

# Public Attitudes Toward Immigration

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## Abstract

Immigrant populations in many developed democracies have grown rapidly, and so too has an extensive literature on natives' attitudes toward immigration. This research has developed from two theoretical foundations, one grounded in political economy, the other in political psychology. These two literatures have developed largely in isolation from one another, yet the conclusions that emerge from each are strikingly similar. Consistently, immigration attitudes show little evidence of being strongly correlated with personal economic circumstances. Instead, research finds that immigration attitudes are shaped by sociotropic concerns about its cultural impacts—and to a lesser extent its economic impacts—on the nation as a whole. This pattern of results has held up as scholars have increasingly turned to experimental tests, and it holds for the United States, Canada, and Western Europe. Still, more work is needed to strengthen the causal identification of sociotropic concerns and to isolate precisely how, when, and why they matter for attitude formation.

## INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, immigration has transformed the demographics of many developed democracies. Today, the foreign-born population in the United States is approximately double what it was in 1950. For other countries including Canada, Italy, and the United Kingdom, the growth has been even larger in percentage terms. These inflows have the potential to reshape the political arena, as democratic electorates and governments consider policies to manage immigration and incorporate immigrants. But whether and how immigration affects democratic politics depend to an important extent on the immigration attitudes of native-born majority groups, the topic of this review.

In this review, we consider studies conducted during the last 20 years explaining mass attitudes on immigration policy in North America and Western Europe. Certainly, a comprehensive assessment of the political impacts of contemporary immigration would cover many related topics, from immigrants' political incorporation to far-right voting (e.g., Arzheimer 2009, Dancygier 2010) and the elite-level politics of immigration (e.g., Tichenor 2002, Lahav 2012). We are fortunate that two such topics are reviewed elsewhere in this volume: research on American identity (Schildkraut 2014) and research on immigrant integration in Europe (Dancygier & Laitin 2014). By necessity, this review will emphasize those works that have been central to debates within political science, but to a limited extent, we also reference work in related disciplines including economics, social psychology, and sociology (see also Ceobanu & Escandell 2010). Our review focuses on the attitudes of national majority groups, as different theoretical models might be appropriate to explain the immigration attitudes of immigrants and other minority groups (e.g., Dancygier & Saunders 2006, McClain et al. 2011). Following the emphasis of prior literature, we primarily cover quantitative scholarship on Americans' immigration attitudes and integrate discussions of Canadians' and Europeans' immigration attitudes where possible.

Even with this limited scope, our review covers approximately 100 studies of immigration attitudes from more than two dozen countries. Once dominated by observational analyses of one-time surveys, research on immigration attitudes has increasingly turned to innovative research designs including survey and field experiments. This review divides research on immigration attitudes into two broad traditions. The first we label political economy. Frequently starting from formal models of immigration's economic impacts, this theoretical approach explains immigration attitudes with reference to native-born citizens' individual self-interest. This perspective commonly views immigration as analogous to international trade: It is of political importance chiefly because of its distributional consequences. Empirically, it directs scholars to examine competition over resources between immigrants and natives, whether in the labor market or through government spending and services. This approach is theoretically parsimonious, often yielding clear and testable empirical implications.

We then turn to a broader set of approaches that we term sociopsychological. Less unified than the political economy tradition, these approaches emphasize the role of group-related attitudes and symbols in shaping immigration attitudes. Such approaches sometimes conceive of immigrant-native differences as similar to differences based on race, religion, or other ascriptive features. One strand of this research emphasizes perceived threats to national identity and so can explain the persistent emphasis on assimilation and language acquisition among native-born people. Other strands emphasize prejudice and stereotyping, sometimes in combination with mass media or local encounters.

After detailing the empirical findings within both traditions, we provide an assessment of this research as a whole. We offer seven conclusions about its progress to date and potential future directions. Despite this literature's substantive and methodological diversity, this review

makes clear that there is substantial agreement on the core features of contemporary immigration attitudes. Overall, hypotheses grounded in self-interest have fared poorly, meaning that there is little accumulated evidence that citizens primarily form attitudes about immigration based on its effects on their personal economic situation. This pattern has held in both North America and Western Europe, in both observational and experimental studies. It also sits well with the broader public-opinion literature emphasizing a limited role of self-interest in attitude formation.

Much more consistently, recent research shows that immigration-related attitudes are mostly driven by symbolic<sup>1</sup> concerns about the nation as a whole. These concerns are most commonly thought to be cultural but are sometimes conceived of as economic. Such findings make it critical for future research to identify the symbols and frames that are associated with immigration at particular times and places. Still, the cultural and symbolic approaches that are typically vindicated by empirical testing lack the theoretical precision of the self-interest approach. Moreover, many of the empirical tests suffer from measurement and endogeneity concerns, facts that may explain the persistence of the self-interest-based approach despite repeated empirical challenges.

The consistency of these conclusions across various research designs is a cause for some methodological optimism, as more recent experiments and quasi-experiments have largely endorsed the general understanding proposed by earlier observational research. That said, the work of identifying and testing the causal impacts of key variables is far from complete. Conceptual work is needed as well: The overwhelming emphasis on testing economic versus cultural explanations can obscure as much as it illuminates. In addition, scholarship on immigration attitudes has too often treated immigration attitudes as isolated from partisanship and political ideology, leaving important questions about the role of party cues in immigration attitudes unanswered. And with only occasional exceptions (e.g., Messina 1989, Tichenor 2002), past research has treated immigration attitudes as an end point in themselves and has not considered their influence on policy making.

## **POLITICAL ECONOMY APPROACHES TO IMMIGRATION ATTITUDES**

Here, we detail the political economy tradition. These studies are unified by an emphasis on material self-interest, whether operating through labor market competition or taxes and transfers.

### **Labor Market Competition**

Within the political economy literature, one pioneering article is Scheve & Slaughter (2001), which links immigration attitudes with a formal model of immigration's distributional impacts. It draws on the factor proportion (FP) model, an economic model that assumes perfect substitutability between natives and immigrants and renders the distributional impacts of immigration in stark terms. That model predicts that an influx of low-skilled immigrants will increase the supply of low-skilled labor, lowering wages (or employment) for low-skilled natives while raising wages for high-skilled natives. An influx of high-skilled immigration will have the opposite effect, as it will make low-skilled labor relatively scarce. Whereas Scheve & Slaughter (2001) acknowledge noneconomic motivations, their main argument is that immigration attitudes are partly rooted in material self-interest. Natives anticipate that the effect of immigration on their wages depends on their skills as well as those of the immigrants. Scheve & Slaughter (2001) then use the 1992, 1994, and 1996 waves of the American National Election Study (ANES) to test these hypotheses.

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<sup>1</sup>Symbolic threats are threats to intangible social constructs, such as the national economy or national identity.

Conditional on various covariates, workers with lower skill levels (measured by years of education and wages) are more likely to oppose immigration. Scheve & Slaughter (2001) interpret that finding as consistent with the FP model based on the premise that American respondents have low-skilled immigration in mind when answering a survey question about preferred immigration levels.

In another widely cited paper, Mayda (2006) applies the FP model of attitude formation cross-nationally, using 1995 data from the International Social Survey Program (ISSP). She finds that the positive correlation between natives' skills and support for immigration is strongest in countries where natives are more highly skilled as compared with the immigrants. These are the countries where high-skilled natives stand to benefit more from the wage effects of low-skilled immigration under the FP model (see also O'Rourke & Sinnott 2006). Realistic fears about labor market competition "play a key and robust role in preference formation over immigration policy" (Mayda 2006, p. 526).

Yet there are theoretical and empirical reasons to challenge that interpretation, as Hainmueller & Hiscox (2007) point out. Prominent models of immigration's economic impacts are actually quite equivocal about the effects on natives' wages and allow for a wide range of predictions depending on specific assumptions about substitutability, factor mobility, country size, the existing product mix, the inclusion of nontraded goods, and other parameters. Reflecting this theoretical ambiguity, empirical work on immigration's labor-market impacts in Europe and the United States has produced very ambiguous findings, with many studies concluding that such wage effects are small or nonexistent (Hainmueller & Hiscox 2010, Hainmueller et al. 2011). Any consensus about immigration's negative economic impacts among natives is not shared by the economists who have studied that question—and might not be grounded in economic reality.

In addition, Hainmueller & Hiscox (2007) argue that previous studies have not directly tested the FP model because the surveys employed did not differentiate between low- and high-skilled immigration, a key theoretical distinction. Using 2003 European Social Survey (ESS) data from 22 countries, they show that in contrast to the predictions of the FP model, natives with higher skills are actually more supportive of all types of immigration. That relationship holds irrespective of the immigrants' skill levels and among respondents who are inside and outside the labor force (and who therefore differ in their exposure to labor market competition).

These findings are reinforced by Hainmueller & Hiscox (2010), who use a survey experiment embedded in a nationwide US survey that randomly varied immigrants' skill levels. That research finds no evidence that natives are more likely to oppose immigrants with skills similar to their own: US natives with more education show more support for both high- and low-skilled immigration. Ford et al. (2012) report a similar pattern in Britain, and that finding also emerges repeatedly in the studies discussed below. In the view of Hainmueller & Hiscox (2010), these results indicate that the correlation between education and support for immigration stems not from self-interested concerns about wages but from differences in cultural values and beliefs about immigration's sociotropic impacts. Also, whereas education was the primary measure of skill in earlier work on immigration attitudes, education is a crude measure of skill and is related to a variety of other factors that can account for its correlation with pro-immigration attitudes. In particular, more educated respondents exhibit lower levels of ethnocentrism, place more emphasis on cultural diversity, and are also more optimistic about the economic impacts of immigration (see also Bobo & Licari 1989, Citrin et al. 1997, Chandler & Tsai 2001, Card et al. 2012).

Two recent studies have tested the role of labor market competition in shaping immigration attitudes using improved measures of economic vulnerability. One, Malhotra et al. (2013), suggests that the weak support for the labor market competition hypothesis results from the fact that a large share of Americans are not economically threatened by immigrants. If we focus instead on workers

for whom the threat is pronounced, we should see an effect of labor market competition. Using a targeted, web-based survey of respondents in high-technology counties, that research finds that native workers employed in the high-tech sector are 7–10 percentage points more opposed to extending visas to high-tech workers from abroad compared with natives in other sectors. Because the study was designed as a most-likely case in which to find an effect of labor market competition, Malhotra et al. (2013, p. 406) argue that these results should be interpreted as that effect's upper bound (they report that less than 5% of the US labor force is in the high-tech sector).

Another study, Dancygier & Donnelly (2013), argues that attitudes are not driven by self-interested concerns about wages but by workers' sociotropic assessments about the impact of migrant labor on their industries overall. Using four waves of the ESS between 2002 and 2009, it examines the impact of sector-level conditions on attitudes toward immigration from poorer, non-European countries. It finds that respondents employed in growing sectors are somewhat more supportive of this type of immigration: A one-standard-deviation increase in sector growth is associated with about a half a percentage point decrease in opposition to immigration. Intriguingly, national economic conditions matter as well, with those in sectors that experience larger inflows of immigrants becoming slightly more anti-immigration only after the 2008 financial crisis.

An especially comprehensive test of the labor market competition hypothesis comes from Hainmueller et al. (2011), who draw on a targeted survey of US workers in 12 industries chosen to vary across several relevant dimensions. This survey design, which includes interviews of large numbers of workers in each industry, allows for increased precision in examining labor market competition. On the basis of this research, fears about labor market competition do not seem to have strong effects. Instead, workers at all skill levels express more support for high-skilled as opposed to low-skilled immigration. Workers in each industry share similar immigration preferences, even though the industries vary widely in their skill intensity, skill specificity, and penetration by immigrant workers (e.g., meatpacking compared with education or finance). The fact that workers in very different segments of the labor market share similar immigration preferences is difficult to square with the FP model. Nor do these findings support a restricted specific factor model that predicts that different types of immigrants produce different responses among native-born workers. Overall, a respondent's labor market position is not a powerful predictor of her immigration attitudes.

## **Fiscal Burden**

Labor market competition is not the only channel through which self-interest may shape immigration attitudes. Indeed, a newer strand in the political economy literature focuses on immigration's fiscal impacts (Campbell et al. 2006, Dustmann & Preston 2007). One influential study in this vein is Hanson et al. (2007). It incorporates a basic model of public finance into the standard FP model such that immigration also affects the posttax income of natives through its impact on tax rates and transfers. Assuming that low-skilled immigrants are a net burden for public finance, an increase in low-skilled immigration increases fiscal pressures to raise taxes or reduce per capita transfers for public spending. High-skilled immigration has the opposite effects. The key prediction is that if natives anticipate immigration's effect on taxes, those with higher incomes should be more opposed to low-skilled immigrants—and more supportive of high-skilled immigrants—than their poorer native-born counterparts. In a federalist system like that of the United States, this dynamic should be particularly pronounced in states with more exposure to the fiscal costs of immigration—that is, states with generous public services and many immigrants. Drawing on 1992 and 2000 ANES data, Hanson et al. (2007) find support for the claim that natives with higher incomes are less likely

to support immigration in high fiscal exposure states compared with other states. The authors interpret this finding as reflecting natives' self-interested fears about immigration-induced tax hikes.<sup>2</sup> Facchini & Mayda (2009) apply a similar model in a cross-national context using ISSP data from 1995. Consistent with the idea that richer natives are concerned about immigration's fiscal consequences, they find that respondents with higher incomes show less support for immigration. That is especially true in countries where influxes are more strongly skewed toward low-skilled immigrants. However, Crepaz & Damron (2009) use various surveys of European publics to illustrate that more comprehensive welfare states are associated with reduced nativist sentiment, perhaps because they establish norms of equal treatment.

Hainmueller & Hiscox (2010) reconsider these hypotheses and urge caution about the claim that pocketbook concerns about tax effects induce anti-immigration sentiments. Not only is there considerable disagreement about the fiscal contributions of immigrants, but in the period from 1990 to 2004, US states with faster-growing immigrant populations experienced lower increases (or larger cuts) in state income taxes and smaller increases in per capita welfare expenditures. If anything, such findings indicate that natives should be concerned about an immigration-induced erosion in spending. Using the experiment described above, the research finds that rich and poor natives are equally opposed to low-skilled immigration. In states with higher fiscal exposure, rich natives are perhaps less opposed to low-skilled immigration than those elsewhere. These findings are inconsistent with the claim that self-interested fears about immigration-induced tax hikes generate anti-immigrant sentiments. Tingley (2013) corroborates these results, finding no evidence of fiscal threat using a variety of US surveys and questions on immigration.

## **SOCIOPSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO IMMIGRATION ATTITUDES**

We turn now to the approaches we label sociopsychological. Although this tradition is quite heterogeneous, it consistently emphasizes perceptions of sociotropic effects on the receiving country as a whole. Those sociotropic effects are most commonly thought to be cultural, but they can be economic as well.

### **Observational Studies of Sociotropic Threats**

One early observational study was Espenshade & Calhoun (1993), which examines the correlates of southern Californians' attitudes toward illegal immigration. This research reports that coarse measures of economic exposure such as employment and income are not related to immigration attitudes, whereas higher education predicts reduced concern. Many of the subsequent observational analyses have focused on overall attitudes toward immigration and have employed nationally representative samples. And certainly, immigration attitudes vary depending on the specific question being asked (Segovia & Defever 2010). Yet this pattern of results reappears again and again.

Consider Citrin et al. (1997), a foundational study employing similar methods. That research uses the 1992 and 1994 ANES to identify the correlates of attitudes about preferred levels of immigration and immigrants' receipt of government benefits. It, too, finds little evidence that personal economic circumstances are influential. Yet pessimism about the national economy and

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<sup>2</sup>Here, too, the assumption is that respondents think about low-skilled immigration when answering a general survey question about preferred immigration levels.

negative affect toward Latinos<sup>3</sup> and Asian Americans do predict restrictionist attitudes. Citrin et al.'s (1997) results thus parallel those from prior studies of vote choice (e.g., Kinder & Kiewiet 1981): Sociotropic assessments of national economic performance prove influential, but personal economic circumstances do not.

Such findings leave a potential role for economic factors—and indeed, Lapinski et al. (1997) point out that anti-immigration attitudes spiked during the recession in the early 1980s (see also Tichenor 2002). Similarly, analyzing surveys of Canadians between 1975 and 2000, Wilkes et al. (2008) find that weaker national economic conditions correlate with increased restrictionism (see also Kehrberg 2007). Yet Citrin et al. (1997) provide a way of thinking about such results that undercuts claims grounded in material self-interest. Prospective voters formulate their opinions on immigration based on perceptions of its national impact rather than reasoning from their personal economic situation.

Subsequent observational studies employed similar empirical strategies, making use of preexisting survey data and regression-type estimators to identify the correlates of immigration attitudes. In an analysis of the 1992 and 1996 ANES, Burns & Gimpel (2000) reach conclusions compatible with Citrin et al. (1997). They consider an alternate pathway: that economic hardship may influence stereotypical thinking. Yet neither personal nor national economic considerations prove to be strongly correlated with immigration attitudes once accounting for stereotypes. Also, Chandler & Tsai (2001) analyze the General Social Survey (GSS) to show that college education and perceived cultural threats, including those related to the English language, are especially strong correlates of attitudes on both legal and illegal immigration. People who hold negative stereotypes of ethnic groups such as Latinos or Asian Americans are more restrictionist.

Are such patterns specific to the United States? Employing 2002–2003 ESS data from 20 European countries, Sides & Citrin (2007) identify several correlates of immigration attitudes; valuing cultural homogeneity proves an especially strong predictor (see also Ivarsflaten 2005). Yet, again, objective indicators of individual-level economic vulnerability show little explanatory power, as do country-level attributes such as immigration levels or economic conditions. By contrast, perceptions of immigrant inflows can matter. Among the majority of respondents who think their country receives more immigrants than others, opposition to immigration rises with their misperceptions about the number of immigrants coming to their country (see also Blinder 2013, which focuses on Britain). Likewise, Fetzer (2000) finds that individual economic indicators are weak predictors of immigration attitudes in France and Germany as well as the United States.

Citrin & Sides (2008) extend these results by using the 2005 Citizenship, Involvement, Democracy Survey to make comparisons between European countries and the United States. Like Europeans, Americans overestimate the number of immigrants in the country. In each of the countries studied, respondents think the foreign-born population is larger than it is. [In contrast, Lahav (2012, ch. 3) is more sanguine about the European public's information levels.] McLaren & Johnson (2007) report patterns comparable to those in Citrin & Sides (2008) from an analysis of the 2003 British Social Attitudes Survey. Measures of self-interest are not strongly correlated with preferences about the overall level of immigration, yet measures of symbolic threat (such as perceptions of British Muslims' attachment to Britain) and perceptions of immigration's sociotropic economic impacts are.

The primacy of the cultural over economic concerns gains further support from Card et al. (2012). They use the 2002 ESS and a latent factor model to estimate the relative importance of economic concerns (about wages and taxes) and compositional concerns (about impacts on

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<sup>3</sup>In this review, we use the terms Latino and Hispanic interchangeably.



the country's culture and social life) in shaping immigration attitudes. Consistent with previous research, this study finds that compositional concerns are roughly two to five times more important than economic concerns. Moreover, it finds that most of the effect of education on immigration attitudes is accounted for by increased compositional concerns among less-educated natives.

### Experimental Studies of Sociotropic Threats

The limits of observational studies for causal inference have been well rehearsed, especially when scholars study how multiple attitudes relate to one another. One groundbreaking experiment on attitudes toward immigrants and immigration was Sniderman et al. (2000). Focusing on Italy, that research set out to test the “distinctive status of race in marking others as outsiders” (Sniderman et al. 2000, p. 4). Using a 1994 nationally representative survey, researchers asked respondents questions about the social problems caused by either Eastern European or African immigrants and then asked about the attributes of either the same group or the other group. Contrary to expectations, the respondents did little to distinguish Eastern European and African immigrants. Negative responses about immigrant groups causing social problems are equally predictive of negative attributions about either immigrant group. In a similar vein, Sniderman et al. (2000, p. 38) find that factor analyses of attributions about Africans and Eastern Europeans show very similar structures, indicating that individuals who are prejudiced against one group are likely to harbor prejudice against other groups. That is not to say that different groups necessarily experience the same *levels* of prejudice—but that people who hold negative stereotypes about one group are likely to hold negative stereotypes about other groups, even if the content of those stereotypes differs. As a result, that research advances a model of immigration attitudes in which out-group categorization plays a central role. Simply to distinguish between groups induces intergroup hostility, irrespective of the content of the distinction. In this paradigm, the process of categorization—and the question of who is categorized as an outsider—becomes central.

Sniderman et al. (2004) and Sniderman & Hagendoorn (2007) apply similar methods, including experiments administered during a nationally representative telephone survey, to examine the antecedents of immigration attitudes in the Netherlands. In one experiment, Sniderman et al. (2004) conducted a direct test of the relative influence of economic and cultural threats. The results show that culturally threatening cues—e.g., immigrants who do not speak Dutch and are not expected to fit in well with Dutch culture—are more influential than economic cues. As the authors summarize, “not fitting in culturally evokes significantly more opposition to immigration than not fitting in economically, while fitting in culturally promotes significantly more support for it than fitting in economically” (Sniderman et al. 2004, p. 43). Sniderman et al. (2004) thus provide experimental evidence for the claim that opposition to immigration is rooted primarily in cultural concerns. As in the Italian case, the structure of Dutch respondents' stereotypes toward various immigrant groups is generally similar across groups (Sniderman et al. 2004, p. 51). “Prejudice is blind in a deep sense. It reflects a dislike not of a particular minority but of minorities in general,” the authors note (Sniderman et al. 2004, p. 56).

Although the survey underpinning Sniderman et al. (2004) and Sniderman & Hagendoorn (2007) was conducted in 1997–1998, its results help illuminate the politics of immigration and incorporation that would become internationally prominent after the 2004 murder of Theo van Gogh. For instance, Sniderman et al. (2004) show that the effects of cultural cues were not especially pronounced among those respondents who were concerned that Dutch culture was threatened. Such findings suggest that salient immigration-related threats have the potential to mobilize broad swaths of the electorate. Immigration is thus an issue with the potential to emerge suddenly and to destabilize existing political alignments, a point also emphasized in Messina's (1989) study of



British immigration politics. Such results suggest that the political salience of the issue is likely to be critical in understanding a country's immigration politics. When salient, immigration has the potential to mobilize otherwise left-leaning voters in a right-leaning direction.

### **Ethnocentrism, Group-Specific Stereotypes, and the Media**

Sniderman et al.'s (2000) survey experiment in Italy indicates that anti-immigrant hostility there is relatively undifferentiated across groups. The Kinder & Kam (2009) study of ethnocentrism uses the ANES to support a similar argument. This research finds that "what whites think about one out-group is quite consistent with what they think about another, just as ethnocentrism requires" (Kinder & Kam 2009, p. 54). Moreover, this generalized predisposition toward out-groups—ethnocentrism, in a word—strongly predicts immigration attitudes and leaves little explanatory role for group-specific attitudes (Kinder & Kam, ch. 6). Those who argue that anti-immigration attitudes do not have strong, group-specific underpinnings can also point to the history of immigration to the United States. At varying moments in time, immigrants from countries including Germany, Ireland, and Poland have all been the targets of nativist attitudes despite sharing the religion, language, and/or European heritage of the native-born majority (Tichenor 2002).

Still, generalized prejudice or ethnocentrism can be expressed through specific stereotypes targeting specific groups at specific points in time—and there is substantial evidence of that. For example, Ford (2011) uses six British Social Attitudes Surveys between 1983 and 1996 to demonstrate a consistent preference for white, culturally proximate immigrant groups. And Ford et al. (2012) show that country of origin is especially influential when British respondents assess low-skilled immigrants. This evidence of different reactions based on immigrants' countries of origin is bolstered by recent scholarship in social psychology that has put a renewed emphasis on the content of stereotypes applied to particular groups (e.g., Lee & Fiske 2006).

Similarly, another strain of scholarship contends that contemporary anti-immigrant hostility is grounded in stereotypes of particular immigrant groups and portrayals of these groups by parties and the mass media. In a study of Swiss elections in which local voters chose whom to make citizens, Hainmueller & Hangartner (2013) show that Swiss voters were much more likely to reject immigrants from Turkey and Yugoslavia than those from elsewhere in Europe. Furthermore, the penalty for those groups grew sharply in the 1990s, as the size of this immigrant group increased and the Swiss People's Party began to mobilize voters on this issue. Changing elite and media rhetoric provides a source of dynamic variation for theoretical approaches that might otherwise yield static predictions.

In the American context, Branton et al. (2011) use the 2000 and 2004 ANES to demonstrate that the correlates of non-Hispanic whites' immigration attitudes changed in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. Specifically, both media exposure and affect toward Latinos become significant predictors of immigration attitudes only after September 11, suggesting that portrayals of immigration shifted after the attacks. Valentino et al. (2013) couple content analyses with ANES data from 1992 to 2008 and a separate survey experiment to advance the argument that the break point in media coverage came with California's Proposition 187 in 1994. Since then, respondents' attitudes toward Latinos can account for much of the impact of ethnocentrism. The American news media has come to emphasize Latino immigration, and that emphasis is reflected in the correlates of Americans' immigration attitudes. As Valentino et al. (2013, p. 164) conclude, "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." In related work, Hartman et al. (2013) use experiments embedded in a nationally representative telephone survey to demonstrate that norm violations such as entering the country illegally or working

off the books are punished more when the immigrant in question is Hispanic as opposed to white.

The claim that Americans' immigration attitudes can be group-specific gets further support from Hopkins (2014b), who uses non-Latino respondents and two Knowledge Networks (KN) experiments in the United States to show that intergroup differences are not always divisive. In fact, a news video featuring a Latino immigrant speaking English with a pronounced accent can increase support for a pathway to citizenship relative to a fluent English speaker without a nonnative accent, likely because his effort to speak English triggers positive associations about immigrant assimilation. How the media portray immigrants—and which immigrants they portray—matters.

Other scholarship concurs about the influence of the media. For example, Abrajano & Singh (2009) find that Spanish-language media sources adopt a more pro-immigration tone in their reporting, and they find that Latinos who primarily consume Spanish-language news are more pro-immigration. Dunaway et al. (2010) show that the issue of immigration gets more coverage in border states and that people in border states are more likely to name the issue as the country's most important problem as a result.

### **Psychological Mechanisms and the Role of Emotions**

Both observational research and experimental research indicate that immigration attitudes are related to attitudes toward ethnic and racial groups—that immigration attitudes are closely linked with immigrant attitudes. But what psychological processes might underpin native-born reactions to immigrants from different backgrounds? Using a 2003 experiment conducted via KN with white, non-Latino, American respondents, Brader et al. (2008) examine that question. By manipulating the tone of a newspaper article as well as the featured immigrant group (white European or Latino), this research identifies anxiety as a mechanism connecting immigrant groups with concerns about immigration. When respondents were exposed to news that was about Latino immigrants and negative in tone, they responded with increased anxiety and became more concerned about immigration as a consequence. In this case, country of origin does seem to matter. The line between in-groups and out-groups is not identical to the line between natives and immigrants, a fact which bolsters group-specific approaches.

Brader et al.'s (2008) introduction of anxiety and of emotional responses served as a stepping-stone for additional research on the role of emotions in shaping immigration attitudes. Building on the close connection between anxiety and information seeking, Gadarian & Albertson (2013) use a KN experiment with American respondents to induce anxiety about immigration. Anxious citizens disproportionately seek out and recall threatening information, a form of biased information processing that has the potential to raise anxiety levels further. Also, Wright & Citrin (2011) use an experiment embedded in the 2008 Cooperative Congressional Election Study to show that protesters waving an American flag produce less negative affective responses to immigration while leaving immigration policy attitudes unchanged. To date, studies of emotion in immigration attitudes have focused primarily on Americans, making this an area ripe for comparative research.

### **National Identity, Norms, and Language**

The literature suggests that symbolic threats are influential in shaping immigration attitudes. That, in turn, raises questions about the specific ways in which immigrants are perceived to be threatening. Here, we summarize research that explains attitudes toward immigration by emphasizing national identity and norms, especially those related to immigrant assimilation and language use.

Understanding who is threatened by immigration may provide clues about what aspects of immigration are culturally threatening. One potential moderator comes from people's conceptions of what it means to be a member of a national community—or, put differently, from different conceptions of national identity. Some conceptions of the national community and its boundaries can easily accommodate newcomers whereas others cannot. Schildkraut (2005) develops these theoretical claims and tests them using the 1996 GSS as well as focus groups. The survey analyses show that Americans who take an ethnocultural view of national identity—for example, to be American is to be born in the United States, to live in the United States, and to be Christian—are more supportive of restricting immigration, a relationship that holds conditional on demographic characteristics (Schildkraut 2005, p. 80). More surprisingly, respondents who held more assimilationist conceptions of American identity were also more restrictionist. Yet that finding may be a product of measuring each conception of identity in absolute terms. Wright et al. (2012) show that measuring respondents' relative emphasis on ethnic versus civic conceptions of identity leads to the conclusion that civic conceptions of identity correlate with less restrictionist attitudes.

As part of a broader analysis of the impacts of how Americans define various communities, Wong (2010, pp. 135–36) uses the 1996 and 2004 GSS to show that those who define the American community in exclusive terms are more restrictionist, more opposed to birthright citizenship, and more opposed to extending citizenship rights to legal permanent residents. Relatedly, using data sets including the 1996 GSS along with structural equation modeling, de Figueiredo & Elkins (2003) illustrate the importance of distinguishing patriotism from nationalism. They contend that although people who are more nationalistic are more xenophobic, people who are more patriotic are not. Readers interested in a more detailed discussion of research on conceptions of American identity and the role of patriotism should consult Schildkraut (2014).

Related to arguments about national identity are arguments about norms. In the United States, a rich literature on racial attitudes indicates that many non-Hispanic whites perceive African Americans as violating work-related norms. Might similar mechanisms shape native-born residents' attitudes toward immigration, even if the content of the norms varies? Paxton & Mughan's (2006) work with undergraduates finds that norms concerning assimilation are especially influential. Schildkraut (2011, ch. 7) develops a measure of respondents' immigrant resentment using questions about immigrants (*a*) taking jobs from the native-born, (*b*) knowing what is going on in the United States, and (*c*) being willing to fit in. For respondents to a 2004 survey of Americans, the strength of the association between this measure and the more familiar racial resentment scale is 0.48 (Pearson's correlation), suggesting that the two concepts are related but not identical. Immigrant resentment is correlated with restrictionist immigration policy preferences, even conditional on racial resentment and other variables. Schildkraut (2011, p. 193) explains that “feeling that today's immigrants choose to violate civic republican and incorporationist norms is not only prevalent in American society, but also consequential” for immigration attitudes.

If assimilation into the host society is a central norm that immigrants are commonly perceived to violate, language is perhaps the most visible signal of that norm (Schildkraut 2005). As Theiss-Morse (2009, p. 88) details, more than 90% of Americans agree that one must speak English to be American; this figure is nearly identical to the share saying one must be a US citizen to be American. Building on that observation, Newman et al. (2012) examine the effect of exposure to Spanish using a 2006 survey of non-Hispanic white Americans as well as experiments with undergraduates. In the experiments, subjects encountered brief, incidental uses of Spanish. Considered jointly, the results support the claim that exposure to Spanish heightens cultural threat and so shapes immigration attitudes. Newman et al. (2013a) expands on these analyses by demonstrating that those high in social dominance orientation are more angered by encounters with Spanish and more likely to

push the costs of encountering a Spanish speaker on to that individual. Here again, we see the role of emotions in mediating responses to out-groups.

## ALTERNATIVE EMPIRICAL APPROACHES AND MODERATORS

### Subnational Contexts

The question of whether and how local demographic contexts correlate with immigration attitudes offers another opportunity to test theories based on material self-interest against approaches that emphasize stereotypes, the news media, or aggregate economic performance. Also, given the centrality of sociotropic attitudes, it is important to consider place-based units other than the nation as a whole.

Studies of subnational demographic context have commonly emerged from research on intergroup contact or local intergroup threat. Residential proximity provides the opportunity to interact with immigrants, potentially reducing negative stereotypes or out-group categorization. Fetzer (2000, p. 106), for example, uses the 1992 ANES to demonstrate that Americans living in US counties with more foreign-born residents like immigrants more. Yet policy preferences are not correlated with residential proximity (Fetzer 2000, p. 107), a finding that holds in analyses of the French Eurobarometer (Fetzer 2000, p. 120) as well. Fetzer (2000) finds that in Germany, proximity increases anti-immigrant feelings, again with no effect on policy preferences. Note the parallel between these results and Wright & Citrin (2011): Affect toward immigrants may be more responsive to context than are policy preferences. In a similar vein, McLaren (2003) studies Western European respondents to the 1997 Eurobarometer to show that contact with members of ethnic minority groups reduces the willingness to expel legal immigrants (see also Ellison et al. 2011).

Still, local intergroup contact may be limited by language barriers and may be overwhelmed by the real or perceived threat that immigrants pose. Hood & Morris (1998) provide evidence that contextual effects depend on the group in question. They use the 1992 ANES to demonstrate that non-Hispanic, white Americans' support for immigration is correlated positively with the size of the documented population and negatively with the undocumented population. Focusing on California, Tolbert & Hero (1996) examine contextual correlates of support for Proposition 187 in 1994, which aimed to prevent unauthorized immigrants from using public services. Campbell et al. (2006) expand those analyses to the subsequent ballot initiatives on affirmative action in 1996 (Proposition 207) and bilingual education in 1998 (Proposition 227). Yet they conclude that context effects differ across policies, with non-Hispanic whites becoming more restrictionist in heavily Latino counties only in 1994. This pattern of findings implies that the effects of residential proximity vary with the broader political context. Similarly, Ilias et al. (2008) use 2004 survey data to show that living in a state with a large immigrant population is predictive of attitudes toward a guest worker program but not attitudes on the appropriate number of immigrants. Here again, the choice of dependent variable matters. Moreover, Ha (2010) finds that the effect of local context on immigration attitudes varies by group, with non-Hispanic, white Americans' proximity to Asian Americans correlating with less restrictive immigration attitudes, whereas proximity to Hispanics correlates with more restrictive attitudes. Such patterns make sense if residential proximity serves in part to activate or challenge group-specific stereotypes (see also Cain et al. 2000). At the same time, Newman et al. (2013b) demonstrate that citizens do, in fact, perceive local demographics and economic conditions in the way assumed by these studies of local context.

The strong suggestion from this work is that local demographics do not have a fixed influence on immigration attitudes and that the broader political context may be influential in politicizing local demographics. That is the claim of Hopkins (2010), who uses repeated cross sections and a

panel of American respondents to illustrate a conditional relationship between local demographic changes and immigration attitudes. At times when immigration is nationally salient, living in a community with a growing immigrant population is associated with more restrictionist views. At other times, there is no such relationship, suggesting a role for national politics in politicizing local contexts. Hopkins (2011) uses panel data from the 2005 British Election Study to uncover similar changes in local contextual correlations during the course of that year's parliamentary campaign. Those who are native-born respond differently to neighboring immigrants depending on how those immigrants are framed in national political discourse. Here again, media and elite discourse provide an important source of dynamics in an otherwise static framework.

The threat hypothesis was originally developed to explain black-white politics, and in its original statement, it could be grounded within theories emphasizing material self-interest: As the size of an out-group grows, the out-group becomes a more credible contender for scarce resources such as jobs and political power. Yet the empirical results for immigrants point to different mechanisms. Newman (2013) provides evidence that Americans' responses to local demographic changes depend on the prior demographic balance. Where there are few Hispanics initially, an influx of Hispanics increases cultural threat and opposition to immigration. Such an influx has the opposite effect in places where there are many Hispanics at baseline. The emphasis on demographic changes in Hopkins (2010) and Newman (2013) suggests that longtime residents' sense of threat is not a deterministic function of the out-group population but depends instead on prior expectations about community composition.

Studies of contact and subnational context rarely exploit experimental or quasi-experimental variation and so must make strong assumptions about the absence of omitted variables. Still, one attempt to do so comes from Hopkins et al. (2014), which presents experiments illustrating that people who frequently encounter Spanish respond more negatively to subtle Spanish-language cues. And Enos (2014) provides evidence from an innovative field experiment that is broadly in keeping with the observational evidence outlined above. The researcher randomly assigned Spanish-speaking confederates to specific train platforms in the greater Boston area over a two-week period and then surveyed riders of those trains along with riders of matched trains in a control group. Subjects exposed to confederates who were ostensibly Spanish-speaking immigrants were less supportive of immigration and of allowing undocumented immigrants to remain in the country. Here again, the accumulated evidence on neighborhood effects is more in line with claims about context-dependent cultural threats than approaches rooted in self-interest. Even in cases where it is not possible to experimentally manipulate perceptions of local context, analyzing whether other immigration-related manipulations vary with respondents' local contexts is a productive direction for future work.

### **Moderators: Political Partisanship, Race, and Ethnicity**

To this point, we have followed past research by focusing on groups defined by race, ethnicity, and nativity. But given research on public opinion generally, it seems quite plausible that partisan and ideological groups also play a central role in immigration attitudes. For instance, to scholars of American politics, the discussion above likely seems surprisingly silent on partisanship, a central correlate of various political attitudes (e.g., Bartels 2002, Green et al. 2002).

Certainly, several studies have included partisanship or ideology as a control variable, but these concepts have not been a central feature in research on immigration attitudes. One exception is Knoll et al. (2011), which uses a framing experiment conducted with voters in Iowa to show that Republicans who think immigration is an important issue are differentially responsive to a treatment identifying immigrants as Mexican. A second comes from Merolla et al. (2013), which

demonstrates that mentioning that immigrants arrived as young children had an especially strong effect on Republicans' policy attitudes. Still another is Albertson & Gadarian (2012), which uses a video experiment conducted on an online, opt-in panel to show that a threatening advertisement leads to more punitive attitudes among non-Hispanic, white Republicans. In the terminology of Sniderman et al. (2004, p. 36), these are "galvanizing effects"—effects that emerge disproportionately among those already predisposed to oppose immigration. So, too, is the finding of Hopkins (2014a) that exposure to spoken Spanish reduces support for a pathway to citizenship among Republicans in the United States.

Still, others find evidence that immigration-related cues can be mobilizing, meaning that they influence even those who are not initially anti-immigration. For example, Neiman et al. (2006, p. 35) conclude from an analysis of Californians' immigration attitudes that Republicans "may be able to use the immigration issue as a wedge to attract support from people who tend to support Democratic candidates" (see also Hajnal & Rivera 2012). Relatedly, in an experiment with American undergraduates, Lahav & Courtemanche (2012) find that liberals' support for restrictive immigration policies grows when immigration is framed as a national security threat. And in two experiments, Merolla et al. (2012) find that specific frames around immigration including national security mobilize Latinos but not other groups.

### **Innovations in Measurement and Design**

At the same time that scholarship on immigration attitudes has been refining our substantive understanding, it has been innovating methodologically. The observational studies detailed above primarily employ general, high-quality survey data that were not collected specifically to study immigration attitudes. As a result, they typically use a limited number of pre-existing measures, focusing on general questions about preferred levels of legal immigration. Yet such measures only capture one dimension of immigration policy, a dimension that is not always the most relevant politically. Furthermore, such responses are potentially cheap talk. To increase external validity by closing the gap between stated and revealed preferences, Brader et al. (2008), Merolla et al. (2012), and Hainmueller et al. (2011) employ quasi-behavioral outcome variables. Their research provides enhanced realism by asking respondents whether they want to learn more about immigration, send a postcard on immigration reform, or convey their views on immigration to their member of Congress. In some cases, these measures of costly actions have ratified and extended the conclusions of prior research relying on stated preferences. However, the results of Hainmueller & Hangartner (2013) suggest that the gap between stated and revealed immigration preferences can be consequential. They find that preferences revealed as Swiss natives vote on naturalization applications differ sharply from immigration preferences measured in comparable public opinion surveys. Their results are consistent with social desirability biases: Natives vote on the basis of immigrants' origins, but these differences are much less pronounced or even reversed in surveys. This finding suggests the benefits to future research of measuring relevant behaviors as well as susceptibility to social desirability biases (e.g., Hainmueller & Hopkins 2012). For example, Blinder et al. (2013) use experimental and observational data to illustrate how social norms against expressing prejudice influence the relationship between anti-immigrant attitudes and support for anti-immigration policies or parties.

Another innovation in measurement involves the use of implicit attitudes. Pérez (2010) introduces the Implicit Association Test to the study of immigration attitudes (see also Iyengar et al. 2013b, Malhotra et al. 2013, and Pérez 2013). Implicit attitudes are attitudes that individuals are unaware that they possess. Using the YouGov/Polimetrix web panel, that research measures



implicit, unspoken attitudes toward Latino immigrants relative to a baseline of implicit attitudes toward white immigrants. It finds that implicit attitudes shape respondents' views on policies directed at both authorized and unauthorized immigrants—and that is true even after accounting for various psychological constructs reviewed above, including intolerance and ethnocentrism. This research thus provides a psychological mechanism through which native-born majority groups may distinguish between groups of immigrants, bolstering views that emphasize different reactions to immigrants from different countries. Further study of such implicit attitudes toward immigrants—including their stability over time, origins, and relationship to explicit biases—seems warranted. Scholarship has demonstrated these measures' predictive power, but their meaning and broader role in attitude formation remain open questions.

The literature on immigration attitudes has also seen innovation in experimental design as scholars seek to advance their understanding beyond what straightforward experiments permit. The relatively small number of experiments on immigration attitudes means that these experiments typically vary in several ways simultaneously. They use different manipulations in different contexts to assess different outcomes measured for different populations, meaning that there are frequently multiple explanations for why any two experiments produce different results. The treatments are also frequently aliased—that is, they combine multiple elements of theoretical interest. For example, immigrants who come from different countries are perceived to differ in several ways, so a manipulation of an immigrant's country of origin cannot tell us what it is about the country of origin that proves influential. As Hainmueller & Hopkins (2012) and Hainmueller et al. (2014) detail, a technique in marketing known as conjoint analysis enables scholars to address these challenges. Hainmueller & Hopkins (2012) apply this technique to a two-wave, population-based survey of Americans to identify the attributes that make individual immigrants more or less likely to be supported for admission.

These hypothetical immigrants differed on nine randomly assigned characteristics, including their education, occupation, work experience, work plans, language skills, and country of origin. Even when respondents had detailed information about an immigrant's background, the preference for highly skilled immigrants persisted for respondents of all skill levels. Especially noteworthy is the fact that immigrants who were described as having no plans to work are 33 percentage points less likely to be supported for admission than are immigrants with job contracts. More generally, the preferred immigrant—one who is well educated and in a high-status occupation, with plans to work, good English skills, and no prior unauthorized entries—hardly varies based on respondent characteristics including age, income, labor market position, partisanship, ethnocentrism, and self-monitoring. This “hidden American immigration consensus” (Hainmueller & Hopkins 2012, p. 1) over who should be admitted to the United States undercuts explanations that highlight respondent-level differences such as varying exposure to immigration's material costs. But it is consistent with explanations that posit similar responses across the population, such as norms-based and sociotropic explanations of immigration attitudes.

These conclusions receive partial empirical reinforcement from Wright et al. (2013), who apply another conjoint design to YouGov/Polimetrix data with American respondents to analyze who is granted legal status. This research, too, finds little evidence of individual-level labor market threat. Wright et al. (2013) also identify few differences based on partisanship. Yet this research does find that respondents with more ethnic conceptions of American identity are less influenced by immigrants' specific traits and more supportive of European immigrants.

To date, the experimental scholarship on immigration attitudes has overwhelmingly focused on individual countries. Given that many of the factors that prior scholarship highlights operate at the level of the nation, conducting parallel experiments across countries is likely to be an important



way forward. By making use of online panels, an ongoing and far-reaching research project aims to do just that. For example, Harell et al. (2012) report an experiment conducted in both the United States and Canada in which respondents were asked about immigrants of varying skin tone, skill level, and country of origin. Like Americans, Canadians prefer high-skilled immigrants and are unresponsive to skin tone (see also Hopkins 2014b). Yet Harrell et al.'s American respondents are more responsive to immigrants' regional origin. This suggests that the conflicting findings about the role of immigrants' countries of origin may be partly explained by cross-national variation in the frames used to understand immigration.

In a separate study of the United States, Britain, Japan, and Korea from that broader project, Iyengar et al. (2013b) show variation in the antecedents of immigration attitudes across countries. Whereas sociotropic economic concerns are especially influential in the United States and the United Kingdom, concerns about cultural conflict are equally influential in Korea and Japan. Iyengar et al. (2013b) also consider how the choice of dependent variable can influence one's conclusions, demonstrating that threatened responses are more powerful when thinking about immigration policy as opposed to individual immigrants. Still, these two attitudes are in general closely related. Also, Iyengar et al. (2013a) use data from seven industrialized countries to reinforce the importance of economic assessments of individual immigrants. That research finds that cultural attributes, including an Afrocentric appearance and Middle Eastern origins, do not shape responses to individual immigrants. These results reinforce the observation that our assessments of immigration attitudes hinge on the specific dependent variable in question—and that when we analyze attitudes toward individual immigrants, economic sociotropic considerations prove more influential.

## DISCUSSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

In light of the empirical evidence from the two distinctive intellectual traditions described above, how should we assess the hypotheses advanced to explain immigration attitudes? In this section, we first assess individual-level (or egotropic) economic explanations such as labor market competition and fiscal threat. We then turn to the more heterogeneous group of explanations that are sociotropic, either emphasizing immigration's economic or its cultural impacts. As we have throughout our review, we focus on majority-group immigration attitudes, although the relative lack of attention to minority-group attitudes means that such studies are likely to provide powerful out-of-sample tests of these theoretical perspectives.

### Individual-Level Approaches

Claims about labor market competition have been among the most scrutinized explanations of immigration attitudes. Such claims are both plausible *a priori* and theoretically innovative. Yet the accumulated evidence weighs strongly against the idea that self-interested concerns about labor market competition are a powerful driver of mass attitudes toward immigration. Although the labor market competition mechanism might operate under special circumstances of pronounced economic threat (e.g., Dancygier & Donnelly 2013, Malhotra et al. 2013), the significant majority of prior work finds that labor market competition does not shape attitudes of the mass public. The evidence indicates that immigration attitudes are not clustered by geography, occupation, or industry in ways consistent with labor market competition—or, for that matter, with fiscal threat. If material self-interest were at work, why would natives be responsive to changes in local immigrant populations rather than immigrant population levels, for example? The empirical weakness of the

labor market threat hypothesis sits well with the broader public opinion literature on the limited role of self-interest in shaping political attitudes (e.g., Green & Cowden 1992, Sears & Funk 1991).<sup>4</sup>

**Conclusion 1.** As an explanation of mass attitudes toward immigration, the labor market competition hypothesis has repeatedly failed to find empirical support, making it something of a zombie theory.

One potential rejoinder holds that the positive correlation between natives' education and support for both high- and low-skilled immigration is consistent with labor market threat operating only among low-skilled natives. Yet there are several reasons to discount that possibility. One problem with this interpretation is that it runs counter to evidence in labor economics indicating that it is actually well-educated natives who are most easily replaced by immigrants (Ottaviano & Peri 2012). Thus any increased labor market threat felt by those with lower skills cannot be explained by economic realities alone. Another problem relates to the role of education, the most common measure of skill. Numerous studies have shown that education is perhaps the most powerful predictor of pro-immigration attitudes, but the interpretation of this correlation is contested because of the multiple mechanisms through which education may act. Education is a very coarse measure of skill. In light of the evidence on stereotyping and ethnocentrism, the education effect is more likely to capture differences in tolerance, ethnocentrism, cultural capital, sociotropic assessments, or political correctness than exposure to competition from immigrants (Bobo & Licari 1989; Citrin et al. 1997; Chandler & Tsai 2001; Hainmueller & Hiscox 2007, 2010; Card et al. 2012). Moreover, we should be careful before inferring causation: The education coefficient may also reflect substantial selection biases if the natives who select into education differ from those who do not on unobserved characteristics that are correlated with immigration attitudes. For example, even though average education levels have risen substantially in developed democracies in recent decades, anti-immigration sentiments remain high. This suggests that a quasi-experimental manipulation of education levels in the study of immigration attitudes would be of substantial value in unpacking the causal mechanisms that underpin the education effect.

**Conclusion 2.** Having more education is consistently correlated with less restrictive immigration views, and the evidence suggests that this relationship is not driven by its connection to competition from immigration. Still, there are varied mechanisms through which education may act, making the value of examining quasi-experimental variation in education substantial.

Overall, there is less evidence on the fiscal burden hypothesis, another channel through which economic self-interest may operate. Those in the nonmaterial camp might argue that the mixed findings regarding fiscal threat further undermine theoretical approaches grounded in self-interest. In our view, though, the fiscal threat hypothesis has been subject to less extensive testing than has labor market competition, making reports of its demise premature. In fact, a modified version of the fiscal threat model—one emphasizing sociotropic rather than self-interested reasoning—has found empirical support. Immigrants with no plans to work are perceived far more negatively (e.g., Hainmueller & Hopkins 2012), as are those with more dependents and low occupational status (e.g., Iyengar et al. 2013a).

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<sup>4</sup>Another, under-researched possibility is that labor market threat may prove more influential for political behavior. Future research might examine this issue, as there is reason to think that self-interest may be more influential on behaviors both generally (e.g., Green & Cowden 1992) and in the case of immigration specifically (e.g., Dancygier 2010).

## Sociotropic Approaches

The hypothesis that immigrants threaten native-born residents' material self-interest is theoretically parsimonious. In the words of Kinder & Kam (2009, p. 37), "when set against the model of rational choice that has reigned supreme over economics, the general model of reasoning offered up by psychology is, admittedly, something of a mess." The relative precision of theoretical claims about self-interest may help explain the staying power of that approach in the face of both observational and experimental results that favor symbolic threats. Still, considered as a whole, the literature suggests that symbolic threats are likely to be more influential in shaping immigration attitudes.

By definition, attitudes on immigration are about groups of people and about challenges to group boundaries (e.g., Theiss-Morse 2009, Wong 2010, Schildkraut 2011). It is thus unsurprising that perceptions about immigration's impacts on salient social groups are powerful correlates of immigration attitudes. Still, that statement raises more questions than it answers, as it forces us to consider which social groups matter under what circumstances. Here, prior research has emphasized two related types of groups: those based on nationality and those based on ethnicity. As we saw above, it has typically classified immigration's impacts on those social groups as economic or cultural.

On the economic side, existing research has connected immigration attitudes with general economic conditions, a finding that is consistent with claims that immigration attitudes are sociotropic and economic in orientation. Indeed, attitudes toward immigration correlate closely with respondents' perceptions about immigration's economic impacts on the nation or other social aggregates. Relatedly, high-skilled immigrants are consistently preferred for admission. All of this is evidence that people assess immigration based on perceptions of its national economic impact.

Perceptions about immigrants' impact on aspects of national identity and culture—especially those related to language—have also proven influential. Still, relatively few studies have considered the impact of sociotropic economic considerations alongside sociotropic cultural considerations (but see Sniderman et al. 2004), making it unclear how much weight to accord each explanation. In fact, it can be difficult to empirically differentiate between the various theoretical pathways that are termed sociotropic. For instance, if immigrants who speak the native language are preferred for admission, is that because of their perceived economic contribution or the reduction in the cultural threat they pose? Conversely, are immigrants with low occupational status a concern because of their possible need for public support or because of cultural conceptions about the centrality of work to American identity?

**Conclusion 3.** As compared to the labor market competition hypothesis, sociotropic theories are less clearly differentiated from one another. Future scholarship should identify critical tests that can differentiate between the various sociotropic hypotheses that fit under the economic and cultural headings.

At the conceptual level, shifting away from the dominant economics-versus-culture framing would also advance this research agenda. Too frequently, culture operates as a residual category, describing any noneconomic immigrant attribute. On its own, the claim that culture matters thus has less content than meets the eye. And not all of the ostensibly cultural attributes operate in the same way. For instance, the fact that immigrants' language use influences immigration attitudes but that their skin tone does not suggests the value of differentiating among cultural traits based on their perceived immutability. Immigrants are rewarded or penalized for how they speak and the education they obtain, attributes over which they are perceived to have control.

As with the sociotropic, economically oriented perspective, some applications emphasizing national identity suffer from limitations in research design. Perceptions about economic conditions, the number of immigrants, or who is a legitimate member of a nation—all are attitudes, and so all raise the specter of endogeneity if still other attitudes jointly influence them as well as attitudes on immigration policy. Respondents may overestimate the size of the foreign-born population or evaluate the state of the economy more negatively precisely because of pre-existing anti-immigrant sentiments, for example. Many empirical tests to date have been too permissive: The key independent variable and the dependent variable partly capture the same concept, inducing simultaneity bias and rendering the direction of the causal arrow ambiguous.

Is the empirical support for the sociotropic perspectives due to their superior explanatory power, or is it instead an artifact of empirical tests biased in their favor? The growing experimental literature suggests the former, but distinguishing between these possibilities is an important task for future research. Here, the use of panel data could allow scholars to isolate the timing of changes in various attitudes. Do changing perceptions of the national economy or of immigration's cultural impacts precede changes in policy attitudes? Experimental manipulations that can successfully modify respondents' economic perceptions or conceptions of identity are likely to prove critical as well, but they need to be carefully designed to isolate the causal effects of interest in a way that is externally valid.

**Conclusion 4.** Theoretical approaches emphasizing attitudes toward social aggregates—either the nation or else groups defined based on ethnicity—commonly find empirical support. However, concerns about endogeneity frequently leave the direction of causation unclear. Future research would benefit from moving away from cross-sectional designs that regress attitudes on attitudes. Instead, it should focus more on research designs that utilize panel data, natural experiments, and experimental manipulations to isolate the causal effects of sociotropic economic and cultural factors.

One answer to concerns about endogeneity is to identify sets of attitudes that are quite stable, and perhaps less likely to be endogenous. Prejudice, ethnocentrism, and stereotype adherence fit that description, and scholarship consistently finds a connection between these constructs and more restrictive immigration attitudes. Still, where and how these variables matter is the subject of ongoing and productive debate. Does the very act of categorizing immigrants as an out-group induce more negative attitudes (as in Sniderman et al. 2000 and Kinder & Kam 2009), or do specific immigrant groups evoke different responses (as in Valentino et al. 2013)? Here, additional comparative experimentation in the spirit of Harell et al. (2012) and Iyengar et al. (2013a,b) will be crucial in identifying the spatial, temporal, institutional, and informational contexts that lead immigration attitudes to be more or less group-specific. Moreover, carefully crafted experimental designs that manipulate ethnocentrism and stereotypes could help to better identify the causal role of these variables. The same is true for political disaffection, an attitude that studies have consistently linked to anti-immigration attitudes (e.g. Messina 1989, Ford & Goodwin 2014).

**Conclusion 5.** Very consistently, prejudice and ethnocentrism have been connected with increased support for restrictive immigration attitudes. Yet existing research disagrees about how group-specific such attitudes are, and it would benefit significantly from developing experimental manipulations of its key constructs.

Theoretical explanations of immigration attitudes that emphasize specific immigrant groups also tend to emphasize the mass media, especially as an explanation of how such attitudes change over time. Repeatedly, we saw above the importance of measuring the changing frames and symbols salient in discussions of immigration. Yet to date, the measurement of the information environment

within this literature has been coarse, with scholars frequently assuming the same information environment for all residents of a country at a given point in time. More precise measurement of the information environment as it is experienced by specific individuals should prove quite valuable—as will the use of panel data, especially when it straddles shifts in events or changes in rhetoric (e.g., Hopkins 2011).

**Conclusion 6.** Information environments and elite rhetoric play central theoretical roles in explanations of immigration attitudes, especially their dynamics. Yet their measurement has to date been very coarse.

By design, the research reviewed here considers attitudes on immigration policy as its primary dependent variable. Yet such research has been to a striking extent unintegrated with broader research on the sources of political attitudes, and with research on political partisanship and ideology specifically (but see Hajnal & Rivera 2012). Much of the existing research considers immigration without considering the question of which political actors are supporting which policies (but see Money 1999 and Messina 1989). It frequently ignores the fact that arguments about immigration are associated with particular political parties and ideologies—and so risks overstating the uniqueness of immigration attitudes. Outside the study of immigration, people are known to rely on attitudes toward various salient social groups in formulating their political opinions. And those social groups could be defined in partisan as well as ethnic or national terms (e.g., Green et al. 2002), an issue for future research to address. Indeed, given the centrality of partisanship in recent theorizing about Americans' political attitudes and behaviors, future research should integrate this foundational concept with our models of immigration attitudes. If conducted beyond the borders of the United States, such studies have the potential to shed light on any cross-country differences in the role of partisanship in shaping public opinion as well.

**Conclusion 7.** Research on immigration attitudes to date has been surprisingly divorced from research on political partisanship and ideology. The relationship between immigration attitudes and political partisanship and ideology should be a central issue moving forward.

Certainly, the research reviewed here has deepened our understanding both of immigration attitudes specifically and of public opinion generally. For instance, recent studies of immigration attitudes have reinforced the claim that the influence of self-interest on public opinion is highly circumscribed. These studies have identified variation in media coverage as an important explanation for attitudinal change over time as well. Yet research on immigration attitudes also has the potential to inform studies of immigration policy making, studies for which public attitudes on immigration are central independent variables. With a few important exceptions (e.g., Messina 1989, Tichenor 2002, Lahav 2012), there has been a paucity of research considering the role of public opinion in shaping immigration policy. That represents a missed opportunity, especially given that both Messina's (1989) study of Britain and Tichenor's (2002) study of the United States illustrate that immigration policy is typically less restrictive than voters would prefer (see also Gilens 2012). If elected officials are out of step with the public on the issue, why is that so, and with what consequences? The study of public attitudes on immigration alone cannot answer that puzzle—but it clarifies that there is a real puzzle to explain.

As a political issue, immigration relates to strongly held conceptions of national identity and boundaries, and it has an emotional resonance that many issues do not. Immigration thus has flash potential: It can disrupt existing political alignments and produce unexpected coalitions when it is mobilized into politics. Indeed, immigration has the potential to induce unusual political coalitions among political elites and activists, as it can pit business interests against social conservatives and can divide the left by class or ethnicity (Tichenor 2002). So although it is undeniably

important to understand mass attitudes toward immigration, it is also insufficient. We also need a thorough explanation of how organized groups and political parties mobilize residents on the issue of immigration, and how that mobilization varies across time and space. The fact that self-interest plays only a limited role in mass attitudes in no way implies that the policy-making process on immigration is devoid of organized interests. Research on immigration policy making has been understandably limited by the relatively small number of cases, and by an inability to identify exogenous variation in many instances. But it will nonetheless play a valuable role in identifying how immigration attitudes shape (or fail to shape) public policy, and thus in determining the broader import of the attitudes that have been our focus here.

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