TESS Proposal: Skill, Sexuality, and Immigrant Deservingness

Nathan I. Hoffmann, Department of Sociology, University of California, Los Angeles

Kristopher Velasco, Department of Sociology, Princeton University

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Overview: Following federal policy changes, numbers of immigrants in same-sex couples have exploded, growing by 140 percent between 2008 and 2019 (from 44 thousand to 107 thousand), while those in different-sex couples grew by only 22 percent (Hoffmann and Velasco 2021). How do Americans view this new type of immigrant? Previous work has shown that immigrants with economic potential and humanitarian merit are seen as deserving of entry. Little work has considered how Americans view cultural aspects of immigrants, such as sexual identity. The goal of the proposed study is to disentangle Americans' preferences for migrants with economic potential, humanitarian merit, or cultural similarity, using sexual minority migrants as a case study.

Background: Two recent policy changes have contributed to a rapid rise of lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) immigrants in the United States. In 2011, President Obama moved to make queer refugees a "population of concern" for the U.S. (Vogler 2016). In 2013, the Defense of Marriage Act ended, allowing U.S. citizens to sponsor the visa of a same-sex partner for the first time (Edwards 2013). Since then, numbers of immigrants in same-sex couples have ballooned. While most scholarship on LGB immigrants focuses on those fleeing repression (Murray 2014; Sam and Finley 2015; Akin 2017; Dhoest 2019; Giametta 2020; Saleh 2020), recent work suggests that the typical LGB immigrant may be privileged and coming from progressive contexts (Hoffmann and Velasco 2021, 2022).

These observations raise a number of questions. How do Americans evaluate the deservingness of LGB individuals to migrate to the United States? Do they see refugees persecuted for their sexuality as more deserving of entry than privileged, high-earning LGB immigrants? When considering who should migrate to the United States, how do Americans evaluate sexuality as compared to earnings potential or credible danger?

Previous experimental work has attempted to assess how native-born respondents assess the "deservingness" of migrants to gain legal entry to their country. This work broadly supports three theories of deservingness: *economic potential*, *humanitarian merit*, and *cultural similarity*.

The *economic potential* theory has the most empirical support. Numerous studies find that highly educated migrants working in prestigious, high-earning professions are seen as most deserv-

ing of entry (Hainmueller and Hiscox 2010; Helbling and Kriesi 2014; Hainmueller and Hopkins 2015; Donnaloja 2022). Although economic potential is not a legal consideration when awarding refugee status, respondents find hypothetical refugees with economic potential to be more deserving (Bansak, Hainmueller, and Hangartner 2016; Lawlor and Paquet 2021).

Work on refugees has pointed to the importance of *humanitarian merit* in matters of deservingness. While Bansak, Hainmueller, and Hangartner (2016) find greater support in Europe for immigrants with greater economic potential, they also find that respondents favor immigrants coming for "humanitarian" rather than "economic" reasons. In the Danish context, Hedegaard (2022) finds that respondents are less likely to support climate migrants than typical refugees, but these two groups are both considered more deserving than economic migrants. In Japan, Fraser and Murakami (2022) find that immigrants fleeing natural disaster are seen as more deserving than those migrating due to political protest, labor shortage, or civil war.

A theory of *cultural similarity* has been evaluated less frequently thus far. In addition to finding a premium for economic potential, Hainmueller and Hopkins (2015) find a penalty for hypothetical immigrants who are Iraqi or do not speak English. The authors frame their results as supporting "norms-based," "sociotropic" explanations. An anti-Muslim bias has been found in other studies as well (Bansak, Hainmueller, and Hangartner 2016; Donnaloja 2022). Other dimensions of cultural similarity have yet to be explored.

Economic, humanitarian, and cultural theories of immigrant deservingness have yet to be convincingly disentangled. Part of the issue is that many of these aspects of countries and individuals are correlated. Immigrants originating in wealthier countries tend to be considered to have both more economic potential and cultural similarity. Humanitarian migrants usually originate in less wealthy countries that are regarded as having less cultural similarity or economic potential. And besides religion, few studies have assessed cultural similarity theory.

We propose using a conjoint survey experiment to isolate these components of deservingness. Despite the recent rise of LGB immigrants in the U.S., sexuality has been under-explored in studies

of immigrant deservingness.[1] We will use sexual minority status as a measure of cultural similarity that overcomes these issues. Sexual minorities are present throughout the world, avoiding issues of country-level correlates. The present era is characterized by rapidly changing policies and attitudes regarding sexual minorities, as well as substantial global heterogeneity. A large majority of Americans now support same-sex marriage and other rights for same-sex couples (**xx?**). The proposed study will be one of the first survey experiments to consider immigrant sexuality explicitly.

Research Design: We will use a conjoint survey experiment, which allows isolation of these components (Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto 2014). Respondents will read two vignettes describing hypothetical immigrants and choose the one they prefer to gain entry to the United States (Lawlor and Paquet 2021; Fraser and Murakami 2022). They will also give a numerical rating (between 1 and 7) of each profile's deservingness and have space to justify their decisions with open-ended text. Respondents will all be U.S. citizens, and the survey will also ask them their gender, age, party identification, and sexuality.

For the immigrant profiles, we will vary four attributes. Two are controls: gender has two levels (man and woman) and country GDP has three levels (wealthy, middle-income, and poor). The other two attributes test our hypotheses: Skill has three levels (has an MD and works as a cardiologist; has a high school degree and works as a restaurant manager; and has a primary school education and works in construction), and reason for migration has five levels (identifies as gay, left because homosexuality is criminalized; identifies as gay, left because spoken out against authoritarian government; identifies as gay, could not find work; identifies as straight, spoken out against authoritarian government; identifies as straight, could not find work). In all, this creates $2 \times 3 \times 3 \times 5 = 90$ potential profiles for respondents to evaluate.

We will present respondents with two vignettes, and they will indicate which one they see as more deserving of being admitted to the United States. One example profile might read: "Immigrant 1 wishes to be admitted as an immigrant to the U.S. She comes from a wealthy country, has a

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[1]Lawlor and Paquet (2021) include persecution due to sexual orientation (along with religion) as a "humanitarian deservingness cues" for hypothetical asylum seeker profiles, but not for refugee profiles, and they do not disaggregate these two cues. Hedegaard (2022) list "sexuality" as a possible form of persecution for hypothetical refugee profiles, along with race, religion, nationality, or political orientation.

high school degree and works as a restaurant manager. She identifies as gay. She had to leave her country because she has spoken out against the authoritarian government and feared for her life."

Further details about the survey instrument are in the Appendix.

Pretest Results: Our pilot study…

Contribution: This study contributes to literature on immigrant deservingness and sexual minorities.

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Appendix

Survey Instrument

1. Please carefully read the following two descriptions of potential immigrants to the U.S. Then indicate which one you personally would prefer to see admitted to the United States.

Immigrant [1/2] wishes to be admitted as an immigrant to the U.S. [He/she] comes from a [GDP] country, [skill]. [He/she] [reason].

- Gender

    - man
    - woman

- Country GDP

    - wealthy
    - middle-income
    - poor

- Skill

    - has an MD and works as a cardiologist
    - has a high school degree and works as a restaurant manager
    - has a primary school education and works in construction

- Reason

    - identifies as gay. [He/she] had to leave [his/her] country because homosexuality is criminalized and [he/she] feared for [his/her] life.
    - identifies as gay. [He/she] had to leave [his/her] country because [he/she] has spoken out against the authoritarian government and feared for [his/her] life.
    - identifies as gay. [He/she] had to leave [his/her] country because [he/she] could not find work.
    - identifies as straight. [He/she] had to leave [his/her] country because he has spoken out against the authoritarian government and feared for [his/her] life.
    - identifies as straight. [He/she] had to leave [his/her] country because [he/she] could not find work.

2. *On a scale from 1 to 7, where 1 signifies that the U.S. should absolutely not admit immigrant 1 and 7 signifies that the U.S. should definitely admit this immigrant, how would you rate immigrant 1?*

3. *Using the same scale, how would you rate immigrant 2?*

4. *Please write a justification for why you made the choice and ratings you did.*

5. *Was anything unclear in these instructions, or did you have any problems completing this task?*

6. *What is your gender? (choose one)*

    a. man
    b. woman
    c. other

7. *What is your age? (open ended numerical)*

8. *What is your political party identification?*

    a. Democrat
    b. Republican
    c. independent
    d. other

9. *Do you identify as a sexual or gender minority (e.g. lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer)?*

    a. yes
    b. no
    c. unsure

Power analysis