

The Demise of Evidence-Based Policy Making: The Case of Immigration

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Evidence-based public policy-making seems to have gone out the window in recent years. In one domain after another – global climate change, economic policy (especially the effects of deficit spending and raising the minimum wage), the cost/benefit ratio of childhood immunizations, and others -- legislators, other elected officials, and even some federal judges have chosen to ignore the settled scientific consensus and proceed as if operating in a parallel universe. Immigration policy is an especially glaring case in point.

What explains this state of affairs?

“Human nature” – i.e., self-interest, habit, ideological fixation, and prejudice – is very much in play. When scientific findings contradict conventional wisdom in some way that seems threatening, they are likely to be resisted until (as the historian of science **Thomas Kuhn** showed) a new generation adopts a paradigm its elders rejected. Eventually, the weight of evidence overcomes the initial resistance. The findings of **Copernicus, Galileo, and**

*... Economic interests are playing up challenges to science in the face of warnings from thousands of climate scientists. They have help from free-market ideologists (like the editors of *The Wall Street Journal*) who see the science as an insidious effort to promote state regulation and bring down capitalism by researchers hungry for government grants.*

Darwin are classic examples. In recent years, inconvenient scientific truths seem to face an equally uphill battle to shape public policy.

Take, for example, the medical finding that smoking poses serious health risks. The Surgeon General's report appeared in the 1950s but was resisted because it was said to rely on epidemiological evidence rather than etiology. The tobacco companies supported the resistance by hiring their own researchers and buying Congressmen. New findings and a rise in health awareness eventually wore down the opposition, but Congress doled out \$1.5 billion in subsidies to tobacco growers from 1995-2012 and twenty percent of Americans are still too addicted to quit.

The controversy over genetically

modified foods provides another example. The preponderance of scientific evidence shows that these have great benefits and minimal, manageable risks, especially in an era when climate change threatens the stability of the world's food supply and hunger stalks the developing world, provoking massive emigration. But in Europe, GM foods are still banned, and here there is a demand for labeling so that consumers can choose to ignore scientific evidence.

Global warming remains controversial in the United States, largely because, as in the case of tobacco, economic interests are playing up challenges to the science in the face of warnings from thou-

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sands of climate scientists. They have help from free-market ideologists (like the editors of *The Wall Street Journal*) who see the science as an insidious effort to promote state regulation and bring down capitalism by researchers hungry for government grants. Oklahoma Sen. **James Inhofe**, who has called this science “the greatest hoax,” chairs the relevant committee in the Senate, and the coal industry has mounted a sustained legal challenge to the EPA’s relatively modest regulations.

Politicians dance around the scientific consensus by asserting that, conveniently, they lack the credentials to evaluate the evidence. (“I am not a scientist” has been the preferred response of Republican politicians.). Or, they cherry-pick evidence. When politicians discover a single scholar whose research seems to support their views, they seize upon this as justification for their ideologically-derived position. The media often fall into this game, since reporting on a deviant finding is the latest version of the man-bites-dog story.

Immigration policy poses an exceptionally clear choice between accumulated scientific evidence and ideologically driven agendas. There are several factors at play in shaping public opinion and public policy in this area, some of them going back many years.

Nativism is as old an ideology as the republic. No less a public figure than Benjamin Franklin was the first to wave the bloody shirt of “unassimilable” immigrants. His target was newly-arrived Germans, whose small, German-language publications were competing with Franklin’s newspaper business in Pennsylvania. (We all know how poorly the Germans assimilated. Think of **John Boehner**, **Timothy Geithner**, **Chuck Hagel**, World Bank President **Robert Zoellick**,

Republican National Committee Chairman **Reince Priebus**, and **Donald Trump** – grandson of an immigrant born **Friedrich Drumpf**.)

Racism and anti-Semitism drove passage of the restrictive immigration laws of 1921, 1924, and 1929. Anti-Mexican prejudice, which first became politically influential in the 1920s, remains a potent force today, as Trump has demonstrated. Even the distinguished Harvard political scientist **Samuel Huntington**, in the last years of his career, stoked public fears that large-scale Mexican immigration will inevitably undermine the country’s cohesion and promote “bifurcation” in language and other respects.

But what are the facts? A massive new survey of the relevant evidence by a panel of experts, led by Harvard sociologist **Mary C. Waters**, published in September 2015, by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, concludes that the newest generation of immigrants, including Mexicans, is assimilating as fast and as comprehensively as previous generations of immigrants. Their integration increases over time “across all measurable outcomes,” the authors find. The report specifically rejects the widespread notions that today’s immigrants lack the desire to learn English, that they commit crimes more frequently than non-immigrant Americans, and that they usually arrive in poor health and burden public health care systems.

Beyond pandering to negative stereotypes of Mexican immigrants and ignorance of their importance to the economy, politicians’ resistance to scientific evidence is being fed by a perceived demographic threat – specifically, the fear among Republicans that the influx of Mexicans and other Latino immigrants will provide growing support for Democrats. **Ruy Teixeira**, a political scientist, has noted that the Hispanic vote in-

creases by one percentage point every year, and it is overwhelmingly Democratic. Republicans’ fears are offset somewhat by their hopes that the GOP can appeal to Latinos in terms of cultural values, and that as more Latinos enter the middle class they will follow Irish and other Catholics into the Republican column. But the example of California, a reliably blue state whose blueness clearly reflects the growth of the Mexico-origin electorate, is not lost on Republicans trying to protect their control of other states.

When it comes to policy options for controlling the flow of Mexican and other unauthorized migrants, the gap between scientific evidence and the claims of public officials is even more yawning. For more than a decade, field interviews with tens of thousands of Mexican migrants and potential migrants, conducted since 2005 by UCSD’s Mexican Migration Field Research Program and the research team of sociologist **Douglas Massey** at Princeton, have demonstrated the ineffectiveness of the obstacle course that we have created along the southwestern border. More than nine out of ten who come to the border still succeed eventually in gaining entry, if not on the first try then on the second or third, regardless of their point of origin in Mexico. Fences can always be climbed over (often using ladders supplied by people-smugglers), dug under, or gone around, including Mr. Trump’s “impenetrable” wall.

Nevertheless, advocates of spending billions more on physical fencing claim that it can be an effective deterrent to unauthorized immigration. Again, the evidence from interviews with migrants and potential migrants belies the claim. Today’s prospective migrants are far more concerned about exposing themselves to violence perpetrated by drug lords and kidnapping gangs in Mexico’s borderlands than about border fences. In UCSD’s 2015 survey of potential migrants,

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only 7.6 percent cited “el muro” (the common term for today’s border wall) as their top concern, compared with 48 percent who feared being kidnapped by organized criminal gangs or assaulted by border bandits while making their way to the United States.

What explains the blind faith of politicians in militarizing the border as the key to controlling immigration? If they actually believe that investing more heavily in this form of enforcement is cost-effective, where is the supporting evidence? The main point is that more than a decade of carefully-executed, field-work-based, multi-method research has yielded what can properly be called a rock-solid academic consensus, i.e., that the massive border enforcement build-up in which we have been engaged since 1993 is (1) ineffective in keeping undocumented migrants out of the country, (2) an extremely weak deterrent to prospective migrants, and (3) has had

huge unintended consequences, most notably keeping millions of undocumented migrants caged inside the United States with an incentive to put down roots. This last consequence will have a major, long-term fiscal impact, especially for health care and education.

The expert consensus and supporting evidence were reported in a major study of the efficacy of U.S. immigration control policy by a panel of sixteen of the country’s leading immigration researchers, convened by the National Research Council. Contrary to official claims that the sharp downturn in new migration from Mexico since 2007 is a function of stronger border enforcement, the NRC panel found that “rising [border] enforcement does not seem to have played a significant role in lowering the likelihood of undocumented migration.” The panel’s report, published in 2011 by the National Research Council, was ignored by the media and the na-

tional political class.

Part of the blame undoubtedly lies with ineffective communication of research findings by the academics who produce them (and/or their publishers). But even with sustained, timely efforts to get research results into the public domain via interviews with media reporters, op-ed articles, Congressional testimony, and other vehicles, political debates in this and other important areas are proceeding with little or no reference to settled empirical research findings. The country is not benefiting from this disjuncture.

Recently collected data on migrants’ border-crossing experiences are presented in chapter 1 of Wayne A. Cornelius, et al., eds., The New Face of Mexican Migration (La Jolla, CA: UCSD Center for Comparative Immigration Studies), available in early December 2015 from Amazon.com.

A Briefing on Medicare part B Rates

By **Joel Dimsdale**

Professor Emeritus of Psychiatry
and Faculty Retirement Liaison

*“O time, thou must untangle
this, not I.*

*It is too hard a knot for me
t’untie.”*

— *William Shakespeare,
Twelfth Night*

Medicare part B rates will increase sharply for 2016 -- by about 20% -- for new enrollees and enrollees whose modified adjusted gross income (MAGI) exceeds \$85,000/year. Actually, the increase was originally forecast to be 52%, but surprisingly, Congress passed a truly last minute compromise that spreads the increase over the next

couple years. I thought I would explain how this came about because if we remain in a zero cost of living adjustment (COLA) environment for another year, the problems will magnify.

To simplify data presentation, this analysis presents single coverage for a Medicare retiree on the

university’s Blue Shield PPO, an insurance product that is widely subscribed by retirees.

Social Security (SS) calculates its COLA retrospectively based on an index of consumer expenses called the CPI-W, but seniors have their index better mapped by the CPI-E, which is more sensitive to their notably higher health care expenses. There is considerable discussion about how the consumer price index should be calculated, but the CPI-W has been virtually flat this past year; thus, there will be no SS



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COLA increase in 2016. This is a rare occurrence (only the third time in 40 years) over the decades of SS, but it has telling consequences for Medicare.

Medicare calculates part B charges prospectively based on health care estimated costs in the coming year. These cost have been rising, and historically, since 1980, Medicare premium costs have increased twice as rapidly as increases to the Social Security cost-of-living (COLA) adjustments benefits.

Congress recognized that if Medicare premiums increased more than the COLA social security benefits, it could seriously hurt the income of seniors who depend primarily on their Social Security checks. It therefore enacted a “hold harmless” clause that in essence protects 70% of existing social security recipients --those with lower incomes -- from having their Social Security incomes reduced by higher Medicare premiums.

But the “hold harmless” clause shifts the lower-income retirees’ costs onto the others in Medicare, thereby increasing their costs even more. These are some of the



own increased costs but also for those of the 70% of Social Security recipients who would be held harmless. The table below lists the five income bands for 2015 and the accompanying part B and D premiums.

groups that are not held harmless by the clause:

- New Social Security beneficiaries, even lower income ones.
- Individuals who do not have their Medicare payments automatically deducted from their Social Security payments.
- Individuals with higher incomes (comprising 6% of seniors on Medicare).

What will happen in 2016?

In 2016, Medicare part B was predicted to increase by \$54 per month. For those with higher Modified Adjusted Gross Income (MAGI), the increase would have been much steeper because they would be paying not only for their

With every successive income band, the premium increases by about 50%, as compared to the lowest income band.

Due to the last minute budgetary compromise, the exact dollar amounts for 2016 part B premiums are unclear as of today (10/30/15) but are expected to be ~20% higher. Part D income-related assessments are projected to be only slightly increased in the coming year (by about \$1 in each income band).

So, how many emeriti will be affected by these substantial increased premiums? The University does not know the income bands of its retirees. It only knows their pension income. The university has no way of knowing the amount of extra income

Income-related monthly Medicare parts B and D premiums+

Single income band	<\$85,000	\$85,000-107,000	\$107,000-160,000	\$160,000-214,000	>\$214,000
Married income band	<170,000	170,000-214,000	214,000-320,000	320,000-428,000	>428,000
2015 premium	104.9	146.90 +12.30*	209.80 +31.80*	272.7 + 51.30	335.70 +70.80*

* reflects the 2015 add-on part D assessment

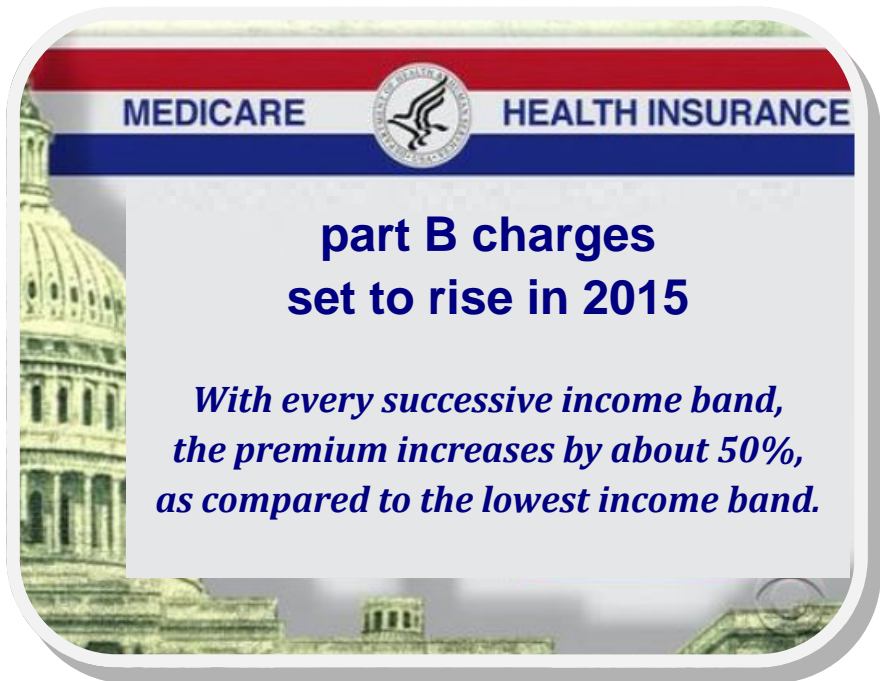
retirees obtain from Social Security or personal investments. The university also generally knows whether the retiree has a spouse but has no way of knowing about the spouse's income. One can speculate that most recently retired emeriti would fall in income band 3.

Bottom Line

Some people are under the misapprehension that retirees on Medicare face negligible health care costs. While the university provides excellent and relatively low cost supplemental insurance to Medicare, retirees have faced sharp increases in premiums for the Blue Shield PPO in the last two years (by about 200%). In addition, Medicare has increased its parts B and D premiums by 20% in 2016.

Medicare part A covers inpatient costs and is typically "free" because employees paid into it all along from their paychecks. Medicare part B covers outpatient and laboratory costs and is typically automatically subtracted from individuals' Social Security checks. Medicare part D covers drugs or prescription benefits. The rates for parts B and D differ, depending upon the retiree's income.

Some have advocated that the government rely instead on the CPI-E, which has been consistently higher in terms of estimates of elderly's costs than the CPI-W. That change, however, would increase the cost of Social Security. See for instance <http://www.forbes.com/sites/jamiehopkins/2015/09/02/congress-considers-new-proposal-to-raise-social-security-benefits/>



Given the difference in magnitude between the SS check and the Medicare premium, these effects are relatively small as long as the COLA is positive. For instance, if one assumed a SS benefit of \$2000/month, even a 1% COLA generates an additional \$20/month. In comparison, the monthly part B Medicare charge for lower income retirees is currently \$105. Even if Medicare rates went up by 10% (i.e. \$10/month), individuals would not "notice" the effects of these different percent increases, because their SS paycheck would still be increasing and there would be no "hold harmless" action affecting new retirees and those in higher income brackets. When the SS COLA = 0, however, the impact of the increased Medicare premium is readily discernible.

There are some back of the envelope calculations, which suggest that emeriti may be in a higher income band than anticipated. For instance, in 2015, faculty re-

tiring at age 70 could earn a maximum Social Security benefit of \$3501 per month. In 2015, the average ladder rank faculty member retired at age 69 after 29 years of service and at an average covered compensation of \$181,000. Such professors would retire with a pension of \$131,225 (data kindly provided by the Vice Provost for Academic Personnel and Programs). After adding the maximum social security of \$42,000, that implies that an average professor would have income of \$173,225, not including any personal investments. These calculations imply that the "average" faculty retiree might well be in income band 3 or 4. Additional personal savings would shift faculty to higher bands. On the other hand, faculty whose spouses had little income would shift the band to a lower income bracket.

Endnotes



Anecdotalage

By Sandy Lakoff

Feel the Bern Come True

OK, here's my dream. **Bernie Sanders** becomes the Democratic nominee for president when **Hillary Clinton** bows out, after realizing she has already lived in the White House long enough and can have a more satisfying career hosting Saturday Night Live. Sanders goes on to defeat the Republican candidate **Donald Trump** in a landslide. (Trump then declares his fifth bankruptcy so as not to have to pay campaign debts, stiffing his staffers just like his running mate **Carly Fiorina** once did.)

At the inaugural in January, the Bernidiction is offered by the Leader of the New York Society for Ethical Culture. Then Sanders becomes the first president to be sworn in on his family copy of *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism* by **George "Bernie" Shaw**.

In his inaugural address, the President-Elect reminds people that **George Washington** was a Mason and says that the Masons may have inspired Karl Marx's slogan, "From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs," which is why they were blamed for the French and American revolutions. He also quotes from my latest essay: "Extreme inequality of wealth and income . . . creates social divisions and tensions that are dangerous not only for societies in transition to democracy but also for those in which it has a firm footing." (Lakoff, "Inequality as a Danger to Democracy," *Political Science Quarterly*, fall 2015. It's my dream, remember!) He promises

to introduce two new constitutional amendments, one giving Congress the power to regulate campaign spending, the other to revise the Second Amendment to allow for gun control (explaining that he now represents the whole country and not just a rural state). And he warns that he will send Marines to annex the Cayman Islands if they don't stop serving as an offshore haven for American tax-dodgers.

The reception on the White House lawn features pancakes topped with Vermont Maple Syrup and Ben and Jerry's ice cream, also shipped in from Vermont. The entertainment is a Hootenanny in which **Bob Dylan and Joan Baez** strum guitars (un-electrified to help control global warming) and lead the singing of such old favorites as *The Ballad of Joe Hill* (the Wobbly troubadour):

*I dreamt I saw Joe Hill last night,
Alive as you or me.*

*"Says I, but Joe, you're ten years
dead."*

"I never died," says he,

*"From San Diego up to Maine, in
every mine and mill,*

*Where working men defend their
rights.*

That's where you'll find Joe Hill."

On Day 1 of his presidency, Sanders issues an Executive Order sending the Dodgers back to Brooklyn, the Padres to LA, and the Yankees to San Diego. The President says he is doing so to symbolize his determination to reduce inequality in America.

Then, in a reprise of FDR's One Hundred Days, he sends a blizzard of legislation to Congress (to which all members of the Freedom Caucus have lost reelection). One bill would raise the minimum wage to \$15. Another would have the Post Office cash checks and provide savings accounts (as they

do in France, Germany and Japan), so that low wage earners would not be gouged by pay-day lenders and denied savings accounts by banks. A third would create a public-private infrastructure Bernie-bank to fix all the bridges, roads, tunnels, etc., and stimulate business and employment. A fourth would raise taxes on the very wealthy -- high enough to provide health care for all, free tuition at public colleges, rooftop solar panels, and subsidized egg creams made only with Fox's U-bet chocolate syrup (made in Brooklyn).

It's a free country, right? We can all have any dream our REM sleep comes up with. I hope I don't have to share my nightmare of what happens if his opponent wins. I'll just quote my beside lexicon:

Trumpery, n. Something deceptively showy, hence, vain or valueless things; rubbish.

Webster's Collegiate Dictionary

The Editor's Dementia!:

Apologies to **Cecil Lytle** and other readers perplexed by the garbled math in the "Dementia Quiz" in the last issues. This is the correct version:

TAKE 1000 AND ADD 40 TO IT.
NOW ADD ANOTHER 1000 NOW
ADD 30.

ADD ANOTHER 1000. NOW ADD
20. NOW ADD ANOTHER 1000.
NOW ADD 10. WHAT IS THE TO-
TAL?

DID YOU GET 5000?

**THE CORRECT ANSWER IS
ACTUALLY 4100.**





Les visages de Paris

Manny Rotenberg, Photographer

A selection of his images currently on display at the
Ida & Cecil Green Faculty Club

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Chronicles

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*Forward queries, changes in mailing/email address to:
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Telephone: (858) 534-4724, Emeriti@ucsd.edu*

Mark your calendar for 2016 events!



Andrew Scull, Distinguished Professor of Sociology
Topic: "Madness and Meaning: Images and discussion about the relationship between madness, culture, and meaning."

Wednesday, January 13, 2016, 3:30 - 5:00 PM

Ida & Cecil Green Faculty Club



Richard C. Atkinson, UC President Emeritus and UCSD Chancellor Emeritus

Topic: "The history of UCSD and the UC System from his unique perspective." To see what he has talked and written about in recent years, visit his website: www.rca.ucsd.edu.

Wednesday, February 10, 2016, 3:30 - 5 PM

Ida & Cecil Green Faculty Club