Is Immigration Enforcement Shaping Immigrant Marriage Patterns?

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RÉSUMÉ

This paper identifies intermarriage (between non-citizens and citizens) as an important response mechanism to intensified immigration enforcement, particularly among Mexican non-citizens. Exploiting the temporal and geographic variation in the implementation of interior immigration enforcement from 2005 to 2017, we find that a one standard deviation increase in enforcement raises Mexican non-citizens’ likelihood of marrying a U.S. citizen by 3 to 6 percent. Our results show that this effect is driven by a change in desired traits in a spouse. Both police-based and employment-based enforcement contribute to this impact. The analysis adds to a growing literature examining how immigrants respond to tightened enforcement and, importantly, sheds light on the recent growth of intermarriage among Mexican immigrants.

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