

Immigration Enforcement and Voter Behavior:

Turnout Effects of the Secure Communities Program

Ariel White • Department of Government • Harvard University • arwhite@fas.harvard.edu

Motivation

Does Deportation Affect Voter Turnout?

Deportation has been linked to all sorts of indirect effects on the people and communities left behind: family disruptions, economic costs, health issues. But what are the political effects? Do people vote more (or less) when people near them get deported?

This Project

I use data from the staggered implementation of the federal "Secure Communities" program to test whether Latino voters become more likely to turn out when people in their county or town face a higher risk of deportation.

Design

Secure Communities (SC)

- Information-sharing program: local jails submit fingerprint records of all bookings to be checked against immigration databases.
- Increased deportation, including long-term residents.
- Piloted in a few cities in 2008; gradually expanded with nearly-complete national coverage by 2012.

Data

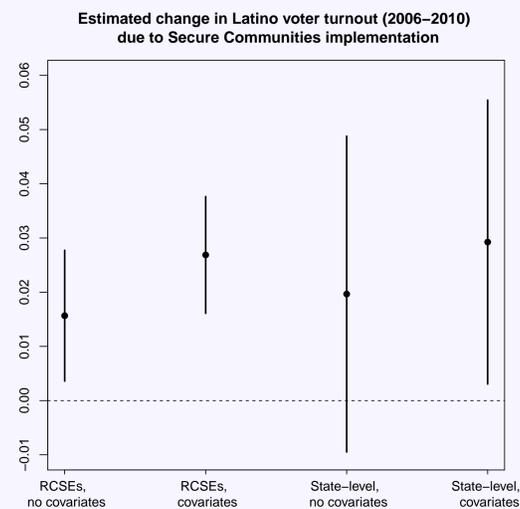
1. Latino turnout data from Catalyst, LLC
2. Population data from ACS (Census)
3. SC data (timing and record submissions) from ICE

Difference-in-Differences

I take advantage of the way some states rolled out the SC program. Many counties/towns selected into the program for reasons that are unclear and could be political. My main analysis focuses only on places that were involuntarily brought into the program by their state law enforcement agency.

I run a difference-in-differences analysis, assuming that Latino turnout trends in these involuntarily-treated places would otherwise have looked the same as in untreated places.

Results



Interpretation

Effect Size

A 2-3 percentage point change in turnout is substantively **very large**. 16% of eligible Latino voters in my sample turn out, so a 3-point increase is a major jump; comparable to treatment effect of 3 pieces direct mail in Gerber & Green (2000).

However, it could represent a relatively small number of people in many of the sample jurisdictions: a few dozen more people turning out to vote.

LATE

These estimates are of a **Local Average Treatment Effect** for the units in my sample, not the whole country. How do they compare?

	Sample	All jurisdictions
Latino citizen population, 2006	2152	5736
Total population, 2010	62409	95955
Population density, 2010	147	210

Bigger cities/counties with larger Latino populations were enrolled in the program earlier, due to some combination of local politics and ICE priorities. But the places in the sample are still geographically varied and contain reasonable Latino populations.

Mechanisms?

Direct/indirect effects:

- Voters personally know people who get picked up by ICE
- Voters hear about the SC program (abstract), fear more deportations

Individual/group effects:

- Activist groups mobilized by the program to GOTV
- Individuals simply decide to turn out

My theory: local activists hear about Secure Communities from national organizations, and start mobilizing their neighbors. Consistent with this (though observational): the treatment effect doesn't increase with the number of actual fingerprint submissions that took place. When sample is split to places with above-/below-median submission rates:

	Change in Latino turnout, 2006-10	
	(High)	(Low)
SC treatment effect	0.021*** (0.005)	0.033*** (0.006)
Constant	0.030*** (0.010)	0.030*** (0.011)
Observations	2,370	2,370
Covariates (election timing)	X	X
Note:	*p<0.1, **p<0.05; ***p<0.01	

Robustness

- Basic OLS (all places enrolled in SC, not just involuntary)
- Drop places with few Latinos
- Restrict to states that signed SC agreements
- Check prior trends using main data, CPS self-reports

Discussion

- I find a substantively large effect on turnout
- Can't parse out mechanisms— more work needed (qualitative interviews?)
- This could lead to perverse incentives for politicians, if new voters keep supporting an administration that keeps increasing deportations