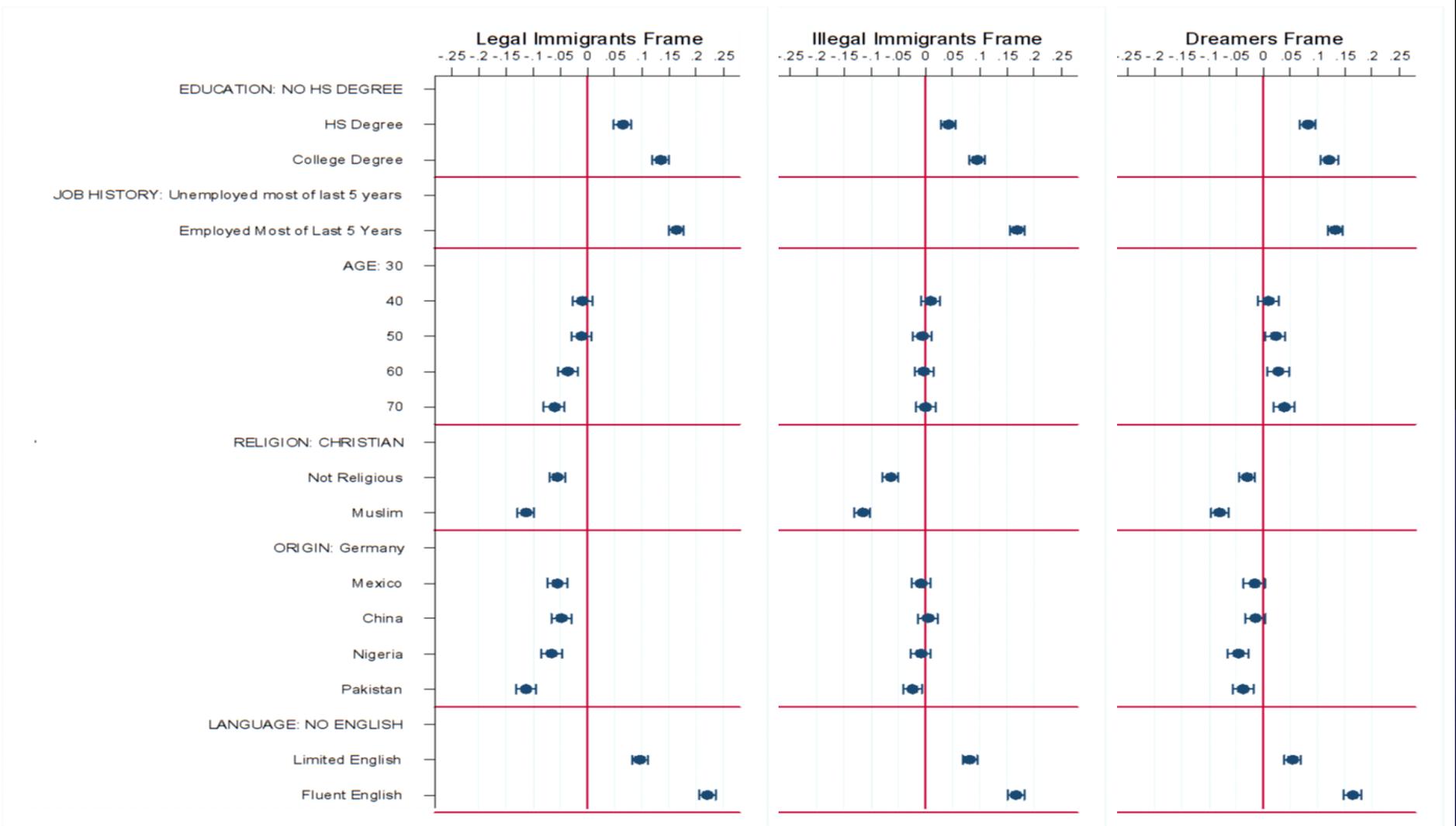
- ⌘ All traits represented by “dummy” variables
- ⌘ Graphed: average marginal change in probability of acceptance, everything else at mean values

The main finding here is that, on average, **everything seems to matter**

- ⌘ National origin
- ⌘ Cultural assimilation
- ⌘ Socio-economic attributes



Results (5): Cross-Domain Differences?



- ⊗ Illegality does not heighten the impact of ethnocultural characteristics.
- ⊗ Respondents not using illegality *per se* as cover for ethnocentrism.
- ⊗ Categoricals in, but dropping them **does not change** this finding

Conclusion: What Do We Know About Immigration Attitudes That We Didn't Before?

- ⌘ **Conflict:** Prevalence of “categorical judgment”
 - ⌘ About 40% of people accept or reject categorically, with some asymmetry in favor of rejection
 - ⌘ Varies substantially (and predictably) by policy domain, and by individual-level predisposition
 - ⌘ It is almost certainly driven by moralistic considerations rather than the “usual suspects”
 - ⌘ Entirely unanticipated in extant literature
- ⌘ **Consensus:** Attributes matter consistently across domains
 - ⌘ Conditional on attribute-based reasoning
- ⌘ **Significance?**
 - ⌘ **Theoretical:** “Ethnocentrism” simply insufficient to tell this story
 - ⌘ **Policy:** The folly of “comprehensive reform”

The image features a dark blue square background. Three large, overlapping circles are arranged in a triangular pattern. Each circle has a thick black outline and a light purple-grey fill. The circles overlap in the center, creating a dark blue area where they meet. The text "Thank You!" is centered within the overlapping area in a white, serif font with a subtle drop shadow.

Thank You!