Separation over Immigration
in the Latino Community

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Anti-Immigration Sentiments in the United States

Immigrants are the soul of the United States, and they're one of the reasons this country is the global superpower it is today. Despite this, the US has a long history of immigrant hatred. One of the earliest examples of this would be the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798, which restricted immigration and speech out of fear of a war with France and unrest among French nationals (National Archives, 2023). These pieces of legislation have stayed prevalent throughout history, such as the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which prohibited Chinese laborers from entering the U.S. for 10 years and continued to be renewed for decades afterward (National Archives, 2023), and more recently, the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) of 1996 which continues to affect immigrants today, criminalized various forms of visa violations, many of which could have been handled outside of the legal system before the passing of this law (Fragomen, 1997).

As such, anti-immigration sentiment has stayed strong until today, with President-elect Donald Trump promising to "invoke the Alien Enemies Act of 1798 to target and dismantle every migrant criminal network operating on American soil" (Forbes Breaking News, 2024). These statements, coupled with rising anti-immigration rhetoric in the United States have started a cycle that many immigrants in the US have gone through before: arrival, settling, and assimilation. Within the Latino community right now, this cycle has evolved to spreading assimilationist and nativist ideals from established immigrants to newly arrived ones.

In New York City, a city steeped in immigrant history and a well-established sanctuary city, there's been an influx of immigration since 2021, which can be attributed to the heavy restrictions on travel during 2020, causing a higher immigration rate the following year. This influx was also bolstered by the added populations of undocumented migrants from other states, leaving the city to scramble for accommodations for migrants (eventually housing them in hotels), much to the anger of the rest of the public. Since a majority of foreign-born individuals in NYC are of Latin-American origin (Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, 2024), they took the brunt of this anger and eventual hatred not just from anti-immigrant groups, but from immigrants within their own community.

Many Latinos in NYC are immigrants themselves, the only difference being that many of them arrived about a decade or two ago, when immigration

views and policies were incredibly different than those today. Nowadays, immigrants who may have felt secure in their place in this country are now faced with the difficulty of their identities as immigrants being dissonant from attempting to achieve the so-called American Dream they're trying to achieve. In order to decrease this dissonance, many have decided to increase the importance of the American Dream and disregard their immigration status. As a result, there's a high cognitive dissonance now, with established immigrants separating themselves from new arrivals due to the heightened anti-immigrant stances throughout the country. Not only has this been seen on social media and media outlets, but many Latinos have witnessed it for themselves, such as myself. Many of my family members believe that allowing immigrants into the country is the primary reason for our receding economy and that political figures who run anti-immigrant campaigns are the solution, the most dominant politician being President-Elect Donald Trump, who built his 2016, 2020, and 2024 campaigns on anti-immigrant ideals and repeatedly criminalizing and dehumanizing immigrants by saying things such as "[Immigrants are] not humans, they're animals" (Layne, et al., 2024). Despite hundreds of statements like this, Trump had a notable increase in Latino supporters from 2016 to 2024 as seen by various exit polls for the past 3 elections.

Social identity theory and crimmigation theory will both be used to examine the   occurrence of intergroup conflict in the Latino community as the result of Latinos beginning to separate themselves from immigrants thanks to the rise of the criminalization of immigration.

Theories

Now that you have all of this background information, we can attribute this phenomenon to certain sociological and criminological theories, one of which is social identity theory, coined by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in 1979 in their article, *An integrative theory of intergroup conflict*, and discusses the interactions within and between groups (Turner & Oakes, 1986). It states that there are two ends of a spectrum of self-concept (interpersonal-intergroup continuum): interpersonal behavior, defined by personal experiences and relationships and unaffected by the groups they're a part of, and intergroup behavior, defined only by their group membership. There is also an additional belief system of social mobility and social action. Social mobility is defined as the general assumption that the society in which the individuals live is a flexible

and permeable one, so they can move into another group, while social action is "the relations between social groups are perceived as characterized by marked stratification, making it impossible or very difficult for individuals, as individuals, to invest themselves in group membership".

More importantly, the theory also posits that subordinate social groups are more likely to turn to methods such as devaluing their own group and displaying positive attitudes toward the dominant group to compensate for their lower status and in hopes of social mobility. While these subordinate groups can develop positive identities, there remains the possibility for subordinate group members to act derogatorily toward their own group. Even with the development of positive identities, the dominant group will still attempt to maintain the status quo to stay dominant, trying to continue to show conflict in the subordinate groups, seen through lower self-esteem enhanced by comparisons with other subordinate groups instead of dominant groups, since "competition between subordinate groups is sometimes more intense than between subordinate and dominant groups". Tajfel and Turner relevantly use the example of American Whites in the Southern United States "rapidly [abandoning] their stereotypes of the Blacks as "childlike" in favor of openly hostile and derogatory ones" to ensure their dominance would persevere. Overall, SIT's examination of intergroup and intragroup dynamics would be an excellent tool for examining anti-immigrant attitudes in the NYC Latino community.

The second theory that can be applied is crimmigration. While criminalization can be seen as a broad term, we can further narrow down exactly how immigrants are affected by criminalization with the theory of crimmigration. The coining of this term can be credited to Juliet Stumpf in 2006, where she defined crimmigration as the "criminalization of immigration law". Her article was written only 4 years after the creation of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), which was created due to the infamous September 11th attacks in 2001. Since then, the DHS and subsequently the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency, have been the increasingly notable faces of the criminalization of immigration in our society. They've caused illegal immigration and other immigration-related crimes to become more heavily criminalized and as a result, publicized in the years following its creation. Therefore, since its creation, crimmigration has expanded to "immigration-related conduct" and "the process of prosecuting immigration violations [resembling] criminal procedure" (Stumpf, 2020). People have started to view immigrants as the reason behind why there's been a rise in crime rates

and a suffering economy despite data showing otherwise. For example, a 2018 study went over crime rates between 1990-2014 to discern whether undocumented immigration increased violent crime; the study found that it did not (Light & Miller, 2018). Regardless, many immigrants in the U.S. are a direct target and scapegoat for the public due to crimmigration. Therefore, crimmigration is a direct reason why anti-immigrant attitudes are on the rise in New York Latino communities.

Divisions in the Latino community

In recent months, we've seen a rise in Latinos—many of them immigrants themselves—calling for mass deportations and to get immigrants out of the US. Bolstered by a history of criminalization, many Latinos distinguish themselves from newly arrived immigrants. Now, as we enter an era similar to the one we faced after the 2016 election it's becoming clear that the first Trump presidency laid the foundations for anti-immigrant rhetoric that is now ready to be built upon in his 2025-2029 presidency. During the 2017 presidency, there was much in-fighting over deportation tactics at all levels of government, with police chiefs refusing to work with the DHS and mayors warning community organizations of raids (Platt, 2020). Despite his deportation numbers being lower than Obama's, it was his unrepentant pushing of racist and anti-immigrant rhetoric that caused more fear than under Obama (Pew Research Center, 2020). Now, there's no telling what the 2025 presidency will look like. Trump repeatedly pushed anti-immigrant sentiments and criminalized immigration throughout his 2024 campaign, and immigrants are now agreeing in an effort for self-preservation and group separation thanks not only to Trump but the government and our country as a whole.

As previously mentioned, this phenomenon can easily be attributed to how members of subordinate groups—in this case, Latinos—will often act derogatorily towards their group in self-interest and search for a more stable, less oppressed, social group. These actions have caused a heightened sense of separation in the Latino community, now creating two subgroups: recent immigrants and established immigrants. Established immigrants will be considered those who have resided in the United States with documentation, or both, for a decade or more. Recent immigrants have been here for 5 years or less, with and without documentation. One can note that mainly established immigrants have been at the epicenter of this separation, but not much attention

is focused on the reason behind it: assimilation. It has been a tried and true method that assimilation is the quickest way to grow closer to the dominant class: white, native-born, Americans.

It's well-taught in American classrooms that white immigrants were heavily discriminated against in the 1800s and 1900s until new scapegoats such as non-white immigrants arose. And how did these immigrants manage to escape this scapegoating? They assimilated, and this is the path we're witnessing American Latinos going down to escape the rapid criminalization of their predominantly immigrant population, and the dominant outgroup is doing its best to help this assimilation along. This method was not previously effective, as it's been established that when Latinos perceive their fates and identities to be more closely connected with undocumented immigrants, they're more likely to have positive views of undocumented immigrants and participate in collective action on their behalf (Serrano-Careaga & Huo, 2019).

However, looking at surveys after the 2024 elections, many Latinos are starting to take an anti-immigrant stance and agree with anti-immigrant policies, and it's clear that this is regardless of the strength of their connection to their Latinidad, instead it's their connection to their past as immigrants. Especially in the 21st century, immigrants are predominantly seen as people of color, causing the United States, an institution with a deep and continuing history of racism, to have an even greater disdain for immigrants. So, for immigrants to achieve the so-called American Dream that many came here for, they are forced to shed not just their immigrant status but also their culture to avoid further discrimination. Many Trump supporters in the 2024 election were notably Latino, thanks to his pushing of anti-immigrant rhetoric. In a survey done by Hickel, et al. (2024), Latinos were shown to have increased immigrant resentment, which likely has only increased in the years since. A previous study by Hickel, et al. (2020) also affirms the assumption that this resentment of immigrants is a way for Latinos to "signal their dissociation from the Latinx community and solidify their passage into the US-American social group." Through this data, we can reasonably assume that the study done by Serrano-Careaga & Huo in 2019 would have drastically different statistics in 2025. This study asserted that this connection with immigrants was often influenced by fear for themselves or anger in favor of immigrants, with fear being the predominant emotion in those with lower feelings of connection. Now, the fear has become normalized. Fear is what has allowed Latinos to be complicit in immigrant hatred because they have no other choice but to be anti-immigrant to continue living in the United States, a country

so embroiled in racist—and as a result—anti-immigrant sentiments that it will not allow immigrants to succeed without shedding their immigrant status.

Conclusion

While this paper was written to repeat the assertions from previous scholars that the ingroup separation within the Latino community and spread awareness of the subject, there still needs to be more research on this topic done. Many are taking the heightened amount of Latino Trump supporters as a surprise while it is anything but and is instead of centuries-worth of immigrant hatred in this country. Social identity theory explains this clearly as Latinos trying to separate themselves from the increasingly negative and criminalized viewpoints of outsiders, while crimmigration adds onto this by painting the backdrop as to why these viewpoints exist in the first place. Wider surveys, interviews, and focus groups are some of the best ways to better understand where these voters are coming from and why they feel the need to separate themselves from their group membership. By gathering a wider database of thoughts and opinions on immigration from various ages, genders, and races within the Latino community, we'll be able to increase and push cognizance of these issues and hopefully come closer to allowing the newly formed ingroups and outgroups to understand one another. The most important aim of this research should be ensuring that this separation is recognized as a method of keeping *all* oppressed groups, not just Latinos, from realizing exactly why they are still fighting for the few resources we have while the dominant group hoards the majority of them. It is only through realizing that the dominant group wants to keep its power at the cost of oppressed groups to achieve intercommunal unity.

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