

The Impact of Federal Immigration Climate on Student Access to On-Campus Academic Services

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Abstract

This study examined whether students who report greater emotional impacts from current federal immigration policies and greater changes in their campus behaviors due to concerns about immigration enforcement also report statistically significant differences in their use of academic support services. Twelve college students completed an online survey measuring support service use, emotional impacts of current immigration policies, and changes in campus behavior due to concerns about immigration enforcement appearances. The results of the survey indicated that the emotional impact of immigration policy was not significantly associated with support service use. However, changes in campus behavior due to immigration enforcement concerns significantly predicted greater use of support services. Models created from the results showed that immigration enforcement concerns remained significant. These findings suggest that immigration-related concerns may influence students' engagement with campus resources. The limitations of this study are a small sample size and a sole reliance on self-report measures.

Introduction

As of 2021, there are over 44.9 million immigrants in the United States, and 11 million are undocumented, with over 640,000 youth holding DACA status (Cadenas et al., 2024). Of these numbers, many who come from undocumented or mixed-status backgrounds enroll in college as one of the first steps toward building a better future for themselves. However, those with this status as students face a handful of boundaries. Previously, undocumented undergraduate students faced barriers that resulted in poor mental health, including discriminatory institutional policies, such as lacking access to federal financial aid, as well as interacting with staff who may be unaware of how to help students with their status (Cadenas et al., 2024). Unfortunately, these barriers have since increased under the new administration. As of 2025, President Trump has created policies that have been found to increase the amount of chronic absenteeism among grade and middle-school-aged children by at least 22% (Dee, 2025). However, there has yet to be any additional research conducted on whether the same pattern is consistent within undergraduate students, including their access to on-campus academic and support services.

Other studies have been conducted seeking to learn the impact of these policies on mental health and their own personal perspectives on their universities. These studies, unfortunately, showed very little trust within their institutions (Santellano, 2019). by even going as far as to say their universities would not “stop any harm from coming toward them if ICE were to ever appear on campus” (Santellano, 2019). This information is heavily troubling as it indicates that undocumented and mixed-status students may be discouraged from pursuing higher education as a result of the perceived attitudes. Unfortunately, this study did not record the further impact of these perceptions.

As a result, it is puzzling to see a lack of research in the use of on-campus services, such as academic advising, basic needs, and tutoring available for free. Previous research has found that many Latino students from undocumented or mixed-status backgrounds tend not to take advantage of such

resources even when they were found to be food insecure before any new administration policies (Nguyen et al., 2026). This finding suggests that patterns of underutilization may have worsened under the current federal immigration climate. However, little research has examined whether concerns about immigration enforcement and perceptions of federal immigration policies are associated with students' willingness to access campus resources and support services.

The present study seeks to address this gap by examining whether the current federal immigration climate's emotional impact and campus actions influenced by immigration enforcement concerns are related to their use of on-campus academic support services. Specifically, the purpose of this study is to determine whether students who report greater emotional impacts from current federal immigration policies and greater changes in their campus behaviors due to concerns about immigration enforcement also report statistically significant differences in their use of academic support services. Understanding these relationships may help colleges and universities better identify barriers that prevent students from accessing resources designed to support their academic success. As a result, these findings may continue to inform future equity plans and/or models to ensure every student has access to the resources they deserve as a student.

The main hypothesis is that students who reported greater concern about immigration enforcement and more negative perceptions of current federal immigration policies would report lower use of on-campus academic support services. See table below for specific null and alternative hypotheses for the study.

Summary of Hypotheses

Hypothesis	Null Hypothesis	Alternative
Hypothesis 1 (DV ~ IV1)	There is no relationship between the perception of administration policy climate and student access to on-campus support services.	Students who perceive the administration's policy climate as negative will report lower access to on-campus support services.
Hypothesis 2 (DV ~ IV2)	There is no relationship between the ICE activity/enforcement concerns and student access to on-campus support services.	Students who report greater concerns about ICE activity and/or immigration enforcement will report lower access to on-campus support services.
Hypothesis 3 (DV ~ IV1 + IV2)	There is no relationship between the perception of administration policy climate, ICE activity/enforcement concerns, and student access to on-campus support services.	Perceptions about the administration's policy climate and ICE activity/enforcement concerns both predict lower student access to on-campus support services.

Methods

Participants

In this study, the researcher recruited participants through advertising on online social channels, such as Instagram and Discord. No participants were excluded from the study. There were 12 ($n = 12$) participants in total with an average age of 20.83, or around 21 years old. (Figure 1). There were five

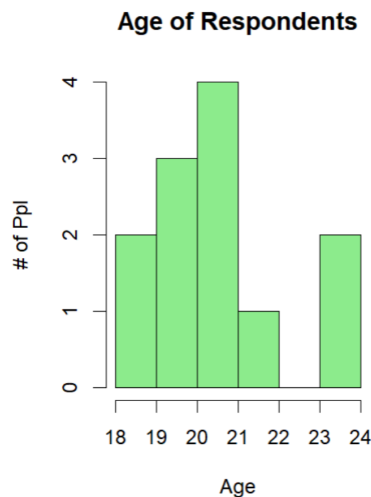


Figure 1

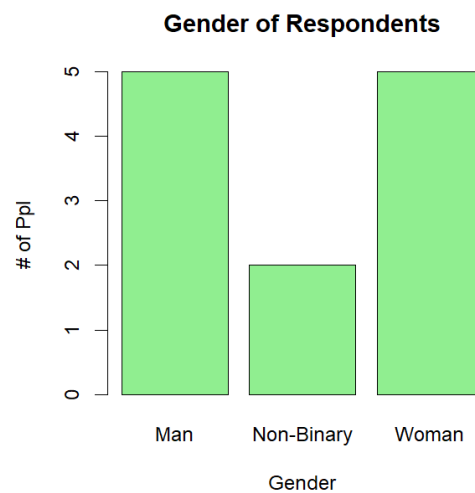


Figure 2

male (~42%), five female (~42%), and two non-binary (~17%) participants. (Figure 2). There were no incentives provided for participating in the study.

Procedures

In order to participate in the study, participants agreed that they were over the age of 18, either 1) a current college student or 2) enrolled in the previous semester, and consented to participate. Participants were also informed that no identifiable information would be collected, including email addresses, and all responses would remain anonymous. They were also informed of the ability to choose to skip any question or stop participating at any time without penalty.

After consenting, participants were asked to fill out a 3-to 5-minute-long Google Forms survey with questions on demographics, use of on-campus services in the past four weeks, the emotional impact of the current federal immigration climate, hearing about ICE in the past month, and avoiding areas or services on campus due to fear of ICE. There were 20 questions in total, with two being focused on demographic information, such as “Age” and “Gender.” All of the questions were rated on a Likert scale of 1-5, with the scale values ranging from “Never” and “Very Often”; “Not at all comfortable” and “Very Comfortable”; and “Strongly Disagree” and “Strongly Agree.”

Measures

DV: Use of On-Campus Services

The name of the survey is “Perceptions of Immigration Policy and Student Use of On-Campus Support Services.” While this did not come from a past survey, the measures in this study were created by me specifically for this project and were not adapted from any previous scale or previous research. Participants answered questions using five-point scales that ranged from 1 to 5, with 1 being Strongly Disagree and 5 being Strongly Agree, along with other modified scales such as Not at All Comfortable to Very Comfortable. I believe “In the past four weeks, how often did you use academic support services on-campus?” and “In the past four weeks, how comfortable did you feel using on-campus services?” are two items that best illustrate the scale because they measure both the frequency of students' use of campus resources and their comfort level when accessing those resources, both of which are the exact variable I am studying in this survey. I believe this measure is valid because the survey questions directly assess participants' perceptions of immigration policies and concerns about immigration enforcement, otherwise known as the variables being studied. Cronbach's Alpha was also used once the data were collected to ensure reliability.

IV1: Emotional Impact of Concerns about Immigration Enforcement

The first independent variable that I measured was the perceived impact of federal immigration policies. These measures were also self-reported, using the same five-point scale ranging from 1 to 5. The top two questions I would use are “Federal immigration policies affect my willingness to participate in campus activities” and “Current federal immigration policies make me feel less welcome on campus.” These illustrate the scale best because this is the opinion of the participants as to how they are currently being affected by immigration policies and whether or not they are less likely or more concerned about going on campus. These measures were not taken from a previous survey, and I came up with them with the assistance of AI when I was stuck and could not determine any more items for the variable. Cronbach’s Alpha was also used once the data were collected to ensure reliability.

IV2: Campus Decisions Affected by ICE

The second independent variable that I measured was campus decisions affected by ICE. These measures were also self-reported, using the same five-point scale ranging from 1 to 5. The best questions listed here are “I avoid certain areas of campus because of concerns about immigration enforcement” and “Concerns about immigration enforcement have made me miss class, events, or services.” Cronbach’s Alpha was also used once the data were collected to ensure reliability.

Other

Additionally, although this was not one of my variables, I also included self-report measures about how students believe the current federal immigration climate and concerns about immigration enforcement may impact immigrant students attending campus. These questions are also self-reported on the same scale of 1 to 5. However, they consist of generalized statements that the

participants may strongly disagree with or strongly agree with.

Overall, these measures are likely to be reliable because all participants received the same survey questions and response scales, as well as Cronbach's Alpha being used. The validity is also dependent on the scale items used, as described above.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

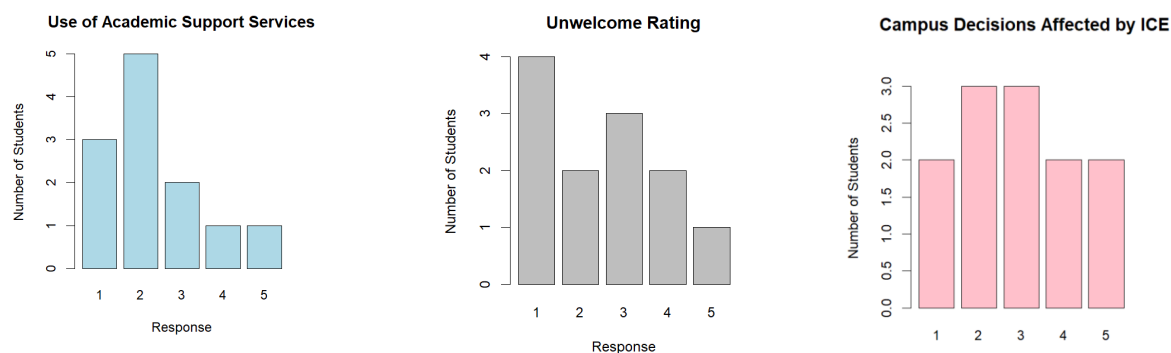
Descriptive statistics are reported below in Table 1. The dependent variable (use of on-campus support services) had a mean score of 2.33 (SD = 1.23) (Figure 3). This result suggests that participants had reported low to moderate recent use of on-campus services. IV1 (Emotional Impact of Concerns about Immigration Enforcement) had a mean score of 2.5 (SD = 1.38) (Figure 3). This finding suggests that there are moderate levels of concern present among participants. IV2 (Campus Decisions Affected by ICE) had the highest mean out of the other variables measured at 2.92 (SD = 1.38) (Figure 3). This finding suggests that participants' actions on campus are being moderately impacted by ICE.. All variables showed the full possible response range (range = 4), demonstrating variability in participants' responses. Reliability estimates were also acceptable. Considering the Cronbach's alpha values of .76 for DV, 0.78 for IV1, and 0.92 for IV2, these scores suggest that the scales had adequate internal consistency

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Variables in Study.

Variable	Alpha Reliability	Mean	SD	Range
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DV	0.76	2.33	1.23	4
IV 1	0.78	2.5	1.38	4
IV 2	0.92	2.92	1.38	4

Figure 3. Distributions of Variables in Study.



Linear Models and Inferential Statistics.

Table 2. Predicting DV from IV1 and IV2.

DV = Use of On-Campus Services (support_use)	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Intercept	0.38	0.48	-0.50, 1.05
IV1 = Emotional Impact of Concerns	0.381, 95% CI [-0.19, 0.95]	—	-0.496, 95% CI [-1.26, 0.27]

about Immigration Enforcement (less_welcome)			
IV2 = Campus Decisions Affected by ICE (daily_decisions)	—	0.637, 95% CI [0.20, 1.08]	1.053, 95% CI [0.28, 1.82]
R²	0.18	0.51	0.60

Hypothesis 1. Predicting DV from IV1

The first hypothesis predicted that students who were more emotionally impacted by the administration's policy climate would report lower access to on-campus support services. In order to test this hypothesis, a linear regression model was created by comparing the use of on-campus support services as the dependent variable and feeling unwelcome on campus as the independent variable (Figure 4). The relationship between feeling unwelcome on campus and use of support services was positive with a slope of 0.38 and a 95% confidence interval of [-0.19, 0.95] (Table 2). These results indicate that for every unit increase in feelings of being unwelcome, the use of support services was predicted to increase by approximately 0.38 units. However, because the confidence interval includes zero, the relationship was not statistically significant. The p-value was 0.166, and the t-value was 1.50, meaning that the estimated slope was only 1.50 standard errors away from zero. This relatively small t-value provides insufficient evidence that a relationship exists. Therefore, the data did not provide sufficient evidence to conclude that feelings of being unwelcome on campus were associated with the use of support services. Overall, the results did not support Hypothesis 1.

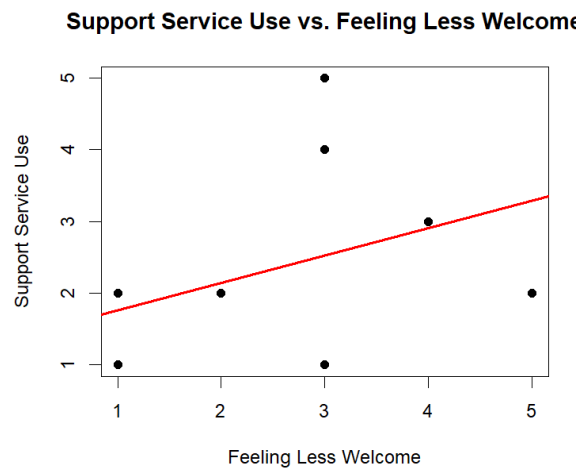


Figure 4. Graph of linear model.

Hypothesis 2. Predicting DV from IV2

The second hypothesis predicted that students whose campus decisions were more affected by concerns about immigration enforcement would report lower use of on-campus support services. In order to test this hypothesis, a linear regression model was created by comparing the use of on-campus support services as the dependent variable and the ratings of on-campus decisions being affected by ICE as the independent variable (Figure 5). This relationship was found to be positive, as well, with a slope of 0.64. This result indicates that for every one-unit increase in the extent to which students' campus decisions were affected by concerns about immigration enforcement, the use of support services was predicted to increase by approximately 0.64 units. The t-value was 3.23, which means that the estimated slope was approximately 3.23 standard errors away from zero. This relatively large t-value provides evidence that concerns about immigration enforcement affecting students' campus decisions were significantly related to support service use. The relationship was also found to be statistically significant

($p = 0.009$), indicating that students whose campus decisions were more strongly influenced by immigration enforcement concerns tended to report greater use of on-campus support services. Rather than supporting the original hypothesis, these results suggest the opposite, as the relationship was found to be positive rather than negative. Ultimately, these results suggest that students whose campus decisions were more affected by concerns about immigration enforcement were more likely to use on-campus support services.

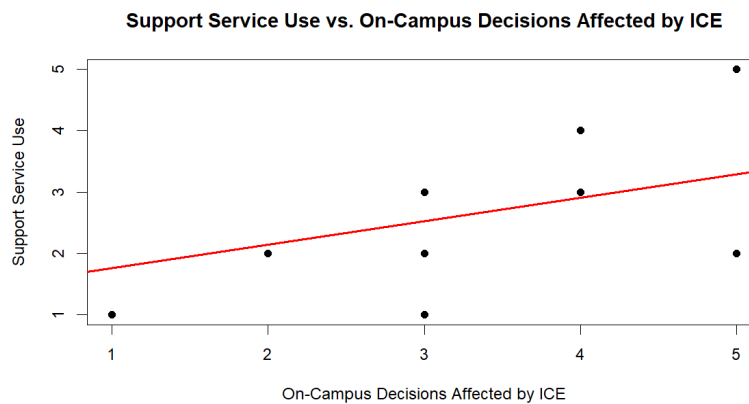


Figure 5. Graph of linear model.

Hypothesis 3. Predicting DV from IV1 and IV2

The third hypothesis predicted that the emotional impact of the administration's policy climate and campus decisions affected by ICE would both predict lower use of on-campus support services. Feeling unwelcome on campus was not found to be a significant predictor of support service use due to a slope of -0.50, a p-value of 0.18, a t-value of -1.46, and a 95% confidence interval of [-1.26, 0.27] (Figure 5). This result indicates that, after controlling for concerns about immigration enforcement affecting campus daily decisions, every one-unit increase in feeling unwelcome on campus was linked to

a predicted decrease of approximately 0.50 units in on-campus support service use. The negative t-value also means that the relationship between feeling unwelcome and support service use was negative after this control. However, because the relationship was not found to be statistically significant due to the p-value, there is insufficient evidence to conclude that feeling unwelcome on campus predicts support service use. In contrast, concerns about immigration enforcement affecting daily decisions significantly predicted greater use of support services due to a slope of 1.05, a p-value of 0.013, and a 95% confidence interval of [0.28, 1.82]. This result indicates that, after controlling for feelings of being unwelcome on campus, every one-unit increase in the impact of campus decisions being affected was associated with a predicted increase of approximately 1.05 units in on-campus support service use. The positive t-value indicates a positive relationship between immigration-related concerns affecting daily decisions and support service use. Because the t-value was relatively large and the p-value was less than .05, this result implies that there is some evidence to conclude that ICE activity influencing decisions to miss class or on-campus events predicts on-campus student support service use.

The slope changing from 0.38 to 0.50 between models 1 and 2 indicates the effect of suppression. This effect is speculated to be due to the fact that the coefficient changed direction. This change of direction may have been due to an overlap between the predictions. Whereas, this change from 0.64 to 1.05 between models 2 and 3 suggests that daily decisions remained a strong predictor of support service use even after controlling for feelings of being unwelcome, or a relatively independent impact. As a result, the third hypothesis was not supported.

Discussion

Summary of the Current Study

The results of this study were very mixed. Unlike the original prediction that students who

reported great emotional impacts from federal immigration would use student services less, the results showed that there was no clear correlation or relationship between these two variables. However, students whose campus decisions were more strongly affected by concerns about immigration enforcement reported a greater use of on-campus services. Interestingly, this finding was the opposite of the original prediction, which hypothesized that students with campus behavior more influenced by immigration enforcement would report less use of these services.

The results suggest that concerns about immigration enforcement may not necessarily discourage students from seeking academic support. Instead, students who are experiencing greater stress or concerns due to immigration enforcement activities and policies may actively seek out campus resources as a source of support.

This study may also be interpreted in the context of previous research on undocumented students' use of campus support services, as well. A previous study found that undocumented students often accessed support services due to social factors or out of necessity (Sarabia et al., 2021). Students who interacted with faculty outside of class or studied with peers were more likely to use these services, while students facing greater barriers, such as demanding work schedules or deportation risks, were also more likely to seek support (Sarabia et al., 2021).

These findings may help explain why the current study found a positive relationship between these two variables. Rather than avoiding campus resources completely, students being careful about where they go on campus due to these fears may choose to actively seek support services because they need additional assistance navigating academic and personal challenges. Therefore, immigration-related concerns may function as a motivating factor for resource utilization rather than a barrier. This interpretation suggests that students affected by immigration enforcement concerns may view campus services as an important source of support during periods of uncertainty, such as the current

administration.

Limitations and Future Directions

One of the biggest limitations of the study was the small sample size. The sample size matters as larger groups reduce the margin of error within research. Larger samples generally also show more representative results of the population being studied. Future research may address this limitation by expanding the time period the survey is sent out and changing the minimum number of participants from 10 to 1000, depending on the college campus population.

Another limitation of this study was a lack of immigration status, or at least targeted outreach towards immigrant communities. Due to this being necessary for class, the researcher reached out to individuals she already knew in order to gain enough responses. This means that, although the sample could consist of both citizens and mixed-status or undocumented individuals, the results may not be representative of immigrant students who face the real consequences of these policy changes in comparison to citizens who do not face as many legal repercussions. Because of this limitation, the researcher suggests future research to complete an Institutional Review Board application, requesting a study like this specifically for undocumented and mixed-status students as a qualification. Once approved, the study results would be more helpful for colleges and universities to understand how to better help their students if the findings and results differ from this study.

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Supplemental Materials

DropBox Folder with R Script, Codebook, Cleaned Data:

https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/6ynzl6giinaalsczs7c6s/AO1CA_Xo4-9UMcV-3HCHnOQ?rlkey=xskpeq0rci5ka0w0gnsjsv94t&st=12bc9gtj&dl=0