

Anti-Immigration Attitudes Among Hispanic Immigrants: The Role of Nativity and Generation

Ann Jiang, xjj017@ucsd.edu

Extended Abstract, Mar 22

FitzGerald PhD Group Discussion, Please Do Not Circulate

ABSTRACT

Immigration has become a defining issue in contemporary politics worldwide, often polarizing public discourse and shaping electoral outcomes (Hopkins and Hainmueller 2014). While much research focuses on *native-born* opposition to immigration, far less attention has been given to anti-immigration sentiments *within* immigrant communities—despite its notable rise in the 21st century (New York Times 2020, 2024). As immigration debates intensify globally, now is a critical time to assess this phenomenon. This project addresses this by systematically analyzing anti-immigration attitudes among Latino immigrants in the United States through the 2018 National Surveys of Latinos dataset. I consider determinants such as nativity and immigration generation status. Then, I investigate anti-immigration attitudes through a composite anti-immigration indicator. Findings reveal a clear generational divide. Foreign-born Hispanics exhibit significantly lower anti-immigration sentiment ($M = 0.64$) than U.S.-born Hispanics ($M = 0.90$). Third-generation Hispanics hold the highest restrictionist views ($\beta = 0.36$), while second-generation respondents do not significantly differ from first-generation immigrants. These results suggest that later-generation Hispanics are more likely to adopt restrictionist views, potentially due to socialization in the U.S. By providing a foundational empirical assessment, this paper contributes to debates on polarization and conservatism in immigrant communities, laying a foundation for future research on generational political shifts.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Puzzle of Immigration Attitudes Among Hispanic Immigrants

The question of immigration attitudes among Hispanic immigrants remains a puzzle in scholarship on political assimilation, despite its centrality to understanding broader shifts in U.S. politics. Existing literature suggests that immigrants tend to hold more liberal views on immigration policy than native-born populations (Hainmueller & Hopkins, 2014). However, recent electoral trends—such as increased Republican support among some Hispanic voters—have sparked discussions on the complexity of these attitudes (Flores & Schachter, 2018; Pedraza & Zhu, 2023). This study situates itself within these debates by examining the conditions under which Hispanic immigrants express anti-immigration sentiments.

Generational Differences in Immigration Attitudes

A key paradox in immigration politics is that later-generation Hispanics often express more restrictionist views than their foreign-born counterparts.

1. **The Assimilation Paradox.** Greater integration fosters stronger national identification, leading to tougher stances on immigration (Telles & Ortiz, 2008).
2. **Political Socialization.** Second-generation Latinos, especially in conservative environments, may internalize more restrictive views (Drouhot & Nee, 2019).
3. **Media Influence.** U.S.-born Hispanics are more exposed to mainstream and partisan media, which often frame immigration as a crisis (Merolla et al., 2013).
4. **By contrast,** foreign-born Hispanics tend to hold more pro-immigration views, likely because they have firsthand migration experiences that shape their perceptions (Massey & Sánchez, 2010).

Hispanic Political Realignment (2014—Present)

Political shifts in Hispanic voting behavior have gained widespread attention, particularly in the aftermath of the 2020 presidential election. Despite the common assumption that immigrant-origin communities lean Democratic due to the party's pro-immigrant rhetoric, recent studies indicate that Latino voters, including immigrants, exhibit heterogeneity in their policy preferences (García Bedolla & Michelson, 2012; Abrajano & Hajnal, 2017).

The rising conservative alignment of some Latino subgroups—particularly among Cubans and certain working-class Mexican Americans—raises questions about their immigration attitudes (Pew Research Center, 2022). While partisan realignments have been well-documented (e.g., Hajnal & Lee, 2011), few studies have systematically assessed whether this shift translates into explicit anti-immigration positions among foreign-born Hispanics.

2. HYPOTHESIS

H1: Foreign-born Hispanics will exhibit *lower* levels of anti-immigration sentiment than U.S.-born Hispanics.

Rationale 1: Lived experience with migration fosters more favorable views toward immigration policy (Massey & Sánchez, 2010).

H2: Second- and Third+-generation Hispanics will exhibit *progressively higher* levels of anti-immigration sentiment than First Gen.

Rationale 2: Generational shifts in political socialization and identity formation may influence immigration attitudes (Portes & Rumbaut, 2014).

3. METHODS

I drew on the 2018 National Survey of Latinos (NSL) as my dataset, focusing on 1,501 Hispanic respondents who are nationally representative. Nearly half of these respondents were native-born (49.6%), while the remaining 50.4% were foreign-born. In my model, I constructed a latent composite anti-immigration score ranging from 0 to 3, derived from three measures: border wall favorability (coded 0 for opposition and 1 for favor), perception of immigration levels (0 for “too few” or the “right amount” of immigrants, 1 for “too many”), and support for DACA extension (0 for opposition, 1 for favor).

Cronbach’s alpha test. To assess the internal consistency of the three-item composite anti-immigration score, I conducted a reliability analysis using Cronbach’s alpha. The resulting alpha was 0.61, indicating moderate internal consistency. While this value falls slightly below the conventional 0.70 threshold, it is acceptable given the brevity of the scale and the binary nature of the items. Notably, the item measuring perceptions of immigrant population size (“too many immigrants”) showed weaker alignment with the other two items. Dropping this item increased the alpha to 0.77, suggesting it may capture a somewhat distinct dimension of immigration attitudes. However, given its theoretical relevance, I retained all three items in the composite for the present analysis.

I used nativity (foreign-born vs. U.S.-born) and generation (first, second, or third-and-higher) as my main independent variables. I began with descriptive statistics to outline basic patterns in the data, then conducted t-tests and chi-square tests to explore group differences across the key measures. Finally, I ran regression analyses to assess the relative impact of nativity and generation on the latent anti-immigration score. By taking this approach, I aimed to capture both the overall distribution of attitudes and the specific sources of variation within the Hispanic population.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Anti-Immigration Scores

Cross-tabulation: Foreign-born vs. immigration_policy_cat:

```
##      0    1    2    3
##  0 312 111   96   77
##  1 299 167   64   19
```

Cross-tabulation: Generation vs. immigration_policy_cat:

```
##      0    1    2    3
## First Gen 301 167   64  20
## Second Gen 145  56   39  22
## Third+ Gen 159  54   54  52
```

Looking at the distribution of anti-immigration scores by nativity, we see a clear divide: among U.S.-born respondents, 312 scored 0 on the composite scale—indicating the lowest level of anti-immigration sentiment—while 77 scored the maximum of 3. In contrast, among foreign-born respondents, 299 scored 0 and only 19 scored 3. This suggests that foreign-born individuals are more concentrated at the lower end of anti-immigration sentiment, while U.S.-born respondents are more evenly distributed across the spectrum, with a greater share expressing higher levels of restriction.

When broken down by generation, the pattern becomes more pronounced. Among First Generation respondents (foreign-born), 301 scored 0 and only 20 scored 3. Second Generation respondents (U.S.-born with at least one foreign-born parent) showed a more dispersed distribution, with 145 scoring 0 and 22 scoring 3. Notably, Third+ Generation respondents (U.S.-born with U.S.-born parents) were the most polarized: only 159 scored 0, while 52 scored 3. This suggests that as generational distance from immigration increases, the likelihood of holding restrictive views on immigration also increases. See Figures 1 and 2 on the next page.

Table 1.

Category	Foreign-born	U.S.-born	Total
Sample Size	756	745	1,501
Average Age	46.5 years	37.5 years	42.0 years
Generational Breakdown	—	—	—
<i>First Generation</i>	759	—	759
<i>Second Generation</i>	—	318	318
<i>Third+ Generation</i>	—	405	405
Mean Anti-Immigration Score	0.64 (SD = 0.82)	0.90 (SD = 1.09)	0.77 (SD = 0.97)
Subgroup Trends	More pro	More anti	—

According to Table 1, Foreign-born respondents exhibit lower average anti-immigration sentiment ($M = 0.64$, $SD = 0.82$) compared to U.S.-born respondents ($M = 0.90$, $SD = 1.09$). On average, Third+ Generation respondents score 0.36 points higher on the composite anti-immigration scale than Foreign-born respondents. This difference corresponds to a 0.37 standard deviation increase in anti-immigration attitudes. Second Generation respondents show a smaller increase of 0.12 points, or roughly 0.13 standard deviations. These findings suggest that generational status has a meaningful, though modest, effect on anti-immigration attitudes among Hispanic respondents. The overall standard deviation of the composite score is 0.97, indicating substantial variation in respondents' attitudes.

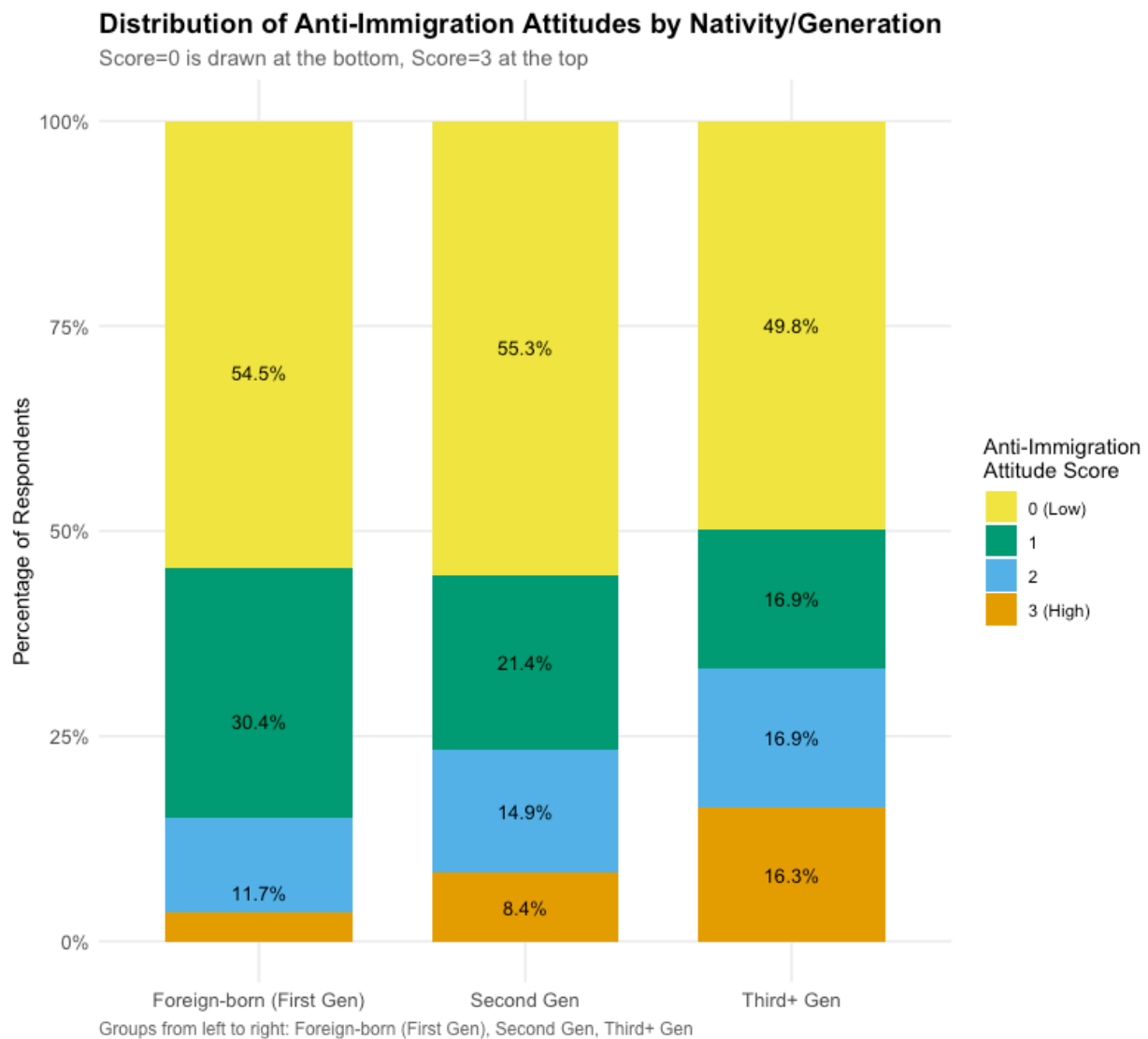


Figure 1.

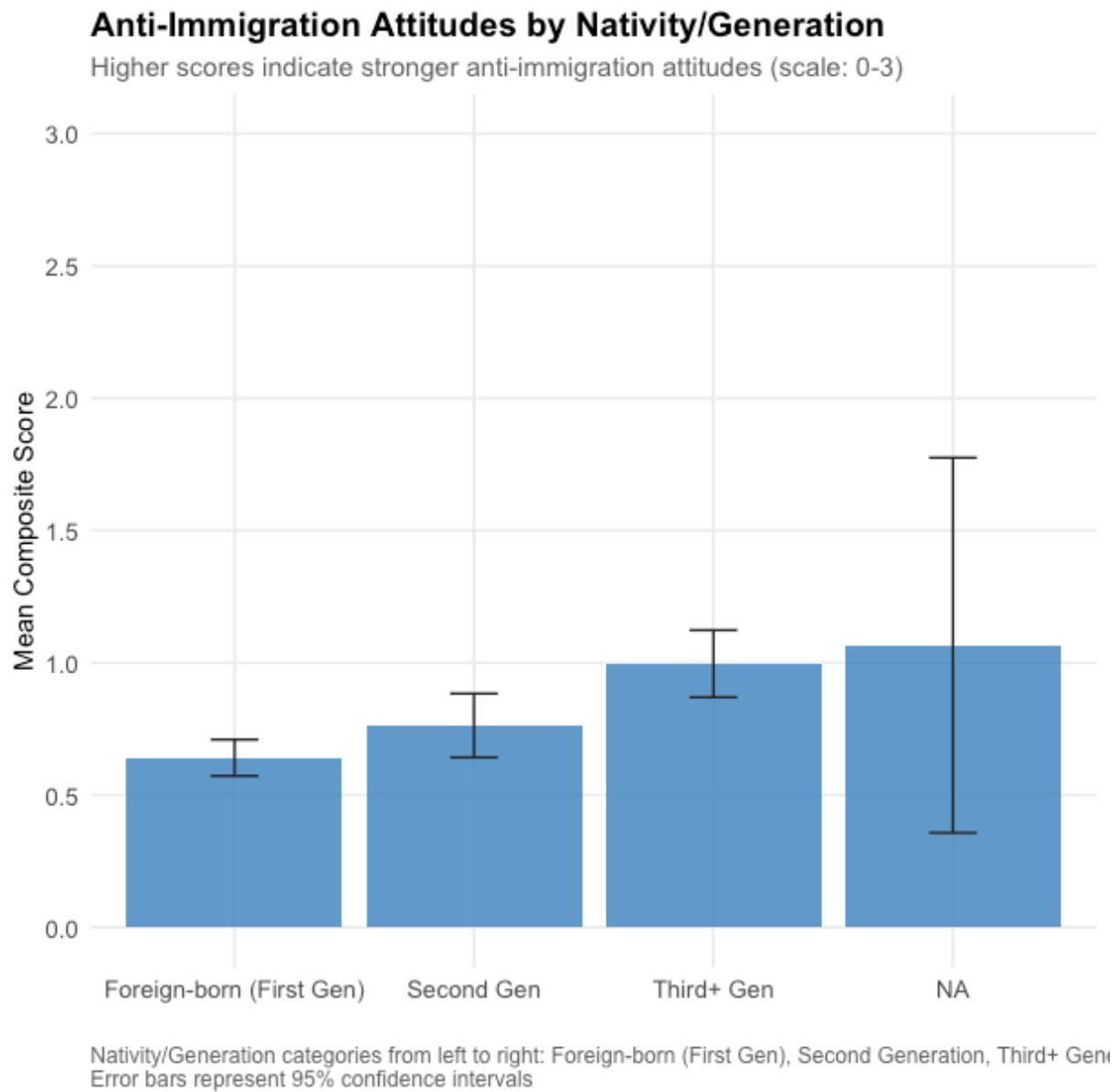


Figure 2.

4.2 T-Test

Chi-square tests confirm that there are statistically significant associations between both nativity and generation and levels of anti-immigration attitudes. Specifically, the distribution of composite anti-immigration scores differs significantly between foreign-born and U.S.-born respondents ($\chi^2 = 51.16, p < 0.001$), as well as across first, second, and third+ generation groups ($\chi^2 = 60.65, p < 0.001$).

Table 2.

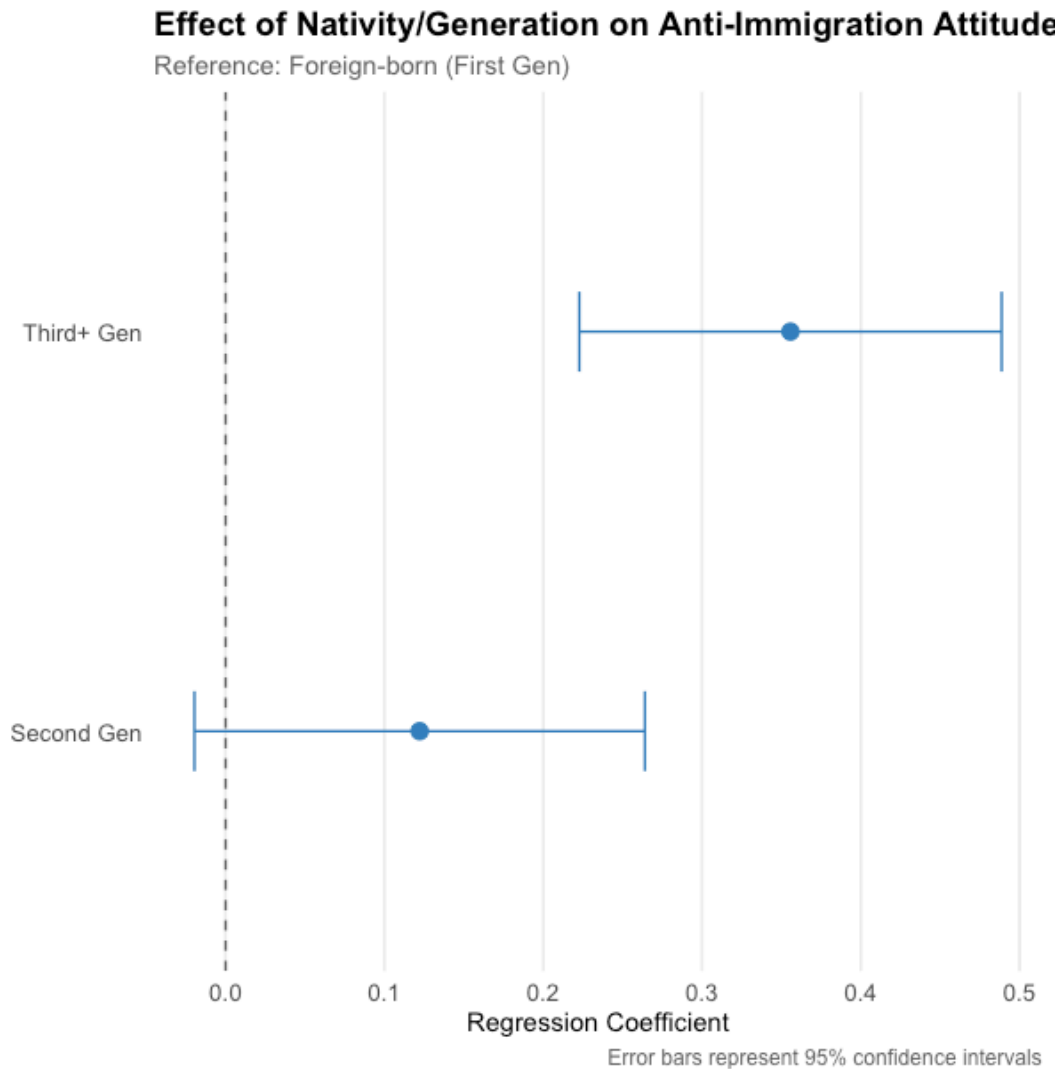
Comparison	t / χ^2	p-value
Composite Score (T-test)	4.49	< .001
Nativity vs. Attitude (χ^2)	51.16	< .001
Generation vs. Attitude (χ^2)	60.65	< .001

These results suggest that nativity and generational status are not randomly related to immigration attitudes. Instead, there is a clear pattern: foreign-born and first-generation respondents are more likely to hold pro-immigration views, while anti-immigration sentiment becomes more prevalent in later generations. The significant chi-square values indicate that these patterns are unlikely to be due to chance and reflect meaningful differences in how immigration is perceived across immigrant generations.

4.3 Regression

```
## Coefficients:
##               Estimate Std. Error t value Pr(>|t|)
## (Intercept)    0.64117    0.04113  15.589 < 2e-16 ***
## nativity_generationSecond Gen 0.12219    0.07236   1.689  0.0916 .
## nativity_generationThird+ Gen 0.35570    0.06784   5.243 1.89e-07 ***
## Residual standard error: 0.9637 on 1127 degrees of freedom
## (371 observations deleted due to missingness)
## Multiple R-squared:  0.02382,    Adjusted R-squared:  0.02209
## F-statistic: 13.75 on 2 and 1127 DF,  p-value: 1.257e-06
```

I observed that foreign-born respondents reported significantly lower anti-immigration attitudes compared to U.S.-born respondents. Meanwhile, individuals who identified as third-generation or higher had notably higher levels of anti-immigration sentiment. Second-generation respondents, however, did not differ significantly from their first-generation counterparts.



5. THEORETICAL INTERPRETATION

Political socialization. These patterns can be interpreted through several theoretical lenses. One possible explanation is political socialization: second-generation Hispanics are more immersed in U.S. partisan contexts than first-generation immigrants, which may expose them more consistently to political and media narratives around immigration. Over time, this exposure could reinforce more restrictive attitudes.

Social and economic assimilation. Another interpretation centers on social and economic identity. Later-generation Hispanics may develop a stronger identification with being "American," which can shape their views in alignment with nationalistic or exclusionary discourses. In contrast, newly arrived immigrants often perceive inclusive immigration policies as directly benefiting themselves or their communities.

6. FUTURE PLAN

Deepen my interpretation. Looking ahead, I plan to deepen this research by exploring the underlying factors that explain variation in U.S.-born Latinos' attitudes toward immigration. Key possibilities include political socialization, educational attainment, ethnic identity, economic position, and geographic location. To investigate these potential drivers, I will incorporate additional variables related to geography and socioeconomic context.

Examine Immigration experience and regional context. One promising direction is to examine how lived immigration experience—whether personal or familial—may mitigate the effects of political socialization. This line of inquiry could help explain why certain U.S.-born Latinos may find Republican messaging on immigration more or less resonant than others. Relatedly, incorporating geographic variables such as state and city location, along with local electoral outcomes and political leanings, may help contextualize how regional and political environments shape attitudes.

Map out generational trends. Another important next step is to construct a longitudinal dataset by merging multiple waves of the National Survey of Latinos (NSL) from 2002 to 2022. This would address a significant gap in the field, as most existing studies rely on cross-sectional snapshots. Asad (2020) has demonstrated the feasibility of merging waves of the NSL, having successfully combined data from 2007 to 2019 on the topic of deportation fear. A time-series approach would allow me to assess whether generational assimilation inevitably leads to more restrictive immigration attitudes, or whether that trend is shifting among younger Latinos today. For instance, if contemporary U.S.-born Latino youth are more supportive of immigration than prior generations, this would challenge dominant theories of acculturation.

Map out longitudinal trend: divergence, convergence, or stability? Using longitudinal data, I can also distinguish between horizontal (temporal) and vertical (group comparison) change. Horizontal change refers to how support for immigration has shifted over time among both native-born and foreign-born Latinos—allowing for an assessment of whether these attitudes are converging or diverging. Vertical change refers to the absolute difference in attitudes between these groups at a single point in time. Although prior research has established that first-generation Latinos are generally more pro-immigration than later generations, little work has tracked whether this gap is shrinking or growing over time. If I find evidence of convergence, this could suggest rising cross-generational solidarity or shared economic conditions. If divergence is occurring, it may reflect assimilation-driven shifts in attitudes. Either outcome would contribute to a major, unresolved question in immigration research.

Learn advanced techniques. To enhance this analysis, I also plan to employ more advanced techniques, including interaction effects, mediation and moderation analysis (e.g., by gender), and controls for variables such as age, education, income, and partisanship. I will also explore subgroup comparisons, such as by country of origin. Eventually, I may use causal inference methods to assess how major political events—such as the introduction of DACA or the Trump and Biden presidencies—have influenced Latino immigration attitudes over time. The lack of

longitudinal studies capturing opinions before and after key immigration policies represents a major gap that I aim to fill.

Leverage machine learning techniques I've learned. Given the size and richness of the dataset, I may also experiment with machine learning approaches, such as deep learning models, to uncover additional relevant variables or patterns.

Seek mentors. Throughout this process, I intend to consult with UC San Diego mentors (April Sutton, David FitzGerald, John Skrentny) and outside mentors, including Asad Asad—who has published with the NSL dataset—and René Flores, whose work on Latino migration and public opinion provides methodological and theoretical guidance.

Extend into a mixed-methods project. Finally, I plan to extend this quantitative work into a sequential, survey-informed interview project. This mixed-methods design would allow me to contextualize individual beliefs, reasoning, and experiences behind the broader trends identified in the data.

REFERENCES

- Abrajano, M., & Hajnal, Z. L. (2017). *White backlash: Immigration, race, and American politics*. Princeton University Press.
- Asad, A. L. (2020). “*Latinos’ Deportation Fears by Citizenship and Legal Status, 2007–2018.*” *PNAS*, 117(16): 8836–8844 ([Latinos’ deportation fears by citizenship and legal status, 2007 to 2018](#)).
- Barreto, M. A., & Segura, G. M. (2014). *Latino America: How America’s most dynamic population is poised to transform the politics of the nation*. PublicAffairs.
- Drouhot, L. G., & Nee, V. (2019). Assimilation and the second generation: A theory of bounded rationality. *American Journal of Sociology*, 124(2), 430-484.
- Flores, R. D., & Schachter, A. (2018). Who are the “illegals”? The social construction of illegality in the United States. *American Sociological Review*, 83(5), 839-868.
- Flores-González, N. (2017). *Citizens but not Americans: Race and belonging among Latino millennials*. NYU Press.
- García Bedolla, L., & Michelson, M. R. (2012). *Mobilizing inclusion: Transforming the electorate through get-out-the-vote campaigns*. Yale University Press.
- Hainmueller, J., & Hopkins, D. J. (2014). Public attitudes toward immigration. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 17, 225-249.
- Hajnal, Z., & Lee, T. (2011). *Why Americans don’t join the party: Race, immigration, and the failure (of political parties) to engage the electorate*. Princeton University Press.
- Hopkins, D. J., & Hainmueller, J. (2014). The hidden American immigration consensus: A conjoint analysis of attitudes toward immigrants. *American Journal of Political Science*, 59(3), 529-548.
- Krogstad, J. M., & Lopez, M. H. (2021). *Hispanic voters’ party affiliation and views on immigration*. *Pew Research Center*.
- Massey, D. S., & Sánchez, M. (2010). Latinos and the U.S. racial order: The role of immigration in shaping racial identity. *Daedalus*, 129(4), 151-177.
- Merolla, J. L., Ramakrishnan, S. K., & Haynes, C. (2013). “Illegal,” “Undocumented,” or “Unauthorized”: Equivalency frames, issue frames, and public opinion on immigration. *Perspectives on Politics*, 11(3), 789-807.
- New York Times. (2020, 2024). *The rise of immigration restrictionism in immigrant communities*.
- Pedraza, F. I., & Zhu, L. (2023). The political incorporation of Latino immigrants in the United States. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 26, 99-117.
- Pew Research Center. (2018). *National Survey of Latinos Dataset*.

Pew Research Center. (2022). Latino voters and the midterm elections: Views on immigration and political parties.

Portes, A., & Rumbaut, R. G. (2014). *Immigrant America: A portrait* (4th ed.). University of California Press.

Telles, E. E., & Ortiz, V. (2008). *Generations of exclusion: Mexican Americans, assimilation, and race*. Russell Sage Foundation.

Wong, J. S. (2010). *Democracy's promise: Immigrants and American civic institutions*. University of Michigan Press.