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The Political, Social, and Economic Variables that Influence American Immigration Attitudes

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THE UNDERLYING VARIABLES OF IMMIGRATION ATTITUDES 1

The Political, Social, and Economic Variables that Influence American Immigration Attitudes

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Honors Research Project

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Section I: Introduction

Comprehensive immigration policy has been and continues to be a challenge for American policy makers. Although this can be said for many other problems, a holistic approach to immigration policy must address several social, economic, and political ramifications. In other words, it is a dynamic issue that requires more than one sweeping solution to become “comprehensive”. For instance, in times of economic downturn, policy makers may reassess the economic impacts of increased foreign labor flows as Americans argue they are increasing competition for scarce jobs. Immigration can also become an issue of national security, namely after the 9/11 attacks which heightened perceived fears of immigrants and prompted tighter border protection. In addition, public opinion on immigration is also complex in nature as the issue can be framed in several different ways. Citizens may be asked of their beliefs on immigration’s impact on jobs and wages, national security, or perhaps their influence on American culture. My objective is to examine a number of variables that likely influence the public’s anti-immigrant attitudes. By analyzing the results of a 2018 polling data set from Pew Research Center, the variables I examine include nativism, partisanship, socioeconomic status (education and income), locale, age, and sex.

The motive behind this research stems from the increasing relevance of comprehensive immigration policy that desperately requires a better understanding of these underlying components. The uncertainty of what U.S. citizens perceive the issue to stem from makes it difficult for legislators to pinpoint a solution. For some, immigrants are a perceived economic threat; others may see it as an invasion of culture and social norms; and of course, partisanship may clearly define those limits for people as well. The reason public opinion measurements of immigration are important to this issue is because it provides a guide for lawmakers on how to

approach the issue. Granted, public opinion is almost never unanimous on anything. However, when dealing with a conflict that captures such a wide array of variables, knowing which ones are the most influential provides a starting point.

Section II: Public Opinion Polls and Immigration

The bulk of professional and academic research in public opinion lies within organizations like Gallup and Pew that conduct frequent surveys to measure changing opinions. These measures are the typical reports seen in the media that show how changes in a new immigration policy, for example, increases immigration's saliency.

Research into this topic typically begins with opinion polls probing a citizen's beliefs on optimal immigration levels. Results are then used to assess overall sentiment towards immigration into the U.S. For example, Gallup has been conducting a poll at least once a year since 1965 asking, "Should immigration be kept at its present level, increased, or decreased?" (Jones, 2019). Studying polls that ask the same question over extended periods of time provides some insight into where overall sentiments are heading. Recently, its June 2019 survey indicated a plurality of Americans (37%) support maintaining current levels. Not far behind at 35% are those that would like to see a decrease and trailing are the 27% that favor an increase. This poll provides a convenient snapshot of what direction Americans believe immigration reform should take.

However, breaking immigration down can be much more complicated when accounting for the sources of those opinions. As aforementioned, people form their opinions for different reasons like party loyalty or perhaps perceptions of threat. People who self-identify with the Republican Party, for example, may be more likely to oppose open border policies as to align with the current party platform. This can be expressed in a measurement of public opinion or

perhaps a vote for a Republican candidate that aligns with that same policy platform. As mentioned, perception of threat is another potential motivator for changing immigration attitudes. The classic example of the heightened border security after 9/11 shows how even perceived fears of threats from immigrants can have a similar effect on policy views. Pew conducted a poll in January 2002, which found that 90% of Republicans and 82% of Democrats thought President Bush should focus efforts to amplify border security (Gramlich, 2018). Right after 9/11, partisanship nearly disappeared as the country rallied around a common cause. This example demonstrates how the public can easily change its opinions on immigration given an exogenous shock such as 9/11.

Further, the way in which questions are worded or framed in opinion polls can also shift the focus and make immigration attitudes more complex. For example, one poll from Gallup notes that “immigration” in its question means both legal and illegal immigration (Gallup, 2019). When undocumented immigrants are specifically mentioned, we see some different results. Respondents were first asked to rank the situation “Large numbers of immigrants entering the United States” in terms of urgency. 39% of respondents said it was a critical threat (Gallup, 2019). However, when “undocumented” is added to the phrase, those that believe it is a critical threat jumped to 47% (Gallup, 2019). A simple explanation for this difference may be that “undocumented” creates a negative image. Opponents of increased immigration frequently associate illegal immigrants with bringing over crime, abuse of government assistance, and/or other negative connotations (Reeves & Johnson, 2008). In other words, people that oppose immigration may do so for different reasons. When looking at the dynamic relationship between public opinion and policymaking, immigration’s multiple reference points make it difficult to pinpoint what drives these beliefs the most.

Examining the literature in this field from a blend of political scientists, psychologists, and sociologists, we see attempts to measure the strength of the variables in question.¹ Before analyzing the current literature, it is important to understand the historical evolution of the public opinion/immigration relationship. By observing changes in anti-immigration sentiment and where they stemmed from, we will have an underlying knowledge to better understand changes in those variables across a timeless debate.

Evolution of American Anti-Immigrant Sentiment

While anti-immigrant sentiment and laws associated with it goes back to the country's founding, current trends have evolved from relatively recent events. As mass immigration increased at the close of the 19th century, so did anxiety among Americans. In 1882, Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, which was the first legislation in the country's history that placed significant limits on immigration. Just a few years later in 1885, a group of white miners in Wyoming blamed their Chinese counterparts for their economic troubles. In an act of aggression, they killed 28 Chinese miners which become known as the Rock Springs massacre (A&E Television Networks, 2017). Later in 1913, California passed another bill (out of many) that denied "aliens ineligible for citizenship" the right to own land. Known as the Webb-Haney Act, this bill passed during the height of Asian immigration into the U.S. As Asian immigration increased on the West Coast, so too did efforts to curb it (Smithsonian, n.d.).

The late 1960s and early 1970s also proved to be pivotal when observing increased immigration restrictions. As a reversal of the 1924 Johnson-Reed Act which placed the "national

¹ It is worth mentioning that public opinion towards immigrants is not always based on accurate information. For instance, negative public opinion of immigrants contrasts empirical evidence that illegal immigrants do not excessively use social services, nor do they display unusually high rates of criminality (Nowrasteh & Orr, 2018; Ingraham, 2018). The examination of empirical data on immigrant behavior and public opinion raises the potential for another study that is outside the scope of this research.

origins” quota on incoming immigrants from Europe, the 1965 Immigration Act removed many of those barriers to entry for immigrants. With the expectation of moving on from an immigration policy based on American eugenics, the 1965 act ended up inflaming fears of overpopulation and boosting nativist sentiment (Normandin & Valles, 2015). In 1968, Paul Ehrlich’s explosive book titled *Population Bomb* was a response to a new America with unrestricted immigration. It stoked fears of overpopulation and the impending doom that faced the planet if it were to continue (Normandin & Valles, 2015). John Tanton, an anti-immigrant activist under the guise of environmental protection, started the Zero Population Group based on Ehrlich’s predictions. As a resounding activist for his group, he laid the foundation for what would become a network of anti-immigrant/nativist groups like US English, which is still active today in pushing for the declaration of English as the national language (Normandin & Valles, 2015).

In more recent years, U.S. immigration policy has taken on a larger role in foreign policy. Beginning in the Bush 41 administration, thousands of Haitian refugees escaping political violence sought asylum in the U.S. Despite current policies (domestically and internationally) allowing refugees to seek asylum, the U.S. Coast Guard ultimately put them into prison camps (Constitutional Rights Foundation, 2018). The detention length of Haitian refugees was indefinite, and the camps failed to provide decent living conditions. During the presidential election, the Clinton campaign advocated the release of the refugees, but maintained the operation after the election. This strategy could have been influenced by a strong disapproval of allowing these refugees into the country. A 1994 poll from CBS/New York Times showed a 77% disapproval and 19% approval of the Haitian refugees coming into the country (DeSilver, 2015).

The events of 9/11 provide the most recent example of how significant foreign threats influence immigrant-restricting laws and sentiment. While immigration restrictions primarily targeted those coming from countries with ties to Al-Qaeda, it strengthened national security's role in immigration policy (Chishti & Bergeron, 2017). After the attacks, terrorism prevention became a priority. Since the attackers entered the country through legal means, cracking down on those ports of entry became essential to national security. In the years following 2001, several policies regarding detention practices and court proceedings of Middle Eastern immigrants were deemed by civil libertarians to be excessively harsh (Chishti & Bergeron, 2017). Indefinite detentions, use of secret evidence in trials, and explicit targeting of Muslims were enforced. Although many of these policies are no longer in effect today, they still influenced the importance of security in immigration policy. Challenges to these policies could not overcome the increased deference to the executive branch (Chishti & Bergeron, 2017). Immigration policy since has become an exercise of executive power that is consequential to politics and public opinion.

Section III: Accounting for Public Sentiment and Immigration

Scholars have forwarded several political and social factors to explain anti-immigrant sentiment. Lee & Kim (2018) and Hainmueller and Hopkins (2015) both assert that issue salience and efforts to measure public opinion go hand in hand. For example, the push for and debate surrounding the Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2007 caused a spike of 15% interest among respondents. Support then sunk dramatically to 2% over the following two years, then jumped back to 10% after Arizona's S.B. 1070, which enacted several strict anti-immigration laws to curb illegal immigration. In 2014, another spike occurred after President Obama announced his Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program (DACA). The most

recent Gallup measures now show immigration at an all-time high in importance among Americans. As of July 2019, immigration is now a top issue for 27% of Americans, likely due to the substantial media attention over Central American refugees (Gallup, 2019). These surges may suggest that the sources of immigration attitudes are amplified by exogenous shocks created by legislation or events that bring immigration to the forefront. It is worth noting that these components likely have an impact on public opinion. However, for the purpose of this project, I will discuss the variables on an individual level that are expected to play a role in determining those changes in attitudes. Further research can perhaps examine the similarities and/or differences between individual characteristics and the impact elite agenda setting has on public opinion in the immigration debate.

Nativism

One variable given consideration in the literature is nativism or, in psychological terms, implicit association. To measure this, surveyors use specific language in a series of questions to learn about the root causes that lead respondents to certain answers. While Lee & Kim (2018) touch on the procedures involved with implicit association tests (IATs) and nativist measurements, Knoll (2013) goes further into the mechanisms of implicit association when measuring public opinion. Given that immigration can be a personal subject and in recent years has become even more racially charged, surveyors have sought to understand how potent nativism and the protection of traditional culture is to American immigration attitudes. In any IAT, respondents initially give what is known as an explicit answer- that is, a response that is thought-out and consciously processed. Implicit, on the other hand, is a person's underlying opinions or world outlook that could be a culmination of past experiences. Implicit behavior can manifest without the person knowing and is out of his/her control (Knoll, 2013).

In 2009, Knoll conducted a study using an IAT that comprised of 625 white non-Hispanic college students at a Midwestern university. Respondents were presented with images of “traditional American culture” like American flags, baseball, and Uncle Sam. The second set of objects represented a more integrated environment with images of bilingual “vote here” signs, the U.S. and Mexico flags together, and a walking taco saluting an American flag (Knoll 2013). An individual’s difference in response times to analyzing the images as good or bad leads to possible implicit bias. Implicit behavior is evident when respondents begin associating images of foreign culture with “bad” and vice versa. Results from the survey show that 80% of respondents exhibited some degree of biased behavior with more than 40% in the “high” range. With scores ranging from -0.94 to 1.51, the mean was 0.53; a moderate-to-strong level of implicit behavior (Knoll 2013).

Pérez (2010) conducted a similar study that had respondents sort stimuli first into *mismatched* pairs where “white immigrant” is “bad” and “Latino immigrant” is “good”. In the second trial, the pairs were theoretically *matched* where “white immigrant” is “good” and “Latino immigrant” is “bad”. The difference between these response times demonstrates the implicit association effect. Pérez suggests that using the IAT to measure opposition to immigration can tell us three things: a person’s level of tolerance towards Latino immigrants; the likelihood of supporting alternative measures like authoritarianism or ethnocentrism; and the extent to which explicit behaviors mediate implicit ones (Pérez, 2010). The results show that participants had faster response times in the matched trial (where Latino immigrants were paired with “bad”) than the mismatched trial. Pérez asserts that the difference in response times between the two trials is statistically significant and reveals a positive IAT score as an indicator of implicit bias against Latino immigrants.

To further confirm his hypothesis, the second matchup was with Latino and Asian immigrants (the latter as opposed to White). Although the difference in response times was slightly less, the change in comparison between Latino and other ethnic immigrants had little effect on IAT scores. Also, to rule out the assumption that these results are based on cultural bias rather than individual bias, Pérez compares the IAT scores of self-identified Hispanic and Asian participants with White participants. The former both had negative IAT scores, showing an implicit bias not against but for their respective ethnic immigrants. In other words, their negative scores strengthen the validity of the IAT to measure individual rather than cultural bias. Hence, Pérez found sufficient evidence to claim the IAT is a reliable predictor of individual implicit bias (Pérez, 2010).

In relation to opinions on immigration policy, research conducted using the IAT in this field has shown the tool's effectiveness in measuring implicit assumptions and how they relate to explicit opinions or answers. Pérez followed up with data on varying factors and their respective magnitudes that contribute to negative assumptions of Latino immigrants. Whether legal or illegal was specified in the study, ethnocentrism had a strong influence on a participant's preference for exclusionary immigration policy (Pérez, 2010). Following Knoll and Pérez' work on nativism, I intend to examine its influence on public opinion, especially as it relates to negative immigrant sentiments. Given the nature of the immigration issue, being able to measure nativism is critical when collecting public opinion data. Capturing implicit association among respondents has potential in showing true attitudes that respondents may not be willing to report. Thus, including this type of data in a measurement of social attitudes and behaviors strengthens a study's predictive power. However, it should be noted that IAT measurements are not perfect in reading implicit bias and are difficult to incorporate into public opinion polls. Accounting for

this challenge, my Research Design section will explain my proposal to measure nativism using a question from the 2018 Pew poll that best taps into those sentiments.

Political Party Affiliation

Conventional wisdom suggests that there is a clear divide between Democrats and Republicans when immigration policy is in question. This seemingly innate knowledge can be broken down by how each party views the problem. The Republican platform typically views immigration as a security issue. The policies backed by Republicans deal with curbing illegal immigration; enacting stricter penalties on those that overstay their visas; limiting or prohibiting the use of sanctuary cities; and/or limiting the excessive distribution of public funds for immigrants (Reeves & Johnson, 2008). Democrats tend to see immigration from a more social perspective. Although security is also important, the Democratic platform advocates broader pathways to citizenship as immigrants are believed to enrich American society and culture. Therefore, examining partisanship's impact on immigration opinion can supply meaningful information (Reeves & Johnson, 2008).

Hainmueller and Hopkins (2015) argue that partisanship is a central variable in immigration opinion studies. The article reviews results from an experiment where respondents (that identify as Democrats or Republicans) were given two hypothetical immigrants with different attributes (gender, profession, etc.) and were asked which they would admit into the country. In contrast to much of the literature that argues party affiliation triggers certain cues in contemporary attitudes, this experiment showed very little contrast in attribute values. Democrats and Republicans have similar preferences when presented with immigrants that are well-educated and high-skilled (Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2015). While this one result does not

negate the literature arguing the differences in policy platforms between the two parties, it does posit further research into the types of immigrants that are preferable for both parties.

When observed in isolation, it becomes easier to examine the differences. Given that conventional party platforms indicate that Democrats and Republicans typically have contrasting views on immigration *in general*, analyzing this variable as it relates to immigration opinion can illuminate a causal link. Thus, it is expected that Republicans would favor tighter immigration restrictions and Democrats a more open system.

Socioeconomic Status

The next variable to consider is socioeconomic status, which is a combination of two fundamental components: education and income. Typically, education and income move together—more education is likely to yield higher income. Of course, there are exceptions such as non-labor income from sources like market investments. In that case, more education is not required for higher income or wealth. Nonetheless, socioeconomic status can still be measured assuming that higher investments in education yield higher levels of labor income. What makes this variable different from its individual determinants is that socioeconomic status is partially a perceived state. In other words, an individual that perceives himself to be in the upper class would derive that from his high level of education and high paying skilled job and vice versa.

As it pertains to immigration opinions, it is expected that higher socioeconomic statuses would be more likely to favor liberal immigration policies. This assumption returns to the individual components of socioeconomic status—higher levels of education signify a better understanding of the impacts of immigration and in turn, a greater ability to see the value in immigration. People with more education are likely to better understand political issues and

exhibit fewer perceptions of threat. As education attainment increases, labor income is expected to increase as well. However, having less education likely decreases one's anticipated income as high-skilled and high-paying jobs usually require higher educational attainment.

The case for higher income stems from greater feelings of security that prompt less hostility towards newcomers. People that earn higher incomes from their occupation likely feel less threatened by immigrants in the labor market. Illegal immigrants, for example, are more likely to enter jobs that require physical labor and for less wages. Someone who is near the middle or top of the socioeconomic scale will unlikely perceive high levels of threat from these immigrants as they are not competing in the same labor market. For someone closer to the working class, they might feel more threatened by increased immigration because of greater perceived competition. Therefore, greater feelings of hostility and insecurity are expected.

Chavez (2016) measured several variables that influence opinions on immigration levels; one of which was "Self-Identified Class". Participants identified as either Working, Lower, Middle, or Upper class. His results showed a dynamic relationship between immigrant attitudes and each class: as self-identified class increases, desires to reduce immigration "by a lot" decreases substantially- almost half of the lower class' percentage (36.5% to 17%). However, going up in class only slightly increases desires to increase immigration "by a little". Some of the implications Chavez draws from this is how immigrants affect social classes in different ways. Those in the upper class may feel more economically secure and do not view immigrants as a threat to their standing. Oppositely, the lower class may feel more threatened by newer populations that pose a risk to the lower class' already fragile job security (Chavez, 2016).

Drawing on economic security, Jetten, Mols, and Healy (2017) find that in both high and low socioeconomic groups, collective feelings of economic uncertainty increased opposition to

immigration. In contrast to the assumptions made by Chavez, Jetten et al. asserts that economic uncertainty decreases class security at all levels. The article's literature review mentions previous studies that show the upper class' greater openness and generosity towards incoming immigrants during stable economic periods. In other words, economic stability brought confidence and security to the upper class. When given news of a potential economic downturn, however, the upper class showed signs of relative deprivation triggered by incoming groups. In the analysis, Jetten et al. demonstrated how the upper class opposes immigration more during economic instability. In the same graph, the lower class showed similar levels of opposition in both stable and unstable conditions- both of which were of higher levels than either condition for the upper class.

Socioeconomic status is rather arbitrary in nature as Jetten et al. and Chavez examined. This makes it difficult to isolate, especially when that polling data relies on the self-assessments of its respondents. However, when we isolate it into its two more distinct sub-variables-- education and income-- it becomes more quantitative. Polling agencies would likely receive more accurate answers to education levels and annual income than they would asking for a status with unclear definitions. As mentioned, these sub-variables are generally expected to move in the same direction (with some noted exceptions). Combining this with the scholarly literature, those with higher incomes and education likely feel more secure. In turn, we can develop a possible causal relationship where a higher sense of security (or socioeconomic status) will decrease a person's opposition to immigrants as they are not perceived as a threat to them and vice versa.

Locale

The fourth variable to assess is the impact of geographic locale on immigration opinions. Including this measure is important because it incorporates theories of exposure and how

interacting with immigrants can change attitudes. Immigrants typically move into urban environments as they provide more economic opportunities. Americans that also live in immigrant-dense urban areas are likely to exhibit an ‘exposure’ effect, which is the normalization of outsiders as they become more ingrained in a community. Therefore, urban residents are likely to be more supportive of open immigration policies as they are not only tolerant of immigrants but recognize the economic benefit they provide. Oppositely, rural residents lack this ‘exposure’ effect as the population is sparse and may view whatever small influx of immigrants there are as disproportionate to the total immigration levels (Fennelly & Federico, 2008). In other words, rural residents likely view immigration as invasive and out of control. Thus, rural Americans will likely show higher opposition to immigration.

As of June 2019, of the 44.4 million immigrants living in America, roughly one-quarter of them are from Mexico (Radford, 2019). The current literature on region’s influence mainly argues that urban areas on the West and East coast have more favorable opinions of immigrants than do regions with significant rural populations (Fennelly & Federico, 2008). The findings show how the ‘exposure’ effect brings about higher levels of tolerance of people from different cultures and backgrounds; which is true for urban areas (Chavez, 2016). These urban regions show greater tendencies to support immigration than rural, central areas. Urban environments create familiarity and generate greater feelings of inclusivity. As for rural areas, Fennelly & Federico attribute immigrant intolerance to several factors that include a disproportionate number of illegal immigrants in rural communities; a higher perceived level of economic threat; and the “Walmartization” effect. The last factor is a metaphor for the loss of a traditional era and settlement of foreigners that threaten previous ideas of identity (Fennelly & Federico, 2008). Their study found that rural residents hold significantly more negative opinions on immigrants

than do urban or suburban respondents. In nearly every category of statements (worded in negative context), rural respondents agreed with the following: “too many immigrants”, “immigrants take jobs away from Americans”, and “immigrants do not pay their fair share in taxes”. These responses all garnered over 60% agreement from rural respondents (Fennelly & Federico, 2008).

More recent studies show similar results. Garcia and Davidson (2013) used rural and urban as independent variables to examine how they affect immigration attitudes. The study operated under the previous theoretical framework that urban and rural residents have distinct differences in opinions regarding immigration. For the most part, the study confirmed that assumption. Looking at “Beliefs about Immigration”, 35% of rural respondents said immigrants are good for the economy compared to 41% of urban respondents. Continuing in the same category, 41% of rural respondents said immigrants increase crime rates while 32% of urban respondents agreed. When measuring “American Identity”, Garcia and Davidson used an index to measure one’s belief that immigrants should be more like us. The study found, contrary to belief, that American Identity does not play a significant role in forming opinions among rural residents. Though, previous studies showed that the same group was heavily invested in the notion of traditional American customs and norms (Garcia & Davidson, 2013).

Age and Sex

Lastly, age and sex are two demographic variables that can influence immigration attitudes. These variables are included because the current literature has touched on their importance in how they can shape immigration beliefs. Beginning with age, measuring immigration attitudes among different generations provides another valuable vantage point. Including age as an independent variable may show if younger people really are more tolerant of

foreigners than older generations. Pew conducted a poll in January 2019 asking respondents if immigrants “strengthen our country because of their hard work and talents”. In Jones’ analysis, Millennials (born 1981-1996) consistently responded in favor of the statement more than any other generation included in the poll (Gen X, Boomer, and Silent) (Jones, 2019). According to a GenForward Survey in 2018, 75% of Millennial Trump voters “support creating pathways for citizenship for law-abiding immigrants” (Cohen, Fowler, Medenica, & Rogowski, 2018). This study also found that significant proportions of Millennials disapprove of statements characterizing immigrants as hostile to American culture, taking away jobs, and increasing the crime rate. However, when broken down by race, a significant number of White Millennials (42%) agreed with the previous statements (Cohen et al., 2018). Shortly before the 2016 election, the Collage Group (2016) found in a study that in contrast to Millennials, “both gen-Xers and boomers are [4 and 9% respectively] more likely than average to say immigration is bad”. These studies typically explain this difference as a result of the inherent diversity younger generations are surrounded by.

Moving to sex, Chavez (2016) includes this variable in his analysis of immigration attitudes. His initial conclusion was that men tend to be more open about immigration; however, because other factors like race and religion were not controlled for, he concludes that sex is spurious. Berg (2010) makes a more concrete argument which states that women are more likely to be pro-immigrant because of their socialization that encourages them to be other-oriented and nurturers. Oppositely, socialization for men encouraged self-socialization. In his analysis of a 2004 General Social Survey, Berg also found that women were actually not pro-immigrant in every immigrant attitude question. When asked if immigrants take jobs away from native-born Americans, women were more likely to disagree with the statement. However, women were also

less likely to agree that immigrants are good for the economy (Berg, 2010). While this analysis emphasized an intersectional approach to gender, race, and education, it does provide some results showing how, when controlling for other factors, men and women may have different immigration attitudes.

Section IV: Hypotheses and Model

As aforementioned, the independent variables I utilize are nativism, partisanship, socioeconomic status (education and income), locale, age, and sex. The data source used to examine their influence on immigration attitudes is from a 2018 poll conducted by Pew.²

Nativism is rather equivocal in public opinion polls, but still observable. As previously discussed, measuring nativism typically involves more complex methods like implicit association tests. If a public opinion poll asked respondents if they were biased against immigrants or racist towards certain groups, they would likely say “no”. However, these feelings can still be measured by changing the wording of questions to tap into those sentiments without being explicit in doing so. Most polls examining implicit bias use phrases instead of questions. They ask respondents if they agree or disagree with the one or, if offered multiple, the one they associate with more. Although polling answers are different, they can ultimately be categorized into positive or negative sentiments about immigrants and their effect on American culture. Positive sentiments are those that argue immigrants are good for America’s culture while negative sentiments show immigrants as threatening. The expectation is that those who agree with statements about immigrants having a positive effect on the country will support more

² Pew Research Center. (2018, June 28). Shifting Public Views on Legal Immigration Into the U.S. Retrieved from <https://www.people-press.org/2018/06/28/shifting-public-views-on-legal-immigration-into-the-u-s/>

immigration (and thus exhibit fewer nativist tendencies) and vice versa. Specific question wordings used in my analysis will be explained further in the next section.

Partisanship will be measured by focusing on Democrats and Republicans. The reason Independents are excluded is because the assumption is that those that identify as Independent, leaning Republican, or leaning Democrat are not heavily influenced by party platforms. Thus, their opinions are likely based on other reasons. Limiting the partisan variable to Democrats and Republicans also maintains the reflection of the two-party system such that it captures those leaning in either direction. In doing this, measuring the relationship by party should reveal how strong partisanship can influence immigrant sentiment. Given the literature review and conventional knowledge of party platforms, there is an expectation for Republicans to favor less immigration.

Socioeconomic status is also complex to measure. However, as explained in the literature and for the purposes of my model, it is measured by income and education. Typically, these components move in a positive direction together. The assumption for this examination is that higher income and education attainment yields a higher socioeconomic status. Increases in income and education are likely to increase one's feeling of economic security and tolerance of immigrants. Because socioeconomic status is a rather arbitrary measurement, polling respondents are not expected to self-identify. Polls typically ask respondents to select his/her highest level of education and annual income. These two sub-variables will be examined together as socioeconomic status. Since education and income are defined on spectrums, they can be categorized as brackets or ranges. Education includes some high school, high school, some college, college, and beyond. Similarly, income can be grouped by intervals such as \$0-\$5,000, \$5,001-\$10,000, etc. Given the current literature on changing attitudes between socioeconomic

classes, we can expect to see less opposition to immigrants as both education attainment and income increase (Chavez, 2016; Jetten et al., 2017).

Locale is the fourth independent variable. This variable will be strictly defined as “urban” or “rural”. Like partisanship, omitting the in-between option (in this case “suburban”) helps isolate the extremes to measure the effect. Rural is typically defined as remote, countryside areas a distance from any sizeable cities. Urban locales are densely populated cities or moderate to large metropolitan areas. The importance of this variable comes from the tendency of immigrants to move into urban areas. As Chavez (2016) notes, the ‘exposure’ effect is the higher level of tolerance exhibited by urban citizens towards immigrants because of closer proximity and more interactions. Fennelly and Federico (2008) examine how rural citizens see higher proportions of illegal immigrants that are typically employed in food processing and agricultural businesses. Thus, their perception is that illegal immigrants are large in number and represent a greater proportion of total immigration. From this, we can expect that urban immigrants are less likely to oppose immigration while rural are more likely to do so.

Age is the first demographic variable under examination. As mentioned in the literature, age becomes a relevant factor because of the difference in political, economic, and/or social values of different generations. Millennials, for example, are more likely to hold pro-immigrant views as opposed to older generations like Baby Boomers or those from Gen X. This is because the former embodies changing views on the role of government and places more importance on racial and cultural diversity. Democratic socialism, as highlighted in the 2016 presidential campaign, garnered significant support among young voters. Oppositely, older age groups like those age 65 or older tend to hold more conservative views. An AP poll in 2018 found that 49% of Republican voters in the 2018 election cycle were 65 or older (Birnbaum, 2018). Although

partisanship is somewhat tied to certain age groups, isolating age and testing it against immigration attitude questions will better determine differences between those generations in terms of immigrant sentiments. Therefore, it is expected that younger people will exhibit greater pro-immigrant attitudes and older people will likely show greater anti-immigrant attitudes.

Sex may also explain differences in immigration attitudes given the sociological theories behind different male and female socializations. The assumptions are that males are socialized in the U.S. to be more self-oriented, individualistic, and hostile towards outsiders. Females are supposedly more other-oriented and, because of their maternal instincts, more nurturing and tolerant of others. Of course, these assumptions are not universally accepted, especially in the U.S. As noted by Berg (2010), women have different opinions on immigrants when framed in social or economic contexts. Nonetheless, we may expect males to hold less favorable attitudes towards immigrants and women will hold more favorable views. However, if the assumption does hold, the degree will likely be significantly less than previous variables pertaining to political and/or social characteristics.

Section V: Research Design

To measure the degree to which each of the independent variables are predictors of immigrant attitudes, I utilized a June 2018 dataset from Pew Research Center to run a binary logistic regression model. The data comes from a telephone survey of 2,002 adults using a random digit dial sample. This dataset was published alongside an article that reported changes in immigration attitudes among Americans.³ Although the poll examined the attitudes of a variety of central attitudes, the focus was on immigration. For the dependent variable, I utilized a

³ Pew Research Center. (2018, June 28). Shifting Public Views on Legal Immigration Into the U.S. Retrieved from <https://www.people-press.org/2018/06/28/shifting-public-views-on-legal-immigration-into-the-u-s/>

question (Q.94) asking, “Should LEGAL immigration into the United States be kept at its present level, increased, or decreased?” (See Appendix A). This question was selected because it is void of any loaded language that depicts immigrants in a positive or negative manner. Given the survey, it is the most objective question to measure immigration attitudes as it does not elicit an answer based on any one independent variable. For instance, there is no mention of origin, skill levels, or legal status. Had these components been added to the question, it would likely put more emphasis on answers based on party platforms or perhaps education attainment. In other words, using this question as the dependent variable puts all the independent variables on the same level.

To conduct the binary logistic regression analysis, the coding options for the dependent variable was adjusted to reflect a binary scale. A value of 1 indicates a positive attitude towards immigrants and a value of 0 indicates a negative attitude. “Kept at present level” and “Increased” were both recoded as 1 as they indicate favorable attitudes or at least tolerance towards immigrants. “Decreased” was recoded as 0 to indicate negative immigration attitudes. For any answers “Don’t know/Refused”, the cases were omitted.

The independent variables examined in the dataset are party affiliation, education, income, sex, and age. Party affiliation was also recoded to match the 0-1 scale that defines the dependent variable.⁴ Any answer “Republican” was coded 0 as Republicans are more likely to hold anti-immigrant opinions. “Democrats” were coded 1 as they are more likely to hold positive views of immigrants. All other answers were omitted. Similarly, sex was recoded in binary so that males are valued 0 as they are more likely to hold negative immigrant attitudes and females

⁴ “In politics TODAY, do you consider yourself a Republican, Democrat, or independent?”

are valued at 1 as they are more likely to hold positive immigrant attitudes. Again, all other answers were omitted.

Education, income, and age were left as is because they are naturally defined by ranges. Similarly, any “Don’t know/Refused” cases were omitted from the dataset. For nativism and locale, there were no explicit measurements available. This is likely because of the impracticality of asking such subjective questions. As Knoll and Lee & Kim have argued, nativism is best measured through implicit association. Respondents are unlikely to be willing to explicitly say they are anti-immigrant or prejudiced against foreigners. To account for nativism in this data, I selected Q.92 as its indicator. It asks, “Just in general... how sympathetic would you say you are toward immigrants who are in the United States illegally”. This question provides a sufficient equivalent for nativism because it taps into the core nativist beliefs that immigrants threaten American culture. Those that are unsympathetic of illegal immigrants likely feel that way because immigrants to them are a threat. The inclusion of “illegal” in the question is also important. Respondents with nativist attitudes are likely less sympathetic of illegal immigrants because of the strong feelings they have on protecting border security. Therefore, any answer “Very sympathetic” and “Somewhat sympathetic” were recoded as 1 to indicate support for immigration and thus little to no nativist tendencies. Any answers “Somewhat UNSympathetic [sic]” and “Very UNSympathetic [sic]” were recoded as 0 to indicate opposition to immigration and thus greater nativist tendencies. Any “Don’t Know/Refused” cases were omitted. Although this translation is not a perfect substitute, it accounts for at least one of the key aspects of nativist behavior.

The other independent variable given an equivalent indicator was locale. Despite the existence of literature describing its importance, explicitly defining urban and rural is often

subjective. For instance, rural areas in the South may have significantly different populations than those in the North. To measure this variable, I placed a greater emphasis on the exposure effect as an alternative way of defining attitudes exhibited by urban and rural respondents. Q.100 in the Pew survey provided the best measure for this variable. It asks, “How often do you personally come in contact with immigrants who speak little or no English”. Those that answered “Often” or “Sometimes” were recoded as 1 as they are expected to experience a high exposure effect, which likely places them in the urban category and thus supportive of immigration. Any answers “Rarely” or “Never” were recoded as 0 because this represents a lack of exposure such as in rural areas and thus would be more opposed to immigration.

As previously stated, a binary logistic model was utilized to analyze American public views regarding the issue of immigration. This statistical technique was used because the dependent variable was broken down into a bivariate variable. Due to the omission of the “Don’t Know/refused” responses, the number of cases for this model decreased from 2,002 to 953.

Table 1: Binary Logistic Results of Support for Immigration

Independent Variable	Coefficient	S.E.	Significance	Odds Ratio	Percentage Change in Odds
Nativism (Q.92)	.856**	.181	.000	2.353	135.3
Party	.929**	.186	.000	2.533	150.3
Education	.115**	.053	.030	1.122	12.2
Income	.153**	.039	.000	1.165	16.5
Locale (Q.100)	.120	.194	.537	1.127	-
Age	-.013*	.053	.005	.987	-1.3
Sex	.161	.168	.340	1.174	-
Constant	-.648	.418	.112	.523	-

$p < .05$

$N = 953$

-2 Log likelihood = 913.482

Nagelkerke R-Square = .195

Section VI: Analysis and Discussion

The results reported in Table 1 show that nativism, party, education, income, and age were all significant at the $p < .05$ level as predictors of support for immigration. Also, each of the significant variables move in the anticipated direction with the dependent variable. This is in alignment with the literature and my hypotheses. Sex and locale were not significant and therefore refute my hypotheses. Although most of the variables tested are significant, the Nagelkerke R-Square value of 0.195 suggests that further research is required to better understand their predictive ability.

Nativism ($p = .000$) was a surprisingly strong predictor of support for immigration. Recall that Q.92 asked respondents about their sympathy for illegal immigrants (See Appendix A). A one unit increase in Q.92 (that is, more sympathy) raised the probability of answering “increased” by 135.3%. In other words, those that exhibited *fewer* nativist tendencies by expressing more sympathy towards illegal immigrants were more likely to be supportive of immigration. Although the model presented this independent as highly significant, the translation of a subjective variable into a survey-provided question is not conclusive. Nativist attitudes are not strictly defined by sympathy for illegal immigrants; rather, it was simply the best option out of the given questions to represent this variable.

Political party affiliation ($p = .000$) exhibited a very strong influence on the dependent variable. Using the percent change in odds, a one unit increase in party (moving towards Democrat) increases the likelihood of answering “increased” by 150.3%. Therefore, party affiliation is a robust indicator of immigration attitudes as Democrats are more supportive of immigration and vice versa. Given both the established policy platforms and the recent partisan divides on immigration policy, the strength of this independent was anticipated.

The results in Table 1 also show that education ($p = .030$) proved to be a strong indicator of immigration attitudes. According to the model, the odds ratio of 1.122 indicates that a one unit increase in education increases the likelihood of answering “increased” by 12.2%. Thus, individuals with higher education attainment are more likely to be supportive of immigration. In concurrence with the literature and my hypothesis, more schooling typically results in a greater understanding of complex political issues as well as greater tolerance of cultural diversity.

Income ($p = .000$) was also a strong predictor of immigration attitudes. The percent change in odds ratio showed that a one unit increase in income raised the possibility of

answering “increased” by 16.5%. Hence, higher levels of income are expected to bring about more attitudes supportive of immigration. It is worthy of note that this ratio is close to that of education (12.2%). Since education and income are the sub-variables of socioeconomic status, this result may give further credibility to the argument that they move together in a positive direction.

Lastly, age is also a strong predictor of immigration attitudes ($p = .005$), exhibiting a negative relationship as discussed in the literature and my hypothesis. Because the relationship is negative, this affirms the generation argument, which says younger generations are more likely to exhibit tolerant attitudes towards immigrants. The percent change in odds ratio shows that a one unit increase in age *decreases* the likelihood of answering “increased” on Q.94 by 1.3%. Therefore, as age increases, support for immigration decreases. Although this change is marginal, it is not expected that the difference in opinions would change much within a generation. As the age gap increases, for example, between a 20-year-old and a 60-year-old, we should begin to see greater differences as different generations begin to appear.

Despite the relative strength of this model, sex and locale proved to be insignificant as determinants of immigration attitudes. This is likely because men and women today are much less defined by their traditional roles. Differences between contemporary socialization for men and women are likely less distinct and influential in political beliefs. In relation to immigration attitudes, the differences in behavior may be more likely to come from other variables mentioned. For example, the “others-focused” mentality designated to women may be influential not because it is a female-specific attitude but because it is an element of the Democratic platform—or perhaps a behavior exhibited by someone with less nativist sentiment. The

immigration debate arguably calls upon sex differences less than abortion or economic inequality, for instance.

The insignificance of locale was likely due to an insufficiency in choosing Q.100 as an equivalent of the variable. Using this question asked in the survey first required defining urban and rural as different levels of exposure and subsequently the question that best described that exposure effect. Defining urban and rural areas is a difficult task in itself. There are several variations within both urban and rural areas that inhibit attempts to classify them. While this dataset did mention an urban-rural measure, it was defined by area codes of the respondent and thus could not be included in the model. So, equating locale instead to the exposure element led to the selection of Q.100. While this choice provided the best fit with the given data, it was still a matter of subjectivity. Also, Q.100 mentions contact with immigrants “who speak little or no English”. This element could have further complicated its utility as it focuses on contact with new immigrants rather than those who are more established. Another consideration may be that immigrants are not as concentrated in urban areas or sparse in rural areas as previously believed. While the literature argues on solid ground that there is a difference between urban and rural immigration attitudes, further research would require a better definition of those areas.

Nonetheless, this model provides valuable insight into the underlying determinants of immigration attitudes. Age, education attainment, income, party affiliation, and nativist tendencies all substantially contribute to the formation of those opinions. Moreover, party affiliation and nativism have shown to be very strong indicators. While partisanship may be an obvious determinant, it does propose an intensifying relationship. Of course, immigration has always been a partisan issue; but since the Trump administration began, the debate has continuously increased in salience. Campaign rhetoric about the border wall with Mexico; the

caravan of Latin American asylum-seekers in late 2018; and the implementation of a “zero-tolerance” policy against illegal immigrants have all been pushed to the forefront over the past few years. Because these events have arguably been spearheaded by the President (who is the head of his respective party), we have begun to see the deepening infusion of immigration policy with party platforms. Consequently, as immigration consumes a larger share of one party platform, the same is expected to happen with the other. As the debate is increasingly defined by party lines, Americans will likely begin to develop their opinions based on them.

Also, as a note on one of the strong indicators, the results of the ‘nativism’ variable should be interpreted cautiously. Although Q.92 was the best option for translating the variable, it remains subjective and does not fully capture all nativist tendencies like xenophobia, racism, and/or nationalism. When conducting public opinion polls, accessing these beliefs becomes more difficult as people may be unwilling to report them. However, the obstacles surrounding nativist measurements are not as limiting as that of the locale variable. Knoll (2013) and Pérez (2010) have demonstrated the utility in using IAT’s to tap into nativist sentiments. The combination of IAT’s with public opinion measurements in the context of immigration attitudes is a possible avenue for further research given the recent surges in the issue’s popularity.

Conclusion

The purpose of public opinion polls is not only to analyze a snapshot of current sentiments and beliefs, but to use that analysis as a guide for legislators. Other possible approaches for research can examine trends, perhaps showing the evolution of those underlying variables. Granted, the American public is never unanimous on anything and even evidence of clear majority opinions must still be given careful consideration before implementation. Yet, the analysis of where those opinions came from can provide that crucial information to lawmakers.

In the context of immigration attitudes, by showing how strong of an indicator partisanship is, it should become clear that real, comprehensive immigration reform will require a bipartisan approach. One of the implications of this research is that people are very likely to form their immigration opinions from party platforms, especially within recent years. Although other factors like age, income, and education were all statistically significant, party affiliation exhibited a substantially stronger effect. However, with this strong effect on the debate, the possibility of immigration becoming a strictly partisan issue is also present. Each side can rally support for one extreme over the other, rendering any bipartisan approaches nearly impossible. Nonetheless, to dilute this strong (and perhaps toxic) grip partisanship has on the debate, change must come from the top.

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Appendix A

Dependent Variable

Q.94 Should LEGAL immigration into the United States be kept at its present level, increased or decreased?

- 1 Kept at present level
Increased
- 0 Decreased
- OMIT Don't Know/Refused

Independent Variables

NATIVISM (Q.92) Just in general ... how sympathetic would you say you are toward immigrants who are in the United States illegally?

- 1 Very sympathetic
Somewhat sympathetic
- 0 Somewhat UNSympathetic
Very UNSympathetic
- OMIT Don't Know/Refused

PARTY In politics TODAY, do you consider yourself a Republican, Democrat, or independent?

- 0 Republican
- 1 Democrat
- OMIT Independent
- OMIT No preference
- OMIT Other party
- OMIT Don't Know/Refused

EDUC What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?

- 1 Less than high school (Grades 1-8 or no formal schooling)
- 2 High school incomplete (Grades 9-11 or Grade 12 with NO diploma)
- 3 High school graduate (Grade 12 with diploma or GED certificate)
- 4 Some college, no degree (includes some community college)
- 5 Two year associate degree from a college or university
- 6 Four year college or university degree/Bachelor's degree (e.g., BS, BA, AB)
- 7 Some postgraduate or professional schooling, no postgraduate degree (e.g. some graduate school)

Appendix A Cont.

- 8 Postgraduate or professional degree, including master's, doctorate, medical or law degree (e.g., MA, MS, PhD, MD, JD, graduate school)
 OMIT Don't Know/Refused

INCOME Last year, that is in 2017, what was your total family income from all sources, before taxes? Just stop me when I get to the right category.

- 1 Less than \$10,000
 2 10 to under \$20,000
 3 20 to under \$30,000
 4 30 to under \$40,000
 5 40 to under \$50,000
 6 50 to under \$75,000
 7 75 to under \$100,000
 8 100 to under \$150,000
 9 \$150,000 or more
 OMIT Don't Know/Refused

LOCALE (Q.100) How often do you personally come into contact with immigrants who speak little or no English ...

- 1 Often
 Sometimes
 0 Rarely
 Never
 OMIT Don't Know/Refused

AGE What is your age?

- _____ years
 97 97 or older
 OMIT Don't Know/Refused

SEX

- 0 Male
 1 Female
 OMIT Don't Know/Refused