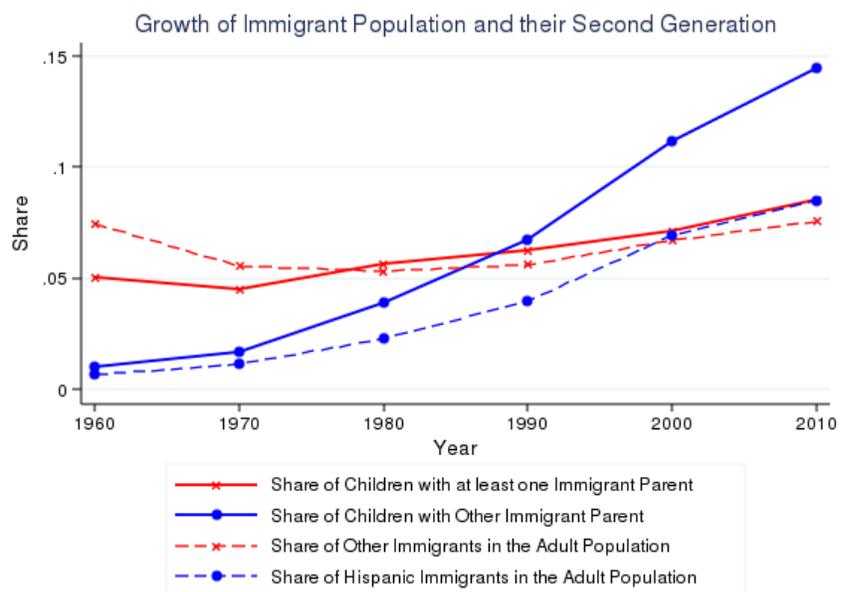


Research Statement

Qinping Feng

During the past few decades, the substantial growth of immigrant populations and their second generations continue to be one salient feature in the demographic evolution of the United States. Hispanic immigrants account for the majority of the immigrant population growth (Figure 1). At the same time, Hispanic immigrants are one of the most disadvantaged groups in this nation. Specifically, Hispanic immigrants have much lower than average household income. Moreover, they have low political power, largely due to the fact that they tend to be undocumented immigrants (Passel, 2006). State and local governments, who bear the main fiscal cost associated with immigrants, have long been concerned with the tax burden that low-skilled immigrants impose on citizens. California, for example, passed Proposition 187 in 1994 to prohibit undocumented immigrants from accessing health care, public education, and other services in the state. In the two decades since, similar bills have been passed in other states. My research focuses on two central themes: (1) How do state and local governments fiscally respond to immigrant inflows? (2) What is the impact of immigration policy and other policies on the second generation's outcomes (e.g., on educational attainment and welfare participation)? Broadly speaking, I find my passion for education or immigration related issues. In this statement, I will first summarize my job market paper and then continue with other completed works in my dissertation. I will also describe some on-going projects and conclude with my future research agenda.

Figure 1: Growth of Immigrant Populations and their Second Generations



My job market paper, **“Statehouses, Schoolhouses, and the Impact of Hispanic Immigrant Inflows on Public Education Finance,”** aims to address the first question in the context of the U.S. public education system. Despite the large increase of Hispanic immigrant children (from almost 0% in 1960 to 14% in 2010), empirical evidence that quantifies the impact of Hispanic immigrant inflows on K-12 education spending in the U.S. is limited. Coen-Pirani (2011) introduced a local public goods framework to calibrate how much immigrants have affected the public education spending in California from 1970 to 2010. However, the notably unique education finance equalization that California has implemented makes it difficult to generalize to other states’ experiences. In this paper, I argue for the importance of state aid in affecting education spending. Specifically, to Coen-Pirani’s local public goods framework, I add the political process of determining state aid and investigate the interaction between state and local government in responses to Hispanic immigrant inflows. I argue that state aid decreases due to decreasing demand in redistribution, while school district spending would increase in response to the state aid decrease. The empirical analysis draws on multiple evidences. I exploit the state level variation for the years of 1970, 1980, 1990, 2000, and 2007 and school district level for the year 1990 and 2000. The key explanatory variable is measured as the change in the fraction of Hispanic immigrant children in a decade. To quantify the causal impact, I use an instrumental variable defined as the predicted inflows of immigrants given the historical settlement of Hispanic immigrants. I find a ten-percentage point increase in the fraction of Hispanic immigrant children leads to a reduction of the current spending per pupil by 13%, which is equivalent to about 1300 dollars per student evaluated at the 2010 mean spending level. Furthermore, I analyze Texas school districts in 2000 to show that local school districts do not negatively respond to immigrant inflows after accounting for the endogenous resident sorting. My results have important implications for both immigration policy and education policy. First, the results highlight the jurisdictional divisions over two immigration related policies. In particular, the immigration policy which determines how many immigrants are allowed in the U.S. is under the sole jurisdiction of the federal government. However, education and other local public goods are under the jurisdiction of state and local governments. Second, my results also suggest that local spending does not fully substitute for the decrease in state spending.

In the second paper of my dissertation, **“Demographic Structure and the Political Economy of State-Level Anti-Immigrant Legislation,”** I continue to probe the first question by systematically investigating state legislators’ voting outcomes on bills related to immigrants’ public service access. In response to the federal government’s lack of meaningful reforms in immigration policy in the past decade, there has been a considerable increase in state-level legislation that aims to regulate illegal immigration in different dimensions. Instead of using the state-level variation on the total number of bills passed like other studies (e.g., Boushey and Luedtke 2011), I focus on bills related to immigrants’ public benefit access. This allows me to observe legislator’s attitude toward immigrants due to fiscal cost associated with them. I compile a novel dataset of legislative district level characteristics and match it with votes on individual bills from each state’s House of Representatives and Senate. Consistent with previous literature on congressional politics on immigration policy (Goldin 1993, Facchini and Steinhardt 2011), I find that districts with more established immigrant populations and a higher fraction of African Americans tend to vote against anti-immigrant legislation. In contrast to previous findings (e.g., Facchini and Steinhardt 2011), districts with a large fraction of Hispanic population tend to vote for anti-immigrant legislation. States that passed anti-immigrant legislation were those that have recently seen large Hispanic immigrant inflows. Further heterogeneity analysis indicates that state legislators perceive the His-

panic population as undocumented immigrants, while Hispanic population size in these states is not large enough to form a political power.

The third paper of my dissertation, **“The Impact of the SAVE Program on Immigrants’ Participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program,”** pursues the second question. Immigrant households’ public benefit participation has always been a public policy interest and one of the centerpieces in state-level legislation related to immigrants in recent years. On the one hand, states are concerned with fraudulent claims by unqualified immigrants. On the other hand, researchers find that welfare take-up rate (participation rate among those who are eligible) among US-born children living with immigrant parents are particularly low (Currie 2004, Bertrand et al. 2000). In this paper, I study how one particular immigrant policy, the adoption of the Systematic Alien Verification of Entitlement (SAVE) program, affects the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) participation for immigrant adults and US-born children living with immigrant household heads. The SAVE program is an intergovernmental initiative designed to help federal, state, and local government agencies check immigration status for granting public benefits. The identification strategy is to exploit state-time variation in adopting the SAVE program to verify immigrant status for SNAP applicants. I compare the SNAP participation in states before and after adopting the SAVE program by using states that have adopted the SAVE program prior to 2004 as a control for secular change over time. To address the concern of differential trends, I pool all immigrants and natives together and use the US-born citizen group as a baseline group in the estimation. I find that immigrant adults without children have an insignificant reduction in SNAP participation following the adoption of the SAVE program. In contrast, I find that the SAVE adoption has a sizable negative impact on SNAP participation among US-born children headed by immigrants, both for the participation rate at a household level (a 12% decrease) and the total number of participants within a household (an 8% decrease). The results suggest that SAVE not only is ineffective in deterring unqualified immigrant applicants, but also reduces the take-up among qualified US-born children. This study highlights the unintended consequences of immigrant policy: even though immigrant policy aims at restricting welfare access for unqualified immigrants, it deters the welfare take-up of eligible second generations.

As extensions of my dissertation work, I have two works in progress. (1) In a joint work with Wen Wang at Indiana University, **“Hispanic Immigrant Children and Resource Allocation in Public Education: Evidence from the School Level in Nevada,”** I am investigating the relationship between the distribution of Hispanic immigrant children and resource allocation at the school level in Nevada school districts for the years of 2012 and 2013. Nevada is particularly relevant in that it is the state that has seen the largest recent increase in the fraction of Hispanic immigrant children (a six-percentage point increase from 2000 to 2007). Since the majority of states have experienced a great deal of education equalization across school districts, it is particularly important to examine the resource disparity at a more disaggregated level: the school level. The initial analysis suggests a negative relationship. However, it is unclear how much of this negative relationship is attributed to teachers sorting across schools and how much of it is due to school districts’ resource allocation decisions. Our next step would be to understand how Nevada school districts distribute money across schools. (2) In the paper **“The Impact of Hurricane Katrina Migration on Local School Districts: Evidence from Texas,”** I examine how Hurricane Katrina migrants from New Orleans have affected school district finance and educational outcomes in Texas school districts. This study provides a good benchmark comparison to my job market paper, as this group of migrants are also poor, but they differ significantly in demographics. The study also aims to

bring some insights into the local and state governments' short term response to a sudden increase in demand for public goods. To date, I have done some initial analysis at the metropolitan level. However, the primary destination of displaced residents are clustered in a few metropolitan areas such as Houston (Gregory and Sastry, 2014). In order to have the information on the locations of displaced individuals after Hurricane Katrina at a finer geographic level (e.g., the school district level), I am in the process of requesting detailed individual data from the U.S. Census Bureau.

Moving forward, in the area of education, with my expertise in complex education finance formula, I will study how the structure of education finance affects educational outcomes. There has been lack of consistent evidence on the relationship between the level of education spending and educational outcomes in the literature (Hanushek and Lindseth, 2009), I am particularly interested in understanding which level of government should be given more autonomy in education finance. For example, when the education spending becomes more centralized to the state government, what extent of fiscal federalism in education finance is efficient in delivering positive educational outcomes.

Lastly, in the area of immigration, I will continue my focus on how immigration policy and other social policies affect immigrants, in particular, children who were born to immigrants. I am particularly interested in the long run impact of immigration enforcement on educational outcomes of the second generation and how different policies affect immigrant parents' investment in their children.

References

- Bertrand, M., Luttmer, E., and Mullainathan, S. (2000). Network effects and welfare cultures. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 115(3).
- Boushey, G. and Luedtke, A. (2011). Immigrants across the u.s. federal laboratory: Explaining state-level innovation in immigration policy. *State Politics and Policy Quarterly*, 11:390–414.
- Coen-Pirani, D. (2011). Immigration and spending on public education: California 1970-2000. *Journal of Public Economics*, 95:1386–1396.
- Currie, J. (2004). The take up of social benefits. National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper 10488.
- Facchini, G. and Steinhardt, M. (2011). What drives US immigration policy? Evidence from congressional roll call votes. *Journal of Public Economics*, 95(734-743).
- Goldin, C. (1993). The political economy of immigration restriction in the United States, 1890 to 1921. NBER Working Paper.
- Gregory, J. M. and Sastry, N. (2014). The location of displaced New Orleans residents in the year after Hurricane Katrina. *Demography*, 51(3):753–775.
- Hanushek, E. A. and Lindseth, A. A. (2009). *Schoolhouses, Courthouses, and Statehouses: Solving the Funding-Achievement Puzzle in America's Public Schools*. Princeton University Press.

Hungerman, D. M. (2005). Are church and state substitutes? Evidence from the 1996 welfare reform. *Journal of Public Economics*, 89:2245–2267.

Passel, J. S. (2006). The size and characteristics of the unauthorized migrant population in the U.S.: Estimates based on the March 2005 Current Population Survey. Technical report, Pew Hispanic Center.