

From Proposition 187 to President Trump: The Evolution of American Anti-Immigration
Rhetoric Since the Mid-1990s

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“They keep coming... control the border... enough is enough.”¹ America as we know it today is no stranger to this phraseology, as we have seen it plastered on countless Facebook ads and television screens for years in the midst and at the edges of the infamous Trump era. However, these words were not pulled from one of Donald Trump’s presidential campaign ads: Instead, they harken from a 1994 television commercial used to propel Pete Wilson to re-election in the governorship of California and a victory in passing Proposition 187. Proposition (or Prop) 187 was a statewide ballot initiative seeking the electorate’s approval of barring undocumented immigrants from using non-emergency health care, social services, and public education.² Only days after being approved by a majority of Californian voters, a federal district court judge issued an injunction that immediately prevented Prop 187’s implementation.³ The ballot initiative was challenged by various civil rights groups who claimed that it violated the 14th Amendment, locking the measure in litigation for five years until then-Governor Grey Davis effectively killed the law by announcing the state would no longer pursue appeals in federal courts.⁴

California, often now treasured by liberal Americans for faithfully handing all 55 of its electoral votes to the Democratic party in presidential elections, may have been the home to the first most dramatically successful anti-immigration campaign in the nation’s history. Scholars agree that debate over Prop 187’s legality and morality, both before its passage and in the years leading up to its failure in court, is responsible for the mobilization of young Hispanic⁵ activists

¹ danieljbmitcheil, “Wilson’s Re-Election Ads on Illegal Immigration,” YouTube, June 15, 2007, accessed November 13, 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o0f1PE8Kzng>.

² Library of Congress, ed, “1994: California’s Proposition 187,” Research Guides, accessed November 10, 2022, <https://guides.loc.gov/latinx-civil-rights/california-proposition-187>.

³ Lyle Denniston, “Calif. Voters Take Dare With Immigrant Aid Ban Proposition Challenged in Courts,” *Baltimore Sun* (Baltimore, MD), Nov. 10, 1994.

⁴ Rene Sanchez, “Divisive Prop. 187 is Voided; Ruling Stands Against Calif. Anti-Alien Law,” *The Washington Post* (Washington, D.C.), July 30, 1999.

⁵ Per findings of the Pew Research Center, I will use “Hispanic” in reference to the U.S. population of people tracing their heritage to Latin America and Spain. For my purposes, this is exchangeable with “Latino” and can be understood to be a pan-ethnic label, as the discourse in this paper most often refers specifically to Mexicans but affects all Hispanics by default. See Luis Noe-Bustamante, Lauren Mora, and Mark Hugo Lopez, “About One-in-Four Hispanics Have Heard of Latinx, but Just 3% Use it,” *Pew Research Center*, accessed December 12,

which ultimately resulted in California's seemingly permanent blue revolution.⁶ Polls show that naturalized Hispanic immigrants were more politically active in California in the mid-1990s than in any other state due to being targeted by anti-immigration campaigns.⁷ Additionally, research has confirmed an astounding increase both in the number of naturalizations of Hispanic immigrants in California and in statewide voter turnout for this demographic between 1994 and 1997.⁸

Today, more than a quarter of a century after Prop 187 won the support of a hefty majority of California voters,⁹ Americans are faced with considering the true legacy of the proposition. While Prop 187 induced a decisive oppositional movement of pro-immigration activists, scholars have not focused as much on how the xenophobic sentiment that drove the ballot to nearly 60% approval in California permeated later restrictionist rhetoric in the rest of the United States. In the grand scheme of things, America's reliance on California now being a Sanctuary State may not be the most significant impact of Prop 187's passage when its failure in California is ultimately eclipsed, one could argue, by its national impact. For instance, legislative campaigns in Texas and Arizona echo similar sentiments to Prop 187 and garnered even more success upon approval and enactment.¹⁰ Although Prop 187 did not cause anti-immigrant sentiments initially, it did perhaps help trigger their increase. Furthermore, its rhetoric and tropes

2022,
<https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/2020/08/11/about-one-in-four-u-s-hispanics-have-heard-of-latinx-but-just-3-use-it/>.

⁶ Kenneth Miller, *Texas vs. California: A History of Their Struggle for the Future of America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2020), 123.

⁷ Adrian D. Pantoja and Gary M. Segura, "Fear and Loathing in California: Contextual Threat and Political Sophistication among Latino Voters," *Political Behavior* 25, no. 3 (Sept. 2003): 281.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3657321>.

⁸ Adrian D. Pantoja, Ricardo Ramirez, and Gary M. Segura, "Citizens by Choice, Voters by Necessity: Patterns in Political Mobilization by Naturalized Latinos," *Political Research Quarterly* 54, no. 4 (2001): 747.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/449232>.

⁹ National Archives, "2016 Electoral College Results," Electoral College, updated January 11, 2021, accessed November 10, 2022, <https://www.archives.gov/electoral-college/2016>.

¹⁰ Patrick J. McDonnell, "Despite Legal Snags, Prop 187 Reverberates," *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, CA), Nov. 8, 1995.

would be replicated and drawn on in subsequent anti-immigrant campaigns and discourse, I will show, to a remarkable degree. The central throughline in 21st-century anti-immigration campaigns, perhaps, is its rhetoric.

While most scholarship on Prop 187 centers on its direct outcomes affecting California, this analysis will focus on the initiative's effects on political discourse as they diffused across America. In directly comparing the anti-immigration rhetoric highlighted in Wilson's 1994 incumbent gubernatorial campaign and Trump's 2016 presidential campaign, there is much to be revealed about how the populace can be encouraged to respond to restrictionism. The patterns connecting Wilson's and Trump's successes in the domains of immigration reform may help illuminate the appeal of anti-immigration discourse to the United States public.

To begin comparing the two campaigns' discourses, it is important to consider the degree to which the situational contexts differed. Trump's 2016 campaign targeted a dramatically larger audience than Wilson's 1994 California campaign purely due to the size of the offices' respective constituencies. One could argue that the political context regarding voters' approval of the incumbent party was different, given that Wilson was running as an incumbent Republican for his office while Trump was a Republican candidate attempting to flip control of a White House most recently occupied by a Democrat. However, the Republican Party had control in both houses of Congress leading up to 2016,¹¹ and notably controlled approximately 2/3 of the nation's state governments¹² (in accordance with the National Conference of State Legislatures' guidelines for determining partisan control).¹³ While Wilson and Trump faced two completely

¹¹ Eric Bradner, "Republicans Keep Control of Congress," *CNN Politics*, November 9, 2016, <https://www.cnn.com/2016/11/08/politics/congress-balance-of-power-2016-election/index.html>.

¹² National Conference of State Legislatures, "2016 State and Legislative Partisan Composition," Legislative Partisan Composition Table, NCSL, accessed December 10, 2022. https://www.ncsl.org/portals/1/documents/elections/Legis_Control_2016.pdf.

¹³ National Conference of State Legislatures, "State Partisan Composition," NCSL, accessed December 10, 2022. <https://www.ncsl.org/research/about-state-legislatures/partisan-composition.aspx>.

different-sized audiences, both of their targeted audiences were voting based on their evaluation of how the incumbent party, specifically the Republican Party in both instances, had performed at the relevant level of government.

Adding to the overlap in situational context between these two campaigns, both targeted audiences of voters identified growing populations as a concern *and* the reason for considering immigration, economics, and crime/terrorism to be the top (inextricably linked) voting issues. In 1994, California's population growth outpaced the rest of the nation's states threefold, with Hispanics generally accounting for most of the growth.¹⁴ Similarly, 2016's national population data reveals incoming immigrants comprising the largest proportion of the population in America's history, and one out of eight incoming immigrants during this year were Mexican.¹⁵ Californians responding to exit polls in 1994 identified immigration, crime, and taxes respectively as the top three most important issues in deciding how to vote.¹⁶ In 2016's general election, voters said the economy and terrorism/crime were the respective top issues, with third place split¹⁷ between immigration and the treatment of minorities.¹⁸ These stark parallels in situational context are necessary to keep in mind, for discourse analysis can reveal little without acknowledging the environment surrounding it.¹⁹

Wilson's and Trump's campaigns are undoubtedly linked by their nature of being reactionary to public opinion; rather than proposing a new argument, they both embraced ideas

¹⁴ "California's Population," January 1995, Legislative Analyst's Office, accessed December 10, 2022, https://lao.ca.gov/1995/010195_calguide/cgep2.html#:~:text=In%201994%2C%20California's%20population%20reached,people%2C%20or%20over%2050%20percent.

¹⁵ Steven A. Camarota and Karen Zeigler, "U.S. Immigrant Population Hit Record 43.7 Million in 2016," *Center for Immigration Studies*, Oct. 16, 2017, <https://cis.org/Report/US-Immigrant-Population-Hit-Record-437-Million-2016>.

¹⁶ Hugo Martin, "California Elections: Immigration Was No. 1 Election Issue, Local Voters Say," *Los Angeles Times*, Nov. 10, 1994, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1994-11-10-mn-61151-story.html>.

¹⁷ Republicans indicated immigration to be the 3rd most important issue, while Democrats said minority treatment.

¹⁸ Pew Research Center, "2016 Campaign: Strong Interest, Widespread Dissatisfaction," Election 2016, July 7, 2016, <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2016/07/07/4-top-voting-issues-in-2016-election/>.

¹⁹ Lichao Song, "The Role of Context in Discourse," *Journal of Language Teaching and Research* 1, no. 6 (Nov. 2010): 876. <https://www.academypublication.com/issues/past/jltr/vol01/06/19.pdf>.

already being expressed by their constituencies and took them to another level. Prop 187 was certainly a direct result of the public's discontent, as the initiative was drafted by 10 ordinary citizens before garnering nearly 400,000 signatures to be put on the November ballot.²⁰ Facing similar circumstances on a national scale 22 years later, Trump fed into White Americans' fear of becoming the minority by blaming Hispanics' presence in the United States for the apparently changing way of life. As one group of political communication scholars put it, Trump successfully "exploited the resentments hidden in the minds of a part of the American citizens, the 'silent majority' that he was going to defend."²¹ Recent studies indicate that the nativist, alarmist rhetoric profusely espoused by Trump led to dramatic increases in not only anti-immigrant sentiment but also anti-Hispanic sentiment and hate crimes against Hispanic residents across the nation.²²

American anthropologist Leo Chavez's concept of the "Latino Threat Narrative" is useful in understanding how these campaigns' constructions of anti-immigrant discourse were racially charged. Chavez suggests it is remarkable that Latin American immigration came to be perceived as a threat to national security before 9/11, amidst popular discourse that could have been more concerned with the war on terrorism abroad.²³ Nevertheless, it is clear the public viewed the ever-growing presence of Hispanic residents in the United States (regardless of citizenship status) as a serious challenge to American identity. Indeed, political scientist Samuel P. Huntington used an academic lens to justify this theory by concluding that Hispanic immigrants'

²⁰ Robin Dale Jacobson, *New Nativism: Proposition 187 and the Debate over Immigration*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008): xvii.

²¹ Giovanna Campani, Sunamis F. Concepción, Angel R. Soler, and Claudia S. Savín, "The Rise of Donald Trump Right-Wing Populism in the United States: Middle American Radicalism and Anti-Immigration Discourse," *Societies* 12, no. 6 (Nov. 2022): 13. <https://doi.org/10.3390/soc12060154>.

²² Stephanie L. Canizales and Jody Agius Vallejo, "Latinos & Racism in the Trump Era," *American Academy of Arts & Sciences* 150, no. 2 (Spring 2021): 151. https://doi.org/10.1162/daed_a_01852.

²³ Leo Chavez, *The Latino Threat: Constructing Immigrants, Citizens, and the Nation* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2013), 24.

tendency to concentrate regionally and have higher fertility rates results in them “outnumbering” the previously established demographics and resisting assimilation.²⁴ Huntington claims this amounts to “rejecting the Anglo-Protestant values that built the American dream.”²⁵ White²⁶ Americans feared the idea of changing American identity because they worried about being excluded from its potential re-definition. It is on this basis, I believe, that Wilson was able to profoundly make restrictionist and distinctly anti-Hispanic rhetoric attractive to the voting public.

The Latino Threat Narrative consists of several differing, yet related, frameworks that contribute to the “othering” of Hispanics and blaming them for widespread issues in American discourse.²⁷ The most generalized schema used to present the Latino Threat Narrative is painting a portrait of Hispanics’ unwillingness to integrate into American society. One of the building blocks of this concept is the idea that Hispanic women have “out-of-control” fertility that results in more and more people born into resisting the American way of life. The two narrative frames that Wilson and Trump lean into the most, I argue, are the idea of a *reconquista* using terminology like “invasion” and the construction of criminality via shifts of language from “undocumented” to “illegal alien” and “criminal alien.” I argue that Trump’s rhetoric was indeed an extension of Wilson’s that exacerbated racist undertones which promoted a sweeping racial stigma and provoked hostility.

²⁴ Samuel P. Huntington, “The Hispanic Challenge,” *Foreign Policy*, 2004, accessed December 10, 2022, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2009/10/28/the-hispanic-challenge/>.

²⁵ See above.

²⁶ I have chosen to use capital letters when using a color to describe race, per the recommendation of the National Association of Black Journalists. See their statement: <https://nabjonline.org/blog/nabj-statement-on-capitalizing-black-and-other-racial-identifiers/#:~:text=The%20organization%20believes%20it%20is,capitalized%2C%20including%20White%20and%20Brown.>

²⁷ Leo Chavez, *The Latino Threat: Constructing Immigrants, Citizens, and the Nation* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2013), 25.

Wilson managed to bifurcate Californians into separate categories of citizens who presumably deserved rights in contrast with undocumented residents who preyed on the system. An exemplification of this distinction was memorialized in a 1994 speech, in which Wilson declared that Congress and the federal judiciary “put criminals’ rights ahead of victims’ rights.”²⁸ The implication here, of course, in the context of a speech devoted to state sovereignty, is that undocumented residents benefiting from public services were criminals and taxpayers contributing to providing these public services were victims.

Wilson goes on to claim that the federal government itself is inviting the influx of immigrants and then leaving the states to address capacity themselves, which he describes as “offering room service to someone who breaks into a hotel room and then signing the tab with the name of the paying guest whose room it is while he’s there in the room!”²⁹ Blaming the higher level of government for failing to protect the state from defraying the costs of “tidal waves of illegal aliens,”³⁰ Wilson polarized the state into those who supported the “Save Our State” initiative and those who, according to the name of the proposition, had no intentions of rescuing California from its strife. The implications of being for or against something called “Save Our State” was California’s equivalent to the notion that “if you are not with us, you are against us”³¹—Voters had the choice of either supporting or challenging the American identity they knew.

The criminality of the undocumented immigrant is enhanced dramatically in Trump’s remarks regarding illegal immigration. In one of the most popular immigration speeches from his

²⁸ Pete Wilson, “Ending the Mandate Madness: A Contract to Restore State Sovereignty,” The Heritage Foundation, delivered Nov. 18, 1994, accessed December 13, 2022, <https://www.heritage.org/report/ending-the-mandate-madness-contract-restore-state-sovereignty-wilson>.

²⁹ See above.

³⁰ Deborah Sontag, “3 Governors Take Pleas on Aliens to the Senate: Federal Compensation Sought for Expenses,” *The New York Times*, June 23, 1994, B7.

³¹ This quote was popularized by The Bush Doctrine, which sought to polarize Americans against terrorism.

2016 campaign,³² he uses “alien” in place of “immigrant” 12 times, increasingly shifting towards using language that directly labels immigrants. Noticeably, rather than describing “aliens” as “illegal” like Wilson did admittedly fewer times, Trump insisted on saying “criminal aliens,” using “criminal” a total of 20 times and “crime” 10 times throughout the speech. The shift from “illegal immigrant” to “criminal aliens” eventually devolves into, simply, “criminals.” This effectively reduces human beings who happen to be undocumented to the status of criminals, imploring the audience to automatically associate a lack of documentation with criminal tendencies.

In the last of three debates with opposing presidential candidate Hillary Clinton, Trump also made a comment strikingly similar to Wilson’s hotel room analogy: “We take care of illegal immigrants better than we take care of our military.”³³ Trump is counting on the audience not to consider what toll they may be facing by what he presents as the burden of heightened incoming immigrants, but how our loved ones serving and protecting our country may be disserved. This emotional appeal, I want to argue, connects the resentment of immigrants (and there is no doubt he is referring most specifically to Hispanic immigrants) to American patriotism. Trump’s version of challenging voters to pick a side poses a new depth to the prospect of assessing whether illegal immigration is an issue worth choosing your candidate over. He is asking voters not whether they want to protect themselves, but whether they want to protect their fellow Americans.

Protection is a major theme in these campaigns, and Wilson can be seen to shift the framed cause of the need for protection away from rhetorical economic stress and towards the

³² “Transcript of Donald Trump’s Immigration Speech,” *The New York Times*, delivered Sept. 16, 2016, accessed December 13, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/02/us/politics/transcript-trump-immigration-speech.html>.

³³ “Full Transcript: Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump’s Final Presidential Debate,” *Vox*, aired live Oct. 19, 2016, accessed December 13, 2022, <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2016/10/19/13336894/third-presidential-debate-live-transcript-clinton-trump>.

actual people coming across the southern border. Wilson's argument that Congress should be responsible for regulating immigration and helping states account for incoming immigrants almost holds logically, as immigration policy is an issue of national sovereignty according to the Constitution. Yet, this resulted in Wilson characterizing illegal immigrants as "invaders": In a lawsuit filed seeking reimbursement for the cost of providing welfare to undocumented immigrants, Wilson and his legal team claimed, "the presence of so many illegal immigrants here amounts to a foreign invasion of California."³⁴ Facing criticism that this was an unprecedented suggestion, the governor's aides "said Wilson did not mean to imply that immigrants were coming with hostile intent or that foreign governments were sending them here."³⁵ However, the provocative language was enough to engage the press, raise the eyebrows of constitutional scholars, and heighten public interest in their lawsuit, which they hoped would catalyze a victory. It was no mistake, too, that Wilson's speech preemptively announcing this lawsuit made sure to mention the toll of undocumented residents on the state's prison system. According to Wilson, "fourteen percent of California's prison population are illegal immigrants- enough to fill 8 state prisons to design-capacity."³⁶ Here, Wilson appears to contradict his aides' statement that the "invader" language was not meant to be inflammatory, as he is encouraging the audience to view (what he is portraying to be a large number of) undocumented residents as dangerous.

Trump went quite a bit further in reinforcing this "invasion" narrative, making much more direct claims about the nature of this matter. Shortly after announcing his bid for the presidency in the summer of 2015, he said, "the Mexican government is forcing their most

³⁴ Daniel M. Weintraub, "Wilson Sues U.S. Over Immigrants' 'Invasion' Politics: Governor Calls on Federal Government to Reimburse the State for the Costs of Educating Undocumented Children," *Los Angeles Times*, Sept. 23, 1994, 3.

³⁵ See above.

³⁶ Pete Wilson, "Securing Our Nation's Borders: Illegal Immigration (Delivered April 25, 1994), *Vital Speeches of the Day* 60, no. 17 (Pro Rhetoric, LLC, June 15, 1994), 534.

unwanted people into the United States.”³⁷ In contrast with the criminalization schema he utilized to suggest who immigrants are, this statement dives into making accusations of why immigrants come to America. This undoubtedly plays into the concern for public safety by implying that immigrants have some sort of agenda and that U.S. citizens are deliberate targets of said agenda.

As segregation levels remain high for Hispanic communities in America,³⁸ their removal from mainstream society allows the public to view them as outsiders and construct conspiratorial ideas about their motivations. In his campaign launch speech, Trump emphasized the notion that undocumented residents were being “sent” for an assumed purpose: “They’re sending people that have lots of problems, and they’re bringing those problems with us. They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists.”³⁹ It is obvious that Trump went a few steps further than Wilson’s invasion narrative by hyper-focusing on the criminalization of undocumented immigrants and re-labeling this group blanketly not only as “illegal aliens” but also “criminals, drug dealers, rapists, etc.”⁴⁰ Hispanics, the largest ethnic or racial minority at the time of this election,⁴¹ were relegated to an image that countered American identity.

Wilson held to the construction of undocumented residents threatening Californian and American identity by bringing attention to communities where they make up a large part of the

³⁷ Rupert Neate and Jo Tuckman, “Donald Trump: Mexican Migrants Bring ‘Tremendous Infectious Disease’ to US,” *The Guardian*, July 6, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/jul/06/donald-trump-mexican-immigrants-tremendous-infectious-disease>.

³⁸ William H. Frey, “Neighborhood Segregation Persists for Black, Latino or Hispanic, and Asian Americans,” *Brookings*, April 6, 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/neighborhood-segregation-persists-for-black-latino-or-hispanic-and-asian-americans/>.

³⁹ Time Staff, “Here’s Donald Trump’s Presidential Announcement Speech,” *Time*, June 16, 2015, <https://time.com/3923128/donald-trump-announcement-speech/>

⁴⁰ Michelle Ye Hee Lee, “Donald Trump’s False Comments Connecting Mexican Immigrants and Crime,” *The Washington Post*, July 8, 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/fact-checker/wp/2015/07/08/donald-trumps-false-comments-connecting-mexican-immigrants-and-crime/>

⁴¹ “Facts for Features: Hispanic heritage Month 2016,” *United States Census Bureau*, Oct. 12, 2016, <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/facts-for-features/2016/cb16-ff16.html>.

population and the fact that these residents reproduce. In a speech promoting his then-soon-to-be-filed lawsuit for reimbursement of welfare, he remarked: “There’s now a community of illegal residents numbering a million people... Alone, it would be the 7th largest city in the nation- half again the population of our nation’s capital.”⁴² The framing of this is intentionally designed to have a threatening undertone; the audience is supposed to be shocked (and perhaps appalled) that there are enough undocumented residents in one area to create their own local government. Americans do not necessarily view the most populated cities as posing any danger to them from across the country, so Wilson is relying on the audience to react purely to the demographics of this hypothetical city rather than its size.

The notion of undocumented immigrants desiring separatism is combined with the construction of “out-of-control” fertility among Latinas to lend coherence to an argument that Hispanic residents are conspiring to challenge American identity. Wilson declared in the most recently aforementioned speech that “two-thirds of all babies born in Los Angeles public hospitals are born to illegal immigrants.”⁴³ Again, this statistic (regardless of accuracy) is intended to resonate unsettlingly with the audience. Simultaneously, it can appeal to both the economy-conscious voter who views increased births as an increased expenditure of taxpayer money and the (White) nativist voter who perceives increases in minority birth rates as a threat to the demographic composition of their home. The very act of repeatedly bringing up the size and growth of the undocumented population in California is itself a fear tactic meant to incite resentment against Hispanics.

Trump bypassed the idea of making implicit suggestions about Hispanic fertility in favor of more directly telling the voters whether the current immigration system serves them. He

⁴² Pete Wilson, “Securing Our Nation’s Borders: Illegal Immigration (Delivered April 25, 1994), *Vital Speeches of the Day* 60, no. 17 (Pro Rhetoric, LLC, June 15, 1994), 534.

⁴³ See above.

delivers a verdict on who gets to allocate attempts for assimilation: “It’s our right, as a sovereign nation, to choose immigrants that we think are the likeliest to thrive and flourish and love us.”⁴⁴

The underlying argument here is that the American people should be able to decide who can and who cannot enter our country. The implication of this is that there should exist a filter system through which only those who “share our values”⁴⁵ can become citizens, raising the question of who is included in the word “our.” This can only be interpreted as a direct challenge to the founding principles of democracy and diversity of thought on which this nation was built.

Without skipping a beat, Trump explores how unregulated immigration threatens America’s security. The alternative to relabeling immigrants as “criminals” is incorporating heartfelt stories that do the dirty work of association for him: “I have met with many of the great parents who lost their children to sanctuary cities and open borders.”⁴⁶ This version of Trump’s narrative constructing criminality in the undocumented immigrant places blame not directly on the immigrants themselves, but on the policies and structures which enable them to enter and remain in America. He goes on to name an elderly man, a veteran, and a young girl who were impacted by crimes allegedly committed by undocumented immigrants. In this lens, they are victims of crimes that are the fault not of an individual, but of an entire demographic’s presence in the nation.

After examining the overlaps and divergences of Wilson’s and Trump’s anti-immigrant rhetoric and its orientation toward Hispanic people, it is worthwhile to note that the divided Hispanic vote in response had less of an impact in the 1994 election than it did in 2016.

Approximately one-third of Hispanic voters did vote in favor of the proposition, citing economic

⁴⁴ Phillip Bump, “Here’s What Donald Trump Said in His Big Immigration Speech, Annotated,” *The Washington Post*, Aug. 31, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/08/31/heres-what-donald-trump-said-in-his-big-immigration-speech-annotated/>.

⁴⁵ See above.

⁴⁶ See above.

self-interest.⁴⁷ Most Hispanic people who voted “No” on the ballot spoke Spanish as their primary language, indicating that this group felt more directly targeted by the initiative (as their accent/language would have exposed them to more discrimination in having to prove their documentation status).⁴⁸ These statistics reveal an arguably wide discrepancy between whether Hispanic voters themselves felt targeted by the initiative. Though, the vast majority did reject the proposition because they felt as though it would disproportionately affect them.

In contrast, Hispanic voters comprised a record-high 11 percent of the national electorate in 2016 and were expected to be responsible for carrying Clinton to victory,⁴⁹ but they ended up being the deciding vote in making Trump the next President-Elect of the United States. Despite a dramatic increase in spending to facilitate Latino mobilization,⁵⁰ Clinton yielded only 65 percent of the Hispanic vote, more than six points lower than what President Barack Obama had garnered just four years earlier.⁵¹ Exit polls predicted that Trump would collect less than 20 percent of the Hispanic vote, but the final results revealed that nearly 30 percent of Hispanic voters favored his candidacy.⁵² In an interview with *USA Today*, co-founder of “Latinas for Trump” Denise Galvez defended Hispanic voters’ support of Trump: According to her, he “pushed a reasonable immigration strategy that would target undocumented immigrants with criminal records... and finally gain control of the country’s borders.”⁵³ This comment reveals her

⁴⁷ Rebecca Liddicoat, “Why California Voted for Prop 187,” *University Wire*, Nov. 21, 1994.

⁴⁸ Lina Y. Newton, “Why Some Latinos Supported Proposition 187: Testing Economic Threat and Cultural Identity Hypotheses,” *Social Science Quarterly* 81, no. 1 (March 2000): 191.

⁴⁹ Holly K. Sonneland and Nicki Fleischner, “Chart: How U.S. Latinos Voted in the 2016 Election,” *Americas Society*, Nov. 10, 2016, <https://www.as-coa.org/articles/chart-how-us-latinos-voted-2016-presidential-election>.

⁵⁰ Suzanne Gamboa, “Trump Targeted Mexicans, Now Latino Vote Surge May Wall Him Out,” *NBC News*, Nov. 8, 2016, <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/2016-election-day/trump-targeted-mexicans-now-latino-vote-surge-may-wall-hi-m-n679201>.

⁵¹ Holly K. Sonneland and Nicki Fleischner, “Chart: How U.S. Latinos Voted in the 2016 Election,” *Americas Society*, Nov. 10, 2016, <https://www.as-coa.org/articles/chart-how-us-latinos-voted-2016-presidential-election>.

⁵² See above.

⁵³ Alan Gomez, “Another Election Surprise: Many Hispanics Backed Trump,” *USA Today*, Nov. 9, 2016, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/elections/2016/2016/11/09/hispanic-vote-election-2016-donald-trump-hillary-clinton/93540772/>.

apparent observation that there was a distinction between “illegal” and “criminal,” which challenges the premise of this research. One question that remains to be asked, however, is whether this distinction was based on Galvez’s own perspective as a child of immigrants that there is a difference between a right and wrong way of crossing the border or her literal interpretation of how Trump presented the criminality of the undocumented immigrant.

My initial research leads me to believe that Wilson’s 1994 anti-immigrant rhetoric acted as a replicable guide for politicians to propagate anti-Hispanic sentiment at an unchecked rate that has detrimentally affected the public’s perception of the Hispanic population in America to this day. With additional time and resources, I would propose a more in-depth discourse analysis tracing how Wilson’s rhetoric has appeared in various statewide and national campaigns from 1994 until 2016. The results of this future analysis may provide insight into how anti-immigrant rhetoric is distinct from, and more harmful than, anti-immigration rhetoric. Further research may provide a comprehensive understanding of how restrictionist rhetoric racializes immigrants and unfairly results in Hispanic residents being blanketly regarded as potentially undocumented.

As conservative American politicians begin to strategize for regaining control of the White House in 2024, this analysis of restrictionist rhetoric portrayal from the mid-1990s to today may relevantly indicate how conservative immigration messaging both subtly and explicitly propagates xenophobia and nativism. Both campaigns examined in this essay conformed to widespread alarmist public opinion rather than constructing new arguments. The Latino Threat Narrative as it was used in the 1994 and 2016 campaigns was effective because it pervaded the comfortability of American identity. Both campaigns’ emphasis on how immigration policy should benefit the established citizenry, not necessarily the incoming immigrants, sent the message that the politicians cared about *defending* the voters. Based on

voters' responses to Prop 187 and Trump's presidential campaign, there is no clear consensus on whether Hispanic residents at large feel directly targeted by anti-immigration rhetoric, despite this research's suggestion that anti-immigration rhetoric can oftentimes overlap with anti-immigrant and anti-Hispanic rhetoric. With a deeper understanding of how the U.S. public interacts with restrictionist rhetoric, America can strategize how to counteract the dangerous impact that anti-immigrant discourse has on the Hispanic population.