

**A Comparison of the Key Factors Influencing  
Negative Public Opinion Against Immigrants in the  
United States and France**

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**Abstract:**

One needs to look no further than the media to understand that the public has very strong opinions on the topic of immigration. From Americans calling for fences along the border with Mexico to anti-immigrant rhetoric of French presidential hopefuls, tensions run high in debates on immigration. But what factors provoke changes in public opinion on immigration? By looking at public opinion on immigration in the United States and France and comparing it to variations in things such as unemployment, crime rates, rates of immigration, and media coverage, the study attempts to find what factors are most compellingly in explaining the vagaries of public opinion toward immigration. In using two countries, the study searches for a more generalizable explanation of public opinion shifts instead of more national results.

## **A Comparison of the Key Factors Influencing Negative Public Opinion Against Immigrants in the United States and France**

The public, informed and uninformed alike, takes positions on a multitude of issues, rallying around causes and taking stands for or against the current and future state of their country. From the hundreds that marched on the capital in April 2012 opposing Arizona's controversial crackdown on illegal immigrants to the 20% popular electorate supporting a radical right wing candidate running on an extremely anti-immigrant platform in the first round of the 2012 French presidential elections, the American and French public hold strong opinions when it comes to immigration.

One does not require much insight to appreciate the saliency of the immigration debate in the United States and France. Both countries are plagued by heated debates that can be witnessed everywhere: in the media, in political speeches, and in daily conversations. But why the exceptional interest in immigration? What factors force the issue to the forefront of public and private debate? This paper aimed to discover what factors are key in driving public opinion on immigration in France and the United States. The first objective was to determine what independent factors are correlated with negative public opinion on immigration in France and the United States respectively. The factors included economic pessimism, unemployment, crime rates and the perception of increased crime, fear of terrorism, cultural dilution, immigration policy creation, election years, and media coverage of immigration. By comparing which factors align and which factors differ in the two countries the research attempted to show whether the same factors influence public opinion in both countries or if the key drivers vary between the two countries. The initial hypothesis purported that media coverage of the immigration issue has the strongest correlation with negative public opinion in both countries. In the end, it was

discovered that a lack of data prevents a true and validated analysis of the factors, particularly media coverage. But even with this scarcity of data, viable conclusions can be drawn from what data is available.

## **Literature Review**

Several authors have already dealt with the correlation between public opinion on immigration and a variety of factors. Jack Citrin et al point to economic pessimism as the main driving force behind a negative public opinion of immigration in their article “Public Opinion Toward Immigration Reform: The Role of Economic Motivations”. The authors maintain that there are “significant relationships between anti-immigrant attitudes and pessimism about the current state of the national economy”.<sup>1</sup> According to their research, the reason for the connection between economic hardship and immigrants is not clear but they cite scapegoating and “fear of competition for scarce resources” as primary causes of the public’s connection between the two. Interestingly, the effect on public opinion lies at the national level, not the local level. The authors found “that respondents living in states and counties with greater concentrations of recent immigrants were no more likely than their counterparts in the rest of the country to express restrictionist opinions”.<sup>2</sup> They speculate that “people are often unable to see the personal implications of remote policies and events and therefore use information about the state of the nation as evidence of their own present or future circumstances”.<sup>3</sup>

In “Determinants of Canadian Attitudes Toward Immigration: More Than Just Racism?” Douglas Palmer draws a connection between levels of unemployment and anti-immigrant sentiments. In trying to show “that opposition to immigration is not simply racism in disguise

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<sup>1</sup> Citrin et al, “Public Opinion Toward Immigration Reform: The Role of Economic Motivations” (The Journal of Politics, 1997) 875

<sup>2</sup> Ibid 876

<sup>3</sup> Ibid 876.

but a complex attitude resulting from an interplay between various concerns and moderating beliefs about immigration's consequences", he discovers a strong correlation between a wish for decreased immigration and increased unemployment rates.<sup>4</sup> Though he allows that prejudice, "crime, culture, increasing population size" and other such factors can influence public opinion, he finds unemployment the most compelling factor<sup>5</sup> particularly since "comparing unemployed to other respondents suggests that becoming unemployed will foster the belief that immigrants take jobs...as well as increase this issue's importance as a determinant of the attitude toward the level of immigration".<sup>6</sup>

In "Anxious Publics: Worries About Crime and Immigration", Jennifer Fitzgerald et al. found a substantial link between crime-related anxiety and immigration concerns.<sup>7</sup> They find this argument to be more compelling than other arguments (such as economic anxieties) and maintain the effect "is independent of past immigration concerns, objective measures of regional crime, regional overrepresentation of foreigners among those arrested, and a host of personal characteristics and other controls".<sup>8</sup> They additionally link the increased perception of and concern over crime to media coverage.<sup>9</sup> Focusing on Germany, they find that the German media frames immigrants and the economy in a positive light, whereas "the immigration-crime pairing is typically framed in a negative light".<sup>10</sup> They broaden this last point, stating, "European news tends to be characterized more by crime than economic themes, and when immigration is reported on, it is framed most often in terms of conflict and much less frequently in terms of

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<sup>4</sup> Palmer, Douglas L, "Determinants of Canadian Attitudes Toward Immigration: More Than Just Racism?" (Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science 1996) 183.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid 191.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid 180.

<sup>7</sup> Fitzgerald, Jennifer, K. Amber Curtis, and Catherine L. Corliss. "Anxious Publics: Worries About Crime and Immigration." (Comparative Political Studies 2012) 491.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid 491.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid 491.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid 491.

economics”.<sup>11</sup> For them, perceptions of crime and media representation of immigration go the furthest in influencing public opinion on immigration.

Terrorism is considered a key factor influencing public opinion about immigration by Victoria Esses, John Dovidio and Gordon Hodson in their paper “Public Attitudes Toward Immigration in the United States and Canada in Response to the September 11, 2001 ‘Attack on America’”. Produced in 2002, the article relies on psychological principles to forecast American and Canadian responses to the “Attack on America” predicting that the groups would perceive an increased threat from “foreigners” leading to possible “discrimination toward and a call for increased restriction on the entry of immigrants into the United States and Canada”.<sup>12</sup> They further suggest that “highly salient and foreign groups are often viewed in particularly simplistic (i.e., prototypic and homogeneous) and negative ways. Thus, in the present case, the actions of a few terrorist “foreigners” may readily come to cognitively represent the actions of the group as a whole, resulting in negative attitudes toward immigrants”.<sup>13</sup> They go on to say that, in the long term, perception of a terrorist threat mixed with economic security concerns, especially those created by the “Attack”, will continue to create unfavorable attitudes toward immigrants.

Chandler and Tsai, in “Social factors influencing immigration attitudes: an analysis of data from the General Social Survey”, negate the effects of race, income and fear of crime on immigration. They furthermore minimize the effects of political ideology, economic outlook, age, and sex, claiming instead that college education and perceived cultural threats go the

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid 491-492.

<sup>12</sup> Esses, Victoria M., John F. Dovidio, and Gordon Hodson. "Public Attitudes Toward Immigration in the United States and Canada in Response to the September 11, 2001 ‘Attack on America’" (Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy 2002) 75.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid 76.

furthest in determining immigration views.<sup>14</sup> For them, the most compelling influencers on attitudes fall into what they term “group comparison” theories, meaning humans’ natural predisposition “to avoid social isolation or disapproval, and to seek self-enhancement and self-validation”, which in turn “increases perceptions of group differences and causes in-group members to favor their own groups with even higher rewards which penalizing out-groups”.<sup>15</sup> The strongest factor to emerge from the “group comparison” analysis was language use with “those respondents who strongly emphasized the use of English [being] the ones most likely to favor a decrease in numbers of immigrants admitted”.<sup>16</sup>

In the study entitled “What’s to Fear from Immigrants? Creating an Assimilationist Threat Scale”, Pamela Paxton and Anthony Mughan analyze how and why Americans fear immigrants as a cultural threat. First working with two focus groups in two different US cities, they developed questions relating to what assimilation actually means, finally settling on an emphasis on learning the language, productivity in society (including employment, education, and giving back to the community) and citizenship (legally entering the country and working towards citizenship) as requirements of full assimilation, while allowing for differences in things such as religion, food, and dress. The focus groups highlighted these three categories and also concentrated on the need of immigrants to “blend in” to American society. Taking the focus group insight, the authors expanded their research to a survey creating a scale by which to measure Americans’ perception of the immigrant assimilationist threat. In summary, their “theoretical argument is that immigrants come to represent a cultural threat when they are

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<sup>14</sup> Chandler, Charles R., and Yung-mei Tsai. "Social Factors Influencing Immigration Attitudes: An Analysis of Data from the General Social Survey." (Social Science Journal 2001) 177.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid 179.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid 185.

perceived not to be adopting values and behaviors consistent with the prevailing cultural norms and lifestyle of their new homeland-the view, in other words, that they are not assimilating”. Failure to assimilate includes not learning English, not contributing to society, and not actively seeking citizenship.<sup>17</sup>

Gareth Mulvey, in his article “When Policy Creates Politics: the Problematicizing of Immigration and the Consequences for Refugee Integration in the UK”, claims that policy making, as well as the “symbols and rhetoric” that go along with it, construct immigrants (for his purposes asylum seekers specifically) as a threat thus “encourag[ing] hostility within the general population”.<sup>18</sup> Analyzing the British Labour party’s policies towards migrants after the 1997 election, he demonstrates how anti-immigrant policies can harden and increase prejudice against immigrants and institutionalize those opinions “in both the political and public debates”.<sup>19</sup> This process creates a “vicious cycle of hostility”, wherein “immigration policy aided the development of a hostile politics that was then responded to by further immigration policy”.<sup>20</sup> This cycle “raise[d] questions of belonging, leading to a move away from a multi-cultural approach to one aimed more at assimilation and loyalty to ‘British values’”.<sup>21</sup> Thus for Mulvey, public opinion against immigrants can be tied most closely to government legislation on the issue.

Peter Burns and James G. Gimpel name “stereotypical beliefs about the work ethic and intelligence of other groups” as the propellant behind public opinion against immigrants in their

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<sup>17</sup> Paxton, Pamela, and Anthony Mughan. "What's to Fear from Immigrants? Creating an Assimilationist Threat Scale." (International Society of Political Psychology 2006) 565.

<sup>18</sup> Mulvey, Gareth. "When Policy Creates Politics: The Problematicizing of Immigration and the Consequences for Refugee Integration in the UK." (Journal of Refugee Studies 2010) 437.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid 437-438.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid 456.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid 456.



work “Economic Insecurity, Prejudicial Stereotypes, and Public Opinion on Immigration Policy”.<sup>22</sup> The authors study perceptions of immigration in 1992 and 1996 based on perceptions of economic insecurity and racial stereotypes in order to determine which has more influence on public opinion about immigration. For Burns and Gimpel, “the role of self-interest, as measured by personal economic forecasts or by one’s national economic outlook, is not as important to attitudes on immigration once stereotypical thinking is taken into account.”<sup>23</sup> The authors additionally raise the point that increased awareness of the immigration issue can lead to shifts in the public’s perception of immigration. Between 1992 and 1996, immigration opinions went from being focused on blacks to being focused on Hispanics, citing the campaigns of 1994 and 1996 as the causes of this shift since they focused on illegal immigration and Mexican migration.<sup>24</sup>

Finally, an extensive study by the Brookings Institution and The Norman Lear Center at USC Annenberg links public opinion on immigration to the amount of attention the media gives to the topic. In “A Report on the Media and the Immigration Debate” the authors note, “Simply put, the more attention that is paid to a topic in the media, the more likely the public will regard that topic as important”.<sup>25</sup> Their report focuses on a recent shift in the journalism industry that allows for “breathless, on-and-off coverage” that “has mischaracterized a massive demographic event that has developed over decades and mostly through legal channels”.<sup>26</sup> This mischaracterization plays an important role in shaping public opinion. By giving viewers and

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<sup>22</sup> Burns, Peter, and James G. Gimpel. "Economic Insecurity, Prejudicial Stereotypes, and Public Opinion on Immigration Policy." (The Academy of Political Science 2000) 222.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid 222-223.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid 223-224.

<sup>25</sup> Akdenizli, Banu, E.J. Dionne, Jr., Martin Kaplan, Tom Rosenstiel, and Roberto Suro. A Report on the Media and the Immigration Debate. Rep. (The Brookings Institution and the Norman Lear Center 2008) 8.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid IX.

readers “on-and-off coverage”, the media creates a greater sense of urgency and implies that immigration occurs in short, illicit bursts, downplaying the relatively steady flow of legal immigrants.

I postulate that the Brookings Institute and USC Annenberg study is the most compelling argument. It is well documented that the media can have a major influence on public opinion. The media readily controls the information the public receives, guiding opinion by highlighting certain facts while completely ignoring or glossing over others. Additionally, by deciding how much coverage to give to an issue, “editors, newsroom staff, and broadcasters play an important part in shaping political reality. Readers learn not only about a given issue, but also how much importance to attach to that issue from the amount of information in a news story and its position”.<sup>27</sup>

### **American Immigration History**

In order to truly discuss immigration in these countries, it is necessary to have some background knowledge on their respective histories. The United States is often referred to as a nation of immigrants. From the very beginning North America has been populated by immigrants starting with the very first settlers tens of thousands of years ago. This conception heavily influences the social and political definitions of a citizen in the United States. From the very beginning, immigrants were coming to the United States in search of political, religious, and economic freedoms that they could not find in their countries of origin. The first wave of immigration, made up of mostly European settlers, led to the Declaration of Independence from

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<sup>27</sup> McCombs, Maxwell E., and Donald L. Shaw. "The Agenda Setting Function of the Mass Media At Three Levels of "Information Holding"" (The Public Opinion Quarterly 1972)

Britain in 1776. The next main wave of immigration came in the 1800s with most arriving from Northern and Western Europe but also with an influx of Asian immigrants who settled mostly in California.

Even in the 1800s anti-immigrant sentiments were high. Predominantly Anglo-Saxon Protestants, these native-borns saw the immigrants “as unwanted competition for jobs, while many Catholics--especially the Irish--experienced discrimination for the religious beliefs.”<sup>28</sup> This highlights the possibility of economic and cultural influencers on public opinion against immigration. After leaving immigration policy up to the states for nearly a century, the Federal Government finally got involved in 1875 with the Supreme Court deciding that the Federal Government should hold responsibility for the regulation of US Immigration.<sup>29</sup> From that point on, many anti-immigrant acts were put into place including the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which banned any more Chinese workers from coming to America,<sup>30</sup> and the Alien Contract Labor Laws of 1885 and 1887, which “prohibited certain laborers from immigrating to the United States”.<sup>31</sup> These and other anti-immigrant policies created by the government bring into play the possibility of US public opinion being influenced by policy creation as suggested by Gareth Mulvey.

Immigration rates rose and fell periodically, with a massive increase during the Industrial Revolution followed by a decrease during the Civil War, an increase in the early 1900s, and a decrease during World Wars I and II and the Great Depression.<sup>32</sup> Increasingly harsh immigrant restrictions were put in place leading up to 1965 when Congress instituted the Immigration and

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<sup>28</sup> "United States Immigration Before 1965." (*History.com*. A&E Television Networks).

<sup>29</sup> "US Immigration History." (Rapid Immigration).

<sup>30</sup> "United States Immigration Before 1965"

<sup>31</sup> "US Immigration History"

<sup>32</sup> "United States Immigration Before 1965" and "US Immigration History"

Nationality Act in an effort to re-stimulate immigration from “the traditional sending societies such as Italy, Greece and Poland”—which it initially did—but by 1970, the majority of immigrants were coming from Asia, the Middle East and parts of Affrica.<sup>33</sup>

By 1986 the focus had shifted from limiting immigrants in general to fixing the problem of illegal immigration. Policies such as the Immigration Amnesty Act of 1986, the creation of “annual limit[s] for certain categories of immigrants” in an effort to attract more skilled immigrants<sup>34</sup> and the Illegal Immigration Reform and Responsibility Act of 1996 all came together to crack down on illegal immigration.<sup>35</sup> Once again, these policies could have had a major impact on anti-immigrant sentiment at this time period. Then September 11<sup>th</sup> changed the American perception of “foreigners” forever and consequently changed the way the government interacts with immigrants. Acts augmented the ability of officials to “track down illegal immigrants with terrorist ties” and created a database in which foreign students are tracked.<sup>36</sup> The public also began discriminating heavily against Muslims. From being refused service to being attacked by racial slurs such as “raghead”, immigrants and Muslim immigrants in particular became the target of public animosity post 9/11.

Since 2001, attempts have been made to reform the strict immigration laws but each has been met with disdain. Obama made a campaign promise in the 2008 elections to make immigration reform a top priority once he entered office yet no action has been seen from the Obama camp since his inauguration.<sup>37</sup> In the meantime, the states have begun to usurp

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<sup>33</sup> Diner, Hasia. "Immigration and U.S. History." (America.gov Archive. EJournalUSA, 2008).

<sup>34</sup> “US Immigration History

<sup>35</sup> Lane, Michael. "A Chronology of US Immigration Law (Indypendent Reader." Indypendent Reader. Summer 2007)

<sup>36</sup> "The Patriot Act and US Immigration." (United States Immigration: Green Card, Visas and U.S. Citizenship. U.S. Immigration Support, 2011).

<sup>37</sup> Walsh, James. "Obama's Tangled Immigration Web." (Newsmax. 2012).

immigration policy from the Federal Government. States such as Arizona, Georgia, Alabama and Mississippi have all attempted to enact laws limiting the rights of immigrants, particularly illegal immigrants. One of the most controversial sections of these laws pertains to “a section that empowers police to check the residency status of illegal immigrants”, leading to claims that racial profiling will soar out of control if police are given these powers.<sup>38</sup> A majority of Americans support these laws with 59% of those polled saying they support the Arizona immigration reform in a Pew Research Center poll.<sup>39</sup>

### **French Immigration History**

France’s immigration history is much different from American history, though both can be considered countries of immigrants on some level. It was not much until much later in its history that France became said nation of immigrants. In the aftermath of World War II, there was major industrialization and a demographic crisis, which demanded a huge increase in labor and thus an increase in immigration. Given this need for workers, early immigrants were defined in terms of economics, framing the discourse with ideas of temporary male labor.<sup>40</sup>

The French definition of an “immigrant” hinges more on origins or parentage than actual French nationality. The category of immigrant is racialized, thus people of “North African origin or parentage and blacks from West Africa and the Caribbean...are frequently assumed to be ‘the immigrants’ (many of whom are in fact French nationals), rather than those of Portuguese,

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<sup>38</sup> Fausset, Richard. "New round of Immigration Battles Set in the South." (Los Angeles Times. Los Angeles Times, 2012).

<sup>39</sup> Wright IV, Sidney. "Flashpoint: Arizona's Immigration Law." (ABC News. ABC News Network, 2010).

<sup>40</sup> Silverman, Maxim. *Deconstructing the Nation: Immigration, Racism, and Citizenship in Modern France*. (London: Routledge, 1992). 28, 39

Spanish or Italian origin (many of whom are not French nationals)”.<sup>41</sup> With the racialization of immigrants in France, it may come as a bit of a surprise that “the major official classification of people in France is in terms of nationality: you are either a national or a foreigner (‘étranger’), there being no official and institutional categories to define people once they have French nationality”.<sup>42</sup>

The official political definitions are rarely respected though. Socially the term immigrant has taken on an aspect of otherness as mentioned above. Foreigners, even those born and bred in France, are often lumped into the category of immigrants and associated with the “problem of immigration”.<sup>43</sup> It is clear in France that “although they do not appear *statistically* as foreigners they are frequently classified *popularly* as immigrants due to the contemporary racialized association between immigration, those of North African origin and blacks”.<sup>44</sup> Those of non-European heritage are viewed as immigrants even when their families have been officially French for generations. The differentiation is often discussed in terms of culture as opposed to race per se, but the two can often go hand in hand.<sup>45</sup> This emphasis on culture and otherness within French society leads one to see the merit of Paxton and Mughan’s assessment that culture and assimilation play a major role in public opinion toward immigrants in France.

These official and unofficial definitions are directly tied to French history of immigration and race relations, including France’s colonial past. As discussed above, the early immigrants seen in France were defined in terms of economic utility, not as permanent installments in France’s future. This is no longer the case and is inciting anti-immigrant fears in the French

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid. 4-5

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. 2

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 3

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. 37

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. 13

public. Many major Western powers have seen waves of immigration but France is on par with the United States and Canada in terms of the size and impact of its immigration waves.<sup>46</sup> With three major influxes of immigrants in the last one hundred years, France has been profoundly impacted by its increasing ‘foreigner’ population. The first two waves, one of mostly Belgians and Italians at the end of the nineteenth century and another of Poles, Czechs and Slavs in the 1920s, were largely comprised of Europeans. These immigrants, relatively similar to French nationals, were fairly well accepted into the French population. The last wave, during the post-war period, was made up much more of North and West Africans, culturally and physically different from the ideal Frenchman.<sup>47</sup>

In terms of politicization and Mulvey’s suggestion that immigration policy breeds anti-immigrant sentiment, the French government created the National Immigration Office (ONI) in the aftermath of World War II after losing much of their young male population in the war. This was the first instance of the French government really stepping in to regulate immigration. France required a major increase in immigration at this time in order to replace its male workforce so it could rebuild and keep up with the global industry of the day.<sup>48</sup> The ONI was an attempt to distribute immigrants throughout France and protect the French from the negative economic effects of immigration, the same effects that Jack Citrin et al and Douglas Palmer point to in their analysis of anti-immigrant public sentiments.

Major immigration did not take off until after 1955 though, contrasting France from the United States immensely.<sup>49</sup> Where the United States has always had immigration and was founded as a country of immigrants, France’s immigration history has been relatively short lived.

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid. 10

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. 10

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. 39

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. 42

At this beginning of French immigration history, immigration was still seen as a relatively positive aspect of French society, “creating a certain flexibility in the labor market and avoiding social tension” by creating the manpower necessary to keep France running as a major world power.<sup>50</sup> These immigrants, forced to live on the outskirts of society and to work the dirtiest of jobs, were relegated to ‘bidonvilles’ and marginalized.<sup>51</sup> Their marginalization created a social problem forcing a change in discourse from seeing immigrants as an economic necessity to seeing them as “a problem of assimilation and ethnic balance”.<sup>52</sup> Legislation thus increased, in an attempt to fix this problem and leading to, if Mulvey is to be proved correct, a potential shift in anti-immigrant sentiments. By the 1980s, austerity measures were replacing nationalization and public spending projects, racism was becoming increasingly a problem, unemployment was ever increasing, and politicians were becoming harsher and harsher on immigrants.<sup>53</sup>

But what part of these histories is tied most closely with negative public opinion towards immigrants?

## **Methodology**

History is an important part of understanding the context of public sentiments towards immigration. This analysis will confine itself to more recent history. Limitations in data require this short-term focus, since data is not available on the topic much before the 1990s, if it even exists in the 1990s. The history previously discussed does help one to understand the current trends in immigration and to understand why immigration is such an important issue in both countries.

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid. 44

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. 46

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. 47

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. 61



As a proxy variable for anti-immigrant public opinion in the United States, this study uses the percentage of people surveyed in a Gallup poll who when asked “In your view, should immigration be kept at its present level, increased, or decreased?” stated they would like to see immigration levels decreased.<sup>54</sup> Anti-immigrant public opinion in France is measured by the results of a Direction recherche études évaluation statistiques (DREES) study that stated, “Here are a few opinions. For each of them, tell me if you more or less (rather) agree or do not agree...” and included the phrase “There are too many foreign workers”.<sup>55</sup> The percentage of those surveyed who responded “rather agree” are included here as the proxy for anti-immigrant sentiment. This second proxy variable is slightly problematic considering it has certain economic connotations that skew the generalness of the anti-immigrant sentiment and give the proxy a more economic tone. Yet, as will be discussed in the conclusion, it is the best variable given the availability of data.

These proxy variables are then tested against direct variables and proxy variables that relate to each of the above authors’ theories. Each individual factor requires a slightly different form of analysis thus more in-depth methodology and statistical description will accompany each of the results.

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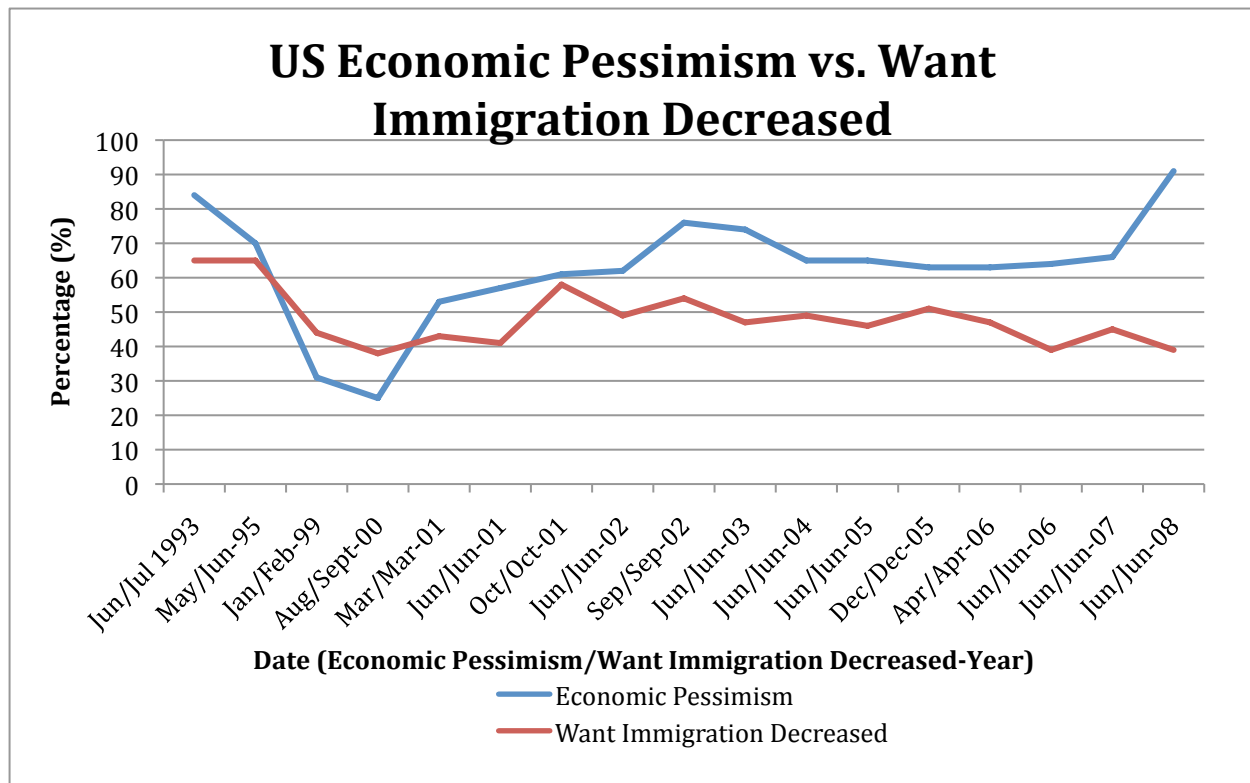
<sup>54</sup> "In Your View, Should Immigration Be Kept at Its Present Level, Increased, or Decreased?" (Immigration-Gallup Inc. 2012).

<sup>55</sup> Ministère De La Santé, DREES. "Accord Ou Non: Trop De Travailleurs Immigrés." (Réseau Quetelet. Réseau Français Des Centres De Données Pour Les Sciences Sociales. 2012) No data available for 2003.

## Results

### *Economic Pessimism*

Figure 1:<sup>56</sup>

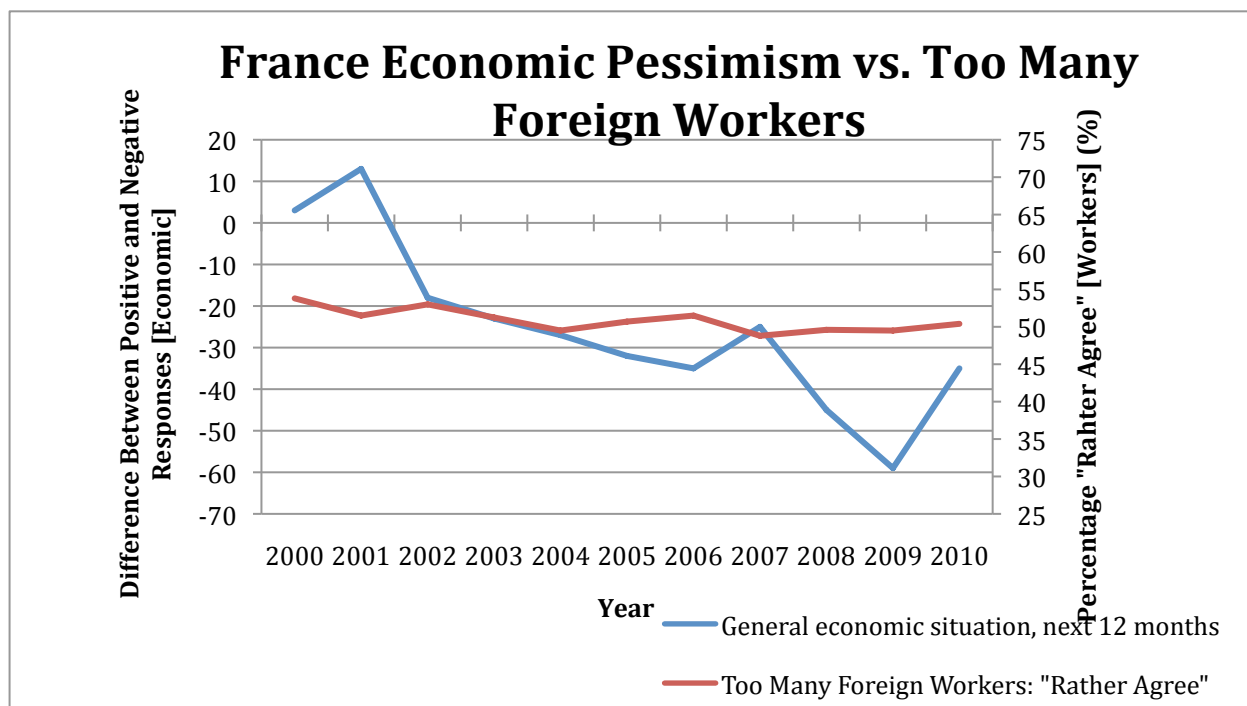


The first variable relates the relationship between economic pessimism and negative public opinion towards immigrants as suggested by Jack Citrin et al. In the United States, the percentage of the population responding “only fair” and “poor” to the Gallup poll asking “How would you rate economic conditions in this country today -- as excellent, good, only fair, or poor?” is used as a proxy for economic pessimism. Contrary to the study produced by Citrin et al, there seems to be no compelling connection between economic pessimism and negative immigrant perceptions when the Gallup proxy variables are compared. One can see some

<sup>56</sup> "How Would You Rate Economic Conditions in This Country Today -- as Excellent, Good, Only Fair, or Poor?" (Economy-Gallup Inc. 2012).

correlation between certain dates, but then there are cases such as the change in economic pessimism between August/September 2000 and March 2001 with no corresponding shift in anti-immigrant sentiment, or the rise in economic pessimism between June '07 and June '08 where there is actually a decline in anti-immigrant sentiment. When tested in this manner, there seems to be no true correlation between economic pessimism and anti-immigrant sentiment in the US.

Figure 2:<sup>57</sup>



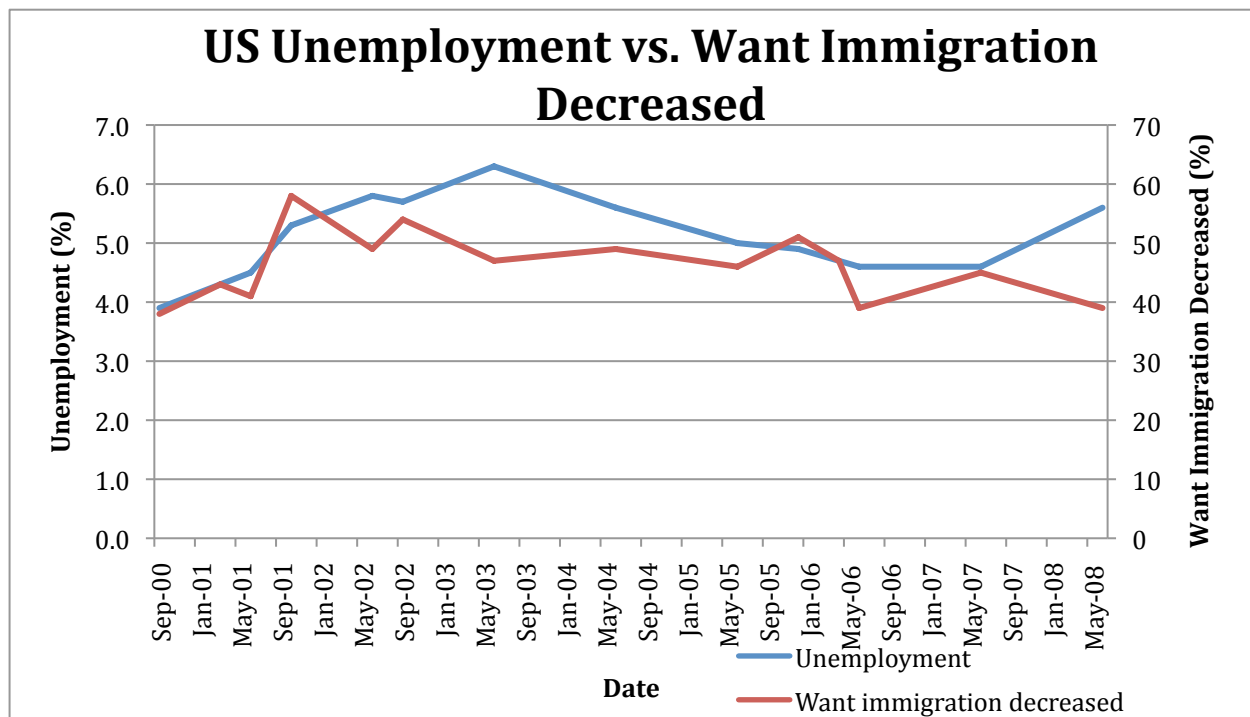
In France, the National Institute of Statistics and Economics Studies (INSEE) poll about economic conditions in France studied the “general economic situation” in the next twelve months by asking those surveyed if they thought the situation was getting better or worse. The data included here is measured by the difference between those who responded getting better and those who responded getting worse meaning if the data is negative 20, 20% more people

<sup>57</sup> "Enquête Mensuelle De Conjoncture Auprès Des Ménages : Opinion Sur Le Niveau De Vie Futur En France - Solde Des Réponses "amélioration"- "détérioration")." (Bases De Données- Institut National De La Statistique Et Des études économiques, 2012).

responded the general economic situation is getting worse than better. As with the United States, the results indicate no clear connection between economic pessimism and anti-immigrant sentiment in France. The extreme vagaries of the economic pessimism are not reflected in the meager changes in public opinion on immigration and many of the changes are actually in opposition. With the economic overtones of the proxy variable for anti-immigrant sentiment, one would expect a strong connection between the two but none can be found. With no correlation in France or the United States, the importance of economic pessimism's influence public opinion seems minimal. By itself, it does not appear to have a major impact on opinion.

### *Unemployment*

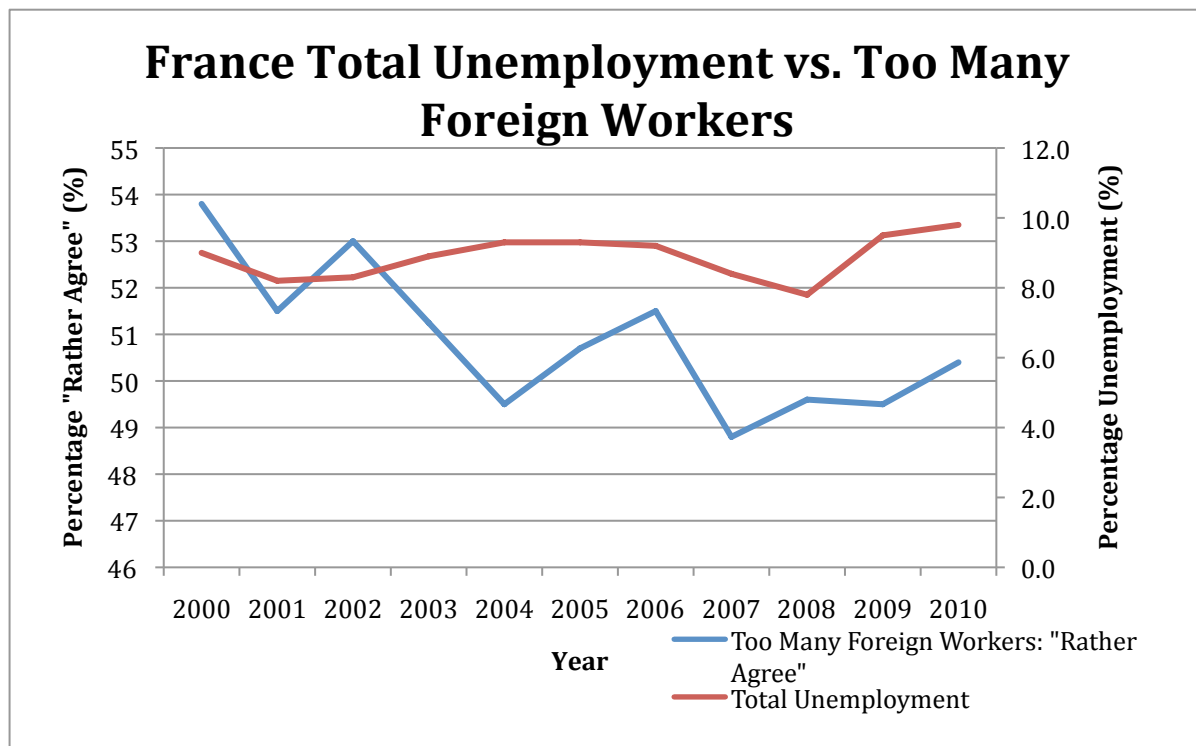
Figure 3.<sup>58</sup>



<sup>58</sup> "Unemployment Rate." (US Bureau of Labor Statistics-United States Department of Labor).

To test Douglas Palmer's hypothesis that unemployment is the key factor in determining anti-immigrant public opinion, the study compares US unemployment levels between September 2000 and May 2008 and compares them against the proxy variable cited above, percentage of the US population wanting a decrease in the rate of immigration. When compared side by side, there is no clear relation between the unemployment rate and the proxy for anti-immigrant sentiment. Some of the contours seem comparable at first glance, but deviations such as the rise in unemployment and the decrease in anti-immigrant sentiment between October 2001 and June of 2002, or between June 2007 and June 2008 negate any correlation that might be assumed. Thus Palmer's hypothesis does not hold up in the United States.

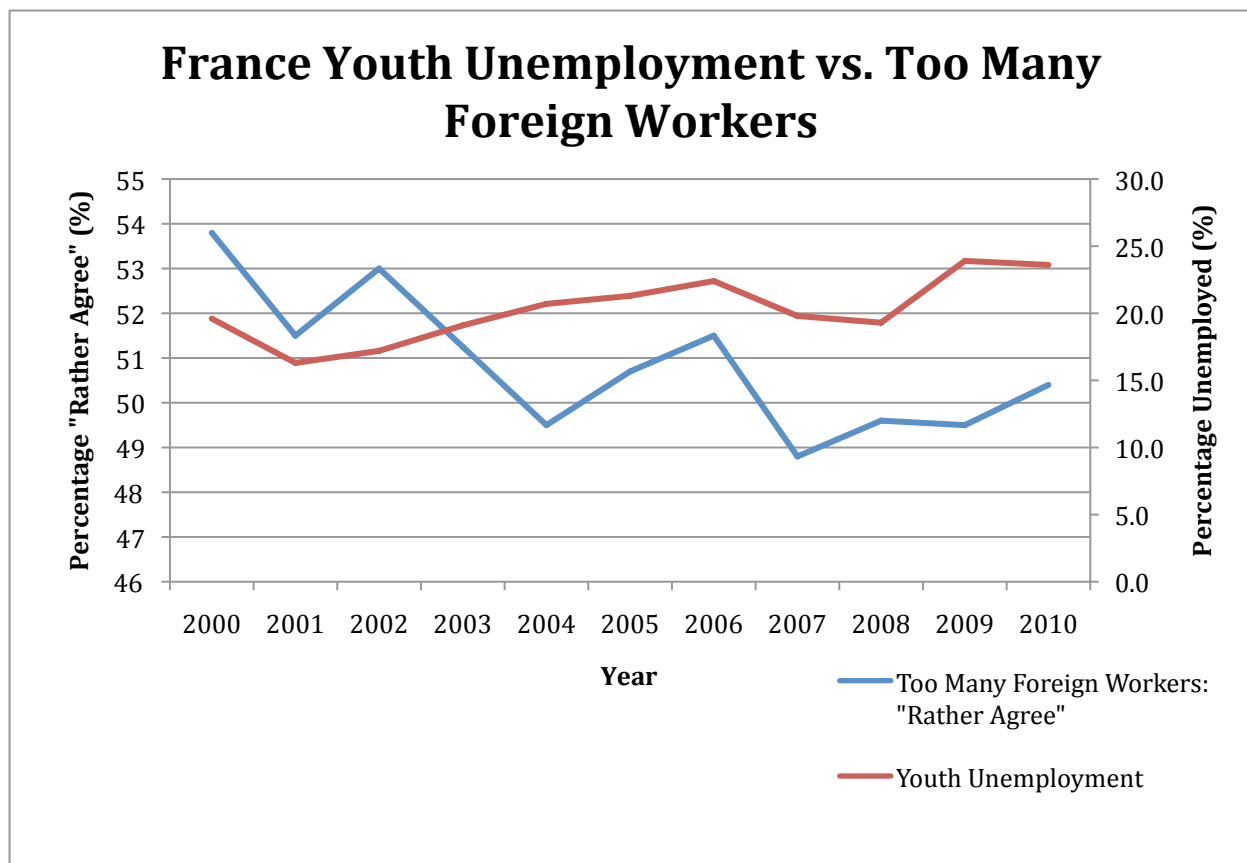
Figure 4.<sup>59</sup>



<sup>59</sup> "Taux De Chômage." (Statistiques-Eurostat, 2012).

In France, those responding “rather agree” that there are “too many foreign workers” in France is measured against total unemployment. Much like the United States, there is no compelling evidence of a correlation between the two in France. Once again, the contours of the changes between certain years appear correlated, but the changes in anti-immigrant sentiment appear much larger than the changes in unemployment and sometimes oppose unemployment changes. These results lead one to believe that something else is working to change anti-immigrant sentiments in France as well as the United States.

Figure 5:<sup>60</sup>



It might then be assumed that a more telling variable in terms of unemployment would be unemployment of those most likely to be affected by immigrants. Immigrants are typically seen

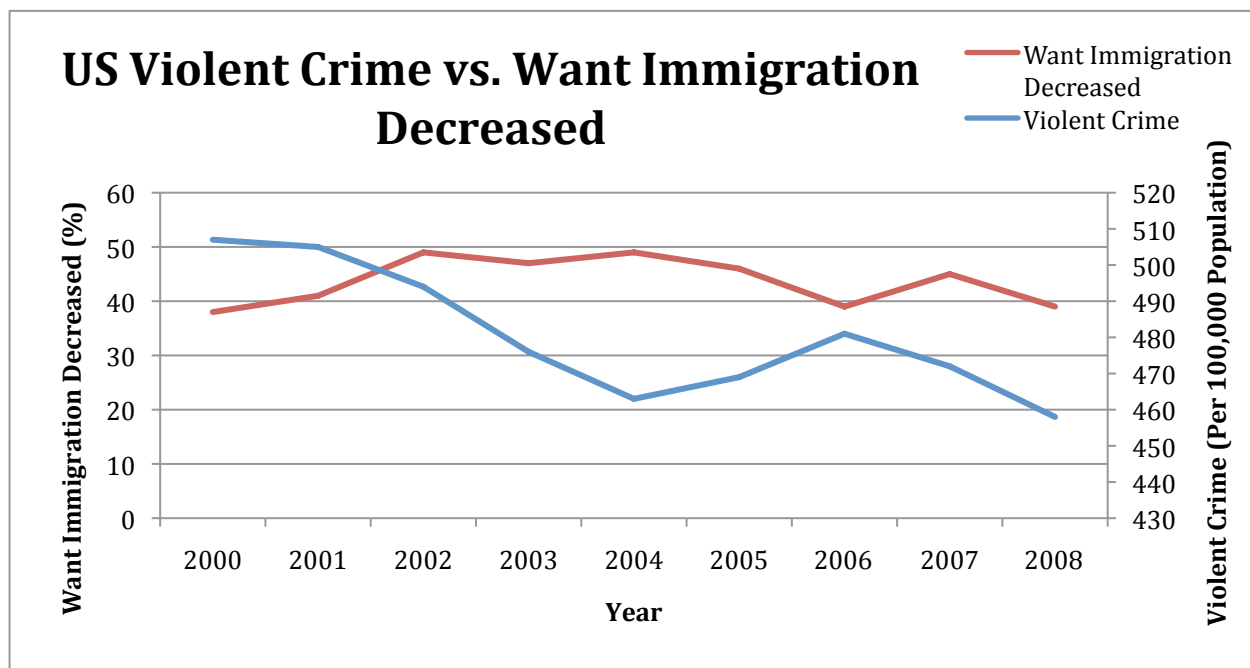
<sup>60</sup> "Taux De Chômage des Jeunes." (Statistiques-Eurostat 2012).

in the lower level job market taking jobs that the youth and minorities of a country would be most likely to hold, leading to the inclusion of comparison of youth unemployment and anti-immigrant sentiments in the United States and France.

The vagaries in sentiments have a greater correlation with youth unemployment than with total unemployment in France and this study holds it as one of the more compelling arguments of those studied so far. But even if more compelling, the correlation does not seem to hold much true descriptive value. Changes in sentiment are much more extreme than changes in youth unemployment leading to the assumption that something else is at work. In the end, unemployment, total or only as it regards to part of the population most likely to be affected, does not seem very descriptive in determining anti-immigrant sentiments.

### *Crime*

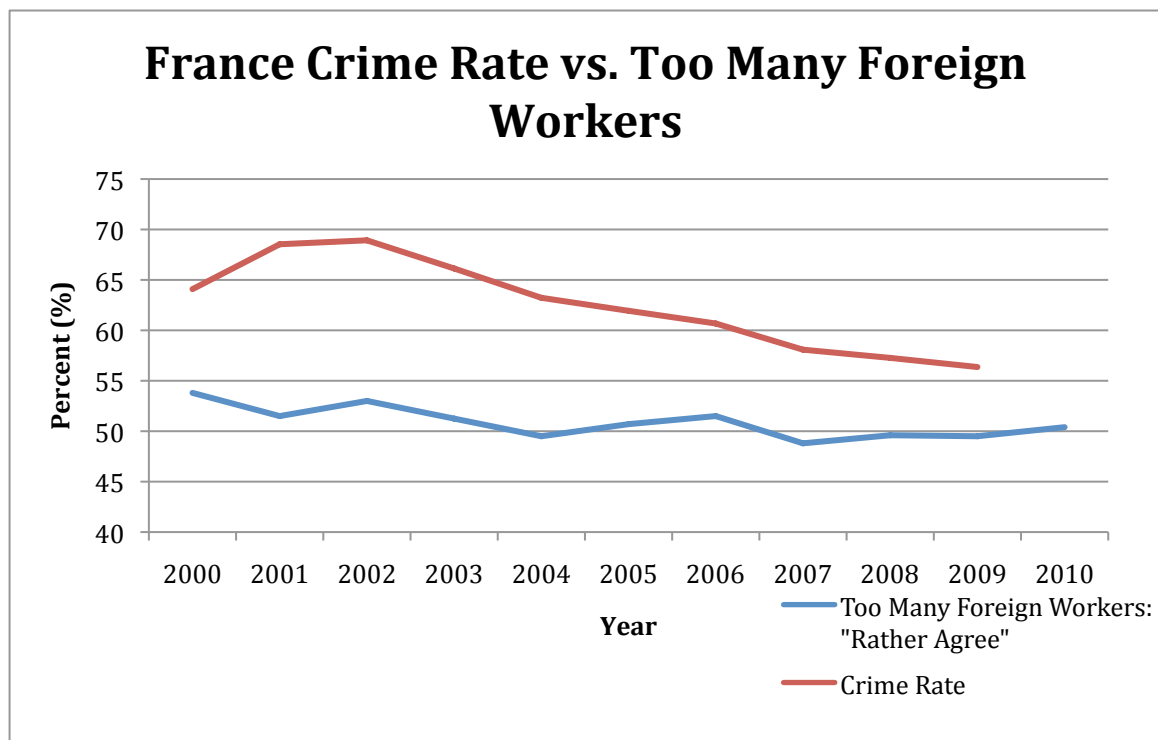
Figure 6:<sup>61</sup>



<sup>61</sup> "Crimes and Crime Rates by Type of Offense." (The 2012 Statistical Abstract-United States Census Bureau 2011)

Figure 6 attempts to test the link between violent crime and anti-immigrant sentiments. The percentage of people wanting decreased immigration is compared with total violent crime rates per 100,000 people. Once again there is no compelling correlation between these variables. While there are some periods such as between 2007 and 2008 where the two are related, the discrepancies between the two do not lend themselves to a correlation. The correlation becomes slightly more salient if a time lag is factored in to account for public opinion changing only after crime rate statistics are released, but the relation is still not enough to merit a true correlation.

Figure 7:<sup>62</sup>



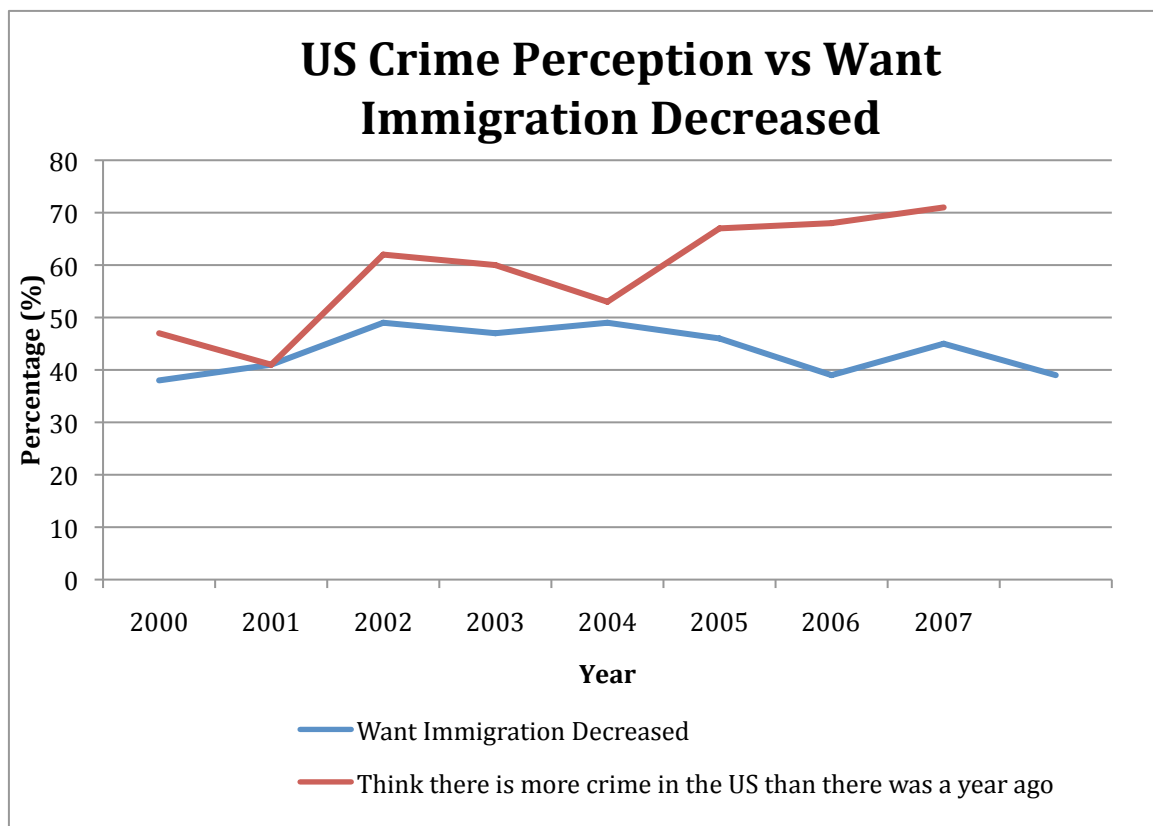
This graph portrays the French crime rate, defined as the relationship between the population considered and the number of crimes and offences reported by the police and

<sup>62</sup> "Taux De Criminalité." (Conditions De Vie-Société: Justice. L'Institut National De La Statistique Et Des études économiques, 2010).



gendarmerie.<sup>63</sup> The overall decline in crime rate is not matched by a decline in French anti-immigrant sentiments. Instead, given the scale of the graph, French anti-immigrant sentiments appear to hold relatively steady while there is quite a massive decline in crime rates. Thus, unlike what one might expect, as crime rates have decreased, the French have not changed their opinion of immigrants. This indicates that actual crime rates have little influence on French public opinion toward immigrants.

Figure 8:<sup>64</sup>



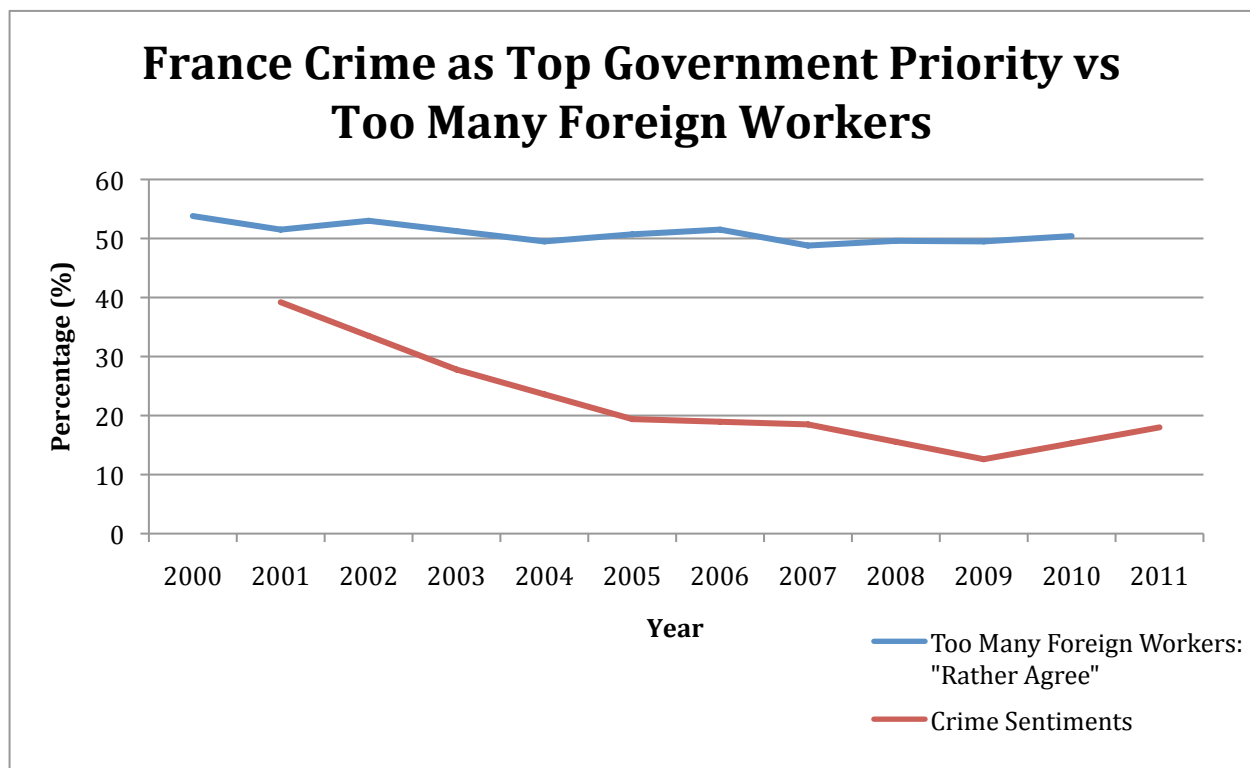
To truly test Fitzgerald et al.'s claim one must observe the relationship between perceived crime rates and anti-immigrant sentiments. In order to do this in the United States we test the

<sup>63</sup> Selon l'Institut National de la Statistique, le taux de criminalité est le rapport entre le nombre de crimes et délits constatés par les services de police et de gendarmerie et la population considérée.

<sup>64</sup> Saad, Lydia. "Perceptions of Crime Problem Remain Curiously Negative." (Gallup-Gallup Inc., 2007).

proxy variable for anti-immigrant sentiment against the Gallup poll asking “Is there more crime in the U.S. than there was a year ago, or less?” The percentage of those responding “more” is included in this study. Even with this proxy for perceived crime rates the correlation between crime and anti-immigrant sentiments remains weak. Here, many rises in perceived crime are actually correlated with declines in anti-immigrant sentiment and vice versa, contrary to what Fitzgerald et al. predicted.

Figure 9:<sup>65</sup>



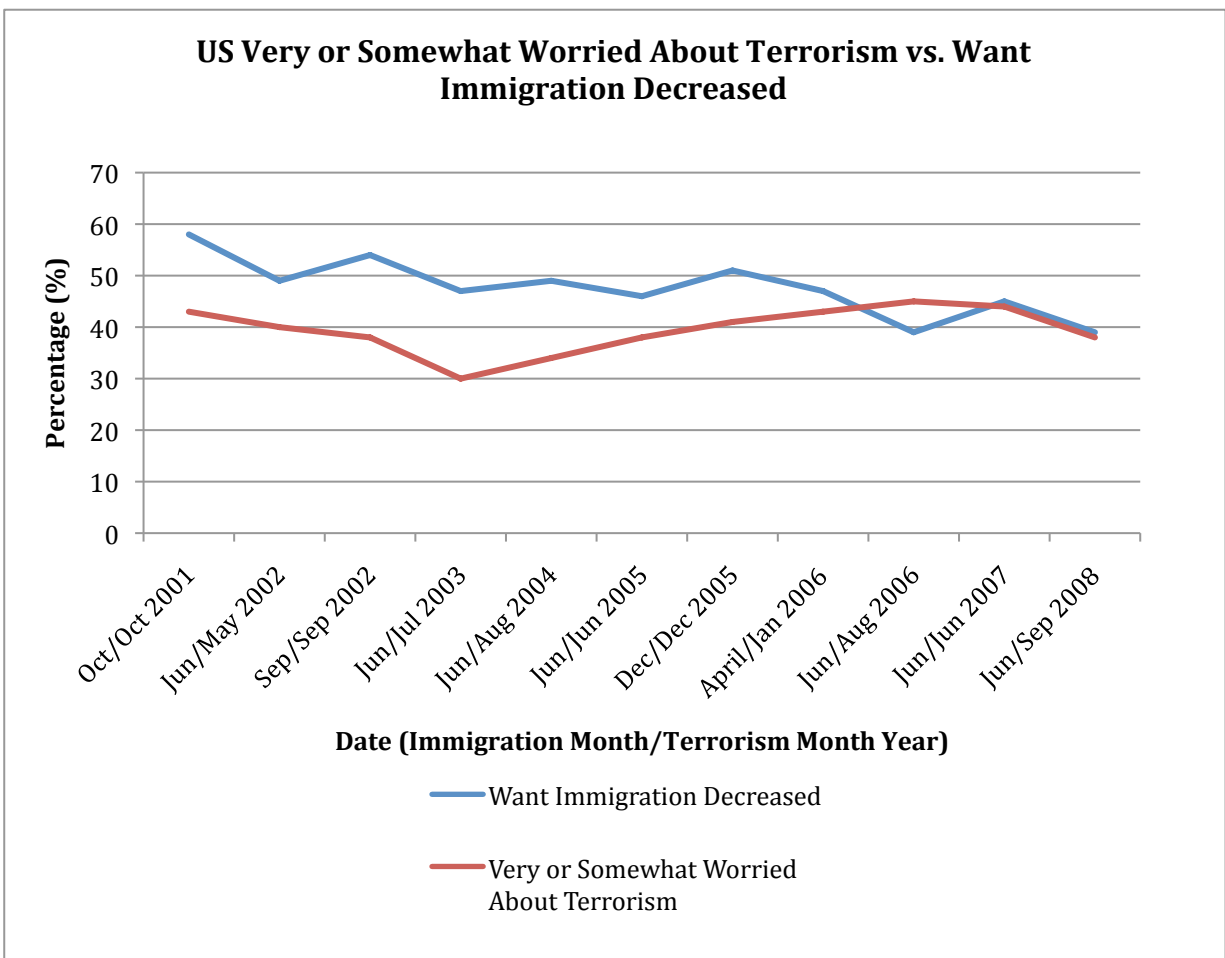
As a proxy variable in France for the perception of crime, this study uses the percentage of those surveyed citing crime as the top government priority. Once again, there is no true correlation between crime perception and anti-immigrant sentiments. Like with French crime rates overall, there has been a decline in the perception of a threat of crime in France with no

<sup>65</sup> "Enquête «victimation Et Sentiment D'insécurité En Île-de-France» De 2011." (Institut D'Aménagement Et D'Urbanisme: Île-de-France 2011). 8

related decline in anti-immigrant sentiments. This begets the conclusion that crime perception has little effect on public opinion toward immigrants. Neither the American nor French variables validate Fitzgerald et al.'s conclusions.

### *Terrorism*

Figure 10:<sup>66</sup>

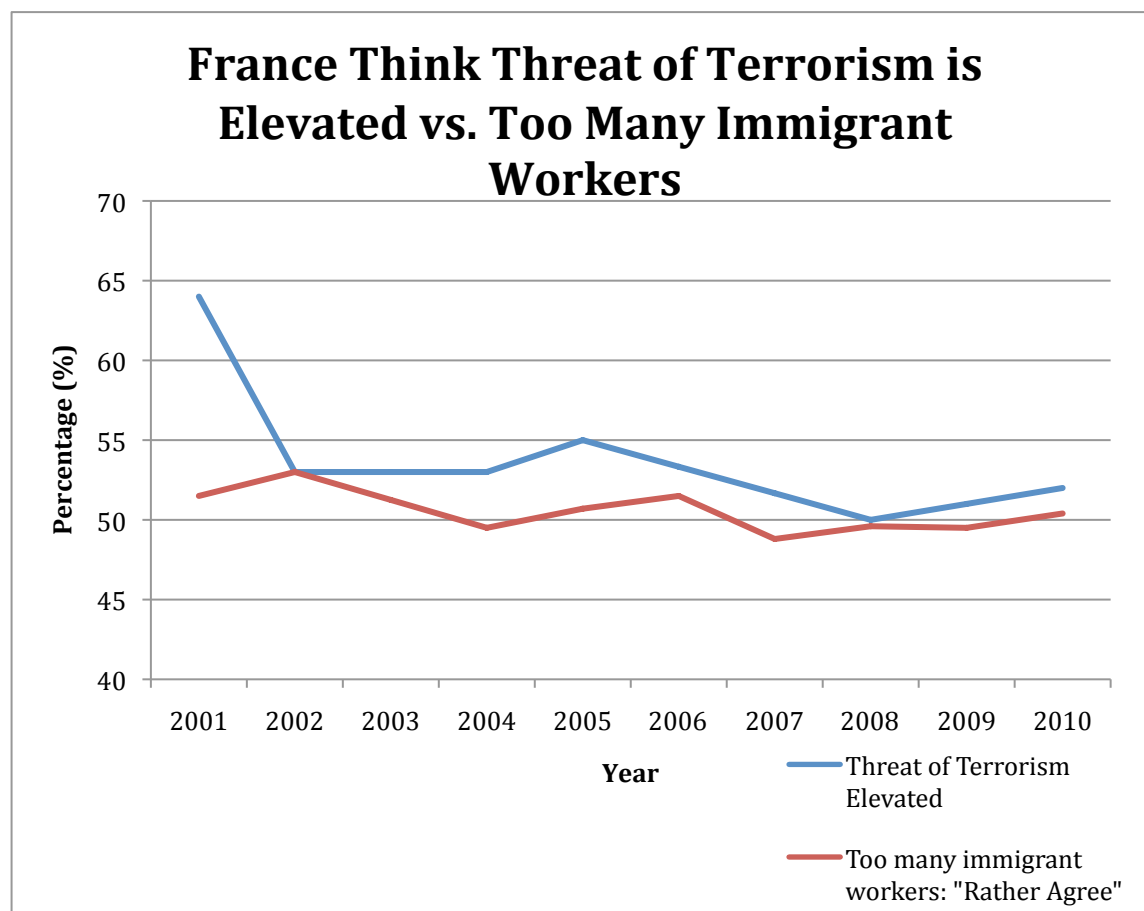


When comparing these statistics on fear of terrorism and anti-immigrant sentiment, Victoria Esses, John Dovidio and Gordon Hodson's hypothesis that increased fear of terrorism

<sup>66</sup> "How Worried Are You That You or Someone in Your Family Will Become a Victim of Terrorism -- Very Worried, Somewhat Worried, Not Too Worried, or Not Worried at All?" (Terrorism in the United States-Gallup Inc).

will lead to increased restrictionism does not seem to hold true in the United States. According to Esses, Dovidio and Hodson, after the 9/11 terrorist attacks on America, one should see a rise in anti-immigrant sentiment. This corollary does not hold; the percentage of the population wanting to decrease immigration after 9/11 has actually decreased. Additionally, the relation between wanting to decrease immigration and fear of terrorism, here measured by the Gallup poll asking “How worried are you that you or someone in your family will become a victim of terrorism -- very worried, somewhat worried, not too worried, or not worried at all?” is not strong.

Figure 11:<sup>67</sup>

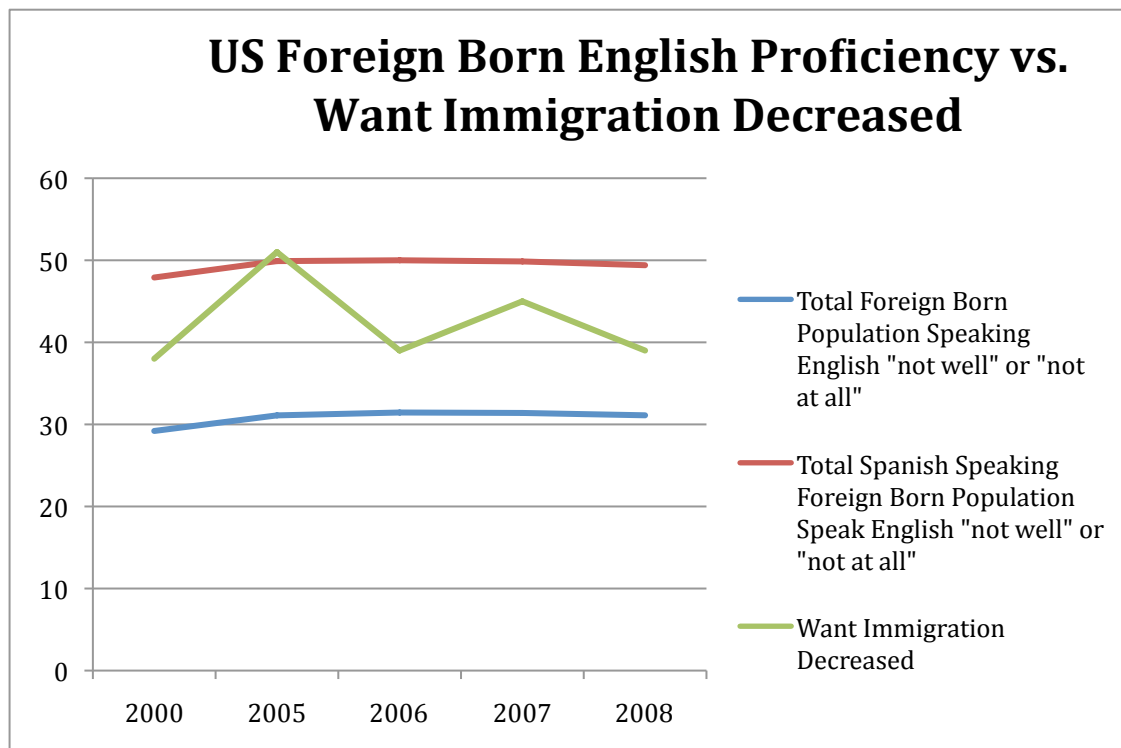


<sup>67</sup> Fourquet, Jerome. "Baromètre De La Menace Terroriste – Vague 12." (IFOP Pour Dimanche Ouest France. Institut Français D'opinion Publique, 2012).

The relation between perceived threat of terrorism and anti-immigrant sentiment in France does not seem much more compelling than it did in the United States. The massive dip in perceived threat of terrorism from 2001-2002 is mated with a slight increase in anti-immigrant sentiment. This contrariety is followed by another contradiction between 2002 and 2003 and again between 2005 and 2006 and 2007 and 2008 where there is a dip in anti-immigrant sentiment but an increase in the perceived threat of terrorism. Other areas on the graph are more correlated but the contradictions witnessed in these years negate any conclusions one might try to draw from the correlated years.

### *Cultural Threat*

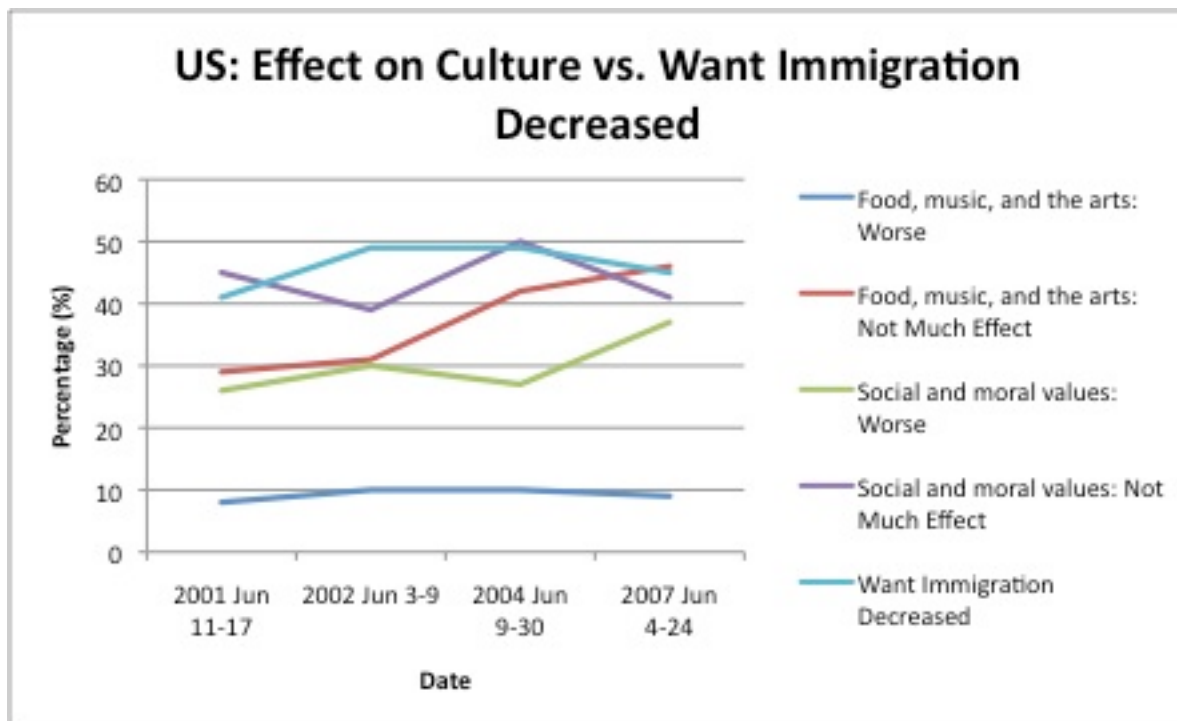
Figure 12:<sup>68</sup>



<sup>68</sup> "Nativity by Language Spoken at Home by Ability to Speak English for the Population 5 Years and Over." (American Fact Finder. U.S Census Bureau).

Two of the studies discussed above (Paxton and Mughan; Chandler and Tsai) list language use as a major factor in determining anti-immigrant sentiments because it is one factor in the “cultural threat” felt by native-born citizens. This study uses language proficiency in the foreign-born population as a proxy for cultural threat. In the United States, between 2000 and 2008, it seems that there is no correlation between foreign-born English proficiency and the desire for immigration to be decreased. The level of immigrants speaking English “not well” or “not at all” remained relatively stable during those 8 years, while the desire for decreased immigration fluctuated dramatically. Thus, language use is not a compelling factor in explaining anti-immigrant sentiment overall.

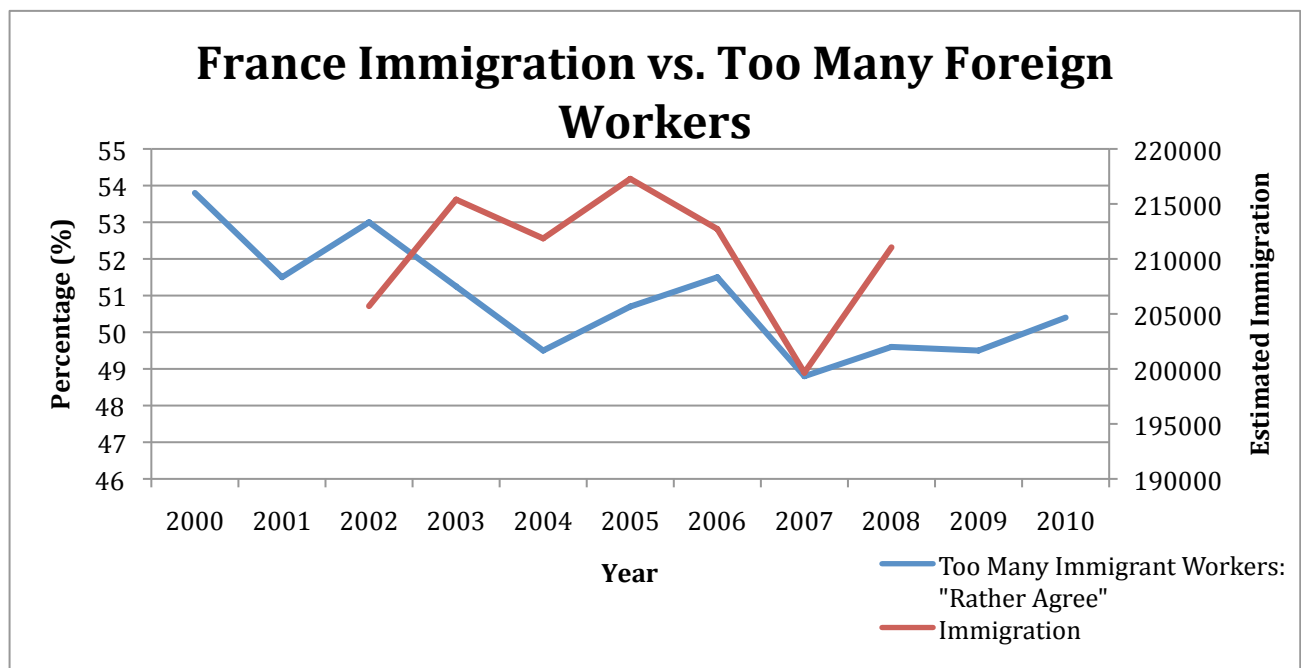
Figure 13:<sup>69</sup>



<sup>69</sup> “For each of the following areas, please say whether immigrants to the United States are making the situation in the country better or worse, or not having much effect. How about...”, (Immigration. Gallup Inc).

Here one can see that in the US, even perception of a cultural threat has little direct impact on the proxy for anti-immigrant sentiment. This chart combines data from a Gallup poll asking “For each of the following areas, please say whether immigrants to the United States are making the situation in the country better or worse, or not having much effect. How about...”, finished with either “Food, music and the arts” or “social and moral values” with the available options of “Better”, “Worse”, or “Not much effect”. Here only “Worse” and “Not much effect” are used. Though there is a much higher perception that immigrants have a negative effect on “social and moral values” than on “food, music, and the arts”, none of these variables are correlated with wanting immigration decreased. It seems then that a perception of a negative effect on culture, also known as a cultural threat, has little direct influence on wanting to decrease immigration in the short run.

Figure 14:<sup>70</sup>



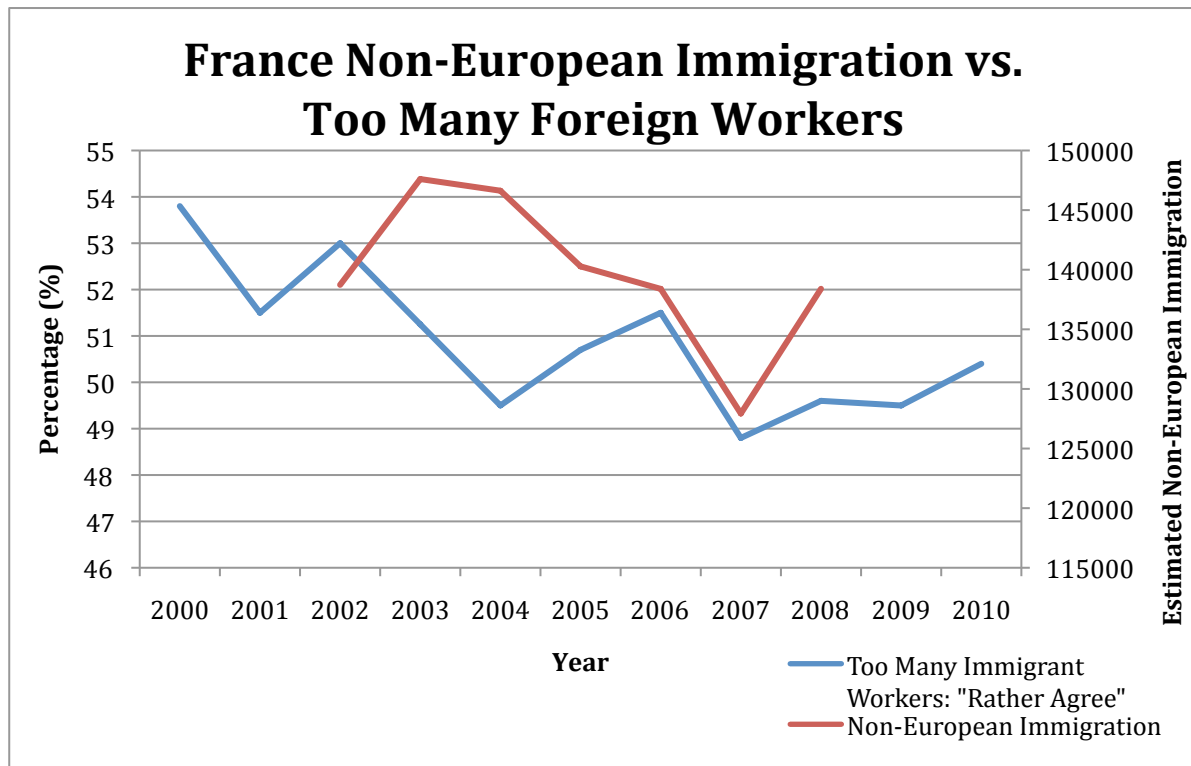
<sup>70</sup> "Immigration Flows by Year and Nationality." (Institut National D'Études Démographiques. Institut National D'Études Démographiques, 2010).

One way the French might perceive a cultural threat is by the pure number of immigrants entering the country each year. An increase or decrease in the number of foreigners moving into the country could very well make the French believe that their way of life is threatened. Data is limited for estimated immigration, since statistics are not necessarily taken every year, but one can see that this variable is also not explanatory of negative French public opinion toward immigrants. A dramatic increase in immigration between 2002 and 2003 is matched with a dramatic decrease in those thinking there are too many immigrant workers in the country. A similar discrepancy in contours can be seen with the major dip in immigration numbers between 2005 and 2006 which here is matched with an increase in those who think there are too many immigrant workers in France. Finally, in those areas where the direct of change correlates between the two variables, the differences in the scale of change lead one to believe that there is little correlation between the two variables, such as between 2007 and 2008 where there is a massive increase in immigration numbers and only a minor bump in anti-immigrant sentiment. Thus the idea that pure immigration numbers have a direct effect on public opinion towards immigrants seems flawed.

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Figure 15:<sup>71</sup>

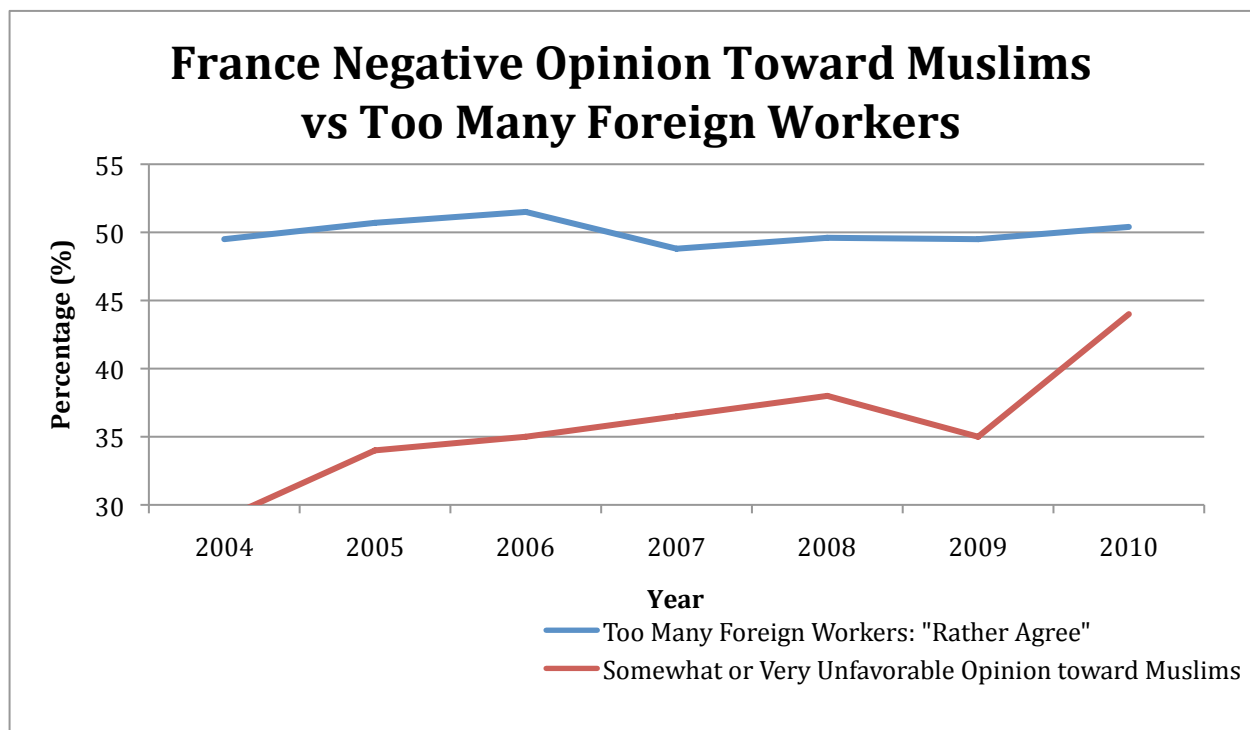


One might argue that only those immigrants not coming from cultures relatively similar to that of France would be perceived as a threat to their culture. In Figure 15, the number of immigrants arriving from other member countries of the European Union and immigrants from other countries in the rest of Europe has been removed from the figures, leaving only those immigrants of non-European origins. Leaving only those most likely to be culturally different from the French in the analysis does not make the argument that total immigration numbers, when considered as a cultural threat, has an effect on anti-immigrant sentiments in France. As with the analysis of the total number of immigrants entering France each year, this graph shows that where there are changes in non-European immigrant numbers entering the country, there is no equal change in anti-immigrant sentiments. Often there is actually the opposite reaction, such

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

as between 2002 and 2003 where anti-immigrant sentiments, as measured by those thinking there are too many immigrant workers in France, takes a dramatic dip while the number of non-European immigrants entering France rises dramatically. A similar occurrence, but inverse, is seen between 2004 and 2005. If one were only to look at the changes between 2006 and 2007, it would be easy to assume that the two variables are correlated. But taking into account multiple years, it becomes clear that no true correlation exists.

Figure 16:<sup>72</sup>



Another way to measure the perception of a cultural threat in France is to query their opinion towards Muslims. France accepted immigrants into the country on a large scale for the last century and a half and Muslims make up a large part of that immigration coming in largely from North Africa typically from former French colonies. The French have had a hard time

<sup>72</sup> "Global Attitudes Project 2010, Q7i." (Pew Global Attitudes Project-Pew Research Center, 2010).

accepting these Muslim immigrants into their fold and thus perceptions towards Muslims have been said to reflect perceptions of immigrants in general in France.<sup>73</sup> This graph looks at the percentage of those surveyed who have a somewhat or very unfavorable opinion toward Muslims and lays that percentage against the percentage of those who “rather agree” that there are too many foreign workers. While neither variable seems to have much change, the correlation between the two appears minimal. A major jump in anti-Muslim sentiments between 2009 and 2010 is not matched by a similar change in anti-immigrant sentiments more generally and the dip in anti-immigrant sentiments between 2006 and 2007 is actually associated with a slight increase in anti-Muslim sentiments. Thus, no clear correlation can be drawn.

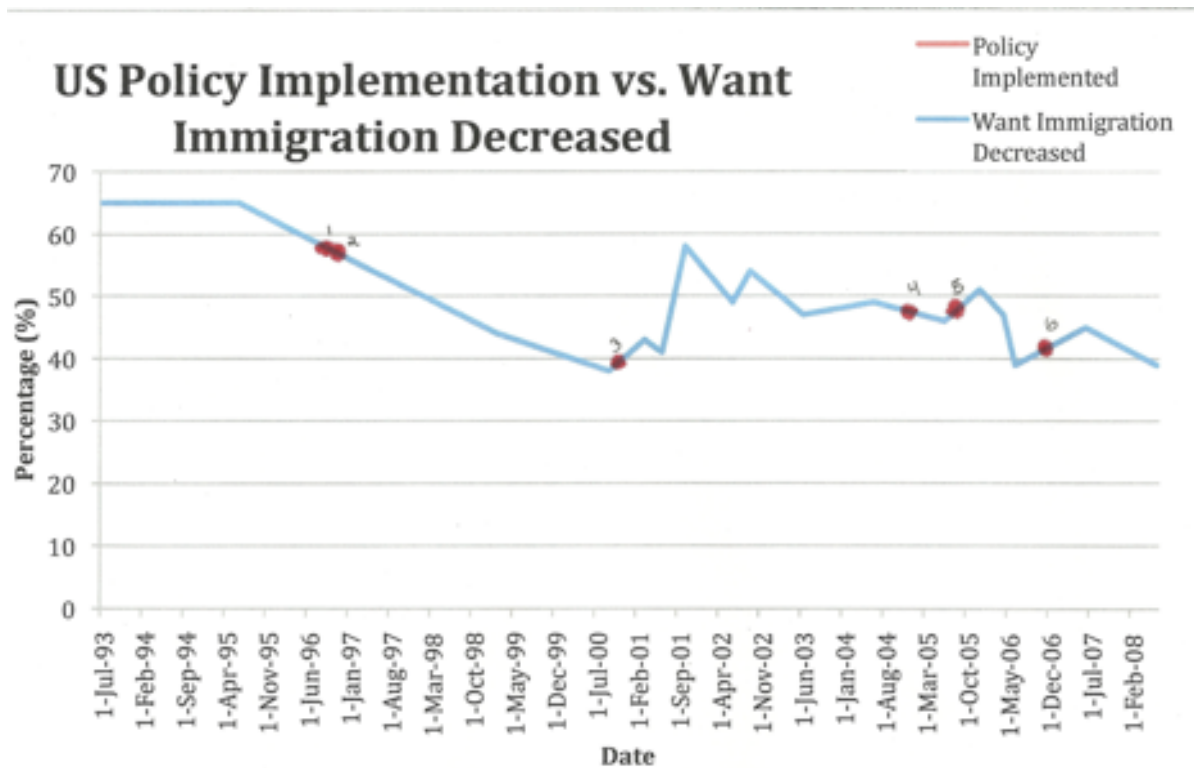
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<sup>73</sup> Giry, Stéphanie. "France and Its Muslims." (Foreign Affairs 2006).

## Policy Creation

Figure 17:<sup>74</sup>



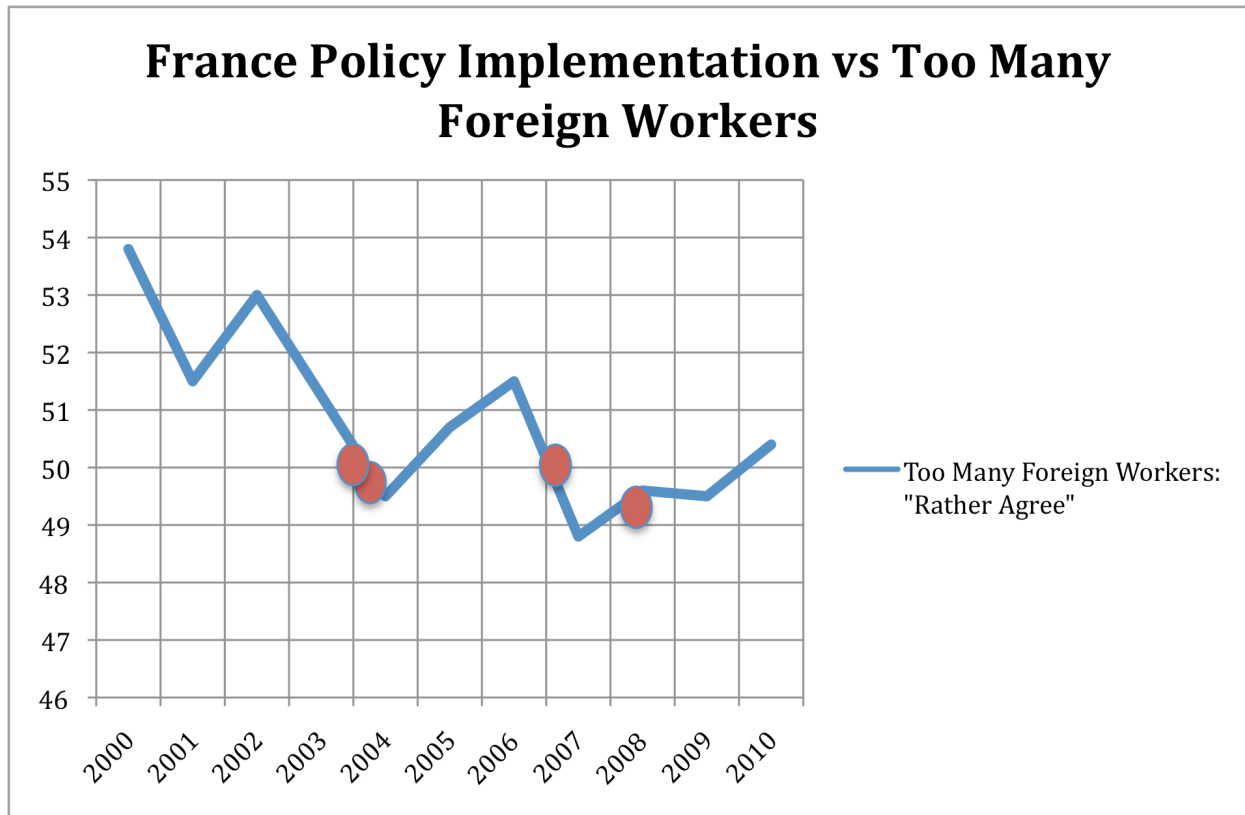
**Point 1-** 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act implemented August 22, 1996; **Point 2-** 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform & Immigrant Responsibility Act implemented September 30, 1996; **Point 3-** 2000 Bring Them Home Alive Act implemented November 9, 2000; **Point 4-** 2004 Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act implemented December 17, 2004; **Point 5-** 2005 Real ID Act implemented May 11, 2005; **Point 6-** 2006 Secure Fence Act implemented October 26, 2006

Gareth Mulvey hypothesized that policy implementation and the debates surrounding that implementation could be a key reason why anti-immigrant sentiments rose. This graph overlays key policy changes in the United States and the proxy for anti-immigrant sentiments. Given the data above, Mulvey's hypothesis actually has some merit with minor upticks in anti-immigrant sentiment following the implementation of the 2000 Bring Them Home Alive Act, the 2005 Real

<sup>74</sup> Starkweather, Sarah. "U.S. Immigration Legislation Online." (U.S. Immigration Legislation Online. The University of Washington-Bothell Library).

ID Act and the 2006 Secure Fence Act. So far, of the authors reviewed in this study, Mulvey's theory based on his observations in the United Kingdom seems to be the most compelling but it is still lacking.

Figure 18:<sup>75</sup>



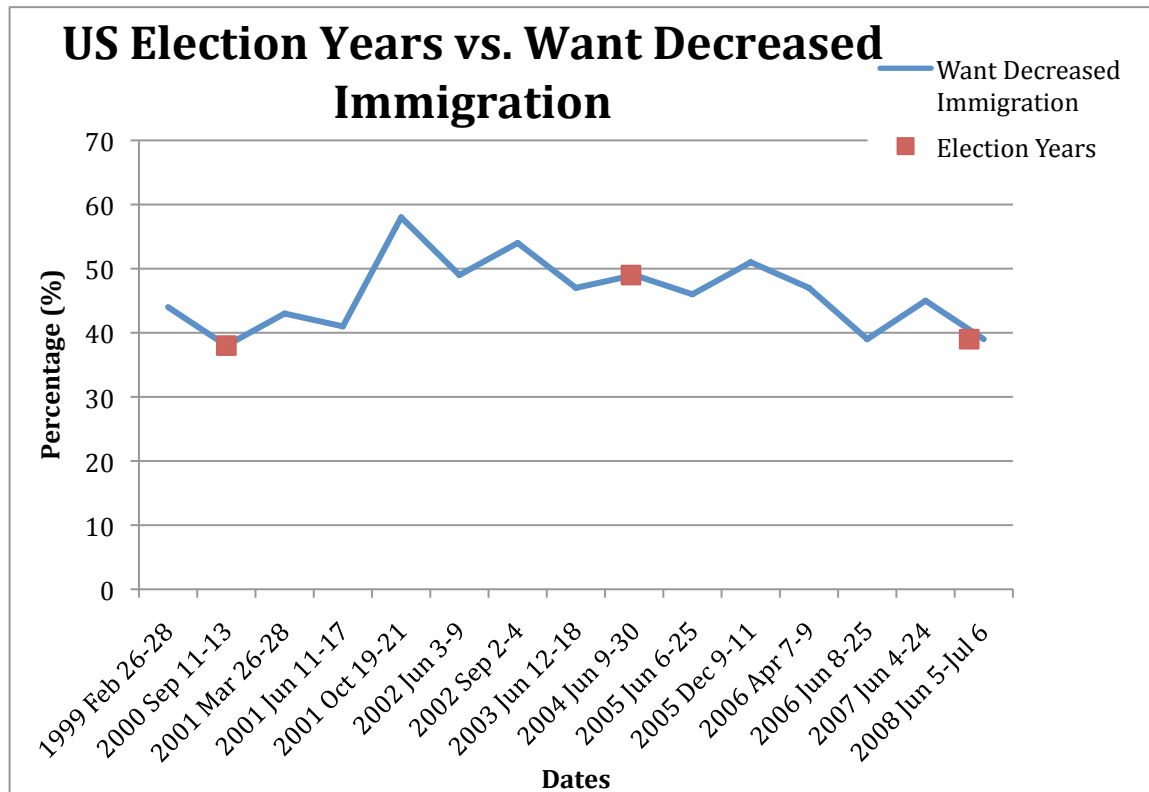
The correlation is less compelling when one looks at France. While one might argue that there is a correlation between the implementation of policy at the end of 2003 and the major uptick in anti-immigrant sentiments between 2004 and 2005, no similar correlation is found between the policy created in 2006 or the policy created in 2007. So while a potentially reliable factor in the United States for predicting levels of anti-immigrant sentiment, immigration policy

<sup>75</sup> "Cinq Lois Sur L'immigration En Sept Ans." (Actualité; Politique. L'Express, 2010).

seems to be an unreliable factor in terms of France. This finding negates any generalizability one might have assumed from the correlation in the United States.

*Political Campaigns: Presidential Election Years*

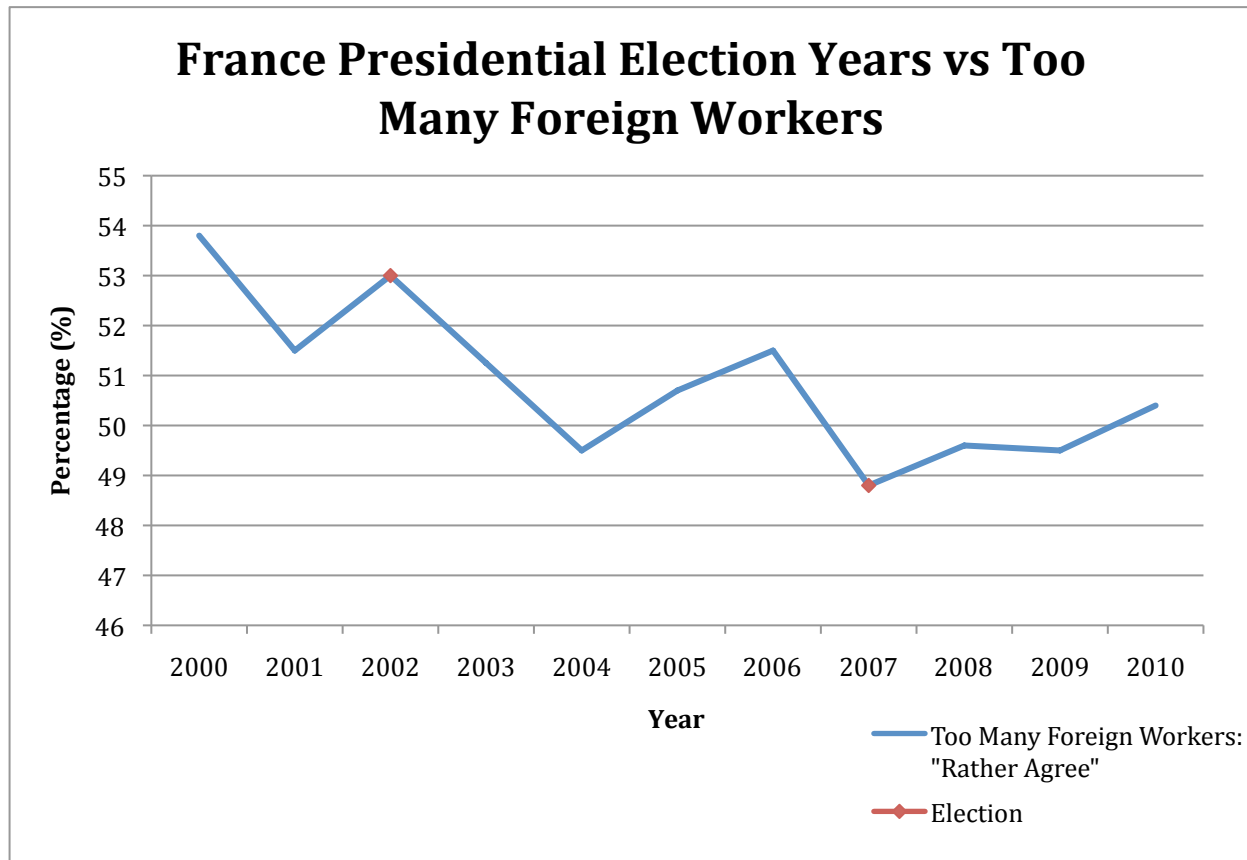
Figure 19:



Burns and Gimpel cite election campaigns as influencing the public's perception of immigration. With all of the negative portrayals of immigrants (particularly illegal immigrants) in American presidential campaigns, it would be logical that the public would turn against immigrants more when politicians were more readily debating the issue. In the United States, the increased discussion of illegal immigration during election years could very well turn the public against even legal immigrants and instill a fear of all immigrants in the populace. Based on the public's desire to decrease immigration though, it seems election years have little effect

on opinions. The data actually demonstrate a diminution in the desire to decrease immigration in the lead up to the 2000 and 2008 elections and only a slight increase in that desire in the lead up to the 2004 election. Therein the role of presidential campaigns seems minimal.

Figure 20:



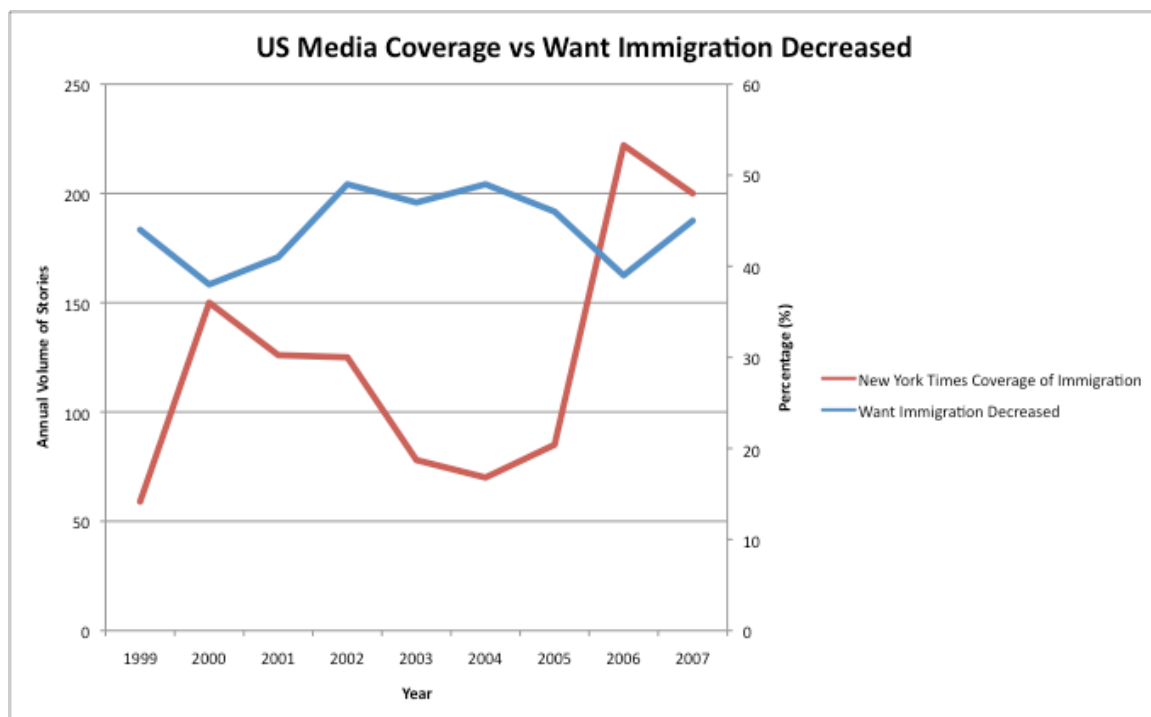
French politicians have also run on extremely anti-immigrant platforms in the recent past, increasing the likelihood of anti-immigrant sentiments increasing in relation to election years. Particularly the Front National, led up by Jean-Marie Le Pen 2002 and 2007, draws attention to immigrants and their negative effects on France while campaigning for the presidency.<sup>76</sup> Given the saliency of immigrants in French presidential debates, there seems to be no real correlation

<sup>76</sup> Willsher, Kim. "Marine Le Pen and France's Front National Sense Their Time Has Come." (The Guardian. Guardian News and Media, 2012).

between French election years and anti-immigrant sentiments. While a minor uptick in anti-immigrant sentiments occurs in 2007, it would be more compelling if there was an increase after the 2002. The 2002 election was particularly characterized by anti-immigrant debates and that year the Front National shockingly won a place in the second round of the presidential elections. With an election so focused on immigration that has no similar increase in anti-immigrant sentiments in the following months, the correlation between anti-immigrant sentiments and political campaigns seems less than convincing.

### *Media Coverage*

Figure 21:<sup>77</sup>



To test this paper's as well as the Brookings Institution and The Norman Lear Center at USC Annenberg's theory in the United States, New York Times' annual coverage of the

<sup>77</sup> Akdenizli, Banu, E.J. Dionne, Jr., Martin Kaplan, Tom Rosenstiel, and Roberto Suro. A Report on the Media and the Immigration Debate. (The Brookings Institution and the Norman Lear Center, 2008).



immigration debate is compared with the percentage of the population wanting immigration levels decreased. The data for the New York Times coverage comes from the Brookings study. Actual data was not provided by the study, thus levels of coverage are estimated based on a chart included in the study (Appendix 1). According to the comparison between media coverage and desire for decreased immigration above, it would actually appear that increased media coverage correlates with a reduction in desire for immigration. One could argue that including a time lag would correct for this opposition yielding a result consistent with this paper's hypothesis but the scale of increases and decreases in the two factors do not line up after the time lag is factored in. Thus, in the United States, media coverage and anti-immigrant sentiment do not seem to have a compelling correlation.

Unfortunately there is no statistical data available to test the theory that increases in media coverage cause increases in anti-immigrant sentiment in France. No research has been done totaling the number of articles that cover immigration in the French media across years. Without this data, it is impossible to make a comparison between France and the United States in order to rule out the theory across nations. If the United States is any indication though, there would be no correlation between the two in France.

## **Conclusions**

After analyzing statistical data pertaining to each of the authors' theories, it is clear that no one individual factor influences negative public opinion about immigration on its own. Each author found persuasive reasons why his or her theory was applicable, but based on these statistics, none of their reasons are validated. The best argument is that public opinion cannot be reduced to just any one factor. Human beings are complex and opinions can change on the

slightest whim. Combinations of all of the above variables act upon each person's perspectives, creating a complex mixture of reasons why people think the way they do.

Due to limitations in the availability of some statistics and the necessary use of proxy variables for some of the more qualitative factors, these results are merely a good starting point for more research. It is nearly impossible to find reliable, unbiased longitudinal data covering public opinion in either country. For instance, the proxy variable in France for anti-immigrant sentiment, those thinking there are "too many foreign workers" in France, only covers the years 2000-2010, and there is no available data for 2003. No other variable related to general feelings toward immigrants could be located. Even when looking for data related to anti-Muslim sentiments in France, to be used as a proxy variable for cultural threat, data was sparse. This is in part due to the French law that "specifically banned the collection and computerized storage of race-based data without the express consent of the interviewees or a waiver by a state committee". With the saliency of race and culture in France currently, it is surprising that more reliable data has not been produced.<sup>78</sup> Exceptions are made for certain survey organizations yet while the question can be asked, results are simply not available in any reliable or continuous fashion.

Additionally, all of the data was limited by what years were available. Most surveys are only carried out every few years and censuses are only carried out every 10 years. This creates major gaps in the data, only providing information for certain years and limiting the possibilities of year-to-year analyses. If anything should be concluded from this review of the current data it is that more research needs to be done. Public opinion is a very important part of democratic societies. Democracy relies on the will of the public, thus a greater ability to understand the

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<sup>78</sup> Bleich, Erik. "Race Policy in France." (Brookings. The Brookings Institution).

intentions of that public and the influences that might change their perspectives would be extremely beneficial.

Further research on this area should include a longitudinal study of public opinion in countries around the world using similar questions each year and in each country and incorporate other variables (e.g. sex, age, race) that might influence overall opinion. This expansion of information would allow the data to be compared across years, as well as across countries and additional demographics so that conclusions can be drawn to help researchers understand the vagaries of public opinion. While gathering more stringent data regarding immigration trends is unlikely due to its inherent nature, such data would greatly enhance this and similar studies. The governmental census would be the most reliable source for this information but as it is conducted only every 10 years, it is difficult to compare census statistics to changes in public opinion. In this study, public opinion data necessitated a limit of only about 10 years on many of the comparisons. It does not make for compelling comparisons to compare the two points of census data against the 10 points of public opinion data.

With a greater availability of statistical data, this study could infer many more conclusions that would aid researchers in understanding public opinion. Without that data, the current correlations and comparisons such as those included in this study will have to suffice.

With the studied data and correlative analysis, no convincing relationships could be drawn between any of the authors' theories and the actual vagaries of public opinion. Even this author's hypothesis about the influence of the media on public opinion was not verified in the case of the United States though the lack of similar data for France makes a true negation of this hypothesis impossible in terms of this study. In summary, the paucity of reputable data makes a valid retrospective review impractical. Future studies will be dependent upon either nations or

well-funded study groups undertaking long term, recurrent polls in a consistent manner and the inclusion of added demographics that allow for additional drill down therein allowing for better determination of those factors that truly shape public opinion and allowing those with a need to better influence those opinions.

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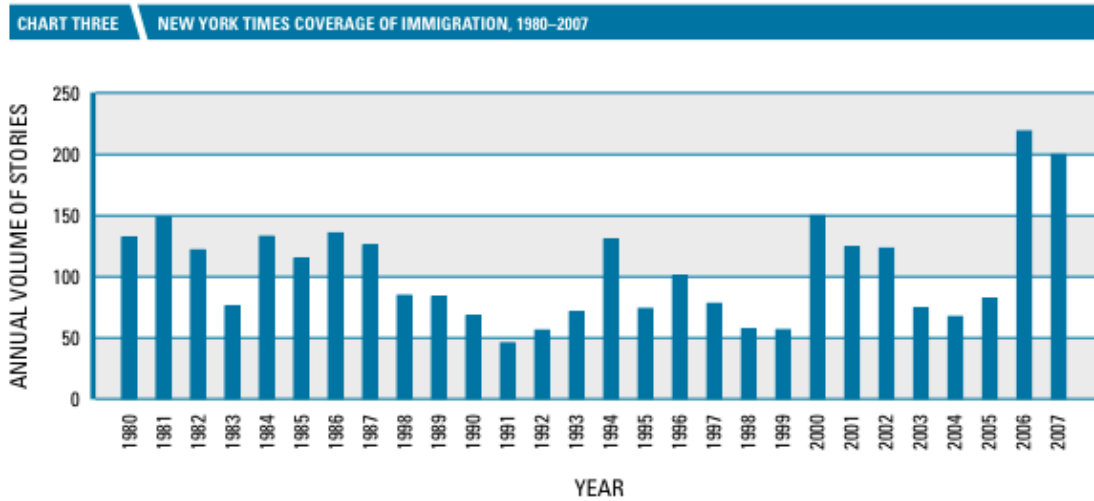
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Appendix I:



Source: USC-Annenberg Content Analysis.