

## **Future Directions in Research Regarding Attitudes Toward Immigrants**

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*Immigration became a political concern after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. Since then, states are implementing legislation that targets immigrant groups. In response, researchers have begun to investigate the consequences of immigration policies in the United States. For this special issue of *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy*, the editors compiled a series of articles that highlight how the new political dynamics are influencing the lives of immigrants, often in reaction to Arizona SB 1070. This commentary summarizes the key topics discussed in the series of articles and provides suggestions for new research. It is proposed that prejudice towards immigrants is now “allowed” by the new social norms and that such prejudice produces new questions rarely addressed in the literature. The realities that some immigrants bring to the country (like reduced homicide rates) contrast the political rhetoric, and those distinctions provide great opportunities for research. In addition, the change brought about by large immigrant populations can influence self-perceptions of what many Americans consider the national identity, which is also rarely studied. This special issue provides a great step in this research endeavor, and it is proposed that there are multiple possible paths to productive research regarding prejudice towards immigrants.*

The events of September 11, 2001, ignited an immigration debate in the United States that continues to be at the political forefront. In reaction to the 9/11 attacks, the southern borders were closed to “protect” the country from terrorism, and immigration patterns changed dramatically. Since then, it has become difficult for immigrant workers to commute over the international border, causing the immigrant population to grow because immigrants are settling in the United

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States. In response to the heightened immigrant population across the country, states are developing immigration policies that are shifting the way society reacts to immigrant populations. Most recently, social psychologists have begun to focus their research efforts on this pressing topic. For example, one of us (Professor Zárate) spent the past year working on the American Psychological Association Presidential Task Force on Immigration. Despite greater interest in the social psychological consequences of immigration, however, only a handful of empirical articles have been published in the social psychological literature. Research investigating the relationship between prejudice and immigration in the United States is limited, with the most critical research conducted by Esses, Dovidio, Jackson, and Armstrong (2001). Thus, the efforts of the editor for the *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy* will make a significant contribution to the psychological literature on immigration. For this issue, the editor has collected an impressive set of articles on immigration reflecting some of the divisiveness seen in the political arena on the topic.

The primary feature that makes this set of manuscripts attractive is the breadth of research. Consistently, these researchers emphasize the consequences of the SB1070 in Arizona, the criminalization of immigrants, and the negative attitudes expressed toward immigrants across the country. It is refreshing to see manuscripts that address both prejudice and stereotyping, and psychological consequences in the social context of immigration. For example, Levers and Hyatt-Burke (2011) and Sládková, Mangado, and Quinteros (2011) address the consequences of immigration policies on both Latinos and other refugee groups away from the international border. Further investigation of prejudice toward immigrants is conducted by Nier, Gaertner, Nier, and Dovidio (2011), who extrapolate from the general intergroups and prejudice domain. Prejudice toward immigrants, however, might differ in important conceptual ways from other forms of prejudice, so while that process is no doubt a productive path, one must also attempt to identify how prejudice toward immigrants might differ from other forms of prejudice. This is attempted by Fisher, Deason, Borgida, and Oyamoto (2011), who cite the research in Oyamoto, Borgida, and Fisher (2006), which identifies the ways in which prejudice toward immigrants might systematically differ from prejudice toward other stigmatized groups. Expressed prejudice toward immigrants is often sanctioned both by others and the associated laws and norms, suggesting that prejudice toward immigrants might be qualitatively different from other forms of prejudice.

Future research must attempt to identify how prejudice toward immigrants might differ from prejudice toward other out-groups. In particular, we currently see how state laws have become targeted toward immigration in a form that can be argued as criminalizing toward immigrants (Sládková et al., 2011). As Mukherjee, Molina, and Adams (2011) point out, most immigration policies aim to punish immigrants without consequences for the American population who engage with immigrants through unlawful employment. In most cases, immigrants

are considered criminals for acts that would be forgiven for the members of American culture. Much of the modern research on prejudice has focused on the subtle and otherwise implicit forms of prejudice toward groups, based often on the assumption that most individuals know that it is inappropriate to express prejudice, so they do so in uncontrollable or otherwise subtle fashions. Hence, it may be the case that legal enforcement against immigration is America's way of expressing subtle prejudice toward immigrants.

This collection provides the impetus for developing deeper models for understanding current attitudes toward immigrants. For example, Diaz, Sanez, and Kwan (2011) show how public attitudes toward immigrants are often polarized, which reflects itself in the seemingly contradictory or ineffective immigration policies. With polarized attitudes, agreeing with other in-group members produces attitude extremity, and disagreeing with out-group members produces the same attitude extremity. Thus, the same norms that often produce attempts to hide one's prejudice might, regarding immigration, serve to actually increase prejudice. That newfound freedom to express one's attitudes may explain the expression of negative attitudes toward immigrant populations.

The research presented in this collection identifies the negative attitudes that are currently expressed toward immigrants, but very few of the studies introduce solutions to ease negative reactions toward immigrants. The state of the research reflects that first warning sign reminiscent of the famous saying "Houston, we have a problem." Research will need to identify the root of the problem (beyond authoritarianism), and from that, identify the ways to ease the problem. The primary exceptions to that critique are Mukherjee, Molina, and Adams (2011) and Stephan (2011). Mukherjee et al. (2011), for example, focus on distinct forms of national identity to disentangle attitudes toward laws designed to reduce immigration and simple prejudice toward immigrants. Moreover, Stephan (2011) identifies the types of threats perceived by Americans and makes recommendations for solutions to be exercised at the individual and societal levels. Both articles reflect new and exciting ways to disentangle the psychological processes that are predicting current negative attitudes toward immigrants.

In addition to the arguments presented in this collection, the question of which processes predict negative attitudes toward immigrants remains unanswered. Other researchers, such as Esses et al. (2001) and Zárate, García, Garza, and Hitlan (2004), argue that economic competition is always a concern. The presented research either explicitly or implicitly identifies economic competition as the primary source of hostility. Another concept highlighted in this issue is right-wing authoritarianism (Fisher et al., 2011). We argue that both of those predictors are a good first step toward understanding the issues. As cited in these manuscripts, prejudice toward immigrants has historically become worse during economic hardships. The current economic standing of this country should not be an exception.

Moreover, right-wing authoritarianism is a great construct that has always predicted prejudice toward out-groups. This collection does not address, however, how attitudes toward immigrants should differ beyond competition and personality. Despite the significant contribution of this collection, we offer suggestions for areas that can continue to be investigated.

First, social psychological research is often distant from social realities. For example, this research focuses on attitudes toward immigrants, and rarely is the research focused on the difference between authorized and unauthorized immigrants. Our research with a predominantly Caucasian sample suggests that the members of mainstream American society express greater negative attitudes toward unauthorized immigrants. There are multiple potential explanations for that effect, including basic media influences, social norms, and perceptions of legality and following the rules of the land. It might also be the case that people perceive fundamental differences between authorized and unauthorized immigrants. For example, some may argue that authorized immigrants are assimilating to American culture, while unauthorized immigrants are attempting to retain their native culture while residing in the United States. Our research failed to address those questions, and the research presented here never touched upon those issues (Quezada, Hitlan, Shenberger, & Zárate, 2011).

Second, this collection fails to identify how public discourse often differs from realities, and therein lies one avenue for research. As identified by Epstein and Goff (2011), one Latino paradox is that more Latino immigrants often translate to less homicide (Martinez, 2002) and violent crime (Sampson, 2006). For example, El Paso, Texas, a predominately Latino community located directly on the United States/Mexico border, is consistently listed as one of the safest cities in the country. Using standard predictors of crime, El Paso should be one of the most dangerous cities in the country, yet the violent crime rates are consistently strikingly low, hence the paradox. How is it, then, that society can believe so strongly that Latino immigrants equate to more crime? This collection did not investigate the differences between such stereotypes and the actual reality of immigrant behavior. One might argue that stereotypes are sometimes driven by a kernel of truth. How is it that the Latino immigrant criminal stereotype can grow, despite consistent evidence to the contrary? How have attitudes failed to follow logic? One might question group identity, leadership effects, or any number of well-developed ideas to address that disparity.

Third, one might also question other psychological motives to understanding negative attitudes toward immigrants. Research regarding immigration outside of the United States suggests that essentialist attitudes often drive prejudice toward immigrants (Pehrson, Vignoles, & Brown, 2009). Essentialism suggests that "races" are often perceived as distinct entities with immutable biological differences, and immigrants simply do not possess the same features that allow one

to include them as in-group members. If nationality is defined by blood (Yogeeswaran & Dasgupta, 2010), then immigrants can never be considered equal persons. Thus, for many, nationality (and therefore equal treatment) is defined by ethnic similarity, and not by birth, loyalty, or citizenship (Devos & Banaji, 2005). There is also a burgeoning literature on models of assimilation and multiculturalism. This relates, broadly speaking, to the research presented by Mukherjee et al. (2011) who test how models of national identification predict specific forms of prejudice. The assimilation/multicultural literature suggests that one predictor of prejudice toward immigrants concerns how one perceives the in-group (Zárate & Shaw, 2010). To the extent that one likes the in-group and perceives that immigrants might change the in-group character or norms, one might feel more negative about the immigrant group. Thus, the research presented here focused on the recent immigration laws passed in Arizona, but the growing number of English-only laws being implemented across the country is far more common. According to *English First* ([englishfirst.org](http://englishfirst.org)), which is a lobbying organization dedicated to producing legislation to make English the official language, 30 states currently have English-only laws. The goal then is to make immigrants assimilate quickly to their perceived notion of the American way.

This issue further highlights a point mentioned by Stephan (2011). One possible predictor in the attitudes regarding immigrants is a fear of change (Zárate & Shaw, 2010). It is our contention that one driving force regarding attitudes toward Latino immigrants, in particular, is the fear that Latino immigrants are changing American cultural customs and values. One oft heard complaint is “why should I have to press 1 for English?” Americans are uniquely monolingual and expect others to adapt quickly to their own cultural ways, to the point that people express irritation when asked to press the number 1 to hear a phone menu in English. One might predict that those most irritated at having to press 1 are the ones most fearful of change and harbor the most negative attitudes toward immigrants.

Finally, one potential critique of the associated manuscripts is that the research fails to extend beyond the negativity that is centralized around Arizona’s SB1070. While this collection was successful in presenting key topics in the social psychological literature regarding prejudice and the effects of that prejudice on immigrants, there were notable concepts that were never addressed. The research seems to assume that most negative attitudes are another case of simple prejudice, and the goal is to predict that prejudice. It is the case that the United States is in the middle of what is often referred to as the “new wave” of immigration. In particular, immigration to the United States has reached historic numbers (though percentage-wise, this is no different from previous immigrant waves). Currently, 12.5% of the population is foreign-born (U.S. Census, 2010). Similarly, another 11% of the population is native-born, but with at least one immigrant parent. The fact that the immigrant population is much younger than the native-born population and tends to have more children reflects a changing face of America. Thus, how might the

cultural and economic stressors produce negative reactions? If one investigates the issue from a stress and reactivity model, one might develop alternative accounts for predictors of negative attitudes. This collection is a strong beginning to the social psychological research investigating immigration. Future research should aim to identify the specific constructs that have produced heightened negativity toward immigrants in the United States.

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