

THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY  
SCHREYER HONORS COLLEGE

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

EXCLUSION FROM ABOVE: MEASURING THE IMPACT OF THE TRUMP PRESIDENCY  
ON AMERICAN ATTITUDES TOWARDS IMMIGRANTS

NICOLE D'AMICO  
FALL 2021

A thesis  
submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements  
for baccalaureate degrees  
in Sociology and International Politics  
with honors in Sociology

Reviewed and approved\* by the following:

Daniel DellaPosta  
Professor Sociology and Social Data Analytics  
Thesis Supervisor

Stacy Silver  
Professor of Sociology  
Honors Adviser

\* Electronic approvals are on file.

## ABSTRACT

Since its conception, the United States has been a refuge for migrants. People of innumerable backgrounds have left the homes they know behind to seek a better life with the “American Dream”. Unfortunately, the American Dream is not always easily achievable for many migrants coming to America. Their path to the American Dream is often hindered by prejudice from people who feel negatively towards outsiders. This negative sentiment can potentially be harnessed by a political leader in favor of their own ideology.

In the case of this study, that political leader was Donald Trump. During his candidacy, and throughout his tenure as president, Trump’s nationalistic comments were marked with anti-immigrant rhetoric that seemed to be strongly supported by his followers. Though ridiculed by the media, and seemingly opposed by most world leaders, Trump assumed the Republican nomination and eventual presidency shortly after these comments were made.

This study examines that negativity and attempts to measure the impact of Donald Trump’s presidency on attitudes towards immigrants in the 2018 election year. Using GSS survey data from the years 2004-2018, this paper defines the overall trend of attitudes towards immigrants in America, before diving into the effect of the Trump presidency on those attitudes. In future research, comparing the new 2020 data with previous results will be imperative to understanding the impact that the remaining years of Trump’s presidency had on attitudes towards immigrants.

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

LIST OF FIGURES.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW.....	9
CHAPTER 3 METHODS.....	14
CHAPTER 4 RESULTS.....	17
CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION.....	28
CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION.....	31
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	32

## LIST OF FIGURES &amp; TABLES

TABLE 1: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS.....	17
GRAPH 1: OVERALL TRENDLINE.....	19
GRAPH 2: PERCENT EACH PARTY WANT DECREASED IMMIGRATION.....	19
TABLE 2: CROSSTABULATION FOR BUSH YEARS/IMMIGRATION.....	20
TABLE 3: CROSSTABULATION FOR OBAMA YEARS/IMMIGRATION.....	20
TABLE 4: CROSSTABULATION FOR TRUMP YEAR/IMMIGRATION.....	21
TABLE 5: REGRESSION ANALYSIS, ATTITUDES TOWARDS IMMIGRANTS....	22
TABLE 6: CROSSTABULATION FOR REPUBLICANS IN TRUMP YEAR/IMMIGRATION.....	24
TABLE 7: CROSSTABULATION FOR REPUBLICANS IN TRUMP YEAR/IMMIGRATION.....	24
TABLE 8: CROSSTABULATION FOR REPUBLICANS IN OBAMA YEARS/IMMIGRATION.....	25
TABLE 9: CROSSTABULATION FOR INDEPENDENTS IN OBAMA YEARS/IMMIGRATION.....	25
TABLE 10: REGRESSION ANALYSIS, INTERACTION EFFECTS INCLUDED.....	26

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to thank my thesis supervisor, Dr. Daniel DellaPosta for his wealth of knowledge on my topic and willingness to assist me through this process. This would not have been possible without his guidance, reassurance, and confidence in my abilities. I am grateful for the past two years of working alongside Dr. DellaPosta.

I would like to thank Dr. Stacy Silver, my honors advisor, for her dedication to my project throughout this process and for always answering my frantic emails to ensure that I reach graduation on time.

Thank you to Dr. Gary Adler for providing me with strict deadlines to add more structure and guidance to my writing process, as well as Kira England for her invaluable SPSS assistance.

I would also like to thank the following: all of my roommates over the past two years, who have become incredible friends to me even while being forced to listen to my hours of rambling on my thesis; my parents, who continue to support me in all my wacky endeavors, and my cats, for being cute.

I would also like to give a special shoutout to myself, because this was a lot of hard-work and I'm proud of myself for all that I've accomplished so far. Nice job, me!

## CHAPTER 1

### **Introduction**

There are more immigrants living in the United States than in any other country in the world. As of 2019, there were an estimated 45 million immigrants living in the United States (Batalova et al. 2021), making up about 13.7% of the U.S population. With the all-inclusive term of “immigrants” (or “foreign born”) representing all people residing in the U.S who were not citizens at birth, immigrants make up a substantial proportion of the United States population—and it is expected to continue growing substantially. In about the last 20 years, according to statistics by the Migration Policy Institute, immigration as a share of the U.S population has been slowly increasing, until the year 2017, where it has remained at 13.7% of the population for three years (Migration Policy Institute 2019). This stagnancy of population is most likely a result of anti-immigrant and “America first” policies of former president Donald Trump that curtailed immigration by at least half (Anderson 2020).

Though Trump was not the first president to oppose immigration, he was arguably the most vocal about his opposition. When comparing each administration’s immigration policies from the past 20 years, this becomes evident; following the World Trade Center terrorist attacks on 9/11, George W. Bush’s administration created the Department of Homeland Security, and subsequently, in 2003, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Bush’s policies were not entirely anti-immigration; in fact, though Bush took a hardline against policies regarding automatic paths to citizenship and “catch-and-release” programs, he typically saw immigrants as hard-working people who were trying to achieve the “American Dream” (The White House 2007). In a 2006 speech (Bush 2006), Bush expressed this belief:

Our new immigrants are just what they've have always been: people willing to risk everything for the dream of freedom. And America remains what she has always been: the great hope on the horizon, ... an open door to the future, ... a blessed and promised land. We honor the heritage of all who come here, no matter where they are from, because we trust in our country's genius for making us all Americans, one nation under God.

Following the Bush administration, Obama took a somewhat similar approach in his rhetoric regarding immigration (Obama 2014):

My fellow Americans, we are and always will be a nation of immigrants. We were strangers once, too. And whether our forebears were strangers who crossed the Atlantic, or the Pacific, or the Rio Grande, we are here only because this country welcomed them in, and taught them that to be an American is about something more than what we look like, or what our last names are, or how we worship. What makes us Americans is our shared commitment to an ideal — that all of us are created equal, and all of us have the chance to make of our lives what we will.

Despite the immigrant-friendly and welcoming tone of his words, Obama's administration often conceded on certain issues in order to achieve enough votes from the Republican party. Additionally, with over three million deportations taking place during the eight years of Obama's presidency (this being the highest amount for any U.S president, including Trump) (The World 2019), it can be argued that the policies of Obama were not entirely pro-immigration. Both Obama and Bush's words provide a stark contrast to the words of Trump, who successfully ran a presidential campaign on nationalist and anti-immigrant rhetoric; in one address to the nation on the border crisis in 2019, Trump began by admitting the contributions

immigrants add to the United States. However, immediately afterwards, his words turn to illegal migration, as well as those who enter the country and commit assaults, sex crimes, and violent killings (Trump 2019). His words—which focused the American population on the negative aspects of immigration to the U.S rather than the positive attributes—followed a similar pattern as his campaign for presidency in 2015, during which he referred to Mexican immigrants as, “They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.” (Trump 2015). Another group Trump often focused his attacks on were Muslims. Specifically, he targeted Syrian refugees, as well as various other nationalities from countries with a heavily concentrated Muslim population, eventually resulting in the creation of Executive Order 13769, or “Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States” (commonly known as the Muslim Ban). Though disguised as a policy with which to deter potential terrorists from entering the country through the refugee resettlement program, many view this order as a blatant xenophobic attack on immigrants and refugees. During his presidency, Trump lowered the number of refugees allowed into the country by 80% (a record low new refugees of 15,000 in 2020) (Snow and Watson 2020).

Trump was not the first president to exhibit anti-immigrant sentiments. Neither was he the first to limit certain groups of people into our nation based on arbitrary conclusions. However, despite America’s pride of being the “melting pot of the world”, as well as having been built by immigrants, Trump was able to secure enough votes in the electoral college to become president, and nearly won the popular vote as well in the 2016 election. How can it be possible that one shows such obvious disdain for most immigrants coming to America (as demonstrated through speeches, Twitter tweets, and other public statements), and still becomes the most powerful man in the world? Through this research, I will attempt to answer this



question, as well as various others, including: 1) How have attitudes towards immigration changed since 2004? 2) How did attitudes towards immigration change during the period of Trump's presidency?, and 3) If a change was present, was it a result of Trump's anti-immigrant rhetoric? Or were anti-immigrant attitudes beginning to emerge in America already, with Trump capitalizing on the tension? I will attempt to answer these questions by analyzing data gathered by the General Social Survey, as well as by applying sociological theories that attempt to explain group attitudes towards immigration. Through this research, I will apply group threat theory to the growing sentiment against immigrants in the United States.

Additionally, I will examine the effects of opinion leadership of the political elite on the general public by assessing how rhetoric from U.S presidents in the past twenty years (Bush, Obama, and Trump) impacted (or did not impact) attitudes towards immigration. Opinion leadership will be examined through the lens of symbolic politics theory as a potential explanation for those attitudes towards immigrants, as well as the resulting policies associated.

With my questions and prior knowledge in mind, I will attempt to find support for two hypotheses:

1) Attitudes towards immigration in the United States have become more negative from the years 2004 to 2018.

2) Trump's presidency is the main reason for this negative sentiment.

If I am to arrive at a conclusion—or even simply an understanding—of how attitudes towards immigrants changed (or did not change) with Trump's presidency, this will give insight as to how national opinion can influence policy changes. Alternatively, this could demonstrate the effect that opinion leadership can have on increasing the polarization of a country and determining policy changes.

## CHAPTER 2

### Literature review

Herbert Blumer (1958) conceptualizes race prejudice in his monumental 1958 article as a factor of perceived group position formed by experiences of each racial group. Prejudice itself is a perceived notion of threat from the out-group. This is further expanded upon in Blumer's article (as well as countless others who have attempted to find variables for explaining prejudice in our society), as four basic feelings of the "dominant group" that contribute to the base for racial prejudice. These include feelings of superiority, a feeling that the subordinate race is intrinsically alien, a feeling of proprietary claim to certain privileges, and a fear and general suspicion that the subordinate race will threaten the position of the dominant group. The above-mentioned conditions present will result in racial prejudice towards another group; Blumer's prejudice theory provides a baseline into a possible explanation for changing attitudes towards immigrants with group threat theory.

The moment immigrants cross the United States border, they are seen as "different" or "other". This alienation towards immigrants is further accentuated with the articulations of people like Trump, who seem to deny acceptance to anyone not born in America—even those seeking asylum or arriving legally. This aligns with American nationalism that attempts to dictate who a "true" American is, and how they should appear to be; based on dominant group theories, the dominant group in America, and therefore, the "true" American, is American-born, Christian, white, and speaks English, among other factors. A perceived threat to this standard—Christian, white, English—such as a large influx of immigrants to a specific geographical area, may be enough to spur anti-immigrant attitudes. This argument of a "true" American is detailed in Perry and Whitehead's (2018) article, which attempts to explain how Trump won the 2016

election by way of Christian nationalism. This Christian nationalism, among other factors, may play a role in the public's perception of immigrants in the United States, causing increased negative attitudes towards immigrants.

Exploring nationalism and identity is one of various ways researchers have attempted to understand attitudes towards immigrants and immigration. In one study to observe the public's attitudes towards immigration, Hainmueller and Hopkins (2014) tested political-economic reasons for negative attitudes against what they refer to as "sociotropic concerns". Sociotropic concerns, which are often associated with symbolic threat theories, question how a native's nationalism and identity will impact their attitudes towards immigrants. This "change from the norm"—with an emphasis on cultural impact—can foster negative perceptions of the "out group", or in this case, immigrants to America. Furthermore, Hainmueller and Hopkins evaluated how an immigrant could be perceived if they were "worth more", to the average American: to evaluate this, questions were examined that focused on level of skill or education for the incoming immigrant. Consistently, people were more inclined to allow and accept immigrants of high skill or education. Despite these findings that point towards self-interest theories, as well as imply evidence of economic concerns being a reason for anti-immigrant attitudes, Hainmueller and Hopkins found a general lack of empirical evidence for self-interest theories concerning the economy of the United States. In fact, when comparing self-interest theories to sociotropic or symbolic threat theories, they found symbolic threat theories to consistently have more empirical support. With these self-interest factors (concerning political economy) appearing to have no effect on immigration attitudes, it can be argued that a primary reason why negative immigration attitudes develop is as a result of perceived attacks on national identity.

Though Hainmueller and Hopkins found a lack of evidence in support of the more political-economic explanation, it has been argued in numerous articles that group threat theory alone does not fully describe national attitudes towards immigration. When Ceobanu and Escandell (2010) examined potential macro-level explanations beyond group threat theory for attitudes towards immigration, they explored both economic hardships as a possible explanation and cultural-symbolic factors (such as identity), similar to the studies of Hainmueller and Hopkins. Unlike Hainmueller and Hopkins, however, Ceobanu and Escandell found support for both cultural symbolic explanations, as well as support for economic hardship explanations. These economic-related self-interest theories assume that an out-group should be held responsible for the economic downturn of a country. Their research, though focused on attitudes of cross-national perspectives, is strongly tied to, and built off, Quillian's (1995) work on anti-immigrant and racial prejudice. Quillian writes on the lack of impact individual-level variables had on influencing perceived group threat. Quillian also found empirical evidence for the economic conditions of a country having an impact on group relations; this, combined with the size of the racial or immigrant group is the strongest influence on people's views, and subsequently, potential prejudice.

This pairs well with Blalock's (1967) power threat theory, which is often also associated with group threat theory. In power threat theory, the larger the size of the out-group, the stronger the in-group will perceive a sense of threat. Though most of the theories mentioned have focused on the perceived threat of a group dynamic, with the dominant group potentially perceiving a threat from the out-group, realistic threat theory assumes there is a real and present threat to the in-group. According to Bobo (1983), during the Civil Rights movement, the concept of the out-group dominating the in-group was entirely possible, with the threat of the Civil Rights

movement being the main catalyst. As such, any prejudice or acts against the out-group is an attempt to retain power as a reaction to a realistic fear that that power will be lost. Here, realistic threat theory does not apply; I propose that any negative reactions to immigrants is the result of the perceived threats developed once Trump began an anti-immigrant crusade as president.

If through this research, there is evidence of an increase in negative attitudes towards immigrants, especially in the GSS year 2018 (the first survey after Trump assumed the presidency) and associated with voting for Trump, this could demonstrate evidence towards symbolic politics theory. This theory proposes that political elites use symbols, words, and laws to provoke emotional responses and assign blame to certain groups for social problems (Fussell 2014). Symbolic politics can be used as a framework with which to potentially understand anti-immigrant attitudes—especially those attitudes that formed after Trump became president. Though most often a political theory used to explain ethnic wars, this can also be applied to levels of immigration in the United States; as policies such as the Muslim ban are enacted, the public perceives a greater sense of threat from immigrant Muslims. Furthermore, the attack on Mexicans with racist stereotypes provokes intergroup anxiety. As the level of perceived threat is raised—such as by making a public speech on the dangers of illegal immigration from Mexico or tweeting about the threat of terrorism from Muslims—the audience will be more likely to oppose those particular groups.

This is also in effect as a subject (such as immigration) becomes highly publicized by the media. In Hopkins's (2010) article on immigration provoking local opposition, he found that in countries where immigration was increasing, reported high levels of immigration on national news headlines led to an increased strong preference for decreasing immigration. After examining the effects of Trump's rhetoric during his campaign run in 2016, Flores (2018) found

evidence that Trump's statements negatively affected public opinion towards immigrants. This was particularly true among groups more supportive of restrictionist policies, such as lower educated people and Republicans (Flores 2018).

This raises an important question for this research: was Trump acting as the "opinion leader" in the 2016 election, being the main catalyst for developing anti-immigrant attitudes? Or were American attitudes gradually becoming more negative towards immigrants regardless, with Trump merely capitalizing on the issue in order to run a successful campaign? By analyzing this data, it will become evident as to whether Trump successfully used his opinion leadership to influence the American public—and subsequently, governmental policies.

Despite an overwhelming media presence purporting the mass hatred of immigrants in America, evidence has shown this is not necessarily true. In Fussell's study, she found that a "growing minority of Americans support increasing immigration levels and fewer Americans want to reduce immigration levels (2014:493)." This may come as a surprise to some, considering the support which Trump received during his tenure as president running on an anti-immigrant and America-first campaign. Originally, before beginning this research, I assumed this same scenario. The research questions I am proposing are multi-faceted and do not have one, clear answer for all; as a result, I will include multiple hypotheses with which to potentially answer these research questions.

## CHAPTER 3

### Methods

First, I hypothesize that there will be evidence of increased negative attitudes towards immigrants in the GSS data for the year 2018 (“Trump” year) when compared to the years 2004-2008 (“Bush” years) and 2009-2016 (“Obama” years). I used the GSS question “Do you think the number of immigrants from foreign countries who are permitted to come to the United States to live should be increased a lot, increased a little, left the same as it is now, decreased a little, or decreased a lot?” which is categorized as variable `letin1a`. Due to this particular question only being asked in the years 2004-2018, the first step in my coding process was to select only the years of the GSS dataset that included this question. Next, I reverse coded `letin1a` so that those who indicated a desire for decreased immigration would be coded with a lower number, which was then relabeled as “`imm_num`”. Rather than include all eight answer choices (increased a lot, increased a little, remain the same as it is, reduced a little, reduced a lot, don’t know, no answer, not applicable), I recoded `imm_num` to include only valid answer choices, as well as combined all the answer categories into three different categories.

My next step was to recode each “set” of years into three different president variables to understand when attitudes towards immigrants were the most negative. I created the “bush” variable with the years 2004-2008, the “obama” variable with the years 2009-2016, and the “trump” variable with the year 2018. Next, I decided to make my key independent variable “`partyid`” (“Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, Democrat, Independent, or what?”), which was then recoded into dummy variables by party: “`indep_party`” and “`republican`”, with Democrat as the reference group.

Next, due to many of my control variables being categorical variables, I recoded several into dummy variables. “Sex” variable was recoded into the dummy variable “female”. “Race” was recoded into the dummy variables of “black” and “other\_race”, with White being the reference group. I next controlled for religiosity by using the variable “fund”, which was recoded into the dummy variables of “fundie” and “moderate\_relig”, with liberal being the omitted reference group. “Degree” was recoded into four dummy variables: “high\_school”, “some\_college”, “bachelors”, and “graduate”, with less than high school being the omitted reference group. “Class” was recoded into the dummy variables of “class1” and “class2” (middle class and upper class), with working class omitted as the reference group. Lastly, I controlled using confidence in federal government with the variable “confed”, which was reverse coded to “confed2”.

In order to test my hypothesis that there was an increase in negative attitudes towards immigrants in 2018 (“trump” year), I ran a regression analysis on imm\_num with partyid (using the dummy variables indep\_party and republican). My next two regression models included control variables: female, age, black, other\_race, confed2, high\_school, some\_college, bachelors, obama, trump, fundie, moderate\_relig, class2, republican, and indep\_party. With this model, I was able to measure the relationship between favoring increasing or decreasing immigration with a positive or negative correlation for each of the control variables. These models included the year variables I created for each president’s time in office.

With the assumption that those who identify as “Republican” in answering the “partyid” question will have likely voted for Trump in the 2016 election, there should be a strong correlation between those who identify as Republican and those who indicated a preferred decrease in immigration to America for 2018. To test this, I ran a regression analysis with my



third model once again, but this time with an interaction effect of the “trump” variable with the “republican” variable, and another interaction effect of the “trump” variable with the “indep\_party” variable.

I hypothesize that Trump’s presidency was the main catalyst for negative attitudes towards immigrants in the United States. When comparing this to the data, there should be, essentially, more Republicans wanting decreased immigration in 2018 than in the “Bush” years and “Obama” years. A trend towards increased negative attitudes towards immigrants in the United States during each presidential set of years will demonstrate support towards group threat theory, as the gradually increasing perceived threat of immigrants threatened the “dominant” natives. A trend towards increased negative attitudes towards immigrants specifically following Trump’s election will show evidence towards symbolic politics theory, as Trump was able to utilize his stance as a public figure to make immigration to the United States seem to be a threatening and urgent problem for the public.

## CHAPTER 4

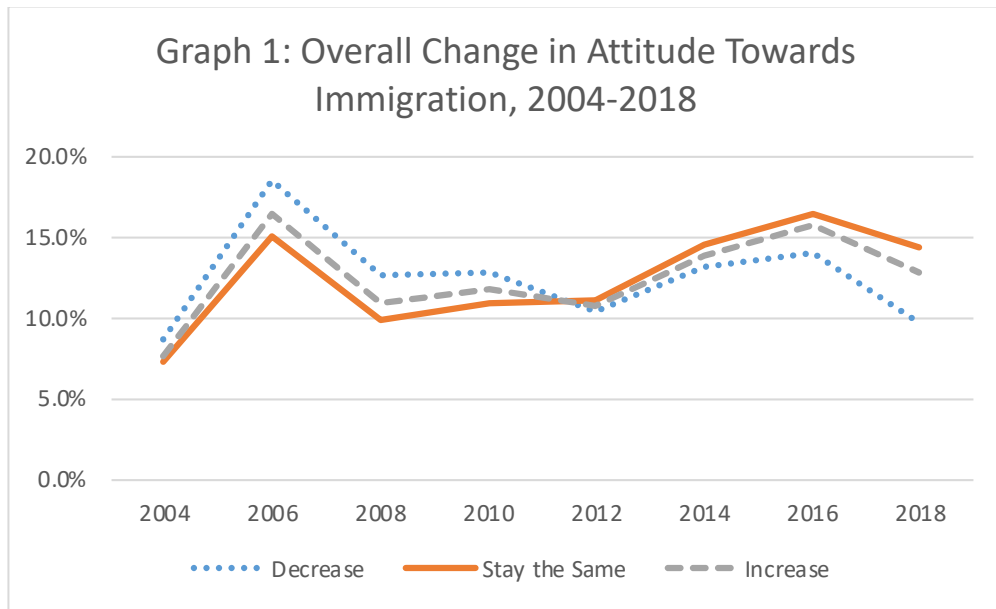
## Results

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics						
Variable	Mean	Median	Frequency	% (Rel Freq)	Range (Min)	Range(Max)
Imm_num			11773	100.0		
Decreased			5519	46.9		
Remain the same			4491	38.1		
Increased			1763	15.0		
Bush (2004-2008)			9345	44.3		
Obama (2009-2016)			9423	44.6		
Trump (2018)			2348	11.1		
PartyID			20944	100.0		
Democrat			7026	33.6		
Independent/other party			8859	42.3		
Republican			5059	24.2		
SEX			21116	100.0		
Male (1)			9458	44.8		
Female (2)			11658	55.2		
AGE	47.92	47			18	89
RACE			21116	100.0		
White (1)			15787	74.8		
Black (2)			3165	15.0		
Other (3)			2164	10.2		
CONFED			11890	100.0		
Hardly any			4854	40.8		
Only some (2)			5400	45.4		
A great deal			1636	13.8		
DEGREE			21103	100.0		
Less than high school (0)			2865	13.6		
High school (1)			10596	50.2		
Some college (2)			1668	7.9		
Bachelor's (3)			3827	18.1		
Graduate (4)			2147	10.2		
FUND			20127	100.0		
Fundamentalist			5482	27.2		
Moderate			8163	40.6		
Liberal			6482	32.2		
CLASS			19458	100.0		
Lower class			1657	8.5		
Working class			8781	45.1		
Middle class			8415	43.2		
Upper class			605	3.1		

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of twelve variables used.

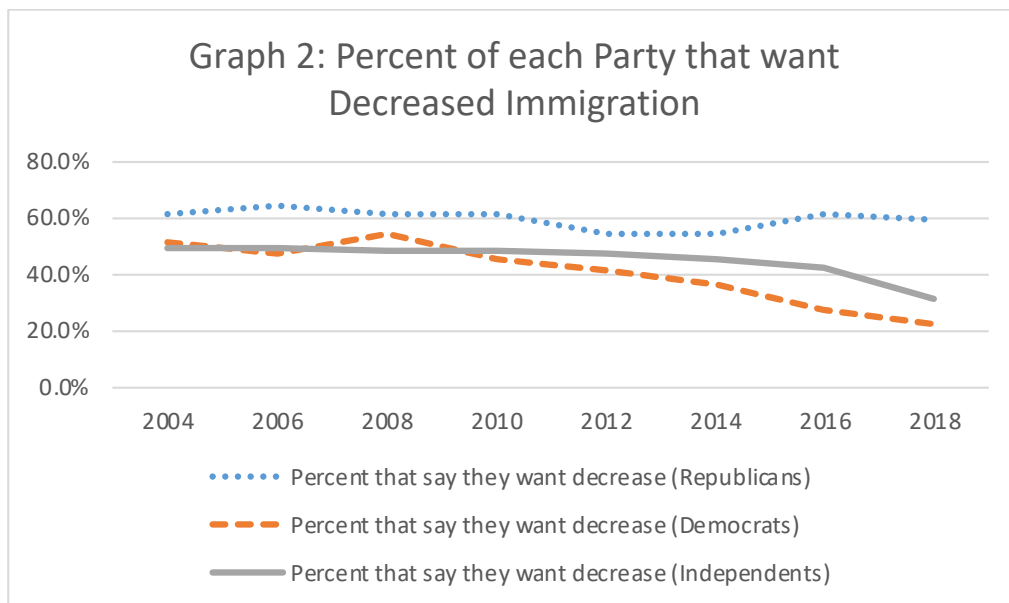
The twelve variables in total that I used to create my crosstabulations and my regression analysis are shown in my univariate Table 1. Shown is my recoded dependent variable `imm_num`, along with my control variables mentioned above. ‘`Imm_num`’ is whether people believe immigration should be increased or decreased to the United States. “Confed” is the confidence that people feel in the United States federal government. “Fund” is how fundamentalist the participant currently considers him or herself. I also included the frequencies of the variables `bush`, `obama`, and `trump`, which are the number of GSS respondents within those sets of years (2004-2008 for the Bush presidential years, 2009-2016 for the Obama presidential years, and 2018 for Trump’s presidential year). While including more years of the GSS for the years that Trump was president would have been beneficial, the GSS had not yet released data for 2020 while writing this. Though separating the variables in a univariate analysis allowed me to view how my variables are organized, in order to answer my hypotheses, it was crucial to run crosstabulations and regression analyses. I hypothesized that there would be more negative attitudes (indicated with a desire for decreased immigration) towards immigrants in the “trump” year when compared to the “bush” and “obama” years. I conducted multiple bivariate analyses with cross tabulations to see if there was evidence of this increase in negative attitudes. Using each of the presidential year variables compared to my `imm_num`, my initial findings did not support my first hypothesis.

In order to comprehensively understand and analyze my data, I created an overall trend analysis for attitudes towards immigrants in America. This first step required me to run an overall trend analysis on my variable, `imm_num`, the recoded `letin1a`. The results of that analysis are shown in this Graph 1:



**Graph 1: Overall trend line, 2004-2018, attitudes towards immigrants**

According to these results, though there has been variability, there has recently been a decrease in those who desire less immigration, as well as a decrease in those who desire more immigration. My next test separated those who indicated a desire for decreased immigration based on political party. The results of this test are shown in Graph 2:



**Graph 2: Percent of people in each party that desire decreased immigration**

The initial results of these tests indicate that there was a slight increase in Republicans who wanted a decrease in immigration around the year 2016. The opposite is true for Democrat voters, with a seemingly strong decrease in Democrats indicating a desire for a decrease in immigration. Next, Tables 2-4 showcase my crosstabulation analyses.

Immigration	Bush		Total
	Other years	2004-2008	
Decrease	43.5%	53.1%	46.9%
Stay the Same	39.7%	35.2%	38.1%
Increase	16.8%	11.6%	15.0%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
$\chi^2=114.876$			
$p<.001$			

**Table 3: Crosstabulation comparing 2004-2008 (the “Bush years”) attitudes towards immigration to other years in the dataset.**

**Table 2: Crosstabulation comparing 2009-2016 (the “Obama years”) attitudes towards immigration to other years in the dataset.**

Immigration	Obama		Total
	Other years	2009-2016	
Decrease	48.3%	45.6%	46.9%
Stay the Same	37.2%	39.0%	38.1%
Increase	14.5%	15.4%	15.0%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
$\chi^2=8.748$			
$p=.013$			

Table 4. Crosstabulation for Trump year and Immigration			
Immigration	Trump		
	Other years	2018	Total
Decrease	48.6%	35.1%	46.9%
Stay the Same	37.5%	42.5%	38.1%
Increase	13.9%	22.4%	15.0%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
$\chi^2=123.757$			
$p<.001$			

**Table 4: Crosstabulation comparing 2018 (the “Trump years”) attitudes towards immigration to other years in the dataset.**

With these crosstabulation comparisons, it appears that there was not an increase in negative attitudes towards immigrants during the Trump year. In fact, when comparing to the other two years, there was an increase in the percentage of participants that wanted to increase immigration to the United States in the 2018 year. 22.4% indicated a desire to increase immigration in 2018 when compared to 15.4% for the years 2009-2016, and 11.6% for 2004-2008. With a p-value of  $<.001$  for the Trump year, this finding is statistically significant. By comparing this year to the other sets of years, I can reject my first hypothesis, and conclude that immigration attitudes did not become more negative during 2018, or the Trump year.

I next hypothesized that Trump’s presidency was the main cause of increased negative attitudes towards immigrants. As immigration attitudes did not become more negative during Trump’s 2018 year, I went back to one of my original questions, which was, “How did attitudes towards immigration change during the Trump presidency?” Though initial findings using crosstabulations indicate that a somewhat positive change occurred, I conducted a regression analysis using above-mentioned control variables to further examine this change.

Table 5. OLS Regression Analysis of Attitudes towards Immigration (key IV partyid)												
	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4		
	<i>b</i>		<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>		<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>		<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>		<i>p</i>
Party (Democrat=omitted)												
Republican	-0.302		<.001	-0.323		<.001	-0.315		<.001	-0.266		<.001
Independent	-0.079		<.001	-0.088		<.001	-0.097		<.001	-0.074		0.001
Female (male = omitted)				-0.057		0.02	-0.051		0.005	-0.053		0.004
Age				-0.003		<.001	-0.003		<.001	-0.003		<.001
Race (white=omitted)												
Black				0.046		0.091	0.077		0.005	0.074		0.007
Other				0.28		<.001	0.287		<.001	0.285		<.001
Confidence in Federal Government				0.077		<.001	0.075		<.001	0.085		<.001
Education (less than high school= omitted)												
High School				-0.178		<.001	-0.162		<.001	-0.163		<.001
Some College				-0.162		<.001	-0.149		<.001	-0.149		<.001
Bachelors				0.06		0.036	0.032		0.255	0.029		0.304
Year/ Bush= omitted												
Obama							0.124		<.001	0.125		<.001
Trump							0.252		<.001	0.437		<.001
Religious (liberal=omitted)												
Fundamentalist							-0.146		<.001	-0.145		<.001
Moderate							-0.07		<.001	-0.07		<.001
Class (lower/working class omitted)												
class 2 (upper class)							0.081		<.001	0.079		<.001
Interaction Effect												
Trump (year) * Republican Party										-0.409		<.001
Trump (year) * Independent Party										-0.192		0.002
<i>Model Statistics</i>												
r2				0.026		0.084	0.107		0.112			

Table 5: Regression analyses of attitudes towards immigrants, four models. Key variable partyid.

My first model for my regression analysis of `imm_num` tested the dummy variables of `republican` and `indep_party`. This yielded a model fit of .026. It also showed a significant coefficient of  $-0.302$  for Republicans and  $-0.079$  for Independents when compared to Democrats. These coefficients stayed relatively the same when adding in the control variables of sex, age, race, confidence in federal government, and education. With these added control variables,  $r^2$  increased to 0.084. After adding religious preferences and the dummy variables Obama and Trump (omitting Bush) for model three, the model fit increased yet again. Additionally, the Republican variable in this model slightly increased.

With this in mind, as well as my crosstabulations indicating an overall increase in positive attitudes towards immigrants during 2018 (“trump” year), I ran an interaction effect of the Trump year variable (2018) on the Republican variable, as well as on the Independent party variable. After creating a fourth model for my regression analysis, the  $r^2$  increased yet again, from 0.107 to 0.112. With the coefficient for `Trump*Republican party` (Republicans in 2018) indicating  $-0.409$ , and `Trump*Indep_party` (Independents in 2018) indicating  $-0.192$ , this is significantly different than the trump variable alone for model four, which showed a 0.437 increase in attitudes towards immigrants. I further questioned this interaction effect by running a crosstabulation and chi-square test of the percent within Republicans in 2018 who indicated a desire for increasing, decreasing, or keeping immigration the same. I also ran the same tests on the percent within Independents in 2018. These tests are shown in Tables 6 and 7.



Table 6. Crosstabulation for Republicans in 2018 year and Immigration			
Immigration	Republicans (2018)		
	Other years	2018	Total
Decrease	46.5%	59.0%	46.9%
Stay the Same	38.4%	30.2%	38.1%
Increase	15.1%	10.8%	15.0%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
$\chi^2=21.158$			
$p<.<.001$			

**Table 6: Republican voters' attitudes towards immigrants, 2018**

Table 7. Crosstabulation for Independents in 2018 year and Immigration			
Immigration	Independents (2018)		
	Other years	2018	Total
Decrease	47.8%	31.4%	46.9%
Stay the Same	37.5%	48.0%	38.1%
Increase	14.6%	20.6%	15.0%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
$\chi^2=70.679$			
$p<.<.001$			

**Table 7: Independent voters' attitudes towards immigrants, 2018**

Overall, attitudes towards immigration between 2004 to 2018 improved. In order to learn how the attitudes of Republicans in 2018 compared to attitudes in previous years, I created an interaction effect of the Obama years and Republicans, as well as that of Independent voters. These variables were coded as obama\_repub and obama\_indep. I created another crosstabulation to test the percent of Republicans during the Obama years indicating their immigration preferences. Tables 8 and 9 illustrates these findings.

Table 8. Crosstabulation for Republicans in Obama years and Immigration			
Immigration	Republicans (2009-2016)		
	Other years	2009-2016	Total
Decrease	45.4%	58.3%	46.9%
Stay the Same	38.8%	33.3%	38.1%
Increase	15.8%	8.4%	15.0%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
$\chi^2=97.952$			
$p<.001$			

**Table 8: Republican voters' attitudes towards immigrants, 2009-2016**

Table 9. Crosstabulation for Independents in Obama years and Immigration			
Immigration	Independents (2009-2016)		
	Other years	2009-2016	Total
Decrease	47.3%	45.6%	46.9%
Stay the Same	38.0%	38.8%	38.1%
Increase	14.8%	15.6%	15.0%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
$\chi^2=2.571$			
$p=.277$			

**Table 9: Independent voters' attitudes towards immigrants, 2009-2016**

The results of these crosstabulations indicate that Republicans in the Obama years had similar levels of desiring a decrease in immigration as Republicans in the Trump year. These numbers were also similar to Independents in the Obama years, but with a p-value of .277, these findings are not statistically significant. It appears that attitudes towards immigration from Republicans in 2018 were not more negative than in previous years.

I next ran another regression analysis with all four interaction effects (Republicans and Independents in the Obama years, as well as Republicans and Independents in the Trump year) with my control variables in order to see whether these patterns remain in a multivariate test.

Table 10. OLS Regression Analysis of Attitudes towards Immigration		
	Model 5	
	<i>b</i>	<i>p</i>
Party (Democrat= omitted)		
Republican	-0.341	<.001
Independent	-0.065	0.037
Female (male = omitted)	-0.052	0.004
Age	-0.003	<.001
Race (white=omitted)		
Black	0.076	0.006
Other	0.284	<.001
Confidence in Federal Government	0.079	<.001
Education (less than high school= omitted)		
High School	-0.162	<.001
Some College	-0.147	<.001
Bachelors	0.032	0.262
Year/ Bush= omitted		
Obama	0.136	<.001
Trump	0.25	<.001
Religious (liberal=omitted)		
Fundamentalist	-0.146	<.001
Moderate	-0.071	<.001
Class (lower/working class omitted)		
class 2 (upper class)	0.081	<.001
Interaction Effect		
Obama (year) * Republican Party	0.051	0.303
Obama (year) * Independent Party	-0.059	0.16
<i>Model Statistics</i>		
r <sup>2</sup>	0.108	

**Table 10: Regression analysis, interaction effects included**

With these added interaction effects, the  $r^2$  increased slightly to 0.113. Republicans during the Obama years showed a decrease a  $-.057$  decrease in attitudes towards immigrants, but with a p-value of 0.288, this finding was insignificant. Attitudes of independent voters during the Obama years also decreased ( $-0.126$ ), but again, this result was not significant. However, results changed significantly for both Republicans and Independent voters in the Trump years. Republicans indicated a decrease in attitudes of 0.441, and Independents a decrease of .268. With both p-values being  $<.001$ , both coefficients were found to be significant. When comparing these interaction effects, it is evident that there was a negative change in attitudes towards immigrants in 2018 that may have resulted from the leadership during this time. Therefore, I fail to reject my hypothesis that Trump's presidency caused the growing anti-immigrant sentiment within the Republican party.

## CHAPTER 5

### **Discussion**

Though my analysis mainly focuses on that of the Republican party, due to that being the presidential party of Trump for the 2016 election, it is interesting to note the changes among Independents. When examining the interaction effects of the Obama presidential years and Independent voters to Independent voters in the Trump year, there was a significant decrease in attitudes towards immigrants. It is worth noting, with some speculation, that Trump may have perceived this anti-immigrant sentiment growing among Independent voters and capitalized upon this to gain more support. This is yet another hypothesis that must be expanded upon with further analyses and testing, but is worth looking into for future research.

I found support for my second hypothesis, but not my first hypothesis. My first hypothesis, that attitudes towards immigrants in the United States had, in general, become more negative, was not supported, as attitudes towards immigrants have improved. This finding supports that of Fussell's research, which found a general "warming up" to immigrants in the United States, rather than an increase in negative attitudes. As immigrant levels in the United States have continued to rise as a proportion of the population, I had expected to find evidence in support of my first hypothesis due to group threat theory.

To explain the support for my second hypothesis, I hypothesized that Trump's presidency was the main catalyst for anti-immigrant attitudes in the United States. By examining attitudes towards immigrants among Republican and Independent voters in years corresponding to the Obama and Trump presidencies, I found a significant decrease in attitudes in 2018 when compared to 2009-2016. Though attitudes had also decreased during the Obama years, these findings were insignificant.

Symbolic politics theory and opinion leadership theories state that leaders shape public attitudes towards groups commonly demonized (such as immigrants or criminals) via rhetoric and mass media (Flores 2018). According to Flores, in a subgroup experimental study to learn the effect of watching one of Trump's speeches on the desire to increase or decrease immigration flow to the United States, those who were Republican and/or without college education were more likely to choose decreasing immigration after watching Trump's speech. Flores's findings support symbolic politics theory. As attitudes towards immigrants greatly decreased following the election of Trump, Trump's presidency is a possible explanation for the decrease in attitudes within the Republican party. Public opinion on immigration to the United States has improved, with certain groups, such as Republicans, going the opposite direction.

Along with the effects of Trump's opinion leadership, another important factor of this polarization may have been the impact of mass media. For Trump and the year 2018, there was more coverage of political elites' opinions than ever before. Whereas in 2004 we may only have heard a few speeches a week from Bush on a wide range of issues, Trump took to Twitter (prior to being banned) and let the world know his thoughts on every subject, including immigration, any day of the week. With more coverage, as well as easier access to mass media, the speed with which certain issues can become polarized political issues can greatly accelerate. Mass media causes the general public—and myself, as I revealed with my hypotheses—to believe that much of the country dislikes certain groups simply because that is how it is portrayed in the news.

As with any academic work, there are certain limitations to my study. One of the greatest limitations facing this study was a lack of data for years prior to 2004 and after 2018, due to my question from the GSS only being asked in those years, as well as data for 2020 not having been released yet. In general, the GSS lacks questions related to immigration. Questions that do relate

to immigration can often be swayed by the social desirability bias, in which people are more likely to not indicate their true feelings (for example, someone may be more in support of decreasing immigration, but does not want to seem xenophobic or racist) to seem more socially acceptable. Another limitation of this study is my data is solely from the GSS. In other publications relating to this subject, other polls are often utilized such as the Gallup poll. Other scholars also often conduct their own experimental study designs, such as the design from Flores that tested how Trump's speech would impact opinions on immigration. With timeliness and lack of funding being primary issues here, I will not be able to conduct my own experiment but must continue using GSS data and/or other reliable data sources in the future.

In order to fully understand attitudes towards immigrants, it may be helpful to me to find survey questions that ask more "in-between the lines" questions. For example, rather than asking a participant outright if they are racist (a strongly negatively connotated and heavily avoided word), a question might ask someone how they would respond to a new immigrant in their neighborhood. Additionally, my study assumes that those who identify themselves as Republican will have voted for Trump. This reasoning led me to my interaction effect that showed Republicans in 2018 having a strong negative correlation with a desire for decreased immigration.

## CHAPTER 6

### **Conclusion**

Though heavily portrayed in media as a polarizing issue, attitudes towards immigration in the United States have been improving since 2004. This was one of my main questions I initially asked, which paired well with my hypothesis that attitudes had become more negative, in general. Though overall opinion has been positive, certain subgroups continue to feel negative about immigrants, as well as have emerged as leaders in negative immigrant sentiments. Republicans, in particular, have strongly opposed increasing immigration. My next question I hoped to answer with my study was how did attitudes towards immigration change during the period of Trump's presidency? Unfortunately, this is a question that may be only answered once the GSS releases data from the 2020 survey. With this data, it will be easier to understand opinions of immigration at the beginning and end of Trump's presidency, which may become a clearer indicator for how attitudes changed. My final question, which also related to my second hypothesis, asked whether it was Trump who caused anti-immigrant sentiment, or if these attitudes were beginning to emerge in America already. Using interaction effects, I found evidence to support the hypothesis that Trump's presidency helped to cause an increase in negative attitudes towards immigrants for Republican voters.

My primary finding of this research is that our perceptions of a situation can be molded based on our leaders and the news we are presented with. Countless news networks worked constantly to document every anti-immigrant sentiment uttered by Trump, while often neglecting to take a critical look towards Obama's own often anti-immigrant policies. With further research on this subject, as well as on more research on attitudes towards immigrants, I will be better able to assess my findings and understand how future politicians may use this to their advantage.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Allport, GW. 1962. "Prejudice: Is it Societal or Personal?" *Religious Education* 1: 20-9.
- Anderson, Stuart. 2020. "A Review of Trump Immigration Policy." *Forbes*. Retrieved March 8, 2021. (<https://www.forbes.com/sites/stuartanderson/2020/08/26/fact-check-and-review-of-trump-immigration-policy/?sh=745ce3356c07>).
- Batalova, Jeanne, Mary Hanna, and Christopher Levesque. 2021. "Frequently Requested Statistics on Immigrants and Immigration in the United States." Migration Policy Institute. Retrieved March 8, 2021. (<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/frequently-requested-statistics-immigrants-and-immigration-united-states-2020>).
- Blumer, Henry. 1958. "Race Prejudice as a Sense of Group Position." *The Pacific Sociological* 1 (1): 3-7.
- Bobo L. 1983. "Whites' Opposition to Busing: Symbolic Racism or Realistic Group Conflict?" *Social Psychology*. 45:1196-2.
- Bush, George. 2006. "Bush's Speech on Immigration." *The New York Times*. Retrieved March 8, 2021. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2006/05/15/washington/15text-bush.html>).
- Ceobanu, Alin M., and Xavier Escandell. 2010. "Comparative Analyses of Public Attitudes Toward Immigrants and Immigration Using Multinational Survey Data: A Review of Theories and Research." *Annual Review of Sociology* 36: 309-28.
- Flores, René D. 2018. "Can Elites Shape Public Attitudes Toward Immigrants?: Evidence from the 2016 US Presidential Election." *Social Forces* 96 (4): 1649-90.
- Fussell, Elizabeth. 2014. "Warmth of the Welcome: Attitudes Toward Immigration and Immigration Policy in the United States." *Annual Review of Sociology* 40: 479-98.

Hainmueller, Jens., and Daniel J. Hopkins. 2014. "Public Attitudes Towards Immigration."

*Annual Review of Political Science* 17: 225-49.

Hopkins, DJ. 2010. "Politicized Places: Explaining Where and When Immigrants Provoke Local Opposition." *American Political Science Review*. 104 (1): 40-60.

Migration Policy Institute. 2019. "U.S. Immigrant Population and Share over Time, 1850-

Present." Migration Policy Institute. Retrieved March 8, 2021.

(<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/charts/immigrant-population-over-time?width=1000&height=850&iframe=true>).

Obama, Barack. 2014. "Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on Immigration."

Obama White House. Retrieved March 8, 2021.

(<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/11/20/remarks-President-address-nation-immigration>).

Pettigrew, Thomas F. 1998. "Intergroup Contact Theory." *Annual Review of Psychology* 49: 65-85.

Quillian, Lincoln. 1995. "Prejudice as a Response to Perceived Group Threat: Population Composition and Anti-Immigrant and Racial Prejudice in Europe." *American Sociological Review* 60: 586-611.

Snow, Anita and Julie Watson. "Under Trump, US No Longer Leads World on Refugee

Protections." AP News. Retrieved March 8, 2021. (<https://apnews.com/article/donald-trump-politics-virus-outbreak-immigration-immigration-policy-1f8c91e31fba158126f8e91c1453b13f>).

The White House. 2007. "President Bush's Plan for Comprehensive Immigration Reform." The White House. Retrieved March 9, 2021. (<https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/stateoftheunion/2007/initiatives/immigration.html>).

The World. 2019. "Trump's Hard-Line Immigration Policies Build on the History of Former U.S Presidents." The World. Retrieved March 8, 2021. (<https://www.pri.org/stories/2019-07-12/trumps-hard-line-immigration-policies-build-history-former-us-presidents>).

Trump, Donald. 2015. "Quote about Mexicans." Retrieved March 8, 2021.

Trump, Donald. 2019. "Full Transcript: Trump's Speech on Immigration and the Democratic Response." The New York Times. Retrieved March 8, 2021. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/08/us/politics/trump-speech-transcript.html>).

Whitehead, Andrew L., et al. 2018. "Make America Christian Again: Christian Nationalism and Voting for Donald Trump in the 2016 Presidential Election." *Sociology of Religion: A Quarterly Review* 79 (2): 147-71.

## ACADEMIC VITA OF NICOLE D'AMICO

### EDUCATION

*The Pennsylvania State University*

University Park, PA

*B.A in Sociology*

*B.A in International Politics (International Relations concentration)*

*Minor in French and Francophone Studies*

### RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

#### **American Religious Data Archive (ARDA) Research Support**

*June 2021 – Present*

*Principle Investigator: Dora Hunter; Project Manager Gail Ulmer*

- Create frequencies for large amounts of religious survey data utilizing SPSS
- Produce data labels for files and variables to categorize survey results

#### **“A Database and Analysis of Intergroup Hostility”**

*June 2020 – Present*

*Principal Investigators: Dr. John McCarthy, Dr. Roger Finke, Dr. Dane Mataic*

- Record acts of hate and advocacy towards Muslims in America following the 9/11 terrorist attacks using qualitative coding techniques with Google Sheets
- Analyze newspaper reporting and word choice to determine trends in hate or advocacy towards Muslims

#### **Various Research Projects**

*Sept 2020 – May 2021*

*Principal Investigator: Dr. Andrew High*

- Coded analytics for Google search terms around case information in quantitative research terms
- Utilized Microsoft Excel to quantitatively analyze and code communication styles and mediums between research participants

### VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

#### **Midstate Literacy Council**

*September 2021 – Present*

*Volunteer Tutor*

- Design lesson plans for an English second language learner
- Promotes English language learning and encourages learner to gain confidence in the community

#### **American Red Cross**

*May 2021 – Present*

*Volunteer Caseworker*

- Conduct initial client interviews and follow-up conversations, according to Red Cross standards
- Assist with recovery planning, problem-solving, and advocacy for clients
- Provide clients with information and referrals to community partners

### HONORS PROGRAMS

*Pi Sigma Alpha, Beta Pi (Political Science Honors Society)*

*Oct 2020 – Present*

*Schreyer Honors College*

*Sept 2019 – Present*

*Paterno Fellows Program*

*Aug 2018 – Present*