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PRESIDENTIAL INFLUENCE ON PUBLIC OPINION ABOUT IMMIGRATION

By Nicole Suarez

A Field Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for

Masters Thesis

In the Department of Sociology

The School of Arts and Sciences

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## **Abstract**

This is a quantitative study that examines the impact of presidential rhetoric on public opinion about immigration, during the Bush, Obama, and Trump administrations. I also touch upon confidence levels in government, opinions on abortion, and confidence in the military during different presidential terms. Those sub-categories are important because they allowed me to see if the variables pertaining to immigration were unusually polarized in comparison to the others. I hypothesized that there would be a higher level of rejection for immigrants during the Trump administration. The present study concluded that although the Bush and Obama administrations demonstrated more positive immigration rhetoric, and the data sets show less resistance against immigrants, presidential rhetoric may not have the impact I predicted.

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## **Introduction**

The president of the United States is someone with significant power. This causes one to question whether that power also extends to their influence on the public's opinion. Whether one supports the president or not, their perception on a topic could possibly be influenced by the president's rhetoric in one way or another. Some argue that the president benefits greatly from influencing the public, with the president's success being dependent on the reaction of the public, while public opinion alone can make other politicians accept the ideas of the president (Kernell 2007). This factor has caused many presidents to "go public". "Going public" is explained as a strategy in which the president promotes his initiatives and policies by appealing to the American people, in hopes of obtaining their support. In turn, forcefully getting other branches of government on board with the president's plans (Kernell 2007). Other scholars agree that public support is an essential political resource for the president, making it difficult for others in power to deny the president their demands, while also providing the president with leverage against Congress. However, they argue that going public and swaying public opinion are two different things, with the swaying of public opinion being extremely difficult to achieve (Edwards 2006).

Predictably, presidents tend to have an easier time swaying the opinions of those that classify as "supporters". However, it is their impact on the rest of the population that could make or break their successful streak. In 2019, Montgomery, Rogol, and Kingsland found that when looking at public support for the U.S. Supreme Court, with the effects of presidential rhetoric, those in support of the president were not influenced by the president giving praise to the Court, however, there was a decrease in support for the Court when the president provided criticism. As for non-supporters, their support for the courts increased when the president shared critiques of the Court (Montgomery, Rogol, and Kingsland 2019). Although this study focused on the

public's opinion of the U.S. Supreme Court, not immigration, it is an example of the president failing to shift public opinion with rhetoric alone.

Other scholars focused specifically on President Trump and whether his rhetoric had an impact on public opinion on immigration. They found that public opinion barely changed during the Trump administration. However, Trump prioritizing immigration policy appeared to cause an increase in the "public's immigration policy agenda". Even though Trump brought the issue of immigration higher on the public's agenda, it did not impact the public's support for issues regarding immigration. They concluded that Trump's rhetoric may have been "too scattered and unfocused" to impact public opinion (Eshbaugh-Soha and Barnes 2021). Similar to both studies, this study aims to answer whether presidential rhetoric influences the public's opinion. However, this study focuses on immigration, specifically, public opinion on immigration throughout three presidential administrations.

The study at hand offers insight into the stance many Americans have taken on immigration, including three of our past presidents, President George W. Bush, President Barack Obama, and President Donald J. Trump. All three presidents were extremely vocal of their stance on immigration in America. To code/formulate the rhetoric tone, rhetoric from each president was collected from well-known magazines, popular news outlets, presidential speeches proposing new immigration policy, the United States Presidential Inauguration, National Committee Galas, and their personal social media accounts. These are all major outlets, which allow presidents to get their message across to a vast population.

Considering the United States large immigrant population, it is important to understand where the majority stands on this matter and whether the presidents are a contributing factor to the opinion formation process. Previous scholars concluded that public opinion alone could sway

other politicians to adapt the same ideas as the president (Kernell 2007), while public support allows the president to have the upper hand on Congress (Edwards 2006). Immigration policies could affect millions of immigrants and the opinion of everyone in the country. Presidents may be more successful at passing immigration policy if they successfully impact public opinion on the matter. Due to the nature of the potential policy impacts and to the great influence the public has on the president's success, this a topic worth exploring.

In 2018, the U.S. population was 327,167,434, of which 45,000,000 were immigrants of which, 22,098,984 were non-citizens (United States Census Bureau 2018). As a result of the large numbers of non-citizen immigrants, many states have passed bills intended to lower these numbers. In 2010, Arizona passed Senate Bill 1070, which created new categories of crime for undocumented aliens and gave local and state law enforcement the power to ask anyone to verify their immigration status (Stupi, Chiricos, and Gertz 2016). This bill was created because Arizona was thought to be "a prime locale for illegal entry into the United States". It was intended to reduce crime involving immigrants and open more jobs for U.S. citizens (U.S. News 2012).

Some states have a greater contribution to the topic of immigration than others. Due to their proximity to the Mexican border, Arizona, Texas, and California are thought to have a larger immigrant population than other states (Stupi, Chiricos, and Gertz 2016). In 2018, the immigrant population in those states was as followed: 13% of Arizona's population, 17% of Texas' population, and 27% of California's population (American Immigration Council). These percentages are relevant when looking at immigration in states near the border because it demonstrates the large immigration presence.

A study focused on newspaper coverage of immigration and Gallup data pertaining to public opinion, from January 2006-December 2006 in the United States, found that geography

and media, together, are essential in influencing public opinion on immigration. Border states were exposed to greater media coverage on immigration than non-border states, which resulted in them being more likely to identify immigration as “a most important problem” (Dunaway, Branton, and Abrajano 2010: 12). Considering that border states have a larger immigration presence than non-border states, it would explain why the media deems them a target audience when broadcasting media coverage pertaining to immigration in America.

The United States is known for its diversity and large population of immigrants from all around the world. People decide to leave their homes and pursue a future in the United States for a variety of reasons. Some are fleeing from violence, persecution, poverty or other problems, others are chasing the American dream, and those who are too young to understand just know that their parents tell them it will pay off in the long run. Americans have different opinions about immigration and immigration reform. Scholars have based much of their work on the “immigrant threat” and the significant role that cultural and economic theories play on this perception (Brader et al. 2008). However, other studies conclude that there is more to it than just the fight for cultural and economic inclusion in America (Mangum and Block 2018).

## **Literature Review**

### **The History of Immigration Reform**

Throughout history lines have been drawn to keep the immigrant community separate from American citizens. An early immigration law was the Naturalization Bill of 1790. This bill was signed on March 4, 1790, by the First Congress. It favored native-born citizens over immigrants, holding on to the belief that Americans held a fear of foreigners. Free whites that were born in foreign countries were allowed to become naturalized citizens after living in the



United States for two years, if they were thought to have “good character”. For many centuries to come, Congress would revisit the Naturalization Act and make changes to it by excluding *or* increasingly including people of different races. (Naturalization Bill 1790).

Later, in 1917 there was an act implemented requiring a literacy test be taken by immigrants 16 years and older to demonstrate basic reading skills in any language. Along with that, it increased the taxes for new immigrants upon arrival, while also allowing more discretion to immigration officials in deciding whom they wanted to exclude. This act excluded entrance into the United States for any individuals born in a geographically defined “Asiatic Barred Zone,” with the exception of Japan and the Philippines (Office of the Historian 1921-1936).

Shortly after, the first permanent quota law was implemented, the Immigration Act of 1924. The Act put a cap on the number of immigrants entering the United States through a national origin’s quota. “The quota provided immigration visas to two percent of the total number of people of each nationality in the United States as of the 1890 national census. It completely excluded immigrants from Asia” (Office of Historian 1921-1936). The law also included a provision that excluded the entry of any alien who due to race or nationality was ineligible for citizenship. Unlike the nationality laws from 1790 and 1870, which allowed the Japanese to immigrate to America, the 1924 law put an end to this and prohibited immigration from Japan. As a result, Japan protested but nothing came of it and the law remained (Office of the Historian 1921-1936).

The national origins quota system established by the Immigration Act of 1924 was later upheld by the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952. The system used in 1924 was revised to reflect the following, “allow for national quotas at a rate of one-sixth of one percent of each nationality’s population in the United States in 1920” (Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952).

This resulted in 85% of the 154,277 visas that were given annually to be provided to individuals of northern and western European lineage. The law also opened back up to immigration from Asian countries, each nation was given a minimum quota of 100 visas each year and stopped the laws that prevented Asian immigrants from becoming naturalized American citizens (Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952).

By 1965 American's stance on immigration began to shift. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 prioritized bringing in highly skilled immigrants, while also opening the door for people with family residing in the United States. Annual visas were capped at 290,000, with a restriction of 20,000 visas per country (Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965). Twenty-one years later came the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986. This act amended the Immigration and Nationality Act, making it unlawful for a person to hire an illegal immigrant, if they had knowledge of the person's illegal status. Employers were also expected to fire individuals if they learned they were illegal immigrants after hiring them. The act also directed the president to provide Congress with "a comprehensive immigration-impact report" and "annual reports for three years on unauthorized alien employment and the temporary agricultural worker (H-2A) program," no later than January 1, 1989 (Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986).

One of the more recent immigration reform acts was passed during the Obama administration; The Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act of 2013. The passage of the Act reports that its success depends on securing American sovereignty and implementing a coherent and just system for bringing immigrants to America. It increased the number of U.S. Border Patrol agents at the Southern border to 38,405 by September 30, 2021. Prior to the act, the number of U.S Border Patrol agents was 10,500 in

2013. The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 was upheld in parts of this act, with employers being prohibited from hiring an illegal immigrant or continuing to supply them with work. America attempted to show compassion with the community of illegal immigrants who had experienced trauma, and decided to implement that into this act, “expands the U-visa (crime victims) category to include aliens who have suffered substantial physical or mental abuse or harm, or who would suffer extreme hardship upon removal, as a result of having been a victim of the following covered violations: (1) certain workplace abuses, (2) slavery or trafficking in persons, or (3) deprivation of due process or constitutional rights. Requires, in addition, that such aliens would be helpful in a cause of action arising from such violations” (Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act 2013).

Immigration reform is a vital part in understanding immigration in America. It has been known to target certain populations throughout American history, while also providing leniency to others. Prior immigration reform also paved the way for present and future immigration reform, namely that under Bush, Obama, and Trump administrations. It illustrates how certain laws are reinforced by some presidents and rejected by others.

### Immigration in America

Stereotypes such as the beliefs that immigrants are on welfare, responsible for crime, and receive undeserved social services cause negative attitudes to arise (Espenshade 1995). Age, unemployment, Republican party ID, being white, and being American are variables associated with an increase in disapproval of undocumented immigrants (Berg 2009). According to survey data, Republicans are more likely to support immigration restrictions than Independents. Democrats, on the other hand, are less likely to support immigration restrictions than both

Independents and Republicans (Hawley 2011). In countries with almost no immigrant population, there is no difference among citizens regarding their support for immigration restrictions (Hawley 2011). Countries with low percentages of immigration populations include China (0.07%), Indonesia (0.13%), Philippines (0.21%), Afghanistan (0.37%), Egypt (0.53%), and Nigeria (0.63%) (World Population Review 2022).

Research demonstrates that an individual's demographics can influence their opinions on immigrants. A national survey of 1,364 non-Latino respondents concluded that conservatives and people with lower levels of income or education, had a higher perception of undocumented immigrants as criminal threats than others (Stupi et al. 2016). The respondents believed that undocumented immigrants were the main perpetrators of acts of murder, DUIs, and sex crimes in the United States (Stupi et al. 2016). Another study found that men were less likely to think that immigration contributes to crime than women, while African Americans and Hispanics are less likely than whites to view immigration as contributing to crime (Higgins, Gabbidon, and Martin 2010).

Survey data (Mangum and Block 2018) finds a negative association between respondents who were "Born in the USA" and support for an increase in legal immigration. On the other hand, the authors found a positive association between the "Born in the USA" respondents and willingness to spend money to keep illegal immigrants out of the country. The data also revealed a negative association between "Being Truly American" and support for legal immigration, while "Being Truly American" positively correlated with support for anti-illegal immigrant spending. The authors defined "Being Truly American" as having lived in America the majority of one's life, being born in America, being Christian, speaking English, and serving in the military (Mangum and Block 2018).

Other scholars focused on differences among respondents, in support of immigration policy. Dorsey and Diaz-Barriga (2007), for example, found that 48% of survey respondents were opposed to immigration legalization, while 31% were supportive and 21% were neutral. In terms of the provisions of the DREAM Act, 54% were in support of it, while 30% were opposed and 16% were neutral. Regarding birthright citizenship, the policy states that “any child born in the U.S. is a citizen of the U.S.” 53% favored the policy, while 37% opposed it and 10% were neutral.

Past researchers have investigated immigration in America and the public's opinion on the matter. However, presidential administrations are worth incorporating in the topic of immigration in America, as they put forth the immigration policies and decide whether they are going to put their efforts into decreasing or increasing immigration into the United States. The long history of immigration reform dating back to 1790 is evidence that the acts implemented throughout history shape the world as we know it.

### The Bush Administration on Immigration

George W. Bush held office from 2001-2009. During his time in office, Bush focused a lot of attention on two major issues involving immigration. The first was 9/11 and the newly found fear Americans gained regarding Middle Eastern people immigrating to the states. The second was immigration at the border and how to bring skilled workers into the United States. Throughout his efforts to address both issues, Bush shifted in his stance on immigration; to putting forth roadblocks for Middle Eastern people trying to build a new life in the United States, to welcoming and collaborating to bring more immigrants to the country for work.

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, had a significant impact on immigration policy in the United States. Some believed that Bush used 9/11 as a reason to sell the “war on terror,” which targeted people from the Middle East as villains (Massey 2006). During a speech in Orlando, Bush made the following statement:

We're dealing with coldblooded killers, and that's all they are. These are people who hijack a great religion and kill in the name of that religion. These are people who send youngsters to their death, and they hide in caves. And so, I just want you to know that my main focus, and the main focus of a lot of hard-working people, is to do everything we can to protect America (Bush 2002).

After the September 11 terrorist attack, the Bush administration facilitated the detention of hundreds of immigrants who resembled the hijackers, in terms of ethnic background, national origin, and religious characteristics. In a span of two months, over 1,200 citizens and non-citizens were detained, many of whom were subject to deportation (Waxman 2004).

During his efforts to “keep the enemy from hurting innocent Americans,” Bush acknowledged that not everyone from the Middle East was against America. He believed some people fell victim to their country’s actions, and he wanted to make sure they, too, were protected.

We freed people from the clutches of a barbaric regime, and, thanks to the United States and our friends and allies, many young girls now go to school for the first time in their lives. History will note that we didn't hit and run, that we stayed there. We stayed there to not only make sure that Al Qaida doesn't bunch up again, but we stayed there to help this country, Afghanistan, flourish (Bush 2002).

Bush was questioned for keeping American troops in Afghanistan long after the work had been done to help rebuild the country. To that Bush responded,

We'll still have hunter-killer teams there to chase down remnants of Taliban and Al Qaida, because—we want, of course, Afghanistan to be a secure and Democratic country. And we want to use—now that we're locked and loaded, as

they say in the military, we want to chase down those who could eventually come back and harm America...And a free Afghanistan and a free Iraq will make America more secure, and that's, after all, the mission that we're after (Bush 2003).

Bush was adamant about letting the guard down and continuing to live the life America lived prior to 9/11. He acknowledged that the goal had been achieved, however, he questioned if whether after American troops left Afghanistan there would be something new that could pose a risk to the American people.

See, the world changed on a terrible September morning, and since that day we have changed the world. Before September the 11th, Afghanistan served as the home base for Al Qaida, which trained and deployed thousands of killers to set up terror cells in dozens of countries, including our own. Today, Afghanistan is a rising democracy...Because we acted, America and the world are safer...members of both political parties, including my opponent—looked at the intelligence and came to the same conclusion (Bush 2004).

Bush believed it took a village to overcome the damage left behind after 9/11. Not only did he call for unity between Democrats and Republicans during this challenge, but he also felt as though the Middle Eastern countries were contributing to making America a safer place. If there was less destruction in these countries, he believed there would be less of a threat to America from the people migrating from said countries. The 9/11 terrorist attack was at the forefront of the Bush administration, Bush made it a point to constantly remind people of his efforts being in the best interest of the American people. Even though some people may not have agreed with things put into place by Bush to address this issue, Bush wanted to reassure the public that he was also fighting in the best interest of other countries and their citizens, and he was not going to let up.

In 2022, Eshbaugh-Soha and Gonzalez Juenke found that presidents are “highly responsive to public concern about immigration”, as the public’s concern goes up, there is a great

increase in the number of speeches pertaining to immigration given by the president. An example provided was the public's increased concern over immigration after 9/11, resulting in Bush attending to the issue of immigration more frequently. This resulted in the immigration narrative being that of "border security amid terrorist threats". How often presidents talk about immigration and how they talk about it, is essential in understanding the formulation and adoption of immigration policy (Eshbaugh-Soha and Gonzalez Juenke 2022).

Bush's efforts to keep America safe from citizens in other countries were taking place around the same time that he was attempting to bring skilled immigrant workers to America. Bush countered the popular stereotype that everyone coming from a different country was a bad person with a hidden agenda, he wanted to make sure the immigration reform reflected that. A couple of months before the 9/11 terrorist attacks occurred, Bush gave a speech on Ellis Island and stated the following, "For those seeking entry, the process is often a prolonged ordeal full of complexities and burdens. I'm committed to changing this with INS reforms that treat every immigrant with respect and fairness" (Bush 2001). Bush also saw bringing skilled workers into America as an exchange with other countries, instead of a favor, he believed it was beneficial for all countries involved.

Every day, thousands of Americans and Mexicans cross the border in both directions for reason of commerce and tourism... They come to fulfill their dreams, and in the process, they enrich our Nation. Last week, I proposed a new temporary-worker program that will help further the cause of safe, legal, and orderly migration. This temporary-worker program will match willing foreign workers with willing American employers when no Americans can be found to fill the jobs. Under this program, undocumented workers currently in the United States will be able to come out of the shadows and establish legal identities (Bush 2004).

Although he may have received backlash for bringing in more immigrants to America and helping illegal immigrants, Bush vouched that it was the right thing to do. "Our Nation will never forget their service and their sacrifice to our security and to our freedom" (Bush 2004). He



expressed gratitude for the immigrants that have contributed positively to American life and acknowledged that they fought alongside Americans during the war on terror in the Middle East.

Bush acknowledged that the United States benefitted from immigrant workers, which in turn caused him to make exceptions when deciding who can and cannot obtain a worker's visa. In 2004, Bush went to great lengths to pass a reform package that included guest worker programs and allowed some illegal immigrants to become legal residents. Bush believed this reform would reduce a potential national security threat, which could have arisen from having large numbers of unidentified, undocumented immigrants in America (Holland 2014). Along with other members of the Republican party, Bush created the Essential Workers Immigration Coalition, which focused on the shortage of "unskilled" labor (Holland 2014). "The 1996 reforms imposed a 5-year ban on most welfare benefits for new legal immigrants, including a permanent ban on food stamps, unless immigrants have worked here for 10 years or have become citizens. We've proposed changing this law so that legal immigrants receive food stamps after 5 years, so that those who are eligible, those who need help" (Bush 2002). Such efforts resulted in an increase of Latino immigration into the United States. The average percentage of Latinos in the local regions went from 8.57% of the population in 1996, to 12.11% of the population in 2004 (Berg 2009). Meaning, the number of immigrants crossing the border had increased by about 25% in a span of 8 years.

One of Bush's main concerns was illegal immigration through the Mexican-American border. However, Bush noted that he was concerned about this due to how dangerous it could be for the people taking the journey, not because of his fear of them. He acknowledged that to protect America's laws something had to be done about the illegal migration, but he also wanted to provide a safe alternative for those seeking to enter America. He emphasized that the people

coming to America to work are not taking jobs away from the American people, they were doing jobs the American people were not doing. “They walk across our deserts in the 100-degree heat. They get stuffed in the back of an 18-wheeler to come. They want to come and work...In order to secure this border, we must have an orderly way for people to come, on a temporary basis, who are doing jobs Americans aren't doing” (Bush 2006).

His efforts to provide a safe passage for many immigrants to America does not take away from Bush making sure the American laws were enforced. He believed that one did not have to choose strongly in favor or against immigration, there could be a middle ground.

Ours is a nation of immigrants. We're also a nation of law...We have a responsibility to enforce our laws. We have a responsibility to secure our borders. We take this responsibility seriously...We must face the reality that millions of illegal immigrants are already here...There is a rational middle ground between granting an automatic pass to citizenship for every illegal immigrant and a program of mass deportation. And I look forward to working with Congress to find that middle ground (Bush 2006).

The Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005 was passed on December 16, 2005. This bill was meant to secure United States borders by allowing the secretary of Homeland Security to take any necessary measures to maintain operational control over U.S international land and borders. This included: “(1) systematic surveillance using unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), ground-based sensors, satellites, radar coverage, and cameras; (2) physical infrastructure enhancements to prevent unlawful U.S. entry and facilitate United States Customs and Border Protection border access; (3) hiring and training additional Border Patrol agents; and (4) increasing deployment of United States Customs and Border Protection personnel to border areas with high levels of unlawful entry” (The Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005). Bush expressed his support for the bill by stating, “America is a nation built on the rule of law, and this bill will help us protect our

borders and crack down on illegal entry into the United States... securing our borders is essential to securing the homeland” (Swarns 2005: 24).

During a Republican National Committee Gala on May 17<sup>th</sup>, 2006, Bush made the following remarks: “America can be a lawful society and a welcoming society, and we don't have to choose between the two” (Bush 2006). However, Bush did acknowledge that there is a great difference between “immigrants” and “illegal immigrants.” “Illegal immigration puts pressure on public schools and hospitals, it strains state and local budgets... and brings crime to our communities. These are real problems, yet we must remember that the vast majority of illegal immigrants are decent people” (Bush 2006). A couple of months after this statement Bush brought forth The Fence Act of 2006, which provided for the construction of a 700-mile fence along the southwestern border.

The Bush administration proposed the following policies in 2007, in order to improve boarder security and immigration within existing laws:

The Department of Homeland Security Will Extend the Visa Term for Professional Workers from Canada and Mexico To Attract More Of These Talented Workers To The United States: The United States must compete for foreign professional workers, and those who elect to lend their talents to the U.S. economy should be welcomed with open arms, not given a bureaucratic runaround...This regulation will extend the TN visa duration to three years – the same term as other popular professional visas (Bush 2007).

This policy also favors professional workers from morally esteemed nations, which do not tend to cause as much controversy as those immigrating from the Mexican American boarder. Bush made it very clear, that although he was providing a way for many foreign workers to extend their stay in the United States, he would not allow for any corners to be cut and for illegal immigration to continue to rise. A “No-Match” regulation was issued by the Department of Homeland Security, which Bush was in complete support of. The regulation

cracked down on employers that hired illegal workers and raised the fines they would receive. This was done to decrease illegal immigrants from entering the United States, by making it harder for them to obtain work. “Efforts to secure the border will fail unless the "magnet" that attracts illegals is turned off” (Bush 2007).

There was a significant increase in deportations in the wake of 9/11, deportations went from 200,000 people in 2001, to nearly 400,000 in 2011 (Hesson 2012). However, Bush also provided a way for millions of skilled workers to come into the United States legally and provide for their families. Roughly 7 million people immigrated to America during Bush’s presidency, while 10,328,850 people were deported during the 8 years George W. Bush was in office (Department of Homeland Security 2019) (Chishti, Pierce, and Bolter 2017).

Bush fought hard for what he believed would be in the best interest of the American people. He went to great lengths to make American’s feel protected after 9/11 by stabilizing the threat in Middle Eastern countries. He also proposed to make great strides for the American economy by bringing in skilled workers from other countries to do the jobs that American’s did not want to do. Ultimately, Bush aimed for the middle-ground and was able to maintain it. He opened the doors for immigrants, while also controlling how many people were being let in. Bush made his stance known in terms of immigration reform during his two terms, it would be up to Obama to pave the way going forward.

### The Obama Administration on Immigration

Like Bush, Obama served two terms as president, holding office from 2009-2017. During his presidency Obama put much of his focus on getting the DREAM Act passed into law and implementing new immigration reform. Bush and Obama addressed immigration reform in

similar ways, however, Bush focused much of his attention in promoting change in other countries, while keeping American troops there to enforce this change, as he did in Iraq and Afghanistan. Obama on the other hand, rose to his presidency and not even two months in started formulating a plan to end the war in Iraq (Jaffe 2016). Obama had referred to the war as, “a dumb war; a rash war; a war based not on reason, but on passion; not principle, but politics” (Obama 2002).

Previous scholars found that post-9/11 presidential rhetoric was more positive than it was negative. Presidents Bush and Obama did have rhetoric referring to border security and the protection of the rule of law, however, they were found to prioritize the rhetoric which presented an optimistic approach towards immigration and policy proposals regarding the matter (Eshbaugh-Soha and Gonzalez Juenke 2022).

Much like Bush, Obama aimed at finding a middle-ground where immigrants were given a chance but not at the expense of the American laws. However, Obama focused his efforts in removing those apprehended at the border and those who were convicted criminals, while Bush focused on ordinary violators that had been apprehended in the U.S interior (Chishti, Pierce, and Bolter 2017). Obama also focused much of his efforts on childhood arrivals, as seen with the DREAM Act, while Bush focused on bringing skilled workers to America and contributing to American economy. Obama too believed America should benefit from immigrants in this country, but also wanted those who had lived their whole lives in this country to have a pathway to citizenship and eventually find peace in their status. Nevertheless, Obama was open about his belief that to live in America people should meet certain requirements and follow certain steps. Obama spoke a great deal about new immigration reform and how, in order to achieve a better America, Republicans and Democrats must push the same agenda. A pattern seen across

Obama's speeches is him vocalizing that the American people must hold immigrants accountable but also give them a chance.

We believe that everyone, everywhere should be loved, and given the chance to work, and raise a family. But as Americans, we also know that this is a nation of laws, and we cannot have those laws broken when more than 2,000 people cross our borders illegally every day...at the end of the day, we cannot walk away - not for the sake of passing a bill, but so that we can finally address the real concerns of Americans and the persistent hopes of all those brothers and sisters who want nothing more than their own chance at our common dream (Obama 2007).

Immigration reform is a controversial topic that can build a wedge in relationships. Obama acknowledged that this was a difficult conversation to have but that doing so was essential. He saw immigration reform as something that affected Americans just as much as the immigrant community, and he thought it was something that had to be addressed as a team, instead of rivals. Finding that middle-ground was essential to him, as it was for Bush, because American laws and people matter but so do the immigrants contributing to this country. Obama often referred to America as a "nation of laws" and a "nation of immigrants", which are key phrases that were also used by President Bush.

So many of us - Democrats and Republicans - were willing to compromise in order to pass comprehensive reform that would secure our borders while giving the undocumented a chance to earn their citizenship...we are a nation of immigrants - a nation that has always been willing to give weary travelers from around the world the chance to come here and reach for the dream that so many of us have reached for. That's the America that answered my father's letters and his prayers and brought him here from Kenya so long ago (Obama 2007).

In Obama's view, a great deal of the people who had immigrated to America did so in good faith. They wanted a chance at freedom and were fleeing countries that did not allow them to live the life they so desperately wanted. Obama himself had ancestors that had immigrated to this country and resonated with the immigrant community, this was something he embraced and mentioned throughout his presidency when addressing immigrant reform. He also wanted it to be

noted that he was doing what was in his power to do, and although he believed in creating a pathway to citizenship, it took more than just him to be able to implement and enforce for presidencies to come.

We define ourselves as a nation of immigrants, a nation that welcomes those willing to embrace America's ideals and America's precepts. That's why millions of people, ancestors to most of us, braved hardship, and great risk to come here so they could be free to work and worship and start a business and live their lives in peace and prosperity... We have gone above and beyond what was requested by the very Republicans who said they supported broader reform as long as we got serious about enforcement. All the stuff they asked for, we've done. But even though we've answered these concerns, I've got to say, I suspect there are still going to be some who are trying to move the goal posts on us one more time (Obama 2011).

Obama proposed the DREAM Act during the 2011 State of The Union Address. Obama was a strong advocate for the DREAM Act, dating back to his time in the Senate. He also acknowledged that in order to get it passed into law it was a team effort and he would make those connections to support the immigrant community. He received tremendous pushback from the Republican population and did not allow that to deter him from his goal of getting the DREAM Act passed. From his perspective not only was the immigrant community benefitting from this, but so was the United States because many of those people would be the ones joining the military to fight for this country.

One thing that I'm very clear about is that young people who are brought here through no fault of their own, who have gone to school here, pledged allegiance to our flag, want to serve in our military, want to go to school and contribute to our society, that they shouldn't be under the cloud of deportation, that we should give them every opportunity to earn their citizenship... And I think that's something that we can get done (Obama 2012).

The people that fell under the umbrella of the DREAM Act were deemed innocent, considering they were brought to America as minors, and many have known nothing else outside of living an American life. Obama believed that people that had no say in whether they wanted to

enter the United States and live their life in the shadows and had grown up and chosen a wholesome successful life, deserved to be considered citizens of this country. Obama often referred to the Dream Act as “the right thing to do”, he was adamant that the act would be signed into law and that if Congress and those against it took the time to get to know the people this would benefit, they too would want this act implemented. To Obama, the dreamers had earned their place in this country and their efforts should be recognized, he was confident he could get them that recognition.

I don't think there's anybody in America who's had a chance to talk to these six young people or the young DREAMers all across the country who wouldn't find it in their heart to say these kids are American just like us and they belong here, and we want to do right by them... And to all the DREAMers who are out there and all those who qualified for my executive action, moving forward, I want you to know that I am confident in my ability to implement this program over the next 2 years, and I'm confident that the next President and the next Congress and the American people will ultimately recognize why this is the right thing to do (Obama 2015).

In 2012, Obama was able to accomplish something that would greatly impact the immigrant population. On June 15, 2012, the Obama administration decided not to enforce the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), which required the removal of 800,000 to 1.76 million undocumented non-citizens (Delahunty and Yoo 2012). Obama wanted undocumented immigrants that came to America for work, to have an opportunity at becoming citizens (Aguirre 2008). Many undocumented people were removed by Obama, but his focus was those with a criminal history (Johnson 2017). Obama wanted those with no criminal history to become citizens but that would come at a cost; he stated they would be sanctioned, penalized, and taxed, as well as expected to learn English (Aguirre 2008).

During an interview with Peter Baker of the *New York Times*, Obama expressed the following statements,



Now I'm banking on the fact that when you look at the attitudes of the American people, they absolutely want stricter border control...But when you ask them does it make sense to give a pathway to citizenship for those folks who are here, as long as we're actually making sure that we're stopping the influx and we're holding them responsible and they're having to pay their taxes and pay a fine and learn English, it turns out that the majority of people agree with that...And there is going to be a contest there — folks who want to demagogue the issue and turn this into a "us versus them" proposition and those of us who I think see the possibility of creating both a nation of laws and a nation of immigrants, continuing that tradition (Obama 2010).

Some have believed Obama was tough on immigrants, while others believed he was not tough enough. Obama himself believed he was doing what had to be done, which was meeting both immigrants and the American people in the middle. He acknowledged that he would be doing an injustice to the American laws if he just provided a pathway to citizenship for immigrants with no consequences or expectations, which is why he made it a point to vocalize what was expected of the community to provide them with the resources to become American citizens.

During the Obama administration, 5,281,115 immigrants were deported, less than that of the Bush administration. However, the Obama administration had roughly around 1,000,000 more removals than Bush. Obama focused most of his efforts in formal removals, instead of returns. During his time in office, recidivism fell along the border from 29% in 2007 to 14% in 2014, meaning that the number of unauthorized immigrants attempting to cross the border illegally multiple times dropped. This is thought to be because removals have a lasting legal consequence. Obama focused his efforts in removing those apprehended at the border and those who were convicted criminals, instead of ordinary violators that had been apprehended in the U.S interior (Chishti, Pierce, and Bolter 2017).

Obama paved the way after Bush by not only adopting some of his rhetoric, considering America a “nation of laws and a nation of immigrants”, but by also taking it a step further and allowing a pathway for citizenship for many of the undocumented that had lived their whole lives as Americans. Obama put himself in their shoes and went so far as to relate himself and his ancestors to them. He acknowledged that citizenship could not be handed to those who immigrated illegally to this country, but also kept an open mind for those who had a positive contribution to their society. Obama and Bush may have set the tone for a nation of laws and a nation of immigrants, however, things changed when Trump entered presidency.

### The Trump Administration on Immigration

Trump only served one term in office from 2017-2021. The Trump administration was different from the Obama administration. It planned on building off the Obama administration’s approach while eliminating the more “generous” programs, such as The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program (Johnson 2017). In 2015 Trump announced his plan to handle immigration the way U.S. president Dwight D. Eisenhower did, with mass deportation. Obama responded to Trump’s plan during his interview with ABC News, “Imagine the images on the screen flashing around the world as we were dragging parents away from their children, putting them in detention centers, and then systematically sending them out...that’s not who we are as Americans” (ABC News 2015).

Trump differed from Bush and Obama in that he did not focus his attention on finding a middle-ground approach in immigration reform, instead he promoted the “us vs. them” narrative and he did so by painting immigrants in a negative light. During his time in office Trump put much of his efforts into border security/building the fence, while also trying to end DACA, which was brought forth by the Obama administration to defer deportation of Dreamers and

prioritize immigrants that committed crimes. To Trump, the fence was a material boundary used to create a symbolic boundary between American citizens and Mexicans looking to immigrate, reinforcing his “us vs. them” narrative.

Trump was trying to get Democrats and Congress on board with building the fence along the Mexican American border, he used DACA to push the agenda. During a press-conference in Fort Meyers, Florida, Trump exchanged the following statements with a reporter, “*Q.* So no relief for DACA recipients unless you get the wall? Is that what you're saying? *Trump:* The wall—at some point, they're going to have to—they cannot obstruct the wall. The wall, to me, is vital. If I don't get the wall, then we will become the obstructionists. *Q.* What has to come first—wall, agreement on the wall? *Trump:* We have to have an understanding that whether it's in the budget or some other vehicle in a fairly short period of time, the wall will be funded. Otherwise, we're not doing any deals” (Trump 2017).

Trump’s reasoning for wanting to put an end to the DACA was his argument that it was “illegal.” According to Trump, Obama overstepped Congress and offered citizenship and work permits to illegal immigrants, which in turn caused the number of illegal immigrations to skyrocket. Ultimately, he believed that for immigration reform to be successful, the American people’s best interest must be put first.

In 2012, after the Congress rejected legislation offering legal status and work permits to illegal immigrants, the previous administration bypassed the Congress and granted those same benefits unilaterally. These actions threatened Congress's status as a coequal branch of Government and have resulted in a surge of illegal immigration... Immigration reform must create more jobs, higher wages, and greater security for Americans—now and for future generations (Trump 2017).

Trump criticized the Obama administration as incompetent when it came to national security and immigration enforcement efforts (Chacon 2016). Trump stated, “We will terminate

the Obama administration's deadly, and it is deadly, nonenforcement policies that allow thousands of criminal aliens to freely roam our streets, walk around, do whatever they want to do, crime all over the place" (Pierce, Bolter, and Selee 2018). He intended on doing this by building the wall, to Trump, DACA could not work if there was not a physical barrier between America and Mexico. If not, he believed things would just get worse in terms of crime and illegal immigration into the country.

We need a physical border wall. We're going to have a wall—remember that—we're going to have a wall to keep out deadly drug dealers, dangerous traffickers, and violent criminal cartels. Mexico is having a tremendous problem with crime, and we want to keep it out of our country... That's why our position has been clear and very clear from the beginning. Any legislation on DACA must secure the border with a wall (Trump 2018).

Even though Trump reassured people that he was not taking DACA off the table completely, he still saw DACA as a deal he was going along with to get his goal accomplished, which was the fence along the Mexican border. He even referred to DACA as "their issue" in reference to the Democrats. "They want to stop us from doing things. We put an infrastructure bill in for \$1.7 billion and I hear they want to stop it. They want to stop DACA. DACA is their issue. But I'm willing to go along and get it done. We got to get it done, right? Get it done" (Trump 2018). On some occasions, Trump referred to the recipients of DACA as criminals but still assured the public that this would not stop him from coming to a deal with the Democrats to get what both parties desired, "DACA recipients with arrest records: 53792! That is a very large proportion of the total. @LouDobbs Not good but we will be able to make a deal with the Dems!" (Trump 2019).

DACA and the Fence Act went hand in hand during the Trump administration, all the years that DACA was being addressed, the Fence Act was not far behind. As early as 2015, when Trump was announcing his candidacy for president, he was giving his thoughts on immigration

through the Mexican border, putting an emphasis on his lack of support for a relationship between America and Mexico. He believed that Mexico was not sending people that would help American civilization, instead, it would cause a burden to the American people, and he was determined to fix that with building a wall between the two countries. According to Trump, he was doing what other presidents were too weak to do-- protect the American people. He promised to do this by cracking down on illegal immigration, terrorists, and preserving the rights of the American people.

When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best... They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people... I will build a great, great wall on our southern border... I am the strongest on the borders and I will build a wall, and it will be a real wall. I am strongest on illegal immigration, strongest on ISIS, strongest on the military and I will take care of our Vets. I am the only person who will Make America Great Again (Trump 2015) (Trump 2016).

Trump continued to promulgate the “us vs. them” narrative by referring to those crossing the Mexican American boarder as rapists, drug dealers, and criminals. All the while by promising Americans he would do whatever was in his power to keep them away, which meant building the fence along the border. Trump acknowledged that he was not the first to bring up building a fence, however, he did believe he was going to be the one to follow through with it, because he was more committed to the American people and their safety than the rest. “In 2006, Congress passed legislation to secure the border with a double-layer fence, but the promised barrier was not constructed... The inability to spend immigration fees on core law enforcement functions impedes security on both the southern and northern borders” (Trump 2017).

To appeal to the American people to get his initiative across, Trump tried to use a fear-based approach. He frequently spoke about the crime that would wash over our nation if the

fence was not built. He spoke about the lives that had been lost at the hands of illegal immigrants and the grief it had brought to the community. “I have met with dozens of families whose loved ones were stolen by illegal immigrants...we cannot keep our country safe without adequate funding for Border security, including a physical barrier and increased in funding for law enforcement” (Trump 2019). He also used this as an opportunity to separate himself from the Democrats; he made sure he blamed them for the lack of progress on the fence and attributed it to their lack of interest in protecting the American people. “Drugs are pouring into our country at a record pace; a lot of people are coming in that we can't have... Many Democrats know we need the wall...They have done everything in their power to make sure we're—I got the military \$700 billion and \$716 billion. The wall is a tiny, tiny fraction of the cost of that. But their whole agenda has been to try not giving me anything for the wall (Trump 2018).

Of all three presidents, Trump vocalized his lack of support for positive immigration reform the most. Trump was clear that for him to implement positive immigration reform, physical barriers must be put in place to put an end to illegal immigration in the United States. As of 2019, the number of deportations by the Trump administration have remained a little under 800,000 (Haulsohner 2019).

Previous scholars investigated the Trump administration and the influence his rhetoric had on public opinion on immigration. They found that presidents struggled to shape public opinion on immigration, this was seen with the use of negative rhetoric by Trump when discussing immigration and the continuous high levels of positive attitudes towards immigration from the public (Eshbaugh-Soha and Gonzalez Juenke 2022). Trumps rhetoric also had little to no impact on the opinion of Congress on the topic of immigration. They saw that Trump provided a great amount of public attention to the topic of immigration; however, he did not

frequently contribute to congressional voting procedures, otherwise known as House roll-call votes. This resulted in him failing to achieve much regarding immigration policy.

All three presidents took their own approach to the topic of immigration reform. Bush and Obama believed America to be a nation of immigrants and laws. Obama spoke about a pathway to citizenship, and both he and Bush put laws in place to accomplish it. Bush approached it with the temporary-workers program, and Obama with DACA. During the Bush and Obama administration immigrants were depicted as hardworking individuals looking for a silver lining. Obama went a step ahead of Bush and even spoke of himself in the same light as the immigrants coming to this country by touching upon his ancestors struggles. Trump was the complete opposite, he used terms such as mass deportation, criminal aliens, rapists, and drug dealers when referring to immigrants. He did everything in his power to alienate the immigrant community and make them feel like unwanted outsiders. Trump focused on a physical barrier to reinforce a symbolic boundary between Americans and immigrants.

Politicians may differ in rhetoric but one thing they all have in common is the belief that Americans are their main priority. They cannot tackle any issue without ensuring that the best interest of the American citizen is at the forefront of their mission. Bush wanted to push immigration reform but made sure to emphasize that immigrants were doing jobs Americans did not want to do, instead of taking jobs from Americans. Obama found his middle-group by letting many immigrants find a pathway to citizenship but also deporting those with criminal records, in order to keep America safe. Trump promised to include more jobs, higher wages, and security for Americans when addressing immigration reform, while also making sure those entering America were going to positively impact the country, not take away from it. Immigration reform

is something that will continue to be discussed throughout American history, it is up to those in power at the time to shape the narrative.

### The Impact of Political Rhetoric on Public Opinion

Other researchers have addressed the topic of political rhetoric on public opinion pertaining to immigration. Flores (2018) found that statements made by elites shape public attitudes towards immigration. Politicians who are against immigration tend to get voters on their side by appealing to emotions. They do so by using phrases and images that will result in an emotional reaction. For example, they use terms like “illegal alien,” which classifies immigrants as “law breakers” and less than human, when taking into consideration the alternate meaning of “alien” (Westen 2009). Framing illegal aliens as “less than human” formulates a clear separation between illegal immigrants and United States citizens. This falls in line with the rhetoric brought forth by Trump, promoting the “us vs. them” narrative and trying to build a physical barrier that would represent the divide between Mexico and America.

Flores also found that negative messages about immigration have a greater effect on public opinion than positive messages. For this reason, politicians are seen linking immigration to crimes, and framing immigrants as thieves of American resources, which ignites fear and anger in people (Flores 2018; Westen 2019). Negative attitudes on immigration in the United States also comes from sharp economic downturns, due to politicians and labor union leaders blaming foreign workers for the economic crisis (Olzak 1992). The issue on immigration is often brought to the attention of Americans by activists and politicians. Activists and politicians that are against immigration in the United States and argue that “the interests, values, or



lifestyles of citizens are in harm's way". This causes a decrease in support for immigration (Brader, Valentino, and Suhay 2008).

In connection with what Flores and Westen theorized, Bush engaged in negative rhetoric towards people from Middle Eastern countries, referring to them as "coldblooded killers" (Bush 2002). Ultimately, fear was instilled, which led to the detention of hundreds of immigrants who resembled the 9/11 hijackers, regardless of their citizenship status. Once Bush believed he successfully stabilized the threat to the American people, he shifted gears towards more positive rhetoric. Trump mainly resorted to a fear-based approach when addressing immigration. He often used terms such as criminal aliens, rapists, and drug dealers when referring to immigrants. Unlike Bush, Trump did not shift from negative to positive rhetoric on the matter. Given that some scholars believe negative messages have a greater influence on the public, this may come up when comparing the affects each president's rhetoric achieved.

This topic could essentially fall under social constructionism theory, which states that reality and meaning is subjective and created by dynamic interactions with individuals and groups (Berger and Luckman 1966). In other words, individuals could be influenced to take a particular stance on the matter of immigration depending on what rhetoric they are exposed to the most. If looking at the public's opinion through this lens, all three presidents have a chance at influencing public opinion on immigration, given how often they broadcast their stance on the matter.

The media also plays a role in shaping how and what opinions people form about important issues. Political elites attempt to use that in their favor by reframing what is covered by media outlets (Haynes, Merolia, and Ramakrishnan 2016). Presidential speeches are often covered by the media. Broadcasting to the public via the media is highly beneficial for

presidents, making it easier for a president to influence a mass public on particular issues (Cohen 1995).

Political elites reframing what is covered by media outlets falls in line with framing theory. Framing theory states that media shapes public opinion by “framing events and issues in particular ways” (De Vreese 2005). The United States president is constantly being presented in the media before and during their presidency, whether that is the presidential debates during the election, the inaugural address, an address to the nation, etc. Ultimately, the president is given many opportunities to present their rhetoric to the American people through the media. They can decide how much positive or negative rhetoric they want broadcasted on the media and when. This could serve as a big advantage to all presidents when attempting to sway public opinion on immigration.

The history of immigration reform, immigration in America, political rhetoric, and the media have all contributed to what public opinion on immigration has looked like throughout the years. It has shown the influx in immigration to America, and how that has impacted the American people. It shows us what steps have been taken by politicians to either increase or decrease immigration numbers. Something that has not been researched thoroughly is what Bush, Obama, and Trump have contributed to how the public feels about immigration in America. All three presidents have had a lot to say about immigrants entering this country, which surely could have negative or positive effects on the public’s opinion.

## **Data and Methods**

Data for this study was collected from the General Social Survey (GSS) website. Initially, I was going to focus on data from 2001-2018, which are the years Bush, Obama, and Trump

were in office. However, once I started my research, I narrowed it down to three years, one during each presidential term. My reasoning for doing this stems from the GSS only covering one year of the Trump administration, which was 2018. In order to have a fair comparison of all three presidents, I chose to focus on one year of the Bush and Obama administrations as well. The three years I focused on for this project were 2004; during the Bush administration, 2014; during the Obama administration, and 2018; during Trumps administration. For the Bush and Obama administrations, I decided to focus on those specific years because they were at the midterm of their two term presidencies. Each of the years I chose had different variables, as different questions are asked each year. Even so, some of the questions remained the same throughout the years and allowed me to compare the different outcomes.

Considering that not every year in the General Social Survey has the same variables, I kept different files for each year which contained my independent and dependent variables. A list of all variables and their specific questions is located in the appendix. Although this study is pertaining to public opinion and immigration during different presidential terms, I have also incorporated other important topics that are often discussed during different presidential administrations, including confidence levels in government, opinions on abortion, confidence in the military, and immigration as my primary focus. Incorporating different topics allowed me to see if there was much polarization within different issues, and if so, how much, in comparison to that of immigration. I initially hypothesized that public opinion on immigration would be significantly negative during the Trump administration, in comparison to Bush and Obama administrations. Below you will find a list of my independent and dependent variables for all three administrations. Refer to appendix for definition of variables.

**Table 1**

Independent Variables:	Dependent Variables:
POLVIEWS	CONFED
PARTYID	CONLEGIS
IMMSTATS	CONARMY
PARCIT	CONJUDGE
PRES08	ABANY
POLNEWS	ABDEFECT
USCITZN	ABHLTH
PRES16	ABRAPE
	EXCLIMM
	IMMCRIME
	IMMAMECO
	IMMRGHTS
	LETIN1A
	KIDSHERE

For my analysis, I ran crosstabulations and independent-samples t-tests. The crosstabulations allowed me to compare percentages, while the t-tests compared two means and established if the relationship was statistically significantly different from the other condition. I then compared the outcomes throughout all three years. I focused on comparing the information that proved to be statistically significant, as this information could relate to the larger population. I also noted any tests that failed to reach traditional levels of statistical significance. Many of the questions on the General Social Survey have more than two answers that respondents could choose from. Turn to the appendix to see the different categories applied to this research.

## **Findings**

### Immigration

Immigration was my focal point for this study. I was looking for differences in public opinion on immigration during three presidential terms. As stated earlier, Bush, Obama, and Trump all contributed to presidential rhetoric on immigration, with some similarities but overall, each took a unique stance on the issue. To observe public opinion during these presidential terms I ran crosstabulations and t-tests with the independent variables addressing: political views (POLVIEWS), party identification (PARTYID), parent’s citizenship status (PARCIT), and voted for Clinton or Trump in 2016 (PRES16). The dependent variables used to pertain to immigration in America were as follows: America should exclude illegal immigrants (EXCLIMM), Immigrants increase the crime rate (IMMCRIME), and the number of immigrants should be (LETIN1A). Using a Likert scale, respondent opinions were measured by their responses of whether they "strongly agree", "agree", "disagree", or "neither agree not disagree" for the exclusion of illegal immigrants and immigrants increasing the crime rate, while for the number of immigrants in America should be... they reported whether they believed it should be "remain the same", "be reduced by a lot".

Table 2

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Public Opinion on Immigration During Bush Administration

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America Should Exclude Illegal Immigrants

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‘Strongly Agree’

‘Agree’

Strong Democrat	19.1%	40.7%
Strong Republican	47.8%	38.0%
Sig	<.001	<.001

---

Number of immigrants nowadays should

---

	‘Remain the same’	‘Reduced by a lot’
Strong Democrats	37.5%	27.9%
Strong Republicans	31.3%	36.7%
Sig	.025	.025

---

Immigrants Increase the Crime Rate

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	‘Disagree’	‘Neither Agree nor Disagree’
Strong Democrats	38.9%	29.3%
Strong Republicans	38.0%	29.1%
Sig	.004	.005

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Table 2 and Table 3 display the respondent responses pertaining to the dependent variables: EXCLDIMM, IMMCRIME, and LETIN1A, during the Bush and Obama administrations. During both presidential administrations, respondents that identified as ‘Strong Republicans’ were seen to be in favor of America excluding illegal immigrants, on higher levels than that of respondents who identified as ‘Strong Democrats’. During the Bush year 19.1% of

‘Strong Democrats’ strongly agree that America should exclude illegal immigrants, while 47.8% of ‘Strong Republicans’ strongly agree that America should exclude illegal immigrants, a difference of 28.7 percentage points. The t-test showed the means were significant at the .001 p-value. During Obama, 36.1% of strong Democrats and 36.6% of ‘Strong Republicans’ ‘agree’ that America should exclude illegal immigrants. The t-test showed the means were significant at the .001 p-value. The polarization during Bush is very drastic; compared to that seen during Obama there appeared to be a greater divide between political parties pertaining to excluding illegal immigrants from America, with ‘Strong Republicans’ being more in favor of the exclusion than ‘Strong Democrats’. During Obama, the divide between ‘Strong Republicans’ and ‘Strong Democrats’ is not as drastic, with the percentages being extremely close for being in agreeance of excluding illegal immigrants from America.

During both administrations most ‘Strong Democrats reported wanting to keep the number of immigrants in the United States the same, while ‘Strong Republicans’ believed it should be ‘reduced by a lot’. During the Bush administration, 37.5% of ‘Strong Democrats’ believed the number of immigrants should remain the same, while 31.3% of ‘Strong Republicans’ believed it should remain the same. On the other hand, 27.9% of ‘Strong Democrats’ believed the number of immigrants should be reduced a lot and 36.7% of ‘Strong Republicans’ believed it should be reduced by a lot. A t-test of the means for wanting the number of immigrants to remain the same, resulted in a p-value of .025. While the t-test for the means of wanting the number of immigrants to be reduced by a lot also resulted in a p-value of .025. Under Obama, 15.9% of strong Democrats believed the number of immigrants should be reduced by a lot, while 40.3% of ‘Strong Republicans’ believed it should be reduced a lot. The t-test showed the means were significant at the .001 level.

The polarization between the Bush and Obama administrations is not drastic, with the Obama administration having slightly higher levels of support for immigration in America, than the Bush administration. Even though Bush himself identified as a Republican and Obama identified with the Democratic party, they both believed people should be held accountable and stood against a pathway to citizenship with no consequences. They both spoke about reaching a “middle ground” and they did not speak of immigrants as outsiders, that rhetoric could explain why the numbers between administrations are not drastically different, considering their rhetoric did not differ drastically either.

Table 3

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Public Opinion on Immigration During Obama Administration

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America Should Exclude Illegal Immigrants

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	‘Agree’	‘Disagree’
Strong Democrat	36.1%	24.0%
Strong Republican	36.6%	05.3%
Sig	<.001	<.001

---



Number of immigrants nowadays should

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	‘Remain the same’	‘Reduced by a lot’
Strong Democrats	45.8%	15.9%
Strong Republicans	33.3%	40.3%
Sig	<.001	<.001

---

Immigrants Increase the Crime Rate

---

	‘Disagree’	‘Neither Agree nor Disagree’
Strong Democrats	41.9%	26.0%
Strong Republicans	39.4%	26.8%
Sig	<.001	<.001

---

However, in the Bush and Obama administrations ‘Strong Democrats’ and ‘Strong Republicans’ both ‘disagreed’ that immigrants increase the crime rate. During Bush, 38.9% of strong Democrats and 38.0% of ‘Strong Republicans’ disagree that immigrants increase the crime rates, a t-test of the means reached statistical significance at the .05 level. While 29.3% of ‘Strong Democrats’ and 29.1% of ‘Strong Republicans’, neither agree nor disagree, a t-test of the means reaching a statistically significant at the .05 level. During Obama, 41.9% of ‘Strong Democrats’ and 39.4% of ‘Strong Republicans’ disagree that immigrants increase crime rates, a t-test of the means reached statistical significance at the .001 level. While 26.0% of ‘Strong Democrats’ and 26.8% of ‘Strong Republicans’ neither agree nor disagree, with a t-test resulting

statistically significant at the .001 level. During Obama, respondents disagreed slightly more with the statement claiming immigrants increase the crime rate, than they did during Bush.

A difference could be seen during the Bush and Obama administration when the independent variable PARCIT was introduced. This variable focuses on the citizenship of the respondents' parents. In 2004 while Bush was in office, it was found that respondents whose both parents were citizens, and respondents whose neither parent were citizens, 'agreed' that America should exclude illegal immigrants. A change occurred during the Obama administration, in which respondents whose parents were non-citizens 'disagreed' that America should exclude illegal immigrants. Despite this difference, respondents with both parents who are citizens and those with both parents being non-citizens voted that they 'disagree' with the statement about immigrants increasing crime rates. They also 'agreed' that immigrants are good for America and that they should not have the same rights as Americans.

Table 4

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Public Opinion During the 2016 Presidential Election

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Number of immigrants nowadays should

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	'Remain the same'	'Reduced by a lot'	Sig
Voted Clinton	48.9%	6.5%	<.001
Voted Trump	29.2%	30.7%	<.001

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Although different variables were present during the Trump administration, there turned out to be statistically significant data that shows polarization. The independent variable PRES16 brought up important results. The results show that 6.5% of those who voted for Hilary Clinton in 2016 and 30.7% of those who voted for Trump believed that immigrants nowadays should be reduced by a lot. A t-test of the means reached statistical significance at the .001 level. These results are what one would expect, considering the differing political parties, however, the numbers are drastically different from one another, with less support for immigration being seen during the Trump administration. Given the negative rhetoric during the Trump administration surrounding immigration, one could infer that it could have led to vast differences in the public's opinion on immigration.

### Confidence

Respondent's confidence levels, as they pertain to the executive branch of federal government and congress ties into this study because those are two essential factors when discussing immigration policy. As stated by previous scholars, the public's opinion could provide the president with leverage against congress (Edwards 2006). Therefore, the way respondents feel about the executive branch, essentially the president, and congress, can impact how much sway the president may have on the public's opinion and in turn their leverage over congress. One can expect respondents to gravitate towards presidents that share their same party identification, however, this discussion will allow us to see if those that differ in party identification hold high confidence levels for any of the three presidents being discussed.

The questions pertaining to confidence involved the following categories: confidence in the executive branch of federal government (CONFED), confidence in congress (CONLEGIS), confidence in the United States supreme court (CONJUDGE), and confidence in the military (CONARMY). By looking into these specific issues, as they pertain to political association and immigrant status, the responses provide an understanding of where the respondents stand, regarding different government forces and the military. The different administrations had great distinctions and similarities regarding respondent confidence level.

Table 5

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Confidence Levels in Executive Branch of Federal Government

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‘Hardly Any’ Confidence in the Executive Branch of Federal Government

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	Bush	Obama	Trump
Conservatives	18.2%	72.2%	24.1%
Liberals	55.4%	29.5%	74.0%
Sig	<.001	<.001	<.001

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‘Only Some’ Confidence in the Executive Branch of Federal Government

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Conservatives	40.3%	23.0%	50.2%
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Liberals	37.8%	51.4%	20.8%
Sig	<.001	<.001	<.001

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‘A Great Deal’ of Confidence in the Executive Branch of Federal Government

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Conservatives	41.6%	04.8%	25.7%
Liberals	06.8%	19.1%	05.2%
Sig	<.001	<.001	<.001

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During the Bush administration, 41.6% of conservatives have ‘a great deal’ of confidence in the executive branch of federal government, while only 06.8% of liberals have ‘a great deal’ of confidence. A t-test of the means reached statistical significance at the .001 level. During Trump, 50.2% of conservatives responding to having ‘only some’ confidence in the executive branch of federal government, while 20.8% of liberals reported to having ‘only some’ confidence. A t-test of the means reached statistical significance at the .001 level. The number of liberals who had ‘hardly any’ confidence in the executive branch of federal government increased significantly from the Bush administration to Trumps administration. On the other hand, in Obama’s term, the number of conservatives reporting having ‘hardly any’ confidence in the executive branch of federal government was much greater than the numbers during both Bush and Trumps administrations. 51.4% of liberal respondents reported having ‘only some’ confidence in the executive branch of federal government, while 23.0% of conservative respondents reported having ‘only some’ confidence. A t-test of the means reached statistical

significance at the .001 level. The most polarization was seen during the Bush administration, considering conservatives were seen having ‘a great deal’ of confidence in the federal government, and liberals had ‘hardly any’, while during Obama and Trump the highest confidence level with significance was ‘hardly any’ confidence by both conservatives and liberals. Meaning, the Bush administration had slightly higher levels of support from respondents, regardless of their political identification, which could have resulted in Bush having the upper hand when it came to swaying public opinion.

A shift could be seen when looking at confidence in Congress. During the Bush administration respondents that identified as conservatives (62.7%) and those that identified as liberals (53.3%), both reported having ‘only some’ confidence in Congress. A t-test of the means had a p-value of .025. During the Trump administration both conservatives (50.2%) and liberals (20.8%) reported having ‘only some’ confidence in Congress. A t-test of the means reached statistical significance at the .05 level. This concluded that the lack of confidence in congress was seen across the board, during both administrations, with responses lingering around ‘only some’ and ‘hardly any’ confidence in Congress.

Regarding confidence in the military, during the Obama administration respondents who identified as conservatives (53.9%) had ‘a great deal’ of confidence in the military, while liberals (35.3%) reported they had ‘a great deal’ of confidence. Liberal respondents had higher numbers for ‘only some’ confidence with 50.8%, while 39.1% of conservative respondents had ‘only some’ confidence in the military. The t-test showed the means were significant at the .001 p-value. While in the Trump administration both conservatives (75.2%) and liberals (48.9%) had ‘a great deal’ of confidence in the military. The t-test showed the means were significant at the .001 p-value. For ‘only some’ confidence in the military during Trump, 23.6% of conservative

respondents and 36.3% of liberals voted in favor. The t-test showed the means were significant at the .001 level. The polarization was slightly higher during the Trump administration than that of Obama, regarding confidence in the military.

I also used the independent variable PARTYID to break respondents into ‘strong Democrats’ or ‘Strong Republicans’. This variable was essential in my research because political parties are fundamental in presential campaigns, determining who one is most likely to support, due to the similarity in political party identification. This variable provided for many similarities between the Obama and the Trump administrations. For starters, in both administrations respondents that identified as ‘Strong Democrats’ and those that were ‘Strong Republicans’ both had ‘only some’ confidence in the United States supreme court. During Obama, 53.6% of ‘Strong Democrats’ and 54.0% of ‘Strong Republicans’ reported having ‘only some’ confidence in the supreme court. A t-test of the means reached statistical significance at the .05 level. For Trump, 58.7% of ‘Strong Democrats’ and 44.1% of ‘Strong Republicans’ reported having ‘only some’ confidence in the supreme court. The t-test showed the means were significant at the .05 p-value. The percentages for both administrations are very close, with the overall consensus being not much confidence in the United States Supreme Court.

The opinion of the public on the United States Supreme Court is important because the supreme court can uphold, or dispute policies put in place by the president. Recently, the United States Supreme Court decided to uphold Title 42, which was an immigration policy implemented during the Trump administration. Title 42 was brought force when the COVID-19 pandemic broke out, it allowed “to quickly expel asylum-seekers at the border” (Hurley 2022). In other words, the Supreme Court plays an important role in the topic of immigration policy and the future of America’s immigrant population.

Confidence in the military is also important when discussing the topic of immigration in America, due to the rhetoric used by presidents to critique actions taken by others in addressing issues surrounding immigration. One example of this was a statement made in 2002 by Obama regarding Bush's decision to keep American troops in Iraq and Afghanistan, following 9/11. Obama referred to the war as "dumb", "rash", and based on pure politics (Obama 2002). It is worth noting, whether the levels of confidence in the military increased or decreased in the years after Bush's presidency, considering Obama took a different stance than he did.

Regarding the confidence in the United States military, both 'Strong Democrats' and 'Strong Republicans' also had 'a great deal' of confidence in the military during both administrations. During Obama, 48.6% of 'strong Democrats' and 64.1% of 'Strong Republicans' had 'a great deal' of confidence. A t-test of the means reached statistical significance at the .05 level. During Trump, 54.1% of 'Strong Democrats' and 79.1% of 'Strong Republicans' had 'a great deal' of confidence in the military. The t-test showed the means were significant at the .001 p-value. Bush's administration differed in that 'Strong Republicans' (82.2%) had 'a great deal' of confidence in the military and 'Strong Democrats' (50.8%) answered having 'a great deal' of confidence, which is a much greater percentage of 'Strong Republicans' over 'Strong Democrats'. Unlike other variables, the confidence in the military appeared to stay consistent throughout the administrations, with most respondents reporting they 'a great deal' of confidence, regardless of their political identification.

'Strong Democrats' also reported having less confidence in the executive branch of federal government during the Bush and Trump administrations, while having more confidence during the Obama administration. During Bush, 54.9% of 'Strong Democrats' reported having 'hardly any' confidence in the executive branch of federal government, and during Trump 72.2%



of ‘Strong Democrats’ reported having ‘hardly any’ confidence. While during Obama, only 24.9% of ‘Strong Democrats’ reported having ‘hardly any’ confidence. The relationships in confidence levels did not follow any exact pattern, and the different presidential terms had many differences, as well as similarities in this category.

### Abortion

Abortion is a very controversial issue that has been discussed throughout many presidential terms. Some would argue that Republicans are ‘anti-abortion’, and it could be seen in some states that are run by Republican politicians that are attempting to outlaw abortion (Ghitis 2021). The results of the test I ran would support that statement. Respondents were asked if they would be in support of a woman getting an abortion for any reason, the chart I have attached below shows how the number of ‘Strong Democrats’ and ‘Strong Republicans’ that responded ‘yes’ to this question is significantly different. The same could be seen across the board regardless of the circumstances surrounding the abortion; ‘Strong Democrats’ always have a higher number of ‘yes’ votes. Respondents who identify as liberals and those who identify as conservatives follow the same pattern. Throughout all three presidential administrations, liberals were more in favor of abortion than conservatives, regardless of the circumstances.

Table 6

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Support for Abortion during 2008 Presidential Election

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Abortion if Woman Wants for Any Reason

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	Obama	McCain
Yes	57.6%	32.2%
No	42.4%	67.8%
Sig	<.001	<.001

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Abortion if Strong Chance of Serious Defect

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Yes	85.1%	68.7%
No	14.9%	31.3%
Sig	<.001	<.001

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Abortion if Woman's Health Seriously Endangered

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Yes	94.0%	85.9%
No	06.0%	14.1%
Sig	<.001	<.001

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Abortion if Pregnant as Result of Rape

---

Yes	85.6%	72.0%
No	14.4%	28.0%

Sig

<.001

<.001

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In 2008, during the presidential election, in which Obama ran against John McCain, it was noted that Obama had the lead among female voters due to his pro-choice rhetoric. He also contributed more to this by running ads in swing states to broadcast McCain's "opposition to abortion" (Saad 2008). Presidential preference, regarding abortion views, appeared to make an impact among independent woman, causing Obama to win many of their votes and take a lead over McCain (Saad 2008).

For the 2014 data set, I used the independent variable PRES08, to see whether respondents voting for Obama or McCain in the 2008 presidential elections was significant to opinion on abortion. I found that respondents who voted for Obama in the 2008 presidential elections were more in favor of abortion under any circumstances, than those who voted for McCain. The polarization between the Obama and McCain voters decreases, as significant reasons for abortion are given. Democrats tend to be more supportive of abortion than Republicans under most circumstances, which plays into the results seen above, however, the rate of McCain voters who were in favor of abortion under all circumstances was much higher than what I would have predicted. For abortion if there is a strong chance for serious defect, 85.1% of Obama voters and 68.7% of McCain voters were in favor. The t-test showed the means were significant at the .001 p-value. For abortion if a woman's health is seriously endangered, 94.0% of Obama voters and 85.9% of McCain voters were in favor. The t-test showed the means were significant at the .001 p-value. Lastly, for abortion if pregnant as a result of rape, 85.6% of

Obama voters and 72.0% of McCain voters were in favor. The t-test showed the means were significant at the .001 level.

Even though those who voted for Obama have greater numbers of support for abortion, those who voted for McCain are not that far off, considering many McCain voters are in favor of abortion in most circumstances. The greatest difference is seen in the responses for abortion if woman wants to for any reason. 57.6% of Obama voters were in support, while 67.8% of McCain voters were against it. The t-test showed the means were significant at the .001 p-value. This data set shows that as significant reasons for abortion arise, the rates of those in favor of abortion goes up, regardless of who they voted for.

The same question was addressed during the 2016 presidential election, in which Hillary Clinton ran against Donald J. Trump. Much like Obama and McCain, Clinton and Trump were on complete opposite sides on the matter of abortion. Clinton's rhetoric was aimed at giving woman rights over their bodies, while Trump stuck to using "scare rhetoric", much like his approach on the topic of immigration (Tinker 2016). Trump used statements such as, "rip the baby out of the womb of the mother just prior to the birth...", to describe late term abortions, painting a vividly cruel photo in the minds of thousands of people tuning in to the final presidential debate (Tinker 2016).

For the 2018 data set, the dependent variable PRES16 was tested to see if there were differences among respondents who voted for Clinton and those who voted for Trump, given the different takes in their rhetoric on the topic. I found that respondents who voted for Clinton had a higher acceptance of abortion, under any circumstances, than did those who voted for Trump. The same situation applies for this data set, most voters on both sides were in favor of abortion for the most part. Trump has pushed forth rhetoric during his campaign and during his

administration against abortion, however, the number of Trump voters who were in favor of abortion was higher than I would have expected. For abortion if there is a strong chance of serious defect, 89.5% of Clinton voters and 67.5% of Trump voters were in favor. In terms of abortion if woman's health is seriously endangered, 96.6% of Clinton voters and 83.5% of Trump voters voted 'yes'. The high percentage of Trump voters who were in favor of abortion if the woman's health is seriously endangered proves that the president's rhetoric did not sway the public's opinion on this matter, considering that Trump spoke rhetoric against abortion, even if the mother's life was in danger.

For abortion if pregnant as a result of rape, 88.3% of Clinton voters and 66.2% of Trump voters were in favor. All of which resulted in a significance at the  $<.001$  level. Again, a bigger difference is seen when addressing abortion if woman want it for any reason. 64.3% of Clinton voters were in favor, while 69.3% of Trump voters were against it. The t-test showed the means were significant at the  $<.001$  level. Overall, those who voted for Obama and Clinton have higher levels of support for abortion under any circumstances, however, those who voted for McCain and Trump have higher levels of support for abortion under special circumstances than expected.

Table 7

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Support for Abortion Depending on Parental Citizenship Status

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Abortion if Woman Wants for Any Reason

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	Both Parents Citizens	Neither Parent a Citizen
Yes	47.9%	31.5%
No	52.1%	68.5%
Sig	<.001	<.001

  

Abortion if Pregnant as Result of Rape		
Yes	78.6%	65.1%
No	21.4%	34.9%
Sig	<.001	.002

A difference could be seen when I examined the 2004 and 2014 data set, which correspond to the Bush and Obama administrations. The variable turned out to be insignificant during the Bush administration. I chose to test this variable because this ties immigration and abortion together, those who have some tie to the immigrant community may have different opinions than those who do not. I found it worth considering whether Obama's pro-choice rhetoric had any impact during his presidency on the support for or against abortion by people directly tied to the topic of immigration. During the Obama administration it was found that both respondents whose parents were United States citizens (52.1%) and respondents whose parents were not United States citizens (68.5%), voted 'no' to abortion if woman wants to for any reason. A t-test comparing the means resulting in statistical significance at the .001 level. Respondents whose both parents were citizens (78.6%), were more willing to allow abortion if

the pregnancy was a result of rape than respondents with two non-citizen parents (65.1%). The t-test revealed significance at the .05 level. Overall, respondents are more in-favor of abortion during special circumstances, while those with two citizen parents have higher percentages of support for abortion.

## **Discussion**

This study concluded that overall, presidential rhetoric may not have the effects that I had initially predicted. Presidential rhetoric obtained from well-known magazines, popular news outlets, speeches pertaining policy proposals, the United States Presidential Inauguration, National Committee Galas, and personal social media accounts, allowed me to assess the rhetorical tone for all three presidents. Bush and Obama had many similarities in their rhetoric, with the goal being finding the “middle ground” and allowing for legal immigration into America. Trump, on the other hand, preferred to maintain an “us vs them” perspective on the matter of immigration and resorted to a fear-based approach, labeling immigrants as dangerous criminals.

To conclude whether presidential rhetoric influenced the public’s opinion on immigration, I used the General Social Survey data and compared variables throughout all three presidencies. Regarding immigration during the Bush administration, the greatest polarization was seen when respondents were asked whether America should exclude illegal immigrants. A 28.7 percentage point difference was seen between 'Strong Republicans' and 'Strong Democrats', with higher levels of ‘Strong Republicans' reporting they strongly agree that America should exclude illegal immigrants. For other categories: whether the number of immigrants nowadays should be reduced and immigrants increase crime rate, 'Strong Republicans' and 'Strong

Democrats' had hardly any difference in responses, with 'Strong Republicans' having a slightly higher resistance to immigration.

For immigration during the Obama administration, the greatest polarization was seen when respondents accounted for whether the number of immigrants nowadays should be reduced, a 24.4 percentage point difference was seen, with 'Strong Republicans' having higher levels of support for reducing the number of immigrants by a lot. For other categories: America should exclude illegal immigrants and immigrants increase crime rate, 'Strong Republicans' and 'Strong Democrats' had hardly any difference in responses, with 'Strong Republicans' having slightly higher resistance to immigration.

One could have predicted that the level of 'Strong Republicans' would be higher in terms of resistance to immigration, however, it was not expected that the level of resistance for immigration from 'Strong Democrats' trailed so closely to that of 'Strong Republicans'. This pattern was seen during both the Bush and Obama administrations. This could lead to the assumption that public opinion did not sway the public's opinion on the matter of immigration during these administrations, considering both presidents presented rather positive rhetoric on the matter. Bush was a member of the Republican party, given his positive rhetoric on immigration, one could have expected a slight increase in the support of Republican respondents for immigration, had presidential rhetoric had an impact on the public's opinion.

During Trump, the greatest and only polarization observed, due to a lack of data provided in the GSS data set, was seen regarding whether the number of immigrants nowadays should be reduced, a 24.2 percentage point difference. Respondents who voted for Trump were seen to have greater support for reducing the number of immigrants by a lot, than did Clinton voters. The resistance of Trump supports to an increase in immigration could be attributed to the negative



rhetoric provided by President Trump regarding the issue, and his constant rhetoric regarding building a physical barrier along the Mexican-American boarder.

Initially, I had hypothesized that presidential rhetoric would influence public opinion, resulting in higher levels of rejection for immigrants during the Trump administration. This hypothesis came about after reviewing theories brought forth by other scholars surrounding political rhetoric on public opinion. Some argued that politicians successfully influence public opinion by appealing to emotions, using phrases such as “illegal alien” and “law breakers” to elicit an emotional reaction (Flores 2018). They also argued that negative messages about immigration have a greater influence on shifting public opinion (Flores 2018; Westen 2019). Considering that the overall rhetoric tone for Trump was negative, this caused me to believe his rhetoric would lead to higher levels of rejection for immigrants during his administration.

Media was also a big component for the topic of political rhetoric on public opinion. Researchers concluded that media shaped how and what opinions were formed by the public, which led to politicians reframing what was covered by the media (Haynes, Merolia, and Ramakrishnan 2016). The presidential rhetoric included in the literature review was broadcasted through the media, to address a mass public on the issue of immigration, allowing me to relate it to framing theory. In framing theory, the presidents would have depicted immigrants in a light that would ultimately get their agenda across. Social constructionism also played a role in my hypothesis. In social constructionism people are influenced by interactions and communications, I believed the public’s interactions with the president’s rhetoric would lead to a shift in public opinion on immigration. Overall, these theories were not supported by the present study.

A sub-category for confidence levels was included in the study to showcase the public’s opinion towards specific government entities. Confidence levels in the Executive Branch of

Federal Government, allowed us to see how confident the public was with the president and congress. Essentially, all three branches of government play a pivotal role in passing policy. Public support has been found to benefit the president and congress when attempting to pass policy. Establishing the public's confidence level could help us predict how successful the president and congress might be at passing policy on immigration. Ultimately, for confidence level in the Executive Branch of Federal Government, the greatest polarization was seen in 'hardly any' confidence. Obama had the highest numbers for 'hardly any' confidence by conservatives across the board, while Trump had the highest numbers for liberals, as expected. However, even for "a great deal" of confidence, liberals did not have large numbers during Obama's administration, and the same applied for conservative during Trump, opposite to what one might have inferred. The data for confidence levels in the Executive Branch of Federal Government infers that the president and congress might not have public support when attempting to pass policy on immigration.

Abortion was also included in the study as a sub-category. Abortion, much like immigration, is a topic that has been discussed by presidents for decades. Presidents tend to take a stance on the issue of abortion, making it a topic at the forefront of many presidential campaigns. Abortion is a clear example of the importance of presidential rhetoric, actions are being taken, allowing for rights to be removed. On June 24, 2022, Roe v. Wade was overturned, it was a constitutionally protected right to abortion, which was ended after nearly 50 years. It was overturned in a 6-3 ruling, in which all three Supreme Court members appointed by former president Trump were part of the majority (Tumin 2022). Millions of people will be impacted by this ruling, as they would be if a monumental decision like this was made regarding immigration policy.

Regarding the data for abortion, there was not much polarization observed throughout administrations. Obama voters did hold more support for abortion than both McCain and Trump voters, under any circumstances. Even so, the difference was not as drastic as expected given the differences in abortion rhetoric, with McCain and Trump voters trailing closely behind Obama voters. The majority of both McCain voters in 2008 and Trump voters in 2016 were in support of abortion, differing from the rhetoric provided by both presidential candidates.

The results could conclude that presidential rhetoric did not sway the public, as the data results do not correspond with the rhetoric presented by the presidents on the topics of immigration and abortion. The confidence levels sub-category allows us to see that the confidence in the president is there. However, most respondents lean towards ‘only some’ confidence in presidents that share the same political party as them, which may not result as satisfactory when trying to accomplish change in policy and overall presidential success.

A few limitations were present throughout the research process. First, the lack of data available for the Trump administration. Survey data was available for the entirety of the Bush and Obama administrations, however, only the first year of the Trump administration was available. This resulted in my study focusing solely on one year of data for each presidential administration. Another limitation that presented itself was the lack of variables pertaining to immigration. Overall, the most variables pertaining to the topic were found in the 2014 data set, which corresponded to the Obama administration, not allowing for a consistent comparison of all variables regarding immigration, throughout all three administrations. The sub-category of confidence was the only category in which there was a data set for each of the presidential administrations. Further research could revisit this topic once the GSS data expands to cover the entirety of the Trump administration.

## **Conclusion**

This study allowed for a look at presidential rhetoric on immigration and its effects on public opinion. Previous researchers examined presidential rhetoric, but none looked at the effects of presidential rhetoric on the public's opinion regarding immigration, throughout three presidential administrations. The GSS data used in this study allowed me to compare all three presidential terms, regarding the public's opinion on major topics, with immigration being the focal point. During all three presidential terms, most respondents, regardless of conservative or liberals, held 'only some' confidence in the executive branch of federal government. Regarding the immigration sub-category, polarization could be seen between Bush and Obama, although it is not drastically different. Considering Bush and Obama had similar rhetoric pertaining to immigration that is to be expected. However, many of the variables for immigration that were present during the Bush and Obama administrations were not present during the Trump administration, making it difficult to compare. Even so, when looking at acceptance of immigration in comparison to Hilary voters, Trump voters were strongly opposed to the increase of immigration, and the majority believed the numbers should be reduced.

The GSS data lacked during the Trump administration. However, when the data was available, a difference could be seen among all three administrations. A look into the literature found that Trump was in fact the president with the most rhetoric opposing immigration in America. Ultimately, it was concluded that my hypothesize was not supported, there was not enough evidence supporting that there were higher levels of rejection towards immigration during the Trump administration.

In formulating the rhetoric tone for each president, I did not conduct a systematic coding and content analysis. I turned to the media and reviewed speeches and statements made by the president on the topic of immigration. I picked specific quotes based on what best represented the presidents overall take on the matter. The presidential rhetoric quotes in the literature review, do not speak on what someone believed the president meant, they allow the reader to hear the words that were spoken directly by the presidents about their stance on immigration. My goal was for the reader to have a clear understanding by the end of the literature review of what type of rhetoric each president had on the topic.

This study is important because it speaks on the influence the presidents have on the public's opinion on a major topic. Many scholars argued that in being able to impact public opinion, presidents could influence other political elites and have an upper hand on congress. It is believed that swaying public opinion could lead to overall success for the president. The public could essentially give the president a lot of power to push his own agenda, which in turn could affect a lot of people, in this case the entire immigrant community. Future work needs to continue to focus on the impact of presidential rhetoric on the American people and their opinions on immigration, as this could be something that changes the lives of many, including our immigrant population.

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## Appendix

Variables	Definition
ABANY (DEPENDENT)	Abortion if woman wants for any reason.
ABDEFECT (DEPENDENT)	Strong chance of serious defect.
ABHLTH (DEPENDENT)	Woman's health seriously endangered.
ABRAPE (DEPENDENT)	Pregnant as result of rape.
CONCLERG (DEPENDENT)	Confidence in organized religion.
CONFED (DEPENDENT)	Confidence in executive branch of federal government.
CONJUDGE (DEPENDENT)	Confidence in United States Supreme Court.
CONLEGIS (DEPENDENT)	Confidence in congress.
EXCLDIMM (DEPENDENT)	America should exclude illegal immigrants.
IMMAMECO (DEPENDENT)	Immigrants good for America.
IMMCRIME (DEPENDENT)	Immigrants increase crime rate.
IMMRGHTS (DEPENDENT)	Legal immigrants should have same rights as Americans.



IMMSTATS (INDEPENDENT) -Box A 'greencard' or Box B 'US citizen, student, work or tourist visa, undocumented, refugee or asylee	R's current immigration status right now.
KIDSAWAY (DEPENDENT)	Child born abroad of American should become citizen.
KIDSHERE (DEPENDENT)	Parent of American born child should become citizen.
LETIN1A (DEPENDENT)	Number of immigrants nowadays should be.
PARCIT (INDEPENDENT) -Both US Citizens or Neither US Citizens	Were your parents' citizens of America.
PARTYID (INDEPENDENT) -Strong Democrat or Strong Republican	Political party affiliation.
POLNEWS (INDEPENDENT) -Several times a day or once a day.	How often use media to get political news.
POLVIEWS (INDEPENDENT) -Liberal or Conservative	Think of self as liberal or conservative.
PRES08 (INDEPENDENT) -Obama or McCain	Vote Obama or McCain.
PRES16 (INDEPENDENT) -Clinton or Trump	Vote Clinton or Trump.
USCITZN (INDEPENDENT) -US Citizen or Non-US Citizen	Is R US Citizen.