

11 Who's Afraid of Immigration?

The Effects of Pro- and Anti-Immigrant Threatening Ads among Latinos, African Americans, and Whites

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In 2010, an Arizona law aimed at identifying and deporting unauthorized immigrants attracted national attention, and several politicians (including Senator John McCain) endorsed the law in the context of their political campaigns. In his campaign ad, McCain blames unauthorized immigrants for “drugs and human smuggling, home invasion (and) murder” before calling for Arizona to “complete the danged fence.” Senator McCain did survive his tough primary challenge, and many politicians see anti-immigrant rhetoric as a winning political campaign strategy. In June 2006, Republican Brian Bilbray picked up the disgraced Randy Cunningham’s congressional seat in a wealthy Southern California district just outside of San Diego. His Democratic opponent, Francine Busby, ran against what she termed the “culture of corruption” in the Republican Party, but Bilbray, who ran a campaign based on opposition to unauthorized immigration, won out (LaVelle 2006). The campaign’s success seems surprising given the characteristics of the district: an extremely wealthy district where voters were in no danger of losing their jobs to undocumented immigrants.

As anti-illegal immigration rhetoric emerges again as a prominent campaign strategy, we note that the effectiveness of these appeals is not well understood. In particular, there is a lack of experimental work on the topic, and the precursors to attitudes on illegal immigration are typically inferred from cross-sectional data. In this chapter, we explore how immigration appeals that evoke the public’s anxieties influence immigration attitudes.

Evoking anxiety over immigration is not an exceptional campaign strategy. In response to the general tone of political rhetoric about immigration, Republican Chris Cannon (R- Utah) criticized politicians for “playing to primal fear” (quoted in Kiely 2006, 4A). In particular, many of the fears evoked by immigration ads and rhetoric implicitly or explicitly reference Latinos as the source of the fear. As governor, Pete Wilson claimed that California had an “immigration emergency” and backed Proposition 187, which was designed to deny social services to unauthorized immigrants.

Commercials supporting the proposition featured the voice over “they just keep coming” coupled with images of people running across the freeway, dodging cars. The *Los Angeles Times* describes a similar ad run by the 1996 Dole presidential campaign as follows:

the viewer sees a sea of menacing Latino faces—only Latino faces—invading the state, filling its schools and prisons and victimizing a non-Latino “we.” “We pay the taxes. We are the victims. Our children get shortchanged,” the ad says as the camera zooms in on a classroom full of white teenagers.

While Republicans have run notable campaigns invoking anti-illegal immigration rhetoric, the issue sometimes cuts across partisan lines. President Bill Clinton portrayed threatening scenarios involving unauthorized immigrants in his 1995 State of the Union address:

All Americans are rightly disturbed by the large numbers of illegal aliens entering our country. The jobs they hold might otherwise be held by citizens or legal immigrants; the public services they use impose burdens on our tax payers. That’s why our administration has moved aggressively to secure our borders more by hiring a record number of new border guards, by deporting twice as many criminal aliens as ever before, by cracking down on illegal hiring, by barring welfare benefits to illegal aliens.

Clinton offers as a given that “all Americans” share these concerns, referencing job competition, abuse of public services, criminality, and “alien” status. Given that many of the campaign ads focus on Latino immigration, we are interested in whether appeals that play on fears about immigration influence Americans of different racial backgrounds differently.

Politicians regularly sound alarm bells about immigration, so the question becomes, how do people react to these alarms? In this chapter, we address this question through an experiment. We test the influence of threatening rhetoric about immigration on political attitudes of Latinos, African Americans, and whites separately. While previous work has examined the effect of threat on immigration attitudes, and racial differences in immigration attitudes, we are interested in whether threatening appeals play out differently among racial groups. Most previous work focuses on the immigration attitudes on one racial group at a time, but one contribution of this study is that we investigate how threatening immigration ads affect three racial groups. We expect and demonstrate that racial identity moderates the effect of threatening appeals.

The second main question in this chapter is whether different types of threat (the threats immigrants pose to the country vs. the threats that immigrants face) can be used to affect immigration attitudes. We vary

the content of threatening ads to determine whether advocates for immigrants' rights can use threat to encourage less punitive attitudes towards immigrants. The vast majority of research on threat and immigration focuses on threats that immigrants pose to the country such as economic, security, and cultural threats. This focus is understandable given the conventional uses of threat in immigration debates. However, there are other threatening dimensions to the immigration debate, such as the threat that immigrants face from border patrol and unsafe work environments. Can emotional appeals about these topics be used effectively by immigrants' rights advocates?

IMMIGRATION POLICY ATTITUDES

Previous research suggests that attitudes toward unauthorized immigration can be shifted, in part, due to the multiple bases of opinion. In cross-sectional work, Alvarez and Butterfield (2000) argued that anti-immigration attitudes are rooted in cyclical nativism and responsive to economic trends. A recent analysis of public opinion trends shows that Americans hold relatively positive views of immigrants themselves, yet are split over whether immigrants benefit the U.S. economically and culturally or are a net burden on the state (Sevogia and Defever 2010). In their study of attitudes about Proposition 187, Lee and Ottati (2002) found that support for the anti-immigration bill was rooted in out-group bias, but was also related to economic worries and support for the rule of law. Furthermore, they found that each of these factors has its own independent effect, rather than economic or rule of law concerns acting as legitimizing arguments for out-group bias. Also, while Lapinski et al. (1997) noted that Americans express negativity toward immigrants of most nationalities, they also found that almost half of their sample believed that immigrants work harder than people born here and about half believed that immigrants enrich the U.S. with their cultures and talents. As of 2006, majorities of poll respondents worried about unauthorized immigration and believed that the government was not doing enough to keep undocumented immigrants out of the U.S., but the level of support for decreasing immigration was lower than in the early 1990s (Pew Research Center for the People and the Press [Pew] 2006).

While research suggests that attitudes towards unauthorized immigration might be malleable, so far little experimental work has explored this possibility. Because immigration attitudes are rooted in multiple, potentially conflicting ideas, we believe that these attitudes can be changed in the context of a political campaign or in an experimental setting. In their experimental work, Domke, McCoy, and Torres (1999) find that attitudes toward and beliefs about immigration are responsive to shifting frames. Subjects who read about immigration framed as an economic issue rely on their racial predispositions, while those who read about immigration

framed as an ethical issue do not. In other experimental work, Brader, Valentino, and Suhay (2008) find that immigration attitudes depend on the ethnicity of the immigrants, as well as whether immigration is framed as a threat or a benefit. They find evidence that white subjects made anxious about the economic costs of low-skilled Latino immigration are the least supportive of immigration policies. We add to this literature by experimentally testing how two threatening messages affect the attitudes of whites, Latinos, and African Americans.

A. Racial and Partisan Differences in Immigration Attitudes

Immigration attitudes in the U.S. differ by racial group. Whites and African Americans are more likely to worry about the effects of immigration on the economy and the fate of workers rather than about the fate of immigrants themselves. When given a choice of saying that immigrants strengthen the country with their talents or burden the country in a 2006 Pew study, 55 percent of whites and 54 percent of blacks answered that immigrants are a burden while 64 percent of Latinos answered that immigrants strengthen the country. Racial differences are also apparent in attitudes about access to social services. For example, 20 percent of whites believe that unauthorized immigrants should be eligible for social services, in contrast to 43 percent of blacks and 64 percent of Latinos who hold this belief. In general, people are more supportive of the idea that the children of undocumented immigrants should be allowed in public schools, but support also differs by race: 93 percent of Hispanics, 79 percent of blacks, and 64 percent of whites support access to public schools for the children of unauthorized immigrants (Pew 2006). On the whole then, Latinos seem more concerned about immigrants themselves and are more supportive of immigrants' access to government services while whites and blacks are more concerned about the effect of immigration and immigrants on the economy.

In a 2007 Gallup Poll, 31 percent of Latinos named immigration policy as the country's most important problem, the second most important issue after the war in Iraq. While both whites and Latinos named immigration as a problem, they did so for different reasons.

More than half of Latinos in an October 2007 poll worried that either they or someone close to them would be deported, and 40 percent reported some type of discrimination due to their immigration status (Pew Hispanic Center 2007). Latinos are generally more liberal than whites or African Americans on immigration policy (Sanchez 2006), but Latinos are not uniformly liberal on immigration. First-generation and middle-income Latinos are more supportive of increasing immigration than low-income and Latinos in the second generation and beyond. Similarly, Branton (2007) finds that Latinos are less likely than Anglos to believe that unauthorized immigrants hurt the economy, but that Latino attitudes vary depending on level of acculturation.

Additionally, Latinos' immigration attitudes are not fixed, but rather are affected by both political context and the information environment. Latinos' group consciousness, or the belief that Latinos' fates are linked, increases support for increasing immigration (Sanchez 2006). Abrajano and Singh (2009) find that Latinos' news sources shape their awareness of immigration policy as well as support for immigration reform. Latinos who rely primarily on Spanish-language television news were more aware of George W. Bush's immigration reform proposals, more likely to believe that unauthorized immigration helps the U.S. economy, and more likely to support a guest worker program than Latinos who rely primarily on English-language news. They attribute these findings to Spanish-language media's more positive coverage of immigration reform than English-language news.

Latinos might view the typical political campaign that references immigration with great suspicion. Pantoja and Segura (2003) found that 70 percent of Latinos in California thought that the debate over Proposition 187 created a climate that facilitated discrimination and racism against the overall Latino community. Together, these findings suggest that an information environment that makes group consciousness salient and focuses on immigrants themselves may increase Latinos' support for pro-immigration policies.

African Americans are less supportive of immigration than Latinos, particularly when African Americans are or believe themselves to be in economic competition with immigrant workers. Surveys of African Americans in the 1990s found that between 53 percent and 65 percent of respondents wanted to decrease immigration (Nteta 2006). Perceptions of economic and political competition between blacks and immigrants tend to depress African American support for immigration policy (Bobo and Hutchings 1996). In general, the relative economic status of racial groups has an important influence on black perceptions and attitudes. In neighborhoods where Latinos are economically advantaged relative to their black neighbors, blacks are more likely to harbor negative stereotypes about Latinos, are more likely to view black and Latino economic and political interests as incompatible, and are more reluctant to extend affirmative action policies to Latinos (Gay 2006). Additionally, beliefs that immigrants increase taxes, decrease the number of people who work hard, and worsen culture all lead blacks to more strongly support limiting immigration (Nteta 2006). Concern about the economic effects of Latino immigrants appears most strongly among blacks; in the 2004 American National Election Studies (ANES), almost two-thirds of black respondents said that Latinos take away jobs from those already working in the U.S. McClain et al. (2007) similarly find that African Americans were more concerned than whites about the economic threat posed by immigrants based on a survey conducted in a southern city with a new immigrant population.

B. Partisanship

While there are clear differences in immigration attitudes based on race, the evidence for partisan differences is mixed. Citrin et al. (1997) found that partisanship is unrelated to preference for limiting immigration in the U.S. based on 1992 and 1994 ANES data. Neiman, Johnson, and Bowler (2006) found weak evidence of partisan differences in immigration attitudes in California. They conclude that partisan differences are often due to correlated factors, such as race, and that the views of many Democrats and Independents overlap with Republicans. Others have found stronger evidence of a partisan divide in immigration attitudes. Tolbert and Hero (1996) found a relationship between county-level Republican percentage and support for California's Proposition 187. More recently, a survey about the recent Arizona legislation found that Republicans are more supportive of requiring people to produce documents verifying legal status than Democrats, though majorities of both parties approve of this measure (Pew 2010).

HYPOTHESES

We hypothesize that the effectiveness of threatening appeals about immigration varies by racial group. Given the different dimensions of worry expressed by Latinos in comparison to the other racial groups (Pew 2006), we expect that Latinos' immigration policy attitudes would significantly differ from the other groups. Latinos are more likely to hold pro-immigration attitudes, worry about the conditions of immigrants, and view anti-immigrant campaigns as racist. We expect that a traditional anti-immigration advertisement that portrays immigration as a threat to the country will not resonate among Latinos. In contrast, we expect that the traditional immigration ad will persuade whites and African Americans to shift their attitudes in an anti-immigrant direction.

We have opposite predictions for a different threatening ad, which focuses on the threats faced by immigrants themselves. Whites and African Americans are more likely to view threats over immigration in terms of economic, culture, or security threats, and so we expect that an ad featuring threats to immigrants themselves will not resonate with them. However, while this type of threatening ad is scarce in the political debate over immigration, it raises concerns that are familiar to many Latinos, and we expect the ad to resonate with them. We expect that this type of threatening ad will push Latinos in a more liberal direction.

Given the contrasting findings in the literature regarding partisanship and immigration attitudes, we are more speculative on this front. If there are partisan differences, we expect that Republicans will be more receptive to an ad that portrays immigrants as a threat to the country and that

Democrats will be more receptive to an ad that focuses on threats faced by immigrants themselves.

EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN

In a previous study, we asked our respondents to summon their own anxiety about immigration in an open-ended question and found that two distinct types of worries emerged. The first worry alluded to the economic and social impact of immigrants on the U.S. and echoed the majority of popular rhetoric about immigration. The second set of worries concerned exploitation and discrimination against immigrants themselves, a worry far less common in mainstream media discussions about immigration. To evaluate whether the content of threatening messages mattered, we created two separate ads that focused on either the fear of immigration message or the exploitation message and randomly assigned subjects to watch one of the ads or a control condition. After watching one of the ads or the control condition, subjects answered a series of questions on immigration policy—whether immigrants should be eligible for a number of social services, how much the government should spend on border security, and general immigration attitudes.

Subjects were randomly assigned to view one of three videos that varied whether respondents received a neutral or threatening message about immigration. All three videos were fifty-eight seconds long and featured a series of statements about immigration on a black background with white text. In the two treatment conditions, the videos were intended to increase respondents' anxieties about either immigration's effect on the economy and crime (i.e., the Fear condition) or the exploitation of unauthorized immigrants (i.e., the Exploitation condition). Additionally, to increase the evocative nature of the Fear and Exploitation conditions, the treatment conditions featured a dramatic instrumental score. The control condition video was designed to bring immigration to mind in a nonthreatening way. The control condition video did not have music or pictures; respondents read census definitions of immigration and native-born status with no emotion evoked.

Our treatment conditions were designed to mimic interest group ads either advocating pro-immigration (Exploitation condition) or anti-immigration (Fear condition) positions. Like Brader (2005), the ads utilized evocative visuals and dramatic music to evoke fear about the effects of immigration on both the country and immigrants themselves. The threatening ads used the same music and most of the same images while varying information about immigration.

Table 11.1 highlights some of the differences between these conditions. In the Fear condition, respondents read statements attributed to prominent politicians and political commentators that portrayed immigrants as

depressing American wages and increasing crime. In one portion of the ad, respondents read a quote from Representative Steve King of Arizona that claimed that unauthorized immigrants murdered twelve Americans a day and killed another thirteen Americans daily in drunk driving accidents. Subjects then saw an image of a totaled car and an American flag hung upside down under a Mexican flag. In the Exploitation condition, respondents read statements from politicians and the press that working conditions for immigrants were often unsafe and that immigrants pay more in taxes than they take from the system. In the last section of the ad, respondents read a statement from a 2007 *New York Times* article that stated that immigrant children in detention centers were denied proper health and educational needs. Subjects then saw an image of a detention center with barbed wire and a child looking out from behind a wire fence.

To ensure that respondents experienced a more realistic experimental environment, subjects completed the study online in their homes. The 440 subjects came from an online panel of respondents, and we oversampled blacks and Latinos. The sample is composed of 145 self-identified whites, 148 African Americans, and 147 Latino respondents. Most surveys and experiments explore the immigration attitudes of one racial group at a time (Brader, Valentino, and Suhay 2008; Nteta 2006; Pew Hispanic Center 2007), so this experiment provides a way to evaluate the effect of immigration messages on a broader portion of the public. Forty-two percent of respondents hold a college degree or higher, 48 percent are female, and the average age is forty-three years old. Among whites, 37 percent identified as Democrats and 37 percent identified as Republicans. Among African

Table 11.1 Experimental Design

	<i>Ad content</i>	<i>Images/music</i>
Nonthreatening ad: Control condition	Information only “The U.S. census bureau defines immigration as . . .”	None
Threatening ad: Exploitation condition	Negative—immigrant rights “There are 230,000 immigrants a year in detention including the sick and elderly.”	Images depicting workers, bad working conditions, immigrants being detained, children. Threatening music.
Threatening ad: Fear of immigrants condition	Negative—costs of immigration “Illegal immigrants make up 30 percent of the federal prison population.”	Images depicting crime, drugs, protests, Mexican flags hanging with American flags. Threatening music.

Americans, 68 percent identified as Democrats while only 4 percent identified as Republican; among Latinos, 49 percent identified as Democrats and 15 percent identified as Republicans. Although the sample cannot be described as representative, we believe that it is a step forward in tracing the influence of fear appeals on immigration attitudes.

RESULTS: POLICY ATTITUDES BY RACE

There are significant differences in immigration policy attitudes between whites, blacks, and Latinos. As in the general public, Latinos in our experiment hold the most pro-immigration and pro-immigrant attitudes with whites and African Americans significantly less supportive of services for immigrants and more supportive of criminalizing unauthorized immigrants. [Table 11.2](#) presents immigration attitudes divided by racial group. The table shows the percent of respondents who said that unauthorized immigrants should definitely be eligible for a variety of state services. In the first set of measures, subjects were asked whether they thought that unauthorized immigrants should be eligible for a variety of services and were offered five response options: definitely not eligible, probably not eligible, unsure, probably eligible, and definitely eligible. Respondents evaluated whether unauthorized immigrants should be able to access basic services such as elementary education and emergency room treatment as well as more controversial services such as in-state tuition at universities, drivers' licenses, and welfare benefits such as food stamps.

Consistent with expectations, Latinos are significantly more supportive of providing services to immigrants than are whites and African Americans. Among all groups there is a distinct break in support for humanitarian policies like emergency healthcare and education compared with much lower support for entitlement policies such as food stamps that indicate more of an obligation of the state to the individual citizen. Latinos are especially supportive of providing humanitarian services such as education and access to the ER: 49 percent of Latinos said that the children of immigrants should definitely be eligible for school while 53 percent answered "definitely eligible" for ER services. In contrast, 21 percent of whites and 30 percent of blacks definitely favor elementary education for unauthorized immigrants. Larger percentages of whites (27 percent) and blacks (38 percent) would definitely allow ER access to immigrants, the most basic and nonpoliticized service on the list.

In contrast, far fewer respondents answered that unauthorized immigrants should definitely have access to in-state tuition, food stamps, and drivers' licenses. Even among Latinos, only about one-fifth of Latinos answered that immigrants should definitely be eligible for in-state tuition and only 13 percent answered "definitely eligible" for food stamps. Small minorities of

Table 11.2 Immigration Policy Attitudes

	Eligibility for social services (% definitely eligible)					Border security	Overall policy
	Element education	ER	In-State tuition	Driver's licenses	Food stamps	(% spend more)	(% felons)
White	20.69	26.90	6.21	8.28	4.83	69.66	29.66
Black	30.41	37.84	8.11	10.81	12.84	72.97	18.92
Latino	48.98	53.74	20.41	26.53	12.93	51.70	10.88
X ²	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
N	440	440	440	440	440	440	440

whites and blacks supported eligibility for food stamps and in-state tuition. Eligibility for drivers' licenses, an issue that garnered attention during the 2008 election, was supported by few respondents. While 27 percent of Latinos want unauthorized immigrants to definitely be eligible for drivers' licenses, 31 percent answered that this group should definitely *not* be eligible. This compares to 47 percent of African Americans and 59 percent of whites who believe that unauthorized immigrants should definitely *not* be able to get drivers' licenses. Across these issues it is apparent that Latinos support a broader array of services for unauthorized immigrants than whites or blacks, but that support is highest for basic health and education needs.

Subjects also answered two questions on broader immigration policy—how much the government should spend on border security and how the government should pursue immigration policy. For the border security question, respondents answered whether they thought that the government should increase, decrease, or maintain spending on the border in order to decrease unauthorized immigration. Support for more border security spending was high among all groups, which we believe is due in part to how closely tied border security spending is to broader homeland security issues. Yet, although a majority of all three groups supported more border spending, Latinos were still significantly less likely to support increasing funding for border security. We also asked subjects a question about what government policy should be toward unauthorized immigrants currently residing in the U.S. and offered four response options that reflect the contemporary debate about immigration policy:

- (1) Make illegal immigrants felons and deport them.
- (2) Have a guest worker program that allows legal work for a limited time.
- (3) Provide a path to citizenship that includes paying back taxes.
- (4) Grant amnesty.

Table 11.2 presents the differences in support for the most punitive of the policies—making unauthorized immigrants felons and deporting them. Across the three groups, whites are most supportive of deportation while Latinos were significantly less likely to support criminalization ($p < .00$). Overall, Table 11.2 demonstrates that immigration attitudes vary dramatically by racial identification with whites and blacks much more likely to support punitive immigration policies than Latinos.

POLICY ATTITUDES BY RACE AND EXPERIMENTAL CONDITION

Beyond these baseline differences in immigration attitudes between the groups, we also expect that whites, African Americans, and Latinos should be affected differently by the threatening cues in the experimental conditions. Consistent with expectations, Latino subjects are most moved by the Exploitation condition while whites, and particularly white Republicans, prefer significantly more punitive immigration policies in the Fear condition. Somewhat surprisingly, African American respondents' policy attitudes were unmoved by either threatening condition.

To demonstrate the effect of the experimental conditions on each group, Figures 11.1–11.4 present mean attitudes on the social services described in the preceding and border security spending. When evaluating eligibility for social services, Americans distinguish between unauthorized immigrants and their children. According to a 2006 Pew survey, only 29 percent of Americans believe that unauthorized immigrants should be eligible for social services provided by state and federal governments. Conversely, 71 percent believe that children of unauthorized immigrants should have access to public schools. Given this tendency to distinguish between types of programs, we combined our five programs into two additive indices. The first, termed “humanitarian programs,” included elementary education and emergency room treatment (Cronbach's $\alpha = .77$). The second scale, “entitlement programs,” includes food stamps, in-state tuition, and drivers' licenses (Cronbach's $\alpha = .87$). The services indices are scaled from 0 to 5, higher values indicating that immigrants should definitely be eligible for services.

A. Latinos

Elite rhetoric and public discourse on immigration tends to emphasize threats and costs to the U.S. (Simon and Alexander 1993). However, this section demonstrates the ability of the Exploitation condition to affect attitudes. Figure 11.1 displays mean immigration attitudes within each condition for Latino subjects. Latinos in the Exploitation condition are the most supportive of pro-immigrant policies while their attitudes in the Fear condition are not significantly different than the control condition for any

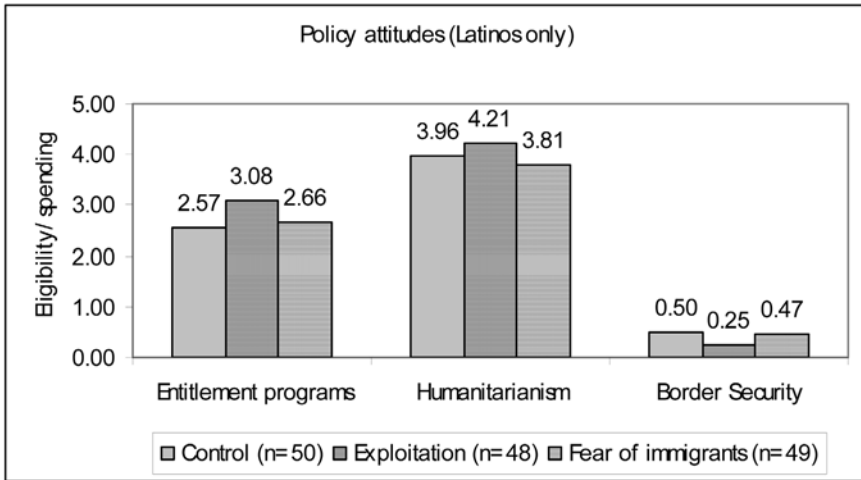


Figure 11.1 Latino immigration attitudes.

of the policies, suggesting that the fear message did not resonate with Latinos. Those subjects in the Exploitation condition are the most supportive of allowing unauthorized immigrants access to both humanitarian and entitlement programs. On both sets of indices, Latinos in the Exploitation condition are significantly more pro-immigrant than Latino subjects in the Fear condition ($p < .07$ for entitlement, $p < .06$ for humanitarianism). Latinos in the Exploitation condition also want to spend significantly less on the border than those in the control or Fear conditions ($p < .06$). Border security spending is scaled -1 (spend less), 0 (keep the same), and +1 (spend more). Forty-two percent of Latinos in the Exploitation condition want to spend more on the border, compared to 57 percent in the Fear condition. While this exploitation message focusing on immigrants themselves is uncommon, it is accessible and able to influence attitudes through enhancing anxiety on behalf of immigrants.

B. African Americans

African Americans' baseline attitudes toward immigration in this experiment are relatively negative as discussed previously. Black subjects may harbor negative attitudes toward immigration for a variety of social, political, and economic reasons that may make manipulating their attitudes difficult. If black citizens view immigrants as competition for housing, political power, and economic position, they tend to hold anti-immigrant attitudes (Bobo and Hutchings 1996; Gay 2006). Morris (2000) argued that inter-minority conflict did not play a role in African American opposition to Proposition 187, explaining that Latino context was unrelated to support and African Americans with

higher incomes were more likely to support the proposition. The latter finding could suggest that support for the proposition was rooted in the threat of an increased tax burden, but the data lacks more nuanced measures.

African American opposition to increases in immigration was less than whites; however, when immigration was framed as an economic threat, African Americans were more supportive of restrictionist policies than whites. These factors suggest that the particular images and content of the fear ad—immigrants exploiting social services, committing crimes, and depressing wages—should resonate with African Americans and lead to more negative attitudes. There are also a number of reasons to believe that black immigration attitudes can be moved in a more pro-immigrant direction—concerns about civil rights generally as well as black immigration from Africa, the Caribbean, and Latin America lead citizens to support more liberal immigration policies (Fuchs 1990). In his analysis of African American views on immigration, Diamond (1998) found support for liberal immigration policy among black political elites (with Fred Morris as a notable exception) and the black press in the mid-1990s, although mass public opinion was more varied. However, our Exploitation ad does not highlight these dimensions or try to evoke anxiety over rights more generally.

In this experiment, blacks' attitudes are unmoved by either the Fear condition or the Exploitation condition. There are no significant differences in attitudes on either the humanitarian or the entitlement scales between the control and either the Fear or the Exploitation conditions. Neither the message that immigrants threaten the economic and cultural fabric of the U.S. nor the message that immigrants are exploited by their legal status moved African American views on what services the government should offer to immigrants and their children. Among black subjects, support for

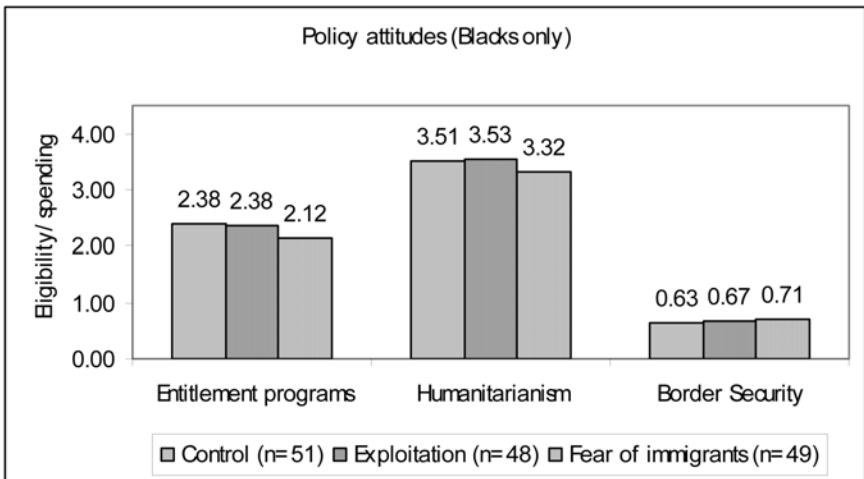


Figure 11.2 African American immigration attitudes.

humanitarian services was higher on average than support for entitlement programs, but the immigration ads did not cause significant differences. Additionally, black subjects were, on average, quite supportive of increasing spending on the border, but again, the immigration ads did not resonate enough to move respondents in either a pro- or anti-immigration direction. By featuring only images of Latinos, the experimental ads may have not resonated with African American subjects.

White participants as a whole also do not exhibit differences in immigration attitudes by the experimental condition (results not shown). We expected that the fear ad would resonate with white subjects, given their worries over immigration and their anti-immigration attitudes. However, we entertain the possibility that partisanship moderates the effectiveness of threatening appeals.

PARTISAN DIFFERENCES IN IMMIGRATION ATTITUDES

We analyze partisan differences in immigration attitudes among white subjects. We present only the attitudes for whites since only the white sample contains enough variation in partisanship to warrant splitting across both conditions and partisanship. In total, out of eighty-three Republicans in a total sample of 440 (18 percent), only eight of those respondents identified as African American and twenty-two as Latino.

Collapsing across all experimental conditions, white Democrats hold more liberal attitudes on provision of services for unauthorized immigrants than white Republicans for both humanitarian programs ($p < .05$) and entitlement programs ($p < .02$). Eighty-one percent of white Republicans think that the U.S. should spend more on border security, in contrast to 59 percent of white Democrats who share this belief ($\chi^2 = 7.60, p < .03$). Thirty-four percent of white Republicans in our sample think that immigrants who are currently in the country illegally should be treated as felons, compared to 17 percent of white Democrats who hold this belief ($\chi^2 = 4.24, p < .04$). While partisan differences were not always found in research on immigration attitudes, white Democrats and Republicans exhibit clear attitudinal differences in our sample.

Figures 11.3 and 11.4 demonstrate that partisanship significantly influences how whites react to threatening appeals. While Democrats and Republicans watched the same threatening ads about immigration, they reacted significantly differently in expressing their attitudes. Like African Americans, Democrats' social services and border security spending attitudes were unmoved by either the exploitation or fear ads. White Democrats may face the same type of ambivalence that African Americans face in evaluating arguments about immigration, and income may play a role in attitudes in a way we do not capture here. However, consistent with expectations, white Republicans support significantly more punitive immigration policies in the Fear condition than in the Exploitation condition.

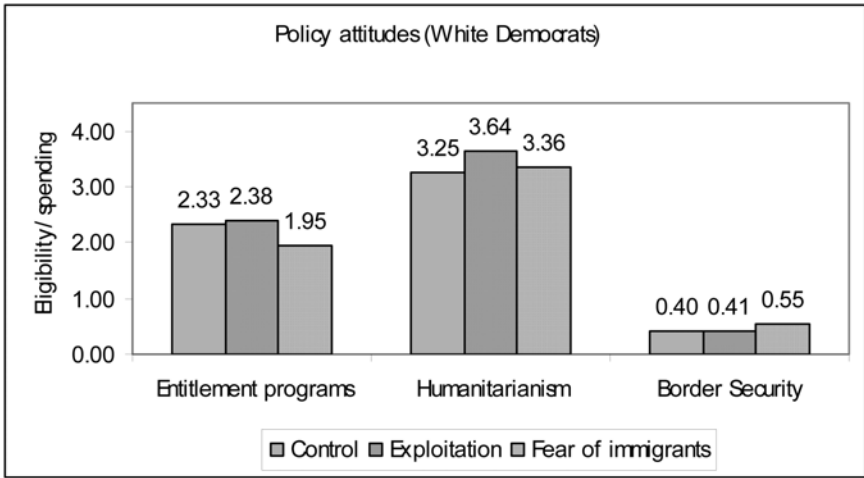


Figure 11.3 White Democrats' immigration attitudes.

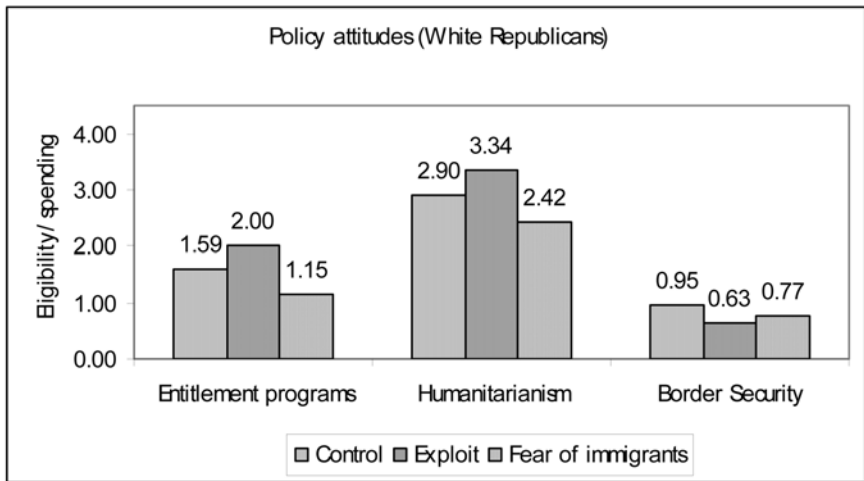


Figure 11.4 White Republicans' immigration attitudes.

The Fear condition clearly resonated more forcefully with Republicans in increasing anxiety about the fate of the country—Republicans were significantly more negative about providing humanitarian and entitlement services in the Fear condition than in the Exploitation condition ($p < .03$, $p < .02$, respectively). This is not to say that Republican respondents only responded to the Fear condition though—the Exploitation condition did lead Republicans to want to spend less on border security than in the control condition ($p < .01$). It is worth noting that support for increased border spending was incredibly high in the control condition (twenty of

twenty-one supported spending more on the border), signaling that the Exploitation condition may be powerful for Republicans under certain conditions. Even in a threatening and negative environment, partisanship still acts as a “perceptual screen” (Campbell et al. 1960) in how people evaluate affectively charged information and form attitudes about immigration.

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

Our results suggest that threatening ads can affect immigration attitudes, but that their effects are not uniform across racial groups and partisanship. On the whole respondents distinguish between emergency care and programs that benefit the offspring of unauthorized immigrants, in contrast with sustained programs that benefit unauthorized immigrants themselves. They are on average less supportive of the latter; yet, we observe racial differences across a range of immigration policies. Latinos are the most supportive of program eligibility for unauthorized immigrants and their children, while whites and African Americans are more supportive of border spending and punitive policies towards unauthorized immigrants. Further, the evocative message in the fear ad successfully decreased support for even “humanitarian” services among white Republicans. In addition, our results suggest that anxiety about the fate of immigrants themselves and concern about exploitation of immigrants in the workforce can increase support for entitlement and humanitarian services alike and decrease support for border security spending. However, the exploitation message is more likely to resonate with Latinos than whites or blacks.

Our analysis demonstrates several useful findings for the study of racial differences in immigration attitudes. Through purposefully oversampling African Americans and Latinos, and by having subjects participate in the study in their own homes, the study was designed to examine a racially diverse nonstudent sample in a more “real-world” environment than the traditional lab experiment. The study could still create demand effects since subjects are clearly aware that we are studying immigration attitudes, but we took several steps to mitigate the possibility. First, we created a control condition that raised the issue of immigration in as nonthreatening a way as possible. Therefore, all subjects were exposed to an immigration video, but the message was varied.

Another contribution from this study is the use of campaign ads as the manipulation. While previous studies have demonstrated a relationship between threat and immigration attitudes at the individual and community level, the effects of threat in the context of a political campaign have received less attention. We hypothesized that these ads are not universally effective, and our data demonstrates that their effects vary in systematic and predictable ways. Another interesting aspect of the campaign ad design was the effectiveness of the Exploitation condition. The Fear condition was

simple to create, as these sorts of commercials are often used by politicians and interest groups. The advertisement designed to create anxiety on behalf of immigrants was more difficult to create because these ideas are not as prominent in political discourse. Consequently, we were unsure whether or not the message would resonate in the mass public. The Exploitation condition did cause Latinos to hold more permissive attitudes towards unauthorized immigrants in terms of government services and border security. Finally, though the differences are often not statistically significant, whites, regardless of partisanship, appear less punitive regarding government services after viewing the exploitation ad.

Our policy attitudes results correspond to a growing literature on racial differences in immigration attitudes. Whites are the least supportive of services for unauthorized immigrants while Latinos are the most supportive in our study. We add to the existing literature by demonstrating how racial identity interacts with threatening appeals. Latinos appear to be immune to an ad about threats immigrants pose to the U.S., while the same ad resonated with white Republicans and made them even more punitive towards immigrants than in the control condition. These findings are not surprising given commonly observed differences in immigration attitudes. While politicians frequently use threatening language and images around immigration, presumably for electoral advantage, our research suggests that these appeals are not universally effective in a racially and politically diverse population.

NOTES

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Part IV

Diversity and Opinion

