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IMMIGRANT VISIBILITY AND POLITICAL
ACTIVISM RESEARCH COLLABORATIVE

DATA REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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The Immigrant Visibility and Political Activism Research Collaborative (IVPARC) is a joint initiative of Providence College and the University of Massachusetts Boston, with funding from the Russell Sage Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation of New York*. Principal Investigators are Dr. Matt Guardino of Providence College and Dr. Jeff Pugh of UMass Boston. This data report and executive summary was compiled by Chris Langevin of UMass Boston. Thanks also to the other members of the IVPARC team, Kelsey Edmond and Julia McCoy, for their research and design assistance.

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INTRODUCTION

This report examines the ways in which societal expectations of migrants' social and political (in)visibility amplify existing prejudices and increase xenophobic attitudes and support for exclusionary policies when these expectations are violated. It also examines the contextual and psychological factors among native-born residents that can intensify or mitigate this backlash response in the face of migrant political activism. Data from an original representative survey in the United States to explore the individual-level factors underpinning an asymmetrical politics of gratitude that demands immigrant social conformity and political passivity builds on and tests a theory developed through qualitative research and survey data in Latin America.

The 'invisibility bargain' conceptual framework describes a set of informal expectations structuring how native-born citizens relate to immigrants. The theory suggests that tolerance for immigration is highly contingent on the perception of migrants' valued contribution to the host society and on their social and political invisibility. Violating these tacit expectations leads to social sanction and political backlash. The larger project from which this report derives examines how ideological predispositions, psychological tendencies, contact with immigrants and mediated cultural cues condition individual-level manifestations of these expectations, including demands for immigrant social conformity and negative reactions to immigrant political action.

Theoretical expectations derived from the literature, results of a pilot version of the survey, and initial examination of data suggest that we will find attitudinal expressions of demands for immigrant invisibility in large minorities and pluralities of Americans. Conservative identification, social dominance orientation and authoritarianism are expected to intensify these attitudes, while frequent and positive contact with immigrants should moderate them. We provide individual-level quantitative evidence for tacit socio-political demands imposed on immigrants to the United States, and for key factors that moderate these prevailing expectations. Our study carries implications for the public appeal of anti-immigrant

discourse and identifies widespread anti-democratic attitudinal tendencies that, while outside the orbit of explicit far-right ideologies, nonetheless may provide openings for xenophobic political groups and parties. The study also has implications for how policies and political strategies to encourage host-migrant integration can be framed in order to minimize backlash and improve intergroup tolerance.

RESEARCH DESIGN

An online survey with a representative sample of 1,800 U.S. adults was fielded by YouGov in September 2021 with support from Russell Sage Foundation. The survey includes an embedded experiment exposing respondents to photographs of an immigrant protest march that vary visual cues of minority religious and linguistic identities in order to disentangle the differential influence of intersecting and overlapping forms of identity and identify which one(s) have greater explanatory power in amplifying anti-immigrant backlash responses to migrant political activism. Dependent variables measure attitudes toward immigrants with different legal, social and economic characteristics, and tolerance for various forms of immigrant political action registered through rights-oriented, norms-oriented and affective reactions.

The research seeks to answer the following questions:

- To what extent do Americans exhibit attitudes consistent with the invisibility bargain?
- How do conservatism and authoritarianism shape attitudinal expressions of the invisibility bargain?
- How do political cues activate attitudinal expressions of the invisibility bargain?
- How does contact with immigrants moderate attitudinal expressions of the invisibility bargain?

RESULTS

The results of the survey data indicate that more than a quarter of the survey respondents supports banning or severely restricting immigration by those with minority racial/ethnic, linguistic & religious identities (social invisibility) and those from poor countries (economic

contribution). The results show widespread political intolerance for immigrants, especially undocumented immigrants. The figures below show some key descriptive results based on data from our study.

Figure 1. Mean representation of responses when respondents asked to indicate their feelings toward a number of groups on a 0-100 “feeling thermometer.”

Feeling Thermometer

On a scale of 0-100, with 100 being the warmest, what are your feelings toward each of the following groups?



n=1800 US Adults

Source: IVPARC • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 2. Percent indicating “no” to whether immigrants should have the right to engage in types of political activity.

Should immigrants have the right to engage in each of the following types of activity while living in this country?



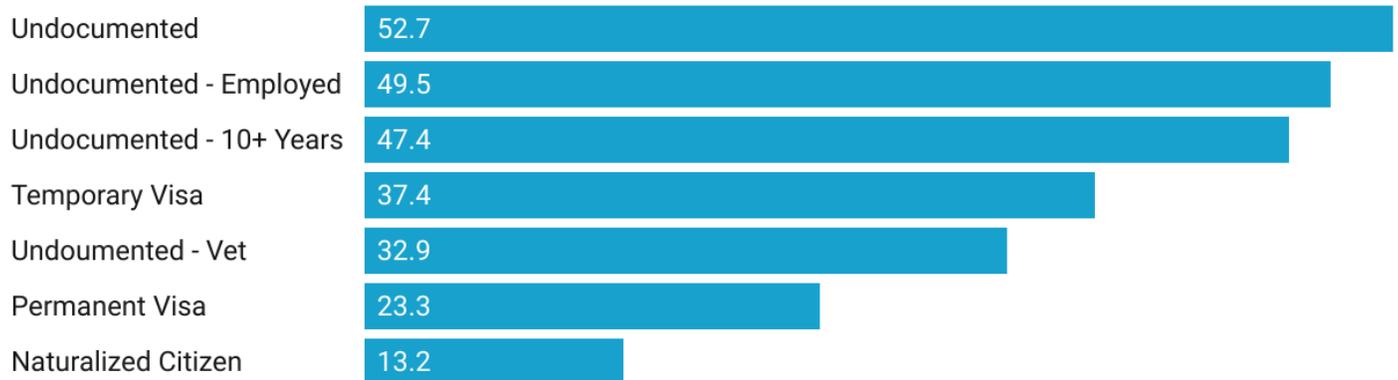
(% saying "No"), n=1800 US adults

Source: IVPARC • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 3. Percent respondents selected “No” to if immigrants should have the right to engage in nonviolent protest based on immigrant status.

Political Intolerance by Immigrant Categories

Should each of these immigrant categories be banned from nonviolent protest? (Yes)



(% Supporting Ban on Nonviolent Protest), n= 1800 US Adults

Source: IVPARC • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 4. Percent respondents selected “Few or none” to whether specific kinds of immigrants should be admitted by the United States government.

Rejection of Immigrants Based on Social Characteristics

In what social contexts would you NOT accept an immigrant with the following social characteristics?



(% Saying "Few or None"), n=1800 US Adults

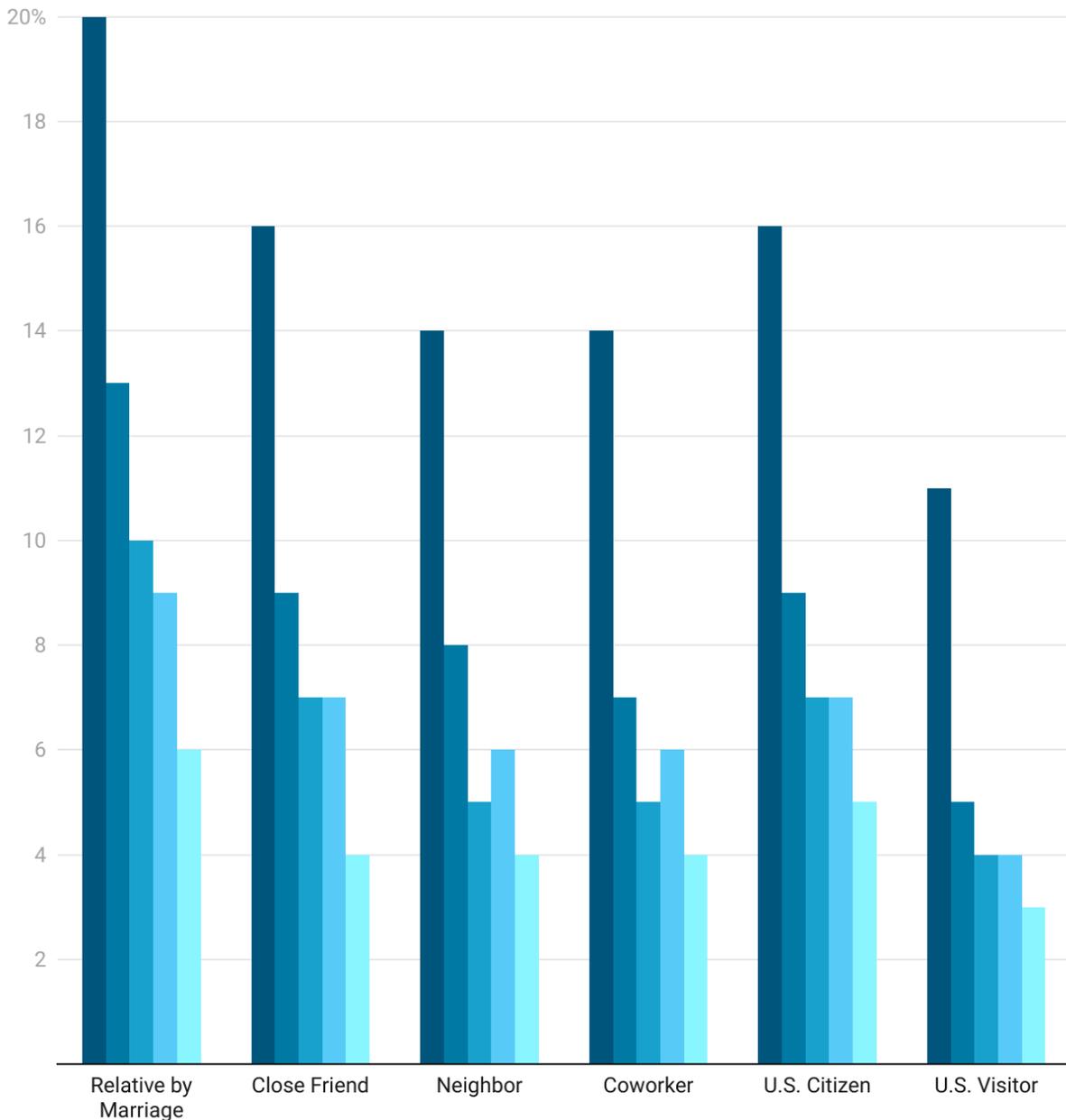
Source: IVPARC • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 5. Social Distance: Percent respondents indicating they would not accept immigrants from different regions according to the following social context categories: “Relative by Marriage,” “Close Friend,” “Neighbor,” “Coworker,” “U.S. Citizen,” “U.S. Visitor.” Respondents were instructed to think about the immigrant group as a whole and not about the best or worst representative of the group the respondent has known.

Social Distance

In what social contexts would you accept an immigrant from the following regions?

■ Middle East ■ Africa ■ Asia ■ Latin America ■ Europe



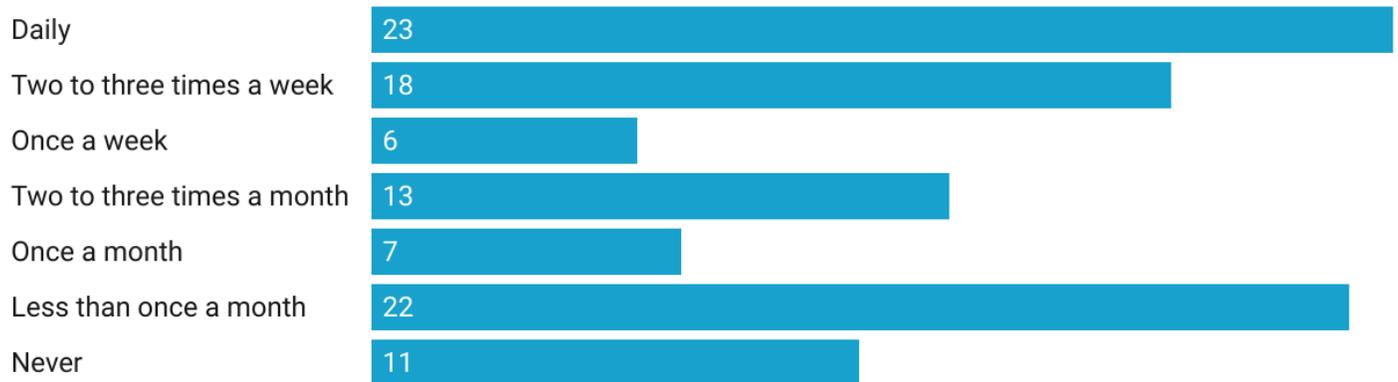
(% saying they would NOT accept), n=1800

Source: IVPARC • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 6. Percent respondents indicating how frequently they interact with immigrants (people who were not born in the United States but who live here now).

Contact Frequency

How often do you engage in contact with immigrants?



(% of Frequency), n=1800 US Adults

Source: IVPARC • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 7. Percent respondents indicating how they would overall categorize their interactions with immigrants

Contact Valence

Participants categorized the positivity of their interaction with immigrants.



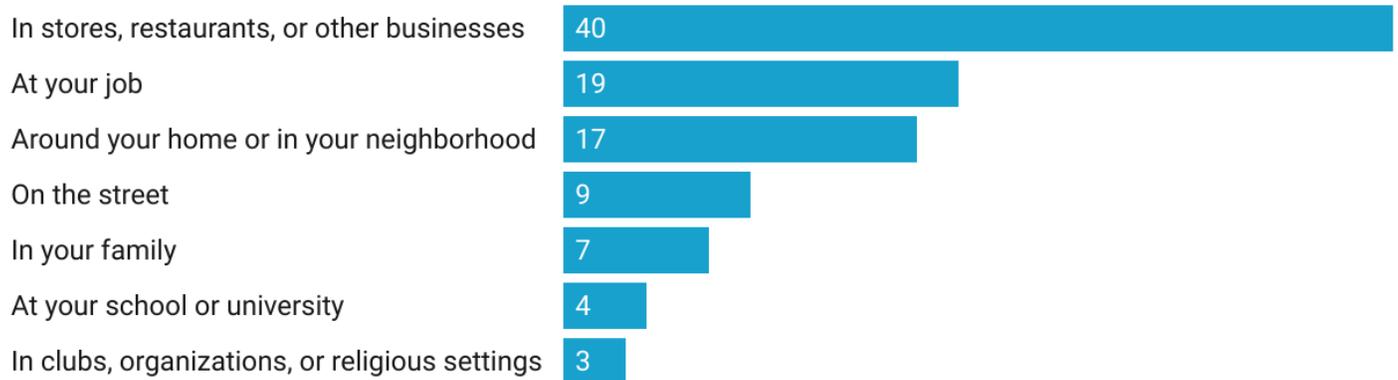
(% respondents for each option), n=1800 US Adults

Source: IVPARC • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 8. Percent respondents indicating in which places they generally interact most with immigrants.

Contact Location

Participants were asked where they have the most contact with immigrants.



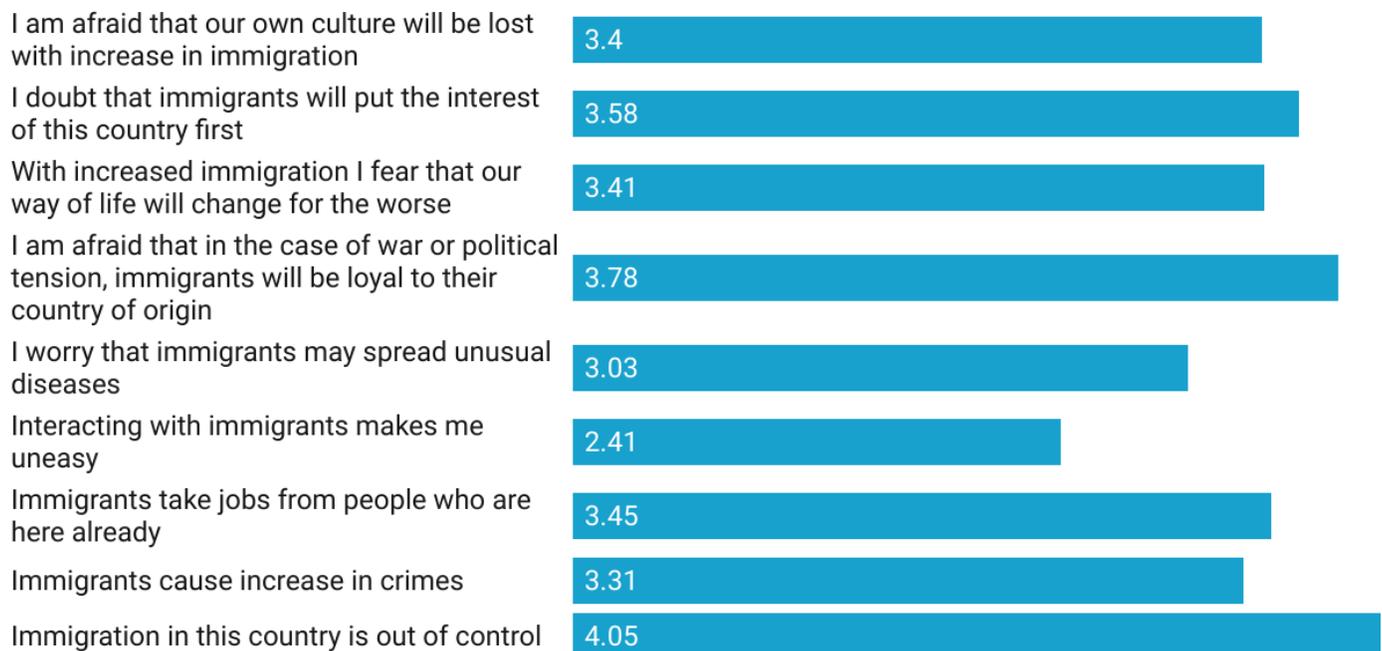
(% Responding "Yes"), n=1800 US Adults

Source: IVPARC • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 9. Average response using numbers 1-7 to indicate agreement or disagreement with each statement.

Statement Agreement Scale

Average agreement of statement by selecting a number from 1 to 7 on a scale



(Average Result of 1-7 Choice), n=1800 US Adults

CONCLUSION

Our findings from this survey suggest that the degree to which social identity differences trigger intolerance for political activism and greater perceptions of threat is strongly influenced by cues that emphasize particular markers of immigrant difference. Particular immigrant identities can result in significantly more hostile reactions to immigrant activism than others. Minority religious and linguistic differences, especially those seen to contrast with dominant-culture norms, are especially likely to be associated with restrictive views of immigrant political participation in the United States. These findings support the need for further research with expanded methods to examine the effects of markers of social difference on tolerance for political participation, and for additional exploration of the role of individual-level pre-dispositions and of political discourse and media. There is a need and opportunity to use the invisibility bargain for additional analysis across multiple national cases.

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