The Relationship Between Immigration Enforcement and Educational Attainment: An Exploratory Analysis of Sanctuary Policies

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1. Motivation

Undocumented immigration to the United States has risen 300% from an estimated 3.5 million in 1990 to an estimated 12 million in 2019 (Krogstad, Passel, & Cohn, 2019). This increase in unauthorized immigration has elicited a variety of responses from the federal government, including increased immigration enforcement. Immigration enforcement manifests through a variety of mechanisms, such as increased patrol officers at the southern border, employment verification systems, and the creation of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency (Meissner, Kerwin, Chishti, & Bergeron, 2013). Immigration enforcement is associated with negative educational outcomes, such as academic achievement (Bellows, 2019), repeating a grade (Amuedo-Dorantes & Lopez, 2017), and displacing students (Dee & Murphy, 2018). One way to reduce immigration enforcement has been through the adoption of sanctuary policies, implemented by city, county, or state governments. Sanctuary policies prohibit local political leaders and police officials from cooperating with federal immigration enforcement officers regarding the detention and deportation of detained immigrants (O’Brien, Collingwood, & El-Khatib, 2017).

2. Counties with Sanctuary Policies in 2017

3. Research Question

What is the association between sanctuary policies and the high school completion and college enrollment of Hispanic undocumented youth?

4. Data

American Community Survey
- Repeated cross-sectional microdata from 2005-2017
- Identify Hispanic foreign-born non-citizens as a proxy measure for undocumented students

ICE Enforcement and Removal Operations Weekly Declined Detainers Outcome Report
- Identify jurisdictions that have enacted policies restricting cooperation with ICE from 1998-2017

5. Method

Event study model
- Accounts for time-varying treatments
- Compares outcomes between Undocumented students to two different comparison groups in counties that adopted policies
  - Comparison Group 1: U.S.-born Hispanics and immigrants who became citizens
  - Comparison Group 2: Coarsened Exact Matched

Statistical model:

\[ Y_{ijt} = a + \sum_{k=1}^{K} \beta_k \cdot \text{Treat}_{ijtk} + \beta_0 \cdot \text{Cov} + \mu_i + \theta_t + \tau_k \times \text{year} + \epsilon_{ijt} \]

6. Selected Results

High School Completion:
- These policies had no association to high school completion leading up to the implementation of these policies and post their implementation, on average, when comparing to both groups

College Enrollment:
- In the years leading up to the implementation of these policies, undocumented students, were less likely to be enrolled in college compared to U.S-born Hispanics and naturalized immigrants
  - I found no association between these policies and being enrolled in college in years 0 and 1
  - 2 years following there implementation, sanctuary policies were positively and statistically significantly associated with increases in college enrollment
  - Positive trends post policy hold when comparing to both groups

Sanctuary policies potentially increase membership in society by reducing the probability of separating families, while also ostensibly decreasing fear and anxiety related to deportation. Immigration enforcement may not have an association to high school completion due to existing federal protections. Reducing immigration enforcement can potentially increase college enrollment among Hispanic undocumented students, especially as policies stay in place.