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Hispanic Immigrants' Opinions towards Immigration and Immigration Policy Reform

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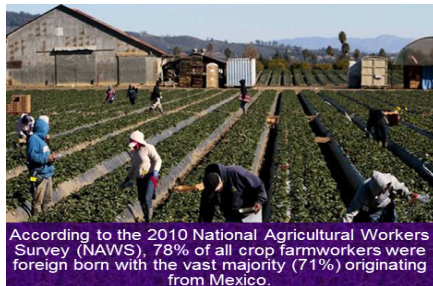
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Abstract

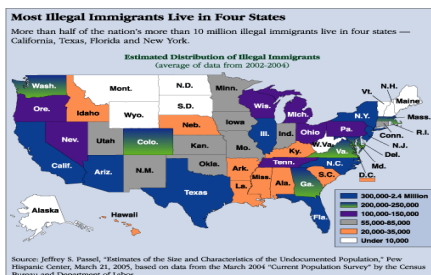
Immigration reform is one of the most polarizing legislative issues in the US. Surprisingly, despite regular polling evidence of the American public's opinions towards immigration reform proposals, little evidence has elicited the preferences of the group most affected by any policy changes - legal and illegal Hispanic immigrants. This study presents evidence from a survey and choice experiment of Hispanic immigrants who entered the US legally and illegally on their preferences and willingness to pay for different immigration reform proposals. Policy attributes, which are based on current competing US Senate and House bills, include pathways to legal permanent residence, length of temporary work visas, family visitation rights, and access to medical care. The results quantify the value Hispanic immigrants place on different policy attributes and suggest that longer term work visas are valued on par with legal permanent residence. Furthermore, the ability to legally work in the US is substantially more valued than social services such as medical care and social security benefits.

Immigration and the Economy

- Hispanics are the **largest minority** and one of the fastest-growing ethnic groups in the U.S.
- Hispanic immigrant labor participation is critical in several industries including construction, landscaping, manufacturing, hotels, restaurants, and agriculture.
- Any changes to the work visa system or prospects for immigrants obtaining legal permanent residence could have substantial impacts on the **agricultural labor supply**.



Immigration Policy Debate



- One of the biggest challenges currently facing legislators is how to **address the status of 11.2 million of unauthorized immigrants** living in the US.
- Current US Senate and House immigration reform proposals have distinct differences in terms of how they address the current population of undocumented workers and create a system for future temporary workers.



- LPR (after 10 years)
- Penalty (\$1,000)
- Special provisions to agricultural workers.



- Temporary worker programs/paths to permanent residence
- Undefined financial penalties

Objective

This study explores the preferences of Hispanic immigrants for the main attributes of proposed immigration reform policies. Specifically, their individual valuation of those attributes is estimated through the use of stated choice experiments (CE).

Experimental Procedure

Data were solicited through a **questionnaire-based face-to-face interview** conducted in Spanish around Northern GA. Participants were asked questions on:

- Socio-demographic and immigration characteristics;
- Motivation to come to the U.S. and their current motivation to stay in the U.S.
- Preferences towards various immigration policy features.

Attributes	Immigration policy	
	Policy A	Policy B
Green Card-eligible	Yes, after 10 years of living in the U.S.	No
Total payment to the government (Monthly payment for 1 year)	\$4,800 (\$400 per month for 1 year)	\$600 (\$50 per month for 1 year)
Family may visit applying for a visa	No	Yes, spouse, children and parents
Work visa length	2 years	2 years
Eligible for federal Benefits	Social Security and Medicare	No
I would choose (please, check only one policy)		

Example of choice set (English version)

Choices of immigration policy alternatives were analyzed using a **mixed logit model**.

Sample Characteristics

Method of Entry into the U.S.

Variable	Variable Definition	Entire Sample (n=209)		Stated Illegal Entry (n=139)		Did Not State Illegal Entry (n=70)	
		Mean	Stdev.	Mean	Stdev.	Mean	Stdev.
US Years	Number of years in the US	14.17	8.88	14.04	6.12	15.01	8.21
Initial Status	1 if Permanent resident/green card	0.04	0.20	-	-	0.13	0.34
	1 if Border crossing Card/Comuter	0.01	0.12	-	-	0.03	0.17
	1 if Temporary Resident-Nonimmigrant visa	0.17	0.37	-	-	0.50	0.50
	1 if Pending status (awaiting official decision)	0.00	0.00	-	-	0.00	0.00
	1 if Other	0.78	0.42	1.00	0.00	0.34	0.48
	1 if Other and voluntarily stated illegally	0.67	0.47	1.00	0.00	-	-

Socio-Demographic Characteristics

Variable	Variable Definition	Entire Sample (n=209)		Stated Illegal Entry (n=139)		Did Not State Illegal Entry (n=70)	
		Mean	Stdev.	Mean	Stdev.	Mean	Stdev.
Socio-demographic Variables							
Age	Years	34.13	9.59	33.99	9.22	34.40	10.34
Birth Country	Mexico	0.77	0.42	0.86	0.34	0.57	0.50
	El Salvador	0.11	0.31	0.09	0.28	0.16	0.37
	Peru	0.07	0.25	0.03	0.17	0.14	0.35
	Other	0.05	0.23	0.02	0.15	0.13	0.34
Children	Number of children	1.89	1.58	2.04	1.56	1.57	1.60
Children US	1 if have Children and Children not in US	0.32	0.47	0.29	0.45	0.39	0.49
Education	Number of Years	10.31	2.75	9.93	2.62	11.06	2.86
English Prior	Self-Rating of English skills prior to coming to US (1=very poor, 5=very good)	1.35	0.71	1.21	2.85	1.64	0.89
English Now	Self-Rating of English skills now (1=very poor, 5=very good)	3.00	1.11	2.85	1.10	3.30	1.09
Male	1 if male	0.51	0.50	0.53	0.50	0.47	0.50
Marital Status	1 if Married	0.47	0.50	0.45	0.50	0.50	0.50
Spouse Location	1 if Married and Spouse not in US	0.58	0.49	0.59	0.49	0.57	0.57

Employment History and Status

Variable	Variable Definition	Entire Sample (n=209)		Stated Illegal Entry (n=139)		Did Not State Illegal Entry (n=70)	
Current and First Employment							
Current Industry	1 if currently employed in agricultural industry	0.09	0.28	0.12	0.32	0.03	0.17
First Industry	1 if first job in US was in agricultural industry	0.24	0.43	0.27	0.45	0.17	0.38
Current Job	Field, nursery, or green house	0.01	0.10	0.01	0.27	0.00	0.00
	Meat packing house	0.06	0.24	0.08	0.27	0.03	0.17
	Other agricultural	0.01	0.12	0.02	0.15	0.00	0.00
	Construction	0.12	0.33	0.12	0.33	0.13	0.34
	Cleaning or Restaurant	0.21	0.41	0.19	0.39	0.24	0.43
	Other non-agricultural	0.34	0.47	0.34	0.47	0.36	0.48
	Field, nursery, or green house	0.06	0.23	0.07	0.26	0.03	0.17
	Meat packing house	0.16	0.37	0.17	0.38	0.14	0.35
First Job	Other agricultural	0.02	0.14	0.03	0.17	0.00	0.00
	Construction	0.13	0.34	0.15	0.36	0.10	0.30
	Cleaning or Restaurant	0.23	0.42	0.19	0.39	0.31	0.47
	Other non-agricultural	0.29	0.45	0.29	0.45	0.29	0.46

Survey Responses

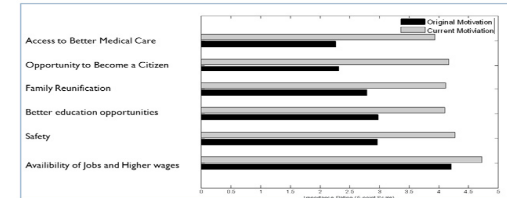
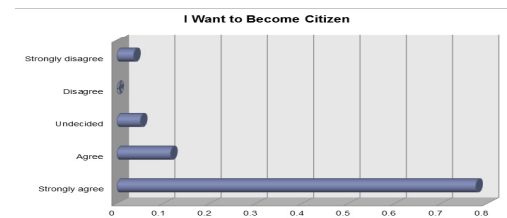


Figure 1. Motivations for Illegal entrants to come and stay in the U.S.



This is in line with previous results from Latino Decision polls. However, this simple survey question **fails to capture the tradeoff between other immigration reform proposal features**.

Choice experiment Results – Willingness to Pay for Immigration Policy Attributes

	Entire Sample (n=209)	Stated Illegal Entry (n=139)	Did Not State Illegal Entry (n=70)	WTP difference p-value
Visa Length	\$1,059.81*** (285.01)	\$925.32*** (279.25)	\$1,434.90** (580.20)	<0.001
Green Card after 5 Years	\$10,949.72*** (2,414.25)	\$10,179.97*** (2,717.48)	\$13,348.40*** (4,905.20)	<0.001
Green Card after 10 Years	\$9,380.95*** (1,723.17)	\$8,481.69*** (1,620.96)	\$10,445.40*** (2,825.38)	<0.001
Spouse & Children may apply for a visa to visit	\$1,144.74 (3,753.83)	\$1,840.21 (5,322.77)	\$3,515.63 (64,018.73)	0.828
All Family may apply for a visa to visit	\$7,664.63*** (1,570.76)	\$7,510.74*** (1,675.84)	\$7,591.71*** (2,875.36)	0.828
Access to Medical Care	\$1,959.58*** (908.90)	\$1,722.19* (1,013.99)	\$2,044.30* (1,159.16)	0.050
Social Security and Medicare	\$5,323.29*** (1,186.99)	\$5,004.44*** (1,334.11)	\$5,422.29*** (1,498.72)	0.051

Note: Bootstrapped Standard Errors in parenthesis. *, **, and *** denote significance at the 1%, 5%, and 10% levels, respectively. Paired difference test shows that within sample group all the WTP estimates are statistically different from each other at 5% level.

The 95% CI of the WTP estimates, illegal entrants are **WTP between \$5,000 -\$16,000 to be eligible for a green card** (one year of illegal entrants' income).

Conclusions and Implications

- Immigrants who illegally entered the US were primarily motivated by **job and wage opportunities**, not social services or even the potential to obtain citizenship.
- Illegal entrants placed similar values on a 10-year work visa as on a green card.
- Other rights such as **long-term work visas and family visitation rights** have substantial value as well.
- Undocumented Hispanic immigrant is most likely willing to pay a **significantly high premium to eventually be eligible for a green card**. In contrast, the willingness to pay for a policy provision that allows them to have the same **access to medical care is relatively small**.