

Becoming an immigrant nation? Attitudes towards immigrants and immigration in
Taiwan

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Abstract

Ever since Taiwan first opened its door to labor migrants in the early 1990s and later to more types of foreign workers, the Taiwanese government has only considered marriage migrants as legitimate citizens and all others as temporary. With the recent amendment of the Employment Services Act, some care workers have extended their length of stay in Taiwan as long as 14 years, making substantial contributions to the Taiwanese society during their most productive years from the early 20s to the late 30s. After almost three decades, would the Taiwanese welcome non-marriage migrants to apply for citizenship if these “temporary” migrants wish to migrate permanently? We use data from the 2015 Taiwan Social Image Survey (n=1,220) and the module of citizens and the role of government (n=1,966) of the 2016 Taiwan Social Change Survey, two large-scale representative surveys covering questions on attitudes toward immigrants and immigration (ATII) such as citizenship rights among labor migrants, care workers, and skilled migrants, and the health rights of undocumented migrants. We found that male, the younger generations, and the highly-educated, tend to be more receptive than others. However, attitudes towards different types of migrants and the importance of social contact with migrants vary. Moreover, political party identification, perceived social class, and gender ideologies are statistically significant covariates in differentiating ATII. Based on empirical data, this article responds to the ongoing discussion over whether Taiwan may adopt immigration as a strategy to tackle population challenges in the context of an ultra-low fertility and rapid aging society.

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