Ignorance in a Context of Tolerance: Misperceptions about Immigrants in Canada

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Abstract

Misperceptions about immigrants are pervasive and have piqued the interest of social researchers given their links to greater intergroup hostility. However, this phenomenon is rarely considered in Canada, with its reputation as a particularly welcoming context. The current study simultaneously considers two such misperceptions: over-estimation of the immigrant population size and mischaracterizations of the typical immigrant's legal status. This research examines their extent and correlates, as well as consequences for five anti-immigrant policies. Results indicate that legal status mischaracterizations, though rare, are more consequential than population over-estimates. Overall, misperceptions exist in Canada, but not all are equally consequential.

Keywords: *Immigration; Misperceptions; Canada; Innumeracy; Undocumented Immigrants.*

Introduction

At nearly 22 percent, Canada has one of the largest proportions of foreign-born residents of any country in the developed world (Statistics Canada, 2017). It admits more immigrants per year (about 1 percent of its total population) compared to other wealthy nations and far outpaces the U.S. in accepting refugees (Economist, 2016). Survey research confirms a welcoming tendency among Canadian citizens as they express high levels of openness toward immigrants (Harell, et al., 2012; Ipsos, 2004). These reflect Canada's own national perception as a "cultural mosaic", which for several decades has motivated a multiculturalist approach to immigration. At the same time, much of the West has shown signs of increased xenophobia, evidenced by the successes of anti-immigrant candidates and movements in the U.S. and throughout Europe (Lee, 2015; Gray, 2015; Schuetz, 2017). Despite its reputation, recent events in Canada may signal a similar shift. For instance, 2018 brought about the founding of Maxine Bernier's populist and anti-immigrant People's Party of Canada (Laskowski, 2018; Berthiaume, 2019). In 2019 Quebec passed Bill 21, which banned public servants from wearing religious clothing or symbols while on the job, which will impact immigrant communities in particular (Kestler-D'Amours, 2019). Additionally, the 2019 Parliamentary elections produced a shift to the right on migration issues, with Conservative leader Andrew Scheer appealing to concerns about undocumented immigrants and famously pledging to end illegal border crossings (Wherry, 2019; Wright, 2019). These signs of push-back within a nation normally characterized by tolerance make Canada an important, but overlooked context for understanding how citizens perceive (and misperceive) immigrants.

If similar to their international peers, Canadians will hold highly inaccurate perceptions (Hjerm, 2007; Semyonov, Raijman, Yom Tov and Schmidt, 2004; Semyonov, Raijman and

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Gorodzeisky, 2008; Sides and Citrin, 2007; Citrin and Sides, 2008). Existing research indicates that U.S. and European respondents view their immigrant populations as much larger than the reality (Citrin and Sides, 2007), as present for reasons that differ from reality (Blinder, 2013), as originating from places that differ from the reality (Herda, 2015), and as having a legal status that differs from the reality (Herda, 2018). When respondents maintain such misperceptions, they also tend to support anti-immigrant policies (Sides and Citrin, 2007; Semyonov et al., 2004). At present however, it remains unknown whether there are similar consequences in Canada, which might elucidate some of the recent anti-immigrant responses.

This article serves to fill this gap in the literature and to contribute to our understanding of immigrant-related misperceptions more generally by considering new policy consequences. Three have not been examined in existing research: 1) should immigrants have access to Canada's social benefits system?; 2) should the Canadian government provide English/French language instruction for immigrants?; and 3) should climate refugees be resettled in Canada?. Through examinations of these, and two additional policy positions, this study provides a more nuanced understanding of the consequences presented by immigration misperceptions.

Using data from the 2009 Trans-Atlantic Trends Immigration Survey (TATIS), this study provides context for the levels of immigrant misperceptions in Canada prior to the heightened xenophobia exhibited in the West over the past few years. It addresses the following questions: 1) How much do Canadians misperceive their immigrant population? 2) What factors characterize Canadians with faulty perceptions? And, 3) are there any consequences when Canadians misperceive? In general, Canadians imagine their immigration incorrectly, similar to those in other Western democracies. Population size misperceptions are pervasive, but innocuous, displaying no association with anti-immigrant policy outcomes. To the contrary, legal status misperceptions are rarer, but associate strongly with support for anti-immigrant policy.

Misperceiving Immigrants

Through his concept of the imagined immigration, Blinder (2015) argues that when individuals develop immigration-related policy positions, they do not consult objective information from official sources. Rather, they turn to their own subjective perceptions. Thus, the specific what or whom citizens imagine when they think of the typical immigrant are powerful for shaping their attitudes. Unfortunately, these ideas are often out of sync with reality. The existing research on immigrant population innumeracy, which is the tendency to incorrectly estimate the size of the foreign born population, demonstrates this pattern. However, there are other qualitative misperceptions that are important to the imagined immigration, which have not received sufficient attention.

Immigrant Population Innumeracy

Citizens typically over-estimate the size of immigrant populations in their country, sometimes by wide margins (Hjerm, 2007; Semyonov, Raijman, Yom Tov and Schmidt, 2004; Semyonov, Raijman and Gorodzeisky, 2008; Sides and Citrin, 2007; Citrin and Sides, 2008).[2] In the 2014 "Perils of Perception" study, which covered 32 nations (including Canada), respondents in nearly all countries held inflated perceptions on average (Ipsos, 2015). The typical Canadian estimated the

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[2] Other studies consider racial and ethnic group sizes in the U.S., finding significant over-estimation of African Americans, Latinos, Asians, Native Americans, and Jews (Nadeau, Niemi, and Levine, 1993; Sigelman and Niemi, 2001; Alba et al., 2005; Wong, 2007).

immigrant population as 39 percent. This represents a full 18 percentage points of incorrectness relative to the actual size (21 percent at the time of the survey). This estimate is just behind the U.S. (19 percentage points of over-estimation) and just ahead of Italy. The average estimates in Western Europe —Britain (12 percentage points of incorrectness), Netherlands (13 points), France (14 points), and Germany (14 points) — are more accurate. Note that the "Perils of Perception" study is unique as Canada is missing from most other scholarly research on the topic.

Beyond Innumeracy

More recent studies consider other bases of ignorance beyond population size, specifically qualitative mischaracterizations. Blinder's (2015) work in the U.K. identified widespread misperceptions when querying respondents about why immigrants are present, and whether their status is temporary or permanent. The respondents were most likely to imagine the typical immigrant as an asylum seeker or labor migrant (students were actually most common), and as permanent (most were temporary).

Immigrants' legal status is a controversial topic in many contexts, including Canada (Wright, 2019), and another potential basis for misperceptions. Herda (2018) considered this in the U.S., Britain, France, Germany, Italy, and Spain using the 2013 Trans-Atlantic Trends Survey (TATS). While the vast majority of immigrants in each context is present legally, many respondents classified the typical immigrant as undocumented. Percentages mischaracterizing ranged from 67.44 percent in Italy, to 13.41 percent in Germany.

Illegal or undocumented immigration involves the unauthorized entry or continued presence of a foreign individual in a host country. It is difficult to determine the size of a clandestine population precisely in any context. Nevertheless, in 2010 Magalhaes, Carrasco, and Gestaldo estimated Canada's to range from 20,000 to as many as half a million. Relative to the total foreign-born population of nearly 7 million in 2013 (Canadian Press), even the larger estimate would make undocumented immigrants a minority among immigrants in Canada. Thus, to characterize the typical immigrant as undocumented is a misperception. For context, in the U.S. there were 11.3 million undocumented immigrants in 2011, among 41.3 million total immigrants (Pew, 2015). Thus, 27.36 percent had illegal status.

Empirical Expectations

In addition to documenting the extent of these misperceptions, the current study also considers two multivariate questions: 1) what characterizes those who express immigrant-related misperceptions?; and 2) are there any consequences to this ignorance? The following sections introduce relevant empirical expectations for these research questions, based on existing research.

Characterizing Misperceivers

Research links larger population size estimates to interpersonal contact with immigrants (Herda, 2010). The logic is that respondents draw heuristically from what they remember from previous experiences. Through Tversky and Kahnneman's (1973; 1974) cognitive availability heuristic, individuals use these memories as "evidence" as they arrive at judgment. Interpersonal contact with immigrants, through neighbours, friends, co-workers, etc., is an important source of evidence. However, it is not equivalent to objective statistics. Rather, it is often biased toward what one remembers rather than what one actually observes, which produces faulty perceptions.

Existing research also links misperceptions to negative attitudes toward the group in question (Hjerm, 2007; Sides and Citrin, 2007; Semyonov et al. 2008). Some have argued that respondents draw heuristically from their pre-existing dislike for immigrants and use these emotions to formulate perceptions (Herda, 2013).[3] Through Zajonc's (1980) affect heuristic, individuals develop an affective feeling about a specific representation (e.g.: immigrants) and these feelings then direct their processing and judgment. If someone dislikes immigrants, they will base their perceptions on their enmity. Similarly, motivated reasoning contends that individuals' pre-existing feelings guide their processing of new information (Kunda, 1990). If one believes that immigrants are bad, all new information will be rationalized to fit within this worldview. An inflated size estimate or the perception that immigrants occupy a maligned status (e.g.: undocumented) would confirm such a worldview.

There are also several demographic factors that predict innumeracy. Across Europe female, younger, less educated, politically conservative, and economically disadvantaged respondents typically estimate higher (Herda, 2010). These same factors will be examined here among Canadians. They will also be used to characterize legal status mischaracterizers, which researchers explore less often.

Consequences for Misperceptions?

Pervasive ignorance raises concerns about individuals supporting policies based on incorrect information or leaders exploiting voters' misperceptions for political gain. In fact, research in Europe has found stronger desires to halt the flow of immigration and restrict immigrants' rights among those who over-estimate their population size (Sides and Citrin, 2007; Semyonov et al., 2004). Similarly in the U.S., over-estimating the African American and Hispanic population predicts opposition to affirmative action and pro-immigration policies (Alba et al., 2005). Although not considered as often, qualitative mischaracterizations are consequential as well. Blinder's (2015) study of qualitative ignorance in the U.K. demonstrated a more inaccurately imagined immigration increases desires to reduce immigration levels. Herda (2018) found that viewing the typical immigrant as undocumented increased desires to restrict refugee flows in 5 out of 6 countries. The current study seeks to identify additional consequences for misperceptions by introducing several new hypothetical policy outcomes, which are described below.

Data, Variables, and Methods

The current analysis uses data from the 2009 TATIS, which was designed to "identify attitudes and policy preferences of the general public related to immigration in Europe, Canada, and the United States" (Wunderlich, 2009). While the data are a decade old, they provide a unique combination of both perceptions and attitudes measured prior to the recent rise in anti-foreigner sentiment throughout the West. Understanding how Canadians perceived immigrants in this context may provide insight into the recent signs of anti-immigrant push-back. The sampling universe includes Canadian residents, aged 18 years and older with access to a landline telephone. Respondent selection occurred via random digit dialing between September 1st and September 17th of 2009. The current analysis focuses on 806 Canadians who completed the survey and responded

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[3] Scholars disagree about the causal sequence between misperceptions and negative attitudes (see Hjerm, 2007; Semyonov et al., 2004; Semyonov et al., 2008; Sides and Citrin, 2007). The current study grounds its expectations in the heuristic theories described. Regardless, the cross-sectional data used here cannot resolve this question.

to both misperception questions described below.[4] Table 1 provides sample descriptive statistics for all variables included in the model.

Table 1: Means (Standard Deviations) and Percentages of Relevant Variables (n = 806)

	Mean/ Proportion	Std. Dev.
Immigrant Population Size Estimate	36.08	24.03
Actual Immigrant Population Size	21.0	---
Typical Immigrant is Undocumented	14.64%	---
Cognitive Availability Sources		
Immigrant Friends	2.09	0.79
Immigrant Colleagues	1.61	0.81
Immigrant Neighbors	1.84	0.80
Immigrant Family	1.59	0.86
Negative Affect Variables		
Xenophobia	1.51	0.61
Controls		
Female	48.51%	---
Age	48.20	15.99
Conservatism	3.97	1.37
Economic Situation	2.77	0.94
Education		
Less than High Sch.	24.01%	---
High School	26.35%	
College	38.60%	---
Graduate Degree	8.19%	---
Other Educ.	2.86%	---
Residence		
City	29.44%	
Suburb	21.18%	---
Town	31.90%	---
Rural	17.48%	---
Provinces		
Newfoundland	1.36%	---
Nova Scotia	3.47%	---
*New Brunswick & PEI**	2.48%	---
Quebec	35.36%	---
Ontario	38.96%	---
Manitoba	2.85%	---
Saskatchewan	2.11%	---
Alberta	6.95%	---
British Columbia	6.45%	---

* These provinces were combined because of few observations in the latter (n=2).

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[4] This omits 194 respondents. These individuals are similar to the current sample, displaying few significant differences in demographic, contact, and xenophobia variables. The exceptions are for age (those dropped are significantly older) and having immigrant colleagues (those dropped have significantly fewer).

Misperceptions in the Imagined Immigration

Perceived immigrant population size comes from the question: "In your opinion, what percentage of the total Canadian population are immigrants?" Respondents entered a number between zero and 100. The response patterns are described below.

Perceived legal status of the typical immigrant comes from the question: "In your opinion, do you think that most immigrants in Canada are here legally, or are most of them here illegally?" Responses include: 1) most present legally, 2) most present illegally, and 3) equal numbers legal and illegal. The two latter categories were combined since both are misperceptions and few chose option three (n=25). The response patterns are described in the analysis.

Availability heuristics

Each regression model includes four measures of interpersonal contact with immigrants, which should be related to a greater likelihood of faulty perceptions. Four measures cover immigrant friends, neighbors, colleagues, and family. The first three have three categories ranging from "No, none at all" to "Yes, several". Immigrant family comes from a question about parents' birthplace. Responses include 1) mother and father born in Canada; 2) one parent born abroad; and 3) both parents born abroad.

Affect heuristics

An index of xenophobia captures negative attitudes toward immigrants. Three components measure the respondents' level of comfort if an immigrant were to become their 1) boss; 2) neighbor; or 3) wed to a close family member. Responses range from "very comfortable" to "very uncomfortable". These measures load highly onto a single principal components factor with an eigenvalue of 2.42 (chi2 = 24,000; p<.000). The final variable is a mean index of the three components.

Demographic variables

Demographic controls include dichotomous measures of sex (female = 1) and foreign-born status (immigrant = 1). Age is measured in years. Residence type has four categories (city, suburb, small city/town, and rural area). Political conservatism has seven categories ranging from "extremely liberal" to "extremely conservative". Socio-economic measures include education (less than secondary school, secondary school graduate, college graduate, post-graduate, and other) and a five-category perceived economic situation relative to the previous year ("got a lot worse" to "got a lot better"). Finally, all models control for province fixed effects to account for geographic variation in each outcome.[5]

Policy positions

The TATIS contains several immigration policy questions, five of which are considered here. The distributions are displayed in pie charts in Figure 1. One is measured dichotomously, with the more anti-immigrant option coded as 1:

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[5] All analyses were replicated using multi-level modelling with provinces occupying level-2 (Raudenbush and Bryk, 2002). The results and conclusions are similar to those presented. However, with only 9 level-2 units (four containing fewer than 30 observations), the current data do not meet most minimum sample size recommendations.

Some people think that the Canadian government should pay for language courses for immigrants. Others think this is not the government's responsibility to pay for these courses.

The remainder have four categories ranging from "strongly support" to "strongly oppose". All are coded so higher values represent more anti-immigrant positions:

As a result of worldwide climate changes, some people in other countries may need to move away from their homes. Can you tell me to what extent you support or oppose allowing these people to settle in your country?
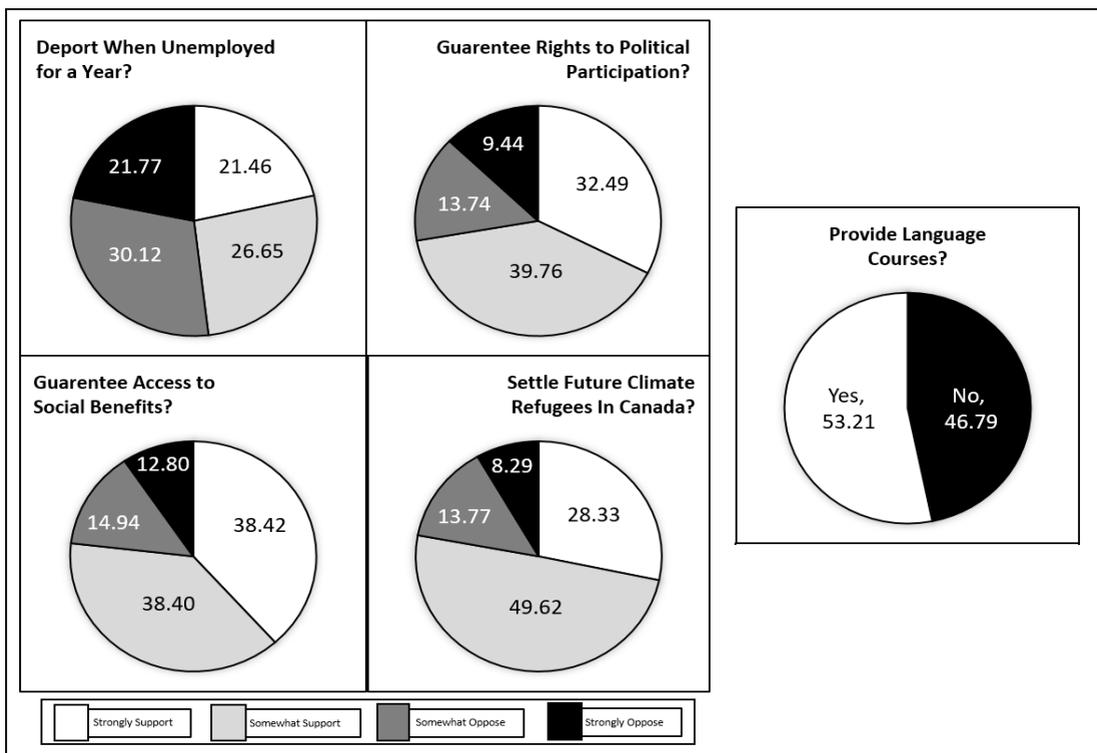
Do you support or oppose guaranteeing legal immigrants the same access to social benefits as nationals.

Do you support or oppose guaranteeing legal immigrants the same rights to political participation?

Do you support or oppose requiring immigrants who are unemployed for more than one year to leave the country?

Respondents are most pro-immigrant for resettling climate refugees, with nearly 78 percent choosing either support option. They are most anti-immigrant for providing language courses, which 46.79 percent view as inappropriate.

Figure 1: Distributions of Anti-Immigrant Policy Outcomes

Methods

The analysis first considers the extent of misperceptions by examining univariate sample means and proportions for the two perceptions of interest. Then, multivariate least squares and binary logistic regression models predict variation in both misperceptions. Finally the analysis concludes with multivariate logistic and ordinal logistic models using misperceptions to predict policy preferences.

Analysis

How do Canadians Imagine Immigrants?

Table 1 displays the mean perceived size of the immigrant population. On average, Canadians estimate immigrants to be 36.08 percent. This is a significant (p<001) over-estimate relative to the actual size of 21 percent. Put another way, the typical Canadian believes the immigrant population is 42 percent larger than the reality. This is similar to the aforementioned IpsosMORI study (2015).

Table 1 also displays the percentage of Canadians believing that the typical immigrant has undocumented status. In total, 14.64 percent exhibit this misperception. Overall, misperceiving immigrants' legal status is rarer than over-estimating their population size (over 65 percent over-estimate).

Characterizing Misperceivers

Table 2 presents regression models predicting both misperceptions. Beginning with the least squares model predicting size perceptions: females provide larger estimates. On average the typical female perceives immigrants as 4.901 percentage points larger than the typical male (p<.01). Political conservatives also offer larger estimates. Conversely, the most highly educated provide smaller estimates; 9.2 percentage points smaller than primary school graduates (p<.05). Rural residents and those perceiving improved economic circumstances also estimate significantly lower (p<.10).

Regarding cognitive availability sources, those with immigrant neighbors (p<.05) and family members (p<.10) offer larger population size estimates. However, immigrant friends and colleagues yield no association. Similarly, xenophobia is unrelated to size perceptions.

The logistic regression model predicting legal status mischaracterizations yields fewer significant associations. Conservatives are more likely to view the typical immigrant as undocumented, though the association is marginally significant (p<.10). For each unit increase in conservatism, the predicted log odds of selecting "mostly illegal" or "equal numbers legal and illegal" increases by .169. Put another way, the likelihood of expressing immigrant status misperceptions is predicted to increase by 18.41 percent ($e^{.169}$) for each unit increase in conservatism. Further, those with less than a primary school education also tend to mischaracterize the immigrant population in this manner. Those residing in small towns are more likely to perceive the typical immigrant's legal status accurately.

Unlike population size perceptions, legal status characterizations are unrelated to contact with immigrants, but strongly related to negative affect (p<.001). Each unit increase in xenophobia corresponds to a .464 point increase in the log odds of choosing the "mostly illegal" (or equal) option. Put another way, the likelihood of misperceptions increases by 59.04 percent ($e^{.464}$) for each unit increase in xenophobia.

Table 2: Multivariate regression models predicting immigrant population size estimates and immigrants' typical legal status (n = 806)

	Population Size Perceptions		Legal Status Mischaracterizations	
	B	SE	B	SE
Cognitive Factors				
Immigrant Friends	0.796	1.297	-0.228	0.172
Immigrant Colleagues	0.304	1.136	0.026	0.150
Immigrant Neighbors	2.757*	1.227	-0.105	0.164
Immigrant Family	2.591+	1.446	-0.133	0.201
Affective Factors				
Xenophobia	1.335	1.453	0.464**	0.165
Demographic Factors				
Female	4.901**	1.673	0.045	0.217
Age	-0.030	0.057	-0.006	0.007
Immigrant	0.865	3.034	0.650	0.402
Conservatism	2.102**	0.694	0.169+	0.093
Subjective Economic Situation	-1.504+	0.906	-0.081	0.117
Less than High School	4.517+	2.590	0.784*	0.328
College	-0.720	2.165	-0.368	0.290
Graduate Deg.	-9.223**	3.376	-0.130	0.443
Other Educ.	0.156	5.205	-0.416	0.807
Suburb	-1.315	2.411	-0.416	0.312
Town	-0.573	2.222	-0.562*	0.283
Rural	-4.681+	2.659	-0.282	0.332
Constant	35.286***	8.985	-1.114	1.017

***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05, +p<.10 (two-tailed test); Models include province fixed effects

Are Misperceivers More Likely to Support Anti-Immigrant Policy?

Table 3 considers the associations between the two misperceptions of interest and five immigrant-related policy positions. The table only displays the misperception coefficients, but each model includes the controls from Table 2. Canadians who incorrectly perceive the typical immigrant

Table 3: Ordinal logistic and binary logistic regression models predicting anti-immigrant policy positions (n = 806)

	Ordinal Logistic Regression								Binary Logistic Regression	
	Send Back if Unemployed		Same Political Rights		Same Social Benefits		Climate Refugees		Language Course	
	B	se	B	se	B	se	B	se	B	se
Size Perceptions	.001	.003	-.004	.003	.003	.003	.001	.003	.000	.003
Status Perceptions	.582**	.199	.494*	.196	.442*	.207	.483*	.214	.587**	.228
Intercept 1	1.652***	.689	-1.723***	.777	-.171	.750	1.649**	.734	-.379	.842
Intercept 2	-.128	.686	.094	.776	1.646**	.752	4.080**	.751	---	---
Intercept 3	1.236	.688	1.111	.776	2.776**	.757	5.328**	.763	---	---

***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05, +p<.10 (two-tailed tests); All models control for gender, age, conservatism, immigrant status, subjective socioeconomic situation, education, locality, contact, xenophobia, and province fixed effects.

as undocumented tend to support anti-immigrant policies. For example, the language course coefficient indicates that the log odds of choosing the more restrictionist option is .587 units higher

for those perceiving the typical immigrant as undocumented compared to those with accurate perceptions (p<.001). This corresponds to about a 79.55 percent increase ($e^{.587}$) in the likelihood of choosing a more restrictionist option relative to those with accurate perceptions. Misperceivers are also significantly more likely to oppose extending political participation and access to social benefits to immigrants. They also exhibit greater support for deporting unemployed immigrants and opposition to accepting climate refugees.

The other notable pattern is the lack of associations for perceived immigrant population size. Those over-estimating are no more likely to express anti-immigrant positions than those who under-estimate or guess correctly.

Summary and Discussion

Responding to President Trump's 2017 travel ban, which barred individuals from several majority-Muslim countries from entering the U.S., Prime Minister Trudeau tweeted: "To those fleeing persecution, terror & war, Canadians will welcome you, regardless of your faith. Diversity is our strength #WelcomeToCanada" (Ahmed, 2017). This attitude speaks to Canada's more welcoming reputation toward immigrants and refugees. However, it does not make Canadians immune from the misperceptions about foreigners that are both pervasive throughout the West and linked to anti-immigrant sentiment. A better understanding of these misperceptions may elucidate the recent signs of anti-immigrant push-back in Canada. The current study compared the extent, character, and potential consequences of two important components of the imagined immigration among Canadians.

Immigrant population innumeracy exists in Canada at levels comparable to the U.S. and Western Europe. Those who over-estimate tend to be female, politically conservative, with an economic situation that they perceive to have worsened over time, lack an advanced degree, and live away from rural areas. They have interpersonal contact with immigrants through neighbors and family, which inform their cognitive availability. But, they are no more xenophobic than correct- or under-estimators.

Though widespread, population size misperceptions are of little consequence in Canada. It is unrelated to any of the hypothetical policy positions considered here. This is counter to research in Europe, which frequently links population innumeracy to restrictionist positions (Sides and Citrin, 2007; Semyonov et al., 2004). One possible explanation lies in Canada's unique identity as a multicultural mosaic. This ideology will likely inflate Canadians' perceptions of the immigrant population size, while simultaneously preventing them from viewing more immigrants as a bad thing.

During the 2019 Parliamentary elections, the Conservative Party famously appealed to voters' concerns about undocumented immigration in Canada — a topic that is strongly associated with misperceptions in the U.S. The current study found that it is relatively rare for Canadians to mischaracterize the typical immigrant as undocumented. Only about 15 percent of do so. This is considerably lower than in the U.S., where over 57 percent held this misperception (Herda, 2018). Regardless, Canadians who mischaracterize tend to be more politically conservative, but also less educated, and live away from small towns. Misperceivers have as much intergroup contact with immigrants as those displaying accurate perceptions, but they are significantly more xenophobic, following expectations based on the negative affect heuristic.

Though rare, legal status mischaracterizations predict anti-immigrant policy leanings. Those viewing the typical immigrant as undocumented expressed greater support for all of the policy outcomes considered. This contrasts with the lack of consequences for population innumeracy and may relate to the different origins of these two pieces of the imagined immigration. Legal status mischaracterizations are linked to negative affect, suggesting that they develop from an underlying dislike for immigrants, which would logically produce opposition to legislation designed to help them. To the contrary, population innumeracy develops more from intergroup contact, which is associated with greater understanding and sympathy for out-groups (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006).

Regardless, the current results show clearly that some misperceptions are consequential, while others are not, which highlights a need for greater consideration of the totality of ignorance within the imagined immigration. Several innumeracy studies conclude with recommendations for the dissemination of correct population size information, hoping to improve perceptions and reduce intergroup hostility (Alba et al., 2005; Nadeau et al., 1991; Sides and Cirtin, 2007; Sigelman and Niemi, 2001). However, simply focusing on this one, relatively innocuous misperception omits a wide array of bases for ignorance that could be even more consequential. Legal status misperceptions proved consequential here, but there are other possibilities. Future research should delve deeper into the imagined immigration to determine which other bases of ignorance exist, which are consequential, and which can be remedied. Whether the typical immigrant can speak the majority language, receives welfare, commits crime, holds a job, or practices Islam, are pieces of verifiable information that respondents can misperceive, which may have consequences for intergroup relations and anti-immigrant preferences.

Future research should also monitor levels of legal status mischaracterizations over time as they have likely increased in Canada. As politicians bring the issue of undocumented immigration into the public discourse and as the media reports on the migration crises in Europe and the U.S., more Canadians are likely to conclude that there are more undocumented immigrants than there actually are. Given this misperceptions' link to dislike for immigrants and the tendency for individuals to malign undocumented migrants, it may generate a population that is highly receptive to anti-immigrant messages. The People's Party of Canada or other right-wing populist movements may find their greatest support among this population of misperceivers. A careful examination of legal status misperceptions over time may help researchers identify whether Canada is swinging further to the right on immigration, as has been the case in the U.S. and Europe.

Regardless, the current study has expanded consideration of immigrant misperceptions to an understudied context with a particularly welcoming reputation. Misperceptions exist and are consequential in Canada, though not all are created equal. Future research should continue to consider the extent, causes, and potential consequences of the totality of misperceptions in both Canada and throughout the world. Doing so may lead to a better-informed and more tolerant citizenry.

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