

2018

# To Build a Wall or Open the Borders: An Analysis of Immigration Attitudes Among Undergraduate University Students

Kelsey Sprenger

*John Carroll University*, [ksprenger18@jcu.edu](mailto:ksprenger18@jcu.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://collected.jcu.edu/honorspapers>

 Part of the [Political Science Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Sprenger, Kelsey, "To Build a Wall or Open the Borders: An Analysis of Immigration Attitudes Among Undergraduate University Students" (2018). *Senior Honors Projects*. 107.

<https://collected.jcu.edu/honorspapers/107>

This Honors Paper/Project is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Essays, and Senior Honors Projects at Carroll Collected. It has been accepted for inclusion in Senior Honors Projects by an authorized administrator of Carroll Collected. For more information, please contact [connell@jcu.edu](mailto:connell@jcu.edu).

To Build a Wall or Open the Borders: An Analysis of Immigration Attitudes Among  
Undergraduate University Students

Kelsey Sprenger

John Carroll University

## ABSTRACT

*Recently, the American political spotlight has focused on the phenomena of legal and illegal immigration due to controversy over who should be allowed to enter the country. However, it is still hard to say with certainty what particular groups, such as university students, actually think about these issues, and whether or not it is possible to predict their attitudes based on certain demographic variables. This project seeks to uncover an answer to the latter question by analyzing the effects of political affiliation, religion, and social class on attitudes toward legal and illegal immigration using data from a survey administered to 123 undergraduate university students at a Midwestern Jesuit liberal arts school. The OLS regression results demonstrate that not all of the independent variables affect these attitudes. When trying to predict support for legal and illegal immigration, political ideology and religious group affiliation are significant. These findings may be used to formulate possible policy suggestions for Jesuit liberal arts schools in the future, which can hopefully improve attitudes toward immigrants within the United States.*

## INTRODUCTION

In the twenty-first century, there has been an incredible global movement of people across borders. These population fluctuations continue to dramatically impact host countries as the number of immigrants, both legal and illegal, increases each year, and more people of different backgrounds come into contact with each other. This constant movement represents an excellent opportunity for scholars from around the world to study immigration in new and exciting ways. Researchers within the United States have taken advantage of this as many try to explain how demographic characteristics may affect attitudes toward legal and illegal immigration (Abdel-Moneim and Simon 2011; Berg 2010; Diaz, Saenz, and Kwan 2011; Garcia and Davidson 2013; Gravelle 2016; Haubert and Fussell 2006; Ilias, Fennelly, and Federico 2008; Knoll 2009; Murray and Marx 2013; Nteta and Wallsten 2012; Ross and Rouse 2015; Vallas, Zimmerman, and Davis 2009). As a major host country, the United States' population has a variety of opinions about these topics, ranging from extremely positive to extremely negative. These diverse opinions are represented within the current American political climate that is fraught with tensions about migration as both sides try to voice their opinions for or against the

phenomenon. Immigration as a whole played a major role in the presidential platforms of the most recent election. It has even affected college campuses across the nation as the issue continues to spark demonstrations and protests both supporting and opposing immigration into the United States. These university students are a vital group to research due to their potential to change the situation in the future, as they are the upcoming leaders of the nation. Therefore, it is necessary to examine this group and determine which demographic factors may impact their views about both legal and illegal immigration. This study will focus specifically on how a variety of factors— including political affiliation, religion, and social class— affect attitudes toward immigration in an attempt to uncover more information about these complex relationships in these undergraduate university students.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies have sought to examine which characteristics affect attitudes toward legal and illegal immigration in order to try to predict the opinions of certain groups about these phenomena. While attitudes about this topic tend to be complicated, there are certain demographic factors, such as age, political affiliation, religion, and social class that influence them greatly. The latter three demographic qualities may also cause similarities in attitudes among age cohort groups, such as undergraduate college students. Overall, studies show that the above factors influence opinions about legal and illegal immigration in some way, but some relationships are more complex than others.

### *Age and Attitudes Toward Immigration*

Studies regarding the relationship of age to attitudes about immigration support the idea that younger generations tend to be more tolerant of immigration, while older generations may not be as accepting (Abdel-Moneim and Simon 2011; Ross and Rouse 2015). One study

conducted by Abdel-Moneim and Simon (2011) examines the effects of age on immigration attitudes using data from the Pew Global Attitudes Project in 2002 and 2003. The data show that as people age, there is an increase in intolerance of both legal and illegal immigration, specifically shown through believing in the restriction of the number of immigrants to the United States, seeing immigration as a high priority problem, and supporting an amendment banning children of illegal immigrants from becoming citizens (Abdel-Moneim and Simon 2011).

Regarding a younger age group, a study by Ross and Rouse (2015) uses data from the 2008 American National Election Study to compare the poor economic situation of Millennials to their tolerance of immigration. Findings show that despite the high unemployment and job competition they face, and the recession going on in the United State during data collection, Millennials' tolerance levels of both legal and illegal immigration are higher (46.6%) than non-Millennials' (31.8%) (Ross and Rouse 2015:1373). This contradiction highlights the Millennials' collective liberal attitudes and increased acceptance of diversity (Ross and Rouse 2015).

In previous years, other studies have focused solely on attitudes of undergraduate university students (Diaz et al. 2011; Murray and Marx 2013). These demonstrate that while younger individuals, such as students, may be more likely to support both legal and illegal immigration, there is still some opposition to the phenomena among this younger group.

Diaz, Saenz, and Kwan (2011) also explored the impact of age on attitudes of immigration. They conducted a multi-year study to look at changes in opinions of 3,195 undergraduate university students from a large state university in Arizona. The study lasted for three years, from 2006-2009, and the sample of students responded to questions each year during their fall semester. When asked to rate their attitudes on a five-point scale of strongly disagree to strongly agree, the students' responses remained fairly consistent among the group (Diaz et al.

2011). For the first two years of data collection, all students responded fairly positively. On a scale of 18 (extremely positive attitudes) to 38 (extremely negative attitudes), the students' answers were within the range of 20-26. However, during the 2008 and 2009 data collection times, the students' support decreased, and by 2009, their answers on the scale increased to a range of 28-36 (Diaz et al. 2011:308). While student attitudes fell during this time, those who felt more positively in 2006 were more likely to feel more positively again in 2009. However, there is no doubt that their attitudes became more negative during this time. One possible reason for this decrease in positive responses comes from the 2008 recession that hit Arizona particularly hard (Diaz et al. 2011). Perhaps the students, some of whom would have been preparing to graduate and move on to mainstream jobs, felt increasing anxiety about future job competition from these perceived illegal Mexican immigrants. This phenomenon of more negative attitudes from students toward this group also demonstrates that national changes, such as a recession and housing crash, may have an effect on students' outlooks of the world around them.

A similar study by Murray and Marx (2013) demonstrates that students may perceive illegal immigrants as less favorable than legal ones. When asked various questions about both groups of immigrants, 201 undergraduate students from a large public university in the United States responded both positively and negatively. More students perceived a bigger threat from illegal immigrants, although some felt threatened by both types. Other students perceived few threats from either group of immigrants (Murray and Marx 2013). These varied responses show that, much like the American public, students hold diverse opinions of this controversial topic. While they may be more likely to support legal and illegal immigrants than other groups, there is still a great deal of variety within their responses.

### *Political Affiliation and Attitudes Toward Immigration*

While age has been shown to impact immigration attitudes, other research has examined the impact of political affiliation on these beliefs. Studies seeking to connect politics and immigration are not completely straightforward due to the complex nature of the relationship between political party affiliation and political ideology (Garcia and Davidson 2013; Gravelle 2016; Ilias et al. 2008). Many scholars acknowledge that this connection is blurry and not completely understood. There are mixed opinions in the field about which variable affects immigration attitudes more, since some studies believe it is ideology, conservatism versus liberalism, while others believe it is party affiliation, typically Democrat or Republican (Garcia and Davidson 2013:85). Thus, this area of research should be studied more to better understand the relationship between these conflicting attributes.

Using a June 2013 phone survey study by Pew Research Center with a sample of 1,086 American adults, Gravelle (2016) examined political party identification and attitudes toward illegal immigration. When asked about what should be done with illegal immigrants residing in the United States, Republicans are only slightly more likely than Democrats to favor a restrictionist view of sending them back to their original homelands (Gravelle 2016). This finding goes against the common idea that “conservative” Republicans will always be less tolerant toward immigrants, particularly illegal ones.

On the other hand, a second study that examines the connection between political party affiliation, political ideology, guest worker programs, and attitudes toward immigration finds the opposite: that political party identification does have a significant effect on immigration attitudes (Ilias et al. 2008). The results of a 2004 New York Times/CBS News Poll of 744 likely U.S. voters show that Republicans are more likely than Democrats to oppose both guest worker

programs to legalize illegal immigrants and an increase in legal immigration to the country. Other studies in the same area of research suggest that there is not a consistent liberal or conservative view of immigration, since the ideologies tend to be mixed up within the parties, such as with a more conservative Democrat (Ilias et al. 2008). However, in this study, political ideology does not appear to have a significant effect on illegal immigration attitudes. This suggests that political beliefs and political parties may be more consistent than previously thought: Republicans may tend to be conservative, while Democrats may tend to be liberal on average (Ilias et al. 2008). These findings also show that beliefs about both legal and illegal immigration may be more consistent with regards to party affiliation, as opposed to political ideology. While both studies conclude that regardless of circumstances, Republicans are more likely to oppose both legal and illegal immigration, it is important to note that they come to these conclusions in different ways (Gravelle 2016; Ilias et al. 2008).

#### *Religion and Attitudes Toward Immigration*

Other studies have analyzed the connection between religion (combining religious affiliation and religiosity) and immigration attitudes. Research regarding religion and attitudes about legal and illegal immigration has come to a few conclusions about the specific factors that influence the relationship between these variables (Knoll 2009; Nteta and Wallsten 2012). One of these studies examines how religion affects individual attitudes toward immigration using data from 6,003 respondents in the 2006 Immigration Survey conducted by Pew Research Center and Pew Hispanic Center (Knoll 2009). When asked if illegal immigrants should be required to return home, granted legal status automatically, or allowed to participate in a work program to gain legalization, the results show a difference among religious groups. Those who affiliate with “minority religions,” specifically Jewish and Latter-Day Saints followers, are more likely than



believers of “mainstream” religions, like Catholicism and Protestantism, to be more accepting of illegal immigrants. However, the most important factor leading to this acceptance is the frequency of church attendance: more frequent worship means more positive attitudes toward immigrants (Knoll 2009). Therefore, it is possible to conclude that those with an increased importance of religion in their lives (more religiosity) have a higher tolerance for immigration.

Messages from religious leaders about immigration, which tend to be in favor of acceptance instead of restriction, also seem to affect how parishioners perceive immigration (Nteta and Wallsten 2012). Using phone survey data of 3,339 Americans from the 2004 National Politics Survey, this study shows that while the majority of those surveyed had not experienced these messages from their religious leaders, those who had were less likely to support a decrease or restriction in legal immigration to the United States (Nteta and Wallsten 2012). Like Knoll’s study, these results show that more frequent church worship and “minority religion” status lead to more openness about legal immigration. However, Nteta and Wallsten (2012) also find that Catholics are more likely to be supportive of immigrants and immigration in general. This discovery illustrates that there may be differences between religion and opinions regarding legal and illegal immigration, since Catholics are not more or less likely to support liberal views toward illegal immigrants, but are more likely when dealing with legal immigrants (Knoll 2009; Nteta and Wallsten 2012). More research is needed on this topic to provide a definitive answer about which religious groups are more likely to support or oppose immigration.

#### *Social Class and Attitudes Toward Immigration*

Lastly, other studies have focused on the impact of social class on immigration attitudes. Regarding this analysis, studies find that educational attainment has the greatest effect of social class variables on immigration tolerance (Berg 2010; Haubert and Fussell 2006; Vallas et al.

2009). Haubert and Fussell (2006) compared immigration attitudes to the “cosmopolitan worldview” of having a white-collar job, university degree, liberal attitudes, and no feelings of ethnocentrism by analyzing 1996 General Social Survey data from 1,083 respondents. When combined, these factors create more tolerance for immigrants on many levels, particularly supporting the ideas that immigrants help the economy and make America more open to new ideas and cultures. White-collar workers are particularly positive with their immigration views and see globalization as favorable to the country. Similarly, a higher education status leads to more support of multiculturalism and thus support of immigration (Haubert and Fussell 2006). These results give an optimistic outcome for the future that more education will lead to more cosmopolitan views, which will in turn increase appreciation of and favorable attitudes toward immigration (Haubert and Fussell 2006).

A study conducted by Berg (2010) also suggests a connection between social class, with the specific focus on education levels, and attitudes toward immigration. After examining 2000 Census and General Social Survey data, the results show that more education tends to improve favorable views of immigrants, but more for some groups than others (Berg 2010). For example, white Americans with college degrees are more likely to have positive attitudes toward immigration when compared to African Americans with the same level of schooling. This research has significant findings that social class “intersects” with other variables, such as gender and race, to create a positive or negative view of immigration (Berg 2010).

While these above findings highlight the importance of increased education and job status, they ignore completely the income aspect of social class. Very few studies seem to analyze income when examining immigration attitudes, but one such study, using data from the 2007 Virginia Survey of Anti-Immigrant Sentiment, finds that higher income results in more

acceptance of immigrants, both legal and illegal (Vallas et al. 2009). Those in the lower income ranges are more likely to oppose immigration than the middle ranges, who are more likely to be in opposition than the higher ranges (Vallas et al. 2009). It is possible that studies that do not look at income in their class analyses consider a higher education and job status to signify higher income and social class automatically, so they do not include it in their discussion.

Overall, the previous literature suggests that age, political affiliation, religion, and social class impact attitudes toward legal and illegal immigration. Some variables appear to have both positive and negative effects on these dependent variables, depending on the study, which means findings so far have been mixed. While age and social class have relatively consistent findings (that a younger age, such as among university students, and a higher social class mean more support for both types of immigration), political affiliation and religion do not. There are mixed findings about the relationship between political party/ideology as well as religious group affiliation. In the future, studies should focus on clarifying the complex association between these variables and attitudes toward legal and illegal immigration.

## METHODS

The principal method of data collection for this study is a survey which I administered to undergraduate university students during the Fall of 2017. To do this, I visited seven different classes after receiving IRB approval to conduct my research. The students chose whether or not they wanted to participate after reading through the informed consent document (see attached) and asking any relevant questions; filling out the survey was completely voluntary. Students were also required to circle “yes” at the top of the survey to guarantee they understood this. Survey responses were also anonymous, as there were no names included on the surveys and I left the room while the students filled them out so I would not know who completed them. Each

question within the survey helps to measure demographic characteristics (independent variables) as well as attitudes toward both types of immigration (dependent variables).

### *Sampling*

The sample for this project consists of undergraduate students at a Midwestern Jesuit liberal arts school. Due to time constraints, this project utilizes a non-probability convenience sample. I selected classrooms from various disciplines and class levels to ensure as much diversity within the sample as possible. These classes included honors program required classes, economics, political science, psychology, and sociology. Prior to beginning data collection, professors from the selected classes granted their approval for their classes to take the survey. The majority of these students completed the survey, leading to a sample of 123 respondents.

### *Hypotheses*

Based on the cited review of previous studies, five hypotheses have been formed concerning how the independent variables will affect attitudes toward legal and illegal immigration. This project predicts the following:

H<sub>1</sub>: Overall, the students will have favorable views of both types of immigration, but especially legal. University students, because of their young age, are typically more open to new ideas and people, which could make them more open and accepting of immigrants, both legal and illegal.

H<sub>2</sub>: Having a liberal political ideology will result in an increased tolerance of and a more positive attitude toward legal and illegal immigration. Political ideology can have a large impact on attitudes about this topic considering immigration is a largely political topic.

H<sub>3</sub>: Those who did not vote in the 2016 presidential election will have more positive attitudes toward both types of immigration. Due to the volatile nature of this election and its emphasis on anger, it is possible that the young people who voted are anti-immigrant, whereas those who did not vote are more likely to have positive views of legal and illegal immigration.

H<sub>4</sub>: Individuals who are not Catholic will hold more positive attitudes toward both types of immigration than those who do follow Catholicism. Those who follow

other religions may be more open to the entrance of foreigners and will be more inclined to have more support because these groups may be more likely to hold liberal beliefs. Also, those who do not consider religion to be important will see legal and illegal immigration in a more positive light than those who do consider it important. Less of a sense of religiosity may lead to more liberal views, and thus more positive attitudes overall.

H<sub>5</sub>: Those students who come from parents who are more educated with better jobs, as distinguished by a higher Occupational Prestige Index score, will favor legal and illegal immigration over those who come from parents with a lower education level and lower job score. The literature has suggested that these households will be the ones with more support of both legal and illegal immigration.

### *Operationalization of Key Variables*

This research project deals with two dependent variables—attitudes toward legal and illegal immigration—and three independent variables—political affiliation, religion, and social class. Specific questions from the attached survey provide all of the measurements for each of the variables. Additionally, this project utilizes regression analysis to determine the relationships between each of the independent variables and the dependent variables.

Immigration, the basis of the dependent variables, is as the act of moving from one country to another to start a new life. Legal immigration means doing this act in a way that is approved by the government. There is explicit permission granted to enter the country and remain there to live and/or work. Opinions may be positive, neutral, or negative about this topic. Positive attitudes will be those expressed in favor of legal immigration and its effects, while negative opinions will be answers that signify being against the phenomenon. Attitudes may also be neutral in which the student has no specific opinion on the issue. To obtain a score to measure students' attitudes, I combined sixteen items for each respondent. The scale created by combining these questions ranges from 16-80, with a higher score showing more support for legal immigration. These sixteen questions come from two articles dealing with attitudes toward

immigration (Abdel-Moneim 2011, Vallas 2009); the *2015 Chicago Council Survey of American Public Opinion and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Kafura et al. 2016); and my own creation. Three items measure attitudes toward legal immigration by asking whether or not it is a big problem, a critical threat, and an important foreign policy goal. Four questions ask respondents' opinions about if they worry about legal immigrants in the United States, believe legal immigrants should be allowed to obtain citizenship, think the government should only accept immigrants from certain parts of the world, and feel the numbers of legal immigrants coming into this country should be decreased. The next nine items deal with attitudes about the legal immigrants themselves by asking if they increase crime, are bad for the economy, take jobs away from Americans, drain social services, hurt American customs, increase terrorism, threaten national security, and should be allowed to serve in the military. One positive item asks if legal immigrants make American open to new ideas and cultures. I flipped the scale for this question (to make strongly agree a 5 and strongly disagree a 1) after data entry to allow for equal analysis.

The second dependent variable is attitudes toward illegal immigration. Illegal immigration means the act of moving from one country to another through unlawful means. This signifies crossing a national border without governmental permission or necessary paperwork and living in the new country as an undocumented person. As with legal immigration, attitudes toward this phenomenon may be positive, neutral, or negative. This project uses the same standards as described above for legal immigration (being in favor of, neutral toward, or against the phenomenon) to judge the attitudes of the sample toward illegal immigration. To measure these attitudes, I combined sixteen items from each respondent. These items create a scale similar to the one used for attitudes toward legal immigration that ranges from 16-80, with a higher score signaling more support of illegal immigration. These questions used to measure this

variable come from a variety of sources, including those by Abdel-Moneim (2011), Vallas (2009), Kafura et al. (2016), and my own creation. Four items in the top portion ask about illegal immigration and whether or not it is a big problem, a critical threat, an important foreign policy goal, and a wrong action; the remaining three questions ask whether or not the respondent worries about the presence of illegal immigrants, thinks Trump's wall is a good idea, and believes illegal immigrants should be allowed to obtain citizenship. The last nine statements are identical to the last nine for legal immigrants, except these ask about respondents' opinions of illegal immigrants. I recoded the same positive statement about whether or not illegal immigrants make America more open to new ideas to make strongly agree a 5 and strongly disagree a 1.

The first construct of this study is political affiliation, which is measured by political ideology as well as whether or not the respondent voted in the 2016 presidential election. Political ideology signifies the type of political feelings people hold. Most often, people define themselves as liberal, moderate, or conservative to help gauge their political beliefs. While the literature review also discusses political party, I chose to include only political ideology in my analysis— which uses a simpler, more direct question— to strengthen my findings, as both political party and political ideology measure the same ideas in this survey. To measure this concept, the survey contains one question asking the respondent to select his/her political ideology on a scale of 1 (extremely liberal) to 7 (extremely conservative). Additionally, this project analyzes whether or not voting in the 2016 presidential election (coded as 0 = no, 1 = yes) affects these attitudes. However, it is necessary to acknowledge that 23% of the sample was 18 at the time of the survey and reported that they did not vote, possibly due to the fact that they were ineligible. Despite this, I ultimately chose to include this measure in my regression to see if voting or not made a difference in these attitudes within the sample.

Religion, the second construct examined in this study, is measured by the religious group with which someone identifies, along with the importance of these religious feelings. While religious groups dictate unique beliefs about who, when, and how to worship that may influence attitudes toward immigration, it is also important to consider how significant religion is within the lives of the respondents. I recoded the question asking the respondent to select his/her religious group affiliation to account for the large number of Catholic students on campus; instead, I used a simpler breakdown of religion with Catholics (coded as a 1) versus Non-Catholics (coded as a 0). This group included those who are Protestant, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, other, or follow no religion at all. The question for religiosity asks about the importance of religion in the respondent's life using a scale of 1 (not at all important) to 7 (very important).

For this project, the construct of social class is measured using parental education and job prestige. Education is the highest degree someone has achieved within his/her lifetime. The questions that address this aspect ask for the respondent's parents' highest degrees received, ranging from high school degree/GED or less (1) to doctorate/professional degree (6). While the literature indicates that income is significant in social class when trying to predict these attitudes, this project uses a measure of parental occupational prestige, as this was easier for the students to answer accurately rather than parental income. The survey asks respondents to provide their parents' occupations, and I translated these into scores based on the Occupational Prestige Scale using 2010 Census data (General Social Survey and National Opinion Research Center 2014). There are four cases in which one or both parents are retired, in which case I used mean substitution according to the corresponding education level provided by the respondent. For example, if someone's father is retired and the student answered that he has a bachelor's degree, I calculated the mean prestige score for men with bachelor's degrees and substituted this number.



One person responded that her mother is a translator, which is not an occupation on the 2010 scale, so I classified it as “other service worker.” Other individuals responded that they do not have their mother or father in their lives, which meant that parent received a score of zero. Overall, these scores allow for comparison among parental occupations. To measure education and job prestige, I combined the scores for mother and father to create one parental measure for each variable. More education and a higher prestige score will signify a higher social class.

## RESULTS

While there are a variety of variables that may affect attitudes toward legal and illegal immigration, this project predicts that political ideology, voting in the 2016 presidential election, religious affiliation, religiosity, parental education levels, and parental occupational prestige scores influence opinions toward these phenomena among a sample of undergraduate university students. More specifically, it hypothesizes that while students as a whole will hold positive views, those individuals who have a liberal ideology, did not vote in the most recent presidential election, are not Catholic, find religion to be less important, and have a higher social class as measured by a higher-level parental education and occupational prestige will be more likely to support both legal and illegal immigration.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Interval Ratio Level Variables

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Support for Legal Immigration	64.3	9.945
Support for Illegal Immigration	51.9	15.388
Political Ideology	3.85	1.347
Religiosity	4.08	2.039
Combined Parental Education Score	7.51	2.735
Combined Parental Occupational Prestige Index Score	101	28.999

Overall, the descriptive data indicate the qualities of the sample of 123 respondents who answered these questions. In terms of the dependent variables, the means for support of legal and illegal immigration demonstrate that the sampled students hold fairly positive attitudes. For legal immigration, the mean is 64.3 on a scale ranging from 16-80, and for illegal, it is 51.9 on a scale with the same possible range. While both means are well above the neutral attitude score of 40, it is clear that students hold more positive attitudes toward legal immigration rather than illegal. This proves  $H_1$  to be correct, that the students hold fairly positive opinions about these topics, especially for legal immigration. The standard deviation for attitudes toward legal immigration (9.945) is smaller than for attitudes toward illegal immigration (15.388), thus showing that there is more variability within the latter. This is reflected within the range of results for each type: legal has a much smaller range from 42-80, while illegal has a larger one from 19-80.

The average score for political ideology is a 3.85 on a scale of 1 (extremely liberal) to 7 (extremely conservative). This corresponds almost exactly to the moderate value of 4, meaning students, on average, see themselves as moderates on the scale. It has a standard deviation of 1.347. Similarly, the respondents average a 4.08 on a scale of religion's importance ranging from 1 (not at all important) to 7 (very important). Again, the students show themselves to be moderate on this scale, as religion has a moderately important impact on their lives. This variable has a standard deviation of 2.039. The standard deviations for both variables demonstrate there is some variability within each of them.

The mean score for combined parental education is a 7.51 on a scale of 1 (assuming there is only one parent in the respondent's home with a high school degree/GED or less) to 12 (meaning both parents hold doctorates or professional degrees). Therefore, this sample's parental education levels are in the middle, but with a slight positive leaning. Its standard deviation is

2.735, which shows some variability. As for parental occupational prestige, the average combined score is 101, with scores ranging from 31-154. The average is on the high side of the range. This measure has a high standard deviation of 28.999, which shows much variability.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Nominal Level Variables

		Frequency	Percent
Religious Affiliation	Catholic	79	64.2%
	Not Catholic	44	35.8%
Voted in 2016 Presidential Election	Yes	61	49.6%
	No	62	50.4%

For religious affiliation, 64.2% of the sample is Catholic, while the remaining 35.8% is not. This group of non-Catholics is comprised of those who are Protestant, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, other, or follow no religion at all. About half of the sample (49.6%) voted in the most recent 2016 presidential election, while the other 50.4% did not.

Table 3. OLS Regression for Attitudes Toward Legal Immigration (N=123)

	OLS Coefficient	Standard Error
Political Ideology	-3.371*	0.604
Voted in 2016 Presidential Election (0 = no, 1 = yes)	-0.220	1.551
Religiosity	0.178	0.411
Religious Affiliation (0 = Not Catholic, 1 = Catholic)	-4.318*	1.707
Combined Parental Education	0.554	0.330
Combined Parental Occupational Prestige Index Score	-0.040	0.031
Constant	79.395*	3.887
R <sup>2</sup>	0.307	

\*p < 0.05

To test the hypotheses described above, this project utilizes OLS regression. The  $R^2$  value for the legal immigration regression (Table 3) is .307. This signifies that 30.7% of the variation within attitudes toward legal immigration can be explained by the independent variables.

Within the regression in Table 3, two of the variables—political ideology and religious affiliation—are significant in predicting attitudes toward legal immigration. Table 3 indicates that the political ideology hypothesis ( $H_2$ ) that states people who are more liberal will have more support for legal immigration is correct. The coefficient of -3.371 signifies that as political affiliation “goes up” on the scale (becomes more conservative), support for legal immigration decreases. For religious affiliation, there is also a negative association ( $b=-4.318$ ) with the dependent variable; therefore, Catholics hold more negative views about legal immigration than non-Catholics do. The data supports the part of the religion hypothesis ( $H_4$ ) that says Catholics will be less likely to have positive attitudes about this type of immigration than other religions.

The remaining independent variables of voting in the 2016 presidential election, religiosity, combined parental education, and combined parental occupational prestige index score are not significant for legal immigration. The prediction that not voting in the election would increase support for legal immigration is insignificant. While the OLS coefficient is negative, there is no association between voting in the 2016 presidential election and opinions toward legal immigration. Religiosity, or how important religion is within the life of the respondent, is also not a variable that affects attitudes toward this type of immigration. Within this regression, its coefficient is positive. The conclusion for this variable is that it is not significant when trying to predict legal immigration attitudes; therefore, the data does not support the hypothesis that other religious groups are more likely to support legal immigration. Combined parental education is also not a significant predictor of legal immigration attitudes

within this sample. While this data does show that there is a positive coefficient for support toward legal immigration, this relationship is not significant within the OLS regression, and thus the data does not support the parental education portion of the social class hypothesis. Lastly, the relationship between combined parental occupational prestige index scores and attitudes toward legal immigration is not significant at any level. While its coefficient is negative, this variable is not significant when predicting attitudes toward this dependent variable. Social class does not appear to be an accurate predictor of support for legal immigration in this sample, since both parental education and occupational prestige are not significant.

Table 4. OLS Regression for Attitudes Toward Illegal Immigration (N=123)

	OLS Coefficient	Standard Error
Political Ideology	-6.549*	0.845
Voted in 2016 Presidential Election (0 = no, 1 = yes)	-3.044	2.171
Religiosity	0.108	0.576
Religious Affiliation (0 = Not Catholic, 1 = Catholic)	-5.086*	2.389
Combined Parental Education	0.788	0.461
Combined Parental Occupational Prestige Index Score	-0.037	0.043
Constant	79.358*	5.439
R <sup>2</sup>	0.433	

\*p < 0.05

Table 4 presents the OLS regression for attitudes toward illegal immigration utilizing the same independent variables tested with legal immigration in Table 3. The R<sup>2</sup> value for illegal immigration is vastly different than legal with .433. This means 43.3% of the variation within attitudes toward illegal immigration can be accounted for by the independent variables within this regression. It is interesting to note how different the two values are for each type of

immigration, especially since the same two factors of political ideology and religious affiliation are significant indicators of both attitudes. For political ideology, the coefficient of -6.549 shows a negative relationship between this independent variable and the dependent variable. As political ideology “goes up” (becomes more conservative), support for illegal immigration decreases, and vice versa. This proves the political ideology part of the political affiliation hypothesis to be correct: those who are more liberal show more support toward illegal immigration. The religious affiliation coefficient of -5.086 also shows a significant negative relationship with attitudes toward illegal immigration. Catholics are less likely than other religions to hold positive opinions about illegal immigration. Thus, this regression shows that this part of the religion hypothesis is also correct.

Voting in the 2016 presidential election, religiosity, combined parental education, and combined parental occupational prestige index scores are not significant predictors of attitudes toward illegal immigration. There is no association between these independent variables and the dependent variable within this regression. The relationship between voting in the election and support for illegal immigration is not significant. Even though the coefficient is negative, this variable proves not to be an important predictor of attitudes toward this type of immigration. The data also does not support the hypothesis that those who did not vote would have better opinions of illegal immigration. Religiosity is also not significant in this regression, which disproves the part of the religion hypothesis that states those who place a lower importance on religion will have more positive attitudes about illegal immigration. Neither part of the social class hypothesis is significant; neither combined parental education nor occupational prestige scores has an association with predicting opinions toward illegal immigration. While parental education has a positive coefficient, the prediction that higher parental education would lead to more support of

illegal immigration is not significant in this case. Parental occupational prestige is also not a significant predictor of attitudes about this topic. Within this data, the negative OLS coefficient shows no association between parental job prestige and support for illegal immigration.

## DISCUSSION

The results regarding general support for legal and illegal immigration among undergraduate university students show that students have relatively positive opinions of both types. The means for their scores are at least eleven points above the “neutral” attitude score of 40. This result is in accordance with the literature, which discusses the phenomenon of general undergraduate support, but with some variability within the group as a whole. The large range of answers for both types demonstrates this point, as there were a variety of negative, neutral, and positive answers within the questions used to measure the attitudes. However, the general positive attitude of this group supports the cohort effect that younger generations are more likely than older ones to approve of topics such as legal and illegal immigration.

When analyzing the significant variables of religious affiliation and political ideology for support toward legal and illegal immigration, the findings are surprising. Of the two factors, religious affiliation supports the literature’s findings more than political ideology does; however, even the findings for religious affiliation are not completely consistent with the literature. A previous study about the connection between religious affiliation and support for legal and illegal immigration has suggested that Catholics are more likely to support immigrants and immigration (Nteta and Wallsten 2012), while another finds that non-Catholics are more likely to support both types of immigration (Knoll 2009). The results from Tables 3 and 4 support the latter finding, as those students who are not Catholic show more favorable attitudes. These results are interesting given the Catholic Pope’s teaching to love everyone and be welcoming to

immigrants; however, those students who are not Catholic seem to hold more liberal views that coincide with more support for immigration. The literature also points to mixed findings on the effect of political ideology on attitudes toward either type of immigration (Gravelle 2016; Ilias et al. 2008). Yet, this project finds that it has an effect on both types of immigration. In this case, being liberal signifies more support for immigration, whereas in some other studies, it has no effect. Perhaps political ideology is significant in this project because of the question used to measure the variable, which asks how the respondent would place him/herself on a concrete scale of being liberal, moderate, or conservative. This is a direct way of asking about political views, which may have strengthened its significance. This finding also may be due to the role of political ideology among college students who may not have as strong of a party affiliation as other populations because of their young age. However, it must be taken into consideration with the significance of both political and religion variables that this study has an extremely small sample size, which only represents a miniscule portion of undergraduate university students, meaning more research is necessary to form a more stable conclusion about whether or not religious affiliation and political ideology affect these attitudes.

The results that show which variables are not significant for both types of immigration are also not as expected. While the literature about this topic suggests that all of the independent variables affect support for legal immigration in some way, the OLS regression results (Tables 3 and 4) demonstrate that this is not the case for this study. These variables—voting in the 2016 presidential election, religiosity, parental education, and parental occupational prestige—are not significant when trying to predict attitudes toward legal and illegal immigration, and thus refute the findings of other studies completed about this topic.



While voting in the most recent presidential election is not covered by any study within the literature review due to its recent nature, I intended this variable to be added as my twist on the “traditional” political variables typically used to measure attitudes toward immigration. Since this election brought out many controversial opinions about these phenomena, I was curious to see if it would affect the students’ attitudes; unfortunately, it did not. Part of this may be due to the fact that some of the freshmen sampled within the study could not vote at the time of the election, and thus this variable would be irrelevant to them when trying to predict their attitudes. However, after re-running the regression to account for these individuals, this variable was still not significant for either type. In hindsight, it would have been better to include a question asking whether or not students would have voted if they were able, regardless of if they actually did.

It is difficult to say why the remaining variables of religiosity, parental education, and parental occupational prestige are not significant within this study when trying to predict attitudes toward legal and illegal immigration. For religiosity, it is possible that college students are still deciding how important religion is within their lives, and thus it is not a significant factor. While they may have a stable religious group affiliation, they may not yet be certain of the importance religion has for them. Regarding parental education, it is important to note that while the literature measured individuals’ education levels and their effects on immigration attitudes, this study was unable to do this because everyone in the sample has the same education level. Perhaps if this study had been completed in the future when it is possible to have variation within the sample, education level would have been significant because they would be the respondents’ levels, and not their parents’. Finally, there are a few reasons as to why parental occupational prestige has no effect on this sample’s attitudes about legal and illegal immigration. Some respondents answered that their parents were retired without listing their previous

occupations, which meant their mean substituted score may not have accurately measured their former occupational prestige. Additionally, everyone in the sample did not have both parents in their lives, meaning these individuals only had a score for one parent. A more ideal measure for this aspect of social class, like the literature suggests, is to measure income, but this would have been difficult to measure as it is hard for students to know their parents' exact incomes.

A variety of changes could improve this study for the future. Most importantly, a randomized probability sample would be ideal for gaining more concrete conclusions about whether or not the tested variables actually affect attitudes toward legal and illegal immigration among undergraduate university students. It would be more beneficial to, for example, obtain a list of every class held within the university, randomly choose classes, and sample those selected classes to ensure as much randomization as possible. It would also be ideal to sample students at similar Jesuit liberal arts schools to combine the results and gain a much larger sample size. Some of the measures used within this study could also be improved for the future, such as the questions about voting in the 2016 election and parental occupation. As mentioned above, the question used to measure whether or not someone voted assumed that everyone was applicable to vote, which may not have been the case. Also, the parental occupational prestige measure is not perfect given that it does not include income, a significant aspect of social class.

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The data from this study implicates policy suggestions for similar Jesuit liberal arts schools. It is necessary to address the data point that suggests Catholics are less likely to support both types of immigration. Jesuit schools such as the one in this study should aim to address this finding by working to align Catholic students' views with the views of the Catholic church about immigration. Specifically, the data suggests that the school within this study should educate

more about the university's mission to be men and women for others. Perhaps by offering a class on Catholic and Jesuit beliefs about certain controversial topics in American society— such as immigration, the death penalty, and health care reform, for example— the university would be able to teach and inform others about how Catholics and Jesuits treat these issues. If a class is too drastic of a step, simply teaching the students in general ways about Catholic views may work as well. While students are free to hold their own views, and even if they identify as Catholic does not mean their beliefs must align as such, it is still important to educate these students on what the true Catholic and Jesuit values regarding immigration are to help them form their own, possibly more cohesive, beliefs. However, it is important to note that these results are only from one school, and may not hold true for other similar schools; therefore, these implications are merely suggestions in response to one data point.

## References

- Abdel-Moneim, Mohamed and Rita Simon. 2011. "Does Age Matter?" *Society* 48(1):41–49.
- Berg, Justin Allen. 2010. "Race, Class, Gender, and Social Space: Using an Intersectional Approach to Study Immigration Attitudes." *Sociological Quarterly* 51(2):278–302.
- Diaz, Priscila, Delia S. Saenz, and Virginia S. Kwan. 2011. "Economic Dynamics and Changes in Attitudes Toward Undocumented Mexican Immigrants in Arizona." *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy* 11(1):300–313.
- Garcia, Carlos and Theresa Davidson. 2013. "Are Rural People More Anti-Immigrant Than Urban People? A Comparison of Attitudes Toward Immigration in the United States." *Journal of Rural Social Sciences* 28(1):80–105.
- General Social Survey and National Opinion Research Center. 2014. "2010 Occupational Classification." *Occupational Classification Distributions*.
- Gravelle, Timothy B. 2016. "Party Identification, Contact, Contexts, and Public Attitudes Toward Illegal Immigration." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 80(1):1–25.
- Haubert, Jeannie and Elizabeth Fussell. 2006. "Explaining Pro-Immigrant Sentiment in the U.S.: Social Class, Cosmopolitanism, and Perceptions of Immigrants." *International Migration Review* 40(3):489–507.
- Ilias, Shayerah, Katherine Fennelly, and Christopher M. Federico. 2008. "American Attitudes Toward Guest Worker Policies." *International Migration Review* 42(4):741–66.
- Kafura, Craig, Dina Smeltz, Karl Friedhoff, Ivo Daalder, Gregory Holyk, and Joshua Busby. 2016. *2015 Chicago Council Survey of American Public Opinion and U.S. Foreign Policy*. ICPSR36437-v1. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research. <https://doi.org/10.3886/ICPSR36437.v1>
- Knoll, Benjamin R. 2009. "“And Who Is My Neighbor?” Religion and Immigration Policy Attitudes." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 48(2):313–31.
- Murray, Kate E. and David M. Marx. 2013. "Attitudes Toward Unauthorized Immigrants, Authorized Immigrants, and Refugees." *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology* 19(3):332–41.
- Nteta, Tatishe M. and Kevin J. Wallsten. 2012. "Preaching to the Choir? Religious Leaders and American Opinion on Immigration Reform." *Social Science Quarterly* 93(4):891–910.
- Ross, Ashley D. and Stella M. Rouse. 2015. "Economic Uncertainty, Job Threat, and the Resiliency of the Millennial Generation's Attitudes Toward Immigration." *Social Science Quarterly* 96(5):1363–79.
- Vallas, Steven P., Emily Zimmerman, and Shannon N. Davis. 2009. "Enemies of the State? Testing Three Models of Anti-Immigrant Sentiment." *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility* 27(4):201–17.

## **INFORMATION SHEET**

*Study: Analyzing Student Opinions Toward Legal and Illegal Immigration*

You are being asked to participate in a research study by taking a survey about student attitudes toward legal and illegal immigration. Please read this form and ask any questions before agreeing to be a participant. This study is being conducted by Kelsey Sprenger at John Carroll University as a part of her Senior Honors Project.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION** - The purpose of this survey is to collect and analyze data about students' attitudes toward legal and illegal immigration. This survey is part of a larger study of seven classes that will be used for the complete Senior Honors Project.

**PROCEDURES** - I would please like you to fill out a survey if you agree to be a participant in this study. This will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. The survey is comprised of closed-ended multiple choice questions. It will be handed out during class and collected in the front of the room when you have finished. You must be 18 years of age or older to participate. You may keep this information sheet for your records.

**RISKS AND BENEFITS** - Since this survey focuses on student attitudes about immigration, there is little risk of harm or discomfort about the topic; however, it is possible that this may occur. If you experience any discomfort because of the topic at any time while taking this survey, you are free to skip the offending question or stop taking the survey altogether. This survey is voluntary and you will not be penalized for not participating. A potential benefit to participating in this study is that your response will add more information to the project, allowing for more and better analysis. There is no compensation for participating in this study.

**PRIVACY** - There will not be any names included on this survey, and no names will be included at any point in the research process. All surveys from the six classes will be placed into the same box upon completion. Surveys in the sealed box will be held in a locked cabinet until the end of the semester. Survey responses will be anonymous. Only the student researcher will have access to the surveys. Analysis of this data will happen during the Fall semester and findings from this study will be presented in the spring.

**VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION** - Your participation for this study is completely voluntary. There will be no penalty if you decide not to participate. At any time, you are free to skip questions or simply decide not to finish the survey.

**CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS** - The researcher conducting this study is Kelsey Sprenger, a senior at John Carroll. If needed, you may contact her through email at [ksprenger18@jcu.edu](mailto:ksprenger18@jcu.edu). You may also contact her project advisor, Dr. Gloria Vaquera, at [gvaquera@jcu.edu](mailto:gvaquera@jcu.edu) if needed. If you have questions about the rights and welfare of research participants, please contact the John Carroll University Institutional Review Board Administrator at (216) 397-1527.

**NOTE** - By returning your completed survey to the front of the room, and circling "yes" at the top of it, you will be granting your permission for the data to be used in this study. If you do not grant your permission, please refrain from completing the survey.

# Senior Honors Project Survey

I have read the information sheet and understand that my participation in this survey is completely voluntary:   yes   no

For the following statements please identify whether you: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, or Strongly Agree.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. Legal immigration is a big problem for the United	5	4	3	2	1
2. Large numbers of immigrants and refugees coming into the United States is a critical threat.	5	4	3	2	1
3. Controlling and reducing legal immigration should be an important foreign policy goal.	5	4	3	2	1
4. I worry about the presence of legal immigrants in the United States.	5	4	3	2	1
5. The United States should ban legal immigrants from obtaining citizenship.	5	4	3	2	1
6. The United States should accept legal immigrants from only certain parts of the world.	5	4	3	2	1
7. The number of legal immigrants to the United States should be decreased.	5	4	3	2	1

For the following statements please identify whether you: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, or Strongly Agree.

Legal immigrants...	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. increase crime rates.	5	4	3	2	1
2. are generally bad for the nation's economy.	5	4	3	2	1
3. take jobs away from people who were born in the United States.	5	4	3	2	1
4. drain social services.	5	4	3	2	1
5. hurt American customs and ways of life.	5	4	3	2	1
6. make America more open to new ideas and cultures.	5	4	3	2	1
7. increase the risk of terrorism.	5	4	3	2	1
8. threaten our national security.	5	4	3	2	1
9. should not be allowed to serve in the military.	5	4	3	2	1

**For the following statements please identify whether you: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, or Strongly Agree.**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. Illegal immigration is a big problem for the United States.	5	4	3	2	1
2. Large numbers of illegal immigrants coming into the United States is a critical threat.	5	4	3	2	1
3. Controlling and reducing illegal immigration should be an important foreign policy goal.	5	4	3	2	1
4. I worry about the presence of illegal immigrants in the United States.	5	4	3	2	1
5. Donald Trump's proposed "wall" is a good solution to fix illegal immigration.	5	4	3	2	1
6. The United States should ban illegal immigrants from gaining citizenship.	5	4	3	2	1
7. Illegal immigration is wrong.	5	4	3	2	1

**For the following statements please identify whether you: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, or Strongly Agree.**

Illegal immigrants...	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. increase crime rates.	5	4	3	2	1
2. are generally bad for the nation's economy.	5	4	3	2	1
3. take jobs away from people who were born in the United States.	5	4	3	2	1
4. drain social services.	5	4	3	2	1
5. hurt American customs and ways of life.	5	4	3	2	1
6. make America more open to new ideas and cultures.	5	4	3	2	1
7. increase the risk of terrorism.	5	4	3	2	1
8. threaten our national security.	5	4	3	2	1
9. should not be allowed to serve in the military.	5	4	3	2	1

<b>Background Questions</b>	
1. What is your age? _____	2. What year are you in school? <input type="checkbox"/> Freshman <input type="checkbox"/> Junior <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Sophomore <input type="checkbox"/> Senior
3. What is your gender? <input type="checkbox"/> Female <input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Other (intersex, transgender)	4. What is your racial/ethnic background? <input type="checkbox"/> White <input type="checkbox"/> Nonwhite <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Choose not to respond
5. What is your religious affiliation? <input type="checkbox"/> Catholic <input type="checkbox"/> Jewish <input type="checkbox"/> Hindu <input type="checkbox"/> No religion <input type="checkbox"/> Protestant <input type="checkbox"/> Muslim <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____	
6. How would you rate the importance of religion in your life? (please circle)  1                      2                      3                      4                      5                      6                      7 not at all important                      moderately important                      very important	
7. Which political party do you identify with? <input type="checkbox"/> Democratic <input type="checkbox"/> Independent <input type="checkbox"/> Republican <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____	
8. On the following scale of political ideology, how would you rate yourself? (please circle)  1                      2                      3                      4                      5                      6                      7 extremely liberal                      moderate                      extremely conservative	
9a. Did you vote in the 2016 presidential election? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No [Skip 9b]	9b. If yes, which candidate did you vote for? <input type="checkbox"/> Trump <input type="checkbox"/> Clinton <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____
10a. What is your mother's occupation?	10b. What is your father's occupation?
11a. What is your mother's highest education level? <input type="checkbox"/> High school degree/GED or less <input type="checkbox"/> Some college (no degree) <input type="checkbox"/> Associate's degree <input type="checkbox"/> Bachelor's degree <input type="checkbox"/> Master's degree <input type="checkbox"/> Professional degree/doctorate	11b. What is your father's highest education level? <input type="checkbox"/> High school degree/GED or less <input type="checkbox"/> Some college (no degree) <input type="checkbox"/> Associate's degree <input type="checkbox"/> Bachelor's degree <input type="checkbox"/> Master's degree <input type="checkbox"/> Professional degree/doctorate
<b>Thank you</b> for taking the time to participate. Please write any coments or concerns you have on the back of this survey.	