

Immigration Enforcement and Hispanic Identity

NBER Economics of Race and Stratification

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March 27 2026

The Hispanic and Latino populations are the largest minority groups in the U.S.

- The 2020 Census counted 62 million Hispanics (19% of the population)
- Nearly all studies of Hispanic outcomes rely on **self-reported Hispanic identity**
 - This implicitly treats Hispanic identity as a fixed/exogenous characteristic of individuals with a Hispanic origin

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- The 2020 Census counted 62 million Hispanics (19% of the population)
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 - This implicitly treats Hispanic identity as a fixed/exogenous characteristic of individuals with a Hispanic origin
- **But what if endogenous self-reported Hispanic identity is influenced by external factors?**

Who's Hispanic? The Hispanic origin question in the CPS

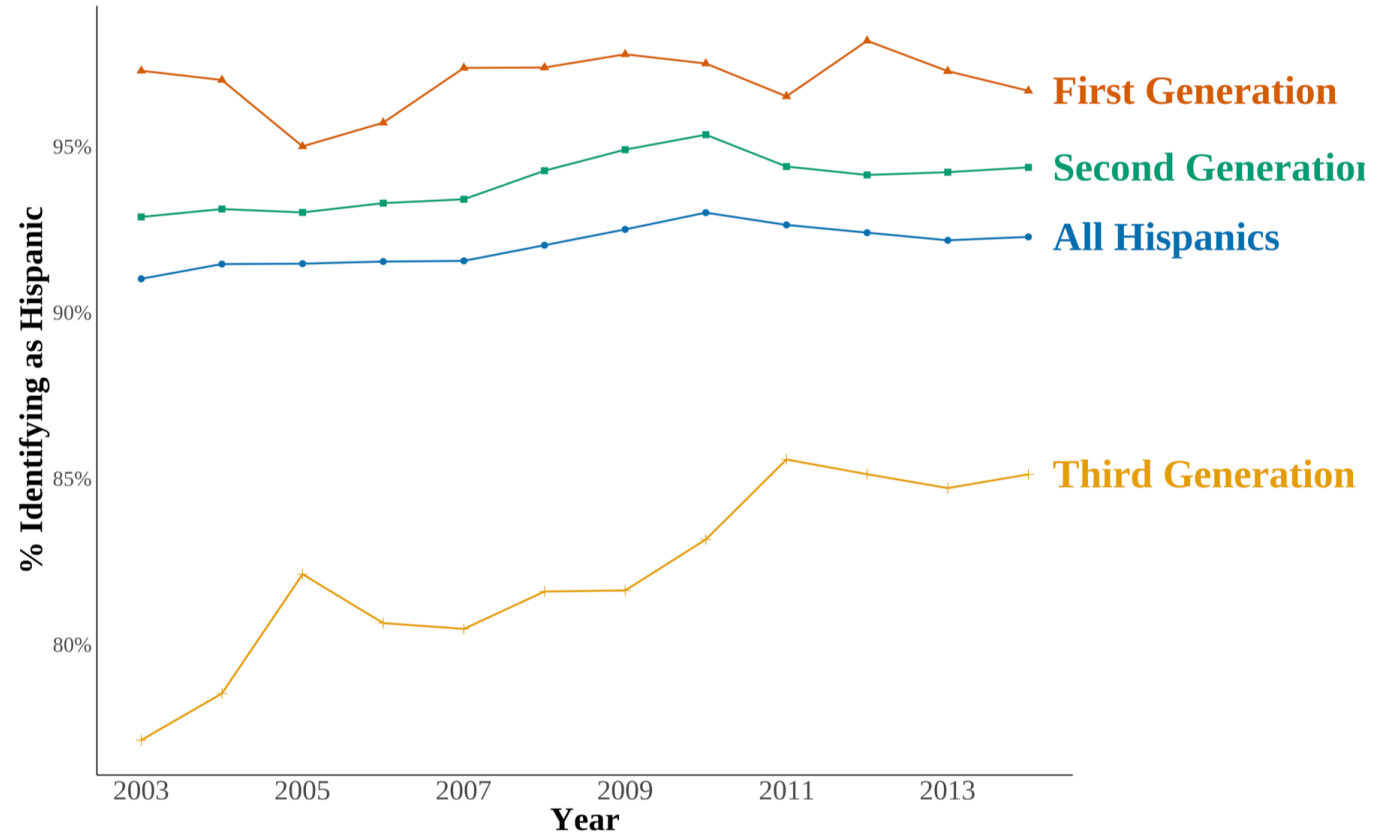
- Since 2003, CPS asks: "Are you Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino?"
 - If YES, a person is coded into major groups: "Hispanic or Latino" and "Not Hispanic or Latino."
- Previous studies argue that these questions reflect "self-identification" (i.e., subjective and endogenous measure)
- "Objective" indicators of Hispanic descent have been proposed (e.g., Duncan and Trejo (2007; 2009; 2011), and Antman, Duncan, and Trejo (2020b))
 - Based on birthplace of the individual, their parents, and grandparents

Endogenous Hispanic and ethnic attrition is a well-documented phenomenon

US-born descendants of Hispanic immigrants tend to self-identify as non-Hispanic

(Duncan and Trejo 2007, 2011, 2017; Antman, Duncan, and Trejo 2020b)

[Objective vs. subjective Hispanic identity][Data and sample]



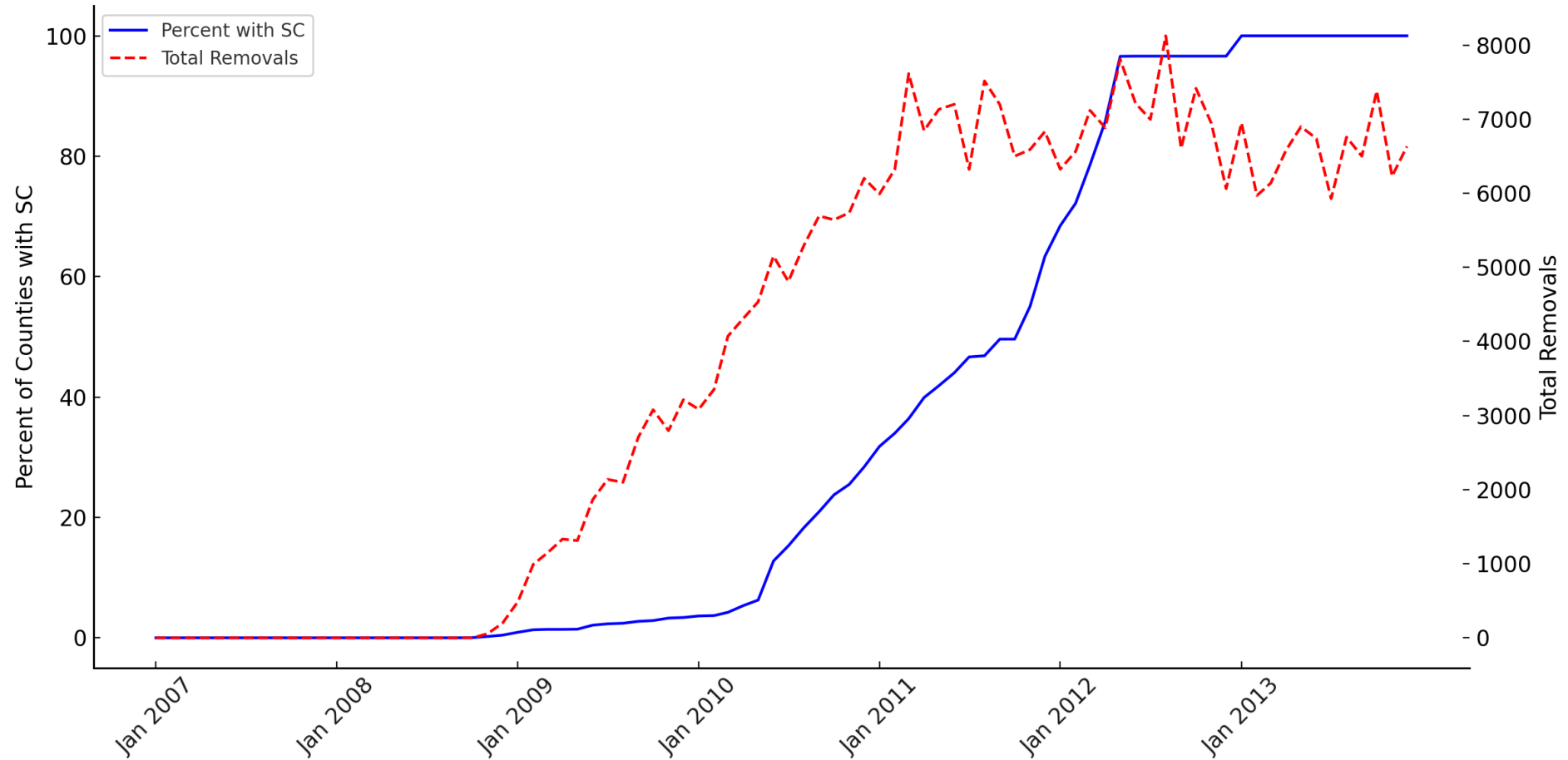
What causes Hispanic attrition?

- Correlates of ethnic attrition are well documented:
 - **Intermarriage**: primary driver; children of interethnic marriages are far more likely to attrit (Duncan and Trejo 2011)
 - **Socioeconomic status**: attritors are more educated, higher income
(Duncan and Trejo 2011, 2017)
 - **Local prejudice**: State-level anti-Hispanic bias reduces Hispanic identity (Hadah 2024)
- If Hispanic attritors are positively selected,
 - Conventional estimates overstate Hispanic health disparities (Antman, Duncan, and Trejo (2016; 2020b))
 - Standard measures understate intergenerational educational progress and assimilation (Duncan and Trejo 2011, 2017)
 - Ethnic gaps in labor market overstate the extent of discrimination in the most biased states (Hadah 2024)
- **Open question: Can policies that disproportionately affect Hispanics causally change ethnic self-identification?**

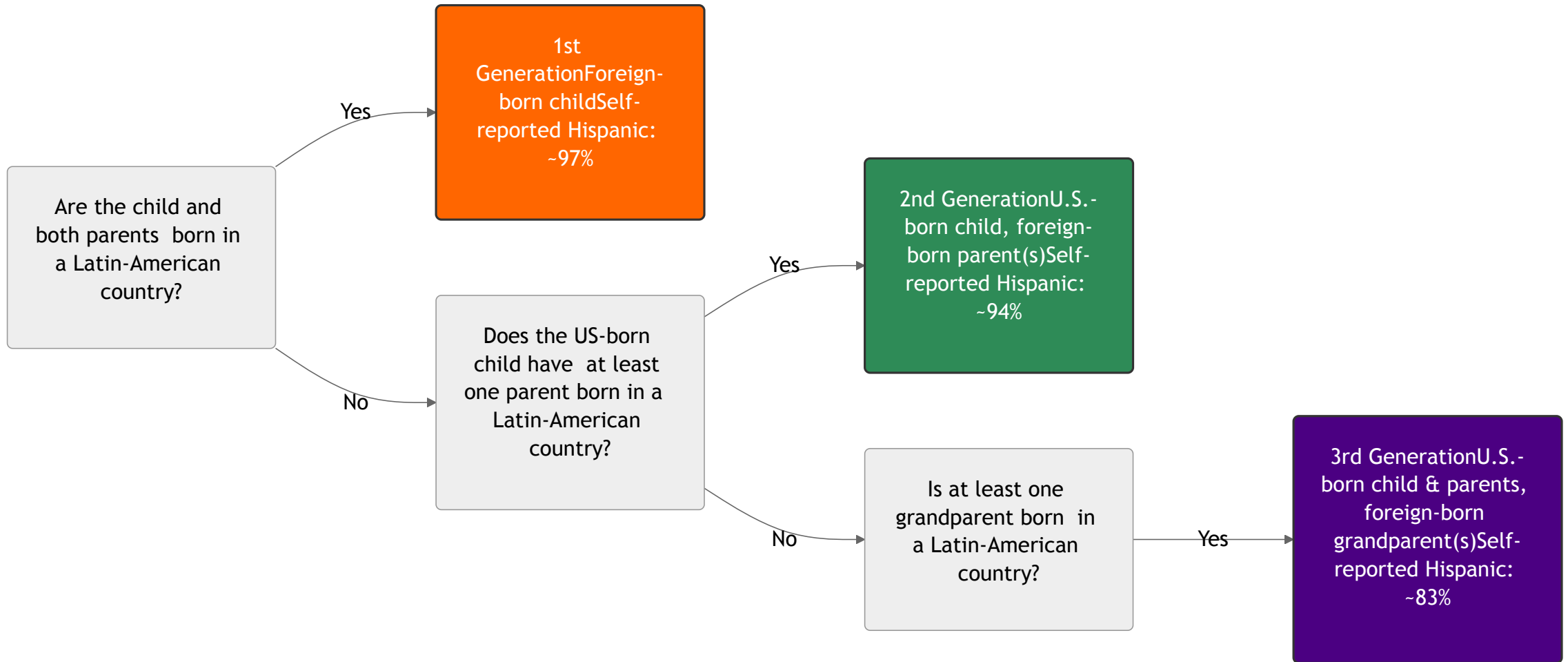
What we study in this paper

- Policy context: **Secure Communities (SC)**
 - Automated fingerprint sharing between local police and federal immigration authorities [\[Secure Communities background\]](#) [\[How SC works\]](#)
- Growing literature documents *spillover effects* on Hispanic community
 - Safety net participation, poverty, engagement with institutions, suicide (Watson 2014; Amuedo-Dorantes, Arenas-Arroyo, and Sevilla 2018; Dee and Murphy 2020; Alsan and Yang 2024; Hadah 2025)
- **Does immigration enforcement (Secure Communities) change who identifies/self-reports as Hispanic?**

Cumulative share of counties activating Secure Communities, and monthly removals, 2008--2013



Objective Hispanic Identity Generations



[Latin-American countries used] [Example 1] [Example 2]

Empirical Strategy

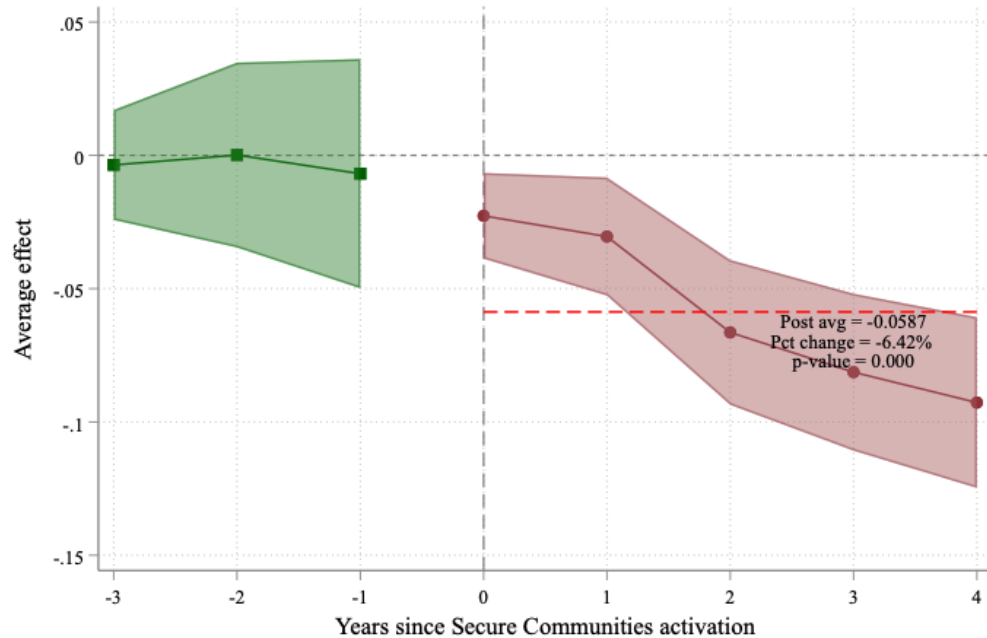
- Event study model with unrestricted treatment effect heterogeneity (Borusyak, Jaravel, and Spiess (2024)):

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

- Imputation procedure (3 steps):
 1. Estimate $\hat{\lambda}_c, \hat{\gamma}_t, \hat{\delta}$ using untreated observations only
 2. Impute counterfactual: $\hat{Y}_{icst}(0)$; compute $\hat{\tau}_{icst} = Y_{icst} - \hat{Y}_{icst}(0)$
 3. Aggregate into horizon-specific ATTs: $\hat{\tau}_h$

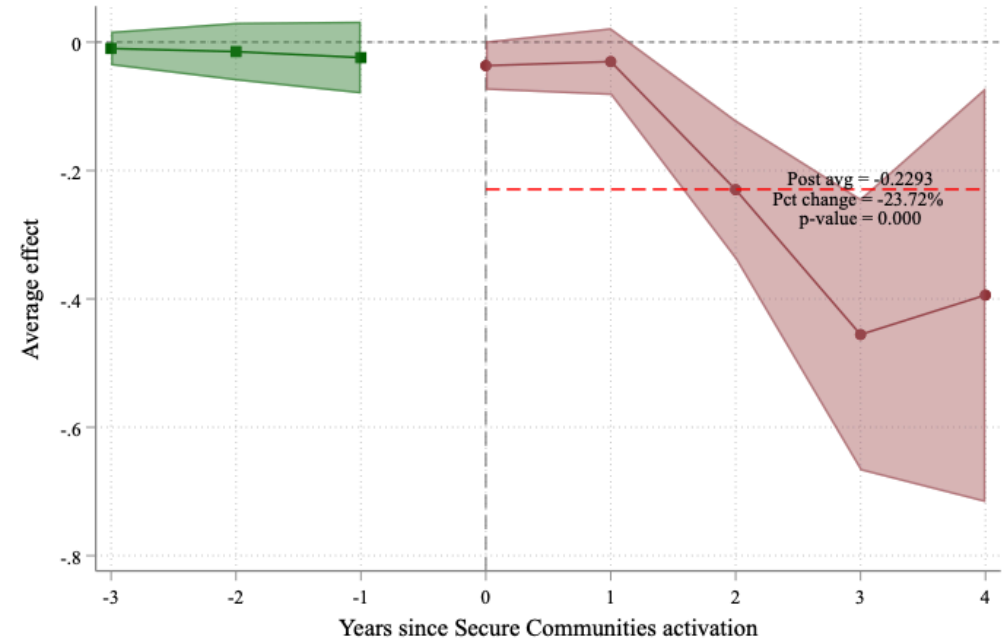
Main results: SC reduces Hispanic identity

All Generations



Overall ATT: -5.9 pp (6.4%)

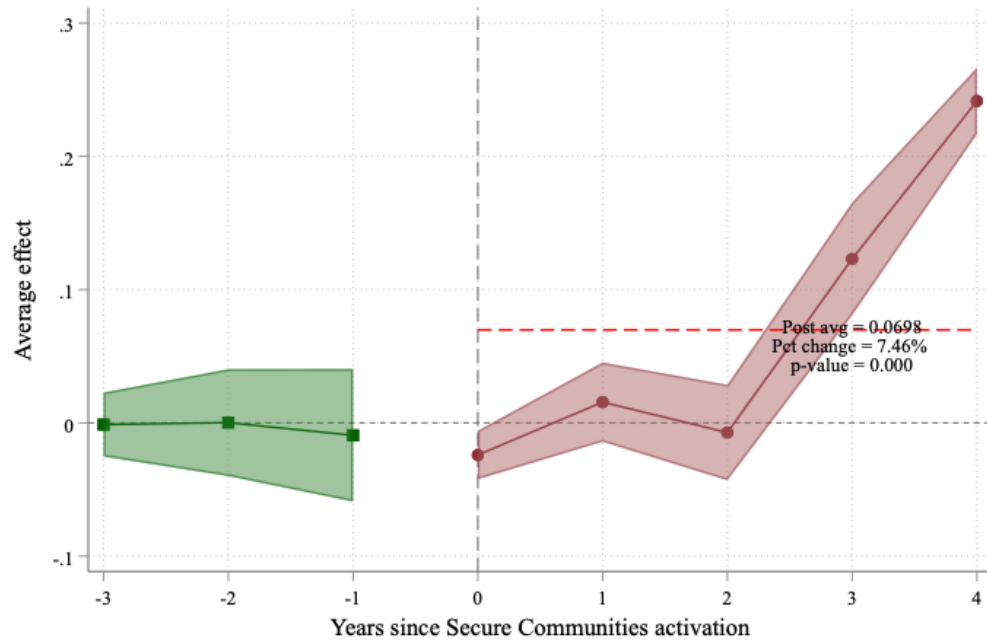
First Generation



First gen: -22.9 pp (23.7%)

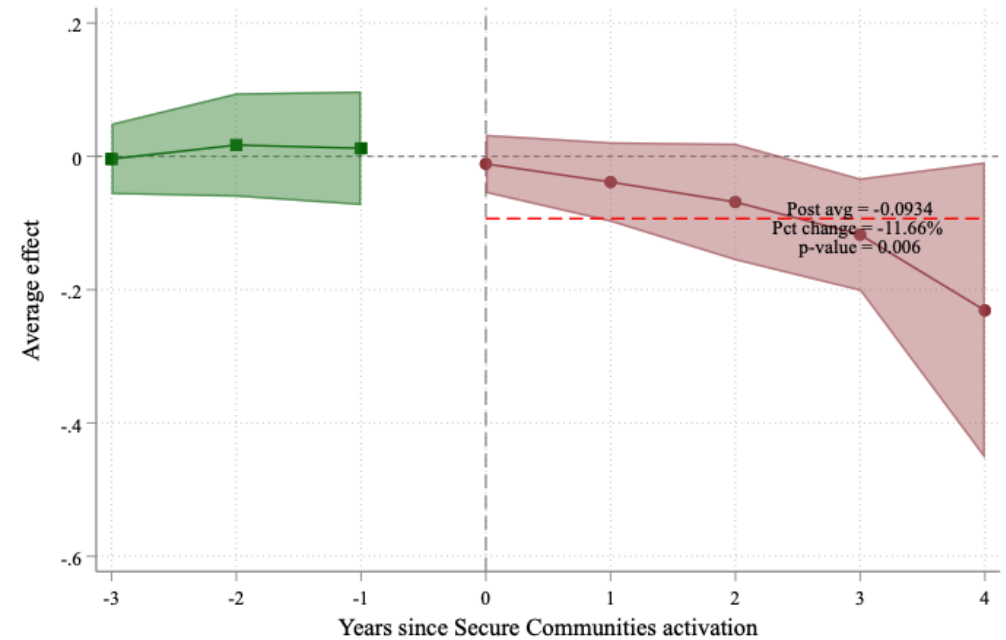
Heterogeneity by generation

Second Generation



Second gen: +6.9 pp (solidarity response)

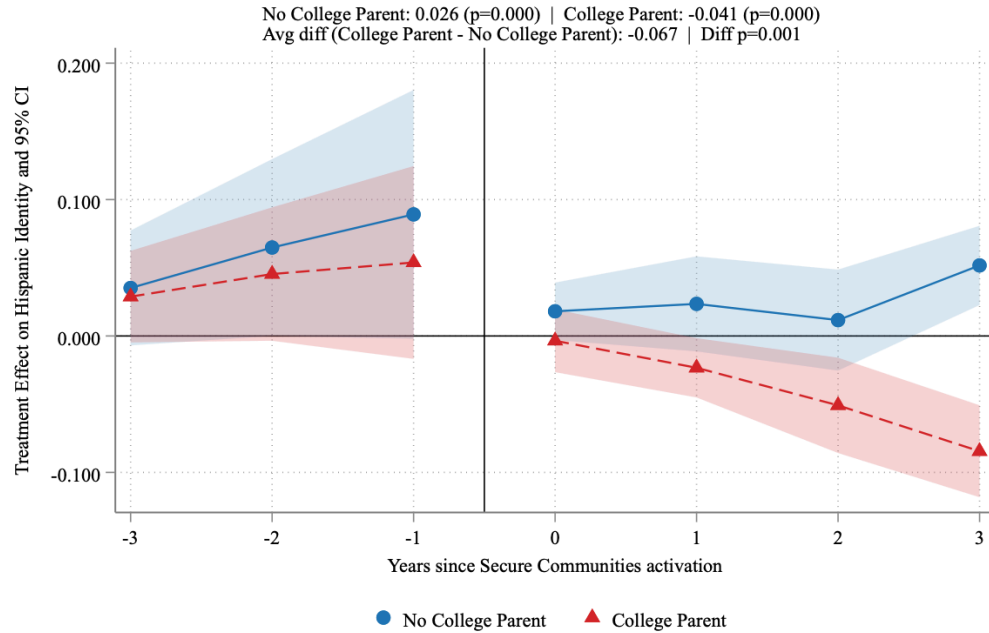
Third Generation



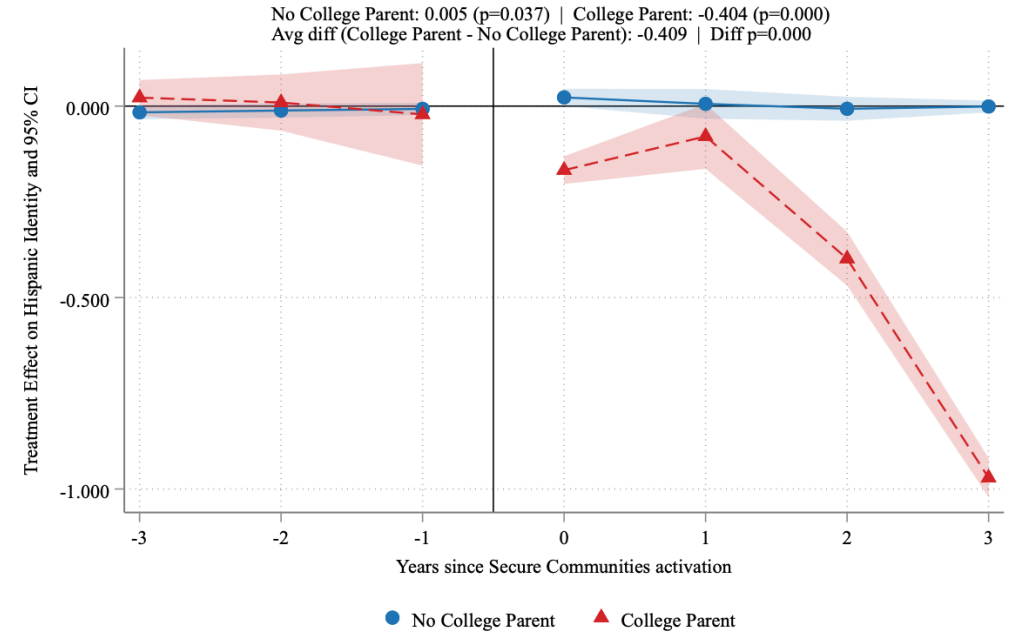
Third gen: -9.3 pp (attrition)

Heterogeneity by parental education

All Generations

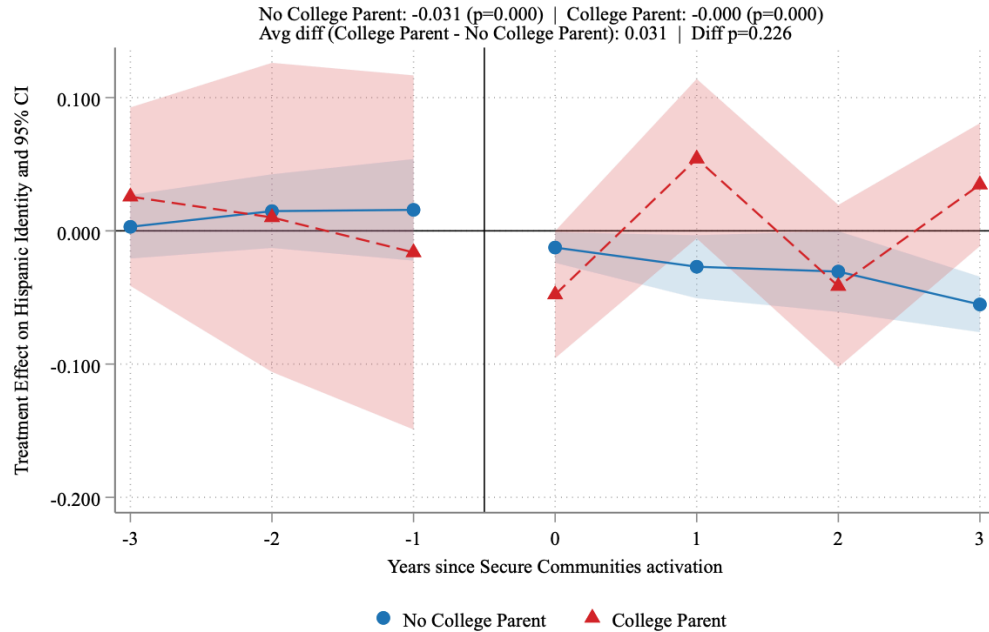


First Generation

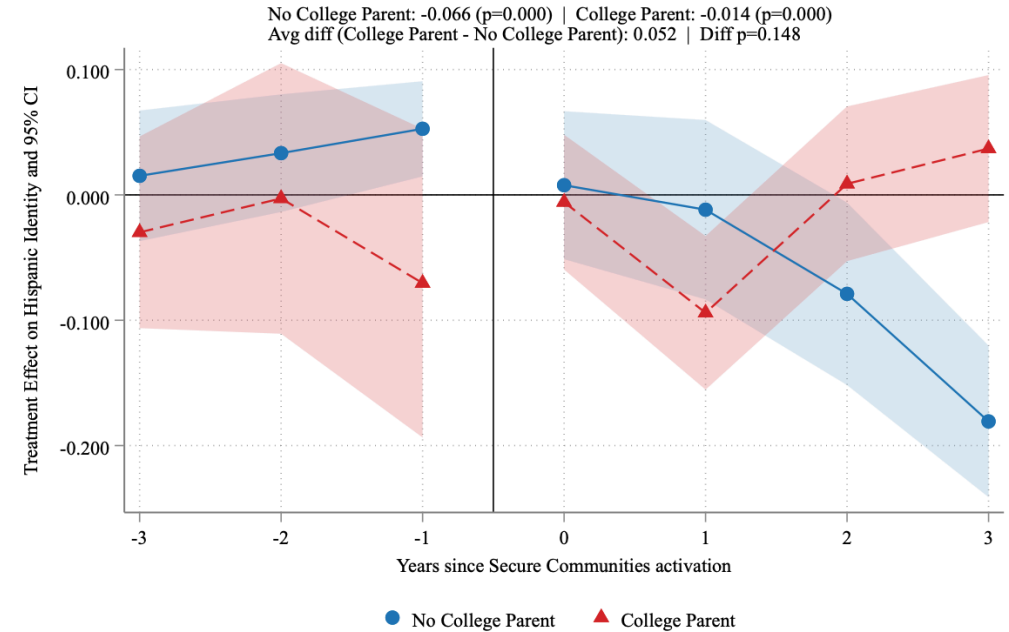


Heterogeneity by parental education (continued)

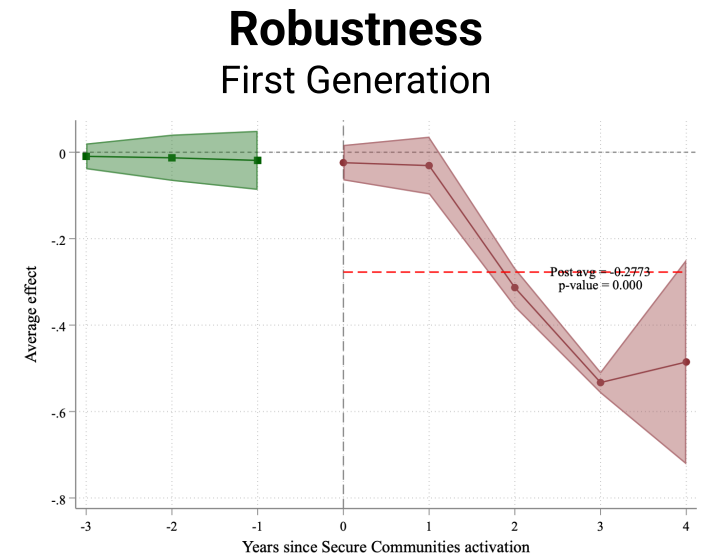
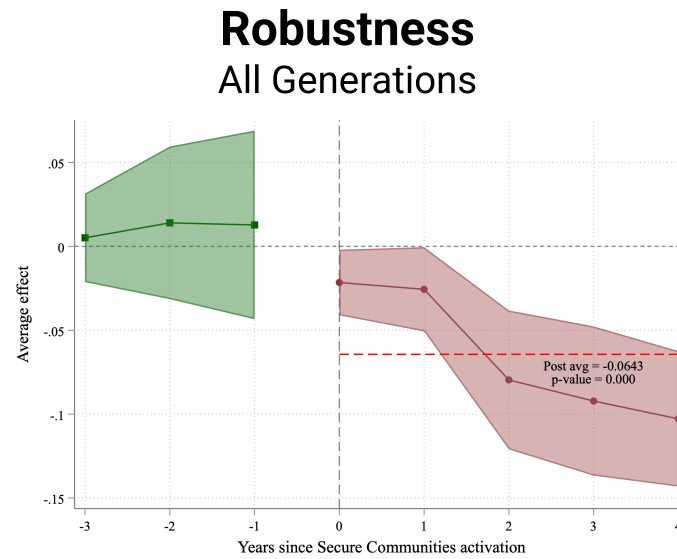
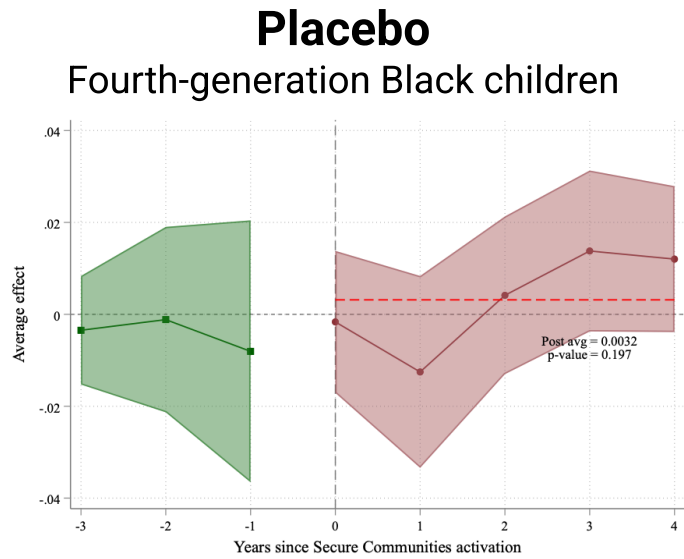
Second Generation



Third Generation



Placebo and robustness



Robustness estimates exclude southern border counties and NY, MA, and IL. Results remain unchanged.

Conclusion

- **Immigration enforcement causally changes Hispanic ethnic self-identification**
 - **Increased** Hispanic attrition among first and third generation Hispanic children
 - **Reduced** Hispanic attrition among second generation Hispanic children **[Mechanisms]**

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Implications

- **Political representation of Hispanics may be affected**
- **Self-reported Hispanic identity in evaluations of immigration enforcement may systematically bias causal inference**
 - **Overestimating** disparities between Hispanics and non-Hispanic whites
 - **Underestimating** intergenerational progress and assimilation of Hispanic immigrants

Thank you!

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Appendix

Objective vs. subjective Hispanic identity

- **Subjective** measure: self-reported Hispanic identity (e.g., CPS Hispanic origin question)
 - Subject to measurement error and endogenous reporting bias
(Duncan and Trejo 2007, 2011, 2017; Antman, Duncan, and Trejo 2020b)
- **Objective** measure: bases on the birthplace of the individual, their parents, and grandparents
 - More objective following the works of Antman et al. (2016) and Duncan and Trejo (2007, 2011, 2017) [\[Back\]](#)

Background: Secure Communities

- Deportation program relying on partnerships between federal and local law enforcement agencies to identify and remove criminal aliens from the US
- Secure Communities has a checked history
 - 2008: Started as pilot program under the George W. Bush
 - Program authorized and expanded under Barack Obama, reaching all U.S. counties by end of 2013
 - 2014: Replaced by a "Priority Enforcement Program"
 - 2017: Reactivated in original form by Donald Trump
 - 2021: Joe Biden discontinued Secure Communities
 - 2025: Donald Trump reinstated Secure Communities

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How Secure Communities works

- Prior to SC: identifying deportable non-citizens relied on manual interviews (e.g., 287(g) agreements)
- SC automated this process:
 1. Local police arrest individual → submit fingerprints to FBI
 2. Fingerprints *automatically* forwarded to DHS biometric database
 3. If match found → ICE reviews immigration status
 4. If violation identified → ICE issues detainer (hold up to 48 hours)

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Key facts about Secure Communities

- Rollout timing correlated with proximity to Mexican border and local Hispanic population size (Miles and Cox 2014)
- Between inception and 2014:
 - 46 million fingerprint submissions
 - 2.3 million removable alien identifications
 - ~440,000 deportations
 - More than 90% of the deportees were Hispanic men (Mexico and other Central and South American countries)

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Latin-American countries used in this analysis [\[Back\]](#)



Included in analysis: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Suriname, French Guiana, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

Who are these generations?



Andy Garcia (Actor)

Andy: born in Cuba (naturalized US citizen)

Mother: Amelie Menendez (Born in Cuba)

Father: Rene Garcia Nunez (Born in Cuba)

1st Generation



George Prescott Bush (Commissioner, Texas General Land Office: 2015-2023)

George: born in Houston, Texas

Mother: Columba Bush (Born in Mexico)

Father: Jeb Bush (born in Midland, Texas)

2nd Generation

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Who are these generations?



Ted Williams

Ted: born in San Diego, California

Mother: May Venzor (born in Texas)

Father: Samuel Williams (born in New York)

Both maternal grandparents: born in Mexico

3rd Generation

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Summary statistics

	All	1st Gen	2nd Gen	3rd Gen
	(N=465,480)	(N=55,239)	(N=317,032)	(N=93,209)
Hispanic identity	0.920	0.969	0.940	0.825
Female	0.485	0.486	0.484	0.485
Age	8.5	11.6	8.1	7.7
Hispanic mother	0.897	0.958	0.926	0.766
Hispanic father	0.884	0.944	0.916	0.749
Frac. Hispanic in county	0.332	0.303	0.339	0.328

Note: CPS 2003--2013. White children ages ≤ 17

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But how would SC impact self-reporting of Hispanic identity?

- SC may increase the salience and expected costs of being treated as Hispanic
- Two competing channels:
 1. **Attrition channel**: increased expected penalty \Rightarrow individuals distance from Hispanic identity to reduce perceived exposure
 2. **Reactive identity channel**: heightened threat \Rightarrow increased value of in-group attachment and solidarity
- Net effect is **theoretically ambiguous** and likely **heterogeneous**
 - Depends on switching costs, perceived exposure, generational ties

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Data and sample

- Current Population Survey (CPS), 2003 to 2013
 - Self-reported Hispanic origin, race, ancestry, parental birthplace [\[Summary statistics\]](#)
- **Sample:** Children under 18 living with parents
 - Focus on White families: lower switching costs, more feasible to "pass"
 - Focus on children lets us define objective Hispanic indicators beyond 2nd gen
- **Outcome:** Self-reported Hispanic identity across ancestry-based Hispanic identity generations

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