Voting in solidarity? Immigration enforcement and political participation in the U.S.

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March, 2022

1   Introduction

The last two decades have witnessed an unprecedented expansion of interior immigration enforcement in the United States, with an 80% increase in funding for the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency, a twofold increase in detentions, and a threefold increase in removals/deportations.[1] In 2012, Congress allocated $18 billion for immigration enforcement, $4 billion more than the budget for all the other major criminal law enforcement agencies combined (Foer (2018)). Between 1996 and 2013, approximately 5 million non-citizens were deported (Simanski (2014)), and recent estimates suggest that since 2008, approximately 360,000 deportations occur each year (White (2016)). Although this expansion targeted individuals with multiple immigration violations, there was a significant increase in the number of people detained and deported after low-level offenses.

This increase in immigration enforcement intensity coincided with a major demographic transformation. The Hispanic or Latino population grew by 23% between 2010 and 2020, and this group now constitutes 18.7% of the US population. The number of citizens living in mixed-status households, defined as a household whose members include people with different citizenship or immigration status, has reached 22 million in 2021. Around 17 million of these live in mixed-status households where at least one of the members is an undocumented migrant. [2] While US citizens are not the targets of immigration enforcement, their proximal contact with potential deportees intricately unites their struggles and actions.

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[1] See U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Budget in Brief, fiscal years 2003-2013
[2] Data from the 2020 Census Report and the Pew Hispanic Research Center

A key question is whether this intensified immigration enforcement affected the political engagement of individuals who live near potential deportees, which disproportionately consists of the Hispanic community. Deportation fear is widespread for Hispanic individuals [3], especially considering that under federal law any non-citizen – both undocumented immigrants and green card holders – can be deported. On the one hand, their political engagement might increase to express discontent with the policies that affect directly the people near them, and indirectly due to the anxiety and financial hardships associated with an increase in enforcement, especially in mixed-status households. On the other hand, these kinds of hardships have been linked to political disengagement in certain contexts (Amuedo-Dorantes and Lopez (2017).

This paper studies the effect of the implementation of the *Secure Communities (SC)* program on Hispanic political engagement. The SC is an *US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)*-run deportation program that improved the partnership level between federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies. The SC allowed local law enforcement agencies to conduct fingerprint matching against the *IDENT Department of Homeland Security (DHS)* database for immigration violations, thus it increased the likelihood of deportation for non-citizens conditional on being arrested. In the months post-SC activation, there was a sharp 15% increase in the number of detainers, 93% of them against Hispanic individuals.

I exploit the gradual roll-out of the SC program across counties to estimate the spillover effect of SC on the political participation of Hispanic citizens using a triple-differences framework.

2 Literature review

In response to the intensification of immigration enforcement, a growing body of work has analyzed the effect of immigration policies on US residents, with a special focus on the Latino population, undocumented immigrants, and their families.

2.1 Immigration enforcement, well-being and economic outcomes

Several studies have shown that the threat of detention and deportation faced by non-citizens has negative consequences for their mental and physical health (Aranda et al. (2014), Perreira and Pedroza (2019)). Moreover, punitive immigration policies spill

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[3]Data from 2017 UCLA Luskin Los Angeles Quality of Life Index Survey

over to those who may not personally be at risk for detention and deportation. Proximal contact, defined as vicarious exposure to the policy through a family member or loved one (Walker (2014)), is particularly meaningful in the area of immigration since interactions with enforcement officers can ultimately lead to family separations (Anoll and Israel-Trummel (2019)). Even if no household member is deported, the fear of this being a real possibility has significant negative outcomes. The fear of being trackdown or, in the case of citizens, increasing the risk of tracking down an unauthorized family member, leads to avoiding interactions with government institutions (Pedraza et al. (2017)).

Watson (2014) documents that heightened immigration enforcement leads to "chilling effects" in Medicaid participation among children of non-citizens, even if the children held U.S. citizenship. Likewise, Alsan and Yang (2018) find a negative impact of the Secure Communities program on the take up of safety net programs by Hispanic citizens. Households with an unauthorized parent have a higher likelihood of living in poverty, and Hispanic households with non-citizen adults are at a higher risk of suffering food insecurity after the implementation of local immigration enforcement programs (Potochnick et al. (2017)). Stricter immigration enforcement causes some families to take unregulated low-paying jobs due to fear of greater exposure to detection and apprehension. Moreover, these policies can have far-reaching negative labor market outcomes even for citizens (East et al. (2018)).

2.2 Immigration enforcement and political behavior

However, the effect of stricter internal immigration policies on political behavior has been less studied. The hardships faced by non-citizens and their families are likely to affect their political engagement (Ewing and Cantor (2014)). A particular policy will shape civic attitudes and engagement through both its impacts on determinants of political participation and how it treats citizens (Mettler and Soss (2004)).

Punitive policies characterized by monitoring and sanctions have ambiguous effects on political engagement. They can spur political mobilization due to a sense of injustice, especially if individuals view their experience as a reflection of a larger set of institutional biases and disadvantages (Jenkins (1983)). This effect may affect a whole community due to a sense of solidarity or the creation of a heightened ethnic identity (Vargas et al. (2017)). On the other hand, punitive policies signal to some constituents that their membership in their polity is not valued, eroding their trust in the government and potentially leading to demobilization. Demobilization is es-

pecially a threat for vulnerable populations (Watson (2014)) and for individuals who believe that the punishment is either indiscriminate, or a product of the choices of the ones who suffer it (Lerman and Weaver (2014), Walker et al. (2020)). Moreover, punitive policies may impact different forms of political engagement differentially. Even if there is a decrease in formal political engagement, it can heighten participation outside the ballot block (Walker (2014)).

Previous research on punitive policy effects has mainly focused on the carceral state. The theoretical framework for immigration enforcement heavily draws from this criminal justice literature, and the theoretical effect is equally ambiguous. The empirical evidence of the consequences of immigration enforcement for political behavior has also been mixed so far. Immigration enforcement programs can be enacted at local, state or federal level, and the efficacy of a program may differ between this different implementations. Furthermore, some geographical units are reluctant to the introduction of these programs, which might translate into a small change in the number of detentions and deportations. (White (2016)) find that stricter policies spur both electoral and non-electoral participation. The introduction of anti-immigration legislation is correlated with an increase in Latino voter turnout (Roman et al. (2021)) and mobilization efforts (Pantoja and Segura (2003)). White (2016) finds that there is an increase in county-level Latino turnout rates in the wake of the Secure Communities program. On the other hand, (Barreto et al. (2009)) argue that the higher voter turnout of the 90s in California after the anti-immigration 1986 IRCA was due demographic changes and mobilization efforts, not by the bill's introduction per se. Rocha et al. (2015) also argue that the Secure Communities program actually eroded political engagement in areas with higher levels of deportation.

Most of these studies do not provide causal estimates due to the poor availability of political data disaggregated by race/ethnicity, especially those focusing on the 90s reforms. The effects on political behavior are likely to vary across demographic groups, with a predicted higher impact on Latinos. One in five registered Latino voters know someone who had been detained or deported in the past year, and they are the group of voters with the most unfavorable views of deportation (Lopez et al. (2018)). Latinos are more likely to engage in activism to express opinions about immigration compared with whites and blacks (Holbrook et al. (2016)). However, they are less-likely to be registered and to vote than non-Hispanic white, especially for the Latino youth (Humphries et al. (2013)). Mexican immigrants constitute an exception, and they have always historically mobilized more than their other Hispanic

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peers (Lopez and Marcelo (2008)). Naturalized Latinos are 29% less likely to vote than US-born Latinos, but among those naturalized, the likelihood of voting increases if they naturalized for political reasons. Thus far from a monolithic group, we could expect the stricter immigration policies to affect these smaller subsets of the Latinos differently. Another important factor is gender, since women have a higher propensity to register and vote, and they tend to have different positions on key election issues than men (Whitaker (2010)).

Proximal contact is likely to be an important mediator of the effect of immigration enforcement. Amuedo-Dorantes and Lopez (2017) find that proximal contact with immigration enforcement lowered the propensity to register by 5% during the period 2003-2016, although there was no change for those already registered. As stated before, individuals may turn away from formal political participation and engage in other types of political activities (Brayne (2014), Pedraza et al. (2017)). Between 1996 and 2013, approximately 5 million non-citizens were deported Simanski (2014). Given that this caused many families to become separated, it is not surprising to find that U.S.-born youth with foreign-born parents are twice as likely as those with U.S.-born parents to participate in protest activities associated with the intensification of immigration enforcement (Lopez and Gonzalez-Barrera (2013)). Children of undocumented parents and citizens living in mixed-status households increase their civic engagement in response to stricter policies, especially through volunteering activities involving community, immigrant, political and advocacy groups (Amuedo-Dorantes and Lopez (2017), Street et al. (2017), Lopez and Marcelo (2008)). Walker et al. (2020) find a positive effect between proximal contact with immigration enforcement and protest behavior across racial boundaries.

The importance of communities of color at the polls is growing. If stricter immigration policies disengage citizens from formal participation, then it could countervail the otherwise growing engagement of some demographic groups, particularly Latinos (Lopez and Gonzalez-Barrera (2013)).

3   Background on Secure Communities

The Secure Communities (SC) program was an internal immigration enforcement program administered by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). It was active from 2008 to late 2014, and then re-activated from 2017 to 2021. It aimed to enhance the capability of the ICE at arresting and removing individuals who violated

federal immigration laws. SC had three main objectives: "1) Identify criminal aliens through modernized information sharing; 2) Prioritize enforcement actions to ensure apprehension and removal of dangerous criminal aliens, and 3) Transform criminal alien enforcement processes and systems to achieve lasting results" (Morton (2009)). To accomplish its goal, SC expanded the ability to build domestic deportation capacity by integrating criminal and immigration databases, and establishing partnerships between local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies.

In particular, it expanded the collaboration between the FBI and local and state law enforcement for bio-metric fingerprint matching. After an arrest, an individual's fingerprints are submitted to the FBI to run a criminal background check for the state or local authorities. Before SC, non-citizens in violation of immigration laws were identified by inmate interviews in local jails under a policy known as *Criminal Alien Program (CAP)* or by local officers under formal written 287(g) agreements with DHS[4] This procedure was highly labor-intensive, and authorized officials screened less than 15% of local jails and prisons in about 2% of all US counties (Miles and Cox (2013)). Under SC, the fingerprints received by the FBI were also automatically cross-checked with the DHS-owned Automated Biometric Identification System (IDENT) database, which contains biometric records of immigration applications.

If the fingerprints matched a non-US citizen, the system automatically notified the Law Enforcement Support Center of ICE. In turn, the ICE determined if there was probable cause for removability. If an individual was deemed removable under immigration law, the ICE issued a "detainer" on the person. The detainer requests state or local law enforcement to hold the individual for up to 48 hours, which allowed ICE to initiate the removal proceedings. As a result of this detainer protocol, individuals who may otherwise be released through the local legal system were detained under SC.[5] Miles and Cox (2014) find that the SC significantly increased the likelihood that a non-citizen would be detained by the ICE and deported from the country conditional on being arrested. The overwhelming majority of detainers (93%) were issued against Hispanic individuals, and over time, the SC issued a growing share of detainers for low-level arrests (Alsan and Yang (2018)). During SC, most of the deportations occured for reasons independent of the triggering arrests, i.e. a fingerprint match may indicate that the person was removable because he or she had broken an immigration law, not due to a criminal infraction.

[4]Additional details on the Secure Communities program and other immigration enforcement policies can be found in the Appendix.

[5]For example, individuals whose cases were dismissed.

3.1 County-level implementation

SC followed a staggered implementation across counties due to technological constraints. It started on October 27, 2008, through a voluntary pilot program under the Bush presidency. It was then expanded to other jurisdictions, beginning with the southwestern border of the US, and most counties had already adopted SC by mid-2012. SC achieved full implementation in all 3,181 jurisdictions under the Obama administration on January 22, 2013 . Once SC became active in a county, state and local jurisdictions could not opt-out, and the fingerprint matching procedure was automatically implemented.

The timing of the implementation was not fully random, due to the reluctance of some states and technological constraints. SC was initially described as a partnership between ICE and each state's State Identification Bureau, requiring a memorandum of agreement (MOA) between both agencies.[6] This gave rise to confusion on the extent of federal enforceability of the program. In the spring of 2011, the governors of Massachusetts, New York, and Illinois ended their respective MOAs with the DHS, alleging that the program did not exclusively target the most violent offenders and instead hindered community policing. In August 2021, the ICE determined that MOAs were not required to activate or operate Secure Communities. Shortly after, ICE's former director terminated all MOAs through the "Morton Memo". This action dictated that no agreement with the state was legally necessary to conduct the fingerprint matching.[7] In response, some jurisdictions disobeyed detainer requests from ICE and became known as "sanctuary cities".[8] Even if not all of the detainers were honored by local law enforcement or led to deportation, there is a strong positive correlation between detainers and removals under SC.(Alsan and Yang (2018))

Partly due to growing resistance of the sanctuary cities, SC was replaced with the "Priority Enforcement Program" (PEP) across the entire country on November 20,2014. This program also relied on fingerprint matching, but it had a limited scope because it could only detain individuals convicted of specifically enumerated high priority offenses. On January 25, 2017, President Trump reactivated the program,

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[6]Add link to legal structure of MOA

[7]Add the sources.

[8]These jurisdictions argued these detentions were unconstitutional under the Fourth Amendment. A current list of sanctuary cities is available at: https://cis.org/Map-Sanctuary-Cities-Counties-and-States. Each sanctuary city might have different policies to restrict information sharing with federal immigration agents. The number of detainers issued could only be influenced if they chose to stop arresting Hispanic individuals. There is no evidence that this was the case, and the strategy these jurisdictions mostly followed was ignoring the detainer requests after an arrest had been produced.

which remained active until President Joe Biden finally terminated it on January, 2021.

Miles and Cox (2013) show that the timing of activation across counties is strongly correlated with the proportion of the Hispanic population, distance to the border, and whether a county had a 287(g) agreement with the ICE. This non-randomness is a potential source of selection bias, and I will come back to it when discussing the restrictions I make to the data sample.

4 Data

4.1 Data on political participation

To capture formal political participation, I use the publicly available CPS November Voting and Registration Supplements from 2006 to 2016. The November Supplement has been conducted for every congressional and presidential election since 1964, i.e. every even year. This survey asks respondents whether they registered and voted in the most recent November election.

I follow Amuedo-Dorantes and Lopez (2017) to construct a proxy for unauthorized immigration status.[9] They use three traits that are a good predictor of unauthorized status (Passel et al. (2011)): citizenship, ethnicity, and educational attainment. Due to geographical proximity, poor economic and social conditions in their home country, and the high density of migrant networks, more than 2/3 of these undocumented migrants are from Mexico and Central America. Hence the literature adopts Hispanic as the non-citizens most likely to be unauthorized. Third, most unauthorized immigrants have relatively low education, with approximately 3/4 of adult undocumented immigrants having no more education than a high school diploma. In addition, they restrict their analysis to individuals who have lived in the US for five or more years to ensure that the sample doesn't include low-skilled legal migrants who might be in the US as non-migrants. Thus, they define as likely unauthorized immigrants as Hispanic non-citizen household members who have at most a high school education and have resided in the US for more than five years. Using the imputed likely undocumented status of immigrants in the sample, I create a dummy variable indicative of living in a mixed-status household.

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[9]They obtain an estimated unauthorized immigrant population of 12,791,033 immigrants, close to the estimated population of 12 million undocumented immigrants in the US obtained by the residual method.

Measurement A widespread problem in the immigration enforcement research is that enforcement could affect responses to survey questions regarding citizenship status and political engagement. Misreporting on citizenship status should not be a concern in our case. First, a recent paper from the census that links administrative records (AR) on citizenship status to the American Community Survey (ACS) responses shows that Hispanics are less likely than other groups to misreport citizenship (**?**). The paper proposes to classify individuals only if they were born in the United States or are naturalized citizens who have been in the country for at least a decade. I check whether this restriction substantially changes the number of citizens of my sample (TODO. [10] I also test whether SC activation affected the share of Hispanic citizens in a county, which would signal changes in reporting of naturalization status and natality (TODO: ROBUSTNESS CHECK).

4.2 Timing of the Secure Communities program

I use county-level data on the specific roll-out dates of the Security Communities program [11]. As mentioned above, it is important to understand the timing of SC activation, since non-randomness could introduce bias. For example, if locations that activated early were already routine targets of immigration enforcement (such as border counties), Hispanic in these areas might be less sensitive to changes in enforcement and thus we would get a downward bias.

I follow the strategy used by Alsan and Yang (2018) to reduce selection bias. First, I exclude border areas and the three states that actively resisted SC implementation (Massachusetts, New York, and Illinois) because they might be unique in ways related to both immigration enforcement and political engagement. Second, I include county interacted with time to account for features of a county that may affect timing of activation. Third, I carry out robustness checks (TODO)

5 Empirical strategy

To study the impact of the implementation of the Secure Communities program on political participation for Hispanic citizens at the county level, I will use a triple-

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[10] Alsan and Yang (2018) use this approach in the paper, and they cross-validate their classification of naturalized citizens using state-year administrative data from the DHS, obtaining a correlation of 0.94.

[11] I thank Marcela Alsan and Crystal Yang for providing me with this data, which they used for Alsan and Yang (2018)

difference strategy. This approach is motivated by the estimation strategy used in Alsan and Yang (2018) to study the impacts of immigration enforcement on the take-up of the *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)* and the *Supplemental Security Income (SSI)*. This triple-differences methodology exploits the staggered roll-out of SC activation across US counties as well as the differential impact of SC on Hispanics than on non-Hispanic whites and blacks within a county. A simple diff-in-diff approach is not valid in this case because there might be county-specific time-varying shocks affecting all minority groups.

Using repeated county-level cross-sectional data from the CPS, I estimate the following specification:

$$Y_{ircst} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 I_{ct}^{post} + \beta_2(I_r^H \cdot I_{ct}^{post}) + \beta_3(I_r^B \cdot I_{ct}^{post}) + \Psi X_{rcst} + \delta_{st} + \theta_{rs} + \kappa_{rt} + \varepsilon_{ircst}$$

where r is race/ethnicity, c is county, s is state, and t is year. Y_{ircst} is an indicator variable for our outcomes of interest, registering and voting. I_{ct}^{post} is an indicator equal to one after the activation of SC at a given county. I_r^H and I_r^B are indicators for Hispanic ethnicity and non-Hispanic blacks, respectively. X_{ircst} is a vector of individual control variables that are direct determinants of political participation such as gender and age. Z_{rcst} is a vector of county-levels controls including the share citizen, and the political party in power during that year. I include state year-specific fixed effects (δ_{st}) to capture state-specific policies or economic shocks that might influence political engagement, including differential state-level effects of federal immigration reforms. State-by-race/ethnicity fixed effects (θ_{rs}) are also included to control for attitudes and policies in each state that affect minority groups differentially. Race-by-year fixed effects κ_{rt} capture yearly shocks that differentially affect the different racial groups. Standard errors are clustered at the county level.

The coefficient of interest is β_2, which estimates the impact of SC implementation on Hispanic political participation response relative to non-Hispanic whites, compared to counties that have not yet activated. β_3 captures the impact of SC implementation on Black political participation response relative to non-Hispanic whites, compared to counties that have not yet activated. This serves as a placebo test since we would expect the effect to be insignificant given that the deportations affect mainly Hispanic families.

The identifying assumption for the triple differences is a modified version of the parallel trend assumption for difference-in-difference models. In particular, it requires

the differential in the outcomes of the group which should be affected (H) and the group which shouldn't be affected (B) in the treatment state to trend similarly to their differential outcomes in the control state, in the absence of treatment. In our context, this requires that there be no location-specific shocks timed with the staggered SC roll-out which influence the evolution of political participation outcomes for Hispanics only.

Two possible threats to identification are that there might have been other policies that have affected the evolution of political participation for Black voters but not for Hispanics; and the fact that there might be cross-ethnicity voting solidarity.

6   Results

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Appendix A   Immigration enforcement policies

This Appendix contains additional information of the immigration enforcement policies carried out from 2006-2017. TODO: 287(g), Criminal Alien Program (CAP), Secure Communities

Automated Biometric Identification System (IDENT). IDENT is a database that stores biometric and biographical information on foreign-born persons that fit at least one of these criteria (Miles and Cox (2014):

1. Non-citizens who have violated immigration laws, such as persons who were previously deported and/or overstayed their visas

2. Non-citizens lawfully in the US, but who might be deported if they are convicted for a crime

3. Citizens who naturalized after their fingerprints were included in the database. However, these group is not subject to deportations.

IDENT also contains the fingerprints of suspected terrorists, criminals, and all the travelers who enter and leave through a US airport, seaport or land border. It was created in 1994 to help border officials keep criminals and terrorists from corssing US borders.