POLICY PAPER SERIES

Public Attitudes Towards Immigration in Canada: Decreased Support and Increased Political Polarization

Mehdi Mohamadian
Mohsen Javdani
Maxime Heroux-Legault

POLICY PAPER SERIES

IZA Policy Paper No. 211

Public Attitudes Towards Immigration in Canada: Decreased Support and Increased Political Polarization

Mehdi Mohamadian
Provincial Health Service Authority of British Columbia

Mohsen Javdani
Simon Fraser University and IZA

Maxime Heroux-Legault
University of British Columbia, Okanagan

APRIL 2024

ABSTRACT

Public Attitudes Towards Immigration in Canada: Decreased Support and Increased Political Polarization

We explore the evolution and determinants of attitudes towards immigration in Canada, utilizing Canadian Election Studies surveys from 1988 to 2019. Our analysis indicates a notable trend: a consistent decrease in anti-immigrant sentiments until the mid-2000s, followed by a shift around 2008 towards gradually more negative attitudes towards immigration. To better understand the factors influencing these attitudes, we examine a comprehensive set of variables. While economic factors seem to have some association with these attitudes, our findings more significantly underscore the role of group-level socio-psychological factors. Additionally, our analysis identifies an emerging polarization along political party lines beginning around 2006. Assessing the relative impact of these factors, our analysis suggests that political party identification has become increasingly significant in influencing attitudes toward immigration.

Corresponding author:
Mohsen Javdani
School of Public Policy
Simon Fraser University
515 West Hastings Street
Vancouver, BC
V6B 5K3
Canada
E-mail: mjavdani@sfu.ca

1   Introduction

The demographics of many developed countries have been transformed through immigration in recent decades, which has made immigration one of the most controversial and increasingly important topics in the public discourse as well as in public policy. Immigration has become increasingly politicized in Western countries and political parties are holding divergent views on how to best deal with this issue (Hout and Maggio 2021; Grande et al. 2019; Baker and Edmonds 2021).

As of 2021, with more than 8.3 million immigrants, almost 23% of its population, Canada has the highest proportion of immigrants since Confederation, and the largest proportion among G7 countries (Statistics Canada 2022a). Immigrants represent a growing percentage of the country's total population and are responsible for more than 70 percent of the total population growth from 2016 to 2021 (Statistics Canada 2022a). During the same period, 80% of the growth in the labour force in Canada was driven by immigration.

Several studies have highlighted that despite Canada's long history of immigration, and its reputation for celebrating diversity and holding pride in its cultural mosaic, Canadians have not always agreed on what constitutes an appropriate level of immigration (e.g., Banting and Soroka 2020; Besco and Tolley 2018; Bilodeau et al. 2012; Donnelly 2017). More recently, especially during both the 2015 and 2019 federal elections, debate about immigration entered in political campaigns as a wedge issue (Banting and Soroka 2020; Kheiriddin 2019). Moreover, there has also been recent evidence of pandemic-related racism and violence against immigrants and racialized groups in Canada (e.g., Lee and Johnstone 2021; Miconi et al. 2021; Statistics Canada 2020), as well as a noticeable recent trend of increasingly rigid attitudes toward immigration in Canada (Environics Institute 2023, Perez 2023).

This change in public sentiment regarding immigration in Canada raises critical questions about the potential emergence of immigration as a prominent political issue in the country. As more attention is focused on the issue, political polarization has intensified surrounding the topic of immigration. This has led to increased debate and division within Canadian society about the appropriate level of immigration and how to address related challenges. The escalation of rigid

attitudes could suggest a significant shift in public sentiment regarding immigration, signifying the need for further exploration into this fast-evolving issue.

Given the importance of understanding attitudes towards immigration (ATI, hereinafter) and its growing influence on Canada's political and social landscape, there has been a notable expansion in the literature on ATI over the last decade. While the existing literature provides valuable insights into ATI in Canada, there are still crucial questions that merit additional investigation. In this paper, we rely on more than three decades of data (1988 to 2019) from the Canadian Election Studies (CES) to examine how ATI have changed in Canada over time.

The CES provides the largest and the most reliable data on Canadians' ATI (White et al. 2008). The richness of the CES data allows us to contribute to this literature by examining the underpinnings of ATI in Canada. It is important, both for descriptive political economy and for policy design, to understand and disentangle the different factors that could influence ATI. This helps better understand who supports more-/less-restrictive immigration policies and why. This greater understanding informs the design and development of policies and practices that could help improve Canada's social climate and cohesion to build a more tolerant and equitable society.

Previous literature in Canada indicates that ATI have gone through significant changes during the last few decades (Banting and Soroka 2020; Besco 2021; Harell 2009; Wilkes and Corrigall-Brown 2011; Wilkes et al. 2008). The novelty of our analysis and findings in improving the understanding of ATI is two-fold. *First*, we update the trends in the evolution of ATI in Canada and, to the best of our knowledge, are the first to document that negative ATI (i.e., the proportion of Canadians who prefer fewer immigrants) have significantly increased since 2008.[1]

Second, our study is the first to examine the impact of a wide range of economic, socio-psychological, and political factors in shaping ATI. We also use a variance decomposition method to directly compare the relative importance of different factors in explaining variations in ATI among Canadians, and how it changes over time. Most studies on ATI in Canada too often focus on a limited set of potential explanatory variables, and do not compare the relative influence of these different variables on ATI.

---

[1]Besco (2021) also documents an increase, albeit less pronounced, in anti-immigration sentiments in recent years using the CES surveys.

Our results suggest that contrary to some recent studies in Canada (e.g., Banting and Soroka 2020), and in line with studies from other countries (e.g., Card et al. 2005; Dustmann and Preston 2007), once a rich set of factors are taken into account, factors such as unemployment rate and immigration intake have a relatively smaller impact on ATI. In contrast, our results are consistent with the significant role of group-level socio-psychological factors in shaping ATI in Canada. We also document that over the last decade, political party identification has become the most important factor in explaining variations in ATI in Canada.

Our findings provide insight into potential influences and trends in ATI, reflecting the intricate and multifaceted nature of public attitudes towards immigration. This approach allows for a richer, more nuanced understanding of the complexity of this issue.

The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows. provides an inter-disciplinary overview of different theories as well as empirical findings regarding the role of different factors in influencing ATI. describes our data and sample characteristics. presents and discusses our results. concludes.

2   Drivers of Public Attitudes Towards Immigration

This section provides a multi-disciplinary analysis of the current literature, with the goal of presenting a comprehensive overview and developing a framework that organizes various theories explaining the mechanisms influencing ATI into a coherent whole. This framework functions as a foundational guide for the ensuing discussions.

Different frameworks seek to organize diverse narratives aiming to elucidate the factors that shape ATI. One particularly insightful approach involves categorizing them into the following three groups.[2] The first group is *individualistic rational choice* models of material self-interest and labour market competition popularized and explored by Neoclassical economists (e.g., Mayda 2006; Scheve and Slaughter 2001; Simon 1989). These models suggest that ATI are mainly driven by individual self-interested motivations and reactions to the economic impacts of immigrants on their wages, employment opportunities, or taxes paid and benefits received (i.e. public finances).

---

[2] It is important to note that while these three groups represent distinct concepts, the boundaries become blurred in certain contexts.

The second group are models that highlight the importance of *sociotropic* concerns (e.g., Citrin et al. 1997; Bilodeau et al. 2012; Dancygier and Donnelly 2013; Hainmueller and Hiscox 2010; Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014; Meuleman et al. 2009; Quillian 1995). These models focus on group-level considerations regarding immigration that are generally *non-prejudiced* or *race-neutral*. They often assess the perceived impact of immigration on broader aspects like the overall economy, job market, or public resources, taking into account how immigration might affect the well-being of the community or society at large (Solodoch 2021). However, sociotropic concerns may also center around groups defined on racial or cultural grounds. In such cases, they align with the principles of Realistic Group Conflict Theory (Bobo 1983; Campbell 1965; LeVine and Campbell 1972; Sherif 1966), which posits that intergroup conflicts and prejudices arise from real or perceived competition between groups over scarce resources, which could include economic benefits, employment opportunities, social services, or cultural dominance.

The third group comprises *socio-psychological* models, which emphasize the role of perceived group interests stemming from a psychological need for a positive social identity, connected to group identities, affinities, animosities, and the influence of values and norms on ATI. These models underscore the role of factors such as symbolic threat, inter-group anxiety, and group position and privileges as key drivers in inter-group dynamics and the development of out-group prejudice. There are several theories that could be categorized under this third group of models. Notably, Social Identity Theory (Tajfel 1979, 1982; Tajfel and Turner 1986) stands out as a prominent framework within this category. This theory posits that a fundamental aspect of individuals' self-concept is shaped by the groups to which they belong or with which they identify (i.e., social identification).[3]

According to Social Identity Theory, individuals engage in both self-categorization and the categorization of others. This process of social categorization involves recognizing culturally meaningful ways to categorize people, often employing *symbols* that serve as conventional social categories and are linked to race, ethnicity, nationhood, religion, etc. The interplay between

---

[3] Intergroup or Integrated Threat Theory (Stephan & Stephan 1996; Stephan et al. 1998) and Group-Threat Theory (Blumer 1958) are other theories that could be categorized under this group. It is also important to note that there exists some overlap between these different theories.

social identification and social categorization leads to the distinction between "in-groups" versus "out-groups" based on categories/symbols used for social categorization.

Coupled with a desire for a positive self-image and an inherent bias favouring one's own group, individuals are inclined to engage in social comparisons. These comparisons frequently result in attributing negative characteristics to members of out-groups and positive ones to members of in-groups. Consequently, this bias can lead in-group members to perceive out-groups as potential threats, fostering group-level prejudice, negative stereotypes, and discrimination (Morrison et al. 2009; Myers et al. 2013; Stephan et al. 2005).

Growing systematic evidence points to the increasing relevance of non-economic factors, particularly those prejudiced group-level factors emphasized by the third model discussed above. More specifically, a tripartite perspective emerges from growing empirical evidence based on bodies of research that are not always linked together: (1) there is very thin empirical evidence supporting egocentric models of material self-interest and labour market competition (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014). (2) There exists scant empirical evidence regarding large distributive effects of immigration, including adverse effects on the overall economy (e.g., Card 2005; Card et al. 2005; Dustmann et al. 2005; Dustmann et al. 2008; Gaston 2000; Preston 2014; Rowthorn 2008). At the same time, there exists extensive evidence that suggests immigrants have positive impacts on a variety of outcomes, including economic prosperity (e.g., Alesina et al. 2016), economic growth and unemployment (e.g., Boubtane et al. 2013; Jaumotte et al. 2016), long-run income per capita (e.g., Ortega and Peri 2014), Total Factor Productivity (e.g.; Peri 2012), labour supply of women (e.g.; Cortes & Tessada 2011), and innovation (e.g., Hunt & Gauthier-Loiselle 2010) just to name a few. (3) While there is some evidence supporting the role of sociotropic concerns, the exact origins of these concerns remain unclear (Levy and Wright 2022).

Moreover, there exists growing evidence that suggests reported/measured sociotropic concerns are often correlated with views on national identity, values, and cultural, religious, or ethnic issues (e.g.; Card et al. 2005; Javdani 2020; Poutvaara and Steinhardt 2018). This suggests that these sociotropic considerations may function as mediating factors for outgroup hostility, rationalized prejudice, or scapegoating (Newman and Malhotra 2018; Poutvaara and Steinhardt 2018; Sides and Citrin 2007; Sniderman et al. 2004; Solodoch 2018).

We are only aware of a limited number of studies that provide a relatively in-depth analysis of the relative role of economics, sociotropic, and socio-psychological factors on ATI. Using data from the UK and estimating a multiple factor model, Dustmann and Preston (2007) find that "racial issues are considerably more important than economic concerns in driving attitudes, and particularly so amongst less educated and lower skilled sections of the population." Card et al. (2005) who use data for 21 countries from the 2002 European Social Survey also find that higher desirability for homogeneity in customs and traditions, common religion, common language as well as concerns regarding the effects of immigrants on country's cultural life and social tensions are significantly more influencial in explaining ATI than sociotropic concerns related to wages, jobs, the economic prospects of the poor, and taxes. In a similar vein, Sides and Citrin (2007), who use a similar data set, also conclude that "European opinion about immigration depends less on economic status (material 'interests') and more on both 'symbolic' attitudes about the nation ('identities') and on misperceptions of the size of immigrant populations."

In addition, using a series of experiments embedded in a public opinion survey carried out in The Netherlands, Sniderman et al. (2004) show that "concerns over national identity are more of a driving force [in ATI] than concerns over economic interest." Using both original survey experiments as well as re-analysis of data from published work, findings from Newman and Malhorta (2018) suggest that seemingly race-neutral preference for more skilled immigrants found in several studies "rather than solely representing race-neutral preference for skilled immigrants […] partly represents a preference against disliked prevalent immigrants." As we discuss in more detail in Section 4, our findings also align with the significance of socio-psychological factors in shaping ATI.

3   Data and Sample Characteristics

Our analysis is grounded in data drawn from ten iterations of the Canadian Election Studies (CES) spanning more than three decades (1988 to 2019).[4] The CES is a randomly administered (mostly over the phone) national survey of eligible Canadian voters that has been primarily

---

[4]Although CES launched in 1965, questions about ATI appeared in the CES starting in 1988. To avoid any potential sample selection bias due to non-random attrition over time, we exclude the panel components and only use the newly added randomly selected respondents for these survey years.

conducted during and/or after federal elections. It gathers data on Canadians' voting behaviour as well as their attitudes on a wide variety of social, economic, and political issues.

In every given year, the CES generally has two waves of surveys. The first, known as the Campaign-Period Survey (CPS), is conducted during election campaigns and aims to represent Canadian adult citizens aged 18 or above, who speak either English or French. The second wave, the Post-Election Survey (PES), is administered immediately after the federal elections. Our study predominantly utilizes data from the CPS to explore Canadian attitudes towards immigration, with further methodological details available in Table A1 of the Appendix.

The dependent variable in our study, measuring ATI, is derived from a survey question inquiring whether respondents believe Canada should admit "more immigrants," "about the same number of immigrants," or "fewer immigrants." We restrict our analysis to respondents who expressed a clear stance on immigration levels. The resultant sample comprises 68,994 individuals across all years, offering a substantial dataset for examining trends and attitudes.

In our analysis, we harness the rich CES dataset, incorporating a broad spectrum of explanatory variables spanning various domains. Specifically, our investigation into the relationship between individual-level economic conditions and ATI centers around three key variables: employment status, income status, and subjective perceptions of personal financial situations (see Table A3 and A4 in the online Appendix for more details).

Additionally, we explore the impact of sociotropic economic factors on ATI using three variables: individuals' subjective assessment of Canada's economic conditions in the preceding year, provincial unemployment rates, and provincial immigrant intake levels.[5] Our decision to use province-level measures is informed by a recognition that national indicators may not fully encapsulate the nuanced experienced by individuals, particularly in a country as vast and diverse as Canada. As the world's second-largest country and one of its most decentralized federations, Canadian provinces present significant variations in economic and social dynamics. These variations, often described in literature as making provinces akin to 'small worlds' (Bilodeau et al., 2012), provide a rich context for examining the effects of local economic conditions on ATI. This approach allows us to consider how regional disparities might shape individuals' attitudes

---

[5] The immigration intake measures the number of new immigrants for every one thousand population. We use unemployment rate and immigration intake measured by Statistics Canada in the year preceding the survey year.

towards immigration, offering a more localized and potentially more accurate reflection of these attitudes than national-level data alone could provide.

Extensive research suggests that ethnic background, immigration status, and re-socialization in the host country are important factors in influencing ATI (e.g., Card et al. 2005; Polinard et al. 1984; Branton 2007). However, there is a gap in understanding how these factors impact ATI in the Canadian context. Our study addresses this gap by specifically examining the roles of ethnic and immigration backgrounds in Canada. We differentiate between whites and ethnic minorities, as well as between immigrants and Canadian-born individuals.[6] This distinction is crucial, as it enables us to investigate systematic differences in ATI across these groups. Furthermore, these characteristics are not merely demographic; they also represent symbols for social categorization and identification, offering a lens through which to view socio-psychological factors influencing ATI.

To conduct this analysis, we categorize respondents into seven distinct groups based on their ethnic and immigration backgrounds: ethnic minority Canadian-born, white Canadian-born, recent white immigrants, more established white immigrants, recent ethnic minority immigrants, more established ethnic minority immigrants, and indigenous individuals.

We also extend our inquiry into the impact of social identity on ATI by examining how participants' self-reported political party identification influences ATI. Accordingly, the party identification variable includes the following seven categories: Liberal, Conservative, NDP, Green, Bloc Quebecois, other parties, and independent. The independent category includes those who do not identify themselves with any party, including other parties (See Table A5 in the online Appendix for details).

Additionally, our analysis incorporates other observed characteristics, including marital status (5 categories), education level (2 categories), religion (5 categories), age (6 categories), province of residence (10 categories), gender (2 categories), and language (4 categories). Like

---

[6] Different countries use different terms to refer to their non-white/non-European population. In Canada, as defined by the Employment Equity Act, they are referred to as "visible minority," which is defined as "persons, other than Aboriginal people, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour." The United Nations (UN) Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination has called on Canada three times (in 2007, 2012 and 2017) to reconsider using the term "visible minority." We find it more appropriate to refer to this population as ethnic minorities. The ethnic minority population in Canada consists mainly of the following groups: Chinese, South Asian, Black, Arab, West Asian, Filipino, Southeast Asian, Latin American, Japanese, and Korean." (Statistics Canada, 2015).

ethnic and immigration backgrounds, these variables serve as markers of social categorization and identification, potentially informing ATI. Moreover, by including these variables, we aim to discern confounding relationships, such as those between party identification and education or religion and age. For a detailed presentation of the variables used and their summary statistics, please refer to Table A2 in the online Appendix.

Although our study provides comprehensive insights into the factors influencing ATI in Canada, it is crucial to emphasize that our findings should not be construed as necessarily establishing causal relationships. The complexity of ATI determinants means that the influence of unobserved factors, such as national identity, cannot be entirely ruled out in our results.

4   Findings

In what follows, we initially delve into an exploration of how ATI in Canada have evolved over a substantial period, spanning from 1988 to 2019. This longitudinal perspective allows us to capture potential shifts in public sentiment and contextualize them within broader historical and socio-political developments. Following this historical analysis, our focus shifts to examining the associations between various factors and ATI, aiming to elucidate the variations observed among individuals and, in some instances, across different time periods. This part of our study is particularly aimed at unpacking the complexities that underlie these attitudes, considering both static and dynamic elements. We utilize a range of statistical techniques to analyze these associations, taking care to account for potential confounders and the multifaceted nature of ATI.

4.1   Evolution of Attitudes Towards Immigration and Potential Contributors

Figure 1 delineates the evolving nature of Canadian ATI between 1988 and 2019. Notably, from 1993 to 2008, there was a significant shift towards less negative ATI, with the proportion of Canadians favouring fewer immigrants declining from 67% to 26%. This trend, however, was predominantly driven by an increase in neutral attitudes, as evidenced by the rise of those supporting the immigration status quo from 17% to 59%. Concurrently, the fraction advocating for more immigrants remained relatively constant at around 16-17%.

This decline in anti-immigration sentiment ceased around 2008, and abruptly shifted to a steady increase in the percentage of Canadians favoring reduced immigration. More specifically, Canadians became increasingly less comfortable with the status quo, as their share in this

category dwindled from 59% in 2008 to 42% in 2019. During the same time period, the share of Canadians who supported a reduction in the number of immigrants substantially increased from 26% to 40%. In 2019, the percentage of Canadians who favoured the same number of immigrants almost fell back to its 1997 level of 43%.

It is also important to highlight that throughout our examined time period, there were less significant changes in the share of Canadians who favoured more immigrants. This group remained a minority throughout, and its share stayed relatively more stable compared to the other two groups, especially between 1993 and 2011, during which it hovered around 15%. These results provide a different picture compared to Banting and Soroka (2020) and Besco (2021), which suggest a plateau in immigration opposition post-2008.[7] We contend that the methodological decisions made by these authors in categorizing and scaling ATI measures may have diminished some of the crucial systematic patterns that our results bring to light.

Several studies have documented how changes in immigration policies in the early 1990s increased the number of economic migrants , which is also evident in our Figure 2. This policy change may explain the positive shift in ATI between 1993 and 2008. Indeed, the reforms were not limited to added focus on the number of economic immigrants as Canada also started to promote immigration as a form of economic stimulus (Abu-laban and Gabriel 2002). In 1994, there was a significant debate around the incorporation of the economic model of "human capital" into Canada's points system (Abu-laban and Gabriel 2002). The model suggests that putting more weight on the immigrants' levels of human capital (such as education and language proficiency) brings skills to the country and contributes to its economy (Picot et al. 2016).

In the ensuing section, we employ a more systematic approach to dissect the role of various factors in shaping ATI, aiming to provide a comprehensive understanding of the underlying dynamics.

---

[7] Banting and Soroka (2020) present findings utilizing Environics data spanning from 1980 to 2019, employing a question that prompts Canadians to indicate their level of agreement with the statement: "Overall, there is too much immigration in Canada." The respondents who express "strongly agree" or "somewhat agree" are categorized as "supportive," while those indicating "strongly disagree" or "somewhat disagree" are classified as "not supportive." Notably, individuals responding with "neither agree nor disagree" are seemingly excluded from the sample. Besco (2021) uses data from Environics (1981 – 2019), Gallup (1975 – 1999), and CES (1988 – 2019). The reported results in the paper represent mean values of normalized variables scaled from 0 to 1.

4.2   Regression Results

Given the ordered nature of our dependent variable, which reflects ATI, we opted for the ordered logit model as the most appropriate analytical tool.[8] This choice is predicated on the inherent ordering of our dependent variable, which we coded as 1 for "fewer immigrants," 2 for "about the same," and 3 for "more immigrants." Such an ordered structure is ideally suited for the ordered logit model, which effectively handles ordinal data where the categories have a natural ranking.

Table 1 presents the regression results from this model, exploring the relationship between various factors and ATI. In this table, the first column reports the conditional marginal effects of each variable on the likelihood of favoring "fewer immigrants." The second column addresses the probability of favoring "more immigrants." Crucially, for each group of variables, the initial row denotes the conditional predicted probability (of supporting fewer/more immigrants) for the reference category. The subsequent rows then delineate the difference in predicted probability for each specific category in comparison to this reference group. [9] This structure allows us to assess how each variable alters the probability of a particular ATI stance relative to a baseline, offering insights into the relative magnitude of these effects.

Additionally, we conducted an estimation incorporating political party identification as an explanatory factor. The inclusion of this variable did not markedly alter the estimated coefficients presented in Table 1. Consequently, we have included these additional results in Table A6 in our Appendix.

4.2.1   Individual-Level Economic Factors

Our analysis reveals that, after controlling for observed characteristics, higher-income Canadians, compared to their lower-income counterparts, are approximately 4.6 percentage points (or 11%) less likely to support fewer immigrants and 2.8 percentage points (or 18%) more

---

[8] The ordered logit model is specifically designed for situations where the dependent variable has a natural ordering. It accounts for the fact that the distances between categories may not be equal, which is a limitation of OLS in such cases. OLS also makes other assumptions (e.g., linearity, continuous and normal distribution) which are also likely to be violated when dealing with ordered variables, leading to inefficient estimates and biased standard errors.

[9] Table A7 and Table A8 in our Online Appendix report the regression results by survey year. We do not find any systematic trends in the direction or magnitude of our estimated coefficient in different survey years.

likely to prefer more immigrants. This finding suggests a small association between income level and openness towards immigration.

Additionally, subjective perceptions of personal financial situations also play a considerable role in shaping ATI. Individuals who believe that their financial situation worsened in the previous year are, on average, 8.5 percentage points (or 28%) more inclined to favour fewer immigrants, and 6.3 percentage points (or 26.7%) less inclined to favour more immigrants, compared to those who perceive an improvement in their financial status.

The relationship between employment status and ATI, while present, is less pronounced. Unemployed Canadians show a slight tendency (1.5 percentage points or 3.7% more likely) towards favouring fewer immigrants and are somewhat less likely (1 percentage point or 6%) to support more immigrants compared to their employed peers. Similar trends are observed among homemakers and individuals who do not report their employment status.

Importantly, controlling for political party identification does not significantly alter these results, suggesting that the observed relationships between economic factors and ATI are robust across political affiliations. These findings underscore the relative influence of economic conditions and perceptions on immigration attitudes. However, it is crucial to consider these results in the context of the broader economic and social environment, acknowledging that other unobserved (non-economic) factors that might be correlated with these individual-level economic factors could play a role in shaping some of these estimated relationships. Our analysis, while revealing, only captures a part of the complex tapestry of factors influencing ATI.

4.2.2 National/Provincial Variables and the Potential Role of Sociotropic Factors

Our study reveals distinct regional variations in ATI within Canada. Notably, ATI are most favorable in Nova Scotia, whereas Alberta and Ontario exhibit the most negative sentiments in Canada. For instance, in Alberta, 47.2% of residents tend to favour fewer immigrants, compared to only 32.4% in Nova Scotia. These regional disparities in ATI persist even after accounting for differences in party identification across provinces, suggesting that regional specificities play a significant role.[10] These differences may stem from diverse sociotropic

---

[10] After controlling for party identification, Ontario becomes the least supportive province for immigration. Nova Scotia remains the most supportive of immigration (see Table A6 in our Online Appendix).

factors, including economic conditions, immigrant composition, and historical experiences, as outlined by Simeon and Elkins (1974).

Further exploring the role of sociotropic factors, our analysis of provincial-level variables in Table 1 indicates a sensitivity of ATI to both provincial unemployment rates and immigration intake. However, the magnitude of these effects is relatively modest. For example, a 50% increase in average immigration intake modestly increases the likelihood of supporting fewer immigrants by 2.1 percentage points or 5%. Similarly, a 1 percentage point increase in the unemployment rate at the provincial level (equivalent to a 15% increase in the average unemployment rate of 7% in our sample) increases the probability of supporting fewer immigrants by 0.5 percentage points or 1.2%. These results somewhat contrast with the conclusions drawn by Banting and Soroka (2020), who argue that immigration intake and unemployment levels significantly influence ATI, but align more closely with the findings of Wilkes et al. (2008).[11]

Interestingly, while objective regional economic factors exhibit a limited association with ATI, subjective perceptions of Canada's economic conditions show a stronger correlation. Canadians who perceive a deterioration in the nation's economy over the previous year are substantially more likely (by 8.5 percentage points or 28%) to favour fewer immigrants and less likely (by 6.3 percentage points or 26%) to support more immigrants, compared to those with a more positive economic outlook.

These findings indicate that while objective economic indicators at a regional level play a role in shaping ATI, individuals' subjective perceptions of economic conditions are more influential. This suggests a complex interplay between objective reality and subjective interpretation in forming ATI.

---

[11] Banting and Soroka (2020) only control for a small set of factors in their regressions. Therefore, it is not clear to what extent what they identify as the effect of immigration intake and unemployment rate is driven by changes in cohorts over time. In addition, despite their explicit claim, a closer examination of their results suggests that immigration intake and unemployment rate do not play a significant role in explaining ATI. Wilkes et al. (2008) however find that immigration rate has no impact on ATI. While they find a statistically significant impact for unemployment rate, the estimated magnitude seems to be much smaller compared to other factors such as gender, education, and party identification.

4.2.3 Social Identity Characteristics and the Potential Role of Socio-psychological Factors

We next examine the association between social identity characteristics and ATI. These are various observed attributes and affiliations through which individuals categorize themselves and others within social groups. Therefore, these characteristics could play a significant role in shaping one's sense of identity and belonging within various social contexts, which could in turn play an important role in shaping ATI as discussed in Section 2.

We begin by examining the interplay between religious identity and ATI. Religious identity stands as one of the oldest and most influential contributors to social identity. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first systematic analysis of the association between religious identity and ATI in Canada. According to the 2021 Census, just over half (53%) of Canadians identified with a Christian religion (Statistics Canada 2022b). Our results indicate that, controlling for other observed characteristics, both Catholic and non-Catholic Christians exhibit the lowest level of support for immigration.

There are various factors that can contribute to the more negative ATI among Christian Canadians. For example, there are studies that underscore the connection between Christian identity and nationalistic sentiments that are often associated with negative views towards immigrants (e.g., Dingley 2011; McDaniel at el. 2011). While most of the literature on Christian nationalism is prominently focused on the US, there are few studies that show a link between Christianity and nationalism in Canada (e.g., McDoland 2011; McKeen 2015). Consequently, our results could be interpreted as consistent with the Social Identity Theory, supporting the hypothesis that Canadian Christians harbour more negative ATI, possibly due to perceived threats from outside groups with different religious, cultural, and social norms challenging their cultural identity and values.

Although much smaller compared to the Christian population, individuals identifying Islam as their religion constitute the second-largest religious group in Canada, making up around 5% of the population in 2021. In stark contrast to their Christian counterparts, Muslims exhibit the most favourable ATI. Specifically, when compared to their Catholic counterparts, Canadians who self-identify as Muslim are, on average, 19.7 percentage points (47%) less likely to support fewer immigrants and 16.7 percentage points (106%) more likely to support more immigrants.

Jewish Canadians emerge as the second most supportive religious group in terms of ATI (10.2 percentage points or 24% less likely to support fewer immigrants). Following relatively closely are Atheists and Agnostics (7.2 percentage points or 17% less likely to support fewer immigrants), who, according to the 2021 Census, comprise more than one-third of the Canadian population. The findings align with "minority marginalization" hypothesis, suggesting that individuals from minority groups, such as Muslims or Jews, are likely to empathize with other marginalized groups, including immigrants in this particular context.

Two other important contributors to social identity are ethnicity and immigration background, influencing how individuals perceive themselves and how they are perceived by others within a larger societal context. Some of the theories reviewed in Section 2 suggest that Canadian-borns, particularly white Canadian-borns, who form the majority of the population in Canada, may exhibit more negative ATI. This tendency could stem from a perceived sense of entitlement and ownership, leading to welfare chauvinism, or from fears of eroding Canadian values and cultural norms.[12] This tendency is also consistent with social identity theory. Canadian-borns may see immigrants as members of the outgroup for self-evident reasons. Our results depicted in Figure 3 are consistent with these hypotheses.

More specifically, after controlling for other observed characteristics, 40.7% of white Canadian-borns are in favour of reducing immigration, while a mere 16.5% support more immigrants. In contrast, among white established immigrants, the preference shifts significantly: only 33.9% support a reduction in immigration, whereas 21.1% are in favour of increasing it. This contrast sharpens when comparing white Canadian-borns to recent white immigrants: the latter group has just 25.7% supporting reduced immigration — a 15 percentage point decrease from white Canadian-borns, equivalent to a 37% reduction. Furthermore, 28.5% of recent white immigrants support increased immigration, which is 12 percentage points higher than their Canadian-born counterparts, translating to a 73% increase in support for more immigration.

A similar, though slightly less pronounced, trend is observed among ethnic minority Canadian-born individuals and immigrants. Specifically, when controlling for other observed

---

[12] Welfare chauvinism refers to the belief that social welfare benefits should be reserved for native-born citizens rather than immigrants. In the context of limited resources and public services, some may view immigrants as a drain on the system, exacerbating tensions and fostering anti-immigrant attitudes.

characteristics, 34.7% of ethnic minority Canadian-borns are in favour of reducing immigration, which is 6 percentage points or 15% less than their white Canadian-born counterparts. Additionally, 20.5% support an increase in immigration, a 4-percentage point or 24% increase compared to white Canadian-borns. Among established ethnic minority immigrants, 32.3% support reducing immigration, a decrease of 2.4 percentage points or 7% from ethnic minority Canadian-borns, and 22.4% are in favour of increasing immigration, an increase of 1.9 percentage points or 9.2%. This difference becomes more notable when comparing recent ethnic minority immigrants with their Canadian-born equivalents: 28.1% of the former group supports fewer immigrants, a decrease of 6.6 percentage points or 19% from ethnic minority Canadian-borns. Moreover, 26% of recent ethnic minority immigrants support more immigration, which is 5.5 percentage points or 27% higher than their Canadian-born counterparts.

Overall, our analysis reveals distinct differences in ATI across both ethnic and immigration status lines. Taking into account differences in a wide range of observed characteristics, we find no significant difference in ATI between ethnic minority and white backgrounds among both recent and established immigrants. In contrast, a marked difference exists among Canadian-born individuals, with white Canadian-borns showing significantly more negative ATI than ethnic minority Canadian-borns. Consequently, the gap in ATI between white Canadian-borns and immigrants, whether recent or established, is more pronounced than between ethnic minority Canadian-borns and immigrants. This indicates that both ethnicity and nativity play crucial roles in shaping immigration attitudes within Canada.

Our results align with findings from various countries indicating that immigrants with longer-term residence often display more negative ATI (e.g., Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014; Helbling 2014; Sides and Citrin 2007; Semyonov et al. 2006). These studies attribute such behaviour to several factors, including perceived economic and social threats from new immigrants, rooted in an assimilation and adaptation process that tends to shift immigrants' attitudes towards the prevailing sentiments in the host society.

In contrast to prior research indicating that a country's minorities typically show more support for immigration than the majority group (e.g., Berry and Kalin, 1995; Binder et al. 1997; Buckler et al. 2009), our findings reveal that Indigenous Canadians exhibit the highest likelihood of supporting fewer immigrants (45.7%) and the lowest likelihood of supporting more

immigrants (13.7%) among various Canadian groups. One possible explanation is the threat to indigenous cultures and languages, which are at risk of extinction. Canadian multiculturalism, linked to immigration discourse and promises of tolerance within Western institutions, has been argued not to adequately recognize the rights and challenges of indigenous people (Macdonald 2014). This could lead indigenous Canadians to view immigration as a threat to cultural preservation and ethnic identity. Strengthening the relationship between indigenous Canadians and immigrants is crucial for fostering a more inclusive society, aligning with recommendations from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015), emphasizing the urgent need for dialogue between indigenous people and new Canadians to build stronger relationships and solidarity.

In line with exiting research (e.g., Banting and Soroka 2020; Chandler and Tsai 2001; Scheve and Slaughter 2001; Citrin et al. 1997; Héroux-Legault, 2016), our study affirms that education and gender are significantly associated with ATI. Consistent with previous findings, those with post-secondary education are more supportive of immigration, while women tend to exhibit more negative ATI. Additionally, our results reveal a non-linear association between age and ATI. Those under 30 are less likely to favour fewer immigrants compared to those under 60, while those under 60 are even more likely to support immigration than those under 30. These findings differ from the U.S. and European studies showing older individuals as least supportive of immigration (e.g., Card et al. 2005; Schotte and Winkler 2018; Mayda 2006) but they do align with Banting and Soroka (2020).

4.2.4 Political Party Identification

Academic studies have consistently emphasized the crucial role of political party identification in shaping social identity (e.g., Campbell et al. 1960; Green et al. 2002). Consequently, shifts in party stances on issues like immigration can impact the perspectives of individuals aligned with a particular party (Brader et al. 2020; Kam 2005; Lenz 2013; Vrânceanu and Lachat 2021), as well as the sorting of individuals across different political affiliations (Merkley 2022). Despite the acknowledged significance of political dynamics in shaping attitudes, the exploration of their role in shaping ATI has received comparatively limited attention in the Canadian context.

This relative neglect may be attributed in part to the perceived lack of substantial disagreement among political parties regarding their stances on immigration. However, Besco (2021) draws attention to a series of diversity-related issues that have surfaced in Canadian politics since the late 2000s, suggesting a noteworthy emergence of relevant considerations. This section delves into our analysis regarding the association between Canadians' ATI and their political party identification.

Figure 4 illustrates the conditional probabilities of supporting different immigration regimes for different party identifications. Overall, Canadians with different party identifications occupy distinctive positions regarding immigration. Canadians who identify with the NDP (New Democratic Party), Liberal, or Green parties clearly distinguish themselves as the most welcoming toward immigrants, while Conservatives are the least supportive group, and those who identify with the Bloc Quebecois or as an independent stand in the middle.

More specifically, conditional on our rich set of control variables, nearly half of the Conservatives (49.8%) support fewer immigrants, and only 9.6 percent of them are in favour of an increase in immigration intake. The contrast between the Conservatives and those who identify with other parties is striking. In comparison with observationally equivalent NDP supporters, Canadians who identify with the Conservative party are, on average, 21.5 percentage points (75.6%) more likely to support fewer immigrants and 11.5 percentage points (54.5%) less likely to support more immigrants. Similar disparities are evident between those who identify with the Conservative Party and those who identify with the Liberal Party or the Green Party. Interestingly, those who do not identify with any party (i.e., independent) have similar attitudes to the Bloc Quebecois supporters as both hold positions almost in the middle of the Liberal versus Conservative divide.

Political party positions and the views and preferences of their supporters undergo significant changes over time. To assess the potential impact of these changes on the relationship between party identification and ATI across different survey years, we conduct separate estimations of our model. A concise summary of our key findings is presented below, with a more comprehensive discussion available in section 2 of our Online Appendix.

Firstly, aligning with the observations made by Besco (2021), our analysis identifies 2004 as a distinct turning point in the attitudes of supporters from various political parties toward

immigration. Figure A1 in our Online Appendix illustrates that, preceding 2004, Liberals, Conservatives, and Bloc Québécois supporters exhibited convergent ATI, while divergence was noticeable between Liberals and NDPs. However, the 2006 election marked the onset of political polarization on immigration, particularly between Liberals, Conservatives, and Bloc Québécois, with the most pronounced divide observed in 2019. Concurrently, views among Liberals, NDPs, and Greens began to converge during this period.

Secondly, as depicted in figure A2 in our Appendix, the observed divergence or convergence over time is predominantly attributed to variations in the pace at which these attitudes evolved (i.e., differences in the rate of change) rather than disparities in the direction of change as suggested by Besco (2021). Specifically, with some minor exceptions, the overall trajectory of change across supporters of different parties closely mirrors the patterns presented in Figure 1. This implies that, when considering the broader temporal shifts in ATI, political party identification primarily influences the speed of change within these overarching patterns rather than altering their direction.

One possible explanation for the observed polarization in ATI is shifts in individual opinions influenced by changes in party positions and cues (i.e., opinion leadership). We shed light on the issue by examining the impact of political partisanship, measured by self-reported degree of party identification (i.e., very strongly, fairly strongly, not strongly) on Canadians' ATI. More specifically, if observed polarization in ATI by party identification is the result of opinion changes driven by opinion leadership, we would expect partisans to exhibit a greater degree of polarization over time, since under this scenario they are more likely to be influenced by party positions and cues.

Our results in Figures A4 and A5 in our Appendix reveal that between 1993 and 2004, there were relatively minor disparities between Liberals and Conservatives, irrespective of their partisanship. However, starting in 2006, a discernible pattern emerges, with individuals strongly identifying as Conservatives expressing heightened opposition to immigration, while those strongly identifying as Liberals show weaker opposition. Specifically, the difference in the conditional probability of supporting fewer immigrants between strong Conservative and strong Liberal identifiers was only 2 percentage points in 2004. This gap consistently widened over time, reaching 18 percentage points in 2011 and 30 percentage points in 2019. Given the

substantial political conflict across parties over immigration since the mid-2000s, this evidence aligns with the notion of opinion change driven by party cues on immigration.

5   Relative Importance Analysis

Our regression analysis explored the relationship between ATI and various factors, providing valuable and nuanced insights. However, it lacks a direct assessment of the relative contribution of these factors in explaining variations in ATI among Canadians. To address this, we employ the Lindeman, Merenda, and Gold (LMG) method, a widely-used approach for relative importance calculation (Grömping 2007, 2015).

Figure 5 presents the LMG results, demonstrating that our explanatory variables collectively account for 14.7% of the total variation in ATI. Notably, political party identification, education level, and subjective views on changes in Canada's economic conditions emerge as the three most influential factors. Specifically, political party identification contributes nearly 22.1% to the model's explanatory power, surpassing education level by 51% and subjective views on economic conditions by 87%.

Another noteworthy observation is that, among the four economic factors, subjective views on Canada's economic situation exhibit significantly greater influence in explaining variations in ATI. These results may be interpreted as emphasizing the significance of sociotropic concerns regarding immigration. However, as previously discussed, another possible interpretation is that these reported sociotropic concerns may, consciously or unconsciously, conceal other fears: that is, the perceived threats immigrants pose to Canadians' sense of cultural preservation and social identity.

As previously discussed, supporters of different political parties started diverging on immigration in 2006, indicating a potential shift in the role of party identification in ATI. To explore this further, we conduct Relative Importance Analysis separately for the periods 1988 to 2004 and 2006 to 2019. In panel 1 of Figure 6, covering the earlier period, education, year fixed effects, and ethnic/immigration background emerge as the top three factors, explaining 20.2%,

14.8%, and 10.5% of the ATI variations, respectively. [13] Strikingly, political party identification contributes only 5.2% during this period.

In panel 2 of Figure 6, covering 2006 to 2019, there is a significant shift in the contribution of factors to variations in ATI. Political party identification now takes the lead, accounting for 27.6% of the explained variation in ATI. Subjective views on Canada's economic situation rank as the second-most influential factor, explaining 15.5%, while education ranks third, contributing only 11.1%. This substantial change underscores the rise of political partisanship and polarization, aligning with the trends discussed in Section 4.2.4.

6   Conclusion

This study investigates the evolution and potential driving factors of attitudes towards immigration (ATI) in Canada from 1988 to 2019, utilizing data from the Canadian Election Studies surveys. We document a notable decline in Canadians' support for reduced immigration intake from 1988 to 2008. However, this trend reverses in the 2010s, with a growing number of Canadians expressing discomfort with the current situation and showing a preference for more stringent immigration policies. Additionally, the proportion of Canadians who prefer increasing immigration levels has remained fairly constant over the last forty years, with only 18% supporting such an increase in 2019.

Our examination of the relationship between ATI and various economic, sociotropic, and socio-psychological factors yields two key insights regarding what influences ATI in Canada. First, among the economic factors under consideration, we find that subjective views regarding changes in Canada's economic performance are more strongly associated with ATI compared to objective economic indicators like income, employment status, unemployment rate, and immigration intake.

Second, our results highlight the significant relationship between group-level socio-psychological factors —stemming from differences in religion, ethnicity, immigration status, and political party identification —and ATI. Notably, our research underscores the prominent polarizing impact of political parties on ATI, positioning them as the foremost factor in

---

[13] The importance of year fixed effect in the explanatory power of our model suggests that some of the variation in ATI is driven by unobserved factors that have a systematically similar effect on individuals but vary over time – e.g., the annual multiculturalism budget in Canada, or the rise of radical right-wing populism.

explaining variations in ATI among Canadians since 2006. This observation is of particular significance and warrants careful attention.

The discernible widening of the divide among supporters of different parties after 2006 coincides with a series of immigration and diversity issues emerging in Canadian politics since the late 2000s (Besco 2021; Marwah et al. 2018; Fiřtová 2021; Abu-Laban 2020; Kwak 2019). Moreover, recent Canadian public polling results have witnessed a further escalation in negative ATI within public discourse (Environics Institute 2023, Perez 2023). This heightened negativity raises concerns, particularly against the backdrop of global trends in political and social polarization. As we witness increasing polarization worldwide, coupled with challenging economic conditions, the exacerbation of negative ATI in Canada adds another layer of complexity to these broader issues. This concerning trend in negative ATI may have far-reaching implications, necessitating a more in-depth examination of its potential impact on societal cohesion and public trust, discrimination and xenophobia, and policy formulation. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach that considers the intricate interplay between socio-psychological factors, political partisanship, and the broader global context.

There is one final point worth emphasizing here. Growing empirical evidence underscores the need to delve deeper into the role of group-level socio-psychological factors that contribute to ingroup versus outgroup dynamics, intensify fears of symbolic threats, generate inter-group anxiety, and influence tolerance of "the other" alongside a preference for social and cultural homogeneity. This issue becomes particularly crucial as immigration emerges as a pivotal issue in political discourse, often manipulated by political parties, especially those leaning towards nationalism and/or populism. Political parties leverage socio-psychological factors by framing and politicizing immigration to galvanize support or marginalize opponents. This not only shapes attitudes toward immigration but also conditions individuals' responses to contextual changes, which, contrary to mounting systematic evidence, are linked to immigration and immigrants.

For instance, the politicization of immigration by political parties, especially during periods of hardship and tension, may explain the apparent association between anti-immigration sentiments and contextual changes, such as concerns about increases in the cost of living or the housing crisis in Canada. Studies have shown that during these times, immigration is injected

into public discourse, anchored to dominant issues of the day (e.g., terrorism, economic anxiety, or cultural tensions) (Mudde 2007; Norris 2005). Therefore, while the association between these dominant issues and immigration remains unclear to the public, immigration's profile is nevertheless elevated in terms of those dominant issues. This is also consistent with findings from several studies, which show that while changes over time in the rate of immigration do not affect ATI, year-to-year changes in other macro-level conditions, often unrelated to immigration, such as the unemployment rate or GDP growth, do influence ATI (e.g., Banting and Soroka 2020; Ruist 2016; Wilkes 2008).

Our results, while not establishing strict causation, underscore the significant and systematic association between ATI and various contributors to one's sense of social identity (e.g., religion, ethnicity, immigration status, party identification). This supports the growing understanding that group-level socio-psychological factors play a key role in shaping ATI. Additionally, the smaller role of economic factors, increasingly evident in more recent studies that explore a broader array of variables, suggests that economic policy may have limited effectiveness in mitigating anti-immigration sentiments. Although preserving low unemployment levels might alleviate a specific type of economic anxiety linked to immigration, it fails to address broader underlying socio-psychological factors influencing ATI. Our results underscore this by revealing that during a period of decreasing unemployment rates (2009 to 2019), negative ATI continued to increase in Canada.

We contend that a comprehensive and effective approach to address negative attitudes toward immigration requires careful attention to and serious engagement with socio-psychological factors that mounting evidence indicates play a significant role in fostering such opposition. Education and learning can play a critical role, as numerous studies consistently find that higher levels of education (net of other factors) are associated with more positive ATI.[14] However, our vision of education goes beyond traditional classroom learning or the acquisition of higher degrees. It involves cultivating the capacity to adopt a broader range of views, promoting open-mindedness, and fostering tolerance for change and diversity.

---

[14] While some studies suggest that the positive effect of education functions through its impact on labour market competitiveness and individual economic self-interest (e.g., Mayda 2006), others highlight the role of education in the process of opinion formation towards immigration, and promotion of tolerance and open-mindedness (Dustmann and Preston 2007, Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014).

In this holistic approach, one must acknowledge the influence of media, acting as powerful shapers of public discourse, and political parties, acting as opinion leaders. These entities play a crucial role in shaping and amplifying ATI, adding layers of complexity to the overall dynamics of ATI. Therefore, it is imperative to recognize that the challenges and solutions surrounding ATI transcend mere policy formulations. This issue is deeply entrenched in political strategies and the manipulation of public perceptions, indicating a significant overlap between policy and politics. The politicization of immigration issues serves as both a catalyst for and a barrier to the development of effective solutions. Political parties, by framing immigration debates within the confines of national security, economic threats, and cultural identity, not only influence policy directions but also shape the socio-psychological landscape within which these policies are received and interpreted by the public.

Thus, the issue of immigration and public attitudes towards it is as much a political challenge as it is a policy one. Overcoming this challenge necessitates a holistic approach that integrates policy solutions with efforts to shift political and public discourse towards a more inclusive, tolerant, and realistic understanding of immigration and its impacts on society. By doing so, we can hope to foster a culture that not only recognizes but also embraces the diversity and dynamism that immigrants bring to the fabric of society.

7   Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in Canadian Election Studies at http://www.ces-eec.ca/.

Since the data set utilized in this research is publicly accessible, there was no need for ethical approval.

No funding was received for this study.

8   References

Abu-Laban, Y. (2020). Immigration and settler-colonies post-UNDRIP: Research and policy implications. *International Migration*, *58*(6), 12–28.

Abu-Laban, Y., & Gabriel, C. (2002). *Selling diversity: Immigration, multiculturalism, employment equity, and globalization*. University of Toronto Press.

Alesina, A., Harnoss, J., & Rapoport, H. (2016). Birthplace diversity and economic prosperity. *Journal of Economic Growth*, *21*(2), 101–138.

Baker, J. O., & Edmonds, A. E. (2021). Immigration, presidential politics, and partisan polarization among the American public, 1992–2018. *Sociological Spectrum*, *41*(4), 287–303.

Banting, K., & Soroka, S. (2020). A distinctive culture? The sources of public support for immigration in Canada, 1980–2019. *Canadian Journal of Political Science/Revue Canadienne de Science Politique*, *53*(4), 821–838.

Berry, J. W., & Kalin, R. (1995). Multicultural and ethnic attitudes in Canada: An overview of the 1991 national survey. *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science/Revue Canadienne des Sciences du Comportement*, *27*(3), 301.

Besco, R. (2021). From stability to polarization: The transformation of Canadian public opinion on immigration, 1975–2019. *American Review of Canadian Studies*, *51*(1), 143–165.

Besco, R., & Tolley, E. (2018). Does everyone cheer? The politics of immigration and multiculturalism in Canada. In E. Goodyear-Grant, R. Johnston, W. Kymlicka, & J. Myles (Eds.), *Federalism and the welfare state in a multicultural world* (pp. 291–318). McGill-Queen's University Press.

Bilodeau, A., Turgeon, L., & Karakoç, E. (2012). Small worlds of diversity: Views toward immigration and racial minorities in Canadian provinces. *Canadian Journal of Political Science/Revue Canadienne de Science Politique*, *45*(3), 579–605.

Binder, N. E., Polinard, J. L., & Wrinkle, R. D. (1997). Mexican American and Anglo attitudes toward immigration reform: A view from the border. *Social Science Quarterly*, *78*, 324–337.

Blumer, H. (1958). Race prejudice as a sense of group position. *Pacific Sociological Review*, *1*(1), 3–7.

Bobo, L. (1983). Whites' opposition to busing: Symbolic racism or realistic group conflict? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *45*(6), 1196.

Boubtane, E., Coulibaly, D., & Rault, C. (2013). Immigration, growth, and unemployment: Panel VAR evidence from OECD countries. *Review of Labour Economics and Industrial Relations*, *27*, 399–420.

Brader, T., De Sio, L., Paparo, A., & Tucker, J. A. (2020). Where you lead, I will follow: Partisan cueing on high-salience issues in a turbulent multiparty system. *Political Psychology*, *41*(4), 795–812.

Branton, R. (2007). Latino attitudes toward various areas of public policy: The importance of acculturation. *Political Research Quarterly*, *60*(2), 293–303.

Buckler, K., Swatt, M. L., & Salinas, P. (2009). Public views of illegal migration policy and control strategies: A test of the core hypotheses. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, *37*(4), 317–327.

Campbell, A., Converse, P. E., Miller, W. E., & Stokes, D. E. (1960). *The American voter*. University of Chicago Press.

Campbell, D. T. (1965). Ethnocentric and other altruistic motives. In D. Levine (Ed.), *Nebraska symposium on motivation* (pp. 283–311). University of Nebraska Press.

Card, D. (2005). Is the new immigration really so bad?. The economic journal, 115(507), F300-F323.

Card, D., Dustmann, C., & Preston, I. (2005). *Understanding attitudes to immigration: The migration and minority module of the first European Social Survey* [CReAM discussion paper no. 03/05]. University College London.

Chandler, C. R., & Tsai, Y. M. (2001). Social factors influencing immigration attitudes: An analysis of data from the General Social Survey. *Social Science Journal*, *38*(2), 177–188.

Citrin, J., Green, D. P., Muste, C., & Wong, C. (1997). Public opinion toward immigration reform: The role of economic motivations. *Journal of Politics*, *59*, 858–881.

Cortes, P., and Tessada, J. (2011). Low-skilled immigration and the labor supply of highly skilled women. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, *3*(3), 88–123.

Dancygier, R. M., & Donnelly, M. J. (2013). Sectoral economies, economic contexts, and attitudes toward immigration. *Journal of Politics*, *75*(1), 17–35.

Dingley, J. (2011). Sacred communities: Religion and national identities. *National Identities*, *13*(4), 389–402.

Donnelly, M. (2017). *Canadian exceptionalism: Are we good or are we lucky? A Survey of Canadian attitudes in comparative perspective* [Report]. McGill Institute for the Study of Canada.

Dustmann, C., Fabbri, F., & Preston, I. (2005). The impact of immigration on the British labour market. *Economic Journal*, *115*(507), F324–F341.

Dustmann, C., Glitz, A., & Frattini, T. (2008). The labour market impact of immigration. *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, *24*(3), 478–95. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxrep/grn024

Dustmann, C., & Preston, I. P. (2007). Racial and economic factors in attitudes to immigration. *B. E. Journal of Economic Analysis and Policy*, *7*(1). https://doi.org/10.2202/1935-1682.1655

Environics Institute. (2023). *Canadian public opinion about immigration and refugees* [Focus Canada report].

Fiřtová, M. (2021). Framing Canadian immigration discourse under the conservative government (2006–2015): Breaking path dependence? *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, *22*(1), 265–287.

Gaston, N., & Nelson, D. (2000). Immigration and labour-market outcomes in the United States: A political-economy puzzle. *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, *16*(3), 104–114.

Grande, E., Schwarzbözl, T., & Fatke, M. (2019). Politicizing immigration in Western Europe. *Journal of European Public Policy*, *26*(10), 1444–1463.

Green, D. P., Palmquist, B., & Schickler, E. (2002). *Partisan hearts and minds: Political parties and the social identities of voters*. Yale University Press.

Grömping, U. (2007). Estimators of relative importance in linear regression based on variance decomposition. *American Statistician*, *61*(2), 139–147.

Grömping, U. (2015). Variable importance in regression models. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Computational Statistics*, *7*(2), 137–152.

Hainmueller, J., & Hiscox, M. J. (2010). Attitudes toward highly skilled and low-skilled immigration: Evidence from a survey experiment. *American Political Science Review*, *104*(1), 61–84.

Hainmueller, J., & Hopkins, D. J. (2014). Public attitudes toward immigration. *Annual Review of Political Science*, *17*, 225–249.

Harell, A. (2009). *Minority-majority relations in Canada: The rights regime and the adoption of multicultural values*. Canadian Political Science Association Annual Meeting, Ottawa ON.

Helbling, M. (2014). Opposing Muslim immigrants: Attitudes of rejection among majority members and Muslim immigrants in Western Europe. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *37*(1), 37–57.

Héroux-Legault, M. (2016). Substate variation in political values in Canada. *Regional and Federal Studies*, *26*, 171–197.

Hout, M., & Maggio, C. (2021). Immigration, race, and political polarization. *Daedalus*, *150*(2), 40–55.

Hunt, J., & Gauthier-Loiselle, M. (2010). How much does immigration boost innovation? *American Economic Journal: Macroeconomics*, *2*(2), 31–56.

Jaumotte, M. F., Koloskova, K., & Saxena, M. S. C. (2016). *Impact of migration on income levels*

in advanced economies [Spillover Notes no. 2016/008]. International Monetary Fund.

Javdani, M. (2020). Public attitudes toward immigration: Determinants and unknowns. *IZA World of Labor*, *473*.

Kam, C. D. (2005). Who toes the party line? Cues, values, and individual differences. *Political Behavior*, *27*, 163–182.

Kheiriddin, T. (2019, May 16). *Will the 2019 vote be the election of hate?* Global News. https://globalnews.ca/news/5235846/canada-immigration-election/

Kwak, L. J. (2019). New Canadians are new conservatives: Race, incorporation, and achieving electoral success in multicultural Canada. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *42*(10), 1708–1726.

Lee, E., & Johnstone, M. (2021). Lest we forget: Politics of multiculturalism in Canada revisited during COVID-19. *Critical Sociology*, *47*(4-5), 671–685.

Lenz, G. S. (2013). *Follow the leader? How voters respond to politicians' policies and performance.* University of Chicago Press.

LeVine, R. A., & Campbell, D. T. (1972). *Ethnocentrism: Theories of conflict, ethnic attitudes, and group behavior.* John Wiley & Sons.

Levy, M., & Wright, M. (2022). *Economic self-interest in public opinion about immigration.* Handbook on Politics and Public Opinion. Edward Elgar Publishing.

Li, P. (2002). *Destination Canada: Immigration debates and issues.* Oxford University Press.

Marwah, I., Triadafilopoulos, T., & White, S. (2018). Immigration, citizenship, and Canada's new conservative party. In J. Farney & D. Rayside (Eds.), *Conservatism in Canada* (pp. 95–119). University of Toronto Press.

Mayda, A. M. (2006). Who is against immigration? A cross-country investigation of individual attitudes toward immigrants. *Review of Economics and Statistics*, *88*(3), 510–530.

McDaniel, E. L., Nooruddin, I., & Shortle, A. F. (2011). Divine boundaries: How religion shapes citizens' attitudes toward immigrants. *American Politics Research*, *39*(1), 205–233

McDonald, M. (2011). The Armageddon factor: The rise of Christian nationalism in Canada. Vintage Canada.

McKeen, L. A. (2015). Canadian Christian Nationalism?: The Religiosity and Politics of the Christian Heritage Party of Canada. PhD Dissertation. Wilfried Laurier University.

Merkley, E. (2022). Polarization eh? Ideological divergence and partisan sorting in the Canadian mass public. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *86*(4), 932–943.

Meuleman, B., Davidov, E., & Billiet, J. (2009). Changing attitudes toward immigration in Europe, 2002–2007: A dynamic group conflict theory approach. *Social Science Research*, *38*(2), 352–365.

Miconi, D., Li, Z. Y., Frounfelker, R. L., Venkatesh, V., & Rousseau, C. (2021). Sociocultural correlates of self-reported experiences of discrimination related to COVID-19 in a culturally diverse sample of Canadian adults. *International Journal of Intercultural*

    Relations, *81*, 176–192.

Morrison, K. R., Fast, N. J., & Ybarra, O. (2009). Group status, perceptions of threat, and support for social inequality. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *45*(1), 204–210.

Mudde, C. (2007). *Populist radical right parties in Europe*. Cambridge University Press.

Myers, C., Abrams, D., Rosenthal, H. E., & Christian, J. (2013). Threat, prejudice, and stereotyping in the context of Japanese, North Korean, and South Korean intergroup relations. *Current Research in Social Psychology*, *20*(7), 76–85.

Newman, B. J., & Malhotra, N. (2019). Economic reasoning with a racial hue: Is the immigration consensus purely race neutral? *Journal of Politics*, *81*(1), 153–166.

Norris, P. (2005). *Radical right: Voters and parties in the electoral market*. Cambridge University Press.

Ortega, F., & Peri, G. (2014). Openness and income: The roles of trade and migration. *Journal of International Economics*, 92(2), 231-251.

Peri, G. (2012). The effect of immigration on productivity: Evidence from US states. *Review of Economics and Statistics*, *94*(1), 348–358.

Perez, A. (2023, September 23). Canada's welcoming attitude toward immigrants is at risk of fraying. *The Globe and Mail*. https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-canadas-welcoming-attitude-toward-immigrants-is-at-risk-of-fraying/

Picot, G., Hou, F., & Qiu, H. (2016). The human capital model of selection and immigrant economic outcomes. *International Migration*, *54*(3), 73–88.

Polinard, J. L., Wrinkle, R. D., & De La Garza, R. (1984). Attitudes of Mexican Americans toward irregular Mexican immigration. *International Migration Review*, *18*(3), 782–799.

Poutvaara, P., & Steinhardt, M. F. (2018). Bitterness in life and attitudes toward immigration. *European Journal of Political Economy*, *55*, 471–490.

Preston, I. (2014). The effect of immigration on public finances. *The Economic Journal*, *124*(580), F569–F592.

Quillian, L. (1995). Prejudice as a response to perceived group threat: Population composition and anti-immigrant and racial prejudice in Europe. *American Sociological Review*, *60*(4), 586–611.

Rowthorn, R. (2008). The fiscal impact of immigration on the advanced economies. *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, *24*(3), 560–580.

Ruist, J. (2016). How the macroeconomic context impacts on attitudes to immigration: Evidence from within-country variation. *Social Science Research*, *60*, 125–134.

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.

Schotte, S., & Winkler, H. (2018). Why are the elderly more averse to immigration when they are more likely to benefit? Evidence across countries. *International Migration Review*,

52(4), 1250–1282.

Semyonov, M., Raijman, R., & Gorodzeisky, A. (2006). The rise of anti-foreigner sentiment in European societies, 1988–2000. *American Sociological Review*, *71*(3), 426–449.

Sherif, M. (1966). *Group conflict and cooperation: Their social psychology*. Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Sides, J., & Citrin, J. (2007). European opinion about immigration: The role of identities, interests, and information. *British Journal of Political Science*, *37*(3), 477–504.

Simeon, R., & Elkins, D. J. (1974). Regional political cultures in Canada. *Canadian Journal of Political Science/Revue Canadienne de Science Politique*, *7*(3), 397–437.

Simon, J. (1989). *The economic consequences of migration*. Blackwell.

Sniderman, P. M., Hagendoorn, L., & Prior, M. (2004). Predisposing factors and situational triggers: Exclusionary reactions to immigrant minorities. American political science review, 98(1), 35-49.

Solodoch, O. (2021). Do sociotropic concerns mask prejudice? Experimental evidence on the sources of public opposition to immigration. *Political Studies*, *69*(4), 1009–1032.

Statistics Canada. (2015). *Visible minority of person.* https://www23.statcan.gc.ca/imdb/ p3Var.pl?Function=DECI&Id=257515

Statistics Canada. (2020, September 17). *Experiences of discrimination during the COVID-19 pandemic*. The Daily. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/daily-quotidien/200917/ dq200917a-eng.pdf?st=wmIBdab4

Statistics Canada. (2022a, October 26). *Immigrants make up the largest share of the population in over 150 years and continue to shape who we are as Canadians.* The Daily. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/221026/dq221026a-eng.htm

Statistics Canada. (2022b, October 26). *The Canadian census: A rich portrait of the country's religious and ethnocultural diversity.* The Daily. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/221026/dq221026b-eng.htm

Stephan, W. G., Renfro, C. L., Esses, V. M., Stephan, C. W., & Martin, T. (2005). The effects of feeling threatened on attitudes toward immigrants. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, *29*(1), 1–19.

Stephan, W. G., & Stephan, C. W. (1996). Predicting prejudice. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, *20*(3-4), 409–426.

Stephan, W. G., Ybarra, O., Martnez, C. M., Schwarzwald, J., & Tur-Kaspa, M. (1998). Prejudice toward immigrants to Spain and Israel: An integrated threat theory analysis. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, *29*(4), 559–576.

Tajfel, H. (1979). Individuals and groups in social psychology. *British Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, *18*(2), 183–190.

Tajfel, H. (1982). *Social identity and intergroup behavior*. Cambridge University Press.

Tajfel, H. & Turner, J. C. (1986). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In S. Worchel & W. Austin (Eds.), *Psychology of Intergroup Relations* (pp. 2–24). Nelson-Hall.

Truth & Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015). *Canada's residential schools: The final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (Vol. 1).* McGill-Queen's University Press.

Vrânceanu, A., & Lachat, R. (2021). Do parties influence public opinion on immigration? Evidence from Europe. *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion, and Parties*, *31*(1), 1–21.

White, S., Nevitte, N., Blais, A., Gidengil, E., & Fournier, P. (2008). The political resocialization of immigrants: Resistance or lifelong learning? *Political Research Quarterly*, *61*(2), 268–281.

Wilkes, R., & Corrigall-Brown, C. (2011). Explaining time trends in public opinion: Attitudes toward immigration and immigrants. *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, *52*(1-2), 79–99.

Wilkes, R., Guppy, N., & Farris, L. (2008). No thanks, we're full: Individual characteristics, national context, and changing attitudes toward immigration. *International Migration Review*, *42*(2), 302–329.
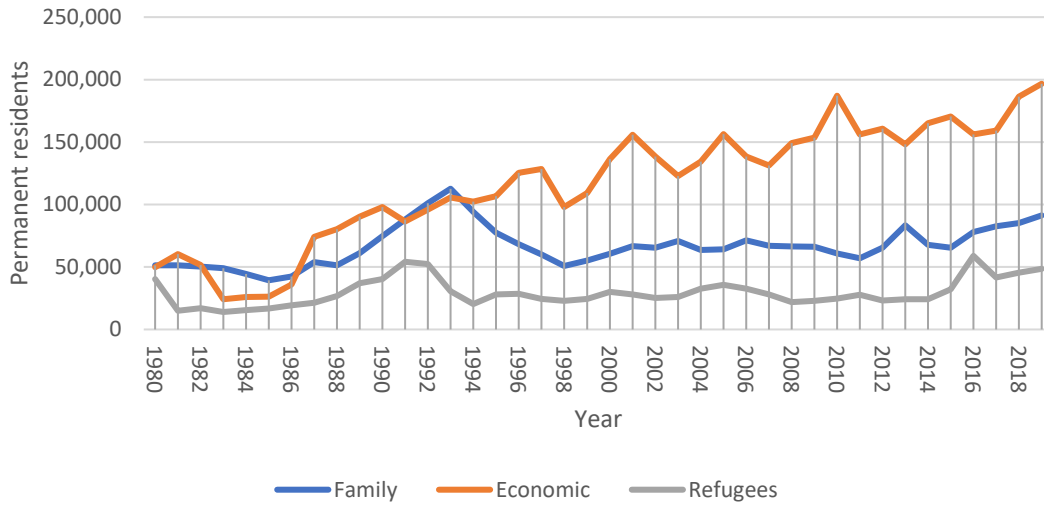
Tables and Figures

**Figure 1: Changes in attitudes towards immigration in Canada – 1988 to 2019**
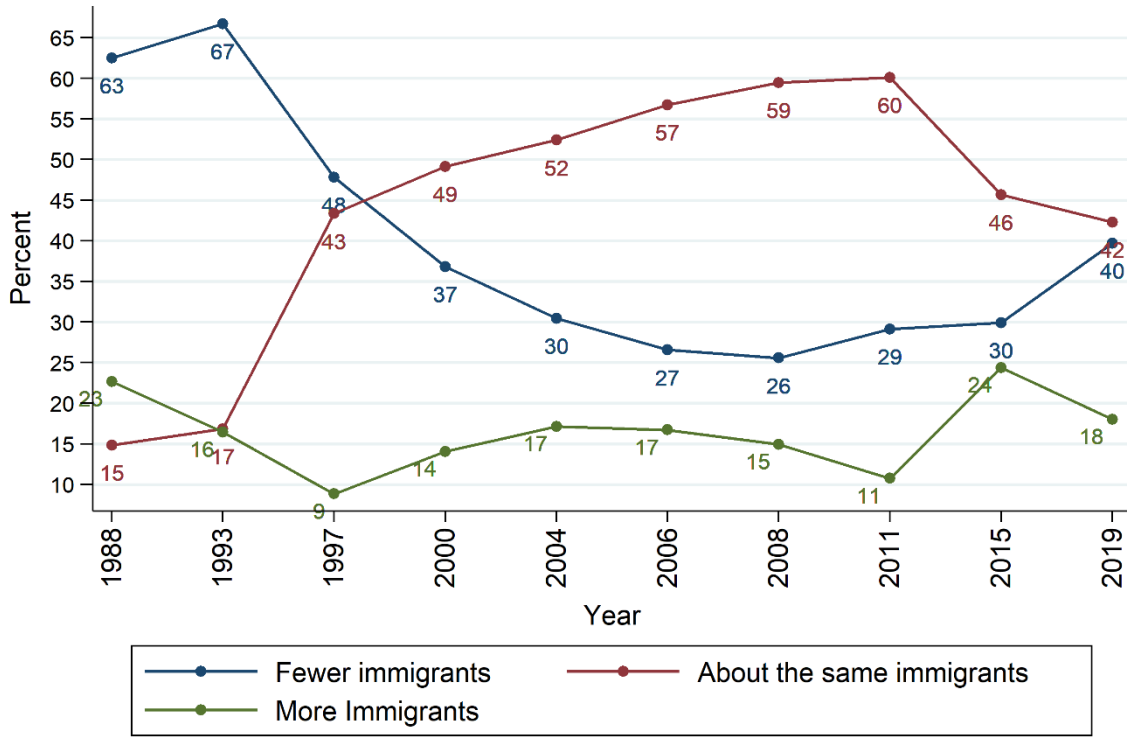
Do you think Canada should admit more immigrants, fewer immigrants or about the same as now?

**Figure 2: Immigration intake by admission category- 1980 to 2019**

Source: Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. Permanent Residents – Ad Hoc IRCC (Specialized Datasets). https://open.canada.ca/data/en/dataset/ad975a26-df23-456a-8ada-756191a23695

Figure 3: Attitudes toward immigration - Conditional predicted probabilities for different groups by ethnic and immigration background – Ordered logit model
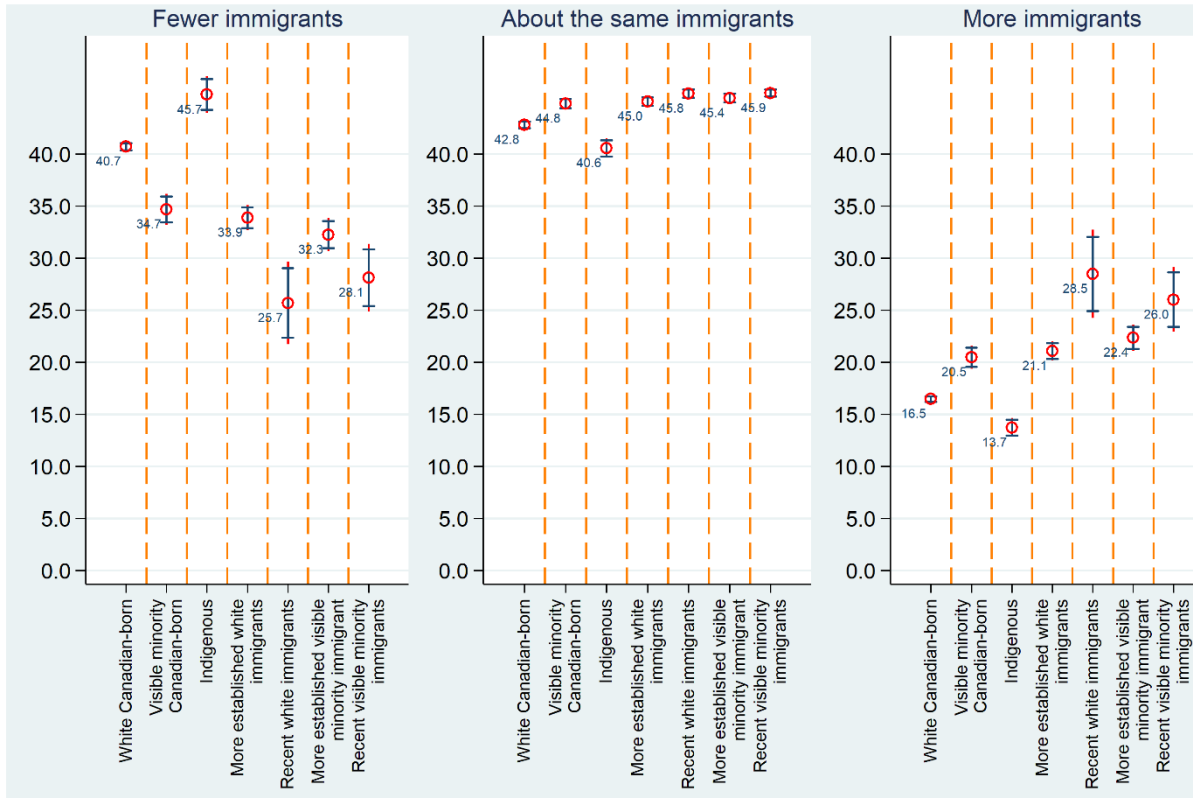
Note: Control variables include employment status, religion, province, income, language, marital status, age, gender, education, year, subjective view about personal financial situation, subjective view about Canada's economic situation, unemployment rate, and immigration intake. Both 90% and 95% confidence intervals are displayed for each estimate. The two horizontal lines on each confidence interval band represent where the 90% confidence interval ends.

Figure 4: Attitudes toward immigration - Conditional predicted probabilities for different groups by political party identification – Ordered logit mode
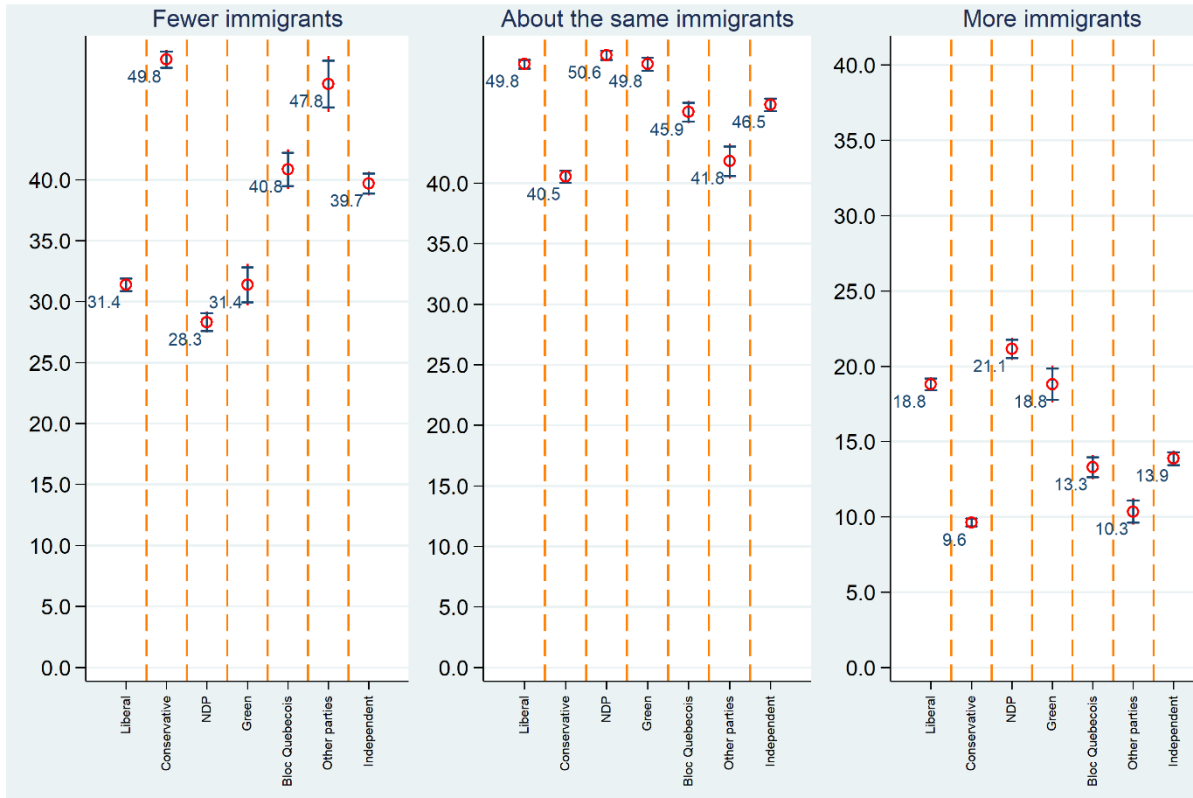

Note: Control variables include employment status, religion, province, income, language, marital status, age, gender, education, year, subjective view about personal financial situation, subjective view about Canada's economic situation, ethnic/immigration background, unemployment rate, and immigration intake. Both 90% and 95% confidence intervals are displayed for each estimate. The two horizontal lines on each confidence interval band represent where the 90% confidence interval ends.

Figure 5: The Relative Importance Analysis of Model 2 – 1988 to 2019
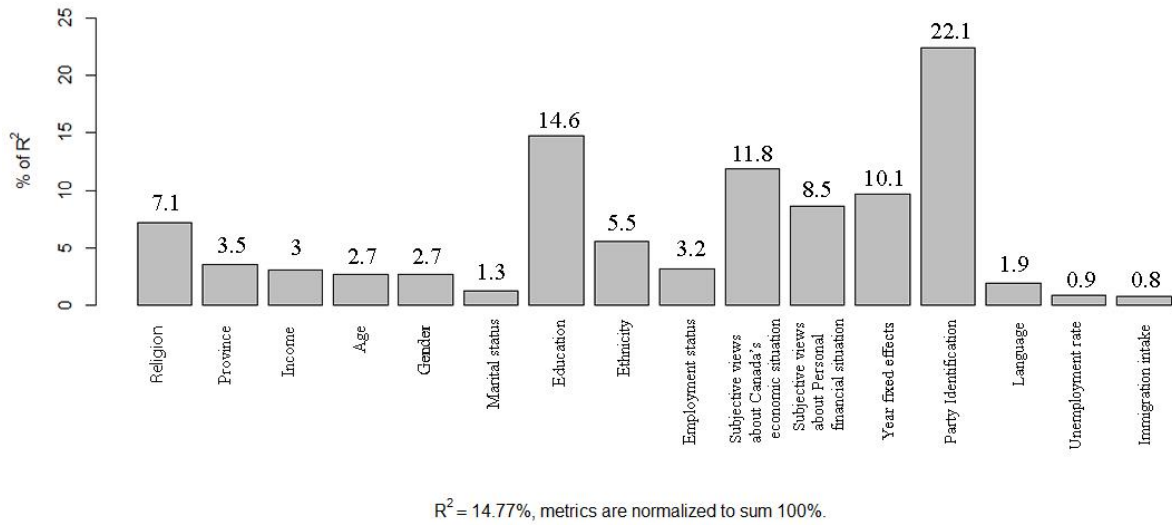
R^2 = 14.77%, metrics are normalized to sum 100%.

Note: The LMG method is used to compute the relative importance of variables. Each histogram bar measures how much of the explained variation in attitudes towards immigration is contributed to different factors.

Figure 6: The Relative Importance Analysis of Model 2 – 1988-2004 and 2006-2019
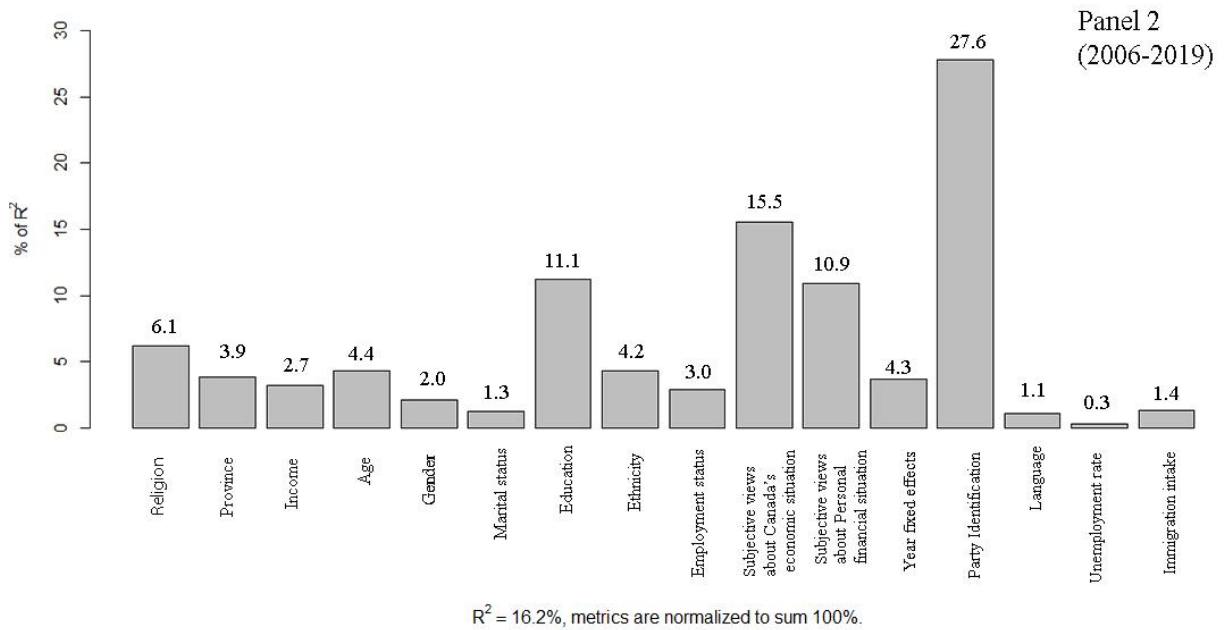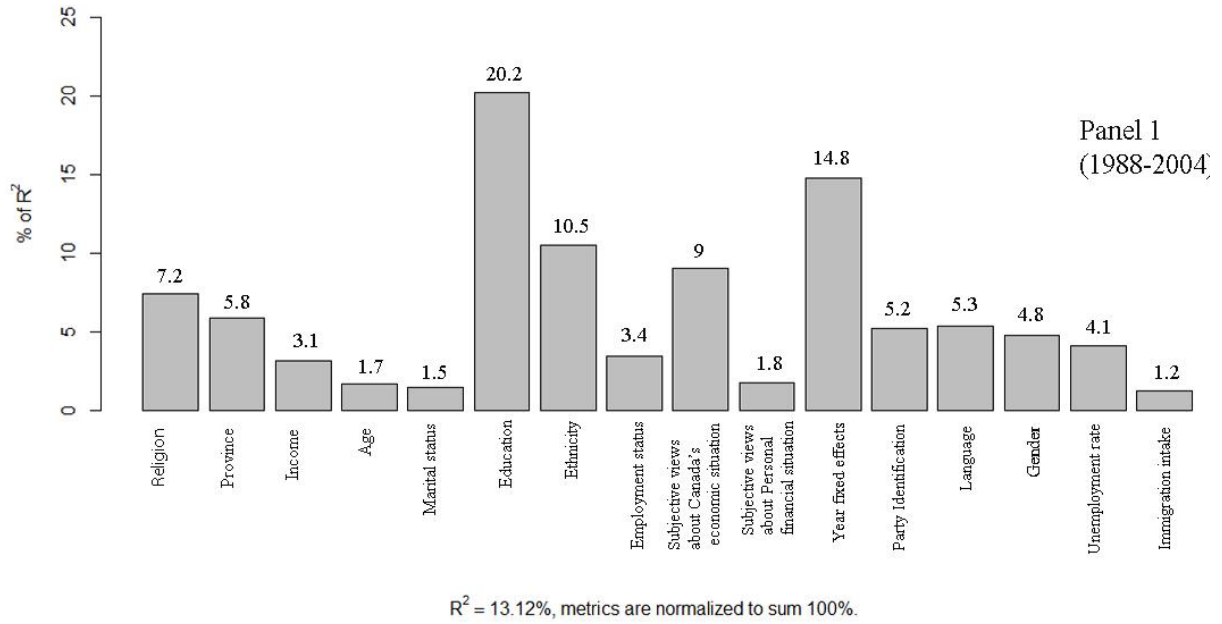
Note: The LMG method is used to compute the relative importance of variables. Each histogram bar measures how much of the explained variation in attitudes towards immigration is contributed to different factors. Panel 1 and Panel 2 show the relative importance results for 1988-2004 and 2006-2019, respectively.

Table 1: Attitudes Toward Immigration - Ordered logit model

Variables	Pr(fewer)	Pr(more)		Pr(fewer)	Pr(more)
Employment status			**Religion**		
Employed	0.403***	0.169***	Catholics	0.419***	0.157***
(predicted probability)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(predicted probability)	(0.003)	(0.002)
Unemployed	0.015*	-0.009*	Atheist/Agnostic	-0.072***	0.047***
	(0.008)	(0.005)		(0.004)	(0.003)
Student	-0.097***	0.071***	Non-Catholic Christians	0.015***	-0.008***
	(0.008)	(0.007)		(0.005)	(0.003)
Retired/Disable	-0.016***	0.010***	Other	-0.058***	0.036***
	(0.005)	(0.003)		(0.008)	(0.005)
Homemaker	0.024**	-0.014***	Jewish	-0.102***	0.070***
	(0.009)	(0.005)		(0.014)	(0.011)
Missing	0.040***	-0.023***	Islam	-0.197***	0.167***
	(0.012)	(0.006)		(0.011)	(0.014)
Income			Missing	-0.007	0.004
Less than Average	0.419***	0.159***		(0.008)	(0.005)
(predicted probability)	(0.003)	(0.002)	**Education**		
More than Average	-0.046***	0.028***	< secondary education	0.419***	0.159***
	(0.004)	(0.002)	(predicted probability)	(0.003)	(0.002)
Missing	0.008	-0.005	Post-secondary education	-0.046***	0.028***
	0.419***	0.159***		(0.004)	(0.002)
Subjective views about Canada's Economy			Missing	0.008	-0.005
Got better	0.302***	0.237***		(0.006)	(0.003)
(predicted probability)	(0.004)	(0.003)	**Gender**		
About the same	0.151***	-0.100***	Male	0.380***	0.184***
	(0.004)	(0.003)	(predicted probability)	(0.003)	(0.002)
Got worse	0.085***	-0.063***	Female	0.033***	-0.021***
	(0.004)	(0.004)		(0.003)	(0.002)
Missing	0.067***	-0.051***	Missing	-0.115***	0.095***
	(0.009)	(0.006)		(0.021)	(0.022)
Subjective views about personal financial situation			**Age**		
Got better	0.302***	0.236***	Less than 30 years old	0.392***	0.176***
(predicted probability)	(0.004)	(0.003)	(predicted probability)	(0.005)	(0.003)
About the same	0.150***	-0.099***	30 and 40 years old	0.026***	-0.016***
	(0.004)	(0.003)		(0.006)	(0.004)
Got worse	0.085***	-0.063***	40 and 50 years old	0.032***	-0.019***
	(0.004)	(0.004)		(0.006)	(0.004)
Missing	0.064***	-0.049***	50 and 60 years old	0.031***	-0.019***
	(0.009)	(0.006)		(0.006)	(0.004)
Province-level variables			60 and 70 years old	-0.021***	0.014***
Immigration intake	0.021***	-0.013***		(0.007)	(0.005)
	(0.004)	(0.002)	70 years old	-0.056***	0.039***
Unemployment rate	0.005***	-0.003***		(0.008)	(0.006)
	(0.002)	(0.001)	Missing	-0.012	0.008
				(0.024)	(0.016)
N		68994			
R-squared		0.066			

Note: Dependent variable measures attitudes toward immigrants and is coded as 1 "fewer immigrants", 2 "about the same immigrants", and 3 "more immigrants". Standard errors are in parentheses. *** indicates statistically significant at 1%,** indicated statistically significant at 5% and * indicates statistically significant at 10%.

Table 1 – Continued

Variables	Pr(fewer)	Pr(more)		Pr(fewer)	Pr(more)
Year			**Province**		
1988	0.511***	0.112***	British Columbia	0.419***	0.157***
(predicted probability)	(0.010)	(0.005)	(predicted probability)	(0.003)	(0.002)
1993	0.008	-0.003	Alberta	0.054***	-0.032***
	(0.014)	(0.006)		(0.007)	(0.004)
1997	-0.060***	0.028***	Manitoba	-0.037***	0.025***
	(0.011)	(0.005)		(0.008)	(0.006)
2000	-0.128***	0.066***	New Brunswick	-0.035***	0.023***
	(0.011)	(0.006)		(0.013)	(0.009)
2004	-0.204***	0.122***	Newfoundland and Labrador	-0.050**	0.035**
	(0.011)	(0.006)		(0.020)	(0.015)
2006	-0.184***	0.106***	Nova Scotia	-0.095***	0.072***
	(0.013)	(0.008)		(0.011)	(0.009)
2008	-0.198***	0.117***	Ontario	0.033***	-0.020***
	(0.013)	(0.008)		(0.005)	(0.003)
2011	-0.148***	0.080***	Prince Edward Island	-0.075***	0.055***
	(0.013)	(0.007)		(0.014)	(0.012)
2015	-0.212***	0.129***	Quebec	-0.008	0.005
	(0.011)	(0.006)		(0.008)	(0.005)
2019	-0.096***	0.047***	Saskatchewan	0.011	-0.007
	(0.012)	(0.005)		(0.009)	(0.006)
Language			**Ethnicity and Immigration Status**		
English	0.398***	0.172***	White Canadian-born	0.407***	0.165***
(predicted probability)	(0.003)	(0.002)	(predicted probability)	(0.002)	(0.002)
French	0.017***	-0.010***	Visible minority	-0.060***	0.040***
	(0.007)	(0.004)	Canadian-born	(0.008)	(0.006)
Other	-0.041***	0.027***	Indigenous	0.050***	-0.027***
	(0.007)	(0.005)		(0.009)	(0.005)
Combination	-0.012**	0.008**	Established	-0.068***	0.046***
	(0.006)	(0.004)	white Immigrant	(0.006)	(0.005)
Missing	-0.006	0.004	Recent white	-0.150***	0.120***
	(0.022)	(0.014)	immigrant	(0.020)	(0.022)
Marital status			Established	-0.085***	0.059***
Married/Partner	0.402***	0.170***	visible minority immigrant	(0.008)	(0.007)
(predicted probability)	(0.002)	(0.002)	Recent visible	-0.126***	0.096***
Divorced/separated	0.019***	-0.011***	minority immigrant	(0.017)	(0.016)
	(0.006)	(0.003)	Missing	-0.004	0.003
Widowed	0.009	-0.005		(0.006)	(0.004)
	(0.008)	(0.005)			
Never married	-0.026***	0.017***			
	(0.004)	(0.003)			
Missing	-0.069***	0.048***			
	(0.010)	(0.007)			
N			68994		
R-squared			0.066		

Note: Dependent variable measures attitudes toward immigrants and is coded as 1 "fewer immigrants", 2 "about the same immigrants", and 3 "more immigrants". Standard errors are in parentheses. *** indicates statistically significant at 1%,** indicated statistically significant at 5% and * indicates statistically significant at 10%.