

Barriers, Borders, and Beliefs: Proximity to the Border and Border Fortification's Impact on Immigration Attitudes*

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In recent years, border fortifications and barriers have been established or strengthened to counter perceived threats from mass migration. While recent work has focused on the factors that impact opinions on immigration, this study explores the role of survey respondent's geographic proximity to the borders as a means to test how potentially enhanced personal exposure to tangible state policies such as border fortifications as well as greater personal exposure to migrants themselves impacts respondents subsequent opinion on immigrants, immigration policy, and nationalistic attitudes. Does geographic proximity to the border impact public opinion on immigration policy? Do visible state policies such as border fortifications shape opinion? Respondents with little personal exposure to state borders and those who cross them may be more susceptible to state narratives or negative stereotypes of migrants as an Otherizing informational heuristic, impacting their opinion on immigration policy. However, those who live near the border ought to be less susceptible to such narratives because of personal experience related to the subject matter, resulting in greater favorability towards migrants and pro-immigration policy. I argue that border fortifications serve as a mediating factor for this relationship, with greater fortifications increasing perceived cultural distance between the resident and migrant, reducing the benefits of intergroup contact and furthering the gap in immigrant attitudes between those who live near the border and those who live far from it. This paper finds that increased distance to the border and more controlling border fortifications reduces the impact of respondents' conservatism on opposition to migrants themselves, but higher levels of distance increases opposition to pro-immigration policy. Lastly, border distance and higher levels of border fortification mute the impact of respondents' political ideology on immigration attitudes.

Keywords: borders, public opinion, immigration policy, immigration attitudes

Introduction

The rise of migration as an international issue has been well charted. In 2000, there were an estimated 150 million international migrants - this number has nearly doubled in 2024 at over 280 million (?). In just the last two years alone, a variety of large-scale displacements have resulted in millions moving as a result of conflict and climate or weather-related disasters

*The paper's revision history and the materials needed to reproduce its analyses can be found [on Github here](#). Corresponding author: thomas-dainty@uiowa.edu. Current version: December 20, 2024.

(?). In just 2023 alone, over 8,500 people died during migrant travel (?). At the same time, migration has become an increasingly politicized topic across the world, with a variety of responses ranging from humanitarian aid or providing refuge to cracking down on illegal immigration or, in many cases, establishing border walls. In the last two centuries, over half of all border walls were built in the post-Cold War era alone (?). As the world has become increasingly globalized, many countries have sought to increase border management and fortifications in response. These fortifications are in large response to economic pressures (?) as well as to prevent migration (?). However, fortifications like border fences have little actual impact on migration and refugee flows (?). If fortifications are in response to migration, but have little impact on actually preventing migration, how does the public respond to such policies? More specifically, how do fortifications impact domestic audiences' views on state immigration policy and on migrants themselves?

The literature provides some clear signals on what should be anticipated. Much of the literature on immigration attitudes highlights the role of perceived economic security in shaping subsequent attitudes on immigrants and immigration policy (?????). Further, the literature highlights the role of cultural similarity, perceived difference, and race or ethnicity (????). Border fortifications serve as a unique policy intersection of these concerns. Border walls are often in response to economic inequality across borders (?), and are also policies that exacerbate or emphasize perceived differences between residents on either side of the border (?). However, not all exposure to the state's border policy should be equal - media narratives on the border may misrepresent the reality of life for those crossing it or those living in the borderlands (?). Given previous literature on contact theory (?), people closer to the border may also have greater contact and experience with migrant populations, breaking down such narratives or helping reduce perceived psychological distance compared to those who witness border fortifications through media and hear-say from public and elites alike.

I argue that fortifications impact audiences' immigration attitudes in three main ways. First, higher levels of border fortifications increase psychological isolation for individuals on

either side of the border, exacerbating perceptions of cultural distance or difference between the public and immigrants. Second, border fortifications serve as a highly visible and often heavily-covered topic in the media, making it a useful heuristic in itself or catalyst for other common heuristic tools like stereotyping and media narratives. Through this process, the public may look to the “state of the border” to form attitudes and opinions on immigration and those who cross the border. Lastly, because of how far-right elites and media may portray immigration issues, utilizing ‘the border’ as a talking point, the role of ideology may have a stronger role on shaping immigration attitudes in states that have higher levels of border fortification and for respondents that live farther from said borders.

I find little or mixed evidence in favor of my hypotheses. I find little evidence for higher levels of border fortifications resulting in negative attitudes towards migrants or immigration policy. Rather, I find some evidence that police presence near the border may result in improved attitudes towards migrants. I also find minimal evidence for the role of distance playing a major role in how border fortifications influence public opinion. However, I find evidence that respondents’ distance to the border may shape the effect of their political ideology on attitudes towards migrants and immigration. As respondents live further from the border, the impact of increased conservatism on opposition to migrants becomes increasingly muted. Interestingly though, in line with the hypothesis, as respondents live further from the border, increased levels of conservatism result in a higher likelihood of opposing pro-immigration policy.

The rest of the paper is structured as following: first, I summarize the literature thus far on immigration attitudes and the factors which may impact them. Then, I discuss the theoretical implications of the literature and how border fortifications and distance could impact immigration attitudes. I then elaborate on the research design and delve into the results. I lastly provide a summary of the findings and highlight directions for future research in both theory and methodology.

Literature Review

Contact Theory and Migration

The broad argument of contact theory or the ‘contact hypothesis’ is straightforward: that prejudice can be reduced, and that understanding can be increased through contact between majority and minority groups (??). For instance, greater intergroup contact can bolster trust and forgiveness for past wrongs by reducing anxiety and improving empathy and can result in effects that generalize beyond the immediate outgroup members to the larger outgroup (?). Evidence for intergroup contact theory is generally robust in the field of psychology [?; ?; ?), but further work needs to be done on examining how racial/ethnic prejudice is impacted by intergroup contact (?). Through investigating immigration attitudes, especially those on immigrants themselves rather than policy, this paper contributes to the literature on intergroup contact theory.

A country-level examination finds potential evidence of contact theory, in which a higher percentage of immigrants in the country results in sharp declines in support for anti-immigration policy (?). However, this proposed trend is not consistently found. For example, ? shows that identity and ideological orientations influence public attitudes towards EU migration and that overestimation of the immigrant population in the EU increases hostility towards solidarity policy measures. Additionally, ? shows how anti-refugee sentiment did not decline with a decline in the actual amount of refugees – rather, more negative sentiments are expected in times of demographic change. This is further shown in the US, where evidence shows that contact with ethnic minorities bolsters support for amnesty policies (?). One moderating factor for this dynamic, however, may be political sophistication – those with greater comprehension of news or mass-mediated events are less likely to be impacted by neighborhood exposure to non-Western immigrants (?).

Following a call for further testing to investigate this potential mechanism shaping immigration attitudes (?) and evidence that suggests that views on immigration may vary among

different localities (?), this paper leverages subnational survey data to provide further examination of how local communities' potential exposure to both migrants and highly visible immigration policy decisions such as border fortifications shapes their subsequent attitudes on immigration policy and stigma towards migrants or foreign workers.

Economic Factors and Immigration Attitudes:

One major focus of literature on immigration attitudes has been the role of economic security and the impact of the economy or wealth at-large on attitudes. While this mechanism has received considerable attention, it has also been met with conflictual findings. For instance, evidence shows how individuals with lower levels of income are less supportive of immigration (???), although this evidence does not come without conflicting results in other contexts, such as the U.S. (?). ? provided some initial evidence on the role of materialist and post-materialist values, impacted by income and education, impacting immigration attitudes. This has only been expanded on as the literature has developed.

?, for instance, shows how individual economic fears could be a direct influence on attitudes through fears of immigrant labor 'replacing' them. However, ? shows that national-level economic factors play a meaningful role rather than individual circumstances. Similarly, other research highlights national policy choices as meaningful influences. For example, ? finds evidence that strong trade unions and social protection policies result in greater levels of integration of immigrants through reducing social inequality and the risk of poverty in the population.

The Role of Culture, Race/Ethnicity, and Prejudice:

While economic security is a likely influence, others argue and find less conflictual evidence for the role of cultural values, perceived differences, and prejudice in impacting attitudes (??). For instance, while ? find some evidence that individual economic fears impact attitudes, they also find that racial and ethnic stereotypical thinking about the work ethic and

intelligence of other groups is a strong influence on individual attitudes towards immigration policy. ? finds evidence supporting the role of cultural affinity between respondents and undocumented migrants in impacting attitudes towards illegal immigration and migrants.

Similarly, ? finds that the role of individual values in shaping immigration attitudes is stronger in countries that have higher levels of intellectual autonomy and weaker in countries that have higher levels of cultural embeddedness. Perceived differences between people may also play a role. For example, ? highlights the impact of racial differences in the US in shaping opinion toward migration. In a subsample of EU countries, ? finds that migrants with the same ethnicity, from rich countries, or other European countries receive higher levels of support than migrants who do not have such qualities.

Taken together, the amount of evidence highlighting the role of both economic and cultural factors in shaping public opinion on immigration ultimately emphasizes the importance of both of these factors. Relatedly, ? finds evidence that highlights the role of both economic factors like GDP per capita and welfare expenditure as well as political ideology in impacting policymakers actions on migrant integration policies. This paper highlights the role of border fortifications as a visible policy that could respond to both economic and cultural qualms. Border fortifications and border walls specifically have been in large response to both heightened levels of migrants (?), as well as concerns related to economic security (?), and as such, serve as a visible reminder of both economic disparity between countries on either side of the border as well as perceived cultural difference and dissimilarity.

Additional Influences:

While much of the literature focuses on economic or cultural factors that impact immigration attitudes, other impacts have also been shown to play a meaningful role in shaping opinions toward immigration. First, ? emphasizes the role of individual values such as universalism or conservatism in impacting the degree to which respondents view immigration as a threat. Second, perceived threats to human security can also impact attitudes towards immigration.

For instance, terrorist attacks are shown to bolster support for more restrictionist immigration policy (?). Third, the particularity of whether migrants are ‘immigrants’ or ‘refugees’ can impact attitudes regarding these groups, where refugees receive higher levels of support than immigrants (?). Additionally, public opinion may be further shaped by existing policy.

Fourth, some evidence of thermostatic public opinion has been found for immigration policy. For example, in the UK, more liberal and less restrictive immigration policies of the late 90s and early 2000s saw strong public demand for restriction in the late 2000s and onward (?). The responsiveness of the government to these demands, however, is generally found to be weak. ? shows how governments like the UK have a tradeoff between responding to demands for less immigration while also maintaining competitiveness for high-demand and skilled migrants. Relatedly, ? shows that rather than the strength of anti-immigrant parties influencing the gap in opinion and policy, it is the salience of the issue, media coverage, and public debate that results in policy change. I argue that the saliency of immigration should vary at a subnational level as well – whether people are closer to the very borders that migrants are entering from should impact the perceived importance of the issue as well as influence perceptions of coverage and public debate. This latter argument is discussed further below.

A considerable amount of literature shows how the public may use heuristics, narratives, and frames to form opinions when information costs are high (?????). Racial and ethnic stereotypes may serve as one such heuristic because of how they can impact information processing and decision-making surrounding policies influencing those that are impacted (?). Even if the public is not as uninformed on immigration as may be traditionally assumed (?), this paper argues that tools like stereotypes, narratives, and heuristics can be influenced by state policy (in)validating such tools. Border fortifications serve as a useful tool to fuel or spark anti-immigrant narratives and anti-immigrant stereotypes, whether it be through validating concerns of migrant criminality or highlighting cultural and/or economic dissimilarity (???). I delve into this theory further below.

Theory

This paper draws inspiration and applies aspects of ?’s theory which argues that walls create psychological distance between residents of either side of the border, creating negative inferences about the relationship between both countries. Additionally, this paper builds on work from ? which emphasizes the ways in which elite actors play intentional and active roles in impacting public opinion and the legitimization of more extremist or reactionary political views. However, this paper extends the theory further by arguing that walls and fortifications more generally serve as an explicit reminder of state power and a deliberate visual, tangible, narrative that can create or exacerbate negative attitudes towards immigrants. I argue this for three reasons.

First, I argue that border fortifications increase the psychological isolation of one nation from another for individuals living nearby, exacerbating the perceived cultural distance between migrant and resident. Second, I argue that the visible, tangible, reality of border fortifications serves as a heuristic to those living further away from the border that the public may use to form attitudes and opinions on immigrants and immigration policy. Lastly, I argue that this heuristic could further strengthen the ‘validity’ of far-right anti-immigrant narratives, bolstering the role of ideology and polarization in shaping the public’s attitudes towards immigration.

In contexts with little border fortification, intergroup contact could help provide information and can circumvent convenient heuristics such as stereotypes and media narratives, complicating residents’ thoughts and creating less anti-migrant sentiment through interaction and exposure (see ?). For example, research on cross-border contact between Czechs and Germans highlights how more frequent interaction improves perceptions of each neighbor as well as the importance of local contexts such as cultural history that could moderate this relationship (?). I argue that the level of exposure to the physical institution of the border serves as another important contextual factor that could moderate the dynamic of

contact on improving attitudes. Previous research provides some evidence that among the general criteria the public uses to determine whether migrants are ‘deserving’ of assistance, perceptions of identity and cultural similarity can play an important role (??). As such, the psychological distance between residents that enhanced fortifications like border walls create should thus lead to an increased perceived cultural dissimilarity that decreases respondents’ opinions of pro-immigration policy and migrants themselves.

Ultimately, I argue that in states with lower overall levels of border fortification, respondents will be more favorable towards immigration and migrants. With less fortifications comes a decrease in the symbolic ‘otherness’ of those who cross it (?) as well as a decline in the psychological impediments that create feelings of cultural distance (?). This better enables the mechanism of greater contact and exposure to migrants to counteract larger anti-immigrant narratives or stereotypes that may be salient or otherwise impact respondents’ attitudes towards immigration and migration more generally. As respondents may be influenced by local conditions, they are not isolated from larger happenings of their country - border fortifications in other localities influence the overall perception of the state of border security. As such, respondents may be influenced by the general state of border securitization in their countries. Given these considerations, I derive the following hypotheses:

H1: Higher levels of overall border fortification will result in more negative attitudes towards immigration/migration

“Visibility” of the Border and its Subsequent Impact

While the public may be influenced by their local encounters with migrants as well as the national level of securitization, I anticipate that these factors do not operate in isolation from one another. Rather, localities near borders with higher levels of fortifications will shape respondents’ attitudes towards immigrants negatively, resulting in negative attitudes towards immigration and migration. I argue that respondents near areas with higher levels of border fortification are likely to feel enhanced cultural distance from immigrants entering

the country. Further, I argue that this effect is only exacerbated for people living further away that have even more limited exposure to the actual behavior and conduct of migrants.

While other criteria matter for public opinion towards migrants' deservingness such as perceptions of immigrants' gratitude (attitude) or ability to contribute to the state they stay in (reciprocity) (?), I argue that enhanced fortification could also alter people's perceptions of migrants' reciprocity or attitude through larger narratives related to the criminality of immigrants. Members of the public who live far from the border may have limited information or suffer from higher information costs to learn about the state of immigration policy and the nature of those who cross the border.

Border fortifications such as fences and walls are convenient tools for the state to establish a tangible narrative and have it reinforced through media coverage and validating negative or harmful rhetoric that portrays immigration as a threat or immigration policy as broken. For instance, during the mass migration wave since 2015, campaign messages from the Hungarian government chose to take a more aggressive and anti-immigrant approach to the crisis: rather than provide humanitarian aid to refugees like many other European governments, the Hungarian government built a wall and began an anti-migration campaign across a wide variety of media sources (?). While it is a challenge to parse the effects of fortifications from potential government controversy and rhetoric regarding immigration, this paper takes a first attempt at beginning to unravel this oftentimes dual-headed strategy by examining how border fortifications themselves influence public attitudes.

For example, in the U.S. context, ? find that coverage of migrant crossings past the U.S.-Mexico border wall creates an emphasis on the migrant's behavior as criminal or dangerous. Despite narratives in the U.S. that immigrants pose a criminal threat and create instability, research shows that residents of border regions near the U.S. such as El Paso, Texas report feeling safe and don't report insecurity because of their proximity to the border (?). In other words, how "visible" immigrants (and their effects on local populations) truly are without the lens of the media is increasingly limited for those who live further away from the

border. I argue that regardless of whether border communities are safer or more dangerous than non-border communities, the limited first-hand visibility of actual border policy and migrant behavior serves as a factor that allows for stereotypes and other heuristics to take hold.

Visibility can have meaningful impacts on the public's attitudes on issues - for instance, previous work on the role of TV news and public opinion on foreign countries shows how foreign affairs news on TV can result in changed perceptions of other countries, even if one has personal connections with people from said countries (?). Previous research also indicates that the presence of deservingness cues can be extremely minimal yet strongly shape respondent attitudes towards providing welfare support (?). If fortifications should create conditions that result in enhancing the ability of the state or anti-immigration parties to push narratives emphasizing 'criminality' of migrants, I argue that the enhanced likelihood of negative public narratives such as these should therefore decrease the likelihood for respondents perceiving immigrants as reciprocal or grateful for aid provided by the recipient state. Given these reasons, I derive my second set of hypotheses:

H2a: As distance to the border increases, the impact of higher levels of local border fortification on respondents' attitudes towards immigration policy and migrants becomes more negative.

H2b: As distance to the border increases, the impact of higher levels of overall border fortification on respondents' attitudes towards immigration policy and migrants becomes more negative.

Similar research has been conducted in an American context, examining how partisanship and proximity to the border interact to impact support for building a border wall with Mexico (?). While conservative partisans farther away from the border are more supportive of a wall, conservatives closer to the border that have greater interaction with the reality and context of the place in reference, avoiding a separation of self from the subject of political debate or discussion (?). I argue that this is especially applicable to immigration

politics more generally. First, Immigration can play such a tangible role in people’s political conceptions that it represents its own political-ideological dimension capturing dynamics related to migration, national identity, and multiculturalism (?). Immigration also serves as a politically useful topic for conservative partisans to exploit to acquire political capital and electoral success as part of a larger message to stoke right-wing populist support (??). This can be frequently seen in prevalent right-wing populist executives of today.

In the case of Orbán’s Hungary, for instance, themes of the anti-immigration campaign from 2015, 2017, and 2019 ranged from migration as a looming threat facing Hungary to migration as a conspiracy by the likes of Hungarian-American billionaire George Soros or the President of the EU Commission (?). Media outlets received or produced a barrage of anti-immigrant sentiment as a threat to Hungarian culture and physical safety, with opposition offering little resistance to these government-supported and oftentimes government-created messages (?). These narrative messages can prove effective – in the case of income inequality, for example, implementation of a populist narrative of systemic unfairness results in higher demands for economic redistribution (?). Further, far-right mobilization of anti-immigrant sentiment can result in a diminished impact on education’s influence on immigration attitudes (?). While the far-right receive heavy attention for such tactics, research also showcases how parties from the political extremes of both sides of the spectrum are more likely to address the issue of migration more frequently and more negatively (?).

In the case of Hungary and immigration, this propaganda campaign from the government did lead to tangible harms, where members of the public would attack or discriminate against refugees or those supporting refugees, normalizing xenophobic views especially among those who lived in rural areas where pro-government media dominated (?). Such actions had little critique from independent outlets, and government narratives were unable to be critiqued by migrants, resulting in little resistance to government policy influencing the normative and attitudinal environment (?). Because of this, immigration should be a salient issue that can create tangible attitude changes that are highly politicized and influenced substantially by

one’s political ideology and leanings. As such, interaction at the border serves as a potential mediating factor that can shape the effectiveness of the tinted lens of ideology. For these reasons, I derive my final hypotheses:

H3: As distance to the nearest border increases, the impact of conservative ideology on respondents’ attitudes towards immigration policy and migrants becomes more negative.

H4: As overall border fortification increases, the impact of conservative ideology on respondents’ attitudes towards immigration policy and migrants becomes more negative.

Research Design

In order to test my hypothesis, I largely rely on data provided by the Integrated Values Survey (IVS) (1981-2022) (??). This survey combines data from the European Value Study (?) and the World Value Survey (?) into one larger cross-national time-series data set. This provides an initial potential sample of 666,907 observations over 7 waves, featuring 118 different countries and territories.

To investigate the role of border fortifications and distance to the border on migration attitudes, I test two primary dependent variables provided by the IVS (??): survey respondents’ opposition to migrants or foreign workers as a neighbor, as well as their support for pro-immigrant policy. The first question asks respondents, “On this list are various groups of people. Could you please mention any that you would not like to have as neighbors?” “Immigrants/foreign workers” are one of the groups listed. This variable is binary, where respondents either mentioned (1) or did not mention (0) immigrants as a group they would not like as neighbors.

The second question asks respondents, “How about people from other countries coming here to work. Which one of the following do you think the government should do?” on an ordinal scale ranging from 1, let anyone come, to 4, prohibit people from coming. I recode

this variable to a binary, in which respondents indicate support for immigration (1) if they answer with either let anyone come or as long as jobs are available, and 0 otherwise. By using these variables, I gain insights into respondents’ attitudes towards migrants themselves as well as their attitudes towards what state immigration policy ought to be.

To measure distance to the border, I leverage data captured in the IVS that records what administrative district the survey was taken in. Using ArcGIS software, I take spatial data for administrative districts and calculate the centroid, or geographic center, of each first-level administrative district globally. I then calculate the distance of that centroid to the nearest state-level border and capture what state is on the other side of the border. This distance is then recorded in hundreds of kilometers and included in the data as the *distance to the border*. I then use a fuzzy matching process to match the GIS software’s district names to the IVS’ recorded district names.¹ By doing so, this provides me with greater confidence that the districts accurately align with one another. Future research could improve by looking at a more small-n case or single-case analysis in order to have a higher degree of certainty that district names are accurately matched for all districts.

To measure border fortifications, I use three main variables to robustly examine the relationship between fortifications and attitudes. First, I use data from ?, which creates a continuous latent scale for the border orientation, or the state’s “...commitment to the public, authoritative, and spatial display of its capacities to control the terms of penetration of its national borders...” (Simmons & Kenwick, 2022, 853), ranging from more permissive border orientations to more controlling ones. Second, I utilize a border infrastructure index from their constituent indicators of border infrastructure – specifically, the degree to which border crossings are gated, feature multiple buildings, and a road (?). Third, I use the degree of police presence near the border relative to the interior of the country to estimate whether states are policing the border more or less heavily than they are the interior (?). While I primarily focus on the border orientation measure, the addition of the other variables provides

¹Before doing so, I first match districts with exact name matches, only fuzzy matching those that do not have a perfect match.

an opportunity to explore potential nuance in what specific factors that contribute to border orientation result in positive or negative sentiment towards migrants and pro-immigration policy.

Because these variables are at a more precise level of analysis, I construct two different aggregations for robustness. First, I average the border fortifications to the border-dyad year level, to capture the border orientation, infrastructure, and police presence along a specific country border. Second, I average these factors for the entirety of the country’s borders – to capture what the overall state of border fortifications looks like in a given country-year. For instance, in the case of France, the first measure would have potentially different values for the border between Belgium and France than France and Germany, while the second measure results in the same values regardless of which specific country is bordering France. I do so in order to more directly discern if the fortifications at the closest border to a respondent matters or if only the fortifications in the country at-large matter, or vice-versa.

Finally, I control for multiple factors that could confound the relationship between my key variables. First, I include a litany of respondent demographic factors such as age, income (on an ordinal scale), education (on an ordinal scale), whether respondents are female (coded 1) or not (0), and whether respondents are married (1) or not (0). Second, I include a set of questions that provide information on respondents’ political worldview. These include a 10-point scale for their political orientation, where a 1 indicates a respondent is strongly left-leaning while a 10 indicates a respondent is strongly right-leaning in their political views. Further, I include respondents’ interest in politics, general trust in the public, as well as belief in personal control over their life.² Additionally, I also include the country’s level of GDP per capita in order to capture national-level wealth characteristics (?). Lastly, in order to account for larger systemic or temporal factors that are not otherwise controlled, I include year-level and region-level fixed effects.

²The specific questions used for these are E023, A165, and A173, respectively.

Results

When modeling the analysis, I use logistic regression with country-level random intercepts in order to better account for country-level heterogeneity otherwise not captured with the existing variables (?). For Hypothesis 1, I estimate two sets of 3 models. Each model features one indicator of overall border fortifications in a given country (border orientation, infrastructure index, and relative police presence near the border). I report the coefficient plot depicted below in Figure 1 for the likelihood that respondents will oppose having an immigrant neighbor.

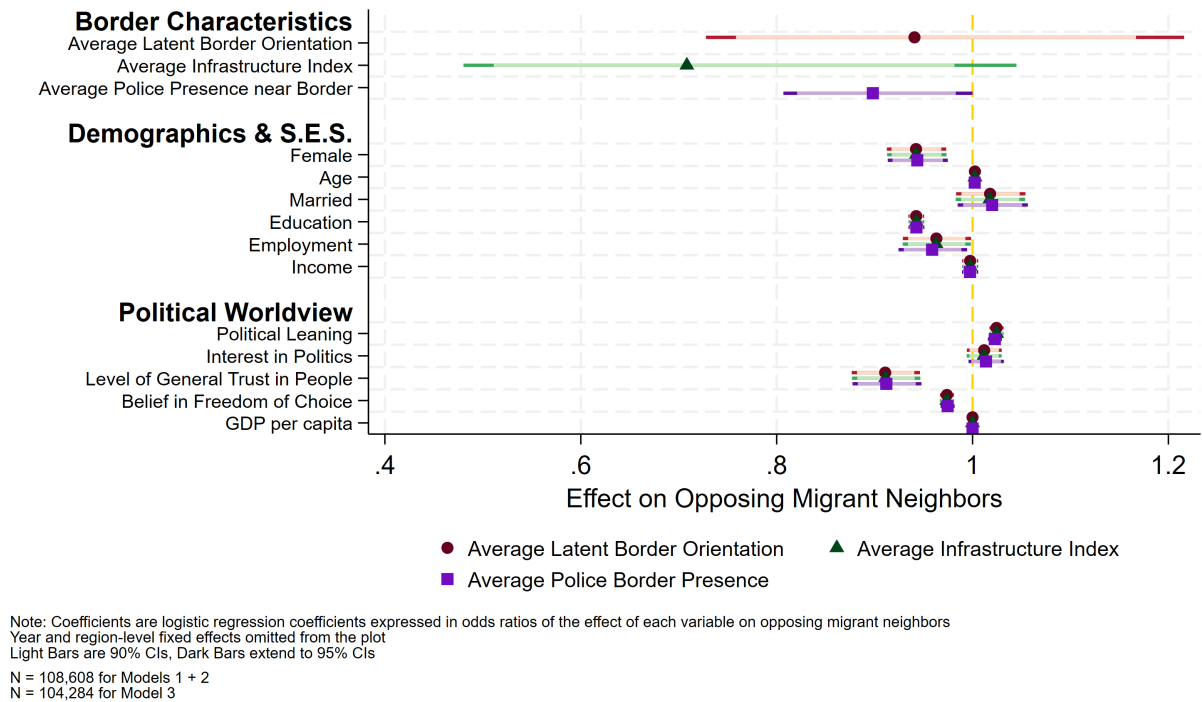


Figure 1: Testing H1 - Opposing Migrant Neighbors

As Figure 1 clearly showcases, I find little statistical significance for the border fortification variables impacting the likelihood of opposing migrant neighbors. Interestingly, I find that a higher level of police presence near the border results in a reduced likelihood of opposing having migrant neighbors. As relative police presence along the border increases, the odds of opposing migrant neighbors changes by a factor of ~0.90. Similarly, the other

fortification variables are also negative, albeit statistically insignificant at the 5% level. I also find weak evidence in favor of higher levels of border infrastructure improving attitudes towards migrants. Additionally, I find that higher levels of trust in the public results in a lower likelihood of opposing migrant neighbors, but higher levels of conservatism does increase the likelihood of opposition.

Figure 2 finds generally similar results as in Figure 1 - the most notable difference is that the police presence near the border becomes statistically insignificant at the 5% level. Similar to before, I find that higher levels of conservatism result in reduced odds of supporting more pro-immigration policies. For each one unit increase on the left-right scale, the odds of supporting pro-immigration policy reduces slightly. Similarly, I find that as general trust in the public increases, the odds of supporting pro-immigration policy increases by a factor of about 1.3 to 1.4.

Overall, I find little support for Hypothesis 1. This poses an interesting development for the literature on immigration attitudes and border walls as well, providing a test of a direct implication of ?'s argument. Given previous literature on the role of identity and perceived similarity and ?'s argument, attitudes towards migrants should theoretically be altered. Further investigation should be done to continue delineating the extent to which heightened psychological distance between both sides of the border has tangible effects on state politics. Below, I further examine my hypotheses, running a series of models featuring interactions between my key variables.

For Hypothesis 2, I run two models - one model where respondents' estimated distance to the border is interacted with the border fortification levels of the specific border that respondents are closest to, and one where distance to the border is interacted with the state's overall levels of border fortification. For these models, I specifically focus on the *border orientation* of the local or overall borders for the interaction. I then estimate the marginal effects for these interactions and depict the effect of border distance as border orientation changes, and vice-versa. These marginal effects are depicted below in Figures

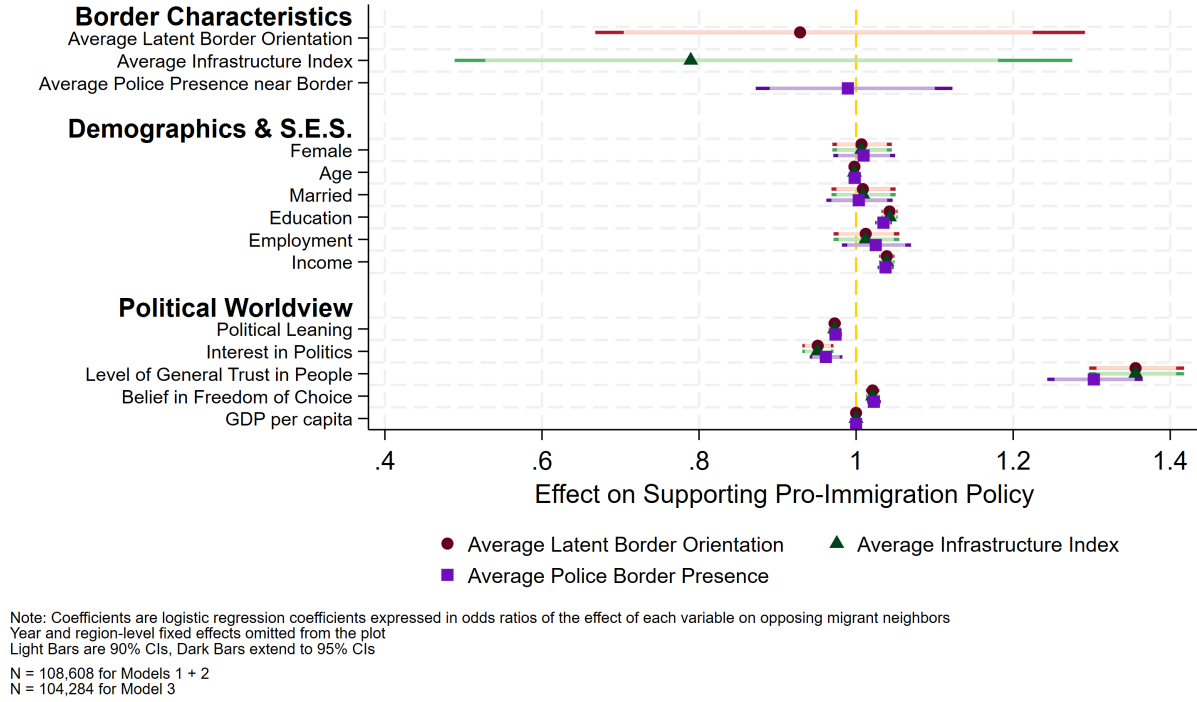


Figure 2: Testing H1 - Pro-Immigrant Policy

3 and 4 for the likelihood of opposing migrant neighbors and supporting pro-immigration policy, respectively.

Figure 3 shows weak evidence in favor of Hypothesis 2a. I find that as the respondent's estimated distance to the border increases, we see a notable decline in the effect of border orientation. Relatedly, I find that there is little impact of local border orientation on the effect of respondents' distance to that border when predicting the odds of opposing having a migrant neighbor. Figure 4 reflects similar results for Hypothesis 2a - as respondents live further from the border, the impact of the states' overall levels of border fortification diminishes slightly. Further, while there is weak statistical significance, these figures reflect weak substantive significance as well, in which increases in border distance change the coefficient for border distance by only a mere fraction before reaching statistical insignificance. Ultimately, I find little support for the interactive effects of local border fortifications and border distance on attitudes related to migrants themselves.

Investigations into how distance to the border impacts the effect of border fortifications

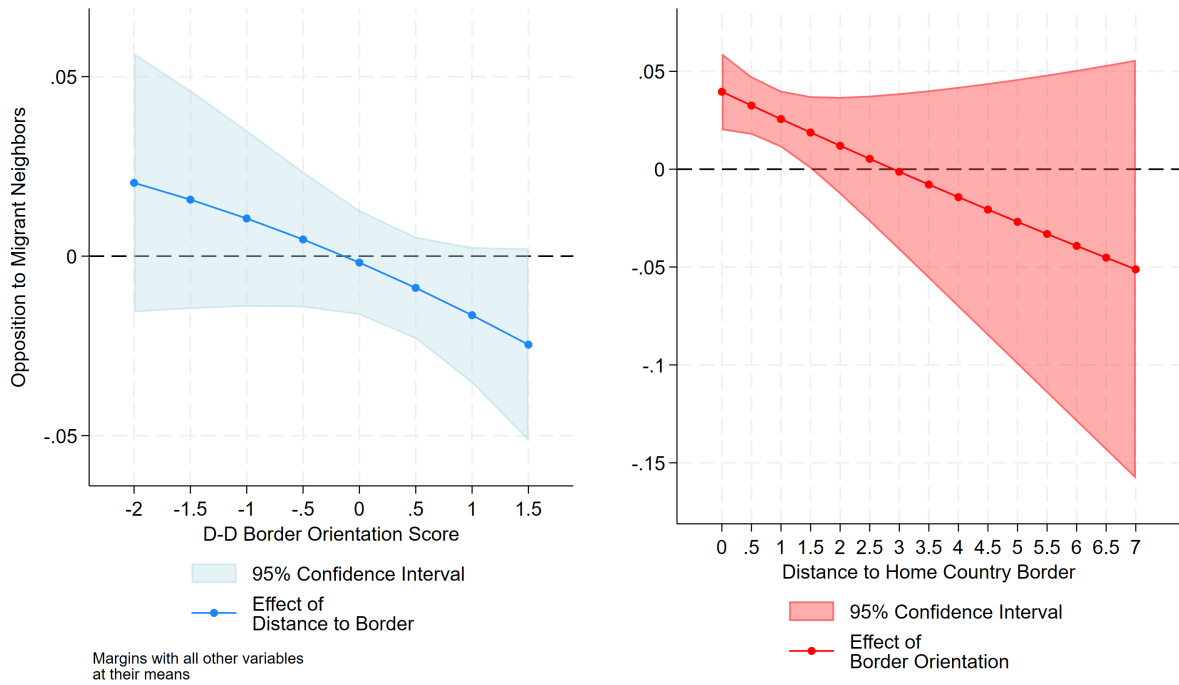


Figure 3: Testing H2a - Opposing Migrant Neighbors

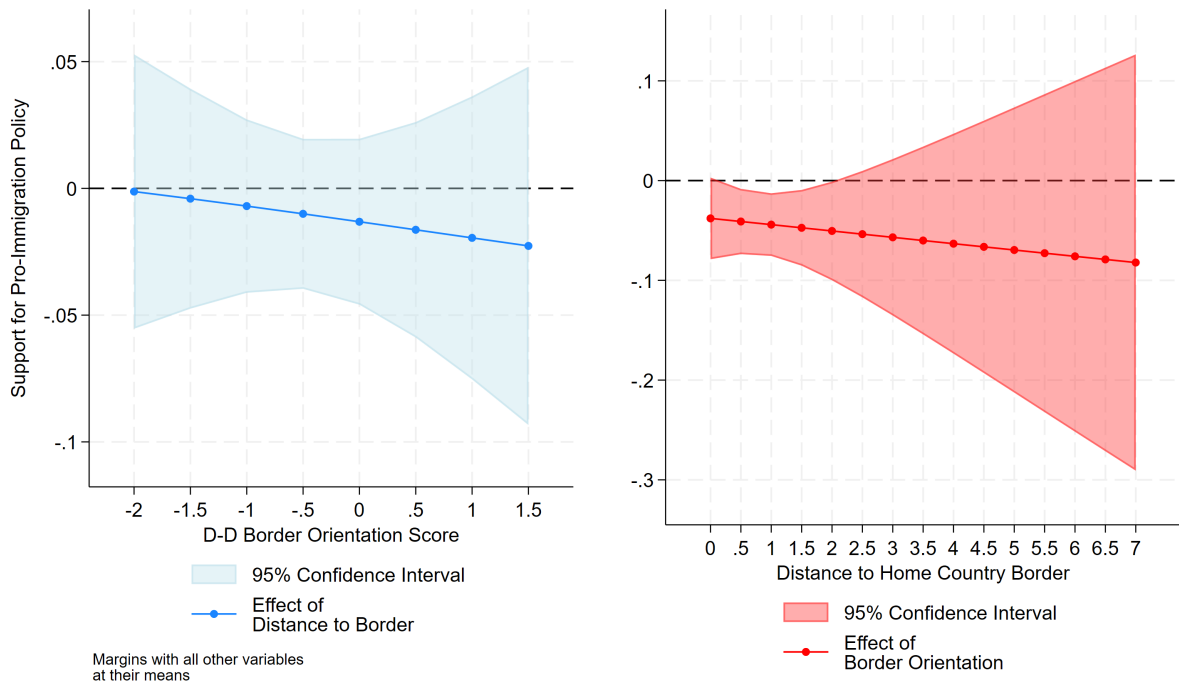


Figure 4: Testing H2a - Pro-Immigrant Policy

on respondent attitudes shows similarly poor findings. In Figure 5, I find that as distance increases, there is a slight positive uptick on the effect of overall border fortifications on opposing migrant neighbors, although the results and their corresponding confidence interval are largely flat, indicating a generally consistent effect for border fortifications as distance increases. Figure 6 reflects little evidence for the interaction's impact on support for pro-immigration policy as well. While the effect of border orientation statewide becomes more positive as distance increases, indicating that more controlling border orientations result in more support for migrants the further they live from said border, the results are ultimately statistically insignificant. While this provides some suggestive evidence that border orientation may result in almost a thermostatic backlash for those who do not actually live near said policies, providing a potential path for exploration in the future, the results here do not showcase significance for such a claim.

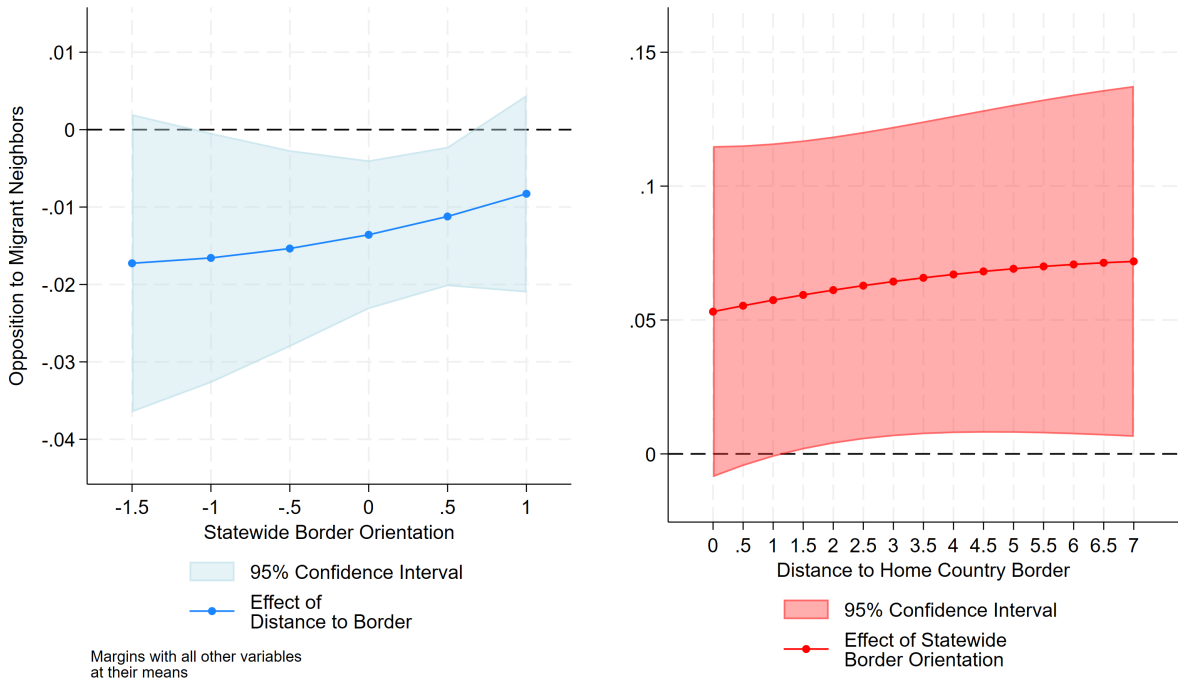


Figure 5: Testing H2b - Opposing Migrant Neighbors

However, Figure 6 finds a clear positive trend for opposition increasing the impact of border distance - as the overall border orientation of the state becomes more controlling,

distance to the border shifts from having a negative impact on the likelihood of support for pro-immigration policy to a positive one. This indicates that as respondents live in increasingly controlling (at least on the border) states, the further away they are from said border, the more likely they are to support pro-immigration policy. This again provides some indication that border orientation may result in a thermostatic backlash for respondents who live far away from the border, but a policy-affirming feedback loop from those who live close to said controlling borders. Ultimately, I find little evidence in favor of Hypothesis 2b, but I find a potential direction for future research as well.

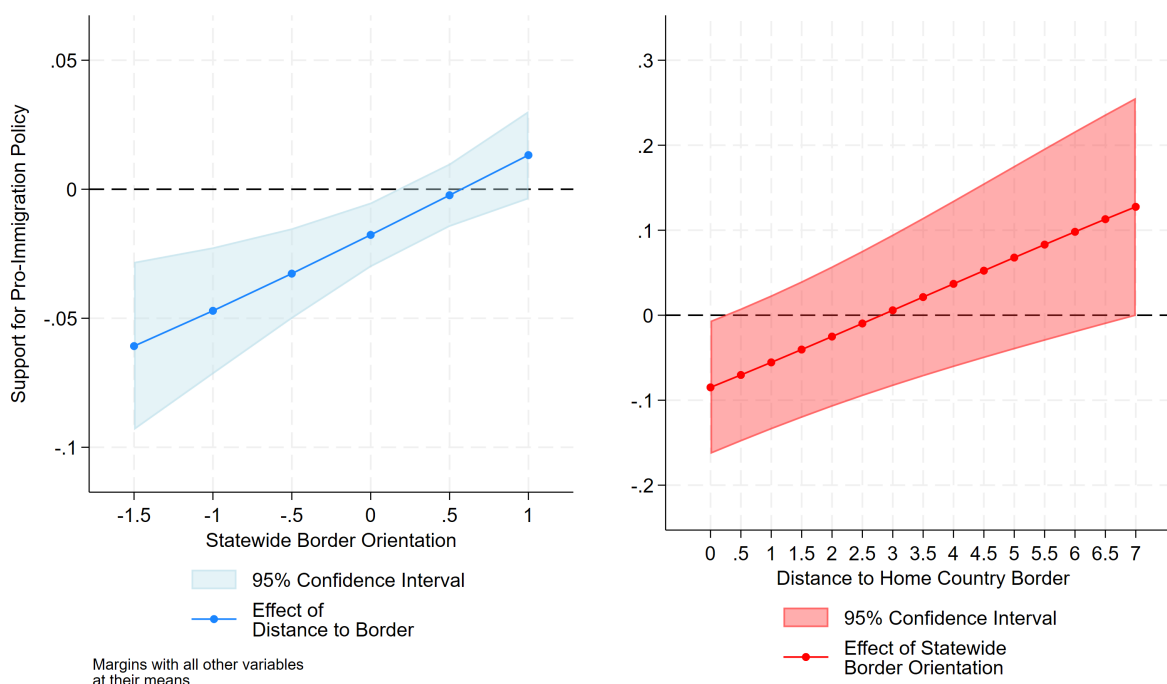


Figure 6: Testing H2b - Pro-Immigrant Policy

When investigating Hypothesis 3, that as border distance increases, the effect of increased conservatism will become more negative towards migrants and pro-immigration policy, I find mixed results. First, in Figure 7, when looking at the interaction's impact on opposing migrant neighbors, I find that as distance to the border increases, an increase in the scale towards conservatism results in a reduced likelihood of opposing migrants, although this quickly loses significance. Interestingly, however, I find that as respondents become more

conservative in their self-identification, distance to the border has a stronger negative impact on their likelihood of opposing migrants. This suggests, contrary to the hypothesis, that distance to the border may be more relevant for conservative-leaning individuals in reducing their opposition to migrant neighbors, even if the role of conservatism itself on opposition is unchanged.

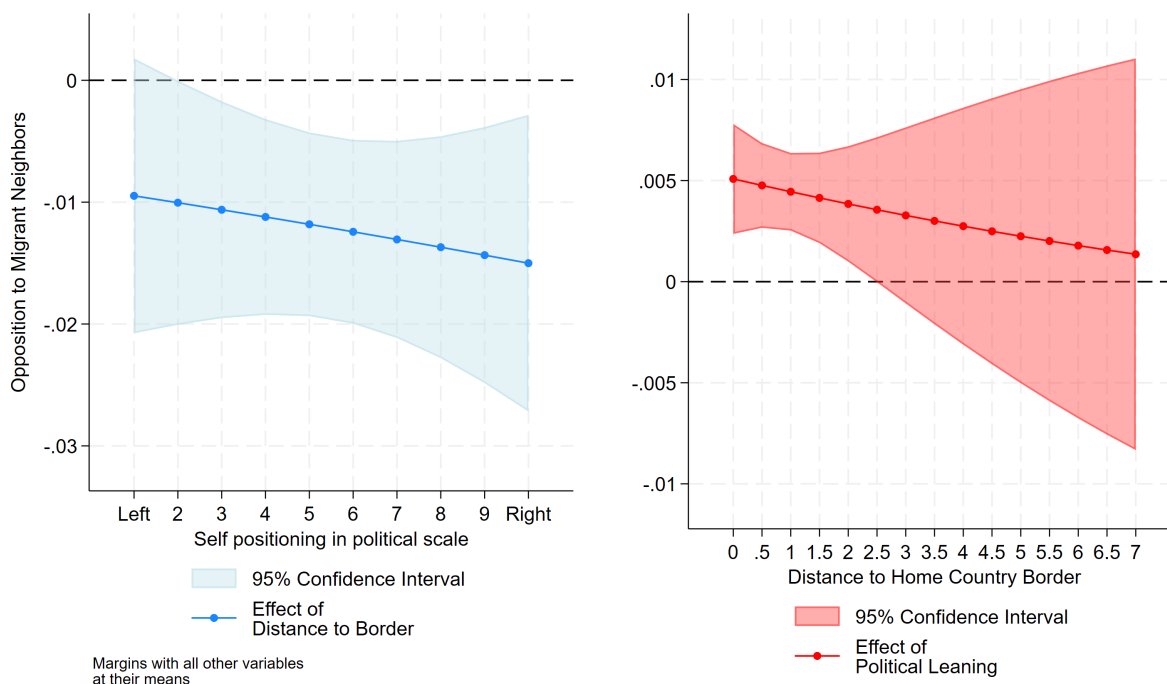


Figure 7: Testing H3 - Opposing Migrant Neighbors

Figure 8, however, shows clear support for Hypothesis 3. As distance to the border increases, the effect of respondents' self-identification becomes increasingly negative, indicating a lower likelihood of supporting pro-immigrant policy. In conjunction with Figure 7, this may indicate that the role of distance and intergroup contact could impact conservatives positively when it comes to policy opinions, even if their opinions on migrants themselves remain negative despite such contact. However, I find no significance for the impact of distance to the border on support for pro-immigration policy changing as respondents' ideology shifts. Ultimately, I find mixed evidence for Hypothesis 3 - as respondents live further from the border, the impact of conservatism on the likelihood of opposing migrants decreases slightly,

but their likelihood of supporting pro-immigration policy declines as well. This mixed finding suggests further research may prove fruitful to disentangle the role of intergroup contact on policy attitudes from its role towards potential stigmatization or prejudice.

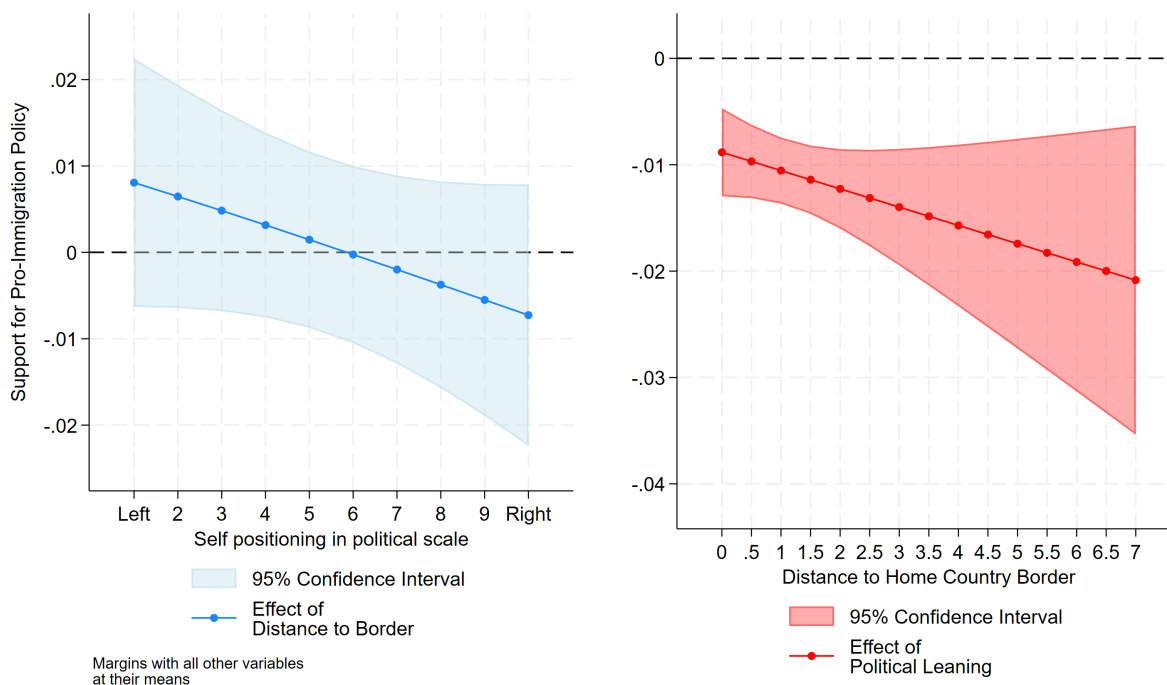


Figure 8: Testing H3 - Pro-Immigrant Policy

Figure 9 shows how as border orientation becomes more controlling, the effect of conservatism trends towards reduced opposition to migrants. Ultimately, as the latent scale increases, the effect of ideology becomes increasingly muted, showcasing a relative dominant role of border orientation in the interaction given the null impact that ideology has on border orientations' effect on public attitudes towards migrants. This provides results opposite of Hypothesis 4, in which orientation should strengthen the role of conservatism on opposition to migrants. This may suggest that as policy becomes more in line with what strong conservatives may want, ideology becomes a less salient determinant of opposition to migrant now that conservative policy is reflected in the status quo.

Figure 10 provides further evidence for the role of border fortification/more controlling border orientations in reducing the impact of personal ideology on immigration attitudes.

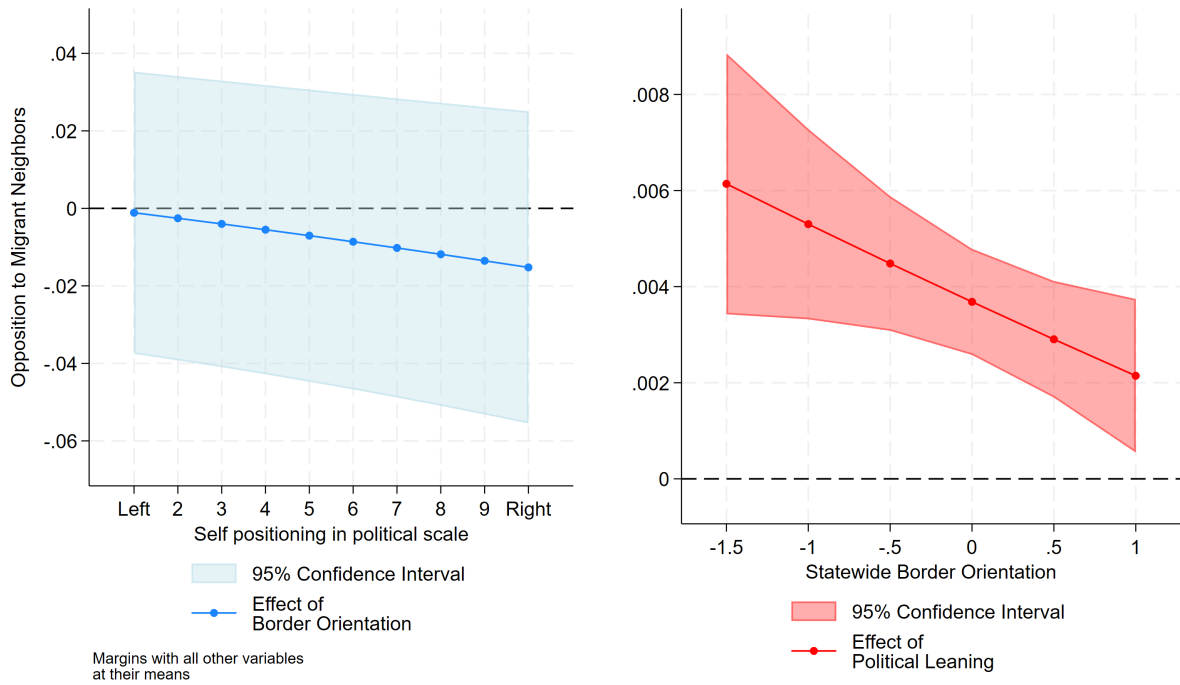


Figure 9: Testing H4 - Opposing Migrant Neighbors

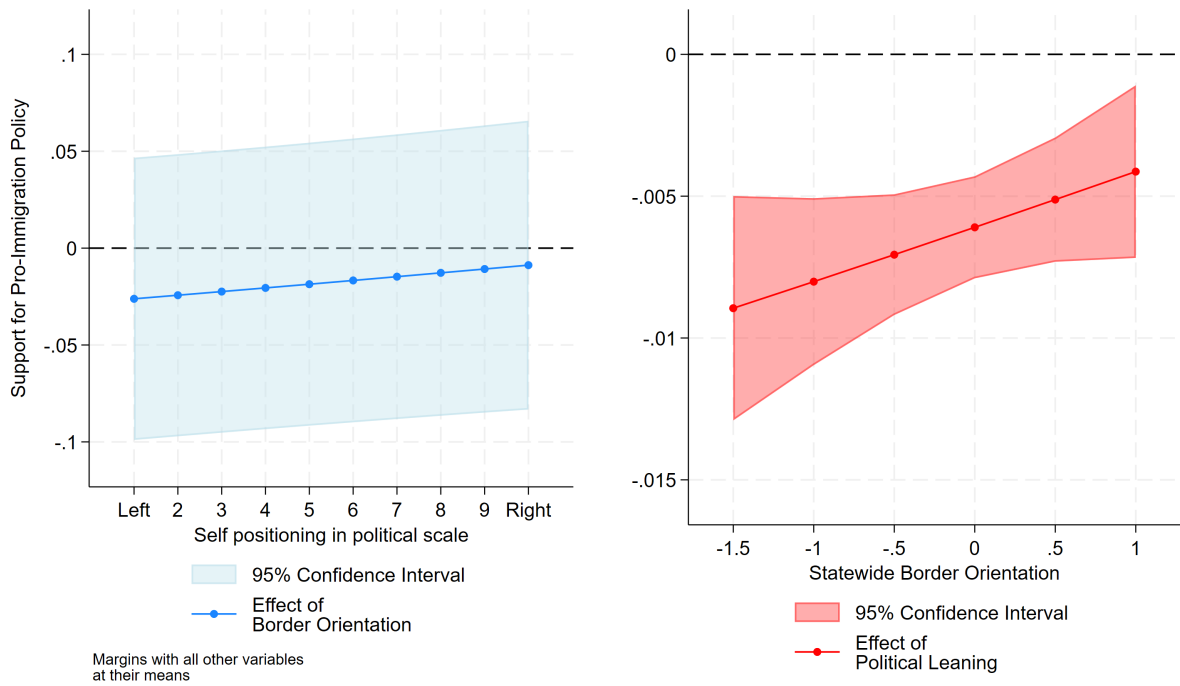


Figure 10: Testing H4 - Pro-Immigrant Policy

As the overall border orientation in a state becomes more controlling, the effect of ideology on supporting pro-immigration policy is reduced by nearly half as states move from more a permissive border to a more controlling one. While this does not show support for Hypothesis 4, it does provide an interesting avenue for future research to explore why border policy might reduce the role of ideology in shaping attitudes rather than exacerbate it. It may be that as border policy becomes more in line with far-right ideological views, more moderate conservatives have a thermostatic response to immigration policy and become less in favor of anti-immigrant policy and more likely to support pro-immigration policies instead, while liberals who were already opposed to the more controlling status quo remain supportive of pro-immigration policy instead. Further research could delve further into this potential dynamic in shaping attitudes.

Discussion and Conclusion

Ultimately, I find little or mixed evidence in favor of my hypotheses. I find minimal evidence for higher levels of border fortifications resulting in negative attitudes towards migrants or immigration policy, and rather I find some evidence that police presence near the border may result in improved attitudes towards migrants. Regardless of the little evidence for Hypothesis 1, this research leads to next steps for the literature on immigration attitudes. First, the significant findings for the role of general trust in the public on immigration attitudes as well as the negative impact of border police presence indicates support for the idea of safety as a considerable influence on immigration, whether it be narratives used by the government (?) or events that occur within a country that increase the saliency of such concerns (?). As such, perceptions of immigrant criminality and the safety of residents from ‘bad actors’ may be a fruitful direction to continue exploring.

I also find minimal evidence for the role of distance playing a major role in how border fortifications influence public opinion, but I do find some evidence that respondents’ distance to the border may alter the effect of their political ideology on attitudes towards migrants and

immigration, albeit in the opposite direction as hypothesized. As respondents live further from the border, the impact of increased conservatism on opposition to migrants becomes increasingly muted. However, as respondents live further from the border, increased levels of conservatism result in a higher likelihood of opposing pro-immigration policy. This provides some evidence in favor of the role of intergroup theory, in which respondents with greater contact with migrants or the border itself are more likely to support favorable policies towards migrants, and less likely to be opposed to interacting with migrants. I also find results in the opposite direction of Hypothesis 4, where I find that as border fortifications shift to become more controlling, ideology has a reduced impact on opposition to migrants. Future research could investigate further into why controlling border orientations weaken the impact of ideology rather than strengthen it.

Future research could improve on these findings in multiple ways. First, improving the matching or estimation procedure for attaining estimates of respondents' distance to the border could help further confirm the validity and robustness of the findings. As of now, the fuzzy matching procedure provides some level of confidence that distances are accurately assigned to respondents' districts, but further specification may bolster confidence in the accuracy of the sample data further as well as potentially improve the available sample size of the data. Relatedly, using a single-case or small-n case design rather than a large-n design may prove more fruitful for theory-testing. While the results provide evidence on the general relationships between these key variables, investigating a 'most likely' case may help discern if these (lack of) dynamics exists in at least some circumstances. A large cross-national time-series sample such as the IVS may be fruitful for general relationships, but given a lack of significance, further investigation in a less generalizing sample may be a more accurate or useful test of the theory.

Lastly, this paper implicitly assumes that distance to border serves as a useful proxy measure for intergroup contact between residents and migrants. However, migrant communities are not necessarily located along or near the border. While many migrants that travel

by land or sea may be at a border for some given amount of time, migrants may also seek to leave border regions and live in the interior of the country for the long-term. Because of this, future research could improve the precision and more directly test the mechanism of intergroup contact by taking advantage of data on the location of migrant neighborhoods and diaspora communities, or survey questions that better ascertain a respondents' perceived level of contact with different groups of people. While this paper uses an imperfect measure, it provides a useful step towards further investigating the role of intergroup contact in shaping public attitudes on topics that bridge foreign policy and domestic politics, especially a topic like immigration that features heavy undertones and topics related to race, ethnicity, economic inequality, and prejudice.

As border fortifications continue to develop in the post-Cold War era (?), policymakers are likely to continue using narratives related to criminality or safety as justifications for their actions. Future research could investigate how such narratives impact respondents' levels of trust, and therefore make another empirical connection between state narratives, policymaker and elite conduct, and public opinion. Additionally, the role of ideology and immigration attitudes has been well studied. These findings continue to showcase this trend, but they further show that ideology is not necessarily independent of other contextual factors, especially factors that may be outside of the respondents' control and in the control of policymakers, like border policy.