

2015-2016

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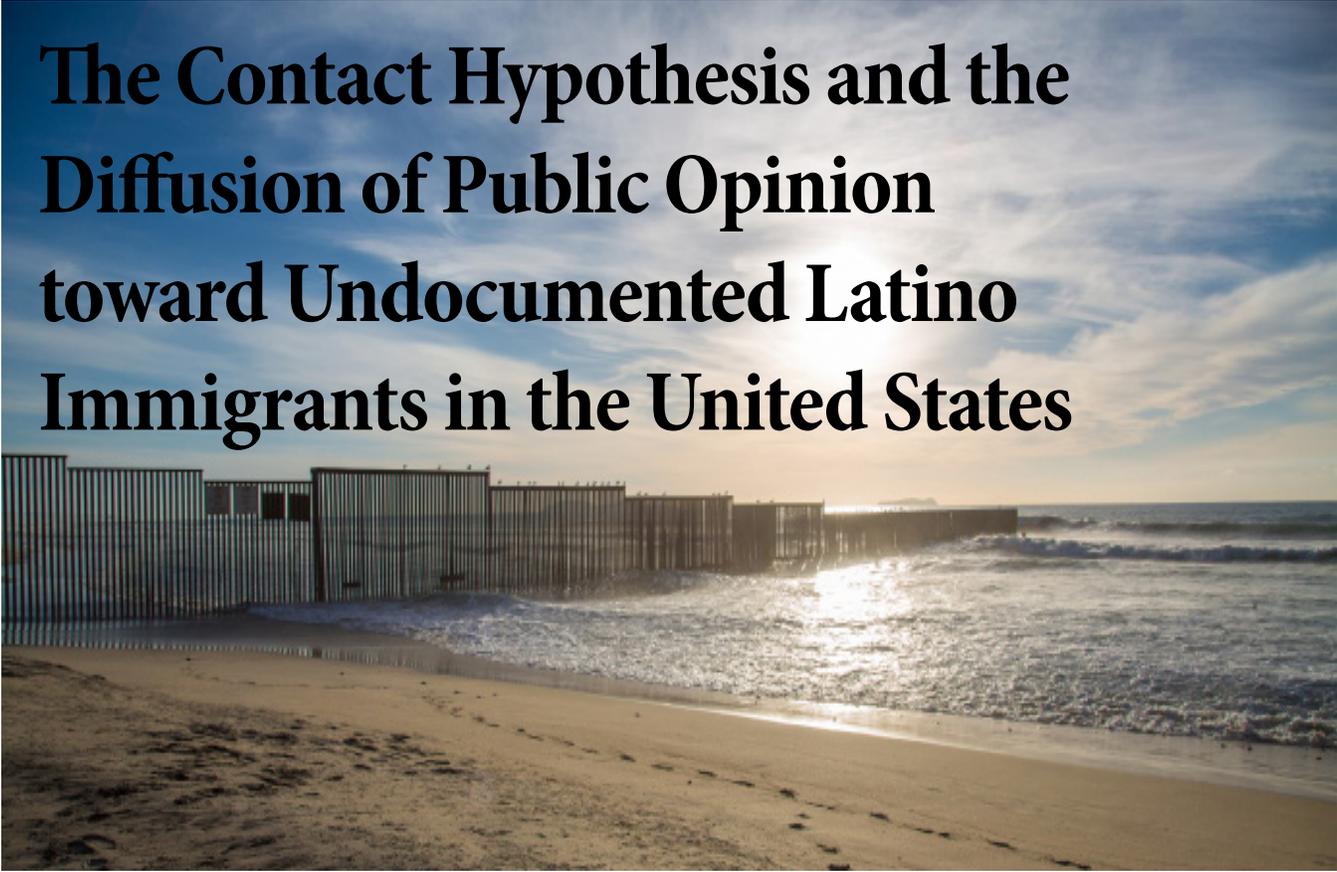
Recommended Turabian Citation

Hackett, Sawyer. 2016. "The Contact Hypothesis and the Diffusion of Public Opinion toward Undocumented Latino Immigrants in the United States." *James Madison Undergraduate Research Journal* 3, no. 1 (March): 26-35. <http://commons.lib.jmu.edu/jmurj/vol3/iss1/3/>.

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The Contact Hypothesis and the Diffusion of Public Opinion toward Undocumented Latino Immigrants in the United States



Sawyer Hackett

Negative and positive attitudes between population in-groups and out-groups are matured through a variety of experiences, chief among them being the extent of interaction between the two groups. The contact hypothesis observes the extent of interaction between in-groups and out-groups—distinguished by a particular demographic descriptor—and asserts that the extent of the two groups’ interaction is positively correlated with favorable attitudes directed toward the out-group. This research analyzes the potential effect that the undocumented Latino immigrant population has on the sentiments of the established native population. In addition to attitudes toward the undocumented Latino population, the importance that U.S. residents place on the issue of citizenship for undocumented immigrants and their preferred reform policies regarding undocumented immigration were also measured. This study has implications for the ongoing debate surrounding immigration reform and helps to explain the way in which geography affects political opinion on immigration.

Introduction

Research involving immigration, especially undocumented immigration, focuses on the economic, social, and demographic effects stemming from an influx of large quantities of immigrants. Defining how these immigrants fit within the existing political, economic, or cultural frameworks has particular appeal to those who study societal trends. The desire to determine immigration's effects most likely stems from the general public's lack of knowledge regarding the estimated number of incoming immigrants, as well as a sense of uncertainty concerning the effect of this number on their daily lives. Does the introduction of a large number of immigrants have an effect on a community's existing political culture, economic well-being, or overall social capital? The answer to this question has implications to researchers and residents alike.

In studies of resident and immigrant relations, the existing group that occupies a geographic location is referred to as the in-group, while the out-group is the demographic population that is migrating to that location. In this study the native residents who populate the United States comprise the in-group, and the undocumented, foreign nationals of Latino descent migrating to the U.S. comprise the out-group. Although the in-group includes different ethnicities, ages, genders, and socioeconomic levels, the natives share the key component of a common legal classification as documented residents of the U.S.

Unsurprisingly, prejudice in varying degrees of intensity is often present between in-groups and out-groups. The contact hypothesis offers an explanation for this variation, asserting that under normal conditions, interaction between the two groups tends to diminish prejudice, pre-existing stereotypes, and perceived levels of competition by producing positive experiences. The contact hypothesis helps to clarify social tolerance for migration and may explain individuals' preferred policy prescriptions for political disputes that arise from immigration. Individuals with positive feelings toward immigrant out-groups, due to increased contact, may prefer less punitive policy prescriptions, while those who have had less contact with immigrants may prefer harsher policies. In addition, this hypothesis may give credence to the idea that elected officials representing areas with high immigrant and Latino populations take a sympathetic stance on immigration issues and tend not to take hardline punitive positions on deportation. This concept is particularly relevant given that these officials lead the charge on local, state, and national reforms.

Literature Review

The contact hypothesis, also known as intergroup contact theory (Hood III and Morris 1998, 3), is more apt to draw conclusions on a community-wide population rather than on individual levels. The theory suggests that "an increase in size of the racial or ethnic minority group is likely to have a positive effect on the attitudes of the dominant group, because members of the different groups may have more opportunities to interact with each other" (Berg 2009, 43). Furthermore, antagonistic in-group members may develop negative expectations for potential interaction and will therefore avoid contact (Hood III and Morris 1998, 3). This lack of contact will then prevent future positive interactions with the out-group, promoting isolationist sentiments. For instance, the contact hypothesis asserts that perceived labor market competition posed by undocumented Latino immigrants may be mitigated by positive intergroup interactions. However, if either group avoids intergroup relations, then negative perceptions may remain. Nativist attitudes—or attitudes that align with natives' opinions—may be altered by way of positive interactions with an out-group.

In addition to using the contact hypothesis to explain native inhabitants' opinions toward undocumented Latino immigrants, researchers have explored other theoretical explanations, including the concept of threat (Berg 2009, 42). Berg notes that threat is a sentiment that stems from competition created by minority out-groups, such as labor market competition or political ramifications in elections. In contrast, the contact hypothesis "suggests that an increase in the size of the racial or ethnic minority group is likely to have a positive effect on the attitudes of the dominant group" (43). While threat tends to measure effects on the individual, the contact hypothesis observes community-wide trends. Further, economists usually study cases of threat, while sociologists or political scientists investigate the contact hypothesis. Therefore, this research will use a survey to examine sentiments of people living in high and low immigrant populations in the U.S. to investigate the validity of the contact hypothesis.

While the contact hypothesis proposes that increased interaction with immigrant populations correlates with positive attitudes toward immigrants, additional data have been collected in an effort to examine how an influx of Latino immigrants affects a community through the variety of potential threats that each individual native will experience. For example, whites in native communities who hold relative "power"—whether economic, political or social—might experience tension or feelings of animosity toward immigrants who could threaten their current predominance (Berg 2009). Under these circumstances, in-groups may develop attitudes of insecurity concerning

Prejudice in varying degrees of intensity is often present between in-groups and out-groups

previously held means, which may then be directed toward the out-group (McLaren 2003). For example, the presence of new populations that are able to compete for jobs held primarily by in-group members fosters tension among the native population. Undocumented immigrants may present competition in the form of cheaper labor given their lack of protection from minimum wage and other labor laws in a jurisdiction. As such, labor market competition is most likely to affect the lowest socioeconomic groups and produce the highest levels of negative attitudes among lower socioeconomic classes (Berg 2009, 42). While the contact hypothesis examines more general sentiments across a community-wide consensus, evaluating perceived threats, such as labor market competition, is still important when examining overall community attitudes.

The contact hypothesis has been studied in various racial group interactions, primarily focusing on how the size of different racial groups within a population affects people's behaviors or feelings. A study by Oliver and Wong (2003) states "in neighborhood contexts, interethnic propinquity corresponds with lower levels of out-group prejudice and competition, although intergroup hostility is higher in metropolitan areas with greater minority population" (567). Fundamentally, Oliver and Wong found that lower levels of prejudice are associated with diverse neighborhoods where different races are expected to interact. Concurring with Oliver and Wong's proposition, Berg concludes in his 2009 study that "whites who live in areas with more Latino residents are more likely to be comparatively sympathetic to undocumented immigrants, arguably due to the greater frequency of intergroup interaction with native-born Latinos and Latino immigrants" (49). To explain the intergroup hostility sometimes found in more urban areas, Oliver and Wong (2003) conducted additional tests, concluding that negative sentiments toward out-groups originate from an isolationist outlook, rather than from a self-selection process. For example, those who may have strong prejudicial feelings toward out-groups are more likely to seek out neighborhoods and geographic locations that are segregated (577).

However, even among the narrow field of immigration research, the contact hypothesis is controversial and subject to a variety of critiques and nuances (Hood III and Morris 1998, 3). This controversy has incited many to call for a new theory to explain how in-group opinions are developed (Jackman and Crane 1980). Given that much of the literature on the contact hypothesis was written during the tempestuous years of the 1960s and early 1970s, it should come as no surprise that a modern alternative theory has been proposed. (Sigelman and Welch 1993, 782). In contrast to Berg's 2009 findings, results from a 1998 study by M.V.

Hood III and Irwin L. Morris conclude that "as the relative size of the undocumented migrant population increases, Anglo support for increased immigration decreases" (1). These results reflect either a disagreement with the contact hypothesis or a change in in-group reactions over time.

Additionally, a majority of the research collected in the past 50 years has measured racial hostilities between whites and blacks. Although these results may relate indirectly to Latinos, the contact hypothesis is more difficult to support and investigate due to the potential undocumented status of some Latinos. The introduction of a legal status that some deem in need of reform may provide justification for negative feelings toward undocumented immigrants. Research from 1998 by Hood III and Morris may have bypassed these criticisms by incorporating undocumented immigrants in their study (6). These researchers found that white support for increased immigration is positively related to the size of the documented immigrant population but negatively related to the undocumented population. However, their research is only marginally relevant to the scope of this

paper because it related support for increased immigration to the size of the documented and undocumented population, rather than solely examining tolerance levels toward undocumented migrants.

Even in the narrow field of immigration research, the contact hypothesis is controversial

Although researchers who study the contact hypothesis may have sustained the theory itself, inconsistency has appeared in their findings, and a synthesis of the various threats presented to the out-group resulted in the notion of the realistic group conflict theory (RGCT) (Hood III and Morris 1998, 3). RGCT declares, much like the labor market theory, that "competition for scarce resources—economic, social or cultural—leads to conflict among groups" (Hood III and Morris 1998, 3). According to RGCT, as competing groups become closer in geographical location, they will exponentially accentuate conflict (Hood III and Morris 1998, 3). As a result, positive relations between the two groups can only be advanced when the groups in question are not contesting over the same resources.

Aggregate research on the contact hypothesis has not systematically proven that a causal relationship between intergroup interaction and attitudes toward immigrants exists, nor has a correlation been established. This study will attempt to measure opinions directed toward undocumented Latino immigrants by using selected states in the U.S. as the measurable geographic descriptor of in-group members. With the exception of antagonistic in-group members who may seek isolation via segregated habitation, measuring this theory at the state level allows for the opportunity to easily examine in- and out-group interaction from compiled statewide data. Additionally,

state-level observation allows the researcher to compare states' political philosophies in order to frame outcomes. To see if ethnicity plays a factor in opinions toward undocumented Latinos, a distinction between resident Latinos and non-Latinos will be made. Furthermore, this research will attempt to measure preferred methods of immigration reform based on the principles of the contact hypothesis, particularly whether those who may have had less contact with out-group members prefer certain punitive reforms.

Theory and Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: The presence of a significant population of undocumented Latino immigrants will have a positive effect on tolerance levels of in-group members toward the undocumented population, as well as the levels of importance placed on immigration issues. Derived from the central tenets of the contact hypothesis, this hypothesis assumes that border state residents will feel that the issue of citizenship for undocumented immigrants is more important than the residents of non-border states, given that these are the states with a higher undocumented immigrant populations.

Hypothesis 2: Concerning the test on preferred public policy, border state residents will feel that a work period allowing undocumented immigrants to remain in the U.S. for three years is more favorable than non-border state residents will feel. Conversely, residents of non-border states will favor strengthening border security more than those who live in border states due to a federal work period that champions reforming immigration laws in a way that may be less punitive than increasing border security.

Data Methodology

This research will not attempt to expound on the competing theories explaining nativist sentiments from in-group members, but will highlight and draw conclusions relating to the contact hypothesis using survey data and data derived from the Statistical Abstract of the United States, a publication put together using U.S. Census information. Specifically, the researcher will demonstrate whether a sample of residents from border and non-border states places importance on undocumented immigration. Additionally, this research will outline this sample's attitude toward public policy, such as a government work program for undocumented immigrants and the strengthening of border security. The states of residence will be the only geographical descriptor, stratified as high and low Latino immigrant states, and will help to examine levels of importance for immigration issues perceived by both the white and nonwhite native populations of those locations.

The level of importance that native citizens place on undocumented immigration helps to assess the desire for specific types of government intervention (in this study: a work period and improving border security) to deal with increasingly high levels of undocumented immigration. To measure the desire for the type of government intervention, survey data from U.S. states differentiated based on the relative size of the Latino population residing within them will be cross-examined to determine how the various populations rate importance of citizenship for undocumented immigrants. The sample of residents will also be asked to conduct a thermometer test based on undocumented immigrants, placing a numerical value on their feelings toward this group. Finally, data will also be gathered from the same sample to measure the appeal of various public policies addressing immigration issues.

Limitations include the assumption that individuals in the denoted states have interacted with the undocumented Latino population. However, the shortcomings of choosing a state-level geographical descriptor are not overcome by choosing a more specific designation such as that of a town or village because recorded interaction is still not measured. As Berg noted, the contact hypothesis studies the likelihood for intergroup contact, and individuals have a higher chance of contact by residing in a state with a larger undocumented immigrant population (2009). While focusing in on the town or village level may give insight to specific threats perceived by natives in areas more heavily populated by immigrants as explained by the realistic group contact theory, such examinations are outside the scope of this study's work.

This study will highlight how the contact hypothesis is useful in gauging support for certain forms of public policy, be it a more beneficial worker program for undocumented immigrants or a more punitive policy of strengthening border security. Although both of these policies could be implemented independently or simultaneously, the results of this particular test will help to demonstrate how the contact hypothesis may determine favorability with regard to certain reforms. Additionally, these findings are particularly relevant to the debate on immigration reform taking place nationally. If a relationship between intergroup interaction and public support is clearly established, policy makers and academics will have a better understanding of how public opinion is developed on immigration issues.

Research Design

The data for undocumented immigrant populations residing in each individual state were obtained through the United States Census of 2012. In 2013, the Center for Immigration Studies gathered information from the

The contact hypothesis may determine favorability with regard to certain reforms

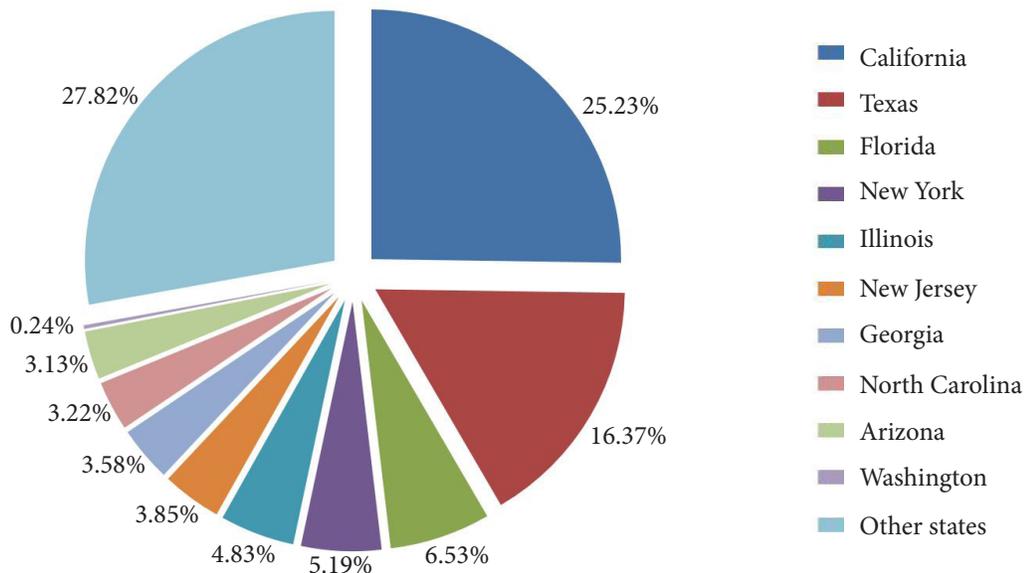


Figure 1. States' respective percent of total undocumented immigrant population. The total U.S. undocumented population was 11, 430,000 in 2013. Data from U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Center for Immigration Studies 2013.

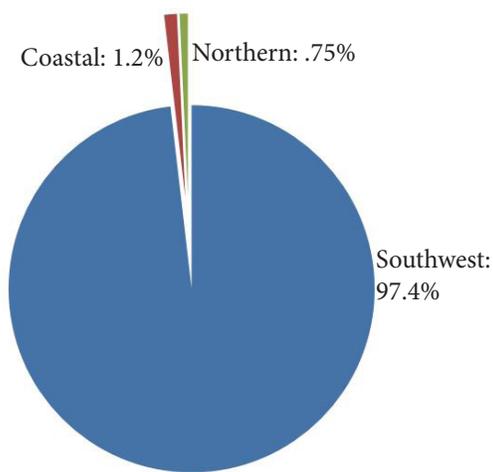


Figure 2. U.S. Border Patrol apprehensions by border from 2005–2008. Data from U.S. Department of Commerce, Statistical Abstract of the United States 2012.

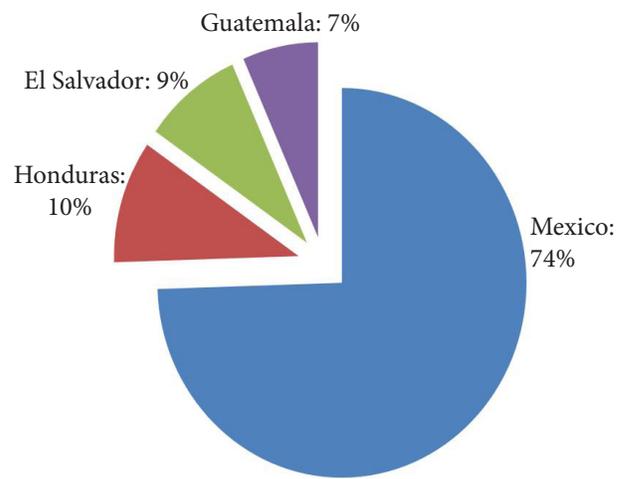


Figure 3. U.S. Border Patrol apprehensions by border from 2005–2008. Data from U.S. Department of Commerce, Statistical Abstract of the United States 2012.

Department of Homeland Security that estimated the population of undocumented immigrants was 11.4 million in January 2012; approximately 50% of these immigrants reside along the southern border of the U.S. (figure 1). The 2012 Statistical Abstract of the United States estimated that in 2008 the U.S. Border Patrol apprehended 723,840 immigrants, 97.4% of which were apprehended in the southwest region of the U.S. (figure 2). For this reason, this study will examine the distinction between states that lie on the southwest border (California, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas, as well as Florida, which draws in many South American migrants) (figure 3) and all other American states. This distinction will be cross-examined with the various dependent variables that have been identified: feelings of tolerance, perceived importance of citizenship,

opinion toward punitive policy, and stance on immigration policy.

To weigh the subjects' state of residence and survey responses against immigration issues, this study will incorporate data from the National Election Survey of 2008, as well as the Council of Foreign Relations 2008 datasets, which incorporate demographic information such as state of residence, gender, and race. To classify individuals as border versus non-border state residents, the researcher will recode all responses of border states (CA, AZ, NM, TX, and FL) to give them a value of one. All other state responses will be given a value of zero. This variable will then be cross-examined in a series of figures as the independent variable for each test.

The first dependent variable measured is a feeling thermometer of in-group members toward undocumented immigrants, which measures “hot or cold” feelings on a scale of 0 to 100. The 2,048 responses were recoded with intervals of 0–33 degrees (low tolerance), 34–66 degrees and 67–100 degrees (high tolerance) and were examined against the independent variable (state of residence). As a control for this test, a recode was completed to account for the “race of respondent.” Latinos were given a value of one, while all other races were given a value of zero, leaving categories of Latino and non-Latino. Although this control was not reproduced in the other tests, it provides additional context for how Latino citizens may feel about undocumented Latino residents. This variable gives additional salience to the contact hypothesis as it relates to the ongoing debate on immigration. If non-Latino border state respondents reported significantly higher thermometer levels toward undocumented Latino immigrants, the contact hypothesis would be more compelling across racial group comparisons.

The second dependent variable measured determines whether or not the respondent feels that citizenship for undocumented immigrants is an important issue. To measure this, a recode was performed for all answers of “extremely important,” “very important,” “moderately important,” and “slightly important” into one category of importance with a value of one. The other category, “not important at all,” was given a value of zero, and all other values were placed as missing. This recode was performed to funnel any answer that indicated the importance of citizenship for undocumented immigrants into one singular response. This test may not provide a perfect representation of the importance of citizenship for undocumented immigrants to the subject, but it does divide the respondents’ answers to create a clear distinction.

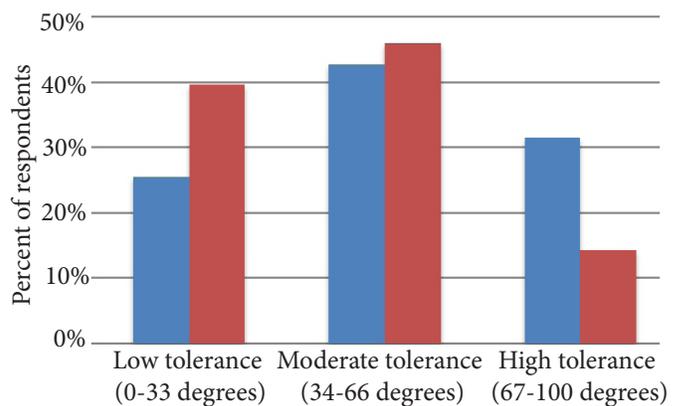
The third dependent variable measured determines whether respondents favor or oppose a three-year work period for undocumented immigrants, a possible policy to mitigate potential negative labor effects of undocumented immigration. For this variable, all missing values including “don’t know,” “refused,” and “neither favor nor oppose” were removed, and “favor” or “oppose” were left as the two possible choices.

The fourth and final dependent variable measured results from a test that determines whether the respondent thinks improving border security is important in the U.S. Two responses, “very important” and “somewhat important,” were put into one category of “important,” and the responses “not very important” and “not important at all” were put into one category of “not important,” and missing values were excluded. This test highlights whether respondents from border and non-border states think it is important to improve border security, as opposed to another possible

policy prescription to fix the immigration system. This test is not mutually exclusive from other policies, but does test a measure that is more punitive than others, such as a work period or amnesty.

Results

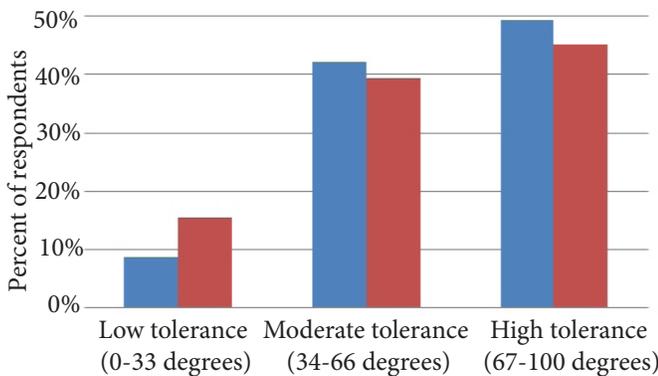
In the first test, a feeling thermometer survey was conducted on the 2,048 respondents’ attitudes toward undocumented immigration (figure 4). This test found that among the 824 people that reside in border states, 25.6% of respondents had a low tolerance (0–33 degrees) for undocumented immigrants, 42.8% had a moderate tolerance level (34–66), and 31.6% had a high tolerance level (67–100 degrees). Among the 1,224 that reside in non-border states, 39.7% had a low tolerance of undocumented immigrants, 46.0% had a moderate tolerance, and 14.3% had a high tolerance. In this test, not only did non-border states have a greater number of individuals with lower tolerance toward undocumented immigrants, but there were also greater numbers of border state residents with a higher tolerance for undocumented immigrants compared to non-border state residents. Given the indicators of statistical significance in this test, it is reasonable to assume that a relationship between a higher population of undocumented immigrants and a higher tolerance for undocumented immigrants exists. This test is compelling for the proponents of the contact hypothesis, as it shows that a higher potential for interaction with immigration populations may also indicate a potential for higher levels of acceptance or positive feelings toward undocumented immigrants.



Statistical significance:
 Chi-Square: 98.902;
 2 degrees of freedom
 Gamma: -.343
 Kendall’s tau-c: -.216
 Somer’s D: -.193

Figure 4. Feeling thermometer survey showing tolerance among all respondents for undocumented immigrants by state classification.

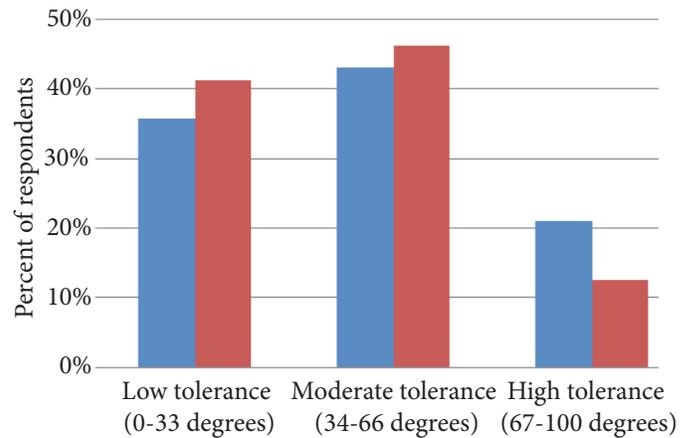
When controlling for ethnicity (distinction between Latino and non-Latino) in the thermometer test, the results were less pronounced. Among the 302 people who are Latino and live in a border state, 8.6% had a low tolerance of undocumented immigrants, 42.1% had a moderate tolerance, and 49.3% had a high tolerance. Among the 71 people who are Latino and reside in a non-border state, 15.5% had a low tolerance of undocumented immigrants, 39.4% had a moderate tolerance and 45.1% had a high tolerance (figure 5). Among the 517 people who are non-Latino and reside in a border state, 35.8% have a low tolerance for undocumented immigrants, 43.1% have a moderate tolerance and 21.1% have a high tolerance. Among the 1,145 people who are non-Latino who reside in non-border states, 41.2% have a low tolerance of undocumented immigrants, 46.3% have a moderate tolerance, and 12.5% have a high tolerance (figure 6).



Statistical significance:
 Chi-Square: 3.056;
 2 degrees of freedom
 Gamma: -.123
 Kendall's tau-c: .046
 Somer's D: -.051

Figure 5. Feeling thermometer survey showing tolerance among Latinos for undocumented immigrants.

This test demonstrates that respondents who are of Latino descent have a generally more positive disposition toward undocumented immigrants than those who are of non-Latino descent. For both border and non-border state residents, more Latinos felt greater tolerance for undocumented immigrants than non-Latinos. It is also noteworthy that Latino citizens residing in border states were more likely to have more positive attitudes toward undocumented immigrants than their non-border state counterparts. The purpose of controlling for Latino ethnicity in this test was to determine if the relationship between border state residents and higher tolerance levels would still be statistically significant if the Latino citizen population was removed from the survey responses. Because the results still display a statistically significant difference, it helps to strengthen the arguments made by the contact hypothesis. This test provides crucial support



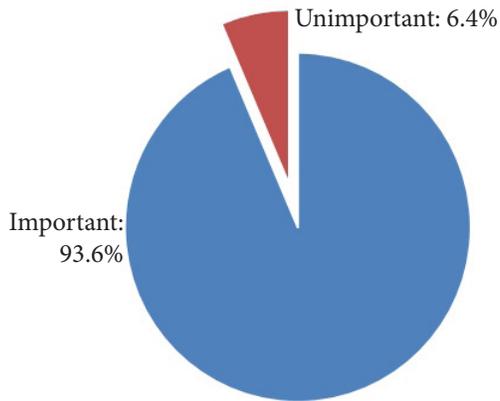
Statistical significance:
 Chi-Square: 20.798;
 2 degrees of freedom
 Gamma: -.157
 Kendall's tau-c: -.084
 Somer's D: -.081

Figure 6. Feeling thermometer survey showing tolerance among non-Latinos for undocumented immigrants.

for the tenets of the contact hypothesis as it dismisses any potential limitations of the original test due to possible ethnic bias of respondents.

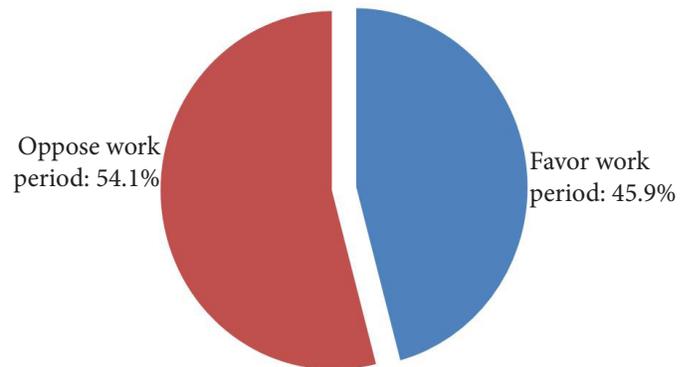
The second test was used to determine the importance placed on citizenship for undocumented immigrants by native residents in border and non-border states. Among the 482 residing in border states, 93.6% believed that citizenship for undocumented immigrants is of some importance and 6.4% said it is of no importance (figure 7). Among the 677 living in non-border states, 89.8% believed that citizenship for undocumented immigrants has some importance and 10.2% believed it has no importance (figure 8). These percentages indicate that more border state residents found citizenship for undocumented immigrants to be important than non-border state residents did. Regardless, because the difference between the two groups is slight, this test could not be classified as statistically significant, making it unable to adequately support the second half of the first hypothesis.

The third test sought to determine whether residents of border and non-border states favor or oppose a work period for undocumented immigrants. Among the 368 residing in border states, 45.9% favor a work period and 54.1% oppose it (figure 9). Among the 546 residents of non-border states, 29.3% favor a work period and 70.7% oppose it (figure 10). This test shows that a higher percentage of border state residents favor a work period for undocumented immigrants compared to non-border state residents; conversely, a higher percentage of non-border state residents opposed that same work period compared to border state residents. Because the test shows



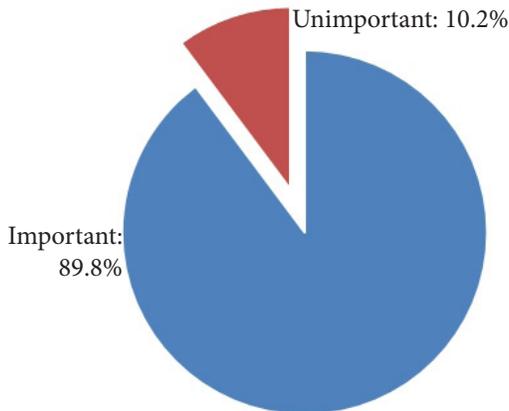
Statistical significance:
 Chi-Square: 5.05; 1 degree of freedom
 Lambda: .000
 Phi: .066
 Cramer's V: .066

Figure 7. Percent of border states that believe citizenship for undocumented immigrants is an important issue.



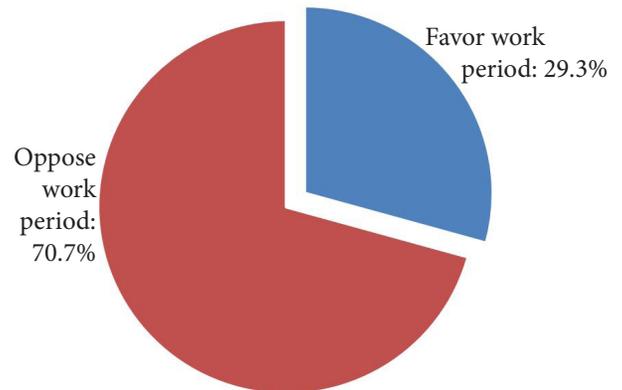
Statistical significance:
 Chi-Square: 26.357; 1 degree of freedom
 Lambda: .013
 Phi: .170
 Cramer's V: .170

Figure 9. Opinions of border state residents on work period for undocumented immigrants.



Statistical significance:
 Chi-Square: 5.05; 1 degree of freedom
 Lambda: .000
 Phi: .066
 Cramer's V: .066

Figure 8. Percent of non-border states that believe citizenship for undocumented immigrants is an important issue.



Statistical significance:
 Chi-Square: 26.357; 1 degree of freedom
 Lambda: .013
 Phi: .170
 Cramer's V: .170

Figure 10. Opinions of non-border state residents on work period for undocumented immigrants.

that border state residents tend to favor a less punitive measure for undocumented immigrants more than non-border state residents, it supports the second hypothesis and underscores that the contact hypothesis may prove that interaction with undocumented immigrants may promote positive feelings toward programs that are less punitive toward immigrants.

The fourth test was used to determine whether residents of border and non-border states believe that improving border security is important (figure 11). Among the 267 residents of border states, 80.5% believed that it is important to improve border security and 19.5% believed it is not important. Among the 745 people residing in non-border

states, 87.2% believed that improving border security is important and 12.8% believed that it is not important. This test indicates that a greater number of non-border state residents thought that improving border security is important than residents of border states. On the contrary, a larger number of border state residents asserted that improving border is less important than residents of border states. However, this test is not statistically significant and does not provide adequate support for the second half of the hypothesis. Additionally, it cannot serve as an authoritative determinant on the degree of punitive reform that respondents prefer as it did not account for multiple reforms in one response. For example, respondents may have favored a combination of flexible and punitive policy

prescriptions on immigration issues, such as a preference for amnesty for undocumented immigrants currently residing in the U.S. and a strengthening of border security. Furthermore, this test asked respondents to assess whether they support strengthening border security, which is not a comprehensive measure of punitive reforms, but merely gives a general outlook on one policy.

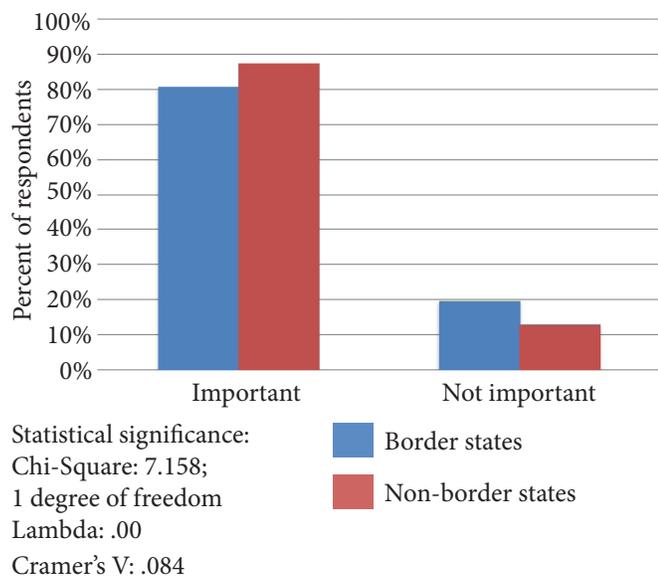


Figure 11. Is strengthening border security important?

Conclusion

The contact hypothesis theorizes the way in which intergroup interactions affect in-group sentiments toward the out-group in question. More specifically, the theory suggests that these interactions have the ability to produce favorable attitudes between one another through repeated interaction. This hypothesis has held up modestly under scrutiny, with additional testing and application to a number of social, cultural, and racial groups failing to reliably uncover a causal relationship. To test the contact hypothesis in a new way, researchers can evaluate the theory in regards to groups with different ethnic and legal classifications. Given the presence of undocumented Latino immigrants in the U.S., this research has attempted to study the contact hypothesis as it pertains to individuals' attitudes toward the role of government, personal responsibility, and legal ramifications concerning this population. To quantify the information studied, a geographic descriptor was applied to the survey subjects based on which U.S. state they reside in. The descriptor was also useful when determining opportunities for interaction between in-group and out-group members, or the interaction between U.S. citizens of particular states and the undocumented Latino population residing within them in the context of this research.

The first test suggested with statistical significance that residents in states characterized by high levels of undocumented Latino immigrants are also characterized

by a propensity for higher tolerance for those same undocumented immigrants. Even when controlling for ethnicity of respondents, this test surpassed the necessary critical statistical values. The test was also performed on the controlled and documented Latino respondents, with the corresponding results suggesting that state of residence had implications for tolerance levels toward undocumented Latinos as well, although these results were not statistically significant. The second test examined the level of importance that respondents placed on citizenship for undocumented immigrants. Although the results of this test indicated that subjects living in border states may place more importance on citizenship than subjects living in non-border states, the results were not statistically significant and were therefore less compelling than the findings of the first test.

Two tests were conducted on favorability of certain policy reforms, namely a work period that would allow immigrants to reside in the U.S. for three years, and the strengthening of border security. The former, less punitive measure, was more preferred by border state respondents than by non-border state respondents. The latter, which was not statistically significant, is a more punitive policy that was preferred by respondents residing in non-border states more so than those living along the border. Although this test was not able to conclusively prove the second hypothesis, it does highlight differences within sample respondents, which may become more pronounced with a larger sample. These results could have implications for public opinion and policy prescriptions related to undocumented immigration issues.

Although it has produced fluctuating results with varying social groups, the contact hypothesis may expose a societal force for positive sensibility. Problems related to isolationism, segregation, and racism may be mitigated by the interaction between an apprehensive in-group and the out-group of its negative attitudes. More compelling, however, is that the the contact hypothesis may have political implications from this type of study, potentially providing explanation as to why citizens of certain areas in the U.S. feel a particular way about undocumented immigration, and which policies are preferred by the general public. Additional research into this theory will be critical as the debate on undocumented immigration continues. Political campaigns at the national level will incorporate policy platforms and messaging based on the general desire for reform. With the number of undocumented Latino immigrants continually growing and settling in new areas across the country, this desire should continue to grow.

The results of this type of research show that positive public opinion may be bolstered with the continued growth of the undocumented population, pushing less punitive reforms and policy platforms forward. Campaigns may also have interest in wielding this data on a localized basis, altering

their messages based on areas of the country that politicians visit or in which they need higher approval ratings. Areas with high undocumented populations have already seen politicians who are comparatively more sympathetic than the rest of their respective party on immigration issues, and with the size of the undocumented population continually growing, the number of elected officials endorsing less punitive reforms such as work periods and amnesty should continue to grow.

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