

Explaining Attitudes toward Immigrants in the United States: Context, Class and Ideology

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This paper explores the influence of social context, class, and ideology on attitudes toward immigrants in the US. Using the conceptual frames of heterophobia and resource competition, we hypothesize that between 1996 and 2014 attitudes toward immigrants would become increasingly negative because of changes in the social context, in particular the growth in the number and diversity of immigrants. We also hypothesize that people in more precarious labor market positions, without a college education, and with a conservative religious ideology will have more negative attitudes toward immigrants. Using the General Social Survey at three points in time (1996, 2004, and 2014), we find mixed support for our hypotheses. Attitudes toward immigrants became more positive in the overall sample, but more negative for religious fundamentalists. Religious ideology and education were better predictors of attitudes toward immigrants than employment status and self-identified class. In general, the data show more support for the heterophobia explanation for negative attitudes than the resource competition explanation.

Keywords: Immigration, attitudes, United States, class, ideology, religious fundamentalism

Introduction

During the 2016 presidential election in the United States, candidate Donald Trump unleashed a maelstrom of anti-immigrant rhetoric that included talk of building a wall between the US and Mexico, banning migrants from specific Muslim dominated countries, and stereotyping immigrants as violent murderers and members of gangs. Given

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this rhetoric, we set out to examine national attitudes to see if this anti-immigrant campaign reflected attitudes of the general population. That is, did candidate Trump tap into some deep reservoir of anti-immigrant attitudes, and if so, who is likely to drink from this reservoir – who is more likely to have negative attitudes toward immigrants?

In general, American concerns about immigration can be characterized as four broad fears. First, the fear that immigrants take jobs or drive down wages. Second, the fear that immigrants are not assimilating or their presence produces cultural fragmentation and threatens dominant culture (e.g., language). Third, the fear that immigrants are a burden on the welfare state, that they don't pay their fair share of taxes and use too many government services. Fourth, the fear that immigrants are a threat to national security.

Numerous studies on US attitudes toward immigrants and immigration have examined factors correlated with attitudes. In addition to basic demographics like age, race, and gender, scholars have focused on a variety of measures to predict attitudes toward immigrants. These include: contact with immigrant populations (Berg 2009; Douzet 2009; Gravelle 2016); cultural and identity concerns (Chandler and Tsai 2001; Berg 2009; Garcia and Davidson 2013; Bikmen 2015); socio economic status, especially education and income (Janus 2010; Gravelle 2016); geographic location (Fennelly and Federico 2008; Douzet 2009; Garcia and Davidson 2013; Gravelle 2016); economic concerns, such as labor market competition and fiscal burden (Fennelly and Federico 2008; Hainmueller and Hiscox 2010; Garcia and Davidson 2013; Hainmueller, Hiscox and Margalit 2015; Ross and Rouse 2015); political beliefs including party and ideology (Janus 2010; Gravelle 2016); and religious beliefs, including affiliation and worship style (Knoll 2009; Brown and Brown 2017). In addition to the what is being asked, research demonstrates that the way surveys ask questions influences how people answer them (Janus 2010).

In this study, we use measures of attitudes from the General Social Survey to examine changes in contemporary attitudes at three points in time, 1996, 2004 and 2014. In addition, we examine factors correlated with anti-immigrant attitudes, in particular: social context (number and origin of immigrants as well as socio-cultural conditions); class (labor market participation, self-identified class, education); and ideology (religious fundamentalism). We ask: 1) what are US attitudes toward immigrants and have they changed over time; and 2) do attitudes toward immigrants vary by class or ideology?

Theoretical Framework

Our theoretical framework is based on the concepts of heterophobia and ethnic resource competition. Together, these two frames encompass cultural and material factors that can influence attitudes toward immigrants.

Heterophobia is the fear of the other. Zygmunt Bauman defines heterophobia as “that diffuse (and sentimental rather than practical) unease, discomfort, or anxiety that people normally experience whenever they are confronted” with people “they do not fully understand, cannot communicate with easily and cannot expect to behave in a routine, familiar way” (2000, 64). This fear is based on anxiety found in situations where people feel they have little control. We would expect this feeling to intensify in times of rapid social change, or a period of perceived threat (e.g., after a physical attack against the nation). Heterophobia objectifies anxiety by directing these feelings at a group of people.

Xenophobia (the fear of foreigners) is a subset of heterophobia. The other, the foreigner or immigrant, becomes the object or target of the (often irrational) anxiety. Previous studies have found that the more foreign (or different from the dominant group) the immigrant is, the more likely the native-born population is to have negative attitudes toward immigration, particularly around issues of language (Chandler and Tsai 2001; Berg 2014) and national culture (Douzet 2009; Sohoni 2017).

Bauman argues that heterophobia is distinct from racism (2000, 64–65). Racism is like a cancer that must be cut out; or to use another favorite metaphor of his, like a weed the gardener must take out. “Out” is the operative word. In contrast, heterophobia – fear of the stranger – can by definition be altered by when the stranger becomes familiar. This means heterophobia can be countered by getting to know the other, or when the immigrant begins to assimilate and adopts the language, customs, and routines of the dominant group.

Heterophobia addresses attitudes rooted in cultural fears. In contrast, ethnic resource competition explains negative attitudes as a result of real or perceived threat to material well-being. Susan Olzak (1983) describes how competition for resources (jobs, public goods, state resources) between different ethnic groups leads to ethnic mobilization. The struggle is organized around ethnic group identities (immigrants, ethnicities, races) as opposed to class identities, though the two intersect. Edna Bonacich (1972) argues that in a split labor market – when different ethnic/racial groups are paid different wages for performing the same jobs – antagonisms are likely to develop along the lines of ethnicity/race. Similarly, when immigrants are perceived as taking jobs away from native workers this would lead to anti-immigrant sentiment. Moreover, conditions or processes that restrict resources (e.g., economic recessions, cuts in state funding) would lead to more competition for resources and influence attitudes toward immigrants. Blalock (1967) found that both the timing and size of the immigrant group influence perceptions: for example, large numbers of immigrants arriving during an economic recession would be perceived as more threatening than smaller numbers in a time of economic prosperity.

We believe that both fear of the stranger and competition for resources lead to anti-immigrant attitudes. Heterophobia manifests itself in the arena of culture and identity and emerges around such issues as language. For example, a white man in

Boston said: "You need to assimilate. Everyone else came here and they wanted to learn English. Now everything's in Spanish. It gets up my nose that every time I ring a number: 'Push 1 for English and 2 for Spanish' (MacLeod 2009: 373). Heterophobia is at the base of the second of the four fears described above -- that immigrants are not assimilating or that their presence produces cultural fragmentation and threatens dominant culture. This is expressed in a 2006 study that found that 48 percent of those surveyed believed that newcomers threaten traditional American values (Kohut et al. 2006). We also believe that this fear of the stranger is more likely to be present among those with conservative worldviews who by definition resist change, champion tradition, and prefer the taken-for-granted everyday world as they know it.

Resource competition manifests in the labor market and distribution of public goods, and is the foundation of fears one and three described above (jobs, taxes, and government spending). For example, when respondents agree with a survey statement: "immigrants are a burden because they take away our jobs, housing and health care" they exhibit a perceived economic threat from immigrants (Pew Research Center 2010). Resources are constructed as a zero-sum game and any resources given to immigrants mean fewer resources for the native-born population.

Using the theories of heterophobia and resource competition, in the next section we formulate our hypotheses regarding factors that influence attitudes toward immigrants.

Factors Influencing Attitudes toward Immigrants

Context Factors

Many studies on attitudes toward immigrants measure attitudes at one point in time (e.g., Chandler et al. 2001; Fennelly and Federico 2008; Knoll 2009; Hainmueller and Hiscox 2010; Wallace and Figueroa 2012; Hainmueller et al. 2015; Ross and Stella 2015; Gravelle 2016). We believe this is problematic because attitudes can change over time, and measuring this change can help identify how social context influences attitudes. Aspects of the social context that can influence attitudes include: number of immigrant arrivals (which can influence competition for resources), country of origin (some groups are seen as stranger than others), world events (e.g., wars or terrorist attacks), the state of the economy (economic recessions lead to scarcity of resources), and socio-cultural conditions (conservative cultures can be less welcoming of outsiders). Moreover, attitudes toward immigrants can be manufactured by the power elite who create a narrative of the "other" that they use for political gain – to whip up nationalist frenzy or the populist vote (Waters and Pineau 2015, 49).

In our study, we look at attitudes at three points in time, 1996, 2004, and 2014.

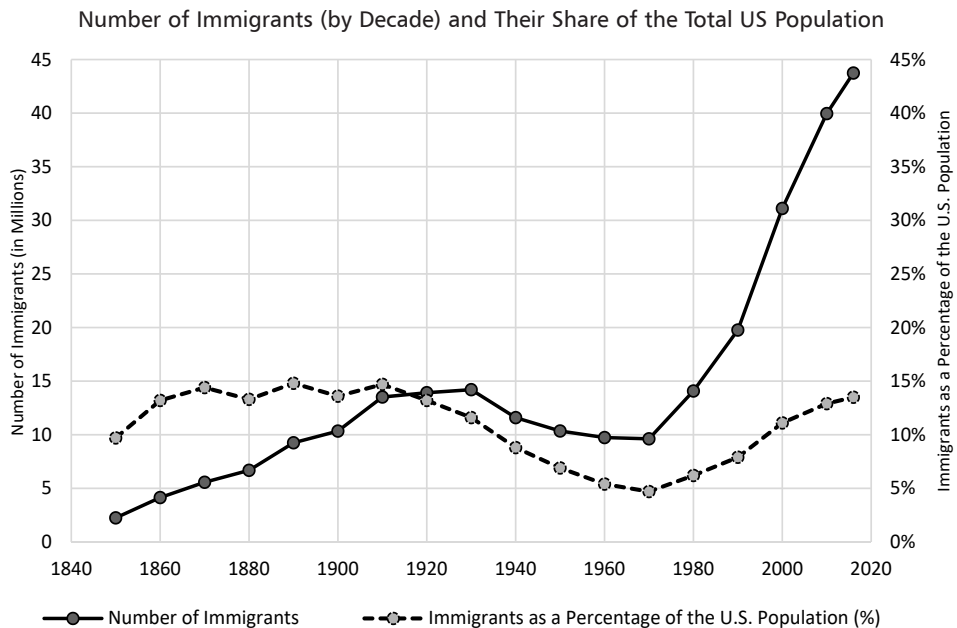
72 The mid-1990s was a period of heavy and diverse immigration. The early 21st century

in the aftermath of the attacks on the World Trade Center was a time of mounting fear of immigrants from the Middle East. And 2014 was a period of increasing bipartisan acrimony in the US visible in the conservative Tea Party movement (with an anti-government plank).

Immigration Context: Size and Origin

Legal immigration hit record levels in 2005 (see Diagram 1). In the last decade of the 20th century, roughly one million documented immigrants arrived annually, and the foreign born composed ten percent of the US population. By 2016, the foreign born made up 13.5 percent of the population, for a total of 43.7 million immigrants. These numbers rival the “great migration” of 1880–1924, when roughly 26 million immigrants arrived (peaking in 1901–1910 when about 900,000 arrived annually) and the foreign born composed 14.8 percent of the population (in 1890).

Diagram 1



Data Source: Migration Policy Institute (MPI) tabulation of data from U.S. Census Bureau, 2010-2016 American Community Surveys (ACS), and 1970, 1990, and 2000 Decennial Census. All other data are from Campbell J. Gibson and Emily Lennon, “Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign-Born Population of the United States: 1850 to 1990” (Working Paper no. 29., U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, 1999).

Note: The term “immigrants” (also known as the foreign born) refers to people residing in the United States who were not U.S. citizens at birth. This population includes naturalized citizens, lawful permanent residents (LPRs), certain legal nonimmigrants (e.g., persons on student or work visas), those admitted under refugee or asylee status, and persons illegally residing in the United States.

The contemporary increase in immigration began in 1965 with the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act. After a 40-year hiatus on immigration, the 1965 Act opened up US borders to all parts of the world and raised the ceiling for the number of immigrants allowed. Roughly one-half of the post-1965 immigrants came from Central America and the Caribbean, and one-quarter from Asia, with a growing number of Africans and Middle Easterners in the 1990s. These immigrants were indeed “strange” to the Euro-centric US population (MPI 2018).

In the 1970s and 1980s, there was also an increase in undocumented immigrants, especially from Mexico (Massey 2007), but also from Poland and Ireland (Erdmans 1998). Most undocumented workers eventually return home, but an amnesty in 1986 (Immigration Reform and Control Act – IRCA), legalized nearly 2.7 million immigrants and their family members (Rytina 2002).

It was the 1990 Immigration Act that exploded the foreign-born population. This act raised the numerical ceiling on immigrants and swelled the categories for employment admissions. In the 1990s, an increasing number of more diverse immigrants were coming to the US from Africa, especially through the Diversity Lottery (MPI 2018). More immigrants were also coming from the Middle East (AlMasarweh 2017).

In the late 20th century, libertarians and conservatives, aligned with business interests, were calling for open borders and unrestricted immigration because they believed an increased supply of labor would control or even deflate labor costs (Borjas 1999). In 2000, the American Competitiveness in the 21st Century Act created more job slots for H-1B visas (tripling from 65,000 to 195,000 per year by 2001). While these are temporary migrants, they still represent foreigners living in US communities and working in US industries, a perceived threat for those with heterophobia or worried about resource competition.

Even after 9/11 in 2001, roughly 1 million immigrants were admitted annually (although the numbers fell by a third in 2003). The US admitted 8.7 million immigrants between 2000 and 2010 (see Diagram 1). Alongside these legal immigrants and despite an increase in border apprehensions and deportations, the population of undocumented immigrants continued to expand and peaked at just over 12 million in 2007, and has remained steady at roughly 11 million (Krogstad, Passel, and Cohn 2017). Studies have found that attitudes toward undocumented immigrants (in the past referred to as “illegal”) are more negative and restrictive than attitudes toward documented immigrants (Chandler and Tsai 2001; Gravelle 2016; Brown and Brown 2017).

In sum, immigration into the US has increased in the last thirty years to some of its highest levels in the nation’s history, and the majority of these immigrants are coming from non-European countries. As such we formulate a general hypothesis based on both heterophobia and resource competition theories:

H1: Between 1996 and 2014 we expect an increase in negative attitudes toward immigration.

Sociocultural Conditions

The United States has become more polarized since the 1970s. Arlene Hochschild writes that the split between the Republicans and Democrats has widened because the “right has moved right, not because the left has moved left” (2016, 7). Beginning with Ronald Reagan in the 1980s, Republicans have become increasingly conservative, reaching one crescendo in the 1994 mid-term elections that led to Newt Gingrich as the Speaker of the House making a Contract with America. The Moral Majority coalesced around an anti-abortion, anti-gay marriage, and pro-Christian ideology that was coupled with a belief in a smaller federal government with fewer restrictions and regulations. This neoliberal economic frame went hand-in-hand with a gun- rights and school-prayer frame. The conservative voice surged with the Tea Party in 2009 and the extreme opposition to the Obama administration (including the Birther movement).

How does immigration map onto this rising conservatism? During the Reagan administration, we saw increases in actions against undocumented immigration, but also a racialization of immigration leading to more heterophobia (Chavez 2001; Massey 2007). Reagan also gave amnesty to undocumented immigrants through IRCA. After this, the government pushed immigrants toward assimilation and naturalization with mandatory but free English–language and citizenship courses. Immigration laws became more bifurcated as naturalized citizens were offered more rewards than Permanent Legal Residents (PLR) in the 1996 welfare reform law, and undocumented immigrants faced increasing harassment and punishment. In 1996, the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act was passed to expedite the exclusion of anyone, even a child or infant, who crossed the border illegally, even if they never committed a felony. In that same year, the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigration Responsibility Act increased border personnel and surveillance, increased penalties for illegal entry and overstay of visas, and limited public assistance to legal immigrants. The 1996 act led to a surge in naturalization.

These policies created a hostile environment in the US toward immigrants with most of the animosity directed at Mexicans who made up roughly 30 percent of all immigrants in 2000 (Zong, Batalova, and Hallock 2018). Post-9/11 was also a period of rising animus toward immigrants in general (Esses, Dovidio, and Hodson 2002). The percent of the population believing that immigrants were a problem increased from just over one-third before the 9/11 attacks to over one-half expressing negative attitudes in the years following the attacks (Massey 2007, 148–149). More specifically, negative attitudes toward Middle Easterners, Arabs, and Muslims increased as these groups were stereotyped as terrorists and considered threats to national security (AlMasarweh 2017).

Media influences how attitudes are constructed. Studies have found that economic concerns and anti-immigrant sentiments in the media increase negative perception of immigration (Segovia and Defever 2010; Esses, Brochu, and Dickson 2012).

Media representations have framed immigrants as onerous burdens (Santa Ana 1999), instigators of crime and poverty (Cisneros 2008), undocumented workers who should be deported (Galindo 2012), and infringers on American's public benefits and employment (Owusu-Sarfo 2016). Leo Chavez in his review of magazine covers found that in the 1990s magazines generally used alarmist terms to depict immigrants as problems, fears, and dangers, and tapped into racist beliefs by overstating the non-white origins of immigrants (2001, 32–33). Moreover, metaphors used to describe immigrants such as “tidal wave,” “flooding,” “under attack” and “time bomb” suggest that immigration is threatening to overwhelm America (Massey 2007, 132–135). Studies have found that anti-immigrant sentiment in the news media leads to public support for restrictive immigration policies (Branton and Dunaway 2009; Martinez-Brawley and Gualda 2009).

In sum, beginning with President Reagan who treated immigrants as a threat to national security when he called Mexicans “terrorists and subversives” (Massey 2007: 135–36), through the 1990s when the media warned of the tidal wave of foreigners flooding the country, into the 21st century when the threat moved to Middle Easterners, Muslims, and Arabs, the contemporary sociocultural landscape in the US would suggest an increasingly hostile view toward immigrants. This would support our first hypothesis that between 1996 and 2014 we expect an increase in negative attitudes toward immigrants.

Class: Labor Market Position and Education

Given our resource competition frame, we expect that attitudes toward immigrants vary by class: those with fewer resources would be more threatened by immigrants. People without a strong foothold in the labor market – for example, those who are unemployed or in precarious labor positions – have more to lose by an increase supply of labor. Resource stress and perceived group competition along with a zero-sum mindset creates conditions for anti-immigrant sentiments. Public support for policies restricting state resources (e.g., limiting assistance to immigrant families) is often the outcome of anti-immigrant sentiment that manifests from perceived threat and resource stress (Esses et al. 2012).

Studies have found more labor market competition in areas with higher rates of immigration. In Los Angeles, for example, studies using 1970s data (when the post-1965 wave was in its infancy), show that immigrants had little adverse effect on African Americans, but a decade later, the data show that the increased supply of labor increased joblessness for African Americans (Ong and Valenzuela 1996). The authors explain this as the “substitution effect” – when firms replace one group of workers with workers from another group to lower labor costs. Bonacich (1972) would call it a split labor market and suggest that this type of market leads to ethnic antagonism, or anti-immigrant attitudes.

Not all workers are hurt equally by the increase in the labor supply. Lesser skilled workers are hurt more by immigration because it lowers wages (Borjas 1999), or leads to joblessness (Ong and Valenzuela 1996). Scott (1996), in his analysis of Los Angeles data in the 1990s, also found that the adverse effects of immigration fall mostly on lower-skilled workers. He argues it is not that immigrants take jobs away from native workers but that immigrants move into expanding industrial sectors and create barriers to African Americans entering those sectors, which is a process of exclusion rather than replacement. It is difficult to measure the impact of immigration on wages and joblessness, however, because often the increase in immigration in a region leads to the out-migration of lesser-skilled residents from the region (Borjas 1999). Nonetheless, these studies suggest that those who have more precarious labor market positions – either unemployed, or in lower-skilled positions – have objective reasons to feel that immigrants lower their wages and compete with them for jobs.

Attitudes toward immigrants can be influenced by real or perceived economic instability”. Studies have found that people with a pessimistic view of the economy had more anti-immigration views, and those with a more optimistic view of the economy had less restrictive views on immigration (Chandler and Tsai 2001; Gravelle 2016). Wallace and Figueroa (2012) found that in regions where there was more economic growth respondents were less likely to perceive immigrants as threats to their jobs. And one survey found that people with poor personal finances support more restrictive immigration policies (Fennelly and Federico 2008). Perceptions rather than actual labor market competition can also be important predictors of attitudes toward immigration (Garcia and Davidson 2013).

These studies lead us to formulate the following hypotheses:

H2: Workers in more precarious positions in the labor market are more likely to have negative attitudes.

H2.a: Those who are unemployed are more likely to have negative attitudes than those who are employed or not actively looking for work (e.g., in school).

H2.b: Those who identify as working class are more likely to have negative attitudes than those who identify as middle class.

Education is often used as a measure of class. Education increases human capital and generally elevates labor market position. Studies have found that non-college graduates support more restrictive immigration policies (Fennelly and Federico 2008), and those with higher education have more pro-immigration sentiment (Chandler and Tsai 2001; Knoll 2009; Hainmueller and Hiscox 2010; Wallace and Figueroa 2012; Ross and Rouse 2015; Gravelle 2016). Respondents with graduate or professional degrees showed less support for restrictive immigration compared to those with just a bachelor’s degree (Janus 2010).

This leads us to our third primary hypothesis:

H3: People with less than a college education will have more negative attitudes than those with some college education.

Ideology: Conservative versus Liberal

Education may be measuring both class and ideology as those with higher education tend to have more liberal ideologies (Knoll 2009). Given heterophobia, we believe that those with more conservative ideologies will have more fear of people who are different from them. In general, a conservative attitude prefers things stay the same, prefers traditional or accepted ways of doing things. A liberal ideology by definition is more open to change and more tolerant of diversity in opinion and people (Carney et al 2008).

While religion can at times be used as a measure of conservative/liberal ideology it is not a one-to-one match as some religions actually promote openness and tolerance (e.g., Unitarians) and others are more conservative (e.g., Fundamentalists). Thus, religiosity per se is not a good measure of conservative/liberal ideology. It is more useful to think of various religions as being conservative, moderate, or liberal.

Conservative religious ideologies are more likely to align with Republican voters (Hochschild 2016), but again, religion is not synonymous with political ideology, as in some cases religious groups have been found to support more liberal or tolerant policies including liberal immigration reform policies (Knoll 2009). Still, studies show that religious conservatives are likely to be political conservatives who have been found to have more negative attitudes toward immigration than political liberals (Chandler and Tsai 2001).

DiTomaso (2013) found that political ideology (liberal vs. conservative) interacts with class to shape attitudes. Affluent white liberals had the most positive views of immigrants, working-class liberals had mixed attitudes, and middle class conservatives expressed the most intolerant attitudes. In sum, she found that men with less precarious positions in the labor market and more liberal ideologies were less likely to perceive immigrants as a threat or concern.

Finally, given that studies find that people in general have more negative attitudes toward undocumented immigrants than documented (Chandler and Tsai 2001; Gravelle 2016; Brown and Brown 2017), we would expect that those with a conservative ideology are likely to have negative attitudes toward undocumented immigrants because they would be perceived as breaking the law.

Our final hypothesis then is:

H4: People who have a conservative ideology hold more negative attitudes toward immigrants than those who have a more liberal ideology.

To summarize, we argue that social context, class, and ideology are factors influencing attitudes toward immigrants. We postulate four main hypotheses: 1) between

1996 and 2014 negative attitudes will increase; 2) those in more precarious labor market positions will have more negative attitudes; 3) those with less than a college education will have more negative attitudes; and 4) people who have a conservative ideology will have more negative attitudes.

Methods

Data are derived from the General Social Survey (GSS), a random sample survey of roughly 2,500 to 3,000 US households that was first administered in 1972. The GSS was originally an annual single sample survey though it became biennial in 1994. Between 2006 and 2014 the survey implemented a panel design where respondents from each year were re-interviewed in the two subsequent GSS surveys, producing three 3-wave, 2-year-interval panels².

For this study, data from 8,254 households were collected from three waves of the GSS—1996, 2004, and 2014. The sample for this study was narrowed to households that received the International Social Survey Program (ISSP) as part of the GSS because the ISSP measures attitudes toward immigrants. List-wise deletion was then used to handle item-level missing data since unanswered responses accounted for less than 5 percent of cases in each variable. The final analytic sample included 3,355 US households.

Dependent Variables

Three variables that measure attitudes toward immigrants are considered: (1) immigrants take jobs; (2) immigrants are good for the economy; and (3) we should exclude “illegal” immigrants. Respondents were asked to answer the following questions via a 5-point Likert Scale. The survey prompt provided to respondents for the first two measures said, “There are different opinions about immigrants from other countries living in America. (By ‘immigrants’ we mean people who come to settle in America.) How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?” (1) “Immigrants take jobs away from people who were born in America.” (2) “Immigrants are generally good for America’s economy.” A separate prompt was used for the third measure: “How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? America should take stronger measures to exclude illegal immigrants.” Each attitude measure was collapsed into a dichotomous variable. For two measures -- “take jobs” and “exclude illegal immigrants” -- affirmative responses (e.g., agree or strongly agree) are coded as 1. For the third measure -- “good for economy” -- affirmative and neutral responses are coded as 0. This measure was reverse coded so all outcomes are measuring attitudes toward immigrants in the same direction.

² Principal Investigator, Tom W. Smith; Co-Principal Investigators, Peter V. Marsden and Michael Hout, NORC ed. Chicago: NORC, 2017. 1 data file (62,466 logical records) and 1 codebook (3,689 pp). Further information about the GSS and ISSP can be found at <http://gss.norc.org/faq>.

Independent Variables

Class and ideology were operationalized in the following ways. Three variables were used to measure class as a reflection of precariousness: employment status, self-identified class, and education.

Employment status was initially measured using eight categories including: employed full time, employed part-time, temporarily not working, unemployed/ laid-off, retired, in school, and keeping house. This variable was collapsed in such a way to measure the difference between those trying to enter the workforce and those not in competition with others for entry into the workforce. Only “unemployed” was coded as 1 and all the other work status categories were coded as 0. Those temporarily not working were out of the labor market because of a temporary illness, vacation or strike – that is, they were not actively looking for work.

Self-identified class was originally a four-value categorical variable that we collapsed into a binary measure, lower/working and middle/upper, with 1 representing the former and 0 the latter. Lower- and upper-class capture, together across all three years, just over eight percent of respondents – as such we refer to these self-identified class categories as working and middle class.

The continuous education variable was collapsed into a dichotomous measure – with 1 representing those with 12 or less years of education, and 0 representing those with over 12 years of education. During initial analyses, we broke education into 3 dummy variables, less than 12 years, 12 years, and over 12 years of education but found no significant difference between the first two values.

Respondents answer to the question, “how fundamentalist is your religion” was used to create a variable for ideology measured as fundamental, liberal, or moderate. Initial analyses showed no difference between moderate and liberal attitudes, so we collapsed religious ideology into a dichotomous variable with 1 representing fundamentals and 0 liberals and moderates. Religious leaning was the only measurement for ideology because political leaning and immigrant attitudes were not asked to the same subset of participants during the 2004 GSS survey. See Table 1 for a summary of our independent variables and their reference values.

Table 1

Variables (and Reference Values) Predicted to Express Negative Attitudes

Values predicted to express negative attitudes	Reference values
unemployed	employed, retired, student, house work, temporarily unemployed
working class	middle class
12 years of education or less	more than 12 years of education
fundamentalist religion	moderate/liberal religion

Analytic Plan

Analysis is done in three stages. In stage 1, we conduct descriptive analyses to identify the means, standard deviations, and proportions of our sample. We also examine the distribution of immigrant attitude by year of survey and used chi square to test for significant difference. In stage 2a, we estimate logistic regression models for each of the immigration attitude measures. In stage 2b, we sum the three attitude measures and conduct a Poisson regression model to predict how many items respondents agree with. In stage 2a and 2b, year of survey is added as covariates into the multivariate model with 2004 as the reference. In stage 3, we estimate Poisson models from Stage 2b separately for each survey wave and test for significant differences in predictors of immigrant attitudes between years.

Findings

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 2. The GSS sample, from years 1996, 2004, and 2014, is comprised of 3,355 respondents. Of these respondents, 94 percent are not trying to enter the work force, 50 percent are from the middle classes,

Table 2

Summary Statistics of Variables Used to Predict Changes in U.S. Attitudes toward Immigration over Time Using General Social Survey Data (Years 1996, 2004, 2014)

Variables (Coding) N = 3, 355	Mean(SD)
<i>Class Measures</i>	
Unemployed (1 = unemployed, 0 = employed/ not actively looking for work)	.06(.24)
Working class (1 = working, 0 = middle)	.50 (.50)
12 years or less of education (1 = 12 years or less of education, 0 = more than 12 years of education)	.40(.49)
<i>Ideology Measure</i>	
Fundamentalist Religious Beliefs (1 = Fundamentalist, 0 = Liberal/Moderate)	.27(.45)
<i>Attitude Measures</i>	
"Immigrants take jobs away from people who are born in America" (1 = agree, 0 = neutral/disagree)	.42(.49)
"Immigrants are generally good for America's economy" (1 = disagree, 0 = neutral/agree)	.26(.44)
"America should take stronger measures to exclude illegal immigrants" (1 = agree, 0 = neutral/disagree)	.68(.47)

60 percent have over 12 years of education, and 63 percent identify with liberal/moderate religious ideologies. In line with the study’s theoretical frameworks, these demographics suggest that the sample should have more favorable attitudes toward immigrants. The total sample, however, has more negative than positive attitudes toward immigrants. The majority of respondents (68%) believe that undocumented immigrants should be excluded, only one-quarter (26%) feel that immigrants are good for the economy, and, slightly under one-half (42%) believe that immigrants take jobs away from people born in America.

Table 3, the distribution of attitudes by year, suggests that there is a relationship between each attitude measure and year of survey. Each chi square value exceeds the critical value of 13.816, so we can reject the null hypotheses at the 1 percent confidence interval. Table 3 indicates that respondents from 2014 had the most positive views of immigrants across measures. In general, attitudes toward immigrants appeared to become more favorable with time but the issue of legality remained a consistent concern for respondents.

Table 3

Distribution of US Immigrant Attitudes by Year of General Social Survey

Attitude Measure	Code	1996	2004	2014	X²
“Immigrants take jobs away from people born in America”	Agree	47.49%	43.45%	34.63%	40.14
	Neutral/Disagree	52.51%	56.55%	65.37%	P<.001
“Immigrants are generally good for America’s economy”	Disagree	33.48%	24.93%	18.87%	63.78
	Neutral/Agree	66.52%	75.07%	81.13%	P <.001
“America should take stronger measures to exclude illegal immigrants”	Agree	74.98%	69.02%	58.72%	69.78
	Neutral/Disagree	25.05%	30.98%	41.28%	P<.001

Logistic Regression Models Analysis

The first four logistic regression (LR) models presented in Table 4 predict the relationship between labor market position and religious ideology and each attitude measure about immigration by year. The last of the four logistic regression models (column 4) presented in Table 4 predicts the effect of the independent variables on one’s agreement with all three attitude measures about immigration combined. The LR chi2 for each model exceeds the critical value at 6 degrees of freedom (18.47) and suggests that, for each model, there is fit and statistical significant at the .001 level. When

we hold all other measures constant, the data in Table 4 suggest that year, religious ideology, and education are key predictors of individual and total attitude measures. Self-identified class and being unemployed, on the other hand, are only predictors of specific attitude measures.

Model 1 (column 1 in Table 4) suggests that 2014, employment status, education, and religious ideology influence respondents' agreement with the statement "immigrants take jobs away from people born in America." Respondents in 2014, when compared to 2004, were less likely (log odds decreased by .37, $p < .001$) to agree that immigrants take jobs away from the native born, however, 1996 had no statistically significant effect on the likelihood of respondents agreeing that immigrants take jobs. Unemployed respondents were more likely (log odds increased by .31, $p < .05$) to believe immigrants take jobs away from people born in the US. Self-identified class had no statistically significant effect on the likelihood of agreeing that immigrants take jobs. Having 12 or less years of education increased the likelihood (.56 higher log odds, $p < .001$) of believing that immigrants take jobs as did religious fundamentalism (.51 higher log odds, $p < .001$).

Model 2 (column 2 in Table 4) suggests that year, education, and religious fundamentalism influence respondents' attitudes about whether "immigrants are generally good for America's economy." In 1996, respondents were more likely (log odds increased by .36, $p < .001$) to disagree that immigrants are good for the economy, and in 2014, respondents were less likely to disagree (log odds decreased by .36, $p < .001$). Having 12 or less years of education increased the likelihood (.65 higher log-odds, $p < .001$) of disagreeing that immigrants are good for the economy. Religious fundamentalists were also more likely to disagree (log odds increased by .45, $p < .001$) with Model 2's statement. Self-identified class and employment status had no statistically significant effect on the likelihood of disagreeing that immigrants are good for the economy (however, being unemployed, with a p value of .09, almost reached significance).

In Model 3 (column 3 in Table 4), year, self-identified class and religious leaning are significant predictors of agreeing that "America should take stronger measures to exclude illegal immigrants." The 1996 respondents had a higher likelihood (.32 higher log odds, $p < .001$) and the 2014 respondents had a lower likelihood (.41 lower log odds, $p < .001$) of wanting to exclude undocumented immigrants. Unemployed had no significant effect. Surprisingly, the self-identified working class were less likely (.40 lower log odds, $p < .001$) to agree that America should exclude undocumented immigrants, and, not surprisingly, religious fundamentalists were more likely (log odds increased by .35, $p < .001$). Education level had no significant impact on this attitudinal measure.

Model 4 (column 4 in Table 4) suggests that year, education, and religious fundamentalism are significant predictors of holding anti-immigrant attitudes on all three measures. Many of the same characteristics that predicted each anti-immigrant

attitude in the prior three models were also those that predicted model 4. In 1996, respondents were more likely (log odds increase by .10, $p < .001$) and in 2014, less likely (log odds decrease by .18, $p < .001$) to have all negative attitudes toward immigrants. Respondents that had 12 years or less of education (.13 higher log-odds, $p < .001$) and those who adhered to a fundamentalist religion (log-odds decreased by .18, $p < .001$) were more likely to have negative attitudes on all three measures. Employment status and self-identified class had no significant effect on the likelihood of having negative attitudes on all three measures.

Table 4

Logistic Regression Models for Each Immigration Attitude Measure and a Poisson Regression Model of Respondents in Agreement with All Measures

Variable N = 3,355	Immigrants take jobs away	Immigrants are good for the economy	America should exclude illegal immigrants	Total
	Log Odds (SE)	Log Odds (SE)	Log Odds (SE)	Log Odds (SE)
1996	.10 (.09)	.36 (.10) ***	.32 (.10) ***	.10 (.03) ***
2014	-.37 (.09) ***	-.36 (.11) ***	-.41 (.09) ***	-.18 (.03) ***
Unemployed	.31 (.15) *	.28 (.16)	.16 (.16)	.08 (.06)
Working class	.06 (.07)	.04 (.08)	-.40 (.08) ***	-.00 (.03)
12 or less yrs. edu.	.56 (.07) ***	.65 (.08) ***	-.04 (.08)	.13 (.03) ***
Fundamental	.51 (.08) ***	.45 (.09) ***	.35 (.09) ***	.18 (.03) ***
Constant	-.67 (.08) ***	-1.54 (.09) ***	.90 (.08) ***	-.41 (.03) ***
LR Chi2 (DF)	158.53 (6)	167.87 (6)	111.38(6)	151.08(6)
Log Likelihood	-2201.45	-1830.99	-2058.17	-4900.36

Reference categories are: 2004, employed/not actively looking for work, middle class, more than 12 years education, liberal/moderate

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Poisson Regression Models Analysis

Table 5 estimates Poisson regression models for total agreement across attitudinal measures by year of survey, testing for significant difference in predictors of attitudes toward immigrants between years. The LR chi2 for each model exceeds the critical value at 4 degrees of freedom (18.47) and suggests that there is model fit and the

model is statistically significant at the .001 level. Across the three survey years, education and religious fundamentalism were the only consistent predictors of having negative attitudes on all three measures. In each model, having 12 or less years of education increased the likelihood (log-odds ~ .13, $p < .05$) of having anti-immigrant attitudes. From model to model (or year to year), the likelihood of have negative attitudes increased for religious fundamentalists. In 1996, religious fundamentalists had .14 higher log odds ($p < .05$) of holding negative attitudes on all three measures; in 2004, their log-odds increased by .04 ($p < .01$), and in 2014, by another .04 ($p < .01$). In contrast, across the three years, employment status, self-identified class, and education had no statistically significant effect on the likelihood of holding all negative attitudes toward immigrants.

Table 5

Poisson Regression Models of Agreeance with All Measure by Year of Survey Testing for Significant Difference in Predictors of Attitudes between Years

Variable	1996 N= 1,135	2004 N=1,091	2014 N=1,129
	Log Odds (SE)	Log Odds (SE)	Log Odds (SE)
Unemployed	.03 (.10)	.08 (.09)	.14(.10)
Working class	.00 (.05)	.03 (.05)	-.04 (.05)
12 or less yrs. edu.	.13 (.05) **	.13 (.05) **	.12(.05) *
Fundamental	.14 (.05) **	.18 (.05) ***	.22 (.06) ***
Constant	.52 (.04) ***	.40(.04) ***	.24 (.04) ***
LR Chi2 (DF)	21.30(4)	23.29(4)	22.35(4)
Log Likelihood	-1691.76	-1594.60	-1612.75

Reference categories are: employed/not actively looking for work, middle class, more than 12 years education, liberal/moderate

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

In sum, Table 3 suggests that over time attitudes toward immigrants get more positive. Table 4 further emphasizes this positive trend over time, suggesting that 2014 respondents have the most positive attitudes. Table 4 also suggests that religious ideology and education are key predictors of individual and total attitude measures. Table 5 reiterates the importance of ideology and education showing that across time, those most likely to consistently hold all negative attitudes toward immigrants do not have a college education and had a fundamentalist religious ideology.

Discussion

The findings from this study provide mixed support for our hypotheses. First, regarding social context, we hypothesized that between 1996 and 2014 there would be an increase in negative attitudes toward immigration for several reasons. We believed that increased diversity in the immigrant population would lead to increased heterophobia, that an increased number of immigrants would lead to increased competition for resources, and that an increasingly polarized socio-political culture would manufacture more resentment toward immigrants. However, data in Table 3 suggest that between 1996 and 2014 respondents had less negative attitudes about immigrants taking jobs and more positive attitudes about their value for the economy. Table 4 reinforces this finding showing that, for each attitude measure, the respondents in 2014 had less negative attitudes than those in the previous two waves.

One possible explanation for this finding is that the demographics of the sample are skewed toward having more favorable attitudes: almost two-thirds have liberal/moderate religious ideologies; 60 percent have a college education, and over 90 percent are employed. Given the polarization of the country, a national survey will skew toward those groups most represented. Although we conceived of “social context” as a national context, it may be that it is more useful to look at attitudes among different groups of people rather than the nation as a whole. And this is what our second research question addressed: who is likely to hold negative attitudes. Here we looked at ideology and class.

Ideology was most consistently correlated with attitudes toward immigrants. Our hypothesis was that those who have conservative beliefs – as measured by fundamentalist religious philosophy – would have more negative attitudes. Table 4 shows that on all attitude measures fundamentalists were consistently and significantly more likely to have negative attitudes. Table 5 reaffirms this and suggests that over time religious fundamentalism has intensified the likelihood of having all negative attitudes toward immigrants, that is fundamentalism is a consistent predictor of attitudes and the robustness of this indicator increases over time. As such, if we were to look only at those with fundamentalist beliefs, we find support for our first hypothesis that attitudes have become more negative over time.

That people with fundamentalist religious beliefs hold more negative attitudes suggests that cultural belief factors – that is, heterophobia – may be operating. Their negative attitudes may be related more to the fear of the stranger -- believing that immigrants challenge the dominant culture or that they will not assimilate -- rather than the fear that they are taking resources. People who are more conservative tend to be less open to new ideas and prefer the routineness of tradition; it is reasonable that they would feel more threatened by people they perceive as strangers or different from them. While US tradition includes the narrative of immigration, in the past this has meant predominantly a European immigration. The increase in immigrants

from Latin America and Asia as well as from Africa and the Middle East threatens the Euro-centric heritage of the United States.

The second most robust variable that explained attitudes was education. We hypothesized that people with less than a college education will have more negative attitudes than those with at least some college. We argued that education could be a measure of both class and ideology as those with higher education tend to have better jobs and more liberal ideologies (Knoll 2009). As such, both resource competition and heterophobia could explain this finding. Table 4 suggests that those with 12 or less years of education were consistently more likely to view immigrants as an economic hindrance which would support the understanding of education as a measure of class with negative attitudes being a result of perceived competition. People with less than a college degree are more likely to be in lower-skilled jobs and secondary labor markets where they are more likely to meet competition with immigrant labor. Moreover, in Table 4, another indicator that education may be more of a measure of class than ideology is that education is not a significant predictor of attitudes regarding undocumented immigrants. Still, Table 5 shows that across the years, having 12 or less years of education was a consistent predictor of holding all negative attitudes toward immigrants. We cannot say with certainty whether education is a reflection of class or ideology – it is most likely both (DiTomaso 2013).

Class had two other measures. First, we looked at participation in the labor market. We argued that those who were unemployed and actively looking for work would have more negative attitudes because they would perceive immigrants as competing with them for jobs. We hypothesized that those who were more secure in their labor market position (either having a job or not actively looking for a job) would have less negative attitudes. We found some support for this but not much. Table 4 shows that unemployment was a predictor of believing immigrants take jobs away. This variable however showed no statistical significance in Table 5. It could be that using a national sample is not appropriate for measuring resource competition. Labor market competition – especially for the lower-skilled and working class -- is more likely to be a local or regional market. Immigrants are not dispersed evenly across the US, but instead are spatially clumped in seven states (California, Texas, New York, Illinois, New Jersey, Florida, and Arizona) and in cities within those states (e.g., Los Angeles, Chicago). Studies have found that attitudes toward immigration are influenced by the physical presence of immigrants (Hainmueller and Hiscox 2010; Wallace and Figueroa 2012). Those areas of the country or cities with large numbers of immigrants would more likely aggravate perceptions of competition than those regions with few immigrants. Surveys done at the regional, state or city level may be more appropriate to capture measures of resource competition in the labor market than national surveys.

Another explanation for the weak correlation between unemployment and attitudes toward immigrants is that the unemployed represent only six percent of our

sample. It is likely with a more representative sample we would see a stronger correlation between being unemployed and having negative attitudes.

The last measure of class was a self-identification variable. This variable showed little evidence of being correlated with attitudes and it was in the opposite direction that we hypothesized. Table 4 shows that those who identified as working class were more likely to disagree with the statement that America should exclude undocumented immigrants when compared with those who identified as middle class. But when all three attitude measures are combined (Table 5), class identification was not a significant predictor of attitudes toward immigrants.

Taken together, the data show more support for a heterophobia explanation for negative attitudes toward immigrants than a resource competition explanation. However, the limitations of the survey data, as mentioned above, make us cautious. Attitudes may best be explained by an interaction of class and ideology (see DiTomaso 2013). Still, because we find no strong correlation between unemployment and attitudes, and we find the reverse correlation (albeit weak) between self-identified class and attitudes, we are inclined to think that education is in fact measuring ideology more than class position. That is, cultural factors (heterophobia) may explain negative attitudes more than material factors (resource competition).

Conclusion

We were motivated to assess attitudes toward immigrants because of the extreme anti-immigrant rhetoric during the 2016 US presidential election. Using measures of attitudes from the General Social Survey to examine changes in attitudes over time, we found that for those who hold fundamentalist religious beliefs attitudes have become more negative. In addition, we found that those without a college education had consistently negative attitudes. Religious fundamentalists and the non-college educated were also more likely to support the Republican presidential candidate (Hochschild 2016). We believe the anti-immigrant rhetoric during the campaign tapped into cultural fears among these voters. Moreover, this same rhetoric can also manufacture animosity toward immigrants. As such, we predict that we will see an increase in negative attitudes toward immigrants among those with less education and more conservative beliefs in the future.

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