

Links between Anti-Immigrant Bias and Racial Prejudice in California

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California is known for its progressive politics and diverse constituency. This reputation, however, might conceal lingering exclusionary sentiment among Californians. A statewide survey by the Othering & Belonging Institute at UC Berkeley shows that even among racial groups with large immigrant populations, anti-immigrant sentiment persists. Why do ethnic/racial groups with high proportions of immigrants have relatively high levels of anti-immigrant sentiment? And how do anti-immigrant sentiments relate to other forms of bias?

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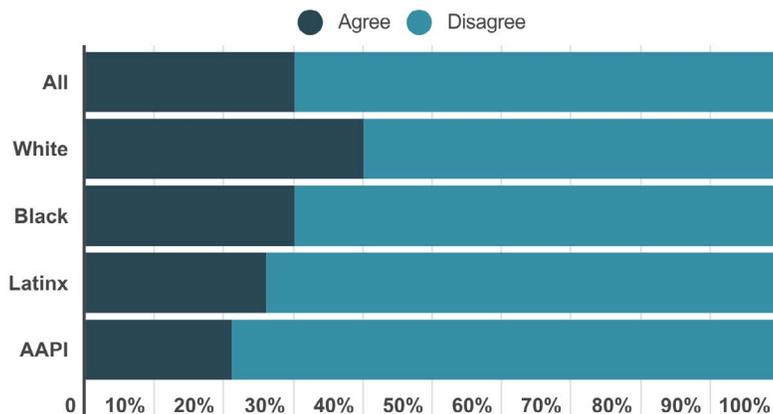


Figure 1. Survey responses by respondents' race/ethnicity, as reported by Mora and Paschel (forthcoming).

But how does this anti-immigrant bias relate to other forms of bias?

After examining the survey results on anti-immigrant attitudes in California, this policy brief will draw on BIMI-affiliate G. Cristina Mora's analysis of the data¹ to help answer these important questions.

Anti-Immigrant Sentiment in California

Thirty percent of Californians believe that immigrants² are a burden to the U.S. You might assume that racial groups with a large proportion of immigrants would *not* be among these respondents—however, one in four Latinx respondents and one in five Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) respondents agreed with the statement, “Immigrants today are a burden on our country because they take jobs, housing, and health care.”

Another part of the Othering and Belonging Survey measured Californians' views on the disadvantages faced by immigrants. Respondents were asked to rate their agreement with statements like, “It's really a matter of some people not trying hard enough;

¹ Mora, G. Cristina and Tianna Paschel. Forthcoming. “Anti-Blackness as a Logic for Immigrant Resentment: Evidence from California.” Sociological Forum.

² For reference, 27 percent of all people residing in California are foreign-born, according to the American Community Survey 2018 5-Year Estimates. Among California AAPIs, 62 percent are foreign-born. Among Latinx Californians, 35 percent are foreign-born. Among non-Hispanic white Californians, 9 percent are foreign-born. Among non-Hispanic Black Californians, 7 percent are foreign-born.

if immigrants today would only try harder they could be just as well off as whites.” An analysis by associate professors of sociology G. Cristina Mora and Tianna Paschel shows that 12 percent of Californians strongly believe that immigrants do not face structural barriers to social mobility and that there is no need for programs or policies to aid immigrants. Again, one might expect that Latinx and AAPI respondents would sympathize with immigrants’ situation in the U.S. Mora and Paschel find, however, that the racial group expressing the most support for programs to aid immigrants is the racial group with the *lowest* share of immigrants: Black Americans. The findings may suggest that material self-interest has little to do with support for progressive immigrant integration policy.

Proportion Strongly Opposing Structural Support for Immigrants

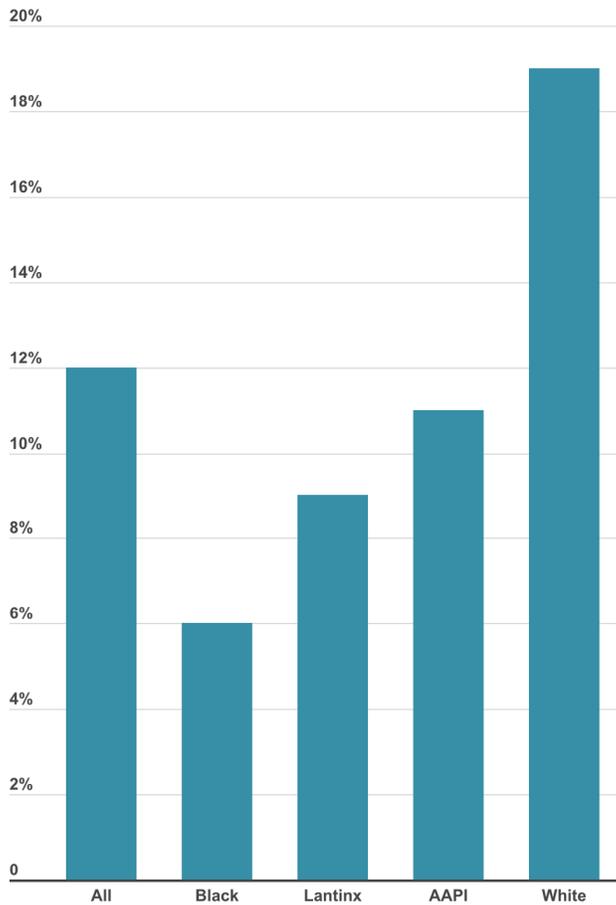


Figure 2. Proportion of respondents who strongly believe that immigrants do not face structural obstacles and do not need special assistance, by race/ethnicity, as reported by Mora and Paschel (forthcoming).

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Explaining Anti-Immigrant Sentiment

Although the Othering & Belonging Institute’s survey cannot explain the *causes* of anti-immigrant sentiment, it can tell us about the factors that are correlated with anti-immigrant sentiment. Homeownership, affiliation with the Republican Party, and older age are all correlated with anti-immigrant bias.

Dr. Mora and Dr. Paschel analyzed the data to see how anti-immigrant sentiment might be linked to bias against a group that is typically not associated with immigration: Black Americans.

Mora and Paschel find that anti-Black attitudes are highly correlated with anti-immigrant attitudes, even when controlling for variables like age, race, homeownership, level of contact with various racial groups, and political affiliation. A respondent who believes that Black Americans are “extremely unintelligent” is three times as likely to believe that immigrants are a burden on the country. Similarly, strongly believing that Black Americans do not face structural barriers to success is linked to a *four-fold increase* in the likelihood of believing that immigrants are a burden. By comparison, *nativist* attitudes—including the belief that you have to be U.S.-born to be a “true” American—are less strongly correlated to anti-immigrant bias.³ According to Mora and Paschel, these results challenge the assumption that anti-immigrant bias is “exclusively, or even primarily, about national origin.”

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³ Nativist attitude, in this study, also includes the beliefs that being Christian and “blend[ing] into larger society” are necessary to be a “true American” (Mora and Paschel forthcoming).



Combating Prejudice with Education and Coalition-building

These findings suggest that the underlying worldview that leads people to hold anti-immigrant views is the same as that which leads people to hold anti-Black views. For activists and educators interested in reducing the prevalence of prejudice in California, this research has two implications. First, persuasive and pedagogical strategies should address the foundational logics that biased beliefs are built on, rather than try to prove that negative stereotypes about immigrants or Black Americans are factually incorrect. Second, immigrant and Black communities across the Golden State could benefit from building coalitions to combat bias and the byproducts of prejudice.

When it comes to reducing prejudice through education, research shows that sensitivity training and courses on cultural diversity often backfire in their attempts to reduce students' bias. Instead, UC Berkeley psychologist Professor Rodolfo Mendoza-Denton suggests teaching students about the psychology and neuroscience of prejudice, so that students can begin to address their own prejudiced assumptions and mental shortcuts. Research shows that learning about how the brain works increases self-awareness,⁴ and prompts students to adopt a growth mindset,⁵ which in turn makes students more able to meet challenges.⁶ Knowledge about the brain, Dr. Mendoza-Denton argues, builds a basis upon which we can begin to interrogate and “challenge deeply rooted negative attitudes,”⁷ whether those negative attitudes are directed against immigrants or racial groups.

Coalition-building between Black Americans and immigrants could draw inspiration from the Black Alliance for Just Immigration (BAJI), an Oakland-based organization whose work centers on bringing together “African American and black immigrant communities to organize and advocate for racial, social and economic justice.” BAJI chapters have sprung up across the nation, from Oakland and Los Angeles to New York and Miami. This illustrates the resonance of BAJI’s argument that the anti-immigrant movement threatens “the gains of the Civil Rights Movement” and “racial equity and human rights”⁸ more broadly. Latinx and AAPI communities, which reported significant levels of anti-immigrant sentiment, might benefit from building coalitions that similarly educate and connect immigrant and non-immigrant members in support of one another’s goals. Armed with knowledge on the entanglement of racist and nativist prejudice, calls for solidarity may resonate more powerfully than ever before.

4 Kuyken, Willem, Ed Watkins, Emily Holden, Kat White, Rod S. Taylor, Sarah Byford, Alison Evans, Sholto Radford, John D. Teasdale, and Tim Dalgleish. 2010. “How Does Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy Work?” *Behaviour Research and Therapy* 48(11):1105-12.

5 Blackwell, Lisa S., Kali H. Trzesniewski, and Carol S. Dweck. 2007. “Implicit Theories of Intelligence Predict Achievement Across an Adolescent Transition: A Longitudinal Study and an Intervention.” *Child Development* 78(1):246-63.

6 Dweck, Carol S. and Ellen L. Leggett. 1988. “A Social-Cognitive Approach to Motivation and Personality.” *Psychological Review* 95(2):256-73.

7 Mendoza-Denton, Rodolfo. 2011. “The Top 10 Strategies for Reducing Prejudice.” *Greater Good Magazine*. January 3, 2011. https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/top_10_strategies_for_reducing_prejudice.

8 Black Alliance for Just Immigration. n.d. “Who We Are.” Retrieved May 2, 2020. <http://baji.org/who-we-are/>.



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