America, Land of Immigrants?
Economic Hard Times and American Public Opinion Towards Immigration from 1993 to 2010

by

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Abstract

America has always been associated with terms such as the “land of immigrants,” “the land of opportunity,” and the “melting pot.” However, there has always been backlash towards incoming waves of settlers and migrants. A great deal of literature has explored what causes these attitudes and the conclusions have varied. This study explores how economic hard times influences immigration by constructing a 20-year time series and analyzing how immigration policy preferences change based on the state of the U.S. economy. Policy preferences also vary greatly based on party affiliation, ideology, and race, which is observed in this study. Data from CBS/New York Times and Gallup Polls were used to analyze how preferences evolved from 1990 to 2010. Data was also drawn from the ABC News Poll in 1996. By seeing how immigration policy preferences fluctuated with the economy, we see that there is some influence. However, inconsistency reveals that economic hard times are not always a predictor of stronger attitudes against immigration.
What are the different factors influencing public opinion on immigration? With the high levels of anti-immigrant rhetoric happening today and the recent spike in anti-immigrant policies, it is important to know what is influencing this phenomenon (Immigration Policy Center). Laws restricting immigrants can be seen in attempts to implement racial profiling policies such as SB1070 in Arizona. This bill would make the failure to carry immigration documents a crime and give law enforcement the power to detain anyone suspected of being an undocumented immigrant. This has been further compounded by recent policies like Secure Communities and 287(g), which gives local law enforcement the added responsibility of sharing information with the federal government and deports immigrants who are arrested for minor offenses. Further anti-immigrant legislation can be seen in the local level with the 107 US towns, cities, and counties that have approved policies intended to regulate immigration or limit its effects on the local community (Immigration Policy Center). In addition, there has been a deluge of anti-immigrant rhetoric such as statements dehumanizing undocumented immigrants. This can be seen in policymakers such as Tennessee Rep. Curry Todd likening undocumented immigrants to rats and State Rep. Virgil Peck (R-Tyro) who proposed “shooting them (immigrants) from a helicopter” (Colorlines).

While it can be seen that racial sentiments fuel anti-immigrant attitudes, it is also necessary to explore influences on public opinion using empirical data. It is important to know the factors that affect this opinion so that readers can be informed whether or not the anti-immigrant policies Americans push for are motivated by racist attitudes or economic concerns. If anti-immigrant attitudes are due to racial or out-group bias, then it is important to become aware that policymakers are legislat ing racially unjust policy.

The following is the main research question: Do attitudes against immigration increase during times of economic stress? I also want to ask a set of interrelated questions about the causes
of anti-immigrant opinion. Is anti-immigrant legislation motivated by economic concerns or by racial and out-group bias? What are the primary factors that cause Americans to have negative attitudes toward immigration?

**Background**

In order to understand what causes attitudes against immigrants, it is important to see its roots in United States history. Ever since North America was colonized, there has always been a competition for the best land and resources, which led to an attempt to keep incoming waves of settlers out (Hing, 2009). According to Simon (1985), there was a drawbridge mentality with preceding settlers that led them to harbor negative sentiments towards newer immigrants. Benjamin Franklin famously said about incoming German settlers: “Unless the Stream of their Importation could be turned... they will soon so outnumber us, that all the advantages we have, will not in my Opinion be able to preserve our Language, and even our Government will become precarious” (Garcia, 2010).

Restrictive laws first began appearing in the 1880s when there was an influx in immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe. Incoming Chinese migration to the United States during the Gold Rush led to further anti-immigrant sentiment due to the perception that they were taking jobs away from whites. The labor unrest at this time compounded the matter and led to an anti-Chinese movement in which they were singled out as scapegoats. Aside from becoming targets of discriminatory laws and racial violence, they were barred from migrating to the United States for several decades. As other Asian ethnic groups were brought in for cheap labor, different movements and legislation arose to restrict these groups (Hing, 2009).

As the largest migrant population, the Mexican immigrants also had a long history of race-targeted immigrant legislation and restrictions (Hing, 2009). While Mexicans have been part of the
American landscape since before the Spanish-American War, large groups of Mexican immigrants migrated due to labor shortages. This started in the late 19th Century when there was a need to import labor for cattle ranches in the Southwest, and fruit production in California. After barring Asian ethnic groups, Mexican migrant workers were brought in. Most notably, the Bracero Program was enacted after negotiations between the U.S. and Mexico, which brought in temporary contract laborers to fill labor shortages during World War II. Ultimately, the program ended, but migration continued due to poverty and neoliberal policies that forced low income people to move north (Chacon, 2006). According to Chacon (2006), neoliberal policies like the North American Free Trade Agreement have devastated Mexico's small farmer class and forced them to look for work in the United States.

Mass migration resulted in restrictive policies as early as the late 50s against undocumented immigrants, such as “Operation Wetback.” This policy targeted hundreds of thousands of Mexicans, some of whom were citizens, through military tactics and racial profiling. This resulted in mass deportations and many families fleeing out of fear (Hing, 2009).

After World War II, more tolerant attitudes towards immigration developed. Different factors are used to explain this such as a “growing acceptance of America’s newfound role as a world superpower which entailed a responsibility to accept more refugees, an expanding postwar economy, and reduced religious and racial prejudice especially among the better-educated segments of the population” (Espenshade and Hempstead, 1996). Survey data at the time also showed that there was a decrease in the number of Americans who wanted to restrict immigration. All of these factors led to major revision in immigration legislation during the 50s and 60s, which increased immigration quotas. The most noteworthy legislation, which led to a significant increase in the immigrant population, was the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. This law increased the
annual limitation of visas and made family reunification visas unlimited.

Sentiment again changed in the 70s and 80s when another wave of anti-immigrant sentiment emerged. Polls revealed that the number of respondents who wanted to decrease immigration began to grow. From 1981 to 1982, two out of three respondents said they wanted to reduce levels of legal immigration in an NBC survey. This number was twice as large as the results in a 1965 Gallup survey (Harwood, 1986). Understanding how attitudes have developed and changed is essential when we analyze the time series from 1993 to 2010 for this study.

Immigration Opinion Theories

The formation of opinion and policy preferences against immigration is due mainly to racial attitudes and economic concerns. Various theories have been presented over the years to explain group opinion on immigration and race-targeted policies. Political scientists have theorized that in-group/out-group bias, ethnocentrism, nationalism, nativism, and racial threat are some of the reasons to explain negative views on immigration (Fiske, 2002; Axelrod and Hammond, 2003; Fetzer, 2000; Anbinder, 2007). Much of the research is attributed to how attitudes are tied with racial sentiments. However, some researchers have also found that economic interests affect opinion on immigration policies. The following present the various theories that are commonly cited today.

“Material interests” is one theory that has been presented by scholars to explain anti-immigration sentiment. Martinez-Ebers and Paolino (2010) proposed that realistic group conflict over scarce material resources might contribute to negative views on immigrants. According to intergroup behavior research by Tajfel et al. (1971), group members will often work together to “maximize their relative advantage over the out-group.” Their experiments found that in-group members view competition over scarce resources with the goal of achieving group dominance
(Tajfel et al, 1971). In understanding this theory, one can say that dominant groups might challenge the presence of immigrants in order to preserve resources that are perceived to be scarce, like jobs. One way anti-immigrant and immigration opinion has developed is due to in-group/out-group bias. This bias develops subconsciously and subtly. Fiske (2002) defines it as comfort with one’s own in-group and the exclusion and avoidance of out-groups. According to Fiske (2002), a majority of society has an out-group bias. Since immigrants are viewed as out-groups, they will always likely be excluded from society. A similar theory to in-group/out-group bias is ethnocentrism. Ethnocentrism develops due to local competition between groups, and is considered a universal condition (Axelrod and Hammond, 2003). In this context, local competition means a struggle for resources between individuals in the same geographical area. Attitudes as a result of ethnocentrism include seeing one’s own group as superior and the out-group as inferior, as well as seeing one’s own standards of value as universal.

Another theory as to how anti-immigrant opinion has formed is nationalism. Nationalism is the concept of “putting the interest of one’s fellow citizens above the well-being of other countries’ citizens” (Fetzer, 2000). This theory explains the reason why Americans tend to oppose legislation that would benefit non-citizen immigrants. They fear that public resources would be drained at the expense of citizens.

One of the most common theories cited by scholars to explain negative attitudes towards immigration is nativism. According to Anbinder (2007), nativism has been a norm for Americans since the 1600s. This can be seen when as soon as the Dutch, French, and Spanish began settling North America, colonists immediately worked to deter other religious and ethnic groups from joining them. While there is no precise definition of nativism, it can be described as the “ethnocentric ideology that that seeks to maintain the racial, religious, and political status quo of the
nation” (Anbinder, 2007). It is also the idea and need to push back the impact of immigrants and take action against them either through violence, immigration restriction, or placing limits on the rights of ethnic groups already in the United States (Anbinder, 2007).

Racial threat or power theory is another reason as to why Americans view immigrants and immigration negatively. The power theory was proposed by Giles and Hertz (1994) to explain “linkage between the rise of black influence within the Democratic party and the decline of Democratic identification among whites.” Basically, the theory views interactions between groups as a result of competition in politics, the economy, and society. When a minority group poses a threat, the dominant group becomes more hostile than when the threat was low. Giles and Hertz (1994) further explains that the “willingness of a dominant group to remain in a particular context declines as its hegemony is threatened by increases in the power of the nondominant group.” As a result, white hostility to immigration can be due to the perception that their hegemony and dominance is being threatened by incoming immigrants who contribute to the rise in minority populations. The fear that this rise can eventually threaten their positions in society fuels opposition to immigration.

Racist and discriminatory policies that have been introduced time and again can cause many individuals to justify their negative beliefs against marginalized groups. Institutional racism has been intertwined with the history of U.S. immigration laws and policies. This system began with slavery as forced immigration. It continued with the Chinese Exclusion Act, policies that barred Asian immigration, as well as labor programs like the Bracero Program and Operation Wetback. According to Hing (2009), “immigration laws have institutionalized a set of values that dehumanize, demonize, and criminalize immigrants of color.” This system normalized the negative
treatment of immigrants to the point that it has pervaded public consciousness, thus justifying anti-immigrant beliefs.

One theory as to why individuals have negative attitudes about immigrants is that opinion leaders are further fueling people’s anxieties about immigration to the United States. They are appealing to many Americans’ suspicion towards immigrants using anti-immigrant rhetoric. According to research by Brader (2005), politicians routinely appeal to the emotions of voters in order to cause changes in political behavior. Brader (2005) further finds that when political ads cue fear, they “stimulate vigilance, increase reliance on contemporary evaluations, and facilitate persuasion.” Some critics claim that this tactic undermines rational decision-making and fact-finding (Brader 2005). In the past election year, there was an overwhelming number of images of Latinos and other people of color accompanied by fear-inciting dialogue. The negative images of Latinos and other immigrants of color fuels likely fuels policy preferences against immigration. The latest ads from the November 2010 election revealed intense race-baiting. One prominent example can be seen with Nevada 2010 Republican Senate candidate Sharron Angle. One of Angle’s ads shows a series of images that portray Arizona under siege, with the announcer saying, “Waves of illegal aliens streaming across our border, joining violent gangs ... forcing families to live in fear.” (“Sharron Angle”). This theme was also featured in several more campaign ads by California Republican gubernatorial candidate Meg Whitman, incumbent Senator John McCain from Arizona, and incumbent Senator David Vitter of Louisiana. All featured ads that showed their support for border fencing and featured negative and oftentimes racist caricatures of Latinos as ‘thugs’ and ‘aliens’ (“Vitter for Senate”).
Author’s Theory

In looking at the previous research, I find that each author has found sufficient evidence support their theories have an influence in the formation of attitudes towards immigrants. In this paper, I theorize that group identity and racial animosity against newcomers has the greatest influences of opinion on immigration. However, I believe that economic downturns further influences negative attitudes on immigration, and leads to a significant dip in attitudes.

Literature Review

Public opinion on immigration is often reviewed in order to figure out if racial biases affect people’s political decisions or if it is simply due to economic concerns. There has been various political science research in the subject of public opinion on immigration. There are three main types of conclusions that have been made by political science scholars. One type of research finds that racial attitudes is a significant factor in an individual’s immigration policy preferences. Racial attitudes may include ethnocentrism, nativism, and racist perceptions of immigrants. The second type of research focuses on how economic concerns affects public opinion on immigration. These concerns may include downward pressure in wages, feelings of employment vulnerability, and anxiety about the general health of the economy. The third type of conclusion finds that opinion on immigration is fueled by a combination of economic concerns and racial attitudes against immigrants.

Economic Concerns

For many individuals, their perception of the economic climate may be a strong influence on their opinion on immigration policy. Many studies have found that economic concerns are what influences individuals’ negative attitudes toward immigration. Scheve and Slaughter (2001) finds that labor market competition influences immigration policy preferences. They found a correlation
between labor market skills and levels of restrictionist preferences, in which low-skilled individuals preferred more restrictionist policies and high-skilled individuals preferred less restrictionist policies. They found that people’s position in the labor force has significant influence in their immigration policy opinion. One of the more extensive research studies on U.S. immigration and public opinion conducted by Hanson et al. (2001) also finds that people’s opinions on immigration policy are affected by their expectations on its impact on the labor market and public resources. One can also find this correlation in German public opinion on immigration. According to Lancee and Pardos-Prado’s findings, individuals who perceive themselves to be more economically vulnerable are more likely to be concerned about immigration. Their findings suggest that competition with new immigrants is an important influence on immigration opinion, whether or not the competition is real or perceived (Lancee and Pardos-Prado, 2010). Hoskin and Mishler (1983) also finds that real economic concerns has the most influence on immigration policy preferences. They found that postmaterialist attitudes and education are strong determinants for immigration opinion, and that postmaterialism produces “greater sympathy for the rights of new minorities” (Hoskin and Mishler, 1983). However, they found that these attitudes change depending on the economic climate, with opposition rising during economic hard times. The authors concluded that opinion on new immigration depends on the health of the state and “its ability to meet the needs of its own citizens” (Hoskin and Mishler, 1983).

Bias

The rise in anti-immigrant sentiment can be attributed to racial bias. This can be due to the media reports on immigration, anti-immigrant speech from opinion leaders, or from a visible increase of immigrants in white-dominant communities. Many scholars have found significant correlations between restrictive immigration policy preferences and traits like in-group/out-group
bias, nativism, ethnocentrism, and racism. One of the earlier studies by Starr and Roberts (1982) relied on telephone polling, which measured respondents’ attitudes toward incoming Southeast Asian refugees through a questionnaire. They found that the respondents’ racial and prejudicial attitudes were positively correlated with disapproval of refugee resettlement and aid programs (Starr and Roberts, 1982). Brader (2010) observed if material interests or in-group/out-group bias influenced attitudes towards immigration during economic hard times. The study focused on survey data during the severe economic upheaval prior to the 2008 presidential election. Even after accounting for the negative economic climate, Brader found that in-group/out-group bias still had the greatest influence on attitudes. Another research study by Burns and Gimpel (2000) asked the same research question and used the American National Election Studies (ANES) from 1992 and 1996 to evaluate various possible sources of opinion. They found that attitudes on immigration policy are highly dependent on stereotypes about the work ethic and intelligence of minorities, especially among whites. Another similar study also uses the 1992 and 1994 ANES, in which authors explore various conceptualizations of the effects of economic adversity and anxiety on immigration opposition (Citrin et al., 1997). Their study finds that personal economic circumstances play little role in opinion formation and that, “the state of the national economy, anxiety over taxes, and generalized feelings about Hispanics and Asians, the major immigrant groups, are significant determinants of restrictionist sentiment (Citrin et al., 1997).

Lastly, Sides and Citrin (2007) provides the European perspective of this research question using the 2002–03 European Social Survey. The authors have found that Europeans’ “symbolic predispositions,” like preferences for cultural unity, have a stronger correlation to anti-immigration attitudes than economic dissatisfaction.
Many times, anti-immigrant sentiment is fueled by racism. Individuals are often unaware of their own racial bias when forming opinions about immigration. Brader et al. (2008) found that ethnic cues during news reports on immigration increased white viewers’ and readers’ opposition to immigration. They found that white viewers reacted more negatively when immigrants of color were being described in news about immigration than when white immigrants were shown. This reveals that racial attitudes against immigrants ignite preferences for policies against immigration. Another similar study uses the Implicit Association Test (IAT) to understand the psychological determinants of immigration and immigration policy preferences (Knoll, 2010). Knoll measures nativism through the IAT by looking at the automatic preferences of individuals for American culture verses Latino-American culture. In this study, automatic preferences are measured by having subjects rapidly categorize two concepts with an attribute. One example would be the images of Latino American and mainstream American culture paired with the attribute of “beneficial.” The study finds that easier pairings, or faster responses, are more strongly associated in memory than more difficult pairings, or slow responses. The results reveal an individual’s implicit attitudes, or judgments that occur without a complete awareness. The results in this study find that an attitude of nativism and automatic rejection of Latino-American culture was a predictor for negative opinion on immigration (Knoll, 2010). Knoll shows that a desire for continued dominance of White American culture in mainstream society is a motivator for anti-immigrant attitudes.

One important factor to consider is that racial attitudes against immigrants vary by factors like race, age, and geographic location. Brader et al. (2010) found that there is a racial divide on immigration opinion, with blacks less threatened by immigrants. For both blacks and whites, they find that group attitudes drive immigration opinion, as opposed to material interests. In this context,
group attitudes mean one racial group’s overall attitudes towards a different racial group. In addition, they also found that blacks are more resistant to negative news reports about immigrants. This evidence further supports the idea that immigration opinion is influenced by symbolic concerns like group identity, as opposed to class or material interests.

**Both Bias and Economic Concern as Influences**

A combination of both racial attitudes and economic concerns can also influence public opinion on immigration. Many times, ideas on immigration are mixed and cannot be attributed solely to racial hostility or economic concern. While racial attitudes towards immigrants have been found to be the most influential on public opinion, economic pressure mixed with racial attitudes against immigrants can also contribute to immigration policy preferences.

Californian attitudes on immigration policy from the early 1990s reveals that various factors like nativism and the recession influenced their opinion formation (Barkan, 2003). The visibility of anti-immigrant sentiments and policies in California during this time made it appear to be a nativist state. However, Barkan (2003) found that various factors influenced opinions, such as demographics. Barkan (2003) concludes that California has more *dual* attitudes toward immigrants, “rather than the leader of a neonativist movement” (Barkan, 2003). In this context, “dual” means that factors like personal attitudes and economic stability work in tandem to influence the opinions of individuals.

Martinez-Ebers and Paolino (2010) also found that a combination of symbolic racism and realistic group conflict influences attitudes. Symbolic racism is defined as covert racism and opposition to policies that would assist historically oppressed groups. While Martinez-Ebers and Paolino (2010) found more support for the symbolic racism hypothesis, there was also evidence that
group conflict over material resources had a significant effect. This trend can also be seen in European attitudes on immigration. One way to differentiate between racial attitudes and economic concern in immigration policy preferences is by seeing if immigrants are considered ‘competitors’ rather than inferior (Dustmann and Preston, 2007). Using the British Social Attitudes Survey, Dustmann and Preston (2007) found that racial attitudes have a strong correlation with hostility to immigration. Despite this, they also found that welfare and labor market concerns are related to attitudes on immigration among skilled and highly educated workers (Dustmann and Preston, 2007). Espenshade and Calhoun (1993) found similar mixed results with economic concerns having a weak correlation with immigration policy preferences. They found firm evidence that cultural affinity between respondents and undocumented immigrants is a significant factor in immigration opinion. However, they also found that people's perceptions of the tangible costs and benefits to themselves had a significant influence on their opinions on immigration.

Other Conclusions

Contact and visibility of new immigrants in a community has a significant influence on public opinion on immigration. The visible influx of new immigrants in a community leads to perceptions that they are a drain on public resources, which fuels a great deal of anti-immigrant sentiment. However, it has been also found that increased contact with immigrants can lead to increased approval for immigration. The following two articles provide two opposing views on how contact and visibility of immigrants influences public attitudes.

The first research article by Hopkins (2010) introduces the “politicized places hypothesis,” which finds that hostile public reactions to immigrants are most likely when communities undergo sudden influxes of immigrants and when mainstream rhetoric reinforces the threat (Hopkins, 2010). This article is unique in the literature because it draws data from local anti-immigrant ordinances.
The next article finds an opposite conclusion. In their paper, Hood and Morris (1997) examined the racial and ethnic context of white public opinion toward immigration, while looking at attitudinal and demographic variables. The authors found that whites living in close proximity to Asian immigrant populations are more likely than racial and ethnic isolated whites to support increased immigration. There are various factors that might have led to these two opposing conclusions. One reason would be that there might be a difference in opinion when a wave of immigrants first arrive as opposed to when they have settled for a longer period. Another reason might be that public opinion depends on the racial group that settles in an area.

Significance of Studying Public Attitudes

It is important to know if economic hard times cause restrictive immigration policy preferences. First, people need to know what causes these preferences because it influences policymaker’s decisions. These decisions, in turn, can potentially affect the lives of millions of immigrants living in the United States. It can also potentially affect those who depend on immigrants for labor or have familial ties to them. Understanding the relationship between economic stress and immigration opinion can explain the extent to which racial attitudes and economic concerns affect people’s attitudes. If there is no significant relationship between economic stress and restrictive immigration policies, then this may indicate that racial bias is a more important influence. If there is a significant relationship, then this means that economic concerns must be considered as a factor. However, this does not mean that racial bias should be discarded as an influence. Due to overwhelming research on the influence of bias on immigration opinion, it should always be considered in this type of research.
Research Design

Main Hypothesis

For this study, the hypothesis is: “Americans’ attitudes towards immigration are more negative during times of economic downturn than during periods of economic stability.” The linkage in this hypothesis explores relationships between level of economic health and the intensity of negative attitudes towards immigration. The relationship between the two variables is negative. This hypothesis predicts that the intensity of negative attitudes towards immigration increases as economic stability decreases, and intensity decreases as stability increases.

In this hypothesis, the unit of analysis is Americans’ immigration policy preferences. A preference for decreasing immigration levels represents negative attitudes against immigration, while a preference for increasing immigration levels represents positive attitudes. The other unit of analysis is level of unemployment. Percentage of unemployment determines economic health. Measurement of attitudes towards immigration (the dependent variable) and the state of the economy (the independent variable) are relevant in testing this hypothesis.

Additional Predictions

To further understand how immigration opinion changes, we need to look at the patterns based on demographic. It is important to look at results based on respondent types because previous theories mentioned earlier in this paper have found that certain identifications have significant influence on immigration policy preferences. This is why we will also be testing how respondents’ immigration policy mood has fluctuated in the past 20 years.

I predict that ideology and political affiliation will have the strongest effect on immigration policy preferences, and will have widely different results based on the type of respondent. As mentioned earlier, the material interests theory finds that, “dominant groups might challenge the
presence of immigrants in order to preserve resources that are perceived to be scarce, like jobs” (Brader et al. 2010). Understanding the material interest theory, I predict that the time series will reveal that conservatives are likely to support restrictive immigration policy preferences because they tend to prefer smaller budgets that would benefit Americans (McDaniel et al. 2010). This prediction would also apply to individuals who are Republican, as they tend to have the same preferences. Factors based on identities like race will also affect results.

According to the “cultural affinity hypothesis,” membership of racial, ethnic, or religious minorities led to a decrease in nativism. One can deduce that nonwhites will prefer less restrictive policies than whites in the time series. The power or racial threat theory also has a similar prediction. According to this theory, whites will likely have more restrictive preferences in the time series because growing minority groups presents a challenge to the current hegemonic structure.

**Variables**

Restrictive immigration policy preference is defined as an individual’s desire to increase restrictions for immigration to the United States and seeks to restrict the actions of immigrants already here. I used the word restriction because it best captures the set of preferences that Americans tend to have towards immigration. The consensus on immigration opinion research is that restrictive attitudes includes a set of desires that hopes to decrease immigration in-flow and decrease the perceived impact of immigrants in society (Hoskin and Mishler 1983; Espenshade and Hempstead 1996; Citrin et al. 1997; Scheve and Slaughter 2001; Hopkins 2010).

I used level of unemployment as defined by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, which states that, “Persons are classified as unemployed if they do not have a job, have actively looked for work in the prior 4 weeks, and are currently available for work” (BLS).
Case Selection

I observed immigration policy preferences of respondents in the surveys I examined. I also looked at preferences by age group, gender, race, geographic location, economic situation, and political affiliation. I paid special attention to groups with a strong relationship to restrictive policy preferences. I wanted to observe if one group has more restrictive immigration preferences than the other.

After checking the available data in the Roper Center, General Social Survey, and LexisNexis, I looked at data from the 1990s to present day. This provided me with two decades of differing economic fluctuations. This provided me with adequate information on public opinion during economic hard times and economic stability.

Data Sources and Measurement

The first main data source was the Roper Center because the polls in its archive can be used to track changes over time in people's attitudes, opinions, and behaviors. The Roper Center polls have demographic and attitudinal questions about immigration policy preferences. In order to test my hypothesis, I looked for similar questions over time in order to have a time-trend study. When I observed how immigration policy preferences have change over time, I used questions with the same wording.

Methods of Inference and Analysis

Using Stata, I used a longitudinal design to observe how individuals’ opinions have changed at multiple points in time. In order to test my hypothesis, I recorded restrictive immigration policy preferences each year, and plotted the data in a time series. The Y-axis was immigration policy preferences and the X-axis was the year. I then compare this to an unemployment time series. Another way I analyzed the data is by looking at policy preferences by gender, age group, party
identification, and geographic location. I observed which groups had more negative groups and recorded it.

Content Analysis

Another data source I used is the New York Times. I looked for articles on immigration using LexisNexis. The two types of categories of content measured were positive articles and negative articles on immigration. Positive articles included wording about the contributions of immigrants, the importance of meeting their needs, and the struggles they face. Positive articles included writings on the need and benefits of less restrictive immigration policies. Negative articles had wording about how immigrants are a drain on the economy and adversely affect American society. Such articles called for the need to restrict immigrants’ access to public resources. Negative articles will also mean that such articles talk about the need for decreased immigration and more restrictive policies. I observed if there was a rise in negative articles on immigration during recession years and if there was a decrease during years of economic stability.

Time Series Analysis Methods

The salience of the immigration issue varies based on the main concerns of the American population. As can be seen from the context analysis, the importance of immigration in the national consciousness was dependent on major historical events and when major immigration legislation was being pushed or passed. Since I want to test my hypothesis that economic hard times influences immigration opinion, I must observe how Americans have viewed immigration to the United States. I further focus on how much they oppose immigration.

To test my main hypothesis, I created a time-series of public opinion on immigration to the United States. In order to measure this quantitatively, I looked for a question that was asked frequently in the past 20 years. I used the Roper Center iPoll Databank to search for survey
questions about immigration. I found that the question most consistently asked was, “Should immigration into the United States be kept at its present level, increased or decreased?” A similar question that was asked emphasized “legal immigration,” as opposed to simply “immigration.” I focused on surveys that did not emphasize “legal immigration” in order to measure public attitudes about immigration in general. The two organizations that asked this question frequently were the CBS/New York Times and Gallup Poll.

The data was drawn from the years 1993 (N=1363), 1995a (N=801), 1995b (N=1005), 1996 (N=1024), 1997 (N=801), 1999 (1013), 2000 (N=1009), 2002 (N=1003), 2005 (N=1003), and 2010 (N=1020). These were the years where the question for the analysis was asked and was available. I also focused on categories of respondents based on race, sex, gender, state, income, and level of education. As I mentioned earlier, I chose these categories due to findings in my literature review that found correlations between these factors and immigration opinion (Fetzer 2000; Brader et al. 2010; McDaniel 2010).

In order to analyze the data, I brought the surveys for each year into Stata. Since the surveys came from different organizations, I recoded the variables I needed from each survey to make them uniform. This was necessary in order to merge all the surveys and view all the data in one set. Once the surveys were merged, I used Stata to create a time series of how respondents answered question: “Should immigration into the United States be kept at its present level, increased or decreased?” I went on to create a time series graph for each category of respondents I listed. By doing this, I was able to focus on how each type of respondent’s attitudes changed throughout the 20-year time series.
Stata Coding

In order to be able to merge all the data, I had to make the datasets uniform by renaming all of the variables. I had to refer to the codebooks for each survey in order to label the variables accurately. For the immigration question, the answer choices were, “Same,” “Increase,” “Decrease,” and “Don’t know.” Since I did not need the last variable, I dropped it and labeled it as missing. Questions about gender, identifying as “Hispanic,” party affiliation, and political ideology were easy to label because the answer choices were almost the same for all surveys and years. The more difficult areas to label were race, income, and education levels. The two main surveys I used, Gallup and CBS/NYT, had different ways of categorizing the answer choices to these questions. Questions also evolved and became more elaborate as the years progressed. Earlier surveys for the question of race only had answer choices “white,” “black,” and “other.” However, later surveys has more answer choices that were more inclusive and recognized other categories such as White-Hispanic and Black-Hispanic, Asian, and Native American. Due to the complexity of the coding for this part, I recoded the variables as “white” and “nonwhite.” Another difficult variable to code was income level. The two main surveys had different methods of recording household income levels. As a result, I had to rename the answer choices “low,” “medium,” and “high.” Respondents who answered that their household income was below $50,000 were categorized under ‘low,’ $50,000 to $75,000 were placed in ‘middle,’ and over $75,000 were placed in ‘high.’ The last variable that was challenging to code was “education level.” I had to recode the answers to be “less than high school,” “high school,” and “college.” “Less than high school” meant any student who did not graduate from high school.

After I finished recoding variables, I merged all the datasets using the append command in Stata and was able to create one file in which to view how respondent’s answers about immigration
levels have shifted each year. In order to measure the mean of overall attitudes on immigration, I had to create a new variable by recoding “increase” as 1 “decrease” as -1, and “same” as 0. However, I later on switched the variables in order to better show how increased negativity rose with increased unemployment and increased immigration. This means that “increase” was recoded as -1 and decrease was 1. To look at trends on opinion for each category of respondents, I created a new variable that incorporated the immigration level variable to each respondent type. This would show how respondents’ opinions have changed based on race, gender, income level, etc. Lastly, I used the weights in order to have a representative demographic. After all the time series variables were created, I used Stata to graph the time-trend for immigration opinion. I also created graphs to show the time-trend for each respondent group.

Sample

Overall, I drew data from over 10,042 respondents for the time series from 1993 to 2010. In the sample, there were more females 48.9% than males 51.1%. A majority of respondents said they had a post-high school education 61.6%, 30.2% had a high school education, and 8.6% had less than a high school education. I wanted to measure opinions of those who identified as Hispanic, but only 5.6% of the respondents chose Hispanic and 94.5% were Non-Hispanic, which meant that I did not have enough respondents to make an analysis on Hispanic attitudes. For party affiliation, 34.9% said they were Republican, 36.7% stated they were Democrat, and 28.4% identified as Independent. In terms of ideology, respondents were 42.4% moderate, 37.7% were conservative, and only 19.9% identified as liberal. In looking at income levels, 23.6% were in a low-income level, 57.3% were middle income, and 19.1% were in a high income level. Lastly, 85.4% were white and 13.9% were nonwhite.
Description of Findings

Immigration Trend Over All

In looking at Figure 1, firsthand observations for the time trend on American mood on immigration policy reveal that attitudes for the last 20 years have been overall negative. The mean for overall attitudes on the question, “Should immigration into the United States be kept at its present level, increased or decreased?” was 0.414, which reveals that attitudes leaned towards decreasing immigration.

Figure 1

Notes: For immigration policy mood, the mean policy mood for each year is plotted. 1 is decrease immigration, 0 same, -1 increase immigration. Source: CBS/New York Times and Gallup Polls and The New York Times

The beginning of the trend in the early 1990s reveals very negative attitudes to current levels of immigration. The trend reveals that opposition becomes less negative through the second half of the 1990s. After 2000, there is again a rise in the trend and attitudes becoming more negative again. After the mid-2000s, we see that opposition to immigration is not as great.
Comparison with Unemployment

In order to see the effects of economic hard times on opinion about immigration, I compared the unemployment levels from the Bureau of Labor Statistics for the past 20 years to the immigration policy mood time series (Bureau of Labor Statistics). I drew data from the BLS website where it listed a table called “Employment status of the civilian noninstitutional population, 1940 to date” and used the “Unemployed” percentages. I then created a table for unemployment percentages in the past 20 years and merged it with the immigration policy mood time-series. According to the hypothesis, shifts in unemployment should cause shifts in immigration policy mood. As can be seen in Figure 2, the shifts in mood and unemployment are consistent with each other. However, inconsistencies appear towards the end of the time series.

Figure 2

Notes: For immigration policy mood, the mean policy mood for each year is plotted. 1 is decrease immigration, 0 same, -1 increase immigration. Source: CBS/New York Times and Gallup Polls and The New York Times
In the beginning of the time series, there is a relationship in the way opinion on immigration was at its most negative around the height of unemployment. Unemployment was at 7.5 percent in 1992 and 6.9 percent in 1993. We further see that the pattern continues as unemployment drops to its lowest in 2000 at 4 percent and immigration mood becomes also drops to .254. When unemployment rises again in 2002 to 5.8 percent, immigration policy mood follows and becomes increasingly negative at .430. Up until 2005, the hypothesis seems to be proven in that opposition to immigration grows as unemployment grows. However, the pattern seems to end in 2010 when immigration mood becomes less negative and unemployment is at the highest in the 20-year time-series at 9.6 percent.

Comparison with Immigration Levels

In order to see if shifts in negative attitudes on immigration coincided with real immigration levels to the United States, I compare the policy mood trend I created to the number of legal immigrants to the United States each year. I used the data called “Legal Immigration to the United States: Fiscal Years 1990 to 2009” from the Department of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics. The data they used represent “persons admitted for legal permanent residence during the 12-month fiscal year ending September 30 of the year designated” (Office of Immigration Statistics). I also created a 20-year time series for immigration levels from this data and merged it with the immigration policy mood time-series. In looking at Figure 3, there seems to be some connection between immigration levels to the United States and immigration policy mood.
Figure 3

We see that the most negative immigration policy mood comes after years of the highest immigration levels from 1990 to 1993. Overall, mood becomes less negative as the 1990s progress from .581 to .348, and immigration levels drop from 1.5 million to 644,000. In 2001 and 2002, we see immigration levels return to over a million, and we see immigration mood become more negative again at .430. As immigration rises again after being lowered from 2003 to 2004, we see mood stay very negative at .413. However, the pattern does not seem to continue when we see immigration levels rise from 2005 to 2009, and immigration mood becomes less negative at .293.

**Income**

Respondent’s attitudes did differ based on income, but the group most opposed to immigration seemed to shift based on the time period. Figure 4 essentially shows that no income
group was consistently the least opposed to immigration, nor was there an income group that was consistently the most opposed.

Figure 4

Notes: For immigration policy mood, the mean policy mood for each year is plotted. 1 is decrease immigration, 0 same, -1 increase immigration. Source: CBS/New York Times and Gallup Polls and The New York Times

The beginning of the time series reveals that the high-income group was most opposed to immigration. The immigration mood of the groups remained the same throughout the nineties, but contrasts dramatically in the 1990s when the high-income group moves towards more positive attitudes toward immigration levels. In 2000, Figure 4 shows that low-income groups show more support for immigration. After 2000, however, we see that the trend for all groups rise and attitudes are very negative again. One significant observation is that the high-income group had the most opposition for immigration after 2000. After 2005, all groups’ attitudes moved more towards 0, with high-income groups visibly less opposed to immigration. Another observation is that low-income
mood is more negative towards immigration than other groups after 2000. The mean for attitudes of each group are similar, with low-income at -.413, mid-income at -.415, and the high-income group at -.413.

Race

Difference in mood based on race shows visibly different attitudes. Figure 5 reveals that the immigration mood for nonwhites was more positive than whites. The mean for immigration mood of whites is .427, while nonwhite mood is .269, which reveals that white attitudes towards immigration is significantly more negative. It does show that the shifts in opinion between groups happened at the same time. After 2005, the difference in opinion become less visible. In 2010, attitudes were almost the same with .313 for whites and .324 for nonwhites.

Figure 5

Notes: For immigration policy mood, the mean policy mood for each year is plotted. 1 is decrease immigration, 0 same, -1 increase immigration. Source: CBS/New York Times and Gallup Polls and The New York Times
Gender

In looking at the time series for attitudes on immigration based on gender, we see a small difference in attitudes between men and women. Men had more negative attitudes on immigration with a mean of .441 and females’ opinion over time had a mean of .396. Figure 6 reveals that difference in opinion between gender categories is not noticeably different before 2000. After 2000, we see that women’s opinion on immigration is less negative than men’s. In 2005, however, we see that men have a slightly less negative opinion than women. At the end of the time series, we again see that women’s attitudes become less negative than men’s.

Figure 6
Education

Looking at Figure 7 reveals that the high school education group consistently had the most negative attitudes towards immigration. The mean of high school graduates’ attitudes on immigration was at .491. This was more negative than groups that had less than high school education at .368 and those with college education at .387. The trend reveals that attitudes of respondents based on education category seemed to shift at the same moments and towards the same directions.

Figure 7

Notes: For immigration policy mood, the mean policy mood for each year is plotted. 1 is decrease immigration, 0 same, -1 increase immigration. Source: CBS/New York Times and Gallup Polls and The New York Times
**Ideology**

Respondents’ mood on immigration based on ideology reveals predictable findings, as can be seen in Figure 8. Respondents who identified as liberal consistently had the least negative attitudes about immigration levels and the mean for liberals’ mood on immigration was .280. This contrasted with conservative respondents who had the most negative attitudes on immigration at .491. Moderate attitudes toward immigration levels showed to be closer to conservative attitudes and had an overall mean of .438.

Figure 8

![Ideology and Immigration Attitudes](image)

Notes: For immigration policy mood, the mean policy mood for each year is plotted. 1 is decrease immigration, 0 same, -1 increase immigration. Source: CBS/New York Times and Gallup Polls and The New York Times

**Party**

Party affiliation also reveals predictable results about attitudes towards immigration levels. Democrats consistently have the least negative mood on immigration throughout the 20 year time
period. The mean for Democrat attitudes was .369, and was noticeably different than Independents and Republicans. Republican attitudes were consistently the most negative and had a mean of .504. Respondents who said they considered themselves Independents had an immigration policy mood between Republicans and Democrats at .407. Figure 9 shows a telling pattern in the way the difference in opinion between Democrats and Republicans were very little in the 1990s. However, the difference begins to grow dramatically after 2000, and moves further apart each year.

Figure 9

Notes: For immigration policy mood, the mean policy mood for each year is plotted. 1 is decrease immigration, 0 same, -1 increase immigration. Source: CBS/New York Times and Gallup Polls and The New York Times

State

I focused on the five states that have the highest immigrant populations, which are California, New York, Texas, Florida, and New Jersey as can be seen in Figure 10 (Migration Policy Institute).
As can be seen in Figure 11, the states with the highest immigration populations also had least negative moods, with New York at .362, then California at .370. Texas had the most negative immigration policy mood at .486, followed by Florida at .474, and then New Jersey at .443.

Figure 11

Notes: For immigration policy mood, the mean policy mood for each year is plotted. 1 is decrease immigration, 0 same, -1 increase immigration. Source: CBS/New York Times and Gallup Polls and The New York Times.
Looking at the breakdown by year and state in the Appendix, we see that the trend differs by time period. In the 1990s, New York state is the least restrictive compared to California. However, after 2000, we see that respondents from New York are more likely to support policy for decreasing immigration than California. As with previous trends, we see that mood becomes less negative as the 1990s progresses, then becomes more negative again after 2001.

**Analysis of Findings**

**Overall Trend**

The way the measure for opinion overall for the past 20 years was negative and respondents consistently preferred decreasing immigration reveals that a majority of public attitudes on immigration policy has been mainly restrictive. This also means that most respondents were dissatisfied with the current immigration inflows. The results may indicate that most respondents had some negative views on the presence of immigrants and harbored beliefs that immigrants had a negative affect on society. While there were some years where opinion fluctuated towards more neutral opinion, the overall average shows that immigration is not thought of positively in the United States. This coincides with much research that has been finding “anti-globalization sentiments rising to the surface” (Cerna and Hynes 2010). Cerna and Hynes (2010) further finds that immigration is bearing the brunt of anti-globalization sentiments as a result of little action by many governments around the world in protecting jobs and native workers.

**Economic Self-Interest**

In looking at how immigration policy mood compares with unemployment levels, we saw a pattern in the way that opinion became more negative during the years that unemployment rose and the way immigration mood became less negative when unemployment levels decreased. This was
most visible in the 1990s to mid-2000s. This coincides with some studies previously mentioned, which found that attitudes toward immigration are due to real economic concerns (Scheve and Slaughter 2001; Hanson et al 2001; Lancee and Pardos-Prado 2010; Hoskin and Mishler, 1983). Looking at Figure 12, we see a similar time-series from 1945 to 1995 by Simon and Alexander (1993), in which there is a clear pattern between the percent of the population who want immigration decreased and the U.S. unemployment rate.

Figure 12

In addition, Berry and Tischler (1978) also find that the intensity of feelings toward immigrants are closely linked to economic conditions and suggested that racial prejudice is stimulated in economic recessions. Palmer (1994) also finds that “opposition to immigration rises and falls with the unemployment rate, whereas measures of ethnic intolerance exhibit a secular decline that is relatively insulated from economic conditions.”
However, when we look back at the 1990-2010 time-series I created, it is clear that the pattern does not always appear. In last few years of the time series (2005-2010), there was high unemployment, yet immigration opinion seemed to be more positive than in the previous years that had more economic stability. The mixed results show that economic hard times is not always a predictor of immigration policy mood in the short run, and that the relationship can be weak depending on the time period.

This weak connection is important to recognize because it calls into question how opinion leadership and rhetoric tend to link immigration with economic problems (Citrin et al. 1997). Iyengar and Kinder (1987) and Zaller (1992) find that Americans have been “primed” by opinion leaders to cite economic concerns when declaring policy preferences. Yet, restrictive dialogue contradicts with the reality that Americans tend to be influenced more by other factors rather than by economic self-interest. Evidence of this can be seen in a great deal of the literature on public attitudes towards immigration. McDaniel (2010) finds in public opinion data that even “those who are unemployed are more likely to express their opposition to immigration in terms of cultural concerns than in terms of self-interest.” In his research, McDaniel (2010) defines “cultural concerns” as attitudes toward immigrants in a more systematic relation to cultural preservation. Extensive research on the link between economic motives and public opinion has generally found that there are relatively few instances in which policy preferences are strongly influenced by self-interest (Brody and Sniderman 1977; Citrin and Green 1990; Sears and Funk 1990). Instead, many studies that challenged this link find that the influence of symbolic politics, racial attitudes, ethnocentrism, and other in-group out-group bias theories have a greater influence (Brader et al. 2009; Brader et al. 2010; Knoll 2010; Miller et al. 1984; Sides and Citrin 2007).
Immigration Levels

The way that mood becomes more negative during times when there is an increase in immigration levels reveals that there is some connection between public attitudes during these time periods. The trend in the early 1990s when there was high immigration coincided with the most negative immigration mood in the whole time series. The fluctuations in mood due to the increasing immigrant population can be explained in the findings of Axelrod and Hammond (2003), who explain that behaviors linked to ethnocentrism emerge from local competition. Increases in the immigrant population in the early 1990s led to a perceived increase in competition for public resources and jobs, and prompted individuals to prefer more restrictive attitudes towards incoming waves of immigrants.

Another explanation to the more restrictive mood of the early 1990s is the power theory, which states that relationships between groups are a function of their competitive positions in society. When the minority group threatens the dominant group’s position in society, the dominant group will respond in a more hostile manner” (Giles and Hertz, 1994). This means that the growing immigrant population prompted whites (the majority of respondents) to have more restrictive attitudes due to the way their growing numbers were a threat to the current majority population. However, the way that immigration levels increased again in the late 2000s, while immigration mood became more tolerant reveals an inconsistent trend. All in all, the inconsistent pattern means that it is not a reliable predictor in the public attitudes towards immigration.

Party

Immigration policy mood based on party reveals the way that preferences rely heavily on the ideology of each party. Looking at the immigration mood of individuals based on party affiliation reveals a great ideological gap that has grown between Democrats and Republicans in the last
decade. Figure 9 reveals that immigration policy mood between Democrats and Republicans were relatively similar in the 1990s with Democrats having less negative views. The difference in opinion becomes wider when Democrats move towards more positive views of immigrants and Republican opinion remains negative in the last decade. This widening difference in opinion on immigration policy reflects party polarization in the last few years and how parties have become more ideologically aligned (McCarty et al., 2008). McDaniel et al. (2010) explains the differences in opinion by writing that “opposition to immigrants among those identifying with the Republican Party is more likely to be driven by cultural values-based concerns than self-interest.”

**Gender**

Differences in respondents by gender mean that women were less restrictive towards immigration than men. While the difference between genders is not as great as other categories, this trend means that women are more sympathetic to immigrants and are more likely to opt for policy that keeps immigration levels the same. This is consistent with many previous findings that women are more favorable towards immigrants (McDaniel et al. 2010). Most research on public opinion on immigration has found that women are more sympathetic to immigrants. For example, Betz (1994) finds that being the female in a society that is male-dominated leads to one form of marginalization. “One reason for expecting that women might be more sympathetic to foreigners than are men,” he theorizes, “is that women, like foreigners, have been the victims of discrimination” (Betz 1994). Betz’s empirical analysis confirms this hypothesis somewhat. Betz finds that women are “significantly less likely to agree” with overt intolerance of immigrants and violence motivated by xenophobia.
**Education**

The fact that high school graduates had a much more negative view than the group with more than a high school education means that they likely felt the most threatened by immigration in-flows. One problem with the findings is that the lowest educated group (those with less than a high school education) was less negative than the high school-educated group. This is inconsistent with the general consensus in previous research that groups with lower education levels were more opposed to immigrants (Starr and Roberts, 1982; Hoskin and Mishler, 1983; Citrin et al, 1997; Dustmann and Preston 2000; Fetzer, 2000; Scheve and Slaughter, 2001). Also, this contradicts the labor market competition hypothesis, which proposes that respondents’ education and income levels have a direct relationship to more tolerant opinion towards immigration. More research and analysis must be done for this group in order to understand the inconsistency. The way that respondents with above a high school education have the most tolerant view fits with the previous findings that college education gives one a more secure place in the labor market (Hernes and Knudsen 1992).

**Ideology**

The findings in regards to immigration policy mood and ideology show that ideology had a great influence on opinion about immigration to the United States. The wide difference between liberals and conservatives means that there is an ideological gap in attitudes about immigrants and immigration in-flow. The way liberals were more tolerant of immigration levels than conservatives can essentially be found in all previous research studies opinion on immigration. Citrin et. al (1997) explains this by writing that “Ideological self-description was more closely aligned with policy preferences because conservatives tend to worry more than liberals about the prospect of rising taxes.”
Another explanation for the divide is that “conservatives might naturally connect immigrants to questions of law and order…while liberals might understand them with respect to social inequality or civil rights (Hopkins 2010). McDaniel further explains that. “Even after controlling for one’s partisanship, the respondent’s conservatism has a statistically significant and positive effect on immigrant animus.”

Race

The results of immigration mood between whites and nonwhites are racially divided. The gap in attitudes is also very wide, which means that the race of the respondent has an important effect in attitudes. Nonwhites, on average, have less restrictive attitudes towards immigration than whites. Looking at the findings, one can conclude that nonwhites are more likely to support maintaining current immigration levels than whites. This trend might be attributed to the Cultural Affinity Hypothesis where “respondents are likely to support more open immigration policies, since they have close ties to their home country and have relatives they would like migrate to the U.S” (Citrin et al. 1997). These results correspond with Fetzer (2000), who wrote, “All else being equal, belonging to a racial, ethnic, or religious minority tended to decrease nativism.” It also corresponds with a conference paper by Valentino et al. (2010), who found that blacks are more liberal on immigration policy and that symbolic politics drive this attitude. However, some research suggests that groups that are more vulnerable in the job market and experience economic stability, such as people of color, are more likely to see immigrants as a threat. Simon and Alexander (1993) found that “persons of a minority racial category are more likely to be anti-immigration.” However, they do not account for people of color who are economically stable. Most of their minority respondents were low-income individuals who would likely have to compete with immigrants for jobs, housing, benefits, and their children’s place in institutions of higher learning” (Simon and Alexander, 1993).
The convergence in attitudes later on in the time series between whites and nonwhites may be due to these findings. The economic hard times later on in the time series may have influenced nonwhites to have more restrictive sentiments, as they are one of the most vulnerable groups during these periods (Simon and Alexander, 1993).

One important consideration is that nonwhites account for a vast array of ethnic and racial groups—all of which have varying experiences and political ideologies. It is important to remember that measuring the attitudes of African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, and Native American may have yielded different results. While there were Hispanic and African American respondents, the sample size was not large enough to be a reliable measure. The number of Asian American and Native Americans were extremely small. After analyzing the wide racial divide in the results and accounting for previous literature, one can predict that each of these groups would have less restrictive views than whites.

**Income**

Looking at the average mood based on income reveals that there is no great difference between groups. This implies that income level is not a great predictor of immigration levels to the United States. However, economic hard times had an influence on opinion. The increased negativity of immigration mood of the low-income group in the late 2000s during the economic recession means that their answers were influenced by economic hard times. The mixed results for this respondent group reflects previous research in this area. For example, the way high-income groups had a slightly more negative mood overall is consistent with some previous research. Fetzer (2000) found that having a higher income relative to other respondents did not seem to reduce nativism. Moreover, his research found that, “higher income even increased opposition to immigration in
Germany” (Fetzer 2000). Most research, however, had expected and found that high-income individuals feel the least threatened by immigrants (Citrin et al. 1997; McDaniel 2010).

State

The way that respondents from the highest populated states also had the most tolerant policy mood supports the theory that contact with immigrants reduces negative attitudes (Fox 2004; Hood and Morris 1997). Other research finds the opposite and concludes that geographic proximity triggers political competition (Glaser 1994). McDaniel concludes differently in his research, and finds that; “Living in a border state or living in a county with higher proportions of foreign-born citizens has no effect.” All in all, it is clear that most research is still inconclusive as to how geographic proximity affects attitudes towards immigrants. Unfortunately, I cannot rely on the data for this section because the sample was not large enough.

House Effect

While the time series relied mainly on Gallup polls, the way this study used data from different polling organizations from 1993 to 1999 may have affected the fluctuations in the time series. This “house effect” can impact results and may be significant (Franklin, 2008). However, when we look at the years of 1993 and 1995, we can assume that the “house effect” is not great. This is because data from 1993 was from CBS/New York Times and 1995 was from Gallup, yet both years had almost identical results, as can be seen in Figure 1 and the Appendix. Data from 1996 was drawn from an ABC News Poll, which might explain the significant drop in the time series. However, the way the subsequent years drawn from Gallup were also lower may imply that the difference between organizations is not great. Future work will require estimating the house effect and applying the findings to the time series.
Content Analysis

Importance of Looking at Media

Another relationship I hoped to explore is the influence that media and public opinion have on each other. Observing mainstream media is vital in understanding how coverage on immigration influences attitudes. In order to explore how media reflects the salience of immigration issues in U.S. public opinion, I conducted a content analysis by looking at articles that discussed immigration to the United States. For the content analysis, the sample of materials I chose were New York Times articles published in 1990 to 2010. I chose New York Times because it is the national newspaper of record and has been known to influence opinion (Friel and Falk, 2004). In addition, the paper is wide-reaching and has more of a chance to reach more individuals. I looked at articles from 1990 to 2010 in order to examine how opinion may have changed between different economic time periods.

Method

I started the analysis by using Lexis Nexis Academic and searching for New York Times articles that mentioned the word “immigration.” I then skimmed through the articles for each year and chose to record articles focused specifically on stories about immigration to the United States. I allowed for a broad definition in order to include various perspectives on immigration to the U.S. I scanned 318 articles that talked about immigration. However, I ultimately chose to only code 195 articles due to time contraints and because some articles did not fit my specifications. I included all types of writing in my analysis: local, national, international, editorial, column, letter to the editor, and op/ed.

Using Excel, I devised a coding sheet to record the contents of the articles. The content categories I used were the focus of the article and the tone. I also recorded the type of article, section, and length. I coded each article based on the overall tone of the whole article. I chose to
code the whole article because I experienced difficulties measuring tone based on a paragraph or picking a certain word to count. I found that there were many variations in describing immigration in a positive, negative, or neutral way. As a result, I decided to measure the level of intensity of messages about immigration. This meant that I created a scale from 1 to 5: 1= “Immigrants as beneficial to country-Support, admiration, appreciation,” 2= “Sympathy/In defense of immigrants,” 3= “Neutral/Mixed opinions,” 4= “Immigrants as a problem,” and 5= “Immigrants as a threat.” I decided on the tone rating of each article based on the way immigrants and immigration’s effects were described in either a positive, negative, or neutral light. Next, I calculated the average of the tone for each year and created a spreadsheet for this. I then brought the spreadsheet into Stata and merged it with the immigration mood time-series I constructed. From there, I was able to make a comparison between the tone of the articles and the mood of respondents for each year.

Next, I recorded the number of articles about immigration each year in order to measure the salience of the issue in the public’s minds throughout time. This method was similar to Hopkins (2010), where he also used the recorded year to understand the salience of immigration. I also compare the salience of the issue to the immigration mood time series. Last, I compare the salience of immigration in the New York Times to tone of the articles.

Observations

All in all, I found that the average number of stories devoted to immigration to the United States was 15 and the median was 13. Firsthand observations of the analysis reveals that the most articles written about immigration to the United States were in the mid-1990s and the mid-2000s. Specifically, we see a spike in articles written in 1996 and 2006, as can be seen in Figure 13.
In 1996, there are 35 articles. In 2006, we see the number of articles spike to 59. This pattern is consistent with previous research by Hopkins (2010), who also finds that these were the years when this issue was the most visible. Hopkins finds the burst of dialogue mid-2000s was, “driven by Congressional consideration of immigration proposals as well as the highly publicized rallies of immigrants.” I then compared this to the immigration mood time series, as can be seen in Figure 14. We see that the salience of the issue reflects the mood.
When looking at the mid 1990s, we see that there is a spike in articles about immigration and it highly corresponds to the negative mood at the time. Again, when we see a slight decrease in articles in the late 1990s, attitudes also become less negative. The trend continues in the early 2000s when the issue seems less salient in the way articles are fewer, and immigration mood moves upwards. I encounter problems in the mid 2000s because immigration mood data is missing for the year that articles on immigration spikes dramatically in 2006. However, we see the pattern again in the way that there is a low amount of articles from 2007 to 2010, and mood becomes more positive.

Next, I compared the tone of the articles to immigration policy mood, which can be seen in Figure 15. In 1993, we see a pattern in the way the mood was more negative and closer to 1 and that the tone of the article was at 4.1, which means that the average article viewed “immigrants as a problem.”
Figure 15

Article Tone and Immigration Mood Comparison

Notes: For immigration policy mood, the mean policy mood for each year is plotted. 1 is decrease immigration, 0 same, -1 increase immigration. Source: CBS/New York Times and Gallup Polls and The New York Times.

Again, we see a pattern in the late 1990s when mood moved upwards and became less restrictive in 1997, while the average tone of articles was 3 (Neutral/Mixed opinions). After mood became more negative in 2001, we find that the tone of articles did not follow and remained a more or less even mix of positive and negative articles about immigration (average tone was 3.3 in 2002). All in all, we do see a small pattern between immigration policy mood and tone of articles. However, the way that it does not follow after 2000 may imply that it is not a strong relationship.

Last, I compared the tone of the articles and the salience for each in Figure 16. In this comparison, we see a definite connection between these two variables. Article tone is consistently more negative in the years that immigration is talked more about.

Figure 16
Analysis of Findings in Context Analysis

After comparing salience of immigration to mood in Figure 14, we see a clear pattern. The years in which immigration is talked about more sees more negative attitudes. This can imply that the public’s exposure to media heightens their awareness of immigrants and triggers anxieties about economic instability and group conflict. This coincides with previous research that the salience of immigration has a significant influence on immigration mood (Citrin et. al, 1997).

The tone of the articles did not seem to correspond as much as to the fluctuation in mood. While we do see that the rise and fall of tone at times corresponded to mood, as can be seen in the early 1990s, we fail to see it later on. This finding contradicts previous findings by Valentino et al. (2002), who does extensive research on how different types of media prime racial attitudes and influence policy preferences. This research study is relevant in finding that when media content makes strong inferences about a specific element in the message; there is a significant alteration in the citizen’s decision-making criteria (Valentino et al, 2002). This would imply that strong inferences about immigration as a problem, especially in the years when the tone of the articles was
negative, should have had some influence on public attitudes. The inconsistent pattern reveals that negative media coverage may not always influence immigration policy preferences.

The tone of the articles and the salience of immigration in the media fluctuated very closely with each other. This means that when there is an increase in discussions about immigration in the media, the rhetoric is more likely to be negative. During times when immigration is not a popular topic, the content of the articles tend to be more neutral. This may be due to the fact that salience fuels anxiety and leads the public to have negative attitudes.

**Common Themes About Immigration in Media**

Articles about incoming immigration all had common themes. The major issues in regards to immigration in the past twenty years were unauthorized immigration to the United States; concerns of AIDS epidemic spreading to the U.S.; inadequate legislation to regulate immigration; the severe inequalities and disparities affecting new immigrant communities; rising anti-immigrant sentiment across the country; and immigration enforcement. Unauthorized immigration to the United States was the most prevalent topic that was associated with negative coverage. This type of immigration was always brought up in controversial stories and events. For example, one heavily covered event was the Postville Raid in Iowa in 2008, which was one of the most brutal, most expensive, and largest Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids in the history of the United States (Hing, 2009). Unauthorized immigration was also brought up the most in letters to the editors where the tone of was highly negative.

Coverage of major immigration legislation was also a common topic in my sample. In this analysis, immigration reform was the main topic of 24 articles. The major reforms that were discussed were the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996, which was passed on September 1996. One of the more significant provisions was that it created the notion
of “unlawfully present” persons and three-year, ten-year, and permanent bars were formed for unauthorized immigrants who were deported. Another significant provision was that it took away judicial discretion, which means that to-be-deported individuals cannot appeal their case. The next heavily covered legislation was the failed Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act introduced in 2006. The provisions included immigration reform, allowed a path to legalization for undocumented immigrants, and created a new guest worker program. Both the House and Senate versions failed to pass the conference committee and died.

One significant theme that was prevalent in the New York Times was the in-depth stories about the struggles that many immigrants faced. Many were feature articles that talked about a specific aspect of immigrant life. For example, one article featured the life of women from developing countries that have migrated to the United States as nannies. Other articles featured the different immigrant enclaves appearing all over the U.S. Some of these stories spoke of families torn apart due to deportation, motivations for migrating to the U.S., and poverty in immigrant communities. A great deal of letters to the editor published were from first generation immigrants, immigrants rights activists, and community leaders who spoke in defense of immigrants.

**Conclusion**

All in all, we find that the connection between economic hard times and immigration policy mood varied. Years of high unemployment sometimes did not always lead to more respondents willing to decrease immigration to the United States. The way it is slightly inconsistent leads me to conclude that the relationship between economic concerns and restrictive immigration policy preferences is not always strong. This means that these findings only partly confirm my prediction in the beginning of this study, in which I state that the state of the economy has an influence on immigration public opinion. The way the connection did not always appear, as with the results in
2010, means that further research is needed. This inconsistency has been found in various studies that have addressed this question. Scheve and Slaughter (2001) finds that, “Different economic models…make contrasting predictions about the nature of this link.” They further emphasize that there is “empirical uncertainty regarding whether individuals consider labor market competition when evaluating immigration policy.” The findings in this study, along with previous research, reveal that many factors influence immigration policy mood and that economic downturn is not a substantial influence.

Future work on this data analysis should focus on why mood did not increase in negativity with economic hard times in 2010. When looking at 1993 and 2010, these were the years that unemployment was one of the highest in their respective decades. 1993 was the second highest (6.9), and followed after 1992, which was the highest (7.5). 2010 was the highest of the decade at 9.6. However, 1993 had the most restrictive attitudes towards immigration, while 2010 had significantly less restrictive attitudes. One reason for this inconsistency was the sample of respondents for these surveys. In comparing the two years, 1993 had 44% Republican, 45% Democrat, and 10% Independent; 2010 had 30% Republican, 30% Democrat, and 39% Independent. Understanding the distinct party ideology on immigration mentioned earlier in this study, it is likely that the smaller amount of Republicans in the survey for 2010 led to less restrictive results.

Further work is also needed in finding which factor was the most significant predictor in negative attitudes during the 20-year time series. While certain respondents based on party and ideology had a distinct divide on opinion, further testing will be needed if these are predictors, such as conducting a chi-square analysis.
Time Lag

One way to explain the periods when immigration policy mood did not fluctuate with unemployment and immigration levels is due to a time lag. The consideration of a time lag can be seen in previous literature that deal with time series analysis (Norporth and Yantek, 1983). In looking at our study, we can consider the way a time lag affected fluctuations in public opinion. We can see that respondents may have had a delayed reaction in the way they connected unemployment or immigration levels with their attitudes towards immigration. When we look at Figure 2 and 3, we can see that it may have taken some time to recognize the shock of rising visibility of immigrants and economic hard times. For example, we see that immigration reached a peak in 1992, and we see intensity in negative attitudes in 1993. The time lag may also explain the discrepancy in 2010 between unemployment and mood. As mentioned earlier in the paper, this time period does not match the hypothesis because the sharp increase in unemployment did not reveal an increase in negative attitudes. At this point, attitudes may not yet have caught up with the sharp increase in unemployment. I predict that in the upcoming years of 2011 to 2012, there will be an increase in negative attitudes due to a time lag.

Weights

To see if the discrepancy in 2010 was due to a lack of representative demographic, we added the weight function to our data to make sure there was no bias. The function was used in order to give some respondent groups more "weight" or influence so that all groups were represented evenly. However, even after adding the weight command for all the variables measured, we saw that the results did not change significantly. After using weights and checking the data, we concluded that the discrepancy in 2010 is not due to a research error.
Historical Context

Historical context had a great deal of influence on public opinion on immigration. First, the Immigration Act of 1990 increased the number of legal immigrants allowed into the United States each year. Immigration increased from 1.5 million in 1990 to 1.8 million in 1991. In addition, this was the period of the “North American Free Trade Agreement, Haitian refugee crisis, Cuban refugee crisis, and California’s Proposition 187 (which barred undocumented immigrants from public assistance)” (Hopkins 2010).

It was during this time period that immigration policy mood was the most negative in the 20-year time series. In the late 1990s, there is little attention to immigration as there are no major events to prompt its salience. The silence during this time period coincides with the decrease in negative opinion. However, the issue of immigration re-appears with the September 11 terrorist attacks, and we see immigration policy mood become more negative during this time. This dip was visible with each respondent type. Hopkins (2010) calls this “The Short-Lived September 11 Effect,” and describes it as a time when immigration debates were in the national agenda and it was linked to issues of national security. However, the issue is placed in the back burner in the late 2000s, which may explain the less negative mood in 2010. At this time, however, immigration was very salient in the media, and further research is needed to find the reason for the inconsistent findings for this year.

Analysis of Implications Towards Immigration Laws

Seeing the overall negative attitude towards immigration levels may explain the restrictive immigration policy of the past 20 years. The last few major immigration reforms were concerned with immigration enforcement and deportation. As mentioned earlier, the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 is one example of this phenomenon. IIRIRA
severely restricted migration to the United States by creating years-long bars for undocumented immigrants who were deported and other individuals who violated federal immigration laws. Another example is with the building hundreds of miles of physical barriers along the Mexico-United States border under the Secure Fence Act of 2006. More current examples would be the various anti-immigration bills being proposed in several states that include racial profiling and banning undocumented children from attaining higher education.
Bibliography


http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/data_access/ipoll/ipoll.html


**APPENDIX**

Yearly Breakdown

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A new wrinkle in the raging political debate: What if immigrants can save the housing market? It's often said that immigrants do the jobs Americans don't want to do. They've just been assigned another task: Buy the homes of the baby boom generation. But this task is one that native-born Americans simply can't do. There won't be enough of them.

Many of the 78 million boomers, the first of whom turn 60 this year, will sell their property over the next two decades, says George Masnick, a research affiliate with the Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard University. Some will move to a smaller home or to their second home, others will move into a managed-care complex. And for some who never moved, it will be their estate making the sale. What many boomers should be asking right now is who will buy their 34 million homes. The buyers may well be immigrants, and not necessarily legal ones (about 12 million of the 35 million foreign-born people in America are illegal immigrants, according to estimates from the Center for Immigration Studies, in Washington).
Demographers say there aren't enough potential homeowners in the echo boom (the children of the baby boomers) or in the generation that comes after that (still without a catchy name) to soak up that supply, no matter how slowly it goes on the market. It is presumed that the bulk of the Gen Xers will have done their home buying by then.

Without sufficient demand, prices will fall. Masnick predicts that as many as 90 percent of the homes will be bought by native-born Americans. "But the last 10 percent is central," he says. "Without that 10 percent, it will be a buyers' market."

The good news is that there are enough young first- and second-generation immigrants to do the job. The popular telling of the American dream that has Smith selling to Schmidt who then sells to Shapiro will record the next chapter with Sung and Sanchez doing the buying. Dowell Myers, a professor at the University of Southern California who studies the impact of demography on urban planning, says, "The odds are that a white baby boomer won't be selling to another white."

He or she will be selling to what we today call a minority, though in many communities, whites may then be in the minority. "The immigrants will take up the slack," Myers says, "and it will be huge."

The even better news, Masnick says, is that "the second-generation immigrants will hit the housing market just when they are needed most."

Demographers are sure this will come to pass, because they have studied the baby boom population bulge, or as they call it, "cohort dynamics." And they see immigrants as another large cohort moving steadily upward. California, where more than 25 percent of the residents are immigrants, is their observation booth. "What happens in California is a precursor to what will happen in the rest of the United States," says John Pitkin, who runs a demographic forecasting firm in Cambridge, Mass. "There is no question that real estate in California will be shaped by immigrants and their children."

What forecasters have seen happen in California is encouraging. The per-household homeownership rate among native-born Americans is about 61 percent, 14 percentage points above the rate for immigrants. But immigrants who have lived in the United States for 30 years or more exceed the homeownership rate of native-born Americans by about 10 percentage points.

Myers now finds ownership rates of 60 percent among Hispanics in the Los Angeles area. "They are buying really cheap housing, but it creates a base of demand that pushes everyone up," he says.

Myers also found that home prices rose faster in areas that Hispanics are moving to, like the Los Angeles County cities El Monte and Montebello, than in surrounding neighborhoods. According to figures compiled by Dataquick, prices for single-family homes in these cities rose at least 25 percent between 2004 and 2005, compared with the 20 percent average gain for all of the county. Prices in parts of Compton, a predominantly black city that has turned increasingly Hispanic, were up almost 40 percent in that one year. "Immigrants have strong upward mobility in housing," Myers says.

If this all seems overly rosy, a 2006 Harvard housing study found that foreign-born residents already account for 37 percent of the new growth in households.

But it's no sure thing that immigrants will save the day. A lot can go wrong. "The danger is downward mobility," says Fred Siegel, a professor at the Cooper Union for Science and Art, who
has studied immigration patterns. "If a significant portion of recent immigrants are downwardly mobile, then that is bad news for the boomers. Who will afford the McMansions?"

And while United States Census data now show that immigrants are spread all over the country -- even well into suburban areas of the heartland -- they certainly aren't evenly dispersed. In 2000, more than half of the foreign-born population lived in just three states -- California, New York and Texas -- and in 10 metropolitan areas. And even though they continue to fan out into other areas in increasing numbers, there may not be enough of them to help homeowners in places like West Virginia and Indiana.

Predictions also become murky for demographers because no one knows what will happen to immigration in the next decade. Will borders really be tightened? Will illegal immigrants be deported?

Will amnesty be granted?

The political picture will have as much impact on the housing market as the demographic one will.

URL: http://www.nytimes.com

LOAD-DATE: September 10, 2006

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

GRAPHIC: Graphs; Graphs show that in 2005, almost half of California home buyers under age 35 were Hispanic or Asian. (Sources by John Pitkin, California Demographic Futures Program, University of Southern California William H. Frey, Brookings Institution, analysis)

PUBLICATION-TYPE: Newspaper

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To the Editor:

Re "Immigrant, Detained for 3 1/2 Years, Emerges From Labyrinth" (news article, Nov. 6):

After spending an emotional week volunteering at Freedom House, a refugee center in Detroit, three years ago, I find that I am not startled by Patrick Mkhizi's story, but it does make me sad. The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act has led us to treat our refugees like criminals.

At Freedom House, I met a champion soccer player from Angola who spoke five languages fluently, an elderly woman from Sierra Leone who did not know if her children were alive or dead, and a young man who has spent most of his life having his family's case tried and retried by the Immigration and Naturalization Service. I cannot understand why we would ever want to turn such worthy and talented people away from our "golden door."

LIDDY GERCHMAN
South Hadley, Mass., Nov. 7, 2000

http://www.nytimes.com

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MIAMI -- Meaghan Patrick, a junior at New College of Florida, a tiny liberal arts college in Sarasota, says discussing immigration with her older relatives is like "hitting your head against a brick wall."

Cathleen McCarthy, a senior at the University of Arizona, says immigration is the rare, radioactive topic that sparks arguments with her liberal mother and her grandmother.

"Many older Americans feel threatened by the change that immigration presents," Ms. McCarthy said. "Young people today have simply been exposed to a more accepting worldview."

Forget sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll; immigration is a new generational fault line.

In the wake of the new Arizona law allowing the police to detain people they suspect of entering the country illegally, young people are largely displaying vehement opposition -- leading protests on Monday at Senator John McCain's offices in Tucson, and at the game here between the Florida Marlins and the Arizona Diamondbacks.

Meanwhile, baby boomers, despite a youth of "live and let live," are siding with older Americans and supporting the Arizona law.

This emerging divide has appeared in a handful of surveys taken since the measure was signed into law, including a New York Times/CBS News poll this month that found that Americans 45 and older were more likely than the young to say the Arizona law was "about right" (as opposed to "going too far" or "not far enough"). Boomers were also more likely to say that "no newcomers" should be allowed to enter the country while more young people favored a "welcome all" approach.

The generational conflict could complicate chances of a federal immigration overhaul any time soon. "The hardening of this divide spells further stalemate," said Roberto Suro, the former head of the nonpartisan Pew Hispanic Center.

And the causes are partly linked to experience. Demographically, younger and older Americans grew up in vastly different worlds. Those born after the civil rights era lived in a country of high rates of legal and illegal immigration. In their neighborhoods and schools, the presence of immigrants was as hard to miss as a Starbucks today.
In contrast, baby boomers and older Americans -- even those who fought for integration -- came of age in one of the most homogenous moments in the country's history.

Immigration, which census figures show declined sharply from the Depression through the 1960s, reached a historic low point the year after Woodstock. From 1860 through 1920, 13 percent to 15 percent of the country was foreign born -- a rate similar to today's, when immigrants make up about 12.5 percent of the country.

But in 1970, only 4.7 percent of the country was foreign born, and most of those immigrants were older Europeans, often unnoticed by the boomer generation born from 1946 to 1964.

Boomers and their parents also spent their formative years away from the cities, where newer immigrants tended to gather -- unlike today's young people who have become more involved with immigrants, through college, or by moving to urban areas.

"It's hard for them to share each others' views on what's going on," said William H. Frey, a demographer with the Brookings Institution. "These older people grew up in largely white suburbs or largely segregated neighborhoods. Young people have grown up in an interracial culture."

The generation gap is especially pronounced in formerly fast-growing states like Arizona and Florida, where retirees and new immigrants have flocked -- one group for sun, the other for work.

In a new report based on census figures titled "The State of Metropolitan America," Mr. Frey found that Arizona has the largest "cultural generation gap," as he calls it, between older Americans who are largely white (83 percent in Arizona's case) and children under 18 who are increasingly members of minorities (57 percent in Arizona's case).

Florida ranks sixth on Mr. Frey's cultural generation gap list, with a 29 percentage point difference between the percentage of white people among its older residents and the percentage that whites make up of its children.

That very different makeup of the young and the old can lead to tensions. Demographers say it has the potential to produce public policy that alienates the young because older people are more likely to vote and less likely to be connected to the perspectives of youth -- especially the perspectives of young people of different races and national origins.

"Short term, politically, the age divide heightens polarization," Mr. Suro said "Long term," he added, "there's the challenge of whether older citizens will pay for the education of the children of immigrants."

Some older Americans acknowledge that how they grew up has shaped their opinions. Mike Lombardi, 56, of Litchfield, Ariz. -- one of 1,079 respondents in the Times/CBS poll conducted from April 28 to May 2 -- said his support for his state's new law stemmed partly from the shock of seeing gaggles of immigrants outside Home Depot, who he assumed were illegal. Comparing the situation to his youth in Torrance, Calif., in a follow-up interview, he said, "You didn't see anything like what you see now."

Maggie Aspillaga, 62, a Cuban immigrant in Miami, had more specific concerns: a risk of crime from illegal immigrants and the costs in health care and other services. "They're taking resources," she said.
Some young people agree, of course, just as many baby boomers support more open immigration policies. In the poll, a majority of Americans in all age groups described illegal immigration as a "very serious" problem.

Still, divisions were pronounced by age: for instance, while 41 percent of Americans ages 45 to 64 and 36 percent of older Americans said immigration levels should be decreased, only 24 percent of those younger than 45 said so.

Ms. Patrick, 22, said the gap reflected what each group saw as normal. In her view, current immigration levels -- legal and illegal -- represent "the natural course of history."

As children, after all, her generation watched "Sesame Street" with Hispanic characters, many of them sat in classrooms that were a virtual United Nations, and now they marry across ethnic lines in record numbers. Their children are even adopting mixed monikers like "Mexipino," (Mexican and Filipino) and "Blaxican" (black and Mexican).

That "multiculti" (short for multicultural) United States is not without challenges. Aparna Malladi, 31, a graduate student at Florida International University originally from India, said that when she first entered laboratories in Miami, it took a while for her to learn the customs.

"I didn't know that when I enter a room, I have to greet everyone and say goodbye when I leave," Ms. Malladi said. "People thought I was being rude."

Still, in interviews across the nation, young people emphasized the benefits of immigrants. Andrea Bonvecchio, 17, the daughter of a naturalized citizen from Venezuela, said going to a high school that is "like 98 percent Hispanic" meant she could find friends who enjoyed both Latin music and her favorite movie, "The Parent Trap."

Nicole Vespia, 18, of Selden, N.Y., said older people who were worried about immigrants stealing jobs were giving up on an American ideal: capitalist meritocracy.

"If someone works better than I do, they deserve to get the job," Ms. Vespia said. "I work in a stockroom, and my best workers are people who don't really speak English. It's cool to get to know them."

Her parents' generation, she added, just needs to adapt.

"My stepdad says, 'Why do I have to press 1 for English?' I think that's ridiculous," Ms. Vespia said, referring to the common instruction on customer-service lines. "It's not that big of a deal. Quit crying about it. Press the button."

URL: http://www.nytimes.com

LOAD-DATE: May 18, 2010

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ADELA JOVER: 53, Cuban immigrant and administrator at Florida International University (PHOTOGRAPHS BY JESSICA A. WOOLF FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES) CHART:
Generational Divide: Top metro areas with the largest gap between the percentage of children who
are white and of residents over 65 who are white (Source: William H. Frey, "The State of Metropolitan America," The Brookings Institution)

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Copyright 2010 The New York Times Company
New immigration and the political reaction against it are nearly as old as the United States itself. Yet the immigration surge of the last decade has awakened tensions of unexpected intensity that have pervaded the presidential campaigns of both parties and stirred voter anger across the country.

In 1960, census figures show, the largest national group of immigrants was the Italians, accounting for 13 percent of the foreign-born. Today, Mexicans account for one-third of all immigrants. Spanish-speakers make up nearly half of the 37.5 million foreign-born people in the country. Young Latino immigrants have brought Spanish to states that had had little exposure to it, like Iowa and North Carolina.

In addition, never before have illegal immigrants settled here in such numbers -- an estimated 12 million. Almost 70 percent of those immigrants are Spanish-speaking, coming from Mexico and Central America, according to the Migration Policy Institute, a nonpartisan research group.

Coinciding with the mood of apprehension following the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, the new immigration has provoked more than the traditional suspicion that foreigners are taking jobs from American workers. For many voters in the primary races, immigration has become an urgent national security concern and a challenge to the American identity.

The new immigration also sharpened the rift between the federal government and the states. Across party lines, frustrated voters accuse the Bush administration of failing to secure the southern border against intruders, of being lax on employers hiring illegal immigrants and of preaching assimilation without providing resources for local schools where Spanish-speaking students are enrolled.

President Bush's failed effort to push an immigration package through Congress foreshadowed the divisions on the campaign trail. Republicans are split about how to proceed, and Democrats are treading carefully, fearful on the one hand of alienating voters in places like Iowa who are fed up with illegal immigration but concerned on the other about missing what they see as an opportunity to win the allegiance of the fast-growing Hispanic population.

The next president will still face the tricky task of negotiating not just the politics of the issue, but also some concrete realities. While border fences and immigration raids have discouraged some
illegal immigrants from coming and encouraged some who are here to go home, millions of illegal
workers have had families here and put down roots, and are not going to disappear.

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The incidents span a decade and a continent: Gulf Coast fishermen in Texas harass Vietnamese competitors who are catching more shrimp. A Florida supermarket manager suspends a cashier for speaking Spanish at work. Residents of a Maryland community protest the establishment of a Japanese junior college near the Chesapeake Bay. Two Los Angeles suburbs try to require Chinese store owners to put up English signs. A Massachusetts gubernatorial candidate, John Silber, asks, "Why should Lowell be the Cambodian capital of America?"

For some observers of American history and politics, the incidents evoke disturbing memories of the virulent, anti-Catholic and anti-Semitic nativism of the 1920's, or, more distant, the open hatreds of the 1890's, when William J. H. Traynor of the American Protective Association opposed granting the right to vote to the "pauper and criminal riffraff of Europe" and "every ignorant Dago and Pole, Hun and Slav."

Some of the same combustible elements of those years are present in America again. With the Northeast already mired in economic hard times and other regions teetering on the edge, will immigrants who arrived in record numbers in the 1980's become a lightning rod for the anger of a swelling crowd of economic losers? "In the past few months there's been a perception that the pie is not expanding, and those are the times when zero-sum solutions raise their ugly heads," observed Gregory Fossedal, the head of the Alexis de Tocqueville Institution, a research foundation based in Palo Alto, Calif., that favors immigration.

Despite some disturbing incidents, there are few signs that the kind of organized anti-immigration movements of decades past are rising again. The strident voice of the nativist has faded. In fact, the House recently passed a bill that would increase annual immigration ceilings by 45 percent, to 775,000. But political scientists say that the immigration debate has created new political fault lines and disrupted old alliances. As
often as not, the voices expressing concerns of increased immigration come from people who once would have been called liberals.

As immigration becomes a greater component of population growth, environmentalists and population control advocates have begun to consider more seriously the case for controls. Nancy Wallace, who directs the Sierra Club's International Population Program, argues that "any immigration legislation should be part of a national population policy moving toward stabilization as fast as possible."

Immigration has also caused rifts in the civil rights coalition. Recently the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People hesitated before agreeing to support Hispanic groups in their effort to repeal Federal sanctions against employers of illegal aliens. This month, Hazel Dukes, New York State president of the N.A.A.C.P., said, "Why let foreigners or newcomers have these jobs while blacks, who have been here for hundreds of years, can't support themselves or their families?" She later apologized.

In fact, her presumption that unskilled immigrants take jobs from unskilled Americans has lost support among most economists. In his book "Friends or Strangers," George J. Borjas argues that ratios of immigrants in major metropolitan labor markets have trivial effects on wage rates and no effect on unemployment.

But provisions in the Senate version of the current immigration bill that would substantially increase the number of skilled immigrants brought in by corporate employers to fill special labor needs has raised fears that immigrants will occupy the higher rungs of the economic ladder, hindering the mobility of those below. "The question is, should immigration be encouraged or should national policy encourage training to allow those here, including blacks, to take those jobs?" said Arthur F. Brimmer, a former member of the board of governors of the Federal Reserve. "My own view is that we should do both."

Although he argued against the issue of economic competition from unskilled immigrants, Mr. Borjas raised a separate issue in a recent paper co-authored with another economist, Stephen J. Trejo. The newer the immigrant, they say, the more likely he is to draw welfare.

Others argue that immigrants may threaten the nation's linguistic cohesion. In 1983 a group called U.S. English was founded to promote ordinances, laws and state constitutional amendments making English the official language of one jurisdiction after another. Early this year, a Federal court struck down a constitutional amendment in Arizona. In 1989 a Federal court overturned an ordinance in Pomona, Calif. - apparently directed at Chinese store owners - mandating that half the space on foreign-language commercial signs be devoted to "English alphabetical characters."

But these ripples do not change the conclusion of David H. Bennett, author of "The Party of Fear," a 1988 study of nativism, that hostility toward immigrants has declined significantly as a political force since World War II. Many historians, economists and social scientists are not asking why there were so many echoes of nativism in the 1980's, but why there were so few.

"If you look back on American society 30 years from now, you'll say in the 1980's there was a watershed in American society and one of the indications was that there was a
change in the attitudes toward foreigners - though not to foreign competition," said Michael J. Piore, a professor of economics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

"I think that what happened in the course of the 1970's and 1980's was that the United States really redefined itself as a multiracial society; there was a general acceptance that society was going to be composed of a variety of different groups and we had to develop a tolerance of them. I don't want to say there's no resentment. There is a lot, more than is being expressed. But it is not being organized, and people don't organize their thoughts around the idea that you can solve these problems by closing the borders."

Martin Heisler, an expert on immigration at the University of Maryland, said: "I'm surprised the reaction hasn't been stronger here, compared with some European countries. The limits of tolerance for pluralism should have been stretched by now, and they don't seem to have been. Are we experiencing a linear expansion in our ability to cope with incredible social diversity?"

But nativism may not be gone forever, said Dr. Piore. "I believe that there are different conceptions of American society that in some ways are contradictory," he said. An essential ingredient of America's self-image is its history as a nation of immigrants. That image "has always been around even in the worst nativist periods," he said. "And the nativist image is always going to be around in the most tolerant periods."

"Whatever happened in American society in the 70's and 80's has brought forth a more tolerant vision. But the problems of working out a multiracial and multiethnic society are immense. I can well believe that at some point those problems would accumulate and we'll go back" to America's nativist past.

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

GRAPHIC: Drawing; graph: immigrants to the United States by region, 1971-1989 (Source: Immigration and Naturalization Service)

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