

The Association Between Education and Support for Pathways to Citizenship for Undocumented Immigrants Among United States-Born Adults

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Introduction

- An early study on the relationship between education and immigration attitudes in the United States found college-educated adults to be more likely to support granting general legal status to undocumented immigrants (Espenshade & Calhoun, 1993).
- Later studies confirm this pattern. A 2018 study shows that education level remains one of the most consistent predictors of pro-immigration attitudes among U.S. citizens, even after adjusting for nationalism, xenophobia, and demographic factors (Pryce, 2018).
- While the association between immigration attitudes and education is well-documented, there is a lack of targeted research connecting higher education to specific immigration policy preferences.
- Past studies often also include foreign-born respondents, making it hard to isolate the views of U.S.-born citizens, who vote and shape policy.

Research Questions

- Is there a relationship between education levels and support for pathways to legal status for undocumented immigrants among U.S.-born individuals?
- Does this association still hold when controlling for other covariates?

Methods

Sample

- U.S.-born adults who answered education and immigration items (N = 5,573) were drawn from pre- and post-election interviews of the 2020 American National Election Studies (ANES) Time Series.
- ANES is a nationally representative survey of non-institutionalized U.S. adults.

Measures

- Pathway to Citizenship Attitude:
 - Support was measured using ANES item: “Do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose providing a path to citizenship for unauthorized immigrants who obey the law, pay a fine, and pass security checks?”
 - Recoded: favor = 1, oppose = 0; “neither” excluded.
- Education Levels:
 - Highest degree completed (ANES)
 - Categories recoded into five groups:
 - No high school degree, high school degree, some college/associate degree, bachelor’s degree, and post-graduate degree.

Results

Univariate

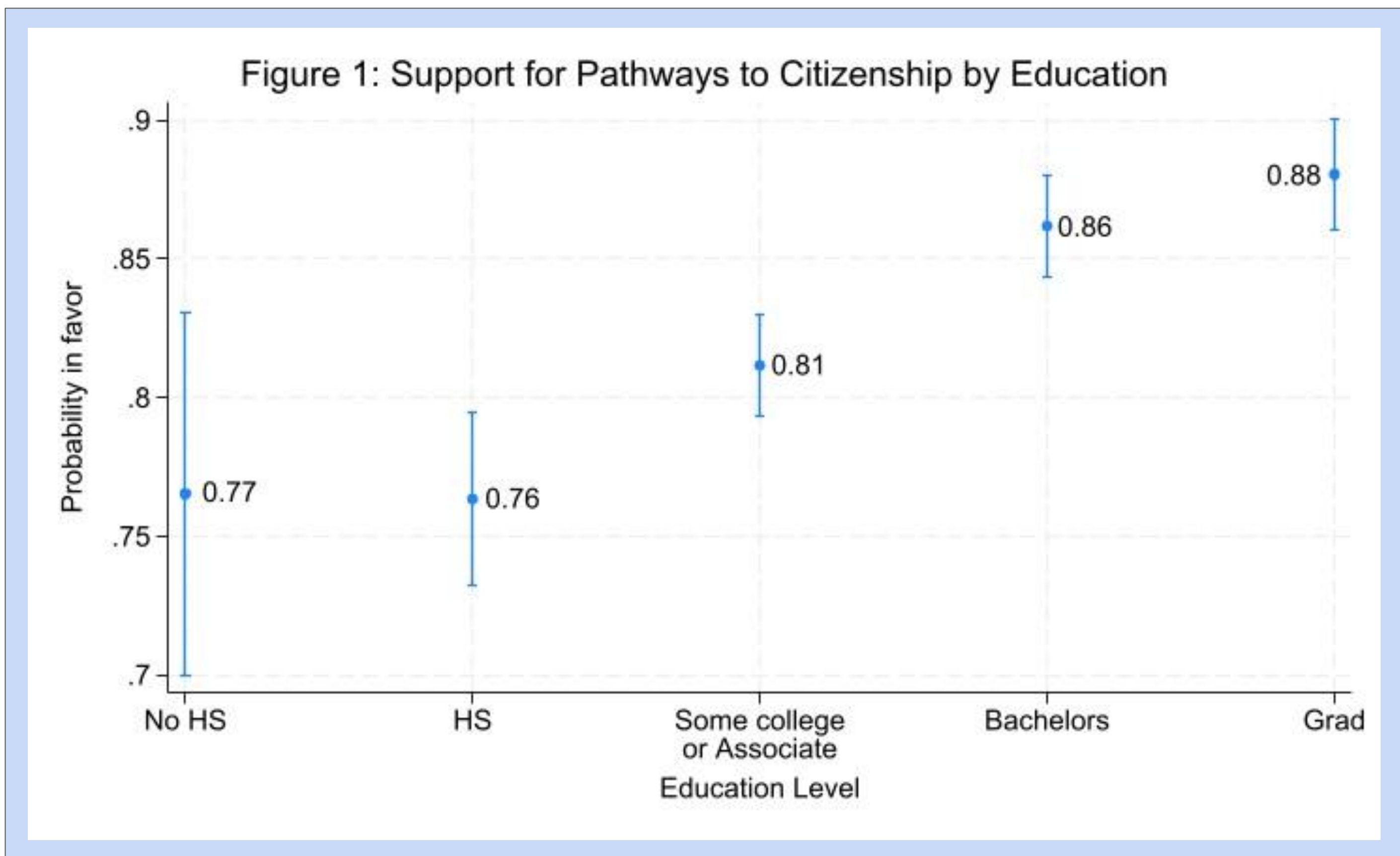
- **82.7% of U.S.-born respondents supported** a path to citizenship.
- Education levels: No HS (4.1%), HS (16.6%), Some College (34.8%), BA (25.4%), Postgrad (19.1%)

Bivariate

- Chi-square analysis showed that **education was significantly associated with support for a pathway to citizenship**, $\chi^2(4) = 60.62$, $p < .001$.
- Support **generally increased with education**: 76.9% (No HS), 75.8% (HS), 81.0% (Some College), 85.3% (BA), 87.7% (Postgrad).
- Post-hoc tests indicated that several pairwise differences were significant, particularly between **lower-education (No HS, HS)** and **higher-education (BA, Postgrad)** groups.

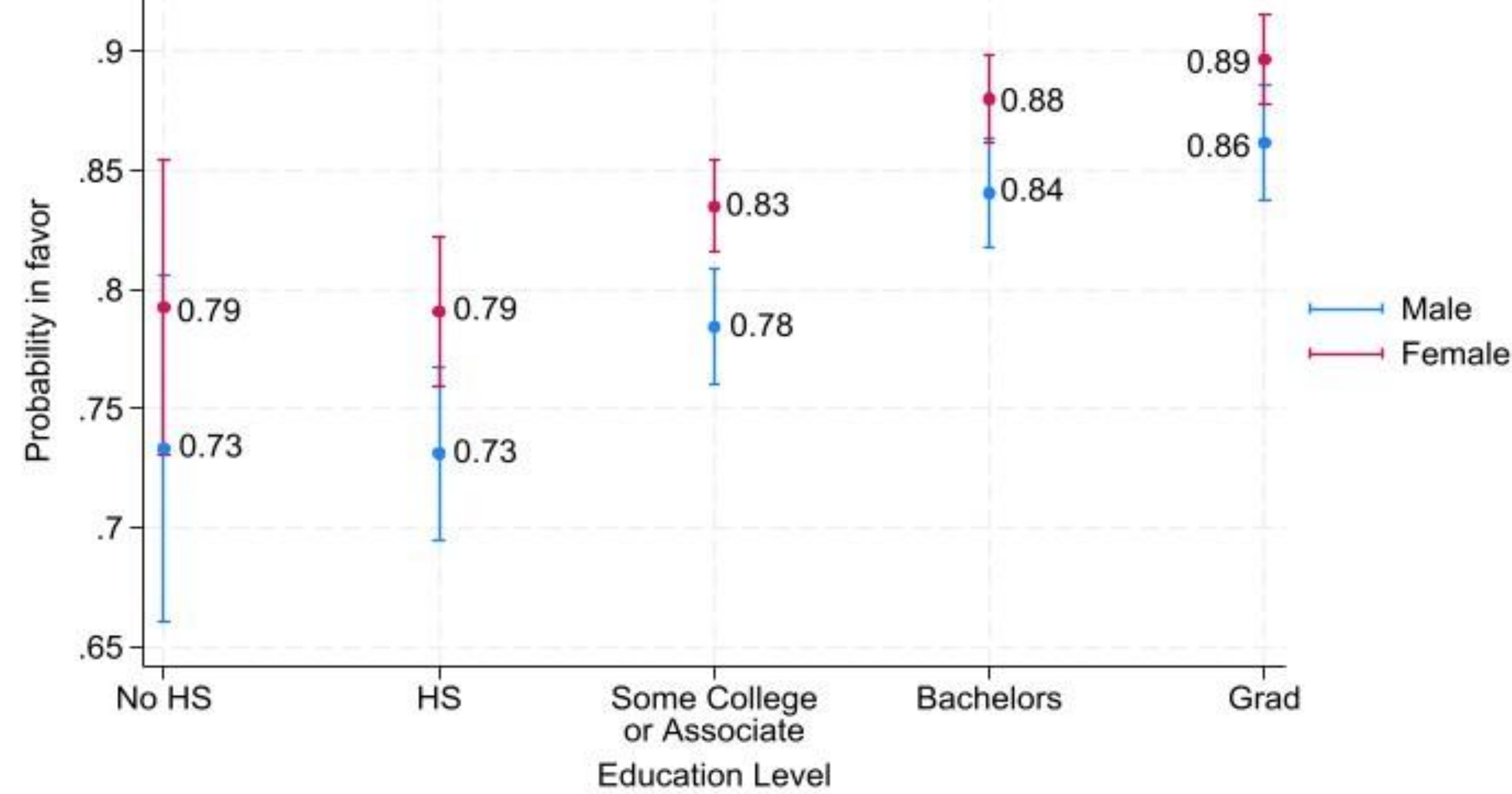
Multivariate

- Logistic regression showed that **only bachelor’s and postgraduate degree holders were significantly more likely to favor a pathway to citizenship** after controlling for race, region, immigrant background, gender, and family income.
- Predicted probabilities illustrate that support rises with education, with the largest increases appearing at the bachelor’s and postgraduate levels (Figure 1).



- Notably, **support drops slightly from No HS to HS**, then increases consistently at higher education levels.
- In the full logistic regression model, **gender was the only covariate that showed a noticeable and statistically significant effect** on support for a pathway to citizenship.

Figure 2: Support for a Pathway to Citizenship Across Education Levels, by Gender



- Predicted probabilities from the interaction model (Figure 2) show a small but stable gender gap.
- **Women were consistently more supportive than men** across all education levels.

Discussion

- **Education significantly shapes support for pathways to citizenship among U.S.-born adults**, and this relationship remains after controlling for demographic and background factors.
- **Women consistently showed higher levels of support than men across all education levels**, indicating a gender-based difference in immigration policy attitudes.
- The study’s cross-sectional design limits the ability to determine how or when education-related differences in attitudes develop, and the reliance on self-reported data and a single policy measure constrains the broader applicability of the findings.
- Future research could investigate the mechanisms through which education influences immigration attitudes and use follow-up or repeated-measure designs, as well as additional immigration policy items, to better understand what drives these patterns.

References

- Espenshade, T. J., & Calhoun, C. A. (1993). An analysis of public opinion toward undocumented immigration. *Population Research and Policy Review*, 12(3), 189-224. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01074385>
- Pryce, Daniel K. "U.S. Citizens' Current Attitudes toward Immigrants and Immigration: A Study from the General Social Survey." *Social Science Quarterly* 99, no. 4 (2018): 1467-83. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/ssqu.12514>.