**Beyond Changing Minds: Raising the Issue Importance of Expanding Legal Immigration**

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**Abstract**

How can public opinion change in a pro-immigration direction? Recent studies suggest that those who support immigration care less about it than those who oppose it, which may explain why lawmakers don't enact pro-immigration reforms even when voters are pro-immigration. To see if personal issue importance of immigration can be changed, I conducted a probability-based, nationally representative US survey experiment (N=3450) exposing respondents to verifiable arguments about the broad national benefits of expanding legal immigration and the costs of not doing so. Using new measures of issue importance, my descriptive results show only one-fifth of voters prioritizing the issue have a pro-immigration preference. Furthermore, while anti-immigration respondents prioritize policies regarding law enforcement and (reducing) future immigrants, pro-immigration respondents prioritize (helping) immigrants already here. The experimental results confirmed the provided arguments raised immigration's importance among pro-immigration voters but didn't backfire by mobilizing anti-immigration voters. Contrary to expectations, arguments increased pro-immigration policy preferences, but did not change voters' subissue priorities within immigration or willingness to sign a petition. Overall, the treatment was effective beyond changing minds by shifting stated issue positions and priorities in a pro-immigration direction. It can thus be used in a non-targeted information campaign to promote pro-immigration reforms.

Keywords: Immigration Policy, Public Opinion, Issue Salience, Survey Experiment

**Introduction**

Why do US lawmakers not pass pro-immigration reforms even when the public seems to support such reforms?[1] Recent studies indicate that one possible behavioral explanation of this question is related to the much lower perception of immigration as a personally important issue (or "priority")[2] among those voters who support it compared to those who oppose it (e.g., Kustov, 2023). As a result of this "immigration issue importance asymmetry," politicians rarely run on a pro-immigration platform (Levy, Wright, and Citrin 2016) and the few pro-immigration advocates there are appear to prioritize aiding existing immigrant constituents over improving the system for future immigrants (e.g., Tichenor, 2002). Unless pro-immigration advocates figure out a reliable way to raise immigration issue importance among sympathetic respondents only, they will always face this systematic disadvantage compared to their counterparts.

So, can voters' issue priorities be changed systematically in a pro-immigration direction? To address this question, I field a large-scale (N=3450), nationally representative, and pre-registered survey experiment of US adults. This study (1) provides better measures of immigration issue importance and then (2) tests whether exposing pro-immigration respondents to verifiable arguments about the substantial national benefits of expanding immigration to the US and the costs of retaining existing restrictions can increase their perceived importance of the issue. The experiment focuses especially on those respondents who are already pro-immigration since these are the people most likely to be responsive to pro-immigration information and bring related policy changes (e.g., Ivarsflaten and Sniderman 2022).

As an important descriptive contribution, I first corroborate the widespread perceptions of immigration importance compared to other issues and immigration issue importance asymmetry using a new measure of "issue public" membership (Ryan and Ehlinger 2023). I then, for the first

time, identify the differences between (predominantly liberal and Democratic) pro-immigration respondents and (predominantly conservative and Republican) anti-immigration respondents in the perceived importance of immigration *subissues* (from border security and treatment of immigrants to admission selection and numbers). These new results indicate that the asymmetry may be even greater than previously assumed—only one-fifth of voters who prioritize the issue have a pro-immigration preference. Furthermore, I show that, while anti-immigration respondents prioritize policies regarding law enforcement and (reducing) future immigrants, pro-immigration respondents prioritize (helping) immigrants already here.

The experimental results confirm that short, verifiable narratives with new, relevant information about the broad benefits of increasing legal immigration can motivate pro-immigration respondents by increasing the personal importance of the issue among them. The results also corroborate that such narratives do not backfire by increasing immigration's personal issue importance among anti-immigration respondents. Contrary to expectations, however, information did not shift people's issue priorities within immigration or their willingness to sign a petition. At the same time, the information also unexpectedly increased pro-immigration preferences among all respondents. Overall, the proposed information treatment was effective above and beyond changing minds by reducing immigration issue importance asymmetry and shifting the public's stated issue positions and priorities in a pro-immigration direction. It can thus be used in a general, non-targeted information campaign (Green et al. 2022) to promote the political priority of pro-immigration reforms to benefit both citizens and non-citizens alike. However, the extent to which such shifts in stated issue importance translate into policy change remains uncertain, as informed respondents did not show significantly increased willingness to sign a petition, suggesting a need for further research on the relationship between issue importance and political action.

The study draws on and contributes to several strands of immigration politics, political behavior, and persuasion literatures. Although there has been a lot of research on how populist politicians raise the issue importance of immigration issues among anti-immigration voters to improve their electoral fortunes (e.g., Hutter and Kriesi 2021), it is still unclear whether it is possible to increase the importance of immigration exclusively among the pro-immigration populations. While information interventions to flip people's immigration issue positions have rarely been successful, the project assesses for the first time whether relevant information can also raise the importance of immigration and its expansion among the already sympathetic population. Given my results, this approach can also be fruitfully applied to other non-immigration issues across countries where there is an evident disconnect between public preferences and policy outcomes, from gun control and abortion to climate change mitigation.

This work also contributes to a better understanding and measurement of personal issue importance and salience, "preference intensity," and "attitude strength" beyond immigration (Cavaillé, Chen, and Straeten 2024; Dennison 2019; Hill 2022; Howe and Krosnick 2017; Miller, Krosnick, and Fabrigar 2017; Ryan and Ehlinger 2023). It informs the literature on information experiments and their effectiveness, which so far has been primarily concerned with changing voters' issue preferences rather than their importance (Coppock 2022; Haaland, Roth, and Wohlfart 2023). By focusing on how weak attitudes can "crystallize" and become more important to voters (and potentially more susceptible to priming) in response to new information, my study also informs the long-standing debate about the nature of campaign effects (Lenz 2009; Tesler 2015).

**Reducing Immigration Issue Importance Asymmetry**

*Background: Relatively Stable Preferences and Relatively Volatile Issue Importance*

One of the most robust findings in the public opinion literature is that the majority of US voters are more sympathetic towards and prefer particular—generally skilled and culturally similar—immigrants from certain countries (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014; Lee and Fiske 2006). Voters' immigration preferences and the very meaning of "immigration" can also significantly vary across contexts depending on the type of immigrant that is salient in respondents' minds (Hopkins 2010). As a result, it is possible to imagine how people's responses to immigration questions can vary depending on the perceived characteristics of immigrants in a survey context and thus be changed via priming of those characteristics. However, immigration persuasion efforts to change people's immigration preferences can arguably only be considered successful to the extent that they are able to durably change people's opinions toward the exact same policies or groups across contexts.

In this respect, despite recent increases in aggregate positivity toward immigration, there has been growing longitudinal evidence that immigration policy preferences are generally stable at the individual level, especially in the long term (Goldstein and Peters 2014; Hopkins, Sides, and Citrin 2019; Kustov, Laaker, and Reller 2021; Lancaster 2022; Maxwell 2019). After all, these preferences form early in life and reflect deep-seated psychological predispositions such as openness to experience and ethnocentrism (Drazanova 2022; Kinder and Kam 2010). Preference changes, especially particular policies, can happen in the short term in response to new information or an external shock, but they tend to persist only among some—especially young—voters (Laaker 2024). To the extent that durable immigration preference changes exist, they thus happen gradually and mostly due to generational replacement, not persuasion (McLaren and Paterson 2020).

Voters have also been shown to be rather ignorant about immigration issues (Hopkins, Sides, and Citrin 2019; Lutz and Bitschnau 2023). But while various attempts to durably change people's minds on immigration by correcting misperceptions or providing new information have generally not been successful[3], there is ample evidence that people routinely change their perceptions about the "national salience" of various issues due to political messaging and events (Dennison and Geddes 2019). In other words, immigration preferences are relatively stable but their perceived salience and importance to voters is relatively volatile.

Although persuasion or preference change by providing information is certainly possible even for racialized issues (Kustov and Landgrave 2023; Santiago, Kustov, and Valenzuela 2020), it appears to be much harder for issues that voters perceive as important (Howe and Krosnick 2017; Vidigal and Jerit 2022) such as immigration in many countries today. At the same time, while being evidently more volatile than preferences, personal issue importance or the extent to which one actually *cares* about issues is still supposed to be a much more stable individual characteristic than merely thinking about issues or recognizing them as "salient" at a particular point of time in response to news or campaign priming (Moniz and Wlezien 2021; Ryan and Ehlinger 2023).

The literature on issue importance is thus arguably central to the understanding of public opinion and its role in politics. When individuals attach personal importance to a certain policy issue, it means that they care about it relatively more than about other issues as evidenced by their greater cognitive and behavioral engagement with that issue. They tend to think more frequently and deeply about it, as well as seek, gather, and spread information about it (Boninger et al. 1995). As a result, they are also more likely to cast their vote based on the issue (Dennison, 2019).

Crucially, however, issue importance is not just about voting. People who care about a certain issue are also more likely to engage in other costly actions in favor of their cause (Miller,

Krosnick, and Fabrigar 2017). The people who care particularly intensely about issues constitute potentially influential "issue publics" even when they are not large (Ryan and Ehlinger 2023). As recently shown by Hill (2022), politicians have an electoral incentive to side with such intense minorities over passive majorities, assuming the issue importance asymmetry is sufficiently high. The failure of gun control reform in the US despite very high public support (but low issue importance among supporters) is perhaps the most prominent example of such a dynamic.

Unfortunately, the research on immigration attitudes has been developing separately from this discussion (but see Dunaway et al., 2010). This is disconcerting given that people for whom a particular immigration issue is very important are likely to place great weight on it when deciding how to vote or, *which can be as consequential*, express their views otherwise. Issue importance can relate to such costly actions as volunteering for immigration organizations, donating money, attending meetings and protests, contacting public officials, advocating for the issue, or even running for office (Moniz and Wlezien 2021).

*Motivation: Revealing Immigration Issue Importance Asymmetry*

While some scholars have recently tried to bring issue importance to the center of immigration research (Dennison and Geddes 2019; Hatton 2021; Paul and Fitzgerald 2021), the link between immigration preferences and their perceived importance has not been explored much due to the lack of relevant data. One exception is the recent paper by Kustov (2023) who has identified all such data from the publicly available representative surveys to provide an empirical assessment of this relationship. Overall, this research finds that those who oppose immigration are more likely to consider it as both personally and nationally important than those who support it, which holds across different years, countries, and measures.

An important implication of this revealed "immigration issue importance asymmetry" is that, even though voters' anti-immigration preferences may be in decline, political events about immigration should be more likely to engage those who oppose it. In other words, pro-immigration advocates are always at a systematic disadvantage compared to their opponents when they want to draw national attention to the issue. As of now, however, it is still unclear what causes this issue importance asymmetry, whether it is about immigration in general or some specific issue like undocumented immigration in particular, and whether the observed gap between pro-immigration and anti-immigration voters can be reduced.

*Goal I: Descriptively Explore the Possible Issue Importance Asymmetries Within Immigration*

Immigration is a complex policy domain with a variety of distinct *"subissues"* (for a review of existing classifications, see Helbling et al., 2017). For instance, Tichenor (2002) famously distinguishes between "immigration admission" and "immigrant rights" policies that have had distinct and changing political coalitions throughout US history. More broadly, in addition to major admission and selection policies that impact the number of future immigrants (or *"flows")*, the US and other governments regulate naturalization and other rights that impact existing immigrants (or *"stocks"*), as well as unauthorized immigration and border security (or *"enforcement"*).

While the results of this project should be relevant regardless of one's beliefs regarding the objective primacy of immigration and its subissues, there is extensive literature documenting the importance of immigration over other government policies (Clemens 2011) and the practical importance of addressing flows over stocks (Ruhs 2013) or enforcement (Massey, Durand, and Pren 2016). After all, most immigration policies arguably regulate the incorporation of non-

citizens into the country and thus are ultimately contingent on the allowed number of legal immigrants.

Similarly, although most people can be consistently classified as either pro-immigration or anti-immigration (Kustov, Laaker, and Reller 2021; Ruedin 2020), many also make meaningful, nuanced distinctions to describe their views. This includes differentiating between individual immigrants and various policies beyond the common "legal/illegal" dichotomy (Helbling, Maxwell, and Traunmüller 2024; Margalit and Solodoch 2022). Thus, they may attach different priorities to these policy views too.

According to recent evidence, most US adults exhibit a "stock premium" due to their stronger sense of moral obligation toward people who are already residing in the country (Margalit and Solodoch 2022). As a result, pro-immigration respondents may be expected to be *relatively more supportive* of stocks (compared to flows) while anti-immigration respondents may be expected to be *relatively less opposed* to stocks (compared to flows). In other words, in addition to the general asymmetry observed earlier, pro-immigration respondents may also be expected to prioritize supporting existing immigrants over future immigration while anti-immigration respondents may be expected to prioritize opposing future immigration over existing immigrants.[4]

*Goal II: Experimentally Explore the Malleability of Immigration Issue Importance Asymmetry*

While the exploration of how individuals decide what issues to care about is still in its infancy, the literature usually singles out three main systematic individual-level sources related to material self-interest, group interest, and predispositions (Boninger et al. 1995; Howe and Krosnick 2017; Miller, Krosnick, and Fabrigar 2017). Notably, all of these factors are also used to explain policy preferences within issues. Consequently, although issue importance and preferences are both

conceptually distinct components of individual attitudes, they may be more or less empirically related depending on the particular issue and political context (Delton, DeScioli, and Ryan 2020; Jennings and Wlezien 2015).

Why do those who oppose immigration care more? One possibility is related to the previously documented asymmetry in the organization of US parties and the respective media environments (e.g., Grossmann and Hopkins 2016). If (increasingly anti-immigration) Republicans are more homogeneous in terms of ideology and media attention, they may care about relatively fewer issues than (increasingly pro-immigration) Democrats but more intensely. Given that the same asymmetry is present outside of the US in countries with multiple parties and different institutions and media environments (Kustov 2023a), however, it is unlikely to be just a function of the US partisan context.[5]

Another much likelier possibility is that the perceived economic or cultural threat from immigration is simply more psychologically potent and mobilizing than perceived opportunities (Ivarsflaten and Sniderman 2022), which may in turn be an instance of the more general phenomena of loss aversion in politics (Alesina and Passarelli 2019; Baumeister et al. 2001). Consistent with this, research indicates that the asymmetry appears to be specific to immigration: anti-immigration respondents care more about immigration in particular, not politics in general (also see Figure 1). Given that issue importance is a relative concept and the amount of time people have is limited, it is likely the case that pro-immigration respondents care more about other issues such as healthcare, environment, gun control, abortion, etc. (the details of which likely depend on a particular context).

What can convince such people to think of immigration and its expansion as more important than other issues? Those people who generally support immigration already do not

consider it a threat. They think that it is a good thing and that it should be increased, they oppose deportations, and they believe that all people should be treated humanely regardless of their immigration status. But they do not necessarily see increasing immigration as an enormous or urgent opportunity to solve their country's problems such as the aging population, labor shortages, or other issues they may care about (especially compared to other policies). Quite equivalently, they do not see current restrictions as imposing an urgent threat by preventing millions of people— including their compatriots—from reuniting with their families and participating in mutually beneficial interactions, including employment, investments, and trade.

At the same time, many scholars document the dominant motivating role of "sociotropic" considerations or perceived national interest (both economic and non-economic) over people's self-interest or humanitarian concerns in shaping their political attitudes, including that of immigration (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014; Kustov 2021). I thus argue that informing pro-immigration respondents about the substantial (non-)economic national benefits of *expanding* immigration to the United States (and thus the urgency of relaxing existing costly restrictions to help solve the country's other ongoing problems)—which many may simply be not aware of— should be an effective way to raise the personal importance of the issue among this population.

I focus on pro-immigration respondents in particular because these are the people who should be more responsive to this information due to its ideological congruency (Kahan 2016). Related, I also focus on relatively uncommon sociotropic arguments as opposed to common humanitarian arguments in favor of expanding immigration because pro-immigration respondents are already more likely to be familiar with and agree with the latter than the former. While most research focuses on anti-immigration voters and their motivations, pro-immigration citizens are arguably the group that is most likely to bring a pro-immigration political change (Ivarsflaten and

Sniderman 2022). This is especially true if one assumes that immigration preferences are relatively stable while the personal importance of immigration to voters is relatively volatile.

**Research Design and Hypotheses**

*Designing Effective Information Treatment to Reduce Immigration Issue Importance Asymmetry*

Many studies show that choosing a good way of framing immigration such that it appeals to other values that voters hold dear may constitute an effective messaging strategy for increasing immigration support (Dennison 2020; Gilliam 2010). In a competitive political environment where voters are constantly exposed to anti-immigration counter-frames, however, such an approach would require constant repetition (and media dominance) to be effective. According to recent extensive reviews of persuasion experiments (Coppock 2022; Haaland, Roth, and Wohlfart 2023), such framing or priming interventions that simply make *existing knowledge accessible* are less effective and durable than information provision interventions that instead make *new knowledge applicable*.

Consequently, simply reminding pro-immigration respondents about the issue by priming it with a short text or other media would likely not be sufficient to change their issue priorities in a durable way. In line with this, the only survey experiment I am aware of in which the authors try to increase the personal issue importance of immigration by showing fictitious news articles on the issue has not been successful (Arias and Blair 2021). It appears that robustly changing personal issue importance is much harder than simply changing the "salience" or mere accessibility of a given issue in a certain context (Bizer and Krosnick 2001; Dennison and Geddes 2019).

It is true that particularly striking, tragic events or stories such as the famous 2015 photograph of a young Syrian child, Aylan Kurdi, who drowned trying to reach Greece may

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motivate sympathetic people to help or even demand political change. Unfortunately, these empathic effects are often short-lived, and simply reminding people about those tragedies may not prove very effective (Slovic et al. 2017). Furthermore, since the costs of immigration restrictions usually play out in the form of missed opportunities (e.g., a business that was not started because the jobs could not be filled), it is hard to find convincing stories in favor of expanding immigration. In fact, I am not aware of any recent events that made US voters demand *more* immigration.

Among possible information interventions, verifiable *narratives*—defined as generalizable selective depictions of reality with causal arguments (Dennison 2021)—that can generate new knowledge in favor of increasing immigration (Cattaneo and Grieco 2021; Facchini, Margalit, and Nakata 2022) and its importance should also be preferable to fact-checking approaches that simply attempt to correct people's misperceptions about current immigrants and their alleged harms (Abascal, Huang, and Tran 2021; Grigorieff, Roth, and Ubfal 2020; Hopkins, Sides, and Citrin 2019).[6] At the same time, those narratives that align with respondents' sociotropic concerns by emphasizing benefits to citizens should be more effective than those that appeal to humanitarian concerns even among pro-immigration adults (Dennison 2021; Gest 2022; Kustov 2021; Voelkel et al. 2022).

Finally, given the potential relevance of loss aversion and (the lack of) urgency in explaining the issue importance gap between pro-immigration and anti-immigration adults, *pro-immigration* "threat" narratives that directly address these concerns should also be more effective. In other words, providing explicit (counterfactual) information on the enormous economic and non-economics costs of current restrictions to the United States *now* in addition to the benefits of *increasing* immigration in the future might be informative to pro-immigration voters even if the former is arguably implied by the latter.[7] Importantly, to the extent that such information could

change people's minds, it should work by generating new knowledge or updating people's relevant empirical beliefs about the importance of immigration and its expansion.

What are the particular arguments about benefits that pro-immigration voters—who already believe that immigration is generally good—can find novel and thus potentially persuasive? According to my content analysis of over a hundred of randomly selected immigration news stories of the last decade from major US media outlets (see Appendix E), various appeals to the national benefits of immigration are quite common among those arguing in favor of it. However, pro-immigration stories predominantly focus on the arguments about the contributions and the rights of those immigrants who are already here. They also commonly address counterarguments against the frequently invoked harms (e.g., "immigrants lower wages") and caution against decreasing legal immigration. But they rarely make an explicit, affirmative argument about the benefits of *increasing* legal immigration or address the costs of current immigration restrictions. In contrast, anti-immigration stories usually invoke a sense of urgent national threat coming from both current and potential immigrants with an explicit call to reduce future immigration as the main objective.

While the relevance of particular immigration benefits may vary across individuals and contexts, it is likely the case that mentioning *specific* ways of why increasing immigration is *urgent* or how it can help other issues pro-immigration voters may care about—like boosting the occupational mobility of native workers—should be an effective strategy (Dennison, 2020a).

*Hypotheses*

Based on the discussions above, I specify the following main hypothesis about the effect of information on immigration's personal issue importance among pro-immigration respondents[8]:

*H1: Receiving relevant information about the national benefits of increasing immigration will increase the personal issue importance of immigration among pro-immigration respondents.*

I also specify the two related hypotheses focusing on shifting priorities within the broad domain of immigration policies and the related behaviors:

*H2: Receiving relevant information about the national benefits of increasing immigration will increase the perceived issue importance of subissues related to immigration flows among pro-immigration respondents (relative to subissues related to immigration stocks).*

*H3: Receiving relevant information about the national benefits of increasing immigration will increase the behavioral manifestations of the personal issue importance of immigration among pro-immigration respondents.*

Although the study is primarily designed to test the effects of relevant information on immigration issue importance among pro-immigration respondents, there are arguably at least two additional hypotheses about the information effects among non-pro-immigration respondents that are worth considering explicitly. First, while the backlash to counter-attitudinal information is rare in terms of preferences (Coppock 2022), it is possible that the information about immigration benefits can increase immigration issue importance among some anti-immigration respondents by simply reminding them about the issue they dislike. However, it is also possible that, after learning about the benefits of immigration, others may decrease the importance of opposing immigration or even their opposition itself. After all, there is some previous evidence that information about national benefits can change people's minds on the issue (e.g., Facchini et al., 2022). Given that people tend to dislike counter-attitudinal information even when they find it persuasive (Coppock 2022), most anti-immigration respondents and those currently indifferent regarding the issue will likely not find the provided pro-immigration information motivating or change their perceived

importance of the issue. Consequently, I also specify the following auxiliary hypotheses regarding non-pro-immigration respondents:

*H4: Receiving relevant information about the national benefits of increasing immigration will not increase the personal issue importance of immigration among non-pro-immigration respondents.*

*H5: Receiving relevant information about the national benefits of increasing immigration will not increase pro-immigration preferences (among all respondents).*

Although my study makes a case that providing relevant information can change people's issue priorities (if not their minds), null findings in a high-quality sample will be informative in light of the growing evidence of immigration attitude stability. Given that immigration issue importance asymmetry is present across contexts, it is possible that providing information cannot easily reduce the issue importance gap between pro-immigration and anti-immigration voters.

Finally, it is important to address the potential ethical issues of the proposed study. Even though my survey simply aims to provide new verifiable information to its participants, one may reasonably wonder about the normative considerations of shifting voter priorities. Given that people have limited time and resources, increasing immigration issue importance by definition should come at the expense of some other political issues (or non-political activities for that matter). While reasonable people may disagree on the desirability of these changes (depending on the particular tradeoffs involved), the study presents minimal risks to individual respondents since their participation is voluntary and there is no deception involved in any aspect of the study.

**Data and Measurement**

The study is based on a probability-based, nationally representative US survey experiment (N=3450) administered by University of Southern California's Understanding America Study (UAS) in June of 2023 (Alattar, Messel, and Rogofsky 2018).[9] The survey took 8 minutes on average. Pre-treatment, the subjects were first asked about a set of standard sociodemographic questions, issues they care about in an open-ended way (Ryan and Ehlinger 2023), and their immigration preferences (to determine pro-immigration voters) among other political questions (to avoid priming and demand effects). Respondents were then randomly exposed to one of the information treatments with an encouragement to read it carefully and answer a substantive question to encourage attentiveness (or no treatment). Finally, respondents completed a set of self-reported questions about immigration (sub)issue importance, repeated post-treatment preference items, a behavioral item on petition signing, and manipulation checks (for specific procedures and items, see Appendix).

As for the experimental setup, 50% of the respondents were exposed to one of the five texts about the benefits of expanding legal immigration to the US (combined treatment group); and 50% of the respondents were in one of the four placebo groups or the pure control group, 10% each (combined control group). For all hypotheses, the treatment effects were estimated across all treatment texts pulled together compared to all placebo and control groups pulled together.

The ~200-word[10] information treatment(s) were based on recent policy reports and editorials that communicate the significant benefits of expanding migration to the US through an accessible, verifiable, and non-judgmental narrative. Given the recent call for "stimuli sampling" as an important complement to "participant sampling" to improve external validity (Clifford, Leeper, and Rainey 2023; Gigerenzer 2022), respondents in the treatment group were randomly

assigned to one of the five conceptually similar but distinct narratives (see Table 1 for one example).[11]

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**How More Immigration Can Benefit America Now**

The debates around immigration and its impacts have gone around in circles. We should ask a different question: *how can we choose better immigration policies that benefit Americans*?

—*Increasing skilled immigration will significantly benefit our economy*. These immigrants bring diverse talent and expertise. They create businesses and jobs. With our current restrictions in place, these immigrants can't invest in our economy or hire Americans.

—*Allowing more immigrants of any skill level can increase economic opportunities for all*. These immigrants can fill essential occupations for which Americans are in short supply. When immigrants take up manual tasks, Americans move to higher-paying jobs that require language and other skills. When our policies restrict most immigrants from filling labor shortages as they do now, these economic opportunities are lost for everyone.

*With the right policies in place, increasing legal immigration creates enormous benefits for the United States.* New immigrants can help our communities, businesses, and public services to thrive again if only we let them.

Unfortunately, our current immigration policies are too strict and convoluted for this to happen. Every single day our harsh restrictions on legal immigration cost us millions. They prevent immigrants and Americans alike from reuniting with their families and working together for mutual benefit.

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**Table 1: An Example of a Treatment Narrative about the Broad National Benefits of Immigration**

With some variation in the language and arguments used, all of these texts convey that (1) increasing legal immigration is beneficial to the US and its citizens. They also explain that this implies that (2) current restrictions are costly economically or threatening otherwise and that (3) increasing immigration or relaxing restrictions can help solve other important problems. Allowing more people to come to the US legally should significantly help the country by growing the economy, filling labor shortages, increasing innovation, boosting native incomes and careers, or improving international standing. At the same time, the current immigration restrictions in place hurt Americans, and retaining them would prevent natives from reuniting with their families and

willing immigrants from contributing to the US. Rather than changing people's minds from opposing to supporting immigration, these pretested information treatments are designed to change the personal importance of increasing immigration among those who already support it.

To avoid demand effects, none of the treatment texts explicitly said that immigration was more important than other issues. The placebo treatments further helped account for potential concerns about priming effects and social desirability bias related to pro-immigration respondents adjusting their issue importance responses in response to any (pro-)immigration information or arguments about other policies and their benefits.

Given the random assignment, to test my first three hypotheses (H1-H3), I simply compared the mean values for relevant issue importance indices between the combined treatment and the combined control and placebo groups using a standard difference-in-means estimator among the pro-immigration respondents. To test H4, I similarly compared the issue importance index between the combined treatment and the combined control and placebo groups among the non-pro-immigration respondents. To test H5, I maximized statistical power by using a "pre-post" experimental design (Clifford, Sheagley, and Piston 2021) and comparing the post-treatment preferences between the pulled treatment and control groups after statistically controlling for pre-treatment preferences among all respondents in linear regression.[12]

Since there could arguably several possible "nonspecific effects" on issue importance behind my treatment informing people about the benefits of increasing immigration, I followed the recently suggested "agnostic approach" to experimental controls by Porter and Velez (2022) and averaged over multiple placebo treatments alongside the pure control. Most importantly, these nonspecific effects could include increased perceptions of immigration importance due to simple priming or invoking any positive arguments in favor of the issue and its decreased perceived

importance due to discussing any other policy issues and their benefits. To address these issues, 10% of the respondents were exposed to a text mentioning policy-neutral facts about immigration (placebo group 1); 10% of the respondents were exposed to a text mentioning common superficial arguments in favor of immigration such as "immigrants fill jobs that natives do not want" or that "they deserve our compassion"  (placebo group 2); 10% of the respondents were exposed to a text about the national benefits of reducing healthcare costs (placebo group 3); 10% of the respondents were exposed to a text about the national benefits of building more housing (placebo group 4); and 10% of the respondents were exposed to no text (pure control group). Although none of these placebo treatments were expected to have any significant effects compared to the pure control, they consisted of a combination of texts that could either slightly attenuate or strengthen the effect of the intervention when included in the control group, and they were deliberately designed to reflect realistic information alternatives that people might encounter in their lives.

No attention checks or other filters were used to screen the participants in the target sample. All hypotheses and specifications were pre-registered prior to data collection. For a summary of hypotheses and methods, see Table A1. For power analysis, see Appendix C. For a summary of all results using pre-registered OLS specifications, see Table A2. For alternative exploratory specifications, see Table A3. In testing hypotheses, I also adjusted for multiple comparisons using the Holm-Bonferroni correction (see Table A4). For the discussion of ethics, see Appendix D.

*Measuring Immigration Preferences, Issue Importance and Their Behavioral Manifestations*

To minimize measurement error, the survey included multiple previously validated preference and issue importance items averaged as 0-1 indices. To measure immigration preferences (and categorize respondents as pro-immigration or anti-immigration), I used three standard 4-point

items gauging people's support for increasing/decreasing immigration flows, making immigration easier/harder, and relaxing/tightening immigration laws.

To date, there is no universally accepted way to measure personal issue importance (Moniz and Wlezien 2021).[13] Fortunately, unlike previous studies mostly based on the existing data created for other purposes, I did not have to rely on the common "what is the most important problem facing the country today" question or similar items. Such traditional methods have a notable limitation—they can confuse immigration's immediate accessibility in people's minds due to recent news exposure or any other priming stimuli with long-term concern for the issue. Additionally, equating the recognition of an issue as a "problem" with genuine care about it can be misleading (Ryan and Ehlinger 2023; Wlezien 2005). This is especially true for pro-immigration voters who might be reluctant to label "immigration" as a problem even when they care about it.

Instead, I used a novel, previously validated "issue public" question (Ryan and Ehlinger 2023) as a "strong" pre-treatment measure of personal issue importance (of immigration). This two-part question is particularly well-suited to reveal any substantively important issue importance asymmetry since it explicitly asks respondents to report if they have any long-standing engagement with any political issues (without prompting them about "immigration" or "problems"). The item reads as follows: "*Some people have a political issue that they care about more than most other issues. They might think about the issue a lot. They might pay particular attention to news about that issue, even when it's not making national news. They might focus on what political candidates say about that issue, and decide who to vote for on the basis of that issue. Or they might just care about the issue a lot. Is there an issue like that for you*?" ("Yes" or "No"; if respondents say "Yes," they are asked a follow-up question: "*In just a few words, what issue or two do you care about?*").

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Despite its ability to capture how much people care about issues, the issue public membership question may not be ideal as a post-treatment measure of personal issue importance since it explicitly asks people about their longstanding engagement with issues in the past, which cannot feasibly change during the survey. As my main post-treatment outcome of interest, I thus used a more standard battery of three 4-point items gauging whether respondents believe immigration issues are more important to the US than other political issues, to what extent immigration issues are important to them personally, and how strongly they feel about immigration issues.[14] I also included a quasi-behavioral issue importance item in which respondents could express their willingness to sign a petition in line with their preferences.

To measure perceived subissue importance, I asked respondents to select up to three (neutrally worded) issues that they believe are the most important to address and then simply calculated the number of mentions by issue or issue category (e.g., "flows" or "stocks"). The classification of immigration subissues is based on the original, previously pretested battery item derived from the widely used IMPIC policy coding (Helbling et al. 2017).

**Analysis and Results**

In line with the previous evidence on the relatively low prevalence of political interest in the public, only about 49% of respondents answered affirmatively to the first issue public question asking if there was any political issue at all they thought a lot about, considered more important than other issues, focused on what politicians said, paid particular attention to the news, or voted based on it. Among those respondents, 13% then specified they cared particularly about immigration or an immigration-related issue like "securing our border" or "treating immigrants with respect" (unprompted). While this may not seem like a big number, there was only a single other issue

chosen by more respondents at the time of the survey in June 2023 (abortion with 16% among issue public members). Similar to recent benchmark surveys, 35% and 40% of respondents then also reported consistently pro-immigration and anti-immigration preferences (pre-treatment).

*Descriptive Findings I: Pro-immigration Voters Care Less About Immigration*

Overall, based on this new issue public membership measure, the results confirm the existence and qualify the substantial size of "issue importance asymmetry" between pro-immigration and anti-immigration groups (see Figure 1a). While immigration has been consistently one of the most important policy issues to US voters, only 4 (±1.5% given 95% CI) of pro-immigration respondents say they care about it. At the same time, 9% of anti-immigration respondents could be identified as such immigration issue public members. In other words, only approximately 20% of the "immigration issue public members" or voters who truly care about the issue have a pro-immigration preference. This is particularly notable since pro-immigration voters are generally more, not less, politically active (51% are able to identify at least one issue they care a lot about compared to 43% among anti-immigration voters).

As can be seen from Figure 1b, while Republicans and Democrats care equally about politics in general, Republicans care more about immigration in particular. Importantly, however, the immigration importance asymmetry is not just a function of partisanship. The same asymmetry is present across all partisan groups—anti-immigration Republicans and Democrats care more about the issue (14% and 6%) than pro-immigration Republicans and Democrats (6% and 4%).[15]
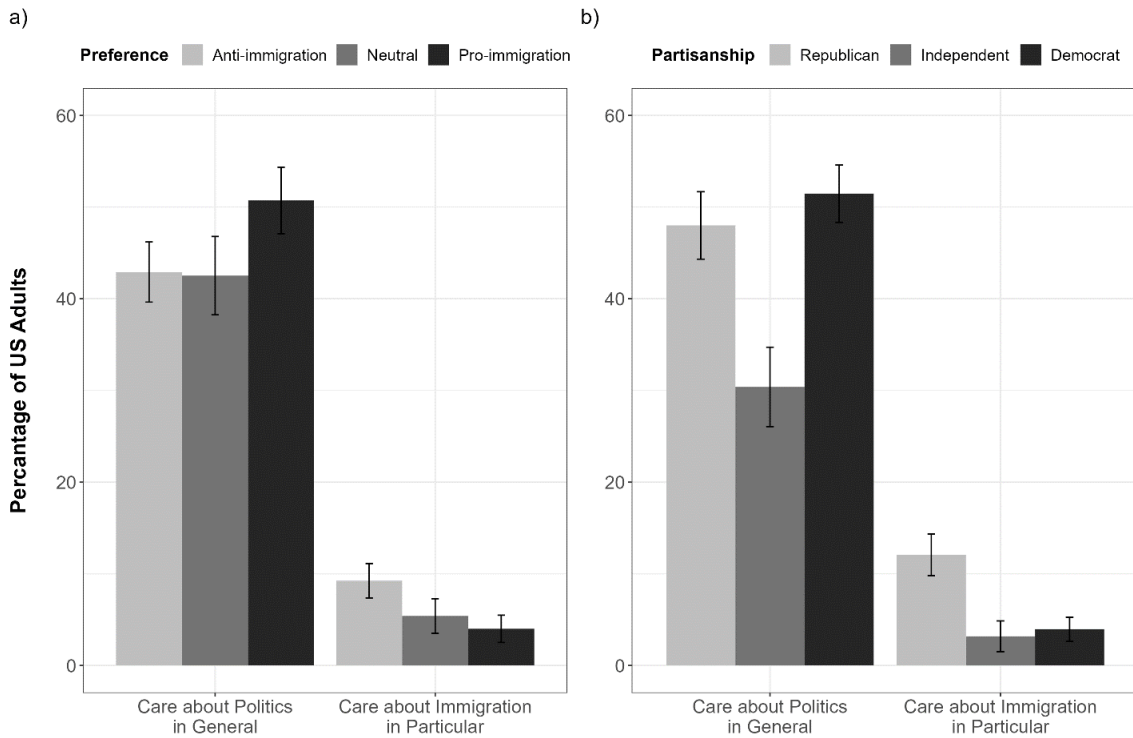
**Figure 1: Immigration Issue Importance Asymmetry.** The figure shows responses to the pre-treatment "issue public" question by pre-treatment (a) immigration preference or (b) partisanship based on the UAS survey. Left columns show any issue public members; right columns show immigration issue public members. Bars are 95% CI.

Similarly, although less dramatically, the (post-treatment) immigration issue importance index has been higher for anti-immigration than pro-immigration voters in the pure control group (0.63 vs 0.59). In particular, anti-immigration voters are more likely to say that immigration is very important to them personally, that it is more important than other issues, and that they feel strongly about it (67% vs 60% on average).

Interestingly, however, despite these results and previous research (Kustov 2023), pro-immigration and anti-immigration were more or less equally willing to sign a petition to express their views regarding the issue (66±3% among all respondents in the control group). While this requires further investigation, it is possible that pro-immigration respondents were more likely to sign any political petition regardless of the issue due to their greater political engagement.

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Table A3 presents the possible demographic differences of interest. As expected, foreign-born respondents were much more likely to perceive immigration as an important issue, regardless of their immigration preference. Additionally, older women who support immigration and older men who oppose it were more likely to consider the issue important. Interestingly, having a college degree was not a significant factor, while high-income pro-immigration respondents were less likely to perceive immigration as important.

*Descriptive Findings II: Pro-immigration Voters Care About Helping Immigrants, Anti-immigration Voters Care about Preventing Future Immigration*

What do people mean exactly when they say they care about immigration? The novel descriptive results on specific immigration "subissues" indicate that, while anti-immigration respondents prioritize policies (reducing) future immigration flows (and law enforcement), pro-immigration respondents prioritize helping immigrants who are already here (Figure 2). In particular, anti-immigration respondents cited the "allowed numbers of immigrants each year" and "skill and English requirements for new immigrants" alongside the more expected "illegal immigration and deportations" and "wall construction along the US Mexico border" as the most important immigration issues for the government to address. The most important immigration issues among pro-immigration respondents were expectedly about the "time and difficulty of acquiring US citizenship," "legal status of children brought here illegally," and the "treatment of immigrants by natives" alongside "the process of applying for asylum in the US."

However, it is important to acknowledge that some immigration subissues do not easily fit the distinction between flows and stocks, and that there is a considerable amount of nuance to these findings. For instance, contrary to expectations, pro-immigration respondents still considered

"availability of temporary work visas" and "red tape and delays in processing immigration forms" as more important than anti-immigration respondents, while anti-immigration prioritized "immigrants' access to government benefits" more so than pro-immigration respondents. Interestingly, while the partisan differences between Republicans and Democrats in immigration priorities largely mirrored the breakdown in Figure 2, they were smaller across all subissues. Since subissue importance and partisanship are post-treatment variables, I replicate the same results exactly based on the pure control subsample (see Figure A2). Among the possible demographic differences of interest (see Table A3), only educated respondents were more likely to perceive immigration flows to be more important that other stock subissues.
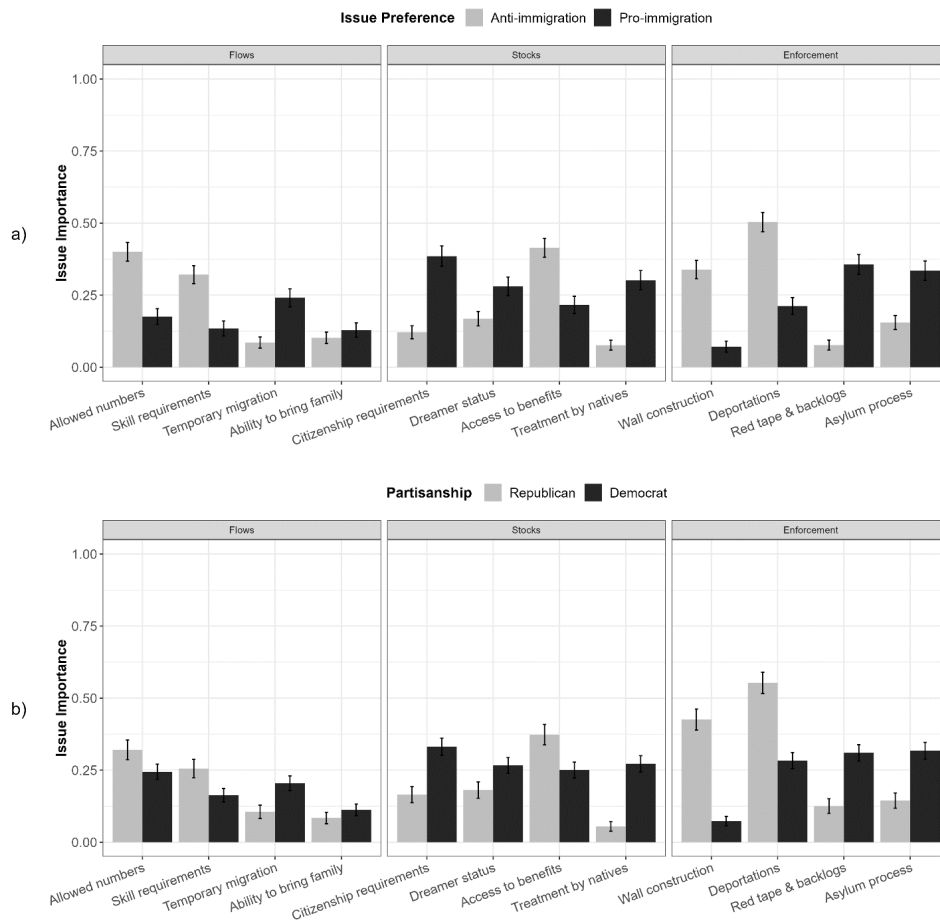


**Figure 2: Immigration Subissue Importance Asymmetry.** The figure shows the importance of immigration subissues by (pre-treatment) immigration preference or partisanship based on the UAS survey. Bars are 95% CI.

*Experimental Findings I: Relevant Information Increases Immigration Issue Importance*

In line with my main pre-registered hypotheses and specifications (H1 and H4), the experimental results show that providing verifiable narratives informing the respondents about the national benefits of increasing immigration to the US is effective. In particular, it increases immigration's stated issue importance among pro-immigration adults (but not non-pro-immigration adults) and thus reduces the immigration issue importance asymmetry observed earlier (Figure 3).
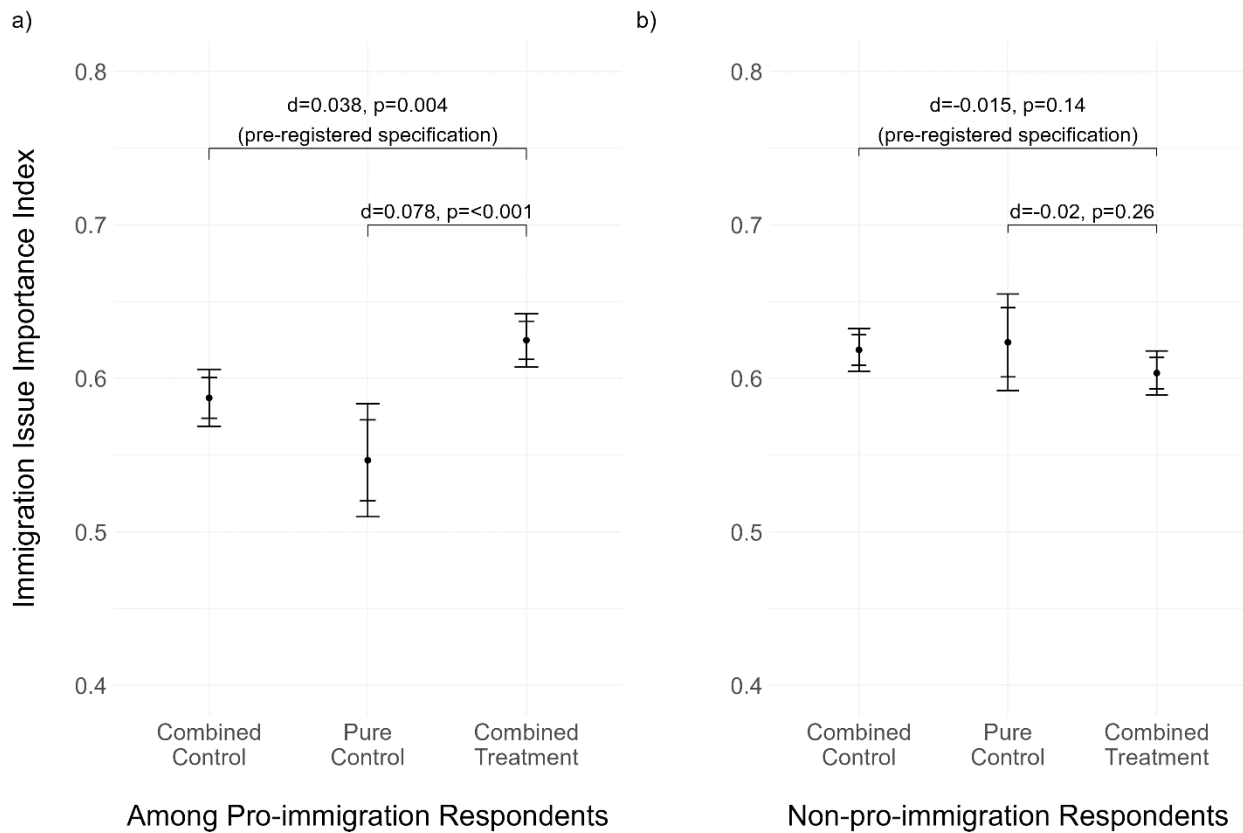


**Figure 3: Information Effects on Immigration Issue Importance.** The figures show the treatment effects on the personal importance of immigration among pro-immigration (a, H1) and non-pro-immigration respondents (b, H4) based on the UAS survey. Bars are 95(84)% CI.

After reading about the broad benefits of increasing immigration and the costs of not doing so, pro-immigration respondents were significantly more likely to report that immigration is important (~0.04 on a 0-1 index scale or Cohen's d of 0.16). Substantively, this amounts to, on average, 9±5 percentage-point (or 16 percent) more pro-immigration respondents considering immigration to be personally important, believing it is more important than other issues, and feeling strongly about it (given the baseline of 62 percent). Additional exploratory analyses indicate that the effects are similar or stronger (~0.08 on a 0-1 index scale or Cohen's d of 0.33) with the pure control as a baseline and that the effects are not driven by any one particular treatment text.

At the same time, in line with H4, the treatment does not affect the personal issue importance of the issue among non-pro-immigration voters. This holds true regardless of specification. Of course, the lack of statistical significance or the failure to reject the null hypothesis does not necessarily imply that the effect is zero.[16] Additional exploratory analyses indicate that the substantively similar practical null findings are true for the subgroup of anti-immigration respondents too (excluding neutral or ambivalent respondents).[17]

Finally, a simple linear model of the outcome index as a function of the interaction between the treatment and the pre-treatment preference indicates that the effects are significantly stronger among pro-immigration respondents (by 0.05 points on a 0-1 scale, $p < 0.01$). Importantly, this is comparable to the size of the immigration issue importance asymmetry between pro-immigration and anti-immigration respondents observed in the control group.

*Experimental Findings II: Relevant Information Doesn't Change Immigration Subissue Priorities*

Apart from the general importance of immigration to respondents, I also pre-specified two additional possible outcomes of interests, including people's stated importance of flows-related

issues as opposed to stock-related issues within immigration, as well as their possible behavioral response in the form of signing a petition expressing their views on the issue.

As can be seen from Figure A3a, contrary to expectations, the provided information does not impact the relative importance of immigration flows among pro-immigration respondents. In the pre-registered specification, the effects are almost precisely estimated at zero. This is also true for a number of alternative specifications and operationalizations of the subissue importance index, including looking at the pure control or the simple count of flows-related issues (not shown).

In Figure A3b, I test whether the treatment can increase a quasi-behavioral manifestation of issue importance related to the willingness of respondents to sign a petition sharing their views with Members of Congress (H3). While the treatment coefficient is in the expected direction, it is not statistically significant at the conventional level. Equivalence tests further confirm the practical null effects of both H2 and H3 given the bounds equivalent to Cohen's d of ±0.15.

*Experimental Findings III: Relevant Information Also Increases Pro-Immigration Preferences*

Finally, I also included a pre-post measure of people's immigration policy preferences. Contrary to my expectations and much of the literature, the information had significant effects on not just people's empirical beliefs about immigration but also their normative beliefs about what the government should do about it (see Figure 4a). In particular, after reading about the provided narratives, respondents were significantly more likely to report pro-immigration preferences (~0.04 on a 0-1 index scale or Cohen's d of 0.2). Substantively, this amounts to, on average, 8±2 percentage-point (or 17 percent) more respondents saying that immigration should be increased, that the process should be easier, and that the existing regulations should be relaxed (given the baseline of 46 percent).
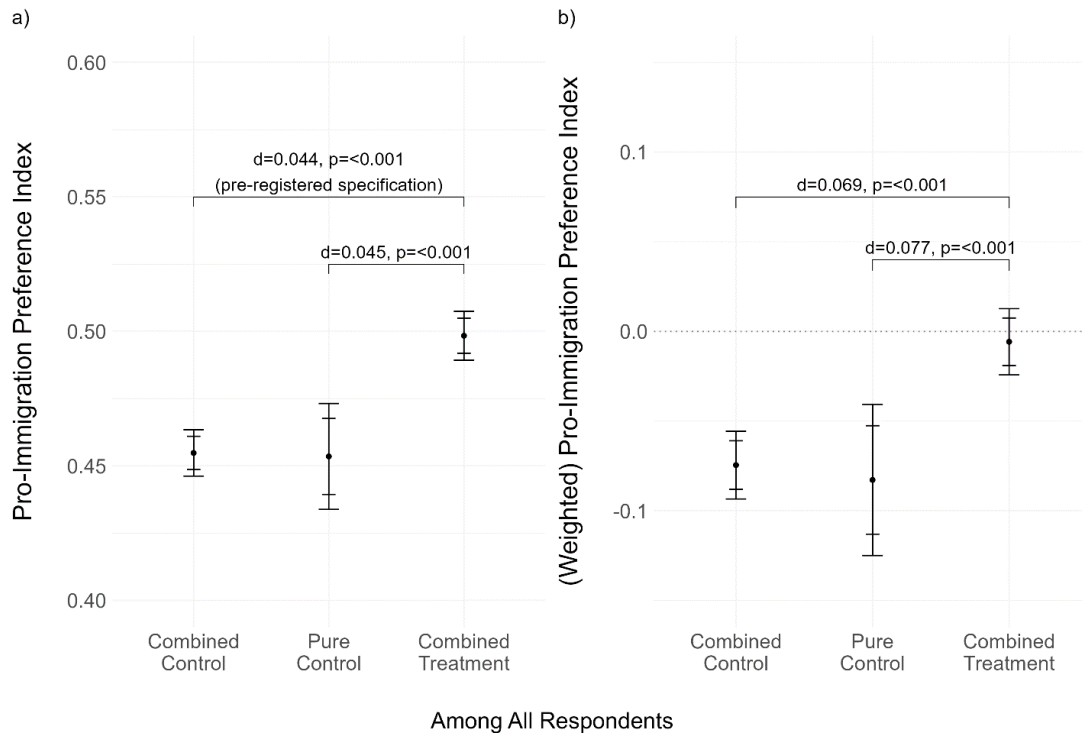
**Figure 4: Information Effects on (Weighted) Immigration Preferences.** The figures show the treatment effects on pro-immigration preferences (a, H5) weighted by immigration issue importance (b) based on the UAS survey. All estimates statistically control for pre-treatment preferences. Bars are 95(84)% CI.

*Additional Exploratory Tests*

Additional exploratory specifications using the pure control only, excluding statistical controls for pre-treatment outcomes, or including demographic controls and survey weights all confirm my main results (see Table A3). My further analysis of manipulation checks indicates that, at least to some extent, the treatment changed immigration issue preferences and importance by providing novel information and changing people's relevant beliefs about the issue. After seeing one of the treatment narratives, respondents were more likely to agree with the factual statements that the average US citizen would be better off with more immigration, that current restrictions are harmful, and that increasing immigration can help other important problems (see Figure A4).

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Given the unexpectedly strong and positive treatment effects on pro-immigration preferences, I also calculated an additional outcome of interest related to people's immigration preferences weighted by how much it is personally important to them (so that both pro-immigration and anti-immigration preferences are amplified when people say they care about immigration). For ease of interpretation, I recorded the variable to vary from -1 (strongest anti-immigration preference) to +1 (strongest pro-immigration preference). As indicated in Figure 4b, the information treatment on weighted preferences is strongly positive, and it is close to the sum of its effects on both issue importance and preferences. It also evidently shifts the mean weighted US opinion on immigration from slightly anti-immigration as observed in previous research, to be close to neutral. The analysis of possible subgroup effects by pre-treatment preference shows that the treatment had a similar average treatment effect on preferences among pro-immigration and non-pro-immigration respondents (as well as Democrats and Republicans). Contrary to some prior research indicating that the issue publics may be less likely to change their mind (Vigidal 2022), there were also no heterogeneous treatment effects by pre-treatment issue importance.

Finally, the analysis of separate text-specific effects indicates that the findings are likely not driven by any particular treatment or placebo narrative (see Figures A5-A7). While there is some variation in the point estimates across treatment and placebo texts, with the common talking points condition (Placebo 2) occasionally showing effects similar to the treatment conditions, there is no clear pattern across all specifications. It is important to highlight, however, that these exploratory analyses were not pre-registered and are underpowered. Given this lack of consistency and power, the observed variations may be due to random chance rather than any systematic mechanism. Future research with larger sample sizes and alternative treatments could help to investigate the potential nuances in how different types of information affect issue importance.

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**Discussion and Conclusion**

Even though Americans increasingly support immigration in the polls, lawmakers are hesitant to enact significant pro-immigration reforms. Research shows that to the extent these recent attitudinal changes are real, they are likely not meaningful in terms of people's engagement with the issue. In fact, when one considers personal issue importance, there have always been more Americans who oppose immigration *and* consider it important than otherwise.

Using a new "issue public" measure of personal issue importance, the descriptive results provide an important qualification of the sheer scope of the previously identified asymmetry of immigration attitudes that systematically disadvantages the pro-immigration side beyond the partisan dynamic. The novel detailed results on immigration subissues further reveal for the first time that pro-immigration and anti-immigration voters often prioritize very distinct problems and policies within the issue. Most generally, it appears that pro-immigrations voters care more about helping existing immigrant populations while anti-immigration voters care more about reducing future immigrant populations and enforcing existing restrictions. I also show that these patterns are largely mirrored in mainstream media where, despite the abundance of explicitly pro-immigration stories, stakeholders rarely make a strong case for expanding legal immigration.

These descriptive findings indicate that pro-immigration advocates will continue to face a systematic disadvantage compared to their counterparts unless they figure out a reliable method to raise the importance of immigration among sympathetic voters only. The experimental part of this study aimed to address this concern by testing the potential effectiveness of information campaigns that clearly communicate the positive implications of increasing immigration to the United States and the threats of not doing so.

Based on a large-scale representative trial, the experimental results confirm that providing such relevant information through a short, verifiable, non-judgmental narrative can raise the perceived issue importance of immigration among pro-immigration voters and thus reduce the observed issue asymmetry. At the same time, the results indicate that motivationally incongruent information does not change the personal issue importance of immigration among anti-immigration adults. This is an important finding since it implies that the proposed pro-immigration intervention is unlikely to backfire by unintentionally mobilizing those who oppose immigration.

However, it is important to acknowledge that not all pre-specified tests have panned out as planned. On the one hand, contrary to my expectations, the provided information was ineffective at either changing people's priorities within immigration or encouraging more petitions. These precise null results imply that it is likely more difficult to shift those outcomes compared to a general personal issue importance or measure them properly (or perhaps a combination of both). For instance, the fact that more people stated their willingness to sign a petition than said that immigration is important to them indicates that this was not perceived as a particularly costly behavior (or that it was not more "real" than a related stated attitude).

On the other hand, contrary to my expectations and a growing literature on the stability of immigration preferences and their robustness to new information, reading these narratives did make people significantly more pro-immigration across a diverse group of voters. There can be a few possible reasons why persuasion effects have been observed, at least in the short term. First, it is possible, though unlikely (Clifford, Sheagley, and Piston 2021), that the observed effects are an artifact due to the use of pre-post design and the related demand effects. What is more likely is that persuasion happened as a real "side" effect of experimental design. While the presented narratives were designed to appeal to pro-immigration voters and increase how much they care

about the issue, they all also make explicit, nonpartisan arguments to increase immigration which some skeptical voters may find persuasive (and more so than simple immigration fact-checking commonly used in previous research). Combined with the positive effects on issue importance among sympathetic voters, this implies that the treatment can reliably shift the "weighted" pro-immigration preferences in the electorate, which is arguably a more meaningful indicator of public opinion and voter influence compared to the policy preference responses only.

Nonetheless, it is also important to replicate these results using alternative treatments across different contexts. While the observed effect sizes are rather small, they are in line with comparable treatments in the existing literature. They are also arguably realistic given the nature of the treatment and the setting, a half-page text with which most respondents engage for not more than a few minutes once as part of an online survey. It is possible that repeated exposure to a set of related narratives about the benefits of expanding immigration, especially if it is decisively framed in terms of the threat of not doing so, would produce more change. It is also important to acknowledge the potential limitations and the difficulty of changing people's priorities within issues and their behavioral manifestations.

Future research can test various alternative ways to boost the (sub)issue importance of immigration and/or across immigrant-receiving countries beyond the US. It can also explore whether the effects observed here are long-lasting in a longitudinal survey and whether alternative treatments can do a better job at changing people's priorities within issues and related behaviors. Finally, future research can consider how the more ideologically congruent information about non-immigration issues (e.g., gun rights) can decrease the *relative* personal issue importance of immigration among anti-immigration respondents (or even pro-immigration respondents). Given

that the treatment selection in all of these cases has to be based on distinct issue-specific and context-specific considerations, it was beyond the scope (and the sample constraints) of this study.

All in all, the project descriptively and experimentally examined an important yet largely overlooked reason why the positive public opinion on immigration had not translated to pro-immigration political change. However, it is important not to overstate the potential consequences of the immigration issue importance asymmetry and its possible change for policy outcomes. Public opinion is only one policy input among many. Due to the increasing partisan polarization and congressional gridlock, for instance, even the much higher issue importance among the larger number of pro-immigration voters may not straightforwardly result in the desired policy change. Still, to the extent the observed issue importance asymmetry is at least in part a result of not sufficiently reliable information campaigning in favor of increasing legal immigration, my results suggest that the benefits of such campaigns in terms of shifting voters' priorities have a potential to outweigh the possible costs even in the currently polarized US context.

**Acknowledgements**

**Notes**

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[1] For a general overview of reasons why majority support does not always translate into policy change, see Hill (2022). Of course, public opinion is only one possible source of immigration policy change (Ford, Jennings, and Somerville 2015) with a possibility of feedback (Kustov 2023b).

[2] I follow Kustov (2023) and use the term *personal issue importance* (or "priority") as opposed to *issue salience* throughout the paper due to the greater ambiguity of the latter. While these terms are often used interchangeably at the level of individuals, some scholars rightly differentiate between them by defining salience as a combination of (relatively stable and subjective) personal issue importance and (relatively volatile and objective) political contexts which may or may not frame a certain issue as a political problem at the moment (Miller, Krosnick, and Fabrigar 2017; Moniz and Wlezien 2021). I also avoid using the related concept of *attitude strength* which also implies preference stability and other features beyond personal importance (Howe and Krosnick 2017). In line with past literature, I define *preferences* (or "positions") as any rankings derived from comparative evaluations of various policies; and use *attitudes* as an umbrella concept for both preferences and issue importance.

[3] For possible exceptions, see Abascal, Huang, and Tran 2021; Grigorieff, Roth, and Ubfal 2020; Haaland and Roth 2020; Kustov and Landgrave 2023.

[4] The expectations for the relative issue importance of *enforcement* are less clear since they affect both the flows and stocks of unauthorized immigration. Given the prominence of "illegal immigration" in the US anti-immigration political discourse, however, *enforcement* is likely more important for anti-immigration than pro-immigration voters.

[5] People seem to prioritize social and cultural issues such as immigration over economic issues more generally (Johnston, Lavine, and Federico 2017). As a result, people's predispositions to oppose immigration may be one prominent path through which many decide to vote for right-wing parties such as the GOP regardless of their economic views (Gidron 2022).

[6] Fact-checking or myth-busting approaches may be more appropriate for mitigating concerns of people who are ambivalent about immigration than raising issue importance among pro-immigration respondents.

[7] All factual narratives arguably have to adopt some kind of framing to present information about causal claims. To ensure that the results are due to new information rather than just a particular "loss" framing, all treatment texts will include information on both the benefits of increasing immigration and the costs of retaining existing restrictions.

[8] Note that H1-4 are not meant to compare the treatment effectiveness among respondent subgroups.

[9] The final sample size (N=3450) was larger than the one pre-registered and determined by power analysis (N=2700). While all confirmatory analyses employed original unweighted data (to be in line with pre-registered specifications), adding the standard post-stratification weights provided by UAS does not substantively impact any of the results (see Table A3).

[10] While there can be legitimate concerns about the greater inattentiveness of respondents to larger texts in a survey context, this does not appear to be a serious issue in practice (Bullock 2011; Coppock 2022).

[11] The treatments are loosely based on the immigration research and materials from the Center for Global Development (Clemens et al. 2018), Brookings Institution (Bahar and Wright 2021), FWD.us, and Simon (1991).

[12] Given that H4 and H5 predict null effects, I also tested for equivalence using two one-sided tests against the interval of d = ±0.15. If the observed confidence interval was fully contained in this interval, I considered this as evidence for a practical null effect (otherwise, I considered the results inconclusive regarding the null).

[13] For a discussion of (dis)advantages of existing self-reported issue importance measures regarding immigration, see Kustov (2023). For a novel method of eliciting aggregate issue importance using choice experiments, see Hanretty et al. (2020) and Ryan and Ehlinger (2023). For a novel method of eliciting individual-level issue importance using a quadratic voting procedure, see Cavaillé et al., 2024. Unfortunately, while promising as an avenue for future research, these techniques are relatively time consuming and sensitive to particular choices presented to respondents.

[14] I previously pretested the validity of this scale in a separate study and found it to correlate well with a variety of self-reported behaviors. While the question of how strongly respondents feel about an issue may be used to measure "attitude extremity" or qualify issue positions as a follow-up question in some contexts, excluding this item from the "personal issue importance" index does not impact the results for H1 (coef = 0.037, se = 0.014) or H4 (coef = -0.015, se = 0.010).

[15] Since partisanship is measured post-treatment, I also replicate the same results exactly based on the pure control subsample (see Figure A1).

[16] To test whether there is a practical null effect, I consider the "two one-sided test" (TOST) procedure. In particular, I test for equivalence against the interval of 0.03 (or Cohen's d of 0.15), which is the minimum effect size that can be considered of substantive political significance given our experimental design. Since the observed confidence intervals for the combined treatment compared to either the combined or the pure control groups are fully contained in this interval, I

consider this as evidence for the null practical effect of the treatment among non-pro-immigration respondents.

[17] Note that ceiling effects are also very unlikely to be at play here since, although anti-immigration voters report higher personal importance of the issue, it is very far from being absolute (e.g., see Figure 1).

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**Supporting Information (SI)**

**Beyond Changing Minds: Raising the Issue Importance of Expanding Legal Immigration**

| Question | Hypothesis | Sampling plan | Analysis Plan | Interpretation given to different outcomes |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Does receiving information about the national benefits of increasing immigration affect the perceived importance of the issue among pro-immigration respondents? | H1: Receiving relevant information about the national benefits of increasing immigration will increase the perceived issue importance of immigration among pro-immigration respondents. | A power analysis suggests that the sample size of 2700 (or ~900 pro-immigration respondents) will have sufficient 90% power to detect an effect size of d=0.2 (0.04 on the 0-1 index scale). | I will compare the mean values for the issue importance index between the combined treatment and the combined control and placebo groups using a standard difference-in-means estimator among pro-immigration subjects. | A significant positive/negative coefficient will be interpreted as evidence that relevant information increases/decreases relevant outcomes.

To evaluate effects where the null hypothesis cannot be rejected, I will test for equivalence using two one-sided tests against the interval of d = ±0.15. If the observed confidence interval is fully contained in this interval, I will consider this as evidence for a practical null effect (otherwise, I will consider the results inconclusive regarding the null). |
| Does receiving information about the national benefits of increasing immigration affect the perceived issue importance of subissues related to immigration flows among pro-immigration respondents (relative to subissues related to immigration stocks)? | H2: Receiving relevant information about the national benefits of increasing immigration will increase the perceived issue importance of subissues related to immigration flows among pro-immigration respondents (relative to subissues related to immigration stocks). | | I will compare the mean values for the subissue importance index between the combined treatment and the combined control and placebo groups using a standard difference-in-means estimator among pro-immigration subjects. | |
| Does receiving information about the national benefits of increasing immigration affect the behavioral manifestations of the perceived importance of the issue among pro-immigration respondents? | H3: Receiving relevant information about the national benefits of increasing immigration will increase the behavioral manifestations of the perceived issue importance of immigration among pro-immigration respondents | A power analysis suggests the sample size of 2700 (or ~900 pro-immigration respondents) will have 90% power to detect an effect size of 10 percentage points given the baseline of 30%. | I will compare the share of signed petitions between the combined treatment and the combined control and placebo groups using a standard difference-in-means estimator among pro-immigration subjects. | |
| Does receiving information about the national benefits of increasing immigration affect the perceived importance of the issue among anti-immigration respondents? | H4: Receiving relevant information about the national benefits of increasing immigration will not increase the perceived issue importance of immigration among anti-immigration respondents. | A power analysis suggests that the sample size of 2700 (or ~1800 non-pro-immigration respondents) will have 99% power to detect an effect size of d=0.2 (0.04 on the 0-1 index scale). | I will compare the mean values for the issue importance index between the combined treatment and the combined control and placebo groups using a standard difference-in-means estimator in non-pro-immigration subjects. | |
| Does receiving information about the national benefits of increasing immigration affect immigration preferences? | H5: Receiving relevant information about the national benefits of increasing immigration will not affect immigration preferences. | A power analysis suggests that the sample size of 2700 will have high 99% power to detect an effect size of d=0.15 (0.03 on the 0-1 index scale). | I will compare the mean values for the post-treatment preference index between the combined treatment and the combined control and placebo groups using a standard difference-in-means estimator after adjusting for the pre-treatment index among all subjects. | |

**Table A1: Design Table.** The table summarizes the pre-registered hypotheses and specifications.

# Appendix A: Tables and Figures
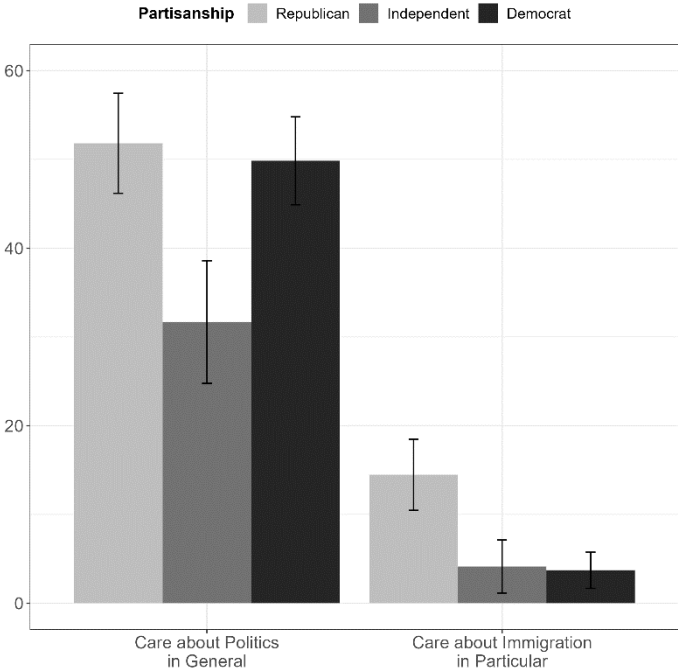


**Figure A1: Immigration Issue Importance Asymmetry (Pure Control Only).** The figure shows responses to the "issue public" questions by immigration partisanship based on the UAS survey only among those respondents in the pure control group (N = 1403). Bars indicate 95% CI.
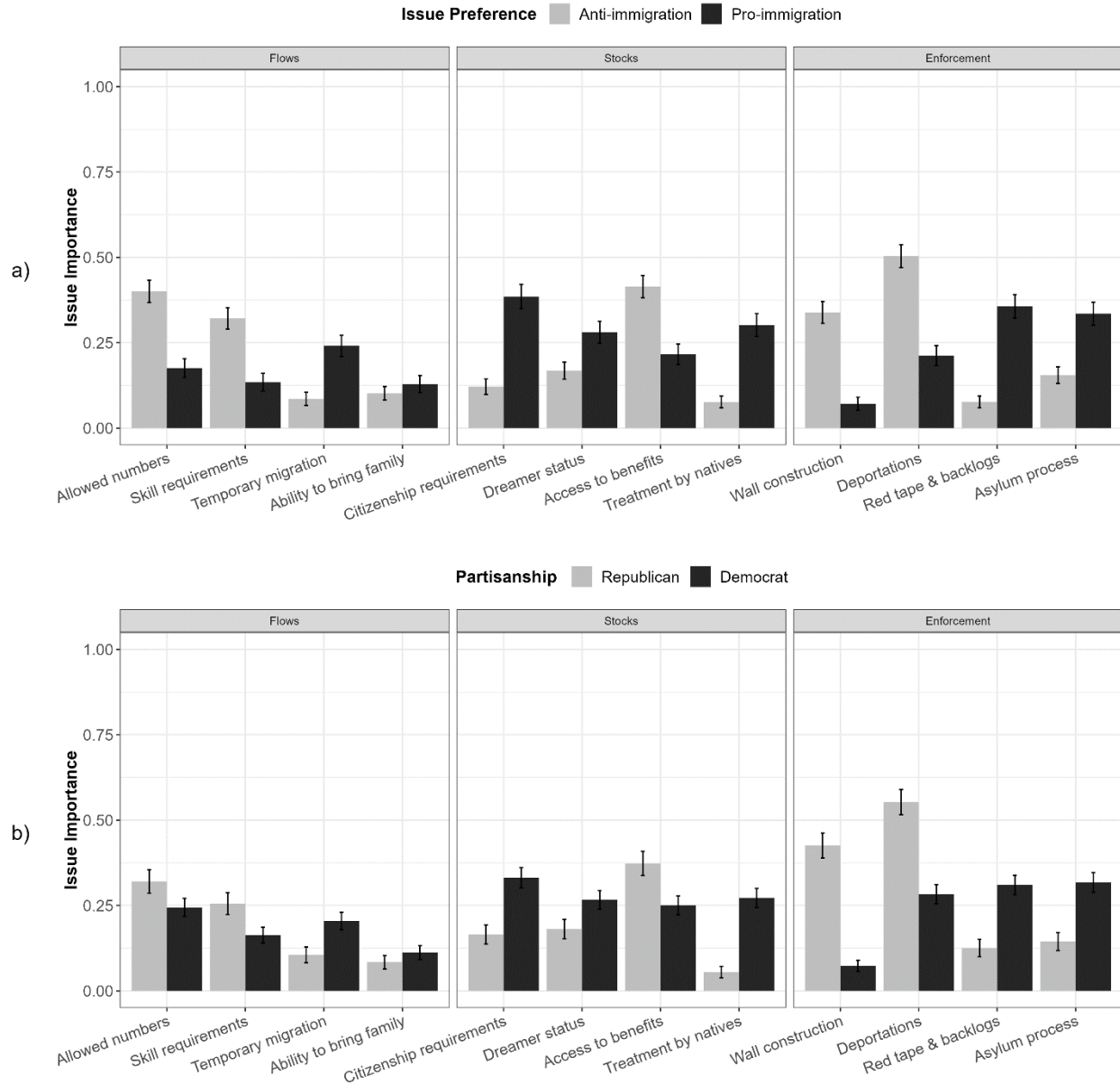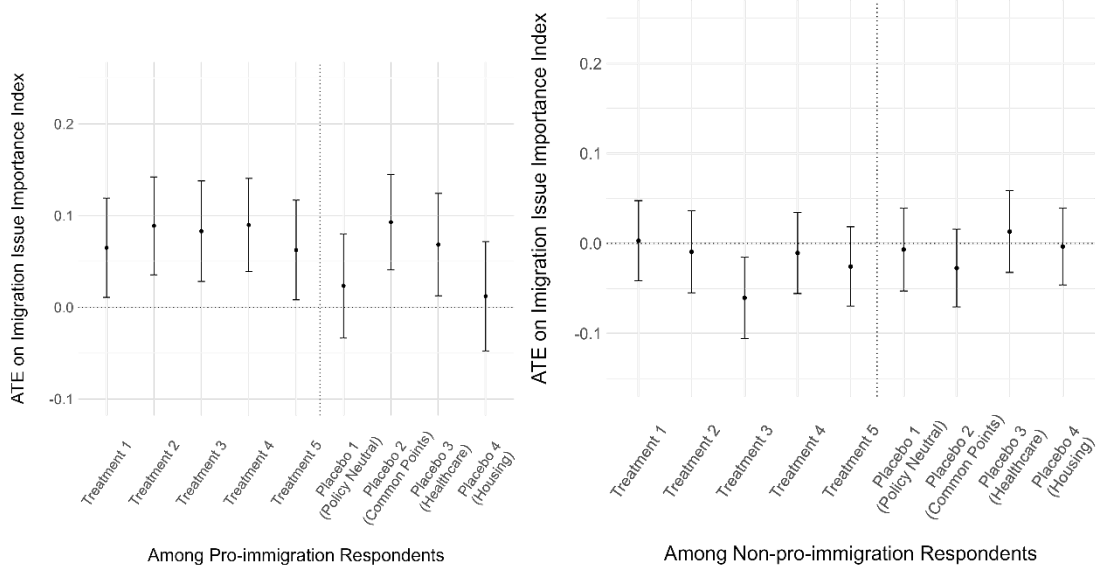
**Figure A2: Immigration Subissue Importance Asymmetry (Pure Control Only).** The figure shows the importance of immigration subissues by immigration preference or partisanship based on the UAS survey only among those respondents in the pure control group. Bars are 95% CI.
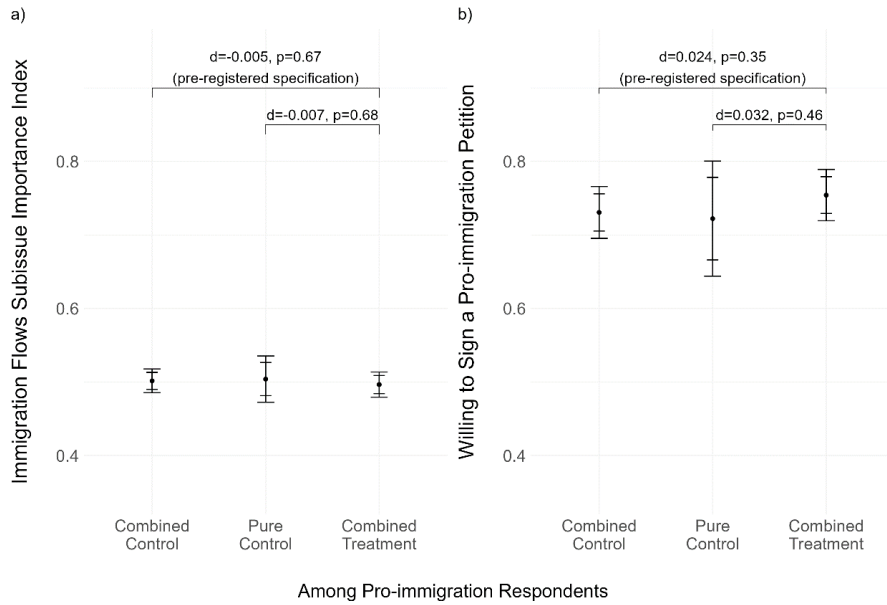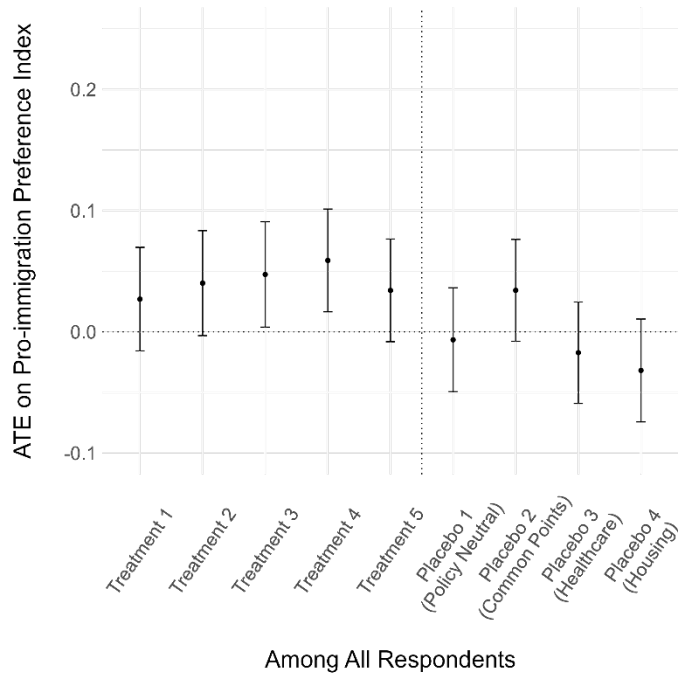
**Figure A3: Information Effects on Immigration Subissue Importance and Willingness to Sign Petition.** The figures show the treatment effects among pro-immigration respondents on the importance of flows-related subissues (a, H2) and willingness to sign a petition (b, H3) based on the UAS survey. Bars are 95(84)% CI.
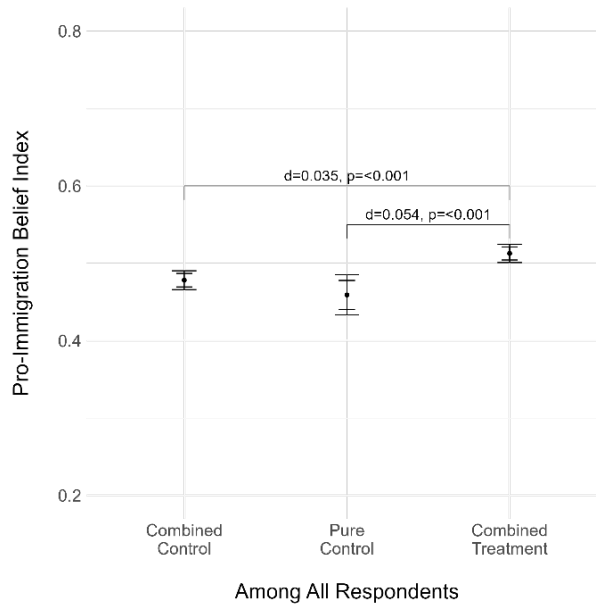


**Figure A4: Information Effects on Immigration Beliefs (Manipulation Checks).** The figure shows the treatment effects among all on pro-immigration beliefs based on the UAS survey. All estimates statistically control for pre-treatment preferences. Bars are 95(84)% CI.
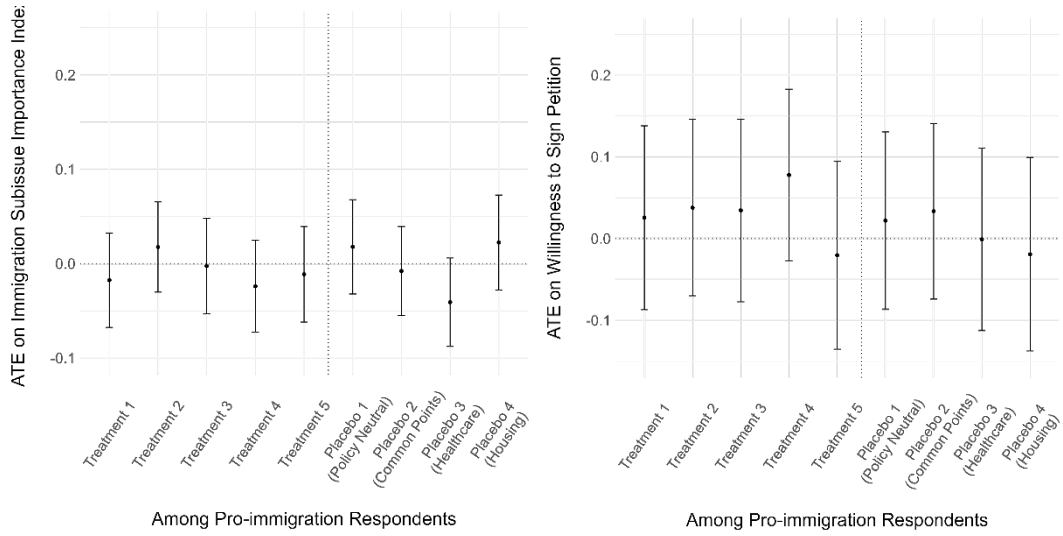
**Figure A5: Information Effects on Immigration Issue Importance (Exploratory Analysis).** The figure shows the effects of distinct treatment texts (relative to pure control) on the personal importance of immigration among pro-immigration and non-pro-immigration respondents based on the UAS survey. Bars are 95% CI.



**Figure A6: Information Effects on Pro-Immigration Preferences (Exploratory Analysis).** The figures shows the effects of distinct treatment texts (relative to pure control) among all on pro-immigration preferences based on the UAS survey. Bars are 95% CI.

**Figure A7: Information Effects on Immigration Subissue Importance and Willingness to Sign Petition (Exploratory Analysis).** The figures shows the effects of distinct treatment texts (relative to pure control) on the importance of flows-related subissues and willingness to sign a petition among pro-immigration respondents based on the UAS survey. Bars are 95% CI.

|  | Issue Importance of Pro-imm. Rs. (H1) | Flows Importance of Pro-imm. Rs. (H2) | Petition Signing of Pro-imm. Rs. (H3) | Issue Importance of Anti-imm. Rs (H4) | Issue Preferences of All Rs. (H5) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Treatment Group | 0.038** | -0.005 | 0.024 | -0.015 | 0.044*** |
|  | (0.013) | (0.012) | (0.025) | (0.010) | (0.006) |
| Pre-treatment |  |  |  |  | 0.489*** |
| Preferences |  |  |  |  | (0.007) |
| Observations | 1,196 | 1,194 | 1,195 | 2,234 | 3,425 |

**Table A2: Information Effects on Immigration Issue Importance and Preferences**. The table shows the effect of information treatment on various immigration outcomes of interest across five hypotheses. All models are OLS regressions with pre-registered specifications. For variable descriptions, see Appendix. The standard errors are given in parentheses: *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001.

| | Issue Importance of Pro-imm. Rs. (H1) | Flows Importance of Pro-imm. Rs. (H2) | Petition Signing of Pro-imm. Rs. (H3) | Issue Importance of Anti-imm. Rs (H4) | Issue Preferences of All Rs. (H5) | (H5*) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Treatment Group | 0.027$^*$ | -0.006 | 0.037 | -0.023$^*$ | 0.059$^{***}$ | 0.056$^{***}$ |
| | (0.013) | (0.012) | (0.026) | (0.010) | (0.008) | (0.009) |
| Pre-treatment Preferences | | | | | 0.454$^{***}$ | |
| | | | | | (0.018) | |
| Female | 0.044$^{**}$ | -0.021 | -0.020 | -0.021$^*$ | 0.014 | 0.005 |
| | (0.013) | (0.012) | (0.026) | (0.011) | (0.008) | (0.010) |
| Old (40+) | 0.032$^*$ | -0.004 | -0.007 | 0.081$^{***}$ | -0.068$^{***}$ | -0.120$^{***}$ |
| | (0.013) | (0.012) | (0.026) | (0.011) | (0.009) | (0.010) |
| College (+) | -0.015 | 0.036$^{**}$ | -0.013 | -0.004 | 0.015 | 0.028 |
| | (0.016) | (0.014) | (0.031) | (0.017) | (0.014) | (0.016) |
| Born Abroad | 0.143$^{***}$ | -0.005 | -0.044 | 0.063$^{***}$ | 0.067$^{***}$ | 0.142$^{***}$ |
| | (0.019) | (0.017) | (0.037) | (0.018) | (0.015) | (0.017) |
| Rich ($150K+) | -0.070$^{***}$ | 0.007 | -0.004 | 0.010 | 0.005 | 0.021 |
| | (0.018) | (0.016) | (0.035) | (0.017) | (0.014) | (0.015) |
| Survey weights | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Observations | 1,190 | 1,188 | 1,189 | 2,224 | 2,219 | 2,229 |

**Table A3: Information Effects on Immigration Issue Importance and Preferences (Alternative Exploratory Specifications)**. The table shows the effect of information treatment on various immigration outcomes of interest across five hypotheses. All models are OLS regressions with adjustments for survey weights and demographic controls. For variable descriptions, see Appendix. The standard errors are given in parentheses: $*p<0.05$; $**p<0.01$; $***p<0.001$.

| Pre-registered Hypothesis | P-value | P-value (Holm-Bonferroni) |
|---|---|---|
| Hypothesis 1 | 0.004 | 0.016 |
| Hypothesis 2 | 0.673 | 0.705 |
| Hypothesis 3 | 0.352 | 0.705 |
| Hypothesis 4 | 0.14 | 0.419 |
| Hypothesis 5 | <0.0001 | <0.0001 |

**Table A4: Holm-Bonferroni Adjusted P-values for Pre-Registered Hypotheses**. For specifications, see Table A2.

**Appendix B: Survey Questionnaire**

**Survey sequence**

1. Survey consent form (<1 minute)
2. Pre-treatment covariates (2 minutes)
   a. <span style="color:gray">Standard sociodemographic and political covariates [given by the survey provider]</span>
   b. General issue importance
   c. Immigration preferences
   d. Healthcare attitudes
3. Treatment (2-3 minutes)
   a. One text containing new information about the benefits of expanding immigration
      i. Treatment Group (5/10 of the sample across five alternative texts, one each)
      ii. Placebo Group 1 (1/10 of the sample)
      iii. Placebo Group 2 (1/10 of the sample)
      iv. Placebo Group 3 (1/10 of the sample)
      v. Placebo Group 4 (1/10 of the sample)
      vi. Control Group (1/10 of the sample, no text)
   b. Substantive question to encourage attentiveness
4. Post-treatment outcomes (3-4 minutes)
   a. Immigration issue importance
   b. Immigration subissue importance
   c. Immigration preferences
   d. Immigration issue importance (quasi-behavioral manifestations)
   e. Manipulation checks

**Pre-treatment covariates**

[Include an introduction:] "The survey asks about your subjective opinion about various issues. There are no correct or incorrect answers, we are just interested in your honest opinions."

*Standard sociodemographic and political covariates*: age, gender, race, nativity, education, income, location, occupation, marital status, partisanship
[pre-treatment covariates were given by the survey provider based on previous surveys]

*General Issue Importance (Issue Public)* [single-choice, randomly flip the choice order]
- "Some people have a political issue that they care about more than most other issues. They might think about the issue a lot. They might pay particular attention to news about that issue, even when it's not making national news. They might focus on what political candidates say about that issue, and decide who to vote for on the basis of that issue. Or they might just care about the issue a lot. Is there an issue like that for you?" (Yes, No)
[If answered "Yes," present the following open-ended question:]
- "In just a few words, what issue or two do you care about?"
[Manually coded as "Immigration Issue Public" if "immigration" in general or any specific immigration issue is mentioned (e.g., "border security", "immigrant rights")]

[page break]

[Include a preamble:] "The next questions ask for your opinion on several topics. The answers will help us learn what people across the country are thinking about these national issues. If you are unsure, please choose the option that is closest to how you feel."

*Immigration preferences* [single-choice questions, randomly flip the order of choices, force responses]:
- "Do you think the number of immigrants from foreign countries who are permitted to come to the United States to live should be increased or decreased?" (Increased, Decreased)
- "Do you think it should be easier or harder for foreigners to immigrate to the United States legally than it is currently?" (Easier, Harder)
  [Code as "pro-immigration" if all responses are positive; "anti-immigration" if all responses are negative; "neutral" if otherwise]

[page break]

*Housing attitudes* [single-choice questions, randomly flip the order of choices and keep that order for other similar questions]:
- "Would you support or oppose a ban on the construction of new homes and apartments in your neighborhood?" (Support, Oppose)
- "Would you support or oppose reducing government regulations on zoning and planning to allow more housing to be built in your area?" (Support, Oppose)
  [these exploratory items are included for the purposes of avoiding priming effects of asking only about immigration and will not be used as outcome for hypothesis testing]

[page break]

*Healthcare attitudes* [single-choice questions, randomly flip the order of choices]:
- "Now thinking about healthcare in the country as a whole, are you generally satisfied or dissatisfied with the quality of healthcare in this country? (Dissatisfied, Satisfied)
- "Do you think the cost of healthcare in America, in general, is higher than it should be or lower than it should be?" (Higher than it should be, Lower than it should be)
  [these exploratory items are included for the purposes of avoiding priming effects of asking only about immigration and will not be used as outcome for hypothesis testing]

[page break]

**Treatment**

[randomly show the respondents one of the five treatments, four placebo texts or no text (10% each across 8 equal groups)]

"For the next question, we will present a summary of a recent report on an important topic.

Please read it carefully. You will be asked a question about the report.

The "Next" button will appear when you have had time to read and answer the question."

[page break]

[set a timer, do not display the "Next" button for 20 seconds]

[display the same title for all five treatment texts:]

**How More Immigration Can Benefit America Now**

*[Treatment group 1:]*

The debates around immigration and its impacts have gone around in circles. We should ask a different question: *how can we choose better immigration policies that benefit Americans*?

—*Increasing skilled immigration will significantly benefit our economy*. These immigrants bring diverse talent and expertise. They create businesses and jobs. With our current restrictions in place, these immigrants can't invest in our economy or hire Americans.

—*Allowing more immigrants of any skill level can increase economic opportunities for all*. These immigrants can fill essential occupations for which Americans are in short supply. When immigrants take up manual tasks, Americans move to higher-paying jobs that require language and other skills. When our policies restrict most immigrants from filling labor shortages as they do now, these economic opportunities are lost for everyone.

*With the right policies in place, increasing legal immigration creates enormous benefits for the United States.* New immigrants can help our communities, businesses, and public services to thrive again if only we let them.

Unfortunately, our current immigration policies are too strict and convoluted for this to happen. Every single day our harsh restrictions on legal immigration cost us millions. They prevent immigrants and Americans alike from reuniting with their families and working together for mutual benefit.

*[Treatment group 2:]*

Immigration is a complicated issue. Many people disagree on how to deal with the current situation at the Southern Border or what to do with those who are here illegally. One thing most sides agree on is that we need to make legal immigration easier. That way, more immigrants can come here to thrive and benefit our country.

*Increasing immigration will bring enormous good to our country, our communities, and our economy.* New arrivals to the US help drive business creation, fuel innovation, fill essential workforce needs, and strengthen the Social Security system. Our current harsh restrictions on legal immigration keep American families separated and damage our economic potential.

The success of our nation comes, in large part, from our tradition of encouraging people seeking a better life to come here. Severely limiting legal immigration as we do it now puts this at risk.

Instead, we should expand current immigration levels. *We should work to pass immigration reform that makes it safer and faster for prospective immigrants to come and contribute to the US.*

*Retaining current restrictions on legal immigration will severely limit our country's ability to respond to the public health and economic crises* brought on by the coronavirus and other ongoing global challenges. We cannot afford to shut out the life-saving contributions that immigrants and immigration bring to our country.

[Treatment group 3:]

Immigration is a difficult issue on which many reasonable people disagree. But there is a wide agreement that *we should welcome more legal immigrants and make it easier for them to go through the appropriate process*.

In recent years, millions of Americans quit low-paid work. This made workers hard to find for employers. Some of these jobs could be filled by immigrants who want to join our work force. Immigrants' hard work can help boost local economies that had been stagnant for decades. Immigration can help fix the supply chain pressures, lower inflation, and give more opportunities to Americans seeking better careers. More immigration can help our cities to sustain their success.

Today, more than ever, *increased immigration levels can be a solution to the biggest challenges facing the American economy*. Immigration makes it easier for American workers to improve their career prospects. Filling front-line positions with new immigrants would allow Americans to move into a wider range of higher-paying jobs which require different skills.

*Keeping our harsh immigration restrictions in place prevents us from realizing these enormous opportunities*. By severely limiting immigration as we do now, we keep many American families separated and poorer than they could have been.

[Treatment group 4:]

People disagree about immigration issues. But many agree that *the United States should make legal immigration easier*. More legal immigration is a safe and sure path—open to no other country—to achieve all of these benefits:

- more innovation, spurred by the addition of top talent from all over the world
- less burden that our retirees impose upon the Social Security system
- rising tax revenues, resulting from the increase in the proportion of workers to retirees
- improvement in our competitive position over China and the rest of the world
- a boost to our image abroad related to immigrants' connections with their relatives back home
- the opportunity given to more people to enjoy their life in the United States.

*All we need to do to achieve these benefits is to relax our harsh barriers against legal immigrants.* Talented and energetic people want to come here. Yet we do not greatly avail ourselves of this golden opportunity. Instead, we bar the door to many of the most economically productive workers in the world.

*Our strict and convoluted immigration policies cost us dearly.* Our restrictions on legal immigration prevent so many Americans from reuniting with their families. These restrictions prevent even more willing immigrants from coming and contributing to our country.

*[Treatment group 5:]*

Immigration is a divisive issue that splits many Americans. But most people can agree that *we should make it easier for legal immigrants to come to the US and add value to our society.*

Allowing more legal immigration can benefit our country in several major ways. *New immigrants can bring diverse skills and talents that create businesses and boost innovation.* They can fill labor shortages across the economy and improve the quality of services. By taking on essential jobs, they can enable natives to pursue better careers that demand more skills and education. They can also help sustain our social security system by paying taxes and slowing down population aging.

Our current immigration policies are too restrictive for that to happen. They separate American families from their loved ones abroad and block many willing immigrants from coming legally. *Harsh restrictions on legal immigration harm our economy by depriving us of valuable workers and reducing our potential.*

We urgently need to reform our immigration system to allow more legal immigrants. We need to welcome more people who want to work hard and join our communities. *We must seize the opportunities that immigration offers us to solve some of the biggest challenges we face today.*

Doing so can make America stronger, more prosperous, and more influential than ever before.


*Follow-up question to increase attentiveness* [multiple-choice question, display right after any of the five treatment texts on the same screen before the next button, make "None of the above" an exclusive option]:
- "According to the information provided above, what are the costs of current US restrictions on legal immigration to American citizens?" (Lost economic opportunities, Family separation, None of the above)
  [Responses to the question—identical across all treatments—will not be used to screen or remove any respondents.]

*[Placebo group 1 (policy-neutral facts about immigration)]*

**Migration**

Ever since the earliest humans began to spread from Africa, humans have been on the move. Even today, *3 percent of the world's population—at least 258 million people—live outside of their country of origin.* The earliest migrants were ancient humans who originated in Africa. Their spread to Eurasia and elsewhere remains a matter of significant scientific controversy. The earliest fossils of recognizable *Homo sapiens* were found in Ethiopia and are about 200,000 years old.

*The "out of Africa" theory says that around 60,000 years ago, Homo sapiens dispersed across Eurasia*, where they met and eventually replaced other human ancestors like Neanderthals. However, that theory has been challenged by evidence of migrations from Africa to Eurasia

120,000 years ago. Either way, early humans are thought to have migrated to Asia either across a strait that lies between the Horn of Africa and what is now Yemen, or via the Sinai Peninsula.

*After spreading to southeast Asia, early humans are thought to have migrated to Australia, which shared a landmass with New Guinea at the time, then to Europe, then to the Americas.* Those migrations were likely driven by climate, food availability, and other environmental factors.

Follow-up question [single-choice question, display right after the text on the same screen]:
- "According to the information provided above, which continent are humans generally believed to have migrated to after Asia?" (Europe, Australia, North America, South America)
[Responses to the question will not be used to screen or remove any respondents.]

*[Placebo group 2 (commonly used and known arguments in favor of immigration)]*

## Why We Should Welcome Immigrants

Some people argue that immigration is bad for America. They claim that immigrants compete with natives for scarce jobs and resources, drive down wages, commit more crimes, and undermine our national identity. They advocate for building more walls, deportations, and stricter regulations.

But research shows that immigrants is actually good. *Immigrants fill the jobs that native-born workers do not want or cannot do.* They are essential in sectors such as agriculture, construction, and healthcare. They can also be innovators, start new businesses, and contribute to our economy.

Most Americans recognize that others should be treated humanely regardless of their immigration status and other circumstances of birth. Immigrants often escape from harsh situations in their home countries. They have a legal right to seek asylum in America. We should not deny them entry or force them to leave. *We need to let immigrants in because it is the right thing to do.*

Immigrants deserve our respect and compassion. They are not criminals, terrorists, or invaders. They are human beings who seek a better life for their families. They are not a threat, but an opportunity. *We should reject hate and welcome people who want to join our country.*

Follow-up question [multiple-choice question, display right after the text on the same screen before the next button, make "None of the above" an exclusive option]:
- "According to the information provided above, why should Americans welcome immigrants?" (They fill jobs that natives do not want, They have a legal right to seek asylum, None of the above)
[Responses to the question will not be used to screen or remove any respondents.]

*[Placebo group 3 (information about national benefits of a different policy / healthcare)]*

## How Reducing Healthcare Costs Can Benefit America Now

Americans pay too much for healthcare, especially the sick and disabled. Americans spends more than people in other rich countries, but has worse health and shorter lives. Lowering healthcare costs benefits everyone. It can free up money for other things, such as education and infrastructure. It can also boost American businesses and workers, and make American families happier.

There are several ways to reduce healthcare costs such as encouraging more high-value care, competition and innovation. High-value care means providing effective and patient-centered services at low costs. For example, we can avoid unnecessary tests that do not improve outcomes. We can also increase the availability of generic drugs to reduce prescription costs and adopt new technologies such as telehealth to improve convenience.

High healthcare costs harm America in many ways. They reduce our resources for other public goods, increase our taxes and debt, slow down our economy, and make life harder and unfair for us. They also damage our health and shorten our lives.

Reducing healthcare costs will help many Americans. It is possible. Many experts agree on how to do it. There are many examples of how it works from different places. What we need now is the courage and support to do it now.

Follow-up question [multiple-choice question, display right after the text on the same screen before the next button, make "None of the above" an exclusive option]:
- "According to the information provided above, how can the US government reduce healthcare costs?" (Allow more competition, Encourage innovation, None of the above)

*[Placebo group 4 (information about national benefits of a different policy / housing)]*

### How Building More Housing Can Benefit America Now

Zoning regulations are government rules that control how land can be used. They protect the public from harmful land uses such as causing pollution or congestion. But they can also limit the amount and type of housing that can be built, making it harder for people to find a place to live.

Some people oppose making it legal to build more housing because they are concerned about how new development can impact their neighborhood. There are valid reasons to disagree, but we should also consider the benefits of building more housing for the country and its citizens.

Building more housing can help address the country's housing crisis and boost the economy. It can increase the supply and lower the prices of homes. It can also boost the economy by creating jobs and generating tax revenue. If we do not allow more construction, the country's most desirable areas will never be accessible for people from all backgrounds and income levels.

Streamlining our convoluted housing regulations to allow more construction is essential for the future prosperity of the United States and its citizens. It can help address some of the most urgent challenges facing the country, such as the housing affordability crisis, the economic slowdown, and the deterioration of life quality.

Follow-up question [multiple-choice question, display right after the text on the same screen before the next button, make "None of the above" an exclusive option]:
- "According to the information provided above, how can allowing more housing benefit average Americans?" (Reducing housing prices, Create Jobs, None of the above)

*[Control group will not be exposed to any text.]*

[page break]

**Post-treatment outcomes**

[Include a preamble:] "The next questions ask for your opinion on the importance of various government policies. The answers will help us learn what issues people across the country prioritize when they think about politics."

*Housing issue importance* [single-choice question, randomly flip the order of choices and keep that order for other similar questions]:
- "In your opinion, how important is housing compared to other issues facing the United States?" (One of the least important issues, Less important than other issues, More important than other issues, One of the most important issues)
- "How important are housing issues to you personally?" (Not at all important, Not too important, Somewhat important, Very important)
  [these exploratory items are included for the purposes of avoiding priming effects of asking only about immigration and will not be used as outcome for hypothesis testing]

*Healthcare issue importance* [single-choice question, randomly flip the order of choices]:
- "In your opinion, how important is healthcare compared to other issues facing the United States?" (One of the least important issues, Less important than other issues, More important than other issues, One of the most important issues)
- "How important are healthcare issues to you personally?" (Not at all important, Not too important, Somewhat important, Very important)
  [these exploratory items are included for the purposes of avoiding priming effects of asking only about immigration and will not be used as outcome for hypothesis testing]

*Immigration issue importance* [single-choice question, randomly flip the order of choices, force responses]:
- "In your opinion, how important is immigration compared to other issues facing the United States?" (One of the least important issues, Less important than other issues, More important than other issues, One of the most important issues)
- "How important are immigration issues to you personally?" (Not at all important, Not too important, Somewhat important, Very important)
- "How strongly do you feel about immigration issues?" (Not at all strongly, Not too strongly, Somewhat strongly, Very strongly)
  [0-1 index calculated as the average of the preceding items recorded to vary from 0 to 1]

[page break]

*Immigration subissue importance of flows relative to stocks* [multiple-choice questions, randomize the order of the 13 listed response options except for the last "other" option, force responses]:
- "Immigration policy is a broad area with many nuanced disagreements about what government should do. Regardless of your opinion on any of the following immigration issues facing the United States at the moment, which ones do you think are the most important to get addressed? Please select up to 3 issues."

- *[Flows:]* Allowed number of immigrants each year; Availability of temporary work visas; Skill and English requirements for new immigrants; Time and difficulty of acquiring US citizenship
- *[Stocks:]* Legal status of children brought here illegally; Immigrants' access to government services and benefits; Treatment of immigrants by natives; Immigrants' ability to bring their relatives to the US
- *[Enforcement:]* Wall construction along the US-Mexico border; Illegal immigration and deportations; Red tape and delays in processing immigration forms; The process of applying for asylum in the US
- Other
  [0-1 index calculated as the average number of mentioned *flows-related* items minus the number of mentioned *stocks-related* items]

[page break]

*Immigration preferences (post-treatment repeated measures)* [single-choice questions, randomly flip the order of choices, force responses]:
- "Do you think the number of immigrants from foreign countries who are permitted to come to the United States to live should be increased or decreased?" (Increased a lot, Increased a little, Decreased a little, Decreased a lot)
- "Do you think it should be easier or harder for foreigners to immigrate to the United States legally than it is currently" (Much easier, Slightly easier, Slightly harder, Much harder)
- "Do you think US laws regarding legal immigration should be relaxed or tightened?" (Relaxed a lot, Relaxed a little, Tightened a little, Tightened a lot]
  [0-1 index calculated as the average of three items recorded to vary from 0 (the most anti-immigration) to 1 (the most pro-immigration option)]

[page break]

*Immigration issue importance* (quasi-behavioral manifestations) [single-choice question, randomly flip the order of choices]:
- "Would you be willing to sign a petition sharing your views with Members of Congress that it should be [easier/harder, depending on their previous answer to the preference question] for foreigners to immigrate to the United States legally than it is currently?" (Yes, No)
- [Include a follow-up debrief prompt: "Thank you for your response about signing a petition. Please note that this was just a survey question and you will not be asked to sign any actual petition or share your personal information with anyone."]

[page break]

*Manipulation checks* [single-choice question, randomly flip the order of choices]:

- "Regardless of your personal opinion on immigration issues, do you agree or disagree with the following factual statements?" (Strongly agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly disagree)
    - "The average US citizen would be better off if a larger number of foreign workers were legally allowed to enter the US each year."
    - "Harsh restrictions on legal immigration can be harmful to American citizens."
    - "Increasing legal immigration can help solve other important problems the US is facing right now."

[Manipulation check will be used to validate the mechanism behind the hypothesized treatment effect (i.e., by changing people's beliefs about immigration's benefits and the costs of restrictions to the United States).]
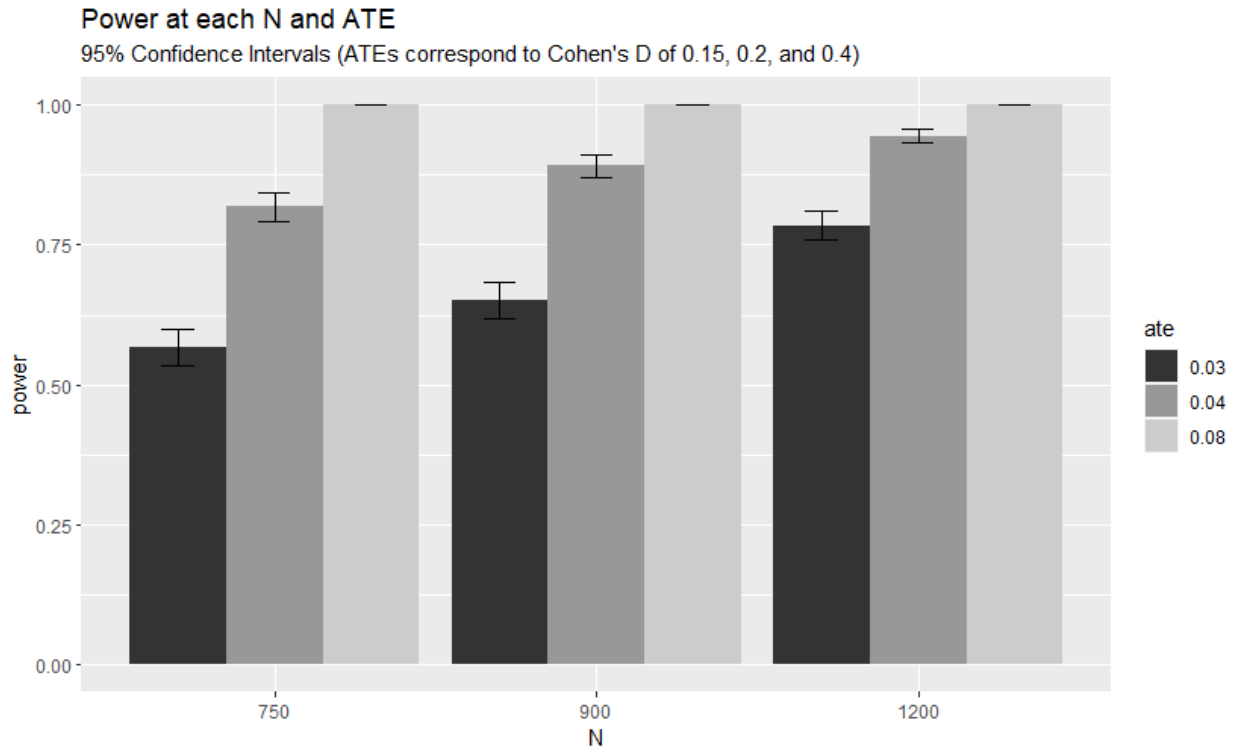
[Importantly, manipulation check asks the respondents about their empirical beliefs about the effects of increasing immigration rather their preference regarding particular policies.]

[Manipulation check will not be used to screen or remove any respondents.]

**Appendix C: Power Analysis**

The proposed sample size of the survey experiment (N = 2700) is determined conservatively based on having adequate statistical power (>90%) to detect a small effect (d = 0.2 or 0.04 of the 0-1 index scales) for H1 and H2 of providing information on immigration issue or subissue importance indices at α = 0.05 among the relevant subgroup of pro-immigration respondents (N > 900, assuming the relevant subgroup size of 33% as in the latest representative Gallup benchmark data and the issue/subissue importance index mean of 0.5/0.4 with the standard deviation of 0.2 in the control group as in the pilot study). For the latest Gallup immigration summary, see https://news.gallup.com/poll/1660/immigration.aspx. For an estimated statistical power for H1 and H2 under somewhat more or less conservative scenarios regarding the effective sample size and the effect size in a simulated data and analysis using *DeclareDesign* in *R*, see Figure C1.

For H3, this will have 90% power to detect an effect size of 10 percentage points given the baseline of 30%. For H4, the size of the rest of the sample (N = 1800) is expected to have >99% power to detect a small effect of d = 0.2 (assuming the relevant subgroup size of 66%). For H5, given the pre-post design and the use of the full sample, it should have >99% power to detect a very small effect (d = 0.15) (assuming the preference index mean of 0.5 with the standard deviation of 0.2 in the pre-treatment control).

## Power at each N and ATE
### 95% Confidence Intervals (ATEs correspond to Cohen's D of 0.15, 0.2, and 0.4)

*Figure C1: Simulation of statistical power under various more or less conservative scenarios for H1 and H2*

**Appendix D: Adherence to the Principles and Guidance for Human Subjects Research**

The survey experiment was received full IRB approval. The data collection was funded by the Russell Sage Foundation. Participants were recruited via University of Southern California's Understanding America Study (UAS). The UAS manages relationships with their respondents and handles incentives to them directly as a part of their online survey panel in line with the guidelines of the University of Southern California. Before entering the survey, participants first completed a consent form that included the researcher name and affiliation, the general purpose of the research, an explanation of the survey (including length, the costs and benefits of participation, and contact information for the IRB). They were also informed that no identifying information would be collected, and that they were able to opt out of the research at any time. The project did not involve any deception, and no identifying information about the participants was collected. The project did not intervene in any political processes.

**Appendix E: Selection and Analysis of Immigration News Articles**

For a related project, I analyzed the arguments used in favor or against immigration across mainstream US news media in 2011-2019. The data collection process was structured as follows:

- To source relevant articles, I used NewsBank. My search was refined to articles mentioning immigration or immigrant* in the title or first paragraph from 2010-2019 among the following left-leaning and right-leaning mainstream US outlets: The New York Times, The Washington Post, USA Today, Fox News, Fox News Opinion, and The New York Post (alongside an equal number of ideologically similar non-US outlets for comparison).

- I then downloaded a random selection of 20 (immigration) articles from each outlet and manually coded them based on several relevant criteria with the help of research assistants.

- For the collected corpus of over 100 US articles, I classified them based on their stance and arguments. Criteria included the general position (pro- or anti-immigration, neutral or ambivalent), policy relevance (yes or no), thematic focus (stocks, flows, enforcement), and argumentation type (sociotropic or humanitarian, material or symbolic).

- According to the basic descriptive analysis, the majority of articles in the sample could be classified as pro-immigration (54%). The vast majority also focused on existing immigrant stocks (74%) and used humanitarian and symbolic arguments (81%).

- Pro-immigration articles were more likely to focus on stocks and use humanitarian arguments than anti-immigration articles.

The news data and analyses are available upon request.