Against The Tide? Core American Values and Attitudes Toward US Immigration Policy in the Mid-1990s

Adrian Pantoja

This article considers the effect of core American values in the structuring of public opinion toward US immigration policies in the mid-1990s. Using the 1996 American National Election Study, ordered logistic and logistic analyses are used to examine the impact that individualism, humanitarianism and egalitarianism have in shaping attitudes toward three policy areas, namely border enforcement, reductions in the number of immigrants admitted, and immigrant eligibility for government services. The research finds that the three core values out-performed the traditional predictors in the third policy area because of the policy’s explicit connection to the welfare state. Core values play a minimal role in shaping attitudes toward border enforcement. However, the pro-social values—egalitarianism and humanitarianism—are found to play a key role in favouring increases in the number of immigrants admitted into the US. The conclusion considers the implications of the findings.

Keywords: Immigration; Core Values; Public Opinion; Humanitarianism; Egalitarianism; Individualism

Introduction

Intense national debates in the United States over immigration often coincide with each wave of mass immigration. The decade of the 1990s witnessed the largest number of immigrants admitted to the US—9.1 million. Previously, the largest wave occurred between 1901 and 1910, when 8.8 million immigrants entered the country (Immigration and Naturalization Service 1999). In addition to increases in legal immigration, the decade of the 90s also saw a dramatic increase in undocumented immigrants, which by the decade’s end had grown to over 8 million (Immigration
and Naturalization Service 1999). It came as no surprise that in the mid-1990s concerns over uncontrolled legal and illegal immigration prompted a reaction on the part of California voters and Congress to re-evaluate and reform US immigration policies. Since California was home to 40 per cent of legal and illegal immigrants, it became ground zero for an intense debate over the financial burden ‘undocumented’ immigrants brought to the state. The end result was the passage in 1994 of Proposition 187. The so-called ‘Save Our State’ (SOS) initiative intended to deny all public services to illegal immigrants, including education and non-emergency medical care, as well as require public administrators, teachers and medical personnel to report suspected undocumented immigrants to the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS).¹

Although a District Court later ruled Proposition 187 unconstitutional, Congress responded to this public outcry in 1994 by doubling the INS budget, adding 1,000 more border patrol agents each year until 1997 and sponsoring an ambitious and controversial INS programme to effectively stop the flow of illegal immigrants entering the San Diego–Tijuana corridor—Operation Gatekeeper. In 1996 Congress overhauled US immigration law by passing the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act. Not since 1924 had Congress sought to reduce the number of legal immigrants admitted annually. Beyond reductions in immigrants admitted, the border patrol’s size, budget and resources were significantly increased. In 1995 there were 4,881 border patrol agents on duty nationally, by 2000 that number doubled to 9,212 (Nevins 2002). Citizenship preferences were given to skilled immigrants over family reunification, reversing the 1965 act. Finally the law contained provisions designed to reduce the use of public assistance services by non-citizens (Gimple and Edwards 1999).

In light of these dramatic events, this paper analyses public opinion in the mid-1990s toward these immigration reforms. More specifically, it analyses the role the core American values of humanitarianism, egalitarianism and individualism play in underlying public opinion toward three areas in US immigration policy: (1) border enforcement; (2) reducing the number of immigrants admitted; (3) immigrant eligibility for government services. Current studies on attitudes toward immigration largely consider the role of economic motives, inter-group contact, affect, and symbolic orientations (e.g. Binder et al. 1997; Citrin et al. 1997; Espenshade and Calhoun 1993; Espenshade and Hempstead 1996; Hood and Morris 1997), while ignoring the role socio-political values play in shaping opinion formation toward immigration.

The absence of values in public opinion studies on immigration is surprising since much of the debate over immigration is framed around the economic costs and benefits immigrants bring to the nation (Borjas 1990; Briggs 1996; Brimelow 1995; Huddle 1993; Simon 1989). A paramount concern is whether immigrants overuse social and public services—in the jargon of US immigration law, become a ‘public charge’. The public charge doctrine has been a major component of immigration law since colonial times (Edwards 2001) and since most immigrants during the 1990s
were coming from less developed nations there was a widespread belief that the majority lacked the skills necessary to survive without relying on public assistance. In fact, policies such as Proposition 187 were based on the belief that the welfare magnet, above all others, was the motivating factor attracting most immigrants. Former INS director Alan Nelson, who helped write Proposition 187, stated that their aim was to cut off social services in order to ‘demagnetize the draw for illegal aliens’ (Chavez 2001: 247).

Debates over immigration are often intrinsically tied to the role of the welfare state in providing a safety net for its citizenry or prospective citizenry (Feldman 1999). Traditionally, variations in support for social welfare programmes have centred on differences in nations’ political cultures (Almond and Verba 1963; Inglehart 1977; Weber 1958). McClosky and Zaller (1984: 17) define political culture as the ‘set of widely shared beliefs, values, and norms concerning the relationship of citizens to their government and to one another in matters affecting public affairs’. Thus, the core values that pervade within the public sphere underlie a nation’s political culture.

In the US case, the core values considered crucial in explaining support or opposition to a wide range of social programmes are economic individualism, egalitarianism, and humanitarianism (e.g. Feldman 1983; Feldman and Zaller 1992; Funk 2000; Steenbergen 1996). What roles do these core American values play in shaping attitudes toward US immigration policy? How well do they perform \textit{vis-à-vis} other factors and controls traditionally used to model public opinion toward immigrants and immigration policy? Using data from the 1996 American National Election Studies (NES), I incorporate these enduring values into general determinant models and consider their effect in structuring public opinion toward US immigration policy in the mid-1990s.

I use the 1996 NES survey for several reasons. First, contextually, 1996 was a period of intense change in policies toward legal and illegal immigration. In that year, Congress passed the 1996 Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act, essentially revamping US immigration law. Second, in the 1996 NES humanitarian questions made their début outside of the 1995 NES pilot study. Third, unlike the 1995 NES pilot study or subsequent NES surveys, the 1996 NES contained two additional questions on immigration beyond the standard question tapping support for increases or decreases in the number of immigrants admitted into the country. Fourth, as a national survey, NES data allow researchers to make broader generalisations about American public opinion (Hood and Morris 1997) than the more parochial surveys previously used by investigators (see de la Garza \textit{et al.} 1991; Espenshade and Calhoun 1993; Miller \textit{et al.} 1984).

The paper is divided into five sections. The first section gives a brief overview of public attitudes toward immigrants and US immigration policy in the 1990s. The second section reviews the extant literature analysing opinion formation toward immigrants and immigration policy. The third explores the role core American values play in public opinion and proffers some propositions on their effects in shaping
attitudes toward the three immigration policies. The fourth tests the propositions using ordered logistic and logistic analyses, and the final section discusses the implications of the findings.

Public Opinion Toward Immigrants in the 1990s

Americans have generally held ambivalent attitudes toward immigrants and immigration policy (Harwood 1986). While Americans tend to positively evaluate previous waves of immigrants, they also tend to hold less favourable opinions toward recent immigrants. For example, in a 1993 survey by the Gallup Organization, 59 per cent of respondents believed immigration had been a good thing for the United States in the past. When asked if they thought immigration was good for the country today, 60 per cent said it was bad. These attitudes carry over to specific questions about the economic and social impact of modern-day immigrants. The 1994 General Social Survey (GSS) contained a battery of questions relating to immigration. The results are indicative of the nation’s mood toward immigrants during this period. Table 1 shows the responses to questions concerning the impact immigration has on the country: most Americans believe continuing immigration would generally have adverse effects on the nation. A majority (83 per cent) believed it would lead to higher rates of unemployment and 66 per cent thought it would make it more difficult to keep the country united. Only 30 per cent thought immigration would spur higher economic growth. Not surprisingly, when queried about specific policies aimed toward legal and illegal immigrants, most Americans are willing to deny them certain benefits currently available to citizens. Table 2 has the responses from the 1994 GSS on these specific issues. The data show that most respondents believe that legal immigrants should be denied government assistance. When it comes to illegal immigrants, an overwhelming majority of Americans believe they should be ineligible for work permits and 62 per cent said they should not be entitled to attend public universities at a cost similar to other non-immigrant students. Finally, the public was divided (47 per cent eligible to 43 per cent ineligible) on reversing US law of jus soli, ‘the right of soil’, which extends citizenship to children of illegal immigrants born in the country. Other surveys conducted throughout the 1990s reveal similar patterns as those given in the 1994 GSS.

Table 1. Economic and social impact of contemporary immigrants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What do you think will happen as a result of more immigrants coming to this country?</th>
<th>Very/somewhat likely</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
<th>Very/somewhat unlikely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Higher economic growth</td>
<td>29% (440)</td>
<td>7% (106)</td>
<td>60% (920)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher unemployment</td>
<td>83% (1,253)</td>
<td>4% (63)</td>
<td>10% (150)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making it harder to keep the country united</td>
<td>66% (997)</td>
<td>6% (93)</td>
<td>13% (204)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The 1994 General Social Survey, n = 1,518.
Although researchers have long noted the primacy of economic conditions in underlying attitudes toward immigration, more recent studies have found a weak connection between personal and national economic evaluations and restrictionist sentiments. More prominent are factors such as intergroup contact, affective evaluations toward immigrant populations and symbolic political orientations (Citrin et al. 1997; Espenshade and Calhoun 1993; Hood and Morris 1997), as well as a host of other individual demographic factors (Espenshade and Calhoun 1993; Espenshade and Hempstead 1996; Miller et al. 1984; Simon and Alexander 1993).

Immigration flows differentially impact certain geographic regions (Portes and Rumbaut 1996). For example, of the 915,900 immigrants admitted to the US in 1996, about 70 per cent resided in the following six states: California (22 per cent), New York (17 per cent), Texas (9 per cent), Florida (9 per cent), New Jersey (7 per cent), and Illinois (5 per cent). Even among these states, most immigrants are concentrated within few locales. Research on intergroup contact suggests that increased interaction with an out-group can lead either to positive or negative evaluations of that out-group (e.g., Blalock 1967). Hood and Morris (1997) find that increased contact with Hispanic and Asian immigrant populations had a favourable effect on evaluations toward those populations, subsequently tempering opposition to immigration flows in general. Others show that increased contact with immigrant populations generally leads to mixed or unfavourable evaluations of immigrants (Citrin et al. 1997).

Because immigration has strong ethnic and racial overtones, researchers have also examined how affective evaluations of minorities and immigrant groups shape attitudes toward them. In the Citrin et al. (1997) study, negative affective evaluations of Hispanics and Asians were among the strongest predictors of opposition to

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2. Support for public policies aimed at legal and illegal immigrants</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eligible or entitled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal immigrants entitled to government assistance*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illegal immigrants entitled to work permits**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illegal immigrants entitled to attend public universities at the same cost as other students***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizenship extended to children of illegal immigrants****</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Under current law, immigrants who come from other countries to the United States legally are entitled, from the very beginning, to government assistance such as Medicaid, food stamps or welfare on the same basis as citizens. But some people say they should not be eligible until they have lived here for a year or more. What do you think? Do you think that immigrants who are here legally should be eligible for such services as soon as they come, or should they not be eligible?

** Should illegal immigrants be entitled to work permits or not?

*** Should they be entitled to attend public universities at the same cost as other students, or not?

**** Should they be entitled to have their children qualify as American citizens if born in the United States or not?

Source: The 1994 General Social Survey, n = 1,518.

Literature Review

Although researchers have long noted the primacy of economic conditions in underlying attitudes toward immigration, more recent studies have found a weak connection between personal and national economic evaluations and restrictionist sentiments. More prominent are factors such as intergroup contact, affective evaluations toward immigrant populations and symbolic political orientations (Citrin et al. 1997; Espenshade and Calhoun 1993; Hood and Morris 1997), as well as a host of other individual demographic factors (Espenshade and Calhoun 1993; Espenshade and Hempstead 1996; Miller et al. 1984; Simon and Alexander 1993).

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policies aimed at assisting immigrants. Similarly, Hood and Morris (1997) note that these attitudes significantly influenced support for reductions in immigration levels, while Espenshade and Calhoun (1993) find that they contributed to negative evaluations of illegal immigration in California. Others note the importance of symbolic orientations. For example, Espenshade and Calhoun (1993) find that individuals who felt that increases in non-English-speaking persons contributed to racial tensions were more likely to hold negative attitudes about illegal immigrants.

Finally, in each of these studies individual demographic characteristics also factor in prominently. Restrictionist sentiment is lowest among individuals with higher levels of education. The significance of education may be the result of it fostering more tolerant attitudes toward out-groups (Espenshade and Calhoun 1993; Espenshade and Hempstead 1996; Hoskin and Mishler 1983), or simply that those with higher rates of education are in occupations less prone to immigrant labour-market competition (Citrin et al. 1997). Being an immigrant contributes to positive evaluations of immigrants generally (Citrin et al. 1997; Espenshade and Calhoun 1993). Hoskin and Mishler (1983) and Espenshade and Calhoun (1993) find that older individuals possess more negative attitudes toward immigrants than younger cohorts. The effects of gender are mixed (Espenshade and Calhoun 1993). Finally, on some immigration issues Latinos in general, and Mexican Americans in particular, hold more liberal opinions than their non-Hispanic white counterparts (Binder et al. 1997; de la Garza et al. 1991; Miller et al. 1984).

This research has significantly advanced our understanding of the factors underlying opinion formation toward immigrants and US immigration policy. But it only tells part of the story. Absent in many of these studies is the inclusion of core values. Values can be defined as general cognitive constructs about socially acceptable modes of conduct. They are enduring and determinant of attitudes and opinions, and are held as being equivalent to a nation’s political culture (Lane 1972; Rokeach 1968, 1973). Because debates over immigration are largely framed in terms of the economic costs and benefits immigrants bring to the nation, the next section considers why the three core American values of individualism, egalitarianism and humanitarianism need to be incorporated into public opinion research on immigration.

**Individualism, Egalitarianism and Humanitarianism**

Three unique values are paramount in American political culture: individualism, egalitarianism and humanitarianism (Feldman 1983, 1988; Feldman and Steenbergen 1996, 2001; Feldman and Zaller 1992; Lipset 1979; Steenbergen 1996; Weber 1958). *Individualism* can be defined as the belief that individuals can and should get ahead on their own merit without government assistance; or, as Feldman (1999: 160) writes, ‘economic individualism is the commitment to merit as the basis for the distribution of rewards in society’. Individualism correlates strongly with support for limited government (Markus 1990) and social programmes designed to assist certain disadvantaged groups (Feldman 1988). In addition, people who score high on
individualism scales tend to explain poverty in terms of individual shortcomings rather than systemic factors (Kluegel and Smith 1986).

The individualistic character of Americans is well known and might easily be construed as leading to general self-centredness and a lack of concern for others. However, this ethos is tempered by and coexists with the ‘pro-social’ or ‘compassion values’—egalitarianism and humanitarianism. Egalitarianism is usually defined as support for equal opportunity for all races and for policies designed to remedy social-economic inequality (Funk 2000). Humanitarianism is defined as ‘a sense of responsibility for one’s fellow human being that translates into the belief that one should help those in need’ (Feldman and Steenbergen 2001: 660). Although closely related, namely capturing a desire to assist the needy, the two values are distinct. Humanitarianism has a strong affective structure, connoting feelings of empathy as well as a need for personal involvement. By contrast, egalitarianism is more cognitive and need not imply a personal involvement in helping others (Feldman and Steenbergen 2001).

The distinctness of humanitarianism and egalitarianism leads them to be predictive of different types of social welfare policies. Egalitarians in general favour extensive market intervention by the government to remedy inequalities. Moreover, egalitarianism has been found to engender positive feelings toward minorities, including immigrants (Espenshade and Calhoun 1993). Humanitarians, on the other hand, do not necessarily favour an active government, but are supportive of certain redistributive policies if the questions are framed with reference to specific groups such as the elderly, women and the homeless (Feldman and Steenbergen 2001). Research on humanitarianism has found that it leads to support for greater spending on welfare programmes for the poor and the expansion of Medicare for the elderly (Feldman and Steenbergen 2001). Humanitarians also tend to give more positive evaluations of people on welfare and the poor, and generally oppose denying welfare benefits to the needy. Finally, humanitarians are supportive of international aid and oppose capital punishment (Steenbergen 1996).

As to their effect on attitudes toward (1) border enforcement, (2) reducing the number of immigrants admitted, and (3) immigrant eligibility for government services, each of these values can play contradicting and complementing roles. Although debates over immigration are largely framed in terms of the economic consequences of immigration (Iyengar and Kinder 1987; Zaller 1992), the first two policy areas do not directly tie immigration to the welfare state. Consequently, responses may be driven by concerns unrelated to redistributive government policies, muting the effects of these core values. Nonetheless, of the three values, the pro-social values egalitarianism and humanitarianism may play an important role in structuring pro-immigration response to the first two policy areas. Immigrants, in search of economic opportunities and/or safety, are among the most needy and vulnerable people within humanity and among them the undocumented are most vulnerable. The plight of the undocumented is compounded by heightened border enforcement programmes such as Operation Gatekeeper along the San Diego–Tijuana corridor,
which has led to an increased death toll among undocumented immigrants seeking to
cross through more remote and difficult terrains (Eschbach et al. 1999). It follows
that egalitarians and humanitarians, because of their concern and willingness to help
others, will generally display pro-immigrant attitudes, or as Steenbergen (1996: 23)
writes, ‘True compassion knows no boundaries. Although it may be felt more strongly
as one gets closer to home, it should not be absent when remote strangers are
concerned’.

The third policy issue directly connects redistributive programmes with immigra-
tion. Consequently, I expect that individualism will be negatively related to welfare
eligibility for recent immigrants, while the egalitarian and humanitarian values will be
positively related to support for this policy. To summarise, the following key
hypotheses are tested:

1. Humanitarians and egalitarians will display pro-immigrant attitudes, leading them
to favour reductions in federal spending on border enforcement.
2. Humanitarians and egalitarians will favour increases in the number of immigrants
admitted.
3. Humanitarians and egalitarians will demonstrate higher levels of support for
immediate government services for immigrants *cateris paribus*.
4. The value individualism will be negatively associated with support for immediate
government services for immigrants.

**Data Measures and Analysis**

As previously noted, the 1996 NES contains three questions pertaining to US
immigration policy. The first asks respondents whether federal spending on
tightening border security and preventing illegal immigration should be increased,
decreased, or kept about the same. Most respondents, 63.8 per cent, thought federal
spending should be increased, 7.7 per cent said decreased, and 26.5 per cent felt it
should be kept about the same. The second question asks respondents about attitudes
toward levels of immigrants entering the country. Specifically it asks, ‘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?’ Most, 50.3 per cent, favoured large or small
decreases, 32.5 per cent wanted levels to stay the same, and only 4.6 per cent of
respondents favoured increases a little to a lot. Finally, the third question asks, ‘Do
you think that immigrants who come to the US should be eligible as soon as they
come here for government services such as Medicare, Food Stamps, Welfare, or
should they have to be here a year or more?’ About 10.7 per cent thought they should
be immediately eligible, while 76.4 per cent thought they should have to wait a year or
more. The responses given are consistent with the surveys previously mentioned. In
sum, most Americans are not enthusiastic about policies that promote immigration
or that are designed to assist them.
To test the factors underlying public opinion toward the questions above, I use ordered logistic regression (Models I and II) and logistic regression analyses (Model III). The responses to the three policy areas are the dependent variables and are coded in the direction of the pro-immigrant response. For example, the first policy is coded as a three-point categorical variable with 0 for respondents who thought federal spending on tightening the borders ‘should be increased’, 1 for those who felt spending should ‘be kept the same’, and 2 for those who felt spending ‘should be decreased’. The second policy is coded as a five-point categorical variable ranging from 0 ‘decreased a little’ to 4 ‘increased a lot’. The final policy variable is dichotomous with respondents who stated that immigrants should be ‘eligible [for welfare services] as soon as they come here’ coded as 1, all others were coded as 0. All other variable coding and distributions are reported in Table 3.

The models include standard socio-demographic variables as controls, such as a respondent’s Age, Education, Household Income, Gender (male), and Union as a measure of individual or household membership in a union. Dummy variables are used to isolate Latino and African American respondents. Also included are measures of retrospective Pocketbook and Sociotropic economic evaluations. Retrospective pocketbook economic evaluations are based on whether a respondent believes he and his family are better or worse off financially today than they were a year ago. Retrospective sociotropic evaluations are based on whether the respondent believes the country’s economy, as a whole, is better or worse off today than it was a year ago.

The variable Ideology is a measure of political ideology, which ranges from 0, ‘extremely liberal’, to 6, ‘extremely conservative’. Using the 2000 Census, a contextual variable, Immigrant Contact, was created based on the per cent foreign-born residing in each of the respondent’s respective counties. Finally, the models include the variable Hispanic Affect, which measures respondent evaluation of Hispanic’s work ethic on a scale ranging from 0, ‘hardworking’, to 6, ‘lazy’.

Each model is augmented with the three core American values. The first, Individualism, is based on a six-point scale based on the government’s role in providing jobs and a good standard of living (0, government should see to a job and a good standard of living, to 6, government should let each person get ahead on their own). Egalitarianism is based on six questions with responses ranging from agree strongly to disagree strongly. The egalitarian responses are recoded into scales ranging from 0 to 4, with 0 being the inegalitarian response and 4 being the strong egalitarian responses. The six questions are added together forming an index ranging from 0 to 24. Humanitarianism is based on four questions with responses ranging from agree strongly to disagree strongly. The responses are recoded into scales ranging from 0 to 4, with the non-humanitarian responses coded 0 and the strong humanitarian responses coded 4. The four questions are added to create an index ranging from 0 to 16.

For each policy, two sets of results are presented in Table 4. The first reports the ordered logistic (Models I and II) or logistic (Model III) coefficients with the standard errors in parenthesis. Since ordered logit and logistic coefficients are not
### Table 3. Technical specification

1. **Variable descriptions**

   - **Age:** Respondent’s age measured in years (18–93)
   - **Education:** Respondent’s level of educational attainment in years (0–17); (0 = no formal schooling; 17 = graduate level)
   - **Household income:** Respondent’s household income measured on an ordinal scale (0–24); (0 = $0–$2,999; 24 = $105,000 and over)
   - **Male:** Respondent’s sex (1 = male; 0 = female)
   - **Latino:** Spanish or Hispanic origin (1 = yes; 0 = non-Latino)
   - **African American:** Respondent’s race (1 = African American; 0 = non-black)
   - **Pocketbook:** Respondent’s personal economic evaluation over the past year (0 much better – 4 much worse)
   - **Sociotropic:** Respondent’s economic evaluation of the nation over the past year (0 much better – 4 much worse)
   - **Union:** Respondent or someone else in household belong to a Union (1 = yes; 0 = no)
   - **Ideology:** Self-identified ideological placement on a six-point scale (0 extremely liberal – 6 extremely conservative)

2. **Scale creation**

   - **Humanitarianism:**
     - For each question respondents can either: 1 agree strongly; 2 agree somewhat; 3 neither agree nor disagree; 4 disagree somewhat; or 5 disagree strongly. Each was recoded to form a scale from 0, non-humanitarian, to 4, humanitarian, responses and then all 4 questions were summed to form a scale ranging from 0 to 16
     - v961235 One should always find ways to help others less fortunate than oneself
     - v961236 A person should always be concerned about the well-being of others
     - v961237 It is best not to get too involved in taking care of other people’s needs
     - v961238 People tend to pay more attention to the well-being of others than they should
     - **Alpha** .604

   - **Egalitarianism:**
     - For each question respondents can either: 1 agree strongly; 2 agree somewhat; 3 neither agree nor disagree; 4 disagree somewhat; or 5 disagree strongly. Each was recoded to form a scale from 0, inegalitarian, to 4, egalitarian, responses and then all 6 questions were summed to form a scale ranging from 0 to 24
     - v961229 Our society should do whatever is necessary to make sure that everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed
     - v961230 We have gone too far in pushing equal rights in this country
     - v961231 One of the big problems in this country is that we don’t give everyone an equal chance
     - v961232 This country would be better off if we worried less about how equal people are
     - v961233 It is not really that big a problem if some people have more of a chance in life than others
     - v961234 If people were treated more equally in this country we would have many fewer problems
     - **Alpha** .709
Table 4. Determinants of attitudes toward US immigration policy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model I Reduce federal spending on border enforcement</th>
<th>Model II Increasing the number of immigrants admitted</th>
<th>Model III Eligibility for public services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ordered logit Predicted probabilities (min &gt; max)</td>
<td>Ordered logit Predicted probabilities (min &gt; max)</td>
<td>Logistic Predicted probabilities (min &gt; max)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>- .001 (.004)</td>
<td>- .003 (.003)</td>
<td>- .005 (.006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>.079** (.032)</td>
<td>.093*** (.028)</td>
<td>-.036 (.049)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>-.028* (.012)</td>
<td>-.002 (.011)</td>
<td>-.005 (.018)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (Male)</td>
<td>-.165 (.141)</td>
<td>-.148 (.122)</td>
<td>.084 (.210)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>.615** (.247)</td>
<td>.201 (.122)</td>
<td>-.662 (.448)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>.009 (.253)</td>
<td>- .117 (.242)</td>
<td>.113 (.339)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pocketbook econ evaluations</td>
<td>-.061 (.073)</td>
<td>- .143** (.063)</td>
<td>-.140 (.110)</td>
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<td>Union</td>
<td>-.216 (.188)</td>
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<td>-.654** (.305)</td>
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<td>Ideology</td>
<td>-.179*** (.057)</td>
<td>.031 (.051)</td>
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<td>Immigrant contact</td>
<td>-.008 (.006)</td>
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<td>Hispanic affect</td>
<td>-.052 (.062)</td>
<td>- .142** (.055)</td>
<td>-.147† (.092)</td>
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<td>.040** (.105)</td>
<td>.049** (.026)</td>
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<td>Humanitarianism</td>
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<td>.063** (.025)</td>
<td>.198*** (.045)</td>
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<td>Individualism</td>
<td>-.069 (.047)</td>
<td>.004 (.043)</td>
<td>-.175** (.068)</td>
</tr>
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<td>Constant</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-2.24** (1.08)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>.456 (.646)</td>
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<td>Ancillary parameters</td>
<td>2.79 (.730)</td>
<td>1.87 (.650)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cut Point 3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4.53 (.668)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cut Point 4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5.84 (.702)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi-square</td>
<td>71.34</td>
<td>81.56</td>
<td>87.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPC</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>87.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRE</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.445</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample size</td>
<td>987</td>
<td>981</td>
<td>990</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Two tailed probabilities: † p < .075, * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001
directly interpretable, the second set of results reports the estimated changes in predicted probabilities given a fixed change in the independent variable from its minimum to its maximum value, holding all others constant at their mean.\textsuperscript{3}

Model I shows the determinants structuring attitudes toward reducing federal spending on tightening the border. In this model, \textit{education} has a positive effect in favouring reductions in spending on border enforcement. The results show that the correlation between high rates of education and pro-immigrant sentiment is not simply due to the fact that educated individuals are in occupations less vulnerable to immigrant labour market competition (Espenshade and Hempstead 1996). If this were the case, the \textit{income} variable should also be positive since individuals with high-skill high-wage occupations are less vulnerable to job competition from immigrants. Since income was negatively associated with taking a pro-immigrant stance on this policy, it is likely that the correlation found is due to the fact that formal education is fostering tolerant attitudes toward immigrants (Citrin \textit{et al.} 1997).

Beyond the socio-demographic characteristics above, being a \textit{Latino} was positively associated with supporting reductions in spending on border enforcement. This is consistent with cultural affinity hypotheses, which suggest that groups with cultural and ethnic ties to fellow immigrants will support policies favourable to fellow ethnics (Espenshade and Hempstead 1996), and studies showing that Latinos generally tend to hold more pro-immigrant attitudes than non-Latinos. The insignificance of the African American variable is telling. Despite the belief that immigrants are particularly threatening to African Americans’ socio-economic well-being, this study, like others, finds that this is not a sentiment widely shared by blacks (Pantoja 2004). However, because of the small sample size of Latinos and African Americans in the NES, the results should be interpreted cautiously. Nonetheless, comparative ethnic/racial studies on immigration attitudes generally show Latinos and African Americans to hold more pro-immigration attitudes than whites (Citrin \textit{et al.} 1997; Pantoja 2004). Finally, political ideology, which ranges from very liberal to very conservative, was negatively associated with proffering a pro-immigrant response. Support for strict border enforcement programmes among self-identified political conservatives is not surprising since conservative candidates and congressional representatives spearheaded many of the immigration reforms undertaken in the mid-1990s. Conservative Republican congressional members were among the strongest advocates of programmes such as Operation Gatekeeper (Gimple and Edwards 1999).

The core values have no impact in structuring attitudes toward border enforcement policies. The expectation that egalitarians and humanitarians would be inclined to favour spending reductions on border enforcement did not pan out. While compassion and concern for the plight of undocumented immigrants from Central America in the 1980s may have played a key role in the Sanctuary Movement (Davidson 1989), it is likely that in the 1990s compassion toward the undocumented may have hardened as a result of negative media attention (Chavez 2001) and the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center. It was during the 1990s that growing concerns over so-called ‘criminal aliens’ and perceptions of a border under siege
transformed border enforcement from being one of the most neglected areas of federal law enforcement to one of the most politically popular (Andreas 2000).

Model II considers the predictors structuring attitudes toward increases in the number of immigrants admitted into the country. Once again, the variable Education was associated with taking a pro-immigrant stance. In addition, economic insecurity plays a prominent role in this model. Respondents who were pessimistic about their own personal finances (Pocketbook) and the nation’s economic well-being (Socio-tropic) favoured numerical reductions in legal immigration. Additionally, the model shows that changes in the assessment of Hispanics’ work ethic (Hispanic Affect), from hardworking to lazy, result in a decrease in supporting further increases in immigration. Since Latin America is the largest sender of legal immigrants to the US, the belief that Hispanics possess undesirable cultural traits eroded support for increases in legal immigration. Finally, the model supports the second hypothesis. The core values egalitarianism and humanitarianism are positively associated with favouring increases in the number of legal immigrants admitted into the country. Proponents of immigration and immigrant rights have largely appealed to feelings of compassion to counter anti-immigrant sentiment. Empirically, the model demonstrates that these appeals have not fallen on deaf ears, at least when it concerns legal immigrants.

Model III directly ties immigration to the welfare state. Consequently, the three core values are hypothesised to play a significant role in structuring respondents’ attitudes. The model correctly predicts 87 per cent of the cases and yields a proportional reduction of error over the null of 45 per cent. First, being in a union results in a .04 decrease in support for immigrant eligibility for social welfare programmes. Unions have historically taken anti-immigration positions and its members are most vulnerable to labour market competition from immigrants, thus the significance and direction of the variable is not surprising. Respondents’ political orientations also factor in prominently. Going from extremely liberal to extremely conservative results in a decrease by .06 in support for public services for immigrants. Finally, a change in the evaluations of Hispanics’ work ethic results in a .07 decline in support for immediate eligibility for public assistance.

Turning to the three core values, all are significant and have signs in the expected direction. The probability of proffering support for welfare eligibility for recent immigrants declines by .10 when individualism moves from its minimum to its maximum value. A change in the egalitarian value from its minimum to maximum value, on the other hand, results in a .10 increase in supporting public services for recent immigrants. Most significant is the impact of humanitarianism. Going from its minimum to maximum value causes an increase by .20 in support for immediate eligibility for public services for immigrants.

The results overall are supportive of the propositions. Although egalitarian and humanitarian values did not perform as expected in Model I, they excelled in predicting support for the second and third policies. These are significant findings as they demonstrate that enduring values play a key role in shaping attitudes toward US
immigration policy. The significance of individualism and egalitarianism supports
the claim that both self-interested and societal-interested motives operate simulta-
neously in the judgments and evaluations of respondents. Despite the public’s
misgivings toward immigration and popular charges that immigrants overuse and
abuse welfare, the evidence presented here suggests that some Americans opposed
reductions in legal immigration and were unwilling to take away the welfare safety-
exto immigrants. The reason? Compassion and a concern for others, a sentiment
expressed through the core values humanitarianism and egalitarianism.

Conclusion
Debates over immigration are inextricably tied to social welfare policies. Since
colonial times immigrants deemed likely to be public charges were considered
inadmissible. In the mid-1990s the public charge doctrine once again rose to
prominence. Since most immigrants entering in the 1990s were coming from less
developed nations there was widespread belief that most lacked the skills necessary to
survive without relying on public assistance. Worse yet were concerns that the welfare
magnet was attracting millions of undocumented immigrants. California, because of
its large legal and illegal immigrant populations, became the battleground for an
intense debate over the financial burden undocumented immigrants brought to the
state. As the decade progressed, the California anti-immigrant backlash spread
nationally. In 1996 Congress enacted sweeping immigration and welfare reform
legislation with the twin goals of removing the welfare magnet by denying public
assistance programmes to legal and illegal immigrants and strengthening the border.

This paper revisits this watershed period in US immigration history and examines
public opinion toward these reforms. More specifically, it considers the role that the
core American values of humanitarianism, egalitarianism and individualism played in
underlying opinion toward US immigration policy. Value-based approaches have
long been used in cross-national studies on attitudes toward social welfare policies
and while immigration policies are intrinsically tied to the welfare state, few public
opinion studies on immigration use socio-political values in their analyses. This
paper fills this omission.

In their study of the American ethos, McClosky and Zaller write (1984: 17),
‘... we focus primarily on beliefs and values, not because they are the entire story but
because without them the story could not be understood at all’. I too argue that
without the incorporation of socio-political values, the story of America’s
ambivalence toward immigration cannot fully be understood. The use of individu-
alist, egalitarian and humanitarian values does not imply that these are the only or the
most important values making up the American ethos, only that among all others
they are the most critical to understanding attitudes toward immigration policies
when they are framed or ‘primed’ around redistributive programmes.

As to their effects on attitudes toward (1) border enforcement, (2) reducing the
number of immigrants admitted, and (3) immigrant eligibility for government
services, each of these values were anticipated to play contradicting and complementing roles. Values very often are in conflict (McClosky and Zaller 1984). The first two policy areas do not directly connect immigration with government redistributive programmes, yet it was anticipated that egalitarians and humanitarians, because of their concern for humanity, would oppose programmes designed to keep immigrants out of the country. The results, however, show that egalitarians and humanitarians were no more likely to proffer a pro-immigrant response *cateris paribus* to the first policy. The reasons at present are unclear, but it may be that a change in the political context in the 1990s quenched the spirit of compassion toward the undocumented population.

The egalitarian and humanitarian variables played a significant role in structuring attitudes toward the second policy, and since the third policy directly connected the welfare state with immigration, all of the three values had a robust effect in structuring respondents’ evaluations. The significance of these enduring values suggests that predictors traditionally used to model attitudes toward US immigration policy do not go far enough in explaining why Americans display ambivalent feelings toward immigrants. This is particularly true when immigration questions are tied to redistributive programmes. Finally, the significance and magnitude of the pro-social values add credence to the observation that individuals are not simply self-interested in their judgments and evaluations. Public opinion studies on immigration that build theories around a material interest framework have difficulty explaining support for programmes that bring material benefit to others while potentially bringing material harm to the advocate.

The widespread support in the mid-1990s for policies designed to dismantle the social safety-net for immigrants and other economically distressed people suggested that the American public was suffering from compassion fatigue. Yet, even at the height of the anti-immigrant backlash, the ethos of compassion among some remained strong. The implications of these findings are clear. Even in periods when the mood of the country hardens and the spirit of compassion appears to have been exorcised, there are citizens who maintain a strong a sense of responsibility for others and are willing to go against the tide of anti-immigrant sentiment.

Notes

[1] Although Proposition 187 was designed to address concerns over California’s growing illegal immigrant population, public debates and media coverage frequently failed to make the distinction between documented and undocumented immigrants, leading to a general mood that all immigrants were responsible for the state’s financial and social woes (Chavez 2001).

[2] The dependent variables for the first two policies are not continuous since the data are event-count data and hence ordered. This implies that, for all observations, the dependent variable can take on only a limited number of discrete values rather than the infinite possible values within the range. Thus, ordered logistic regression analysis is carried out for these policies.

[3] I use CLARIFY (King et al. 2000; Tomz et al. 2001) to estimate these changes.
References


