

A Tale of Two Counties:

Perceptions and Attitudes toward Immigrants in New Destinations

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Abstract: This paper analyzes a representative survey from a pair of matched counties in North Carolina to compare native residents' attitudes and perceptions toward immigration, depending on whether their county has experienced recent growth of its foreign-born population. We formulate testable hypotheses derived from several theoretical perspectives, including group threat, contact theory, and symbolic politics. We find only narrow evidence that competition and threat play a role in opinion formation. We show modest support for claims that parents with school-aged children harbor more negative views of immigration than their childless counterparts, but except for residents in precarious economic situations, these negative attitudes appear unrelated to the immigrant composition of the community. We find limited support for claims that the media promotes negative views of immigration, but no evidence that this relationship is moderated by local immigration. We also present suggestive evidence that superficial contact between natives and immigrants outside the work context are conducive to anti-immigration sentiments, while more sustained contacts promote positive views of immigration. Political orientation, educational attainment, and indicators of respondents' tolerance for diversity are found to be strong predictors of views of immigration. The distribution of these characteristics explains most of difference between the two counties in overall support for immigration.

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I. The Problem

The United States has a longstanding love-hate relationship with immigrants, accepting them with open arms during prosperous times, and too often blaming them for a host of problems during bad times. Yet, many industries, such as food processing, construction, home maintenance services, janitorial services and subsectors of the hospitality industry (such as restaurants and hotels) have increased their dependence on immigrant workers. Sergio Arau's humorous film, "A Day without a Mexican," is an apt satire of California's high dependence on Hispanic workers, but its relevance transcends the Golden State as immigrants disperse across the nation, beyond the traditional gateways. Through much of American history, immigrants settled almost exclusively in a few major cities such as New York or Los Angeles. From 1971 to 1995, for example, 78 percent of immigrants settled in one of five states (New York, California, Florida, Texas, and Illinois) and nearly half went to one of five metropolitan areas (Massey and Capoferro 2008:26). Lured by plentiful unskilled jobs and affordable housing, large numbers of foreign-born workers settled in communities where immigrants had a minimal presence. Thus, by 2005, only half of recently arrived immigrants resided in one of the top five traditional gateway states.

The geographic dispersal of the recent immigrants has rekindled the love-hate immigration quandary in new destination communities. As the widely publicized conflicts in Farmingville, NY, Hazelton, PA, and Danbury, Connecticut attest, employers and homemakers delight at their willingness to work long, often irregular hours for low wages, but community residents resent their presence in the schools, neighborhoods, and public spaces. Many of the "new immigrant destinations" are in the South and Midwest. In North Carolina, the site of our study, the foreign-born population surged from 115 thousand persons in 1990 to 630 thousand by 2007. In that year 115 thousand children, 14.2 percent of

all children in North Carolina, resided with at least one foreign-born parent, up from 3.4 percent in 1990 (Migration Policy Institute 2009).

Like Arau's satire film, Viglucci's (2000) interviews with employers, community leaders and parents in Chatham County, North Carolina give voice to the contemporary immigration dilemma in one of the new immigrant destinations:

"I hate to think what would happen if the immigrants left tomorrow. Our industry would disappear." -Siler City Town Manager Joe Brower

"We (African Americans) were already down, and now we're even further behind. Latinos have rented and are steadily buying a lot of property. They have cash money, they have good credit, they're a good liability. People cater to them. But it has made housing skyrocket." -Rev. Barry Gray, pastor of the First Missionary Baptist Church of Siler City.

"I heard from other parents, 'My child is the only white child in the classroom.'" -T.C. Yarborough, President of the Siler City Elementary School Parent-Teacher Association

"But we're not racists or bigots. We need help. I ran for office to lower my taxes and we ended up passing the biggest tax increase in years." -Chatham County Commission Chair Rick Givens.

While instructive, these anecdotes do not reveal whether and in what ways a surge in the foreign-born population shapes attitudes toward immigration. Nevertheless, the geographic dispersal of immigrants has several implications for understanding perceptions and attitudes towards foreign-born and ethnic minority residents. First, it means that a large number of natives for whom contemporary immigration was formerly an abstract national-level issue directly witness immigration into their communities. Compared with natives living in communities not impacted by immigration, residents of the new immigrant destinations are more likely to have interacted with newcomers—in the workplace, schools, churches, or local parks—and thus may be more likely to form opinions based on *actual experience* or local portrayals of specific incidents or community-wide changes rather than media coverage of immigration as a national issue. Second, how immigrants fare in new destinations will depend on myriad local attributes that either facilitate or thwart integration, including the presence and

size of co-ethnic native communities, the emergence of social organizations that provide assistance to new arrivals, and the political orientation of community leaders toward immigrants.

The growing residential dispersal of foreign-born populations has not gone unnoticed, but the literature on immigrant integration and the reactions of natives to immigrants in the new destinations is still maturing. Researchers have documented the timing, scale and residential contours of the new settlement patterns, establishing that this dispersal has been driven by changes in the distribution of Mexican and Central American immigrants and that it involves a great diversity of American communities, from resurgent urban cores to booming suburbs to small towns. Social scientists have also conducted richly textured case studies that focus on specific places, national origin groups, or industries (Massey 2008; Gozdziaik and Martin 2005; Zuniga and Hernández-León 2005; Singer, Hardwick, and Brettell 2008). The geographic diversification of immigrant settlement in the United States has also rekindled social science interest in revisiting a number of theoretical, substantive, and practical questions about whether and how *integration prospects* of recent arrivals may be impacted by this change. The relative newness of immigrants' residential scattering coupled with the diversity of the places and groups involved defies easy generalization about the consequences of the dispersal. An important part of the answers surely depends on the *contexts of reception*—the capacity of local institutions to serve the needs of newcomers, the local market and social conditions, and the constellation of state and local policies that govern access to social goods (Rumbaut and Portes 2000; Portes and Rumbaut 2006)—as well as the timing and intensity of the influx.

There are several reasons why reactions to the recent immigration to new destinations may differ from those observed in the traditional gateway destinations. First, the contexts of reception differ; specifically, few nontraditional immigrant destinations feature institutions that operated at the time of the last great wave of immigration, such as settlement houses, unions, multi-ethnic schools and ethnic

organizations. More generally, the new immigrant destinations may have a very different set of social and political dynamics than are found in the traditional destinations. Second, a large share of recent immigrants has education levels well below those of their host populations and many lack legal status. Third, and depending on the size of the immigrant influx compared with the host population, the arrival of foreign workers may disrupt social hierarchies and trigger ethnic and racial antagonism, particularly if established residents perceive that the newcomers compete for coveted resources (jobs, seats in local schools, housing) and drain public coffers. Where perceived threats are salient, native populations may promote acts of social exclusion, such as local ordinances that restrict access to benefits and services (Rodriguez, Chisti and Nortman, 2007). In 2007, for example, state legislatures considered 1,059 immigration-related bills and passed 167 of those (Migration Policy Institute 2008). From 2005 to 2007, localities considered at least 176 immigration-related ordinances, passing at least 129 (Ramakrishnan and Wong 2008). Some communities have required landlords to check the legal status of tenants, fined employers for hiring unauthorized immigrants, declared English to be the official local language, and ordered local police to assist federal officials in detaining and deporting illegal immigrants (Rodriguez, Chisti, and Nortman 2007). Not all responses have been negative. Other communities have explicitly declared that local government agencies and police will ignore legal status, organized trips for public servants to immigrant-sending communities, or aggressively promoted English and citizenship education.

Relatively little information exists about what factors lead to more adversarial or more cooperative relationships between immigrants and natives in the “new immigrant destinations.” Excluding a few exceptions of investigative journalism, televised and printed media have dramatized high profile cases that showcase anti-immigrant responses to increases in foreign-born residents (Barry 2006; Lambert 2005; Kaplan 2008). Precisely because they are extreme, such anecdotes about place and time-specific incidents are not helpful for gauging the prevalence, intensity, or causes of anti-immigrant

sentiment. A rich literature that uses ethnographic methods and thick description has uncovered the complex dynamics of immigration in specific new destination communities (Anderson 2000; Stull, Broadway, and Griffith 1995; Massey 2008; Singer et al. 2008; Zuniga and Hernández-León 2005; Gozdziaik and Martin 2005), but these are too focused on specific institutional and social dynamics to permit broader tests of the competing explanations for how natives react to immigrants.

Accordingly, this paper examines the *reactions of the native population* to the influx of immigrants using a representative survey from a pair of matched counties in North Carolina—one that experienced rapid growth in its immigrant population and one that did not. Building on insights from existing case studies of immigrant-native relations in new immigrant destinations and the rich theoretical literature about immigrant integration, we develop and test several hypotheses about how contexts of reception shape public opinion. In particular, we consider how perceptions of immigration differ depending on whether native populations are exposed to foreign-born populations. That the two counties are located in the same metropolitan area, have overlapping media markets, and have similar industry structures provides a contrast between attitudes and perceptions toward immigration by native residents who witnessed a rapid increase in their foreign-born population locally and those who observed the phenomenon from a distance.

To frame the empirical analysis, the next section provides a framework for theorizing native responses to immigrants and formulates testable propositions. Following a description of the sites, the data and methods, we present empirical results. The concluding section draws both research and policy implications in light of evidence that the dispersal is unlikely to reverse, even if its pace abates in the near term.

II. Theoretical Considerations

Our study builds on an extensive social science literature about how inter-group relations influence perceptions of and attitudes toward minority groups, and newcomers in particular. Whether natives harbor positive or negative opinions of immigrants depends both on whether groups actually interact, and whether they compete for resources (Lieberson, 1961). Hypotheses of intergroup threat and resource competition predict adversarial relationships between immigrants and local native populations, but sustained exposure to immigrants could produce positive attitudes by fostering understanding of differences. The framing of immigration in the national and local media also can shape attitudes toward immigrant and ethnic minority groups, even in places unaffected by the surge in foreign-born residents. We elaborate on these ideas below.

Intergroup Contact Hypotheses

Coined by sociologists, a general set of contact hypotheses predict that the larger the relative size of a minority group in a local area, the greater the hostility toward that group will be among dominant groups due to perceived competition for power and resources (Blalock 1967; Bobo and Hutchings 1996). Much of this literature was derived using black-white relations and the evidence based on immigrant and Hispanic populations is mixed (Taylor 1998; Citrin et al. 1997; Stein, Post, and Rinden 2000; Dixon 2006; Berg 2009). The “group threat” and “competition” hypotheses imply that, compared with residents not directly impacted by the immigrant dispersal, those living in communities that have witnessed an increase in their foreign-born population will harbor more negative attitudes toward immigrants. Whether immigrant group size is sufficient to trigger a protective response by the majority or more established minority group depends on the extent and nature of inter-group contact (Alba, et al., 2005). Specifically, if native and foreign residents do not compete for valued resources (e.g., housing, jobs, seats at school), then it is unlikely that large immigrant populations will foster negative sentiments.

In North Carolina, where immigration is relatively recent, the foreign-born and their children may not yet impact electoral politics. However, competition may be present in other spheres. Recent immigrants, particularly the unskilled and undocumented, tend to occupy very specific labor market niches, which concentrate job competition with specific segments of the local workforce (Marrow, 2008). In many localities, immigrant workers visibly sustain and dominate employment in non-durable manufacturing and personal services industries (Fischer and Tienda 2006), creating potential for competition and conflict with less-skilled workers, black workers and other segments of the native workforce even as they contribute to the overall welfare of their new communities. Housing and schools are other potential arenas for conflict, particularly in resource-strapped districts required to increase fiscal outlays for special instructional needs, such as bilingual programs and special English instruction methods.

The political economy literature contributes a more specific version of the group threat hypothesis that centers on the distribution of costs and benefits of immigration, without sociology's emphasis on groups. Economic theory predicts that workers whose characteristics place them in economic competition with immigrants, such as those with low skill levels, would be more likely to harbor anti-immigrant sentiments, compared with potential beneficiaries, such as the affluent and owners and managers of capital, who would favor immigration (Scheve and Slaughter 2001). Group threat and economic competition perspectives of inter-group relations suggest that the opinions of natives depend on whether they and groups they belong to are threatened by or benefited by immigration. Concretely, unskilled workers will harbor negative attitudes toward immigrants but owners of capital who employ low-skill workers will be positively disposed. Furthermore, we hypothesize that the intensity of threat and perceived competition will depend on whether the local community received new immigrants.

On the other hand, exposure to other groups can also produce positive attitudes toward immigration if inter-group contact dispels stereotypes and unfounded fears, but empirical support for this hypothesis in the case of immigrants and Hispanics is mixed (Allport 1979; Dixon 2006; Dixon and Rosenbaum 2004; Citrin et al. 1997; Hood and Morris 1997, 1998). Although this argument posits that cooperative contacts will result in more positive views of the out group, superficial or adversarial contacts could foster negative attitudes. As with the threat and competition hypotheses, both the size of the immigrant population and the context of inter-group contact (i.e., job, neighborhood, school) will determine whether the influx of foreigners promotes understanding or fosters antagonism in new destinations. Empirical tests thus require information about the *nature of inter-group contact*. We expect that indicators of sustained contact with immigrants will be associated with more positive views of immigration. More superficial contacts will have no such association, and may be associated with more negative views of immigration. Additionally, because sustained contact with foreign-born residents is more likely to occur in new immigrant destinations than in places that did not receive immigrants, we expect that attitudes toward immigrants will be more positive in places that received immigrants.

Indirect Contact: Media Exposure

Immigration is a high-profile national issue. This magnifies public responses, which are shaped by media images and narratives about the problems and controversies associated with international migration. The prominence of immigration and the debate surrounding it mean that even people who have little first-hand experience with actual immigrants are aware of the issues surrounding immigration. The experience of those who do interact with immigrants may be shaped by this national media environment.

An especially promising theoretical insight concerns how media and political events shape perceptions and local responses to immigration. Hopkins (2007) theorizes that *both* rapid changes in the foreign-born population size *and* media coverage of immigration as a problem are necessary to generate perceptions of threat among natives. This “politicized change” perspective differs from conventional contact theory by emphasizing two new features—the *pace of change* in foreign-born population size (as compared with the size of the foreign-born population *per se*) and national media coverage of immigration as a social problem. Hopkins’s argument suggests that exposure to media will be associated with negative attitudes toward immigrants, especially in places that experienced rapid immigration growth.

Political Orientation

In their simplest form, political beliefs may influence attitudes toward immigration by defining group membership, social values, and policy preferences. For example, advocates of limited government may view immigration as an expansive force on public budgets. The geographic dispersal of the US foreign born population has re-distributed the fiscal impacts away from coastal “blue” states toward Southern and Midwestern states, and within states away from large metropolitan centers toward smaller urban and suburban places.

If immigration cues up and beliefs about national identity (Huntington, 2004), reactions to immigration may be independent of actual exposure but instead express core values about national identity and who can belong to the *unum*. This “symbolic politics” thesis, which helps explain why hostile reactions to illegal immigration occur in places where few immigrants reside, finds support in public policy responses to immigration. Despite pervasive evidence that immigration poses no threat to the nation’s common language, many states and localities have passed “English-only” ordinances (Rodriguez

et al. 2007; Citrin et al. 1990). Pantoja (2006) finds support from the opposite direction by showing that humanitarianism and egalitarianism predict support for immigrant admissions.

Several studies show that individual beliefs, preferences and values are more powerful predictors of attitudes toward immigration in the new destinations than contact or exposure perspectives. For example, Ramakrishnan and Wong (2008) find that political party composition is a powerful prediction of the likelihood that local governments will initiate and pass immigration-related legislation but that the emergence and growth of Hispanic and immigrant populations is less consequential for these outcomes. Stated differently, the literature on identity and political preferences indicates that political beliefs and receptiveness to cultural change will determine attitudes toward immigration, but the size and growth of the local immigrant population figures less prominently than in the inter-group contact perspectives. Thus, we expect that higher levels of political and social conservatism will be associated with less positive views of immigration; however, the size of this association will not depend on the size of the foreign-born population.

Tolerance for Diversity

Evaluating contact hypotheses requires looking beyond global changes in public opinion and considering how native reactions are mediated by their individual characteristics and exposure to information about immigrants (Alba, et al., 2005). Variants of the contact hypothesis compete with a more straightforward explanation about the formation of attitudes toward immigrants, or other “out groups.” Building from the premise that *education* and *exposure to other cultures* raise tolerance for diversity and change, we expect a positive association between levels of education and positive attitudes toward immigrants (Espenshade and Hempstead 2006, Pantoja, 2006). A shared or similar cultural heritage or recent immigrant ancestry, too, should predict support for immigration (Espenshade and Hempstead 1993, Espenshade and Calhoun 1993). These arguments suggest the testable

proposition that more highly educated residents, those with an immigrant heritage, and those with more cosmopolitan experience will harbor more positive views of immigration compared with their less educated counterparts, those with no immigrant heritage and limited exposure to communities beyond their own.

Native Attitudes toward Immigration: Empirical Assessments

A few studies have simultaneously evaluated theoretical claims about attitudes and perceptions of immigrations by polling native residents in traditional immigrant destinations or the country as a whole. Typically, these analyses consider questions about whether immigration should be increased, decreased, or left the same as their dependent variable. Using a survey from southern California, Espenshade and Calhoun (1993), find that indicators of cultural affinity to immigrants and greater education are associated with views that immigration should be increased or remain unchanged. They show that perceptions of economic costs and benefits influence opinions about immigration, but find a weak association between labor market competition and support for immigration. Espenshade and Hempstead (1996), using a nationwide sample, find that political identification is a powerful predictor of attitudes toward immigration and that isolationist positions on foreign policy are associated with preference for restrictive admission policies. They find only weak associations between support for immigration and perceptions of the strength of the national economy and indicators of political disaffection. Importantly, they find that, *ceteris paribus*, natives who perceived that most immigrants come from Latin America or Asia were less supportive of immigration than those who believed most immigrants came from Europe.

Pantoja (2006) uses national survey data from the mid-nineties to assess how individualism, egalitarianism, and humanitarianism influence respondent's disposition toward three aspects of immigration policy. He shows that all three are associated with support for immigrant access to public

benefits and levels of immigration, but not views about border enforcement. Pantoja also finds that respondents' assessment of their own financial situation and the national economic outlook are associated with restrictionist admission policies; but Citrin, et al. (1997) disagrees. Rather these authors claim that perceptions of the state of the national economy and concerns about taxes are stronger predictors of public attitudes toward immigration. Their analyses showed that generalized perceptions about and attitudes towards Hispanics and Asians also were strongly associated with immigration policy preferences.

Building on these myriad insights, we empirically evaluate which theoretical mechanisms, direct (contact and competition) vs. indirect (media) exposure to new immigrants explain native reactions to the growth of foreign-born residents in a specific, but highly interesting case. Specifically, we are interested in deciphering whether negative attitudes towards immigration are triggered or enhanced by contacts with immigrants in local life and which ones are more generalized and also active in communities with few immigrants. We evaluate several testable hypotheses in one "new immigrant destination" and a closely located, loosely matched county with few immigrants. As such, our analysis is among the first to investigate the formation of opinions about immigration in the "new immigrant destinations." Additionally, the focused nature of the survey we use allows us to include a number of variables describing respondents' reported contacts and experiences with immigrants in a way that more generalized surveys on political and social attitudes rarely permit. Finally, we explore an aspect of opinion formation that has not been extensively explored, namely how the influence of selected personal characteristics and experiences depend on whether respondents live in a community that has actually witnessed rapid demographic change.

III. Study Sites

We analyze a unique survey based on a randomized phone survey of native-born adults in Chatham County and Person County, North Carolina. The two counties were selected through a matching process designed to identify appropriate matched pairs of high and low immigration counties nationwide. The foreign-born made up less than 1 percent of the population of each county in 1980. A simple model based on county characteristics in 1980 and 1990 predicted that both Chatham County and Person County would experience high rates of growth in their foreign-born population between 1990 and 2000 (Hanson 2007). By 2000, the foreign-born population of Chatham County increased to nearly nine percent of the population, primarily due to immigration from Mexico and Central America, while Person County's foreign-born population share remained unchanged.

A total of 1,080 native-born adults (574 from Chatham County and 506 from Person county) participated in the phone survey. The survey was conducted in August of 2008, during the US Presidential election campaign and about a year after a major immigration reform bill failed in the US Congress amid high-profile protests. Stock market indices were well off the highs posted the previous summer, and the current recession was already underway as of December 2007; however, data collection was complete well before widespread acknowledgement of the extent of the financial crisis and the resulting market crash in late September, 2008.

After eliminating cases with incomplete information, we analyzed 998 cases with information on all the relevant variables. The survey obtained respondent's race, occupation, social contact with immigrants, perception of the size of the local immigrant population, awareness of media coverage of immigration, and opinions on various national and local level immigration issues. Respondents answering "Don't Know" or declining to answer a question were recoded as a neutral answer on questions where such a category was implied.

Person County and Chatham County were chosen because of their many similarities.

Manufacturing employment in both counties is well above the national average—22 percent in Chatham versus 26 percent in Person—which is important because of the growing representation of foreign workers in manufacturing industries. Both counties border Durham County and are part of the Durham Metropolitan Statistical Area. Person and Chatham County; both are served by the Durham Herald-Sun and several other regional newspapers and broadcast television and radio stations based in Raleigh-Durham or Greensboro. Each county also has several small local periodicals and at least one local radio station.

Despite these similarities, Chatham County and Person County differ in important ways. Table 1 shows select demographic information for the two counties from the American Community Survey, while Table 2 shows important covariates from our sample. Chatham County residents are, on average, better educated and have higher family incomes than those living in Person County (Table 1). The proportion of residents who are black in Person County is about twice as high as in Chatham County, although this difference is smaller when only the native population is considered. In these two counties, the Hispanic population largely corresponds to the population of person in households headed by immigrants, explaining why Chatham County has a much larger population of Hispanics in Census data but not in our sample of natives. Age structures of both counties were similar, however. Our samples in each county correspond to these differences, although blacks are somewhat underrepresented in our sample of Person County.

Person County has had lower rates of population change than Chatham County (Table 1). This is reflected in our survey data in the higher proportion of Chatham County natives in our data who reported having been born outside North Carolina (Table 2). Voters in each county are about equally likely to register or identify as Democrats or Republicans, but at every education and income level

Chatham County respondents were far more likely than those in Person County to describe themselves as “liberal” (Table 2). This corresponds with voting data from the 2004 Presidential Elections: John Kerry won 50% of votes in Chatham County, but only 41% in Person County.

Chatham County immigrants are concentrated around Siler City, attracted by job opportunities in its poultry processing plants, but the foreign-born are also dispersed in other areas of the county, where they find employment in construction, agriculture and service industries that hire unskilled workers. Immigration has been an active political issue in Chatham County since 1999 at latest. In 2000, then-Chair of the County Board of Commissioners Rick Givens triggered uproar from state Hispanic advocacy organizations and a rebuke from the North Carolina Governor’s office for a letter requesting assistance in removing illegal immigrants, although he later adopted a more conciliatory approach to immigration (Viglucchi 2000). In January 2008 the Board of Commissioners voted that Chatham County would not participate in the federal 287(g) program, under which local law enforcement officers are trained to enforce federal immigration laws. As of August 2008, eight North Carolina jurisdictions, none of them in the study counties, participated in the program.

IV. Analytic Strategy

Our broad goal is to evaluate variants of the contact hypothesis by investigating whether perceived threats, actual contact, or indirect exposure to foreign-born populations are associated with negative views of immigration. Additionally, we wish to evaluate the importance of personal characteristics, such a political alignment and tolerance of diversity, in setting attitudes towards immigration in the presence and absence of a local immigrant population. We first define our theoretical constructs operationally and compare mean values for the core constructs using t-tests in each county (Table 2 and Table 3). We then use multivariate regression techniques to determine which theoretical covariates are associated with anti-immigration attitudes in respondents from both counties

(Table 4). Next, we evaluate which theoretical mechanisms are activated or aggravated by local growth of the immigrant population and/or direct contact with immigrants. We do so by allowing for *differences* in the association between these covariates and attitudes toward immigration in the immigration county and the non-immigration county, using a simple model that interacts theoretically important covariates with a dummy variable for residence in Chatham County (Table 5).

The above approaches model differences in opinions about immigration among individuals. However, they do not help us explain differences in opinions about immigration between residents of Person County on one hand, and Chatham County on the other. This is especially important given the differences in the composition of native populations of the two counties and the fact that many more Chatham County residents have been exposed to immigrants directly. Again using multivariate regression, we investigate how the estimated association between opinions about immigration and residence in Chatham County changes as theoretically important controls are introduced (Table 6.)

Dependent Variable: Immigration Problems Index

In order to capture natives' perceptions of immigration in the broadest possible sense, while excluding to the extent possible normative judgments and preferences about specific policies, we created an index from responses to eight questions, listed below and summarized in Table 3. A numerical score was assigned to the ordinal responses (1 to 5, 1 to 3, or 1 to 10, depending on the number of implicit categories), with higher scores indicating that immigration was a more important or more problematic issue, or indicating a preference for fewer immigrant admissions. The "Immigration Problems Index" is an unweighted sum of the standardized scores for each question. Alternative compositions of the index using different weightings of the scores derived from factor analysis and

subsets of the eight variables were used to check the robustness of our multivariate results. Substantive results were unchanged. ¹Responses to the following questions were used to develop the scale:

1. Do you think the number of immigrants from foreign countries who are permitted to come to the United States to live should be decreased a lot, decreased a little, left the same as it is now, increased a little or increased a lot?
2. Now consider illegal or undocumented immigration as a *national* issue. On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is equal to unimportant and 10 is equal to very important, how would you rank the issue of illegal immigration?
3. And using the same scale, how would you rank the issue of illegal or undocumented immigration as a *local* issue? 1 being unimportant; 10 being very important.
4. Considering legal immigrants, do you think that today's legal immigrants pay their fair share of taxes, or not? (No, Don't know, or Yes)
5. What about undocumented immigrants -- do you think that they pay their fair share of taxes? (No, Don't Know, or Yes)
6. Consider the statement that more good jobs for immigrants means fewer good jobs for American citizens. Would you say you agree strongly, agree somewhat, neither agree nor disagree, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly?
7. Consider the statement that having more students from immigrant backgrounds makes it more difficult for schools to teach all children. Would you say you agree strongly, agree somewhat, neither agree nor disagree, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly?
8. On balance, do you think immigration into the United States is good, bad, or doesn't make much difference?

On six of the eight items, respondents from Chatham and Person Counties provided significantly different answers. Respondents in both counties agreed that the presence of larger numbers of immigrants increase educational challenges for teachers. Further, residents of both counties indicated

¹ The dependent variable and many of its component items show signs of censoring for respondents with the most negative view of immigration, especially in Person County (Figure 1). Tobit models were used in robustness testing. For ease of interpretation, we present OLS models with Huber-White standard errors generated using STATA's "robust" option.

that illegal immigration is an equally important *local* issue, despite the fact that Person County was not impacted by immigration. The composite Immigration Problems Scale shows that residents of Person County harbor more negative perceptions of immigration compared with Chatham County respondents. At face value, this raw difference lends support to the claim that exposure can dispel myths and stereotypes, but differences in average education and political orientation of the two counties indicate that other mechanisms might be responsible for the unequal perceptions. This is investigated in the third stage of our analysis.

Independent Variables

The independent variables used for multivariate analysis (Table 2) correspond to the hypotheses outlined above, although some variables are implicated in more than one hypothesis.

Competition and Threat

Because most competition takes place in the labor market via displacement or wages, we use several measures of labor market status to capture perceived threat. As the quotes in the introduction indicate, rapid growth of foreign-born populations also activates competition in schools (for teacher's time), which we represent with an indicator variable for parents of school-aged children. Precarious economic circumstances gauge respondents' vulnerability to competition from foreigners and perceptions of threat. Therefore, to assess group threat and competition hypotheses, we use several indicators including employment status, whether respondents had a child enrolled in public school, and respondents' perceived financial status. Unadjusted mean differences show considerable similarity between respondents from Chatham and Person County, with several notable exceptions (Table 2). There were twice as many respondents out of the labor force in Person compared with Chatham. Person County respondents were also significantly more likely than respondents from Chatham to report having

children enrolled in the public schools. A larger proportion of Person County respondents were managers while a greater proportion of Chatham County respondents were retired.

Education also plays a role in economic competition and threat, although it also has a theoretically important role in an individual's tolerance of diversity. A political economy perspective predicts that competition with immigrants for jobs and other resources will be felt most intensely by those with similar educational profiles, meaning that not having a high school degree or GED is a key competition indicator.

Contact

To assess whether non-threatening intergroup contact is associated with positive perceptions of immigration, we use several measures of actual contact and exposure to immigration, including whether respondents socialized with an immigrant outside of the workplace; had contact with an immigrant on the job; and reported hearing non-English languages spoken frequently in their community or at work. Chatham County witnessed a surge of immigrants during the 1990s, which is reflected in the significantly higher shares of residents who report socializing with an immigrant outside of work, as well as frequent exposure to non-English language in the community (but not in the workplace).

Indirect Exposure: Media

We included measures of media consumption in order to measure other ways in which respondents gathered information about immigration. We measure respondents' indirect exposure to immigrants using indicators of media consumption habits and frequency with which immigration appears in the news. Respondents from our comparison counties differ both in their frequency of newspaper reading and their awareness of immigration themes in media. Just over one-quarter of

respondents from both counties reported watching the “Lou Dobbs Tonight” (a news commentary show on CNN that frequently covers immigration and consistently frames it as a problem).

Tolerance of Diversity

To capture variation in tolerance for diversity, we use three indicators of a respondent’s breadth of experience: whether respondent was born outside of North Carolina; speaks a foreign language; and has a foreign-born grandparent. Education also plays a role in this theoretical construct; higher education in particular is thought to increase the ability to adapt to change and difference. We thus include the indicator variable for obtaining a bachelor’s degree or higher in this category.

Political Orientation

Political orientation is measured using a self-characterization as politically liberal, conservative, or moderate or apolitical. Exploratory analysis revealed this self-description as a better predictor of preferences on immigration than party preference. About one-third of respondents from each county self-identified as conservative, but Chatham County respondents were over twice as likely as Person County residents to identify as liberal (18 versus 7 percent), but Person County respondents were significantly more likely to identify as politically moderate or apolitical.

V. Results

Testing Theories of Opinion Formation

The hypotheses that political orientation and tolerance of diversity are strong predictors of a person’s assessment of immigration are clearly upheld in our sample of the two counties. A college degree, being born outside of North Carolina, speaking a foreign language, and identifying as politically liberal all had significant and important associations with more benign views of immigration (Table 4).

Our hypotheses regarding intergroup personal contact also find support. Socializing with an immigrant and working with an immigrant are associated with more benign views of immigration. Not all contacts may be positive, however: reporting that one hears a foreign language spoken frequently in the community is associated with a more problematic view of immigration (Table 4).

Media consumption is also related to views of immigration. Viewing “Lou Dobbs tonight” is associated with a more problematic view of immigration, while frequently reading a newspaper (perhaps a more nuanced source of information about immigration) is associated with a more benign view.

The competition and threat hypothesis is supported only narrowly. Being a parent of a school-age child is associated with a more negative view of immigration, but other predictor variables implicated in intergroup competition show no significant association with views of immigration in this multivariate analysis.

Differences in Opinion Formation between Counties

Many of our theoretical arguments posit that there will be differences in the way natives form opinions about immigration, depending on whether they live in a place that has experienced immigration or not. The pattern of associations between theoretically important variables and views of immigration is generally similar in the two counties, with few significant associations between views of immigration and the interaction of our predictors and residence in Chatham County in Table 6.

There is a large and significant difference in the association between reporting financial insecurity in Chatham County and that observed in Person County. The net association is a significant and substantial negative association between financial insecurity and more problematic views of immigration in Chatham County, while no such association is observed in Person County. Being retired is

associated with a more benign view of immigration, relative to working in a non-managerial position, only in Chatham County. Thus, there is some evidence that the economically insecure may feel threatened by local immigration or blame it for their plight and that the opinions of workers and retirees differ in the immigration county. However, there is no evidence that competition and threat, more broadly speaking, explain opinions about immigration in the immigration county but not the non-immigration county.

Parents of school-aged children in Chatham County do not have significantly more problematic views of immigration than parents of children in Person County. This is curious, given the association between being a parent and more problematic view of immigration found above. However, there are signs that Person County parents may perceive competition in schools despite the small number of immigrants and children of immigrants in their county. About a third of Person County parents reported that their child's class was more than 10% immigrant students.

The hypothesis that the intersection of local immigration and the media play an important role in opinion formation is not supported. Associations between media consumption and opinions about immigration are not significantly different in the two counties.

A few unexpected differences in associations were observed in the two counties. Being a liberal was associated with a less problematic view of immigration, relative to identifying as moderate or apolitical, in Chatham County but not in Person County. Two explanations for this association seem likely. First, local immigration may polarize opinions about immigration, increasing the difference in opinions between liberals and moderates. Second, liberals in Chatham County may be, on mean, "more liberal" than liberals in Person County. There are many more liberals in Chatham County and liberals in Chatham County, like residents of Chatham County more generally, are more likely to have been born outside of North Carolina.

Another unexpected result is that the association between socializing with an immigrant and a more benign view of immigration is much weaker in Chatham County than in Person County. Again, interpretation is not obvious and heterogeneity could play a role: people socializing with immigrants in a county where there are very few foreign-born may be predisposed to extremely positive views of immigration. Alternatively, natives in a high-immigration county may have other opportunities to gather information about immigration, lessening the importance of social contacts.

Differences in Opinions about Immigration between Chatham and Person County

Residents of Person County view immigration more problematically than residents of Chatham County (Table 3, Figure 1). More Person County residents scored a maximum score of “10” on the Immigration Problems Index and fewer had benign views of immigration (Fig. 1).

This difference at the county level argues against the blunt hypothesis that broad competition and threat will cause sharply negative views of immigration in counties that receive immigration, which would predict the opposite differential.

In the absence of extensive differences between counties in associations between our theoretically important covariates and views of immigration, as found above, there are two leading explanations for why residents of the non-immigration county would have more problematic views of immigration than the residents of the immigration county. The first is that differences in the native population composition of the two counties explain the gap in opinions between the two counties. The fact that a greater proportion of Chatham County residents have college degrees, were born out-of-state and identify as liberals is particularly important.

The second explanation revolves around the contact hypothesis. Natives in Chatham County have much greater opportunity to have contacts with immigrants and a greater proportion report doing

so. Given that some of these contacts are associated with a more benign view of immigration in our analysis above, the larger number of contacts with immigrants in Chatham County may explain the opinion gap between the two counties.

In multivariate analysis, the estimated association between residence in Chatham County, relative to Person County, and a more benign view of immigration is greatly decreased when controls for political orientation, tolerance for diversity, and education are introduced (In Table 6, Model Two versus Model One). Although introducing measures of direct contact with immigrants as controls also results in an attenuation of the estimated association between the county of residence and scores on the Immigration Problems Index, this attenuation is far smaller. Thus, differences in population composition most likely explain the large difference in opinions about immigration in the two counties.

Limitations

The most significant limitation of our analysis is that a few of our operational variables may be highly selected or subjective, making the direction of causal pathways ambiguous. Persons with more problematic views of immigration may chose to watch Lou Dobbs Tonight, rather than the program influencing their opinions. Natives may be more sensitive to hearing foreign languages spoken if they have more problematic views of immigration. Additionally, our analysis claims to represent only these two counties, although we argue that these counties are a good testing ground for theories regarding opinion formation in new immigrant destinations.

VI. Discussion

We present one of the first analyses of the way natives form opinions about immigration in new immigrant destinations, making a novel comparison between a new immigrant destination and a

geographically proximate and loosely matched place that has not received immigration. Overall, our results are optimistic: natives in the county that received immigration viewed immigration more benignly than those in the county that did not, although much of this difference was explained by differences in the characteristics of the population of the two counties.

There were signs that contact between natives and immigrants, when they are more sustained than merely passing in the street or grocery store, foster a benign view of immigration. Policies intending to bolster support for immigration and immigrants in these places would do well to focus on promoting these interactions. Just as importantly, the hypothesis that natives would broadly sense competition and threat from immigration is not supported.

However, our analysis reveals points of friction: Those in dire economic straits appear especially prone to take a negative view of immigration when immigrants are present locally. Parents have a more negative view of immigration in both counties, suggesting that schools may be a site of perceived competition. Both of these observations are worrisome in the light of the current recession.

Other researchers should take note of our finding that political orientation and the predisposition of natives to tolerate diversity are extremely important in both counties. Additionally, our results suggest that differences in opinions about immigration among people of different political orientations may be aggravated by local immigration. These results bear more extensive exploration in light of the extensive political and educational differences between populations in the new and traditional immigrant destinations.

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Table 1. Key demographic characteristics of Person County and Chatham County, North Carolina, 2005-2007.

	Person County	Chatham County
Total Population	37,356	59,811
Population growth, 2000 to 2007	4.9%	24.6%
Median family income	\$48,877	\$63,410
Place of Birth		
Foreign-born	2.6	10.7
Born in North Carolina	74.0	58.1
Born in other US state	23.3	30.3
Race and Ethnicity		
Black (Non-Hispanic)	27.8%	14.6%
White (Non-Hispanic)	67.4%	70.6%
Hispanic	2.8%	12.3%
Other	2.0%	3.7%
Education		
No HS degree or GED	21.4%	17.1 %
HS degree, GED, or some college	65.8%	49.5%
Bachelor's Degree or higher	12.8%	32.4%

Source: US Census Bureau estimates from the American Community Survey 2005-2007 and Census 2000.

Table 2. Sample Characteristics: Key Predictor and Control Variables, Person and Chatham Counties, North Carolina with t-tests for differences between counties.

	Proportion, Person County N=506	Proportion, Chatham County N=574	SE of difference	P-value
Male	0.38	0.43	0.03	0.136
Race and Ethnicity				
Black (Non-Hispanic)	0.19	0.13	0.02	0.003
White (Non Hispanic)	0.77	0.86	0.02	0.000
Hispanic	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.316
Other race/ethnicity	0.04	0.03	0.01	0.582
Education				
No High School Degree	0.09	0.06	0.02	0.053
High School Degree, some college	0.66	0.49	0.03	0.000
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	0.24	0.44	0.03	0.000
Age				
Age 18 to < 35	0.12	0.09	0.02	0.133
Age 35 to < 50	0.20	0.23	0.03	0.242
Age 50 to < 65	0.37	0.35	0.03	0.230
Competition and Threat				
Employment				
Employed	0.55	0.54	0.03	0.733
Non managerial	0.35	0.38	0.03	0.23
Managerial	0.20	0.16	0.02	0.051
Unemployed	0.03	0.03	0.01	0.855
Retired	0.29	0.35	0.03	0.053
Not in Labor Market	0.12	0.06	0.02	0.003
Parent of public school student	0.20	0.13	0.02	0.005
Finances are poor	0.12	0.11	0.02	0.723
Immigrant Contact				
Direct Contact				
Socialized with an immigrant	0.28	0.39	0.03	0.000
Worked with an immigrant	0.32	0.37	0.03	0.076
Hears foreign language very often	0.38	0.46	0.03	0.008
Hears foreign language at work very often	0.20	0.21	0.02	0.658
Media Contact				
Reads Newspaper Frequently	0.39	0.46	0.03	0.019
Watches "Lou Dobbs Tonight"	0.27	0.28	0.03	0.776
Sees or hears Immigration in media several times a week	0.49	0.55	0.03	0.048
Tolerance of diversity				
Born outside North Carolina	0.69	0.51	0.03	0.000
Speaks a foreign language	0.08	0.12	0.02	0.055
Has a foreign-born grandparent	0.13	0.23	0.02	0.000
Political Orientation				
Liberal	0.07	0.18	0.02	0.000
Moderate or apolitical	0.57	0.49	0.03	0.011
Conservative	0.31	0.30	0.03	0.604

Source: New Immigrant Destinations Project survey, August 2008.

Table 3. Perceptions of immigration in Person County and Chatham County: Immigration Problems Scale and its components

Item	Person County mean value (S.D)	Chatham County mean value (S.D.)	Standard Error of Difference	P-value, two- sided T- test
Immigration Problems Scale (1 = least problematic, 10 = most problematic)	7.21 (1.98)	6.43 (2.30)	0.14	0.000
Preferred number of immigrant admissions (1 = Increased Greatly, 5 = Decreased Greatly)	3.71 (1.08)	3.40 (1.23)	0.07	0.000
Good jobs for immigrants means less good jobs for Americans (1 = disagree strongly, 5 = agree strongly)	3.46 (1.49)	3.14 (1.52)	0.09	0.001
More immigrant students make it more difficult for teachers to educate all students (1 = disagree strongly, 5 = agree strongly)	3.94 (1.35)	2.82 (1.42)	0.09	0.123
Importance of illegal immigration as national issue (1 = Not important, 10 = Most important)	8.60 (2.28)	8.13 (2.43)	0.15	0.001
Importance of illegal immigration as local issue (1 = Not Important, 10 = Most important)	7.73 (2.76)	7.89 (2.56)	0.16	0.326
Legal immigrants pay fair share of taxes (1 = Yes, 2 = Don't Know, 3 = No)	2.13 (0.89)	1.76 (0.87)	0.05	0.000
Unauthorized immigrants pay fair share of taxes (1 = Yes, 2 = Don't Know, 3 = No)	2.78 (0.55)	2.59 (0.71)	0.04	0.000
Immigration is good (1) bad (3), or neutral (2).	2.17 (0.81)	1.88 (0.87)	0.05	0.000

Source: New Immigrant Destinations Project survey, August 2008.

Fig. 1. Immigration Problems Scale by County

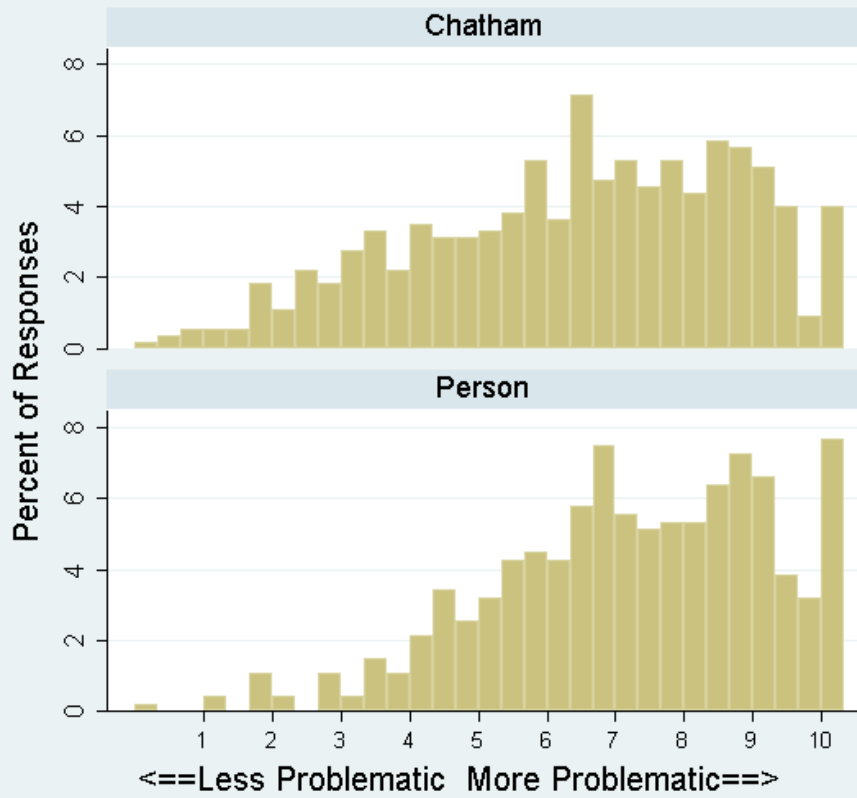


Table 4. Regression of Immigration Problems Scale (1 = least problematic, 10 = most problematic) on key predictors, with robust standard errors. ^A

	Variable	OLS Coef.	S.E.
Gender	Female	--	--
	Male	-0.313*	-0.125
Race and Ethnicity	White (non-Hispanic)	--	--
	Black (non-Hispanic)	-0.081	-0.176
	Hispanic and other	-0.737[^]	-0.407
Education	No High School Degree	0.176	-0.247
	High School, GED, some college	--	--
	Bachelor's Degree or Higher	-0.917**	-0.147
Employment	Non-managerial worker	--	--
	Managerial worker	0.247	-0.171
	Unemployed	0.293	-0.331
	Retired	-0.314	-0.209
	Not in Labor Market	-0.152	-0.247
Competition Indicators	Parent of public school student	0.496**	-0.187
	Own Finances are bad	0.111	-0.201
Direct Contact with Immigrants	Socialized with an immigrant	-0.768**	-0.134
	Worked with an immigrant	-0.516*	-0.216
	Hears foreign language very often	0.481**	-0.127
	Hears foreign lang. at work very often	0.367[^]	-0.221
Media	Reads Newspaper Frequently	-0.329*	-0.132
	Watches "Lou Dobbs Tonight"	0.326*	-0.132
	Immig. in media several times weekly	0.099	-0.125
Tolerance for Diversity	Born outside North Carolina	-0.487**	-0.144
	Speaks a foreign language	-0.563*	-0.231
	Has a foreign-born grandparent	-0.11	-0.177
Political Orientation	Liberal	-1.421**	-0.216
	Moderate	--	--
	Conservative	0.399**	-0.134
	N	998	
	r2	0.30	

A. Model includes dummy variables for age, coefficients not shown

** = p < .01, * = p < .05, [^] = p < .10

Source: New Immigrant Destinations Project survey, August 2008.

Table 5. Regression of Immigration Problems Scale (1 = least problematic, 10 = most problematic) on key predictors and their interaction with residence in Chatham County, with robust standard errors. ^A

Variable		Main Effect (Person County)	S.E. of Main Effect	Interaction with Chatham County	S.E. of Interaction
Gender	Female	--	--	--	--
	Male	-0.147	-0.183	-0.312	-0.249
Race and Ethnicity	White (non-Hispanic)	--	--	--	--
	Black (non-Hispanic)	-0.108	-0.238	0.027	-0.347
	Hispanic and other	-0.369	-0.562	-0.63	-0.812
Education	No High School Degree	-0.033	-0.324	0.419	-0.488
	High School, GED, some college	--	--	--	--
	Bachelor's Degree or Higher	-0.659**	-0.221	-0.247	-0.302
Employment	Non-managerial worker	--	--	--	--
	Managerial worker	0.415[^]	-0.250	-0.397	-0.338
	Unemployed	0.127	-0.536	0.166	-0.648
	Retired	0.133	-0.255	-0.660*	-0.303
	Not in Labor Market	-0.07	-0.330	-0.285	-0.444
Competition Indicators	Parent of public school student	0.534*	-0.240	-0.154	-0.353
	Own Finances are bad	-0.425	-0.303	1.076**	-0.390
Direct Contact with Immigrants	Socialized with an immigrant	-1.101**	-0.211	0.666*	-0.272
	Worked with an immigrant	-0.553[^]	-0.316	0.000	-0.397
	Hears foreign language very often	0.271	-0.186	0.362	-0.251
	Hears foreign lang. at work very often	0.614[^]	-0.342	-0.37	-0.448
Media	Reads Newspaper Frequently	-0.362*	-0.183	0.055	-0.257
	Watches "Lou Dobbs Tonight"	0.237	-0.194	0.251	-0.261
	Immig. in media several times weekly	0.195	-0.180	-0.244	-0.243
Tolerance for Diversity	Born outside North Carolina	-0.538*	-0.211	0.187	-0.285
	Speaks a foreign language	-0.648	-0.397	0.173	-0.478
	Has a foreign-born grandparent	0.139	-0.307	-0.372	-0.376
Political Orientation	Liberal	-0.426	-0.422	-1.396**	-0.486
	Moderate	--	--	--	--
	Conservative	0.29	-0.188	0.13	-0.254
	N	998			
	r2	0.33			

A. Model includes dummy variables for age, coefficients not shown

** = p <.01, * = p<.05, ^ = p<.10

Source: New Immigrant Destinations Project survey, August 2008.

Table 6. Estimated difference between responses of Person and Chatham County residents on the Immigration Problems Scale (1 = least problematic, 10 = most problematic) when controlling for different sets of variables, using OLS regression.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Chatham County coefficient	-0.760**	-0.255*	-0.650**	-0.202
S.E.	-0.136	-0.128	-0.132	-0.128
Sets of Control Vectors (x = included)				
Gender and Age	X	X	X	X
Race and Ethnicity				X
Education		X		X
Employment				X
Competition				X
Direct Contact with Immigrants			X	X
Media				X
Tolerance for Diversity		X		X
Political Orientation		X		X
N	998	998	998	998
r2	0.04	0.24	0.13	0.3

** = p <.01, * = p<.05, ^ = p<.10

Source: New Immigrant Destinations Project survey, August 2008.