

**When Fear Spreads: Individual- and Group-Level Predictors of Deportation Worry
Among Latino Immigrants**

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Abstract

What shapes Latino immigrants' worries surrounding deportation? Using five waves of the Latino National Survey, we examine this question by considering immigrants' own legal status, their social background, and the legal vulnerability of their national origin group. We find that while individual legal vulnerability heightens deportation worries, social and group markers also have independent and intersecting associations with immigrants' worries. Disadvantaged social traits such as lack of English language proficiency and lower levels of education are associated with higher rates of deportation anxiety regardless of legal status, while also differentially shaping the effects of legal status. In addition, while all national origin groups are likely to report worrying about deportation, immigrants from national origin groups at greater risk of deportation tend to worry more, regardless of individual legal status. Finally, decomposition analysis suggests that individual legal status does not have greater explanatory power over deportation fears than social markers or group-level legal vulnerability. Even while being undocumented remains significant in shaping deportation fears, these fears vary widely and systematically within and across legal and social categories.

Key words: deportation, fear, legal status, immigration enforcement

Word count: 8,942

Introduction

Migration control inevitably yields undocumented immigration, as states lack the infrastructural power needed to fully override the force of migrant social capital, on the one hand, and employer demand for migrants, on the other. Since the 1980s, U.S. immigration policy has taken a repressive turn: while employers of undocumented immigrants have been largely sheltered, anti-immigrant animus targeting undocumented immigrants has spawned a series of measures heightening the vulnerability of a much broader foreign-origin population. Legislation passed at the turn of the 21st century heightened the vulnerability of noncitizens to deportation. Acts such as the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA), and the 1996 Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act (AEDPA) expanded grounds for deportation, restricted due process from removal proceedings, widened the scope of enforcement to the local level, and promoted anti-immigrant rhetoric in media and politics. In recent years, anti-immigrant sentiment has proliferated in the United States following the 2016 presidential election (Schaffner 2020).

Given the size of the undocumented population, full-scale removal exceeds the capacity of the American state. Thus, while any individual undocumented immigrant is at relatively low risk of deportation, *every* undocumented immigrant is potentially deportable (de Genova 2002). Hence, the repressive turn has made certain immigrants “hyperaware” of the risk of deportation for themselves and those around them (Menjívar 2011). For immigrants lacking legal authorization to reside in the United States, the salience of deportability can also permeate their daily lives, shaping how they are perceived by others, weakening their sense of belonging, and limiting the opportunities and resources they may pursue (Asad 2020b; Gonzales et al. 2013). Likewise, stress from the looming specter of deportability can damage immigrants’ mental and physical health, hinder their use of social services, and foster distrust towards law enforcement officials (Armenta and Rosales 2019; Asad 2020b; Martinez, Ruelas, and Granger 2018; Patler and Pirtle 2018). Nonetheless, the salience of deportability may vary within the undocumented population, with differences in social position – such as those distinguishing undocumented youths embedded in the U.S. higher education system from their undocumented parents with more precarious backgrounds – associated with disparities in the perception of risk (Abrego 2011; Enriquez and Millan, 2019).

Furthermore, the specter of deportation looms above a broader population, as all noncitizens residing in the United States are vulnerable to deportation. Between 1997 and 2007, twenty percent of deported immigrants possessed legal documentation to reside in the United States (Human Rights Watch 2009). Documented immigrants may also fear that visibility from being “on the books” of government officials through use of social services puts them at risk of deportation (Asad 2020b). With the creation of the Denaturalization Section of the Department of Justice in 2020, even naturalized citizens may find themselves at risk of deportation (United States Department of Justice 2020). Finally, studies suggest that the legal consciousness of the documented family members of undocumented immigrants is greatly shaped by fear of family separation through deportation (Abrego 2019; Dreby 2012). A survey of college students living in California found that nearly 75% of U.S. citizen youths with undocumented parents worry about family separation at least once a month (Enriquez et al. 2021). Asad (2020a) demonstrates that even U.S. citizen immigrants harbor deportation fears, and that fears of deportation among Latino U.S. citizens have increased in recent years.

Individual-level legal status and deportability may be contingently and variably related because perceptions of deportation risk can be shaped by social and national-origin characteristics (Enriquez and Millan 2019; Gonzales 2015; Gonzales and Burciaga 2018). Unlike other qualities — phenotype, language, behaviors — that might distinguish a member of the majority group from a member of a minority group, or someone of foreign origin from a native, legal status cannot be read from the body or from interactions. Perceptions of deportability and risk of deportation could therefore be conditional on immigrants’ “social illegality” (Flores and Schachter 2018). Public perceptions of who is undocumented (and thus at greatest risk for deportation) are shaped by stereotypes keyed to characteristics such as language, education levels, the possession of a criminal record, use of public services, and ethnicity. As a result, some groups may be more targeted for enforcement than others, putting all members of the group at greater risk (Armenta 2017). Furthermore, auxiliary characteristics may intersect with legal status to differentially shape immigrants’ experiences of deportation anxiety. For example, the stress that immigrants experience due to their legal precarity may be amplified by socioeconomic disadvantage (Enriquez 2017; Valdez and Golash-Boza 2020). Similarly, 1.5-generation undocumented students may have their anxiety over deportation alleviated due to their English proficiency and educational background (Abrego 2011; Cebulko 2018).

Additionally, the salience of deportability may vary with the prevalence of undocumented status at national origin level, a factor which may in turn moderate the effects of individual legal status. As a greater prevalence of unauthorized status will increase the share of any national origin population that stands at risk of repressive measures, the toll of deportability may spill over to the entire group, independent of any individual’s own status. Furthermore, as immigration enforcement practices target some nationality groups far more than others, the risks of deportation may differ from one group to another (Armenta 2017). For example, Guatemalan migrants comprised 5% of the U.S. unauthorized immigrant population in 2018 but accounted for 20% of all persons deported that year (US Government Accountability Office 2019; Migration Policy Institute 2019). By contrast, Indian immigrants comprised an almost equal share of the unauthorized immigrant population (4%) but accounted for only 0.3% of persons who were deported (*ibid.*). As such, anxiety about deportation may be greater for individual members of groups facing greater risk of deportation.

This paper seeks new insight into how Latino immigrants’ fears of deportation are shaped by individual- and group-level social characteristics. Towards that end, we undertake a systematic literature review, identifying three broad hypotheses of deportation fear which have yet to be tested together: legal status, individual-level social characteristics, and group-level legal vulnerability. We then distill a broad set of hypotheses, some of which specify an interaction between individual and group-level traits. To test these hypotheses, we turn to five nationally representative surveys of the U.S. Latino population conducted by the Pew Hispanic Center in 2007, 2008, 2010, 2013, and 2018 that measure the degree to which Latino respondents worry that they or their closest contacts could be at risk of deportation. By considering deportation anxiety as a concern related both to an individual’s own fate as well as those with whom the person is entwined, this question aligns well with the social world of contemporary migration, in which populations are not partitioned, but rather crisscrossed, by legal status. We supplement the individual-level data collected by Pew with group-level data measuring the proportion undocumented and deportation risk of the national origin group.

Predictably, we find that individual legal vulnerability increases immigrants’ worries surrounding deportation. However, social and group markers also shape immigrants’ deportation

fears independent of legal status. Individual traits linked to “social illegality,” such as Spanish language and lower levels of education, are associated with higher rates of deportation fears regardless of legal status. At the same time, the individual traits of interview language and age at arrival in the United States moderate the fear-inducing associations of legal status. In addition, individuals from national origin groups at greater risk of deportation tend to harbor greater deportation worries, but here our analysis shows no moderation of the effects of legal status. Among Latino immigrants, group-level legal vulnerability explained as much of the variation in deportation anxiety as individual-level legal status, while social markers yielded the greatest contribution. Even while being undocumented remains significant in shaping deportation fears, these fears vary widely and systematically within and across legal and social categories.

Individual-level explanations of deportation worry

A growing body of literature has argued that deportability is an omnipresent threat in the lives of undocumented immigrants and represents a fundamental condition of the undocumented experience (De Genova 2002; Gonzales 2015; Menjívar and Abrego 2012). As Menjívar and Abrego (2012:1391) note, “the mere threat of deportation, even when not coupled with the practice of deportation, is key to the power of the law and what makes undocumented immigrants potential targets of abuse.” For immigrants lacking legal authorization to reside in the United States, fear of deportation may permeate their daily lives, shaping how they are perceived by others, weakening their sense of belonging, and limiting the opportunities and resources they may pursue (Gonzales et al. 2013). As the threat of deportation for legally vulnerable migrants applies regardless of race, class, gender, or national origin, scholars of undocumented immigration (Gonzales 2015; Gonzales and Burciaga 2018) have deemed unauthorized status to be a “master status-determining trait,” one, that in the words of E.C. Hughes (1945:357), who coined the concept decades ago, “tends to overpower, in most crucial situations, any other characteristics which might run counter to it.” Thus, we expect that:

H1a: Undocumented status will significantly increase deportation worry among Latino unauthorized immigrants relative to both lawful permanent residents and naturalized citizens, an effect that is robust to the application of individual demographic and national origin group controls.

H1b: Individual-level legal status will explain the most variation in immigrants’ reports of deportation anxiety relative to individual demographic and group-level features.

Nonetheless, immigrants’ anxiety over deportation may be shaped by a multitude of social factors in addition to their legal status. Immigrants who arrive in the United States as adults and who have low levels of English proficiency and educational attainment are frequently uncomfortable navigating U.S. bureaucratic systems and vulnerable to exploitation (Waters and Pineau 2015). Such disadvantaged migration-related characteristics may exacerbate immigrants’ worry over their deportability by heightening the sense of precarity and helplessness immigrants’ experience in their daily lives. In addition, immigrants with disadvantaged social markers may be more likely to be embedded in family and friendship networks composed of legally vulnerable individuals, increasing the salience of deportation worries. Even U.S. citizens who are not at-risk of deportation themselves may be highly attuned to the deportability of their undocumented

family members and experience persistent fear of family separation through deportation (Enriquez et al. 2021).

Moreover, the attributes that the public and, presumably, enforcement agencies associate with undocumented immigration coincide imperfectly with the population itself. As a result, regnant stereotypes at once spill over onto documented persons, while obscuring others who are present without authorization and yet lack the triggering features. Thus, Flores and Schachter (2018) find that native-born white Americans perceive immigrants from African, Middle Eastern, and Latin and Central American countries and those who have lower education levels and English proficiency as likely to be undocumented and thus deportable. Possessing social traits commonly stereotyped with undocumented status may heighten sensitivity to deportation risks among certain immigrants. Coupling embeddedness in vulnerable networks with the intersection of formal and social illegality in immigrants' own lived experiences, we would expect immigrants' fears of deportation to be determined not only by their legal status, but also by certain social attributes. In particular, we expect that,

H2: Disadvantaged social characteristics such as low levels of education, limited English proficiency, and entering the United States in adulthood will be associated with greater fear of deportation among Latino immigrants.

Social locations may also shape how immigration status is experienced in the context of deportation anxiety. While some studies have deemed undocumented status to be a “master status” with omnipotent effects for those who are legally vulnerable, other studies have noted that experiences of legal vulnerability may differ according to immigrants' social characteristics. Disadvantaged socioeconomic traits such as household poverty, low levels of education, and arriving in the United States in adulthood may exacerbate the disadvantages of undocumented status and therefore increase anxiety surrounding deportation (Abrego 2011; Cebulko 2018; Enriquez 2017; Valdez and Golash-Boza 2020). For example, Abrego (2011) argues that first-generation immigrants are more likely to experience their undocumented status through the lens of deportation fear relative to their 1.5-generation children. Likewise, 1.5-generation undocumented immigrants who were brought to the United States as children and who grew up under the shelter of the U.S. education system and are fluent in English may be less likely to fear deportation for themselves and feel more at ease when interacting with immigration officials (Cebulko 2018). Furthermore, socioeconomic instability also heightens documented immigrants' perceptions of legal precarity, particularly through restrictions that crack down on immigrants' access to public benefits. For example, even low-income citizens and lawful permanent residents who qualify for public benefits may decline enrollment in aid programs for fear of being labeled a public charge and increasing the deportation risk for themselves or their family members (Bernstein et al. 2020).

Furthermore, “auxiliary” social characteristics generate stereotypes of undocumented status that filter public perceptions (Flores and Schachter 2018; Hughes 1945). These associated traits might attract greater attention, making unauthorized immigrants who conform to widely held stereotypes more vulnerable to detection and hence more worried than those whose individual characteristics deviate from widely held expectations. Likewise, while not all undocumented persons possess stereotyped auxiliary traits, those same stereotyped auxiliary traits are often held by persons enjoying authorized presence, whether as lawful permanent residents or as naturalized citizens. Hence, as argued by Flores and Schachter (2018), the public

association between certain externally perceptible, *individual-level* traits such as national origin, language, and occupation on the one hand, and legal status on the other, can lead to a divergence between the reality of legal status and how it is experienced. Thus, “light-skinned Latin Americans [...] can live their lives relatively undisturbed, because most people expect them to be legal and treat them as such” (Flores and Schachter 2018:863). By contrast, authorized or even naturalized Mexicans and Central Americans “who are primarily suspected because they fulfill an ethnic-based stereotype” will experience “social illegality,” a condition “based on social stereotypes and not on legal realities” (*ibid.*).

Rather than categorizing experiences of illegality according to the presence or absence of papers, Flores and Schachter (2018) conceptualize immigrant illegality across the axes of both formal and social legality, typologizing four ideal cases. Those who possess “full citizenship” in U.S. society are both legally authorized to reside in the United States and socially perceived as legal residents. Those who are “invisibly illegal” lack legal documents authorizing their residency but are not socially stereotyped as “illegal.” By contrast, those who are “socially illegal” are legal residents of the United States who are socially perceived as unauthorized immigrants. Finally, those who experience “full illegality” both lack legal residency and are stereotyped as undocumented due to possessing certain traits associated with public ideas of immigrant illegality. Thus, legal status is theorized to interact with social characteristics to influence the lives of immigrants. Certain undocumented immigrants may manage to avoid the stigma and burden of illegality due to possessing more favorably perceived characteristics such as English proficiency and high levels of education, while even those who possess full rights to legal residence in the United States may experience the consequences of being classified as “socially illegal.” We therefore expect that,

H3: Disadvantaged social characteristics will both exacerbate deportation anxiety among undocumented Latino immigrants and increase anxiety levels among lawful permanent resident and naturalized citizen immigrants.

Group-level explanations

While unauthorized immigration is at once an object of growing attention and increasingly stigmatized, the public links the phenomenon not only to such individual traits as speaking a foreign language in public or employment in manual labor but also to particular ethnic or national origin groups (Flores and Schachter 2018). Reflected in the disproportionate targeting of Latino immigrants by U.S. immigration enforcement (Armenta 2017; Gómez Cervantes 2021), such a connection aligns with the rise of the “Latino threat” narrative and the role that it has played in fomenting anti-immigrant attitudes. Chavez (2008), for example, found that many national media sources between 1965 and 2000 portrayed Latino immigrants as unable to integrate, unwilling to adopt “American” values, and hence threatening to American society. Other textual analyses of media sources have noted that discussions of Latino immigrants frequently contain such negative and hostile words as “invasion,” “illegal,” or “criminals” (Menjívar 2016). Notably, these associations of Latinos with undocumented status have persisted despite the increasingly diverse national origins of the undocumented population (Donato and Armenta 2011).

Nonetheless, as the population of Latin American immigrants itself varies greatly in national origin, the stigmatization driven by the Latino threat narrative may not yield similar effects across all nationalities. Most importantly, the mechanism linking group membership to

legal-status vulnerabilities may instead be connected to the very sizeable inter-group differences in the prevalence of unauthorized migration among Latino nationalities. While island-born Puerto Ricans residing in the continental United States may possess traits that co-occur with public perceptions of undocumented status (such as speaking Spanish), their universal citizenship rates may shelter this group from the direct vulnerabilities associated with undocumented status. By contrast, while Salvadoran and Guatemalan immigrants gained territorial access due to the then prevailing acceptance of unauthorized immigration, their relatively later arrival meant that only some qualified for legalization, whether via the 1986 IRCA or the 1997 NACARA and its relatively liberal implementation (Coutin 2011). The subsequent conversion of a refugee migration into ordinary economic migration, later accelerated by escalating violence in the Central America, produced a high unauthorized density for these origin groups.

In this light, one might hypothesize that the key group-level influence may instead stem from objective differences in the distribution of more- or less-advantaged legal statuses. As nationalities of Latin American origin are not neatly compartmentalized groups living in perfect isolation from one another, but are rather populations characterized by overlapping social relations, every group is likely to contain members who, whether directly or indirectly, experience the constriction of rights that accompanies unauthorized presence. Nonetheless, as long within-group exposures are common, a greater prevalence of unauthorized status will increase likelihood of experiencing deportation anxiety, whether for oneself or for others. Given the socially experienced nature of legal vulnerability and the diversity of legal backgrounds within national origin groups, we hypothesize that:

H4a: Deportation worries will increase as the density of legally disadvantaged persons from the same country of origin grows.

Furthermore, individual deportation fears may be influenced not only by the prevalence of co-nationals with vulnerable legal status, but also by the overall “risk” of deportation faced by the origin group. Latino immigrants may be hyperaware of their deportability given their disproportionate targeting by U.S. immigration enforcement (Armenta 2017). Furthermore, rates of deportation relative to the undocumented population vary widely within the Latino population. For example, while Guatemalan immigrants made up 5% of the unauthorized population in 2018, they made up nearly 20% of immigrants deported from the United States in that year. By contrast, Colombian immigrants comprised roughly 2% of the unauthorized population in 2018 but only 0.4% of deported immigrants in 2018 (Migration Policy Institute 2018; United States Department of Homeland Security 2019). As such, we expect that,

H4b: Immigrants’ worries surrounding deportation increase with the rising risk of deportation for their national origin group, measured as a ratio of the deportation rate of the group relative to the percentage of the group’s immigrants who are undocumented.

Finally, group-level legal disadvantage may also influence how immigrants’ own legal status affects their deportation fears. Immigrants who are themselves undocumented may be hypersensitive to the overall deportation risk of their national origin group and feel more fearful as the risk of deportation for members of their national origin group increases. In addition, citizens from national origin groups with a high proportion of undocumented immigrants may be more likely to be enmeshed in family, friendship, and community networks containing

undocumented persons, increasing the salience of deportability in their lives. We therefore hypothesize that:

H5: Group-level attributes, including proportion undocumented and risk of deportation, moderate the effects of individual legal status.

Data and Measures

To date, little research has tested these individual- and group-level explanations of deportation anxiety together. To test these hypotheses, we employ five years (2007, 2008, 2010, 2013, 2018) of the National Survey of Latinos (NSL), a nationally representative survey of the U.S. Latino population conducted by the Pew Hispanic Center. Each NSL wave in our sample poses a question measuring respondents' sense of deportation risk: "Regardless of your own immigration or citizenship status, how much do you worry that you, a family member, or a close friend could be deported? Would you say that you worry a lot, some, not much, or not at all?" By considering deportation worry for both respondents themselves and those in their social networks, this question aligns well with the social world of contemporary migration, in which populations are not partitioned, but rather crisscrossed, by legal status. In line with many phone surveys, the response rate for the years of the NSL used in this study ranges between 7.4% in 2018 and 33.2% in 2008 (G. M. Leong, personal communication, June 8, 2021; Pew Hispanic Center 2018). While it is possible that immigrants most fearful of deportation may be less likely to respond to the NSL, the NSL is nonetheless one of the only large-scale, nationally representative surveys to ask immigrants detailed questions about their legal status and deportation fears.

We merge this individual-level data with national-origin data from the Immigration and Naturalization Service (2000) and Yearbook of Immigration Statistics (FY 2010) measuring the national origin group's proportion undocumented and deportation risk relative to the undocumented population. As a totality, our data source is well-suited to the question at hand. Merging the different years of the National Survey of Latinos generates a large sample of Latin American foreign-born and Puerto Rican respondents ($N = 4,266$) that would otherwise be under-represented in a survey of the U.S. population as whole. We restrict the analysis to persons of Hispanic background born outside of the continental United States, doing so because the detailed country of origin data needed to assess our group-specific hypotheses are only available for this population. As island-born Puerto Ricans comprise a population of persons who are sociological foreigners but possess status citizenship, including this group gives us strategic leverage over the impact of the social characteristics marking persons as native or foreign, independent of citizenship status. As the reader will see, island-born Puerto Ricans, despite holding full citizenship upon arrival on the mainland, experience a high level of deportation fear. Separate analyses in the Online Appendix show that results are unchanged when island-born Puerto Ricans are excluded from the analysis.

The large numbers, generated by aggregating these five years of the Pew surveys, in turn yield a high level of national origin diversity, spanning 28 countries. Each year's survey also identifies respondents according to citizenship and permanent residency status. For the 2013 NSL survey, which contains information on respondents' citizenship but not permanent residency status, we imputed immigrants' legal residency status according to a prediction equation model (Sohn and Pebley 2020; Van Hook et al. 2015). Our model predicts noncitizen respondents' legal residency status according to their deportation fear levels, age, gender,

generation status, education levels, US region of residence (Northeast, North Central, South, and West), country of origin, and the language of their interview.¹

Though a unique resource, the focus of each year's survey reflects the intellectual priorities of the Pew Hispanic Center, with the consequence that the concatenated dataset lacks the capacity needed to fully evaluate the rich set of ideas that emerge from the literature review. Prior research suggests that the influences bearing down on deportability stem from a variety of social factors (Enriquez and Millan 2019; Flores and Schachter 2018). Many of those factors are captured in one or more of the surveys that we analyze, but fewer appear in all five. Rather than focus on the limited set of independent variables contained in all five surveys, we have instead sought to exploit the diversity of the dataset. While our approach lends an exploratory nature to some of the analyses developed below, we provide a preliminary test of each of the hypotheses generated by our systematic literature review.

We examine four individual explanatory variables. The first is legal status, encompassing naturalized U.S. citizens, permanent residents, and those who lack permanent legal status. The other three are potential social markers of legality. Education is coded as three categories: less than high school, more than high school, and the reference category of a high school education. An indicator for belonging to the 1.5 generation marks immigrants who arrived in the U.S. before the age of 13, and a dichotomous variable signifies whether the survey interview was conducted in English rather than Spanish.

We also include two variables at the origin group level. The first is a measure of group undocumented status: percentage undocumented in the U.S. in the year 2000. The second is the ratio of the deportation rate of the national origin group in fiscal year 2010 to its percentage undocumented in 2000, effectively a signifier of deportation risk.²

We include four control variables. Age is coded as four categories: 18 to 29, 30 to 49, 50 to 64, and 65 and older. Gender is coded as 1 for woman and 0 for man. Region is grouped into four categories: Northeast, North Central, South, and West. The final control variable is a categorical variable for survey year.

Analytic Strategy

Our analysis proceeds in three parts. First, we present descriptive statistics, displaying the average probability of reporting deportation fears by year, country of origin, group-level factors, and legal status. Second, we use logistic regression to predict the probability of reporting deportation fears, recoding the ordinal deportation fear variable as a dichotomous variable representing whether the respondent feels “some” or “a lot” of concern for deportation (rather than “not much” or “not at all”). We regress the binary response on our four individual variables of interest. To examine how markers of social illegality may moderate the effect of legal status, we interact each in turn with legal status. We also include fixed effects for age group, gender, region, and survey year in all models.

We also include all three interactions in a final model. This model serves as the basis of counterfactual simulations. In logistic regression the effect of any one variable on predicted probabilities depends on the values of all other covariates; hence the aim of these simulations is

¹ Replicating our analyses excluding the 375 respondents from 2013 produces substantively similar results.

² For Puerto Rico, we set this ratio to 0.

to harness the empirical distribution of covariates in the sample to extrapolate the average effect of a variable to the level of the population (Muller & MacLehose 2014). We create a counterfactual dataset by setting a variable of interest to a single value for the entire sample. We then draw logistic regression coefficients 500 times from their joint distribution as estimated in the final model. Each time we use the counterfactual dataset to predict every respondent's probability of reporting deportation fears and calculate the mean. We use the resulting distribution of means to estimate the average predicted probability and 95 percent confidence intervals. We repeat this process for each value of each variable of interest and plot the results.

Finally, we model the effects of two variables at the level of national-origin group. We add each of these variables in turn as predictors to a multilevel logistic model of deportation fear, with individuals nested within countries of origin. These models also control for the individual factors and interactions from the final individual logistic model. The last of these multilevel models includes cross-level interactions between each group-level variable and individual legal status, testing whether characteristics of the group moderate the effect of individual legal status. For interpretability, we again implement the counterfactual simulation method described above to obtain predicted probabilities across the empirical range of these group-level factors and legal statuses.

Results

Table 1, presenting frequencies and percentages for the variables used in our analysis and disaggregating by legal status, demonstrates that fear has become a pervasive quality of Latino immigrant life. In response to the question, "Regardless of your own immigration or citizenship status, how much if all do you worry that you, a family member, or a close friend, could be deported," two-thirds of all respondents reply by choosing "some" or "a lot." Nonetheless, levels of deportation anxiety differ by immigrants' legal status. 80% of undocumented immigrants report deportation worries, compared to just over half of naturalized citizens. Similarly, sociodemographic characteristics vary considerably across legal status categories. Compared to undocumented respondents, naturalized citizens and permanent residents have higher levels of education, are more likely to have an interview in English, are older, and are more likely to be male. Region and survey year do not vary greatly by legal status.

[TABLE 1]

Figure 1, looking only at respondents with U.S. citizenship, highlights differences in deportation worries by country of origin. The left panel displays percentage undocumented by country of origin on the horizontal axis and probability of reporting deportation worry on the vertical axis, averaging over individuals and survey years; the right panel shows the relationship between worry and the ratio of deportation rates to proportion undocumented, a measure of deportation risk. Two broad patterns emerge from these displays. On the one hand, despite their own secure legal status, U.S. citizens express a high level of anxiety, a pattern likely related to the prevalence of mixed-legal-status families as well as mixed-nationality social networks (Dreby 2012). Consequently, even respondents originating in populations largely (Cubans) or entirely (Puerto Ricans) exempt from deportation express relatively high deportation anxiety (39 and 47 percent, respectively). On the other hand, even among citizens, levels of anxiety vary by nationality: persons from countries with greater proportions of undocumented immigrants are more likely to express deportation anxiety (correlation = 0.44). Overall, the relationship between

anxiety and risk of deportation is similar (correlation = 0.47). Nonetheless, we note the position of Honduran and Guatemalan respondents at the top right of this panel, with anxiety levels comparable to those of Mexican respondents, but membership in nationalities disproportionately likely to experience deportation. As confounding factors may affect these relationships, we turn to statistical modeling.

[FIGURE 1]

Individual Models

We now present logistic regressions of deportation anxiety on individual attributes, examining how these interact with legal status (Table 2; full regression table in the Online Appendix). Model 1 contains no interactions, regressing the binary indicator of deportation anxiety on legal status, education, 1.5-generation status, language of interview (with Spanish as the reference category), and fixed effects for region and survey year. Supporting H1a, this model shows that permanent residents are $\exp(0.35) = 1.4$ times as likely as similar U.S. citizens to worry about deportation, and those without legal status are nearly twice as likely. In alignment with H2, Model 1 also shows that traits associated with “social legality” are related to deportation anxiety, and generally in the directions expected: Compared to those with a high school degree, those with more than a high school education are less likely to report deportation anxiety, while those with less than a high school education show no significant difference. Although the large standard error for the 1.5 generation indicates that age at migration is not statistically significant in this model, those who opted for an interview in English are half as likely to report deportation anxiety as those who interviewed in Spanish.

[TABLE 2]

To assess H3, Models 2-5 test the interaction of social markers with legal status, first doing so separately for each marker to conserve estimation power. Model 2 starts with education, finding no significant interaction effects; the effect of education on deportation anxiety does not appear to vary by legal status. Model 3 includes an interaction for the 1.5-generation indicator for those who immigrated at age 12 or younger. Here, the interactions are significant. Among naturalized citizens, those who migrated at an early age are less likely to report deportation anxiety than those who arrived as adults; by contrast, youth migrants possessing legal permanent residency or lacking legal status are about twice as likely as adult migrants with similar status to worry about deportation.³ Model 4 includes an interaction of respondents’ legal status with their interview language. Citizens and undocumented respondents who opt for an interview in English are 60 percent less likely to report deportation worries than those who choose Spanish. Green-card holders who opt for English interviews are also less worried, but this difference is smaller than for citizens and the undocumented.

In the Online Appendix, we examine another social marker: annual income. Results are substantively similar as for education: like respondents with less than a high school education, respondents earning less than \$30,000 a year are more likely to worry about deportation. The

³ In the Online Appendix, we include supplementary analyses that replace the 1.5-generation indicator variable with years in the U.S. Results are substantively similar.

possible social marker of gender has no significant coefficients, as shown in the full regression table in the Online Appendix.

[FIGURE 2]

Finally, Model 5 includes all of these variables and their interactions. Since the sample size may be too small to detect significant effects for any one interaction, we assess their joint significance in predicted probabilities from counterfactual simulations, presenting the results in Figure 2. In all three panels, we see a common pattern: naturalized citizens are least likely to worry about deportation, followed by permanent residents, and finally those without legal status, though the only consistent difference across statuses involves citizens. However, these probabilities are moderated by social markers.

The left panel shows that across levels of education, citizens are less likely to report deportation anxiety and that across status categories, respondents with more than a high school education are somewhat less likely to do so. Among LPR respondents, high school graduates report more worry than those with higher levels of education. In the center panel, we see that members of the 1.5 generation possessing lawful permanent residency or lacking authorization are expected to express *greater* deportation anxiety compared to their counterparts who migrated at older ages, while the opposite is true for naturalized citizens (although differences between LPR and unauthorized 1.5 generation respondents are not significant). Among adult migrants, by contrast, greater security in status consistently yields reduced levels of worry.

The right panel shows greater uncertainty around responses for those who opt for an interview in English, although almost all who chose to be interviewed in English possessed a more secure status (only 4 percent of undocumented respondents and 10 percent of permanent residents chose English interviews). Across status categories, those who chose a Spanish-language interview are much more likely to report worry over deportation. More importantly, across-status differences appear with sharpest definition among persons interviewed in Spanish. Though doing so in somewhat variable ways, social markers of deportability and legal vulnerability clearly moderate individuals' deportation anxiety, thus providing partial support for Hypothesis 3.

Group-level models

Our next set of models turns to variables at the level of national-origin groups, seeking to assess both main and interactive effects. Table 3 presents coefficients from multilevel models, with individuals nested within countries of origin. All models include the same individual covariates and interactions as in Model 5 from Table 2. Model 1 adds a variable for percentage of immigrants from a respondent's national group who are estimated to be undocumented in the U.S. in the year 2000. The coefficient is significant but substantively small; each percentage point increase in undocumented co-nationals is associated with about a 1 percent increase in probability of reporting deportation worry.

[TABLE 3]

Model 2 examines a different group-level variable: the ratio of the national origin group's deportation rate to percentage undocumented, constructed to represent the risk of deportation. Again, the variable is in the expected direction and statistically significant: members of groups

with higher risk of deportation are more likely to express deportation anxiety. Models 3 and 4 introduce cross-level interactions between each of these variables and individual legal status. While the interaction coefficients are insignificant, the individual coefficients retain their values and significance.

Due to the inclusion of multiple individual-level interactions and the small sample size, insignificance of these cross-level coefficients could be due to a lack of statistical power. Hence, Figure 3 presents counterfactual simulation plots using these two models to assess the substantive effect of varying these group-level variables along with individual legal status. The left panel varies the percentage undocumented over the range in the sample; moving it from its minimum to its maximum shows a substantial increase in the probability of reporting deportation fear for all legal statuses, though the rate of increase by legal group does not vary. The right panel simulates varying the deportation risk. Here we see more overlap between the three legal statuses. We also see that U.S. citizens show the steepest slope in this graph (despite its lack of statistically significant difference). When they come from countries with low deportation risk, these citizen respondents have low levels of worry. But as deportation risk for co-nationals rises, even those with secure legal status are likely to harbor deportation worries. Since group-level markers significantly predict deportation anxiety, the analysis supports Hypotheses 4a and 4b, but the lack of significant cross-level interactions does not support Hypothesis 5.

[FIGURE 3]

To put these results in the context of representative countries, we compare the predicted probabilities for Cuba, Mexico, and Honduras, using simulations where we adjust the group-level variables to their respective values while using the sample distributions for variables other than legal status. Among these three countries the proportion undocumented is 0.8%, 52.4%, and 48.8% respectively, and the ratios of deported to undocumented are 0.25, 1.06, and 3.22, respectively, values that put them near the extremes in our sample. Although undocumented respondents from all three countries have high expected probabilities of reporting deportation fears, comparing naturalized citizens and green-card holders between these countries reveals how group markers can trump even individual legal status in shaping anxiety around deportation.

A typical immigrant with U.S. citizenship with the percentage undocumented variable set to the value for Mexico has about a 66 percent chance of expressing deportation worry, whereas an equivalent individual with legal permanent residency and the percentage undocumented value for Cuba has a 58 percent chance. This difference is statistically significant ($p = 0.04$). The model for the ratio of deported to undocumented reveals a similarly stark contrast when we compare immigrants from Honduras and Cuba, although this time it does not reach statistical significance ($p = 0.46$). A typical naturalized U.S. citizen with the risk of deportation comparable to Hondurans has a 71 percent chance of expressing worry over deportation, whereas a similar green-card holder with the deportation risk for Cubans has a 67 percent expected probability of reporting such worries. Thus, these contrasts demonstrate that even though an individual permanent resident is still at risk of deportation while a naturalized citizen is not, group-level vulnerability may significantly shape deportation anxiety.

[TABLE 4]

Finally, we evaluate the relative power of individual legal status, social markers, and group markers in explaining variation in responses. We employ the method for generalized linear mixed models outlined in Jaeger et al. (2017) to calculate the total variance explained by the model, R^2 , as well as semi-partial R^2 for each predictor, which is a relative measure of effective size. (Note that the sum of semi-partial R^2 is not equivalent to the total R^2 for multilevel models, since the former do not include random effects.) First, we fit a new multilevel logistic model including all individual and group-level variables entered without interactions. We then add together the semi-partial R^2 values for education, 1.5 generation, and interview language to obtain an estimate for social markers, and we calculate an estimate for group markers by summing the values for percentage undocumented and the ratio of deported to undocumented. Finally, we divide these along with the semi-partial R^2 for legal status by the total R^2 for the model to obtain relative effect sizes for these groups of variables.

Table 4 displays the results of this procedure. Legal status and group-level markers account for similar amounts of total R^2 out of the three sets of variables, at 7.3 percent. Social markers explain the greatest amount of variation in deportation fear, at 12.5 percent of the total R^2 . Driving the impact of social markers is interview language, a proxy measure of language proficiency, which contributes 8.9 percent of the total R^2 . By contrast, education contributes 3.7 percent, and membership of the 1.5 generation is relatively unimportant at 0.2 percent. Our findings thus do not support Hypotheses 1b: although legal status is an important contributor to deportation worries, there is no evidence that it overshadows the group and social factors that intersect with it.

Discussion

Deportation tears the social fabric, yielding direct government intrusion into individual lives, with immense consequences for the roughly 11 million undocumented immigrants in the United States and the lawfully present immigrants and citizens to whom they may be linked (Migration Policy Institute 2018). Past studies of immigrants' perceptions of deportation have primarily focused on how individual legal status shapes immigrants' deportation fears (Asad 2020a). Nonetheless, studies of immigrant integration have noted the importance of individual- and group-level social circumstances, in addition to legal status, in shaping experiences of vulnerability under the specter of the US immigration regime (Cebulko 2018; Enriquez 2017; Flores and Schachter 2018). Our paper is the first to build on this literature by synthesizing a set of comprehensive hypotheses regarding the factors that shape the salience of deportation anxiety in immigrants' lives and test these hypotheses empirically using nationally representative data. We find that while legal status matters significantly for immigrants' levels of deportation anxiety, worry about deportation is shaped by a variety of additional factors including immigrants' education level, age at arrival, and English proficiency, and the legal vulnerability of immigrants' national origin group. Our paper contributes to the study of immigrant deportation by unraveling the independent and intersecting effects of legal status, individual social traits, and group-level legal vulnerability on immigrants' deportation anxiety.

Following Asad (2020a), we find that immigrants' own legal status matters for their levels of worry surrounding deportation. Possessing legal status proves broadly protective: citizens feel less apprehensive, followed by lawful permanent residents, while undocumented respondents express the most worry. Yet certain social characteristics moderate the impact of status. While low English proficiency and educational attainment heighten anxieties among all legal status categories, legal status and age at arrival intersect in different ways. Citizen

respondents who arrived in the United States as children are less likely to fear deportation, but permanent resident and undocumented child migrants are more fearful of deportation. Our finding that undocumented immigrants who arrived in the United States as children are more fearful of deportation is surprising considering findings by ethnographic studies that first-generation undocumented immigrants are more likely to internalize fears of deportation compared to 1.5-generation undocumented immigrants, who are more attuned to the stigma of their status (Abrego 2011). Future work should more closely examine why 1.5-generation undocumented immigrants experience such heightened fears, including potentially their hyperawareness of the uprooting consequences of deportation from the country that they have known their entire adult lives.

Furthermore, while past work has characterized undocumented status as a “Master Status” shaping the immigrant experience (Gonzales 2015), our findings leave room for future research to evaluate the significance of vulnerable legal status for deportation fears relative to other social and group-level characteristics. We find that individual legal status explains less variation in immigrants’ deportation anxiety relative to immigrants’ social characteristics. The most powerful influences on immigrants’ deportation worries stem from individual social markers – most notably, language of the interview, a likely proxy for the language in which the respondent felt most proficient. Respondents who were interviewed in Spanish, or who have lower levels of education expressed higher levels of fear. These disadvantaged social characteristics may exacerbate immigrants’ worry over their deportability by heightening the sense of precarity and helplessness immigrants’ experience in their daily lives (Enriquez 2017). In addition, the effects of immigrants’ social characteristics on their deportation anxieties may reflect additional vulnerabilities faced by migrants stereotyped as “socially illegal” by legal authorities and majority population members (Flores and Schachter 2018).

Individual legal status may explain less variation in immigrants’ deportation worries due in part to the high baseline levels of anxiety among the Latino immigrants in our sample. We find consistently high reports of deportation anxiety across all legal status groups. As racialized enforcement practices result in disproportionate deportations of Latino immigrants (Armenta 2017), deportation anxiety extends across legal categories. Not only are most naturalized citizens fearful, but that same apprehension extends to the 47% of island-born Puerto Ricans who report “some” or “a lot” of worry over the possibility of deportation. These findings of high levels of deportation worry also reflect the interconnectedness of immigrant communities across legal status categories and the socially contagious nature of deportation anxiety. Even individuals with secure legal status may experience concern for the expulsion of those in their close networks with more vulnerable legal status, particularly in the case of mixed-legal status families. Consequently, the survey question on which this paper has focused – asking not simply about worries for oneself but those extending to family members and friends – demonstrates that deportation anxiety ramifies far beyond the population that is most directly targeted.

Nonetheless, we find that the legal vulnerability of one’s national origin group exacerbates deportation anxieties. We find that across statuses, fear rises as the percentage of the nationality that is undocumented grows; the ratio of persons who are deported to persons who are undocumented yields a still stronger effect, suggesting that targeting by enforcement agencies are an especially powerful driver of group-level differences in fear. Whereas the individual social markers moderate the effects of legal status, the group-level markers do not; hence, the impact of targeting appears to override the buffering effect of status citizenship, as citizens belonging to

nationalities heavily affected by deportation are likely to be more fearful than non-citizen members of nationalities among whom deportation is relatively rare.

Our paper takes an important step in capturing how legal status, social characteristics, and national-origin attributes independently and intersectionally shape immigrants' deportation fears; however, it suffers from several limitations that should be addressed in future research. First, the NSL does not collect data on social characteristics such as skin tone or racial identification that may be potentially relevant to perceptions of social illegality (Cebulko 2018). Second, the NSL does not collect fine-grained spatial and contextual-level data. The salience of deportability may be heightened in environments with high levels of immigration enforcement and reduced in more sheltering contexts (Enriquez and Millan 2019). These contextual characteristics may therefore intersect with legal status, social, and national-origin characteristics to shape immigrants' anxiety over deportation. Third, we cannot generalize these results beyond Latino immigrants; future research should investigate deportation worry in other populations. Last, it would be preferable to be able to distinguish deportation anxieties for oneself versus for others. Only new data collection efforts will alleviate this problem.

Our paper highlights both a limitation to and a paradox of integration. Precisely because undocumented migration is a permanent fixture, long-term presence gives some immigrants lacking authorization the opportunity to gain competencies that make them resemble natives. Nonetheless, social integration does not completely shield undocumented immigrants from looming fears of deportation, which can only be overcome through pathways to legalization. Furthermore, although exacerbated by less secure legal status, as well as by membership in nationalities more targeted by immigration enforcement, fear of deportation ramifies broadly across the Latin American-born population residing in the United States. Its prevalence among naturalized citizens, as well as among members of nationalities such as Puerto Ricans or Cubans with universal or near-universal citizenship rates, reflects the diffuse nature of the social boundaries separating Latin American nationalities as well as the social processes that build ties across legal categories. As the threat of deportability has grown, the integration of immigrants of distinctive nationalities into a broader Latino population has provided the mechanism by which that fear has spread, extending even to groups whose individual members have an unqualified right to permanent residence in the United States.

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Tables

Table 1: Summary statistics of variables used in the individual analysis, by legal status of immigrant respondents.

Characteristic	Legal Status			
	Overall, N = 4,266 ¹	Citizen, N = 1,811 ¹	Green card, N = 1,344 ¹	None, N = 1,111 ¹
Worry about deportation	2,824 (66%)	985 (54%)	945 (70%)	894 (80%)
Education				
High school	1,142 (27%)	449 (25%)	373 (28%)	320 (29%)
Less than high school	1,932 (45%)	666 (37%)	643 (48%)	623 (56%)
More than high school	1,192 (28%)	696 (38%)	328 (24%)	168 (15%)
1.5 generation	1,191 (28%)	676 (37%)	314 (23%)	201 (18%)
Interview language				
Spanish	3,586 (84%)	1,297 (72%)	1,216 (90%)	1,073 (97%)
English	680 (16%)	514 (28%)	128 (9.5%)	38 (3.4%)
Gender				
Female	2,061 (48%)	944 (52%)	649 (48%)	468 (42%)
Male	2,205 (52%)	867 (48%)	695 (52%)	643 (58%)
Age				
18 to 29	807 (19%)	223 (12%)	212 (16%)	372 (33%)
30 to 49	1,959 (46%)	634 (35%)	696 (52%)	629 (57%)
50 to 64	955 (22%)	553 (31%)	305 (23%)	97 (8.7%)
65 or older	545 (13%)	401 (22%)	131 (9.7%)	13 (1.2%)
Region				
Northeast	658 (15%)	395 (22%)	138 (10%)	125 (11%)
North Central	259 (6.1%)	102 (5.6%)	81 (6.0%)	76 (6.8%)
South	1,638 (38%)	677 (37%)	536 (40%)	425 (38%)
West	1,711 (40%)	637 (35%)	589 (44%)	485 (44%)
Survey year				
2007	1,221 (29%)	488 (27%)	383 (28%)	350 (32%)
2008	1,188 (28%)	439 (24%)	412 (31%)	337 (30%)
2010	785 (18%)	336 (19%)	250 (19%)	199 (18%)
2013	375 (8.8%)	199 (11%)	108 (8.0%)	68 (6.1%)
2018	697 (16%)	349 (19%)	191 (14%)	157 (14%)

¹n (%)

Table 2: Individual logistic regressions of binary deportation worry.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Legal status: green card	0.35 *** (0.08)	0.58 *** (0.15)	0.38 *** (0.09)	0.32 *** (0.09)	0.27 (0.18)
Legal status: none	0.68 *** (0.11)	0.95 *** (0.18)	0.80 *** (0.11)	0.74 *** (0.11)	0.62 ** (0.21)
Education: <high school	0.11 (0.09)	0.31 * (0.13)			0.19 (0.13)
Education: >high school	-0.32 *** (0.09)	-0.44 *** (0.12)			-0.28 * (0.13)
1.5 Generation	-0.06 (0.09)		-0.48 *** (0.11)		-0.17 (0.12)
Interview: English	-0.68 *** (0.10)			-0.95 *** (0.11)	-0.73 *** (0.13)
Female	0.13 (0.07)	0.15 * (0.07)	0.14 * (0.07)	0.12 (0.07)	0.08 (0.10)
Legal status: green card × <high school		-0.27 (0.19)			-0.16 (0.20)
Legal status: none × <high school		-0.23 (0.22)			-0.11 (0.22)
Legal status: green card × >high school		0.03 (0.21)			-0.11 (0.21)
Legal status: none × >high school		0.14 (0.26)			0.07 (0.27)
Legal status: green card × 1.5 generation			0.47 ** (0.18)		0.19 (0.20)
Legal status: none × 1.5 generation			0.68 ** (0.24)		0.42 (0.26)
Legal status: green card × Interview: English				0.50 * (0.22)	0.35 (0.25)
Legal status: none × Interview: English				0.09 (0.37)	-0.14 (0.39)
Controls?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	4266	4266	4266	4266	4266
AIC	5085.14	5135.60	5164.36	5103.74	5095.77
BIC	5199.59	5262.77	5272.45	5211.84	5273.81

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$. Coefficients displayed as log-odds. All models control for age category and gender, with survey year and region fixed effects. Standard errors in parentheses.

Table 3: Multilevel logistic models of deportation worry.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Percentage undocumented	0.01 *** (0.00)		0.01 *** (0.00)	
Legal status: green card × percentage undocumented			0.00 (0.00)	
Legal status: none × percentage undocumented			-0.00 (0.01)	
Ratio deported to undocumented		0.17 * (0.07)		0.19 * (0.09)
Legal status: green card × ratio				-0.07 (0.12)
Legal status: none × ratio				0.03 (0.13)
Controls?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	4266	4266	4266	4266
AIC	5064.21	5068.24	5067.84	5071.59
BIC	5242.24	5246.27	5258.59	5262.34

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$. Coefficients displayed as log-odds. All models contain random effects for country of origin as well as the individual-level controls and interactions from Model 5 in Table 1, including fixed effects for age category, gender, survey year and region.

Table 4: R-squared and semi-partial R-squared for a multilevel logistic model of deportation worry regressed on all individual and group predictors

Effect	(Semi-partial) R-squared	Percent of total R-squared
Legal status	0.007	7.3
Social markers	0.012	12.5
Group markers	0.007	7.3
Total	0.097	100

Figures

Figure 1

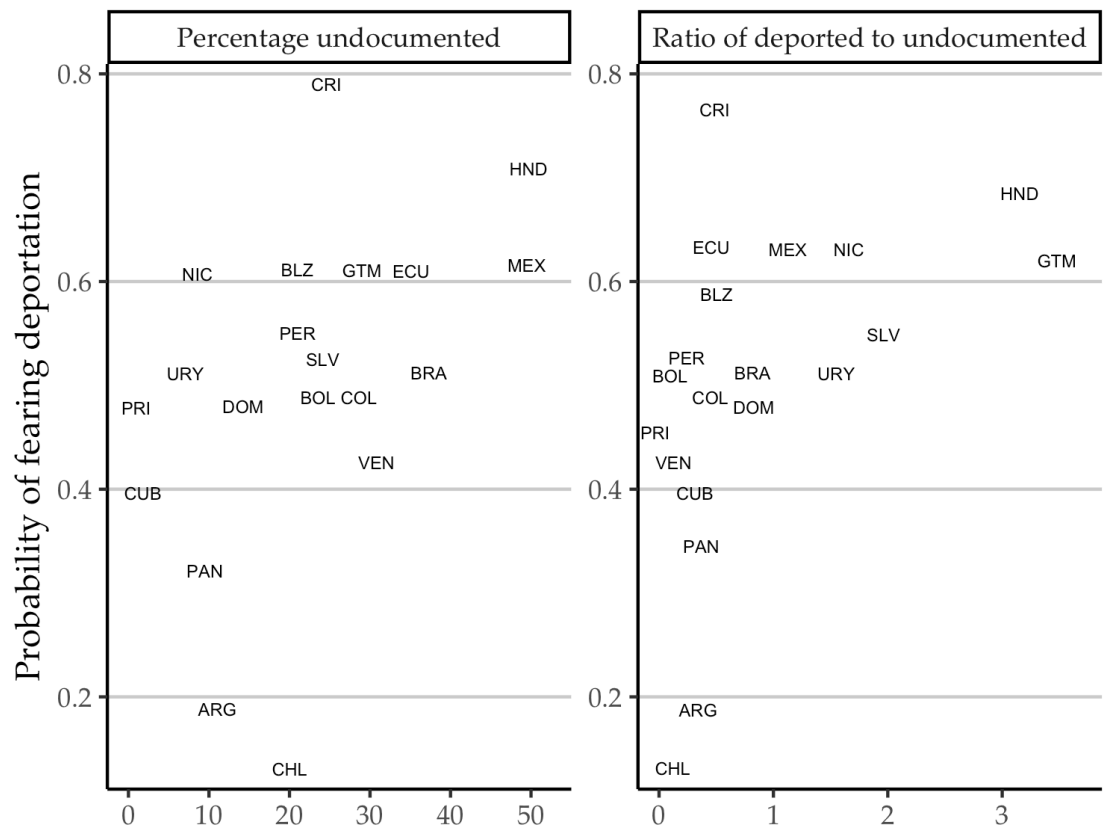


Figure 2

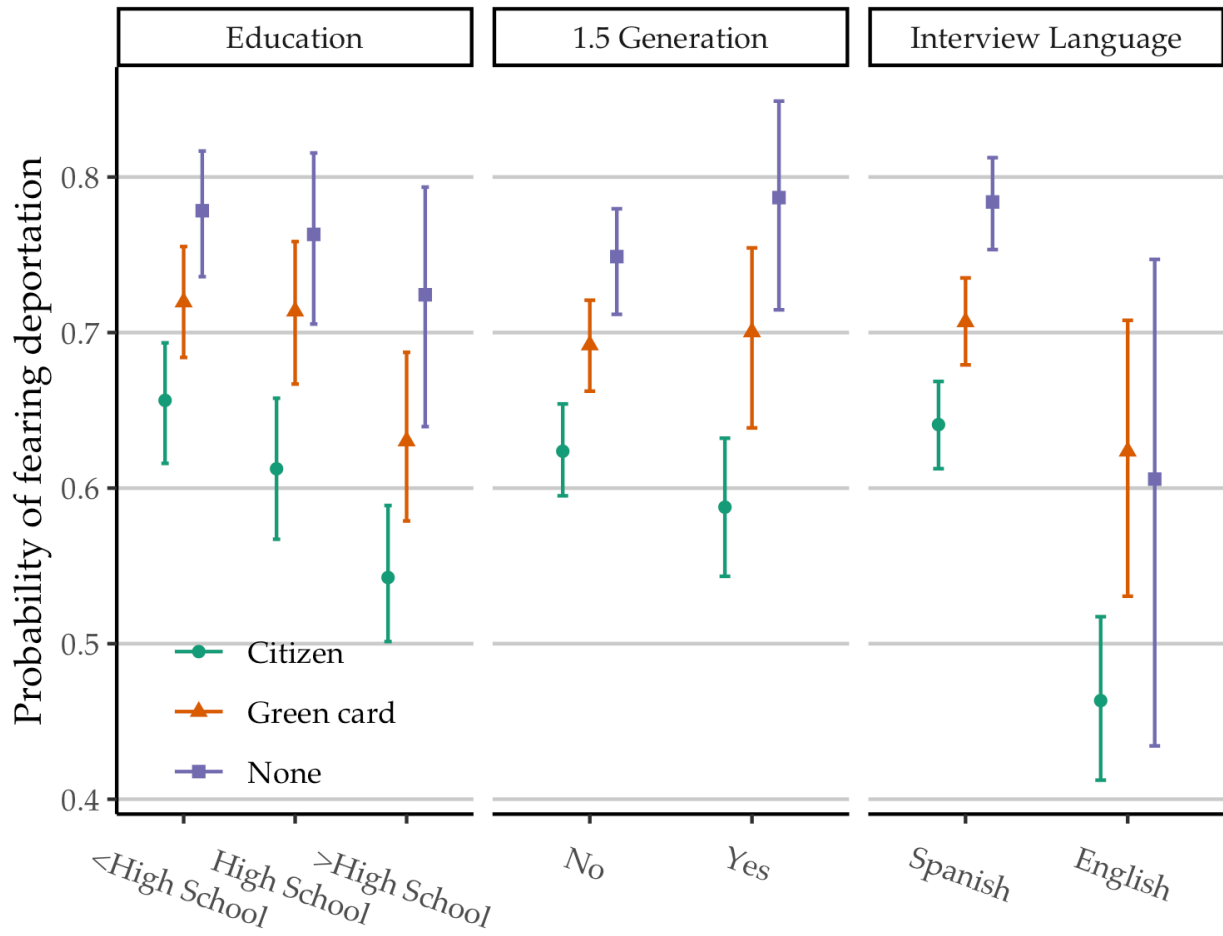


Figure 3

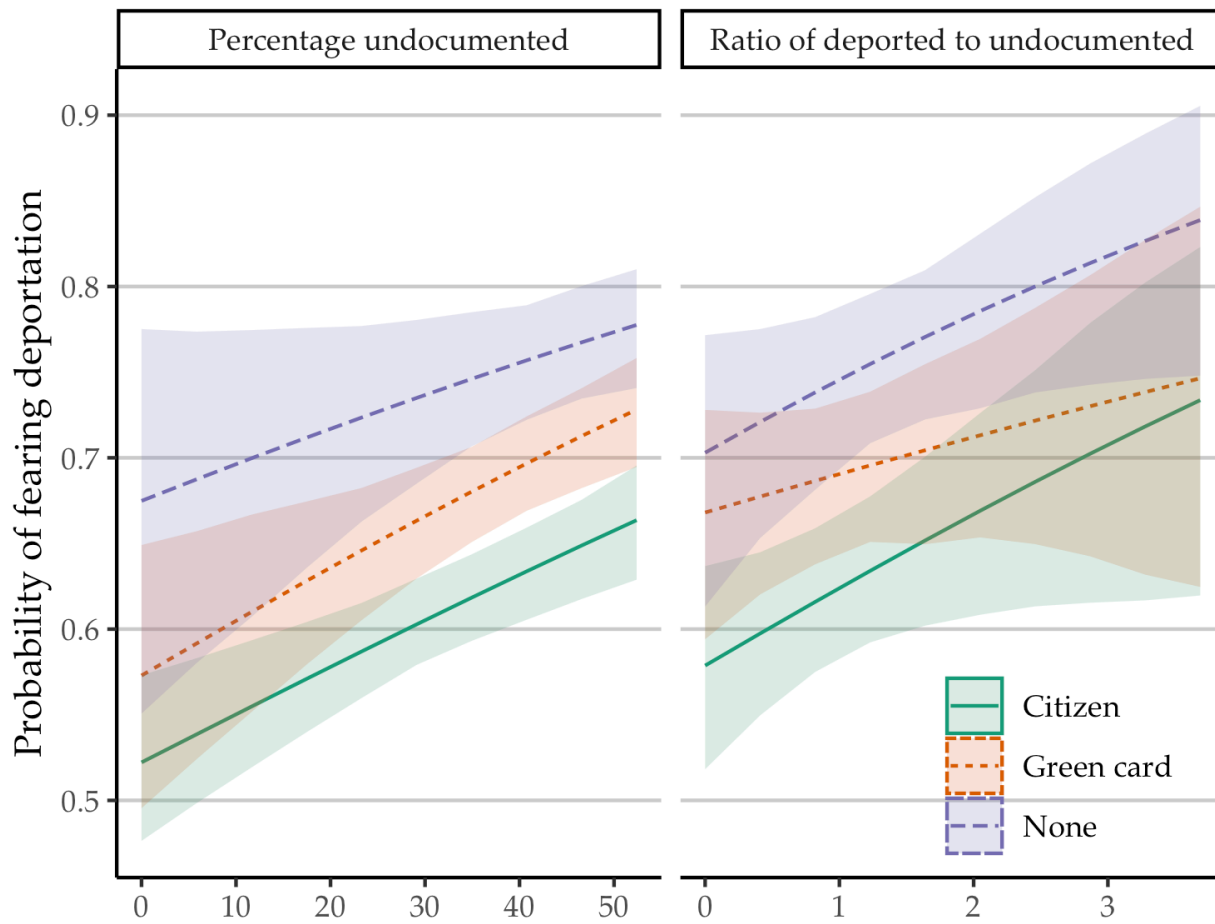


Figure captions

Figure 1: Likelihood of worrying about deportation for Latino immigrants with U.S. citizenship, by country of origin and group percent undocumented or ratio of deportation to undocumented rates. Text labels have been slightly jittered to avoid overlap.

Figure 2: Predicted probabilities of deportation fear by legal status and social markers, simulated 500 times over the sample

Figure 3: Predicted probabilities of deportation fear by legal status and group markers, simulated 500 times over the sample