# *Ex Ante* Immigration Policy:
# How Local Politics Anticipate Future Flows

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## Abstract

Scholarly work on the politics of immigration in the United States has focused primarily on the influence of local demographics. Less understood are the ways in which local governments respond to demographic changes beyond the city limit. We hypothesize that local governments anticipate future influxes of immigrants from neighboring localities and adjust policies *ex ante* in order to constrain their movement across jurisdictional borders before it can occur. We predict variation in anti-immigrant legislation as a function of proximity to nearby immigrant populations and find that a 10 percentage point increase in the share of foreign-born populations in a city's surrounding areas doubles the likelihood that a city considers a restrictive policy. The effect is more pronounced when neighboring immigrants originate from Latin America than from other regions. We also find suggestive evidence that knowledge of adjacent foreign born populations is transmitted via commuting patterns, specifically when neighboring populations commute into cities for work.

**Keywords:** *local politics, immigration attitude, political geography, cultural threat, event history analysis*

9,705 Words

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Despite no great influx of illegal immigrants and what the mayor himself admits has been little trouble, Valley Park, Mo., Mayor Jeffery Whitteaker decided his town would tackle the issue.

– Janet Shamlian, "Town's Mayor Tackles Illegal Immigration", *NBC News*, 2006.

# 1 Introduction

Since the rapid growth of immigrant populations in the early 2000s, hundreds of municipalities and counties across the United States have proposed or implemented immigrant-related policies. These policies range from restrictive ordinances aimed at driving out undocumented immigrants, to permissive policies that support the basic rights of the newcomers (Steil and Vasi, 2014; Walker and Leitner, 2011). Studies that have examined the recent wave of municipal immigration policy-making have identified local demographic changes, resource competition, and political partisanship as important predictors of the passage of immigrant-related legislation (Hopkins, 2010; Ramakrishnan and Lewis, 2005; Newman, Hartman and Taber, 2012).

While these studies have developed an important theoretical framework for understanding policies that target immigrants at a local level, less understood are the ways in which policies are impacted by the spatial relationships among localities. That is, in examining demographic changes that happen in a given locality, prior studies have treated each place as an ontologically separate unit, isolated from factors in nearby areas. Here, we investigate whether local policymakers take into consideration demographic patterns in neighboring localities when considering immigrant-related policy.

The core motivation of this research is to expand our definition of the factors that influence local ordinances beyond the current focus on the locality in question, thereby

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enriching our theoretical understanding of the determinants of anti-immigrant legislation and local policy writ large. Specifically, we focus on the spatial relationships in local immigration policies by examining whether the presence of immigrants in a nearby locality influences whether a city considers an anti-immigrant ordinance. Are local policymakers attentive to the presence of immigrants in their neighboring areas in addition to their own? Upon observing large stock of immigrants in their surrounding regions, do their legislative behaviors change in anticipation of future spillovers?

We document evidence of this pattern, and argue that it is consistent with a story of *ex ante* immigration policymaking in which policymakers attempt to "close the door" to potential foreign-born populations before they arrive. In addition to previous scholarship that predicts hostile political reactions to a *change* in local demographics, we find an important role played by the *level* of the immigrant population in neighboring areas. When it comes to the population beyond its jurisdiction, our findings suggest that city governments are sensitive to the stock of neighboring immigrant populations and consider policies in anticipation of future inflows.

We evaluate two potential pathways by which a local government learns about what goes on in the nearby areas: through direct observation (proxied with commuting flows) and through local news coverage (proxied with shared designated market areas and radio broadcast service areas). We document patterns consistent with direct observation, but not with local news coverage, although we suspect the latter null result might reflect data limitations, and consider this an important area of future research.

We also test explanations for why these cities might seek to prevent future inflows, looking at heterogeneous effects across three commonly discussed theories found in the existing literature: economic theories regarding labor market competition; political theories regarding conservative emphasis of law and order; and cultural threat theories emphasizing that more culturally distinct foreign born populations elicit stronger anti-immigrant responses. We find

little support for either economic or political motivations, suggesting that the concern with barring new entrants is not a function of labor market competition felt by local employees, and manifests similarly in Democrat- and Republican-leaning localities. Instead, we show that the relationship between a city's consideration of anti-immigrant policies and the demographic composition beyond the city's border is strongest when neighboring foreign-born populations hail from Latin America. These patterns do not obtain when focusing on immigrants from Asia, Africa, or Europe. These patterns suggest that *ex ante* anti-immigrant policymaking is a manifestation of racialized xenophobia in which more easily identifiable and nationally salient non-American groups engender greater legislative effort to bar their movement into neighboring cities.

By demonstrating that local ordinance "here" is a constitutive reaction to both demographic change "here" *and* demographic characteristics "there", we highlight the importance of geographic space in the study of immigration in local American politics. Furthermore, our finding emphasizes the *ex ante* strategic responses of policymakers, which calls for additional research into the when and why government takes actions in anticipation.

# 2   Demographic Factors Beyond the "Local"

The rapid growth of immigrant populations in the 2000s, coupled with Congress's failure to pass comprehensive immigration reform legislation in 2006 and 2007, prompted municipalities to pass their own immigration laws in an often-explicit effort to drive undocumented immigrants out of their territory.The sub-federal attempts to deter unlawful immigration largely began with the Illegal Immigration Relief Acts (IIRA) passed by the city of Hazleton, Pennsylvania in 2006. The ordinance empowered the city to revoke the licenses of businesses that hired undocumented workers and revoke rental licenses from landlords who rented to persons without valid documentation (Gulasekaram and Ramakrishnan, 2015).

Furthermore, Hazleton simultaneously passed legislation declaring English to be the town's official language (McKanders, 2007). Hundreds of towns followed suit, utilizing policy tools to restrict immigrants' broader living and working conditions with the intent of making the respective cities inhospitable for them.

The most common provisions of exclusionary local ordinance require that local businesses use the national Employment Eligibility Verification Program, or E-Verify, to verify the work authorization of potential employees. Other common types of restrictive measures implemented by local governments include 287(g) agreements – which facilitate cooperation between state and local law enforcement agencies and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) by designating local officers to perform limited immigration enforcement functions – as well as "anti-stacking" ordinances designed to eliminate cheap or illegal housing units often perceived as magnets for immigrant workers (Varsanyi, 2010). Cities also adopt policies that implicitly target immigrants, including a declaration of English as an official language, restrictions on soliciting work in public places (targeted towards migrant day laborers), and limiting access to local services and benefits to non-citizens.

A large body of research has examined the relationship between the presence of immigrants in a respondent's locality and immigration attitudes. The main perspective builds on group threat theory which posits that, when applied to immigration, the presence of local immigrant groups in sufficient numbers will threaten native-born residents' political power and economic status (Key Jr, 1949; Blalock, 1967). Given the theorized relationship between immigrant group size, real competition, and the perception of threat, the theory predicts that hostility toward immigrants and support for anti-immigrant policies will be stronger among native residents living in areas with larger immigrant populations. While empirical evidence relating immigrant group size and anti-immigrant attitudes has been mixed (see Pottie-Sherman and Wilkes, 2017), a recent set of innovative studies points to the importance of salient population change as the primary source of immigration attitudes. Namely,

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Hopkins's (2010) "politicized places hypothesis" predicts that when communities undergo sudden demographic shifts in combination with salient national rhetoric on immigration, immigrants can quickly become the targets of local antipathy (also see Newman, 2013).

These patterns are consistent with several possible mechanisms, including economic competition, political ideology, and cultural threat. Studies that test economic motivations theorize that anti-immigrant sentiment may be particularly acute in places of resource or labor competition (Olzak, 1992; Gay, 2006; Mayda, 2006). The second mechanism emphasizes the importance of political ideology, particularly the issue ownership of conservatives on the topic of law and order (Ramakrishnan and Wong, 2010; Egan, 2013). The theoretical intuition posits that more conservative and Republican-leaning areas will pursue anti-immigrant legislation in accordance with the ideologically-oriented importance of law and order, cracking down on illegal immigrants and ensuring safe borders. The final set of theories focuses on humans' need to positively differentiate their own group from other groups (Tajfel et al., 1979) which, in the context of immigration, predicts negative affect towards more culturally distant immigrants along the dimensions of country of origin or language (Valentino, Brader and Jardina, 2013; Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2015). This set of theories speaks to the economic competition framework by positing that the need for differentiation is exacerbated in contexts of resource scarcity, but generates more precise predictions about which immigrant groups are most likely to engender an anti-immigrant response.

## 2.1 *Ex Ante* Immigration Policy

While these studies have developed an important theoretical framework for understanding retrospective responses to immigration at a local level, we have little knowledge on how local governments take into consideration the changes happening in nearby localities and adjust their laws prospectively. As discussed, the effect of local demographics – especially an abrupt change in the immigrant population – has been found to be a potent determinant of hostility

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towards immigrants both at the individual and government levels. But does local government also react to what goes on beyond its jurisdiction? Scholarly work examining spatial patterns in local governments find that governments do not make policy decisions in isolation (Salmon, 1987; Rincke, 2006; Sapotichne, Reese and Ye, 2019). Instead, policies are interdependent as legislators anticipate beneficial or harmful externalities in neighbouring regions and take political actions accordingly (e.g., Solé-Ollé, 2006). Therefore, the complicated nature of local immigration policies throughout the country may in part be explained by the interaction between what happens "in" and "around" the locality in question.

We start from the observation that anti-immigrant legislation is fundamentally preventative. While the details of specific policies are designed to regulate social and economic behaviors within their jurisdiction, they all share a deterrent effect on future inflows. By signing 287(g) agreements, legislating against informal work solicitation, restricting access to cheap multi-family housing, and prohibiting local business owners from hiring immigrant labor, these policies are designed to make their localities inhospitable to potential inflows. Furthermore, the preventative nature of anti-immigrant legislation makes fiscal sense. It is far cheaper to deter future inflows than it is to evict those who have already migrated.

Given this intuition, we hypothesize that the immigrant populations in neighboring areas represent a stock of potential future inflows which are observed by the city's policymakers, and acted upon accordingly, which we refer to as "*ex ante* immigration policy". For cities adjacent to large foreign-born populations, the spectre of future inflows is greater than those cities who are adjacent to predominantly native-born populations. Importantly, since these populations have not yet spilled over, they better capture the anxieties over future inflows, providing an opportunity to evaluate prospective laws that would not be identifiable in equilibrium.

Beyond this intuition about anxiety over future inflows, we are agnostic about which mechanisms are at play in explaining the *ex ante* restrictive measures against immigrants.

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Local policymakers may learn about a large stock of immigrant population in nearby areas in the news and act accordingly, or they may directly perceive these populations due to commuting patterns. We test each of these mechanisms in our extensions.[1]

Furthermore, we examine the source of anti-immigrant attitudes. Drawing on existing literature, it may be that the anxieties over future inflows are stimulated primarily by economic concerns, by ideologically conservative politicians, or by more fundamental perceptions of cultural threat. We test each of these three theories in our extensions as we explore conditions under which the effects are more pronounced.

We underscore that the precise motivations for anti-immigrant ordinance may not be explicitly strategically preventative. For example, if policymakers are motivated by perceptions of cultural threat, either within themselves or among their constituents, their decision to enact anti-immigrant ordinances needn't be "strategic" in the classic sense of rational calculation. Yet we argue that this behavior is still fundamentally preventative if it is stimulated by the observation of foreign-born populations in neighboring areas, which is a theoretically distinct understanding of these types of legislation compared to existing research.

# 3 Empirical Approach

To assess the relationship between local policy decisions and nearby immigrant populations, we apply a standard event history analysis (EHA) approach commonly used in the policy diffusion literature (e.g., Gilardi, 2010; Shipan and Volden, 2008; Volden, 2006). Using this technique, scholars have conceptualized the dependant variable as the adoption of a policy

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[1]We do not engage with the related question of whether policymakers themselves develop these beliefs, or whether they respond to shifting constituent preferences, effectively treating the consideration of anti-immigrant legislation as the product of a representative process that reflects a mixture of constituent and policymaker preferences.

(the "event"), with each unit of analysis being tracked over time until the policy is adopted, and used various statistical models to investigate factors that influence the likelihood of the policy adoption.

Following the conventional approach of EHA, our dependent variable captures whether a city considers an anti-immigrant ordinance in a given time that is initially set equal to 0. In the period the city proposes a law, this outcome variable is set equal to 1, and in the following periods the city's observations are removed from the data, as the city is no longer "at risk" of a policy consideration.[2] By linking a city's policy decision to its surrounding areas' demographics over time, the EHA method allows us to predict the probability that an event will occur given that it has not already occurred, and how this probability changes in relation to changes in the value of the neighboring factors.

## 3.1 Measuring Anti-Immigrant Ordinances

Our dependant variable captures whether or not a city considered the passage of anti-immigrant policies. We rely on data collected by Steil and Vasi (2014) and Walker and Leitner (2011) that identify cities with population of 25,000 or more in 2000, which is the

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[2]We have incomplete information on the status of ordinance (whether it has passed or has been considered but tabled). Analyses of both are commonplace in the literature (Walker and Leitner, 2011; Gulasekaram and Ramakrishnan, 2015) and we argue that consideration of anti-immigrant legislation captures the concept of substantive interest: the locality's openness to xenophobia in the policy-making process. In the extreme where none of the considered policies are enacted, our outcome captures an Overton Window shift separating areas' differential willingness to consider exclusionary ordinances. Nevertheless, in Appendix F.3, we use only the ordinances that passed as an outcome (based on available, hence noisy, information) and re-run the main analyses, finding substantively similar results.

population to which we speak..[3] Of these 1,423 cities, 101 of them considered anti-immigrant policies during the period of analysis and 75 considered pro-immigrant measures. Our main outcome variable is a binary indicator for whether the city considered anti-immigrant legislation.[4]

## 3.2    Measuring Demographics

Our primary explanatory variable of interest is the presence of immigrants in surrounding areas. To measure this variable, we use the share of the foreign-born population in adjacent counties for each city in each time period. Because data on county's foreign-born population is available by the decennial U.S. Census (and the 2008-2012 5-year data from American Community Survey), we can only observe our key contextual variable for three points in time: 1990, 2000, and 2008. In order to match the demographic data to the year in which a city considers a restrictive immigration policy, we apply the following rule: cities that proposed anti-immigrant ordinances in years zero through six of the Census cycle use the prior Census year as the decade in which the city considered the ordinance. Meanwhile, ordinances considered in years seven through nine use the subsequent Census. For example, Lancaster, Pennsylvania's passage of an anti-immigrant policy in 2006 is matched to its neighboring areas' demographics in 2000 while Montgomery, Alabama's enactment of exclusionary ordinance in 2008 is matched to its adjacent regions' demographics in 2010. This approach is consistent with a measure adopted by Hopkins (2010), who validates the adequacy of using Census data in representing local demographic changes.[5]

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[3]We also supplement ordinance information with additional information provided by Fair Immigration Reform Movement and Americas Society and Council of the Americas.

[4]We confirm our results are robust to alternative measures that incorporate pro-immigrant legislation (discussed below).

[5]Hopkins (2010) provides evidence that the inflows of immigrant population both over decades and within counties are highly stable, reducing the concerns about mismeasurement

We define adjacent counties as the regions comprising the main county to which each city belongs as well as counties that are contiguous to the main county. For example, Houston, TX, is a county seat of Harris County, which is contiguous to seven other counties, as shown in Figure 1. Houston's considerations of anti-immigrant ordinance are thus examined in relation to the demographic composition in these eight counties combined.
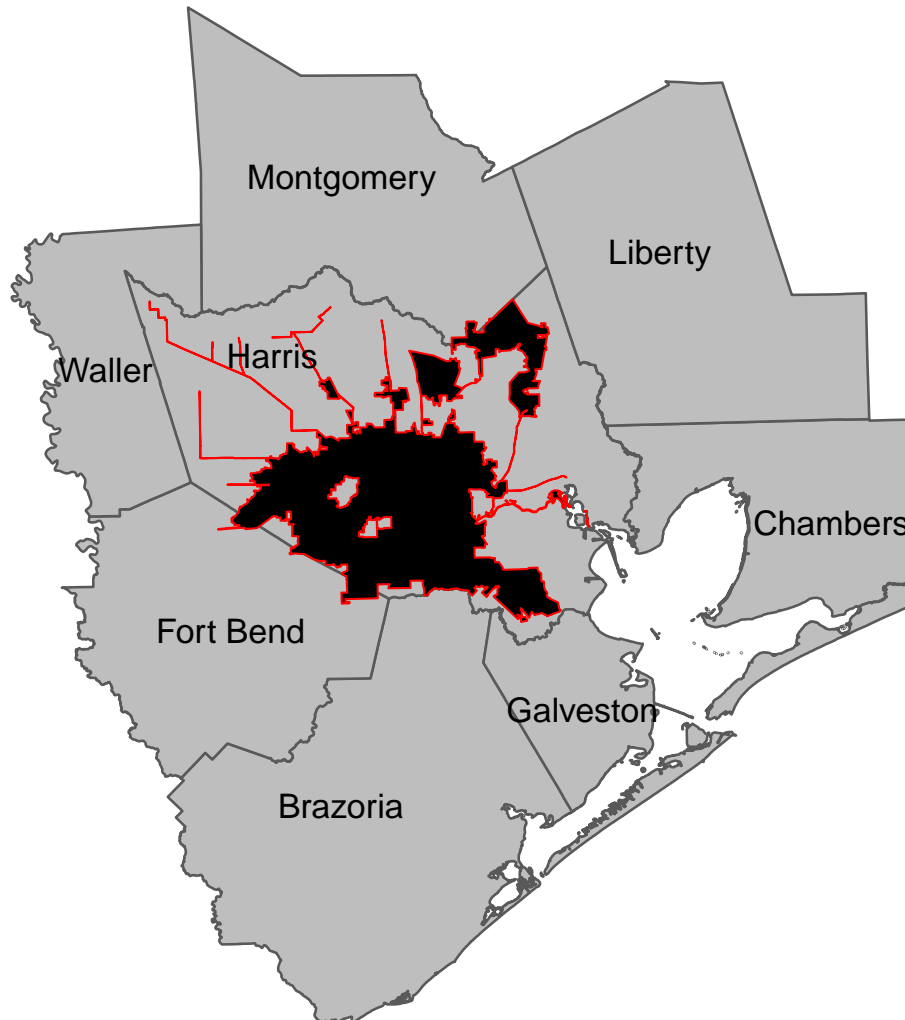


Figure 1: Adjacent Counties of Houston, TX.

To avoid double counting the population values in the counties where cities are located, we exclude the proportion of the foreign-born population in county $j$ that is expected to reside

(45-6).

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in city $i$ located within the county $j$ using the following formula.For county $j$ which seats a city $i$, or a portion of $i$, in year $t$:

$$\text{Population}_{j,t} = \text{Population}_{j+i,t} - \text{Population}_{i,t} * \frac{\text{Area}_{j \cap i}}{\text{Area}_i} * \frac{\text{Density}_{j+i}}{\text{Density}_i} \qquad (1)$$

Here, we apply the relative population density between the region $j + i$ and the city $i$ in order to account for the uneven spatial population distribution. If city $i$ is more densely populated than the overall area $j + i$, the formula reduces the expected number of city residents in county $j$ by the ratio of overall area's density to that of the city alone. In so doing, we attempt to capture a more realistic number of residents in the overlapping region.[6] Figure 2 displays the geographic dispersion of cities and their neighboring localities from which we collected data.[7]

## 3.3   City and County Controls

The analysis uses a set of controls for city-level factors that may influence the adoption of anti-immigrant ordinances. Existing research demonstrates that changing demographics in the city itself is a strong predictor of local attitudes and legislation (Hopkins, 2010; Newman, 2013). Therefore, we include both the level and change in the foreign-born population of the city.

Scholars have shown that partisanship is a powerful predictor of both restrictive and

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[6] We use Census TIGER Line shapefiles for each decade to calculate the proportion of the overlapping region. We also run our analyses using two extreme bounds: (1) treating that the entirety of city residents live in the overlapping region ($Pop_{j,t} = Pop_{j+i,t} - Pop_{i,t}$), and (2) treating that no city residents live in the overlapping region ($Pop_{j,t} = Pop_{j+i,t}$). Our results are not sensitive to this choice.

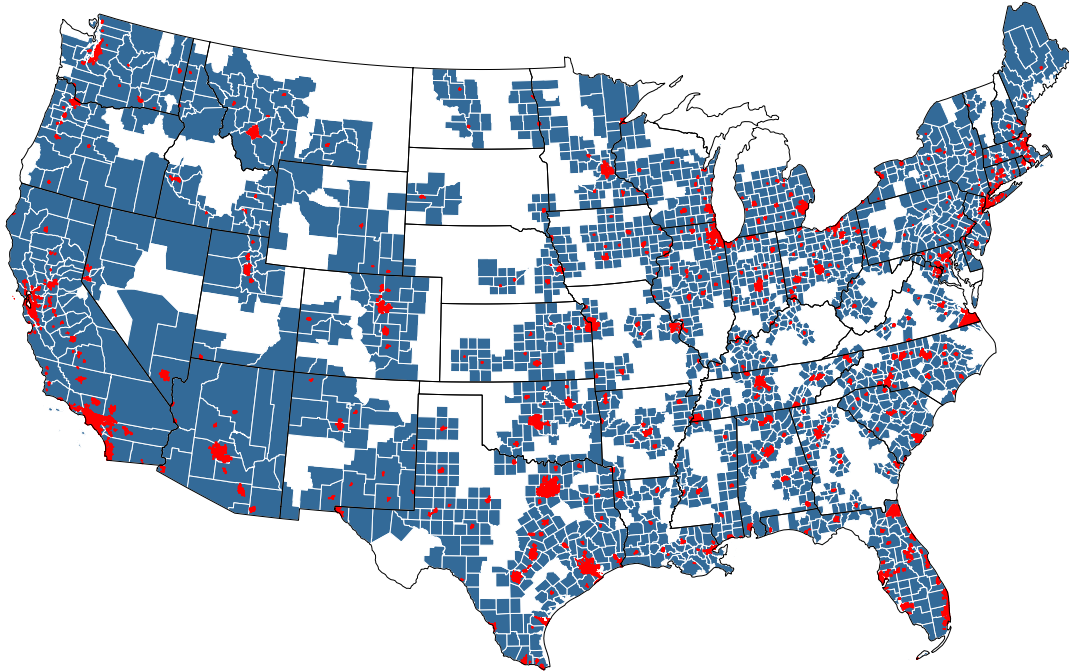[7] Localities in Alaska and Hawaii are excluded due to data availability.

Figure 2: U.S. map indicating cities (red) and counties (blue) used in the analyses.

permissive local ordinances when it comes to immigration issues (Ramakrishnan and Lewis, 2005; Ramakrishnan and Wong, 2010). Therefore, we include city-level Republican presidential election vote share estimated for each decade from 1990 through 2010.[8]

We also include a variable accounting for the partisanship of the neighboring counties. Scholars of intergovernmental relations demonstrate an increased likelihood of policy adoption when neighbors adopt the policy (Shipan and Volden, 2008; Volden, 2006). In the context of immigration, it is possible that, if a nearby governmental unit adopts an anti-immigrant ordinance, a city policymaker may follow suit because they either observe the effectiveness of the policy and/or fear that the resulting policy may cause the outside

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[8]This control is generated using multilevel regression and poststratification (Park, Gelman and Bafumi, 2006) predicted using the county-level Republican presidential vote margin modeled as a function of county-specific demographic and geographic factors. Further details on the estimation and validation of the city-level partisanship measures are discussed in the Appendix B.

immigrants to spillover to the city's jurisdiction. Due to data availability, we cannot directly measure whether a neighboring municipal government imposed exclusionary measures against immigrants. However, because the adoption of immigrant legislation is a highly political matter over which liberals and conservatives adopt starkly different positions, we use the Republican vote share of the neighboring counties as a proxy for their partisan composition.

To account for the possibility that anti-immigrant proposals stem from local competition over resources, we include measures of logged median household income and real estate prices in the city.[9] We also control for the city's reliance on industries that are heavily dependent on immigrant labor. On the one hand, cities that rely on industries that demand immigrant labor may be less likely to consider anti-immigrant policies because of the value of low-skilled migrants to the city's economy. However, having a large share of low-skilled job availability may induce wage competition with local residents and group conflict over resources, thereby increasing the likelihood of the restrictive measures (Gay, 2006). To account for this economic competition effect, we include the percent of residents employed in industries that are understood to rely heavily on immigrant workers – namely agriculture, mining and construction.[10] Finally, the model also conditions on the share of the population that is African American, the share Hispanic, the share Asian, the logged population, and the logged population density.[11]

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[9]We multiply impute a small subset of cities that lack data on the real estate prices (King et al., 2001), although the results are not sensitive to this choice. Listwise deletion eliminates 10% of the data, producing a consistent coefficient on the share of foreign-born population in neighboring counties with regards to both magnitude and direction.

[10]Hereinafter, we refer to this measure as a "labor market demand". We use the U.S. Census County Business Patterns data collected at a zip-code level and aggregate up to the city level. We identify agriculture, mining, and construction industries using Standard Industrial Classification code (see Ramakrishnan and Wong, 2010).

[11]Variable descriptions and summary statistics are provided in the Appendix A.

## 3.4 Model

We apply a standard EHA specification which models the predicted probability of anti-immigrant policy adoption by decade for municipalities that have not yet adopted the policy in the previous decade. Our main specification uses a linear probability model for ease of exposition, although we confirm our results are robust to limited dependent variable models such as logistic regressions and probits.[12] Our baseline specification predicts variation in local ordinance proposals as a function of both the level and change in the share of immigrant populations in neighboring areas. Formally, for city $i$ in $t = \{1990, 2000, 2010\}$,

$$\text{Ord}_{i,t} = \alpha_i + \delta_t + \beta_1 \text{Imm}_{j,t} + \beta_2 \Delta \text{Imm}_{j,t} + \rho \mathbf{X}_{i,t} + \gamma \mathbf{X}_{j,t} + \varepsilon_{i,t} \tag{2}$$

where $\text{Ord}_{i,t} = \{0, 1\}$ is the conditional expectation that a city considers a proposal for anti-immigrant ordinance. $\text{Imm}_{j,t}$ represents the share of immigrants in city $i$'s surrounding areas $j$ in year $t$, and $\Delta \text{Imm}_{j,t}$ represents the change in the share of immigrants between $t$ and a decade prior. $\mathbf{X}_{i,t}$ and $\mathbf{X}_{j,t}$ are vectors of the city- and neighboring area-specific controls, respectively. $\alpha_i$ and $\delta_t$ are fixed effects for city and year, respectively.

While we account for both level and change of immigrant population in neighboring areas, our primary quantity of interest is $\beta_1$, which, under conditional ignorability, identifies the total effect of the level of immigrant population in nearby areas. We include both the level and change in neighboring foreign-born populations. While a city may be sensitive to abrupt demographic changes happening to its residents' "backyards", a city may be less sensitive to dynamic changes occurring beyond its borders. Instead, a city may exhibit more threatened responses upon observing nearby localities with immigrant-heavy communities

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[12]Results using alternative models are included in the Appendix F.4. We appeal to the discussion in Angrist and Pischke (2008) regarding OLS as the best linear approximation to the conditional expectation function.

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as these represent a stock for potential future inflows. For instance, a city whose adjacent regions carry an insignificant number of immigrants may not even notice their presence, regardless of how fast the population has grown. Conversely, a city neighboring a large immigrant community is likely both aware of this population, but also view it as a source for future inflows, regardless of whether this community is growing or shrinking.

Given that we are collapsing to decades, we might be ignoring important variation over time that may explain the city's decision to consider a particular policy. In order to exploit the within-decade variation in estimating the effect, we also run an EHA model using annual-level data from 2000 to 2011 where we define the neighboring areas' immigrant populations in 2000 as the time-invariant treatment variable. Formally, for city $i$ in $t = \{2000, ..., 2011\}$

$$\text{Ord}_{i,t} = \alpha_i + \delta_t + \beta_1 \text{Imm}_{j,2000} + \beta_2 \Delta \text{Imm}_{j,2000} + \rho \mathbf{X}_{i,2000} + \gamma \mathbf{X}_{j,2000} + \varepsilon_{i,t} \qquad (3)$$

where $\text{Ord}_{i,t}$ is now the conditional expectation that a city considers an anti-immigrant ordinance in year $t$, and $\text{Imm}_{j,2000}$ and $\Delta \text{Imm}_{j,2000}$ represent percent immigrant in city $i$'s surrounding areas $j$ in year 2000 and the change in the percent immigrant between 1990 and 2000, respectively. Given this set up, it is crucial that we use time-invariant control variables measured at the start of our period of analysis in order to avoid post-treatment bias (Egami, 2020). Therefore, we use the city- and neighboring area-specific controls measured in 2000.

Importantly, the annual EHA model allows us to estimate longer-term effects of the demographic composition in neighboring areas on a city's ordinance considerations. The direct applications of the standard EHA only work for the immediate future outcome, which, in our analysis, estimates the predicted probability of anti-immigrant policy adoption at year $t$ for municipalities that have not yet adopted the policy in $t-1$. But one might be interested in the long run consequences of *ex ante* immigration, specifically $Ord_{i,t+s}$ with $s > 0$. These longer-run dynamics can account for the time it may take for local governments to respond to changes in neighboring foreign-born populations. For example, the process by which local

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residents recognize the existence of large neighboring immigrant populations, raise the issue with local officials, and have their proposals considered takes time. Furthermore, if it is the case that the media plays an important mediating role, there may also be delays in local news coverage. However the information reaches the attention of the primary stakeholders, there are reasons to believe that the local government's propensity to consider new immigration ordinances may not be immediately observed.

To measure the dynamics of anti-immigrant ordinance in response to neighboring foreign-born populations, we move beyond the standard EHA. We instead estimate this longer-term effect using the recursive EHA estimator that – as its name suggests – recursively estimates the EHA model to appropriately account for the inherent post-treatment bias in these methods (Egami, 2020). First, we estimate $s + 1$ standard EHA models using equation (3) where each model predicts the outcome measured at $j \in \{0, 1, ..., s\}$ years after the treatment administration using the same model specification, and obtain predicted probabilities under high (i.e., treatment) and low (i.e., control) stocks of immigrant population in nearby areas. We define high and low stocks based on the inter-quartile range of neighboring immigrant populations from the data, described in the next section. Second, for each unit, we recursively multiply the predicted probabilities to estimate the long-term adoption rate to quantify estimates of the probability of considering anti-immigrant ordinance *at or before* $s$ year after the treatment administration. Formally, we estimate

$$1 - \Pi_{j=0}^{s}\{1 - \hat{p}_{i,t+j}(d)\} \tag{4}$$

where $\hat{p}_{i,t+j}(d)$ represents predicted probabilities from each model estimated separately for treatment value $d \in \{high, low\}$. Substantively, this allows us to chart the growing divergence in the probability a treated city considers anti-immigrant legislation relative to a control city as a function of initial levels of neighboring foreign-born populations. By averaging over units, we obtain the treatment estimates of the nearby immigrant population for

both the immediate outcomes and also future outcomes up to $s$ years since the population change. To compute standard errors of the recursive EHA estimator, we use a quasi-Bayesian approximation (King, Tomz and Wittenberg, 2000).[13]

## 3.5   Assumptions

Our methods must be evaluated in light of their required assumptions, which we make explicit here. First, EHA models assume that units do not revert, meaning that once a municipality considers an anti-immigrant ordinance, it is removed from the analysis. While it may be the case that a given ordinance we observe may be tabled, modified, or repealed in the next time period, we never observe an instance where an anti-immigrant ordinance converts to pro-immigrant ordinance in the data we analyze. However, we argue that our approach is appropriate because we are interested in how the neighboring environment influences how local government makes legislative decisions on immigration issues for the first time. In doing so, we isolate the spatial effect of proximate immigrant populations on the local government's policy decision from other external factors (e.g., media coverage after the policy adoption) that may complicate the government decision *after* the initial decision. Insofar as our interpretation of the consideration of anti-immigrant ordinance is akin to a "willingness" to consider certain types of policy in the sense of a shifting Overton Window, we believe this assumption is justified.

Second, the binary outcome measure only accounts for restrictive versus no policy targeting immigrants, which does not account for pro-immigrant ordinances. We identified 75 cities which considered pro-immigrant legislation in our dataset and remove these from our data in the main results following the advice of Ramakrishnan and Wong (2010), who argue against including cities with both pro- and anti-immigrant policies as it is more accurate to "model policy making as starting in a neutral state, from which cities can go 'pro' or

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[13]We provide a detailed description of the recursive EHA estimator in Appendix C.

'con.' Thus we need two separate models to estimate deviations from the neural status-quo state" (83). However, we confirm our findings are robust to their inclusion, treating them as zeros, in the Appendix F.1. We also predict consideration of pro-immigrant ordinances, dropping cities who consider anti-immigrant ordinances, and find a negative association between neighboring populations and pro-immigrant ordinances (see Appendix F.2).

Third, a causal interpretation of our estimates requires an assumption of conditional ignorability, meaning that, after conditioning on other predictors of local anti-immigrant ordinance, proximity to neighboring foreign-born populations is as-good-as-random. The plausibility of this claim rests on both a belief that we have sufficiently identified these confounds, and that a linear regression model is sufficient to partial out their variation. We implement covariate balancing propensity scores (CBPS; Imai and Ratkovic, 2014) to bolster the latter claim, relaxing the parametric functional form of our estimation strategy.[14] Nevertheless, we acknowledge the limitations inherent in our analysis of observational data, and argue that – even when viewed as conditional correlations – our findings are nevertheless important and instructive to the existing literature on local policymaking in the context of immigration.

# 4    Results

First, we run our model excluding the neighboring area-related factors, as shown in Table 1 column 1.The result indicates a positive effect of change in local demographics: when all other predictors are held constant, a shift from a community whose immigrant population represents the 10th percentile to one representing the 90th percentile results in a 1.5 percentage point increase in the probability of considering an anti-immigrant proposal. The result

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[14]We provide a more thorough methodological discussion of why we prefer CBPS to other weighting or matching methods in Appendix D.

confirms that local immigrant populations – specifically the change thereof – are important determinants of the city's proclivity toward anti-immigrant legislation (Hopkins, 2010; Newman, 2013; Steil and Vasi, 2014; Walker and Leitner, 2011).

Next, to test our hypothesis, we include our main variables of interest, namely the change in the share of foreign-born populations, along with the levels, of the neighboring counties' demographics. The results, reported in column 2, indicate that the level of immigration in neighboring counties, rather than the change, increases the probability that a city considers an anti-immigrant proposal. Substantively, when the stock of immigrants living in neighboring counties increases by 10 percentage points (which is equivalent to the standard deviation of the predictor), the probability of a city considering anti-immigrant legislation increases by almost two percentage points, all else equal. Given that the mean probability of considering anti-immigrant legislation is roughly two percent in our data, this estimate implies that the probability a city would consider an exclusionary measure against immigrants increases by 62% if their neighboring counties have a noticeable immigrant community. Furthermore, including these county-specific explanatory variables in the model augments Hopkin's (2010) finding as the change in a city's immigration level becomes an even stronger predictor of a city's decision to consider an anti-immigrant policies. These results are robust to alternative estimation strategies that use multilevel models with state and year random effects (column 3).

The preceding discussion focuses on simple correlations between the foreign-born populations in a city's neighboring counties and the likelihood that the city considers a restrictive measure against immigrants. To bolster this interpretation, we apply covariate balancing propensity scores (CBPS, Imai and Ratkovic 2014), which balances cities in our sample data on their pre-treatment covariates. We choose pre-treatment covariates that capture the most plausible alternative explanations for why we would observe variation in anti-immigrant ordinance proposals, including the political preferences of these cities and their neighbors

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Table 1: Effect of Immigrant Populations in Neighboring Counties on City Ordinance

| | Dependent Variable: Consideration of Anti-Immigrant Ordinance | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | *No Neighboring Cnty Factors* | *Baseline* | *Multilevel* | *Baseline Weighted* |
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
| % Immigrant, i | −0.002 | −0.007 | −0.005 | −0.033 |
| | (0.004) | (0.005) | (0.006) | (0.020) |
| Δ % Immigrant, i | 0.007** | 0.010** | 0.010*** | 0.027** |
| | (0.003) | (0.004) | (0.004) | (0.013) |
| % Immigrant, j | | 0.015** | 0.010* | 0.050** |
| | | (0.008) | (0.006) | (0.020) |
| Δ % Immigrant, j | | −0.006 | −0.006 | −0.010 |
| | | (0.005) | (0.004) | (0.014) |
| % Black, i | −0.002 | −0.003 | −0.001 | 0.003 |
| | (0.003) | (0.003) | (0.003) | (0.006) |
| % Asian, i | −0.004 | −0.003 | −0.003 | 0.001 |
| | (0.004) | (0.004) | (0.005) | (0.009) |
| % Hispanic, i | 0.009*** | 0.008** | 0.007 | −0.005 |
| | (0.003) | (0.003) | (0.005) | (0.013) |
| log(Income, i) | −0.0003 | −0.001 | −0.001 | −0.040** |
| | (0.004) | (0.004) | (0.005) | (0.018) |
| log(Real Estate, i) | 0.00000 | −0.0003 | 0.001 | 0.014* |
| | (0.003) | (0.003) | (0.004) | (0.008) |
| % Immig Job, i | 0.001 | 0.001 | 0.0001 | −0.005 |
| | (0.002) | (0.002) | (0.003) | (0.008) |
| log(Density, i) | −0.007** | −0.008** | −0.008** | 0.009 |
| | (0.004) | (0.004) | (0.003) | (0.012) |
| log(Pop, i) | 0.018*** | 0.019*** | 0.018*** | 0.018*** |
| | (0.004) | (0.004) | (0.003) | (0.006) |
| % GOP Vote, i | 0.009** | 0.006* | 0.006* | 0.035*** |
| | (0.003) | (0.004) | (0.004) | (0.013) |
| % GOP Vote, j | | 0.008* | 0.006 | 0.008 |
| | | (0.005) | (0.004) | (0.014) |
| Constant | | | 0.028* | |
| | | | (0.016) | |
| State FE | Y | Y | N | Y |
| Year FE | Y | Y | N | Y |
| Cluster SE | Y | Y | N | Y |
| Observations | 3,996 | 3,996 | 3,996 | 3,996 |
| $R^2$ | 0.056 | 0.058 | | 0.159 |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | 0.042 | 0.043 | | 0.145 |
| Log Likelihood | | | 1,776.421 | |
| # of Cities | 1,420 | 1,420 | 1,420 | 1,420 |
| Mean Ordinance Prob. | 2.47% | 2.47% | 2.47% | 2.47% |

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01. All variables are standardized to mean 0 and standard deviation 1 based on the full data. Reported standard errors, excluding model 3, are clustered by city and year and rely on Huber/White robust standard errors.

(measured with Republican presidential vote shares); financial measures of overall wealth (household income and real estate values); the city's own measures of immigrant populations (both decennial changes and the current level); and additional city-specific socioeconomic predictors such as share of Asian, Black, and Hispanic population and the unemployment rate.

Column 4 of Table 1 reports our results using the covariate balancing propensity score method. Our main findings are strengthened by the inclusion of these covariate balancing propensity score weights, reinforcing the causal interpretation of our results. After balancing on the pre-treatment covariates, the estimated coefficient on the adjacent counties' immigration level doubles from our baseline model reported in column 2: comparing two similarly situated cities, the one whose surroundings have one standard deviation (roughly 10%) larger share of immigrant population are 5 percentage points more likely to consider an anti-immigrant policies, or an increase of over 200%.

Taken together, these results suggest that (1) a city's consideration of anti-immigrant ordinance is influenced not just by the changing demographics within its borders, but also by the demographic composition of its neighboring areas, and (2) the dynamics of these influences differ. Specifically, a city is more likely to propose an anti-immigrant ordinance when its *internal* foreign-born population *increases* abruptly, but is more likely to consider the policy when its *neighboring* foreign-born population is *large*.[15]

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[15]We re-estimate our model including covariates that control for the population size and land area of neighboring localities and find no substantive differences in the results. Another consideration is the role of protests: the presence of pro-immigrant protests may inhibit the passage of anti-immigrant ordinances. Indeed, including a social movement indicator for those cities that had pro-immigrant marches in Spring 2006 shows that, all else equal, cities where the marches were held are less likely to consider anti-immigrant policies in 2010, compared to those places where marches did not occur. Importantly, including the protest

As discussed, we are also interested in looking at the longer-term outcomes. We estimate the effect of the neighboring immigrant populations on the immediate future outcome ($s = 0$) as well as up to five years after the treatment. The results are shown in Figure 3.[16] On the left panel, we present the difference in the probability of considering an anti-immigrant ordinance between a "control" city whose neighboring areas' immigrant population represents the 10th percentile in our data (roughly 2.5 percent of total neighboring population) and a "treated" city whose nearby immigrant population represents the 90th percentile in our data (roughly 30 percent). The average treatment effect on the immediate future outcome is approximately 5 percentage points (s.e. $= 1.31$), and gets larger over time. For example, two years after experiencing the large stock of its neighboring immigrant population, the estimated probability of a treated city considering an anti-immigrant ordinance increases by more than 15 percentage points on average (s.e. $= 4.04$), compared to a control city with a smaller neighboring immigrant population. This estimate increases to over 36 percentage points (s.e. $= 7.3$) five years after. Substantively similar conclusions are found if we reduce the comparison to between cities at the 75th versus 25th percentiles, as visualized in the right panel of Figure 3.

# 5    Mechanisms: How Information Transmits

Our main results demonstrate that areas with adjacent foreign born populations enact more restrictive ordinances. Implicit in this finding is the assumption that the relevant actors are aware of the neighboring foreign-born populations, which requires some information transmission mechanism from "there" to "here". We provide descriptive evidence of two

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indicator augments our finding as the nearby counties' immigration level becomes an even stronger determinant of city's restrictive policy proposal. See Appendix F.5.

[16]See Appendix E.1 for the regression result of equation 3 and E.2 for the regression results of the recursive EHA models.
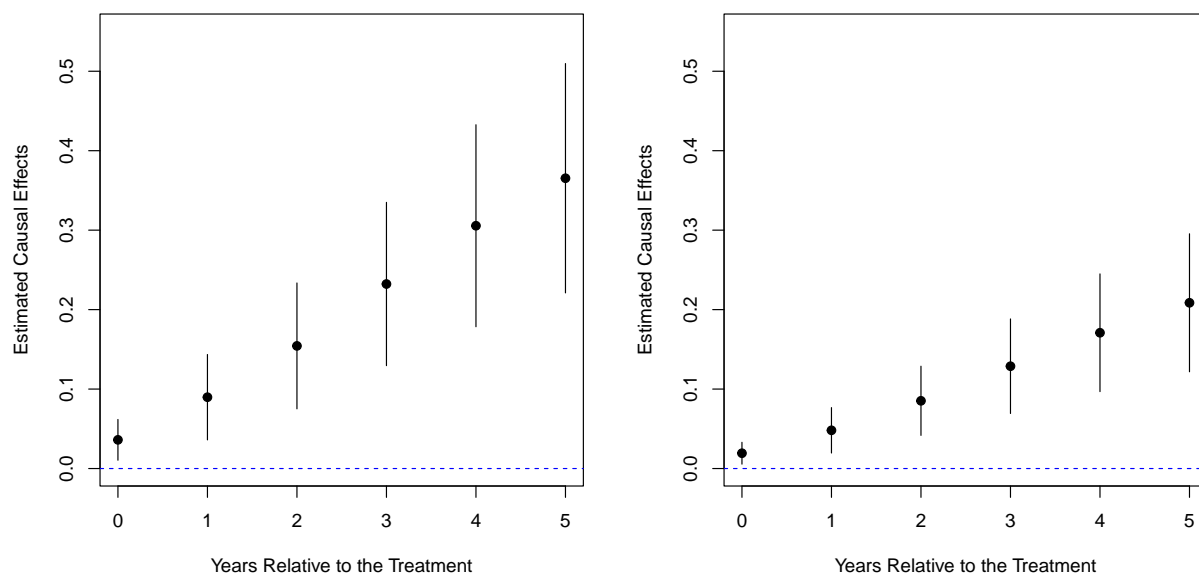
Figure 3: Effect of neighboring areas' immigrant population on city's anti-immigrant ordinance considerations from the recursive EHA estimator with their 95% confidence intervals. The estimated effects on the immediate future outcome as well as longer-term outcomes up to five years relative to the timing of the treatment $s \in \{0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5\}$.

potential mechanisms: direct observation via commuting and local media coverage.

The first mechanism is direct exposure in which city residents are more likely to travel to or through adjacent areas home to foreign born populations. If city residents frequently travel to neighboring areas, they are more likely to witness the mass of immigrant population. On the other hand, when most of resident mobility is confined within the boundary of the city itself, the information about the adjacent population may not travel as much. We test this mechanism using detailed data on commuting patterns obtained from the 1990, 2000, and 2010 Census. Treating the flow of commuting patterns as a proxy for direct exposure, we examine whether the relationship between nearby foreign born populations and increased restrictive ordinances is stronger when the city has heavier commuting flows with the adjacent county.

The second mechanism is a shared information environment, in which city residents learn about neighboring foreign-born populations via local news coverage. We test this

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mechanism by constructing two different measures of local media environment. First, we measure the proportion of neighboring counties that are in the same Designated Market Area (DMA) as the city of interest, thereby receiving the same local channels. Second, we obtain Frequency Modulation (FM) radio service contour data from Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to measure common radio media zones. These data provide the polygon area in which the service in each station propagates to. We overlap this radii information with shapefiles of cities and adjacent counties to measure the extent to which the city-county dyads have access to the same radio broadcast service.

Across all measures, we treat our proxies as interaction terms, and test whether the relationship between nearby foreign born populations and increased restrictive ordinances is stronger when the city has heavier commuting flows with the adjacent county, shares a DMA, or has a greater overlap in radio and television broadcasts. Formally, we run the following specification:

$$
\begin{aligned}
\text{Ord}_{i,t} = \; & \alpha_i + \delta_t + \rho \mathbf{X}_{i,t} \\
& + \beta_1 \text{Imm}_{j,t} + \lambda_1 \text{Trans}_{i,j} + \lambda_2 \text{Imm}_{j,t} * \text{Trans}_{i,j} \\
& + \beta_2 \Delta \text{Imm}_{j,t} + \lambda_3 \Delta \text{Imm}_{j,t} * \text{Trans}_{i,j} \\
& + \gamma \mathbf{X}_{j,t} + \lambda_3 \mathbf{X}_{j,t} * \text{Trans}_{i,j} + \varepsilon_{i,t}
\end{aligned}
\tag{5}
$$

where Imm is the share foreign-born, Trans is either the commuting zone, DMA, or FCC measure of information transmission, $\mathbf{X}$ is a vector of controls described above, and $i$ indexes the city considering the ordinance and $j$ indexes the neighboring areas. As above, we implement city and year fixed effects with $\alpha_i$ and $\delta_t$ respectively. We are interested primarily in the $\lambda_2$ coefficient which captures the marginal effect of larger immigrant populations in county $j$ on restrictive ordinances when $j$ has a stronger transmission pathway, measured as either commuting flows or one of our three proxies for media information environments.

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Our findings are summarized in Table 2, where the first two columns summarize the results on commuting patterns, and the subsequent two columns display the results for the media pathway, broken out into shared DMAs, and shared radio stations. We find a significant and positive interaction coefficient only for the inflow measure (column 1), capturing the proportion of total inflows to city $i$ that come from neighboring county $j$. While the outflow measure is also positive (column 2), it is not significant at conventional levels.

Table 2: Descriptive Tests of Mechanisms

|  | Inflows (1) | Outflows (2) | DMA (3) | Radio (4) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| % Immigrant, i | -0.020 | -0.019 | -0.014 | -0.015 |
|  | (0.021) | (0.020) | (0.022) | (0.022) |
| Δ % Immigrant, i | 0.009 | 0.009 | 0.010 | 0.009 |
|  | (0.007) | (0.006) | (0.008) | (0.008) |
| % Immigrant, j | 0.007 | 0.003 | 0.005 | 0.002 |
|  | (0.005) | (0.004) | (0.005) | (0.006) |
| % Immigrant, j × % Inflow j → i | 0.009** |  |  |  |
|  | (0.004) |  |  |  |
| % Immigrant, j × % Outflow i → j |  | 0.012 |  |  |
|  |  | (0.008) |  |  |
| % Immigrant, j × Same DMA |  |  | -0.011 |  |
|  |  |  | (0.008) |  |
| % Immigrant, j × 90% overlap radio |  |  |  | 0.0004 |
|  |  |  |  | (0.004) |
| State | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Year | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| *Fit statistics* |  |  |  |  |
| Observations | 21,390 | 21,494 | 17,176 | 17,172 |
| $R^2$ | 0.118 | 0.117 | 0.158 | 0.156 |
| Within $R^2$ | 0.028 | 0.029 | 0.031 | 0.029 |

Note: $^*$p<0.1; $^{**}$p<0.05; $^{***}$p<0.01. Standard errors are clustered at the city-level. Column (1) looks at heterogeneity of neighboring populations by the proportion of commuting inflows that come from the neighboring county. Column (2) looks at heterogeneity of neighboring populations by the proportion of commuting outflows that traveled to the neighboring county. Column (3) looks at heterogeneity of neighboring populations by whether they share the same designated market area (DMA) as the city. Column (4) looks at heterogeneity of neighboring populations by whether 90% of both the city and the neighboring county are serviced by the same radio signal. See Appendix E.3 for full regression results.

Importantly, there is no evidence that sharing a media environment between the city where the ordinances are considered and the adjacent counties where the immigrant populations reside matters to our story, regardless of whether the media is defined as DMA, or the overlap of radio broadcast service. In the case of the DMA, the coefficient is of the opposite sign. One possible explanation might be that our measure of shared media environments is too coarse to test our theory. For example, if sharing a media environment means more positive coverage of immigrant populations, this might explain the negative coefficient estimate for the DMA indicator. Future work that incorporates richer measures of local news content (i.e., the proportion of coverage pertaining to immigrants and the tone thereof) and more detailed measures of commuting patterns (i.e., Census block group level flows) would be useful to confirm the suggestive evidence documented in Table 2.

# 6 Motivations: Source of Anti-Immigrant Attitudes

Our main analysis finds support for our *ex ante* immigration policy hypothesis, in which city policymakers attempt to disincentivize future inflows of foreign-born populations that reside nearby. But what are their motivations for doing so? We test three mechanisms – economic, political, and cultural – that may explain why a policymaker might pursue the type of *ex ante* anti-immigrant legislation we document. As further described in the Appendix G, we find little support for either economic or political motivations, suggesting that the concern with barring new entrants is not a function of labor market competition felt by local employees, and manifests similarly in Democrat- and Republican-leaning localities. Here, we document evidence in support of the cultural threat hypothesis wherein the effect on restrictive policy is strongest when neighboring foreign-porn populations hail from Latin America.

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## 6.1 Region of Origin Heterogeneity

The main analyses indicate that anti-immigrant ordinance at the city level is more likely to be considered in cities whose neighboring areas have higher shares of foreign-born residents. One plausible explanation for this pattern proposed in the existing research emphasizes the theory of group conflict which focuses on humans' need for positively differentiating their own group from other groups (Tajfel et al., 1979). According to this cultural threat perspective, members of distinct out-groups (i.e., immigrants) are seen as threatening as they challenge the cultural identity of native residents. Observational studies find a positive association between anti-immigrant attitudes and negative attitudes toward multicultural practices (Espenshade and Calhoun, 1993; Citrin et al., 1997; Chandler and Tsai, 2001). Recent studies compare natives' responses to immigrants by manipulating immigrant characteristics such as country of origin or language skills, and also find strong support for this claim (Malhotra, Margalit and Mo, 2013; Valentino, Brader and Jardina, 2013; Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2015).

In this framework, immigrant populations differ in the degree to which they threaten group cohesion based on ethnic characteristics such as religion, culture, and language. These differences generate prejudice and stereotypes that can further inflame out-group antipathy among local natives. We probe for evidence consistent with this explanation by asking whether the *ex ante* anti-immigrant legislation is more likely where neighboring immigrant populations are from a particular continent-of-origin.[17]

We re-estimate our main analyses in two ways. First, we reproduce our main specification by substituting the neighboring counties' foreign-born population measures with each of the four measures of continents-of-origin-specific foreign-born population one-by-one. For

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[17]Data limitations preclude a more granular test of *ex ante* immigration policy by country-of-origin.

example, the key variables $\text{Imm}_{j,t}$ and $\Delta\text{Imm}_{j,t}$ in equation 2 are replaced with $\text{Europe}_{j,t}$ and $\Delta\text{Europe}_{j,t}$, respectively, to estimate the effect of European immigrant populations in neighboring counties on a city's policy decision. This analysis replicates the weighted specification from Table 1, focusing on each continent of origin in isolation. Second, we test the relationship between neighboring foreign-born populations and *ex ante* immigrant policy by including all four measures of continents-of-origin-specific foreign-born population in a single regression.
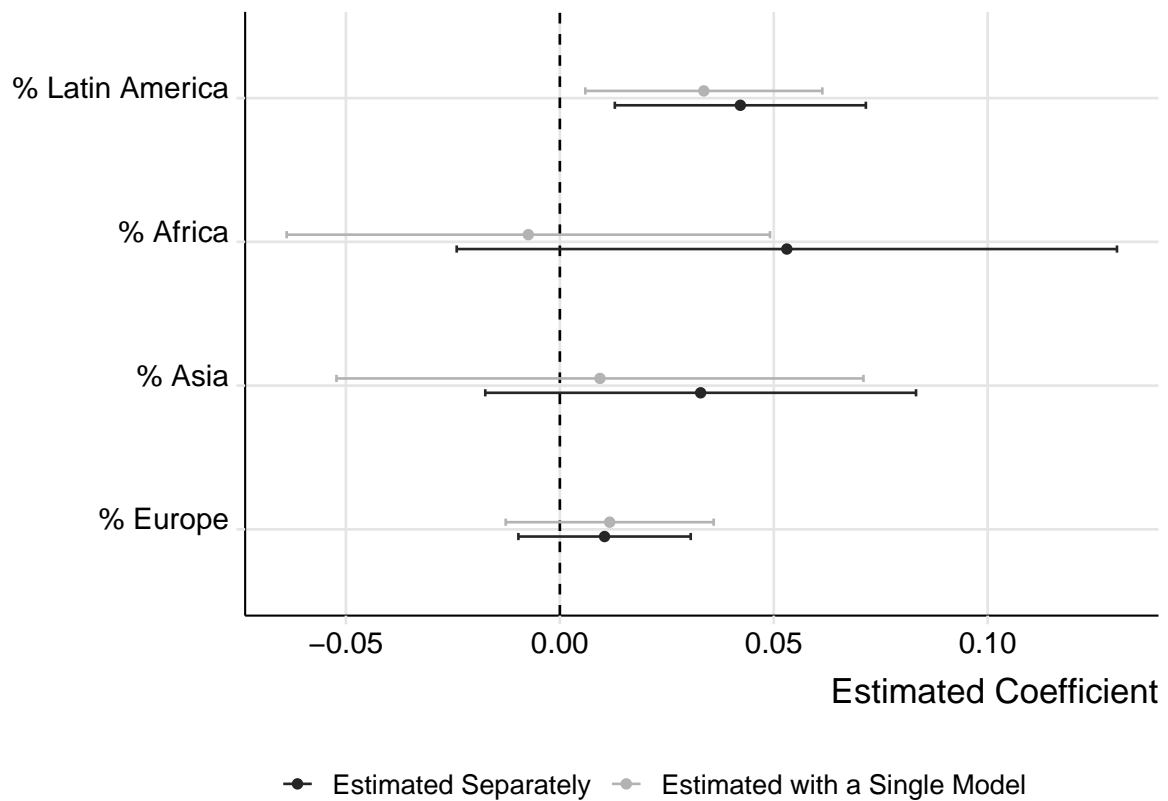


Figure 4: Coefficient estimates and 95% confidence intervals (x-axis) for the share of the neighboring counties with foreign-born populations by continent of origin (y-axis).

These estimates are summarized in Figure 4, with black points representing the estimates from models in which each of the continents-of-origin-specific factors are estimated

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separately and the grey points representing the estimates from the combined analysis.[18] As illustrated, there is consistent evidence that foreign-born populations in neighboring areas increase the likelihood of a city pursuing anti-immigrant legislation regardless of the continents of origin of these groups, albeit to varying degrees of statistical and substantive significance. When estimated separately, the estimates on immigrant populations from Latin America exhibit a large and statistically significant relationship on the probability of a city's anti-immigrant ordinance. The estimates on immigrant populations from Africa and Asia are not significant at the conventional thresholds, but they are positive and of a similar magnitude to the estimates on Latin American-originating groups. The estimated coefficient on immigrants originating from Europe is consistently the smallest and, while positive, is not statistically significant.

However, some of these patterns may bundle the influence of multiple foreign-born populations together. For example, if immigrants from Africa and Latin America co-locate geographically, a specification that separately estimates their correlation with anti-immigrant ordinance is unable to disentangle their relative influence. Thus, we combine all measures together and plot these coefficient estimates in grey, finding much weaker relationships between foreign-born populations from all continents of origin with the exception of Latin America, whose estimate increases in both substantive and statistical significance.

These findings are broadly consistent with the cultural threat hypothesis which predicts that anti-immigrant attitudes and policies are exaggerated in the face of more culturally distant immigrant groups (i.e., Latin Americans) relative to culturally proximate ones (i.e., Europeans). However, the lack of significant associations with foreign-born populations from Asia and Africa complicates the simplicity of the story, given that both continents are home to groups with different cultures and languages. We posit that the significant findings for Latin America alone reflects the greater salience of this immigrant group in the national

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[18]See Appendix E.4 for regression results.

discourse about immigration, perpetrated by both media and elite cues, and is consistent with much of the recent work on immigration attitudes and the information environment (Valentino, Brader and Jardina, 2013; Hopkins, 2010).

# 7   Conclusion

In this paper, we test the influence of geographically proximate foreign-born populations on anti-immigrant ordinance at the city-level in the United States. We argue that nearby immigrant populations induce a perceived threat among native residents and local policymakers, as it represents the stock from which potential future inflows might enter their jurisdiction. The presence of immigrant populations in surrounding areas can prompt an *ex ante* response by city policymakers in an attempt to prevent future immigrant residents even before they arrive. We show that these neighboring populations exhibit an independent effect on city's anti-immigrant legislation, even after controlling for city-level measures of the stock and change in immigrant groups. Furthermore, we provide evidence of delays in a local government's decision to consider immigration issues upon recognizing the large stock of neighboring immigrant population via recursive EHA, which shows that the probability that a city considers an anti-immigrant ordinances increases over time.

How do policy-makers and/or their constituents come to learn about these neighboring populations? We provide exploratory evidence of heterogeneous effects by either "direct" exposure or media coverage. For the former, we demonstrate that the increase in anti-immigrant ordinance in response to neighboring foreign-born populations is larger in cities that experience larger commuting flows with these neighboring areas, although the interacted coefficient is statistically significant only for inflows (i.e., neighboring populations driving into the city for work). Conversely, we find no evidence to support the media transmission mechanism. Sharing similar radio stations has a positive but small and insignificant mod-

erating relationship, and sharing the same designated market area is negatively associated with increased anti-immigrant ordinance, although this too is not statistically significant. We tentatively conclude that learning of these neighboring populations in a way that stimulates the consideration of anti-immigrant ordinances is primarily via direct exposure, especially when neighboring populations commute into one's city. However, a more careful exploration of the media pathway is warranted, particularly one that separates positive from negative media coverage. We leave this to future work.

In evaluating the explanatory power of three dominant explanations behind the *ex ante* anti-immigrant attitudes, we find that the influence of neighboring foreign-born populations is not related to the labor market demand for foreign workers in the city, nor does it vary significantly across the partisan affiliation of city residents. However, in line with recent research on the cultural threat hypothesis, we find that the relationship is stronger when focusing on immigrant populations originating in Latin America compared to Asia, Africa and Europe.

Taken together, our research is contributes to the study of xenophobic policy-making at the local level, while introducing a previously neglected dimension: neighboring foreign-born populations. This contribution suggests several extensions beyond the scope of our paper. First, we are unable to determine how much of the policy-making response is driven by local legislators satisfying constituent or interest group demands, and how much is driven by changes within the politicians themselves. Second, our empirical results are descriptive analyses of observational data. While we implement a variety of methods to bolster the causal interpretation of our findings, future work should confirm our findings with more internally valid causal evidence. Third, our tests of the transmission mechanisms are coarse, which may explain their marginal statistical significance. In particular, future work that characterizes the content of local media coverage within a DMA would better disentangle how much of the effect of neighboring populations is driven by media framing. Finally, due to

data limitations, our analyses predicts only whether anti-immigrant legislation is considered, not whether it passes. We argue that this is a substantively important measure insofar as it captures a shifting Overton window of what is legislatively feasible. Nevertheless, future work that separates what is proposed from what is enacted would improve our understanding of the processes by which policy outcomes respond to not just changing demographic patterns locally, but also to neighboring immigrant populations.

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