Immigration Enforcement and Child Maltreatment*

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Abstract

We study the effects of a major immigration reform on alleged and substantiated maltreatment of Hispanic children using administrative data from child protective services agencies. Secure Communities ties federal immigration enforcement to local law enforcement, effectively increasing the likelihood of deportation for undocumented immigrants who are arrested for a crime. We exploit the staggered rollout of Secure Communities across counties to estimate a dynamic treatment effect model. We find that Secure Communities implementation increased the number of Hispanic children per 1000 found to be victims of child maltreatment as well as the likelihood that maltreatment allegations for Hispanic children are substantiated, consistent with increased average severity of investigated cases.

Keywords: Immigration enforcement, child maltreatment, child abuse and neglect.
JEL codes: J15, J12, J13, J18.

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1 Introduction

About a quarter of children living in the United States are Hispanic, up from nine percent in 1980 (*America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being*, 2023). More than half of Hispanic children live in or near poverty (Shrider & Creamer, 2023), but participation in public assistance programs like Medicaid, SNAP, and TANF is lower among poor Hispanic children than among poor children of other races and ethnicities (Bitler et al., 2021). While low income is a risk factor for adverse outcomes, Hispanic children have better health outcomes along a variety of dimensions, including low birth weight and infant mortality (Franzini et al., 2001). This seeming contradiction is known as the "Hispanic paradox," and has been largely attributed to the protective familial and cultural characteristics of Hispanic families (Johnson-Motoyama, 2014).

Similarly, while low income is a risk factor for child maltreatment, Hispanic children are less likely to be the subject of a child protective services (CPS) investigation than white children with similar socioeconomic characteristics (Putnam-Hornstein et al., 2013).[1] The primary interpretation of this fact is that, conditional on income, maltreatment is lower among Hispanic children.[2] An alternative explanation, differential reporting of maltreatment, has received less attention.[3] CPS relies primarily on individuals outside of the child welfare system to refer potential cases of abuse and neglect. Federal and state laws designate certain professionals as mandated reporters of abuse and neglect, and non-professionals such as parents, relatives, friends, and neighbors may also make referrals to CPS. Although reports by professionals and community members are critical for CPS' detection of and response to child maltreatment, the factors that influence the decisions of potential reporters are not well

[1] Child maltreatment refers to a range of different types of abuse and neglect of children under 18 by an adult in a custodial role. We use the terms "maltreatment" and "abuse and neglect" interchangeably.

[2] In the discussion of meta-analysis results, Millett (2016) notes that "...US Studies using CPS and community data suggest that immigrant (mostly Latino) parents may have lower propensity to maltreat their children when compared to US-born families" (p. 1212).

[3] For a recent exception, see Drake et al. (2023), who explore rates of reporting to CPS by child ethnicity. They conclude their findings provide "continued evidence for the Hispanic paradox in CPS reporting compared to observed risk exposure." (p. 694).

known.

Hispanic children may be underrepresented in child maltreatment data for several reasons. While most Hispanic children in the U.S. are U.S.-born, about one in four has an unauthorized immigrant parent (Clarke et al., 2017), and reporting to child protective services (CPS) can risk a parent's detention or deportation. This risk, which can also lead to foster care placement if a child is left without a caregiver (Wessler, 2011), may discourage reporting. In addition, Hispanic children, particularly those with unauthorized parents, may have less contact with mandatory reporters such as teachers and doctors. For instance, only 37% of children aged 3–4 with unauthorized parents are enrolled in preschool, compared to 48% of all children (Capps et al., 2016), and Hispanic children are less likely to have regular doctor visits (Abdus & Selden, 2024; Larson et al., 2016).

In this paper, we study the effects of a shock, in the form of major immigration reform, on alleged and substantiated maltreatment among Hispanic children as measured by administrative data from child protective services (CPS) agencies.[4] In particular, we ask whether and to what extent increased immigration enforcement via the roll-out of Secure Communities impacted administrative child maltreatment outcomes for Hispanic children. Briefly, Secure Communities aimed to increase cooperation between local law enforcement and federal immigration enforcement and served to increase both salience and likelihood of deportation for unauthorized immigrants.

There are several possible ways in which Secure Communities could affect underlying child maltreatment rates for Hispanic children as well as reporting of maltreatment of Hispanic children. First, the increased likelihood of deportation, conditional on being arrested for a crime, increases the cost to unauthorized potential perpetrators of committing a crime. If the decision to abuse or neglect a child is rational, then an increased cost would reduce the underlying maltreatment. Second, the increased threat of deportation might cause an increase

[4]As the true rate of child maltreatment is unobserved, quantitative studies of child maltreatment rely on three different sources of data: administrative data like those we use, victimization surveys, and emergency department visits. L. R. Bullinger et al. (2021) discuss these data sources, including their relative advantages and disadvantages, in more detail.

in mental distress (Wang & Kaushal, 2019) or reduced access to resources (Alsan & Yang, 2024) among Hispanic parents, which might increase the rate of abuse and neglect among Hispanic children. Third, increased fear of deportation may also increase the perceived cost of reporting suspected child maltreatment. If reporters are worried about the threat of deportation to their own networks, or alternatively internalize the potential cost of deportation to reported individuals, the rate of reports per true cases of maltreatment would decrease. Fourth, some reporters may feel there is an additional *benefit* of reporting if the suspect is more likely to be deported (i.e., if the alleged perpetrator is truly abusive, or if the reporter gains utility from the deportation of unauthorized immigrants). In this case we would expect an increase in reporting rates. Finally, Secure Communities may change the ways in which children interact with potential reporters. For example, Bellows (2021) finds that the 287(g) program, a predecessor to Secure Communities, decreased school attendance among Hispanic children in North Carolina. Teachers are important source of child maltreatment reports (Benson et al., 2022)

Given that we cannot observe maltreatment rates or reporting rates, we instead study the number of Hispanic children with investigated case(s) per Hispanic child population ("allegation rate"), the number of substantiated victims per child population ("victimization rate"), and the fraction of substantiated victims per child with investigated case(s) ("substantiation rate"). Following prior work, we exploit the staggered and quasi-random roll-out of Secure Communities across U.S. counties, leveraging the differential timing of program implementation to evaluate its impact using a staggered difference-in-differences design. We find that Secure Communities increased the victimization and substantiation rates of Hispanic children, without significantly affecting the allegation rate. These results are consistent with a combined increase in victimization and reduction maltreatment reporting.

Previous work has investigated the effects of Secure Communities - and stricter or more lenient immigration enforcement in a more general sense - on crime incidence and reporting (Jácome, 2022; Muchow & Amuedo-Dorantes, 2020; Pearson, 2024). Most recently,

Gonçalves et al. (2024) showed that Secure Communities simultaneously increased the victimization of Hispanic residents and reduced their willingness to report crimes. This is consistent with a body of work documenting the "chilling effect" of immigration enforcement on take-up of social and medical services among Hispanic individuals (Alsan & Yang, 2024; Rhodes et al., 2015; Watson, 2014). This research suggests that immigration enforcement has wide-ranging unintended consequences, including on activities which are unlikely to increase the risk of deportation.

We contribute to the literature in three ways. First, compared to Black and white children, maltreatment of Hispanic children is understudied (Drake et al., 2023; Johnson-Motoyama et al., 2021). This paper sheds light on potential causes of ethnic disparities within the child welfare system. Second, while there is now a robust literature exploring effects of Secure Communities on adults, the consequences of immigration enforcement policies on child well-being are less well-understood. Finally, we explore the challenges of using administrative data to measure maltreatment in the presence of barriers to reporting. We suggest avenues for learning about underlying maltreatment and reporting rates from administrative data on alleged and substantiated maltreatment in the face of these challenges.

2 Policy and Institutional Context

2.1 Secure Communities

Secure Communities is a program administered by the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), which aims to increase detection and deportation of unauthorized immigrants, particularly those convicted of a crime (United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement, 2009).[5] Prior to Secure Communities, local law enforcement had limited interaction with federal immigration enforcement. Potential unauthorized immigrants were identified primarily through biographic interviews, conducted either by federal officers under

[5]For a detailed history of the institutional context of Secure Communities, see Alsan and Yang (2024), Online Appendix C.

the Criminal Alien Program or law enforcement officers in jurisdictions with 287(g) agreements.[6] According to ICE, these "traditional processes of identification are labor-intensive, time-consuming, and are often limited by the accuracy of the biographic information obtained from the subject" (p.2, United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement, 2009). Accordingly, prior to Secure Communities, prisoners were screened by immigration officials in only 14% of local jails and prisons (Cox & Miles, 2013). Under Secure Communities, this process became automated and less labor-intensive. When an individual is arrested and booked by state or local police, their fingerprints are automatically sent to the FBI, who uses them to conduct a criminal background check. Under Secure Communities, all fingerprints received by the FBI are automatically shared with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). DHS then checks those fingerprints against a biometric database that stores information on non-citizens in the U.S. Specifically, this database stores information on three categories of individuals: (1) non-citizens who have violated immigration law (e.g., were previously deported or overstayed their visas), (2) non-citizens who are in the U.S. legally but who may be deported if convicted of a crime, and (3) citizens who naturalized after their fingerprints were included (Alsan & Yang, 2024; Miles & Cox, 2014). If there is a match between the arrested individual and the DHS database, ICE issues a "detainer," requesting that local law enforcement hold the individual in custody until ICE can begin deportation proceedings. Thus, under Secure Communities, individuals who might otherwise have been released by local law enforcement were instead held and turned over to federal immigration enforcement.

Secure Communities represented a major shift in U.S. immigration policy, and had a significant impact on the Hispanic community in particular. Over 93% of detainers issued by ICE were to Hispanic individuals (Alsan & Yang, 2024). Between 2009 and 2014, almost

[6]Section §287(g) of the Immigration and Nationality Act allows the Attorney General to authorize local law enforcement to assist with immigration enforcement. To enter such an agreement, jurisdictions must submit a request to ICE, and sign a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) which defines the terms of the partnership. As of November 2008 (the beginning of the rollout of Secure Communities), 67 jurisdictions had MOAs with ICE. See https://www.ice.gov/287g for more details.

300,000 individuals were deported under Secure Communities, approximately 13% of all deportations from the U.S. during that time period. Moreover, although the program claimed to prioritize public safety and the removal of potentially dangerous individuals, ICE issued a large number of detainers for individuals arrested for low-level and non-violent offenses, and approximately 20% of those removed were never convicted of any crime, or were convicted only of illegal entry or re-entry into the country.[7]

The program began in October 2008 and was rolled out across counties until it covered the entire country by January 2013. Resource and technological constraints were largely responsible for the county-by-county rollout.[8] The federal government was solely responsible for the pattern of staggered activation, and counties could not decline to participate.[9] Cox and Miles (2013) describe the rollout in detail, and test whether early activation was correlated with a number of county-level characteristics. Although a major priority of the program was to identify and deport potentially dangerous individuals, they find that the timing of the rollout was not in fact correlated with crime rates. However, the timing *was* correlated with higher Hispanic population, shorter distance from the border and whether county law enforcement previously had a 287(g) agreement. Later work has consistently confirmed that the rollout was not correlated with crime rates or economic conditions (East et al., 2022; Gonçalves et al., 2024; Medina-Cortina, 2023). Secure Communities was discontinued in November 2014, and re-activated in January 2017.[10] Alsan and Yang (2024) verify that the rollout of the program was salient for individuals at the local level, using an event-study analysis of Google Trends data. In particular, they find that implementation of Secure Communities sharply increased normalized deportation-related search terms by 25%.

[7]Deportation statistics are from https://trac.syr.edu/immigration/

[8]As described by Cox and Miles (2013), these constraints included transportation and housing of those taken into custody, communicating with local law enforcement, and the lack of live-scan fingerprint machines in many jurisdictions.

[9]Several states (New York, New Jersey and Illinois) did resist the policy, and therefore we exclude them from our empirical analysis, following Alsan and Yang (2024).

[10]In the interim, Secure Communities was replaced with a program called Priority Enforcement Program (PEP), which used similar methods to identify unauthorized immigrants, but under which only high-priority individuals were subject to detainer and removal.

Previous work has studied the effects of Secure Communities on a variety of outcomes. Most relevant to this paper, Gonçalves et al. (2024) show that Secure Communities both increased victimization of Hispanic individuals and reduced the likelihood that Hispanic victims report crimes. When studying effects on total reported crime, these effects cancel one another out, emphasizing the importance of considering reporting effects when studying crime rates.[11] This "chilling effect" on reporting is consistent with other work showing how changes in immigration enforcement affect Hispanic engagement with various government programs (Alsan & Yang, 2024; Comino et al., 2020; Grittner & Johnson, 2021; Watson, 2014).

More broadly, the Secure Communities program has had widespread effects across various domains, extending beyond social services and crime reporting. The program has been linked to declines in mental health (Wang & Kaushal, 2019) and increased absenteeism among Hispanic students and children of immigrants (Bellows, 2021; Heinrich et al., 2023). Labor market impacts include reduced employment among likely undocumented immigrants (Amuedo-Dorantes & Antman, 2022; East et al., 2022), decreased labor supply among high-skilled citizen mothers, and disruptions in the childcare market (Ali et al., 2024a; East & Velásquez, 2024). Immigrant women also faced declines in wages and hours worked, alongside worsening workplace conditions in industries with high shares of Hispanic workers (Bansak et al., 2024; Grittner & Johnson, 2021). These findings suggest that Secure Communities may have worsened economic conditions for some Hispanic households in the U.S. Results from the extant literature underscore the program's broad and often unintended impacts on Hispanic households and the communities and institutions with which they interact.

2.2 Child Protection System

While the causes of child maltreatment are not fully understood, several risk factors at the individual, family, and community level correlate with or predict abuse and neglect.

[11] Miles and Cox (2014) and Hines and Peri (2019) each show a null effect of Secure Communities on reported local crime.

At the individual level, children under age four or with special needs are most at risk for maltreatment (Austin et al., 2020). Parents with substance abuse or mental health issues, parents who are young, have low educational attainment or income, single parents and parents with many children are all more likely to be perpetrators of maltreatment (Austin et al., 2020). Children in families who are socially isolated, or dealing with stress, separation or divorce are more likely to be maltreated (Van Berkel et al., 2024). Finally, children living in communities with violence, high poverty levels, high unemployment rates or poor social connections are at greater risk for maltreatment (Austin et al., 2020). Several studies show that employment and income are important determinants of maltreatment (Berger et al., 2017; L. Bullinger et al., 2023; Lindo et al., 2018; Raissian & Bullinger, 2017; Rittenhouse, 2023).

Administrative data on child maltreatment come from child protection services (CPS) agencies. In 2022, CPS agencies in the U.S. received over four million allegations of child maltreatment, involving over seven million children (Children's Bureau, 2024). Although CPS agencies are run at the state level, and thus specific policies and procedures are heterogeneous across the U.S., the general process for reporting and investigating child maltreatment is similar across states. In the first stage of the process, potential cases of maltreatment are referred to CPS, either by mandated reporters (e.g., teachers, police, physicians) or other members of the public (e.g., friends, family members, neighbors). Mandated reporters are required by law to refer suspected cases of maltreatment to CPS; specific regulations, penalties for non-compliance and mandated reporter categories vary by state (Children's Bureau, 2019). The CPS process is inherently linked to law enforcement as confirmed cases of child maltreatment can result in criminal convictions and law enforcement and legal personnel are important sources of maltreatment referrals. In 2022, legal and law enforcement personnel were responsible for 21.2% of screened-in reports to CPS, followed by education personnel who reported 20.7% of cases.(Children's Bureau, 2024)

Once reported, CPS agencies must decide whether to screen in the referral for further in-

vestigation. Standards for which referrals warrant investigation differ somewhat across states but referrals are generally screened out if they do not concern child maltreatment, contain insufficient information to proceed with an investigation, fall under a different jurisdiction (e.g., military installation or tribe), or refer to a suspected victim who is not under age 18. In 2022 approximately 50% of referrals were screened in.(Children's Bureau, 2024). Once screened in, the case is assigned to an investigator charged with determining whether the allegations of maltreatment are true (substantiated) or likely true (indicated) under state law, what services to provide the family and whether to remove the child from their home. In 2022, 7.7 children out of 1,000 in the population were found to be victims of maltreatment, that is to have substantiated and/or indicated allegation(s)(Children's Bureau, 2024).

American Indian or Alaskan Native and Black children are overrepresented in the child welfare system. The disparities have been raised as a significant concern by individual CPS agencies, scholars and child welfare experts alike.[12] However, the causes of racial disparity at each stage of the CPS progress are not fully understood. While disparities may in part be explained by differences across race/ethnicity in risk factors associated with maltreatment, recent work shows that human bias also plays a role in various stages of the CPS process. In the first stage, bias may impact which cases of abuse are actually reported if, for example, a potential reporter is more suspicious of minority families, or alternatively less concerned with the welfare of minority children. We would also expect to see differences in reporting rates across race and ethnicity if the costs associated with reporting child abuse are heterogeneous along this dimension. In subsequent stages, (either conscious or subconscious) bias may affect call screeners' and investigators' actions and decisions (Baron et al., 2024; Rittenhouse et al., 2024). However, research on causes of ethnic disparities in the child welfare system is sparse.

Relatively little work has looked at the forces that bring cases of child maltreatment to the attention of the relevant authorities. Exceptions include Benson et al. (2022) and Baron et al. (2020), both of which investigate the role of educators in maltreatment reporting.

[12]See Gateway (2016) for an overview.

Benson et al. (2022) find that reports by educators increase as children begin school, and that this increase is not offset by a decrease in reports from other sources. Baron et al. (2020) show that school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic were the primary driver of a 27 percent drop in child maltreatment reports during March and April of 2020. In this paper, we investigate the role of reporters in perpetuating the observed disparity in rates of victimization and substantiation across ethnicity, and in particular we consider a barrier to reporting that may heterogeneously affect Hispanic children and families.

3 Data

Administrative data on child maltreatment come from the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) Child Files ("Children's Bureau, Administration on Children, Youth And Families, Administration For Children And Families, U. S. Department Of Health And Human Services." Year varies).[13] Each NCANDS Child File includes information at the case-child level on all referrals (i.e., reports) of child maltreatment to CPS agencies that were investigated and received a disposition in the fiscal year. Although data submission to NCANDS is voluntary for states, all states currently participate, and most states have done so since 2006. The data include information on reporter type (e.g., educator, relative, medical professional), case disposition (i.e., whether the allegation was substantiated), as well as child demographics, including child ethnicity. In our main analysis, we consider two groups: (1) Hispanic children and (2) non-Hispanic children.[14]

Importantly for our analysis, the data specify the approximate date of the report, as well

[13]The data used in this publication were made available by the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect and have been used with permission. Data from the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) were originally collected by the Children's Bureau with the assistance of WRMA, Inc. Funding for the project was provided by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau. The collector of the original data, the funder, NDACAN, Duke University, Cornell University and their agents or employees bear no responsibility for the analyses or interpretations presented here.

[14]Prior to collapsing and imposing any sample restrictions as discussed below, about 17% of children have missing values for ethnicity. These children are excluded from our analysis.

as county for a subset of case-child observations.[15] So as not to violate confidentiality, county name is masked in a given Child File for counties with fewer than 700 investigated cases in the respective fiscal year. Given this convention and our focus, we create a balanced county-by-quarter panel of counties that appear in every Child File from 2006 to 2018 and have referrals involving Hispanic children during all quarters from 2006 to 2015.[16] We then follow Alsan and Yang (2024) and exclude counties from New York, Illinois, and Massachusetts as these three states actively resisted the roll-out of Secure Communities; and counties on the U.S. border with Mexico to guard against endogenous roll-out activity. This leaves us with a sample of 418 counties, accounting for approximately 12.9% of U.S. counties (Figure 1). As a result of these restrictions, compared to excluded counties, in 2010 sample counties are more populous, younger, more Hispanic, less rural, with higher shares of multi-generational households and households who rent (Table 1).[17]

Restricting to these sample counties, we merge the 2006 to 2015 Child Files and collapse the data by the county and quarter to create three maltreatment measures separately for Hispanic and non-Hispanic children. The allegation rate measures the number of children per 1,000 with investigated maltreatment allegation(s) in the quarter-county. The victimization rate gives the number of children per 1,000 with substantiated or indicated allegation(s) in the quarter-county. Lastly, the substantiation rate reflects the fraction of children with substantiated/indicated allegation(s) among those with allegations. We construct measures of quarterly Hispanic and non-Hispanic child population for each county over the sample period by linearly interpolating annual population estimates from the U.S. Census.

We use administrative data on the rollout of Secure Communities from Alsan and Yang (2024), who obtained the data via Freedom of Information Act requests to ICE.[18] These data

[15]The report date is rounded to either the 8th of the month (for days 1-15) or the 23rd of the month (for days 16-31). We collapse the data to the quarterly level as discussed in more detail below.

[16]Our focus on counties appearing in every Child File from 2006 to 2018 ensures that our sample reflects referrals that were reported to CPS between 2006 and 2015; while most cases receive a disposition in the year of referral, a small number take more than one year to investigate.

[17]Differences between sample and non-sample counties are similar to those described in Evans et al. (2022), who use earlier versions of the NCANDS Child Files that had a stricter masking convention.

[18]More information on these data can be found in Alsan and Yang (2024) and the accompanying online

include the exact date on which Secure Communities was activated in each county in the U.S. We merge implementation dates at the county-quarter level with the county-by-quarter child maltreatment measures.

4 Empirical Approach

To estimate the effect of Secure Communities on child maltreatment, we exploit the staggered rollout of the policy across counties and time. Our three main outcomes of interest measure the allegation, victimization, and substantiation rates for Hispanic children in county c and quarter t. We estimate the following dynamic event-study specification:

$$Y_{ct} = \sum_{\ell=-8}^{\ell=-2} \beta_\ell \times SC_{ct}^{\ell} + \sum_{\ell=0}^{\ell=8} \beta_\ell \times SC_{ct}^{\ell} + \mu_c + \tau_t + \epsilon_{ct} \tag{1}$$

where Y_{ct} denotes the maltreatment outcome of interest. The event time term ℓ indicates the quarters since the program activation relative to quarter t. The indicator variable SC_{ct}^{ℓ} is equal to one when a county c is ℓ periods away from initial Secure Communities activation at quarter t.[19] The quarter of Secure Communities activation, ℓ is equal to zero. The terms μ_c and τ_t correspond to county and quarter-year fixed effects, which account for time-invariant differences across counties and common time-varying shocks respectively. ϵ_{ct} is the error term. Standard errors are clustered at the county level.

We consider eight quarters before and after Secure Communities activation and omit the quarter before activation $\ell = -1$, so the β_ℓ coefficients measure the difference relative to $\ell = -1$. The first and last indicators SC_{ct}^{ℓ} are equal to one for all time periods before and after the two years around implementation. Following Gonçalves et al. (2024), we use the later-treated counties in our sample as the control group. We define later-treated counties as those that adopted Secure Communities during or after the second quarter of 2011.[20]

appendix.

[19] $SC_{ct}^{\ell} = 1\{t - SC_c = \ell\}$, where SC_c is the time when Secure Communities was activated in county c

[20] The control group is 24.8% of the counties in our sample. We limit our estimation sample to the period before any of the counties in our control group is treated.

We estimate equation (1) using the dynamic treatment effect model proposed by Sun and Abraham (2021). Their interaction weighed (IW) estimator allows for heterogeneous and dynamic treatment effects with a staggered treatment (Sun & Abraham, 2021). We prefer the IW estimator to a standard two-way fixed effect (TWFE) event study specification for several reasons. First, Secure Communities was implemented in all counties in the US by 2013. With all counties in our sample eventually treated, the TWFE estimator would use early-treated counties to estimate the effects on later-treated counties. Multiple authors have pointed out the problems with exploiting these "forbidden comparisons" (Borusyak & Jaravel, 2018; De Chaisemartin & d'Haultfoeuille, 2023; Goodman-Bacon, 2021). Second, unlike TWFE, the IW estimator allows for heterogeneous, dynamic treatment effects. With heterogeneous effects, staggered treatment adoption TWFE could assign negative weights to some comparisons (Goodman-Bacon, 2021). There is evidence of the effects of Secure Communities varying over time, this would have a negative weight on the effect of later-treated counties (Alsan & Yang, 2024; East et al., 2022). The IW estimator avoids this issue by using later-treated counties (prior to treatment adoption) as controls for earlier-treated counties. The identifying assumption to interpret the effect of Secure Communities on child maltreatment as causal is that, in the absence of Secure Communities, the maltreatment outcome in earlier-treated counties would have continue in a similar trend to the maltreatment outcome in later-treated counties.

5 Results and Discussion

Figure 2 reports the results of estimating equation (1) for each of our three outcomes of interest for Hispanic children.[21] The corresponding aggregated treatment effect for each outcome is reported in Table 2.[22]

[21]We use the eventstudyinteract package to present our estimation results, $\hat{\beta}_\ell$ and the associated 95% confidence intervals, graphically (Sun, 2022).

[22]The estimated aggregated treatment effect, denoted $\hat{\beta_{SC}}$, is computed as the linear combination of the post-activation $\hat{\beta}_\ell$ estimates from equation (1). We use the following: $\beta_{SC} = \frac{\sum_{\ell=0}^{\ell=8} \hat{\beta}_\ell}{9}$, where $\hat{\beta}_\ell$ is the Sun

Each of the three panels of Figure 2 shows similar trends in the respective outcome for treated and control counties prior to the activation of Secure Communities, supporting the parallel trends assumption. We find no change in the number of Hispanic children with maltreatment allegation(s) per 1000 (i.e., the allegation rate) in the first five quarters following activation (Figure 2a). Starting in the 6th quarter post-activation, there is some evidence of a reduction in the allegation rate, although the estimated coefficients remain statistically indistinguishable from zero. The estimated aggregated effect reported in column (1) of Table 2 is similarly negative but statistically insignificant. Thus, we fail to detect a clear impact of Secure Communities on the maltreatment allegation rate for Hispanic children.

Figure 2b and column (2) of Table 2 report results for the victimization rate. Both suggest that Secure Communities activation increased the number of Hispanic children with substantiated maltreatment allegation(s) per 1000. The estimated aggregated effect corresponds to an increase of approximately 10% relative to the mean of about two children per 1000. Finally, Figure 2c and the final column of Table 2 depict results for the substantiation rate, which reflects the fraction of Hispanic children found to be victims among those with allegation(s). Like the victimization rate results, the results for the substantiation rate suggest an increase as a result of Secure Communities activation, with an estimated aggregated effect size of 9.8% when evaluated at the mean.

Our main results for Hispanic children in Figure 2 and Table 2 suggest that Secure Communities activation had a negligible impact on the allegation rate but increased both the victimization rate and the substantiation rate for Hispanic children. This pattern of results is worthy of discussion. Recall that the allegation rate does not measure *all* reports of suspected child maltreatment of Hispanic children to CPS agencies. Rather, it only measures those reports that are screened in.[23] Thus, a null result on the allegation rate does not necessarily indicate no change in the rate of child maltreatment reports to CPS agencies for

and Abraham IW estimator.

[23]We assume that screening decisions are unlikely to be impacted by Secure Communities given the common reasons for screening out a referral noted earlier.

Hispanic children; we do not have data on all reports so our analysis cannot speak to this.

A null result for the allegation rate coupled with increases in the victimization and substantiation rates suggests that Secure Communities increased screened-in maltreatment reports that eventually were substantiated but simultaneously decreased screened-in maltreatment reports that would not have been substantiated.[24] In order to elucidate a potential mechanism for this, consider that maltreatment reports from some mandatory reporters like law enforcement personnel are more likely to be substantiated than those from other reporters like neighbors (Ho et al., 2017). If potential non-mandatory reporters (e.g., neighbors, other family members) are less inclined to report maltreatment after SC activation, then we would observe a reduction in maltreatment reports from non-mandatory reporters. On average, these reports would have had a relatively lower likelihood of substantiation had they been submitted. On the other hand, the related literature suggests that we also expect children to have less exposure to mandatory reporters (e.g., doctors, teachers) after SC activation for fear that a child maltreatment allegation could result in the detention or detainment of an unauthorized parent.[25] In this case, the suspected maltreatment observed and reported by mandatory reporters post-SC activation would likely be more severe, and therefore more likely to be substantiated. With no changes, or perhaps even reductions in the allegation rate for Hispanic children, an increase in the victimization rate is consistent with SC increasing the underlying rate of maltreatment, as defined by state laws, of Hispanic children. That is, like Gonçalves et al. (2024)'s finding that SC increased victimization of Hispanic adults, our results suggest that the policy increased maltreatment victimization of Hispanic children. This is consistent with prior work showing that Secure Communities may reduce access to resources and increase household stress, each of which are predictors of child maltreatment (Alsan & Yang, 2024; Amuedo-Dorantes & Antman, 2022; East et al., 2022; Wang & Kaushal, 2019).

[24] A negative result for the allegation rate would indicate that the latter effect dominates the former.

[25] In a qualitative survey of healthcare providers, Hacker et al. (2012) found responses consistent with fear of immigration actions leading to reduced healthcare utilization. One respondent noted "Children miss their Well Child appointments because their parents are afraid of immigration services." (p. 5)

While our primary focus is on the impacts of Secure Communities on the maltreatment of Hispanic children, if Secure Communities impacted settings in which child maltreatment reports are generated, then the program's impact could extend to non-Hispanic children. Ali et al. (2024b) find that Secure Communities decreased employment in center-based childcare and reduced the childcare participation rate of young children with citizen mothers. Both of these effects could reduce reporting of child maltreatment. Table 4 reports estimated aggregated effects for the three maltreatment outcomes for non-Hispanic children in sample counties. The estimated aggregated effect for the allegation rate of non-Hispanic children is negative and statistically insignificant, similar to the result for Hispanic children. However, the estimated aggregated effect for the non-Hispanic victimization rate is negative, small in magnitude and statistically insignificant, whereas the comparable effect for Hispanic children in Table 2 is positive. The estimated aggregated effect for the non-Hispanic substantiation rate is positive. We find evidence of pre-trends for the non-Hispanic victimization and substantiation rate, suggesting caution in a causal interpretation. While we cannot rule out potential impacts of Secure Communities on reporting channels for non-Hispanic children, our results are inconsistent with increased victimization of non-Hispanic children as a result of Secure Communities.

Next, we use information available in NCANDS on the source of maltreatment reports to explore some of these issues further. To do so, we estimate additional results in which we break down each of the main maltreatment measures for Hispanic children into two new outcomes, which reflect the report source for the maltreatment allegation(s). Specifically, we return to the case-level data and distinguish between allegations from professional reporters like teachers, doctors, and law enforcement personnel and non-professional reporters like neighbors and other family members prior to aggregating to the county-quarter.[26] This

[26]Laws on mandatory reporters vary across states and time. As of 2019, 47 states have laws that identify specific professionals as mandatory reporters (Children's Bureau, 2019). We include as professional reporters common report source categories including social services personnel; medical personnel; mental health personnel; legal, law enforcement, and criminal justice personnel; education personnel; child daycare provider. Other report source categories are categorized as "non-professional reporters". These include substitute care provider, alleged victim, parent, other relative, friends/neighbors, alleged perpetrator, anonymous reporter,

process yields six new maltreatment measures, one for allegations from professional reporters (i.e., reporters who are more likely to be mandated reporters) and one for those from non-professional reporters, for each of the three primary maltreatment measures.

Table 3 shows estimated aggregated effects for these new outcomes. Results are qualitatively similar to our main results.[27] However, the results identify important differences in the maltreatment outcomes based on report source. For example, the increases in the victimization and substantiation rates seen in our main results are driven almost entirely by allegations reported by professional reporters. The results in columns (4) and (6) suggest no changes in these two outcomes for allegations from non-professional reporters. Instead, the results in columns (3) and (5) suggest economically and statistically meaningful increases in the victimization and substantiation rate(s) based on reports from likely mandatory reporters, respectively.

Although the estimated coefficients for the two allegation rate measures are not statistically different from zero, the estimated magnitudes tell a different story. When taken at face value and evaluated at the mean, the estimated aggregated reduction in the allegation rate based on non-professional reports (column (2)) is twice the magnitude of the reduction based on professional reports (column (1)). This is consistent with relatively larger reductions in reporting from non-professional reporters such as neighbors and family, who themselves may be unauthorized or have unauthorized family members.

6 Conclusion

In this paper we study the effects of Secure Communities on the incidence and reporting of child maltreatment. Exploiting the staggered rollout of Secure Communities across counties, we estimate effects on allegation rates, victimization rates and substantiation rates. We find that Secure Communities increased substantiation and victimization rates, without

other, unknown or missing.

[27] For five of the six outcomes, the final row provides evidence consistent with the parallel trends assumption.

significantly affecting allegation rates. These results are consistent with stricter immigration enforcement increasing maltreatment among Hispanic children while reducing reporting rates. Our findings suggest that tying immigration enforcement to law enforcement may have adverse consequences for child safety and well-being.

We also shed light on a potential cause of the "Hispanic paradox" observed in administrative child welfare data. Hispanic children are less likely to receive an investigated maltreatment report, conditional on income. Our study suggests there may be barriers to reporting, which disproportionately affect Hispanic children. Secure Communities likely served to increase those barriers, with negative impacts for child welfare.

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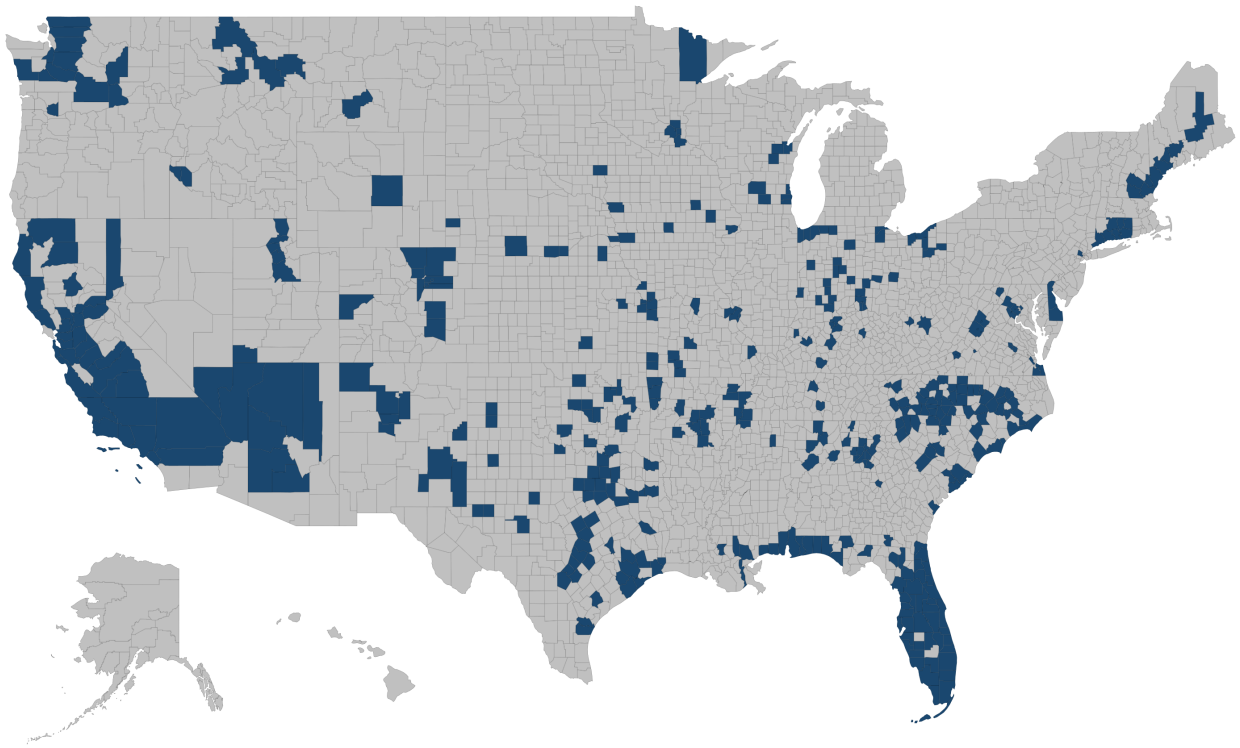
Figures and Tables

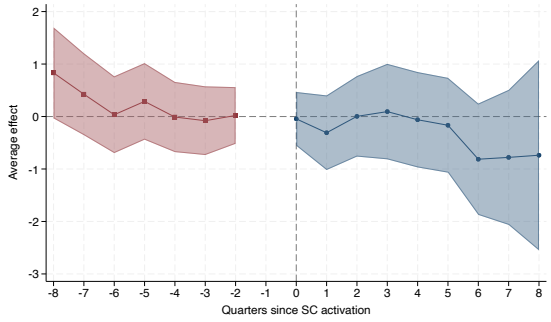
Figure 1: Counties in Sample



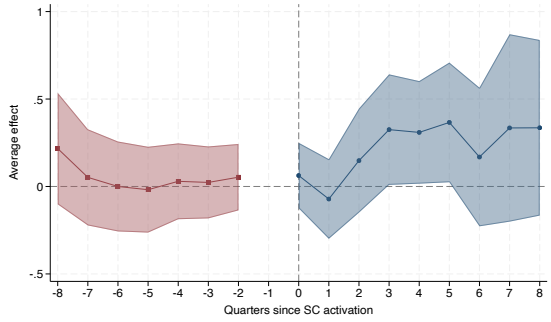
Note: Shaded areas represent the counties included in our estimation sample. We exclude border counties and resister states (IL, NJ, and NY) following Alsan and Yang (2024) as well as counties without allegations for Hispanic children during the sample period.

Figure 2: Estimates Hispanic Children Maltreatment Rates

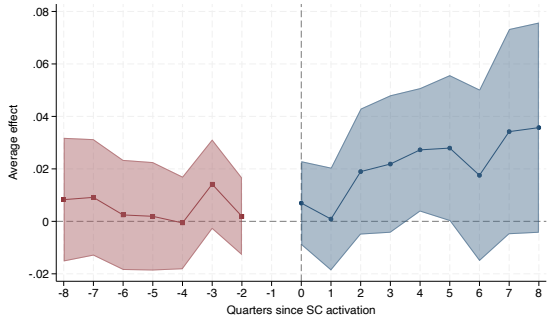
(a) Allegation Rate



(b) Victimization Rate



(c) Substantiation Rate



Note: Each panel of this figure reports the β_ℓ Sun and Abraham (2021) estimation results for equation (1). Each estimation of effects of Secure Communities includes county and quarter-year fixed effects, and clustered standard errors at the county level. Panel (a) shows the effects of Secure Communities on Hispanic children allegation rate per 1000 children. Panel (b) shows the victimization rate for Hispanic children. Panel (c) shows the substantiation rate for Hispanic children. All of these estimations utilize the later-treated counties as the control group (treated on or after the second quarter of 2011, corresponding to 25% of our sample counties) to estimate the effects of Secure Communities in earlier-treated counties. The x-axis shows the quarter relative to Secure Communities activation and the y-axis reports the effect relative to the omitted period $\tau = -1$. The first and last time periods ($\tau = -8$ and $\tau = 8$) represent the average effect for all quarters before and after those quarters. The shaded area represents the 95% confidence interval. Data from NCANDS, sample from 2006 to before control (later-treated) counties start treatment (first quarter of 2011), excludes border counties, resister states (IL, NJ, and NY), and counties without allegations for Hispanic children.

Table 1: Comparison of Sample and Non-Sample Counties

	Sample Counties (1)	Non-Sample Counties (2)	Diff. (S - N) (3)	s.e. (4)
Median Age	37.266	40.679	-3.414***	(0.257)
Population	365,760	56,973	30,8786***	(15284.294)
Share Hispanic Population	0.134	0.100	0.034***	(0.010)
Share Rural Population	0.225	0.627	-0.402***	(0.015)
Share Households Renting	0.331	0.269	0.063***	(0.004)
Share Multigenerational	0.041	0.035	0.006***	(0.001)
Unemployment Rate	9.640	9.566	0.074	(0.184)

Note: Mean values and differences in means for county characteristics. Column (1) provides mean for the 418 counties included in our sample. Column (2) shows means for the 2801 counties not reflected in our sample due to the NCANDS masking convention and sample restrictions. Column (3) presents the differences in means (1-2) with the corresponding standard errors given in column (4). *** denotes a p-value of less than 0.01. Data are from 2010 Census and 2010 average county unemployment rate from Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Table 2: Aggregated Effect Estimates Hispanic Children Maltreatment Rates

	Allegation (1)	Victimization (2)	Substantiation (3)
Aggregate Effect Post	-0.313	0.220	0.021
P-value	0.390	0.100	0.050
Y-Mean	10.836	2.109	0.204
Pre-Trend Test	0.267	0.566	0.494

Note: Each column includes the estimated aggregated treatment effect of Secure Communities on Hispanic children allegation, victimization, and substantiation rates respectively. The aggregated effect post, is an aggregation of the Sun and Abraham (2021) estimates of β_ℓ for equation (1) for the eight quarters from Secure Communities activation. P-value corresponds to the significance of the linear combination of $\hat{\beta}_\ell$ from $\ell = 0$ to $\ell = 8$. Y-mean is the pre-treatment average for earlier-treated counties for each of the dependent variables. The pre-trend test shows the significance of a joint F-test of $\hat{\beta}_\ell = 0$ fol ℓ values from $\ell = -8$ to $\ell = -2$. Data from NCANDS, sample from 2006 to before control (later-treated) counties start treatment (first quarter of 2011), excludes border counties, resister states (Il, NJ, and NY) , and counties without allegations for Hispanic children.

Table 3: Aggregated Effect Estimates Hispanic Rates: by Reporter Type

	Allegations		Victimization		Substantiation	
	Professional (1)	Non-pro (2)	Professional (3)	Non-pro (4)	Professional (5)	Non-pro (6)
Aggregate Effect Post	-0.123	-0.200	0.215	0.003	0.045	0.006
P-value	0.642	0.339	0.046	0.960	0.005	0.677
Y-Mean	5.757	5.197	1.528	0.590	0.289	0.140
Pre-Trend Test	0.245	0.098	0.657	0.778	0.505	0.680

Note: Each column group includes the aggregated treatment effect of Secure Communities on Hispanic children allegation, victimization, and substantiation rates by reporter type respectively. Mandated refers to mandated reporters (eg., teachers, police, physicians) who are required by law to refer suspected cases of maltreatment to CPS; Non-Mand refers to all other reporters of child abuse and neglect. The aggregated effect post, is an aggregation of the Sun and Abraham (2021) estimates of β_ℓ for equation (1) for the eight quarters from Secure Communities activation. P-value corresponds to the significance of the linear combination of $\hat{\beta}_\ell$ from $\ell = 0$ to $\ell = 8$. Y-mean is the pre-treatment average for earlier-treated counties for each of the dependent variables. The pre-trend test shows the significance of a joint F-test of $\hat{\beta}_\ell = 0$ fol ℓ values from $\ell = -8$ to $\ell = -2$. Data from NCANDS, sample from 2006 to before control (later-treated) counties start treatment (first quarter of 2011), excludes border counties, resister states (Il, NJ, and NY) , and counties without allegations for Hispanic children.

Table 4: Non-Hispanic Children Maltreatment Rates

	Allegation (1)	Victimization (2)	Substantiation (3)
Aggregate Effect Post	-0.240	-0.054	0.009
P-value	0.292	0.427	0.077
Y-Mean	12.098	2.230	0.197
Pre-Trend Test	0.623	0.000	0.081

Note: Each column includes the aggregated treatment effect of Secure Communities on Non-Hispanic children allegation, victimization, and substantiation rates respectively. The aggregate effect post, is an aggregation of the Sun and Abraham (2021) estimates of β_ℓ for equation (1) for the eight quarters from Secure Communities activation. P-value corresponds to the significance of the linear combination of $\hat{\beta}_\ell$ from $\ell = 0$ to $\ell = 8$. Y-mean is the pre-treatment average for earlier-treated counties for each of the dependent variables. The pre-trend test shows the significance of a joint F-test of $\hat{\beta}_\ell = 0$ fol ℓ values from $\ell = -8$ to $\ell = -2$. Data from NCANDS, sample from 2006 to before control (later-treated) counties start treatment (first quarter of 2011), excludes border counties, resister states (Il, NJ, and NY) , and counties without allegations for Hispanic children.