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Attitudes Toward Internal and Foreign Migration:
Evidence from a Survey Experiment in China

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Evidence from a Survey Experiment in China**

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Abstract

We explore attitudes toward internal and foreign migration in China using an original survey experiment. If labor market competition drives attitudes, then residents will be opposed to migrants with comparable skill levels, regardless of migrant origin. If residents fear a dilution of their national identity, then they will be more opposed to foreign migration than internal migration. We test these arguments by randomly assigning respondents to answer questions about migrants with different skills levels and from either foreign countries or other provinces in China. We find that attitudes cleave universally over skill level, but the foreign-internal dimension is, on its own, not a salient cleavage in preferences. However, when considering high-skilled migrants, respondents are more supportive of foreign than internal migration; when considering low-skilled migrants, they are more opposed to foreign than internal migration. The results cast further doubt on material explanations for attitudes toward migration and suggest a reevaluation of cultural threat arguments that privilege nationality and national borders.

Do prevailing arguments about attitudes toward international immigration also apply to the movement of people *within* a country? This question is especially salient for large emerging-market countries, many of which are experiencing a substantial dislocation of residents from rural areas to manufacturing centers as well as a significant increase in foreign immigration. Past scholarship has posited that the movement of people across borders can generate concerns over job security and falling wages for local residents if migrants have similar skills (Borjas 2011; Mayda 2006; Scheve and Slaughter 2001). An untested observable implication of this argument is that the public should have similar economic concerns about internal migrants who, like foreigners, compete in local labor markets. Another strand of scholarship is skeptical of material drivers of opposition to immigration and instead points to noneconomic considerations, including the cultural threat of outsiders from foreign nations (see, e.g., Adida, Laitin, and Valfort 2010; Hainmueller and Hiscox 2007, 2010; Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014; Sides and Citrin 2007). If the dilution of national identity and culture is the *sine qua non* of cultural threat, then residents should show greater opposition to foreigners than internal migrants, who are by definition co-nationals. On the other hand, if residents from the countryside instill their own brand of cultural threat to urban dwellers, then the foreign-internal divide in attitudes will be less prominent.

To test hypotheses about the determinants of attitudes toward immigration, we conducted an original survey experiment in China that explicitly examined public preferences toward foreign *and* internal migration. In a nationwide survey conducted in 2016, we randomly assigned respondents to answer questions about migrants who come to China from other countries, or co-nationals who move from other provinces to the respondent's province. We also randomized the skill level—either high skilled or low skilled—of the migrants. This experimental design enables

us to obtain an unbiased comparison between the distribution of attitudes toward high-skilled and low-skilled foreign and internal migration.

China is an ideal environment for such a study, given its recent history of mass internal migrations from the countryside to urban centers as well as foreign immigration from Africa and Southeast Asia. Moreover, China's government is not agnostic about these issues. National legislation provides many barriers to foreigners who seek visas, and a national registration system restricts internal migrants' ability to access public services. Therefore, focusing on the foreign-internal and skilled-unskilled dimensions of public attitudes tracks the salient dimensions of government policy over migration.

Our results challenge predictions from economic and nationality-based arguments about opposition to migration. Whether migrants are foreign or internal does not, by itself, shape respondents' preferences. Roughly one third of respondents prefer a decrease in foreign migration; the same fraction also prefers a decrease in internal migration. In line with past research, respondents generally prefer high-skilled to low-skilled migration, whether foreign or internal. We also explored the interaction between the foreign-internal dimension and the skill level of migrants. When considering high-skilled migrants, respondents are more supportive of foreign than internal migration; when considering low-skilled migrants, they are more opposed to foreign than internal migration. These results suggest that the public is more polarized when evaluating foreigners than co-nationals from other regions. Skilled foreigners are valued, whereas unskilled foreigners are shunned. Attitudes toward internal migration also cleave over skill level, but with far less intensity. Finally, in line with past research, we found no evidence of personal economic drivers of preferences: respondent skill levels, measured by educational

attainment and by self-assessment, are not associated with attitudes toward foreign or internal migrants with similar skill levels.

This is the first study to compare attitudes toward internal and foreign migration. We also join a small but growing literature on the determinants of attitudes toward internal migration in large emerging-market countries, and an even smaller literature on attitudes in China.¹

Economics, National Identity, and Public Opinion Toward Immigration

Immigration can affect societies in many ways. Economic models developed in the early 20th century suggest that the movement of people across borders generates distributional consequences. Low-skilled immigrants place downward pressure on the wages of low-skilled native workers, or in economies with sticky wages, cause higher unemployment (Borjas 2011; Mayda 2006; Scheve and Slaughter 2001). The same dynamic applies to high-skilled immigrants and high-skilled natives. Whether or not these changes in wages or unemployment actually hold in practice, if natives have expectations of greater labor market competition, they are likely to oppose immigrants with similar skills.²

In societies with social safety nets, such as government-provided health care, education, and income support, residents may also fear that migrants will impose a burden on public finance. Natives might therefore expect immigration to trigger a rise in taxes or an erosion of public services (Facchini and Mayda 2009; Hanson, Scheve, and Slaughter 2007). As with the

¹ See Gaikwad and Nellis (2017) on internal migration in India, and Zhu (2017) focusing on China. On fiscal responses to internal migration in India, see Bhavnani and Lacina (2017). Tai and Truex (2015) study the related question of attitudes toward return migration in China.

² See Murard (2017). For similar factor-endowment related arguments in the context of attitudes toward international trade, see Ardanaz, Murillo, and Pinto (2013) and Baker (2005). On individuals' countervailing beliefs about the effect of global market integration on themselves and others, see Guisinger (2017).

labor market competition channel, natives' expectations might not correspond with reality if immigrants are net contributors to the public purse, but nevertheless they might oppose immigration with fiscal concerns in mind.³

Apart from concerns about jobs and taxes, individuals might believe that immigration is a threat to national culture and identity (Card, Dustmann, and Preston 2012; Chandler and Tsai 2001; Fetzer 2000; Sides and Citrin 2007; Sniderman, Hagendoorn, and Prior 2004). At issue is the tension between in-groups and out-groups. As Kinder and Kam note, “[T]he policy issues that arise around immigration—whether outsiders should be allowed in; whether borders should be strengthened or relaxed; whether outsiders, if allowed in, should be granted the same rights and privileges as insiders—lend themselves readily to ethnocentric appeals among elites and to ethnocentric thinking among the general public” (Kinder and Kam 2010, 127). An individual’s pride or insecurity about national identity is arguably more difficult to measure than economic factors, but nevertheless virtually all recent studies acknowledge or speculate that cultural concerns are partly responsible for driving opposition to immigration (Malhotra, Margalit, and Mo 2013, 394).⁴

The challenges of making inferences about attitudes toward immigration are well documented. National-level surveys that pose general questions about immigration are ill-suited to testing competing hypotheses, as such data do not allow us to isolate the causal effects of the variables of interest (see Ford 2011; Hainmueller and Hangartner 2013). Thus, recent research has used experimental methods and targeted samples to overcome the limitations of past efforts. Hainmueller and Hiscox, for example, conducted a U.S. survey in which they randomly assigned

³ For a skeptical view, see Tingley (2012).

⁴ For a study that seeks to disentangle the various sources of immigration bias under the “sociotropic” rubric, see Rosenbluth, Kage, and Tanaka (2016).

respondents to answer questions about immigrants with different skill levels (Hainmueller and Hiscox 2010; see also Goldstein and Peters 2014). A subsequent study examined potential relationships between skill levels, industry locations, and other characteristics for respondents in a targeted survey of 12 industries (Hainmueller, Hiscox, and Margalit 2015). Both of these studies find that fears about labor market competition do not drive attitudes toward immigration. However, Dancygier and Donnelly (2012) find that economic context matters: respondents in growing sectors are more favorable toward immigration than those in declining sectors. Other scholars find support for labor market competition in narrower areas. For example, Malhotra and his colleagues find evidence of job and wage insecurity in a “most likely case” of high-tech workers evaluating the desirability of granting H-1B visas to Indian immigrants (Malhotra, Margalit, and Mo 2013). Ongoing research by Zhu finds that labor market concerns shape attitudes toward internal migration in China, but only after respondents are prompted to think about the economic impacts of migrant inflows (Zhu 2017).⁵

Other researchers find evidence of cultural threat through experimental methods. Adida and her colleagues find that a Muslim immigrant job candidate in France is less likely to receive a job interview callback than an otherwise identical Christian immigrant counterpart (Adida, Laitin, and Valfort 2010). Another study finds that respondents in the U.S. are more likely to oppose immigration in general when they read news stories about the costs of Latino immigrants rather than European immigrants (Brader, Valentino, and Suhay 2008). And finally, Hainmueller and Hopkins confront U.S. respondents with a choice of two immigrants whose attributes vary on nine dimensions, including country of origin and skills (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014). The

⁵ For a related argument about information as a cue for egocentrism in the context of preferences over monetary policy, see Bearce and Tuxhorn (2017); on self-interest and trade policy, see Rho and Tomz (2017).

effect of immigrants' countries of origin—their admittedly imprecise indicator of cultural differences—is typically small and statistically insignificant, but English language ability is an important predictor. The study also find that Americans' preferences do not vary with their own education, skills, or other attributes.

In all of these studies, respondents are asked to evaluate immigrants from foreign countries. But the main threat that underpins attitudes toward immigrants should also be present when considering internal migration. In particular, the labor market competition channel need not depend on foreigners; residents from elsewhere in the country who seek employment in a different region could also generate fears of job market security by local residents. If taxation and public spending are handled by regional authorities, then internal migration could also trigger concerns about the fiscal burden of public services provision. In short, it is the movement of people into one's community that leads to these material concerns, not necessarily the movement of people across national borders. On the other hand, if inflows of people perceived to threaten a nation's "distinctive identity" (Sides and Citrin 2007, 480) elicit particular hostility among local residents, then internal migrants—who by definition have the same nationality as locals—will instill less fear than foreigners, who are more likely to speak different languages and engage in different cultural and religious practices.⁶

The theoretical irrelevance of crossing a national border for the labor market channel, and its centrality for arguments based on national identity, suggests an unexploited strategy for identifying public motivations for opposing immigration. If labor pressures are paramount, then residents' opposition to migrants should be invariant to whether they are foreign or internal, all else equal. For example, a low-skilled resident should fear a loss in wages or job security when

⁶ For a study of the impact of language, accents, and cultural norms on support for immigration, see Hopkins (2015).

faced with increases in either foreign or internal low-skilled migration. If the public fears a dilution of its national identity, then residents should favor internal migrants over foreign ones, conditional upon their skills. And if respondents are more sensitive to the skill level of foreign migrants than internal migrants when forming their preferences, then we would expect the interaction of migrants' skill level and origin to reveal the extent of that sensitivity.

Foreign and Internal Migration in China

Since the 1980s, China has experienced a “tidal wave” of rural migrant labor to its urban areas (Roberts 1997). More than 260 million residents have left their agricultural jobs behind and moved to cities to take up higher-paying positions in manufacturing and services (World Bank 2014, 5). Rapid urbanization is not a new phenomenon, nor is it unique to China—indeed, the movement of residents from the countryside to cities is a rite of passage for all developing economies—but the absolute numbers are unprecedented.

A formal system of urban-rural certification also differentiates China's internal migration from those of other countries at a similar stage of development. A household registration system (*hukou*) provides every citizen with a permanent rural or urban designation (Chan and Buckingham 2008). Those with a rural designation have historically been precluded from receiving government services, even if they relocate to urban areas; however, the State Council has experimented with loosening these restrictions, with implementation largely left to individual city governments (Fan 2008, 67). Nevertheless, approximately 85 percent of urban migrants are ineligible for the basic government-provided entitlements offered to local *hukou* residents (Zhang and Li 2016, 1–2).

In recent years, foreign immigration has also increased dramatically, further complicating the influx of workers to urban centers. Data on Chinese migration are scarce, but a report from the Bureau of Exit and Entry Administration of the Ministry of Public Security found that more than 25 million foreigners entered the country in 2007, more than 10 percent of whom for employment reasons.⁷ China's migrant statistics may be drastically understated, given the documented waves of immigration from countries like North Korea, especially during that country's famine in the late 1990s. Hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese refugees entered China in the 1970s, mostly through the border town of Dongxing in the southern province of Guangxi, and were then resettled in several neighboring provinces.⁸ Moreover, illegal immigration is common, especially to China's large metropolitan areas (Pieke 2012). For documented migrants, the National Bureau of Statistics of China estimates that the top five countries of origin are South Korea, the U.S., Japan, Burma, and Vietnam (National Bureau of Statistics of China 2011).

As in many other countries, foreign immigration is controversial in China, even though foreigners constitute a small percentage of the country's population. In light of China's "brain drain," in which millions of residents have emigrated to other countries for education and employment (see Tai and Truex 2015), inflows of much-needed foreign labor have an obvious economic appeal. China's aging population and steep decline in the growth rate of its labor force intensify the appeal of foreign workers. However, natives sometimes view immigrants as opportunistic fortune-seekers who are prone to crime (Pieke 2012). Tensions occasionally flare between immigrant communities and local law enforcement, thereby intensifying natives' unfavorable attitudes (Bodomo 2010). For example, in 2009, a protest erupted in Guangzhou

⁷ See "China Plans Draft Immigration Law." China Daily, May 22, 2010. http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2010-05/22/content_9881622.htm

⁸ See "China has successfully absorbed many refugees from Vietnam. But it is ill-prepared for another influx." The Economist, Oct. 10, 2015.

after a Nigerian man died during a police immigration raid; a second protest occurred in 2012 under similar circumstances.⁹ Driven in part by public concerns over foreigners, the National People's Congress passed a new Exit and Entry Administration Law in 2013, which raised penalties for immigration offenses and set a legal framework for regulating visas and residency privileges in China.¹⁰

Internal migration is also controversial in China. Although workers from other provinces generally speak the same language and are of the same nationality and ethnic group (Han Chinese) as urban residents, some urban dwellers may harbor prejudices toward them and believe they are uneducated, unrefined, and prone to crime (Solinger 1999; Zhu 2017). Survey evidence of attitudes toward migration is scarce in China, but two recent studies are noteworthy. Zhu (2017) finds that urban natives think about the economic and material implications of internal migration when primed in a survey, but otherwise they do not make an immediate connection between their financial circumstances and migration. Tse (2016) finds that educated and high-income urban residents harbor more prejudice toward internal migrants than less-educated and poorer residents.

China is an ideal laboratory for a study of public opinion toward migration, given the prevalence and political salience of both foreign and internal migration. As Zhu (2017) notes, the political economy of China's internal migration is similar to that of foreign immigration, except that religious and ethnic differences are less salient for the case of internal migration. We therefore have a unique opportunity to adjudicate among labor market competition, national

⁹ "Africans protest in China after Nigerian dies in immigration raid." *The Guardian*, July 16, 2009; and "African Migrants Rioted in China Today after a Man Died in Police Custody," *Business Insider*, June 19, 2012.

¹⁰ See <http://cs.mfa.gov.cn/wgrlh/lhqz/lhqzjjs/t1120988.shtml> for an English translation of the law.

identity, and cultural threat as drivers of attitudes toward migration in a country that is experiencing notable movements of people within and across borders. We also have a valuable opportunity to ascertain the validity of arguments developed in a U.S. and European setting to other contexts.

Survey Experiment: Design and Data Analysis

To date, there are relatively few survey experiments in China, and even fewer that engaged the national level or moved beyond a convenience sample. Running an independent and well-sampled survey to capture national opinion is difficult in China's current political environment. To our knowledge, the data collected in this study is among the first of its kind.

We designed a survey experiment to test the theoretical arguments laid out in the previous section. The experimental tests are independent of how much popular opinion affects policymaking in authoritarian contexts. However, recent literature shows that authoritarian governments are susceptible to public pressure in many ways, and the stability of the Chinese regime in particular may depend on how the government addresses public sentiments (e.g., Chen, Pan, and Xu 2016; Distelhorst and Hou 2017; Lorentzen 2013; Meng, Pan, and Yang 2017; Pan and Xu 2017; Truex 2016; Tsai 2007).

To test our hypotheses, we conducted a national survey in China in April-May 2016. We included an experiment in our survey, which was fielded online to cover all provinces and capital municipalities in mainland China. Research has shown that anonymized online surveys can help to minimize political and social desirability biases, which is important in a sensitive environment such as China (e.g., Chang and Krosnick 2010; Chen, Pan, and Xu 2016; Huang 2015). We partnered with a survey company which helped to recruit a sample of 1,556 Chinese adults (18

years and older) matching the national census population on gender, age, race, income, and geography. These subjects were directed to the online survey hosted at the researcher end, allowing us to retain full control over the experiment and data collection. The appendix highlights the sample characteristics and shows that the experimental groups were successfully randomized and identical across different pre-treatment variables.

In our experiment, we randomly divided our respondents into four groups in a 2 x 2 factorial design. Each group received one of the four versions of the survey question about migration:

[Group 1] Do you think the number of high-skilled immigrants from foreign countries who come to China to live should be increased, left the same as it is now, or decreased?

[Group 2] Do you think the number of low-skilled immigrants from foreign countries who come to China to live should be increased, left the same as it is now, or decreased?

[Group 3] Do you think the number of high-skilled migrants from other provinces who come to your province or municipality to live should be increased, left the same as it is now, or decreased?

[Group 4] Do you think the number of low-skilled migrants from other provinces who come to your province or municipality to live should be increased, left the same as it is now, or decreased?

Thus, there were four different versions of the question that differed along two binary treatment variables: skill level and migrant origin.¹¹ Due to randomization, the four groups are statistically the same across all covariates except in the experimental treatments they received. The dependent variable is measured on a seven-point scale: 3 (increase by a very large amount), 2 (increase a lot), 1 (increase a little), 0 (keep the same as it is now), -1 (decrease a little), -2 (decrease a lot), -3 (decrease to zero). We coded the variable such that a positive (negative) value denotes a positive (negative) preference toward immigration. The appendix reproduces the full original text in Chinese alongside the translated text in English.

The wordings of the foreign and internal migration questions are parallel in that the invoked territorial origin of the migrants (foreign country or other province) is of the same type as the migrants' posited new home (China or the respondent's province). In other words, we ask respondents to assess migration from foreign countries to their country, and from other provinces to their province. There is little precedent for mixing these territorial types within one question. For example, a standard question from the American National Election Studies (ANES) about attitudes toward immigration ask about "immigrants from foreign countries who are permitted to come to the United States to live," not about immigrants who are permitted to live in the respondent's home town (Citrin et al. 1997).¹² Given that a goal of our research design is to maintain comparability with previous surveys, our foreign immigration questions ask about immigrants who come to China rather than a subnational region.

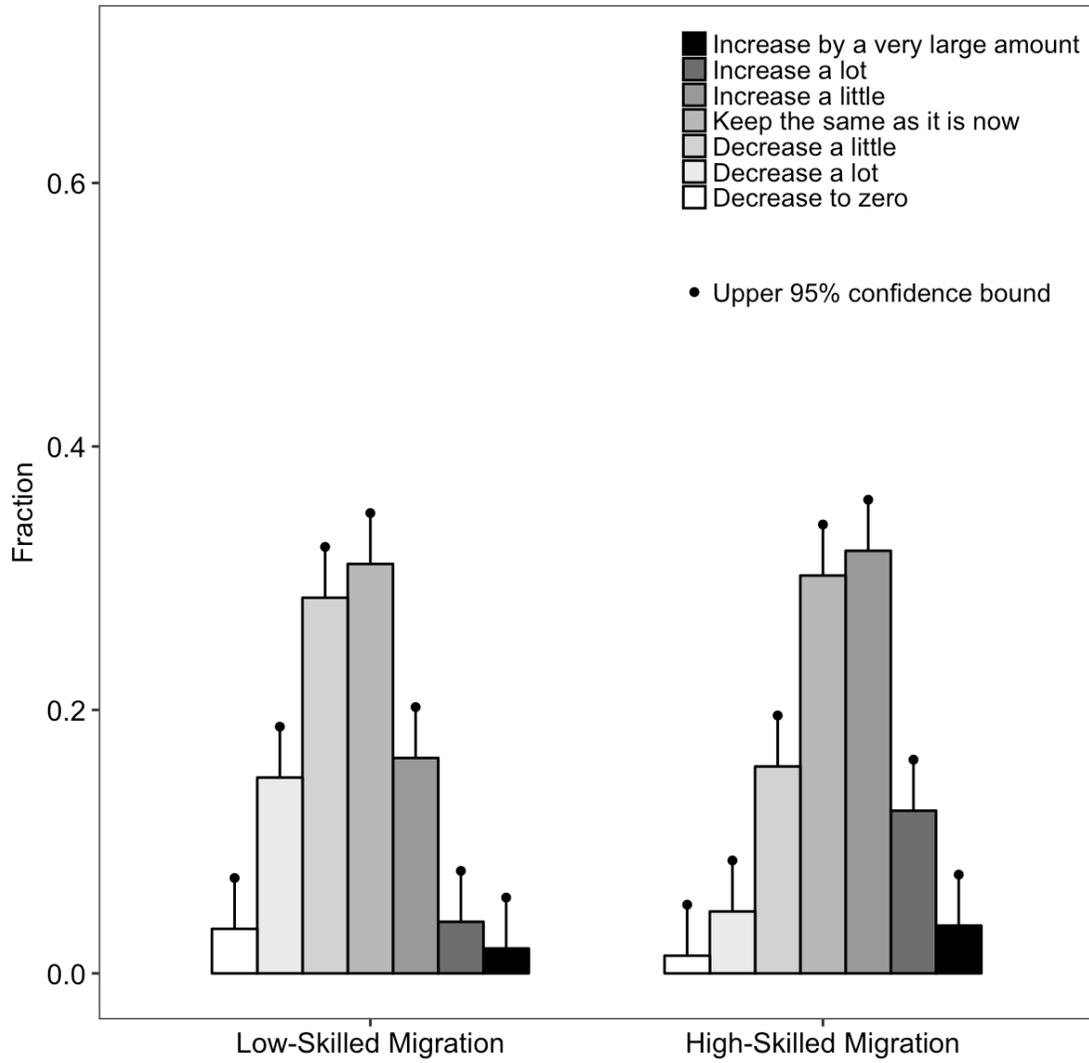
We begin the analysis by displaying the pooled distribution of preferences over high-skilled and low-skilled migration from any origin. The barplots in Figure 1 show the fraction of

¹¹ We use the term "migration" generally to cover both foreign and internal migration.

¹² Similarly, Hainmueller and Hiscox (2010, 67) ask, "Do you agree or disagree that the U.S. should allow more skilled/unskilled immigrants from other countries to come and live here?"

respondents answering each of the seven answer categories, with the whiskers showing the upper 95th percent confidence interval derived from the design-based variance estimator. In line with past research, respondents clearly preferred high-skilled to low-skilled migration. Approximately 40 percent of respondents prefer a decrease in low-skilled migration (whether a little, a lot, or to zero), whereas just over 20 percent of respondents prefer a decrease for high-skilled migration (difference in means: 0.74; $p < 0.001$).

Figure 1. Preference for High- and Low-Skilled Migration

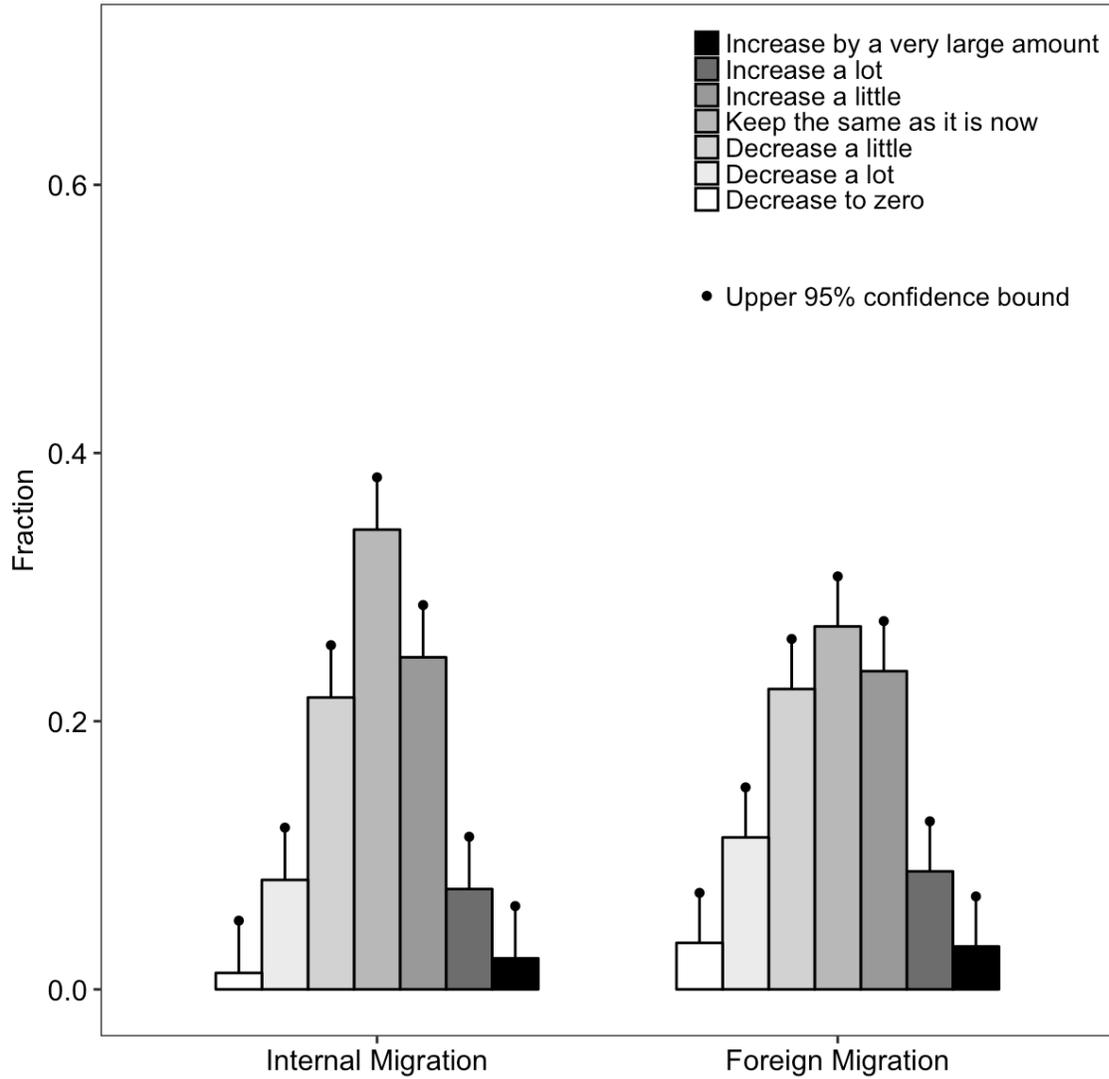


Note: The vertical axis shows the fraction of respondents who answer each of the seven categories.

More surprising are the results displayed in Figure 2, which shows the distribution of preferences over foreign and internal migration, pooling across the different skill types. Respondents make little distinction between foreign and internal migration. Approximately 37 percent of respondents prefer a decrease (whether a little, a lot, or to zero) in foreign migration; the corresponding number for internal migration is just slightly lower at 31 percent, and the difference is not statistically significant (difference in means: 0.11; $p > 0.1$). This is a remarkable finding. Prevailing arguments about the role of nationality identity and cultural threat suggest that respondents would be far less supportive of foreign migrants than internal co-nationals, but our experimental results do not support this prediction. Moreover, residents of China appear to be less opposed to foreign immigration (of any skill level) than residents of the U.S. Both Citrin *et al* (1997, 862) and Hainmueller and Hiscox (2010, 67), for example, find that approximately 50 percent of U.S. respondents prefer a decrease in immigration.

Cultural threat, of course, is likely still at work in driving respondents to be wary of internal migration. Some residents might fear that internal migrants will behave boorishly or make their communities less safe. But if these threats exist, they are necessarily not based on nationality or national identity. We return to this issue in the conclusion.

Figure 2. Preference for Foreign and Internal Migration

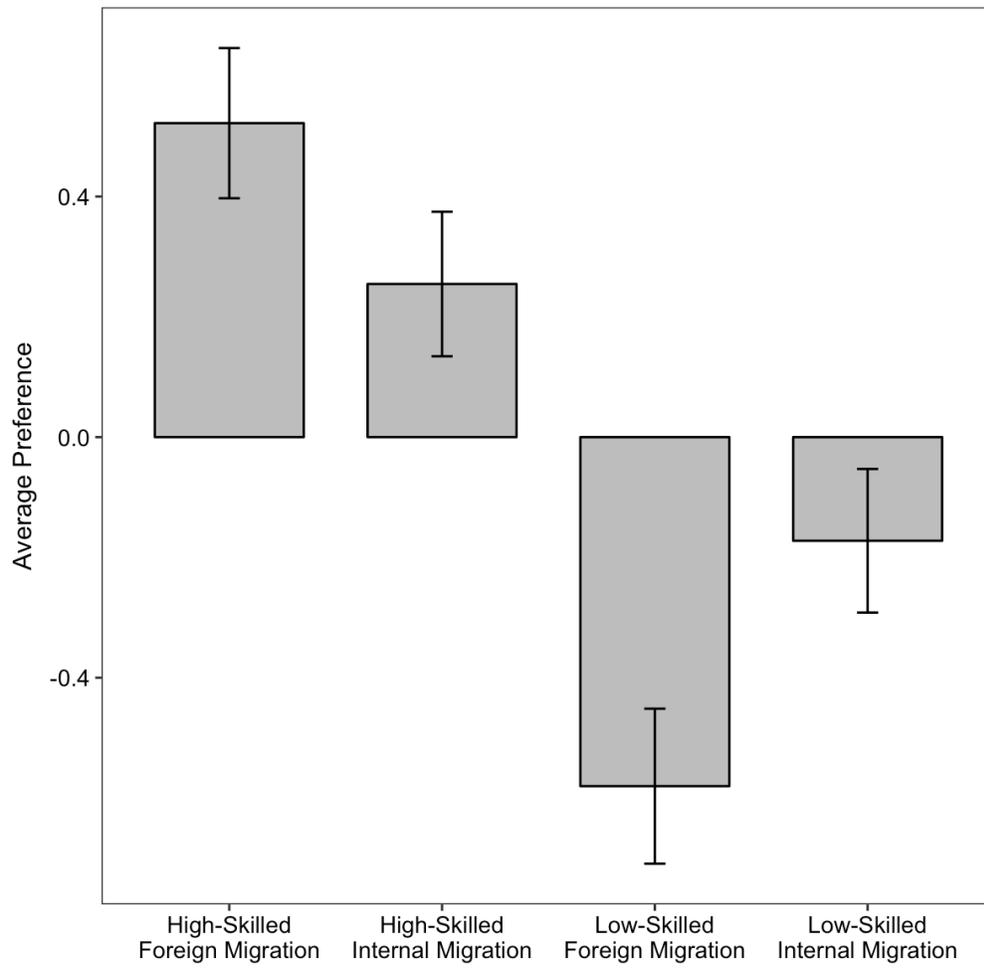


Note: The vertical axis shows the fraction of respondents who answer each of the seven categories.

To explore these patterns further, we break down the average preferences on each of the four experimental groups in Figure 3. The results show that respondents prefer high-skilled over low-skilled migration for both foreign migrants (difference in means: 1.10; $p < 0.001$, $n = 750$) and internal migrants (difference in means: 0.42; $p < 0.001$, $n = 735$). In both cases, preferences are positive (favoring an increase) toward high-skilled migration but negative (favoring a decrease) toward low-skilled migration. The difference in the intensity of preferences between foreign and internal migration—clearly evident in Figure 3—is in fact statistically significant for both skill levels. Respondents are significantly more opposed to low-skilled foreign migration compared to low-skilled internal migration (difference in means: 0.41; $p < 0.001$, $n = 740$), but significantly more supportive of high-skilled foreign migration compared to high-skilled internal migration (difference in means: 0.27, $p < 0.01$, $n = 745$).¹³ These results are broadly consistent with sociotropic concerns about the economy as a whole, assuming respondents believe that high-skilled migrants generate larger gains for the economy than low-skilled migrants (Hainmueller and Hiscox 2010; Mansfield and Mutz 2009). The difference in preference intensity between foreign and internal migration, at either skill level, could reflect the notion that skilled foreigners are able to bring talent to the local economy that is not otherwise accessible from the national population, whereas low-skilled foreigners have little to add that could not otherwise be provided by co-nationals from other provinces. The results also suggest that respondents are more polarized when evaluating foreign migrants: they are supportive of skilled foreigners, but resistant to unskilled foreigners. For internal migrants, respondent attitudes also vary conditional upon skill level, but with far less intensity.

¹³ The p-values from Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests are virtually identical.

Figure 3: Average Responses by Treatment Group



Note: Preferences range from -3 (decrease to zero) to 3 (increase by a very large amount).

To explore the data econometrically, Table 1 presents ordered probit estimates with the inclusion of demographic covariates.¹⁴ The dependent variable is the 7-category survey response described above, coded from -3 (“decrease to zero”) to 3 (“increase by a very large amount”). The binary variable *Foreign* is coded 1 if the respondent received a question about foreign migrants and 0 if otherwise, whereas the variable *Skill* is coded 1 if the question is about high-skilled migrants and 0 if the question is about low-skilled migrants. The model specification is

$$y_i = \alpha + \beta_1 \text{FOREIGN}_i + \beta_2 \text{SKILL}_i + \mathbf{Z}_i \psi + \varepsilon_i.$$

where the parameter β_1 identifies the premium that respondents attach to foreign migrants relative to internal migrants, and β_2 identifies the premium for high-skilled relative to low-skilled migrants. Model 2 also includes covariates \mathbf{Z} which include the respondent’s age and gender, with coefficient vector ψ .¹⁵ Across both of these specifications, the variable *Skill* is positive and significant, and *Foreign* is not statistically significant. The results from columns 1 and 2 reinforce our conclusion that a migrant’s skill level largely determines whether a respondent supports or opposes migration.

¹⁴ Results from OLS are nearly identical for all models.

¹⁵ On the importance of gender in the context of attitudes toward international trade, see Guisinger (2016).

Table 1

| | DV: Support for Migration [-3, 3] | | | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) |
| Foreign | -0.0587 (0.0536) | -0.0655 (0.0538) | -0.3633*** (0.0767) | -0.0659 (0.0538) | -0.0671 (0.0538) |
| Skill | 0.6467*** (0.0550) | 0.6424*** (0.0552) | 0.3510*** (0.0768) | -0.1256 (0.2596) | 0.6639*** (0.0991) |
| Foreign × Skill | | | 0.5901*** (0.1082) | | |
| Education | | | | -0.0513 (0.0341) | |
| Skill × Education | | | | 0.1500** (0.0497) | |
| High School Dropout | | | | | 0.2531 (0.1459) |
| Skill × High School Dropout | | | | | -0.6195** (0.2219) |
| High School Grad | | | | | -0.0590 (0.1131) |
| Skill × High School Grad | | | | | -0.0225 (0.1566) |
| BA or Above | | | | | -0.0112 (0.0904) |
| Skill × BA or Above | | | | | 0.0700 (0.1279) |
| Age | | -0.0025 (0.0021) | -0.0031 (0.0021) | -0.0025 (0.0021) | -0.0024 (0.0021) |
| Male | | 0.0942 (0.0544) | 0.1062 (0.0545) | 0.0912 (0.0545) | 0.0928 (0.0545) |
| Observations | 1,485 | 1,478 | 1,478 | 1,476 | 1,476 |
| Pseudo-R ² | 0.0287 | 0.0292 | 0.0353 | 0.0310 | 0.0314 |
| log likelihood | -2392 | -2378 | -2363 | -2370 | -2369 |
| chi-square | 141.1 | 143.1 | 172.9 | 151.5 | 153.8 |

Note: Ordered probit estimates with standard errors in parentheses. Constant cuts omitted. ***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05.

Model 3 adds an interaction term to more formally explore the patterns revealed in

Figure 3:

$$y_i = \alpha + \beta_1 \text{FOREIGN}_i + \beta_2 \text{SKILL}_i + \beta_3 (\text{FOREIGN}_i \times \text{SKILL}_i) + \mathbf{Z}_i \psi + \varepsilon_i.$$

where the parameter β_3 captures how the attitudes toward foreign migration vary conditional upon migrants' skill level. The results are in line with expectations based on Figure 3: the coefficient for *Foreign* is negative, the coefficient for *Skill* is positive, and the interaction term is also positive. To interpret this result, consider that the coefficient on *Foreign* reflects the association between the foreign survey frame (*Foreign*=1) and attitudes when the interaction term is zero (i.e., when *Skill*=0). In other words, the negative coefficient on *Foreign* suggests that respondents have more negative attitudes toward low-skilled foreign migration than low-skilled internal migration. To test the labor market competition argument—namely, that respondents will oppose migrants with skills similar to their own—we also include the following specification for model 4:

$$y_i = \alpha + \beta_1 \text{FOREIGN}_i + \beta_2 \text{SKILL}_i + \beta_3 \text{EDUCATION}_i + \beta_4 (\text{SKILL}_i \times \text{EDUCATION}_i) + \mathbf{Z}_i \psi + \varepsilon_i.$$

which adds *Education*—which takes the value of 1 if the respondent is a high-school dropout, 2 for high school graduate, 3 for junior college graduate, and 4 for university graduate (BA) or higher—as well as an interaction between the *Skill* survey frame and respondent education. As in

previous research, we use education as a proxy for respondent skill level.¹⁶ As shown in column 4, the interaction term is positive and significant, suggesting that the premium attached to high-skilled migration varies positively with respondent education. A negative and significant interaction term would have provided support for the labor market competition channel.¹⁷

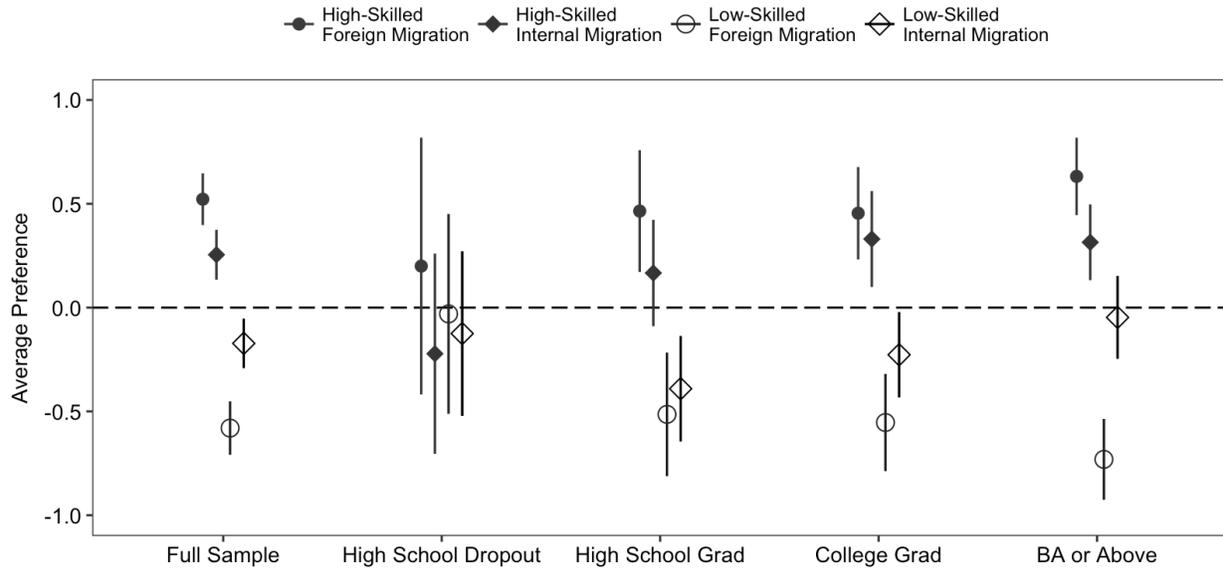
Model 5 emulates the modeling strategy in Hainmueller and Hiscox (2010) by relaxing the assumption of linearity in the conditional relationship between respondent education and preferences toward migration. This model allows for a different premium placed on high-skilled immigration for each of the four respondent educational attainment categories. The omitted reference category is “junior college graduate.” Coefficients on these terms are generally statistically insignificant, although “high school dropout” is negative and significant. The combined results from Models 4 and 5 suggest that support for migration—whether foreign or internal—is positively correlated with education and does not reflect a calculus of labor market competition.

This finding is also reflected in Figure 4, which depicts average support for migration across the four educational categories. As education and presumably skills increase, respondents remain supportive of high-skilled migration. The results also suggest an intensification of the high-skilled versus low-skilled distinction for foreign immigration as education increases. Highly educated respondents are especially supportive of high-skilled foreigners and opposed to low-skilled foreigners.

¹⁶ We follow Facchini and Mayda (2009), Hainmueller and Hiscox (2010), Scheve and Slaughter (2001), and many other studies in using education as a proxy for skill level, despite its weaknesses. See robustness tests for a further exploration.

¹⁷ When *Education* is included by itself in the model, it is not statistically significant.

Figure 4: Average Responses by Educational Attainment



Note: Preferences (vertical axis) range from -3 (decrease to zero) to 3 (increase by a very large amount).

We conducted a number of additional tests and robustness checks.¹⁸ Most notably, we found that the only noticeable regional pattern was that respondents in Guangdong province had a small but statistically significant preference for foreign versus internal migration. This finding might reflect a mild backlash against substantial internal migration in the province in recent years. Guangdong is China’s most populous province and a hub of large-scale manufacturing industries. Of its approximately 110 million residents, nearly 25 million are internal migrants from other regions.¹⁹ However, we should not make too much of this finding; indeed, respondents in China’s other densely-populated manufacturing-focused coastal provinces,

¹⁸ We found no associations between attitudes toward migration and indicators of respondent nationalism and cosmopolitanism. Our main results are unchanged with the inclusion of additional covariates such as political knowledge and Communist party affiliation.

¹⁹ See <https://blogs.wsj.com/chinarealtime/2015/07/10/13-million-guangdong-migrants-could-gain-permanent-residence-by-2020/>

including Fujian, Zhejiang, Shandong, and others, supported foreign and internal migration roughly equally.

Nevertheless, to ensure that the presence of respondents who are themselves internal migrants does not bias our results, we limited our sample to include only respondents who live in provinces that have at least 90 percent locally-born populations based on China's most recent census in 2010. The resulting sample, which excludes the coastal provinces of Fujian, Guangdong, and several others, is nearly halved at 807 observations, but our results were virtually unchanged. (See Appendix 3)

To address the concern that respondent education is a problematic measure of labor-market skills, we asked respondents to self-assess their occupations as "high skilled" or "low skilled" and used the resulting binary variable in Model 4 in place of *Education*. This is an ideal test in that respondents determine what constitutes high- and low-skilled labor for both themselves and migrants. The labor-market competition hypothesis suggests that self-reported high (low) skilled respondents would oppose migration described as high (low) skilled, but neither self-reported skill level nor its interaction with the skilled survey frame are statistically significant.

As a final note, as with most past surveys we have no way of knowing who pops into respondents' heads when asked to assess foreign or internal migration. As discussed earlier, China's inflows of low-skilled foreign migrants include people from Sub-Saharan Africa as well as neighboring East- and Southeast Asian countries. The Asian countries are also a source of high-skilled migrants, as are the United States and Europe. Internal migrants in China are, in expectation, no different than any other residents in terms of nationality, religion, ethnicity, and language (although regional dialects and accents exist). Skill is most likely the key relevant

attribute, and our survey manipulates this variable experimentally. When respondents consider low-skilled internal migration, the existence of the *hukou* system and regional prejudices suggest that non-nationality based cultural fears may arise.

Political sensitivities and feasibility constraints precluded an attempt to implement a conjoint experiment in which multiple attributes of migrants—including nationality, occupation, ethnicity, and so on—could be experimentally manipulated. However, as evidenced by the rural and urban designations of the *hukou* system and the occupational discrimination in the Exit and Entry Administration Law, China’s policies over migration cleave mostly over skill level, not over more fine-grained characteristics. Our experimental design is therefore theoretically justified on the grounds that we focus only on the policy dimensions that the Chinese government itself has found most salient.

Discussion

How do residents view outsiders who relocate to seek employment and a better life? A large body of scholarship has attempted to answer this question by focusing on foreign immigration, which is undoubtedly one of the most contentious political issues in developed and emerging-market countries today. This study adds internal migration—a critically important phenomenon in emerging-market countries like China—to the scholarly mix. The prevalence of foreign and internal migration in China provides a useful opportunity to explore some of the previously unexplored observable implications of current arguments about attitudes toward immigration. In particular, the labor market competition channel—which posits that residents will oppose immigration if they fear for the security of their jobs and wages—should also apply

to internal migration, because residents from other provinces should be just as economically threatening to local residents as workers from abroad. On the other hand, co-nationals from other regions who generally speak the same language and engage in similar religious and cultural practices should not instill the sort of threat to national identity that might drive residents to oppose foreign immigration. We explored these questions by conducting an original survey experiment that examined respondents' opinions toward foreign and internal migration in China. Our nationwide survey randomly assigned respondents to answer questions about skilled or unskilled migration from foreign countries or other provinces in China.

Some of our findings were surprising while others verified the results from earlier research. Notably, support or opposition to migration did not hinge upon the foreign versus internal dimension. This is the first study to make this claim. It sits uneasily with arguments about the precariousness of national identity as a driver of opposition to migration. One possible explanation for this finding is that the “insider-outsider” distinction is more nuanced in the context of labor mobility than previous studies of immigration would suggest. Individuals need not cross a border to be deemed “outsiders” by local residents. Even co-nationals can trigger cultural or xenophobic reactions. In the case of China, the *hukou* system effectively codifies this insider-outsider divide between urban residents and workers from the countryside; by denying certain rights and privileges to outsiders, the system resembles the ingroup-outgroup tension depicted by Kinder and Kam (2010, 127), minus the centrality of a national border. In short, respondents' perception of “foreignness” need not depend on a foreign-domestic distinction. We suspect that China is not unique in this regard. Societal tensions arising from the movement of people from the countryside to urban areas during industrialization are a feature of many countries' histories. While China formalized the second-class status of internal migrants, other

countries did so in *de facto* ways, manifested in the rise of ghettos and by worker discrimination and violence based on socioeconomic and ethnic grounds.²⁰

Another key finding is that respondents in China are more discerning when evaluating foreign migrants than internal ones. Preferences cleave based on migrant skill level, but the intensity of this cleavage is greater for foreign migration. Respondent education amplifies these distinctions.

Our findings support the skepticism of earlier studies of the economic and material drivers of public opinion (e.g., Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014). However, we found scant connection between respondent education and support for migration in general. This might suggest that the cosmopolitan and anti-ethnocentric impact of education so commonly attributed to the U.S. educational system is not universally applicable. On the other hand, residents of China appear less opposed to foreign immigration than their counterparts in the U.S. or Europe, so there may be less xenophobia to mitigate via education.

One motivation for this study was to test arguments about immigration in the context of China, the largest country in the world and one of the most dynamic in terms of internal migration. We have done so here, but with important limitations. For example, we were not able to control for all aspects of migration, whether internal or foreign. Results from a conjoint analysis, in which respondents would express support or opposition to migrants with a range of varying characteristics, would be helpful to confirm the results of this study, but it should be noted that there are greater challenges—technological and political—to implementing such a study in China than in the U.S. And finally, our results could prompt further studies in other emerging-market countries and rich countries like the U.S. Internal migration within developing

²⁰ See Gaikwad and Nellis (2017) for a discussion and references.

countries, especially in Asia, will likely continue its steep increase for many years (Montgomery 2008). In developed countries, a study of attitudes toward workers from poorer states or regions who relocate to richer areas for employment could help determine whether crossing a border is a necessary ingredient for public opposition to migration, or whether an equivalent xenophobic response could be triggered by co-nationals as well.

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Appendix 1

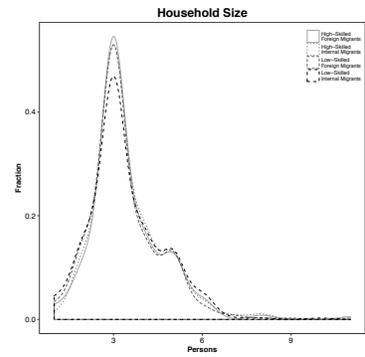
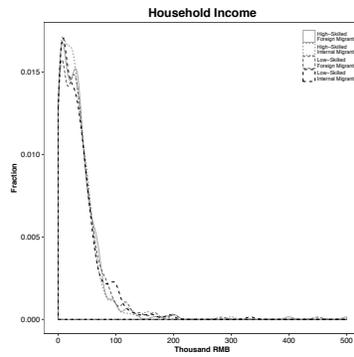
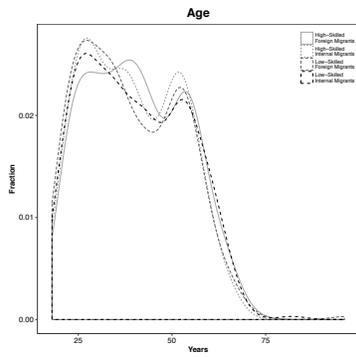
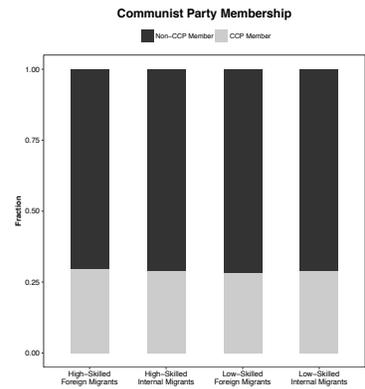
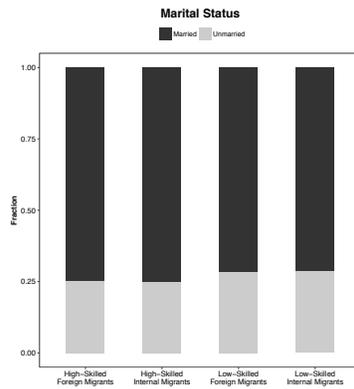
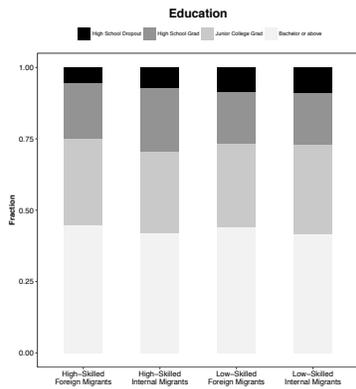
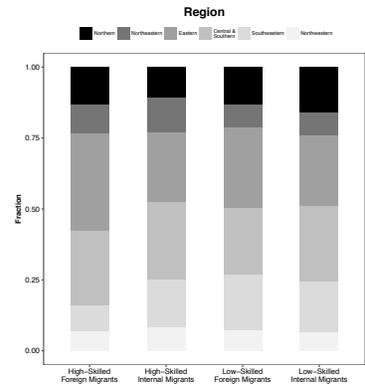
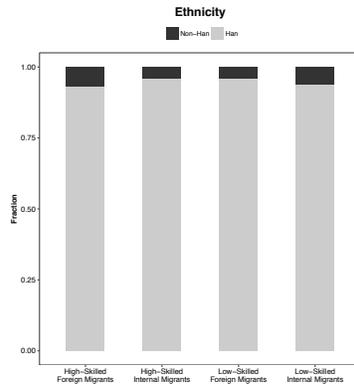
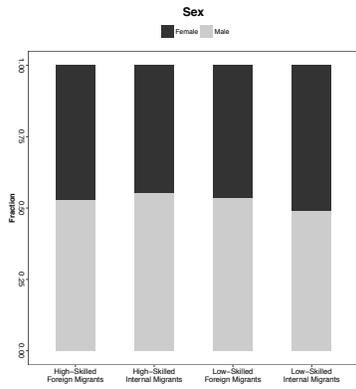
Sample Characteristics

| | | 2010 National Census ²¹ | This study |
|-----------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Income | Per Capita Annual Disposable Income | -- | ¥26,666.7 ²² |
| Region | North | 12.69% | 13.13% |
| | Northeast | 8.76% | 9.74% |
| | East | 30.24% | 28.01% |
| | South | 26.97% | 25.91% |
| | Southwest | 14.17% | 15.90% |
| | Northwest | 7.18% | 7.31% |
| Sex | Male | 50.52% | 52.63% |
| Age | 18-19 | 4.01% | 2.03% |
| | 20-29 | 21.67% | 25.63% |
| | 30-39 | 20.42% | 24.14% |
| | 40-49 | 21.86% | 18.19% |
| | 50 and above | 32.04% | 30.02% |
| Ethnicity | Han | 92.28% | 94.85% |
| N | | | 1,485 |

²¹ Adult population (age \geq 18 years) only. Data from Population Census Office of the State Council and National Bureau of Statistics, *Tabulation on the 2010 Population Census of the People's Republic of China*, dataset (Beijing: National Bureau of Statistics, 2011), <http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/pcsj/rkpc/6rp/indexch.htm>.

²² Median per capita annual disposable income.

Sample Characteristics by Experimental Group



Appendix 2

Summary Statistics

| Statistic | Obs | Mean | SD | Min | Max |
|-----------------------|------------|-------------|-----------|------------|------------|
| Support for Migration | 1,485 | 0.001 | 1.281 | -3 | 3 |
| Skilled Treatment | 1,485 | 0.502 | 0.5 | 0 | 1 |
| Foreign Treatment | 1,485 | 0.505 | 0.5 | 0 | 1 |
| Education | 1,483 | 5.115 | 1.086 | 1 | 8 |
| Age | 1,479 | 39.81 | 12.952 | 18 | 96 |
| Male | 1,484 | 0.526 | 0.499 | 0 | 1 |
| High School Dropout | 1,485 | 0.075 | 0.264 | 0 | 1 |
| High School Grad | 1,485 | 0.195 | 0.396 | 0 | 1 |
| Junior College Grad | 1,485 | 0.297 | 0.457 | 0 | 1 |
| BA or Above | 1,485 | 0.432 | 0.495 | 0 | 1 |

Appendix 3

Robustness Checks Using Subsamples of Provinces of High Proportions of Locally Born Population (LBP)

Average effects of skill treatment on support for internal migration by subsample

| Subsample | Mean _{Low-skilled} | Mean _{High-skilled} | Diff. in means | <i>n</i> _{Low-skilled} | <i>n</i> _{High-skilled} | <i>t</i> statistic | <i>p</i> value |
|-------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|----------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Full Sample | -0.1723 | 0.2546 | 0.4269 | 354 | 381 | -4.9492 | 0.0000 |
| >95% LBP | -0.1317 | 0.2320 | 0.3638 | 167 | 181 | -2.9817 | 0.0031 |
| >90% LBP | -0.1495 | 0.2455 | 0.3950 | 194 | 224 | -3.5023 | 0.0005 |
| >85% LBP | -0.1864 | 0.2500 | 0.4364 | 220 | 252 | -4.1289 | 0.0000 |
| >80% LBP | -0.1674 | 0.2530 | 0.4204 | 227 | 253 | -4.0327 | 0.0001 |

Average effects of skill treatment on support for foreign migration by subsample

| Subsample | Mean _{Low-skilled} | Mean _{High-skilled} | Diff. in means | <i>n</i> _{Low-skilled} | <i>n</i> _{High-skilled} | <i>t</i> statistic | <i>p</i> value |
|-------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|----------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Full Sample | -0.5803 | 0.5220 | 1.1023 | 386 | 364 | -12.0590 | 0.0000 |
| >95% LBP | -0.7198 | 0.5286 | 1.2484 | 182 | 140 | -8.7826 | 0.0000 |
| >90% LBP | -0.6619 | 0.5642 | 1.2262 | 210 | 179 | -9.3801 | 0.0000 |
| >85% LBP | -0.6092 | 0.5498 | 1.1590 | 238 | 211 | -9.5856 | 0.0000 |
| >80% LBP | -0.6041 | 0.5540 | 1.1581 | 245 | 213 | -9.6697 | 0.0000 |

Average effects of foreign treatment on support for low-skilled migration by subsample

| Subsample | Mean _{Internal} | Mean _{Foreign} | Diff. in means | <i>n</i> _{Internal} | <i>n</i> _{Foreign} | <i>t</i> statistic | <i>p</i> value |
|-------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|----------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Full Sample | -0.1723 | -0.5803 | -0.4080 | 354 | 386 | 4.5442 | 0.0000 |
| >95% LBP | -0.1317 | -0.7198 | -0.5880 | 167 | 182 | 4.5186 | 0.0000 |
| >90% LBP | -0.1495 | -0.6619 | -0.5124 | 194 | 210 | 4.2131 | 0.0000 |
| >85% LBP | -0.1864 | -0.6092 | -0.4229 | 220 | 238 | 3.7081 | 0.0002 |
| >80% LBP | -0.1674 | -0.6041 | -0.4367 | 227 | 245 | 3.9002 | 0.0001 |

Average effects of foreign treatment on support for high-skilled migration by subsample

| Subsample | Mean _{Internal} | Mean _{Foreign} | Diff. in means | <i>n</i> _{Internal} | <i>n</i> _{Foreign} | <i>t</i> statistic | <i>p</i> value |
|-------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|----------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Full Sample | 0.2546 | 0.5220 | 0.2674 | 381 | 364 | -3.0356 | 0.0025 |
| >95% LBP | 0.2320 | 0.5286 | 0.2965 | 181 | 140 | -2.2253 | 0.0268 |
| >90% LBP | 0.2455 | 0.5642 | 0.3187 | 224 | 179 | -2.6219 | 0.0091 |
| >85% LBP | 0.2500 | 0.5498 | 0.2998 | 252 | 211 | -2.6657 | 0.0080 |
| >80% LBP | 0.2530 | 0.5540 | 0.3010 | 253 | 213 | -2.6890 | 0.0074 |

Note: Limiting the sample to >90% LBP, as discussed in the text, excludes the following: Beijing, Fujian, Guangdong, Jiangsu, Ningxia, Shanghai, Tianjin, Xinjiang, and Zhejiang.

Appendix 4

Survey Instrument

Low-skilled foreign migration

您认为，定居中国的低职业技能外国移民数量应当增加、保持现有水平、还是减少？

-3 = 减到零

-2 = 减少很多

-1 = 减少一点

0 = 保持不变

1 = 增加一点

2 = 增加很多

3 = 增加非常多

Do you think the number of low-skilled immigrants from foreign countries who come to China to live should be increased, left the same as it is now, or decreased?

-3 = Decreased to zero

-2 = Decreased a lot

-1 = Decreased a little

0 = Kept the same as it is now

1 = Increased a little

2 = Increased a lot

3 = Increased by a very large amount

High-skilled foreign migration

您认为，定居中国的高职业技能外国移民数量应当增加、保持现有水平、还是减少？

-3 = 减到零

-2 = 减少很多

-1 = 减少一点

0 = 保持不变

1 = 增加一点

2 = 增加很多

3 = 增加非常多

Do you think the number of high-skilled immigrants from foreign countries who come to China to live should be increased, left the same as it is now, or decreased?

-3 = Decreased to zero

-2 = Decreased a lot

-1 = Decreased a little

0 = Kept the same as it is now

1 = Increased a little

2 = Increased a lot

3 = Increased by a very large amount

Low-skilled internal migration

您认为，定居您所在的省／直辖市的低职业技能外省移民数量应当增加、保持现有水平、还是减少？

-3 = 减到零

-2 = 减少很多

-1 = 减少一点

0 = 保持不变

1 = 增加一点

2 = 增加很多

3 = 增加非常多

Do you think the number of low-skilled migrants from other provinces who come to the province or municipality where you are to live should be increased, left the same as it is now, or decreased?

-3 = Decreased to zero

-2 = Decreased a lot

-1 = Decreased a little

0 = Kept the same as it is now

1 = Increased a little

2 = Increased a lot

3 = Increased by a very large amount

High-skilled internal migration

您认为，定居您所在的省／直辖市的高职业技能外省移民数量应当增加、保持现有水平、还是减少？

- 3 = 减到零
- 2 = 减少很多
- 1 = 减少一点
- 0 = 保持不变
- 1 = 增加一点
- 2 = 增加很多
- 3 = 增加非常多

Do you think the number of high-skilled migrants from other provinces who come to the province or municipality where you are to live should be increased, left the same as it is now, or decreased?

- 3 = Decreased to zero
- 2 = Decreased a lot
- 1 = Decreased a little
- 0 = Kept the same as it is now
- 1 = Increased a little
- 2 = Increased a lot
- 3 = Increased by a very large amount