

Perceptions of Immigration as a Threat to the Good Life in Rural America

By

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## **Abstract**

Rural attitudes differ from those of the general public because much of rural America tends to be or recently was predominantly non-Hispanic white. Attitudes towards immigrants and immigration have changed in rural America as new immigrants came into rural communities that did not fit with the dominant culture and ethnicity of rural residents. Rural whites are more likely find immigrants, especially non-European immigrants, to be threatening. They are more likely to perceive immigrants to be a threat to their identity, community, culture, political power, and economic well-being because the new immigrants do not fit with rural whites' stronger attachment to the identity of American as being white. However, this perceived threat may be mitigated by increased social contact with immigrants in their community.

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## **Chapter 1:**

### **Introduction**

Relatively little research in political science focuses on the workings of the vast swaths of rural America, while most of the work studying intergroup relations, and racial and ethnic politics, generally examines urban areas and neighborhoods. Demographers have found that the population is shrinking in many rural areas and 1 in 3 U.S. counties are “dying.” However, immigrants are helping to avert such losses and are even gains in population in some rural communities (Pew Charitable Trusts 2014). The Latino population in rural areas grew at the fastest rate of any racial or ethnic group since 1990, and has expanded out of the traditional destinations of the Southwest into the rural areas of the Great Plains, Midwest, the Carolinas, and the Deep South (United States Census Bureau 2011).

Globalization and economic changes are at least partly responsible for these shifts in demographics. Over the past few decades, meatpacking and other food-processing industries have increasingly moved out of the cities and into sparsely populated rural areas in right-to-work states. This was done to avoid the collective bargaining power of unions and the environmental regulations found more often in more densely populated areas, as well as to move “closer to the raw materials – the cattle”(Golash-Boza 2012, 12). When doing so, these industries moved from areas of high unemployment to areas of relatively low unemployment, which according to a supply and demand perspective would lead one to believe they would have to increase wages to attract workers. However, these industries sought a different and more manipulable source of labor that would allow them to keep labor costs and likelihood of labor organization low: recent immigrants (ibid).

This research seeks to explore how these changes in rural communities has affected how the more established white residents see the newcomers, and what influence this has on their racial and immigration policy preferences. Rural attitudes differ from those of the general public because rural America tends to be (or recently was) predominantly white. I hypothesize that rural whites are more likely find immigrants, especially non-European immigrants, to be threatening because rural whites are more likely to perceive a nativist and white American identity.

I also hypothesize rural whites are more likely to perceive immigrants to be threat. They are more likely to perceive immigrants to be a threat to their identity, community, culture, political power, and economic well-being. This threat is demonstrated in the numerous anti-immigrant policies proposed in rural municipalities and states over the past decade. I also examine whether rural whites' perceptions of economic or ethnocultural threat are more influential on their support for restrictive immigration policy. However, this threat may be mitigated by increased social contact with immigrants within their community.

### ***Theory: Racial Threat, Social Identity, and Social Contact***

Two competing theories have sought to explain what happens when different racial or ethnic groups live in the same area and must share economic and political resources. Social contact theory posits that increased social contact with different ethnic and/or racial groups leads to more tolerant opinions of those groups. The racial threat hypothesis argues quite the opposite in that increased contact and proximity can lead in turn to increased economically or culturally-based competition and hostility between groups. Previous literature has left the conflict between the theories unresolved. This research seeks to explore the contexts in which social contact and

racial threat influence whites' individual attitudes about their new neighbors within the context of changing rural municipalities, and if one theory lends more insight in this context than the other.

Residential racial and ethnic context plays a significant role in shaping whites' individual attitudes and policy preferences towards minorities and immigration (Gimpel and Lay 2008; Rocha et al. 2011; Rocha and Espino 2009; Tolbert 2003; Welch et al. 2001). Both the racial threat hypothesis and social contact theory attempt to explain the influence of individuals' neighbors and their surrounding neighborhood on their political attitudes and behaviors, as well as feelings towards minority groups. However, they often take divergent paths in theorizing whether increased diversity in one's social contacts and neighborhood lead to increased tolerance or to increased conflict. While they are not entirely at odds, the findings of research based in these theories provide evidence that seems contradictory unless context is taken into consideration.

First, social identity theory provides some insights into the roots of racial threat, as it explores the impact of one's own group identity and the desire for positive comparisons to other groups on individuals' behavior. According to this theory, people differentiate between in-groups, which they belong to, and out-groups, which they do not (Tajfel and Turner 1979). Discrimination between groups can occur as a result of an individual's motivation to evaluate one's own group more positively than other out-groups (Tajfel and Turner 1986). In other words, people tend to categorize the social world into "us" vs. "them." This paradigm leads to intergroup competition over resources, both real and perceived. The social identity theory perspective also provides insight into how scapegoating of out-groups occurs during times of trouble, such as an economic recession. Its proponents argue that scapegoating is a result of

social causality assessments (Hogg and Abrams 1988). Individuals find out-groups to blame for the troubles of their own in-group. This relates to the common stereotype that immigrants take the jobs of native-born Americans.

The racial threat hypothesis suggests that whites identify as a group and feel threatened when minorities are able to compete with them for economic or political power and resources (Hajnal 2001). Whites Americans have long held the upper hand in both the political and social realms, and may feel threatened when they perceive that this preferred position is threatened in the presence of growing minority groups. This occurs not only when a person from a minority group wins elected office, but also in the neighborhood context with intergroup competition over jobs and other resources. It is within this context that this research focuses focus, as our data was collected from rural communities in which all residents must share, or compete for, the same limited economic resources and jobs. Citrin et al found attitudes toward immigration to be strongly tied to one's perception of economic vulnerability (1997). Within the sampled communities, and most of rural America, whites have long held a preferred position in regards to economic and political power, but the ethnic and racial makeup of rural America is changing with large numbers of immigrants from Latin America moving to these areas to fill meatpacking and agricultural jobs over the past few decades (United States Census Bureau, 2011) (Johnson, 2012).

A perception of racial threat can be expressed in different ways, such as partisan identification, support for extremist candidates, and support for the death penalty. Stephan, Ybarra, and Bachman find subjective perceptions of threat from Latino immigrants to in-group political and economic resources among whites, to be a significant predictor of racial prejudice (Stephan, Ybarra, and Bachman 1999). The Democratic Party's support for the Civil Rights Act

of 1964 has over the past four decades turned the once solidly Democratic south over to the more racially conservative Republican Party (Carmines and Stimson 1989). Other research has found, when whites feel that they, or their group, are being threatened politically or economically by black advances, they oppose policies intended to help blacks, such as busing, or they support racist candidates, such as David Duke or George Wallace (Bobo 1983, 1988). In rural Louisiana, research found that for the higher proportions of African-Americans in a parish were associated with declines in the percentage of white voters who were registered as Democrats, and an increase in white voters registered as Republicans (Giles and Hertz 1994). Proximity to a larger proportion of blacks can also lead to increased support for the death penalty among whites that hold prejudice views (Soss, Lanbein, and Metelko 2003).

Another theory that is examined in this research is the social contact theory. As originally outlined by Gordon Allport in the mid-1950s, social contact theory assumes that increased interracial contact “promotes positive racial attitudes” and lack of such contact leads to ignorance and hostility (Allport 1954). Much of the social contact literature since has focused on changes in individuals’ attitudes based on the racial composition of communities in which they reside with mixed results in regards to the effect of increased contact. Using national survey data, Sigelman and Welch find that both interracial friendships and neighborhood contacts increase whites’ desire for racial integration with blacks (1993). Similar results come from Hood and Morris, with whites residing in areas with large Latino and Asian populations tended to favor less restrictive immigration policies (1997).

Another set of research posits that intergroup hostility has increased in cities with larger minority populations (Oliver and Wong 2003).. Tolbert conducted a census-tract-level analysis of white support for California’s Proposition 209, an initiative aimed at ending Affirmative

Action in the state. Her results suggest that white support for the initiative was higher in tracts with larger Latino, African-American, or Asian-American populations, even after controlling for other factors (Tolbert, 2003). A study of rural communities with growing Latino immigrant populations, found that tolerance for diversity was contextually conditioned by the number of immigrants that had settled in a neighborhood, with negative attitudes increasing as diversity increased (Gimpel & Lay, 2008)

Other authors have sought to rectify the differences between these theories (Rocha & Espino, 2009). Rocha and Espino found that both the size of Latino population and level of residential segregation in a neighborhood have an effect on the influences of racial threat and contact on whites' attitudes (ibid). In other words, they argue that racial threat and social contact are not necessarily directly competing forces that determine whites' attitudes toward minorities, and their influence varies depending on the racial context. The level of residential segregation was an "intervening factor that makes the conditions for either racial threat or social contact more likely", which in turn affects whites' attitudes towards Latinos (ibid). Also, of specific interest to this research, white's attitudes toward English-only and immigration policies were "significantly related to changes in size of Latino population conditional on levels of residential segregation" becoming much less supportive of such policies in integrated neighborhoods with larger Latino populations (ibid).

Beyond the immediate threat to their own community, whites may also feel resentment towards the government over policies that are targeted towards aiding minority students. Policies that provide aid to minority groups are a good example of policies that may be viewed as asking for the sacrifice of some but not others. There is tendency among some whites to perceive efforts to aid minority groups as an effort to directly disadvantage white Americans

(Lipsitz 1996). A large majority of white Americans claim to be in support of racial equality, but they differ in their support of these policies, such as Affirmative Action or educational quotas, that are designed to ensure it (Hetherington and Globetti 2002).

To answer these questions I will analyze multiple survey datasets to assess rural whites' perceived threats from immigrants. This includes original data drawn from a face-to-face survey of rural communities in Kansas and Nebraska, in which I was a co-investigator. The analysis will explore differences in rural vs. urban perspectives on the value of newcomers to the United States and their communities. It will also look at how rural whites are more likely to perceive immigrants and refugees to be threats to their culture and community, as well their political and economic power. I argue that this perception of threat is greater in rural areas because whites in rural areas conception of the American identity is white and Christian, and that rural whites adhere more strongly to this identity than those in urban and suburban areas. Finally, I will examine the how increased intergroup social contact may alleviate the rural whites' perceptions of threat from immigrant and minority groups within their communities.

## **Outline of the Dissertation**

### **Chapter 2: Rural vs. Urban: Differing Attitudes Towards Immigrants**

Chapter 2 begins by discussing how immigration is changing the demographic makeup large swaths of rural America. Large parts of rural areas the U.S. were near homogeneously white just three decades ago. In 1980, nearly half over U.S. counties (over 1400) had populations that were 98 percent or greater white (Ingraham 2015). By the time of the 2010 census only 149 counties were that level of homogeneous white. During this same timeframe,

Latino immigration has increased rapidly in rural communities, including many of that had been homogeneously white.

Meanwhile, much of rural America suffers from stagnant or shrinking numbers due to “brain drain” and/or aging populations. The population is shrinking in many rural areas and 1 in 3 U.S. counties are “dying.” However, immigrants are helping to avert rural population loss. According to U.S. Census data, where there is growth in rural areas, minorities account for 83 percent, and that the Hispanic population in nonmetropolitan areas grew at the fastest rate of any racial or ethnic group during the 1990s and post-2000 time period (Johnson 2006, 2012).

This chapter seeks to examine how changing demographics in rural American communities due to growth in immigrant populations affected attitudes regarding immigration. It will also look at how rural whites’ attitudes on immigration policy differ from those of the general public in the U.S., and whether a larger immigrant population affects policy preferences amongst rural whites

I hypothesize that rural whites’ will tend to have more negative attitudes than their urban and suburban counterparts. I also expect to find that growth in the foreign-born population in rural whites’ communities tends to increase the likelihood of their support for restrictive immigration policy. Additionally, I hypothesize that perceptions of threat from immigration will increase the likelihood whites’ support for restrictive policy.

This chapter will use data from the Pew Research Center 2006 Immigration Survey. Using the national survey portion of this dataset I will compare the rural residents’ attitudes towards immigrants to their urban and suburban counterparts. The survey asked a range of

questions seeking to gauge respondents' attitudes towards immigrants, as well as their immigration policy preferences.

### **Chapter 3: Perceived Threat from Immigration Amongst Rural Whites: Cultural or Economic?**

The United States enjoys a love/hate relationship with its identity as a nation of immigrants. On one hand, many relish in its identity as a “melting pot,” in which many peoples became one (E Pluribus Unum), on the other, the nation’s immigration policies have been rooted in cycles of xenophobia and racism. Over the past 130 years, politicians have shaped their arguments with these conflicting social constructions in mind, often trying appeal to both sides when trying to legally define *who* is an American and *who* deserves to be an American. These cycles of immigration policies generally coincide with times of economic trouble and to this day seek to differentiate between the “right” and “wrong” kinds of immigrants. Debates usually center around “(1) who is worthy of being considered for full incorporation into the nation and (2) who is incapable of assimilating and taking on the characteristics and responsibilities associated with full political and social membership” (Newton 2005, 139).

In chapter 3, I will explore the roles of social identity and perceptions of threat, both realistic and symbolic, in the formation of immigration and racial policy attitudes in rural America. Social and group identities have been shown previous research to influence attitudes towards out-groups, party identification, ideology, and policy preferences. For example, Deborah Schildkraut, argues that national identities are “key players in shaping how people respond to diversity and public policy debates” (2011). Using survey experiments, researchers find that when presented with data detailing demographic shifts toward a majority-minority

future, white Americans across the ideological spectrum endorse conservative policy positions more strongly, implicating group-status threat (Craig and Richeson 2014).

### *Research Questions*

1. How do the content of and the attachment to American identity in rural areas vary from those of the general public?
2. How do such variations affect perceptions of immigrants amongst rural whites?
3. Do rural whites consider immigration to be more of a cultural or economic threat?

### *Hypotheses*

1. Rural whites' have a greater attachment to an American identity that is white.
2. This attachment is associated with rural whites' greater perceived threat from Latino immigrants.
3. Rural whites tend to see immigration is seen more as a cultural than economic threat.

This chapter will utilize data from the 21st Century Americanism Survey (21-CAS). The 21-CAS survey interviewed 2,800 respondents by phone on questions of race, ethnicity, social identity and immigration in the fall of 2004. The dataset allow me to subset the data by metropolitan status to allow comparison between rural and other areas. The survey includes questions that allow testing the influence of the content of social identity held by rural whites on their policy preferences and attitudes towards immigrants in their communities. I will use these questions to construct variables to use in a regression analysis testing the effects of social identity of the policy preferences and attitudes of rural whites. The survey also includes batteries of questions that allow testing the influence of economic and ethnocultural threat on attitudes and policy preferences of rural whites.

I expect the results to confirm the hypotheses found above, which would help that the increased perception of threat from immigrants in amongst rural whites is at least partially due to how they view themselves in comparison to the newcomers to their communities. I expect to

find that rural whites are more likely to see white and Christian as the default American identity. In turn, those who hold this view will be more likely to support restrictive racial and immigration policy, and to express negative opinions of racial and religious minorities.

#### **Chapter 4: Meeting the New Neighbors: Cure for Rural America's Animosity Towards Immigrants?**

Lay argues that the rural communities lower levels of residential segregation, compared to urban areas, and smaller pool of collective resources, such as schools and retail, creates the opportunity for greater interaction between groups (Lay 2012). Lay finds that the limited housing of rural communities, with the exception of the most affluent neighborhoods, makes it “nearly impossible” to find anywhere to live but ethnically integrated neighborhoods (Ibid, 134). Chapter 4 seeks to test whether social contact can mitigate the perceptions of threat found in previous chapters.

Past research has primarily focused on residential context to test conflicting theories of racial threat and intergroup contact, and has found that proximity does not always necessarily lead to tolerance or perceptions of threat. I hypothesize that other factors such as type of intergroup contact, friendship or the forced proximity of the workplace, may provide new ways in which to test these theories, and that social contact in the workplace may trigger perceptions of racial threat.

The racial threat hypothesis has been tested in many regions across the country, at the state level, and metropolitan areas (Tolbert and Hero 1996, 2001.; Welch et al. 2001). Testing it in the rural community context can provide valuable insights, as rapid demographic change is happening in many parts of the rural U.S. With the white population stagnant or declining in

many rural areas of the country (United States Census Bureau, 2011), continuing significant growth in the Latino population could result in significant shifts in political power in the not so distant future, in parts of the country where whites have long held onto the majority of political and economic power. In these changing rural communities, intergroup contact is inevitable. Whites and Latinos must share the more limited resources that rural municipalities have to offer. Not only are there fewer options for employment, but there are often only a few elementary schools, one high school, one or two grocery stores, and one Wal-Mart.

### *Research Questions*

This chapter seeks to reconcile the effects of the racial threat hypothesis and social contact theory. While seemingly contradictory and competing, this paper demonstrates that the influence of each may vary by context. The social contact theory posits that increased social contact with different ethnic and/or racial groups tends to lead to more tolerant opinions of those groups. The racial threat hypothesis argues the opposite in that increased contact and proximity may lead to increased competition and hostility between groups that can be economically or culturally-based. Therefore, I seek to explore the following questions:

- How does social contact with Latinos affect the policy preferences of whites' in rural communities on issues dealing with immigrant students?
- How are the anticipated benefits of social contact affected by perceptions of racial threat, or that Latinos are taking whites' political and economic resources?

### *Hypotheses*

Intergroup contact alone will not create more tolerant stances towards Latinos and immigrants, as well as support for the policies that benefit them. I argue the context of that

contact matters. The forced contact of the work place is different than the consensual contact of friendship. Whites with Latino coworkers in these smaller communities with fewer economic opportunities may see the newcomers as a threat to their economic well-being. Meanwhile, having Latino friends will also decrease perceptions of racial threat, or that Latinos are taking whites' economic and political resources. I hypothesize that:

*Hypothesis 1:* Whites in rural areas who report having friends who are Latino will be more likely to prefer policies that aid immigrant students.

*Hypothesis 2:* Whites in rural areas who report having friends who are Latino will be less likely to express perceptions of racial threat.

*Hypothesis 3:* Whites who report having Latino coworkers will be less likely to support measures that benefit immigrant students

*Hypothesis 4:* Whites who report having Latino coworkers will be more likely to express a perception of racial threat.

*Hypothesis 5:* Perceptions of racial threat will significantly decrease support for policies aiding immigrant students, and increase support for policies that would restrict their rights.

*Hypothesis 6:* Whites who report having Latino coworkers and more conservative ideology will be even more likely to express a perceptions of racial threat.

The data used in this chapter is drawn from the 2011 KU Rural Attitudes Survey. The survey included questions about the racial or ethnic makeup of their friends and coworkers, as well as whether they have any close friends, relatives or colleagues who are immigrants. I use responses to these questions to construct the primary independent variables that I use to test the effects of social contact and racial threat. Also included are variables for respondents' perceptions of immigrants' willingness to assimilate, whether they see immigrants as criminals, and whether they consider immigrants as a burden on society. To measure for respondents' more general attitudes towards newcomers in their communities, I have included variables that are

measures of respondents' views of Latinos in general, and a measure of respondents' perceptions of shared commonality with Latinos.

### ***Conclusion***

In conclusion, this research seeks to examine how the changing demographics of rural America have influenced native-born whites attitudes towards the newcomers in their communities. It also seeks to explore the roots of rural whites perceptions of threat from immigrants, and whether the perceptions of cultural threat and more influential to their attitudes and policy preferences than perceptions of economic threat. Finally, it will look at whether increased social contact, and different types of social contact, influence the immigration policy preferences and perceptions of threat from immigrants of rural whites who live in demographically changing communities.

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## **Chapter 2:**

### **Rural vs. Urban: Differing Attitudes Towards Immigrants**

The politics of place in America has received limited scholarly attention from political scientists in recent decades. Sociologists have long been concerned with this divide, and entire journals are devoted to the study of rural sociology. However, a number of works suggest that we cannot continue to neglect the urban-rural divide in America and its effect on politics. In a recent work, Bishop argues that Americans have been self-“sorting” into clusters of like-minded communities increasing the “cultural distance” between Americans (2008). His evidence on rural areas demonstrates that levels of inequality are increasing, and that rural areas also faced the brunt of the human cost of the recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

It is not just demographics, socioeconomic indicators, and war causalities that separate the rural from the urban; the divide is having important impacts on our political system. In 2004, every city over 500,000 voted for Democratic nominee John Kerry (Raban 2010). Broken down more specifically, towns under a population of 25,000 had a Democratic voting rate of 36 percent, compared to 52 percent for cities over 300,000 (Gimpel and Karnes 2006). Analysis of presidential elections has shown that a major influence on what distinguishes “purple” from red or blue states is that within purple states are rural communities that vote closely with the urban population (McKee 2008). Rural areas also elect consistently fewer female candidates their urban counterparts (Stiles and Schwab 2009). Size of community was also found to be a better predictor of attitudes than common metrics like income and occupational prestige (Glenn and Hill 1977). The urban-rural divide is not without electoral consequence, and as such deserves

more scholarly attention. The intention of this chapter is to explore the whether there is a divide between urban and rural attitudes regarding immigration.

Over the past few decades, meatpacking and other food-processing industries have increasingly moved out of the cities and into sparsely populated rural agricultural areas. This was done to avoid the collective bargaining power of unions and the environmental regulations found more often in more densely populated areas, as well as to move “closer to the raw materials – the cattle” (Golash-Boza 2012). When doing so, these industries moved from areas of high unemployment to areas of relatively low unemployment, which according to a supply and demand perspective would lead one to believe they would have to increase wages to attract workers. However, these industries sought a different and more manipulable source of labor that would allow them to keep labor costs and likelihood of labor organization low: undocumented immigrants (ibid).

Large parts of rural parts of the U.S. were near homogeneously white just three decades ago. In 1980, 1,412 U.S. counties, nearly half, had populations that were 98 percent or greater white (Ingraham 2015). That number had shrunk to only 149 counties by the 2010 census. Figures 2.1 and 2.2 are national maps broken down by county made using a map creator on Social Explorer’s website using census data that illustrate this change from 1990 to 2010 (2015a, 2015b). The highlighted counties indicated non-Hispanic white portions of the population greater than 98 percent. Figure 2.1 shows that much of the rural Great Plains, the Midwest, and New England were very white in 1990, while Figure 2.2 displays the greatly reduced number of homogeneously white counties that remained two decades later.

[Figure 2.1 here]

[Figure 2.2 here}

During this timeframe, Latino immigration increased dramatically in rural areas of the country, including many of those areas that had been almost entirely white. Figure 2.3 below displays how the Latino population has expanded out of the traditional areas of the Southwest into the rural areas of the Plains states, upper Midwest, Carolinas, and even the Deep South(United States Census Bureau 2011). The darker the blue the greater the increase in Latino population.

[Figure 2.3 here]

Meanwhile, much of rural America suffers from stagnant or shrinking numbers due to “brain drain” and/or aging populations. Demographer Kenneth Johnson finds that the population is shrinking in many rural areas and 1 in 3 U.S. counties are “dying,” and that immigrants are helping to avert the losses. Using U.S. Census data, Johnson finds that where there is growth in rural areas, minorities account for 83 percent, and that the Hispanic population in nonmetropolitan areas grew at the fastest rate of any racial or ethnic group during the 1990s and post-2000 time period (Johnson 2006, 2012).

“The young people leave and the older adults stay in place and age. Unless something dramatic changes - for instance, new development such as a meatpacking plant to attract young Hispanics – these areas are likely to have more and more natural decrease” (Johnson, 2012).

Figure 2.4 illustrates how immigration is slowing or *even* overcoming population decline in the central United States on the county level (Pew Charitable Trusts 2014). Light green indicates that foreign-born population growth has countered native-born loss to slow overall population loss. Meanwhile, the counties marked dark green have experienced foreign-born population growth that has overcome native-born losses to create net growth in overall

population. Much of this change has taken place in the rural counties of middle America, in Texas, Oklahoma, Iowa, as well as counties in Kansas and Nebraska that were surveyed in the collection of data used in Chapter 4.

[Figure 2.4 here]

### *Perceptions of Threat, Population Changes, and Attitudes towards Immigration*

This research will explore how these demographic changes in rural America have affected the attitudes and policy preferences of rural residents. The group threat hypothesis posits that individuals will feel threatened when they perceive out-groups to be taking their economic or political power (Key 1949; D. R. Kinder and Sears 1981; Brader, Valentino, and Suhay 2008; Craig and Richeson 2014; Burns and Gimpel 2000). The racial threat hypothesis was originally identified by V.O. Key to describe a source of hostility in intergroup relations in the South (1949). Key noted that an increased presence of African-Americans in a community led increased backlash towards them from the whites. Following this hypothesis would suggest that non-Hispanic whites identify as a group and feel threatened when minorities are able to compete with them for power and resources (Hajnal 2001). White Americans have long held the upper hand in both the political and social realms, and may feel threatened when they perceive that this preferred position is threatened by the presence of growing minority groups (Lipset 1996).

Residential racial and ethnic context of a community can play a significant role in shaping the nature of whites' individual attitudes and policy preferences towards minorities and immigration (Tolbert and Hero 2001b; Tolbert 2003; Rocha et al. 2011; Rocha and Espino 2009). Because this research looks at the effects of demographic changes to rural communities, how population change takes place is also of interest. Looking at white-Latino relations,

Newman and Velez find that communities that had few Latinos initially and then a growing population due to immigration, led to a tendency amongst the white population to feel threatened and to hold anti-immigration views (Newman and Velez 2014). Whereas, they find that communities that had a larger preexisting Latino population and then experience a rapid growth in the immigrant population, showed that the white population felt less threatened and reduced opposition to immigration.

Lay argues that the rural communities lower levels of residential segregation, compared to urban areas, and smaller pool of collective resources, such as schools and retail, creates the opportunity for greater interaction between groups (2012). Lay finds that the limited housing of rural communities, with the exception of the most affluent neighborhoods, makes it “nearly impossible” to find anywhere to live but ethnically integrated neighborhoods (Ibid, 134). To account for how size of immigrant population may influence attitudes, a variable of the percentage of foreign-born population in the communities of the respondents is included in the models.

### ***Research Questions and Hypotheses***

Immigration has brought relatively rapid change to many of the rural areas of the U.S. The goal of this chapter is to examine how rural attitudes may differ than those in urban and suburban areas. Also, this chapter will look at how changes in immigrant population influence attitudes about immigrants and immigration policy. This chapter will address the following research questions:

1. Have changing demographics in rural American communities due to growth in immigrant populations affected attitudes regarding immigration?

1. How do rural whites' attitudes on immigration policy differ from those of the general public in the U.S.?
2. How does a larger immigrant population affect policy preferences amongst rural whites?

I hypothesize that rural whites' will tend to have more negative attitudes than their urban and suburban counterparts, and that growth in the foreign-born population in their community will tend to increase the likelihood of rural white support for restrictive immigration policy.

### ***Data and Analysis***

This chapter will utilize data from the Pew Research Center 2006 Immigration Survey (2006). The survey interviewed a national sample of 2,000 respondents by phone in the spring of 2006. This dataset allow me to subset the data by metropolitan status to allow comparison between rural and other areas. Due to the attitudes of whites being the key interest to this research, I have subset the dataset for this chapter to only include the observations of white respondents, of which there are 1304. Of this 1304, 330 are from urban areas, 683 suburban, and 291 rural.

### ***Dependent Variables***

The dependent variables for this chapter are immigration policy preferences that have been coded as dichotomous that are used in logit models. The first dependent variable is preferred level of immigration. Respondents were asked to identify their preference of whether the number of immigrants permitted to come to the United States to live should be "increased, decreased, or left the same as it is now". Responses indicating that the level of immigration should be decreased are coded as 1, with all other responses coded as 0. 40 percent of white

respondents in the national portion of the 2006 Pew Immigration Survey said that they would prefer a decreased level of immigration.

The second dependent variable is support prohibiting undocumented children from attending public schools. 29 white respondents in the survey indicated a preference for such a policy. Respondents were asked the following question, and asked whether they favored or opposed such a policy: “Should the children of illegal immigrants who are in the U.S. be permitted to attend public schools, or don’t you think so?” Responses favoring that policy are coded as 1, with all other responses coded as 0.

The third dependent variable is a preference to deny government assistance to legal immigrants. The variable was created using responses to the question, “Would you favor changing the Constitution so that the parents must be legal residents of the U.S. in order for their newborn child to be a citizen, or should the Constitution be left as it is?” Those responses indicating that this should not be allowed are coded as 1, and all other responses as 0. 46 percent of those surveyed said that the Constitution should be changed.

I hypothesize that rural whites’ will tend to have more negative attitudes than their urban and suburban counterparts, and that growth in the foreign-born population in their community will tend to increase the likelihood of rural white support for restrictive immigration policy

#### *Key Independent Variables*

Based Newman and Velez’s findings, in their study of Latino-white relations, communities that had few Latinos initially and then a growing population due to immigration, led to a tendency amongst the white population to feel threatened and to hold anti-immigration views (Newman and Velez 2014). Whereas, they find that communities that had a larger

preexisting Latino population and then experience a rapid growth in the immigrant population, showed that the white population felt less threatened and reduced opposition to immigration. Rural U.S. communities generally follow the former pattern, rather than the latter, with small Latino populations that grow rapidly due to immigration (Johnson 2012). To account for how size of immigrant population may affect attitudes, a variable is included in the models for the percentage of foreign-born population in the respondents' communities.

Rural residence is another key independent variable included in the models. I predict that rural residence will significantly influence the support for more restrictive immigration-related policies. Mean levels of negative attitudes towards immigrant are higher amongst rural residents. A t-test of the difference of means for questions from the Pew 2006 Immigration Survey show significant differences in the attitudes towards immigrants between rural residents and those from suburban and urban areas. Figure 2.5 below displays that rural residents are more likely to feel that immigrants are a burden on society. The difference in means between rural residents and urban and suburban residents is significantly different than 0 using a two-tailed test ( $p < .05$ ). Figures 2.6 and 2.7 illustrate that rural residents are also more likely than urban and suburban residents to perceive Latin American immigrants to be more likely to commit crime and to end up on welfare. These differences were also found to be statistically significant.

[Figure 2.5 here]

[Figure 2.6 here]

[Figure 2.7 here]

Another key independent variable included is a measure of perceptions of threat from immigrants. The threat variable is an additive variable running from 0 to 8 made from responses to 8 questions:

- Immigrants today strengthen our country because of their hard work and talents,  
Or...  
Immigrants today are a burden on our country because they take our jobs, housing and health care.  
(Responses to the first option were coded as 0, and the second as 1.)
- The growing number of newcomers from other countries threaten traditional American customs and values  
Or...  
The growing number of newcomers from other countries strengthens American society.  
(Responses to the first option were coded as 1, and the second as 0.)
- Do you believe that you or a family member has ever lost a job or not gotten a job because an employer hired immigrant workers instead, or don't you think so?  
(Responses of "Yes" were coded as 1, all other responses as 0.)
- Do you think the immigrants coming to this country today mostly take jobs away from American citizens, or do they mostly take jobs Americans don't want?  
(Responses of "Take jobs away" were coded as 1, all others as 0)
- Thinking about all of the immigrants who have moved into your community in recent years: What effect, if any, do you think these recent immigrants are having

on the quality of your local government services? Are they making things better, making things worse or not making much difference either way?

(Responses of “Worse” were coded as 1, all others as 0)

- Do you think most recent immigrants do or do not learn English within a reasonable amount of time?

(Responses of “No” were coded as 1, all other responses as 0.)

- Do you think most recent immigrants pay their fair share of taxes, or not?

(Responses of “No” were coded as 1, all other responses as 0.)

- Compared to the immigrants of the early 1900s, are TODAY'S immigrants more willing to adapt to the American way of life, less willing to adapt to the American way of life, or are they about as willing to adapt to the American way of life?

(Responses of “Less willing” were coded as 1, all others as 0)

Looking at the first model on Table 2.1, the results confirm the second hypothesis that rural residence increases the likelihood of support for restrictive immigration policy, but not the first that a larger immigrant population would positively influence support for restrictive policy. Rural residence is found to be a significant influence on the likelihood of support for decreasing the level of immigration into the U.S. However, the interaction in the second model between rural residence and a larger foreign-born population did not have a significant effect on preferred level of immigration. Another finding of interest in the first model is that greater perception of threat from immigrants is found to be a significantly positive influence on a preference for fewer immigrants, which makes sense.

For the dependent variable of a preference for not allowing undocumented children to attend public schools, rural residence is found to have a significant influence, but in the opposite

direction of the second hypothesis. This finding indicates that other factors that influence the dependent variable in this case are not accounted for in the model or in the dataset as potential variables. One could guess that children are not threatening, and hence the difference, but a perception of threat is still found to significantly increase the likelihood of keeping such children out of public schools. Increased presence of foreign-born population is not found to have a significant effect. I do not know how to explain this finding, and the findings about third dependent variable - support for changing the clause in the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment that grants citizenship to all children born in the U.S. – follow a similar pattern.

For the third dependent variable, a perception of threat from immigrants is again a significant influence on the likelihood of support for restrictive immigration policy. Once again, rural residence has statistically significant negative influence on the dependent variable. Rural residents are found to be less likely to support changes to the citizenship clause of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment. An increased foreign-born population is also a significant negative influence on support for changing this part of the Constitution. This indicates that there is perhaps a tolerating influence of living near a greater number of immigrants in regards to this policy. However, the interaction between rural residence and proportion of foreign-born population is not found to be a significant influence. Social contact theory argues that increased contact with out-groups tends to lead to more tolerant opinions of those groups. I will further examine the influence of social contact on attitudes towards immigrants and immigration in Chapter 4.

Looking at the first research question, have changing demographics in rural American communities due to growth in immigrant populations affected attitudes regarding immigration, the answer is likely yes, but regarding the direction of the relationship, it depends. The interaction variables in the second and third models indicate that an increase in foreign-born

population may decrease the likelihood of support for policies that prevent undocumented students from attending public schools or change how the citizenship is granted in the Constitution to excluded children born to undocumented parents. In regards to the second question, how do rural attitudes on immigration policy differ from those of the general public in the U.S., the answer drawn from the analysis of this chapter is that rural whites' attitudes towards immigrants tend to be more negative than suburban and urban whites. However, this may not lead rural whites to tend to be more supportive of restrictive immigration policies than suburban and urban whites, and the influence of a larger foreign-born population may decrease the likelihood of rural residents' support for restrictive policy further.

### ***Conclusion***

A perception of threat was found to be a statistically significant influence on individual preferences for all three immigration-related policies examined in this chapter. The results indicate that rural residence increases the likelihood of whites' support for decreasing the level of immigration, their attitudes towards immigrant children is more tolerant than their urban and suburban counterparts. Those who perceive a threat from immigrants are more likely to support a decrease in the number of immigrants allowed into the U.S, to oppose allowing undocumented children to attend public schools, and to support changing the citizenship clause of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment of the Constitution.

These results regarding rural residence ran counter to my hypotheses, living in a rural area had a statistically significant negative influence on support for prohibiting undocumented children from attending public schools and support for changing the citizenship clause of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment. However, other research on immigration and rural communities may lend some insight. In her book exploring political socialization in four rural Iowa towns that have

experienced ethnic diversification from growth in immigrant populations, Lay finds that native-born young people in diverse towns are “no more or less tolerant” to immigrants than those from more homogeneous towns early on during their towns’ population changes (2012). But over time young people from the diverse towns became more supportive of immigrants, which the author at least partly attributes to having attended diverse schools and other contact from extracurricular activities (Lay 2012). In other words, Lay’s findings and those of this chapter perhaps find evidence for a tolerating effect from increased intergroup contact. I know, at least anecdotally, my own experience growing up in a changing rural town would follow the same pattern, with the native-born young people who shared the socializing experience of school with immigrants becoming more tolerant than older adults in the community. The following chapters will take a further look at the types, and influences of perceptions of threat, as well as the influence of increased social contact with Latino immigrants, amongst rural whites.

*Tables and Figures:*

**Table 2.1: Influence of Threat and Rural Residence on Immigration Policy Support**

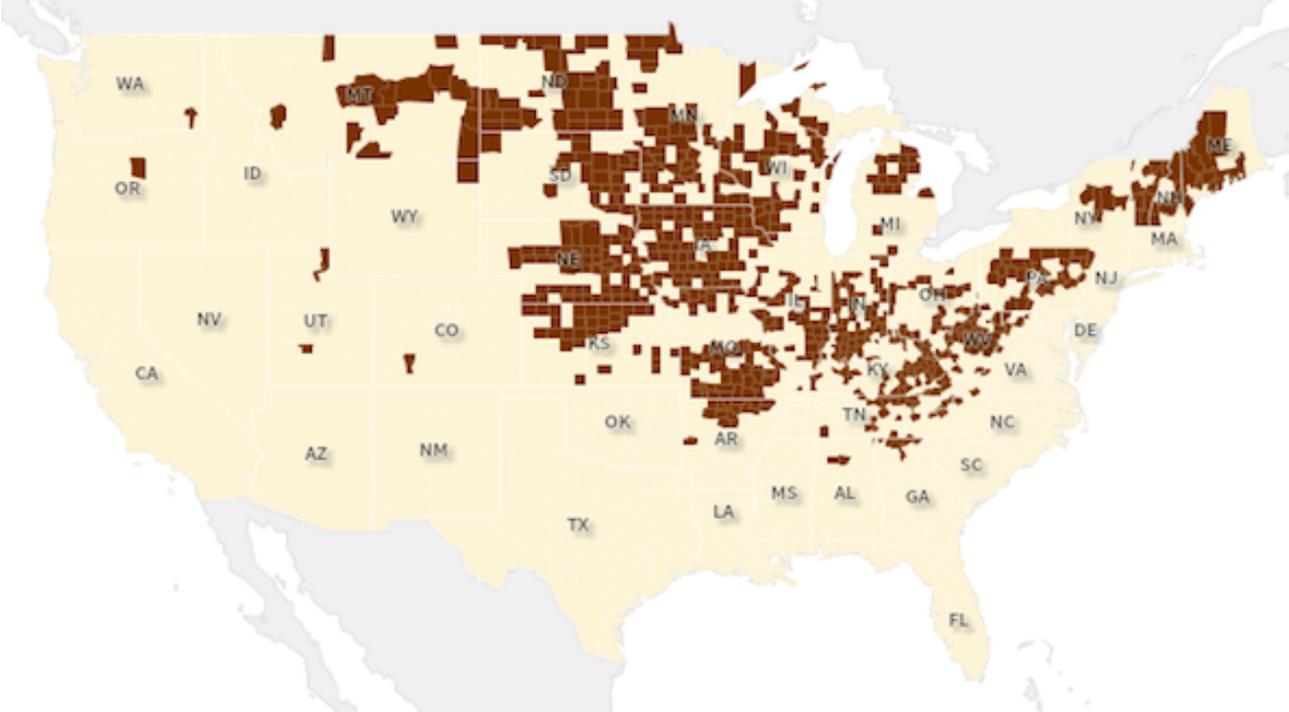
	Decrease Level of Immigration	Decrease Immigration w/ Interaction	Undocumented Not Allowed in Public Schools	Undocumented Not Allowed in Public Schools w/ Interaction	End Birthright Citizenship	End Birthright Citizenship
Age	-0.00344 (-0.77)	-0.00343 (-0.77)	-0.0130* (-2.01)	-0.0130* (-2.00)	-0.000551 (-0.13)	-0.000679 (-0.16)
Male	-0.134 (-0.95)	-0.134 (-0.95)	0.452* (2.23)	0.465* (2.29)	-0.0448 (-0.34)	-0.0381 (-0.29)
Education	-0.234*** (-4.62)	-0.234*** (-4.62)	0.0535 (0.70)	0.0532 (0.70)	-0.112* (-2.35)	-0.111* (-2.32)
Income1	0.0496 (1.35)	0.0496 (1.34)	0.0150 (0.28)	0.0161 (0.30)	0.0530 (1.53)	0.0535 (1.54)
Conservative	0.205* (2.35)	0.205* (2.35)	0.103 (0.82)	0.0995 (0.80)	0.234** (2.86)	0.231** (2.83)
Republican	-0.0599 (-0.39)	-0.0600 (-0.39)	0.0272 (0.12)	0.0232 (0.10)	-0.0318 (-0.22)	-0.0268 (-0.18)
Threat	0.425*** (12.01)	0.425*** (12.01)	0.267*** (5.66)	0.271*** (5.72)	0.321*** (9.88)	0.322*** (9.88)
Rural	0.176+ (1.72)	0.181 (1.33)	-0.439+ (-1.68)	-0.708* (-2.00)	-0.334* (-2.02)	-0.502* (-2.38)
% Foreign-Born	-0.00526 (-0.55)	-0.00520 (-0.53)	-0.00491 (-0.35)	-0.00726 (-0.52)	-0.0249** (-2.72)	-0.0273** (-2.90)
Rural * % Foreign-Born		-0.00165 (-0.03)		0.114 (1.24)		0.0612 (1.28)
_constant	-1.333** (-2.87)	-1.333** (-2.87)	-1.946** (-2.95)	-1.944** (-2.94)	-1.335** (-3.04)	-1.318** (-3.00)
<i>N</i>	1116	1116	556	556	1116	1116
<i>r</i> <sup>2</sup>	.176	.176	.0771	.0792	.112	.113

*t* statistics in parentheses

+  $p < 0.10$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

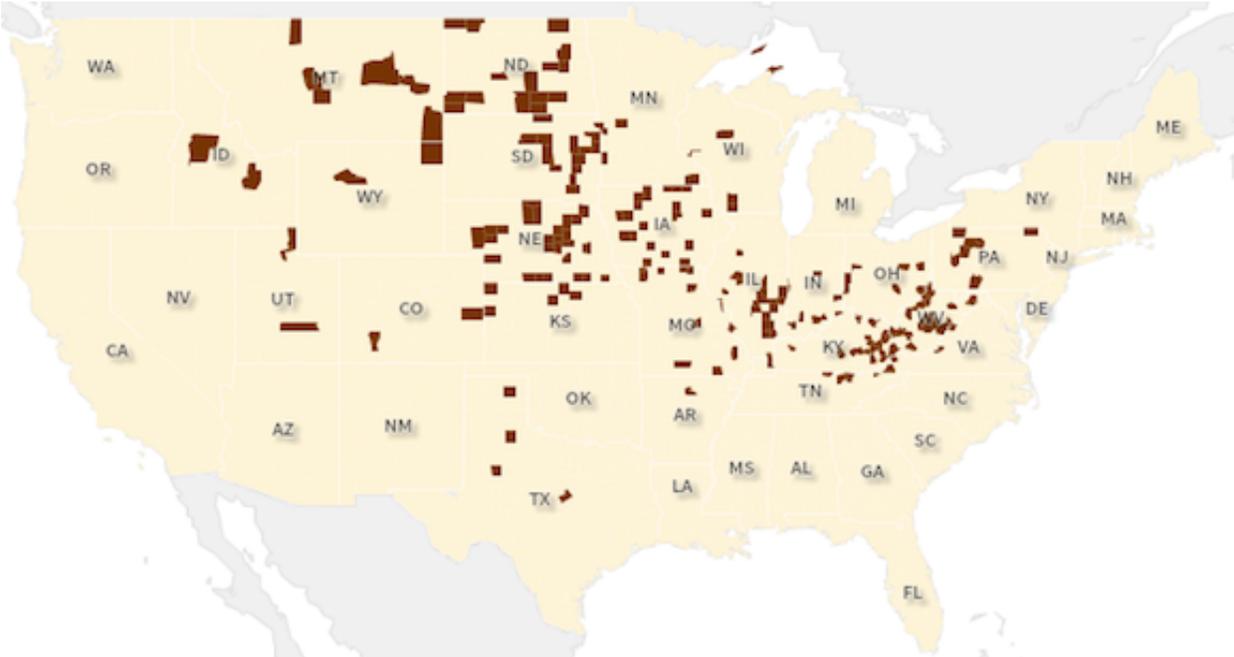
Source: Pew Research Center for the People and Press & Pew Hispanic Center 2006 Immigration Survey

**Figure 2.1: Homogeneous White Counties in 1990. Non-Hispanic white > 98**



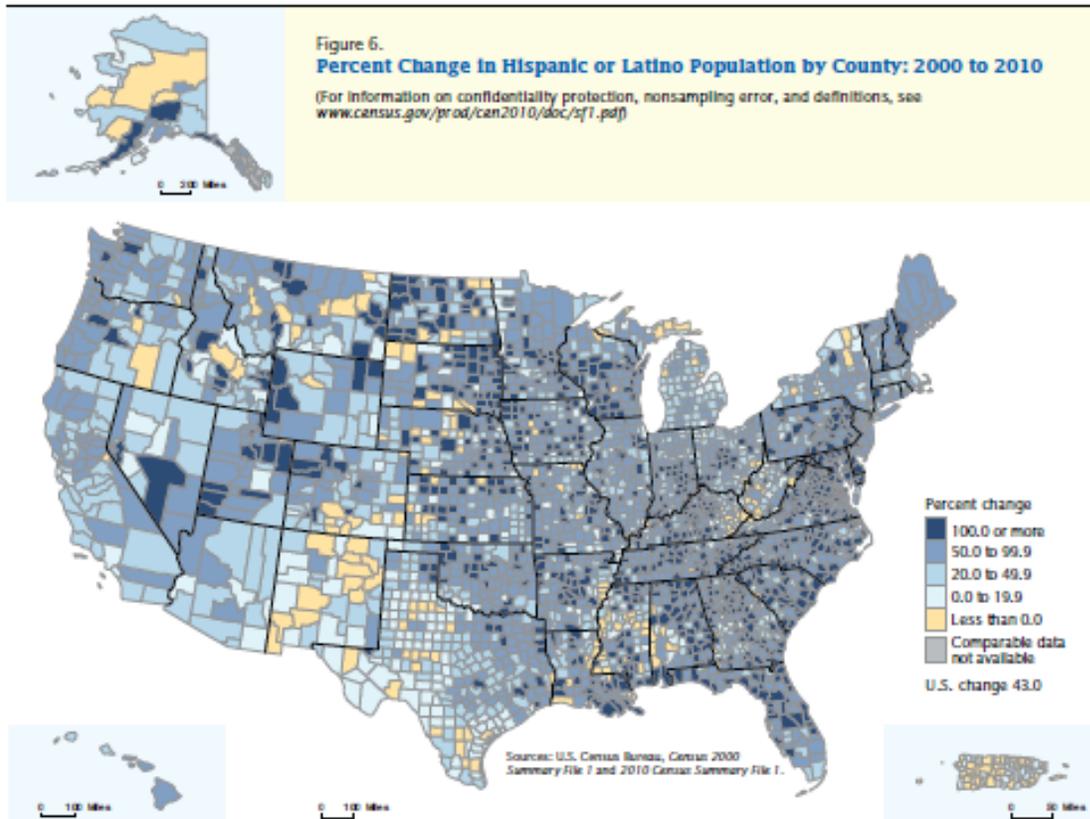
Note: Highlighted counties indicate > 98 percent non-Hispanic white population.  
Source: (Social Explorer, 2015)

**Figure 2.2: Homogeneous White Counties in 2010. Non-Hispanic white > 98.**

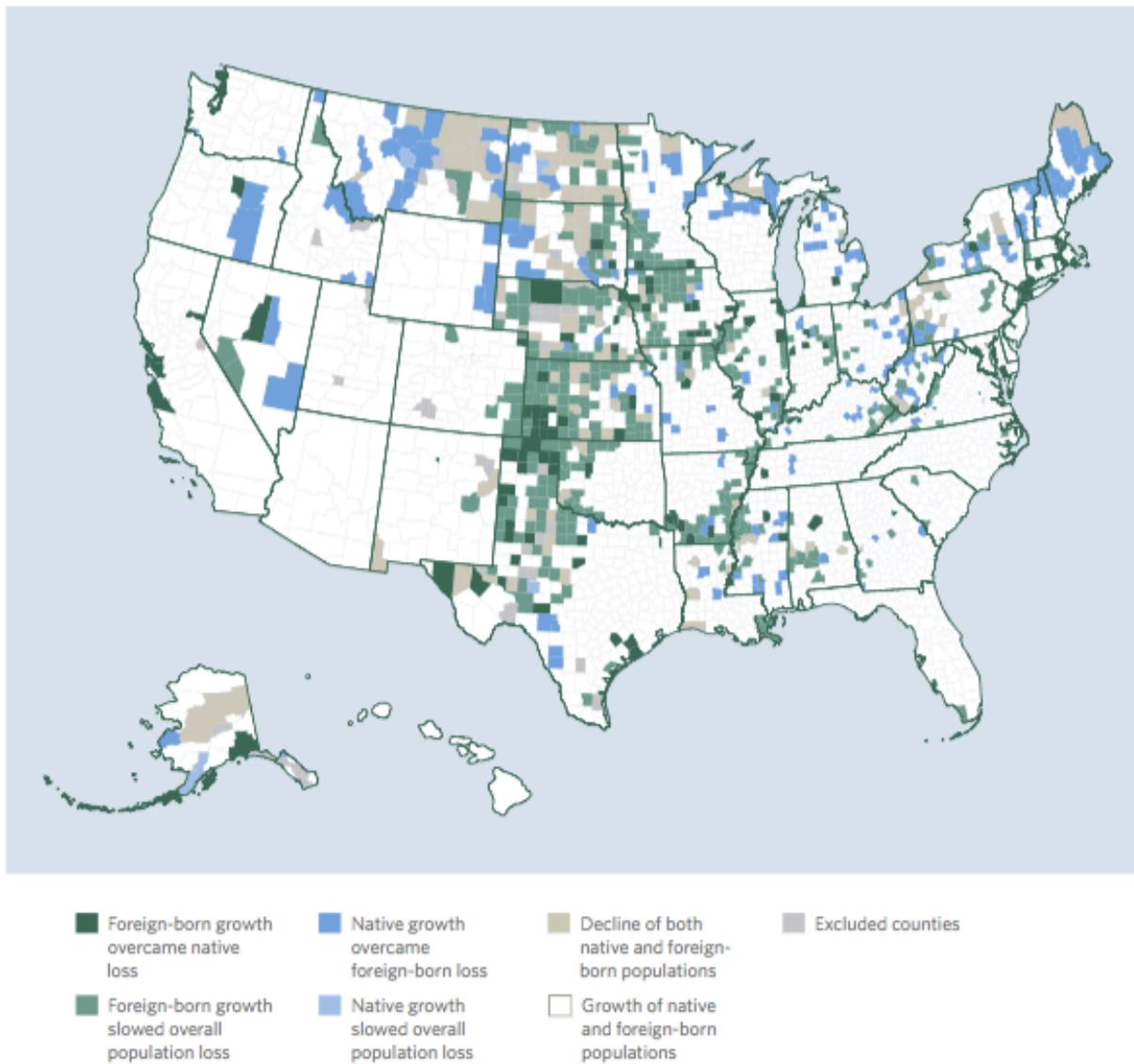


Note: Highlighted counties indicate > 98 percent non-Hispanic white population.  
Source: (Social Explorer, 2015)

**Figure 2.3: Percent Change in Latino Population by County: 2000 to 2010**



**Figure 2.4: Immigration Slows, and Even Reverses Population Decline**

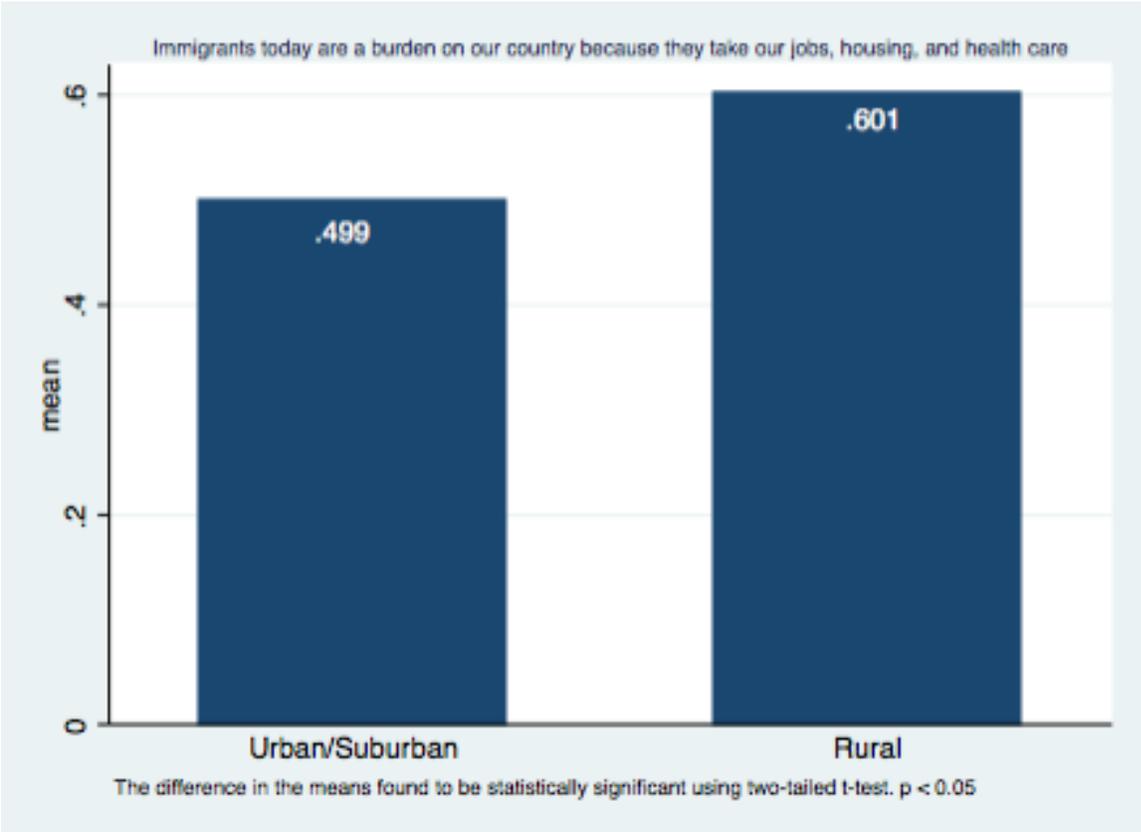


Note: Categories are based on calculations of the difference in county population from 1990 and 2008-2012, the difference in foreign-born population from 1990 to 2008-2012, and the difference in native-born population from 1990 to 2008-2012. Categories shown cover all possible outcomes and types of population change. Excluded counties are those with fewer than 1,000 residents in 1990 or for which no data were available.

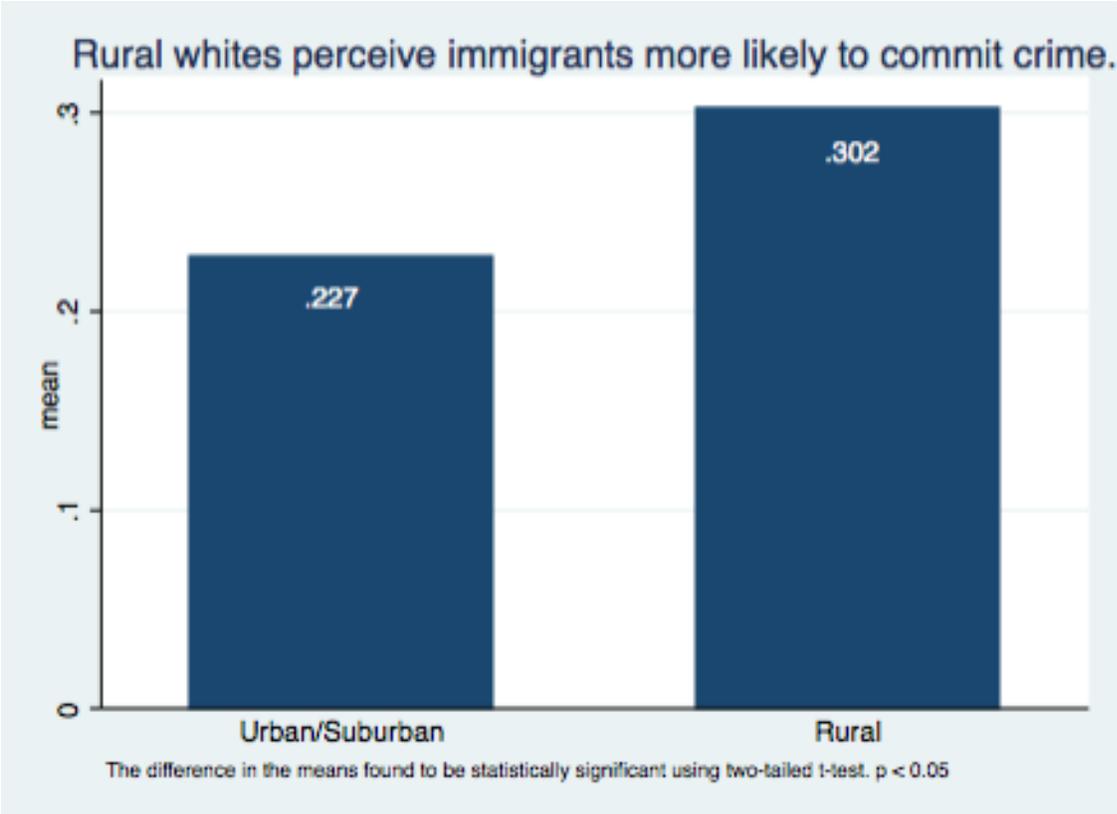
Sources: Pew's analysis of the 1990 decennial census and 2008-2012 American Community Survey

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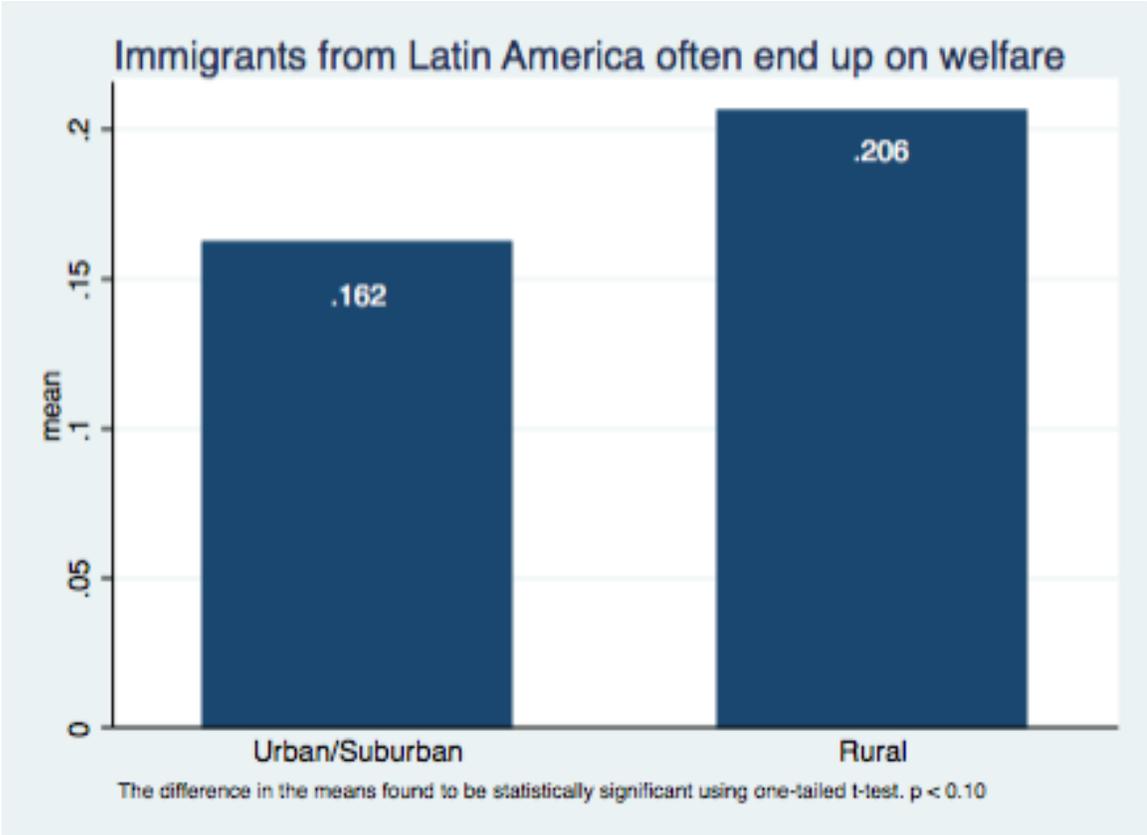
**Figure 2.5: Rural whites more likely to see immigrants as a burden on society.**



**Figure 2.6: Rural whites more likely to perceive Latin American immigrants to increase crime.**



**Figure 2.7: Rural whites more likely to perceive Latin American immigrants to end up on welfare.**



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## Chapter 3

### Perceived Threat from Immigration Amongst Rural Whites: Cultural or Economic?

The United States enjoys a love/hate relationship with its identity as a nation of immigrants. On one hand, many relish in its identity as a “melting pot,” in which many peoples became one (E Pluribus Unum), on the other, the nation’s immigration policies have been rooted in cycles of xenophobia and racism. Over the past 130 years, politicians have shaped their arguments with these conflicting social constructions in mind, often trying appeal to both sides when trying to legally define *who* is an American and *who* deserves to be an American. These cycles of immigration policies generally coincide with times of economic trouble and to this day seek to differentiate between the “right” and “wrong” kinds of immigrants. Debates usually center around “(1) who is worthy of being considered for full incorporation into the nation and (2) who is incapable of assimilating and taking on the characteristics and responsibilities associated with full political and social membership” (Newton 2005).

In chapter 3, I will explore the effect of rural whites’ social identity on their immigration-related policy preferences, as well as the influence of whites’ perceptions of economic and ethnocultural threat from immigrants on such policy preferences. The findings of chapter 2 establish a perception of threat from immigrants significantly increases the likelihood of support for restrictive immigration policy. This chapter will examine the roots of such perceptions of threat and its link to an rural whites’ sense of who is an American, as well as the influence of different types of different types of threat. Is perceiving a threat from immigrants based more on economic or ethnocultural concerns?

### *Literature: Identity and Threat*

Social and group identities have been shown in previous research to influence attitudes towards out-groups, party identification, ideology, and policy preferences. For example, Deborah Schildkraut, argues that national identities are “key players in shaping how people respond to diversity and public policy debates” (2011). Using survey experiments, researchers find that when presented with data detailing demographic shifts toward a majority-minority future, white Americans across the ideological spectrum endorse conservative policy positions more strongly, implicating group-status threat (Craig and Richeson 2014).

Social identity theory posits that individuals habitually differentiate other people as being members of their own in-group or as being part of out-groups .(Tajfel 1981; Tajfel and Turner 1986) This differentiation is often accompanied by the individual’s belief that his/her in-group is superior to out-groups. As people strive to achieve positive social identity it can lead to disparaging of out-groups and ethnocentrism. Group identity and in-group bias emerge without difficulty in high-status groups because membership distinguishes group members from outsiders. Research in social identity theory has also found that intergroup prejudice can occur even when the existence of competition over resource and benefits is only perceived (Tajfel and Turner 1986).

Social identity theory argues that heightened cohesion will occur among members of groups whose status is threatened. Social dominance theory lends insight into this aspect by arguing that there is a hierarchy of social groups within societies and that groups seek dominance over other groups, or to maintain the existing hierarchy. Other researchers have observed that intergroup competition can lead to the belief among individuals that their group is superior to other and that they will seek to solidify this belief through the political process (Conover 1984,

1988). According to this theory, dominant groups will seek to maintain the status quo in the political arena, in order to maintain their preferred status, as well as their hold on the resources and benefits that come with their dominant political power. In other words, some people tend to favor unequal and hierarchical relationships between groups, in which their group dominates the others. An example of this would be the Jim Crow South, where the dominant group, whites, sought to maintain the social hierarchy that was present during slavery long into the twentieth century. Whites who seek to maintain this dominance will also be opposed to affirmative action or other policies that seek to increase equality between their in-group and ethnic and racial minorities.

People tend to make different types of attributions towards members of out-groups. People tend to be more likely to remember the negative behaviors of out-groups than their positive behaviors, while doing the opposite for members of their in-group and tending to remember their positive behaviors and forgetting their negative behaviors (Fiske 1998). People are also more likely to attribute dispositional characteristics towards out-groups, while tending to attribute characteristics based on situational factors to members of their in-group. In other words, if a member of an out-group is unemployed, it is due to their lack of work ethic, but if a member of the in-group is unemployed, it is because of the poor economy. This theory expects the existence of in-group bias when dealing with out-groups. Some supporters of this theory also argue that out-groups are likely to be blamed, due to this in-group bias, for the in-group's problems in times of trouble (Hogg and Abrams 1988).

Social identity theory provides some insights into the roots of racial threat, as it explores the impact of one's own group identity and the desire for positive comparisons to other groups on individuals' behavior (Cottam, Dietz-Uhler, Mastors, & Preston, Introduction to Political

Psychology, 2010). Individuals also tend to be more inclined to feel that their own in-group is deserving of benefits gained from certain policies. Conover argues that it is not only group membership that plays a role in how individuals view policies, but whether or not they believe that certain groups deserve what is obtained from the policies (Conover 1988). She also argues that support for a policy will vary depending on whether or not the groups affected are seen as deserving (Ibid). Theiss-Morse notes that strong identifiers are more likely to hold a “more ethnocultural view of society because of a strong desire to maintain the group boundaries and therefore, they believe, to ensure the group’s strength, vitality and exclusivity” (Theiss-Morse 2009). Therefore, strong identifiers to an identity that is white will tend to be more likely to perceive a threat to their in-groups well-being from immigration, especially immigration from Latin America.

Residential racial and ethnic context plays a significant role in shaping whites’ individual attitudes and policy preferences towards minorities and immigration (Rocha et al, 2011; Rocha & Espino, 2009; Gimpel & Lay, 2008; Tolbert, 2003; Welch, Sigelman, Bledsoe, & Combs, 2001). Because this research looks at the effects of demographic changes to rural communities, the way population change takes place is also of interest. Looking at white-Latino relations, Newman and Velez find that communities that had few Latinos initially and then a growing population due to immigration, led to a tendency amongst the white population to feel threatened and to hold anti-immigration views (Newman and Velez 2014). Whereas, they find that communities that had a larger preexisting Latino population and then experience a rapid growth in the immigrant population, showed that the white population felt less threatened and reduced opposition to immigration.

Both the threat hypothesis and social contact theory (which is explored further in Chapter 4) attempt to explain the influence of individuals' neighbors and their surrounding neighborhood on their political attitudes and behaviors, as well as feelings towards minority groups. However, they often take divergent paths in theorizing whether increased diversity in one's social contacts and neighborhood lead to increased tolerance or to increased conflict. While they are not entirely at odds, the findings of research based in these theories provide evidence that seems contradictory unless context is taken into consideration.

A useful framework for understanding the influence of threat is to make a distinction between realistic threat and symbolic threat (Citrin, Green, and Sears 1990; Sniderman, Hagendoorn, and Prior 2004; Stephan, Ybarra, and Bachman 1999; Stephan, Ybarra, and Rios Morrison 2009). Perceptions of realistic threats can arise from competition over resources, the loss of which could hurt a group's well-being or standing (Bobo 1983, 1988). In regard to immigration, perceived realistic threats tend to be in the form of competition for jobs, reduced wages, the consumption of government resources and benefits, and increased taxes to support immigrants' benefits (Campbell, Wong, and Citrin 2006; Hood and Morris 1997; Stephan, Ybarra, and Bachman 1999). Past research finds that subjective perceived threats to the national economy from immigrants are a consistent predictor of opposition to immigration (Burns and Gimpel 2000; Citrin et al. 1997; Sniderman, Hagendoorn, and Prior 2004).

On the other hand, symbolic threats are perceived violations of a group's cultural norms, values, or identity (Citrin et al. 1990; D. R. Kinder and Sears 1981; Stephan, Ybarra, and Bachman 1999). For example, individuals may be threatened by Latino immigrants that they feel are not embracing American culture or identity (Huntington 2004). Such beliefs that immigrant groups will fail to assimilate due to their religion, culture, or ethnicity, and that that

American culture will therefore be contaminated have their roots in nativism (Higham 1985; Schrag 2010). The analysis in this chapter will include a measure to account for the effect of a white, nativist American identity on immigration and racial policy preferences. Other measures of symbolic threat and fear of the cultural influence of immigration are consistent predictors of support for restrictive immigration measures and negative assessments of immigrants (Citrin et al. 1990, 1997; Hood and Morris 1997). Measures of symbolic threat often show greater influence than economic threat in the analyses of previous research (Citrin et al. 1997; Sniderman, Hagendoorn, and Prior 2004), and I hypothesize that the analysis in this chapter will find similar results when looking at rural whites specifically.

The threat hypothesis also suggests that whites identify as a group and feel threatened when minorities are able to compete with them for economic or political power and resources (Hajnal, 2001). White Americans have long held the upper hand in both the political and social realms, and may feel threatened when they perceive that this preferred position is threatened in the presence of growing minority groups. This occurs not only when a person from a minority group wins elected office, but also in the neighborhood context with intergroup competition over jobs and other resources (Hajnal, 2001). It is within this context that we focus, as our data was collected from rural communities in which all residents must share, or compete for, the same limited economic resources and jobs. Citrin et al found attitudes toward immigration to be strongly tied to one's perception of economic vulnerability (1997). Within most of rural America, whites have long held a preferred position in regards to economic and political power, but the ethnic and racial makeup of rural America is changing with large numbers of immigrants from Latin America moving to these areas to fill meatpacking and agricultural jobs over the past few decades (United States Census Bureau, 2011) (Johnson, 2012).

A perception of threat can be expressed in different ways, such as partisan identification, support for extremist candidates, and support for the death penalty. Stephan, Ybarra, and Bachman find subjective perceptions of threat from Latino immigrants to in-group political and economic resources among whites, to be a significant predictor of racial prejudice (1999). The Democratic Party's support for the Civil Rights Act of 1964 has over the past four decades turned the once solidly Democratic south over to the more racially conservative Republican Party (Carmines & Stimson, 1989). Other research has found, when whites feel that they, or their group, are being threatened politically or economically by black advances, they oppose policies intended to help blacks, such as busing, or they support racist candidates, such as David Duke or George Wallace (Bobo, 1983; Bobo, 1988). In rural Louisiana, research found that for the higher proportions of African-Americans in a parish were associated with declines in the percentage of white voters who were registered as Democrats, and an increase in white voters registered as Republicans (Giles & Hertz, 1994). Proximity to a larger proportion of blacks can also lead to increased support for the death penalty among whites that hold prejudiced views (Soss, Langbein, & Metelko, 2003).

### ***Research Questions***

As a result, I focus on several research questions in my assessment of white attitudes in rural America, this chapter will explore the following research questions to explore the relationship between rural whites' immigration policy preferences and their identity and their perception of threat from immigrants.

4. How do the content of and the attachment to American identity in rural areas vary from those of the general public?
5. How do such variations affect perceptions of immigrants amongst rural whites?

6. Do rural whites consider immigration to be more of a cultural or economic threat?

### ***Hypotheses***

4. Rural whites' tend to have a greater attachment to an American identity that is white and nativist.
5. This attachment is associated with a greater perceived threat from immigrants that increases support for restrictive immigration policies.
6. Rural whites tend to see immigration as more of a cultural than economic threat. Therefore, ethnocultural threat will have a greater influence on whites' immigration policy preferences than economic threat.

I expect to demonstrate the increased perception of threat from immigrants amongst rural whites is at least partially due to how they view themselves in comparison to the newcomers to their communities. I expect to find that rural whites are more likely to see white as the default American identity. In turn, those who hold this view will be more likely to support restrictive racial and immigration policy, and to express negative opinions of racial and religious minorities.

### ***Data and Analysis***

This chapter will utilize data from the 21st Century Americanism Survey (21-CAS) (Schildkraut and Grosse 2004). The 21-CAS survey interviewed 2,800 respondents by phone on questions of race, ethnicity, social identity and immigration in the fall of 2004. This dataset allow me to subset the data by metropolitan status to allow comparison between rural and other areas. The surveys included questions that allow testing the influence of the content and attachment of social identity held by rural whites on their policy preferences and attitudes towards immigrants, as well as their attitudes towards racial, ethnic, and religious minorities in their communities.

I will use these questions to construct variables to use in a regression analysis testing the effects of social identity of the policy preferences and attitudes of rural whites.

First, because the attitudes of whites are of interest to this research, I have subset the 21-CAS dataset for this chapter to only include the observations of white respondents. In the first model, I use an ordinary-least-squares regression analysis to test the influence of rural residence on whites' association with a nativist American identity. Then, I use logit regression models to analyze whites' immigration and racial policy preferences using additive independent variables for nativist identity, realistic and symbolic threat, in addition to rural residence.

Rural residence in the 21-CAS is defined by using the USDA Economic Research Service (ERS) Rural-Urban Commuting Area Codes (RUCA), a scheme developed for delineating sub-county settlement, and merged with the 21-CAS by respondent zip code. RUCA codes are based on measures of population density, urbanization, and percentage of commuting daily to metropolitan areas to identify urban cores and adjacent territory that is economically integrated with those cores" (Economic Research Service -USDA 2014). The RUCA codes provide a more conservative definition of rural than the definition used in chapter 4, which is also from the ERS but the definition used in the 2008 Farm Bill, which defines rural as a community of less than 50,000 in population that is not part of a metropolitan area (Economic Research Service-USDA 2008).

### *Dependent Variables*

Remember that previous research argues the more strongly individuals identify with their group, the more it affects their attitudes and behaviors (Theiss-Morse 2009). To create a measure of respondents' identification of American identity as white, with European ancestors,

Christian, and English speaking, I constructed an additive variable from respondents' level of agreement to the following battery of questions from the 21-CAS:

- “I am going to read a list of things some people say are important in making someone a true American. The first one is...”
  - “Being born in America.”
  - “Being a Christian.”
  - Having European ancestors.”
  - “Being white.”
  - “Being able to speak English.”

Following each item, respondents were asked, “Would you say that it should be very important, somewhat important, somewhat unimportant, or very unimportant in making someone a true America?” I coded responses of “very important” and “somewhat important” as 2 and 1, respectively, while other responses were coded as 0. This additive variable was used as the dependent variable in an ordinary-least-squares regression to analyze the influence of rural residence and other control variables on holding a nativist American identity. In her study of American identity, Theiss Morse finds that those who identify most strongly with a white and nativist American identity tend to be older, less educated, and less politically knowledgeable (2009). I included independent variables for rural residence (using the RUCA score by ZIP code), age, years of education, annual household income, gender, party identification, ideology (1-7 scale, strong liberal to strong conservative), political knowledge, and measures of the demographics within respondents' ZIP codes.

Results: Identity

As hypothesized rural residence is found to be a statistically significant influence on strength of attachment to a nativist American identity (See Table 3.1 below). Besides conservatism, rural residence had the largest influence on the dependent variable. Older respondents, males, Republicans, and those who identified as more conservative ideologically were all more likely to hold nativist views of American identity. Meanwhile, greater education, income, and political knowledge tended to decrease such views.

[Insert Table 3.1 here]

The makeup of one's community was also found to have a statistically significant influence on one's views of who is an American. The greater proportion of a respondent's ZIP code being made up of racial and ethnic minorities tended to increase white, nativist views of American identity, but this was also found to be the case with a greater portion of respondent's ZIP code being white. In other words, more minorities in a white respondent's neighborhood are correlated with greater likelihood of the respondents adopting a white and nativist American identity, but also, so might living around a greater proportion of other white people. These results seem to indicate that living near a greater proportion of other whites may lead whites to be more likely to adopt a white and nativist idea of who is an American, but also living near greater proportions of minorities may also increase the likelihood of whites of developing the same idea, which would be compatible with group threat hypothesis. It is also compatible Tolbert and Hero's findings in their study of support for anti-immigrant ballot initiatives in California in the 1990s, in which they found white support to be higher in "bifurcated" environments with large white populations and large minority populations, and in areas with homogeneous white populations(Tolbert and Hero 2001a). They found support to be lower areas

with more heterogeneous populations that have large white populations and moderately-sized minority populations.

Figure 3.1 below displays the probable effects of rural residence on holding a white, nativist American identity by age. Rural residence is only shown to predict a statistically significant increase on individuals' perceptions of a nativist American identity amongst rural whites from their mid-40s to early-60s. I also examine the interactions of white's age and ideology on their perceptions of identity, however the interactions were not statistically significant (See Table 3.2 in appendix for models with interactions).

[Figure 3.1 here]

#### *Results: Support for Policy*

Next, I test the second and third hypotheses, in which rural whites' perception of a nativist white American identity is associated with a perception of threat from immigrants that increases support for restrictive immigration policy, and that perceptions ethnocultural threat will have a greater influence on rural whites' immigration policy preferences than economic threat. I constructed three logit models that test three policy preferences as the dependent variable. Two independent variables were also created to measure economic and ethnocultural threat. For economic threat an additive variable (running 0-8) was created using responses (strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree) from the battery of questions below:

- “Immigrants today take advantage of jobs and opportunities here without doing enough to give back to the community.”
- “Over the last few years, immigrants have gotten less than they deserve.” Reverse coded.

- “It’s really just a matter of some people not trying hard enough. If immigrants would only try harder, they could be just as well off as people born in America.”
- Years of discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for immigrants to work their way out of the lower class.” Reverse coded.

I coded responses of “strongly agree” and “somewhat agree” as 2 and 1, except for the questions that I reverse coded, in which case “strongly disagree” and “somewhat disagree” were coded as 2 and 1. Other responses were coded as 0.

The next variable categorizes the respondent’s ethnocultural threat from immigrants. The additive variable (running 0-8) was created using the same coding method as above from the following battery of questions:

- “The idea of an America where most people are not white bothers me.”
- “The country would be better off if more of our immigrants were from Europe instead of Asia and Latin America.”
- “Blending into the larger society while still maintaining cultural traditions is difficult, but a lot of immigrants today seem to do a good job of it.”
- “Irish, Italians, and Jews overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Today’s immigrants should do the same.”

#### Preferred level of Immigration

The first policy preference analyzed is preferred level of immigration. Respondents were asked to identify their preference of whether the number of immigrants permitted to come to the United States to live should be “increased, decreased or left the same as it is now”. Responses

indicating that the level of immigration should be decreased are coded as 1, with all other responses coded as 0. The first column of Table 3.3 below displays the results.

As predicted by the second hypothesis, both economic and ethnocultural threat, as well as a more nativist and white perception of American identity were statistically significant predictors of a preference for a decreased level of immigration in the U.S. For every one unit change in economic threat the log odds of support for decreasing the level of immigration into the U.S. increase by 0.220, and for every one unit change in ethnocultural threat the logs odds increase 0.332. This indicates that the influence of ethnocultural threat on the dependent variable of support for decreased immigration is larger than that of the effect of economic threat. This also supports the third hypothesis, but without further interpretation, log odds are difficult metric to understand. I have also calculated predicted probabilities for the two threat variables in the model that can be found on Tables 3.4A and 3.5A in the appendix. The predicted probability an individual will support decreasing immigration in the U.S. is around 18 percent if that individual has a score of economic threat score of 1 and about 80 percent if she has a score of 8, the highest on the scale. Figure 3.2 further displays the predicted relationship between economic threat and support for decreasing the level of immigration. As perception of economic threat increases, so does probability of support for more restrictive immigration policy.

[Figure 3.2 here]

Ethnocultural threat has a similar relationship with this dependent variable. Figure 3.3 illustrates that, as predicted, whites' increased sense of threat to one's group from out-groups increases the probability of support for decreasing the number of immigrants entering the country. There were zero scores of 7 or 8 of this additive variable that ranges from 0 to 8. This is possibly due to social pressure to avoid being overtly racist. The battery of questions used to

create the variable included questions that could lead respondents to be reluctant to offer their true opinions to avoid expressing openly racist attitudes. The figure also demonstrates a potential problem with the data that may limit the potential level of nuance in measuring ethnocultural threat. Further discussion of this possible limitation can be found in the conclusion. While the other three primary variables are found to statistically significant factors on support for shrinking the number of immigrants, rural residence was not found to have a significant influence in either direction.

[Insert Table 3.3 here]

#### English-only law and Public Benefits for Immigrants

Next, I examine respondents' support for an English-only law.. Respondents were asked, "Do you favor or oppose a law making English the official language of the United States, meaning most government business would be conducted in English only?" I would expect ethnocultural threat to be a greater influence on support for such laws. The next dependent variable is support for denying public benefits to legal immigrants, which I would expect to be influence more by economic threat than ethnocultural threat. The public benefit question is worded: "Do you think that people who immigrated LEGALLY should be allowed to benefit from government assistance programs like Medicaid and food stamps?"

Both measures of threat are also found to influence the likelihood of whites' support for an English-only law and for a policy of refusing public benefits to legal immigrants. For every one unit change in economic threat the log odds of support for an English-only law into the U.S. increase by 0.252, and for every one unit change in ethnocultural threat the logs odds increase 0.296. The predicted influence of the two measures of threat on whites' support for an English-only are further clarified by Figures 3.4 and 3.5 found in the appendix.

Greater proportions of minorities in their ZIP code may also decrease whites' support for English-only laws. Figure 3.6 displays the predicted probability of whites' supporting the English-only law by proportion of the population within respondent's zip code that is Latino. While support is predicted to be very high in Zip codes with very small Latino populations, at about 25 percent Latino population, support is predicted to drop quickly below the midpoint and be statistically no different than zero. This lends support for the social contact argument analyzed in the next chapter that argues that increased intergroup contact leads to increased tolerance.

[Figure 3.6 and 3.7 here]

Larger Latino populations in a respondent's ZIP code is also found to decrease white support for denying public benefits to legal immigrants (see Figure 3.7). Similar to the other two models, ethnocultural threat was found to have a larger likely effect than economic threat, which is surprising considering the policy at hand. This being a question about the distribution of economic resources to an out-group, I would have hypothesized that of the three dependent variables on Table 3.3, this would be the most likely to show economic threat having a larger likely effect than ethnocultural threat. Therefore, this finding provides further support for confirming the third hypothesis. Whites tend to see immigration as more of an ethnocultural than economic threat even when the dependent variable is considered a more economic issue.

### ***Conclusion***

In this chapter, I examined the effect of rural whites' social identity on their immigration-related policy preferences, as well as the influence of whites' perceptions of economic and ethnocultural threat from immigrants on said policy preferences. The results of the analysis in this chapter confirm the three hypotheses. Social and group identities have been shown in

previous research to influence attitudes towards out-groups, party identification, ideology, and policy preferences. For example, Deborah Schildkraut, argues that national identities are “key players in shaping how people respond to diversity and public policy debates” (2011). This research supports those findings, while highlighting the influence of place. Rural whites’ are more likely to perceive a nativist and white American identity as their in-group, leaving immigrants as an out-group that they see as a threat to their resources and culture.

Ethnic context played a role in support for the policies used as dependent variables. Larger Hispanic populations with a respondent’s ZIP code decreased the likelihood of supporting restrictive policies such as English-only laws and denial of public benefits to immigrants. This leads to the possibility of increased social contact leading to more tolerant opinions of immigrants and decreased support for restrictive policies. The influence of social contact will be further examined in the following chapter, which looks at the influence of social contact.

*Tables and Figures:*

**Table 3.1: Whites and a Nativist American Identity**

---

Rural	0.636** (2.88)
Age	0.00687*** (5.65)
Education	-0.351*** (-7.21)
Income	-0.143*** (-7.03)
Male	0.344* (2.23)
Republican	0.0966* (2.57)
Conservative	0.987*** (5.48)
Political Knowledge	-0.557*** (-8.32)
% White in Zip Code	0.103** (2.94)
% Hispanic in Zip Code	0.111** (3.14)
% Asian in Zip Code	0.109** (2.83)
% Black in Zip Code	0.116** (3.29)
_constant	-1.803 (-0.53)
<hr/>	
<i>N</i>	1263
<i>r</i> <sup>2</sup>	.318

---

*t* statistics in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

Source: 21st Century Americanism Survey

**Figure 3.2: Whites and a White, Nativist American Identity:  
Interactions of Age and Ideology with Rural Residence**

	Rural * Age	Rural * Ideology
Rural	0.233 (0.55)	.430* (2.13)
Age	0.0246*** (7.53)	.247*** (8.24)
Rural * Age	0.00144 (0.18)	
Education	-0.190*** (-6.07)	-.189*** (-6.06)
Income	-0.0855*** (-6.46)	-.0853*** (-6.44)
Male	0.301** (3.03)	..301** (3.03)
Republican	0.0628** (2.59)	.0612* (2.52)
Conservative	0.552*** (4.74)	.595*** (4.69)
Rural * Conservative		-.229 (-0.87)
Political Knowledge	-0.414*** (-9.56)	-.410*** (-9.44)
% White in Zip Code	0.0570* (2.54)	.0556* (2.47)
% Hispanic in Zip Code	0.0640** (2.81)	.0625** (2.73)
% Asian in Zip Code	0.0614* (2.49)	.0602* (2.44)
% Black in Zip Code	0.0672** (2.96)	.0656** (2.88)
_cons	-2.033 (-0.92)	-1.923 (-0.87)
<i>N</i>	1258	1258
<i>r</i> <sup>2</sup>	.327	.327

*t* statistics in parentheses

+  $p < 0.10$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

Source: 21st Century Americanism Survey

**Table 3.3: Threat and Immigration-Related Policy Preferences**

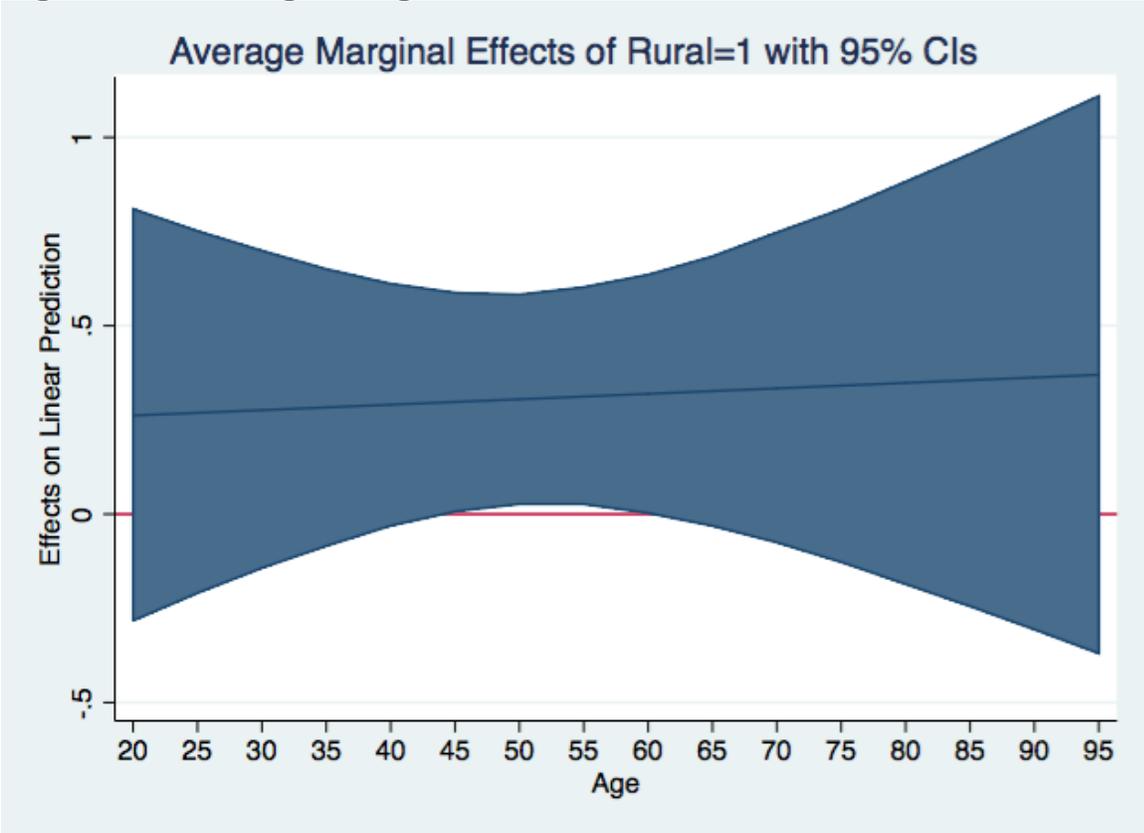
	Immigration Level Decreased	English-only Law Support	No Public Benefits for Legal Immigrants
Economic Threat	0.220 <sup>***</sup> (5.44)	0.252 <sup>***</sup> (4.43)	0.267 <sup>***</sup> (5.09)
Ethnocultural Threat	0.332 <sup>***</sup> (5.84)	0.296 <sup>***</sup> (3.95)	0.292 <sup>***</sup> (4.15)
White, Nativist American Identity	0.238 <sup>***</sup> (5.93)	0.417 <sup>***</sup> (7.04)	0.205 <sup>***</sup> (4.09)
Rural	0.131 (0.68)	-0.377 (-1.56)	-0.0632 (-0.25)
Age	-0.00601 (-1.39)	-0.00134 (-1.01)	0.00640 (1.07)
Education	-0.0137 (-0.31)	0.0133 (0.26)	-0.104 <sup>+</sup> (-1.69)
Income	0.00596 (0.32)	-0.00434 (-0.19)	0.0353 (1.33)
Male	-0.0950 (-0.67)	-0.131 (-0.82)	0.314 (1.61)
Republican	0.0706 <sup>*</sup> (2.37)	0.169 <sup>***</sup> (4.71)	0.044 (1.05)
Political Knowledge	-0.191 <sup>**</sup> (-3.01)	0.103 (1.43)	0.239 <sup>**</sup> (-2.63)
% White in Zip Code	0.0103 (0.33)	-0.0823 <sup>+</sup> (-1.81)	-0.0568 (-1.57)
% Hispanic in Zip Code	0.0143 (0.46)	-0.0928 <sup>*</sup> (-1.98)	-0.0613 <sup>+</sup> (-1.67)
% Asian in Zip Code	0.00750 (0.22)	-0.0921 <sup>+</sup> (-1.87)	-0.0813 <sup>*</sup> (-0.28)
% Black in Zip Code	0.0104 (0.33)	-0.0787 <sup>+</sup> (-1.71)	-0.0558 (-1.53)
_constant	-3.756 (-1.24)	6.412 (1.42)	1.430 (0.41)
<i>N</i>	1258	1258	1258
<i>r</i> <sup>2</sup>	.153	.181	.160

*t* statistics in parentheses

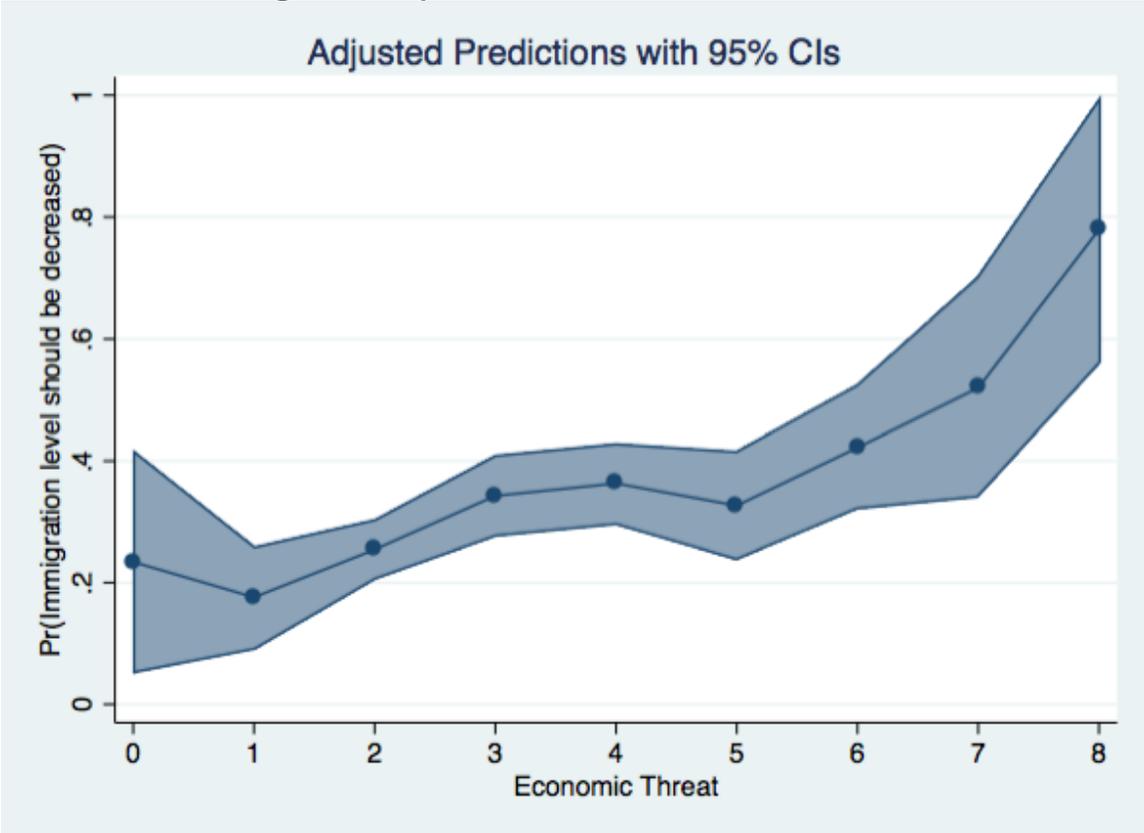
<sup>+</sup>  $p < 0.10$ , <sup>\*</sup>  $p < 0.05$ , <sup>\*\*</sup>  $p < 0.01$ , <sup>\*\*\*</sup>  $p < 0.001$

Source: 21st Century Americanism Survey

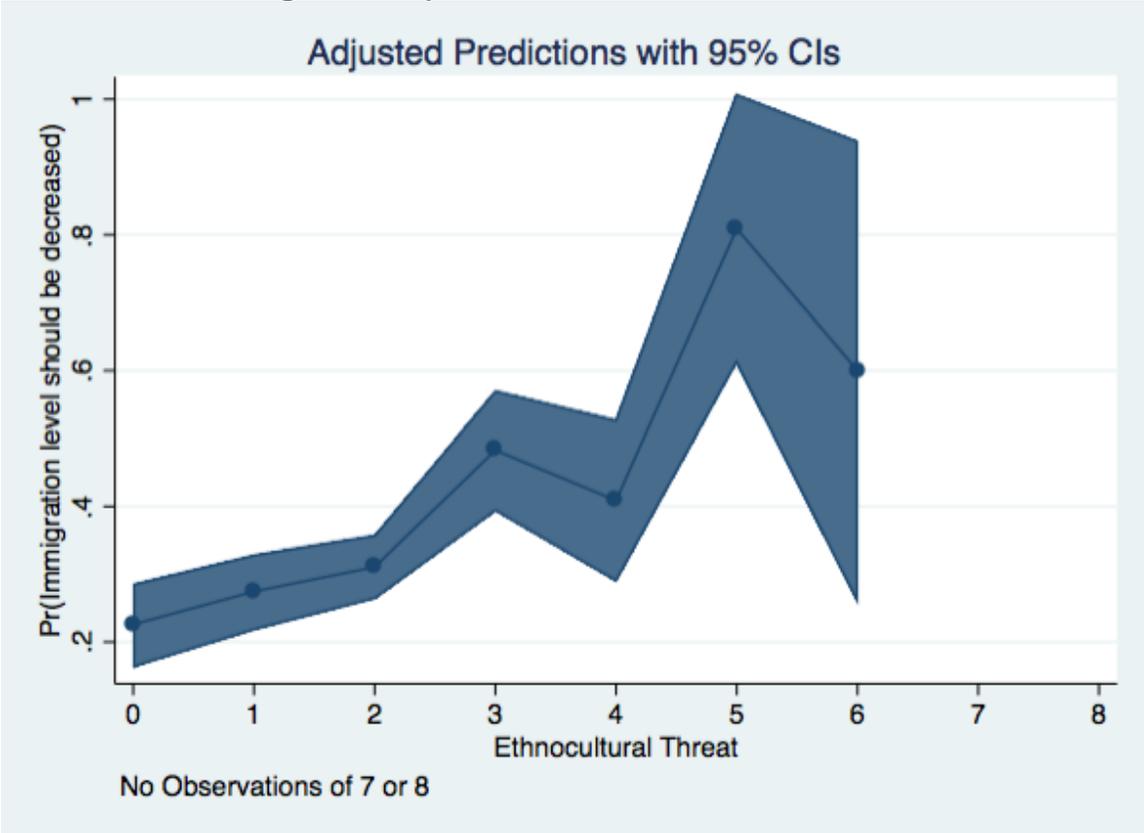
**Figure 3.1: Average Marginal Effects of Rural Residence**



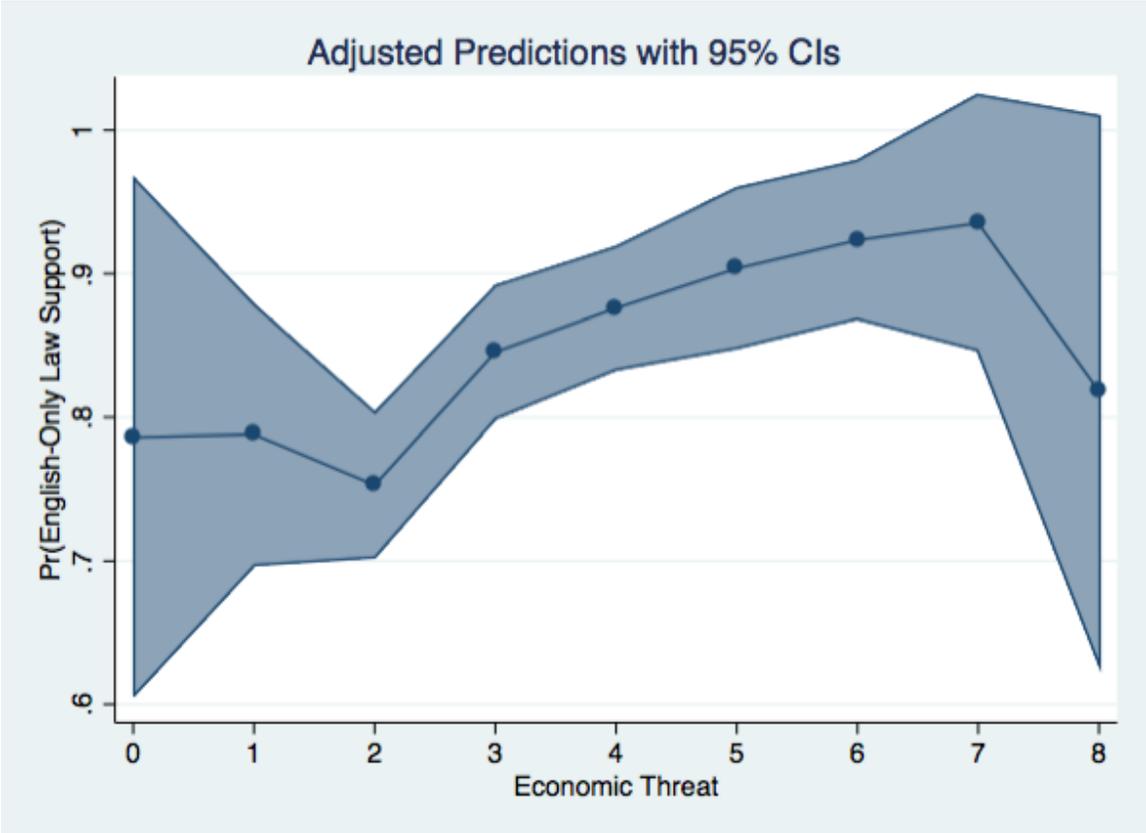
**Figure 3.2: Predicted Probability of Preference For Decreased Immigration by Level of Economic Threat**



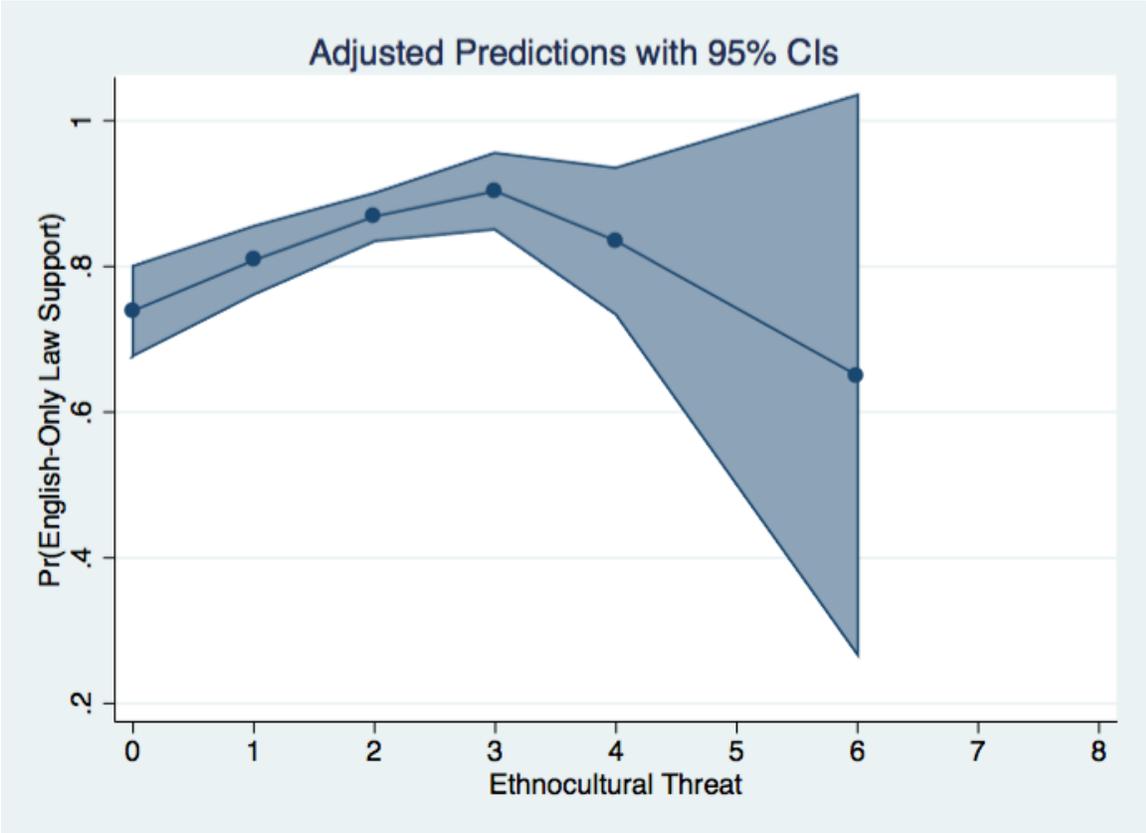
**Figure 3.3: Predicted Probability of Preference For Decreased Immigration by Level of Ethnocultural Threat**



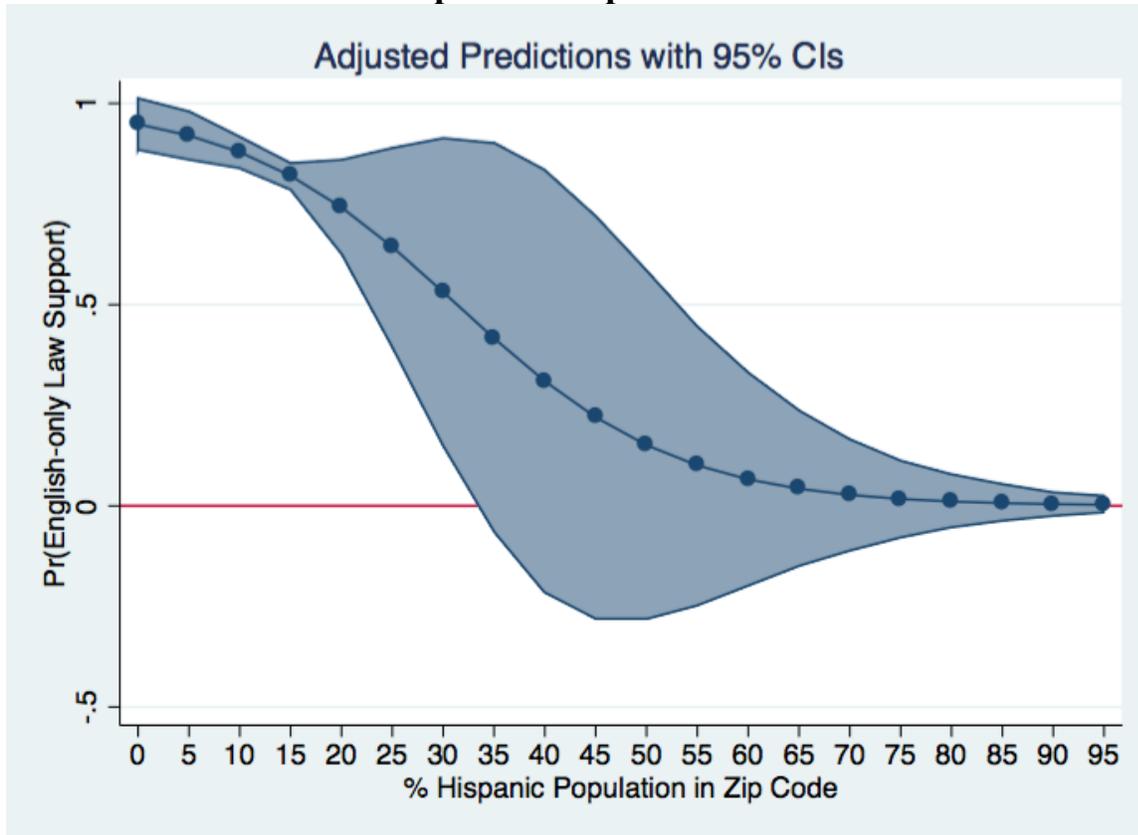
**Figure 3.4: Predicted Probability of Support for English-Only Law and Economic Threat**



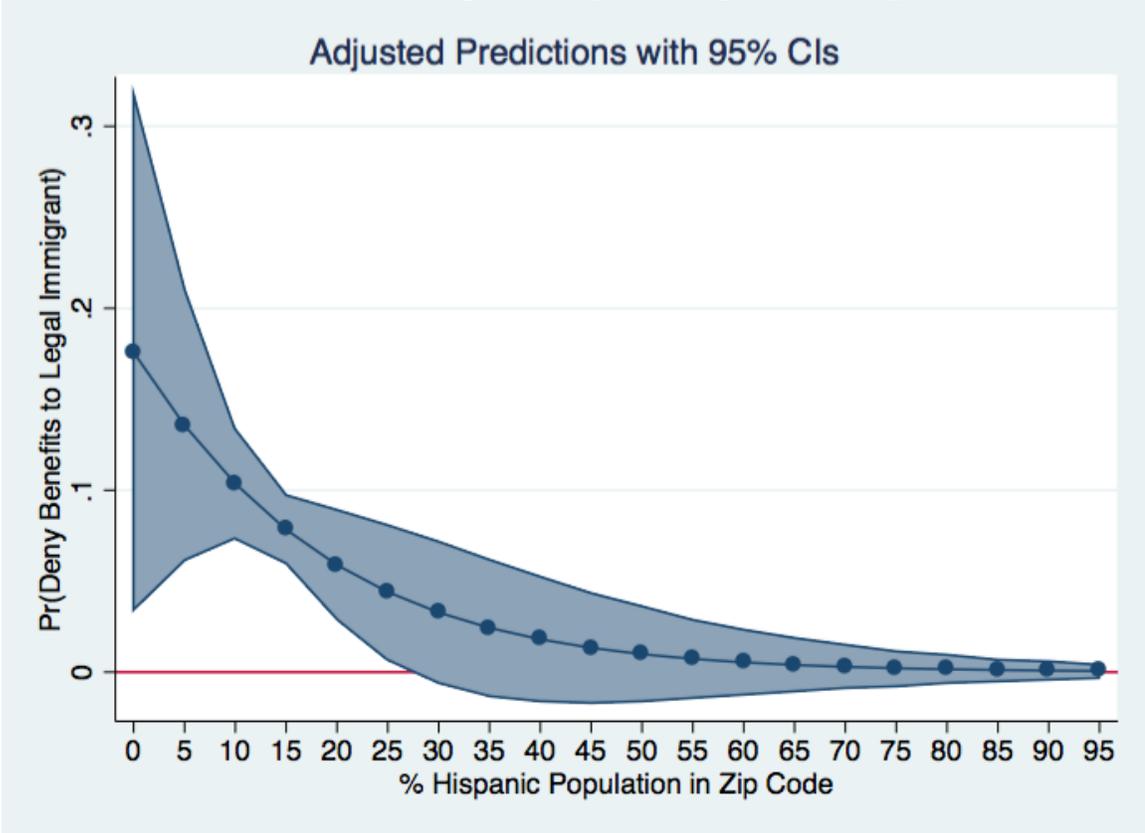
**Figure 3.5: Predicted Probability of Support for English-Only Law and Ethnocultural Threat**



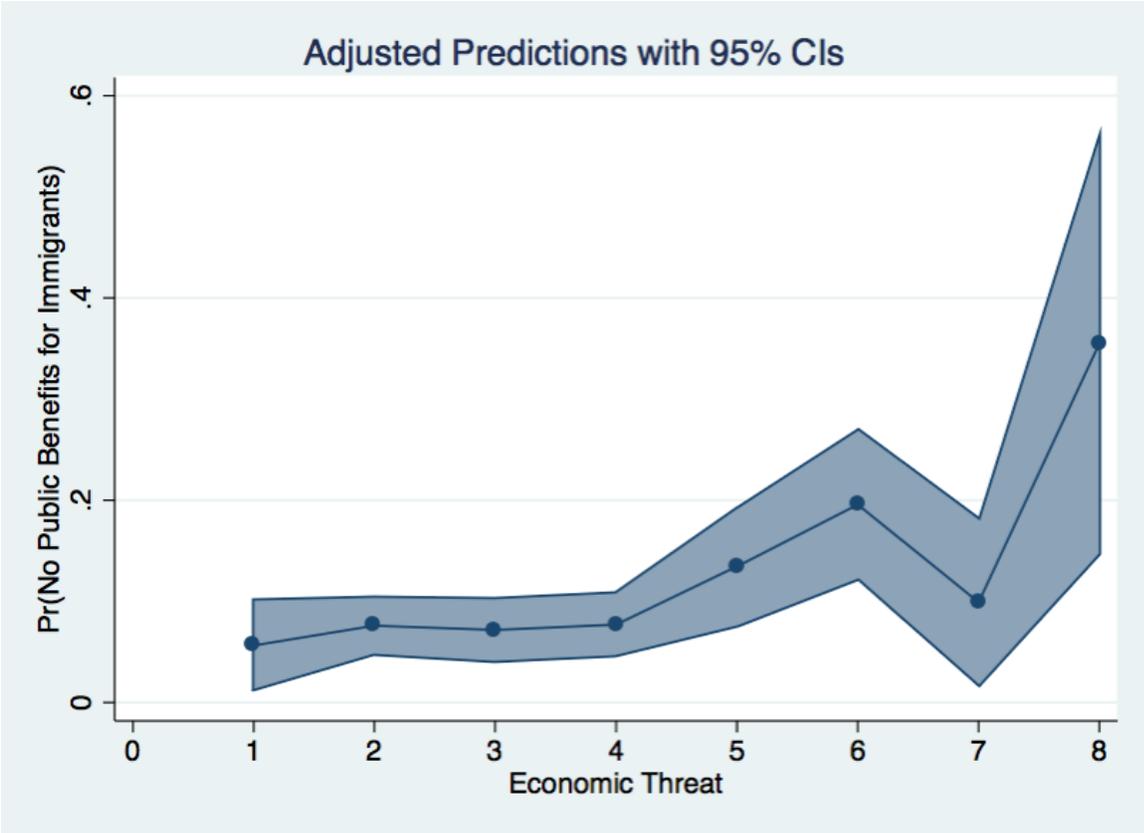
**Figure 3.6: Predicted Probability of Whites' Support for English-Only Law and % Hispanic in Zip Code**



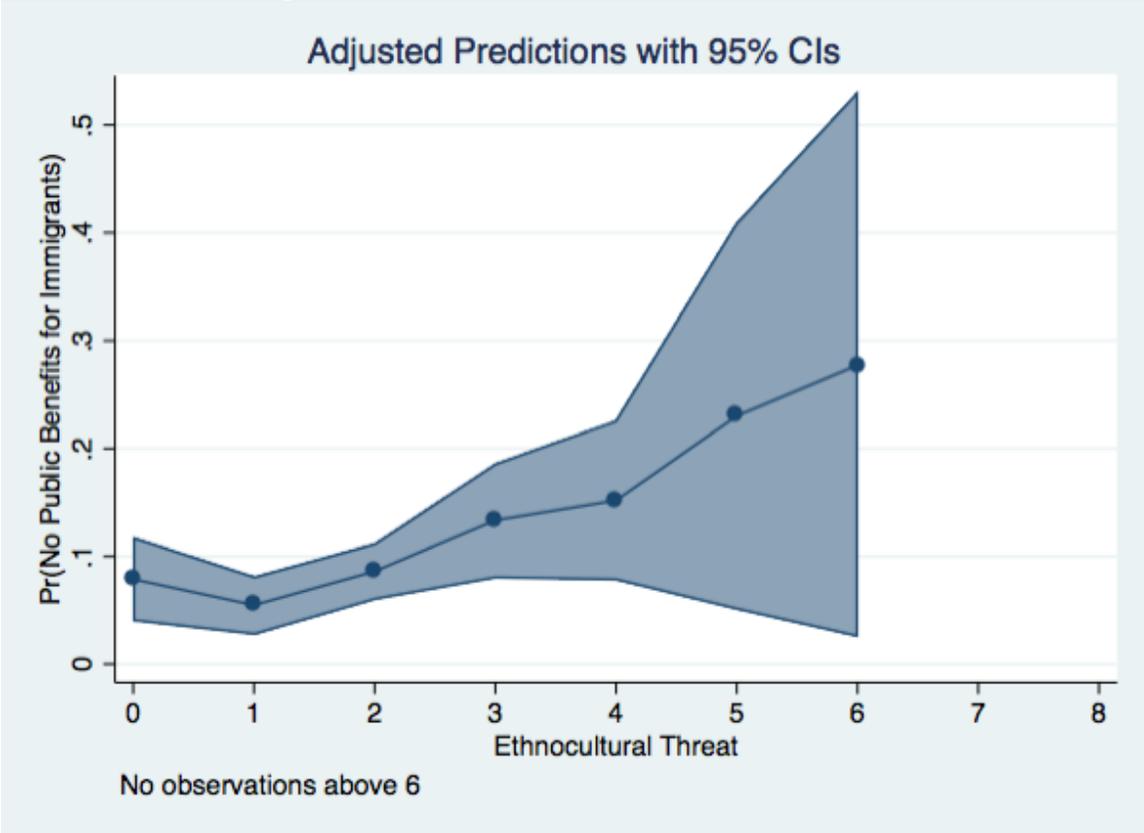
**Figure 3.7: Predicted Probability of Whites' Support for Denying Public Benefits to Immigrants by % Hispanic in Zip Code**



**Figure 3.8: Predicted Probability of Denial of Public Benefits to Immigrants and Economic Threat**



**Figure 3.9: Ethnocultural Threat and Denial of Public Benefits to Immigrants**



*Appendix:*

**Table 3.4A: Predicted Probabilities of Preference for Decreased Imm. by Levels**

<b>Economic Threat</b>						
	Margin	Std. Err.	z	P>z	[95% Conf.	Interval]
0	.2341821	.0917614	2.55	0.011	.0543331	.4140311
1	.1760218	.0423843	4.15	0.000	.09295	.2590935
2	.2543609	.0250437	10.16	0.000	.205276	.3034457
3	.342641	.0329554	10.40	0.000	.2780496	.4072324
4	.3631433	.0333584	10.89	0.000	.2977621	.4285245
5	.3264952	.0454109	7.19	0.000	.2374915	.4154988
6	.4218901	.0517636	8.15	0.000	.3204353	.5233449
7	.519649	.0913715	5.69	0.000	.3405642	.6987338
8	.7792925	.1102538	7.07	0.000	.5631989	.995386

**Table 3.5A: Predicted Probabilities of Preference for Decreased Imm. by**

<b>Ethnocultural Threat</b>						
	Margin	Std. Err	z	P>z	[95% Conf. Interval]	
0	.2258401	.0307947	7.33	0.000	.1654837	.2861965
1	.2745507	.0278926	9.84	0.000	.2198822	.3292193
2	.3106572	.0234132	13.27	0.000	.2647682	.3565462
3	.4828337	.0446025	10.83	0.000	.3954144	.5702531
4	.4087636	.0606515	6.74	0.000	.2898888	.5276383
5	.8090289	.1004018	8.06	0.000	.612245	1.005813
6	.6000595	.1721884	3.48	0.000	.2625765	.9375426
7	omitted- no observations					
8	omitted- no observations					

**Table 3.6A: Predicted Probabilities of Support for English-Only Law by Economic**

<b>Threat</b>						
	Margin	Std. Err.	z	P>z	[95% Conf.	Interval]
0	.7861584	.091789	8.56	0.000	.6062552	.9660615
1	.7880938	.0460317	17.12	0.000	.6978733	.8783142
2	.752906	.0255409	29.48	0.000	.7028468	.8029652
3	.8453622	.0237004	35.67	0.000	.7989103	.891814
4	.8759493	.0219384	39.93	0.000	.8329509	.9189477
5	.9035777	.0282945	31.93	0.000	.8481215	.959034
6	.9233284	.0283218	32.60	0.000	.8678187	.978838
7	.9352104	.0454822	20.56	0.000	.846067	1.024354
8	.8181647	.0977283	8.37	0.000	.6266208	1.009709

**Table 3.7A: Predicted Probabilities Support for English-Only Law by Ethnocultural Threat**

	Margin	Std. Err.	z	P>z	[95% Conf.	Interval]
0	.7391908	.031454	23.50	0.000	.6775421	.8008395
1	.8084358	.0233761	34.58	0.000	.7626195	.8542521
2	.8684847	.0167797	51.76	0.000	.8355971	.9013723
3	.9032571	.0263927	34.22	0.000	.8515283	.9549859
4	.8349317	.0513991	16.24	0.000	.7341913	.9356721
6	.6501355	.1961344	3.31	0.001	.265719	1.034552
7	Omitted- No Observations					
8	Omitted- No Observations					

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## **Chapter 4:**

### **Is Meeting the New Neighbors Cure a for Rural America's Animosity Towards Immigrants?**

This chapter seeks to explore how the changes in rural communities discussed in previous chapters affect how rural whites see immigrants and how their attitudes are affected by social contact with Latinos.. I also examine what influence this has on their policy preferences for issues dealing with students who are the children of these immigrants, who may be undocumented, permanent residents, or citizens themselves.

Two competing theories have sought to explain what happens when different racial or ethnic groups live in the same area and must share economic and political resources. Social contact theory posits that increased social contact with different ethnic and/or racial groups leads to more tolerant opinions of those groups. The group threat hypothesis argues quite the opposite in that increased contact and proximity can lead in turn to increased economically or culturally-based competition and hostility between groups. Previous literature has left the conflict between the theories unresolved. This research seeks to explore the contexts in which social contact and racial threat influence whites' individual attitudes about their new neighbors within the context of changing rural municipalities, and if one theory lends more insight in this context than the other.

This chapter seeks to reconcile the conflicting effects of the group threat hypothesis, explored in the previous chapter, and social contact theory. While seemingly contradictory and competing, this chapter demonstrates that the influence of each may vary by context. The social contact theory posits that increased social contact with different ethnic and/or racial groups tends

to lead to more tolerant opinions of those groups. The group threat hypothesis argues somewhat the opposite in that increased contact and proximity may lead to increased competition and hostility between groups that can be economically or culturally-based. The results of this chapter show that the effects of the two theories are not mutually exclusive.

### *Group Threat and Social Contact*

Residential racial and ethnic context plays a significant role in shaping whites' individual attitudes and policy preferences towards minorities and immigration (Gimpel and Lay 2008; Rocha et al. 2011; Rocha and Espino 2009; Tolbert 2003; Welch et al. 2001). Both the racial threat hypothesis and social contact theory attempt to explain the influence of individuals' neighbors and their surrounding neighborhood on their political attitudes and behaviors, as well as feelings towards minority groups. However, they often take divergent paths in theorizing whether increased diversity in one's social contacts and neighborhood lead to increased tolerance or to increased conflict. While they are not entirely at odds, the findings of research based in these theories provide evidence that seems contradictory unless context is taken into consideration.

Social identity theory provides some insights into the roots of racial threat, as it explores the impact of one's own group identity and the desire for positive comparisons to other groups on individuals' behavior (Cottam et al. 2010). According to this theory, people differentiate between in-groups, which they belong to, and out-groups, which they do not (Tajfel and Turner 1979). Discrimination between groups can occur as a result of an individual's motivation to evaluate one's own group more positively than other out-groups (Tajfel and Turner 1986). In other words, people tend to categorize the social world into "us" vs. "them." This paradigm leads to intergroup competition over resources, both real and perceived. The social identity

theory perspective also provides insight into how scapegoating of out-groups occurs during times of trouble, such as an economic recession. Its proponents argue that scapegoating is a result of social causality assessments (Hogg and Abrams 1988). Individuals find out-groups to blame for the troubles of their own in-group. This relates to the common stereotype that immigrants take the jobs of native-born Americans.

### *Group Threat Perspective*

As discussed in the previous chapter, the group threat hypothesis suggests that whites may identify as a group and feel threatened when minorities are able to compete with them for economic or political power and resources (Hajnal 2001). White Americans have long held the upper hand in both the political and social realms, and may feel threatened when they perceive that this preferred position is threatened in the presence of growing minority groups. This occurs not only when a person from a minority group wins elected office, but also in the neighborhood context with intergroup competition over jobs and other resources (Hajnal, 2001). It is within this context that we focus, as our data was collected from rural communities in which all residents must share, or compete for, the same limited economic resources and jobs. Citrin et al found attitudes toward immigration to be strongly tied to one's perception of economic vulnerability (1997). Within the sampled communities, and most of rural America, whites have long held a preferred position in regards to economic and political power, but the ethnic and racial makeup of rural America is changing with large numbers of immigrants from Latin America moving to these areas to fill meatpacking and agricultural jobs over the past few decades (United States Census Bureau, 2011) (Johnson, 2012).

A useful lens for understanding the influence of threat is to make a distinction between realistic threat and symbolic threat (Citrin, Green, and Sears 1990; Sniderman, Hagendoorn, and

Prior 2004; Stephan, Ybarra, and Bachman 1999; Stephan, Ybarra, and Rios Morrison 2009). Perceptions of realistic threats can arise from competition over resources, the loss of which could hurt a groups well-being or standing (Bobo 1983, 1988). In regard to immigration perceived realistic threats tend to be in the form of competition for jobs, reduced wages, the consumption of government resources and benefits, and increased taxes to support immigrants' benefits (Campbell, Wong, and Citrin 2006; Hood and Morris 1997; Stephan, Ybarra, and Bachman 1999). Symbolic threats are perceived violations of one's group cultural norms, values, or identity (Citrin et al. 1990; D. R. Kinder and Sears 1981; Stephan, Ybarra, and Bachman 1999). Individuals may perceive a threat to American culture from Latino immigrants that they feel are not embracing American culture or identity (Huntington 2004). Measures of symbolic threat and fears of the cultural influence of immigration are consistent predictors of support for restrictive immigration measures and negative assessments of immigrants (Citrin et al. 1990, 1997; Hood and Morris 1997).

### *Social Contact Perspective*

The social contact theory, as originally outlined by Gordon Allport in the mid-1950s, assumes that increased interracial contact "promotes positive racial attitudes" and lack of such contact leads to ignorance and hostility (Allport 1954). Allport proposes numerous stipulations if the contact is to lead towards reduction of prejudices. One way a positive interaction will take place is if there is contact between two people from a majority and minority who share the same status. A second condition is if there is a difference between the types of contact that can occur. Allport argues that there will be different outcomes if the contact is competitive in nature or if it is cooperative in nature. It is unlikely there will be a positive influence if the contact environment is competitive rather than cooperative. In the current contextual example, the

limited number of jobs within rural communities creates a more competitive environment in the workplace than the more consensual contact of other social settings. As a result, this competitive environment will lead to a more negative influence of the contact between individuals.

Much of the social contact literature since has focused on changes in individuals' attitudes based on the racial composition of communities in which they reside, with mixed results in regards to the effect of increased contact. Using national survey data, Sigelman and Welch find that both interracial friendships and neighborhood contact increase whites' desire for racial integration with blacks (1993). Similar results come from Hood and Morris, where whites residing in areas with large Latino and Asian populations tended to favor less restrictive immigration policies (1997). Other research posits that increased neighborhood integration will correspond with lower levels of intergroup prejudice and competition, but intergroup hostility increased in cities with larger minority populations (Oliver and Wong 2003). A study of rural communities with growing Latino immigrant populations found that tolerance for diversity was contextually conditioned by the number of immigrants that had settled into the neighborhood (Gimpel & Lay, 2008). Tolbert conducted a census-tract-level analysis of white support for California's Proposition 209, an initiative aimed at ending affirmative action in the state. Her results suggest that white support for the initiative was higher in tracts with larger Latino, African-American, or Asian-American populations, even after controlling for other factors (Tolbert, 2003).

#### *Theory and Argument: Latino Context*

A few authors have sought to rectify the differences between the two theories, social contact and the threat hypothesis (Rocha & Espino, 2009). Rocha and Espino found that both the

size of the Latino population and level of residential segregation in a neighborhood can influence both whites' perceptions of threat and the tolerating influence of social contact (ibid). In other words, they argue that racial threat and social contact are not necessarily directly competing forces that determine whites' attitudes toward minorities, and their influence varies depending on the racial context. The level of residential segregation was an "intervening factor that makes the conditions for either racial threat or social contact more likely", which in turn affects whites' attitudes towards Latinos (ibid). Also, of specific interest to this paper, white's attitudes toward English-only and immigration policies were "significantly related to changes in size of Latino population conditional on levels of residential segregation"; becoming much less supportive of such policies in integrated neighborhoods with larger Latino populations (ibid).

Beyond the immediate threat to their own community, whites may also feel resentment towards the government over policies that are targeted towards aiding minority students. Policies that provide aid to minority groups are a good example of policies that may be viewed as asking for the sacrifice of some but not others. There is tendency among some whites to perceive efforts to aid minority groups as an effort to directly disadvantage white Americans (Lipsitz 2006). A large majority of white Americans claim to be in support of racial equality, but they differ in their support of these policies, such as affirmative action or educational quotas, that are designed to ensure it (Hetherington and Globetti 2002). Past research on opposition to bilingual education programs found both racial prejudice and a perception of threat to whites' economic interests, because these policies redistribute educational resources to Latinos (Huddy and Sears 1995). Schildkraut also finds that holding the predominant ethnocultural view of an "American as a white, English-speaking person of Anglo-Saxon descent" to "have the clearest

and most consistent influence” on an individual’s language policy preferences, such as English-only laws and bilingual education (Schildkraut 2005).

It is estimated that 50,000-65,000 undocumented high school students graduate each year in the United States (Reich and Barth 2010). Since 2001, 16 state legislatures have enacted legislation that allows undocumented high school graduates to attend the states’ public post-secondary schools at in-state tuition rates, while six states have barred such benefits (National Conference of State Legislatures 2014). Combined with the local threat of a growing minority population within their own community, that they view as stressing local resources, government implemented policies intended to aid minority groups may increase white Americans’ sense of racial threat.

### ***Research Questions***

- *How does social contact with Latinos affect the policy preferences of whites’ in rural communities on issues dealing with immigrant students?*
- *How are the anticipated benefits of social contact affected by perceptions of racial threat, or that Latinos are taking whites’ political and economic resources?*

### ***Arguments and Hypotheses***

Past research has primarily focused on residential context to test these competing theories, and has found that proximity does not always necessarily lead to tolerance nor perceptions of threat. I hypothesize that other factors such as type of social contact, consensual friendships or the forced proximity of the workplace, will provide new ways in which to test the theories, and that social contact in the workplace may trigger perceptions of racial threat. The racial threat hypothesis has been tested in many regions across the country, at the state level (Tolbert and Hero 2001a), and metropolitan areas (Welch, Sigelman, Bledsoe, & Combs, 2001).

Testing it in the rural community context can provide valuable insights, as rapid demographic change is happening in many parts of the rural U.S. With the white population stagnant or declining in many rural areas of the country (United States Census Bureau, 2011), continuing significant growth in the Latino population could result in significant shifts in political power in the not so distant future. This is especially true in parts of the country where whites have long held onto the majority of political and economic power. In these changing rural communities intergroup contact is inevitable. Whites and Latinos must share the more limited resources that rural municipalities have to offer. Not only are there fewer options for employment, but there are often only a few elementary schools, one high school, one or two grocery stores, and one Wal-Mart.

Social contact alone will not create more tolerant stances towards Latinos and immigrants, as well as policies that benefit them. The context of that contact matters. The forced contact of the workplace is different than the consensual contact of friendship. Whites with Latino coworkers in these smaller communities with fewer economic opportunities may see the newcomers as a threat to their economic well-being. Meanwhile, having Latino friends will also decrease perceptions of racial threat, or that Latinos are taking whites' economic and political resources.

*Hypothesis 1: Whites in rural areas who report having friends who are Latino will be more likely to prefer policies that aid immigrant students.*

*Hypothesis 2: Whites in rural areas who report having friends who are Latino will be less likely to express perceptions of racial threat.*

*Hypothesis 3: Whites who report having Latino coworkers will be less likely to support measures that benefit immigrant students*

*Hypothesis 4: Whites who report having Latino coworkers will be more likely to express perceptions of racial threat.*

*Hypothesis 5: Perceptions of racial threat will significantly decrease support for policies aiding immigrant students, and increase support for policies that would restrict their rights.*

*Hypothesis 6: Whites who report having Latino coworkers and more conservative ideology will be even more likely to express perceptions of racial threat.*

### ***Data and Methods***

To examine the questions of contact and threat in rural American I utilize a unique dataset from a survey of towns in Kansas and Nebraska that have experience demographic change from immigration over the past two decades. The United States Department of Agriculture defines rural in the 2008 Farm Bill, as “a rural area or municipality excludes cities of 50,000 or more and any urbanized area that is contiguous, or adjacent to a city of 50,000 or more” (United States Dept. of Agriculture, 2008). Using these criteria, four municipalities were selected, two in Kansas (Dodge City and Garden City), and two in Nebraska (Fremont and Grand Island) in which to conduct face-to-face surveys. These four municipalities were chosen for both their changing demographics and, due to budget and time constraints, their proximity to the University of Kansas in Lawrence.

The data used in this chapter was collected during the summers of 2011 and 2012. Respondents were administered a 73 multi-part question survey, in both English and Spanish. This survey utilizes questions used on previous national surveys, such as the General Social Survey, the American National Election Studies surveys, the Harris Poll, Gallup, and the 2006 Latino National Survey. The use of these questions provides us with increased confidence in the validity of our results, as the questions have been previously tested numerous times.

The surveys were administered using three different methods. The first was face-to-face, which were administered door-to-door in rural community neighborhoods. The primary

investigators randomly chose voting precincts within each city and then attempted to survey the occupant of every third house or business. For the second method, the principal investigators contacted local community college instructors in each community to obtain permission to conduct the survey during class time to willing participants. The third method was an internet based survey. The internet survey was advertised on local message boards, community business and organization Facebook pages, and by contacting instructors of community college classes. The cities chosen for the internet survey were randomly drawn from a list of all nonmetropolitan cities under 50,000 residents. This mixed method improves the chance that all residents of the selected municipalities have an equal chance of being selected to participate in the survey, reducing the likelihood of selection bias. The survey yielded a sample that was representative of these communities on age, income, and educational attainment. This chapter will only focus on the responses of white non-Hispanic residents, which included 285 respondents.

### *Coding of Variables*

The dependent variables for this project are respondents' preferences for various policies that affect immigrants and the education of immigrant students. These include respondents' support for a policy that grants in-state tuition rates for undocumented students, multi-year bilingual education programs, the granting of birthright citizenship to children of undocumented immigrants born in the U.S., and English-only laws. Explanation of coding is included in the discussion of the results of models.

### *Primary Independent Variables*

Included are independent variables that are intended to measure the effects of social contact and racial threat. These variables are drawn from questions about the racial or ethnic makeup of their friends and coworkers, as well as whether they have any close friends, relatives

or colleagues who are immigrants. Also included are variables for respondents' perceptions of immigrants' willingness to assimilate, whether they see immigrants as criminals, and whether they consider immigrants as a burden on society. To assess the respondents' more general attitudes towards newcomers in their communities, I have included variables that are measures of respondents' views of Latinos in general, and a measure of respondents' perceptions of shared commonality with Latinos. Also, included is a measure of respondents' perception of alienation from society, as those who feel alienated may perceive greater threat from immigrants.

### *Threat*

To test the influence of perception of group or racial threat, I created an additive variable that runs from 0-6 from the following questions that asks whether respondents feel that Hispanics threaten their economic well-being and political influence. Respondents were asked how strongly they agree with the following two statements:

- “The more influence that Hispanics have in politics the less influence people like me will have in politics.”
- “More good jobs for Hispanics mean fewer good jobs for people like me.”

Those that answered “Strongly Agree” are coded as 3, “Somewhat Agree” as 2, “Somewhat Disagree” as 1, while those that responded “Strongly Disagree,” or “Don’t Know,” are coded as 0. This racial threat variable was also used as an independent variable in the other models using the same coding.

### *Social Contact Variables*

The variables seeking to test social contact theory are meant to determine the different types of social contact respondents have with Latinos and immigrants. I made dichotomous variable for each of the measures. The respondents were asked the following questions:

- “How would you describe your friends?”
- “How would you describe your coworkers?”

After each question respondents were read the following list of options: “Mostly

Latino/Hispanic, Mostly White, Mixed Latino/Hispanic and White, Mostly Black, Mixed Latino and Black, Other, or Mix of all of the above.” Those that responded “Mostly Latino/Hispanic”, “Mixed Latino/Hispanic and White”, “Mixed Latino/Hispanic and Black”, or “Mix of all of the above,” were coded as 1 for each of the above questions.

### *Commonality*

Next, I assess respondents’ perceived solidarity with Latinos in the U.S. I created an additive variable, running from 0-6 for “A lot, Some, Little, Nothing, Don’t Know,” with the response to the following two questions

- “Thinking about issues like job opportunities, educational attainment, and poverty, how much do people of your racial or ethnic groups and Hispanics have in common in the United States today?”
- “Now, I’d like you think about the political situation of people of your racial or ethnic groups and immigrants in society. Thinking about things like government services and employment, political power, participation, and representation, how much do people of your racial or ethnic group and Hispanics have in common?”

### *Prejudice towards Latinos Variable*

To measure respondents’ negative feelings about Latinos/Hispanics in general they were asked to respond to the battery below.

- “Do you think Hispanics are generally:
  1. Lazy, Hardworking, or Neutral
  2. Unintelligent, Intelligent, or Neutral
  3. Untrustworthy, Trustworthy, Neutral”

An additive variable was created from these responses ranging from 0-3. Responses of “Lazy,” “Unintelligent,” and “Untrustworthy” were coded as 1 for each. Responses of “Hardworking,” “Intelligent,” “Trustworthy,” and “Neutral” were coded as 0.

### *Alienation*

Hetherington and Globetti find the sense of alienation from the political system and low levels of trust in government to undermine non-Hispanic whites’ support for educational policies that benefit minority students, due to a perception that government is asking the sacrifice of some for the exclusive benefit of others (2002). An additive variable was created using respondents’ level of agreement (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree Nor Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree) with the statements:.

- “The people running the country don’t really care what happens to you.”
- “Most people with power try to take advantage of people like yourself.”
- “You’re left out of things going on around you.”
- “The rich get richer and the poor get poorer.”
- “What you think doesn’t count very much anymore.”

The additive sum of their answers was used to test alienation and ranges from 0-25.

### *Demographic Variables*

Past research has also found that negative attitudes towards immigrants to be correlated with demographic factors, such as income, education, age, and party identification (Schildkraut 2011). Schildkraut found that Republicans, people with lower household incomes, and those with lower levels of education are more likely to harbor racial or immigrant resentment than those with higher incomes and education levels or who identify as Democrats (2011, p. 182).

Based on these past findings, I include the key demographic variables of education, income, ideology, gender, age, political knowledge, and employment status. Education is a

numerical variable running from 0-7 (none through graduate or professional degree). A dichotomous variable was made for employment status and was coded as 1 for those who are employed. The same was done for gender with male coded as 1. Age is a continuous variable ranging from 18-87. Income is an ordinal variable running from 0-6, “Below \$15,000” to “Above \$65,000.”

Due to multicollinearity issues and to the overwhelmingly conservative Republican nature of the rural towns sampled, I include a measure of ideology and not a measure for party. The unidimensional liberal-conservative scale in American politics is closely tied to racial attitudes (Carmines and Stimson 1989; Sniderman and Carmines 1997). Therefore, one of the principal variables I want to control for in assessing attitudes towards Latinos is an individual's ideological self-placement on the 7-point liberal-conservative scale.

## ***Analysis and Results***

### *In-State Tuition*

First, I examine support for a policy that allows undocumented students that graduated from state high schools to attend state-funded colleges and universities at the in-state tuition rate. The respondents were asked the question below. Those that indicated “Strongly Oppose” or “Oppose” were coded as 1 for opposition to the policy, while all other responses are coded as 0.

- “How do you feel about the following statement: Undocumented immigrants attending college should be charged a higher tuition rate at state colleges and universities, even if they grew up and graduated high school in the state.”

The results show that context matters when it comes to the effect of increased social contact. People can freely choose their friends, but they often cannot choose those they work with and compete with for such economic resources. Table 4.1 presents the probit regression of support for in-state tuition. In rural communities, having Latino coworkers is found to be a

significant influence on whites' support for in-state tuition for undocumented students who graduated from their state's high schools. The findings run counter to some of the previous research built on the social contact theory, but they are supported by the racial threat hypothesis. Public colleges and universities are a shared resource funded by the taxpayers. Whites' who perceive that their economic and political power is threatened by Latinos in general, are shown to be unsupportive of measures that would grant access to this shared resource to undocumented students, whom they may see as being undeserving and a part of that threat. These results also support my third and fourth hypotheses, as these individuals in rural communities may see their Latino coworkers and other recent immigrants in their community as a threat to their economic well-being, a near perfect definition of part of the racial threat hypothesis.

[Insert Table 4.1 here]

However, two variables were found to significantly influence support for this policy in a positive direction. An increased level of education tends to increase individuals' support for granting in-state tuition to these students, as those who have attained higher education may support the expansion of educational opportunities for all groups. Indicating a sense of commonality of the economic and political situations between non-Hispanic whites and Latinos was also a significantly positive influence on support for this policy.

#### *Multi-Year English as a Second Language Classes*

Next, I examine the support for English as a Second Language programs, which provide non-native English speaking students an opportunity to learn English in the public schools. The dependent variable for support for multi-year bilingual education is created from the following question, with those "Strongly Support" or "Support" are coded as 1, with all other as 0.

- “Do you think schools should replace multi-year bilingual instruction with English instruction after one year?”

In the logit models found on Table 4.1, neither the social contact variables nor the racial threat variable were significant factors in the model testing support for multi-year bilingual education programs. Much like the results of support for in-state tuition, the participants’ higher education significantly increased their support for multi-year bilingual education programs. Those who have achieved higher education, tend to prefer to expand such opportunities for others. On the other hand, conservative ideology and feelings of alienation from the government are found to significantly decrease support for expanding the educational opportunities for immigrant children.

#### *English-Only Law*

I then look at the respondent’s support for English-only laws, which is measured by responses to the following question: “Should an English-only law be passed and enforced in your town?” Answers in the affirmative were coded as 1, while responses of “No” or “Don’t Know” are coded as a 0.

The results of the model show that the social contact of having Latino friends has no effect on whites’ attitudes towards English-only laws and bilingual education. However, having Latino coworkers tends increase support for English-only policies. This is consistent with past research. Rocha and Espino find whites’ attitudes toward “language policies to be unrelated to the presence of English-speaking Latinos, while whites do react to the presence of Spanish-speaking Latinos” (Rocha & Espino, 2009). Racial threat is also found to significantly influence support for English-only laws. In the these rural communities, whites who have Latino friends may be less likely to perceive a need for an English-only law, but those with Latino coworkers,

who they also may perceive to be a threat to their economic and political resources, are more likely to support such a law. This finding supports my third hypothesis, as many English-only laws would prohibit bilingual education programs within the communities that adopt them.

[Insert Table 4.2 about here]

Other factors were found to significantly influence support for English-only-laws, such as age, sense of alienation, and ideology. Increased age and conservatism are both found to increase support for an official language within rural municipalities. These findings are supported by previous research such as Schildkraut (2011, pg. 182). The interactive term included for this model (see Table 4.2) is significant and in the direction predicted by much of the social contact literature. Increased conservatism is found to be a significantly positive influence on support for English-only policies, but for those who identify as more conservative with Latino coworkers the effect may be mitigated by social contact.

Figure 4.3 below includes a plot of the marginal effects of ideology and of respondents having Latino coworkers on support for an English-only law. The solid black line indicates the marginal effect of respondents working with Latinos and their range of ideology, running from extremely liberal to extremely conservative. The figure displays that the marginal effect of the interaction, represented by the solid black line, has a statistically significant effect on probability of support for an English-only law when both the upper and lower bounds of the 95 percent confidence interval, represented by the shaded area, are above or below the zero line. If the marginal effect line is above the zero line it indicates a positive effect, while being below the zero line indicates a negative effect. In Figure 4.3, differences in the effect of having Latino coworkers emerge moving from left to right on the ideological spectrum. In other words, if a respondent has Latino coworkers, it is likely to increase the probability of his/her support for an

English-only law if he/she is liberal to moderate ideologically. However, there is likely no difference in the probability of support among those who lean conservative. The more conservative respondents are more likely to support such measures regardless of the racial/ethnic identity of their friends or coworkers.

[Insert Figure 4.3 about here]

### *Changing Birthright Citizenship Clause of 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment*

Next, I look at the respondent's support for a policy that would change the birthright citizenship clause of the 14<sup>th</sup> amendment in the constitution. Responses indicating a preference of changing the citizenship clause of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment of the Constitution are coded as 1. Responses indicating support for keeping the citizenship clause as it is are coded as a 0.

- “Do you think we should continue to grant citizenship to all children born in the U.S., or do you think the Constitution should be changed so children of illegal immigrants are not automatically granted citizenship?”

The social contact variables do not have a significant influence on the dependent variable of support for eliminating birthright citizenship for children born to undocumented immigrants. However, the racial threat variable was shown to be a positive and significant influence on support for amending the U.S. Constitution to prohibit the granting of citizenship to children born in the U.S. to non-citizens parents. This finding supports my fifth hypothesis that perceptions of racial threat will significantly and positively influence policies that restrict the rights of immigrant children. Increased conservatism was also shown to increase support for changing the 14<sup>th</sup> amendment.

### *Threat Models*

In the next set of models in Table 4.3, I assume that intergroup contact affects perceptions of racial threat and not the reverse. The causal relationship could also run in exactly

the opposite direction with Anglos who are more positively disposed to Latinos actively seeking them out as friends. However, this would run counter to past literature. It also would not explain the observed relationship between rural whites' increased perception of racial threat and having Latino coworkers, as people often have little choice in the ascriptive characteristics of their coworkers.

[Insert Table 4.3 about here]

The results lead to the conclusion that white residents of rural communities who feel threatened by the growing presence of minorities, and their perceived impact on whites' political and economic resources, will be significantly more likely to support anti-immigrant policies.

The two models test group threat as the dependent variable, one in which ideology is interacted with Latino coworkers, and one in which ideology is interacted with Latino friends. Ordered probit models are utilized because the racial threat variable running from zero to six provides a cruder measure than would a truly continuous variable, which would be preferable to a linear model. Proportional-odds models are generally preferred for an ordered response variable on "grounds of parsimony" (Fox 2008).

For whites in the sample, having Latino coworkers was found to increase perceptions of racial threat, but it is also contingent upon individuals' ideology. Figure 4.3, is a conditional marginal effects plot that includes 95 percent confidence intervals. When the 95 percent confidence interval for the difference does not include zero, the difference can be considered to be statistically significant. Figure 4.3 shows that the difference in the probability of perceptions of racial threat is not statistically significant, between those who have Latino coworkers and those that do not, among those who identify ideologically as conservatives. This indicates that rural whites who identify as conservative tend to have increased perceptions of racial threat,

regardless of whether or not they work with Latinos. The findings are consistent with some previous literature (Carmines and Stimson 1989; Giles and Hertz 1994; Schildkraut 2011). A more interesting finding is that respondents who have Latino coworkers have an increased probability of holding perceptions of racial threat, by up to 25 percent among those who identify as more liberal when compared to those of same ideology with no Latino coworkers. This finding supports my fourth hypothesis that rural whites who have Latino coworkers may see themselves as being in economic competition with Latinos and will then in-turn be more likely to express a perception of racial threat.

While social contact in the workplace leads to a greater likelihood of rural whites having a perception of racial threat, the context of consensual friendship tends to have the opposite effect. This effect is displayed in Figure 4.5. The more liberal an individual is, and if they have Latino friends, the greater the probability that that individual will not perceive a threat from Latinos. This finding supports the social contact theory's thesis of increased tolerance between groups with increased social contact, as well as my second hypothesis. However, the figure with 95 percent confidence intervals indicates that there is likely no statistically significant difference between the perceptions of racial threat of conservatives who do and do not have Latino friends.

[Insert Figures 4.4 and 4.5 about here]

One of the more interesting findings is that holding negative feelings towards Hispanics was not found to have a significant impact on any of the dependent variables except for racial threat. Meanwhile, racial threat had a significant impact on respondent's support for in-state tuition and English-only laws, indicating feelings of racial animosity. This may be explained more clearly by research from social psychology. It has become socially unacceptable to be overtly racist, yet racist sentiments still linger within the public. This "new" kind of racism is

called “symbolic racism” and today’s “racial resentment . . . manifests itself in opposition to race-targeted policies” (D. Kinder and Sanders 1996; D. R. Kinder and Sears 1981). According to this theory, individuals express their bias towards minorities in the guise of “commitment to the American values of individualism and self-reliance” (Hetherington & Globetti, 2002). This argument is similar to those made in support of recent state and local policies that restrict the rights of undocumented immigrants, exhorting a commitment to law and order or a “principled appeal to traditional conservative values” (Sniderman and Piazza 1993).

The symbolic racism argument is not without its critics. The “principled politics” argument counters symbolic racism and argues that opposition to racial policies may reflect a principled objection to the policies, rather than biases towards their beneficiaries (Sniderman and Piazza 1993). Supporters of this view argue that principled objections to policies that are beneficial to minorities will manifest themselves in terms of the individual attitudes such as partisanship and conservatism (Sniderman & Carmines, 1997). However, Rocha et al find that whites’ support for more restrictive immigration policies in areas with large Latino populations is not a product of the size of the foreign-born Latino population, but rather the size of the native-born Latino population (2011). Therefore, the authors conclude that “racial- or ethnic-based concerns may trump worries about legal procedures or national security when it comes to the formation of immigration policy attitudes (ibid). It is not within the scope of this paper to address these differences. However, both ideology and racial/ethnic bias were significant in influencing the perceptions of racial threat among the rural whites in the sample.

### ***Conclusion***

Non-Hispanic whites who perceive a threat from Latinos to one’s economic well-being, political resources and power are significantly more likely to oppose policies that lend aid to

immigrant students. This effect may be increased among these individuals by workplace contact with groups they perceive as being a threat to their economic security. While the consensual social contact of friendship with Latinos is shown to significantly reduce perceptions of racial threat among rural whites, the forced contact of the workplace tends to influence their attitudes in the opposite and negative direction. This chapter also finds a difference in how social contact interacts with ideology. Workplace contact with Latinos does little to change perceptions of racial threat or support for English-only laws among those who are more conservative, and already more likely to feel threatened and be supportive of such laws. However, workplace contact is shown to increase such perceptions and support among those who identify as more liberal. When it comes to the effects of social contact, context matters.

I find that social contact, whether with friends or in the workplace, have little to no effect on non-Hispanic whites that identify as conservative. I also find that those whites who lean conservative are more likely to perceive Latinos to be a threat to their economic and political resources, and social contact likely has no statistically significant influence upon these perceptions. Much of the past literature on the effects of social contact has been conducted in urban neighborhoods, finding mixed results as to whether or not increased contact in these neighborhoods leads to more intergroup tolerance (Hood III & Morris, 1997; Oliver & Wong, 2003; Sigelman & Welch, 1993). My research instead demonstrates that there can be significantly different results when examining attitudes in rural communities. One has to look no further than a map of Congressional representation to see the dominance of more conservative ideology in most rural areas in the U.S. This research indicates that increased social contact with Latinos, the fastest growing population in rural areas, may have little to no impact on increased tolerance of the conservative population.

The overall population of the rural U.S. is stagnant or shrinking, but where the population is growing, it is experiencing some growing pains. However, I find older individuals have increased perceptions of racial threat and are more supportive of restrictive policies. This indicates that there may be some generational differences that will possibly alleviate this clash between ideology and a growing rural immigrant population over time. The electoral map may change as younger Latinos and non-Hispanic whites interact and become friends in school, and then come of age and join the electorate.

*Tables and Figures*

**Table 4.1: Rural Whites' Support of In-State Tuition For Undocumented Students and ESL Classes**

	In-State Support	In-State Support w/ interaction	ESL Support	ESL Support w/ interaction
Age	0.00687 (0.48)	0.0185 (1.11)	-0.0149 (-0.91)	-0.0213 (-1.20)
Male	-0.631 (-1.35)	-0.781 (-1.52)	-0.0346 (-0.07)	-0.0376 (-0.07)
Education	0.801** (2.72)	0.818** (2.59)	0.538 (1.84)	0.502 (1.63)
Political Knowledge	0.0686 (0.33)	-0.0696 (-0.29)	-0.243 (-1.35)	-0.334 (-1.64)
Employed	-0.105 (-0.21)	0.118 (0.21)	-0.0912 (-0.18)	-0.169 (-0.32)
Income	-0.226 (-1.82)	-0.246 (-1.79)	0.0104 (0.09)	0.0432 (0.33)
Alienation	-0.0287 (-0.53)	0.00893 (0.15)	-0.205** (-3.26)	-0.210** (-3.14)
Prejudice	-0.211 (-0.53)	-0.157 (-0.36)	-0.0228 (-0.05)	-0.0953 (-0.22)
Ideology	-0.0617 (-0.44)	-0.0347 (-0.14)	-0.277* (-1.96)	-0.0662 (-0.27)
Racial Threat	-0.525** (-3.17)	-0.669*** (-3.37)	-0.251 (-1.31)	-0.198 (-0.98)
Commonality	0.226 (1.83)	0.210 (1.62)	-0.166 (-1.34)	-0.183 (-1.39)
Latino Friends	0.192 (0.42)	0.0234 (0.05)	0.114 (0.26)	0.0125 (0.03)
Latino Coworkers	-0.596 (-1.32)		-0.273 (-0.58)	
Latino Coworker * Ideology		-0.469 (-0.29)		0.0703 (0.04)
_constant	-2.202 (-1.10)	-3.546 (-1.44)	2.678 (1.35)	2.635 (1.13)
<i>N</i>	256	256	261	261
<i>r</i> <sup>2</sup>	.252	.298	.207	.230

*t* statistics in parentheses

+  $p < 0.10$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

Source: 2011 KU Rural Attitudes Survey

**Table 4.2: Rural Whites' Support for English-only laws and Changing 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment**

	English-only Support	Eng.-only w/ interaction	Change 14 <sup>th</sup>	Change 14 <sup>th</sup> w/ interaction
Age	0.0273* (1.99)	0.0280+ (1.74)	0.0151 (1.13)	0.0157 (1.09)
Male	0.334 (0.79)	0.539 (1.17)	0.0957 (0.23)	0.0410 (0.09)
Education	-0.227 (-1.01)	-0.321 (-1.28)	-0.143 (-0.67)	-0.157 (-0.73)
Political Knowledge	0.0886 (0.54)	0.0653 (0.34)	0.170 (1.09)	0.165 (0.97)
Employed	0.501 (1.07)	0.620 (1.18)	0.345 (0.74)	0.223 (0.46)
Income	-0.0906 (-0.85)	-0.0542 (-0.45)	0.0587 (0.56)	0.0920 (0.81)
Alienation	0.0702 (1.35)	0.0716 (1.23)	0.0658 (1.27)	0.0597 (1.08)
Prejudice	0.325 (0.88)	0.658+ (1.67)	0.858* (1.99)	0.898+ (1.95)
Ideology	0.130 (1.00)	0.415 (1.49)	0.232+ (1.84)	-0.0265 (-0.11)
Racial Threat	0.476** (3.26)	0.489** (2.89)	0.541*** (3.63)	0.551*** (3.35)
Commonality	-0.135 (-1.21)	-0.182 (-1.43)	-0.105 (-0.96)	-0.0824 (-0.72)
Latino Friends	-0.189 (-0.43)	-0.363 (-0.73)	0.470 (1.11)	0.501 (1.13)
Latino Coworkers	0.918* (2.15)		-0.308 (-0.74)	
Latino Coworkers * Ideology		-1.016+ (1.68)		0.466 (0.34)
_constant	-3.213 (-1.88)	-3.901 (-1.56)	-4.321* (-2.54)	-2.961 (-1.36)
<i>N</i>	258	258	260	260
<i>r</i> <sup>2</sup>	.230	.293	.223	.243

*t* statistics in parentheses

+  $p < 0.10$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

Source: 2011 KU Rural Attitudes Survey

**Table 4.3: Rural Whites' Perceptions of Racial Threat from Latinos – Ordered Logit**

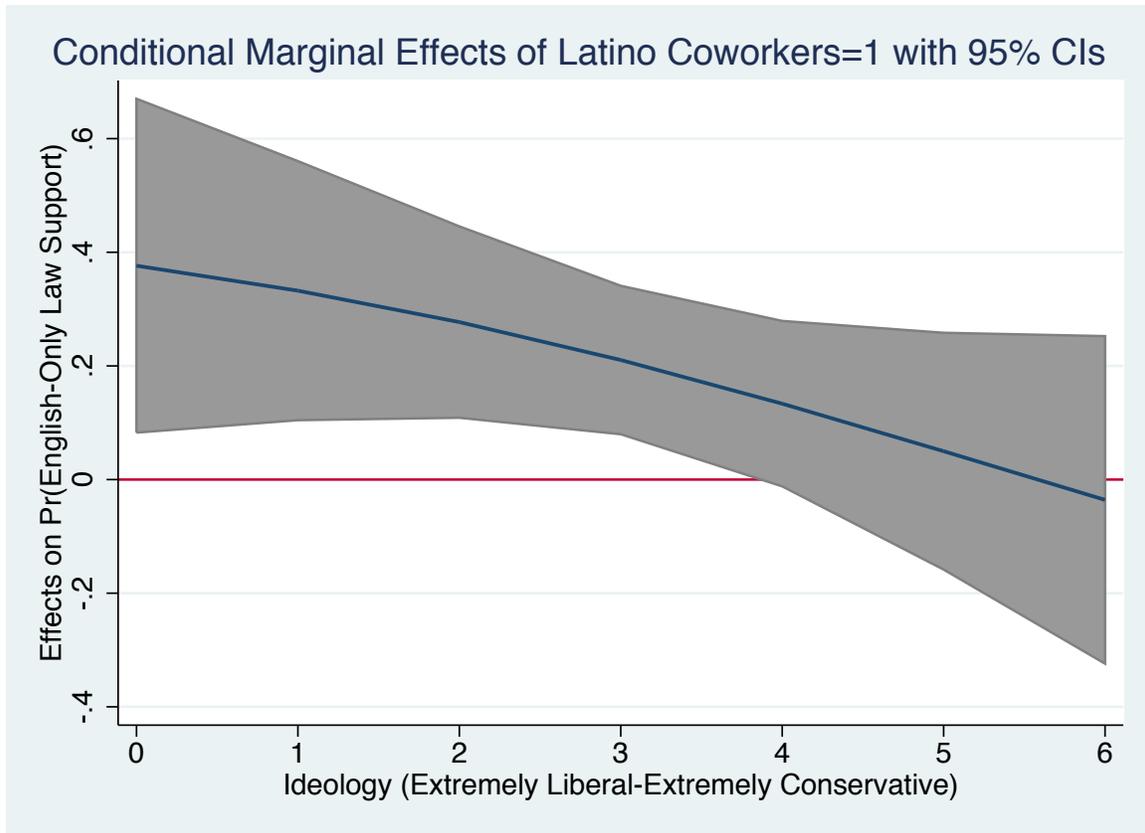
	(1) Racial Threat	(2) Ideology * Latino Friend	(3) Ideology*Latino Coworke
Age	0.0255** (2.71)	0.0252** (2.68)	0.0254** (2.71)
Male	0.451 (1.46)	0.435 (1.41)	0.465 (1.50)
Education	-0.564*** (-3.58)	-0.563*** (-3.59)	-0.556*** (-3.50)
Political Knowledge	-0.307* (-2.45)	-0.301* (-2.39)	-0.311* (-2.48)
Employed	0.523 (1.51)	0.509 (1.47)	0.531 (1.53)
Income	-0.0580 (-0.72)	-0.0577 (-0.72)	-0.0629 (-0.78)
Prejudice	1.029*** (4.17)	1.008*** (4.07)	1.040*** (4.20)
Ideology (1-7)	0.118* (2.47)	0.0651 (0.54)	0.156 (1.38)
Alienation	0.0631** (3.24)	0.0623** (3.21)	0.0624** (3.22)
Latino Coworkers	0.456 (1.49)	0.442 (1.44)	
Latino Friends	-0.996** (-3.24)		-0.980** (-3.18)
Latino Friends * Ideology		0.140 (0.73)	
Latino Coworkers * Ideolog			-0.216* (2.01)
<i>N</i>	263	263	263
<i>Pseudo R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.283	0.291	.287

*t* statistics in parentheses

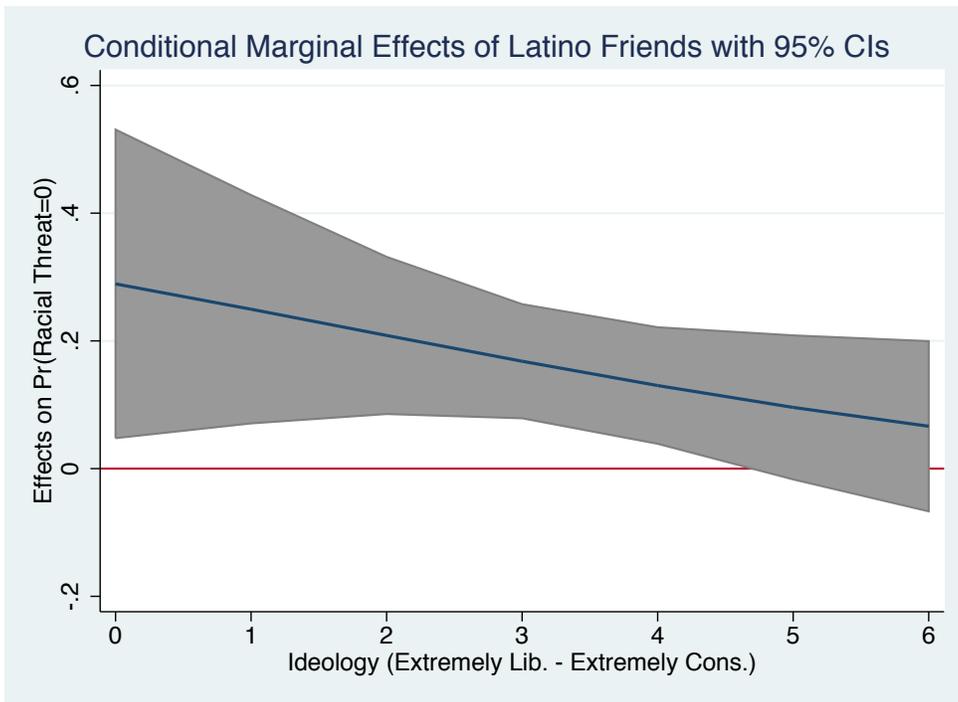
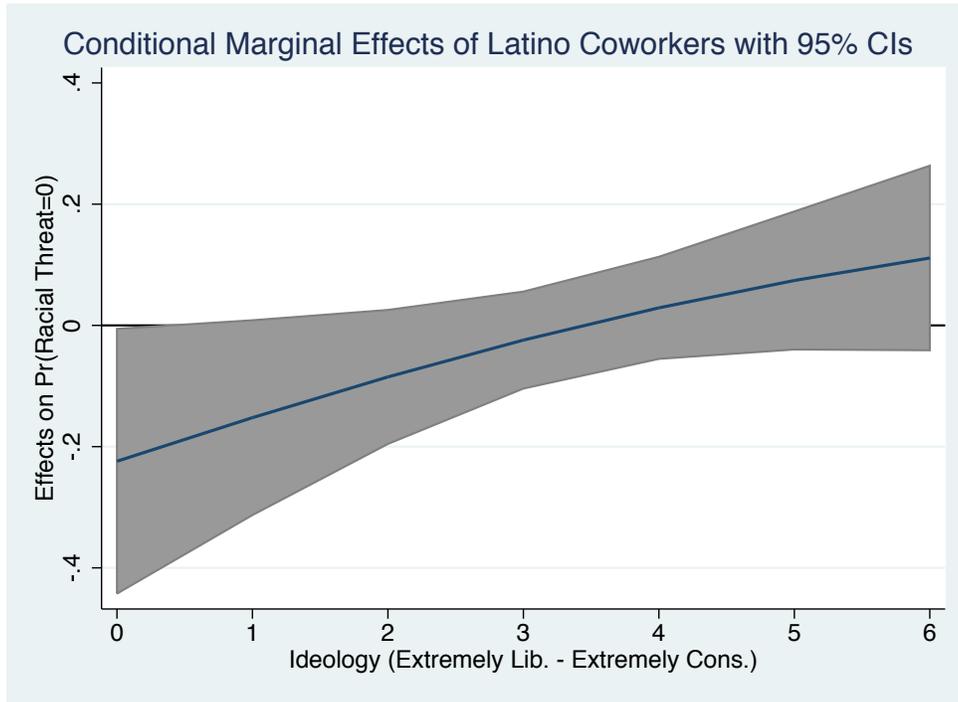
+  $p < 0.10$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

Source : 2011 KU Rural Attitudes Survey

**Figure 4.3: Conditional Marginal Effects of English-Only Law Support and Latino Coworkers**

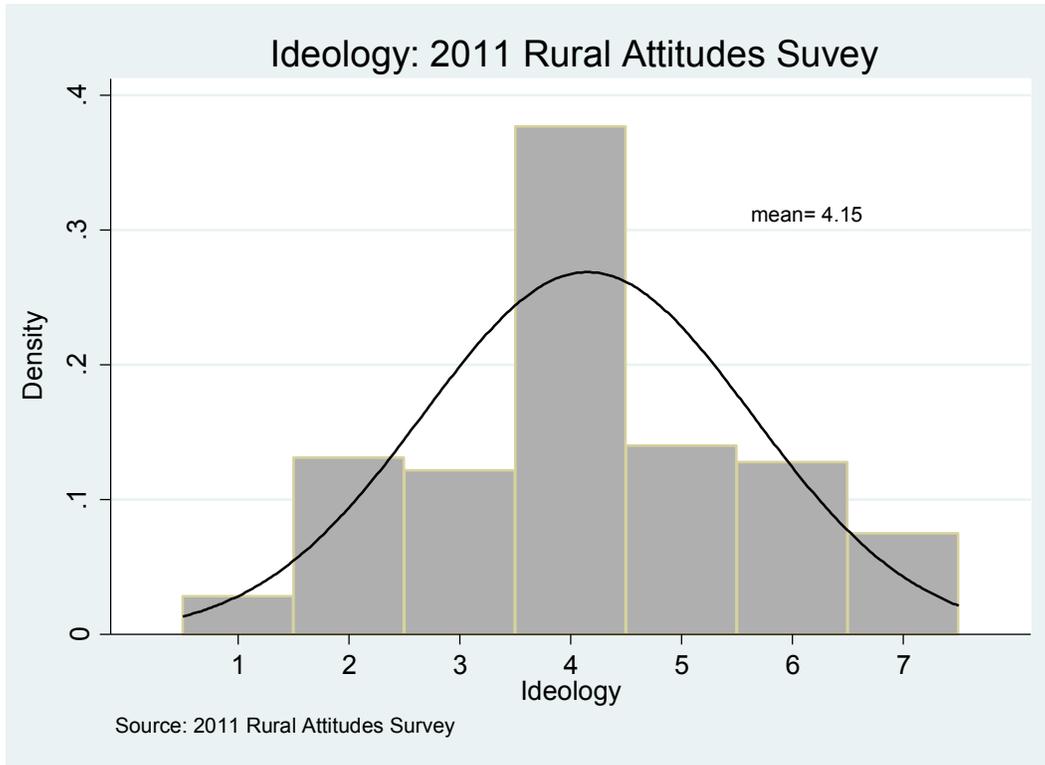


**Figures 4.4 and 4.5: Conditional Marginal Effect of Social Contact and Ideology on Perceptions of Racial Threat**

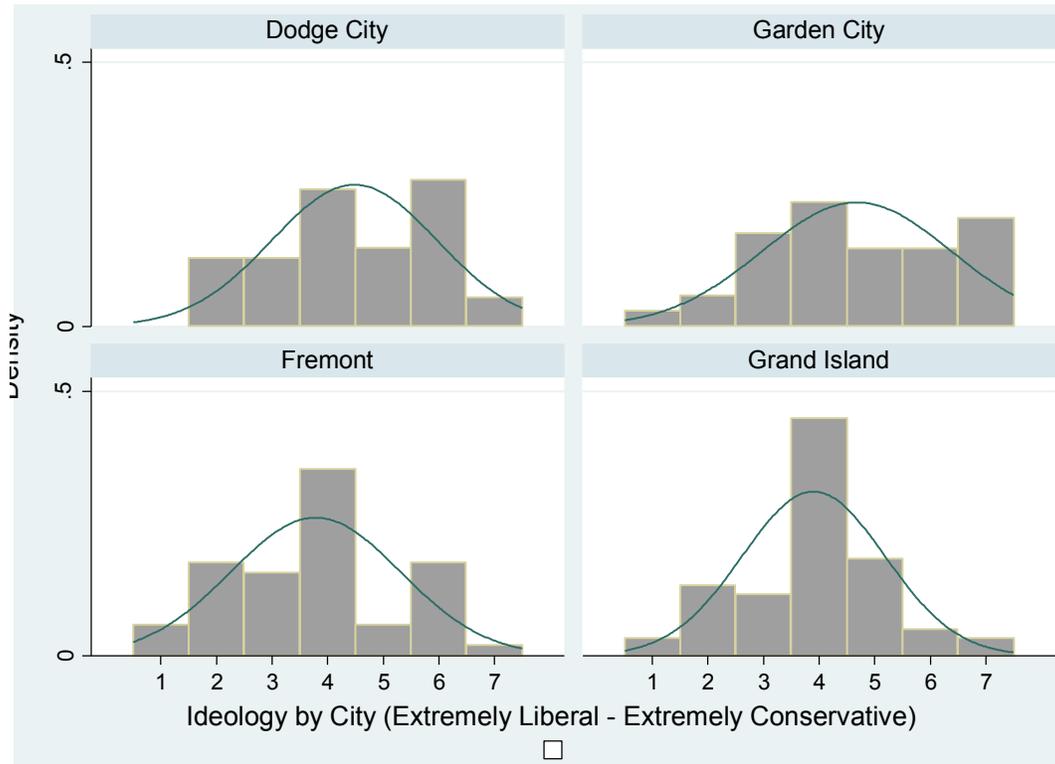


*Appendix: Descriptive Statistics of Dataset*

**Figure 1B: Distribution of Ideology in Data**



**Figure 2B: Distribution of Ideology in Cities Sampled**



**Table 1B Crosstab of Latino Friends and Latino Coworkers (as percentage)**

Latino Coworkers	Latino Friends		Total
	No	Yes	
No	78.57	47.87	65.45
Yes	21.43	52.13	34.55
Total	100	100	100

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## **Chapter 5:**

### **Conclusion and Implications**

Immigration policy has lately been amongst the most contentious issues in American politics. Most discussion of immigration as an issue regards major cities and the areas along the southern border, but that would overlook the changes in the rural areas of the interior. This omission ignores how immigration and related policy has affected rural communities and their residents. Shrinking small towns and cities have averted their population losses due to long-term changes in economic structures by either embracing or grudgingly accepting immigrants. The momentum of this change to the makeup of rural America seems unlikely to slow in the foreseeable future, regardless of national-level immigration policy reform. As national-level immigration policy reform languishes in Washington, D.C., the likelihood of continuation of the status quo grows. The legal limbo of the undocumented only gives ammunition, and perhaps some form of justification, to nativist opponents to immigration who would seek their outright removal. But their goals are unlikely to reach fruition in anything resembling reality. Reality is increasingly moving in the direction of increased diversification previously homogeneous parts of rural America due to immigration. Whether native-born residents embrace the change or not, immigration just may be what will return, or maintain, the vitality of their communities that have lost their luster to larger economic forces.

The goal of this research is to examine crucial questions regarding the present and future of residents of America's heartland. Immigration is providing the only population growth in many parts of rural America that are otherwise losing residents to urban areas or old age. However, the native-born residents that are already established in rural communities have not

always welcomed this growth. By examining how the changing demographics of rural America have influenced native-born whites attitudes towards the newcomers in their communities this work explores the roots of rural whites perceptions of threat from immigrants, I have found that social identity plays a role in the rural residents' attitudes towards immigrants as well as their immigration policy preferences.

### *Discussion of Key Findings*

Rural whites are more likely than their counterparts in urban and suburban areas to identify a nativist and white American identity, which makes them more likely to prefer to decrease the number of immigrants allowed in this country. Those that hold this idea of who is an American and who is not, are more likely to perceive Latin American immigrants as a threat to their preferred in-group, and to the culture and economic well-being of the U.S. A perception of threat was found to be a statistically significant influence on individual preferences for all three immigration-related policies examined in this chapter. The results indicate that rural residence increases the likelihood of whites' support for decreasing the level of immigration, their attitudes towards immigrant children is more tolerant than their urban and suburban counterparts. Those who perceive a threat from immigrants are more likely to support a decrease in the number of immigrants allowed into the U.S, to oppose allowing undocumented children to attend public schools, and to support changing the citizenship clause of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment of the Constitution.

These results regarding rural residence ran counter to my hypotheses, living in a rural area had a statistically significant negative influence on support for prohibiting undocumented children from attending public schools and support for changing the citizenship clause of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment. However, other research on immigration and rural communities may lend some

insight. In her book exploring political socialization in four rural Iowa towns that have experienced ethnic diversification from growth in immigrant populations, Lay finds that native-born young people in diverse towns are “no more or less tolerant” to immigrants than those from more homogeneous towns early on during their towns’ population changes (2012). But over time young people from the diverse towns became more supportive of immigrants, which the author at least partly attributes to having attended diverse schools and other contact from extracurricular activities (Lay 2012). In other words, Lay’s findings and those of this work perhaps find evidence for a tolerating effect from increased intergroup contact. I know, at least anecdotally, my own experience growing up in a changing rural town would follow the same pattern, with the native-born young people who shared the socializing experience of school with immigrants becoming more tolerant than older adults in the community. Age was also shown to be a significant influence on likelihood of negative attitudes towards immigrants and support for restrictive policy.

This work also examines how different types of perceptions threat influence rural attitudes. A perception of an ethnocultural threat from immigrants is found to be more influential to whites’ attitudes and policy preferences than perceptions of economic threat. Social identity is also shown to influence rural attitudes towards immigrants. Rural whites’ are more likely to perceive a nativist and white American identity as their in-group, leaving immigrants as an out-group that they see as a threat to their resources and culture.

Ethnic context also played a role in support for immigration policy. Larger Latino populations within a respondent’s ZIP code decreased the likelihood of supporting restrictive policies such as English-only laws and denial of public benefits to immigrants. This supports the

possibility that increased social contact may lead to more tolerant opinions of immigrants and decreased support for restrictive policies.

The influence of social contact is further examined in the Chapter 4, which looks at whether increased social contact, and different types of social contact, influence the immigration policy preferences and perceptions of threat from immigrants of rural whites who live in demographically changing communities. Non-Hispanic whites who perceive a threat from Latinos to one's economic well-being, political resources and power are significantly more likely to oppose policies that lend aid to immigrant students. This effect may be increased among these individuals by workplace contact with groups they perceive as being a threat to their economic security. While the consensual social contact of friendship with Latinos is shown to significantly reduce perceptions of racial threat among rural whites, the forced contact of the workplace tends to influence their attitudes in the opposite and negative direction. This chapter also finds a difference in how social contact interacts with ideology. Workplace contact with Latinos does little to change perceptions of racial threat or support for English-only laws among those who are more conservative, and already more likely to feel threatened and be supportive of such laws. However, workplace contact is shown to increase such perceptions and support among those who identify as more liberal. When it comes to the effects of social contact, context matters.

I find that social contact, whether with friends or in the workplace, have little to no effect on non-Hispanic whites that identify as conservative. I also find that those whites that lean conservative are more likely to perceive Latinos to be a threat to their economic and political resources, and social contact likely has no statistically significant influence upon these perceptions. Much of the past literature on the effects of social contact has been conducted in

urban neighborhoods, finding mixed results as to whether or not increased contact in these neighborhoods leads to more intergroup tolerance (Hood III & Morris, 1997; Oliver & Wong, 2003; Sigelman & Welch, 1993). My research instead demonstrates that there can be significantly different results when examining attitudes in rural communities. One has to look no further than a map of Congressional representation to see the dominance of more conservative ideology in most rural areas in the U.S. This research indicates that increased social contact with Latinos, the fastest growing population in rural areas, may have little to no impact on increased tolerance of the conservative population. But the influence of age and the social contact provided by schools may lead to more tolerant attitudes with each generation. Rural communities will learn to embrace the change as time and experience with their immigrant population grows, and their hardened older populations pass.

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