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**Concern over Immigration and Support  
for Public Services**

Eric McGhee and Max Neiman  
Public Policy Institute of California

**Abstract**

This paper presents data and analysis suggesting that immigration as an issue has ramified on to a broader policy agenda than “just” immigration. We show that, controlling for a wide range of political and demographic variables, those who say that immigration is the most important problem facing the state of California are more likely to want a smaller government that provides fewer services. However, we also find that this link weakens as the number of people concerned about immigration grows. The results suggest that public concern over immigration can be, within some range, a potent means of rallying voters against government. This potential, however, weakens as the proportion of individuals concerned about immigration rises beyond a certain level.

**KEYWORDS:** immigration, public services, public policy, California

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## **Concern over Immigration and Support for Public Services**

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### **Introduction**

There is a long research tradition that connects attitudes about immigration to attitudes about government in general. According to this argument, the welfare state is premised on a certain concept of community: the shared burdens and benefits of the welfare state are acceptable so long as everyone shares the same culture as well. Immigration then shatters this sense of the body politic, and government increasingly appears to be an institution that takes from one's own community and gives to a different one. Yet despite the long theoretical tradition behind this idea, existing empirical research on the topic has generally failed to explore the potential for immigration to be exploited as a means of fighting the size and scope of government. If there is a link between concern about immigration and support for public services, how robust is it? Does it extend beyond a small community of voters who care passionately about the issue?

Focusing on survey data produced at the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) between 1998 and 2008<sup>1</sup>, we investigate the characteristics of those individuals who indicate that immigration is the most important issue facing the state of California as well as explore the contextual characteristics that are plausibly connected to the growth of public anxiety over immigration in recent years. We then explore the extent to which concern regarding immigration persists as an important predictor of nonimmigrant-related policy preferences, even after adjusting for other factors that ordinarily are associated with both concern for immigration as well as such policy issues as education, health care, and general tax and expenditure issues. We confirm that the issue of immigration ramified on to a broader policy agenda than "just" immigration, but we also find that this connection is limited to a relatively small community of intense policy demanders. The analysis and conclusions have implications for understanding and managing this divisive issue.

### **Why and How Should Social Diversity Affect Public Policy?**

There is much social theory and research linking increasing heterogeneity in the population to higher levels of social tension and conflict. Scholars interested

in theorizing about broad social change have long concerned themselves with the influence of changing demography and economic structure on institutions and the relationships among groups (e.g., Durkheim 1997; Giddens 1977). Of particular interest is the way the sudden arrival of poorly incorporated social groups who lack shared social rules or beliefs challenges the social solidarity of an existing order. Lewis Wirth's seminal article on "Urbanism as a Way of Life" (1938) anticipates the tensions posed by increasing social heterogeneity within the confines of fixed, urban places. Standard economic theory also claims that for local public goods (Tiebout 1956) there exist markets that are more efficiently provided by homogeneous groups, because larger, socially more heterogeneous jurisdictions will have greater diversity in public service tastes and more disagreement and conflict over policy preferences. The result is higher transaction costs and higher aggregate levels of dissatisfaction with the mix of services provided in a socially heterogeneous jurisdiction (Bish 1971).

Put differently, greater social diversity increases the percentage of residents who are distant from the average (median) voter's preferences, making the average resident less satisfied with the extant mix of public services. The result is likely to be decreasing regime support, lower political trust, and declining support for transfer payments or redistributive policy (Atkinson and Stiglitz 1980: 502–04; McCarty 1993; Hetherington 2005). Consistent with this tradition, Money (1999), Gimpel (1999), and Bishop (2008) discuss the contributions made to national disputes by the increasing differentiation of populations into distinct, local constituencies, a process that immigration accentuates. The social psychology literature also contends that greater diversity implies a stronger basis for individuals to form identities around different groups. The result is a tendency to perceive one's own group—"us"—in competition, if not in conflict, with "them" (Blalock 1967; Bobo 1983; Oliver and Mendelberg 2000).

Empirical research has long suggested that greater social diversity increases conflict (Alba and Nee 1997; Branton 2005; Brubaker 2001). For example, white antipathy towards blacks and white support for antiblack politicians has been associated with increases in the percentage of blacks living in an area or jurisdiction (Blalock 1967 and 1990). Glaser (2003) has demonstrated in experimental manipulations that white support for affirmative action declines as the percentage of blacks in a stipulated area increases. Hero and Tolbert (1996) found that higher levels of social diversity resulted in lower state Medicaid expenditures. Hero (2003) found that increases in social diversity, particularly resulting from higher levels of minority populations, produced increased severity in sentencing policy. At the local level, Alesina, Baqir, and Easterly (1999) discovered in their study of ethnic diversity in U.S. cities, as well as states, that increased heterogeneity predicted lower spending on redistributive programs. Moreover, with respect to local services, Rice (2001)

confirmed that greater social diversity was associated with perceptions of lower levels of government performance.

Similarly, Quillan (1995) and McClaren (2003) revealed that opposition to immigrants in two separate European Union nations increases as the share of non-European community immigrants rises. Finally, a wide variety of studies have found that higher levels of social diversity in advanced nations, particularly as a consequence of immigration, are associated with lower support for and declining satisfaction with the social welfare state, taxes, and general support for social welfare spending (McCarty 1993; Alesina and Glaser 2004; Soroka, Banting, and Johnston 2003).

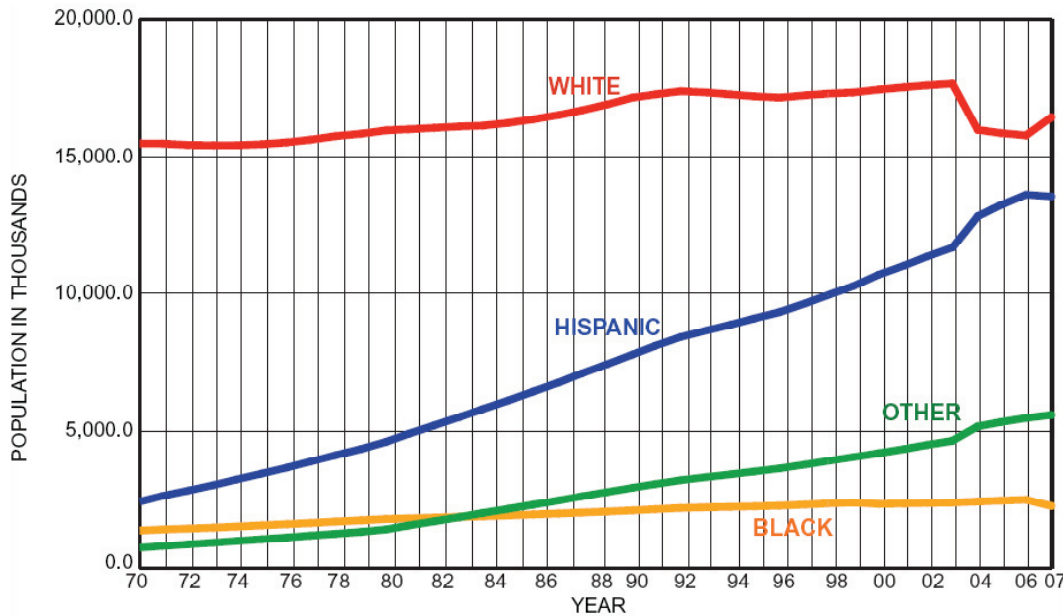
What are the implications of this relationship between immigration as an issue and general attitudes about government? Does it make immigration an effective means of mobilizing the public against government? Or are those who care about immigration already antigovernment in their political perspectives? The existing literature has suggested a relationship between immigration and attitudes about government, but it has not put that relationship into a broader political context. Exploring the scope of the relationship is the goal of this paper.

### **Demographic Change in California and the Influence-on-Policy Thesis**

California grew rapidly throughout the 20th century. Today, the state has about 37 million people and is 150% more populous than Texas, the second largest state. The state also has the highest number and percentage of foreign born population in the U.S. and leads the nation with a minority population of more than 20 million. From 1970 to 2000, the Latino share of the state population increased from 12% to 32% and the Asian population increased from 3% to 12%, while the non-Hispanic white residents' share dropped from over three fourths of the state's population to a little less than half (Figure 1). By 2000, California had become the second "minority majority" state (after Hawaii) with no ethnic or racial group constituting a majority. Indeed, the absolute number of whites in California by 2005 is approximately the same as it was in 1970, while the number of Latinos grew from under 3 million to approximately 13 million by 2005.

Over the coming decades, California's foreign-born population is expected to grow at a slower pace, accounting for about 30% of California's state residents by 2030 (Myers, Pitkin, and Park 2005). But ethnic diversity will continue to increase. Domestic Latino births will be the highest contributor to California's new population growth. By 2030, Latinos will be up to 47% of the state's population, and by 2040 they will be California's majority.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, the non-Hispanic white

**Figure 1. Demographic Groups In California, 1970-2007**



Note: Beginning in 2004, the “other” category includes the race/ethnic group of multi-racial.

\*Source: California Department of Finance. Between 2000 and 2007, 80% of the “other” category is comprised of “Asian.” See: <http://ag.ca.gov/cjsc/glance/cht18.php>

population share will continue its dramatic decline. By 2030 it is expected that non-Hispanic whites will comprise only 29% of California’s population.

The decline in the non-Hispanic white population in California is viewed as a central issue for the state’s politics, particularly considering the state’s increasing reliance on direct democracy. California’s likely voters are disproportionately white and do not reflect the diversity of the population. Seven in 10 of the state’s likely voters are white (72%), but whites make up under half (46%) of the adult population. Latinos, on the other hand, represent only 14% of voters, but represent 32% of California’s population (Baldassare 2006). Non-Hispanic whites continue to be the key voice for many relevant policy decisions that will affect the future of the state.

The potential connection between this rapid demographic change and the state’s politics has not gone unnoticed. Peter Schrag, a long-time observer of the state’s politics, has stated the point well in several places:

... for good reasons or bad, Californians’ willingness to support schools, colleges and other major public services depends on three interacting sets of

variables: one is the state of the economy. The second is the extent to which voters and taxpayers feel that those services aren't swamped by waves of immigrants so large that their needs can never be adequately met. The third is the extent to which the users of those services and the citizens who pay and vote for them are—and are perceived to be—members of the same community (Peter Schrag, *San Diego Union-Tribune*, November 28, 2003).

Similarly, in his latest assessment of California society and politics, Schrag (2006: 240) states:

. . . the most systematic comparative studies—both at the local level and among nations, and through history—reinforce the commonsense notion that, the more similar the beneficiaries and voters are, the more likely the latter will be to provide generous support for schools, roads, social services, and other programs.

Of course, the corollary is that the more dissimilar are the clients of public programs and voters who pay for these programs, the more miserly will be the latter.

There is, in sum, an emerging conventional wisdom and it goes like this: in contrast to earlier periods, immigrants arriving in the United States in recent decades are coming primarily from Latin American and Asia. The rapid growth in nonwhite immigrants in places like California, it is claimed, produces a kind of generalized reluctance to support public services, especially among non-Hispanic whites. In fact, the rate of immigration and demographic change in California not only makes the state an outlier on these measures, but also an ideal place to test the political implications of diversity.

### **Data and Analysis**

Our goal is to explore the robustness of this link between concern about immigration and attitudes about government services. Is it the province of a small community of individuals who are persistently both anti-immigration and anti-government? Or does it reach beyond such a community to influence the attitudes of individuals throughout the broader public? The answers to these questions tell us something about the implications for this issue as a wedge to press support for or opposition to government programs in general. Our objective is not to demonstrate that concern about immigration explains attitudes about government better than any other issue. Instead, we seek to establish only whether those who are concerned about immigration connect that concern to feelings about government, independent



of other important political opinions such as feelings about elected officials or the state of the economy, and broader predispositions such as partisan identification and ideology.

We measure concern about immigration using the open-ended “most important issue” question from the Statewide Survey of the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC). PPIC runs an ongoing series of surveys of the California public about questions of politics and policy. The surveys are conducted from 10 to 12 times per year and draw a random-digit-dial sample of about 2,000 respondents each time. Interviewers code responses to the most important issue question into a number of different categories; we code any immigration-related response into a single category. In this paper, we refer to this category as “immigration is the most important issue” or “concern about immigration.”

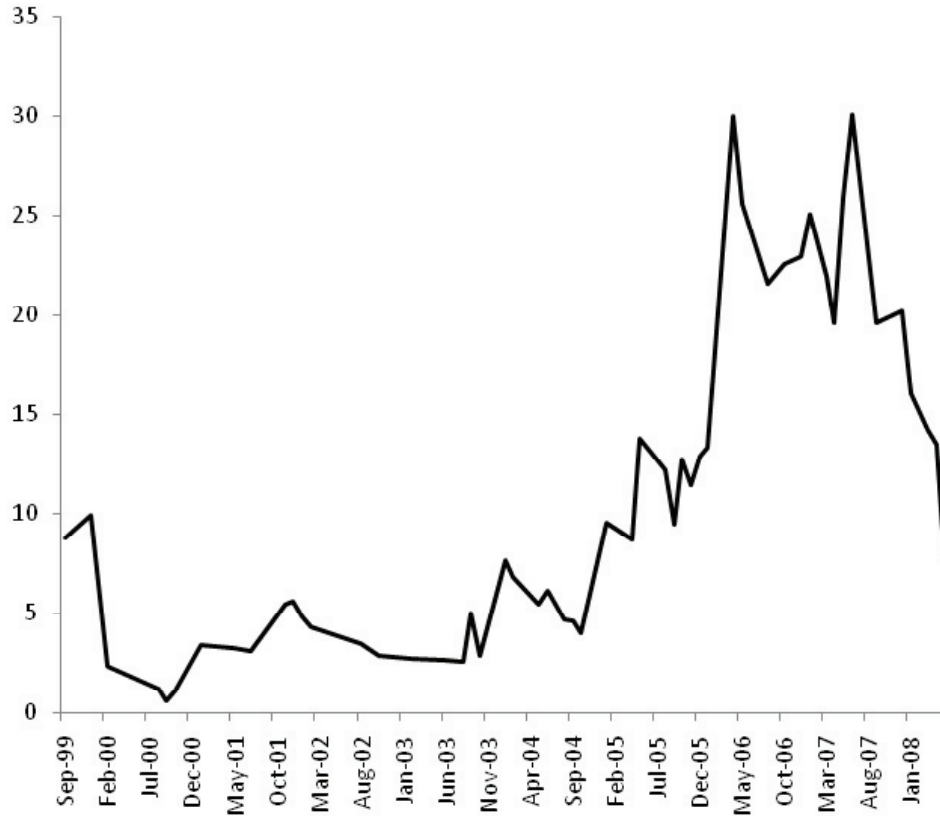
Over the past few years, the percentage who are concerned about immigration in this sense has fluctuated widely, ranging from as low as approximately 3% in the fall of 2000 to as high as 32% in the Spring of 2007. Figure 2 displays the trend in this statistic. This tremendous variation suggests that a large immigrant population alone is not enough to prompt concern about immigration—political events must activate the issue. Moreover, not all political events are created equal in this sense. Neither the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, nor the question of driver’s licenses for illegal immigrants that suddenly hit the public agenda prior to the recall election in 2003 produced much change in the time series. Our purpose here is not to explain this trend, but we will offer speculation later about its consequences for the link between immigration and government that is our primary focus.

To gauge general opposition to the public sector, we use a question that asks respondents to choose between a government with higher taxes and more services and one with lower taxes and fewer services. We code this variable one for lower taxes and fewer services and zero otherwise. Thus, if our suspicion is correct, the relationship between concern about immigration and this size of government question should be positive: those who are concerned about immigration will want a smaller government with lower taxes. In short, we are suggesting that those who claim immigration is their most important policy concern are viewing immigrants and immigration negatively.

This link between immigration and attitudes about government implies a certain degree of ethnocentrism. Only those who believe immigrants will make outsize demands on the public sector *and* who view immigrants as fundamentally different from themselves will be less willing to support government as a result. This makes it likely that non-Hispanic whites—who constitute a small share of the current immigrant population—and Latinos—who are largely the public face of immigration today—will not only have different opinions about immigration but different feelings about the implications of immigration for government programs. Thus, it will



**Figure 2. Percent Identifying Immigration as the Most Important Issue**



be important for us to examine both non-Hispanic whites and Latinos separately to see if this expectation is confirmed.

A casual comparison between individuals who say immigration is their most important concern and their counterparts who list any number of other diverse issues as the most important facing California suggests large differences (Table 1). Among non-Hispanic whites, an individual who indicates that immigration is the most important issue facing the state is considerably more likely to indicate an anti-immigrant sentiment on a variety of issues. Do individuals with concerns over immigration as an issue come to be less supportive of government as we measure it? If so, are such effects independent of other factors that might promote a general dislike of government?

This analysis presents two important challenges. First, to the extent possible, we must show that attitudes about immigration are not simply a reflection of other opinions, predispositions, and demographic characteristics. Attitudes about immi-

**Table 1. Percentage of Non-Hispanic White Respondents Indicating an Anti-Immigrant Position, Based on “Most Important Issue”**

<b>Policy Preference</b>	<b>Other Issue Most Imp’t</b>	<b>Immigration Most Imp’t</b>
• Give priority to immigrants with education, jobs, skills, rather than family unification	54%	70%
• Disapprove of Bush’s handing of immigration issue	64%	81%
• Immigrants are a burden to California	43%	73%
• Oppose providing health care to illegal immigrants	63%	90%
• Minutemen should be allowed to patrol border	37%	80%

gration must reflect concern with immigration *per se*, not something else that might account for attitudes about the public sector.

Second, we must show how the influence of this issue on other policy domains evolves as more people become mobilized to it. Those who are persistently concerned about immigration, even when the total percentage of residents concerned about immigration is otherwise low, might reflect a subcommunity of people who see an explicit link between immigration and the size of the public sector. That does not mean that anyone who comes to view immigration as an important issue will manifest the same pattern. As the proportion of people concerned about immigration grows, the “newly concerned” might see it from different perspectives and connect it with different policy debates. Thus, we need to identify the limits on the effect of this issue as it increases and decreases in salience.

We begin with a model that explains preferences for larger or smaller government as a function of identifying immigration as the most important issue. To ensure that concern about immigration is not driven by other factors, we include a wide a range of controls in the model. First, we include other opinions that might be proximate to attitudes about smaller government: respondent's approval of the governor, opinion of the state economy, and feeling about whether the state is heading in the right or wrong direction. The gubernatorial approval variable is multiplied by negative one for Democratic governors, so we also include a dummy variable for the party of the administration.

Second, we include longer-standing predispositions: ideology and partisan identification (as measured by party registration). These are included as separate dummies for liberals, conservatives, Democrats, and Republicans, leaving moderate independents as the reference category. Finally, we include a number of demographic controls: age, income, education, number of years in current residence, home ownership, and birth country (U.S. or other). Because we have degrees of freedom to spare, we enter age, income, and education as separate dummies for each category of these variables. We also add a dummy variable for each survey in order to control for effects that might be unique to particular surveys. Finally, to examine the effect of ethnicity, we run models separately for non-Hispanic whites and Latinos. Because the dependent variable is dichotomous, we estimate the model with a logistic regression.

The results of this estimation are presented in Table 2. The results for non-Hispanic whites indicate that concern about immigration remains a statistically significant predictor of preferences about the size of government, even with the numerous controls we have included in the model. Most of our control variables are also statistically significant and of the expected sign. Liberals, Democrats, and those who expect a good economy support a larger government, while conservatives, Republicans, those who approve of a Republican governor, and the elderly, the wealthy, and homeowners prefer their government smaller in size with lower taxes. Individuals who believe that the state is heading in the wrong direction are more likely to support fewer services and lower taxes. Education, birth country, and years in current residence seem to have less effect in this model.

The results are very different for Latinos. The link between concern about immigration and a desire for smaller government is positive, but with a coefficient less than one-third the size of the estimate for non-Hispanic whites. In fact, the model for Latinos is a poorer fit in general: almost none of the variables is as large as its counterpart in the model for non-Hispanic whites.

The practical effect of these coefficients can only be estimated through predicted probabilities, which are shown in Table 3. Most of the dummy variables—the opinion items, the categories of education, nativity, and home ownership—are pre-

**Table 2. Explaining the Desire for Smaller Government**

	Non-Hispanic Whites		Latinos	
	Coeff	S.E.	Coeff.	S.E.
Immigration is most important issue	0.77***	0.08	0.20	0.12
<b>Proximate Opinions</b>				
Gubernatorial approval	0.64***	0.06	0.56***	0.09
Party of governor	-1.13***	0.14	-0.46	0.24
Good economic times ahead	-0.17**	0.06	-0.07	0.09
Right/wrong direction for state	0.39***	0.06	0.19*	0.09
<b>Predispositions</b>				
Liberal	-0.85***	0.06	-0.11	0.10
Conservative	0.85***	0.06	0.35***	0.09
Democrat	-0.72***	0.06	-0.47***	0.10
Republican	0.42***	0.07	0.46***	0.13
<b>Demographics</b>				
<b>Age</b>				
25 – 34	0.47***	0.13	0.07	0.14
35 – 44	0.69***	0.13	0.33*	0.14
45 – 54	0.75***	0.13	0.46**	0.15
55 – 64	0.82***	0.13	0.61***	0.17
> 64	0.74***	0.14	0.69**	0.21
<b>Income</b>				
\$20K - \$40K	0.18	0.10	-0.03	0.11
\$40K - \$60K	0.25*	0.10	0.14	0.13
\$60K - \$80K	0.40***	0.11	0.47**	0.15
\$80K – \$100K	0.41***	0.11	0.42*	0.19
\$100K – \$200K	0.43***	0.11	0.36*	0.18
> \$200K	0.46**	0.15	0.51	0.39
<b>Education</b>				
High school graduate	0.06	0.16	-0.07	0.11

**Table 2. cont.**

Some college	0.10	0.15	0.14	0.12
College Graduate	0.13	0.16	0.10	0.15
Post-Graduate	-0.29	0.16	-0.14	0.20
Native born US	0.02	0.10	0.65***	0.09
Homeowner	0.34***	0.06	0.10	0.09
Years in residence	-0.04	0.03	0.02	0.04
(Survey dummies)				
Constant	-0.71**	0.23	-1.50***	0.22
$\chi^2$	3192.95***			2272.57***
-2 * log likelihood	10169.40			171.09
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.24			0.07
N	9724			2257

\*p<0.05 \*\*p<0.01 \*\*\*p<0.001

sented as the difference between zero and one. The age and income dummies had positive and monotonically increasing effects, so we have simply presented the difference between zero and one for the highest category of each. The ideology and party variables are shown as the difference between one extreme of the scale and the other, while years of residency is the difference between its minimum and maximum values. In each case, all variables but the one of interest have been held at their sample means.

The most striking finding in Table 3 is the strong effect that concern about immigration has for non-Hispanic whites, relative both to other variables in the model and to the same effect for Latinos. The estimates suggest that roughly 18 points separate a non-Hispanic white respondent who cares most about immigration from one who names a different issue. Only ideology and partisanship have effects that are clearly larger, while age, income, and approval of the governor are roughly comparable in size. The point is not that the effect of concern about immigration is larger than any conceivable combination of variables, but that it is on a par with the effects of many other important attitudes, opinions, and demographic variables.

By contrast, the same effect for Latinos is only about four percentage points, and fails to reach conventional standards of statistical significance. This is true despite the fact that Latinos are just as likely to express concern about immigration as non-Hispanic whites at each point in time. When Latinos speak of concern

**Table 3. Predicted effects on desire for smaller government**

	Non-Hispanic Whites		Latinos	
	1st Diff.	S.E.	1st Diff.	S.E.
Immigration is most important issue	0.18*	0.02	0.04	0.02
<b>Proximate opinions</b>				
Approve of governor	0.15*	0.01	0.12*	0.02
Good economic times ahead	-0.04*	0.01	-0.01	0.02
State headed in wrong direction	0.09*	0.01	0.04*	0.02
<b>Predispositions</b>				
Conservative – Liberal	0.40*	0.01	0.09*	0.02
Republican – Democrat	0.27*	0.01	0.19*	0.03
<b>Demographics</b>				
Age	0.18*	0.03	0.14*	0.04
Income	0.11*	0.04	0.11	0.09
Education				
High school graduate	0.02	0.04	-0.01	0.02
Some college	0.02	0.04	0.03	0.02
College Graduate	0.03	0.04	0.02	0.03
Post-Graduate	-0.07	0.04	-0.03	0.04
Native born US	0.01	0.02	0.13*	0.02
Homeowner	0.09*	0.02	0.02	0.02
Years in residence	-0.03	0.02	0.01	0.03

\*p<0.05

about immigration, it apparently means something different than when non-Hispanic whites offer the same response.

In the remainder of the paper we explore the extent and robustness of this link between concern for immigration and support for government among non-Hispanic whites. Support for government in this context is focused on how disposed respondents are to trading off service levels for lower tax burdens. Those who prefer higher taxes and more services are viewed as generally more supportive of government, while those who choose lower taxes and fewer services are viewed as less supportive. Concern about immigration might strongly predict attitudes about government for middle-of-the-road or conservative respondents, but might have little effect on

the liberals and Democrats most inclined to support government in the first place. If true, this would suggest immigration as an issue has only minor effects outside of the enduring influence of long-term predispositions among ideologically conservative, small-government adherents.

To explore these issues, we ran the model for non-Hispanic whites with interaction terms for ideology and partisanship. These interaction terms are shown in Model 1 of Table 4, and they do suggest some differences, but not always in the expected directions. The effect of concern about immigration is *stronger* among liberals, just as it is among conservatives. Concern about immigration has a somewhat smaller effect for Democrats, as predicted, but the effect for Republicans is no different than for independents. At any rate, only two of these interactions for Model 1 are statistically significant at conventional levels.

Figure 3 shows how the predicted impact of the most important issue question varies by ideology and party. Each bar shows the effect of concern about immigration for that combination of party and ideology. The asterisks at the top of the bars indicate effects that are statistically significant at the  $p < .05$  level. Just as the coefficients suggested, the impact of concern about immigration is larger among liberals than any other category: a minimum of 0.15 for Democrats and a maximum of 0.28 for Independents. The effects are generally smaller for Democrats since their interaction term is negative, but the effect only falls to statistical insignificance for moderate Democrats, and even then just barely so.

Finally, we must question whether these effects persist through time, and in particular, whether they persist during periods of high salience for the immigration issue. When the salience of immigration increases, more respondents identify it as the most important issue. One could easily imagine that those newly or belatedly concerned about the issue would be fundamentally different from those who had been concerned early on or when the issue was less salient, that is, when relatively low percentages of respondents reported immigration as the most important issue facing the state. Respondents who indicate that immigration is the most important problem as part of some wave of individuals motivated because of some catalyzing event or intense national debate might be ephemeral in their concern or propelled by different fundamental motivations; such individuals might hold less tightly constrained views regarding immigration-related issues in that they are less likely to be linked to some core value, such as a commitment to limited government (Converse 1964; Peffley and Hurwitz 1985). This would suggest that as the issue grows in salience, its linkage with attitudes about government might attenuate. If true, this would place some boundaries on the issue's influence. At some point, higher salience, evidenced by larger numbers of individuals being concerned about immigration, would not necessarily link up with a preference for less government.



**Table 4. Explaining the Desire for Smaller Government—Interaction Models**

	(1)		(2)	
	Coeff.	S.E.	Coeff.	S.E.
Immigration is most important issue	0.74***	0.18	1.00***	0.11
<b>Interactions</b>				
Immigration X liberal	0.51*	0.23	--	--
Immigration X conservative	0.23	0.19	--	--
Immigration X Democrat	-0.49*	0.21	--	--
Immigration X Republican	-0.05	0.20	--	--
Immigration X salience	--	--	-0.04**	0.01
<b>Immigration salience</b>	--	--	-0.03	0.05
<b>Proximate opinions</b>				
Gubernatorial approval	0.65***	0.06	0.64***	0.06
Party of governor	-1.13***	0.14	-0.28	1.27
Good economic times ahead	-0.17**	0.06	-0.17**	0.06
Right/wrong direction for state	0.39***	0.06	0.39***	0.06
<b>Predispositions</b>				
Liberal	-0.90***	0.06	-0.85***	0.06
Conservative	0.82***	0.07	0.85***	0.06
Democrat	-0.67***	0.07	-0.72***	0.06
Republican	0.42***	0.07	0.42***	0.07
<b>Demographics</b>				
<b>Age</b>				
25 – 34	0.47***	0.13	0.47***	0.13
35 – 44	0.69***	0.13	0.70***	0.13
45 – 54	0.75***	0.13	0.76***	0.13
55 – 64	0.82***	0.13	0.82***	0.13
> 64	0.74***	0.14	0.75***	0.14
<b>Income</b>				
\$20K - \$40K	0.18	0.10	0.18	0.10
\$40K - \$60K	0.24*	0.10	0.25*	0.10
\$60K - \$80K	0.39***	0.11	0.39***	0.11

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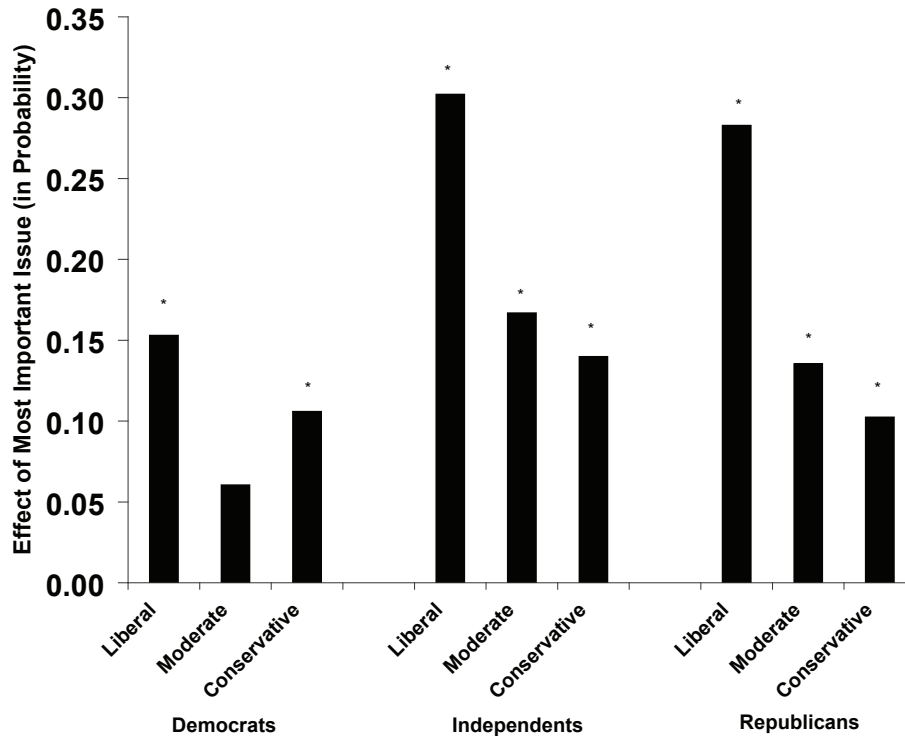
\$80K – \$100K	0.40***	0.11	0.41***	0.11
\$100K – \$200K	0.42***	0.11	0.43***	0.11
> \$200K	0.46**	0.15	0.46**	0.15
Education				
High school graduate	0.06	0.16	0.07	0.16
Some college	0.09	0.15	0.10	0.15
College Graduate	0.13	0.16	0.13	0.16
Post-Graduate	-0.29	0.16	-0.28	0.16
Native born US	0.02	0.10	0.02	0.10
Homeowner	0.35***	0.06	0.34***	0.06
Years in residence	-0.04	0.03	-0.04	0.03
(Survey dummies)				
Constant	-0.69**	0.23	-1.09	0.60
$\chi^2$	204.13***	3205.37***		
-2 * log likelihood	10158.22	10156.98		
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.24	0.24		
N	9724	9724		

\*p<0.05 \*\*p<0.01 \*\*\*p<0.001

To gauge the presence of this sort of effect, we interacted concern about immigration with the overall percentage of respondents in the survey who named immigration as the most important issue, which we refer to as “immigration salience.” Higher percentages are assumed to indicate greater overall salience for the immigration issue, and so a stronger “diluting” effect. The interaction term should therefore be negative: as salience increases, the effect of concern about immigration should decline. The results of this exercise are presented as Model 2 in Table 4. There is, indeed, a negative and statistically significant effect from the interaction term, suggesting that the impact of concern about immigration weakens as more respondents rally to the cause. According to this interaction term, the coefficient on concern about immigration ranges from a high of 1.34 to a low of 0.49 over the full range of immigration’s salience as an issue.

Once again, we must translate these coefficients into predicted probabilities to see their true effects. Figure 4 shows the effect of concern about immigration as a function of the size of the population that identifies immigration as their top concern. The coefficients reveal that the estimated impact of concern about immigra-

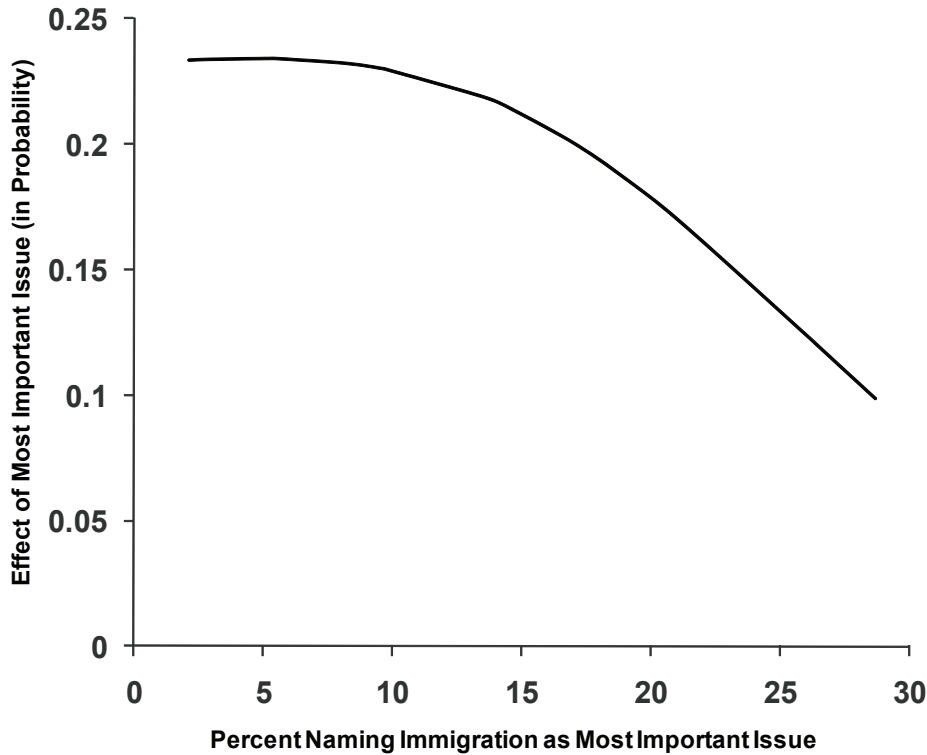
**Figure 3. Predicted Effect of Concern about Immigration for Non-Hispanic Whites, by Ideology and Party**



tion declined as the salience of the issue increased (i.e., the proportion of respondents reporting immigration as California’s most important problem). The results here—which situate the effects within the larger distribution of the independent variables—suggest this effect is substantial. At the lowest levels of immigration salience (where smaller proportions report immigration as the most important problem), the effect of concern about immigration is over twice as large as at the highest levels, with the steepest drop-off after about 10% of the electorate expresses concern. There appears to be a point at which bringing more voices to the issue of immigration dilutes its influence on other policy questions.

In Figure 5, we weight the numbers in Figure 4 by the percentage of the population at each point in time who say that immigration is the most important problem. This gives a sense of the *total* effect of concern about immigration on support for public services—both the marginal effect of concern and the share of the population that harbors that concern. Measured this way, the effect of concern about immigration peaks when about 20% of the non-Hispanic white population expresses

**Figure 4. Predicted Effect of Concern about Immigration for Non-Hispanic Whites, as a Function of Issue Salience**

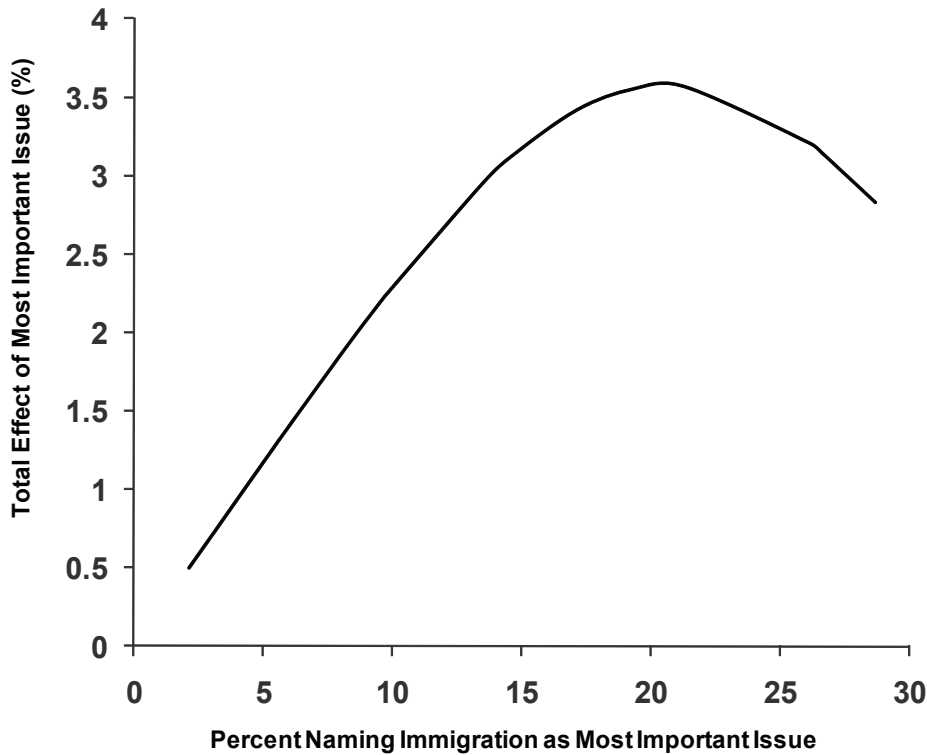


concern, after which it begins to decline as the decrease in the effect outpaces the increase in the share of the population to which it applies. Thus, there may still be political gain from mobilizing non-Hispanic whites to the issue, but only to a point.

### Conclusions

We use a very rich, detailed data source from a state in which immigration has periodically been a front-burner issue for years. The findings support some of the traditional theories regarding the corrosive effect that increasing social diversity has on reducing public support for a more active, larger public sector. Moreover, the effect seems robust and broad, affecting individuals across the ideological and partisan spectrum. The point is not that concern about immigration is the *most* important predictor of attitudes about preferences regarding the mix of taxes and pub-

**Figure 5. Total Effect of Concern about Immigration for Non-Hispanic Whites, as a Function of Issue Salience**



Graph displays the effect of most important issue question weighted by the percent in the population who offer each response.

lic services, but that concern about immigration is an independent and important factor that is not simply a proxy for other common opinions and predispositions.

At the same time, our findings underscore the complexity of the story. When the proportion of individuals who express concern about immigration exceeds a certain level, there appears to be a rapid decline in the issue's influence on broader attitudes about government. This finding, if confirmed, has profound implications for those who might have, at some point, viewed immigration and rising social diversity as a possible wedge issue or a way in which to mobilize support for smaller government. Promoting the cause for smaller government and lower taxes through the immigration frame might have defined limits. Indeed, the failure of the GOP to galvanize voters around the immigration issue in the 2006 congressional elections might have reflected the pattern we have described here.

Our findings in this project likely reflect other complex relationships. The link between concern about immigration and preferences about the size of government is apparently conditional, but the precise nature of the conditions is not clear. There is a substantial literature regarding the variety of causes of anxiety, concern, apprehension, and hostility over immigration, and not all of them necessarily or conceptually link up to public sector size (Barkan 2003; Esses and Armstrong 1998; Citrin, Green, and Wong 1997; Simon and Lynch, 1999; Hopkins 2009). Even substantial collective *angst* about immigrants and immigration does not neatly result in less support for public services or taxes (Crepaz 2008; Mau and Burkhardt 2009).

What might be driving this variation? Those who are distrusting or resentful of people who are different from themselves probably form a core group whose concern about immigration never wanes. Indeed, “ethnocentrism” of one sort or another is probably an important missing variable in our analysis, as it is in much analysis of public opinion (Kinder 2003). This would explain why those who are newly mobilized to the issue do not make the same link to government: their concern about immigration is not fed by a deeper sense of threat from the immigrant population. It would also help explain why the link between immigration and public services does not emerge among Latinos, since they are far less likely to be threatened by their own ethnicity.

However, the same people also vary in their level of concern, perhaps because the issue is managed differently at different points in time. Why, for example, did the immigration issue explode in the United States and California in the 2003–2006 period and not during the steep economic downturn in the early years of the new millennium or even after the attacks of September 11, 2001? Was it the presidential and congressional proposals for immigration reform and the resulting furor over “legalization” and “amnesty?” Or was it images of marches for immigrant rights that featured as many Mexican flags as American ones? If so, how does a reaction of this sort differ qualitatively from ethnocentrism? The differing motivations and contexts in which the immigration concern emerges, in short, can likely affect the degree and type of public sector preferences affected.

Unfortunately, these qualifications must remain speculative, since our data offer no way to measure these sorts of distinctions. We rest our case, for the time being, on having demonstrated that the link between attitudes about immigration and attitudes about public services is large but circumscribed. Uncovering the various circumstances and dynamics that link immigration issues to a broad array of policy preferences should provide an array of topics for future research.

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### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> These surveys are implemented by PPIC's Survey Group, directed by the Institute's president, Mark Baldassare.

<sup>2</sup> The Asian population will experience only a modest increase and is projected to account for 13% of the population by 2030.

## **Erratum**

The article was originally published with the designation: Volume 1, Issue 1 (2009) on the cover-page. This was corrected to: Volume 2, Issue 1 (2010) on Friday, January 29, 2010.