TESS Proposal: Skill, Sexuality, and Immigrant Deservingness

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Previous work shows that Western publics usually prefers "high-skill" over "low-skill" immigrants, but also view refugees fleeing for their lives as "deserving." We're curious how lesbian, gay, or bisexual identity moderates these relationships. Does the public find LGB immigrants to be more deserving of visas if they're fleeing violence than if they work in prestigious occupations? And does it consider refugees fleeing due to their sexual identity more deserving (perhaps because of some notion of cultural similarity) than those fleeing political persecution?

To test this, we envision presenting survey respondents with six profiles. We will vary skill (low/high), reason for migration (work/asylum), and sexual identity (straight/LGB). We will set this up as a conjoint survey experiment with vignettes, following Lawlor and Paquet (2021) and Donnaloja (2022), where respondents are forced to choose one of the two profiles.

It could also be interesting to look at how effects vary by respondents' education level and political affiliation.

1   Literature Review

Questions of immigrant deservingness have a recent but vibrant history. Researchers consider two interrelated types of deservingness: deserving legal status, and deserving welfare benefits.

Hainmueller and Hiscox (2007) provide some of the first (albeit nonexperimental) work on the topic using the 2003 European Social Survey (n = about 28,000). They study answers to the following question in 22 countries: "To what extent do you think [respondent's country] should allow people from [source] to come and live here?" They find that more highly educated and occupationally skilled respondents are more likely to support immigration – even high-skilled immigration, in contrast to conventional wisdom about labor force competition. They argue that results are driven by differences in cultural beliefs and values.

In a more rigorous test in the U.S. context, Hainmueller and Hiscox (2010) conduct a survey experiment on 1,601 respondents to answer questions about randomly assigned, hypothetical immigrants with different skill levels. They aim to test two theories: a labor market competition model, which supposes that workers oppose immigrants with similar skills to their own, and the fiscal burden model, which predicts that higher-income people should oppose immigration in countries with more generous welfare. Their results are at odds with both theories: both low- and high-skill natives want high-skill immigrants

Helbling and Kriesi (2014) conduct another survey experiment of 1,864 people in Switzerland. They randomize the skill level of hypothetical visa applicants, then ask respondents to give a general assessment form 0 to 100. Results corroborate those of Hainmueller and Hiscox (2010): they find no support for a labor competition, and only weak support for a fiscal burden model.

Hainmueller and Hopkins (2015) assess the first conjoint survey experiment (n = 1,407) to address this set of questions. Rather than asking respondents to assess an immigrant profile in isolation, their conjoint design forces respondents to choose one out of two hypothetical applicants to admit to the U.S. They find that respondents view highly educated immigrants favorably, and are more likely to reject those without employment plans, who enter without authorization, are Iraqi, or do not speak English. Results vary little by respondent characteristics. The authors frame their

results as supporting "norms-based," "sociotropic" explanations.

Bansak, Hainmueller, and Hangartner (2016) focus on *refugee* deservingness in Europe. They use a conjoint experiment of 18,000 Europeans in 15 European countries. They find greater support for immigrants with better "economic potential" (higher-skill occupations, stronger language skills, younger), but at the same respondents favor immigrants coming for "humanitarian" rather than "economic" reasons. There is also distinct anti-Muslim sentiment.

Reeskens and van der Meer (2019) implement a vignette survey experiment on 23,000 Dutch respondents. They focus on welfare deservingness for unemployed immigrant and Dutch-born hypothetical profiles, with each respondent evaluating only one vignette. They find that immigrants are invariably rated as less deserving than native-born, even when they have otherwise favorable characteristics such as actively looking for a job or unemployed due to unfair firing.

Lawlor and Paquet (2021) consider how evaluations of migrant deservingness vary between refugees and asylum seekers in Canada. They use a conjoint survey experiment with vignettes for 1,153 Canadians. They ask whether a hypothetical refugee and hypothetical asylum seeker should be allowed to stay, and how many of five government services they should have access to. They find that, for refugees, the economic contribution is more important than economic deservingness (e.g., actively looking for employment). But for asylum seekers, inclusion of deservingness cues (persecution due to sexual orientation or religion) outweigh economic contributions.

Donnaloja (2022) tests citizenship deservingness in the UK in a conjoint survey experiment of 1,597. She finds a penalty for Muslims and people with no occupation. Although respondents were less likely to award citizenship if they had voted to leave the EU, were older, less educated, and lower, variation by respondent attributes were small.

Fraser and Murakami (2022) consider refugees in the Japanese context, with a rating-based conjoint survey experiment on 2,953. They also ask respondents a series of questions to assess their "humanitarianism." They find respondents with high humanitarianism are more likely to support admitting refugees than economic migrants, and prefer refugees fleeing natural disaster and war than political repression.

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However, Hedegaard ([2022](#)) finds opposite results in Denmark: Respondents are less likely to support climate migrants than typical refugees. But these two groups are both considered more deserving than economic migrants.

Magni ([2022](#)) considers what factors reduce welfare discrimination against immigrants in the U.S., UK, France, and Italy. A conjoint survey experiment asked 5,000 respondents which of two hypothetical unemployed individuals were more deserving of welfare support. Results show that natives are clearly favored over immigrants. Among immigrants, those with a long work history are considered more deserving, but higher education and a proactive work attitude do not decrease the gap.

Related studies: Grigorieff, Roth, and Ubfal ([2020](#)) use an experiment to find that providing accurate information about immigration to U.S. citizens improves their attitudes toward current authorized immigrants. Kyriakidou ([2021](#)) uses focus groups to uncover hierarchies of deservingness for Greek respondents in conceptualizing the European refugee crisis. van der Meer and Reeskens ([2021](#)) consider welfare deservingness in the Netherlands, but only in blanket comparisons between immigrants and natives, finding that immigrants are rated as less deserving. With a specific focus on asylum seekers associated with terrorism, Rowen, Blinder, and Hamlin ([2022](#)) conducts a (non conjoint) survey experiment on 1,000 U.S. respondents, asking to evaluate whether low- or high-level Taliban members who qualify for refugee status deserve a visa. They find that a majority of respondents did not want to deny visas to low-level Taliban associates, but high status were seen as not deserving of asylum.

2 Summary

Hainmueller and Hopkins ([2015](#)) provide support for a cultural similarity argument: respondents were unfavorable toward Iraqi immigrants and those who do not speak English. They frame their results as supporting "norms-based," "sociotropic" explanations. Despite these results, few other studies have considered cultural dimensions of deservingness, continue to focus on (and corrobo-

rate) economic deservingness. Few studies have directly assessed cultural similarity.

Studies find little difference by respondent characteristics (but could be underpowered?).

None of these studies explicitly focuses on queer migrants. 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. 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.

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