Immigration Enforcement and Hispanic Identity

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Abstract

Ethnic identity is typically treated as an immutable demographic attribute in most economic analysis. Motivated by recent work on ethnic attrition, we estimate the causal effect of immigration enforcement on the self-identification of Hispanic children. Exploiting the staggered rollout of the Secure Communities and imputation difference-in-differences method, we find that enforcement reduces self-reported Hispanic identity. This average effect masks a remarkable divergence by generation. While first- and third-generation immigrants retreat from Hispanic identity, second-generation citizens increase identification. We also find larger reductions among college-educated families and no differential effects by sanctuary city. Our results suggest that ethnic identity is not immune to policy, suggesting that policy evaluations must account for ethnic self-identity to avoid conflating policy effects with compositional changes in the target population.

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1 Introduction

Measuring Hispanic identity is complicated by substantial changes in how Hispanics by heritage self-identify in survey data. Recent literature documents that Hispanics by heritage increasingly self-identify as non-Hispanics over time, a phenomenon known as "ethnic attrition" (Duncan and Trejo 2007, 2009, 2011b, 2017).[1] Importantly, this ethnic attrition is not random but rather reflects endogenous selection correlated with intermarriage, education, and labor market outcomes. Understanding these identity dynamics is of critical policy importance, especially given that recent evidence shows that having a Spanish-sounding surname reduces earnings by 5 percentage points compared to having a White surname among children of inter-ethnic marriages (Hadah 2025). Moreover, racial and ethnic attitudes significantly influence the formation of Hispanic identity, with evidence that local prejudice affects whether individuals with Hispanic heritage choose to self-identify as Hispanic (Hadah 2024).

Although researchers are increasingly paying attention to quantifying the consequences of ethnic identity attrition, the underlying causes that drive changes in self-reported identity are not well understood. A better understanding of how people self-select into Hispanic identity is crucial for studies examining differences in outcomes between Hispanic and non-Hispanic populations, including educational attainment (Antman and Cortes 2023), health outcomes (Antman, Duncan, and Trejo 2016a; Antman, Duncan, and Trejo 2020a), and labor market performance (Antman, Duncan, and Trejo 2023). Understanding these dynamics is particularly important given that Hispanics now represent the largest minority group in the United States, and continue to experience persistent gaps in educational and economic outcomes relative to non-Hispanic whites (Antman, Duncan, and Trejo 2023).[2] One promising avenue for understanding the dynamics of ethnic self-identity is studying the causal link between policies that may disproportionately impact Hispanic and racial minority groups. While the direct legal impacts of enforcement fall on undocumented immigrants, a growing literature documents substantial "spillover effects" on the broader Hispanic community, including reduced participation in the safety net and decreased engagement with local institutions (Watson 2014; Dee and Murphy 2020; Alsan and Yang 2024). We extend this literature by examining whether these "chilling effects" are severe enough to alter ethnic self-identification itself.

This paper estimates the causal effect of immigration enforcement on the self-reporting of Hispanic identity using variation from the Secure Communities program.[3] The Se-

1. Similar ethnic attrition has been documented in China (Francis-Tan and Mu 2022).

2. The 2020 Census counted more than 62 million Hispanics—19 percent of the population—triple the number of Hispanics counted three decades earlier (Flood et al. 2021). The Hispanic population numbers are based on the authors' calculations from the Current Population Survey and US Census data.

3. Throughout the paper, we use self-reporting and self-identification interchangeably.

cure Communities (SC) program, implemented between 2008 and 2013, represents the largest expansion of local involvement in immigration enforcement in the nation's history (Miles and Cox 2014). The program operated through coordination between federal authorities and local law enforcement agencies, increasing information sharing to facilitate the detection and removal of undocumented immigrants. The Department of Homeland Security rolled out SC on a county-by-county basis, creating substantial geographic and temporal variation in enforcement intensity. A growing literature has examined SC's effects on various economic outcomes, including poverty rates (Amuedo-Dorantes, Arenas-Arroyo, and Sevilla 2018) and participation in food assistance programs (Alsan and Yang 2024). We hypothesize that heightened immigration enforcement creates both economic and social incentives for individuals of Hispanic heritage to distance themselves from Hispanic identity to avoid potential discrimination, mirroring the surname-based disadvantages documented in recent research (Hadah 2025).

We exploit the staggered rollout of Secure Communities using the imputation estimator developed by Borusyak, Jaravel, and Spiess (2024). This approach addresses well-documented biases that arise when using conventional two-way fixed effects estimators in settings with staggered treatment adoption (Goodman-Bacon 2021; Sun and Abraham 2021; De Chaisemartin and d'Haultfoeuille 2020; Roth et al. 2023; De Chaisemartin and d'Haultfoeuille 2023). Our identification strategy leverages the quasi-random timing of SC implementation across counties, which was driven primarily by administrative capacity rather than local demographic or political characteristics.

This paper makes three primary contributions to the literature. First, we provide new causal evidence that non-economic policy interventions can significantly impact ethnic self-identification. Most previous studies either present theoretical examinations of identity choice or provide non-causal evidence of ethnic attrition correlates (Darity Jr, Mason, and Stewart 2006; Duncan and Trejo 2011a; Hadah 2024). A notable exception is Antman and Duncan (2015), who examine how state-level affirmative action bans affect racial self-identification, finding that multiracial individuals are 30% less likely to identify with their minority group after affirmative action bans. We advance this literature by demonstrating how the chilling effects of immigration enforcement create incentives that increase Hispanic ethnic attrition.

Second, our findings contribute to a growing understanding of how policy environments shape ethnic identity formation across generations. Building on recent work showing that local racial attitudes influence Hispanic identity choices (Hadah 2024), we demonstrate that policy-induced changes in the perceived costs of ethnic identification can have differential effects across immigrant generations and family structures. This extends the conceptual framework of identity as a choice variable (Akerlof and Kranton 2000) by showing how external policy shocks can shift the relative benefits

and costs of ethnic identification in ways that vary systematically across demographic groups.

Third, our results have important methodological implications for the extensive literature examining Secure Communities and other immigration enforcement policies. Specifically, studies that rely on self-reported Hispanic identity—whether to define the estimation sample or in difference-in-differences designs—introduce endogenous measurement error that may threaten internal validity. Given our findings that Hispanic identity may be a function of the treatment (Secure Communities), research designs comparing Hispanic to Non-Hispanic outcomes are susceptible to biases from using a "bad control" (Angrist and Pischke 2009; Montgomery, Nyhan, and Torres 2018). If immigration enforcement systematically changes how individuals self-identify ethnically, studies that condition on Hispanic identity may conflate direct policy effects with compositional changes in who identifies as Hispanic. This insight is particularly relevant for the large literature examining how immigration enforcement affects Hispanic communities, which largely implicitly assume stable ethnic identification over time. Consequently, the previous literature may have mask the true economic and health costs of policies such as Secure Communities by not addressing this composition bias (Wang and Kaushal 2019; Alsan and Yang 2024; Vu 2024).

Our analysis uncovers substantial heterogeneity in how Secure Communities impacts the self-reporting of Hispanic identity across different demographic groups. We find that SC implementation led to an overall reduction in the self-reporting of Hispanic identity of 5.9 percentage points (6.4%). However, this average effect masks substantial generational differences. On the one hand, first-generation Hispanic children (the group with children and their parents born in Spanish-speaking countries) experienced the largest reductions in Hispanic identity self-reporting at 22.9 percentage points (23.7%). In addition, third-generation children showed moderate reductions in Hispanic identity self-reporting. We also document significant heterogeneity by parental education, with college-educated Hispanic families more likely to reduce Hispanic identification. Sanctuary city policies do not appear to meaningfully moderate these effects.

On the other hand, second-generation children (U.S.-born with at least one parent born in a Spanish-speaking country) increased their Hispanic identity self-reporting by 6.9 percentage points on average (7.5%). Notably, the positive effects among second-generation children are entirely driven by children with Hispanic fathers and non-Hispanic White mothers, suggesting that family structure and paternal versus maternal transmission of ethnic identity play crucial roles in identity responses to enforcement. The finding for second-generation Hispanic families is also consistent with enforcement policies triggering an "identity backlash," increasing their self-identification with Hispanic identity. This finding connects with recent evidence that forced assimi-

lation policies can reverse integration and strengthen minority identity (Fouka 2020). In addition, our results align with Antman and Duncan (2024), who document a similar divergence in response to California's Proposition 187, where vulnerable populations with stronger ties to the minority conceal their identity while those with weaker observable ties affirm it.[4]

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. Section 3 describes the institutional context of Secure Communities. Section 2 discusses a simple conceptual model. Section 4 presents our data sources and the measurement of Hispanic identity. Section 5 outlines our empirical framework and identification strategy. Section 6 presents and discusses the empirical results. Section 7 examines robustness of our results. Section 8 concludes.

2 Conceptual Framework

This paper builds on the theoretical framework developed in Hadah (2024), which incorporates prejudice into the identity model of Akerlof and Kranton (2000). The core insight is that individuals belong to ethnic groups, and their actions can either affirm or contradict their ethnic identity. Deviations from group-associated behavioral norms impose utility costs.

Consider an individual i who belongs to ethnic group $e_i \in \{H, NH\}$, representing Hispanic and non-Hispanic respectively. Utility depends on the individual's actions and the degree to which those actions align with their identity I_i:

$$U_i = U_i(\mathbf{a_i}, \mathbf{a_{-i}}, I_i) \tag{1}$$

Identity itself is endogenous, shaped by one's own actions, the actions of others, and the behavioral norms associated with one's ethnic group:

$$I_i = I_i(\mathbf{a_i}, \mathbf{a_{-i}}; \mathbf{B}_{e_i}) \tag{2}$$

Here $\mathbf{a_i}$ represents individual i's actions, while $\mathbf{a_{-i}}$ captures the actions of others—including prejudice—that affect i's identity. The term $\mathbf{B}_{e_i}$ denotes the behavioral norms that society associates with ethnic group e_i, following the concept of "prescriptions" in Akerlof and Kranton (2000).

Utility maximization with respect to action a_i, given ethnic group e_i, prescribed

4. This heterogeneity aligns with the idea of "reactive ethnicity" from the sociological literature, which posits that a hostile context of reception can prompt second-generation immigrants to assert their ethnic identity rather than assimilate (Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Rumbaut 2008). Similarly, other studies suggest that xenophobic rhetoric can mobilize racial solidarity among those with the legal security to respond (Pérez 2015).

behaviors $\mathbf{B}_{e_i}$, and others' actions $\mathbf{a_{-i}}$, yields the first-order condition:

$$\frac{\partial U_i}{\partial a_i} + \frac{\partial U_i}{\partial I_i} \cdot \frac{dI_i}{da_i} = 0 \tag{3}$$

Let $a_i^\star$ denote the optimal action, generating utility $U_i^\star$. Now suppose individuals can switch their ethnic identity at cost c. An individual will choose to do so when $\tilde{U}_i{}^\star \geqslant U_i^\star + c$, where $\tilde{U}_i{}^\star$ represents utility under the counterfactual ethnicity with corresponding optimal actions $\tilde{a_i^\star}$.

Identity switching occurs when the net benefit $\tilde{U}_i{}^\star - U_i^\star$ exceeds the switching cost c. Importantly, these net benefits are non-zero only when both $\frac{dI_i}{da_i} \neq 0$ and $\frac{\partial U_i}{\partial I_i} \neq 0$.

This framework motivates several empirical considerations. First, the analysis should examine individual characteristics—such as immigrant generation or parental intermarriage—that would generate different optimal actions under alternative identities. Second, contextual factors, particularly variation in bias across settings, may differentially affect outcomes under different identities. Third, focusing on populations with low switching costs c ensures the sample includes individuals for whom identity change is feasible. Fourth, the analysis benefits from examining individuals whose utility is meaningfully affected by identity, satisfying $\frac{\partial U_i}{\partial I_i} \neq 0$.

The adoption of Secure Communities represents a shift in $\mathbf{a_{-i}}$—the actions of others that affect individual i's identity. Specifically, this policy increases the salience of discriminatory actions directed toward Hispanic individuals, which enters the identity function in equation (2). As $\mathbf{a_{-i}}$ shifts to reflect heightened enforcement and perceived hostility, the marginal utility of identity $\frac{\partial U_i}{\partial I_i}$ and the marginal effect of actions on identity $\frac{dI_i}{da_i}$ may both change. Crucially, the direction of this change is theoretically ambiguous and likely heterogeneous across individuals. For some Hispanic individuals, this external threat could strengthen in-group attachment, making deviations from Hispanic identity norms more psychologically costly. For these individuals, the net benefit of switching identities $\tilde{U}_i{}^\star - U_i^\star$ decreases, as the utility under Hispanic identity $U_i^\star$ now incorporates a stronger identity component that would be forfeited upon switching.[5] However, for other Hispanic individuals—particularly those with weaker initial attachment to Hispanic identity or those facing direct costs from being identified as Hispanic—the policy may increase the relative attractiveness of identifying as non-Hispanic. For these individuals, the heightened costs associated with Hispanic identity raise $\tilde{U}_i{}^\star$ relative to $U_i^\star$, making identity switching more appealing. The net effect of Secure Communities on Hispanic-to-non-Hispanic identity switching is therefore an empirical question, depending on the distribution of initial identity

5. This defensive identity response is empirically supported in Fouka (2020), who documents that German Americans strengthened their cultural identity and ethnic attachment in response to state-level bans on German-language instruction during World War I.

attachments and the heterogeneous ways individuals respond to perceived discrimination.

3 Overview of Secure Communities

This section presents a brief overview of the Secure Communities program, drawing heavily on previous studies (Miles and Cox 2014; Alsan and Yang 2024; Ali, Brown, and Herbst 2024). Secure Communities was a federal immigration enforcement program administered by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) designed to identify and remove non-citizens in local policy custody who may have violated potential immigration laws, thereby making them at risk of deportation. Launched in October 2008, the program fundamentally restructured the relationship between local law enforcement and federal immigration authorities by establishing automatic data sharing between their biometric databases. The program's stated objective was to enhance public safety through prioritizing the removal of "high-risk" criminal aliens, specifically those convicted of violent offenses or major drug crimes.

Prior to SC, identifying non-citizens that may be subject to deportation procedures relied on manual methods, such as the Criminal Alien Program (CAP) or 287(g) agreements (Miles and Cox 2014). These earlier programs required federal officers to physically interview inmates or deputized local officers to screen arrested individuals. In contrast, SC automated this process, ICE a "remote presence" in local jails without requiring direct officer involvement at the time of booking. The main innovation of SC was the automated sharing of biometric data. When local police arrested an individual and submitted their fingerprints to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) for a routine criminal background check, the data was automatically forwarded to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to be checked against the Automated Biometric Identification System (IDENT). If an arrested person's fingerprints matched a record in the DHS database, ICE officials reviewed the individual's immigration status. If a violation was identified, ICE could issue a "detainer" request, asking the local jail to hold the individual for up to 48 hours beyond their scheduled release to facilitate transfer into federal custody. Despite the focus on serious criminals, a significant portion of those detained under SC had only minor convictions or no criminal history at all.[6]

SC was implemented on a staggered, county-by-county basis between 2008 and 2013. The rollout began with 14 counties in late 2008 and expanded rapidly, achieving

6. ICE categorized deportable individuals into three levels based on the severity of their criminal history to guide enforcement priorities. Level 1 individuals are those convicted of "aggravated felonies" (e.g., murder, rape, kidnapping) or two or more felonies (Miles and Cox 2014). Level 2 individuals are persons convicted of any other felony or three or more misdemeanors and Level 3 individuals are convicted of misdemeanor offenses (Miles and Cox 2014).

full nationwide coverage by January 2013. The timing of a county's activation was determined by federal authorities and was strongly correlated with proximity to the Mexican border and the size of the local Hispanic population, rather than local crime rates (Miles and Cox 2014). Although ICE initially solicited participation through memoranda of agreement, creating the appearance that the program was voluntary, the agency later clarified that SC was mandatory (Alsan and Yang 2024). By 2011, ICE terminated all MOAs and declared that local jurisdictions could not opt out of the biometric information sharing (Miles and Cox 2014). Between its inception and 2014, the program resulted in over 46 million fingerprint submissions, 2.3 million identifications of removable aliens, and approximately 440,000 deportations. More than 90% of those deported were men, and the program disproportionately affected Hispanic communities (Alsan and Yang 2024; Ali, Brown, and Herbst 2024).

While intended to target criminal offenders, SC generated widespread "chilling effects" that created fear and insecurity within immigrant communities. Research indicates that the program eroded trust in law enforcement, leading immigrants to reduce their interaction with public institutions to avoid detection. A growing literature has emerged examining the effects of SC on a host of economic outcomes Miles and Cox (2014), Wang and Kaushal (2019), Alsan and Yang (2024), and Vu (2024).

4 Data

4.1 Data sources

We use the CPS data set to study the effect of secure communities on the ethnic identity choices of children of Hispanic immigrants. We take advantage of the fact that the CPS asks parents' place of birth, ethnicity, and race. To study the effect of SC on self-reported Hispanic identity, we must measure subjective and objective Hispanic identities to select a subgroup of Hispanic immigrants for analysis. Thus, we use information on ancestry to construct an objective identity measure Flood et al. (2021).

The Current Population Survey is a monthly household survey conducted jointly by the U.S. Census Bureau and the Bureau of Labor Statistics, covering approximately 60,000 households. The CPS contains detailed demographic information including self-reported Hispanic origin, race, and ancestry, as well as parental birthplace for individuals residing with their parents. This allows us to identify children with at least one foreign-born Hispanic parent—our population of interest—and to compare their subjective ethnic identification (self-reported Hispanic identity) against an objective measure based on parental nativity and ancestry. We show the summary statistics of the overall sample and by Hispanic immigrant generation in Table 1.

4.2 Measuring Objective Hispanic Identity

Typically, researchers measure Hispanic identity using affirmative responses to a survey question asking whether the respondent is Hispanic or Latino. Unlike this self-reported measure, we measure Hispanic identity using the Current Population Survey (CPS), which allows us to construct an objective measure of the Hispanic identity of minors under the age 17 who live with their parents. Our objective measure of identity depends on the birthplaces of the individual, their two parents, and four grandparents. We use information on the place of birth, parent's place of birth, and place of birth of grandparents to construct an objective Hispanic measure (Antman, Duncan, and Trejo 2016b; Antman, Duncan, and Trejo 2020b). Using this information, we identify and construct a dataset of first-, second-, third-generation, and fourth Hispanic immigrants.[7]

As such, our data allow us to identify three generations of Hispanic families: (1) first-generation immigrants that are born in a Spanish-speaking country with both parents also being born in a Spanish-speaking country, (2) second-generation immigrants are native-born citizens to at least one parent that was born in a Spanish-speaking country, (3) third-generation immigrants are native-born citizens to two native-born parents and at least one grandparent that was born in a Spanish-speaking country, 4) fourth-generation+ Hispanic immigrants are native-born citizens to two native-born parents, all grandparents were native, and at least one parent self-reported Hispanic identity, 5) fourth-generation+ White are native-born citizens to two native-born parents, all grandparents were native, and both parents self-reported that their race was White identity, and 6) fourth-generation+ Black are native-born citizens to two native-born parents, all grandparents were native, and both parents self-reported that their race was Black.[8] We restrict the sample to Hispanic Whites, first-, second-, third-, and fourth+ generation immigrants, fourth-generation+ White and Black who are 17 year old and younger and still live with their parents between 1994 and 2019.

Moreover, using the place of birth of parents and grandparents, we can objectively identify their ethnic ancestry. Consequently, we can identify different types of parents and grandparents. Using the place of birth of parents, we can divide parents of second-generation children into three objective types—objectively Hispanic-father-Hispanic-mother, objectively Hispanic-father-White-mother, and objectively White-father-Hispanic-mother.

7. For the purposes of this analysis, Spanish-speaking countries are defined as Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Equatorial Guinea, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

8. We restrict first-generation immigrants whose parents were born in a Spanish country to avoid including naturally born US citizens that were born abroad to US parents.

5 Empirical Strategy

In this paper, we estimate the dynamic effects of Secure Communities on Hispanic identity using the imputation estimator developed by Borusyak, Jaravel, and Spiess (2024). This approach addresses the well-documented biases that arise when using conventional two-way fixed effects (TWFE) estimators in settings with staggered treatment adoption (Goodman-Bacon 2021; Sun and Abraham 2021; De Chaisemartin and d'Haultfoeuille 2020; Roth et al. 2023; De Chaisemartin and d'Haultfoeuille 2023). We now discuss the model, identification assumptions, and estimation approach.

Let Y_{icst} denote the measure of Hispanic identity for individual i in county c, state s, and year t. Following Borusyak, Jaravel, and Spiess (2024), we specify the following event study model that allows for unrestricted treatment effect heterogeneity:

$$Y_{icst} = \lambda_c + \gamma_t + X'_{icst}\delta + D_{icst}\tau_{icst} + \varepsilon_{icst} \tag{4}$$

where λ_c represents county fixed effects, γ_t are time fixed effects, and X_{icst} is a vector of individual controls (sex and parental education). D_{cst} is an indicator equal to one if Secure Communities is active in county c at time t, and τ_{cst} represents the fully heterogeneous treatment effect for county c at time t. In equation (**??**), for each county, the data contains an activation date, E_c, when D_{icst} switches from 0 to 1. This specification allows treatment effects to vary arbitrarily across counties and time periods without imposing parametric restrictions.

Our identification strategy leverages the staggered roll-out of Secure Communities across counties between 2008 and 2013. The model in equation (**??**) is generated from three main assumptions on potential outcomes and causal effects. First, the parallel trends assumption requires that in the absence of Secure Communities, Hispanic identity would have evolved similarly between counties. Second, we assume no anticipation effects—that Secure Communities did not affect Hispanic identity before the program's actual implementation in each county. This assumption is plausible given that the timing of county-level implementation was largely determined by federal administrative capacity and technical infrastructure rather than local conditions that might affect our outcome. Finally, we impose a model of unrestricted causal effects, referred to as the "null model" in Borusyak, Jaravel, and Spiess (2024). In this case, the target estimand (parameter of interest) is the dynamic average treatment effect on the treated (ATT) h periods (horizons) since the treatment for a given $h \geqslant 0$:

$$\tau_h = \sum_{\{i,c,s,t\}:K_{cst}=h} w_{icst}\tau_{icst} \tag{5}$$

where weight is given by $w_{icst} = \frac{\mathbb{1}(K_{cst}=h)}{|\{i,c,s,t\}:K_{cst}=h|}$ and sums one within each event time

h. Borusyak, Jaravel, and Spiess (2024) proposes an imputation estimator that uses untreated observations to predict what would have happened to treated units in the absence of treatment. The estimator proceeds in three steps:

1. Using only the untreated units only (i.e., observations with $D_{cst} = 0$) and ordinary least squares (OLS), we obtain $\hat{\lambda}_c$, $\hat{\gamma}_t$, and $\hat{\delta}$ from

$$Y_{icst} = \lambda_c + \gamma_t + X'_{icst}\delta + \varepsilon_{icst}.$$

2. For each treated observation $\{i, c, s, t\}$ with $D_{icst} = 1$, we construct untreated potential outcome (counterfactual outcome) as $\hat{Y}_{icst}(0) = \hat{\lambda}_c + \hat{\gamma}_t + X'_{icst}\hat{\delta}$ and estimate the individual-specific treatment effect as $\hat{\tau}_{icst} = Y_{icst} - \hat{Y}_{icst}(0)$.

3. Estimate the event-time coefficients as weighted averages: $\hat{\tau}_h = \sum_{\{i,c,s,t\}:K_{cst}=h} w_{icst}\hat{\tau}_{icst}$.

We cluster standard errors at the county level to account for potential serial correlation within counties over time and to allow for arbitrary forms of heteroskedasticity across counties. Although the maintained assumptions of the differences-in-differences design is untestable in the post-treatment period, we can perform a robust test of the identifying assumptions in the pre-treatment period (pre-trends test). Unlike the conventional pre-trends test using standard event studies, the imputation-based method affords the opportunity to test for parallel pre-trends and no-anticipation assumptions using only the untreated observations. To proceed with the pre-trends test, one needs to choose an alternative model for the outcome Y_{icst} for the untreated observations. Specifically, for an observable vector W_{icst}, the alternative model may be written as $Y_{icst} = \lambda_c + \gamma_t + X'_{icst}\delta + W_{icst}\theta + \varepsilon_{icst}$, where W_{icst} may represent a set of binary indicators for $1, \ldots, k$ periods prior to the start of the treatment for some chosen k. Next, using the untreated observations only, obtain the OLS estimate of θ and test the hypothesis $\theta = 0$. We present all our main results using graphically, combining these pre-trend estimates with the horizon-specific ATTs from equation (5). As discussed in Borusyak, Jaravel, and Spiess (2024), this robust OLS-based pre-trends test avoids the pre-testing concerns in Roth (2022). Specifically, regression-based tests use the full sample, including the treated observations, thereby imposing restrictions on treatment effect heterogeneity. Moreover, conducting inference using the imputation estimates of the ATT remains valid even if we condition on passing the pre-trends, avoiding the issue of inflated variances and overly conservative inference that often arises with standard pre-trend tests Roth (2022).

6 Results and Discussion

6.1 Main Effects of Secure Communities on Self-reporting of Hispanic Identity

We begin by presenting our main findings on the effects of Secure Communities on the self-reporting of Hispanic identity among children. Figure 1d displays the dynamic treatment effects estimated using the imputation estimator described in Section 5. We find a consistent pattern of reduced Hispanic identity self-reporting following Secure Communities implementation.

Our estimates indicate that Secure Communities led to a statistically significant reduction in Hispanic identity self-reporting among Hispanic children in the full sample. The overall ATT estimate is 5.9 percentage points reduction, representing a 6.4% decline in self-identification rates relative to the pre-treatment level of Hispanic identification. The dynamic pattern shows that effects occur within the first year of implementation, with point estimates remaining relatively stable across event-time horizons.

The pre-trend coefficients provide reassuring evidence for our identification strategy. As shown in Figure 1d, the lead coefficients are small in magnitude and statistically indistinguishable from zero, supporting the parallel trends assumption underlying our analysis.

6.2 Heterogeneous Effects by Generational Status

The aggregate results mask substantial heterogeneity across different generations of Hispanic families. As discussed in Section **??** and following previous studies, we argue that grouping Hispanic families by countries of birth of the respondent child, their parents, and grandparents, provide a more "objective" measure of Hispanic heritage (Duncan and Trejo 2011b). We hypothesize that different generations of Hispanic identity differ in their underlying likelihood of self-reporting Hispanic identity, which may produce heterogeneous effects of Secure Communities (Duncan and Trejo 2011b; Hadah 2024).

Figure 1 presents our estimates separately for first-, second-, and third-generation Hispanic children, showing striking differences in how Secure Communities affected identity self-reporting across these groups. First, Panel (a) of Figure 2 shows that the negative effects on the self-reporting of Hispanic identity are most pronounced among first-generation Hispanic children. These children, who were born in Spanish-speaking countries with both parents also born in Spanish-speaking countries, experience a substantial reduction in Hispanic identity self-reporting following Secure Com-

munities implementation. The overall ATT estimate for this group is 22.9 percentage points reduction, nearly four times larger than the aggregate effect.

Again, the dynamic pattern for first-generation children shows effects that emerge immediately upon program implementation and remain persistent throughout the rest of the sample period. The magnitude of these effects is economically substantial, representing approximately a 23.7% reduction in Hispanic identity self-reporting rates relative to the pre-treatment period.

Second, in contrast to first-generation children, Panel (b) of Figure 1 reveals that Secure Communities increased the Hispanic identity self-reporting of second-generation Hispanic children—those who are U.S.-born with at least one parent born in a Spanish-speaking country. The overall ATT estimate for this group is 6.9 percentage points, with effects becoming more pronounced after two years of exposure to the program.

Given that first- and second-generation Hispanic families are typically viewed as more or less objectively of Hispanic heritage, the opposite finding for these groups appears counterintuitive at first. We hypothesize that the mixed-ethnicity nature of second-generation families may produce a more complex behavioral response to immigration enforcement. Following Hadah (2025), we examine heterogeneity by parental racial and ethnic composition. Figure 2 presents estimates for second-generation children stratified by parental background, revealing important insights into the mechanisms driving our the average second-results.

The results suggest that the positive effects of Secure Communities on the self-reporting of Hispanic identity among second-generation children are entirely driven by children with Hispanic fathers and non-Hispanic White mothers. For this specific type of family, Secure Communities led to a substantial increase in Hispanic identity self-reporting. In contrast, children from other parental combinations—those with Hispanic mothers and non-Hispanic White fathers, or those with two Hispanic parents—show either null effects or slight reductions in Hispanic identity self-reporting. This pattern suggests that the identity responses to immigration enforcement may depend crucially on family structure and the specific pathways through which Hispanic identity is transmitted across generations.

Finally, Panel (c) of Figure 1 shows that third-generation Hispanic children (i.e., those who are U.S.-born with U.S.-born parents but with grandparents born in Spanish-speaking countries) also experienced reduced Hispanic identity self-reporting, though the effects are more modest than those observed for first-generation children. The overall ATT estimate is 9.3 percentage points reduction, representing a 11.7% decline.

The results for third-generation children suggests that even families with more distant immigration histories (i.e., weaker ties to their Hispanic heritage) were affected by Secure Communities. This finding is consistent with previous research that finds that third-generation Hispanic families are more likely to experience ethnic attrition

(Duncan and Trejo 2011b; Hadah 2024).

6.3 Heterogeneous Effects by Parental Education

We next examine how the effects of Secure Communities vary by parental education, as measured by whether at least one parent has completed college. Figure 3 shows differential effects across education levels that provide additional insights into the potential mechanisms underlying our main findings.

Panel (a) of Figure 3 shows results for the full sample of Hispanic children. Among children with college-educated parents, Secure Communities reduced the self-reporting of Hispanic identity, consistent with our main findings. However, among children whose parents lack college education, we observe the opposite effect, where Secure Communities increased self-reporting of Hispanic identity.

This education-based heterogeneity suggests that responses to immigration enforcement may depend on families' socioeconomic resources and integration into mainstream American society. Previous studies document that more educated Hispanic families are more likely to attrit, suggeting that such families may have greater ability to "pass" as non-Hispanic and may view reduced ethnic identification as a protective strategy (Duncan and Trejo 2011b).

The effect heterogeneity by education persists when we examine each generational group separately. For first-generation children, Secure Communities reduced self-reporting of Hispanic identity regardless of parental education, though the effects are somewhat larger for children with college-educated parents.

For third-generation children, the negative effects of Secure Communities are concentrated among those with college-educated parents, while children whose parents lack college education show smaller responses. This pattern mirrors the full-sample results and reinforces the interpretation that education provides both the means and incentives for identity switching among families with more distant immigration histories.

For second-generation children, the positive effects on Hispanic identity self-reporting are stronger among children whose parents lack college education. The positive effect may reflect increased ethnic solidarity or identity salience in response to perceived threats to the Hispanic community, which may be more pronounced among lower-socioeconomic-status second-generation families (Fouka 2020; Antman and Duncan 2024).

6.4 Heterogeneous Effects by Sanctuary City Status

We also examine whether local immigration policy environments moderate the effects of Secure Communities by estimating separate effects for counties with and without sanctuary city policies. Figure 4 presents these results, showing limited evidence of systematic differences across sanctuary jurisdictions. Overall, we do not find substantial evidence that sanctuary city policies meaningfully moderate the effects of Secure Communities on Hispanic identity self-reporting. The point estimates are similar across sanctuary and non-sanctuary jurisdictions for all generations.

This null finding may reflect the possibility that Secure Communities' effects on identity operate through channels that are less sensitive to local policy environments.

7 Robustness Checks and Placebo Tests

7.1 Placebo Analysis: Fourth-Generation Black Children

We conduct a placebo analysis to provide empirical support for our research design and mitigate concerns regarding spurious effects. Specifically, we estimate placebo effects using a population that should be unaffected by Secure Communities: fourth-generation Black children. This group consists of Black children aged 17 and below with U.S.-born parents and grandparents, where both parents self-identify as Black.

Figure 5 presents the placebo results, which show no systematic relationship between Secure Communities and the self-reporting of Hispanic identity among fourth-generation Black children. These null results provide reassuring evidence that our main findings reflect credible causal effects of immigration enforcement.

7.2 Alternative Sample and Methods

We also estimate the model excluding southern border counties and counties in New York, Massachusetts, and Illinois, following Alsan and Yang (2024). Excluding southern border counties addresses potential selection into treatment by ICE, while excluding New York, Massachusetts, and Illinois accounts for these states' legal challenges to the Secure Communities program, which delayed implementation. Figure 6 presents the results of this specification for first-, second-, and third-generation Hispanic immigrants, as well as all generations pooled. The results do not differ from our main specification, strengthening our confidence that the main findings are not driven by these potentially problematic counties.

To validate our choice of the Borusyak, Jaravel, and Spiess (2024) imputation estimator, we compare our main estimates against other difference-in-differences estimators proposed in the recent econometrics literature. Figure 7 presents event study

estimates from five approaches: standard two-way fixed effects (TWFE), Callaway and Sant'Anna (2021), Borusyak, Jaravel, and Spiess (2024), De Chaisemartin and d'Haultfoeuille (2020), and Gardner (2022). Each of these estimators addresses potential bias from staggered treatment timing through different methodological approaches, yet all are designed to avoid the "forbidden comparisons" that can contaminate conventional TWFE estimates. Across all four panels—first-, second-, and third-generation Hispanic children, as well as the pooled sample—the estimates from the alternative robust estimators closely align with our main Borusyak, Jaravel, and Spiess (2024) specification in both sign and magnitude. This consistency across methodologies demonstrates that our findings are not an artifact of any particular estimation approach and reinforces confidence in the reliability of our main results.[9]

8 Conclusion

This paper provides novel causal evidence that Hispanic ethnic identity is not a fixed demographic characteristic but a strategic choice responsive to policy incentives. We find that the expansion of local immigration enforcement through Secure Communities significantly altered the composition of the self-identified Hispanic population in the United States.

We also find substantial heterogeneous effects of the impacts of Secure Communities. Although first-generation immigrants and those with higher deportation risks retreat from Hispanic identity, we find evidence of a "reactive ethnicity" response among second-generation citizens, who increase their self-identification with the group. This divergence suggests that enforcement policies potentially operate through dual channels, raising the cost of identification for the vulnerable while simultaneously encouraging identity assertion among the legally secure. Notably, we find that these effects are not moderated by sanctuary city policies.

Our findings also have methodological implications for the economics of immigration. Our results demonstrate that Hispanic identity functions as a "bad control" in evaluations of enforcement policy. Because the decision to self-identify is endogenous to the treatment (i.e., immigration enforcement), studies that condition on Hispanic identity or define samples based on ethnicity risk introducing significant selection bias. Consequently, prior literature may systematically bias the negative economic and health impacts of immigration enforcement.

Finally, our results point to a profound social cost of immigration enforcement. Beyond the direct economic effects, immigration enforcement exerts a psychological tax

9. The differences between the estimators, especially compared with Callaway and Sant'Anna (2021), could be due to multiple factors, including the choice of weights in aggregating group-time effects into over ATT estimates; see for e.g., Deb et al. (2025).

on the broader Hispanic community, causing individuals to erase their heritage to signal assimilation. Future research evaluating the welfare effects of immigration policy must account for these endogenous identity dynamics to fully capture the scope of "spillover effects" on the target population.

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A TABLES

Table 1: Summary Statistics by Generation Type

	All Sample		First Generation		Second Generation		Third Generation	
Variable	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Panel A: Outcome Variables								
Hispanic Identity	0.903	0.297	0.964	0.187	0.924	0.265	0.791	0.407
Poor Health	0.001	0.023	0.001	0.024	0.001	0.024	0.000	0.021
School Lunch	0.091	0.288	0.098	0.298	0.094	0.292	0.079	0.269
SNAP	0.026	0.160	0.022	0.148	0.028	0.166	0.021	0.143
Below Poverty Line	0.042	0.200	0.053	0.225	0.044	0.205	0.026	0.160
Food Insecurity	0.273	0.445	0.333	0.471	0.285	0.452	0.195	0.396
Child Food Insecurity	0.161	0.368	0.219	0.414	0.169	0.374	0.104	0.305
Panel B: Demographics and Treatment								
Female	0.487	0.500	0.481	0.500	0.488	0.500	0.486	0.500
Age	8.458	5.076	11.486	4.316	8.120	5.032	7.749	5.016
Panel C: Family Characteristics								
Hispanic Mother	0.889	0.315	0.952	0.214	0.918	0.274	0.752	0.432
Hispanic Father	0.874	0.332	0.937	0.242	0.907	0.290	0.726	0.446
Family Income ($)	48669.293	60204.756	36228.630	42940.258	45102.108	55855.946	68590.582	76955.824
Panel D: Geographic Variables								
Fraction Hispanic in County	0.328	0.211	0.309	0.202	0.336	0.205	0.314	0.231
Southern Border State	0.541	0.498	0.445	0.497	0.564	0.496	0.519	0.500

Note:

Sample includes first, second, and third generation Hispanic children ages 17 and below from the Current Population Survey (1994-2019).

First generation: born in Spanish-speaking country. Second generation: born in US with at least one parent born in Spanish-speaking country.

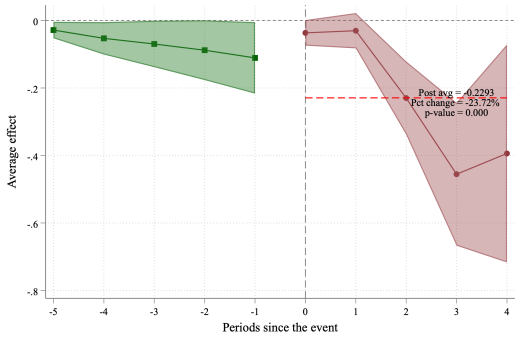
Third generation: native-born with native-born parents and at least one grandparent born in Spanish-speaking country.

Binary variables are expressed as proportions (0-1). Family income is measured in dollars.

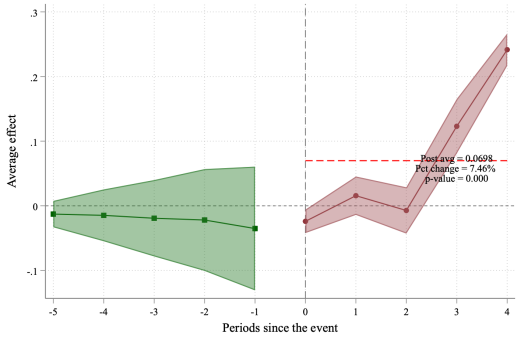
B FIGURES

Figure 1: Immigration Enforcement and Self-Reported Hispanic Identity: By Generation

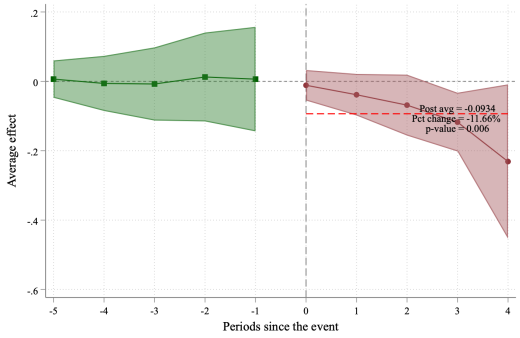
(a) First Generation



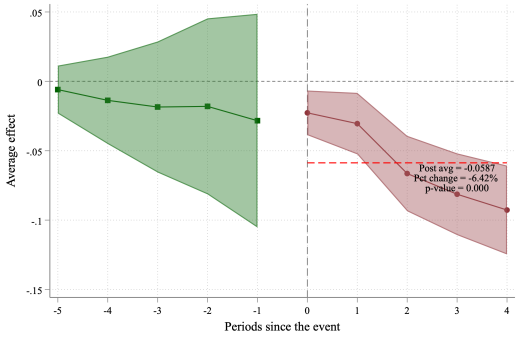
(b) Second Generation



(c) Third Generation



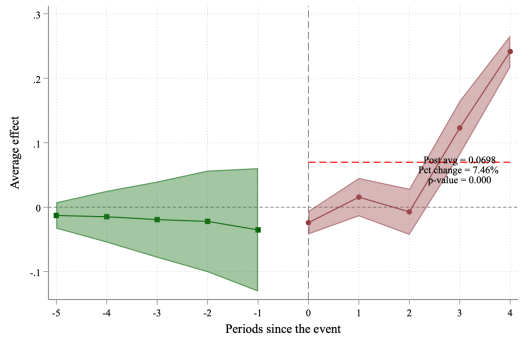
(d) All Generations



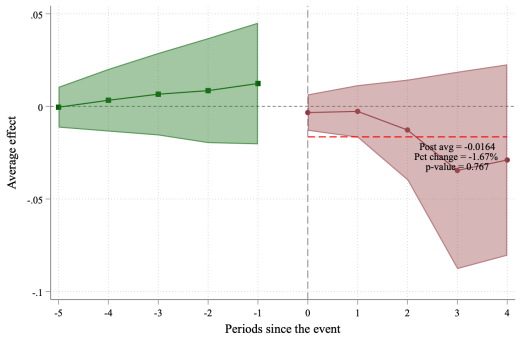
This figure shows four panels of estimating equation (4). I include county and year fixed effects. The dependent variable is self-reported Hispanic identity. Each panel is the results from the same regression but on different samples that are divided by generation. Standard errors are clustered on the state level. The samples include first-, second-, and third-generation Hispanic children, and the three generations pooled that are racially White, ages 17 and below who live in intact families. First-generation Hispanic immigrants are children that were born in a Spanish-speaking country. Native-born second-generation Hispanic immigrants are children with at least one parent born in a Spanish-speaking country. Native-born third-generation Hispanic immigrants are children with native-born parents and at least one grandparent born in a Spanish-speaking country.

Figure 2: Immigration Enforcement and Self-Reported Hispanic Identity Second-Generation: By Parents' Type

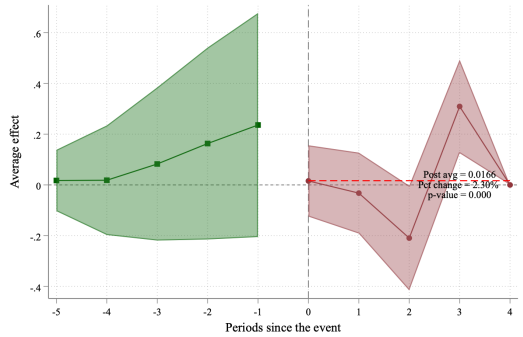
(a) Second Generation



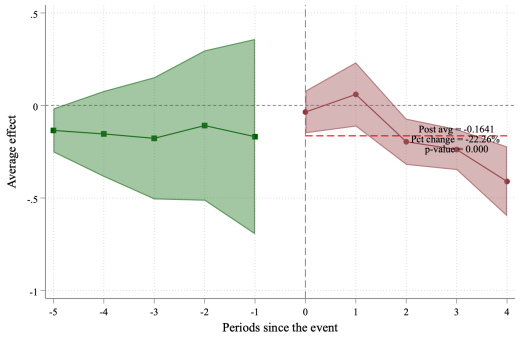
(b) Second Generation Hispanic Father Hispanic Mother



(c) Hispanic Father White Mother



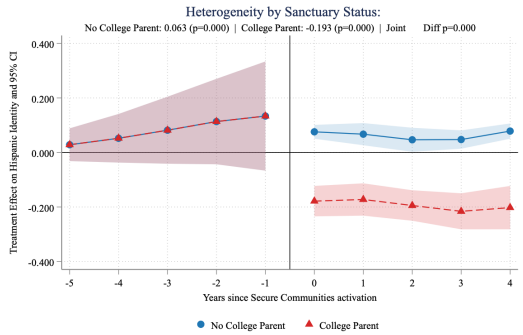
(d) White Father Hispanic Mother



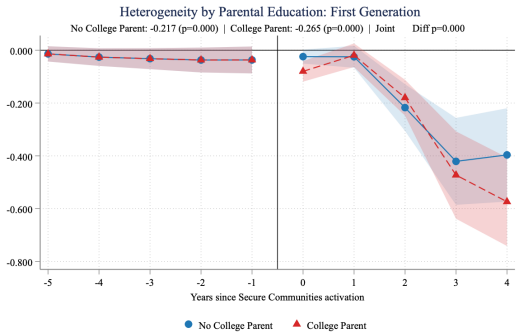
This figure shows four panels of estimating equation (4). I include county and year fixed effects. The dependent variable is self-reported Hispanic identity. Each panel is the results from the same regression but on different samples that are divided by the race and ethnicity of the parents. Standard errors are clustered on the state level. The samples include second-generation Hispanic children that are racially White, ages 17 and below who live in intact families. Parents can be endogamous, i.e. Hispanic father and Hispanic mother, or interethnic parents.

Figure 3: Immigration Enforcement and Self-Reported Hispanic Identity Heterogeneous Effect: By Parental Education

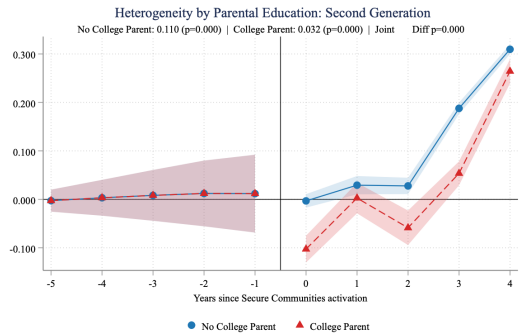
(a) All Generations



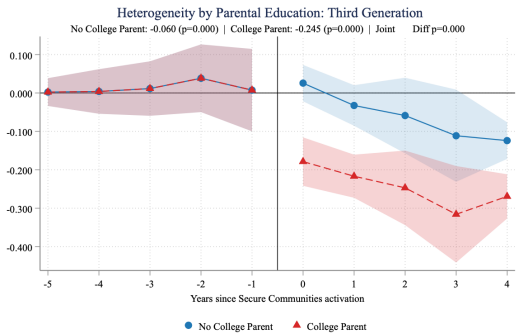
(b) First Generation



(c) Second Generation



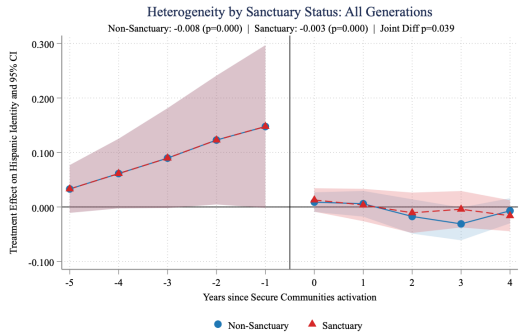
(d) Third Generation



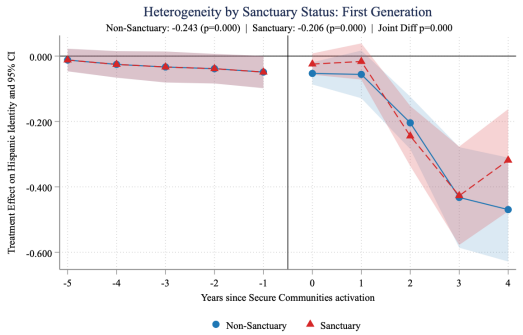
This figure shows four panels of estimating equation (4) by parental education. I include county and year fixed effects. The dependent variable is self-reported Hispanic identity. Each panel is the results from the same regression but on different samples that are divided by generation. Standard errors are clustered on the state level. The samples include first-, second-, and third-generation Hispanic children that are racially White, ages 17 and below who live in intact families. First-generation Hispanic immigrants are children that were born in a Spanish-speaking country. Native-born second-generation Hispanic immigrants are children with at least one parent born in a Spanish-speaking country. Native-born third-generation Hispanic immigrants are children with native-born parents and at least one grandparent born in a Spanish-speaking country.

Figure 4: Immigration Enforcement and Self-Reported Hispanic Identity Heterogeneous Effect: By Sanctuary City Status

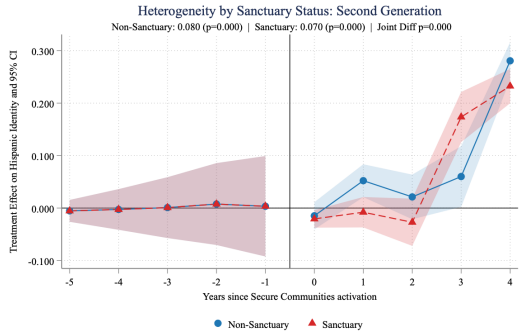
(a) All Generations



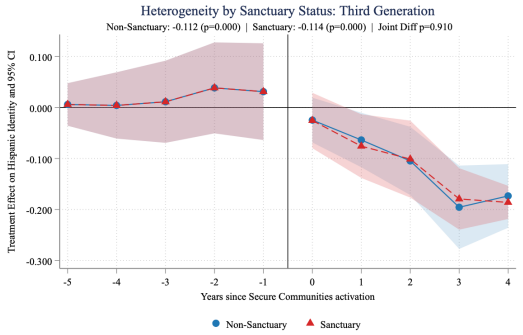
(b) First Generation



(c) Second Generation

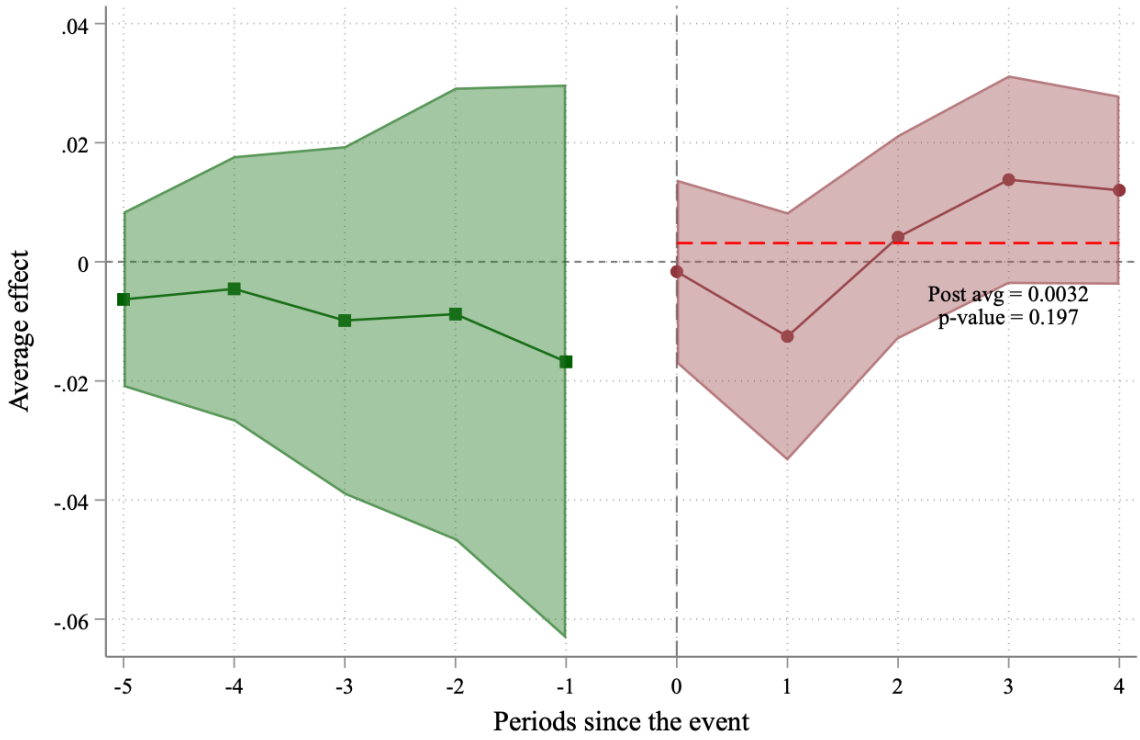


(d) Third Generation



This figure shows four panels of estimating equation (4) by sanctuary local ordinance. Sanctuary ordinances were passed at local levels to limit a municipality's cooperation with federal immigration enforcement agencies and typically represent policies where local jurisdictions do not honor Immigration and ICE detainer requests or otherwise limit cooperation with federal immigration authorities. I include county and year fixed effects. The dependent variable is self-reported Hispanic identity. Each panel is the results from the same regression but on different samples that are divided by generation. Standard errors are clustered on the state level. The samples include first-, second-, and third-generation Hispanic children that are racially White, ages 17 and below who live in intact families. First-generation Hispanic immigrants are children that were born in a Spanish-speaking country. Native-born second-generation Hispanic immigrants are children with at least one parent born in a Spanish-speaking country. Native-born third-generation Hispanic immigrants are children with native-born parents and at least one grandparent born in a Spanish-speaking country.

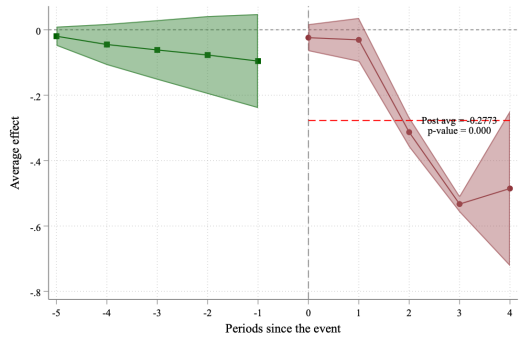
Figure 5: Immigration Enforcement and Self-Reported Hispanic Identity: Placebo Among Fourth Generation+ Black



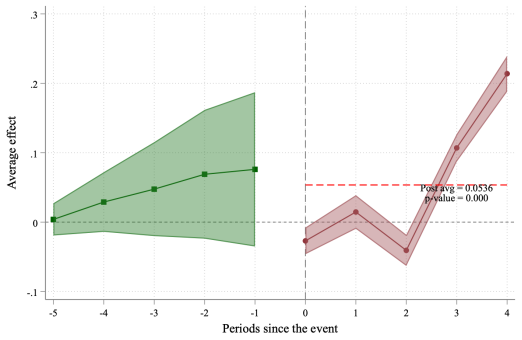
This figure shows four panels of estimating equation (4). I include county and year fixed effects. The dependent variable is self-reported Hispanic identity. The figure shows the results from the same regression but on a sample of fourth generation+ Black Americans. Standard errors are clustered on the state level. The samples include fourth+ Black children, ages 17 and below who live in intact families. Native-born fourth-generation+ Black are children with native-born parents and native-born grandparents and both parents self-reporting Black racial identity.

Figure 6: Immigration Enforcement and Self-Reported Hispanic Identity: Robustness Check

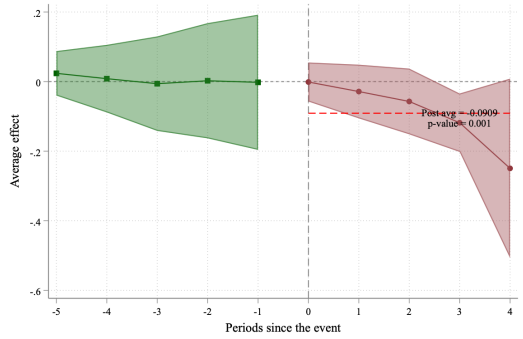
(a) First Generation



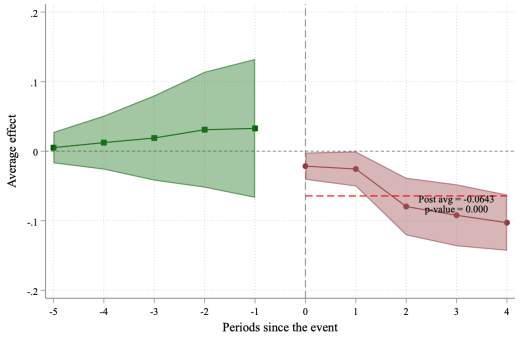
(b) Second Generation



(c) Third Generation



(d) All Generations

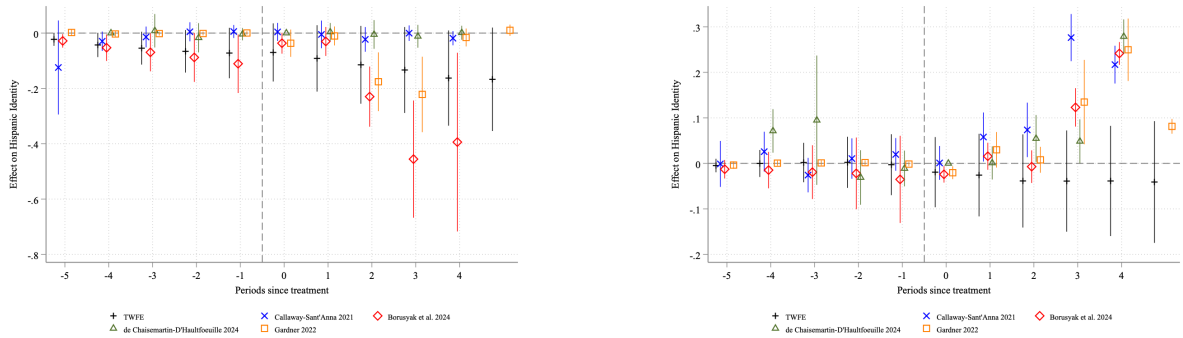


This figure shows four panels of estimating equation (4). I include county and year fixed effects. The dependent variable is self-reported Hispanic identity. Each panel is the results from the same regression but on different samples that are divided by generation. Standard errors are clustered on the state level. The samples include first-, second-, and third-generation Hispanic children that are racially White, ages 17 and below who live in intact families, excluding southern border counties and counties in New York, Massachusetts, and Illinois. First-generation Hispanic immigrants are children that were born in a Spanish-speaking country. Native-born second-generation Hispanic immigrants are children with at least one parent born in a Spanish-speaking country. Native-born third-generation Hispanic immigrants are children with native-born parents and at least one grandparent born in a Spanish-speaking country.

Figure 7: Immigration Enforcement and Self-Reported Hispanic Identity: Comparison of DiD Estimators

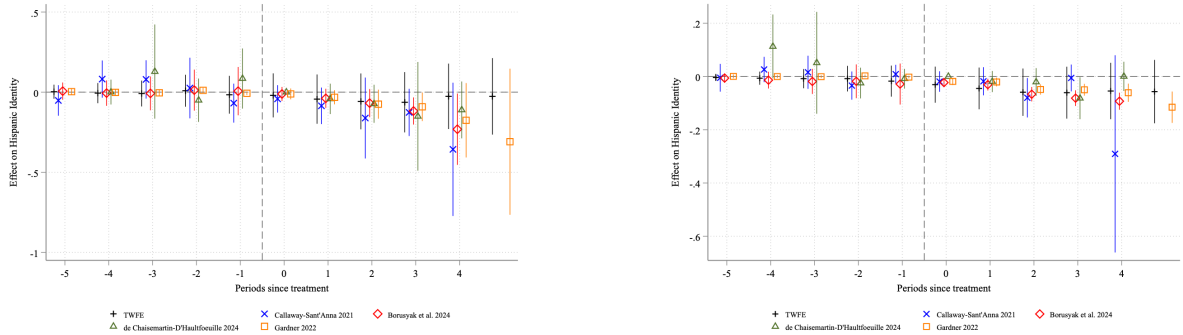
(a) First Generation

(b) Second Generation



(c) Third Generation

(d) All Generations



This figure compares estimates from five difference-in-differences estimators robust to staggered treatment timing. Each panel displays event study coefficients from: (1) two-way fixed effects (TWFE), (2) Callaway and Sant'Anna (2021), (3) Borusyak, Jaravel, and Spiess (2024), (4) De Chaisemartin and d'Haultfoeuille (2020), and (5) Gardner (2022). The dependent variable is self-reported Hispanic identity. All specifications include county and year fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the county level. The vertical dashed line indicates the period before treatment ($t = -1$), which serves as the reference period. The horizontal dashed line marks zero effect. The samples include first-, second-, and third-generation Hispanic children who are racially White, ages 17 and below, living in intact families.