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**Abstract**

Achieving the American dream is typically equated with strong upward socioeconomic mobility economic individualism, and low use of social assistance programs. Immigrants migrating to the United States migrate for a variety of reasons; however, do they share perceptions of socioeconomic mobility and similar attitudes regarding social assistance? And do the children and grandchildren of immigrants also share similar perceptions and attitudes? This study seeks to understand whether or not perceptions of socioeconomic mobility affect attitudes regarding social assistance in the immigrant first generation, second generation, and third generation. By examining the core values and beliefs held by different immigrant generations, a pattern of perceptions of upward mobility and negative attitudes about assistance emerge in the first generation. The quintessential American value of economic individualism appears to be a core value held by those coming from outside the borders of the United States and offers some explanation for the variation in assistance attitudes expressed by all generations.

Hard work and perseverance have long been considered the most important factors in achieving the American dream. Discourses of American individualism and the possibility of positive socioeconomic mobility are powerful and commonplace in the United States today and are frequently cited as core American values. Just as strong as a belief in positive mobility are the stories of America as a nation of immigrants. Record numbers of immigrants are migrating to and naturalizing into the US seeking new opportunities for themselves and their children. The impetus for migration is varied, though one factor that may draw immigrants to the U.S. is the appeal of social programs such as welfare, social security, and education. Incentives to utilize the wide array of social assistance programs provided by state and federal governments are perceived to be a driving factor in immigration. The question of whether or not immigrants utilize social assistance programs is a simple one: immigrants utilize welfare programs, and at a higher rate than native born Americans (Van Hook, 2003). Regardless of utilization rates, support for social assistance programs must come from the American general public, of which new immigrants, their children, and eventually their grandchildren, are a part. Do immigrants show support for or oppose social assistance policies and programs? The ways in which perceptions of mobility affect support for social assistance are not fully known. How do perceptions of socioeconomic mobility affect the willingness of an immigrant to show support for social assistance programs and do perceptions of mobility change between generations?

Since immigrants comprise a substantial and unique portion of the American population, and tend to be concentrated in certain regions and cities within the U.S., understanding why immigrants do, or do not, support the creation and funding of social assistance programs is valuable for the policy-making bodies to understand. Within the United States first and second generation immigrants constitute over 15 percent of the eligible voting population, making the

American immigrant demographic extremely valuable to elected policy-makers (Ramakrishnan & Espenshade, 2001). The number of immigrants migrating to the United States is not likely to decrease; if current rates of immigration remain consistent immigrant populations and their U.S. born children are projected to be an estimated 82 percent of the population increase of the United States in the next 40 years (Passel & Cohn, 2008). In addition to the practical implications of understanding the motivations for social assistance support, the literature for these issues is sparse and ambivalent at best. Literature on social assistance tends not to look at immigrant specific populations and only occasionally concentrates on the reasons for why support is shown for programs. The relevant literature also tends to concentrate on different demographics within the immigrant population, and does not typically consider motivations behind behavior, but rather behavior only. Literature on immigrants and social assistance does not go much beyond utilization rates and the effects of “chilling out” noncitizen immigrants from various welfare programs (Van Hook, 2003).

First, second, and third generation immigrants will be considered when looking at attitudes about social assistance programs. The behavior of a new or first generation immigrant is likely to vary greatly from that of their children, as the children of immigrants, or second generation immigrants, are both exposed to and more experienced with the American individualism discourse and the economic realities of day to day life within the US. First generation immigrants are likely to be influenced by the motivations they felt to make their initial migration to the US. Understanding these motivations sheds light on new immigrants’ perceptions of their ability to be successful within the US. Newly naturalized immigrants are likely show a stronger belief in their ability to be upwardly mobile in the US economy and successive generations thereafter will show a decreasing belief in upward mobility. Although a

strong sense of American individualism is likely to be instilled through a process of political and economic socialization to a greater degree in the second and third generations of an immigrant family, it is likely that the economic realities and the relative difficulty in achieving upward mobility will override feelings of individualism and mobility. Generational differences in experiences with and perceptions of socioeconomic mobility situate this study and are the most significant variables to consider when looking at why immigrants may support or oppose social assistance. Actual generational differences between immigrants are another place where the literature is ambivalent. Some studies suggest that there is significant difference, others suggest there is not, thus in an effort to clarify and hopefully add to the existing literature on immigrant behavior, the research questions for this study are as follows:

**Question<sub>1</sub>:** Are perceptions of socioeconomic mobility in immigrant populations significantly different from those of native born Americans, and if so, do generational differences in immigrants decrease or increase a perceived belief in upward socioeconomic mobility?

**Question<sub>2</sub>:** Does a perception of upward socioeconomic mobility explain low support for social assistance programs?

### **Literature Review**

Generation can be defined in a variety of ways, though in the context of this study, generation should be understood in genealogical terms: the second and third generations are the children and grandchildren of individuals not born in the United States. The first generation is the first generation of their families to live in the United States. The literature does not agree about the effects of generation on political attitudes, feelings about socioeconomic mobility, or core values

as they are transferred and differ between generations. Several scholars argue that there is considerable difference between immigrant generations and specifically the difference between generations can shape political attitudes and core values, as well as create significant variation in perceptions of socioeconomic mobility. Other scholars argue that there are core values that do not differ between generations that shape political attitudes and perceptions of mobility.

The first portion of the literature review argues that generation has a significant effect on shaping ideas about socioeconomic mobility and social assistance. The second section of the literature review, however, shows that there is extensive literature that suggests that many beliefs which appear to be ideological or generational, such as ideas about socioeconomic mobility and social assistance are actually shaped by a set of core values and beliefs. Core values and beliefs are shared by members of a common culture. Immigrants, their children, and grandchildren are very much a part of the larger American culture in many ways. Since the first section of the literature review argues that generation plays a role in the degree to which immigrants share American values and ideals, we should first examine how shared values such as economic individualism and dreams of upward socioeconomic mobility have been previously studied. Values are defined as “conceptions of the desirable” that serve as guiding social norms, are used to evaluate people and events, and are “trans-situational criteria or goals...ordered by importance as guiding principles in life” (Schwartz, 1999: 24-25). Values are shared socially and are useful in understanding how individual political attitudes are structured (Feldman, 2003). Economic individualism is an example of a shared core value that is arguably one of the most important in the United States. Economic individualism plays a role in both the desire for upward social mobility and social assistance (Feldman, 2003; Feldman, 1988; Markus, 2001; Shen & Edwards, 2005).

Economic individualism is linked to social mobility and support for a market economy which shapes the way people respond to social assistance programs (Feldman, 2003). Since economic individualism is defined by an individual's belief that people are ultimately responsible for their own mobility, individuals who express strong feelings of individualism are not likely to strongly support social assistance programs. Society is not responsible for those who are in need when core social values dictate strong feelings of individualism (Feldman, 2003). There is some disagreement about how much of an effect individualism has on social assistance attitudes. Individualism may not entirely determine attitudes about assistance programs as Feldman argues. Even when an individual has strong perceptions of mobility and individualistic attitudes, people are still capable of understanding that some circumstances are beyond the control of the individual and thus may still show some acceptance for social assistance (Markus, 2001). The literature on core values is not completely clear; however, the existence of an effect by core social values should not be ignored. As the next section addresses, generation may contribute to some of the ambiguity regarding how core values dictate attitudes and feelings.

### **Generational Determinants of Mobility Perceptions and Assistance Attitudes**

First, second, and third generation immigrants experience very different processes of political and economic socialization, although the degree to which socialization differs and the effects upon policy that it has is not clear. The ways in which different processes of political and economic socialization affect immigrants' perceptions of themselves and their ability to move within the strata of the American economic system are likely influenced by generational status. Younger, American-born generations, in comparison to their older, foreign-born counterparts are more likely to participate politically and vote. Since "the life experiences of the younger, native-

born sectors have socialized them to a stronger belief in American civic norms” and “the same norms have not been reinforced in the older, foreign-born cohort”, attitudes supportive of social assistance programs may also be stronger in the younger generation (Tam Cho, 1999: 1153). This section of the literature review will address the literature that posits a generational effect on feelings of mobility and assistance attitudes.

### **Characteristics of the First Generation**

There are a variety of characteristics that make first generation immigrants different from second generation immigrants. In addition to differences in perceptions of socioeconomic mobility, first generation immigrants also utilize their social networks within the US differently. A first generation immigrant’s country of origin may also play a significant role in their feelings about social assistance policies that result in programs. Looking first at mobility, we see that motivations for immigration are frequently based on the belief that increased socioeconomic mobility will be greatly increased through an act of migration, although this perception frequently does not reflect the economic reality of living in the United States. Within the US, there is a discrepancy between beliefs about socioeconomic mobility and the reality of socioeconomic mobility: there is a “common and persistent perception of the United States as an exceptionally mobile society” (Benabou & Tirole, 2004: 5). Strong feelings of economic individualism may not reflect the economic or political reality of immigrants living in the United States.

Establishing that a new migrant to the United States perceives themselves as upwardly mobile is important to explaining the causal mechanisms that help to determine whether or not a first generation migrant is likely to support social assistance programs. For first generation immigrants, migrations may occur because of economic factors: prospects of brighter futures and



a more comfortable lifestyle are forceful conceptions in the decision to migrate. Since the initial act of migration is made by a first generation immigrant, the act of migration itself is indicative of strong perceptions of upward mobility within the US economic strata. The traditional argument for migration is one of better jobs in the United States, with migrants seeking to escape poverty and unemployment in their home countries, and diversify their economic risks (Massey et al.,1993: 436). Diversification of risks through migration is not the only reason for migration. The strong influence of westernized lifestyles, or an increase in the comfort of lifestyle for a migrant that has a post high school or post collegiate degree, are also common reasons for migration; not all “immigrants...come to escape perennial unemployment or destitution in their homeland. Most undertake the journey instead to attain the dream of a new lifestyle that has reached their countries but that is impossible to fulfill in them” (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006: 19).

Not all migrants are poverty stricken or unemployed in their home country, in fact “migration is the means to stabilize family livelihoods and meet long-desired aspirations...contemporary immigration is a direct consequences of the dominant influence attained by the culture of the advanced West in every corner of the globe” (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006: 19). Pursuit of an Americanized lifestyle, which has strong roots in consumption and the free market is a powerful force for today’s migrants. “The enormous variety of today’s immigrants and the fact that they come spontaneously, rather than through recruitment, reflect the attraction of American lifestyles and their gradual conversion into a world standard” (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006: 19). Migrants come to the US for a chance to increase their socioeconomic mobility, and as such, perceptions of this mobility would be relatively high for the first generation of immigrants.

Another illustration of strong perceptions of economic mobility is the dreams migrants have for their children, the second generation. Ambitions and expectations for the second generation, especially in the realm of higher education also show that migrants perceive themselves and their children to have the ability to be highly mobile. Close to 74 percent of immigrant “parents expect their children to graduate from college, and of these, close to 50 percent expect them to earn a postgraduate degree; majorities of all immigrant nationalities voice these goals” (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001: 103). Strong perceptions of socioeconomic mobility are indicative of low support for social assistance. Perceiving one’s self to be self sufficient and as having the opportunities to increase income and consumption power suggests one would be less likely to seek out and support programs that do not encourage the strong sense of American individualism that often motivates immigrants to migrate. Whether it is through motivations for migration, or the dreams of a parent for their child, migrants perceive themselves to have more opportunities in the US than in their home countries. The ways in which these perceptions manifest themselves in the actions of migrants for or against issues of social assistance is the reasoning for this study.

After migrating, immigrants frequently join a community of immigrants from a common country or region of origin. By joining with a community, immigrants can be exposed to certain types of social assistance which may not necessarily reflect all of the programs available. The types of programs that first generation migrants are exposed to may or may not reflect their preferences and support for social assistance, and as will be addressed in the following section on second generation immigrants, likely influence their children. Newly arrived immigrants are likely to utilize the same type of assistance as those immigrants who arrived prior to them. This “suggests that there are information networks operating within ethnic communities which

transmit information about the availability of particular types of benefits to newly arrived immigrants” (Borjas & Hilton, 1996: 602). Information networks within specific communities may bias an immigrant towards one form of social assistance over another, and it may also influence an immigrant to support or oppose entire social assistance policies. Both perceptions of mobility and the influence of social networks can help to explain the feelings an immigrant has about social assistance.

Processes of socialization, experience with assistance, and community networks are all based on the type of country from which an immigrant originated. Political and economic experiences from the country of origin are elements of life that an immigrant or the child of an immigrant has to cope with when trying to integrate into the American mainstream. Since children of immigrants spend more time in the United States, in comparison to their parents, it is reasonable to conclude that first generation immigrants will retain stronger political and economic ties to their country of origin (Ramakrishnan & Espenshade, 2001). Not all immigrants utilize or seek out assistance benefits in the same fashion either. Immigrant welfare utilization rates vary significantly according to country of origin (Borjas & Trejo, 1993). Welfare utilization rates for specific populations of the immigrants in the United States can be accounted for when looking at country of origin, and increases in welfare utilization in the 1980s correlate directly with the changes in immigrant source countries for that same period (Borjas & Trejo, 1993). After migration some immigrants will also continue to participate socially in the politics and economics of their sending countries, keeping strong ties in the political areas they were previously active (Guarnizo et al., 2003). Forms of government and types of social assistance provided in a home country are likely to influence first generation immigrants’ impressions

about social assistance, and the policies of home countries should be less influential as generations spent outside of the home country increase.

### **Characteristics of the Second Generation**

Second generation immigrants are born in the US, therefore their experiences within the US will be substantially different from their parents. The literature shows that second generation immigrants have different experiences with economic mobility than their parents, they utilize and view their social networks in a different fashion, and country of origin plays almost no role in their perceptions of their own mobility or in their feelings about social assistance. Although the second generation has a greater exposure to discourses on American individualism, their actual experiences with minimal or no upward mobility frequently override these discourses (Zhou, 1997). As was discussed in the section on first generation characteristics, there is a discrepancy regarding socioeconomic mobility within the US. The discrepancy between perceptions of and experience with mobility are reflected in the attitudes of second generation immigrants. Because their experiences with mobility differ from the perceptions of their parents, their perceptions of their own potential to be mobile are also different. Economic disadvantage among immigrant youth in the second generation leads to feelings of frustration about the widening gap between American mainstream culture, which places high values on freedom and materialism, and the reality of a dwindling economic future (Zhou, 1997). As a response to this frustration, many immigrant youth are beginning to reject the goals of achievement and upward mobility that are so prevalent in their parent's generation (Zhou, 1997). Although many immigrants follow a traditional bottom-up route of socioeconomic mobility, some new arrivals have merged directly into the American middle class, bypassing the very bottom of the socioeconomic bracket. The implications for the children of these immigrants are significant

because “the current state and future prospects of immigrant children are related to the advantages or disadvantages that accrue to the socioeconomic status of their parents” (Zhou, 1997). Generational difference, and differences between perceptions of and the reality of socioeconomic mobility are likely to be highly influential on a migrant’s or their children’s willingness to show support for social assistance.

Essentially, mobility experiences are important because if first generation immigrants come to the United States perceiving themselves to be more mobile than they actually are, their children’s experience with mobility will be less reflective of their parent’s perceptions, and more reflective of the reality of economic mobility in the United States. Thus, second generation immigrants will be more willing to support social assistance based on their experience with socioeconomic mobility rather than based on the prevailing American discourse of upward mobility.

As a complement to experiences with mobility, social networks for second generation immigrants are expected to have a strong effect on individual values and perceptions (Kwak, 2003). Individual values and political attitudes may be mitigated when someone has benefited from social programs, or when they have known someone close to them who has benefited from assistance. Knowing someone who was the recipient of assistance increases the likelihood of supporting policies with social benefits (Appelbaum, 2001). This is supportive of the idea that contact with people who are in need of assistance increases positive feelings towards other people in need of assistance. The existence of networks will be especially significant to second generation immigrants, because of the overwhelming affect experiences with socioeconomic mobility are expected to have on the second generation. Assuming that second generation immigrants experience low levels of socioeconomic mobility, as is argued by Zhou (1997), the

likelihood that second generation immigrants come into contact with assistance programs is high. Since second generation immigrants have a higher likelihood of encountering recipients of assistance due to a longer time spent in the United States the social network variable is likely to have a strong effect on second generation immigrants and a weak effect on first generation immigrants. Finally, in an effort to break a cycle of disadvantage and social inequality, young first generation and second generation immigrants attempt to cultivate relationships within their ethnic communities which can provide potential avenues for upward mobility (Zhou, 1997). Through the cultivation of these relationships, second generation immigrants may have an easier time accessing and understanding the benefits of social assistance programs.

### **The Role of the Welfare State**

Understanding how welfare programs relate to immigrants is important and relate closely to the motivations for migration experience by the first generation. Common misconceptions about motivations for migration to the United States include the potential draw of a strong welfare state. Proponents of stricter immigration control frequently cite the draw of the United States' welfare programs for incoming immigrant populations (Van Hook, 2003; Borjas, 1999). "From the individual's point of view the major effect of welfare state policies is partial protection from and modification of, market-mediated rules of inclusion in the economic system" (Halfmann, 2000: 41). Immigrants are accused of seeking out state protection in the form of welfare and empirical evidence suggests that immigrants tend to congregate in states where welfare benefits are the highest (Borjas, 1999). This trend, however, could be a result of other variables, such as strong ties to specific immigrant communities. After migrating, immigrants seek inclusion into American mainstream culture regardless of whether or not they are naturalized citizens. Welfare politics frequently seek to exclude immigrant populations from the protection of welfare

programs and inclusion into the welfare state (Halfmann, 2000). Ethnocentric perceptions of immigrants as a drain on social assistance programs has been a driving force in welfare legislation politics.

Welfare legislation in 1996 sought to exclude non-citizen immigrants from participating in welfare programs, partly as a means of discouraging immigration and partly as a means of reducing state expenditures on welfare programs (Borjas, 1999; Van Hook, 2003). Prior to the 1996 welfare reform legislation, non-citizen welfare recipients initially had much lower naturalization levels than non-welfare recipients, which suggests that welfare was a disincentive to naturalization; however this gap closed by 1998. After the passage of 1996 welfare legislation, both recipients and non-recipients of welfare were equally as likely to naturalize (Van Hook, 2003). This finding suggests that incentives for naturalization for a non-citizen migrant are neither predicated on their desires to continue utilizing the welfare system nor was welfare utilization necessarily a driving force in the decision to migrate. Inclusion into American culture and in the context of the United States where the nation state as a welfare state is actually fairly limited, ideas of nationalism must instead come from “substitutes and supporting ideologies—a civil religion, the belief in certain uniquely American virtues—for creating and maintaining a nation” (Halfmann, 2000; 45). Inclusion may come in the form of shared cultural ideas and values such as individualism, but these ideas and values are likely influenced and differ by generation, given some of the unique generational attributes such as migration, networks, and actual experience with socioeconomic mobility and social assistance programs.

### **Non-Generational Determinants of Mobility Perceptions and Assistance Attitudes**

Generation is arguably a very broad measure incapable of accounting for the enormous differences in immigrant populations. David Kertzer argues that there are a numerous problematic reasons in using generational analysis as a determinant of any sort of political or ideological difference between individuals (Kertzer, 1983). First and foremost, Kertzer warns of the erroneous assumption that an intergenerational study of any sort can account for forms of value transmission between generations. As is the case with this study, comparisons of values between generations are being made, however according to Kertzer, this is cannot be done unless the respondents are related and in this case they are not (Kertzer, 1983). Additionally, the creation of categories based broadly on just three genealogical generations is problematic because of the vast variation in the location from which migrants come and the difference in historical time period at the time of their migration (Kertzer, 1983). While Kertzer's arguments are valid, part of the tested variables within this study will consider the countries and regions from which migrants originate. Finally, the vast variation in age and in age of arrival to the US for the first generation will create a variety of differences within each generational category (Kertzer, 1983). As is the case with taking countries and regions of origin into account, age is also statistically accounted for in this study. Kertzer's arguments offer a solid base for many other important ideas about how core values, political attitudes, and perceptions of mobility are created in all people, not just those who are immigrants or those who fall into a single generational category

The relevant literature as it relates to immigrants and social assistance is very sparse, therefore the following sections describing social assistance attitudes are not specific to immigrants as a demographic. Just as economic individualism is upheld as core value closely linked to mobility, other core values exist in tandem with individualism. The following section is useful in highlighting how some scholars believe a person conceptualizes inequality and



poverty and how they believe these problems should be remedied, which is often dictated by their core values. Humanitarianism and egalitarianism are two core values that can shape a person's attitudes about social assistance. Income, political ideology, and the importance of core values are covered in the following sections as being alternative explanations to generational effects on mobility and assistance attitudes.

Assuming that an individual's income will influence his or her feelings for providing support to another individual whose income is inadequate is a logical conclusion to draw; the literature, however, does not necessarily agree about how income affects attitudes about giving assistance. On one side of the argument, Appelbaum suggests that individuals with low incomes are less likely to support social assistance than those with higher incomes since "it is possible that people with low incomes feel that if they can survive without aid, then others should be able to provide for themselves as well" (Appelbaum, 2001: 431). On the other side of the income/assistance debate, Picketty finds that the majority of lower income voters who were born into a low income will vote for liberal policies, however, low income voters who were born into middle incomes will not (Picketty, 2005). Finally, Picketty finds that parent's income history also affects attitudes about social assistance as much as one's own income, however, in this study, opposite findings are expected because perceptions of socioeconomic mobility in second generation immigrants will be a stronger determinant of assistance attitudes than income. Thus, although the literature does not agree on how income affects assistance attitudes, first generation immigrants are expected to follow the arguments presented by the first author, Appelbaum; where first generation immigrants exhibit low levels of social assistance support, based on their own experiences with low socioeconomic mobility and low income. Second and third generation immigrants are likely to follow the arguments presented by Picketty; where they show

more support than the first generation for social assistance based on the low income histories of their parents.

Many attitudes regarding assistance are in part a product of a person's political ideology. A strong indicator of support for assistance is the perception of a person's adherence to traditional norms. Conservatives view violators of traditional norms to be in need of punishment and are morally outraged by violations, while liberals do not. Skitka and Tetlock identify what they call the trade-off avoidance hypothesis. The trade-off avoidance hypothesis shows that liberals find it to be emotionally difficult and distasteful to make individual resource allocation decisions. Liberals would rather expand a resource pool (to help those perceived to not to be responsible for their predicament) at personal expense than distinguish between one person's need over another (Skitka & Tetlock, 1993). Rudolph and Evans provide an overview of the concept stating that "not surprisingly... support for government spending is greater among Democrats and liberals than it is among Republicans and conservatives" (Rudolph & Evans, 2005: 666). Thus, attributions of poverty and consequently attitudes about providing assistance to another person may be strongly determined by that individual's political ideology.

Alternatively, conservatives engage in what Skitka and Tetlock have termed the self-interest hypothesis; where conservatives are unwilling to expand a resource pool to increase social assistance when expanding resources comes at a personal expense. However, when resources are scarce, both liberals and conservatives denied social assistance to those people they deemed personally responsible for their own predicament. Under conditions of resource scarcity and abundance, conservatives are more likely to withhold various forms aid from those they consider to be in violation of traditional norms, which Skitka and Tetlock call the Punitiveness hypothesis. When resources are abundant, liberals and conservatives fall back into the behavior

noted prior, with liberals providing assistance to everyone and conservatives continuing to withhold assistance to those perceived as responsible for their predicament. Conservatives tend to withhold assistance consistently, across both resource scarcity and abundance (Skitka & Tetlock, 1993). Liberals tend to withhold assistance in a more contextual sense, and really only withhold assistance when resources are scarce and recipients are perceived a personally responsible for their need. Ideology can be a powerful determinant in understanding how one behaves politically although frequently, ideology is really just a reflection of an individual's core beliefs and values (Feldman, 2003)

In addition to ideology and income, the core values of humanitarianism and egalitarianism can help to predict a person's attitudes about assistance. Individuals who seek to rectify worldwide inequalities through social assistance programs are egalitarians. Egalitarians will more strongly support government assistance programs than humanitarians because they perceive government action to be the most effective remedy to world inequalities (Feldman & Steenbergen, 2001). Alternatively, humanitarians will support social assistance only when they perceive the recipient's neediness to be no fault of their own. "Most individuals feel a strong need to believe that they live in a world that is just, in the sense that people generally get what they deserve, and deserve what they get" (Benabou & Tirole, 2004: 1; Alesina & Angeletos, 2005). A belief in a just world reflects strongly egalitarian values, however, when people combine a belief of a just world with the belief that individuals are responsible for their own poverty, believing in a just world rarely leads to support for social assistance (Lane, 2001). From a humanitarian's perspective, viewing someone as responsible for their own poverty or neediness will not lead to strong support for assistance programs.

Individual views on why and how someone came to need assistance are vastly different and reflective of core values. The way people understand income inequality affects the way they understand poverty and directly contributes to whether or not they choose egalitarianism or humanitarianism as a core value. If a person does not perceive income inequality to be an issue, as an egalitarian would, they are much less likely to support policies to alleviate it, making them a humanitarian. For an egalitarian, support for social assistance policies is based on perceptions of the fairness of market outcomes and the underlying sources of income inequality (Feldman & Steenbergen, 2001). Humanitarianism looks instead at whether or not a person is responsible for their own poverty. Individualism as a core value is compatible with and frequently accompanies humanitarianism to make a set of core values. In the case of the United States, humanitarianism and individualism can accompany each other and “American’s believe that poverty is due to bad choices or lack of effort...Americans perceive wealth and success as the outcome of individual talent, effort, and entrepreneurship” (Alesina & Angeletos, 2005: 960). In support of this finding, only a minority of Americans, 20 percent, believe that poverty is entrapping and only 30 percent believe that luck, rather than effort or education, determines income (Benabou & Tirole, 2004).

Allocating assistance for those who are impoverished is often done based on an attribution of poverty; whether or not an individual’s poverty is caused by internal (humanitarianism) or external factors (egalitarianism). Attributions of poverty accompany individualism when a person decides whether or not to support assistance programs, although there is a tension between egalitarianism and individualism that does not exist for humanitarians. “Sixty percent of Americans...believe that the poor could become rich if they just tried hard enough,” indicating that most Americans attribute poverty to internal sources; lack of

education, lack of determination, etc., rather than external, circumstantial sources (Alesina & Angeletos, 2005: 960). When poverty is attributed to internal rather than external sources, a humanitarian views the person in need of assistance more negatively (Appelbaum, 2001; Lane, 2001). The core values of humanitarianism and egalitarianism are linked to political ideology, “conservatives blame poverty on self-indulgence and lack of moral standards and intelligences. Liberals see the poor as victims of unjust social practices and structures” (Skitka and Tetlock, 193: 1205). Assistance attitudes are strongly based in the core values of individualism and humanitarianism or egalitarianism.

### **Argument and Hypothesis**

As immigrants are socialized politically and economically over successive generations, factors such as core values, ideology, and perceptions of mobility influence their understanding of and support for specific programs. The most significant variables in this study are going to be generational difference between immigrants and their perceptions of socioeconomic mobility. Portes and Rumbaut argue that “despite efforts of immigrant families and sending-country governments to preserve vibrant national loyalties among the second generation, the process of acculturation inexorably turns their members into Americans with primarily domestic views and aspirations” (Portes and Rumbaut, 2006: 147). As a result of change over time, different immigrant generations are likely to support or oppose social programs in different ways. The following are hypothesis to each of the research questions presented:

**Hypothesis<sub>1</sub>:** First generation immigrants will perceive themselves to be more upwardly mobile than native born Americans, with successive generations exhibiting perceptions of less upward mobility

**Hypothesis<sub>2</sub>:** Perceptions of upward mobility will be indicative of low support for social assistance programs.

Generational status is expected to be a good predictor of whether or not an immigrant will support the allocation of assistance, based on perceived socioeconomic mobility. As generational status changes from first to second, and second to third; perceptions of mobility are likely to decrease, resulting in an increased support for social assistance. If first generation migrants come to the United States perceiving themselves to be more economically successful than they could be in their home country, then migrants would be less likely to show support for social assistance, because if they themselves can be successful, then other people should be able to do the same. The influential discourse of economic individualism is expected to be very strong for first generation immigrants and show diminishing importance for successive generations.

### **Data and Methods**

The 2006 General Social Survey (GSS) constitutes the data set for this study. Since 1994 the GSS has been a biannual survey conducted by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC). The GSS is the longest running NORC project, with its inaugural survey conducted in 1972. The GSS is funded by the Sociology Program of the National Science Foundation and in 2006 it had a total of 4505 respondents. Survey results from the GSS are analyzed and utilized by a variety of public and private academic institutions, government agencies, nonprofits, and private corporations. Second only to the Census, the GSS is one of the most frequently analyzed surveys conducted in the United States.

### **Variables**

Four different groups of individuals were established: first generation, second generation, third generation, and the four-plus generation. For the purposes of this study, first generation

represents anyone who was born outside of the United States. The second generation requires that a person is born in the United States and has one or both parents born outside of the United States. The third generation requires that a person is born in the United States, that both parents are born in the United States and that one or more grandparent is born outside of the United States. The fourth-plus generation encompasses everyone born in the United States who have both parents born in the United States, have all grandparents born in the United States, and may or may not have one or more great-grandparent born outside of the United States. Establishing generation beyond and including the fourth generation was not possible based on the lineage questions asked by GSS 2006. In 2006, GSS respondents were asked whether or not they were born in the United States, how many parents were born in the United States, and how many grandparents were born in the United States. Based on these questions, the total of all respondents who qualified as first generation were 417, 14 percent of the sample; second generation respondents totaled 249, 8 percent of the sample; third generation respondents totaled 580, 20 percent of the sample; and the fourth-plus generation totaled 1,642, 58 percent of the sample. It should be noted that not all respondents answered all the questions pertaining to their lineage, therefore each generational category, including the four-plus generation, is based on only those who answered enough or all of the questions regarding their own status, the status their parents, and the status of their grandparents to place them into one of the available categories.

After generation, the most important variable to this study is a measure of perceived socioeconomic mobility. For all tables and graphs, this variable is referred to as “feelings of mobility”. On the 2006 GSS respondents were asked, “The way things are in America, people like me and my family have a good chance of improving our standard of living. Do you agree or

disagree?” Agreement or disagreement was based on a five point scale: *1 strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 neither agree nor disagree, 4 agree, 5 strongly agree*. This categorical variable represents a measure of perceived socioeconomic mobility and is used in all models. Perceived socioeconomic mobility is both an outcome variable and an explanatory variable, depending on the model being discussed. Clarification of how the “feelings of mobility” variable is used will be covered in the discussion of the models later in this section.

The primary outcome variable of this study is a measurement of attitudes regarding the amount of money being spent on social assistance programs. This variable is referred to as “assistance attitudes” for all tables and graphs. The “assistance attitudes” variable is comprised of three questions from GSS 2006. These questions ask the respondent’s opinion about whether or not the government is spending too much, about right, or too little on welfare, social security, and education. Generating a measure of opinions regarding spending on social assistance was done by scaling these three questions (welfare, social security, and education) into one variable. Spending is a reasonable measure of support for social assistance because it indicates that when spending is too low the respondent would be willing to spend more through a possible increase in taxes or a reallocation of government funding from one program to another. Thus, opinions on spending indicate whether or not a person supports a given set of programs. Welfare and social security are obvious examples of social assistance, while education is more abstract. Education was included as part of the “assistance attitudes” variable because the original GSS asked about education as part of the set that included questions on welfare and social security spending.

Other variables of interest include respondent’s country of origin, political views, education, income, socioeconomic index, sex, and age. Two different country of origin variables were created from the same question and differ by the categories available within each. Country



of origin by HDI is a variable comprised of four categories, each one representing a Human Development Index (HDI) rating: low development, medium development, high development, and very high development. Country of origin by region breaks respondents' country of origin into the following world regional categories: North America (excluding the US), Western Europe, Eastern Europe, Central America, South America, Asia, Africa, and the United States. For a more extensive discussion of how the country of origin variables were created, the exact wording of the question, and the countries placed into each category, please see Appendix A. The political views variable ranges from extremely conservative to extremely liberal. Education measures the highest completed year of school; some high school, high school graduate, some college, college graduate, post graduate. Finally, for more information regarding the breakdown of income and socioeconomic index, age, and education please see Appendix A.

### **Models**

Two linear regression models are used to examine the relationship between immigrant generation, perceived socioeconomic mobility, and support for social assistance programs. The first model is based on hypothesis<sub>1</sub>; that there is a difference in perceptions of socioeconomic mobility between immigrant generations. This first model, the Generational Mobility model, examines the effect of generational difference on perceptions of mobility. This model looks at mobility perceptions for first, second, third, and four-plus generations. The Generational Mobility model is used to establish the relationship between immigrant generation and perceived socioeconomic mobility over other factors such as country/region of origin, income, socioeconomic index, political views, education, and other demographic variables. The second model is based on hypothesis<sub>2</sub>; that perceived mobility will have an effect on attitudes regarding social assistance programs. Model two, the Assistance Attitudes model, examines the effect of

perceived mobility and generation on attitudes about social assistance programs over demographic variables and the above mentioned variables of interest.

In the Generational Mobility model, perceived socioeconomic mobility is the outcome variable and results from this model help to establish the existence of a relationship between generation and perceptions of mobility. In the Assistance Attitudes model, mobility is an explanatory variable and is tested against the outcome variable, assistance attitudes. In the Assistance Attitudes model, the relationship between generation and assistance attitudes is first tested, with perceived mobility introduced as an explanatory variable. The introduction of perceived mobility to the Assistance Attitudes model tests the mediating effect of perceived mobility on the relationship between immigrant generation and assistance attitudes over other variables.

### **Results and Analysis**

The Generational Mobility model addresses the first research question and hypothesis; on the issue of socioeconomic mobility, are there unique differences in perceptions of socioeconomic mobility between immigrants of different generations? The first generation over all other generations is expected to show the strongest perception of upward socioeconomic mobility because migrating to the United States suggests that an individual perceives themselves to have greater opportunities in the United States compared to in their home country. Figure 1 is a cross-tabulation analysis of the relative feelings of mobility within each generation. Within the first generation, over 70 percent either agree or strongly agree that they have the potential for positive social mobility and less than 10 percent believe they do not have the potential for upward socioeconomic mobility. Cross-tabulation analysis cannot provide a full picture of why a first generation immigrant may perceive themselves as being upwardly mobile, nor can it make

meaningful comparisons between the generations compared to the fourth-plus generation. Multivariate linear regression analysis of mobility feelings shows differences between generational perceptions of mobility, along with other explanatory variables that have an effect on feelings of mobility. Much of the statistical analysis is based on beta coefficients for each regression, therefore a table of the beta coefficients for the Generational Mobility model can be viewed in Appendix B.

**Figure 1**      **Feelings of Mobility by Generation**

Feelings of Mobility	First Generation	Second Generation	Third Generation	Fourth-Plus Generation	Total
Strongly Disagree	7	7	9	29	52
	13.46	13.46	17.31	55.77	100.00
	2.42	4.40	2.58	2.64	2.74
Disagree	22	20	69	153	264
	8.33	7.58	26.14	57.95	100.00
	7.61	12.58	19.77	13.92	13.92
Neither	34	23	59	171	287
	11.85	8.01	20.56	59.58	100.00
	11.76	14.47	16.91	15.56	15.14
Agree	133	75	141	548	897
	14.83	8.36	15.72	61.09	100.00
	46.02	47.17	40.40	49.86	47.31
Strongly Agree	93	34	71	198	396
	23.48	8.59	17.93	50.00	100.00
	32.18	21.38	20.34	18.02	20.89
Total	289	159	349	1,099	1,896
	15.24	8.39	18.41	57.96	100.00
	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Key: Frequency Row Percentage Column Percentage
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**Figure 2** **Generational Mobility**

Model Number	-1- Feelings of Mobility	-2- Feelings of Mobility	-3- Feelings of Mobility	-4- Feelings of Mobility	-5- Feelings of Mobility	-6- Feelings of Mobility
1st Generation	0.328*** (0.067)	0.375*** (0.069)	0.353*** (0.069)	0.351*** (0.090)	0.358*** (0.096)	0.170 (0.134)
2nd Generation	0.048 (0.087)	0.062 (0.089)	0.087 (0.088)	0.121 (0.121)	0.132 (0.129)	0.006 (0.147)
3rd Generation	-0.085 (0.061)	-0.090 (0.061)	-0.056 (0.062)	-0.008 (0.083)	0.051 (0.093)	0.038 (0.097)
Political Views		-0.046*** (0.017)	-0.058*** (0.017)	-0.083*** (0.022)	-0.077*** (0.024)	-0.076*** (0.025)
Education			0.029 (0.019)	0.004 (0.027)	0.004 (0.030)	0.019 (0.031)
Sex (1=male)			-0.078 (0.048)	0.012 (0.064)	0.010 (0.071)	0.005 (0.072)
Age			-0.114*** (0.020)	-0.124*** (0.032)	-0.135*** (0.035)	-0.122*** (0.036)
Income				0.127*** (0.043)	0.128*** (0.049)	0.126** (0.049)
SEI				0.002 (0.003)	0.002 (0.003)	0.002 (0.003)
Origin by HDI					-0.017 (0.026)	0.076 (0.092)
Origin by Region: N. America						-0.576 (0.532)
Origin by Region: West Europe						-0.382 (0.393)
Origin by Region: East Europe						-0.428 (0.386)
Origin by Region: Central America						0.003 (0.321)
Origin by Region: S. America						0.067 (0.381)
Origin by Region: Asia						-0.061 (0.343)
Origin by Region: Africa						-0.101 (0.191)
Constant	3.662*** (0.031)	3.844*** (0.070)	4.289*** (0.134)	4.093*** (0.191)	4.146*** (0.225)	4.081*** (0.243)
Observations	1891	1837	1833	1086	884	884
R-squared	0.015	0.022	0.042	0.045	0.046	0.053
Parentheses indicate standard error	* p<0.10	**p<0.05	***p<0.01			

## **Generational Mobility Model**

-1-

Regression one of the Generational Mobility model indicates that first generation immigrants have the strongest feelings of positive socioeconomic mobility, compared to the feelings of second, third, and the fourth-plus generation immigrants. In this regression, only first generation immigrants have a statistically significant relationship to the mobility variable, indicating that when all other generations are held constant, first generation American immigrants believe they are more upwardly mobile than Americans whose families have two or more generations born in the United States. The finding that the first generation perceives itself to be more mobile than any other generation was not unexpected and adds support to the existing literature on immigration. The act of migration in and of itself suggests that immigrants perceive themselves as having a greater chance to achieve their economic goals and improve their lives by coming to the United States (Massey et al., 1993; Portes & Rumbaut, 2006). As the generation that experiences the actual act of immigration, the first generation shows itself to most strongly believe in the possibility of upward mobility.

The coefficients for the second and third generation, while not statistically significant, indicate that there is still a difference in feelings of mobility between all three generations in comparison to the fourth-plus generation. Second generation immigrants exhibit feelings of upward mobility that are not nearly as strong as those felt by the first generation, suggesting that perceived upward mobility diminishes in the second generation. The third generation has a negative coefficient in this regression, but since it is not statistically significant, we can only conclude that the third generation does not consider itself to have the same feelings of potential upward mobility as the first generation, and are no different from the fourth-plus generation in

regards to perceptions of mobility. Overall, evaluating the generational relationship to mobility only explains a small portion (about two percent) of the overall variance in the feelings of mobility variable.

-2-

Regression two of the Generation Mobility model introduces and examines the effect of political ideology on perceptions of socioeconomic mobility. With a negative, statistically significant coefficient in regression two, we can conclude that political ideology is not only important to understanding how people perceive their own mobility, but additionally as people become more liberal, their perceptions of possible upward mobility decrease in comparison to their more politically conservative counterparts. Individuals with the strongest feelings of political conservatism also have the strongest feelings of the potential for positive mobility. The strength of the trend between liberal political ideology and perceived decreased socioeconomic mobility, however, does not mitigate the strength of the relationship between feelings of positive socioeconomic mobility and the first generation. In this model, the beta coefficient for the first generation is 0.128 and the beta coefficient for political ideology is -0.063, which indicates that being part of the first generation more strongly predicts feelings of mobility over all other variables tested in regression two. The relationship between the first generation and positive mobility also remains statistically significant in this regression. The explanatory power of regression two has increased from the first regression, but adding political ideology as a way of explaining feelings of mobility only slightly increases the explanatory power.

-3-

Regression three of the Generation Mobility model attempts to account for the effects of various demographic variables on feelings of mobility. Regression three measures the effect of

education, age, and sex on the perceptions of individual feelings of mobility. Of the three new variables introduced in this model only age has a statistically significant effect on feelings of mobility. As the age of the respondent increases, their likelihood of perceiving themselves as upwardly mobile decreases. This makes logical sense; the older an individual is, the less time they have to achieve upward mobility, and the less time they may have to work within or move up in a job, if they are even employed. Those in the younger age brackets are more likely to perceive themselves as upwardly mobile since they may still occupy lower positions in the workforce, which lends the possibility of moving up within their given occupation. Additionally, younger people have more of their life to achieve some form of upward mobility than those who are higher in age. There is also potential for obtaining more education and increasing socioeconomic mobility through increased education for the younger cohorts. The beta coefficient for age in this regression is  $-0.130$ , which is the strongest beta coefficient, indicating that age is a powerful determinant of feelings of mobility.

Surprisingly, education has no real effect on perceptions of upward or downward socioeconomic mobility. Despite evidence of increased income earning potential with increased time spent in school, there is no statistically significant relationship between increased time spent in school and increased feelings of upward mobility (Glick & Miller, 1956). If the education coefficient was statistically significant it would indicate that those with more education tend to perceive themselves as more upwardly mobile.

The explanatory power of regression three is double that of regression two, indicating that the inclusion of demographic variables aids in explaining people's perceptions of their socioeconomic mobility. Political ideology remains a statistically significant predictor of perceptions of mobility, but compared to first generation and age, political ideology is less

strongly related feelings of mobility. The political ideology variable has a beta coefficient of -0.079, which is higher than the previous regression, suggesting that when all else is held constant, political ideology as an explanatory variable is growing in importance. Although ideology is statistically significant, it remains less predictive of perceptions socioeconomic mobility than age or the first generation variables. Finally, in returning to the variables deemed most significant in this overall study, the first generation still remains statistically significant and indicative of strong feelings of potential positive socioeconomic mobility. The beta coefficient for the first generation is 0.121, which is slightly smaller than the beta coefficient of -0.130 for age. With a 0.121 beta, being part of the first generation remains one of the strongest predictors of positive feelings of mobility. The diminishing belief in upward mobility in the second and third generations is a pattern that continues to be statistically insignificant.

-4-

Regression four of the Generation Mobility model introduces income and socioeconomic index variables. Predictably, there is a statistically significant relationship between mobility and income. As income increases, feelings of upward socioeconomic mobility also increase. Like age, this is a logical trend; those who have more income are going to feel more mobile. The security and opportunities afforded by excess income and savings are going to make individuals feel more mobile. Higher income affords opportunities such as education, which although not statistically significant in this regression, still shows a trend towards higher feelings of mobility at higher levels of education. Less measurable effects such as community networks and family and occupational associations at higher levels of income and socioeconomic index are also reasons for why those occupying higher income levels might feel more mobile. The beta coefficient for income in this regression is 0.098, and compared to the other betas of statistically



significant variables such as age, political ideology, and first generation, income is the weakest predictor of feelings of mobility.

Socioeconomic index does not show a statistically significant effect on feelings of mobility. This is surprising because the SEIs lack of effect indicates that occupation may have nothing to do with how an individual feels about their potential for mobility. An implied lack of effect on feelings of mobility by the SEI variable suggests that those who work low prestige jobs, have low incomes, and have lower levels of education do not perceive themselves as having low or high potential for upward mobility. Structural barriers to socioeconomic advancement are not perceived to be important. Additionally, because SEI is an aggregate measure of education, income, and occupational prestige, it is possible the lack of effect SEI has on feelings of mobility is due to the previously introduced and independent measures of education and income.

The first generation continues to be a strong predictor of whether or not someone will have high feelings of mobility when all other variables are held constant. Feelings of upward mobility in the second generation continue to be diminished, and the third generation also continues to perceive itself as having less potential for upward mobility compared to the first and second generations. The previously discussed relationships between political ideology and feelings of mobility; and age and feelings of mobility also remain statistically significant. The beta coefficients for the first generation and age are almost exactly the same in terms of variable strength; 0.121 and -0.122 respectively, which indicates that in this regression, age and first generation status are equally predictive of feelings of mobility. For age, the older a respondent is, the more likely they are to perceive themselves as not being upwardly mobile. The first generation continues to have strong perceptions of upward mobility. The strength of political ideology in predicting feelings of mobility continues to grow with each successive regression

and has a beta coefficient of -0.115 in this regression. The more conservative a respondent, the more likely they are to feel as if they have the opportunity to move up in a socioeconomic capacity continues to be true as the regressions progress through the model. The explanatory power of regression four is also increased from the previous regression, although the number of observations is reduced. A loss of observations in this regression likely comes from respondents who chose not to answer questions on income. Non-responses could be due to a variety reasons, perhaps those who did not respond were not comfortable with how they were paid or with the amount they made. Observations lost in this regression are probably not significantly different from those that did respond to questions regarding their income.

-5-

Regression five measures the effect of a respondent's country of origin as divided up by that country's human development index rating. This regression is especially useful in understanding the relationship between first generation, their country of origin, and their relationship with socioeconomic mobility. The expected effect within this regression would be that respondents from countries with low human development index scores would display higher levels of perceived socioeconomic mobility since migration to the US is typically done with a goal of increasing lifestyle and socioeconomic mobility. This expected result, however, is not seen and first generational status and age over all other variables continue to be the best predictors of feelings of mobility.

The first generation and age continue to exhibit similar strengths within this regression, with beta coefficients of 0.131 for the first generation and -0.132 for age. It should also be noted that the strength of age and first generational status within the overall Generational Mobility model continues to grow with each successive regression. The original trend exhibited by the

second and third generations of decreased perceptions of upward mobility continues to be expressed, although as was the case in the first regression, second and third generations do not show statistically significant relationships to feelings of perceived mobility. Relationships to mobility in the income and political ideology variables continue to remain statistically significant and continue to express the same directional relationship to the feelings of mobility variable as they did in previous regressions. The beta coefficient for political ideology in this regression is -0.107, which is slightly decreased from the regression four and suggests that the introduction of a country of origin variable slightly mitigates the strength of political ideology when considering a person's feelings of mobility. Income's beta coefficient of 0.098 is unchanged by the introduction of the first country of origin variable and continues to be the weakest variable in comparison to the other statistically significant variables (age, first generational status, and political ideology). Aside from adding some predictive power to the model, regression five really does not introduce any variables that have a significant effect on those measured previously. Regression five loses observations, probably due in part to the way the country of origin variable was created. The respondents lost in this regression are likely from the fourth-plus generation and probably did not know or answer what country or region of origin their families were from.

-6-

Regression six also examines the effect of country of origin on the respondent's feelings of mobility. Just as was expected in regression five, country of origin is most likely to affect first generation immigrants. In regression five, this did not occur; however, in regression six the introduction of the country of origin variable as divided by world region completely mitigates the relationship between feelings of mobility and first generation immigrants. The mitigation of this

relationship is seen from the loss of statistical significance in the first generation coefficient and the drop in the first generation's beta coefficient from 0.131 to 0.062. In addition to lessening the effect of first generational status on feelings of mobility, the introduction of the world region of origin variable also significantly reduces the effect of political ideology on feelings of mobility. Reduction in the effects of first generational status and political ideology suggests two particularly interesting findings: first, immigrants who migrate to the United States and constitute the first generation bring with them feelings of mobility strongly shaped by their countries and regions of origin. Second, the substantial reduction in the strength of political ideology also indicates that immigrants' home countries and regions strongly shape political ideologies. Although statistical significance remains, the beta coefficient for political ideology is also drastically reduced in this regression to -0.014, down from -0.107 in regression five. Age also experiences a slight reduction in strength but income does not, and both variables remain statistically significant. Income's strength in significance in the overall model is very stable with a beta coefficient of 0.096 for regression six.

Individual regions of origin on their own do not have a statistically significant effect on feelings of mobility; however, despite the lack of statistical significance, an examination of the strength of individual regions of origin on feelings of mobility is warranted. Immigrants from North America (excluding the US), Western Europe, and Eastern Europe are more likely to express decreased feelings in potential for upward mobility compared to those whose country of origin is the United States, South or Central America, Asia, and Africa. Western Europeans also exhibit the strongest feelings about mobility—a decreased potential for upward mobility—over all other regions of origin. Immigrants from Central America, South America, Asia, and Africa all express feelings of an increased potential for upward mobility compared to those whose

country or region of origin is the United States, North America, and West or East Europe. Of those regions of origin that express increased feelings of upward mobility, immigrants from Africa express the strongest feelings, with immigrants from South and Central American expressing equally strong feelings for upward mobility.

### **Assistance Attitudes Model**

The Assistance Attitudes model seeks to explain how attitudes about social assistance are shaped and whether or not feelings of mobility have a significant effect on assistance attitudes. Specifically, the Assistance Attitudes model in Figure 3 examines the potential of feelings of mobility acting as a variable that mediates the relationship between generation and assistance attitudes. As was the case in the Generational Mobility model, much of the statistical analysis is based on beta coefficient comparisons. Please see Appendix C for a table of the beta coefficients for the Assistance Attitudes model.

-1-

Regression one of the Assistance Attitudes model examines the difference in support for social assistance programs between first, second, and third generation immigrants. All three generations show decreased support for social assistance programs in comparison to the fourth-plus generation. The second generation does not exhibit statistically significant negative feelings about social assistance in the United States; however, the first and third generations do exhibit negative feelings. As generation changes from first to second and from second to third, strength in negative feelings about social assistance become stronger. The beta coefficient for the third generation is -0.073 and is the largest beta coefficient for this regression. The finding that individuals who have third generation status oppose social assistance programs more strongly

**Figure 3** **Social Assistance Attitudes**

Model Number	-1-	-2-	-3-	-4-	-5-	-6-	-7-
1st Generation	-0.191*	-0.177	-0.293**	-0.306**	-0.447**	-0.405**	-0.658***
	(0.108)	(0.135)	(0.132)	(0.132)	(0.176)	(0.180)	(0.230)
2nd Generation	-0.068	0.002	-0.070	-0.051	-0.173	-0.167	-0.435*
	(0.129)	(0.159)	(0.155)	(0.154)	(0.217)	(0.225)	(0.261)
3rd Generation	-0.244***	-0.233**	-0.237**	-0.165	-0.047	0.097	0.049
	(0.094)	(0.118)	(0.114)	(0.114)	(0.159)	(0.170)	(0.176)
Feelings of Mobility		-0.143***	-0.113***	-0.115***	-0.131**	-0.097	-0.099
		(0.042)	(0.042)	(0.042)	(0.055)	(0.060)	(0.060)
Political Views			0.234***	0.237***	0.280***	0.261***	0.256***
			(0.031)	(0.031)	(0.041)	(0.045)	(0.045)
Education				-0.081**	-0.047	-0.020	-0.007
				(0.034)	(0.048)	(0.052)	(0.054)
Sex (1=male)				0.278***	0.092	0.078	0.097
				(0.086)	(0.117)	(0.127)	(0.127)
Age				-0.066*	-0.061	-0.046	-0.013
				(0.037)	(0.056)	(0.062)	(0.063)
Income					-0.071	-0.056	-0.0650
					(0.080)	(0.087)	(0.086)
SEI (Socioeconomic Index)					-0.012**	-0.010*	-0.011*
					(0.005)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Origin by HDI						-0.105**	0.048
						(0.045)	(0.171)
Origin by Region: N. America							0.555
							(0.961)
Origin by Region: West Europe							-0.315
							(0.721)
Origin by Region: East Europe							-0.087
							(0.722)
Origin by Region: Central America							0.429
							(0.597)
Origin by Region: S. America							0.254
							(0.716)
Origin by Region: Asia							0.108
							(0.628)
Origin by Region: Africa							0.576*
							(0.323)
Constant	7.226***	7.739***	6.728***	6.728***	6.969***	7.079***	6.613***
	(0.046)	(0.166)	(0.303)	(0.303)	(0.418)	(0.472)	(0.490)
Observations	1319	880	869	869	510	427	427
R-squared	0.007	0.019	0.103	0.103	0.141	0.128	0.158
Parenteses indicate standard error	* p<0.10	**p<0.05	***p<0.01				

than those who are part of the first generation is an unexpected finding. This finding suggests that the original hypothesis driving this paper, that first generation immigrants will show lower support for social assistance compared to the second and third generations, may be entirely incorrect. The explanatory power of regression one in the Assistance Attitudes is very low, indicating that generation alone does not explain most of the variance within the assistance attitudes variable.

-2-

The introduction of the mobility variable is vital to understanding whether or not perceptions of mobility have a mediating effect on support attitudes about social assistance programs. Regression two examines the effect feelings of mobility have on attitudes about social assistance programs. The feelings of mobility variable is statistically significant in this regression and also has the strongest beta coefficient over all the generation variables. High feelings of potential upward mobility generally suggest that the respondent will show low to no support for social assistance programs while low feelings of potential upward mobility indicate that a respondent will show strong support for assistance programs.

Third generational status also remains a statistically significant predictor of low support for social assistance but with a beta coefficient of -0.068, being part of the third generation does not predict low support for social assistance as strongly as perceptions of high socioeconomic mobility potential do in this regression. The first and second generations are statistically insignificant and negative in this regression, indicating that inclusion in the first or second generation may mean a respondent is going to show low support for social assistance. However, when considering the attitudes about social assistance of a first or second generation immigrant, the effects of generation are likely through feelings of mobility.

-3-

The third regression in the Assistance Attitudes model examines the effect of political views on feelings about social assistance. Not surprisingly, the more liberal a respondent, the more likely they are to have positive attitudes about the presence of programs and show support for an increase in funding for social assistance programs. Political ideology is often reflective of core values; therefore, it is logical that liberal respondents would more strongly support assistance because liberal political ideology places an emphasis on the core value of egalitarianism.

Introducing political ideology as a control variable in this regression also yielded unexpected results. Feelings of mobility significantly decreased in predictive power, with the beta coefficient dropping to -0.090, but still suggesting that high feelings of upward mobility correspond to low support for social assistance. Feelings of mobility as a variable did remain statistically significant in the regression, as did the first and third generation variables. By introducing political ideology and then holding it constant, the first and third generations prove to also be predictive of attitudes about social assistance. The first generation has a beta coefficient of -0.074 and the third generation has a beta coefficient of -0.070, neither of which is as strongly predictive of attitudes compared to political ideology and mobility, but are growing in predictive strength between regressions two and three. First and third generation status appears to be important to determining whether or not a person is willing to support social assistance programs. The first and third generations are almost equal in predictive strength that a respondent who is either first or third generation will likely show low support for social assistance programs overall. Additionally, regression three helps to support the idea that first generation immigrants are less likely to support social assistance programs; however, it



contradicts the argument that support will be shown for programs by the second and third generations. Finally, the overall explanatory power of regression three is significantly stronger compared to the first two regressions.

-4-

Regression four introduces demographic variables to the Assistance Attitudes model. Education, sex, and age are added with all three having a statistically significant effect on attitudes about social assistance. As the number of years spent in school increase, the likelihood that a respondent will display low support for social assistance programs also increases. Respondents with lower levels of education tend to support social assistance programs more, all else held constant. Sex also appears to play a role in determining attitudes about social assistance. Men tend to show more support than women for social assistance programs. In terms of age, the older a respondent is, the less likely they are to show support for social assistance. The younger the respondent, the more likely they are to support increasing spending for social assistance. First generation status and political ideology are also statistically significant in regression four with the first generation continuing to exhibit negative attitudes towards social assistance. Political ideology continues to be the strongest predictor of support or lack of support for social assistance with a beta coefficient of 0.0254. Sex is the next strongest predictor of support for assistance, with education and first generation status both showing equal strength in indicating whether or not someone will show support for assistance. Age is least predictive of support. The introduction of demographic variables did not increase the explanatory power of regression four.

-5-

Regression five introduces income and socioeconomic index variables to the Assistance Attitudes model. As the literature does not agree on the ways in which income can affect attitudes about assistance, the results of regression five are particularly enlightening. Income as an indicator of attitudes about social assistance suggest that those at low incomes tend to be more supportive of social assistance, while those in the high income brackets are less supportive of assistance programs. We cannot conclude, however, whether or not income has a significant role in determining attitudes about social assistance programs because the variable does not have statistical significance in this regression. Socioeconomic index is statistically significant in this regression which indicates that all variables held constant, those with a high socioeconomic index show low levels of support for assistance programs. Combined high levels of education, income, and occupational prestige all suggest that a respondent will not support strong social assistance programs or increased spending for these programs. Socioeconomic index is the weakest predictor of support for programs of the statistically significant variables within regression five.

Sex, age, and education are no longer statistically significant and do not predict attitudes about social assistance programs. Feelings of mobility remain statistically significant in regression five and have a beta coefficient of -0.100. The first generation is also statistically significant and has similar predictive strength to feelings of mobility with a beta coefficient of -0.111. Despite several more control variables being added to the regression, feelings of mobility and first generation status continue to have an effect on attitudes about social assistance. Compared to the second, third generations and the fourth-plus generation, being part of the first generation still suggests that a respondent will not strongly support assistance programs.

Additionally, feelings of strong upward mobility are also still indicative of low support for social assistance. Political ideology remains the strongest variable and predictor of support or lack of support for various forms of social assistance and grows in predictive power with each successive regression; in regression five, political ideology has a beta coefficient of 0.295. The explanatory power of regression five is also increased, although there is a significant drop in observations between regression four and regression five, likely due to non-responses to questions of income.

-6-

In regression six, the effect of country of origin on attitudes about assistance is being measured. Country of origin is divided by the human development index to see if coming from a country of low or high development has any effect on how an immigrant may feel about social assistance in the United States. Introducing country of origin does have a statistically significant effect on attitudes and the more developed country one originates from, the less likely they are to support social assistance programs in the United States. First generation status, political ideology, and socioeconomic index also continue to have a statistically significant effect on attitudes about social assistance. In terms of predictive strength, country of origin has a beta coefficient of -0.111, with political ideology the only variable being more predictive of attitudes regarding social assistance. Socioeconomic index also continues to predict whether a respondent will show or not show support for assistance programs, although overall the predictive power of socioeconomic index is weak compared to all other significant variables. Finally, the loss of statistical significance by the feelings of mobility variable is notable. Mobility does not mitigate the relationship between attitudes about assistance and variables such as first generation status,

political ideology, socioeconomic index, and country of origin by development index. Feelings of upward mobility are no longer predictive of low support for social assistance.

Belonging to the first generation also has a predictive power similar to country of origin and has a beta coefficient of  $-0.109$ , which is unexpected. Just as introducing country of origin variables in regressions five and six of the Generational Mobility model helped to mediate the first generation as a variable, the expected result in regression six of the Assistance Attitudes would have been a mediation of the first generation's predictive power. Political and economic socialization from a home country was expected to play a significant role in how a first generation immigrant feels about social assistance programs, but it does not appear to play as significant a role as expected. Since the first generation continues to be important, assistance attitudes of the first generation are not determined entirely by the countries from which immigrants migrate. As the number of observations between regressions five and six decrease, the explanatory power of regression six decreases as well.

-7-

The seventh regression introduces the second country of origin variable, country of origin by region. In regression seven neither country of origin by region nor country of origin by human development index has a statistically significant effect on a respondent's attitude regarding social assistance, with the exception of one region. Immigrants from Africa tend to support social assistance programs more strongly than respondents for other regions of the world and from the US. We would expect to find some effect by country of origin in either of its forms, but attitudes about social assistance appear to be shaped by a variety of variables other than geographical origin, with the exception of immigrants from Africa. As a region of origin, Africa has a beta coefficient of  $0.138$ , and has some predictive power when considering whether or not

a first, second, or third generation immigrant will support social assistance, although African origin is not as strong in predictive power compared to first generation status and political ideology.

First generation status also continues to be statistically significant and strongly predictive of low support for social assistance when all other variables are held constant. The first generation has a beta coefficient of -0.177 and has greater predictive power than region of origin. Regardless of where an immigrant or their parents or grandparents originate from, first generation immigrants over all others are not as supportive of social assistance programs. Surprisingly, the second generation has statistical significance in regression seven suggesting that by holding region of origin constant, second generation immigrants emerge to have attitudes about social assistance. Second generation immigrants also tend to have low support for social assistance, but their support is not as low as that expressed by the first generation. Additionally, the second generation has significantly less predictive power than the first generation, with a beta coefficient of -0.092. Socioeconomic index is still statistically significant in regression seven, and those with a higher socioeconomic index do not support social assistance programs as strongly as those who have a low socioeconomic index. Socioeconomic index does not have strong predictive power and of the statistically significant variables in regression seven, socioeconomic index is the least predictive of attitudes expressing support or lack of support for social assistance programs. Finally, political ideology remains the strongest predictor of whether or not someone will support social assistance. The explanatory power of regression seven is increased from regression six and no respondents are lost between regression six and regression seven.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

The primary objective of this study was to examine the relationship between different immigrant generations, their perceptions of their own socioeconomic mobility, and the affect those perceptions have on attitudes about social assistance. Perceptions of mobility and assistance attitudes are reflections of core values which determine an individual's perception of their mobility and what their assistance attitudes will be. Hypothesis<sub>1</sub> posited that there were significant differences in perceptions of mobility between generations, and that the first generation would perceive itself as being more mobile than the second, third, and fourth-plus generations. On the topic of the first generation, hypothesis<sub>1</sub> was correct: the first generation does perceive itself to be more upwardly mobile than all other generations and native born Americans. There was no significant difference between second generation immigrants, third generation immigrants and everyone else in their feelings of mobility.

After accounting for the effects of an individual's region of origin, the first generation was no longer an important predictor of feelings of mobility. This finding suggests that while a first generation immigrant's perceptions of their own socioeconomic mobility may be high compared to all other generations and individuals, their country or region of origin plays a significant role in shaping their perceptions of mobility. Perceptions of mobility are strongly tied to the core value of economic individualism—arguably one of the most is strongly held American values. Since immigrants come to the United States with powerful feelings of individualism this suggests that in the second and third generation, individualism as a core value may not be cultivated as strongly. Since regional origin variables mitigate the relationship between the first generation and feelings of mobility, we can conclude that first generation immigrants do not come to the US having shed their entire set of core values. Economic individualism appears to be a core value that is shaped prior to an immigrant's migration to the

United States. First generation immigrants may actually care more about the quintessentially American value of economic individualism than native born Americans.

Political ideology is also a strong predictor of feelings of mobility; however, political ideology may also be a variable that is indicative of a person's core values and beliefs. Values are frequently packaged by political elites into ideological categories meant for consumption by the greater public, often reflecting a core set of beliefs and ideas neatly parceled on to one side or the other of the political spectrum (Feldman, 1988). Since conservatives view themselves as having greater socioeconomic mobility than liberals, conservatives may just be reflecting economic individualism as one of their more strongly held core values, not their political ideology. Finally, in adding region of origin to the Generational Mobility model, political ideology is substantially reduced in predictive strength. This indicates that when individuals who are from the same region and who may share similar core values are controlled for, political ideology becomes much less important to understanding perceptions of socioeconomic mobility. People utilize and self-place on the ideological spectrum because ideological labels reflect core values (Feldman, 2003). This lessens the importance of political ideology as explanatory of feelings of mobility.

Income is one of the most consistent predictors of feelings of mobility. Those with high incomes feel that they have more potential for upward mobility than those with low incomes. Having a high income legitimates economic individualism as a core value. Although there are numerous social and structural barriers to earning a high income, a topic which is outside the purview of this study, those with high incomes may believe more strongly in the value of economic individualism because their income is evidence of economic individualism at work. Economic individualism does not dictate whether or not an individual has a high or low income,

however, those with high incomes may perceive their level of income to be a manifestation of economic individualism.

A perception of socioeconomic mobility is a reflection of a core value and is specifically a reflection of economic individualism as a value (Feldman, 2003). First generation immigrants hold more strongly economic individualism as a core value over all other types of respondents. For the first generation, core values are shaped in their home countries, though this is not to say that all cultures in the world value economic individualism in ways similar to or the same as Americans. If individualism is a strong value in immigrants prior to migration, additional research on how individualism becomes a core value in cultures that may not cultivate it as strongly as in the United States could be enlightening. Perhaps the discourses of American economic individualism have become transnational, proliferating to many corners of the world and offering immigrants who migrate to the United States a value upon which to base their migration decision.

The second primary objective of this study was to test whether or not generational perceptions of mobility affect attitudes regarding social assistance, and specifically that perceptions of upward mobility indicate low support for social assistance. Mobility perceptions do differ by generation, and hypothesis<sub>2</sub> argues that these perceptions have an effect on whether or not a person is willing to support social assistance programs. There is a generational effect on assistance attitudes; overall, the first generation tends to be less supportive of social assistance programs. We know that the first generation does perceive itself to be more upwardly mobile than all other respondents; therefore it would appear that perceptions of socioeconomic mobility may account for the variation in assistance attitudes and that first generation immigrants' perceptions of upward mobility lead them to show low support for social assistance. When



mobility is introduced as an explanatory variable, it does have a statistically significant effect on assistance attitudes, however, that effect disappears when the region of origin variables are introduced. The first generation continues to have an effect on attitudes regarding social assistance, unmitigated by any of the other explanatory variables. Finally, political ideology also affects assistance attitudes, but as argued about the role of political ideology on feelings of mobility, ideology frequently reflects core values and thus is not an important factor in understanding how assistance attitudes are shaped.

The apparent lack of effect by mobility on assistance attitudes is due to the region of origin variables, which may be because perceptions of mobility are already imbedded in the first generation as part of the core value of individualism. Alternatively, mobility's explanatory power may be mitigated because other core values in different regions and countries do not encourage strong social assistance programs. Although individualism allows for some support of assistance when a person's need is perceived to be a result of circumstances beyond their control, other core values have been studied and are not mutually exclusive from individualism (Feldman & Steenbergen, 2001). The first generation's relative low support for social assistance indicates that first generation immigrants may hold the humanitarian value as part of their core set of values that include economic individualism. Unless the first generation perceives individuals as not responsible for their own need for assistance—which humanitarians generally do not, they will not support social assistance.

Since we do not see the second and third generation affecting mobility and assistance attitudes, additional research on the second and third generations would clarify which and if core values shape mobility feelings and assistance attitudes in these generations. Additionally, there is extensive discussion on the importance of family and social networks, and actual assistance

utilization in the literature review as it pertains to the second and successive generations. Exploring networks and utilization of social assistance would be an area of important research not just for the second and third generations, but also for the first generation. Unfortunately, this study does not directly test core values, although feelings of mobility relate strongly to individualism, and other core values are often invoked as explanations for high or low support for assistance programs. This study would be strengthened if a measure directly related to individualism, humanitarianism, and egalitarianism were tested as part of the explanatory variables examined in both the Generational Mobility model and the Assistance Attitudes model.

The first generation has a core set of values that are shaped prior to migrating to the United States. For the first generation, their attitudes and perceptions are strongly shaped by core beliefs and values that they retain from their country of origin, which contribute to their political and economic opinions and perceptions. Economic individualism and humanitarianism are core values held by much of the first generation. We cannot conclude entirely that second and third generation immigrants are also shaped by core beliefs and values, nor which core beliefs and values these may be. However, the patterns observed in this study indicate that variables beyond feelings of mobility, political ideology, demographics, and regions of family origin contribute to perceptions of socioeconomic mobility and attitudes about social assistance in the second and third generations.

**Appendix A: Variables**

**Region of Origin by HDI** uses the 2006 GSS ETHNIC question “from what countries or part of the world did your ancestors come?” The intention of region of origin by HDI was to measure the effect of origin when it was divided by Human Development Index to see if levels of development affected perceptions of mobility and assistance attitudes. The HDI is “a summary measure of human development. It measures the average achievements in a country in three basic dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, access to knowledge and a decent standard of living” (United Nations Development Program, 2010). There are four levels of development: very high development, high development, medium development, low development. The following countries and regions fall into each of the four HDI categories:

Very high development: Austria, French Canada, Other Canada, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, England and Wales, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Scotland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Portugal, Belgium, Non-Spanish West Indies

High Development: Mexico, Russia, Lithuania, Yugoslavia, Romania, Arabic speaking Countries, Other Spanish speaking countries, Other Asian Countries, Other European Countries

Medium Development: China, Philippines, West Indies, India

Low Development: Africa

The United States, those with Native American heritage, and those from Puerto Rico were coded into a 0 category since measuring the origin of immigrants from other countries was the intended use of this variable.

The Human Development Index ranks almost every single country in the world, a rank between 1 and 42 indicates very high development, a rank between 43 and 85 indicates high development, a rank between 86 and 127 indicates medium development, and a rank between 128 and 169 indicates low development. Since many of the categories available within the original ETHNIC variable are actual regional and language groupings, categorizing these large groupings of countries was slightly problematic. For example, Africa is categorized as having low development. This categorization was made based on the average development ranking of every single country in Africa. The average HDI ranking of all countries in Africa was between 128 and 169. This same methodology was used to find the HDI categorization for Other Asian countries, Other European countries, etc. This measure is imperfect because it's an average of HDI rankings for many categories within the ETHNIC variable.

**Origin by Region** is a variable that also uses ETHNIC from the 2006 GSS. This variable places each region or country into one of eight world regions: North America, West Europe, East Europe, Central America, South America, Asia, and the United States. The imperfection of origin by region as a variable is not just in the groupings of countries and regions into eight regions, but additionally that geographical regions cannot account for the vast difference in people around the world. Eight regions do not necessarily explain the commonalities and differences between people in the world. Even within a single country, there are regional differences between people which may shape their political attitudes and perceptions of mobility.

**Age** of the respondent is broken into five categories: 18-24, 25-34, 35-49, 50-64, 65+

**Education** is the highest year of school completed by the respondent. There are five available categories: some high school, high school graduate, some college, college graduate, and post college.

**Income** categories were created based on the respondent's income with the five available categories created according to the 2006 income tax brackets: \$0-\$6395.625, \$7816.875-\$25582.5, \$31237.5-\$68220, \$79590-\$154000, \$159292.3+

**SEI** or socioeconomic index is an aggregate measure of education, income, and occupational prestige. There are ten categories of SEI scores, with scores ranging from 10.1-99.7. Categories are in increments of nine: 10.0-19.9, 20.0-29.9, 30.0-39.9, 40.0-49.9, 50.0-59.9, 60.0-69.9, 70.0-79.9, 80.0-89.9, 90.0-99.7

**Appendix B: Beta Coefficients for Generational Mobility**

<b>Generational Mobility Model (beta coefficients)</b>						
	-1-	-2-	-3-	-4-	-5-	-6-
1st Generation	0.114***	0.128***	0.121***	0.121***	0.131***	0.062
2nd Generation	0.013	0.016	0.023	0.031	0.035	0.002
3rd Generation	-0.032	-0.035	-0.022	-0.003	0.019	0.014
Political Views (1=Conservative 7=Liberal)		-0.063***	-0.079***	-0.115***	-0.107***	-0.014***
Education			0.035	0.005	0.005	0.023
Sex (1=male)			-0.037	0.006	0.005	0.002
Age (18-24, 25-34, 35-49, 50-64, 65+)			-0.130***	-0.122***	-0.132***	-0.120***
Income				0.098***	0.098***	0.096**
SEI (Socioeconomic Index)				0.020	0.022	0.020
Country of Origin by Human Development Index					-0.022	0.098
Country of Origin by Region: N. America						-0.053
Country of Origin by Region: West Europe						-0.184
Country of Origin by Region: East Europe						-0.117
Country of Origin by Region: Central America						0.001
Country of Origin by Region: S. America						0.011
Country of Origin by Region: Asia						-0.011
Country of Origin by Region: Africa						-0.030
*p<0.10 **p<0.05 ***p<0.01 on variable coefficient						

**Appendix C: Beta Coefficients for Assistance Attitudes****Assistance Attitudes (beta coefficients)**

	-1-	-2-	-3-	-4-	-5-	-6-	-7-
1st Generation	-0.049*	-0.045	-0.074**	-0.078**	-0.111**	-0.109**	-0.177***
2nd Generation	-0.015	0.000	-0.015	-0.011	-0.034	-0.035	-0.092*
3rd Generation	-0.073***	-0.068**	-0.070**	-0.049	-0.013	0.028	0.014
Feelings of Mobility		-0.113***	-0.090***	-0.091	-0.100**	-0.075	-0.077
Political Views			0.251***	0.254***	0.295***	0.276***	0.270***
Education				-0.078**	-0.044	-0.019	-0.007
Sex (1=male)				0.104***	0.034	0.030	0.037
Age				-0.058*	-0.047	-0.036	-0.010
Income					-0.042	-0.033	-0.038
SEI (Socioeconomic Index)					-0.094**	-0.085*	-0.089*
Origin by HDI						-0.111**	0.051
Region: N. America							0.041
Region: West Europe							-0.119
Region: East Europe							-0.017
Region: Central America							0.100
Region: S. America							0.029
Region: Asia							0.016
Region: Africa							0.138*

\*p<0.10 \*\*p<0.05 \*\*\*p<0.01 on  
variable coefficient

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