



DEMOCRACY REMIXED: BLACK YOUTH AND THE FUTURE OF AMERICAN POLITICS

A Series on Black Youth Political Engagement

JON C. ROGOWSKI

Immigration Reform and the Possibility of Black-Brown Coalitions among America's Youth

Though immigration reform has been one of the hottest political issues for much of the last decade, there has been little consensus about how best to address it. Reflecting this gridlock, it remains unclear whether the two chambers of Congress will agree on an immigration reform bill this fall. From the DREAM Act to the Kids Act, young people have been at the center of discussions about immigration reform. We surveyed a national sample of young people to examine their views about immigration and the possibility of reform. Our key findings are as follows:

- Young people of color support a comprehensive approach to immigration reform at higher rates than white youth, who are more supportive of punitive measures and increased enforcement of existing law.
- Majorities of both Black and white youth believe that undocumented immigrants take away jobs, housing, and health care from people born in the U.S.
- However, Black (43.3 percent) and white (17.6 percent) youth disagree substantially about whether undocumented immigrants should be eligible for government services.
- Black youth have a more inclusive and expansive view than white youth of the role of immigrants in American society.
- A clear majority (61.1 percent) of Black youth believe that immigrants are treated *better* than most Black people born in this country. These feelings of alienation may inhibit the prospects for Black-Brown coalition-building.

Immigration Reform and Public Opinion among America's Youth

Policymakers have discussed a wide range of proposals to reform America's immigration system. In June, the U.S. Senate passed a comprehensive immigration reform bill that contains a variety of these provisions. In particular, this bill (S. 744) includes provisions to increase border security, requires businesses to verify the legal status of employees, and creates a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants currently living in the U.S. who meet certain requirements. The bill also includes provisions from the so-called DREAM Act, which would allow undocumented immigrants brought to the U.S. as children to apply for citizenship if they complete high school and attend college or accrue military service. Though this bill easily passed the Senate with 68 votes, as Congress went to recess earlier in August the bill's future in the House of Representatives seemed uncertain at best.

Though young people in general grant substantial support to each of these provisions, there is substantial variation across racial groups. In particular, Black and Latino youth demonstrate greater support for comprehensive approaches to reforming the current immigration reform, while white youth tend to favor more punitive and law-and-order approaches. For instance, Black (77.5 percent) and Latino (89.4 percent) youth support a path to citizenship at much higher rates than white youth (67.1 percent). Large majorities of Black (69.1 percent) and Latino (86.8 percent) youth also support granting citizenship to undocumented immigrants who were brought to the U.S. as children, though white youth (53.3 percent) are much less supportive. Black (73.7 percent) and Latino (85.8 percent) youth also express greater support than white youth (64.5 percent) for extending citizenship to undocumented immigrants who serve in the U.S. military. Moreover, Black (62.2 percent) and Latino (87.9 percent) youth also support the expansion of guest worker programs at higher rates than white youth (59.9 percent).

In contrast, white (88.0 percent) youth support requiring businesses to verify the legal status of new employees at higher rates than both Black (80.9 percent) and Latino youth. White (67.2 percent) youth also support increasing border security at higher rates than both Black (64.5 percent) and Latino youth (57.3 percent). Furthermore, white (58.7 percent) youth support the deportation of undocumented

immigrants currently living in the U.S. illegally at higher rates than both Black (52.0 percent) and Latino (27.1 percent) youth.

Table 1: Support for Immigration Measures among Youth (Ages 18-29)

Proposal	Blacks (%)	Whites (%)	Latinos (%)	All (%)
Require employers to verify that all new hires are living in the U.S. legally.	80.9	88.0	64.2	77.9
Creating a path to citizenship in which law-abiding immigrants currently living in this country illegally are allowed to eventually apply for citizenship.	77.5	67.1	89.4	77.8
Increase government spending on security measures and enforcement at U.S. borders.	64.5	67.2	57.3	63.1
Allow undocumented immigrants brought to the U.S. as children to gain citizenship when they receive a degree from a U.S. college or university.	69.1	53.3	86.8	69.5
Grant citizenship to undocumented immigrants who serve in the U.S. military.	73.7	64.5	85.8	74.5
Expand guest worker programs that would give a temporary visa to non-citizens who want to work legally in the United States.	62.2	59.9	87.9	69.8
Identify and deport all immigrants currently living in this country illegally.	52.0	58.7	27.1	46.1

Source: Black Youth Project Quarterly Survey, April/May 2013.

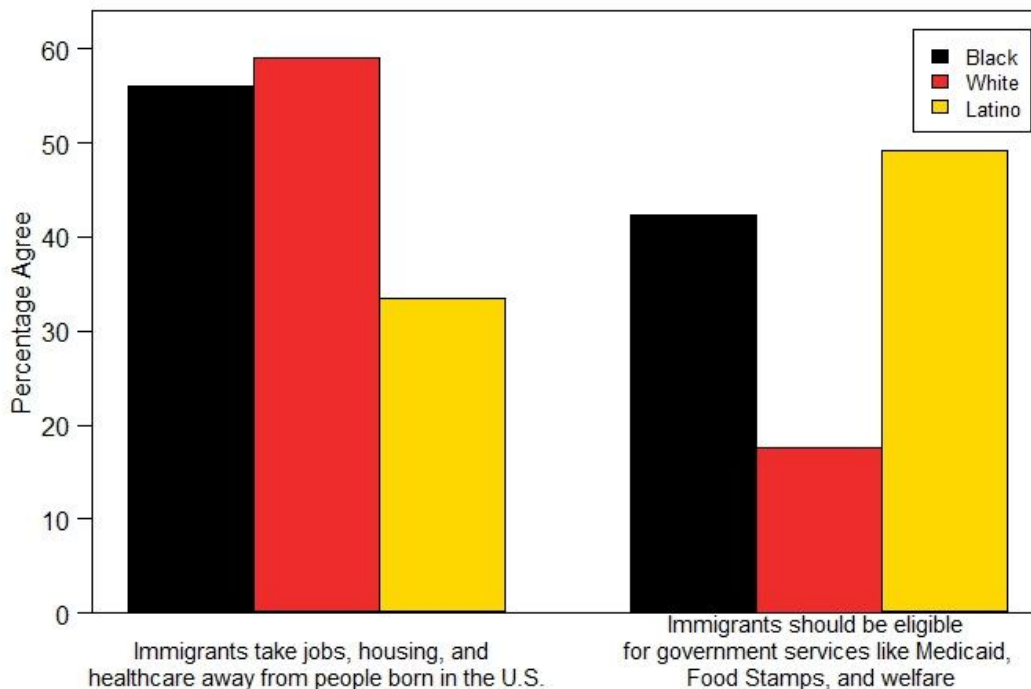
Youth and the Political Economy of Immigration

Opponents of immigration reform often argue that undocumented immigrants take away jobs and other economic opportunities from native-born citizens. Opponents also frequently argue that undocumented immigrants exact huge costs on the taxpayers by using government services such as health care and welfare.

We find that these arguments about the economic impact of immigrants also characterize the way young people think about this issue. As Figure 1 below shows, nearly sixty percent of both Black (56.1 percent) and white (59.0 percent) youth believe that immigrants take away jobs, housing, and health care from people born in the U.S. Only a third (33.4 percent) of Latino youth shared this view.

Just as white youth supported more punitive measures to fix America's immigration system, white youth also oppose extending government benefits, including welfare, Medicaid, and food stamps, to immigrants before they become citizens. Only 17.6 percent of white youth believe immigrants should be eligible for these benefits prior to becoming citizens, compared with 42.3 percent of Black youth and 49.1 percent of Latino youth. It appears clear that young people, especially white youth, support the idea that immigrants exact a heavy toll on the U.S. taxpayer and threaten the economic well-being of native-born citizens.

Figure 1: Regulating Access to Jobs, Health Care, and Government Services



Source: Black Youth Project Quarterly Survey, April/May 2013.

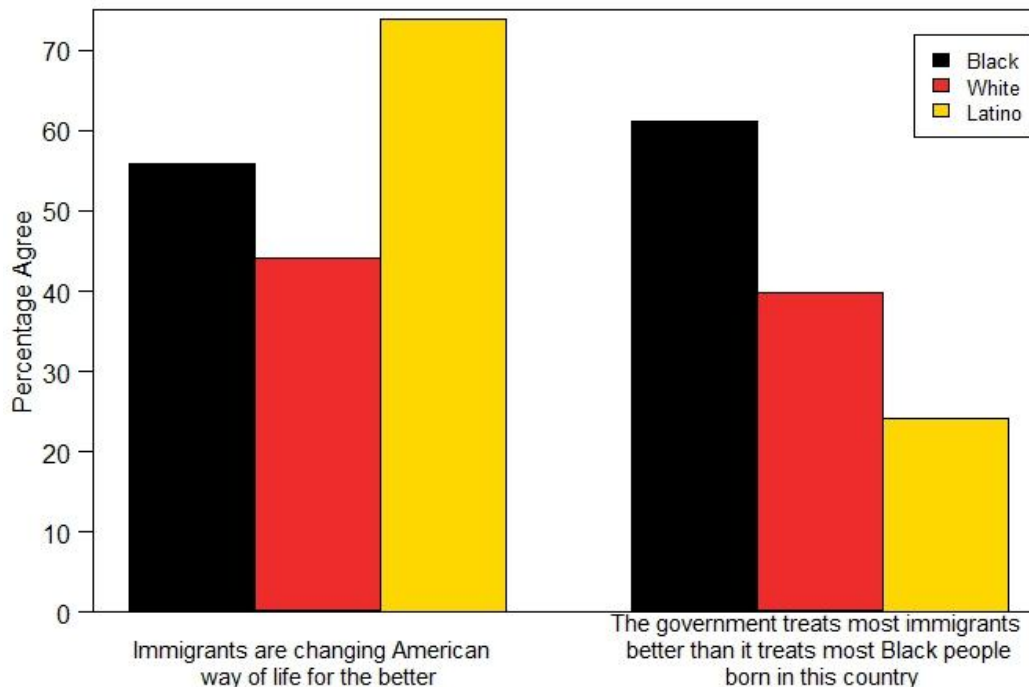
The Political-Cultural Impact of Immigration

Perhaps part-cause and part-consequence of their views about immigrants and the economy, young people have varying levels of ambivalence about the effect of immigrants on American society and culture. Nearly three-quarters (73.9 percent) of Latino youth believe that immigrants are changing the American way of life for the better. But Black and white youth are much less sanguine about the effect of immigration. Slightly more than half (55.8 percent) of Black youth, and just 44.1 percent of white youth, agree that immigrants are changing the American way of life for the better.

Immigration also raises questions about the established racial order in the United States. We asked young people to compare the ways immigrants are treated to the ways Black people born in this country are treated. The results are again polarized by racial group. More than sixty (61.1) percent of Black youth responded that most immigrants are treated *better* than most Black people born in this country. In contrast, less than a quarter (24.2 percent) of Latino youth agreed. Nearly forty (39.8) percent of white youth replied that immigrants are treated better than native-born Black people.

In fact, these figures have increasingly polarized over the course of the Obama administration. Four years ago, in early 2009, 54.5 percent of Black youth between 18 and 29 years of age believed that immigrants are treated better than most Black people born in this country, compared with 20.3 percent of white youth and 20.4 percent of Latino youth. These data clearly indicate a growing racial divide in young people's perceptions of the racial order and how immigrants fit into it.

Figure 2: Youth Beliefs about the Cultural Impact of Immigration



Source: Black Youth Project Quarterly Survey, April/May 2013.

The Politics of Immigration and the Possibility of Interracial Coalition-Building

On the whole, young people—particularly young people of color—are quite supportive of immigration reform. Clear majorities support a variety of proposals that have figured prominently in recent discussions in Washington. Based on the data shown here, young people of all racial groups would appear to support S.744, recently passed by the Senate but which faces tougher opposition in the U.S. House.

A closer look at the data, however, suggests that young people’s beliefs about immigration are somewhat more complicated. Our findings point to a deep skepticism among young whites and Blacks about the effect of immigration on the economy and the nation’s culture. Moreover, though our data suggest that although many young Blacks and whites view immigrants as “outsiders” and “foreigners”, many young people also believe that America’s native-born Blacks are treated as second-class citizens relative to immigrants.

These findings have substantial implications not only for politics of immigration reform, but also for the political cohesion of young Blacks and Latinos. Though many observers assume that young people of color have a common political perspective, our data indicate that this is not always the case—at least as far as immigration is concerned. The findings in this report suggest that there are a variety of attitudinal barriers to Black-Brown collaboration. In an era where young people are deeply worried about the availability of jobs and affordable health care, it is important to limit the ability of the media and our politicians to exploit these concerns and generate mistrust and anxiety among young people of color.

Methodology

The data for this project were collected by GfK Knowledge Networks. The survey was conducted in English and Spanish and was fielded in April-May 2013. The target population consists of non-institutionalized African American, Latino, and White adults residing in the U.S. and between the ages of 18 and 29. Households were sampled by KnowledgePanel, a probability-based web panel that is designed to be representative of the U.S. population, yielding a sample size of 1,513 respondents.

Surveys were completed online. Households selected for the survey initially received an email announcing the availability of a new survey for them to take. After three days, email reminders were sent to those panel members that had not responded. Several days after that, panel members yet to respond were contacted by phone. Modest incentives were also offered to encourage participation. These procedures were followed until the desired sample size was achieved.

After the survey was fielded, the data are weighted so that the sample reflects the characteristics of the population of U.S. African American, Latino, and White adults between the ages of 18 and 29. These adjustments correct for any differences between the sample and the population that result from survey non-response as well as the oversampling of African Americans and Latinos. Demographic (i.e., gender, age, race/ethnicity, education, income) and geographic (i.e., census region, metropolitan area, primary language by census region) distributions from the most recent Current Population Studies were used as benchmarks in this adjustment.