



The Relationship Between State Foreign-Born Population Share and Immigration Attitudes

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Introduction

- With immigrants comprising 15.4% of the U.S. population, immigration has become one of the most politically salient issues in American politics. (Pew Research Center 2025).
- Although prior research indicates that immigration attitudes are dependent on individual-level characteristics, evidence on how state-level immigrant proportion shapes residents' attitudes across multiple dimensions is limited. (Brader, Valentino, Suhay 2008).
- Drawing on the contact hypothesis, this study examines whether proximity to immigrant populations, through state-level foreign-born population data, is associated with favorable attitudes across four immigration opinion metrics.

Research Questions

- Is state foreign-born population share associated with residents' immigration attitudes across four dimensions; (1) preferred immigration levels, (2) economic perceptions, (3) cultural expectations, and (4) support for a citizenship pathway?
- Does this association persist after controlling for (1) age, (2) education level, and (3) household income?

Methods

- Respondents (n = 4,295) were drawn from the **2024 American National Election Study (ANES)**, a nationally representative survey conducted during the 2024 election year via inperson, telephone, and paper interviews. State-level foreign-born proportions were obtained from the **U.S. Census Bureau ACS** and categorized into five quintiles: Very Low (<6%), Low (6–10%), Medium (10–15%), High (15–20%), and Very High (>20%).
- Response variables measuring immigration attitudes were used across; (1) **immigration levels**: should levels be increased or decreased? (1=increased a lot to 5=decreased a lot), (2) **economic perceptions**: are immigrants good or bad for America's economy? (1=extremely good to 7=extremely bad), (3) **cultural adaptation**: how important is immigrant adaptation to U.S. customs? (1=not at all to 5=extremely important), and (4) **citizenship pathway**: favor or oppose a path to citizenship for unauthorized immigrants? (binary: favor/oppose)
- Binary response variables indicating support or opposition were constructed for each metric. In addition, the models of the relationship controlled for (1) **age** (continuous), (2) **household income** (1= Under \$9,999 to 6=\$250,000 or more), and (3) **education** (1=less than high school to 5=graduate degree).

Results

Bivariate

- Chi-square analysis showed that support for **decreasing immigration levels** ($X^2=28.29$, $df=4$, $p<.0001$), and **increasing immigration levels** ($X^2=23.18$, $df=4$, $p<.0001$) were significantly associated with foreign-born population share. Viewing immigrants as **good for the economy** ($X^2=74.44$, $df=4$, $p<.0001$) and **bad for the economy** ($X^2=30.075$, $df=4$, $p<.0001$) were also significantly associated.
- Chi-square analysis further showed that only **support for a citizenship pathway** ($X^2=27.05$, $df=4$, $p<.0001$) was significantly associated with foreign-born population share, and views on cultural adaptation were not significantly associated.

Multivariate

- Multiple logistic regressions showed that, after controlling for education, income, and age, the foreign-born share effect remained significant across **immigration levels and economic views**.
- Residents of Very High states retained 36% lower odds of wanting to **decrease immigration** (O.R.=0.64, CI 0.52–0.79, $p<.001$) and 97% higher odds of viewing immigrants as **good for the economy** (O.R.=1.97, CI 1.57–2.47, $p<.0001$) compared to Very Low states.
- In terms of control variables, **education** was the strongest across all models. **Age** was significantly associated with immigration levels and citizenship attitudes, but not with economic perceptions. **Income** was not significant in any model.

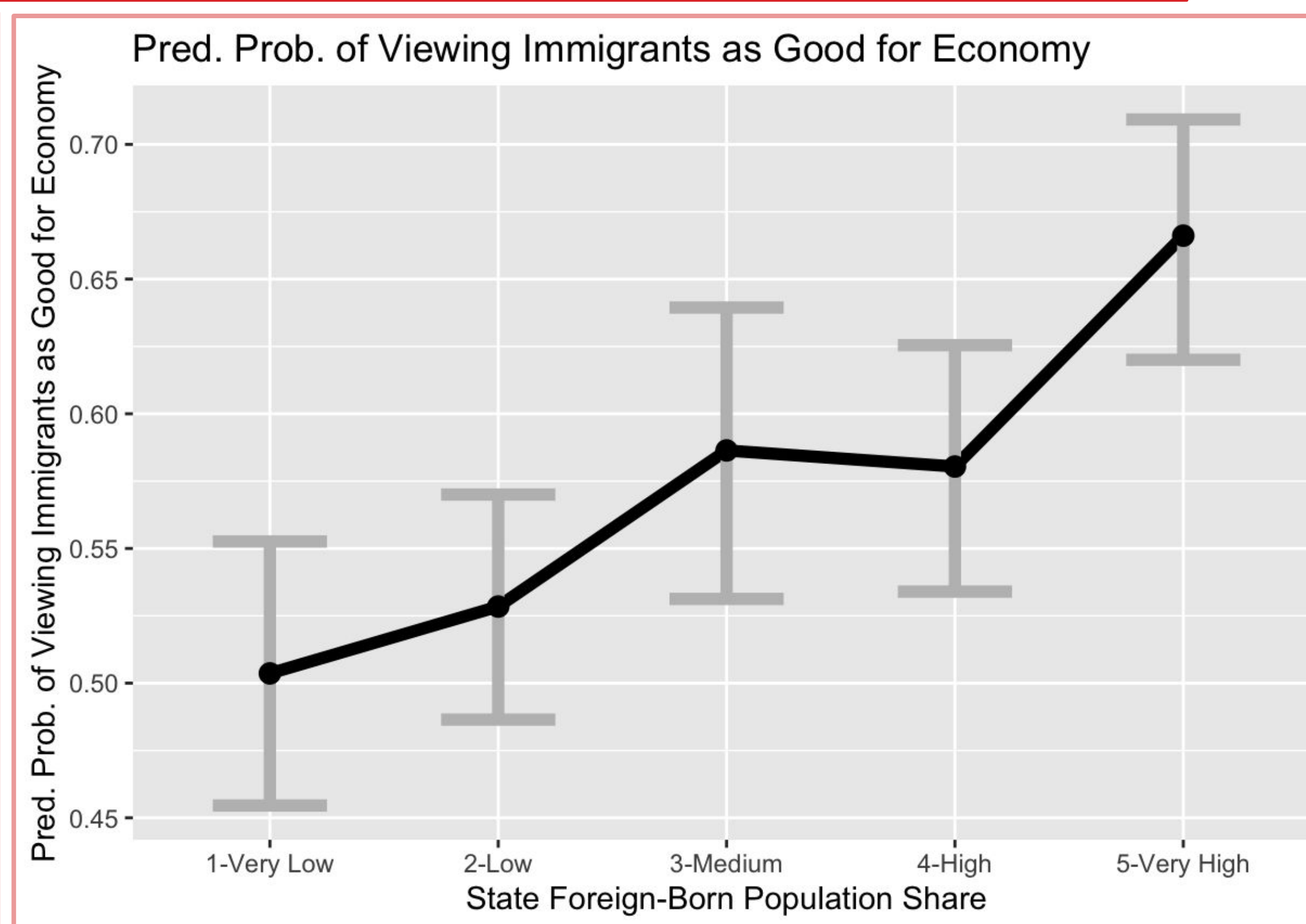


Figure 1 - Multiple Logistic Regression Plot of Viewing Immigrants as Good For Economy

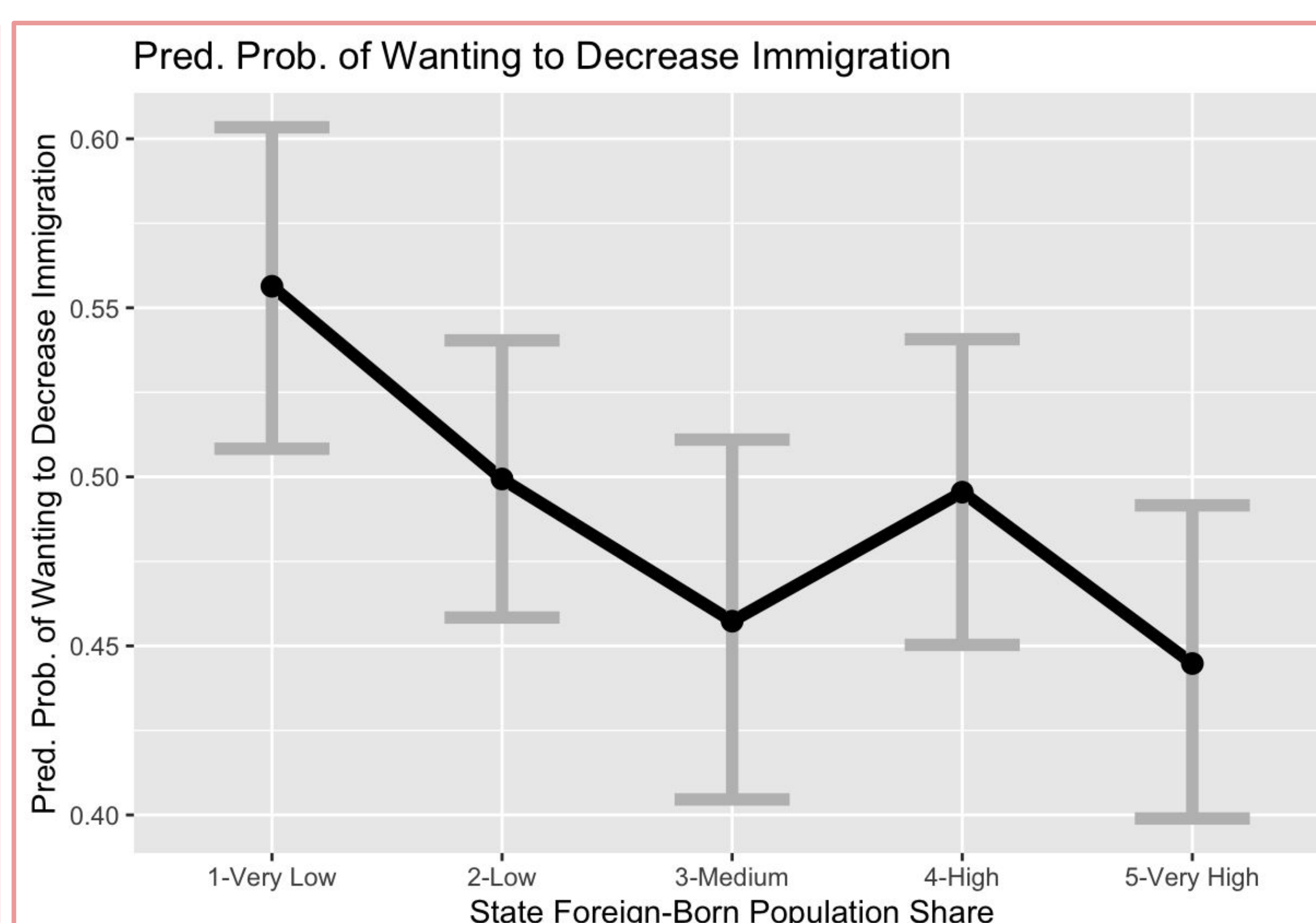


Figure 2 - Multiple Logistic Regression Plot of Supporting the Decrease of Immigration Levels

Discussion

- Residents of states with higher foreign-born population shares are significantly more likely to want **immigration increased** and view immigrants as **good for the economy**, and **vice versa** for both immigration levels and economy.
- The foreign-born population association **holds** even after controlling for age, education, and household income, suggesting that demographics shape immigration views beyond individual characteristics, consistent with the contact hypothesis. Notably, **income became insignificant** once accounting for education and age, challenging the economic hypothesis.
- This analysis is observational, and isn't causal. It **may reflect residential self-sorting**, and future research should analyze rate of immigration and causal mechanisms.

References

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