

Increased immigration enforcement has a detrimental effect on the school performance of the children of unauthorized immigrants

The past 13 years have seen a massive increase in immigration enforcement at the state and local level aimed at reducing undocumented immigration. In new research, [Catalina Amuedo-Dorantes](#) and [Mary J. Lopez](#) find that this increased enforcement has adversely impacted the children of unauthorized migrants. They find that increased enforcement has the largest impact on children aged 6 to 13, raising their likelihood of repeating a grade or dropping out of school.



Since 2002, we have witnessed an extraordinary increase in interior immigration enforcement at both the local and state levels. These enforcement measures, intended to reduce undocumented immigration, have also adversely impacted the children of unauthorized migrants, the vast majority of whom are U.S.-born citizens.



In 2009, twenty-three percent of children under the age of 18 in the United States resided in an immigrant household and 5.1 million of the 17.1 million children of immigrants had at [least one unauthorized immigrant parent](#). Although nearly three-fourths of the children living with undocumented parents are citizens by birth, they often face significant social and economic disadvantages due to a [parent's unauthorized status](#). For instance, these children experience episodes of family separation when their parents are apprehended, deported or unable to re-enter the United States. Even if their parents are not detained, children still endure increased fear, stress, anxiety, changes in sleeping and eating patterns, anger, and physical ailment as their families find it necessary to relocate or to [start living in the shadows](#) in order to evade apprehension. These circumstances can result in difficulties concentrating, disruptive classroom behaviors, school absences and parental disengagement, all of which can have [detrimental impacts](#) on the schooling progression of these children.

Using data on Hispanic children ages 6-17 from the 1995 through 2010 Current Population Survey (CPS) October Supplements, we evaluate how intensified interior immigration enforcement impacts the likelihood that children of unauthorized immigrants will repeat a grade or drop out of school. The October Supplement includes data on the enrollment and grade level for both the current and previous years, which we use to identify whether a child has repeated a grade or dropped out of school. The CPS also enables us to link children with their parents to account for household characteristics. One important limitation of the CPS, however, is that it lacks sensitive information on the legal status of migrants. Hence, we rely on [ethnicity and citizenship traits](#), which have been shown to be [good predictors](#) of immigrants' unauthorized status, to proxy for the parents' likely unauthorized status.



Credit: [Medill News21](#) (CC-BY-2.0)

Our key regressor is the intensity of interior immigration enforcement to which children are exposed. To capture that intensity, we gather information regarding the timing and geographic scope of several interior enforcement policies. Specifically, data on the enactment of E-Verify mandates and on the approval of Omnibus Immigration Laws (OIL) at the state level are gathered from the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCLS) website. Additionally, data on the implementation of 287(g) agreements and [Secure Communities](#) (SC) at the state and county levels are collected from the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) 287(g) Fact Sheet [website](#), from [Kostandini et al.](#) (2013), and from the ICE's [Activated Jurisdictions document](#), respectively. Using the aforementioned data, we construct a weighted index of the [intensity of interior immigration enforcement](#) at the MSA levels for each year in our sample in the spirit of [Watson](#) (2013).

We find that increased enforcement has the largest impact on younger children ages 6 to 13. The estimates, which account for the non-random residential location of children and their families, reveal that increased enforcement raises the probability of repeating a grade and dropping out of school for children with likely unauthorized parents.

Given the well-known role of human capital in economic development, productivity growth, and innovation, the adverse impact of interior enforcement on the schooling progression of young children irrespective of their own citizenship status should be given full consideration in the evaluation of current enforcement initiatives and in the design of future immigration policy. In particular, as the new Presidential elections approach, large-scale immigration reform proposals will likely resurface. As such, awareness of the consequences of current immigration policies on the children of immigrants –most of them U.S. citizens– is critical in informing the upcoming policy debate and in striking the right balance between the enforcement of immigration laws and the need to protect children's well-being.

*This article is based on the paper "[Falling Through the Cracks? Grade Retention and School Dropout among Children of Likely Unauthorized Immigrants](#)" in the *American Economic Review*.*

Please read our [comments policy](#) before commenting.

Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of U.S.App– American Politics and Policy, nor of the London School of Economics.

Shortened URL for this post: <http://bit.ly/1JAOuTM>

About the authors

Catalina Amuedo-Dorantes – *San Diego State University*

Catalina Amuedo-Dorantes is a Professor at the Department of Economics, San Diego State University, California. Her primary research area is labor economics, with a focus on contingent work, immigration policy, undocumented immigrants and remittances.



Mary J. Lopez – *Occidental College*

Mary Lopez an Associate Professor of Economics at Occidental College. Her primary field of interest is labor economics. Her teaching and research interests include immigration and immigration policy; gender and racial inequality; poverty; and Latino entrepreneurship.



- CC BY-NC-ND 3.0 2014 LSE USAPP