

**HOW DO CITIZENS DEVELOP PERCEPTIONS OF JOB COMPETITION FROM  
IMMIGRANTS? ECONOMIC INTERESTS AND IMMIGRATION ATTITUDES IN  
CANADA**

by

Robert William Straughan

B.A. (Hons.), National University of Singapore

& The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2017

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**Examining Committee:**

Dr. Matthew Wright, Associate Professor, Political Science, UBC  
Supervisor

Dr. Antje Ellermann, Professor, Political Science, UBC  
Additional Examiner

## **Abstract**

The incumbent Liberal Party of Canada (LPC) has set ambitious targets for the number of immigrants to be granted permanent residency annually. At the same time, there are no other major Canadian political parties with anti-immigration platforms. Despite this elite consensus on the necessity of economic immigration, the opinions of ordinary Canadian citizens toward immigrants, and in particular, whether Canadians view immigrants as potential competitors for jobs, have not been fully understood. Drawing upon a representative web-based survey in Canada conducted by Professors Matthew Wright from the University of British Columbia and Morris Levy from the University of Southern California in March 2022, this thesis addresses this problem: How do economic interests influence the immigration attitudes of ordinary Canadian citizens? The results suggest that respondents' perceived economic context shapes their sociotropic job threat from immigration, but not their personal job threat from immigration. In addition, both personal and sociotropic job threat from immigration are influenced by political partisanship, with a stark difference between Liberal and Conservative supporters. Finally, my findings demonstrate that both personal and sociotropic job threat from immigration are associated with Canadians' preferred level of immigration to Canada. Overall, this thesis validates the role of economic interests in the formation of immigration opinions, and reveals how these economic interests change based on information received by citizens. Economic self-interest, which scholars criticize as irrelevant to immigration attitudes, remains important in shaping public opinion on immigration.

## **Lay Summary**

This study investigates how ordinary Canadian citizens develop perceptions of job competition from immigrants. To achieve this objective, the study leverages an embedded experiment in a representative survey of Canadians conducted in March 2022. The experiment examines the effect of citizens' perceived economic context on their personal and sociotropic job threat from immigration. The role of political partisanship in influencing both dimensions of economic attitudes is theorized. In addition, the effect of personal and sociotropic job threat on citizens' preferred level of immigration to Canada is studied. The results suggest that respondents' perceived economic context shapes their sociotropic job threat from immigration, but not their personal job threat from immigration. In addition, both personal and sociotropic job threat from immigration are influenced by political partisanship, with a stark difference between Liberal and Conservative supporters. Finally, my findings demonstrate that both personal and sociotropic job threat from immigration are associated with Canadians' preferred level of immigration to Canada.

## **Preface**

This thesis is the original, unpublished work of the author, Robert William Straughan.

Ethics approval was obtained from UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board. (UBC BREB Ethics Number: H20-01185-A003)

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## **List of Abbreviations**

CPC	Conservative Party of Canada
IAT	Implicit Association Test
LMCH	Labour Market Competition Hypothesis
LPC	Liberal Party of Canada
NDP	New Democratic Party
PPC	People's Party of Canada



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I dedicate this thesis to my parents, who have been my champions throughout my education, and to my wife, Pooja, my best friend and pillar of support.

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

The major Canadian political parties generally view skilled immigration as beneficial to the national economy. The Liberal government has set ambitious targets for the number of immigrants to be granted permanent residency annually. Immigration Minister Sean Fraser stated that if there was a need for additional foreign workers, his government was prepared to further increase the immigration target for year 2022, which was set at 411,000 (Hagan 2021).

The Liberal Party of Canada (LPC) is not alone in its vision for economic immigration. A major opposition party, the Conservative Party of Canada (CPC), is ideologically to the right of the Liberals. Unlike socially and economically conservative parties in other countries, Conservatives in Canada generally do not advocate for decreased immigration. In some ways, Conservatives have sought to make administrative processes easier for potential immigrants. For example, one Conservative proposal was to allow married couples to remain together in Canada while their immigration applications were being processed (Conservative Party of Canada 2021). When asked for his views on the Liberals' immigration targets, Pierre Poilievre, a candidate for the Conservative leadership position, acknowledged that Canada needs foreign workers and added that "gatekeepers" who hinder immigrants from taking up work in their professional fields should be removed (Ibbitson 2022).

It is unclear to what extent ordinary Canadians agree with increased economic immigration, and how citizens' economic interests operate in the formation of immigration opinions. Scholars studying public opinion on immigration have not reached decisive conclusions about how immigration attitudes are formed. The discourse on immigration attitudes draws on diverse theories ranging from self-interest and rational choice to social-psychological concepts invoking group identities and values.

The puzzle I address in this thesis relates to how citizens develop perceptions of job competition from immigrants. I investigate the possibility that citizens' perception of job competition from immigrants could be conditional on their perception of the national economy and the availability of jobs for Canadian citizens. It is cause for concern if citizens' economic interests related to immigration can change with perceptions of the economic context, regardless of the accuracy of these perceptions. As it stands, mass publics are particularly prone to motivated reasoning and misinformation when it comes to immigration (Banulescu-Bogdan 2018). Potentially, anti-immigrant politicians could manipulate citizens' economic considerations and turn people against economic immigration by making the economic context seem bleaker than it actually is.

This thesis draws upon a representative web-based survey of Canadians conducted by Professors Matthew Wright from the University of British Columbia and Morris Levy from the University of Southern California in March 2022, and addresses this problem: **How do economic interests influence the immigration attitudes of ordinary Canadian citizens?**

Using an embedded experiment, I analyze the effect of citizens' perceived economic context and political partisanship on personal and sociotropic job threat from immigration. In addition, I explore the relationship between citizens' personal and sociotropic job threat from immigration and their preferred level of immigration to Canada.

## Chapter 2: Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

Scholars agree that immigration attitudes are linked to economic interests, and specific economic contexts such as perceived competition from immigrants within citizens' professional field shape opinions about immigrants (e.g. Malhotra, Margalit, and Mo 2013). A perceived negative economic context that could affect citizens' employability will thus cause citizens to view immigrants as a threat to job security. I theorize that perceived economic context is causally linked to both personal and sociotropic job threat from immigration. In addition, both economic self-interest and sociotropic economic interests influence general immigration attitudes. In this chapter, I ground my hypotheses in the existing scholarship.

### 2.1 Economic Self-Interest and Immigration Attitudes

Two competing views feature in the scholarship on economic considerations and immigration attitudes. The economic self-interest argument posits that citizens support or oppose immigration because of perceived impacts on their personal financial situation. According to the Labor Market Competition Hypothesis (LMCH), citizens' opposition to immigration results from their concerns about individual-level job competition from immigrants. In this thesis, I refer to these individualized feelings of job competition as **personal job threat from immigration**.

Espenshade and Hempstead (1996), using data from a 1993 CBS News/*New York Times* poll, presented earlier but foundational findings about the impact of economic concerns, including economic self-interest, on immigration attitudes. The researchers concluded that higher income and highly educated citizens were pro-immigration: they supported maintaining immigration levels at the status quo or increasing immigration levels. In Espenshade and Hempstead's (1996, 541) view, this finding supports the LMCH – financially secure, highly skilled citizens are less likely to perceive a personal job threat from immigration.

The authors operated under the assumption that immigrants to the U.S. in the early 1990s were mostly “low-skill and low wage” (Espenshade and Hempstead 1996, 541). Following this reasoning, better educated citizens at the time of the survey did not feel a threat to their job security because most immigrants did not compete at their skill level. To be sure, more high-skilled workers immigrate to the U.S. today than in the early 1990s, and the results of Espenshade and Hempstead’s study may be different today. Still, low skilled American workers today could easily be aware of the alleged threat to their job security, due to prominence of anti-immigration rhetoric. It remains to be seen if Canadian citizens could be similarly influenced by rhetoric that paints immigrants as a threat in supposedly negative economic conditions.

Gerber et al. (2017) also find support for the economic self-interest argument. They conclude that American workers with low and high skill levels perceive job threat from immigrants who match their skill levels, which validates the LMCH. Counterintuitively, Gerber et al. (2017) also find that low-skilled citizens perceive threats to job security from both low- and high-skilled foreign workers. This outcome is inconsistent with the LMCH, since there should not be a concern about high-skilled immigrants competing with low-skilled citizens. Still, this finding is not a reason to dismiss economic self-interest. Rather, it raises questions about how low-skilled citizens understand job competition from immigrants. Low-skilled citizens may not actively differentiate between foreign workers of different skill levels. Possibly, concerns about immigrants taking away jobs are applied broadly to all immigrants regardless of skill level. Indeed, this tendency to treat immigrants of different skill levels as a homogenous group is prevalent in anti-immigrant rhetoric. Economic self-interest could also overlap with group identity and nativism, but this interaction does not invalidate personal job threat.

## **2.2 Sociotropic Economic Interests and Immigration Attitudes**

Another school of thought in the economic interests literature is the idea that citizens develop immigration opinions based on immigrants' perceived impact on the national economy. Sociotropic economic considerations refer to considerations that are related to the society or country, not individuals and self-interest. I refer to these society-level feelings of job competition as **sociotropic job threat from immigration**.

Hainmueller, Hiscox, and Margalit (2015) find evidence that citizens rely on sociotropic economic interests. Based on a survey of American workers from 12 industries, the researchers conclude that Americans of a particular skill level do not oppose immigrants who are similarly skilled. All categories of American workers were more supportive of high-skilled immigrants than migrants with low skill levels (Hainmueller, Hiscox, and Margalit 2015).

Even so, the internal validity of the study has limitations. Hainmueller, Hiscox, and Margalit (2015) measure citizens' skill levels based on educational attainment, not job type. Education is an imperfect proxy for skill – it is possible for less credentialed individuals to perform technically challenging jobs, and more qualified individuals to take on lower-level positions. Arguably, the respondent's job type and corresponding skill level would enable a more accurate assessment of job competition.

Hainmueller and Hopkins (2015) also argue for sociotropic economic interests, using a conjoint experimental design. Citizens are presented pairs of potential immigrants and asked which immigrant should be admitted to the U.S. Respondents are provided with background information on each immigrant, including educational attainment, country of origin, and other randomly selected qualities (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2015).

The authors conclude that respondents valued immigrants' adherence to American norms and viewed immigrants positively when they were expected to contribute to the economy. For

instance, immigrants with bachelor's degrees were 20 percent more likely to be viewed favourably compared to migrants who lacked formal education. Immigrants with proficiency in English and work experience, especially in high-status jobs, were positively received by citizens. By contrast, immigrants who did not have firm plans for employment or entered the U.S. illegally were viewed negatively. Additionally, Americans viewed highly educated immigrants favourably, whether or not the American respondents had a college education themselves (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2015). These findings are consistent with the argument that citizens' economic interests operate at a sociotropic level, not individually: The immigrants who received respondents' approval were those with the potential to be contributing members of society based on their language ability, education and other attributes. Yet, citizens may express different immigration attitudes when they are considering individual immigrants as in the conjoint analysis, as opposed to the categories of people the individual immigrant represents.

Espenshade and Hempstead's (1996) study also points to sociotropic economic interest. They conclude that Americans who think the national economy is "getting worse" are more restrictionist than Americans who believe the economy is improving. Americans who believe that economy is doing well and that the U.S. would "be an economic superpower in the twenty-first century" hold expansionary immigration attitudes (Espenshade and Hempstead's 1996, 556).

Sociotropic considerations regarding the state of the national economy influence citizens' preferred level of immigration, but the logic employed by citizens seems counterintuitive: It would seem that high skilled immigrants would be desired to bolster a declining economy. Conversely, it is unclear why a positive view of the economy leads to greater acceptance of immigrants. Espenshade and Hempstead's findings merit further research into the mechanisms

behind economic interests. Further scholarship could theorize how optimism about the national economy influences immigration attitudes through economic interests.

Valentino et al.'s (2019) results seem to suggest that if economic considerations are relevant to immigration attitudes, it is not economic self-interest that is at play. In their study, respondents of all socioeconomic statuses view higher-skilled immigrants more positively. The authors hence infer that high socioeconomic status citizens do not feel personal job threat from the skilled migrants. In addition, citizens with higher education levels responded even more positively to high-skilled immigrants, but the results were not statistically significant. This outcome seems to reinforce the hypothesis that citizens do not see themselves as being personally threatened by immigrants that could potentially compete with them at their job and education level.

However, Valentino et al.'s study (2019) has problems with external validity. It is unclear if the vignettes, which include slightly artificial-looking photos, seem realistic to respondents. Further, by being queried about whether potential immigrants should be allowed to live in the U.S., respondents are arguably playing the role of immigration officers. This position of officially evaluating potential immigrants differs from how citizens interact with immigrants in day-to-day life. It is possible that respondents could favour certain immigrants for the sake of fairness, even though the respondents actually hold more restrictionist views. Asking a respondent to evaluate these individual cases is different from querying citizens about immigration issues in general or categories of immigrants.

The literature explored above – on both economic self-interest and sociotropic economic interests – suggests that both dimensions of economic interests are relevant to immigration opinions. The treatment in my survey experiment resembles how citizens receive information



about the economic context in the real world. These economic cues can be from official and formal sources such as the news, political speeches, and government data, or from informal sources such as conversations with fellow citizens about the state of the economy. These economic cues correspond to the perceived economic context treatment in my survey experiment.

I theorize that economic cues influence citizens' sociotropic economic interests because citizens rely on a heuristic that involves information about the collective economic plight of citizens. As with other policy opinions, citizens form immigration attitudes using heuristics: mental shortcuts that allow ordinary citizens to make judgements on complex policy issues even with insufficient technical expertise or information (Sniderman 2000). Political judgments resulting from heuristics are not necessarily competent, but citizens would not otherwise have their say on the myriad of policy proposals presented by politicians.

The perceived economic context treatment provides a heuristic through which citizens assess the sociotropic economic impact of immigration. This mechanism resembles how heuristics are employed to form opinions of a sociotropic nature on other policy areas such as national security, the welfare state, and other issues. Heuristics enable citizens to extrapolate the consequences of a policy to other citizens despite their unfamiliarity with the particulars of those other citizens' lives.

Thus, citizens understand the implications of the national economic context in sociotropic terms. They think about the ramifications of economic conditions for their group: workers who are citizens. To be clear, this group-centric dynamic is not necessarily related to nativism. Rather, any question posed about immigration prompts citizens to consider the validity of immigrants' position in society vis-à-vis the economic circumstances of citizens.

The national economic context is also likely to shape personal job threat from immigration. However, the treatment effect may not be as large, because economic cues generally do not provide sufficient information for citizens to judge the impact of immigration on their industries, let alone their individual jobs. Further, the rhetoric and policy proposals of anti-immigrant politicians pertain to immigration's sociotropic impacts and the need to reduce the overall number of immigrants; individual job security is ostensibly secondary to the welfare of citizens as a group. The People's Party of Canada (PPC) seeks a significant decrease in immigrants and refugees admitted to Canada annually, to between 100,000 and 150,000 (People's Party of Canada 2021). The PPC's proposal is to decrease immigration across the board, not immigrants of specific professions.

In the U.S., too, politicians do not link curbs on specific visas to individual job security. Criticizing the alleged abuse of the H-1B lottery by outsourcing companies, Senators Richard Durbin and Charles Grassley argued that "thousands of new H-1B visas are issued each year to outsourcing companies offering below-market wages and seeking to offshore American jobs" (Durbin and Grassley 2021). Even though high-technology workers comprise a large segment of H-1B immigrants (cf. Malhotra, Margalit, and Mo 2013), citizens working in that industry do not often receive cues that link H-1B visas to their personal job security. Indeed, the Senators' statement referenced "American jobs" and we can thus expect citizens to interpret economic arguments against immigration in a sociotropic fashion.

Possibly, both economic self-interest and sociotropic economic interests will change based on whether respondents perceive a negative or positive economic context. However, we can expect to observe a much stronger link to sociotropic, as opposed to egocentric, interests. Conceivably, the impact of economic immigration is further removed from individual job

security because it is relatively more difficult for citizens to personalize the implications of an immigration policy that affects the national economy, not individual professions and industries. Although a majority of citizens do not make this link between perceived economic context and personal job threat, it is still possible that a minority of citizens from particular industries would personalize the impacts of perceived economic context (cf. Malhotra, Margalit, and Mo 2013).

Thus, my first two hypotheses are as follows:

H1: Exposure to the perceived negative economic context will be related to greater personal job threat from immigration.

H2: Exposure to the perceived negative economic context will be related to greater sociotropic job threat from immigration.

## **2.3 Conditional Economic Interests**

Malhotra, Margalit, and Mo (2013) argue that American high-technology workers oppose H-1B immigration on the basis of economic self-interest because these citizens compete directly with H-1B workers. Malhotra, Margalit, and Mo's (2013) research differentiates between economic interests that are prevalent or conditional. The economic interest of citizens in general is considered prevalent, while conditional economic interest is only observed when particular citizens from specific industries are surveyed. The authors conclude that American high-technology workers, as compared to Americans from other job categories, are less supportive of H-1B visas. At the same time, the authors rule out the possibility that American workers oppose H-1B immigration on the basis of cultural threat, since the Implicit Association Test (IAT) scores of American high-technology workers and other workers are similar (Malhotra, Margalit, and Mo 2013).

It is unclear what aspect of H-1B immigrants threatens high-technology American workers. Since most H-1B immigrants in the software industry are from India, it is plausible that American workers in that industry associate H-1B workers with Indian immigrants. It is unclear if the Americans surveyed oppose H-1B visas because of job threat, because they dislike Indian workers, or both. Indeed, citizens in the high-technology industry would likely have frequent interactions with Indian H-1B workers and develop immigration attitudes based on ethnic bias, unhappy that Indian workers take up jobs in their industry. Because ethnicity and job type may be conflated, it is possible that cultural reasons, not economic interests, explain the low support for H-1B visas.

Malhotra, Margalit, and Mo (2013) use of the IAT has limitations. For one, the test has weak internal validity. Randomness could be involved in subjects' lapses in response time during the IAT. Subjects in Malhotra, Margalit, and Mo's study only took the test once. The score from this one-time IAT is probably not sufficient to reliably discern respondents' biases toward Indian Americans. Further, the IAT used the term "Indian American", which refers to American citizens of Indian descent. The test is thus imprecise in measuring attitudes towards H-1B foreign workers who have Indian rather than American citizenship and are thus not American citizens of Indian descent. The IAT also has significant problems with external validity: it is difficult to demonstrate that an IAT score translates into discriminatory behaviour in the real world.

## **2.4 Fiscal Burden from Immigration**

Economic interests are also manifested in citizens' perceived fiscal burden from immigration. Scholars theorize that citizens could be concerned about a heavier individual tax burden, or immigration being a strain on the national economy. This theory assumes that citizens think that less well-off immigrants receive help from the welfare state. In turn, the egocentric

concern is that individual citizens have to pay higher taxes to fund the expanding welfare state, while the sociotropic concern is that the national economy suffers under the strain of having to support immigrants.

In this way, Gerber et al. (2017) expand the idea of economic self-interest to encompass not just job threat, but concerns about fiscal burden. According to Gerber et al. (2017), citizens report greater personal economic threat from low-skilled immigrants, because of the perception that these immigrants cause tax increases, compromise the ability of citizens to benefit from government programs, and result in increasing costs of goods and services. Americans of different skill levels are concerned about the fiscal burden brought by low-skilled migrants, more than high-skilled migrants (Gerber et al. 2017). This finding aligns with the assumption that citizens see lower skilled immigrants are less well-off and more likely to rely on the state for assistance.

Valentino et al.'s (2019) research also validates the fiscal burden argument. In their study, citizens were asked to read vignettes containing information about fictional immigrants' skills, family background, country of origin, and race. Subjects then answered questions about whether these immigrants should be allowed to work in the U.S. and eventually become American citizens. Valentino et al.'s (2019) findings illustrated citizens' perception of lower skilled immigrants as strains on the state and national economy. Indeed, when the vignettes depicted low-skilled immigrants as having a wife and children, citizens were less supportive of these immigrants, presumably because the larger family size presents a greater fiscal burden.

A key limitation of the work on fiscal burden from immigrants is the difficulty in differentiating between individual and sociotropic fiscal burdens. Unlike job threat, which directly relates to an individual's job security, fiscal burden can either relate to individual taxes,

a nationalized (sociotropic) understanding of tax burden, or the national economy. This limitation is clear when considering the vignettes in Valentino et al.'s study. When restrictionist citizens respond to fictional low-skilled immigrants with families, it is unclear which type of fiscal burden these citizens are most concerned about. To make this distinction, future survey experiments could be designed to either appeal to respondents' self-interested or sociotropic considerations about fiscal burden. For instance, to rule out economic self-interest, the survey could specify that "To better support lower income immigrant communities, resources have been reallocated to the Administration for Children & Families (ACF) from other government agencies. Although other agencies have undergone budget cuts, it is very unlikely that the U.S. government will have to raise taxes for individual residents like yourself." Such a statement would test whether citizens oppose immigration because of a strain on state resources.

## **2.1 Studying Immigration and Immigration Attitudes in Canada**

In contrast to other Western liberal democracies such as the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia, where at least one major party in each country espouses restrictionist rhetoric, the pro-immigration platforms of the major Canadian parties are an anomaly. The main divergences among political elites have been the Liberals' stronger support for family and humanitarian immigration as well as lessening the importance of an in-hand job offer for prospective economic immigrants, as opposed to the Conservatives' labour market-focused, employer-driven model of economic immigration, and emphasis on temporary foreign worker recruitment (Ellermann 2021).

Anti-immigrant sentiment does exist among Canadian voters. On the extreme right of the ideological spectrum, the People's Party of Canada (PPC) appeals to these voters. The PPC seeks

a significant decrease in immigrants and refugees admitted to Canada annually, to between 100,000 and 150,000 (People's Party of Canada 2021).

Scholars of Canadian immigration have sought to theorize the mechanisms behind these atypical expansionary immigration policies and pro-immigration attitudes at the level of political parties, but less so for ordinary citizens. Specifically, we do not understand how economic considerations affect Canadians' immigration opinions.

One view is that anti-immigration policies and voters who support these restrictionist platforms are generally absent in Canada. Gordon, Jeram, and van der Linden (2020) assert that the Canadian party system lacks an anti-immigration party because Quebec nationalism disrupted anti-immigration attitudes in non-urban areas. Hence, parties on the Right could not successfully mobilize nativist voters on the immigration issue (Gordon, Jeram, and van der Linden 2020). Yet, the absence of mobilization of nativist voters does not mean that anti-immigrant attitudes do not exist among ordinary citizens. Taylor (2021) contends that the Conservative Party has not developed a restrictionist platform on immigration because it recognizes the importance of the immigrant vote, especially as this vote is clustered in the metropolitan areas of Greater Toronto and Hamilton. While the votes of foreign-born Canadian could partly explain the pro-immigrant stance of the major Canadian parties, it is an insufficient explanation for the major parties' ostensible success in gaining the broad support of Canadians for pro-immigration platforms.

It is likely that pro-immigration rhetoric among party leaders shapes voter opinions. As Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus (2013) found in the U.S., elite polarization causes partisan cues to have a stronger effect on the attitudes of ordinary citizens, including on immigration. While the major Canadian political parties are not polarized on immigration policy, elite

polarization on a whole has been observed in Canada (e.g. Cochrane 2015). Yet the literature suggests that Canadians are not always supportive of immigration despite the expansionary stance of elites. Banting and Soroka (2020) argue that Canadians' immigration opinions depend on prevailing levels of immigration and macro-economic factors. Banting and Soroka's longitudinal approach assumes that economic conditions identified are causally linked to Canadians' immigration attitudes, but this relationship cannot be tested directly without an experiment. Further, their approach does not distinguish between egocentric and sociotropic economic considerations. An experimental design could isolate the causal effect of the explanatory variable through random assignment to treatment, as well as distinguish between different dimensions of economic self-interest.

Both economic self-interest and sociotropic economic interests are shaped by citizens' social interactions and group identities. One of the most influential identities is political partisanship. I theorize that political partisanship is a primary driver of economic interests related to immigration.

Like other policy issues, immigration has the potential to be politically divisive, even in Canada where partisan polarization has not reached levels seen in the U.S. Ellermann (2021) argues that this paucity of elite polarization, and the pro-immigration views of ordinary citizens, can be attributed to the executive's insulation from voters as well as its practice of seeking elite consensus on changes to immigration policy. Other studies suggest that the Canadian public is not always in agreement. Studying preferences on redistribution, Kevins and Soroka (2018) find evidence of partisan sorting in the Canadian electorate. Given these party-driven divergences in opinion on other policy issues, it is plausible that Canadians economic interests related to immigration are in line with partisan affiliation. When citizens express support for a political



party, they are affiliating themselves with the worldview of that party, and partisanship functions as a group identity that drives perceptions about the economic impact of immigration both to individuals and the group. Specifically, we can expect supporters of the Conservative Party to express greater job threat. Their economic insecurity may arise because they view the Liberal approach to economic immigration as offering insufficient protection for Canadian jobs. Thus, my third and fourth hypotheses are:

H3: Support for the Conservative Party will be associated with greater personal job threat from immigration.

H4: Support for the Conservative Party will be associated with greater sociotropic job threat from immigration.

Altogether, the literature reviewed above suggests that both economic self-interest and sociotropic economic interests are involved in the development of immigration attitudes. The scholarship does not conclusively privilege one school of thought over the other. By implication, it is plausible that citizens could perceive immigration as a threat to their individual jobs (economic self-interest) as well as the jobs of fellow citizens (sociotropic economic interests).

Scholars have argued that sociotropic economic considerations, more than economic self-interest, explain immigration attitudes (e.g. Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014). Yet, citizens' subjective personal job threat from immigration has not been fully understood, as existing research has focused on objective and general measures of job threat. The literature does not fully account for the possibility that citizens' job threat could be conditional on other variables, such as respondents' perception of the national economy – especially in relation to industry-

specific competition with immigrants. The lack of comparison across immigration policies, how these policies are framed, as well as economic and political contexts, impair our understanding of the role of economic self-interest in attitude formation.

Previous studies failed to detect personal job threat from immigration, but the alleged absence of economic self-interest in immigration attitudes was likely due to limitations in research design. In this thesis, I re-examine the claim that sociotropic economic interests more strongly influence immigration attitudes.

The fact that respondents of all socioeconomic statuses view higher-skilled immigrants more positively in Valentino et al.'s (2019) study does not confirm that personal job threat does not exist. Their approach – making inferences based on citizens' perceptions of immigrants, and drawing conclusions about job competition based on matching citizens' skill levels with their preferred immigrant skill levels – is indirect. Similarly Hainmueller, Hiscox, and Margalit (2015) conclude that Americans of a particular skill level do not oppose immigrants who can compete with citizens at the same skill level, because American workers of different skill levels are more supportive of high-skilled immigrants, as opposed to migrants with low skill levels.

A more direct approach, which I employ in this thesis, is to ask citizens about their perception of individual-level job threat from immigration. This method allows citizens to *subjectively* express their perceptions of job threat, and will likely yield different results from less direct methods which involve citizens weighing the merits of different immigrant types. Moreover, assessing citizens' subjective personal job threat separates feelings of job threat from possible confounders that shape immigration attitudes. Notably, studies that investigate economic interests in an objective, non-personal way (e.g. Hainmueller, Hiscox, and Margalit 2015) may allow citizens to draw on opinions independent from job threat, such as the

admiration of high-skilled immigrants of a higher socioeconomic status. This reasoning leads to my fifth and sixth hypotheses:

H5: Greater personal job threat from immigration will be related to lower preferred immigration level.

H6: Greater sociotropic job threat from immigration will be related to lower preferred immigration level.

## **Chapter 3: Data, Research Design and Methodology**

### **3.1 Data**

This thesis draws upon a representative web-based survey of Canadians conducted by Professors Matthew Wright from the University of British Columbia and Morris Levy from the University of Southern California in March 2022. In total, 1502 Canadian citizens participated in the survey, of which 1230 respondents were born in Canada. This thesis focuses on this representative sample of 1230 Canadian-born citizens. I choose to analyze the attitudes of Canadian-born citizens because naturalized Canadians originate from diverse national and cultural backgrounds that may introduce confounding variables. Because naturalized citizens likely possess different attitudes, and form these attitudes differently, from Canadian-born citizens, the two groups should not be studied together. Studying the two groups separately would not be effective either, as the number of naturalized citizens surveyed (272) is relatively small. In addition, the scholarship on immigration attitudes does not explicitly theorize the opinions of naturalized citizens or immigrants.

In this thesis, I do not explore the impact of economic interests on immigration attitudes on other countries. Although I reference scholarship on a related case, the U.S., I do not examine the attitudes of American respondents in this thesis. Focusing on one country allows me to analyze the Canadian context in-depth in this thesis. In addition, the U.S. context is dissimilar from that in Canada in regard to generally positive public opinion in Canada on immigration, as well as the support for economic immigration by both Liberals and Conservative leaders. Hence, it would be best for me to examine American attitudes in a separate study.

## **3.2 Research Design and Methodology**

The results of my analysis rest on an embedded experiment that analyzes respondents' perceived economic context as an independent variable. The dependent variables are subjective personal job threat from immigration and sociotropic job threat from immigration. A further question probes respondents' preference on how many immigrants should be admitted to Canada, enabling me to explore the relationship of both dimensions of economic interests and general immigration opinions.

### **3.2.1 Experimental Design and Survey Questions**

Canadian respondents were randomly assigned to one of two groups. Each group received a vignette and two questions, shown in Table 1 below. One group read a vignette that described the decline of Canada's real GDP in 2020; I refer to this group as the negative group. The vignette was designed to be relevant to the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020; it is reasonable to expect that respondents taking the survey in March 2022 would have been aware of the detrimental impact of the pandemic on the Canadian economy in 2020, given the prominence, in the news media, of the pandemic and its associated economic costs.

Besides the reference to declining GDP, the negative group's vignette states that as a result of these poor economic conditions, many Canadian workers lost their jobs. By explicitly referencing the loss of Canadian jobs, the vignette links the negative economic context to the job security of Canadian citizens, making the case described relevant to the topic of immigration and economic interests.

The other group is presented with a vignette describing the reverse case: an increase in Canada's real GDP in 2021; I refer to this group as the positive group. The authenticity of this vignette to respondents is bolstered by the fact that in reality, the economic crises directly

associated with the pandemic had begun to abate by 2021. The vignette then says that as a result of these favorable economic conditions, many new jobs were created for Canadian workers. In both negative and positive groups, the source of the GDP figures, Statistics Canada, is cited to add to the realism of the treatment.

Following the vignette, the same 2 questions are posed to each group, in a randomized order. Respondents are asked to express on a scale of 1 to 5, ordered from “Strongly disagree” to “Strongly agree”, how much they agree that immigrants were “a threat to my job security” and “a threat to Canadian jobs”. By referencing “my job security”, the former statement explores respondents’ subjective personal job threat: the individual’s self-determined perception that their job is at risk. This measure is preferable to indirectly inferring job threat through other means such as asking citizens about their opinions regarding immigrants of different skill levels. With the phrase “Canadian jobs”, the latter statement prompts respondents to consider sociotropic interests about the job security of Canadians in general. Both questions – pertaining to personal job threat and sociotropic job threat – explicitly relate these economic interests to immigration.

**Table 1: Negative and Positive Group Questions**

Independent Variable	<u>Negative Group</u>	<u>Positive Group</u>
Perceived economic context	<p><b><u>Group 1: Negative economic context</u></b></p> <p>According to Statistics Canada, Canadian real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) decreased by 5.4% in 2020. As a result of these poor economic conditions, many Canadian workers lost their jobs.</p> <p>We want to know what you think about immigration to Canada. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?</p> <p><i>[The order of the following two questions was randomized.]</i></p> <p>“Immigrants are a threat to my job security.”</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Strongly disagree</li> <li>2. Somewhat disagree</li> <li>3. Neither agree nor disagree</li> <li>4. Somewhat agree</li> <li>5. Strongly agree</li> <li>6. Don’t know</li> </ol> <p>“Immigrants are a threat to Canadian jobs.”</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Strongly disagree</li> <li>2. Somewhat disagree</li> <li>3. Neither agree nor disagree</li> <li>4. Somewhat agree</li> <li>5. Strongly agree</li> </ol>	<p><b><u>Group 2: Positive economic context</u></b></p> <p>According to Statistics Canada, Canadian real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) increased by 5.7 % in 2021. As a result of these favorable economic conditions, many new jobs were created for Canadian workers.</p> <p>We want to know what you think about immigration to Canada. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?</p> <p><i>[The order of the following two questions was randomized.]</i></p> <p>“Immigrants are a threat to my job security.”</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Strongly disagree</li> <li>2. Somewhat disagree</li> <li>3. Neither agree nor disagree</li> <li>4. Somewhat agree</li> <li>5. Strongly agree</li> <li>6. Don’t know</li> </ol> <p>“Immigrants are a threat to Canadian jobs.”</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Strongly disagree</li> <li>2. Somewhat disagree</li> <li>3. Neither agree nor disagree</li> <li>4. Somewhat agree</li> <li>5. Strongly agree</li> <li>6. Don’t know</li> </ol>

	6. Don't know	
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Immediately after clicking a button to proceed to the next question, respondents from both groups were presented with a question about their preferred immigration level, where responses can range from 1 to 5, from “Decreased a lot” to “Increased a lot”:

In your view, should immigration to Canada be kept at its present level, decreased, or increased?

1. Decreased a lot
2. Decreased somewhat
3. Kept at its present level
4. Increased somewhat
5. Increased a lot

### 3.2.2 Regression Analysis

I estimate 3 ordinary least squares regression models related to economic interests and immigration attitudes. First, I estimate the effect of the perceived economic context treatment on subjective personal job threat from immigration. The second model estimates the effect of the perceived economic context treatment on sociotropic job threat from immigration. Finally, I estimate the effect of both personal and sociotropic job threat from immigration on preferred immigration level.

In each model, the control variables are each respondent's political partisanship, age, and gender. Political partisanship was chosen as a control variable since attitudes on immigration policy tend to conform to social and economic conservatism versus liberalism, ideologies that are manifested in support for political parties. Political partisanship is measured based on citizens' response to the following question in the survey:

Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a supporter of one of the following political parties, an independent, or what?



1. Liberal Party
2. Conservative Party
3. New Democratic Party
4. Bloc Québécois
5. Green Party
6. Independent
7. Something else

A separate dummy variable was created to represent support for each party. The Liberal Party was chosen as the reference category because the incumbent Liberal federal government has enacted the most recent reforms to Canadian immigration policy. The Liberals moved away from an employer and labour market-focused economic immigration system, and reduced the importance of an in-hand job offer for attaining permanent residency. Liberals also lessened the emphasis on temporary foreign labour, prioritizing the permanent settlement of economic immigrants (Ellermann 2021). Supporters of the incumbent Liberal Party are thus plausibly more receptive to the current economic immigration system than other partisans. Hence, the coefficients for the other parties' supporters can be interpreted as how different their immigration attitudes are, on average, from the pro-immigration attitudes of Liberals. Positive coefficients indicate more expansionist attitudes than Liberal supporters, and negative coefficients indicate more restrictionist attitudes than Liberal partisans.

Technically, control variables are not absolutely necessary for experiments. The experimental method facilitates causal inferences using randomized subjects and a controlled environment (McDermott 2002). Because of these in-built controls, the effect of the independent variable can be precisely observed without the need for controlling for numerous confounders.

## **Chapter 4: Results and Discussion**

### **4.1 The Effect of Perceived Economic Context on Personal and Sociotropic Job Threat from Immigration**

While existing scholarship has not developed a model that explains the immigration attitudes of Canadian citizens, much less their economic motivations, my results show that economic attitudes are very much at play in the Canadian context.

First, I examine the results for H1 and H2: the hypotheses that a perceived negative economic context will be related to greater personal job threat from immigration and sociotropic job threat from immigration, respectively. The results confirm that economic interests are relevant for the immigration attitudes of Canadians, and that these economic considerations are contingent on citizens' perceived economic context. The results are presented in Table 2 (Personal Job Threat From Immigration) and Table 3 (Sociotropic Job Threat From Immigration), below. The 95 percent confidence intervals are shown in brackets below each coefficient.

Table 2: Effect of Perceived Negative Economic Context on Personal Job Threat From Immigration

	Personal Job Threat From Immigration
Perceived Negative Economic Context	0.090 (−0.061, 0.240)
Partisanship (ref = Liberal)	
Conservative	0.419*** (0.218, 0.620)
NDP	−0.285** (−0.511, −0.060)
Bloc Quebecois	0.315 (−0.073, 0.703)
Green Party	0.192 (−0.199, 0.584)
Independent	−0.035 (−0.360, 0.290)
Other Party	0.364*** (0.096, 0.633)
Age	−0.018*** (−0.023, −0.014)
Gender (ref = Other Gender)	
Male	1.518*** (0.560, 2.475)
Female	1.441*** (0.488, 2.395)
Constant	1.604*** (0.636, 2.572)
Observations	1,094
R <sup>2</sup>	0.087
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.078
Residual Std. Error	1.266 (df = 1083)
F Statistic	10.292*** (df = 10; 1083)
<i>Note:</i>	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 3: Effect of Perceived Negative Economic Context on Sociotropic Job Threat From Immigration

	Sociotropic Job Threat From Immigration
Perceived Negative Economic Context	0.173** (0.017, 0.328)
Partisanship (ref = Liberal)	
Conservative	0.530*** (0.322, 0.737)
NDP	-0.268** (-0.501, -0.036)
Bloc Quebecois	0.170 (-0.239, 0.580)
Green Party	0.301 (-0.107, 0.709)
Independent	-0.021 (-0.357, 0.315)
Other Party	0.482*** (0.204, 0.761)
Age	-0.013*** (-0.017, -0.008)
Gender (ref = Other Gender)	
Male	1.670*** (0.682, 2.659)
Female	1.526*** (0.541, 2.511)
Constant	1.383*** (0.383, 2.382)
Observations	1,091
R <sup>2</sup>	0.079
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.070
Residual Std. Error	1.307 (df = 1080)
F Statistic	9.245*** (df = 10; 1080)
<i>Note:</i>	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

The treatment effect of perceived negative economic context is not statistically significant when respondents are asked about their personal job threat from immigration, meaning that the observed average increase in personal job threat by 0.09 (95 percent confidence interval: -0.061, 0.24) is likely due to random chance. Thus, the results do not validate H1. In essence, the vignette about a declining economy and Canadians losing their jobs failed to activate *personal* fears that immigrants would compete with citizens for jobs, even though, as I proceed to explain, the vignette succeeded in activating group-level feelings of threat. Citizens did not interpret the phenomenon of Canadian jobs being lost as being directly related to their own jobs. This failure to internalize the effects of economic conditions on personal job security implies that citizens tend to focus on facets of economic cues that are relevant to the group, not individuals. This group-centric nature of economic interests is closely related to the way in which politicians choose to frame economic immigration: in group-centric terms.

The treatment effect of perceived negative economic context on sociotropic job threat from immigration is statistically significant, with a 3 percent likelihood that a treatment effect of this magnitude would be observed due to random chance ( $p=0.029$ ). This result validates H2. Canadian citizens exposed to the treatment expressed an average sociotropic economic threat from immigration that was 0.173 higher compared to those who were exposed to a positive economic context. 95 percent of treatment effects were between 0.017 and 0.328. This positive effect points to the tendency of citizens to think about the economic consequences of immigration for Canadians as a whole.

The treatment effect implies that sociotropic job threat from immigration is based on citizens' evaluations of the national economy. Feelings that Canadian jobs are threatened are thus not based on a nativist, ingrained dislike for immigrants. Indeed, the fact that citizens change

their level of economic threat based on information available to them about the state of the national economy suggests that a degree of rationality is involved in the formation of immigration opinions. In this experiment, citizens who read that Canada's real GDP decreased and that many Canadians lost their jobs expressed higher levels of sociotropic economic threat from immigration, compared to citizens who read that Canada's real GDP increased and that jobs were created for Canadians.

This finding highlights the importance of perceived economic context, and by extension the political context, in shaping immigration opinions. There are implications for politics and policy: Politicians who portray Canadian workers as economically vulnerable given the state of the national economy may be able to sway immigration opinions in a restrictionist direction by harnessing elevated feelings of sociotropic economic threat. Moreover, Canadians' acceptance of the narrative that economic immigration is beneficial to the Canadian national economy is likely to be conditional on Canadians' beliefs about the state of the economy.

In addition, sociotropic concerns are arguably triggered by the vignette's reference to Canadian workers, just as political elites often speak of the implications for Canadians as a group. This reference to Canadian jobs need not be an abstract concept that is irrelevant to individual job security. Rationally speaking, the state of the national economy can have an eventual effect on personal job security. However, the group-centric nature of the reference to Canadian jobs was more influential than any individual considerations of job threat. Thus, the treatment effect illustrates that sociotropic economic considerations are not only top of mind for citizens, but change according to the perceived economic context as well.

The results highlight the role of sociotropic job threat as an intermediate step between citizens' perceived economic context and general immigration opinions. Immigration attitudes

may not be a direct consequence of macroeconomic conditions (e.g. Banting and Soroka 2020). Rather, citizens' perceptions of macroeconomic conditions, regardless of the accuracy of these perceptions, first influence the level of job competition that citizens think their fellow citizens face from immigrants. The effect of economic context reveals that immigration is a form of scapegoat for the potential job losses faced by citizens. To be sure, the vignette did not reference the role of immigrants in adding or removing jobs for citizens, but immigrants' impact was inferred by respondents themselves. It is likely that the high salience of economic immigration in Canada, including the increasing numbers of economic migrants, places immigration at the forefront of citizens' thought process when respondents analyze a particular economic context in the experiment.

This tendency of placing responsibility on immigrants for job losses has the potential to make immigration a flashpoint in political debates about the economy. It suggests that a robust justification by the Liberal government for its expansionist policies may be needed, and that Canadian citizens cannot be assumed to be perpetually supportive of high levels of economic immigration.

## **4.2 Political Partisanship and Economic Interests**

I now turn to H3 and H4: the hypotheses that egocentric and sociotropic economic interests, respectively, will be related to Conservative partisanship. In Table 2 above, Conservative partisans' average personal job threat from immigration is 0.419 higher than Liberal supporters' ( $p < 0.01$ ), with a 95 percent confidence interval of 0.218 to 0.62. This relationship is echoed in Table 3, with Conservative partisans' average sociotropic economic threat from immigration being 0.53 higher than Liberal supporters' ( $p < 0.01$ ), with a 95 percent confidence interval of 0.322 to 0.737.

Palpably, Conservative supporters are more likely to perceive immigrants as an economic threat, and the statistical significance of Conservative partisanship for shaping both dimensions of economic interests reveals that this threat is both to individual job security and to Canadian jobs. These results differ from the model in the scholarship that largely elevates only sociotropic economic interests to importance. When respondents are queried *directly* about their economic self-interest, they do not hesitate to express it in a way that is consistent with their partisanship.

These partisan differences in economic interests related to immigration are surprising in the Canadian context because of the lack of a major party with an anti-immigration platform. Moreover, Conservative leaders in the past have advocated economic immigration, but in a different form. The Harper government prioritized temporary over permanent economic immigration and made the labour market, not human capital, the basis for the points system (Ellermann 2021). Besides Conservative partisans, the coefficients for NDP supporters are significantly different from 0. On average, both dimensions of job threat are lower among NDP supporters as compared to Liberal partisans.

The generally pro-immigration stances of major Canadian parties and, in particular, a points-based system to encourage economic immigration mean that immigration should not be a polarizing issue for Canadians, but only with the assumption that the major party platforms reflect pro-immigration attitudes in the electorate. My results highlight that economic immigration opinions are more heterogeneous among supporters of different major Canadian parties than the elite rhetoric would make it seem.

Conservatives' and NDP partisans' economic interests differ significantly from Liberals' on both the egocentric and sociotropic economic dimensions, but this difference is not observed among Green Party and Bloc Québécois supporters. (I do not analyze support for other parties



since these views cannot be related to a specific major Canadian party.) It is also noteworthy that the statistical significance of the effect of Conservative partisanship on economic interests is greater than that of NDP supporters, for both egocentric and sociotropic interests. There is a clear gap: taking economic self-interest as an example, the likelihood that a coefficient that large for Conservative partisanship would be observed if the null hypothesis were true is close to 0 (0.0000462), whereas the equivalent probability for NDP partisanship is 0.01319. For sociotropic economic interests, there is an approximately 0 percent chance (0.000000641) that that effect of Conservative partisanship would be observed if the relationship did not exist, while this probability is larger, at 0.023896, for NDP partisans.

Without a doubt, there is a robust effect of Conservative partisanship and ideology on economic interests related to immigration. This result tells us that among the major Canadian parties, there is arguably the largest gulf between Conservative and Liberal thinking about the economic impacts of immigration. By contrast, the higher likelihood that the difference between NDP and Liberal supporters could be observed due to random chance implies that while there are differences between the economic interests of these partisans, other major parties' supporters are not nearly as different from Liberals as Conservatives are.

Conservative citizens' views on the economic impacts of immigration can most likely be attributed to a type of economic conservatism unique to Canada. In 2006, when the new Conservatives won the federal election, the Conservative Party comprised a merger of centrists and social conservatives. The Conservative preference for market liberalism likely contributed to that government's reconfiguration of the human capital-based points system to one driven by employer demand (Ellermann 2021). Plausibly, Conservative citizens could be supportive of this form of economic immigration, which seems to ensure that there is a real necessity for each

economic immigrant. By contrast, Liberal reforms facilitated economic immigration that did not directly address the needs of the labour market. For example, under Liberal policies, an in-hand job offer did not grant immigrants the same advantages as before, and job bank registration was no longer required (Ellermann 2021). Possibly, Conservative citizens do not think that the current points system is set up in an optimal way that delivers benefits to the economy based on a targeted approach to addressing labour market needs. Thus, the current economic immigration system may make Conservatives perceive threats to their job security. To be sure, there is a social dimension of conservatism, and the tendency of conservatives to prefer less immigration is related to a desire to preserve the culture and status of the in-group of citizens. At the same time, the results of my experiment highlight the relevance of economic considerations to conservative views on immigration: Conservative partisanship is associated with heightened personal and sociotropic job threat from immigration. These feelings of threat are probably especially pronounced with the Liberal government's high targets for immigration.

The economic considerations expressed by Conservatives in my experiment should be understood in the context of the rise of anti-immigrant rhetoric and platforms of politicians across the North America and Europe. This framing of immigrants as economically draining on citizens has made the economic impacts of immigration a salient issue in Canada too. South of the border, four years of a Trump presidency that was hostile not just to undocumented migrants, but legal economic migration, contributed to the idea that citizens need be most concerned about their jobs being lost to foreigners. Indeed, Trump's administration temporarily succeeded in ending the lottery system for H-1B visas, claiming that H-1B visas were being allocated to low-salaried migrants who were making employers less willing to hire Americans with higher salary expectations (Anderson 2021). In this global context that paints immigrants and their sponsor

companies as competitors that do not play by the rules, it is unsurprising that Conservative Canadians are concerned about an immigration system that seems more focused on the pursuit of human capital than directly responding to the needs of employers. In an affectively polarized political context where Canadian partisans harbour animosity towards citizens on the opposing “team” (cf. Johnston 2019), it is plausible that Conservatives would dislike Liberal immigration policy.

Overall, given certain perceived economic contexts that include rhetoric on the global stage that is hostile towards economic immigration, job competition from immigration will be conceptualized in both self-interested and sociotropic terms, and in a way that is consistent with partisanship. The tendency for both economic self-interest dimensions to be associated with partisan ideology means that it is premature to dismiss economic self-interest as the scholarship has tended to do.

In Tables 5 and 6 in the Appendix, I report my results for an alternative analysis with an interaction term between the perceived negative economic context and each dummy variable for partisan affiliation. The interaction term for perceived negative economic context and Conservative partisanship is not statistically significant for either dimension of economic interests. These results suggest that Liberals and Conservatives do not process the experimental treatment differently. However, Bloc Québécois and independent partisanship may influence citizens’ processing of the negative economic treatment prime in relation to sociotropic economic interests (Table 6): the coefficients for the interaction terms for these partisan identifications are statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). It is possible that Bloc Québécois partisans process the treatment differently because of cultural distinctions: they are likely to be French-

speaking citizens with ties to Quebec. Independents are non-partisan, which possibly plays a role in how they process the treatment.

The significance level for the interaction terms is lower for economic self-interest (Table 5). The interaction terms for perceived negative economic context and NDP, Bloc Québécois and independent partisanship, when personal job threat is the dependent variable, are statistically significant ( $p < 0.1$ ). While partisan differences in how citizens process the prime may exist, this relationship is more tentative for economic self-interest as compared with sociotropic economic interests.

### **4.3 The Effect of Economic Interests on General Immigration Attitudes**

Testing H5 and H6 – the hypotheses that both greater personal and sociotropic job threat will be associated with a lower preferred immigration level – enables us to validate two sets of claims. First, if economic interests of either dimension are statistically significant, this observation would provide evidence of the importance of perceived job competition for the formation of immigration opinions in a country where economic immigration is a strategic policy directive. Apart from the puzzle of what influences perceptions of job threat from immigrants, the results would signal that either type of economic interests consistently determines views on immigrants in general.

Secondly, this test sheds light on *which* type of economic interest (or both) is influential in shaping immigration attitudes. Previous scholarship claimed that if economic interests affected immigration attitudes at all, it was mainly sociotropic, not egocentric, economic interests at play. If these claims were correct, we would expect to see a relationship between sociotropic job threat and preferred immigration level. Indeed, if respondents perceive that immigrants harm the job

security of fellow Canadians, they should have greater reservations about admitting more immigrants to Canada.

The role of economic self-interest presents an even more compelling puzzle. Scholars have cast doubt on whether citizens perceive immigrants as threats to their individual job security. Just as uncertain is an association between these egocentric economic interests and general immigration attitudes. If arguments against economic self-interest were sound, we would not expect to see a relationship between personal job threat from immigrants and preferred immigration level. Indeed, if economic self-interest was a moot point, citizens could acknowledge personal job threat in some cases but still prefer increased immigration. Put differently, there would not be a consistent trend observed involving the two variables. This observation would be similar to Hainmueller, Hiscox, and Margalit's (2015) conclusion that American workers were more supportive of high-skilled immigrants than migrants with low skill levels. In that case, immigration opinions could be based on considerations besides personal job threat, such as a preference for high-skilled immigrants.

The model with preferred immigration level as the dependent variable, and personal and sociotropic job threat as the respective independent variables, is presented in Table 4 below:

Table 4: Effect of Personal and Sociotropic Job Threat From Immigration on Preferred Immigration Level

	Preferred Immigration Level
Personal Job Threat From Immigration	-0.059* (-0.125, 0.008)
Sociotropic Job Threat From Immigration	-0.287*** (-0.351, -0.223)
Partisanship (ref = Liberal)	
Conservative	-0.507*** (-0.645, -0.368)
NDP	-0.291*** (-0.445, -0.138)
Bloc Quebecois	-0.554*** (-0.824, -0.284)
Green Party	-0.346** (-0.614, -0.077)
Independent	-0.383*** (-0.603, -0.162)
Other Party	-0.591*** (-0.776, -0.405)
Age	-0.003* (-0.006, 0.0002)
Gender (ref = Other Gender)	
Male	-0.497 (-1.151, 0.157)
Female	-0.468 (-1.119, 0.183)
Constant	4.773*** (4.113, 5.432)
Observations	1,085
R <sup>2</sup>	0.284
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.277
Residual Std. Error	0.860 (df = 1073)
F Statistic	38.677*** (df = 11; 1073)
<i>Note:</i>	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Contrary to the scholarship, I find a statistically significant relationship between economic self-interest and general immigration attitudes: the coefficient for personal job threat is significantly different from 0 ( $p=0.08$ ). A one-unit increase in personal job threat is associated with an average preferred immigration level that is 0.059 lower, with a 95 percent confidence interval of -0.125 to 0.008. This finding validates H5.

The coefficient of sociotropic job threat from immigration is also significantly different from 0 ( $p<0.01$ ). With a one-unit increase in their perception of immigrants as a threat to Canadian jobs, citizens preferred an average immigration level that was 0.287 lower, with a 95 percent confidence interval of -0.351 to -0.223. This result is consistent with H6: there is indeed a relationship between sociotropic economic interests and general immigration attitudes.

Evidently, the likelihood of a relationship between sociotropic economic interests and preferred immigration level is higher than that between economic self-interest and preferred immigration level. While there is an approximately 0 percent likelihood of observing a coefficient of that magnitude for sociotropic economic interests if there was no relationship, the corresponding likelihood for economic self-interest is 8 percent, making the relationship between economic self-interest and general immigration attitudes more tentative. The magnitude of the coefficient for sociotropic economic interests (-0.287) is also higher than that for economic self-interest (-0.059), implying that sociotropic economic interests have a greater impact on general immigration opinions.

Still, it is difficult to completely dismiss the role of economic self-interest in the development of general immigration attitudes. Indeed, the two main variables in the two models capture two substantively different aspects of the mechanism for immigration attitude formation. The first variable captures citizens' perception that immigrants threaten their *personal* job

security. The validity of this measure is bolstered by the fact that citizens are expressing a *subjective* feeling of job threat: self-interest is not conceptualized through indirect inference as in other studies. To be sure, the survey question clearly relates immigrants to “**my** job security” (emphasis added). It is extremely unlikely that respondents would read this prompt and evaluate fellow **Canadians**’ job security. Further, the question’s specific reference to “immigrants” precludes the evaluation of personal job security unrelated to immigration.

The statistically significant results contradict what we would expect to see if citizens did not perceive job competition at the individual level at all, and the LMCH were false. If citizens did not feel their job security being threatened by immigrants, they would tend to express lower perceptions of personal job threat overall, and this would preclude a relationship between personal job threat and citizens’ views on immigration to Canada in general.

The statistical significance of both dimensions of economic interests reveals that immigration attitudes are not solely a function of partisan ideology. Indeed, the fact that economic interests retain their explanatory power even when partisanship is controlled for suggests that ideologies that could influence immigration attitudes are not confounding the relationship between economic interests and immigration attitudes. To be sure, Conservative supporters have an average preferred immigration level that is 0.507 lower than Liberal supporters.

However, it would be inaccurate to reduce these partisan differences in immigration opinions to a simplistic divide between globalists and nativists. Neither do conservative views on immigration only stem from a resistance to demographic change. The results illuminate the feelings of personal and sociotropic job threat that animate conservative, in relation to liberal, viewpoints. The first 2 models estimated in this thesis, with personal and sociotropic job threat as



outcome variables, revealed variation between Conservative and Liberal partisans' perceptions of job threat. Hence, elite rhetoric on immigration from both parties is unlikely to be the only factor influencing these partisans' differing views. Citizens' inherently different perceptions of job threat from immigration are at play in the formation of their immigration opinions.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

This thesis began with the investigation of this puzzle: How do economic interests influence the immigration attitudes of ordinary Canadian citizens? It is important to study the Canadian case for several reasons. First, the federal government has set high targets for immigration to Canada, which includes economic immigration. This makes immigration a salient issue for ordinary citizens, and presents an opportunity to study perceptions of job competition in a context where citizens are likely aware of the arrival of large numbers of skilled foreign workers. Secondly, the mechanisms behind Canadian immigration opinions have been less theorized and tested compared to other contexts in the U.S. and Europe. Even less is understood about the mechanisms behind economic interests and immigration attitudes in Canada. A recent survey, leveraged in this thesis, probes the economic interests of Canadians directly and tests the responsiveness of these economic attitudes to information citizens receive about the national economy.

The first main set of findings is that citizens' perceived economic context shapes their sociotropic job threat from immigration, but not their personal job threat from immigration (H1 and H2). These results highlight the malleability of sociotropic economic interests, and point to the volatility of group-centric, as opposed to individual, attitudes. I theorized that citizens typically interpret information about the national economy in sociotropic, not egocentric, terms. This is consistent with how political elites frame the economic impacts of immigration, in terms of the impact of foreign workers as an outgroup on the ingroup: citizen workers. It is thus reasonable that citizens in this study interpreted information about the national economy and its impact on Canadian jobs in sociotropic terms. One possible counterfactual – that this information would also influence economic self-interest – would not have been inconceivable. Certainly,

respondents could evaluate their personal job security based on contingent assessments of fellow Canadians' job security given the prescribed economic conditions, but the results show that this causal relationship was unlikely.

The influence of perceived economic context on perceptions of sociotropic job threat highlights that sociotropic economic interests are malleable, and further research could identify the other variables that influence sociotropic economic interests. As it stands, the influence of perceived economic context, regardless of the accuracy of these perceptions, has important implications. For one, citizens' perception of the economy is likely to fluctuate over time based on information easily and constantly gleaned from various sources, especially with the advent of social media and other digital platforms. By implication, sociotropic economic interests will fluctuate as well, and influence immigration attitudes in turn. Despite the ostensible consensus among major Canadian parties that immigration is beneficial, leaders cannot take for granted that public opinion will always be in favour of immigration.

Moreover the result suggests that political elites can potentially leverage rhetoric on the national economy to sway perceptions of job threat to Canadian workers. Even as Canada exits the COVID-19 pandemic, the national economy has not fully recovered. In some respects, notably rising housing prices and rents, as well as rapid inflation in general, economic conditions continue to worsen. This bleak economic outlook is shared by more than half of Canadians, who believe that Canada is in a recession (Ritchie 2022). Based on my results, there is cause for concern: anti-immigrant politicians could take advantage of economic pessimism to activate Canadians' feelings of sociotropic job threat from immigration. The potential for activating job threat will be even greater when the national economy is *actually* not doing well, as has been the case since the pandemic. In future studies, it would be worth investigating whether anti-

immigrant politicians both in Canada and in other countries have already been successful in manipulating citizens' perceptions of sociotropic job threat from immigration in this way. Such research would further illuminate the reasons for the rise of far-right, nativist parties in the Western world.

Possibly, other factors such as citizens' education level could influence how they respond to perceived economic context. Future research could thus compare the results of the perceived economic context treatment for citizens of different education levels. Moreover, the type of economic threat could be examined further. Surveys could probe citizens' perception of specific groups of immigrants that may be associated with different types of economic threat. For example, international students may be associated with economic interests because of possible competition with Canadians for university admission and impacts on tuition fees.

The second main set of findings in this thesis is that both personal and sociotropic job threat from immigration are influenced by political partisanship, with a stark difference between Liberal and Conservative supporters (H3 and H4). Despite generally positive rhetoric on economic immigration from both these parties, the public's economic interests related to immigration are divided on partisan lines. Yet, differences in immigration opinions are not automatically assumed by citizens because of partisan affiliation. The results show that economic interests operate differently for supporters of different parties. I theorized that Conservative supporters' opinions are driven by a preference for labour-market based economic immigration, in contrast to the Liberal model which places a greater emphasis on human capital. Conservatives arguably do not view the current economic immigration model as an optimal approach to benefitting the economy while protecting Canadians' job security. Future research could study the extent to which nativism interacts with job threat in Conservatives' immigration

opinions. To be sure, economic interests, not just social-psychological factors, are at play in the development of conservative immigration opinion in Canada. Divergences in Liberal and Conservative citizens' immigration opinions are puzzling because both parties have sought to admit economic migrants and have espoused the necessity of economic immigration. If attitudinal differences exist in this less controversial area of economic immigration, we could expect to see more significant divergences in opinion in relation to other forms of immigration, such as family and humanitarian migration, where disagreements between Liberals and Conservatives have been more pertinent. Further research could explore partisan differences in public opinion toward these other forms of immigration.

My final set of findings demonstrates that both personal and sociotropic job threat from immigration are associated with Canadians' preferred level of immigration to Canada (H5 and H6). Contrary to scholarship that privileges sociotropic economic interests over economic self-interest, the survey data points to the importance of *both* dimensions of economic interests. The relative importance of either dimension could be further validated in future studies.

All in all, this thesis validates the role of economic interests in the formation of immigration opinions, and reveals how these economic interests change based on information received by citizens. This thesis contributes to our understanding of the nascent field of Canadian public opinion on immigration, especially in the context of the current expansionist economic immigration policies in Canada. Economic self-interest, which scholars often criticize as irrelevant to immigration attitudes, remains important in shaping public opinion on immigration. As Canada's immigration priorities continue to develop, it is important to study how Canadians' economic interests and attitudes toward immigrants change according to this evolving policy environment.

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# Appendix

Table 5: Effect of Perceived Negative Economic Context on Personal Job Threat From Immigration (Interaction Terms)

	Personal Job Threat From Immigration
Perceived Negative Economic Context	-0.029 (-0.282, 0.224)
Partisanship (ref = Liberal)	
Conservative	0.430*** (0.144, 0.715)
NDP	-0.479*** (-0.796, -0.162)
Bloc Quebecois	-0.081 (-0.640, 0.479)
Green Party	0.154 (-0.392, 0.701)
Independent	-0.371 (-0.838, 0.097)
Other Party	0.438** (0.071, 0.805)
Age	-0.018*** (-0.023, -0.014)
Gender (ref = Other Gender)	
Male	1.544*** (0.587, 2.501)
Female	1.482*** (0.529, 2.435)
Perceived Negative Economic Context*Conservative	-0.020 (-0.420, 0.380)
Perceived Negative Economic Context*NDP	0.387* (-0.057, 0.832)
Perceived Negative Economic Context*Bloc Quebecois	0.761* (-0.013, 1.535)
Perceived Negative Economic Context*Green Party	0.071 (-0.710, 0.851)
Perceived Negative Economic Context*Independent	0.648* (-0.001, 1.296)
Perceived Negative Economic Context*Other Party	-0.177 (-0.715, 0.360)
Constant	1.623*** (0.649, 2.597)
Observations	1,094
R <sup>2</sup>	0.096
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.083
Residual Std. Error	1.263 (df = 1077)
F Statistic	7.161*** (df = 16; 1077)
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 6: Effect of Perceived Negative Economic Context on Sociotropic Job Threat From Immigration (Interaction Terms)

	Sociotropic Job Threat From Immigration
Perceived Negative Economic Context	0.095 (-0.166, 0.357)
Partisanship (ref = Liberal)	
Conservative	0.540*** (0.245, 0.834)
NDP	-0.370** (-0.696, -0.044)
Bloc Quebecois	-0.240 (-0.817, 0.337)
Green Party	0.430 (-0.146, 1.005)
Independent	-0.424* (-0.907, 0.058)
Other Party	0.588*** (0.211, 0.964)
Age	-0.012*** (-0.017, -0.008)
Gender (ref = Other Gender)	
Male	1.718*** (0.731, 2.706)
Female	1.591*** (0.607, 2.574)
Perceived Negative Economic Context*Conservative	-0.020 (-0.433, 0.392)
Perceived Negative Economic Context*NDP	0.203 (-0.255, 0.661)
Perceived Negative Economic Context*Bloc Quebecois	0.820** (0.006, 1.634)
Perceived Negative Economic Context*Green Party	-0.261 (-1.074, 0.553)
Perceived Negative Economic Context*Independent	0.778** (0.108, 1.447)
Perceived Negative Economic Context*Other Party	-0.251 (-0.809, 0.307)
Constant	1.356*** (0.351, 2.361)
Observations	1,091
R <sup>2</sup>	0.089
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.076
Residual Std. Error	1.303 (df = 1074)
F Statistic	6.565*** (df = 16; 1074)

Note:

\*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01