Received: 1 December 2020 | Revised: 15 March 2022 | Accepted: 23 March 2022

DOI: 10.1111/puar.13499

RESEARCH ARTICLE

PAR PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REVIEW ASPA

Delivering public services to the underserved: Nonprofits and the Latino threat narrative

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Abstract

Some politicians employ harsh rhetoric demanding that government deny public services such as food, housing, and medical care to immigrants. While nonprofits assist immigrants in this regard, their work is sustainable only if private donors support them. Using a survey experiment, this article examines whether donors' willingness to support a charity depends on the legal status of its beneficiaries, and the region from which they have come. We find that, in relation to a charity that serves low-income families (control group), donors are less willing to support a charity serving immigrants, but the region from which beneficiaries emigrated is irrelevant. Donor willingness diminishes substantially when beneficiaries are undocumented or face deportation. While shared ethnicity between donors and beneficiaries does not increase charitable support, bilingualism does. In addition, support for the charity rises substantially among Latinx donors who were born outside the US and do not speak English at home.

Evidence for practice

- Nonprofits function in an ecosystem that, to some extent, is shaped by political rhetoric. Political rhetoric can affect the donor support they receive.
- Nonprofits should think about the benefits and drawbacks of highlighting their activities, as opposed to highlighting the demographic characteristics of their beneficiaries.
- Terms such as "undocumented migrant" can be triggers for certain individuals. Including immigrants' legal status in nonprofit fundraising campaigns can lead to a reduction in the number of individuals willing to donate to the cause.
- Given the importance of language spoken at home in motivating donor support in this experiment, nonprofits may benefit from running their fundraising campaigns in multiple languages, especially if they serve immigrant communities.
- Nonprofits serving immigrant communities should target Black donors.

INTRODUCTION

Governments often cannot provide adequate and timely support to underserved groups. Private charity plays an important role in supplementing governmental efforts, be it by operating food banks in response to COVID-19, providing medical relief to hurricane victims, or operating shelters for abused and battered women.

Scholars note that nonprofits arise in response to the failures of both markets and governments (Hansmann, 1980; Weisbrod, 1988) to address a pressing policy need. Sources of government failure are many, including budget constraints and responding to the median voter, thereby ignoring heterogeneous constituent preferences. In this article, we propose that political officials (as well as the media amplifying their message) may influence nonprofit viability in a different manner: through their rhetoric. If political leaders portray certain groups (e.g., formerly incarcerated people, immigrants) as undeserving of government resources in their speeches

Human subjects permission: IRB approval 1474252-1 from the University of Maryland.

and their writings (Schneider & Ingram, 1993), the political rhetoric itself may be enough for segments of the general public to conclude that these groups are undeserving of support more generally. If individuals take cues from political leaders, the latter's rhetoric might motivate individuals to decrease support for charities that serve these stigmatized groups.

Empirically, we focus on the provision of housing, food, and health services to children. While few oppose charities that help children, we suggest that the harsh anti-immigration rhetoric from certain political leaders in recent years could undermine private support for a charity that serves immigrant children. The conservative media, amplifying this negative rhetoric, routinely depict immigrants from Latin American countries in a negative light (Newman et al., 2018). We examine whether this sentiment could influence private support for humanitarian assistance to immigrant children.

Broadly, our paper contributes to fundamental issues in the study of charitable giving. While individuals donate to specific causes that are dear to them, it is not clear whether, within the context of a given cause, donors' motivations vary across different types of recipients. Does a cause become less or more worthy if donations are directed toward recipients of certain races, incomes, occupations, immigration status, and so on? Some laboratory and survey experiments have focused on the race/ethnicity, gender, and religion of recipients (Chen et al., 2019; Fong & Luttmer, 2009, 2011; Tremblay-Boire & Prakash, 2019), but not on immigration status. In this article, we examine whether American donors' willingness to donate to a nonprofit that provides housing and food services to children is affected by the beneficiaries' immigration status and the region from which they came. Does donors' willingness to support the charity depend on whether the beneficiaries are from Asia as opposed to Latin America, or are documented or undocumented?

Conservative politicians and media (Heuman & González, 2018) tend to leverage the "Latino threat narrative" (Chavez, 2013). In this narrative, Latinx immigration is portrayed as a serious economic, cultural, and security threat to the country. Presented with this harmful narrative, some Americans may become more suspicious of immigrants from Latin America. Based on this perspective, we should expect that survey respondents would be less willing to give to humanitarian charities supporting Latin American immigrants than to charities supporting immigrants from other regions.

Survey respondents' own ethnic/racial/immigrant identification may also influence their support for the charity. The linked-fate argument (Dawson, 1994; Sanchez, 2006; Sanchez & Masuoka, 2010) would suggest that, when donors share an identity with the charity's beneficiaries, they may be more likely to support it. Social identity theory also suggests that, under some conditions, individuals start perceiving their own social group (be it ethnic, religious, linguistic, or other) favorably and the out-group negatively (Tajfel, 1979; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). While much of social identity theory research focuses on dominant groups excluding minority groups, its insights are also useful to determine whether immigrant donors might be more sympathetic to the challenges faced by immigrant children. Thus, we operationalize in-groups among survey respondents in two ways: immigrants versus others and respondents with Latin American/Asian heritage versus others. We expect that immigrant respondents will show a higher willingness to donate to a charity that serves immigrant children than American-born respondents. Similarly, we expect that respondents with Latin American/Asian heritage will be more willing to donate when the charity helps Latin American/Asian immigrants specifically.

Holding issue area constant, we conduct a survey experiment to explore whether information about (1) the legal status of immigrant beneficiaries, and (2) the immigrants' area of origin influences individuals' willingness to donate to the charity in the United States. Subjects are randomly divided into experimental groups, each reading a slightly different description of a fictional charity that provides shelter, food, and medical services to immigrants (except in the control group, where these services are provided to homeless or low-income families with children). The description varies in terms of the beneficiaries' legal status (non-immigrants; immigrants; undocumented immigrants) and their country of origin (Latin American countries vs. Asian countries). We administered the survey online to 1600 respondents in October 2019. After reading the description of the charity, participants are asked about their willingness to donate to the organization.

We find some support for the argument that the Latino threat narrative influences private giving. While donor willingness to support a charity is lower for immigrants than for non-immigrants, it is not influenced by the region from which beneficiaries emigrated. However, we do find that donor willingness diminishes when beneficiaries are undocumented or face deportation. We also find mixed support for linked fate and social identity arguments. While shared ethnicity between donors and beneficiaries does not increase support for the charity, bilingualism does. Further, compounding multiple identities (immigration status, ethnicity, and linguistics) leads to increased support. That is, support for the charity rises substantially for Latinx donors who speak a language other than English at home (and even more if they were also born outside the United States).

THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

Latino threat narrative

Conservative media and politicians tend to employ harsh rhetoric against Mexicans, describing them as "rapists, drug dealers, and illegals," while describing immigrants as "invading, animals, and aliens" (Chavez, 2013). Although the Latinx community contains a multitude of ethnicities,

cultures, and histories, the Latino threat narrative has grown to encompass the entire community, regardless of national origin or ethnicity. To be of Latinx descent is to pose a threat to the American way of life.

Although first coined by Chavez (2013), the Latino threat narrative emerged decades ago. Huntington (2004) warned that the United States would soon face an internal threat from individuals of Latinx descent. He claimed that the Latinx community is unwilling to assimilate into the fabric of America, threatening the American way of life: "Along with immigration from other Latin American countries, it [Mexican immigration] is advancing Hispanization throughout America and social, linguistic, and economic practices appropriate for an Anglo-Hispanic Society" (Huntington, 2004, p. 221). Implicit is the claim of an unstoppable Latinx migration and culture constantly replenished through new immigration (Jiménez, 2010). Unlike European immigrants, Latinx immigrants have a shared history and border with the United States. This intertwined fate creates the idea that the Latinx community will one day use its sheer numbers as an "invading" force to reconquer the land that once belonged to Mexico (Chavez, 2013; Huntington, 2004).

The Latino threat narrative has had an impact on public perceptions. Scholars have discussed at length how attitudes toward immigrants of Latino descent are negative and harmful to the immigrant population (Espenshade & Calhoun, 1993; Espenshade & Hempstead, 1996; Fraga & Segura, 2006; Massey & Sánchez, 2010; Sevillano & Fiske, 2012). Furthermore, irrespective of their legal status, Latinx immigrants are often labeled as *illegals*, which implies that they free ride on public services and deprive American citizens of their rightful resources.

In the past few years, the United States has grappled with border crises over the construction of the border wall and the influx of migrant caravans. Similar to the rise in alarmist rhetoric and imagery between 1965 and 1999 (Massey & Pren, 2012), these current crises, coupled with the rhetoric of former President Trump, reinvigorated media and public attention to immigration and re-ingrained the Latino threat narrative in the minds of some Americans. In a July 2020 poll by NPR/Ipsos, when asked if undocumented immigrants who pay taxes in the United States should receive a COVID stimulus check, while 49% of respondents said yes, 43% said no (Rose, 2020). Research supports the findings from this poll: individuals in the US report anxiety about all immigrants but perceive a greater threat from unauthorized immigrants (Murray & Marx, 2013).

In contrast to the Latinx community, some commentators stereotype Asian Americans as a "model minority" who work hard and assimilate well into the American cultural milieu (Chou & Feagin, 2015). Yet, this ignores historical discrimination against Asians, including the 1885 Chinese Exclusion Act, the 1924 Immigration Act, and the internment of Japanese Americans during the Second World War. The recent increased incidence of hate crimes, including assaults, on Asian Americans, reveals that some remain hostile to Asian immigrants (Tavernise & Oppel Jr, 2020). Moreover, Chao et al. (2010) find that individuals who are malleable to the "model minority" myth are less likely to support redistributive government policies for Asian Americans. The authors suggest that this myth could lead to the denial of funding for nonprofit social services to the Asian community. Furthermore, Wu and Kim (2014) find that Asian immigrants do not benefit from the positive effects of the "model minority" myth in legal proceedings when compared to other immigrant groups. Thus, it is not clear whether public perceptions about supporting Asian Americans and Latin Americans diverge or follow similar patterns.

The above discussion relates to a broader policy debate on why individuals have specific opinions on policy issues, and what sorts of actions they undertake (or do not undertake), be it by voting, protesting, expressing views on social media, or boycotting products. On one end, rational choice theories suggest that individuals are able to assess individual benefits and costs from specific policy positions. Constructivists suggest that individuals interpret the world and policies through their specific worldviews (Pierce et al., 2014; Schneider & Ingram, 1993). Social identity theories recognize the importance of worldviews in shaping policy choices. However, they suggest that these worldviews arise from group processes: individuals tend to employ the perspective of the group with which they share a common identity (Greene, 1999; Monroe et al., 2000). Adopting such a group-sanctioned perspective confers benefits to the individual, including a sense of belonging and pride (Hornung et al., 2019). The "psychological wage" argument is one example where working-class whites adopt racist attitudes and behaviors to maintain a sense of superiority over other races—even when some behaviors militate against their individual economic interests (Roediger, 1999).

The Latino threat narrative is a racialized conflict narrative that fuels the growth of anti-Latinx sentiment, especially toward undocumented immigrants. As people in the United States are constantly presented with this narrative in the media and by political officials, some of them may become more suspicious of immigrants from Latin America. We posit that this will also influence their charitable giving. We propose that survey respondents will be less willing to give to a humanitarian organization supporting Latin American immigrants in relation to Americans and to immigrants from other regions.

Hypothesis 1. *Donors are less likely to support a charity that serves Latin American immigrants as opposed to (non-immigrant) homeless/low-income families.*

Hypothesis 2. *Donors are less likely to support a charity that serves Latin American immigrants as opposed to Asian immigrants.*

Hypothesis 3. *Donors are less likely to support a charity that serves Latin American immigrants*

who are undocumented or facing deportation as opposed to ones who are documented.

What is driving this sense of "being threatened" by immigrants, especially Latin American immigrants, within the general population? A crucial issue is whether the support for anti-immigrant attitudes is driven by economic factors, cultural factors, or both (Ben-Nun Bloom et al., 2015; Guiso et al., 2017; Inglehart & Norris, 2017). Scholars and pundits have argued that individuals in the United States (especially among the working class and less educated) may hold negative perceptions of immigrants, especially Latin American immigrants because they believe that immigrants are stealing American jobs and depressing wage rates. They see immigrants as immediate economic competitors (a "perceived realistic threat"), especially for low-skilled jobs. If that argument is correct, we should expect that economically vulnerable respondents would be less likely to support a charity that serves immigrant families.

Hypothesis 4. *Economically vulnerable donors (as measured by income and education) are less likely to support a charity that serves immigrants as opposed to (non-immigrant) homeless/low-income families.*

Individuals may also feel threatened by immigrants for cultural reasons. In the words of Murray and Marx (2013, p. 333), "symbolic threats represent challenges to the morals, values, and identity of the majority community." When members of a majority/dominant group perceive that newcomers are different, perhaps through language, religion, or customs, they can feel that their current "way of life" or that "American identity" is threatened, affecting their willingness to help the newcomers. For example, Burhan and van Leeuwen (2016), in an experimental study in Europe, find that people who display high levels of nationalism see immigrants as a threat to their culture (regardless of the immigrants' levels of cultural adaptation), and, as a result, are less willing to help them. On the other hand, intergroup contact may help diminish the feeling of cultural threat. For instance, having a friendship with a Latinx immigrant can result in more positive attitudes toward the Latinx immigrant community as a whole (Ellison et al., 2011). Buckingham et al. (2018) find that people who self-report low levels of contact with immigrants tend to see intergroup differences as more threatening and are more likely to see diversity as an impediment to a common identity of "us."

Hypothesis 5. *Donors who see immigrants as a cultural threat (as measured by political ideology, attitudes toward Latinx people and immigrants, and frequency of interactions with people of other races/ethnicity) are less likely to support a charity that serves immigrants as opposed to (non-immigrant) homeless/low-income families.*

Linked fate theory

Individuals sometimes recognize their shared identity and feel motivated to help fellow group members. Common identity invokes shared sacrifice or experiences of discrimination that encourage group-level empathy (Dawson, 1994; Sanchez, 2006; Sanchez & Masuoka, 2010). This sort of shared identity is not aimed at hurting others; it is aimed at helping individuals who have had similar life experiences, especially with regards to discrimination (Dawson, 1994). While living in a period of anti-immigrant sentiment and punitive immigration policy (Vargas et al., 2017), the immigrant community may experience an increase in its sense of linked fate, perhaps contributing to an interest in helping other immigrants.

In its extreme version, an emphasis on social identity encourages the "us versus them" attitude where individuals favor members of the in-group at the expense of others, and even hold prejudices against out-group members (Tajfel, 1979; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; see also Tremblay-Boire & Prakash, 2019 for an experiment on the impact of religious in-group/out-group identities on charitable giving). However, we are interested in a different, more "positive" aspect of social identity. We propose that charitable giving decisions might be affected by whether donors identify with the charity's beneficiaries. We expect that people who identify as immigrants would be more willing to donate to immigrants. As Barreto et al. (2008) find, following an increase in nativism and anti-Muslim sentiment, the sense of linked fate among the Muslim American population grew. A similar mechanism may be at play here.

Relatedly, survey respondents who share an ethnic or racial identity with the charity's beneficiaries, even if they are not immigrants themselves, may be more likely to support the charity's work. Laboratory experiments on generosity and income redistribution, including trust games and dictator games, have found mixed evidence of racial/ethnic bias in their participants (Fong & Luttmer, 2009; Stichnoth & Van der Straeten, 2009). It may be the case that, in some circumstances, sharing a race or ethnicity is a key factor in our giving decisions. For example, Fong and Luttmer (2009) find that people who feel close to their racial/ethnic group donate more to their own group, while people who do not feel as close tend to give more to others. Interestingly, Fong and Luttmer (2011) propose that white bias against Black recipients of charity may not be based on race per se, but rather on racialized perceptions of moral worthiness. A similar prejudice may exist against immigrants who are undocumented or facing deportation (and perhaps even against immigrants more generally). Yet, in other cases, people

may choose to donate to people of another race/ethnicity because they are perceived as needier (Chen et al., 2019).

> **Hypothesis 6.** *In relation to non-immigrant donors, immigrant donors are more likely to support a charity that serves immigrants.*

> **Hypothesis 7.** *Latinx (Asian) donors are more likely to support a charity that serves Latin American (Asian) immigrants.*

DATA AND METHODS

To test these hypotheses, we conducted a survey experiment that presented the profile of a fictional charity, Help Kids Thrive (HKT), and asked respondents how much they would be willing to donate to the organization.[1] The private survey firm Dynata administered the survey online in October 2019, implementing quotas on gender, race/ethnicity, age, and census region to ensure that the sample was representative of the US population. Dynata maintains a nationally representative panel of participants. In exchange for their participation in various Dynata-administered surveys (for both commercial and academic projects), participants earn reward points that they can redeem for gift cards, loyalty miles, and so on. A total of 1645 respondents answered the survey, but 218 asked that their information be deleted after being debriefed, leaving 1427 usable entries. Of the 1427 usable entries, 1209 had complete observations on all variables of interest. In the final sample, women are slightly underrepresented (48% compared to the 51% quota) as are respondents between 18 and 24 (11% compared to the 13% quota). Otherwise, the numbers remain similar (see Appendix S1 for sampling details).

The survey consisted of three parts: (1) a factsheet about HKT, the fictional charity, (2) questions about the factsheet (including the dependent variable and attention checks), and (3) demographic and attitudinal questions. Each respondent was assigned randomly to one of eight different experimental groups. The factsheet always includes information about what HKT does, a statement about current priorities, and a plea for a donation at the end. Figure 1 shows the control vignette.

The key experimental manipulation was to vary the population HKT prioritizes. Survey respondents saw one of four text options:

- Control text: "[…] Help Kids Thrive prioritizes services to families with children who are homeless or struggle to afford basic necessities."
- Treatment 1: "[…] Help Kids Thrive prioritizes services to families with children who immigrated recently from Mexico, Guatemala, and El Salvador."
- Treatment 2: "[…] Help Kids Thrive prioritizes services to families with children who immigrated recently from China, India, and the Philippines."

About Help Kids Thrive

What we do:

- We run temporary shelters for families where parents and their children stay together.
- We have created a network of food banks so that children can eat nutritious meals.
- We operate medical and dental clinics for uninsured or underinsured children and their parents.

Because of the large demand in our community, currently Help Kids Thrive prioritizes services to families with children who are homeless or struggle to afford basic necessities.

Please act now! We need your help!

For example, a $5 donation provides complete, nutritious meals for one person for one day.
$10 = Feeding two people for a day
$15 = Feeding a family of three for a day
$20 = Feeding a family of four for a day

FIGURE 1 Control experimental frame

- Treatment 3: "[…] Help Kids Thrive prioritizes services to families with children from Latin America who are undocumented and/or facing deportation."

We selected the countries mentioned in treatments 1 and 2 (Mexico, Guatemala, and El Salvador, as well as China, India, and the Philippines) because they represented the largest share of foreign-born immigrants to the United States for Latin America and Asia at the time of the study. Our focus was on selecting countries with which survey respondents were more likely to be familiar immigration-wise. One limitation of this approach is that the Asian countries listed in treatment 2 are more heterogeneous than the listed Latin American countries: they are not contiguous, do not share language or history, and may not even share a racial identity. The experimental conditions do note that the prioritization of these immigrants is due to "the large demand in our community," hopefully signaling that HKT is focusing on the immigrants who are more numerous in the community, and not on any particularistic preferences for certain Asian states. Future research should study the effects of different combinations of countries on respondents' behaviors.

In addition, we also experimented with different suggested donation amounts (the appeal scale). Past research has shown that the appeal scale can affect the likelihood and magnitude of donations (De Bruyn & Prokopec, 2013; K. Y. Lee & Feinberg, 2017). In this case, one-half of survey respondents were given the choice between a $5, $10, $15, or $20 donation (the low-ask group) while the other half saw a choice between $20, $40, $60, or $80 (the high-ask group). All respondents were also provided with two additional options: they could specify an amount of their choice (text entry) or they could select "I would prefer not to give at this time."

In order to maintain consistency between the text of the vignette and the suggested donation levels, the vignette was altered as follows for respondents in the high-ask group: "[…] a $20 donation provides complete, nutritious meals for a family of four for a day; $40 = Feeding a family for two days; $60 = Feeding a family for three days; $80 = Feeding a family for four days."

In sum, survey respondents were assigned randomly to one of four profiles of HKT (prioritizing service to low-income families, Latin American immigrant families, Asian immigrant families, or Latin American immigrant families who are undocumented or facing deportation) and to one of two appeal scales ($5/10/15/20 or $20/40/60/80). This resulted in one baseline/control group and seven treatment groups. Through this random assignment, we aimed to determine if the beneficiaries' country of origin and immigration status impact survey respondents' willingness to donate to the charity.

We included two general attention check questions (#1 and #3) and one stimulus attention check question (#2) to verify if respondents paid attention to the vignette: (1) What type of service does HKT not offer?, (2) Which of these populations is HKT prioritizing right now?, and (3) According to the HKT's page you saw, what can a $20 donation to HKT provide? Table 1 sorts respondents by the number of attention check questions they answered correctly. Overall, 40.7% of respondents (N = 492) answered two or three questions correctly. Since our goal is to measure the effect of our experimental manipulations, the regression analyses presented below focus on the subset of respondents who answered at least two questions correctly (the "attentive" subsample). Arguably, one can only be influenced by the manipulation if one was paying attention. In Appendix S1, we present the results for the full sample (Section 2.1).

Finally, respondents were asked a series of demographic and attitudinal questions. To test the linked fate hypotheses, we asked respondents about their race/ethnicity, whether they were born in the United States and whether they speak a language other than English at home. We also asked about other demographics: gender, age, education, household income, marital status, employment status, political party affiliation, political ideology, religion, religiosity, previous charitable giving and volunteering, and state of residence. In addition, we asked about their news consumption (did they read/watch/listen to the news yesterday) and their knowledge of politics (select the name of the current Speaker of the House of Representatives).

TABLE 1 Distribution of respondents by attentiveness level

	0/3 correct	1/3 correct	2/3 correct	3/3 correct	Total
Respondents, *n*	231	486	329	163	1209
Respondents, %	19.1	40.2	27.2	13.5	100

To assess attitudes toward Latinx individuals and immigrants, we administered the 9-item Modern Racism Scale modified by Abad-Merino et al. (2013), and we asked three questions about attitudes toward immigrants.[2] Finally, we asked respondents how frequently they interact with people of a different race/ethnicity in various settings (e.g., workplace, family, religious services, etc.).

We conducted regression analyses using two specifications. First, we transformed our dependent variable into a dichotomous variable (whether a person chooses to give or not) and estimated logistic regressions. The results presented below are based on the logit estimation. As opposed to linear regression coefficients which can be interpreted easily, logit coefficients are traditionally interpreted using log odds, which can be difficult to understand. Following King et al. (2000), in this article, we present the results of simulations instead. Using the point estimates and variance–covariance matrix from the full specification of the regression including all controls (column 5 in the regression table, section 1.4 of Appendix S1), we simulate the regression parameters 10,000 times by randomly drawing from the multivariate normal distribution. Second, we treated our dependent variable as an ordered categorical variable and estimated ordered probit regressions. Since the results for the ordered probit specification were consistent with the first specification, we present them in Appendix S1.

In Appendix S1, we also report the results of robustness checks. We repeat all analyses for the two appeal scale subsamples: low-ask (donation levels of $5/10/15/20) and high-ask (donation levels of $20/40/60/80). Furthermore, because it is possible that survey respondents did not read the experiment carefully, we test an alternative dependent variable: who they *believe* the charity is helping (regardless of the truth of this belief). All robustness checks can be found in Appendix S1.

FINDINGS

Does beneficiary identity influence survey respondents' willingness to donate?

About 55% of respondents in the attentive subsample answered that they would donate some money to HKT (see Table 2). But were survey respondents more/less likely to say they would donate to HKT when they were presented with different recipients? Would it matter if the recipients were immigrants? Would it matter where they came from? (Hypotheses 1, 2, 3).

We hypothesized that survey respondents should favor low-income families (non-immigrant control group) over Latin American immigrant families, and over Asian immigrant families. But we expected that, if we compared the two immigrant groups, Asian immigrants would be perceived as less of a threat than Latin American immigrants. We also hypothesized that support for the charity

TABLE 2 Breakdown of dependent variable

	Original sample		Attentive subsample	
	n	%	*n*	%
Donation of $1 or more	707	58.5	270	54.9
"Prefer not to give at this time" ($0)	502	41.5	222	45.1
Total	1209	100	492	100

would diminish even more when the beneficiaries were identified as Latin American families who are undocumented or facing deportation. Regression analyses mostly support our hypotheses (see Appendix S1 for regression tables).

In accordance with our hypotheses, all else equal, respondents are less likely to support Latin American families ($p < .10$), Asian families ($p < .05$), and Latin American families who are undocumented or face deportation ($p < .05$) than non-immigrant low-income families. To illustrate the substantive effects of the experiment, we conducted simulations using the regression output. Figure 2 shows the results. The dotted vertical line at 67.6% is the baseline probability. Based on the logistic regression analysis, the probability that the average survey respondent will say they would donate anything to HKT is 67.6% for the control charity profile (HKT prioritizes low-income families). The three rows in the figure are the three treatment groups (HKT prioritizes Asian immigrants, Latin American immigrants, and undocumented Latin American immigrants). The point for each row represents the expected change in the probability of being willing to donate any amount of money as we change the control charity profile to that profile, holding other variables constant. Lines around each point represent 90% confidence intervals. Each scenario for which the confidence intervals do not cross the zero line is statistically significant. The distance of the scenario from that zero line shows its substantive effect.

The first row of Figure 2 illustrates that, if we tell the average survey respondent in the sample that HKT prioritizes recent Asian immigrant families, the probability that the respondent will express willingness to donate to HKT is 14.7 percentage points lower (at 52.9%) than if they were told that HKT is prioritizing low-income families. Similarly, the probability that the average respondent would be willing to donate to HKT if it prioritizes Latin American families is 54%, also significantly lower than for the control group. When it comes to Latin American families that are undocumented or facing deportation (last row in the figure), the results are even starker: the average survey respondent is 20.9 percentage points less likely to be willing to donate anything to HKT in that scenario (almost a third less likely than for the baseline scenario). Figure 2 tells the story we were expecting: the probability that respondents would express willingness to

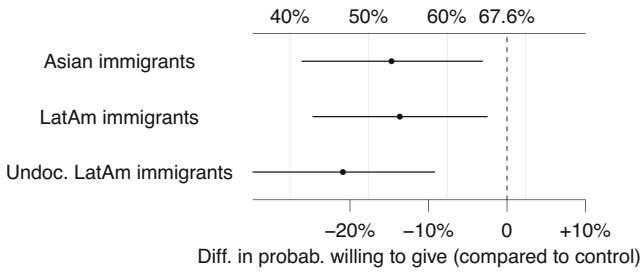

FIGURE 2 Results of counterfactual simulations: Predicted differences in willingness to donate between the control frame (baseline) and each experimental frame, all else equal, attentive subsample (90% confidence intervals shown)

donate to HKT is lower for all groups of immigrants compared to the control group (low-income families). However, contrary to our hypotheses, the predicted probability that the average survey respondent would be willing to donate to Asian immigrant families (52.9%) is about the same as for Latin American immigrant families (54%). Similarly, if we compare the predicted probability that the average survey respondent would be willing to donate to Latin American immigrant families directly to the predicted probability for Latin American families that are undocumented or facing deportation, we do not find a statistically significant difference.

Do survey respondents view immigrants as economic threats?

If the economic explanation of Latino threat theory is correct, we should find that survey respondents with a high school degree or less would be less likely to support a charity helping immigrants than their more educated counterparts because they see immigrants as "competitors" (Hypothesis 4). Yet, the regression analyses tell a different story. Respondents with some college education or a graduate degree are both significantly less likely to support HKT than respondents with a high school degree or less ($p < .05$).

Figure 3 shows the results. Black triangles represent the baseline: the probability that an average survey respondent with a high school degree or less would

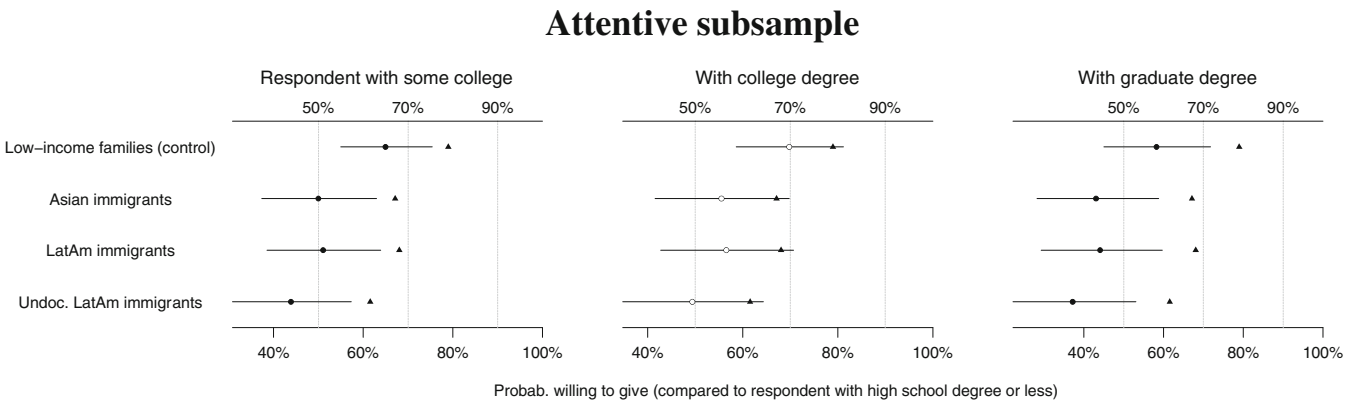

FIGURE 3 Results of counterfactual simulations: Predicted differences in willingness to donate based on the education levels of survey respondents, all else equal, attentive subsample (90% confidence intervals shown). Triangles represent the predicted probability that an average respondent with a high school degree or less (reference category) will express willingness to donate to Help Kids Thrive, all else equal. Filled black circles indicate that the difference between the education level for a given plot (see each plot subtitle) and the reference category is statistically significant. White circles indicate that the difference between the two is not significant.

donate anything to HKT, all else equal, for each scenario. The circles represent the difference between the baseline and other education levels (for example, the right-hand plot shows differences between respondents with a graduate degree and respondents with a high school degree). Overall, what we see is the opposite of what one would expect based on the economic explanation. The most educated survey respondents are the least likely to support HKT (a difference in probability of about 20.7 percentage points for graduate degree holders and about 14 percentage points for respondents with some college; the results for college degree holders are not statistically significant). According to the giving literature, higher educational achievement is generally associated with a greater likelihood of making charitable contributions (Andreoni et al., 2003; Brown & Ferris, 2007). So what could explain this unexpected finding? More educated survey respondents may be more sophisticated donors. They may not be willing to donate to an organization about which they know very little. More educated respondents may also be more likely to believe a small donation would not make a difference and thus choose not to give. Or they may not identify as much with the immigrants' situation. Research has also shown that more educated survey respondents are less likely than their less-educated counterparts to overstate their willingness to pay in a hypothetical situation (Mjelde et al., 2012).

Another way to test the economic explanation is through income. We would expect that survey respondents with the lowest income ($20,000 or less) would be least likely to support a charity helping immigrants because they see immigrants as "competitors." Again, the explanation is not supported by the data. None of the income brackets is statistically significant. Survey respondents with lower household incomes do not behave any differently than respondents with higher household incomes (see Figure 4). More generally, the charitable giving literature is not definitive on whether income affects the incidence of giving: while some scholars find that people with more financial resources are more likely to make a donation (irrespective of amount), others find no difference in the incidence of giving across incomes (see Wiepking & Bekkers, 2012 for a detailed overview of the literature on income and giving). This finding is consistent with the latter.

Do survey respondents view immigrants as a cultural threat?

Beyond economic fears, some Americans may hold negative views of immigrants for cultural reasons (Hypothesis 5). We expect survey respondents who identify as conservative (Republican) to be less willing to donate to HKT than their liberal (Democrat) counterparts. We expect survey respondents who score as less accepting of Hispanic/Latinx people (using the Modern Racism Scale) and who score as less accepting of immigrants more generally to be less willing to donate to HKT than more accepting respondents. We also expect survey respondents who rarely interact with people of other races and ethnicities in their day-to-day life to be less willing to donate to HKT than those who interact more often. None of the cultural indicators—political ideology and affiliation, general attitude toward Hispanic/Latinx people, general attitude toward immigrants, or level of interactions with people of other races and ethnicities—are statistically significant, as Figure 5 shows. The cultural threat explanation for anti-immigrant sentiment does not generate any support in this sample.

Does shared identity with beneficiaries change respondents' willingness to donate?

Using the linked fate argument, we suggested that survey respondents who share the same pan-ethnic identity as

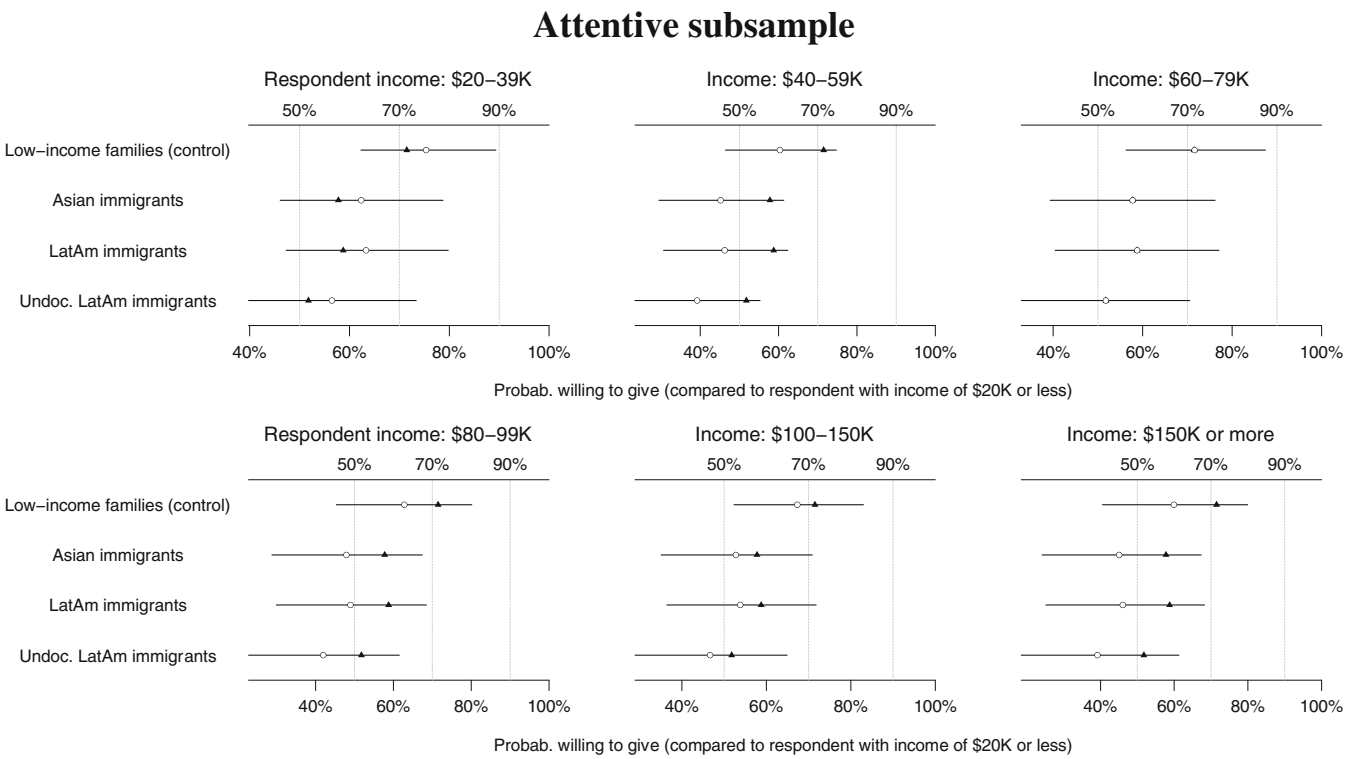

FIGURE 4 Results of counterfactual simulations: Predicted differences in willingness to donate based on the income of survey respondents, all else equal, attentive subsample (90% confidence intervals shown). Triangles represent the predicted probability that an average respondent whose household income is $20,000 or less (reference category) will express willingness to donate to Help Kids Thrive, all else equal. Filled black circles indicate that the difference between the income category for a given plot (see each plot subtitle) and the reference category is statistically significant. White circles indicate that the difference between the two is not significant.

HKT's beneficiaries (Hispanic/Latinx or Asian) would be more willing to donate to the organization (Hypothesis 7). Survey respondents who were born outside of the United States or speak a language other than English at home should also be more willing to donate because of their belonging to the same "immigrant" in-group (Hypothesis 6).

The black triangles in Figure 6 show the predicted probability that an average white, non-Hispanic survey respondent who was born in the United States and speaks English at home will donate to HKT, all else equal, for each of the different experimental scenarios. These black triangles are our baseline. Then, each plot of Figure 6 changes one or a few characteristics of the survey respondent to see if their probability of expressing willingness to donate will be different from the baseline white person, all else equal.

The first column of Figure 6 focuses on race and ethnicity. All else equal, the probability of donating for the average survey respondent who self-identifies as Black or African-American is about 16 percentage points higher than for the average white, non-Hispanic respondent. The nonprofit literature has produced mixed conclusions on the effect of race on charitable giving, with some studies finding that Black people give less than their white counterparts (usually citing the vast difference in wealth as a key explanatory factor) while others find no difference between races (V. B. Carter & Marx, 2007). In this particular case, the result could be due to a sense of linked fate with immigrants, as "Henry Fernandez and Jennifer Jones explain…, 'Black people know what it's like to have their communities terrorized, to feel fear when pulled over by police, and to fight to keep their families together'" (Alexander, 2020, p. xliii–xliv), leading to a sense of empathy toward immigrants. Additionally, Carter and King-Meadows's (2019) recent work has shown a dual consciousness in Black public opinion about immigration: while Black people may worry about immigrants, they do not want to see them suffer through deportation, for instance.

On the other hand, the probability of donation for average self-identified Latinx/Hispanic and Asian survey respondents is not statistically significantly different from the average white, non-Hispanic respondent, contrary to our expectations. The Latino threat narrative may be affecting Latinx respondents' calculus: the negative stereotype associated with their identity may cause them to identify with white non-Hispanics and act in a similar manner as found by Wilkinson (2014). Furthermore, Fraga and Segura (2006) and Vargas et al. (2017) find that weakened ethnic attachments through education and distance from the immigrant experience could lead to a weakening of linked fated and shared political behavior.

As shown in the first row of Figure 6, different proxies for "immigrant identity" produce different results. Being born outside of the United States is not statistically significant. However, not speaking English at home is associated

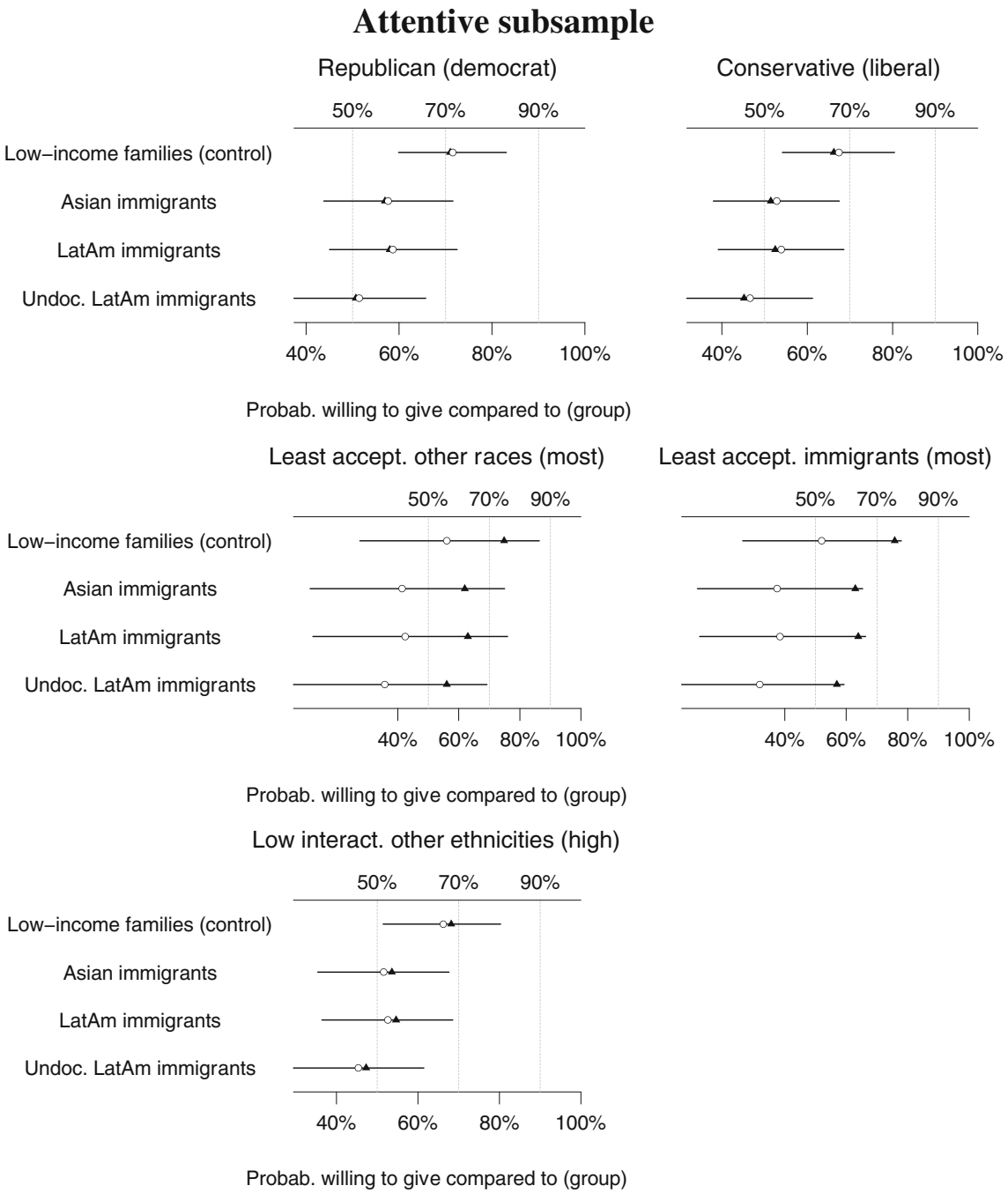

FIGURE 5 Results of counterfactual simulations: Predicted differences in willingness to donate based on "cultural explanation" variables, all else equal, attentive subsample (90% confidence intervals shown). Triangles represent the predicted probability that an average respondent in the reference category (in parenthesis in subtitle) will express willingness to donate to Help Kids Thrive, all else equal. Filled black circles indicate that the difference between a given characteristic and its associated reference category is statistically significant. White circles indicate that the difference between the two is not significant.

with a positive and statistically significant difference of about 13 percentage points ($p < .05$). Arguably, spoken language at home shows a greater connection and commitment to the immigrant identity. After all, immigrants face great pressure to assimilate, including by speaking English. Those who value their immigrant identity may be more sympathetic to the needs of immigrant children that the charity seeks to support.

Interestingly, if we combine both "types" of identities, the results become substantively larger for Latinx/Hispanic respondents. For example, all else equal, the probability that a Latinx/Hispanic respondent who does not speak English at home will donate to HKT is about a third higher substantively than that of a white, non-Hispanic survey respondent who was born in the United States and speaks English at home (middle row, plot 3 of Figure 6). The effect is not

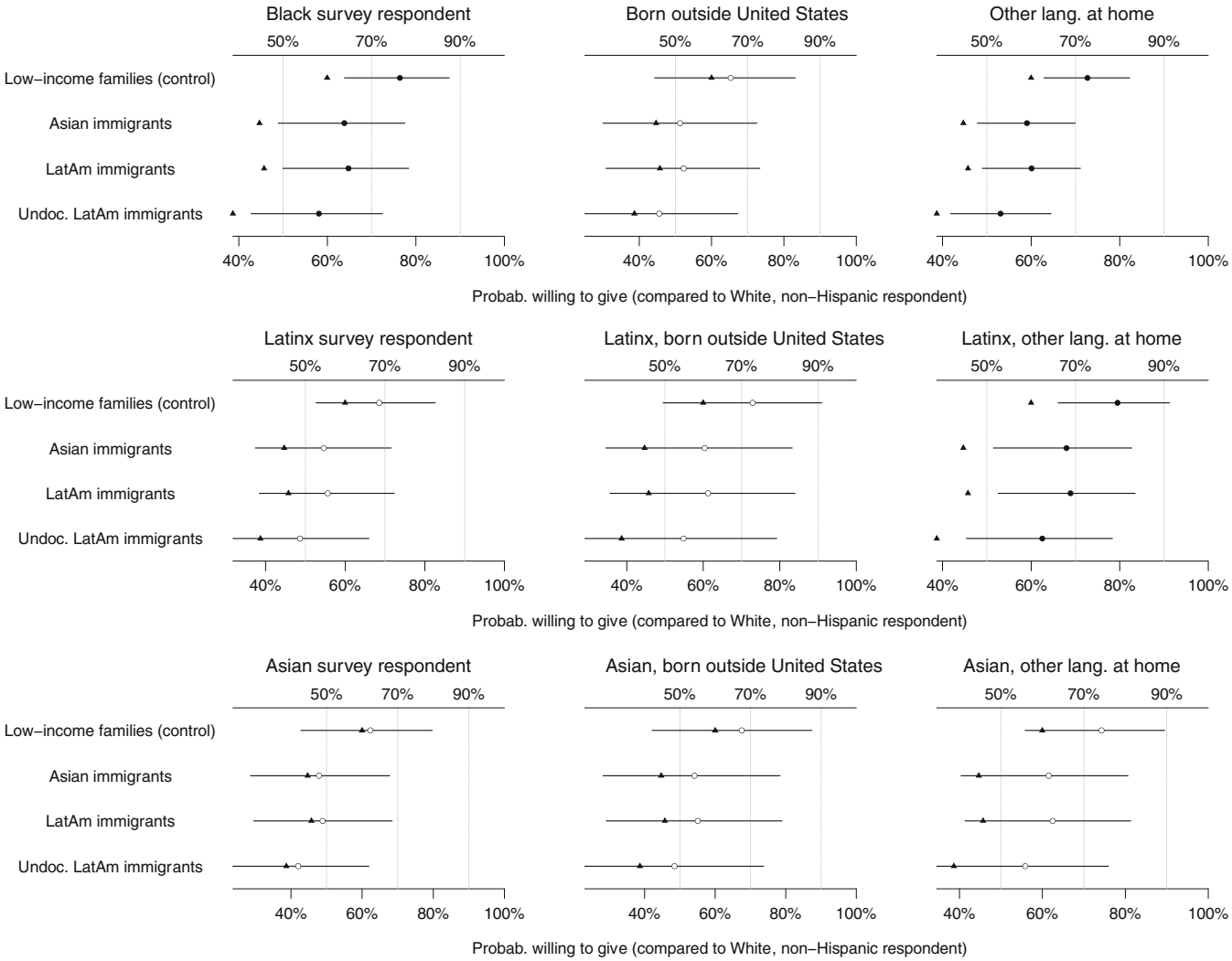

FIGURE 6 Results of counterfactual simulations: Predicted differences in willingness to donate based on the race/ethnicity and immigrant identity of survey respondents, all else equal, attentive subsample (90% confidence intervals shown). Triangles represent the predicted probability that an average white, non-Hispanic survey respondent who was born in the United States and speaks English at home (reference category) will express willingness to donate to Help Kids Thrive, all else equal. Filled black circles indicate that the difference between the characteristic(s) for a given plot (see each plot subtitle) and the reference category is statistically significant. White circles indicate that the difference between the two is not significant.

statistically significant when not speaking English at home is combined with Asian identity, however (bottom row, plot 3 of Figure 6). Statistically significant and substantively large differences seem to indicate that the identity of the donor matters. However, "immigrant" identity appears to be more salient than racial/ethnic identity in this case.

CONCLUSION

Nonprofits are a crucial pillar for delivering services, especially to the underprivileged. To accomplish their missions, nonprofits need resources from governments, foundations, and individuals. However, politicians' rhetoric about vulnerable groups (such as immigrants), as well as the resulting media attention, may foment prejudices among individual donors, thus potentially reducing the amount of funds available to these nonprofits even further.

Our paper contributes to the literature on how donor characteristics drive individual-level giving. As the populations that nonprofits serve become more heterogenous, the issue of recipient characteristics gains salience. Our study focuses on willingness to give as the first step in soliciting donations. The amount given to nonprofits is crucial, but without feeling motivated to give, it might be unlikely that the nonprofit would receive any donations. We test narratives based on racial/ethnic characteristics and legal status as mechanisms for engaging individuals to make charitable donations. The study is not without limitations. For instance, future surveys should increase the overall number of respondents and ask more specific questions about respondents' national origins (Castellano

et al., 2021; Uji et al., 2021). It may be the case that respondents feel a much stronger sense of common identity with fellow nationals than with pan-ethnic "Hispanic/Latinx" or "Asian" communities. Because we name specific countries in the experimental treatments, it would be interesting to distinguish between pan-ethnic and national identifications. The fact that the control condition mentions homelessness explicitly while the experimental conditions do not also creates the potential for differentiated responses unrelated to the immigration status of recipients.

In addition, the study does not ask respondents to make a real donation. If confronted with the decision to donate in "real life," research suggests that respondents may behave differently (Jerolmack & Khan, 2014; Sheeran, 2002). Moreover, certain groups of people may be more likely to exaggerate their hypothetical willingness to donate than other groups (Mjelde et al., 2012). In our case, immigration serves as a third-rail political issue for many individuals. This could cause, especially in an era of social justice, for respondents to engage in false reporting on our survey so as not to be seen as discriminatory or racist. Respondents may also display other forms of social desirability bias or self-deception, for instance trying to appear generous (Lee & Sargeant, 2011). Designing experiments that rely on real donations instead of willingness to donate may help address some of these issues. If asking for real donations is not possible, other strategies, such as including a follow-up question about the certainty of the response, have been found to be effective (Blumenschein et al., 2008). Yet, despite these limitations, we argue that this research makes important contributions to the literature. Given the rise of populism and the scapegoating of underprivileged groups that may need support, it is critical to understand how recipient characteristics might influence individual-level support for nonprofits.

The Latino threat narrative seems to have the potential to affect private philanthropy based on this sample of attentive respondents. Compared to (American) low-income families (control group), these results reveal a lower willingness to support HKT when beneficiaries are Latin American immigrant families (Hypothesis 1), Asian immigrant families (Hypothesis 2), and Latin American immigrant families who are undocumented/facing deportation (Hypothesis 3). However, readers should not that we do not find a statistically significant difference when we compare willingness to donate across immigrant groups directly. We expected that respondents would express less willingness to donate to Latin American immigrant families compared to Asian immigrant families, but they did not (although the results were both statistically significantly lower than for the control group, the difference between the two was insignificant). When we dive into potential explanations of anti-immigration sentiments, we find that the perception of an economic threat (Hypothesis 4) or of a cultural threat (Hypothesis 5) does not drive survey respondents' generosity, in line with previous research. Lower-income and less educated respondents are no less likely to say they would donate. Politically conservative respondents, those who are less accepting of Hispanic/Latinx people or of immigrants, and people who do not really interact with people of other races/ethnicities are also no less likely to donate. Regarding the linked fate argument, while being born outside of the United States (Hypothesis 6) and sharing an ethnic or racial identity (Hypothesis 7) do not drive support for HKT, those who speak a language other than English at home express a higher willingness to donate (Hypothesis 6 partially supported). Interestingly, compounding identities (i.e., self-identifying as Latinx/Hispanic *and* speaking a language other than English at home) results in an even higher willingness to support HKT, suggesting that Latinx/Hispanic identity does matter, along with immigrant identity (Hypothesis 7 partially supported).

This project also produces unexpected results that could prompt further research. For instance, the willingness to support HKT is lower among educated donors, and higher among African Americans, but not among Latinx or Asian respondents. Future research should examine how the willingness to support recipients might change if the charity has a religious affiliation. Religion is an important dimension of social identity and has been found to be a key determinant of charitable giving in survey research (Schervish, 1997; Toppe et al., 2002), yet experimental work in this area has been more limited (Tremblay-Boire & Prakash, 2019). Given that religious nonprofits play an important role in service delivery, future work should focus on this substratum of nonprofits.

Finally, this article should motivate research on how "populism" (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2013; Müller, 2016), especially through using trigger phrases such as "illegal" as dog-whistles, aims to activate in-group identity for white people (Albertson, 2015). If populism leads to the resurgence of "us versus them" dynamics, it could affect overall levels and distribution of philanthropy across sectors and across charities. On the other hand, scholars and the media have focused on "rage giving" lately: negative emotions about an issue/individual prompting donations to organizations that oppose this individual or issue (Sanders, 2017). It is possible that these two contradictory trends may be emerging at the same time: while some people shy away from giving to certain sectors/charities because of dog-whistles, others may become even stauncher supporters of those organizations as an act of resistance. Future research should study how political rhetoric impacts giving and the conditions that trigger either withdrawals of support, rage giving, or both. As a corollary, scholars may also want to differentiate between the use of dog-whistles/trigger phrases by media outlets or directly by political actors. In addition, it may be informative to replicate this study during the Biden administration (a relatively pro-immigrant president) to see if the results hold now that presidential rhetoric on immigrants has been toned down considerably while media rhetoric arguably has not.

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ENDNOTES

[1] IRB approval 1474252-1.

[2] (1) Immigrants today strengthen our country because of their hard work and talents. (2) Immigrants today are a burden on our country because they take our jobs, housing, and health care. (3) Immigrants are as patriotic as other Americans.

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How to cite this article: Tremblay-Boire, Joannie, Aseem Prakash, and Maria Apolonia Calderon. 2023. "Delivering Public Services to the Underserved: Nonprofits and the Latino Threat Narrative." *Public Administration Review* 83(1): 78–91. https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.13499