

# The Mediating Role of Level of Education and Income on the Relationship between Political Ideology and Attitude towards Immigration

Zohreh Bang Tavakoli, Shuktika Chatterjee

**Abstract**—This study is investigating the impact of ideological structures in terms of conservative and liberal on shaping immigration acceptance attitudes under the contribution of socio-economic status. According to motivated reasoning theory, political ideology is identified as a recurrent impact on the formation of attitude, while conservatives tend to express more hostility toward immigrants in comparison to liberals which are proposed to be more tolerant towards immigrants. Our finding suggests that political ideology will structure individual attitudes when citizens socio-economic vulnerability and level of education are low enough to consider immigrants as a threat. Therefore, economic vulnerability is proposed to weaken the ideological predispositions' resistance. There has been some threats and factors such as level of education and economic condition proposed by group competition theory and labor market competition theory as fundamental factors which can strengthen or weaken the effects of political ideology on individuals' attitudes towards immigration; those mechanisms for liberals and conservatives will be operated differently.

**Keywords**—Conservative, immigration, liberal, political ideology.

## I. INTRODUCTION

THIS study is investigating the extent to which individuals' level of income and education influence their reasoning regarding undocumented immigrants across different political ideologies. There has been proposed some threats and factors such as level of education and economic condition by group competition theory and labor market competition theory as fundamental factors which can strengthen or weaken the effects of political ideology on individuals' attitudes towards immigration; those mechanisms for liberals and conservatives will be operated differently [1]. Since, conflicts over immigration policy play progressively a central role towards United States politics, such as those conflicts over President Obama's executive order in 2014 for stopping the undocumented immigrants' deportation vs. Donald Trump's anti-immigrant prominence in 2016, conducting research in aim of extending the research on immigrant acceptance seems to be beneficial. According to [2], political factors alongside other factors might affect public acceptance and willingness towards immigrants. The study objective is to examine whether being identified as liberal or conservative identification influences how individuals with different levels of income and education respond differently to threat signs of

immigrants.

## Importance of the Study

Individual attitudes towards immigration policies are a crucial contribution to the broad immigration policymaking model and for understanding the policies implementation and the associated conflict over political issues, policymakers should understand who will support more restrictionism or who will support fewer restrictionism policies as well as why. Attitudes are certainly contingent on the host of particular considerations including, political ideology, and the economic effect of immigrants.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The labor market competition theory, motivated reasoning theory, Receive-Accept-Sample model by Zaller, have been utilized as the study's starting point for theoretically conceptualizing that liberals and conservative's identification with different level of education and income will respond differently to the immigration issues [8].

### A. Ideology and Attitudes towards Immigration

According to motivated reasoning theory, political ideology is identified as a recurrent impact on the formation of attitude. While conservatives tend to express more hostility toward immigrants in comparison to liberals which are proposed to be more tolerant towards immigrants [3]. When established, being liberal or conservative is considered as a substantial identification in various settings [4]. Increasing polarization in political ideas seems to develop additional raise in the prominence of such procedures in the US, and according to the scholar, there is evidence which shows that individuals with different political ideology as being liberals vs conservatives incline differently towards immigrants [5]. Recent scholars place political ideology as the focus of their investigation, and they have been trying to see whether the influences of ideology on the ways that they perceive and assess immigrants will be mediated by other variables [17]. Therefore, the present study is investigating the interaction of political ideology with attitudes towards immigration in their attributes' incorporation such as level of education and income.

According to the scholar, education is related to anti-immigrant reaction inversely [8]. According to the theory of labor market competition, this is because the less educated parties with having parallel job proficiencies to those of immigrants, will lead perceive competition and as a result will

Zohreh Bang Tavakoli is with University of Nevada, Las Vegas, United States (e-mail: Bangtava@unlv.nevada.edu).

be more consider immigrants as treat [6]. In terms of economic concerns, the predicted impact of immigration on wages will play a vital role, since the income factor is a key to individual economic well-being determinants. As income factor depends predominantly on levels of individual's skill, consequently depict from labor market competition theory, growths in size of an immigrant group, together with the existence of comparably same skilled immigrants create challenges to level of individuals welfare as well as their identity, in which all these create negative insights in encountering the immigrants [7].

#### *B. The Heterogeneous Impact of Ideological Categories*

Ideological indicators in framing social and political attitudes move forward from this general correlation among the political ideology and attitudes towards immigration. According to the ethnic competition theory, individuals who live in lower socio-economic and educational divisions are proposed to be less familiar with the post-industrial societies' cultural transformations, and more tending to compete over resources as immigrants. According to [8], individuals differ in their inclination and contact to political knowledge and are capable of responding to the argumentation to which they are exposed merely to the extent to which they are knowledgeable. Any attitude is a combination of evidence to shape a mental image of the subject and predisposition and tendency to stimulate some conclusion regarding the given issue. On the other hand, forming attitudes towards immigration various individual traits such as socio-economic statuses and education are proposed to control the political dispositions.

### III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Based on the presented theoretical argumentation in the previous paragraphs, political ideology outlines various continuing ethics and political dispositions which exert a safeguard against new data regarding the given circumstances [18]. Educational level and socio-economic condition initiate consideration and consciousness towards the immigration issue, and political ideology tendencies are proposed to be not as a powerful safeguard against external motivations and to play a weaker role in attitudes toward immigration and immigrants. As a whole, this research is testing whether underlying proposition of formation attitudes towards immigration work the same way for individuals with different level of education and income across the ideological range.

#### *Hypothesis*

Scholars proposed the correlation among elements of cognitive capability and the liberal ideology as opposed to those with conservative political ideology and it is proposed that this relationship is positive [9]. According to [10], individuals' level of cognitive capacity is correlated with their political ideology via two pathways of socio-economic condition which incorporates two significant factors namely, level of income and level of education. Reference [10] indicated the mediating influence of education and income on

the of cognitive ability on political ideology.

Individuals' cognitive capability is positively related to the level of income as an economic accomplishment in the United States which is a society with modern meritocratic, is dependent on the level of cognitive ability. On the other hand, cognitive ability is proposed to be related to education since, educational attainment relies deeply on individuals' mental capability [19]. At the same time, it is proposed that the level of cognitive capability is positively associated with individuals' political ideology as it brings about enlightenment [11].

Education which primarily causes more socialization of core values in society, therefore, democratic societies inclined more towards being liberal ideologist. According to [12], income level is associated with liberal ideology, since, the notion of self-interest is associated with the liberal ideology, but not the ideology of conservative; liberal ideology respects equality, in which it is in contradiction to the self-interest of conservative ideology. Therefore, incorporate all the effects argued in this section the study come up with a comprehensive model of the correlation among ideological self-identification, an individual attribute (education and income) which was found to be beneficial in the prediction of social and political attitudes [13].

1. Individuals with liberal political ideology are more likely to support undocumented immigrants.
2. Individuals with conservative political ideology are less likely to support undocumented immigrants.
3. Income level plays a mediator role in the effect of political ideology on attitudes towards immigration.
4. Educational level plays a mediator role in the effect of political ideology on attitudes towards immigration.

### IV. METHODOLOGY

To investigate the degree of impact of the project independent variables (liberal ideology and conservative ideology) on attitudes towards undocumented immigrants, the binary logistic regression is applied. Later for investigating the degree of impact of the project independent variables (liberal ideology and conservative ideology) in the mediators' presence (i.e., income level and education level) on dependent variable (i.e., attitudes towards undocumented immigration), the binary logistic regression will be performed.

The study utilized the secondary data from 2019 State of the State Surveys questionnaire survey which allowed this research to investigate whether liberal and conservatives have different reasoning towards undocumented immigrants and also to investigate whether the underlying proposition of formation attitudes towards immigration work the same way for individuals with different level of education and income across the ideological range.

The main independent variable of this research is liberal and conservative political ideology. Also, this study measures the ideology as a dummy variable of respondent-level attribute, in a way that ideology enters the analysis first as a main effect in regression models predicting attitudes toward immigrants and then in tests with income and education level as two mediators

of the project for ideology-mediators 'interactions. Below are the study variables as well as their description constructs.

#### A. Independent Variable

##### 1. Political Ideology

Liberal and conservative political ideology are dummy variables equal to one if individuals think themselves as liberal and zero if not and also the same with the conservative respondents.

#### B. Moderators

##### 1. Education Level

Education level is also a dummy variable equal to zero if respondents' level of education completed is less than high school, high school/general educational development GED, some college, 2-year degree, and equal to one if they completed 4-year degree, Master's degree, PhD or other professional degree (JD, MD).

##### 2. Income Level

Income level is also a dummy variable equal to zero if respondents combined annual household income including all earnings, salaries, investment and banking income, social security income, public assistance, and retirement income. If the accumulated level of income is under \$20,000, \$20,000-\$39,999, \$40,000-\$59,999, \$60,000-\$79,999, \$80,000-\$99,999, then the income level would be equal to zero. Also, the level of income would be equal to one if their income is \$100,000-\$149,999, over \$150,000.

#### C. Dependent Variable

##### 1. Reasoning about Undocumented Immigrants

The study dependent variable is also a dummy variable equal to zero if they were agreed with deporting all undocumented immigrants, and equal to one if not.

### V. FINDINGS

According to the results the expected B (EXP B) reports that individuals with the liberal political ideology are more likely to support undocumented immigrants to stay in the US, whereas, individuals with conservative political ideology are less likely to support the undocumented immigrants. Also, the results show that the control variables of education, age, and income do not affect the liberal and conservative attitudes towards undocumented immigrants with the coefficients of .574, .213, .252 respectively. Therefore, the third and fourth hypotheses are rejected whereas the gender is shown to have effect on the attitudes of liberal and conservative towards undocumented immigrants. For this the research run the moderator effect of gender interaction with the liberal and conservatives to test the moderation effect of gender on the relationship between liberal and conservative attitudes towards undocumented immigrants.

### VII. DATA ANALYSIS

TABLE I  
IDEOLOGY AND REASONING ABOUT IMMIGRANTS

Step	-2 Log likelihood	Cox & Snell R Square	Nagelkerke R Square
1	303.072 <sup>a</sup>	.208	.325

a. Estimation terminated at iteration number 6 because parameter estimates changed by less than .001.

TABLE II  
CLASSIFICATION TABLE<sup>a</sup>

	Observed	PolicyUndoc Recode	Percentage
Step1	PolicyUndoc-recode	1.00	19
		284	93.7
Overall Percentage			82.5

a. The cut value is .500

TABLE III  
VARIABLES IN THE EQUATION

VARIABLES IN THE EQUATION							
	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	
Step 1 <sup>a</sup>	liberal	1.590	.769	4.272	1	.039	4.902
	conservative	-1.928	.334	33.410	1	.000	.145
	Income_recode	.353	.308	1.311	1	.252	1.423
	education_recode	-.170	.302	.316	1	.574	.844
	Gender	.753	.294	6.552	1	.010	2.123
	Age2	-.011	.009	1.552	1	.213	.989
	Constant	2.481	.678	13.379	1	.000	11.949

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: liberal, conservative, Income\_recode, education\_recode, Gender, Age2.

TABLE IV  
LOGISTIC REGRESSION MODERATOR GENDER LIBERAL

Step	-2 Log likelihood	Cox & Snell R Square	Nagelkerke R Square
1	352.793 <sup>a</sup>	.107	.167

a. Estimation terminated at iteration number 20 because maximum iterations has been reached. Final solution cannot be found.

TABLE V  
CLASSIFICATION TABLE<sup>a</sup>

	Observed	PolicyUndoc Recode	Percentage
Step1	PolicyUndoc-recode	.00	0
		1.00	0
Overall Percentage			268
			100.0
			79.0

a. The cut value is .500

TABLE VI  
VARIABLES IN THE EQUATION

VARIABLES IN THE EQUATION							
	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	
Step 1 <sup>a</sup>	liberal	2.322	.745	9.725	1	.002	10.200
	gender_lliberal	17.425	5991.614	.000	1	.998	36955306.863
	Gender	.782	.271	8.301	1	.004	2.186
	Constant	.673	.172	15.313	1	.000	1.961

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: liberal, gender\_lliberal, Gender.

TABLE VII  
LOGISTIC REGRESSION MODERATOR GENDER CONSERVATIVE

Step	-2 Log likelihood	Cox & Snell R Square	Nagelkerke R Square
1	313.802 <sup>a</sup>	.193	.301

a. Estimation terminated at iteration number 5 because parameter estimates changed by less than .001.

TABLE VIII  
CLASSIFICATION TABLE<sup>a</sup>

		PolicyUndoc		Percentage	
Observed	Recode			Correct	
Step1	PolicyUndoc-recode	.00	44	37	54.3
	de	1.00	37	268	87.9
Overall					80.8
Percentage					

a. The cut value is .500

TABLE IX  
VARIABLES IN THE EQUATION

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Conservative_gender	.683	.614	1.238	1	.266	1.980
Step 1 <sup>a</sup> conservative	-2.611	.413	39.960	1	.000	.073
Gender	.279	.504	.306	1	.580	1.322
Constant	2.438	.348	49.176	1	.000	11.444

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: conservative gender, conservative, Gender.

## VIII. DISCUSSION

Most of today's developed countries populations has been transformed by immigration and has increased the conflicts around citizenship issues and social inclusion [14]. In the US., mobilization of anti-immigrant campaigns specially those of Donald Trump presidential campaigns has increased the intense conflicts over acceptance of immigrants on the American public. This study proposed the importance of individuals' socioeconomic and education alongside with their political ideology on their reasoning about immigrants. Theoretical framework in this study is introduced based on the motivated reasoning theory to develop a proper perception towards how education and socioeconomic status influence individuals' prior ideological beliefs which form the ways that people react to received information and treats regarding immigrants.

The study outcome is in line with previous studies which characterize the significant association of education and attitudes of pro-immigration [17]. Education is associated with openness and beliefs, which related to the immigration's attitudes as well as reducing the analyzing political parties to get less susceptible towards hate-generating stories [15]. The result of this study showed that the education level and income status affect the individuals reasoning about undocumented immigrants, however there is not found any interaction between socio economic status of individuals and their political ideology parties.

According to research, additional level of education on individual's earnings and family income will bring better financial wellbeing and security which in turn will reduce the Perception of economic threat of immigrants. Therefore, it is on educational systems to deliver broad-mindedness and egalitarian beliefs and improve individuals' cognitive ability and logical thinking in order to elude the treat of social reality values' oversimplifications [16].

## REFERENCES

[1] Leon McDaniel, E., Nooruddin, I., &amp; Faith Shortle, A. (2011). Divine

boundaries: How religion shapes citizens' attitudes toward immigrants. *American Politics Research*, 39(1), 205-233.

- [2] Hainmueller, J., & Hopkins, D. J. (2015). The hidden American immigration consensus: A conjoint analysis of attitudes toward immigrants. *American Journal of Political Science*, 59(3), 529-548.
- [3] Jost, J. T., Federico, C. M., & Napier, J. L. (2009). Political ideology: Its structure, functions, and elective affinities. *Annual review of psychology*, 60, 307-337.
- [4] Martin, J. L., & Desmond, M. (2010, March). Political Position and Social Knowledge 1. In *Sociological Forum* (Vol. 25, No. 1, pp. 1-26). Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- [5] Ceobanu, A. M., & Escandell, X. (2010). Comparative analyses of public attitudes toward immigrants and immigration using multinational survey data: A review of theories and research. *Annual review of sociology*, 36, 309-328.
- [6] Kunovich, R. M. (2013). Occupational Context and Anti-immigrant Prejudice. *International Migration Review*, 47(3), 643-685.
- [7] Schlueter, E., & Davidov, E. (2013). Contextual sources of perceived group threat: Negative immigration-related news reports, immigrant group size and their interaction, Spain 1996– 2007. *European Sociological Review*, 29(2), 179-191.
- [8] Zaller, J. R. (1992). *The nature and origins of mass opinion*. Cambridge University Press.
- [9] Ganzach, Y. (2020). From intelligence to political ideology: Socioeconomic paths. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 164, 110095.
- [10] Lancee, B. and Sarasin, O. (2015). Educated Preferences or Selection Effects? A Longitudinal Analysis of the Impact of Educational Attainment on Attitudes Towards Immigrants. *European Sociological Review*, 31(4):490–451.
- [11] Schoon, I., Cheng, H., Gale, C. R., Batty, G. D., & Deary, I. J. (2010). Social status, cognitive ability, and educational attainment as predictors of liberal social attitudes and political trust. *Intelligence*, 38(1), 144-150.
- [12] Burns, P., & Gimpel, J. G. (2000). Economic insecurity, prejudicial stereotypes, and public opinion on immigration policy. *Political science quarterly*, 115(2), 201-225.
- [13] Jost, J. T. (2006). The end of the end of ideology. *American psychologist*, 61(7), 651.
- [14] Brooks, C., Manza, J., & Cohen, E. D. (2016). Political ideology and immigrant acceptance. *Socius*, 2, 2378023116668881.
- [15] Lodge, M., & Taber, C. S. (2013). *The rationalizing voter*. Cambridge University Press.
- [16] Hainmueller, J., & Hiscox, M. J. (2007). Educated preferences: Explaining attitudes toward immigration in Europe. *International organization*, 399-442.
- [17] Onraet, E., Van Hiel, A., Dhont, K., Hodson, G., Schittekatte, M., & De Pauw, S. (2015). The association of cognitive ability with right-wing ideological attitudes and prejudice: A meta-analytic review. *European Journal of Personality*, 29(6), 599-621.
- [18] Scheve, K. F., & Slaughter, M. J. (2001). Labor market competition and individual preferences over immigration policy. *Review of Economics and Statistics*, 83(1), 133-145.
- [19] Deary, I. J., Strand, S., Smith, P., & Fernandes, C. (2007). Intelligence and educational achievement. *Intelligence*, 35(1), 13-21.