Pro-Trump Vote and US-Mexico Migration *

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Abstract

We study how the US presidential election of 2016 affected the subsequent inflow of Mexican-born immigrants. We use the "Matricula Consular de Alta Seguridad" data to construct proxies for annual inflows and internal movements of Mexican-born individuals, including undocumented immigrants, across US commuting zones. We find that a 10-percentage point increase in the Republican vote share in a commuting zone reduced inflows by 1.8 percent after the 2016 Trump election. The internal relocation of established Mexican immigrants primarily explains this reduction, though inflows of new immigrants decreased as well.

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Rising immigration to many Western democracies has coincided with the emergence of populist parties with strong anti-immigration platforms. This trend has spurred research on the causal role of immigration in the ascendance of populist, nationalist and anti-immigrant parties.[1] A less analyzed question is whether the advent of these parties and their local support has, in turn, reduced immigration, either through the adoption of restrictive policies, or by discouraging immigrants from moving to localities where nationalist parties have had more success.

In this paper, we study how the intensity of electoral success of a populist candidate in destination areas affects new immigrant inflows and the relocation of existing immigrants. Our empirical analysis focuses on the consequences of the 2016 US presidential election, in which, for the first time in recent decades, a candidate (Donald Trump) based his campaign on anti-immigration sentiment and populism. Unlike previous elections, where immigration was less of a partisan issue and Republican and Democratic presidential candidates held more moderate views, the 2016 the Republican vote share in a location became an expression of local anti-immigration support. We analyze whether a larger shift towards the Trump-led Republican party affected subsequent immigrant inflows to such locations.

To track the evolution of immigrant flows over time and their response to local electoral results, we use the *Matrículas Consulares de Alta Seguridad* (MCAS), identity cards issued to Mexican nationals residing in the US, including undocumented immigrants. Using the MCAS data, we construct bilateral migration flows from Mexican municipalities to US Commuting Zones (CZs) between 2008 and 2019. We distinguish between recently arrived and existing immigrants using newly issued versus renewed cards.

We find a reduction in post-2016 immigration flows to destinations in which the Republican vote share increased most relative to the 2012 presidential election. The estimated effect is stronger among established immigrants and is consistent with an internal relocation from Republican-leaning to Democrat-leaning areas. In contrast, newly arrived immigrants

[1] Edo et al. (2019), Halla et al. (2017), and Barone et al. (2016) find such connection.

respond less to local political conditions, especially those from Mexican municipalities with stronger migration networks. These results are robust to the inclusion of specific immigration policy indicators (Secure Communities Program), which suggests that local-level support for Trump may have discouraged immigrants beyond its effect on local enforcement. Overall, an increase in the 2016 Republican vote share induced immigrants with weaker networks and attachment to their destinations to relocate to locations they perceived to be less hostile.

1 Data and key trends

1.1 Migrant flows and networks

We use an extended version of the MCAS data, described in Caballero et al. (2018), to analyze how migration flows change over time in response to destination shocks. Our dataset comprises counts of matricula cards issued in each US county, by Mexican municipality of birth, and year of issuance (2008-2019), both for newly issued cards (newly arrived immigrants), valid for 5 years, and renewed cards (established immigrants).[2]

Appendix Figure A.1 shows the evolution of Mexican immigrant inflows as measured in the MCAS data. Overall, we see a decline in the total number of matriculas issued, consistent with the slowing of Mexican immigration to the US. The decline among newly arrived immigrants is more pronounced during the Great Recession (2008-2010), and flattens during the recovery (2011-2015). In the 2016-2019 period, we see a decline in both newly issued and renewed cards, coinciding with increased border enforcement during the Trump administration.

[2]After cleaning municipio and county names, our data include 9,764,929 matriculas. In Appendix B, we validate the MCAS dataset by documenting its consistency with the American Community Survey (ACS) and the Mexican Censo.

1.2 Voting data and attitudes

To measure the local-level intensity of the pro-Trump support in 2016, we use the percentage change in the Republican party vote share between the 2012 and the 2016 presidential elections, using county-level data from the *MIT Election Data and Science Lab*. We aggregate the voting outcomes (candidate and total votes) and construct party vote shares at the Commuting Zone (CZ) level. This level of aggregation ensures comparability over time for migration inflows, while fully capturing the within-state, local-level variation in political outcomes (e.g., between urban areas and rural counties).[3]

We further construct local-level measures of natives' attitudes using the *Cooperative Election Study* (CCES). Specifically, we construct indicators for respondents with conservative ideology and whom identify with the Republican party, as well as an indicator that captures anti-immigration attitudes (support for increased border enforcement).[4]

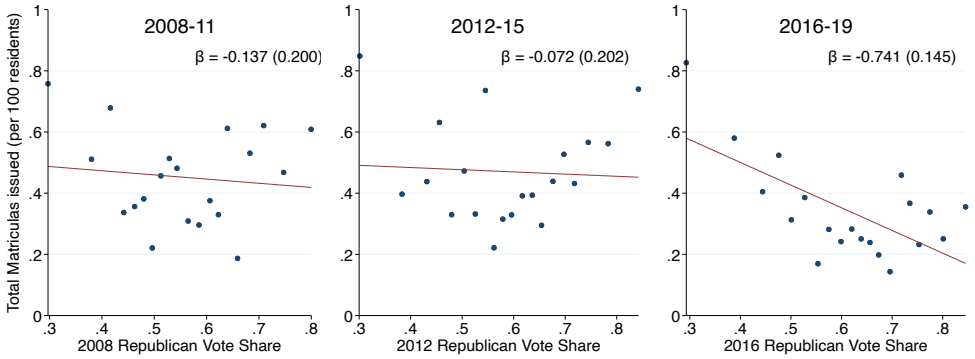
2 Results

Did the Trump election affect the geographical distribution of Mexican-born immigrants in the US? Figure 1 reveals a negative and significant correlation across CZs between the Republican vote share and total number of new cards and renewals (per 100 inhabitants) issued in 2016 and in the subsequent three years, but not in the wake of the 2008 or 2012 elections. Despite the striking patterns in the figures, omitted variable bias and reverse causality might contribute to a spurious correlation. The latter is especially relevant as recent evidence shows that the arrival of undocumented Mexican immigrants may increase local-level support for the Republican party (Tiburcio and Camarena, 2023; Mayda et al., 2022). We address these threats in the next section.

[3]While aggregating voting data leads to underestimating the Republican vote share in levels due to smaller counties being disproportionately Republican, the distributions overlap when considering the 2012-2016 change (Appendix Figure A.2).

[4]Following the literature, we drop counties with fewer than 5 individual respondents in a given year, and we then average the measures at the CZ level.

Figure 1: Correlations between inflows and Republican vote shares across CZs



Note: Binned scatter-plots across Commuting Zones, plotting the Republican vote share and total matriculas (per 100 residents in 2008) issued in the four years following the 2008, 2012 and 2016 presidential elections. β are the estimated coefficients (standard errors in parenthesis) from a simple regression of cumulated inflows on the vote share and a constant, separately for each time period.

2.1 Difference-in-Differences results

We estimate the following regression across destination CZs over time (2008-2019):

$$log(mig_{dt}) = \beta \Delta RepVoteSh_d^{2012-16} * Post_t^{2016} + \gamma' X_{dt} + \mu_d + \psi_{st} + \varepsilon_{dt} \qquad (1)$$

where mig_{dt} is the number of matriculas issued in year t to Mexican-born immigrants residing in CZ d; $\Delta RepVoteSh_d^{2012-16}$ is the percentage change in the Republican vote share in d between 2012 and 2016, which we interact with a post-2016 dummy;[5] X_{dt} is a vector of time-varying controls capturing local economic shocks (log average wage for low-skilled workers from the ACS) and immigration policy shocks (Secure Communities Program roll-out) at destination; and μ_d and ψ_{st} denote CZ and State-Year fixed effects (FEs). Standard errors are clustered at the CZ level.[6]

The coefficient of interest is β, capturing the differential effect of a shift of votes to the Republican party in 2016 relative to the 2012 share, conditional on controls, CZ and state-year fixed effects. Our specification resembles an intensity-of-treatment Difference-in-Differences specification, leveraging the differential intensity of the local vote shift towards

[5]The un-interacted share is absorbed by the CZ fixed effects.

[6]The estimating sample includes the 393 CZs for which there is at least 1 new and renewed matricula in each year between 2008-2019, which account for over 99.5% of total matriculas.

Table 1: Effect of Destination Political Shocks on Migrant Inflows

Outcome (log):	Total Matriculas		New	Renewed
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
%Δ Repub	-0.555	-1.013	-0.366	-0.547
Vote Sh 2012-16 ∗ Post	(0.142)	(0.188)	(0.204)	(0.261)
Log Average Wage		0.167	0.219	0.290
		(0.128)	(0.140)	(0.178)
Secure Communities		-0.053	-0.017	-0.006
		(0.025)	(0.028)	(0.046)
Observations	4,716	4,644	4,644	4,644
Observations (CZs)	393	387	387	387
R-squared	0.968	0.978	0.974	0.963
Avg Outcome	5.574	5.587	5.126	4.353
Year FE	Yes			
Commuting Zone FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
State-Year FE		Yes	Yes	Yes

Note: Standard errors clustered at the Commuting Zone level shown in parentheses.

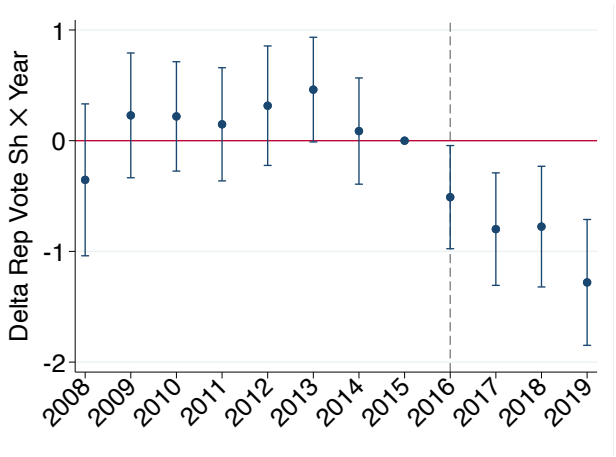
Trump in 2016. Importantly, the inclusion of state-year fixed effects creates a demanding specification, which absorbs the time-varying, unobservable determinants of immigrants' destination choices, such as state-level migration policy (e.g. omnibus enforcement bills).

Table 1 reports our main results. Column 1 includes only Year and CZ FEs, while Column 2 adds controls and State-Year FEs. Focusing on the more restrictive specification in Column 2, we observe a highly significant negative relationship in the post-2016 period between the change in the Republican vote share and total matriculas issued, in line with the naive correlations. Specifically, a 10-percentage point (≈1 standard deviation) increase in the Republican Vote Share translates to a 1.8% decrease in log inflows relative to the mean.

We then estimate the latter specification separately for newly arrived (Column 3) and established immigrants who renewed their cards (Column 4).[7] We find that the location choice of both groups is sensitive to the Trump shock, with a stronger response among existing immigrants than for new arrivals (1.2% vs 0.7% decrease for a 10 percentage point increase in $RepVoteSh$).

[7]The lower number of observations in Columns 2-4 is due to the inclusion of state-year FEs, which drops singleton CZs within a state (VT, RI, NH, CT, SD, AK).

Figure 2: Effect on Total Matriculas over time



Note: β_τ coefficients (and 95% C.I.) of the interaction between $\Delta RepVoteSh_d^{2012-16}$ and year indicators $I(t = \tau)$ in Equation 1 (in lieu of the $Post_t$ dummy), including controls and state-year FEs. Standard errors clustered at the CZ level.

Figure 2 shows the results of the event study version of Equation 1, where the $Post_t$ dummy is replaced by indicators for $t \in [2008, 2019]$.[8] Reassuringly, there is no evidence of pre-trends, supporting the underlying assumption in our model that locations that experienced a large Republican shift (versus those that became more Democratic) in 2016 had similar Mexican immigration trends prior to 2016, conditional on the controls and fixed effects. The effect begins to appear in 2016, plausibly as the Trump electoral campaign heightened the salience of anti-immigrant sentiment, and its magnitude increases over time in the post-election years.

We perform a battery of checks to assess the robustness and validity of our findings. First, we use an alternative definition of the Trump shock, using the 2008-2016 change in the Republican vote share between Obama's and Trump's first elections, as in Dahl et al. (2022); the estimates are nearly unchanged (Table A.2). When using a placebo shock as a validity check, namely the 2008-2012 change (Obama I - Obama II), the coefficients are statistically insignificant and less than half as large relative to the mean. Finally, our results are robust to excluding independent voters (Table A.3), controlling for lagged outcomes (Table A.4), and using Poisson Pseudo-Maximum Likelihood (PPML) estimation to deal

[8]The specification corresponds to Column 2 in the previous table, with state-year fixed effects.

with zeros (Table A.5), and are not driven by any specific US state (Figure A.3).

Overall, our findings show a clear negative relationship between local increases in support for the Republican party and the post-election net change in Mexican immigrants, which neither local immigration policies, state-by-year policy changes nor economic shocks explain. These results are consistent with the electoral support for Trump as an information shock for existing and would-be Mexican immigrants regarding how welcoming destination areas are towards immigrants.

An alternative interpretation is that natives' attitudes towards immigration changed systematically between the two election years. However, we find no evidence of a significant relationship between changes in natives' attitudes towards immigration, or changes in natives' ideology as reported in the CCES data, and the inflow of immigrants (Table A.1). These results are consistent with the interpretation that, while attitudes themselves are slow moving (Kustov et al., 2021), the Trump election communicated pre-existing anti-immigration attitudes to potential and existing immigrants, affecting their location choices.[9]

2.2 Mechanisms

Our empirical analysis shows that Mexican immigrants were less likely to locate in areas that experienced a stronger Republican shift in the Trump election of 2016. For new arrivals, the estimated effect could reflect a lower propensity to migrate to the US or a change in their location patterns conditional on moving. For established immigrants, both an increase in internal migration or return migration from Republican shifting locations could drive our results.

While we cannot directly separate these mechanisms, we can exploit the bilateral structure of the MCAS data to learn about the importance of each margin by estimating separate regressions based on *origin* information. We perform two tests. First, to assess the potential importance of return migration for established immigrants, we split the sample based on

[9]The results of these regressions should be interpreted with caution given the small number of respondents in the CCES.

whether the return migration rate in origin municipalities is above or below median post-2016.[10] A higher response to the Trump shock among immigrants from origins with more returnees would suggest that return migration is an important channel.

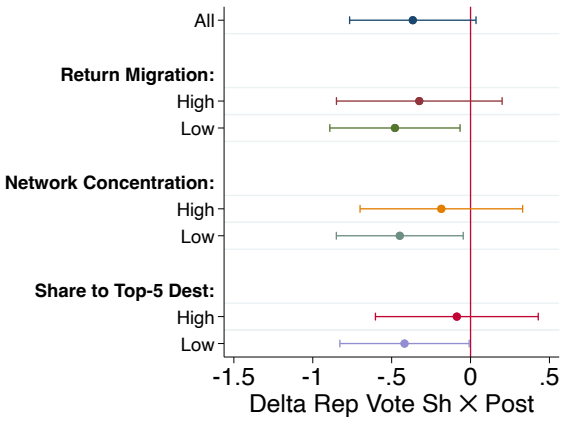
Second, we split Mexican municipalities of origin based on two proxies for the density of migration networks originating there: (i) an Herfindahl-Hirschman Index (HHI) measuring the concentration of immigrant shares to US destinations, and (ii) the combined share of immigrants to the top-5 destinations in 2006-2010. A longstanding literature on migration networks highlights the role of localized migration chains from specific origins to destinations in lowering the cost of migrating to specific locations (Munshi, 2003). If the Trump election reduced immigration flows by increasing the perceived cost of migration, we should observe a larger response among immigrants with greater ties to specific destinations.

Figure 3 shows the results of this exercise, separately for (a) newly arrived and (b) existing immigrants. For the new arrivals in Panel (a), the effects are driven by immigrants from origin areas with weaker networks, who are plausibly less tied to specific destinations and whose location decisions are relatively more sensitive to destination shocks. Panel (b) shows that the effect on existing immigrants is driven by municipalities with lower return migration rates, suggesting that internal relocation is the key driver of the estimated effect, rather than selective return migration. The strength of migration networks, in contrast, does not affect the estimates in Panel (b), consistent with networks being less important for established immigrants than for the newly arrived. Taken together, both pieces of evidence suggest that location choice is the key margin of response to this populist-vote shock, both for immigrants already in the US and those who had already decided to migrate.

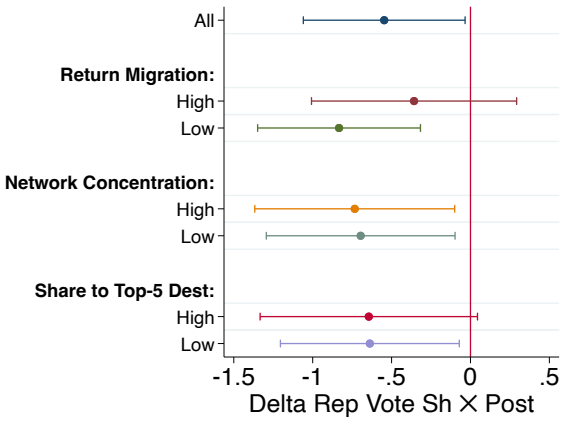
[10] Return migration rates are constructed from the 2020 Mexican Population *Censo*, based on the proportion of households with at least one member who returned from abroad in the past 5 years. More than 90% of Mexican returnees are from the US.

Figure 3: Mechanisms: heterogeneity by origin characteristics

(a) Newly arrived migrants



(b) Established migrants



Note: estimated β coefficients and 95% confidence intervals from equation 1, including state-year fixed effects, using subsamples obtained by splitting origin municipalities into above vs below median for each measure. Standard errors clustered at the CZ level.

3 Discussion

In this paper we investigate how local-level political shocks at destination affect the geographical distribution of foreign-born individuals. Using data from the Matriculas consular program and a Difference-in-Differences design, we document a reduction in the number of Mexican-born immigrants in US locations that experienced a larger shift towards the Trump-led Republican party after the 2016 presidential election. The effect is driven by relocation among established immigrants who have been in the country for at least 5 years, and to a lesser extent by newly arrived immigrants. Overall, our findings underscore the importance of local-level political shocks in determining the distribution of workers across locations, with potentially important implications for local population and labor market dynamics.

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Appendix - For online publication

A Additional Figures and Tables

Figure A.1: Total matriculas over time, breakdown by newly issued cards and renewals

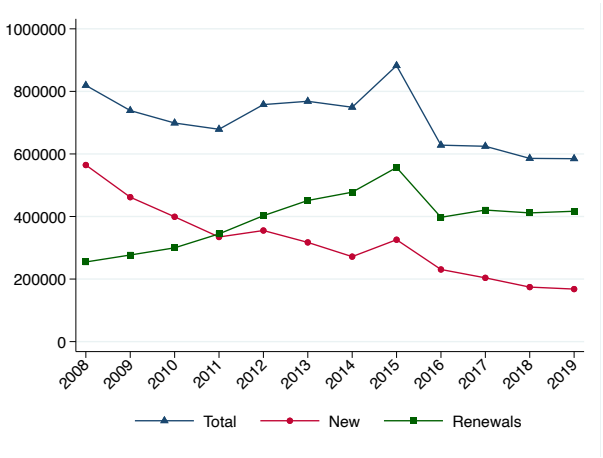
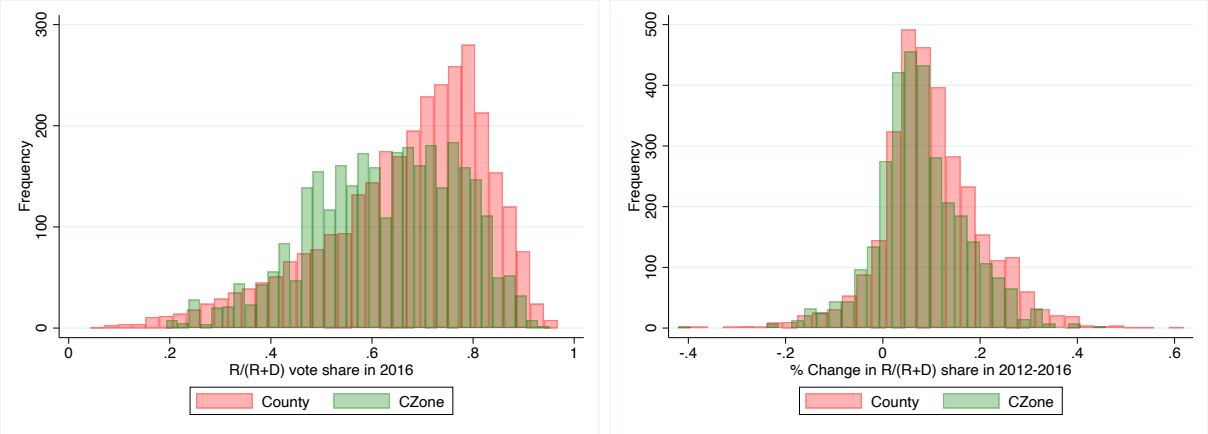
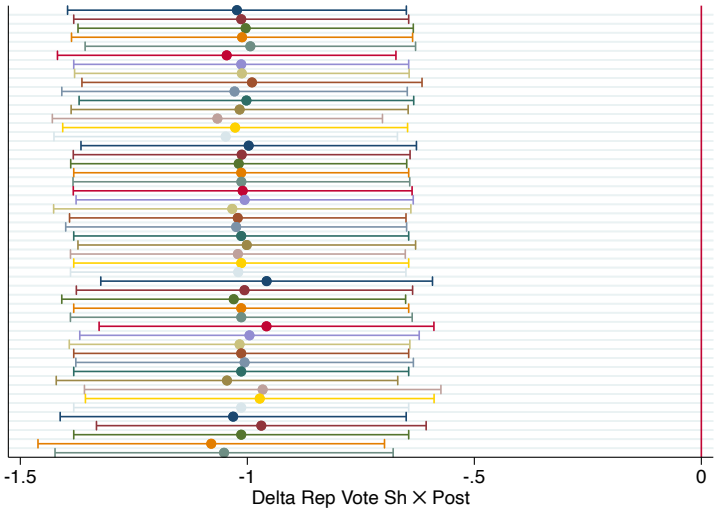


Figure A.2: County-level vs CZ-level Republican vote share, in 2016 levels and 2012-2016 changes



Note: county-level and commuting-zone-level two-party Republican vote share in the 2016 Presidential election (left), and percentage change between 2012 and 2016 (right). Source: MIT Election Data Lab.

Figure A.3: Robustness: drop each US state (outcome: log total matriculas)



Note: estimated β coefficients and 95% confidence intervals from equation 1, including state-year fixed effects, dropping each US state at the time. Standard errors clustered at the CZ level.

Table A.1: Natives' attitudes towards immigration and natives' ideology

	(1) Total	(2) Total	(3) Total
%Δ Sh More	0.071		
Border Enforc 2010-16 ∗ Post	(0.068)		
%Δ Sh Conservative		-0.033	
Ideology 2012-16 ∗ Post		(0.030)	
%Δ Sh Repub			-0.033
Ideology 2012-16 ∗ Post			(0.021)
Log Average Wage	0.111	0.214	0.204
	(0.145)	(0.148)	(0.149)
Secure Communities	-0.055	-0.059	-0.058
	(0.026)	(0.027)	(0.027)
Observations	3,876	3,912	3,876
Observations (CZs)	323	326	323
R-squared	0.981	0.981	0.981
Avg Outcome	5.873	5.846	5.859
Std Dev indep var	0.267	0.506	0.732
Commuting Zone FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
State-Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes

Note: Standard errors clustered at the Commuting Zone level shown in parentheses. * p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01. Attitudes and ideology measures are 5% winsorized.

Table A.2: Robustness: alternative shock and placebo shock

	Delta Vote Sh 2008-2016			Delta Vote Sh 2008-2012		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Total	New	Renew	Total	New	Renew
%Δ Rep	-0.872	-0.355	-0.510			
Vote Sh 2008-16 ∗ Post	(0.165)	(0.184)	(0.219)			
%Δ Rep				-0.773	-0.660	-0.671
Vote Sh 2008-12 ∗ Post				(0.450)	(0.553)	(0.545)
Log Average Wage	0.185	0.226	0.301	0.182	0.232	0.304
	(0.127)	(0.139)	(0.178)	(0.129)	(0.138)	(0.179)
Secure Communities	-0.052	-0.016	-0.005	-0.068	-0.021	-0.013
	(0.026)	(0.028)	(0.046)	(0.026)	(0.028)	(0.046)
Observations	4,644	4,644	4,644	4,644	4,644	4,644
Observations (CZs)	387	387	387	387	387	387
R-squared	0.978	0.974	0.963	0.978	0.974	0.963
Avg Outcome	5.587	5.126	4.353	5.587	5.126	4.353
Std Dev indep var	0.108	0.108	0.108	0.047	0.047	0.047
Commuting Zone FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
State-Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Note: Standard errors clustered at the Commuting Zone level shown in parentheses. * p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01.

Table A.3: Robustness: excluding independent voters

Outcome (log):	Total Matriculas		New	Renewed
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
%Δ R/(R+D)	-0.782	-1.036	-0.362	-0.588
Vote Sh 2012-16 ∗ Post	(0.154)	(0.205)	(0.223)	(0.273)
Log Average Wage		0.167	0.219	0.290
		(0.128)	(0.140)	(0.178)
Secure Communities		-0.054	-0.017	-0.006
		(0.025)	(0.028)	(0.046)
Observations	4,716	4,644	4,644	4,644
Observations (CZs)	393	387	387	387
R-squared	0.968	0.978	0.974	0.963
Avg Outcome	5.574	5.587	5.126	4.353
Year FE	Yes			
Commuting Zone FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
State-Year FE		Yes	Yes	Yes

Note: Standard errors clustered at the Commuting Zone level shown in parentheses. * p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01.

Table A.4: Robustness: controlling for lag of dependent variable

	Outcome: Log Matriculas		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Total	New	Renew
%Δ Repub	-1.011	-0.464	-0.591
Vote Sh 2012-16 ∗ Post	(0.178)	(0.169)	(0.253)
Log Average Wage	0.129	0.125	0.189
	(0.130)	(0.131)	(0.184)
Secure Communities	-0.055	-0.017	-0.006
	(0.025)	(0.026)	(0.046)
L.Total Matriculas (log)	0.062		
	(0.028)		
L.New Matriculas (log)		0.193	
		(0.033)	
L.Renewed Matriculas (log)			-0.030
			(0.023)
Observations	4,257	4,257	4,257
Observations (CZs)	387	387	387
R-squared	0.979	0.977	0.965
Avg Outcome	5.574	5.088	4.413
Commuting Zone FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
State-Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes

Note: Standard errors clustered at the Commuting Zone level shown in parentheses. * p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01.

Table A.5: Robustness: PPML estimates

	Outcome: Matriculas (per 100 residents)	
	(1)	(2)
	Total	Total
%Δ Repub	-0.540	-0.778
Vote Sh 2012-16 ∗ Post	(0.145)	(0.179)
Log Average Wage		0.053
		(0.134)
Secure Communities		-0.057
		(0.028)
Observations	8,436	8,412
Observations (CZs)	703	701
Pseudo R-squared	0.261	0.266
Avg Outcome	0.106	0.106
Year FE	Yes	
Commuting Zone FE	Yes	Yes
State-Year FE		Yes

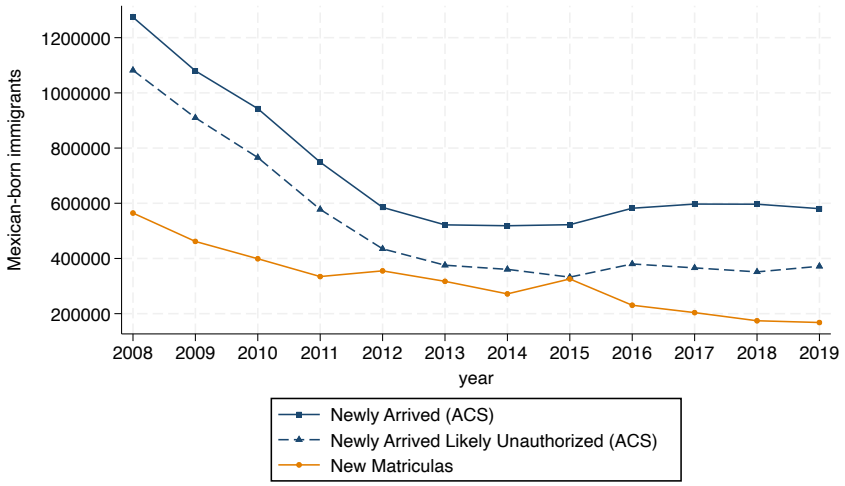
Note: PPML estimates. Outcome is total matriculas per 100 residents in 2008. Standard errors clustered at the Commuting Zone level shown in parentheses. * p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01.

B Data validation

In this Appendix, we validate the MCAS data by documenting their consistency with commonly used data sources. We perform three comparisons: with the American Community Survey (ACS), both over time and across destination locations in the US, and with the Mexican Censo, across origin location in Mexico.

First, we compare the evolution over time, distinguishing between all Mexican-born immigrants arrived in the past 5 years in the ACS, and those likely unauthorized using the Borjas and Cassidy (2019) method. We focus on new matriculas because, unlike renewals, they can be compared with the newly arrived in the ACS. Figure B.1 shows that, while the Matriculas data underestimate overall Mexican immigration relative to the ACS data, the levels and the trends are very similar when focusing on likely unauthorized immigrants. This pattern is consistent with matriculas being a useful form of identification for undocumented immigrants, who usually do not have a passport, but not for documented immigrants.

Figure B.1: MCAS vs ACS: Newly Arrived Mexican-born, All vs Likely Unauthorized



Second, we compare the distributions across Commuting Zones (CZs). Table B.1 shows that the MCAS tracks well the inflows in the ACS data. Consistent with the time-series, the correlation is stronger with likely undocumented immigrants in the ACS than when

considering all Mexican-born individuals.

Table B.1: MCAS and ACS Mexican-born working age (15-64) and low skilled population, 2008-2019

	New cards		Log New cards	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Newly Arrived Mexican-born ACS	Newly Arrived Likely Unauthorized Mexican-born ACS	Newly Arrived Mexican-born ACS	Newly Arrived Likely Unauthorized Mexican-born ACS
Number of New Matriculas	1.551***	1.503***	0.031	0.114***
	(0.139)	(0.092)	(0.038)	(0.035)
Observations	8433	8580	6201	5832
R^2	0.933	0.903	0.749	0.755
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
CZ FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

All regressions include Commuting Zone and year fixed effects. Robust standard errors are shown in parentheses.

Last, we compare the flows at the origin-level, across Mexican municipios, using the Mexican censos relative to the periods 2005-2010 and 2015-2020. The distributions across origin areas are highly correlated, despite the slightly different time periods.

Table B.2: MCAS and Mexican Emigration 2005-2010 and 2015-2020

	New Matriculas		Log New Matriculas	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Emigrants	Emigration Rate	Log Emigrants	Log Emigration Rate
Number of New Matriculas	0.045**	0.139***	0.239***	0.462***
	(0.018)	(0.014)	(0.017)	(0.015)
Observations	18152	18152	14702	14702
R^2	0.719	0.502	0.829	0.911
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Municipio FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

All regressions include municipio and year fixed effects.
Robust standard errors are shown in parentheses.

References:

Borjas, G.J. and Cassidy, H., 2019. The wage penalty to undocumented immigration. Labour Economics, 61, p.101-757.