

Immigration Opposition Among U.S. Whites: General Ethnocentrism or Media Priming of Attitudes About Latinos?

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General ethnocentrism seems to be a powerful antecedent of immigration opinion, typically displaying larger effects than economic concerns. News about immigration, however, may focus attention on a particular group in a given historical moment. We predict group-specific affect, not general ethnocentrism, should most powerfully shape immigration policy opinion in the contemporary United States. We test this expectation with content analyses of news coverage, survey data from 1992 to 2008, a survey experiment, and official statistics. First, we find that mentions of Latinos in news coverage of immigration outpace mentions of other groups beginning in 1994, the year when Proposition 187, a proposal in California to end most social welfare and educational assistance to illegal immigrants, garnered significant national attention. Second, while ethnocentrism dominates economic concerns in explanations of Whites' immigration policy opinions, attitudes toward Latinos in particular account for nearly all of the impact of ethnocentrism since 1994. Finally, journalistic attention to Latino immigration roughly parallels actual rates of immigration from Latin America, suggesting the media shaping of policy opinion around this group may be driven by real-world demographic patterns.

KEY WORDS: immigration, Latinos, media priming, ethnocentrism

The public debate about immigration policy is heated in the United States and around the world, and recent historical events have exacerbated tensions between natives and newcomers. Passed in 2010, Arizona State Senate Bill 1070, for example, requires police to check the citizenship status of anyone they suspect is in the United States illegally. Arizona House Bill 2281, passed the same year, eliminates ethnic studies curricula from public schools. While public support for new immigrants has never been widespread, it has been particularly scarce in recent years (Fetzer, 2000; Kinder & Kam, 2009; Lapinski, Peltola, Shaw, & Yang, 1997). Public rhetoric often highlights the economic and cultural costs of immigration, but rarely touts the benefits of new taxpayers or low-wage labor. Finally, concerns about immigration often emerge in public discussions about other important policies such as health care reform and national security.

Two broad sets of explanations have been offered for variation over time and across groups and societies in opposition to immigration. One focuses on economic burdens new citizens bring to the

host nation. At the aggregate level, opposition to immigration tends to increase during severe economic downturns (Espenshade & Calhoun, 1993; Foner, 1964; Gimpel, Burns, & Edwards, 1999; Harwood, 1983; Higham, 1988/1955; Lapinski et al., 1997; Olzak, 1992; Simon & Alexander, 1993). Some studies also find individual economic vulnerabilities to be correlated with resistance to new immigrants (Abowd & Freeman, 1991; Borjas & Freeman, 1992).

These economic forces, therefore, can be divided into two broad categories: aggregate *fiscal burdens* that increase the size of the welfare state, and *market competition* that threatens individuals in specific job sectors. In the first case, pressure that immigrants put on national, state, and local social welfare agencies may boost opposition due to the fears of increased taxation, educational costs, and other burdens on infrastructure (Coenders & Scheepers, 1998; Quillian, 1995). Calavita (1996) suggests that support for Proposition (Prop) 187, a controversial California ballot initiative in 1994 eliminating social services for illegal immigrants, was driven by such concerns. The recession of the early 1990s hit California hard, the argument goes, increasing public sensitivity to social welfare burdens.

National economic concerns, however, do not always trigger opposition to immigration. Citrin, Green, Muste, and Wong (1997) found that optimism about the economy in the mid-1990s coincided with an *increase* in opposition to immigration. Hainmueller and Hiscox (2010) employ a survey experiment to test the *fiscal burden* hypothesis—that wealthy natives should oppose low-skilled immigration because of the added share of the tax burden these citizens carry. They find instead that all natives, regardless of occupational status, opposed low-skilled immigration. If anything, high-skilled natives seem less opposed to immigration than their low-skilled countrymen.

The second variant of the economic explanation—the *labor market competition* hypothesis—suggests opposition to immigration will be highest among individuals most likely to lose their jobs to newcomers. There is some circumstantial evidence for this. Cross-nationally, economically vulnerable groups sometimes display higher opposition to immigration compared to those who are well off (Clark & Legge, 2009; Pettigrew, Wagner, & Christ, 2007). Low-wage laborers, who are subject to greater occupational competition with new working-class immigrants, oppose immigration most (Scheve & Slaughter, 2001). However, Hainmueller and Hiscox (2010) find little experimental support for the labor market competition hypothesis. Regardless of their own occupational status, natives in their study preferred high-skilled immigrants. Therefore, the effect of job competition on immigration opinion may be large in magnitude but focused only on very narrow occupational strata (Malhotra, Margalit, & Mo, 2010).

Evidence about the role of economic concerns in opposition to immigration, therefore, has been inconsistent. On the other hand, symbolic attitudes such as group identities turn up as powerful in study after study. The notion that many domains of public opinion are “group-centric” has been well established (Nelson & Kinder, 1996), and immigration is no exception (Citrin et al., 1997). Lee and Ottati (2002) find that the tendency to rate out-groups negatively powerfully boosted support for Prop 187. Social dominance orientation and authoritarian personality are also associated with anti-immigrant sentiment (Pettigrew et al., 2007). Sides and Citrin (2007) also find symbolic attitudes to be much stronger predictors of immigration policy opinions than economic concerns or real variation in the size of immigrant populations across Europe.

Ethnocentrism, defined as the preference for and positive affect toward one’s ethnic or racial group relative to all others (Yinger, 1985), has been shown to predict immigration opposition across a range of contexts (Sniderman & Hagendoorn, 2007; Sniderman, Hagendoorn, & Prior, 2004). The strong and consistent correlation among attitudes toward a wide variety of groups has long been noted (Adorno, Frankel-Brunswick, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950). Kinder and Kam (2009) find ethnocentrism to be positively correlated with support for restrictive immigration policies among White Americans in the early 1990s. Further, they find few distinctions in the strength of correlations between immigration policy opinion and attitudes about Latinos, Asians, or other minority groups.

When they control for attitudes about particular out-groups (such as Latinos), the impact of general ethnocentrism is reduced only slightly, if at all.¹

Group-specific attitudes may play a much larger role than has been previously demonstrated. Kinder and Kam's (2009) analyses utilize American National Election Studies (ANES) surveys up to the early 1990s. Since that time, media coverage of immigration has come to focus intensely on Latinos (Chavez, 2001; Huntington, 2004; Santa Ana, 2002; Waldman, Ventura, Savillo, Lin, & Lewis, 2008). Burns and Gimpel (2000) maintain that the power of attitudes about Latinos increased between 1992 and 1996. In 1992, opinions on immigration policy were strongly associated with attitudes toward a variety of racial and ethnic groups. The term "immigrant," therefore, may have been understood in a more general way. By 1996, the impact of negative Black stereotypes decreased, while the impact of negative Latino stereotypes increased dramatically. Prop 187, also known as the "Save Our State" ballot initiative, garnered national attention in 1994. As a result of real trends in immigration and the news coverage it triggers, we expect large differences may have emerged in the impact of affect toward Latinos, Asians, and Blacks on immigration opinion among Whites.

White Americans' attitudes about illegal immigration are quite sensitive to racial cues (Segovia, 2009). Brader, Valentino, and Suhay (2008) find that while Latino immigrant cues do not increase perceptions of threat relative to White European cues, they do trigger stronger anxiety. This anxiety in turn boosts opposition to new immigrants. Implicit attitudes toward Latino immigrants are quite negative and strongly associated with policy opinions (Pérez, 2010).

These findings about group cues suggest a narrower "racial priming" process than is proposed by the ethnocentrism hypothesis. Racial priming theory (Mendelberg, 2001; Valentino, Hutchings, & White, 2002) suggests that subtle negative group cues in the media can activate racial attitudes, boosting their impact on political judgments. If correct, the impact of attitudes about specific out-groups, not more general ethnocentric sentiments, will drive public opinion depending on the salience of the group in the political environment. In other words, *which* group attitudes will be most powerful at any moment depends in part on the media.

We focus on the media contexts that lead Latino immigrants to be both stigmatized and anxiety-producing. Media attention to particular groups may explain variation in support for immigration across individuals and over time. Based on the descriptions of news coverage about immigration in the late 1990s and early 2000s reviewed above, we propose that negative attitudes about Latinos were increasingly salient relative to other immigrant groups in the United States (Asians, in particular). If so, by 2008 we should see a sharp distinction between Whites' attitudes about Latinos and other groups as predictors of immigration policy opinion.

Of course, economic interests and group prejudice may also be causally linked. Real economic threats might activate existing levels of prejudice, causing them to become more potent predictors of policy opinion (Rickert, 1998; Sniderman, Hagendoorn, & Prior, 2004). Alternatively, economic stressors may directly boost ethnocentrism or specific group prejudice, which might then lead to opposition to immigration (Jackson & Inglehart, 1995). This notion is consistent with group position theory (Blumer, 1958; Bobo & Hutchings, 1996), which suggests that perceived competition over scarce resources triggers negative out-group attitudes and thus boosts opposition to egalitarian policies. The dimension of intergroup comparison seems to matter. Cultural similarity between dominant group members and immigrants seems to reduce negative attitudes, while perceived class similarity leads to increased prejudice and negativity toward immigrants (Zárata, García, Garza, & Hitlan, 2004). While our primary focus is on the direct effects of economic interests and symbolic attitudes, we also investigate these indirect causal explanations.

¹ In this article, we use the term "Latino" consistently to describe U.S. citizens and/or immigrants who trace their ancestry to Latin America. However, the more general term "Hispanic" is often used in surveys and in the Census and includes immigrants from Spain. In the United States, the words are functionally synonymous.

Methods

Several types of evidence are necessary in order to evaluate our claims. First, we analyze a nationally representative Internet survey taken in 2008. An experiment embedded in this survey helps illuminate the causal impact of cues about specific immigrant groups on policy opinions. ANES data allows us to replicate our findings and extend our tests of the causal antecedents of immigration opinion back to 1992. We also track journalistic attention to specific immigrant groups in several newspapers from 1985 to the present. Finally, estimates by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) help determine how closely the group focus of immigration news coverage hews to actual immigration patterns.

Sample

We conducted a survey using Knowledge Networks (KN) before and after election day, 2008. KN participants are initially recruited to the pool using random sampling from an address-based frame. After agreeing to participate in the KN pool, participants are given free Internet access and use either their personal computer or a laptop provided to them. A very large, randomly drawn pool of participants is thus available for sampling in any study. This procedure allows for national Internet samples that match population demographics quite closely by including households that did not initially have a computer or Internet access. Individuals in the pool participate in no more than one survey per week. While there is some debate about the representativeness of online samples, especially with regard to bias for high socioeconomic status and political interested subjects, KN seems to perform far better than nonprobability samples on these dimensions (Chang & Krosnick, 2010).

Respondents for this survey were drawn randomly from the larger KN participant pool. Selected respondents were sent an email invitation to participate in the study. They were told the study involved public opinion about current issues and politics. The study included pre- and post-election surveys. For the pre-election wave, 1,184 people were invited to participate. The pre-election interviews took place between October 22 and November 3 (the day before the election). Of those contacted, 617 completed the survey, for a cooperation rate of 52%. All questions were answered using the web interface. The median interview date for the first wave was October 24. Though we ask many items of interest in both waves, we focus here on the first-wave responses. We ran all analyses for both waves with nearly identical results.

Of the 617 valid first wave interviews, 421 were from White, non-Latino U.S. citizens. We interviewed 49 African Americans, 39 Latinos, 18 Asians, and 18 respondents of mixed race. We restrict our analyses to Whites because no other ethnic group was large enough to permit reliable inferences. Seventy-two respondents were not U.S. citizens and so were also excluded. We focus on White citizens as an example of the opinion-formation process among the economically and numerically dominant social group.²

We replicate the results from our 2008 study with data from the ANES.³ Models are matched as closely as possible. The ANES data are used for two specific tests. First, we replicate models comparing the impact of material interests with ethnocentrism and more group-specific affect in 2008 on a scale of immigration policy opinion. Second, using a measure of immigration support that is asked beginning in 1992, we analyze similar models over time to determine whether changes in the

² Data from the 2008 survey data are weighted. KN provides poststratification weights, derived from distributions for age, race, ethnicity, gender, education, and Census region. Distributions are adjusted based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau. More information about KN procedures can be obtained from their website (www.knowledgenetworks.com).

³ ANES data are weighted. The weights adjust for unequal probability of household selection, for respondent selection within households, and for nonresponse. Poststratification adjustments correct for differences from benchmarks, the source of which are usually the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Surveys. For more information, see DeBell and Krosnick (2009).

news coverage parallel changes in the impact of attitudes about Latinos versus other groups on immigration opinion.

Measures

Our key outcome measures include beliefs about the impact of immigration and opinions about specific policies. To measure perceptions of immigration's impact on jobs, we employ a 5-point scale of "how likely it is that immigration will have a negative impact on jobs for American citizens." The second item uses the same response categories to measure views of immigration's impact on American communities: "Setting aside job concerns, how likely is it that immigration will have a negative impact on the way of life in American communities?" We combined these items to create a scale of negative immigration beliefs (Cronbach's alpha = .82).

We also measured support for specific immigration policy proposals. One item asked whether "the number of immigrants from foreign countries who are permitted to come to the United States should be increased, decreased or kept about the same," measured on a 5-point scale. We also tapped agreement and disagreement with two statements: (1) "Immigrants should only be allowed to take jobs that cannot be filled by American workers"; and (2) "Immigrants should be allowed receive government benefits like Social Security and Medicaid." We summed all three items to create an immigration opposition policy scale (Cronbach's alpha = .63).

An experiment in the 2008 KN survey manipulated the regional origin of immigrants in a question regarding the impact of immigration on American communities. The question asks respondents on a 5-point scale "[h]ow worried are you about the effect that immigrants from (Latin America/East Asia/Africa/Eastern Europe) are having on communities across the United States?" A control group got the same question without any region mentioned.

In order to measure group attitudes, we used standard feeling-thermometer ratings for African Americans, Asians, Hispanics, and Whites. Respondents were told "we would like to get your feelings about several groups in society" and were asked to rate each group between 0 and 100 degrees. We created a general ethnocentrism scale patterned after Kinder and Kam (2009) in which the average of the three out-group thermometers (in this case, for Blacks, Asians, and Hispanics) was subtracted from the in-group thermometer (in this case, Whites).⁴ We also created specific group difference scores between Whites and each out-group. All these measures are scaled to run from -1 (preference for the out-group) to +1 (preference for the in-group).

In measuring material interests, our goal was to tap both national, i.e., sociotropic, threat as well as individual economic vulnerability. Household income is measured in \$5,000 increments from less than \$5,000 to \$175,000 or more. The variable is distributed such that 11.2% report an income of less than \$20,000, 42.7% have incomes between \$20,000 and \$49,000, 37.9% make at least \$50,000 but less than \$100,000, and 18.1% make \$100,000 or more. We also included a subjective measure of personal financial insecurity: "As far as you and their family are concerned, how worried are you about your present financial situation?" To measure national economic concerns, we included both a retrospective and a prospective question. The former asks "over the past year has the nation's economy gotten better, stayed the same, or gotten worse?" The prospective measure asks whether in the next 12 months the economy as a whole will get better, stay the same, or get worse. These variables were coded so that higher values indicated more concern either personally or nationally.

Variables that might account for the relationship between economic or group-based concerns and immigration opinion are also included as controls. Partisanship is measured using the standard 7-point party identification scale. Education is measured as the highest level of education completed

⁴ The ANES uses the label "Hispanic" rather than "Latino" in feeling thermometers. We adopted this term in our 2008 survey so we could closely compare results to the ANES time series.

among 11 response categories. In the sample, 10% have less than a high school education, 27.7% are high school graduates, and 31.4% have a college degree or higher. Age in years is also included.

Results

Table 1 presents results for our model of material interests versus ethnocentrism as predictors of beliefs about the negative impact of immigration on American culture, jobs, and the economy. The first column includes the general ethnocentrism measure, while the second column includes group-specific comparisons between feeling thermometers for Whites and other groups. In the first row, we see that personal financial concerns in 2008 are associated with believing immigration will harm Americans' way of life and job prospects. This association is statistically robust and substantively large: moving from the least to the most positive personal financial outlook reduces negative

Table 1. Impact of Material Interests and Ethnocentrism on Negative Beliefs about Immigration

	Negative Immigration Beliefs Scale	
Economic Threat Perceptions		
Negative Personal Financial Outlook	0.220*** (0.061)	0.214*** (0.061)
Negative Retrospective Economic Evaluation	-0.013 (0.089)	-0.008 (0.087)
Negative Prospective Economic Evaluation	-0.050 (0.061)	-0.070 (0.061)
Vulnerable Groups		
Unemployed	0.110 (0.076)	0.074 (0.066)
Laborer	-0.014 (0.062)	-0.001 (0.060)
Union Member	-0.021 (0.058)	-0.025 (0.054)
Income	0.052 (0.082)	0.032 (0.083)
Ethnocentrism	0.293*** (0.076)	
Specific Out-group Comparisons		
White-Black FT		0.005 (0.116)
White-Asian FT		-0.155 (0.098)
White-Hispanic FT		0.413*** (0.132)
Controls		
Party ID	0.194*** (0.045)	0.181*** (0.046)
Age	0.268*** (0.080)	0.260*** (0.078)
Education	-0.120 (0.128)	-0.119 (0.124)
Constant	0.360** (0.120)	0.382*** (0.120)
R^2	0.241	0.267
N	345	345

Note: All data are weighted. Reported N 's are unweighted. Dependent variable is coded 0 to 1. Entries are unstandardized OLS coefficients. $^{\wedge}p < .10$; $*p < .05$; $**p < .01$; $***p < .001$, two-tailed. Standard errors are in parentheses.

beliefs about immigration by 22 percentage points. On the other hand, national economic concerns (retrospective or prospective) are not significantly related to beliefs about the negative impact of immigration.

We also found no association between membership in a variety of economically vulnerable groups and negative beliefs about immigration. Neither laborers nor union members showed heightened concern about the impact of immigration. Likewise, neither employment status nor income significantly affected beliefs about immigration. These relatively weak results for economic vulnerability are quite typical of findings in this area.

On the other hand, ethnocentrism exerts a substantively and statistically enormous effect on negative views of the cultural and economic impact of immigration. Moving from the lowest to the highest value (i.e., -1 to 1) on the ethnocentrism scale boosts negative beliefs by 59 percentage points. The standardized coefficient (not reported here) for ethnocentrism is the largest in Model 1.⁵

The second column of Table 1 displays results for the same model except with individual group comparisons replacing general ethnocentrism. Recall that the ethnocentrism scale measures the deviation of the in-group (White) thermometer from the average of the out-group (Black, Asian, and Hispanic) thermometers. In the right-hand column, it is replaced by three variables tapping the deviation of the White feeling thermometer from that for Blacks, Asians, and Hispanics. The overall pattern of results is identical to the model in the left-hand column. However, here we find, as predicted, that the White-Hispanic difference is the only significant group-attitudes predictor of immigration beliefs. In these models, the White-Hispanic feeling thermometer score makes the largest contribution to explaining anti-immigration views. These results suggest that sentiments toward Asians and Blacks play little role in Whites' perceptions of the impact of immigration. When Whites think of immigration, they think of Latinos.

We replicate these models for a different dependent variable—support for restrictive immigration policy—in Table 2. To remind the reader, the dependent variable is coded 0 to 1 and consists of an additive scale of support for restrictive immigration policies. The results are nearly identical to those reported in Table 1. Personal financial concern still modestly boosts immigration policy restrictiveness, but other economic concerns and vulnerable group memberships have no significant impact on policy views. Ethnocentrism is strongly associated with immigration policy restrictiveness, as expected. Again, however, when we break down the general ethnocentrism measure in the second column, we see that the White-Hispanic feeling thermometer is the only group measure to have a significant impact on policy views. The more White respondents favor their own group over Hispanics, the more restrictive their preference on immigration policy becomes. Attitudes about Latinos in particular, not general ethnocentrism, are associated with policy opinions about immigration.

Next we report on the results of a question-wording experiment that manipulates the regional origin of immigrants under consideration. The results in Table 3 provide additional support for the notion that attitudes about Latinos dominate the contemporary immigrant schema in the minds of White Americans. In the first column, we report means on the 5-point scale of worry ($1 = \textit{not at all worried}$ to $5 = \textit{extremely worried}$) about the effect immigrants from various regions have on “communities across the United States.” In the control group, the mean response was 3, representing *moderately worried* on this scale. When the question invokes immigrants from Latin America in particular, the mean is nearly identical (2.88) and statistically indistinguishable from the baseline condition containing no explicit reference to a region. The mean level of worry about immigrants from East Asia (the second biggest contributing region to contemporary U.S. immigration) is slightly

⁵ We explored whether material interests have a larger impact specifically on the item measuring beliefs about the negative economic impact of immigration and whether ethnocentrism predominantly drives cultural concerns. This was not the case.

Table 2. Impact of Ethnocentrism Versus Group-Specific Attitudes on Immigration Policy Restrictions

	Immigration Policy Restrictiveness Scale	
Economic Threat Perceptions		
Negative Personal Financial Outlook	0.107** (0.043)	0.105** (0.043)
Negative Retrospective Economic Evaluation	-0.067 (0.050)	-0.059 (0.053)
Negative Prospective Economic Evaluation	0.000 (0.044)	-0.016 (0.045)
Vulnerable Groups		
Unemployed	-0.032 (0.038)	-0.051 (0.043)
Laborer	0.034 (0.055)	0.042 (0.053)
Union Member	-0.032 (0.058)	-0.035 (0.056)
Income	-0.010 (0.062)	-0.024 (0.063)
Ethnocentrism	0.230*** (0.068)	
Specific Out-group Comparisons		
White-Black FT		0.062 (0.081)
White-Asian FT		-0.125 (0.082)
White-Hispanic FT		0.271*** (0.094)
Controls		
Party ID	0.162*** (0.035)	0.150*** (0.035)
Age	0.089 (0.059)	0.082 (0.058)
Education	-0.241*** (0.092)	-0.244*** (0.091)
Constant	0.614*** (0.084)	0.633*** (0.086)
R^2	0.211	0.232
N	345	345

Note: Data are weighted. Reported N 's are unweighted. Dependent variable is coded 0 to 1. Entries are unstandardized OLS coefficients. $^{\wedge}p < .10$; $*p < .05$; $**p < .01$; $***p < .001$, by two-tailed test. Standard errors are in parentheses.

lower (2.65) and marginally distinct from the control ($t = 1.79$, $p < .10$, two-tailed). The last two cells in column 1 contain even lower levels of worry about immigrants from Africa and Eastern Europe. These groups seem to provoke significantly less concern than immigrants from Latin America.

The similarity between the control and Latin America conditions suggests Whites may be thinking of Latinos when they think about immigration. These results are consistent with direct tests of the automatic linkage between the two schemas (Pérez, 2010). Knoll, Redlawsk, and Sanborn (forthcoming) also find no difference in the impact of frames that emphasize “Mexicans” compared to ones that merely mention “immigrants.” Second, immigrants from other regions of the world do not trigger as much anxiety as do Latin American immigrants. The fact that immigrants from Asia, Africa, and Eastern Europe trigger less concern than those from Latin America further suggests that general ethnocentrism is not driving policy views or beliefs about the impact of immigration on the nation’s economy or cultural values.

Table 3. Question Wording Experiment on Group-Specific Concerns About Impact of Immigration
How worried are you about the effect that immigrants (from . . . Latin America/East Asia/Eastern Europe) are having on communities across the United States?

	Mean Response	Difference of Means w/Control (t-value)	Difference of Means w/Latin America (t-value)	Difference of Means w/East Asia (t-value)	Difference of Means w/Africa (t-value)
Control	3.00 (1.23)				
Latin America	2.88 (1.35)	0.61			
East Asia	2.65 (1.23)	1.79 [^]	1.15		
Africa	2.20 (1.20)	4.29***	3.57***	2.37*	
East Europe	2.36 (1.25)	3.22**	2.56*	1.45	0.80

Note: Scale runs from 1 (*not worried at all*) to 5 (*very worried*).

[^] $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$, by two-tailed test. Standard errors are in parentheses.

In Table 4, we present results from a replication of the previous models using data from the 2008 ANES survey.⁶ In these models, we include both retrospective and prospective personal and national financial considerations. In this case, personal financial views have little impact on immigration policy restrictiveness. As before, economic perceptions do not seem to drive opposition to immigration. Vulnerable groups are generally not more opposed to immigration, though union membership modestly boosts opposition. However, in this case income has a significant impact in the opposite direction to that predicted: Controlling for other variables, wealthier Whites are *more* opposed to new immigrants than those who are less well off.

As in our own 2008 survey, the association between ethnocentrism and immigration policy restrictiveness dwarfs that of perceived economic threats or membership in economically vulnerable groups. However, in the second column of Table 4, affect toward the in-group compared to Hispanics is again the only group comparison that is significantly related to immigration opinion. Furthermore, the coefficient for the differenced Hispanic thermometer is significantly larger than that for either the Asian or Black thermometer ($p < .05$). These results replicate the pattern of findings from the KN survey almost exactly.

Two other possible causal explanations are worth attention. One is that attitudes about Latinos might be more powerful predictors of immigration opinion *among natives who feel economically threatened*. We tested the interactions between Latino attitudes and each of the economic threat variables in these models to determine if these economic factors activated negative attitudes about the group. We found no evidence of such moderating effects; the effect of attitudes about Latinos did not vary significantly across levels of economic threat. A second possible causal pathway involves a potential mediating effect of racial attitudes *between* economic threat and immigration opinion: Perhaps economic threats cause negative racial attitudes, and these negative feelings in turn drive policy opinions. We examined models with and without the White-Hispanic feeling thermometer to test this hypothesis. The impact of economic concerns was not significantly larger when we excluded the White-Latino thermometer score and consequently is not reduced by inclusion of the variable.

⁶ The sample available for the analysis displayed in Table 4 ($n = 448$) is a subset of the total number of ANES respondents interviewed in 2008. One reason for the reduced sample is our focus on White, non-Hispanic respondents. However we lost additional respondents because the study contained a number of split samples. In particular, the prospective economic outlook question (V083084x) cuts the available sample in half.

Table 4. Replication Models of Immigration Policy Restrictiveness With the 2008 ANES Survey

	Ethnocentrism Model	Feeling Thermometer Difference Model
Economic Threat Perceptions		
Negative Retrospective Personal Financial Situation	-.049 (.036)	-.052 (.035)
Prospective Personal Financial Situation	.012 (.044)	.013 (.044)
Evaluation of Nation's Economy Over Past year	.030 (.032)	.029 (.031)
Projected Evaluation of Nation's Economy Over Next 12 Months	-.014 (.039)	-.013 (.039)
Vulnerable Groups		
Unemployed	.044 (.048)	.050 (.048)
Union Member	.078** (.027)	.073** (.027)
Income	.165*** (.042)	.162*** (.042)
Ethnocentrism	.360*** (.075)	
Specific Out-group Comparisons		
White-Black FT		-.046 (.084)
White-Asian FT		.101 (.078)
White-Hispanic FT		.278*** (.062)
Controls		
Party ID	.137*** (.029)	.143*** (.029)
Age	.043 (.042)	.043 (.041)
Education	-.497*** (.086)	-.487*** (.084)
Constant	.878*** (.077)	.863*** (.075)
R^2	.289	.300
N	448	448

Note: All data are weighted. Reported N 's are unweighted. Policy scale consists of four variables: Opinion toward program where immigrants can work for three years before returning to home country, opinion toward illegal immigrants become U.S. citizens, importance of controlling immigration as an important foreign policy goal, and opinion on the number of immigrants permitted to come to the United States. The variable is coded on a 0 to 1 scale such that greater values indicate negative attitudes toward immigration. $^{\wedge}p < .10$; $*p < .05$; $**p < .01$; $***p < .001$, by two-tailed test. Standard errors are in parentheses.

This pattern suggests there is no mediation of the impact of economic threats via group attitudes in these data.⁷

Why have group-specific attitudes come to dominate immigration opinion over the last 25 years? We suspect group-specific ingredients of immigration opinion change with media attention. As the media increases its attention to Latino immigration relative to other groups, the impact of attitudes about Latinos should also increase. Several studies suggest that the media and political elites have

⁷ Results available from the authors on request.

negatively stigmatized Latinos over the last 20 years, especially in regard to illegal immigration (Chavez, 2001; Huntington, 2004; Santa Ana, 2002; Waldman et al., 2008). We undertook a systematic check on the relative attention the media has given to various immigrant groups over time. We performed a content analysis of coverage of immigration in seven major newspapers from various regions of the country. We compare the incidence of group-specific mentions of Latinos compared to others in immigration news over time.

News mentioning immigration in any section of the *New York Times*, the *Houston Chronicle*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Charlotte Observer*, the *Seattle Times*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, and the *Washington Post* between 1985 and 2009 was sampled.⁸ These newspapers are prominent regional or national papers with large subscriptions. They cover most areas of the country without overrepresenting the southwest where we might expect special attention to Latino immigration.⁹ A computer search identified articles that mentioned “immigration” or “immigrant(s)” and also included the words Hispanic(s), Latino(s), or the names of countries from which significant numbers have emigrated to the United States according to the Department of Homeland Security.¹⁰ We also searched for news about immigration mentioning Asians, Africans, and Muslims. Figure 1 tracks coverage over time, as a percentage of all stories in a given newspaper that mentions both immigration and each region.

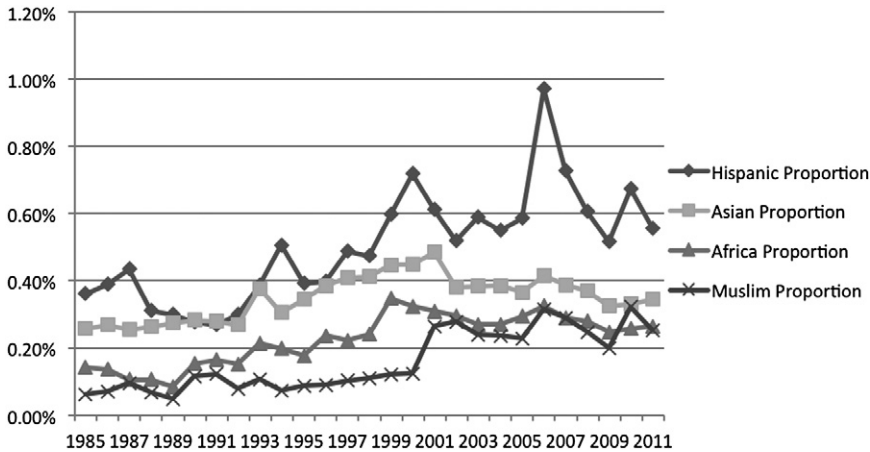


Figure 1. The coincidence of immigration and national group mentions in newspapers, 1985–2009. Points represent the percentage of the total number of stories published in that year in all the papers examined that discuss immigration from a particular region of origin. Search words identifying each regional group were drawn from the country names representing the largest groups of immigrants to the United States as identified by the Department of Homeland Security. Hispanic: Hispanic, Latino/a, Latin America(n), Central America(n), Mexic(o/an), Cuba(n), El Salvador(an). Asian: Asia(n), Chin(a/ese), Philippines, Filipino, Vietnam(ese), Korea(n), Japan(ese), Cambodia(n), Khmer, Lao(s/tian), Hmong, Thai(s). African: Africa(n), Nigeria(n), Ghana(ian), Ethiopia(n), Eritrea(n), Egypt(ian), Somali(a/ian), South African. Muslim: Muslim, Arab, Islamic, Saudi Arabia(n), Kuwait(i), Iran, Leban(on/ese), Iraq(i), Pakistan(i), Palestin(e/ian), Afghani(stan). Searches performed on Newsbank Archive articles from *New York Times*, *Charlotte Observer*, *Houston Chronicle*, *Seattle Times*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Washington Post*, and *Chicago Tribune*.

⁸ These papers were consistently available starting in 1985 via NewsBank, an online service that archives a comprehensive full-text collection of newspapers.

⁹ Indeed, though southwestern newspapers are not well represented in the Newsbank archive, it does contain articles from the *Arizona Daily Star* since 1991. Coverage in this newspaper shows the sharpest increases in mentions of Latinos in articles about immigration. These articles were not included in the full content analysis because the archive did not go back to 1985. From 2009 to 2011, we needed to use ProQuest news archives to capture coverage in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* since these papers were no longer carried by Newsbank in those years. Data for the other papers continue to be drawn from Newsbank.

¹⁰ Data drawn from the DHS website at <http://www.dhs.gov/files/statistics/immigration.shtm>.

The trends in coverage depicted in Figure 1 are consistent with our expectations. Between 1985 and 1993, Latinos were mentioned in news stories about immigration only slightly more than were other groups, and overall attention to the issue was quite low. In 1994, the year Prop 187 was on the ballot and voted into law in California, attention to immigration in general, and Latino immigration in particular, spiked in the news. After 1994, attention to immigration continued to increase, and by 2000 the distinct mention of Latinos in stories about immigration became significantly more common than news mentioning other groups. By the mid 2000s, news about immigration mentioning Latinos was by far the most common. News mentions of Latino immigrants peaked in 2006 in the wake of elite debate and mass protests surrounding the Border Protection, Anti-Terrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act. This bill, which was not passed into law, would have increased federal penalties for violating immigration laws and raised the classification of illegal immigration to felony status. The legislation was the catalyst for widespread protests over U.S. immigration policy throughout 2006. Attention to immigration waned somewhat in 2009, but regained traction by 2010 and 2011, with Latinos continuing to be the group most commonly associated with news articles on immigration.

Given the increased focus on Latinos in immigration news, we expect the impact of attitudes about Latinos to increase over the same period. Our reasoning is that as the “immigrant” schema becomes more frequently linked to a particular group, attitudes about that group should be at the top of the head when natives think about the issue. The ANES has asked one question tapping support for immigration with regularity over the last 20 years, and it is identical to one of the three items we use in our policy scale: “Should the number of immigrants from foreign countries who are permitted to come to the United States be increased, decreased or kept about the same?” We regressed answers to this question on the same explanatory model for all the years it was available (1992, 1994, 1996, 2000, 2004, and 2008). Controls for economic interests, age, education, income, union membership, party identification, and employment status were also included.

Figure 2 displays estimates of the impact of attitudes toward each out-group: Latinos, Asians, and Blacks. The figure plots regression coefficients for each group difference score drawn from models like the one presented in Table 4 performed on each election year study. The impact of White-Latino affect was minimal in 1992, but spiked in 1994 mirroring the news coverage trends. Following 1994, Latino

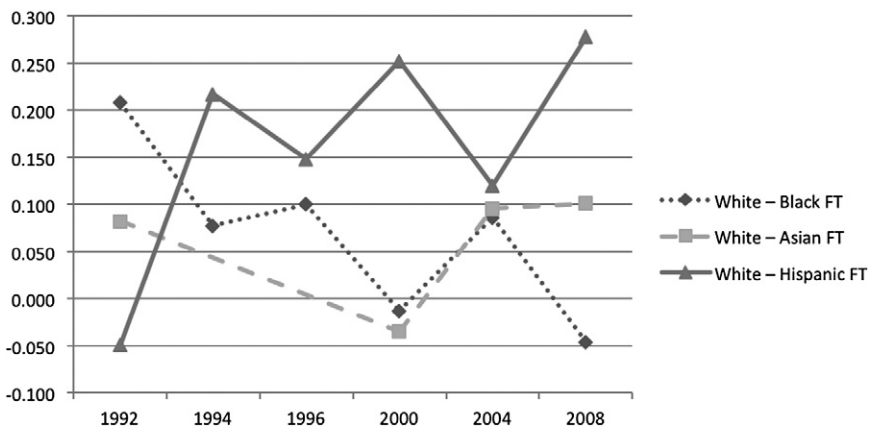


Figure 2. The relative impact of group-specific attitudes on opposition to immigration over time. (Source: ANES.) Points represent the regression coefficient for each group difference variable in each year drawn from a model with controls for personal and national material interests, age, education, income, labor, party ID, and employment status. Higher values represent a larger association between a particular group difference variable and opposition to immigration. The dependent variable is coded on a 0 to 1 scale such that greater values indicate opposition to immigration. The coefficient for the White-Hispanic thermometer is statistically significant in every year after 1992.

opinion remained stable and substantially larger than other group comparisons throughout the time series, except for 2004. The impact of affect about Asians relative to Whites was not significantly associated with immigration opinion in any of these years. Affect toward Blacks in 1992 was a significant predictor of immigration opinion, even though Africans do not comprise a significant percentage of immigrants in this period. This association dissipates completely by 2008. The impact of attitudes about Latinos is significantly larger than that of other groups in 2000 and 2008.

As in the rise of Latino attitudes after 1994, the temporary dip in 2004 is also consistent with a media priming account, since the 9/11 terrorist attacks temporarily focused concern on Muslim and Middle Eastern immigrants. The uptick in coverage of immigration mentioning Muslims or emigrés from the Middle East in Figure 2 coincides with these events. An alternate model for 2004 (not presented in Figure 2) found that the White-Muslim feeling-thermometer comparison makes a statistically significant contribution to immigration opinion.

The robustness of the results in Figure 2 might be questioned, since comparisons between group feeling thermometers may be sensitive to the particular control variables available to us in every year. Ideally, we need a systematic way to check many different model specifications to see if the pattern is not dependent on the particular controls we have in the model. These concerns about model uncertainty have led political scientists to employ Bayesian Model Averaging (Montgomery & Nyhan, 2010). The general technique averages over the entire set of model specifications and generates a posterior distribution of the likelihood that each model parameter will be nonzero in the best-fitting models produced. By examining the influence of each variable to see how often it appears in the best-fitting models, we can determine how robust a particular variable's contribution is to changes in the specification. We used this technique to assess the sensitivity of our estimates of the impact of the White-Hispanic feeling thermometer relative to other group comparisons.¹¹ The results are summarized graphically in Figure 3.

The figure presents several pieces of information about the results of the BMA procedure, which was run on all models from 1992 to 2008. First, each row represents one year, and each panel represents a specific variable in the model for that year. We present only the comparisons for the feeling thermometers, but all of the control variables were included in the analysis. In each panel, we can see the posterior distribution for the specific regression parameter. The probability that the variable does *not* contribute to the best-fitting models generated by the data is indicated by the height of the spike over the "0" point on the x -axis. Where a distribution is present, this represents the range of effect sizes a given variable returns over all the model configurations examined. Finally, the height of the distribution represents the posterior probability that the variable is in the model, approximated by a finite mixture of normal densities. What we find in 1992, for example, is that both White-Hispanic and the White-Asian feeling thermometers contribute little to the overall explanatory power of the best-fitting models. The impact of the White-Black thermometer is larger, and the posterior probability that it is in the best-fitting models is very close to 1. As we move down the rows, however, we see confirmation of our previous observation: The White-Hispanic feeling thermometer makes a substantively large and consistent contribution in the best-fitting models even after all possible combinations of the variables are examined. Furthermore, the other group affect variables rarely make an appearance. The year 2004 is the only exception, and here we see that the White-Muslim feeling thermometer makes a significant contribution to the best-fitting models while the other group comparisons drop out. By 2008, the influence of the White-Muslim comparison has waned and once again White-Hispanic thermometer is the largest and most significant group predictor.

Our last question is normative: Can we say anything about whether the pattern of effects we find are driven by a biased media system that covers Latinos disproportionately in stories about

¹¹ To conduct the BMA analysis, we employed the R package BMA, which searches over the entire model space using the "fast leaps and bounds" algorithm.

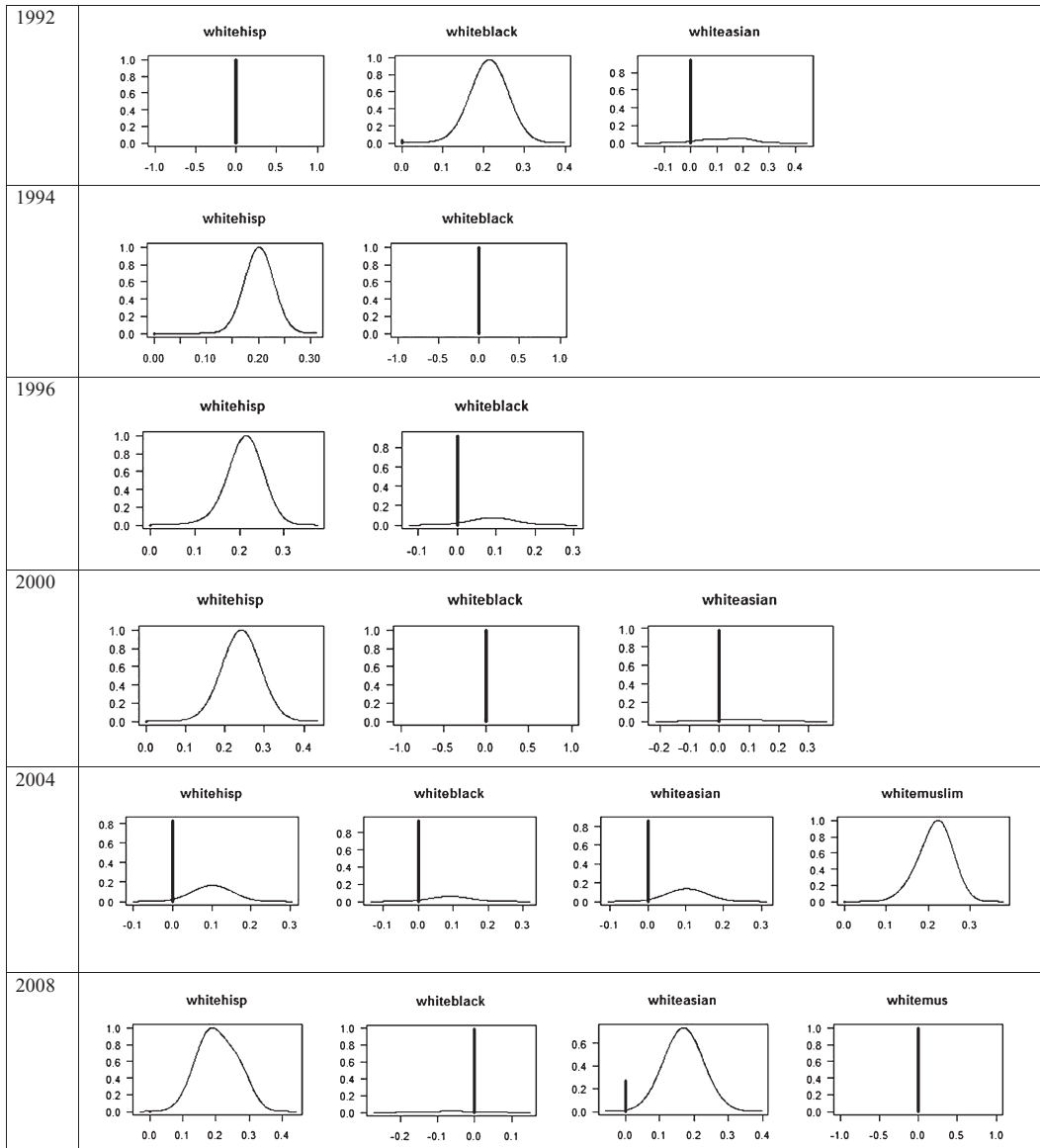


Figure 3. BMA posterior distribution of group-specific regression parameters, by year. Panels display BMA posterior distributions for coefficients on the difference between White and each out-group feeling thermometers available each year. Spike at 0 is the posterior probability that each variable is not in the model. Height of curve represents the posterior probability that the variable is in the model.

immigration, or are these the result of real changes in immigration patterns? Though we do not have conclusive evidence on this point, we can examine changes in real-world immigration patterns in the United States to see how closely they match the coverage and opinion patterns. Figure 4 displays trends in legal immigration since 1992 as compiled by the DHS. Latin Americans are the largest immigrant group, and their numbers are increasing faster than those from Europe and Canada, the Middle East, and Africa. However, Latin American and Asian immigration appear to track together closely over time, at least when it comes to legal resident status.

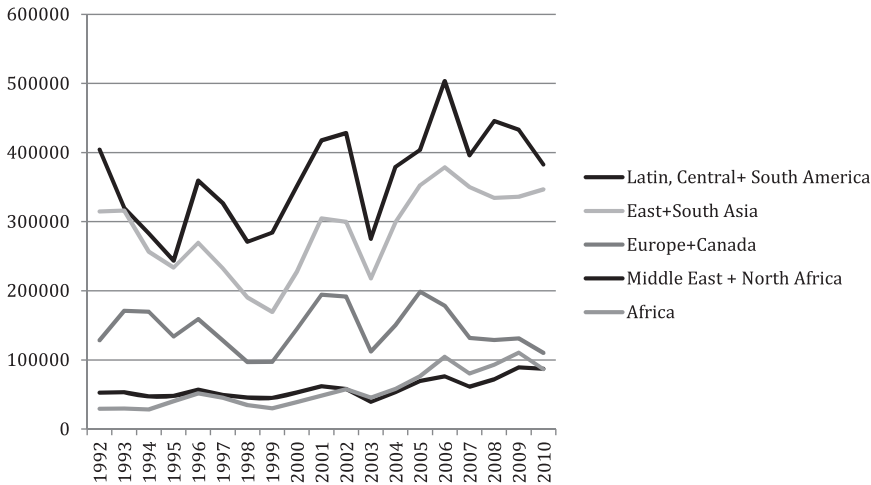


Figure 4. Legal foreign-born residents by region of birth, 1992–2010.

Source: Department of Homeland Security

Of course, one might be more interested in patterns of undocumented immigration as a trigger for both news coverage and opinion. Unfortunately, accurately measuring the region of origin for undocumented immigrants is no easy task. According to the DHS, however, the number of immigrants coming to the United States illegally since 2000 has been dominated by those from Latin America and has also increased at the same time undocumented immigration from Asia and other regions of the world has decreased.¹² These findings suggest the news might be more accurate, then, in its emphasis on Latinos if its focus is primarily on undocumented immigration.

These results suggest that newspaper coverage of immigration seems to underemphasize immigration from Asia while it is quite sensitive to changes in immigration from Latin, Central, and South America. These changes in journalistic attention, moreover, track closely with the impact of attitudes about Latinos on immigration policy opinions. But do these results prove that biases in news coverage is causing opinions to be driven by attitudes about Latinos? If so, we should be able to see changes in opinions mapping onto more substantive changes in immigration coverage, such as the types of problems that are linked to the issue in the presence of one group of immigrants compared to another. One way to further investigate these effects would be to measure the *tone* of immigration coverage of particular groups in more detail. If the news overemphasizes the frequency of social problems in a particular immigrant community, such as among Latinos, we would expect support for policy restrictions to be even more powerfully linked to attitudes about the group. While beyond our current study, we think this is an important topic for further research.

Conclusions

Our evidence is consistent with previous studies that have identified symbolic attitudes about groups as a powerful driver of opposition to new immigrants. Across several measures of economic threat, material interests make only a small contribution to explaining support for policies that would benefit immigrants or loosen restrictions on their entry into the United States. While not ruling out the impact of economic concerns, our results do confirm that immigration opinion is driven substantially by group attitudes.

¹² Data can be found at <http://www.dhs.gov/files/statistics/immigration.shtm>, and a figure documenting these trends in illegal immigration is available upon request from the authors.

While general ethnocentrism was a quite powerful predictor of White opinion on immigration in our data, the specific comparison between Whites and Latinos was doing most of the work. The difference between Whites' feelings about their own group compared to Latinos had the largest impact on every dependent variable we examined, including perceptions of harm to American jobs and values, as well as on support for immigration restrictions, allowing immigrants to take jobs in the United States, and allowing immigrants to receive government benefits.

Further evidence for this narrow out-group effect comes from a question wording experiment in which anxieties about the impact of ethnically unspecified "immigrants" are at the same level as anxieties about the impact of newcomers from Latin America. Immigrants from Eastern Europe and Africa triggered significantly less worry. Concern about immigrants from "East Asia" fell in between. In other words, when the group is not specified, Whites think of Latino immigrants. Further, immigrants from Africa or Eastern Europe provoke significantly less concern. We speculate that the lack of concern Whites show toward immigrants from Africa is a function of the small proportion of total immigration this group represents.

The use of explicit measures of group affect makes our tests here particularly conservative. A long literature suggests that people are often unaware of their own racial biases and are often willing to suppress negative attitudes even when they are aware of them. Unfortunately, we are unable to compare these effects among Whites with those for other ethnic groups. Kinder and Kam (2009) suggest that ethnocentrism should work much differently for Whites and Blacks than it does for Asians and Latinos, who are essentially torn between their ethnic and national identities. They do find large differences in the effect of ethnocentrism between Whites and Latinos, but due to sample sizes they cannot make these comparisons between Whites and Asians or Whites and Blacks. We suffer from the same challenges: We simply do not have enough cases to determine how powerful a force ethnocentrism is for Blacks. It is worth noting, however, that when we run our model on the 43 African Americans in our sample, the coefficient for ethnocentrism is only half of that reported for Whites. In future studies, researchers should oversample African Americans in order to estimate these effects with sufficient power.

The media's increasing focus on Latino immigration at the same time that we see attitudes about Latinos becoming a better predictor of immigration opinion suggests a group priming process. Previous work (Brader et al., 2008) has demonstrated just such a causal role for media coverage of immigration: Bad news about Latino immigrants, but not immigrants of other groups, causes Whites significant anxiety, and this anxiety is critical in triggering opposition to immigration. Thus, while these coverage patterns are not conclusive proof of cause, they are consistent with previous experimental results.

In some ways, a context-dependent theory of immigration opinion is unsatisfying. A model that posits group-specific attitudes as the primary drivers of policy opinion is not as elegant as one that posits a more general ethnocentrism drives opposition in any social system. The group-specific model requires more information about the social and historical context and debates about particular policy domains before one can fully explain opinion shifts or variation across society at any point in time. Therefore, one might think of our result as a more precise specification of the general theory of ethnocentrism. However, the broader theory supposes ethnocentrism is, itself, a general orientation toward *all* dissimilar groups in a wide variety of circumstances (Kinder & Kam, 2009). It insists that communal groups make invidious distinctions between the traditions, practices, values, and physical characteristics of their own group versus all others. While this notion might be consistent with our theory—that particular out-groups become focal at particular historical moments—it does not seem consistent with the notion that the majority will oppose all policies that benefit any out-group.

Our work suggests that particular groups do, in fact, figure more or less prominently in deliberation over the distribution of rights and resources depending on news salience. With regard to

immigration opinion in the United States, this process has led the list of possible group targets to settle primarily on one—Latinos—for much of the past two decades.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For excellent and careful commentary about this work, the authors would like to thank William Clark, Donald Kinder, Brendan Nyhan, Cara Wong, William Zimmerman, participants at the CPS Interdisciplinary Workshop on Politics and Policy, participants at the American Politics Seminar at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, participants at the Experimental Methods Speaker Series at Vanderbilt University, and participants in the Seminar on Intergroup Relations at the University of Texas at El Paso, especially Gaspare Genna and Michael Zárate. Correspondence concerning this article should be sent to Nicholas Valentino, 426 Thompson Street, Ann Arbor, MI 48106; nvalenti@umich.edu

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