

Introduction

Immigration is unquestionably one of the most important forces shaping the United States. Since 2000, the United States has absorbed almost fourteen million immigrants, bringing the total of all documented and undocumented immigrants currently in the nation to over forty million.¹ Immigrants and their children now represent fully one in four Americans.

These raw numbers are impressive. Yet they tell only part of the story. The present wave of immigration has also wrought dramatic changes in the social and economic spheres. Large-scale immigration has produced a sea change in the racial and ethnic composition of the nation. The phenomenal growth of the Latino population has allowed Latinos to displace African Americans as the country's largest racial and ethnic group. Asian Americans, once a negligible share of the national population, are now the fastest-growing racial and ethnic group. This means that white numerical dominance is very much on the decline. By the midpoint of the twenty-first century, whites are, in fact, expected to no longer be the majority. The arrival of so many new Americans who herald from different shores has also brought cheap labor, new languages, and different cultural perspectives. There are sizable industries flourishing on low-wage migrant labor, massive Spanish-language media empires, and countless communities that have been altered almost beyond recognition. There is little doubt that US society has been transformed in innumerable, deep, and perhaps-permanent ways.

But has this changed the political sphere? What are the political consequences of such a dramatic demographic, racial, economic, social, and cultural makeover? In spite of the obvious and dramatic changes wrought by immigration, its impact on the political world is much less clear. On one level, the influence of immigration on poli-

¹ US Census Bureau 2012.

tics is obvious and already well documented. Countless studies have demonstrated the growing strength of the minority vote, particularly the Latino electorate, the largest immigrant group in the nation.² Many others have demonstrated the increasing party attachment of immigrants and their offspring to the Democratic Party.³ These are certainly crucial developments in the course of US political history.

A Broad Political Impact for Immigration?

We contend, however, that these changes represent only a small fraction of immigration's potential impact on US politics. Immigrants may be arriving in historically high numbers, but they account for only a relatively small proportion of the nation's population. Native-born whites still represent 63 percent of the population, and perhaps more important, some 75 percent of its voters. Thus, how nonimmigrant white Americans respond to this growing immigrant and Latino population is critical not only to the welfare of current immigrants and future of immigration policy in the United States but also relations between different racial and ethnic groups within the United States. Acceptance is likely to bring assimilation and rising economic status among immigrants. Fear and resentment is likely to bring increased efforts at border enforcement, more migrant deaths, and strained relations between the nation's white (and primarily native-born) population along with its racial and ethnic minority groups. Even more significant, if immigration leads to a backlash that not only shapes views on immigration but also alters the basic political orientation of large numbers of Americans, then the entire direction of US politics hangs in the balance. A broad backlash could lead to increasingly strict and conservative policy making, shift the balance of power between Democrats and Republicans, and advantage rightward-leaning candidates throughout the country. In short, in order to fully understand how broadly immigration is transforming US politics, we need to examine the attitudes and actions of the white population.

That is the subject of this book. We hope to delineate the different ways in which the partisan patterns, electoral decisions, and policy preferences of native white Americans are changing in response to immigration's imprint. Are whites responding with a broad backlash that

² De la Garza et al. 1992; DeSipio 1996; Alvarez and Garcia Bedolla 2003; Abrajano and Alvarez 2010.

³ Wong et al. 2011; Alvarez and Garcia Bedolla 2003; Hajnal and Lee 2011.

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results in more restrictive immigration policy, more punitive criminal justice policies, less generous public spending, and a large shift to the right politically that results in more support for the Republican Party and the candidates it puts forward? Or are whites embracing the benefits of immigration to such a degree that they seek to expand government and the services it offers to less advantaged segments of the population? Alternatively, is immigration—despite its visible effects—not deeply felt by the US public, and thus not consequential for basic political decisions like policy, party, and the vote?

On these questions, political scientists have had surprisingly little to say. Although widespread attention has been paid to the *causes* of our attitudes about Latinos and immigration, little research has focused on the *consequences* of immigrant-related views.⁴ We know, for example, that cultural and racial considerations, more than personal economic interests, often seem to shape attitudes toward immigration.⁵

But we know little about how views of immigrants in turn shape core political affiliations and basic voting decisions. There is almost no direct evidence to date that the basic policy positions, partisan affiliations, or voting decisions of individual white Americans strongly reflect their views on immigration or the Latino population.⁶ Studies of the white population tend to fall into one of two categories. Either they ignore immigration and race altogether.⁷ Or if they focus on race, they limit the analysis to the impact of the United States' old black-white divide.⁸ Only two studies that we are aware of have demonstrated a connection between immigration and the white vote in national contests, or revealed a link between immigration and white partisanship.⁹ Despite the tremendous impact that immigration has had on the demographics of the nation along with the large-scale social, economic, and racial change that has ensued, there is little direct evi-

⁴ On the causes, see Schildkraut 2010; Hainmueller and Hiscox 2010; Kinder and Kam 2010; Brader, Valentino, and Suhay 2008; Pettigrew et al. 2007; Scheve and Slaughter 2001; Quillian 1995; Citrin et al. 1997.

⁵ Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014; Brader, Valentino, and Suhay 2008; Hainmueller and Hiscox 2010. See also Hanson 2005.

⁶ Scholars have found clear evidence that immigration fundamentally shapes the views of Latinos, though (Hawley 2013; Nicholson and Segura 2005; but see Abrajano, Alvarez, and Nagler 2008; Alvarez and Garcia Bedolla 2003).

⁷ McCarty et al. 2007; Miller and Shanks 1996; Alvarez and Nagler 1995, 1998.

⁸ Lewis-Beck, Tien, and Nadeau 2010; Valentino and Sears 2005; Abramowitz 1994; Carmines and Stimson 1989.

⁹ The first study is work on California alternately showing that Proposition 187 led to growing white support for the Democratic Party (Bowler, Nicholson, and Segura 2006) or that the episode had no impact on white partisanship (Dyck, Johnson, and Wasson 2012). The other is a recent study by two psychologists, Maureen Craig and Jennifer Richeson (2014), who find a relationship between changing racial demographics and white Americans' political ideology.

dence that immigration has had an enduring effect on the basic political decisions of the white majority.

Moreover, many would be skeptical that immigration could have a profound influence on the basic political choices of white Americans. The near-complete assimilation of US immigrants and their children, rapid growth of interracial marriage, increasing willingness of white Americans to support minority candidates, inexorable—if uneven—waning of white racial intolerance, and arrival of potentially more pressing issues like the United States’ economic crisis, two wars, and terrorist security threats all imply that immigrant-related considerations should not weigh heavily on the political calculus of white Americans.¹⁰

Other skeptics would point to the immobility of partisanship.¹¹ Many scholars view party identification as the “unmoved mover” that colors a wide array of political perceptions and remains largely unaltered by the politics of the day.¹² Can immigration really lead to substantial changes in party identification when party identification is a deeply ingrained psychological attachment instilled early in life and largely impervious to change? From this perspective, immigration is likely to be one of many issues that fail to make much of an impact on the fortress of partisanship.

Immigration’s Impact on Partisan Politics: A Theory

Nevertheless, we believe that immigration and the Latino population do impact whites’ core political calculus. We offer a theory of how large-scale immigration can result in real partisan shifts in the white population. First, the sheer size of the racial and demographic change that has happened and continues to occur is impossible for white Americans to miss. All this demographic change is accompanied by the extensive presence of Latinos, Asians, and other immigrants in the media along with almost-daily interactions with nonnative speakers in the nation’s streets, workplaces, and neighborhoods. It would be surprising if such a massive transformation in the makeup of the nation did not result in immigration playing a more central role in the minds of white Americans.

¹⁰ Alba and Nee 2005; Bean and Stevens 2003; Hajnal 2006; Highton 2004; Sniderman and Carmines 1997; Schuman 1997.

¹¹ Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002; Campbell et al. 1960.

¹² Goren 2005.

Second, irrespective of the actual fiscal consequences of immigration, there is an ongoing and often-repeated threat narrative that links the United States' immigrant and Latino populations to a host of pernicious fiscal, social, and cultural consequences.¹³ This narrative emphasizes cultural decline, immigrants' use of welfare, health, and educational services, their propensity to turn to crime, and their tendency to displace native citizens from jobs.¹⁴ Each of these concerns has been spelled out repeatedly as well as in great detail in the media, political sphere, and scholarly outlets.¹⁵

Moreover, although many people inside and outside the political arena dispute the threat narrative, it appears that the narrative has been absorbed by a significant segment of the white population. Across the white population, attitudes on Latinos and immigration are diverse, but there is little doubt that many white Americans express real concerns about immigration and hold negative attitudes toward Latinos. Recent polls suggest that well over half of white Americans feel that immigrants are a burden on the nation, a slight majority think that Latinos add to the crime problem, and about half believe they take jobs away from Americans.¹⁶ For many, the changes taking place in the United States represent a real threat.

Third, and critically for our account, this threat narrative has recently taken on increasingly clear *partisan* implications. Although there is still considerable variation within each party's leadership on the issue of immigration, empirical studies demonstrate growing partisan divergence on immigration between leaders of the two parties. When Republican and Democratic leaders take divergent stances on immigration and other issues of special relevance to the Latino community, and when Republicans stand more strongly against immigration, the two parties present individual white Americans with a stark choice. For those concerned about the Latino population and growth of immigration, this may be reason enough to support the Republican Party.

In short, many white Americans will see that the United States is changing, believe that immigration is driving many of the negative shifts, they see, and know that the two parties represent two different responses—one largely on the side of immigrants and one primarily in opposition to immigration.

¹³ Pérez, forthcoming; Chavez 2008; Hopkins 2010; Brader, Valentino, and Suhay 2008; Santa Ana 2004.

¹⁴ Huntington 2005; Borjas 2001; Gimpel and Skerry 2009.

¹⁵ Pérez, forthcoming; Valentino, Brader, and Jardina 2013; Chavez 2008; Santa Ana 2004.

¹⁶ CNN poll from 2010, cited in Polling Report 2014.

Why Immigration Is Different

But what about the supposed stability and immovability of party identification?¹⁷ Can immigration shape such fundamental and stable political attachments? We believe that the answer is yes, and that in fact there are clear circumstances under which party identification can be responsive and more malleable. Even those who write forcefully about the immovability and durability of party identification note that major shifts in partisanship occur in one circumstance. When the social groups associated with each party change, mass shifts in partisanship can and have happened.¹⁸

Immigration today is a unique phenomenon in that it has changed the social group imagery of the parties. The growth of the Latino population and increasing support of Latinos as well as other immigrants of the Democratic Party means that a party that as late as 1980 was still 80 percent white, is now more than 40 percent nonwhite. A party that was supported by lower-class white interests increasingly became a party supported by the black community, and since the 1980s has increasingly become a party supported by Latinos and other immigrants. In other words, what it means to be a Democrat has changed. This means that even for inattentive Americans who may have little knowledge of current issues and strong attachments to a political party, immigration could still change their partisanship.

History Repeated: Partisanship and Immigration

Equally important, history provides plenty of evidence to suggest that immigration can fundamentally alter the nation's politics. The United States may be a nation of immigrants, but that does not mean it has always welcomed immigrants with open arms. Often when the number of new arrivals has been large, or the makeup of new Americans has differed from the native born in obvious racial or ethnic ways, many Americans have responded with anger, fear, and efforts to either punish immigrants who are already in the country or beat back any further influx of immigrants.¹⁹ One of the earliest examples is the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798. They curbed the rights of immigrants—especially radicals from France and Ireland. Nativist violence

¹⁷ Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002; Campbell et al. 1960.

¹⁸ Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002; Goren 2005.

¹⁹ Schrag 2011; Zolberg 2009; Daniels 2004; Fetzer 2000.

and rioting reemerged in the nineteenth century when large-scale immigration from Europe reached a peak.²⁰ Much more recently, millions of Japanese citizens were interned in concentration camps during the course of World War II. For the vast majority of Americans (and even the Supreme Court), the threat of these immigrants—many of who were US citizens—justified the clear violation of their rights. In short, a wide-ranging backlash against immigration today would hardly be new.²¹

We have witnessed several moments in US history where immigration and partisan politics have become closely intertwined. Critically, many of these nativist episodes have had a real impact on the partisan politics of the day. In the 1850s, for example, a nativist backlash against Irish Catholic immigrants helped spur the Know-Nothings and American Party to electoral success.²² Later in the nineteenth century, the issue of Chinese immigration spurred both the Democratic and Republican parties into action as a means to increase their voter bases. Republicans began the period internally divided on the issue, but competition from a Democratic Party strongly in favor of Chinese exclusion, the threat of their supporters' defection to the Workingmen's Party—a third party that campaigned exclusively on a platform of Chinese exclusion—and intense public sentiment against the Chinese led Republicans to support Chinese exclusion.²³

By the 1880 presidential election, both major parties campaigned on the promise to restrict Chinese immigration to the United States, and two years later the Chinese Exclusion Act was signed into law. Again in the early 1950s, immigration exposed internal divisions in the Republican Party. More nativist members of the party hoped to place limits on the total annual inflow of immigrants, and establish preferences for immigrants from northern and Western Europe, while at roughly the same time that party's presidential nominee, Dwight D. Eisenhower, campaigned on a pledge to “strike an intelligent, unbigoted balance between the immigration welfare in America and the prayerful hopes of the unhappy and oppressed.”²⁴ With Democratic support, the nativist wing of the Republican Party was able to enshrine both quotas and white European preference into law with the

²⁰ Schrag 2011.

²¹ Pushing the analogy even further, the current backlash could be compared to any number of other historical episodes in which racial and ethnic minority efforts to attain social, economic, or political rights were actively as well as often violently rebuffed by large segments of the white population (Klinkner and Smith 1999; Foner 1984; Parker 1990; Kousser 1999).

²² Anbinder 1992.

²³ Tichenor 2002.

²⁴ Quoted in *ibid.*, 198.

passage of the 1952 Immigration and Nationality Act. Almost two decades later, in an effort to bring in more constituents who would ultimately support the party, Democrats undertook a sharp reversal of position and supported the Hart Cellars Act of 1965. The landmark immigration law that repealed national origins quotas, and replaced them with a system based on skilled workers, family reunification, and refugees, would become a critically important base for the Democratic Party over the ensuing decades.²⁵ As Republicans woke up to that fact in the late 1970s and 1980s, “votes in Congress on restricting legal immigration and controlling illegal immigration became increasingly easy to predict in partisan terms.”²⁶ With the two major parties solidifying their position on immigration by the 1980s, the public was able to more easily discern where the two parties stood on immigration.

In sum, each of these historical events highlights just how interrelated immigration and partisan politics can become.

History Repeated: Partisanship and Race

Finally, there is yet another historical precedent within the arena of racial politics. Many scholars contend that the large-scale movement of whites from the Democratic to the Republican Party that occurred from the 1960s to the 1980s was mainly spurred by racial concerns. From this perspective, African American demands for increased civil rights coupled the willingness of leaders within the Democratic Party to support those demands ultimately repelled millions of white Americans from the Democratic Party and helped Republicans win nationally.²⁷ In this sense, our book has its intellectual origins in the “issue evolution” approach that Ted Carmines and James Stimson employed so influentially to explain how racial politics altered the nation’s partisan dynamics. Just as their book was about what happens to US politics when race emerged as a political concern, our book is about what happens to US politics when immigrants and Latinos arise as a core political issue.

²⁵ Gimpel and Edwards 1998.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 21.

²⁷ Hood, Kidd, and Morris 2012; Valentino and Sears 2005; Black and Black 2002; Edsall and Edsall 1991; Carmines and Stimson 1989; Huckfeldt and Kohfeldt 1989; Giles and Evans 1994. It is important to note, however, that other scholars dispute the centrality of racial considerations in the white partisan shift (Shafer and Johnston 2005; Lublin 2004; Abramowitz 1994).

Ultimately, it remains to be seen whether white worries about immigrants and Latinos mirror the concerns whites have held about African Americans. But if one minority group has triggered broad partisan reactions in the past, there is at least some reason to expect similar responses in the present. The fact that Latinos have now replaced African Americans as the nation's largest racial and ethnic minority may suggest that any current backlash is especially likely to be focused on the Latino population.

Testing Our Theory

Since our argument contends that immigration is fundamentally reshaping US politics, our data must be weighty and wide ranging. The evidence should not be limited to one election, a single survey, or a year. Instead it should span a considerable range of contests, comprehensive set of surveys, and meaningful period of time. The evidence should also not be subtle. We should see substantial movement—on the order of magnitude that could sway elections and alter the balance of power in US politics.

Demonstrating this kind of robust change is not a simple task. Thus, the bulk of this book is designed to offer a clear, systematic assessment of just how far reaching the impact of immigration is on the basic political choices and identities of the white US public. We begin this process by looking at the big picture: the overall patterns in aggregate white partisanship over the last fifty years. If immigration has had a major impact on US politics and caused the defection of substantial numbers of white Americans from the Democratic to the Republican Party, then there should be signs of a marked change in aggregate white partisanship.

Demonstrating a large partisan shift is crucial, but this kind of aggregate analysis is at most suggestive. Even if we can uncover a major change in white partisan attachments coinciding with the growth of the immigrant population, its origins will still by no means be certain. Immigration could be a fundamental driving force in the defection of so many white Americans to the Republican Party. But there are many alternative accounts for this massive movement to the right. As we have noted, some contend that African Americans have driven whites to the Republican Party.²⁸ Scholars and political observers also point to

²⁸ Hood, Kidd, and Morris 2012; Black and Black 2002; Carmines and Stimson 1989; Edsall and Edsall 1991; Valentino and Sears 1995.

other cultural and social factors, such as gay marriage, abortion rights, or the war on crime, as primary determinants of white Republicanism.²⁹ Similarly, some have claimed that Republican gains are driven by an advantage on foreign affairs and the greater willingness of Republican leaders to confront our enemies. There are, finally, perhaps even more fundamental issues like taxes, the scope of government, and the economy that are undoubtedly a central consideration for most Americans when they choose to take partisan sides.³⁰

In order to tie this partisan shift to immigration, we need to undertake more fine-grained analysis to rule out these other factors. To demonstrate this causal connection, we compile several large national public opinion surveys and develop a series of statistical models of individual partisan choice that not only incorporate attitudes on immigration but also take into account each of the alternative explanations known to shape partisanship. An even more decisive test is to examine changes in individual party identification over time. If we can predict when and if a particular individual will change their partisan affiliation from Democrat to Republican based on their preexisting attitudes on immigrants, then we can be more certain that immigration is driving partisanship rather than the reverse. This kind of panel data, while not perfect, represent close to the gold standard in identifying causal connections. In addition, we assess the causal ties between immigration and partisanship at the aggregate level. We specifically look to see if the public's views on immigration at one point in time predict changes in aggregate white partisanship in future periods—a test that gets us even closer to causality.

Although party identification is generally considered to be the principal driving force in US politics, it is by no means the only measure we might care about. At its heart, democracy is about votes and elections. Who wins office and who loses? If immigration is having a basic impact on the political arena, we should also see it in the vote. Thus, we will move on to consider the role that immigrant-related attitudes play in a series of national elections. Once again using an array of public opinion surveys, we will do our best to distinguish between the effects of immigration and any number of other factors purported to shape the vote. Our focus will primarily be on the 2008 contest between Barack Obama and John McCain, but to make a more general statement about the link between immigration and US politics, we realize that we need to assess the influence of immigrant-related views

²⁹ Adams 1997; Layman and Carmines 1997.

³⁰ Shafer and Johnston 2005; Lublin 2004; Abramowitz 1994.

on a wide set of elections and years. Hence, we repeat our analysis of the vote going as far back as 1976 and as recently as 2012, and gauge the role of immigration not just in presidential contests but also in elections for Congress, senate, and governor.

Finally, for individual citizens, policies as opposed to parties or politicians might be the true measure by which to judge a democracy. It is not who is elected but instead what they do once in office that ultimately matters. As such, it is important to evaluate links between immigration and policy views. It would hardly be surprising to find that those Americans who hold more negative feelings toward different segments of the immigrant population favor more restrictive policies to curb the number of immigrants, reduce the benefits and services that immigrants can receive, and in different ways make life difficult for immigrants—regardless of their citizenship status. This is, in fact, a central focus of much of the immigration literature.³¹

But we suspect that the effects of immigration will extend much more broadly into a range of related policy arenas. We suspect these wide-ranging policy effects for two reasons. First, policy debates on a host of issues ostensibly not about immigration are increasingly being infused with references to both legal and undocumented immigrants, the broader Latino population, and other aspects of the immigration process. Take health care, for example. After much of the recent debate on health care reform centered on whether or not the Democratic reform package would cover undocumented immigrants, a recent Pew Research Center poll found that 66 percent of those opposed to the plan reported that they were opposed because it might cover undocumented immigrants. Welfare reform since the 1990s has similarly been permeated with discussions of Latinos and undocumented immigrants. California's Proposition 187, which sought to restrict public services to undocumented immigrants, is only the most prominent case. The fact that just under 70 percent of whites view Latinos as particularly prone to be on welfare suggests that the connection between Latinos and welfare is now firmly in place.³² Latinos and crime is another readily available script throughout the nation.³³ Crime, terrorism, and undocumented immigration account for fully 66 percent of the network news coverage of Latinos.³⁴ Concerns about immigra-

³¹ See, for example, Ha and Oliver 2010; Hood and Morris 1998; Stein, Post, and Rinden 2000; Green, Strolovitch, and Wong 1998.

³² Bobo 2001.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ National Association of Hispanic Journalists 2005.

tion therefore should be linked to attitudes on crime, welfare, education, and the like.

Second, evidence of race impacting core policy views would not be new. Research has already shown that nonracial policy can be racially coded.³⁵ In particular, there is evidence that individual policy preferences on welfare, education, crime, and a host of other core issue arenas have, at least at some points in the past, been shaped by attitudes toward blacks.³⁶

Given the importance of race in the past along with the increasingly central role played by immigration and Latinos in the political debates of today, there is every reason to expect wide-ranging policy effects. Thus, we offer a broader study of the effects of immigration on numerous policy areas, including health, welfare, crime, and education.

All these empirical tests offer an opportunity to establish a link between immigration and US politics. But none tells us how individual Americans make that connection. How do individual Americans learn about immigration and its consequences? What is the source of their concerns and political motivations? In other words, what is the mechanism that translates demographic change into political consequences?

We explore these mechanisms in the second third of the book. Our goal here is to get at the actual mechanisms through which immigration leads to political effects. In our theory, we outline two such mechanisms: demographic change and the media. One is the direct recognition of racial change by individual residents and the sense of racial threat that this demographic change can produce. We believe that reactions to larger immigrant populations are analogous to past white responses to larger black populations. As researchers from V. O. Key to Susan Olzak to Michael Giles and Melanie Buckner have so aptly demonstrated, many individual white Americans appear to be threatened by larger black populations, and as a result have reacted in negative ways as black populations have grown or become more empowered.³⁷

We test the racial threat model with an innovative research design incorporating the size of both the local and state-level Latino population. The idea is to see if whites who live in close proximity to larger Latino or immigrant populations tend to have more negative views of immigrants, favor more punitive policies, align more regularly with

³⁵ Mendelberg 2001.

³⁶ Winter 2008; Soss, Langbein, and Metelko 2006; Gilens 1999; Kinder and Sanders 1996.

³⁷ Key 1949; Olzak 1992; Giles and Buckner 1993.

the Republican Party, and more consistently support Republican candidates.

Although we believe there is a direct link between demographic change and white views, we contend that whites learn about immigration from other sources as well. Namely, we maintain that the media is a critical source of information on immigration. How whites perceive immigration, whether they think it is a widespread problem, and ultimately whether they buy into an immigrant threat narrative are all, in our opinion, likely to be shaped by what they see, hear, and learn from various media outlets. Thus, to try to further understand the underlying mechanism driving immigration's transformation of US politics, we conduct a series of tests of media coverage and its relationship to white partisanship. Specifically, using a comprehensive data set of three decades of *New York Times* articles on immigration, we assess the tone, content, and salience of immigration coverage over time. Then we look to see if attention to negative aspects of immigration by the media leads to large-scale changes in aggregate white partisanship. In essence, when the media repeats the immigrant threat narrative, does an increasing portion of the white public identify as Republican?

Finally, we turn to an examination of the consequences of this move to the right for policy making across the states. If the majority white public has, in fact, shifted to the right in response to a growing immigrant population, we should see a robust relationship between the size of the immigrant population and policy direction. Given that states have become increasingly active in advancing immigrant-related policy and are, outside the federal government, the principal policy maker, we focus our examination on state-level policy. Our empirical tests examine whether states with large and growing Latino populations are more likely to enact policies that could negatively impact the local immigrant population. In particular, do states respond to larger Latino populations by increasing criminal punishment, reducing educational funding, decreasing welfare support, and cutting health care spending?

The Transformation of White American Politics

The results that we present over the ensuing pages will demonstrate the wide-ranging impact of immigration on the politics of white America. Our analysis shows a massive shift in aggregate white partisanship. In 1980, white Democrats dominated white Republicans numerically. Today the opposite is true. As immigration's impact on the United

States has grown, whites have fled to the Republican Party in ever-larger numbers. The end result is that the principal partisan choice of white America has been totally reversed.

At the aggregate level, we show that when media coverage of immigration uses the Latino threat narrative, the likelihood of whites identifying with the Democratic Party decreases and the probability of favoring Republicans increases. At the individual level, we will demonstrate that how we think about immigration tells us a lot about our policy preferences, partisan ties, and voting decisions. Whites who are fearful of immigration tend to respond to that anxiety with a measurable shift to the political right. Similarly, where we live and in particular whether we live in states with few or large numbers of Latinos greatly influences those same political choices. As immigration encroaches more and more on different neighborhoods, whites who live in those areas are more and more apt to want to disinvest in public spending, and less likely to offer support to less advantaged segments of the population. In short, who we are politically is driven in no small part by immigration.

One direct result of all this is the passage of a conservative policy agenda in the areas most affected by immigration. Our analysis shows a close connection between the size and growth of the state Latino population and state policy making. In states with larger and faster-growing Latino population—states where immigrants and Latinos could benefit from public support—whites have been exceptionally successful at reducing educational funding, decreasing welfare support, and cutting health care spending.

Implications

What we learn about immigration and its impact on US politics will have far-reaching implications for our understanding of how race does or does not work in the United States, grasp of the emerging place of Latinos in the hearts and minds of white Americans, knowledge of what white party identification is and how much it can change, and perhaps most obviously, predictions about the future balance of power between Democrats and Republicans in the tug-of-war that is US politics.

What is striking about the empirical patterns we will present in the following pages is not that immigration matters; it is startling just how broad the effects are. We already know that many white Americans have felt threatened by different racial/ethnic groups throughout US

history.³⁸ What is impressive is just how wide-ranging those effects remain today, and how the presence of different minority groups can heighten or diminish those effects. In a political era in which many claim that the significance of race has faded, we find that Latino- or immigrant-related views impact the political orientation of many members of the white population. Party identification—the most influential variable in US politics—is at least in part a function of the way individual white Americans see Latinos and immigrants. So too is the vote in national contests for president and Congress. In short, who we are politically at our core is shaped substantially by deeply felt concerns about immigration and racial/ethnic change.

What is also clear from this pattern of results is that the Latino population has become a more central factor in US race relations. In US history, the issue of race has traditionally been viewed through a black-white dichotomy. That is no longer true today. The increasing visibility of immigration along with its widespread impact on the nation's economic, social, cultural, and political spheres appear to have brought forth a real change in the racial dynamics of our politics.

Our results will also speak to the long-standing debate about what partisanship is, and how much it does or does not change. The traditional and most widely held view is that party identification is a deep-seated psychological predisposition, which is both stable and drives most of the core political decisions we make.³⁹ An alternative notion is that party identification is both more rational and more responsive.⁴⁰ Individual Americans, from this latter perspective, survey the world and the political positions of the two parties to determine which represents a better fit. We will not attempt to argue that one of these two views is always right, but the real shifts in individual and aggregate partisanship that we will uncover along with the fact that this partisan movement can be logically tied to real-world events suggest that at least for many Americans, partisan attachments are relatively rational responses to actual circumstances.

There are also implications for the future balance of power in US politics. The pattern of results presented here suggests that at least over the short to near term, determining which party will dominate US electoral politics is very much an open question. The conventional view of pundits and prognosticators, and maybe even most social sci-

³⁸ Masuoka and Junn 2013; Tichenor 2002; Olzak 1992.

³⁹ Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002; Campbell et al. 1960; Goren 2005.

⁴⁰ Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson 2002; MacKuen, Erikson, and Stimson 1989; Fiorina 1981; Downs 1957.

entists, is that the dramatic growth of the minority population and its strong ties to the Democratic Party portend the demise of the Republican Party. That may be true in the long term. But that prediction ignores the white population and the possibility of a widespread white backlash in the short term. Given that whites still make up about three-quarters of the voters in the nation and will likely be the clear majority for decades to come, there is every reason to believe that whites will have a real say in who governs. Indeed, the white population's rapidly growing allegiance to the Republican Party points toward a very different short-term future—one that might more likely be highlighted by Republican victory than by Democratic dominance.

Finally and perhaps most important, the dramatic surge in white support for the Republican Party has disquieting implications for the future of race relations in this nation. While many have hoped for the end of large-scale racial tensions, and some have even acclaimed Obama's election as the first sign of a postracial United States, the political impact of immigration seems to be leading the country in the opposite direction. The rightward shift of many white Americans, on the one hand, and the leftward drift of much of the racial and ethnic minority population, on the other, is exacerbating already-large racial divides.⁴¹ The last presidential election, for example, was by some calculations the most racially divided contest in US history. Immigration and other factors appear increasingly to be pitting the declining white majority against the growing nonwhite minority. Some degree of polarization is a normal and health part of democracy, but when the core dividing line in a nation becomes closely aligned with racial and ethnic demography, larger concerns emerge about inequality, conflict, and discrimination. In short, when race becomes the primary determinant of political decision making, the nation's population is in danger of being driven apart.

Hanging in the balance is the fate of the United States' immigrants, its racial and ethnic minorities, and other less advantaged segments of the population. To this point, our results suggest that the white backlash has in many ways been successful. Our analysis of policy outcomes across the states indicates that whites have been especially effective in disinvesting in public goods in the states where immigration is most deeply felt. Precisely where the number of immigrants is largest and where the need is greatest, these public funds have become less and less available. All this has distressing implications for the welfare of these different groups. Unless the partisan poli-

⁴¹ King and Smith 2011.

tics of immigration shift dramatically, more newcomers will simply mean a greater white backlash and greater disinvestment. Immigrants and racial/ethnic minorities themselves will have more and more of a say as they increase in size, yet they are a long way off from becoming a majority of the voting public. That means, unfortunately, that things may get worse before they get better.

Race, Immigration, or Undocumented Immigration?

Up to this point, we have been deliberately imprecise about defining exactly which immigrants or which aspects of immigration threaten white Americans. Are white Americans most opposed to some specific aspect of immigration policy (e.g., the number of immigrants, the education levels of immigrants, or border security issues) or are they more concerned about the immigrants themselves? And if immigrants are at the heart of the response, is it all immigrants or a subset of them, like undocumented or Mexican immigrants? Another possibility is that restrictive policy is directed more at a racial group most closely associated with the negative side of immigration (e.g., Latinos).

Our imprecision stems largely from the fact that we believe these different categories tend to be muddled together in the minds of individual white Americans. In theory, categories like undocumented immigrant, legal immigrant, and Latino are all distinct from each other. But in the practice of US politics, these concepts often blur together. Media coverage and the rhetoric of the two major parties as well as other political elites frequently conflate these different groups. It therefore is likely that for most individual Americans, immigration is not a precise threat but rather more of a general concern generated by the changes that immigration is bringing to the United States. In light of these muddled categories, we will begin with a series of tests that in different ways measure attitudes toward Latinos, Asian Americans, and other immigrant-related groups to try to get a clearer sense of just who or what it is that white Americans are reacting to.

What will become apparent is that reactions to immigration are highly racialized. Only one racial group—Latinos—is at the heart of white Americans' response to immigration. In this sense, our findings are more like those of Ted Brader and his colleagues, Efrén Pérez, and Jennifer Merolla and her colleagues, who in different ways, all find that images of Latinos spark distinctly negative reactions.⁴² The flip side of this racial story is that Asian Americans do not spark nearly the

⁴² Brader, Valentino, and Suhay 2008; Pérez, forthcoming.

same political response. Asian Americans, as we will see, are viewed quite differently from these other groups, and white reactions to proximity to large numbers of Asians are radically different from white reactions to large influxes of Latinos.

There are all sorts of reasons why whites might make this racial distinction. Fewer Asian Americans are in the United States without legal status, and they tend to fall much closer to whites than to Latinos on the socioeconomic scale and in fact surpass whites on many of these indicators. Asian Americans, at least until recently, were also much less clearly aligned with the Democratic Party than Latinos or African Americans have been.⁴³ Perhaps most critically, whites tend to have different stereotypes of Asian Americans than they do of Latinos or the broader immigrant category.⁴⁴ Whereas Asian Americans are often viewed as an intelligent, hardworking, law-abiding, and successful model minority, Latinos are more regularly thought of as less intelligent, welfare prone, poor, and in the United States, without legal status.⁴⁵ Whatever the root cause, it is clear that for many white Americans, Latinos—more than Asian Americans—represent an economic, social, and cultural threat that strongly shapes their partisan politics.

Book Outline

Part I: Theory

CHAPTER 1: A THEORY OF IMMIGRATION BACKLASH POLITICS

In this chapter, we offer an explanation of how immigration could lead to a broad white backlash that transforms the basic political leaning of much of white America. Specifically, we contend that the rapid and steady growth of the immigrant population with the immigrant threat narrative that dominates media coverage of immigrants work together to lead to widespread concerns about immigration. When Republican elites offer a distinctly anti-immigrant platform and Democrats counter with little support for these policies, the many Americans anxious about immigration are drawn to the Republican Party and its candidates.

⁴³ Hajnal and Lee 2011.

⁴⁴ Masuoka and Junn 2013.

⁴⁵ Bobo 2001; Lee 2001.

*Part II: Views on Immigration and Defection
to the Republican Party*

**CHAPTER 2: IMMIGRATION, LATINOS, AND
THE TRANSFORMATION OF WHITE PARTISANSHIP**

This chapter provides an individual-level assessment of whites' partisan preferences. Using data from the American National Election Survey (ANES) and a series of other national public opinion surveys, we show that white Americans who harbor anti-immigrant sentiments are much more likely than others to identify as Republican. This is true regardless of what other potentially relevant political factors we take into account, how we measure partisanship, or which survey we focus on. Importantly, using panel data, we find that changes in individual attitudes toward immigrants precede shifts in partisanship. Similarly, using aggregate data, we demonstrate that the public's views on immigration predict shifts in macropartisanship. Immigration really is driving individual defections from the Democratic to Republican Party.

CHAPTER 3: HOW IMMIGRATION SHAPES THE VOTE

In this chapter, we assess whether the effects of immigration extend to the electoral arena. Are concerns about immigration leading to greater support for Republican candidates across a range of elections from the presidency to gubernatorial contests? The findings reveal a strong, robust relationship between immigration attitudes and white vote choice. Whites who hold more negative views of immigrants have a greater tendency to support Republican candidates at the presidential, congressional, and gubernatorial levels, even after controlling for party identification and other major factors purported to drive the vote. The result has been a slow but steady shift of white support from Democratic to Republican candidates over the past thirty years.

Part III: Understanding the Roots of the Backlash

CHAPTER 4: THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE IMMIGRATION BACKLASH

In this chapter, we examine one of two causal mechanisms that help to explain white anxiety over immigration. Specifically, we find a strong as well as consistent link between the size and growth of the state Latino population and white attitudes on a range of immigrant-related policies and white partisan choices. All else being equal, whites who live in states with more Latinos are more punitive, less supportive

of welfare and other public services, and generally more conservative than whites in other states. Whites in those same states are also significantly more likely to support the Republican Party.

**CHAPTER 5: MEDIA COVERAGE OF IMMIGRATION
AND WHITE MACROPARTISANSHIP**

This chapter focuses on the second factor responsible for driving white fears over immigration: the mass media. In particular, we assess the relationship between media coverage of immigration and aggregate shifts in white party identification. We begin by outlining the media's profit-driven incentives to frame immigration in a negative manner. Our content analysis of immigration-related articles from the *New York Times* from 1980 to 2011 clearly demonstrates that when the issue of immigration is brought to the attention of the public, it is generally with an emphasis on the negative consequences of immigration. We then show that this negative coverage leads to important effects on white partisanship. Across this time period, we find that the reliance on the Latino threat narrative by the media is correlated with significant defection away from the Democratic Party along with increases in the proportion of the public that identifies as Republicans and Independents.

Part IV: The Consequences

CHAPTER 6: THE POLICY BACKLASH

The final empirical chapter examines the implications of this backlash on the policy decisions of state legislatures. Our analysis using the data from the National Association of State Budget Officers as well as a range of other sources reveals the impact that Latino population size has on policies tied to immigrants and Latinos. We find that in states with larger Latino populations, public goods provision drop significantly, and funds for welfare, health, and education all decline. Once the Latino population passes a threshold, however, policy outcomes become more pro-Latino.

*Conclusion: Implications for a Deeply
Divided United States*

In the final chapter, we summarize the main findings of the book, and engage in a discussion of the book's contributions to the areas of race, immigration, and US politics. Our results, we believe, confirm the important role that immigration plays in US politics and also highlight

Introduction

the enduring though shifting role of race in the nation. Where African Americans once dominated the political calculus of white Americans, Latinos appear more likely to do so today. The movement of so many white Americans to the right has wide-ranging implications for both the future balance of partisan power and likely trajectory of US race relations. With a clear majority of the white population now on the Republican side and a clear majority of the minority population now on the Democratic one, political conflict in the United States is increasingly likely to be synonymous with racial conflict—a pattern that threatens ever-greater racial tension.