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Deborah J. Schildkraut: Press "ONE" for English

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Introduction

IN 1996, WAYLAND H. COOLEY, the tax assessor of Madison County, Alabama, was sued for refusing to grant a tax credit—a local benefit that is supposed to be given to people who live in the homes that they own rather than renting them out—to a Korean-American family and to other minorities. He defended his action by arguing that even with a translator, he could not be sure if their oath of residency was accurate. He also maintained that his refusal to grant the credit was in accord with the state's constitution, which declares that English is the official state language. The case was eventually settled in November of 1999, with Cooley agreeing to grant the tax credits as long as the applicants brought translators (Sack 1999; Associated Press 1999).

Nearby, in suburban Atlanta, some Hispanic store owners were fined for violating an ordinance that requires signs to be at least 75 percent English. In defense of making words like *supermercado* be changed to *supermarket*, Sergeant H. Smith, a local police officer, said, “The ‘super’ is English. But I don’t know what ‘mercado’ means. If an American was out there driving by, he wouldn’t know what that was” (Branigin 1999). The case is working its way through the judicial system, with the store owners charging that the ordinance violates their freedom of speech (Lezin 1999b). As in Alabama, English is the official language in Georgia.

Regardless of whether one finds the actions and comments of Cooley and Smith to be offensive, justified, or simply entertaining, it is certain that conflicts such as these are becoming more and more common in the United States. The ethnic composition of the population has undergone dramatic changes over the past thirty years. From the mid-1960s to the mid-1990s, levels of immigration rose steadily, as did the proportion of immigrants arriving from Latin American and Asian countries. The government estimates that the foreign-born now make up 11.5 percent of the population, up from 5 percent in 1970 (Camarota 1999; Schmidley 2003). Several public policy issues have gained prominence in response to these demographic changes, including bilingual education, immigration laws, border enforcement, official-English laws, and the provision of public services to immigrants.

All levels of government, from the U.S. Congress and the Supreme Court to the assemblies of places like Evergreen Park, Illinois, and Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, have been faced with the challenge of developing appropriate policies to help immigrants adapt and become full members of the community.

In 1996, for example, four Chicago suburbs, including Evergreen Park, voted to make English their official town language. Supporters claimed that the measures were intended to encourage immigrants to learn English and, as one mayor argued, to ensure that they would become better citizens and be able to do more than “sweep floors [and] work in places like McDonald’s” (Cotliar 1996). But not everyone saw such admirable intent. Critics charged that the declaration was a form of immigrant bashing and would only promote discrimination and alienation. Also in the mid-1990s, six towns in Bergen County, New Jersey, including Englewood Cliffs, passed ordinances requiring storefront signs in foreign languages to have words in English. Some of those towns have since repealed their ordinances to avoid lawsuits, though supporters still assert the integrity of their concerns: promoting communication among residents and protecting public safety by ensuring that firefighters and emergency crews can locate where they need to be (Geller 1997). As these examples illustrate, policies that deal with language have become both common and contentious, and debates about how to respond to the presence of non-English-speaking residents and citizens, including debates about whether to make English the official language, have become an important feature of American political discourse.

Official-English legislation consistently enjoys widespread support among the American people. In 1998, for example, Alaska voters approved an initiative to make English the official state language with 70 percent of the vote (Clark 1998). Also in 1998, California voters opted to end bilingual education programs by passing Proposition 227 with 61 percent of the vote (Terry 1998). Since then, Arizona and Massachusetts have done the same. In the 1994 General Social Survey (GSS), 60 percent of the respondents supported making English the official language of the country, and other surveys throughout the 1990s show similar figures. This high level of public support for restrictive language policies remains substantial across the traditional political and social cleavages along which competing interests in America normally divide. Hispanics and liberals tend to be the only groups whose support for official-English is under 50 percent, but even among these groups, support is often above 25 percent.

With figures such as these, the question that begs to be answered is, why do so many people support restrictive language policies? The high levels of public support become even more curious when we take into account some key elements of the role of the English language in American society. First, for all practical purposes, English already is the *de facto* official language of the United States. Second, most non-English speakers are aware of the need to learn English if they hope to “make it” in mainstream American life. It is also becoming more and more essential to learn English if one hopes to “make it” anywhere in the world. Third, most immigrants and their children want to and do learn English (Stevens 1994; Portes and Rumbaut 2001) and think

that the United States should expect immigrants to learn English (Public Agenda 2003). In short, strong incentives to learn English already exist, and by and large, those incentives work (Schmidt 2000). Moreover, there is no evidence to suggest that making English the official language would add to the incentive structure or make it easier for people to learn English.

Because a logical connection between learning English and official-English laws appears to be lacking, accounts of support for official-English laws have tended to focus on two other motivations, both of which simply involve the desire to make immigrants feel unwelcome. The first motivation is economic security. The argument here is that people become more willing to close borders and deny services to immigrants when they perceive that either the nation or their own family is economically vulnerable. Conventional wisdom holds that people blame immigrants when they fear for their economic security. By this reasoning, official-English is just a way to send a message that “America is for Americans” and that we should look after our own before expending our efforts on others. I show in later chapters that evidence for this economic security argument is less than sound despite the intuitive appeal of its hypotheses.

The second motivation is racism, or more precisely, anti-immigrant sentiments targeted specifically at Latinos and Asians (e.g., Perea 1997). The United States has always had citizens who do not know English, yet official-English battles are largely a recent phenomenon. That the changing face of immigration coincides with an increase in debates about language is, some fear, no coincidence at all. For instance, opponents of Atlanta’s ordinance requiring signs to be 75 percent English point out that the policy has not been enforced at French and Italian restaurants the same way it has at Latino markets. Noting the potential absurdity of the ordinance, the Mexican consul general in Atlanta remarked that true enforcement would require El Taco Veloz, a restaurant chain in the area, to change its name to “Speedy Cornflour Pancake” (Lezin 1999a). Enforcement has not been taken to this extreme but rather has been more selective, leading many to feel that the motivation behind enforcement is not really about language but instead about sending a message to a particular group of people that they are not welcome.

In another example, Carbon County, Pennsylvania, passed an official-English resolution in 1997 with the support of a county commissioner who said, “We have to gear everything around Spanish. That doesn’t make a whole lot of sense to me” (Ayers 1997). Yet Carbon County has very few non-English speakers and did not print any bilingual materials before the resolution was passed. The county did request one hundred voter registration guides in Spanish from the state in 1996, but two years later, all one hundred were still sitting in a file cabinet due to lack of demand (Ayers 1998). When a county commissioner justifies an official-English law through complaints about accommodating non-English speakers when in fact the county has never found itself nega-

tively impacted by such accommodation, one cannot help but wonder if anything other than anti-immigrant sentiments are at work. I show throughout the analysis that such sentiments help to explain some, but not all, of the public support for restrictive language policies.

But there is also a third possible explanation for why so many Americans support official-English laws, one that has surfaced primarily in academic circles. It concerns language itself more directly than the previous explanations and focuses on conceptions of American national identity. Scholars have derived this explanation from the idea that national symbols, values, norms, and myths shape how people interpret the social and political world and help them make sense of policy debates. For some, this process will still involve a degree of racism, but for many, the ideals that are considered to make America unique are seen as endangered without a single public language.¹ Likewise, other people feel that American values and ideals will be threatened if official-English is mandated. A wide range of American ideals, including individualism, economic opportunity, participatory democracy, openness to immigration, and tolerance, are all implicated in debates about language use. People seek to protect the images of American identity that they cherish; for some this leads to support for official-English laws, whereas for others it leads to opposition.

Americans have always been somewhat obsessed with ideas about “what it means to be an American” and with whether certain practices and beliefs emulate “the American way of life.” This obsession, which seems to have gained prominence in recent years, centers on values, myths, and norms that dictate the conceptual boundaries of national identity. Some of these norms and values are ideological, others cultural. But regardless of whether the norms people associate with national identity are attitudinal or ascriptive in nature, they all have the potential to be activated when people think about the appropriate role of government in addressing political issues. In other words, this third explanation for why official-English enjoys such widespread support maintains that how people think the government should respond to ethnic change will be affected by their understanding of what it means to be an American and by their expectations about whether the proposed governmental action—or inaction—will sustain or threaten the American way of life. Many people see ethnic change as a threat to the American way of life (for a variety of reasons—some ideological and some ascriptive) and, consequently, as a threat to their own sense of self. It is this perceived threat that leads to support for official-English.

An appealing aspect of this argument is that it allows scholars to study opposition to restrictive policies rather than forcing them to rely on the assump-

¹ Support for official-English as a means to preserve the integrity of American identity assumes that official-English laws will actually promote the learning of English. This assumption reappears among the participants in my study and in pro-official-English rhetoric despite its questionable accuracy.

tion that opposition results from an absence of the factors that drive support. For example, American society is popularly defined by an unparalleled amount of freedom. For some people, making English the official language could be seen as a violation of certain freedoms and thus pose a threat to what America is supposed to stand for. This motivation is missed by studies that assume opposition to official-English results from simply a lack of nativist sentiments. Certain ideas about what being American means can lead to one policy preference, while other ideas about what being American means can lead to the opposite preference. Regardless of the resulting policy view, the desire to protect one's sense of national identity drives his or her opinions on the issue.² There is a growing amount of evidence to support the argument that the way people define being American is an important influence on how they feel about political issues. There is disagreement, however, over what exactly people think it means to be an American and over which national norms and values should be included in the analysis. In this book, I add to the evidence that national identity shapes attitudes, and I address in great detail the competing images people hold about what being American means. I argue that these competing images constitute distinct conceptions of American identity and that all of them need to be incorporated into analyses of public support for, and opposition to, ethnicity-related policies such as official-English.

AMERICAN IDENTITY AND OFFICIAL-ENGLISH

In response to the increasing prominence of debates about language and ethnicity, more and more political scientists have begun to examine several aspects of this issue area. Some scholars have tried to understand why certain states have chosen to declare English the official state language (e.g., Hero 1998; Tatalovich 1995; Gamble 1997; Schildkraut 2001), while others study how Congress and the courts address language and immigration issues (e.g., Baron 1990; Gimpel and Edwards 1999; Schmid 2001) or how activists in language policy battles frame their positions (e.g., Perea 1997; Schmidt 2000; Schmid 2001). Another set of research examines public opinion and seeks to understand how Americans feel about issues that arise from ethnic change and why (e.g., Espenshade and Calhoun 1993; Espenshade and Hempstead 1996; Huddy and Sears 1995; Hood et al. 1997; Hood and Morris 1997; Vidanage and Sears 1995; Citrin, Reingold, and Green 1990; Citrin, Reingold, Walters, and Green 1990; Citrin et al. 1997; Citrin and Duff 1998; Frensdreis and Tatalovich 1997; Citrin, Sears, Muste, and Wong 2001). On one level, these studies have provided avenues through which we can learn more about the

² Sapiro and Soss (1999) demonstrate similar claims about the role of symbolic politics and interpretation of events.

broader sets of issues surrounding state politics and the initiative process, congressional position taking and agenda setting, and opinion formation. On another level, they have helped to advance the study of ethnic politics and policy in the United States, a growing research tradition itself.

Following suit, my goals in this book are to contribute to our understanding of opinion formation on a general level and to provide an analysis of how Americans use their interpretations of American identity to come to terms with the specific and increasingly salient issue of language policy. I define and document four distinct conceptions of American identity and show how each one is implicated in debates about language use. The four conceptions are the universally accepted *liberal* tradition (America as a land of freedom and opportunity), the under-studied *civic republican* tradition (America as a participatory democracy with vibrant communities and dutiful citizens), the highly contested *ethnocultural* tradition (America as a nation of white Protestants), and the equally contested *incorporationist* tradition (America as a diverse “nation of immigrants”). I rely on focus groups with ordinary Americans and survey data to establish that these four traditions guide what people think it means to be American and to demonstrate how people rely on them when forming and explaining their views on different language policies, such as declaring English the official language and printing election ballots only in English. Throughout, I argue that these different conceptions of American identity are often at odds with one another and can be internally conflictual as well, and I show how these clashes between and within alternative ideas of what it means to be an American are an integral part of how people debate these salient political issues. People on both sides of the language issue have very strong and cherished notions of what being an American means, and both sides feel that their sense of American identity is at stake in these debates.

LINKING AMERICAN POLITICAL THOUGHT AND PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH

One central aim of this book is to expand the range of concerns that have been used to explain the widespread support for official-English legislation by showing how multiple conceptions of American national identity shape opinions about language policies. I argue that people’s views about the role of the citizen in the polity—views that are guided by the tenets of civic republicanism—affect preferences at least as much as the other aspects of American national identity that have received more attention in public opinion research, namely liberalism and ethnoculturalism. American political culture is infused with the image of the participating citizen in a cohesive community in which deliberation and compromise contribute to a stable public life. The power of this image to affect policy preferences has not been addressed adequately in past attempts to explain how American identity shapes public opinion on language issues or on public policy more broadly. By incorporating this version of

American identity into the analysis and by using a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches, I am able to increase our understanding of the role that national identity plays in debates about diversity and ethnic change.

Three of the four conceptions of American identity on which my analysis centers—liberalism, civic republicanism, and ethnoculturalism—are adopted from Rogers Smith's work on the history of citizenship laws in the United States (1988, 1993, 1997). Smith is not the only scholar to describe the political culture in the United States as derived from these traditions, but his explicit juxtaposition of them provides a systematic framework that can address some of the shortcomings that plague existing data and analyses. For example, this framework allows me to study the role of civic republicanism, an ideological tradition that has virtually been ignored by public opinion research.

Despite this advantage, however, Smith's analysis emphasizes the attitudes and behaviors of elite political actors only through the Progressive Era and may not accurately describe the contemporary beliefs of ordinary Americans. To address this possibility, I add a fourth conception of American identity to Smith's formulation—incorporationism—and it is derived from the immigrant legacy of the nation. Although many Americans identify the nation with particular ideological principles, they also recognize the unique role that immigration has played in the political and social development of the country. This role may not have been particularly relevant for Smith's project, but could prove to be an important addition here. Thus, another aim of the book is to provide structure to the very nebulous treatment that the image of the United States as a "nation of immigrants" has received in public opinion research and to evaluate its role as a conception of national identity.

In assessing opinion formation on the increasingly salient and contentious debates about language use, I unite theory-based treatments of American identity with opinion data. These two types of scholarship often address the same topics, but scholars in each field do not pay enough attention to what the other is doing. I maintain that the problem of inadequate survey design could be remedied if public opinion scholars did more to acknowledge the insights that work in American political thought offers. Theoretical and historical approaches have often done a more thorough job of exploring enduring national myths than survey-based analyses or studies of interest group activity. These works discuss the philosophical underpinnings of civic traditions, how these traditions have evolved over time, and how elite actors have employed them in the political arena. The behavior of elites and the opinions of citizens unquestionably have different sets of influences, but thorough accounts of elite-driven ideals need to be consulted when generating hypotheses about opinion formation among ordinary Americans and when designing methodological tools for testing them. Research shows that the public often takes cues from political elites about values, norms, and specific policy stances (e.g., Zaller 1992; Baumgartner and Jones 1993; Mendelberg 2001). These works demon-

strate that the ways in which issues are framed and in which social norms are constructed often start from above and eventually make their way into the consciousness of the average citizen.³ Studies of nationalism suggest that elite influence is particularly potent when it comes to defining the content of national identity (e.g., Anderson 1991; Brubaker 1996; Gellner 1983; Hobsbawm 1990; Snyder and Ballentine 1996). It is for these reasons that I look to work by scholars such as Rogers Smith, Michael Walzer, Louis Hartz, Gordon Wood, and John Higham for developing the model of American identity that I expect ordinary Americans to endorse. Whether the guidance these studies provide results in a more accurate model of how people conceive of American identity than the guidance provided solely by studies of public opinion and language policy activists is an empirical question. Existing surveys, however, do not ask the kinds of questions needed that would allow for such empirical investigation to take place. In the end, I conclude from focus group analysis that a model informed by political theory does indeed provide a more useful way to characterize how people think about American identity and to examine the influence that identity has on policy views than the models currently in use in public opinion research.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Focus groups serve as the main tool that enables this project to achieve its goals. Hence, another central aim of this book is to demonstrate the value of focus groups for studying opinion formation on ethnicity-related policies and for studying public opinion more generally. The focus groups allow me to explore questions that surveys have had difficulty addressing and allow participants to express their views in their own words without being constrained by a fixed set of choices or by my specific hypotheses. They offer depth and insight that allow me first to test whether my model provides an appropriate framework for understanding how regular Americans describe their national identity and then to study the connections people make between that identity and their particular policy preferences. The discourse that emerges from these group discussions provides unique and useful information on which aspects of the political culture are revered (or abhorred), how people define those aspects of the political culture and use them to justify policy preferences, and what the important similarities and differences are between the policy proposals being debated. Finally, my use of the focus groups makes methodological as well as substantive contributions. Protocols and standards for using this relatively new research tool are still being developed. My analysis adds to the

³ Other studies suggest that elite behavior on certain issues follows from, rather than precedes, changes in public opinion (e.g., Page and Shapiro 1983), and still other works argue that the relationship between elite opinion, mass opinion, and policy outputs is reciprocal, or one of “opinion sharing” (e.g., Hill and Hinton-Andersson 1995). Understanding the conditions that affect the direction of the links between elite and mass beliefs is an ongoing research agenda.

growing list of ways that people have used this exciting method to gain important insights into opinion formation. The description and justification of my methodological choices should be of interest to the increasing number of scholars considering incorporating focus groups into their own research.

Using the theoretically derived model of American identity advances our knowledge of how people conceive of what it means to be an American, how conceptions of identity guide opinion formation, and how people apply their notions of national identity to the specific realm of language policy. Using the focus groups demonstrates the complex and contextual nature of how people feel about language issues. The focus groups provide insights into the very real struggle people go through in sorting out their competing values. People sense that language policy can be a window into the soul of the nation. The focus groups give them a chance to articulate what it is they want to see when they look through that window.

OPINIONS ABOUT LANGUAGE: BELOW THE SURFACE, GROWING STRONGER

My interest in this project originally grew out of a discomfort with existing studies that looked at how people feel about language issues and ethnic change. Certainly we can think of benefits of having everyone in a society speak the same language. For instance, a common public language facilitates political participation and fosters a public sphere where citizens can communicate and debate with one another over public policy in an efficient manner. Yet supporting official-English laws is often cast as irrational or nativist, though such condemnation is, I argue, premature. In a crude sense then, determining how much of this support is “bad” (i.e., driven by anti-minority affect or the belief that only people with certain cultural backgrounds can be American) and how much of it is “good” (i.e., wanting the benefits of having a common language used in the public sphere) is one of the underlying motivations of this project. People frequently rely on the questionable assumption that official-English laws will actually promote the learning of English. Why they think that is so is a question to be pursued elsewhere. But agreeing that all Americans should know English is not in and of itself a sign of sinister motives.

I was also drawn to this project simply because of the salience that language issues have in today’s political landscape and what that salience reveals about the United States at the start of the twenty-first century. It is difficult pick up a major newspaper without seeing stories of diversity, population projections, or other conflicts and issues that arise from demographic change. Moreover, there has been much more legislative activity and many more court cases at all levels of government that deal with language over the past two decades.

Official-English may not be an issue that people think about regularly. Few issues are. But for the past several years, whenever I meet someone who asks me what I do, without fail, we end up in an animated discussion with the per-

son arguing for his or her own view on language policies. The frequency and consistency of this reaction indicates that the issue strikes a chord despite not being considered one of the “most important problems facing the country today.” It speaks to concerns that academics have focused on for a long time—attitude formation, prejudice, national identity, diversity—but it also speaks to concerns that provoke strong emotions among the rest of the American population.

The United States already has an incentive structure that promotes the learning of English, yet many people feel that this incentive structure is no longer working. As the country becomes even more diverse, examining whether they are right or wrong and what the implications are becomes more important. This study is about language policy in particular, but it is fundamentally linked to broader issues that deal with how the government of a democratic society addresses the presence of multiple ethnic and language groups. These dilemmas are not new, but they are increasingly prominent. Although the United States has been fortunate relative to most other countries in its ability to deal with ethnic and linguistic diversity, investigating the role of identity politics in the causes and consequences of language debates is imperative.

LANGUAGE POLICY IN THE UNITED STATES

Before delving into theories of opinion formation or the specific conceptions of American national identity and their power to shape how people interpret language policy debates, it is first necessary to have a basic knowledge of the current state of language policy in the United States. The following brief history of language politics in American society is not meant to be an authoritative account of the development of language laws in the United States. Rather, this review is meant to provide context to the debates explored throughout my analysis.⁴

LANGUAGE CONFLICT AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

According to the *1997 Political Handbook of the World*, the United States is one of 8 countries (out of 191 entries) that do not have an official language.⁵ Many Americans are surprised when they are told that English is not the official language of the country. The questions that usually follow are valid ones: Why not? Why did the Framers not include a language provision when they wrote the Constitution? Why has one not been added since? English has without a doubt been the dominant language of public discourse in America since

⁴ See Baron (1990), Schmidt (2000), and Schmid (2001) for more detailed accounts of language policy debates and court decisions.

⁵ The other seven countries are Great Britain, Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Pakistan, Costa Rica, and Bosnia-Herzegovina (Banks et al. 1997).

the establishment of the colonies. This dominance has been unchallenged for so long that many people assume that the English language has official status.

Two arguments have been offered to explain why the founders did not make English the official language when they wrote the Constitution. The first posits that the founding fathers did not think language was or would be an issue. It is argued that they felt that all men of importance (that is, white Anglo-Saxon Protestants) spoke English and that English would eventually spread to become the only language of the land (King 1997; Schmid 2001). Those men who were considered citizens at the founding were ethnically homogeneous, and the cultural and ethnic homogeneity of the American people in future generations was assumed (Gleason 1980). As John Jay (Hamilton, Madison, and Jay 1961 [1787–1788]) famously wrote in *Federalist #2*: “With equal pleasure I have as often taken notice that Providence has been pleased to give this one connected country to one united people—a people descended from the same ancestors, speaking the same language, professing the same religion, attached to the same principles of government, very similar in their manners and customs. . . .” In short, they saw no reason to designate English as the official language when all people who were considered to be true Americans already spoke it.

The second argument asserts that language use was indeed an issue, but fears that a language provision would thwart the ability to form a union won the day and such a provision was left out. Many official and unofficial political documents of the time were printed in German and French in addition to English. The ability to spread information to the different ethnic groups living in the colonies was seen as essential in building support for and loyalty to the new nation (Piatt 1990). Being open to several languages both made the new nation more attractive to immigrants and allowed for the spread of democratic ideas (Heath 1992; Marshall 1986). Benjamin Rush, a member of the Continental Congress, for example, was against language regulations and felt that education, in any language, was crucial for the survival of a democratic government. Those Americans who did not speak English, he argued, should have opportunities for intellectual development and political involvement. Such opportunities were necessary if the new nation was going to endure. Others agreed with him and felt that mandating this cultural norm did not fit with the sentiments in the Declaration (Heath 1992).

Opposing Rush were John Adams and Noah Webster, both of whom supported the idea of a common language as a means to social and political progress. Webster even opposed regional accents because of their tendency to create divisions (Crawford 1992; Simpson 1986). He argued that multiple languages and dialects would only separate people and make them less willing and able to cooperate in a common political enterprise. At a time when union and independence were so tenuous, establishing a single public language was seen by some as necessary for the creation of the nation itself (Baron 1990). Adams

even proposed the establishment of a national academy for language but was unable to garner enough congressional support for its approval (Edwards 1985).

The first known congressional vote concerning language occurred in 1795. The first language bill of that year would have allowed Congress to print its laws both in German and in English. It was rejected, but debate continued and led to a second proposal that same year. This second bill required that all federal statutes be printed in English only. The bill passed and was signed by George Washington. The story behind these votes has been transformed over the years into the myth that the United States came within one vote of declaring German the official language (Baron 1990).

Over the next 150 years, the ethnic composition of the American population continued to evolve, and congressional debates about immigration policy became common. Debates about language, however, were largely confined to the states and localities. The federal government did not return to the issue of language until the post–World War II era when immigration laws and trends entered their current phase.

Strict quotas on the number of immigrants allowed to enter the United States from different nations were in place for much of the twentieth century. In 1965, Congress passed the Immigration and Nationality Act amendments, which amended the McCarran-Walter Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952. The 1952 act eliminated racial barriers to naturalization but left immigration quotas in place. The 1965 amendments finally dropped the country-specific quotas and shifted the focus toward family reunification (Mills 1994; Edmonston and Passel 1994). Since then, the overall number of immigrants legally entering the country each year has increased dramatically. In the 1960s, the United States saw an annual average of 332,000 immigrants entering the country. In the 1990s, the annual average was 991,000.⁶ Another important change in immigration trends is that the countries from which most immigrants arrive have shifted away from Europe and toward Asia and Latin America. According to the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), immigration from Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean has come to account for over 70 percent of all legal immigration to the United States, whereas in the 1950s and early 1960s, it accounted for only 47 percent.⁷

⁶ In recent years, the overall number of legal immigrants admitted per year has declined somewhat. The INS attributes this decrease to a substantial rise in the number of pending “adjustment of status applications.” Applying for an adjustment of status is the process through which “aliens” living in the United States attempt to get legal permanent residence. The INS estimates that the mid-1990s would have seen between 350,000 and 450,000 more legal immigrants had the pending applications been processed. The INS also estimates that the 1990s saw about 275,000 undocumented immigrants entering the country per year (U.S. Department of Justice 1999). *Note:* As of March 1, 2003, the INS was replaced by the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services (BCIS) and is now under the jurisdiction of the Department of Homeland Security.

⁷ U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service 1999.

This major—and rather rapid—change in the demographic makeup of people living in the United States, combined with an added boost from the civil rights movement, led Congress to pass two pieces of legislation that required political and social institutions to be more responsive to the needs of language minorities. The first language provision passed in this era was the 1968 Bilingual Education Act, which provided funding for bilingual education programs across the country. It set broad guidelines for programs to be eligible for funds but stopped short of prescribing how such programs should be implemented (Schmid 2001). In 1974, the Supreme Court ruled in *Lau v. Nichols* that schools that did not provide the opportunity for non-English-speaking students to “participate meaningfully” in the classroom were violating the 1964 Civil Rights Act, and that the failure to meet the educational needs of these students is discrimination based on national origin. The burden was placed on state boards of education and local schools to develop programs that would meet those needs (Citrin 1990).

The second piece of legislation came in 1975 when language provisions were added to the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (VRA). These amendments required election officials to provide bilingual voting assistance in communities where 5 percent or more of the citizens speak a language that is not English (Thernstrom 1980). In 1992, these provisions were extended for another fifteen years and were amended to require bilingual assistance in communities where at least ten thousand citizens in a jurisdiction speak a language that is not English even if they do not constitute 5 percent of the jurisdiction’s population. This and other provisions of the VRA come up for reauthorization in 2007.

The passage of these laws has not allowed supporters to rest on their laurels. Instead, they have faced continual challenges since the 1980s from policy makers, organizations, and citizens who favor more restrictive policies. In 1981, Senator S. I. Hayakawa (R-CA) introduced a bill to amend the Constitution to declare English the official language of the United States, and similar bills for either amendments or statutes have appeared in every Congress since then. These bills have often died in committee, but in 1996, the Bill Emerson English Language Empowerment Act passed in the House of Representatives by a 259–169 vote. It died in the Senate and has consistently been reintroduced (Ricento 1998). If the act had become law, it would have declared English the official language of the U.S. government, required that all “representatives” of the federal government conduct business in English, required all naturalization ceremonies to be conducted in English, and repealed the bilingual voting requirements of the VRA. It also curiously stated that “no person shall be denied services, assistance, or facilities, directly or indirectly provided by the Federal Government solely because the person communicates in English.”⁸

⁸ See <http://thomas.loc.gov> for the full text of the bill.

Two official-English bills have been introduced in the House of Representatives of the current Congress (108th), and both have been sent to committee. One, the National Language Act of 2003 (H.R. 931), states: “Unless specifically stated in applicable law, no person has a right, entitlement, or claim to have the Government of the United States or any of its officials or representatives act, communicate, perform or provide services, or provide materials in any language other than English.”⁹ It would repeal the Bilingual Education Act, terminate the Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs (OBEMLA), require all naturalization ceremonies to be conducted in English, and repeal the bilingual voting requirements of the VRA. As of this writing, the bill has forty cosponsors. To date, such efforts to pass restrictive language laws have been unsuccessful at the federal level. Yet the efforts continue unabated. The states, however, have enjoyed much more success in this area.

LANGUAGE CONFLICT AT THE STATE LEVEL

The needs of language minorities have always been both met with and frustrated by state and local policies more so than with national ones. Many states used to allow public schooling in the languages of ethnic minorities and printed official state proceedings in multiple languages (Baron 1990). The first state to declare English the official language was Louisiana, and it did so in its 1812 constitution with the hope of securing its admission to the Union (Foote 1942).¹⁰ After Louisiana, there was little state-level activity until 1920, when Nebraska amended its constitution to declare English its official language. In a wave of anti-German paranoia, this period saw many states legislate that only English could be used in public schools. By 1923, thirty-four states had passed laws prohibiting public—and in some cases private—schools from using languages other than English (Marshall 1986). The Supreme Court ruled in *Meyer v. Nebraska* (1923) that such laws violated the due process clause and were unconstitutional. States still control the form and extent to which educational and other services are provided in other languages, but they do so largely under federal mandate.

Corresponding to the federal limits on immigration, state-level language policy activity waned during the middle part of the twentieth century and resurfaced in the 1980s. As of this writing, twenty-eight states have declared English the official state language. Of these twenty-eight declarations, twenty-three have been since 1980 and eleven have been since 1990.¹¹ Figure 1.1 displays a map of the United States highlighting all twenty-eight states that have

⁹ See <http://thomas.loc.gov> for the full text of the bill.

¹⁰ Some controversy exists over whether English is in fact the official language of Louisiana, with proponents of official-English interpreting early nineteenth-century documents one way and opponents interpreting them another. The interpretation I use was provided to me by a reference librarian at the Louisiana State Library who relayed a 1942 analysis via telephone.

¹¹ The following websites provide useful information about official-English legislation: English-First at www.englishfirst.org/efstates.htm; U.S. English, Inc. at www.us-english.org/inc/official/states.asp; and James Crawford at <http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/jwcrawford/langleg>

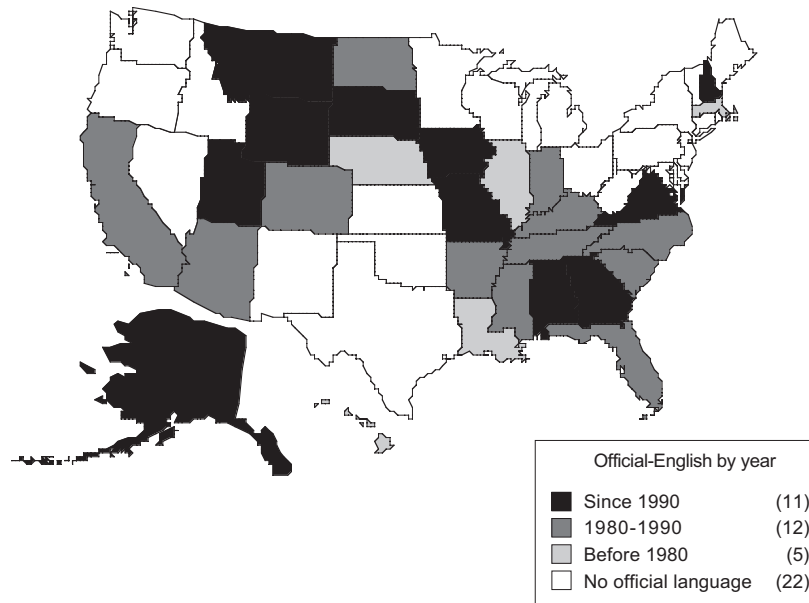


Fig. 1.1 States that have made English official.

declared English official.¹² Most states with English as the official language are clustered in the South and in the plains with a few outliers in the Northeast and the West. At least fifteen of the remaining twenty-two states have debated making English official over the past decade,¹³ leaving—at most—only seven states that have not publicly considered official-English legislation in recent

.htm#stateleg. Note that the state of Hawaii has declared both English and Native Hawaiian to be official state languages. Also note that Massachusetts' official-English declaration came about through a state supreme court ruling in 1975 (*Commonwealth v. Olivio*) rather than through explicit legislative activity. The commonwealth has since attempted to make English official through statutory as well as case law. As with Louisiana, some controversy exists over whether the English language has official status in the state, with U.S. English maintaining it does (telephone conversation with George Capacinsky, the organization's government director and director of technology, Jan. 24, 2001) and James Crawford, former Washington editor of *Education Week* and independent writer and lecturer on language policy, maintaining that it does not (e-mail exchange, Jan. 25, 2001). In the absence of concrete guidance over classification, I decided to include both Massachusetts and Louisiana among the states that have official-English laws, and I welcome more arguments and evidence in either direction.

¹² Arizona's official-English law was declared unconstitutional in 1999 (Greenhouse 1999) and Alaska's was declared unconstitutional in 2002. Supporters of Alaska's law have appealed to the Alaska Supreme Court; arguments were heard in June 2003 (Pemberton 2003). Thus, as of this writing, only twenty-six of the twenty-eight states (including HI, LA, and MA) effectively have English as the official state language.

¹³ CT, ID, KS, ME, MD, MN, NJ, NY, OH, OK, PA, RI, WA, WI, and WV have all recently debated making English official but have not (yet) passed any laws or constitutional amendments on this issue.

years.¹⁴ And as the stories from Madison County, Atlanta, Evergreen Park, and Englewood Cliffs illustrate, language use has continued to be a contentious issue on a more local level as well, causing a stir in cities and towns across the country.

PLAN OF THE BOOK

The book is organized such that each chapter builds upon the work of the preceding one, culminating with an analysis of focus group data that ties the arguments from previous chapters together. Chapter 2 makes the case for national identity as a symbolic predisposition that shapes preferences, and develops a set of expectations regarding this relationship in the area of language policy. For this task, I rely on the literature that explains how and why symbolic predispositions influence attitudes and behaviors. Next I evaluate the claims of empirical public opinion research that examines how abstract ideas affect preferences on issues related to ethnicity and immigration with regard to the expectations laid out in the first part of the chapter. I pay particular attention to the work of Jack Citrin and his colleagues, who emphasize the importance of two broad components of national identity: liberalism (believing that a set of liberal democratic norms are the basis for American national identity) and ethnoculturalism (believing that certain cultural characteristics, such as race or religion, determine who is and who is not an American). While these abstract notions of national identity clearly matter, I argue that focusing on these two conceptions of American identity provides only a limited understanding of the relationship between identity and opinion, for two reasons. First, it omits other widely cherished notions of American identity from the analysis, in particular civic republicanism and incorporationism. Second, it does not recognize the internal conflicts within each of the theoretical constructs, which can and do influence preferences in opposite directions.

In chapter 3, I define the liberal, civic republican, ethnocultural, and incorporationist conceptions of American identity and describe their historical and contemporary relevance in American society. I also look at research on the rhetoric and motivations of activists in language policy debates to examine the extent to which the conceptions of American identity in my model are employed and if so, how. This chapter brings together theory-based treatments of American identity with concrete accounts of policy battles; together, these literatures enhance the set of expectations regarding how ordinary Americans might invoke national norms and values when explaining their views on language issues.

In chapter 4, I use data from the 1996 GSS to demonstrate that the ways in

¹⁴ Those seven are DE, MI, NV, NM, OR, TX, and VT. Note, however, that the Texas legislature considered, and rejected, an official-English bill in the 1980s (Tatalovich 1995).

which notions of American identity influence opinions toward immigrants and immigration policy are more complex than a unidimensional construct can capture. I show that at least two distinct components of American identity can be constructed from the limited range of items that appear on the survey and that these components each have a powerful influence on attitudes. The two components represent an ascriptive or ethnocultural definition of being American (e.g., that true Americans were born in the United States) and a more fluid or “adoptable” definition (e.g., that true Americans have American citizenship). I find that the former makes people more likely to harbor anti-immigrant sentiments than the latter, but that an adherence to either conception makes a person more willing to impose immigration restrictions. I also find that the impact of ethnocultural views is mediated through anti-immigrant sentiments, while the impact of assimilationist views on policy preferences is more direct. While these two constructs are still too broad to fully appreciate the relationship between identity and opinions, they confirm the need to separate the different conceptions of American identity rather than join them together in a single “Americanism” scale. The findings in this chapter also demonstrate that not all support for restrictive policies is driven by anti-immigrant sentiments, but rather that some support derives from other, less exclusive, ideas about national identity.

In chapter 5, I turn to the content analysis of the fourteen focus groups that I conducted in New Jersey in 1998. Before analyzing how conceptions of identity shape attitudes, I first need to confirm the appropriateness of the constructs being used. Thus, the goal of this chapter is to examine the extent to which my model of American identity accurately reflects how citizens think about and discuss what being an American means. I find that describing American identity in terms of Smith’s model provides a useful, though incomplete, framework for analyzing opinions about American national identity. His tripartite setup describes ideal types that are not always neatly delineated at the individual level. People not only adhere to different aspects of each, but also often simultaneously express sentiments derived from each one. I also find frequent criticism of the ethnocultural tendencies of American political culture. This criticism, combined with frequently expressed descriptions of American society as one in which people maintain and celebrate their ethnic differences, suggests that a fourth tradition should be added to Smith’s trilogy, one that grows out of America’s legacy of immigration. This incorporationist conception of American citizenship is indeed quite prevalent among the participants in my study.

Chapter 6 uses the focus group discussions to show how people justify attitudes on official-English laws and proposals for English-only ballots with the symbolic conceptions of American identity. I find that the four conceptions of national identity provide a common means of discourse for talking about language conflicts and ethnic change, but that none of them is consistently asso-

ciated with either support for or opposition to these policies. Liberal discourse, for example, is used to justify support for making English the official language when people emphasize the belief that a command of English is essential for economic self-sufficiency and success and when they value the distinction between private and public spheres of life. On the other hand, liberal opposition to this policy focuses on civil rights and freedom of expression. In another example, the civic republican conception of national identity leads to support for restrictive language policies when people think the United States is too “balkanized” and needs a common language to help prevent further “balkanization.” It also promotes official-English laws when people want to protect the quality of political participation. Participants in the study argue that allowing non-English speakers to be involved in the project of self-governance violates the sacred civic republican image of citizens making informed choices to promote the public good. On the other hand, civic republican concerns lead to opposition to restrictive policies when people value participation—both in terms of quality and *quantity*—and fear that the policies will exclude language minorities from being able to take part. Similar patterns exist regarding ethnoculturalism and incorporationism as well.

Chapter 7 continues my analysis of the relationship between identity and policy preferences by showing how the combination of different conceptions of American identity (conceptual hybridization) shapes support for, and opposition to, these language policies. I also show that the interplay between identity and opinion will vary from issue to issue. It is not surprising that this might be true across issue domains (e.g., immigration vs. school vouchers), but I find that it is also true within a single issue domain (e.g., declaring English the official language vs. printing election ballots only in English vs. bilingual education). The degree of abstraction, the number of policy alternatives, and the clarity of policy options all affect which aspects of identity will matter and whether identity will matter at all. For example, symbols of national identity are more likely to be invoked when the issue at hand is itself abstract and has few policy alternatives, as in the case of declaring English the official language, and less likely when the issue is more complex, as in the case of bilingual education. Even though both issues concern the incorporation of language minorities into the polity, concerns about identity drive preferences on the former more so than on the latter.

I conclude the book with chapter 8, in which I review my arguments, summarize my main findings and discuss their implications, and suggest avenues for future research. When all is said and done, I show that the idea of national identity is an extremely important component of debates about language and ethnicity. People on both sides of the debate, those who support official-English laws and those who oppose them, have very complex images of what being American means. These images are often learned early in life, they are deeply held, and they are also seen to be at risk. On both sides, people fear that

many political and cultural norms will be violated if the “wrong” side of the debate prevails.

Above all, I show that civic republicanism, a doctrine of active and responsible citizenship that emphasizes the public good and political participation, is seen as a central aspect of what it means to be an American and plays a large role in how people justify their views on restrictive language policies. That civic republicanism is both cherished by Americans and influential in shaping their preferences, however, does not mean that there is consensus on the language issue. Both supporters and opponents of official-English legislation invoke civic republican ideals and feel that their preferred policy outcome will enable us to live up to them. My hope is that this complex pattern will be explored further in future research, and I offer a variety of theoretical and methodological suggestions in this regard.

The analysis in this book provides insights into how political symbols in general and images of American national identity in particular influence policy preferences. It introduces innovations that will spark debates about both core concepts and methodology. I expect, for example, that some readers will take issue with my articulation of the incorporationist conception of American identity, while others will be skeptical about conclusions drawn from focus groups. Yet these innovations break us out of existing constraints and are necessary for achieving a richer comprehension of the various dynamics that guide opinion formation on salient ethnicity-related policies. Our understanding of the contours and substance of the ideals underlying views about how the state should respond to ethnic change is still evolving. It is my hope that this book will advance that understanding and that it will stimulate the kinds of conceptual and methodological arguments that are needed for this evolution to progress.

Debates about the language(s) in which interactions between citizens and government should be in the United States are on the rise and will most likely be an element of national and local political dialogue for quite some time, especially as the ethnic composition of the American polity continues to change. The Census Bureau projects that by 2020 the U.S. population will be 64 percent white non-Hispanic, 16 percent Hispanic, 13 percent African-American, and 6 percent Asian. By 2050, it will be roughly 53 percent white non-Hispanic, 25 percent Hispanic, 13 percent African-American, and 8 percent Asian.¹⁵ These projections underscore the growing importance of this issue and of understanding the political dynamics that drive these debates.

On one level, my analysis is about the relationship between identity and opinion, a relationship that warrants analysis across a variety of policy domains and should interest scholars of public opinion and political psychology.

¹⁵ Population projections can be obtained from the U.S. Census Bureau's website at www.census.gov.

On another level, it emphasizes a set of concerns that are specific to debates about language, immigration, and ethnicity. The challenge of simultaneously upholding liberal democratic norms, facilitating and encouraging political participation, and incorporating new members into the dominant society has always been, and will continue to be, an important feature of American politics. In studying the relationship between ethnic change and conceptions of American identity, I uncover the fears and desires that need to be addressed as lawmakers try to design policies that both promote the common good and protect the rights of all citizens.