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Words Really Can Hurt You: The Potential Impacts of Political Rhetoric on Secondary School Students in the San Diego-Tijuana Border Region

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree Master of Arts

in

Latin American Studies

by

Haley Grace Daigle

Committee in charge:

David Fitzgerald, Chair
Phoebe Bronstein
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2019

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The Thesis of Haley Grace Daigle is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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Chair

University of California San Diego

2019

DEDICATION

To Mom, for always believing in me, and for providing me with every opportunity to grow and become.

To Bernie, for being my rock and my dearest friend.

To Robert, Liz, and Jaclyn, my family, for their constant encouragement and support both in this project and in my life.

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To everyone who always believed in what I could achieve, and who encouraged me to reach higher.

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Finally, I'd like to extend acknowledgements to the MMFRP program at UCSD, and everyone involved in it. The experience was truly inspiring and eye-opening, and allowed me to tackle my research interests in full. I am deeply grateful to everyone who makes the project possible.

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Words Really Can Hurt You: The Potential Impacts of Political Rhetoric on Secondary School Students in the San Diego-Tijuana Border Region

by

Haley Grace Daigle

Master of Arts in Latin American Studies

University of California San Diego, 2019

David Fitzgerald, Chair

This thesis examines the potential impacts of anti-immigrant political rhetoric in the Sweetwater Union High School District in San Diego, California at two points in time, 2016 and 2018. A great number of these students are either themselves born in Mexico or have one or more parents who were. Therefore, these students and their families were the explicit targets of the immigration policy debate of the 2016 election. To explore the extent to which this

potentially impacted these students, I divide them into groups based on their own place of birth and that of their parents. Based on survey data gathered as part of the Mexican Migration Field Research Project, I examine various areas of the student experience, including the rates at which bullying occurred. The results suggest that at the same time that anti-immigrant rhetoric and policy increased, students reported more bullying, particularly along the lines of their usage of Spanish, while also reporting an increase in the frequency of political discussions in their homes. Drawing on past historical patterns, I highlight these trends and the need for action to be taken at the school level to improve students' educational environment, and suggest that these trends might occur on a larger scale elsewhere in the country, given the demographic composition of the district surveyed.

Chapter 1: Introduction and Methodology

Introduction

> *"We have people coming into the country, or trying to come in — and we're stopping a lot of them — but we're taking people out of the country. You wouldn't believe how bad these people are. These aren't people. These are animals."*

PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP AT A CALIFORNIA SANCTUARY STATE ROUNDTABLE (TRUMP 2018A)

The centrality of the immigration debate to American politics, especially in the 2010s, cannot be overstated. It has been considered a wedge issue in multiple elections, and was arguably *the* central issue of the 2016 presidential campaign. It would be an arduous, and perhaps redundant, effort to detail every single instance of anti-immigrant rhetoric in recent memory, but it would be more than sufficient to say that this rhetoric has proliferated in the past few administrations. While the sheer brazenness of the rhetoric might be a newer feature of the political discourse, the sentiments it expresses are not: just three decades ago in California, those who voted for the passage of Proposition 187—which would have barred non-citizens from using any public services, including health care and schools—justified their position by claiming that "if [immigrants] are proud Mexicans, [they should] go back to bloody Mexico" (Jacobson 2008:97). This sentiment was not uncommon, and it fostered an image of Mexican immigrants a dangerous, unwanted, and criminal entity that must be removed. In fact, much of the rhetoric promoted by those who were in favor of Proposition 187 targeted the Mexican population as being proverbial leeches on the federal system; not so unlike the rhetoric seen today.

This process of rendering a group of persons as illegal is sometimes called illegalization, and it is a prominent component of immigration rhetoric today. This can have the effect of creating fear (of deportation, of violence, of family separation) and, in other cases, can negatively affect the self-esteem of those it targets. The question that spurred my research explores a narrower, more targeted investigation of this phenomenon: specifically, how does

illegalization function in the high school classroom? Additionally, is there a connection between the increase in anti-immigrant rhetoric and negative experiences in classrooms at the San Diego-Tijuana border region? If so, then to what extent are they impactful? What is the strength of the connection? What are the potential ramifications of these effects as students graduate, and enter universities and/or the American workforce?

While much research has been done on the effects of public policy and rhetoric on the adult undocumented* population, this investigation that grounds this thesis will turn the focus inward and focus on specific areas of student experience. I explored these areas by becoming part of the Mexican Migration Field Research Program (MMFRP) at the University of California, San Diego. The project surveys students in high schools in both San Diego and Tijuana about various dimensions of their school experience at different points in time to see how and if the results change over time, and the potential implications of these changes. Because this thesis examines American political rhetoric, I draw from the data gathered from the students currently attending school in San Diego and compare the change in responses to certain questions between 2016 and 2018. This study aims to close the gap on existing research on immigrant populations by examining how secondary students feel about their own futures as a result, and attempts to contextualize those findings within the broader political discourse.

The rest of this chapter (Chapter 1) details the methodology of the project, both in terms of how the raw data was gathered, and in terms of the specific analyses used to examine the data. Chapter 2 delves into a deeper historical context of the United States-Mexico relationship, with particular focus on the rhetoric and policy surrounding undocumented immigrants from the

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* Throughout the thesis, "undocumented" will be used in place of "illegal" immigration, as the latter term connotes a certain degree of criminality and illegality that I wish to avoid in discussing this population.

Clinton administration through the present Trump administration. Chapter 3 explicates the terms of the theoretical framework and reviews the relevant literature; specifically, it defines "illegalization" and identifies areas in which it appears in rhetoric and policy, with a special focus on the rhetoric that surrounded the 2016 US presidential election onwards, as this was synchronous with the administration of the survey. Additionally, Chapter 3 touches on other research performed in schools that is similar to my own project, to connect this research to that which has already been done. Chapter 4 reports the data on relevant survey questions and provide analysis of that that data might suggest about what students are experiencing. Chapter 5 concludes with limitations, areas for further study, and final thoughts. I believe my research and the project which gathered this data to be relatively unique, and that they provide a new angle that is often unexplored in US-Mexico immigration debate. To explore this topic, I became part of the MMFRP, a project whose methods and mission are detailed below.

Methodology

The MMFRP is a cross-university, cross-border initiative designed to collect information from secondary students in both San Diego and Tijuana in order to gauge their uniquely binational experience and the challenges they face. The program is part of a collaborative project with UCLA's Civil Rights Project, El Colegio de la Frontera Norte (COLEF) in Tijuana, and the Universidad Autónoma de Baja California (UABC), also in Tijuana (Mungaray, Floca, and Matus 2017). Southern California is a unique cross-border region, as the state has a 40% Latinx population, and one out of every three Mexican immigrants to the US settle in California (Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies 2016). Because this area is so unique in terms of the students shared between countries, and because many Mexican-born children are spending a considerable amount of time in U.S. classrooms, it is important to understand the broader issues of access and mobility faced by these students. Despite the uniqueness of this area, I believe the results are

generalizable to some degree, and I later elaborate upon this in Chapter 3. The results of the questions I examine echo the results of other case studies done in schools in other parts of the country, and the data I gather here adds to that. Additionally, the project has brought its invaluable data to California lawmakers in hopes of creating policy-level solutions for the unique challenges faced by this vulnerable population group.

To gather this data, the project administered comprehensive survey of approximately 100 questions to these students that covers a plethora of information surrounding their daily home and school lives. The survey was provided in both Spanish and English, with students having the choice of preferred language, regardless of location of data collection. Schools on both sides of the border were selected using a probability weighted, two-stage method that, among other things, took the academic performance index of the schools and their demographic composition into account, in order to obtain data that was statistically representative for the districts surveyed (Mungaray et al. 2017). Within each school, the classrooms were selected randomly and provided a survey, both on laptop computers (and in 2018, tablets) and on paper.

In 2016, the project was able to gather data from two San Diego school districts: San Diego Unified and Sweetwater Union High School District in 9th and 10th grade classrooms. The project gathered information about the schools' academic performances via the academic performance index (API), which is a measure standardized by the state of California (Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies 2017). Schools were then divided into three groupings based API, and half of the schools in each API tier were selected. Some schools refused to participate, and when that happened, a new school from the same API tier was selected to take its place (ibid). To ensure maximum participation in the survey, the classrooms selected were most frequently English or physical education courses: classes in which all 9th and 10th graders were required to

enroll (ibid). After the selected schools agreed to participate, the research team went in to oversee the administration of the survey; I was part of this effort in 2018. Two weeks before the survey was to be administered, researchers met with the teachers of the classrooms that had been selected and delivered a presentation on the purpose and nature of the study, especially stressing the survey's voluntary nature (Mungaray et al. 2017). Every student in both years had the option to decline to take the survey, but over 90% of students opted to participate (ibid).

In 2018, the project intended to return to all of the same schools to repeat the survey but, due to scheduling concerns, was only able to return to Sweetwater Union High School District. The classrooms selected in the 2018 survey were, once again, random, but were 11th and 12th grade classrooms in an attempt to re-capture many of the same students who had been surveyed the first time, two years prior. This method fails to capture students who changed schools, dropped out of school, or moved to the other side of the border in the meantime. Although these students would have potentially rich data, it would be costly and difficult to try to re-locate every participant in the original 2016 survey. In terms of the analysis that frames this project, while it would be possible to connect as many repeat respondents from 2016 to 2018 to measure change in responses at the individual level, doing this would then mean that the data would no longer be representative of the district surveyed. The data gathered in 2018 retains its representativity of the district that the project was able to survey; in other words, the results seen in the 2018 data can be assumed to be true of the entire Sweetwater Union High School district. The data in this analysis relies on a direct comparison of responses to survey questions in 2016 and 2018 within this district

Although the issue of legal status of the students is one that is of great interest to the project, one limitation of this data-gathering method is that, in order to maximize participation

rates, the MMFRP made the decision to eliminate questions of this nature in order to maintain the confidentiality and safety of the participants. While this means that the exact details of who is and is not undocumented were not gathered and therefore are not known, this cost is greatly outweighed by the benefit of the safety and comfort of the participants. Additionally, asking such a question would necessitate parental approval as a condition to participation, as the students are minors. This restriction would eliminate many students from participating in the survey and, thus, this limitation is acceptable in order to obtain data that is more representative.

In order to analyze the results, Qualtrics was used to separate out the data and compare groups. Although the aforementioned limitation still applies in the sense the percentage of undocumented students remains unknown, the analysis instead divides the students into generational "birth cohorts" as a proxy. As the central phenomenon being measured, illegalization, just as often relies on the *perception* of being undocumented as it does on that *reality*, dividing students into groups that simulate the standard immigrant generation is thus suitable for examining the process. To elaborate, the students are divided into four groups: 1) students born in Mexico with two Mexican-born parents (thus emulating the "first generation" of immigration); 2) students born in the United States with two Mexican-born parents (the "second generation"); 3)students born in the United States with only one parent born in Mexico (also the "second generation"); and finally, as a control group, 4) students born in the United States with two parents born in the United States (making these students "third generation" or later, sometimes called "3+").

As this project examines the potential impacts of specifically American political rhetoric on these students, only the San Diego data is used in the following analysis. The literature gathered examines United States policy and rhetoric on students of Mexican origins within the

United States; therefore, extending this analysis to the students who completed the survey in Mexico would potentially skew the results in either direction and not be perhaps as representative of the specific phenomenon under investigation.

Additionally, as this is a comparative survey, the data used must be directly comparable. Although the project was able to survey two San Diego school districts in 2016, those of San Diego Unified and Sweetwater Union High School, due to scheduling and timing, the project was only able to examine Sweetwater Union High School District in 2018. Therefore, responses gathered from the San Diego Unified school district in 2016 are eliminated from the analysis. This leaves one remaining methodological stipulation, that of case selection. While the data gathered was careful to be statistically representative of its districts, as noted above, the school district examined in this analysis is hardly representative of the entire United States, and does not claim to be. However, this particular case is useful for the analysis of the question *because* of its extreme nature. The logic of the selection of such a demographically extreme case, then, is that if the impacts of this phenomenon can be measured even in this district, which has an overwhelmingly Latinx-majority, then these results could also potentially be seen in other areas of the country: perhaps on an even larger scale. In other words, if students are feeling increasingly outcast and isolated even in an area where students of Mexican origin and the usage of Spanish are accepted parts of everyday life, then this sense of otherness might be amplified in a district where Latinx students are a minority. The following table shows the composition of the San Diego students analyzed, per the groups outlined above:

Table 1: Composition of Survey Respondents in Sweetwater Union High School District in San Diego, by birth cohort, as a percentage of total respondents in the district

	2016	2018
Mexican-born, two Mexican-born parents	6.25% (95)	8.84% (100)
US-born, two Mexican-born parents	23.22% (353)	30.50% (345)
US-born, one Mexican-born parent	17.17% (261)	20.60% (233)
US-born, two US-born parents	21.91% (333)	19.01% (215)
Total Respondents	1,520	1,131

Note: these groupings are not the only four possibilities, hence why the percentages do not equal 100%

The middle two groupings—students born in the United States with at least one Mexican-born parent—notably comprise a higher percentage of the total amount surveyed in 2018 than in 2016. Additionally, due to scheduling issues, fewer total students were surveyed in this district in 2018 than in 2016; however, this is typical given the convenience sampling method: for example, the students surveyed were those that were physically present that day, classrooms themselves are of unequal size, and some students opted out of the survey. However, as can be seen in Table 1, students who have at least one parent born in Mexico—that is, students who could be classified as either first- or second-generation immigrants—constitute a sizeable portion of the students surveyed in both years, highlighting the importance of exploring the specific issues they face in schools.

Chapter 2: Historical Context

The United States and Mexico, as neighbors, have a unique and intertwined history as far as immigration is concerned. It is of no small importance that the much of the landmass that was Mexico—and, indeed, the land in which this very research occurs—now belongs to the United States, and even to this day the border region has an intensely fascinating cross-cultural feel. California, specifically, has been the site of the backlash against undocumented immigration starting in the 1990s and spreading across the country, potentially because it remains the state with the largest undocumented population (Wroe 2008). Southern California remains a unique center of cross-national interaction, and this carries over to the schools surveyed, all of which are Latinx-majority schools.

Beginning with the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which eliminated many previous immigration quotas set by country of origin, the United States has been at once relatively welcoming and discouraging of immigration from its southern neighbor. The last major comprehensive immigration reform was in 1986 with the Immigration Reform and Control Act, which provided paths to naturalization for many undocumented immigrants. The first area of focus is the Clinton era, in which undocumented immigration was a hot-button political issue both in the larger United States and in California specifically. While this was certainly not the first time this is true, the review begins here because there is a marked shift towards enforcement as a tactic to promote later reform: an approach that was repeated in the Obama years, unsuccessfully. From there the review will move forward, from reforms attempted in the Bush era that were thwarted by the post-9/11 War on Terror politics, to Obama and the era of zero net migration alongside mass deportation, and finally a brief description of the preliminary policy outcomes of the 2016 election. This historical context provides insight into the United States' often contradictory attitude in regards to immigration from Mexico, and the rhetoric, policies,

and attitudes that can potentially filter down to the level of influencing students' own experiences in school.

The Clinton Era: Tough on Enforcement: 1993-2000

The Clinton years saw the emergence of the "spectacle" of border enforcement, as coined by De Genova (2004) and further discussed in the literature review. At this time, political commentators and news outlets had been noting a numerical increase in the nonwhite population of California, with some even referring to the process as "Latinoization" (Wroe 2008). This fostered an anti-immigrant sentiment among the dominant white population that quickly spread across the country. The Clinton era opened with a series of operations along the US-Mexico border to address the issue of undocumented immigration. The joint and near-simultaneous Operations of Hold-the-Line and Blockade in the El Paso/Juárez region in 1993 and Operation Gatekeeper in the San Diego/Tijuana region in 1994 were early and harsh attempts at an intervention. Both of these policies were intended to bring increased visibility to the efforts to secure the border in order to project strength, and were implemented as a response to accusations from the right that not enough was being done to combat the issue of undocumented immigration.

In the enforcement of Operation Blockade, numerous human rights violations enacted by the Border Patrol actively criminalized unauthorized migrants attempting to cross the border; that is, the very act of crossing became enforced as a deportable offense, instead of as a simple misdemeanor (Dunn 2009). This sets a clear historical precedent for the type of rhetoric and policies being proposed today, and these previous governmental actions are not so long in the past that they are out of the memory of immigrant parents of children in school today. This spectacle of border enforcement lingers in the minds of both the undocumented immigrants

themselves and in the public at large, and contributed to the construction of an image of undocumented Mexican migrants as "illegals" in the public consciousness (De Genova 2004).

Operation Gatekeeper quickly followed the lead of the El Paso operations just one year later in San Diego, at a time when California was already in a period of heightened anti-immigrant sentiment due to the passage of Proposition 187 and arguably helped the state deliberately construct a negative image of the "illegal alien." (Jacobson 2008; Suárez-Orozco 1996). In their efforts to publicly enforce immigration laws, state actors simultaneously facilitated the growth of the cross-border economy while also strictly dictating who was and was not allowed entry, further complicating a region that is already a permeable and fluid mix of Mexico and the United States (Nevins 2010). Fascinatingly, in research conducted since this era of increased enforcement, many scholars contend that these increased security measures did not even influence whether or not an individual would migrate, but instead they merely displaced where border crossings would be attempted, and increased the physical danger of doing so due to the inhospitable nature of the desert climate at the border region (Cornelius 2005; Durand and Massey 2003; Fuentes et al. 2007; Hicken, Fishbein, and Lisle 2011; Sisco and Hicken 2009). In fact, it could be argued that these measures and the stigma that became associated with being undocumented—one of many forms of illegalization that will be discussed below—put would-be migrants directly in harm's way, since it forces them to take more dangerous routes into the United States. These dangerous routes both take the form of crossing scorching deserts on foot, and in the form of paying increasingly expensive and unregulated *coyotes* to be smuggled into the country.

At the same time Operation Gatekeeper was well underway, a different California law was making national headlines: Proposition 187. Also marketed as the "Save Our State"

initiative, Proposition 187 would have barred undocumented immigrants from accessing public services, including public education (Martin 1995). The measure passed, with 59% of California voters approving. The measure was ultimately never enforced and was the subject of many legal battles; the first initial refusal to enforce the law came from W. Matthew Byrne, a federal judge, who issued a restraining order on its enforcement (The New York Times 1994). Pete Wilson, the then-governor of California who earlier championed the proposition, challenged this ruling, but this was ultimately dropped by the following governor, Gray Davis. (Lesher and Morain 1999).

Regardless of the intent of the policy, it was arguably advertised and later passed in such a way that relied on racial rhetoric, on making othering the undocumented population of California (Garcia 1995). This opposition often took the form of creating an us vs. them argument, in which allowing the undocumented to use state resources was described as an "undermining of our [American] laws, our language, our culture, our history" (Ono and Sloop 2002:32). Indeed, sectors of opposition did not use the euphemistic language of earlier years, but outwardly admitted that "[i]t's not just an immigration thing; it is a racial thing" (Ono and Sloop 2002:144) A few years later, Proposition 209 was brought to the floor, arguably spurred by the rhetoric of Proposition 187; this measure would have eliminated government-sponsored affirmative action programs in the state (Hasian and Delgado 1998). The publicity around Proposition 187 both inspired the debate of future harsh measures within California itself, and laid the foreground for the national measure that was to follow soon after.

The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (IIRIRA) was enacted to revise the earlier Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, and was largely a response to the perceived growing crisis of undocumented immigration. The IIRIRA reformed many aspects of the immigration system, but one chief provision concerned the reclassification of what

offenses could be considered aggravated felonies, and from there, which undocumented people could be deported. It also recharacterized certain offenses as felonies that were simply misdemeanors before, and this reclassification, some would argue, impacted the records and livelihoods of legal permanent residents (LPRs) as well as those of undocumented immigrants (Johnson 2001). While the law ostensibly provided relief *from* deportation to LPRs, it has been argued that this had the opposite effect, to the point where the mental health of the Latinx population might have been impacted due to increased fear of deportation (Hunker 2000; Shu-Huah Wang and Kaushal 2018).

However, the more controversial element of the IIRIRA was Section 287(g). This provision effectively allows the Department of Homeland Security to deputize certain state and local officers to enforce immigration policy (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) 2018). This was a precursor to further joint federal-state cooperation on immigration enforcement, such as Secure Communities (2008-2014; 2017-). While the provision was created in 1996 with the rest of the law, it was more heavily promoted after the September 11th attacks in such a way that, arguably, linked terrorism with undocumented immigration (Menjívar and L. J. Abrego 2012). This federal action, combined with local measures as outlined above, contributed to an increasingly hostile political environment around undocumented immigration and, indeed, around undocumented immigrants themselves, the vast majority of whom are not criminals.

In the Clinton years, both federal and local laws were passed that contributed to the formation of the image of an undocumented person as a racialized and criminal subject. The most notable among these were the aforementioned Operations Gatekeeper, Blockade, and Hold-the-Line, which brought increased visibility to those seeking to enter the country, and increased militarization at the border. It would appear that the border enforcement policies of this era

contributed to the later stigma seen around undocumented immigration in later years that would continue to plague the Latinx populations of the United States for years to come. This provides pertinent background into the social context in which binational children are educated and raised, including being viewed as a dangerous and deportable Other. Additionally, for the second-generation students examined in the survey, the policies and rhetoric of the Clinton era contribute to the fear potentially felt by some of their parents. As Chapter 3 elaborates, the stigma surrounding immigration from Latin America, documented or not, can potentially follow children of immigrants through their lives as a form of "multigenerational punishment" (Enriquez 2015). The attitudes that took hold in this administration would only expand in the administration to follow.

The Bush Era Paradox: 2000-2005

The Bush administration at the turn of the 21st century presented a number of paradoxes in its relationship with Mexico and its efforts to crack down on terrorism following the catastrophic terrorist attacks on September 11th, 2001. This administration, combined with the significant and regime-shattering election of Vicente Fox as president in Mexico the same year, had previously seemed poised to work together to produce significant reform to undocumented immigration in a way that would work for both countries. On February 16, 2001, Fox and Bush attended a historic meeting in which they worked to address the migration question; a meeting which resulted in both parties feeling hopeful for a new and different future of US-Mexican relations (Domínguez and Fernández de Castro 2009). At this meeting, President Bush acknowledged that the longstanding drug problem between the countries resulted from American demand, and Mexico announced its sympathy for the United States in its decision to bomb Iraq, signaling an unprecedented cooperation between the countries (Leiken 2001). This era of

cooperation, however, was incredibly short-lived due to the September 11th attacks, and the lack of sympathetic response from Fox in their wake.

The September 11th terrorist attacks changed many things about American life including its approach to immigration policy. Just nine days after the attacks, President Bush himself warned against scapegoating and criminalizing entire groups of people and against living in fear as a response (Bush 2001). However, in the wake of the resulting fear and panic, there were frequently calls for what some have deemed the "securitization" of the border: that is, strengthening America's defenses in a way that clearly identified and attempted to keep out those who didn't belong, often mapping this quality onto physical features such as skin color (Rodríguez 2008). This embodied racialization, in fact, has itsroots in prior immigration policies that more explicitly singled out would-be immigrants for their race, and marking them as inferior, such as the Chinese Exclusion Act (Ngai 2004). In some ways, though the targets changed, the ideology and justification for exclusion of certain people from the country is merely a continuation of previous attitudes, and the laws that were to follow only emphasize this.

One notable law to come out of the post-9/11 paranoia was the PATRIOT Act, which imposed heavier restrictions on any non-citizen seeking to enter the United States for any reason or, to put this another way, putting the spotlight on anyone deemed illegal. This and subsequent laws, including the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in 2002 and the creation of Immigration Customs and Enforcement (ICE) in 2003, have been said to constitute "the criminalization of immigration," and the corresponding "moral panic" in the wake of the terror attacks only served to further ostracize immigrants and indeed, anyone deemed as othered (Hauptman 2013). In the case of the PATRIOT Act specifically, Muslim-Americans and Mexican-Americans were singled out and racialized as dangerous terrorists, thereby

institutionalizing the concept of the illegalization of these people (Alden 2008; Correa 2013; Hauptman 2013; Rodríguez 2008).

Synchronous to these events, the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act was proposed for the first time by Senators Dick Durbin (D-IL) and Orrin Hatch (R-UT) in 2001. It has never officially passed into law and has instead been enacted by means of executive order, notably by President Obama. The DREAM Act was designed to provide deportation relief and education opportunities, and potential permanent residency, to undocumented youth provided they met a certain set of criteria, such as their date of entry to the US, and their lack of a criminal record (Durbin 2009). The bill was brought to the floor numerous times later on, in the Obama years, and never gained enough votes to pass into law—many lawmakers argued that such a measure should not be voted on without increasing enforcement. Still, it is important to note the bipartisan reform efforts that this bill represents: alongside the massive uptick in immigration enforcement, there were efforts to ease the transition from immigrant to LPR, especially for young people. This arguably sent mixed messages to immigrant communities, who seemed to be simultaneously scorned and welcomed into the country. At times, the executive branch seemed to welcome the arrival of new immigrants into the country, seeking to ease their transition with the aforementioned measures, and at the same time, there were plans to construct a border fence with the explicit intention of keeping them out, even as fewer and fewer migrants were arriving.

A turning point in how immigration was conceived and discussed came in 2005, which represented the peak of inflow of immigrants from Mexico to the United States. In the following years until at least 2010, the number of total immigrants coming into the United States lowered, and research conducted by PEW Hispanic shows that around this time, return migration back to

Mexico *exceeded* the number of new immigrants, a phenomenon that has been called "zero net migration" (Passel, Cohn, and Gonzalez-Barrera 2012). Despite this statistical reality, the Secure Fence Act was passed in 2006, and called for 700 miles of fencing along the southern border with Mexico (Maril 2011). This measure also authorized the Department of Homeland Security to use new technology in immigration enforcement, including detention facilities and "unmanned aerial vehicles," more commonly referred to as drones (Office of the Press Secretary 2006). This marked a shift in the material reality of the number of immigrants entering the United States that markedly contrasted with the way in which immigration was continuing to be discussed on the national stage as an uncontrolled wave of people coming across the southern border.

In some ways, the Bush administration can present a paradox following the 2001 attacks its discussions of undocumented immigration, simultaneously advocating sweeping amnesty reforms and easier paths to citizenship while also overseeing the construction of a fence along many parts of the southern border. The administration wanted to pass a comprehensive immigration reform bill along the lines of what would become the DREAM Act, but found themselves hampered by their own earlier efforts at ramping up border security as a response to the September 11th attacks to such a degree that Congress was no longer amenable to such a reform (Alden 2008). These new measures included the Secure Fence Act of 2006, which resulted in approximately 700 miles of fencing along the nearly 2000-mile-long southern border with Mexico. The fence not only failed to significantly reduce the rates of immigration into the United States, but also inspired militant anti-immigrant vigilantism in nearby regions (Maril 2011). The fence also inspired some degree of the drastic political polarization still seen in the present era, as it was built with the explicit intention of keeping terrorists out, often conflating terrorists with undocumented immigrants (Tavares 2007). Interviews with undocumented

immigrants and anti-immigrant activists alike suggest that such a polarizing divide is dangerous, sometimes physically, for everyone involved (Eichstaedt 2014). This focus on enforcement would persist into the next administration, even as sweeping change was rhetorically promoted by the new president.

The Obama Years and The Height of Deportations: 2008-2016

While rhetorically it might have appeared that the United States was ushering in a new era of immigration reform, advocating for increased temporary legal protections for youth, the actual proposals offered by Obama did not differ quite so much from those offered by previous president Bush. Near the beginning of the Obama years, in 2009, then-Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano laid out what she called a "three-legged stool" approach to immigration reform, with the legs being "[1] a commitment to serious and effective enforcement, [2] improved legal flows for families and workers, and [3] a firm but fair way to deal with those who are already here" (Napolitano 2009). Napolitano also cited the 1986 IRCA as a "one-sided" reform that didn't deliver the enforcement it had promised (ibid). This very clearly laid out administrative priorities in the years to follow. The focus on enforcement, as in the previous administrations, would remain strong, as would the language of "illegal aliens," a phrase that in and of itself criminalizes and makes a dangerous other of anyone seeking to enter the country. Indeed, this particular phrasing concerning the undocumented has a history that did not begin in this administration, but rather drew on the same language as administrations prior.

It must first be noted that Obama himself was vocally supportive of undocumented children throughout his presidency—advocating to make the DREAM Act a permanent law, and signing the executive order authorizing DACA in 2012. DACA, or Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, granted renewable two-year periods of deportation relief for undocumented people who arrived as children, had completed high school or been honorably discharged from

the U.S. military, and had no criminal record (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services 2016). This provided peace of mind for these young people and enabled them to find employment and to enroll in American universities, although the turbulent, non-permanent nature of the program has been shown to adversely affect university students (Enriquez, Morales Hernandez, and Ro 2018). However, both of these programs were rescinded by the Trump administration in 2017, at the same time Secure Communities, discussed below, was re-instated. Additionally, despite efforts to provide a temporary legal status to many undocumented people, young people in particular, the aforementioned focus on enforcement and deportation created yet another administrative paradox in terms of just how welcome the undocumented truly were.

This focus on enforcement lead to the Obama administration overseeing the most deportations of any administration up until that point: at least 2.5 million immigrants were deported from 2009-2015 (Department of Homeland Security 2018). A good portion of these were under the Secure Communities program (2008-2014; 2017-present), which was a collaboration between federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies to facilitate the removal of "criminal" undocumented immigrants, all overseen by ICE. Some of these immigrants were picked up by law enforcement for misdemeanors and found themselves deported shortly afterwards, and only 52% of those arrested through the program even had a hearing with a judge (Kohli, Markowitz, and Chavez 2011). Many were placed in detention facilities to expedite their removal (ibid). This program contributed to the reason Obama was frequently referred to as the "Deporter in Chief" by immigration activism groups. By 2014, the program was widely criticized as violating numerous human rights, and the Obama administration rescinded the program the same year (Stumpf 2015). Secure Communities is ongoing as of this writing,

having been reinstated by President Trump via executive order at the same time he rescinded DACA and Dream Act protections.

The Obama administration, at least in terms of immigration policy and border enforcement, was mired in contradictions. On the one hand, Obama himself enforced DACA via executive order, ensuring that many otherwise undocumented youths would have the opportunity to receive an education and work in the United States, without fear of deportation. On the other hand, his administration oversaw the implementation of Secure Communities, which some have argued increases racial profiling in arrests, and makes Latinx communities unsafe despite its ostensible goal of deporting only those undocumented who were criminals (Zoghlin 2010). All of this goes to say that while perhaps the rhetoric to follow is more explicit about who it targets than in administrations previous, the undercurrent of restrictive immigration policy and specific targeting of certain kinds of people is perhaps not all that new.

“And Mexico will pay for the wall…”: 2016 and beyond

The speech that kicked off Donald Trump’s ultimately successful campaign for president included the widely shared soundbite “when Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending their best. They’re bringing drugs, they’re bringing crime, they’re rapists—and some, I assume, are good people” (Trump 2015b). This statement was bold in the sense that instead of relying on concrete policy goals as did his predecessors, such as increasing deportations, and cracking down on border enforcement, Trump explicitly equated immigrants, and specifically Mexicans, with criminality. In the same speech, Trump also called for the construction of a border wall between the United States in Mexico, with “build the wall” becoming a rally cry throughout the campaign (ibid). He promised that Mexico would pay for it, something the Mexican government has repeatedly refused to do, and the inability for Congress to reach a deal on wall funding caused the longest government shutdown in US history at the end of 2018 through the beginning months

of 2019. Clearly, the issue of immigration is a signature one to President Trump and his administration, and his specific political rhetoric on the matter will be discussed in the next chapter. While the boldness of the language used is newer, the following literature review demonstrates that illegalizing policy and rhetoric is far from a new phenomenon.

Chapter 3: How Policies and Rhetoric Create “Illegal” Subjects and Fear

This literature review narrows the historical focus of the previous chapter to interrogating how and if illegalization as a result of public policy impacts students who have close ties to Mexico. While the subjects of the survey are not exclusively undocumented, illegalization relies just as often on the racialized perception of an illegal immigrant as it does on that material reality. To examine this, the literature review defines what is meant by illegalization, as well as showing the forms that it takes, particularly as it relates to immigration policy. Then, it examines the dimension of fear specifically created by this phenomenon, most notably the fear of deportation. Finally, it addresses the role of rhetoric and social media in spreading and perpetuating these ideas. Especially in the modern age of social media, it has become much easier to spread stories that contain harsh language, and in turn, this can impact the way certain groups and issues are viewed. Illegalization is but one of the many phenomena that can be spread in this way.

What is illegalization and what forms does it take?

In its most basic terms, illegalization is a process by which a person, or group of persons, are rendered illegal in the public perception. This can be both explicit, in the language of the law, and implicit in political rhetoric. This is a newer term given to a more longitudinal phenomenon, and it finds its deepest roots in the border militarization of the 1990s and gained more traction in the post-9/11 era. Immigrants from Mexico and Mexican-Americans, documented or not, have been targets of this process, along with other immigrant groups. Illegalization is perhaps at its most visible when it is done explicitly, and in the case of the United States, policymakers often engage in this process in the name of security, casting certain individuals as worthy of citizenship and residency in a country, and framing those who are not as dangerous Others. Specifically, the term “illegal aliens” is often used to conjure this specific

kind of castigation. Furthermore, this "illegality" often has the effect of "stigmatizing" migrants and rendering them "suspect in the eyes of society" (Abrego 2008:723). In the current political landscape, classifying a person as illegal or undocumented has also become a racialized category, and indeed, a potential rationale for illegalization as a rhetorical framework is that it might justify "the juridical inequalities of citizenship and alienage as categorical differences that may be racialized" (De Genova 2013:1181). In other words, the process repeats and appears to legitimize itself as time goes on.

Illegalization is the driving force behind what De Genova (2004) calls the "spectacle" of border enforcement policy, in which it readily and clearly becomes apparent who is legal and who is not. This distinction transfers to the physical dimension as well by showing, in no uncertain terms, what an "illegal" person looks like (De Genova 2004). The "spectacle" takes on both federal and local dimensions. A notable example of the "spectacle of enforcement" at the national level was the passage of the Secure Fence Act in 2006, which called for the construction of some 700 miles of fencing along much of the southern border. The spirit of this spectacle has not quite died, as the current administration has made building a wall along the Mexican border a central policy goal, despite the pre-existing fencing from the Secure Fence Act more than a decade prior.

However, the spectacle takes on local forms as well, even in small communities such as Escondido, who banned front-yard parking in 2008 in a move deliberately targeting homes that the city knew housed multiple Latinx families (García 2012). Such attempts are sometimes called "attrition through enforcement," or occasionally "self-deportation" which purports to "[encourage] voluntary compliance with immigration laws rather than relying on forced removal" (Vaughan 2006). By this logic, local communities have made their own laws that

target their immigrant populations, intending to make daily life so difficult that they simply leave and return home, rather than stay in the country. Though this is the explicit goal, the numbers of immigrants even within these communities has remained steady: that is, immigrants are not leaving or self-deporting (García 2012). However, the increasing feeling of isolation, discomfort, and exclusion resulting from policies intended to force certain groups out remains.

The current era is no different in terms of the spectacle around the southern border and its enforcement. In 2016, Donald Trump was elected to the presidency, and no small part of his campaign's message involved portraying undocumented immigration from Mexico as a problem of almost catastrophic proportions. This criminalizing and targeting of Mexican immigrants specifically was notably present in his campaign announcement speech, as discussed previously. In the same speech, Trump made his promise to "build a great wall...on our southern border" with assurances that he "will make Mexico pay for that wall" (Trump 2015b). The kind of language expressed in this particular speech makes assumptions about others based on certain characteristics, including physical ones, and maps deviancy onto those traits, which casts certain individuals as those who belong and others in the role of the Other in the process. In the last three decades especially, the United States has made clear, through its policy and rhetoric, that its southern border with Mexico is a dangerous one and that it must be protected, enforced, and policed.

This enforcement has also been enacted through what can be called the militarization of the border, which involves displays of physical and military might at the border in an attempt to prevent would-be immigrants from crossing. The general reaction to the September 11th attacks comes to mind; the PATRIOT Act cracked down on anyone seeking to enter the United States or, to put this another way, created a "moral panic" in regards to immigration (Hauptman

2013). Others have gone so far as to cite 9/11 as the flashpoint in the "securitization" of the border, a systematic tightening of defenses in order to identify and keep out those who didn't belong (Rodríguez 2008). Even before that, the joint Operation Blockade, in El Paso, and Operation Gatekeeper, in San Diego, contributed to both the spectacle of border enforcement via the increased visibility the border was receiving. These measures increased the militarization of the border: the use of military force to keep would-be immigrants from physically entering the country (Dunn 2009). In the efforts to enforce the aforementioned laws, numerous human rights violations were reported, and these instances served to fuel the flames of nationalist and anti-immigrant sentiment, thereby legitimizing the policies in the eyes of the public at large (Dunn 2009). More recently, alongside President Trump's ongoing commitment to building a wall along the southern border, the administration moved to stop the caravan of Central American refugees with military action. 5,200 troops were sent to the southern border in November 2018 in response to the migrants who at that point were 1,100 miles away from American soil (BBC 2018). This explicitly draws on previous attempts to dam the flow of undocumented migration, as outlined in Chapter 2.

Another form illegalization can take is one that has been termed by some as legal violence. This results when immigration law and criminal law become intertwined with each other and are enforced in a way that actively criminalizes the very act of immigration (Menjívar and L. J. Abrego 2012). The legal violence framework is one that "underscores the central role of law in making possible and providing legitimacy to structural and symbolic forms of violence against immigrants" (Abrego and Lakhani 2015:268). Legality, then, is not something inherent to an individual, but something that has been carefully constructed, something these scholars recognize and proscribe with great importance. Legal violence is thought of in different terms of

most violence; rather than assuming that violence is deviant, violence is instead viewed as inherent to particular institutions and in the way they enforce their policies, and the effects can be seen in everyday life: family, work, and school (Menjívar and L. J. Abrego 2012). This concept can be thought of as referring to the tangible, everyday effects of the illegalization processes outlined above. While this framework of "legal violence" might be especially useful for examining struggles faced by those known to be undocumented, it might be less useful in describing populations where documentation status is unknown, such as the data I gathered for this thesis. Additionally, this framework might become confusing when considering that temporary legal status does indeed protect from deportation, as is its intention, and referring to this as "legal violence" might obscure the issue.

Moreover, immigrants themselves, documented or not, can reproduce this legal violence in mixed-status social networks, a term that refers to social groups where some members are documented and others are not. It has been found that sometimes in these situations, those with documentation can sometimes exploit their undocumented friends, either financially or with the threat of turning them over to ICE and thus, the difficulties of undocumented life can be exacerbated by these "toxic ties" (Del Real 2018). It seems that not only has the criminalizing element of being undocumented become permanent, but that these impacts can extend beyond the original undocumented person into their social network and family. These fears and pressures, then, may exist among the students surveyed and affect how they perceive their own educational futures and their own place in the American education system.

Adding onto these fears and pressures is the state of "perpetual illegality" (Sarabia 2012). This term refers to the closing of avenues of the undocumented, once sufficiently "illegalized" to adjust their status, as the last opportunity for them to do so en masse was the

IRCA in 1986 (ibid). Though it remains possible for some undocumented to attain legal status, including through marriage, what Sarabia refers to is the increasing difficulty of the undocumented to legalize their status in recent years, and that this has been brought about by the increasing criminalization of immigration (ibid). Through "attrition through enforcement," the language of laws such as SB 1070 in Arizona, and Secure Communities (2011-14; 2017-present) actively contribute to both perpetual illegality and legal violence by making undocumented entry a criminal, rather than civil, offense (Menjívar and L. J. Abrego 2012). This makes it difficult for people to enter the country undocumented, for any reason, without being viewed as a criminal. Some have argued that these criminal implications produce a "multigenerational punishment;" that is, that the criminality and legal punishments associated with being undocumented can carry over into future generations (Enriquez 2015). Notably, deportation is a common fear even among the U.S.-citizen children of the undocumented (Abrego 2016; Enriquez 2015; López 2015).

Before moving forward, it would be pertinent to take a moment to note that, although the literature gathered focuses more on how Mexicans and Mexican-Americans are impacted by the process, it by no means suggests that this group is the *only* target of the illegalization phenomenon. Indeed, there are multiple dimensions to consider: for example, the more nuanced *intergroup* conflict between Mexican and non-Mexican Latinxs in the United States, or the larger *intragroup* clashes that result when anti-immigrant activists confuse foreign-born and American-born migrants for each other based on appearances (Jiménez 2008). Illegalization is also a good framework for thinking of the particular kinds of discrimination that Muslim-Americans faced in the wake of the September 11th attacks. Indeed in this time period, the two groups were often lumped together as "terrorists" by those who sought to limit immigration (Alden 2008; Correa

2013; Hauptman 2013; Kanstroom 2007; Rodríguez 2008). While it could be argued that illegalization as a process was cultivated by federal institutions themselves, such as the Border Patrol in their efforts to police the borders (Luna 2008), other argue that the framework does not advocate a solution to this particular kind of discrimination, and needs restructuring in order to find a more equitable solution both for its targets and its perpetrators (Chavez 2014; Menjívar and Kanstroom 2014). In any case, the consensus seems to be that whatever forms illegalization takes, a very specific dimension of fear is created in the undocumented community, one that impacts how they go about their daily lives.

Illegalization's Creation and Perpetuation of Fear

Illegalization, together with the increase in anti-immigrant rhetoric and harsher immigration policies, has struck the hearts of many of America's undocumented with fear. This fear can result from any number of things: the fear of deportation (De Genova 2002; Jefferies 2014b, 2014a; Kanstroom 2007), the fear and stigma of being "outed" as undocumented (Abrego 2006, 2008, 2011; Ngai 2004), or quite simply the fear of not belonging. This fear, however, is twofold: there is the fear on part of non-immigrants that immigrants will change their very way of life, that their presence is a threat, that they will bring every manner of degeneracy with them to the United States, and so forth. To again connect these concepts to the present day, many political commentators and journalists have expressed that the presence of immigrants is indeed a visceral threat. T FOX News host Tucker Carlson best exemplifies this sentiment: in 2018, said on the air that accepting immigrants is "mak[ing] our own country more like Tijuana is now, which is to say poorer, dirtier, and more divided" (Moran 2018). In this instance, just like countless others, immigrants are publicly equated with being dirty, unsafe, unwelcome.

However, the second prong of this fear—that felt by the immigrants themselves—is the area of immediate interest to this thesis. The fear of deportation is perhaps the most common of

these fears; that is, the apprehension that one will be picked up by ICE and sent back to their country of origin. To put it simply, undocumented immigrants are affected "not simply [by] enforcement actions themselves…[but] also the ever-present *fear* of enforcement actions" (Menjívar and L. Abrego 2012). Of course, illegalization, like any social process, is hardly a monolithic force, and it affects different groups of migrants differently. In some cases, this fear can affect the first generation of immigrants more intensely than their children, even if these children are also themselves undocumented (Abrego 2011). For these children who are also undocumented and were brought to the US at a young age—usually called the 1.5 generation—this fear more often than not manifests as stigma, as they feel that that they are in the situation they are in is "unfair" since they "did not [participate] in the decision-making process [to migrate]" (Abrego 2011:349). In other cases, the fear is more tangible: rather than presenting itself as a high-level, theoretical problem, illegalization and illegality are tangible and real in mixed-status families; that is, when the parents are undocumented but one or more of their children are citizens (Dreby 2015). These children are faced with conflicting pressures: fear for their parents' safety and loyalty to them, peer relationships, and beginning to face legal status as a source of inequality either for themselves or for their parents (Dreby 2015).

This fear can permeate parents' and students' interactions with the education system. The ways in which fear interacts with and influences the schooling experience of undocumented children has been termed the "Circle of Silence" (Jefferies 2014a). Although *Plyer vs Doe* (1982) does guarantee the right to a K-12 education to children residing in the US, regardless of citizenship status, misinformation and fear exist among undocumented students and their families, especially in places that have recently been swept up in ICE immigration raids. In some cases, this fear can lead students to delay or forgo high school enrollment (Jefferies

2014b). The Circle of Silence, then, emerges when legal status penetrates the daily lives of students and administrators, parents, and counselors are unsure about how to handle this delicate issue; thus the cyclical nature of the phenomenon is reproduced year after year (Jefferies 2014a). This fear often manifests in parents being afraid to give away information about the legal status of their children, students finding their participation in school activities hampered by their status, and is compounded by teachers who are ill-equipped to handle these sensitive matters (Jefferies 2014a). In one school in Massachusetts, administrators took note of a one-third decrease in the number of students attending following an ICE immigration raid in the city: the undocumented students stayed home out of fear that they, too, would become targets for deportation (Jefferies 2014a). In other words, these students are feeling the fear and stigma surrounding their status, which is reproduced in the environment of the school. The research of this thesis builds upon the findings of these past ethnographies, and surveys students' feelings on a variety of concerns to better understand their effects.

Past literature and research have asked adult first-generation and second-generation immigrants about their own experiences with illegalization, and while some studies have gone so far as to ask secondary school *teachers* how they have seen their students affected, this project's research is unique in that it students if they feel excluded at the very point in their lives in which they are making decisions about where and whether or not to continue on with their education or enter the labor force. Examining students' feelings and reactions on the matter at such a critical point in their lives is essential in determining the effects of illegalization and the fear it can engender, if there are any, at all levels of society. A more recent way that this kind of rhetoric and fear can permeate students' lives is through social media, which has a unique way of propagating messages that is only just beginning to be understood, at the time of this writing.

The role of rhetoric and social media

As the current era unfolds, so too do the studies on the impacts of the current administration and its rhetoric. Analysts have devised all sorts of explanations for how such a nontraditional candidate came to hold the presidency, but the explanations that involve voters' feelings on immigration are the ones of immediate concern to this project. One such explanation that was and continues to be popularly circulated is that Trump was winning most often with white voters without a college education, and that this demographic is what Democrats had to pay attention to if they wanted to win (Cohn 2016). Specifically, it was theorized that the "populist message on trade and immigration" that characterized Trump's message was "all but perfectly devised to attract these voters" (ibid). A related explanation details what was later popularized as economic anxiety among voters, particularly the white working class. According to this model, voters who were doing worse off financially were more likely to support Trump simply because they were suffering economically, and any radical change would alleviate that hardship (Sides and Tesler 2016). Additionally, in Trump's own speeches, the undocumented Mexicans that were crossing the border were conflated with legal immigrants who were conceptualized as "stealing" jobs from working-class voters. Even as Trump continued to characterize immigrants, and Mexicans specifically, as illegals—a term that carries a whole host of connotations with it, as previously discussed—his message of economic populism seemed to resonate with these voters (Trump 2015c).

According to others, the role that race played in mobilizing voters must not be overlooked. This particular line of reasoning suggests that Trump's blunt statements about race, and specifically about Mexicans, were crucial to garnering early support in areas that already had lived experience with this group (Newman, Shah, and Collingwood 2018). This is concurrent with a prominent model in political and media studies called the resonance model, which

postulates that a successful candidate has a basic message that reinforces voters' pre-existing political feelings (Hanson 2011). Following this logic, support for Trump could be expected to be stronger in areas that were *already* navigating a demographic shift towards an increasing Latinx population. While California remains the central site of undocumented immigration—the state alone was home to an estimated 2.2 million undocumented immigrants, roughly 20% of the total number of undocumented immigrants in the country—other areas were beginning to see increases in their own immigrant populations as well (Pew Research Center 2019).

In some cases, this demographic shift manifested in local schools having an influx in students with particular educational needs that they were not equipped to handle, such as English language learning, Spanish-language instruction, and additional curricular support (Smolarek 2018). In a case study in Wisconsin, this educational disparity combined with racial marginalization to produce a situation in which Latinx bilingual students faced a "racially hostile schooling environment and a general lack of investment in their education" (Smolarek 2018:1). The community studied had recently experienced a notable shift in Latinx population, and in this way speaks to the lived experience and pre-existing feelings some areas of the country had about Latinx immigrants. Notably, the state of Wisconsin *did*, by a narrow margin, pledge its electoral votes to Donald Trump in the 2016 election (POLITICO 2016). While this does not necessarily mean that the residents of that state voted solely on the basis of the demographic shift they were witnessing, it is worth noting that these trends—that of a sharp increase in Latinx population and increasingly harsh rhetoric towards them by an eventually successful presidential campaign—did occur simultaneously, potentially speaking to the power of illegalizing rhetoric.

The question that remains, then, concerns whether or not this increased national political conversation trickled down to the students in schools. While the students examined in this study

cannot vote—due to age, legal status, or both—it doesn't mean that they aren't affected by the change in the political landscape or that they aren't talking about it in schools. Studies that interview teachers about their students can give some insight into this question, as teachers are the constant in these students' lives. In some places, teachers reported that their students experienced higher levels of anxiety after the 2016 election than beforehand; in particular, anxiety about the safety and well-being of their families (Rogers 2017). This can be taken in conjunction with the reported increase in political conversations between teachers and their students, specifically, conversations about Trump, in the months following the election (Will 2017). This occurred alongside teachers reporting that "bullying incidents related to national politics had increased" in the timeframe of the survey, after the election (ibid). One teacher reported that although they had "[seen] this dynamic happening on the national level," they were "amazed to see such a mirror of the same thing with 14 to 16 year olds" (Rogers 2017:1). Whether teachers actively encourage it or not, students are most definitely feeling the impact of the national political scene in schools. While studies like these have asked *teachers* if they feel that the political environment in their classrooms has changed over time, it is more difficult to find surveys asking students the same, as the survey in this particular project has done. In this way, the survey examined in this thesis can fill the gap and add more student voices, in order to paint a more complete picture of the political landscape in secondary schools.

A review of political rhetoric and the social context in which secondary students are navigating their lives would be incomplete without taking a moment to describe the intensity, frequency, and nature of Donald Trump's tweets from his personal Twitter account (@realDonaldTrump), which has increasingly become a means for him to signal his policy goals and intentions. Even early on in his campaign, the future president referred to immigrants as

"Druggies, drug dealers, rapists, and killers [that were] coming across the southern border" concluding by rhetorically pondering when "the U.S. [would] get smart and stop this travesty" (Trump 2015a). In this tweet, Trump characterizes the entire Mexican population, and by extension, anyone of Latinx descent, as a criminal, undesirable element, in line with the kinds of rhetoric and hostility that fosters the sentiment of illegalization. This message has been perhaps the most consistent of Trump's even as he entered office and began serving the role of President. An early 2018 tweet reads "We must have Security [sic] at our VERY DANGEROUS SOUTHERN BORDER [sic] and we must have a great WALL [sic] to help protect us, and to help stop the massive inflow of drugs pouring into our country!" (Trump 2018b). The repetition of this message, combined with the not infrequent associations Trump makes between Mexicans, the need for a wall, and his signature promise to "make America great again" create a very clear rhetorical message that was circulated widely. As the above examples demonstrate, this message laid out in no uncertain terms that the key to improving America would be to keep immigrants, and specifically Mexican immigrants, out of the country.

It must be noted that this conflation of immigration with drugs and crime is not a new one, and indeed, draws on a long history of similar rhetoric, most notably in pursuit of the War on Drugs (Johnson 2009). However, this analysis seeks to narrow down the particular kinds of political rhetoric used to create certain images of the Mexican-American population that were circulated and cultivated over time until they became more or less a common topic of conversation. In the next section, the data collected by the program is narrowed down to the questions that directly concern how, and to what extent, students in American high schools might have been potentially affected by both past and present rhetorical trends. In this sense, the thesis seeks to provide a new way to conceptualize this longstanding problem, and to show how

students attending high school at the site of high immigration activity might specifically be impacted.

Chapter 4: Data Reporting and Analysis

In order to discuss the data, I divided participants into groups based on where they and their parents were born. As outlined previously, for the safety of the participants, data was not collected on students' actual documentation status. However, grouping students by where they and their parents were born, while not confirming or suggesting anything about legal status can be used to better estimate how close the students' ties to Mexico might be. Additionally, as outlined in the literature review and in the methodology section, some of the social process of illegalization is based more on appearance than a person's actual legal status, and grouping the students this way to compare results reflects that aspect of it as well. Therefore, the four groups I use to categorize and compare student responses to questions are organized below, and will be referred to by their acronyms hereafter. Students who were unsure of their own place of birth or that of their parents were omitted:

- **M2M** refers to students who were born in Mexico who reported that both of their parents were also born in Mexico.
- **US2M** refers to students who were born in the US who reported that both of their parents were born in the US.
- **US1M** refers to students who were born in the US who reported that only one parents was born in Mexico. As long as the birthplace of the second parent was known by the respondent, the student was included in this set (in other words, as long as the response for the second parent was not "I don't know").
- Finally, **US2US** refers to students who were born in the US who reported that both of their parents were also born in the US.

These abbreviations are used in the prose and in the tables in order to minimize unnecessary repetition.

As stated in the methodological considerations, these groups were selected in order to approximate a student's ties to Mexico in order to see if that impacts the degree and incidence of issues they might face in schools. While the data set prevents knowing the exact documentation status of the students in order to ensure their safety and anonymity, illegalization and political

rhetoric just as frequently relies on the *presumption* of undocumented status as it does on the *reality*, and that then these "illegal" traits are mapped onto people who "look Mexican," or who speak Spanish. In this sense, dividing the students up in a way that roughly approximates immigrant generation is an acceptable and useful proxy for considering and analyzing the responses to the questions discussed in this chapter.

As the survey was comprehensive and approximately 100 questions, not all questions and answers will be examined but, rather, the ones that can most acutely help answer the questions "How does illegalization function in the classroom?" and "To what extent does political policy and rhetoric concerning immigration impact students attending school in the San Diego-Tijuana border region?" The rest of this chapter will be devoted to presenting the results of the following questions, and discussing their implications:

- How frequently do you talk about politics in your home?
- Questions concerning how frequently students are bullied, particularly concerning the areas of:
    - The language [they] speak
    - The place [they] were born
- Educational Aspirations; notably as it concerns the percentage of students who wish to go to college
- Mental health screening questions, measured by the widely accepted Patient Health Questionnaire 2 (PHQ-2) screening scale
- Data showing where students intend to live and work post-graduation

All of these questions paint a clearer picture of the on-the-ground reality for these students in San Diego schools, and provide information about the potential impacts of illegalization. Notably, the data shows that at the same time that anti-immigrant political rhetoric increased, students with closer ties to Mexico experienced more bullying, and became more politically conscious in their daily lives.

How frequently do you talk about politics in your home?

This question was asked in order to provide a general sense of students' political consciousness at the time the survey was administered, and simply asks "how frequently do you talk about politics in your home?" with the answer choices being "never, every month, every week, daily." While students had the option to answer these questions for both United States and Mexican politics, the results shown below consider only those students reported discussing American politics, as that is the focus of this analysis. The hypothesis, then, predicts that students who are more politically conscious would perceive more bullying, worse educational prospects, and/or worse mental health outcomes.

Table 2: Relative Political Consciousness of Sweetwater Union High School District Students Measured by Frequency of Political Discussion in the Students' Homes

Population Group	Year	"Never"	"Every month"	"Every week"	"Every day"
M2M	2016	51.9%	26.6%	16.5%	5.1%
	2018	36.1%***	20.5%***	27.7%***	15.7%***
	Change	-30.44%	-22.93%	+67.88%	+207.84%
US2M	2016	46.9%**	22.0%**	18.9%**	12.2%**
	2018	37.3%***	25.5%***	23.5%***	13.7%***
	Change	-20.47%	+15.91%	+24.34%	+12.30%
US1M	2016	52.0%	18.4%	19.4%	10.2%
	2018	35.2%***	21.0%***	29.0%***	14.8%***
	Change	-32.31%	+14.13%	+49.48%	+45.10%
US2US	2016	45.2%***	18.5%***	21.9%***	14.4%***
	2018	24.4%***	33.0%***	25.9%***	16.8%***
	Change	-46.02%	+78.39%	+18.26%	+16.67%

Significance is reported by p-value as follows: *= <.05, **= <.01, ***= <.001

The general trend in responses to the question was that in 2018, all four groups reported discussing politics in their households more frequently in 2018 than they did in 2016. The M2M group experienced the most dramatic change. As can be seen in Table 2, this group was the least likely to report a daily discussion of politics in 2016, with just 5.1% of respondents confirming this to be the case. However, in 2018, 15.8% of respondents in this group reported discussing American politics in their homes daily: triple the percentage of students who reported this to be

the case just two years earlier. Weekly political conversations were also reported to occur significantly more frequently; the rate of students in this group that reported these conversations rose by 68%. In the short timeframe of the two surveys, the M2M group experienced the most radical shift in terms of political discussions in their households, going from among the least likely to have such a conversation in 2016 to discussing politics somewhat regularly in 2018. It is clear that students are discussing American politics in their homes in 2018 more frequently than they were in 2016, sometimes by a very wide margin. While this may have to do with students becoming exposed to the harsher rhetoric and intra-student debates, as outlined in the previous chapter, this could just as easily be the result of other factors, such as the students becoming older and thus more capable of understanding such conversations in the latter survey.

The group that experienced the next biggest change was the US1M group. In 2018, there was a 45% increase in the proportion of students who reported discussing politics daily as compared to 2016. There was a similar percentage increase in the number of students in this group who reported political conversations in their homes on a weekly basis. The US2M group reported a similar pattern of change, though not nearly to as large of a degree. Students are having more political conversations at home than they were before, and the biggest change for these students was that 25% more of them reported having these conversations weekly in 2018 as compared to 2016. The biggest increase for the US2US grouping, meanwhile, was a 78% change in the amount of students that reported having these conversations on a monthly basis. Taken together, the findings across the board suggest that students are discussing American politics in their homes more frequently than they were before, with the M2M group experiencing the biggest increase, proportionally. It is equally important to note is that the percentages of students reporting that these conversations "never" occurred in their homes went down in 2018

as compared to 2016: that is, it was more likely in 2018 for a student to be discussing politics in their home than it was in 2016. Although this question and its responses did not make it clear if this trend was in *direct* response to the increase in negative political rhetoric as outlined above, it neither eliminates the possibility.

These trends reflect the findings of previous surveys conducted on teachers. Students reportedly discussed politics with each other and with teachers more frequently than they did before the 2016 election (Rogers 2017; Will 2017). In particular, teachers noticed increased hostility between white and nonwhite, particularly Latinx, students, as well as students expressing heightened anxiety and fear for the safety of their families in the months following the 2016 election (Rogers 2017). This, combined with anti-immigrant sentiments in the national political scene that some have called "the new nativism" (Young 2017) creates an environment in which students become more aware of their own role in the larger society and, in some cases, become aware of the potentially negative meanings attached to their own legal status (Abrego 2006, 2011). In fact, in some cases, students may view their lack of legal status and/or connections to Mexico as more stigmatizing than do their parents, who view it as a source of fear (Abrego 2011). These studies have also shown that students are increasingly more politically aware, and as the political discourse environment becomes less civil in schools, these students may suffer worse social and academic outcomes (Rogers 2017).

In addition to being aware of politics and discussing it more frequently in their homes, these students and their families may also face a unique kind of fear. This increased political awareness may not simply be because students wish to be more politically active as they grow up, but may also be a necessity as they or their families may feel directly threatened by new actions proposed on the front of immigration. Indeed, the undocumented community faces a

particular fear of enforcement action alongside the enforcement policies themselves (Menjívar and L. Abrego 2012). The data resonates strongly with similar studies before it: in a time of increased tensions and fear, students are beginning to feel the effects of that pressure in their own lives, starting first with an increase in discussions on the subject in their own households. To further understand these results, it is instructive to next turn to the questions students were asked about perceived bullying incidents along various lines, some of which highlight traits that may mark a student or their family as an outsider in the eyes of other students.

Relative Rates of Bullying

In both years, students were asked the following question with the following answer choices, and had the ability to select more than one response: "In some instances, there are people that can make you feel embarrassed, or who make fun of you. If this has happened, could you tell us it if had anything to do with the following aspects? Select all options that apply:"

- **The language you speak**
- **The place you were born**
- Your religion
- Your family and traditions
- Your group of friends
- Your gender
- Sexual orientation
- None of the above

The questions bolded above are the ones of most relevance to the guiding questions of this thesis, as they hint at the feeling of being outcast and potentially criminalized. It must be noted that the responses to the question are based on the student's own perception of why they are being bullied, even if this isn't necessarily the reality. However, as noted by the literature review and as discussed below, teacher surveys have previously suggested that the same tone of debate concerning immigration has played out in classrooms as well, and it is possible that students are aware of this in their responses. It is also important to note that the design of the survey did not allow for students to express how the bullying occurred: that is, whether it was verbal, physical,

emotional, or some combination. That said, the first area of perceived bullying concerns the use of language in students' daily lives.

"The language you speak"

The results below in Table 3 differ slightly for each of the four groups, but the general trend is that students who reported having closer ties to Mexico experienced more self-reported bullying along the lines of language spoken than did their peers who did not have such close ties:

Table 3: Change in Rate of Bullying for Language Spoken, 2016 and 2018

Population Group	Year	Percentage of grouping who reported being bullied for "the language [they] speak"
M2M	2016	16.8%***
	2018	31.0%***
	Change	+84.52%
US2M	2016	9.92%**
	2018	13.6%***
	Change	+37.10%
US1M	2016	8.81%*
	2018	11.0%**
	Change	+24.86%
US2US	2016	4.20%
	2018	4.4%
	Change	+4.76%

Significance is reported by p-value as follows: *= <.05, **= <.01, ***= <.001

While all groups experienced an uptick in bullying along these lines, the changes were not equal. The most dramatic change, once again, is in the M2M group, which experienced an 84% increase in the rate of bullying for language spoken in 2018 from 2016—in other words, the rate nearly doubled. Drawing back to the results in the previous section, the M2M group in particular experienced both an increase in conversations concerning American politics at home *and* a significant increase in the rate of bullying for language spoken in the same timeframe. Other groups that have ties to Mexico saw increases in bullying as well: in the US2M group,

37% more students reported this bullying in 2018 than in 2016, and in the US1M group, 24% more students reported such incidents. These three groupings contain students who were themselves born in Mexico or have parents who were, and thus these students are the most likely to speak Spanish. The group that experienced almost no change was the US2US group; these results were also not statistically significant. As Table 3 shows, the closer to Mexico a student is, the more likely it is that they have been on the receiving end of bullying for the language they spoke. This is perhaps the most significant finding of the entire thesis: that there was a notable and statistically significant jump in bullying in this particular area.

In some ways, these results concur with the concepts outlined in the previous chapter: as noted by the literature, speaking Spanish—or, indeed, any non-English language—is a way for some to recognize the "otherness" in other students. This can manifest in bullying in the school environment, as reported by the students surveyed. As San Diego, and the Sweetwater district in particular, are particularly close to the US-Mexico border, is must be noted that these particular students experience a high degree of exposure to the usage of Spanish in everyday life. However, the trend that bullying as a result of language spoken increased between the years of the study still remains; perhaps suggesting that if this is a pattern of bullying noticed even in a Latinx-majority district, the same trend might hold—and perhaps to a more extreme degree—in school districts in other states. In other words, because Sweetwater Union High School District is a place where the majority of students are Latinx, then places in the United States where Latinx students are a minority of the students might show even more bulling of this marginalized group, as was shown by the case studies outlined in the previous chapter that took place in other parts of the country. At least in California specifically, the use of Spanish in schools has a

complex and sometimes paradoxical history, which may potentially contribute to the feeling of bullying expressed by students in this survey.

Although non-English instruction is permitted in the state of California, some caution against using this to suggest that this is a result of California voters truly becoming more open and accepting of non-English instruction so much as a result of the specific ways the proposal might have been framed to voters: for example, maintaining a second language as a marketable skill in a globalized economy (Citrin, Levy, and Wong 2017). An additional barrier to students who do not speak English as a primary language in the home concerns the observation that some teachers may not be as prepared to assist these students in schools, even if they desire to (Santibañez and Gándara 2018). In addition, teachers in California schools have reported that even if they are able to reach students who do not speak English in the home, communication with their parents about school expectations was frequently difficult and an inability to communicate with these students' parents was often cited as the biggest obstacle in teaching English language learners (Gandara, Maxwell-Jolly, and Driscoll 2005). Even if support is available, some teachers felt unsure about how to use that support to best assist their students, which can suggest a failure of teacher training in light of the specific needs of their students (ibid).

Teachers may not be as prepared to assist their English Language Learners because the rules surrounding the instruction of said students has been changing quite a bit in California. As mentioned before, Proposition 187 (1994) was passed, though never enacted, and would have prohibited the undocumented from accessing any public resources, including public education, and the campaign for the passage of this measure—up to and including public statements made by then California Governor Pete Wilson—targeted California's Spanish-speaking population

specifically (Jacobson 2008; Suárez-Orozco 1996). While this measure never took effect, as it stands in direct violation of *Plyer vs Doe* (1987) and was struck down by a higher court, the English-only, anti-immigrant stance the campaign fostered yet remained. A short four years later, the aforementioned Proposition 227 (1998) did pass and was enacted, which effectively banned non-English instruction in California public schools. Results are mixed as to whether or not this bill actually increased English proficiency: an analysis commissioned by the California Department of Education concluded that although test scores went up for both native English speakers and English learners since the passage of the bill, the performance gap *between* the groups did not increase or decrease, but remained constant (Parrish et al. 2006).

Regardless of whether or not the measure actually improved student performance, the messaging was clear: speaking English and only English was all that would be permitted in California public schools, and the usage of a second language was heavily discouraged. The rhetoric of the campaigns to pass these measures was pervasive, to the point that "[l]oyalty [to the United States] was connected specifically with learning English" (Jacobson 2008:97). This is all to say that California's comparatively more open stance on bilingual education is *recent*, and there has not been enough time since the changing of the policy to effectively analyze its impacts on students. As stated before, speaking Spanish, or any non-English language, is a clear marker of "foreignness," at least in the eyes of California voters, and the constantly changing stances and laws might have had an adverse impact on students in some cases (Citrin et al. 2017; Gunderson 2017; Jacobson 2008).

In addition to feeling unprepared to assist students with language needs in the classroom, teachers have also reported feeling unprepared to have honest discussions about politics with their students in the classroom, as well, even as they report an increase in intra-student hostility

following the 2016 election (Will 2017). The fact remains that the closer a student's tie is to Mexico, in this survey, the more likely they were to report an increase in political consciousness, and an increase in perceived bullying for language spoken. There are many potential causes for such changes, such as preparedness of the teachers, the change in the mood in classrooms following the election, the repetition of national rhetoric at the level of the classroom, and changes in meaning assigned to the quality of speaking Spanish. Whatever the case, these changes are notable, and future research would do well to explore school districts in other areas of the country to see if these trends hold. The other area of bullying that students were asked about concerns the place of their own birth, a question that ties more directly to the exploration of the impacts of illegalization.

"The place you were born"

This question asked if students believed that they had been bullied as a result of "the place [they] were born." Since the students examined in this study are those going to school in the United States, and three of the subgroupings identified by this analysis are born in the United States themselves, the results to this question were somewhat mixed:

Table 4: Change in Rates of Bullying for Place of Birth, 2016 and 2018

Population Group	Year	Percentage of grouping who reported being bullied for "the place [they] were born"
M2M	2016	14.7%***
	2018	18.4%***
	Change	+25.17%
US2M	2016	2.83%
	2018	1.9%
	Change	-32.86%
US1M	2016	2.30%
	2018	1.8%
	Change	-21.74%
US2US	2016	1.2%*
	2018	2.9%
	Change	+141.67%

Significance is reported by p-value as follows: *= <.05, **= <.01, ***= <.001

The results were the most statistically significant for the M2M group, as can be seen in Table 4; that is, it can be said with high confidence that the presence of bullying incidents is strongly connected to the students' place of birth, and that of their parents. The proportion of students who reported bullying for their place of birth in 2018 was 18.4%, which represents a 25% increase from the number of students who reported such incidents in 2016. As for the other three population groupings, their data is reported for consistency's sake, however, there was minimal change, and the change they did have was not statistically significant in any direction. The M2M subgroup reported a not-insubstantial rate of bullying in both years, which only increased in 2018.

Additionally, it is highly possible that some of the students in the M2M group belong to what is referred to as the "1.5 generation," that is, students who were born outside of the United States, but were brought to the United States at a young age, and experienced much of their development and schooling within the United States (Abrego 2006, 2008, 2011; Abrego and

Gonzales 2010; Gonzales 2016; Jensen and Sawyer 2013; Nicholls 2013; Voss and Bloemraad 2011). In other studies conducted on youth who are known to be undocumented, many simply felt that their status was "not fair" and felt more stigmatized for it than afraid—many of them not knowing until they went to apply for a driver's license only to find they did not have Social Security numbers (Abrego 2011). In the case of the students in this survey, 11th and 12th graders were surveyed the second time around, so it is possible that students are becoming more aware of what their status means in terms of continuing their education and applying to college. These students may perceive their status, or lack thereof, as an embarrassment, and this may be exacerbated by remarks made to them by other students. Bullying in this area occurred the most frequently, and had the highest increase, among Mexican-born students with Mexican-born parents—the demographic with the closest ties to Mexico.

Here it must also be noted that surveys conducted on teachers have shown an increase in the hostility of the political discourse in their classrooms, particularly targeted at Latinx and Muslim students, in the months since the 2016 presidential election (Rogers 2017; Will 2017). It is possible that this aggressive discourse reached the classrooms in which the survey was conducted, and that this could be connected to why students felt more harassed for their place of birth in 2018 than they did in 2016. In studies in which teachers were surveyed, some teachers noted that they witnessed incidents of one student telling another that Trump would deport that student's father after the election, and the same teacher reported never having witnessed this kind of bullying before (Will 2017). Although our survey did not allow for students to describe specifics of their bullying incidents, the fact remains that they reported experiencing more bullying after the election than beforehand along the lines of their place of birth. Another way to

measure the changes happening for these students is to question their educational aspirations; that is, where they believe they can go after high school.

Educational Aspirations

This question attempts to gauge how far students believe they will go in their educational trajectories. Examining this question for this particular project helps understand whether or not students' educational aspirations are being affected by the changes going on around them. It has been found by much of the literature examined that immigrant children, and the children of immigrants, report lower educational outcomes than do their native-born peers, but this project seeks to go further than that and to ask students what they would *like* to accomplish in the future. The question was posed to the students with the following answer choices:

- **Being realistic**, what is the highest level of education you think you will attain?
    - Less than high school completion
    - High school (high school diploma or GED)
    - Vocational or technical certificate (e.g. cosmetology or auto mechanics)
    - Associates degree (2-year degree from a community college)
    - Bachelor's degree (4-year college degree)
    - Master's degree
    - Doctoral or professional degree such as medicine or law

The subgrouping of students didn't seem to influence the results of this question much, as the trend across the board was almost identical (see Table 6 and Figure 1 below). All groups reported a decrease in students who aspired to have a graduate degree, but all groups also showed an increase in the number of students who wanted a bachelor's degree in 2018 as compared to 2016. More students than before felt that they would be able to at least complete high school, as well.

Contrary to the original hypothesis, the central trend in the data remains that more students overall seem to have collegiate aspirations than before, even though this increase in aspirations coincided with upticks in bullying reported by students with closer ties to Mexico. In an absolute sense, this could be seen as a decrease in educational aspirations if one were to

consider that the number of students who believed they could obtain a graduate degree dropped; or at the very least, the *ceiling* of educational aspirations dropped. However, the fact remains that a higher percentage of students in all groups felt that they would be able to obtain a college degree at all, and in this sense educational aspirations *increased*, despite the prediction of the initial hypothesis. It is certain is that the place of students' birth, the place of birth of their parents, and the educational aspirations they have are all linked together in a statistically significant way, even if it remains difficult to determine exactly what this relationship is. What is known is that expectations and aspirations of future educational and occupational achievement are particularly important to the children of immigrants, more so than to their native-born counterparts (Feliciano and Rumbaut 2005). Additionally, the demographic composition of schools and the attitude of teachers towards said diversity has been shown to be a predictor of academic outcomes (Brown and Chu 2012). That said, there are a wide range of factors that contribute to whether or not students achieve the expectations laid out for themselves, or what those expectations are to begin with.

In order to process all of the results of this broad question, they are shown two ways: first, the table below will report the raw data in terms of students' response to all options across the subgroupings laid out above, and then to refine this, the graph below will narrow this down to highlight the change in students who said they wanted a 4-year degree or higher (i.e. either a bachelor's or postgraduate degree):

Table 5: Educational Aspirations of Sweetwater Union High School District Students by Population Grouping, 2016 and 2018

Population Group	Year	Less Than High School Completion	High School or Equivalent	Vocational or Technical Certificate	Associate's (2-year) Degree	Bachelor's (4-year) Degree	Master's or PhD
M2M	2016	7.1%**	15.3%**	7.1%**	4.7%**	29.4%**	36.5%**
	2018	0.0%***	10.0%***	4.0%***	16.0%***	45.0%***	23.0%***
	Change	-100%	-34.64%	-43.66%	+240.43%	+53.06%	-36.99%
US2M	2016	1.8%***	13.5%***	3.9%***	13.8%***	29.1%***	37.8%***
	2018	0.6%***	4.9%***	4.3%***	18.3%***	38.6%***	32.2%***
	Change	-66.67%	-63.70%	+10.26%	+32.61%	+32.65%	-14.81%
US1M	2016	2.9%***	11.5%***	5.7%***	14.8%***	32.8%***	32.4%***
	2018	1.3%***	10.3%***	5.2%***	13.7%***	42.5%***	26.6%***
	Change	-55.17%	-10.43%	-8.77%	-7.43%	+29.57%	-17.90%
US2US	2016	1.9%**	6.7%**	4.2%**	8.6%**	34.5%**	44.1%**
	2018	0.5%***	7.4%***	2.3%***	9.8%***	46.0%***	34.0%***
	Change	-73.68%	+10.45%	-45.24%	+13.95%	+33.33%	-22.90%

Significance is reported by p-value as follows: *= <.05, **= <.01, ***= <.001

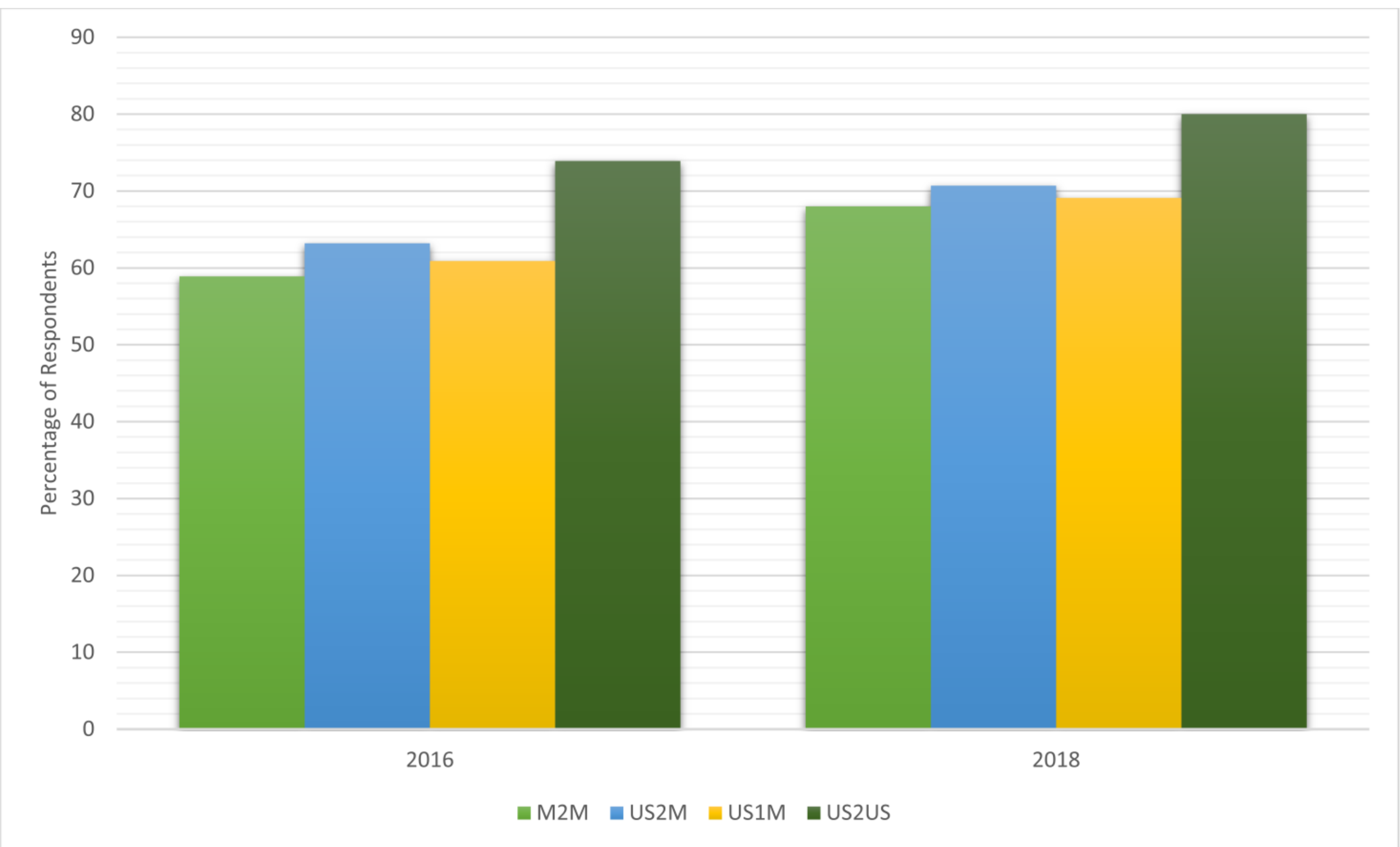

Figure 1: Collegiate Aspirations of Sweetwater Union High School District Students, 2016 and 2018

The subgroup closest to Mexico, the M2M subgroup, reported results that concurred with the general trends outlined above, but on a more exaggerated scale. An interesting trend concerned their belief that they would be able to complete high school; in 2018, no student in this group answered that they believed they wouldn't graduate high school. This could be taken a number of ways: that students feel better about their chances to complete school, or that students are striving to reach higher, since the question asked what their *maximum* educational attainment might be. It is also noteworthy that in 2016, fewer students reported that they wanted a vocational or associate's degree than those who reported that they would stop their education in high school. In 2018, a shocking number of students in this subgroup reported that they wish to obtain an associate's degree as compared to 2016. Perhaps this goal seemed more attainable later on than it did the first time the survey was administered. The M2M group reported the largest increase in the percentage of students who wanted a bachelor's degree, and also experienced the sharpest decrease in the number of students wishing to pursue a postgraduate degree. In general, this group reported the more extreme end of the results.

The two middle groups, US2M and US1M, reported similar trends. Both groups had fewer students who believed they wouldn't graduate high school in 2018 than they did in 2016, and both groups also experienced an increase in the number of those who wanted a bachelor's degree alongside a decrease in postgraduate aspirations. One notable difference between the two groups is that the US2M group reported an increase in the number of students who wanted a vocational or associate's degree, while students in the US1M group reported a decrease in each. Additionally, the US2M group reported a sharp decrease in the number of students who believed their education would stop at high school; perhaps the bulk of the increase in students who wanted a 2-year degree comes from students who previously answered they would only complete

high school. Finally, the US2US group also reported the aforementioned general trends with one exception: this was the only group to experience an *increase* in students who believe their education would stop at high school. While all subgroupings had differences between one another, the largest trend was clear and consistent, as shown in Figure 1: all groups experienced an increase in students who believed they could obtain a bachelor's degree alongside a decrease in the belief that they could attain a postgraduate degree.

Although the hypothesis would predict that students would have depressed educational outcomes in 2018 as compared to 2016, the results shown above show that this is not true in the absolute sense. If the measurement of "educational outcomes" is students' belief in their ability to go to college at all, then all groups experienced an increase: although it is also notable that the 3+ generation group (US2US), while still experiencing an increase, also had the highest absolute percentages in both years, while the first-generation group (M2M) had the lowest values. However, looking at the table and graph together, a notable change concerns the *ceiling* of expectations and aspirations: more students did want *a* college degree, but significantly fewer were reaching for a *pos*t-graduate degree in 2018 than were in 2016. This could potentially speak to students feeling their own prospects diminished in this new sociopolitical landscape. This could also connect back to the previously discussed results, those that concern bullying, that students feeling ostracized might internalize this in reduced expectations for what they believe they can achieve.

Educational outcomes for the children of undocumented immigrants has been a topic of much study over the years (Abrego and Gonzales 2010; Chiswick and DebBurman 2004; Enriquez 2015; Haller, Portes, and Lynch 2011; Jefferies 2014a; Zhou 1997). A common conclusion is that immigrant students, and students that are the children of immigrants, have

lower educational outcomes than their native-born peers, for a variety of reasons. Some believe that it is a result of certain attitudes within children of immigrants (Zhou 1997), others attribute this to the fear of deportation in schools due to misinformation about what is required to attend (Jefferies 2014a), and still others cite the barrier of legal status in entering college and getting financial aid (Abrego 2006; Abrego and Gonzales 2010; Chiswick and DebBurman 2004). This study adds to all of the aforementioned by simply asking students what they *believe* they will be able to achieve, and specifically asks students to be realistic about what is possible, offering a unique angle on the data that has already been gathered on the subject.

Although these results are not yet known—and likely will not be due to the method of the survey—it would be interesting to see how many of these students actually do achieve their goals of enrolling in college and graduating with a four-year degree. One encouraging sign comes in the form of a Pew Hispanic Center study, which found that Latinx high school graduates are enrolled in any form of college at a higher rate than their native-born peers (Fry 2002). However, the same report found that Latinx students are more likely to be enrolled in a two-year college and to be part-time students, they tend to graduate less often and at an older age, and that *very* few of them move onto a post-baccalaureate degree (Fry 2002). Additionally, it has been suggested that when they get to college, they lag behind their native-born peers in terms of the analytical abilities needed to successfully complete a four-year degree (Hurtado and Ponjuan 2005). Students overwhelmingly want to go to college after they graduate high school, but the students in the survey group face particularly unique challenge and obstacles in their journey.

Essentially, there is a huge gap in terms of what students believe they can achieve, and what they later go on to achieve. It is not, however, for lack of enthusiasm on part of the students, as our survey overwhelmingly demonstrates. School and universities, knowing of this

data, ought to collaborate to bridge the preparation gap and make education more successful for a wide variety of high school graduates. Although students can currently attend college if they qualify for the DREAM Act or DACA, neither of these are permanent programs, and it is possible that the fear of losing this status may impact either their belief in their ability to go to a university or diminish their academic performance once they have already enrolled. Additionally, with the disappearance of these programs in recent years, these students may find their access to jobs more restricted than before. A more thorough and targeted study would need to be conducted in order to solidify these burgeoning connections. Another way to explore the potential ramifications of educational aspirations is to consider students' mental health reports at the same time.

Mental Health Screening Questions

Mental health in these students is a critically important area for the project to explore, as it might reveal insights into how students are feeling in their day-to-day lives. As part of the comprehensive survey of the students, depression-screening questions were used as a way to gauge students' relative mental health. These questions and their answer choices are as follows:

- Over the past two weeks, how many times have you had little pleasure or interest in doing something?
    - Never
    - Once or twice a week
    - Almost half the time
    - Almost every day
- Over the past two weeks, how many times have you felt sad, depressed, or hopeless?
    - Never
    - Some days
    - Almost half the time
    - Almost every day

These questions and their phrasing were inspired by the Patient Health Questionnaire-2 (PHQ-2), which is a two-question system used to screen for potential depressive disorders. This is a scale

that has been repeatedly shown to be a valid diagnostic tool in screening for these behaviors (Löwe, Kroenke, and Gräfe 2005).

A clearer way to visualize and understand the mental health results is to approximate them onto the aforementioned PHQ-2 scale. The PHQ-2 score is calculated on a scale of 0-6, in which a score of 3 or higher is used to predict if the patient might have any depressive disorder. In this approximation, "never" would be worth 0 points, "once or twice a week" would be worth 1 point, "almost half the time" would be worth 2 points, and "almost every day" would be worth 3 points. Seeing the proportion of students who would score higher than a 3 on this scale could be used as predictive of major depressive disorders. With this framework in mind, a more concrete picture of the students' mental health state begins to emerge, as this scale has been validated many times by mental health professionals to be an accurate and valid screening tool to assess the occurrence of depressive disorders.

The following data, then, reports the percentage of students whose combined answers to the two aforementioned questions would produce a score of 3 or higher on the PHQ-2 scale. In 2016, the numbers were relatively stable across all groups, hovering between 35-40% of students in each. Keep in mind that, by these approximations, these results can best be read as showing the percentage of students who would potentially qualify as having a major depressive disorder. The numbers were about the same in the 2018 survey, with the difference being that these findings have higher statistical significance; or, in layman's terms, that the birth group of the student and the mental health distress they report is more likely to be linked together rather than just being a mere coincidence. However, these results are not to be taken as any sort of definitive link between the increase in anti-immigrant sentiment and rhetoric and worse mental health outcomes; rather, they note that some of these groups did experience an increase in

students who would score a 3+ on the PHQ-2 scale at the same time that these social processes occurred:

Table 6: PHQ-2 Score Approximations for Sweetwater Union High School District Students, 2016 and 2018

Population Group	Year	PHQ score approximation of 3+
M2M	2016	40.0%
	2018	37.0%
	Change	-7.5%
US2M	2016	34.6%
	2018	35.9%**
	Change	+3.76%
US1M	2016	34.1%
	2018	38.2%**
	Change	+12.02%
US2US	2016	36.9%*
	2018	37.2%*
	Change	+0.81%

Significance is reported by p-value as follows: *= <.05, **= <.01, ***= <.001

The group that showed the most change was the US1M group, whose results show that 12% more students were reporting high mental health distress than before. Contrary to the hypothesis, and contrary to what previous data might suggest, the M2M group was the only group that had fewer students reporting high mental distress in 2018 than in 2016. The other two groupings, US2M and US2US, had remarkably consistent results in both years. However, the general results are clear: students are reporting an increase in mental health distress over time alongside potentially dramatic changes in their lives as a result of the change in political administration.

This is not to say that this is the only possible explanation for the change. It is possible that students are simply becoming more distressed because high school is coming to an end, and they are unsure of what the future holds for them. It may have to do with stress from work, stress in home life, and other unrelated pressures; my study is simply noting that the trends

occurred alongside each other. As mental health is a complex and multi-faceted issue, this project in no way seeks to propose an over-simplistic cause-and-effect relationship between the two variables. One notable confounding variable that would be impossible to separate out with how the study was conducted concerns the age and life stage of these students; that is, the students are going through adolescence, and experiencing major life changes whether or not the political landscape had changed.

Whatever the cause, this is a trend that ought to concern educators at the border region, and teachers especially ought to be better trained to meet the unique needs of their students. Indeed, the role of teacher attitudes towards students of various racial minorities has been shown to be critical to student success—or lack thereof (Brown and Chu 2012). Investing in strategies that considers students' specific mental health needs at this region will prevent the trends noted in this thesis from continuing to spiral into worse outcomes and experiences.

Although results in this category were mixed in terms of connecting them to the specific research hypotheses at hand, they are included in these findings to report the troubling rate of incidence in mental health distress among this vulnerable population, and to note that regardless of the cause, it is an issue that needs addressing. This community in particular faces a unique kind of situation, in which their lives and families are the subject of much political debate. It is prudent to consider that it appears to be school-age youth who are bearing the effects of these higher-level political conversations, notably in terms of perceived bullying and potential mental health outcomes.

Where do you think you will live and work?

Finally, as a way to form a broader understanding of where these students believe they will end up after graduation, students were asked "Realistically, where do you think you will live and work after you finish school?" with the answer choices of The United States, Mexico, both

sides of the border, and somewhere else. This question can provide insight into where these uniquely transnational students see themselves fitting into university or the labor force, and can show us of the need to consider what might be impacting their experiences. The overwhelming trend is that these students, regardless of birth group, see themselves living and working in the United States, even though they also report the various difficulties and challenges with bullying and mental health as outlined above:

Table 7: Where Students Intend to Live and Work After Completing School, 2016 and 2018

Population Group	Year	The United States	Mexico	On both sides of the border	Somewhere else
All San Diego Respondents	2016	84.1%	8.4%	6.4%	1.1%
	2018	82.9%	1.1%	10.8%	5.2%
M2M	2016	65.0%*	8.8%*	18.8%*	7.5%*
	2018	71.4%***	4.1%***	16.3%***	8.2%***
US2M	2016	79.7%***	0.6%***	13.0%***	6.7%***
	2018	76.1%***	1.5%***	19.2%***	3.2%***
US1M	2016	82.5%***	0.9%***	11.8%***	4.8%***
	2018	84.9%***	1.3%***	9.5%***	4.3%***
US2US	2016	89.2%***	0.0%***	2.4%***	8.5%***
	2018	91.6%***	0.0%***	2.8%***	5.6%***

Significance is reported by p-value as follows: *= <.05, **= <.01, ***= <.001

Students across all subgroupings overwhelmingly desire to live and work in the United States after they graduate high school, whether they seek to go to university or to join the work force. Or, to put this another way, these students are overwhelmingly wanting to bring their skills, talents, and perspectives to the American labor force, which provides incentive to invest in the issues they are facing. One potential explanation for this phenomenon is the "immigrant optimism" hypothesis, in which the optimism of immigrant parents is passed on to their children, and leads to them performing better in school and feeling more positively about their ability to incorporate into American society (Kao and Tienda 1995). Tackling the problems they are facing in schools will allow them more freedom to enroll in and attend university, something

many of them wish to do. This will then allow them to strengthen the economy and contribute to overall innovation and growth; there thus exists both a humanitarian and practical call to action when considering investment in these particular youth.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Suggestions for Further Research

The fact of the matter is that political rhetoric and language concerning immigration from Mexico is, by and large, overwhelmingly negative, and in recent years that rhetoric is being distributed in a top-down fashion. The effects of this rhetoric might be felt at lower levels, even potentially trickling all the way down to high schools, and possibly to students of even younger ages. As the study reveals, a very large percentage of students at the border wish to remain in the United States to live and work after they graduate high school, and a sizeable percentage of *those* wish to attend university in the United States. Therefore their specific experiences are worth exploring for many reasons: the humanitarian side, because all students deserve a safe and welcoming school experience, the spirit of which was first established in *Plyer vs. Doe* (1987); the practical side, realizing that these students will contribute financially and economically to the United States in the near future necessitates an investment in their experiences and transition. To this end, the data has uncovered that students are feeling more ostracized and bullied for their connections to Mexico, broadly speaking, and it is possible that teachers and faculty may have a role to play in curbing this.

This thesis sought to explore the relationship, if any, between illegalizing policy and rhetoric and the experience of secondary school youth in San Diego at the border region, in 2016 and 2018. To explore this, the project divided the students into groups that approximated their immigrant generation and their ties to Mexico, in order to measure the different responses. The thesis focused on how this affected rates of bullying, the rates at which students believed they could go to college, and their mental health. Finally, the data analysis noted that the large majority of students, regardless of population grouping, seek to live and work in the United States after graduating from high school. I hypothesized that students with a closer relationship

to Mexico would experience more bullying and poorer mental health and educational outcomes, but ultimately found mixed results.

Perhaps the most salient and alarming of the results uncovered concerns the increase in bullying incidents reported by the students, particularly along the lines of language spoken. Much of the literature on the subject of the undocumented and Mexican-origin populations uncovers the use of Spanish as an easy "signifier" of legal status, and a way to delineate someone as "not from here." The fact that this result showed up in *this* school district, which is majority-Latinx, could perhaps speak to a similar effect in other areas of the country, and perhaps at a larger scale due to fewer Latinx students. I believe that a different survey design or methodology could perhaps strike at the heart of the question. To explore the issue further, it would be beneficial to create a more targeted version of the survey that gauged students' direct reactions to recent political changes, or perhaps to administer the survey after having them view some of the more popularly circulated soundbites. The same sentiment goes for further exploring the mental health and educational outcomes results outlined in the previous chapter. Both of these issues are complex, and one survey—even if given out at two points in time—is simply insufficient to draw any casual relationships.

However, the trends found in both of these areas could potentially be concerning to educators, and anything that can negatively impact students' achievement ought to be closely examined in future studies. Calling this issue to attention is also a way to call upon schools and their administrators to analyze what they might be able to do in order to provide a more fair and equitable experience of school for all of their diverse students. The trends I uncovered in this exploration of this data are nonetheless notable, and I urge educators and anyone who works with this population to consider them.

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