

**Factors Affecting Canadians' Attitudes Toward Immigration and Immigrants:
A Quantitative Study of Differences in Attitude Definitions**

by

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Bachelor of Arts (Honours), Minzu University of China, 2023

Master of Arts, University of Victoria, 2025

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We acknowledge and respect the Lək̓ʷəŋən (Songhees and X̱wsep̓səm/Esquimalt) Peoples on whose territory the university stands, and the Lək̓ʷəŋən and W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the factors shaping Canadians' attitudes toward immigrants and immigration policy in the context of shifting global immigration patterns. This research used data from the Canadian sample of the seventh wave of the World Values Survey. By employing quantitative methods, this study investigates how social demographic characteristics, geographical considerations, religion, social capital, social integration and boundary perception, political ideology, economic competition, and personality traits influence two distinct yet interrelated attitudes. A key finding is that participation in social organizations exerts opposite effects on the acceptance of immigrants and support for immigration policies, highlighting that social capital could have different cognitive pathways for interpersonal openness versus institutional preferences. This study reveals clear cognitive differences between the two attitudes through systematic and empirical analyses, offering more precise insights for immigration studies.

Keywords: immigrants; immigration; attitudes; Canadian public opinions

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, global immigration patterns have undergone new trends and challenges. Factors such as policy changes, economic fluctuations, geopolitical conflicts, and climate change have reshaped countries of host and home, immigration modes, and policy orientations of host countries. While Canada continues to uphold a strong humanitarian reputation in its immigration policies, it is also facing increasing pressures and adjustments within the rapidly changing global context.

In Canada, neoliberalism has shaped structural nationalism, which has primarily focused on immigration policies that maintain membership boundaries (Joppke 2024). In practice, this is reflected in a balance between diversity and meritocracy. A key example is Canada's well-known points-based immigration system. Since the millennium, high-skilled immigrants have arrived first as temporary residents before being processed through separate immigration programs, which often decentralize selection authority to provincial governments and employers. In 2000, the number of foreign workers with temporary work visas increased six times, rising from 66,600 to 429,999 (Hou 2020). This process, in which individuals first obtain temporary residence status and later qualify for permanent residency based on their performance, is known as “two-step immigration.”

This policy shifts all economic and time costs onto immigrants, minimizing the burden on society and its institutions in the integration process. The first step is temporary residence, driven by employers or universities. For temporary foreign workers, it links immigration to a single employer and does not allow for replacement. In the case of international students, previous regulations imposed fewer restrictions, allowing them to hold open study permits - which meant they could transfer schools without affecting their visa status. However, in 2024, IRCC (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada) officially transitioned study permits to a closed

visa, requiring students to apply for a new visa to transfer institutions (Government of Canada 2024). The PGWP (Post-Graduation Work Permit), often seen as a “shortcut” for international students, allows graduates to work in Canada and facilitates their path to permanent residency. In 2024, it was also formally reformed. IRCC tightened eligibility requirements on undergraduate students at universities and colleges applying for PGWP, while postgraduate students remain unaffected for the time being.

The government intervenes in the second step of the permanent residency process. Since 1967, the FSWP (Federal Skilled Worker Program) has served as a primary pathway for skilled immigrants, while provinces have also actively participated with a high degree of autonomy. For instance, various PNPs (Provincial Nominee Programs) allow different regions to design tailored pathways for temporary workers. PNPs often align with local labor market needs and, in many cases, provide a faster route to permanent residency. Whether through the FSWP or PNPs, temporary residents must maximize their points based on various skill-based criteria to stand out in the candidate pool. The skills assessed include the test level of two official languages, years of work experience, educational background, income level, and so forth. Notably, the longer a temporary resident legally resides in Canada, such as by completing additional degrees or accumulating more work experience, the greater their advantage in the points-based system.

From the design of immigration policies, it is evident that permanent residency in Canada is primarily granted to highly educated and skilled individuals, with a preference for temporary residents who have lived in Canada for an extended period. The PNPs, with strong provincial characteristics, also address public debates and respond to the demands of local governments and interest groups. The logic behind this aligns with the construction of an ethnically and racially heterogeneous middle-class nation, where the priority is placed on attracting valuable human

capital rather than preserving a distinctly Eurocentric or white-majority national identity (Winter 2020). Canada's immigration policy is fundamentally grounded in the spirit of social contracts. The strict principle of reciprocity requires permanent immigrants to adhere to Canadian laws and social conventions while also providing economic, cultural, or social contributions in exchange for their resident rights. This equivalence of giving and receiving is reflected in many aspects of the immigration process: skilled immigrants must possess qualifications that correspond with national economic needs, international students are expected to transition into the workforce and integrate into society after completing their studies, and refugees must demonstrate the legitimacy of their asylum claims and actively integrate into society once granted protection.

In addition to transitioning study permits to closed visas and tightening PGWP eligibility, IRCC's policy reforms also involve structural adjustments in the selection criteria for permanent residents. For example, the FSWP (Federal Skilled Worker Program) has become more targeted in its occupational preferences, prioritizing engineers, educators, and skilled workers in high-demand sectors. PNPs (Provincial Nominee Programs) have also undergone major adjustments. British Columbia canceled its previous direct nomination pathway for STEM master's graduates, now requiring a "job offer" as a prerequisite. Manitoba and Alberta have gone even further, suspending certain nomination streams entirely. These changes reflect a broader shift in provincial immigration policies toward a stricter labor market-driven approach, emphasizing direct alignment between immigrants and local employment needs. The goal is to facilitate faster economic integration while minimizing concerns about labor market competition. Both federal and provincial governments have reinforced their emphasis on applicants' professional backgrounds and work experience. The policy shift embodies a functionalist orientation in immigration management, which prioritizes the recruitment of skilled professionals who can

address labor shortages in specific sectors, thereby optimizing resource allocation and mitigating public concerns regarding the economic impact of immigration.

Citizenship is no longer regarded as a universally accessible right but has gradually evolved into a privilege that must be earned. This shift is most evident in the tightening of permanent residency requirements. Permanent Residency is no longer seen as a tool to promote immigrant integration but rather as a final test to determine whether an immigrant has successfully integrated. In other words, whereas past policies adopted a looser approach to citizenship acquisition to support population growth and integration, citizenship is now increasingly framed as an achievement. Immigrants must meet national standards in areas such as economic independence, language proficiency, and social adaptation prior to being granted this status.

Canada has the highest level of immigration in the G7, with over 8 million international immigrants residing in the country, accounting for 20% of the total population (Kitchen, Williams, and Gallina 2015). Although Canada has long enjoyed a reputation for its inclusivity and multiculturalism as a land of immigrants, immigration policies and public attitudes are not static. COVID-19 intensified pre-existing xenophobia and racism in Canadian society, with minority groups identified by race, ethnicity, or skin colour facing harassment or assaults at double the rate of other groups (Heidinger and Cotter 2020). While this hostility has somewhat subsided in the post-pandemic period, immigration remains a central issue in public discourse and policy debates.

In the third quarter of 2024, the Canadian government officially announced a significant reduction in immigration quotas. The government projects a nearly 21% decrease in the number of new permanent residents in 2025, along with more restrictions on the intake of temporary

foreign workers (IRCC 2024a). This policy adjustment indicates the growing tendency among Canadian political leaders to attribute social issues, such as the housing crisis and healthcare resource strain, to immigrant expansion. It thereby drives a more restrictive immigration approach. However, such political discourse not only shapes policy trends but may also reinforce anti-immigration sentiment within society, further normalizing hostility and exclusionary behaviors toward immigrants, especially among racialized minority groups. For example, preliminary data from Statistics Canada (2024) indicates that in the first six months of 2024, 48% of reported hate crimes to the police were targeted at specific racial or ethnic groups. The Vancouver Police Department's monthly hate crime statistics report shows an upward trend in incidents involving bias, discrimination, or hate-related themes from early 2019 to the end of 2024. These trends underscore the growing challenges faced by Canada's multicultural policies¹.

Consequently, the issue of public attitudes toward immigrants is one of major sociological concern. While immigrants are needed to address labor shortages and stimulate population growth, many people continue to have unfavorable attitudes towards them and are concerned about social security (Gusciute, Mühlau, and Layte 2020) or are cautious about the potential loss of cultural homogeneity, community values, and national identity (Davidov et al. 2019). In turn, these worries may result in less favorable attitudes towards immigrants and immigration, and it is common for immigrants to be subjected to discrimination (St-Pierre, Tardif-Grenier, and Villatte 2021; Szaflarski and Bauldry 2019).

¹ Similar dynamics are also observed in the United States. Findings from the Chicago Council Survey (Kafura 2024) indicate that half of Americans regarded the immigrants and refugees as a critical threat, a level of concern not observed since 2010. The increase was especially pronounced among Republicans, with 83 percent identifying immigration as a critical threat, the highest proportion documented since the Council initiated this measure in 1998.

In recent years, there has been a trend towards more positive public attitudes towards newcomers in Canada (Vang and Chang 2018). This shift may be attributed to changes in the effect of population characteristics, which means the change in the population's opinions as a result of changes in the composition of the population (Aytac, Parkin, and Triandafyllidou 2024). The education level was the most significant cause of the effect of the characteristics, which initially contributed to positive attitudes but declined over time (Aytac, Parkin, and Triandafyllidou 2024). Besides, Esses et al. (2006) found that this shift may also be enhanced by reminding Canadians of a common national in-group that includes immigrants. At the same time, the voluntary and involuntary characteristics of immigration could lead to positive or negative public attitudes toward immigrants (Verkuyten, Mepham, and Kros 2017).

Scholars often examine public opinions towards immigrants and opinions towards immigration together (e.g., Ramos, Pereira, and Vala 2019; Simon and Lynch 1999), but it has also been noted that the study of the two perceptions constitutes distinct domains of study (Ceobanu and Escandell 2010). When we distinguish these two attitudes, much of the existing research on immigrants focuses on perceived discrimination and prejudice stemming from their ethnicity (Ahmad 2020; Espinosa 2020; Quillian and Lee 2023) or on the social integration of immigrants with different ethnicities (Danzer and Yaman 2013; Martiny et al. 2019). In contrast, research on immigration processes or policies has predominantly emphasized values, social capital, and ideology (Barceló 2016; Davidov and Meuleman 2012).

Realizing this gap in the existing literature, I consider both attitudes conceptually distinct. I intend to conduct a quantitative study that will employ theory to guide statistical modeling to establish the different sets of specific factors influencing the two attitudes and thus reveal the conceptual distinctions between them. This study employs a quantitative research method. The

data used in this study are derived from the seventh cycle of the World Values Survey (WVS) conducted in Canada in 2020. Statistical models are used to analyze the determinants of Canadian public attitudes toward immigrants and immigration.

I will examine attitudes toward immigration from a national perspective (opinions on immigration policy) and attitudes toward immigrants from a personal perspective (willingness to interact with individual immigrants). Specific research questions include: What are the main value and worldview factors that influence the public's assessment of Canada's immigration process and policies? Additionally, what are the primary value and worldview factors that influence the public's personal interactions with immigrants? Are the two attitudes influenced by completely distinct, overlapping, or identical factors? I aim to further clarify the concepts of the two attitudes and demonstrate their distinctions.

Previous studies often treat public attitudes toward immigrants (individual immigrants) and immigration (policies and systems) as similar or interchangeable concepts without distinguishing their differences in conceptualization, influencing factors, and social consequences. This study attempts to fill this gap by systematically analyzing the independence of these two attitudes and their potential interconnections in order to reveal the distinct positions and cognitive frameworks the public may adopt when considering immigrant groups versus immigration policies. In existing literature, many studies rely on similar theoretical propositions (such as economic competition theory, cultural threat theory, or social identity theory) to explain the determinants of both attitudes, yet few critically assess the applicability of these theoretical assumptions. While attitudes toward immigrants and immigration may be intricately intertwined, they may stem from different psychological mechanisms, social structural factors, and political ideologies. This study, therefore, aims to critically evaluate and challenge the validity of this

common premise, examining whether these two attitudes constitute independent constructs and identifying the key factors that shape them at different levels. By separately analyzing public attitudes toward immigrants and immigration, this study hopes to provide more nuanced insights. For instance, do certain social groups (such as individuals with different educational backgrounds or political orientations) exhibit significant differences in these two attitudes? Are individuals with higher levels of social contact with immigrants more likely to hold positive views toward immigrants on a personal level yet still support stricter immigration controls at the policy level? Do certain values and worldviews predict support for immigration policies but have little influence on attitudes toward individual immigrants?

The research findings will possess reference significance at multiple levels. In policymaking, it can help the government more accurately identify key aspects influencing public acceptance of immigrants so as to adjust policy communication strategies. At the level of social practice, this study can provide empirical evidence for educational programs and cross-cultural exchange initiatives to help reduce biases and discrimination against temporary or permanent residents in everyday life. In terms of academic research, this study deepens the understanding of how values and worldviews shape public perceptions, particularly how they can have different impacts at the micro (individual interactions) and macro (national policies) levels.

THEORETICAL DISTINCTION BETWEEN ATTITUDES TOWARD IMMIGRANTS AND IMMIGRATION

Attitudes Toward Immigrants

International migration flows have brought issues and debates about immigrants to the forefront of mainstream political and media agendas across the Global North². Attitude is defined in this study as an individual's (subject) relatively stable psychological tendency and evaluative response toward another individual, group, or event (objects). Such psychological evaluation includes the subject's understanding and cognition, emotions and feelings, and behavioral tendencies of the object.

Personal identity.

Immigrants often have multiple identities, which complicates the discussion of public attitudes towards them. Academics are often concerned about negative sentiments towards immigrants and their perceived unequal treatment.

In case studies analyzing negative attitudes toward immigrants, many scholars first focus on the impact of personal identity on attitudes. This may be influenced by the individual identity of the object. For example, older immigrants are more likely to be viewed negatively than younger immigrants (Sharples and Chasteen 2021). People tend to exhibit greater sympathy and support for involuntary immigrants compared to voluntary immigrants (Verkuyten, Mepham, and Kros 2017). It may also vary based on the individual identity of the subject. For example, the study by François and Magni-Berton (2013) showed that women tend to have lower tolerance

² In the literature review, this study will incorporate research on immigrants and immigration in other countries. These cases are relevant because examining divergent case study outcomes across national contexts helps to highlight both the commonalities and the contrasts in public responses. The synthesis of these findings provides a valuable reference for shaping the analytical framework of the present study.

toward immigrants than men; however, their intolerance is also more likely to decrease with increased interaction with immigrants. In Russia, highly educated groups usually show more tolerant attitudes toward immigrants (Bessudnov 2016). However, some scholars suggested that education is not a direct determinant of attitudes toward immigrants; rather, its influence operates through the cultural values and beliefs that education tends to reflect or shape (Hainmueller and Hiscox 2007).

Among various personal dimensions, the Big Five personality traits are considered to have a broad and sustainable impact on political attitudes, particularly those related to immigrants and immigration. The Big Five represents five core dimensions recognized in psychology that summarize the main differences in people's personalities (Gallego and Pardos-Prado 2013; Roccas 2002). They include extraversion (confidence and sociability), agreeableness (friendliness and helpfulness), conscientiousness (self-discipline and organization), neuroticism (emotional instability and anxiety), and openness (independent thinking and creativity). These traits are believed to be universally present across different cultures and can reliably predict an individual's social attitudes and behaviours.

Individuals with high levels of “openness to experience” tend to be more tolerant of diversity and respond positively to non-traditional and complex contexts, hence increasing the likelihood of positive attitudes toward immigrants (Dinesen, Klemmensen, and Nørgaard 2014). In contrast, those who score high in “conscientiousness” often place strong value on order, stability, and adherence to social norms, which can lead to more exclusionary attitudes toward immigrants (Gallego and Pardos-Prado 2013). Bègue et al. (2014) further confirmed that “conscientiousness” and “agreeableness” are significant predictors of obedience.

Social identity.

More scholars focus on people's social identity. *Social Identity Theory* is one of the most well-known theories used to explain attitudes toward immigrants (Stets and Burke 2000). Social identity enables individuals to categorize themselves into ingroups and outgroups, and such distinctions often lead to prejudiced attitudes toward the outgroups (Tajfel and Turner 2000). Under perceived threat, previously gentle group identities may transform into more antagonistic forms characterized by hostility toward outsiders.

Specifically, race, ethnicity, and language are common causes of prejudice against landed immigrants. Nelsen and Guth (2003) argued that European attitudes toward immigrants are associated with a general intolerance of social diversity. However, this intolerance does not always apply to all types of immigrants. Ethnic minorities are more likely to report discrimination than whites (Ford 2011; Oxman-Martinez et al. 2012; Vang and Chang 2018). Canada is a land of immigrants. The 2022 census data (Statistics Canada) shows that immigrants comprise as much as 23% of the population. However, Canada is primarily a settler state. European-descended Canadians constitute the largest demographic group at approximately 52.47%, despite a decline over the past few decades (Statistics Canada 2022). As a result, white European-descended individuals are often positioned as the normative reference group in discussions of social identity in Canada, tending to receive comparatively greater social visibility and political representation. Minority immigrants perceive significantly more workplace discrimination than native-born Canadians (Vang and Chang 2018). Despite the introduction of anti-discrimination policies and the growth of racial and ethnic diversity in Canada, workplace discrimination has not decreased over the past 20 years (Quillian and Lee 2023).

Further, when the state is perceived as being in a state of instability or vulnerability, citizens tend to reinforce their national identity and establish closer ingroup boundaries while displaying stronger exclusion and hostility toward outsiders. This mechanism is not limited to the topic of immigrant-related issues and can also be observed in other contexts where national identity is challenged. In the Canada-US tariff war of 2025, for example, US president Donald Trump imposed 25% tariffs on Canadian imports, citing national security and immigration concerns. Canada once responded with retaliatory tariffs on US-made automobiles. The trade dispute quickly triggered strong nationalist sentiment within Canada, with public calls to buy Canadian-made and boycott American goods. Public opinion has begun to portray the United States, long regarded as an ally, as an economic “other” and a potential threat.

In addition, language proficiency and place of residence greatly influence immigrants' social integration in Canada. Studies have found that immigrants whose mother tongue is either French or English exhibit higher employment rates, demonstrating the critical role of official language skills in labor market integration (Solati, Chowdhury, and Jackson 2021). In Quebec, the role of language advantages is particularly pronounced. These structural factors not only affect the socioeconomic status of immigrants but also indirectly influence public attitudes toward them. Beyond the influence of language, Canada's provinces exhibit significant geographic variation in attitudes toward immigrants (Bilodeau, Turgeon, and Karakoç 2012). Among immigrants with robust employability and effective linguistic integration, Canadians tend to show higher levels of acceptance and recognition. This variation in public attitudes suggests that society's evaluation of immigrants is shaped to a large extent by their perceived functional integration rather than solely by their cultural or ethnic background.

Meanwhile, public attitudes towards immigrants sometimes depend on the immigrant's characteristics other than ethnicity. For example, higher levels of religious commitment and cultural identity are significantly associated with stronger xenophobic attitudes (Stipišić 2022). Some studies suggest that the association between religious affiliation and perceived discrimination may be stronger than that of ethnic identity and that women with religious beliefs tend to feel a higher degree of discrimination than men (Litchmore and Safdar 2014). In Western and Eastern Europe, prejudice against Muslims is significantly higher than the overall level of prejudice toward immigrant groups (Strabac and Listhaug 2008). From the standpoint of social identity, religion may function as a more prominent criterion for group boundaries than race, especially in highly secularized countries, where religious affiliation may be perceived as an indicator of “Otherness.” In other words, the visibility of religious affiliation also influences public attitudes toward immigrants. Symbolic religious signs, such as the hijab for Muslim women, the turban for Sikhs, or the kippah for Jews, may reinforce group boundaries, making immigrants more susceptible to social exclusion. Religious signs represent personal beliefs and may also be assigned political or cultural significance (Göle 2003), creating symbolic boundaries between the majority population and immigrant communities. This mechanism is particularly evident in Croatia, providing a concrete case for observing the relationship between religion and xenophobic attitudes. Croats exhibit significantly higher rejection levels toward immigrants compared to Italians, despite both countries being predominantly Catholic; this divergence is partly attributed to their different historical and political contexts (Stipišić 2022). As a former communist country, Croatia lacks a long-standing tradition of democratic institutions. Its citizens are more prone to holding prejudices against social diversity than in countries with a longer

history of democracy. Such historical experience limits society's acceptance of immigrants, multiculturalism, and religious pluralism.

However, some studies also pointed out that public unease toward Muslim immigrants primarily stems from a rejection of religious fundamentalism rather than mere opposition to immigrant status (Helbling and Traummüller 2018). That being said, resistance toward religious immigrants may originate from the tension between political liberalism and religious fundamentalism rather than a simple dichotomy between immigrants and natives or Muslims and Christians. This suggests that what is commonly perceived as “anti-Muslim” sentiment in the public may, in fact, be a response to conflicting values, especially when immigrants are seen as threatening core social norms such as secularism, gender equality, or democratic institutions.

Socioeconomic status is also an important component of social identity and shapes public attitudes toward immigrants. Generally speaking, income, education level, and occupation are considered aspects of socioeconomic status (Broer et al. 2019; Hughes et al. 2022; Vyas and Kumaranayake 2006). Groups with higher socioeconomic status tend to have more positive attitudes toward immigrants. The study by Citrin et al. (1997) suggested that high-income individuals and those with higher education levels are less likely to perceive immigrants as economic competitors and are more inclined to embrace multiculturalism.

In contrast, when faced with competition over limited resources such as employment and social benefits, economically insecure groups are more prone to perceiving immigrants as a threat (Quillian 1995). Such perception is also evident in the political developments of recent years. The intensification of the refugee crisis has heightened public concern over the growing prominence of far-right nationalist and populist rhetoric. The narrative of the national defense against the immigration threat has become an important factor of electoral success for extremist

political forces in recent years (Ekman 2020). During the anti-immigration wave in the second half of 2024, many opponents claimed that immigrants were taking job opportunities that should be prioritized for local residents. This seems to be supported by the latest data from Statistics Canada (2025), which shows that the unemployment rate rose from 4.5% in 2022 to 5.3% in 2024, while the immigration rate also steadily increased. Indeed, population growth may intensify labor market competition, particularly in low-skill industries that are more vulnerable to economic fluctuations, such as manufacturing and customer services. During economic downturns, the public tends to be more supportive of restrictive immigration policies to alleviate pressure on the job market (Quillian 1995).

However, no direct empirical evidence confirms that increased immigration is the primary cause of rising unemployment rates. The impact of immigration on local employment varies depending on skill levels. High-skilled immigrants typically do not compete directly with low-skilled local workers, while low-skilled immigrants often take jobs that locals are less willing to accept. Since 2016, the mismatch between education and occupation has been common among new immigrants, yet the rate of overeducation has declined (Schimmele and Feng Hou 2024). Attributing the rise in unemployment solely to immigrant population growth may be an oversimplified or even misleading causal inference. Overall, economic pressures and social inequality remain key variables affecting public attitudes toward immigrants.

Social Capital.

Social capital stems from individuals' interactions and connections within social networks. As a relationship-based resource, it plays a significant role in shaping how people perceive and evaluate immigrants. In contrast to defining identity as a fixed attribute (such as ethnicity or language), social capital emphasizes the degree to which individuals are embedded

in social relations and the trust, cooperation, and support that they receive as a result (Bourdieu 1986). Those who are active in diverse social organizations and maintain broad interpersonal ties generally possess higher levels of social capital: a resource that promotes social cohesion and encourages more inclusive and open forms of group identity (Chu and Yang 2019; Côté and Erickson 2009). As a result, people with greater social capital tend to hold more favorable attitudes toward immigrants and view them as potential partners in common networks rather than as threats.

The involvement of social organizations also provides a practical anchor for the Contact Hypothesis, which posits that direct intergroup interactions help to reduce prejudice (Pettigrew and Tropp 2006). Individuals who have had actual contact with immigrants or refugees tend to exhibit more positive attitudes toward them than those without such experiences (McKenna et al. 2018). Both formal and informal social organizations offer individuals greater opportunities for sustained and structured engagement with people from different ethnic backgrounds, especially immigrants. Such contact facilitates visibility across groups and is more likely to satisfy the optimal conditions identified by the contact hypothesis: equal status, intergroup cooperation, and institutional support (Barlow et al. 2012; De Coninck et al. 2020). People living in heterogeneous communities are more inclined to engage in frequent intergroup contacts, which often sets them on a pathway toward more friendly attitudes through these interactions (Laurence and Bentley 2018). Conversely, people who lack such participation are more prone to rely on stereotypes to form their perceptions (Valentino, Brader, and Jardina 2012).

Meanwhile, social trust, as one of the key components of social capital that reflects the quality of intergroup interactions, also plays a crucial role in shaping public attitudes toward immigrants. Higher levels of social trust increase the likelihood that individuals will view

strangers with goodwill, thus reducing hostility toward outgroups (Herrerros and Criado 2009; Knack and Keefer 1997). Chu and Yang (2019) emphasized that interpersonal trust not only facilitates community cooperation but also mitigates exclusion triggered by perceived cultural or economic threats. Within this framework, individuals who trust political institutions are more likely to hold positive views of immigrants (Chang and Kang 2018) and be more supportive of open immigration policies (Macdonald 2020).

In the past, public attitudes toward immigrants were not always negative. In Canada, popular perceptions of immigrants have improved over the past two decades (Aytac, Parkin, and Triandafyllidou 2024; Banting and Soroka 2020). The percentage of the public advocating for a reduction in immigrants has declined significantly in all ten Canadian provinces (Bilodeau, Turgeon, and Karakoç 2012). Research has found that national identity does not necessarily conflict with multiculturalism. Citrin, Johnston, and Wright (2012) suggested that Canadian identity could encourage an inclusive orientation due to its relatively open policies and multicultural commitments compared to the United States, making the public more willing to accept newcomers. From the perspective of social capital theory, multiculturalism policies and high rates of immigration acceptance foster cross-group social networks and establish structural conditions conducive to positive intergroup interactions. Such policies promote trust and reciprocity by reinforcing daily interactions and institutionalized cooperation among groups. As social bonds across communities grow stronger, immigrants are less likely to be perceived as outsiders and more likely to be integrated into the framework of collective social identity, thus transforming public understanding and attitudes toward them.

However, as Canada entered 2024, significant changes occurred in both its immigration policies and public attitudes. Anti-immigrant sentiments have risen against a backdrop of

growing public concerns about the affordability of living and housing. According to Reuters Press (2024), the number of hate crimes in Canada has doubled since 2019, mainly targeting people of colour and international students. In response to public pressure, the Canadian government announced in October 2024 a reduction in immigration intake for the next three years. Specifically, 395,000 permanent residents will be admitted in 2025, marking a 21% decrease from the previous year; by 2027, the number of temporary residents will be reduced to 17,439 (IRCC 2024c). These changes reflect the complex attitudes and policy shifts surrounding immigrants in Canadian society. It also suggests that contact itself does not always lead to positive outcomes. When intergroup contact coexists with socioeconomic anxiety, it can take on a competitive character and trigger hostility toward outgroups. Therefore, when studying public attitudes, it is important to recognize that this issue is not static but constantly evolving under the influence of multiple factors. Historically, Canada's immigration policies and societal attitudes have been relatively open. However, in recent years, public acceptance of immigrants has fluctuated.

Attitudes Toward Immigration

Although many scholars do not consciously distinguish between attitudes towards immigrants and attitudes towards immigration (Barceló 2016; Ramos, Pereira, and Vala 2019; Simon and Lynch 1999), we can find that the latter is more focused on public responses to immigration processes and policies. Public attitudes toward individual immigrants are influenced by factors such as personal identity, social identity, and social contact. However, on a macro level, opinions on immigration policies often involve broader cultural, political, economic, and institutional considerations. The latter includes government decisions on immigration intake, visa management, asylum systems, and border control, as well as public support or opposition to

these policies. While attitudes toward immigrants are largely driven by social-psychological factors, views on the immigration process are more influenced by national interests and political ideologies. Therefore, in this section, I will focus on how the public perceives the formulation and implementation of immigration policies, examining the debates, support, and opposition at the policy level, as well as how different social groups shape their stances based on their interests and values.

Cultural values and political beliefs.

Many scholars put forward value-based arguments in studies of people's attitudes toward the immigration process and policies.

Cultural values shape people's perspectives on multiculturalism and social identity. For example, highly educated cosmopolitans with white-collar occupations, international experience, and a rejection of ethnocentrism are more inclined to embrace immigration (Haubert and Fussell 2006). Similarly, individuals who uphold self-transcendence values, which prioritize social outcomes, embrace cultural variety, and concern for the well-being of others, typically cultivate empathy for both ingroups and outgroups (Zibenberg 2016), leading to greater acceptance of immigrants. These individuals tend to view cultural differences as complementary rather than conflicting, perceiving immigrants as participants in a global social network rather than as outsiders.

Another tradition highlights the importance of cultural threats in shaping public attitudes towards immigration. Racism is one of the most common factors explaining public opposition to immigration policies (Dustmann and Preston 2007; Ramos, Pereira, and Vala 2019). Cultural insecurity plays another critical role in generating public attitudes that are not positive towards immigration policies (Turgeon and Bilodeau 2014), which includes public concern that

immigrant inflows may pose a threat to the cultural homogeneity and national identity of the host country (Breton 2015; Turgeon and Bilodeau 2014). This perception of cultural threat often stems from concerns that the languages, religious affiliations, and cultural practices of immigrants may disrupt the stability of the dominant culture. According to Rohmann, Florack, and Piontkowski (2006), individuals who feel culturally threatened tend to embrace immigrants who are racially or ethnically similar to themselves. Those with a broader sense of identity also exhibit more favorable attitudes toward immigrants (García-Faroldi 2017). Additionally, anti-immigration rhetoric often carries a strong ethnicity-based narrative. Stereotypical portrayals of immigrants by political elites and the media, such as associating them with crime, unemployment, or welfare dependency, may further intensify feelings of cultural threat, thereby reducing public support for lenient immigration policies (Brader, Valentino, and Suhay 2008; Valentino, Brader, and Jardina 2012). Compared to arguments focused on economic impact, cultural anxieties are more deeply rooted in a sense of belonging and tend to be more pronounced among groups with strong nationalist sentiments (Joppke 2024).

Political beliefs further determine public stance on the government's role in immigration management, border control, and national security. In other words, individual attitudes toward immigration are not solely based on personal experiences or economic considerations but are embedded within broader ideological frameworks. Research has found that political values are a significant predictor of an individual's stance on immigration (Davidov et al. 2019).

Universalism, which focuses on acceptance and a general concern for others, presents a more supportive attitude towards immigrants (Araújo et al. 2019; Seewann 2021). This aligns with the trend of globalization. As transnational interactions become more frequent, universalists are

more inclined to perceive immigrants as members of a global community rather than as “the Other” in opposition to local society.

In contrast, conservative values place greater emphasis on national stability, cultural homogeneity, and traditional social structures, leading to more skeptical or even exclusionary attitudes toward immigration (Davidov et al. 2019). Among younger populations, the influence of far-right ideology cannot be overlooked. Research has found that far-right political ideologies have a major influence on young people's opposition to immigration (McLaren and Paterson 2019). Over time, political ideology has played an increasingly significant role in shaping public attitudes toward immigration in European countries. Anti-immigration sentiments are particularly prevalent in regions that support far-right parties (Semyonov, Raijman, and Gorodzeisky 2006). These parties strategically link immigration to highly sensitive issues such as national sovereignty, public security, and economic stability, thereby framing immigration as symbols of national crisis. However, the political manipulation of immigration is not limited to the right-wing camp. In an increasingly polarized political landscape, even liberal voters may come to support stricter immigration controls. Such phenomena highlight how immigration has increasingly become a strategic tool in party competition and electoral mobilization.

This trend is also reflected in the evolution of Canada's immigration policies. Historically, Canada has been known for its welcoming and inclusive immigration policies, which have long been recognized as an important component of the country's identity. However, in recent years, mounting public concerns over housing affordability, social service pressures, and job market competition have gradually translated into questions and dissatisfaction with immigration policies. Political leaders have also begun to adjust their policy positions in

response to public pressure and electoral considerations, leading to a more conservative turn in immigration policies and tighter admission quotas.

Self-interest and group interests.

Building on the above theories, some scholars focus on individuals' cognitive evaluations of their own and their group's interests to assess their attitudes in favor of or against immigration. Overall, *Integrated Threat Theory* appears to be one of the most prevalent theories in the academy. Threat perceptions mediate the relationship between prejudice and discrimination (Pereira, Vala, and Costa-Lopes 2010; Stephan et al. 2005). They are generally categorized into realistic and symbolic threats. Realistic threats are those that have a direct impact on an individual or group's actual survival, well-being, resources, health, and safety. These threats are usually concrete and quantifiable and can be countered or mitigated through direct action. Symbolic threats are those that have an indirect impact on the cultural, beliefs, values, and identity aspects of the group's members. Studies have found that threat perceptions are a defense mechanism for public justification against immigrants and immigration policies (Crandall and Eshleman 2003; Pereira, Vala, and Costa-Lopes 2010).

Economic threats are also common considerations in the studies (Barceló 2016; Dustmann and Preston 2007). At the micro level, labor market status has a greater impact on the public's attitudes. Amid increasing globalization and economic uncertainty, immigrants are often perceived as scapegoats for economic hardship. This notion is particularly strong among low-income and economically vulnerable groups. People with unsustainable household incomes are more likely to maintain a negative view of immigration (Heizmann and Huth 2021), and people in lower-level occupations are more likely to generate negative feelings because of their concerns about increased competition in the labor market (Helbling, Reeskens, and Stolle 2013;

Ruist 2016). In contrast, high-income individuals and those with higher education tend to have a more moderate attitude toward immigration (Quillian 1995), as they are less directly affected by economic competition and may benefit from labor force replenishment driven by immigration.

Such social perception also influences policy directions at the national level. The Canadian government's decision to reduce quotas for immigrants and temporary residents was framed in political discourse as a direct response to growing competition in the labor market. By echoing public concerns over job opportunities, housing shortages, and rising living costs, politicians skillfully redirected socioeconomic anxieties toward immigrants in order to gather political support. However, the negative impact of immigration on local wages and employment is often exaggerated (Card 2005). Research suggests that immigration has only a minimal adverse effect on the wages and employment outcomes of native workers with similar skill levels (Edo and Rapoport 2019).

In addition, the perception of realistic threats may be enhanced by major events that occur during specific periods. The public tends to blame outgroups when faced with uncertainty in times of crisis. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, lockdown measures reinforced public sensitivity to resource allocation and intensified fears related to health risks, thus fueling anti-immigrant sentiments (Han et al. 2022). Đoàn et al. (2021) found that the public experienced a stronger sense of constraint and deprivation during the pandemic, which in turn led to immigrants being treated as responsible for society's resource shortages. From a macro perspective, economic threat is not merely a matter of individual perception; it is closely intertwined with structural inequalities, political mobilization mechanisms, and media discourse. As Joppke (2024) argues, cultural and economic anxieties often intersect to form what he terms identity-based economic anxiety - a condition in which individuals, when facing economic

uncertainty, worry not only about material losses but also about threats to their social status and group identity. This combination of anxieties frequently manifests through anti-immigrant rhetoric and serves as an important driver of restrictive policy shifts and the rise of nationalism.

At the macro level, patriotism and group identity are important components of scholarly research on symbolic threats to attitudes toward immigration (Davidov et al. 2019). Blind patriotism, characterized by unconditional support for the state and rejection of external criticism, signals greater realistic and symbolic threats and is more likely to foster anti-immigrant attitudes than constructive patriotism (Willis-Esqueda, Delgado, and Pedroza 2016). Blind patriotism is not a rational identification with the country, but rather an emotional response rooted in an exclusive national identity. Such group identity is more easily activated under specific social and political conditions, especially when national identity feels challenged. Political elites and media narratives sometimes link immigration to national security, cultural traditions, or social norms, thereby rendering symbolic threats “visible” and transforming them into collective anxiety (Valentino, Brader, and Jardina 2012). However, symbolic and economic threats do not exist in isolation; instead, they frequently intersect and reinforce one another.

Studies found that people in wealthy countries do not perceive immigrants as an economic threat in a significant way, and economic improvement within the country mitigates this threat (Heizmann and Huth 2021). This is especially evident during periods of stable economic growth and balanced labour supply and demand when immigrants are often seen as valuable contributors to economic development rather than a burden. However, such moderating mechanisms are not effective in all contexts. When the economy enters a recession or structural unemployment intensifies, immigrants may still be perceived as competitors for jobs and social resources. People may fear that immigrants are taking away employment opportunities, driving

up housing prices, or exacerbating government debt (Ford 2011; Valentino, Brader, and Jardina 2012). Respondents' negative evaluations of immigrants' impact on the national economy increase during times of rising unemployment (Finseraas, Pedersen, and Bay 2014; Ruist 2016; Vogt Isaksen 2019).

The impact of self-interest and group interests on attitudes toward immigration reveals how individuals perceive threats through their position in the social structure and, in turn, construct their social identity. In a modern state like Canada, immigration is not only a labor market variable but also a symbolic issue tied to resource distribution, social cohesion, and political identity. The distinction between realistic threats and symbolic threats highlights the complexity of immigration issues across different social groups. The former emphasizes resource scarcity and direct competition, while the latter touches on the boundaries of collective identity and the legitimacy of its continuation. More specifically, individual self-interests (e.g., income, employment stability) are often intertwined with structural variables that give rise to pragmatic concerns in the face of immigration. At the same time, perceptions of group interests are often expressed through the lenses of ethnic, religious, or national identities, leading to more symbolic forms of anxiety.

Besides, immigration often transcends its apparent policy nature and becomes a collective symbol of how the national “self” is defined. It reflects how the state maintains social order and imagined community by drawing boundaries between citizens and non-citizens, insiders and outsiders. During periods of economic stability, immigrants are often integrated into the production system and seen as the driving force for economic growth. In times of economic downturn or social unrest, immigrants may be constructed as political tools to manage collective anxieties.

Theoretical Debate

While much is known in the academic community about the reasons for differences in the public's attitudes and preferences toward immigration, it is generally believed that these attitudes are malleable and susceptible to the influence of information and contextual factors. However, some scholars have contended that public attitudes towards immigration remain remarkably stable over time. According to Kustov, Laaker, and Reller (2021), refugee crises and economic shocks do not significantly influence individuals' underlying immigration preferences, and overall, immigration attitudes are more stable than other economic and social attitudes.

Previous research has shown that public attitudes toward immigrants and immigration often overlap empirically. However, existing studies often do not systematically distinguish between the two, either examining them in combination or focusing on one or the other. One attitude may influence the other. Perceived realistic and symbolic threats may strengthen the public's association between immigrants and immigration policies in shaping their attitudes. For instance, resistance to personal interaction with immigrants may further influence people's opposition to the immigration process. For example, Lee and Ottati's study (2002) found that prejudice against Mexican immigrants significantly influenced public attitudes toward the *1994 California Proposition 187*, a measure that prohibited undocumented immigrants from accessing various state-provided services, including non-emergency medical care and public education. On the contrary, the two can be unrelated, meaning that people's lack of support for immigration policies does not significantly contribute to their rejection of immigrants in their daily lives. Therefore, it is necessary to distinguish and compare these two attitudes' logical structure and research focus from both theoretical and empirical levels.

In terms of research focus, academic studies on attitudes toward immigrants concentrate on the micro level, emphasizing how individuals perceive and evaluate specific out-group members. Such research highlights the influence of psychosocial mechanisms, such as personal status, social identity, contact experiences, and personality traits, in shaping prejudice or tolerance. Researchers typically regard immigrants as out-group members in daily social interactions and analyze how individuals categorize, compare, and emotionally respond to social signs such as race, language, religion, or culture. In other words, this line of research focuses on how attitudes toward immigrants are constructed in everyday practices and how social identity shapes and sustains intergroup boundaries.

In contrast, research on attitudes toward immigration focuses primarily on the institutional and policy levels, looking at how the public evaluates the mechanisms for receiving, managing, and regulating immigration at the national level. Such research path tends to move beyond the analysis of individual interactions. It addresses the public's support for and opposition to institutional arrangements, drawing on structural variables such as political ideology, cultural values, assessment of economic interests, and awareness of national security. Unlike studies on attitudes toward immigrants, which emphasize interpersonal distance and social emotions, literature on attitudes toward immigration is more concerned with abstract policy preferences and the logic of national interests. For example, whether to support open borders, asylum systems, or restrictions on specific groups. Public attitudes in this direction are more likely to reflect in assessments and judgments about the country's future direction, the continuation of cultural identity, and the boundaries of social governance.

Further, the threat perceptions underlying these two attitudes differ. Attitudes toward immigrants are more susceptible to specific social contact situations, which is why research in

this area often emphasizes psychosocial mechanisms such as the contact hypothesis, symbolic boundaries, and identity-related anxiety. In contrast, attitudes toward immigration are more frequently associated with perceptions of macro-level threats. Particularly during socioeconomic or health crises, the public perceives immigration as a symbolic issue tied to national competitiveness, cultural sovereignty, or social stability. Although the two types of attitudes may appear empirically intertwined, their cognitive foundations and emotional logic diverge substantially.

Finally, policy debates often revolve around immigration, while social prejudice is more often directed at immigrants. However, the two are often strategically confused in actual political mobilization and media narratives: politicians obtain support for tighter immigration controls by highlighting the “problematic” nature of specific immigrant groups, while the media amplify institutional controversies to stoke public hostility toward those groups. As a result, if academics do not clearly distinguish between these two attitudes, the findings may risk conflating individual-level perceptions with institutional preferences, thereby obscuring the mechanisms underlying public opinion shifts. Therefore, clarifying the conceptual boundaries and analytical pathways of these two types of attitudes helps to understand the complexity of the public's cognitive structure and provides a theoretical basis for the formulation of effective social integration policies and immigration governance systems. This, ultimately, is the core objective of the present study.

METHODOLOGY

Data

This study employs a quantitative research methodology, using data from the Canadian subset of the 7th wave (2017–2020) of the World Values Survey (WVS)³. The WVS is a cross-national project led by the World Values Survey Association, aimed at exploring the evolution of political, social, economic, cultural, and religious values and their implications for global social structures. As one of the most representative and influential international surveys in social sciences, WVS data are widely used in research on comparative politics, public opinion, and social psychology, and have high academic value and methodological authority.

The Canadian data used in this study was collected in 2020 and the survey was based on computer-assisted web interviewing (CAWI). A total of 4,018 Canadian respondents⁴ were included, including 1,959 males and 2,059 females. 76.93% of the interviews were conducted in English and 23.07% in French, reflecting the bilingual structure of Canadian society.

Regarding regional distribution, the Canadian sample covered all ten provinces across the country to ensure a high degree of geographical representativeness. Respondents are primarily concentrated in the more populous provinces: Ontario (24.99%), Quebec (24.96%), British Columbia (18.72%), and Alberta (9.38%) together account for the majority of the sample. The remaining provinces are also evenly distributed, including Manitoba (5.55%), Saskatchewan (3.78%), Nova Scotia (4.23%), New Brunswick (4.11%), Newfoundland and Labrador (3.19%),

³ The Canadian sample of the 7th wave WVS was selected because it provides the most recent nationally representative dataset containing detailed information on immigration and immigrants in Canada.

⁴ The target population was identified as Canadian citizens and permanent residents aged 18+. No upper age limit was applied. Migrants and refugees were not included into the sample. Only people residing in private households (non-institutionalized population) have been included into the sample.

and Prince Edward Island (1.1%). This distribution pattern closely aligns with the demographic weight of Canada's provinces and provides a solid geographic foundation for further analysis of differences in public attitudes toward immigrants and immigration.

This dataset was selected because of its comprehensive coverage of both demographic characteristics and attitudinal variables. In particular, the WVS provides a wide range of contextual variables, such as political trust, social capital, national identity, citizenship rights, economic satisfaction. These variables allow for in-depth modelling and comparative analysis while controlling for multiple potential confounding factors.

In conclusion, Canada's data from the 7th wave of the WVS serve as a reliable empirical foundation for this study due to its methodologically rigorous design, strong sample representativeness, and rich variable dimensions for analyzing the heterogeneity of public attitudes toward immigrants and immigration.

Dependent Variables

In order to explore the differences in public attitudes toward the concepts of immigrants⁵ and immigration, it is necessary to distinguish between them in the empirical analysis. This study focuses on two dependent variables: general acceptance of immigrants and preferences for immigration policy. The World Values Survey (WVS) provides operational measures for these two dimensions.

The first dependent variable captures public attitudes toward immigrants. It is a binary variable constructed based on respondents' preferences for neighbourhoods. Specifically, respondents who indicated they would NOT like to have immigrants or foreign workers as

⁵ An immigrant refers to a person who is, or who has ever been, a landed immigrant or permanent resident. Such a person has been granted the right to live in Canada permanently by immigration authorities. Immigrants who have obtained Canadian citizenship by naturalization are included in this group.

neighbours are coded as 0, indicating an unaccepting attitude. Otherwise, responses are assigned a value of 1, suggesting an accepting attitude toward immigrants.

The second dependent variable reflects individuals' attitudes toward immigration policy. This variable is constructed based on respondents' answers to the following questions: How about people from other countries coming here to work; which one of the following do you think the government should do? The answers include a) let anyone come who wants to, b) let people come as long as there are jobs available, c) place strict limits on the number of foreigners who can come here, d) prohibit people coming here from other countries, e) don't know, f) no answer. It was recoded into a binary format to make this variable comparable to the first dependent variable. Respondents who selected option a) or b) are coded as 1, indicating a preference for more open immigration policies. Those who selected options c) or d) are coded as 0, reflecting a preference for more restrictive policies. Since no respondents selected options e) or f), these categories were excluded from the recode process.

Table 1

Attitudes Toward Immigrants and Immigration by the World Values Survey (WVS)

Dimension	Survey question	Measurement
		(1)
Attitude toward immigrants	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	Binary variable: 0: Would <i>not</i> want immigrants / foreign workers as neighbors. 1: Would accept immigrants / foreign workers as neighbors.
		(2)
Attitude toward immigration	How about people from other countries coming here to work. Which one of the following do you think the government should do?	Binary variable: 0: If the respondent chooses "place strict limits on the number of foreigners who can come here" or "prohibit people coming here from other countries." 1: If the respondent chooses "let anyone come who wants to" or "let people come as long as there are jobs available."

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for two dependent variables and their Pearson correlations. Approximately 8.2% of Canadian respondents were unwilling to have immigrants or foreign workers as neighbours. In contrast, about 35.8% of Canadians are conservative about immigration policies. The standard deviations of the two variables are 0.275 and 0.480, reflecting a greater divergence in respondents' answers on immigration policy preferences than on attitudes toward immigrants. There is a correlation between two variables ($r = 0.197$), and the relationship is highly statistically significant. This indicates a moderate and positive association between attitudes toward immigrants and preferences for immigration policy: respondents with more negative views of immigrants tend to support restrictive immigration policies. However, it is noted that such a correlation does not imply a causal relationship.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Attitudes Toward Immigrants and Immigration and Their Correlations

Variables	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Attitude toward immigrants	.918	.275	0	1
Attitude toward immigration	.642	.480	0	1
	(1)		(2)	
1. Attitude toward immigrants	1			
2. Attitude toward immigration	.197***		1	

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Independent Variables and Research Hypotheses

Based on existing literature, this study categorizes the independent variables into eight dimensions and forms corresponding research hypotheses.

Social Demographic Characteristics: Age, Gender, Education, Income.

Most existing research on attitudes toward immigrants treats age as a control variable, and some have found no significant correlation between the two (Debrael et al., 2019). However, among studies reporting statistically significant effects, age appears as an important explanatory factor, suggesting that sentiments toward immigrants may shift systematically over generations. Research has consistently shown that the older are less tolerant toward immigrants compared to the younger (Chandler and Tsai 2001; Jacobs et al. 2017), and Canada is no exception (Sharples and Chasteen 2021). In contrast, more recent research on immigration policy reveals a different trend. In the context of the rise of far-right political forces, younger cohorts have instead shown levels of exclusion toward immigration (Keating and Janmaat 2020; McLaren, Lauren, and Ian Paterson 2019).

Similar to age, gender often shows significant differences in attitudes toward immigrants. Most studies found that women are less likely to express anti-immigrant sentiments compared to men (Jacobs et al. 2017; Semyonov, Raijman, and Gorodzeisky 2006). Men's misunderstanding of immigrants is more likely to translate into negative policy attitudes than women's, and the

degree of misconceptions may be a key factor of gender differences in immigration policy preferences (Kobayashi and Tanaka 2024).

Educational attainment is considered one of the important social characteristics shaping public attitudes toward immigration. Existing research generally finds that individuals with higher educational qualifications are more inclined to embrace open and inclusive stance on immigration, as they are less prone to perceive immigrants as direct economic threats (Bessudnov 2016; Citrin et al. 1997), whereas those with lower educational attainment tend to have negative contact experiences that reinforce exclusionary sentiments (Laurence and Bentley 2018). Haubert and Fussell (2006) argued that cosmopolitans are more likely to adopt immigrants and oppose ethnocentrism. Although the positive effects of education may diminish over time due to broader social dynamics (Aytac, Parkin, and Triandafyllidou 2024), overall, individuals with higher levels of education continue to have a greater propensity to support immigrants and immigration policy.

When examining how economic factors shape attitudes toward immigration, income level reflects material resources and individuals' perceptions of and responses to social change. Research indicates that higher-income individuals are less likely to view immigrants as direct economic threats and may even benefit from immigrant labour, leading to more moderate attitudes toward immigration policies (Citrin et al. 1997; Quillian 1995). Johnson and Tamney (2001) also noted that people with economically conservative perspectives but have high incomes are more capable of responding to social changes with pragmatism and openness and, thus, are more receptive to the transformations brought by immigration. In contrast, lower-income communities experiencing greater economic pressures are more inclined to perceive

immigrants as competitors for scarce resources, therefore cultivating exclusionary sentiments (Heizmann and Huth 2021).

H1 (social demographic characteristics): Age and gender will significantly influence public attitudes toward immigrants and positions on immigration policy, with younger individuals and women being more likely to hold positive and inclusive views. Individuals with higher education and income levels tend to hold favourable attitudes toward immigrants and support open immigration policies.

Geographical Considerations: Province.

Under Canada's federal system, provinces differ significantly in terms of historical development, economic structures, immigrant composition, and policy orientations. However, existing research has yet to reach a consensus on the extent to which provincial differences influence public attitudes toward immigrants. Growing evidence suggests that variations in public opinion tend to manifest in positions on immigration policy rather than in emotional identification with immigrant groups.

Bilodeau, Turgeon, and Karakoç (2012) pointed out that Canada's provinces differ significantly in their acceptance of immigrants and attitudes toward minority integration. For instance, Nova Scotia generally welcomes immigrants, while Alberta adopts a more conservative stance; Ontario and British Columbia broadly support multicultural integration but also advocate for moderate limits on immigration levels (Bilodeau, Turgeon, and Karakoç 2012). This indicates that public judgments on immigration issues may be shaped by strategic or policy-oriented considerations rather than direct emotional responses to individual immigrants. In other words, support for policy may be influenced by local economic needs and does not necessarily imply greater acceptance of ethnic minorities in everyday life.

This trend is also reflected in a recent governmental survey. According to IRCC (2024b), concerns about immigration levels increased by 15% across most provinces in 2023, while Quebec and Manitoba saw a smaller rise of five percent. Specifically, Canadians became more cautious in supporting international students and temporary foreign workers based on realistic concerns over competition for resources such as housing and employment. However, sympathy and support for refugees remain relatively strong. This contrast reflects an overall public attitude towards immigration that is more of an instrumental response to perceived policy outcomes than cultural resistance due to provincial differences.

Moreover, language and regional distribution are intertwined, especially in Quebec, where French serves as a medium of communication and as a symbol of cultural identity (Medeiros 2017). The overlap between language and geographic location helps provide a more comprehensive understanding of the structural factors underlying public attitudes.

Therefore, it is reasonable to hypothesize that the province of residence has a limited impact on public attitudes toward immigrants but shapes their stance on immigration policy. Differences across provinces in economic demands, social pressures, and media discourse may guide public evaluations of policies' effectiveness and fairness rather than directly altering affective assessments about immigrants.

H2 (geographical considerations): Province of residence does not have a significant impact on public attitudes toward immigrants but can significantly shape individual policy positions.

Religion: Religious belief.

Religious affiliation is often considered a factor influencing public attitudes toward immigrants. Research showed that individuals with more substantial religious commitment and

higher levels of cultural identification are more likely to exhibit defensive tendencies and exclusionary stances (Deslandes and Anderson 2020; Stipišić 2022). This attitude is rooted in religious doctrine and also fundamentally in a preference for cultural homogeneity and a desire to maintain social order. Religious symbols are often imbued with cultural and political meanings that transcend personal belief, serving as tangible markers of symbolic boundaries between majority populations and immigrant groups (Göle 2003). These boundaries distinguish not only “believers” from “non-believers” but also reflect perceptions of cultural difference and the potential for exclusion.

Some studies, however, suggest that religious affiliation itself does not consistently predict public attitudes toward immigrants (Deslandes and Anderson 2020). People's positions on religious issues are often independently formed and are not directly linked to their attitudes toward racial or ethnic matters (Weeden and Kurzban 2015). This “null finding” may result from the interaction of multiple factors. For instance, doctrinal differences across religious traditions and the entanglement of religion with a given country's political and historical context can lead to different attitudes toward the same faith in different cultural settings.

Existing research has also explored the potential impact of religious beliefs on public attitudes toward immigration policy at the macro level. At a fundamental level, personal religious belief plays an important role in shaping people's core values and worldviews, subsequently influencing their political ideologies and preferences (Olson and Green 2006). Individuals who regularly engage in religious activities, especially within traditions that prioritize compassion and social justice, are more likely to advocate for immigration reforms guided by liberal principles (Knoll 2009). In other words, religious belief does not inherently lead to exclusionary or conservative positions; its influence often depends on the core values of

the religious doctrine and the ways in which individuals engage with their faith. While in some contexts, religion may promote tolerance, the majority of studies find a strong association between religiosity and exclusivist attitudes toward immigration policy. Religious conservatism has been linked to negative views of immigrants, especially concerning cultural issues (Leon McDaniel, Nooruddin, and Shortle 2010).

H3 (religious affiliation): Individuals who identify with a religious affiliation are expected to exhibit more negative attitudes toward immigrants and immigration policies compared to those without a religious affiliation.

Social Capital: Social organization participation, Trust in people, Trust in government. Social capital refers to the resources individuals accumulate through their social relationships and networks, which enhance trust and cooperation among members and serve as credentials and safeguards for accessing social support and opportunities (Bourdieu 1986). This study operationalizes social capital through two dimensions: the first is social organization participation, which reflects an individual's level of engagement in collective interactions; the second is social trust, further divided into generalized interpersonal trust and institutional trust in state institutions.

Organizational participation refers to the degree to which individuals are actively involved in formal or informal social groups, such as community associations, volunteer services, religious organizations, or interest-based groups. Chu and Yang (2019) argued that the diversity of an individual's social network constitutes an essential foundation for social capital, as it strengthens social cohesiveness and promotes interpersonal connections and collaboration. People active in diverse social organizations are more likely to cultivate greater tolerance (Côté

and Erickson 2009), and thus cultivate understanding and acceptance of immigrants through positive contact experiences.

Another component of social capital is social trust. It is important to clarify how this form of trust is conceptualized to better understand its role in shaping social cognition. On the one hand, social trust is defined as the anticipation of goodwill and reliability from both acquaintances and strangers in this study. More specifically, such trust should extend to all members of society, including immigrants from different cultural backgrounds. Social trust is often closely associated with more effective community governance, economic development, and broader social cooperation (Chu and Yang 2019; Knack and Keefer 1997). High levels of social trust imply a greater willingness to believe in the goodwill and cooperative intentions of others, thereby facilitating acceptance of newcomers and also helping mitigate the negative impact of perceived threats on attitudes toward immigrants (Herreros and Criado 2009). In contrast, individuals with low social trust are more likely to perceive immigrants as potential threats or burdens.

On the other hand, trust in government reflects an individual's basic identification with social order, the legitimacy of political decision-making, and the capacity of the state. Such institutional trust shapes how people evaluate the effectiveness and acceptability of immigration policies. For instance, some Canadians may support skills-based immigration programs grounded in economic contribution while opposing more lenient refugee intake policies (Van Wolleghem and Georges 2025). Within the framework of the worldview conflict hypothesis (Brandt and Crawford 2020), when individuals perceive that immigration policies do not contradict their values and maintain a high level of trust in the government, they are more likely to view such policies as legitimate and necessary mechanisms of regulation, rather than as threats to the social

structure. Accordingly, this study hypothesizes that greater trust in government is associated with higher public support for immigration policy.

H4 (social capital): Higher levels of social organization participation, interpersonal trust, and trust in government, are associated with more positive attitudes toward immigrants and immigration policies.

Social Integration and Boundary Perception: Belongingness to Canada, Security in the neighbourhood.

Both national identity and perceived neighbourhood security reflect individuals' perceptions and maintenance of group boundaries during the process of social integration. The former is rooted in identification with the nation's collective identity and shared values, while the latter arises from everyday experiences of social order and personal safety.

A sense of national belonging reflects an individual's identification with and emotional attachment to their country. It is widely recognized as an important psychological factor influencing social attitudes and political positions. Social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 2000) suggests that individuals identify themselves through group affiliation, often accompanied by an underlying tendency to maintain symbolic boundaries.

Research has shown that in the context of Canada's multicultural policies, national identity tends to be centred on openness and diversity (Citrin, Johnston, and Wright 2012). Cultural identity is embedded within the sense of belonging, which helps guide the public toward more inclusive attitudes. Joppke (2024) further argues that neoliberalism in Canada creates a kind of structural nationalism that allows the state to define belongingness in terms of immigration policy. A strong identification with one's country correlates with a heightened likelihood of engaging with issues of membership and actively evaluating immigration policies.

Such a sense of belonging does not necessarily translate into exclusivity in a multicultural society. Instead, it can serve as a foundation for promoting orderly integration.

However, the effects of national identity are also dual. If this identity is too exclusive or closely tied to national purity, it can provoke resistance toward outgroups. During the refugee crisis, studies have noted that political discourse increasingly turns national identity into a key strategy for populist mobilization (Ekman 2020). In such contexts, national belonging is often reconstructed as a defensive resource. Besides, different types of national sentiment exert divergent effects on attitudes toward immigration: constructive patriotism fosters support for open immigration policies, while blind patriotism is accompanied by vigilance toward outgroups and heightened perceptions of symbolic threat (Willis-Esqueda, Delgado, and Pedroza 2016). The extent to which national membership generates inclusive or xenophobic sentiments largely depends upon its foundation in cultural openness or exclusivity. In Canada's long-standing context of multiculturalism and inclusivity, it is reasonable to expect that national identity would be endowed with positive connotations.

Perceived neighbourhood safety constitutes a different level of social identity compared to national belonging, and the two operate through complementary mechanisms in shaping public attitudes toward immigrants and immigration. Heerden and Ruedin (2017) found that individuals' attitudes toward immigrants are closely related to the visibility of immigrant groups within their communities and their frequency of interactions. While the racial threat theory received some support, stronger evidence comes from the contact hypothesis, which suggests that intergroup contact reduces hostility and enhances acceptance of immigrants (Pettigrew and Tropp 2006). As the proportion of non-Western immigrants in a community rises, public awareness of their presence becomes more pronounced, with the resulting impact on attitudes

shaped by the frequency, nature (positive or negative), and context of intergroup interactions (Heerden and Ruedin 2017). As a routine and perceptible public space, the neighbourhoods are where contacts occur most frequently and emotional reactions are most likely to occur.

Ross et al. (2001) found that residents of disordered neighbourhoods tend to experience lower levels of safety and trust, regardless of the area's racial composition. Building on this, Havekes et al. (2013) further showed that diminished neighbourhood order is associated with increasingly hostile attitudes toward minorities. These findings suggest that the sense of neighbourhood safety reflects individuals' perceptions of their social environment and serves as a mediating variable between contact experiences and social attitudes. Public attitudes toward immigrants often extend beyond emotional responses at the individual level to influence overall evaluations of immigration policies.

H5 (social integration and boundary perception): A stronger belongingness to Canada and higher perceived neighbourhood safety are both associated with more favourable attitudes toward immigrants and greater support for immigration policies.

Political Ideology: Political spectrum.

Worldviews not only influence people's cognition, attitudes, and behaviours but also shape how they maintain and defend their belief systems. *Cognitive Dissonance Theory* (Festinger and Carlsmith 1959) suggests that people have the motivation to maintain cognitive consistency and usually reduce psychological conflict by aligning their behaviours with their attitudes. People intentionally avoid cross-information and the opponent's voice in anticipation that it will cause cognitive dissonance and damage relationships (Frimer, Skitka, and Motyl 2017; Hoshino-Browne 2012).

This mechanism for maintaining cognitive consistency is particularly evident in the political sphere. People with different ideologies often display distinct attitudes and biases when confronted with political issues, responding in various ways to social and political changes. Among these, the conservative-liberal spectrum is one of the most widely referenced concepts in political discourse. Traditionalists and liberals often hold significantly different attitudes toward political topics. The academic literature is filled with examples suggesting that conservatives exhibit more prejudice and intolerance than liberals. For instance, social traditionalists are generally less willing to engage with opposing viewpoints and find it more challenging to adapt to evolving social and political realities (Davidov et al. 2019; Godø et al. 2024; Johnson and Tamney 2001; Lewis et al. 2017; Malka and Lelkes 2010; McLaren and Paterson 2019).

Research indicates a positive correlation between negative attitudes toward homosexuality and political conservatism, meaning that individuals with more conservative political views are more likely to hold negative opinions about homosexuality (Godø et al. 2024). In the United States, the Democrats are more supportive of anti-discrimination protections for the LGBTQ community compared to the Republicans (Lewis et al. 2017). Similarly, conservatives and liberals hold starkly different attitudes toward immigration. Traditionalists tend to emphasize national security, cultural homogeneity, and economic competition, and generally support stricter immigration policies to restrict illegal immigration and prioritize the interests of local citizens (Davidov et al. 2019; McLaren and Paterson 2019). Liberals, on the other hand, are more inclined to advocate for immigrant rights, emphasizing multiculturalism, inclusivity, and social equity (Joppke 2024).

Traditional theories suggest that those with conservative and conventional worldviews find it easier to defend their worldviews through prejudice (Brandt and Crawford 2020). This

defence mechanism may manifest in several forms, such as rejecting information that conflicts with one's beliefs, selectively interacting with similar-minded groups in social settings, or reinforcing contrary stances through biases and stereotypes. Overall, the avoidance of uncertainty (and the pursuit of certainty) associated with political conservatism is closely linked to resistance to change; similarly, concerns about fears and threats may contribute to accepting social inequalities (Jost et al. 2003).

H6 (political ideology): Individuals with left-leaning ideologies are predicted to demonstrate positive perspectives on immigrants and immigration policy compared to those with right-leaning ideologies.

Economic Competition: Employment status.

Income, education, and occupation collectively form the core dimensions of socioeconomic status, with employment status not only directly tied to an individual's sense of economic security but also indicative of their relative position within the broader landscape of resource competition (Broer et al. 2019; Kunovich 2013; Vyas and Kumaranayake 2006). In contexts of economic downturn or heightened employment pressure, immigrants are often perceived by the public as potential competitors for labour market opportunities and social resources, fueling concerns about rising housing prices, increasing living costs, and intensified pressure on public services (Ford 2011; Valentino, Brader, and Jardina 2012). However, empirical research shows that the overall negative impact of immigration on local workers' wages and employment is very limited (Card 2005; Edo and Rapoport 2019). Perceptions of economic anxiety also vary across different employment groups. Full-time workers, part-time workers, students, and retirees occupy distinct economic positions and life stages, leading to systematic differences in how they assess their interests with regard to immigration policies.

Overall, employment status and occupational type shape individuals' sensitivity to resource distribution and influence their levels of support for immigration policies (Kunovich 2013). Nonetheless, this economically driven anxiety is expected to remain largely at the policy level and is unlikely to directly translate into negative emotional attitudes toward immigrants as individuals.

H7 (economic competition): There are group variations in attitudes regarding immigration policy across professional sectors, but these variations are unlikely to occur in attitudes towards immigrants as individuals.

Personality Trait: Personality.

In explaining public attitudes towards immigration, it is difficult to adequately capture individual differences by relying solely on the lens of economic competition or cultural threats. Personality traits, as deeper psychological foundations, have been shown to play an autonomous and notable role in this process. Dinesen, Klemmensen, and Nørgaard (2014) found that individuals scoring high in openness generally hold more positive attitudes toward immigrants, while agreeableness and conscientiousness moderate individual responses under specific threat conditions. This suggests that independent and autonomous personality tendencies help weaken exclusionary reactions toward outgroups. Other studies also highlighted that authoritarianism is closely associated with negative emotions toward immigrants (Oyamot et al. 2012). Tendencies toward deference to authority and a preference for order make certain individuals more susceptible to reinforcing exclusionary attitudes under social norm pressures. Therefore, this study posits that persons with pronounced independent characteristics are more motivated to accept immigrants and advocate for a more liberal immigration policy than those with obedient personality traits.

H8 (personality trait): Compared to individuals with obedient personality traits, those exhibiting greater independence hold more favorable attitudes toward immigrants and support more open immigration policies.

Table 3 presents the measurement of each variable. Table 4 presents the descriptive statistics for the independent variables. The means, standard deviations, minimum, and maximum values provide an overview of the sample's distributional characteristics.

Method

This study uses a logistic regression model to examine the factors influencing public attitudes toward immigrants and immigration policy. Logistic regression is suitable for situations where the dependent variable is binary (0/1), and it estimates the effect of explanatory variables on the probability of an event occurring. The basic formula is as follows:

$$\log\left[\frac{P}{1-P}\right] = \beta_0 + \beta_1\text{Age} + \beta_2\text{Gender} + \beta_3\text{Education} + \beta_4\text{Income} + \beta_5\text{Region} + \beta_6\text{Religion} + \beta_7\text{SocialOrgParti} + \beta_8\text{TrustInPeople} + \beta_9\text{TrustInGov} + \beta_{10}\text{Belongingness} + \beta_{11}\text{SecurityNeighbor} + \beta_{12}\text{PoliticalSide} + \beta_{13}\text{EmploymentStatus} + \beta_{14}\text{Personality} + \varepsilon$$

This study adopts a nested model approach, sequentially introducing explanatory variables to assess their contributions to model fit. Model selection is guided by the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) and the Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC), which balance model fit and complexity. Lower AIC and BIC values indicate better-fitting models. The model with the best performance on these criteria is selected as the main analytical framework.

Table 3

Measurement of Independent Variables

Variable	Survey question	Measurement
Social Demographic Characteristics		
		(1)
Age	Age of respondents	Measured in years
		(2)
Gender	Respondents' biological sex	Binary variable: 0: Male 1: Female
		(3)
Education	What is the highest educational level that you have attained?	9-point scale: 1, Early childhood education / no education; 2, Primary education; 3, Lower secondary education; 4, Upper secondary education; 5, Post-secondary non-tertiary education; 6, Short-cycle tertiary education; 7, Bachelor or equivalent; 8, Master or equivalent; 9, Doctoral or equivalent.
		(4)
Income	On this card is an income scale on which 1 indicates the lowest income group and 10 the highest income group in your country. We would like to know in what group your household is. Please, specify the appropriate number, counting all wages, salaries, pensions, and other incomes that come in.	10-point scale: 1, Lower step; 2, Second step; 3, Third step; 4, Fourth step; 5, Fifth step; 6, Sixth step; 7, Seventh step; 8, Eight step; 9, Ninth step; 10, Tenth step.
Geographical Considerations		
		(5)
Province	Province of residence	Categorical variable: 1, Alberta; 2, British Columbia; 3, Manitoba; 4, New Brunswick; 5, Newfoundland and Labrador; 6, Nova Scotia; 7, Ontario; 8, Prince Edward Island; 9, Quebec; 10, Saskatchewan.
Religion		
		(6)

Religion belief	Independently of whether you go to church or not, would you say you are...	Binary variable: 0: Not religious 1: Religious *I retained the original response category “a religious person” and combined the responses “not a religious person” and “atheist” into a single category.
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Social Capital

(7)

Social organization participation	Now I am going to read off a list of voluntary organizations. For each organization, could you tell me whether you are an active member, an inactive member or not a member of that type of organization? *Organizations include: church or religious organization; sport or recreational organization; art, music or educational organization; labour union; political party; environmental organization; professional association; humanitarian or charitable organization; consumer organization; self-help group or mutual aid group; women's group; and other organizations.	25-point index: Respondents who reported being an active member of a given organization were assigned 2 points; inactive members received 1 point; and those who were not members received 0 point. The scores of all questions were summed to form a composite index ranging from 0 to 24, with higher values indicating involvement in a greater number of organizations or a higher level of participation.
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(8)

Trust in people	I'd like to ask you how much you trust people from various groups. Could you tell me for each whether you trust people from this group completely, somewhat, not very much or not at all? *Groups include: family; people in their neighbourhood; people they know personally; people they meet for the first time; people of another religion; and people of another nationality.	19-point index: Responses include “trust completely,” “trust somewhat,” “do not trust very much,” and “do not trust at all,” which were assigned scores of 3, 2, 1, and 0 respectively. The scores of all questions were summed to form a composite index ranging from 0 to 18, with higher scores indicating a stronger overall level of interpersonal trust.
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(9)

Trust in government	I am going to name a number of organizations. For each one, could you tell me how much confidence you have in them: is it a great deal of confidence, quite a lot of confidence, not very much confidence or none at all?	22-point index: Responses include “trust completely,” “trust somewhat,” “do not trust very much,” and “do not trust at all,” which were assigned scores of 3, 2, 1, and 0 respectively. The scores of all questions were summed to form a composite index ranging from 0 to 21, with higher scores indicating greater trust in government-related organizations.
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*Institutions include: the armed forces; the police; the courts; the government in Canada's capital; political parties; parliament; and the civil service.

Social Integration and Boundary Perception

(10)

Belongingness to the country

People have different views about themselves and how they relate to the world. Using this card, would you tell me how close do you feel to Canada?

Ordinal variable:
1: Not close at all
2: Not very close
3: Close
4: Very close

(11)

Security in neighbourhood

How frequently do the following things occur in your neighbourhood?

*Incidents include: robberies; alcohol consumed in the streets; police or military interference with people's private life; racist behavior; drug sales in the streets; street violence and fights; and sexual harassment.

22-point index:
Each incident was rated on a four-point scale: very frequently (0 point), quite frequently (1 point), not frequently (2 points), and not at all frequently (3 points). The scores were summed to create a composite index ranging from 0 to 21, where higher totals reflect a greater sense of neighbourhood safety, i.e., lower perceived frequency of negative incidents in one's residential area.

Political Ideology

(12)

Political spectrum

In political matters, people talk of "the left" and "the right." How would you place your views on this scale, generally speaking?

Categorical variable:
It measures respondents' self-reported position on a left-right political spectrum on a scale from 1 (Left) to 10 (Right).

Economic Competition

(13)

Employment status

Are you employed now or not?

Categorical variable:
1, Employed; 2, Retired; 3, Student; 4, Unemployed; 5, Other.

Personality Trait

(14)

Personality traits

Autonomy-4 item Index.

5-point scale:
1, Obedience / religious faith; 5, determination, perseverance / independence.

Table 4
Descriptive Statistics for Independent Variables

Variables	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Age	46.565	16.877	18	93
Gender (reference: Male)	.512	.500	0	1
Education	5.894	1.595	1	9
Income	5.574	1.872	1	10
Province				
Alberta	.094	.292	0	1
British Columbia	.187	.390	0	1
Manitoba	.056	.229	0	1
New Brunswick	.0411	.198	0	1
Newfoundland and Labrador	.032	.176	0	1
Nova Scotia	.042	.201	0	1
Ontario	.250	.433	0	1
Prince Edward Island	.011	.104	0	1
Quebec	.250	.433	0	1
Saskatchewan	.038	.191	0	1
Religion belief (reference: not Religious)	.350	.477	0	1
Social organization participation	3.683	4.190	0	24
Trust in people	12.163	2.558	0	18
Trust in government	10.823	3.801	0	21
Belongingness to the country	3.265	.771	1	4
Security in neighbourhood	15.336	4.554	0	21
Political spectrum	5.250	2.045	1	10
Employment status				
Full time	.450	.498	0	1
Part time	.072	.259	0	1
Self employed	.056	.230	0	1
Retired/pensioned	.227	.419	0	1
Homemaker not otherwise employed	.036	.185	0	1
Student	.080	.271	0	1
Unemployed	.060	.237	0	1
Other	.019	.138	0	1
Personality	3.735	.983	1	5

FACTORS INFLUENCING ATTITUDES TOWARD IMMIGRANTS AND IMMIGRATION

Factors Influencing Attitudes Toward Immigrants

Table 5 presents the results of logistic regression to examine the influence of various independent variables on public attitudes toward immigrants. The findings indicate that variables exhibit varying levels of significance and explanatory power. Overall, some hypotheses receive strong support, while others show limited effects across different dimensions. In the following sections, I will discuss the performance of the variables associated with eight research hypotheses.

H1 (social demographic characteristics):

The results exhibited a non-linear relationship between age and attitudes toward immigrants. Increasing age is generally associated with rising unfavourable sentiments. Such a trend appears to accelerate in middle-aged and older demographics.

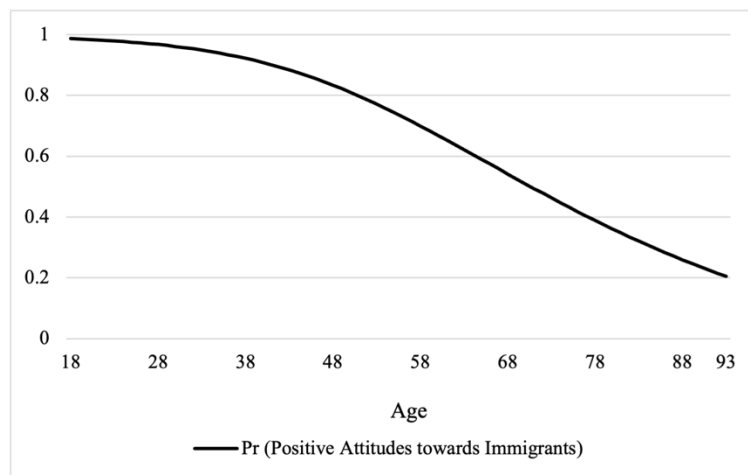


Figure 1. Predicted Probability of Positive Attitudes toward Immigrants by Age

Figure 1 illustrates the predicted effect of age on public attitudes toward immigrants. As age increases, the probability of expressing a positive attitude toward immigrants continuously declines. When individuals are at the youngest age (18 years old), the predicted support rate

reaches as high as 98.73%. However, this proportion drops to 20.50% at the oldest age (93 years old). This finding supports the research hypothesis yet also suggests that attitudes toward immigrants may not evolve in a linear trajectory with age. Instead, they are likely shaped by the interplay of diverse social experiences and cognitive shifts occurring across different life course stages.

In contrast, the effect of gender on attitudes toward immigrants diverges entirely from the original expectation. This study reveals that contrary to the prevalent belief in the existing literature that women exhibit greater empathy and social inclusivity, men in Canada are statistically more likely to hold friendly attitudes toward immigrants. While gender itself does not determine the direction of attitudes, it mirrors underlying perceptions of social roles and value preferences that significantly influence public positions toward immigrants.

Educational attainment, on the other hand, exhibits the anticipated positive effect. Canadians possessing advanced education are more inclined to embrace individuals from diverse backgrounds, confirming the formative role of education in shaping worldviews and value orientations.

The hypothesis on income is not supported. Although income level may influence individuals' perceptions of resource distribution to some extent, its impact on attitudes toward immigrants does not appear to be direct or consistent. On one hand, economic anxiety may indeed lead some lower-income groups to adopt more cautious views toward immigrants. On the other hand, value-based and ideological divisions among higher-income individuals may counterbalance this effect, weakening the overall predictive power of income.

In summary, social demographic characteristics contribute to explaining public attitudes toward immigrants to a certain extent, but their effects are neither uniform nor linear.

Table 5

Logistic Regression of Attitudes Toward Immigrants

Independent Variables	Null	Social demographic characteristics	Geographical considerations	Religion affiliation	Social capital	Social integration & boundary perception	Political ideology	Economic competition	Personality trait	Best Model
Age		-.099*** (.024)	-.096*** (.024)	-.010*** (.024)	-.095*** (.024)	-.106*** (.024)	-.087*** (.024)	-.064* (.027)	-.100*** (.024)	-.082** (.024)
Age square		.001*** (.0002)	.001*** (.0002)	.001*** (.0002)	.001*** (.0002)	.001*** (.0002)	.001*** (.0002)	.001* (.0003)	.001*** (.0002)	.001** (.0002)
Gender (reference: Male)		-.655*** (.124)	-.651*** (.125)	-.661*** (.124)	-.575*** (.127)	-.608*** (.125)	-.518*** (.127)	-.696*** (.128)	-.625*** (.125)	-.440** (.129)
Education		.163*** (.037)	.162*** (.037)	.161*** (.037)	.157*** (.038)	.145*** (.037)	.143*** (.038)	.154*** (.037)	.146*** (.037)	.116** (.038)
Income		-.010 (.032)	-.017 (.032)	-.006 (.032)	-.059 (.034)	-.032 (.032)	.052 (.032)	-.040 (.034)	-.006 (.032)	
Province (reference: British Columbia)										
Alberta			-.137 (.242)							
Manitoba			-.357 (.270)							
New Brunswick			-.365 (.298)							
Newfoundland and Labrador			-.217 (.340)							
Nova Scotia			-.367 (.293)							

Ontario	-.294 (.185)			
Prince Edward Island	-.648 (.505)			
Quebec	.153 (.199)			
Saskatchewan	-.592* (.285)			
Religious belief (reference: not Religious)		-.254* (.072)		
Social organization participation			-.086*** (.013)	-.054*** (.014)
Trust in people			.197*** (.024)	.177*** (.024)
Trust in government			.049** (.017)	.045* (.017)
Belongingness to Canada			.248** (.072)	
Security in neighbourhood			.078*** (.012)	.035** (.013)
Political spectrum				-.272*** (.030)
Employment status (reference: Full time)				
Part time				-.177 (.233)
Self employed				.381 (.303)

Retired/pensioned								.107 (.236)		
Homemaker not otherwise employed								-.436 (.298)		
Student								.626 (.351)		
Unemployed								-.532* (.220)		
Other								-.177* (.336)		
Personality									.265*** (.058)	.154* (.061)
Constant	2.410*** (.057)	3.928*** (.567)	4.049*** (.585)	4.016*** (.569)	1.973** (.616)	2.516*** (.617)	4.913*** (.586)	3.454*** (.663)	3.053*** (.596)	1.939** (.682)
Number of observations	4018	3997	3997	3997	3997	3997	3997	3997	3997	3997
Pseudo R2	0.0000	0.0312	0.0376	0.0332	0.0907	0.0540	0.0681	0.0401	0.0404	0.1230
Log likelihood	-1143.29	-1087.078	-1079.914	-1084.895	-1020.37	-1061.529	-1045.665	-1077.174	-1076.773	-984.120
Deviance	2286.582	2174.1557	2159.828	2169.790	2040.734	2123.059	2091.330	2154.348	2153.545	1968.240
Akaike information criterion (AIC)	2288.582	2186.156	2189.828	2183.79	2058.734	2139.059	2105.33	2180.348	2167.545	1990.24
Bayesian information criterion (BIC)	2294.881	2223.915	2284.228	2227.843	2115.374	2189.405	2149.383	2262.161	2211.598	2059.466

Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Nevertheless, these fundamental attributes represent important contextual conditions in forming attitudes. Accordingly, they will be included as control variables in subsequent models to isolate the independent effects of other social factors.

H2 (geographical considerations):

In pairwise comparisons, it can be observed that Quebec residents display a more positive attitude toward immigrants compared to those in Ontario, and Saskatchewan shows a higher level of acceptance than both British Columbia and Quebec. However, the provincial variable fails to show statistically significant effects overall. This finding supports the research hypothesis that provincial differences have limited influence on public attitudes toward immigrants.

Although Canada's regions vary significantly in terms of historical development, economic structures, and immigrant composition, the emotional perceptions of immigrants among the public may not differ fundamentally across provinces. One important explanation lies in the observation that public opinion in Canada tends to diverge more on views about immigration policy than on affective responses to immigrants themselves. As noted by Bilodeau, Turgeon, and Karakoç (2012), while provinces may differ in their approaches to immigration levels and integration policies for minority groups, such differences often stem from strategic or functional considerations rather than public hostility toward immigrants.

In addition, the overlap between language and geographic distribution may further weaken the direct impact of the province of residence on attitudes toward immigrants. For example, in Quebec, language serves as an important boundary of identity. Public acceptance of immigrants is more likely shaped by specific qualities of the immigrant group (such as language proficiency, cultural background, or economic contribution) rather than by an undifferentiated stance of general acceptance or rejection. As a result, in models where the dependent variable

reflects emotional attitudes, provincial differences may be mediated or diluted by other factors such as language, class, or social capital.

H3 (religious affiliation):

Religious affiliation demonstrates considerable explanatory power in predicting public attitudes toward immigrants, and the proposed hypothesis is supported. Compared to individuals without religious beliefs, those with religious affiliations are more likely to maintain negative perspectives. This finding aligns with dominant views in existing literature, particularly those emphasizing the connection between religiosity and preferences for cultural homogeneity. Religious individuals often display heightened sensitivity in maintaining symbolic and cultural boundaries, which may foster defensive responses against outgroups and act as an internal constraint on openness to immigrants. The formation of such attitudes is not exclusively derived from religious doctrine but instead mirrors a more profound desire for stability in cultural order and social norms.

The religion variable employed in this study is a binary classification (whether or not individuals identify with a religion). It does not distinguish between different religious traditions and their core doctrines. Therefore, while the results support a significant association between religious affiliation and exclusionary attitudes, a refined explanation of the mechanism needs to be further explored. Overall, the presence of religious belief appears to reinforce individuals' awareness of cultural boundaries, increasing their perceived social distance from immigrants. This finding also underscores the normative influence of religion in shaping public attitudes.

H4 (social capital):

This study considers social organization participation, trust in people, and trust in government components of social capital. The model results generally support the research

hypothesis that higher levels of social capital are associated with more positive and open public attitudes toward immigrants. However, the effects of the three dimensions exhibit differences.

Unexpectedly and contrary to the hypothesis, social organization participation positively predicts exclusionary attitudes toward immigrants. Individuals who participate more frequently in formal or informal social groups are more likely to possess less inclusive views toward immigrants. Figure 2 illustrates the predictive effect of organizational participation on attitudes toward immigrants. As the number of organizations an individual participates in increases, the predicted probability of holding a positive attitude toward immigrants decreases significantly. When respondents report no participation in any social organization, the probability of expressing acceptance toward immigrants is 93.97%; however, when the number of organizations reaches the maximum observed value (24), this probability drops to 70.22%. This result challenges the conventional understanding of social capital, suggesting that social participation should not be uncritically equated with acceptance.

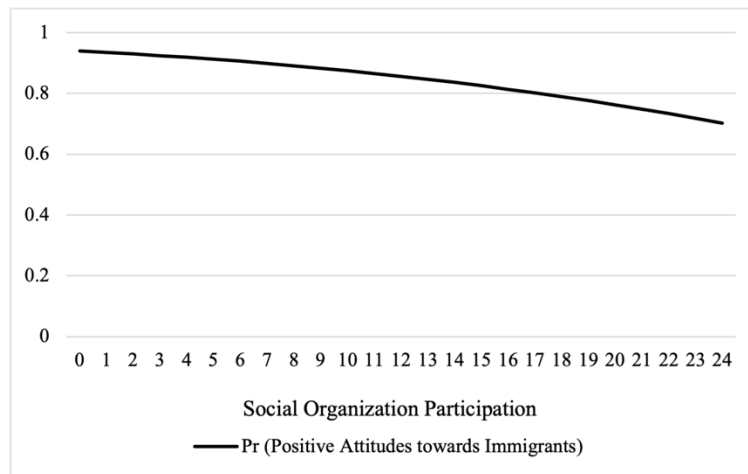


Figure 2. Predicted Probability of Positive Attitudes towards Immigrants by Social Organization Participation

Although extensive participation in social activities is often regarded as a key mechanism for promoting group integration and open-mindedness, real-world organisations' structural characteristics and internal atmosphere may significantly shape the direction of its effects. If the

groups in which individuals participate are internally homogenous or foster discourses that are reserved or even exclusionary toward outgroups, organizational involvement may, in fact, reinforce social boundaries. When individuals attain recognition and support within such groups, they may develop an increased sensitivity towards protecting ingroup interests and norms, subsequently perceiving immigrants as potential risks or resource competitors. Within this logic, organizational participation may act as a mechanism of social reinforcement that solidifies existing social divisions. When assessing the role of social capital, it is essential to consider its specific forms and social contexts rather than assuming its inherently positive impact. The mere existence of organizational ties does not necessarily lead to greater social inclusion. The direction of its influence likely depends on the openness of the organization, the diversity of its members, and its underlying stance toward outgroups.

Trust in people, as a cognitive dimension of social capital, also exerts a significant influence on public attitudes toward immigrants. The statistics show that persons who exhibit a greater propensity to trust acquaintances and strangers are less disposed to perceive immigrants as potential threats and are consequently more likely to express supportive opinions. Figure 3 illustrates the predictive effect of interpersonal trust on positive attitudes toward immigrants. When respondents' trust in others is at its lowest level, the predicted probability of holding a negative view toward immigrants reaches as high as 42.92%; by contrast, when the trust reaches its highest level, this probability drops dramatically to 2.46%. Interpersonal trust thus plays a substantial buffering role in shaping more open and inclusive attitudes toward immigrants. This finding reinforces existing scholarly perspectives that emphasize the importance of social trust in mitigating cultural or economic anxieties. Individuals with higher trust are more psychologically

open to diversity, which helps to reduce hostility toward outgroups and promotes greater social acceptance of immigrants.

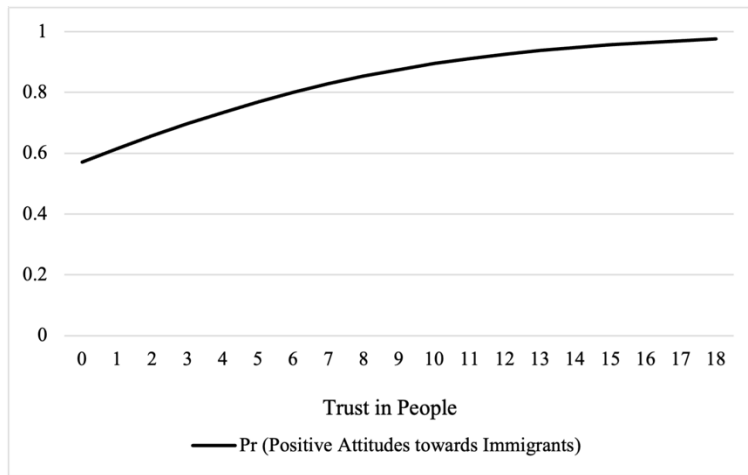


Figure 3. Predicted Probability of Positive Attitudes towards Immigrants by Trust in People

In contrast, trust in government represents an institutional dimension of social capital and similarly exhibits a positive effect in the results. Figure 4 illustrates the predicted impact of institutional trust on attitudes toward immigrants. As trust in government increases from its lowest to highest level, the predicted probability of holding a positive attitude toward immigrants rises by approximately 7.29%.

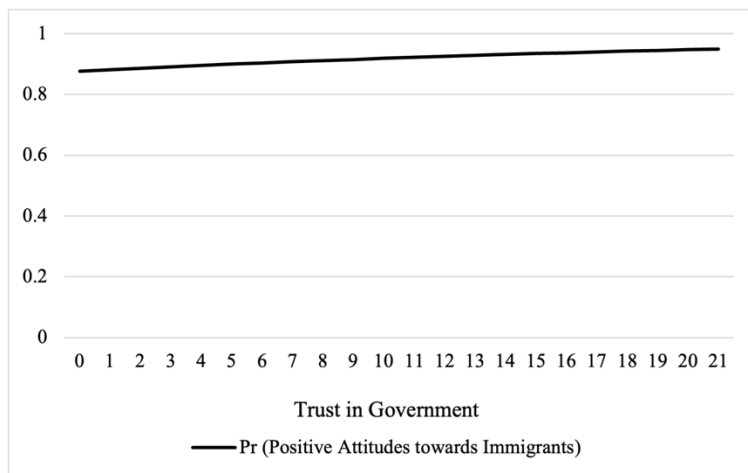


Figure 4. Predicted Probability of Positive Attitudes towards Immigrants by Trust in Government

This suggests that institutional trust indeed plays a role in shaping public perceptions of immigrants. Unlike the horizontal nature of interpersonal trust, trust in government reflects a vertical form of identification. It embodies individuals' fundamental assessments of the legitimacy of social institutions, policy effectiveness, and state governance. When immigrants are not perceived as contradicting one's core values, and individuals hold high levels of trust in the government, they are more likely to consider immigrants as a normative component of social functioning within the established social order.

Overall, while the regression results partly confirm the significant influence of social capital on attitudes toward immigrants, they also reveal the internal complexity of its dimensions and underscore the need for cautious and nuanced application of the concept. Social organization participation reflects the structural aspect of contact and intergroup interaction; interpersonal trust operates at the psychological level, representing deeper value expectations and social perceptions; and trust in government pertains to institutional-level judgments of legitimacy. Among these three, the effects of social organization participation and interpersonal trust are more powerful, indicating that openness toward immigrants is largely grounded in individuals' everyday social experiences and their predisposition to assume goodwill in others.

H5 (social integration and boundary perception):

The findings support this hypothesis. After controlling for other variables, individuals with a stronger sense of belonging to Canada are more likely to hold positive attitudes toward immigrants. As shown in Figure 5, the predicted probability of expressing a positive attitude toward immigrants increases by approximately 6.2% as the sense of national belonging rises from the lowest to the highest level.

This suggests that national identity does not inherently lead to exclusionary views; rather, within Canada's longstanding multicultural context, it serves as a psychological resource that fosters openness. Individuals who perceive themselves as part of the national community are more inclined to view immigrants through an inclusive framework and to recognize immigrants as legitimate members of the national collective.

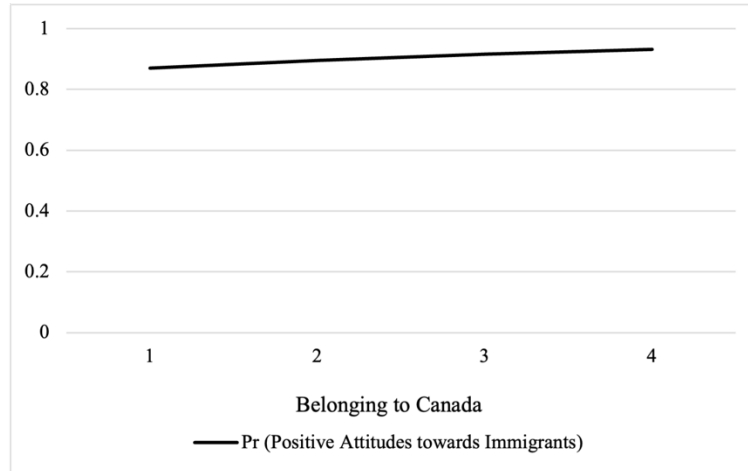


Figure 5. Predicted Probability of Positive Attitudes towards Immigrants by Belonging to Canada

On the other hand, perceived neighbourhood safety also exerts a positive influence on attitudes toward immigrants. Individuals who perceive their communities as safe and orderly are more likely to trust strangers and less likely to perceive outsiders as threatening. As shown in Figure 6, the predicted probability of holding a positive attitude toward immigrants is 79.09% among respondents with the lowest level of perceived neighbourhood safety; this probability rises to 94.89% when perceived safety reaches its highest level.

In other words, the safer individuals feel in their immediate environment, the less likely they are to exhibit exclusionary attitudes toward immigrants. This finding supports the Contact Hypothesis, which suggests that in communities characterized by frequent and positive social interactions, contact with immigrants is more likely to foster favourable perceptions and reduce stereotypes. Although neighbourhood safety is essentially a subjective judgment of social order,

its influence operates through enhanced emotional trust and reduced defensive responses, thereby facilitating more positive shifts in immigration attitudes.

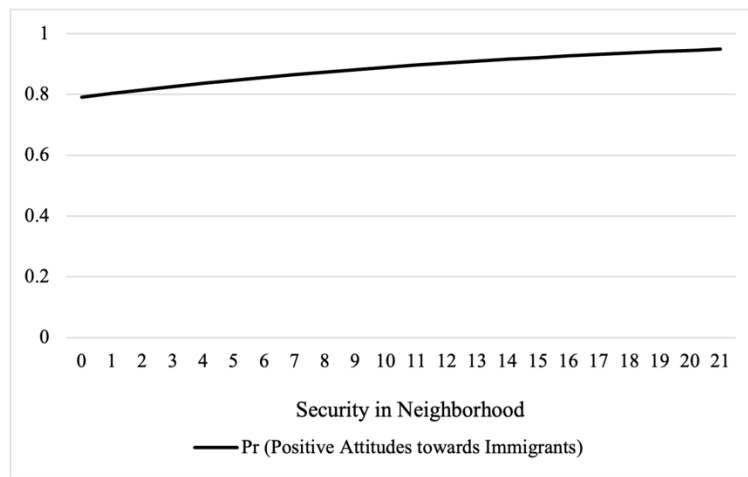


Figure 6. Predicted Probability of Positive Attitudes towards Immigrants by Security in Neighbourhood

It is worth noting that the mechanisms through which these two variables operate are not entirely the same. National belonging functions as a macro-level identity, shaping individuals' overall understanding of the national community. In contrast, perceived neighbourhood safety is more situational, rooted in direct, everyday experiences of social order. The former influences value judgments and social role identification, while the latter is more closely tied to emotional responses and social trust. Together, these two dimensions construct the psychological framework and attitudinal orientation through which individuals engage with issues related to immigration.

H6 (political ideology):

The findings demonstrate that those with a greater right-leaning political orientation are increasingly susceptible to expressing unfavourable or exclusionary attitudes towards immigrants. In contrast, individuals with left-leaning inclinations exhibit markedly greater support for immigrants. This conclusion conforms to Hypothesis 6 and verifies that political ideology functions as an essential cognitive framework shaping public views toward immigrants.

Figure 7 illustrates the predicted effects of individuals' political orientation on attitudes toward immigrants. When respondents positioned themselves as far-left (score 1), the predicted probability of holding a negative attitude toward immigrants was only 2.37%. This probability rises to 21.31% among those identifying as far-right (score 10).

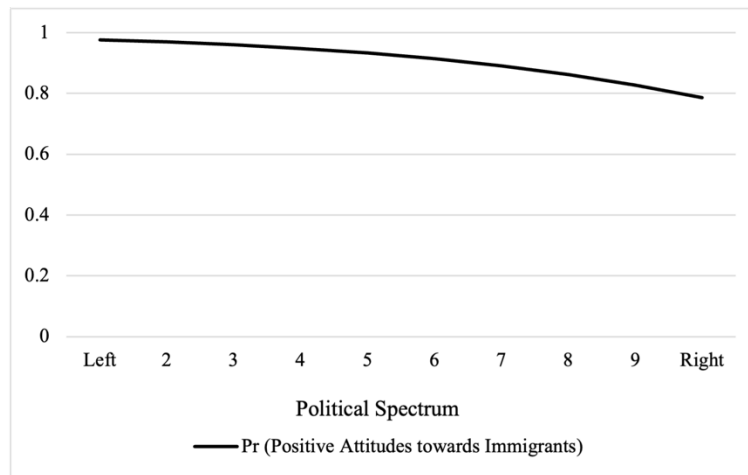


Figure 7. Predicted Probability of Positive Attitudes towards Immigrants by Political Spectrum

Right-leaning individuals tend to maintain social homogeneity psychologically and perceive “outsiders” in society with a greater sense of cultural distance. This sense of distance is not only reflected in institutional exclusion but also manifests in everyday interactions as lower acceptance of immigrants on a personal level. In addition, right-wing ideology is often associated with a higher tendency to avoid uncertainty and a heightened sensitivity to perceived group threats. When immigrants are viewed as an unstable demographic, right-leaning individuals are more likely to translate such risk into suspicion or even hostility toward immigrant individuals. Furthermore, political orientation is often linked to media consumption habits. Right-leaning individuals are more frequently exposed to media and information sources that highlight the negative impacts of immigration, thereby reinforcing their vigilance and perception of immigrants as culturally divergent on both the perceptual and emotional levels.

H7 (economic competition):

Contrary to the initial hypothesis, some variations in attitudes toward immigrants were also observed across occupational groups. In comparison to full-time workers, persons who are unemployed or classified under “Other” occupational statuses exhibit significantly higher negative opinions toward immigrants. This illustrates the vulnerability of economically disadvantaged groups in terms of their perceived competition for resources, as they are more likely to perceive immigrants as a potential danger to their interests. This inclination to exclude is particularly evident in areas involving public resources, such as social welfare, housing allocation, and healthcare.

However, no statistically significant differences were found between full-time workers and other occupational categories such as part-time workers, the self-employed, retirees, homemakers, or students. This finding aligns with existing research suggesting that economic anxiety is more commonly reflected in responses to immigration policy rather than in emotional judgments about immigrants as individuals. Employment status, as one reflection of socioeconomic position, shapes individuals' subjective perceptions of resource competition. Yet, such perceptions are more likely to translate into negative emotional evaluations only among specific socially marginalized groups. For the majority of employment categories, immigration is still perceived as a structural issue rather than a direct personal threat embedded in everyday experience.

H8 (personality trait):

The hypothesis that individuals' personality trait greatly influences their attitudes toward immigrants is confirmed. Specifically, individuals with a stronger inclination toward

independence are less likely to hold hostile views toward immigrants compared to those with more obedience-oriented personality traits.

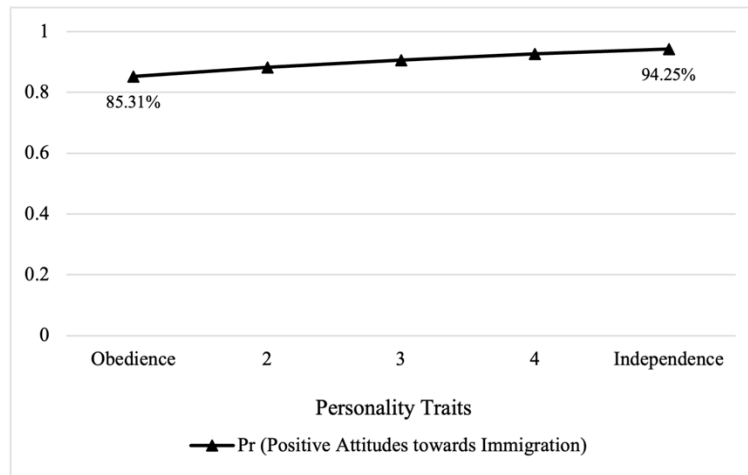


Figure 8. Predicted Probability of Positive Attitudes towards Immigrants by Personality Traits

Figure 8 illustrates the predicted effect of different personality orientations on attitudes toward immigrants. Those who emphasize obedience or religious faith exhibit a predicted probability of 11.6% for holding negative attitudes, whereas individuals who value independence, autonomy, and perseverance show a reduced probability of 6.7%. This suggests that independence is not only a reflection of cognitive and behavioural autonomy but also an indicator of greater openness to outsiders. This finding underscores the fundamental role of personality in shaping attitudes toward immigrants and provides important evidence for understanding psychosocial mechanisms beyond economic or cultural threat perspectives.

Full Model

The final model integrates all variables that demonstrated either statistical significance or strong theoretical explanatory power in the earlier hypothesis-testing stages, aiming to comprehensively identify the key factors influencing public attitudes toward immigrants as individuals. Based on stepwise regression analyses, the full model retains theoretically justified and empirically robust variables while excluding those with weak explanatory power or no

statistical significance. This approach improves the overall model fit and provides a clearer structural picture of the core determinants of immigration attitudes.

The retained variables include age, gender, education level, trust in people, trust in government, organizational participation, perceived neighbourhood safety, political orientation, and personality traits. These variables consistently demonstrated stable directionality and statistical significance across prior models and remained significant in the full model, indicating their robust predictive power.

In contrast, several variables initially included in the model were not retained. Although relatively regional differences were observed in provincial comparisons, the overall effect of the province was not statistically significant and thus omitted from the final model. Similarly, the influence of religious affiliation and sense of national belonging diminished after integration. Employment status also failed to demonstrate statistical significance for most categories, except for the “Other” group and was therefore excluded.

In the full model, social demographic variables remain statistically significant, indicating that individuals' basic social attributes continue to exert explanatory power in shaping attitudes toward immigrants. Most notably, the age variable exhibits a significant negative nonlinear relationship. Positive attitudes toward immigrants gradually decline with age, with a more pronounced decline during later life stages. This pattern likely reflects cumulative shifts in social experience, risk perception, and value orientation throughout the life course. Older people may place greater emphasis on stability and social order, leading to increased apprehension toward societal changes such as growing demographic diversity, and consequently adopting relatively conservative positions.

Gender factors continue to yield results that are contrary to mainstream expectations in this model. Specifically, the findings indicate that men are more likely than women to express friendly attitudes toward immigrants. Women tend to exhibit greater sensitivity in interpersonal contexts and place a higher emphasis on situational security, particularly when encountering unfamiliar social groups. On immigration issues, such sensitivity may lead to increased concern over community resource allocation and potential cultural tensions, resulting in a comparatively cautious stance. This does not imply a lack of empathy among women but rather reflects gender-based differences in social experience and risk perception.

As theoretically expected, education has a significant positive effect on attitudes toward immigrants. Those with higher educational attainment are typically exposed to more diverse cultural perspectives and information and tend to possess greater cognitive complexity and cross-cultural understanding. This not only enhances their acceptance of social diversity but also leads them to support more inclusive policies at the level of values and normative commitments.

Meanwhile, all three dimensions of social capital show significant effects. The negative association between social organization participation and attitudes toward immigrants is noteworthy. This finding challenges the traditional assumption that social participation inherently promotes openness and suggests that organizational involvement should not be equated with cross-group understanding. In reality, participation itself is not a neutral form of connection; its effects are contingent upon the internal composition and normative orientation of the group. When individuals are embedded in organizations characterized by strong homogeneity or discursive environments that lean toward conservatism or exclusion, such participation may actually reinforce ingroup boundaries. Such mechanism indicates that the effects of social capital cannot be interpreted in isolation from the broader social context in which it operates.

Trust in people, as a cognitive dimension of social capital, consistently demonstrates a positive predictive effect on attitudes toward immigrants. Individuals with higher interpersonal trust are more willing to assume good intentions in others, including strangers. Such trust reduces the perceived threat posed by outgroups. Among high-trust individuals, the threshold for accepting members of outgroups tends to be lower, and immigrants are more likely to be evaluated based on shared human qualities rather than group-based identities. This mode of perception facilitates the reduction of social distance that may otherwise result from identity-based distinctions.

Institutional trust in the government also exerts a significant positive influence. Government trust reflects individuals' recognition of the efficiency, fairness, and legitimacy of national institutions. When people believe that the government has the capacity and integrity to manage immigration affairs, they are more likely to view immigrants in Canada as legitimate participants within the system. In this context, immigrants are perceived as part of an orderly and regulated process, rather than as potential sources of disruption. This mechanism highlights the structural role of institutional trust in the formation of public attitudes.

Perceived security in one's neighbourhood continues to show a positive impact in the full model, indicating that individuals' sense of safety in their immediate environment substantially shapes their attitudes toward outgroup members. Those who perceive their neighbourhood as safe are less likely to activate defence mechanisms and more inclined to assume that others will not disrupt the existing order. Neighbourhood safety reflects subjective assessments of the objective social environment and also an overall evaluation of one's interpersonal experiences within that setting. Residents living in communities they perceive as safe are more likely to engage in shared public spaces and have low-conflict interactions with people from diverse

backgrounds. Such positive contact experiences help to counteract stereotypes and enable immigrants to be perceived as familiar neighbours. Therefore, neighbourhood security influences attitudes toward immigrants both by reducing perceived threats and by indirectly enhancing a broader sense of trust and social belonging.

The political spectrum unsurprisingly demonstrates a significant effect in the full model, indicating that ideological orientation plays a consistent role in shaping public attitudes toward immigrants. Individuals with right-leaning political views typically place greater emphasis on social order, national borders, and cultural continuity, and are therefore more likely to perceive immigrants as a potential institutional burden or source of social pressure. This stance often translates into a more cautious attitude toward immigrants in their daily lives. In contrast, left-leaning individuals generally emphasize social equality, minority rights, and multicultural values, and are more inclined to approach immigrants from a humanitarian perspective. Additionally, political orientation indirectly influences attitudes through information processing mechanisms. According to the Worldview Conflict Theory, an individual's worldview is crucial for understanding which groups they may hold biases toward, rather than whether they will hold biases at all (Brandt and Crawford 2020). Regardless of political orientation, people are prone to selectively accept or reject information about immigrants based on its alignment with their pre-existing ideological beliefs, thereby reinforcing prior preferences.

The consistent significance of personality traits suggests that attitudes toward immigrants are also moderated by internal psychological dispositions. Individuals with higher levels of autonomy and openness tend to possess greater psychological flexibility and a stronger inclination toward cognitive exploration. They are more accepting of differences and, as a result, are more willing to engage in direct interpersonal contact with immigrants. This mechanism

reflects emotional tolerance and also a deeper role of personality in shaping how individuals navigate social identity boundaries. Autonomous individuals are less dependent on traditional sources of social identity or external norms for self-definition, which makes them more open to integrating diverse others into their social worldview. In contrast, those who score higher on traits related to conformity to authority and ingroup cohesion tend to maintain greater social distance from immigrants. This suggests that personality serves as a cognitive-affective filter through which multicultural contexts are interpreted and responded to.

Factors Influencing Attitudes Toward Immigration

The results of the logistic regression model for public attitudes toward immigration are presented in Table 6. The analysis reveals differences in both statistical significance and theoretical explanatory power across variables: while some research hypotheses receive strong support, others show only limited effects in specific dimensions. The following sections will evaluate the performance of each relevant variable and research hypotheses in the models.

H1 (social demographic characteristics):

Overall, the model results largely support the core proposition of this hypothesis, though some heterogeneity is observed across different variables. First, age exhibits a pronounced nonlinear effect. Figure 9 illustrates the predicted effect of age on public attitudes toward immigration policy. A clear downward trend emerges: as age increases, the probability of expressing positive views toward immigration policy declines sharply. When age is at its lowest (18 years old), the predicted support rate reaches as high as 98.73%. By contrast, at the highest age (93 years old), this probability drops to just 3.36%.

This pattern mirrors the age effect observed in the model of attitudes toward immigrants as individuals. The result suggests that age, as a structural social variable, exerts a consistent

Table 6

Logistic Regression of Attitudes Toward Immigration

Independent Variables	Null	Social demographic characteristics	Geographical considerations	Religion affiliation	Social capital	Social integration & boundary perception	Political ideology	Economic competition	Personality trait	Best Model
Age		-.122*** (.013)	-.123*** (.013)	-.122*** (.013)	-.107*** (.013)	-.124*** (.013)	-.116*** (.013)	-.107*** (.015)	-.123*** (.013)	-.089*** (.015)
Age square		.001*** (.0001)	.001*** (.0001)	.001*** (.0001)	.001*** (.0001)	.001*** (.0001)	.001*** (.0001)	.001*** (.0002)	.001*** (.0001)	.001*** (.0002)
Gender (reference: Male)		-.111 (.069)	-.106 (.069)	-.112 (.069)	-.087 (.071)	-.095 (.069)	-.024 (.071)	-.113 (.071)	-.097 (.069)	
Education		.182*** (.022)	.189*** (.023)	.181*** (.022)	.166*** (.023)	.1766*** (.022)	.165*** (.023)	.180*** (.022)	.174*** (.022)	.161*** (.023)
Income		.084*** (.019)	.079*** (.019)	.084*** (.019)	.011 (.020)	.074*** (.019)	.123*** (.019)	.072*** (.020)	.085*** (.019)	
Province (reference: British Columbia)										
Alberta			-.143 (.134)							-.028 (.140)
Manitoba			.124 (.164)							.156 (.171)
New Brunswick			.019 (.183)							-.018 (.191)
Newfoundland and Labrador			-.128 (.202)							-.203 (.208)
Nova Scotia			.380* (.188)							.387* (.195)

Retired/pensioned								.047 (.131)	.045 (.136)	
Homemaker not otherwise employed								-.007 (.188)	.056 (.193)	
Student								.337 (.173)	.237 (.179)	
Unemployed								-.278 (.147)	-.146 (.152)	
Other								-.354 (.247)	-.342 (.252)	
Personality									.119*** (.034)	
Constant	.582*** (.033)	2.040*** (.310)	1.981*** (.320)	2.057*** (.311)	-.051 (.356)	1.318*** (.345)	2.721*** (.323)	1.762*** (.366)	1.638*** (.331)	.398 (.431)
Number of observations	4018	3997	3997	3997	3997	3997	3997	3997	3997	3997
Pseudo R2	0.0000	0.0436	0.0485	0.0437	0.0801	0.0483	0.0642	0.0473	0.0459	0.1039
Log likelihood	-2621.6833	-2492.7831	-2480.146	-2492.525	-2397.838	-2480.524	-2439.279	-2483.234	-2486.911	-2335.824
Deviance	5243.3665	4985.5661	4960.293	4985.051	4795.675	4961.049	4878.558	4966.467	4973.821	4671.649
Akaike information criterion (AIC)	5245.367	4997.566	4990.293	4999.051	4813.675	4977.049	4892.558	4992.467	4987.821	4719.649
Bayesian information criterion (BIC)	5251.665	5035.326	5084.692	5043.104	4870.315	5027.395	4936.611	5074.28	5031.874	4870.688

Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

influence across different dimensions of immigration-related attitudes. Older individuals tend to display more reserved and cautious views, which may be linked to a stronger sense of social order, cultural conservatism, and heightened security concerns. In contrast, younger individuals are generally more receptive to open policies and multicultural environments.

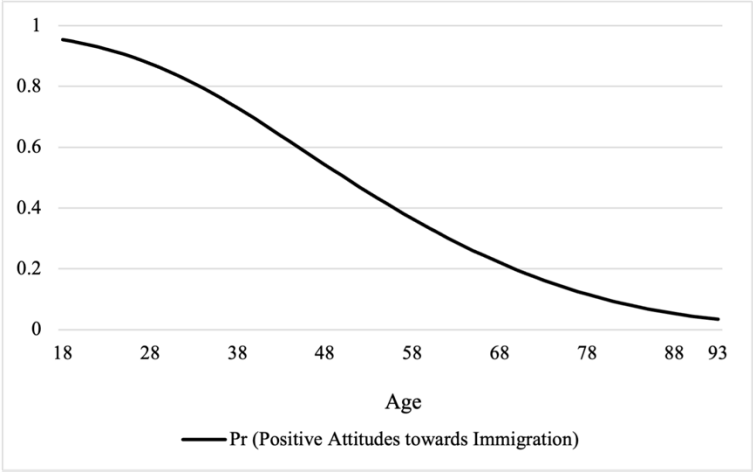


Figure 9. Predicted Probability of Positive Attitudes towards Immigrants by Age

However, the gender variable did not pass the statistical significance test, failing to confirm the original hypothesis that women are more likely to support open immigration policies. This outcome may reflect two underlying developments. On the one hand, the diversification of public discourse and access to information regarding immigration may have diminished cognitive differences traditionally observed between genders. On the other hand, Canada's relatively high level of gender equality and broad societal consensus may have led to a convergence of male and female perspectives on immigration policy. As a result, the independent predictive power of gender on policy attitudes appears increasingly limited in empirical terms.

In contrast, the significance of educational attainment emerges as one of the most robust factors. The regression analysis reveals that increased educational achievement correlates with a greater likelihood of supporting immigration policy. Education transcends the mere delivery of

knowledge and skills; it profoundly impacts cognitive capacities and social values. Individuals with higher education are more likely to cultivate critical thinking and a deeper awareness of structural inequality. Consequently, they are more predisposed to examine immigration issues through lenses of human rights, fairness, and global awareness, rather than from a limited perspective of resource competition.

Unlike the model examining attitudes toward immigrants, income level shows a significant effect on public attitudes toward immigration policy. Higher-income individuals are more likely to hold inclusive and supportive positions, supporting the research hypothesis. This can be attributed to their stronger socioeconomic stability in domains such as employment, housing, and public services, which makes them less inclined to perceive immigration as an immediate threat to their livelihoods. Such individuals are more likely to adopt pragmatic and open viewpoints toward social diversity and structural change, reflecting higher levels of political and economic flexibility. In contrast, low-income groups, often situated at the socioeconomic margins or under greater economic stress, are more prone to express exclusionary attitudes when faced with immigration-related issues.

H2 (geographical considerations):

The impact of provincial residence on public attitudes toward immigration policy is statistically significant, confirming the hypothesis that regional variation matters. Specifically, Saskatchewan shows the lowest predicted support rate for immigration at just 59.49%, while Nova Scotia ranks highest at 70.94%, followed closely by Quebec at 69.29%. The case of Quebec is particularly noteworthy and somewhat unexpected. It suggests that language, often assumed to be a cultural barrier, does not necessarily lead to public rejection of immigration. Instead, the findings indicate that public acceptance may be more influenced by the structure and

design of provincial immigration systems. Quebec's immigration policy emphasizes French language proficiency as a core entry criterion, effectively selecting immigrants with a higher potential for cultural adaptation. This orderly and culturally attuned policy framework likely plays a key role in alleviating public anxieties and fostering a more favourable attitude toward immigration policy.

Overall, residents of Nova Scotia and Quebec exhibit significantly more positive attitudes toward immigration policy compared to those in Alberta (59.83%), British Columbia (63.02%), Newfoundland and Labrador (60.16%), Ontario (61.78%), and Saskatchewan (59.49%). This finding aligns with prior studies suggesting that Canadian provinces differ markedly in their approaches to ethnic and immigrant integration. Such variations are less likely to stem from cultural exclusion toward immigrants themselves but more likely reflect strategic considerations related to resource allocation and perceptions of policy efficacy.

H3 (religious affiliation):

The empirical results do not support the hypothesis concerning religious affiliation. Contrary to expectations, having a religious belief does not significantly predict individuals' stance on immigration policy. This null result may be attributed to the interplay of several contextual mechanisms.

In Canada's sociopolitical landscape, religion does not consistently function as an exclusionary identity. Unlike in countries where religion is more politicized, Canadian religious practice is often more privatized and community-oriented rather than serving as a foundation for exclusionary political attitudes. Consequently, religious affiliation does not systematically correlate with support for or opposition to immigration policies. Moreover, existing research has shown that individuals' attitudes toward religious and racial issues may develop through separate

cognitive and social pathways and are not necessarily closely aligned (Weeden and Kurzban 2015). As such, despite holding morally or culturally conservative views, believers could embrace more rational or strategic stances on policy matters. This decoupling helps explain why religious affiliation lacks consistent predictive power regarding attitudes toward immigration policy.

H4 (social capital):

This study concludes that trust in people and trust in government play critical roles in shaping individuals' attitudes toward immigration policy, whereas the impact of social organizational participation is less significant than expected. This outcome highlights the differentiated mechanisms through which various components of social capital operate.

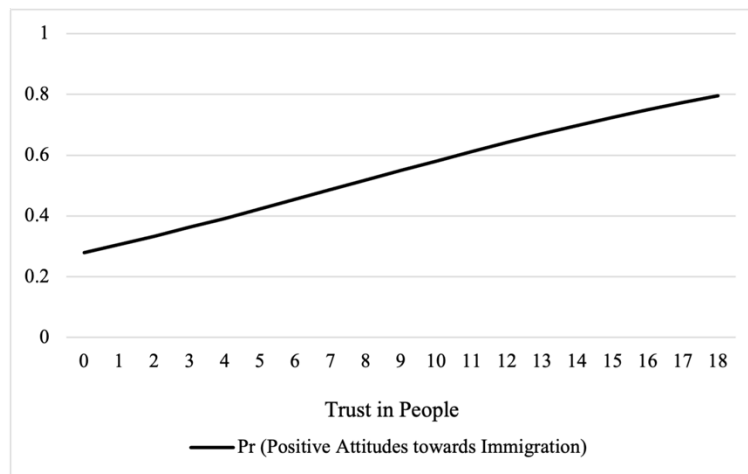


Figure 10. Predicted Probability of Positive Attitudes towards Immigration by Trust in People

In particular, interpersonal trust exhibits a strong positive influence in the analysis. Specifically, individuals more inclined to trust strangers tend to hold more tolerant and rational views toward immigration policy. Figure 10 illustrates the predicted impact of interpersonal trust on public attitudes. When a person's trust in others is at its lowest level (0), the predicted probability of holding a negative attitude toward immigration policy reaches 72.06%. As trust increases to the maximum value (18), this probability significantly drops to 20.48%. Such trust is

a favourable anticipation of others' behaviour and a manifestation of accumulative collective social experience grounded in everyday interactions and influenced by assumptions of goodwill.

Social trust serves as a crucial psychological mechanism for maintaining cooperation and mitigating conflict within society. It effectively minimizes identity anxiety and perceived threats related to resource competition brought about by immigration. When people maintain a basic trust in the intentions of others, they are more willing to support integrative and multicultural policy frameworks. Individuals with a high level of trust are less likely to consider immigrants as disruptors of social order yet more inclined to see them as fellow community members in pursuit of opportunities.

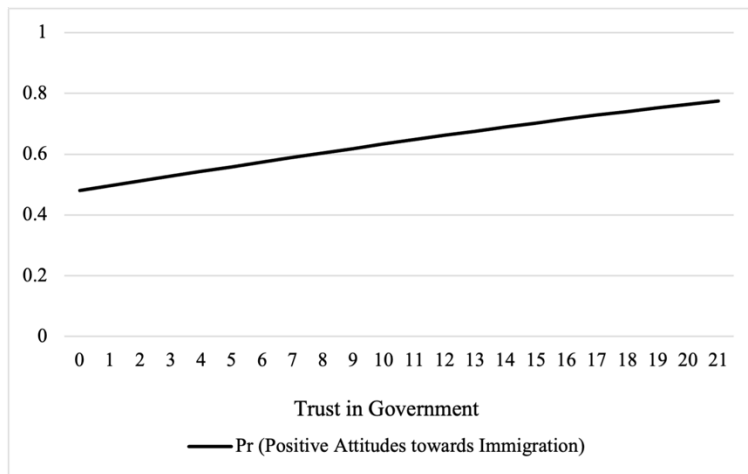


Figure 11. Predicted Probability of Positive Attitudes towards Immigration by Trust in Government

As expected, trust in government also considerably enhances public acceptance of immigration policies. Figure 11 illustrates the predicted relationship between individuals' trust in government and their attitudes toward immigration policy. When trust in government is at its lowest level (0), the predicted probability of supporting immigration policy is 48.11%. As trust increases to its highest value (21), this probability ascends to 77.56%, suggesting a 61.2% increase.

Trust in government reflects an individual's confidence in the state's governing capacity, institutional legitimacy, and effectiveness of policy implementation. According to Worldview Conflict Theory (Brandt and Crawford 2020), people's support for a given policy often depends on whether it aligns with their core values. When citizens have confidence in the government's ability to manage the social transformations produced by immigration, they are less likely to respond with panic or resistance, even in the face of uncertainty. The public's substantial approval of the skills-based immigration system is founded on faith in the government's policy framework and selection criteria. Therefore, high levels of governmental trust enable the public to perceive immigrants as qualified members who have been appropriately selected through institutional processes.

By contrast, the dimension of social organization participation does not exhibit a significant effect, suggesting the need to reassess how civic engagement influences the formation of political attitudes. One possible explanation is that participation in social organizations operates primarily at the interpersonal level, reinforcing networks of personal relationships, neighbourhood support, and group identity rather than shaping cognitive evaluations of macro-level institutional issues such as immigration policy. Social participation often centres on the routines of daily life, such as community events, hobby groups, or religious gatherings. The primary function of these settings is to maintain ties among acquaintances and foster a sense of emotional belonging rather than to facilitate in-depth discussions about national governance or the management of immigrant populations. Within such contexts, individuals are more likely to focus on those around them rather than abstract institutional matters. As a result, even when levels of participation are high, the sense of civic responsibility or belonging that such

involvement fosters does not necessarily extend to support for immigration institutions or multicultural state policies.

H5 (social integration and boundary perception):

Hypothesis 5 is supported in this model. Both “Belongingness to Canada” and “Security in Neighbourhood” demonstrate significant positive effects on public attitudes toward immigration policy.

An individual's sense of belonging to Canada is widely regarded as a concentrated manifestation of national identity. The analysis reveals that individuals with stronger identification with Canada are more likely to perceive the country as an inclusive collective and, in turn, support immigration policies. Figure 12 illustrates the predictive effect of national belonging. When respondents' sense of belonging to Canada is at its lowest, the predicted probability of holding a positive attitude toward immigration policy is 56.55%. When belonging reaches its highest level, this chance increases to 66.62%.

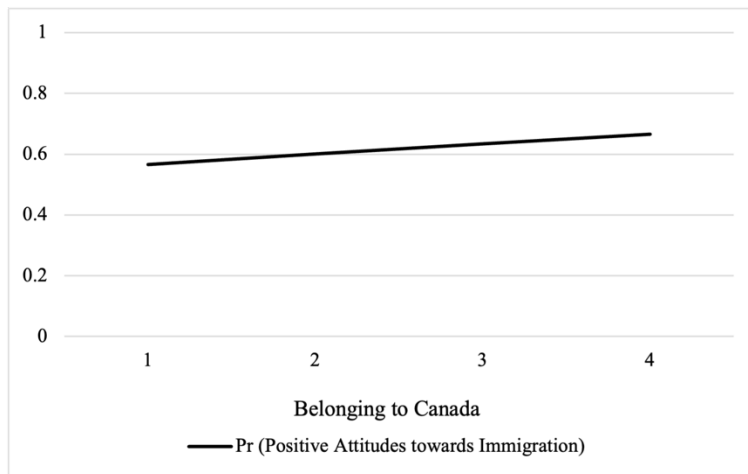


Figure 12. Predicted Probability of Positive Attitudes towards Immigration by Belonging to Canada

This result is consistent with Social Identity Theory, which underscores the central role of group affiliation in shaping value orientations and social attitudes. In the Canadian context, the state constructs immigrants' national identity through various institutional mechanisms, such as

immigration selection systems, language proficiency evaluations, and professional skill certifications. These link belongingness to indicators of cultural adaptability, economic contribution, and social responsibility. This framework roots national identity in normative standards and institutional performance. Such institutionalized logic of belongingness effectively shifts public evaluation of immigrants away from essentialist considerations, such as race, ethnicity, or ancestry, toward a more pragmatic assessment of whether immigrants align with the state's civic ideals and societal compatibility. Within this context, public attitudes toward immigration policy reflect rational judgments about institutional effectiveness and immigrants' capacity for integration rather than emotionally driven or identity-based exclusion.

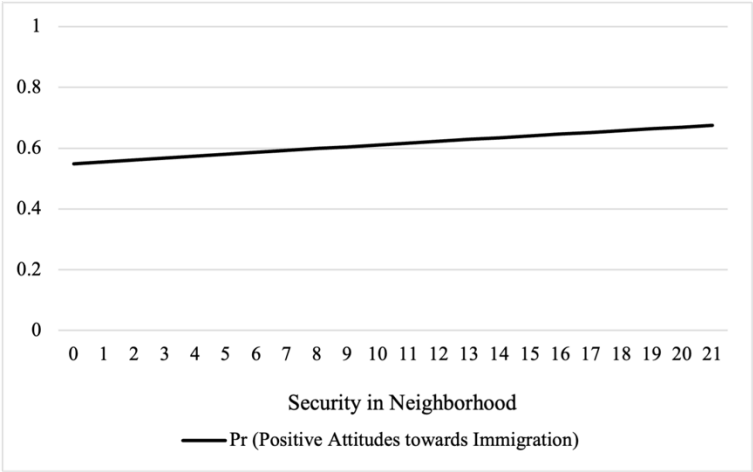


Figure 13. Predicted Probability of Positive Attitudes towards Immigration by Security in Neighbourhood

In contrast, “Security in Neighbourhood” reflects individuals' everyday experiences within their immediate social environment, and its influence primarily operates through mechanisms of social trust and risk perception. Empirical research indicates a strong association between the perceived safety of one's living environment and the level of acceptance toward outgroups. Figure 13 illustrates the predictive effect of neighbourhood security on public attitudes toward immigration policy. When respondents reported the lowest level of perceived neighbourhood safety (0), the predicted probability of expressing a positive attitude toward

immigration policy is 54.90%. As perceived safety increases to its highest level (21), this probability rises to 67.48%.

Perceived security does not merely reflect crime rates or law enforcement conditions. It profoundly represents individuals' overall judgment of whether social norms and rules are effectively upheld in their living environment. In communities perceived as orderly, residents tend to report higher life satisfaction and emotional stability, which in turn lowers their sensitivity to perceived threats from external groups. Conversely, when neighbourhood environments are viewed as chaotic or unsafe, individuals are more likely to adopt conservative attitudes to preserve psychological boundaries and a sense of security for themselves and their community. In these situations, immigration may be emotionally construed as symbols of external disruption and projected targets of anxieties about social order.

Within this model, the influence of belongingness to Canada is more prominent than neighbourhood safety. This suggests that macro-level national identification exerts a more profound and enduring explanatory power in shaping public attitudes toward policy, while neighbourhood safety primarily affects individual emotions and judgments through everyday experiences.

H6 (political ideology):

The political spectrum is confirmed to be a significant cognitive factor influencing public attitudes toward immigration policy. As individuals' identification with the political right intensifies, their opposition to more liberal immigration policy increases. Figure 14 illustrates the predicted effect of political orientation on attitudes toward immigration policy. When respondents self-identify as far-left (1), their predicted probability of supporting immigration

policy reaches 79.13%. In contrast, when political orientation shifts to the far-right (10), this probability drops sharply to 44.81%.

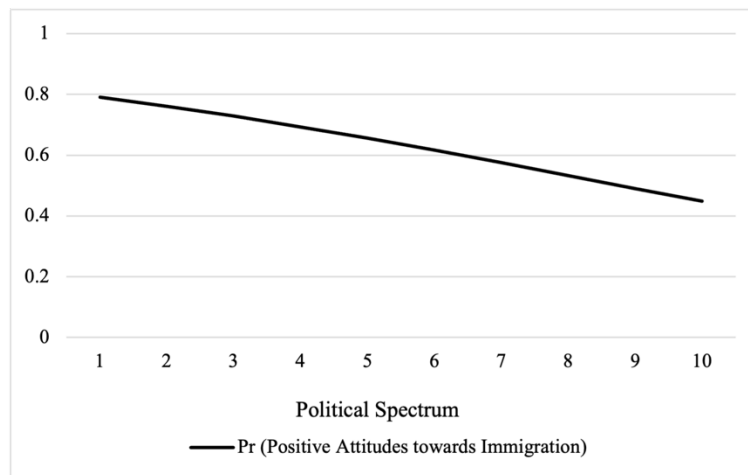


Figure 14. Predicted Probability of Positive Attitudes towards Immigration by Political Spectrum

This outcome corresponds closely with existing studies, confirming the fundamental role of ideology in shaping public attitudes. Individuals with right-wing tendencies generally prioritize national security, social order, and cultural homogeneity more than their left-leaning counterparts. They tend to exhibit heightened caution toward social change and external groups, often viewing immigration as a potential institutional burden or a danger to core societal norms. As a result, their attitudes toward immigration tend to be more reserved or even exclusionary. In contrast, those with left-wing orientations emphasize social inclusion, equity, and diversity, often interpreting immigration through the lens of structural inequity and human rights, resulting in more favourable group opinions.

From a cognitive perspective, this divergence can be attributed to the combined effects of worldview conflict theory and cognitive dissonance theory. Individuals seek information that aligns with their political beliefs and avoid opposing views that may trigger psychological discomfort. As such, when confronted with issues involving identity, social boundaries, and the

distribution of resources, political conservatives are more likely to adopt exclusionary stances to preserve their existing value systems.

H7 (economic competition):

The results of this model confirm the research hypothesis regarding economic competition, demonstrating that significant differences exist among occupational groups in their attitudes toward immigration policy. Specifically, self-employed individuals (72.15%) and students (70.82%) generally display more positive attitudes, while full-time workers (63.76%), part-time workers (61.57%), retirees (64.79%), and the unemployed (57.47%) exhibit relatively more negative positions. Figure 15 presents the predicted probabilities of support for immigration policy across different occupational categories.

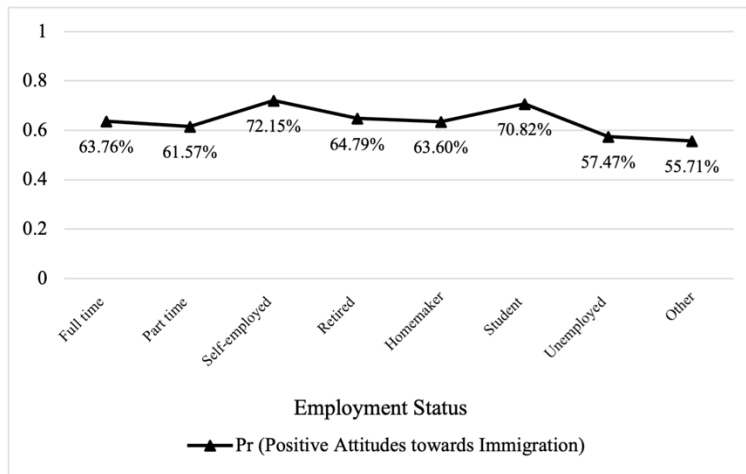


Figure 15. Predicted Probability of Positive Attitudes towards Immigration by Employment Status

These differences can be understood from perceived economic security and subjective resource competition. Self-employed individuals typically enjoy greater occupational autonomy and market mobility, and they often view immigrants as potential clients or collaborative labour resources, making them less likely to develop exclusionary attitudes toward immigration. Students in an educational phase tend to be more attuned to policy changes and social diversity. Immigration is frequently integrated into their cognitive framework as part of a pluralistic

society. Moreover, students have not yet faced direct structural competition in the labour market, which makes them more inclined to adopt supportive attitudes. The former group demonstrates higher adaptability to policy shifts, while the latter expresses openness based on value-driven perspectives.

Although relatively stable in terms of employment and income, full-time and part-time workers are more sensitive to economic pressures, making them more cautious about immigration policies. Retirees and the unemployed, as groups with higher dependency on public resources, tend to be more concerned about the sustainability of the social welfare system. When policies or media narratives suggest that immigration might increase the strain on public resources, they are more inclined to translate their structural anxieties into reserved or sceptical policy attitudes.

H8 (personality trait):

The findings strongly support the research hypothesis that individual personality traits significantly shape public attitudes toward immigration policy. Specifically, individuals who score high on determination and independence exhibit more favourable attitudes toward immigration policy. Figure 16 illustrates the predicted probability based on different personality traits. When the dominant personality traits are obedience or religious faith, the predicted probability of supporting immigration policy is 56.95%. However, when individuals are characterized by determination, perseverance, and independence, the predicted probability increases to 67.46%.

Individuals with an independence-oriented personality are more likely to form political stances based on personal value judgments rather than conforming to group biases or external pressures. They tend to process information with greater openness and are less influenced by

stereotypes or fear-based narratives. Those with strong self-efficacy and goal orientation are generally less inclined to attribute their circumstances to external groups or policies. Dinesen et al. (2014) noted that individuals with such personality traits tend to respond to social competition through personal effort rather than blame-based explanations. Consequently, they are more inclined to evaluate immigration in terms of institutional value rather than from a zero-sum perspective.

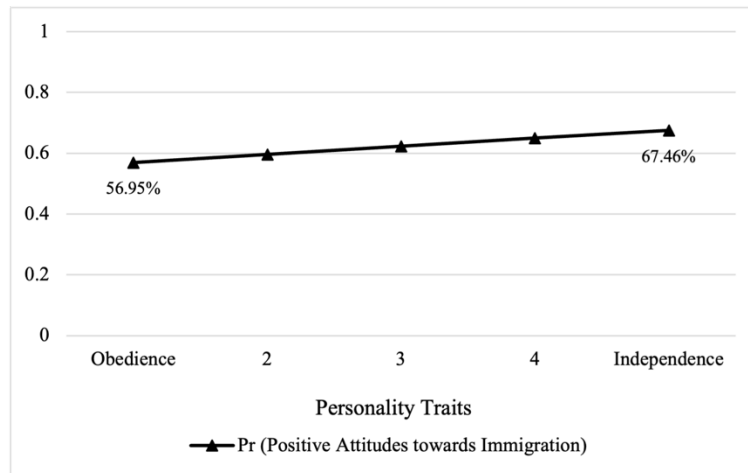


Figure 16. Predicted Probability of Positive Attitudes towards Immigration by Employment Status

In contrast, those with high obedience scores tend to prioritize social order, norms, and reliability. They are prone to view immigration as a potential threat to institutional stability and socioeconomic sustainability. This tendency does not necessarily arise from direct interactions or media exposures but signifies a deeper personality-based orientation toward maintaining social controllability. Moreover, these individuals are predisposed to evaluate outgroups according to normative standards, increasing their propensity to embrace conservative or cautious stances on immigration policy.

Full Model

This study constructed an integrative logistic regression model based on stepwise regression to identify the key variables influencing public attitudes toward immigration policy.

The final retained variables include age, education level, province, social organization participation, trust in people, trust in government, political spectrum, and employment status. These variables consistently demonstrated stable directions and statistical significance, indicating their strong predictive power regarding public support for immigration policy.

Some variables were excluded during model integration. For example, gender and income were not included in the final model. Religion, belongingness to Canada, perceived security in the neighbourhood, and personality traits were also dropped, suggesting that, after controlling for other core factors, their marginal impact on immigration policy attitudes was not statistically significant.

Among social demographic factors, age exerts a significant influence in the previous model, indicating that generational differences play a sustained role in shaping macro-level policy preferences. Older people tend to prioritize social stability and cultural continuity, leading them to adopt a more cautious stance toward immigration policies that involve national borders, demographic change, and institutional adjustments. Such conservative orientation may stem from a heightened sensitivity to the potential consequences of policy shifts. In contrast, younger generations, who have grown up in a globalized and multicultural environment, are generally more receptive to the open-ended transformation of the state's role.

The impact of educational attainment remains stable and pronounced at the policy level. Highly educated individuals tend to possess stronger capacities for information processing and policy evaluation. They are more likely to assess immigration policy through a macro-structural perspective in terms of their legitimacy and long-term societal implications. They are also more attuned to the potential contributions of immigration to economic vitality and social diversity.

Such understanding makes education a key social factor that differentiates between support for and resistance to immigration policy.

The significance of province in the full model highlights the structural role of regional context in shaping public policy perceptions. Support for immigration policy varies markedly across provinces, suggesting that local social environments and institutional frameworks are critical in informing individual policy positions. Residents in Nova Scotia and Quebec show notably higher support levels than those in other provinces⁶. In the case of Quebec, this finding challenges the conventional assumption that language barriers reduce public acceptance of immigration. On the contrary, Quebec's emphasis on French language proficiency as a core component of its immigration policy may enhance perceived cultural compatibility and institutional fit among newcomers. This, in turn, reduces public uncertainty and reinforces a broader sense of legitimacy and control over immigration. In this context, policy design that signals coherence and selectivity strengthens public support.

Trust in people serves as a strong predictor of support for immigration policy. Individuals who trust others are more likely to believe that social cooperation is feasible and thus adopt a more tolerant and constructive position toward immigration policy. They are less prone to fall into a zero-sum mindset or perceive immigrants as triggers for resource strain or cultural conflict. At the macro level, this form of trust can be understood as confidence in the overall social order and the mechanisms that enable pluralistic coexistence, which translates into greater support for policy stability and capacity.

⁶ In this study, Alberta does not emerge as significantly different from other provinces. Yet recent survey evidence identifies Alberta as the most negative province toward immigration, with 47.2% supporting a reduction (Mohamadian, Javdani and Heroux-Legault 2024). This suggests that Alberta's current distinctiveness may not be reflected in this study's dataset, and future research with newer data may capture this divergence more clearly.

Correspondingly, public trust in the Canadian government significantly increases acceptance of immigration policy. It typically reflects confidence in the policymaking process's professionalism, fairness, and legitimacy. Such trust suggests that individuals believe the state possesses the ability to implement selective admission, effective regulation, and orderly integration. This belief reduces public anxiety regarding potential policy failure or social disruption. This form of institutional trust is particularly crucial in the Canadian context, as immigration policy has historically been grounded in selective and criteria-based admission systems. Those who trust the government are more likely to interpret immigration policy as a legitimate tool for advancing national interests and societal development rather than as an unregulated or destabilizing force.

Notably, participation in social organizations, which was initially non-significant, becomes a significant predictor in the full model. In the previous model, the effect of organizational participation may be offset by internal group homogeneity or exclusionary discourses. However, after controlling for key variables such as age and political orientation, organizational participation captures broader patterns of institutional engagement and public affairs experience. Individuals participating in social organizations are more likely to be familiar with policy discourse and accustomed to addressing social issues within institutional frameworks. As a result, their evaluations of immigration policy are more likely to be informed, structured, and grounded in institutional logic. In other words, organizational participation is no longer merely about community engagement but serves as a social vehicle for institutional trust and civic awareness.

The political spectrum continues to play a significant role in attitudes toward immigration policy, partly because of fundamental differences in how ideological groups approach policy

trust and risk assessment. Right-leaning individuals tend to view the state as an agent of order maintenance and border control and thus place greater emphasis on the controllability of policy outcomes. In contrast, left-leaning individuals tend to view the state as a guarantor of distributive justice and rights protection. Their support for immigration policy is often grounded in concerns about moral legitimacy and social inclusion. These divergent interpretive frameworks lead to starkly different meanings ascribed to the same policy depending on ideological stance. Moreover, political orientation also shapes how the public defines national interest in the context of immigration. Right-leaning individuals are more likely to conceptualize national interest in prioritizing native citizens. At the same time, those on the left tend to frame national interest in ways that align with global responsibility and international cooperation.

Public attitudes toward immigration policy vary systematically across employment statuses, reflecting the close link between labour market position and perceptions of state resource allocation. Self-employed individuals and students demonstrate significantly higher levels of support for immigration policy compared to other groups, suggesting a greater tendency toward openness and inclusivity in their policy orientations. Such support can be understood through the lenses of social identity and institutional trust. Self-employed individuals depend less on traditional employment frameworks and engage with policy environments through autonomous decision-making. In this process, they are more attuned to the flexibility and inclusiveness of institutional arrangements. From their perspective, immigration policy signals a state's openness and contributes to an environment encouraging innovation and cooperation, which they are more likely to value and support. Students, as prospective participants in future institutional systems, have not yet been fully exposed to structural inequalities in the labour market. However, they are deeply embedded in educational contexts that emphasize the

connections between national development and global integration. Consequently, students often hold forward-looking expectations regarding institutional trust and interpret immigration policy as a component of national modernization and international engagement. Within this interpretive framework, support for immigration policy serves as an expression of social values and a selective identification with the future image of the nation.

In contrast, unemployed individuals and the “other” group exhibit the lowest approval ratings. These groups often face greater economic uncertainty and higher dependency on public resources, leading them to interpret immigration policy as a potential source of added pressure on welfare systems and job availability. Meanwhile, full-time workers, part-time workers, retirees, and homemakers display moderate levels of support. Although these groups generally enjoy a degree of economic security, they remain sensitive to potential strains on housing, healthcare, and other public resources. As a result, their policy attitudes tend to be more cautious or neutral.

COMPARATIVE EXAMINATION OF THE DETERMINANTS

To further distinguish the underlying mechanisms shaping public attitudes toward immigrants and immigration, this section conducts a comparative analysis based on the two full logistic regression models constructed in this study. Although both models initially employed the same set of independent variables, the results reveal notable differences in terms of statistical significance, direction of effects, and explanatory mechanisms. By comparing variables across dimensions, this section aims to illuminate the divergent cognitive pathways and affective responses individuals exhibit when evaluating concrete social actors versus abstract policies.

Social Demographic Characteristics

In both full models, age exhibits a significant nonlinear negative effect, indicating a consistent generational divide in public attitudes toward both immigrants as individuals and immigration as policy. Specifically, the relationship between increasing age and declining support is robust across both models, with a clear pattern of accelerated decline in later age groups. This consistency suggests that age functions as a cumulative marker of socialization experience, shaping dual-level perceptions of both social outgroups and institutional arrangements. From a psychological perspective, older individuals often have higher order needs and risk sensitivity, and they tend to adopt a more cautious stance toward changes in social norms and interpersonal dynamics. These tendencies influence both their everyday interactions with immigrants and their evaluations of immigration policy. At the same time, age reflects the differential socialization trajectories shaped by distinct historical contexts. Individuals raised in more culturally homogeneous environments may display more conservative orientations in terms of multicultural openness and cross-group understanding.

Gender remains a significant predictor in the model assessing attitudes toward immigrants yet fails to retain significance in the model focused on immigration policy.

This difference suggests that gender plays a more prominent role in shaping affective responses toward concrete social others than in guiding macro policy evaluations. One possible explanation lies in the gendered patterns of social cognition. Women are generally more context-sensitive than men in everyday interpersonal interactions. However, at the policy level, public attitudes are more strongly structured by considerations such as institutional trust, resource distribution, and conceptions of the state's role. These evaluations typically require more abstract reasoning and are less influenced by personal identity attribute like gender. As such, gender is more likely to shape perceptions of “who” is being welcomed into one's social environment than to determine one's stance toward the broader institutional frameworks governing immigration.

In both models, educational attainment demonstrates a consistently significant and positive effect, indicating that higher levels of education are associated with greater acceptance of immigrants and stronger support for immigration policies. This result underscores the structural role of education in shaping public attitudes, with its influence operating across both interpersonal and institutional domains. At the individual level, higher education is linked to greater cognitive complexity and intercultural competence, which facilitate the ability to look beyond group boundaries and to engage with others on the basis of shared human values rather than perceived cultural differences. This fosters more inclusive and empathetic attitudes toward immigrants.

Simultaneously, education enhances the capacity to understand the policy objectives, operational mechanisms, and societal implications of immigration policy. Highly educated individuals are typically better equipped to recognize immigration's contribution to economic development, labor market restructuring, and the construction of a pluralistic national identity. This leads them to support such policies through informed and evaluative reasoning rather than

emotional response. Moreover, education is closely tied to broader informational access and the development of critical thinking skills. These qualities create a cognitive environment conducive to openness, tolerance, and institutional trust, making education one of the most robust explanatory variables across both models.

Income levels have not shown statistical significance in the model of attitudes toward immigrants. This suggests that when individuals evaluate specific members of an outgroup, their responses are shaped more by social cognition and affective predispositions than by perceptions of economic competition tied to income. In contrast, income initially appears to have a significant and positive effect in the immigration policy model, implying that individuals with higher income levels may be generally more supportive of immigration policy. However, this effect diminishes once employment status is introduced, indicating that occupational category more precisely captures one's structural position within the labor market, level of institutional dependence, and sensitivity to policy change, thereby occupying the explanatory power that income might have otherwise assumed in the model.

Geographical Considerations

The performance of the province variable across two models offers a noteworthy insight. In the model predicting attitudes toward immigrants, residence of province fails to reach statistical significance, suggesting that individual-level responses to immigrant groups are not strongly conditioned by regional identity or geographic location. Instead, such attitudes appear to be shaped by personal value systems, interpersonal experiences with outgroups.

In contrast, provincial context emerges as a significant predictor in the immigration policy model. Such public attitudes are more easily influenced by regional political climates, media narratives, and local governance logic. This reveals the role of local political atmosphere

in shaping policy positions. For example, British Columbia and Ontario, as major immigrant destinations, have long maintained high overall levels of acceptance toward immigration. However, the prevailing policy discourse in both provinces often combines a narrative of openness with an emphasis on regulatory control, favoring skilled immigrants and emphasizing system manageability. This dual orientation may foster public support for immigration policy while still leaving room for cautious evaluations of its implementation. In contrast, Quebec demonstrates notably strong policy support, which may be attributed to its distinctive, localization immigration regime. The province's emphasis on linguistic and cultural integration through requirements related to French language proficiency enhances the perceived compatibility between immigrants and host society. This institutional filtering mechanism likely mitigates public concerns about social disruption and fosters trust in the province's ability to manage immigration effectively, thereby increasing support for immigration policy.

Overall, the significant effect of province on attitudes toward immigration policy highlights the critical role of regional political culture and institutional practices in shaping public opinion. In contrast, such influence is mitigated when individuals evaluate specific immigrants.

Religion Affiliation

Religious belief did not demonstrate statistical effects in either of the two full models. The result indicates that, after controlling for other key variables, religious belief itself is not a decisive factor influencing the public's attitudes toward immigrants or immigration policy. However, religion initially showed a significant effect on attitudes toward immigrants, with non-religious individuals more likely to express favorable opinions. This preliminary result suggests that religious belief may, in certain contexts, influence emotional and cognitive responses to

outgroups. Specifically, religious doctrines may psychologically reinforce group boundary awareness, leading some believers to exhibit a degree of reservation when encountering immigrants from culturally distinct backgrounds. Yet such caution is more reflective of uncertainty management than explicit rejection. Moreover, prior research indicates that the effect of religion on attitudes toward others is not uniformly negative. It largely depends on individuals' selective interpretation of inclusive or defensive values within their religious doctrines. As such, religiosity tends to function as a weak predictor characterized by directional inconsistency and substantial within-group heterogeneity.

At the policy level, religion has never shown a significant effect in this study, an outcome that can be reasonably interpreted within Canada's institutional context. Compared to some other countries, Canada has a strong tradition of institutional separation between religion and politics. Religion does not occupy a dominant position in either the formulation of national immigration policy or in the public's policy-related reasoning. Immigration policy in Canada is generally framed as a technical and institutional matter, with public discourse centering more on economic viability, cultural integration, and social sustainability. Religion, as a value-based backdrop, plays a relatively marginal role in such assessments.

In summary, religious beliefs may influence individuals' emotional responses to immigrants, especially when specific value frameworks lead to biased attitudes toward outgroup members. However, when structural variables are introduced, this effect is significantly weakened. This suggests that in the Canadian context, religious beliefs do not constitute a key dividing line between public attitudes toward immigrants. Instead, their influence is more likely to be indirectly reflected through education, political stance, or social contact experience.

Social Capital

One of the most insightful findings of this study is that social organization participation has a significant impact in both models, but in completely opposite directions. In the model predicting attitudes toward immigrants, a higher number of organizational affiliations is associated with lower levels of acceptance. By contrast, in the model predicting attitudes toward immigration policy, the same variable shows a positive effect, indicating that individuals who are more involved in social organizations are more likely to support immigration at the national policy level.

This phenomenon suggests that participation in social organizations, as a core component of social capital, does not consistently function in an inclusive manner. Its effects are shaped by the context of participation and the specific target of public attitudes. The negative association with attitudes toward immigrants may stem from the internal homogeneity and value alignment found in certain types of organizations, particularly local, religious, or function-specific groups. Within such social environments, organizational involvement may reinforce social distance and stereotypes toward immigrants. However, when the focus shifts to immigration policy at the institutional level, a different dimension of organizational participation emerges. Social organizations often serve as channels for civic engagement, and their participants tend to exhibit greater policy awareness and institutional familiarity. This enhances people's capacity to understand policy frameworks and governance structures, thereby fostering trust in the immigration system and increasing overall support for immigration policy. In other words, social organization participation simultaneously constructs group boundaries while cultivating institutional cognition. This precisely illustrates that the same variable triggers distinct psychological pathways depending on the object of attitude.

Both types of trust variables have a significant positive impact on people's emotional attitudes and policy positions toward immigrants, but their mechanisms of action and intensity of influence are significantly different. The regression results show that trust in people has higher coefficient values in both models, indicating that it plays a more central role in attitude formation.

In the model predicting attitudes toward immigrants, interpersonal trust emerges as a particularly strong predictor. Individuals who trust others are more likely to hold positive expectations toward strangers. Such assumption mechanism serves as a crucial psychological foundation for open social attitudes. Interpersonal trust here reflects an affective predisposition toward concrete others, playing an important role in emotionally driven evaluations. In contrast, trust in government exerts a more targeted influence in the model of attitudes toward immigration policy. When the public believes that immigration policies operate within a transparent, orderly, and controllable institutional framework capable of effectively managing population inflows and social integration processes, they are more likely to support the current immigration system. Trust in governmental competence reduces concerns about the uncontrollability of policy implementation, making immigration policy more readily accepted as a legitimate institutional instrument.

Social Integration and Boundary Perception

Among the various psychological perception variables, security in neighbourhood shows a significant positive effect only on attitudes toward immigrants in the full model, while sense of belonging to Canada is not retained in either model. This result contrasts with the findings from the initial models, indicating that after controlling for other variables, two variables diverge markedly in their pathways of influence.

A sense of belonging is theoretically conducive to fostering public openness toward newcomers, especially in situations where group identity boundaries are inclusive and flexible. However, in the full model, this effect is likely offset by more specifically targeted variables such as cultural identification, perceived resource allocation, and institutional trust. For instance, factors like education level, political orientation, and trust in government more directly capture individuals' positions on institutional legitimacy and social integration, thereby diminishing the independent explanatory power of belongingness.

By contrast, perceived neighborhood security is a form of everyday social experience that directly relates to individuals' emotional responses to their immediate environment and to people from different groups. Precisely because it operates within the realm of daily life, the sense of safety exerts a more concrete and pronounced influence on public attitudes toward individual immigrants. When surrounding social conditions convey cues of stability and cooperation, individuals are more willing to engage with strangers from different backgrounds. This psychologically grounded mechanism is rooted in routine experience and gives neighborhood safety stronger explanatory power in shaping attitudes toward individuals. However, its influence on broader policy issues remains comparatively indirect.

Political Ideology

The political spectrum has a stable and significant effect in both models, indicating that individuals' ideological orientation plays a decisive role in shaping public attitudes. Specifically, the more right leaning an individual's political stance, the more likely they are to hold negative attitudes, both in terms of emotional evaluations of immigrants and institutional support for immigration policy.

At the macro level, left-wing ideologies typically emphasize core values such as equality, rights, diversity, and social justice. They advocate for institutional measures to correct structural inequalities and to promote social inclusion and cross-cultural understanding. Within this ideological framework, immigrants are not only seen as subjects of expanded social membership, but also integrated into a broader ethical narrative of international humanitarianism and global civic responsibility. As a result, individuals with left-leaning orientations are more likely to support liberal immigration policies that emphasize institutional protections and cultural acceptance for immigrant groups. This stance reflects both their understanding of the state's role and their critical awareness of global structures of inequality.

At the micro level, political orientation shapes individuals' cognitive frameworks and interactional expectations toward outgroups. Those with right-leaning tendencies generally place greater emphasis on group order and cultural homogeneity, with cognitive patterns that prioritize group distinctions, identity boundaries, and normative conformity. When immigrants, as individuals with significantly different identity backgrounds, appear in interactive situations, this is more likely to activate defensive maintenance of existing group boundaries and value norms.

Economic Competition

Occupational status did not exhibit significant effects in the model predicting attitudes toward immigrants. It suggests that when individuals evaluate specific immigrants, their emotional responses are less directly shaped by their own position in the labor market. In other words, acceptance or rejection of others tends to be a socio-psychological reaction rather than a structural reflection of occupational roles.

However, in the model predicting attitudes toward immigration, occupational status shows significantly explanatory power. Clear differences emerge across occupational groups,

with self-employed individuals and students showing notably higher levels of policy support. This divergence reflects how occupational identity activates distinct logics of interest evaluation and cognitive reasoning in the context of institutional issues. Owing to the flexible nature of their work, the self-employed rely more on diverse social and labor structures and are thus more inclined to support immigration policies that enhance population mobility and labor supply flexibility. Students, having been systematically exposed to pluralistic values and global issues through education, are more likely to interpret immigration policy through lenses of humanitarianism, equality, and sustainable development.

By contrast, groups such as full-time workers, part-time workers, and the unemployed tend to have their attitudes toward immigration policy shaped more directly by their degree of dependence on social institutions. As they are more closely tied to state-provided labor protections and public services, they often exhibit heightened sensitivity to issues of resource allocation and policy change. They are more likely to perceive immigration as a potential source of strain on employment opportunities, welfare systems, and public goods, leading them to adopt a more defensive evaluation when considering immigration policy. This structurally embedded response pathway operates primarily at the institutional level and has limited influence in interpersonal encounters with individual immigrants.

Personality Trait

Personality traits in this study show distinct effects across the two models: they are statistically significant in the model predicting attitudes toward immigrants, but not in the model assessing attitudes toward immigration policy. This contrast highlights the situational basis on which personality traits operate in shaping attitudes, namely, their greater tendency to influence responses through direct social contact and affective judgment.

Research has shown that when individuals encounter real or imagined members of outgroups, their personality structure intervenes in specific ways in cognitive and emotional processing (Dinesen et al. 2014). The present study confirms this theory. People with high levels of openness to experience are more likely to respond positively in intercultural interactions, demonstrating understanding and acceptance toward immigrants. In contrast, those with high levels of obedience, who tend to favor order and norms, are more prone to maintain psychological distance from unfamiliar others, thereby developing more conservative or even exclusionary attitudes. These personality effects are typically activated through concrete interpersonal interactions or anticipated social contact.

However, as a highly abstract institutional issue, immigration policy is primarily evaluated through cognitive mechanisms such as institutional trust, resource assessments, and political orientation. In this context, emotion-driven responses and social intuitions shaped by personality traits are relatively diminished in the formation of attitudes. Especially when structural variables such as education, political orientation, and trust are controlled for, personality tendencies no longer serve as a stable predictor. It suggests that people engage fundamentally different psychological mechanisms when responding to people versus evaluating policy. As a deep-seated attribute influencing social contact preferences and emotional regulation, personality is more relevant to explaining attitudes toward individual immigrants. However, in assessments of institutional policy, its impact is likely overshadowed by more salient social cues and structural factors.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This study is a quantitative analysis based on the 2020 survey data collected by the World Value Survey in Canada. Drawing on established literature, the research first developed a theoretically grounded framework to construct a set of structurally parallel models. It then examines the potential factors influencing public attitudes toward immigrants and immigration, respectively. The key variables with stable explanatory power in each model are identified using stepwise regression, forming two independent attitudinal frameworks for subsequent comparative analysis. By incorporating diverse variables such as social demographic characteristics, social capital, social integration and boundary perception, political ideology, economic competition, and personality traits, the study found that while two immigration-related attitudes exhibit some correlations, their underlying driving factors demonstrate clear differentiation in terms of variable significance and causal pathways.

Among the social demographic variables, both age and education exhibit stable effects across the two models, reflecting the profound influence of generational experience and cognitive resources on attitude formation. In contrast, variables such as gender and province demonstrate selective significance in each model, highlighting the contextual and stratified nature of their impact.

The most insightful finding within the dimension of social capital is that participation in social organizations shows opposite directional effects on two attitudes, revealing that it may activate different cognitive pathways in emotional and institutional judgments. The analysis of trust structures indicates that interpersonal and institutional trust play important roles in shaping attitudes toward immigrants and immigration. The former helps reduce uncertainty toward outgroups, while the latter provides cognitive support for the legitimacy of policy instruments.

This study also finds that variables related to social integration and boundary perception do not exert equal influence. For instance, perceived neighbourhood safety shows a positive effect in the model concerning attitudes toward immigrants, whereas national belonging is not significant in either model. Such contrast suggests that a sense of safety is a highly context-dependent social experience directly affecting emotional responses in everyday interpersonal interactions. It exerts a more substantial influence when specific contact targets are involved. In contrast, national belonging is more likely to be supplanted by more concrete variables such as education level, political orientation, or governmental trust when it comes to institutional judgments.

Moreover, political ideology consistently demonstrates strong explanatory power in both models, confirming its moderating role in shaping attitudes toward immigration issues. However, personality traits primarily influence attitudes toward individual immigrants, indicating a psychological mechanism more sensitive to concrete social interactions.

The most innovative aspect of this study is that it systematically distinguishes and empirically analyzes the differences between the public's attitudes toward immigrants and immigration, which have often been treated together or insufficiently differentiated in previous studies. By constructing parallel models and progressively comparing the impact paths of various variables, this study uncovers significant cognitive distinctions between two attitudes, providing more nuanced and practice-oriented insights for the study of immigration.

The findings also have important policy implications, especially in growing social fragmentation and cognitive polarization in global immigration governance. The analysis offers empirical evidence on the mechanisms underlying public attitude formation. Trust, as a deep-seated socio-psychological construct, provides a stable value and cognitive foundation. When the

public believes in the goodwill of strangers, and the competence of the government, their willingness to accept newcomers and institutional change is more likely to increase. Therefore, fostering generalized trust helps mitigate societal division and provides essential social support for advancing inclusive immigration governance.

Overall, this study reveals the multidimensional and context-dependent nature of public attitudes toward immigrants and immigration. It contributes to challenging the common tendency in previous research to treat these two constructs as an undifferentiated dimension. The results also underscore the importance of distinguishing between responses directed at “specific people” and those directed at “abstract policy” when analyzing social attitudes.

Undoubtedly, this study also has certain limitations and room for improvement. Since the WVS data used in this study is from 2020, it may not fully capture the impact of recent policy changes. Therefore, future research could incorporate the latest data from sources like the Canadian Social Survey (CSS) to examine how policy changes affect public perceptions. Another potential improvement could be the inference of causality. Since this study relies on cross-sectional data, it is somehow limited in establishing causality. Future research could employ longitudinal data to track how public attitudes evolve in response to policy changes.

In addition, the questionnaire design and variable measurement also present certain limitations. For example, in terms of religious variables, this study adopts a binary classification (whether or not respondents have religious beliefs), which is relatively simplistic and fails to adequately reflect the potential heterogeneity of religion in shaping attitudes at different levels (such as intensity of belief, type of religion, and doctrinal content). This approach may obscure the complex social-psychological role that religion could play in immigration issues. Therefore,

future research could refine the measurement of religious variables and incorporate qualitative materials to interpret the impact of religion more comprehensively on public attitudes.

Public attitudes toward immigrants and immigration are neither static, uniform, nor easily categorized. Instead, they are complex cognitive outcomes shaped by multiple layers of social structure, psychological mechanisms, and institutional experiences. While this study has identified several statistically significant pathways of influence, these should not be interpreted as evidence of linear or singular causality. Public attitudes vary not only by individual traits and social experiences but also shift in response to temporal context, policy environments, and information landscapes. The high political sensitivity of immigration issues also requires researchers to maintain methodological caution and ethical considerations when constructing analytical frameworks and interpreting research findings. Future research should continue to adopt a multi-dimensional approach to explore further the possibilities of ambiguity, contradiction, and even transformation in public cognition, thereby providing more explanatory theoretical and practical support for understanding the complex emotions and interactions within immigrant societies.

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