# Public Libraries and Immigrants: Influences on the Degree of Welcomeness

Abstract

Studies of the actions of local public agencies towards immigrants show that while some engage in punitive actions, many others do not. Much of the research has focused on law enforcement actions towards immigrants, but many other public agencies frequently interact with these groups. Existing research has identified many determinants of punitive action, especially those of law enforcement, but these studies have not addressed why some agencies have developed *welcoming* policies and practices towards immigrants. Using nationwide surveys of public library systems, I demonstrate that many libraries actively engage with immigrants in their community to provide critical services and have *consciously* and *deliberately* developed policies and practices that are intended to develop positive relationships between the library and immigrants and to help immigrants integrate into the community. I present the concept of ‘welcomeness,’ develop a framework for measuring it, examine how widely libraries are welcoming (or unwelcoming) to immigrants, and identify the conditions that shape it. Libraries face conflicting political pressures that are often hostile to immigrants and professional norms favoring equal service to all in the community. The degree of welcomeness depends on the balance between these opposing forces.

Public Libraries and Immigrants: Influences on the Degree of Welcomeness

 Local agencies have adopted a wide range of policies and practices designed to welcome and integrate immigrants into the community. These efforts include punitive actions designed to encourage self-deportation of undocumented immigrants while others are designed to assist and help integrate immigrants into the community (Marrow 2009). Libraries have played an important role in immigrant integration in the United States since the early 1900s by providing free access to a wide range of information and services (Jones 1999; Jones 2010; Luevano-Molina 2001; USCIS 2005). This commitment to assisting immigrants continues today. Immigrants heavily use public libraries for all manner of materials and services, and libraries in communities with large or new immigrant populations often face a demand for services and materials that exceed their resources (USCIS 2005).

Immigration is a controversial issue with concerns focusing on border enforcement and perceived lack immigrant assimilation into society. English language acquisition is a key concern for the public and elected officials. Many believe that immigrants, especially undocumented immigrants from Mexico, do not learn English (Buchanan 2002, Buchanan 2006; Chavez 2008; Hanson 2007). Some communities have policies designed to make the city more accessible to those who are low English proficient, while others have proposed or passed English-only policies in order to restrict access or encourage immigrants to leave (Holeywell 2012). Public libraries have historically played an important role in assisting immigrants integrate into society, including helping them learn English, and they continue to do so (Burke 2008; Jones 1999; Jones 2010; Luevano-Molina 2001; Task Force on New Immigrants 2008).

Public libraries are “service” agencies heavily influenced by professional norms favoring openness to all people regardless of status (Marrow 2009). Still, libraries’ policies and practices towards immigrants vary substantially. Libraries are subject to political and community pressures. While some librarians argue that immigrants are best served when they are provided with materials that help them learn English, others maintain that immigrants should have access to materials in the language they prefer (Quesada 2007; Stephens 2007). These pressures and conflicts have affected public libraries; some have eliminated Spanish language collections in response to public pressure (Quintero 2005) and one in Louisiana faced a public vote to reduce its budget since it offered English language classes to immigrants (Besson 2013).

The political pressures to respond punitively towards immigrants and the professional norms to treat all patrons equally are profoundly in tension. In response to these tensions, libraries have responded differently. While some libraries have responded to these pressure by not purchasing or even removing non-English materials from library shelves, others libraries have continued to provide materials and programming for immigrants. The variation in the policies and practices (or degree of welcomeness) of public libraries towards immigrants is important because of the role libraries play in providing important resources.

Public libraries have adapted to the needs of the community and to changes in technology. Initially, libraries focused on providing books and newspapers, but many libraries now provide programming for children, such as story time, and adult literacy classes, as well as DVDs, CDs, and e-books. Libraries also now usually have computer and internet access for the public. Many low income people and people who live in rural areas lack internet access and public libraries are an important access point and help to bridge the digital divide between those who have access to computers and the internet and those who do not. Almost all public libraries have computers and internet access available for no charge and in 2009 an estimated 77 million people accessed the internet at public libraries (Becker et al 2010). Grants from individuals, corporations and philanthropic foundations, such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, are an important funding source for these initiatives. Some libraries provide in-language computer classes to help immigrants become computer literate so they can improve their skills for the job market and be able to apply for jobs online.

Public libraries perform many functions. They frequently form partnerships with schools and community organizations to promote literacy and learning at all age levels. Many libraries provide story time programs for children to encourage reading and learning, homework assistance for older children and adult programs such as book clubs, adult literacy programs and speakers. Some have expanded these programs to include languages other than English.

Supporters of these various programs say that the programs provide economic benefits to both the individuals who participate and the community more broadly (Americans for Libraries Council 2007; Bureau of Business Research Institute 2012). A more educated and literate community can attract new businesses and economic investment. Some programs are touted specifically for their economic benefits to participants.

Libraries provide essential access to information and technology and promote literacy and equality of access. Research on public libraries and immigrants has focused on the ways in which libraries provide materials and services to immigrants, but this hardly scratches the surface of the full range of libraries’ policies and practices toward immigrants. While libraries as public institutions have received little scholarly attention, the development of their policies and practices towards immigrants raises important and enduring theoretical questions regarding under what conditions administrative agencies act proactively to equally serve minority groups in the context of political pressures to the contrary.

Some libraries provide extensive materials and programs for immigrants in the community but others do little. Libraries that do much in these areas may be thought of as having “welcoming” policies and practices; libraries that do little are unwelcoming. This research describes and aims to explain the considerable variation in policies and practices of local public libraries towards immigrants. First, I describe of the key concept of ‘welcomeness,’ which encompasses a range of policies and practices towards immigrants. Second, I identify the key dimensions of welcomeness. Finally, using four competing theories, this research seeks to enhance understanding of what factors influence welcoming policies.

**The Concept of Welcomeness and How it Matters**

Local agencies have adopted a wide range of policies and practices designed to welcome and integrate immigrants into the community. Welcoming policies and practices, under my definition, are those that treat immigrants as equal members of the community regardless of whether they speak English, are citizens of the United States, or have legal documentation authorizing their presence in the country. But welcoming policies and practices require more than equal treatment, narrowly understood. Welcoming policies affirmatively strive to make public services accessible to immigrants given their particular competencies and circumstances. If, for example, an immigrant does not speak English, to make services accessible to him or her will require use of the immigrant’s home language. If an immigrant does not trust the police, agencies will need to engage in efforts aimed at building this trust. The policies that I characterize as welcoming thus have a range of dimensions aimed at facilitating accessibility by immigrant groups. These dimensions will be described below. The key preliminary point is that welcoming policies and practices are in stark contrast to punitive immigration enforcement, but they go considerably beyond a mere absence of hostility. Welcoming policies are often intentionally created, thoughtfully implemented and are found in a variety of communities, including many in which welcomeness would not be expected. *Relative* welcomeness, then, is the degree to which administrative policies and practices vary from punitively excluding immigrants to helping to integrate immigrants into the community.

My concept of welcomeness builds on a body of research showing that the administration of law and policy varies considerably toward subordinate and marginalized groups, and that these variations directly shape peoples’ understanding of their place in society (Soss 1999; Soss et al 2011). These studies suggest that individuals who have positive experiences with public programs and bureaucracies that they perceive as fair, rational, and rule-governed, learn the habits and ways of thinking of full citizens: that government is reasonable and responsive, and that they are respected members of society who may call upon, and influence, government. Those who experience agencies they perceive as unfair, opaque, and arbitrary feel reinforced in their perceptions of their own marginality and government’s lack of responsiveness. Soss’s research has recently been extended to policing and police stops: while police stops that are reasonably based on a person’s actions and are fairly administered contribute to trust in the police, police stops that are arbitrary, intrusive, and not reasonably justified contribute to distrust of the police (Epp et al*.* 2014).

These studies have important implications for local policies toward immigrants. Just as the structure and implementation of social welfare policies varies considerably from being fair and predictable to arbitrary and unpredictable, so also local administrative policies toward immigrants may vary in much the same way. And just as these variations in social welfare administration have been shown to influence recipients’ perceptions of government and their own place in society, we might, by extension, expect that variations in local policies toward immigrants may affect immigrants’ perceptions of government and *their* place in society. The effects of local policies on immigrants’ perceptions are beyond the scope of this article. I focus here on the preliminary matter: how, and how much, local administrative policies toward immigrants vary from hostility to welcomeness.

The term welcomeness is drawn from research on homeless peoples’ access to healthcare which drew on narratives to understand how homeless individuals perceived their treatment at healthcare facilities and how their perception affected their likelihood to return to that agency for assistance (Wen et al 2007). Some policies and practices expressed welcomeness. Drawing on the work of philosopher Martin Buber (1996), Wen observes that interactions between social-welfare workers and homeless individuals are divided into two distinct types: “I-It” interactions and “I-You” interactions. In “I-It” interactions, the social-welfare official treats the homeless individual as a thing or object with no personality or agency of his or her own and with no standing as an equal member of human society. In “I-You” interactions, the social-welfare official treats the homeless individual as a person, with personality and agency and standing as an equal member of society. Wen observes that the homeless people who experienced the “I-It” interaction felt treated rudely, ignored or overlooked. In many cases they described unfair treatment, power imbalances and a feeling that they were not viewed as human beings. But individuals who experienced the “I-You” interactions felt as if their concerns and needs were heard and taken seriously and that they were viewed as a person. The individuals who experienced unwelcomeness indicated they were less likely to seek assistance from the agency in the future than those who had a welcoming encounter.

These observations closely parallel Tom Tyler’s theory of procedural justice, which observes that people place a high value on being treated respectfully by persons in authority (Tyler 1990; Tyler et al 1996; Tyler and Lind 1990; Tyler and Lind 1992; Tyler 2001). Tyler’s research suggests that being treated respectfully is especially important to members of groups that are historically or commonly viewed as outsiders or of lower status. These individuals often are unsure whether they are accepted as full members of the community. Being treated respectfully sends the message that they are accepted as a member of the community.

Although most immigrants are not homeless, their status is in some ways analogous to the homeless. Both the homeless and many immigrants are often viewed as marginal members of society. Immigrants sometimes may not understand American social norms or speak English fluently, may be viewed with suspicion and may perceive public employees as being disrespectful or hostile. It is plausible to expect that agencies that have policies and practices that encourage or facilitate positive interactions between employees and immigrants will be perceived as more welcoming than those that have policies and practices that inhibit positive interactions or promote negative interactions. Policies, practices and interactions with public employees that show respect and acceptance of immigrants as equal members of the community may enhance immigrants’ perceptions of individual public agencies and encourage integration in to the community. As noted earlier, these expectations regarding immigrants’ perceptions are beyond the scope of this paper; it focuses on how, and how much, local administrative policies vary from unwelcomeness to welcomeness toward immigrants.

**Dependent Variable: Dimensions of Welcomeness**

How much libraries provide programs and services to reach and serve immigrants will be called the extent to which libraries are “welcoming.” Welcomeness has several dimensions and encompasses the formal policies of an organization as well as how front-line staff act and speak toward immigrants. Libraries have a wide range of such programs and services, and it is useful to divide them into several dimensions. The dimensions of welcomeness build on prior research and interviews with agency leaders and frontline employees (Jones 1999; USCIS 2005; Luevano-Molina 2001). Each of these dimensions encompasses a continuum of possible actions that vary from the merely symbolic to the substantive. Welcomeness is measured through seven dimensions designed to assess the degree to which the agency presents a face to immigrants of regularity, fairness, accessibility, and rule-abidingness, specifically the extent to which the agency: a) provides access to library resources through materials in the native languages of local immigrant populations and bilingual employees who can assist immigrants in their native language, b), utilizes library facilities for classes and programming for immigrants, c) provides access to online library resources in the native languages of immigrants, d) has outreach programs to immigrant communities, e) cooperates with other local agencies and organizations that support or assist immigrants, f) provides training to staff to improve interactions with immigrants and finally, g) makes obtaining a library card feasible. The dimensions are discussed in more detail in the next section.

The dimensions of welcomeness in library policies are summarized in table 1.

[Insert table 1]

**Dimension 1: In-Language Resources**

The first dimension is in-language resources, which is a term used to characterize any library document, audio tape (or compact disc), digital video disc (DVD), sign, or other resource that is conveyed in the language of a group of immigrants in the community. In short, in-language resources are books or CDs in Spanish (or Hindi, Somali, German, or any language other than English). Websites, because of their importance, are considered separately below. Providing in-language resources is an extension of the core purpose of the public library, which is to provide information and to educate residents. The essential function of a library is to provide public accessibility to a wide range of information in books, newspapers, magazines, the Internet and speakers and seminars.

The first measure is the availability of in-language written materials, including books, magazines, DVDs and CDs. In-language materials are typically shelved in separate sections to make it easier for patrons to browse the materials that meet their needs. The second measure is the availability of collateral materials, such as pamphlets, bookmarks, calendar of events and newsletters to patrons, in languages other than English. The third measure is the presence of signs in the library to help non-English speaking patrons find materials. Libraries can be confusing places, with row after row of books and materials, multiple stories in a building and complex classification and categorization systems. Signs represent a commitment to help non-English speakers find materials in this complex structure. Table 2 summarizes the results

The fourth measure is whether the library has in-language holdings in the majority of languages spoken in the community. Thus, if six languages are spoken in a locality, does the library have holdings in at least four of these languages? Purchasing in-language materials obviously imposes a cost, and thus it is in this fourth dimension where the measure of welcomeness taps the extent of libraries’ substantive (as opposed to merely symbolic) efforts. Libraries have many competing priorities and face budget restrictions. They must balance the needs of the various groups in their community. Striking this balance may be complicated by tensions between local majorities, which typically are white and English speaking, and immigrant minorities. Many communities have immigrant populations from multiple countries or regions of the world and may have several or dozens of languages and dialects spoken in the community. Purchasing materials in the majority of these languages represents a significant resource commitment. This is a dichotomous variable.

The fifth measure is how much priority the library gives to obtaining non-English materials for their patrons. As noted above, libraries face budget pressures and must allocate resources to meet the needs of their patrons. Some libraries may choose to limit acquisition of in-language resources in order to continue to provide the existing level of service for established patrons, while other libraries may prioritize the acquisition of in-language resources in order to provide equitable service to immigrants. Libraries may have materials in the majority of languages spoken in their community, but not prioritize acquisition of these materials so these collections may remain disproportionately small and limited compared to English collections. This dimension is measured by a Likert scale and is based on the library director’s report of the priority given to purchase of these materials.

The sixth measure is whether the library provides United States Customs and Immigration Service (USCIS) test preparation materials to assist immigrants in studying for the citizenship test. The USCIS provides little organized assistance to immigrants to help them integrate into society or help them become citizens. While sample tests, materials and forms are available on the USCIS website, immigrants must find them. Many libraries have chosen to provide USCIS materials in an organized manner to immigrants.

The seventh and eighth measures reflect the library’s emphasis on recruiting and hiring employees who are bilingual. The first of these is whether the library offers a pay differential or bonus to bilingual employees or provides extra points to bilingual candidates in the hiring process. These bonuses represent at least an attempt to recruit and retain bilingual employees. The second of these measures the substantive outcomes of hiring and recruiting: what percentage of the library employees are bilingual?

**Dimension 2: In-language website**

The second dimension reflects the increasing use and importance of internet communications and is the availability of information on the library’s website in a language other than English or a link to a translation website. Libraries increasingly offer services online, including the ability to search the catalog, see upcoming events and programs, and reserve and renew materials. Some libraries provide the full array of these resources in the language of immigrant groups in their community while others offer online access to such language learning programs as Mango Language. These resources help immigrants gain access to information, learn English and develop basic computer skills. The measure is a single dichotomous variable expressing whether a library has any such online in-language resources.

**Dimension 3: Library classes and programming**

 The third dimension of welcomeness is the extent to which library facilities are used by the library or other organizations to provide programming and services of particular interest to immigrants. Libraries often have meeting rooms, computer labs and other facilities that they use to provide classes and programming for patrons. They may also allow other organizations to use their facilities for free or for a small fee. Libraries are typically located in convenient locations with ample available parking making them ideal locations for organizations to offer programs to the public. Many types of programs of interest to immigrants may be offered: educational programs or speakers, citizenship classes, English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, children story times in a language other than English, and English conversation sessions. For example, a library in a Western state offers ESL courses and has sponsored a public meeting with the local representative to the United States Congress to discuss the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy, a federal policy with significant implications for immigrants.[[1]](#footnote-1) Another Midwestern library has invited speakers to the library to discuss issues relevant to immigrants, including a representative from the Social Security Administration to discuss social security benefits and immigration lawyers to discuss the naturalization process and other legal issues.[[2]](#footnote-2)

I use two measures of the extent of library programming for immigrants: the number of these programs for immigrants and the frequency with which they are offered.

**Dimension 4: Collaboration**

 The fourth dimension of welcomeness is the extent to which the library collaborates with other organizations and agencies. Libraries and other organizations that serve immigrants may face a demand for those services that exceed the ability of any one group to provide, especially in areas with large or new immigrant populations. Many public libraries work with other agencies and organizations in the community in order to identify needs, promote literacy and to obtain feedback. Collaboration with other agencies and organizations is considered to be a best practice for libraries by both the American Library Association (ALA) and a working group convened in October 2004 by the Office of Citizenship, a department in the USCIS (USCIS 2005). The endorsement of collaboration by this working group is a valuable indication of the importance of collaborative networks, as the working group was composed not only of representatives from public libraries but also of representatives of immigrant organizations and educators working with English language learners.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Libraries commonly develop relationships with nonprofit organizations, faith-based organizations, social service agencies, literacy councils and public school systems. These partnerships allow all organizations to share information, refer immigrants to the appropriate organization and bridge resource gaps. I use two measures of the extent of collaboration: the number of organizations with which the library collaborates and the frequency of interactions

**Dimension 5: Community Outreach**

 The fifth dimension is the extent of the library’s outreach efforts to immigrant communities based on key actions suggested by the 2004 working group at the Office of Citizenship, including recruiting immigrants to serve on the library board, holding tours of the library for immigrants groups and hosting seminars and lectures on issues of interest to immigrants (USCIS 2005).

Many public libraries attempt to communicate directly with members of immigrant communities in order to build trust and relationships and to obtain information about how best to serve these groups. Since many immigrants come from countries without a tradition of a free, egalitarian public library system, new arrivers may not be aware of the services and programs offered by the library, so many libraries reach out to immigrants through public schools, ethnic organizations and refugee centers. Immigrants may also lack trust in public agencies, particularly when they come from countries where public agencies are abusive and where providing personal information to such an agency (even for something as innocuous in this country as a library card) is regarded as risky. In this context, libraries may regard outreach messages and programs as key ways to improve immigrants’ perceptions and use of the library.

Outreach efforts range from symbolic to substantive. Some actions may symbolically reach out to immigrants, such as using non-English media to promote events and meeting with immigrants in the community. These actions represent attempts to obtain information or to demonstrate interest in the needs and issues of immigrants, but they do not necessarily show that the library is using that information to change policies or to acquire materials or programs for immigrants. Libraries also reach out to immigrants in more substantive ways, such as recruiting immigrants to serve on the library board, sending surveys to residents in multiple languages and participating in such public events as block parties and cultural festivals to publicize the library’s services to immigrants. These actions represent substantive attempts to incorporate immigrants in the library’s organizational structure and to integrate their needs and concerns into the organization’s policies and service provision.

For example, a library in a Southern state routinely sends library employees to neighborhood parties to promote the library and explain its services.[[4]](#footnote-4) These neighborhood parties are commonly held throughout the city, including in areas in which many immigrants live. During these events, residents learn about the library and its programs and services and library employees learn about residents’ needs and issues. For another example, a library in a South Central state developed a display of the Muslim religious holiday of Ramadan which educated non-Muslims about Islam and reached out to Muslims in the community who were involved in developing the display. The display was also intended to demonstrate that the library was for all members of the community. The director stated “we have a growing Muslim population in this area and they are part of the community just like everybody else.”[[5]](#footnote-5) A Midwest community participated in an ethnic community celebration of Cinco de Mayo and provided information about library services, allowed residents to sign up for library cards and gave away donated children’s books.[[6]](#footnote-6) Outreach efforts are measured by a Likert scale.

**Dimension 6: Staff Training**

When library patrons visit a library or contact it for information, they encounter library employees, and these interactions may give rise to communication difficulties both linguistic and cultural in nature. Whether and how the library prepares its employees to address these difficulties is the sixth dimension of welcomeness. Immigrants often come from countries that do not have public libraries that are open to everyone, and so they may be unfamiliar, intimidated and uncomfortable when they come to the library. Language and cultural differences may make them hesitant to ask questions, even when approached by a library employee. Other differences include cultural expectations regarding appropriate forms of eye contact, personal space, as well as cultural expectations regarding how to address female members of the family.

My measure of this dimension is whether or not the organization provides training to employees to help them interact more effectively with immigrants. This dimension is an index of the number of types of training provided to employees. Libraries may provide a variety of training including language classes or cultural awareness skills.

**Dimension 7: Immigration Status Verification Efforts**

While some library services, such as the ability to read magazines, newspapers and books on site, are available to anyone who enters the library, other services are limited to those who have a library card. Full access to all library programs and services is only available to those with the borrowing privileges given with a library card. To get a library card, libraries generally require an applicant to verify identity and residence within the library’s service area.

The seventh dimension measures the ease with which immigrants, including undocumented immigrants, can provide the necessary documentation to obtain a library card. Library policies vary considerably regarding what forms of documentation are acceptable to prove one’s identity and address. Some forms of identification are less onerous to provide than others, and thus library policies vary considerably in making it easy or hard for an immigrant to obtain a library card. The most welcoming libraries require no photo ID or accept a wide range of photo identification cards including business IDs, passports issued by other countries and Consular Matricular cards issued to Mexican citizens in the United States by the Mexican embassy and consulates, regardless of their immigration status. The most restrictive libraries require U.S. government issued identification such as a driver’s license, U.S. passport or United States Permanent Resident Card (Green Card). This dimension is measured by a Likert scale.

**How “welcoming” and “unwelcoming” libraries vary on each dimension**

We might characterize libraries that are one standard deviation or more below the mean as “unwelcoming” and libraries that are one standard deviation or more above the mean as “welcoming.” The differences between welcoming and unwelcoming libraries are remarkable (see table 2). Libraries that score high on the general index typically have welcoming policies and practices on most of the particular dimensions; libraries that score low are generally unwelcoming across almost all of the dimensions. Welcomeness is a characteristic of the organization as a whole.

[Insert table 2]

**Possible Influences on the Policies and Practices of Public Libraries towards Immigrants**

To understand why public libraries have a wide range of policies and practices towards immigrants, I focus on four possible explanations: minority-threat theory, political factors, professional norms of equal service and economic regimes.

**Minority Population**

Minority-threat theory suggests that majority groups use local agencies to maintain their power: as the relative proportion of minority groups increases, the dominant group perceives this as an economic, political and criminal threat and responds with political discrimination, symbolic segregation and coercive policies (Liska 1992; Ramakrishnan and Wong 2010; Varsanyi 2008). Although research on the perceived threat of immigrants and Latinos is in its early stages, some studies have observed heightened policing in response to growing immigrant populations. (Chandler and Tsai 2001; Ha 2010; Hopkins 2010; Hood and Morris 1997; Quillian 1995). Immigrants may be perceived as threats due to race or ethnicity, perceptions of criminality and economic factors. As minority-threat theory would lead us to expect, as the relative percentage of the minority population increases, the dominant group responds with political discrimination, symbolic segregation and coercive strategies.

Minority-threat theory also may help to explain the widespread perception that immigrants take jobs from native-born residents. Although immigrants are not, in fact, a drain on the economy and little evidence supports the belief they take job from citizens (Friedberg and Hunt 1995; Sanders 2012), these perceptions are widespread. Perceptions of who is to blame for a problem often shape policy agenda-setting in general (Stone 1989), and, in the context of immigration, the more a person believes the national economy is not doing well the more he or she is likely to be opposed to immigration (Citrin et al 1997).

While previous minority-threat research has focused mainly on the police, other agencies are not immune to these pressures. Thus, in some communities, public libraries have eliminated Spanish language collections from their shelves in response to criticism that they cater to ‘illegal’ immigrants (see Quintero 2005; Stephens 2007). As the relative proportion of minority groups in the community increases, the perceived threat from them may increase. As a result, libraries may face pressure to reduce or eliminate foreign language materials and programming, and fearing loss of public support from the majority group in the community, they may choose to comply with these pressures.

Immigrants to the United States are from predominantly non-white regions of the world. They are also increasingly settling in suburban and rural communities in what are called “new destination states,” those that do not have a tradition of immigrant settlement, and so these new immigrants often have produced considerable changes in the ethnic and racial composition of the local population (for general explanation see Brookings Institute 2009; Zúñiga and Hernández-León 2006). If minority-threat theory is a useful explanation outside of the policing context, we might expect to find that library policies are more or less welcoming to immigrants in relation to how much new immigrant groups are perceived by the local majority as a threat.

It is also possible that libraries are influenced by a very different dynamic. The “contact hypothesis” is a competing theory which suggests that frequent contact between racial or ethnic minorities and whites reduces whites’ negative perceptions and attitudes towards racial minorities (Ha 2010; Oliver and Wong 2003; Welch et al 2001). If this is so, we might expect that the larger the proportion of the local population who are immigrants, the more welcoming are library policies and practices.

The foregoing discussion of minority-threat theory suggests that public libraries may be less welcoming where the proportion of the population that is foreign-born is higher, where the proportion of the population that is white is lower, and where the unemployment rate is higher. Alternatively, if the contact hypothesis is correct, local police departments may be *more* welcoming where the proportion of the population that is foreign born is higher.

**Border Proximity**

Proximity to a national border is closely related to the idea of minority threat: geographic proximity to international borders may also be associated with perceptions of threats from immigrants (Alvarez and Butterfield 2000; Branton et al. 2007; Branton and Dunaway 2009). Drug-gang violence in Mexico has contributed to growing concerns about drug violence, gun smuggling and human trafficking in states close to the Mexican border. Although the political and public discourse about immigration focuses on the U.S.-Mexico border, agencies in states along the northern border may also be sensitive to immigration since some of those implicated in the September 11 attacks entered the U.S. through Canada and Ahmed Ressam was caught in 1999 trying to bring an explosives-filled car into the United States on a ferry from British Columbia in order to bomb the Los Angeles airport. The U.S. Border Patrol is authorized to set up immigration checkpoints within 100 miles of an international border so the presence of federal law enforcement agents in these areas may contribute to an atmosphere of concern (Congressional Research Service 2005). Cities located within 100 miles of the U.S.-Mexican border are more likely to have an enforcement orientation (Lewis et al 2013). A higher propensity to have punitive law enforcement policies could indicate a higher propensity to have unwelcoming policies and practices towards immigrants more broadly.

It is also possible that areas near the border with Mexico and Canada are *more* welcoming toward immigrants. States that border Mexico and several that border Canada have a history as traditional immigrant destination states. Research on the effects of frequent contact between racial or ethnic minorities and whites suggests that whites’ negative perceptions and attitudes towards racial minorities soften over time (Ha 2010; Oliver and Wong 2003; Welch et al 2001). Due to the history of immigration into these states, agencies and individuals may have had more contact with immigrants and perceive them as less of threat.

**Political Context**

Although public libraries are not high profile public agencies that are politically controversial, they do depend on funding from city, county and state governments. Local agencies make decisions in a political environment and it is important to test the influence of political factors separately from the more direct measures of minority threat. Conservative political attitudes are associated with greater opposition to immigration (Pew 2012a; Pew 2012b). Scholarship has not focused on the relationship between political partisanship and public library actions towards immigrants. In the policing context Hopkins (2010) found no association between conservative political influence and immigration enforcement, however several studies found that where local majorities are more politically conservative there is more immigration enforcement by local police agencies (Chavez and Provine 2009; Ramakrishnan and Lewis 2005; Ramakrishnan and Wong 2010). Conservative political attitudes would be expected to influence variations in welcoming policies and practices.[[7]](#footnote-7) I expect the ideological beliefs of the local community will affect the degree of welcomeness of public libraries; specifically more conservative communities will be associated with lower levels of welcomeness.

Another political factor is the relative presence of racist hate-groups in a state. The number of hate groups, including neo-Nazis, Klansmen, white nationalists, neo-Confederates, racist skinheads, black separatists and nativist extremist groups, has more than doubled from 2000 to 2010 (Southern Poverty Law Center 2011). These groups engage in a variety of activities, including advocating for the supremacy of one race over other races, watching the border for undocumented immigrants crossing the border and staging protests. These groups can influence public attitudes. Individuals, especially youth and young adults, who have personal contact with members of hate groups are more likely to support these groups (Turpin-Petrosino 2002). Those who are not comfortable with racial and ethnic minorities are also more likely to support these groups (Turpin-Petrosino 2002). Individuals in states with more of these groups are more likely to interact with members of these groups, and this, coupled with discomfort with immigrants who are not Caucasian, may contribute to political pressure for punitive responses. I expect states with higher numbers of hate groups per 10,000 residents will be less welcoming.

The presence of naturalized immigrants may also affect the local political context. Naturalized U.S. citizens can vote and run for office and may serve as political proxies for the broader immigrant population. Lewis and his colleagues (2013) found that communities with a higher proportion of naturalized citizens are associated with a higher likelihood of enforcement-oriented city policies, perhaps, as these scholars suggest, because naturalized immigrants may be more assimilated into society and, therefore may be unsympathetic toward more recent immigrants. If so, naturalized immigrants may also be less supportive of welcoming policies and practices. In keeping with this logic, I expect that a higher proportion of naturalized immigrants will be associated with a lower level of welcomeness in public libraries.

State laws favoring local immigration enforcement and punitive actions towards undocumented immigrants are another key aspect of the political context, and they may contribute to less welcoming policies at the local level. Six states (Arizona, Alabama, Georgia, Indiana, South Caroline and Utah) have passed state-level legislation that is designed to identify and detain undocumented immigrants. This legislation often requires that public agencies verify the legal status of immigrants seeking services. Although the circumstances in which this is authorized vary among these states and not all of these statutes have been fully implemented due to pending lawsuits (Immigration Policy Center 2012), these statutes plausibly encourage public agencies, including libraries, to adopt less-welcoming policies. Lewis and his colleagues (2013) found no relationship between state-level legislation and local enforcement of immigration laws, still, it is important to take into account the possibility. Public libraries may respond by removing or decreasing foreign language materials and programming for immigrants. I expect that localities in states with laws requiring or authorizing local verification of immigration status will have less welcoming policies and practices.

**Professional Norms**

Local government agencies are influenced by professional norms of equal service to members of the public, and these norms may push agencies to adopt welcoming policies toward immigrants. Neo-institutional theories suggest that organizations are social constructs that are shaped by shared meanings and rely on symbols to orient members of the organization in relation to these shared meanings. These norms and procedures grow from the broader institutional environment (the “field” within which an organization is situated) and insulate organizations from the local environment (Selznick 1957; March and Olsen 1989; DiMaggio and Powell 1983). These field-level norms and procedures are disseminated throughout a field of similar organizations via professional associations and networks (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Dobbin and Sutton 1998; Edelman 1990, 1992). As a result, institutions in a field, such as public libraries, adopt a dominant model of the right way to do things. In public libraries, these field-level norms and procedures are key elements of what is called equality of access.

Equality of access is a key professional norm of public libraries and is central to the mission of public libraries. The American Library Association (ALA) is the dominant professional association in this field and the Library Bill of Rights outlines its guiding principles. A fundamental tenet of the ALA Bill of Rights is equal treatment and access. The first principle states “Books and other library resources should be provided for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all people of the community the library serves. Materials should not be excluded because of the origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation (ALA 2013).” This principle is important because it states ‘all people of the community,’ and this is explicitly not limited to citizens. Principle #5 states “A person’s right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background, or views” (ALA 2013). This principle supports the rights of all people to utilize library services regardless of origin, including status. In 2005 the ALA adopted a resolution opposing the Real I.D. Act that would create a standardized, state-issued identification card. In this resolution, the ALA affirmed the “right of individuals, regardless of their legal status, to library services” and stated that the ALA works to educate libraries on ways patrons can demonstrate eligibility for library services and protect patron privacy in order to encourage immigrant’ use of public libraries (ALA 2005).

The theoretical premise of this study is that institutional norms shape local agency policies and practices toward immigrants. For public libraries, professional norms and rules may be passed through the organization by personnel affiliations with professional associations, primarily the American Library Association (ALA). Libraries have historically conveyed a symbolic message of welcomeness and the American Library Association emphasizes the importance of libraries to immigrants. Membership in the ALA is ubiquitous for professional librarians, although many front-line library workers are not members of the ALA. Still, front-line library employees play an important role in library-immigrant relationships and have considerable discretion in their day-to-day interactions with library patrons. Professional norms and rules may be disseminated from library professionals to front-line employees through training and performance expectations.

Professional networks are a mechanism through which norms and rules are disseminated.

The local connection to these broader field-level professional associations is often a professional employee who is given authority to carry out a professionalized task and who comes to see his or her role as bringing the agency into compliance with broader norms. These professionals act as a “window” between the organization and the broader professional field and legal environment (Edelman 1992). These professionals are a path through which the professional association can exercise influence within organizations. For example, following the influence of broader professional norms, organizations may adopt new social norms and rules in symbolic form while leaving the underlying practices largely unchanged (Edelman 1990; Edelman 1992). Then, faced with pressures from local activists and these internal professionals, organizations may follow through with substantive actions (Epp 2009).

Drawing on these studies, it is plausible to expect that the professional position of a library liaison to immigrant communities may serve as such a window into the library for communicating the concerns, needs and preferences of immigrants. In the context of policies toward immigrants, the relevant professional position is the designated liaison with the immigrant community. Immigrants may not know about the library and the services it provides. The liaison to these communities can work with other organizations that assist immigrants and can build trust and work with immigrants and immigrant leaders to identify their needs and issues. That position can then serve as a conduit or window for feedback, needs and preferences of immigrants in the community into the library. Libraries with a designated liaison who works with immigrants may have a better understanding of and relationship with immigrants. This leads to the expectation that having a designated liaison to immigrant communities will be associated with higher levels of welcomeness.

**Economic Factors**

In addition to responding to political pressures and professional norms, local administrators have powerful incentives to serve important local economic interests. The relative autonomy of local governments in the United States and their dependence on local revenues encourages them to adopt competitive policies favoring local economic growth (Peterson, 1981), and so local administrators may be attentive to the needs and preferences of the large economic interests in their local areas. Libraries are public organizations that typically rely on funding from the state, local and federal governments in order to function. Libraries may also depend on community organizations, such as Friends of the Library, to raise additional money and show public support to elected officials. Corporations, such as Dollar General, provide funding to libraries for in-language materials and philanthropic foundations, such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, provide funding for computers and internet access. Due to this dependence, library executives, like other local administrators, have powerful incentives to serve local economic interests. Local agencies may be more welcoming when immigrants are important to local businesses as employees.

**Data Sources**

My key measures of public library policy and practices are derived from an original survey of library executives in counties with a minimum population of 30,000 and a foreign-born population of at least 5%. The survey was distributed in June 2012 and all correspondence with survey respondents was based on the tailored design method for mixed-mode surveys.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Based on the 2006 - 2010 American Community Survey (ACS), 2,069 library systems met the population criteria. Valid email addresses were obtained for 1,887 executives. These executives received an invitation to complete the survey online and were promised anonymity of their responses. After sending three follow-up emails, useable surveys were received from 461 library systems for a response rate of 19%.[[9]](#footnote-9) The responses were a reasonably representative sample of US counties in this size range.

The survey responses for both agencies were merged with city and county-level data on local social, economic and political characteristics drawn from a number of other sources (U.S. census sources, Congressional Quarterly election data, the National Conference of State Legislatures, the Southern Poverty Law Center and the Department of Labor).

**The Measure of the Dependent Variable: Welcomeness**

The dependent variable is an additive index of the dimensions of welcomeness summarized above. Factor analysis indicates that a single primary factor underlies the variables, and the Cronbach’s alpha of the index is .77.[[10]](#footnote-10) These measures suggest that the index is plumbing a common underlying dimension. Additionally, the index is normally distributed.

**Measures of Independent Variables**

*Minority threat.* Minority threat has typically been measured as the percentage of the population that is Caucasian or African-American, although research focusing on local enforcement of immigration laws has used the percentage of the population that is foreign born (Lewis et al 2013). I use several measures. The first is the proportion of the population that is white (data from the American Community Survey [hereafter, “ACS”], 2006 – 2010). Communities range from 19% to 96% white, with a mean of 75%. A larger proportion of white residents is expected to be associated with lower levels of welcomeness. The second measure is the proportion of the population that is foreign born (data from ACS 2006-10).[[11]](#footnote-11) The proportion of the local population that is foreign born ranges from 4% to 46%, with a mean of 14%. The third measure is the average monthly unemployment in the community in 2012 based on Department of Labor statistics.[[12]](#footnote-12)

*Border proximity.* Lewis and his colleagues (2013) tested the border-proximity expectation by examining whether communities within 100 miles of the U.S.-Mexican or U.S.-Canadian border were more likely to engage in immigration enforcement; they found no association. The basis for the 100-mile measure is that this is the area of jurisdiction of the U.S. Border Patrol. Another way to test for the effect of border proximity is by examining whether communities in states that share a border with Mexico or Canada are more (or less) welcoming than communities in other states. Indeed, to test the influences on police welcomeness, arguably a state-level measure that reflects broad patterns of immigration is more appropriate for public libraries than the 100-mile region that is tied to U.S. Border Patrol jurisdiction. I use two dummy variables, one for states that border Mexico and one for states that border Canada, to test for the effect of proximity to an international border on the degree of welcomeness. Of the survey respondents, 18% of the departments are in states that border Mexico and 25% are states that border Canada.

*Popular political attitudes.* I measure local political ideology in four ways. Partisan preferences are measured by the percent of the county residents that voted for the Republican candidate for president in 2008. This percentage ranged from a low of 10% to a high of 81%, with a mean of 44%. The second measure is the presence of hate groups including neo-Nazis, Klansmen, white nationalists, neo-Confederates, racist skinheads, black separatists and nativist extremist groups, and is calculated as the number of hate groups per 10,000 residents of the state. The mean number of residents per hate group is 45 with a range of 9 to 105 state residents per group. The third measure is the percentage of the immigrant population that is naturalized. Naturalization represents potential political influence since these residents may now vote and may be more empowered to participate in the political process. As noted in the earlier discussion, it is possible that this percentage will be either negatively or positively associated with welcomeness. The final measure reflects the presence of state level laws, such as Arizona’s SB 1070, that encourage local immigration enforcement and punitive actions towards undocumented immigrants. This is treated as a dichotomous variable with states that have passed a variation of Arizona’s law coded 1 and others coded 0. Six percent of the libraries that responded are in a state with this type of legislation.

*Neo-Institutional Norms of Equal Service.* I use two variables to measure the potential influence of neo-institutional norms on organizational policies of welcomeness. The first is the respondent’s assessment on the level of influence of professional associations, such as the ALA, on policies towards immigrants, measured by responses to a survey question measured by a Likert scale that varies from no influence (13.4%), little influence (34.7%), moderate influence (39.1%) to high influence (12.7%). The second is the presence or absence of a designated liaison to the immigrant communities, measured by a survey question; 28% of the departments have such a liaison.

*Economic Factors.* The economic importance of immigrants to a community is measured in two ways. The first is the percentage of the state-wide workforce that is foreign-born, using data from the Immigration Policy Center (2009).[[13]](#footnote-13) The mean percentage of the state workforce that is foreign-born is 18% and ranges by state from 3% (in Maine and Wyoming) to 35% (in California). The second measure is based on a survey question asking the respondent to indicate their level of agreement from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree* to the statement “Immigrants are very important as employees in the local economy.” This question measures the library leader’s *perception* of the importance of immigrants to the local economy. In the sample, 63% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.

*Control Variables.* I control for a range of other factors.First, I take into account the library’s annual operating budget (excluding capital budget), which is correlated with county size. Library systems with larger budgets may be better able to fund activities and practices that are welcoming. Second, I consider the per capita income in the county. Per capita income and the average level of education of residents are closely correlated; rather than using two closely-correlated measures I use per capita income. Counties characterized by higher income and education are likely to have residents who are more knowledgeable of other languages and other cultures and therefore more accepting of immigrants. The immigrants who *live* in the more affluent county may also have more education and higher paying jobs so they may be perceived as more worthy than poorer, less educated immigrants who may *work* in low paying jobs in the community. The expectation of the representative bureaucracy thesis is that the race or ethnicity of public administrators may affect their decisions (Meier, et al 2003; Selden et al 1998). Third, to account for this potential factor, I control for whether the library executive is Hispanic or Latino, using responses to a survey question (5% reported that they are Hispanic or Latino).

**Results**

To understand why some departments are welcoming while others are not, I examined the influence of the various factors discussed above on my index, departmental welcomeness. The “welcomeness” index is continuous and relatively normally distributed, and so I used OLS regression, a straightforward modeling technique that is appropriate for such a dependent variable. In order to correct for the possibility of correlation in the error term between departments within a state, the standard errors are clustered at the state-level. Table 3 shows results from the OLS regression analysis from the three limited models, each containing only the measures associated with a particular theory, and the full model that controls for all variables. The dependent variable ranges from -2, representing extreme unwelcomeness, to 2, representing extreme welcomeness.

Examining each of the categories of possible influences alone (without controlling for the others) suggests that professional norms, political pressure, and perceptions of the economic importance of immigrants each show promise as possible influences on a library’s degree of welcomeness. Among the variables measuring professional norms, having a designated liaison to the immigrant community is associated with higher levels of welcomeness. Among the variables measuring political pressure, being in a county that is more politically conservative is associated with lower levels of welcomeness. But, as the percentage of immigrants increases, libraries show a *higher* likelihood of welcoming policies. This is contrary to the expectation of minority-threat theory. Among the variables measuring the economic context, the perception of the economic importance of immigrants is positively associated with welcomeness.

When all of these possible influences are considered in the full model, the results reveal that libraries are caught between political pressure from political conservatives to be less welcoming to immigrants and professional norms to be *more* welcoming, especially where immigrants form a sizable portion of the population. Libraries respond to each of these pressures, but especially to their professional norm of welcomeness to all members of the community.

[Insert table 3]

Three political variables associated with minority-threat theory have the expected result: libraries in communities that are more politically conservative, those in states with a higher number of hate groups and those in states with Arizona SB 1070 style legislation are significantly less welcoming. But other variables associated with minority-threat theory are associated with library welcomeness in unexpected ways, and neo-institutional theories of the influence of professional norms helps explain these results. Thus, larger proportions of immigrants are associated with *more* welcomeness, entirely contrary to the expectations of minority-threat theory. Library professional norms call on librarians to facilitate access to their materials by all members of the community. These results reveal that as the immigrant proportion of local populations increases, librarians respond in keeping with this professional norm: they take active steps to increase accessibility to these immigrant groups. Likewise, having on staff a professional liaison to immigrant communities is significantly associated with more welcoming policies. This, too, is expected by theories of neo-institutional norms and how key professional staff positions act as windows between the organization and its environment.

As expected, one economic variable, the perception of immigrants’ economic importance, is associated with higher levels of welcomeness. Public libraries’ reliance on funding from city and county governments and donations from local businesses may make them more sensitive to meeting the needs of immigrants, especially when they are a significant proportion of employees in the area. The perceived economic importance of immigrants may also explain why, contrary to expectations from minority threat theory, as unemployment increases, welcomeness increases. In interviews, librarians acknowledged the important role of providing internet and computer access to patrons. The use of library computer resources for looking and applying for jobs was mentioned in all interviews with library leaders.[[14]](#footnote-14) Rather than viewing immigrants as threats for employment, libraries may emphasize their role in helping those in the community find jobs.

Some results, to be sure, were unexpected. Contrary to expectations, libraries in states that share a border with Canada show a significantly lower likelihood of having welcoming policies. This is an interesting result that deserves further research. Likewise, the measure of the influence of professional associations had no significant association with welcomeness, but this is understandable in light of follow-up interviews. These interviews with leaders of seven public libraries in three states suggest that professional norms associated with the ALA’s stated mission are so deeply ingrained that the library professionals who answered the survey probably did not *consciously* associate their library’s policies and practices with the recommendations of the ALA. When asked in the interviews, “how do the library professional associations affect the library’s policies and practices towards immigrants,” the responses were noncommittal and the interviewees looked puzzled. When asked a follow-up question of “how do the mission and values of the American Library Association, such as the Library Bill of Rights, influence the library’s policies and practices towards immigrants,” interviewees expressed recognition of the link between their policies and those of the ALA. In response to the question that specifically referenced the ALA, a library director explained “At this library we use the American Library Association kind of as a guide and a resource where we can. If there is a question that arises from the community that we need kind of to validate what we are doing then we usually can go to the American Library Association. We go to them for different ideas to see what other libraries are doing.”[[15]](#footnote-15) Another Library Manager explained “We use those [the ALA’s mission and Library Bill of Rights] as a foundation absolutely. We are members so their philosophies are pretty much what we follow. They are good guidelines. We are all part of the profession and believe in those charges. It goes to making sure that people have access to the information that they need.”[[16]](#footnote-16) This would suggest that the survey question probably was not a good measure of the influence of library professional standards on library policies.

Which of these influences—political pressure, minority threat and professional norms—has a more substantial influence? Figure 1 shows the relative magnitude of the influence of some of the independent variables, using the Clarify procedure (King et al 2000). [[17]](#footnote-17) The range of the dependent variable, welcomeness, illustrated in the table ranges from one standard deviation below the mean to one standard deviation above the mean. On the continuous independent variables “low” represents the 25the percentile and “high” represents the 75th percentile; the dichotomous variables are varied between not present and present. With this in mind, it is striking that the most substantial effect is associated with neo-institutional norms. Thus, all else equal, the difference between not having a designated liaison with the immigrant community (“liaison”) and having one produces a shift on the dependent variable of over one-half a standard deviation in welcomeness. The perception of the importance of immigrants to the local economy produces a shift of between one-third and one-half a standard deviation. Where library leaders perceive immigrants as important to the local economy, the libraries are substantially more welcoming.

[Insert figure 1 here]

By contrast, the measures of minority-threat are associated with less substantial if still significant shifts in the dependent variable. Contrary to the expectations of minority-threat theory, the effect of a difference between a low foreign-born population (75th percentile below the mean) and a high foreign-born (75th percentile above the mean) is to make a library substantially *more* welcoming, by about a half of a standard deviation on the welcomeness scale. All other things equal, the difference between being in a county with relatively few conservative voters and relatively many conservative residents produces a change of between one-third and one-half of a standard deviation on the degree of welcomeness: public libraries in counties that are more conservative are substantially less welcoming.

In summary, the effects illustrated in figure 1 are consistent with the results outlined above: the effects of neo-institutional norms and economic factors are more substantial than the effect of local political pressures associated with “minority-threat,” and having a larger local population of immigrants actually leads public libraries to be *more* rather than *less* welcoming.

**Discussion**

Libraries interact frequently with immigrants and may offer resources that are critical for immigrants. While libraries have come under increasing pressure to shift resources away from the foreign-language materials needed by immigrant groups, this research has shown that their policies and practices towards immigrants are influenced by deeply engrained professional norms to make the library accessible and useful to all members of the community.

Literature on attitudes towards immigrants suggests that we might expect political factors to strongly influence organizational policies and actions towards immigrants (Mayda 2006; Dustmann and Preston 2007; Chavez 2008; Hanson et al 2008; Hainmueller and Hiscox 2010). Attitudes towards immigrants, especially undocumented immigrants, are divided along ideological lines with conservatives often favoring more restricted immigration and more punitive policies towards undocumented immigrants. These expectations are partly borne out. The more politically conservative the community, the less welcoming its library is.

But these political pressures are only part of the story, and a relatively small one. As the proportion of the population who are immigrants increases, library welcomeness *increases*. This is entirely unexpected by minority-threat theory, and it suggests that libraries are not the puppets of local political majorities. Library executives are not merely responding to political pressures from dominant groups in the community.

My findings provide support for the presumption that economic factors and professional norms of equal service play important roles in shaping library policies towards immigrants. Perceptions of the importance of immigrants as employees in the community and higher rates of unemployment are associated with higher levels of welcomeness. Libraries may seek to generate public and financial support by supporting the economic needs of businesses that employ immigrants.

Discourse around immigration often reflects the perception that immigrants take jobs away from American citizens. Historically crackdowns on immigration, and especially punitive policies toward undocumented immigrants, have gained greatest force during recessions. But my results show that libraries are more welcoming in communities with higher levels of unemployment. The qualitative results indicate that libraries recognize not only the importance of immigrants to the local economy but also understand that the library plays an important role in helping immigrants find jobs. Libraries are an important mechanism to provide information and services to members of the community. In addition to written materials, libraries help address the digital divide in the country by providing access to computers and the internet. A recurring theme in interviews with librarians was the importance of providing immigrants with access to computers to look for and apply for jobs, even entry level and short-term employment. Without access to computers at the library, many low income immigrants would struggle to find jobs.

The findings also support the argument that professional norms of equal service have important and positive effects on the degree of welcomeness towards immigrants (Edelman 1990; Edelman 1992; Epp 2009). In these examples, professional associations take both symbolic and substantive actions to show their compliance with broader legal and professional norms. Libraries widely use liaisons with the immigrant communities to disseminate information to those groups as well as obtain feedback and information on immigrants’ needs and preferences. This communication enhances the library’s services to immigrants as well as immigrants’ access to information and services the library provides. Since many immigrants do not come from countries with public libraries or with public libraries that are open to the general public, they may not know to seek out the library. By working with immigrant groups and with other organizations that work with immigrants, the library is able to promote its services to these groups. In return, libraries may be able to broaden their public support in the community.

Library facilities are open to members of the public who enter, walk around and see the shelves of in-language materials, notices of classes and programs for immigrants and in-language signs and may overhear a library employee speaking a language other than English. These are powerful and visible indicators of libraries’ welcomeness to immigrants. While city governments may hesitate to reduce the budget of a high profile agency, such as police, libraries have faced budget cuts in many communities. Libraries are a low profile public organization with a mission that, unlike public safety, may be seen as not critical to a community.

Despite the potential public and political criticism and backlash, welcoming libraries make a conscious, deliberate decision to provide services and materials for immigrants. To illustrate this important point, a library in a conservative state provides books and DVDs in all the major languages spoken by the immigrant groups, including Somalis, Ethiopians, and Burmese. Obtaining these materials is not easy for the library. The library also provides fax services because some immigrant groups need the service. Why does this library go to these lengths? The Deputy Director explained, “Because our professional mission as a public library is to provide the materials and information the public needs, the way they need it. *We are a public library; that is what we do*.”[[18]](#footnote-18)

**Conclusion**

Existing research on bureaucratic incorporation of immigrants has suggested that racial and ethnic minority groups will be incorporated into local politics before local bureaucratic agencies improve treatment of these groups (Browning et al 1984; Dahl 1984; Jones-Correa 2008; Lewis and Ramakrishnan 2007; Marshall 1964). These studies suggest gaining political rights and political representation is a prerequisite for gaining benefits from public agencies (Marshall 1964). As Meier and O’Toole (2006) find, from a political control perspective bureaucratic response to minority groups follows the lead of elected officials. Little research has found that bureaucratic organizations are taking the lead in incorporating immigrants into the community (Marrow 2009).

Like Marrow, I find that bureaucratic agencies are taking a leading role in welcoming immigrants. The findings I present here suggest that while libraries are responsive to political pressures to behave punitively towards immigrants, those pressures are often offset by professional norms of equal service and perceptions of the importance of immigrants to the local economy.

Providing equal access to service may understate the role of libraries: more than simply providing services, librarians may serve as sense-makers in the community. For organizations, sense-making is about re-imagining their story in such a way that it is comprehensible to their local community and resilient in the face of challenges. It is about fitting the organization into the broader social and cultural context (Scott 1995; Weick et al 2005). Librarians, heavily influenced by professional norms of equal service, engage in this activity on an ongoing basis and have done so throughout the history of public libraries. In the face of changing community demographics, social and economic needs and technology, libraries have rewritten their organization’s story in ways that keep the public library relevant to the community. Libraries are more than repositories for books and literacy programs. The commitment to their core mission of literacy is still central to their story, but in their search for a shared meaning in a changed community they have incorporated other roles and commitments. They look at their community and its needs and change their story in small ways on an ongoing basis. For immigrants, they still promote literacy with books and classes, but as they see gaps in the broader services, libraries have stepped in to fill them. They have cultural displays and programs that educate residents and send the message to newcomers that they are part of the community. Libraries have responded to the needs of local employers and potential employees by providing access to computers and the internet as well as training on how to use them. They provide assistance with resumes and job applications. They are a central place in the broader community where residents of all races, ethnicities and economic statuses come and interact.

Faced with competing public preferences and ambiguous situations, librarians rely on their understanding of their context in the broader community, such as their history as an egalitarian organization, their role of providers of information and their focus on literacy to develop their understanding of the services they should provide to immigrants and their role in helping immigrants in the community. Based on these findings, future research should not assume that libraries only respond to demands from the dominant groups in the community or from elected officials. In fact, libraries often seek out the underserved, unseen groups in the community in order to identify their needs and better serve them.

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Table 1: Library Policies

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Dimensions of Welcomeness** | **Measures** |
| In-language Resources | * In-language materials, collateral and signs
* Citizenship test and process materials
* Priority of purchasing non-English materials
* Materials in the majority of languages spoken in the community
* Bilingual pay/recruitment
* Percent bilingual employees
 |
| Library classes and programming | * Use of library facilities for classes, speakers and other programs for immigrants
 |
| In-language website resources | * Webpages in a language other than English or link to a translation website
 |
| Community outreach programs | * Symbolic outreach to immigrants
* Substantive outreach programs to immigrants
 |
| Collaboration with other agencies | * Collaboration with other organizations and agencies
 |
| Staff training | * Training to improve interactions with immigrants
 |
| Eligibility requirements | * Requirements to obtain a library card
 |

**Table 2 - Summary of Results of Dimensions of Welcomeness**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|   | **Unwelcoming**  | **Neutral**  | **Welcoming**  |
| ***Results for in-language materials, signs, collateral, training and pay differential*** |
| **% of in-language materials** |
| Less than 1% | 9% | 6% | 2% |
| 1% - 2% | 71% | 46% | 14% |
| 2 % - 3% | 4% | 9% | 21% |
| 4% - 5% | 11% | 6% | 17% |
| 5% + | 4% | 34% | 45% |
| ***Materials in the majority of spoken languages***  | 51% | 89% | 92% |
| ***Priority of building non-English collections***  |   |   |   |
| Low | 65% | 30% | 17% |
| Neutral | 35% | 42% | 28% |
| High | 0% | 26% | 55% |
| ***Training to improve interactions***  | 13% | 47% | 66% |
| ***Gives bilingual applicants extra points in the hiring process*** | 16% | 47% | 69% |
| ***Offers pay differential for bilingual employees*** | 2% | 9% | 24% |
| ***Library facilities used for programming for immigrants*** |
| No reported programming | 7% | 3% | 2% |
| 1-2 types of programming | 50% | 22% | 8% |
| 3 - 4 types of programming | 27% | 28% | 12% |
| 5+ types of programming | 14% | 47% | 78% |
| ***Website has in-language information***  | 3% | 39% | 65% |
| ***Percentage of Bilingual Employees*** |
| 0% | 49% | 12% | 2% |
| 1-10% | 51% | 67% | 31% |
| 11-20% | 0% | 13% | 26% |
| 21-30% | 0% | 6% | 17% |
| 31-40% | 0% | 1% | 17% |
| 41% + | 0% | 1% | 7% |
| ***Photo ID Required to Obtain a Library Card*** |
| No photo ID required | 67% | 39% | 35% |
| Issued by non-U.S. government or business ID | 13% | 82% | 75% |
| Valid U.S. government issued ID | 88% | 18% | 25% |
| ***Symbolic Outreach (“speak”)*** |
| Used non-English media (i.e. newspapers or TV) | 11% | 44% | 81% |
| Met with immigrant leaders to discuss needs | 23% | 68% | 89% |
| Participated in events to reach out to immigrants | 20% | 62% | 82% |
| Met with staff at agencies that serve immigrants | 4% | 34% | 53% |
| ***Substantive Outreach (“hear”)*** |
| Included feedback from immigrant leaders or groups in developing policies, programs or acquisitions | 11% | 37% | 56% |
| Recruited immigrants to serve on library board | 4% | 17% | 38% |
| Partnered with immigrant leaders or groups | 4% | 21% | 45% |
| ***Collaboration Efforts***  |
| No reported collaborative activity | 55% | 10% | 7% |
| Collaborated with 5+ agencies in last year | 7% | 46% | 84% |
| Average frequency of collaborative activities | Less than 1x per month | 1-3x per month | More than 1x per week |

Table 3: OLS Regression with Robust Standard Errors[[19]](#footnote-19)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | **Minority-threat Model** | **Political Context** | **Border Proximity** | **Professional Norms Model** | **Economic Model** | **Full Model** |
|  | **Minority Threat Variables** |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | % of population - white | -.0007 (.003) |  |  |  |  | .006 (.003)\*\* |
|  | % Immigrants  | .973 (.300)\*\*\* |  |  |  |  | 1.51 (.622)\*\* |
|  | % monthly unemployment | 1.92 (.814)\*\* |  |  |  |  | 2.03 (.685)\*\*\* |
|  | **Political Variables** |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | 2008 Presidential Vote (% Republican) |  | -1.032(.306)\*\*\* |  |  |  | -.855 (.294)\*\*\* |
|  | Hate Groups per 10K population |  | -.003 (.001)\*\* |  |  |  | -.004 (.001)\*\*\* |
|  | % of Immigrants Naturalized |  | -2.15 (.517) |  |  |  | -2.14 (.744)\*\*\* |
|  | Arizona Style Legislation |  | -.072 (.119) |  |  |  | -.127 (.094) |
|  | **Border Proximity** |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | Share border - Mexico |  |  | .097 (.057)\* |  |  | .127 (.092) |
|  | Share border with Canada |  |  | -.149 (.072)\*\* |  |  | .008 (.074) |
|  | **Professional Variables** |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | Influence of professional associations |  |  |  | .035 (.026) |  | .016 (.021) |
|  | Immigrant Liaison |  |  |  | .260 (.065)\*\*\* |  | .273 (.042)\*\*\* |
|  | **Economic Variables** |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | Foreign-born % of the Workforce |  |  |  |  | .239 (.474) | -.365 (.413) |
|  | Perception of economic importance of immigrants  |  |  |  |  | .121 (.027)\*\*\* | .081 (.021)\*\*\* |
|  | **Control Variables** |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | Budget | .0001 (.0001) | .00006 (.0001) | .0002 (.0001) | .0001 (.0001) | .00002 (.00006)\*\*\* | .0001 (.0001) |
|  | Library Director is Hispanic | .540 (.201)\*\* | .644 (.187)\*\*\* | .643 (.264)\*\* | .657 (.301)\*\* | .648 (.267)\*\* | .312 (.149)\*\* |
|  | Per capita income | -.00001 (.000006)\* | .00001 (00001) | .00001 (00001) | .00002 (000008)\* | .00002 (.00006)\*\*\* | -.00001 (.000006)\* |
|  | R Squared | .184 | .218 | .159 | .197 | .203 | .398 |
|  | Observations | 250 | 250 | 250 | 233 | 237 | 222 |
| \*p<.10; \*\*p<.05; \*\*\*p<.01. |

Figure 1: The impact of various factors on the degree of welcomeness.

# Appendix A: Interviews

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Interview** | **Position** | **State** | **Date** | **Population** | **% Foreign-born**  |
| 1 | Director of Library | CO | February 26, 2013 | 430,066 | 15% |
| 2 | Library Manager | CO | February 26, 2013 | 430,066 | 15% |
| 3 | Children’s Librarian | CO | February 26, 2013 | 430,066 | 15% |
| 4 | Library Assistant | CO | February 26, 2013 | 430,066 | 15% |
| 5 | Director of Library | CO | February 27, 2013 | 248,620 | 9% |
| 6 | Community Outreach Librarian | CO | February 27, 2013 | 248,620 | 9% |
| 7 | Library Director | GA | March 13, 2013 | 703,670 | 15% |
| 8 | Library Assistant | GA | March 13, 2013 | 703,670 | 15% |
| 9 | Library Assistant | GA | March 13, 2013 | 703,670 | 15% |
| 10 | Library Manager | GA | March 14, 2013 | 209,696 | 9% |
| 11 | Library Assistant | GA | March 14, 2013 | 209,696 | 9% |
| 12 | Library Director | TX | February 11, 2013 | 242,309 | 9% |
| 13 | Library Manager - Literacy | TX | February 11, 2013 | 242,309 | 9% |
| 14 | Library Manager | TX | February 16, 2013 | 16,855 | 11% |
| 15 | Library Assistant | TX | February 16, 2013 | 16,855 | 11% |
| 16 | Library Director | TX | February 14, 2013 | 393,022 | 10% |
| 17 | Library Assistant | TX | February 14, 2013 | 393,022 | 10% |
| 18 | Deputy Library Director | KS | June 21, 2011 | 36,776 | 20% |
| 19 | Bilingual Coordinator | KS | June 22, 2011 | 33,848 | 25% |
| 20 | Library Director | KS | July 20, 2011 | 498,365 | 8% |
| 21 | Library Director | NC | July 25, 2011 | 49,040 | 11% |
| 22 | Library Director | NC | September 2, 2011 | 268,925 | 14% |
| 23 | Assistant Library Director | TX | June 29, 2011 | 842,592 | 19% |

1. Author’s interview with library manager, Interview 18, February 26, 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Author’s interview with library bilingual coordinator, Interview 37, June 22, 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Author’s interview with library bilingual coordinator, Interview 37, June 22, 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Author’s interview with library director, Interview 13, March 13, 2013;library assistant, Interview 24, March 13, 2013 and Interview 25, March 13, 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Author’s interview with library director, Interview 28, February 11, 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Author’s interview with library assistant, Interview 24, March 13, 2013 and Interview 25, March 13, 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The relationship between partisanship or party affiliation is complicated. Some libertarian and pro-business groups are supportive of pro-immigration policies while Tea Party members are opposed. Pew Research Center reports (*Immigration Rises on Washington’s Agenda, Not the Public’s*, 2013; *Immigration: Public Backs AZ Law, But Also Path to Citizenship*, 2012) shows Republicans place a higher priority on reducing illegal immigration, are more supportive of Arizona SB 1070 style legislation, and are more opposed to creating a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants in the United States. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. To maximize survey responses, I followed Dillman’s (2007) tailored design method. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Other published studies involving police executives have had response rates of about 50% although the response rate has been declining over time (Baruch 1999). Although the response rate is lower than desired, the respondents are representative of the total population based on population size, percent of foreign born residents, geographic distribution and per capita income. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. A factor analysis of the eleven items in the welcomeness scale reveals one main factor (eigenvalue of 3.13), accounting for 77% of the variation. In the analysis presented in this chapter, I use the actual value of the additive scale as the dependent variable. Results are similar if I use the factor score as the dependent variable. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. I use ACS data to calculate the percentage of the population that is foreign-born. It is possible that the potential relationship between the size of the immigrant population and welcomeness is not linear. I substituted the percentage of the population that is foreign born with the log of that variable which produced no significant change in results. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Another potential variable, the change in the relative proportion of immigrants in a community, might affect the degree of welcomeness. When a variable for the change in proportion from 2000 to 2010 is included, it is statistically significant. It is omitted from this analysis and the models since interviews with librarians suggest the effect is the result of budgetary constraints rather than a response to outside pressures. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. The variables for the total proportion of employees at the state level and the percent of the city’s residents who are foreign born are correlated at .48 using Pearson’s Correlation command in Stata. Removing one variable from the regression model produces no substantive change in the other variable. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Author’s Interview with Library Manager, interview 2, February 26, 2013; Interview with Library Director, interview 7, March 13, 2013; Library Manager, interview 10, March 14, 2013; Library Director, interview 12, February 11, 2013; Library Manager, interview 14, February 16, 2013; Library Director, interview 16, February 14, 2013; Assistant Library Director, interview 18, June 21, 2011; Library Director, interview 22, September 2, 2011; Assistant Library Director, Interview 23, June 29, 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Author’s Interview with Library Director, interview 31, February 14, 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Author’s Interview with Library Manager, interview 25, March 14, 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Each pair of columns represents the impact of variations in the identified variable on the library’s degree of welcomeness, with all other variables set at their means. The figure’s scale covers one standard deviation above and below the mean on the dependent variable (welcomeness). On the independent variables “low” represents the 25th percentile and “high” represents the 75th percentile on the independent variables. Results generated using the Clarify procedure in Stata. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Author’s interview with Deputy Library Director, Interview 36, June 21, 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. The variables for the total proportion of the population that is white and the percentage of the foreign born population are correlated at -0.5816 using Pearson’s Correlation command in Stata. Removing one variable from the regression model produces no substantive change in the other variable. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)