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Abstract

Immigration often come with hopes for a better life, mostly in terms of one's economic situation. While it's intuitive to assume the economic opportunism hurts the local labor market and thus rightly triggers local hostility, this essay argues otherwise. In a political sense, immigration is a conservative strategy, a passive choice, because the person is not intended to subvert the existent social structure to better his life. However, on a sociological level, immigration is actually avant-garde, in that life after immigration is highly uncertain. Therefore it is adventurous, risk-taking, and in a sense, progressive and radical. On the one hand, the progressive nature of immigration necessitates active and innovative approaches to carve out their new life, which could challenge the existing social and political structure and order. On the other hand, the passive nature of immigration determines that their avant-garde spirit could only go so far before being accommodated within the institutional structure of destination, in which they then negotiate their identity along with their social, economic, and political position with their local counterparts. It is this re-negotiation process that could spawn hostility towards immigrants. With several empirical researches providing counter-intuitive evidence, this essay argues that it is the perceived economic loss of local labor from re-negotiation in the labor market, particularly during the economic downturn, which encourage hostility towards immigrants. More importantly, on the political level, the re-negotiation of one's identity out of growing leverage on an economic and political level generates the xenophobic rhetoric of some politicians, who channel hostile sentiment towards immigrants either because of perceived threats or solely for an electoral advantage in a xenophobic community.

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Immigration often come with hopes for a better life, mostly in terms of one's economic situation. While it's intuitive to assume the economic opportunity hurts the local labor market and thus rightly triggers local hostility, this essay argues otherwise. In a political sense, immigration is a conservative strategy, a passive choice, because the person is not intended to subvert the existent social structure to better his life. However, on a sociological level, immigration is actually avant-garde, in that life after immigration is highly uncertain. Therefore it is adventurous, risk-taking, and in a sense, progressive and radical. On the one hand, the progressive nature of immigration necessitates active and innovative approaches to carve out their new life, which could challenge the existing social and political structure and order. On the other hand, the passive nature of immigration determines that their avant-garde spirit could only go so far before being accommodated within the institutional structure of destination, in which they then negotiate their identity along with their social, economic, and political position with their local counterparts. It is this re-negotiation process that could spawn hostility towards immigrants. With several empirical researches providing counter-intuitive evidence, this essay argues that it is the

perceived economic loss of local labor from re-negotiation in the labor market, particularly during the economic downturn, which encourage hostility towards immigrants. More importantly, on the political level, the re-negotiation of one's identity out of growing leverage on an economic and political level generates the xenophobic rhetoric of some politicians, who channel hostile sentiment towards immigrants either because of perceived threats or solely for an electoral advantage in a xenophobic community. Similarly, the re-negotiation of identity also emboldens the need of those who hate immigrants to create and strengthen their group identity against the existence of immigrant "others." Although all three factors target only a certain group of immigrants, they engender "collateral damage" by galvanizing hatred sentiment towards other immigrant groups (Perez, 2015). Correspondingly, the perceived hostility by the immigrant group gives impetus to re-negotiation by raising awareness of their own group identity, enhancing political participation, and further obfuscating their assimilating into the host society. Consequently, the enhancing effect of re-negotiation in immigrant groups, together with a defensive "self-othering" approach, further threatens local residents and again feeds into a xenophobic

narrative, which is then exploited by both politicians and other groups.

First of all, the perceived economic security of local labor has been changed by immigrants. The following alleged harmful impact of immigrants on the local labor market could explain some local hostility towards immigrants. The economic “textbook” competitive model simply suggests that an increasing supply of labor should lower the wage of competing factors, if not crowd out extant employment opportunities. This indication seems to buttress the intuition that an increase of immigrants could hurt the economic benefit of local laborers. This hypothesis seems to be substantiated by Borjas (2003). He argues that it is biased to only focus on the impact of immigrants on a national level because the internal displacement of local labor within the nation could conceal the real impact of immigrant influx. In addition, he shows that education should not be the only gauge to determine the substitutability between immigrants and local workers. Immigrants with the same education level but different experience would have imperfect substitutability due to different working experience. However, they would be better substitutes and thus harm specific groups of local laborers with both similar education and experience. Therefore, the variance in distribution of immigrants with different levels of education and work experience would imbalance the labor supply and induce harm upon a more spe-

cific “competing native workers”— 3-4% reduction in wages from 10% increase in labor supply, for instance. (Borjas, 2003).

In agreement with the economic negative impact of the immigrant, Habyarimana et al. (2007) sought to explore why increasing diversity, which comes along with certain immigrant groups, would undermine public goods. Their experiment demonstrates that higher levels of ethnic homogeneity brings more successful public good provision because of a “strategy selection mechanism” that makes “co-ethnics play cooperative equilibria, whereas non-co-ethnics do not.” In addition, a “technology mechanism” also bolsters better provision in this circumstance because the threat of sanctions against non-compliance is more salient to co-ethnics who are “more closely linked on social networks” (Habyarimana et al., 2007). Although the experiment was conducted in Uganda, its implication holds valid that co-ethnics comply better within group norms like reciprocity and cooperation, plausibly because of the easier identifiability of and hence sanctioning on co-ethnics (Habyarimana et al., 2007). However, neither of these two proposals withstand challenge upon the economic damage on local workers.

Refuting the research method and result from Borjas (2003), Ottaviano and Peri (2012) find that variance in experience does not have a substantial impact on the substitutability of immigrants and native

workers with the same educational level. More importantly, apart from the traditional “partial wage effect” of immigrants that mainly focuses on the impact upon certain groups, they introduce the “total wage effect” that emphasizes “complementarities among different types of immigrants and natives.” Together, they show that the influx of immigrant has a small effect on average native wages (+0.6%) (Ottaviano & Peri, 2012). Their finding is in line with the research of Card, who finds that in 1990 Mariel immigrants increased the Miami labor force by 7% but appeared to have virtually no effect on the wages or unemployment rates (Card, 1990).

Notwithstanding their importance, these empirical researches do not eradicate the local workers’ hostile allegation on economic concerns towards immigrants, indicating that it is most likely the belief of economic harm upon local labors that help sustain the hostile sentiment. Along with the changing economic position in the labor market, the local laborers had to re-negotiate their benefits with these “outsiders,” thus generating a grudge that is waiting to erupt at the “proper” time, such as in 1982, when “an unusually severe cyclical effect” caused “one of down turnings on local wage” (Card, 1990). The research by Wadsworth et al. also further supports this proposal that perceived loss during the social re-negotiation of economic benefit generates hostility towards immigrants. Focusing on Brexit’s impact of immigrants

from other EU countries, Wadsworth et al. (2016) concludes that while economically EU immigrants contribute significantly more than they claim from social welfare and thus bolster the British economic recovery, the general economic circle, such as the economic crisis in 2007, can facilitate the ostensible causation between an increase of immigrants and job loss or wage lowering.

Moreover, if economic concern is really a salient factor that generates hostility, then the old generation of immigrants should hate the new immigrants more than local laborers because, indicated by Ottaviano and Peri’s research, that that because the older generation of immigrants suffer from a substantial negative effect (-6.7%) on wages after the new inflow of immigrants (Ottaviano & Peri, 2012). Such a hypothesis has been countered by Bergh and Bjørklund’s research on voting behavior of immigrants in Norway. Bergh and Bjørklund (2011) find that, despite economic competition, immigrants groups as a whole still share a strong sense of group adherence. This collective identity, rather than by individual ideology or social-economic background explains the stable electoral preference of immigrant groups towards the non-Western world for left-of-center parties. That the older immigrants might get hurt economically by the new-comers does not impede all immigrants from living together and, in addition to their economic gains, claim political power.

Furthermore, Leighley and Vedlitz (1999) test the Group Threat theory and find that “Anglos residing in communities where the size of the out-group is large are less likely to participate than individuals who reside in communities where the size of the out-group is small.” Although Leighley and Vedlitz’s finding does not mean that the minority candidates could benefit significantly from their ethnicity, Anthony et al., find that the candidates from those constituencies with smaller immigrant population could indeed benefit more electorally when they specifically appeal to non-immigrant voters. This political exploitation is particularly true when the minority candidates are Muslims, whom are much less favored by Anglo voters (Anthony et al., 2014). Therefore, given the rising number of immigrants under the economic strain, it is particularly convenient, or even contingent, for some politicians to exploit the tension between immigration influx and discontent of locals. Brexit and the election of Donald Trump, to a certain extent, attest to such explanation.

Besides the exploitative and instrumentalized politicization of hostile sentiment against immigrants, some people are genuinely averse to the immigrant groups in the process to re-negotiate their social roles. Researchers on hate groups in the U.S. who are against undocumented immigrants, Gemignani and Hernandez-Albujar (2015) demonstrate how these hate groups forge the narrative of threat

from “irregular immigrants” on “specific social orders and values, for instance about citizenship, national identity and otherness.” Differing from hostile groups who mainly focus on economic or electoral aspects, Hate groups are ideological organizations of individuals who “have beliefs or practices that attack or malign an entire class of people, typically for their immutable characteristics...” tend to follow extreme-right and white supremacist ideologies (Adamczyk et al., 2014; Mulholland, 2013; Gemignani & Albujar, 2015). Validating the left-centrist electoral preference of immigrant groups as mentioned above, hate groups embrace the discourse of identity development through the ongoing dialogue of “I am/I am not and you are/you are not” (Gemignani & Albujar, 2015). On the one hand, they develop their own identity as “heroes, saviors and protectors of American values” who are “acting for the service of legality and justice,” on the other hand, they label those unauthorized immigrants as “invaders, aliens, drug dealers, parasites and prostitutes threatening the pre-established social order,” in this way reducing one’s “humanity “his/her border crossing” (Gemignani & Albujar, 2015). Despite that the members of hate groups ostensibly only target undocumented immigrants, they actually “push the limits of mainstream discourse”, in a way to normalize view and opinions of discrimination and violence that go beyond the unauthorized group, those discourse that

would otherwise be regarded as radical (Gemignani & Albuja, 2015).

Not only problematizing and even self-criminalizing the unauthorized immigrant by this self-granted judicature position, the hate groups also demonstrate their distrust and disappointment towards government in dealing with such problem. In response, the hate groups proclaim “a supposed ability to address [the problem of undocumented immigrants]”, while in the meantime “develop specific positions of power for themselves” (Gemignani & Albuja, 2015). Through the “narratives of reification (e.g. the creation of the ‘illegal’), opposition (us versus them), exclusion, superiority (e.g. of the native citizen over the undocumented immigrant), problematization, instillation of fear, and depicting undocumented immigrants as disposable, second-class members of society,” those hate group members create their own subjectivities, along with imposing their own narrative of immigrants on others (Gemignani & Albuja, 2015). Rather than economically or politically motivated, these hate group members are “part of a larger and more pervasive discourse of neo-liberal discrimination” that actively creates systematic cleavages between “insiders and outsiders, winners and losers (or, legals and illegals), and full citizens and second-class newcomers” (Gemignani & Albuja, 2015). Together with their internalized hostility against immigrants, their collective disappointment with

mainstream government further consolidates their in-group identity, highlighting their sense of moral obligation that they are the only saviors against the “invaders,” thus making them blame and hate immigrants more.

In response to hostility, the immigrant groups are lambs to the slaughter. In fact, as mentioned at the beginning of this essay, the progressive and radical features of immigration have determined that immigrants, who brave the uncertainty lying ahead of their migration, will adjust their habits to strive for a better life. Therefore when xenophobic rhetoric prevails, such hostility against immigrants actually raises the “salience of ethnic identity and impugns its worth” (Perez, 2015). In particular, the “strong political response” elicited by xenophobic rhetoric in the minority group is to assert the worth of a group they value (Perez, 2015). In accordance with findings such as that of Bergh, which showed the variance of group loyalty between the new comers and those who have settled in their host country in a while, Perez also demonstrates the importance of acculturation of individuals whose “orientation toward a host society might be described as implying distance from, or less contact with, the mainstream public” (Perez, 2015). This self-othering factor is particularly noteworthy in its influence on the “the second generation: the American-born offspring of immigrants who bridge the least and

most acculturated elements of the Latino community” (Perez, 2015). Combining with the findings that the descendants of immigrants perform better at school They are also more likely to attain a higher education. This finding suggests that those second generation immigrants would have better economic prospects and higher political participation rates. Xenophobia, whether it is economic, political, or social, only leads to further alienation between local residents in host societies and immigrants, thus exacerbating the confrontational relationship.

Sometimes hostility comes not from negative sentiment, but actually from a benevolent attempt to bridge the gap. As exemplified by the attempt of the U.S. government to force assimilation of German immigrants during and after WWI. During 1917 and 1923, several U.S. states barred foreign language from their schools, particularly German, in hope to lessen the cultural identity of German immigrants. Such policy “instigated a backlash”: those German descendants who had been affected by the language law, particularly those children who had two German parents, were less likely to volunteer in WWII, and more likely to marry within their ethnic group, as well as to choose decidedly German names for their offspring (Fouka, 2016). Therefore, the genuine attempt to assimilate immigrants could also lead to inter-group segregation—self-othering, which poten-

tially induces mutual hostility.

Resonating with the strengthening effect in-group identity generated by deliberate xenophobia as mentioned above, this backlash also confirms that “parental investment overcompensate for the direct effects of assimilation policies” (Fouka, 2016). This may explain Group Conflict theory which emphasizes the historical relationship between two groups, that ethnic diversity could indeed undermine the provision of the higher level of public goods. However, this example, as well as other ones mentioned in this essay, illustrate that the failure of the public goods provision is attributed to these factors for their facilitating inter-group hostility and segregation, as claimed by Habyarimana et al. (2007). In other words, it is the policy in response to ethnic diversity, rather than ethnic diversity per se, that is the cause of failure of public goods provision.

Nonetheless, the perceived economic loss of local labors, the power re-negotiation out of a growing leverage on an economic and political level generates the xenophobic rhetoric of some politicians, and the identitarian re-negotiation of those hate group members explain why some people are more hostile towards immigrants. The immigrant group gives impetus to the re-negotiation by rising awareness of their own group identity, enhancing political participation, and further obfuscates their assimilation into the host society. Consequently, the enhancing

effect of re-negotiation in immigrant group, together with their defensive “self-othering” approach, further threatens local residents and again feeds into a xenophobic narrative which is then exploited by both politicians and other groups. In the meantime, the confrontational responses from immigrant group only exacerbate the hostility.

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