

# Effects of Zero-Sum Thinking on Anti-Immigration Attitudes

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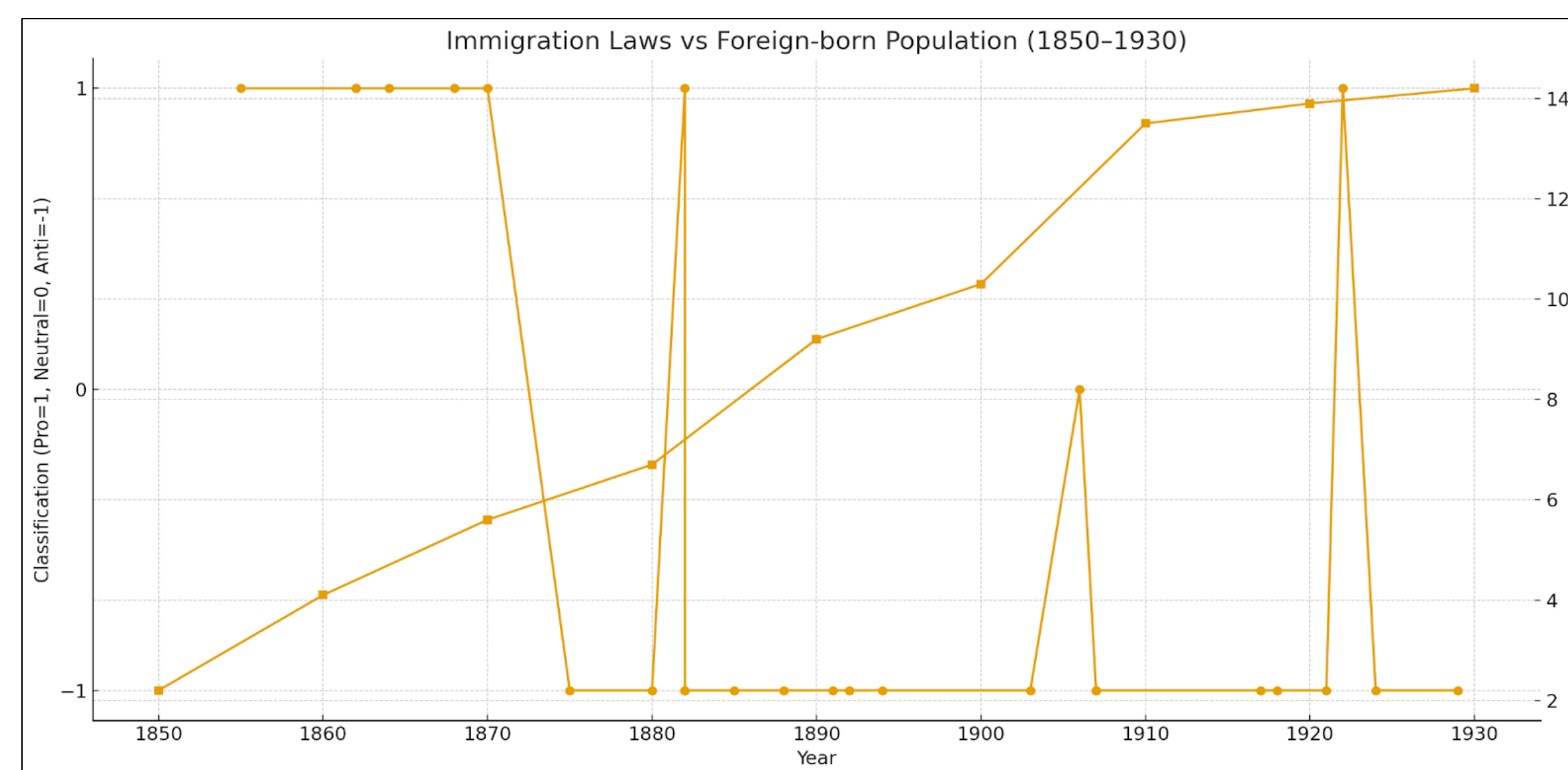
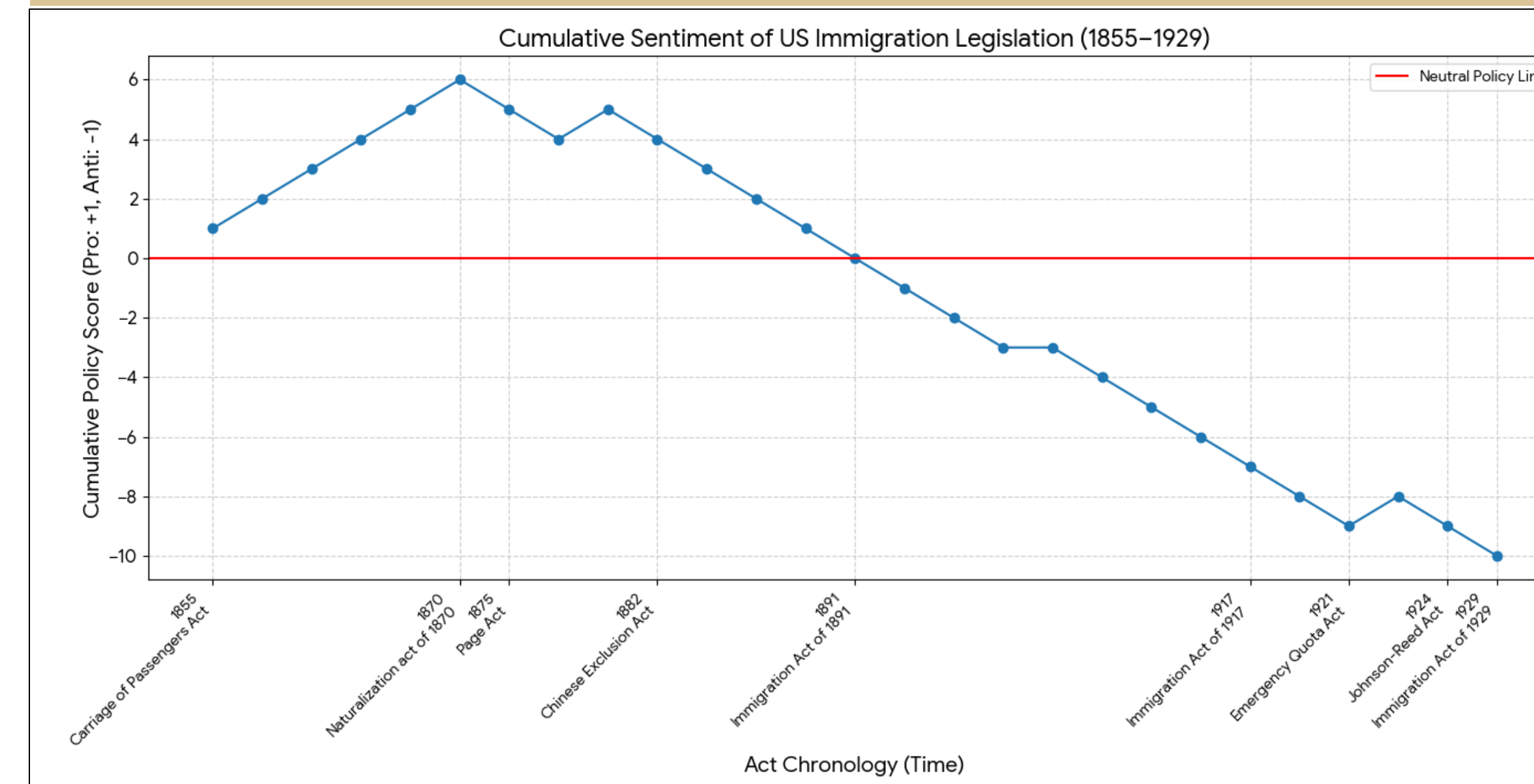
## Introduction

- Between 1850 and 1930, the US faced industrialization, urbanization, demographic change, and various political and economic events.
- Zero-sum thinking (the belief that one group's gains comes at another's loss) has led to increasing anti-immigration attitudes over time. We examine the cause and effects.
- Existing research fails to consider multiple causes of these attitudes working together to change attitudes or examine public reactions to immigrants to show broader attitude changes over time.
- **Research question:** To what extent does zero-sum thinking drive anti-immigration attitudes in the United States between 1850 and 1930?
- **Purpose:** This project aims to determine the extent to which zero-sum thinking is apparent in influencing these attitudes over other factors.
- **Hypothesis:** Individuals exhibit stronger zero-sum thinking towards immigrants when they feel their social or economic position is threatened.

## Zero-Sum Thinking Assessment

- Replication of a study that examined the historical role news elites played in shaping public beliefs of immigrants as a distinct social group using 156 *The New York Times* front-page articles focused on immigration between 1892-1924.
- **Hypothesis 1: Homogenization**
  - 117 (3/4) discussed immigrants only in terms of their collective identity, or as members of homogenous immigrant subgroups.
  - 36 (23.1%) discussed individual immigrants.
  - 3 (1.9%) discussed immigrants as complex, multi-dimensional individuals.
- **Hypothesis 2: Negative Descriptors**
  - 70 (44.9%) contained only negative or negative and neutral labels and descriptors.
  - 79 (50.6%) exclusively neutral.
  - 7 (4.5%) included positive descriptors.
- **Hypothesis 3: Prominent Positioning**
  - 81 (51.9%) focused on negative impacts of immigrants.
  - 61 (39.1%) discussed neutral impacts.
  - 13 (8.3%) focused on positive impacts.
- **Hypothesis 4: Silencing Immigrants**
  - 15 (8.2%) quoted immigrants.
    - 9 (60%) no more than 3 sentences long. 2 (13.3%) less than full sentence. 8 (53.3%) quoted while on Ellis Island. 5 (1/3) powerless social positions. (40%) depicted as helpless or vulnerable.
  - 33 (18.1%) quoted politicians.
  - 27 (14.8%) quoted immigration experts.
  - 58 (31.9%) quoted other non-immigrants with elite social standing.
- **Hypothesis 5: Justifying Exclusion**
  - 48 (30.8%) included banning immigration or denying certain groups.
  - 40 (25.6%) detaining or quarantining immigrants.
  - 23 (14.7%) about deportation.
  - 21 (13.5%) about detaining.
  - 78 (50%) included explicitly threatening language.
  - 37 (23.7%) of negative articles were about disease.
  - 8 (5.1%) discussed cultural threats.
  - 14 (9%) about economic threats.

## Timelines and Data



- **American Civil War (1861-1865): Pro-Immigration laws**
  - Carriers of passengers Act of 1855, Coolie Trade Prohibition Act of 1862, Homestead Act of 1862, the Immigration Act of 1864, Burlingame-Seward Treaty of 1868, Naturalization act of 1870
  - Labor and personnel shortages from the war caused a need for immigrants to settle on the land.
- **Panic of 1873: Anti-Immigration laws**
  - Page Act of 1875, Angell Treaty of 1880, The Passenger Act of 1882, Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, Immigration act of 1882, Foran Act of 1885, Dawes Act of 1887, Scott act of 1888, Immigration Act of 1891, Geary Act of 1892
  - Unemployment, job competition, and lower wages were all blamed on immigrants.
- **Depression of 1893: Anto-Immigration laws**
  - Gresham-Yang Treaty of 1894, Foraker Act of 1900, Immigration Act of 1903, Naturalization Act of 1906, Immigration Act of 1907, Gentlemen's agreement of 1907, Expatriation Act of 1907
  - Similar reasons as before, economic fears fueled poor attitudes and introduced restrictions on immigrants coming into the country.
- **World War I (1914-1918): Anti-Immigration laws**
  - Immigration Act of 1917, Immigration Act of 1918
  - Nationalism, security concerns, and social fears fueled anti-immigration attitudes.
- **Post WWI and the Red Scare (1919-1920): Anti-Immigration laws**
  - Emergency Quota Act of 1921, Cable Act of 1922, Johnson-Reed Act of 1924, Immigration Act of 1929
  - Nativism, firm ideologies, and demographic fears added to the anti-immigration attitudes.

## Discussion

- While the 1850s and 1860s received positive immigration policies, public sentiment soon turned against immigrants from the 1870s to the 1930s.
  - Initially welcomed with the emergence of the Civil War.
  - Later attitudes shifted with the emergence of the Panic of 1873 and the Depression of 1893, which were pinned on immigrants.
- Increased nationalism and zero-sum thinking from psychological perceptions of connecting immigrants to economic events, even if immigrants were not the cause.
- Cultural and social fears present with changing demographics.
- Across 1850-1930, there was a repeating pattern:
  - Reformers or activists raised concerns.
  - The media exposed or exaggerated issues.
  - Public anxiety rose.
- Caused politicians to respond with laws that became more restrictive over time. Both the government and media took more active roles to public outcry. Most persistent in economic downturns, health scares, and political conflicts.

## Conclusion

- This research showcases how the meaning of nationalism, the role of the media, and demographics have changed over time.
- With a more active media and worry about losing culture or identity, backlash against immigrants has intensified, especially when individuals perceive social or symbolic losses.
- Zero-sum thinking is caused by the misperception of immigrants causing negative events/conditions.
  - Explains anti-immigration attitudes over different economic and political conditions and why similar patterns appear over time.
- Zero-sum thinking was a big cause for anti-immigration attitudes and was portrayed more in times of economic, cultural, and social changes.
- These results are significant to understand what drove anti-immigration attitudes.

## Future Implications

- **Limitations:**
  - Much of the project is based on historical documents and existing research rather than direct empirical measurement of psychological mechanisms.
  - Zero-sum thinking must be inferred from tone and language rather than quantitative variables, meaning it is very subjective.
- Our historical approach provides valuable insight into long-term patterns that are difficult to capture using short-term datasets alone.
- More research could expand on these findings and conduct experimental studies measuring these psychological perceptions and zero-sum thinking on current attitudes.

## References and Acknowledgements:

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