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Democracy Online: Immigration Discourse over Time

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Democracy Online: Immigration Discourse over Time

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Science

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August 2011

ABSTRACT

Democracy Online: Immigration Discourse over Time

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The growth of internet communication has affected deliberative democracy by introducing new public spheres. One emerging public sphere is the discussion forum linked to online news sources. By analyzing 1,768 comments posted to a regional online news website, I discuss five key frameworks that commenters used to simplify the debate over immigration. I also find that extreme comments decreased in frequency over a two-year period while more moderate comments increased. In light of group polarization theory, this finding suggests that the forum is more like a single community with a fairly moderate average position to which people with differing opinions converge, rather than a divided community consisting of two distinct groups, each polarizing toward more extreme positions. The forum appears to have moderated itself in response to triggers of discourse change by means of temporary reframing of arguments. I develop a theoretical framework for understanding how group interactions produce self-regulatory behavior that can prevent polarized discourse.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks to all who have helped me in any way with this project, and particularly all who have spent time on my graduate committee, pushing me toward a finished product that I can feel proud of.

I am especially grateful to Charlie Morgan for funding a great deal of my project, and for allowing me to begin, not knowing what would come of it. I appreciate your willingness to let me take the lead, but I also recognize that I could not have finished without your guidance and direction. Thanks also to Ben Gibbs for having a clearer vision about the value of my work than I had and for sharing the "big picture" with me. Working with you on this paper made the finished product much more meaningful for me. Your advice was always helpful and I'm proud of the progress we made together.

Finally, I could not have accomplished any of this without the encouragement and support of my family. Thank you, Erin. You took more than your share of our responsibilities at home to allow me to finish, and I could never have done it without your patience, help, and encouragement. Calvin, thanks for giving me hugs and kisses when I needed them, and for reminding me that playing is just as important as working.

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INTRODUCTION

Online political debate is a crucial component for understanding social change. Change cannot happen without communication, and internet technologies allow more people to participate. Because deliberative democracy[1] is played out in new public spheres online (Habermas, 2006; Buchstein, 1997; Poster, 2001), public opinion about political issues forms differently now than in the pre-internet era. Though some fear that anonymous online discussion may become synonymous with polarization, acrimony, or intolerance of dissenting opinion (e.g., Bosker, 2011; Sunstein, 2002), I claim that some online communication can actually strengthen democracy and provide a positive, productive, and cooperative public sphere.

The decentralized nature of internet communication allows public opinion to arise from debate rather than from political, economic, and media elites (Habermas, 2002; Poster, 2001). Instant and inexpensive broadcasting by individuals and small organizations may change the structure of knowledge production in the public sphere. As the spread of information is now less restricted than in the past, people in remote locations can engage in political dialogue[2]. The internet facilitated the spread of information during the tumult in the Middle East and North Africa during 2011 (Mackey, 2011a; Mackey, 2011b), inviting widespread foreign support for the protesters and influencing political discussions globally[3]. Furthermore, the anonymity offered by the internet can encourage people to share candid opinions online when social and political conventions prohibit them from doing so offline (e.g., Hacker, et al., 2006). Because

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[1] Deliberative democracy is defined in this paper as the kind of participatory democracy which includes productive discussion and consensus building among the citizens (Kim, 1999).
[2] To be sure, although some of the dialogue is functional for democratic systems, some of the dialogue is unproductive and does not result in important or immediate change.
[3] President Barack Obama mentioned internet communication and internet-based social networks in his speech about democracy in those regions on May 19, 2011 (Obama, 2011)

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social and political influence is in part determined by access to the means of knowledge production (Habermas, 2006) and because the use of the internet for political participation is increasing so rapidly (Bosker, 2011), online communication has become an important aspect of social change. Because internet communication is still new, its full impact on democracy cannot yet be determined, though there is some evidence that it promotes democracy by providing free space for discussion and debate (Dahlberg, 2007)[4].

I observed an online discussion forum centered on regional news regarding immigration. The website allowed readers to submit comments about each article. I identify the style and content of a sample of comments posted during a two year period. The outcomes of the debate, should they alter public opinion, could also alter existing structures of advantage and disadvantage via legal rights, economic well-being, and social status of millions of people[5]. In the United States, widespread interest in immigration, efforts to pass legislation at the national and state levels, and a perpetual lack of consensus about what to do about immigration make this an interesting and useful lens for studying discourse and social change. I identify various patterns of discussion, focusing on *framing*, *consensus*, and *polarization*.

In this paper, I answer two broad research questions relating to democratic practices and online dialogue about immigration. First, how does an online community build a collaborative definition of immigration? Second, to what extent does the community polarize, and does consensus emerge from continuing discussion? This examination of a dialogue in progress allows for a better understanding of the interrelationship of dialogue, public opinion, and

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[4] It should be noted that the quality of political debates online is not uniform, and some forms of communication may lend themselves better to democratic outcomes. Some online communication may even be destructive, but I proceed with my analysis on the assumption that some democratic good may come of increased communication.
[5] Including both immigrants and natives.

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polarization over time. I also discuss the need for a theory of how group processes affect polarization and self-monitoring in discourse.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are two general schools of thought about the impact of new technology on polarized discourse: those who believe that new technologies will foster collaboration and cooperation in politics (e.g., Habermas, 2006; Buchstein, 1997; Poster, 2001) and those who believe that new technologies create isolated communities in which dialogue leads to the adoption of increasingly extreme positions (e.g., Sunstein, 2001; Hacker, et al., 2006). While no solution to this paradox is universally accepted (e.g., Witschge, 2004), one key to understanding dialogue is the quality of the debates that occur within the public sphere (Dahlberg, 2001a). Some specific kinds of dialogue are more productive, in terms of deliberative democracy, than others (Wojcieszak & Mutz, 2009). For example, congressional committees with the task of producing legislation are more likely to come to a formal agreement than many other groups would be. The frequency and intensity of their meetings differ from other social settings. In addition, some topics lend themselves better to true deliberation and collaboration than others. Consider the case of same-sex marriage, where both major parties in the US tend to view the same issue in two fundamentally different ways, and have difficulty finding middle ground on which to compromise. Because many immigration policy suggestions do not coincide perfectly with either liberal or conservative political ideology in the United States (Lakoff & Ferguson, 2006), this may be one political issue on which people are still undecided. Thus, individual and public opinions may continue to develop through dialogue and makes assessing its evolution over time even more worthwhile.

The Value of the Internet for Democracy

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One potential positive effect of online political deliberation is a revival of deliberative democracy. Habermas (2002) argued that the rise of mass media caused a decline in participation in democracy because the necessary feedback between citizens and the political elite was severed by a one-way communication from the top-down – from the political elite, through the media, to the public. Herbert Blumer (1948) defined public opinion as a form of collective behavior, a functional and organic part of human communication. Public opinion, then, is not simply the aggregate of all individual opinions, but rather the outcome of dialogue that generates ideas and political action. Habermas (2002) argues that public opinion forms through dialogue in forums that are free from governance by any power structure, within the public sphere. Because public opinion is derived from discourse and interactions at the interpersonal level, it is in constant flux and may have multiple interpretations at once (Habermas, 2002; Hacker, et al., 2006). In healthy democracies, differences of opinion emerge within the public sphere, and public opinion forms as a response to problems through rational, deliberative debate (Witschge, 2004: 109; Eriksen & Weigård, 2003: 179). When opinion forms at the top and is later disseminated to the masses, the public loses considerable political influence, displaced by powerful media and economic interests.

As a result of internet communication media, some scholars believe that information is now shared more freely, reducing the information monopoly held by media corporations, and public opinion may now emerge more freely from the bottom up, through dialogue and discourse (Buchstein, 1997; Habermas, 2006; Poster, 2001). This suggests that the power structure of media and news may be shifting in ways that could affect the development of democracy. As access to knowledge production becomes less stratified, democratic practices such as deliberation in the public sphere, for example, will likely change as a result. When the creation

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of information and deliberation shifts from the elite political sphere to the public sphere, the public may have increased power to make political decisions.

People often use the internet to seek information that both confirms and contradicts their existing opinions and to discuss politics with others who disagree with them (see Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2010; Valentino et al., 2009; Vatrapu, Robertson & Dissanayake, 2008; Adamic & Glance, 2005; Hacker, et al., 2006; Dahlberg, 2007). Greater consensus and understanding may emerge when people are exposed to multiple viewpoints and discuss matters civilly with people who hold different opinions, even if only for a short time, strengthening a deliberative democracy (Dahlberg, 2001a; Habermas, 2006).

Questioning the Value of the Internet

Critics of this view argue two main counterpoints. First, the ability to build consensus may be complicated by psychosocial factors specific to the media used (see Witschge, 2004: 115-117). If consensus cannot be reached due to the impersonal and anonymous nature of the communication and the social norms of the various media used, the formation of a public opinion will be obstructed and the role of the people in democratic processes will be negligible compared to the power of the political elite, media and corporate interests (Buchstein, 1997; Dahlberg, 2001a). Disagreement in discourse is not necessarily the same as deliberation, and a lack of answers to problems could be harmful to a democratic system. One crucial element of the power of the people in a democracy is the ability to form a single "public opinion" that can be promoted with some force (Habermas, 2006). A unified public has more political influence than a fragmented public. Because face-to-face communication may be more persuasive than online communication, an inability to change individual opinions in an online setting could prevent the formation of a unified public opinion (Dahlberg, 2001a; Buchstein, 1997). If the internet

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becomes the only public space used for debating politics or attempting to resolve political conflicts, and if the internet makes true deliberation more difficult, democracy may become weakened rather than strengthened.

A second key counterpoint to the optimistic view of the internet is the argument that online political discussion is characterized by increased polarization and hostility in political communication. When using the internet to find political information, many people tend to seek out information that agrees with their preconceptions and to filter out information that would cause cognitive dissonance (see Witschge, 2004: 133-114; Buchstein, 1997; Sunstein, 2001; Valentino, et al., 2009; Hacker, et al., 2006). If people are selectively seeking political communication and discussion with others who already agree with them, polarization may increase as groups form with "high intra-group homogeneity and high inter-group heterogeneity" (Hacker, et al, 2006, 31; see also Dahlberg, 2007; Esteban & Ray, 1994).

Polarization

Group polarization theory suggests that the attitudes of discussion participants in homogeneous forums will shift in the direction of the dominant view after discussion (see Myers 2010: 284). To the extent that political debate online occurs within insulated, homogeneous groups, polarization toward more extreme views is likely to occur. When group polarization occurs, fewer opinions are acceptable within a group, and opinions become increasingly distant from opinions developed in other groups. Polarization may limit consensus-building by widening gaps between groups and by fostering abusive language between groups (see Sunstein, 2001; Buchstein, 1997; Dahlberg, 2007). Because discussion has been shown to amplify dominant group attitudes (Myers & Bishop, 1970), it is not unreasonable that online discussion might have some polarizing effect on immigration-related forums. However, it remains unclear

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whether news forums with representatives from various political perspectives more closely resemble a single heterogeneous forum or a few separate homogeneous forums in a shared space that talk past one another and become more extreme.

Although some early studies of online debate conclude that computer-mediated communication does not affect the group polarization process (e.g., Muhlberger, 2003; Taylor & MacDonald, 2002), others confidently declare that group discussion carried out using computer-mediated communication does tend to stimulate group polarization (Sia, Tan & Wei, 1999; Sia Tan & Wei, 2002; Sunstein 2007). The issue of group polarization in online discussion clearly has not been conclusively resolved, and polarization functions differently in forums with a greater variety of opinions than in more homogeneous forums (Sunstein 2002).

One crucial element of the polarization debate that has been too often ignored is the *quality* of the debate that occurs in the public sphere. Sunstein argues that heterogeneous forums may have a depolarizing effect, just as homogenous forums have a polarizing effect (Sunstein 2002: 180). Drawing heavily on Habermas's ideas about communicative action, deliberative democracy, and discourse ethics, Dahlberg (2001) proposed several other conditions that contribute to the quality of a deliberative public sphere: autonomy from state and economic power, exchange and critique of criticizable moral-practical validity claims, reflexivity, ideal role-taking, sincerity, and discursive inclusion and equality. These conditions can contribute to compromise, decision-making, and convergence of opinion. Contestable claims and tolerance toward opposing points of view are crucial for understanding how internet communication might contribute to polarization. Furthermore, these conditions are also predictive of productive debate offline and may have more to do with the issues discussed than with the media used. I argue that

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deliberative democracy may thrive when quality debate is encouraged through civil communication and tolerance of differences.

Dialogue Online and Offline

In 2007, nearly a quarter of all Americans had used the internet as either their primary or secondary source of news about the presidential election campaign (Pew Research Center, 2007b). In a 2010 survey, 75% of all American users of email (79% of all Americans) reported using the internet to retrieve news at least occasionally, and nearly half had used the internet to retrieve news sometime during the day before they were surveyed (Pew Research Center, 2010). Because information about political and social issues so often passes through news outlets, news websites are particularly important in my discussion of political public opinion. The opinions that individuals express in political discussions online are generally the same opinions they hold offline (see Hacker, et al., 2006), although the population that uses the internet for news consumption differs markedly from the general population, primarily by age (Pew Research Center, 2007a). Other differences have been observed between the population that uses the internet and the population that does not, in terms of race, gender, income, and education (Dahlberg, 2001b; Katz & Aspden, 1997; Bimber, 2000; Hoffman, Novak & Schlosser, 2001; Muhlberger, 2003; Pew Research Center, 2007b), and some scholars question whether online discussions are truly democratic if unequal access to the forum persists. However, online political dialogue "more equitably represents the less-educated and women than offline discussion", partially offsetting inequalities in internet use and other forms of political participation (Muhlberger, 2003:120, 129). Because the internet is still a new technology, inequalities are not unexpected and some evidence indicates that unequal access is beginning to

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vanish as the internet becomes more ubiquitous in American society (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2000:22; Weiser, 2000; Ono & Zavodny, 2003; Hoffman, Novak, & Schlosser, 2001).

Aside from issues of access, other factors may also affect how online discussions occur, relative to offline discussions, and create unique types of public spheres online. These factors include different communication norms, different discussion prompts, possible restrictions on what is said, and selection effects that alter the makeup of online communities (Hacker et al, 2006; Poster, 2001; Vatrapu, Robertson & Dissanayake, 2008; Wojcieszak & Mutz, 2009; Valentino, et al., 2009; Dahlberg, 2001a; Buchstein, 1997). Personal preferences are particularly useful in explaining why certain people use the internet and why they participate in online political debate while others avoid it (Dahlberg, 2001a:8). Similarly, selection effects may explain the types of forums people participate in, who they debate with, what they debate about, and in what manner.

Recent research by Wojcieszak and Mutz (2009) suggests that selection into different forums does in fact affect the degree of political homogeneity in the forum. People who participate in political discussions within hobby, trivia, or fan-based forums, for example, tend to do so in a relatively heterogeneous environment. Those who seek political discussion within a political, religious, or ethnic forum tend to do so with like-minded others (p. 46). While some news sources have obvious political biases, not all do. Discussions within news websites, as a result, may be either homogeneous or heterogeneous.

Another factor that may affect processes of group polarization in online discussion forums is selection into certain news forums. People who read the news online are less likely to

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seek out information about civic affairs[6] than to read news about sports, business, or entertainment (Tewksbury, 2003). This suggests that political discussions hosted by news websites may represent the views of a very specific population (those interested in political news), and a very different population than that which participates in other kinds of public discussions. Because more people read political news stories than comment on them, it is likely that the public opinion formed in online forums is developed by a relatively small group of citizens. However, this smaller group is likely to be more knowledgeable about political issues and may be more likely to participate in civic affairs offline (Best & Krueger, 2005; Katz, 1997; Weber, Loumakis, & Bergman, 2003).

While selection effects may seem to cast doubt on the legitimacy of the formation of public opinion in online forums, selection effects may actually strengthen the case for the study of public opinion formation through online dialogue. Most people read only those stories that particularly interest them (Tewksbury, 2003). Selection into discussion groups is likely also driven by personal preference, making a discussion forum a space that primarily includes people who have the most interest in the discussion. People who are more interested in solving a problem may contribute higher-quality comments to a discussion, increasing the effectiveness of a forum. Selection effects explain more about participation in political debate than just the choice of which online forum to participate in – it also helps to explain why some people participate in political debate at all. Participation in face-to-face debate is also determined by personal preference. Because most people feel more comfortable discussing politics behind a veil of anonymity, selection into participation in online political dialogue – even with others who

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[6] This includes local, national, and global civic affairs.

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disagree – should be easier to accomplish and perhaps more common than selection into offline dialogue. Thus, even if online discourse is limited to a particular group, further investigation of these interactions is valuable. In particular, given that people self-select into certain forums (both online and offline), more study is needed for a proper understanding of how polarization occurs in many different settings.

Why Immigration Matters

The role that communication technology plays in the formation of public opinion about a wide variety of issues has not received enough attention from social scientists. I focus on dialogue surrounding immigration policy, which may have a lasting impact on who counts as "American" and who does not, with important consequences for both groups. For most of the history of the United States, delivery of information and discussion about immigration has taken place primarily in a top-down fashion beginning with commentary from political and economic elites and funneling down to the masses (Zolberg, 2006). Communications, history, anthropology, and sociology have each taken great interest in media representations of disadvantaged groups (see VanDijk, 1990:10-11; Chavez, 2001; Cisneros, 2008; Flores, 2003; O'Brien, 2003; Santa Ana, 2008), and agree that mass media, including metaphorical and symbolic representations, has influenced policy outcomes. While some public deliberation was certainly involved, the question posed by this paper is: With the rise of internet political communication (and supposedly greater deliberation), how might public opinion be formed differently than in previous eras?

Debate over illegal immigration is a particularly useful case study because it offers a view of a public opinion that is still being formed on an issue that is still empirically contestable. Because this issue has not yet been resolved, either through political action or public discourse,

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and because it has no clear solutions along partisan lines (Lakoff & Ferguson, 2006), immigration is a unique opportunity to learn about how public opinion is formed in a diverse public sphere as dialogue continues to shape opinion. Other political questions such as gun control or abortion may be less affected by new technologies because partisan boundaries have already been drawn around those issues. Though both liberal and conservative pundits are staking claims about immigration and attempting to persuade like-minded others to agree, questions continue to emerge and dialogue continues to lead to new ideas.

Most scholars agree that political discourse at the grassroots level typically has little direct impact on policy outcomes, but can influence the political process in a variety of more indirect ways (Buchstein 1997; Habermas 2002). In addition, discourse about immigration matters in other ways beyond simply the formation of a public opinion. Discourse forms part of a context of immigrant reception that affects how immigrants become integrated into their new communities. For example, hostile discourse or actions may interfere with immigrants' full participation in democratic processes, leading to further marginalization within the political system (e.g., Exdell 2009; Wong 2007). Economic and social networks are also affected by discourse, because immigrants navigate complex new societies guided by verbal cues (Light 2006). Thus, verbal contexts impact material contexts. News coverage and conversations about Minuteman rallies or student demonstrations in favor of immigrant rights, for example, affect the way other people talk about immigrants in the future, regardless of the outcome of policy decisions (see Chavez 2001). Public discourse may not always drive social change, but it does shape debate around immigration-related social problems.

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The Discourse of Immigration

Discourse and dialogue about immigration have been important at regional and national levels for decades. News outlets, research institutions, and politicians continue to debate what immigration means for the United States and its people. Speech, symbols, interpretations, and metaphors have become an important part of the context into which immigrants arrive in new communities. These shape the experience of immigrants in much the same way as more concrete realities, such as existing social policies, contact with neighbors, and availability of employment or housing. In addition, these concrete realities are often *perceived* in disparate ways – good empirical data is lacking for many important questions related to immigration, and heated rhetoric often confuses reality and perceptions even when good data is available. As a result, much about immigration is defined through dialogue rather than reliance on facts. Indeed, perceived threats have been shown to be more predictive of anti-immigrant attitudes than actual threats (Chavez & Provine 2009). Perceptions influence the way people interpret and respond to social settings, and give shape to public opinion.

Goffman (1974) argued that human beings intuitively simplify complex social situations into "primary frameworks" in order to comprehend and respond to social stimuli. Even simple events can have various meanings depending on one's point of view or previous experience, and are automatically conceptualized in one single way that gives people a context in which to react. Political dialogue about immigration for the past decade has typically centered on a few key primary frameworks for understanding immigration. The economy, crime, culture, overpopulation, environmentalism, legal status, rule of law, and human rights all overlap in complicated ways, and each of these topics serves as a primary framework for simplifying arguments. A variety of opinions and attitudes is found within each of these frameworks and

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arguments commonly employ multiple frameworks in support of claims. These framings are an integral part of the dialogue surrounding immigration, and must be considered when examining the effects of dialogue on consensus-building and decision-making.

Research Questions

Because the internet is an integral part of the way people share information with one another, we cannot afford to ignore its role in producing public opinion. Recent dialogue about immigration has not led to consensus or major national reforms, and provides an excellent example of how an online discussion about an unresolved political problem can unfold. As the internet is still developing as a context for political discourse, social scientists have an underdeveloped understanding of the consequences of online debate. As a result, it is unclear whether online discussion produces increased polarization. To forward the literature on this important topic, I analyze immigration-related arguments made by internet users on a regional news website. I address two questions. First, how does an online community build a collaborative definition of immigration? Second, to what extent does the community polarize, and does consensus emerge from continuing discussion? I will show that polarized discourse did not, in fact, increase over time and that external events are critical triggers that reframe immigration discourse in important ways.

METHOD

A team of three researchers analyzed 1,768 comments posted to immigration-related news articles in the online forum of a regional news agency. By analyzing a forum with a specific geographic reach, we can infer slightly more about the population. As with many online communities, members are difficult or impossible to identify and membership changes hourly. By centering our focus on a particular region, we are able to define the population more narrowly

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as internet users who are interested in news events specific to this region. In addition, this research design allows us to discuss dialogue about both national and regional news events, adding an element to this study that is often difficult to capture in other kinds of online communities.

Comments posted online are a valuable resource for analyzing public discourse for four reasons. First, the format of the forum offers a high degree of anonymity, which allows people to voice opinions openly and without fear of personal consequences. Because face-to-face conversations about politics can inhibit honesty (such as among coworkers or relatives), openness becomes an important defining characteristic of online discourse. Anonymous forums foster the sharing of non-mainstream opinions (including vitriolic reactions) that may be inappropriate in other settings. Anonymity prevents the identification of individual forum users and makes analysis of individual attitudes and patterns of discourse impossible. However, this study is aimed at understanding the dialogue of entire communities.

Second, virtually any interested person may access online comments. The public is welcome to comment on many news forums, not just news subscribers, thus the forum may host a greater variety of opinions than sites hosted by more exclusive groups. Geographical boundaries and distances do not prevent people from participating, though people in remote locations may not find regional forums particularly interesting. Some forums require potential commenters to register and log in, but are nonetheless open to anyone who creates an account, typically free of charge. Indeed, only a few, if any, restrictions (such as age requirements or bans on offensive language) regularly apply to posting in online forums. When restrictions are in place, some of the content of an otherwise open discussion may be inaccessible to researchers using online comment boards and the number of comments removed by discussion moderators is

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unknown. Deseret News did not require users to log in prior to commenting, but did restrict the content of published comments.

Third, the archives of news agencies facilitate longitudinal studies of public discourse. Like many blogs and other websites, news archives sometimes remain active indefinitely and users' comments can be viewed years later. News-related forums are especially informative because comments are linked to specific articles and researchers can identify which events sparked important discussions and which topics were most salient at various points in time. Fourth, and finally, online comments are voluntarily added to a public dialogue. Comments are inherently public and available for use in research without violating the privacy of internet users. While many forms of content analysis require copyright permissions from publishers or informed consent, analysis of public domain material requires far fewer legal and ethical precautions.

Our data were collected through a systematic sampling of articles published online by Deseret News, headquartered in Salt Lake City, Utah. Our choice to draw our sample from this Utah newspaper between 2007 and 2009 was influenced by two key factors. First, the 2008 legislative session in Utah focused heavily on issues of immigration and resulted in a controversial new immigration law which attracted attention even months after it was signed[7]. The new law and debate over immigration affected discussions about state and national elections later that year. Because our sample includes comments from several months before the 2008 legislative session as well as several months after the 2008 general election, we can see a variety of patterns of discourse in many different contexts and can make some comparisons across time.

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[7] The only law I refer to in this paper is Utah Senate Bill 81 from the 2008 legislative session. The full text of the document can be found at http://le.utah.gov/~2008/bills/sbillenr/sb0081.pdf

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The increased interest in immigration generated in Utah during this time period makes Utah an interesting focal point for this study.

Second, Deseret News is one of the region's largest news corporations and is owned by the region's dominant religious organization, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS). Sampling from this newspaper helps to define an anonymous and hard-to-define population because we are able to make a somewhat tentative assumption that the people who comment have either some interest in events occurring within the state of Utah or some interest in the LDS Church. In many cases, these interests overlap a great deal. In addition, representatives of the LDS Church made a number of controversial public statements about the legislative session and the immigration law. These pro-immigrant comments affected the heavily anti-immigrant discourse within the Church's own newspaper. Also importantly, our sample covers the time when Deseret News first launched a readers' forum on their website, giving us unique insight into the development of discourses in a new forum.

Though there are two major newspapers in the Salt Lake City area, our choice to sample from only one reflects both expediency and theoretical considerations. The moderate to conservative political orientation of Deseret News matches the views of the majority of Utahns more closely than the more liberal Salt Lake Tribune, also headquartered in Salt Lake City. The Salt Lake Tribune also required users to log in before commenting, although it may be with a pseudonym, somewhat limiting the greater anonymity we found in Deseret News, which required no login and allowed users to create new pseudonyms for each comment, if desired. In addition, Deseret News provided complete access to readers' comments in an online database. The Salt Lake Tribune provides access to comments only while articles remain online and, after 60 days, all articles are archived and associated comments are permanently deleted.

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Sample

Sampling from Deseret News and excluding data from the Salt Lake Tribune provides the best possible sample of comments from Utah's online news sources, but also introduces three potential threats to generalizability, each of which is unavoidable. These limitations are similar to the limitations facing any study of this type of online comments. First, the readership of the two newspapers is different. While the Salt Lake Tribune draws primarily a regional readership, Deseret News draws both a nationwide audience among LDS Church members as well as a regional audience which includes both people who are and who are not members of the LDS Church. Differences in readership may affect the content and tone of both the articles published as well as the readers' comments[8]. This threat to generalizability exists anytime researchers have incomplete access to data from any source.

Second, the competitive "two-newspaper town" environment of Salt Lake City drives both newspapers to publish unique articles that the other does not have access to, thus, analyzing the content of only one newspaper will not account for every immigration-related event that occurred in Utah during the study period. Many of the more salient events are reported in both newspapers, but a few are covered in only one. Only 3-4% of newspaper subscribers have subscriptions to both newspapers (MediaOne, 2011), but it is not possible to assess how many people read news from both *online* sources. Given the absence of comments in the archives of the Salt Lake Tribune, we cannot assess the degree of similarity or difference between comments

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[8] I attempted to obtain subscription information from both Deseret News and the Salt Lake Tribune, but was denied access. I also attempted to obtain this information from the agency responsible for handling advertising for both newspapers, but was similarly denied access.

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from the two sources. Again, this limitation exists whenever data from one source are unavailable.

Third, Deseret News removes comments from the forum that are "found to be abusive, offensive, off-topic, misrepresentative, more than 200 words or containing URLs" (Deseret News, 2009). This limits freedom of speech in the forum, and censored comments are unavailable for analysis. Deseret News keeps no records of how many comments are removed from each thread or why individual comments are censored.[9] Some selection effects may be introduced in this way. However, the comments themselves indicate that many persistent commenters had comments accepted after revising their submissions.

Articles were retrieved using the news website's search function, searching for the keywords "migrant," "undocumented," "illegals," "illegal alien," and any variation of the root "immigra*." One researcher recorded the title and number of comments associated with each of the 990 articles that were both published between June 2007 and June 2009, inclusive, as well as relevant to human migration. Due to the enormity of the data set, we could not feasibly analyze every comment from every article[10]. We sampled approximately 2,000 comments in order to discuss with confidence many dimensions of the content as well as changes in the discourse over the two-year study period. Our sample size is comparable to other analyses of online comments

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[9] Richard D. Hall, Managing Editor of Deseret News responded to my requests for details about rejected comments:
"We do monitor comments — mostly to keep the conversation civil and on topic.
I'm quite sure that we have no idea of how many comments get posted and how many don't. And I wouldn't even venture any guess (or estimate) to that number.
Comments are never altered. They are either posted, or not posted, as is. To my knowledge we have not received any requests to see non-posted comments. I suspect that such requests would be denied — under the same logic that a newspaper must control its editing process."
Source: Personal e-mail communication with Richard D. Hall, September 24, 2009.
[10] I estimate that the full data set of 990 articles would have yielded at least 30,000 comments.

(e.g., Kindred & Mohammed 2006; Zavestoski, Shulman, & Schlosberg 2006; Millward 2006; Jimenez & Solis 2008).

To obtain an appropriate sample in size and characteristics, we used both random and non-random sampling techniques. The extremely abnormal distribution of data over the 25 months of the study (see Figures 1 and 2) required us to use non-random techniques to preserve some of the qualities we desired in our final data set. In an attempt to represent each month adequately and as many topics as possible, we decided to purposively select five articles from each month and then randomly select comments from those articles for the final analysis. This would ensure representation from each month but would also represent the quantity of comments recorded each month proportionately. By selecting the five most popular articles from each month and then randomly selecting an appropriate proportion of the comments we were able to analyze enough articles from each month, enough articles on a variety of topics, and enough articles with a widely varying number of comments to be able to answer our research questions.

Analyzing all the comments from the single most popular article from each month would have yielded a sufficient number of comments, but would also have introduced a substantive bias by eliminating 97.5% of the articles from our original data set, reducing the variety of topics represented. However, a simple random sample of either all the comments or all the articles (including all the comments from selected articles) would have oversampled articles with very few or no comments and would have eliminated too many articles that seem to have been relatively salient for the community.   For example, 106 articles were published during February of 2008 alone, approximately equal to the number of articles (104) published between July 2008 and December 2008, and the number of comments was likewise disproportionately high in

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February. Thus, a simple random sample would not adequately represent each month of the study period, limiting our ability to analyze changes in discourse over time.

[Figure 1 here]

[Figure 2 here]

Two months, June and July 2007, did not provide enough articles with comments to be able to analyze five (because comments were first permitted beginning in the summer of 2007 and were still quite rare), so we included all three of the comments posted during those two months. When we encountered two articles in a month with an equal number of comments and that tied for the fifth place (August 2007, January 2009 and March 2009) we included the first six articles in the analysis (rather than eliminate one) in order to both bring us closer to our ideal sample size and avoid artificially representing one article over another when readers gave equal attention to each in the forum. A slight oversampling of these three months did not affect the results of the analysis due to the typically small number of comments involved in such ties.

After this purposive sample of the five most salient articles from each month, totaling 121 articles, we divided the total number of comments in the purposive sample (N=7,060 comments) by our ideal sample size of 2,000 comments. We rounded the resulting quotient to 4, and thus determined to use every 4th comment in our analysis, yielding a final sample size of 1768 comments (including all three comments from June 2007 and July 2007). We ordered the articles chronologically, and coded beginning at the first comment on the earliest article published. In order to avoid coding the first comment of each article and to randomize the starting point within each set of comments, we ordered all the comments and treated them as a continuous string, considering the comment at the end of one article adjacent to the first comment in the next. For example, if we coded the last comment on one article, we eliminated

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the first three comments of the next article, and coded the fourth. This pattern was repeated until we reached the end of the comments.

[Table 1 here]

One set of codes describes the framings (content) of each comment. These codes were created as the researchers reviewed relevant literature and gained a deep familiarization of the data. Each researcher coded comments from several articles independently and discussed the results until reaching consensus on the meaning of each code. The codes were adjusted and redefined several times before beginning the final analysis and were designed to be mutually exclusive and exhaustive (Lofland, et al. 2006:145-147) to allow us to create a typology of the comments in our sample. The codes that describe Utah's current debate about immigration between 2007 and 2009 are Culture, Danger, Economy, Humanity, and Rights, each enveloping a variety of specific topics, but each representing a distinct pattern of discourse. Appendix A provides a sampling of comments representing each framing. Each code identifies dominant frameworks used in the comments.

Another set of codes documents the writers' general attitudes about immigrants or immigration. Nominal categories prevent a loss of nuance and complexity in the data that could not be captured with a more simplistic scale. An ordinal scale ranging from "very anti-immigrant" to "very pro-immigrant" is inappropriate for capturing the complexities of readers' attitudes. For example, such a scale cannot adequately deal with comments that are clearly pro-*legal*-immigration but anti-*illegal*-immigration. This distinction is especially important in a culture where some people who are opposed to illegal immigration view undocumented immigrants with contempt but others do not. In addition, many comments contrasted certain kinds of immigration (e.g. legal vs. illegal, skilled vs. unskilled, white vs. non-white, etc.) and

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some did not clearly reveal the authors' general attitudes about immigration. Defining objective boundaries with an ordinal scale is similarly difficult (e.g., the difference between somewhat pro-immigrant and very pro-immigrant), thus a set of clearly-defined nominal codes was necessary. The final scale was devised to be mutually exclusive and exhaustive (Lofland, et al. 2006:146-147) in order to avoid confusion and subjective judgments. Each of the categories is distinctly different from the others in some objective way. The codes are designed as follows:

Extreme Anti-Immigrant

Comments that are explicitly anti-immigrant or anti-immigration, or derogatory comments toward certain groups of immigrants (e.g., undocumented, specific nationalities, etc.)

Moderate Anti-Immigrant

Comments that are not explicitly anti-immigrant or anti-immigration but are generally unsupportive of immigrants or immigration, or comments that are pro-legal immigration and anti-illegal immigration that are derogatory toward illegal immigrants

Neutral

Neutral comments or comments in which attitudes are unclear from the given context

Moderate Pro-Immigrant

Comments that are not explicitly pro-immigrant or pro-immigration but are generally supportive of immigrants or immigration, or comments that are pro-legal immigration and anti-illegal immigration that are not derogatory toward illegal immigrants

Extreme Pro-Immigrant

Comments that explicitly state pro-immigrant or pro-immigration attitudes, or that

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support and/or defend immigrants, or comments that explicitly support continued or increased rates of undocumented immigration.

After reaching consensus on the definitions of each of the codes, two researchers independently coded some of the comments and compared their results to refine the coding scheme and definitions where necessary, and repeated this process until all researchers were in agreement. The two researchers then coded the remainder of the sampled comments independently and compared their results, reaching consensus when disagreements between the two data sets arose and using a third researcher to settle disputes when needed. After each comment was coded they were analyzed inductively in order to draw meaning and patterns from the sources themselves. The researchers made every effort to suspend their own judgments about the immigration debate as they analyzed the comments, in order to analyze the data as objectively as possible (Creswell, 2007:59-60, 235).

Replies to previous posts tended to drive many of the discussions in the sample, often quoted other comments, asked for references or clarification, and answered questions posed by others in the forum. Most comments were easily understood without referring to the referenced comments, although it was sometimes necessary to read previous comments for context.

FINDINGS

Figures 3 and 4 summarize patterns found in frameworks used (culture, danger, economy, humanity, rights) and attitudes expressed (pro-immigrant and anti-immigrant, each divided into two categories, extreme and moderate). Some frameworks are particularly important for building a collaborative definition of immigration and of immigrants while others play a more secondary role. Some arguments are associated with a particular attitude and a particular framing. For example, note the contrast between the dominance of anti-immigrant comments

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within the "danger" framework and the dominance of pro-immigrant comments in the "humanity" framework (Figure 3). These patterns give some insight into the relative frequencies of various distinct ways of framing the immigration debate. Immigration is defined by people expressing opposing viewpoints both within frameworks and across frameworks.

The five frameworks identified in this forum are associated with different kinds of arguments, and examples of each framework are given in Appendix A. Comments coded as Culture deal with the language, lifestyle, values, and attitudes of immigrants. Anti-immigrant culture comments often mentioned degradation of American culture or aspects of the "Third World" being introduced into the U.S. while pro-immigrant culture comments more often focused on ways that immigrants enhance American culture and support many traditional American values.

Comments coded as Danger refer to topics like drugs, crime, terrorism, and other kinds of violence. As shown in Figures 3 and 4, a majority of these comments carried anti-immigrant messages, and carried a greater proportion of extreme remarks than any other framework. Most of the few pro-immigrant danger comments simply refuted claims that immigrants endanger American communities.

[Figure 3 here]

[Figure 4 here]

Economy comments generally revolved around discussions of how immigration affects employment and wages, taxes, and strain on public resources. The topics of pro- and anti-immigrant comments were similar; interpretations of the same topics differed greatly.

Comments coded as Rights encompassed a variety of themes, although most involved debate about the rule of law. Pro- and anti-immigrant commenters interpreted the rule of law differently. Other themes include determining eligibility for access to public resources (distinct

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from the economic impact on those resources) and debating whether there is or should be a legal right to migrate.

For comments coded as Humanity, individuals discussed morality, severity and lenience, compassion, generosity, and the value of immigrants' lives. Most of the pro-immigrant comments used the Humanity framework, and most Humanity comments were pro-immigrant. Many humanity comments, both pro- and anti-immigrant, made reference to policy positions and statements by the LDS and Catholic Churches, which emphasized compassion and tolerance. Anti-immigrant comments tended to be refutations of claims that immigrants deserve mercy and compassion. Some argued for harsher penalties for immigration violations, including death and deprivation of basic necessities.

Figure 5 provides some evidence to answer the question of whether and to what degree the attitudes of the population of comment writers changed over the two-year span of the research. There is virtually no change in the attitudes of the group. While many individual readers may have experienced some change in opinion or attitude[11], roughly the same proportion of all the comments represents pro-immigrant comments across the course of the study and roughly the same proportion represents anti-immigrant comments across the course of the study. Each of the two groups of comments represented in Figure 5 (pro-immigrant comments and anti-immigrant comments) show a great deal of variation, indicating that the content of the articles published in particular months and other external factors probably affected the discourse in this forum. However, such variation tended to be short-term rather than long-term, and the change over time, on average, is very slight for both groups.

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[11] I do not attempt to assess such changes.

[Figure 5 here]

[Figure 6 here]

[Figure 7 here]

[Figure 8 here]

Over a two-year period, extreme dialogue (both pro- and anti-immigrant) declined and moderate/mainstream dialogue (both pro- and anti-immigrant) increased. Figure 6 demonstrates changes over time in both extreme and moderate comments for all comments in the sample. Figure 7 shows both extreme and moderate comments, but only within the narrower category of anti-immigrant comments. Figure 8 similarly shows changes in extreme and moderate comments, but only within pro-immigrant comments. In each of Figures 6, 7, and 8, the decrease in extreme comments over time is unrelated to the total number of articles published or the number of comments submitted[12]. Moderation became more common both during periods of heightened interest in immigration as well as during periods of relatively sparse discussion of immigration.

Figures 6, 7, and 8 indicate that, in this forum, between 2007 and 2009, the discourse did not become noticeably more polarized, though opinions did not converge to form a single moderate solution to the problems discussed. The increase in moderate comments reveals a trend toward more mainstream opinions as expressed in both anti-immigrant and pro-immigrant comments. The Deseret News forum is an example of high intra-group heterogeneity (see Figure 5), so a trend toward more extreme views would be counterintuitive, given the findings of

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[12] The correlation between extreme comments and the number of articles published is not statistically significant (p=0.814). The correlation between extreme comments and the number of comments submitted is not statistically significant (p=0.758).

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previous research. Figures 6, 7, and 8 indicate that although people still frequently disagree with one another after two years of debate, they disagree in somewhat more respectful language. That the trend toward moderation is seen most vividly among anti-immigrant comments indicates that continued dialogue about immigration and immigrants may have some positive consequences for immigrants.

The Process of Moderation

I now turn to a discussion of how forum participants acted collectively to moderate the discussions about immigration. I discuss in some detail two triggers of discourse change. These triggers include the economic downturn that approached a climax during the latter half of 2008 as well as religious commentary from prominent leaders throughout the study period. Using these two examples to illustrate a pattern seen in the data, I explain how forum participants acted individually to offset polarizing discourse they witnessed in the group. Some explanation is needed to contextualize the debate in this forum.

Economic impact on discussions about immigration. Because anti-immigrant rhetoric has traditionally accompanied past economic downturns (Flores, 2003), we expected that the largest recession in recent history would have had some impact on the way people framed the immigration debate. To test the hypothesis that, in a troubled economy, a greater proportion of the debate about immigration would consist of arguments framed in economic terms, we compared economic trends over time with the comments in our sample. The data seem to offer support for this hypothesis. Figure 9 shows that in the latter half of 2008 and the beginning of 2009, the economic framework did dominate a greater proportion of the comments than it did previous to the recession. Figure 10 shows that among comments framed in economic terms, the great majority of economic comments conveyed anti-immigrant messages throughout the course

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of the recession. This is the rationale for using the economic recession as a trigger of discourse change in the forum.

While this finding appears fairly straightforward, we also discovered something much less intuitive. While anti-immigrant messages dominated the economic framework and the economic framework dominated discussion about immigration, we also noticed that pro-immigrant economic arguments increased both as a proportion of all comments and as a proportion of pro-immigrant comments, on average, during the period between June 2008 and March 2009. The development of a major economic recession was associated with an increase in pro-immigrant economic debate. This relationship is seen clearly in Figures 10 and 11. By January 2009, half of all pro-immigrant comments were framed in economic terms.

[Figure 9 here]

[Figure 10 here]

[Figure 11 here]

That the economic recession is so closely related to pro-immigrant economic arguments comes as somewhat of a surprise. An increase in the economic framing among pro-immigrant comments is equivalent to a relative *decrease* in every other framing. Because there was no increase in the proportion of comments that were pro-immigrant during the recession (and indeed there was a substantial temporary decrease), the increase in economic pro-immigrant comments must come at the expense of pro-immigrant comments in other frameworks. It appears that when there was a formidable argument against immigration or against immigrants (and the bad economy provided plenty of ammunition for the anti-immigrant position), pro-immigrant commenters abandoned other frameworks in order to defend immigrants from a more strategic angle. In other words, when commenters sympathetic to immigrants perceived that anti-

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immigrant attacks would likely come framed as a debate about the economy, they defended immigrants using the economic framing as well.

This change in framing is an individual reaction to a trend observed in the group. The interaction between the group and the individual not only affects how arguments are framed, but also the balance of attitudes expressed within each framing. The slight increase in pro-immigrant economy comments during a period of economic stress helped to moderate the discussion. The recession's effect on the discourse of the forum was strong, but because of shifting frameworks, they were also quite temporary.

Religious impact on discussions about immigration. During the study period, several events in the community related to religion also influenced public debate about immigration. Statements from LDS, Catholic, and other religious leaders in the community who advocated a more compassionate and humane stance on immigration policy profoundly altered the discursive landscape of Utah between 2007 and 2009. Because religion is often associated with human rights movements as well as immigrant and refugee rights movements (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2006; Hondagneu-Sotelo, Gaudinez, Lara & Ortiz, 2004; Hagan & Ebaugh, 2003; Hagan, 2006) and because most Utahns claim affiliation with a religious organization[13], we expect that any well-publicized involvement from prominent religious leaders in the community would have some impact on the way people discuss immigration, both in terms of the framings they use as well as the attitudes they communicate about immigrants.

In addition to the state legislative session dealing with illegal immigration, the 2008 general election also influenced the debate over immigration. Mitt Romney's affiliation with the

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[13] Over 70% of Utahns are affiliated with either the LDS or the Catholic Church (The Association of Religious Data Archives, 2000).

LDS Church made his presidential candidacy a particularly salient political issue in Utah. In addition, about 80% of Utah's state legislators are LDS (Bernick, 2006; Julander, 1964)[14], so state elections, while not primarily "about" religion, certainly involved religion. Because such prominent church members frequently discuss political issues such as immigration, religion is injected into many otherwise secular discussions, including political debate. As a result, several of the articles we sampled from expose the intersection of religion and immigration policy. While each of the five frameworks occasionally involved the use of religious speech or symbols, the humanity framework tended to do so much more regularly and frequently. The relationship between humanity-oriented discussion and religious events is shown in figure 12.

Examining the humanity framework by looking at pro-immigrant comments and anti- immigrant comments separately, it is clear that anti-immigrant sentiment is more often expressed during times of religious commentary on the immigration debate (see Figures 13 and 14). Although nearly every news story about immigration and religion promoted a pro-immigrant message, the reaction in the forum to these stories is overwhelmingly anti-immigrant. Similar to pro-immigrant economic comments during the economic recession, anti-immigrant humanity comments increased in periods of prominent religious commentary and returned to lower levels afterward. In addition, humanity comments made up a greater proportion of all anti- immigrant comments during these periods, suggesting that many anti-immigrant commenters abandoned other framings.

[Figure 12 here]

[Figure 13 here]

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[14] All of Utah's national legislative representatives are also members of the LDS Church, as of the time of publication of this manuscript.

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[Figure 14 here]

These shifts in framing, like the changes seen during the economic recession, are indicative of self-moderating processes at work within the group. Individual actors seek to balance out the discussion by adding their argument, framed in a particular way. It is possible that this process of reframing as a means of balancing the arguments in the forum may be encouraged by the restricted length of approved comments in this forum. In forums where participants are free to write more lengthy arguments, such reframings may not be as central to the development of a moderate discourse because participants may discuss a variety of topics at length in a single comment. The ability to fully develop more than a single, brief, simple argument may limit the necessity of reframing.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results of this research indicate that forum participants are keenly aware of changes in the political and economic landscape and react swiftly to them. Short-term reframing was a central component of self-moderation in the forum. Triggers of discourse change had very strong temporary effects on the way forum participants discussed immigration, and the temporary reframing of arguments appears to have aided in keeping balance in the forum when it might otherwise have become a more polarized public space.

The temporary reframing of arguments acted as a check on the speech of other participants. When one group became more hostile toward immigrants, for example, others reacted by attempting to reign in that hostility by changing the content and tone of their own arguments. This process helped to maintain a balance in the forum. Because speech on the internet is inherently visible to others, forum participants are aware that their comments will be critiqued by others, and may restrain certain comments based on what they assume others will

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think of their remarks. This should not be surprising. As social scientists have long known, individual actions are governed, in part, by interactions at the larger group level (see Blau, 1960; Poggi, 2000:30-31). Group members likely use cues from others to determine what comments to post, indicating a complex relationship between peers and self. While polarization is certainly a potential consequence of communication in certain online settings, we must not ignore the regulatory processes within the group or among the individuals of which it is comprised. Self-monitoring occurs at both individual and group levels, and to ignore group influences on individual moderating actions is to ignore a critical component of communication in online settings.

There is some evidence that this online forum did not increase in polarization, though it did not necessarily come to a consensus about what to do about immigration. On the contrary, this discussion of immigration lasted over two years, and moderate comments prevailed in a context of diverse opinions. The theory of group polarization is partially supported only if we consider the forum as a single heterogeneous group rather than as two distinct groups within a single shared discursive space. Participants frequently responded directly to people with whom they disagreed, indicating that this was fundamentally one group with interactions occurring both across and within ideological perspectives.

There was no significant trend toward more extreme positions on either the pro-immigrant side of the debate or the anti-immigrant side. The trend toward more moderate comments was more clearly seen among the more anti-immigrant comments. However, the average attitude in the forum remained relatively unchanged after prolonged discussion rather than shifting in the direction of the dominant position (in this case, toward anti-immigrant discussion). The opinions expressed in the Deseret News forum were heterogeneous throughout

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the study period, supporting arguments that internet communication need not imply polarization, particularly in heterogeneous communities. Heterogeneity in a forum appears to lead to verbal or rhetorical moderation by means of temporarily reframing arguments supporting the weaker position, as defined by contextual triggers. Online forums of democratic debate may play a positive and moderating role in the formation of public opinion.

Because the quality of public online debates is always in flux, future research should attempt to determine how forums of various degrees of quality affect processes of moderation. Although the quality of debate in the Deseret News forum was not ideal for forming consensus[15], yet polarization did not develop, and extreme discourse decreased. I suggest that we might expect to see moderation in many different kinds of forums, and more research in this area is needed. The preservation of moderate forums may not occur the same way in every forum, and the starting attitudes of group members may influence how weaker positions are asserted.

There is no evidence of an attitude shift toward any consensus of opinion, signaling that true deliberation either did not occur or was ineffective in terms of producing a majority opinion. Moderation and deliberation are indeed two separate processes; forums that result in consensus and forums that do not may both preserve a relatively moderate tone while avoiding polarization. Further study of the complex relationship between agreement and polarization is much needed.

We do not yet have a comprehensive understanding of how online communication, in all its forms, influences public opinion or policy outcomes, though opportunities to study these

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[15] Prolonged contact with the same participants cannot be assessed. The brevity of the comments (200 word limit) made developing more complete arguments difficult. Mutual respect and tolerance of dissenting opinions were not always present in discussions. Many people made untestable claims or referenced information without providing citations. Though these are challenges to productive debate, they should not invalidate the study of online discourse. This forum is merely one example of an endless variety of online forums, and should serve as a first look at how interactions between individuals and the group can produce discourse change in an online setting.

important communications are abundant. Future research should aim to develop a more in-depth understanding of group polarization and deliberation in different kinds of forums. Forums that center on issues other than news may function differently or attract different participants, and little is known about how polarization may function in these settings. In addition, for a more complete understanding of how online communication affects group polarization, forums with different rules should be examined. For example, the constraints placed on a discussion (various levels of anonymity, etc.) may have some impact on the degree to which a forum maintains a moderate tone. Such comparisons are vital for understanding the importance and impact of online political debate in the public sphere.

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FIGURES

Figure 1. Number of Immigration-Related Articles Published in Deseret News (June 2007 - June 2009), by Month
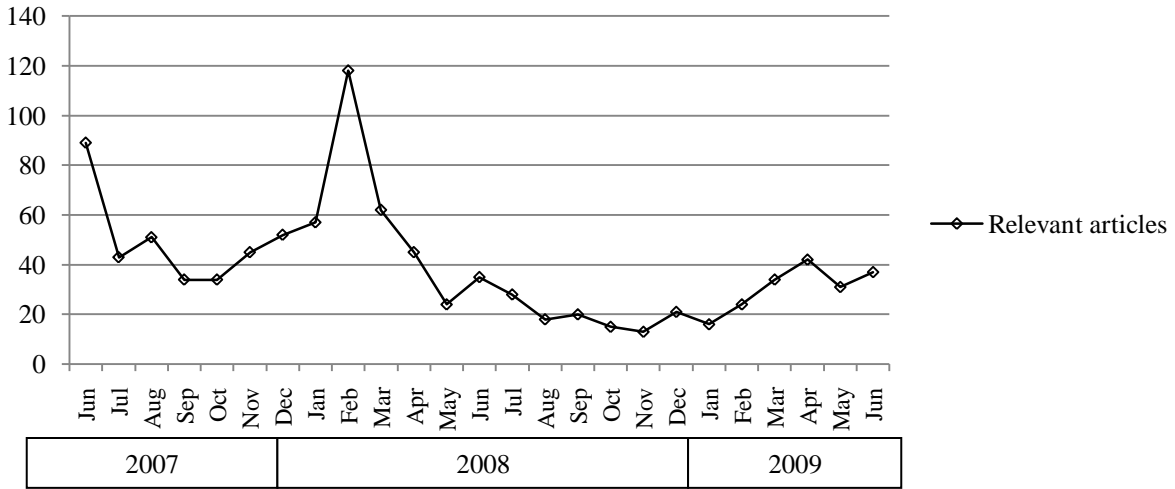

Figure 2. Number of Comments Posted to Sampled Articles in Deseret News, by Month
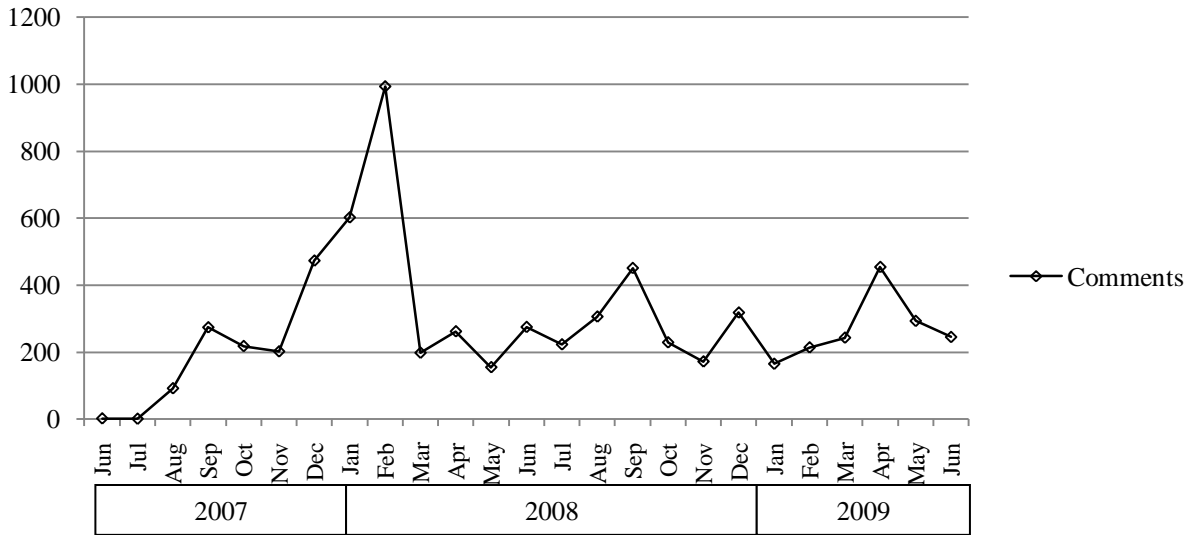

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Figure 3. Frameworks and Attitudes Expressed in Sampled Comments
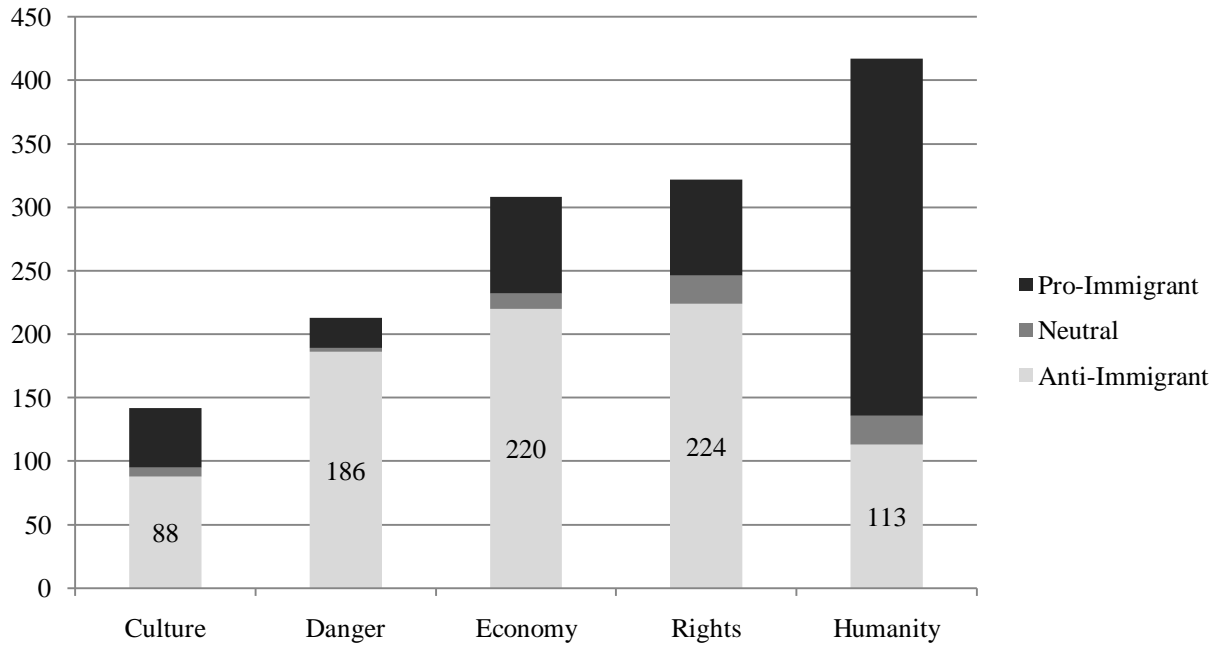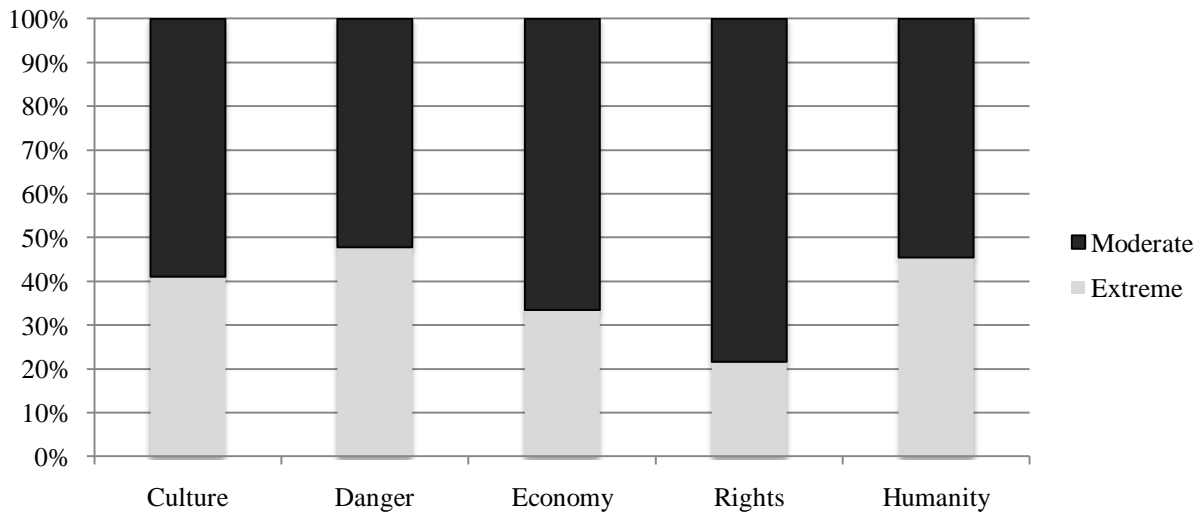

Figure 4. Extreme and Moderate Attitudes, by Framework

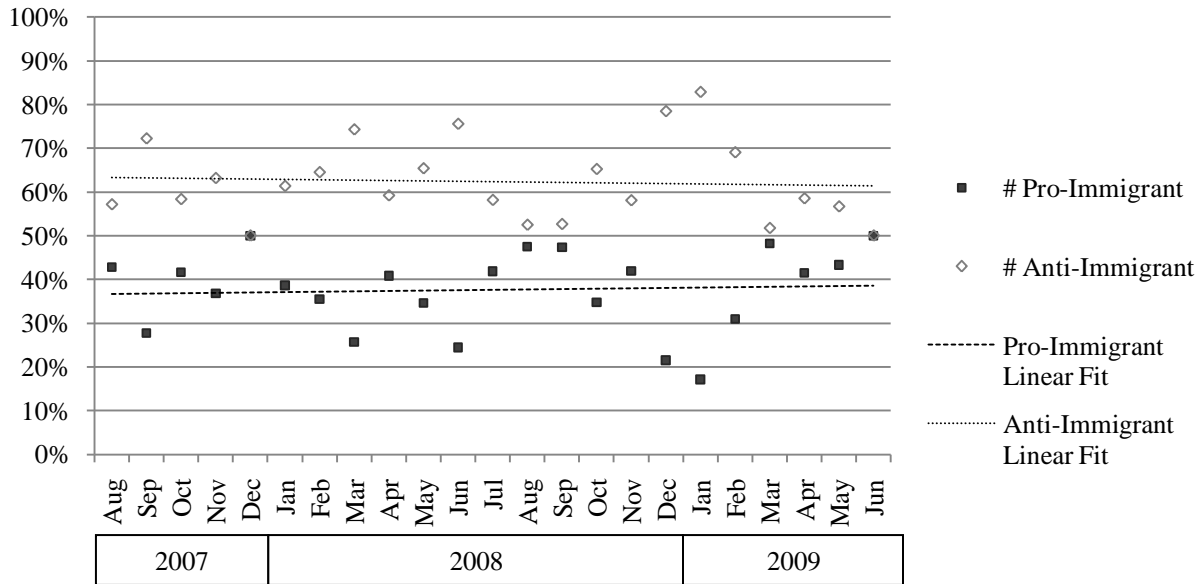Figure 5. Proportions of Pro-Immigrant and Anti-Immigrant Attitudes, by Month

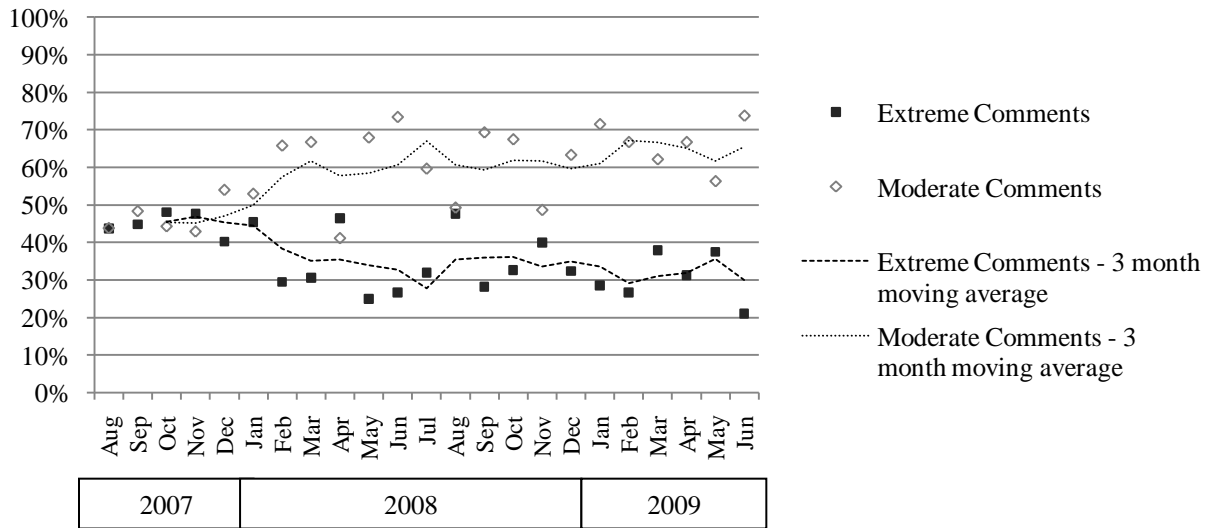Figure 6. Proportions of Extreme and Moderate Comments, by Month

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Figure 7. Proportions of Extreme and Moderate Anti-Immigrant Comments, by Month
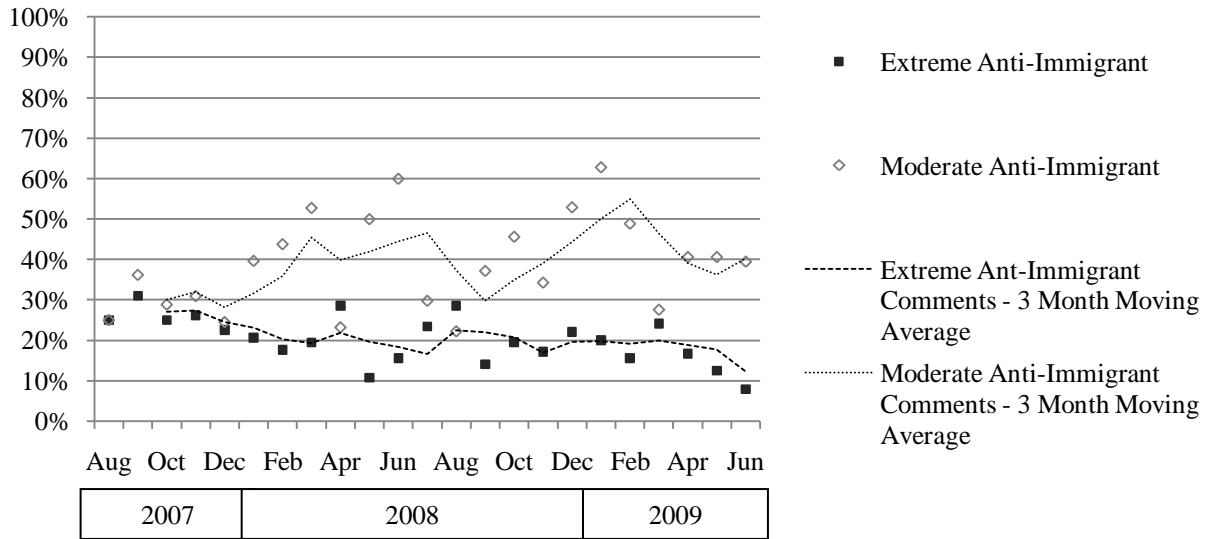

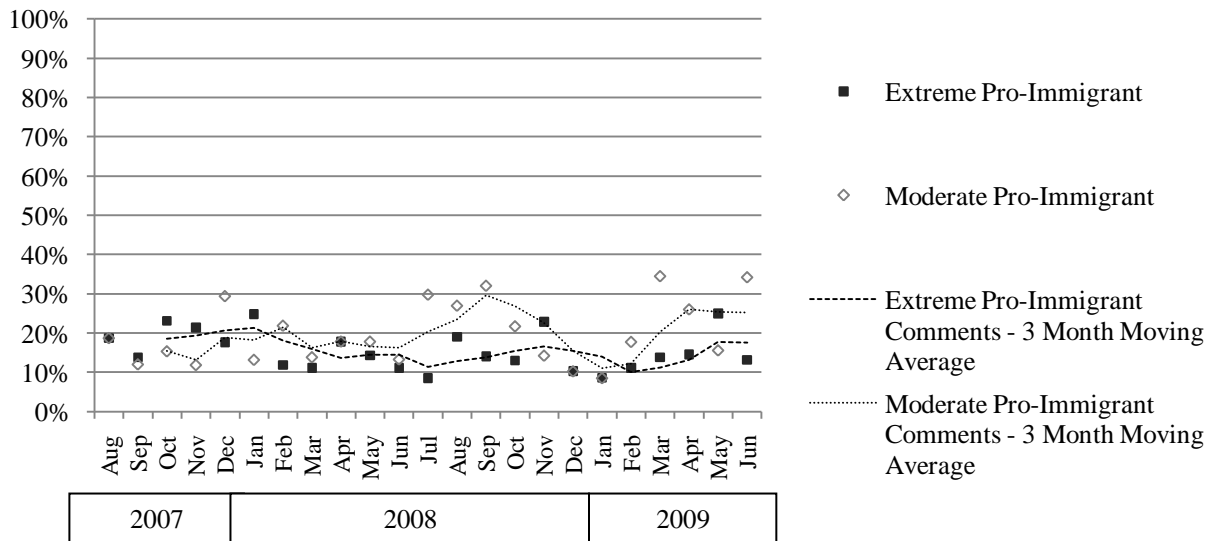Figure 8. Proportions of Extreme and Moderate Pro-Immigrant Comments, by Month
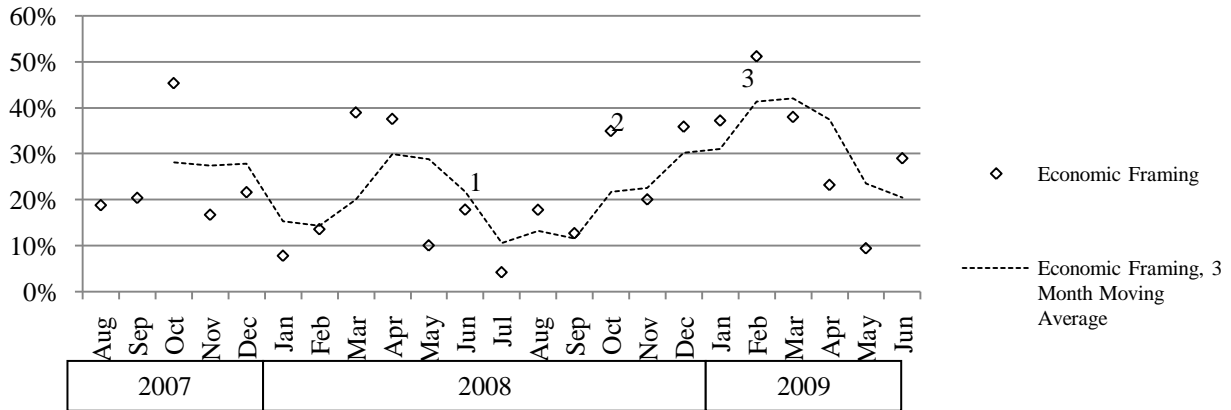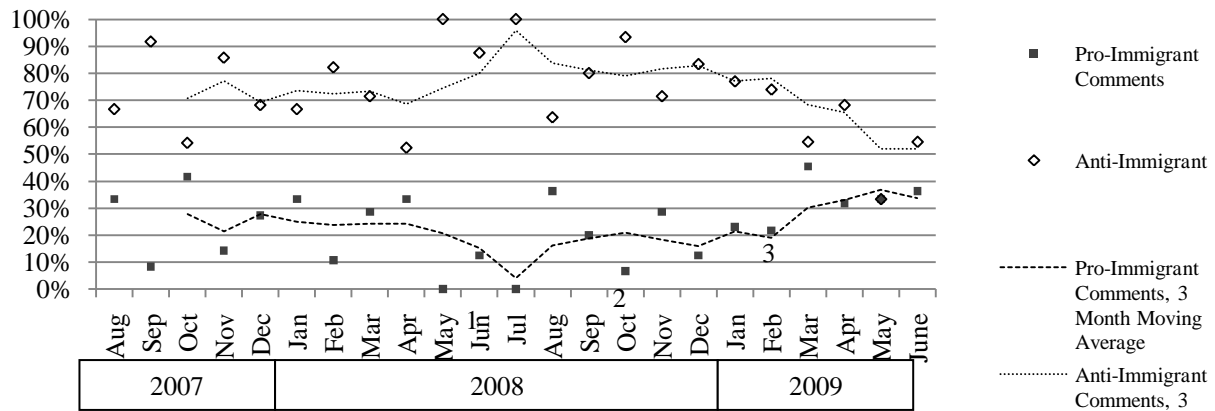

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Figure 9. Economic Framework as a Proportion of All Sampled Comments, by Month

Note: The points labeled 1, 2, and 3 represent the three most rapid declines in the Dow Jones Industrial stock index. They represent the progression of the economic downturn.

Figure 10. Proportions of Pro-Immigrant and Anti-Immigrant Comments within the Economy

Framework, by Month

Note: The points labeled 1, 2, and 3 represent the three most rapid declines in the Dow Jones Industrial stock index. They represent the progression of the economic downturn.

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Figure 11. Pro-Immigrant and Anti-Immigrant Economic Comments, as Proportions of All
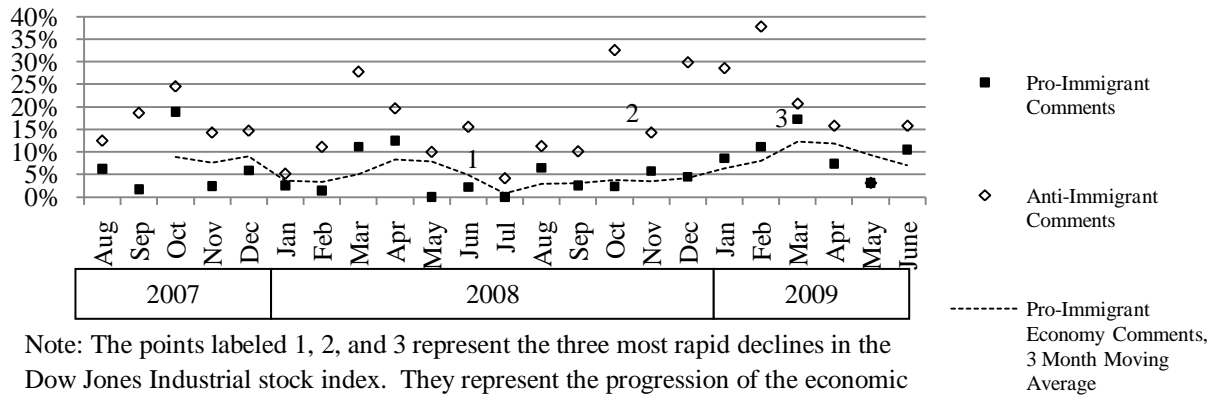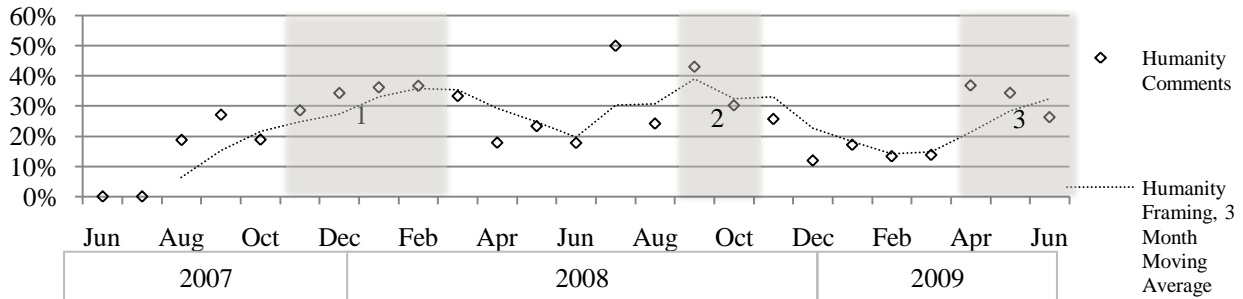
Sampled Comments, by Month

Note: The points labeled 1, 2, and 3 represent the three most rapid declines in the Dow Jones Industrial stock index. They represent the progression of the economic downturn.

Figure 12. Humanity Comments as a Proportion of All Sampled Comments, by Month

Note: Each month represents a monthly average of a randomly sampled 25% of all comments published on the articles included in the study
   - typically the 5 articles from each month receiving the most comments. There was a non-religious human interest story published in
   July 2008 that accounts for the increase in humanity comments. Because it is not related to a religious event in the community, we
   offer no discussion here. Religious events that may have influenced the use of the humanity framework:

1   Nov 2007 = Bishop Wester (Catholic) announces plans to tackle immigration issue in Utah
     Dec 2007 = Hispanic cleric (Evangelical) criticizes Romney
     Jan 2008 = LDS leaders address state legislature regarding SB81
     Feb 2008 = SB81 introduced, LDS position revisited in Deseret News

2   Sep 2008 = Bishop Wester (Catholic) denounces workplace raids
     Oct 2008 = Bishop Wester (Catholic) criticizes US immigration laws

3   Apr 2009 = Article published: "LDS Church Attracts Latinos", undocumented LDS missionary arrested
     May 2009 = Editorial on humane treatment of Latinos, aftermath of LDS missionary arrest
     June 2009 = Interfaith meeting in Salt Lake City on immigration (Unitarian, Episcopal, Catholic, others)

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Figure 13. Proportions of Pro-Immigrant and Anti-Immigrant Comments within the Humanity

Framework, by Month

Note: See note in Figure 12 for an explanation of the shaded portions of the timeline.
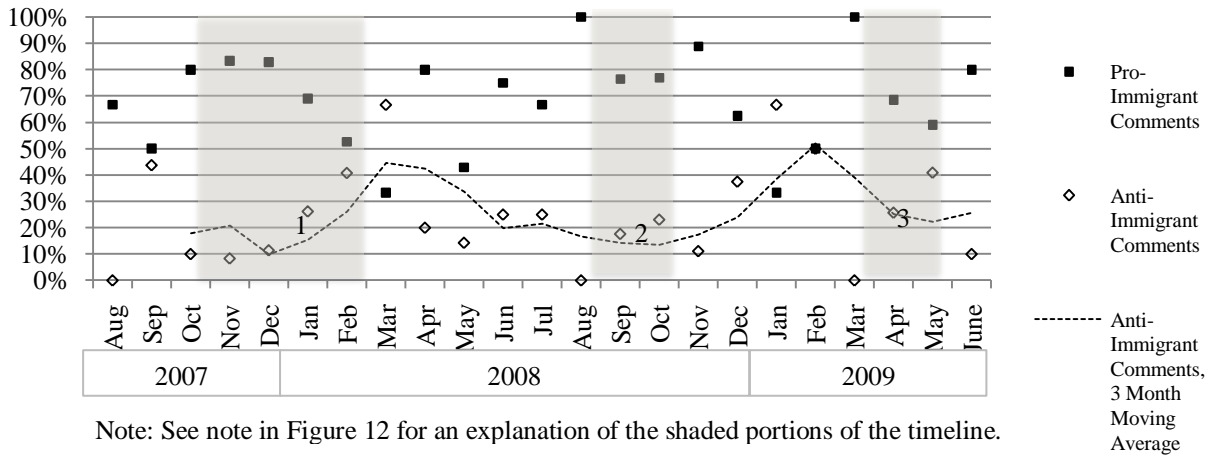
Figure 14. Anti-Immigrant Humanity Comments as a Proportion of All Anti-Immigrant

Comments, by Month

Note: See note in Figure 12 for an explanation of the shaded portions of the timeline.

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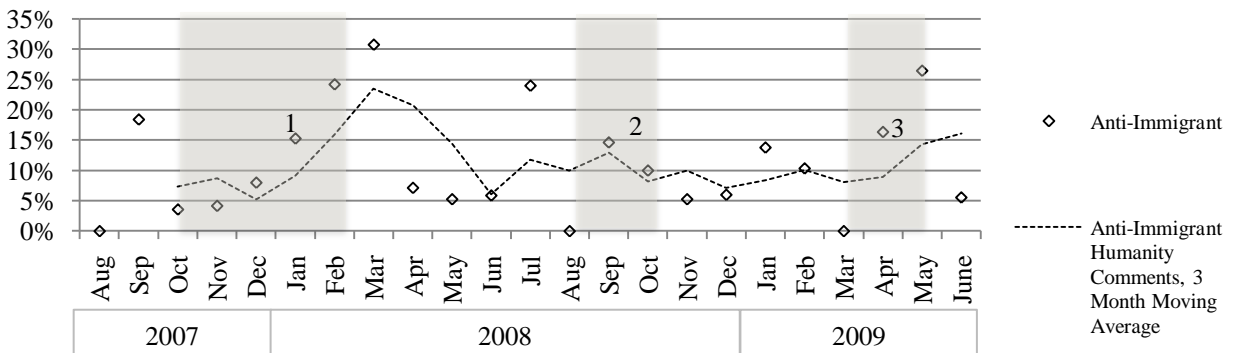
TABLE

Table 1. Description of Sample: Articles and Comments

Total Immigration-Related Articles	990
Articles Randomly Selected	121
Total Comments in Selected Articles	7060
Comments Randomly Selected	1768

EXAMPLE COMMENTS TO ILLUSTRATE THE CODING SCHEME

This appendix contains some of the data used for the analysis in this thesis. Comments posted to the Deseret News website contain a heading with a name or pseudonym, printed in bold font, followed by the time and date when the comment was posted. Spelling, grammar, and punctuation have been preserved. When comments refer to previous posts, authors often use the symbol, @, to specify to whom they are addressing their remark.

Pro-Immigrant Comments

Culture

Go Home??? | 2:37 p.m. April 5, 2008

"And now they are coming to our country in great numbers. Few of their children know English. They bring much of their own reading from their homeland and print newspapers in their own language. In some parts of our state, ads, street signs and even some legal documents are in their own language and allowed in courts.

Unless the stream of these people can be turned away from our country, they will soon outnumber us so that we will not be able to save our language or our government.

However, I am not in favor of keeping them out entirely, All that seems necessary is to distribute them more evenly among us and set up more schools that teach English. In this way, we will preserve the true heritage of our country."

Ben Fanklin 1751

It seems the last person on the submarine always wants to close the hatch.

A friend of mine came to this country illegally as a 5 year old boy, and now is a principal of a highschool in Southern California. Another received his PhD and is a Professor at UCLA.

The thugs should be dealt with, but we should not paint with such broad strokes.

Danger

message | 9:59 a.m. May 14, 2009

..many of you complain at the hispanics involved on drugs.. but you don't realize that the one that consume drugs are you.. if you really want to end drug traffic, and all the crime problems that come with that.. STOP USING DRUGS!! simple as that..

Immigrant | 9:30 a.m. May 15, 2009

I am a white female that is fed up with hearing all the 'they took our jobs' and 'they need to be here legally' comments. AMERICA is nothing but immigrants. None of us would be here if someone from our ancestry didn't migrate here. Most, if not all, came here illegally. I also believe that the majority of the Hispanics are only taking the jobs that no one else wants (the dirty, hard labor jobs). I am personally offended when I here comments like that from Migra man, MUST LEARN ENGLISH, and U.S.A. (all commented above). If you look in any prison the majority are white men. The drug users and abusers are white men. School shootings - white boys. Unibomber - white man. Oklahoma bombing - white man. Cult suicide/murder in Texas - white man. Charles Manson, Ted Brundy, Ed Gein, David Berkowitz (aka Son of Sam, John Gacy, Jeffrey Dahmer, and Gary Ridgway (aka The Green River Killer) seriel killers - ALL white men. I'm sorry, but I think I prefer the Hispanics!

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Economy

They Could Be Beneficial | 9:15 a.m. April 4, 2008

Mexican immigrants could be very beneficial to our economy, if they were legal.
America needs an influx of young, hard workers who still believe in having large
families. Mexicans even believe in saving. How many Americans can say that? They
would be a boon to the country if they came here legally and became citizens. What we
don't need is more of the current situation.

Militarize the border, deal compassionately with those already here and set up a workable
system to allow legal entry to the country. That would solve everything.

they earn it, its not charity | 10:33 p.m. Feb. 12, 2009

As long as they are here working, they are also contributing, so to educate their kids is
not an economic burden or charity.

They help business be profitable, so business can pay tax and they pay taxes too.

If you think education is expensive, try ignorance.

Rights

que lastima | 6:26 p.m. Nov. 24, 2008

Anchor baby laws, what the heck are you talking about? The US Constitution!Read it
nimrods! It would take an Amendment to the Constitution to change the fact that people
born on US soil are citizens and these citizens will grow up and contribute greatly to our
society. Special privleges my rear, the majority of immigrants work hard for little pay
only to have to listen to blowhards like so many of commentators on this thread and guys
like lou dobbs, jason chaffetz and "family values" bob lonsberry who I think know full

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well that their rhetoric fuels crimes like thes. Get used to a better, more just country or go north to hole up with your militia buddies and then we'll let the law deal scum like you.

bill | 9:55 a.m. June 27, 2009

The Hopi see us as illegal aliens. They have been waiting years for us to do the right thing: pack up and leave. I would say we all get legal with the Hopi then we might have some right to see others as illegal aliens.

Humanity

Ricko | 10:00 a.m. May 8, 2009

I'm no expert on immigration but I do know (first hand) the mind set of some Mexicans who are here in the country and look like undocumented workers. First, they are very grateful they can come here and work. They are farmers in Mexico and look forward yearly to going home. They are here working hard for American companies who are eager to have them. If they don't seem suficiently American it's because they are not planning to become citizens. They are on work visas which allows them to come here for 7 months to work for a specific company. They supplement this work by working weekends for people. They have been coming here for years and have good reputations as very hard workers and honesty. So, please don't generalze about Mexicans! They are remarkably like Americans - some good, some bad and some just in between.

happened to be born in america | 1:11 p.m. Jan. 19, 2008

I think if any of us were born in a country where we couldn't make enough money to support our family even with an education, couldn't trust the police or receive protection from them, but knew that across the border we could work hard and be safer with our

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families, I think we would probably jump the border too. It's easier to take it for granted just because you happen to be born a little further north. That's the human element. Certainly there has to be regulation, but these are still people whose motives are not so hard to understand as we pretend. Sure, there is some criminal element, but anyone who believes that those make up the majority is being purposefully ignorant to the facts. I think if you're standing in a picket line next to minutemen and members of the ku klux klan or skinheads then you should probably reexamine your stance on illegal immigration.

Angie | 10:12 a.m. Nov. 13, 2008

I am ashamed of Rep. Neil Hansen, D-Ogden to suggest killing people. And even more ashamed of the crowd applauding the idea. Securing our borders doesn't guarantee anything. Evil can be found in every city and country, no matter if people are native or immigrating. We do not know the hearts and intents of all Americans either! We need to build up homes and families to produce individuals that contribute positively to society. Not borders.

Anti-Immigrant Comments

Culture

Jack | 8:34 a.m. May 14, 2009

Utah used to be such a white and delightsome state and now all that is changing - hope it is for the better. We sure do not want to look like California or Newark in the future.

Mink | 7:58 a.m. May 14, 2009

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I for one are tired of going everywhere and seeing Spanish, hearing Spanish, and being forced to have to deal with it. This is America. If you want to LIVE here learn English and adopt our culture. Why do we have to adapt theirs. I'm tired of seeing immigration ralies of illegals demanding citizenship. It's not a right;it needs to be earned.We will be a third world country in fifty years. We aren't letting in the cream of the crop immigrants to our country and are paying for it!

Danger

Arizona Native | 11:13 a.m. Nov. 13, 2008

My son welded much of the border fence and his life was in danger EVERY DAY! They were shot at DAILY by illegal's. Some even charged him with knives in hand! Thousands enter daily and what's to prevent a terrorist from entering? You bleeding hearts might think twice when another 9-11 happens. Just last night it was announced on the evening news that Arizona is #1 in the nation for home invasions and KIDNAPPING! Kidnapping is a DAILY occurence here. All involved are the drug cartel and illegal aliens from Mexico! Just 1 1/2 miles from my home is what we call "Little Mexico" NO one drives down that road at night. Something has to be done to protect our borders! No room for bleeding hearts! This situation is critical.

Diseases | 3:35 p.m. Nov. 16, 2007

Evidence Pharisee.... Did you try to swim in Utah county this summer? Perhaps you noticed that most of the pools were closed due to a parasite spreading rapdily throughout the county? I wonder where that came from...?

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Maybe you followed the news this summer, when the government was tracking a man with a drug resistant strain of TB who had boarded an airplane and eventually ended up in Denver for treatment (it turned out he had a more mild case of the disease). However, a real carrier was identified as an undocumented male from Mexico who had crossed the border numerous times and had to be held in a hospital against his will because he refused to follow a treatment regimen.

Recently a poultry plant in Arkansas tested all of their workers after an employee was found with the same strain of TB. It turns out most of the workers were carrying the disease, including 100% of the foreign born ones (immigration status: illegal).

Think about it, a legal immigrant must pass a health check to prevent diseases from entering the country, illegals bypass all of those protections.

Anonymous | 3:46 p.m. April 8, 2008

THIS IS NOT IMMIGRATION, IT IS AN INVASION.Close the border and then discuss the future of the criminals.

Economy

More than crumbs | 6:49 a.m. Nov. 21, 2008

Illegals are eating more than just crumbs of our tables. They have moved into our house, their kids follow our kids to school, they lowered wages for American Workers-especially those without a college degree. They have filled our emergency rooms, use up social services for their anchor babies, and have lowered the quality of life for that house. Its more than crumbs off a table. There are 20 to 30 million here now, just wait until there are 100 million, and we'll all be lookign for crumbs to eat!

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Wow, I was wrong! | 8:58 a.m. April 4, 2008

Wow, I was wrong on this whole Mexican invasion thing. It is a good thing! This article told me so! They gave lots of facts to back it up, er, wait a minute, there were no facts! This is a propoganda piece from the Chamber of Commerce acting under direction of the Council on Foreign Relations acting under executive orders from the Bilderberger management council. Mr. Cannon, editor of this paper OK'd the release of this propoganda. This is insulting to what our eyes are telling us!!! The illegal immigration problem DOES NOT benefit the United States. I spent one Sunday afternoon in the emergency room at Primary Children's hospital. What an eye opener!!! Go there some sunday afternoon, talk to one of the nurses and have her explain who those people are! And imagine just what they might be costing you and I!

Yeah tell that | 8:55 a.m. April 6, 2008

to my son who is just getting into the job market. i busted my tail fighting for this country...then to have him competing against the illegals ...we might as move to mexico and sneak across the border as illegals as they get better treatment than we do!

Rights

Pets | 5:51 a.m. Dec. 16, 2008

How many pets are illegal, without a proper license and documentation? Not all pets are criminals, but they do require a license.

All Knowing | 11:30 a.m. Dec. 16, 2008

If you don't like "criminal" then how about "law breaker?"

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People who come into this country without permission and people who exceed highway speed limits are law breakers. And they should be brought to justice.

All Knowing | 4:00 p.m. Feb. 12, 2009

@They earned it | 2:56 p.m.:

>>>Q: Why are we even having an argument about denying education to people who are actually paying for it? Does anybody have a good answer to that?<<<

Yes, I have and answer. Illegal immigrants, it is said, take only those jobs Americans won't take... Like digging ditches and hoeing potatoes. Those jobs don't need an education to perform.

Humanity

shoot to kill | 1:40 p.m. April 12, 2008

word will get around in a hurry

jason | 8:05 a.m. Jan. 19, 2008

adding an 'element of humanity'? How about the church's teachings about honoring and sustaining the law? Enforcement first!

Love and inforcement | 12:43 p.m. Jan. 19, 2008

We can show human love at the same time we round the illegals up and shipem back. Ship back whole familys together. Bus fulls train fulls what ever it takes, but do it with love. Thats what I hear here.