Can Political Speech Reduce Xenophobic Prejudice?*

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Abstract

Political speech frequently appeals to xenophobic prejudice, which shapes political preferences and behavior, and feeds the success of the populist right. Whether political speech can be used effectively to *stem* xenophobic prejudice, however, remains unexplored. We identify three mechanisms through which political speech could reduce xenophobic prejudice: (1) extending conceptions of the in-group by highlighting commonalities between immigrants and host communities; (2) emphasizing tolerance as an in-group social norm; and (3) providing information that counters harmful stereotypes about immigrants. Using quotes from US politicians in three survey experiments, we find that pro-immigrant speech can decrease xenophobic attitudes when it stresses norms of tolerance or counters negative stereotypes about immigrants. However, the effects are small and can only be detected with sufficiently large sample sizes. Pro-immigrant speech has no effect on behavior toward immigrants. In sum, our experiments show that political speech has some, albeit limited potential to reduce xenophobic prejudice.

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> "Our openness is part of who we are... we must never give in to those who would throw away our values, with the appalling prospect of repatriating migrants who are here totally legally and have lived here for years. We are Great Britain because of immigration, not in spite of it." (David Cameron, UK Prime Minister, 28 Nov 2014)[1]

> "For more than 200 years, our tradition of welcoming immigrants from around the world has given us a tremendous advantage over other nations. It's kept us youthful, dynamic, and entrepreneurial." (Barack Obama, US President, 20 Nov 2014)[2]

> "My story is really not much different from millions of other Americans. Immigrants have been coming to our shores for generations to live the dream that is America. They wanted better for their children than for themselves. That remains the dream of all of us, and in this country we have seen time and again that that dream is achievable." (Nikki Haley, Governor of South Carolina, 12 Jan 2016)[3]

Politicians devote significant attention to the issue of immigration. Some demonize immigrants and use this issue to enflame xenophobic prejudice, often reaping electoral rewards in the process (Brader, Valentino and Suhay 2008; Ford, Goodwin and Cutts 2012; Ivarsflaten 2008; Valentino, Hutchings and White 2002). However, politicians also regularly champion immigration, as the opening quotations illustrate. Whether these pro-immigration appeals dampen prejudice remains unexplored.

The frequency with which politicians endorse immigration makes the lack of scholarly attention to these appeals a striking omission. Between 1998 and 2013, party manifestos in both Western Europe and North America spoke positively about immigration more often than nega-

[1] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-30250299

[2] https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/11/20/remarks-president-address-nation-immigration

[3] https://edition.cnn.com/2016/01/12/politics/state-of-the-union-2016-republican-response-nikki-haley/index.html

tively (Lehmann and Zobel 2018). While some mainstream parties have responded to radical right success with increased skepticism toward immigration (Abou-Chadi and Krause 2018), most have not radicalized their stance (Akkerman 2015; Alonso and Fonseca 2012; Mudde 2013). In the US, Democrats firmly support immigration (Wong 2017), and Republicans, despite their general hardline stance on this issue, have described the country as "...a melting pot with room for those who dare to dream,"[4] stressed that "...people from everywhere have made America great,"[5] and said that "America's immigrant history made of us who we are."[6]

Prior work has studied prejudice reduction outside of political speech and identified several effective interventions, including perspective taking, norm change, and countering stereotypes (see Paluck and Green 2009*b* for a review). We merge these previously unconnected insights with social identity theory (SIT) to explore whether and how pro-immigrant political speech reduces xenophobic prejudice in native populations.

According to SIT, individuals' group identities generate prejudice against out-groups through three inter-related processes (McArthur and Friedman 1980; Tajfel and Turner 1979): (1) self-identification with a social group, which leads to the categorization of other individuals as either in-group or out-group members; (2) a psychological need to maintain in-group membership, requiring adherence to in-group norms; and (3) the assignment of positive value to the in-group and negative value to the out-group, which gives rise to the perception that out-group members constitute a threat to the positive distinctiveness of the in-group.

Prejudice reduction treatments interfere with these processes by changing perceptions of in-

[4]Senator Rand Paul. 2013. https://blogs.wsj.com/washwire/2013/03/19/text-of-rand-pauls-immigration-speech/

[5]Senator John McCain. 2018. https://twitter.com/SenJohnMcCain/status/951892536116817921

[6]President George W. Bush. 2019. https://www.cbsnews.com/news/george-w-bush-speech-george-w-bush-says-immigration-is-a-blessing-and-a-strength-urges-politicians-to-dial-down-rhetoric-today/

and out-groups. First, perspective taking interventions impede categorization by invoking empathy and extending conceptions of in-group membership to former out-group members (Broockman and Kalla 2016; Simonovits, Kezdi and Kardos 2018; Robinson 2016). Second, norm change interventions introduce tolerance as an in-group norm, and thereby interfere with the process of maintaining group membership, which requires adhering to this norm (see Blinder, Ford and Ivarsflaten 2013; Paluck and Green 2009*a*; Tankard and Paluck 2016). Third, stereotype countering treatments provide accurate information about out-groups and thereby undermine perceptions of out-group threat, which are often based on invalid negative information about those groups (Blinder 2015; Tversky and Kahneman 1973). Building on these insights, we examine whether political speech that uses these three mechanisms (i.e., stresses common humanity, reinforces norms of tolerance, or counters harmful stereotypes) reduces xenophobic prejudice.

Our empirical design relies on real political speech by national leaders and we conducted three separate experimental studies: one embedded over three waves of a national survey ($N \approx 3,000$) and two pilots ($N \approx 360$ and $N \approx 800$). The experiments randomly assigned respondents to one of the three political speech treatments or a control condition before measuring xenophobic attitudes and behavior. The first treatment stressed common humanity, the second reinforced norms of tolerance, and the third countered stereotypes. The norms and countering stereotypes treatments manipulated in- and out-group perceptions as intended, although the effect of norms was relatively larger. Moreover, these two treatments decreased xenophobic attitudes, but their effects are small and can only be detected with sufficiently large sample sizes. The common humanity treatment altered neither in- and out-group perceptions nor xenophobic attitudes. Regarding behavior toward immigrants, the effects are consistently null across all treatments. To summarize, the pro-immigrant political speech in our experiments had some, albeit limited, power to reduce xenophobic prejudice.

Our study contributes to a better understanding of what does and does not work in prejudice reduction and has three distinct strengths. We offer the first investigation of the effects of real political speech on xenophobic prejudice. This improves on prior work that has either looked at

positive framing of the immigration issue (but not political speech) (Voss, Silva and Bloemraad 2019) or used artificial political speech (Flores 2018). Second, our study directly evaluates three clearly specified and theoretically derived mechanisms of prejudice reduction, while prior work often uses complex treatments that do not clearly isolate the mechanism (see, e.g., Simonovits, Kezdi and Kardos 2018). Third, we consider both attitudes and behavior, thereby establishing the scope of the political speech effects. We elaborate on our contributions in the conclusion.

Political Speech and Xenophobic Prejudice Reduction: Theory

Xenophobic prejudice refers to negative attitudes toward foreigners and immigrants, based on generalized negative beliefs and opinions about them as a group (Allport 1954; Harding et al. 1954). It shapes policy preferences (see, e.g., Blinder 2015; Burns and Gimpel 2000; Ivarsflaten 2005; McLaren 2003), fuels anti-immigrant violence, inspires protests, and swells the ranks of nativist political movements (Benček and Strasheim 2016; Ivarsflaten 2008; Merolla et al. 2013). Moreover, xenophobic prejudice responds to elite discussions of immigration: negative and threatening frames of the issue raise the prevalence of exclusionary attitudes toward immigrants (Albertson and Gadarian 2013; Hopkins 2010), enhance opposition to immigration (Blinder 2015; Brader, Valentino and Suhay 2008; Valentino, Brader and Jardina 2013) and amplify the influence of ethnic identity in politics (Pérez 2015). However, little is known about the effects of pro-immigrant political speech on xenophobic prejudice.

Drawing on insights from SIT and past research of prejudice reduction, we hypothesize that pro-immigrant political speech, which alters perceptions of in- and out-groups, can reduce xenophobic prejudice. Below, we explain the relevance of three processes central to SIT in the formation of prejudice and then identify three types of interventions which have been shown to interfere with these processes: (1) perspective taking, i.e., extending conceptions of in-group membership to former out-group members and stressing a common humanity; (2) norm change, i.e., highlighting the in-group norm of tolerance; and (3) countering negative stereotypes by providing accurate information about the contributions of out-group members, for instance in the economic or social sphere.

Because xenophobic prejudice is rooted in deeply held conceptions of identity (Citrin, Reingold and Green 1990; Kalkan, Layman and Uslaner 2009; Wright 2011), SIT sheds light upon its formation and reduction. Three inter-connected processes are relevant. First, individuals self-categorize as members of a specific social group, leading to identification with that group and giving rise to a social identity. A person's social identity complements their unique idiosyncratic traits and forms part of an individual's self-concept (Tajfel and Turner 1979). Simultaneously, an individual categorizes others as either sharing their identity, i.e. as members of the in-group, or as being different, and hence, members of the out-group. Second, individuals cognitively represent groups as characterized by norms that describe and prescribe the behavior of group members. An individual's psychological need to maintain in-group membership therefore requires attitudinal and behavioral adherence to in-group norms (Hogg and Reid 2006). Third, due to a need for positive self-esteem and a positive in-group image, individuals extend positive regard, cooperation, and empathy to in-group members, but negatively evaluate the out-group (Turner and Reynolds 2012; Tajfel and Turner 1979). As a result, out-group members are perceived as threatening the positive distinctiveness of the in-group. The perceived threat may concern the in-group's social identity, its goals and values, its position in the social hierarchy, or, in the extreme, its existence (Dancygier 2010; Hewstone, Rubin and Willis 2002; Quillian 1995). Together, these three mechanisms—categorization, maintaining membership of a favored in-group, and out-group threat perceptions—cause in-group members to exhibit prejudice in their attitudes and actions toward out-group members (see, e.g., Tajfel and Turner 1979). Consequently, interventions that interrupt these mechanisms should reduce prejudice. We now turn to three such interventions.

Common humanity: Expanding the in-group

Interventions that extend conceptions of in-group membership to former out-group members can be effective in reducing xenophobic prejudice. Such interventions invoke empathy by drawing on shared experiences of in- and out-group members (perspective taking) or by directly appealing to a shared superordinate identity (common humanity). As Gaertner and Dovidio (2005 p. 625) note, "if members of different groups are induced to conceive of themselves as a single group rather than

as two completely separate groups, attitudes toward former outgroup members will become more positive through the cognitive and motivational forces that result from ingroup formation."

Evidence from a wide range of contexts indicates the effectiveness of in-group expanding interventions. Broockman and Kalla (2016) show that perspective-taking significantly and durably reduces anti-transgender prejudice and increases support for non-discrimination legislation. Their intervention invites voters to reflect on a situation in which they were judged negatively for being different and encourages them to see this universal experience as a window into transgender people's experiences. Likewise, Simonovits, Kezdi and Kardos (2018) report that participation of young Hungarian adults in an online perspective-taking game reduces anti-Roma prejudice. Interventions that directly re-categorize in- and out-group members as part of a common superordinate group are similarly effective. A field experiment in Malawi shows that raising the salience of a shared superordinate national identity diminished ethnic barriers to trust (Robinson 2016), and a study of prejudice against Syrian refugees in Turkey finds that appealing to a shared religious Muslim or Sunni identity reduces exclusionary behavior and attitudes (Lazarev and Sharma 2017). Applying the common humanity intervention to pro-immigrant political speech, we anticipate that:

> Hypothesis 1 (*Common humanity*: Political speech that extends conceptions of in-group membership to immigrants reduces xenophobic prejudice.

Norms: Introducing acceptance of diversity and tolerance as in-group norms

Interventions that promote acceptance of diversity and tolerance as normative for the in-group can also reduce prejudice. These interventions build on individuals' psychological need to maintain group membership (e.g. Tajfel and Turner 1979), which requires following in-group norms that delineate the beliefs, behaviors, and traits of the in-group from those of out-groups (Hogg and Reid 2006). Interventions that emphasize tolerance and acceptance of diversity as in-group norms may therefore cause individuals to adjust their beliefs and behaviors to match these norms.

Empirical work indicates that prejudice reduction efforts, which target perceptions of social norms, are highly effective. Paluck and Green (2009*a*) conducted a year-long field experiment

that employed a radio soap opera to enhance norms of inter-group tolerance in Rwanda; they found that prejudice was reduced across a wide range of behaviors including intermarriage, open dissent, cooperation, and trauma healing. Less demanding interventions also produce significant effects. For instance, telling participants that racial stereotyping is not normative for their peer group reduces stereotyping in the laboratory (Stangor, Sechrist and Jost 2001). Similarly, Blinder, Ford and Ivarsflaten (2013) show that highlighting anti-prejudice in-group norms increases support for the equal treatment of asylum seekers. In the context of political speech, this discussion leads to the following expectation:

> Hypothesis 2 (*Norms*): Political speech that introduces acceptance and tolerance of immigrants as normative for the native in-group reduces xenophobic prejudice.

Countering stereotypes: Providing accurate information about immigrants

Interventions that target negative stereotypes, i.e., invalid generalized associations between immigrants and a series of social and economic problems, by providing accurate information about the out-group, can reduce threat perceptions and xenophobic prejudice. Perceptions of immigrants often significantly diverge from reality in ways that exacerbate perceptions of threat. For example, members of the public tend to overestimate the number of immigrants in the population and this innumeracy correlates strongly with threat perceptions from immigrants and with restrictive immigration policy preferences (Citrin and Sides 2008; Herda 2015).

Information that corrects misperceptions and counters stereotypes can change attitudes and preferences. For example, a recent study shows that, out of 17 interventions tested, providing counter-stereotypical information about racial groups (e.g., linking blacks with positivity) was most effective in reducing implicit racial bias (Lai et al. 2014). Another study similarly found that counter-stereotypical images of gender roles reduce spontaneous gender biases (Finnegan, Oakhill and Garnham 2015). In the immigration context, Facchini, Margalit and Nakata (2016) performed a large-scale experimental study in Japan and found that information regarding the potential social and economic benefits from immigration increased support for a more open immigration policy.

Information that focuses on the sociotropic benefits of immigration appears critical: Hopkins and Citrin (2019) found that just providing individuals with information about the scope of immigration has no effect on attitudes. In the context of political speech, this discussion implies:

> Hypothesis 3 (*Countering stereotypes*): Political speech that provides information about the sociotropic benefits of immigration reduces xenophobic prejudice.

Research Design

We test our hypotheses with three survey experiments (a main study and two pilots), which randomly assigned respondents to read one of four short texts: three composed of actual statements from US politicians on immigration and one non-political control text. The survey experiments have two important advantages compared to observational studies of the effects of pro-immigration political speech. First, randomization allows us to rule out confounding and reverse causality between xenophobic attitudes and exposure to pro-immigrant political speech. Second, we can tailor treatments that use real political speech but highlight exactly one of the three mechanisms described above.

We fielded our main study as part of Qualtrics' online omnibus survey over three waves: October 2018, November 2018, and December 2018-January 2019. The omnibus survey includes approximately 1,000 respondents per wave, with the target population comprising adult US citizens.[7] Qualtrics uses quotas for gender, age, ethnicity, household income, and US Census regions to produce samples that are approximately nationally representative. We ran our questionnaire in three waves to (a) achieve sufficiently large sample size, and (b) ensure that the data do not represent a single (and potentially unusual) timepoint and that the results have some generalizability over time. The final sample includes close to 3,000 respondents. More information on the survey and sample can be found in Supplementary Information (SI) 1 (pp. 1–5; see also Table S.1, p. 12, for descriptive statistics). We pre-registered an analysis plan for our survey results (available in SI

[7]To further ensure that only citizens are included in our study, we used a screening question to remove non-US citizens from our sample.

2, pp. 5–9); all results below follow that plan unless otherwise indicated. We ran the pilot studies with respondents from Amazon MTurk: Pilot 1 included about 360 respondents and was fielded in August 2018, and Pilot 2 included about 800 respondents and was fielded in September 2018. We briefly discuss the main findings from these pilot studies below; details and full results for each are in SI 3 (pp. 9–10) and Figure S.3 (p. 20).

Treatments

We randomly assigned respondents to read one of four short texts, which we label *Common Humanity*, *Countering Stereotypes*, *Norms*, and *Control*. We constructed the treatment texts using statements on immigration from US politicians; the control text explained the benefits of sleep. We introduced the treatment texts with the following preamble: "Please carefully read the following excerpts from speeches made by prominent politicians in the U.S. about immigration. Once you have read the text, we will ask you a few questions about them."[8] The *Common Humanity* text focuses on quotes that extend conceptions of in-group membership (e.g., phrases that remind readers that "we are all immigrants") and tests H1. The *Norms* text contains quotes that call on Americans to uphold in-group norms of inclusiveness, tolerance, and acceptance of diversity; we use it to test H2. Similarly, we test H3 with the *Countering Stereotypes* text, which presents information about the positive contribution of immigrants to the American economy. Table 1 presents each of the four texts in full.[9]

[8]The preamble for the control group read as follows, "Please carefully read the following excerpts from speeches made by prominent scholars at the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute about the importance of sleep. Once you have read the text, we will ask you a few questions about them."

[9]Pilot 2 was structured similarly. Pilot 1 included a pure control group, which did not read any text and proceeded directly to the outcome items, in addition to the four groups listed here. For consistency across studies, we exclude respondents assigned to this group from our analyses.

Table 1. Treatment Information

Condition	Text	Politicians
Common Humanity	"There's something unique about America [...] – we are born of immigrants. That is who we are. Immigration is our origin story." "In [...] new Americans, we see our own American stories—our parents, our grandparents, our aunts, our uncles, our cousins who packed up what they could and scraped together what they had." "As the son of immigrants, my grandfather, who only had an 8th grade education, would live to see his own children all go to college." "[O]ur families—all of our families—come from someplace else." "Many of you [...] are Americans by choice, and you have followed in the path of millions." "[W]e're a nation of immigrants."	George W. Bush, Barack Obama, Rand Paul
Countering Stereotypes	"One of the primary reasons America became a great power in the 20th century is because we welcomed the talent [...] of immigrant families. The contributions of immigrants to America continue." "Many of the Fortune 500 companies in this country were founded by immigrants or their children. Many of the tech startups in Silicon Valley have at least one immigrant founder." "[In some parts of the country], 35 percent of business owners are immigrants–and [in those parts, the] economy is among the fastest growing in the country. That's not an accident. That's the impact that our talented, hardworking immigrants can have. That's the difference they can make." "The hard work of [...] immigrants helped make our economy the largest in the world."	George W. Bush, Barack Obama
Norms	"We've got to honor the great American tradition of the melting pot." "We make [newcomers] earn it, but we welcome them." "And every generation of immigrants has reaffirmed our ability to assimilate newcomers, which is one of the defining strengths of America." "[W]e must never, ever believe that our diversity is a weakness. It is our greatest strength." "This means that people of every race, religion, and ethnicity can be fully and equally American. It means that bigotry or white supremacy in any form is blasphemy against the American creed." "Standing up for each other is what the values enshrined in [the constitution] compel us to do—especially when it's hard. Especially when it's not convenient. That's when it counts."	George W. Bush, Bill Clinton, Barack Obama
Sleep (control)	"Sleep plays a vital role in good health and well-being throughout your life. Getting enough quality sleep at the right times can help protect your mental health, physical health, quality of life, and safety." [For example,] "studies show that a good night's sleep improves learning and problem-solving skills." [Studies also show that] "sleep is involved in healing and repair of your heart and blood vessels, while ongoing sleep deficiency is linked to an increased risk of heart disease, kidney disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, and stroke." [Furthermore,] "people who are sleep deficient are less productive at work and school. They take longer to finish tasks, have a slower reaction time, and make more mistakes."	Source: National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute

We subjected our treatments to pre-tests, which asked respondents to what extent they thought each vignette represented its intended theme. Pre-tests used samples of university undergraduates or MTurkers. Results of the final pre-test, which used an MTurk sample and tested vignettes that closely match those used in the main study and pilots, are available in SI 4 (pp. 10–11; see also Table S.8, p. 18) and confirm that our treatments largely work as intended. That is, among the three texts, the one on *Common Humanity* was the most effective at conveying the message that immigrants and Americans share a common humanity. Similarly, the messages that American norms include tolerance toward immigrants and that immigrants are good for the economy were best communicated by the *Norms* and *Countering Stereotypes* texts, respectively.

Our treatment design aims to maximize realism, retain respondent attention and minimize confounding by factors other than the themes contained in the quotes. To maximize realism we construct our treatments from actual pro-immigrant speech by politicians. We also calibrated the length of our quotes to represent a reasonable amount of exposure to political speech: our quotes are longer than newspaper headlines but shorter than full-length articles. Pre-test respondents spent roughly 80 seconds reading the treatments, which resembles the average amount of time that an individual stays engaged with a news article.[10] As prior work has found significant treatment effects of one- to three-sentence xenophobic messages (e.g. Pérez 2015), we believe that our treatments are long enough that respondents can absorb the intended messages yet short enough that respondents do not lose attention. Further, restricting the treatment to text, rather audio or video, eliminates the possibility that a speaker's style and persuasiveness influence responses to treatment.

We did not inform respondents of who delivered the statements on immigration. This approach follows other work on xenophobia (Perez 2015), and limits the influence of messenger effects—i.e., that who says something matters more than what is said. While this deviates from actual political speech, which citizens rarely consume without knowledge of the messenger, it provides a

[10] A recent report shows that an average user stays actively engaging with the content of an online news article for about 77 seconds (Kukoleva, Preobrazhenskaya and Sidorova 2017).

clean test of the effects of the messages contained in political speech.[11]

Attitudinal outcomes

Our survey included two sets of outcomes: attitudinal and behavioral. Attitudinally, we capture xenophobia by negative views toward immigrants using two items. First, we asked if respondents would "...welcome it or object if a couple who has come to live in the US from another country moved in as your neighbors?" Answers to this question use a seven-point scale that ranges from "Welcome a lot" to "Object a lot." This item, labelled *Immigrant Neighbors*, relies on prior work (e.g. Ward 2019) and measures natives' willingness to live close to immigrants.

Second, we asked respondents whether they think "that the US should reduce or increase opportunities for people from other countries to come and live here?" Again, we provided seven response categories, ranging from "Should reduce opportunities" to "Should increase opportunities." This question appears frequently in studies of immigration attitudes and on large-scale surveys such as the European Social Survey. The measure, labelled *Increase Immigration*, gauges the disposition to welcome immigrants into the country and complements Immigrant Neighbors, which captures willingness to welcome them into one's community.

We combine these two items using scores from the first dimension of a principal component analysis to create *Immigration Index*.[12] Combining responses to our items minimizes variance due to random measurement error, affording us greater statistical precision. As this increased precision

[11] Pre-test results reported in SI 4 (pp.10–11) and Table S.8 (p.18) show that 72% of respondents attributed the quotes to Democrats, 8% to Republicans, and 19% to politicians from both parties. To the extent that pro-immigrant messages from Democrats have smaller effects, given Democrats' general support for immigration, these perceptions work against finding an effect for our treatments, which contain roughly equal numbers of statements from both parties. Exploring the interaction of message themes and messenger effects represents an important path for future studies.

[12] In SI 1 (pp. 4–5; see also Models 10–12 in Table S.3, p.14), we show that using the arithmetic mean to aggregate *Immigrant Neighbors* and *Increase Immigration* produces similar results.

comes at the cost of interpretability, we present results for the individual items as well. We did not pre-register analyses with *Immigration Index*.

Behavioral outcome

If pro-immigrant political speech reduces prejudice, we would expect to see this reflected not only in attitudes, but also in behavior toward immigrants, which we measure by including a short behavioral game in the survey. Games of this type are often used to measure trust and cooperation (e.g., Habyarimana et al. 2007; Whitt and Wilson 2007).

After reading the treatment vignette, but prior to the attitudinal items, respondents participated in four rounds of a trust game, which we modeled on prior work (e.g. LeVeck et al. 2014). In each round of the game, respondents were given an endowment of 10 tokens and told that their payoff depended on the number of tokens they had at the end of the game. Respondents played the game by passing some, all, or none of their tokens to their partner. We told respondents that we would triple the number of tokens sent to the partner, who would then return some, all, or none of the tokens.

The instructions to the game stated that respondents would play with other survey participants. In reality, the partners were fictitious; we explained this to respondents during debriefing. We provided four pieces of information about partners in each round: the partner's age, state of residence, gender, and whether he or she was born in the US. We did not randomize age and state of residence; these changed from round to round but were the same for all respondents in a given round. In contrast, we randomized gender and country of birth across rounds and respondents.

If respondents expected their partner to return more than one-third of the tokens, they could increase their final payoff by sending more tokens. Otherwise, they maximized their payoff by keeping all of the tokens. Hence, the greater a respondent's trust in their partner to return more than one-third of the tokens, the higher the expected payoff from sending more tokens. To induce serious play, we informed respondents that one randomly chosen participant would receive a payment of $10 per token in their possession at the end of the game. Prior to the start of the game, we presented respondents with detailed instructions and examples of how to play; SI 1.4 (pp. 2–4)

presents this text closely following LeVeck et al. (2014).

From the trust game, we measure the number of *Tokens Given* to the second player in each round, which varied from 0 to 10. Because we randomized the partner's national origin (country of birth: US, other), we can measure whether respondents shared more tokens with natives than with immigrants (i.e., the size of the in-group bias) and test whether exposure to pro-immigrant political speech reduces this bias.

Empirical methods

We estimate treatment effects with linear regression. For the attitudinal outcomes, the regressions adjust for all the covariates collected as part of our study (*Age*, *Education*, *Race*, *Gender*, *Region*, *Partisanship*, *News Consumption*, *Survey Wave*). As higher values indicate more favorable views toward immigrants for all three attitudinal outcomes, we expect the coefficients on our treatments to be positive and significant: consuming the pro-immigration messages contained in the treatment texts should reduce exclusionary attitudes.

For *Tokens Given*, we use a difference-in-differences type specification, in which we interact each treatment with partner origin, include respondent fixed effects, round fixed effects, controls for partner gender and origin, and cluster standard errors at the respondent level. We expect our treatments to shrink the gap in *Tokens Given* between native and foreign-born partners: that is, compared to respondents in the control group, those exposed to pro-immigrant political speech should show less difference in their level of trust in native versus foreign partners. In terms of regression coefficients, we expect positive effects on the interactions between treatment and partner origin. All empirical specifications follow our pre-analysis plan (which includes formal regression equations; see SI 2 pp. 5–9).

Results

We present our results in two steps. First, we explore whether the manipulation worked as intended, i.e., whether respondents understood the treatment vignettes and adjusted their beliefs about the in-group, out-group, and social norms to match the messages conveyed in the treatments. After

that, we estimate the effects of our treatments on immigration attitudes and trust game behavior.

Comprehension and uptake of vignette themes

Three conditions must be met for the political speech contained in our treatments to impact attitudes and behavior. First, the speech must convey the intended messages. Our pre-tests confirm that this condition is met (see above, SI 4, pp. 10–11, and Table S.8, p.18). Second, respondents must understand the content of our vignettes. Third, if the treatments impact attitudes according to the mechanisms we propose, respondents' beliefs about in-group and out-group membership, norms, and immigrants' economic contributions must shift based on the treatment they received. We test the second and third conditions below.

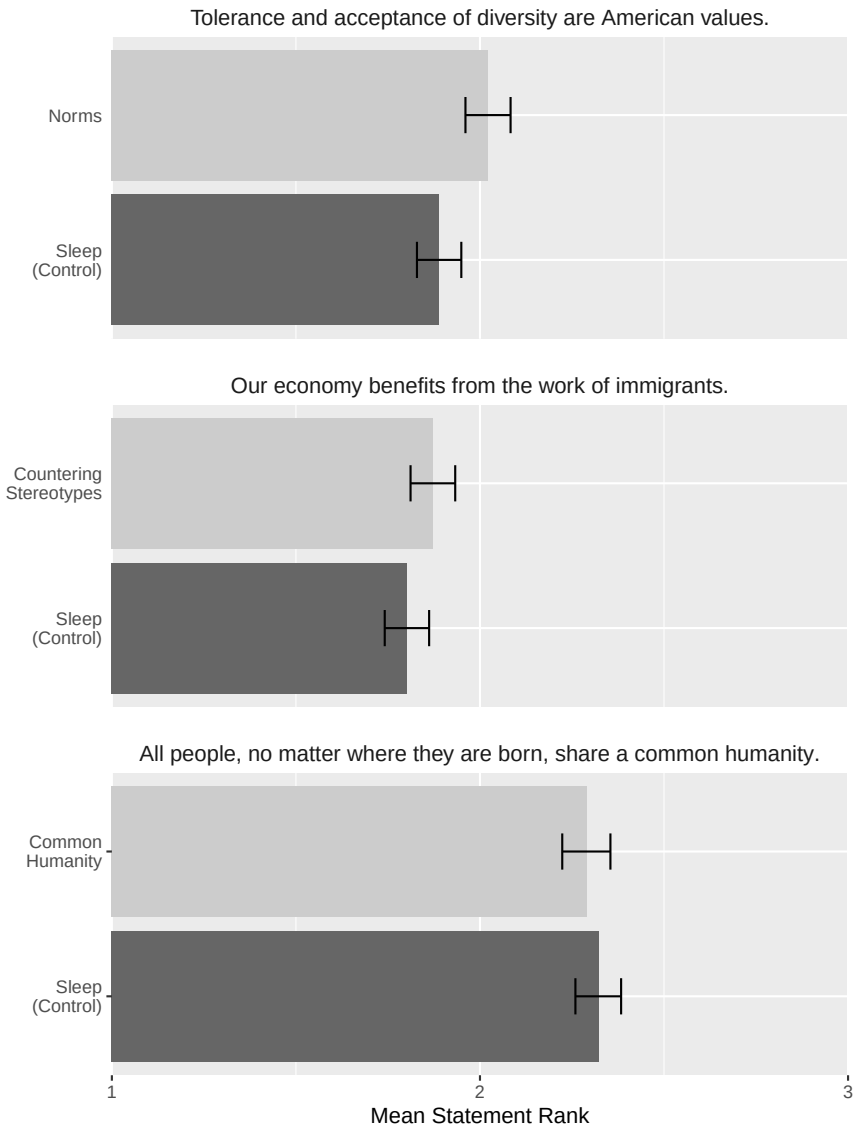
We assess treatment comprehension with three yes-or-no questions that required respondents to recall the content and arguments of the text that they read. To prevent respondents from "straight-lining" through these questions, two questions had "yes" as the correct answer, one "no" (for question wording, see SI 1.3, pp. 1–2). These questions appeared immediately after our treatment texts and in randomized order.

Respondent comprehension of treatments was generally high: on average, respondents answered 2.27 (out of 3) questions correctly.[13] Split by treatment, the average numbers of correct answers in the *Common Humanity*, *Norms*, and *Countering Stereotypes* groups were 2.30, 2.19, and 2.31, respectively. The low variation in correct answer rates across treatments indicates that the vignettes were relatively similar in terms of comprehensibility.

We now assess whether respondents took up the themes embedded in our treatments, adjusting their beliefs about in-group membership, in-group norms, and out-group contributions as intended. This serves as a manipulation check. Specifically, we presented respondents with the following three statements (in random order and after treatment): "All people, no matter where they are born, share a common humanity"; "Tolerance and acceptance of diversity are American values"; and "Our economy benefits from the work of people who have come to live here from other countries." These statements capture the perceptions we intended to manipulate with the *Common Humanity*,

[13]Respondents in the *Control* group gave 2.50 correct answers, on average.

Figure 1. Manipulation check: respondents' beliefs based on treatment assignment



Note: Bars represent within-group averages with 95% confidence intervals.

Norms, and *Countering Stereotypes* treatments, respectively. We then asked respondents to "?rank them in the order in which you agree with them, from 1 = you agree with the most to 3 = you agree with the least." From these rankings, we created the variable *Statement Ranking* for each statement, reversing the scale so that higher values indicate greater agreement.

Figure 1 reports the average of *Statement Ranking* for each statement. The top panel presents rankings for the *Norms* statement, the middle and bottom panels provide rankings of the *Countering Stereotypes* and the *Common Humanity* statements. Each panel contrasts the average for respondents whose treatment matches the statement and for control respondents. If respondents

adjusted their beliefs to match the arguments that they read, then we should find higher values when the treatment and statement match, in comparison to the control group. We formalize these differences with regression estimates that adjust for covariates (see Table S.2, p.13). Respondents in the *Norms* group ranked this statement 0.13 points higher than the control group, on average ($p < 0.01$; all p-values represent two-sided tests), while *Countering Stereotypes* respondents placed that statement 0.07 points higher than the control group, on average ($p < 0.10$). In contrast, respondents who read the *Common Humanity* treatment had lower levels of agreement with the corresponding statement than control respondents (difference $= -0.02$, $p = 0.61$). Additionally, Figure S.2 (p.19) compares the treatment groups to each other and shows that each statement is ranked highest by the group that received the corresponding treatment. Again, however, the differences are larger with respect to *Norms* and *Countering Stereotypes* than *Common Humanity*.

In sum, these tests show that respondents understood our treatments, but that uptake of the intended messages was mixed. Respondents clearly absorbed the *Norms* message, and to a lesser extent, the *Countering Stereotypes* message increased agreement with the corresponding theme. The *Common Humanity* treatment did not increase agreement that "All people, no matter where they are born, share a common humanity." This null result may reflect a ceiling effect: as Figure 1 shows, control respondents agreed with the common humanity statement at high levels, meaning that respondents in the *Common Humanity* group may have received a text that tried to persuade them of something they largely already believed.

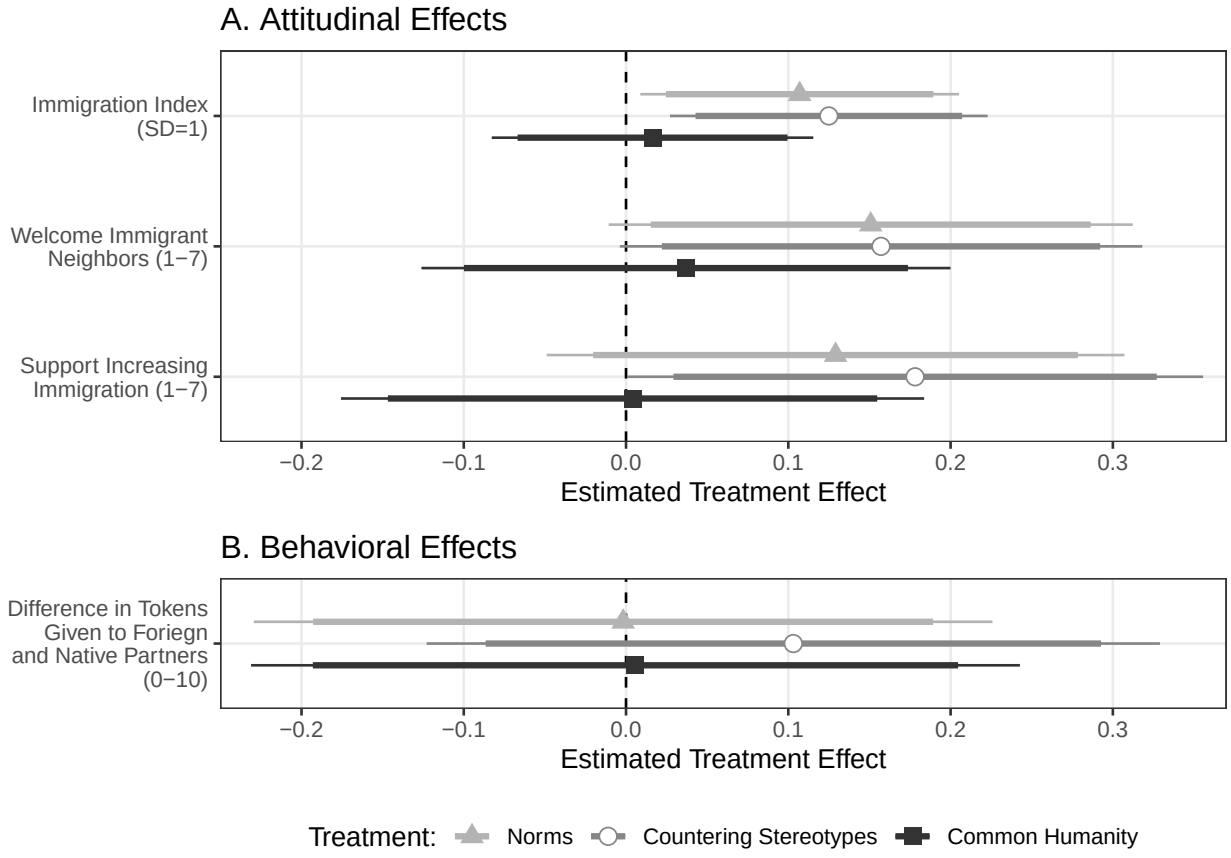
Effects on immigration attitudes

Panel A of Figure 2 presents the estimated effects of our three political speech treatments on the attitudinal outcomes: *Immigration Index*, *Immigrant Neighbors*, and *Increase Immigration*.[14] As explained above, *Immigration Index* is the first principal component of the other two outcomes (which come directly from the survey). The estimates for *Immigration Index* paint a clear picture of which treatments shifted respondents' attitudes. *Norms* and *Countering Stereotypes* produce positive and statistically significant effects. Specifically, the estimated effects are 0.11 ($p = 0.03$)

[14]Table S.3 (p. 14) presents the corresponding regression estimates.

for *Norms* and 0.12 ($p = 0.01$) for *Countering Stereotypes*. As *Immigration Index* has a standard deviation of one by design, these effect sizes approximately equal 10% of a standard deviation. In contrast, we see no evidence of an effect for *Common Humanity* (est. $= 0.02$, $p = 0.75$).

Figure 2. Treatment Effects



Note: Points indicate effect estimates with 95% (thin) and 90% (thick) confidence intervals.

Combining our outcomes reduces random measurement error and increases precision, but comes at the cost of reduced transparency regarding which item(s) treatment primarily affected. For these reasons, we also report results for the raw survey items. Focusing on *Immigrant Neighbors*, the estimates reinforce the inferences described for *Immigration Index*. For the *Norms* and *Countering Stereotypes* treatments, we estimate effects of 0.15 ($p = 0.07$) and of 0.16 ($p = 0.06$), respectively. These effects approximately equal 10% of a standard deviation in *Immigrant Neighbors*, similar to the effect sizes we documented for *Immigration Index*. They also reflect the decreased precision when shifting from our index to the individual survey items, achieving statistical

significance only at the 10% level. *Common Humanity* again produces an effect that is smaller, at 0.04, and that is far from statistical significance ($p = 0.66$). Under an assumption of constant treatment effects across respondents, the *Norms* and *Countering Stereotypes* effect can be interpreted as causing one in seven and one in six treated respondents, respectively, to select a response category one level more positive toward immigration.[15]

Finally, the estimated effects for *Increase Immigration* are 0.13 ($p = 0.16$), 0.18 ($p = 0.05$), and 0.01 ($p = 0.97$) for the *Norms*, *Countering Stereotypes*, and *Common Humanity* treatments, respectively. These estimates follow pattern established above: the *Countering Stereotypes* effect amounts to roughly 10% of standard deviation of *Increase Immigration*, the *Norms* effect is slightly smaller (7% of a standard deviation of *Increase Immigration*), both of these estimates have less precision than the *Immigration Index* estimates, and we see no evidence for an effect of *Common Humanity*.

To explore the robustness of these results, we turn to our two pilot studies (analyses available in SI 3, pp. 9–10, and Figure S.3, p. 20). Pilot 1included a richer set of attitudinal measures than the main study, five items in total. Across all five items, including the two from the main survey, estimated treatment effects are consistently null, or even opposite to the expected direction, and do not achieve statistical significance. Combining them into an index, thereby reducing measurement error, still does not produce significant effects. In short, contrary to the main study, Pilot 1 produces consistent null results for all treatments. This may, of course, be an artifact of a small sample size ($N \approx 360$), roughly one-tenth of the main study).

We therefore turn to Pilot 2 ($N \approx 800$), which included the item *Immigrant Neighbors* but not the *Increase Immigration* item. Instead, it included a different attitudinal measure: *Immigrants Enrich Culture*, which comes from the following survey item, "Would you say that people who come to live in the US from other countries generally undermine or enrich America's cultural life?" Respondents answered on a seven-point scale ranging from "Enrich a lot" to "Undermine a lot." As before, we combined the two items (*Immigrant Neighbors* and *Immigrants Enrich Culture*)

[15] $1/7 \approx 0.142$ and $1/6 \approx 0.167$

into an index using principal component analysis. The results show that the *Norms* treatment had positive and significant effect on *Immigrant Neighbors* and the combined index, while the effect of the other two treatments remained close to zero. Robustness tests show that the results hold when not adjusting for covariates or only adjusting for imbalanced covariates (see Table S.3, p.14). We also performed an exploratory analysis of heterogenous effects in our main study (see Table S.4, p.15). We do not find evidence of heterogeneity: out of 21 interactions between treatment and covariates, we find only one that is significant—roughly what we would expect to find in the absence of heterogeneity based on the definition of p-values.[16]

Taken together, we conclude that the *Norms* and, to a lesser extent, *Countering Stereotypes* treatments can shift attitudes, yet their effects are relatively minor and can only be detected in sufficiently large samples. The *Common Humanity* treatment, however, consistently produced null results, leading us to believe that it cannot reduce prejudicial attitudes. These differential effects across treatments echo the findings of a recent study, which shows that activists can best increase public support for immigration by appealing to American values (which bears similarities to our norms treatment), while appealing to human rights (similar to our common humanity treatment) does not help and may even be counterproductive (Voss, Silva and Bloemraad 2019). The relative weakness of our treatment effects, in turn, corresponds with findings from another recent study, which shows that attitudes on salient and contested issues such as immigration are less affected by framing (Bechtel et al. 2015). Further exploring the reasons behind the weak and differential effects across treatments is beyond the scope of our study, but offers an interesting avenue for future research.

[16]We consider six covariates (*Gender*, *Age [above/below median age]*, *Party ID [Democrats, Republicans, Independents]*, *Education [University degree or not]*, *Race [white/non-white]*, and *News Consumption [daily/less often]*) across our three treatments, producing 21 interactions (note that *Party ID* has three categories). Heterogeneity analysis was not pre-registered.

Effects on behavior toward immigrants

We now turn to analyzing whether pro-immigrant political rhetoric decreases in-group bias in the behavioral game. Panel B of Figure 2 reports estimates of our treatments' ability to reduce the difference in tokens given to native-born and foreign-born partners during the trust game embedded in our survey (full regression results are in Table S.5, p.16). We find no evidence of treatment effects. The estimated coefficients are substantively very small (*Countering Stereotypes*: 0.10, which suggests that this treatment reduced in-group bias by about one-tenth of a token compared to the control group, *Common Humanity*: 0.01, and *Norms*: -0.00). None of these estimates approach statistical significance.

What could explain these null results? We do not believe that respondents simply did not understand how to play the game. They spent an average of 95 seconds reading the instructions, and 70% of our them changed the number of tokens they gave across rounds. Further, Table S.5 (p.16) shows a significant effect of playing with a female partner, indicating that respondents did base play on partner characteristics. We also doubt that any treatment effects had "worn off" by the time respondents participated in the trust game, which was played before our attitudinal items.

Moreover, these null results do not appear to arise from an *ex ante* absence of differences in trust in native compared to foreign-born partners. Respondents in the control group gave native-born partners an average of 5.32 tokens and foreign-born partners an average of 5.08 tokens, a statistically significant difference of 0.24 tokens ($p = 0.03$). Among this same set of respondents, those who played all four rounds of the trust game with native-born partners gave 5.03 tokens on average, while those who played all rounds against foreign-born partners gave 4.52 tokens on average, a difference of 0.51 tokens ($p = 0.09$). Likewise, the within-respondent difference in play against native versus foreign partners among the control group is negative, though less precisely estimated (-0.12 tokens, $p = 0.15$; see Table S.5, p.16). Taken together, this evidence suggests that control group respondents awarded foreign partners systematically fewer tokens than native partners.

Additional evidence reinforces the conclusion that our treatments do not reduce bias against

non-natives in the behavioral game. As a robustness test, we estimated treatment effects for *Tokens Given* to foreign-born partners (i.e., only analyzing rounds played with foreign-born partners). These tests find no effects (see Table S.5, p.16). An exploratory analysis of heterogenous effects, similar to above, also finds no evidence of effects (see Table S.7, p.17; analysis not pre-registered). Results from Pilot 1 corroborate the conclusions from the main analysis: all treatment effects are consistently null (see Figure S.3, p.20). Finally, we considered the possibility that our treatments could indirectly influence behavior, by altering beliefs about the acceptability of prejudice. Two additional items on our survey, one asking respondents how comfortable they feel voicing negative views about immigrants in public and another asking respondents to what extent they believe Americans support treating immigrants differently than US citizens, allow us to test the possibility of indirect effects on behavior. We find no treatment effects on these outcomes (see Table S.6, p.16).

In sum, we find no evidence that pro-immigrant political speech affected behavior toward immigrants in our trust game. This result clarifies the scope conditions for the effect of political speech in our experiment: while it weakly changed attitudes, it could not alter behavior.

Conclusion

We set out to explore whether political speech can reduce xenophobic prejudice. Our study took care to distinguish the effects of three messages that political speech can contain, each theorized to reduce prejudice by affecting beliefs about in- and out-groups. Speech stressing common humanity was hypothesized to decrease prejudice by expanding respondents' conception of in-group to also include immigrants. Speech focusing on norms was hypothesized to reduce prejudice by introducing tolerance as an in-group norm, which individuals have incentives to comply with in order to maintain group membership. Finally, speech that countered stereotypes about immigrants was hypothesized to decrease prejudice by correcting misperceptions about their negative effects on society and economy. Our results provide mixed evidence about the ability of political speech to reduce prejudice. With regard to behavior toward non-natives, the results are unambiguously null. For xenophobic attitudes, we find that speech focusing on norms of tolerance and counter-

ing stereotypes can be effective, while speech emphasizing common humanity is not. Even for the former two types of speech, however, the effects are relatively small and only achieve statistical significance in larger samples. Overall, we conclude that political speech has some limited potential to reduce xenophobic prejudice.

A key strength of our study is that our treatments represent realistic exposure to political speech: they use real speech and keep exposure short, replicating the brevity of politicians' quotes in newspaper articles or news coverage. Our finding that passive consumption of political speech is a relatively weak means to reduce prejudice complements recent work that shows large and lasting effects of more intensive interventions involving active participation (Broockman and Kalla 2016; Simonovits, Kezdi and Kardos 2018). Future research could explore whether more active engagement with pro-immigrant political speech (e.g., in the context of party conferences, town hall meetings, or political demonstrations), or repeated exposure to this type of political speech more effectively reduce xenophobic prejudice than our treatments.

Our study also highlights a striking asymmetry: while multiple pieces of research establish that even brief xenophobic appeals increase exclusionary attitudes and behavior towards immigrants, our findings suggests that pro-immigrant political speech has a much harder time reducing xenophobia and—depending on the message—may not succeed at all. This contrast begs further questions. Is negative speech more potent than positive speech? Is this asymmetry confined to xenophobia alone or does it apply to other types of prejudice? Does positive speech have systematic effects that differ from those that we investigate: for instance, does it affect political mobilization? These questions call for future research.

Rising anti-immigrant speech and waning pro-immigrant speech in the real world enhance this study's relevance. Our results do not suggest that pro-immigrant speech is the silver bullet in tackling xenophobia, but they do suggest that such speech is not completely toothless either. Appealing to norms of tolerance and countering negative stereotypes about immigrants can contribute to keeping xenophobia at bay. Given this, it is possible that the greater presence of pro-immigrant political speech until recently served as a bulwark against further prejudice, and that for politicians

to abandon such statements altogether may lead to normatively troubling consequences.

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