

Researchers assess stereotypes of immigrants and views on the impact of immigration

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A new study led by the University of Cincinnati examines stereotypes of immigrants from four global regions and measures opinions of the impact of immigration on U.S. society. The researchers say their findings provide the most solid evidence yet that perceptions of the characteristics of Latin American immigrants in particular are strongly linked to beliefs about the impact of immigration, especially on unemployment, schools, and crime. The research will be presented at the 107th Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association.

The study was conducted by Jeffrey M. Timberlake, a UC associate professor of sociology; Junia Howell, a graduate student at Rice University; Amy Baumann Grau, an assistant professor of sociology at Eastern New Mexico University; and Rhys H. Williams, a professor of sociology at Loyola University Chicago.

They used data from two waves of the Ohio Poll, a semiannual UC-sponsored survey of registered Ohio voters. The Ohio Poll data for this study were collected by the UC Institute for Policy Research in November 2007 and May 2008. The researchers' findings came from a sample of about 2,150 people.

Respondents were randomly assigned a group of [immigrants](#) -- either from Latin America, the Middle East, Asia, or Europe -- and asked to evaluate that group on five commonly used racial and ethnic stereotypes, including:

- Rich versus poor
- Intelligent versus unintelligent
- Self-sufficient versus dependent on government assistance
- Trying to fit in versus staying separate from Americans
- Violent versus nonviolent

Without mention of any particular group of immigrants, respondents were also asked questions about the likelihood of five outcomes resulting from immigration:

- Higher levels of unemployment
- Lower quality schools
- Difficulty in keeping the country united
- Higher levels of crime
- A terrorist attack in the U.S.

The researchers report that Ohioans do not strongly link their beliefs about the traits of Asian, Middle Eastern, or European immigrants to views of the impact of immigration. In contrast, according to the researchers, effects of stereotypes of Latin American immigrants are "large and robust, especially regarding attitudes about the impact of immigration on unemployment, school quality, and crime." The findings also showed a relatively weak association between stereotypes of all groups and the belief that immigration makes it harder to keep the country united.

U.S. Census data indicate that residents in most parts of Ohio have little direct contact with recent immigrants. As a result, the researchers say that makes the Buckeye State ideal for understanding public attitudes toward immigrants by populations that are relatively unaffected by actual immigration levels.

"Anyone who follows the public discourse on the current politics of

immigration cannot escape noticing the number of times people preface their opinions -- both for and against many different versions of immigration reform -- with the claim to feel positively about immigration in principle, or with a bow to our 'nation of immigrants' history," conclude the researchers. "However, as our findings show, reaction to immigration is often filtered through attitudes toward the particular characteristics they believe immigrant groups hold. Who 'they' are matters."

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Provided by American Sociological Association

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