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Are High-Immigrant Neighborhoods Disadvantaged in Seeking Local Government Services? A Case Study of 311 Service Request Data in Baltimore, Maryland

by Prof. Min XIE

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To modernize public service delivery, U.S. communities increasingly rely on a hotline or web-based system, 311, for residents to request government services. Research on 311 systems is relatively new, and there is mixed evidence on whether 311 can be used efficiently to help bridge the gap between disadvantaged communities and governments. This study draws from research on immigration, race/ethnicity, and differential engagement to explore the links between immigrant concentration and 311 usages. We use longitudinal data on 311 calls in Baltimore City, Maryland (2014-2019) and spatial panel regression analysis to show that neighborhood and policy environments determine whether immigrant concentration is a barrier for 311 service-seeking. Specifically, we find that neighborhood racial/ethnic structure and the 2017 presidential transition significantly influence the relationship between immigrant concentration and 311 requests. Immigrant concentration is found to reduce 311 requests in high-immigrant neighborhoods with high Latino or Black concentration, but not in high-immigrant neighborhoods with high White/Asian concentration. We also find that in Latino-high-immigrant neighborhoods, the suppression of immigrant concentration on 311 requests is mainly manifested in the post-2017 period, when the federal government adopted hostile immigration policies. By establishing and contextualizing the relationship between immigrant concentration and 311 usages, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of civic participation.

MIN XIE is a professor in the Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice at the University of Maryland-College Park. She received her BA and MA in information management from Peking University and her PhD in criminal justice from University at Albany, SUNY. Her research interests include theories of criminal victimization; race, ethnicity, gender, and immigration; multilevel and longitudinal models; and spatial data analysis. She has received funding from the National Institute of Justice (NIJ), the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), and the National Science Foundation (NSF) to study issues related to criminal victimization, race, ethnicity, and immigration. She has published in Criminology, Journal of Quantitative Criminology, Justice Quarterly, Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency, Annual Review of Criminology, among other journals. She serves as an Executive Counselor at the American Society of Criminology (ASC).

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