

From Benjamin J. Newman , et al. "Foreign Language Exposure, cultural Threat and Opposition to Immigration" *Political Psychology*, Vol. 33, No. 5, 2012 doi: 10.1111/j.1467-9221.2012.00904.x

The problem for many monolingual Americans is that the presence of non-English speakers creates barriers to interpersonal communication and challenges what is perceived to be a core aspect of American identity (Citrin, Reingold, & Green, 1990; Citrin & Wright, 2009; Schildkraut, 2007). As a result, many individuals experience a degree of disorientation or "culture shock" (Oberg, 1960) without ever leaving their home country. Although generally thought to affect travelers, immigrants, or refugees, culture shock theoretically can afflict anyone that has an "absence or distortion of familiar environmental and social cues" (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001, p. 65). We argue that exposure to culturally unfamiliar stimuli within one's habituated environment—in this case, the Spanish language—may threaten citizens and cause them to experience some degree of emotional disturbance. [. . .]

Objective measures such as income, occupational field, employment status, and local unemployment rates often fail to exert statistically significant effects on immigration policy preferences (Citrin, Green, Muste, & Wong, 1997; Campbell, Wong, & Citrin, 2006; Hood & Morris, 1997). In contrast, subjective measures, such as pessimistic sociotropic evaluations and perceived threats to the national economy stand as consistent predictors of opposition to immigration (Burns & Gimpel, 2000; Citrin et al., 1997; Espenshade & Hempstead, 1996; Sniderman et al., 2004). [. . .]

Symbolic threats, by comparison, concern violations to a group's core set of beliefs, values, cultural norms, or identities (Citrin et al., 1990; Kinder & Sears, 1981; Sears, 1988; Stephan et al., 1999). For instance, individuals may feel threatened by Hispanic immigrants, who are seen as putting little effort into embracing American culture and identity (Huntington, 2004). The identification of threat to culture as a distinct category of concern over immigration has its intellectual roots in the study of nativism. The belief that specific immigrant groups will fail to assimilate due to their ethnicity, religion, or culture of origin, and thus Americans' fears that their culture will be contaminated or displaced, is a defining feature of American nativism (Bennett, 1988; Higham, 1985; Schrag, 2010).

[. . .]To clarify, the key contribution of our conception of cultural threat is its focus on the individual native-born member of an immigrant receiving country and his or her reactions to real encounters with culturally unassimilated immigrants who speak a foreign language. In the section that follows, we briefly review three veins of research that provide a basis for understanding what these personal experiences are, why they are threatening, and how they should influence immigration attitudes.

[. . .] Over time, these individuals incorporate culturally distinct elements from each other into their own culture through a process of exchange known as acculturation (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936). Acculturation is characterized by the displacement of the original cultural patterns of a group, followed by a period of cultural adjustment and change. [. . .]

Sociocultural adaptation depends upon the possession of the social and cultural skills or competencies necessary to deal with everyday social situations and demands in one's immediate context. Sociocultural competence involves the ability to interact effectively and comfortably with cultural outgroup members, which presupposes both sensibility to the beliefs, values, and norms of the cultural outgroup, as well as the ability to effectively communicate with its members (Castro, 2003; La Fromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993). These skills affect the ease with which an individual navigates surrounding sociocultural environment and accomplishes goals, such as performing tasks, making friends, participating in social

activities, and understanding and communicating with others (Ward & Rana-Deuba, 1999). Negative adaptation outcomes are primarily indicated by trouble understanding outgroup beliefs, customs, and behaviors, as well as difficulty effectively communicating and interacting with outgroup members.

[. . .] we seek to extend our understanding of the processes leading to anti-immigrant policy preferences by identifying personal contact and foreign language exposure as concrete factors and experiences that precede the perception of threat and thus move us “further back” in the causal chain.

[. . .] More specifically, they find that residing in proximity to a large Hispanic population leads to anti-immigrant sentiment among Whites, but only in the absence of personal contact with Hispanics. When actual contact with Hispanics is high, residing near a large Hispanic population drastically attenuates group antipathy and support for restrictive immigration policy.

[. . .] The contrasting of realistic, economic threats and symbolic, identity-based threats as competing explanations for opposition to immigration has been useful in furthering our understanding of anti-immigrant sentiment. However, this framework has led to the implicit equation of cultural threat with the symbolic and contributed to the underdevelopment of alternative bases for cultural threat. In this article, we argue that real, intercultural contact and exposure to unfamiliar cultural stimuli, such as a foreign language, generates tangible, yet noneconomic, threats to the individual. Namely, our theoretical perspective emphasizes how the increased prevalence of linguistically unassimilated immigrants within one’s local environment, and the resulting presence of language barriers to the completion of basic everyday tasks and social interactions, challenge a core aspect of Americans’ social and cultural competencies with their surrounding environment. It is through this presumed mechanism that we believe exposure to unfamiliar language enhances the perceived threats of immigration and thus leads to increased political opposition to immigration. In Study 1, we demonstrated that personal contact with non-English speakers increased the likelihood that Whites feel culturally threatened, which in turn, increases support for restricting immigration levels and deporting illegal immigrants. We feel that this study is an improvement over remain fundamentally unchanged. We also reran the analyses on subsamples of White-only subjects and find that the direction and significance of the treatment remained positive and statistically significant. 654 Newman et al. previous research that relies on indirect measures of contact such as the local immigrant population size. Studies 2 and 3 compliment our survey-based findings by demonstrating that two distinct forms of exposure to the Spanish language directly cause increased feelings of threat, which increases support for anti-immigrant policies. In addition to demonstrating tangible bases for the experience of cultural threat, these studies add to our understanding of the dynamics underlying opposition to immigration by identifying real experiential factors that causally precede threat perceptions