

“Illegal” vs. “Undocumented” and the Perceived Criminality of Unauthorized Border Crossings

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Unauthorized¹ immigration is a hotly debated issue in the United States. In this debate, some people – especially partisans – use different language to frame their arguments. This transforms the debate to not just one about immigration policy, but also about how to discuss and frame this issue. For example, people disagree over whether “illegal immigrant” or “undocumented immigrant” is the more appropriate term to describe the unauthorized immigrant population. Even though these terms are used to refer to the same population, they seem to have different associations. How specifically are these terms different? In other words, what comes to mind when people hear the term “illegal immigrant” versus “undocumented immigrant?” This research seeks (1) to develop a further understanding of why and how the terms “undocumented immigrant” and “illegal immigrant” differ and (2) to explore whether the difference between these terms is related to the perceived criminality² of the unauthorized border crossings. Answering these questions will help create a deeper understanding of two commonly used terms that have consequential effects on how the American public views unauthorized immigrants, which in turn affects immigration policy. It also may help explain how partisans think differently, which could help people understand where the other side is coming from, even if they do not agree.

In order to explore the differences in perception between “illegal immigrant” and “undocumented immigrant,” this research will observe how people describe unauthorized immigrants based on whether this population is described as “illegal” versus “undocumented” and whether they are described as criminals or not. This can be achieved by using previously established research methods measuring attitudes towards a specific population that have people rate how well certain words describe that population (Peffley et al. 1997, Sears and Henry 2003, Feldman and Huddy 2004, Ommundsen et al. 2014). By identifying the different associations people have with “illegal immigrants” versus “undocumented immigrants,” this project can provide a deeper insight about the consequences of using these terms in the current debates surrounding unauthorized immigration.

1 The importance of language

Words matter. Language affects various aspects of people’s cognition – such as their thoughts, beliefs, and perceptions – which can ultimately affect their rationalizations for particular political stances and actions (Edelman 1964, Edelman 1971). This means that language can be used to

¹ Much of this paper discusses the difference between “illegal” and “undocumented” immigrant. I am using the term “unauthorized” to refer generally to this group in order to separate my reference to this population from the two terms I am analyzing.

² Unauthorized immigrants are technically not criminals as they have committed a civil offense; a follow-up experiment will be needed to measure whether people can distinguish between committing a civil offense and being a criminal.

manipulate people (Edelman 1964). How does language gain such power? Words mean much more than their dictionary definition; language creates a shared meaning of words amongst people, and these words can carry emotional connotations (Edelman 1964, Edelman 1971).

In many debates about controversial issues, people manipulate their language choice to advocate for certain positions. In general, how elites message issues to the public can alter people's political predispositions and affect what stance they take (Stoker 1998, Abrajano et al. 2017). For example, on both sides of the abortion debate, people make the issue about values by framing the issue as one about "choice" versus one about "life." These framing choices have an effect on how people understand and react to certain issues. For example, whether Ku Klux Klan rallies are framed as a free speech issue or as an issue of disruption to public order affects whether people support them (Nelson et al. 1997). The debate on unauthorized immigration is no different. Previous research already shows that elites frame unauthorized immigration to advocate for particular policy decisions (Masuoka and Junn 2013, Merolla et al. 2013) and that how they do so has an effect on public opinion (Knoll et al. 2011, Ommundsen et al. 2014). In other words, the way unauthorized immigration is discussed has a tangible effect on how the issue is perceived and therefore dealt with in the United States.

The debate over whether to refer to unauthorized immigrants as "illegal" or "undocumented" is an example of how two words that have very similar literal meanings are used and interpreted very differently by different people. Part of this is because people create categorizations based on their perception and then use language to dictate these categorizations to different groups of people, which affects how the public feels about and votes on policies related to that group (Edelman 1964, Edelman 1977). One can see this in public debates where partisans say "illegal immigrant" or "undocumented immigrant" based on which policies they are advocating for and in normal discourse where members of the public may use one or the other based on which policies they support. This is not unique to the unauthorized immigration debate.

2 Terminology, crime, and border crossings

This project is largely an expansion upon Ommundsen et al.'s "Framing Unauthorized Immigrants: The Effects of Labels on Evaluations." Ommundsen et al. (2014) administered a survey to 274 undergraduate psychology students in which the respondents received one of three 20-item scales that referred to unauthorized immigrants as "illegal immigrants," "undocumented immigrants," or "illegal aliens." Respondents then had to rate how much they agreed with certain statements about unauthorized immigrants (Immigrant Scale) and about the United States (Patriotism Scale). Ommundsen et al. (2014) found that respondents who received the "illegal immigrant" treatment had the harshest views towards unauthorized immigrants and, surprisingly, that those who received the "illegal alien" treatment gave the most favorable ratings; the treatment results were not affected by the respondents' levels of patriotism.

As suggested by Ommundsen et al. (2014), even though "illegal immigrant" and "undocumented immigrant" refer to the same populations, these terms vary in several ways. Some people, mainly elites, use the linguistic implications of these terms in an attempt to sway public opinion, which has an effect on the general public's attitudes towards this issue (Merolla et al. 2013). Therefore, these terms differ in both their use and in their understanding.

Those who speak or write about the unauthorized immigration issue are careful to use the term “illegal immigrant” or “undocumented immigrant” depending upon the message they are trying to convey (Merolla et al. 2013, Nelson and David-Wiley 2018, Raynal 2018). Conservatives and other opponents of unauthorized immigration use the term “illegal immigrants” to evoke negative sentiments by emphasizing the illegality of this group’s actions (Merolla et al. 2013, Nelson and Davis-Wiley 2018). They often do so to advocate for certain policy decisions, such as stricter immigration enforcement (Koulisch 2009, Masuoka and Junn 2013). This messaging has consequential effects for the people who hear it. People are less supportive of and more punitive towards immigrants who are described as “illegal” instead of “undocumented” (Knoll et al. 2011, Ommundsen et al. 2014, Hoops and Braitman 2018). This could be because “illegal” primes people to think in terms of legality (Caicedo 2016). Sympathizers to unauthorized immigrants oppose this language because they believe it carries negative implications and criminalizes this population (Paspalanova 2007, Koulisch 2009, Merolla et al. 2013). These advocates, usually liberal Democrats, use the term “undocumented” to describe this population in more positive contexts (Nelson and Davis-Wiley 2018, Raynal 2018).

Part of the difference between the use and understanding of “illegal immigrant” versus “undocumented immigrant” has to do with legality and criminalization (Koulisch 2009, Masuoka and Junn 2013, Caicedo 2016, Nelson and Davis-Wiley 2018). Previous research examining this relationship between immigration and crime has focused on the perceived versus actual crime rates of immigrants - unauthorized and authorized - once they are living in the United States. It has been widely established that while the public believes immigrants are more prone to committing crimes, immigrants typically have lower crime rates than do native-born Americans (Mears 2001, Reid et al. 2005, Zatz and Smith 2012). Reid et al. (2015) analyzed 2000 US Census data and 2000 Uniform Crime Report data and found out that immigrants do not increase crime rates and, in fact, sometimes help to lower crime rates. Zatz and Smith (2012) explored the difference between this reality and people’s rhetoric, finding that the public’s unwarranted panic about immigration has negatively impacted immigrants. Here, it seems pertinent to address another discrepancy between public rhetoric and reality. Language has the power to create an appearance of reality that does not match reality itself (Edelman 1977). As applied to this research, most of unauthorized immigrants are in the U.S. because they overstayed their visas,³ whereas much of the public date – for example, Trump’s “build the wall” campaign – is focused on border crossings, which in turns makes border crossings seem like the primary threat. Since this research is focused on language, and much of the language about unauthorized immigration has to do with the border, this specific project will focus on perceptions of those unauthorized immigrants who crossed the border. Further research will need to be done to address the perceptions of those who overstay their visa since those account for the majority of unauthorized immigrants in the U.S.

Most of the previous literature on border crossing has been about enforcement (Hanson and Spilmergo 1999, Cornelius 2001, Gaytán-Fregoso and Lahiri 2004, Massey et al. 2016) or about the narratives of what happens to people during the crossing (Cornelius 2001). In other words,

³ Unauthorized immigrants are technically not criminals as they have committed a civil offense; a follow-up experiment will be needed to measure whether people can distinguish between committing a civil offense and being a criminal.

research has focused on the logistics of the border crossing, with limited research on the perceptions of unauthorized immigrants' border crossings. Harris and Gruenewald (2020) have begun to explore these perceptions by analyzing frames used in media. They use a time-series trend analysis on the frames used to discuss the relationship between immigration and crime across 2,200 news stories. They found that frames describing immigrants as being prone to commit crimes have increased, as have frames claiming that unauthorized immigrants are criminals because of their immigration status. They make the point that the latter claim is false, but there does not appear to be further research on other people's evaluations of this narrative.

To summarize, previous research has established that "illegal immigrant" is a more negative term preferred by conservatives while "undocumented immigrant" is a more positive term preferred by liberals. It has suggested that part of this difference may be related to the fact that the term "illegal immigrant" more explicitly refers to the law. Most of the focus on immigration and the law has centered around the perceived versus actual crime rates of immigrants, unauthorized and authorized, after the move to the United States. In terms of how they got to the United States, which for some immigrants involved border crossings, past literature on border crossings has focused on enforcement. This research aims to develop a further understanding of why and how the terms "illegal immigrant" and "undocumented immigrant" are perceived differently. It also seeks to combine these different aspects of immigration research to explore whether the perceived criminality of the unauthorized border crossing helps to explain the difference in understanding between these two terms. In doing so, this research will provide deeper insight into the politically charged terms used in important policy debates.

3 Methods

This project measures people's perceptions of and attitudes towards unauthorized immigrants based on whether this population is described as "illegal" versus "undocumented" and whether they are described as criminals or not. Presumably, people will evaluate unauthorized immigrants more negatively if they read the term "illegal immigrant" and are primed to think about the unauthorized border crossing as a crime, whereas people who are presented with the term "undocumented immigrant" and are primed to think about them not as criminals will evaluate them more positively. I will measure this by administering a survey in which respondents read a vignette and then rate how well certain adjectives apply to unauthorized immigrants.

This survey experiment⁴ was administered to 412 undergraduate political science students at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in November 2020. They took the survey for extra credit. The survey is a 2 x 3 design:

	Control	Criminality	No criminality
Illegal	69	69	68
Undocumented	69	68	69

Table 1: Treatment sample sizes

⁴ The complete survey, can be found in Appendix A.

Respondents were randomly assigned to one of six treatments. As shown by the table above, 68-69 respondents received each treatment. In the control treatment, respondents were told neutral information about the number of unauthorized immigrants in the U.S. as well as the fact that there is an ongoing debate about the issue:

Although the exact number is difficult to determine, experts believe there are approximately 11 million **[illegal/undocumented]** immigrants in the United States. There has been tremendous debate, and a great deal of research, regarding the impact of these **[illegal/undocumented]** immigrants on the American economy and society. We are interested in your views.

The criminality treatments received this same text. However, before asking respondents for their views, respondents were also primed to think about unauthorized immigrants as criminals:

*One argument advanced by critics of such immigrants is to note that because **[illegal/undocumented]** immigrants are in the United States without legal authorization, they are breaking the law, which makes them all criminals.*

In contrast, the no criminality treatments primed respondents to not think of unauthorized immigrants as criminals because they merely committed a civil offense:

*One argument advanced by defenders of such immigrants is to note that just because **[illegal/undocumented]** immigrants are in the United States without legal authorization, that does not make them criminals. This is because violation of U.S. immigration laws is a civil offense, not a criminal offense. No one can be arrested and sent to jail for being an **[illegal/undocumented]** immigrant.*

After reading a vignette, respondents were asked to rate how well each of ten adjectives applied to illegal immigrants⁵ or to undocumented immigrants.⁶ These ten words were randomized and included five positive and five negative: hardworking, honest, intelligent, loyal, responsible, lazy, immoral, uneducated, unlawful, and violent.

These dependent variables can be used to answer my research questions by measuring how people think about unauthorized immigration based on how they are primed to think about this population. Stereotypes can be thought of as “pictures in the head” (Lippmann 1922); language, through political discussions as well as the news, can also create pictures in people's minds (Edelman 1964, Edelman 1977). This survey seeks to find what pops up in people's minds when they hear “illegal immigrant” versus “undocumented immigrant.” Past research has shown that these stereotypes can be influenced by priming (Devine 1989), and this survey's 2x3 design aims to capture the differences in people's ratings depending upon how they were primed.

To reiterate, my research questions are (1) how are the terms “illegal immigrant” and “undocumented immigrant” perceived differently and (2) is part of this difference related to the

⁵ For those who received the “illegal immigrant” treatments 1, 3, and 5.

⁶ For those who received the “undocumented immigrant” treatments 2, 4, and 6.

perceived criminality of the unauthorized border crossing. I have the following three hypotheses:

- Respondents assigned to the “illegal immigrant” treatment will rate negative words as more applicable,⁷ whereas those assigned to “undocumented immigrant” will rate the positive ones as more applicable⁸ (Hypothesis 1).
- Respondents assigned to the criminality treatment will provide less favorable evaluations of unauthorized immigrants as compared to the control (Hypothesis 2).
- Respondents assigned to the no criminality treatment will provide more favorable evaluations of unauthorized immigrants as compared to the control (Hypothesis 3).

4 Results

4.1 How are the terms “illegal immigrant” and “undocumented immigrant” perceived differently?

My first research question is about how the terms “illegal immigrant” and “undocumented immigrant” are perceived differently. Hypothesis 1 predicts that respondents who received the “illegal immigrant” treatments will rate negative words as being more applicable to the unauthorized immigrant population, whereas those who received the “undocumented immigrant” treatments will rate positive words as more applicable. This can be tested by conducting a difference-in-means test to compare the results from the “illegal” treatments to those of the “undocumented” treatments.

	Diff in means	95 pct CI	p-value
Positive	0.03	(-0.07, 0.12)	0.59
Negative	0.1	(0.01, 0.19)	0.04

Table 2: Positive versus negative affect based on terminology

Results from Table 2 suggest that terminology did not have an effect on respondents’ positive affect toward unauthorized immigrants, but it did have an effect on their negative affect. Respondents who received the “illegal” treatment rated negative words as more applicable to unauthorized immigrants than did those who received the “undocumented” treatment. Therefore, we have evidence to support part of Hypothesis 1.

4.1.2 Is part of this difference related to the perceived criminality of the unauthorized border crossing?

What happens when we vary whether or not respondents are primed to think about criminality? Hypothesis 2 predicts that results from the criminality treatment will be less favorable towards unauthorized immigrants because it primes respondents to think about something negative. We can test this by conducting a difference-in-means test comparing the criminality treatment to the control treatment.

⁷ I will refer to this as providing “unfavorable evaluations” of unauthorized immigrants.

⁸ I will refer to this as providing “favorable evaluations” of unauthorized immigrants.

	Diff in means	95 pct CI	p-value
Positive	-0.05	(-0.16, 0.07)	0.42
Negative	0	(-0.11, 0.11)	1

Table 3: Positive versus negative affect when criminality is primed

Results from Table 3 suggest that priming respondents to think about criminality does not have an effect on how they feel, positively or negatively, about unauthorized immigrants. Therefore, we do not have enough evidence to support Hypothesis 2.

Hypothesis 3 predicts that prompting no criminality will cause respondents to produce more favorable evaluations of unauthorized immigrants. We can test this by conducting a difference-in-means test in which we compare the no criminality treatment to the control.

	Diff in means	95 pct CI	p-value
Positive	-0.07	(-0.18, 0.04)	0.23
Negative	0.06	(-0.05, 0.18)	0.3

Table 4: Positive versus negative affect when no criminality is primed

Results from Table 4 suggest that priming respondents not to think about unauthorized immigrants as criminals does not affect their feelings towards that group. Therefore, we do not have enough evidence to support Hypothesis 3.

4.1.3 What do college students think about unauthorized immigrants?

While the treatments had limited to no effects, this study did still produce one definitive finding: students at UIUC perceive unauthorized immigrants more positively than they do negatively. This is suggested by the results for the overall word ratings.

	Mean rating
Hardworking	4.33
Responsible	3.67
Intelligent	3.47
Loyal	3.47
Honest	3.34
Uneducated	2.40
Unlawful	2.35
Immoral	1.76
Violent	1.73
Lazy	1.54

Table 5: Overall mean word ratings

Table 5 shows the average means for each word across all treatments. Positive words were rated more highly than negative words and this trend is true for all of the words: the top five words were all positive and the bottom five words were all negative.

	Mean rating
Positive	3.66
Negative	1.96

Table 6: Positive versus negative mean word ratings

Table 6 shows the overall means for positive versus negative words. The overall mean for positive adjectives was 3.66 in contrast to the lower mean of 1.96 for negative adjectives. This suggests that students at UIUC have overall positive evaluations of unauthorized immigrants.

5 Conclusion

To summarize, terminology had a partial effect on respondents' affect towards unauthorized immigrants, whereas criminality had no effect. Specifically, terminology seemed to have some effect on respondents' negative affect towards unauthorized immigrants, but not on their positive affect. Results also suggest that students, at least at UIUC, rate positive words as being more applicable to unauthorized immigrants and rate negative words as less applicable. This suggests they have an overall positive view of unauthorized immigrants.

There are several next steps for this research project. The first involves analyzing data I have already collected: after rating adjectives, respondents also answered open-ended responses and provided demographic information.⁹ The results from the word ratings suggest that respondents' open-ended responses will also be favorable towards unauthorized immigration, but further analysis might reveal more insight into how respondents view that population. While this sample was not particularly large or diverse, comparing responses across demographics could show how one's identity affects his or her perceptions of unauthorized immigrants.

Another next step would be to administer the survey to a nationally representative sample. Student pools tend to be younger, more liberal, and more educated than the national population, which could skew results especially since unauthorized immigration is a salient issue about which many Americans have already made up their minds. Results from a more diverse sample would provide insight into how the average American perceives these terms differently. Analyzing responses from a nationally representative sample could also be particularly useful for analyzing partisan differences in responses, which would be interesting as unauthorized immigration is a polarizing issue.

While it could be valuable to administer a similar survey to a more diverse sample, it is important to consider why the terminology treatments did not have as strong of an effect as those in Ommundsen et al. (2014) who also used a student pool. One potential explanation is the timing of 2014 versus 2020: unauthorized immigration has become an increasingly polarizing

⁹ A full breakdown of respondents' provided demographics is in Appendix C.

issue since Ommundsen et al. (2014)'s survey, especially with the election of Donald J. Trump in 2016. This may have increased the effect of social desirability on students' responses for those who might otherwise have negative views of unauthorized immigration. For more liberal students, perhaps the increase in partisanship of these terms prevented them from being affected by the treatments. This is suggested by some of the open-ended responses of those who received the "illegal treatments:" at least a couple students were offended by the language used in the vignette. Another potential explanation for these null results could be what Pérez (2015) found in his research on immigration rhetoric. He found that the term "illegal immigrant" in itself did not have a particularly strong effect, but that "illegal immigrant" accompanied with xenophobic rhetoric did have more of an effect. Perhaps my treatments were too weak in testing the partisan term without additional partisan framing.

Nonetheless, administering a similar survey to a nationally representative sample would be useful as (1) if there is an effect, those results would suggest that language and terminology are powerful in their ability to influence public opinion and (2) if there is not an effect, those results would suggest that unauthorized immigration has become so polarized that the terms no longer have an effect on public opinion. If the latter is correct, that could be either because the public has such strong preferences for which term to use and is unaffected by hearing the other or that political elites have created these partisan terms and the public is not affected by them. Before administering this survey to a more diverse sample, I want to make a couple of changes in which (1) I refer to unauthorized immigrants who have overstayed visas in addition to crossing the border to see whether Americans have different views of those methods and (2) either reword or replace the criminality/no criminality treatments to get a more precise assessment of how people feel about the unlawfulness of the unauthorized immigration as "criminal" is not the legally precise term. I also want to explore internal factors that affect one's views about unauthorized immigration such as personal and political values.

This research will provide a valuable contribution to further understanding how "illegal immigrant" and "undocumented immigrant" are perceived in the current debate on unauthorized immigration. Both of these terms are commonly used, yet we do not necessarily know what appears in people's minds as they use and hear these terms. In partisan debates, especially with the current levels of outpartisan animosity, it often seems like people on opposing sides are talking past each other; even though "illegal immigrant" and "undocumented immigrant" are used to refer to the same population, it almost seems like those who use these terms are talking about different people. This research seeks to understand what pops into people's minds when they hear these terms to measure whether and how these images of unauthorized immigrants are different. This can be used to identify what people on opposite sides of the debate are thinking about when discussing unauthorized immigration, which can hopefully lead to understanding – even if not acceptance – of the other side and to understand the considerations people have when forming their opinion on unauthorized immigration, which in turn affects policy. This project is important to continue because meaningful results would show further evidence that language is a powerful political tool.

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7 Appendix A: Survey Instrument

Below is the full survey experiment. Please note that the bolding and italics did not show up in the survey itself – I have added them to mark differences in the treatments. Bolded words point out where the terminology "illegal" vs. "undocumented" would go – instead of retyping the whole thing – and italic words in the vignettes show what is unique to that pair of vignettes. The purposes of these bolded and italicized words are to clearly demonstrate the similarities and differences across treatments.

Part I: Vignette

Treatments 1-2

Although the exact number is difficult to determine, experts believe there are approximately 11 million **[illegal/undocumented]** immigrants in the United States. There has been tremendous debate, and a great deal of research, regarding the impact of these

[illegal/undocumented] immigrants on the American economy and society. We are interested in your views.

Treatments 3-4

Although the exact number is difficult to determine, experts believe there are approximately 11 million **[illegal/undocumented]** immigrants in the United States. There has been tremendous debate, and a great deal of research, regarding the impact of these **[illegal/undocumented]** immigrants on the American economy and society. *One argument advanced by critics of such immigrants is to note that because **[illegal/undocumented]** immigrants are in the United States without legal authorization, they are breaking the law, which makes them all criminals.* We are interested in your views.

Treatments 5-6

Although the exact number is difficult to determine, experts believe there are approximately 11 million **[illegal/undocumented]** immigrants in the United States. There has been tremendous debate, and a great deal of research, regarding the impact of these **[illegal/undocumented]** immigrants on the American economy and society. *One argument advanced by defenders of such immigrants is to note that just because **[illegal/undocumented]** immigrants are in the United States without legal authorization, that does not make them criminals. This is because violation of U.S. immigration laws is a civil offense, not a criminal offense. No one can be arrested and sent to jail for being an **[illegal/undocumented]** immigrant.* We are interested in your views.

Part II: Word ratings

Please tell us how well each of the following words applies to **[illegal/undocumented]** immigrants from 1 (not very well) to 5 (very well).

	1 (not well at all)	2	3	4	5 (very well)
Responsible	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Loyal	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Unlawful	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Intelligent	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Honest	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Violent	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Immoral	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lazy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Hardworking	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Uneducated	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Part III: Open-ended question

Briefly describe your view of the typical **[illegal/undocumented]** immigrant. Feel free to elaborate on your responses to the previous question and/or to add new information when writing your description.

Part IV: Demographics

What is your age?

What is your gender?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Other _____

What is your race?

- ☐ White
- ☐ Black or African American
- ☐ American Indian or Alaska Native
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- ☐ Other

Are you Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an independent, or other?

- ☐ Republican
- ☐ Democrat
- ☐ Independent
- ☐ Other _____

(If they answered “Independent” to the previous question.)

Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican Party or to the Democratic Party?

- ☐ Closer to Republican Party
- ☐ Neither
- ☐ Closer to Democratic Party

Where would you place yourself on this scale?

- ☐ Extremely liberal
- ☐ Liberal
- ☐ Slightly liberal
- ☐ Moderate, middle of the road
- ☐ Slightly conservative
- ☐ Conservative
- ☐ Extremely conservative

(If they answered “Moderate, middle of the road” to the previous question.)

If you had to choose, would you consider yourself a liberal or a conservative?

- ☐ Liberal
- ☐ Conservative
- ☐ Moderate

Which of these statements best describes you?

- ☐ I am an immigrant to the USA and a naturalized citizen.
- ☐ I was born in the USA, but at least one of my parents is an immigrant
- ☐ My parents and I were born in the USA, but at least one of my grandparents was an immigrant.
- ☐ My parents, grandparents and I were all born in the USA.
- ☐ Other

8 Appendix B: Results

The results in the paper (1) collapsed the treatment cells so we could focus on the terminology and criminality comparisons and (2) combined the word ratings into overall positive and negative affect. The tables and figures in this appendix are meant to provide more detailed breakdowns of the individual word ratings and the individual treatments.

Illegal vs. undocumented

	Diff in means	95 pct CI	p-value
Intelligent	-0.07	(-0.26, 0.12)	0.49
Hardworking	0.02	(-0.16, 0.2)	0.86
Responsible	0.03	(-0.17, 0.24)	0.77
Loyal	0.05	(-0.17, 0.26)	0.67
Honest	0.09	(-0.12, 0.3)	0.38

Table 7: Applicability of positive words based on terminology

	Diff in means	95 pct CI	p-value
Violent	0.17	(-0.01, 0.35)	0.06
Uneducated	0.15	(-0.04, 0.35)	0.13
Immoral	0.14	(-0.06, 0.33)	0.16
Lazy	0.08	(-0.09, 0.25)	0.36
Unlawful	-0.05	(-0.29, 0.19)	0.66

Table 8: Applicability of negative words based on terminology

Control vs. criminality

	Diff in means	95 pct CI	p-value
Loyal	0.19	(-0.03, 0.41)	0.1
Intelligent	-0.04	(-0.3, 0.21)	0.75
Hardworking	-0.07	(-0.29, 0.15)	0.51
Honest	-0.15	(-0.4, 0.1)	0.24
Responsible	-0.16	(-0.41, 0.1)	0.23

Table 9: Applicability of positive words when criminality is primed

	Diff in means	95 pct CI	p-value
Uneducated	0.06	(-0.18, 0.29)	0.63
Violent	0.09	(-0.12, 0.31)	0.39
Lazy	0.1	(-0.09, 0.3)	0.3
Immoral	0.18	(-0.05, 0.4)	0.12
Unlawful	0.25	(-0.04, 0.54)	0.09

Table 10: Applicability of positive words when criminality is primed

Control vs. no criminality

	Diff in means	95 pct CI	p-value
Loyal	-0.16	(-0.41, 0.1)	0.23
Responsible	-0.15	(-0.4, 0.1)	0.24
Hardworking	-0.07	(-0.29, 0.15)	0.51
Honest	-0.04	(-0.3, 0.21)	0.75
Intelligent	0.19	(-0.03, 0.41)	0.1

Table 11: Applicability of positive words when no criminality is primed

	Diff in means	95 pct CI	p-value
Unlawful	0.25	(-0.04, 0.54)	0.09
Immoral	0.18	(-0.05, 0.4)	0.12
Lazy	0.1	(-0.09, 0.3)	0.3
Violent	0.09	(-0.12, 0.31)	0.39
Uneducated	0.06	(-0.18, 0.29)	0.63

Table 12: Applicability of positive words when no criminality is primed

2x3 across treatment comparison

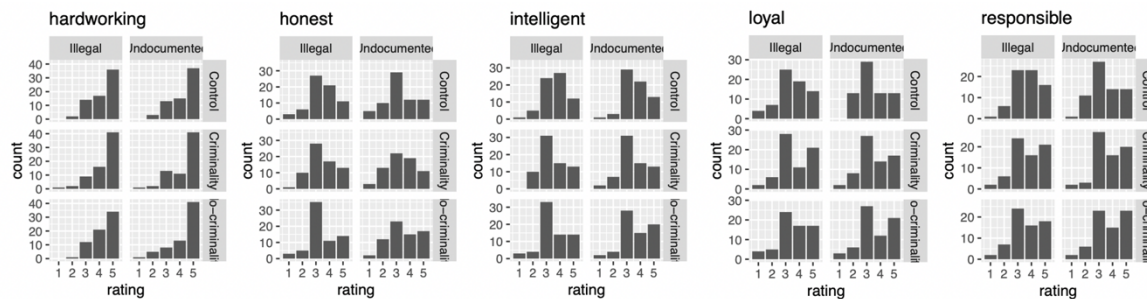


Figure 1: Positive word ratings across all treatments

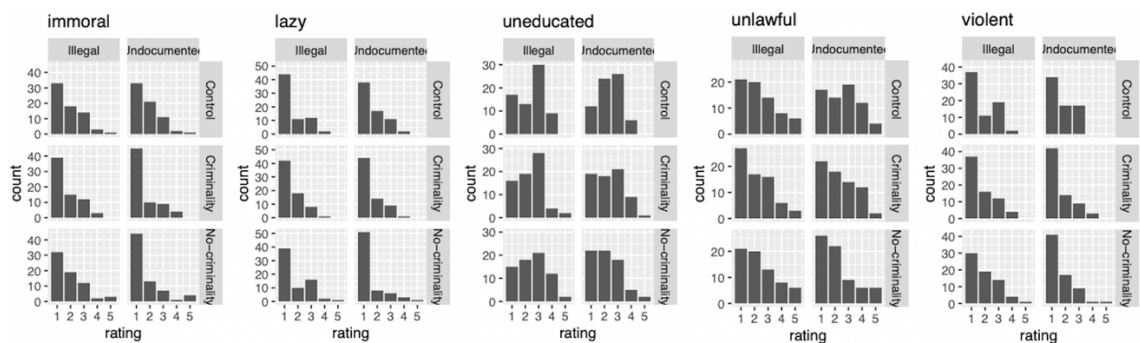


Figure 2: Negative word ratings across all treatments

Figures 1-2 show the distributions for word ratings across all six treatments. These visuals suggest that the individual treatments did not have an effect on the individual word ratings. However, we can see clear trends across positive and negative words. Positive words were rated higher, overwhelmingly in the 3 to 5 range, while negative words were rated lower,

overwhelmingly in the 1 to 3 range. Hardworking was by far the highest rated positive word. Uneducated was the highest rated negative word, perhaps because it is less of a normative judgment like the other adjectives and more so an acknowledgement that unauthorized immigrants have less access to education.

9 Appendix C: Demographics

Below are the breakdowns for the demographic information of this student survey pool. None of the questions on this survey, including demographics, were mandatory for students to answer, as per IRB protocol. Therefore, the tables below may have totals lower than 412.

	Number of respondents
Age 18	79
Age 19	87
Age 20	93
Age 21	86
Age 22	38
Age 23	9
Ages 24-29	10
Ages 30+	4

Table 11: Age of respondents

	Number of respondents
Female	237
Male	166
Other	4

Table 12: Gender of respondents

	Number of respondents
White	241
Asian	73
Black or African American	23
American Indian or Alaskan Native	1
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	1
Multi-racial	10
Other	45

Table 13: Race of respondents

Number of respondents	
No	319
Yes	84

Table 14: Ethnicity of respondents

Number of respondents	
Democrat	241
Republican	58
Independent	96
Other	12

Table 15: Party of respondents

Number of respondents	
Extremely liberal	95
Liberal	140
Slightly liberal	59
Moderate, middle of the road	35
Slightly conservative	46
Conservative	24
Extremely conservative	7

Table 16: Ideology of respondents on a 7-point scale

Number of respondents	
Liberal	294
Moderate, middle of the road	35
Conservative	77

Table 17: Ideology of respondents

	Number of respondents
My parents, grandparents and I were all born in the USA.	161
I was born in the USA, but at least one of my parents is an immigrant.	136
My parents and I were born in the USA, but at least one of my grandparents was an immigrant.	56
I am an immigrant to the USA and a naturalized citizen.	26
Other.	29

Table 18: Immigration status of respondents