1 Introduction

> When Mexico sends its people . . . They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime.
> They're rapists . . .
>
> – Donald Trump, 2015

From the Constitution's only mention of migration – a reference guaranteeing the continuation of slavery – to our first Congress' decision to limit American citizenship to "free white persons," US immigration legislation has deeply racist roots (Ngai 2004; Johnson 2004; Molina 2014; Garcia Hernandez, 2019: 21). In line with this tradition, and, never one to be outdone, Donald Trump has undoubtedly become, in both his rhetoric and his enacted policies, the most blatantly anti-Latino and anti-immigrant president in modern American history. Over the four years of his first term, he has not only demonized, made racist comments about, and justified violence against Mexican and Central American immigrants, but has also allowed white nationalists like Stephen Miller and Steve Bannon to shape his immigration policies. The president has tried to end temporary protected status for hundreds of thousands of vulnerable Latin American, Caribbean, and African migrants; capped the number of refugees allowed into the United States at historic lows; made it harder to qualify and file for asylum; and violated international laws by forcing asylum seekers to "wait" in dangerous Mexican border towns. Trump has also attempted to ban Muslim immigrants from entering the country, deported undocumented youth activists (i.e., "Dreamers"), tried to end the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, expanded the number of immigrants subject to expedited removal, and created a new section of the Department of Justice dedicated to denaturalizing immigrants. His administration has also substantially increased local–federal immigration law enforcement agreements (i.e., 287(g)), further restricted prosecutorial discretion in cases involving undocumented immigrants, and boosted the number of US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) arrests by 40 percent, among other nativist actions (Moreno 2016; Garcia Hernandez, 2019: 6; Hayden 2019; Hing, 2019: 297–299; Wadhia, 2019: vii; Department of Justice 2020).

Given the array of anti-immigrant policies promoted by this administration and the devastating effects they have had on millions of people, why limit this Element to walls, cages, and family separation? As we explain in Section 1.1, these three immigration enforcement practices are not only politically salient issues with severe material consequences and symbolic meanings, but they also help expose and remind us of the close links between racism and US immigration policies. Consequently, we felt it important to explore who supports these draconian measures, what factors drive their beliefs, and whether their opinions

are amenable to change in response to information about the catastrophic consequences of these policies.

1.1 Race, Walls, and Cages

During Donald Trump's 2016 campaign rallies, by far the most popular slogan chanted by thousands of attendees was, "Build the wall! Build the wall!" Indeed, his promise to build a barrier along the US–Mexico boundary was the centerpiece of the political agenda that won Trump the White House. Since becoming president, he has attempted to deliver on his commitment by announcing an executive order, declaring a national emergency, issuing his first veto, deploying the National Guard, and initiating the longest government shutdown in American history – all in an attempt to build support for and construct his "great, great wall" along the United States' nearly 2,000-mile southern border. From the start of his presidential campaign, Trump has maintained that such a mammoth bulwark is needed in order to keep out Latino immigrants who he falsely claims are "rapists" who bring "crime" and "drugs" into the country (Mark 2018).

Irrespective of this type of blatantly bigoted discourse, many social scientists often underemphasize or fail to consider the role that racism plays in fueling American calls for border walls.[1] According to geographer Reece Jones (2017), the election of Donald Trump has "reemphasized the significant role of race in the expansion of border security and in society's ambivalence to the appalling violence borders do to the bodies of others" (viii). Jones contends that the "exclusionary policies that make borders so violent today are implemented in the name of the citizens of America . . . by which their proponents really mean 'white Americans'" (viii). Given the United States' history of border expansion through indigenous colonization and genocide in the name of a white "Manifest Destiny," we find Jones's argument justifiable. Nonetheless, little to no survey evidence exists that explores the contemporary relationship between race and backing the idea of a border wall. Thus, we aim to help fill this lacuna by putting white racial attitudes and opinions about Trump's fortification proposal front and center in our analysis.

Race has also historically played a key role in the development of US immigrant detention policies. Today, for example, Ellis Island is widely known as one of the most iconic symbols of American "freedom and democracy." Yet, tellingly, it was built in the late 1800s during the influx of "nonwhite" Southern and Eastern European immigrants, and it served as the country's first federal detention center (Silverman, 2010: 4). More surprising to

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[1] See Jonson 2009, Nevins 2010, and Lytle Hernandez 2010 for exceptions.

readers may be that by the mid-1950s, when Ellis Island permanently closed its doors, the United States had all but abolished its immigration detention policies. In what was described by the Republican Eisenhower administration as a step toward a more "humane administration of immigration laws," even the Supreme Court praised the ending of detention as reflecting "the humane qualities of an enlightened civilization" (Garcia Hernandez, 2019: 47). The virtual abolition of immigrant detention policies occurred at a time when the Southern and Eastern European migrants initially targeted by them had, for the most part, "become" white (Jacobson 1998; Alba and Nee 2003; Roediger 2018). That whiteness may have played a part in the ending of US immigrant detention, however, might also provide some clues as to why the policy of immigrant detention resurfaced with a vengeance and is at the top of Trump's presidential agenda. As we will see, not only was immigrant detention revived to an unprecedented degree in response to Latin American and Caribbean migration, but race continues to play an important role in shaping public opinion on family and child detention policies today.

1.2 Main Findings and Argument

Our research reveals that the vast majority of survey respondents oppose the president's most punitive immigration policies. Across the political spectrum, people overwhelmingly support the releasing of migrant minors to family members or sponsors, and back a host of rights and accommodations for children in the custody of immigration officials. We find that most people, moreover, do not support the idea of a border wall or believe a wall would bring about the outcomes that President Trump has promised: namely, stopping undocumented immigration, drugs, and terrorists from entering the country. These opinions are deeply polarized by party affiliation, with Republicans much more likely than Democrats and independents to support Trump's policies, especially the border wall. Yet even the most fervent border fortification backers express doubt that a wall would achieve its stated purposes.

But if these policies are so unpopular with the public, and even those who support them believe they are ineffective, why does the president continue to make walls and immigrant detention the cornerstones of his political agenda and reelection bid? We argue that the answer to this question may lie in the symbolic meanings these practices convey, and in their ability to politically activate the small but racially conservative segment of Americans who support the president's most draconian immigration policies. Recall that in 2016, Trump lost the popular vote and only won the electoral college by a razor-thin margin. He did so to a large degree by mobilizing white voters who harbored high levels of

racial resentment and anti-immigrant sentiments (Jacobson, 2017: 20; Sides et al., 2017: 40; Hooghe & Dassonneville, 2018: 531–532; Schaffner et al., 2018: 10). Similarly, our statistical analyses show that people who feel culturally threatened by Latinos, who are racially resentful, and who fear a future in which the United States will be a majority-minority country are the most likely to support the president's wall, family separation, and child caging policies. In short, we find that while not all whites in the United States support Trump's most brutal border and detention practices, those with the most negative racial attitudes tend to. As such, we believe that despite widespread opposition, the president's most controversial actions on immigration are less about reflecting the public's policy desires than they are about electorally rousing a racially extreme faction of the white public. In Section 1.3, we explain the methodological approach and data that brought us to these conclusions.

1.3 Public Opinion and Immigration Policy

A wealth of scholarship examines public opinion on immigration. One dominant model centers on labor market competition (Hainmueller & Hopkins 2014), whereby workers view immigrants as competitors and are less supportive of policies allowing more immigrants (Malhotra et al. 2013); some studies that engage with this approach, however, have found only a limited role for economic explanations (Hainmueller & Hiscox 2007). Another approach focuses on how higher education levels are associated with less restrictive immigration attitudes (Citrin et al. 1997). Hainmueller and Hiscox (2010) contend that highly educated individuals adopt cosmopolitan ideals that lead them to be more supportive of policies that increase immigration levels. On balance, more research has found support for the role of education in shaping immigration attitudes than for the influence of labor market competition, though the precise mechanism by which education influences attitudes toward immigration continues to be debated.

Immigration has also increasingly become a divisive issue in the United States, with Republicans and Democrats adopting enormously different positions in a highly polarized era (Layman & Carsey 2006). Republicans and conservatives express positions less supportive of immigration than do Democrats and liberals (Wong & Ramakrishnan 2010; Wong 2017; Wallace & Wallace 2020). Under certain conditions, however, Republicans can support pathways to citizenship (Wallace & Wallace 2020) or policies that can be described as expansionist (Tichenor 2002). Hainmueller and Hopkins (2014) note that more research is needed on the role of partisanship and ideology in explaining contemporary immigration attitudes.

Another strand of this literature focuses on racial factors, such as prejudice and demographic changes, in driving immigration attitudes. Individuals with higher levels of ethnocentrism or prejudice are more supportive of restrictive immigration policies (Kinder & Kam 2010; Valentino et al. 2013). People who have a strong conception of American identity, which includes whether people were born in the country and are Christian (Schildkraut 2005), or who define Americanism in exclusive terms (Wong 2010), are also more likely to support restrictive policies. Demographic change may also be a key factor, where proximity to larger immigrant populations can result in more restrictive and negative views toward immigration and immigrants (Hopkins 2010; Newman 2013; Abrajano & Hajnal 2015), though others find muted effects of demographic change and suggest anxiety may be the actual driver of anti-immigrant sentiment (Brader et al. 2008; Wallace 2014a).

What is missing from this scholarship is an explicit focus on how racial attitudes, various types of threat, and negative group sentiments are key explanatory factors in understanding immigration attitudes.[2] Our contributions to this literature are threefold. First, we provide a needed analysis of attitudes toward a host of immigration policies. Past work examines attitudes toward immigrants and policies on immigration levels or policy solutions for the undocumented population. Opinion studies that focus on specific immigration policies, such as immigrant detention or the border wall, are uncommon and needed.[3] Second, we center the role of racial attitudes – including racial resentment, views on discrimination, and perceptions of cultural and demographic threat – in driving public opinion. Finally, we demonstrate how polarized opinion toward immigration policies is split along partisan lines. Our data shows that while factors such as partisanship are important in parsing differences in opinion, racial attitudes are also critical to understanding attitudes on an issue that is highly racialized.

1.4 Empirical Approach

To analyze attitudes toward immigration, we conducted an original survey called the Immigration in the Trump Era Survey (ITES). Our survey was conducted online in August 2019 by the survey firm Prolifics. The median completion time was fifteen minutes. Our sample of 1,109 white respondents is representative of the national US white population. Our analysis focuses on white respondents for several reasons. First, the most variation in opinion on immigration is found among whites (Abrajano & Hajnal 2015). This can be

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[2] One exception is Pérez (2010), who demonstrates that implicit racial attitudes shape attitudes toward immigration policies.

[3] A key exception is the DREAM Act (see Wallace & Wallace 2020).

partially explained by significant variation in political ideology and partisanship: roughly half of whites are Democrats and half Republicans, with similar proportions of liberals and conservatives (Noel 2014; Junn 2017). This variation is particularly important when immigration politics is polarized along party and ideological lines, among elites and in the general public (Haynes et al. 2016). This is not to say that other racial groups do not express meaningful differences on immigration, but rather that the greatest divergence is expressed among whites.[4] By focusing on white attitudes, we are able to examine what drives both support for and opposition to immigration policies. Finally, we focus on a single group in order to fully explore differences within this group rather than simply compare groups to one another.

The survey included questions about various immigration policies, respondent's racial and ethnic identification, the strength of their racial and ethnic identity, and their perceptions of linked fate. The survey also contained questions measuring the respondents' perceptions of economic, demographic, and cultural threat; anti-immigrant sentiments and stereotypes; levels of racial resentment; political ideology; and political partisanship.[5] Sections 2, 3, and 5 of this study draw heavily on the observational survey data to examine the state of support for and opposition to immigration policies.

Finally, we conducted three survey experiments to examine the conditions under which immigration attitudes might shift. This approach is particularly useful given the amount of misinformation and misperceptions that mire the immigration debate (Chavez 2008; Haynes et al. 2016). Through this research design, we are able to directly assess whether information about the negative consequences of Trump's immigration policies decreases support for them. Our results provide little evidence that information moves opinion, however. Our analyses aim to achieve three goals: (1) to provide an assessment of overall levels of public support for some of Trump's signature immigration policies; (2) to analyze the most important factors in explaining support for and opposition to these policies; and (3) to identify the conditions under which support for or opposition to these policies can be shifted.

1.5 Salience of Immigration

We focus on immigration because it is a centerpiece of the Trump presidency and because its salience has increased dramatically. Historically, immigration has been identified as either the top issue or among the top three issues for Latinos (Wallace 2014b). Scholars suggest immigration is a highly personal issue for

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[4] See Carter (2019) for Black attitudes, Fraga et al. (2011) for Latino attitudes, and Masuoka and Junn (2013) for Latino and Asian-American attitudes.

[5] ITES offers a wealth of information on contemporary attitudes on Trump's immigration policies. A full list of survey questions is in Appendix A.

Latinos and that Latinos tend to support policies expanding immigrant rights (Wallace 2012; Sanchez et al. 2015). Other racial groups have traditionally not attached comparable levels of importance to immigration (Rouse 2013). In the last five years, however, a growing proportion of whites have begun to rank immigration as a top issue, with large segments ranking it as their number-one issue (Abrajano & Hajnal 2015; ANES 2016 and 2018). Our survey data reveals that 21 percent of white respondents now rank immigration as a top-three issue.

But what is driving this increased salience? In examining differences by political party, a more nuanced picture of salience emerges. Among white Republicans, 42 percent rank immigration as a top-three issue. This level may indicate increasing anxiety about immigration and cultural threat. The dominant public discourse frames immigrants and immigration in deeply negative and pejorative ways, and this rhetoric has likely resulted in a greater proportion of the white population seeing immigration as an important issue. Increased issue salience thus might not always reflect desire for immigration reform that expands immigrant rights, as is the case for Latinos: it may instead indicate anxiety and support for restrictive policies (Abrajano & Hajnal 2015).

Immigration's increased salience has meaningful implications. Candidates, especially Trump, will likely continue to keep immigration at the forefront of their political agendas. Elites will adopt positions and seek to implement policies they believe will be popular with voters to whom immigration is highly salient. We may also observe an increase in the frequency of more explicit and negative rhetoric about immigration, since this rhetoric increasingly resonates with portions of the public. In this political environment, it is critically important to understand public attitudes toward Trump's immigration policies and the factors that drive support for and opposition to them.

1.6 Plan of the Element

The Element proceeds with three main sections analyzing opinion data, followed by a conclusion discussing the implications of our results. Sections 2 and 3 have a similar structure, beginning with a brief policy history and discussion of the symbolisms conveyed by border walls and migrant detention. We contextualize these practices with recent examples of how they have affected immigrants. The goal of each of these sections is to describe and analyze how and why these policies have manifested, as well as the key factors that drive current public support for and opposition to them.

More specifically, Section 2 centers on Trump's proposal to build a wall along the US–Mexico border. We analyze general levels of support and opposition, as well as whether individuals believe a wall would be effective in stopping

undocumented immigrants, illegal drugs, and terrorists from crossing the border. Section 3 concentrates on the detention of children in immigration facilities and family separation. Our data focus on support for and opposition to these policies, as well as public opinion about the rights and accommodations migrant children should have while in detention. Section 4 turns to our experimental data to examine the conditions under which support and opposition to the wall, child detention, and family separation might shift. We assess whether providing information about the negative consequences and harms of all three policies can reduce support for them. Section 5 considers the implications of our findings for contemporary immigration politics with an eye toward the 2020 election and beyond.

1.7 Note on Terminology

In this Element, we have made a number of choices regarding terminology. We primarily use the term "undocumented" rather than "illegal" immigrants. This choice reflects contemporary best practice in scholarship and media, given the problematic nature and harmful impacts surrounding constructions of illegality (Jones-Correa & de Graauw 2013; Menjivar & Kanstroom 2013). The exception to this terminological choice was in survey question wording where we wanted to maintain consistency with past polls, or where we felt the usage of undocumented could fundamentally alter how respondents answered.[6] With regard to immigration detention facilities, considerable debate exists among the media, activists, and elites about whether to use "centers," "facilities," "concentration camps," or "prisons" (Katz 2019; Stolberg 2019). We employ the word "facilities" because we view it as the most neutral available term, and the one least likely to affect how respondents with different political ideologies and partisan identification might respond. We contend that "facilities" invokes neither a potentially positive-sounding place, as does "center" (with its echoes of a community or youth center), nor does it have the negative connotations of "camps," which often conjure memories of the Holocaust or Japanese internment.

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[6] See Appendix A for question wording.

2 The Wall

> Tear down this wall!
>
> – President Ronald Reagan, 1987

> BUILD THE WALL!
>
> – President Donald Trump, 2017

The bulwark referred to by President Reagan in the first epigraph is the iconic Berlin Wall, whose fall was celebrated around the world. The German fortification had come to symbolize economic stagnation and the suppression of freedom, democracy, and human rights. For good reason, as the Cold War came to an end, border walls were seen as shameful embodiments of the totalitarian countries that built them to keep people fleeing poverty and repression from crossing. Thus, the idea of any nation constructing a massive and costly national boundary barrier seemed anachronistic (Jones, 2012: 5). In fact, many observers at the time believed we had entered a new and interdependent era of capitalist globalization that would lead to "the rollback of the state and the erosion of its borders," including the walls that sometimes delineate them (Andreas, 2000b: 2; Ohmae 1999).

Although the international system has become more economically interconnected, contrary to expectations, the stigma associated with the erecting of walls has all but vanished, as "the current era of globalization has resulted in the most intensive and extensive period of bordering in the history of the world" (Jones & Johnson, 2016: 1). Importantly, and as the second epigraph illustrates, border walls are not solely an international phenomenon but are presently at the center of US politics. This raises a number of questions. How could a country whose leaders once advocated for the tearing down of walls elect a president who ran on a platform promising to build one? How can we explain the contemporary clamoring for an American border barrier, and what factors drive support for this proposal? Before exploring these vital questions, we examine what previous research tells us about what walls symbolize, why countries build them, and what they signify about the people who demand them. Additionally, we provide a brief review of some of the major policies – and their effectiveness – that over several decades have led to the construction of about 700-miles of fortifications along the 2,000-mile US–Mexico border.

2.1 Why Walls?

Prominent scholars agree that border bulwarks "have always spectacularized power" and aimed to evoke permanence, security, and impenetrability (Sorel, 2014: 136; Brown, 2017: 51). State border fortifications convey two messages: one of deterrence to the unsanctioned would-be crossers outside of them, and

one of reassurance to the citizens living behind them (Nieto-Gomez, 2014: 193). Walls "reflect the nature of power relations and the ability of one group to determine" lines of separation (Newman, 2006: 147), often excluding "suspicious outsiders on ethnic, racial, and social grounds" (Golunov, 2014: 123). In the process, they attempt to preserve an imagined – often white – national homogeneity, distinguishing those who demographically belong from those who do not.

The people on "the other side" of walls are almost always seen as ungoverned and uncivilized, and are described in dehumanizing ways that make them seem unworthy of human rights or even of human life itself (Jones, 2012: 15: De Leon 2015). Hence, walls not only serve as markers of state sovereignty, they also symbolize the reaffirmation of identities. They are instruments of division and tools for the "othering" of foreignness (Newman & Paasi, 1998: 189; Vallet & David, 2014: 142). Viewed through this lens, the recent worldwide increase in xenophobia and populism has manifested itself in a racialized, nativist backlash embodied by the desire for border barriers (Longo, 2018: 2).

How can we best understand racist calls for walls in a globalized era that was supposed to be unifying and borderless? According to Longo (2018), since the September 11 attacks, immigration and terrorism "have dominated the global political imaginary" (2018: 1). Not surprisingly, then, the top reasons contemporary governments – including the United States – give to justify their construction of border bulwarks are their desires to stop undocumented migration (57 percent), terrorism (28 percent), and smuggling (24 percent) (Vallet, 2019: 158–159). Yet, as we will see, at least in the case of the United States, walls have not been effective in achieving their stated goals. So why erect them?

Rather than create a more unified and equitable world order, the post–Cold War era of global capitalism has exacerbated both domestic and international economic inequalities, often along racial lines (Harvey 2007; Jones 2012; Stiglitz 2018). These extreme financial disparities contribute to or directly create the supply of and demand for international migration, including clandestine migration (Sassen 1988; Sassen 2014). Tellingly, quantitative studies on border wall building have shown that the countries that construct them share one primary commonality: major differences in wealth between them and the neighbors they seek to block out (Hassner & Wittenberg 2015; Carter & Poast 2017). As Jones and Johnson (2016) put it, border barriers have essentially "become lines for the protection" of resources amassed by rich nations (9). According to Brown (2017), border walls help "organize deflection from crises of national cultural identity, from colonial domination in a postcolonial age, and from the discomfort of privilege obtained through superexploitation in an increasingly interconnected and interdependent global political economy" (145). As a result, the citizens of Western countries convince themselves that