*Validity Behind Stereotypes: Analysis of Perceptions on the Death Penalty & Immigration*

*Introduction*

I was intrigued by the prevailing stereotypes concerning Americans and aimed to investigate their validity and extent. Utilizing data from the 2021 General Social Survey (GSS), I explored perceptions of the death penalty (V1) and the necessity of limiting immigration to preserve the American way of life (V2). The GSS is an annual national survey conducted by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago, offering valuable insights into contemporary American society and tracking trends in opinions, attitudes, and behaviors.

*Summary of Findings*

Regarding the death penalty (V1), native-born Americans, conservatives, Republicans, those with a college education, and Trump voters were more likely to support it. Older individuals (50 years and older) also favored the death penalty. As for attitudes toward limiting immigration, US-born participants were more likely to oppose it. Political leanings, education, race, and age played a role in shaping opinions, with liberals strongly opposing limits and conservatives strongly supporting them. Geographic location, religion, and marital status also influenced immigration attitudes.

Our first hypothesis, unhappy older males who voted for Trump are likelier to favor the death penalty, was statistically validated and proven accurate. The second hypothesis that individuals who strongly favor limiting immigration are primarily Christian or Catholic white conservatives who own guns and businesses was partially supported by the findings showing that older individuals identifying as Christian and maintaining conservative political views were more likely to advocate for restricted immigration.

*Study Implications*

These findings carry substantial policy significance, particularly in criminal justice and immigration reform. Policymakers should consider the influences of religious and political affiliations, education, age, and marital status when crafting policies related to the death penalty and immigration. By devising targeted and strategic public education campaigns, it is possible to engage specific demographic profiles, encouraging reform to abolish the death penalty and fostering support for diversity through immigration reform.Top of Form

Bottom of Form

*Summary of the Viewpoints & the Participants’ Characteristics*

The study involved 1,016 observations (obs), with 53% (n=541) supporting the death penalty and 47% (n=475) opposing it. Views on immigration limits were divided: 43% (n=437) strongly disagreed, 34% (n=342) strongly agreed, and 23% were neutral. The participants were predominantly White (81%, n=827), with a near-even gender split (46% male, n=470; 54% female, n=546) and an average age of 56. They exhibited diverse political affiliations, leaning slightly liberal (39%, n=397) and Democratic (42%, n=429). Most participants were married (53%, n=539), US-born (95%, n=963), and employed by someone else (89%, n=906). They were generally happy (62%, n=634) and geographically dispersed across the US.

The sample primarily identified as Protestant (44%, n=451) and held at least a bachelor's degree (53%, n=534). Income disparities were significant, with 31% (n=319) reporting no income. A large segment was from the South (38%, n=386). Most had neighbors of the opposite race (82%, n=846) and did not own a gun (58%, n=593). Regarding national spending to address rising crime rates, 64% (n=430) believed it was too little, 27% (n=183) considered it about right, and 8% (n=56) found it excessive.

*Relationship between Participants’ Characteristics & Viewpoints*

Comparing the respective viewpoints with the participants’ characteristics revealed intriguing patterns across various demographic and contextual factors. Regarding the death penalty, native-born Americans (n = 521) were more likely to support it than foreign-born residents (n = 20), with a statistically significant difference (chi2 = 5.40, df = 1, p < 0.05). However, no statistically significant difference was found between genders. Support for the death penalty was most prominent among conservatives (n = 259), Republicans (n = 213), those with a college education (n = 282), and Trump voters (n = 289). Also, the opposition was highest among Clinton voters (n = 359). Older individuals (50 years and older) were more likely to favor the death penalty (chi2 = 18.71, df = 3, p < 0.001), and Southerners had the highest representation of proponents (n = 223).

Regarding attitudes towards limiting immigration, similarly, no noticeable difference was found between genders. US-born participants were more likely to oppose limiting immigration (n = 407), while those who lived with neighbors of the opposite race were more likely to strongly oppose it (n = 375, chi2 = 6.90, df = 2, p < 0.05). Gun ownership (n = 189, chi2 = 43.85, df = 4, p < 0.001), political leanings, education, race, and age all played a role in shaping opinions on immigration limits, with liberals (n = 288) strongly opposing limits and conservatives (n = 206) strongly supporting them (chi2 = 295.73, df = 4, p < 0.001). Whites were the most strongly opposed (n = 355) and the most strongly supportive of immigration limits (n = 294, chi2 = 13.56, df = 4, p < 0.01). Geographic location, religion, and marital status also influenced immigration attitudes (p < 0.001).

The findings carry crucial implications for policy formulation. Recognizing the demographic factors and attitudes associated with support for the death penalty can help policymakers tailor their messaging and advocacy efforts. Additionally, understanding the intersection of political leanings, happiness, age, and regional differences offers a more nuanced perspective on the death penalty debate, informing more effective policy strategies. Likewise, the complex interplay between demographic and contextual factors in shaping attitudes toward immigration policy is noteworthy. Policymakers should consider the diversity of opinions and the influence of political leanings, education, race, and age when designing and implementing immigration policies. By considering these aspects, they can ensure that policies address the concerns and needs of various population groups in a more comprehensive and targeted manner.

*Binary Logistic Regression Analysis*

After addressing data anomalies, logistic analysis was employed, presenting both a logit model and an ordinal logit model. These models are detailed in Appendix A, with a summary of the data processing and resulting variables in Appendix B. To evaluate my first hypothesis, I employed logistic analysis to identify the factors significantly influencing attitudes toward capital punishment. I developed a binary logistic regression model with two classifications: 'yes' or 'no,' transforming the original variable, *cappun*, to assume values of '0' and '1.' The independent variables considered included sex, age, religion, income, political views, party affiliation, educational years, marital status, number of children, country of birth, 2016 presidential vote, perception of public spending on crime, happiness level, and region.

I maintained the number of children as a continuous variable while representing ordinal and nominal variables using dummy variables. For a categorical variable consisting of 'k' categories, I generated 'k-1' dummy variables and incorporated them into the model. Table 1.1 in Appendix A displays the overall model (chi2 = 224.37, p < 0.001). The analysis utilized 660 observations and yielded a significant pseudo R-squared value of 0.25, suggesting that the chosen model effectively explains capital punishment's dependent variable. To further investigate the estimated coefficients of individual categories, I created Model 2 based on variables that were statistically significant at the 5% level – age (mature adult – aged 50 to 64) (p < 0.01), political views (moderate and conservative) (p < 0.001), voted for Trump (p < 0.001), and unhappy (p < 0.01).

The results indicate that being middle-aged, having lower education levels, being a Trump supporter, having a lower income, and being divorced or never married were significantly associated with a greater likelihood of supporting the death penalty. Conversely, being female, being born in the United States, being pretty happy or not too happy, and residing in certain regions were not significantly associated with the dependent variable. Consequently, my hypothesis that unhappy (significant), older males (significant) who voted for Trump (significant) are more likely to favor the death penalty is statistically validated and proven to be accurate.

*Ordinal Logistic Regression Analysis*

To discern the factors influencing views on limiting immigration, I developed an ordinal logistic regression model with three classifications, combining the original five categories into "strongly disagree," "neutral," and "strongly agree." The independent variables considered were sex, age, race, religion, political view, educational years, gun ownership, income, marital status, self-employed, and whether their neighbor is of a different ethnicity and region. Table 2.1 in Appendix A displays the overall model (chi2 = 455.07, p < 0.001), indicating that the selected model effectively explains the dependent variable, limiting immigration. The analysis aimed to identify the characteristics of individuals who favor limiting immigration.

The significant findings correspond to variables with p-values less than 0.05. There is a higher likelihood that older adults (middle-aged adults, mature adults, and older adults) favor limiting immigration. Conservatives and moderates are more inclined to support immigration restrictions. The probability of supporting immigration limits is lower among those with higher education levels, such as bachelor's or advanced degrees. Additionally, individuals identifying as Catholic or Christian are less likely to support limiting immigration, whereas those with no religious affiliation exhibit greater support. Higher-income individuals, including those in high and very high-income brackets, are more likely to favor limiting immigration. Divorced individuals are more likely to support immigration restrictions, while never-married individuals are less likely.

I discovered no significant effects of race, sex, gun ownership, being widowed or separated, having children, working for someone else, or living in a different race community. A pseudo-R2 of 0.21 indicates that the model possesses moderate explanatory power, implying that approximately 20% of the variation in attitudes toward limiting immigration can be explained by its variables.

*Conclusion*

I used binary and ordinal logistic regression models to investigate the factors shaping opinions on the death penalty and limitations on immigration to preserve the American way of life. Both models yielded statistically significant results, indicating that the chosen independent variables effectively explained the corresponding dependent variables. Education level, religion, and political leanings emerged as the most critical predictors of both perspectives.

The logit model demonstrated that various factors, such as being Black, divorced, possessing fewer educational years, holding conservative or moderate political leanings, affiliating with the Independent or Republican party, and believing that public spending on crime prevention was excessive, were statistically significant in determining an individual's stance on capital punishment (V1). Our findings corroborated the hypothesis that older, unhappy males who voted for Trump were more inclined to support the death penalty. Interestingly, the study revealed that Black men, compared to White men, were more likely to favor the death penalty.

Regarding limitations on immigration to safeguard the American way of life (V2), the analysis identified age, education level, atheist or agnostic, moderate or conservative political views, and being from the South as statistically significant factors shaping this perspective. The research indicated that older individuals identifying as Christian and maintaining conservative political views were more likely to advocate for restricted immigration. Moreover, married individuals living in predominantly white neighborhoods were more inclined to support this stance.

I found that the findings highlight the significant impact of demographics on shaping perspectives toward criminal justice and immigration reform. Policymakers should consider factors like religion, politics, education, age, and marital status when crafting impactful policies. By developing targeted public education campaigns, they can actively contribute to abolishing the death penalty and advocate for diversity through immigration reform. By understanding these nuances, policymakers and society can better address the underlying factors driving these opinions and challenge prevailing stereotypes.

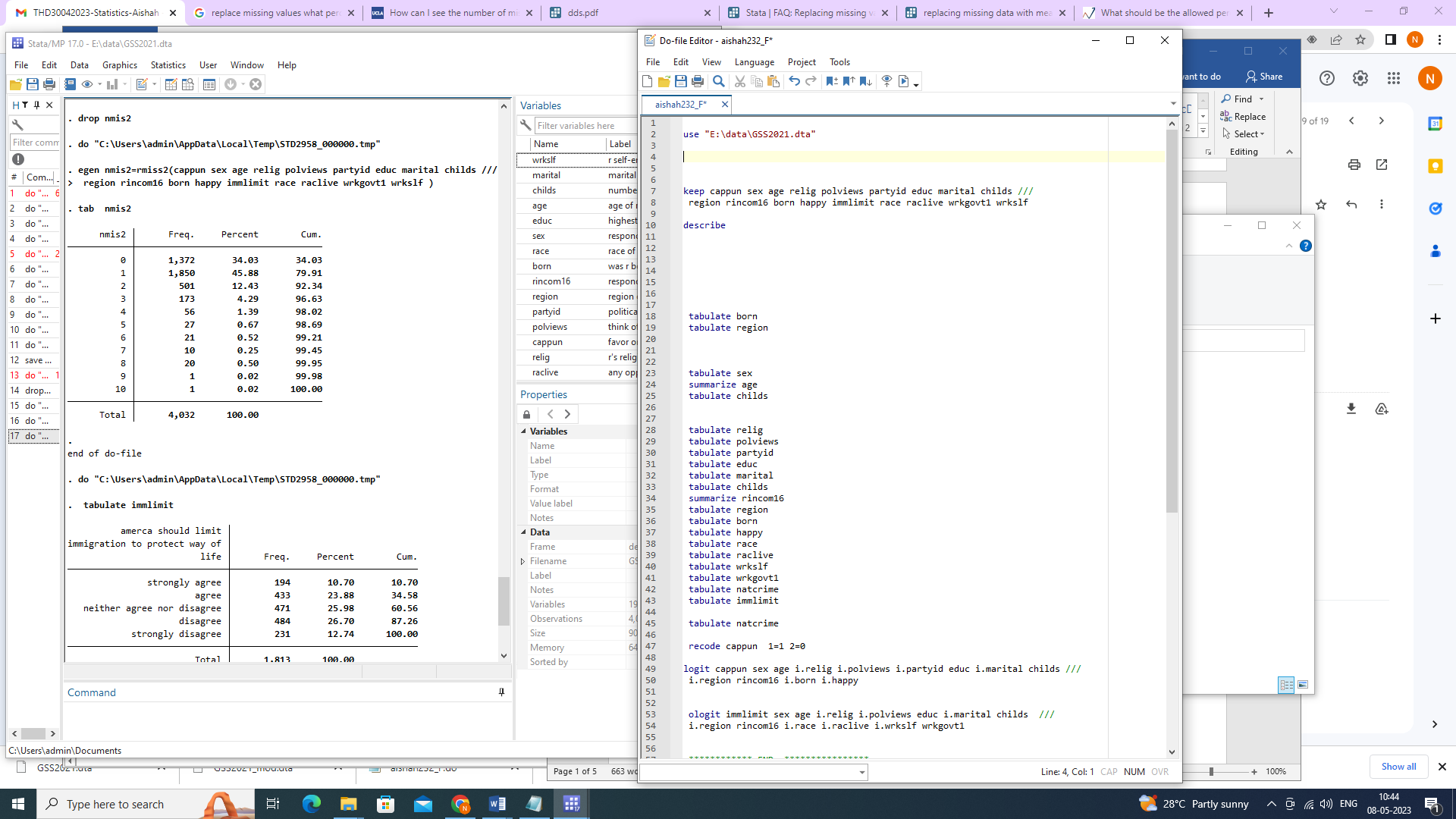
*Appendix A: Logistic & Ordinal Logit Models*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *Table 1.1: Binary Logistic Regression of Capital Punishment Perceptions* | | | | | |
|  | (n = 660) |  |  | (n = 1016) |  |
|  | Model 1 | |  | Model 2 | |
|  | Coef. |  |  | Coef. |  |
| *sex* |  |  |  |  |  |
| *female* | -0.20 |  |  |  |  |
| *age4* |  |  |  |  |  |
| *midadlt* | 1.01 | \*\* |  |  |  |
| *matadlt* | 0.90 | \* |  | 0.46 | \*\* |
| *oldadlt* | 0.04 |  |  |  |  |
| *born* |  |  |  |  |  |
| *no* | -0.78 |  |  |  |  |
| *polviews3* |  |  |  |  |  |
| *moderate* | 1.25 | \*\*\* |  | 1.12 | \*\*\* |
| *conservative* | 1.36 | \*\*\* |  | 1.33 | \*\*\* |
| *educ3* |  |  |  |  |  |
| *bachdeg* | 0.53 | \* |  |  |  |
| *advdeg* | -1.15 | \*\*\* |  |  |  |
| *pres3* |  |  |  |  |  |
| *trump* | 0.85 | \*\* |  | 1.20 | \*\*\* |
| *other* | -0.43 |  |  |  |  |
| *natcrime* |  |  |  |  |  |
| *about right* | -0.35 |  |  |  |  |
| *too much* | 0.66 |  |  |  |  |
| *happy* |  |  |  |  |  |
| *pretty happy* | -0.09 |  |  |  |  |
| *not too happy* | 0.44 |  |  | 0.52 | \*\* |
| *partyid4* |  |  |  |  |  |
| *independent* | 0.36 |  |  |  |  |
| *republican* | 0.72 |  |  |  |  |
| *other* | -0.21 |  |  |  |  |
| *region4* |  |  |  |  |  |
| *midwest* | -0.23 |  |  |  |  |
| *south* | 0.27 |  |  |  |  |
| *west* | 0.40 |  |  |  |  |
| *relig5* |  |  |  |  |  |
| *catholic* | -0.37 |  |  |  |  |
| *none* | 0.16 |  |  |  |  |
| *other* | 0.26 |  |  |  |  |
| *christian* | 0.26 |  |  |  |  |
| *rincom5* |  |  |  |  |  |
| *lowinc* | -0.76 | \*\* |  |  |  |
| *midinc* | -0.55 | \* |  |  |  |
| *highinc* | -0.12 |  |  |  |  |
| *vhighinc* | -0.14 |  |  |  |  |
| *marital* |  |  |  |  |  |
| *widowed* | -0.59 |  |  |  |  |
| *divorced* | 0.62 | \* |  |  |  |
| *separated* | -0.06 |  |  |  |  |
| *nevermarried* | 0.82 | \*\* |  |  |  |
| *childs* | 0.05 |  |  |  |  |
| *\_cons* | -0.85 |  |  | -1.20 |  |
| Pseudo R2 | 0.25 |  |  | 0.16 |  |
| AIC | 755.12 |  |  | 1184.96 |  |
| BIC | 912.35 |  |  | 1214.50 |  |
| HL-GOF | p = 0.24 |  |  | p = 0.75 |  |
| Key: | \*p < 0.05 | |  |  |  |
|  | \*\*p < 0.01 | |  |  |  |
|  | \*\*\*p < 0.001 | |  |  |  |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *Table 2.1: Ordinal Logistic Regression of Limiting Immigration Perceptions* | | | | | |
|  | (n = 1016) |  |  |  |  |
|  | Model 1 | |  |  | |
|  | Coef. |  |  |  |  |
| *sex* |  |  |  |  |  |
| *female* | 0.20 |  |  |  |  |
| *age4* |  |  |  |  |  |
| *midadlt* | -0.56 | \* |  |  |  |
| *matadlt* | -0.69 | \*\* |  |  |  |
| *oldadlt* | -0.79 | \*\* |  |  |  |
| *race* |  |  |  |  |  |
| *black* | 0.12 |  |  |  |  |
| *other* | 0.39 |  |  |  |  |
| *relig5* |  |  |  |  |  |
| *catholic* | -0.05 |  |  |  |  |
| *none* | 0.78 | \*\*\* |  |  |  |
| *other* | 0.39 |  |  |  |  |
| *christian* | 0.68 |  |  |  |  |
| *polviews3* |  |  |  |  |  |
| *moderate* | -1.35 | \*\*\* |  |  |  |
| *conservative* | -2.20 | \*\*\* |  |  |  |
| *educ3* |  |  |  |  |  |
| *bachdeg* | 0.51 | \*\* |  |  |  |
| *advdeg* | 1.13 | \*\*\* |  |  |  |
| *owngun* |  |  |  |  |  |
| *no* | 0.43 |  |  |  |  |
| *refused* | 14.77 |  |  |  |  |
| *rincom5* |  |  |  |  |  |
| *lowinc* | 0.17 |  |  |  |  |
| *midinc* | 0.18 |  |  |  |  |
| *highinc* | 0.57 | \* |  |  |  |
| *vhighinc* | 0.86 |  |  |  |  |
| *marital* |  |  |  |  |  |
| *widowed* | -0.43 |  |  |  |  |
| *divorced* | -0.53 |  |  |  |  |
| *separated* | 0.04 |  |  |  |  |
| *never married* | -0.12 |  |  |  |  |
| *wrkslf* |  |  |  |  |  |
| *someoneelse* | 0.07 |  |  |  |  |
| *raclive* |  |  |  |  |  |
| *no* | -0.23 |  |  |  |  |
| *region4* |  |  |  |  |  |
| *midwest* | 0.03 |  |  |  |  |
| *south* | -0.47 |  |  |  |  |
| *west* | -0.40 |  |  |  |  |
| */cut1* | -1.54 |  |  |  |  |
| */cut2* | -0.13 |  |  |  |  |
| Pseudo R2 | 0.21 |  |  |  |  |
| AIC | 1779.01 |  |  |  |  |
| BIC | 1931.64 |  |  |  |  |
| Key: | \*p < 0.05 | |  |  |  |
|  | \*\*p < 0.01 | |  |  |  |
|  | \*\*\*p < 0.001 | |  |  |  |

*Appendix B: Data Cleaning Summary & Variables Tables*

The original dataset had 4,032 obs and 707 variables. However, we omitted 3,005 obs due to missing data, resulting in the remaining 1,027 used for this analysis.



The above table shows that nearly 80% of the observations have no missing values or, at most, one missing value. Thus, we can retain the data set as such for the analysis. Of the selected variables, age and the participant’s income are numerical in nature (ratio scale) and in order to find the outliers, we used the box plots presented below:



No outliers are present from the above box plots, as no points are outside the Whisker lines.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Original Variable | New Variable | Original Categories | New Categories |
| *immlimit* | *immlimit3* | 5 categories: *strongly agree*, *agree*, *neither agree nor disagree*, disagree, strongly disagree | 3 categories: *strongly agree*, *neutral*, *strongly disagree* |
| *relig* | *relig5* | 13 categories: *protestant, catholic, jewish, none, other, buddhism, hinduism, other eastern religions, muslim/islam, orthodox-christian, christian, native american, inter-nondenominational* | 5 categories: *protestant, catholic, none, other, christian* |
| *polviews* | *polviews3* | 7 categories: *extremely liberal, liberal, slightly liberal, moderate, slightly conservative, conservative, extremely conservative* | 3 categories: *liberal, moderate, conservative* |
| *partyid* | *partyid4* | 8 categories: *strong democrat, not very strong democrat, independent (close to democrat), independent (neither, no response), independent, close to republican, not very strong republican, strong republican, strong republican, other party* | 4 categories: *democrat, independent, republican, other* |
| *pres16* | *pres3* | 4 categories: *clinton, trump, other candidate, didn’t vote for president* | 3 categories: *clinton, trump, other* |
| *region* | *region4* | 9 categories: *new england, middle atlantic, east north central, west north central, south atlantic, east south atlantic, west south central, mountain, pacific* | 4 categories: *west, midwest, northeast, south* |
| *educ* | *educ3* | 17 categories (years): *no formal schooling, 2, 6 to 20* | 3 categories: *highsch* (0-13), *bachdeg* (14-17), *advdeg* (18-20) |
| *age* | *age4* | 66 categories (years): *23 to 89* | 4 categories: *yngadlt* (23-34),midadlt (35-49), *matadlt* (50-64), *oldadlt* (65-89) |
| *rincom16* | *rincom5* | 26 categories (USD): no income, under $1,000, $1,000 - $169,999, $170,000 or over | 5 categories: *noinc* (no income), *lowinc* ($1,000-$29,999), *midinc* ($30,000-$74,999), *highinc* ($75,000-$169,999), *vhighinc* ($170,000 & above) |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Original Variable | New Variable | Description |
| *cappun* | *capfav* | favor death penalty |
| *cappun* | *capopp* | oppose death penalty |
| *immlimit* | *immsa* | strongly agree on limiting immigration to protect the American way of life |
| *immlimit* | *immln* | neutral on limiting immigration to protect the American way of life |
| *immlimit* | *immlsd* | strongly disagree on limiting immigration to protect the American way of life |
| *sex* | *maledum* | male |
| *sex* | *femaledum* | female |
| *relig5* | *protestant* | Protestant |
| *relig5* | *catholic* | Catholic |
| *relig5* | *norelig* | no reported religion |
| *relig5* | *otherelig* | other religions |
| *relig5* | *christian* | Christian |
| *polviews3* | *liberal* | liberal |
| *polviews3* | *moderate* | moderate |
| *polviews3* | *conserv* | conservative |
| *partyid4* | *democrat* | registered Democrat |
| *partyid4* | *indepen* | registered Independent |
| *partyid4* | *republ* | registered Republican |
| *partyid4* | *otherpar* | registered Other Party |
| *marital* | *married* | married |
| *marital* | *widowd* | widowed |
| *marital* | *divorc* | divorced |
| *marital* | *separat* | separated |
| *marital* | *unmarried* | never married |
| *born* | *usborn* | America-born |
| *born* | *forborn* | foreign-born |
| *pres3* | *clint* | voted for Clinton in the 2016 U.S. presidential election |
| *pres3* | *trump* | voted for Trump in the 2016 U.S. presidential election |
| *pres3* | *otherprez* | voted for other candidate or did not vote in the 2016 U.S. presidential election |
| *happy* | *veryhapp* | very happy |
| *happy* | *happ* | pretty happy |
| *happy* | *unhapp* | not too happy |
| *region4* | *northeast* | the participant took the survey in the northeast |
| *region4* | *midwest* | the participant took the survey in the northeast midwest |
| *region4* | *south* | the participant took the survey in the south |
| *region4* | *west* | the participant took the survey in the west |
| *race* | *white* | White |
| *race* | *black* | Black |
| *race* | *othrac* | other ethnicity |
| *wrkslf* | *selfemp* | self-employed |
| *wrkslf* | *employee* | work for others |
| *raclive* | *divneigh* | live with opposite races in their neighborhood |
| *raclive* | *homoneigh* | do not live with opposite races in their neighborhood |