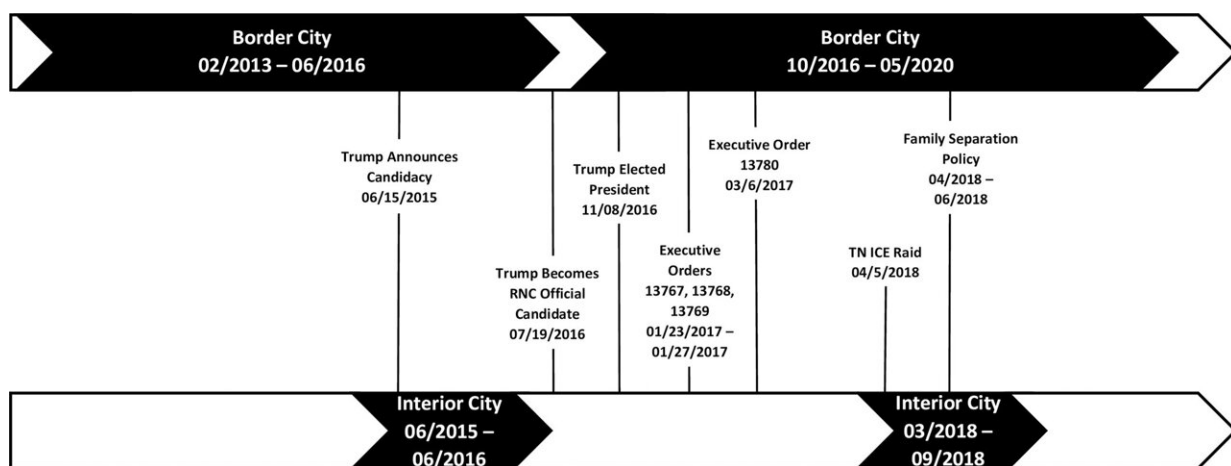


# More stress, fewer coping resources for Latina mothers in a shifting political climate

September 13 2022



Timeline of study sample collection. These two timelines show the timing of sample collection in the two locations of our study in relation to federal policies shared by both sites (shown by lines connecting to both timelines) and a local event (in the interior city) that impacted immigrants during the post-candidacy period. Three Executive Orders (13767, 13768, and 13769) were issued by the President within the last week of January 2017. These orders collectively included demands for a border wall (13767), expanded use of detention of immigrants (13768), limited access to asylum, enhanced enforcement along the border and increased the number of ICE agents (13768, 13769), prohibited sanctuary jurisdictions from receiving federal funding (13768), and limited travel from Muslim majority countries (13769). Additionally, a policy specifically aimed at separating families at the border was enacted in spring of 2018. In TN specifically, an ICE raid on a meatpacking plant occurred a few hours away, possibly the largest raid of Trump administration with 86 individuals detained and 11 arrested. All together, these policies sent a collective message that immigrants were not welcome and increased anti-immigrant media attention

during this time. Credit: *PLOS ONE* (2022). DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0273548

The sociopolitical climate in the United States has taken its toll on the mental health of Latina mothers, according to new research from the University of California San Diego. Findings show increased depression, anxiety and perceived stress in a border city and reduced coping resources in both a border and interior US city.

"Latinx Americans have been historically disadvantaged on many fronts, including access to quality education, job security and health care, making them particularly vulnerable to stressors that can lead to poor mental health," said Amy L. Non, a genetic anthropologist at UC San Diego. "Our findings indicate that in a more hostile political landscape their well-being is even more threatened."

Non co-authored the study with Elizabeth S. Clausen, an assistant professor at the University of Nebraska and a doctoral alumna of the UC San Diego Department of Anthropology, and Kimberly L. D'Anna Hernandez, a professor of psychology at Marquette University.

The study—an analysis of longitudinal surveys that the research team began before the Republican nomination of Donald Trump and concluded several years after his election as president—measured changes in sociocultural stressors, protective factors and mental health in two cohorts of Latina mothers, one in San Diego and the other in Nashville.

Amid their findings: The effects of discrimination were associated with high anxiety in the Nashville group, and acculturative stress, a particular kind of stress experienced by people adapting to a new culture, was associated with consistently worse mental health in the San Diego group.

The researchers examined stress and coping within families by taking into consideration stressor events, perceptions of these events on the parts of the study participants, available coping resources, and possible crises that can result from imbalances.

"The stressors we measured were influenced by the changing and increasingly hostile political climate toward Latinas following the nomination and election of Donald Trump," said Non. "We measured such resources for coping as optimism, [social support](#) for mothers and protective cultural values. We measured the mothers' perceptions of stress in relation to many factors, including socioeconomic status, acculturation, racial discrimination, and other factors. Taken all together, these increased stressors and reduced coping resources led to higher levels of mothers' [psychological distress](#), as measured with scales for anxiety, depression, and such symptoms resulting from stress as sickness, anger and frustration, fear, and feelings of aging too quickly."

These alarming findings didn't occur in a vacuum, the researchers believe. The increased stress experienced by Latina mothers, along with reductions in coping resources, were likely related to the rhetoric of Donald Trump as a candidate and as president.

"In Nashville, we noticed reductions in optimism and social support since Trump's candidacy," Non said. "We also asked some direct, open-ended questions about how the women felt seeing 'Make America Great Again' hats in the wake of the 2016 election, as well as any behavior changes they may have implemented in response to the election results. Many mothers qualitatively expressed increasing fears at what they saw as rising anti-immigrant sentiments. Some expressed concern about their safety when driving or taking their children outside."

This paper builds on findings of the authors' prior studies in the interior city dataset, showing immigrant-related stress effects across generations,

in the epigenomes of children of immigrant Latina mothers, which may have implications for cardiometabolic health. The authors' prior work also found acculturative stress and discrimination related to maternal depression and anxiety in the border city. Future research will focus on COVID-related [stress](#) and mental health in border city Latina mothers.

The paper, "Changes in Sociocultural Stressors, Protective Factors, and Mental Health for US Latina Mothers in a Shifting Political Climate," is published in *PLOS ONE*.

**More information:** Amy L. Non et al, Changes in sociocultural stressors, protective factors, and mental health for US Latina mothers in a shifting political climate, *PLOS ONE* (2022). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0273548](#)

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