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The Public Perception of Unauthorized Immigration in Local American Communities

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Abstract

This paper investigates the American public perception of unauthorized immigrants and whether that has been influenced by the impact unauthorized immigrants have had on their local American communities in recent years. As most Americans do not tend to distinguish between legal and unauthorized immigrants when they perceive immigrants to the US, it is more important to look at the American perception of immigrants as a whole to extrapolate reasonable conclusions.¹ For this discussion, unauthorized immigrants are defined as foreign nationals who are residing illegally in the US. This paper proposes the hypothesis that higher numbers of unauthorized immigrants, whether as a percentage of the total population or as a percentage of total immigrants, generally have an overall positive impact on public perception, due to a variety of factors related to social interactions, integration, and economic benefits. It will also challenge common political and media assertions that US states with higher numbers of unauthorized immigrants tend to have more negative opinions toward immigration. Data presented here will show a correlation between the number of unauthorized immigrants as a proportion of the total population in each US state, and the publicly-surveyed positive perception toward immigration in each of those states.

¹ John Gramlich, "How Americans see illegal immigration, the border wall and political compromise," Pew Research Center, last modified January 16, 2019, accessed April 15, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/16/how-americans-see-illegal-immigration-the-border-wall-and-political-compromise/>.

Historical Background

Immigration History

The United States has been a magnet for immigrants from all over the world, but public perception of immigration has fluctuated over time. The plaque at the base of the Statue of Liberty reads: “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door.”² The earliest known migration to the United States was the Native Americans crossing the Bering Strait from Asia to Alaska 20,000 years ago.³ The first major wave of immigration was in the 1600s when waves of colonial immigrants from Europe arrived on the Eastern seaboard, composed principally of Spanish, French, Dutch, and English settlers. These were followed by millions of enslaved Africans who were transported against their will to the Americas during this time and in subsequent decades.⁴ The second major wave of immigration occurred in the early 19th century, when the United States saw the arrival of many immigrants of both Asian and European descent, emigrating from their home countries in favor of the fabled land of freedom and opportunity: approximately 4.5 million Irish, 5 million Germans and 25,000 Chinese emigrated to the US.⁵ In the third wave during the 20th century, the US accepted millions of refugees fleeing devastating conflicts and repression in Europe and Southeast Asia, with the World Wars, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War.⁶ In 1986, the US government provided amnesty to 3 million aliens through the Immigration Reform Act, while simultaneously imposing further restrictions on immigration to the US.⁷ As a “nation built on immigration,” the US has taken in millions of immigrants in several different waves throughout its history, principally from Europe, Africa, and East Asia.

² Emma Lazarus, “The New Colossus,” National Park Service, last modified November 2, 1883, accessed April 11, 2019, <https://www.nps.gov/stli/learn/historyculture/colossus.htm>.

³ “USA Immigration History,” Immigration Direct, accessed April 7, 2019, <https://www.uscitizenship.info/usa-immigration-history/index.html>.

⁴ “USA Immigration,” Immigration Direct.

⁵ A&E Television Networks, “US Immigration Timeline,” HISTORY, last modified December 28, 2018, accessed April 7, 2019, <https://www.history.com/topics/immigration/immigration-united-states-timeline>.

⁶ Ellis Island Foundation, “Immigration Timeline,” The Statue of Liberty & Ellis Island, accessed April 8, 2019, <https://www.libertyellisfoundation.org/immigration-timeline>.

⁷ Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, Pub. L. No. 99-603, 100 Stat. 3359 (Nov. 6, 1986). Accessed April 8, 2019. <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-100/pdf/STATUTE-100-Pg3359.pdf>.

Immigration Legislation

At the same time, the US has also imposed restrictive and often discriminatory legislation against immigrants. Beginning in 1790, Congress passed the Naturalization Act that limited citizenship based on race, specifically stating that naturalization was limited to “free White persons of good character.”⁸ In succeeding decades, laws were also implemented that introduced procedures for the deportation of aliens and other unwanted immigrants. The mid-19th century also saw the rise of anti-immigration sentiment as native-born Anglo-Saxon Americans perceived the influx of arrivals from Asia and Europe as unwanted competition for jobs and challenges to Protestant religious authority. In 1882, the Chinese Exclusion Act became the first significant anti-immigration legislation, which sought to ban the import of Chinese laborers for 10 years. This ban was later extended for another decade, with expanded immigration restrictions following the expiry of the ban.⁹ The groups of immigrants restricted included bearers of contagious diseases, polygamists, beggars, prostitutes, and, in some cases, people possessing contrary political views.¹⁰ Quotas were later introduced with the 1921 Emergency Quota Act which targeted immigrants from specific countries and ethnicities to limit the overall percentage of immigrants that were able to enter the US, using the National Origins Formula. In particular, Chinese immigrants were limited to only 105 people each year.¹¹ This was later amended by the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, which ended immigration admission policy based on race and ethnicity. The 1965 Act also had the unintended consequence of giving rise to the current system of legal and unauthorized immigration.¹²

Public Attitudes toward Immigration

In recent years, the American public’s attitude toward immigration has generally become more positive, due in part to globalization and a gradual demographic shift in the population. In

⁸ Naturalization Act, ch. 3, 1 Stat. 103 (June 18, 1798). Accessed April 11, 2019. <http://legisworks.org/sal/1/stats/STATUTE-1-Pg103.pdf>.

⁹ Chinese Exclusion Act, Pub. L. No. 47-126, Stat. (May 6, 1882). Accessed April 7, 2019. <https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=false&doc=47>.

¹⁰ D’Vera Cohn, “How US immigration laws and rules have changed through history,” Pew Research Center, last modified September 30, 2015, accessed April 7, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/09/30/how-u-s-immigration-laws-and-rules-have-changed-through-history/>.

¹¹ Cohn, “How US immigration laws and rules have changed through history,” Pew Research Center.

¹² Immigration and Nationality Act 1965, Pub. L. No. 89-236, 79 Stat. 911 (Oct. 3, 1965). Accessed August 22, 2019. <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-79/pdf/STATUTE-79-Pg911.pdf>.

1968, only 7 percent of Americans indicated they desired increased immigration to the US, compared to 39 percent desiring immigration be kept at its present level, and 33 percent desiring a reduction in immigration rates. In contrast, in 2019 the rates for the three categories were roughly similar: 30 percent of Americans favored increased immigration to the US, 31 percent favored a decrease, and 37 percent expressed support for remaining at the present level.¹³ While anti-immigration sentiment may also appear to be increasing recently with the resurgence of white nationalism and right-wing extremism in the US, the statistics do not appear to bear this out. Instead, they show that Americans as a whole are growing increasingly supportive of immigration.

Government Policy and Response

The current US administration has adopted an increasingly restrictive immigration policy. In 2017, President Trump signed an executive order that banned foreign nationals from seven predominantly Muslim countries from entering the US for 90 days and prohibited any refugees from entering the country for 120 days.¹⁴ Current US immigration policies continue to make the entry process extremely difficult for potential immigrants, forcing many to resort to illegal measures to secure passage into the US. As of 2018, approximately 34 million legal immigrants reside in the US, compared to around 10.5 million estimated unauthorized immigrants.¹⁵ Legal immigrants can stay in the US through the issue of either a green card or a temporary visa. Green cards can be issued through family-based migration, employment, or lottery; President Trump has advocated for restricting all three methods to some degree. Acquiring green cards remains an inefficient and lengthy process; some applicants can spend more than 20 years waiting for one because no single country can account for more than 7 percent of all issued cards.¹⁶ Temporary visas have also come under increased scrutiny under the Trump administration: legal challenges to individual temporary visas increased 45 percent since President Trump took office, while the actual number of petitions rose by less than 3 percent in the same

¹³ Gallup Polls, "Immigration," Gallup News, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/1660/immigration.aspx>.

¹⁴ ACLU Foundation, "Timeline of the Muslim Ban," American Civil Liberties Union, accessed April 8, 2019, <https://www.aclu-wa.org/pages/timeline-muslim-ban>.

¹⁵ Jens Manuel Krogstad and Ana Gonzalez-Barrera, "Key facts about US immigration policies and proposed changes," Pew Research Center, last modified February 26, 2018, accessed April 7, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/02/26/key-facts-about-u-s-immigration-policies-and-proposed-changes/>.

¹⁶ Krogstad and Gonzalez-Barrera, "Key facts," Pew Research Center.

period.¹⁷ In addition, President Trump has advocated for increased restrictions on the number of years that foreign workers can hold temporary visas. The Trump administration has stated that it will not renew temporary visas for people from El Salvador, Haiti, Nicaragua, and Sudan, together accounting for around 76 percent of immigrants under the program.¹⁸ President Trump has also advocated for increased security along the US-Mexico border, as well as calling for the construction of a border wall and even threatening to close the border to all Latin American migrants.¹⁹

Literature Review

Immigration has always been a popular and contemporary topic for study and documentation. In the past few decades, Western Europe and North America have experienced the effects of increased immigration as conflict and hardships grow in the developing world, forcing many migrants to flee their home countries. News agencies, public organizations, and universities have conducted numerous studies and research projects to demonstrate trends in unauthorized immigration and its effects on host countries.

Despite the wealth of studies that have been done on this subject, more research is needed on the systematic geographic analysis of unauthorized immigration and how it relates to public perception. Immigration is fundamentally a geographical concept, and it is important to study the effects that increased immigration has on specific geographic regions. Many studies focus on the effects of immigration on host countries, particularly at a local level, but not specifically on the public attitudes toward, and perceptions of, these immigrants within their communities. One such study conducted in 2015 by The Journal of Quantitative Criminology analyzed the effect of immigration on crime levels in host cities.²⁰ This study used data from the 2000 US Census to statistically investigate 1,252 communities and analyzed how immigration affected their crime rates,

¹⁷ Yeganeh Torbati, "Trump administration red tape tangles up visas for skilled foreigners, data shows," Reuters News Agency, last modified September 20, 2017, accessed April 7, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-immigration-employment-insight/trump-administration-red-tape-tangles-up-visas-for-skilled-foreigners-data-shows-idUSKCN1BV0G8>.

¹⁸ Krogstad and Gonzalez-Barrera, "Key facts," Pew Research Center.

¹⁹ Maggie Haberman, Annie Karni, and Eric Schmitt, "Trump Urged Homeland Security Official to Close Border Despite an Earlier Promise of a Delay," New York Times, last modified April 12, 2019, accessed April 15, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/12/us/politics/trump-border.html>.

²⁰ Vincent Ferraro, "Immigration and Crime in the New Destinations, 2000–2007: A Test of the Disorganizing Effect of Migration," *The Journal of Quantitative Criminology* 32, no. 1 (March 2016): 23-45.

ultimately concluding that “increases in foreign-born did not have a significant effect on the rate of crime.” Similar to many other studies conducted in this particular field, this study chose to focus more on the tangible effects of immigration rather than on public attitudes toward it. A study carried out by Jens Hainmueller of Stanford University and Daniel J. Hopkins of Georgetown University was titled “Public Attitudes toward Immigration.”²¹ However, the study focused more on identifying potential causes for so-called “nativist,” “nationalist,” and “anti-immigration” sentiments, and sentiments several solutions and counters to these issues. The study also focused on debunking the labor market competition theory that is typically used as an argument against immigration. Overall, the study did not focus on correlating the attitudes of a host country with the proportions of immigrants on a geographical level.

A study in 2013 led by Kate E. Murray and David M. Marx of the University of California, San Diego on “Attitudes toward Unauthorized Immigrants, Authorized Immigrants, and Refugees” is most similar in subject material to this paper.²² The study summarized that age, race, religion, legality, and nationality all play a role in how the American public views immigrants. However, that study was conducted in 2012 and needs to be updated in the rapidly changing world of immigration. Additionally, the study was more focused on the psychology of immigration; it conducted surveys of 191 members of the university’s undergraduate population, to determine the extent and nature of prejudicial attitudes toward immigrants of subjects in the sample. As a result, the study is more of a micro-level test of a sample than a macro-level systematic geographical analysis and does not conflict with this paper.

Finally, many researchers choose to focus on the economic impact of immigrants on communities, such as in a 2013 study conducted by George J. Borjas of Harvard University, “The Slowdown in the Economic Assimilation of Immigrants: Aging and Cohort Effects Revisited Again.”²³ This study investigated generational changes in the economic mobility of US immigrants and analyzed the effects that immigration has on the US economy and the potential for socio-economic changes. All these reports do not

²¹ Jens Hainmueller and Daniel J. Hopkins, “Public Attitudes toward Immigration,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 17 (May 2014): 225-249.

²² Kate E. Murray and David M. Marx, “Attitudes toward Unauthorized Immigrants, Authorized Immigrants, and Refugees” (PhD diss., University of California San Diego, 2012), 332-341.

²³ George J. Borjas, *The Slowdown in the Economic Assimilation of Immigrants: Aging and Cohort Effects Revisited Again*, report no. 19116 (n.p.: National Bureau of Economic Research, 2013).

address public attitudes and perceptions toward immigrants, choosing instead to research the economic impacts of immigrants over periods of time.

Methodology and Data

Methodology

This paper analyzed data from two published studies that identified a correlation between the proportion of unauthorized immigrants in each US state and the average positive attitude toward immigrants, both legal and unauthorized, in each state. The data for the number and proportion of unauthorized immigrants was taken from the Migration Policy Institute, and it is important to note that the specific values for each data point are estimations.²⁴ The direct population of unauthorized immigrants in each state was then compared with the total population of each state, to calculate a direct percentage. This calculation would show a reasonably approximate percentage of each state’s population that is comprised of unauthorized immigrants. Data for the average positive attitude in each state toward immigrants was taken from the Public Religion Research Institute.²⁵ Washington DC was not included in the surveyed data.

The data table has been organized in descending order of the proportion of unauthorized immigrants in each state. In addition, this report includes data on the number of unauthorized immigrants in each state as a percentage of the total number of immigrants in each state.²⁶ This was done to highlight that the positive perception of residents in each state toward unauthorized immigrants has not been significantly impacted by the presence of legal immigrants.

Data Table

State	Positive perception of immigrants	Unauthorized immigrants / of the total	Unauthorized immigrant / of all	Immigrants / total state population
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²⁴ “Unauthorized Immigrant Populations by Country and Region, Top States and Counties of Residence, 2012-16,” Migration Policy Institute, accessed April 13, 2019, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/charts/unauthorized-immigrant-populations-country-and-region-top-state-and-county>.

²⁵ Robert P. Jones et al., “How Americans View Immigrants and What They Want from Immigration Reform: Findings from the 2015 American Values Atlas.,” PRRI, accessed April 13, 2019, <https://www.prii.org/research/poll-immigration-reform-views-on-immigrants/>.

²⁶ “States with the Most Immigrants,” Lattice Publishing, last modified July 2, 2018, accessed August 3, 2019, <https://www.latticepublishing.com/blog/states-with-the-most-immigrants>.

		population	immigrants	
California	58	7.63	20	27
New Jersey	56	5.59	22	21.8
Texas	52	5.12	33	16.7
New York	58	4.35	15	22.6
Nevada	50	4.25	35	19.3
Maryland	52	4.19	29	14.7
Illinois	52	4.07	22	13.9
Georgia	50	3.58	36	9.8
Arizona	55	3.40	24	13.4
North Carolina	47	3.26	39	7.7
New Mexico	53	3.25	29	9.7
Virginia	49	3.19	27	11.9
Connecticut	56	2.94	23	14
Washington	53	2.91	23	13.5
Colorado	52	2.86	34	9.8
Florida	50	2.86	18	19.9
Rhode Island	58	2.77	19	13.5
Oregon	56	2.74	24	9.9
Utah	50	2.56	38	8.3
Massachusetts	60	2.51	22	15.7
Delaware	55	2.38	31	8.8
Kansas	50	2.16	35	6.9
Oklahoma	47	2.16	38	5.88
Nebraska	45	1.97	41	6.7
South Carolina	44	1.93	35	4.8
Idaho	46	1.88	24	6
Arkansas	43	1.86	41	4.7
Tennessee	42	1.77	38	4.8
Minnesota	45	1.51	20	7.8
Alabama	36	1.45	34	3.4

Louisiana	42	1.42	36	4
Indiana	43	1.40	29	4.9
Wisconsin	46	1.22	24	4.88
Iowa	44	1.14	24	4.9
Pennsylvania	47	1.07	19	6.4
Wyoming	38	1.04	32	3.6
Kentucky	40	1.01	22	3.5
Michigan	44	0.97	15	6.4
Missouri	45	0.93	23	3.9
Mississippi	39	0.84	35	2.3
Ohio	45	0.71	17	4.2
West Virginia	35	0.33	14	1.6
Hawaii	60	No data*	17	17.9
Alaska	49	No data*	13	7.5
Vermont	49	No data*	4	4.4
Montana	46	No data*	12	2
North Dakota	43	No data*	23	3.3
New Hampshire	42	No data*	13	5.8
Maine	41	No data*	9	3.6
South Dakota	40	No data*	19	3.2

Data Analysis

Based on the above data, a least squares regression line was plotted to illustrate the trends of the data. The correlation data indicated a generally positive trend, with a strong R-value of 0.788 and a coefficient of determination of 0.621, which means that the spread of the data is largely captured by the line of best fit. Several states did not have recorded data for numbers or proportions of unauthorized immigrants, due to their negligible presence in those areas.

Discussion

The topic of immigration, and in particular unauthorized immigration, has become a divisive issue in the United States.

Addressing the influx of immigrants, in particular from Latin America, has been a major part of President Trump's electoral platform and Presidential policy. Impressionistic deductions would suggest that US states with less immigration and more distance from the Southern border would be more supportive of unauthorized immigration, given that they do not have to deal with the consequences, while states that are located nearer to the Southern border are more likely to take issue with unauthorized immigrants. The findings of this paper would appear to draw a different conclusion.

NIMBY Syndrome

The common intuitions about the geographical divisions of immigration politics are further supported by the sociological phenomenon called "Not in My Backyard Syndrome," or NIMBY, as it is colloquially referred to. NIMBY is a characterization of opposition by residents to a proposed development in their local area, with the understanding that residents are only opposing this development because it is occurring in their "backyard."²⁷ This concept can be applied to the real-world issue of immigration as well by looking at states like New York, Massachusetts, and Illinois that are located far from the Southern border where unauthorized immigrants are entering the country, allowing them to support the idealistic notions of humanitarian aid and providing economic opportunities to migrants in concept while avoiding dealing with the consequences among their citizens. On the other hand, according to NIMBY, states like Texas that are located along the Southern border would be firmly anti-immigrant, because they have to deal with the real impact that unauthorized immigrants have on their communities, and thus cannot afford to consider any idealistic notions. This narrative seems to fit with the current political and media landscape. However, the findings of this paper indicate that the NIMBY-based impressionistic narrative does not appear to be supported by actual data and that the general perception of immigrants across the US is far more positive than one would expect using NIMBY logic.

Geographical Analysis

The data as a whole seems to indicate that there is a moderately strong positive correlation between the perception of immigrants and the proportion of unauthorized immigrants in each

²⁷ Peter D. Kinder, "Not in My Backyard Phenomenon," Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed May 6, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Not-in-My-Backyard-Phenomenon>.

state in the US. The states that had the highest proportions of unauthorized immigrants (New York, Texas, California), generally aligned with the states that had the most positive opinions of unauthorized immigrants (New York, Massachusetts, California). However, it is important to note that the findings of this report only demonstrate correlation, not causation. It cannot be definitively concluded that the population of New York approves of unauthorized immigrants specifically because more of them are located there since numerous other confounding variables may have provided alternate reasons for a correlation unrelated to the hypothesis. For example, the reverse may be true in that more unauthorized immigrants live in New York because the Democratic state government has passed legislation that favors unauthorized immigrant workers, causing more of them to gravitate there over other destinations in the US. This paper does not seek to determine the cause of the results; instead, it only seeks to show a correlation between the two variables. Reasons for this correlation will be analyzed in this section on a micro and macro scale, with observations on how the opinions of local state residents and state governments respectively can be influenced by the presence of immigrants.

Possible Factors for Correlation

On a micro scale, it is important to consider how social interactions between local Americans and immigrants can change the perceptions and perspectives of both parties on an individual level. It can be inferred from the data that the US states with a higher proportion of unauthorized immigrants and a higher number of immigrants as a whole also tend toward the most positive opinions of immigration. This would suggest that individual Americans in these states hold immigrants in comparatively high esteem, presumably because of their increased social interactions with immigrants in their communities. By interacting with immigrants living in their communities daily, local Americans can develop their perspectives of immigration based on personal, anecdotal evidence from their own experiences, as opposed to hearing about it from the media or other secondhand sources, thus enabling them to be less influenced by the implicit bias present in third party sources such as politicians and the media.

Even so, assuming that immigrants and local Americans will form a closer understanding and connection based purely on broad geography may be naive; they more than likely will not be residing in the same place. After all, in many US states, the suburbs are almost

overwhelmingly ethnically white, while ethnic minorities and immigrant populations tend to make up the majority of urban areas.²⁸ It is important to recognize that just because there is a high proportion of immigrants living in a particular state does not necessarily mean that they are demographically spread out throughout the state, and therefore it cannot be assumed that immigrants will necessarily develop interpersonal relationships with Americans in their residential communities.

However, it can also be argued that continued contact which fosters positive impressions may still occur even without the development of close relationships between the two groups, in the form of low-stakes cross-cultural experiences. For example, residents may still encounter immigrants in shared public venues such as schools, malls, supermarkets, gathering spaces, playgrounds, or public transport, where they become normalized to the ideas of multiculturalism and diversity without necessarily having to speak or interact regularly or directly with the immigrants themselves.

On a macro scale, the presence of immigrants in a state, both legal and illegal, can help to dispel many of the popular criticisms leveled at “unwanted” immigrants; namely, that they contribute to a rise in crime, drain welfare resources, and cause unemployment among local Americans.

There is a common perception that immigrants cause an increase in crime levels in their local communities by becoming involved in illicit activities. President Trump has previously said that Mexican immigrants are “...bringing crime. They’re rapists.”²⁹ In addition, a 2017 Gallup Poll showed that almost half of all Americans believed that immigrants caused a rise in crime.³⁰ However, a 2018 study by the Marshall Project shows this to be false. Immigrant populations in 200 cities in the US have increased by 118 percent

²⁸ Kim Parker, “Demographic and economic trends in urban, suburban and rural communities,” Pew Research Center, last modified May 22, 2018, accessed May 12, 2019, <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2018/05/22/demographic-and-economic-trends-in-urban-suburban-and-rural-communities/>.

²⁹ Byron Wolf, “Trump basically called Mexicans rapists again,” CNN, last modified April 6, 2018, accessed June 15, 2019, <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/04/06/politics/trump-mexico-rapists/index.html>.

³⁰ Gallup Polls, “Immigration,” Gallup News, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/1660/immigration.aspx>.

from 1980 to 2018, while violent crime rates have dropped 36 percent in those cities over the same period.³¹

The common argument regarding unemployment is that immigrants who are willing to work as unskilled labor for lower wages take jobs away from Americans, causing a rise in unemployment. The reverse is true: from 1820 to 2014, in all the years when immigration was above the historical average, national unemployment was at or below 5.7 percent. In all the other years when there was less immigration, unemployment was above 7.5 percent (this data excludes both World War periods because of the impact of the draft on unemployment).³² The general conclusion that can be drawn from this is that immigrants are a sign of positive economic times, and correlating immigrants to rises in unemployment is unsubstantiated.

Finally, immigrants are commonly attacked as being a drain on social welfare and other government resources that are intended for local Americans. However, current state and federal policies contradict this depiction of immigrants. As a result of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996,³³ all legal and unauthorized immigrants other than green-card holders and refugees were disqualified from receiving any welfare. However, according to data from the American Immigration Council, immigrants as a population group in the US in the 21st century earn more than \$240 billion a year, pay about \$90 billion a year in federal taxes, and use only about \$5 billion in public welfare and benefits.³⁴ In essence, these “drain on social welfare” claims are made on a national level, by some politicians who use this rhetoric to formulate opposition to immigration as a whole to suit their political objectives.

An analysis of the data above would suggest that where Americans can have greater exposure to, and increased interaction with, immigrants, they are more able to experience the social, economic, and other benefits of their presence. This direct exposure

³¹ Anna Flagg, “The Myth of the Criminal Immigrant,” The Marshall Project, last modified March 30, 2018, accessed May 6, 2019, <https://www.themarshallproject.org/2018/03/30/the-myth-of-the-criminal-immigrant>.

³² David Bier, “Why Unemployment Is Lower When Immigration Is Higher,” Cato Institute, last modified July 26, 2016, accessed May 6, 2019, <https://www.cato.org/blog/why-unemployment-lower-when-immigration-higher>.

³³ Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, Pub. L. No. 104-193, 110 Stat. 2105 (Aug. 22, 1996). Accessed May 7, 2019. <https://www.congress.gov/104/plaws/publ193/PLAW-104publ193.pdf>.

³⁴ Giving the Facts a Fighting Chance: Addressing Common Questions on Immigration, 8-9, December 14, 2015, accessed May 7, 2019, http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/research/giving_the_facts_a_fighting_chance_addressing_common_questions_on_immigration.pdf.

enables them to form a more independent, and ultimately more positive, perception of immigration instead of simply being influenced by third-party rhetoric.

Conclusion

This paper seeks to examine the correlation between the American public's perception of unauthorized immigrants, and the proportions of unauthorized immigrants in each US state. Supplementary data has also been included to mitigate the confounding factors of legal immigrants in each state that may create bias in the data. The overall conclusion that can be drawn from the data in this paper is: as there is a clear association between the two variables, we can extrapolate that higher concentrations of unauthorized immigrants in each state directly contribute to more positive public perceptions of their presence. This conclusion is in contradiction with the NIMBY syndrome mentioned earlier, but it is generally in line with the initial hypothesis of this paper. In particular, it appears that factors such as social interaction and ethnic integration, on both a micro and macro level, are particularly important in changing public perceptions in favor of immigration.

Several areas for further research can be examined based on the conclusions of this paper. Firstly, there is a "chicken and egg" phenomenon about this correlation that could be investigated: this paper included no concrete data on whether it was the large proportions of unauthorized immigrants influencing perception and policy in each US state, or if it was the reverse and large numbers of unauthorized immigrants were attracted to certain, specific states that were more welcoming because of higher existing public perception and state policy. It is currently unknown which factor is the primary or more dominant cause and which is the effect, but that could be a source of further research.

In addition, the conclusions of this paper are only localized to the US, which receives unauthorized immigrants primarily from its southern neighbors on the continent. However, the reasoning behind the conclusions drawn could still apply to other developed nations around the world, for example in Europe, which receives unauthorized immigrants from all over North Africa and the Middle East. It would be an interesting research proposition to investigate whether different provinces and countries in Europe hold different perceptions and policies based on the numbers and proportions of unauthorized immigrants located in each of those regions.

This principle could also be applied on a more local level in the US rather than by states; further research could determine whether the settlement of unauthorized immigrants in urban or rural communities has a pronounced impact on perceptions.

While the above additional areas for potential research exceed the scope of the present paper, they are areas where the impact of the proportion of immigrants on general public perception could be further investigated.

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