



An Analysis of the Effect of Immigration Integration Policies on Migration Flows

Vyomika Gupta¹, Benjamin Scheve¹, Duncan Lawrence²
¹Palo Alto High School, ²Stanford Immigration Policy Lab



INTRODUCTION

With high levels of immigration to wealthy countries around the world, governments are increasingly adopting policies with the objective of better integrating immigrants into society (Hainmueller & Lawrence, 2017). Despite the large number of immigration policies in place, the impact of many of these policies has not been systematically evaluated. In the United States, some integration policies are targeted toward undocumented immigrants. A common concern about these policies is that regardless of whether they meet their integration goals, they will attract more undocumented immigrants.

What is the effect of state integration policies on the size and movement of undocumented immigrants in the last 10 years?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

- Method #1:** We compared the level of undocumented immigrants in states with each of the policies of interest and states without that policy. This naive estimator assumed that absent a given policy, the level of undocumented immigrants would be the same in both sets of states. This was almost certainly not true and our analysis implemented alternative comparisons that attempted to account for selection bias.
- Method #2:** We attempted to control for the impact of economic opportunity on the level of undocumented immigrants. States with more economic opportunities are likely to have more immigrants, and this may be correlated with the policies that they adopt. We compared states with and without each policy, but grouped by high and low levels of economic opportunity, measured by state income per capita.
- Method #3:** We examined before and after comparisons within each state, looking at immigration levels before and after the state enacted a given policy. This method controlled for all time constant factors that might influence a state's level of undocumented immigration, but does not account for factors that might change over time in a state besides the policy.
- Method #4:** We looked at the difference in differences between states that implement a given policy and states that do not over time. This method allowed us to compare states with and without a policy but adjust that comparison for common trends.

DISCUSSION, ANALYSIS, AND EVALUATION

The first figure shows the average percentage of undocumented immigrants across all 50 states. This average stayed relatively constant throughout the period of time observed. The second figure shows the number of states with each integration policy across the 10 years observed. These two figures show the independent (integration policies) and dependent (percent of undocumented immigrants in a state) variables. The next figure shows a naive estimator. The graph shows the mean and 95% confidence interval for the percent of undocumented immigrants for all state years with a certain integration policy and a similar estimate for all state years without said plan. This is a flawed estimate because it does not account for other factors that determine the number of undocumented immigrants in a state or why the state adopted a given policy in the first place. Next, we had to try to control for these factors through other methods. First, we sorted states by income. This alleviated some of the difference between states with and without a certain policy, but still could be influenced by many other variables such as the types of industries in a state. Next, we tried a before-and-after comparison looking at state years before and after the implementation of a policy which controls for time constant factors in each state. This showed a negligible impact of integration on levels of undocumented immigrants but does not account for common trends across the country. Our most convincing estimates are presented in the final figure and estimate the difference in differences between 2005 and 2014 between states that implemented a given policy and those that did not. These estimates are negative rather than positive, small in magnitude, and not significantly different from zero.

DATA AND FINDINGS

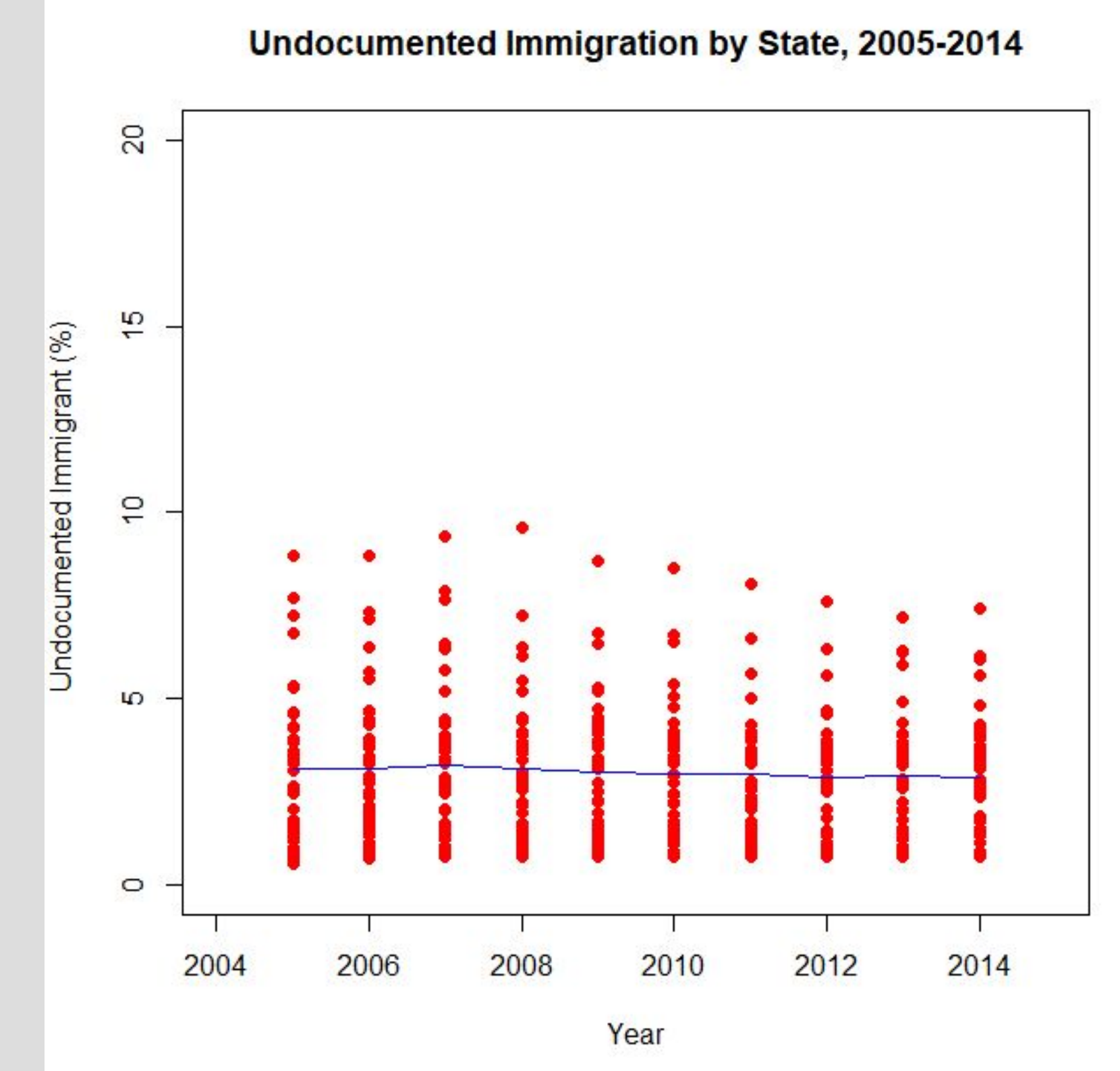


Figure 1. Individual state percentages of undocumented immigrants with the average percentage shown in the blue midline.

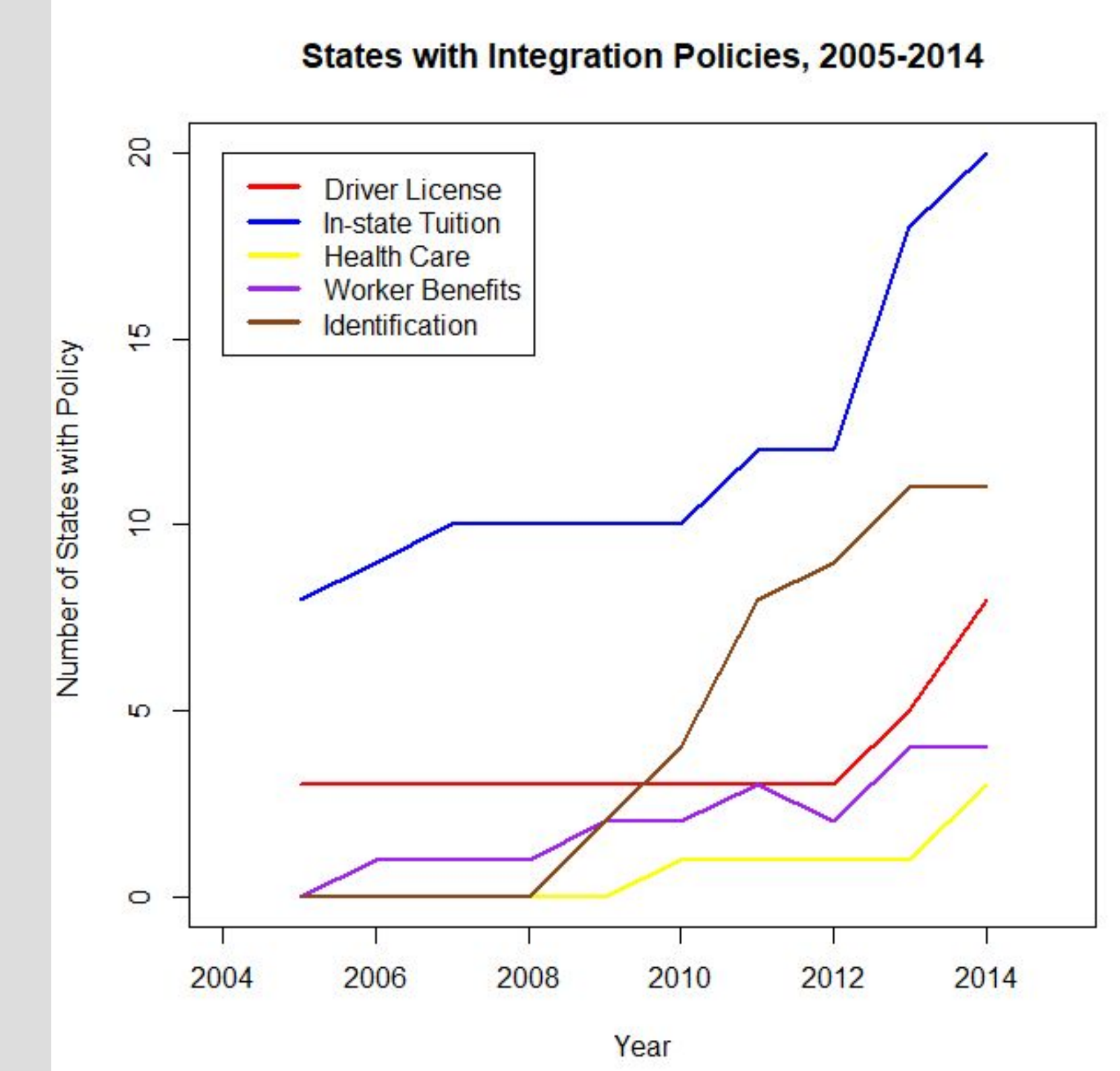


Figure 2. A line graph showing the number of states with a certain policy over time.

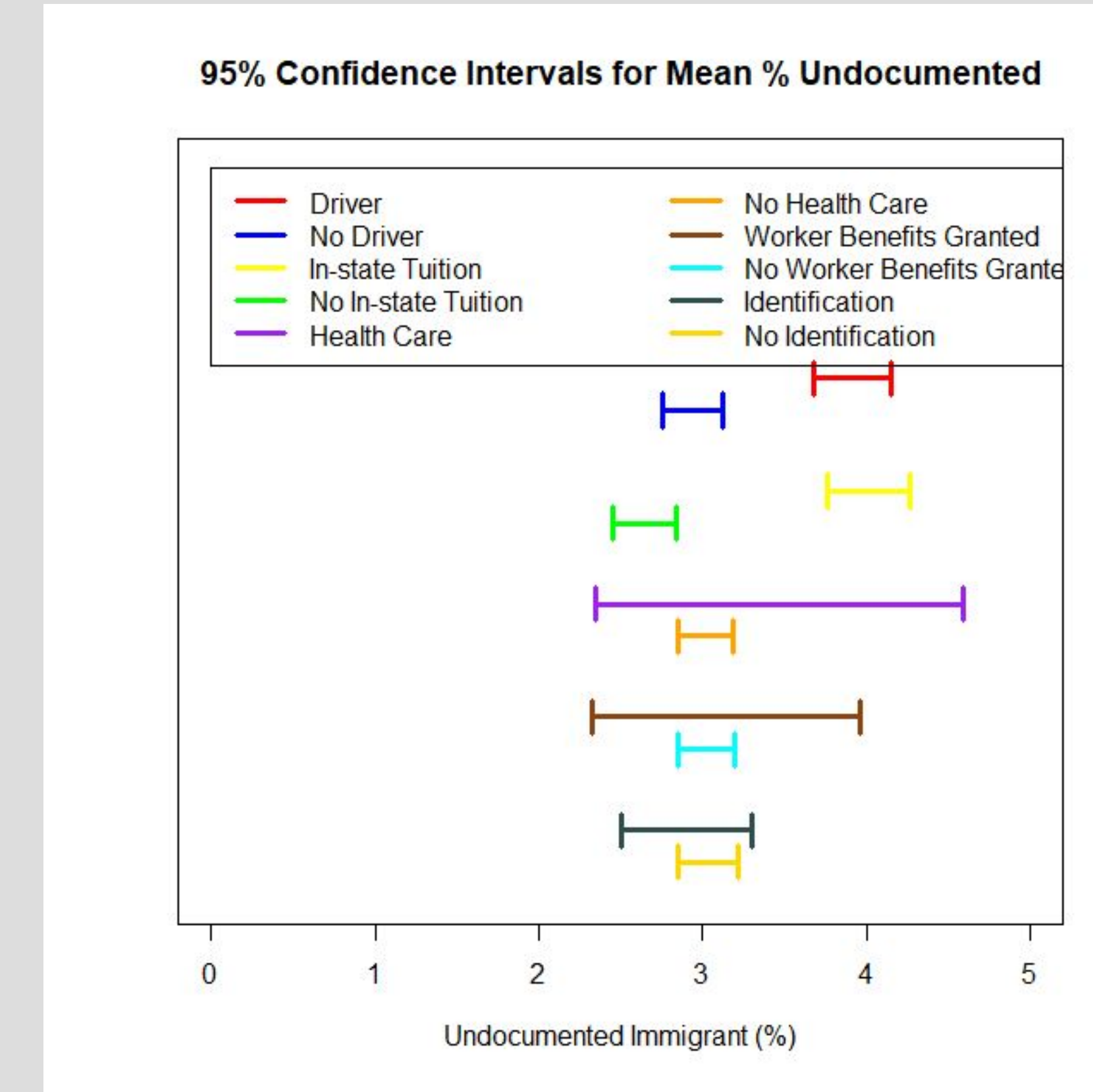


Figure 3. Shows the 95% confidence interval for the average percent undocumented for all state years with and without a specific policy.

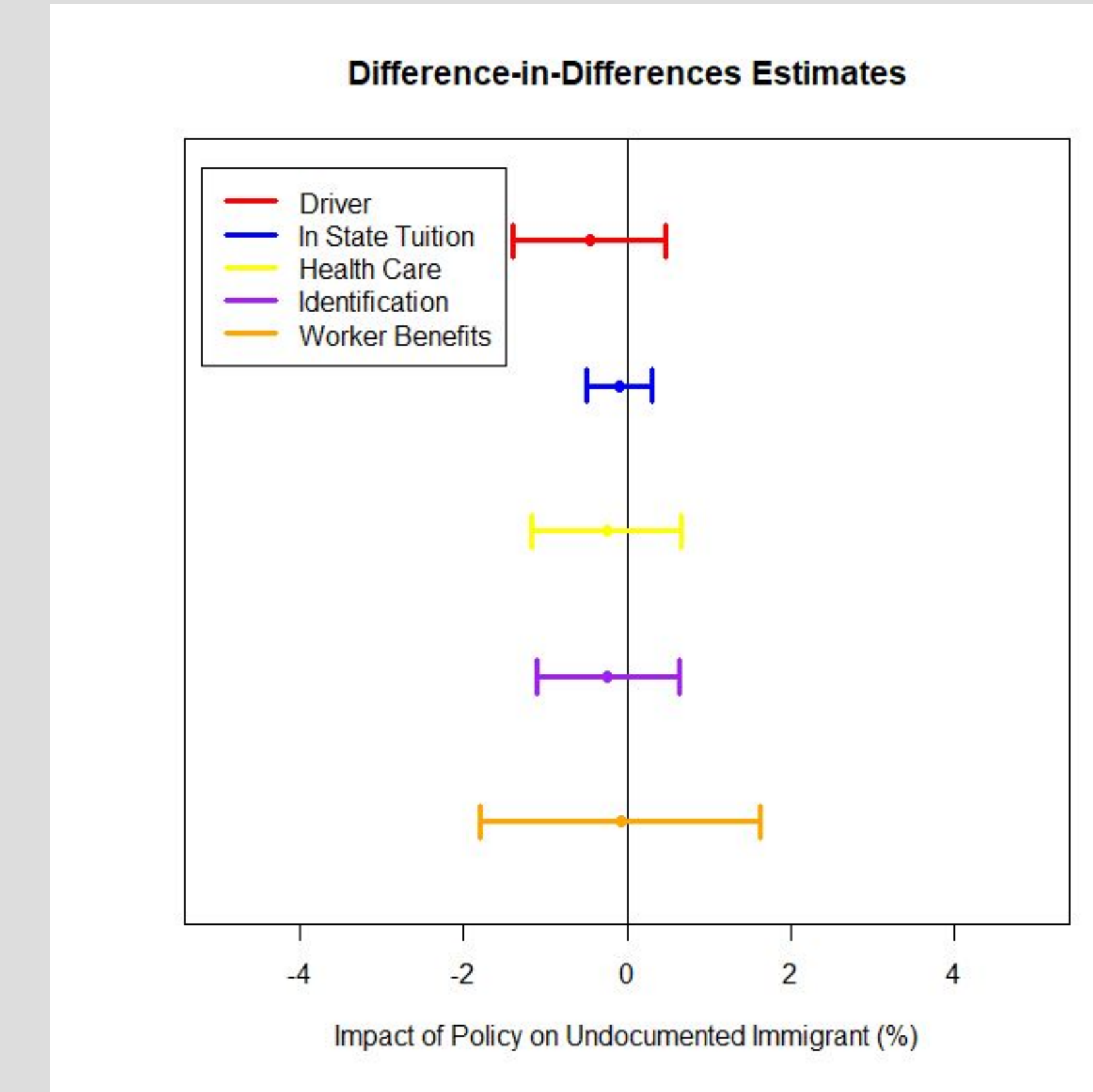


Figure 4. An estimation of the difference in difference between 2005 and 2014 between states that implemented a policy and those that did not.

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND NEXT STEPS

The data suggests that overall, state-specific integration policies have a negligible effect on state undocumented populations. As can be seen in Figure 4, the policies actually had a slightly negative effect. This is contrary to the popular conception that having policies that positively benefit undocumented immigrants, such as worker's benefits or health care, would lead to large increases in undocumented migration flows. This implication is a relevant one to today's society, as the American public debates similar topics (such as DACA) and their effects. The main argument against most integration policies is that they would increase the level of undocumented immigrants which, while arguably not harmful, can be used as a justification not to implement a policy. The fact that this effect is not present, as shown by our analysis, has important implications for policy making. Policies such as providing Driver's Licenses to undocumented immigrants, which has been shown to reduce hit and run accidents, arguably have no drawbacks for states to implement, because there is a measurable benefit to the safety of all citizens and does not increase the level of undocumented immigrants in a state. The clearest next step is to do the same data collection, but for later years, as these integration policies only became popular towards the beginning of the decade. Doing a study from 2008 to 2018 would allow for there to be more states with policies to compare to states without policies and there would have been more time for the policies to have an impact.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS / REFERENCES

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