Ethnic Identity and Anti-Immigrant Sentiment: Evidence from Proposition 187

Francisca M. Antman* and Brian Duncan†

PRELIMINARY AND INCOMPLETE

March 12, 2024

Abstract

Political discourse has often stoked racial and ethnic divisions, raising the possibility that individuals' self-reported racial and ethnic identities may change in response to an increasingly hostile environment. We shed light on this question by measuring the impacts of local support for California's Proposition 187, one of the first and most well-known ballot measures widely seen to be anti-immigrant and anti-Latino, on individuals' willingness to identify ethnically as Hispanic and specifically, Mexican. Linking data on self-reported ethnicity, ancestry, and parental place of birth with county-level voter support for Proposition 187, we show that individuals with stronger ties to Mexican ancestry or parentage are less likely to identify ethnically as Mexican in response support for Prop 187, just as individuals with weaker ties to Mexican ancestry are more likely to identify as Mexican. This is consistent with our predictions that anti-minority sentiment may drive individuals with more observable ties to a minority group to reduce their willingness to identify due to heightened fear of discrimination and hostility. At the same time, anti-minority sentiment may raise the saliency of ethnicity and race and thus increase the willingness to identify as a minority for those with weaker observable ties, who are relatively more protected from adverse impacts. To our knowledge, this is the first paper to document a connection between political discourse and endogenous ethnic identity.

*University of Colorado Boulder, Department of Economics, 256 UCB, Boulder, CO 80309, Phone (303) 492-8872, Fax (303) 492-8960, francisca.antman@colorado.edu

†University of Colorado Denver, Department of Economics, Campus Box 181, Denver, CO 80217-3364, Phone (303) 315-2041, brian.duncan@ucdenver.edu

1. Introduction

In recent years, many elections have centered on stoking racial and ethnic divisions. At the same time, mounting evidence points to the fluidity of racial and ethnic identity over time and over generations (Penner and Saperstein 2008; Dahis, Nix, and Qian 2020; Duncan and Trejo 2011), and additional research suggests individuals may change their racial identities in response to the relative costs and benefits of doing so (Cassan 2015; Francis and Tannuri-Pianto 2013; Antman and Duncan 2015; Antman and Duncan 2024).[1] This raises the possibility that individuals may change their racial and ethnic identities in response to an increasingly tense political and social climate.

The expected effect of anti-minority sentiment on willingness to identify as a racial or ethnic minority is not obvious. Individuals from ethnic or racial minorities might be less likely to identify with their minority groups if they fear the political discourse may have negative consequences for them, for example due to discrimination and hostility. On the other hand, individuals from minority groups may be more likely to identify as minorities if the heightened saliency of race and ethnicity has raised their consciousness surrounding this aspect of their identity.

To address these questions, we use data surrounding one of the first and most well-known ballot measures widely seen to be anti-immigrant and anti-Latino, Proposition 187, which is sometimes credited for changing the political trajectory of California. Passed by a wide margin in 1994, Proposition 187, also known as the "Save our State" initiative, called for denying public social, health, and education services to unauthorized immigrants. State and local officials were also called on to investigate and report anyone suspected of being in the US in violation of

[1] This can be considered in a larger theoretical framework of how identity shapes economic outcomes (Akerlof and Kranton 2000).

immigration laws, including public school districts which would be required to verify the legal status of students and their parents/guardians. As such, Proposition 187 was widely seen to plausibly discriminate against the Latino community in California, regardless of legal status, and was thus seen as anti-Latino and specifically anti-Mexican, since Mexicans are by far the largest Hispanic origin group in California.

In the days leading up to the election, many protests were held, including student walk-outs and school boycotts, which included many newly-organized Latino students. The measure passed by a wide margin in November 1994, but faced significant court challenges and was ultimately found to be unconstitutional. Although Proposition 187 never went into effect, its impact on increased Latino political participation and mobilization has been widely speculated, suggesting that Proposition 187 may have indeed awakened Latino identity for a broader population, a question we pursue here. Using data from the US Census and Current Population Survey, as well as county-level vote share information on the passage of Prop 187, we ask whether individuals with documented Hispanic ancestry or parentage are more likely to identify ethnically as Hispanic/Latino or as Mexican origin in areas with higher support for the initiative after it was passed. To our knowledge, this is the first investigation into this question and the first to document a connection between political discourse, participation, and endogenous ethnic identity.

Our results suggest that anti-minority sentiment indeed plays a role in individual's willingness to identify as an ethnic minority. Specifically, we find that individuals with stronger ancestral ties to a Mexican origin identity, who are arguably more likely to be perceived as Mexican due to a Spanish last name or direct parental lineage, are less likely to identify as Mexican in response to the anti-immigrant sentiment surrounding the passage of Proposition 187. At the same time, we find that individuals with weaker ancestral or observable ties to a Mexican origin identity,

who are arguably less likely to be perceived as Mexican and thus face fewer adverse effects of anti-minority sentiment, are more likely to identify as Mexican in response to the passage of Proposition 187. These results are consistent with our predictions that anti-minority sentiment plays a role in driving ethnic identity, which varies depending on the relative costs and benefits of identifying as a racial or ethnic minority. The rest of the paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 discusses the data used in the analysis. Section 3 discusses the empirical strategy and predictions. Section 4 presents the results and Section 5 concludes.

2. Data

To explore the impact of anti-immigrant sentiment on ethnic identity, we link county-level vote share data showing support for Proposition 187 from the November 1994 election in California with two sources of individual-level data. We use data from the US Census to explore the impacts at the county level with the benefit of a larger sample size. The drawback is that since these data are from the decennial censuses, we only observe impacts well before (1990) or well after (2000) the passage of Proposition 187. This means that our interpretation of the Census results might be best described as measuring long-run impacts. At the same time, the long intervals between measurements of the outcomes also raises questions about whether some other variable, correlated with vote share for Proposition 187, might actually be driving the results. To address this concern, in separate analysis we use the 1994 and 1995 Current Population Survey (CPS), which enables us to measure short-run impacts of the passage of Proposition 187, thus measuring outcomes just after the vote, relative to a period immediately preceding the vote.

It should be noted that difference-in-differences analyses of the type employed here typically use data from a longer pre-treatment period to establish evidence for parallel trends between treatment and comparison groups. The analysis of pre-trends can then bolster the

argument that the difference-in-differences estimates are accurately capturing causal effects. In this case, however, several features of our data and policy setting preclude that as a useful avenue of exploration. We do not use earlier waves of the Census to analyze pre-trends due to significant changes in immigration policy over the earlier period, e.g., the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, which might be correlated with both our treatment and outcome variables. We do not utilize earlier waves of the CPS because 1994 is the first year in which parental place of birth is asked of respondents, and thus, for symmetry, we focus only on the 1995 CPS as the post-treatment period. [2] This effectively reduces our sample window to the survey waves immediately before and after the passage of Proposition 187. Nevertheless, we argue that the fact that the results show responses in opposite directions for ethnic minority groups based on the strength of the group's ancestral ties serves as *prima facie* evidence that the results are not driven by any pre-existing trends, as any unobservable variable driving these trends would likely impact all groups in the same direction.

2.a. Census Sample

The Census sample is from the 1990 and 2000 Census 5% microdata drawn from IPUMS USA (Ruggles et al. 2022). The sample is limited to U.S.-born individuals living in California in 1990 and 2000. Individuals with an allocated Hispanic origin have been dropped from the sample. Note that county is not identified in the 1990 and 2000 public-use microdata. IPUMS identifies counties from the Public Use Microdata Areas (PUMA), where possible. Since we will need to link these data to vote share information at the county level, the Census sample is restricted to individuals living in 33 identifiable counties in the 1990 and 2000 Census. This accounts for approximately 95% of the population in California.

[2] For more details on the Hispanic origin questions and race questions in the U.S. Census and Current Population Survey, as well how they have changed over time, see Antman, Duncan, and Trejo (2023).

The analysis of the US Census sample also makes use of two distinct questions on the US Census: (1) the Hispanic origin question, which is used to measure rates of Hispanic/Latino and Mexican ethnic identification specifically, and (2) the ancestry question, which is used to measure the strength of Mexican ancestry, as measured by whether individuals list only Mexican ancestry, Mexican and non-Mexican ancestries, or no Mexican ancestry.

Table 1 shows rates of ethnic identification for the Census sample based on the strength of Mexican ancestry in 1990 and 2000, specifically, by separating the sample into three groups: individuals with no Mexican ancestry, individuals with Mexican and non-Mexican ancestry (described as multi-ancestry Mexican), and individuals with only Mexican ancestry. Since ethnic identification may vary across the life course, and adult family members may be responding for children in the household, the table further decomposes the sample into children (panel A) and adults (panel B). Rates of identification appear roughly similar for children and adults in the group of individuals with multiple Mexican and non-Mexican ancestries as well as individuals with only Mexican ancestry, however, children with no Mexican ancestry listed generally display higher rates of Mexican identification than adults in the same category. This may be related to the fact that children are not likely to be responding to the survey directly. Thus children's ethnic identification may be reflecting, in part, the parent's view of the child's ethnic identity, which may be more distinct from the child's own view for those children with no Mexican ancestry listed. To ensure these differences are not confounding our analysis, throughout we will analyze results separately for children and adults and include age and age squared as control variables in the regression analysis below.

To address concerns that individuals in the sample may identify as Hispanic origin as opposed to Mexican origin, especially considering the Census sample is restricted to US-born

individuals, Table 1 also includes statistics on Hispanic identification rates. While rates of identification to a Hispanic origin are slightly higher than rates of Mexican identification, the increase is relatively small, thus justifying our primary focus on Mexican identification as the main outcome variable throughout the analysis.

From Table 1 it is also clear that patterns of Mexican identification vary by strength of ancestry in predictable ways, i.e., those with a stronger Mexican ancestral tie, are, all else equal, more likely to identify as Mexican. However, it is important to note that the precise relationships are not entirely predictive. For example, 97.89% of children and 97.76% of adults with only Mexican ancestry identify as Mexican origin in 1990, but these rates are not 100% for either group. Moreover, rates of Mexican identification among those with no Mexican ancestry listed are perhaps higher than expected (5.90% among children and 1.77% among adults in 1990), but they are not 0%. This likely reflects the fact that some individuals with no Mexican ancestry listed actually have some ancestral link to a Mexican origin, but a connection that is not as strong as for those with some or only Mexican ancestry listed.

Finally, Table 1 shows a pattern of increasing Mexican identification in California between 1990 and 2000, i.e., after the passage of Proposition 187, for those with no Mexican ancestry, while this pattern is reversed for those with only Mexican ancestry who demonstrate a decreased willingness to identify over time. This would be consistent with the predicted patterns described above, where individuals with stronger ties to Mexican ancestry, who are arguably more likely to be perceived as Mexican origin, decrease their willingness to identify as Mexican, whereas individuals with weaker ties to Mexican ancestry increase their willingness to identify as Mexican due to the increased salience of ethnic identity and raising of ethnic consciousness surrounding the passage of Proposition 187.

2.b. CPS Sample

The data covering the period immediately before and after the passage of Proposition 187 (1994 and 1995) come from the Current Population Survey, which is drawn from IPUMS CPS Basic Monthly data (Flood et al. 2022). Questions regarding the place of birth of the individual and their parents were added to the CPS in 1994. These questions allow us to identify first- and second-generation adults and children. For children who reside with their parents, we can also identify third-generation children. First-generation Mexican Americans are individuals who were born in Mexico. Second-generation Mexican Americans are U.S.-born individuals who have at least one parent born in Mexico. Third-generation Mexican Americans are U.S.-born individuals with two U.S.-born parents and at least one grandparent born in Mexico.

The sample is limited to individuals living in an identifiable California county who were interviewed in the 4th outgoing rotation group. We do not limit the CPS sample to US-born individuals in order to exploit the information on parental place of birth available only in the CPS, which allows us to explore impacts on ethnic identification by immigrant generation. County is not identified in the CPS data, thus metropolitan areas were matched to counties, where possible, in order to link with vote share data which are reported by county. Just over six percent of the sample (6.1%) of the sample was dropped due to individuals living in metropolitan areas with populations too small to be identified.

Table 2 presents summary statistics on Mexican identification rates from the CPS sample of adults based on immigrant generation. Perhaps unsurprisingly, almost all of first-generation Mexican immigrant adults identify as Mexican (98.35%). Rates of Mexican identification are almost as high for (US-born) second-generation Mexican individuals if both parents were both in Mexico (97.94%). However, rates of Mexican identification drop much more dramatically for

second-generation Mexican individuals if only one parent was born in Mexico (87.34%). These summary statistics reveal patterns of ethnic attrition, whereby individuals do not identify ethnically with their ancestral lineages. These data also highlight the link between ethnic attrition and intermarriage which has been established in the literature (Duncan and Trejo 2011; Antman, Duncan, and Trejo 2016; Antman, Duncan, and Trejo 2020). Moreover, Table 2 shows that if only the individual's mother was born in Mexico, rates of Mexican identification are even lower (84.82%) compared with rates of Mexican identification if only an individual's father was born in Mexico (89.47%). This likely reflects the importance of patrilineage and resulting naming conventions on ethnic identification.

Table 3 is the analogue of Table 2, but for children who reside with their parents, so that immigrant generation can be traced to the third generation using the data on parental place of birth for the respondent. A similar pattern of falling rates of Mexican identification is observed at the second generation which can again be traced to intermarriage and in particular matrilineal ancestral lines. For third generation Mexican Americans, who, it is worth emphasizing have parents who are also U.S. born, Mexican identification rates are relatively high if the child has Mexican-born maternal and paternal grandparents (89.97%), but rates fall precipitously if the child has Mexican-born grandparent(s) on only one side (62.13%).[3]

2.c. County Vote Share Data

The data on county-level vote share showing support for Proposition 187 come from the November 8, 1994, General Election Statement of Vote compiled by the California Secretary of State.[4] Figure 1 shows votes in favor of Proposition 187 and rates of self-reported Mexican

3 The third-generation sample is especially small once we divide it up into those with Mexican-born grandparents on only the mother's side and only on the father's side, respectively, so we do not emphasize those results here.
4 Available at https://elections.cdn.sos.ca.gov/sov/1994-general/sov-complete.pdf

origin in California in the 1990 and 2000 Census analysis samples. In it we see that in most counties in the sample, the vote share in support of Proposition 187 exceeded 50 percent. Moreover, there is significant variation in the vote share across California. The bottom two maps show the shares of Mexican identification across the two Census waves, which shows growth in the share of Mexican-identifying population in many counties, especially those in Southern and central California, over time. The spirit of the identification strategy in this paper is to link the bottom and top sets of figures to analyze the extent to which anti-immigrant sentiment, as measured by voter support for Proposition 187, is driving rates of ethnic identification. However, it is important to recognize that the patterns observed in Figure 1 may simply reflect an increased presence of Mexican-origin individuals in those counties due to migration, as opposed to a greater willingness of the Mexican-origin population to identify as Mexican.

We begin to address this concern by splitting the Census sample into three groups, based on the extent of their Mexican ancestry. Figure 2 shows the share of the population reporting to be of Mexican origin in California counties in the 1990 and 2000 Census, for individuals with no Mexican ancestry, individuals with Mexican and non-Mexican ancestry, as well as individuals with only Mexican ancestry. Here, the pattern appears to show increases in rates of Mexican identification for those with no Mexican ancestry between 1990 and 2000, while individuals with only Mexican ancestry appear less likely to identify as Mexican over the same time period. This pattern is consistent with the predicted effects noted above, i.e., individuals with the strongest ties to Mexican identity (those reporting only Mexican ancestry) are less likely to identify as Mexican while those individuals with the weakest ties to Mexican identity (those reporting no Mexican ancestry) are more likely to identify as Mexican, after the passage of Proposition 187. Since it is difficult to visually link county-level support for Proposition 187 from Figure 1 with

the rates of self-identification in Figure 2, we will do this via regression analysis below. We also address the concern that migration may be driving these results by examining the period immediately before and after the passage of Proposition 187 with CPS data from 1994 and 1995 and further decompose the sample to examine effects by immigrant generation and maternal versus paternal sources of Mexican ancestry.

3. Empirical Strategy

We measure the impact of anti-immigrant sentiment, as proxied by county-level vote share for Proposition 187, on the ethnic identification of individuals with the following difference-in-differences style regression model:

$$Mexican_{icy} = \alpha + \beta(Post_1994_y \times Yes187_c) + \delta Post_1994_y + \lambda_c + \mathbf{X_{icy}}\boldsymbol{\pi} + \epsilon_{icy}, \quad (1)$$

where $Mexican_{icy}$ is an indicator variable equal to one if person *i* in county *c* in year *y* identifies as Mexican on the Hispanic origin question. $Yes187_c$ is the percentage of votes in favor of Proposition 187 in county *c* (which ranges from 29.3% to 75.1% and averages 60%). This vote share measure is interacted with an indicator variable, $Post_1994_y$, equal to one if the person is observed after the passage of Proposition 187, i.e., after the November 1994 California election, and zero otherwise. Since we use two survey waves from each data source, in the analysis using CPS data, $Post_1994_y$ equals 1 for the 1995 survey year and 0 for the 1994 survey year, while in the analysis using the Census data, $Post_1994_y$ equals 1 for the 2000 survey year and 0 for the 1990 survey year. The coefficient of interest, β, is the estimated effect of one percentage-point increase in the percentage of votes in favor of Proposition 187 in the county on the probability that a person in that county will identify as Mexican. All regressions include individual level controls ($\mathbf{X_{icy}}$) for age, age squared, gender, a $Post_1994_y$ indicator, and county

fixed effects (λ_c). Sampling weights were used in the calculations and standard errors are clustered at the county level.

In principle, equation (1) could be driven by changes in the ethnic composition of the county level population, which might change over time due to migration and be driven by variables that are correlated with support for Proposition 187 (e.g., county-level economic growth patterns), thus confounding our interpretation of the coefficient of interest (β) as the impact of Proposition 187 on ethnic identification. Thus, analyzing heterogeneity in our results by population group will be a critical component of arguing that the anti-immigrant, anti-Latino climate surrounding Proposition 187 affected individuals' willingness to identify as being of Mexican origin. As noted above, individuals with ties to a Mexican identity may be affected by the anti-immigrant sentiment exemplified by support for Proposition 187 in two opposite ways: (1) they may feel adverse impacts, like discrimination and hostility, which would reduce their willingness to identify as Mexican, and (2), they may feel greater salience of their Mexican identity which is activated in response to the heightened focus on Mexicans in the local community, thus increasing their willingness to identify as Mexican origin.

Although both effects may manifest in any individual, it is likely that they will vary based on the strength of the individual's ties to Mexican ancestry, and relatedly, the extent to which they are perceived to be Mexican. Specifically, individuals with stronger ties to Mexican ancestry may be more likely to be identified as Mexican and thus are more likely to feel threatened by adverse impacts of anti-immigrant sentiment, like discrimination or hostility, thus the net effect on their willingness to identify as Mexican may be negative. At the same time, individuals with weaker ties to Mexican ancestry, who may be less likely to be identified by others as Mexican and thus be relatively more protected from adverse impacts, may on balance

feel the increased salience of their Mexican identity, and thus the net effect on their willingness to identify as Mexican may be positive.

To assess the evidence for these predictions, we exploit proxies for the strength of ties to a Mexican origin and observed Mexican ancestry available in the Census and the CPS. Specifically, in the Census, we estimate Equation (1) separately for individuals with: (*i*) Any Mexican ancestry, (*ii*) no Mexican ancestry, (*iii*) Mexican ancestry along with other non-Mexican ancestry, and (iv) only Mexican ancestry, respectively, where categories (*ii*) through (iv) are mutually exclusive and exhaustive. In the CPS, we estimate Equation (1) separately for individuals by immigrant generation, utilizing the CPS information on parental place of birth. We further decompose higher-order immigrant generations based on the source of the Mexican ties in their family lineage. For example, for second-generation Mexican Americans, we analyze results separately based on whether both parents were born in Mexico, or only the father was born in Mexico, or only the mother was born in Mexico. Note that the CPS does not include data on grandparent's place of birth, so for third-generation Mexican Americans, our sample is limited to children living with both parents, for whom we can trace grandparent's Mexican origin through data collected on the parental place of birth of the child's parents.

4. Results

4.a. Census Results

Table 4 shows the results of estimating Equation (1) on the Census sample using the full population of children and adults. In it, we see that US-born children and adults in California are more likely to identify as Mexican origin in 2000 relative to 1990. However, as noted above, this positive association may simply reflect a positive correlation between the share of Mexican

origin individuals in a given county and anti-immigrant sentiment in that location that is increasing over time, and may be driven by migration.

Table 5 instead focuses on the crux of the causal identification strategy by decomposing the sample into individuals based on the strength of their Mexican ancestry. The most striking results are the opposing patterns of Mexican identification between individuals with no Mexican ancestry and those with only Mexican ancestry. Specifically, a one percentage point increase in support for Proposition 187 results in an increase in identifying as Mexican origin of 0.117 percentage points for children (relative to a mean of 6.17 percent), and 0.04 percentage points for adults (relative to a mean of 1.95 percent). At the same time, the signs of the coefficient of interest are negative for those with only Mexican ancestry (-.0003 for children and -.00095 for adults), though only statistically significant for adults. This shows that a one percentage point increase in support for Proposition 187 results in a decrease in identifying as Mexican origin of 0.095 percentage points for adults (relative to a mean of 2.98 percent). Taken together, these results are consistent with the interpretation that anti-immigrant sentiment, as measured by the county level support for Proposition 187, decreased the willingness to identify as Mexican origin for those most likely to be targets of hostility and discrimination while it increased the willingness to identify as Mexican origin for those who would be relatively more protected from the adverse effects of anti-immigrant sentiment, yet more likely to be affected by the increased saliency of their Mexican identity.

4.b. CPS Results

As mentioned above, one concern with the US Census results is that there is a large gap between the measurement of ethnic identification in the survey waves (1990 and 2000) and the passage of Proposition 187 in 1994. This raises concerns about differential migration rates over

these long time periods and raises the possibility that an omitted variable, correlated with ethnic identification and support for Proposition 187, might be driving the results. To address these concerns, we use the 1994 and 1995 waves of the CPS, which also include information on parental place of birth that allow us to further explore mechanisms underlying our results.

Table 6 shows the CPS sample results from estimating Equation (1) for adults distinguished by immigrant generation. Results show that ethnic identification of first-generation immigrants does not appear responsive to anti-immigrant sentiment as the coefficient of interest is not statistically significant. This makes sense since this group was born in Mexico and may not have an obvious choice of ethnic identity since they are likely to be perceived universally as Mexican-born. A choice of ethnic identity may thus only really be possible at higher-order immigrant generations, who are US-born, and especially those with parents who are intermarried, and thus come from different ethnic backgrounds, resulting in the possibility of a choice of ethnic identity for their children.

For second generation adults, who are all US-born Americans, Table 6 shows a negative impact of the passage of Proposition 187 on willingness to identify as Mexican (coefficient estimate -.0072, statistically significant at the 1% level). Further analysis shows that this effect is driven by second-generation immigrants with only one Mexican-born parent (coefficient estimate -.0137, statistically significant at the 1% level). Similar magnitudes are obtained if the individual has Mexican parentage on their mother's or father's side.

Note that we can only trace the adult sample to the second generation using the CPS data on parental place of birth, and thus one might argue that the entire adult sample has relatively strong ties to Mexican identity, since one of their parents was born in Mexico. Thus, for the

adult sample, it makes sense that we only observe negative impacts of anti-immigrant sentiment on rates of Mexican identification.

Moving to the sample of children in Table 7, we can explore the impacts of anti-immigrant sentiment on the first, second, and third immigrant generations. As with other papers that have studied ethnic attrition, we do not see much evidence of an impact on second-generation children (Duncan and Trejo 2011, Antman and Duncan 2024). This may in part be due to the fact that the racial and ethnic identities of children are likely being entered into surveys by their parents. This reduces the amount of disconnection we might observe between ethnic identification of second-generation children and their parents, who are first-generation Mexican immigrants and, as we have seen above, are not likely to change their ethnic identities in response to Proposition 187. This would explain why we do not find a statistically significant impact of Proposition 187 on the ethnic identification of second-generation children, though the coefficient is negative (-.0018).

When we further decompose the sample into the source of Mexican parentage, we see a reduced willingness to identify as Mexican in the sample of children with only Mexican-born fathers (coefficient -.0347, statistically significant at the 1% level). As this group would also likely have a Spanish surname, these results are consistent with our hypothesis that those with the strongest link to a Mexican origin, who are most likely to be perceived as Mexican by others, would reduce their willingness to identify as Mexican in response to the anti-immigrant sentiment surrounding Proposition 187.

At the third generation, we also see more nuanced responses, consistent with both predictions regarding reduced and increased motivations to identify with a Mexican-origin identity. First, we see that third-generation children with the strongest ties to Mexican ancestry,

that is, children with Mexican-origin ancestors on both their mother's and father's sides, are less likely to identify as Mexican after the passage of Proposition 187 (coefficient estimate -.0563, statistically significant at 1 percent level). Second, we see that children with Mexican ancestry on only one side of their family are more likely to identify after the passage of Proposition 187 (coefficient estimate .0269, statistically significant at the 5 percent level).

Unpacking this further, we see that this positive impact is driven by third generation children with a Mexican-origin ancestor only on their mother's side, and thus who are arguably the least likely to be perceived as Mexican since their last name is not likely to reveal their Mexican identity (coefficient estimate .0906, statistically significant at the 5 percent level). For third generation children with a Mexican-origin ancestor on their father's side, and who are thus more likely to have a Spanish surname and thus more likely to be perceived outwardly as Mexican, we see a reduced willingness to identify as Mexican in response to Proposition 187 (coefficient estimate -.0130, statistically significant at 5% level). These results are consistent with our predictions that individuals with stronger ties to a Mexican-origin identity, who are arguably more likely to suffer adverse impacts related to the anti-immigrant, anti-Latino, hostility surrounding Proposition 187, will be less likely to identify as Mexican in response. At the same time, those with weaker ties to a Mexican-origin identity, who may be less likely to suffer these adverse impacts, increase their willingness to identify as Mexican due to the raising of ethnic consciousness which surrounded the passage of Proposition 187. The latter might also be described as a reaction in direct opposition to the anti-immigrant sentiment expressed by supporters of the measure.

5. Conclusion

To our knowledge, this paper is the first to explore the causal impacts of anti-immigrant sentiment, and political discourse more broadly, on the choice of ethnic identity. It is also the first paper to extend the research on the causal impacts of incentives to identify as a racial minority group (Antman and Duncan 2015, Antman and Duncan 2024) to an ethnic minority group and specifically, to Hispanic and Mexican identity. Thus, we bring an important causal perspective to the existing literature on ethnic attrition which has largely focused on linking intermarriage, itself a choice, with the choice of ethnic identity (Duncan and Trejo 2011; Antman, Duncan, and Trejo 2016, 2020).

Our results suggest that individuals with stronger ancestral ties to a Mexican origin identity, and those who are more likely to be perceived as Mexican due to last name or direct parentage, are less likely to identify in response to the passage of Proposition 187. At the same time, we find that individuals with weaker ancestral ties to a Mexican origin identity, who are arguably less likely to be perceived as Mexican, are more likely to identify as Mexican. The fact that these effects run in opposing directions bolsters our argument that our results are not due to some confounding variable, but instead driven by the anti-immigrant sentiment that is more prevalent after the passage of Proposition 187 and in those counties with greater support for the measure. Nevertheless, to the extent that other anti-immigrant, anti-Latino, sentiments developed over this period, and may also be correlated with support for Proposition 187, our estimates may be picking up those changes as well. While we have tried to address these concerns by narrowing the time window around the passage of Proposition 187, we acknowledge that it is possible that our results are driven by a multitude of factors resulting in a broader anti-immigrant climate, which is itself reflected in local support Proposition 187. Further research

should try to disentangle these effects to shed greater light on the mechanisms underlying the choice of ethnic identity.

References

Akerlof, George A. and Rachel E. Kranton. 2000. "Economics and Identity." Quarterly Journal of Economics, 115(3): 715-53.

Antman, Francisca M. and Brian Duncan. 2015. "Incentives to Identify: Racial Identity in the Age of Affirmative Action." T*he Review of Economics and Statistics*, 97(3): 710-713.

Antman, Francisca M., Brian Duncan, and Stephen J. Trejo. 2016. "Ethnic Attrition and the Observed Health of Later Generation Mexican Americans." *American Economic Review*, 106(5): 467-71.

Antman, Francisca M., Brian Duncan, and Stephen J. Trejo. 2020. "Ethnic Attrition, Assimilation, and the Measured Health Outcomes of Mexican Americans." *Journal of Population Economics*, 33(4): 1499-1522.

Antman, Francisca M. and Brian Duncan. 2023. "American Indian Casinos and Native American Self-Identification." *Journal of the European Economic Association*, 21(6): 2547–2585. https://doi.org/10.1093/jeea/jvad018

Antman, Francisca M., Brian Duncan, and Stephen J. Trejo. 2023. "Hispanic Americans in the Labor Market: Patterns over Time and across Generations." *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 37 (1): 169-98. DOI: 10.1257/jep.37.1.169

Cassan, Guilhelm. 2015. "Identity-Based Policies and Identity Manipulation: Evidence from Colonial Punjab." *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*, 7, 103–131.

Dahis, Ricardo, Emily Nix, and Nancy Qian (2020). "Choosing Racial Identity in the United States, 1880–1940." NBER Working Paper No. 26465.

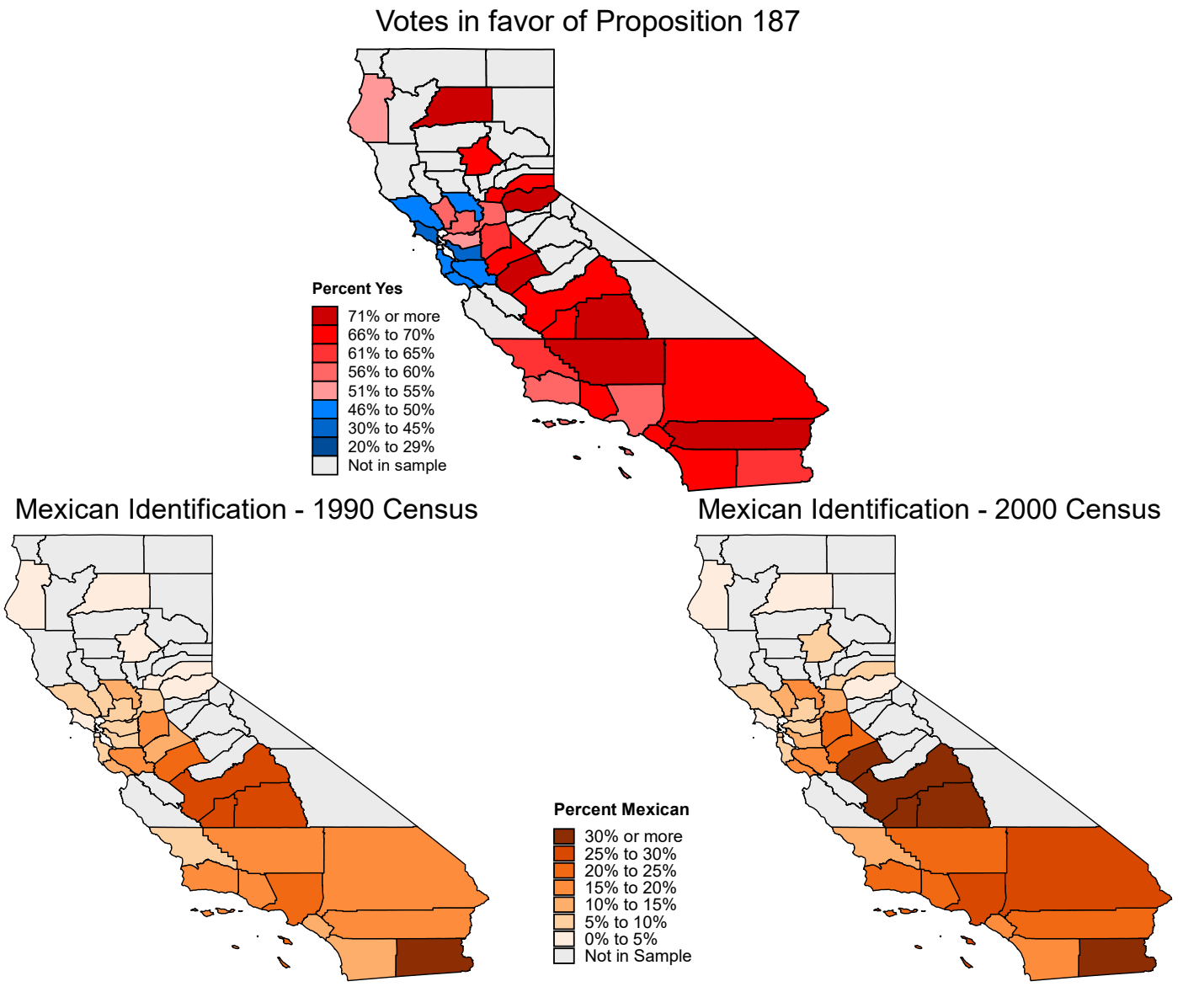
Duncan, Brian and Stephen J. Trejo. 2011. "Intermarriage and the Intergenerational Transmission of Ethnic Identity and Human Capital for Mexican Americans." *Journal of Labor Economics,* 29(2): 195-227.

Flood, Sarah, Miriam King, Renae Rodgers, Steven Ruggles, J. Robert Warren, Daniel Backman, Annie Chen, Grace Cooper, Stephanie Richards, Megan Schouweiler, and Michael Westberry. IPUMS CPS: Version 11.0 [dataset]. Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2023. Extracted on September 6, 2023. https://doi.org/10.18128/D030.V11.0

Francis, A. M. and M. Tannuri-Pianto. 2013. "Endogenous Race in Brazil: Affirmative Action and the Construction of Racial Identity among Young Adults." *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, 61, 731–753.

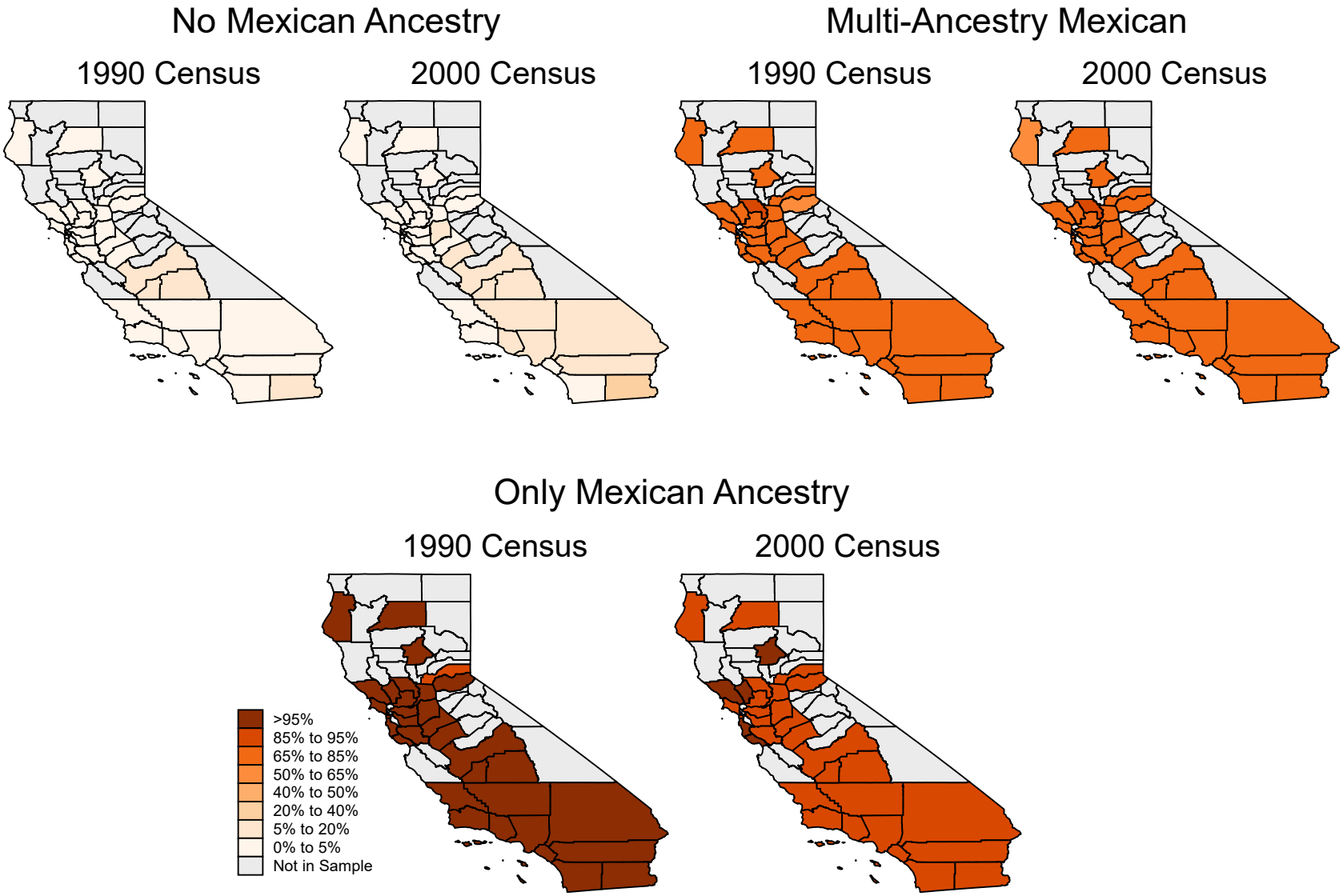
Ruggles, Steven, Sarah Flood, Matthew Sobek, Daniel Backman, Annie Chen, Grace Cooper, Stephanie Richards, Renae Rogers, and Megan Schouweiler. IPUMS USA: Version 14.0 [dataset]. Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2023. Extracted on May 19, 2023. https://doi.org/10.18128/D010.V14.0

Figure 1: Votes in Favor of Proposition 187 and Self-reported Mexican Origin in California in the 1990 and 2000 Census, by County



Source: 1990 and 2000 Census Data. The samples include U.S.-born individuals living in identifiable counties in California in 1990 and 2000.

Figure 2: Self-reported Mexican Origin in California Counties in the 1990 and 2000 Census, by Mexican Ancestry



Source: 1990 and 2000 Census Data. The samples include U.S.-born individuals living in identifiable counties in California in 1990 and 2000.

Table 1: Self-reported Hispanic Origin of Children and Adults in California in the 1990 and 2000 Census, by Mexican Ancestry

Panel A: Children	No Mexican	Multi-Ancestry	Only Mexican
1990 Census	Ancestry	Mexican	Ancestry
Hispanic	11.32	80.99	98.55
Mexican	5.90	75.86	97.89
Other Hispanic	5.42	5.12	0.66
2000 Census			
Hispanic	17.98	86.68	98.76
Mexican	9.43	67.79	93.93
Other Hispanic	8.55	18.89	4.83
1990 Sample size	233,767	9,712	69,320
2000 Sample size	262,140	13,607	100,940
Panel B: Adults	No Mexican	Multi-Ancestry	Only Mexican
1990 Census	Ancestry	Mexican	Ancestry
Hispanic	3.81	80.97	98.32
Mexican	1.77	77.77	97.76
Other Hispanic	2.03	3.20	0.56
2000 Census			
Hispanic	5.60	84.97	98.63
Mexican	2.77	72.88	93.65
Other Hispanic	2.83	12.09	4.98
1990 Sample size	654,325	6,343	57,746
2000 Sample size	655,601	8,914	75,521

Source: 1990 and 2000 Census Data. The samples include U.S.-born individuals living in identifiable counties in California in 1990 and 2000 with the indicated ancestry. Individuals with allocated Hispanic origin are excluded.
Notes: All numbers are percentages. Sampling weights were used in the calculations. .

Table 2: Self-reported Hispanic Origin of Adults in California by Mexican Generation

	Hispanic	Mexican	Other Hispanic
First-generation Mexican	99.12	98.35	0.77
	95.38	93.20	2.18
Second-generation Mexican			
Both parents born in Mexico	99.11	97.94	1.16
One parent born in Mexico	90.78	87.34	3.44
Only mother born in Mexico	88.03	84.82	3.21
Only father born in Mexico	93.10	89.47	3.63

Source: 1994-1995 Current Population Survey (CPS) 4th outgoing rotation group data.
Notes: The samples include first- and second-generation Mexican Americans 18 and older who reside in a California county that can be identified in the CPS data. First-generation Mexican Americans are individuals who were born in Mexico. Second-generation Mexican Americans are U.S.-born individuals who have at least one parent born in Mexico. The sample sizes are 2,540 for the first generation and 833 for the second generation. Sampling weights were used in the calculations.

Table 3: Self-reported Hispanic Origin of Children in California by Mexican Generation

	Hispanic	Mexican	Other Hispanic
First-generation Mexican	98.15	97.79	0.35
Second-generation Mexican	96.68	94.31	2.37
Both parents born in Mexico	99.50	99.07	0.44
One parent born in Mexico	89.22	81.73	7.49
Only mother born in Mexico	86.04	83.16	2.88
Only father born in Mexico	92.82	80.11	12.71
Third-generation Mexican	72.79	68.19	4.60
Grandparent born in Mexico on:			
Mexican Both Sides	100.00	89.97	10.03
Mexican One Side	65.22	62.13	3.09
Mexico only on mother side	67.97	67.97	0.00
Mexico only on father side	62.67	56.73	5.95

Source: 1994-1995 Current Population Survey (CPS) 4th outgoing rotation group data.
Notes: The samples include first- and second-, and third-generation Mexican Americans 17 and younger who are living with both parents and who reside in a California county that can be identified in the CPS data. First-generation Mexican Americans are individuals who were born in Mexico. Second-generation Mexican Americans are U.S.-born individuals who have at least one parent born in Mexico. Third-generation Mexican Americans are U.S.-born individuals with two U.S.-born parents and at least one grandparent born in Mexico. The sample sizes are 275 for the first generation, 1,321 for the second generation, and 196 for the third generation. Sampling weights were used in the calculations.

Table 4: Relationship between Votes in Favor of Proposition 187 in County and Hispanic Identification

Dependent Variable: Identified as Hispanic	Children	Adults
Percent Yes on 187 × 1{year = 2000}	.00218***	.00086***
	(.00052)	(.00030)
Mean of the dependent variable	.3745	.1399
Dependent Variable: Identified as Mexican		
Percent Yes on 187 × 1{year = 2000}	.00192***	.00056***
	(.00059)	(.00019)
Mean of the dependent variable	.3113	.1145
Dependent Variable: Identified as Other Hispanic		
Percent Yes on 187 × 1{year = 2000}	.00025	.00030**
	(.00042)	(.00011)
Mean of the dependent variable	.05611	.02105
Sample size	689,486	1,458,450

*Statistically significant at 10% level; **at 5% level; ***at 1% level.
Source: 1990 and 2000 Census Data.
Notes: Robust standard errors clustered at the county level are shown in parentheses. Sampling weights were used in the calculations. The sample includes U.S.-born children (ages 0-17) and adults (ages 18 and older) living in identifiable counties in California in 1990 and 2000. Individuals with allocated Hispanic origin are excluded. All regressions include controls for age, age squared, gender, a year 2000 indicator, and county fixed effects. Percent Yes on 187 is the percentage of yes votes on Proposition 187 in the county.

Table 5: Relationship between Votes in Favor of Proposition 187 in County and Hispanic Identification, by Mexican Ancestry

	Any Mexican Ancestry		No Mexican Ancestry		Multi-Ancestry Mexican		Only Mexican Ancestry	
	Children	Adults	Children	Adults	Children	Adults	Children	Adults
Dep. Var.: Identified as Hispanic								
Percent Yes on 187 × 1{year = 2000}	.00013	-.00019	.00145**	.00062***	.00058	-.00077	.00004	-.00013
	(.00032)	(.00020)	(.00056)	(.00018)	(.00119)	(.00089)	(.00016)	(.00014)
Mean of the dependent variable	.9691	.9689	.1483	.0470	.8428	.8328	.9867	.9850
Dep. Var.: Identified as Mexican								
Percent Yes on 187 × 1{year = 2000}	.00037	-.00067**	.00117***	.00040***	.00304*	-.00002	-.00030	-.00095***
	(.00042)	(.00026)	(.00022)	(.00011)	(.00155)	(.00094)	(.00030)	(.00022)
Mean of the dependent variable	.9257	.9329	.0776	.0227	.7118	.7494	.9556	.9545
Dep. Var.: Identified as Other Hispanic								
Percent Yes on 187 × 1{year = 2000}	-.00024	.00049*	.00029	.00022**	-.00246**	-.00075	.00034	.00082***
	(.00023)	(.00027)	(.00046)	(.00010)	(.00117)	(.00071)	(.00021)	(.00027)
Mean of the dependent variable	.04151	.0347	.06166	.01952	.1166	.06594	.03032	.02983
Sample size	193,579	148,524	495,907	1,309,926	9,163	5,635	170,260	133,267

*Statistically significant at 10% level; **at 5% level; ***at 1% level.

Source: 1990 and 2000 Census Data.

Notes: Robust standard errors clustered at the county level are shown in parentheses. Sampling weights were used in the calculations. The sample includes U.S.-born children (ages 0-17) and adults (ages 18 and older) living in California in 1990 and 2000. Individuals with allocated Hispanic origin are excluded. All regressions include controls for age, age squared, gender, a year 2000 indicator, and county fixed effects. Percent Yes on 187 is the percentage of yes votes on Proposition 187 in the county.

Table 6: Effect of a One Percentage Point Increase in Yes Votes on Proposition 187 in County on the Mexican Identification of Adults by Mexican Generation

	Mexican	
	1st-Generation	2nd-Generation
Percent Yes on 187 × 1{year=1995}	.0008	-.0072***
	(.0007)	(.0021)
Mean of Dependent Variable	.9835	.932
Sample size	2,540	833

Second-generation Mexican:	Both parents Mexican	One parent Mexican	Only mom Mexican	Only dad Mexican
Percent Yes on 187 × 1{year=1995}	-.0024	-.0137***	-.0131*	-.0173**
	(.0023)	(.0042)	(.0066)	(.0082)
Mean of Dependent Variable	.9794	.8734	.8482	.8947
Sample size	460	373	174	199

Source: 1994-1995 Current Population Survey (CPS) 4th outgoing rotation group data.

Notes: The samples include adults 18 and older who reside in a California county that can be identified in the CPS data. Robust standard errors clustered at the county level are shown in parentheses. All regressions include controls for age, age squared, gender, year fixed effects and county fixed effects. Percent yes on 187 is the percentage of yes votes on Proposition 187 in the county. Sampling weights were used in the calculations.

Table 7: Effect of a One Percentage Point Increase in Yes Votes on Proposition 187 in County on the Mexican Identification of Children by Mexican Generation

	Mexican			Not Mexican
	1st-Gen.	2nd-Gen.	3rd-Gen.	3rd+-Gen.
Percent Yes on 187 × 1{year=1995}	.0004	-.0018	.0206**	.0007
	(.0013)	(.0024)	(.0095)	(.0012)
Mean of Dependent Variable	.9779	.9431	.6819	.08004
Sample size	275	1,321	196	2,354
Second-generation Mexican:	Both parents Mexican	One parent Mexican	Only mom Mexican	Only dad Mexican
Percent Yes on 187 × 1{year=1995}	.0010	-.0123	.0097	-.0347**
	(.0011)	(.0114)	(.0129)	(.0148)
Mean of Dependent Variable	.9907	.8173	.8316	.8011
Sample size	967	354	196	158
Third-generation Mexican:	Mexican on both sides	Mexican on one side	Mexican only on mom side	Mexican only on dad side
Percent Yes on 187 × 1{year=1995}	-.0563***	.0269**	.0906***	-.0130**
	(.0109)	(.0106)	(.0112)	(.0051)
Mean of Dependent Variable	.8997	.6213	.6797	.5673
Sample size	41	155	74	81

Source: 1994-1995 Current Population Survey (CPS) 4th outgoing rotation group data.
Notes: The samples include children 17 and younger who are living with both parents and who reside in a California county that can be identified in the CPS data. Robust standard errors clustered at the county level are shown in parentheses. All regressions include controls for age, age squared, gender, year fixed effects and county fixed effects. Percent yes on 187 is the percentage of yes votes on Proposition 187 in the county. Sampling weights were used in the calculations. Not Mexican 3rd+ generation are U.S.-born individuals with two U.S.-born parents and no grandparents born in Mexico.