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Current Perceptions of Undocumented Immigrants in the United States

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CURRENT PERCEPTIONS OF UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS IN THE
UNITED STATES

by
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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for Honors in the Major Program in Sociology
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Abstract

The intent of this thesis is to examine current perceptions that U.S. Americans have about immigrants coming to the U.S. illegally/ undocumented. There is currently an ongoing debate around immigration in today's political climate. Historically, immigration has always happened in the U.S. and has sparked a vast array of feelings from the U.S. population (Obinna 2018). This study aims to contribute to the existing literature on undocumented immigration to the U.S. and opinion surrounding it. The current study uses the opinion of 177 people to compare current perceptions of undocumented people based on gender, income, and political standing. This study found that income was not related to opinion on immigration. Specific questions regarding border control, undocumented immigrants as a problem, and whether children and families should be detained were found to be answered differently based on gender. It also found that those who identified as more conservative- leaning had more negative opinions surrounding undocumented immigrants.

Key Words: immigration, United States, undocumented immigrants

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INTRODUCTION

The United States has continuously had waves of opposition and acceptance of immigrants. Today, politics is often revolved around immigration laws and policy. Politicians run for office with promises to crack down on illegal immigration or make the process easier for immigrants to come to the U.S. Either way people are generally on a side of this social issue. News outlets often use language like “illegal alien” to describe and dehumanize immigrants to separate them from the rest of the country (Craig, Pitts and Osborne 2011).

Understanding the history behind immigration sentiments is important in the interpretation of current views of immigrants, particularly undocumented ones. The social problems process approach will be used to further explain the history of immigration and the claims making process- central to immigration ideas and reform. Joel Best’s (2017) social problems process explains the steps in how something becomes a problem. Blumer's symbolic interactionism plays a big part in claims making. We give meaning to the claims we find important. Views on immigration have changed due to the role claims makers have in the social problems process. Claims makers are responsible for bringing a problem to attention and have periods where they are more active and make more claims (Best 2017). People derive meaning on immigration through various media sources. Different news stations lead the public to find a new system of meaning. With new meanings come policymaking in the Social Problems Process. Policies like ICE were a result of terrorist attacks but also the fear and anxiety that surrounded

foreigners (Obinna 2018). People developed new meaning systems and perceptions of foreign-born people in the U.S.

Herbert Blumer was a central figure in the sociological theory of symbolic interactionism. Blumer (1973) states that we give meanings to things based on our interactions with people and symbols. These meanings can change based on our interactions because our action depends on the meaning. Symbols can include languages, gestures, and actions. We are constantly being socialized, and therefore, our meaning systems are always shifting and evolving. People have these different meanings because of how they were socialized to react to them. Meanings can change based on the people we associate with, the news we watch, and the Facebook feed we look at. This easily applies to views on undocumented immigrants as well.

The current study addresses this question: What are people's current perceptions of undocumented immigrants coming to the United States? This study was inclusive to all adults over the age of 18. A survey determined people's opinions with questions about undocumented immigrants including current events surrounding immigration, immigration laws, and personal views of immigration.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A History of Immigration

During the late 19th and early 20th century the U.S was going through another “periodic wave of opposition to immigration” (Best 2017: 316). These opinions were socially constructed and formed. At times like this, anti-immigration claims were stronger because of the worry about Southern and Eastern immigrants (Best 2017). Years before the Civil War we see U.S Americans showing anti- Irish and anti-immigration sentiment (Best 2017).

Labor has always been an important part of the United States. It has taken different forms throughout the years. “Between 1907 to 1915 the public was vastly divided as millions of southern and eastern Europeans entered the country. Native-born workers expressed their anxieties over job security and raised questions over the competition for state resources” (Obinna 2018:2). We also start to see the division between Republicans and Democrats on immigration issues. Republicans advocated for European immigrants because that meant cheaper labor; Democrats wanted to keep jobs at home (Obinna 2018). Immigration rates fell during World War I and immigration policies were at a national, rather than state, level. We also see a glimpse of blame being placed on Mexicans during the Great Depression with half a million deportations, violation of rights, and deportations based on “looking Mexican” (Obinna 2018). This is especially important knowledge to talk about in this discussion due to the policies today surrounding profiling of people of color. This is not a new subject, but something that has been systematically in place for years and has been building to this point.

An important connection can be made between policies throughout the years in immigration. The government Bracero program in 1942 allowed for immigrants to come from Mexico to work in farms in the United States where U.S American had anxiety over immigrants stealing jobs (Obinna 2018). Today, agricultural businesses rely on H2-A guest workers who are here with special permission. Employers can fire or send back workers without any reason or explanation given to them (Bacon 2019).

The years and administrations after WWII saw a lot of change between strict immigration policies to a more open-door policy during Lyndon B Johnson's presidency with a focus on immigrants' skills and relationships. At this time, the majority of immigrants were not coming from Europe, but Mexico and Asia (Obinna 2018). The 80's introduced reform to apprehend undocumented people who were committing crimes; this included the Immigration Reform and Control Act. "Research suggests that in many ways, the passage of the IRCA was a game changer for immigration enforcement because it changed how we dealt with crime and matters related to punishment" (Obinna 2018: 6). Fast forward to 9/11 where the country was in crisis and panic mode amid a terrorist attack. Claims (part of the social problems process) were made about the lack of border security and there were demands for tougher immigration policies (Best 2017). Anxiety levels in the country led to the social construction of views on what terrorists looked like and where they came from. Thus, the Department of Homeland Security and Immigration and Customs Enforcement were created in the early 2000's. These departments currently still have power over security and immigration currently.

The illegality of people has become more important to the public in the past couple of decades (Abrego 2016). It is important to understand the background and context of immigration

laws as well as their importance to American business and politics. As discussed, anti-immigration laws are not anything new. Although they might be broadcasted more frequently in today's political climate, Obama, had strict laws in place during his presidency. “Under President Barack Obama, a new requirement mandated filling 34,000 beds in detention centers every night. The detention system mushroomed, and over 2 million people were deported” (Bacon 2019:1). Often Republicans have the spotlight on them for their harsh laws. It is valuable to pay attention to the political system as an institution and understand the laws put in place to devalue or hurt undocumented immigrants. Undocumented immigrants also have a place in business. As discussed earlier, H2-A workers are an important part of agricultural business. The public does not usually see this side of business and laws pertaining to undocumented immigrants. It is not something that is broadcasted on the news frequently. Businesses rely on workers from other countries while the public makes claims that jobs are being stolen from Americans. These businesses make the decision to bring on H2-A workers and ultimately help contribute to the ideas people have about workers from other countries here in the United States.

Views on Immigration

The media undoubtedly has a big effect on how undocumented immigrants are portrayed. The media is used by claims makers to showcase and validate the recognition of a problem (Best 2017). Mass amounts of people can easily tune in to hear information about a group of people whether it's biased or not. The news can also serve as a catalyst policy making from people who want to change and are responding to events in their town or city (Best 2017). “Typifying examples used by U.S news media to show plights of individuals affected by immigration” (Best

2017:308). For example, in Virginia, a drunk driver hit and killed a teenage girl who was walking across the street. When the media got a hold of the story it was made apparent that he was undocumented. The community was angry that there were not stricter immigration laws in place. Bill O'Reilly continuously used this example to explain the importance of immigration reform and explain the danger of undocumented immigrants. Virginia Beach was labeled a sanctuary city and an example of the insanity in the U.S (Craig, Pitts and Osborne 2011). This is an example of how the media can use fear to create negative opinions toward undocumented immigrants. This example is important because Bill O'Reilly is a household name with many viewers who watch his show. What he said influences people and their opinions. In fact, "65+ year old male, white conservative, Republican, and lacking a college degree" are more likely to cite illegal immigration as causing them a great deal of worry (Suro 2009: 2). This speaks greatly to the type of people who are worried about undocumented immigrants living in this country. A story like this is meant to entice fear or further this anxiety. In the news story, details were focused around the Mexican native's illegal status. The Latinx community feared backlash after the story was published.

The Latinx community is often very aware of their perception in relation to public opinion. In a survey it was found that 85 percent of people who are not citizens of the United States felt like immigrant marches in the U.S had a favorable effect on the public's view of immigrants that are undocumented (Morales, Murga, and Sanchez 2012). The survey also found that Latina/os are 141.3 times more likely to support a march than someone who is white (Morales, Murga, and Sanchez 2012). This can be telling of racial divides in the U.S. when it comes to perceptions of immigrants.

There are varying opinions on immigration inside the Latinx community. In a study, Latinos of higher socioeconomic status were more likely to support expanding border patrol while Latinos who are less educated and had lower incomes were less likely to support increased border patrol (Stringer 2018). There are other factors besides race that are influencing how people view immigrants. The wealthy, for example, were found to be more likely to support building a wall than people with a lower income (Stringer 2018). This is important to consider when examining perceptions of illegal immigrants. In a study done to examine beliefs people held on immigrants coming to their country, 81% of grad students in believe there should be open/ free borders (Veer, et al. 2004). Education is also a deciding factor for people's views on immigration. Immigration has always been a part of US history. Although people's views on immigrants have changed throughout the years, this literature suggests that negative views of immigrants are often transferred through media and can be altered by education, race, and income.

Stringer (2018) also studied the differences in attitudes toward undocumented immigrants and mentions that "Those who are older, more educated, and have a higher income are significantly more likely to support increasing the number of border patrol agents than Latinos who are younger, less educated, and have lower incomes" (2018: 705). These are different groups of people who have similar views on immigration. Symbolic interactionism would view their joint ideals as a result of their environments that they are subject to. Their action would be their view on border control, and they got to this opinion because of their shared meaning toward immigrants through the experiences they have had. Having a higher education allows you to

have different knowledge, colleagues, jobs, and experiences than people with less education.

Interacting with these different people can alter your views.

Gender and socioeconomic status also specifically affect views on immigration. “Males of all ages have consistently expressed greater anxiety about immigration than females, with older males exhibiting the highest level of worry” (Suro 2009: 11). As we think about views on undocumented immigrants it is important to realize that gender is a big deciding factor of opinion. In a study conducted by Pew research it was found that education level was also a predictor of opinion on immigration. Those who were not a college graduate were more likely to agree that “immigrants are a burden on the country.” This translated for Democrats and Republicans (Suro 2009). Those who answered that they were “financially struggling” were more likely to have negative opinions on immigration than those who responded they were “financially secure” (Suro 2009).

In a more private sense, immigrants take part in many sectors of private business, where their legal status could always pose as a problem. Professionals have a responsibility to have unbiased attitudes toward their clients. A 2017 study was conducted with mental health professionals and their views on their Latino clients. Most of the professionals in this study were found to have positive views of Latino immigrants. This was in correlation to the multiculturalism training they experienced. For those who referred to their clients as illegal aliens, this training did not seem to affect their views (Alfaro and Bui 2017).

Finally, religion is often a contributing factor in the debate on immigration. Nine out of ten evangelicals said that the Bible has no impact on their immigration views. Two-thirds of these people surveyed also said that they preferred immigration reform (Suomala 2017).

Evangelical support was important to Trump's election; 81% of white evangelicals supported him (Suomala 2017). Trump has been known for his anti-immigration sentiments and influences U.S. Americans on their views of immigration. In a survey, people who identified as Republican or conservative stated higher levels of worry or anxiety over illegal immigration than liberals/Democrats (Suro 2009). On the other hand, the New Sanctuary movement is a religious campaign aimed toward changing views on immigrants and giving sanctuary to mixed status families (Best 2017). Positive typifying examples are used to showcase immigrants as kind, nonviolent family members, rather than criminals (Best 2017).

Xenophobia and its Effect on Immigrants

The United States has the most immigrants in the world, and they account for 13.5% of the population; most immigrants (76%) are here legally (Lopez and Bialik 2017). This contradicts the popular opinion of the overwhelming number of "illegal immigrants" that are in the United States. By race and ethnicity, more Asian immigrants than Hispanic immigrants have arrived in the U.S each year since 2010 (Lopez and Bialik 2017). The media heavily portrays Hispanic immigrants coming to the United States (Craig, Pitts and Osborne 2011). Asian Americans experience the anxiety over undocumented status, though the Hispanic population seems to be targeted in this modern-day wave of anti-immigration sentiment.

Information surrounding undocumented immigrants is widely generalized or distressing- immigrants reported the use of metaphors that will often compare them to animals or objects (Bishop 2018). Many of these immigrants view themselves as Americans and wished the laws aligned with those feelings. Children are not excluded from the fear that immigrants face. "My

siblings are scared every day that one of these days we will come home and either one of our parents won't be there. We haven't even done anything" (Buenavista 2016: 160). This comes from an interview with Asian- American immigrants who are undocumented in this country. The child who gave this quote fears for his well-being just because his parents are undocumented. Others in the interviews expressed similar sentiments whether it was hearing people calling them illegal and threatening on TV or feeling like they are not seen as regular people (Buenavista 2016). Thirteen out of the fifteen participants also had direct relationships with someone who had been deported or detained. This included friends and family. (Buenavista 2016). These feelings of fear held by immigrants can shed light on the perceptions that documented U.S. Americans have toward immigrants.

Once in the country, holding an undocumented status can pose many risks because of the xenophobic policies formed. For example, Southwest Key, a nonprofit contractor that makes about a half a billion dollars to detain migrant children in facilities across the country. Three of their employees have been arrested for sexually abusing migrant children (Lopez and Park 2018). 1,448 allegations of sexual abuse were filed with ICE between 2012 and March 2018 and many of these cases are not investigated (Lopez and Park 2018). This can speak volumes to the treatment of undocumented persons in this country who are being detained and abused. The Office of Refugee Resettlement is responsible for placing undocumented and unaccompanied minor immigrant children in the care of someone in the United States while they are here. In 2017 the ORR reached out to 7,635 unaccompanied children and their sponsors. They were unable to find 1,475 children, meaning they lost these minors in the system (Wagner 2018). The

debate on whether ORR is responsible for the care of these children is important to understand the power dynamics with laws and undocumented immigrants.

Recently, there has been a notion that the people coming to the United States are all criminals. People in positions of power can make claims that are widely broadcasted and seen throughout the country as well as globally. Donald Trump gave his presidential announcement speech by talking about immigration as a problem in the U.S. This was the start to him campaigning on the dangers of “illegal immigrants.” This is now something he is known for. “When Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending their best. They’re not sending you. They’re not sending you. They’re sending people that have lots of problems, and they’re bringing those problems with us. They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists. And some, I assume, are good people” (Trump 2015). When a person in power makes a statement like this it is likely to affect the masses.

Many immigrants come here for similar reasons. In a study conducted with nineteen immigrant women who crossed the Mexican border into the United States without permission, it was found that most of them came to the United States because they or their family were in danger because of political, ethnic/and or political grounds. One woman’s husband became politically active in their country and was thrown in jail. They received death threats and had to flee for their lives (Goodman, Vesley, Letiecq, and Cleaveland 2017). Having an illegal status can produce anxiety in a family. “Illegality-the historically specific, socially, politically, and legally produced condition of immigrants' legal status and deportability intimately and deeply impacts all immigrants (Abrego 2016: 5).

Research surrounding immigration is not lacking. Research has been conducted to find statistics and data on immigration numbers. Qualitative research has been used to tell immigrants shared experiences and stories. This study aims to fill in the gap of lacking research on the public's perceptions of undocumented immigrants in the United States.

METHODOLOGY

The data for this study was collected using online surveys examining people's current perceptions of immigrants coming to the United States illegally. Surveys were distributed through the online surveying system, Qualtrics, and responses were anonymous. The participants could stop taking the survey at any time as it was voluntary. The Qualtrics survey link was also distributed to my personal contacts via Facebook. Once all the surveys were completed, the data was input into SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) and analyzed statistically. Indexes were created for all Likert scale questions and run through correlation tests. The sample was obtained using convenience sampling. The study consisted of 177 U.S. Americans at least 18 years or older.

Variables

Independent: To measure gender participants in the study were asked if they identify as female, male, or non-binary. They were asked to choose one or more races/ethnicities that they consider themselves to be. Participants had the option to choose White, Black or African American, American Indian, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, Hispanic/ Latino, or Other. The other section allows them to write in a race/ ethnicity for themselves. Participants were asked to place themselves on a scale to determine political views where the left is extremely liberal, and the right side is extremely conservative.

Dependent: The survey used a five-point Likert scale that ranged from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree." Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement or disagreement with the statements given. This was used to measure opinions and perceptions on

undocumented immigrants. Many statements included opinions on the dangers of immigrants, how they contribute to society, and immigration in general. Current events were also used in measuring perceptions such as the recent detainment of children and families that crossed the Mexican border. To further analyze perceptions, questions about how the United States should handle immigrants coming here illegally were also included.

Hypothesis

- Hypothesis 1: Men are more likely to agree that it is wrong to come to this country illegally or undocumented compared to women.
- Hypothesis 2: Those with a higher income are more likely to agree it is wrong to come to this country illegally or undocumented than those with lower incomes.
- Hypothesis 3: Those who are more conservative are more likely to agree it is wrong to come to this country illegally or undocumented compared to those who are more liberal.

RESULTS

Univariate Analysis

Frequencies were run on political views, gender, and education to determine the samples characteristics. These demographics are shown on Table 1. The mean and median were taken from political views because political views were measured on a scale where 1 was extremely conservative and 10 was extremely liberal. Given that the mean was 3.57, the average of the participants who took the survey were in between conservative and neutral. Most of the participants who took the survey were female (61.9%). For education, people with Doctoral Degree had the lowest response rate of 1.1%. Bachelor's degrees had the highest percentage at 29.9%, Associate degree (27.1%) followed by Some College but no Degree (23.7%), then Masters (10.2%), High school/Ged (6.2%), and Professional Degree (1.7%).

Table 1. Demographics N=177

	Percentage*
Political Views	
Mean	3.57
Median	3.00
Gender	
Male	32.4
Female	61.9
Education	
High school graduate (high school diploma or equivalent including GED)	6.2
Some College But No Degree	23.7
Associate Degree in college (2-year)	27.1
Bachelor Degree in College (4-year)	29.9
Master's Degree	10.2
Doctoral Degree	1.1
Professional degree (JD, MD)	1.7

*Unless otherwise noted

Descriptive statistics were run for all Likert scale questions. Questions had to be reverse coded, so they matched when run through statistics. For example, if someone answered Strongly Agree for the question, “The United States should accept all refugees,” Strongly agree was coded as a 5 on a scale of 1-5. The outcome for this question is different from, “Undocumented immigrants are dangerous.” Answering Strongly Agree for this question could not be coded as a 5 and mean the same thing for the previous question, thus the need to reverse code the questions marked with a star in Table 2. Separate indexes were not created for this reason. Items were reverse coded until Cronbach’s Alpha Coefficient was enough at 0.76.

Participants in the study were asked to answer the questions with a Likert scale. 1 being Strongly Disagree, 2 being Agree, 3 Neither Agree or Disagree, 4 Agree, and 5 Strongly Disagree. These questions were about their views on undocumented immigrants, border policies, general immigration questions, and current event statements to measure views on undocumented immigrants (question about detaining families and children if they have come to the U.S illegally as it relates to current events). People seemed to be modest in their agreement with a question and did not want to fully commit to agreeing strongly. People were more likely to have stronger disagreements with the questions.

Table 2. Variable Descriptive Statistics-Impulse Index

Measure	Median	Mean	Std. dev.
Undocumented immigrants are a problem in society	2.00	2.19	1.319
Undocumented immigrants take Americans' jobs	2.00	2.07	1.169
Undocumented immigrants are dangerous	1.00	1.80	1.045
*There should be open borders around the United States so anyone can come here.	2.50	2.66	1.334
*The United States should accept all refugees	3.00	3.21	1.370
Undocumented immigrants should be excluded from social welfare	3.00	2.93	1.380
It is okay to detain families and children if they have come to the United States illegally	2.00	2.38	1.1417
*There is plenty of room in the United States for anyone who wishes to come here	4.00	3.58	1.302
Not breaking the law is more important than seeking refuge from violence or poverty	2.00	2.03	1.144
*Undocumented immigrants are not infringing on our country's resources	4.00	3.40	1.344
Coming to this country illegally is too easy	2.00	2.48	1.217
Undocumented immigrants pay taxes	4.00	3.49	1.193

*1= Strongly Disagree; 2= Disagree; 3= Neither agree nor disagree; 4= Agree; 5= Strongly Agree.
 Note: Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient =.76 *Statements were reverse coded to match

Bivariate Analysis

The bivariate analysis run in SPSS was used to test hypotheses. A correlation was run to test the significance between opinions on undocumented immigrants and income. The test had a significance at .131 with a p value of .05. This meant the test was not significant and there was not statistical significance between opinions on immigration and income. Income was proven to not be a telling factor of opinion on undocumented immigrants. A correlation was also run to test the significance between opinions on undocumented immigrants and political affiliation. The correlation is significant at a .01 level with a test statistic of .530. This means that there is a significance between opinions on undocumented immigrants and political views. These

correlations can be seen in table 3. Those who considered themselves more conservative had more negative views of undocumented immigrants versus those who considered themselves more liberal.

Table 3. Correlation Between Income and Opinions on Undocumented Immigrants

	Opinions on Undocumented Immigrants
Income	.131
Political Views	.530**

Note: P value not significant ** Correlation significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

A T-test was run to evaluate gender differences in opinion on undocumented immigrants. Because there was a p value of .05 it was concluded that the test is not significant because the significant value is .722 meaning that men and women do not have a difference of opinion on undocumented immigrants. A T test was run on just men and women because there was not enough data to support the non-binary category when ANOVA was run. The T test concludes that there is not a significant difference in the opinions of men and women and their views on undocumented immigrants in the United States shown on Table 4. An additional one-way ANOVA test was run for gender to determine differences in opinion on specific questions versus the index previously discussed in table 4. ANOVA found that questions 1, 4, and 7 were significant.

Table 4: T-test- Gender Differences in opinion on undocumented immigrants

	t	Sig	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Men	-.360	.722	42.8095	6.28983	1.37255
Women			43.6364	5.93755	1.79024

Because the gender tested to not be statistically significant when ran on an index, a one-way ANOVA test was run between gender and the individual Likert scale questions to determine if there were any differences in opinion based on gender. ANOVA found questions 1, 4, and 7 to be statistically significant, meaning that there is a difference of opinion between men and women. Women were less likely to agree that undocumented immigrants are a problem in society (Question 1). Women were also more likely to agree that the United States should have open borders so anyone can come here (Question 4). And finally, women were more likely to disagree with the statement, “It is ok to detain families and children if they come to the United States illegally” (Question 7). These specific results are presented in Table 5 and 6.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics for Statistically Significant Gender Findings

Measure		N	Mean	Std. Dev
Q.1 Undocumented immigrants are a problem in society	Women	113	1.94	1.038
	Men	58	2.47	1.354
Q.4 There should be open borders around the United States so anyone can come here	Women	113	2.72	1.278
	Men	58	2.29	1.298
Q.7 It is ok to detain families and children if they have come to the United States illegally	Women	113	2.20	1.368
	Men	58	2.78	1.377

Table 6. One- Sided ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Q1	Between Groups	10.663	1	10.663	8.009	.005
	Within Groups	224.997	169	1.331		
	Total	235.661	170			
Q4	Between Groups	6.881	1	6.881	4.169	.043
	Within Groups	278.955	169	1.651		
	Total	285.836	170			
Q7	Between Groups	12.554	1	12.554	6.581	.011
	Within Groups	322.405	169	1.908		
	Total	334.959	170			

DISCUSSION

Hypothesis one predicted that men would be more likely to believe that it is wrong to come to the United States illegally/ undocumented compared to women. This was not supported when a T-test was run to test this. It was found that their answers did not differ enough to be statistically significant. Because previous research states otherwise, additional tests were run to see if there were differences in opinion on specific questions based on gender. All three questions that were found statistically significant showed that men held more negative views on undocumented immigrants and immigration policy than women. This matches with the evidence within the literature discussed that men are more likely to hold negative views of undocumented immigrants (Suro 2009).

Hypothesis two predicted that there would be a significant difference between opinions on undocumented immigrants and income. When the correlation was run it was found that there is no statistical significance between the two. This result was not consistent with the research. “Those who are older, more educated, and have a higher income are significantly more likely to support increasing the number of border patrol agents than Latinos who are younger, less educated, and have lower incomes” (Stringer 2018: 705). This was a surprising find because of the research that pointed to the hypothesis being significant. The literature states that those who are more financially insecure have more negative views on immigration than those who are financially stable (Suro 2009). A possible explanation for this could be the social problems process discussed throughout this research. Even though there is data to support this claim, the

social problems process would argue that the people who took this survey were not socialized to give this claim as much meaning as those surveyed in other research (Best 2017).

The final hypothesis stated that political views affect opinions on undocumented immigrants was proven to be statistically significant. People with a higher average on the political scale from 1-10 were more likely to have negative views of undocumented immigrants. So, in other words, conservatives are more likely to hold these views. This is consistent within the literature examined. Particularly Veer, (2004) found that conservatives are more likely to hold negative views of undocumented immigrants and Suros (2009) review of Pew research data found that those who define themselves as more conservative hold more negative views of undocumented immigrants.

CONCLUSION

This study posed several limitations. The questions asked were not the easiest or most politically correct. Some of the answers could have been skewed due to social desirability. This could have caused people to want to answer in a way that suits a certain political correctness, instead of giving their actual opinion. The wording on at least one or more of the questions proved to be tricky, as I got some feedback. Also, the sample size of 177 is limited and could be bigger so the demographics of participants could be spread out evenly, instead of where they were at.

It was found that women are more likely to have a less negative view on these specific topics versus men: border control, families and children being detained when coming to the U.S. illegally, and immigrants being a problem in society. These are important findings in gender since the research discussed previously did not have such narrow views to focus on. This allows for more specific conversation and research with gender and immigration. These specific topics can be used in other research to further examine gender differences.

Future studies should examine political affiliation and views on undocumented immigrants on a greater scale. As the literature suggests, political affiliation does influence views of undocumented immigrants with Republicans/conservatives feeling more worried about illegal immigration (Suro 2009). Because only 177 participants answered the Qualtrics survey and the results were found significant, I imagine a broader reach of participants could producer better

results. Doing more quantitative research could help the understanding of why political affiliation affects opinions on undocumented immigrants.

Qualitative research could also be helpful in trying to decipher opinions, in future research. With time to interview respondents, one could go more in depth about political affiliation and find out background information. All other areas from the current study could be integrated into qualitative research. I believe that future studies could examine this to grow the field of knowledge we have on opinions of undocumented immigrants. “Illegality as a Source of Solidarity and Tension in Latino Families” was particularly helpful in gaining knowledge and insight on families who deal with undocumented status. The same research could be helpful in deciphering opinions of people who think negatively of undocumented immigrants. Do these opinions form from the social construction of a social problem- as discussed throughout the paper- or do they fall into another process?

This type of research is particularly important in our current political climate. With media sources and political figures speaking out on undocumented immigrants, opinions are constantly being thrown around. Studies like this show the real opinions of people, instead of over generalized or far reaching ones. It is possible and important to study these things so we can understand where people are coming from and what their background looks like. This is important to know in the fight for the decriminalization of undocumented immigrants. When there is significant tested knowledge, it strengthens arguments.

APPENDIX A: HARD-COPY VERSION OF SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Are you 18 or older?

Yes

No

Skip To: End of Survey If Are you 18 or older? = No

Please select an answer that best matches your feelings and opinions on immigrants who have come to the United States illegally.

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
Undocumented immigrants take Americans jobs (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Undocumented immigrants are a problem in society (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Undocumented immigrants are dangerous (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
There should be open borders around the United States so anyone can come here (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Undocumented immigrants should be excluded from social welfare (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The United States should accept all refugees (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is okay to detain families and children if they have come to the United States illegally (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Not breaking the law is more important than seeking refuge from violence or poverty (8)

There is plenty of room in the United States for anyone who wishes to come here (9)

Undocumented immigrants are not infringing on our country's resources (10)

Coming to this country illegally is too easy (11)

Undocumented immigrants pay taxes (12)

What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?

- Less than high school degree (1)
- High school graduate (high school diploma or equivalent including GED) (2)
- Some college but no degree (3)
- Associate degree in college (2-year) (4)
- Bachelor's degree in college (4-year) (5)
- Master's degree (6)
- Doctoral degree (7)
- Professional degree (JD, MD) (8)

Choose one or more races that you consider yourself to be:

- White (1)
- Black or African American (2)
- American Indian or Alaska Native (3)
- Asian (4)
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (5)
- Hispanic/Latino (6)
- Multiracial (7)

Other (8) _____

Please select your gender

Female (1)

Male (2)

Non- binary (3)

Information about income is very important to understand. Would you please give your best guess? Please indicate the answer that includes your entire household income in (previous year) before taxes.

- Less than \$10,000 (1)
- \$10,000 to \$19,999 (2)
- \$20,000 to \$29,999 (3)
- \$30,000 to \$39,999 (4)
- \$40,000 to \$49,999 (5)
- \$50,000 to \$59,999 (6)
- \$60,000 to \$69,999 (7)
- \$70,000 to \$79,999 (8)
- \$80,000 to \$89,999 (9)
- \$90,000 to \$99,999 (10)
- \$100,000 to \$149,999 (11)
- \$150,000 or more (12)

Here is a scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from extremely liberal (left) to extremely conservative (right). Where would you place yourself on this scale?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

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