Contact, Contexts, and Public Attitudes toward Illegal Immigration

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Context: immigration politics in the US

- Estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants residing in the US.
- President Obama’s 2014 executive action staying deportation for millions.
What factors shape immigration attitudes?

- Party identification
- Intergroup contact
- Ethnic and spatial context
- Labor market competition
- Feelings of cultural threat
Contact and context

- Intergroup contact literature focuses on direct, face-to-face contact.
- Measures of racial, ethnic context are sometimes assumed to be proxy measures of contact.
- If context simply proxies contact, it should not exert an effect on attitudes when controlling for contact.
- If context still has an effect, it must be capturing something else – passive exposure to Spanish, media exposure.
Ethnic and spatial context

- Individuals’ contexts can be characterized in multiple ways.
  - Hispanic percent
  - Change in Hispanic percent (over time)
  - Proximity to US–Mexico border

- Not all segments of the American public will be affected by a given context in the same way: political attitudes and ethnic/spatial context *interact*. 
Data: Pew Research Center

- Survey conducted June 12–16, 2013; n = 1,512.
- Dual-frame (landline plus cell) sample design.
- Response rates (AAPOR RR3): 8.7% (landline) and 5.8% (cell).
- Analyses are limited to the sub-sample of white non-Hispanic respondents (n = 1,086).
- Special access dataset with ZIP and FIPS codes obtained from Pew.
Data: how to handle undocumented immigrants

“Which comes closer to your view about how to handle undocumented immigrants who are now living in the US? They should not be allowed to stay in the country legally, there should be a way for them to stay in the country legally, if certain requirements are met.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opinion</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Should not be allowed to stay</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Should be allowed to stay legally</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DK/Ref</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“Thinking about your daily life, do you have personal contact with any recent immigrants who you know for a fact, or who you suspect, are in the United States illegally, or not?”

- Yes, have contact: 29%
- No, do not have contact: 69%
- DK/Ref: 2%
Methods: appending demographic, spatial data

- County-level demographic data from the 2000 and 2010 Censuses were appended to the data.
- Survey respondents were geocoded using SAS PROC GEOCODE (ZIP code geocoding). Secondary matching on county FIPS codes was done using Census Bureau 2013 TIGER/Line shapefiles (county centroids).
- Distance to the US–Mexico border was calculated using respondent latitude-longitude coordinates and the shapefile of the US–Mexico frontier from the State Department.
Methods: statistical modeling

- Binary logit models were fit.

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\begin{pmatrix}
\frac{(h \cdot \cdot)}{(h \cdot \cdot)} \\
\end{pmatrix} = . +
\]

- Demographic and attitudinal controls are included in the models (age, sex, education, region, ideology, attitudes toward economy).

- Missing data were multiply imputed (x 10) using IVEware v0.1 for SAS (ISR, University of Michigan).

- Multiply imputed datasets were analyzed using SAS PROC SURVEYLOGISTIC with estimates then combined using SAS PROC MIANALYZE.
Key results

- Weak main effect of party ID: Republicans (marginally) less likely than Democrats to support allowing undocumented immigrants to stay.
- No effect of contact with undocumented immigrants.
- No significant main effects for county Hispanic percent, county Hispanic percentage point change, proximity to US–Mexico border.
Key results

- Significant *interaction effects* between party ID and each of county Hispanic percent, county Hispanic percentage point change, and proximity to US–Mexico border.

- Contextual/spatial factors *moderate* the effect of party ID.

- Partisan polarization in immigration attitudes increases with greater Hispanic concentration, increasing Hispanic concentration, and closer proximity to the US–Mexico border.
Hispanic population, party ID & illegal immigration
Hispanic change, party ID & illegal immigration

![Graph showing the predicted probability of staying with changes in county Hispanic population change. The graph includes two lines: one for the probability of staying as a Democrat and one for the probability of staying as a Republican.](image-url)
Border proximity, party ID & illegal immigration

Predicted Probability (Stay)

Distance from US-Mexico Border (km)

- P(Y=1), Democrat
- P(Y=1), Republican
Wrap up

- Party ID, ethnic context, and US–Mexico border proximity contribute to an explanation of American attitudes toward illegal immigration.
- Ethnic context and border proximity *amplify* the effects of party ID.
- No effect of (a blunt measure of) contact with undocumented immigrants.
- Measures of contact need to distinguish between casual contact and closer acquaintance/friendship.
Future work ought to more precisely specify the mechanisms through which ethnic and spatial context exert effects on immigration attitudes.

To this end, data from the Public Religion Research Institute *Religion, Values & Immigration Reform 2013* study are promising: larger set of immigration policy-related items; data can be geocoded.
Thank you!

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Ethnic context and US–Mexico border proximity

- Histogram of County Hispanic Population % (2010)
- Histogram of County Hispanic Population % point change (2000-2010)
- Distribution of Distance to U.S.-Mexico Border (km)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Missing</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Should be way for undocumented immigrants to stay</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>1064</td>
<td>22</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>1086</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age (ln years)</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>1074</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education: College</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>0.25</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.43</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>0.50</td>
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<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy: getting worse</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>1067</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party: Democrat</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>1081</td>
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<tr>
<td>Party: Republican</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.50</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>0.31</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>24</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ideology: moderate</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>0.49</td>
<td>1062</td>
<td>24</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ideology: liberal</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.40</td>
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<td>24</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contact with undocumented immigrants</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>1067</td>
<td>19</td>
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<tr>
<td>County Hispanic % (2010)</td>
<td>11.81</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>79.58</td>
<td>12.57</td>
<td>1086</td>
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<tr>
<td>In County Hispanic % (2010)</td>
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<td>1.09</td>
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<tr>
<td>County Hispanic % point change (2000–2010)</td>
<td>3.18</td>
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<td>0.39</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>0.28</td>
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<td>Distance to US–Mexico border (km)</td>
<td>1659.78</td>
<td>23.45</td>
<td>3375.41</td>
<td>763.95</td>
<td>1086</td>
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<tr>
<td>In Distance to US–Mexico border (km)</td>
<td>7.22</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>8.12</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>1086</td>
<td>0</td>
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</tbody>
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Coefficient plots, county Hispanic %
Coefficient plots, county Hispanic % point change
Coefficient plots, distance to US–Mexico border