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Introduction*American Identity in the Twenty-First Century***ENGLISH-ONLY CHEESESTEAKS**

In 2006, a landmark cheesesteak shop in Philadelphia garnered national attention not for its menu but for a sign posted by its owner telling customers, “This is America. When ordering, please speak English.” Owner Joey Vento argued that the sign was aimed not at tourists but at illegal immigrants from Mexico. He gave many media interviews during the controversy, stating in one of them that it is “wrong, wrong, wrong that a Mexican girl comes here to pop a baby,” and that he is only saying “what everybody’s thinking but is afraid to say.” Though some potential customers chose to avoid the shop during this time, others eagerly voiced their support for Vento as they waited in long lines for their cheesesteaks (Zucchini 2006). In 2007 then-presidential candidate Rudolph Giuliani campaigned at the shop (Dale 2007). A panel of the Philadelphia Commission on Human Rights ruled in 2008 that the sign was not discriminatory. In response to the flood of support Vento received from across the country, he said, “I woke up America” (Maykuth 2008).

SCARED TO REPORT CRIMES TO THE POLICE

As the federal government failed to enact immigration reform amid cries for change in the early years of the twenty-first century, states, counties, and cities began devising their own policies to address issues that arise from legal and illegal immigration. One increasingly common approach is to enlist local law enforcement agencies in efforts to determine whether a person is in the country legally and to detain them if they are not. In 2007, for example, the supervisors of Prince William County, Virginia, passed a resolution that directed “officers to check the status of anyone in police custody who they suspect is an illegal immigrant” (Miroff 2007). Because the directive does not require all people in custody to be asked their status, Latino residents have voiced fears that the resolution would render them targets of racial profiling. For their part, police

officers affected by similar measures in other locales have expressed worries that residents will be less willing to report crimes for fear of increased scrutiny (Ford and Montes 2007). An Arizona statute passed in 2010 sent shock waves across the country for calling on officers to check the status of anyone they suspect of being in the country illegally, regardless of whether the person was already in custody for some other offense. Not only did this law spark fears of reporting crimes to police, but it also generated comparisons to South Africa's apartheid and to Nazism.

ATTITUDE ADJUSTMENT NEEDED

During the 2008 presidential primaries, with growing attention devoted to the preferences of Latino voters, journalist and talk-radio host Bob Lonsberry wrote a column questioning why Latinos are considered a minority group while Italian and German Americans are not. The main difference between Latinos and these other groups, he argues, is one of "attitude," writing that Latinos "typically make choices that perpetuate their minority status," such as not learning English and maintaining a strong identification with their country of origin. He goes on to say that once Latinos Americanize, they can not only achieve the American Dream but can also strengthen America with their achievements.¹

What all of the preceding situations highlight is that all levels of American society across the nation are finding themselves dealing with a tangled web of ethnic change, language diversity, national security, effective law enforcement, and civil liberties. They all stem from the changing demographic makeup of the United States and how various levels of government address the policy needs that arise from such change. More importantly, these policy debates and local controversies can have long-lasting consequences for the relationships people have with American political institutions. For whites and nonwhites, legal immigrants and illegal immigrants, first-generation and fourth-generation Americans, one's very sense of self vis-à-vis his or her national identity is brought to the fore when such controversies arise. All of these debates touch in one way or another on the concept of American national identity, what it means, and who can be a part of it. When people are confronted with such issues, they look to their views of the norms and values that constitute American national identity in order to help them determine what they think are appropriate policy responses (Citrin, Reingold, and Green 1990; Schildkraut 2005a). Moreover, they can begin to question the extent to which they think their membership in the national community is an important part of who they are, especially if they feel that political institutions or their fellow Americans do not treat them as full and equal members.

¹ Column available at <http://www.boblonsberry.com/writings.cfm?story=2301&go=4> (accessed January 21, 2008).

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The question of what consequences ethnic change has on American society is a recurring one in our history. From Ben Franklin worrying about the impact of Germans on the Anglo way of life in the colonies, to the Know-Nothing Party campaigning against Irish Catholics in the 1840s, to Chinese exclusion in the 1880s, to national origin quotas in the 1920s, and to Japanese internment in the 1940s, fears of the cultural and demographic changes brought by immigrants have always sparked outrage and division.² This story is as American as the story of the shots fired at Lexington and Concord. We continue to add chapters to it in the current era as the percentage of foreign-born residents in the country has been rising steadily, from a low of roughly 4 percent in 1970 to approximately 13 percent today.³ Although in the past our immigration politics concerned immigrants from various European and Asian countries, today the focus is largely on immigrants from Latin America, and especially from Mexico. Not only do Latin Americans constitute the vast majority of immigrants today, but they also comprise a majority of illegal immigrants. The Department of Homeland Security reports that illegal immigrants from North America constitute 76 percent of all illegal immigrants to the United States, 78 percent of which is attributable to Mexico alone. An additional 12 percent of illegal immigrants come from Asian countries (Hoefer, Rytina, and Baker 2008).

When viewing current immigration politics in its historical context, it is also important to note that the concept of an “illegal immigrant” did not exist for much of American history. The Johnson-Reed Act of 1924 (aka the National Origins Act) created the restrictionist framework that established the notion of illegality. Though the quotas from that act were abolished in 1965, numerical limits on immigration remained, and thus, so did illegality. It took on new political significance as the 1965 immigration reforms have been credited with exacerbating the rate of illegal immigration (Ngai 2004). Further immigration reforms in the 1980s increased the rate even more. Estimates suggest that the number of illegal immigrants in the country grew from 2.5 million in 1980 to 3.5 million in 1990 to close to 12 million today (Edwards 2006; Hoefer, Rytina, and Baker 2008). Due to these trends and the subsequent immigration-related policy debates that accompany them, we find ourselves once again challenged to address public policy issues that arise from ethnic change and the debates about the meaning of American identity that such change brings. This book is not an analysis of such policies. Rather, it is about the American people – how they feel about the changes around them, how they feel about the policies in question, and about how much – or little – commonality there is among Americans of different backgrounds regarding these matters.

There is a significant amount of heated rhetoric on immigration, ethnicity, and identity, and the rhetoric can be consequential for the very phenomena under investigation here. When Vento says his Mexican customers are there

² See Chapter 7 for a more detailed history of attitudes toward immigrants in the United States.

³ Data on demographics were found at the Migration Policy Institute, <http://www.migrationinformation.org/datahub/charts/final.fb.shtml> (accessed June 19, 2008).

just to “pop a baby,” how are those customers ever going to feel like they belong or are proud to be members of that community? When police officers are told to use their own judgment when deciding whether to inquire about immigrant status, how are Latino residents going to feel that they can trust those officers or the county government that issued the directive? When there is a constant barrage of political discourse that chastises immigrants for not wanting to become American and rejecting American values, how can that not affect the very likelihood that those immigrants (or their children) will come to think of themselves as American?

I do not mean to give the impression that a majority of Americans is hostile to immigration or to immigrants. Many points exist throughout this book in which I demonstrate otherwise. Although it is true that when asked if immigration to the United States should be increased, decreased, or kept the same, since 1965 a plurality of Americans has consistently said it should be decreased with only three exceptions (1965, 1999, and 2001 – pre-9/11), it is also true that Americans have consistently been more likely to say that immigration is, on the whole, a good thing for the country rather than a bad thing.⁴ Moreover, majorities throughout the past several years consistently voice support for providing an opportunity for undocumented immigrants to earn legal status, even if the words *amnesty* and *illegal* are used in the survey question (Schildkraut 2009). Americans are often sympathetic to immigrants who do not know English (see Chapter 4), and they routinely credit immigrants for being hardworking (see Chapter 7). In short, proimmigrant and ambivalent attitudes about immigrants appear to be as widespread – if not more so – than hostile ones. Ambivalence is a key analytical concept that I employ at points in this book. Nonetheless, hostility is also present. By its nature, it has been more noticeable and newsworthy than the proimmigrant and ambivalent voices, and it needs to be addressed. It shapes the political debate and thus has consequences for how policy makers approach immigration-related issues and how the hostility’s targets relate to American society.

The concerns raised in immigration discourse – about citizenship, law enforcement, and a sense of common purpose – are valid ones for citizens in a multiethnic society to have. Given the pace of demographic change in recent years, it would be foolish if we did not think about these issues. But the rhetoric is often devoid of careful empirical analysis, and a major goal of this book is to fill some of that void, to provide the kind of data and assessment that allow us to examine, for instance, whether the alleged traditional consensus on what it means to be an American is breaking down or whether people are increasingly rejecting an American identity and instead prioritizing panethnic or national origin identities. In doing so, it also examines where such patterns of identity prioritization come from and what their consequences are.

⁴ Trends on these questions were found at Gallup Brain’s “Topics and Trends,” <http://institution.gallup.com.ezproxy.library.tufts.edu/content/?ci=1660> (accessed September 10, 2009).

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One constant theme among elite commentators and ordinary Americans alike is that the very idea of being American is in jeopardy, and that we have of late failed to recognize just how much work it takes to keep this diverse country together. Such concerns have come from those on the right and on the left. The “work” discussed as essential for national stability often involves wrestling with the competing identities that individuals have and highlights the need to ensure that one’s identity as an American achieves and maintains prominence. Public opinion about the contours and dynamics of American identity is where the central focus of this book lies.

Identity Content and Attachment

The starting point for this project is the assumption that national identities are key players in shaping how people respond to diversity and public policy debates. Identities have multiple dimensions, and this research falls within the increasing body of political science scholarship concerned with understanding the political consequences of these dimensions (Citrin et al. 1994; Citrin, Wong, and Duff 2001; Lien, Conway, and Wong 2004; Theiss-Morse 2004; Abdelal et al. 2006; Huddy and Khatib 2007; Theiss-Morse 2009). The aspects of American identity addressed in this empirical political science literature include beliefs about what it means to be a member of this particular national community, examinations of the boundaries people draw that delineate who can be a member of the national group, and more recently, the degree of connection or belonging that individuals have with the group and its members, especially when they might also claim a connection to an alternate group, such as a racial or ethnic group.

There is an increasing recognition that American identity, along with all national identities, is not necessarily unique in its attitudinal dynamics but rather akin to other social identities. The term *social identity* refers to the part of a person’s sense of self that derives from his or her membership in a particular group and the value or meaning that he or she attaches to such membership (Tajfel 1982a). Accordingly, one’s degree of attachment to the group and particular understanding of what it takes to be a member of “group X” are key factors shaping the role that social identities – including national identities – play in determining subsequent political attitudes and behaviors (e.g., Citrin, Wong, and Duff 2001; Huddy and Khatib 2007; Theiss-Morse 2009). The research presented in this book is not an attempt to confirm or challenge this view of national identity as a social identity but rather to use its insights for guidance when assessing contemporary debates about a wide range of attitudes and behaviors that stem from the politics of immigration. As such, the book focuses on two particular individual-level dimensions of American identity that derive from an understanding of national identities as social identities and are implicated in today’s heated rhetoric about immigration. These two dimensions are *content* and *attachment*.

IDENTITY CONTENT

The first part of the analysis is centered on identity content, understood here to be the set of “constitutive norms” that provide “formal and informal rules that define group membership” (Abdelal et al. 2006, 696). Content applies to institutions (formal content) and citizens (informal content). For institutions, content refers to the rules of the game. Is ours a society that protects speech rights, or is speech limited? What, if any, restrictions are placed on eligibility for citizenship? Is political participation – such as voting – a requirement, or are people free to abstain? These kinds of regulated norms define the legal boundaries of membership. They also set expectations for how group members behave and allow government officials to impose sanctions when citizens violate those expectations.

For citizens, content also refers to expectations about what our compatriots are like but in an informal manner and without the force of law when norms are violated. When citizens contemplate the constitutive norms of American identity, they are thinking about what makes us American – and what they think *should* make us American. It is this informal boundary making that leads us to use terms such as *true American*, *all-American*, and even *un-American*. Constitutive norms encompass behaviors (such as political participation), beliefs (such as tolerance and patriotism), and personal characteristics (such as where a person was born or the language she or he speaks).

In this study, the focus is on identity content from the perspective of citizens rather than institutions. It examines the expectations people have of each other as living and breathing embodiments of American identity. Recent scholarship has underscored the importance that setting these kinds of boundaries plays in social identities like national identities, in which people yearn for both a sense of belonging and distinctiveness. The boundaries emerge from the group’s history and from ideas about what “typical” group members are like (Theiss-Morse 2009). Previous work has called the collection of informal boundaries associated with American identity “Americanism” (Citrin, Reingold, and Green 1990). A wide range of boundaries that fall under this label is examined as is the extent to which they should be thought of as a single construct or whether it is more appropriate to analyze multiple “Americanisms.” Then the impact of peoples’ understanding of Americanism on immigration-related policy debates is explored.

In his 2004 book *Who Are We?*, Samuel Huntington warned of the loss of a common set of norms and values uniting Americans. He wrote, for example, that “the battles over racial, bilingual, and multiculturalist challenges to the [American] Creed, and America’s core culture had become key elements of the American political landscape by the early years of the twenty-first century. The outcomes of these battles in the deconstructionist war will undoubtedly be substantially affected by the extent to which Americans suffer repeated terrorist attacks on their homeland and their country engages in overseas wars against their enemies. If external threats subside, deconstructionist movements could

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achieve renewed momentum” (2004, 177). In other words, the very meaning of American identity is under siege from within, and without an external enemy to unite us, we may do ourselves in. He argued that a multicultural America will become a multicreedal America, and that a multicreedal America cannot survive because a common creed has historically been essential in holding this country together.

Huntington’s book garnered national attention not only because it provocatively targeted Latinos as a key source of the problem, but also because it tapped into an increasingly widespread sentiment that there is a loss of a common core in terms of beliefs and behaviors. Huntington was far from alone in voicing such concerns (Pickus 2005; Farmer 2006; Wilson 2006; Geohegan 2007). One particularly successful issue entrepreneur in the area of immigration has been Lou Dobbs of CNN. During George W. Bush’s second term as president, Dobbs expressed consistent outrage about proimmigrant and proimmigration arguments and policy proposals. He regularly chastised immigrant-friendly political leaders as betraying the country, its values, and its people. His outrage found a receptive audience in the American public. During the height of congressional debates about so-called comprehensive immigration reform in 2006, Dobbs was getting more than eight hundred thousand viewers per night, an impressive 46 percent increase in his viewership from the previous year.⁵ As a reporter from the *Los Angeles Times* noted, Dobbs seemed to “add viewers in direct proportion to [his] fiercely expressed views against illegal immigration” (Collins 2008).

This outrage is consequential. Recent research shows that people who cite CNN as their main source of television news exhibit higher levels of antiimmigration sentiment than viewers of network news (as do people who cite Fox News and their main source of news). Using data collected during the 2006 midterm elections, Facchini and colleagues find that people who watched CNN were 8 percentage points more likely than people who watched news on CBS to oppose the Senate’s rather immigrant-friendly reform bill even after controlling for ideology and partisan identification (Facchini, Mayda, and Puglisi 2009). Even though a majority of Americans were supportive of the key elements of comprehensive immigration reform (Schildkraut 2009), the vocal minority drowned them out and won the day. The reform bill that Bush worked so hard to advance, which would have created a guest-worker program and provided an opportunity for illegal immigrants to become legal residents, died in Congress.

Antiimmigration rhetoric is thus fueled, in part, by the notion that the country’s growing ethnic diversity is fracturing popular consensus about the meaning of American identity. One goal of this book is to assess that claim. If this claim turns out to be a misperception and is not supported by the evidence, findings from social psychology indicate that it is imperative to set the

⁵ Newsmax, “Lou Dobbs’ Ratings Up at CNN,” <http://archive.newsmax.com/archives/ic/2006/5/10/104603.shtml> (accessed March 3, 2009).

record straight. Decades of research show that “people respond systematically more favorably to others whom they perceive to belong to their group than to different groups” (Gaertner and Dovidio 2000, 15). It does not take much for “we/they thinking” to emerge, and when it does, a wide range of group conflict processes are set into motion (Tajfel 1982b).⁶ (Mis)perceiving that immigrants and their descendants reject “traditional American values,” such as the work ethic or the value of political participation, would be sufficiently threatening such that native-born Americans close ranks and devalue the perceived out-group. Thus, whether native-born Americans and their immigrant compatriots actually share common perceptions about – and commitments to – the American political community needs to be investigated, and commonalities need to be highlighted. Prosocial behavior and cooperation increase when people of different backgrounds are led to focus on a common identity (Gaertner and Dovidio 2000).

Investigating the degree of consensus about what Americanism means is not only important from the perspective of group conflict theory, but it is also important from the perspective of democratic theory. Although democratic theorists disagree over the extent to which shared norms and values are essential for democratic stability, an impressive roster of scholars advance some version of this claim (e.g., Walzer 1983; Kymlicka 1995; Dahl 1998; Gutmann 2003; Müller 2007; Miller 2008). Robert Dahl, for instance, writes that a shared democratic political culture among the participants of self-governance is an essential condition for a stable democracy. Kymlicka goes further, writing that “the health and stability of a modern democracy depends, not only on the justice of its basic institutions, but also on the qualities and attitudes of its citizens: e.g. their sense of identity” (Kymlicka 1995, 175). Jan-Werner Müller writes that constitutional patriotism, a perspective developed by Jürgen Habermas that maintains that “political attachment ought to center on the norms, the values, and more indirectly, the procedures of a liberal democratic constitution” is especially important in “established democracies with increasingly diverse populations” (2007, 1–4).⁷ According to this reasoning, the lack (or loss) of a shared identity and shared commitment to democratic procedures threatens the viability of the self-governing process.⁸

Theorists who debate the extent of commonality and common identity necessary for democratic stability often fall into – and pit themselves against – different camps, such as liberal nationalism, communitarianism, constitutional patriotism, and liberal multiculturalism (Song 2009). The nuances that distinguish these perspectives are interesting and important but are not the main concern here. Rather my point is that although proponents of these different

⁶ See Ellemers et al. (1999) for discussion of the conditions under which group conflict might be more or less likely to occur.

⁷ See Mason (1999) for another version of this argument.

⁸ See Abizadeh (2002) for a rebuttal.

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perspectives may disagree on the degree of commonality that is necessary for democratic stability, they all accept (some reluctantly) the premise that some commonality and sense of shared commitment is necessary. Charles Taylor, for example, a critic of the notion that a common culture is necessary in liberal societies, admits that “democratic states need something like a common identity” (1998, 143), but he laments rather than promotes this observation. He continues, “In practice, a nation can only ensure the stability of its legitimacy if its members are strongly committed to one another by means of a common allegiance to the political community” (144).

Of late, scholars who argue for the importance of shared values and a common sense of purpose in democratic societies point to empirical work that shows that cultural heterogeneity and/or rapid cultural change is often associated with both lower levels of generalized trust and expenditures on public goods, including education and infrastructure (Alesina, Baqir, and Easterly 1999; Alesina and La Ferrara 2002; Putnam 2007; Hopkins 2009). These negative correlations are likely due to the social psychological consequences of perceiving that the majority group’s value is threatened through its encounters with the ever-growing outgroup.

But before the claim that immigration is leading to national disintegration can be assessed, the set of norms that Americans rely on to define their national identity must first be established. One argument of this book is that political commentators and public opinion scholars need to employ more accurate and wide-ranging measures of what Americanism is than they have used previously if they hope to shed light on debates about how changing demographics affect the meaning of American identity and to examine how ideas about identity content shape the contours of such debates. People engaged in these debates either neglect relevant opinion data altogether or rely on a narrow set of norms that typically pit inclusive norms (such as the belief that true Americans respect American political institutions and laws) against exclusive norms (such as the belief that true Americans are Christian). Yet in reality, the American public relies on a broader and deeper set of norms when they think about what uniquely distinguishes Americans from non-Americans. In particular, the norms of civic republicanism (based on participatory democracy) and incorporationism (based on being a “nation of immigrants”) need to be examined in order to conduct a more complete assessment of the state of identity content in the United States today.

We know from existing scholarship that beliefs about constitutive norms have strong influences on policy attitudes (Freundreis and Tatalovich 1997; Citrin et al. 2001; Citrin, Wong, and Duff 2001; Schildkraut 2005a; Theiss-Morse 2009), but I argue that we need more accurate assessments of what those beliefs are if we strive for a deeper understanding of their power. Only when such assessments are in place can we appropriately gauge whether dissensus exists and if it falls along racial and ethnic lines. In this book, I develop such measures and use them to investigate claims that increasing diversity in the

United States threatens consensus over what it means to be American. I also use them to explore how ideas about identity content affect attitudes on policy debates related to ethnicity and immigration, such as whether government documents should be provided in multiple languages and whether racial profiling is an acceptable counterterrorism tactic.

I also argue that public opinion about the content of a national identity is not just about the expectations we have regarding our compatriots, but that it also involves judgment. We judge others based on whether we think they live up to or violate the ideals embodied in our constitutive national norms. Studies of norm violation have a long and storied history in public opinion scholarship. The concept of symbolic racism, or racial resentment, was developed to capture the notion that race-based policy views in the United States are now shaped not by beliefs about biological differences between blacks and whites but rather by the belief that African Americans *choose* to abandon the traditional American norms of individualism and the work ethic (Kinder and Sanders 1996; Sears, Henry, and Kosterman 2000; Mendelberg 2001; Henry and Sears 2002). It is this norm violation that sustains modern aversion to government efforts aimed at reducing inequality, racial resentment scholars argue. Though other scholars have vigorously challenged whether racial resentment exists and if it is free of “old-fashioned” beliefs about biological inferiority (Sniderman and Piazza 1993; Sniderman and Carmines 1997), many compelling studies have shown that perceptions of norm violation are persistent and powerful (see Mendelberg 2001).

Judgments about whether other groups in American society violate American norms exist as well, though they have not received nearly the same degree of scholarly scrutiny as judgments involving African Americans (see Paxton and Mughan 2006 for an exception). In analyzing public opinion about the content and boundaries of American national identity, I therefore address the issue of norm violation once belief in the norms has been established. My earlier qualitative research uncovered a great deal of resentment toward immigrants and their descendants, and such resentment was often based on the perception that traditional American norms were being consciously abandoned (Schildkraut 2005a). Unlike the norms invoked in racial resentment, which stem from America’s legacy of classical liberalism, the immigration-related resentment on display by participants in my qualitative research had more to do with notions of identity (whether immigrants wanted to become American or think of themselves as American), active citizenship (whether immigrants were willing to “do their part”), and incorporation (whether immigrants aspired to “blend in”). In this book, I take these qualitative observations and test their generalizability. To what extent do such perceptions of norm violation exist in American society today? What is the best way to measure them? What are their consequences? As with the analysis that develops measures of constitutive norms, the analysis of perceptions of norm violation speaks to contemporary concerns in American politics as well as to scholarly debates in public opinion research about the more abstract phenomenon of how identities shape public opinion.