

## How do immigration policies affect voter support for low-skilled immigrants?

### Evidence from two survey experiments

Vince Hopkins, University of British Columbia and  
Andrea Lawlor, McMaster University

#### Abstract

Countries depend on both high- and low-skilled immigration to meet economic needs. But most voters prefer high-skilled immigrants, despite the fact that multiple economic sectors structurally depend on low-skilled immigrants. This presentation will examine voter preferences toward low-skilled immigrants as one barrier to effective immigration policy. The presentation will ask two questions. First, what determines support for labour market programs that help low-skilled immigrants? The presentation will focus on the openness of a country's immigration policy as well as characteristics of newcomers (e.g. race, country of origin, language). Second, does policy communication shape support for immigrant-facing labour market programs, especially as they target low-skilled immigrants? Here, the focus will be on narrative styles (anecdotal vs statistical) and sentiment (positive vs. mixed). Using two survey experiments with representative samples of voters, this presentation aims to clarify the contingent relationship between voters' perspectives toward low skill migration and labour market supports across a rapidly changing set of social and demographic realities. Findings are relevant for theory and policy development. In particular, the presentation will explore whether successful immigration policy that includes both high and low skills streams depends on a combination of supply-side factors, such as the immigrant selection process, as well as demand-side factors, such as how the government communicates the benefits of low-skilled immigration to the public.

#### Biography

**Vince Hopkins** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of British Columbia. Vince is an applied behavioral scientist who focuses on increasing access to public services among low-income and marginalized populations. Vince has over 10 years of experience using behavioral and data science to improve policy and has built partnerships with government and industry to maximize impact through large-scale field experiments.

**Andrea Lawlor** is an Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science & Public Policy and Digital Society, McMaster University. Her research spans multiple areas of public policy including immigration and refugee policy, election policy and the use of behavioral insights in policies to improve the delivery of public services. Dr. Lawlor's work can be found in the Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, the Journal of Social Policy and the Canadian Journal of Political Science, among others.