Social factors influencing immigration attitudes: an analysis of data from the General Social Survey

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Abstract

This report partly replicates and also extends previous work exploring social factors influencing public opinion concerning immigration policy in the United States. Our findings are that college education and perceived cultural threats, especially to the English language, have the most impact upon immigration views. Other variables having some effect are political ideology, economic outlook, age, and sex. Effects of race, income, and fear of crime appear to be negligible. The findings are discussed in light of a multifactor theory of immigration opinion. © 2001 Elsevier Science Inc. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Immigration policy became one of the most hotly debated topics in the United States during the decade of the 1990s. In California during 1994, Proposition 187, cutting off state benefits for illegal immigrants, passed with 59% of the vote and was promptly tied up in the courts. In 1996, Congress enacted a bill widely seen as unfriendly toward immigration and controversy continues over how the bill should be enforced or possibly modified. Immigration critics, bolstered by opinion polls showing approximately two-thirds of the public wishing to reduce the level of immigration, continue to press for more restrictive laws (Brimelow, 1995), while others defend current policies (Simon, 1996).

Despite the salience of this debate, social scientists have only recently begun to submit immigration attitudes to analysis beyond that found in news reports. In the United States, the work of Rita J. Simon (1987, 1993), Simon and Alexander (1993) and of Thomas Espenshade and his associates (Espenshade & Calhoun, 1993, Espenshade & Hempstead, 1996)

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almost stand alone as examples of scholarly, as opposed to polemical, literature on immigration attitudes. We draw upon these and a few other writers in approaching our study of 1994 General Social Survey data (Davis & Smith, 1994).

Our purpose is the same as that of Espenshade and Hempstead (1996) who were attempting to examine systematically the social factors influencing American attitudes toward immigration. These authors, like Rita J. Simon in her analyses, used the results of commercial public opinion polls as their source of data. While these polls are valuable, we believe the 1994 General Social Survey (hereafter, GSS) provides an excellent alternative data source, including some interview items not found in the polls of news organizations. Also, although the 1994 GSS does not allow us to look at some of the variables Espenshade and Hempstead included, it does give us an opportunity to investigate several factors they did not include in their analysis. (More recent version of the GSS have not included the key immigration items.)

In the remainder of the paper, we examine the sociological literature on factors influencing immigration attitudes, add some suggestions of our own, and proceed to cast as many of these ideas as possible into a form we can test using the GSS data. First we take up each proposed explanatory variable and examine tabular data and a simple regression model on the effects of that variable upon immigration attitudes. We then present a full regression model, including all the variables, and conclude with a discussion of our findings.

2. Theoretical framework

In the broadest sense our theoretical orientation goes back to the work of people like Charles Cooley (1922), G.H. Mead (1934), and Herbert Blumer (1969) who founded the theoretical approach now called symbolic interactionism. It holds that individuals develop their conceptions both of themselves and others, including the broader society, in a process of communicative interaction with other actors. Many, and perhaps most, of the current theories about public opinion formation are based at least in part on this approach.

When one focuses upon more specific theories of public opinion, however, one finds the field to be fragmented. As Price and Oshagan (1995, p. 179) write, "a single complete theoretical explanation is not available" (also see Zaller, 1992). Certainly this is true about proposed explanations of immigration attitudes. In fact, we suspect that there are many diverse causal factors at work, some more influential with some categories of people than with others. Palmer (1996), for instance, argues for a multifactor approach in his study of Canadian attitudes as measured by polls conducted between 1975 and 1995.

While we cannot propose a unified theory of public opinion on immigration, we do try to organize our discussion in terms of some explanatory conceptions which are widely recognized in the literature. For instance, practically all analyses of variations in public opinion examine the effects of *ascribed background characteristics* such as age, sex, and race (see Milburn, 1991, pp. 23–30). We follow the usual practice of researchers and include all three variables as controls in our statistical analyses.

Another common assumption is that individuals pursue *self-interest* in forming their views (Key, 1961, p. 223; Campbell et al., 1960). Some writers would attempt to understand all

human behavior in terms of rational self-interest, but here we are only referring to more obvious considerations such as source and amount of income, perceived effects of policies upon economic conditions and/or personal safety.

Besides more obvious material interests, people are also motivated to avoid social isolation or disapproval, and to seek self-enhancement and self-validation. Several related theories have addressed these interests. Max Weber (1946) was a pioneer in this area, since he originated the concept of status groups whose members seek to augment the honor or prestige associated with a particular lifestyle. A long research tradition documents the effects of pressures for conformity within groups (Sherif, 1935, 1936; Asch, 1952, 1956) and the importance of reference groups (Sherif, 1936). Also useful may be social identification theory, originated by Tajfel and his associates (Tajfel, 1969, 1982; Tajfel and Wilkes, 1963). Tajfel argued that the mere categorization of people into groups had powerful consequences. For one thing, it is the basis for stereotyping, both of the in-group (as heterogenous, for instance) and the out-group (as homogeneous). It also increases perceptions of group differences and causes in-group members to favor their own group with higher rewards while penalizing out-groups. These consequences apparently hold true even when group categorization is completely arbitrary and involves little or no interaction within the group.

We designate all these last points of view very broadly as *group comparison* theories and we argue below that the effects of college education and perceived cultural threats upon immigration attitudes may be usefully interpreted in terms of these theories.

Finally, most people in modern societies hold certain political beliefs, predispositions, or values which influence the positions they take on issues such as immigration policies. We will call such beliefs *ideologies* even though the majority of people are not ideologues or even very well informed on many of the issues about which pollsters query them. Still, many writers believe that most individuals possess such predispositions, often as a result of political socialization along with many of the factors already mentioned, such as self-interest and group identification factors (see Lippman, 1922; Campbell et al., 1960; Key, 1961; Zaller, 1992).

3. Data and methods

Data used in this study were drawn from the file of the 1994 General Social Survey (GSS) conducted for the National Data Program for the Social Sciences at the National Opinion Research Center, University of Chicago (Davis & Smith, 1994). The 1994 GSS like its previous editions uses full-probability sampling to select respondents from adult, English-speaking, noninstitutionalized, population of the United States. In 1994, a total sample of 2,992 individuals were interviewed. While some basic background questions were asked of all these 2,992 individuals, certain subsets of questions were asked of only selected individuals, usually half of them. Thus, for example, 1,474 of the 2,992 respondents were asked the key questions used as our dependent variables. Note that number of respondents may vary in the tables due to missing data on the various items. In the next section, we describe how the variables used in the present study were selected and constructed. We begin with the dependent variables.

4. The dependent variables

Since attitudes toward legal immigrants differ markedly from those toward people who enter the country outside of legal channels, we look at these issues separately. For clarity of presentation in statistical tables, we list *anti-immigration* opinions as the dependent variable. This is an arbitrary decision. We are also trying to explain pro-immigration sentiment.

The standard polling survey item which has been used for many years to measure overall opinion about legal immigration is either identical with or very similar to the 1994 GSS item which reads, "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 (Davis & Smith, 1994, Qs. 514). The categories are usually reported collapsed into "increased," "decreased," and "kept at present levels." Preliminary to more sophisticated analysis, we look at cross tabulations of this item with our independent variables. As a shorthand form of notation we will call this the NUMBERS variable. There is no comparable GSS item on illegal immigration.

In order to construct dependent variables to use in the multivariate analysis, we take advantage of the availability of questions asked in the 1994 GSS concerning the issue of rights and entitlements in various areas for legal immigrants and other questions focusing upon "undocumented aliens" or "illegal immigrants" and their children born in the United States. Seven of these items were about legal immigrants and, besides the item about numbers of immigrants admitted, included questions about eligibility for welfare, demands for immigrant rights, whether immigrants should "work their way up" without special favors, and the effects of immigration upon economic growth, unemployment, and problems of keeping the country united (Qs. 514, 516A,B, C, 517, 518A,B). Three of the items asked about "undocumented aliens" and asked subjects' opinions as to whether illegal immigrants should be entitled to work permits, allowed to attend public universities at the same cost as other students, and whether their children should continue to qualify as citizens when born in the U.S. (Qs. 517A-1, 517A-2, 517A-3).

We ran a factor analysis that included all these variables and obtained two very clearly distinguishable factors: (1) those variables concerning legal immigrants and (2) the variables having to do with illegal immigrants. These two factors are used in the present study as the second set of dependent variables, labeled as attitudes which are ANTI-LEGAL immigration and ANTI-ILLEGAL immigration respectively.

5. Independent variables and results

To avoid repetitious discussions of so many different variables, we have combined some of our review of the literature with explanation of how we measured each of the variables, and included the results of our own statistical analysis for each of the factors before going on to the next variable.

First we examine the effects of what we have termed *ascribed background characteristics*, AGE, SEX, AND RACE. Since data on these traits were available on nearly all the respondents, we included these variables as controls in all the regression equations. Note that

Table 1
Attitude toward immigration: post war trends
Question: Should immigration be kept at its present level, increased, or decreased?

	1946	1953	1965	1977	1981	1982	1986	1993[a]	1994[b]
More/increased	5%	13%	8%	7%	5%	4%	7%	6%	6.4%
Same/present level	32%	37%	39%	37%	22%	23%	35%	27%	28%
Fewer/decreased	37%	39%	33%	42%	65%	66%	49%	65%	65.6%

Note. 1946–1986, these trends data are taken from Simon (1987), Table 1. Columns may not add up to 100 due to "don't know" responses. Also, in 1946, a "none" category was included.
[a] CNN/USA Today/Gallup Poll, 1993, p. 127
[b] These are the data used in the present study. Note: N = 1379.

we first regressed each of the two dependent variables upon each of the remaining independent variables along with age, sex, and race. This allowed us to make judgments concerning which independent variables to include in the full model (Table 3). We do not show the results of the simple models, but these are available from the authors.

Earlier studies have produced mixed results with respect to AGE and immigration attitudes. Our own NUMBERS results, seen in Table 2, show older respondents more likely to want to decrease number of legal admissions. In our full regression model (Table 3), where actual, ungrouped ages were coded for the variable, the relationship between age and anti-immigration attitudes (legal) is positive and statistically significant. Age is not related to the ANTI-ILLEGAL variable in a statistically significant manner.

NUMBERS data, when broken down by SEX, also show inconsistent results in the polls. The 1993 Gallup poll showed females more favorable toward larger numbers of immigrants than male respondents. Our Table 2 shows virtually identical figures for men and women on the NUMBERS variable. However, using the composite dependent variable in the full model regression analysis, Table 3, we find females more ANTI-LEGAL immigration, and the difference is statistically significant. Sex has no significant effect upon ANTI-ILLEGAL attitudes.

RACE of respondents has been examined in a few surveys of attitudes toward immigration. The racial and ethnic categories usually employed are "white" and "nonwhite," or "white" and "black." The response categories for the GSS "race" item included "white," "black," and "other (specify)." The main difference between the two different ways of specifying race, that is, white and black as opposed to white and nonwhite, is that the nonwhite category includes not only Blacks, but also Asians and American Indians, plus a very small number of respondents who gave other designations, such as Arab, Mulatto, Polynesian, and so forth

NUMBERS data from the GSS show 67% of Whites favoring a decrease in immigration compared to 65% of Blacks and 60% of nonwhites. Similar results were obtained on the 1993 Gallup Poll. Respondents in the black and nonwhite categories have tended to be predominantly anti–immigration, but not as much so as Whites. In our regression equations, we used "white" and "other" as our RACE variable. The impact of this variable did not reach the level of statistical significance for either ANTI-LEGAL or ANTI-ILLEGAL attitudes in the complete model reported in Table 3.

Table 2
Effects of theoretical variables on attitude toward immigration: frequency distribution by percentage

Theoretical variables		Increased	Decreased	N
Personal social attributes:				
A.	Sex			
	male	6.6%	64.6%	635
	female	6.0	66.1	762
B.	Race			
	white	4.9%	66.6%	1,160
	nonwhite	13.1	59.9	237
	black	11.0	65.4	182
c.	Age			
	18–29	7.6%	58.6%	251
	30–49	6.5%	65.9%	645
	50–64	5.2%	65.9%	270
	65 & over	5.7%	70.9%	230
Economic threat:				
A.	Perceived national economy			
	getting better	6.7%	58.9%	360
	about the same	5.7	67.2	613
	getting worse	7.1	69.2	406
B.	Income			
	$10,00 or less	12.9%	64.4%	163
	$10,000–19,999	4.9	68.2	223
	$20,000 or more	5.5	64.6	876
Fear of crime:				
A.	Any area around here or within a mile you would be afraid to walk alone?			
	no	5.2%	67.6%	497
	yes	7.8%	65.8%	436
B.	Do you happen to have in your home or garage any guns or revolvers?			
	yes	4.6%	72.6%	394
	no	7.9	62.3	530
Political conservatism:				
Where would you place yourself on the scale from extremely liberal to extremely conservative?				
	liberal	8.0%	58.0%	374
	moderate	4.6	68.5	496
	conservative	6.0	68.2	485
Cultural threat:				
A.	English language used in school			
	in native language	10.2%	58.6%	215
	native lang 1–2 yrs	5.8	62.9	660
	English only	5.3	71.3	491
B.	English language used in ballots			
	printed in some other	7.0%	61.5%	857
	printed in English only	5.3	72.4	508
C.	English language as official language			
	oppose	8.5%	53.7%	378
	neither	9.7	54.0	24
	favor	5.0	71.8	859
D.	Bilingual education			
	strongly favor	9.3%	58.5%	364
	somewhat favor	5.7	66.3	540
	somewhat oppose	4.7	69.9	236
	strongly oppose	4.3	71.3	209

(continued)

Table 2 *(continued)*

Theoretical variables		Increased	Decreased	N
Education:				
A.	Whether graduated from college			
	not college graduated	6.3%	70.3%	1,024
	graduated from college	6.2	52.0	369
B.	Level of education:			
	grade school only	3.7%	66.7%	27
	high school	6.9	71.8	656
	college	5.8	59.6	710

Note. Rows do not add up to 100 due to omission of "same/present level."

Next we take up several independent variables which may be considered expressions of perceived *self-interest*. It is a common assumption that many people oppose the entry of large numbers of immigrants because they see these newcomers as an ECONOMIC THREAT (Simon, 1993; Palmer, 1996; Espenshade and Hempstead, 1996). There are widespread beliefs that immigrants take jobs from natives and frequently end up on welfare, thus increasing the tax burden.

If immigrants are seen as competing for jobs, then the unemployed and the poor among the native population, it is reasoned, should be more anti-immigration than the employed and the prosperous. Palmer (1996) provides data showing a relationship between unemployment and anti-immigration attitudes in Canada. We attempted to draw comparisons between the employed and unemployed (as well as the retired) in the GSS sample but were thwarted by the low numbers of cases once the sample was broken down into meaningful work status categories.

Previous studies provide mixed data on the relationship between INCOME levels and immigration attitudes. The 1993 Gallup poll, cited in Table 1, found no relationship between the two variables. Our analysis of GSS data agrees with the 1993 Gallup poll. See Table 2 for a cross tabulation of the NUMBERS data by income categories. We also conducted a full model regression run, including INCOME (ungrouped data) as an independent variable (not reported). There was no statistically significant relationship between INCOME and either ANTI-LEGAL or ANTI-ILLEGAL variables. Since inclusion of the INCOME variable reduced our number of cases substantially, due to missing data, we dropped this variable from our final analysis.

Another way of measuring ECONOMIC THREAT, however, is by examining the consequences of different *perceptions* of the economy. Espenshade and Hemphill (1996) found that respondents with an optimistic view of the economy were more favorable, and those with a pessimistic view less favorable toward larger numbers of immigrants.

The 1994 GSS data includes items similar to those reported by Espenshade and Hempstead (1996). As can be seen in Table 2, under "Perceived national economy," respondents with a more pessimistic view of recent economic performance tend to be more anti-immigration on the NUMBERS variable. In the regression analyses, this variable had a statistically significant effect upon ANTI-LEGAL attitudes, both in the simple model (not

Table 3
Attitude toward legal and illegal immigrants: The full multiple regression models

Independent variables	Legal immigrants b (beta)	Illegal immigrants b (beta)
age (actual age)	.005* (.078)*	−.003 (−.043)
race (white = 1, else = 0)	.047 (0.18)	.094 (.035)
sex (male = 1, female = 2)	.185* (.092)*	−.097 (−.043)
national economy	.139* (.104)*	−.075 (−.056)
college graduated	−.557* (−.248)*	.021 (.009)
cultural threat	.293* (.292)*	.150* (.150)*
political conservatism	.076* (.108)*	.048* (.068)*
Constant	−.987	.136
R Square	.218	.041
N	1.061	1.061

Note. Unless otherwise noted, all the independent variable (s) except college graduation are expected to have a positive effect on the dependent variables: attitude toward legal immigrant and illegal immigration.

   * Statistically significant at .05 level.

shown) and the full model (Table 3). The effect upon the ANTI-ILLEGAL variable was not significant.

We are also considering FEAR OF CRIME under the heading of perceived self-interest, in this case, interest in one's personal safety as well as protection of one's property. This seems to be a major reason given for opposition to immigration (Simon, 1993), but we could find little polling data on the topic. Palmer (1996), in his analysis of Canadian data, provides the only empirical evidence for a relationship between fear of crime and anti-immigration attitudes.

Our cross tabulation of two GSS items, which may measure fear of crime, with NUM-BERS data (Table 2) indicate a slight relationship in the expected direction, that is, those with greater fear are more anti-immigration. However, insertion of these items into regression equations (not shown) produced no statistically significant results with either ANTI-LEGAL or ANTI-ILLEGAL immigration attitudes. Since no relationship was found in simple regression models, and inclusion of the fear of crime items reduced our number of cases to 775, we dropped this variable from the full regression model.

Next we turn to what we have termed *ideology* as bases for views on immigration. POLITICAL CONSERVATISM is the first of these variables that we consider. It has been observed that persons on the conservative side of the political spectrum are more likely than others to favor restricting immigration (Betts, 1988; Espenshade & Hempstead, 1996). The 1993 Gallup poll compared NUMBERS attitudes of people of conservative, moderate, and liberal ideological positions. The ones claiming a liberal ideology were more favorable toward immigration than the other two. Accordingly we used the GSS item which asks respondents to place themselves on a seven point scale between extremely conservative and extremely liberal. These ideological scores, collapsed into three categories, are cross tabulated with the NUMBERS variable in Table 2, and the correlation between conservatism and anti-immigration attitudes seems apparent, at least in the column of percentages of respondents wishing to reduce numbers of immigrants.

A somewhat ethnocentric and protective attitude toward one's own culture may be

considered under the heading of *group comparison*. Thus, in this section we look at variables reflecting what we call CULTURAL THREAT. Persons who wish to reduce the flow of immigrants into their country often see the newcomers as a menace to cherished cultural traditions (Simon, 1993). Pollsters have sometimes included items presumably measuring cultural concerns in their investigations but it is difficult to interpret the miscellaneous items they employ. See Lapinski et al., (1997) for some of these polling items. The 1994 GSS items which might reflect concerns about the effects of immigration upon U.S. culture were all related to language usage. Four of these items (Qs. 510–513) emerged as one factor in a factor analysis. In this part of the interview, the respondent was asked about bilingual education, the language used on ballots, and whether they favored a law making English the official language of the U.S. As can be seen in the cross tabulations of these items with the NUMBERS variable (Table 2), those respondents who strongly emphasized the use of English were also the ones most likely to favor a decrease in numbers of immigrants admitted.

In the regression analysis (Table 3), this English language factor score had the strongest impact of any variables on both ANTI-LEGAL and ANTI-ILLEGAL attitudes.

We are going to interpret certain levels of education as bases for a different kind of group identification and we will explain our reasoning on this in the final section. Whether or not the respondent had four years of COLLEGE turned out to have the second strongest impact upon ANTI-LEGAL attitudes of all the variables in our full model regression analysis (Table 3). Public opinion polls have consistently shown the more educated favoring larger immigration limits than the less educated (Simon, 1987; Simon & Alexander, 1993). However, when one uses years of schooling as the measure of education, the relationship with immigration attitudes is not always linear. The 1994 data on the NUMBERS variable, for instance (Table 2), shows high school graduates desiring to decrease immigration numbers more than those with grade school only.

We found college education to have a stronger effect upon immigration attitudes than simply years of schooling and thus we report the former in Table 3.

6. Discussion and conclusions

Since there is so little variation in attitudes toward illegal immigration–almost everybody is opposed to it–most of our discussion will concern opinions on legal immigration policy. We organize our summary around the theoretical conceptions previously introduced and take up different categories of variables roughly in accordance with the strength they demonstrated in explaining variations in immigration attitudes, but in reverse order.

Ascribed background characteristics had only a weak impact upon immigration attitudes according to the GSS data. For sex and age this is not very surprising. Race is another matter, however, since in the polemical literature at any rate, anti-immigration attitudes are sometimes blamed almost entirely upon racism (see Richmond, 1995). Palmer (1996) has exposed the inadequacies of this interpretation for Canada. Some of the same considerations apply in the United States, such as the observation that anti-immigration opinion has increased sharply at the very time that racist attitudes have declined precipitously. While some are

skeptical of these polling results on race, interpreting them as superficial changes in socially acceptable verbalizations, others, such as Sniderman and Carmines (1997) present evidence that the expressions of greater racial tolerance are genuine. Evidence from the GSS provides little support for the racism hypothesis. Virtually the same percentages of both Whites and Blacks believe the number of immigrants should be reduced. When "white" and "nonwhite" were the racial categories, the nonwhites were somewhat more favorable toward larger numbers of immigrants. Still, 60% of nonwhites wanted to limit immigration further. We used the white, nonwhite categories in the regression analyses, but race was not found to have a statistically significant effect in the full model.

The idea that anti-immigration views are a result solely of prejudice against either ethnic or racial minorities is also contradicted by the Latino National Political Study (de la Garza et al., 1992). This major survey of Latino groups in the United States found virtually identical percentages of Hispanics and Anglos agreeing that there were "too many immigrants" in the U.S.

We now turn to variables listed under *self-interest*. We did find that respondents who held a pessimistic view of the economy were more anti-immigration than those who were more optimistic. However, we found no statistically significant relationship between income and immigration attitudes. Also, anti-immigration sentiment has remained fairly constant in the U.S. since the early 1980s, according to the polls, despite fluctuations in the economy. Thus, while pessimism about the economy has an impact, economic factors seem to have played a minor role in sustaining recent anti-immigration opinion in this country.

We also placed fear of crime under the rubric of *self-interest*. While respondents who feared crime were slightly more likely to desire smaller numbers of immigrants, this factor dropped out of sight in the multivariate analysis.

Ideology has apparently had more impact upon immigration attitudes than other factors we have examined so far. Not too surprisingly, political conservatives are more negative toward current immigration than are political liberals.

We come finally to what we have called *group comparison* factors. If our interpretation is correct, then the mere fact of self-identification as an American may lead to in-group feelings of ethnocentrism and a defensive attitude toward anything seen as threatening to the culture and society. We could only identify the perceived threat to the English language, but this concern was very strong.

We also consider education level under the heading of group comparison theories. College education seems to be a powerful agent for engendering pro-immigration sentiment. Practically every study has identified a positive correlation between education (especially college education) and pro-immigration attitudes. Most studies observe this relationship but provide no theoretical basis for it, either before or after presenting their data. There is a large literature on the relationship between education and toleration of various kinds of diversity, especially racial. The greater tolerance of persons with higher levels of education has been attributed to their wider knowledge, more critical habits of thought, greater security, or merely a more sophisticated defense of their class interests (see Case et al., 1989; Allport, 1954). Or the more educated may possess "more diverse and cosmopolitan social networks" (Case et al., 1989).

Whatever the merits of these theories, they were not originally meant to explain attitudes toward immigration policies. The Australian writer, Katharine Betts (1988), has developed

a theory as to why the college educated tend to be pro-immigration based upon the concept of the New Class (see Bruce-Briggs, 1979). The New Class consists of college graduates who studied mainly in the humanities and social sciences and who are employed largely in the public sector. They fulfill society's demand for information workers, people whose main job is the production and processing of symbols. As these people have multiplied in numbers and been upwardly mobile, they have come to form a status group which seeks social closure, that is, a demarcation of boundaries between themselves and outsiders. One of these "markers" has become a kind of air of cosmopolitan sophistication and appreciation for other cultures. In fact, New Class members frequently derogate the dominant culture of their own society, especially since ethnocentrism is a common trait among rival groups, such as the business class and the less educated masses. And they tend to associate ethnocentrism with the ultimate taboo of their class, racism. For these reasons, plus, often, their own economic interests as public employees, they are likely to be advocates of multiculturalism and favor only minimal restrictions upon immigration. As an obviously very rough approximation, Betts (1988) uses college graduation as her operationalization of the New Class in her own study.

Summarizing, in examining attitudes toward legal immigration, we found the independent variables we considered under the heading of group comparison theory to have the most explanatory power. Ideology had moderate impact. Self-interest (narrowly defined) and ascribed background characteristics had minimal, but sometimes statistically significant, impact. Several of the variables which had no statistically significant effect may have come as a surprise to some readers. These included race, income, and fear of crime.

Our study was limited by the data we used. The GSS has asked the immigration questions only one time, in 1994. One should consider how news events and the popular culture of that particular year may have impacted results. Comparisons of GSS data with results of other polls, however, do not seem to point to any anomalies (see Table 1).

Another suggestion for future research would be to focus upon smaller geographical areas than entire nations or multistate regions. One of the advantages of Palmer's (Palmer, 1996) research in Canada was that he could report data from much more localized areas, such as specific cities, than was possible using the GSS national sample. It is entirely possible, for example, that some of the variables which appeared to have little effect upon immigration attitudes in the present study, for example, income and fear of crime, might have more impact in places like South Texas, Florida, and California, than in areas which receive few immigrants. Finally, since group comparison theories seemed to be most effective in explaining variations in immigration attitudes, it would be most useful to explore these further. For instance, are members of the national in-group as sensitive to perceived threats to other aspects of their culture and society as they are to the dominant language? Is it possible to measure this protective sensitivity in other ways? Can the New Class concept be refined and tested? Our hope is that the present study will lead to further inquiries along these lines.

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