

# Economic Uncertainty, Job Threat, and the Resiliency of the Millennial Generation's Attitudes Toward Immigration\*

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*Objective.* Drawing a distinction between conditional and prevalence factors that affect immigration attitudes, we examine if the recent economic recession has influenced the **Millennial Generation's attitudes about immigration**, compared to non-Millennials. *Methods.* Employing data from the **2008 American National Election Study (ANES)**, we conduct a logit analysis to estimate the effects of theoretically relevant factors on immigration attitudes. *Results.* Our findings indicate that even in the face of poor economic conditions that disproportionately impacted Millennials, this cohort's attitudes toward immigration are quite resilient. **While Millennials' immigration attitudes vary across a number of determinants, overall, they are more tolerant of immigration than non-Millennials.** *Conclusion.* Millennials' tolerance of immigration is consistent with their general liberal beliefs. This is true even under the conditional impact of economic self-interest and the conditional and prevalence impact of culture during the recession—a time when Millennials could have been susceptible to factors mitigating their feelings toward immigrants.

The Millennial Generation,<sup>1</sup> the cohort born from the early 1980s to the early 2000s, has been significantly affected by the recent economic downturn. This generation, 80 million people strong and the second largest population in the workforce (Smith and Clark, 2010), has had and continues to suffer the highest unemployment rates of any age cohort. In 2014, the unemployment rate among 18–29-year olds was 15.8 percent, compared to the national rate of 5.8 percent (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). Of the Millennials who are employed, “many are stuck in low-wage or part-time jobs, with mountains of student loans to pay off . . .” (Fox, 2014). And, although the overall job market is improving, unemployment is still hitting Millennials harder than any other group; some 40 percent of unemployed workers are Millennials, compared to 37 percent of Gen Xers and 23 percent of Baby Boomers. In real numbers, this translates to 4.6 million unemployed Millennials (Fottrell, 2014).

Economic anxieties run high even among employed Millennials; less than half surveyed by Pew (2012) said they felt confident that they could find another job if they lost or

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<sup>1</sup>The Millennial Generation is also known as Generation Y.

left their current one. There are numerous potential ramifications to the unemployment and underemployment status of today's youth. These consequences are largely discussed in terms of the economic impact to both individuals and society in the form of lost wages and workforce experience (Ayers, 2013) or the attitudes of Millennials about work orientation and work ethic (Deal, Altman, and Rogelberg, 2010). However, little attention has been given to whether and how the current economic climate affects Millennials' attitudes about another related topic: immigration.

A number of surveys suggest that current economic conditions have led some Millennials to blame their economic circumstances on immigrants. For example, four in 10 Millennials surveyed by Pew say that immigrants burden the country because "they take our jobs, housing, and health care" (Lerman, 2012). Similarly, when asked in a recent survey about illegal immigration, one of the top concerns that Millennials cited (34 percent of all respondents aged 18–29 years) was job threat, while burdens on government services were reported most frequently by older adults (Pew Research Center, 2011a).

Concerns over immigration displacing native workers in the labor force are nothing new (Espenshade and Calhoun, 1993; Citrin et al., 1997; Burns and Gimpel, 2000; Doherty, 2006). However, the question is whether these concerns are greater for Millennials, given how they have been disproportionately impacted by the economic recession. As we will discuss below, while research has generally found weak ties between anti-immigrant attitudes and labor competition, the effects can be stronger under specific circumstances. We test if the impact of the Great Recession on Millennials is one such circumstance.

The Millennial Generation is generally known for its liberal attitudes. This cohort is more accepting of gay marriage and homosexuality, puts a higher priority on the environment, and supports to a higher degree the promotion of minorities when compared to other generations (Pew, 2010; Lerman, 2012). They are also largely supportive of immigration; in a recent survey by Pew (2011b), 69 percent of Millennials polled said that "newcomers strengthen society," while 55 percent of Generation X, 44 percent of the Baby Boomer Generation, and 40 percent of the Silent Generation said the same. Yet, as the above references indicate, job threat remains a salient issue for this generation as well. Therefore, we are left to question whether Millennials' liberalness is challenged in the context of poor economic conditions. *Are Millennials more tolerant of immigration in comparison to other adults? Is this tolerance tempered by the recent economic recession? What other factors may affect this cohort's attitudes toward immigration?*

To explore these questions, we use data from the 2008 American National Election Study (ANES). We test if the Millennial Generation, in comparison to older adults, has greater tolerance for immigration in general and across common explanations for immigration attitudes: economic self-interest (labor competition) and symbolic politics (culture), as well as immigrant contact and context. We find that Millennials have a greater probability of tolerance in comparison to non-Millennials in all the scenarios tested. Even among Millennials who perceive job threat by immigrants and believe their future financial situation will be worse, tolerance is higher than among their non-Millennial counterparts. Before grounding the Millennial Generation's immigration attitudes in existing theories and delving into the analysis, it is important to first understand what defines the beliefs of the Millennial Generation as a whole and what makes them distinct from other generations.

## The Millennial Generation Persona

Generations are distinguished by what generational theorists refer to as a “core persona”—the set of “attitudes about family life, gender roles, institutions, politics, religion, culture, lifestyle, and the future” (Howe and Strauss, 2000:40) that result from shared experiences at the same phase of life. For example, Generation X's<sup>2</sup> persona was shaped by coming of age during the Watergate scandal, the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the introduction of the personal computer and cable TV. Equally important to a generation's core persona are those experiences absent from a cohort's collective memory. Generation Xers did not watch news coverage of John F. Kennedy's assassination on black-and-white TVs from their school desks and family living rooms—an experience that defines Baby Boomers. Likewise, Millennials have not written a term paper without the use of the Internet, feared a Soviet invasion such as the one depicted in *Red Dawn* (1984), or used a payphone to call home. Rather, their childhoods were marked by the Columbine school shooting, the terrorist attacks of September 11, and the global proliferation of the Internet and cell phones.

These experiences, in addition to others, have shaped the Millennial core persona, which includes a number of attributes that may influence this cohort's attitudes toward immigration. Millennials are *diverse*—the Millennial Generation has a higher percentage of minorities compared to older generations (e.g., 4 percent more African Americans and nearly 10 percent more Hispanics) (Pew, 2011b); Millennials are *politically liberal*—in comparison to older adults, Millennials are more likely to describe themselves as liberal and have voted at higher rates for the Democratic Party in past elections (Pew, 2011b); and Millennials are *civic-minded*—they match (and in some cases exceed) older adults in their political interest and civic engagement (Pew, 2010). The diversity and political liberalism of Millennials supports tolerance for minorities, including newcomers.

Many scholars have noted that younger cohorts are in general more likely to be liberal and supportive of immigrants than older Americans (Espenshade and Calhoun, 1993; Burns and Gimpel, 2000; Rouse, Wilkinson, and Garand, 2010). While this may be true, the Millennial core persona is *especially* liberal—even for young cohorts. Consider this snapshot of generational differences for Generation X in 1992 and the Millennial Generation in 2008—the point in time when each group was 18–30 years old: the ANES in each of these years asked—*Should the U.S. increase levels of immigration?* Nearly 7 percent (6.69 percent) of Millennials responded “yes” as compared to only 1.89 percent of Generation Xers. While the context of the immigration debate is somewhat different across the two time periods, we can see further evidence of the distinctiveness of the Millennial Generation's immigration attitudes in Table 1. Using data from the Pew Generations Survey (2011a), *t*-tests show that Millennials are statistically different from older adults in their responses to “*The growing number of newcomers from other countries is a threat to traditional American customs and values.*” When controlling for ideology, the mean difference among Millennial and non-Millennial liberals is 0.209 and the mean difference among Millennial and non-Millennial conservatives is 0.351. Even when accounting for the effect of the economic recession (proxied by *satisfaction with the way the country is going today*),<sup>3</sup> Millennials appear to be more tolerant and liberal in their immigration attitudes than older adults.

<sup>2</sup>Generation Xers were born in the 1960s to early 1980s; Baby Boomers, 1940s–1960s; the Silent Generation, 1925–1940s; and the Greatest Generation, 1900s–1924 (Howe and Strauss, 2000).

<sup>3</sup>The mean difference among Millennials and non-Millennials on *feelings toward newcomers* when both groups responded as being *satisfied* with the direction of the country is 0.253. And the mean difference among both groups who are *not satisfied* is 0.376.

TABLE 1  
Comparison of Means for Millennials and Non-Millennials

Dependent Variable: Feelings Toward Newcomers Controlling for Ideology*		
Ideology	Millennials	Non-Millennials
Liberals**	3.297	3.089
Conservatives***	2.630	2.280
Dependent Variable: Feelings Toward Newcomers Controlling for Country Satisfaction**		
Country Satisfaction	Millennials	Non-Millennials
Satisfied**	3.183	2.930
Dissatisfied***	2.873	2.498

\*\* $p > 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $p > 0.001$  (statistical significance denotes group mean distinctions).

\*Dependent variable question reads as follows: As I read a few statements tell me if you completely agree = 1, mostly agree = 2, mostly disagree = 3, or completely disagree = 4: The growing number of newcomers from other countries are a threat to traditional American customs and values.

\*\*Country satisfaction control reads as follows: Are you satisfied with the way things are going in the country today? (1 = satisfied; 2 = dissatisfied).

Given these findings coupled with ideas of the Millennial Generation's core persona, we expect:

H1: *Millennials will be associated with greater tolerance for immigration.*

We recognize, however, the effect of the Millennial persona may be tempered by context, influenced by exceptional circumstances (Hopkins, 2010). One such circumstance is the recent economic recession. Poor economic conditions may have contributed to a growing prevalence of anti-immigrant sentiment among Millennials as they are a segment of the population that feels especially threatened by having to compete with immigrants for jobs. To explore this as well as other common explanations for intolerance, we now turn to the literature on immigration attitudes.

### Explaining Individual Millennial Immigration Attitudes

Most of the literature on immigration, or more specifically opposition to immigration, focuses on general public opinion (e.g., Citrin, Reingold, and Green, 1990; Burns and Gimpel, 2000; Scheve and Slaughter, 2001; Hainmueller and Hiscox, 2010). This work tends to divide along the type of threats that immigrants may pose, which have been delineated as economic and cultural. While economic or self-interest explanations address a choice set of maximizing benefits and minimizing costs in individuals' well-being, cultural or "symbolic politics" models focus on the influence that socialization factors, particularly stereotypes, have on preferences (Sears, Hensler, and Speer, 1979). Although these theories have been widely examined as explanations of anti-immigrant sentiments of the population at large, very little work to date has looked at the opinions of a specific segment of the population, especially during a time of heightened economic insecurity.

According to the theory of economic self-interest, individuals feel threatened by immigrants on two fronts: (1) immigrants (both legal and illegal) may displace native workers and suppress their wages (i.e., labor competition) (Alvarez and Butterfield, 2000; Scheve and Slaughter, 2001) and (2) immigrants create an undue burden on public services (Passel

and Fix, 1994; Hainmueller and Hiscox, 2010).<sup>4</sup> Work to date has found inconsistent results with respect to labor competition and anti-immigrant attitudes. Malhotra, Margalit, and Mo (2013) argue that weak support for the labor competition hypothesis results not from a complete lack of economic threat, but from the fact that for a majority of Americans, immigrants do not pose such a threat. The authors distinguish between *prevalence impact* (occurrence of a mechanism across the population) and *conditional impact* (a particular mechanism affecting a certain outcome) to understand the connection between both economic self-interest and cultural explanations for animus toward immigrants. They argue that economic self-interest is high on conditional impact and low on prevalence impact and culture is high on both prevalence and conditional impact. The authors test these concepts on attitudes toward holders of H-1B visas (highly skilled Indian immigrants who are most likely to compete with American high-tech workers) and find effects for both labor market competition and cultural measures on anti-immigrant attitudes.

Following the lead of Malhotra, Margalit, and Mo (2013), we employ the conceptual distinction of prevalence and conditional impact to understand economic and cultural concerns on attitudes toward immigration. We contend that if Millennials are going to express feelings of intolerance toward immigrants, it will occur during the economic recession—a time when this cohort was disproportionately and negatively affected by the economic climate. During this time, we may observe the negative effects of economic self-interest (high on conditional impact and low on prevalence impact) on Millennials and culture (high on both conditional and prevalence impact) on both Millennials and non-Millennials. We depart from Malhotra, Margalit, and Mo (2013) in that we contend conditional impact is not limited to the high-skilled segment of the population but rather affects low-skill workers as well. Studies of attitudes about low-skilled labor have not made the distinction between prevalence and conditional impact. We examine both conditional and prevalence impact to test whether a particular group may be more likely to oppose immigration and if it is likely to oppose it within a certain context. We heed the authors' advice for research that examines a more targeted sampling to test underlying explanations about immigration attitudes.

Based on the conceptual underpinnings discussed above, economic self-interest may be particularly heightened when there is a downturn in the economy. The argument is that an economic downturn creates anti-immigrant sentiments because immigrants, both legal and illegal, are perceived to contribute even greater hardship on an already strained economy (Lapinski et al., 1997; Tichenor, 2002). However, this research has rarely focused on particular segments of the population. Scholars have noted that individuals who may directly compete with immigrants in the labor market (i.e., those who are most economically vulnerable with low-skill, low-wage jobs) are significantly more likely to hold anti-immigration attitudes (Espenshade and Hempstead, 1996; Citrin et al., 1997; Harell et al., 2012). Millennials during the economic recession fit this profile.

Although Millennials tend to be more educated (Deal, Altman, and Rogelberg, 2010), studies have shown that many have not been able to leverage their education for higher paying jobs during the recession (Harvard Public Opinion Project, 2014). In addition, Millennials are facing a long-term decline in demand for high-skilled labor. Research has shown that each successive cohort of college graduates since 2000 that is employed in jobs requiring a college degree has steadily declined (Beaudry et al., 2014). This

<sup>4</sup>We focus on the self-interest aspect of economic threat and not how this threat can manifest from the undue burden immigrants place on public services. We contend that the timing of the survey data we use captures perceptions of immigration in the context of economic competition, given that the surveys were in the field during 2008—the height of the economic recession.

decline has a ripple effect that places downward pressure on wages for both Millennial high-skilled and low-skilled workers (Emmons, 2014). And, as employment experts note, entry-level jobs were “choked off” after the recession; the ones that were available became very competitive, particularly for Millennials (Fottrell, 2014). As a result, many Millennials are underemployed or not employed at all—placing them in more direct competition with low-skilled labor.<sup>5</sup> Given the high conditional impact of the economic recession, we test the following hypothesis:

*H2: Economic self-interest will increase intolerance for immigration, with a greater (conditional) impact on Millennials.*

Second, cultural factors are also posited to influence individuals’ views on immigration (Citrin, Reingold, and Green, 1990; Malhotra, Margalit, and Mo, 2013). The theory of symbolic politics links racial prejudices or ethnic stereotypes to immigration attitudes (Burns and Gimpel, 2000). Negative stereotypes can enhance anti-immigrant sentiment by viewing immigrants as a threat to one’s own culture, traditions, and way of life (Chandler and Tsai, 2001). Specific examples include how religious affiliation can provide a “cultural framework” that helps shape attitudes toward immigration and immigrants (McDaniel, Nooruddin, and Shortle, 2011) and how the media defines and accentuates cultural factors that shape immigration attitudes (Valentino, Brader, and Jardina, 2013; Merolla, Ramakrishnan, and Haynes, 2013).

Millennials have come of age in the post 9/11 era, a time period where negative stereotypes and immigrant hostility has been quite high (Branton et al., 2011). Furthermore, in their lifetimes there has been a large influx of immigrants (both legal and illegal) into the country, complicated by a lack of comprehensive immigration reform to mitigate the flow.<sup>6</sup> These events create environments in which negative ethnic stereotypes can flourish. However, we believe the overall liberalness of the Millennial Generation mollifies these circumstances. We do not expect a conditional impact of the economic recession in this regard. Nonetheless, we recognize that there may be variation among Millennials in their perceptions and stereotypes of immigrants, just as among the general population. Given the prevalence of cultural concerns with respect to immigration (Malhotra, Margalit, and Mo, 2013), we posit the following:

*H3: Individuals (Millennial and non-Millennial) who hold negative ethnic stereotypes are more likely to be intolerant of immigration.*

Attitudes about immigration are not explained by economic or cultural concerns alone; rather, the environment in which individuals live and the degree of interaction they have with immigrant groups also play an important role. Thus, we consider the influence of contact (direct interaction individuals have with their environment) and context (more broadly defined social measures of interaction) in our assessment. Research on the role of contact and context is largely imbedded in the racial politics literature (Powers and Ellison, 1995; Taylor, 1998). However, there is a lack of consensus on how varying racial contexts influence individual immigration attitudes (Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014). Some research shows that closer proximity to and interaction with immigrant groups reduces anti-immigrant sentiments (Fetzer, 2000; Abrajano and Singh, 2009). Other work demonstrates that contact increases animus toward immigrants (Rouse, Wilkinson, and Garand, 2010). And yet additional research has produced mixed findings, noting that

<sup>5</sup>An estimated 62 percent of Millennials are working, half only part-time (Harvard Public Opinion Project, 2014).

<sup>6</sup>After decades of growth, immigration levels decreased over the last few years (Passel and Cohn, 2012).

the effects of direct or broad interaction with immigrants on immigration attitudes are conditional, depending on what is being examined (Hood and Morris, 1998; Hopkins, 2010; Hopkins, Tran, and Williamson, 2014). Despite these mixed findings, we recognize that Millennials, more than any other age cohort in recent history, have lived with and among immigrants. And as previously discussed, the Millennial Generation is the most diverse generation in U.S. history. In part, strong exposure to and contact with immigrants should mitigate Millennials' adverse attitudes about immigration. Therefore, we expect that:

*H4: Increased contact with immigrants will be associated with more tolerance for immigration, with higher levels among Millennials in comparison to non-Millennials.*

Attitudes about immigration may also vary depending on context—whether a person lives in a border state (Dunaway, Branton, and Abrajano, 2010). It may be reasonable to expect that close contact with immigrants, coupled with already general liberal attitudes, mitigate anti-immigrant sentiments, especially in border states where a large number of immigrants reside. On the other hand, the experience of having close contact with immigrants may not be enough to combat anti-immigrant sentiments in border states where the issues of immigration are more prevalent due to concerns over security, illegal migration, and law enforcement (Preston, 2012). Given conflicting expectations about contextual explanations of immigration attitudes (Citrin et al., 1997), the effect of living in a border state remains ambiguous. Therefore, we do not propose a direct hypothesis for this measure, but do test its effect on immigration attitudes.

## **Data, Model, and Methods**

To test our hypotheses, we use a standard tool of American public opinion survey research—the ANES from 2008. The survey was in the field from September 2 through December 30, 2008, during the height of the economic recession<sup>7</sup> and polled adults aged 18 years and above in 33 states. We analyze the immigration attitudes of this sample by exploring how age cohort, perceptions of economic competition with immigrants, perceptions of future financial situation, feelings toward illegal immigrants, having parents who are foreign born, and residence in a border state affect expressed tolerance for immigration, measured as beliefs regarding levels of immigration. We control for political party affiliation, education, gender, race, and ethnicity. A summary of variable coding is presented in Supporting Information Appendix A.<sup>8</sup>

The dependent variable, immigration intolerance, is measured as attitudes regarding the restriction of immigration levels: Do you think the number of immigrants from foreign countries who are permitted to come to the United States to live should be increased a lot, increased a little, left the same as it is now, decreased a little, or decreased a lot? In line with other research that has utilized this question (Espenshade and Hempstead, 1996; Hopkins, 2010), we collapse the survey responses into two categories to reflect tolerance and intolerance for immigration. Those who responded “increased a lot,” “increased a

<sup>7</sup>The effects of the “Great Recession” were strongly felt by the time the ANES (2008) survey was in the field. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2012) reports that the recession began in December 2007 and ended in June 2009.

<sup>8</sup>All appendices are available online via the authors' websites: (<http://www.gvpt.umd.edu/srouse/>) and (<http://localdisresilience.com/>).

little,” or “left the same” are considered tolerant, while those who responded “decreased a little” and “decreased a lot” are considered intolerance.

To test if the Millennial Generation is more liberal and tolerant of immigration, we include a dummy variable to capture those respondents who belong to this age cohort. Respondents born in the year 1980 and after are considered Millennials, while those born before 1980 are considered non-Millennials. We expect this variable to represent the Millennial Generation persona, defined by political liberalness, ethnic diversity and tolerance, and civic-mindedness—a persona that should be associated with higher tolerance for immigration.

The second hypothesis we test focuses on economic self-interest, measured in two ways: (1) job competition and (2) outlook of future financial situation. The survey captures perceptions of job threat from immigrants by asking respondents: *How likely is it that recent immigration levels will take jobs away from people already here—extremely likely, very likely, somewhat likely, or not at all likely?* We code responses so that higher values indicate higher perceived job threat from immigrants and expect those who perceive competition with immigrants to have less tolerance for immigration.

In addition to perceived job threat, we include a variable that captures the respondent’s perception about his or her future financial situation: *Now looking ahead, do you think that a year from now you/your family living here will be better off financially, worse off, or just about the same as now?* We code the variable so that higher values indicate pessimism about the future. This question is particularly salient when examining Millennials because, despite the effects of the economic recession, survey research has shown that this age cohort is extremely optimistic about its financial future (Pew, 2012). However, if an individual feels pessimistic about his or her financial future, this economic uncertainty may translate into less tolerance for immigration, as immigrants may be perceived to create an even greater hardship on an already strained economy.

To test our hypothesis about symbolic politics, we rely on the survey question that asks respondents to place illegal immigrants on a feeling thermometer. Focusing on feelings toward illegal immigrants is an appropriate proxy for sentiments toward immigrants in general for a number of reasons. A large number of illegal immigrants (between 40 and 50 percent) initially enter the country legally, making it more difficult to disentangle the legal/illegal designation (National Research Council, Smith and Edmonston, 1997). Relatedly, the majority of Americans overestimate the number of illegal immigrants in the country and erroneously believe that illegal immigrants outnumber legal immigrants (Doherty, 2006). And a large part of the discussion about immigration reform involves a path to legal status for undocumented (illegal) immigrants. This, coupled with recent rights granted to DREAMers in a number of states, signals decreased disparity in how natives view illegal and legal immigrants. The illegal immigrant feeling thermometer ranges from 0 to 100 with 0 indicating extremely unfavorable or negative feelings toward illegal immigrants and 100 extremely favorable or positive feelings toward illegal immigrants. We expect respondents who rate illegal immigrants unfavorably to harbor negative immigrant sentiments and, in turn, to express less tolerance for immigration than those who view illegal immigrants favorably.

To test our hypothesis regarding the effects of immigrant contact, we include a measure of the respondent’s contact with immigrants, represented by parents’ country of origin. We assume that having parents who are foreign born increases the likelihood that a respondent will have contact with other immigrants, and we expect individuals who have close ties to immigrants to be more likely to express tolerance for immigration. This is consistent with past studies that have found that people born outside the United States are likely to have

more favorable attitudes toward immigration (Espenshade and Hempstead, 1996; Rouse, Wilkinson, and Garand, 2010).

We also test if context influences immigration attitudes, measured by the respondent's state residence. It is coded one for border state (Arizona, California, New Mexico, and Texas) and zero for all other states. Since there are conflicting findings on contextual explanations of immigration attitudes, we do not propose a direct hypothesis for this measure.

We also incorporate into our model a number of control variables, including political party affiliation, education, gender, race, and ethnicity, which reflect personal characteristics and experiences that may influence immigration attitudes. To measure political party affiliation, we rely on respondents' self-identification as Republican, Democrat, or independent. We include Republican and independent in the model, expecting that both are associated with lower degrees of immigration tolerance (Merolla, Ramakrishnan, and Haynes, 2013).

To measure education, we use reported years of educational attainment. Consistent with past research, we expect individuals with higher education to be more likely to express tolerance for immigration (Espenshade and Calhoun, 1993; Burns and Gimpel, 2000; Hainmueller and Hiscox, 2010). We also include measures for gender, coded one for female and zero for male. While on a majority of policy issues, women tend to be more liberal than men (Swers, 2002), previous findings on the effect of gender on immigration attitudes have shown women to be more supportive of restrictive immigration policies (Citrin, Reingold, and Green, 1990; Burns and Gimpel, 2000; Rouse, Wilkinson, and Garand, 2010).

To measure ethnicity/race, we include three variables that report if the respondent self-identifies as Latino, African American, or Asian. Studies have found conflicting results with respect to how minorities view immigration—some finding minorities to be pro-immigration (Espenshade and Hempstead, 1996), and other studies showing that they hold anti-immigrant sentiments (Gay, 2006; Rouse, Wilkinson, and Garand, 2010).

Given that the dependent variable is binary, we use logit analysis to estimate the effects of these independent variables on immigration tolerance.<sup>9</sup> Since we are interested in exploring the Millennial Generation's level of expressed tolerance for immigration in relation to older adults, we interact each independent variable of interest (immigrants take jobs, future financial situation, illegal immigrant feeling, border state resident, and foreign-born parent) with the Millennial Generation variable. This allows us to test if Millennials are distinct from non-Millennials in their immigration beliefs, particularly in the face of significant economic uncertainty. We also include sampling weights as appropriate for ANES (2008) to adjust for the oversample of Latino and African-American populations. See Supporting Information Appendix B for the descriptive statistics for each variable included in the model. We report the findings of the regression analysis below.

## **Results**

Are Millennials more tolerant of immigration than non-Millennials? Does this tolerance degrade with the effects of economic self-interest? Does negative sentiment affect Millennial and non-Millennial immigration beliefs alike? Table 2 presents the results of the logit estimation that address these questions. Since the model includes nonlinear interaction terms with coefficients that are difficult to interpret, we discuss the results in terms of predicted probabilities.

<sup>9</sup>The model was estimated using probit analysis, and the results were substantively the same.

TABLE 2

## Analysis of Immigration Attitudes Using ANES (2008)

Dependent Variable: Intolerance for Immigration. Do You Think the Number of Immigrants Who Are Permitted to Come to the United States to Live Should Be Increased, Decreased, or Kept the Same? 1 = Intolerance (Decreased a Little or Decreased a Lot); 0 = Tolerance (Increased a Little, Increased a Lot, or Stay the Same)

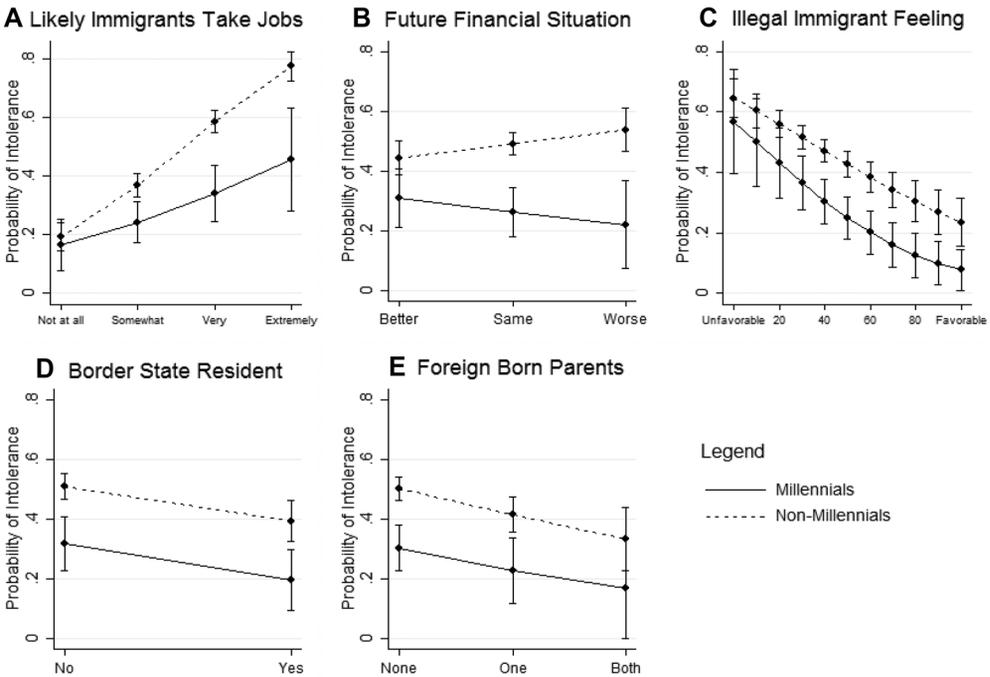
		Coefficient (Standard Error)
Millennial Generation	Respondent born 1980 and after	1.599** (0.968)
Economic self-interest	Immigrants take jobs	0.890** (0.088)
	Immigrants take jobs * Millennial	-0.407* (0.212)
	Future financial situation	0.189* (0.111)
	Future financial situation * Millennial	-0.419 (0.295)
Symbolic politics	Illegal immigrant feeling	-0.178** (0.003)
	Illegal immigrant feeling * Millennial	-0.010 (0.008)
Contact and context	Foreign-born parent	-0.352** (0.131)
	Foreign-born parent * Millennial	-0.035 (0.345)
	Border state resident	-0.466** (0.174)
	Border state resident * Millennial	-0.193 (0.429)
Controls	Republican	0.118 (0.188)
	Independent	0.078 (0.167)
	Education	-0.081** (0.031)
	Female	0.116 (0.138)
	African American	0.148 (0.180)
	Latino	0.223 (0.233)
	Asian American	0.589 (0.496)
	Cut 1 (constant)	-0.513 (0.560)
	<i>N</i>	1,766

NOTE: Coefficients reported with standard errors in parenthesis; statistical significance denoted as \*\* $p < 0.01$  and \* $p < 0.05$  (one-tailed test).

Our first hypothesis posits that Millennials are more tolerant of immigration than non-Millennials. The results of the model estimated support this contention. Predicted probabilities indicate that a Millennial has 31.8 percent likelihood of expressing *intolerance for immigration*—saying that levels of immigration should be decreased some or a

FIGURE 1

**Predicted Probabilities of Immigration Intolerance with 95 Percent Confidence Intervals**



NOTES: All variables held at their means. Means for Millennial group: immigrants take jobs (2.38), future financial situation (1.62), illegal immigrant feelings (44.49), border state resident (0.29), foreign-born parents (1.31), Republican (0.17), independent (0.46), education (13.49), female (0.57), African American (0.13), Latino (0.13), and Asian American (0.04). Means for non-Millennial group: immigrants take jobs (2.52), future financial situation (1.81), illegal immigrant feelings (37.82), border state resident (0.24), foreign-born parents (1.24), Republican (0.29), independent (0.29), education (13.53), female (0.54), African American (0.11), Latino (0.07), and Asian American (0.03). See Supporting Information Appendix D for a table of the predicted probabilities graphed.

lot—while a non-Millennial respondent has a 46.6 percent likelihood of the same.<sup>10</sup> This difference is considerable: nearly one of three Millennials versus nearly one of two non-Millennials is intolerant of immigration.

Our second hypothesis contends that economic self-interest will increase intolerance for immigration, with a greater (conditional) impact on Millennials. The results of the model do not fully support this. While heightened perceptions of job threat by immigrants and sense of worsening future finances are associated with increases in intolerance, Millennials maintain lower levels of intolerance when compared to non-Millennials. These findings are best presented graphically.

Figure 1 presents the predicted probability of intolerance for immigration for each independent variable of interest: (1) *immigrants take jobs*, (2) *future financial situation*, (3) *illegal immigrant feeling*, (4) *foreign-born parents*, and (f) *border state resident*. The probability of intolerance is shown for the Millennial Generation cohort with a solid line and for non-Millennials with a dotted line. As evident from these graphs, the probability of intolerance is lower for Millennials than non-Millennials in all scenarios tested, although

<sup>10</sup>See Supporting Information Appendix C for a graph depicting these predicted probabilities.

the differences are statistically significant in some cases for specific, but not all, values of the independent variable.

Perceptions of immigrants taking jobs have a negative effect on immigration tolerance for both Millennials and non-Millennials, as expected. However, a conditional impact of the economic recession on Millennials is not evident as they maintain lower levels of intolerance in comparison to non-Millennials when expressing perceptions of job threat. As shown in Figure 1A, the difference among those who say it is “not at all” likely immigrants take away jobs from Americans is not statistically significant, meaning there is no distinction among Millennials and non-Millennials who share this belief. There are noticeable differences, though, across the other values of the variable. Millennials who say it is “somewhat” likely immigrants take jobs have a 24.3 percent likelihood of intolerance for immigration compared to a 36.8 percent likelihood among non-Millennials—a difference of 12.5 percent. This difference across predicted probabilities of tolerance grows to 31.8 percent when comparing Millennials and non-Millennials who say it is “extremely likely” immigrants take jobs. Millennials holding this perception have a 45.8 percent likelihood of intolerance while non-Millennials with the same beliefs have a 77.6 percent likelihood of intolerance. This highlights that the rate of change for non-Millennials is higher than Millennials when comparing across the values of the job threat variable. In other words, stronger beliefs that immigrants take jobs (i.e., “very likely” and “extremely likely”) have a larger effect on non-Millennials’ intolerance when compared to Millennials.

Assessments of personal financial futures also influence immigration tolerance, but the direction of the effect for Millennials is contrary to the expectations of Hypothesis 2. Again, there is no difference among Millennials and non-Millennials who believe that their financial future will be better, but there are statistically significant distinctions between the groups for those that say their future will remain the same or get worse. The trends in predicted probabilities, shown in Figure 1B, indicate that perceptions of personal financial future increases immigration tolerance for non-Millennials but not Millennials. A non-Millennial who says her personal financial situation in one year will stay the same has a 49 percent likelihood of immigration intolerance, while a non-Millennial who says it will get worse has a 53.7 percent likelihood of intolerance. For non-Millennials, as financial outlooks worsen, immigration intolerance grows. The same does not hold true for Millennials.

As Millennials’ financial outlooks worsen, their intolerance lessens. A Millennial who says her financial situation will stay the same has a 26.1 percent likelihood of intolerance; this drops to 22 percent likelihood for a Millennial who says her situation will be worse. This finding supports the general optimism of Millennials about their financial future (Pew, 2012) and further suggests that this cohort is less likely than non-Millennials to tie their own financial conditions (present or future) to their attitudes about immigration. Once again, we see the resilience of Millennials’ liberalness despite a disproportionate impact from poor economic conditions that arguably should have a conditional (negative) effect on their tolerance for immigration.

Turning to culture, we find support for Hypothesis 3 that individuals, Millennial and non-Millennial, who hold negative ethnic stereotypes are more likely to be intolerant of immigration. Predicted probabilities indicate that individuals who express negative sentiment toward immigrants (lower values on the feeling thermometer scale) are more likely to express intolerance for immigration. As negative sentiments lessen (greater values on the feeling thermometer scale), there is a lower likelihood of intolerance. We also find, as shown in Figure 1C, the effect of negative immigrant sentiment is distinct between Millennials and non-Millennials at moderate to high values of the variable. On the low end of the scale

(more unfavorable feelings representing greater negative sentiment), there is no statistically significant difference among Millennials and non-Millennials. At the moderate rating of 30, trends of predicted probabilities between Millennials and non-Millennials are statistically different, with Millennials having lower levels of intolerance as their ratings increase. A non-Millennial who gives a rating of 30 on the illegal immigrant feeling thermometer has a 53.8 percent likelihood of intolerance, while a Millennial has a 39.8 percent likelihood of intolerance. This decreases to a 44.9 percent and 27.6 percent likelihood of intolerance for non-Millennials and Millennials, respectively, for those who give a rating of 50 on the feeling thermometer. The difference between the two groups remains statistically significant across the higher end of the feeling thermometer scale, culminating with a 7.7 percent likelihood of intolerance for Millennials and a 23.4 percent likelihood of intolerance for non-Millennials who give a rating of 100. Our results demonstrate stronger support for the prevalence impact of culture than for its conditional effect.

Beyond culture, we find support for Hypothesis 4 that posits increased contact with immigrants is associated with more tolerance for immigration, with higher levels of tolerance among Millennials in comparison to non-Millennials. The effect of contact is statistically significant for two of the three values of the variable, *foreign-born parents*, as shown in Figure 1E. There is no statistical distinction among individuals whose parents were both born outside the United States. However, there are statistically significant differences between the groups when considering the values representing one parent born outside the United States and both parents born in the United States. The likelihood of expressing immigration intolerance for a non-Millennial with one parent born outside the United States is 41.5 percent as compared to a likelihood of 22.8 percent for a Millennial. This probability of being more intolerant increases when considering the scenario that both parents are born in the United States—50.2 percent for a non-Millennial and 30.3 percent for a Millennial. Exposure to immigrants mitigates intolerance for immigration, particularly among Millennials.

In addition to immigrant contact, context also influences immigration attitudes. Living in a border state increases tolerance for immigration among both Millennials and non-Millennials, although tolerance remains higher for Millennials. As shown in Figure 1D, the likelihood of intolerance for a non-Millennial living in Arizona, California, New Mexico, or Texas is 39.4 percent, compared to a 50.9 percent likelihood of intolerance for a non-Millennial residing outside of a border state. Similarly, a Millennial living in a border state has a 19.4 percent likelihood of expressing intolerance, compared to a likelihood of 31.8 percent for a Millennial living in a nonborder state.

Among the control variables we consider, *education* is the only measure to have a statistically significant effect on intolerance for immigration. For both Millennials and non-Millennials, more educational attainment significantly decreases intolerance for immigration. A non-Millennial who graduates from high school is associated with a 51.2 percent likelihood of immigration intolerance. This decreases to a 43.1 percent likelihood with the attainment of four-year college education. Similarly, a high school Millennial graduate has a 30.35 percent likelihood of expressing immigration intolerance, while a college-educated Millennial has a 23.96 percent likelihood of intolerance. The other control variables have no effect on attitudes toward immigration for either group.

## Discussion and Conclusion

Millennials have disproportionately experienced the adverse effects of the economic recession with higher unemployment and underemployment rates and greater devaluation

of their college education. They are concerned about their economic prospects, and recent surveys show that at least for some, these concerns are tied to immigration. Thus, the primary question that we ask in this article is whether the recent economic recession has negatively affected this cohort's attitudes about immigration. Utilizing the 2008 ANES, our results indicate Millennials are more tolerant of immigration than non-Millennials in scenarios that were expected to reflect the conditional impact of the Great Recession, namely, perceptions that immigrants are somewhat, very, and extremely likely to take jobs and perceptions that future financial situation will stay the same or worsen. Contrary to our expectations, we find that Millennials are more tolerant in these scenarios, highlighting the resilience of their liberal attitudes despite poor economic conditions that negatively affected this cohort. We also find that Millennials are no different than non-Millennials who do not perceive economic threat (say it is "not at all" likely immigrants take jobs) and espouse financial optimism (say their financial situation in the future will be better). Individuals of all ages who are not motivated by economic self-interest have more tolerance for immigration. When economic self-interest becomes present, we see a divergence of Millennial and non-Millennial attitudes, with Millennials exhibiting greater tolerance. This trend is also evident with negative immigrant sentiment, immigrant contact, and immigrant context. Millennials consistently have higher levels of tolerance for immigration in these scenarios.

Most immigration studies do not draw distinctions among particular segments of the population or consider specific circumstances that may affect opinions about immigration. Following the lead of Malhotra, Margalit, and Mo (2013), we discern between conditional and prevalence impact of factors that may influence the attitudes of Millennials. Even with this more specific analysis on a particular group, we find that Millennials are less likely than non-Millennials to tie economic self-interest (conditional impact) and cultural considerations (conditional and prevalence impact) to immigration intolerance.

Some literature has shown that threatened immigration responses are a product of exceptional times (Hopkins, 2010). Even though there has been no greater exceptional time for Millennials than the Great Recession, our results for this cohort in the face of significant economic adversity do not lend support to this idea. It appears that for Millennials, immigration tolerance has a great deal of resilience, despite difficult conditions that might put these positive sentiments to the test. Only time will reveal the durability of Millennial attitudes toward immigration. For one thing, even though the overall economy has improved, Millennials continue to feel the impact of the recession. It is possible that longer and lingering economic adversity may eventually diminish their tolerance. Additionally, it will be important to test whether Millennial immigration attitudes persist as this cohort ages. Ultimately, the only way to confirm that tolerance toward immigration is a cohort, rather than an age, effect is to examine Millennials over time.

This study contributes to the body of literature on immigration by examining the Millennial Generation's attitudes, which to our knowledge no other studies have investigated. We have shown the theoretical mechanisms that drive general immigration attitudes also affect Millennials, but true to their liberal persona, Millennials are overall more tolerant of immigration than non-Millennials. The main value of this work is in examining how immigration attitudes can be explained for a specific group, under particular circumstances, and as a result of their experiences. The next logical step is to use this theoretical frame as the foundation for a larger more comprehensive study, testing Millennial attitudes beyond the height of economic struggles and across other issue areas. Such studies are increasingly salient; the political beliefs and policy preferences of the Millennial Generation will be front and center in many discussions as their presence and influence only continues to rise.

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### Supporting Information

Additional supporting information may be found at the authors' websites: (<http://localdisresilience.com/>) and (<http://gvpt.umd.edu/srouse/>).

**Appendix A:** Variable Coding

**Appendix B:** Descriptive Statistics

**Appendix C:** Predicted Probabilities of Immigration Intolerance

**Appendix D:** Marginal Effects

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