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“Overcoming Origin-Based Preferences by Selecting Skilled Immigrants? Preferences in Immigrants’ National Origin and Social Classes in Quebec” Antoine Bilodeau (Concordia) and Audrey Gagnon (Oslo)

Although multiple liberal democracies have abandoned preferences for national origins in their immigrant selection policies, there is evidence that the public continues to express preferences for immigrants of certain origins over others. What remains unknown is whether a carefully selected set of immigrants based on skills and economic considerations can help overcome preferences of immigrants of certain origins over others. Can governments count on the promotion of successful economic integration to ensure acceptance of the greater ethnocultural diversity of immigrants that now settles in host-countries through the middle-class nation-building enterprise? Relying on an original survey experiment of 2,400 respondents in Quebec, this study assesses whether immigrant selection based on skills, and beliefs of a strong economic integration of immigrants, result in stronger acceptance of immigrants from less preferred national origins. We compare reactions to immigrants of different professional status and national origins to investigate if certain types of economic immigration can reduce origin-based preferences. Results show that origin-based preferences can be attenuated when immigrants are of the upper-social class, but not when they are of the middle-class. That said, anticipations that immigrants will contribute to Quebec economy translate into greater acceptance of immigrants of different national origins and social classes.