

The Effect of the Texas Migrant Busing Program on the 2024 U.S. Presidential Election

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Abstract: From 2022 to 2024, Texas transported more than 100,000 migrants from the U.S.–Mexico border to six cities led by Democratic mayors, creating a unique migration shock far from the border. We use county-level data to estimate the program’s effects on presidential elections. Comparing two elections prior to the program (2016–2020) with one after (2024), we find that the busing program increased Trump’s vote share by more than three percentage points in treated counties. These effects are robust to alternative analyses. To explore mechanisms further, we analyze individual-level data from AP VoteCast. The increase in Trump’s vote share in places receiving buses was driven by swing voters and elevated Republican turnout. Swing voters in busing destinations were moved to Trump by amplified concerns with crime, whereas Republican turnout was linked to heightened concerns over immigration. Our findings highlight the enduring power of minority threat and the growing role of subnational immigration policies.

Keywords: elections; minority threat; politics; immigration

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IN April 2022, Texas Governor Abbott directed the state’s Division of Emergency Management to charter buses for the transportation of newly arrived immigrants to six cities: Chicago, Denver, Los Angeles, New York, Philadelphia, and Washington D.C. Each city, led by Democratic mayors, instituted sanctuary ordinances that protected undocumented immigrants by restricting local cooperation with federal immigration officers. In the subsequent two years, more than 2,600 buses transported more than 100,000 immigrants to these locations (Goodman et al. 2024). When asked, Abbott argued at the Republican National Convention that busing would “take the border to them.”

The busing program represents a unique migration shock to places far from the border. Highly visible “immigration events” like this have featured prominently in social science debates about migration, ethnoracial diversity, and minority threat (Blumer 1958; Flores and Schachter 2018; Giesselmann, Brady, and Naujoks 2024; Hill, Hopkins, and Huber 2019). Prior research shows that the perception of rapid growth in immigration drives exclusionary beliefs and behaviors, including voting (Hill et al. 2019). However, the migrant busing event we study has several unique qualities that advance this field of study. We are not aware of a case like this where a subnational state instituted a large-scale migration policy that directly intervened on and challenged the authority of the federal government or other states. In addition, the heightened visibility of the program relative to its moderate demographic impact provides a unique contrast to other forms of immigration

shocks studied previously. For instance, the refugee migration shock to Germany in 2015–2016 was much larger and had pronounced effects on local populations. The number of immigrants involved in the Texas busing program represents only a small fraction of the total foreign-born population in cities such as Los Angeles, New York, or Chicago. Hence, residents' perceptions are less likely to be shaped by direct contact with bused immigrants than by feelings of "threat" constructed by political and media narratives of an immigrant crisis in destination cities (Blumer 1958; Fink and Brady 2020; Flores and Schachter 2018; Giesselmann et al. 2024). This more clearly aligns with Blumer's (1958, P. 7) classic definition of immigrant shocks as a "grave disorganizing event that allow for the formation of a scapegoat." As Blumer (1958, P. 6) remarked, "It is not the experience with concrete individuals in daily association. . . but through the transcending characterizations that are made of the group as an entity. . . in the 'public arena.'" Hence, the political spectacle of the Texas busing program presents a unique opportunity to inform longstanding literature on immigration shocks and minority threat.

Our analyses test whether counties that received migrant buses experienced a greater increase in the share of voters supporting Donald Trump in 2024 compared to 2016 and 2020. We do so with a series of two-way fixed-effect models that contrast "treated" counties against counties that did not receive buses across the 2016, 2020, and 2024 elections. This design removes the many obvious and large stable differences between treated and control counties. It also exploits the within-treated and within-control over-time variation to net out differences between the 2016, 2020, and 2024 elections. Therefore, our approach isolates how much the treated counties distinctively changed in 2024 versus 2016–2020 compared to how much control counties changed.

After estimating the unique impact of the busing program and confirming its robustness, we go further to investigate mechanisms by analyzing individual-level exit poll data from AP VoteCast (Associated Press and NORC at the University of Chicago 2025). With these data, we test whether Trump's increased performance in places receiving migrant buses was due to (1) swing voters who supported Biden in 2020 and then Trump in 2024, (2) increased Republican turnout, and/or (3) reduced turnout among Democrats. We then examine whether exposure to the busing program amplified economic, immigration, or crime concerns within each group, shaping their subsequent voting behavior. We focus on these political issues because they are focal in research on immigration, ethnic threat, and political attitudes (Fink and Brady 2020; Malhotra, Margalit, and Mo 2013; Simes and Waters 2014).

Methods

Data

We used official administrative data from the Office of the Texas Governor (2024) to identify cities receiving migrants through the Texas busing program. From 2022 to 2024, migrants were bused to Washington, D.C., New York City, Chicago, Philadelphia, Denver, and Los Angeles. We follow prior research on shifting political views

by linking cities to counties, which offer consistent boundaries over time (Clinton and Sances 2018; Goetz et al. 2019; Hall, Yoder, and Karandikar 2021; Hamel 2024; Sances 2019; Scala and Johnson 2017; Shepherd 2025; Sides, Vavreck, and Warshaw 2022). Counties receiving the busing treatment included: Los Angeles County, CA; Denver County, CO; District of Columbia; Cook County, IL; Bronx County, NY; Kings County, NY; New York County, NY; Queens County, NY; Richmond County, NY; and Philadelphia County, PA. County-level presidential voting results were obtained through McGovern's (2025) publicly available data repository. We focus on counties rather than precincts because scholars caution against longitudinal analysis of precincts due to regular changes in boundaries, a major concern in our data that includes a decennial census year that is often followed by precinct changes (Baltz et al. 2022).

County-year characteristics used as controls come from the American Community Survey (ACS) five-year samples and were obtained using the Census API (code included in the replication package) (U.S. Census Bureau 2025). We attach 2023 ACS county characteristics to 2024 voting results because the 2024 ACS was not yet available. We use three analytic samples to examine the robustness of findings across different comparison groups. First, we use the full sample of counties with reported election results for years 2016, 2020, and 2024 ($N = 3,101$ counties, 9,303 county years). Second, we include only counties with at least 500,000 residents to compare treated counties, which were all urban centers, with untreated urban counties ($N = 140$ counties, 420 county years). Third, we include only counties within states that received migrant buses to compare treated counties with untreated counties in receiving states ($N = 511$ counties, 1,533 county years). States included in this sample are California, Colorado, Illinois, Maryland, New York, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. We include Maryland and Virginia because Washington, D.C. is not in a state but surrounded and integrated with these two. Results are confirmed when Washington, D.C., Maryland, and Virginia are omitted (see Section A in the online supplement).

We used the public-use AP VoteCast (Associated Press and NORC at the University of Chicago 2025) data set for our analysis of individual-level poll data. We restrict our sample to those who reside in urban areas to make a comparable sample of respondents in places that received migrant buses, which were universally urban settings, and those residing in places that did not receive migrant buses. We use three analytic samples to test different mechanisms by which the busing program may have shaped voter preferences. First, we examine potential swing voters' likelihood of supporting Donald Trump in the 2024 election with a sample of likely voters who reported voting for Joe Biden in the previous 2020 election ($N = 14,234$). Second, we examine the potential for increased Republican voter turnout by testing whether self-identified Republicans who did not vote in the 2020 election were more likely to vote in the 2024 election if they resided in a place that received migrant buses ($N = 1,927$). Third, we explore the potential for reduced turnout among Democrats by examining whether self-identified Democrats who voted in the 2020 election were less likely to vote in the 2024 election if they resided in a busing destination ($N = 11,596$).

The AP VoteCast data enable us to use two criteria to approximate respondents residing in places that received buses from the Texas program. First, respondents must live in one of the states targeted. In these data, this includes California, Colorado, Illinois, New York, and Pennsylvania. Unfortunately, the AP VoteCast data did not sample in Washington, D.C. Second, respondents must live in a self-reported urban area. We apply the second restriction because each location targeted by the Texas busing program was an urban area. Although the AP VoteCast data do not allow the same level of precision for identifying treatment status as the county-level analyses described above, these two criteria nonetheless enable us to compare respondents who resided in, or were more proximate to, areas receiving buses compared to those who were more distant from this treatment.

Analytic Plan: Identifying County-Level Electoral Effects

To test the impact of the Texas busing program, we first use county-level data from each of Trump's three presidential elections in 2016, 2020, and 2024. The 2016 and 2020 elections took place before the start of the migrant busing program and serve as pre-treatment periods. The busing program started in 2022 and continued through 2024. We therefore consider the 2024 election to be the treatment period for identifying the impact of the migrant busing program.

We estimate two-way fixed-effect models with fixed effects for county and state-year to account for stable county-level characteristics and state-specific trends. Our approach focuses on how change in the percentage of voters supporting Donald Trump during his presidential races in 2016, 2020, and 2024 differed between treated and control counties. We include time-variant controls commonly used in research on election outcomes (Clinton and Sances 2018; Hall et al. 2021; Hamel 2024; Sides et al. 2022): logged population of voting age residents, racial composition (percent white), percent with a high school education or less, percent aged 65 or older, and the inflation-adjusted logged median household income. We estimate treatment effects with a time-variant item identifying whether counties received migrant buses. Coefficients from this variable estimate the impact of the busing program in destination counties during the 2024 election. Our three analytic samples isolate these treatment effects relative to (1) untreated counties in the full sample, (2) untreated urban counties, and (3) untreated counties in states that received migrant buses. All analyses include county population weights.

We conducted a series of robustness tests to confirm our findings under different conditions. These tests are reported in the online supplement, section A:

- 1) using a traditional difference-in-difference model without controls,
- 2) adding time variant controls to the traditional difference-in-difference model,
- 3) omitting Los Angeles and Philadelphia because they received fewer migrant buses than other destinations,
- 4) limiting our sample to only 2020 and 2024 election years (i.e., dropping the 2016 election year),

- 5) using a continuous treatment variable measuring the logged number of migrants bused to each destination, as identified by prior research (Goodman et al. 2024),
- 6) unweighted models,
- 7) adding controls for the population and percent of residents who are immigrants in each county; null effects on these two variables confirm prior research (Hill et al. 2019),
- 8) restricting sample to counties with populations of more than 100,000, 250,000, 500,000, 750,000, and one million, and
- 9) sensitivity analyses: reapplying the model six times omitting a different treated destination in each application.

Across all robustness tests, our main findings were consistent: Trump performed better in the 2024 election in places that received migrant buses.

A key assumption of difference-in-difference models is parallel trends—that differences between comparison groups would be stable if not for the treatment (in this case, receiving migrant buses). We examined the plausibility of this assumption by directly testing whether treatment (counties that received buses) and control (counties that did not receive buses) groups followed parallel trends in the pre-period years before the Texas busing initiative. Results from these tests are reported in the online supplement, section B, and support the plausibility of the parallel trends assumption.

Analytic Plan: Identifying Individual-Level Mechanisms

To investigate the mechanisms underlying the county-level results, we use individual-level cross-sectional exit poll data from AP VoteCast (described above). For our analysis of swing voters, our outcome is respondents' preference for Trump in the 2024 election. In analyses of Republican and Democrat turnout, our outcome is whether respondents report that they have already or will vote in the 2024 election (relative to reporting that they will not vote).

We also use the AP VoteCast data to explore how the busing initiative may have corresponded to concerns that predicted voting behavior in the 2024 election. We focus on respondents' concerns over the economy, immigration, and crime because of their prominence in migration debates during the 2024 election and their centrality in prior literature on exclusionary attitudes (Eitle and Taylor 2008; Meuleman et al. 2020; Simes and Waters 2014; von Hermann and Neumann 2019; Ziller 2022). We measure the presence of these concerns with a survey item that asked respondents to identify the issue that is most important to them in the 2024 election. Respondents were given nine issues to choose from, including topics such as health care, abortion, climate change, and gun policy. Respondents who selected "The economy and jobs" in this survey item were coded as expressing economic concerns; those choosing "Immigration" were coded as holding concerns toward immigration; and those selecting "Crime" were coded as expressing concerns with crime. Following prior studies using individual-level poll data (Allamong 2024; Jardina

2021; Ollerenshaw 2023; Tucker et al. 2019), our analyses include controls for sex (men/women/other), race (white/black/Hispanic/other), education (less than college/college degree or more), age (18–24/25–29/30–39/40–49/50–64/65+), income (less than \$25,000/\$25,000–\$49,999/\$50,000–\$74,999/\$75,000–\$99,999/\$100,000 or more), religion (Protestant/Catholic/Other/none), and political ideology (five-point scale from very liberal to very conservative).

For each of the three sub-samples, we apply two hierarchical logistic regression models with a random intercept by state. We first apply a baseline model to identify the main effects of residing in a state receiving migrant buses, expressing economic concerns, expressing immigration concerns, and expressing crime concerns on (1) the probability of voting for Trump in 2024 after having voted for Biden in 2020, (2) the probability of voting in the 2024 election for Republicans who did not vote in 2020, and (3) the probability of voting in the 2024 election for Democrats who voted in 2020. In a second model, we test whether the effects of economic, immigration, and crime concerns were amplified among residents of a busing destination by adding an interaction between these items. Log odds and odds ratios from interactions can produce biased estimates when the distribution of the outcome varies between groups compared in the interaction term (Mize, Doan, and Long 2019; Mood 2010)—a condition that applies in our comparison of people residing in busing destination areas to those residing elsewhere. Therefore, we calculated the average marginal effects of economic, immigration, and crime concerns by destination status and tested differences between these coefficients (Long and Mustillo 2018; Mize 2019). In supplementary analyses, we examined whether political concerns mediated the effects of busing destination status and found no evidence for this pattern (section C in the online supplement).

Results

Texas's Migrant Busing Program and County-Level Election Results

Table 1 reports the results of two-way fixed-effect models predicting within-county changes in the percentage of residents voting for Trump in the 2016 and 2020 elections, pre-treatment, versus the 2024 election, post-treatment. We estimate whether shifts in Trump's share of votes were greater in places receiving buses (treatment group) compared to those that did not (control group). We present results for: the full sample of counties (model 1), a sample of counties with at least 500,000 residents that compares treated areas to urban untreated locations (model 2), and a sample that includes only states that received migrant buses to compare treated counties to untreated counties in receiving states (model 3).

Across models in Table 1, Trump's share of the vote grew by more than three percentage points in counties that received migrant buses from Texas ($p < 0.01$). Treatment effects were similar across sub-samples. Urban counties receiving migrant buses reported a 3.0 percentage point increase in Trump's 2024 vote share compared to untreated urban counties. Within states that received buses, treatment effects exceeded 3.6 percentage points. For the full sample, receiving migrant buses

Table 1: Results of two-way fixed-effect models predicting percent voting for Trump.

	Percent Voting for Trump		
	1	2	3
	Full Sample	Urban Counties	Counties in States That Received Buses
Received migrant buses (treatment effect)	3.437** (0.661)	3.049** (0.827)	3.639** (0.686)
Population of voting age residents (logged)	-24.951** (2.185)	-24.259** (7.996)	-17.438** (4.228)
Racial composition (% white)	-0.265** (0.040)	-0.357** (0.057)	-0.155* (0.065)
% with high school education or less	0.015 (0.037)	0.245 (0.276)	0.309** (0.101)
% aged 65 or more	-0.181 (0.095)	0.366 (0.586)	-0.134 (0.308)
Median household income (logged)	8.841** (1.682)	28.138** (6.641)	17.756** (3.515)
Fixed effects	State-year, county	State-year, county	State-year, county
<i>N</i> , county years	9,303	420	1,533
<i>R</i> ²	0.995	0.992	0.994

Note: Standard errors clustered by county in all models. Treatment coefficients in TWFE models estimate treatment effect in post-treatment years. State-year fixed effects account for distinct time trends by state. Standard errors in parentheses. **p* < 0.05; ***p* < 0.01 (two-tailed tests).

predicted a 3.4 percentage point increase in Trump’s share of the 2024 presidential vote.

Our county-level analyses show that the migrant busing program enhanced Trump’s performance in the 2024 election. These findings are robust to additional model specifications, such as limiting our sample to only 2020 and 2024 elections, adding additional controls, and checking sensitivity to specific treated cases. To understand the mechanisms underlying this trend, we now turn to our analysis of individual-level poll data.

Mechanisms Driving Busing Effects and Amplification of Political Concerns

Table 2 reports the results of hierarchical logistic regression models predicting 2024 voting behavior. Each column examines a different mechanism behind busing effects. The first column examines *swing voters* by reporting predictors of voting for Trump in 2024 after voting for Biden in 2020. The second column tests the role of *increased Republican turnout* by predicting likelihood of voting in 2024 among Republican-identified respondents who did not vote in 2020. The third column examines the role of *reduced Democrat turnout* by predicting likelihood of voting in 2024 among Democrat-identified respondents who voted in 2020.

Table 2: Marginal effects of area receiving migrant buses on voting behavior in 2024 presidential election.

	Swing Voters: Voting for Trump in 2024 after voting for Biden in 2020	Republican Turnout in 2024 Among Prior Non-Voters: Republican respondents voting in 2024 after not Voting in 2020	Democrat Turnout in 2024 Among Prior Voters: Democrat respondents voting in 2024 after Voting in 2020
A. Main Effects			
Received migrant buses	0.009* (0.004)	0.100** (0.032)	-0.009 (0.008)
<i>Political concerns</i>			
Economic concerns	0.036** (0.004)	0.059* (0.030)	-0.004 (0.006)
Immigration concerns	0.138** (0.013)	0.110** (0.040)	-0.035 (0.023)
Crime concerns	0.041** (0.013)	-0.044 (0.039)	-0.021 (0.020)
B. Effect of political concerns by busing status			
<i>Economic concerns</i>			
Did not receive migrant buses	0.035** (0.006)	0.039 (0.036)	-0.015* (0.008)
Received migrant buses	0.038** (0.006)	0.130* (0.054)	0.012 (0.009)
Significant difference, did not receive and received buses?	No	No	Yes
<i>Immigration concerns</i>			
Did not receive migrant buses	0.135** (0.019)	0.062 (0.045)	-0.009 (0.019)
Received migrant buses	0.144** (0.019)	0.262** (0.040)	-0.060 (0.031)
Significant difference, did not receive and received buses?	No	Yes	No
<i>Crime concerns</i>			
Did not receive migrant buses	0.008 (0.008)	-0.043 (0.052)	-0.050 (0.030)
Received migrant buses	0.078** (0.009)	-0.021 (0.048)	0.014 (0.019)
Significant difference, did not receive and received buses?	Yes	No	No

Note: Marginal effects calculated from hierarchical logistic regression models predicting whether respondents voted for Trump in 2024 with random intercept by state. Controls include gender, race, education, age, income, political ideology, and religion. Panel A reports main effects with no interactions. Panel B reports results from a second model that included an interaction between busing status and political concerns. N = 14,234 for sample of swing voters; N = 1,927 in sample of Republican turnout; and N = 11,596 in sample of Democratic turnout. Standard errors in parentheses. * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01 (two-tailed tests).

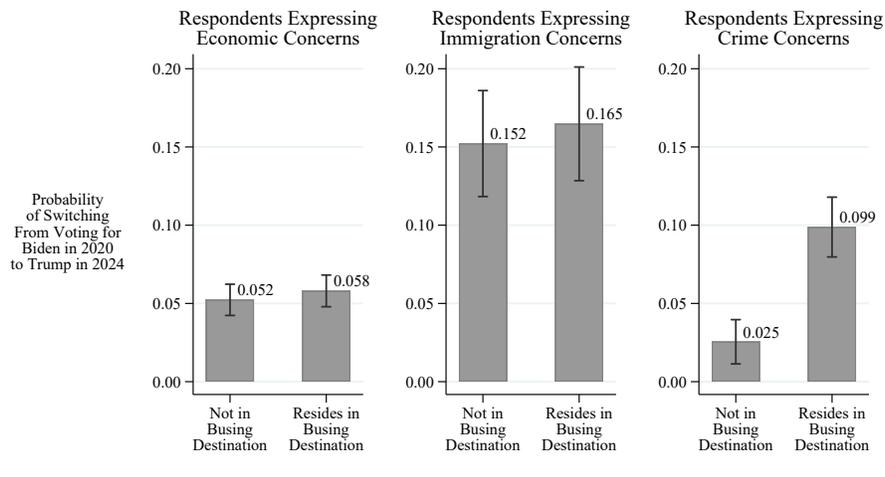


Figure 1: Swing voters: probability of switching from voting for Biden in 2020 to Trump in 2024.

The first column in Table 2 provides evidence that swing voters contributed to Trump's gains in places that received migrant buses. Former Biden voters were 0.9 percentage points more likely to vote for Trump in 2024 if they lived in an area that received migrant buses ($p < 0.05$). Panel A in Table 2 also reports the main effects of respondents' political concerns. Respondents who held economic or crime concerns were around four percentage points more likely to vote for Trump ($p < 0.01$), whereas those with concerns about immigration were nearly 14 percentage points more likely to support Trump ($p < 0.01$). Panel B presents results from a second model with interaction terms, assessing whether exposure to the Texas busing program amplified the effects of these political concerns. The relationship of economic and immigration concerns was consistent across busing destination status. Concerns over crime, however, were significantly amplified by the busing program. Former Biden voters expressing crime concerns were nearly eight percentage points more likely to vote for Trump if they resided in a busing destination ($p < 0.01$). In contrast, those holding these concerns were no more likely to vote for Trump if they lived in a location that did not receive migrant buses. Figure 1 visualizes these patterns by plotting the predicted probabilities of voting for Trump. Among those with crime concerns, only 2.5 percent of former Biden voters voted for Trump in non-destination locations, compared to almost 10 percent of those in areas that received migrant buses. In short, the migrant busing program intensified the link between crime concerns and support for Trump among voters who had previously supported Biden.

The second column of Table 2 shows that the busing program also drove Republican turnout in destination areas. Republican respondents who did not vote in 2020 were 10 percentage points more likely to vote in 2024 if they resided in a place that received migrant buses ($p < 0.01$). Republicans were also about six percentage points more likely to vote if they held economic concerns, ($p < 0.05$) and 11 percentage points more likely to vote if they were concerned about immigration ($p < 0.01$). Worries over crime were unrelated to Republican turnout. Panel B reports how these effects varied by exposure to the busing program. Although economic concerns had a larger impact on Republican turnout in destination areas, the difference was

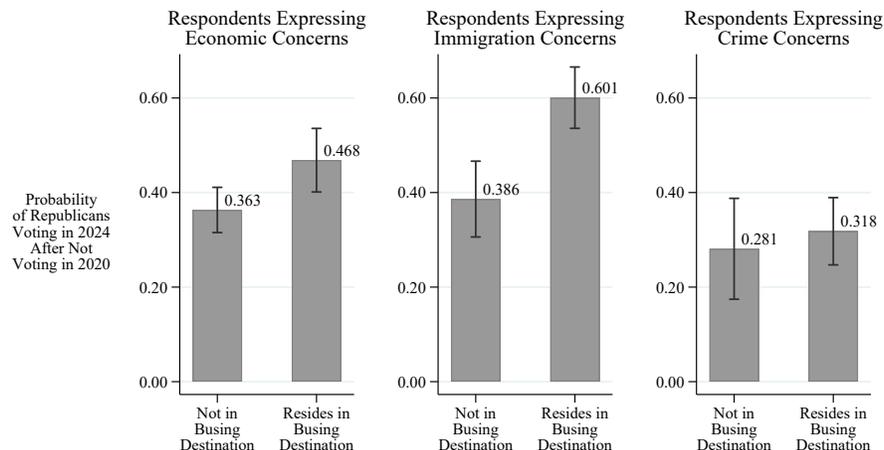


Figure 2: Republican turnout in 2024 among prior non-voters: probability of voting in 2024 after not voting in 2020 among Republican respondents.

not significantly different from areas that did not receive migrant buses. In contrast, the effect of immigration concerns on Republican turnout was significantly larger in busing destinations ($p < 0.05$). Republicans were 26 percentage points more likely to vote in 2024 after having not voted in 2020 if they held concerns over immigration and resided in a place that received migrant buses ($p < 0.01$). In comparison, immigration concerns had no relationship to Republican turnout in non-destination areas. This effect is visualized in Figure 2. Among former non-voting Republicans holding concerns toward immigration, turnout was 60 percent for those in destination areas compared to less than 40 percent in places that did not receive migrant buses. In other words, the busing program strengthened the relationship of Republicans' concerns with immigration to voting turnout. Republicans' fears over crime did not impact turnout regardless of respondents' residence in a busing destination.

The last set of models in Table 2 tests whether reduced turnout among Democrats contributed to Trump's gains in destination areas. Our results indicate that this was not a factor. Democrats who voted in the 2020 election were no less likely to vote in 2024 if they resided in a place that received migrant buses. We also find that political concerns with the economy, immigration, and crime were unrelated to Democratic turnout. Testing whether the main effects of political concerns varied by exposure to the busing program (*Panel B*), we found that Democrats with economic concerns were less likely to vote in 2024 if they resided in a place that did not receive migrant buses ($p < 0.05$). This pattern is in the opposite direction than what would drive Trump's gains in destination areas. In short, the busing program did not influence Democratic voters. Instead, it drove many swing voters toward Trump through amplifying the role of crime concerns on voting preferences. It also contributed to increased Republican turnout through intensifying the relationship of concerns over immigration to voter participation.

Discussion and Conclusion

Our results show that the Texas migrant busing program increased Republican support in areas receiving migrant buses. Analyzing voting trends between 2016 and 2024, we found that counties receiving migrant buses reported an increase of more than three percentage points in the share of voters supporting Trump in 2024 compared to the 2016 and 2020 elections. These findings indicate that the 2024 election was more strongly shaped by voters' sense of minority threat from the widely publicized migrant busing initiative than by concerns over how bused immigrants were treated. To understand the specific mechanisms underlying these trends, we examined individual-level polling data. Our analyses show that Trump's electoral gains in places receiving migrant buses were driven by swing voters and an increase in Republican turnout. Former Biden voters were more likely to support Trump if they resided in a place that received migrant buses. For these respondents, concerns over crime were a major factor motivating their swing vote. Republicans who did not vote in 2020 were also more likely to vote in 2024 if they resided in a destination location. These individuals were motivated by pronounced concerns with immigration that were amplified by the busing initiative. We did not find evidence that the busing program had any impact on Democratic turnout.

The Texas busing program was seemingly unmatched in scope. However, its political impact was likely driven less by voters' direct exposure to migrants than by the media and political construction of an immigration crisis, especially in destination cities. In each destination, bused migrants represented only a small share of the existing immigrant population. Moreover, prior research shows that objective demographic shifts have minimal effects on voting behavior (Hill et al. 2019). Attitudes about immigrants are shaped more by subjective perceptions of threat, rather than direct exposure and contact with immigrants (Blumer 1958; Fink and Brady 2020; Flores and Schachter 2018; Giesselmann et al. 2024). Our results suggest that the impact of the busing program operated similarly. Media coverage and political messaging constructed public narratives of an immigration crisis in destination cities. These messages alone increased Republican turnout in places that received migrant buses. Immigration has become increasingly partisan in recent decades, with Democrats espousing liberal stances and Republicans embracing restrictive policies (Ollerenshaw and Jardina 2023). Discourse emphasizing immigration crises in busing destinations triggered Republican residents' partisan stances and mobilized many who did not vote in prior elections to participate in 2024, adding to Trump's electoral gains in places that received migrant buses. Although Republican respondents in destination areas were no more likely to hold immigration concerns than those residing elsewhere (see section C in the online supplement), their exposure to the busing initiative motivated increased voting participation. In other words, proximity to perceived minority threat stemming from increased immigration increased Republican turnout, translating anti-immigration political concerns to voting behavior.

The busing initiative also drove a meaningful share of former Biden voters toward Trump in the 2024 election. These swing voters in busing destinations were more heavily swayed by fears over crime. Alongside public narratives of

an immigration crisis, discourse commonly linked migrant buses to increased crime in destination locations. News stories covering anecdotal reports of migrants committing crime commonly associated these instances with the arrival of bused immigrants, despite research showing that the influx of bused migrants has had no impact on local rates of crime (Hing, Li, and Mahajan 2024), and other evidence that immigrants commit crimes at lower rates than native-born citizens (Light, He, and Robey 2020). Within this context, swing voters' subjective concerns with crime drove them toward Trump's restrictive immigration platform—an established expression of minority threat (Fink and Brady 2020). Compared to the direct immigration concerns that mobilized Republican turnout in destination areas, concerns about crime constitute a more indirect expression of minority threat, with greater influence among swing voters who are less inclined to embrace partisan anti-immigration stances.

We also explored whether the busing initiative reduced Democratic turnout in the 2024 election, a potential contributor to Trump's gains in destination areas. Democratic voters may have expressed minority threat not through endorsing Trump, but by withholding their vote in opposition to Democrats' more liberal immigration stances. Alternatively, some Democrats may have withheld their vote in protest of their local Democratic officials' restrictive response to new arrivals. In New York, for example, Mayor Eric Adams added to public narratives of an immigration crisis by saying the influx of bused migrants "Will Destroy New York" (Fitzsimmons 2023). From this view, limited local support for new immigrants may have created disaffection among Democratic voters. We found no evidence for these mechanisms. Democrats who voted in 2020 were no less likely to vote in 2024 if they resided in a place that received migrant buses. Similarly, political concerns toward the economy, immigration, and crime were not amplified among these Democrats in destination areas. Instead, expressions of minority threat were largely confined to the voting behavior of swing voters and Republicans, whose responses were shaped by exposure to the busing initiative and its surrounding public discourse.

Our findings highlight the influence of minority threat in shaping electoral outcomes, while also revealing the growing role subnational state governments play in provoking such sentiments. The Texas busing program manufactured the image of immigration crises in places far from the border, spurring reactionary voting. We show how perceptions of minority threat motivate voting behavior by amplifying partisan anti-immigration views among Republicans and less-partisan concerns with crime among swing voters. As states and subnational governments play a larger role in immigration policy, these findings provide new insights into their impact on national elections and voter behavior.

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