

Why Immigration Policy Is Hard And How to Make It Better (Alan Manning)

Discussion by Edoardo Teso

XX RDB Lecture

The Book in one slide

Why Immigration Policy is Hard

- It forces societies to make morally uncomfortable distributive choices in a world with radical global inequality
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- Modest, slow increase in migrant share
- Work visas mainly limited to high-skills workers
- Family visas only for spouse and children
- Better fight against illegal immigration
- More efficient system for asylum seekers (decisions on requests + resources for integration)

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- Data suggest a majority prefers radically **more conservative** platforms
- Looking at the data, it might seem somewhat surprising at first
- My take: mostly (almost entirely?) driven by **misperceptions** on illegal immigration and cultural clash
 - Immigration mostly seen through a **cultural lens**, and parties use this lens in their communications
 - Economic (“**They are stealing our jobs**”) arguments have more limited explanatory power

Support for alternative immigration scenarios

Total support minus total oppose, percentage points

Scenario	Italy	UK	Germany
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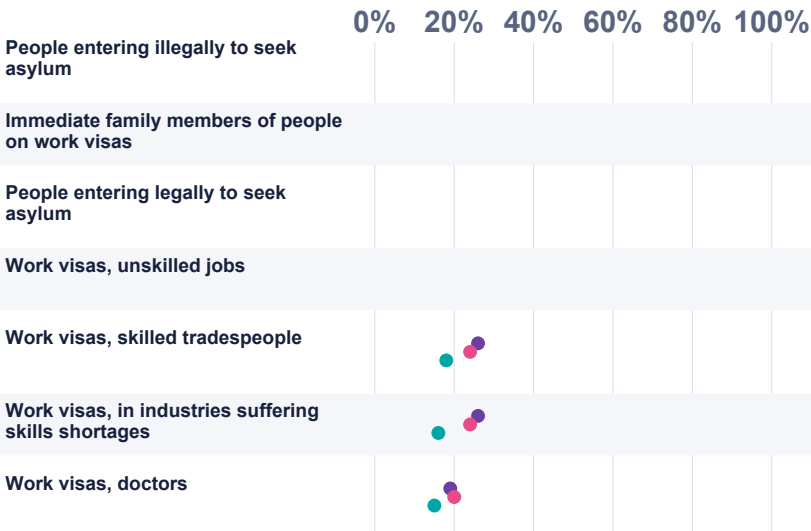
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No more new migrants + requiring large numbers of recent migrants to leave	+18	+1	+18

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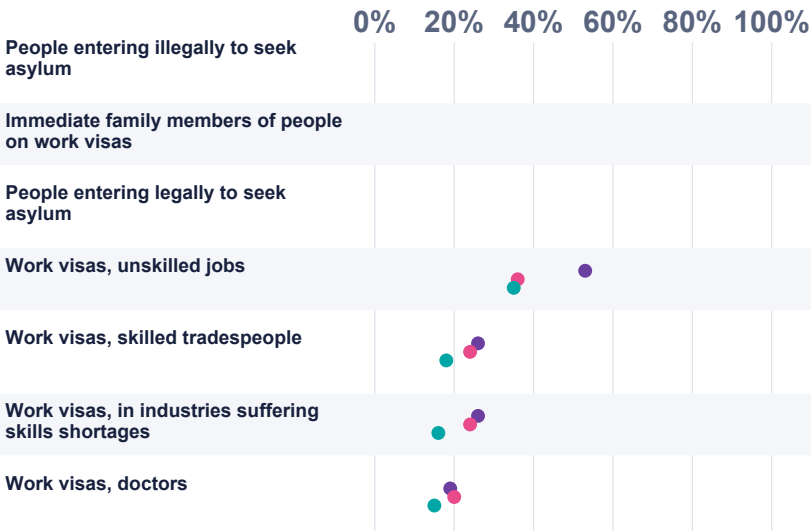
Among those (a majority!) in favor of mass repatriations, who do they want to deport?

● Britain ● Italy ● Germany



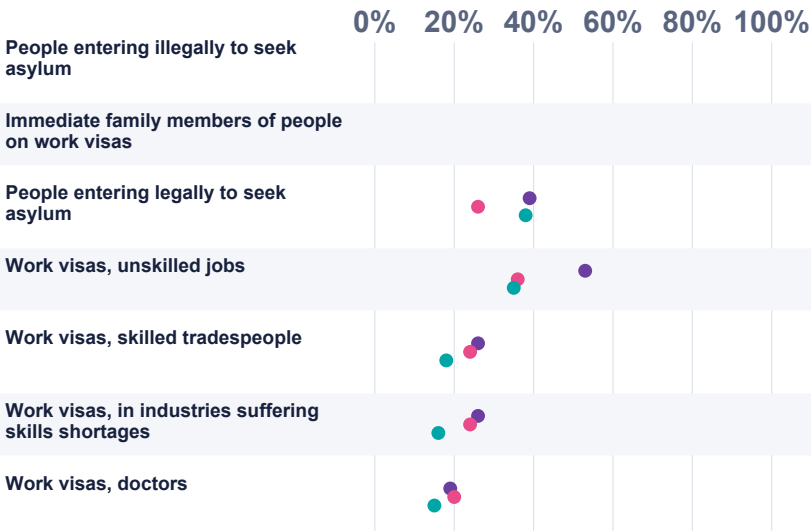
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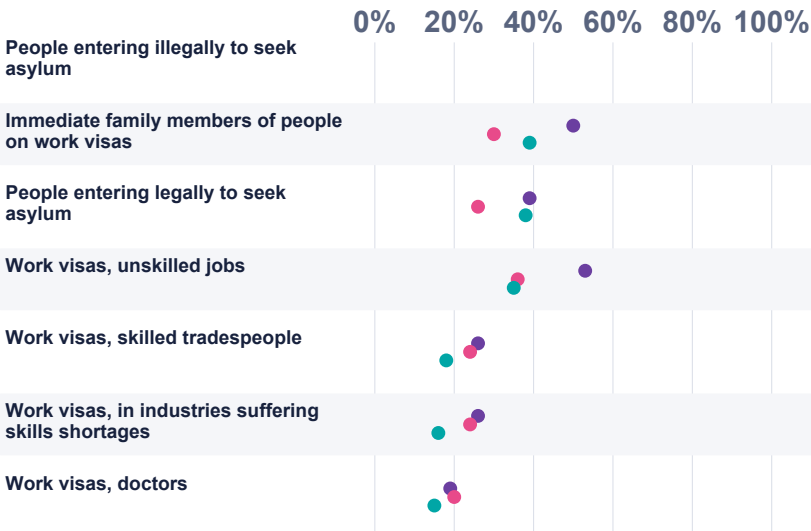
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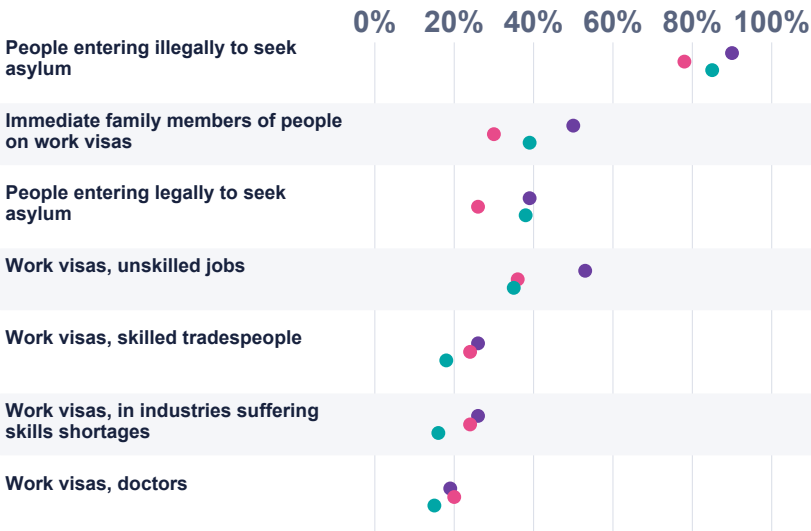
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Illegal, Not Legal, Immigration is Bad for the Country

Level of **illegal** immigration over last 10 years has been good or bad?

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Both good and bad	16	19	16
Mostly bad for the country	70	66	75

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	Italy	UK	Germany
Mostly good for the country	30	36	24
Both good and bad	28	33	31
Mostly bad for the country	28	22	38

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- This should suggest a moderate position on immigration
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How can we reconcile these numbers?

Do you think there are more immigrants staying legally or illegally in your country?

60% of Italians, 44% of Germans, and 46% of British people believe there are more **illegal** than **legal immigrants** in their country

Percent of respondents

Answer	Italy	UK	Germany
Much more staying illegally than legally	34	32	26
Somewhat more staying illegally than legally	26	15	18
About the same	11	8	16
Somewhat more staying legally than illegally	13	14	18
Much more staying legally than illegally	8	19	14
Don't know	9	13	9

Source: YouGov, 2025.

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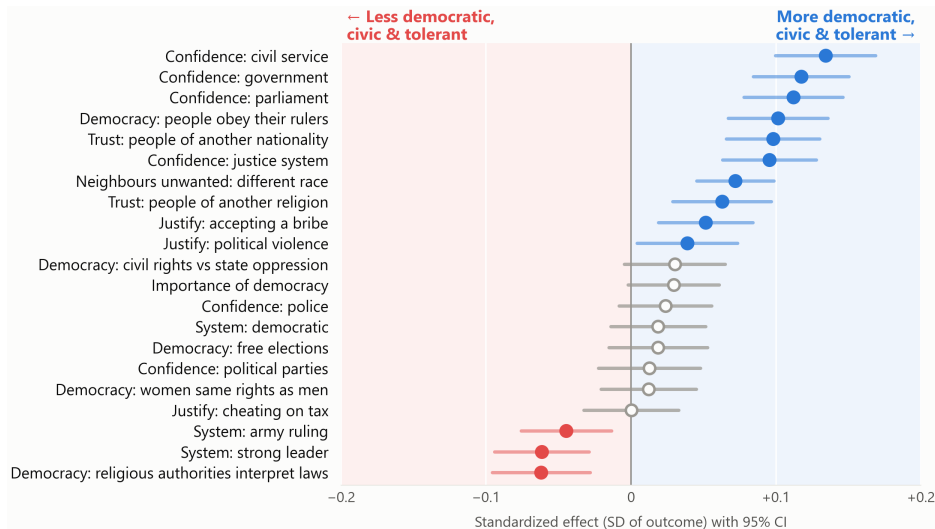
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- **What about democratic values and civic-mindedness?**

Immigrants have more civic and democratic values than natives



Source: My calculations using the 2017 European Values Study. Coefficient on “immigrant”

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 - Immigration makes salient the distinction between insiders and outsiders
 - Conflict moves from “economic winners vs losers” to “us vs them” (Bonomi et al. 2021)

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- Voters might be more likely to engage in **motivated reasoning** that confirm their deeply rooted moral views, leading to large misperceptions

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- Why a moderate platform may fail: cultural discourse on immigration pushes people to extreme views + cultural values hard to change
- Moral nature of immigration policy $\Rightarrow$ critics of immigration focus on “illegal immigrants” and “cultural distance”
- Increased animosity towards immigrants
- State capacity investments are distorted: perception that majority of migrants are illegal $\Rightarrow$ more resources to “send them back home”, less on integration of legal immigrants