

# Just like us: Immigrants embrace 'distinctly American' values

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Much of the fervor fueling the anti-immigration debate is shaped by the belief that immigrants—legal and otherwise—are somehow a threat to our national identity. Americans, some critics believe, venerate a set of ideals and attitudes that are distinctly American. But do immigrants honor these same values?

They do, says Deborah Schildkraut, associate professor of political science at Tufts University, who investigates such questions in her continuing research on immigration in America. In her most recent work, Schildkraut surveyed Americans' attitudes towards immigrants, and the opinion of immigrants and ethnic minorities themselves.

Schildkraut found that [immigrants](#) and their descendants embrace basic American values—the love of freedom, the desire for economic advancement, the promise of the American Dream— even as they celebrate and honor their own heritages.

The findings are based on a 144-question telephone survey of 2,800 [people](#) nationwide representing all demographics. Schildkraut finished her analysis of the data, which was collected in 2004, a year and a half ago, and it formed the foundation for her book "Americanism in the Twenty-First Century: Public Opinion in the Age of Immigration" (Cambridge University Press, 2011).

The majority of those surveyed were white while thirty percent were black, Asian and Latino. Among the survey questions were queries

designed to measure how strongly different groups felt about being an American and the importance of being an American.

Respondents generally agreed that being identified as an American was a personal priority regardless of their background. They also felt a strong sense of civic obligation, patriotism, and trust.

Schildkraut also found that a majority of white Americans are not anti-immigrant. "It just feels that way because immigration's critics are the most organized, and they have people in positions of power who agree with them to help further their agendas."

Schildkraut says hers is one of the only studies to intentionally include ethnic minorities from many backgrounds, and contains the broadest set of data collected on what people think it means to be an American.

Her current research project explores public opinion about political representation in the United States. Do people want their representatives to resemble them, or do they want their representatives to be "better" than they are? What makes them feel that they are being represented well in government? In what ways to issues of race and ethnicity affect how people feel about political representation?

Provided by Tufts University

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