



# What Immigration Issues Do Americans Hold Sacred?

*A Psychological Journey Into  
American Attitudes Toward Immigrants*

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## About the Authors

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## About the Center for Inclusion and Belonging

The American Immigration Council's Center for Inclusion and Belonging houses the signature culture and narrative change programs of the Council. The Center also convenes institutions and individuals nationwide who share the common goal of building a more cohesive America where all people are welcomed and included.

## About Over Zero

Over Zero works to prevent and reduce identity-based violence and other forms of group-targeted harm. Over Zero provides trainings and strategic advising, incubates promising approaches, and connects cross-sector research to practice.

## Executive Summary

### Understanding how deeply we hold our immigration stances may matter as much as what our stances are.

When it comes to immigration research in the United States, mainstream media coverage and policy analysis have traditionally focused on more top-line public opinion and what is revealed through polling. Average public polling is useful as a means of identifying which Americans are pro- or anti-immigration. It can explain *what* people feel or want, but it is unable to explain *why* they feel that way or how deeply they hold that position. It has also therefore been unable to suggest meaningful strategies for intervention or change.

This report and the interdisciplinary survey on which it is based sought to overcome these limitations by digging deeper into how respondents think about immigration issues. Our goal was to assess U.S. citizens' **mental models** of immigration, i.e., their beliefs and attitudes towards it, but also their perceptions of the risks and benefits it poses. Broadly, we asked: In what ways do their beliefs and values interact with their perceptions of immigration? **How and why do U.S. citizens hold the immigration attitudes that they do?**

Our attitudes about immigrants are wrapped up not only with our personal characteristics, life experiences, and beliefs about a wide range of other issues, they are also integrally shaped by our **social identities**. For instance, we are galvanized when a social group that we feel a part of is under threat. Amidst today's toxic polarization, for example, both liberals and conservatives feel threatened by the other. We are also influenced by the emotions and stances our social groups have or take towards an issue (**group norms**). People often think and act in accordance with perceived group norms rather than rely on their own individual attitudes or beliefs. Lastly, both threat and the influence that group norms have on us feel even more powerful when our group affiliations overlap (e.g., say one is white, evangelical, and conservative, and that each of those groups shares the same life situations, threat perceptions and policy stances).

Research shows that when perceived threat and social identity become involved, our policy stances can become **sacralized**, transforming into absolutist, moralized, non-negotiable values. These sacred values do not operate like regular values, which can be reevaluated if one is willing to make trade-offs. Instead, sacred values are processed implicitly in the brain, outside of our conscious awareness or control.



**Social identity** is a person's sense of who they are based on their group membership(s).

**Group norms** are the informal rules that govern behavior in a group. They set expectations of how to behave, whether in terms of eating a meal or interacting with outsiders.

For example, imagine someone offered you \$5,000 to sell your child. Would you be utterly offended and reject the offer or would you try to negotiate for more money? If your answer is the former, then you have identified a sacred value.

Being able to identify sacred values is critical because they must be handled differently than regular values. Rational arguments will fail (try convincing an average mother that it makes sense to give up her child). Indeed, attempts to bargain over a sacralized issue will often evoke moral outrage, and even lead to disengagement or the embrace of violence.

Instead, **sacred values must be acknowledged with respect**. If they are not central to an issue, they must be avoided; if they are central to an issue, it may be possible to reframe them – but they can never be negotiated by using incentives or disincentives.

Given the all-or-nothing nature of sacred values, it is important to understand whether immigration issues in the United States have become sacralized, and if so, by whom. In other studies, immigration issues like family separation, a U.S.-Mexico border wall, or deportation of undocumented people have elicited strong emotional reactions, and the language used to describe stances on these issues is often morally absolutist. To date, however, no other studies have examined the public's willingness to make trade-offs on them.

## Method

We surveyed a nationally representative sample of 1,370 U.S. citizens in mid-March 2020, assessing each respondent's stance on 14 main issues that are discussed in the immigration debate today (see sidebar, next page). For each issue, respondents were asked to select which of two stances was closer to their own. For example, on the issue of Asylum:

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**A** “We should *increase* the number of asylum seekers allowed into the country,”

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or

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**B** “We should *decrease* the number of asylum seekers allowed into the country.”

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Respondents then rated how much the stance mattered to them. Those who selected “a lot” or “totally,” were asked to write for two minutes about why their chosen stance resonated so strongly, and to decide whether they'd be willing to make a monetary trade-off (up to \$100 million) to take an action *against* that stance.



After assessing their willingness to make trade-offs on their immigration stances, respondents rated their agreement with taking various civic and political actions (activism), and then responded to demographic questions.

For each issue, we categorized the stances as more **open** (typically more welcoming and generous toward immigrants, like option A) and more **restrictive** (typically more focused on protecting U.S. citizens and American law and resources from outsiders, like option B).

In case we found that immigration stances were sacred values, we designed the survey so we would also be able to explain why. We asked additional questions related to:

- **Perceptions of immigration threat** (in terms of economy, security, identity, and demographic makeup);
- **Sense of social belonging** (measures for: perceived social support; level of community engagement; and, “social sorting”—the extent to which one’s various social identities overlap, reinforcing one’s exposure to a more narrow range of information and group norms);
- **Social rejection** (perceived alienation within one’s community, the experience of discrimination);
- **Ideology and beliefs** (political ideology; marginalization, i.e., feeling like a stranger in America given the changes that have occurred in the political landscape, or feeling afraid to share one’s views because of the backlash one will surely receive; belief that minority groups are unfairly favored; belief that some groups should naturally be above others in the social hierarchy; beliefs that life and resources are zero sum); and,
- **Demographics** (gender, age, income, race, education, proximity to an urban area, exposure to stressors, contact with immigrants, etc.).

#### 14 Immigration Issues Surveyed

Allow or punish sanctuary cities
Make undocumented/illegal immigration punishable by civil or criminal offense
Increase or decrease asylum
Make citizenship available to any eligible immigrant or only to English-speaking immigrants
Make citizenship available to any eligible immigrant or only to those who would not use benefits
Reduce or increase legal immigration
Uphold or revoke the Muslim ban
Provide a pathway to citizenship for DACA recipients or deport them
Deport all undocumented/illegal immigrants or only those who pose a security threat
Be a nation of immigrants or try to preserve a white and Christian culture
Make public benefits available only to legal immigrants, or also to undocumented/illegal immigrants
Continue or stop family separations
Build the U.S.-Mexico border wall or stop building it
Stop undocumented/illegal immigration or shift our focus to improving the functioning of our existing immigration system

## Findings

### U.S. citizens consider immigration issues sacred values.

- **All 14 immigration issues in this study are considered sacred values by significant percentages of the survey sample, by those on both the right and the left.**
  - The issue of Family Separation is sacralized the most—56% of the survey sample sacralizes either the open stance (“stop family separation”) or the restrictive stance (“continue family separation”).
  - The issue of Sanctuary Cities is sacralized the least—34% of the sample sacralizes either the open stance (“allow sanctuary cities”) or the restrictive stance (“punish sanctuary cities”).
- **Open immigration stances are generally sacralized by greater portions of the survey sample than restrictive stances.**
  - The most sacralized position on the open stance list—“stop family separation”—is held by 47% of the survey sample.
  - The most sacralized stance on the restrictive stance list—“withhold public benefits to unauthorized immigrants”—is sacralized by 33% of the survey sample.
  - Open immigration stances may have been more sacralized because they were under greater threat (i.e., a conservative government focused on restrictive immigration policies). In scientific studies threat predicts greater sacralization of one’s values.
- **The ranking of open and restrictive sacred values differs.**
  - **The top three sacralized open stances are:**
    - › Stopping family separation (47%)
    - › Being a nation of immigrants (rather than preserving a white and Christian culture) (37%)
    - › Stopping construction of the border wall (33%)
  - **The top three sacralized restrictive stances are:**
    - › Withholding public benefits from unauthorized immigrants (33%)
    - › Stopping undocumented immigration (22%)
    - › Continuing to build the border wall (21%)



- **Liberals most often consider open immigration stances to be sacred, and conservatives most often consider restrictive immigration stances to be sacred, yet there is crossover.**
  - Conservatives considered 6 immigration stances to be sacred, on average; 3.8 of those stances were restrictive and 2.2 of them were open.
  - Liberals sacralized 7 stances; of these, 6 were open and 1 restrictive.
  - The open stances considered sacred by the greatest percentage of conservatives and right-leaning independents, respectively, are:
    - › Stopping family separation (26.9 and 22.3%)
    - › Honoring the U.S. tradition of being a nation of immigrants (29.9% and 22.3%)
    - › Creating a pathway to citizenship for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients (22.4% and 20.7%)
    - › Granting access to public benefits to anyone in the country (19.7% and 14.7%)
  - The restrictive stances considered sacred by the greatest percentage of liberals and left-leaning independents, respectively, are:
    - › Withholding public benefits from unauthorized immigrants (17.4% and 26.27%)
    - › Withholding citizenship from non-English-speaking immigrants (10.3% and 10.6%)
    - › Stopping undocumented immigration (8.8% and 9.4%)
- **Partisanship factors into how much one sacralizes.** As mentioned above, liberals have sacralized 7 immigration-related issues and conservatives have sacralized 6. This is a statistically significant difference. This partisan breakdown may be explained by the political status quo: past research shows that perceived threat causes sacralization and liberal immigration stances have been under attack throughout the Trump administration. Similarly, perceived threat may be less intense for those who identify as independent rather than Democrat or Republican because they may feel less under attack in mainstream rhetoric. Indeed, right-leaning and left-leaning independents sacralize 5 and 4.5 issues on average, respectively.



## Sacralization is primarily driven by perceived norms, and barely driven by demographics.

To identify the configuration of beliefs and attitudes related to immigration, an essential part of a mental-models approach, we assessed respondents' perceptions of immigration threat, factors related to their sense of social belonging and/or rejection, ideology (political, but also as regards social hierarchy and a zero-sum view of the world), and demographics.

- **The factor most strongly associated with sacralization of immigration stances—be they open or restrictive—was the perception that the stances are central to membership in one's political group.** A great deal of research has shown that norms influence people's behaviors, but this goes further. In this survey, partisan norms didn't just influence respondents' positions on immigration issues, they also influenced whether or not those issues were sacralized. The fact that an issue was perceived as central to one's political group thereby made it non-negotiable, possibly even transforming it into an implicitly processed moral rule.
- **The factors least likely to predict sacralization were demographic.** In fact, demographics were not strongly associated with the extent to which respondents sacralized open or restrictive immigration stances. While open-stance sacralization generally occurred more often for females and individuals who have experienced discrimination, and restrictive-stance sacralization generally occurred more often with an increase in age, **the inclusion of demographic factors added less than 1% of explanatory power to each of these statistical models.** This is a powerful finding because it means that the other components of the respondents' mental models—their threat perceptions, their social identities, their beliefs about hierarchy and fairness in today's society—are far better at explaining sacralization of immigration issues, and remain significant even when controlling for demographics.
- **There were notable differences in the factors associated with open- and restrictive-stance sacralization:** Respondents who hold high numbers of open stances as sacred values tend to be strongly engaged in their community, enjoy high levels of social support, and report experiences with discrimination. Respondents who hold high numbers of restrictive stances as sacred values tend to perceive high levels of economic and security threat due to immigration. They also tend to hold conservative ideological views, feel marginalized, believe minority groups are unfairly favored in today's America, and are more "socially sorted," meaning their social identities are strongly aligned with their partisan identity. Lastly, although adding only a very small contribution to the model, they are more likely to be restrictive-stance sacralizers as they increase in age.



## The more one sacralizes open immigration stances, the more activism one supports.

- **Note:** Approximately 21% of the survey sample said they would agree with joining, donating money to, or volunteering time at an organization that fights for their immigration positions, or driving an hour to attend a related rally or protest. Other factors associated with *increased* activism intent include: perceptions that holding one's open or restrictive immigration stances is central to membership in one's political group, high levels of community engagement, and more exposure to discrimination and life stressors. Factors associated with *decreased* activism intent include: feelings of alienation, the belief that the world is zero-sum, older age, and living further from an urban center.



## There are core values driving immigration-related sacred values.

We investigated the narratives behind open- and restrictive-stance sacralization by asking respondents why their sacred stances resonated so much for them. Here, we report findings from five key immigration issues: American Identity, Family Separation, DACA, Asylum, and Sanctuary Cities.

- **American Identity is sacralized by 43.3% of the survey sample.** With support from majorities across party lines, 85.5% of those who sacralize this issue take the more open stance. Narratives explaining this stance cite “*hypocrisy*” (our ancestors were immigrants), “*fairness*” (to all), the fact that immigrants help the United States “*progress*,” and “*positive experiences with immigrants*.” Only 14.5% of those who sacralize this issue support the more restrictive stance. These respondents cite the need to “*protect America*” from immigration-related threats to identity, security, and economic well-being, and focus on “*unfairness to Americans*.”
- **Family Separation is sacralized by 56.4% of the survey sample.** The 82.8% of those who sacralize this issue take the more open stance, and this includes 68.2% of liberals and 30.4% of conservatives. Those sacralizing the more open stance primarily cite “*moral outrage*” due to the “*harm and trauma*” the practice causes to the families who are forced to undergo it. Only 17.2% of respondents who sacralized Family Separation consider the more restrictive stance to be sacred (this includes 17.2% of conservatives and 1.7% of liberals), citing the fact that entering the country without documents is “*wrong and deserving of punishment*,” and emphasizing their belief that family separation is an “*effective deterrent*.”

### More Open Stance

“U.S. immigration policy should try to honor the American tradition of being a nation of immigrants.”

### More Restrictive Stance

“U.S. immigration policy should try to preserve an American culture of being white and Christian.”

### More Open Stance

“Stop the practice of separating families.”

### More Restrictive Stance

“Continue the practice of separating families.”

- **DACA is sacralized by 40.4% of the survey sample.** 20.7% of those who sacralize DACA consider the more restrictive stance to be sacred while 79.2%, composed of respondents from across party lines, sacralize the more open stance. Those who sacralized the open stance referenced the “*well-being of DACA recipients*,” who could experience physical or psychological danger if deported, and “*eligibility*,” since DACA recipients often grew up in the U.S. and have needed skills. Importantly, rationales for deporting DACA recipients are not characterized by perceptions of immigration threat; instead, they are characterized by “*Americans first*” (native-born and documented Americans should receive help before anyone else) and “*illegality*” (the idea that the moral justification for a DACA recipient’s status stems from legality). These respondents consider that the DACA recipients’ parents broke the law; since these respondents don’t wish to separate families, they believe that both parents and children should be deported.
- **Asylum is sacralized by 35.1% of the survey sample.** 50.7% of those who sacralize Asylum support the more open stance while 49.9% take the more restrictive stance. The more open and restrictive stances tend to gain their support from the left and right, respectively, with some crossover across parties. Those taking the more open stance cited America’s “*moral obligation*,” as a free country that has historically been a nation of immigrants, and emphasized that the United States has the physical and financial “*capacity*” to take in asylum seekers. Importantly, perceptions of immigration-related threat were not associated with restrictive-stance sacralization; instead, rationales for decreasing asylum seekers landed on themes of “*scarcity*,” “*unfairness to Americans*,” and “*legality*” (while people fleeing violence are deserving of protection, they must follow immigration laws and *not* come to the United States undocumented).
- **The issue of Sanctuary Cities is sacralized by 33.9% of the survey sample.** 54.6% sacralize the more restrictive stance and 45.4% sacralize the more open stance. In general, sacralized support for allowing sanctuary cities stems from liberal and left-leaning independents, while punishing is more often sacralized by conservative and right-leaning independents. That said, there is significant cross-partisan support for each stance. Those taking the more open stance cited “*federalist principles*” (that local governments have a right to set their own policies), “*universal humanity*” (a “they are us” narrative seen to be a core American value), and “*physical safety for immigrants*” (who, without sanctuary cities, would not have a safe place to live). Those taking the more restrictive stance cited legality and punishment (not following national law is a crime no matter who commits it), the idea that “*federal policy should overrule local policy*” (particularly in the domain of security), “*unfairness to Americans*” (who pay for immigrants’ health care and other services while sometimes not being able to access it themselves), and “*safety for Americans*” (focused on the danger posed by undocumented immigrants as criminals).

#### More Open Stance

“The U.S. should protect and support children of undocumented or illegal immigrants by offering them a path to citizenship.”

#### More Restrictive Stance

“The U.S. should deport the children of undocumented or illegal immigrants, even if they grew up here.”

#### More Open Stance

“We should decrease the number of asylum seekers we let into the country.”

#### More Restrictive Stance

“We should increase the number of asylum seekers we let into the country.”

#### More Open Stance

“We should allow local governments to create sanctuary cities.”

#### More Restrictive Stance

“We should punish local governments that create sanctuary cities.”

## Conclusion

Every single one of the 14 immigration issues assessed in this survey has become sacred to a significant proportion of the survey sample. Since these sacred values are animating public debate and policymaking in America today, it becomes easy to understand why (or is partially explained by the fact that) the rhetoric and dialogue around immigration is often uncompromising, moralized, and explosive.

The survey identified 14 mainstream immigration issues and broke each into an open and a restrictive stance. The more open stances were generally considered sacred by higher proportions of the population (this may be explained by the pre-election status quo: past research shows that perceived threat causes sacralization and liberal immigration stances were under attack throughout the Trump administration). The most sacralized open and restrictive stances differed in how they were ranked. In terms of partisanship, liberals currently average more sacred values than conservatives (7 versus 6).

While liberals and conservatives tend to sacralize open and restrictive stances, respectively, there is valuable crossover, or common ground. On average, conservatives sacralize 2 open stances, and liberals sacralize 1 restrictive stance. Thus, it is possible that certain values and beliefs transcend America's partisan identities; specifically, this appears to play out on stances such as “nation of immigrants,” “stop family separation” and “support pathway to citizenship for DACA recipients.”

In order to explain why U.S. citizens sacralize what they do, we created mental models for those who tend to sacralize open versus restrictive immigration stances and assessed them via four categories: perceived threat, social belonging, ideology/beliefs, and demographics. **Critically, those who are more likely to sacralize immigration issues—whether open or restrictive—have some things in common.**

First, perceived norms. The more respondents perceived that immigration issues were central to membership in their political group, the more issues they sacralized. Given this finding, it would be hard to exaggerate the influence of party leaders and party rhetoric, whether liberal or conservative. A second common predictor was “sortedness”—the greater the extent to which respondents' social and political identities were aligned (meaning they are less exposed to people and views that differ from theirs), the greater number of issues they sacralized.

That said, the worldviews of respondents who hold higher numbers of open versus restrictive sacred values differ in profound ways. Perhaps most importantly, those who sacralize higher numbers of restrictive (but not open) stances tend to report high levels of perceived threat due to immigration; they tend also to be older, endorse conservative ideological views, carry a feeling of marginalization in today's



America, and perceive that minority groups receive favoritism in today's society. The rationales they offer for their restrictive stances tend toward themes of protecting the country against immigrant crime, disease, or poverty; the importance of rule of law; and fairness to U.S. citizens. In contrast, those who hold a lot of open (but not restrictive) stances as sacred values do not report feeling threatened by immigration; they do report strong community engagement and feeling socially supported; and they have often experienced discrimination. Rationales for sacralizing open-stance immigration values tend toward themes of universal humanity and morality; fairness to all (versus just U.S. citizens); acknowledgment of America's history as a nation of immigrants; and appreciation for diversity as something that strengthens our country.

Lastly, sacralization matters beyond its implications for dialogue or negotiation—it also inspires action. This survey showed that survey respondents who sacralize more immigration issues are more willing to invest in immigration-related activism than those with fewer immigration-related sacred values.

## Recommendations

### Implications for Practice: Communicating or Negotiating with Someone Around a Sacred Value

Whether you are a member of the public who wants to communicate better with others across immigration divides, or an immigration advocate or professional, the findings in this report point to useful principles for effective communication. Note that we did not test these approaches; instead, they stem from the general literature on how to negotiate around sacred values.

First, identify whether the immigration issue under discussion is sacred to the other side. Once you know how deeply someone else holds their stance (i.e., is it just a value or a *sacred* value?), you have a better idea how to engage with them. This report provides initial data toward that end, although similar research may be needed periodically since shifts in the geopolitical, political, or cultural landscape may change how immigration issues are sacralized in the United States over time.

If you have identified an issue to be a sacred value, treat it differently than you might if it were a regular value or stance. Rather than jumping into debate, try to learn more about the mental models of the people you're dealing with—their beliefs, attitudes, threat perceptions, general sense of societal belonging, etc. Try to discover why they sacralize the issue. Do they, for example, perceive a threat to law and order or to universal rights? (These values are prominent for conservatives and liberals, respectively.) You might dig deeper, seeking to understand the *intention* behind the sacralization, which is often tied up in a sense of personal or nationalistic honor (e.g., protecting families or the nation, defending fairness). You might even affirm the sacralizer by acknowledging the intent behind their stance. Showing respect for the sacralizer and the values underlying the sacred stance should always be a priority.

People with sacred, opposing stances can work to discover core underlying values that both sides hold in common—and those values or perspectives can then be affirmed. If this common ground is found, a new dialogue can begin.



## Theoretical Framework

### What Are Sacred Values and Why Do They Matter?

Sacred values are moral imperatives that drive human behavior irrespective of a material goal.<sup>1</sup> They can have their basis in religion, as in the obligation to journey to Mecca if you are Muslim. They can also be secular, such as a transcendent commitment to security, the welfare of one's children, justice, or nationhood. Such values are "treat[ed] as possessing infinite or transcendental significance which precludes comparisons, trade-offs, or indeed any other mingling with founded or secular values."<sup>2</sup>

In the brain, sacred values are processed as moral rules, and the acts that stem from them are seen as duties or obligations rather than choices made by cost-benefit calculations.<sup>3</sup> Unlike the brain processing of cost-benefit decision-making, which occurs in the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex (dlPFC), sacred values are processed in the left temporoparietal junction (TPJ) and the ventrolateral prefrontal cortex (vlPFC), areas associated with rule-based behavior and the inhibition of negative emotions and inappropriate behaviors, respectively.<sup>4</sup>

What happens when material trade-offs are proposed in exchange for sacred values? In research comparing routine trade-offs (such as paying someone to clean their house) with "taboo" trade-offs (such as buying and selling body parts), participants responded to the taboo trade-offs with a cocktail of explosive emotions—such as anger, disgust, moral outrage, a need for moral cleansing, and a refusal to engage further with anyone involved.<sup>5</sup> These emotions<sup>6</sup> and the destructive, cost-insensitive reactions they manifest have since been coined *the backfire effect*.<sup>7</sup> In the Palestinian territories, when average Palestinians were asked to evaluate a deal whereby Europe would pay them billions of dollars to give up the right of return, they "quit" negotiations out of disgust. The same reaction came from average Iranians who stood to gain a massive economic package were they to give up nuclear energy in 2008.<sup>8</sup> In Afghanistan, India, Indonesia, Kurdistan, and Ireland, attempts to trump a sacred value with material offerings not only triggered negative responses, it bolstered respondents' adherence to their sacred value, and in some cases led to an increase in the endorsement of violence.<sup>9</sup>

In other studies, immigration issues like family separation, the border wall, or deportation of undocumented immigrants have elicited strong emotional reactions by at least one partisan side,<sup>10</sup> and the language used to describe those stances is often morally absolutist. To date, however, no other studies have examined the public's willingness to make trade-offs on them. That is our first goal in this study. It is important that we identify which issues are sacred, because if they are and we don't communicate wisely around them, the holders of such values are more likely to become "devoted actors" willing to disengage from dialogue or to fight and sacrifice for them.<sup>11</sup>

## Main Findings

### Immigration Stances Are Sacred Values for Significant Proportions of the U.S. Population

All 14 immigration issues included in the survey have been sacralized by a significant portion of the population. The sidebar tables on this page show the ranking of open and restrictive stances by percentage of the survey respondents for whom each stance is considered sacred. A high ranking indicates that the stance is a sacred value to more people.

For each issue, respondents were asked to select which stance was closer to theirs. The wording for each stance is shown below.

#### Fourteen Immigration-Related Issue Themes, Each With Two Polar Stances

More Open	More Restrictive
<b>Family Separation</b>	
Stop the practice of separating families, known as family separation, by jailing individuals who cross the border and holding their children in custody	Continue the practice of separating families, known as family separation, by jailing individuals who cross the border and holding their children in custody
<b>U.S.-Mexico Border Wall</b>	
We should NOT build the wall; there are better ways to limit illegal immigration into the U.S.	We should build the wall to protect America's southern border from illegal immigrants
<b>Public Benefits</b>	
Access to public benefits in the U.S.—such as education, Medicaid, and food stamps—should be made available to everybody, including undocumented or illegal immigrants	Access to public benefits in the U.S.—such as education, Medicaid, and food stamps—should be restricted to legal or documented immigrants
<b>Illegal Immigration</b>	
We should shift our focus away from trying to stop undocumented or illegal immigration and instead improve the functioning of our immigration system	We should stop undocumented or illegal immigration
<b>Deportation</b>	
The U.S. should deport undocumented or illegal immigrants <i>only</i> if they pose a threat to public safety	The U.S. should implement a mass deportation of all undocumented or illegal immigrants
<b>American Identity</b>	
U.S. immigration policy should try to honor the American tradition of being a nation of immigrants	U.S. immigration policy should try to preserve an American culture that is white and Christian
<b>Citizenship-English</b>	
Citizenship should be granted to any eligible immigrant	Citizenship should only be granted to eligible immigrants who learn to speak English

Sacred Values— More Open Stances	%
Family separation – Stop	46.7
Identity – Nation of immigrants	36.8
Border wall – Stop building	32.5
DACA – Pathway	32.4
Deportation – Threat only	29.4
Citizenship – Benefit use	25.8
Legal immigration – Increase	24.6
Illegal immigration – Fix system	23.3
Citizenship – English	22.4
Civil Offense	21.4
Muslim ban – Revoke	18.9
Asylum – Increase	17.8
Sanctuary Cities – Allow	15.4
Public Benefits – Available to all	13.1

Sacred Values— More Restrictive Stances	%
Public benefits – Withhold	32.8
Illegal immigration – Stop	21.5
Border wall – Continue to build	21.0
Muslim ban – Uphold	19.8
Citizenship – English	18.6
Sanctuary Cities – Punish	18.5
Asylum – Decrease	17.3
Deportation – Mass deport	13.9
Criminal Offense	13.9
Legal immigration – Reduce	13.1
Citizenship – No benefit use	12.2
Family separation – Continue	9.7
DACA – End/deport	8.4
Identity – white/Christian nation	6.5

## What Immigration Issues Do Americans Hold Sacred?

### A Psychological Journey into American Attitudes Toward Immigrants

More Open	More Restrictive
<b>DACA</b>	
The U.S. should protect and support children of undocumented or illegal immigrants by offering them a path to citizenship	The U.S. should deport the children of undocumented or illegal immigrants, even if they grew up here
<b>Muslim Ban</b>	
Revoke the “Muslim ban,” allowing the U.S. to once again admit refugees from a group of countries with Muslim majorities that are currently experiencing conflict (such as Iraq, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen).	Uphold the “Muslim ban,” which prevents the admittance of refugees from a group of countries with Muslim majorities that are currently experiencing conflict (such as Iraq, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen)
<b>Legal Immigration</b>	
We should increase legal immigration	We should reduce legal immigration
<b>Citizenship–Benefits</b>	
Citizenship should be granted to any eligible immigrant, regardless of whether they would use public benefits such as Medicaid and food stamps	Citizenship should only be granted to eligible immigrants who would not use public benefits such as Medicaid and food stamps
<b>Category of Offense</b>	
Undocumented or illegal immigration should be a minor offense punishable by fines or civil penalties	Undocumented or illegal immigration should be a criminal offense punishable by jail time
<b>Asylum</b>	
We should increase the number of asylum seekers we allow into the country.	We should decrease the number of asylum seekers we allow into the country
<b>Sanctuary Cities</b>	
We should allow local governments to create sanctuary cities, thereby setting their own public safety priorities and choosing to limit cooperation with federal immigration agencies	We should punish local governments that create sanctuary cities, thereby setting their own public safety priorities and choosing to limit cooperation with federal immigration agencies

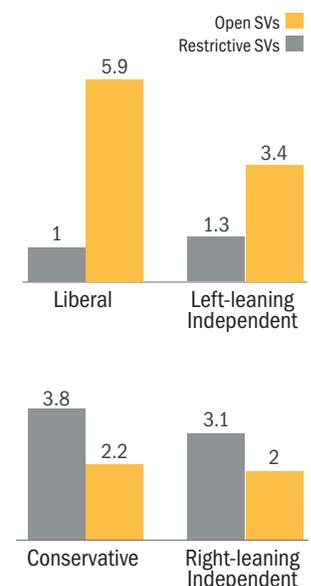
#### There are several observations worthy of note in these data.

- **First, the more open stances are sacralized at higher rates.** While the most sacralized position in the more open stance list, “stop family separation,” is held by 46.7% of the survey sample, the most sacralized restrictive stance, “withhold public benefits,” is held by 32.8%. Generally, the rate of sacralization is higher for almost all the more open stances than for the restrictive stances.
- **Second, restrictive and open stances are sacralized with different priority.** For example, “withhold public benefits from undocumented immigrants” is the most sacralized restrictive stance (32.8%), followed by “stop illegal immigration” (21.5%), “continue to build the wall” (21%), “uphold the Muslim ban” (19.8%) and “offer citizenship only to legal immigrants who speak English” (18.6%).

“Punish sanctuary cities” comes in a close sixth position (18.5%). The top five more open stances are: “stop family separation” (46.7%), “uphold an American identity of being a nation of immigrants” (36.8%), “stop building the wall” (32.5%), “support a “pathway to citizenship for DACA recipients” (32.4%), and “not deporting undocumented immigrants unless they are a security threat” (29.4%). Indeed, the only issue these lists hold in common is the border wall. Meanwhile, the least-sacralized stance on the restrictive list, “white/Christian nation,” is the second item on the open stance list; “public benefits” is first on the restrictive stance list, but at the bottom of the open stance list.

- Third, while the more open stances tend to be held most often by liberals, and vice versa for the more restrictive stances, we also observe a significant cross-over of issue support.** For instance, on average, liberals hold one restrictive stance sacred, left-leaning independents hold 1.3 restrictive stances sacred, conservatives hold 2.2 liberal stances sacred, and right-leaning independents hold 2 liberal stances sacred. The fact that conservatives and right-leaning independents sacralize at least 2 more open stances, on average, helps to explain why the more open stances are more sacralized.
- Last, partisanship factors into how many immigration issues are being sacralized, on average, with liberals sacralizing more than conservatives.** Respondents who identified as liberal average almost 7 sacred values, while conservatives average 6, right-leaning independents average 5, and left-leaning independents average just over 4.5 (see figure in sidebar). There is a statistically significant difference between the number of values sacralized by liberals and those sacralized by conservatives, but this makes sense from a threat perspective: Prior to the 2020 presidential election, conservatives held enough power to overturn liberal policies from within and beyond the immigration domain. That is, political threat was likely more salient for liberals than conservatives in the domain of immigration, and could have caused greater sacralization.

**Average Number of Sacred Values**  
Mean (Max=14)

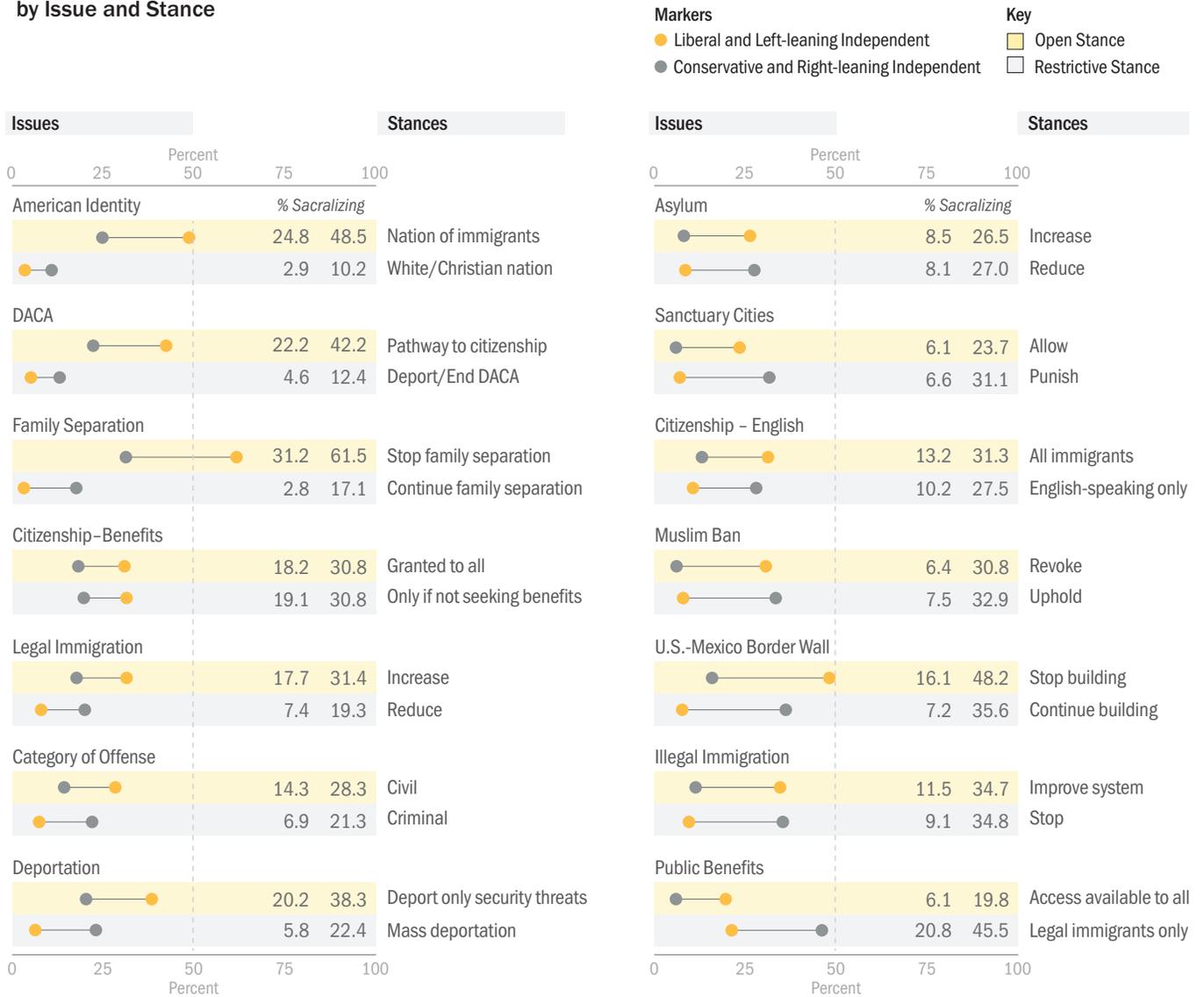


# What Immigration Issues Do Americans Hold Sacred?

*A Psychological Journey into American Attitudes Toward Immigrants*

This figure further illustrates crossover sacralization, by issue and stance. The top bars show sacralization breakdowns for the open immigration stances; the bottom bars show the breakdown for restrictive immigration stances. Note that the data points represent data from both liberals and left-leaning independents (gold markers), and from both conservatives and right-leaning independents (gray markers).

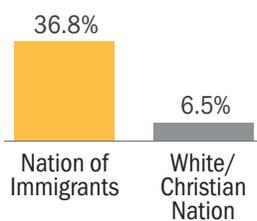
## Crossover Sacralization by Issue and Stance



## Looking Deeper: Understanding the Values Behind Sacralization by Examining Specific Immigration Issues

**Once an issue has been identified as sacred, it becomes important to understand why.** For example, think about the U.S.-Mexico border wall – there is nothing intrinsically sacred about the wall itself. Rather, it is what the wall is protecting (or harming), or how the wall is seen as just (or unfair) that has caused the wall to be sacralized by some. For any sacred value, therefore, it is important to ask, “What is the value *behind* the sacred value?” We asked survey respondents who identified a stance as mattering “a lot” or “totally” to write about why it resonated so much for them. We then coded and analyzed their open-ended responses. Below, we offer insights on the open- and restrictive-stance narratives behind five key immigration issues: American Identity, Family Separation, DACA, Asylum, and Sanctuary Cities.

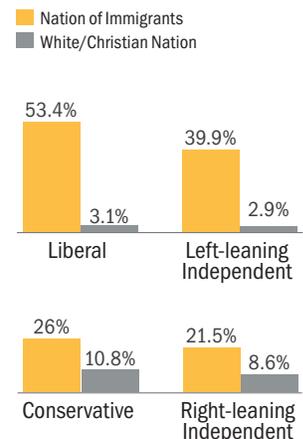
### American Identity



**43.3% of survey respondents sacralize immigration issues through the lens of American Identity.** Only 6.5% sacralize the more restrictive position, “U.S. immigration policy should try to preserve an American culture that is white and Christian,” while 36.8% (and 85.5% of all those sacralizing American Identity) are uncompromising about the more open

stance, “U.S. immigration policy should try to honor the American tradition of being a nation of immigrants.”

Indeed, the more open “nation of immigrants” stance resonates across party lines: *from every political category*, the majority of respondents who sacralize American Identity sacralize the “nation of immigrants” stance.



### Values Underlying the Sacralization of American Identity

#### “Honor the American tradition as a nation of immigrants”

Rationales for “honor the American tradition as a nation of immigrants,” the stance taken by 36.8% of survey respondents—the vast majority of those who sacralize American Identity—were based on the following four values:

1. **Moral history**—the idea that we shouldn’t exclude immigrants today given that our very own ancestors did not face such exclusion, and even then, we stole this land from Indigenous tribes.

2. **Fairness**—all humans deserve to be treated equally, and diversity makes us stronger.
3. **Progress and opportunity**—referencing how immigrants have helped the United States progress in multiple ways.
4. **Personal experience**—references to the respondent’s own experience as an immigrant, or having close friends or family who are immigrants, which made them unwilling to discriminate against “their group.”

We also analyzed the data to see if there were survey variables associated with respondents who sacralized the more open “nation of immigrants” stance.<sup>12</sup> Four factors were significantly and positively associated: one’s perception that the issue is central to membership in their political group, personal experience with discrimination, being older, and higher alienation scores. Two factors were negatively associated: the higher one scored on perceived immigration threat, and the belief that some groups in society should be above others.

#### *“Preserve a culture that is white and Christian”*

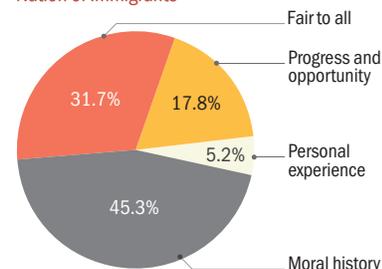
The 6.5% of survey respondents who sacralize “preserve a culture that is white and Christian” drew on the following three values in their rationales:

1. **Protection**—that American culture and religion needs to be safeguarded, and that crime and terror will be the consequence if the status quo is lost.
2. **Unfairness to Americans**—that immigrants, many of whom are lawbreakers, take away opportunities and services that should be reserved for U.S. citizens.
3. **Progress and opportunity**—referencing the “self-made American Dream,” and noting that immigrants who help the country progress should be let in.

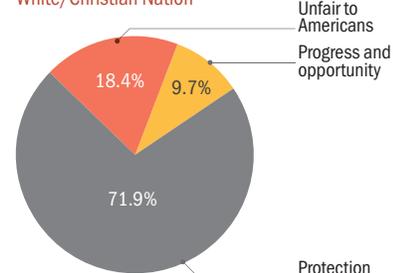
There were three survey variables positively associated with respondents who sacralized the more restrictive “white/Christian nation” stance:<sup>13</sup> norms, e.g., the perception that this value is central to membership in one’s political group; high perceived immigration threat; and concern over how COVID-19 will affect one’s community.

#### Values: American Identity

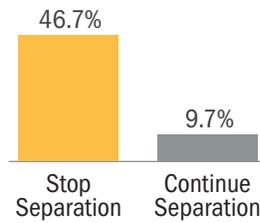
Nation of Immigrants



White/Christian Nation

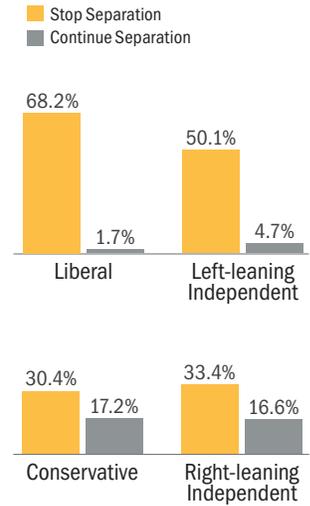


## Family Separation



**56.4% of survey respondents sacralize the issue of Family Separation.** Only 9.7% sacralize the restrictive stance, “continue the practice of separating families,” while 46.7% are uncompromising about the more open stance, “stop the practice of separating families.”

As with “nation of immigrants,” the “stop family separation” stance resonates across party lines: from every political category, the majority of respondents who sacralize this issue sacralize the “stop family separation” stance.



## Values Underlying the Sacralization of Family Separation

### “Stop the practice of separating families”

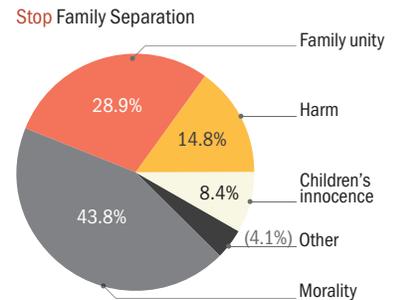
Rationales for “stop the practice of separating families,” the stance taken by 46.7% of the survey respondents (the vast majority who sacralize Family Separation) were based on the following four values:

1. **Morality**—that separating children from their families is cruel and a violation of human rights (many respondents drew these conclusions by putting themselves in the shoes of these families).
2. **Harm**—that the practice is both traumatic and harmful to children.
3. **Family Unity**—the belief that families belong together.
4. **Children’s Innocence**—the idea that children are innocent and should be protected, no matter the crimes of their parents.

The “stop family separation” stance received support from majorities on the left *and* the right. The most prominent codes from conservatives who sacralized “stop family separation” had to do with morality and harm—with statements that referenced shame, cited the cruelty of the practice, and emphasized the harm that would come to children and families as a whole.

There were two survey variables positively associated with one’s odds of sacralizing the more open “stop family separation” stance:<sup>14</sup> norms (e.g., one’s perception that the issue is central to membership in their political group), and being female. Factors that were negatively associated with sacralizing “stop family separation” included: perceiving immigration to be a threat, holding the beliefs that minority groups are favored in America today and that some groups in society should be above others, conservative ideology, and living further from an urban center.

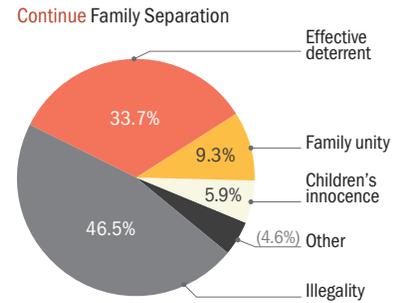
### Values: Family Separation



*“Continue the practice of separating families”*

Respondents who sacralize the “continue family separation” stance prioritize the following values:

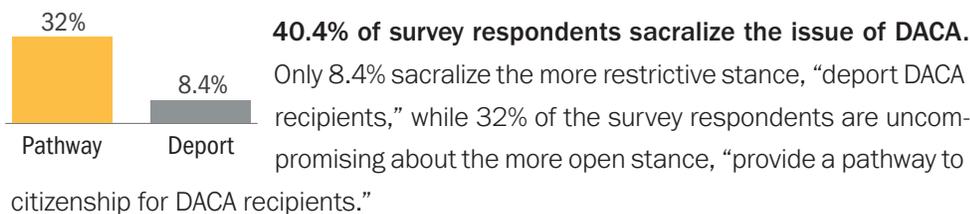
1. **Illegality**—focusing on the fact that entering the country without documentation is wrong and deserving of punishment.
2. **Effective Deterrent**—the idea that the policy is a justified and effective deterrent (many responses here were skeptical of adult intentions, arguing that these parents are simply using their children to gain access to the United States).



While respondents who sacralize “stop family separation” and “continue family separation” overlap on beliefs that children are innocent and families should be unified, they differ in that those holding the restrictive stance prioritize legality, and thus believe family unification should happen outside of U.S. borders.

There were four factors significantly and positively associated with one’s odds of sacralizing the restrictive “continue family separation” stance:<sup>15</sup> perceiving immigration as a threat, the belief that minority groups are favored in America, living further from an urban center, and social sorting (i.e., the extent to which one’s political, racial, and religious identities overlap). The more a respondent was engaged in their community, the less likely they were to sacralize this stance.

**DACA**

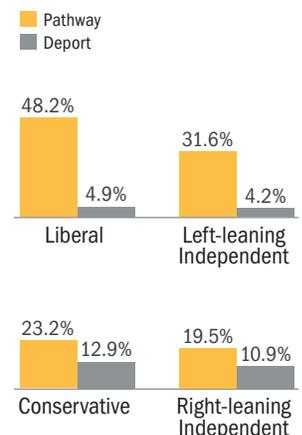


As with “nation of immigrants” and “stop family separation,” the “pathway” stance resonates across party lines: *from every political category*, the majority of respondents who sacralize this issue sacralize “pathway.”

**Values Underlying the Sacralization of DACA**

*“Provide a pathway to citizenship for DACA recipients”*

Rationales for “provide a pathway for DACA recipients,” the stance taken by 32% of respondents (the vast majority who sacralize DACA) were based on the following two values:



1. **Well-being**—the idea that DACA recipients are innocent and should be protected from physical or psychological danger (that could occur if deported).
2. **Eligibility**—the idea that DACA recipients largely grew up in the United States and belong here, have needed skills, and deserve the same opportunities as everyone else.

There were three factors significantly and positively associated with sacralizing the “pathway” stance:<sup>16</sup> sacralizing higher numbers of other open stances, perceiving that the “pathway” stance is central to membership in one’s political group, and the extent to which one’s political, racial, and religious identities overlap. The odds that someone would sacralize this stance decreased if they scored higher on the belief that society should be hierarchical, i.e., that some groups in society should be dominant over others.

“Deport DACA recipients”

Rationales for “deport DACA recipients,” the stance taken by 8.4% of respondents, were based on the following two values:

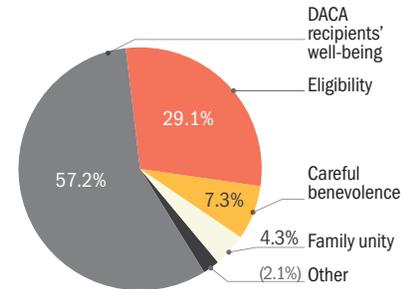
1. **Americans First**—the idea that “true” Americans should receive help before anyone else.
2. **Legality**—the idea that the moral justification for DACA recipients’ citizenship stems from legality, and their parents broke the law.

Sacralizers of both “pathway” and “deport” stances agreed on two values: *family unity*—the belief that families belong together (although for “pathway” stances this meant the whole family should be allowed to stay, and for “deport” stances this meant the whole family should be deported); and *careful benevolent*—meaning that DACA recipients should be allowed to stay under certain conditions (e.g., if they have not committed a crime, or have lived in the United States for at least 10 years, and only if they become citizens), in order to reconcile moral obligation with their concern for American safety and rule of law.

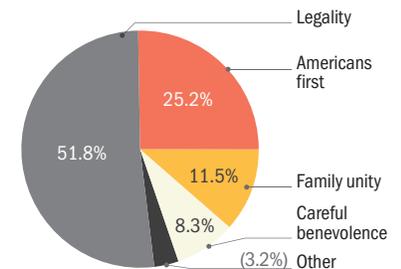
Two factors<sup>17</sup> were significantly and positively associated with sacralizing the more restrictive “deport DACA recipients” stance: sacralization of other restrictive stances and the perception that “deport DACA recipients” is central to their political group. The odds that someone would sacralize this stance decreased if they personally experienced discrimination.

Values: DACA

Provide a Pathway to Citizenship



Deport DACA Recipients



## Asylum

**35.1% of survey respondents consider Asylum a sacred value.** 17.3% sacralize the restrictive position, “We should decrease the number of asylum seekers we allow into the country,” while 17.8% are unwilling to compromise on the more open stance, “We should increase the number of asylum seekers we let into the country.”

In general, a majority of liberals and left-leaning independents sacralize “increase the number of asylum seekers,” while a majority of conservative and right-leaning independents sacralize “decrease the number of asylum seekers.” That said, minorities from each of these political groups sacralize the other side’s view.

### Values Underlying the Sacralization of Asylum

#### “Increase the number of asylum seekers allowed into the U.S.”

Rationales for “increase the number of asylum seekers allowed into the U.S.,” the stance taken by 17.8% of respondents, were based on the following two values:

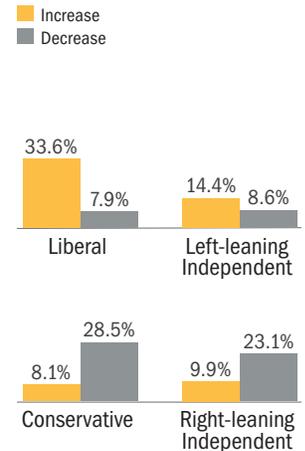
1. **Moral obligation**—these arguments drew upon our universal humanity and saw the United States as having an obligation, as a free country that has historically been a “nation of immigrants,” to shelter anyone seeking safe haven, assuming they are properly vetted.
2. **Capacity**—that America has the physical space and financial ability to take care of and provide opportunities for asylum seekers. Some respondents drew on religion or references to party leaders or factionalized politics to support their stance.

Three factors<sup>18</sup> were significantly and positively associated with sacralizing the more open “increase asylum” stance: sacralizing higher numbers of other (open) sacred values, norms (e.g., perceiving that “increase asylum” is central to membership in one’s political group), and social sorting (the extent to which one’s political, racial and religious identities overlap).

#### “Decrease the number of asylum seekers allowed into the U.S.”

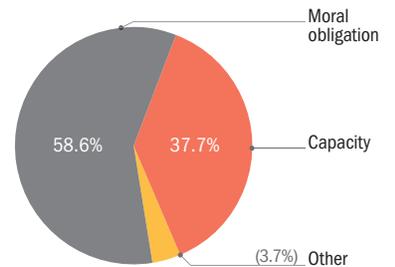
Respondents who sacralize a decrease in the number of asylum seekers admitted into the country, which includes 17.3% of the survey sample, reference the following four values in their rationales:

1. **Scarcity**—the idea that the United States is “full” and overpopulated as it is, unable to financially or physically support more people.

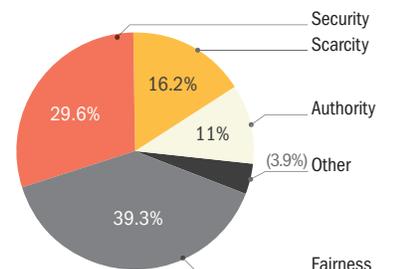


#### Values: Asylum

Increase the number of asylum seekers allowed



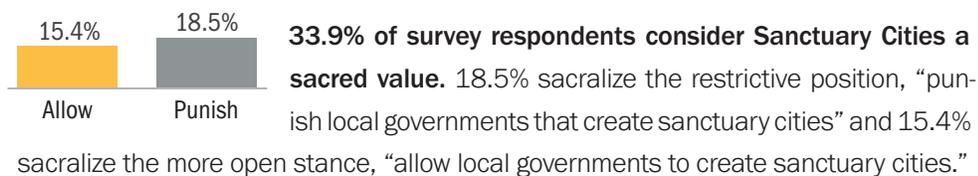
Decrease the number of asylum seekers allowed



2. **Unfairness to Americans**—views the tax burden of accepting asylum seekers and immigrants in general as too high, since there are U.S. citizens who cannot get the benefits to which they’re entitled.
3. **Security**—reporting a bias against or fear of foreigners (often Latin Americans or Muslims, specifically) who could bring crime or terror, and emphasizing how hard it is to distinguish between someone with good intentions and someone who is lying.
4. **Legality**—which often reflected the notion that people fleeing violence are innocent and deserving of protection but must follow immigration laws and *not* come to the United States as an undocumented immigrant.

Three survey factors<sup>19</sup> were significantly and positively associated with sacralizing the more restrictive “decrease asylum” stance: sacralization of other restrictive stances, norms (e.g. the perception that decreasing asylum is an issue central to membership in their political group), perceived immigration threat, and increased age.

## Sanctuary Cities



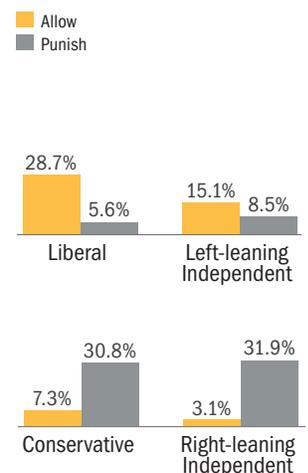
In general, sacralized support for “allow sanctuary cities” stems from liberal and left-leaning independents, while “punish sanctuary cities” is more often sacralized by conservative and right-leaning independents. That said, minorities from each of these political groups cling strongly to the opposite view.

## Values Underlying the Sacralization of Sanctuary Cities

### “Allow local governments to create sanctuary cities.”

The 15.4% of respondents who sacralize “allow local governments to create sanctuary cities” reference the following three values in their rationales:

1. **Local power is greater than federal**—arguing that, since the founding federalist principles of this country, local governments have a right to set their own policies. Many linked this to a perception that national leadership is being racist and callous toward immigrants.



2. **Universal humanity and equality**—these arguments took a “they are us” frame, relying on a position of universal humanity for all people; many saw this as a core American value, which, if eschewed, would be un-American.
3. **Safety for Immigrants**—focused on the physical safety of undocumented immigrants if they do not have a safe place to live; some posited that U.S. immigration officials are the ones endangering immigrants.

Two survey factors were significantly and positively associated with sacralizing “allow sanctuary cities”:<sup>20</sup> sacralizing higher numbers of other open sacred values, and norms (e.g., perceiving that “allow” is central to membership in one’s political group).

### “Punish local governments that create sanctuary cities”

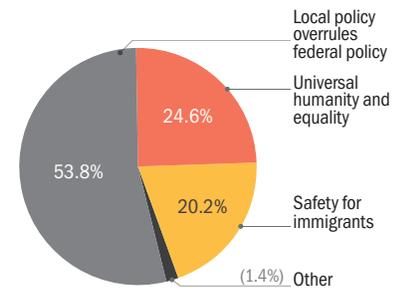
The 18.5% of respondents who sacralize “punish local governments that create sanctuary cities” reference the following four values in their rationales:

1. **Legality and punishment**—which invoked the idea that not following the law is a crime no matter who commits it, thus dissenting local governments deserve punishment in the form of no (or decreased) federal aid.
2. **Federal power is greater than local**—the idea that federal policy should overrule local policy, particularly in the domain of security; this idea relied on the notion that we need strong central control over immigration.
3. **Unfairness to Americans**—the idea that U.S. citizens are paying for undocumented immigrants’ healthcare and other services via taxes, while many cannot access those benefits for themselves.
4. **Safety for Americans**—focused on the danger posed by undocumented immigrants as criminals and potential terrorists, but some noted the slippery slope created by the establishment of sanctuary cities; e.g., if one federal law doesn’t have to be followed, what could be next?

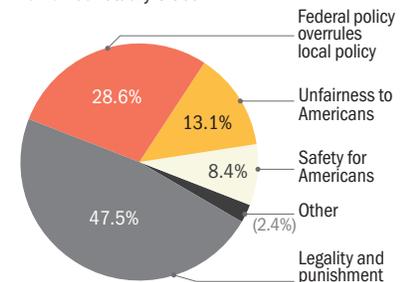
Two survey factors were significantly and positively associated with sacralizing the more restrictive “punish” stance:<sup>21</sup> sacralization of other restrictive stances and norms (e.g., the perception that punishing sanctuary cities is central to their political group). The likelihood that a respondent would sacralize this stance decreased the more they expressed feeling like a stranger in America due to changes in the political landscape.

### Values: Sanctuary Cities

#### Allow Sanctuary Cities



#### Punish Sanctuary Cities



## Explaining Sacralization

In addition to identifying immigration-related sacred values in the United States today, we also wanted to characterize those most likely to sacralize open versus restrictive stances by exploring their **mental models**—the beliefs, values, experiences with, and attitudes they hold about immigration and life in America today more generally.

Drawing on other studies of sacralization, we knew that several types of variables could potentially explain when and why immigration issues are sacralized. They are: perceptions of threat (immigration-related threat, but also unrelated environmental threats such as COVID-19); social belonging (as measured by social sorting, social support, community engagement, and responsiveness to partisan norms); social rejection (alienation, marginalization, perceptions of minority group favoritism, and experienced discrimination); and politico-ideological factors (zero sum thinking, beliefs about social hierarchies, and political ideology). However, we did *not* know how influential these factors would be in comparison to one another. To better understand the relevance of each group of factors, we ran step-wise regressions. Using this method, one adds groups of variables into a predictive model *sequentially* in order to see whether the new variables, or “steps,” improve our ability to explain why immigration stances are sacralized.

### Factors Associated with the Sacralization of Open Immigration Stances

Increased sacralizing of more open immigration stances is primarily associated with perceived group norms (number of immigration issues perceived as central to political group), but both social belonging (i.e., social support, engagement in community) and social rejection (the experience of discrimination) play a role too.<sup>22</sup> Factors that predict *less* sacralizing of open immigration stances primarily include perceived economic and security threat, but ideological factors (conservatism and believing that societies have a natural hierarchy) and social rejection (feeling culturally marginalized and believing that minority groups are being favored above the majority in America) play a role too.

### Factors Associated with the Sacralization of Restrictive Immigration Stances

Increased sacralization of restrictive immigration stances is primarily associated with higher perceptions of immigration-related economic and security threat.<sup>23</sup> This finding holds even when controlling for significant social factors such as perceived group norms (number of immigration issues perceived as central to political group) and identity fusion (social sorting)—both of which also predict restrictive sa-

cralizing. In terms of ideology and beliefs, respondents are more likely to sacralize restrictive immigration stances if they have a more conservative political ideology, a stronger belief that minority groups are being favored in the U.S. today, and a greater sense of marginalization (the feeling that the U.S. today is “different than what they knew”). Lastly, the older someone is, the more likely they are to sacralize restrictive immigration stances.

### **What Do These Models of Open- and Restrictive-Stance Sacralization Have in Common, and How Do They Differ?**

Both models get most of their explanatory power from threat. While open-stance sacralization is more likely with higher levels of incidental or environmental threat (e.g., COVID-19 concern—a variable that ceases to be significant once political ideology is controlled for), restrictive-stance sacralization increases with perceptions that immigration poses an economic and security threat. From a sacred values perspective, this tells us it will be important to understand and affirm the fact that—whether one holds open or restrictive sacred values—their primary concern is to protect people in this country.

In terms of social factors, **both open- and restrictive-stance sacralization is strongly predicted by perceived norms**—the more respondents perceive that these 14 immigration issues are central to their political group, the more likely they are to sacralize their stances. Unsurprisingly, both open- and restrictive-stance sacralization is also predicted by political view—the more liberal one is the more likely they are to sacralize open stances, and the more conservative one is the more likely they are to sacralize restrictive stances. This tells us that the influence of our partisan identities—and of the partisan leaders who signal group norms—is enormous.

Predictors for the sacralization of open and restrictive immigration stances also differ in important ways. Interestingly, social sorting is a significant predictor of restrictive-stance sacralization but not open-stance sacralization. Specifically, being a conservative who strongly identifies with white *and* evangelical identities makes one particularly prone to sacralizing restrictive immigration issues. Note: This finding is significant in that it is not about demographics, but instead the way in which our social identities have come to overlap. That is, restrictive-stance sacralization is not associated with being white or evangelical—it is associated with identifying strongly as a conservative who is white and evangelical. For this reason, **interventions intended to diversify contact and build more overarching identities might lead to decreased sacralizing behavior.**

Lastly, while “social rejection” variables are significant predictors for both models, the type of social rejection differs—understanding those differences is critical when thinking about how to address sacralizing on both sides. Open-stance

sacralization is predicted by one's experience of discrimination and feelings of cultural marginalization (whereby one needs to hold back because voicing their opinion will likely put them under attack), whereas restrictive sacralizers feel marginalized because today's America feels foreign to them and they think minority groups are being favored in America today.

### **Does Sacralization Lead to Immigration-Related Activism?**

Because sacred values are so linked to identity and emotion, research has shown that holding sacred values can make it easier to mobilize. We thus hypothesized that sacralization of immigration issues would predict immigration activism. After completing the immigration stance section of the survey, respondents read: "As you read the following statements, think about the group of people (and/or political affiliates) that feel as strongly as you do about the immigration issues you just rated." We created a composite measure of immigration-related activism based on the following items: "I would [join/donate money to/volunteer my time for/travel for one hour to join a rally in support of] an organization that fights for my group's political and legal rights." After each statement, respondents were asked reply using a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (agree). We averaged responses to these items to create a composite measure for activism.

In this model, the variables associated with activism include: high levels of community engagement (the strongest factor), open-stance sacralization, social norms (i.e., the perception that one's open or conservative stances are central to one's political group), perceptions that immigration constitutes an economic threat, increased exposure to objective life stressors (e.g., death, marriage or divorce, having kids), being male, experiencing discrimination, contact with legal immigrants, and contact with undocumented immigrants. Factors decreasing the likelihood of activism include: alienation, beliefs that the world is zero-sum, being of older age, and being rural. We note that socio-demographic variables explain about 11% of variation in this activism model, meaning they are better at predicting immigration-related activism than they are at predicting sacralization.

The fact that open-stance sacralization and *not* restrictive stance sacralization predicts activism may not be surprising, since a conservative government is currently enacting restrictive immigration policies and there is therefore less for restrictive sacralizers to contest. Once again, we highlight the importance of social norms and social connectedness (through community engagement) as factors that increase activism, and note that they stand in contrast to alienation and beliefs that the world is zero-sum.

## Conclusion and Implications

For many survey respondents, immigration issues have become sacred values. They are animating public debate and policymaking in America today, which helps to explain why (or is partially explained by the fact that) the rhetoric and dialogue around immigration is often uncompromising, moralized, and explosive. Further, this research shows that the effects of sacralization go beyond just influencing the nature of immigration-related dialogue and compromise: those who sacralize larger numbers of immigration issues are more likely to engage in immigration-related activism, e.g., participating in advocacy, attending rallies or protests, volunteering for immigration causes or organizations.

Importantly, this report's findings are not simply about sacralized divisions. **We have also seen in these data that some liberals sacralize restrictive stances and some conservatives sacralize open stances—for instance, on the issues of maintaining our tradition as a nation of immigrants, ending family separation, and supporting DACA recipients we know that certain core values and beliefs transcend America's partisan identities.** Immigration and policy leaders can and should showcase these shared values and stances in order to reinforce a common bi-partisan commitment to them. This can signal what the dominant beliefs and norms are on these issues, which can encourage a virtuous cycle on increasing support.

This report offered insights into the mental models of polarized U.S. citizens by identifying the factors associated with increased sacralizing on open versus restrictive immigration stances. Sacralizers of more open and restrictive immigration stances shared something in common: the influence of their social identity. Immigration-related sacralizing was always associated with group norms—the more one's perception that immigration issues were central to membership in their political group, the more activated they were. Another common predictor was “social sortedness”—the extent to which our racial, religious and political identities overlapped. The more they overlap, the less exposed we are to a diverse array of narratives and the more susceptible we might be to the influence of perceived norms. Lastly, open and restrictive stance sacralizers differed in that restrictive stance sacralizers were often characterized by high levels of perceived immigration threat, perceptions of minority group favoritism, and sometimes, a belief that some groups are supposed to be above others in society.

We note that demographics have been a point of focus in previous immigration research. For that reason, **it seems critically important to highlight that demographics are not strongly associated with the extent to which survey respondents are sacralizing open or restrictive immigration stances.** While open-stance sacralization generally occurred more often for females and individuals who have experienced discrimination and restrictive-stance sacralization generally occurred more often with an increase in age, the inclusion of demographic factors added less than 1% of explanatory power to each of these statistical models. This is a powerful finding because it means that the other components of U.S. citizens' mental models—their threat perceptions, their social identities, their beliefs about hierarchy and fairness in today's society—are far better at explaining sacralization of immigration issues.<sup>24</sup>

However, this research also examined open- and restrictive-stance sacralization on specific immigration issues, and explored factors associated with immigration-related activism. We found that being older and living further from an urban center made immigration activism less likely (though it is likely the case that being older and less urban makes all activism less likely). Being female was positively associated with the sacralization of “stop family separation,” while being more rural was associated with sacralizing the opposite, “continue family separation.” Lastly, increased age was associated with the sacralization of the restrictive asylum stance, “decreasing asylum seekers,” but also with the open stance of being a “nation of immigrants.” It is possible to speculate as to why these demographics stand out for these issues, but further work would need to be done to identify the demographically-driven narratives in each of these cases.

These findings are important because two decades of research tell us that sacred values should be handled differently than regular values, or else one risks creating a backfire effect. We know that responding to immigration-related sacred values with rhetoric or argumentation that revolves around cost-benefit rationales or character denigration will likely backfire. Instead, opposing camps can engage each other by seeking to understand the opposition's sacralized perspective—what are the core values they see in this issue? Then, they can ask, are there core values or aspects of their perspective that both sides hold in common, and which can thus be affirmed? If yes, dialogue can start there—in a way that shows respect for the values underlying the sacralization.

## Appendix One

### The Survey and Analytical Strategy

In March 2020, we conducted a nationally representative survey with U.S. citizens aged 18 or older through Qualtrics, a web-based survey platform.<sup>25</sup> 1,370 respondents volunteered to take our survey and were compensated with a time-based monetary or point incentive offered by the survey company. Data from 57 respondents was dropped due to an extremely short survey duration or incomplete responses. The analyses in this report relied upon a sample of 1,327. Participant characteristics can be seen in Appendix Two.

### Selection of Main Measures

Research has identified six factors that can cause issues to sacralize, which we explain in more detail here.

- **Threat.** Issues tend not to become sacred, or at least we don't recognize them as such, until they are under threat.<sup>26</sup> Critically, that threat often comes from another group of people (as when nuclear energy became a sacred value to Iranians within six months in response to pressure exerted by the United States to end its nuclear program).<sup>27</sup> To capture threat in this survey, we measured four types of perceived immigration threat—threat to security, the economy, American culture/identity, and demographics—and expected that those who scored high on perceived threat would be most likely to sacralize restrictive immigration stances. We also realized that concern about the threat of COVID-19 might influence the sacralization of immigration issues—by increasing concern about general societal welfare, or exacerbating fears about scarcity and security. Research shows that environmental threats can affect decisions, even if unrelated.<sup>28</sup> We thus included items to measure perceived risk and concern about COVID and hypothesized that greater perceptions of COVID risk would yield greater sacralization of immigration issues.
- **Fusion.** It is possible to hold a sacred value and not act on it<sup>29</sup>—but studies with Kurdish militants and jihadis in Spain show that the more one's individual identity becomes fused<sup>30</sup> to a group that cares about the sacred value, the more likely they are to endorse risk and sacrifice to fight whomever poses the threat.<sup>31</sup> In this study, we used a four-item measure of *fusion* (how much someone identifies with, or feels connected to a group) to capture whether respondents are or are not fused with their political, religious, racial, and social groups. We also calculated the extent to which those groups are “socially sorted.” This is a concept used by political scientist Lilliana Mason to explain the process by which individuals' social identities grow increasingly aligned with a partisan identity, reducing social cross-pressures on political behavior.<sup>32</sup>

- **Perceived norms from one's group.** Since feeling fused to a group predicts sacralization, and fusion often entails taking on the beliefs of one's group, believing that a value is central or sacred to other members in one's in-group might be a powerful predictor of values sacralization. Research shows that this can work both ways, the inverse also being true: In a recent study, seeing that one's group didn't hold an issue as sacred caused people to desacralize that issue themselves.<sup>33</sup> In this study, we measured perceived norms by asking respondents how important or central each immigration issue is to membership in their political group. We expected that those who saw the most immigration issues as important/central to their group would be most likely to sacralize immigration issues (regardless of partisanship, i.e., whether they sacralized generally "open" or "restrictive" issues).
- **Social or societal rejection.** Social rejection, something as simple as being ignored by people you don't know, or feeling insignificant in society, or feeling consciously devalued by society (discrimination, group favoritism, etc.), has recently been shown to increase issue sacralization.<sup>34</sup> In this study, we measured three types of perceived rejection: one's experience with discrimination based on gender, race, religion or immigration status; one's perception that minority groups are being favored in today's America; and cultural marginalization (one's feeling that the political landscape in America has changed, or that they don't want to speak out about their views for fear of being attacked). We anticipated that social rejection would predict sacralization. Specifically, since the measure of discrimination is a status-quo based rejection, we anticipated that it would predict sacralization of more open immigration stances, which minority group favoritism would predict sacralization of more restrictive immigration stances.
- **Ritual.** Participation in individual and collective ritual (e.g., prayer, meditation, church or mosque attendance) can increase sacralization, though neither religion nor religiosity do.<sup>35</sup> Given these findings, we measured attendance at a house of worship and well as individual and collective ritual.
- **Sacred rhetoric.** Sacred rhetoric is absolutist and uncompromising, often invoking morality and intonations of moral outrage. Those exposed to such rhetoric tend to mimic it, making readers/listeners less willing to entertain trade-offs and more willing to act on their stance.<sup>36</sup> While this is an important finding, survey length constraints made it impossible for us to measure media consumption (which might have been used as a proxy for exposure to absolutist rhetoric on the left or the right).

## Measures

### Stances on Immigration Issues

To assess participants' stances on immigration issues, we identified 14 issue themes that arise commonly in immigration debates and then generated two stances for each issue. One was meant to represent a more open stance, the other to represent a more restrictive position. The issue themes and stances were as follows: to allow or punish sanctuary cities; to make undocumented/illegal immigration punishable by civil or criminal offense; to increase or decrease asylum; to make citizenship available to any eligible immigrant or only to English-speaking immigrants; to make citizenship available to any eligible immigrant or only to those who would not use benefits; to reduce or increase legal immigration; to uphold or revoke the Muslim ban; to provide a pathway to citizenship for DACA recipients or to deport them; to deport all undocumented/illegal immigrants or only those who pose a security threat; to be a nation of immigrants or try to preserve a white and Christian culture; to make public benefits available only to legal immigrants, or also to undocumented/illegal immigrants; to continue or stop family separations; to build the wall or stop building it; and to stop undocumented/illegal immigration or to shift our focus to improving the functioning of our existing immigration system.

For each issue theme, we asked respondents the following: "Which of the following two positions is closer to your position on this issue?" The exact language of the issue stances can be seen in the table on pages 15 and 16.

After participants selected the position most similar to theirs, we asked them to rate how much that position mattered to them on a scale of 1–5, where 1 = "not at all" and 5 = "totally." If the participant selected 1, 2, or 3 ("not at all," "a little," or "somewhat"), they were routed to a question asking how central this issue was to their political group (the group they affiliate with politically), and then to the next issue. If participants answered how much it mattered to them by selecting 4 or 5 ("a lot" or "totally"), they were given a prompt ("Please tell us why this issue matters so much to you.") and asked to write 1–2 sentences in response. Participants had to write at least 70 characters to proceed.

### Assessing Sacred Values

If participants had said the position mattered to them "a lot" or "totally," they were then asked, "How much money would you require to take an action in support of the opposing position?" Response options included: \$0, \$100, \$1,000, \$100,000, \$1 million, or "Nothing, I would not trade this value for any amount of money." Only those participants who selected "Nothing" were counted as holding that stance to be sacred.

## Other Measures

In order to better understand why respondents *supported, felt strongly about, or sacralized* their stances, we evaluated additional variables.

We grouped most of these factors conceptually into four categories: threat, social belonging and rejection, ideology and beliefs, and demographics. While these variables had been identified as important in other studies, it was unclear how much influence they would have with respect to one another—they had previously not been tested together in the same study. For this reason, we analyzed them as separate steps in hierarchical regressions.

## Threat

- **Perceptions of immigrants as a threat to the nation:** This measure had four subcategories for threat: economic (loss of jobs), security (violence, drugs), identity (loss of American identity, culture), and prototypicality (that the typical American will no longer be white).
- **Perceptions of concern about COVID-19:** The extent to which respondents are concerned that COVID-19 will harm the economic and social well-being of their community.

## Social Identity Variables

We broke these variables down further into social belonging and social rejection. We used four different measures from the category of **social belonging**:

- **Social support:** The extent to which respondents have people to call upon if they need help.
- **Community engagement:** The extent to which respondents are involved in their local community
- **Social sorting:** A measure of how much one's racial, religious and political identities overlap, and how strong each is. In political science research, those Americans with the most overlapping religious, racial, and political identities are also most emotionally involved and least likely to compromise in politics (Mason 2015, 2019).<sup>37</sup>
- **Perceived norms:** The extent to which respondents think immigration issues are central and important to their political group.

We also used four measures from the category of **social rejection**:

- **Alienation:** The extent to which individuals feel dislocated from or rejected by their community.
- **Minority group favoritism:** The extent to which individuals feel that Blacks, immigrants, women, or Muslims receive preferential treatment in American society today.
- **Marginalization:** The extent to which individuals feel that America has changed in ways that are unfamiliar to them, and the extent to which they don't feel comfortable voicing an opinion because they expect to be attacked.
- **Experience of discrimination:** The extent to which individuals have been discriminated against based on their gender, religion, nationality, or race.

### **Ideology**

- **Political ideology:** Individuals ranked themselves politically on a scale from very conservative to very liberal.
- **Social dominance orientation:** The extent to which individuals think it is natural and right for hierarchy and dominance to exist in society.
- **Zero-sum thinking:** A measure of the extent to which an individual believes that available resources are finite; i.e., if one person gets more, another gets less.

### **Demographics**

- **Sociodemographic characteristics:** The survey asked respondents about their gender; age; ethnicity; level of education; religion, religiosity, and level of religious ritual/attendance; the size of the place where they live (city, suburban, or rural); their exposure to stressful events in the past year; and about the frequency and quality of contact they had with unauthorized immigrants.

## Appendix Two

### Participant Characteristics

		Frequency	Percentage
<b>Gender</b> What is your gender?	Female	686	51.7
	Male	632	47.6
	Non-binary/agender	7	0.5
	Other	3	0.2
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1,328</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Residence</b> Which of the following best characterizes where you live?	Urban	461	34.7
	Suburban	560	42.2
	Rural	307	23.1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1,328</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Race</b> What is your race or ethnicity?	Caucasian (white)	860	64.7
	African-American (Black)	142	10.7
	Hispanic/Latino	218	16.4
	Asian	68	5.1
	Native American	31	2.3
	None of the above	9	0.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,328</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

		Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
<b>Age</b>	How old are you?	19	88	43.87	16.691
<b>Religious Attendance</b>	How often do you attend church or other religious meetings?	1	5	3.10	1.54
<b>Religious Ritual</b>	How often do you spend time in private religious activities such as prayer, meditation, or Bible study?	1	5	3.44	1.583
<b>Contact Quantity-Illegal</b>	How frequently do you come into contact with undocumented or illegal immigrants?	1	5	1.874	1.014
<b>Contact Quality-Illegal</b>	When you do come into contact with undocumented or illegal immigrants, how positive or negative is the experience?	1	5	3.34	.892
<b>Contact Quantity-Legal</b>	How frequently do you come into contact with legal immigrants?	1	5	2.795	1.333
<b>Contact Quality-Legal</b>	When you do come into contact with legal immigrants, how positive or negative is the experience?	1	5	3.81	.885
<b>Exposure to Life Stressors</b>		1	3	1.33	.594

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<b>Threat</b>		<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
<b>COVID–Death</b>	How likely do you think it is that you OR someone close to you will become seriously ill or die from coronavirus in the next 6 months?	2	5	3.21	1.231
<b>COVID–Others</b>	How likely is it that someone close to you (e.g., friend, family member) will catch the coronavirus within the next 4 months?	0	100	42.28	27.726
<b>COVID–Self</b>	How likely is it that you will catch the coronavirus within the next 4 months?	0	100	35.30	25.101
<b>COVID–Concern</b>	How concerned are you about the impact coronavirus could have on your community? (e.g., quarantine or other effects on the economy, jobs, way of life, etc.)	1	5	3.86	1.193
<b>Threat–Prototypical</b>		1	5	2.394	.943
<b>Threat–Symbolic</b>		1	5	2.490	1.102
<b>Threat–Economic</b>		1	5	2.784	1.066
<b>Threat–Security</b>		1	5	2.638	1.300
<b>Threat–All</b>		1	5	2.579	.963
<b>Social Belonging</b>					
<b>Socio-Partisan Sorting</b>		<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
		0	1	.509	.200
<b>Community Engagement</b>	To what extent are you engaged or involved in your local community (e.g., participating on committees or attending community meetings or events)?	1	4	2.12	.948
<b>Social Support–Count on</b>	How many people are so close to you that you can count on them if you have great personal problems?	1	4	2.68	.904
<b>Social Support–Interest</b>	How much interest and concern do people show in what you do?	1	5	3.37	1.216
<b>Social Support–Help</b>	How easy is it to get practical help from neighbors if you should need it?	1	5	3.17	1.061
<b>Social Support (Recoded, Oslo SSS-3)</b>		1	3	1.83	.720
	# Fused SVs	0	14	4.96	5.155
	# Fused Open SVs	0	14	2.86	4.051
	# Fused Restrictive SVs	0	14	1.87	3.254

## Appendix Three

### Descriptive Statistics for the Survey Variables

<b>Social Rejection</b>		Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
<b>Group Favoritism (R2)</b>		1	5	2.670	1.019
<b>Discrimination-Composite</b>		1	5	1.809	.865
<b>Discrimination-Religious</b>	Have you ever personally experienced hostility or unfair treatment because of your religion?	1	5	1.64	.970
<b>Discrimination-Cultural</b>	Have you ever personally experienced hostility or unfair treatment because of your cultural background?	1	5	1.78	1.074
<b>Discrimination-Racial</b>	Have you ever personally experienced hostility or unfair treatment because of your race or ethnicity?	1	5	1.93	1.121
<b>Discrimination-Gender</b>	Have you ever personally experienced hostility or unfair treatment because of your gender?	1	5	1.88	1.103
<b>Alienation (Composite)</b>		-1.5	2.5	.841	.825
<b>Alienation (Belonging)</b>		-1	3	1.37	1.016
<b>Alienation (Meaningful)</b>		-1	3	1.481	1.007
<b>Alienation (Self Esteem)</b>		-2	2	.447	.924
<b>Ideology</b>		Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
<b>Zero Sum (R)</b>		1	5	2.502	.831
<b>Zero Sum (R2)</b>		1	5	1.79	.990
<b>Social Dominance Orientation</b>		-.96	2.67	.001	.697
<b>Democratic Sorting</b>		.01	1	.487	.173
<b>Republican Sorting</b>		0	1	.544	.232

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<b>Sacred Values</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
American Identity-White & Christian	0	1	.190	.390
American Identity-Nation of Immigrants	0	1	.810	.390
Wall-Continue to build	0	1	.380	.486
Wall-Stop building	0	1	.62	.486
Asylum-Reduce	0	1	.540	.499
Asylum-Increase	0	1	.46	.499
Family Separation-Continue	0	1	.200	.400
Family Separation-Stop	0	1	.800	.400
Legal Immigration-Reduce	0	1	.400	.490
Legal Immigration-Increase	0	1	.600	.490
Illegal Immigration-Stop	0	1	.470	.499
Illegal Immigration-Focus on fixing imm system	0	1	.53	.499
Deportation-Mass deport all illegals	0	1	.320	.467
Deportation-Only deport illegals if they are security threats	0	1	.680	.467
Benefits Restricted-to legal	0	1	.680	.467
Benefits to all	0	1	.320	.467
Muslim Ban-Uphold	0	1	.48	.500
Muslim Ban-Stop	0	1	.52	.500
Citizenship-for English speaking legal immigrants	0	1	.41	.493
Citizenship-all eligible	0	1	.59	.493
Citizenship-Only if not seeking benefits	0	1	.28	.450
Citizenship-No matter if they seek benefits	0	1	.72	.450
Illegal immigration as criminal offense	0	1	.36	.481
Illegal immigration as civil offense	0	1	.64	.481
DACA-deport kids	0	1	.20	.399
DACA-pathway to citizenship	0	1	.80	.399
Sanctuary City-Punish	0	1	.47	.499
Sanctuary City-Allow	0	1	.53	.499
# "More Open" Values	0	14	8.62	4.305
# "Restrictive" Values	0	14	5.38	4.305
# Sacred-American Identity	0	1	.43	.496
# Sacred-Wall	0	1	.53	.499
# Sacred-Asylum	0	1	.35	.477
# Sacred-Family Separation	0	1	.56	.496
# Sacred-Legal Immigration	0	1	.38	.485
# Sacred-Illegal Immigration	0	1	.45	.498
# Sacred-Deportation	0	1	.43	.496
# Sacred-Benefits Restricted	0	1	.46	.498
# Sacred-Muslim Ban	0	1	.39	.487

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<b>Sacred Values</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
# Sacred-English Speaking	0	1	.41	.492
# Sacred-Citizenship Restricted	0	1	.37	.483
# Sacred-Criminal	0	1	.35	.478
# Sacred-DACA	0	1	.41	.492
# Sacred-Sanctuary City	0	1	.34	.473
# Sacred-Tradition (Restrictive)	0	1	.07	.247
# Sacred-Tradition (Open)	0	1	.37	.483
# Sacred-Wall (Restrictive)	0	1	.21	.407
# Sacred-Wall (Open)	0	1	.32	.468
# Sacred-Asylum (Restrictive)	0	1	.17	.379
# Sacred-Asylum (Open)	0	1	.18	.383
# Sacred-Family Separation (Restrictive)	0	1	.10	.296
# Sacred-Family Separation (Open)	0	1	.47	.499
# Sacred-Legal Immigration (Restrictive)	0	1	.13	.337
# Sacred-Legal Immigration (Open)	0	1	.25	.431
# Sacred-Illegal Immigration (Restrictive)	0	1	.22	.411
# Sacred-Illegal Immigration (Open)	0	1	.23	.423
# Sacred-Deportation (Restrictive)	0	1	.14	.346
# Sacred-Deportation (Open)	0	1	.29	.456
# Sacred-Benefits Restricted (Restrictive)	0	1	.33	.470
# Sacred-Benefits Restricted (Open)	0	1	.13	.337
# Sacred-Muslim Ban (Restrictive)	0	1	.20	.399
# Sacred-Muslim Ban (Open)	0	1	.19	.391
# Sacred-English Speaking (Restrictive)	0	1	.19	.389
# Sacred-English Speaking (Open)	0	1	.22	.417
# Sacred-Citizenship Restricted (Restrictive)	0	1	.12	.328
# Sacred-Citizenship Restricted (Open)	0	1	.25	.431
# Sacred-Criminal (Restrictive)	0	1	.14	.346
# Sacred-Criminal (Open)	0	1	.21	.410
# Sacred-DACA (Restrictive)	0	1	.08	.277
# Sacred-DACA (Open)	0	1	.32	.468
# Sacred-Sanctuary City (Restrictive)	0	1	.19	.389
# Sacred-Sanctuary City (Open)	0	1	.15	.361
# Sacred Values	0	1	5.87	4.986
# SVs (Open)	0	14	3.59	4.274
# SVs (Restrictive)	0	14	2.27	3.535

<b>Activism</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>Median</b>	<b>Mean</b>
Activism Intent	1	5	3.327	1.004

### Endnotes

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- 11 Atran, 2016.
- 12 A logistic regression model ( $n=636$ ,  $LR\ chi^2(25)=187.87$ ,  $p=.000$ , pseudo  $R^2=.234$ ) identified the following factors as being positively associated: one’s perception that the issue is central to membership in their political group ( $z=6.22$ ,  $p=.00$ ), personal experience with discrimination ( $z=3.23$ ,  $p=.001$ ), being older ( $2.35$ ,  $p=.019$ ), and higher alienation scores ( $z= 2.18$ ,  $p=.029$ ). Two factors were negatively associated: the higher one scored on perceived immigration threat ( $z= -3.35$ ,  $p=.001$ ) and the belief that some groups in society should be above others ( $z= -2.94$ ,  $p=.001$ ).

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- 13 A logistic regression model (n=636, LR Chi2(26)=170.11, p=.00, pseudo R2 = .49) identified these three factors as being positively associated: the perception that this value is central to membership in one's political group (z=6.81, p=.00), high perceived immigration threat (z=2.84, p=.005), and concern over how COVID-19 will affect one's community (z=3.3, p=.001).
- 14 A logistic regression model (n=636, LR Chi2(26)=170.11, p=.00, pseudo R2 = .49) identified two factors positively associated with one's odds of sacralizing "Stop family separation": norms (e.g., one's perception that the issue is central to membership in their political group) (z=3.19, p=.001), and being female (z= 2.99, p=.003). The odds that someone would sacralize this stance decreased if they scored higher on perceived immigration threat (z= -3.04, p=.002), the belief that minority groups are favored in America today (z= -3.44, p=.001), the belief that some groups in society should be above others (z= -2.66, p=.008), conservative ideology, and living further from an urban center (-2.17, p=.03).
- 15 A logistic regression model (n=638, LR chi2(24)=196.25, p=.000, pseudo R2=.418) identified four factors positively associated with sacralization of "Continue family separation": perceiving immigration as a threat (z=2.77, p=.006), perceived minority group favoritism (z= 4.22, p=.000), the further one is from an urban center (z=2.70, p=.007), and the extent to which one's political, racial and religious identities overlap (z=2.13, p=.033). The odds that someone would sacralize this stance decreased if they scored higher on community engagement (z= -2.59, p=.009).
- 16 A logistic regression model (n=638, LR chi2(26)=519.79, p=.000, pseudo R2=.658) identified three values positively associated with "pathway" sacralization: sacralizing higher numbers of other (open) SVs (z=9.86, p=.00), norms (e.g., perceiving that the "Pathway" stance is central to membership in one's political group) (z=8.22, p=.00), and social sorting (e.g., the extent to which one's political, racial and religious identities overlap) (z= 2.71, p=.007). The odds that someone would sacralize this stance decreased if they scored higher on the belief that some groups in society should be above others (z= -2.26, p=.024).
- 17 A logistic regression model (n=638, LR chi2(26)=322.09, p=.000, pseudo R2=.73) identified two values positively associated with "Deport" sacralization: sacralization of higher numbers of restrictive stances (z=6.57, p=.000) and the perception that Deportation of DACA recipients is central to their political group (z=6.48, p=.000). The odds that someone would sacralize "Deport" decreased if they had experienced discrimination (z=2.20, p=.028).
- 18 A logistic regression model (n=638, LR chi2(26)=336.57, p=.000, pseudo R2=.658) identified three factors significantly and positively associated with sacralizing the more open "Increase" stance: sacralizing higher numbers of other (open) SVs (z=7.60, p=.00), norms (e.g., perceiving that "Increase Asylum" is central to membership in one's political group) (z=5.66, p=.00), and social sorting (e.g., the extent to which their political, racial and religious identities overlap) (z= 2.81, p=.005).
- 19 A logistic regression model (n=638, LR chi2(26)=484.78, p=.000, pseudo R2=.681) identified four factors that are significantly and positively associated with sacralizing the more restrictive "Decrease Asylum" stance include: sacralization of other restrictive stances (z=9.10, p=.000), the perception that deportation of DACA recipients is central to membership in one's political group (z=6.48, p=.000), perceived immigration threat (z=2.39, p=.017), and increased age (z=2.27, p=.023).
- 20 A logistic regression model (n=638, LR chi2(26)=333.02, p=.000, pseudo R2=.68) identified two factors that were positively associated with the odds of sacralizing "Allow": sacralizing higher numbers of other (open) SVs (z=7.66, p=.00), and perceiving that "Allow" is central to membership in one's political group (z=5.75, p=.00).
- 21 A logistic regression model (n=638, LR chi2(26)=521.77, p=.000, pseudo R2=.738) identified two factors positively associated with the odds of sacralizing "Punish": sacralization of other restrictive stances (z=8.57, p=.000) and the perception that punishing sanctuary cities is central to their political group (z=6.95, p=.000). The likelihood that one would sacralize

this stance decreases the more they expressed feeling like a stranger in America due to changes in the political landscape ( $z = -2.17, p = .03$ ).

- 22 We looked first at which variables were associated with increased sacralizing of more open immigration stances. Since perceived threat (both issue-related and incidental) is core to sacralizing, the first test included perceived immigration threat and concern about COVID. Considering threat alone, that model already had large explanatory power with an R-squared of 34%. Higher levels of COVID concern were significantly associated with sacralizing higher numbers of open immigration stances while higher levels of perceived economic and security threat were associated with fewer sacralized immigration stances. COVID, economic and security threat remained as significant factors in the next model, when we controlled for social belonging (social sorting, social support, community engagement and responsiveness to partisan group norms). In this model, Model 2, perceptions that immigration related issues were central to one's political group, and higher levels of social support and community engagement were also associated with higher numbers of more open immigration stances being sacralized; adding social factors to the threat factors increased the model's explanatory power by 11%. In the next step—where we would add factors related to social rejection and political-ideological beliefs—several variables had a negative impact on more open immigration stance sacralization. They were: more conservative political ideology, a belief that minority groups are being favored in America today, a sense of marginalization because one can be attacked so easily if they speak their views, and a belief that society is supposed to be hierarchical. Our statistical model's explanatory power grew by 5%, however when these variables were controlled for, concern over COVID-19 was no longer associated with increased sacralizing of open stances. This likely means that concern over COVID-19 is not causing the sacralization of open immigration stances, but that it co-varies with beliefs—such as political ideology—that are more directly related to immigration-related sacred values. This likely comes as no surprise to those who have followed the immensely different way that partisans perceive the threat of COVID. Adding demographic variables to Model 4 increased its explanatory power by only 1%—here, the experience of discrimination was a significant factor.
- 23 Again, since perceived threat (both issue-related and COVID) is core to sacralizing, the first test included perceived immigration threat and concern about COVID. Similar to this same step in the open stance sacralization model, this first step had relatively large explanatory power (with an R-squared of 34%): high perceptions of economic and security threat were strong and significant predictors for sacralization of restrictive immigration stances, though COVID was not. Economic and security threat remained as significant predictors in the next model, Model 2, when we controlled for social belonging (social sorting, social support, community engagement and responsiveness to partisan group norms). Amongst those social factors, significant predictors included perceptions that immigration related issues were central to one's political group, higher levels of social sorting (or identity fusion), and higher levels of social support; adding these social factors to the threat factors increased the model's explanatory power by 11%. In the next step—where we would add factors related to social rejection and political-ideological beliefs—several additional variables predicted restrictive immigration stance sacralization. They were: more conservative political ideology, a belief that minority groups are being favored in America today, a sense of marginalization in that America today is different than what they knew. Our statistical model's explanatory power grows by 6% with this step, however, social support is no longer a significant predictor. Controlling for demographic variables in Model 4 increases its explanatory power by only 1%—in terms of predictors, only age is significant (as age increases, so does sacralization of restrictive immigration stances).
- 24 In the case of open and restrictive sacralization, the component with the most explanatory power is immigration-related threat perceptions (at 34% in both models). The second most powerful component in terms of explanatory power was social belonging (at 11% in both models), including: perceived norms (the perception that open or restrictive stances are central to political group membership), social sorting (the extent to which one identifies with political, racial and religious identities in a way that they overlap), and social support and community engagement. Next, political and societal beliefs (political ideology, but also the nature of so-

- cietal hierarchy, whether resources are zero-sum, whether minorities are favored in America, and the extent to which today's political landscape feels foreign), were able to explain 5% and 6% of the variation in our open- and restrictive-stance sacralization models, respectively.
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