

Sabet, Navid

**Conference Paper**

## Legal Status and Political Representation: The 1986 IRCA and Hispanic Public Officials

Beiträge zur Jahrestagung des Vereins für Socialpolitik 2020: Gender Economics

**Provided in Cooperation with:**

Verein für Socialpolitik / German Economic Association

*Suggested Citation:* Sabet, Navid (2020) : Legal Status and Political Representation: The 1986 IRCA and Hispanic Public Officials, Beiträge zur Jahrestagung des Vereins für Socialpolitik 2020: Gender Economics, ZBW - Leibniz Information Centre for Economics, Kiel, Hamburg

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/224655>

**Standard-Nutzungsbedingungen:**

Die Dokumente auf EconStor dürfen zu eigenen wissenschaftlichen Zwecken und zum Privatgebrauch gespeichert und kopiert werden.

Sie dürfen die Dokumente nicht für öffentliche oder kommerzielle Zwecke vervielfältigen, öffentlich ausstellen, öffentlich zugänglich machen, vertreiben oder anderweitig nutzen.

Sofern die Verfasser die Dokumente unter Open-Content-Lizenzen (insbesondere CC-Lizenzen) zur Verfügung gestellt haben sollten, gelten abweichend von diesen Nutzungsbedingungen die in der dort genannten Lizenz gewährten Nutzungsrechte.

**Terms of use:**

*Documents in EconStor may be saved and copied for your personal and scholarly purposes.*

*You are not to copy documents for public or commercial purposes, to exhibit the documents publicly, to make them publicly available on the internet, or to distribute or otherwise use the documents in public.*

*If the documents have been made available under an Open Content Licence (especially Creative Commons Licences), you may exercise further usage rights as specified in the indicated licence.*

# Legal Status and Political Representation: The 1986 IRCA and Hispanic Public Officials

Navid Sabet\*

This Version: February 18, 2020

## Abstract

What factors lead underrepresented groups to gain more political representation? I digitize a novel source of data that contains records of Hispanics elected to public office from the local to the federal level from 1984 to 1994 and exploit variation in legal status arising from the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), which legalized three million Hispanic migrants in the United States, to shed light on this question. I find that counties with more per capita legalized migrants experience significant increases in the number of Hispanics in public office around 1992 when the migrants first gained the right to vote. The result is driven almost entirely by increases at the local level, in particular school board members and mayors of small towns, and is stronger in counties with larger Hispanic populations, pointing to network effects. Individuals in IRCA-affected counties are more politically active, lending credence to the view that the political engagement of the newly legalized helps drive the results. I find no evidence for increased Hispanic candidate entry. Finally, I provide indirect evidence that demand for representation, rather than candidate competence, drives Hispanic selection to public office. Together, the results open a new dimension to the economics of legal status: its effects on political representation.

*JEL Codes:* J15, H72, P16

*Keywords:* immigrant legalization, identity politics, political representation, franchise extension

---

\*Faculty of Economics and Business, Goethe University Frankfurt, Theodor-W.-Adorno-Platz 4, 60629 Frankfurt, Germany. Email: [sabet@econ.uni-frankfurt.de](mailto:sabet@econ.uni-frankfurt.de). Telephone: +49 (69) 798-34803. I thank Nava Ashraf, Mathias Bühler, Davide Cantoni, Guido Friebel, Michael Kosfeld, Christoph Winter and seminar participants at the Universities of Munich and Frankfurt for constructive comments and feedback.

## 1. Introduction

Recent midterm elections in the United States have been distinguished for producing the youngest and most diverse group of federal representatives to serve the country (Manning, 2018; Jin, 2019). Still, just 46 of the new members elected to Congress in the 2016 midterm elections were Hispanic, comprising approximately eight percent of that body even though Hispanic people make up about 18 percent of the United States population (Manning, 2018; United States Census Bureau, 2017). Women, to cite a further example, won 24 percent of all Congressional seats in 2016 despite their making up half the population.<sup>1</sup>

There are many reasons—social, political, moral—why lack of representation in democracy might be a problem for society. From a strictly economic point of view, however, it is well documented that a politician’s identity and individual characteristics matter for his or her economic policy decisions (Chattopadhyay and Duflo, 2004; Pande, 2003; Levitt, 1996; Besley et al., 2011). Understanding the factors that determine who gets elected to office is therefore a question of primary economic importance.

Models of political selection suggest that candidates are selected to public office on account of individual characteristics that make them particularly competent to implement policy (Caselli and Morelli, 2004; Besley et al., 2017; Besley and Reynal-Querol, 2011) or on account of their ability to represent a wider diversity of policy preferences (Osborne and Slivinski, 1996; Besley and Coate, 1997). Although some empirical work has shown that it is possible to for representative democracy to accommodate politicians of both high competence and broad representation (Dal Bó et al., 2017), citizen-candidate models in the spirit of Besley and Coate (1997) predict that the competence-representation dilemma is especially pronounced when capacity for policy formulation and implementation is clustered among groups with specific policy preferences: in such cases, the electorate may very well sacrifice policy-making ability in favor of a candidate that better represents their interests.

In this paper, I test whether documenting undocumented migrants—and eventually enfranchising them—affects the ethnic identity of those who assume public office and if so, whether it does on account of candidate competence or on account of better representation. To do so, I combine quasi-experimental variation in legal status arising from the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) with newly digitized data that contains information on over 43,000 Hispanic individuals elected to public office in the United States from 1984 to 1994.

The trends in the number of Hispanics elected to public office exhibit no distinguishable difference in counties affected by the IRCA compared to those unaffected by it in the two periods prior to the passage

---

<sup>1</sup>Estimates of the Hispanic and female share in the population come from the Census Bureau Quick Facts Website: <https://bit.ly/2GXW8JW>. Accessed 5 February 2020.

of the IRCA in 1986, suggesting that geographical considerations with respect to where undocumented migrants reside play little to no role in Hispanic selection to public office. These two sources of variation—between treated and non-treated counties before and after 1986—allow me to identify the parameters of a difference-in-difference regression model which reveal a clear pattern: counties with larger shares of documented migrants experience positive and significant increases in the number of Hispanic persons holding public office. Decomposing the data further, I find that the result is driven almost entirely by stronger representation at the local level, in particular school board officials and mayors of small towns. The point estimates are robust to alternative specifications and the inclusion of various socio-economic controls.

The IRCA legalized, and offered a path to citizenship, for some three million undocumented migrants, the vast majority of whom were of Hispanic origin and whose socio-economic characteristics differed systematically to those of the native-born population. I therefore posit that these migrants—and their networks of families and friends—are more likely to vote in Hispanic officials on account of their ability to better represent their interests, an effect which I expect to be the strongest in and around 1991 when IRCA documented migrants began to naturalize. To verify this hypothesis—and to shed light on potential mechanisms that drive the results—I undertake a three empirical exercises.

First, I examine the timing of the effect and find patterns that suggest the result is driven by the voting potential of the newly documented migrants. By and large, but with notable exceptions, only citizens can vote in the United States.<sup>2</sup> Consistent with this fact, I find that counties affected by the IRCA experience an increase in the number of Hispanic's elected to public office in and around 1991, the first year those legalized by the IRCA gained citizenship and the right to vote.

Second, I investigate the role that networks of friends and family play in driving Hispanic selection to public office. In this respect, there is research that demonstrates the political engagement of non-citizens, including undocumented Hispanic migrants, in mobilizing their networks of friends and family to participate in political affairs (McCann and Jones-Correa, 2016). To this end, I examine the interaction between the Hispanic population of a given county and its share of legalized migrants. The findings are clear: immigrant legalization has a much stronger effect on the number of Hispanics elected to public office in those counties with larger shares of Hispanic people in the population.

Third, the two channels proposed—the voting potential of the newly legalized migrants and that

---

<sup>2</sup>Legal permanent residents can, and have been able to in the past, vote in some local and municipal elections in the United States. This was especially the case before the passage of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) of 1996 which subsequently restricted the right to vote in state and local elections to citizens. New York City, for example, allowed legal permanent residents to vote in local school board elections from 1969 to 2002 and Chicago and a number of cities in Maryland allowed non-citizens to vote in a range of local elections.

of their networks of friends and family—are only plausible to the extent that the IRCA leads to more political engagement. I thus exploit individual level voting data from the American National Elections Studies (ANES) in order to test the impact of the IRCA on levels of political engagement. I find that an individual’s propensity to vote and to register to vote both increase as the share of legalized migrants in his or her county increases. Importantly, I also find a positive association between an individual’s political engagement—as measured by whether (s)he discusses politics with friends and family—and the share of newly legalized migrants in his or her county of residence, highlighting the role that networks of friends and family play in driving the result. As a further check of the political engagement channel, I also report the effects of immigrant legalization on county level turnout in Presidential elections. Encouragingly, I find that counties affected by the IRCA experienced greater turnout in the 1992 Presidential election as compared to the 1984 and 1988 elections, suggesting that the IRCA lead to more participation in the political process of the United States once the legalized migrants gained eligibility to vote in such elections.

Arguably, the greater Hispanic selection to public office after 1991 might be the result of two complementary forces at work: more naturalized citizens of Hispanic origin might, on the one hand, increase the number of Hispanic candidates running for office; it may also, on the other hand, increase the vote share of existing Hispanic candidates. Although disentangling the two is not essential to sustain the main thesis of this paper, I nevertheless endeavor to understand how much of the effect is driven simply by having more Hispanic candidates running for office. To this purpose, and owing to data limitations, I restrict my analysis to all candidates from a select number of mayoral races from 1986 to 1994. The results indicate that share of Hispanic candidates entering mayoral races does not increase with the IRCA policy, indicating that the results are driven by stronger selection of existing candidates rather than the entry of new ones.

In the final part of my analysis, I try to understand to what extent candidate competence, as opposed to candidate representation, drives Hispanic selection to public office. Because the IRCA legalized individuals of relatively lower socio-economic status, I expect demand for representation to be a stronger driver than competence alone. Lacking data on the individual characteristics of the Hispanic officials elected to office, I proxy representation and competence by the types of office that the Hispanic officials were elected to occupy. I also exploit a unique feature of the United States judiciary that allows for many judgeships to be elected. Accordingly, I examine the differential impact of the IRCA on Hispanic officials elected to state and local judgeships. Although the requirements to serve as judge vary, in general they correlate strongly with measures of competence employed in the literature. If selection

is driven by competence considerations alone, it is not unreasonable to expect an increase in the number of Hispanic judges in those areas most affected by the IRCA. To this end, I find no discernible effect for elected judges at any level.

The data digitized for this paper includes the names of all Hispanic officials elected to public office and the level(s) of office which they served.<sup>3</sup> I am therefore able to trace the officials over the course of the sample in order to identify those who display political mobility and to test whether the IRCA leads to high mobility types assuming office. I find that the absolute number of Hispanics elected to office who experience political mobility does indeed increase in IRCA-affected counties, though the share of politically mobile Hispanic officials relative to the total number of Hispanic officials exhibits no clear statistical relationship. Moreover, I find that the average size of their climbs up the political ladder decrease in the share of IRCA migrants in a given county. Given that the Hispanics in the data typically start at the level of a school board or municipal official, these result suggest that the few who do display political mobility tend to move less up the political ladder and instead concentrate on the demands of local office. To the extent that political mobility—or the lack thereof—correlates with stronger ability to represent local interests, these findings seem to suggest that candidate representation is a stronger driver of Hispanic selection to public office.

This study relates to three strands of literature. First, it contributes to enhancing our understanding of the process of political selection. This scholarship began in earnest after Osborne and Slivinski (1996) and Besley and Coate (1997) articulated an alternative framework to that put forward by Downs (1957) for understanding policy credibility, convergence and candidate selection (Besley, 2005). This literature includes theoretical and empirical work that has helped us to better understand, among other things, the quality of public officials (Caselli and Morelli, 2004), what attracts high-quality types to public office (Ferraz and Finan, 2009), the effects of high-quality leaders on economic growth (Besley et al., 2011), and to what extent it is possible to select leaders that are both of high quality and representative of a wide cross-section of society (Dal Bó et al., 2017) or of distinct groups (Besley et al., 2017). The question of politician identity has also received attention within the citizen-candidate framework. Pande (2003) and Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004), for example, both consider the impact of political reservation for minority groups—scheduled castes and women, respectively—on policy outcomes in India. They find that stronger political representation of these groups leads to an allocation of public resources that positively affects those groups. This paper contributes an entirely new dimension to this scholarship: it

---

<sup>3</sup>There are eight levels included in the data starting with school board officials and municipal officials all the way to federal members of congress.

considers, in the absence of mandated political reservation, what factors enable minority groups to gain stronger political representation in the first place.

Second, the paper adds to the literature that aims at understanding the consequences of franchise extension. The majority of these studies aim at testing models put forward by the likes of Downs (1957) and Meltzer and Richard (1981) and have advanced our understanding of the effects, both on the level and distribution of public spending, of extending franchise to such groups as women Miller (2008); African Americans (Cascio and Washington, 2014); lesser-educated citizens Fujiwara (2015) and undocumented migrants (Sabet and Winter, 2019). It contributes to these studies by considering a new facet of franchise extension: its impact on the ethnic identity of elected politicians.

Finally, this paper utilizes variation in legal status arising from the 1986 IRCA in order to understand its impact on the number of Hispanic people elected to public office. Accordingly, the study also contributes to scholarship that documents the economic and social consequences of legal status. The majority of these studies examine the positive impacts of acquiring legal status on the social and economic outcomes of the individual migrant, including employment and wages (Kossoudji and Cobb-Clark, 2002; Pan, 2012; Amuedo-Dorantes and Bansak, 2011); health (García-Pérez, 2013); and education (Cortes, 2013) but also on more aggregate outcomes such as crime (Baker, 2015). To my knowledge, this is the first study to relate legal status with the question of political representation. In doing so, it sheds light on a new mechanism—political representation—that links legal status to a range of social and economic benefits documented elsewhere in the literature.

The rest of this paper is organized as follows: in Section 2, I provide a brief account of the IRCA. To carry out this study, I digitized a novel source of data that contains information on Hispanic officials elected to public office from the local to the federal level. In Section 3, I describe this and other data used in the study. I outline my econometric methodology and present my baseline results in Section 4. In Sections 5 and 6, I present evidence on potential mechanisms that drive the results. Section 7 concludes.

## **2. Background**

### **2.1 The Immigration Reform and Control Act**

As explained in greater detail in Sabet and Winter (2019), the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) is the most comprehensive piece of legislation the United States government has put forward in order to address the question of undocumented immigration. The purpose of the bill, which was signed into law in November 1986 by the Reagan Administration, was to restrict the inflow of undocumented

migrants. It did so through three main mechanisms: an employer sanctions provision that made it illegal for employers to knowingly hire unauthorized workers, increased funding for border security to discourage new people from migrating illegally, and an amnesty program intended to legalize various unauthorized workers (Chishti and Kamasaki, 2014).

The amnesty provision of the IRCA is generally regarded as the most successful component of the law. It enabled undocumented migrants to apply for legal status from May 1987 until November 1988, depending on the circumstances of the person applying.<sup>4</sup> On acceptance of their application, applicants were given temporary legal status under the title of *Temporary Resident Aliens* which could last for as long as 18 months. During this time, their applications would be further processed and upon successful completion of an English test and a civics test, applicants were given permanent resident status. Five years after permanent residency, these migrants were eligible for naturalization.

At the time of the Act, there were some 3 million undocumented immigrants residing in the United States, corresponding to nearly 1 percent of the population (Wasem, 2012; Baker, 2015) and the IRCA enjoyed near universal take-up (Baker, 2015). As detailed in Sabet and Winter (2019), the vast majority of these migrants were of Mexican origin, economically active and healthy. Although not wealthy, those documented by the IRCA earn, by and large, somewhere between the poverty rate and median income levels (Sabet and Winter, 2019). As to education: 40 percent of the IRCA applicants report having completed high school or more in 1989. The comparable figure for the population as a whole in 1990 stood at 75 percent.<sup>5</sup> Given that income and education are two measures of competence employed in the literature on political selection, these characteristics are useful to bear in mind when considering the question of whether Hispanic selection to public office is driven by candidate competence or his or her ability to better represent Hispanic interests.

The timing of the IRCA's passage in 1986 was unexpected. Legislation to address undocumented migration began in earnest after 1964 when the *Bracero* program—a guest worker program that the United States negotiated with Mexico in 1942—was terminated and since which time undocumented migration to the United States became an issue. Congress even attempted to sign comprehensive legislation a

---

<sup>4</sup>The IRCA provided paths to legalization and naturalization for two groups of unauthorized workers: Legally Authorized Workers (LAWs), which enabled undocumented immigrants who resided in the country for an uninterrupted period from before 1 January 1982 to legalize (DHHS (1991), Cascio and Lewis (2017)), and Special Agricultural Workers (SAWs) which allowed applications from unauthorized migrants who could show that they carried out 90 days of work on select USDA defined seasonal crops in the year leading to 1 May 1986 (DHHS (1991); Cascio and Lewis (2017)). LAW applicants were eligible to apply from May 1987 to May 1988 whereas SAW applicants from 1 June 1987 to 30 November 1988 (DHHS, 1991).

<sup>5</sup>The educational attainment of the IRCA migrants comes from the Legalization Population Survey Public Use File which surveyed 6,193 of the migrants legalized by the IRCA. The educational figures for the United States population are from the 2000 Census Atlas of the United States. Chapter 10 of that Atlas reports on education and it can be found online: <https://bit.ly/2jjoVBb>. Accessed 7 March 2019.



number of times but always failed (Chishti and Kamasaki, 2014). The prospects of the 1986 IRCA were also uncertain. Fuchs (1990), for example, reports that just days before the IRCA passed, “congressional leaders pronounced it dead, this time after more than fifteen months of hearings, legislative negotiations, and debate”. Reinforcing this notion, Representative Daniel E. Lungren (R-California) remarked on the day of the bill’s passage that the IRCA was “a corpse going to the morgue, and on the way to the morgue a toe began to twitch and we started CPR again” (Fuchs, 1990).

The geographic distribution of IRCA documented migrants may pose a greater cause for concern. If, for example, undocumented migrants are concentrated in counties with larger Hispanic populations where the likelihood of a Hispanic running for office is greater, then the effect on Hispanic officials may be reflective of factors other than that of legal status. In this respect, the pre-trends are informative. Although the roughly 300 IRCA affected counties differ with respect to certain observable characteristics to the rest of the counties in the country,<sup>6</sup> these two county types exhibit no discernible difference in *trends* with respect to the number of Hispanics in public office in the two years leading up to the passage of the IRCA in 1986. This is made clear in Figure 1 which plots the total number of Hispanic public officials in counties affected by the IRCA as compared to those unaffected by the IRCA.

### 3. Data

#### 3.1 Legalized migrants

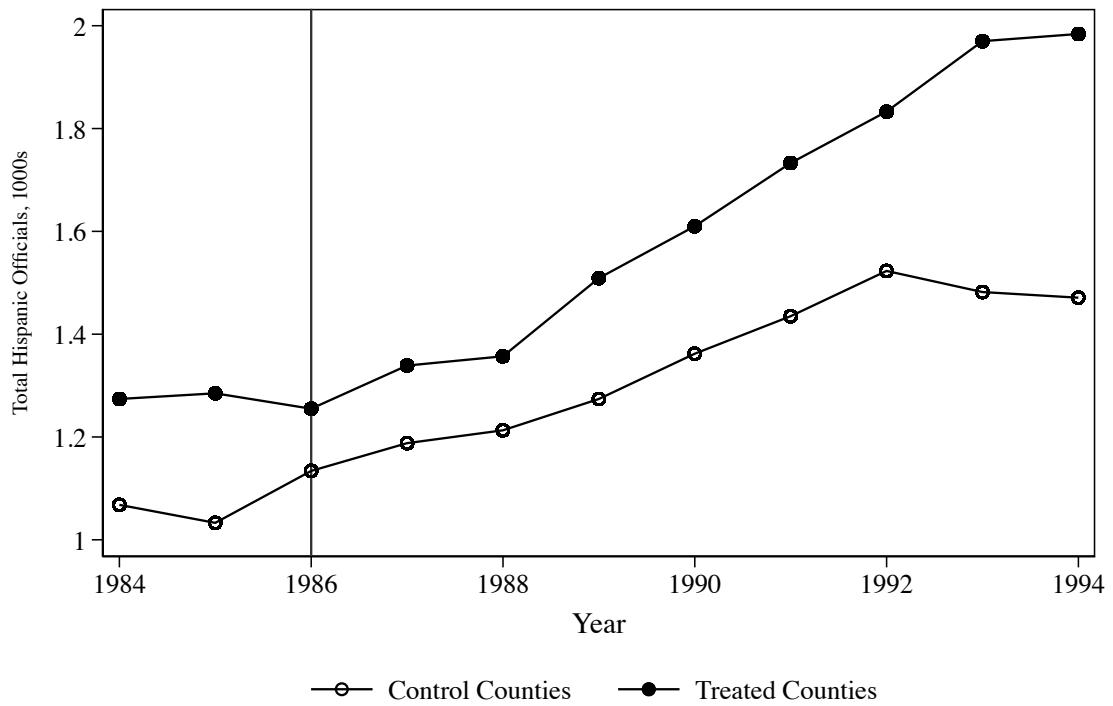
The independent variable of interest is a measure of the number of IRCA applicants per 1,000 county inhabitants in the United States for the period between 1984 and 1994. In the treated counties (i.e. those counties that received at least 1 application for legal status), this value ranged from as little as .04 to as many as 50 applications per 1,000 county inhabitants. These data come from Baker (2015) who, in turn, takes it from the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). I also take from Baker (2015) measures of county poverty, unemployment, population and income which I use as control variables in the analysis.

#### 3.2 Hispanic Public Officials: the NALEO Roster

The goal of the analysis is to understand whether legalizing, and eventually enfranchising, migrants of a particular group bears any influence on their representation in politics, as measured by the number of persons of that particular group elected to public office. To measure the impact of legal status on this outcome, I digitized a novel source of data taken from the historical archives of the National Association

---

<sup>6</sup>See Table A.1 in the Appendix to see how various covariates balance in treated and control counties.



**Figure 1:** Number of Hispanics in elected public office by county type

**Note:** This graph plots the number of Hispanics in elected public office in counties affected by the IRCA as compared to those counties unaffected by the IRCA.

**Source:** NALEO's National Roster of Hispanic Elected Officials, author's own calculations

of Latino Elected and Appointed Officers (NALEO), a non-profit, non-partisan organization which has, among other things, gathered data on Hispanic persons elected to public office from the local to the federal level since 1984.

NALEO has been tracking this data in two waves: from 1984 to 1994 through the *National Roster of Hispanic Elected Officials* and, following a change in methodology, from 1996 to present day through the *National Directory of Latino Elected Officials*.<sup>7</sup> The present study digitized the early archive records of the *Roster*. Doing so provides me with a dataset of over 43,000 individual officials that contains information on the level of office served, the title of the role, the political affiliation of the official, his or her gender and, perhaps most importantly, their address which I use in order to generate county-level aggregates of the total number of Hispanic public officials in a given county in a given year. County officers are aggregated to the county in which they serve whereas federal and state officers are aggregated to the county to which their ZIP code corresponds. Thus, for example, State Representative for Arizona Carmen Cajero (1986, DEM) is coded under Pima County because that is the county in which her ZIP code falls. It is not the case that all state and federal representatives have ZIP codes that correspond to the counties where their respective state capitols are located. Carmen Cajero serves as a case in point. She serves as a state representative for Arizona but is based out of Pima County, not Maricopa County where Phoenix, the state capitol, is located. Municipal officials are aggregated to the counties in which their municipality falls. The more than 600 counties across which the Hispanic officials are distributed contain, on average, 11 officials, some of which contain just one officer and some of which contain more than 100.

### *Trends in Hispanic officials*

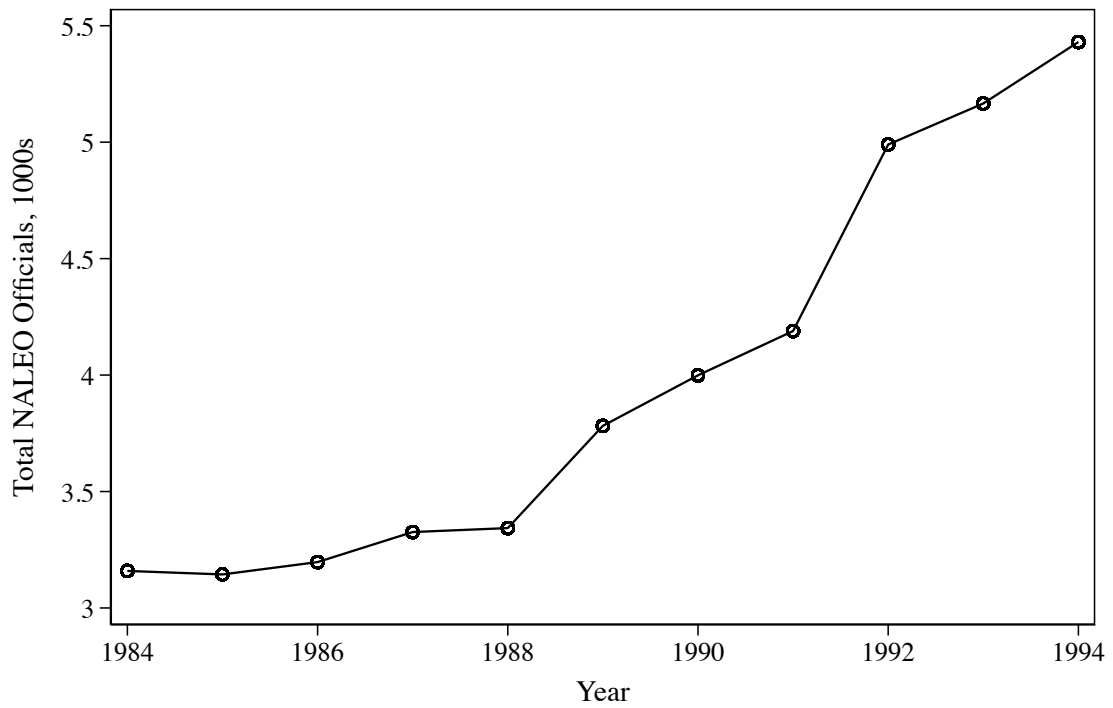
Figure 2 shows the overall trend in the number of Hispanics entering public office each year over the period of the sample from 1984 to 1994. As shown, in the years before 1988, there is modest growth in the number of such officials: from some 3,100 in total across the United States to approximately 3,300 in 1988. Thereafter, however, there is an appreciable increase to some 5,400 in 1994.

### *Gender*

In 1992 and 1987, the Census Bureau prepared its *Popularly Elected Officials* reports which identify elected officials across all levels of government in the United States and provide a breakdown by, among other things, gender. The reports indicate that the majority of public officials are male: 76 and 80 percent

---

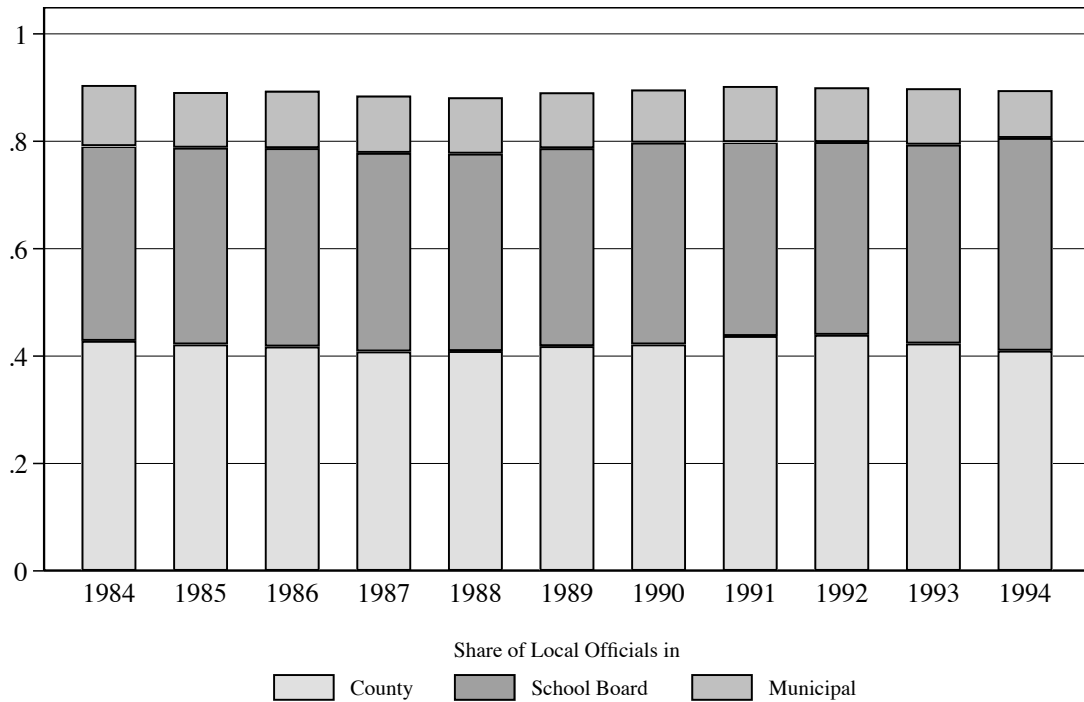
<sup>7</sup>See the online Appendix for more detail as to how NALEO collects these data.



**Figure 2:** Total number of Hispanics in elected public office

**Note:** This graph shows the total number of Hispanics in elected public office at all levels of government across the entire United States.

**Source:** NALEO's National Roster of Hispanic Elected Officials



**Figure 3:** NALEO Officials at the Local Level

**Note:** This graph illustrates the breakdown among the 80 percent of Hispanic public officials that serve at the local level.  
**Source:** NALEO’s National Roster of Hispanic Elected Officials

in 1992 and 1987, respectively. The NALEO figures are comparable: on average, 79 percent of the NALEO public officials are men.

*Levels of office*

The NALEO data indicate that 80 percent of all Hispanic officials serve in local branches of government. Breaking this down further, as shown in Figure 3, reveals that the majority of these individuals serve as school board or municipal officials. This is perhaps unsurprising as these lower levels of office are typically considered as the first rung on the ladder of political power.

*Political affiliation*

The NALEO *Roster* contains information on political affiliation for 40,572 of the 43,000 officers. Of these, 56 percent are independent or non-partisan whilst 40 percent are registered Democrats. The remaining 4 percent are registered Republicans.

## 4. Immigrant Legalization and Hispanics Officials

### 4.1 Testing for pre-trends

I begin the formal analysis by plotting the coefficient,  $\beta_j$ , of the event-study model specified in equation 1 in order to visualize the difference in trends between treated and non-treated counties with respect to the number of Hispanics in public office.

$$y_{c,t} = \delta_c + \zeta_{st} + \sum_{j=1984}^{1994} \beta_j [T_c \times D_t^j] + \epsilon_{c,t} \quad (1)$$

Here,  $y$  denotes the number of Hispanics in elected public office in county  $c$  in year  $t$ .  $T_c$  is a binary variable set to one if a county received one or more applications for legal status post-1986 and zero otherwise; and  $D_t^j$  is a dummy set to one when  $t = j$  ( $\forall j \neq 1986$ ). I control for county-specific time-invariant characteristics through the inclusion of county fixed effects,  $\delta_c$ , and I likewise account for any state-specific time-varying shocks through the inclusion of state-year fixed effects,  $\zeta_{st}$ . The error term is expressed as  $\epsilon_{c,t}$  and is clustered at the county level. The results are shown in Figure 4, which indicate that the difference in the number of Hispanic elected officials is not significantly different for treated and non-treated counties prior to 1986, thus rendering the identifying assumption of the model plausible.

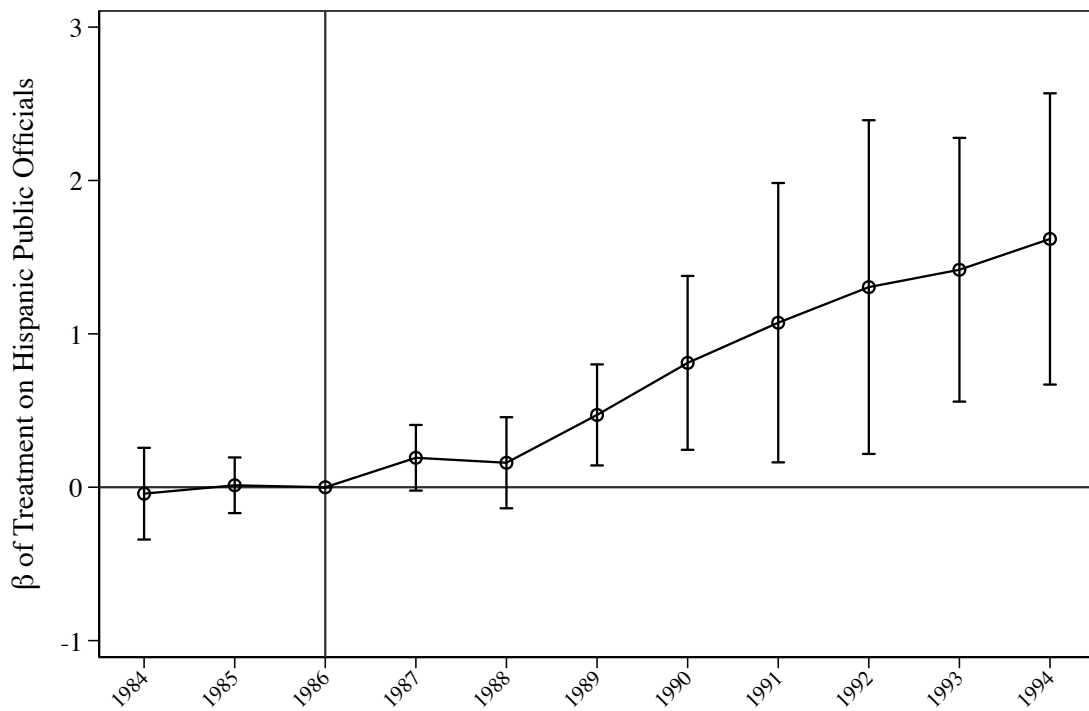
### 4.2 Baseline Estimates

Next, I control for county population, income, poverty and unemployment rates indicated by  $\mathbf{X}_{c,t}$  in equations 2 and 3. In equation 2, I measure the difference between treated and non-treated counties by interacting  $T_c$  with an indicator,  $P_t$ , that is one if  $t \geq 1986$  and zero otherwise. In equation 3, I estimate the impact of treatment intensity by exploiting the cumulative number of legalizations per 1,000 county inhabitants (plus one), as expressed by  $\ln(IRCA + 1)_{c,t}$ .

$$y_{c,t} = \beta_0 + \delta_c + \zeta_{st} + \beta_T \cdot (T_c \times P_t) + \Theta \cdot \mathbf{X}_{c,t} + \epsilon_{c,t} \quad (2)$$

$$y_{c,t} = \beta_0 + \delta_c + \zeta_{st} + \beta_{IRCA} \cdot \ln(IRCA + 1)_{c,t} + \Theta \cdot \mathbf{X}_{c,t} + \epsilon_{c,t} \quad (3)$$

Results are shown in Table A.2 and indicate a positive and statistically significant relationship between immigrant legalization and the number of Hispanics in elected public office. Panel A shows



**Figure 4:** Coefficient on treatment for the number of Hispanics in public office

**Note:** This graph plots the regression coefficient on a treatment indicator when it is interacted with year dummies as specified in equation 1. The outcome is the number of Hispanics in elected public office in a given county in a given year. The regression includes no controls but includes county fixed effects and state-year fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the county level. Confidence intervals are drawn at 99 percent.  $N = 24,356$ .

the estimated coefficient for  $\beta_T$  when using a treatment indicator as shown in equation 2 whereas Panel B shows the same estimate,  $\beta_{IRCA}$ , when using treatment intensity as shown in equation 3. Column 1 shows the baseline effect: counties affected by the IRCA experience an increase in the number of Hispanics elected to public office of .63; using treatment intensity, the result in Panel B indicates that a ten percent increase in per capita legalizations at the county level is associated with a 0.12 increase in the number of Hispanics in office. Increasing the number of per capita legalizations from the 25<sup>th</sup> to the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile,<sup>8</sup> this coefficient translates into an increase of five additional Hispanics in public office.

In Column 2, I restrict the sample to those counties with populations less than the average population size (of treated counties) in order to rule out the possibility that the effect is driven by a handful of large urban centers, some of which may serve as sanctuary cities. The results on this restricted sample are precisely estimated, though slightly less than half the magnitude of the baseline, suggesting that the effect is not exclusively driven by very populous cities. In Column 3, I address the potential geographic endogeneity associated with where the IRCA migrants settle. I carry out a propensity score match in order to identify the most comparable control county for each treated county.<sup>9</sup> For this test, I drop the state-year fixed effects to allow for the possibility that the best-matched control county for a given treated county may, in fact, lie in a different state.<sup>10</sup> The results are similar to those in the baseline, suggesting geographical endogeneity is not a threat to identification. Finally, in Column 4, I conduct a first differences estimation using only two time periods in the sample: 1984 and 1994. Skipping the intervening years allows me to (a) account for any issues that might arise with respect to IRCA application processing times and (b) compare one period before the passage of the IRCA with a period when many IRCA documented migrants were not only legalized but naturalized and, hence, enfranchised. As shown, comparing treated and non-treated counties only in the first and last year of the sample leads to equally precise estimates of slightly larger magnitude uncovered in the baseline.

### 4.3 Robustness checks

In Table 2, I undertake a number of empirical checks to test the strength of the relationship uncovered in the baseline estimations. I begin by lagging the number of per capita legalizations in a county by five and six years to allow ample time between legalization and naturalization. As shown, both lagged variables are precisely estimated and of similar magnitude to the baseline, suggesting that the effect is

---

<sup>8</sup>This represents a 450 percent increase in the number of legalized migrants per capita.

<sup>9</sup>I match using the nearest neighbor when the propensity score is calculated on the basis of county population, income, poverty and unemployment rates as well as the per capita crime rate.

<sup>10</sup>Matching within a state and leaving state-year fixed effects in makes no difference to the result.



**Table 1:** Hispanic Officials and the IRCA

	Outcome: Number of Hispanic Elected Officials			
	(1) Baseline	(2) Pop ≤ 428,000	(3) Matching	(4) $\Delta y_{1994-1984}$
<i>Panel A. Treatment Indicator</i>				
Treatment × Post	0.633*** (0.151)	0.275*** (0.0714)	1.030*** (0.278)	1.399*** (0.313)
<i>Panel B. Treatment Intensity</i>				
Legalizations per 1000 capita	1.210*** (0.299)	0.527*** (0.119)	1.410*** (0.376)	1.963*** (0.469)
Control Variables	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year Fixed Effects	No	No	Yes	No
County Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
State-Year Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	25,699	24,690	7,054	4,162
Number of Counties	2,624	2,534	656	2,081
Mean of Dependent Variable	1.24	.905	2.86	1.32

*Notes:* The dependent variable is the number of Hispanic individuals in elected public office in a given county in a given year. Panel A shows results when using a treatment indicator whereas Panel B shows results when using a measure of treatment intensity which is the log of the cumulative number of IRCA applications from a given county in a given year (plus one) per 1000 county inhabitants. Control variables include poverty and unemployment rates, log of population and log of income, all aggregated to the county level. Demographic controls include share of the population that is over 18 and of Hispanic origin. Standard errors (shown in parentheses) are clustered at the county level. \*  $p < 0.1$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

as strong many years after legalization when IRCA migrants earned the right to vote. Next, in Column 3, I use the 1980 population as a basis for the per capita legalized calculation so as to mitigate concerns that changes to county population confound the result.<sup>11</sup> The number of Hispanic officials elected to public office in a given county is likely to be influenced by the size of two key demographic populations: potential voters and those of Hispanic origin. To rule out mechanical increases in the number of Hispanic officials that might arise as a result of these factors, I control for the share of the county population that is (a) over 18 and (b) of Hispanic origin in Column 4. The results remain robust to the inclusion of these characteristics.<sup>12</sup> Finally, in Column 5, I allow for the possibility that the number of Hispanic officials elected to office were on different trajectories in treated and non-treated counties by allowing these counties to follow separate linear time trends. As shown, the coefficient is estimated precisely and, like the other coefficients in Table 2, is very similar in magnitude to that of the baseline, indicating that the relationship between immigrant legalization and Hispanics elected to public office is a robust one.<sup>13</sup>

## 5. Mechanisms: timing, networks and political engagement

The richness of the NALEO data enables me to conduct a more refined analysis. In this section, I undertake five empirical exercises to shed light on potential mechanisms that link immigrant legalization to greater numbers of Hispanic officials elected to office. First, I examine whether there is a differential effect for officers serving at different levels of office. Second, I try to gain insight into the timing of the effect to test the plausibility of the voting channel—that is, that the legalized migrants, once naturalized as of 1991, elect Hispanic officials. Third, I investigate the role of Hispanic networks in driving Hispanic selection to public office. Fourth, I test whether immigrant legalization led to greater levels of political engagement so as to verify the voting and networks mechanisms. Fifth, I provide evidence that the results are not driven by increases in candidate entry.

### 5.1 Office Type

NALEO officers occupy a range of office types, from county and municipal officers, which include county executives, mayors and city councilors all the way to Federal members of Congress.<sup>14</sup> To investigate

---

<sup>11</sup>As documented in Sabet and Winter (2019), however, the IRCA did not lead to any population increases. This is because undocumented migrants are already included in census population estimates.

<sup>12</sup>This is consistent with the fact that the IRCA did not lead to an increase in county population but instead a change in legal status of the already resident population.

<sup>13</sup>Table ?? in the Appendix uses a linear scale for the dependent variable so as to mitigate concerns that the results are sensitive to the logarithmic transformation of the data. As shown, all the results go through. I opt for a *log – log* specification because the legalization variable is unevenly distributed and for ease of interpretation.

<sup>14</sup>The only exception is that of State Governors. There are only two in the sample: Bob Martinez of Florida who served until 1990 and Toney Anaya of New Mexico who served until 1986. Because of the fewness of NALEO Governors, I am unable to

**Table 2: Robustness Checks**

	Outcome: Number of Hispanic Public Officials				
	(1) $t - 5$	(2) $t - 6$	(3) 1980 PC	(4) Extra Controls	(5) Time trends
Log legalizations $_{t-5}$	1.169*** (0.372)				
Log legalizations $_{t-6}$		1.092*** (0.342)			
Log legalizations			1.121*** (0.269)	1.126*** (0.285)	1.258*** (0.332)
Control Variables	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
County Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
State-Year Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Demographic Controls	No	No	No	Yes	No
$T_c \times$ Year Trends	No	No	No	No	Yes
Observations	12,719	10,523	22,552	25,699	24,356
Number of Counties	2,383	2,341	2,213	2,624	2,375

*Notes:* The dependent variable is the number of Hispanic individuals in elected public office in a given county in a given year. Log legalizations is the log of the cumulative number of IRCA legalized migrants (plus one) in a given county in a given year. Control variables include poverty and unemployment rates, log of population and log of income, all aggregated to the county level. Standard errors (shown in parentheses) are clustered at the county level. \*  $p < 0.1$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

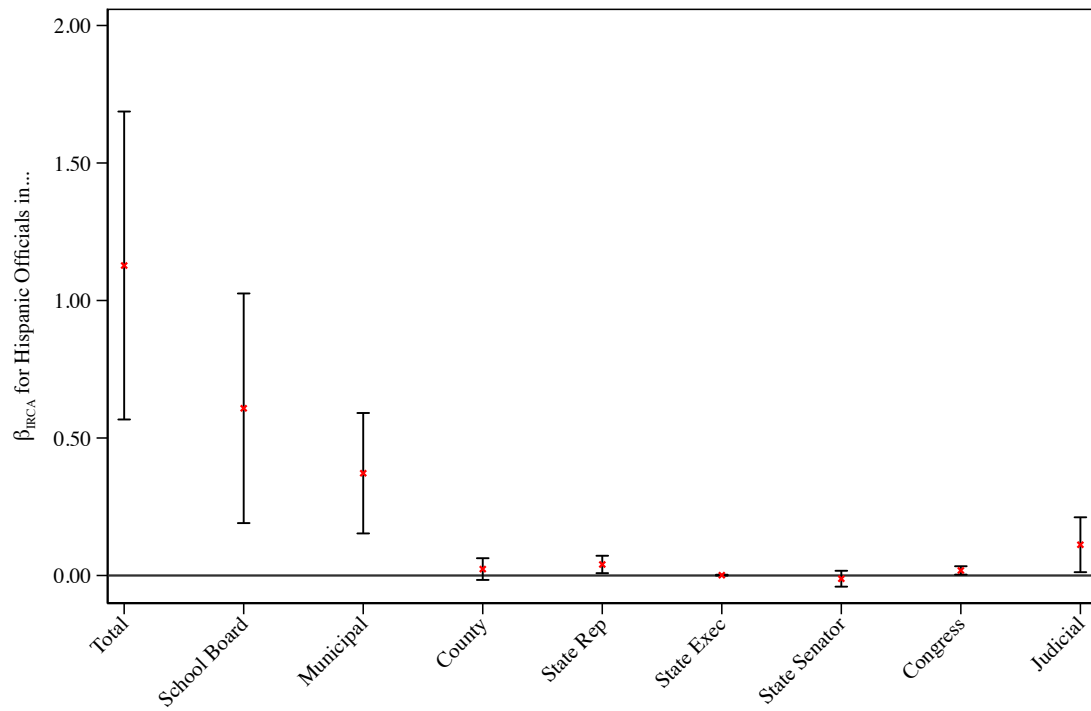
whether there is a differential impact on the number of Hispanics entering a specific office type, I estimate  $\beta_1$  from equation 4:

$$y_{o,c,t} = \beta_0 + \delta_c + \zeta_{st} + \beta_1 \cdot \ln(IRCA + 1)_{c,t} + \Theta \cdot \mathbf{X}_{c,t} + \epsilon_{c,t} \quad (4)$$

Where the outcome variable is the number of Hispanics in elected public office  $o$  in county  $c$  in year  $t$  and all other variables are as previously defined. The results are shown in Figure 5. Whilst the overall effect is positive and significant, Figure 5 reveals interesting heterogeneities. The effects are largest for more localized and less politicized levels of office. For example, the effect of legal status on the number of Hispanics entering office is the largest for school board officers (school board members, chairs, presidents, trustees) and municipal officers (mayors and city councilors) and whereas there is little to no effect for state officers and a modest effect for federal members of congress. This suggests that legal status has a significant impact on the ethnic composition of holders of public office but that this effect is most strongly felt at the local level.<sup>15</sup>

estimate the effect of the IRCA on this particular type of office.

<sup>15</sup>The judicial officers of Figure 5 include not just judges but also county sheriffs, town marshals, constables, police chiefs and other such officers serving at all levels.



**Figure 5:** Regression coefficients: The IRCA and Hispanics public officials by office type

**Note:** This graph plots the regression coefficient on the log number of per capita legalizations (plus one) as specified in equation 4. The outcome variable is the log number of Hispanics serving a particular office type (denoted on the x-axis) in a given county in a given year. Control variables include poverty and unemployment rates, log of population and log of income, all aggregated to the county level. The regressions also include county fixed effects and state-year fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the county level. Confidence intervals are drawn at 95 percent.  $N = 25,699$  for all regressions.

## 5.2 Timing of the Effect for Local Office

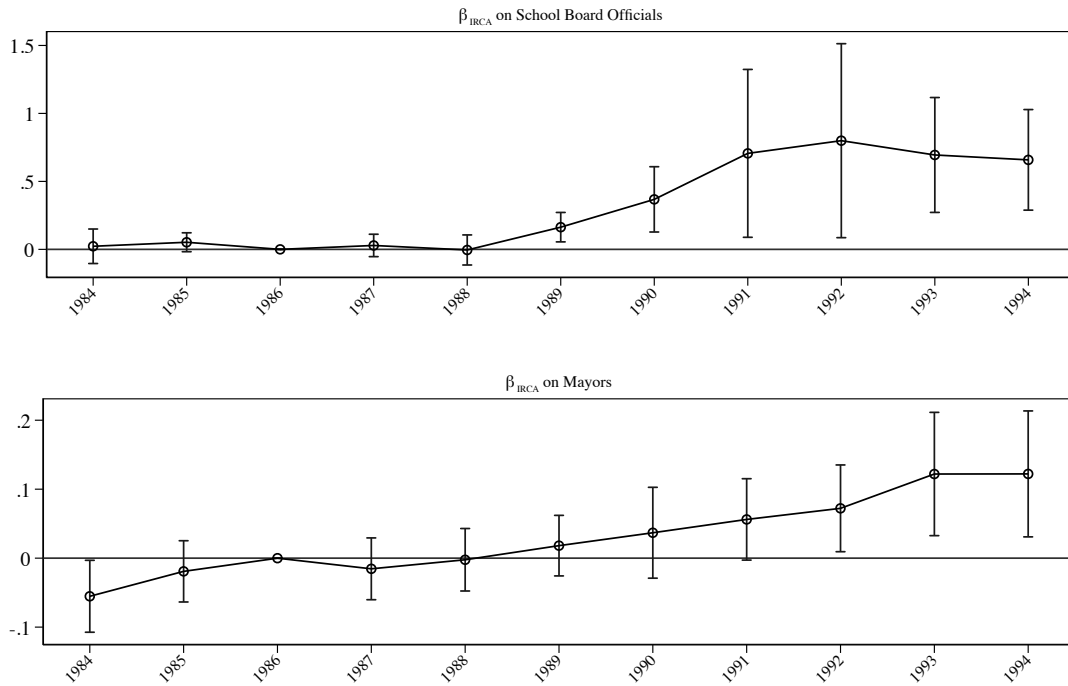
Given the results for school board and municipal officers, I probe these effects further so as to better understand the timing of the effect and to test the plausibility of the voting channel. To this end, I estimate  $\beta_j$  in equation 5 separately for officers,  $o$ , who serve only as school board officials or mayors.<sup>16</sup> The results are presented in Figure 6. The top panel plots  $\beta_j$  for school board officials. Here, the pre-trends are flat and indicate virtually no difference in the number of Hispanics in school board positions in treated and non-treated counties prior to the IRCA and a sharp increase beginning in 1991, the first year IRCA migrants are eligible for citizenship and hence, voting. Given that a number of states allow non-citizens to vote in such elections, it is also not surprising that the coefficient on school board officials is positive for the years 1989 and 1990, though the magnitude of these coefficients is much smaller compared to 1991 and beyond.<sup>17</sup> The bottom panel of Figure 6 plots  $\beta_j$  when it is estimated for Hispanic mayors. Here, the effect becomes demonstrably positive in 1992 and beyond, shortly after IRCA migrants gained the right to vote.<sup>18</sup> The timing of the effect shown for these two types of office seem to suggest that the voting potential of the newly legalized is a driving force in the selection of Hispanic officials to public office.

$$y_{o,c,t} = \beta_0 + \delta_c + \zeta_{st} + \sum_{j=1984}^{1994} \beta_j [T_c \times D_t^j] + \Theta \cdot \mathbf{X}_{c,t} + \epsilon_{c,t} \quad (5)$$

<sup>16</sup>Mayors are the most prominent office within municipal officers.

<sup>17</sup>Non-citizen voting in the United States has a long history. Up until the 1920s, 22 states allowed non-citizens to vote in local, state and even national elections (Raskin, 1992). In more recent times, the ability of non-citizens to vote in federal and state elections has been curtailed since 1996 and the enactment of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) which criminalized non-citizen voting in such elections. However, the text of the law makes clear that “aliens are authorized to vote for such other purpose under a State constitution or statute or a local ordinance”. (18 U.S.C §611 - Voting by Aliens.) As such, there is some heterogeneity—even in present day—as to which states allow non-citizens to vote in local elections. At present time, for example, a number of municipalities in Maryland, the city of Chicago, Illinois and the cities of Cambridge and Amherst in Massachusetts allow non-citizens to vote in local elections (Kini, 2005). New York City allowed non-citizens to vote in local school board elections from 1968 to 2002 (Kini, 2005) and San Francisco allows non-citizen parents to vote in school board elections. Accordingly, while the majority of elections in the United States require citizenship, there are notable cases of non-citizen voting, especially at the local level. That the coefficient on legal status is largest for school board officials reflects this fact.

<sup>18</sup>Interestingly, the results vanish when I restrict the sample to counties with populations greater than 500,000 which suggests that the effect of the IRCA on mayors is strongest in small towns where, possibly, visibility of candidates is greater.



**Figure 6:** Regression coefficients: The IRCA and Hispanic local officials over time

**Note:** This graph plots the regression coefficient on a treatment indicator when it is interacted with year dummies as specified in equation 5 but only for those officers serving at the local level. The outcome variable is the log number of Hispanics serving in an elected role at the county, municipal or school board level. Control variables include poverty and unemployment rates, log of population and log of income, all aggregated to the county level. The regressions also include county fixed effects and state-year fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the county level. Confidence intervals are drawn at 95 percent. N = 24,358 for all regressions.

### 5.3 Hispanic Networks

In this subsection, I endeavor to explore a complementary mechanism that may drive the results: networks of Hispanic friends and family. In this respect, there is evidence that shows that non-citizens in the United States, including undocumented Hispanic migrants, display high levels of civic and political engagement despite being ineligible to vote. Using data from the Latino National Survey (LNS), among other sources, McCann and Jones-Correa (2016) find, for example, that 80 percent of foreign-born non-citizen Hispanics participated in some form of local political initiatives, 20 percent had made contact with a government official about a particular concern and 10 percent indicated participation in formal political groups. What is more, McCann and Jones-Correa (2016) argue that such migrants tend come from multi-generational households with mixed legal status which prompts higher political engagement among children and relatives of the undocumented who may already have legal or citizenship status.

To test the plausibility of this channel, I interact, in Column 1 of Table 3, per capita legalizations at the county level with the share of the population that is of Hispanic origin. In Column 2, I interact

legalization with an indicator for whether a county has a “high” Hispanic share in the population, as measured by whether the Hispanic share in a given county is greater than median Hispanic share in the sample. In both cases, the interaction positively and precisely estimated, suggesting a dynamic interaction between the two: IRCA migrants have a stronger effect on the number of Hispanics elected to public office the larger the extent of the Hispanic network is in given county.

**Table 3:** The IRCA and the Hispanic Population

	Number of NALEO Officials in Office	
	(1) Hispanic Share	(2) High/Low Hispanic
Log legalisations	0.0623 (0.314)	0.650*** (0.163)
Share Hispanic	0.183*** (0.0526)	
Log legalizations × Share Hispanic	0.0504*** (0.0169)	
Log legalizations × High Hispanic		0.566*** (0.144)
Control Variables	Yes	Yes
County Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes
State-Year Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes
Observations	25,699	25,699
Number of Counties	2,624	2,624

*Notes:* The dependent variable is the number of Hispanic individuals in elected public office in a given county in a given year. Log legalizations is the log of the cumulative number of IRCA legalized migrants (plus one) in a given county in a given year. Control variables include poverty and unemployment rates, log of population and log of income, all aggregated to the county level. Standard errors (shown in parentheses) are clustered at the county level. \*  $p < 0.1$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

#### 5.4 Engagement in Politics

Both mechanisms proposed thus far—that the IRCA migrants vote themselves once eligible and that they encourage others in their networks to become more politically active—imply a measure of political engagement on behalf of those legalized by the IRCA. I test the plausibility of these proposed mechanisms in this subsection by investigating the relationship between immigrant legalization and political engagement. To this purpose, I draw on individual level survey data from the American National Elections Studies (ANES) in order to better understand the relationship between the IRCA and political activity. The results shown in Table 4 are instructive. The coefficient in Columns 1 and 2 suggests that individuals residing in counties with a higher share of legalized migrants tend to both register to vote and vote more

than their counterparts residing in counties less affected by the IRCA. What is interesting is that such individuals also tend to discuss politics with friends and family more often, again pointing to political engagement in IRCA affected counties as a driver of the results.<sup>19</sup>

**Table 4:** Political Engagement using ANES

	Measures of Political Engagement:		
	(1) Registered	(2) Voted	(3) Engagement
Log legalisations	0.0246*** (0.00702)	0.0249*** (0.00777)	0.0252*** (0.00792)
Control Variables	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
County Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
Income Dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes
Education Dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	4,745	9,063	7,933
Number of Counties	116	158	158
Years in Sample	84, 86, 88, 90	84, 86,...,94	84, 86,...,94

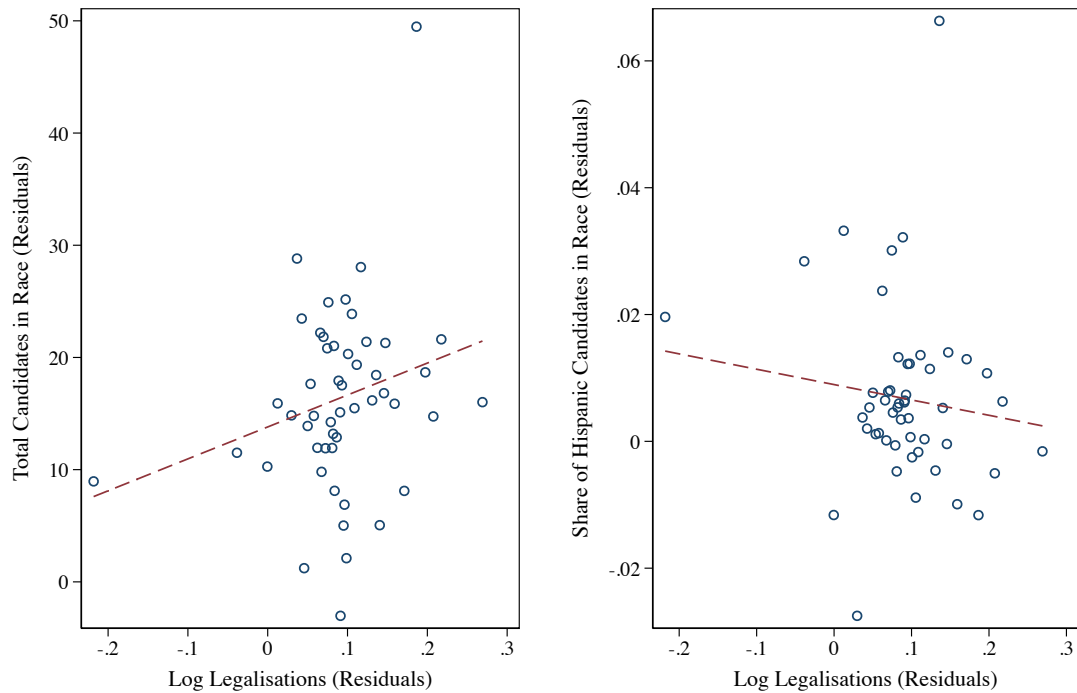
*Notes:* The dependent variables in Columns 1, 2 and 3 are binary variables that indicate whether, respectively, individuals (1) are registered to vote; (2) have voted in national elections; and (3) discuss politics with friends and family. Log legalizations is the log of the cumulative number of IRCA legalized migrants (plus one) in a given county in a given year. Control variables include individual level education, income, race, age and its square, marital status and log of county population. Standard errors (shown in parentheses) are clustered at the county level. \*  $p < 0.1$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

## 5.5 Candidates

Thus far, I have argued that those legalized by the IRCA and their networks of friends and family use their voting potential to select an increasing number of Hispanic officials to public office. Another potential mechanism, however, could be that the migrants, and those in their networks, run for office themselves, thereby increasing the number of eligible candidates to choose from. Although this would not alter the essential argument of the paper—after all, candidates still need to be voted to office—in this section I endeavor to distinguish to what extent candidate entry is a driving force of Hispanic selection to public office. Data limitations do not allow me to test for candidate entry across all potential offices. Instead, I focus only on elected mayors. To this purpose, I obtain data from from the Local Elections America

<sup>19</sup>Table A.3 in the online Appendix provides a further evidence for political engagement. Specifically, it regresses county level turnout in Presidential elections against an interaction between an indicator for treatment and an indicator for time periods after 1988. As shown, county level turnout increases in IRCA-affected counties, relative to unaffected counties, for the 1992 Presidential election when IRCA migrants are eligible to vote as compared to the 1984 and 1988 Presidential elections when the IRCA migrants are ineligible to vote.





**Figure 7:** Bin scatter plots of legalization and mayoral candidates

**Note:** This graph plots residuals of (a) total number of mayoral candidates (left panel) and (b) share of mayoral candidates of Hispanic origin (right panel) against residuals of per capita legalization at the county level. The residuals were obtained by regressing total number of candidates, share of Hispanic candidates, and per capita legalization on county fixed effects, state-by-year fixed effects as well as county level poverty and unemployment rates, log of population and log of income.

Project (LEAP) which, at the time of writing, had collected data on some 28,000 candidates from 13,252 mayoral races across nine states from 1986 to 2017. After merging with my data on legalization and Hispanic officials, I am left with information on 1,543 candidates from 784 mayoral races. This data includes first and last names of all candidates. Accordingly, I use this information to match it with Census Bureau data on surname frequency as well as basic demographic characteristics associated with surnames, including race. I am therefore able to identify Hispanic candidates in a given county in a given year and test whether more Hispanics ran for office after 1986 as compared to before in those counties more affected by the IRCA.

The results are shown in Figure 7, which plots residuals of (a) the total number of candidates per race (left panel) and (b) the share of candidates of Hispanic origin (right panel) against residuals of log legalization at the county level once county fixed effects, state-by-year fixed effects and county level controls, including population, unemployment, poverty and income, have been accounted for. The left panel of the figure shows that the size of mayoral races, as measured by the number of candidates competing for office, experienced a significant increase in counties affected by the IRCA. However,

the right panel demonstrates that the share of Hispanics competing for office did not experience a corresponding increase. These results suggest that Hispanic selection to public office is being driven by more votes for existing Hispanic candidates rather than the entry of new ones into the race.

## 6. Competence

The literature on political selection suggests that two factors drive candidates to office: their ability to represent a wide range of interests in the population or their capacity to formulate and enact policy. The tension between these two factors increases if and when competence is concentrated among specific groups—say, those with university degrees—in the population. Given that the IRCA legalized migrants who, relative to the native population in the United States, earned less and reached lower levels of educational attainment, I expect that demand for representation would be a stronger driver of Hispanic selection to public office. The fact that the results are strongest for school board officials and mayors of small towns is suggestive of this fact.<sup>20</sup> Nonetheless, in this section, I undertake a number of empirical tests in order to better understand to what extent demand for representation—as opposed to pure competence—drives the results of the paper.

### 6.1 Elected officials v Elected Judges

Candidate competence is usually proxied by measures of individual income, education, age and occupational status (Besley et al., 2017). Lacking this information my data, I am unable to provide a direct test for whether the incoming Hispanic officials differ systematically in their socio-economic characteristics. However, a peculiarity of the institutional context of the United States does allow me to carry out an indirect test for the competence channel: elected judges. Although qualifications do differ from state to state, most have relatively stringent requirements. In Texas, to take but one example, judges from the county level to the state level are elected. At the county level, qualification for judicial office includes being a US citizen, at least 25 years of age, resident of that particular county for at least two years and a licensed attorney who has practiced law or served as a judge for four years.<sup>21</sup> Although some lower level judges have less exacting qualifications, candidates who run for judgeships are likely to correlate with higher measures of competence as used in the literature. Accordingly, I first regress the legalization variable against the total number of Hispanic elected officials from a given county in a given year,

---

<sup>20</sup>School boards often require their members to be diverse and as representative of the community as possible. In this respect, the National School Boards Association of the United States explains that “[s]chool board members, especially those in large districts, are more representative of the communities they serve than state legislatures and members of Congress.” Taken from the Website of the NSBA: <https://bit.ly/2xn7pyb>. Accessed 7 March 2019.

<sup>21</sup>Taken from the Website of the Texas Judicial Branch: <https://bit.ly/1TOJvRM>. Accessed 6 March 2019.



**Figure 8:** Bin scatter plots of legalization and mayoral candidates

**Note:** This graph plots the coefficient of per 1,000 capita legalizations (plus one) at the county level when it is the regressor in regressions with elected officials (excluding judges) and only elected judges as the outcome variables. The regressions include county fixed effects, state-by-year fixed effects as well as poverty and unemployment rates, log of population and log of income, all aggregated to the county level. Confidence intervals drawn at 95 percent and  $N = 25,699$  for both regressions. Standard errors are clustered at the county level.

excluding elected judges. I then carry out a similar regression but use only elected judges as the outcome variable of interest. The coefficients, shown in Figure 8, suggest that legalization correlates strongly with the number of elected officials who enter office but not with the number of elected judges. To the extent that judgeships can be used as a proxy for demand for competence, this is a further piece of evidence that suggests demand for candidate representation drives the results.<sup>22</sup>

## 6.2 Political Mobility

Another way to test for competence is to measure the political mobility of the officials in the data. If demand for policy competence is driving the results, we might expect successful candidates to display greater political mobility, in the sense of advancing higher up the political ladder. If demand for representation is driving the results, we might expect locally elected officials—school board officials and mayors of small towns, specifically—to display less mobility as they concentrate on the duties of local

<sup>22</sup>Figure A.2 in the Appendix also makes clear that elected judges, at whatever level, did not experience significant increases at any point in time during the sampling period.

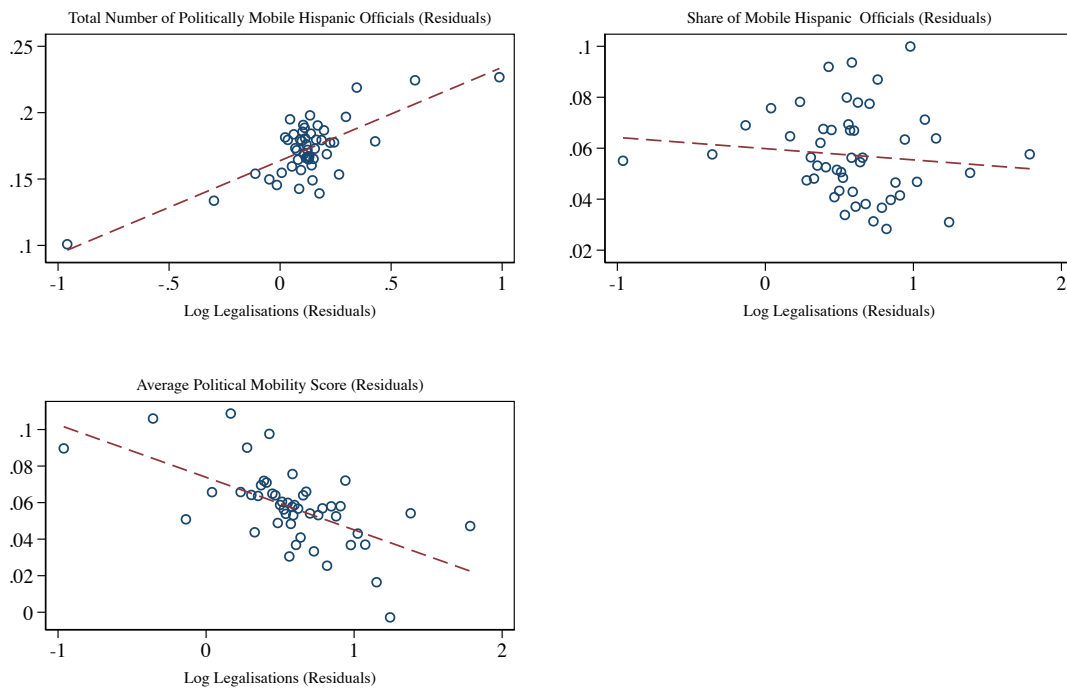
office. Again, this is an indirect test for competence: it could be that perfectly competent types choose to stay in lower levels of office. But given the measures of competence employed in the literature, it does not seem unreasonable to use political mobility as a proxy for some measure of competence.

The NALEO data contains first and last names of the Hispanic officials elected to public office. Moreover, the NALEO officers fall into eight levels of office from school board officials to federal members of congress as shown in Figure 5. Accordingly, for each official, I am able to identify (a) whether they experienced mobility in their careers in the sense of moving from one level of office to another and (b) the size of their mobility as measured by the gap between their highest and lowest level of political office. Using this information I create two aggregate measures for each county in the sample: first, I identify the total number of Hispanic officials that experienced some form of political mobility in a given county in a given year and second, from among those who experienced mobility, I calculate an average political mobility score which measures the number of levels a given officer scaled up the political ladder.<sup>23</sup> On average, the NALEO officers in the data begin as school board officials and those who do display mobility experience, on average, a jump of two political levels.

The results, shown in the form of partial correlation plots, are shown in Figure 9 and point to a number of findings. First, the total number of Hispanic officials who experience political mobility does increase significantly in the share of legalized migrants in a given county, as shown in the top left panel of the figure. However, once the total number of Hispanic officials is taken into account, the relative share of Hispanic officials who experience political mobility displays no discernible relationship with immigrant legalization, as shown in the top right panel of Figure 9. Finally, the bottom left panel shows that the average political mobility score in counties with greater numbers of legalized migrants actually decreases significantly, suggesting that officials in counties affected by the IRCA who do experience political mobility move less up the political ladder than their counterparts in non-IRCA affected counties. To the extent that high political mobility is a proxy for high competence political types—and to the extent that representation is proxied by small moves up the political ladder at the local end of the spectrum—these results, in conjunction with those in subsection 5.2, suggest that the officials who are selected to office as a result of the IRCA are selected on account of their ability to represent the interests of their constituents on local matters pertaining mostly to schooling and education.

---

<sup>23</sup>For example, school board is classified as level 1 whereas county officials are classified as level 3. An individual who at some point served as a school board official but later served as a county executive, for example, would be identified as someone who experienced political mobility with a score of 2. The average score of all those who experienced political mobility becomes the county political mobility score for that particular year.



**Figure 9:** Bin scatter plots of legalization and political mobility of Hispanic public officials

**Note:** This graph plots residuals of (a) total number of politically mobile Hispanic officials (top left panel); (b) the number of politically mobile Hispanic officials as a fraction of the total number of Hispanic officials (top right panel); and (c) average political mobility scores (bottom left panel) against residuals of per capita legalization at the county level. The residuals were obtained by regressing each variable on county fixed effects, state-by-year fixed effects as well as county level poverty and unemployment rates, log of population and log of income.

## 7. Conclusion

Hispanics are the largest ethnic minority in the United States. Notwithstanding, Hispanic representation in politics is not reflective of their share in the population. Accordingly, this paper has sought to better understand some of the underlying features of the institutional structure in the United States that determines who gets elected to office and on what grounds. The explanation I proposed is in line with models of political selection that highlight a candidate's ability to represent the interests of a particular group as a key driver of selection.

The particular institutional feature that I studied more carefully is that of Hispanic immigrant legalization and enfranchisement. The 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) provided an unexpected change in the legal, and eventual citizenship, status of a relatively homogeneous group of three million migrants of Hispanic origin, thereby increasing their relative power in choosing their representatives. Exploiting a novel source of data that contains information on over 43,000 Hispanic public officials, I found that counties most affected by the IRCA are more likely to have more Hispanics elected to public office, in particular for local offices including school board officials and mayors of small towns.

I provided evidence for two potential mechanisms that link Hispanic legalization to Hispanic political selection. First, the timing of the effect revealed that the effects are strongest in and around 1991, the shortly after the IRCA migrants gained the right to vote, suggesting that the newly legalized, once naturalized, used their newfound political voice to elect more Hispanic candidates. Second, there were modest effects prior to immigrant naturalization, in particular for school board officials. Probing this question further, I found evidence for network effects: those migrants legalized as a result of the IRCA have a much stronger effect on Hispanic selection to public office when they reside in counties with large Hispanic populations. Data on voting confirmed that the IRCA also led to greater political engagement on behalf of the migrants themselves, both in terms of their participation in elections and in terms of their ability to engage friends and family in political affairs. I also tested the relationship between immigrant legalization and candidate entry and found no evidence that the IRCA led to more Hispanic candidates running for public office. Taken together, these results suggest that the effect runs through the voting potential of the newly legalized migrants and that of their networks of friends and families rather than through increases in the number of Hispanic candidates running for office.

In the final part of the paper, I addressed the question of whether the Hispanics who are elected to office are chosen on account of their competence or their ability to represent a wide range of interests as

many models of political selection suggest. In this connection, I exploited the institutional feature of the United States that allows for many judges to be elected to office. The intuition is that if competence is a very strong driver of political selection in this setting, we ought to expect a strong effect for elected judges as the requirements for that office correlate strongly with measures of competence typically employed in the literature. My results, however, indicate no significant relationship between counties affected by the IRCA and the number of Hispanic officials serving as elected judges. I also found that the Hispanics selected to office as a result of the IRCA display little to no political mobility, and instead remain in local offices. To the extent that political mobility correlates with some measure of competence, this finding suggests that the Hispanic's that are selected to public office as a result of the IRCA are selected not strictly on account of their individual characteristics and political ambition but rather on account of their ability to better represent Hispanic interests on local matters pertaining to schooling and education.

Overall, the results of this study combine to introduce a new mechanism—enhanced political representation—that links legal status to its various other socio and economic benefits documented elsewhere in the literature.

## References

- Amuedo-Dorantes, C. and C. Bansak (2011). The impact of amnesty on labor market outcomes: A panel study using the legalized population survey. *Industrial Relations: A Journal of Economy and Society* 50(3), 443–471.
- Baker, S. R. (2015). Effects of immigrant legalization on crime. *American Economic Review: Papers and Proceedings* 105(5), 210–213.
- Besley, T. (2005). Political selection. *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 19(3), 43–60.
- Besley, T. and S. Coate (1997). An economic model of representative democracy. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 112(1), 85–114.
- Besley, T., O. Folke, T. Persson, and J. Rickne (2017). Gender quotas and the crisis of the mediocre man: Theory and evidence from sweden. *American economic review* 107(8), 2204–42.
- Besley, T., J. G. Montalvo, and M. Reynal-Querol (2011). Do educated leaders matter? *The Economic Journal* 121(554), F205–227.
- Besley, T. and M. Reynal-Querol (2011). Do democracies select more educated leaders? *American Political Science Review* 105(3), 552–566.
- Cascio, E. U. and E. Lewis (2017, March). How much does amnesty stretch the safety net? evidence from the immigration reform and control act of 1986.
- Cascio, E. U. and E. Washington (2014). Valuing the vote: The redistribution of voting rights and state funds following the voting rights act of 1965. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 129(1), 379–433.
- Caselli, F. and M. Morelli (2004). Bad politicians. *Journal of Public Economics* 88(3-4), 759–782.
- Chattopadhyay, R. and E. Duflo (2004). Women as policy makers: Evidence from a randomized policy experiment in india. *Econometrica* 72(5), 1409–1443.
- Chishti, M. and C. Kamasaki (2014). Irca in retrospect: Guideposts for immigration reform.
- Cortes, K. E. (2013). Achieving the dream: The effect of irca on immigrant youth postsecondary educational access. *The American Economic Review* 103(3), 428–432.
- Dal Bó, E., F. Finan, O. Folke, T. Persson, and J. Rickne (2017). Who becomes a politician? *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 132(4), 1877–1914.

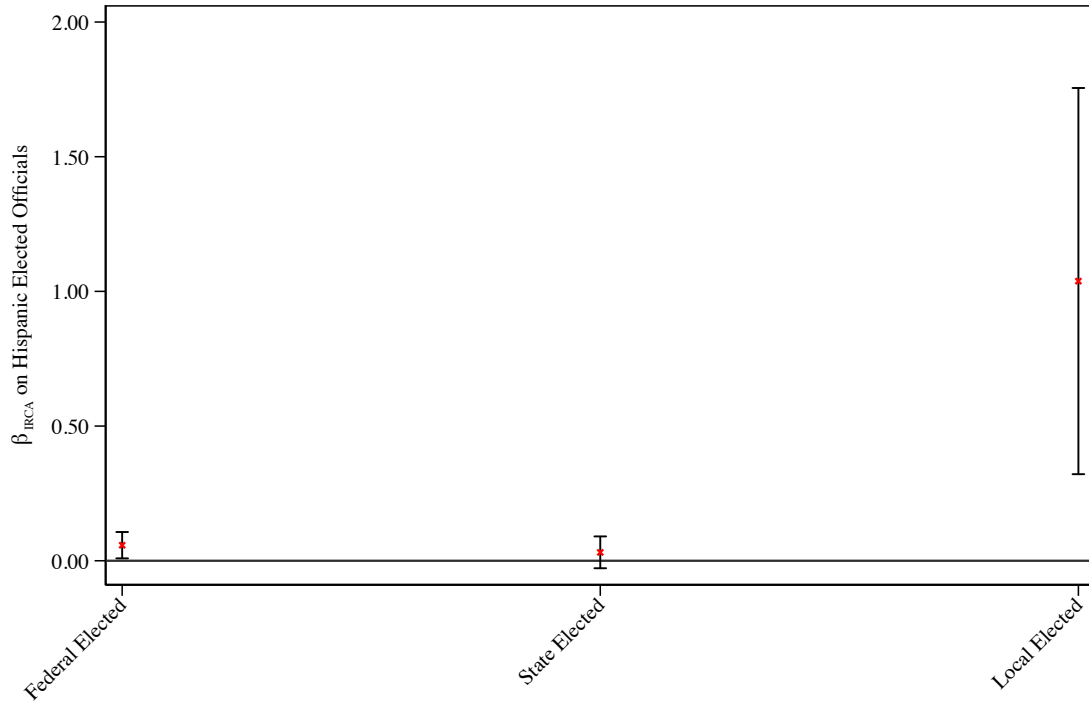


- DHHS (December 1991). State legalization impact assistance grant program. report to congress. Technical report, Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families.
- Downs, A. (1957). *An economic theory of democracy*. New York.
- Ferraz, C. and F. Finan (2009). Motivating politicians: The impacts of monetary incentives on quality and performance. Technical report, NBER Working Paper, No. 14906.
- Fuchs, L. H. (1990). The corpse that would not die: the immigration reform and control act of 1986. *Revue européenne des migrations internationales* 6(1), 111—127.
- Fujiwara, T. (2015). Voting technology, political responsiveness, and infant health: Evidence from brazil. *Econometrica* 83(2), 423–464.
- García-Pérez, M. (2013). Health care usage and health status of immigrant children: the effects of nativity versus citizenship. *The American Economic Review* 103(3), 412–417.
- Jin, B. (2019, January). Congress’s incoming class is younger, bluer, and more diverse than ever. politico. accessed 5 march 2019: <https://politi.co/2tnpnbg>.
- Kini, T. (2005). Sharing the vote: noncitizen voting rights in local school board elections. *California Law Review* 93, 271–322.
- Kossoudji, S. A. and D. A. Cobb-Clark (2002). Coming out of the shadows: Learning about legal status and wages from the legalized population. *Journal of Labor Economics* 20(3), 598–628.
- Levitt, S. D. (1996, June). How do senators vote? disentangling the role of voter preferences, party affiliation, and senator ideology. *The American Economic Review* 86(3), 425–441.
- Manning, J. E. (2018). Membership of the 115th congress: A profile. Technical report, Congressional Research Service.
- McCann, J. A. and M. Jones-Correa (2016). In the public but not the electorate: The “civic status gap” in the united states. *Journal of the Social Sciences* 2(3), 1–19.
- Meltzer, A. H. and S. F. Richard (1981). A rational theory of the size of government. *Journal of Political Economy* 89(5), 914–927.
- Miller, G. (2008). Women’s suffrage, political responsiveness, and child survival in american history. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 123(3), 1287–1327.

- Osborne, M. J. and A. Slivinski (1996). A model of political competition with citizen-candidates. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 111(1), 65–96.
- Pan, Y. (2012). The impact of legal status on immigrants' earnings and human capital: Evidence from the irca 1986. *Journal of Labor Research* 33(2), 119–142.
- Pande, R. (2003). Can mandated political representation increase policy influence for disadvantaged minorities? theory and evidence from india. *The American Economic Review* 93(4), 1132–1151.
- Raskin, J. B. (1992). Legal aliens, local citizens: the historical, constitutional and theoretical meanings of alien suffrage. *University of Pennsylvania Law Review* 141, 1391–1470.
- Sabet, N. and C. Winter (2019). The political economy of immigrant legalisation: Evidence from the 1986 irca. *Working Paper*.
- United States Census Bureau (2017). *Facts for Features: Hispanic Heritage Month 2017*. United States Census Bureau.
- Wasem, R. E. (2012, December). Unauthorized aliens residing in the united states: Estimates since 1986. Technical report, Congressional Research Service.

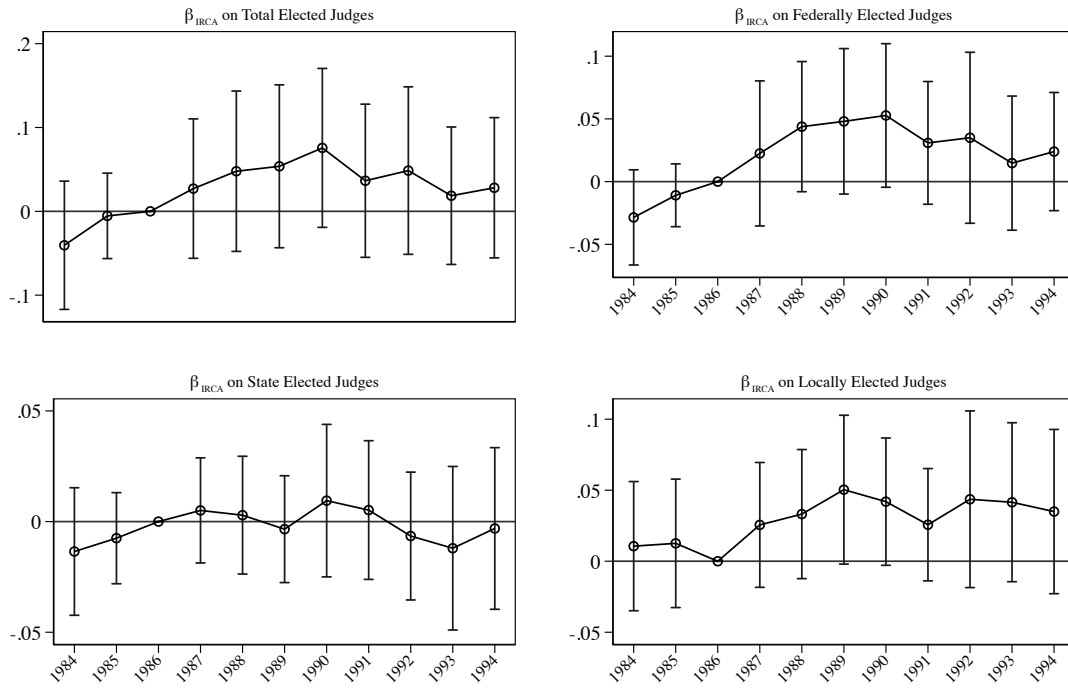
ONLINE APPENDIX

A.1 Additional Figures



**Figure A.1:** Regression coefficients: The IRCA and Hispanics public officials by levels of office

**Note:** This graph plots the regression coefficient on the log number of per capita legalisations (plus one) when the outcome variable is the log number of Hispanics in elected public office at the federal, state and local levels as well as on the total number of Hispanic elected officials at all levels. Control variables include poverty and unemployment rates, log of population and log of income, all aggregated to the county level. The regressions also include county fixed effects and state-year fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the county level. Confidence intervals are drawn at 95 percent. N = 25,699 for all regressions.



**Figure A.2:** Regression coefficients: The IRCA and Hispanic elected judges over time

**Note:** This graph plots the regression coefficient on a treatment indicator when it is interacted with year dummies. The outcome variable is the log number of Hispanic elected judges at different levels in a given county in a given year. Control variables include poverty and unemployment rates, log of population and log of income, all aggregated to the county level. Standard errors are clustered at the county level. Confidence intervals are drawn at 95 percent.  $N = 24,358$  for all three regressions.

## A.2 Additional Tables

**Table A.1:** Balance Table: Treated v. Untreated Counties in 1984

	Treated			Untreated			Difference	
	Mean	S.D	Counties	Mean	S.D	Counties	Mean	S.D
Total Hispanic Officials	1.81	[2.78]	97	1.07	[0.35]	143	0.74***	(0.23)
Average Political Mobility	0.048	[0.21]	116	0.064	[0.25]	161	-0.016	(0.028)
<i>County Characteristics:</i>								
Unemployment Rate	7.98	[1.84]	328	7.98	[2.27]	1890	-0.00078	(0.13)
Poverty Rate	11.9	[5.85]	328	16.8	[7.48]	1890	-4.94***	(0.43)
Population (1000)	399.0	[617.1]	328	32.1	[30.0]	1890	366.8***	(14.3)
Log Of County Income	9.53	[0.19]	328	9.29	[0.18]	1890	0.24***	(0.011)
Share Democratic Governor	0.66	[0.48]	328	0.78	[0.41]	1890	-0.13***	(0.025)

**Table A.2:** Hispanic Officials and the IRCA

	Outcome: Number of Hispanic Elected Officials			
	(1) Baseline	(2) Pop ≤ 428,000	(3) Matching	(4) $\Delta y_{1994-1984}$
<i>Panel A. Treatment Indicator</i>				
Treatment × Post	0.633*** (0.151)	0.275*** (0.0714)	1.030*** (0.278)	1.399*** (0.313)
<i>Panel B. Treatment Intensity</i>				
Legalizations per 1000 capita	1.210*** (0.299)	0.527*** (0.119)	1.410*** (0.376)	1.963*** (0.469)
Control Variables	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year Fixed Effects	No	No	Yes	No
County Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
State-Year Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	25,699	24,690	7,054	4,162
Number of Counties	2,624	2,534	656	2,081
Mean of Dependent Variable	1.24	.905	2.86	1.32

*Notes:* The dependent variable is number of Hispanic individuals in elected public office in a given county in a given year. Panel A shows results when using a treatment indicator whereas Panel B shows results when using a measure of treatment intensity which is the cumulative number of IRCA applications from a given county in a given year per 1000 county inhabitants. Control variables include poverty and unemployment rates, log of population and log of income, all aggregated to the county level. Standard errors (shown in parentheses) are clustered at the county level. \*  $p < 0.1$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

**Table A.3:** The IRCA and Presidential Turnout

	Turnout in Presidential Elections
	(1)
$T_c \times P_{1988}$	0.00522*** (0.00175)
County Controls	Yes
County Fixed Effects	Yes
State-Year Fixed Effects	Yes
Observations	6,631
Number of Counties	2,324
Years in Sample	84, 88, 92

*Notes:* The dependent variable is the total number of votes, at the county level, in Presidential elections as a fraction of the county population that is over 18. Log legalizations is the log of the cumulative number of IRCA legalized migrants (plus one) in a given county in a given year.  $T_c$  is an indicator for whether a county is affected by the IRCA whilst  $P_{1988}$  is an indicator that is one for years after 1988 and zero otherwise. Control variables include poverty and unemployment rates, log of population and log of income, all aggregated to the county level. Standard errors (shown in parentheses) are clustered at the county level. \*  $p < 0.1$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

### A.3 The NALEO Data

NALEO collects its information via survey. It begins with a mailed questionnaire to its current and past members which ranges from 2,500 individuals in 1984 to over 5,000 in 1994. In addition, NALEO identifies potential Hispanic office holders by surveying state directories, membership lists of national and state organizations, *Who's Who in American Politics* and Election Results Directories. In some years, NALEO retained a national press clipping service to identify news articles that report on Hispanics newly elected to public office. All newly identified persons, as well as those who did not respond to the initial questionnaire, were followed up through an extensive telephone verification process. Each year, NALEO undertakes over 5,000 phone calls to verify Hispanics officials who assume public office. In addition, NALEO has benefited from Census data. In 1987 and 1992, the Census Bureau prepared its *Popularly Elected Officials* reports. These reports identify elected officials across all levels of government in the United States and provide a breakdown by race. In these years, the Census Bureau provided NALEO with a breakdown of governments where Hispanics occupied public office and a handful of new officers were identified as a result. However, these officers were almost exclusively at the special district Level and did not affect NALEO's estimates for other types of office. As such, the NALEO *Roster* is the most comprehensive source of information on Hispanics elected to public office.