

A Preliminary Quantitative Scale Construction of Perceived Immigration Threat

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ABSTRACT

Attempts to measure anti-immigration attitudes within policy research struggles to encompass the full nuance of modern immigration definitions. To heighten the applicability of immigration-related statistics in policy change, the possibility of alternative anti-immigration measurements is considered. Further the addition of interdisciplinary methodologies, such as social psychology theory, compliments immigration research. The Integrated Threat Theory of Prejudice(ITT) is used as a theoretical framework to inform the construction of a measurement for how survey respondents perceive immigration as a threat. Reliability analysis supported previous research on ITT as a framework, additionally justifying a scale construction based on gaps discovered between the referent of selected survey questions and the reliability of the resulting item cluster. Future research aims to conduct primary research to further validate the creation of a new measurement known as Perceived Immigration Threat, or PIT.

Keywords: Immigration, Attitudes, Intergroup Relations, Threat, Scale Construction

INTRODUCTION

During the 2024 U.S. presidential election campaigns, Gallup polling indicated immigration as the fifth most important topic amongst U.S. voters, falling behind: (1) the economy, (2) democracy, (3) national security, and (4) supreme court justices (Brenan, 2024). According to post-election polling, U.S. voters—despite showcasing “stark partisan divides” — are exhibiting majority support for increasing immigration (Smeltz & El Baz, 2026). Gallup’s polling found that 79% of Americans say immigration positively impacts the United States (Saad, 2025); and that 91% of Democrats find immigration to be a “good thing” for the United States (Brenan, 2026). Marist Poll found that 65% of Americans believe that Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officers have gone too far (2026). Further, in recent political rhetoric the outcomes of resulting U.S. immigration policies have become a central priority in both policy and humanitarian research (Karandikar, 2026; Kerwin, 2026; Tanne, 2026).

Attitudes toward immigration often stem from a wide array of beliefs or assumptions, and can be too nuanced to measure solely through broad descriptions of immigration. For instance, political discussions often correlate immigration with the economy via job security, or democracy via voting rights, or national security via criminal stereotyping. Past research has developed anti-immigration sentiments through these varied descriptions without changing the overarching construct being measured. Which in turn risks misinforming immigration policies due to the large variance in sociopolitical perceptions of immigration. As an alternative to broader assessments of Anti-Immigration attitudes, this paper proposes specifically measuring feelings of threat posed by Immigration using the Integrated Threat Theory of Prejudice (ITT) as a theoretical guide.

Modern political research highlights Anti-Immigration attitudes through broader survey item responses, often creating a latent factor consisting of multiple immigration-type questions (Taylor, 2025; Dražanová et al. 2024; Creighton, 2015; Chandler & Tsai, 2001); such factor analysis is capable of measuring response patterns between differing immigration-type questions. One complication with the broad description of anti-immigration sentiment is that these public opinions are often more nuanced than a singular spectrum of pro vs anti. These nuanced attitudes require an alternative measurement that can specifically capture a tangible attitude capable of informing public policy. This paper constructs and proposes a quantitative scale capable of measuring how threatened an individual feels toward immigration or immigrant populations. By focusing specifically on a singular form of attitude toward immigration, the resulting analysis can more accurately inform future immigration policy.

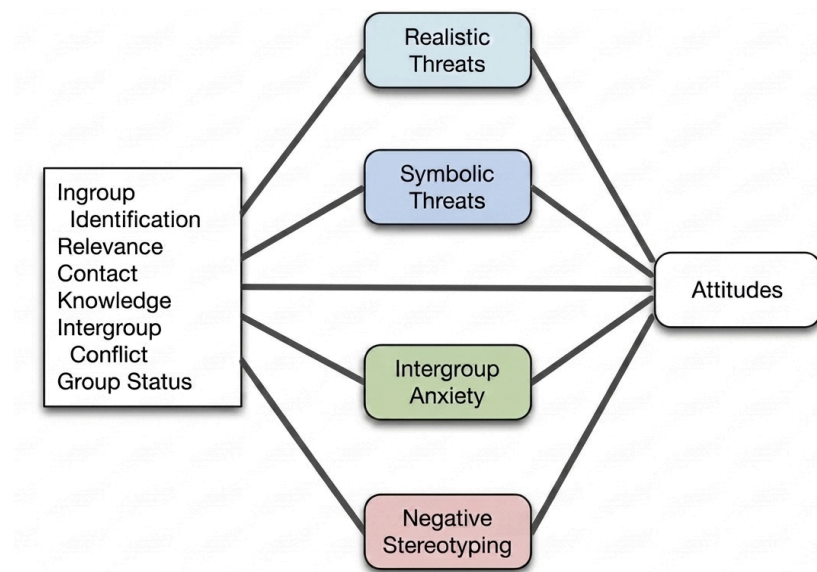
This research uses ITT, a social psychology theory, to inform the categorization of immigration questions into an Immigration-specific threat perception scale. A combination of threat-related existing items from multiple U.S. national polling surveys are tested to begin developing this scale. I hypothesize that immigration-type survey items, when separated by ITT threat categories (Realistic Threats, Symbolic Threats, Intergroup Anxiety, Negative Stereotypes), will maintain internal consistency. This study proposes alternatively measuring a key component of anti-immigration—perceived immigration threat—to improve how policy research reports immigration attitudes among diverse groups and perspectives.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Integrated Threat Theory of Prejudice (ITT)

ITT was introduced by social psychologists, Walter G. Stephan and Cookie White Stephan (2000), to classify the increasing variance in threat perceptions during intergroup relations. Their theoretical model showcases six antecedents—observed events, relationships, or stimuli occurring before the recognition of the threat—and four threats that significantly load onto attitudes (Figure 1). This theoretical model has been consistently applied as a guide for threat-related scales in the past; for example to assess prejudice toward American Muslims, Hindu-Muslim relations in India, and how Dutch employees see immigrant workers (SM. Croucher, et al. 2013; Tausch, et al. 2008; Curşeu, et al. 2006). For this research, the threats identified by ITT will be used as a theoretical framework to categorize survey questions measuring perceived feelings of threat toward immigrants and immigration as a whole.

Figure 1: Theoretical Model of ITT; adapted from Stephan & Stephan, 2000, p. 37



Realistic threats refer to “threats to the very existence of the ingroup (e.g. through warfare), threats to the political and economic power of the ingroup, and threats to the physical or material well-being of the ingroup or its members (e.g. their health)” (Stephan & Stephan, 2000, p.25). In other words, realistic threats are those that directly threaten a person’s access to resources, namely physical safety, financial prosperity, or political representation. For immigration, realistic threats are manifested in concerns surrounding physical safety, national security, job opportunities, legality, and preferential treatment.

Symbolic threats refer to “perceived group differences in morals, values, standards, beliefs, and attitudes”, and these “Symbolic threats are threats to the worldview of the ingroup” (Stephan & Stephan, 2000, pp.25-26). One unique difference between previous prejudice theories and ITT is the approach to symbolic threats; Stephan and Stephan (2000) believe that prejudice causes threatened feelings towards group values, as opposed to symbolic threats simply being one form of prejudice. When discussing immigration, groups may perceive a symbolic threat toward the increasing amount of different—seemingly opposing—cultural or religious ideologies held by immigrants; the fear of becoming ideologically isolated could manifest from perceived language barriers, religious differences, or normative behaviors.

Intergroup anxiety in the context of ITT corresponds to threatened feelings during “intergroup interactions because they are concerned about negative outcomes for the self, such as being embarrassed, rejected, or ridiculed” (Stephan & Stephan, 2000, p.27). Similar research described negative effects of intergroup anxiety as “discomfort, uneasiness, disgust, and sometimes fear” (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986, p.63). One such example of intergroup anxiety is the fear and stigma toward AIDS in the 1990s; resulting in general prejudice toward gay people out of fears of shifting social norms (Devine, et al. 1999). For immigration, intergroup anxiety

manifests as a fear surrounding how increasing immigration will influence and shift what is considered normative behavior..

Negative stereotypes are acknowledged as “threats to the ingroup because one of the functions of stereotypes is to serve as a basis for expectations concerning the behavior of members of the stereotyped group” (Stephan & Stephan, 2000, p.27; Hamilton, Sherman, & Ruvolo, 1990). Threat-related stereotypes are often reinforced by or developed through individual interactions, therefore classifying stereotyped traits as positive or negative requires adequate context before being used to characterize a person’s attitudes (Stephan & Stephan, 2000, p.27). Negative stereotypes surrounding immigration often overlap with both realistic and symbolic threats, focusing on a specific prejudice or assumption of immigrant behavior. Surveys analyzed within this paper measured stereotypes such as laziness vs hardworking, poor vs wealthy, and aggressive vs kind.

The antecedents of threats play a key role in identifying if a survey item is contextually related to the overarching threat perception. The first antecedent observed—ingroup identification—describes how closely the participant feels their identity is linked to their in-group membership(Stephan & Stephan, 2000, p.37). For example, a sample of U.S. workers were asked in a survey if they feared immigrants were stealing their jobs, but some respondents identified as self-employed or having strong job-security. These respondents have less ingroup identification with other U.S. workers and therefore are less likely to feel threatened by the idea of immigrants stealing jobs. Therefore, survey questions that discuss the respondent’s ingroup identification could be contextually significant toward measuring an immigration attitude. The other antecedents similarly provide clarity on how survey items could indirectly influence how threatened a respondent feels about immigration.

‘Relevance’ refers to the anticipated impact of policy deemed preferential to the outgroup population. Policies supporting minority populations, such as immigrants, are occasionally perceived as preferential treatment; the relevance of that treatment to the participant’s livelihood is notably an antecedent to the extent of threat perception. For instance, while a labor policy removing English as a language requirement for hiring may help a majority of immigrant applicants, it could see heightened opposition from native English speakers as it does little to support them.

‘Contact’ and ‘Knowledge’ are both related to the respondent’s perception of the outgroup. The amount and especially quality of intergroup contact, paired with the knowledge of the outgroup, heavily influence the severity of a threat-related attitude toward immigration (Stephan & Stephan, 2000, p.38). Contact and knowledge can be acquired through direct or indirect interactions with immigrants, therefore survey questions exploring a respondent’s choice of media, neighborhood demographics, or place of birth could additionally provide contextual information on immigration threat.

As opposed to individual contact, historical ‘Intergroup Conflicts’ are also described as signifiers for heightened attitudes among ingroup members. For instance, Japanese-Americans living in Hawaii during the late 20th century chose to increasingly Americanize their children’s names fearing prejudice and backlash for the 1941 Pearl Harbor bombing (Saavedra, 2021). High opposition between social groups caused by historical conflicts was observed to increase the likeliness of high threat perceptions in all four ITT categories (Stephan & Stephan, 2000, p.38).

Finally, ‘Group Status’ and power differences are considered to be a significant indicator of increased perceptions of threat (Stephan & Stephan, 2000, pp.38-39). In the context of immigration, political power, financial influence, and resource accessibility are representations

of this threat antecedent. Questions probing a participant's access to education or wealth could indirectly inform their perceived threat toward immigrants.

ITT was initially theorized and tested by examining prejudiced attitudes toward immigrants coming to the U.S. from Mexico, Asia, and Cuba (Stephan, et al. 1999). They conducted a single experimental survey, sampling university students from Florida, Hawaii, and New Mexico to test whether the four aforementioned threats could predict attitudes toward Mexican immigrants. Results found that ITT threat categories significantly predicted the variance of participant responses, discussing how future research can utilize this theoretical framework to measure prejudice attitudes between two distinct social groups.

One such application by Tausch et al (2008) used ITT to identify predictors of prejudice between two religious groups: Hindu Indians and Muslim Indians. They surveyed students from the Psychology and Sociology departments of Utkal University using likert-scale questions to measure predictors, mediators, and criterions. The predictors and criterions consisted of three antecedents of threats outlined in ITT (Contact quantity & quality, Relative status, and In-group bias) and one antecedent adapted by the authors (Social distance). Social distance was uniquely measured by asking respondents if they would oppose someone from the opposite religion being their boss or spouse. The mediator variables used within Tausch's study were three of the four ITT categories: Realistic threats, Symbolic threats, and Intergroup anxiety. Using ITT as a framework, the authors built a survey that significantly measured how social factors contribute to the intergroup threats between Hindu and Muslim Indians.

Another example is Curşeu, et al. (2006) whose research used ITT as a model to measure how Dutch employees react and behave toward migrant workers. The study sampled four economic sectors of the Netherlands using ten scales consisting of the six antecedents and four

threats discussed in ITT. The scales created were: (1) Symbolic threat scale, (2) Realistic threat scale, (3) Inter-group conflict scale, (4) Perceived status differences, (5) Social identity scale, (6) Inter-group anxiety scale, (7) Stereotypes valence scale, (8) Social distance scale, (9) Direct social contact scale, and (10) Informational contact scale. This application of ITT—similar to Tausch et al— combines both ITT antecedents and threat categories into the same quantitative scale construction. Curşeu concluded that negative stereotypes most significantly mediate the relationship between threats and prejudice, suggesting that diversity training should seek to reduce information processing biases associated with negative stereotypes.

Political Intergroup Relations

Political research often uses public-opinion surveys and policy analysis, while social psychology research focused on intergroup relations often test social identity theories with experimental survey construction. These fields are indirectly associated by their respondent-level analysis of social issues and perspectives. Intergroup relations is more a psychological concept than it is a political term, however the underlying theory is deeply rooted in prejudice and foundational U.S. policies on race.

The Contact hypothesis by Gordon Allport (1954) was the first recorded attempt to measure the impacts and conditions surrounding intergroup contact (Everett, 2013). The theory came to be during heightened racial segregation policies, with a goal of reducing prejudice. Future research expanded the Contact hypothesis into intergroup relations as a subset of psychological research aiming to study interactions between two distinct groups. Modern political research has increasingly incorporated intergroup relations to create targeted intervention policies or measure support for such social policies (Ho & Kteily, 2024; Nir & Halperin, 2025). Contextually these fields have long intersected, with intergroup relations theory

serving as a theoretical framework for political research on race, culture, and other demographic identities.

When examining attitudes toward immigration, intergroup relations theory significantly informs survey creation, data collection, and latent variable modeling for analysis. Surveys including aspects of intergroup relations can increasingly measure how social perspectives and identities influence these negative meta-perceptions between social groups (Nasie, 2025). These studies develop lengthy experimental surveys measuring attitudes of a smaller sample of the intended population. However, to display significant support or need for a policy change, a much larger sample size would be needed to generalize a public perception. In the United States, such generalizable surveys are systematically conducted to measure thousands of participant's public opinions. Surveys such as American Trends Panel (ATP), General Social Survey (GSS), or American National Election Studies (ANES), include a few immigration-related questions meant to generalize how Americans feel toward immigrants and immigration.

U.S. Immigration surveys typically look at both attitudes toward specific racial demographics and toward the general action of immigrating to America. To understand 'who' is feeling threatened, and subsequently 'who' is the threatening party, intergroup relations plays a crucial role in separating these groups into two key terms: Ingroup and Outgroup. "An ingroup refers to a group that individuals identify with and feel an emotional attachment to, often contrasted with an outgroup, which is the group that ingroup members oppose or view with resistance" (Bennett, 2019). Ingroup and outgroup identification varies by environment, experiences, and both racial/cultural identities. In the context of Immigration threat, the outgroup is not a tangible population but rather a representation of the respondent's perception of an

immigrant. The methodology behind categorizing ingroups is elaborated within the future research direction and proposal.

Differing Measurements of Immigration Attitudes

Creighton et al. (2015) conducted a list experiment that found that social desirability bias influenced the transparency of anti-immigration attitudes before and after the 2008 U.S. financial crisis. Creighton concluded that “the post-crisis period is marked by greater tolerance to overtly expressed anti-immigration sentiment, despite little change in the underlying true levels of opposition” (2015, p.746). He suggests this phenomenon is explained by increased political relevancy of Immigration in the post-crisis period which reduced the social desirability of neutral attitudes as media exposure increasingly polarized existing opinions. Within this experiment, immigration attitudes were measured by the support or opposition to “cutting off all immigration to the US” (Creighton, et al. 2015, p.734). The list experiment created a control and treatment group, and asked how many policies from a list of three commonly supported arguments did the participants oppose. The treatment group’s list contained one additional question on immigration, while the control was provided the immigration question separately as an individual assessment. The comparative results from 2005 to 2010 found that post-crisis (2010) respondents were 50% more likely to support cutting off immigration, while the treatment group showcased little to no change in total opposition (Creighton, et al. 2015, p.738). The use of a list experiment enabled the measurement of a change in attitudes toward the social desirability of immigration.

More recently, Taylor (2025) analyzed Cooperative Election Study (CES) data from 2010-2020 presidential elections to understand how Trump’s presence within political campaigning may have increased the relevancy of immigration as a topic for American voters. This study explored how a participant’s support for Trump or Obama is correlated with their

support for immigration policy. Taylor suggests that Trump had a distinct impact on the polarization of immigration attitudes but more significantly on trade policies. Support or opposition of Immigration policy was measured through a series of immigration questions from CES with binary responses. The question used to measure a respondent's support for immigration policy differed by year, but the 2010 question selected by Taylor is: *"What do you think the U.S. government should do about immigration?... (1) Grant legal status to all illegal immigrants who have held jobs and paid taxes for at least 3 years, and not been convicted of any felony crimes (2) Increase the number of border patrols on the US-Mexican border? (3) Allow police to question anyone they think may be in the country illegally?"* (Taylor, 2025). Although Taylor measures a similar opposition to Immigration policy as Creighton, it could be argued that the measured responses described differing attitudes regarding Immigration. For instance, responses (1) and (3) focused on illegal immigrants, but response (2) is more closely related to border security or an attitude directly toward Mexican immigrants. The variability in response options contributes to a vague description of a participant's support or opposition toward Immigration policy. Taylor measured presidential and policy support, but was limited by the available selection of immigration-related survey questions found in CES. A similar study with a primary dataset could further determine the presidential impact on policy support by inviting more nuanced immigration perspectives.

Chandler & Tsai (2001) used Symbolic Interactionism as a theoretical framework enhancing how social factors are understood to influence public opinions on immigration. Symbolic Interactionism is a theory centered around using intergroup relations to understand how "individuals develop their conceptions both of themselves and others, including the broader society, in a process of communicative interaction with other actors" (Chandler & Tsai, 2001).

Their research sampled attitudes toward both legal and illegal immigrants from the 1994 General Social Survey (GSS). To measure these attitudes, they conducted a factor analysis including questions such as, *“Do you think the number of immigrants from foreign countries who are permitted to come to the United States to live should be increased a lot, increased a little, left the same as it is now, decreased a little, or decreased a lot,”* and *“Whether illegal immigrants should be entitled to work permits, allowed to attend public universities at the same cost of other students, and whether their children should continue to qualify as citizens when born in the U.S.”* (Chandler & Tsai, 2001). The factor analysis revealed that questions could be split into two categories: one concerning legal immigrants, and the other concerning illegal immigrants. The authors used Symbolic Interactionism as a theoretical framework explaining how individual attributes (e.g. Sex, Race, Finance, Political lean, Culture, Language) could correlate to changes in immigration attitudes. Throughout the analysis, economic or cultural threats appear to provide the largest increases to immigration attitudes. However, the Immigration measurement developed was hindered by smaller sample sizes or limited Immigration-related awareness among respondents. A new measurement could address these limitations by increasing the survey’s measurement of outgroup knowledge before probing immigration-related survey answers.

METHODOLOGY

This methodology showcases the quantitative scale construction process used to select and develop immigration questions for future psychometric research; the resulting questionnaire is proposed as a survey capable of measuring a new scale, Perceived Immigration Threat (PIT). The scale measures threat-related meta-perceptions of U.S. immigration policies, migrants, and asylum seekers. PIT seeks to improve generalizability of similar approaches using ITT such as Latinx Immigrant Threat Attitudes Scale (LITAS) and Perceived Realistic Physical Threat

(PRPT) by expanding potential ingroup identifications (Kiehne & Cadenas, 2021; Hellman, et al. 2021). Existing measurements such as the Positive and Negative Perception of Immigrants scale (PANPIS) and Perceived Threat Scale further inform question development processes and response formatting (Panno, et al. 2023; Van Acker, et al. 2014).

Quantitative scale construction best practices indicate three overarching phases: Item Development, Scale Development, Scale Evaluation (Boateng, et al. 2018). The first two of these phrases were used within this study to select viable survey items for a predetermined scale guided by ITT threat categories. This process has received IRB exemption. The next-step being proposed for scale evaluation will further require a human-subjects IRB certification and survey-related funding. For the purposes of this research paper, the proposed evaluation portion is relocated into the ‘future research’ subsection of the ‘discussion’ section. Scale and item development processes are explained and followed by findings from three unique secondary datasets.

Survey & Dataset Selection

Eight publically available, secondary datasets from multiple U.S. National survey platforms were processed to inform scale construction. Of the eight datasets—*American Trends Panel (ATP) Wave 20(2016) & 151(2024)*, *Cooperative Election Study (CES) Common Content 2025*, *American National Election Studies (ANES) Time Series Study 2020 & 2024*, *National Public Opinion Reference Survey (NPORS) 2024*, and the *General Social Survey (GSS) 2022 & 2024*—the 2024 datasets for ATP, ANES, and GSS were selected for further analysis. The remaining five datasets were additionally probed for threat-related terminology and went through preliminary testing of the coding process (see Appendix 1); notably NPORS 2024 survey lacked sufficiently examinable immigration-related survey items and therefore excluded.

The four datasets used to probe for threat-related terminology were ATP 2016, CES 2025, ANES 2020, and GSS 2022. A frequency analysis of the four datasets revealed that the word ‘threat’ was explicitly mentioned 6 times out of the total 43 observed survey items (Appendix 1). However, 88% (n=38) of coded terminology could reasonably be associated with the ITT definition of realistic threats.

The datasets selected for further analysis contained significantly more Immigration survey items: ATP 2024 (n=75), ANES 2024 (n=70), GSS 2024 (n=52). The cumulative 197 survey items were coded into ITT threat categories (See Appendix 2). Table 1 presents the distribution and descriptive statistics of the three surveys.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Sampled Surveys

	ATP 2024 Wave 151	ANES 2024 Time Series	GSS 2024 Cross-Section
Survey Info			
Date	August 5th - 11th, 2024	August 3rd - November 5th, 2024	May - December, 2022
Follow up?	n/a	November 7th, 2024 - February 17th, 2025	April - December 2024
Language(s)	English, Español	English, Español	English, Español
Survey Mode	Web, CATI	FTF, Web, Paper, Phone	FTF, Web, Phone
Sample Size	9,201	5,521	3,986
Survey Items			
Item total	131	944	975
Potential Immigration Items	75	70	52
Potential Realistic Threat items	39	23	20
Potential Symbolic Threat items	11	5	11
Potential Intergroup Anxiety items	4	6	6

Potential Negative Stereotype items	7	17	12
Multiple Category items (total sum)	8 (8/2/4/2)	19 (9/6/1/10)	3 (2/1/0/3)
Non-conforming Immigration items	6	6	0
Party Lean			
Republican	2623 (28.5)	1743 (31.6)	935 (30.1)
Democrat	2871 (31.2)	1930 (35)	1202 (23.4)
Independent	2653 (28.8)	1810 (32.8)	1705 (42.8)
Other	989 (10.7)	n/a	93 (2.3)
Education			
College Graduate+	4462 (48.7)	2471 (44.8)	1440 (36.2)
Some College	2760 (30)	1738 (31.5)	360 (9)
H.S. Grad or less	1945 (21.1)	1256 (22.7)	2179 (54.7)
Gender			
A Man	4133 (44.9)	2397 (43.4)	1787 (44.8)
A Woman	4976 (54.1)	2773 (50.2)	2169 (54.4)
Other	72 (0.8)	64 (1.1)	n/a
Race			
White	6962 (75.7)	3946 (71.5)	2441 (61.2)
Black or African-American	904 (9.8)	508 (9.2)	810 (20.3)
Asian or Asian-American	540 (5.9)	197 (3.6)	n/a
Hispanic	n/a	582 (10.5)	n/a
Mixed Race	399 (4.3)	188 (3.4)	n/a
Other	264 (2.9)	33 (0.6)	655 (16.4)
Age			
18-29	992 (10.8)	n/a	606 (15.7)
30-49	2918 (31.7)	n/a	1217 (31.5)

50-64	2558 (27.8)	n/a	901 (23.3)
65+	2696 (29.3)	n/a	873 (22.6)

Scale Development

The Perceived Immigration Threat (PIT) scale contains the four ITT threat categories—Realistic Threats, Symbolic Threats, Intergroup Anxiety, and Negative Stereotypes—using existing samples of the framework’s application to inform additional portions of the final questionnaire (Kiehne & Cadenas, 2021; Hellman, et al. 2021; Tausch, et al. 2008, Curşeu, et al. 2006, Stephan, et al. 1999). These examples use antecedents of threats from the original ITT model as additional factors equivalent to the four threat categories. Additional factors were assessed for scale development after having conducted reliability analyses on the selected items.

For the selection process, existing items from the three selected surveys were coded into the four threat categories and two antecedents from ITT. Reliability and question clusters inform statistical and logical gaps in existing immigration survey items. These gaps were assessed to further inform the scale development of PIT.

Item Selection & Development

Across ATP Wave 151, ANES 2024, and GSS 2024, 197 immigration-related questions were selected for having the potential to either directly or indirectly contribute to a PIT scale. For each survey, potential immigration items were categorized as one of the four ITT threats and clustered by response scale; items with unique response formats were excluded from analysis. Afterwards these clusters were tested for omega reliability using SPSS reliability analysis. McDonald’s Omega was selected as the reliability coefficient based on recent psychological measurement guidelines (Deng & Chan, 2016). Variables with statistically significant reliability

are recognized as topics and item clusters that effectively contribute to the PIT scale. Immigration-related survey items with lesser reliability were separated and examined as relating to antecedent threat constructs. Variables correlating with more than one ITT threat category were considered as questions requiring further specificity to be used in the PIT scale survey.

DATA & FINDINGS

The quantitative analysis established Omega reliability coefficients for 16 potential scales corresponding to the four threats and two antecedents from ITT. Table 2 shows these coefficients and describes each potential scale; categorized by the overarching ITT construct. Surveys were simplified numerically: (1) ATP 2024 Wave 151, (2) ANES 2024 Time-Series, and (3) GSS 2024 Cross-section. Since this analysis is conducted on survey items rather than responses, response-level descriptives have been omitted. Referent—the population being discussed in each scale—and the related topics are provided to categorize contextual differences across survey items. 80 of the 197 immigration-related survey items were selected by matching response scales referring to existing item classification frameworks (Westland, 2022; Widhiarso, et al. 2025). Appendix 3 details the questions corresponding to the 80 selected items.

Table 2: Reliability Analysis of ITT-Categorized Scales

ITT Cat.	Survey ID	Referent	Topic	Response Scale (Likert)	Number of Items	Reliability Coefficient Omega (ω)
Realistic Threats						
1		Undocumented Immigrants	Crime, Economy, Public Resources	3-point	4	0.736*
2		Illegal Immigration	Border Security, Job Security, Crime	5-point	5	0.803*
2		Black/Hispanic/Asian Americans	Political Influence, Racial Inequality	3-point	6	0.867*

2	Countries: China, Russia, Mexico, Israel, Iran, Japan	National Threat to the United States	5-point	6	0.573
3	Immigrants	Public Resources, Job Security, Crime	5-point	5	0.813*
Symbolic Threats					
1	Regions: Asia, Latin America, Africa, Mideast, Europe	Embrace U.S. Values, Commonality	3-point	6	0.874*
2	Immigrants	Adapt to U.S. Customs, Traditions, Morals, Family Values, Language	5-point	5	0.679
3	Self ("American" Identity)	Nationalist Values: Ancestry, Birth, Legality, Identity, Laws,	4-point	7	0.804*
Intergroup Anxiety					
1	Immigrants	English-Speaking Requirement/Capacity	5-point	3	0.804*
2	Immigrants, Minorities	Sympathy, Empathy, Apathy	5-point	3	0.841*
3	Self (R's Community)	Shame & Favorability of Interracial Marriage	5-point	5	0.839*
Negative Stereotypes					
1	Immigrants: Asia, Latin America, Africa, Mideast, Europe	Impact on American Society	3-point	5	0.877*
2	Black/Hispanic/Asian Americans	Lazy-Hardworking / Violent-Kind	7-point	6	0.779*
3	Black/Hispanic/White Americans	Poor-Rich / Lazy-Hardworking	Semantic Differential	6	n/a
Ingroup/Outgroup Identification					
1	Born Americans	U.S. Citizenship Classification	2-point	4	0.635
Outgroup Knowledge					
1	Self (Immigrant Knowledge)	Media, Contact, Immigration Policy	5-point	4	0.497

11 of the 16 scales showcased significant omega reliability. While over half of the initial immigration-type survey items were omitted from analysis, those questions still represented unique aspects of a perceived immigration threat attitude. However, inconsistent formatting and partial responses between omitted questions made reliability analysis statistically impossible. For instance, the scale measuring a respondent's nationalist values through ANES survey items surrounding symbolic threats contained seven 4-point likert scale questions. Two other questions, *“Do you think immigrants living in the U.S. should adopt U.S. culture, keep their own culture, or do both?”* and *“Should immigrants give up their culture of origin and adopt American culture”* were statistically and conceptually associated with the potential scale but eventually excluded because they were conducted on a 3-point likert scale. In another case, a scale measuring negative stereotypes on Black/Hispanic/White Americans from the GSS 2024 survey could not result in a reliability coefficient because the items used a semantic-differential rating scale.

To indicate the potential nuance behind a survey item, the creation of two descriptive variables ‘Referent’ and ‘Topic’ respectively distinguishes who the question is about and what information is being asked about them. These variables stressed the possibilities for referent variance even if a threat scale relied solely on ITT, meaning the theoretical framework does not account for differing outgroups. However, these findings additionally represent topic continuity in light of referent variance, even across differing ITT categories. The topic continuity being observed across surveys reinforces that threat-based categories can accurately depict a specific attitude within anti-immigration. Scales categorized as realistic threats had significant overlap in topics, aligning with the ITT description: political, economic, and resource-related threats impacting the physical or material wellbeing of the ingroup. Yet an inverse relationship can also be observed in the intergroup relations category, specifically through survey items on the topic of

language overlapping with the symbolic threat category. An experimental measurement study would likely include questions tailored toward a specific referent, this combined with topic continuity will further minimize the negative impacts of nuanced attitudes.

The two antecedents of threats observed both fail to measure significant internal reliability using existing survey items, however the scope of topics being represented are nonetheless influential in measuring immigrant threat perception. The failure to measure significant reliability indicates that scales measuring these antecedents will require further specificity and development to be conceptually included within a new questionnaire. The individual and group correlations between these 16 potential scales provide insight into developing a questionnaire capable of measuring this newly proposed scale: perceived immigration threat, or PIT.

DISCUSSION

The hypothesis proposed states that immigration-type questions, when separated by ITT threat categories, will have significant internal reliability. This hypothesis was supported but simultaneously denied based solely on the quantity of omitted questions. The reliability analysis found that a majority of threat-related scales were reliable, but the selection process required eliminating multiple questions that fell within the same ITT categories as their reliable counterparts. Considering the innate limitations of using national publicly available datasets, it cannot be assumed that the reliability comes entirely from associating questions by ITT threat categories. However, the resulting reliability still represents a nuanced perspective toward immigration that cannot be summarized as anti-immigration attitudes. In this sense, the goal of this paper—justifying a separate anti-immigration measurement using threat perception and

intergroup relations—was accomplished by showcasing the variance in referents and topics even in statistically reliable scales.

Although previous research on anti-immigration attitudes used similar scales to theorize changing sentiments or predict policy support, they eventually struggled to convert national survey data into tangible attitudes capable of informing immigration policy. The reliability analysis reinforces previous immigration research that uses ITT as a theoretical framework for measuring attitudes toward immigrants (Curşeu, et al. 2006; Van Acker, et al. 2014; Hellmann, et al. 2021; Kiehne & Cadenas, 2021). These findings, more generally, suggest that statistical reliability does not single-handedly determine the generalizability of a seemingly popular sentiment. The national surveys I analyzed showcased inconsistent definitions and descriptions of immigrants, contributing to the creation of convoluted and potentially unreliable anti-immigration attitude measurements. U.S. national surveys are unlikely to disappear as a political research methodology, therefore it is increasingly important for interdisciplinary considerations, perspectives, and theories to be applied in political analysis as a means of appreciating the nuanced interpretations surrounding public opinions on immigration. Any combination of these issues outlined surrounding recent immigration research can contribute to a non-representative outlook on immigration policy, and subsequently reinforces the need for an alternative measurement of anti-immigration attitudes focused on individual perceptions and intergroup relations.

Limitations

This study is limited by the access and depth of U.S. national surveys. As previously mentioned, inconsistent response formats heavily limited the interpretation of the hypothesis by preventing a holistic reliability analysis on categorized survey items. This is a two-pronged

limitation creating the inability to assess a full factor structure needed for future psychometric analysis, and the inability to test scale validity due to the lack of overlap between datasets. However, this study serves as a preliminary scale construction seeking to propose and support the creation of a new scale, rather than conduct the tests needed to empirically validate the scale. These limitations are addressed in the next step for this research through primary data collection.

The other significant limitation was the growing nuance surrounding immigration attitudes as a political tool and measurement. Past research utilized simpler definitions of immigration attitudes and while these papers were likely in-line with the societal understanding during that time; current U.S. political rhetoric surrounding immigration has evolved past a singular definition. One that is intertwined with international relations, human rights, employment, and so much more. Relying on solely legal definitions of immigration for our understanding of foreign policy needs will detriment the nuanced perspective held within a diverse nation. Thus relying on precedent found through older immigration research while trying to keep up with modern definitions is a limitation that will continue to burden political analysis.

Future Research

The scale evaluation portion of this study requires human participants, additional resources, and most importantly the space and time to expand this research beyond the scale of a Master's thesis. Nonetheless, the goal of this project was achieved in justifying and proposing a new threat-based measurement for anti-immigration. This future research subsection aims to address the existing limitations and visualize a future measurement study using the proposed PIT scale.

The step following this study is to use the reliability analysis to develop additional items and conduct question-wording-effects analysis to ensure all questions address the same referent.

After having developed a comprehensive questionnaire incorporating potential scales from this study, the survey will be conducted to obtain primary data capable of testing a full factor structure and scale validity using confirmatory factor analysis. The findings of this study presented multiple referents even within similar item clusters, to address this issue question-wording-effects analysis would be used to establish a central definition for key terms such as minorities, immigrants, and immigration. The goal would be to conduct a full scale development study that assesses internal consistency, measurement structure, and predictive validity.

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