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# **Politically Excluded, Undocu-Engaged: The Perceived Effect of Hostile Immigration Policies on Undocumented Student Political Engagement**

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**Abstract:** Prior research suggests that hostile immigration policies can motivate undocumented immigrants' political engagement, but may also create unique risks that limit their willingness to participate. We examine how perceptions of the immigration policy context may help or hinder undocumented college students' political engagement. Using data from an online survey of 1,277 undocumented college students attending California 4-year public universities, we conducted regression analyses to examine the extent to which perceived discrimination, social exclusion, and threat to the family due to current immigration policy affects three forms of political engagement: political voice, collective action, and individual action. We then examined potential factors that may facilitate engagement, including participation in campus and community-based organizations and legal protections. Results show that perceived discrimination and threat to family due to the immigration policy context are positively associated with all forms of political engagement, while social exclusion is negatively associated. Campus and community engagement weakly moderate these relationships. Comparisons across immigration status suggest that many of these relationships are unique to students who have legal protections like DACA. Ultimately, we argue that undocumented students' political engagement is shaped by nuanced manifestations of a hostile immigration policy context.

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Undocumented students have been at the forefront of a political movement to advance rights for immigrant youth and communities. Undocumented youth advocated in the late 1990s to pass AB 540, which allowed undocumented students to establish residency and pay in-state tuition at California public colleges and universities (Seif, 2004). Student activism also pressured the California legislature to pass AB 130 and 131, also known as the California Dream Act, which provided undocumented students with access to institutional and state financial aid (Gordon & Watanabe, 2010). Undocumented students and alumni led campaigns for the federal DREAM Act, which would create a legalization pathway for undocumented youth who attend college or enlist in the military, and called for administrative relief, including the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) Program which provides temporary protection from deportation and access to employment authorization (Getrich, 2021; Negrón-Gonzales, 2014; Nicholls, 2013; Terriquez, 2017). Undocumented students were also central to efforts to preserve DACA after its rescission (Solorzano & Ruiz, 2021). Undocumented young people have also called for comprehensive immigration reform and an end to the deportation regime that terrorizes their families and communities (Unzueta Carrasco & Seif, 2014).

Collectively, this research suggests that undocumented youth are motivated by a desire to improve social conditions for themselves and their families and communities. However, exclusionary immigration policies can also be de-motivating as deportation fears and concerns about stigmatization dissuade undocumented students' political participation, particularly more public and risky forms of collective action (Enriquez & Saguy, 2016; Getrich, 2021; Saguy & Enriquez, 2020). Building on this work, we turn attention to perceptions of the immigration policy context to examine whether these may help or hinder students' political engagement.

Using data from an online survey of 1,277 undocumented college students attending

California 4-year public universities, we examine potential factors that may contribute to undocumented students' political engagement. Heeding calls for more nuanced approaches to undocumented immigrants' political engagement (García, 2020; Getrich, 2021), we examine three unique outcome measures: political voice, collective action, and individual action. We address three research questions: 1) What effect do perceptions of the immigration policy context have on undocumented students' political engagement?, 2) To what extent does participation in community and campus opportunities moderate this relationship?, and 3) To what extent do differences emerge between students who have legal protections (e.g., DACA) and those who do not? Regression results show that negative perceptions of the immigration policy context are positively associated with political engagement, and that campus and community engagement weakly moderates this relationship. Further, this association varies by students' immigration status. Ultimately, we argue that undocumented students' political engagement is shaped by nuanced manifestations of the hostile immigration policy context.

### **Immigration Policy, Legal Vulnerability, and Political Engagement**

Prior scholarship has interrogated the impact of hostile immigration policies on political engagement. Walker and colleagues (2019) posit that “the belief that punitive immigration policies unfairly target Latinos” spurs engagement among undocumented young people (1822). Studies have demonstrated the impact of hostile immigration policy on voting (Filindra & Manatschal, 2020; White, 2016), political knowledge (Pantoja & Segura, 2003), and political protest (Negrón-Gonzales, 2013; Zepeda-Millán, 2017). This work has generally found that undocumented people in the U.S.—both youth and adults—are more likely to be politically engaged in the face of hostile immigration policy.

Building on this work, we seek to interrogate a nuanced conceptualization of the

immigration policy context. The immigration policy context is informed by federal immigration policies as well as federal, state, local, and institutional policies that determine the extent to which immigration status is consequential for one's everyday life (Enriquez, 2020; Enriquez et al., 2019; Golash-Boza & Valdez, 2018). The policy context is also dynamic due to frequently shifting policies (Silver, 2018). This legal reality means that perceptions of immigration policy are highly contextual. During the time of this study, the federal immigration policy context was openly and increasingly hostile toward undocumented immigrants. Advancing a racist-nativist platform, former president Donald Trump advanced anti-immigrant proposals, including ramped-up deportation threats, the rescission of the DACA program, and its subsequent protracted legal contestation (NILC, 2020). Such actions contributed to increased fear and uncertainty among undocumented students (Gomez & Perez Huber, 2019). Alternatively, the state of California offered a relatively inclusive policy context, including a slate of educational access policies as well as a range of inclusionary social policies, such as access to driver's licenses (Pastor, 2018; Raza et al., 2019). Institutional policies at the California State University and University of California have also fostered increasingly inclusive contexts with the development of holistic undocumented student services that provide educational, financial, and socio-emotional support (Cisneros & Valdivia, 2020; Enriquez et al., 2019; Sanchez & So, 2015).

Individuals develop perceptions of the immigration policy context based on their interpretation of the effects that immigration laws are having on their lives (Millán, 2021). The immigration policy context can fuel discriminatory experiences, including in social interactions with mainstream society as well as intragroup relationships (Ayón & Becerra, 2013; Córdova & Cervantes, 2010; Menéndez Alarcón & Novak, 2010). Studies with other marginalized groups show that those who report facing more discrimination are more likely to politically engage

(Valdez, 2011; White-Johnson, 2012). Social exclusion emanates from being threatened with deportation, denied access to rights, and deprived of resources; such experiences can drive undocumented immigrants to self-isolate in order to minimize the risks they face in being in social spaces (Ayón, 2018). Undocumented immigrant youth report being motivated to engage in political action precisely because they are legally and socially excluded, but this exclusion can also foster fears that can dissuade participation (Enriquez & Saguy, 2016; Getrich, 2021; Negrón-Gonzales, 2014). Finally, individual youth are nested in undocumented and mixed-status families, raising concerns about threats of family separation (Enriquez & Millán, 2021).

Perceptions of one's legal vulnerability may also inform the extent to which one experiences and perceives exclusionary immigration policy contexts. DACA buffers undocumented youth against some of the most severe consequences of undocumented immigration status by altering their experiences of legal vulnerability; they are less likely to fear deportation and experience less financial strain (Enriquez & Millán, 2021; Gonzales et al., 2014; Patler et al., 2021). Receiving DACA reduces the risks associated with political participation and fosters identification with one's undocumented status, suggesting that DACA recipients' would be more likely to engage in public political activities that may reveal their immigration status (Katsiaficas et al., 2019) However, Mena Robles and Gomberg-Muñoz (2016) find that the establishment of the program has opposing effects “at once stifling the urgency of comprehensive immigration reform and galvanizing efforts to expand and strengthen protections against deportation” (46). Similarly, Getrich (2021) finds that DACA's rescission led some youth to a retreat from political participation—often out of frustration and disillusionment—while motivating others to speak out for the first time. These findings suggest that the immigration policy context may have varying effects, especially across immigration status.

Scholars have called for the study of multiple forms of political participation, including individual forms of activism and everyday forms of resistance (Getrich, 2021; Mendes & Chang, 2019). García (2020) finds that immigration policies are associated with multiple political incorporation outcomes, including undocumented immigrants' political socialization, political efficacy, and political participation. Further, different factors are associated with distinct political engagement behaviors (Fendrich & Lovoy, 1988). Terriquez (2017) finds that being undocumented is positively associated with protest actions among young adults, but not political voice or community involvement. Thus, we examine three forms of political engagement: collective action, individual action, and political voice. We conceptualize collective action as group behaviors, such as protesting or marching, which are often visibly public and potentially risky. Alternatively, individual action, such as boycotting a company or signing a petition, can be conducted in relative seclusion. Political voice is defined as engaging in expressive political communication, such as expressing a political point of view in class or to an elected official (Fendrich & Lovoy, 1988). Examining these three forms of political engagement is critical as prior research suggests that undocumented youth build up their comfort with more public and risky forms of political engagement by engaging first in more private forms of consciousness raising and everyday acts of resistance (Enriquez & Saguy, 2016; Getrich, 2021). Thus, it is possible that undocumented students' varying perceptions of the immigration policy context and their own immigration protections (or lack thereof) inform their perceptions of risk and differentiate their willingness to participate in these various forms of political engagement.

### **Campus and Community Engagement as Opportunities for Politicization**

Recent scholarship signals the importance of creating an opportunity structure to foster the political engagement of undocumented immigrants, particularly through their involvement in

civic and community organizations. Terriquez (2017) finds that membership and participation in civic groups serve as “scaffolding” for undocumented youths’ later political engagement (11). Further, she notes that participation in more activist-oriented organizations, such as undocumented immigrant youth and student organizations, fosters politicization and identification with a broader movement for immigrant rights. Getrich (2021) further documents early politicization of some undocumented youth through community-based organizations; such groups educated youth about policies they could advocate for and also provided opportunities to participate in public actions, such as marches. García (2020) establishes the importance of local opportunity structures, which she finds to affect undocumented adults’ political engagement.

University campuses also present opportunities for politicization and political participation. Schools play an important role in developing students’ civic and political engagement (García Bedolla, 2012; Spiezio, 2009). Many undocumented students come to activism precisely because of the community that they forge with similarly situated students. Negrón-Gonzales (2013) notes that “students frequently engage with other undocumented students out of necessity, which then propels them into political activism” (1288). College campuses also host undocumented student organizations which are dedicated to empowering undocumented students with the knowledge needed to thrive in higher education, as well as mobilizing their participation in social movement efforts at the institution and beyond (Hinton, 2015; Seif, 2011; The S.I.N. Collective, 2007). Universities also offer undocumented student services which, in addition to providing material resources and support, also serve as spaces of empowerment and engagement with other undocumented students (Sanchez & So, 2015). Indeed, Nájera (2020) finds that the establishment of such safe spaces foster undocumented students’ civic and political engagement over time, even for those without DACA protections.



Research has documented a participation gap between racial and ethnic groups specifically finding that Latinas/os/xs have a lower likelihood of civic skills, civic engagement, and recruitment into civic activities (DeSipio, 1996; Geron & Michelson, 2008). Given these gaps, campus and community groups can provide civic skills and develop an individuals' capacity for political engagement and collective action (Putnam, 2000; Verba & Nie, 1972). Not all organizational participation, however, leads to more civic and or political engagement as some organizational experience may discourage participation in certain political activities (Eliasoph, 2011) and even lead to non-civic action (Lichterman & Eliasoph, 2014). Thus, we hypothesize that organizations will play an important role in fostering politicization and creating opportunities for political engagement, but it is possible that not all forms of organizational participation will lead to increased political engagement. We assess an array of escalating types of engagement from volunteerism, organizational participation, off-campus and on-campus organizational membership and undocumented student service use to examine the extent to which community and campus opportunities may strengthen or weaken the relationship between perceived immigration policy context and undocumented students' political engagement.

### **Data and Methods**

This study uses survey data collected from an online survey of 1,277 undocumented college students attending the California State University (CSU) and the University of California (UC) from March to June 2020. Participants were recruited at all nine UC undergraduate campuses and nine of the 23 CSU campuses. Recruitment announcements were distributed widely, including emails and social media posts from each campus' undocumented student support services office, faculty teaching large general education courses and ethnic studies courses, departmental and university office newsletters, and undocumented student

organizations. Eligibility criteria included being over age 18, having at least one immigrant parent, and current enrollment, being born outside of the United States, and having no permanent legal status. The Qualtrics survey had an estimated completion time of 25–35 minutes.

Respondents received \$10 electronic gift card compensation.

Multivariate regression analyses were conducted to test the perceived effects of immigration policy on political engagement outcomes. The analyses proceeded in four steps: 1) we first examined descriptively the association between perceived effects of immigration policy on political engagement; 2) we estimated nine multivariate regression models to examine the association between perceived effects of immigration policy and political voice, collective action, and individual action; 3) we examined the moderating effects of campus and community engagement on this association; and 4) we explored group differences by examining whether the observed effects varied by students with no legal status and students who had received legal protections through DACA or Temporary Protected Status (TPS).

Our final analytical sample consisted of 982 undocumented students due to list-wise deletion to manage missing data. Over 54% indicated they attended a UC campus with 46% attending a CSU campus; roughly 37% were in their 4th year or higher. Seventy-five percent of respondents indicated that they had DACA or TPS and 94% indicated that they had no parent that was a permanent resident or U.S. citizen. A majority (82%) were between 18 and 23 of age and 93% identified as Latina/o/x. Over 54% indicated they work, 80% had volunteered in the past, and 47% had participated in an organization to solve a problem (*See Table 1*).

### ***Dependent Variables***

Political engagement. Political engagement was measured as three items: political voice, collective action, and individual action. Principal component factoring (PCF) was undertaken to

reduce the number of outcome variables and capture theoretically-informed concepts. For political voice, we combined four underlying measures: a) contact a public office to express an opinion; b) discuss political issues on social media; c) wear buttons/stickers with a political message; and d) express a political point of view during class. The PCF analysis for political voice revealed that one combined factor accounts for 57% of the variance observed and an **eigenvalue of 2.29 ( $\chi^2[1, 982] = 971.74, p \leq .0001$ )**. For collective action, we combined two underlying measures regarding taking part in a protest, march, or demonstration: a) on-campus; and b) off-campus. The PCF analysis for collective action indicated that one factor accounted for **86% of the observed variance with an eigenvalue of 1.72 ( $\chi^2[1, 982] = 719.29, p \leq .0001$ )**. For individual action, we combined three underlying measures: a) signed a petition regarding an issue/problem that concerns you; b) boycott a company or product for social/political reasons; and c) buy a product or service because of social/political reasons. The PCF analysis indicated that one factor accounted for **64% of the observed variance with an eigenvalue of 1.94 ( $\chi^2[1, 982] = 667.8, p \leq .0001$ )**.

### ***Main Independent Variables***

The main independent variables were three subscales derived from Ayón's (2017) empirically validated Perceived Immigration Policy Effects Scale (PIPES). The three subscales focus on the perceived immigration policy effects on discrimination (9 items,  $\alpha=.874$ ), threat to family (3 items,  $\alpha=.815$ ), and social exclusion (5 items,  $\alpha=.829$ ). Sample statements include: "Have you been treated unfairly at a restaurant or store because of current immigration policy?" (discrimination), "Do you worry about the impact immigration policies have on you or your family?" (threat to family), and "Do you feel that you have no liberty and need to stay home because of current immigration policy?" (social exclusion). Response options include "never,"

“rarely,” “sometimes,” “often” and “always.” Higher scores on each subscale indicate more frequent negative perceptions. To avoid multicollinearity, each subscale was mean centered in our statistical estimations, accomplished by subtracting the mean of the combined variable from each value in the variable (Iacobucci et al., 2016). Table 1 provides the mean and standard deviations of the three uncentered subscales.

### ***Moderating Variables***

Five moderating variables that capture campus and community engagement opportunities were examined: volunteerism, organizational participation, off-campus organizational membership, on-campus organizational membership, and use of on-campus undocumented student support services. Volunteerism was recoded as a binary variable of whether or not the respondent had ever participated in community service or volunteer activity. Similarly, organizational participation was recoded as a binary variable of whether or not the respondent had ever participated in an organization that tried to solve a problem in their school, community, or broader society. Off-campus and on-campus organizational membership were coded as binary variables measuring respondents’ membership at their current campus. Use of undocumented student services was a composite measure of five items that assessed the frequency of using specific undocumented student services: office visits, speaking to a professional staff member, speaking to a student staff member, speaking with a campus partner of the program office, and speaking to immigration lawyer or legal service provided by the program office. Response categories included never, a few times a year, about once a month, about once a week, and more than once a week. The five items were averaged and mean centered for model estimation purposes. PCF analysis confirmed that one combined factor accounted for 64% of the variance observed and an eigenvalue of 3.22 ( $\chi^2[1, 982] = 2470.07, p \leq .0001$ ).

### *Socio-demographic Control Variables*

We included contextual and sociodemographic controls in our analyses. These controls included respondent's immigration status (no legal status or DACA/TPS), race/ethnicity (Latina/o/x or not Latina/o/x), gender (woman or man), parental legal status (no parent who is a citizen or permanent residency or one or more parent who is a citizen or permanent resident), parental educational background (no parents have a BA or higher or one or more parents have a BA or higher) and age (18-23 years old or 24 years or older). We also controlled for year in school; reported years were collapsed into the following groups: first and second years, third years, and fourth years and higher. Respondents also identified their university campus which we used to create a dummy variable for university system (UC campus or CSU). To account for potential constraints on their time, we controlled for hours worked (not working, 1-20 hours, or 21 or more). To account for pre-college selectivity, we included high school grade point average (under 2.5, between 2.5 and 3.0, between 3.0 and 3.5, and 3.5 and over).

### **Descriptive and Statistical Findings**

#### *Descriptive Findings*

Undocumented student respondents demonstrated considerable political engagement with some variation. Engagement in political activity varied among undocumented students with 11% of respondents indicating that they had contacted a public official to express an opinion “sometimes” or “often,” and approximately 57% of respondents signed a petition regarding an issue that concerns them “sometimes” or “often.” Approximately 30% of students indicated they took part in a protest, march, or demonstration on-campus “sometimes,” or “often.”

*[Table 1 about here]*

Undocumented students' perceptions of the effects of immigration policies varied with

respect to perceived social exclusion, discrimination, and threat to family. Table 1 provides the mean and standard deviation for the three uncentered PIPES subscales. For the social exclusion subscale, the mean score for our sample was 14.39 which indicates that, on average, respondents perceived moderate levels of exclusion; this average score is an equivalent of answering between “sometimes” and “rarely” on these survey items. For the discrimination subscale, the mean score for our sample was 19.23 which indicates that, on average, respondents perceived a low level of discrimination due to immigration policy; this average score is equivalent to answering “rarely” on most items. For the threat to family subscale, the mean score of our sample was 12.19 which indicates that, on average, respondents perceived moderately high levels of threat to family due to immigration policy; this average score is an equivalent of mostly answering “often” on these three items. Correlational analyses revealed that more frequent perceived negative effects of the immigration policy context is positively associated with political engagement.

With regard to campus and community engagement, undocumented students overwhelmingly responded that they have volunteered in the past (81%) and almost half had participated in an organization to solve a problem (47%). Respondents were more likely to be a member of an on-campus organization (49%) than an off-campus organization (9%). The mean score on the undocumented student support index is 2.677 with a standard deviation of 1.929, reflecting a moderate use of services by undocumented students with substantial variation.

### ***Multivariate Statistical Findings***

The base models demonstrate all three PIPES subscales predict undocumented students’ political participation. However, once controlling for campus and community engagement and socio-demographic variables, only discrimination and threat to family predict political engagement (*See Table 2*). Three panels in Table 2 summarize the ordinary least square

regression results predicting political voice (left panel), collective action (middle panel), and individual action (right panel). Under each panel, the base models (M1, M4, and M7) provide the coefficient estimates of the main independent variables while the full models (M3, M6, and M9) provide the main effect estimates of the PIPES subscales, including moderating variables and controlling for socio-demographic factors. At the bottom of each panel, one can observe model fitness measures demonstrating that the models that include predictors and controls better fit the observed variation for each of the political engagement variables.

*[Table 2 about here]*

The base model estimations demonstrated that all three PIPES subscales were statistically associated with all three forms of political engagement, with the exception of the main effect of perceived social exclusion on individual action.<sup>1</sup> While discrimination and family threat subscales were positively associated with political engagement, the social exclusion subscale was negatively associated with political engagement. When compared to respondents who reported lower levels of perceived discrimination and family threat, those who reported higher levels tended to be more politically engaged along all three measures of political voice, collective action, and individual action. These results were statistically significant at the  $p \leq 0.001$  level for all three measures. In contrast, when compared to students that reported lower levels of social exclusion, respondents who reported higher levels of perceived exclusion tended to be less politically involved along measures of political voice and collective action ( $p \leq 0.05$ ); no statistically significant differences were detected for individual action. These relationships hold when controlling for sociodemographic characteristics.

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<sup>1</sup> As the PIPES subscales are mean centered the coefficients can be interpreted as the average change in political engagement when the respective PIPES subscale increases by one unit. For example, a unit increase in the perceived discriminatory effects of immigration policy increases engagement in political voice by an average of 0.03 (M1), increases collective political action by an average of 0.03 (M4), and increases individual political action by an average of 0.01 (M7). All these coefficient estimates are statistically significant at the  $p \leq 0.001$  significance level.

The full models demonstrated, however, that net of socio-demographics and campus and community engagement opportunities, only perceived discrimination and family threat continued to predict all three political engagement outcomes. Campus and community engagement very weakly moderated the relationship between discrimination and political voice (M2:  $\beta=0.028$ ,  $p\leq 0.001$ ; M3:  $\beta=0.024$ ,  $p\leq 0.001$ ), collective action (M5:  $\beta=0.029$ ,  $p\leq 0.001$ ; M6:  $\beta=0.025$ ,  $p\leq 0.001$ ), and individual action (M8:  $\beta=0.014$ ,  $p\leq 0.01$  versus M9:  $\beta=0.010$ ,  $p\leq 0.05$ ). They also very weakly moderated the relationship between family threat and political voice (M2:  $\beta=0.059$ ,  $p\leq 0.001$ ; M3:  $\beta=0.057$ ,  $p\leq 0.001$ ), collective action (M5:  $\beta=0.042$ ,  $p\leq 0.01$ ; M6:  $\beta=0.039$ ,  $p\leq 0.01$ ), and individual action (M8:  $\beta=0.061$ ,  $p\leq 0.001$  versus M9:  $\beta=0.058$ ,  $p\leq 0.001$ ). Yet, campus and community engagement opportunities did moderate the relationship between perceived social exclusion and political voice (M2:  $\beta= -0.017$ ,  $p\leq 0.05$ ; M3:  $\beta=0.013$ ,  $p>0.05$ ) and collective action (M5:  $\beta=0.021$ ,  $p\leq 0.05$ ; M6:  $\beta=0.016$ ,  $p>.05$ ) as both coefficients decreased in size and lost statistical significance.

While the moderating effects of campus and community engagement were limited, many were significantly and positively associated with varying political engagement outcomes, net of socio-demographic controls. Volunteerism increased individual political engagement by 0.16 ( $p\leq 0.05$ ). Participating in an organization to solve a problem, versus not participating, increased political voice by 0.19 ( $p\leq 0.001$ ), collective action by 0.30 ( $p\leq 0.001$ ), and individual action by 0.18 ( $p\leq 0.01$ ). Similarly, being a member of an off-campus organization, versus not being a member, increased collective action by 0.30 ( $p\leq 0.01$ ) and individual action by 0.22 ( $p\leq 0.05$ ). Being a member of an on-campus organization, versus not being a member, increased political voice by 0.11 ( $p\leq 0.05$ ) and individual action by 0.23 ( $p\leq 0.001$ ). Students who indicated higher utilization of undocumented student support services versus lower utilization were positively and



significantly associated with more expressed higher rates of political voice ( $\beta=0.028$ ,  $p\leq 0.05$ ).

Engagement in political activities varied among undocumented students with no legal status and those that had DACA/TPS. Table 3 presents OLS regression results predicting all three political engagement outcomes by undocumented students with no legal status and undocumented students with DACA/TPS. Results in Table 3 suggests that having no legal status disrupts the relationships between the immigration policy context, campus and community engagement, and political engagement. For example, the coefficients for the family threat subscale predicting collective action ( $\beta=0.033$ ,  $p>0.05$ ) and individual action ( $\beta=0.035$ ,  $p>0.05$ ) were not statistically significant for respondents with no legal status. However, positive associations between family threat subscale persisted for all three political engagement outcomes for respondents who had DACA/TPS (political voice:  $\beta=0.057$ ,  $p\leq 0.001$ ; collective action:  $\beta=0.036$ ,  $p\leq 0.05$ ; individual action:  $\beta=0.068$ ,  $p\leq 0.001$ ). Further, while increased perceived discrimination continued to be positively associated with increased political participation for all three outcome measures for respondents with no legal status, it was only significant for political voice ( $\beta=0.021$ ,  $p\leq 0.001$ ) and collective action ( $\beta=0.023$ ,  $p\leq 0.001$ ) among respondents who had DACA/TPS. Similar to the main results in Table 2, perceived social exclusion was not associated with any of the observed political engagement behaviors for either sub-group.

Lastly, campus and community engagement exert a positive effect on political voice, collective action, and individual action only for respondents with DACA/TPS. Volunteerism continued to be positively associated with individual political engagement of DACA/TPS recipients ( $\beta=0.17$ ,  $p\leq 0.05$ ) but not those with no legal status ( $\beta=0.17$ ,  $p>0.05$ ). Participating in an organization to solve a problem continued to be positively associated with political voice ( $\beta=0.21$ ,  $p\leq 0.01$ ), collective action ( $\beta=0.37$ ,  $p\leq 0.001$ ), and individual action ( $\beta=0.20$ ,  $p\leq 0.01$ ) for

DACA/TPS recipients but not those with no legal status ( $\beta=0.14$ , 0.06, 0.12 respectively,  $p>0.05$ ). Being a member of an off-campus organization continued to be positively associated with collective action ( $\beta=0.34$ ,  $p\leq 0.01$ ) and individual action ( $\beta=0.24$ ,  $p\leq 0.05$ ) for DACA/TPS recipients but not those with no legal status ( $\beta=0.09$ , 0.07 respectively,  $p>0.05$ ). Being a member of an on-campus organization continued to be positively associated with individual action ( $\beta=0.24$ ,  $p\leq 0.01$ ) for DACA/TPS recipients but not those with no legal status ( $\beta=0.17$ ,  $p>0.05$ ); political voice was no longer significant for both groups. Higher utilization of undocumented student services continued to be positively associated with political voice ( $\beta=0.31$ ,  $p\leq 0.01$ ) for DACA/TPS recipients but not those with no legal status ( $\beta=0.03$ ,  $p>0.05$ ); a new positive association arose with collective engagement ( $\beta=0.03$ ,  $p\leq 0.05$ ) for those with DACA/TPS.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

This study examines the motivations of undocumented students that engage in political life. In particular, it captures a moment at the end of a presidential administration that enacted high profile and unapologetic nativist and anti-immigrant policies. Our findings provide a nuanced understanding of how undocumented students navigate and respond to the effects of immigration policy as they perceive them. This approach elevates and prioritizes the lived realities of undocumented students. Our results show that perceived negative immigration policy effects are positively associated with political engagement. Further, campus and community engagement weakly moderates this relationship. Finally, we find that even the temporary and vulnerable legal protections offered by DACA/TPS matter substantially.

Previous literature has documented that hostile immigration climate is associated with increased political engagement (Negrón-Gonzales, 2013; White, 2016; Zepeda-Millán, 2017). Building on this, our study unpacks the everyday manifestations of discrimination, threat to

family, and social exclusion at the hands of immigration policy to assess their independent effects on three measures of political engagement. We find that net of socio-demographic and campus and community engagement variables, only discrimination and threat to family predict political voice, collective action, and individual action. This is consistent with prior research that has found that discrimination is strongly associated with political engagement among marginalized groups (Valdez, 2011; White-Johnson, 2012). For undocumented students, threat to family is likely a strong motivator as students report deep concerns about the safety and security of their undocumented parents and family members (Enriquez & Millán, 2021). On the other hand, perceived social exclusion functions mostly as a demotivator as signaled by its negative association with political voice and collective engagement. Specifically, prior studies have suggested that threatened rights and protections can both encourage political participation but also dissuade undocumented young adults from participating in such actions out of fear of deportation, feelings of futility, and concerns about social stigma (Enriquez & Saguy, 2016; Getrich, 2021; Mena Robles & Gomberg-Muñoz, 2016). Importantly, social exclusion was not associated with individual political action suggesting that more private political activities are neither encouraged nor compromised by social exclusion, possibly because they do not invoke immigration-related concerns. These findings highlight the need to develop nuanced assessments of how immigration policies are affecting individuals as the different types of perceived policy effects have unique impacts on political engagement.

Examining the effects of different types of campus and community engagement, we find that such activities slightly moderate the relationship between perceived immigration policy effects and political engagement. In particular, campus and community engagement eliminated the statistically significant negative relationship between social exclusion and two forms of

political engagement among respondents. This finding suggests that campus and community engagement ameliorates the exclusionary impacts of immigration policy for undocumented students, possibly because these often function as empowering spaces that provide information about one's rights and foster politicization (Nájera, 2020; Negrón-Gonzales, 2013; Terriquez, 2017). On the other hand, campus and community engagement very slightly weakened the positive relationship between both discrimination and threat to family with political engagement; although a statistically significant relationship persisted. So although some undocumented students might want to engage politically given a hostile immigrant climate, participating in civically oriented organization might demotivate their political engagement (Eliasoph, 2011), possibly in conjunction with their assessment of the risks associated with political action. Given these findings, further research should examine how and if undocumented students differentially perceive risk when engaging in civic-oriented activities versus politically-oriented actions.

Engagement in campus and community activities are all positively associated with some form of political engagement. Participating in an organization to solve a social problem was the only type associated with all three political outcomes, suggesting that such action-oriented organizational participation plays an important role in the politicization process. Volunteerism and both off- and on-campus organizational membership is associated with individual political action and may serve an important early politicization function for lower-risk activities (Terriquez, 2017). Off-campus organizational membership is also associated with collective action, suggesting that such organizations may uniquely function as opportunity structures to facilitate involvement in such events (Getrich, 2021). Campus opportunities, including both on-campus organization membership and higher use of undocumented student services, are associated with political voice. This reflects prior research that has documented how campus

spaces function as spaces of empowerment and encourage undocumented students to exercise agency and uplift their own stories to impact politics (Nájera, 2020; The S.I.N. Collective, 2007).

Examining the differences between students with no legal status and those with DACA/TPS provides a deeper understanding of the relationship between immigration policy and political engagement. For example, threat to family no longer had a statistically significant relationship with collective and individual political action for respondents with no legal status; however, this positive relationship did persist for DACA/TPS recipients. This suggests that the motivating potential of exclusionary policies that target one's family are dampened for students who have no legal status and occupy a more precarious social position. Further, discrimination no longer had a statistically significant relationship with individual political action for respondents with DACA/TPS; however, this positive relationship did persist for respondents with no legal status. This result suggests that the motivating potential of discrimination on individual action is unique to undocumented students in more precarious social positions. Finally, all of the campus and community engagement factors were no longer associated with the political engagement of students with no legal status. This suggests that the legal vulnerability of undocumented students with no legal status prevents these opportunity structures from fostering their political engagement. However, it is important to remember that these are average effects; given that prior qualitative research has documented both the motivating and demotivating effects of political threats, it may be that the effect of campus and community engagement is not powerful enough to overcome these (Enriquez & Saguy, 2016; Getrich, 2021; Mena Robles & Gomberg-Muñoz, 2016). Overall, these findings suggest that DACA and TPS protections facilitate political engagement and the persistence of campus and community opportunity structures that facilitate such actions. Even though DACA protections are temporary and

contingent upon the whim of the current presidential administration, the program seems to offer enough security for recipients to exercise their political voice as well as to engage both collectively and individually in the political processes of the country. Given the threatened nature of the DACA program and ongoing efforts to maintain its existence (Solorzano & Ruiz, 2021), it may also be that such threats further motivate DACA recipients' unique participation.

While our findings reveal new insight on the political engagement of undocumented students, the findings of this study are limited. First, we do not know for what specific issues students were politically engaged. Future research should assess if advocating for immigration-related issues or other issues matters. Given that the survey we examined is cross-sectional, the findings here are associational. Future research should use longitudinal data to allow researchers to make causal claims on what motivates undocumented students to engage. Second, although we control for pre-college selective factors such as high school grade point average, it is insufficient to address questions of selection; there may be unobserved selective factors that explain why some students are likely to engage politically and civically during college. Third, the perceived discriminatory effects of immigration policy are measured at the individual-level; additional research should explore if the perception of group-level discrimination has different effects. This will allow a greater opportunity to examine the relationship between more collective group threats and how they are tied to engagement.

Ultimately, our study suggests that undocumented students' political engagement is shaped by nuanced manifestations of the hostile immigration policy context. We show that undocumented students perceive immigration policies as effecting both themselves as individuals and their families. We demonstrate that individual perceptions of various aspects of the immigration policy context, as well as how it is experienced given one's immigration status,

have unique effects on undocumented students' political action. This points to the importance of critically assessing the links between immigration policies, individual's perceptions and experiences, and their behaviors.

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**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics (N=982)**

	Percentage	Mean (SD)	Range	
			Min.	Max.
<b><u>Dependent Variable 1: Political Voice</u></b>		<b>1.049</b>	0	3
		<b>(0.799)</b>		
Contact a Public Office to Express Opinion "Sometimes" or "Often"	10.59	0.433 (0.745)	0	3
Discuss Political Issue on Social Media "Sometimes" or "Often"	41.14	1.237 (1.162)	0	3
Wear buttons or stickers with political messages "Sometimes" or "Often"	36.26	1.117 (1.150)	0	3
Expressed a political point of view during class "Sometimes" or "Often"	48.98	1.410 (1.109)	0	3
<b><u>Dependent Variable 2: Collective Action</u></b>		<b>0.853</b>	0	3
		<b>(0.918)</b>		
Take part in protest, march, demonstration on-campus "Sometimes" or "Often"	29.54	0.914 (1.008)	0	3
Take part in protest, march, demonstration off-campus "Sometimes" or "Often"	23.42	0.792 (0.971)	0	3
<b><u>Dependent Variable 3: Individual Action</u></b>		<b>1.455</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>
		<b>(0.932)</b>		
Signed a petition regarding an issue/problem that concerns you "Sometimes" or "Often"	56.92	1.590 (1.119)	0	3
Boycott a company of product for social/political reasons "Sometimes" or "Often"	42.46	1.227 (1.193)	0	3
Buy a product or service because of social/political reason "Sometimes" or "Often"	55.19	1.546 (1.170)	0	3
<b><u>Main Independent Variables</u></b>				
PIPES Discrimination average composite measure		19.230 (6.874)	9	42
PIPES Family Threat average composite measure		12.178 (2.810)	3	15
PIPES Exclusion average composite measure		14.395 (4.445)	5	25
<b><u>Campus and Community Engagement Variables</u></b>				
Volunteerism (Ever participated in community service or volunteer activity)		0.805 (0.396)	0	1
No, I have not done it	19.45			
Yes, I have done it in the past	80.55			
Organization Participation (Participated in an organization to solve a problem)		0.470 (0.499)	0	1
No, I have not done it	52.95			
Yes, I have done it in the past	47.05			
Off-campus Organ. Membership (% indicating membership in off-campus organ.)	9.06	0.091 (0.287)	0	1
On-campus Organ. Membership (% members)	49.29	0.493 (0.500)	0	1

Undocumented Student Support Index		2.677 (1.929)	0	5
<b><u>Socio-demographic Controls</u></b>				
Undocumented Status				
No Status	24.75	0.753 (0.432)	0	1
DACA/TPS	75.25			
Race/Ethnicity		0.926 (0.262)	0	1
Not Latina/o	7.42			
Latina/o	92.57			
Gender		0.763 (0.426)	0	1
Men	23.73			
Women	76.27			
Year in School		1.066 (0.824)	0	2
1st and 2nd years	30.86			
3rd years	31.67			
4th years and higher	37.47			
Hours Worked		0.777 (0.799)	0	2
Not working	45.52			
1 - 20 hours	31.26			
21 hours or more	23.22			
System		1.536 (0.499)	1	2
CSU	46.44			
UC	53.56			
LPR/Citizen Parent		0.064 (0.245)	0	1
No parents are LPR/Citizens	93.58			
1 or more parent is LPR/Citizen	6.42			
Parental Educational Background		0.930 (0.256)	0	1
One or more parents have BA or higher	7.03			
No parents report BA or higher	92.97			
Age		0.184 (0.388)	0	1
18 - 23 years	81.57			
24 years or more	18.43			
HS GPA		2.457 (0.849)	0	3
Less than 2.5	5.40			
2.5 to 3.0	7.43			
3.0 to 3.5	23.22			
3.5 and over	63.95			







2.5 to 3.0	-0.060	-0.090	0.012	-0.018	-0.164	-0.207			
3.0 to 3.5	-0.121	-0.115	-0.060	-0.055	-0.149	-0.149			
3.5 and over	-0.093	-0.119	-0.062	-0.099	-0.111	-0.157			
Constant	1.057***	0.731***	0.623***	0.861***	0.378	0.175	1.461***	0.912***	0.662**
R-squared	0.097	0.122	0.163	0.056	0.085	0.149	0.067	0.117	0.171
F-Test	35.36***	7.95***	8.50***	19.19***	5.26***	7.62***	23.54***	7.53***	8.98***
Root MSE	0.760	0.755	0.739	0.894	0.886	0.857	0.902	0.884	0.859

Source: UC Collaborative to Promote Immigrant and Student Equity and the Undocumented Student Equity Project

\*  $p \leq 0.05$ , \*\*  $p \leq 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p \leq 0.001$

**Table 3: OLS Regression Results Predicting Political Voice, Collective Action, and Individual Action By Undocumented Students with No Legal Status and Undocumented Students with DACA (N=982)**

	No Legal Status (N=243)			DACA/TPS Status (N=739)		
	M1: Political Voice	M2: Collective Action	M3: Individual Action	M4: Political Voice	M5: Collective Action	M6: Individual Action
<b><u>Main Independent Variables</u></b>						
Discrimination Scale	0.031***	0.028**	0.020*	0.021***	0.023***	0.005
Family Threat Scale	0.053*	0.033	0.035	0.057***	0.036*	0.068***
Exclusion Scale	-0.022	-0.027	-0.013	-0.008	-0.011	0.014
<b><u>Campus and Community Engagement</u></b>						
Volunteerism	0.110	0.254	0.166	0.032	0.080	0.170*
Organization Participation	0.135	0.062	0.121	0.209**	0.372***	0.196**
Off-campus Organizational Membership	0.148	0.092	0.068	0.139	0.335**	0.241*
On-campus Organizational Membership	0.194	0.14	0.165	0.086	0.065	0.243**
Undocumented Student Support Index	0.03	0.019	0.031	0.31*	0.033*	0.015
<b><u>Socio-Demographic Controls</u></b>						
Race/Ethnicity						
Not Latina/o	referent	referent	referent	referent	referent	referent
Latina/o	-0.061	0.000	-0.137	0.100	-0.022	0.186
Gender						
Men	referent	referent	referent	referent	referent	referent
Women	0.132	-0.071	0.366**	0.082	0.232**	0.102
Year in School						
1st and 2nd years	referent	referent	referent	referent	referent	referent
3rd years	0.193	0.100	0.328*	-0.004	-0.026	0.082
4th years and higher	-0.417**	-0.286	-0.161	0.109	0.084	0.167*
Hours Worked						
Not working	referent	referent	referent	referent	referent	referent
1 - 20 hours	0.267*	0.340*	0.245	0.080	-0.083	0.043
21 hours or more	0.268	0.024	0.162	0.008	-0.093	0.078
System						
CSU	referent	referent	referent	referent	referent	referent
UC	0.076	0.194	0.163	0.064	0.190**	0.192**

LPR/Citizen Parent						
No parents are LPR/Citizens	referent	referent	referent	referent	referent	referent
1 or more parent is						
LPR/Citizen	-0.007	-0.154	0.062	0.154	0.158	0.347*
Parental Educational Background						
One or more parents have BA or						
higher	referent	referent	referent	referent	referent	referent
No parents report BA or higher	0.217	0.293	0.450*	0.111	0.206	0.079
Age						
18 - 23 years	referent	referent	referent	referent	referent	referent
24 years or more	0.247	0.096	0.013	-0.073	-0.000	0.01
HS GPA						
Less than 2.5	referent	referent	referent	referent	referent	referent
2.5 to 3.0	-0.293	-0.052	-0.606	-0.110	-0.034	-0.153
3.0 to 3.5	-0.380	0.095	-0.340	-0.106	-0.093	-0.107
3.5 and over	-0.511	0.002	-0.439	-0.050	-0.109	-0.076
Constant	0.949*	0.138	0.727	0.585**	0.234	0.751**
R-squared	0.281	0.141	0.174	0.163	0.182	0.200
F-Test	4.10	1.73*	2.22*	6.63***	7.59***	8.47***
Root MSE	0.704	0.883	0.869	0.745	0.845	0.850

Source: UC Collaborative to Promote Immigrant and Student Equity and the Undocumented Student Equity Project

\*  $p \leq 0.05$ , \*\*  $p \leq 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p \leq 0.001$