

Impact of Cultural Assimilation and Voter Policy Preferences on Immigrant Politician Competitiveness in Homogeneous Societies: Survey Experimental Evidence from South Korea's Young Generation

Yeonwook Kang (MPP, 2022)

KDI School of Public Policy and Management
kang1995@kdis.ac.kr

9th April, 2025

Overview

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Research Method
- 3 Data, Survey Attributes, Actual Survey Questionnaire Sample
- 4 Result: Main Findings
- 5 Conclusion and Future Study

Introduction

Introduction

● Immigration as the New Norm

- Increased immigration from the Global South to the Global North
- The emergence of new immigrant populations can provoke negative perceptions in origin societies (Gessler, T., Tóth, G., & Wachs, J, 2022; Brown, H. E., 2013)
- Immigration identified as a significant contributor to social challenges (Meuleman, B., Davidov, E., & Billiet, J., 2009; Erez, E., 2017)

● Underrepresentation in Democratic Systems

- Minorities, particularly immigrant groups, often face underrepresentation in contemporary societies (Bloemraad, 2013; Fisher et al., 2015)
- This underrepresentation raises significant concerns regarding the expression of immigrant interests:
 - Impact on policymaking processes (Butler & Broockman, 2011; Grose, 2011; Mansbridge, 1999)
 - Potential to exacerbate social conflicts (Bleich et al., 2010; Dancygier, 2010)

Immigrants often face challenges in host countries due to their small population size and limited political representation

Introduction

However, there are some cases that are chosen by society despite



Figure: Barack Obama



Figure: Rishi Sunak



Figure: Alberto Fujimori



Figure: Antonio Costa

How can they be selected?

Literature Review: Acceptance of Immigration Politician?

- **Main Factor 1: Perception of Immigrants**

- Immigrants' countries of identity influence acceptance in the U.S. and Europe (Lee & Fiske, 2006; Dustmann & Preston, 2007; Hainmueller & Hangartner, 2011; Brader, Valentino & Suhay, 2008)
- Racial or ethnic identity (Carmines & Stimson, 1980) and skin tone (Kinder & Kam, 2009) significantly affect attitudes

- **Main Factor 2: Cultural Assimilation**

- English fluency as a key determinant of assimilation in the U.S. (Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010; Hopkins, 2011; Newman, Hartman & Taber, 2012)

- **Main Factor 3: Policy**

- Rational choice theory highlights the critical role of policies in shaping candidate selection (Downs, 1957)

Ethnocentrism studies emphasize **cultural factors** over economic considerations (Hainmueller & Hopkins, 2012).

Immigrant-Origin Candidates

• Challenges in Researching Politicians of Immigrant Origin

- Limited availability of studies (Valentino & Suhay, 2008)
- Structural disadvantages within political systems (Kinder & Kam, 2009)
- Impact of unfamiliar names on candidate perception (Portmann & Stojanović, 2019)

This presentation emphasizes **cultural assimilation** as the central concept

Research Question & Gap

- **Can Cultural Assimilation Overcome Ethnic Limitations Within Ethnocentrism?**

- **Research Gap:**

- Limited understanding of the role of politicians' personal characteristics, particularly the influence of cultural assimilation
- Existing studies predominantly focus on Western contexts with diverse immigrant populations, such as Germany, the USA, and the UK

- **Aim:**

- To conduct research in countries where a growing immigrant population intersects with strong ethnocentric attitudes, yet allows immigrant political participation
- Focus on individuals who are directly experiencing the demographic shift brought by increasing immigration

Hypothesis 1: *Cultural assimilation is a critical factor that enables immigrant candidates to overcome ethnic boundaries*

Hypothesis 2: *Policy positions remain a key determinant in the selection of immigrant-origin candidates*

This study aims to investigate these dynamics within the context of South Korean society, with a particular focus on the young generation

Why South Korea?

- **South Korea exemplifies the significance of cultural assimilation in contemporary societies**
 - Historically, South Korea maintained exclusivity toward foreigners (Kim, 2009; Lee, 2009), but recent shifts highlight greater inclusivity
 - Immigrants now represent **5.2% of the total population** (Ministry of Justice, 2024)
 - Since 2010, notable immigrant-origin politicians have emerged, including Jasmin Lee (19th, 21st National Assembly) and Yohan Lin (22nd National Assembly)
 - South Korea has a unique group of immigrants: “North Korean defectors”
 - Internationally classified as refugees, defectors are recognized as Koreans within South Korea (Four defectors from the 19th, 21st, and 22nd National Assembly)
 - Despite this legal recognition, public perceptions of North Korean defectors align closely with those of immigrants

Thus, in countries where diversification is less advanced, **ethnicity** and the **political participation** of immigrants exist at an early stage of development

Why Focus on the Young Generation?

- **The Young Generation in South Korea Provides Unique Insights into Cultural Assimilation**

- This cohort (born between 1980 and 2005) grew up alongside second-generation immigrants and immigrant communities
- In terms of policy, it is practical to inquire about "youth policies," which benefit everyone, "gender equality policies," which benefit half of the target population, and "immigration policies," which may be less directly relevant to the respondents.
- Their interactions with immigrant groups offer a distinct perspective on societal attitudes toward cultural assimilation

These dynamics merit examination with a focus on **ethnicity** and **generational shifts**

Research Method

Research Method: Conjoint Experimental Approach

- **Application of the Conjoint Experimental Method**

- Originally utilized in marketing research (e.g., Green, Krieger, & Wind, 2001; Raghavarao, Wiley, & Chitturi, 2011)
- Through its application by Hainmueller (2010, 2014), the method has gained prominence in political science for analyzing public perceptions and causal relationships
- This study investigates the interplay between cultural assimilation and policy factors to predict the expected probabilities of candidate selection

- **Role of Average Marginal Component Effect (AMCE)**

- The conjoint experimental method identifies critical attributes influencing individual preferences
- AMCE quantifies the average effect of each attribute, providing insights into relative importance
- This study investigates the interplay between cultural assimilation and policy factors to predict expected probabilities

Theorem1

Theorem (Average Marginal Component Effect(AMCE))

$$AMCE = \mathbb{E}[Y|X = x] - \mathbb{E}[Y|X = x']$$

Theorem2

Theorem (Total of Average Marginal Component Effect(AMCE))

$$\begin{aligned}
 \bar{\pi}_l(t_1, t_0, \mathbf{p}(t)) &\equiv \mathbb{E} [Y_i(t_1, T_{ijk[-l]}, T_{i[-j]k}) - Y_i(t_0, T_{ijk[-l]}, T_{i[-j]k}) \mid (T_{ijk[-l]}, T_{i[-j]k}) \in \tilde{\mathcal{T}}] \\
 &= \sum_{(t,t) \in \tilde{\mathcal{T}}} \mathbb{E} [Y_i(t_1, t, t) - Y_i(t_0, t, t) \mid (T_{ijk[-l]}, T_{i[-j]k}) \in \tilde{\mathcal{T}}] \\
 &\quad \times p(T_{ijk[-l]} = t, T_{i[-j]k} = t \mid (T_{ijk[-l]}, T_{i[-j]k}) \in \tilde{\mathcal{T}}),
 \end{aligned}$$

$\bar{\pi}_l(t_1, t_0, \mathbf{p}(t))$: Total AMCE for attribute l

i : Respondent index

k : Choice task index

$T_{ijk[-l]}$: Profile excluding attribute l

$\tilde{\mathcal{T}}$: Set of all possible attribute combinations

Y_i : Potential outcome for respondent i

j : Candidate index

l : Attribute index

$T_{i[-j]k}$: Profile of competing candidate(s)

$\mathbb{E}[\cdot]$: Expectation (mean)

Data, Survey Attributes, Actual Survey Questionnaire Sample

Attributes	Values
Control Variable	
Gender	● Male
Candidate's Value	
Specialized & Main interest policy for improve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Young Generation Policy ● Female Policy ● Immigration Policy
Immigration Background	
Parent's Nationality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● North Korean defector (Same Ethnicity) ● Japan ● China ● Uzbekistan ● Vietnam ● United States of America
Religion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Buddhism ● Catholic or Protestant ● Mormonism ● Islamic
Cultural Assimilation	
Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Fluent Korean - without accent ● Intermediate Korean - with accent ● Limited Korean - broken grammar
Living Period	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Born and grew up in South Korea ● Born abroad and grew up in South Korea ● Born and grew up abroad, but immigrated 20 years ago ● Born and grew up abroad, but immigrated 5 years ago

Example: Actual survey questionnaire sample

- Following is the group of candidates with immigrant backgrounds who are ultimately nominated as parliamentary candidates by the party you support. Please review the characteristics of these candidates and then respond to the following questions.

	Candidate A	Candidate B
Gender	Male	Male
Specialized and main interest policy for improve	Immigration Policy	Young Generation Policy
Immigration Background	USA	North Korean defector
Religion	Catholic or Protestant	Buddism
Language	Fluent Korean	Limited Korean
Living period in Korea	Born and grew up in South Korea	Born and grew up abroad, but immigrated 20 years ago

Table: Sample of Actual Survey Questionnaire

- Which candidate would you prefer to be the final nominee for the parliamentary election in South Korea?
 - Candidate A
 - Candidate B

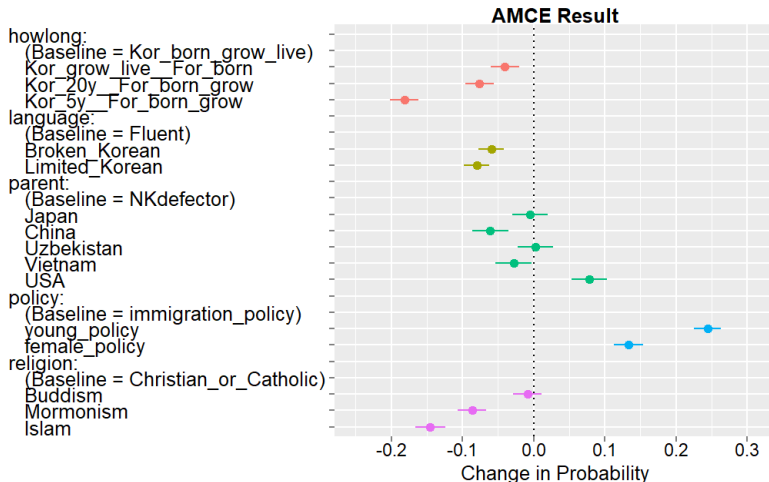
Data

- **Used survey for this research**

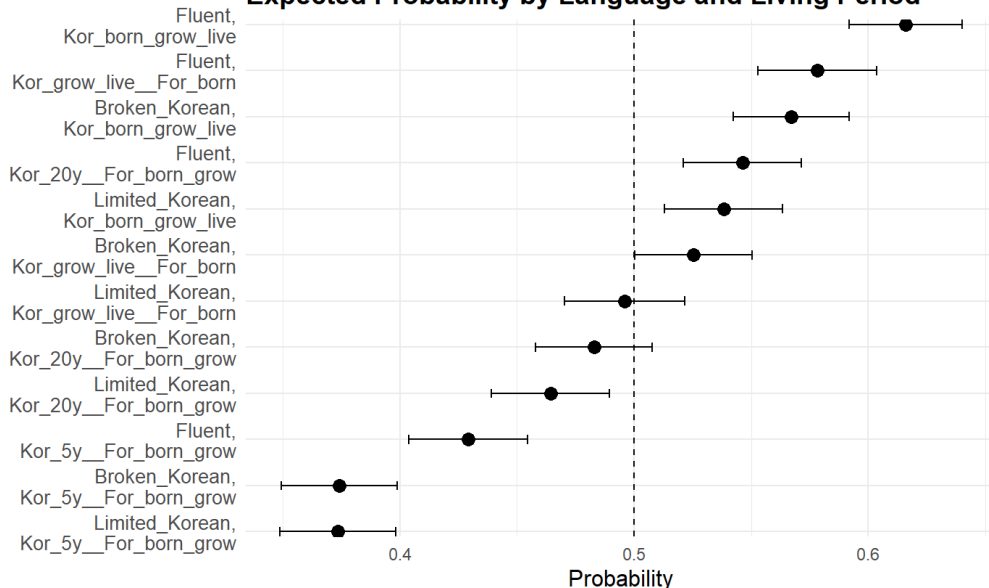
- N=1,800 (Male: 932, Female:868)
- Age: 20–44
- Survey date: 29. Nov.–5. Dec. (7 days) in 2024
- Repetition count: 5 times
- Total Profile Cases: $3 \times 6 \times 4 \times 3 \times 4 = 864$ cases
- Total Views: $1,800(\text{Sample Size}) \times 5(\text{Repetition}) \times 2(\text{Visualized Candidates})=18,000$

Result: Main Findings

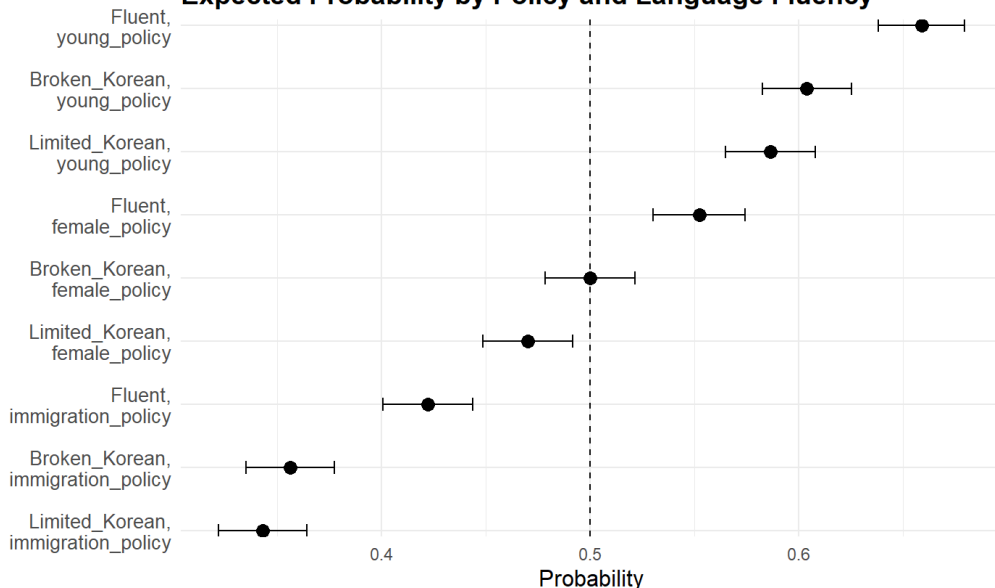
Result: Average Marginal Component Effect(AMCE)



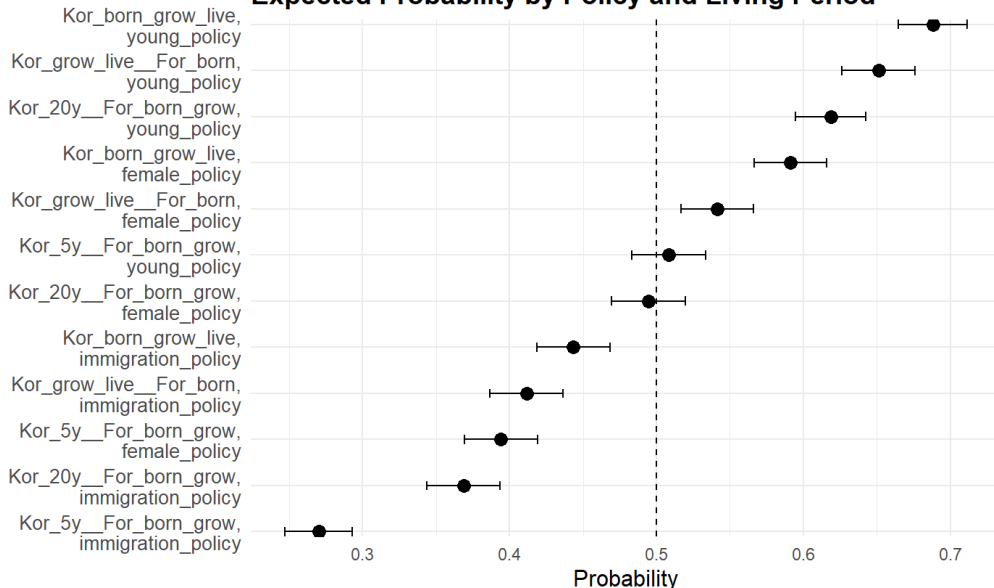
Expected Probability by Language and Living Period



Expected Probability by Policy and Language Fluency



Expected Probability by Policy and Living Period



Conclusion and Future Study

Conclusion

- **Cultural assimilation is recognized as a critical determinant for immigrants, comparable in significance to other influential variables**
 - Factors such as length of residence and language proficiency play pivotal roles in shaping perceptions and outcomes
 - Confirmed that language proficiency and length of residence are more significant factors than ethnic preferences([North Korean defectors](#))
 - The emphasis on cultural assimilation among younger generations provides key insights for party decision-makers in evaluating future candidates
- **Policy dimensions interact with cultural assimilation to influence perceptions**
 - Factors such as length of residence and language proficiency clearly have the potential to offset their own interest policy.
 - The perception of candidates is strongly influenced by the interaction of personal attributes with targeted policies

Future Studies

- **Future Studies:**

- Observing other age groups with limited exposure to immigrants
- Studies on whether consistent results can be obtained when evaluated using various methodologies (e.g., Downsian framework, Political-Demography approach, Analytic Hierarchy Process)

The End