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An Examination of the Relationship Between Povery and State-Level Immigrant Policies

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STATE-LEVEL IMMIGRANT POLICIES CREATE CONTEXTS THAT CAN SHAPE INEQUALITIES BETWEEN CITIZENS AND NONCITIZENS

States with policies that foster immigrant inclusion are more likely to have lower poverty among Latino and Asian populations. Inclusive immigrant policies at the state-level provide noncitizens with critical rights, protections, and access to opportunities that can improve their economic well-being. While immigration policy, which governs who can enter the country, continues to be enacted at the federal level, it is immigrant policy at the state-level which increasingly determines immigrants' rights and access to services based on their citizenship and legal status. Currently, state policymakers have the discretion to pass policies in the areas of health, social welfare, education, labor, and enforcement [1]. These immigrant policies determine immigrants' access, based on their citizenship status, to a range of rights, public services, higher education, and workplace protections.

State immigrant policies likely influence poverty rates among immigrants by determining their level of access to social, economic, political, and health resources and by shaping the social environment [2,3]. To reduce poverty among immigrants, more information is needed about the relationship between poverty and these state policies that influence immigrants' opportunities. Specifically, in the states with a greater number of inclusive state policies, such as those listed in Table 1, there may be reduced socioeconomic inequality between citizens and noncitizens. Overall, immigrant policy contexts may contribute to distinct patterns of poverty disparities by both citizenship and race/ethnicity.
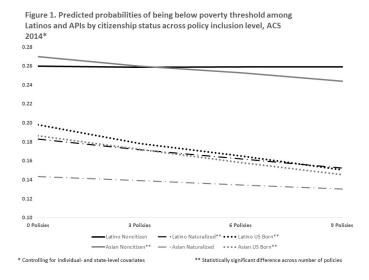
Table 1. State Immigrant Policies Used in the Analysis

Policy Sectors	Policy Indicators
Public Health and Welfare Benefits	(1) Does the state provide health insurance to children regardless of legal status?
	(2) Does the state provide care to pregnant women regardless of legal status?
	(3) Does the state count a prorated share of ineligible noncitizen income?
Higher Education	(4) Does the state provide tuition equity to undocumented students?
	(5) Does the state provide access to scholarships or financial aid to undocumented students?
Labor and Employment	(6) Does the state prohibit employers from using E-Verify?
	(7) Does the state include undocumented immigrants in workers' compensation laws?
Driver's Licenses and Identification	(8) Does the state offer driver's licenses to undocumented immigrants?
	(9) Does the state have a statutory opposition or resolution in opposition to compliance with the REAL ID Act?
Immigration Enforcement	(10) Does the state limit participation in Secure Communities?

WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INCLUSIVE STATE IMMIGRANT POLICY CONTEXTS AND POVERTY RATES?

I sought to understand how the contexts created by state-level immigrant policies shape the socioeconomic stratification of immigrants across citizenship status for Latino and Asian and Pacific Islanders (APIs), two race/ethnic groups with large proportions of noncitizens. I conducted a systematic review of immigrant policies in each state [4]. Each state received an inclusion score based on its total number of inclusive policies (Range 1-10). I combined this measure with data from the 2014 American Community Survey (ACS). In addition to providing representative demographic data on citizens and noncitizens in the US, the ACS provides a measure of whether or not individuals are below the poverty threshold, an indicator of family income that takes into account family size, composition, and ages of its members. I estimated fixed-effects logistic regression models to test the associations between being below the poverty

threshold and the states' level of inclusiveness, as it varied by both citizenship and race/ethnicity, controlling for state- and individual-level characteristics.

The results, presented as predicted probabilities in Figure 1, showed that there are significant disparities in poverty by citizenship status for both Latinos and Asian and Pacific Islanders (APIs). Overall, noncitizens had higher levels of poverty compared to citizens. Among API noncitizens, there was lower levels of poverty in states with higher levels of inclusion. Further, the difference in poverty between noncitizens and citizens was smaller in these states with higher inclusion, suggesting there is a smaller poverty disparity in these states.

Figure 1. Predicted probabilities of being below poverty threshold among Latinos and APIs by citizenship status across policy inclusion level, ACS 2014*

Latino Noncitizen — Latino Naturalized** — Latino US Born**
Asian Noncitizen** — Asian Naturalized — Asian US Born**

* Controlling for individual- and state-level covariates   ** Statistically significant difference across number of policies

Both Latino and API citizens experienced lower levels of poverty in states with higher versus lower levels of inclusion. Among Latinos, however, the gap in poverty rates between noncitizens and citizens was larger in more inclusive than less inclusive ones, suggesting that there was no reduction in poverty disparities for this group. The potential positive impact of more inclusive environments may not necessarily translate into socioeconomic benefits for the most vulnerable Latino group.

MORE INCLUSIVE STATES MAY FOSTER ENVIRONMENTS THAT ADVANCE ECONOMIC WELL-BEING

States with more inclusive immigrant policy contexts provide noncitizens with more rights, protections, and access to opportunities. They likely have a more inclusionary immigrant receptivity climate. This analysis suggests that these more inclusive climates are associated with reduced disparities in poverty among APIs and also have positive "spillover effects" for API and Latino citizens. However, it also found that does not necessarily translate into a more inclusionary economic climate for Latino noncitizens, suggesting more research and action is needed to understand the impact of immigrant policies in this population.

While federal policy continues to determine *who can be* an immigrant, it is state policies that shape *what it means* to be an immigrant—particularly a noncitizen—in each state in the United States. State policymakers have the discretion to advance policies in a range of sectors. As the federal government continues to pursue increasingly restrictive policies, inclusive state-level policies can foster more welcoming social environments that contribute to economic security and well-being of both immigrants and citizens.

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