Immigrants and Hosts is a collection of research-based articles in the Journal of Social Issues (JSI), published in December 2010. Editors Kay Deaux (City University of New York), Victoria Esses (University of Western Ontario), Richard N. Lalonde (York University) and Rupert Brown (University of Sussex) bring together cutting-edge science on immigration experienced from the point of view of both the immigrants and their host communities in the U.S. and other countries.

Overview of immigration in the U.S.

The U.S. has an estimated foreign-born population of 38.5 million people, representing 12.5% total. Of these, an estimated 11 million (3.5%) immigrants are undocumented (a number that is recently reported to be declining).

In the U.S. nearly a quarter of children live in immigrant families.

The world has a total population of 200 million migrants (3%).

Key findings: The host perspective

Host communities can overestimate illegal immigration
People generally overestimate the proportion of immigrants who are illegal.

The voice of raised security and policing may be misleading
People in favor of tough policies have the most exaggerated perceptions of public support. Spiral of silence theory says that when you assume majority support you are more likely to speak out. Opposition therefore becomes quieter and opinion shifts.

Policy and public opinion go hand in hand
Policies addressing false beliefs about crime related to economic threats can reduce prejudice. Similarly important is stressing civic identity over ethnic identity. Attitudes towards immigrants can also be improved by framing policies in terms of skilled workers rather than family reunification.

Key findings: The immigrant perspective

Education is a motivator
The more focus immigrant parents give to education as a reason for immigrating, the higher their children’s GPA score. The more motivation there is for immigrants to see a path to educational success for their kids, the more likely this is to be realized for the new members to American society.
Separateness leads to pain
If immigrants experience a discrepancy between their own and other’s appraisals of themselves, social alienation and depression can become acute, and social conflict tends to rise. This applies to both first and second generation migrants [12].

Key findings: Hosts meet immigrants
Perceptions and realities
Identities and characteristics are often imposed on immigrants by the citizens of the host country, rather than reflecting the true values of the immigrants themselves. Misperceptions about values of the other group can create unjustified and unnecessary conflict between groups [13].

Proximity leads to harmony
Programs encouraging contact between hosts and newcomers can lead to lower levels of prejudice [14].

About JSI
This is one in a series of executive summaries of published issues of the Journal of Social Issues (JSI). JSI, SPSSI’s flagship journal has been published quarterly since 1945, with every issue devoted to an in-depth examination of a single topic from an empirically-sound, peer-reviewed, social science perspective.

About SPSSI
The Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPSSI) is an international group of approximately 3000 psychologists, allied scientists, students, and others who share a common interest in research on the psychological aspects of important social issues. In various ways, the Society seeks to bring theory and practice into focus on human problems of the group, the community, and nations, as well as the increasingly important problems that have no national boundaries.

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