Institutionalizing Welcome: The Emergence of Municipal OIRAs and the Deliberate Disruption of Restrictive Immigration Governance

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Abstract

Offices of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs (OIRAs) have become prominent local actors within the U.S. immigration governance regime, primarily focused on immigrant integration. This study traces the emergence of three OIRAs and outlines their position within the U.S. immigration governance regime. It then investigates the tensions, challenges, and common but nuanced strategies they use to institutionalize welcome at the local level. Comparative case study methods are used to compare this work in diverse welcoming cities —Atlanta, Minneapolis, and Seattle. Drawing on semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and informal archives, this study explores how, when, and why OIRAs engage in deliberate disruption of restrictive elements of the U.S. immigration governance. In-depth exploration of these three cases reveals the relational patterns that are central to constraining and enabling this disruption. The overarching structure of immigration governance in the U.S. results in common strategies used by OIRAs to balance relationships and change through deliberate engagement with forms of disruption. At the same time, differences in the social, political, and historical contexts of welcoming cities create significant diversity in the specific tactics used to disrupt exclusive practices and work toward institutionalizing welcome at the local level.

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Part I. Introduction and Emergence

Chapter 1. Introduction

> And in a job like this, you have to decide what battles you're going to fight because you're not going to win all of them. And so there's an art to it of like, what do you push? When do you take a breath? (interview 13).

This study is interested in conceptualizing the tensions, challenges, and common but nuanced strategies used to *institutionalize welcome* at the local level within the U.S. immigration governance regime. By *institutionalize welcome,* I mean establishing conventions, practices, and norms that are receptive to immigrant and refugee communities. This is an effort that is largely taking place at the subnational level. As political scientist Abigail Fisher Williamson (2018) notes, "Cities today, more so than any other level of American government, are at the forefront of efforts to welcome immigrants" (p. 1). Cities working to welcome immigrants engage broadly across many policy areas and with many partners to develop inclusive practices that support immigrant and refugee integration. These areas may include civic engagement, law enforcement, education, health, and economic or workforce development.

Welcoming cities are often affiliated with national nonprofits or networks that support the development of welcoming policies and practices. For example, many welcoming cities are

affiliated with the national nonprofit Welcoming America.[1] Welcoming America has developed a welcoming network of "over 300 nonprofits and local governments working to build more inclusive and welcoming communities in the United States" (Welcoming America, 2024a, n.p.). Welcoming America has also developed a "welcoming standard" used to evaluate cities according to specific welcoming criteria and to encourage "accountability" and "innovation" in cities striving to create more welcoming spaces for newcomers (Welcoming America, 2024b, n.p.). The organization provides a framework that encourages cities across the country to push for welcoming practices, to network with other cities, and to learn from one another about what policies and practices have been effective.

Not all cities that strive to be welcoming are affiliated with Welcoming America. Some cities consider Welcoming America's approach to be "more of a southern strategy" that is less useful in cities that identify as "far left" (interview 11). However, these cities are often affiliated with national networks that afford similar collective approaches. For example, the city represented in the above quote, that saw Welcoming America's practices as too conservative, is affiliated with Cities for Action, another national network of over 200 U.S. cities and counties focused on advocating for more immigrant-friendly federal policies.

One practice that has emerged in dozens of welcoming cities across the country is the establishment of a municipal office of immigrant and refugee affairs. Offices of Immigrant and

[1] In this study, I focus on the role of Welcoming American due to the organization's focus and networking at the local level, particularly its focus on nonprofits and governments at the municipal and county level. However, this is not the only organization that has emerged in recent years to support welcoming movements and the integration of newcomers. New American Economy (NAE) was founded in 2010 with the goal of highlighting economic contributions of immigrant communities to promote a positive narrative around immigrant inclusion. In 2023, NAE merged with the American Immigration Council (AIC) to bring together legal, policy, and research expertise to better advocate for immigrant inclusion. Welcome.US was founded in 2021 in the wake of the Afghan resettlement challenges after the fall of Kabul and focused on mobilizing civic and private sector partners in resettlement efforts.

Refugee Affairs (OIRAs) are government offices focused on addressing the needs of immigrant and refugee communities in a particular jurisdiction by providing services, education, and advocacy that support immigrant and refugee integration as well as highlighting and celebrating these communities. While some OIRAs exist at the county or state level, the majority are offices at the municipal level, where they have become a relatively common part of the U.S. immigration governance regime in large cities across the country (Huang & Liu, 2018). These offices occupy a unique position within the U.S. immigration governance regime, which offers a critical perspective on creating more welcoming communities while working from within city government – a complicated position that both enables and constrains action.

There are two primary and interrelated driving forces behind this study. The first is to further understand how actors push for more welcoming policies and practices from within the complex institution of the U.S. immigration governance regime. The second is to understand this phenomenon specifically in the context of welcoming cities that are on the front lines of immigrant integration in the U.S. To accomplish these goals, this study focuses on the emergence and work of OIRAs, which are positioned as key actors within immigration governance in many welcoming cities.

This study follows Magnusson's (2011) call to move away from "seeing like a state" (Scott, 1998) and move toward "seeing like a city." This means moving away from knowledge production that prioritizes legibility to a presumed monolithic nation-state and embraces a more diverse and relational understanding of the actions happening within a city (Magnusson, 2011). In brief, the knowledge produced by "seeing like a city" is more chaotic. Magnusson (2011) writes:

To see like a city is to accept certain disorderliness, unpredictability, and multiplicity as

> inevitable, and to pose the problem of politics in relation to that complexity, rather than in relation to the simplicity that sovereignty seeks. (p. 120)

Seeing like a city means seeking to understand, and center, the entangled nature of the city.

Pushing one step beyond "seeing like a city" I define this work as *seeing from within a city* – focusing on seeing challenges and strategies from within this complexity through the perspective of OIRAs. Centering the perspective of OIRAs provides an opportunity to understand the complex negotiation of policies, practices, and norms that challenge the institutionalization of welcome even in places that have demonstrated a commitment to improving integration experiences for immigrant and refugee communities. The goal is to highlight the ongoing challenges and necessary negotiation required in these cities as OIRAs are established and as they work to institutionalize more welcoming practices.

This study offers the opportunity to learn how actors push, and sometimes pause or partner, to create more welcoming contexts of reception from a position *within* a complex institution – as OIRAs are located within the U.S. immigration governance regime. OIRA's position within the regime is a position of responsiveness, restraint, and power; they are located within the "laboratories of innovation" at the subnational level of governance (Newton, 2012, p. 131), allowing them to be responsive to local communities; they are located at the lowest level of a federalist system, preempted by local, state, and federal regulations, requiring OIRAs to practice restraint; finally, they are a government entity, located within an arm of the state where they are afforded significant privilege and power.

To study the welcoming work from within this complex position, the following study uses comparative case study methods, examining the emergence and work of three OIRAs: the Atlanta

Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, the Minneapolis Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs, and the Seattle Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs. These offices were carefully chosen based on theoretically important commonalities and differences shaping their local context, including state political context and history of immigration. These factors may shape how and why each city creates an OIRA, the types of challenges that OIRAs face, and the way OIRAs choose to navigate those challenges.

Despite a stated interest in understanding the negotiation of challenges from within welcoming cities, it was initially communicated through interviews that these OIRAs may not be the site of significant challenge. Each OIRA in this case study is in a large, Democratic majority city where such offices commonly emerge (Huang & Liu, 2018). Initially, informants in each city OIRA described little opposition to the work of welcoming immigrant and refugee communities. OIRA staff commonly made comments like:

> I've not met anyone who is opposed to the existence of the office, or who's opposed to the work (interview 9).

> I think all departments have - were always very supportive of our work and wanted to collaborate with us (interview 14).

> or at least…

> We didn't run against anybody who was opposed to this [office] (interview 26).

These quotes, one each from Atlanta, Minneapolis, and Seattle, suggest that the city OIRAs were

established easily and that their work was received in a supportive fashion. This would leave little to explore regarding tensions, barriers to change, or strategies for creating change. However, my former experience interning at an OIRA and collaborating with city staff suggested a more complex reality, and the more I listened to experiences described by OIRA staff, partners, government officials, and elected representatives, the more I became aware that these initial, general statements about support did not tell the full story.

Further conversations revealed that, in working to institutionalize welcome, OIRAs continually bump up against, navigate, and at times leverage barriers that emerge from across institutional sectors and scales of immigration governance. They are constantly choosing when and how to fight and when to push, pause, or partner. This navigation includes both actions of resistance and actions of collaboration in a kind of *deliberate disruption*. Deliberate in that these actions are careful and strategic, navigating relationships and power dynamics that define a position within the institution itself. Disruption in that these actions create change – though at times that change may be somewhat limited in its scope.

In the study that follows, I consider the way OIRAs use a combination of institutional pushback and partnership to deliberately disrupt restrictive aspects of the immigration governance regime, and the forms of disruption that OIRAs choose. I use the term *institutional pushback* to refer to actions of resistance used to push for change within the U.S. immigration governance regime. Similarly, I use the term *institutional partnership* to refer to actions of collaboration used to reinforce aspects of the U.S. immigration governance regime. I find that institutional partnership and institutional pushback exist simultaneously and are strategically employed by OIRAs as tools for deliberate disruption in response to challenges across multiple sectors and scales of

immigration governance, and that often resources distribution was disrupted and reimagined while institutional norms, laws, and frameworks went largely unchallenged or unchanged.

Background and Definitions

The United States has long been called a nation of immigrants (Lee, 2019), and the country receives a large population of immigrants and refugees each year. In 2022, over one million immigrants and refugees arrived in the U.S. through legal pathways, including humanitarian, work, and student visas; over two million immigrants were apprehended at the southern border (a then-record number), and an unknown number of unauthorized immigrants entered the U.S. without inspection (Knapp & Lu, 2022; Ruiz Soto, 2022). Regardless of their motivations for leaving their home countries, their pathway to the U.S., or their immigration status, immigrants and refugees arrived in the U.S. to find jobs, join communities, enroll in schools, and raise families. Whether they arrived by plane, on foot, or were bussed to northern cities by southern governors, immigrants and refugees arrived in U.S. cities with talents, challenges, resources, and needs central to their lived experience and dependent upon local resources and support.

The division between governing immigrants' arrival (immigration) and their daily lives (integration) is central to the U.S. immigration governance regime (Varsanyi et al., 2012). The federal government controls the admission, removal, and immigration status of newcomers. However, with the exception of humanitarian immigrants that receive federal support through the refugee resettlement program, the federal government takes a "laissez-faire approach" to immigrant integration (Jiménez, 2011, p. 1) by largely abstaining from the work of incorporating immigrants into U.S. life and "expecting immigrants and the communities they live in to pick up

the slack" (Williamson, 2018, p. 8). As a result, subnational governments are intimately involved in integration governance (de Graauw & Vermeulen, 2016; Van Raemdonck & Meissner, 2021). Through the formal devolution of federal power and informal gap-filling, subnational governments advocate for, draft, and work to implement policies that shape immigrant and refugee integration and daily life (de Graauw, 2018; Steil & Vasi, 2014).

Despite ongoing passage of restrictive legislation in some jurisdictions, a study by Visser and Simpson (2019) found that, after the year 2000, local governments were more likely to pass welcoming immigration-related policies (p. 182). Since 2007, a growing number of cities have implemented a Municipal ID program, providing valid identification cards for city residents, regardless of immigration status. These identification cards allow immigrants, as well as other vulnerable populations, to access critical city services and health care (LeBrón et al., 2018). Similarly important for community integration, cities have passed ordinances that require city implementation of language access programs, guaranteeing interpreter and translator services for anyone accessing city services. Additional welcoming policies and practices include those that support immigrant entrepreneurs, promote employment access for immigrant communities, encourage civic participation by immigrant communities, foster positive relationships between immigrants and police, and provide legal support and aid to noncitizens (Huang & Liu, 2016).

Perhaps the most well-known and contentious welcoming policy relates to the sanctuary city movement. Although sanctuary cities are not new, their prominence has recently escalated (Darling & Bauder, 2019), with at least 120 communities enacting sanctuary policies since 2017 (ILRC, 2019) despite at least seven states passing anti-sanctuary city laws since 2015 (Gulasekaram et al., 2019). While the definition of a sanctuary city is disputed, sanctuary cities

are generally understood as allies to their immigrant communities (Collingwood & O'Brien, 2019). Based on a review of over 500 sanctuary policies enacted in the U.S., Lasch et al. (2018) classify sanctuary policy actions according to the restrictions placed on cooperation between local law enforcement and ICE. In addition to these substantive policy changes that restrict immigration enforcement, the establishment of sanctuary city policies also serves the symbolic purpose of demonstrating support for immigrant communities (Collingwood & O'Brien, 2019). These policies, as well as many others, are constructed and implemented through the complex institution of the immigration governance regime described in the next section.

U.S. Immigration Governance Regime (IGR)

The U.S. immigration governance regime is a central figure in this study. I define the U.S. immigration governance regime as *an interrelated constellation of actors, frameworks, policies, and norms that collectively shape the way immigration and integration operate in the United States.* This definition draws on the conceptualization of a *migration regime* by Bernt (2019). While some scholars have attempted to bind the concept of *migration regime* to a limited set of actors to increase its utility for analysis, Bernt (2019) describes the concept as inclined to "openness" (p. 11). He writes:

> The definition of 'migration regimes', thus, oscillates between different elements and is endless. It includes almost all possible phenomenon related to migration and – applied to actual research – it is, in fact, hard to imagine any social fact related to migration that could not be included in the definition of a 'migration regime' (Bernt, 2019, p. 11).

Defined this way, a migration regime is an approach more so than an analytic concept. The definition allows for a regime to be "developed inductively" throughout the research process and

to include different types of actors that emerge as relevant to analysis (Bernt, 2019, p. 10). This approach challenges the notion of predefined relations between predetermined actors.

In the context of the U.S. immigration governance regime, there are a plethora of actors, frameworks, policies, and norms working across scales, geographies, and temporalities to shape the way immigration and integration operate in the United States. Federal agencies include the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), which focuses on efforts to "secure the nation" (DHS, n.d., n.p.) through the work of agencies such as U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), and U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP); the Department of Justice, empowered "to uphold the rule of law, to keep our country safe, and to protect civil rights" (DOJ, n.d., n.p.) includes the Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR), the Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA), Office of Immigration Litigation (OIL), among others; and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services which includes the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) as well as the U.S. Department of State which includes the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) whose work focuses on humanitarian migration and the resettlement of refugee populations. These are just some of the agencies most directly working on immigration-related issues at the federal level.

Other agencies work at subnational levels of governance, such as the Minnesota Department of Human Services Refugee Resettlement Program, or in less newcomer-focused roles that nonetheless shape immigration and integration in the U.S. For example, the Minnesota Department of Public Safety and Driver Vehicle Services is a state-level agency whose operations profoundly affect newcomers in the community, with everything from licensing and license testing in multiple languages to legislation that determines whether legal status is required for licensing.

Other departments like the Minnesota Department of Human Services, the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, and the Minnesota Department of Higher Education all help shape newcomers' access to opportunities and benefits at the state level. School systems are an example at the local level, acting as an important institution of integration for families, as public schools are required to serve all children regardless of immigration status (Plyler v Doe, 1982). Other local institutions like hospital systems, the chamber of commerce, and even neighborhood associations impact the day-to-day lives of immigrants and refugees. All these agencies are shaped by norms and policies, and they depend upon individual actors who can have a significant influence over the way policies are implemented and services are delivered (Lipsky, 1980).

OIRAs have recently emerged as important actors within the U.S. immigration governance regime. The first OIRA was established in New York City in 1986, and this office continues to be one of the largest and most well-resourced offices in the country (de Graauw, 2015). Most of the nation's OIRAs were established in the last two decades and they are generally concerned with immigrant integration and "welcoming" immigrants to their city (de Graauw, 2018). There are approximately 100 subnational offices of immigrant and refugee affairs in the U.S., although producing an exact count of offices can be difficult given their diverse nature. De Graauw (2015) writes that immigrant and refugee affairs offices "differ in when and why they were created, their structure, organization, degree of institutionalization, and the amount of resources they have to get things done" (p. 3). In an ongoing process, new offices are established, old offices are merged, multiple names are used, or positions and goals related to immigrant and refugee affairs are established and shifted within existing offices. For example, the Atlanta Mayor's Office of

Immigrant Affairs (MOIA) is also known and maintains public communications as Welcoming Atlanta, and in August 2022, the office merged with the Office of International Affairs to become the Mayor's Office of International and Immigrant Affairs (MOIIA).

Adding another layer of complexity to OIRAs, the offices that have emerged in different areas of subnational government. Offices exist at the state level (such as the Minnesota Office of New Americans), county level (such as the King County Immigrant and Refugee Program), and city level. Focusing on just city immigrant and refugee affairs offices, as in this study, still presents challenges, as some offices of diversity or multicultural affairs serve similar purposes by addressing cultural and language barriers for newcomers (see, for example, the Richmond Office of Multicultural Affairs). In addition, while many OIRAs are located within the mayor's office, some have been established as executive-level offices within the city (Seattle), while others are located within a range of city departments that include the Office of Equity and Inclusion (Albuquerque), Office of Neighborhood and Community Relations (Minneapolis), or the Attorney General's Office (St. Paul). These offices also represent a spectrum of investment by cities. There are offices with one FTE while other offices have dozens of FTEs, and budgets range from several thousand to several million dollars. With such a range of resources available, it is no surprise that offices also vary in their programming and the amount of direct and indirect service they do.

Nonetheless, common elements hold this group of offices together, particularly a focus on immigrant integration. De Graauw (2015) describes attributes that subnational OIRAs share, including a focus on welcoming immigrant and refugee communities, an emphasis on the economic contributions of immigrant communities and refugees, efforts to coordinate integration work, support for immigrant and refugee civic engagement, support for local immigrant-serving

organizations, celebrations of immigrant and refugee communities, and efforts to develop new policies that promote inclusion of immigrants and refugees. Many offices are guided by workgroups or community-developed priority areas (see Twin Cities G4G, 2022) and they are engaged in networks such as Welcoming American or Cities for Action that help establish and share best practices in immigrant integration. They negotiate relationships with mayors, city councils, community organizations, and community leaders as they develop and implement welcoming policies and programs.

OIRAs work to welcome immigrants and refugees from a complex position within the U.S. immigration governance regime. As government offices, OIRAs are imbued with a certain power, legitimacy, and privilege grounded in state-granted authority. OIRAs may leverage this position to advocate for, challenge, or implement policies that welcome immigrant and refugee communities. Yet, as evidenced by some of the earliest U.S. immigration policies that excluded newcomers based on race, the U.S. immigration governance regime (and, by extension, a government-sanctioned office that plays a role in the immigration governance regime) is simultaneously associated with xenophobic and punitive practices of immigration control (Lee, 2019). Practices such as these are antithetical to welcoming immigrants and may overshadow, complicate, or create barriers to the work of OIRAs. This history can result in tensions, such as stakeholders debating whether to associate with municipal OIRAs for fear that some immigrant or refugee communities would be reluctant to participate in government-sponsored programming.

OIRAs provide a unique opportunity to study the tensions that persist, and the forms of disruption engaged, even within welcoming cities. In some ways, OIRAs already represent the best-case scenario. They exist in liberal leaning cities that have demonstrated the political will to

commit resources to supporting the inclusion of immigrant and refugee communities. However, the establishment of an OIRA or the implementation of welcoming policies are by no means end-state solutions. Because of the multidimensional and often conflicting elements of the U.S. immigration governance regime, OIRAs and welcoming initiatives continue to experience challenges and bump up against barriers to welcoming and inclusion. This study pushes beyond a dichotomy of welcoming and unwelcoming cities to grapple with tensions experienced within welcoming cities embedded in a complex institution with both restrictive and welcoming tendencies. Former scholars have noted this mixed and nested context of reception that is shaped by differences across individual actors, geographies, and organizations as well as across local, state and federal levels of governance (Golash-Boza & Valdez, 2018; McDaniel & Smith, 2017), but this study provides an additional window into the way local government offices can work from within differently positioned welcoming cities to negotiate and disrupt multidimensional challenges to welcome.

Questions

My research will draw primarily on the experiences of OIRA staff and affiliates to understand how OIRAs work within and against the U.S. immigration governance regime to institutionalize welcome at the local level. I engage with two questions that illuminate my overarching interests. First, (Q1) how have OIRAs emerged from, and how do they fit within the U.S. immigration governance regime? Second, (Q2) given differences in local social, historical, and political contexts, how do OIRAs vary in their attempts to institutionalize welcome?

Significance and contribution of the study: *why it matters*

From a theoretical perspective, this research adds to a rich literature on the role of immigration governance in developing welcoming contexts of reception. The first important theoretical contribution comes from peeling back the layers of welcoming cities to understand how municipal offices negotiate mixed or nested contexts of reception. This study centers the idea that, even when cities have invested in welcoming initiatives and created an internal actor to champion welcoming policies, there continue to be multidimensional challenges to institutionalizing welcoming practices in welcoming cities. Digging into the complexities of these tensions provides insights into the temporal, scalar, political, and social factors that enable and constrain cities working to create more welcoming spaces for newcomers.

The second theoretical insight comes from this approach to studying the emergence of new institutional settings and the disruption of old institutional settings. While much of institutional theory is built on micro or macro studies concerned with the actions and motivations of individuals or the norms and social contexts promoted by institutions, this is a meso-level analysis that focuses on relationships and interactions to elucidate how mechanisms of disruption, including institutional pushback and partnership, work together at the local intersection of institutional theory and immigration federalism to create local offices of immigrant and refugee affairs and to disrupt unwelcoming elements of immigration governance.

In a more practical light, this study explores the current state of immigration governance and reform in the United States. Trends in immigration and integration governance have made it critical to understand the role of subnational actors. At the national level, Congress has failed to address immigration reform for four decades, while recent presidents have engaged in an

unprecedented use of executive actions to strong-arm sweeping changes in immigration policy (Bolter, 2022; Waslin, 2020). These (in)actions reverberate through immigrant communities, yet the federal government takes little to no responsibility for addressing their impact on immigrant integration. Instead, subnational actors must negotiate their impacts on the daily lives of immigrants. Because municipal OIRAs are relatively new subnational actors, overarching studies exist, but in-depth research is limited. This study provides an opportunity to look more closely at three OIRAs to understand tensions and resources shaping subnational integration governance and welcoming communities in diverse contexts.

Literature Review

Another Look at the U.S. Immigration Governance Regime

As previously introduced, I define the U.S. immigration governance regime broadly in this study, following calls for conceptual "openness" that allow for an interpretive approach (Bernt, 2019, p. 11). In the spirit of openness, I have defined the U.S. immigration governance regime as *an interrelated constellation of actors, frameworks, policies, and norms that collectively shape the way immigration and integration operate in the United States.*

The *way immigration and integration operate in the United States* is simultaneously welcoming and unwelcoming, receptive and restrictive, inclusive and xenophobic. Lee (2019) reminds us that these contrasting dynamics have a long history in America, writing:

> History has shown that xenophobia is not a contradiction to the U.S. identity as a "nation of immigrants" or its tradition of immigration. It is not a matter of the U.S. being either a "nation of immigrants" or a "nation of xenophobia." It is also not a matter of the United

> States being a "nation of immigrants" during certain moments of its history and a "nation of xenophobia" during others. Rather, just as racial progress and racist progress can happen at the same time, Americans' embrace of immigrants and their fears and hatred of them have coexisted as equally strong forces shaping the U.S. (p. 324)

The U.S. immigration governance regime is deeply rooted in intertwined histories of welcome and xenophobia, with significant effects on the distribution of resources and relations of power among immigrant and refugee communities.

This tension is evident from the earliest iterations of the U.S. immigration governance regime through today, contributing to a complex context of reception for immigrants and refugees in the U.S. Though the phrase "nation of immigrants" has been critiqued for its erasure of indigenous populations, this popular phrase is part of a national legacy in the U.S., as a country that has welcomed more immigrants than any other country in the world. Batalova (2024) notes:

> Worldwide, the United States is home to more international migrants than any other country, and more than the next four countries—Germany, Saudi Arabia, Russia, and the United Kingdom—combined, according to the most recent UN Population Division data, from mid-2020. While the U.S. population represents about 5 percent of the total world population, close to 20 percent of all global migrants reside in the United States. (p. 1)

The U.S. is also the country that has resettled the highest number of refugees. By 2018, the U.S. had welcomed 3 million of the world's 4 million refugees resettled outside their country of refuge since 1980 (Connor & Krogstad, 2018).

Nonetheless, xenophobia has been a part of the U.S. history of immigration from the very beginning as well. While xenophobia is at times characterized as the "exception to America's

immigration tradition," Lee (2019) highlights how "central xenophobia has been to the making of the United States" (p. 5). Lee (2019) defines xenophobia as "a set of beliefs and ideas based on the premise that foreigners are threats to the nation and its people" noting that "it promotes an irrational fear and hatred of immigrants" (p. 8). New waves of immigrants to the United States have been repeatedly cast as outsiders, racialized, or criminalized by media, popular rhetoric, law, and policy. Lee (2019) notes that "Native Americans and African Americans were the first 'others'" (p. 8), but this othering has extended to include the arrival of each new group to come ashore. Policies such as the Chinese Exclusion Act in the late 19th century demonstrate the country's formal commitment to xenophobic exclusion. The U.S. has sustained policies that exclude immigrants and refugees from a rotating list of countries, even up to the present-day. At times, the explanation for exclusion has changed. For example, the country focused on protecting social benefits in the 1990s with the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA), while more recently, a focus on national security has resulted in xenophobia and negativity toward immigrant populations (Flores, 2018; Löfflmann, 2022). In addition, scholars note (and challenge), the "construction of immigrant illegality" (De Genova, 2002; Menjivar & Kanstroom, 2013, p. 20) and the "production of illegal aliens" (Ngai, 2004, p. 70) through law and policy that has served to exclude newcomers based on their documentation, or their perceived documentation according to race or language abilities.

How can we understand the challenge OIRAs face when institutionalizing welcome in their respective cities within this broader context of the U.S. immigration governance regime? To approach this question, I begin with an introduction to institutional theory that helps to build a conceptual framework of the complex institution of the U.S. immigration governance regime. I

then use institutional theory to explore and describe the potential for OIRAs to disrupt institutional practices that are antithetical to welcoming immigrant and refugee populations. This kind of institutional work falls into the realm of deinstitutionalization or disruption of unwelcoming practices, but can also be understood as the first step toward the institutionalization of welcome.

Institutional Theory & Change

Institutional change has emerged as a complex but rich research area, as scholars grapple with how to theorize the persistence and stability of institutions alongside the possibility of change. Clegg (2010) writes that "the coexistence of stasis and change...comprises a key theoretical tension in institutional theory" (p. 10). On the one hand, "stability" and "durability" are defining concepts of institutions (Dacin et al., 2002; Hodgson, 2006; Scott, 1995). Scott (2005) indicates that "institutional theory attends to the deeper and more resilient aspects of social structure" (p. 460), and institutionalization has been described as a reality in which "alternatives may be literally unthinkable" (Zucker, 1983, p. 5). This understanding of institutions makes the concept of change difficult to theorize as it seems to suggest that change contradicts the fundamental idea of institutions.

On the other hand, scholars have argued that institutional stability should not be taken for granted (Scott, 1995; Zucker, 1988). Institutions ultimately depend upon actors and actions to exist and persist (Scott, 1995). Actors - including individuals, groups, and organizations - that exist within institutions are responsive to institutional demands but also possess agency (Oliver, 1991). Hence, they possess "(varying) potential for reconstructing the rules, norms and beliefs that guide—but do not determine—their actions" (Scott, 2005, p. 467). In other words, actors can

negotiate within, influence, and even change institutions, although their ability and motivation to do so varies. Understanding the theoretical construction of institutions helps illuminate how this change might take place.

Institutional Pillars

Scott (1995) writes: "Institutions consist of cognitive, normative, and regulative structures and activities that provide stability and meaning to social behavior" (p. 33). With this definition, Scott introduces what he calls the three "vital pillars" of institutions: regulative, normative, and cognitive. Drawing on Weber (1968), who emphasizes the importance of legitimacy in the survival of any system, Scott aligns each institutional pillar with a form of legitimacy as outlined in Table 1. These pillars, and the basis of legitimacy they depend upon, are key to understanding pathways for institutional change. Disruption of these pillars opens possibilities for new forms of regulative, normative, and cognitive structures. Before discussing potential disruption, each pillar is described in more detail below.

Table 1: Three Pillars of Institutions

	Pillar		
	Regulative	*Normative*	*Cognitive*
Basis of compliance	Expedience	Social obligation	Taken for granted
Mechanisms	Coercive	Normative	Mimetic
Basis of legitimacy	Legally sanctioned	Morally governed	Cultrually supported, conceptually correct

Modified from Scott (1995).

Regulative Pillar

The regulative pillar includes rules, laws, and regulations that govern behavior (Scott, 1995). These elements of an institution are often associated with behavioral constraint and control. Rules, laws, and regulations can be thought of as an institution's *power over* actors within the institution, in-line with Foucault's understanding of repressive power (1980). However, laws, rules, and regulations can also enable actions and empower actors to think, act, and behave in certain ways through *productive power* (Foucault, 1980). According to Scott (1995), coercion is the mechanism of control through which the regulative pillar operates. Fear of sanctions or punishment often elicits compliance with the regulative pillar and its imposed constraints. However, Scott (1995) names expedience as the primary basis of compliance with institutional laws, rules and regulations. Expedience explains compliance with the regulative pillar as the most convenient and practical approach to action within a shared system of meaning. Thus, institutional theory predicts that most actors will work within the regulative framework established by an institution.

Normative Pillar

The normative pillar comprises the norms and values that shape behavior within an institution. Norms refer to the acceptable way of doing things, while values refer to beliefs about what is good or bad. This pillar encompasses ideas about what is right and wrong and how things should be. Similar to the regulative pillar, the normative pillar enables and constrains behavior. Norms and values provide guardrails for what is considered appropriate and good, limiting certain actions while enabling or encouraging others. According to Scott (1995), social obligation is the foundation of compliance for normative values. Feelings such as shame can serve as punishment

to those who do not comply with normative constructs, while feelings of honor accompany compliance (Scott, 1995). This pillar is what Scott (1995) refers to as a "morally governed" realm that relies on shared values for legitimacy, utilizing a common understanding of "appropriateness" to shape behaviors and relationships (p. 35).

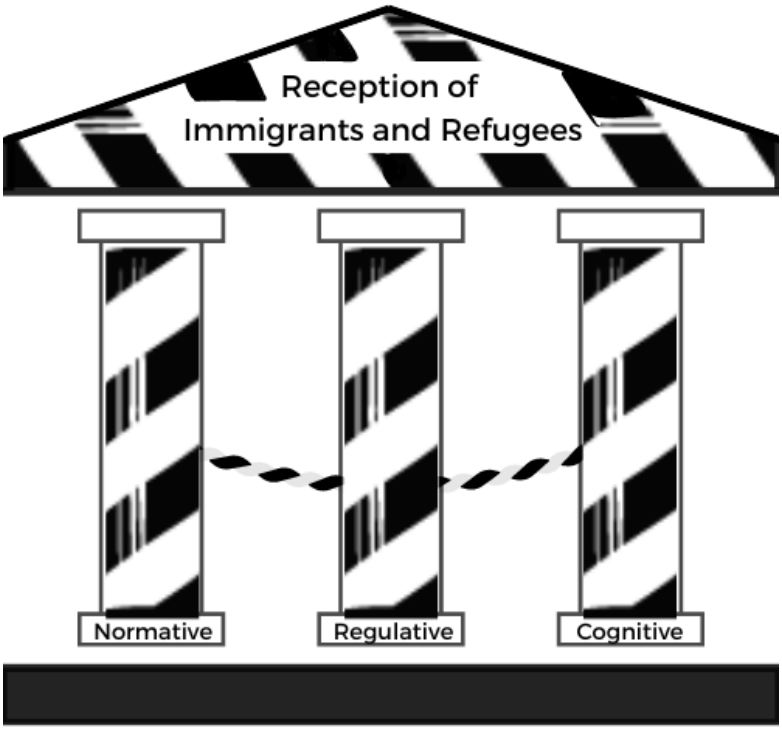
Cognitive Pillar

The cognitive pillar is perhaps best understood as sensemaking through shared cultural logics. This pillar is not guided by values-laden ideas about how things *should* be (as in the normative pillar), but by conscious or unconscious thoughts about how the social world fundamentally functions and how it can be understood. Here it may be helpful to consider the concept of schema, drawn from the work of cognitive psychologist Jean Piaget. A schema is a mental model or framework distilled from significant information. Adopted into the field of anthropology, researchers refer to "cultural schemas" or "schemas that have come to be shared among people who have had similar socially mediated experiences" (Strauss & Quinn, 1997, p. 48). The basis for compliance with the cognitive pillar is what Scott (1995) refers to as "taken-for-grantedness" indicated by "shared logics of action" (p. 35). Drawing on French anthropologist Rene Girard, Scott names mimetics as the mechanism for operationalizing social control through the cognitive pillar. Essentially, the pillar functions through imitation. Because human desire is communal rather than individual, lending itself to behavior patterns and common ideas about what is normal, recognized, or assumed. Often, this pillar is not consciously engaged with at all.

A Model for Analytic Engagement with the U.S. Immigration Governance Regime

I use institutional theory in combination with social construction theory and immigration federalism to develop a model that allows for analytic engagement with the U.S. immigration governance regime. This model is at once overly complex and overly simplified. On one hand, it names multiple dimensions of interconnecting relationships that shape U.S. immigration governance across multiple spatialities, including scale, time, and place (Walker, 2015). On the other hand, it only skims the surface of the complex interactions that shape these relationships and the realized functioning of immigration governance in the U.S. Figure 1 provides a visual representation of this model that is described below.

Figure 1: U.S. Immigration Governance Regime



The U.S. immigration governance regime can be understood as an institution, one made up of Scott's (1995) regulative, normative, and cognitive institutional pillars, that is ultimately responsible for the reception of immigrant and refugee populations. Figure 1 represents some of the complexity of this institution. First, this is an institution in which each pillar is composed of both welcoming and unwelcoming elements, represented here by the colors black and white. Of course, this is an oversimplification. There is a spectrum of welcoming and restrictive elements that define these pillars, and they certainly are not always of equal weight or size. Nonetheless, it is a good reminder of diverse policies and practices. Second, these elements may vary both temporally and spatially. This is represented by the implied movement of each pillar. As with a barber's pole, these pillars are meant to be in motion, continually twisting to suggest how the

configuration of welcoming and unwelcoming elements change across time and space. Third, these elements vary within the same time and space, but across scales, changing across local, state, and federal levels. Though not illustrated in this figure, such an arrangement might be understood through imagined miniature models of Figure 1. This more complex figure would be made up of one, large, three-pillar model at the federal level, with 51 smaller models underneath, representing the states and Washington D.C., and about 20,000 even smaller models below the states, representing city governments. This is a nested model that represents the multiple layers of governance shaping reception of immigrant and refugee communities (Rodriguez et al., 2022). Ellis and Almgren (2009) challenge immigration scholars to approach integration research from a position that "does not assume a priori the validity of this hierarchy" reflected by the federal, state, local model of immigration federalism (p. 1067). Nonetheless, immigration federalism is a prominent characteristic of the U.S. immigration governance regime, and a useful starting point for understanding how and why subnational governments approach integration in different ways. Fourth, these elements are co-constitutive, meaning that their dynamic evolution is tied together in an interdependent process. This is represented by the lines running between the pillars. Without being exhaustive of the possibilities, this means that norms and values will shape the creation of laws and policies and produce taken-for-granted ways of acting and assumptions (Schneider & Ingram, 1993). Alternatively, one can imagine how cultural logics and assumptions would shape values that inevitably are expressed in law and policy. These four types of institutional complexity are described in more detail in the sections below.

Both Welcome and Unwelcome: A Pattern of Black and White

Each pillar of the U.S. immigration governance regime is complex, containing both inclusive and restrictive elements. Even ignoring variation across time, scale, and place, the regulative, normative, and cognitive pillars of immigration governance contain laws and regulations, values and norms, logics and patterns of behavior that simultaneously work to welcome and exclude immigrant populations.

Exclusionary policies, values, and logics represent one side of this spectrum, working together to produce a context that is unwelcoming to immigrant and refugee populations. Welcoming policies, values, and logics represent the other side of the spectrum, working together to produce a context that invites immigrant and refugee populations. Listen to any political debate and it is no surprise to hear immigrants and refugees characterized as criminals, terrorists, and job stealers. In the same debate, one is almost guaranteed to hear immigrants and refugees characterized as entrepreneurs, hard workers, and neighbors, with additional comments describing these populations as victims in need of protection. It follows that more and less welcoming contexts would emerge to align with these different descriptions and understandings of immigrant and refugee populations.

The U.S. has laws and policies that conform to these mixed perceptions, often varying according to immigrant and refugee characteristics such as race, education, or socioeconomic status. A look at U.S. immigration governance quickly gives the feeling of an eclectic shop, where immigrants are welcomed into communities but seen as outsiders; encouraged to assimilate but valued for their diversity; encouraged to be civically, economically, and socially engaged while combating stereotypes about their histories and backgrounds.

While it might be easier to think of welcoming pillars existing in welcoming cities and unwelcoming pillars existing in unwelcoming cities, this is not – in fact – the case. Instead, immigrants and refugees encounter a mixed reception that includes elements of welcome and exclusion (McDaniel & Smith, 2017; Harden et al., 2015; Schuch et al., 2021). One study found that receptivity may vary by classroom within a school district (McDaniel & Smith, 2017) and policies such as DACA provide work authorization for a subset of unauthorized immigrants, while simultaneously denying a pathway to citizenship for those individuals. Receptivity also varies according to immigration status. In a look at receptivity in Charlotte, Schuch et al. (2021) found that documentation status was a barrier to positive receptivity. They noted that "some participants saw themselves as receptive until extended to the undocumented" (Schuch et al., 2021, p. 163). Thus, cities may be welcoming and unwelcoming simultaneously, with variation related to organizations or individual characteristics.

Time and Space: Reception in Motion

Variation in practices over time and space adds complexity to this mix of welcoming and unwelcoming practices. Literature often engages with contexts of reception in ways that methodologically treat the concept as cohesive and static, examining a point in time (Jones, 2019, p. 1005). Scholars compare integration outcomes across contexts by choosing locations defined as hostile, friendly, or neutral (see, for example, Bloemraad, 2006; Ebert & Ovink, 2014). These studies illustrate how receiving communities may enable or impinge the successful integration of immigrants and refugees, illuminating the factors that determine whether a context is more or less hospitable to newcomers (Jaworsky et al., 2012).

However, an important addition to this literature focuses on the temporal changes in the context of reception. In a study of newcomer reception in three Charlotte, N.C. elementary schools, McDaniel and Smith (2017) describe receptivity as "spatially and temporally contingent" (p. 1061) as they found that the reception of immigrants and refugees varied across different areas of the city, in suburban areas, and over time. Takenaka (2024) notes that contexts of reception shift in response to both "big event" changes in crisis and "long-term social changes" that take place more slowly over time (p. 128). Literature has explored factors that influence the creation of restrictive or inclusive policymaking at the local level, a process that implies ongoing changes in contexts of reception. Factors examined include political ideology, growing Hispanic populations, economic well-being, and crime (Chavez & Provine, 2009) as well as narrative frames and local advocacy efforts (Majka & Longazel, 2017), among others. Crisis can also be an important causal mechanism, as Takenaka (2024) points to shifting contexts of reception after the terrorist attacks on 9/11 or the Mariel Boatlift that brought thousands of Cubans to Miami in the 1980s (De Haas et al., 2019; Stepick & Stepick, 2009). These crises provide examples of punctuated equilibrium, when discontinuous change replaces more gradual shifts in policy.

Immigration governance in the U.S. has also been described as a "patchwork," indicating that contemporaneous geographies often differ in their approaches to immigration and immigration-related policies (Varsanyi et al., 2012, p. 138; Walker, 2015, p. 486). Neighboring states, such as Minnesota and Iowa, may have very different approaches to immigrant integration. For example, in the span of six months at the end of 2023 and the start of 2024, Minnesota enacted a bill providing driver's licenses for all residents regardless of immigration status, while Iowa attempted to pass a bill that would make unauthorized immigration a state crime. Similarly, driving

across a single state may result in moving into and out of counties with 287(g) agreements which allow local law enforcement to enter agreements with the Department of Homeland Security and deputize law enforcement agents to perform certain immigration enforcement activities. Variation can also be found at the "intraurban level" as neighborhoods within the same municipality may adopt different approaches to receiving immigrant and refugee populations (Furuseth et al., 2015; McDaniel & Smith, 2017). Often invisible and overlapping geographic boundaries determine stark differences in the governance of immigration and integration.

Multiscalar Tensions: Moving Across Vertical Scales of Federalism

Welcoming and unwelcoming practices vary across scales, producing tensions between local, state, and federal levels. In the U.S., federal law controls who may enter the U.S. and federal laws have preemptive power in matters concerning immigration. Nonetheless, the U.S. system of immigration federalism is marked by the "constitutional diffusion of power" which results in state and local governments maintaining significant power over the creation and implementation of immigration-related policy (Elazar, 1987, p. 5). Through immigration federalism, the federal government does little to support or direct the way immigrants are incorporated into communities, utilizing a "laissez-faire approach to immigration integration" (Jiménez, 2011, p. 1). Thus, states and municipalities play an important role in determining the integration experiences of immigrants (Ellis, 2006; Ellis & Almgren, 2009; Rodriguez, 2007). Subnational legislation functions as a "back channel" for creating and implementing integration policies that shape the reception of immigrants at the local level (Reich, 2018, p. 377).

Scholars have generally categorized subnational policies as either "welcoming" or "restrictive", and significant work has been done to explain the context that gives rise to these different approaches to subnational immigration governance. Studies have found that welcoming legislation tends to be passed in municipalities with local political allies and a higher concentration of immigrant-supporting organizations (Steil & Vasi, 2014), in areas that are politically liberal and fiscally capable of supporting social investment (Huang & Liu, 2018), and in areas characterized by urban centers, higher levels of education, and larger populations of majority-Democratic voters (Walker & Leitner, 2011). Restrictive legislation is more likely in areas experiencing rapid immigrant population growth (O'Neil, 2010), rapid growth of a Latino population (Steil & Vasi, 2014; Esbenshade & Obzurt, 2008), and areas that are majority-Republican (Ramakrishnan & Wong, 2010). Additional research contends that a local lens limits understanding of policy initiatives and illustrates how restrictive policies emerge in "polarized places" experiencing local demographic changes *while simultaneously* inundated with significant negative rhetoric, especially from the national level (Hopkins, 2010).

Because governments are developing both welcoming and restrictive policies and at different scales, immigrants often face multiple layers of conflicting policy governing their rights and experiences. This can result in tension, when local, state, and federal governments develop immigration-related policies that work at cross purposes. Local norms, NGOs, and street-level bureaucrats further complicate things by shaping policy implementation and immigrant reception. Varsanyi et al. (2012) write that immigration policy, especially enforcement, is "emerging, confusing, and often contradictory" across multiple scales and jurisdictions in the United States. For example, Austin, Texas declared it was not a "sanctuary city" but a "freedom city" in 2018

after Texas SB4 banned sanctuary cities and the federal government threatened to withhold funding from sanctuary cities (Rubin, 2018). The result of such realities within immigration governance is not just tensions between government actors but also significant potential confusion, fear, and precarity within immigrant and refugee communities caught in the middle of conflicting policy positions.

Co-Constitutive Pillars: Insights of Social Construction Theory

Finally, understanding the complexity of the U.S. immigration governance regime requires an acknowledgement of the co-constitutive nature of institutional pillars. There is a connection between each institutional pillar that reacts to or shapes other institutional elements. Social construction theory (Schneider & Ingram, 1993) helps illustrate the co-constitutive nature of Scott's (1995) institutional pillars in shaping immigrant and refugee populations' integration and welcome. According to Schneider and Ingram (1993), norms and values shape the development and implementation of laws and policies that allocate benefits and burdens accordingly while also constructing our mental models of the way the world works. For example, constructing refugees as deserving immigrants through the lens of humanitarianism has contributed to a system that gives refugees immediate access to the labor market. However, the simultaneous strong emphasis on the economic contributions of refugees means that this population is quickly put to work, regardless of their prior occupations, desire to learn English, or interest in returning to school. This framework and resulting policies have resulted in the "steepest occupational downgrading" that positions refugees within U.S. society as victims and low-skilled laborers (Allen et al., 2023; Batalova et al., 2008, p. 10). Another example includes framing of unauthorized immigrants as undeserving

or dangerous, resulting in their exclusion from rights, resources, and protections afforded other groups.

From Durability to Disruption

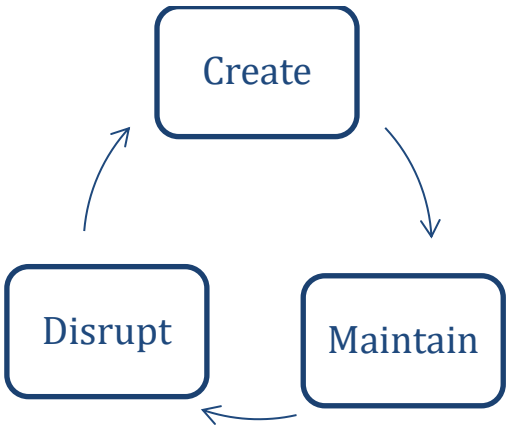
This model of the U.S. immigration governance regime provides a way to begin theorizing change within the institution. More specifically, it provides a framework for understanding how OIRAs might engage in the disruption of unwelcoming practices to begin the process of institutionalizing welcome. As previously described, institutional theory has long emphasized the stability and durability of institutions and institutional practices (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Over time, institutions become less likely to change, as isomorphic pressures move institutions toward convergence rather than innovation (Scott, 2005). Suggesting pathways for change, Oliver (1992) provides a theory of deinstitutionalization in which political, social, and functional factors may overcome institutional inertia to result in institutional change. She defines deinstitutionalization as "the delegitimation of an established organizational practice or procedure as a result of organizational challenges to or the failure of organizations to reproduce previously legitimated or taken-for-granted organizational actions" (Oliver, 1992, p. 564).

More recent work has challenged deinstitutionalization, calling it an "overly optimistic depiction of institutional dynamics in organizational fields" (Aksom, 2023). In place of deinstitutionalization, Aksom (2023) suggests that perceived changes in institutional practices are changes in widely diffused, but not institutionalized, practices. In his reexamination of institutional theory, these diffuse practices are always at risk of "abandonment," while institutional practices are "immune to those dangers typical for non-institutionalized practices" (Aksom, 2023, p. 1567). Regardless of whether a practice is institutionalized or diffused or whether it is to be

deinstitutionalized or abandoned, this chapter is concerned with setting the stage to understand efforts aimed to disrupt restrictive aspects of immigration governance at the local level, in pursuit of institutionalizing welcome.

Institutionalization is a multi-step process that takes place over time. Through institutionalization, "individuals come to accept a shared definition of social reality" (Scott, 1987) as they engage accept behaviors, ways of thinking, and ways of interacting (p. 496). This involves three forms of "institutional work" according to Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) including "creating, maintaining, and disrupting institutions" (p. 215). Figure 2 provides a visual representation of this cycle of institutional work described by Lawrence and Suddaby (2006).

Figure 2: Cycle of Institutional Work



Based on Lawrence & Suddaby (2006)

In this cycle of institutional work, old, institutionalized practices end with change, but new institutionalized practices begin. Simply, the institutionalization of new practices begins with the disruption of established, predominant institutional practices. Disruption can be defined as "engaging in institutional work aimed not at creating or supporting institutions but at tearing them down or rendering them ineffectual" (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006, p. 217). Known by another

name, disruption has primarily been theorized as "desinstitutionalization," which Oliver (1992) describes as "the delegitimation of an established organizational practice or procedure" (p. 564). Through disruption or deinstitutionalization, actors dismantle predominant institutional structures and work to institutionalize new policies and practices. This study predominantly explores this first step in the process of institutionalizing welcome: disruption of predominant and undesired institutional structures that are not welcoming to immigrant and refugee communities.

Institutional theory, as it is concerned with institutional change, provides a framework for understanding how this disruption might take place. While the regulative, normative, and cognitive pillars of institutions "provide stability and meaning to social life" (Scott, 2008, p. 48), they are not invulnerable to change. Actors in the form of individuals or organizations may work as agents of change – challenging or deviating from the patterns of behavior shaped by institutional pillars (Scott, 2005). This may look differently according to the pillar that is being challenged. Challenging the regulative pillar of an institution involves undermining legal authority. This means challenging what is legally permissible, what can and cannot be done or how it can or cannot be done. Challenging the normative pillar of an institution involves undermining the moral basis of governance. This means challenging ideas about what is morally permissive, what should or should not be done or how it should or should not be done. Challenging the cognitive pillar of an institution involves undermining the status quo or assumed practice. This means challenging ideas about what something is, or about the assumed relationship, role, or framework the practice is based.

This study explores this move from durability to disruption, exploring a tension in institutional theory between stasis and change (Clegg, 2010) and the role of actors working to

create change from within an institution. While institutions are often defined by stability and durability (Hodgson, 2006; Scott, 1995), they are also dependent upon their constituent actors (such as individuals and organizations) to exist and persist (Scott, 1995). Institutions may shape behavior, but they do not monopolize it (Scott, 2005). Thus, organizations such as OIRAs retain some ability to respond to their institutional environment. They can be creative and strategic in their engagement with the U.S. immigration governance regime and, as this study will demonstrate, they are.

This creative and strategic engagement, defined by a deliberate disruption of restrictive aspects of immigration governance, is powerfully shaped by the complex and changing contours of the U.S. immigration governance regime. Immigration federalism plays a significant role in shaping strategies for deliberative disruption. Preemptive power at state and federal levels of immigration governance limits some forms of action taken by OIRAs located at the local level and within the institution itself, but the devolution of immigration federalism also allows room for OIRAs to engage in disruptive strategies. This research acknowledges limitations to the policies and programs that local governments can implement concerning welcoming immigrant populations, but also highlights the significant room for local actors to work within and against federal or state policies targeted at immigrant populations.

Empirically, this study demonstrates the important role of multiscalar relations in the emergence of OIRAs within local governments. Focusing in particular on multiscalar threats, or restrictive governance practices across levels of federalism that may threaten welcoming practices, case studies provide examples of how cities leverage restrictive policies or practices to advocate for the creation of an OIRA. Multisectoral partnerships at the local level also play a vital role in

shaping the emergence of OIRAs according to local narratives, histories of serving immigrant communities, and political challenges confronting city welcoming initiatives. It is critical for these multisector actors to prioritize partnership, even when different approaches to welcoming work produce tensions.

This study also explores deliberative disruption of restrictive institutional practices within the U.S. immigration governance regime. Case studies reveal common strategies of disruption that nonetheless encompass nuanced and context-specific tactics, perhaps most impacted by a city's immigration history, local politics, network of immigrant-serving organizations, and crisis. In response to each element, and in each context, OIRAs were likely to demonstrate a balance of partnerships and pushback, oftentimes choosing to work around directly confronting restrictive elements to prioritize newcomers' access to resources. This seemed especially true when resources were necessary to fulfill basic needs such as food, shelter, and health. Such strategies often prioritize responsiveness through disruption of disparate resource allocation over more systemic disruption that would take on laws, norms, and frameworks head on.

This study proceeds in four sections, comprising six chapters. The first section is a methodological chapter which includes an overview of the case study design, the types of data collected and analyzed, and a description of the three selected OIRAs and their respective cities. The second section is an empirical chapter that focuses on the emergence of OIRAs and builds on existing research that has examined the development of subnational immigration-related policies and offices. The third section includes three empirical chapters that explore the way OIRAs employ deliberate disruption to unsettle restrictive aspects of the immigration governance regime's normative, regulative, and cognitive pillars. The final section provides a concluding chapter that

draws together insights from the description and theory building conducted in the empirical chapters and provides policy recommendations tailored for bureaucratic audiences interested in advancing welcoming work in their respective cities.

Chapter 2. Methods

Inference and Positionality

I approach this study through the lens of abductive reasoning. This approach is elucidated through juxtaposition with deductive and inductive reasoning. In inductive and deductive reasoning, research begins with a statement of knowledge. New knowledge is built by moving between the level of the general and the specific. In abductive reasoning, research emerges from a "puzzle, a surprise, or a tension" recognized by the researcher (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012, p. 27). There is no starting statement of knowledge or verification of a "fact" produced. Instead, a researcher articulates a tension and then uses data to make contextual sense of the tension. A researcher's positionality plays a key role in discerning this tension or puzzle. Schwartz-Shea and Yanow (2012) write that "marking something as surprising requires attending to the expectations and other prior knowledge one brings to the field" (p.33). It is thus imperative to describe the events that led me to ask questions about the U.S. immigration governance regime and the role of local offices positioned to welcome immigrant communities.

I come to this field of study as a white, college-educated woman who inadvertently became interested in the systems enabling and restricting immigration and integration in the United States.

After college, I began working for a program called TORCH (Tackling Obstacles and Raising College Hopes), which engaged with immigrant families in rural Minnesota to support high school and post-secondary success. I spent the next five years learning about and working to address the barriers to education faced by mixed-status families, or families where individuals have different immigration or citizenship statuses. Two goals shaped my work: 1) programmatically, TORCH worked to support students' educational and occupational aspirations, and 2) systematically, TORCH worked to help inform the (re)creation of an education system that no longer disadvantaged those from an immigrant background.

These two goals often pulled my work in competing directions. In my time as TORCH coordinator, the program doubled the number of students served, the graduation rates of traditionally underserved populations approached 95 percent, and the college admission rates of TORCH graduates who applied to college approached 100 percent. These were all successes shaped by the programmatic goals of TORCH and touted in grant proposals and school district reports. Importantly, these programmatic successes opened possibilities for the lives of hundreds of young people who pursued careers and lives with increased optionality thanks to their educational achievements.

Our second goal, to create systems change, was more elusive and in tension with programmatic goals. We often created workarounds to produce positive student outcomes, even when they did not create sustainable change. Several examples come to mind. TORCH students rarely succeeded in AP classes, so we created a supported PSEO (post-secondary enrollment options) program to help our students earn college credits in high school. Many TORCH students struggled with professional work experience, accessing school activities, and participating in

volunteer roles, so we created these opportunities and organized the transportation, translated materials, and supported scholarships necessary to make them accessible. These actions created little systems change and, in some ways, disincentivized our district from addressing systemic barriers within the institution. Should the tenuous financial situation of our external, grant-funded program falter, few changes would support the continued success of disadvantaged students in the district.

This experience was the inception of my interest in local, internal interventions in larger systems change. As TORCH coordinator, I partook in well-intentioned efforts that provided good, needed, and desired services to immigrant communities. At the same time, I could not help but wonder to what extent the ability to "make things work" only reified the systems we sought to change. Several years later, these same questions arose when I began interning at the Minneapolis Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs (OIRA).

Similar to my role with TORCH, my internship at the Minneapolis OIRA was shaped by a mission of inclusivity. The city office pursued the inclusion of immigrant communities in several ways. The OIRA drafted city resolutions, established a legal defense fund for immigrants, developed bi-weekly immigration forums to work collaboratively on issues facing immigrant communities, tackled issues of housing and food scarcity during COVID-19, and celebrated immigrant contributions and holidays such as World Refugee Day. Yet the Minneapolis OIRA is also embedded within a governance regime that has historically contributed to marginalization. At dozens of community meetings, city staff and community members considered whether community distrust of government institutions meant that they should avoid using the city logo when advertising events. Similarly, in several cities, I have heard OIRAs discuss how to be

palatable to government investment while still serving immigrant communities. There is a tension in this work along various spectrums, as welcoming initiatives negotiate between responses that are programmatic or systematic, responsive or proactive, indirect or direct, and symbolic or substantive.

Ontological and Epistemological Approaches

While these tensions have shaped my research agenda, it would be disingenuous to pretend that my individual research questions have not changed over time. My questions have evolved over years of engagement with OIRAs through shifting political and social contexts. When I began this research, Donald Trump was president and COVID-19 was unimagined. While I do not see critical junctures upending the immigration governance regime during my research, there were certainly significant political, historical, and social events. During my research, Trump threatened to withhold federal funds from sanctuary cities at the height of a global pandemic; hundreds of thousands of people – racial minorities and immigrants especially – died of COVID-19; the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis sparked racial protests nationally and worldwide. I chose an interpretivist, reflexive approach that allowed for flexibility, as I sought to understand the social world as constructed by participants in my research as they experienced these events.

While some research traditions frown on this type of explorative approach, I work within critical and interpretive research traditions that understand reflexivity as a strength. Joe Soss provides helpful reflection on this reflexive process in email communication with Schwartz-Shea and Yanow:

> The point is not to ask the question so that you can go out and find the answer. The point is to ask a question so that you can clarify your thinking now and raise the odds that you'll

> discover what's wrong with your thinking when you get into the field (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012, p. 37).

A change in question can be framed as a success, acknowledging the role of learning throughout the "life-span" of research (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow 2012, p. 36). Throughout research, I intentionally and continually reassessed my framing and work to challenge categories taken for granted (Pader, 2014; Van de Ven, 2007). Shaping research questions is an act of power, and it is a role dominated by those in privileged positions, dictated by funding resources, and utilized by those with the ability to access and wield results (Rose, 2018b). While certainly not immune to these dynamics, I begin unraveling a puzzle by first listening to and learning from informants (Pader, 2014) and listening remains central throughout my research process.

Research Design: Multiple Case Study Research

For this study, I utilize a multiple-case study research (MCSR) design to understand how different OIRAs 1) emerge from and position themselves within the U.S. immigration governance regime, and 2) disrupt restrictive practices as a step toward institutionalizing welcome.

Though difficult to generalize, multiple case study research is useful in thinking about the layered and dynamic relationships that shape the work of OIRAs. As Ellis and Almgren (2009) note, this work can illustrate "local variations in integration processes and outcomes" (p. 1072). My focus is not on falsification or replication, as I do not hope to generalize a model for all subnational offices. Instead, these cases contribute "theoretical insights" and empirical evidence to a larger body of knowledge related to immigration governance (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2016, p. 34).

Through the multiple-case study design, the analysis works to identify two types of replications, as described by Yin (2003). First, the study seeks to explain the extent to which these

offices exhibit “literal replication” or the production of comparable results (Yin 2003, p. 47). The study also explores “theoretical replication,” or the production of different results but for “predictable reasons” (Yin, 2003, p. 47). With a limited number of case studies, it may not be possible to draw broad conclusions about these replications. However, a central tenant of this study is that a small-n study can do more than provide descriptive results – it can point to causal relationships that help to build theoretical models of the social world.

Two approaches to causality provide context for the role that qualitative and small-n studies might play in constructing causal arguments: regularity and realist approaches. The regularity approach to causality has been more traditionally employed in research. The regularity approach refers to the “constant conjecture” that does not directly observe causal mechanism but discovers causality in the “systematic relationship between inputs and outputs” whereby there are many observations where a certain input (in a certain context) produces the same result (Maxwell, 2004, p. 4). Such a causal pathway is impossible to discern with a case study of three OIRAs. However, a realist perspective of causality shifts focus from input and outputs to considerations of process and causal explanation which do not depend on large-n studies. According to Sayer (1992),

> Realism replaces the regularity model with one in which objects and social relations have causal powers which may or may not produce regularities, and which can be explained independently of them (p. 2–3).

Qualitative studies are uniquely positioned to explore and explain these social relations and are not only capable, but critical, to discussions of causality through their dynamic engagement with the complex processes and conditions that shape social outcomes (Maxwell, 2021). Thus, without making a case for generalizability or replication, this study follows other small-n studies that aim

to use case study analysis to contribute to a causal understanding of the relationship between variables and phenomena of interest (Skocpol, 1979). Of course, insights realized in this research heavily depend on the cases selected and the questions asked.

In this study, I use an informed site selection strategy based on a national review of U.S. OIRAs that I completed as a part of my internship with the Minneapolis OIRA in Fall 2019. Out of the more than 50 municipal sites I identified that summer, this study focuses on three offices located in Atlanta, Georgia (Welcoming Atlanta/Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs), Seattle, Washington (Seattle Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs), and Minneapolis, Minnesota (Minneapolis Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs). The offices are located within Democratic-majority cities of over 100,000 people and less than 1 million people. These medium-sized cities receive significantly less attention in migration and urban studies compared to larger metropolitan areas (Schmiz et al., 2022). In addition, each office represents a context defined by different intersections of political and social factors, as well as different histories of immigration and immigrant populations.

Socio-historical and demographic characteristics are important factors in the proposal and implementation of local immigration-related policy (Huang & Liu, 2018; O'Neil, 2010; Steil & Vasi, 2014; Walker & Leitner, 2011). Atlanta, Seattle, and Minneapolis have foreign-born populations that differ in both size and characteristics (Table 2). Briefly, the foreign-born populations range from about 8 percent of the total population in Atlanta to almost 20 percent of the total population in Seattle. While metro areas tend to have a lower percentage of foreign-born when compared to cities, this is not true for Atlanta where the foreign-born population is 6 percent higher in the metro compared to the city. Additional differences emerge in socio economic status

and region of origin. Minneapolis has a higher poverty rate among its foreign-born and a higher percentage of African immigrants compared to both Atlanta and Seattle.

Table 2: Characteristics of Selected Sites (Atlanta, Minneapolis, Seattle)

	Atlanta, Georgia		Minneapolis, Minnesota		Seattle, Washington	
Population	**City**	**MSA**	**City**	**MSA**	**City**	**MSA**
2021 Total population	492,204	6,026,734	425,091	3,659,156	726,054	3,971,125
2021 Foreign-born population	41,044	849,138	62,965	390,513	140,102	775,513
2021 Foreign-born population (%)	8.3	14.1	14.8	10.7	19.3	19.5
2010 Foreign-born population (%)	7.8	13.5	15.1	9.1	21.9	16.1
Foreign-born region of origin (%)						
Europe	16.6	8.1	7.8	9.5	13.3	14.4
Asia	40.5	33.5	25.0	38.9	56.9	53.4
Africa	10.0	12.1	39.2	28.2	10.6	8.2
Latin America	28.5	44.3	26.2	21.1	12.4	18.5
Foreign-born human capital (%)						
Speaks English less than very well	23.2	39.1	44.8	40.2	33.5	39.5
Less than high school graduate	8.5	20.8	33.2	22.3	13.0	15.2
Additional foreign-born characteristics (%)						
Undocumented estimate*	14.3	32.3	16.8	17.6	17.0	23.3
Entered 2010 or later	39.9	27.8	31.8	29.3	40.5	33.2
Naturalized citizen	45.7	48.7	53.1	58.1	46.0	49.3

This table is based on data from the ACS 5YR tables S0501 and S0502.

* This data is calculated based on 2019 estimates provided by data.cmsny.org and 2019 ACS 5YR tables.

Political context also plays a significant role in determining the reception and integration of immigrant communities (Filindra et al., 2011; Filomeno, 2017; Ramakrishnan & Wong, 2010). Table 3 displays differences in the state-level political contexts of selected sites over the last 20 years. There is a significant difference in rhetoric about immigration between the Republican and Democratic parties, especially with respect to the unauthorized population. Republicans tend to emphasize the need for security and deportations, while Democrats lean toward legal pathways for immigrants to regularize their status (Oliphant & Cerda, 2022). Wong (2017) points to the proposed Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005 as a turning point in post-9/11 partisanship that resulted in the entrenched division in immigration

policy making between Republican and Democratic parties that continues today. It is thus not surprising that the political leadership and political majority within a jurisdiction is associated with different immigration-related policies. The Republican party is associated with more restrictive immigration-related policies and the Democratic party is associated with more welcoming immigration-related policies (Filomeno, 2017; Ramakrishnan & Wong, 2010). These political differences are also associated with different integration outcomes for immigrant populations, as Filandra et al. (2011) find that second generation immigrants have better educational outcomes with respect to their peers in Democratic-majority states as compared to Republican-majority states. As shown in Table 3, the three states where study OIRAs are located represent a spectrum from primarily Democratic (blue) to primarily Republican (red) state contexts. Minnesota is classified as a light blue or purple state, where there is a more significant history of a split legislature and a more recent switch between Democratic and Republican governorships.

Table 3: State-level Political Climate of Selected Sites (Atlanta, Minneapolis, Seattle)

Atlanta, Georgia	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Govenor	D	D	D	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R
Senate	D	D	D	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R
House	D	D	D	D	D	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R
Presidential Vote (state)		54.7% Bush				58.0% Bush				52.2% McCain				53.3% Romney				50.4% Trump			49.5% Biden	
Mayor	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D
Minneapolis, Minnesota																						
Govenor	I	I	I	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D
Senate	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	R	R	D	D	D	D	R	R	R	R	R
House	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	D	D	D	D	R	R	D	R	R	R	R	R	D	D	D
Presidential Vote (state)		47.9% Gore				51.1% Kerry				54.1% Obama				52.7% Obama				46.4% Clinton			52.6% Biden	
Mayor	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D
Seattle, Washington																						
Govenor	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D
Senate	D	D	D	R	R	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	R	R	R	R	R	D	D	D	D
House	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D
Presidential Vote (state)		50.2% Gore				52.8% Kerry				57.7% Obama				56.2% Obama				54.5% Clinton			58.0% Biden	
Mayor	S	S	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D

Based on Ballotpedia.com

In addition to the state-level political context, this study also selected sites with differences in city leadership. While each city has a democratic mayor, the initial selection considered the weak or strong mayor-council structure in each city. At the time of selection and initial interviews, Seattle and Atlanta were strong mayor-council cities, while Minneapolis represented a weak mayor-council setting. However, after the 2021 mayoral election in Minneapolis, the city moved to a strong mayor-council structure. This change means that each city now has a strong mayor-council structure in which the mayor is "the undisputed master of the executive agencies of city government and [also] has substantial legislative powers in the form of budget making, vetoes, and the opportunity to propose legislation" (Dye & MacManus, 2015, p. 306). Nonetheless, offices in Atlanta, Minneapolis, and Seattle emerged under different city leadership structures. These differences and the shift in Minneapolis' city leadership structures provided an opportunity to consider if and how city leadership structures impact OIRAs. The next section provides a more in-depth discussion of each OIRA's local context.

Study Sites

Atlanta, Georgia: Home to the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (Welcoming Atlanta)

A Major Emerging Gateway

This study focuses on non-traditional immigrant gateways, cities lacking a substantial and stable historical immigration presence. Singer (2015, 2016) classifies Atlanta as a "major emerging" non-traditional immigrant gateway, characterized by historically low levels of immigration in the early 20th century but increasing rates of immigration more recently. In the

early 20th century, Atlanta's foreign-born population hovered around 2 percent of the total population. In 1990, the foreign-born population crested 3 percent for the first time. By 2000, the share of foreign-born people doubled to 6.5 percent, and by 2021 that share had increased to over 8 percent. This represents a 135 percent increase in Atlanta's foreign-born population since 1990, nearly twice the rate of increase (70 percent) experienced by the U.S. over the same period (Gibson & Jung, 2006).

While this study focuses on the city of Atlanta, the majority of Atlanta's foreign-born live outside of the city. Atlanta lies at the heart of the Atlanta–Sandy Springs–Alpharetta Metropolitan Statistical Area (ASSA MSA). While Atlanta is a modest-sized capital city, with just under 500,000 residents according to the 2020 census, ranking it 39th among U.S. cities, the ASSA MSA is massive. It is the largest MSA in the southeast United States and among the top 10 largest in the country. It has a population of over 6 million people spread amongst 29 counties, 120 cities, and over 8,000 square miles. The area of the ASSA MSA surrounding Atlanta is also home to the majority of the Atlanta area's foreign-born population, as only 5 percent of the ASSA MSA's foreign-born population live in the city of Atlanta[2].

There are noticeable differences between Atlanta's foreign-born populations and the ASSA MSA. First, the predominant region of origin among the foreign-born living in Atlanta differs from the ASSA MSA. Asians comprise the largest share of the foreign-born within the city of Atlanta (41 percent), followed by Latin Americans (29 percent), Europeans (17 percent), and Africans (10 percent). Alternatively, Latin Americans are the largest share of the foreign-born in the ASSA

[2] Demographic statistics are from the 2021 ACS 5 yr sample tables S0501 and S0502 unless otherwise noted (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021a; U.S. Census Bureau 2021b).

MSA (44 percent), followed by those from Asia (34 percent), Africa (12 percent), and finally Europe (8 percent). Second, foreign-born people living in Atlanta tend to be more recent arrivals, but there is only a slightly lower share of naturalized citizens compared to the average of the MSA. Compared to the foreign-born residents of the ASSA MSA, a higher share of Atlanta's foreign-born entered the U.S. in 2010 or later (40 vs 28 percent respectively), and about 46 percent have naturalized, compared to 49 percent among all ASSA MSA foreign-born. However, considering the larger share of new arrivals among the foreign-born living in Atlanta, this is a relatively small difference in naturalization rates. Third, the foreign-born living in Atlanta have slightly higher rates of human capital on average. Those living in Atlanta are more likely to speak English very well (77 vs 60 percent) and are more likely to have at least a high school diploma (91 vs 79 percent). This is likely related to the higher housing costs required to live within the city limits. Finally, the ASSA MSA is home to one of the largest populations of unauthorized immigrants in the country. In 2019, the PUMAs making up the ASSA MSA had an estimated unauthorized population of over 260,000, although this area is slightly larger than the ASSA MSA, this population would represent around 30 percent of all foreign-born in the ASSA MSA (Center for Migration Studies New York, n.d.). In comparison, the city of Atlanta is home to just over 5,000 unauthorized immigrants, representing around 14 percent of the foreign-born living there (Center for Migration Studies, n.d.).

The Blue Island and the Red Sea

The city of Atlanta is a largely Democratic metropolitan area in the middle of a historically Republican state. Atlanta has a long history of Democratic mayoral leadership that stretches across

decades. However, many surrounding counties and the state are largely Republican and tend to implement policies that are restrictive of immigrant communities. For example, due in part to the 287(g) agreements active in several counties, the Atlanta area saw some of the largest increases in noncriminal arrests and deportations in the country during Trump's first year of presidency (Rose, 2018a). Non-criminal arrests in the Atlanta area increased by over 300 percent between 2016 and 2017, and deportation increased by over 100 percent (Rose, 2018a).

Zooming out to the state level, Atlanta is the capital of the historically red state of Georgia, which is also well-known for its anti-immigrant policies. While the state of Georgia cast its 16 electoral college votes for Democratic candidate Joe Biden in the 2020 Presidential election, the state has historically been a stronghold for the Republican party. Prior to 2020, the state of Georgia was reliably Republican for the previous six presidential elections and elected a Republican trifecta in every election since 2004. Under this leadership, the state of Georgia has implemented some of the country's most restrictive and anti-immigrant legislation. In a study of U.S. state policy context spanning 2009 to 2019, Georgia consistently ranked as the most exclusionary state when considering immigration-related policies such as benefit access, education, labor and employment, identification documents, and immigration enforcement (Samari et al., 2021). Not only did the state remain the most exclusionary throughout the study period, it also implemented additional policies throughout the study period that steadily increased the state's exclusion of immigrant populations (Samari et al., 2021).

Seattle, Washington: Home to the Seattle Office of Immigrant Affairs

A Re-Emerging Gateway

Seattle is another non-traditional gateway for immigration, though the city's pattern of immigration differs from Atlanta's and other "major emerging" gateways. Singer (2016) describes Seattle as a "re-emerging" immigrant gateway. Cities in this category experienced a lull in migration during the middle of the 20th century, bookended by significant migration in the early 20th century and increasing migration at the end of the 20th century, extending into the early 2000s. Nearly 30 percent of Seattle's population was foreign-born in the early 20th century, but this share fell over the next several decades and by 1970 the foreign-born made up less than 10 percent of Seattle's population (Gibson & Jung, 2006). Since then, the foreign-born share of the population has more than doubled – reaching nearly 22 percent in 2010 before declining slightly so that in 2021 the foreign-born made up about 19 percent of the city's population.

The geographic distribution of the foreign-born population looks more similar between the city and metropolitan area in Seattle than it did in Atlanta, but there are still a few notable differences. First, the most common region of origin among the foreign-born living in both the city and the MSA is Asia, though the percentage is slightly higher in the city (57 vs 53 percent). However, in the city, European immigrants hold second place (13 percent); in the MSA Latin American immigrants come in second (19 percent). Second, there are slight differences in human capital markers among the foreign-born. There is a slightly higher rate of English fluency in the city (66 percent) as compared to the MSA (60 percent) and an even smaller difference in the rate of high school completion among the foreign-born settled within the city of Seattle (87 percent) as compared to those settled in the MSA (85 percent). For comparison, these both fall within the same range of high school completion represented by the foreign-born populations in the city of Atlanta and the ASSA MSA. There is also a higher proportion of more recently arrived foreign-born living

in the city (41 percent) as compared to the MSA (33 percent). Finally, the Seattle MSA has an estimated unauthorized population of around 160,000, representing about 23 percent of the MSA's total foreign-born population (Center for Migration Studies, n.d.). The city of Seattle has a slightly lower share of unauthorized immigrants, who comprise about 17 percent of the city's foreign born (Center for Migration Studies, n.d.). This is just slightly higher than the percentage of unauthorized immigrants living in the city of Atlanta.

A Sea of Blue

Seattle is another largely Democratic metropolitan but situated in the middle of a historically Democratic state as well. Seattle has had a string of Democratic mayors stretching back to the 1960s. According to a recent Seattle Times article, Seattle was ranked among the "top 10 bluest areas" in the country, with nearly 55 percent of adults identifying as Democrat or leaning Democrat (Balk, 2023).

At the state level, Washington has a similarly long history of Democratic leadership and generally pro-immigrant policies. The state has elected Democratic governors since the early 1980s and elected a blue trifecta to lead the state for 14 years between 2000 and 2020. In addition, the state has been reliably blue in presidential elections – electing a Democratic president every year since 1988. Using the Cook Partisan Voting Index, which can measure how strongly a state favors one party, the state of Washington is the 7th most Democratic state in the U.S.

Over time, Washington has emerged as one of the most inclusive states for immigrant and refugee populations, and the state has grown increasingly more inclusive over the last decade according to the state policy context study spanning 2009-2019 by Samari et al. (2021). For

example, Washington has long offered driver's licenses to all residents, regardless of immigration status, provided health insurance to low-income unauthorized children, and allowed LPRs to access SNAP within their first five years of arriving in the United States. For comparison, in 2019 only six other states provided health insurance to low-income unauthorized children, three other states provided recent LPRS with access to SNAP, and 16 other states allowed access to driver's licenses regardless of immigration status (Samari et al., 2021).

Minneapolis, Minnesota: Home to the Minneapolis Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs

A Re-Emerging Gateway

As another "re-emerging" gateway, immigration to Minneapolis followed a similar pattern to that of Seattle (Singer, 2016). Immigrants accounted for around 30 percent of the population in Minneapolis in the late 19th century and through the first decade of the 20th century. Over the course of the next 80 years, the share of immigrants declined steadily until immigrants represented just under 5 percent of the population in 1980. Since that time, the city has seen a resurgence of immigrants, driven primarily by refugee resettlement and secondary refugee resettlement. By 1990, the immigrant population accounted for just over 6 percent of the city's total population. Over the next decade, that share more than doubled, and immigrants accounted for over 14 percent of the population in 2000 (Gibson & Jung, 2006). There has been relatively little change in the share of immigrants in the city of Minneapolis since that time, with the city's share of immigrants hovering around 15 percent from 2010 and through 2021.

The proportion of the population that is foreign-born is slightly higher in the city of Minneapolis (15 percent) than in the MSA (11 percent). This is the opposite of the pattern observed in Atlanta, where a higher percentage of foreign-born were found in the MSA. There are again some notable differences to be found within these two foreign-born populations. First, the most common region of origin among the foreign-born living in the city of Minneapolis is Africa (39 percent) followed by Latin American (26 percent). In part, this is due to a significant resettlement of refugees from Somalia living in the city. In the Minneapolis MSA, the most common region of origin among the foreign-born is Asia (39 percent) followed by Africa (28 percent). Second, there are differences in human capital markers among the foreign-born. Opposite to Seattle and Atlanta, there are overall lower levels of human capital among the foreign-born living within the city. There is lower rate of English fluency in the city (55 percent) as compared to the MSA (60 percent) and a lower rate of high school completion among the foreign-born who settle within the city of Minneapolis (77 percent) as compared to those that settle in the MSA (88 percent). There is also a slightly higher percentage of newer foreign-born residents living in the city (32 percent) versus living in the MSA (29 percent). Finally, the Minneapolis MSA has an estimated unauthorized population of about 70,000, representing about 18 percent of the MSA's total foreign-born population (Center for Migration Studies, n.d.). The city of Minneapolis is home to about 11,000 unauthorized immigrants, which comprises 17 percent of the city's foreign-born population (Center for Migration Studies, n.d.). These percentages are very similar to those found in the Seattle MSA and the city of Seattle.

Shades of Blue and Purple

Like Atlanta and Seattle, Minneapolis is a largely blue metropolitan area that has elected democratic mayoral leadership for decades. The city adopted a separation ordinance in 2007 that prohibited city employees from soliciting information about immigration status unless a law explicitly required them to, and it prohibited public safety officers from inquiring into a resident's immigration status in any circumstance when immigration status is not relevant to a criminal case or criminal prosecution. Then-mayor R.T. Rybak explained that, "The role of the police officer is to protect and to serve every person who is in Minneapolis" (ILCM, 2018). By separating the city and the police from immigration enforcement, Rybak hoped to alleviate the fear of retribution immigrants faced when interacting with government officials and police in the city of Minneapolis.

Unlike the persistent red and anti-immigrant state context of Georgia over the last two decades, and the deep blue and long-standing pro-immigrant state context of Washington over the last two decades, Minnesota's state context has been described as light blue or purple. A brief look at the presidential elections over the past 20 years indicates that Democratic candidates have received the largest share of Minnesota votes. However, compared to Washington, the margins of victory for Democratic presidential candidates in Minnesota have been substantially smaller. The largest gap appeared in the 2016 election. Hillary Clinton was the lead candidate in Washington and Minnesota, but Washington's support for Clinton was 8 percentage points higher than Minnesota's. While Washington and Georgia have consistently elected a trifecta of leadership from one party, this has been a rare occurrence in Minnesota. Before 2022, the state had a trifecta for only two years of the last two decades when there was a Democratic majority in the house and senate during a portion of Democratic Governor Dayton's term. Between 2000 and 2020, the state of Minnesota operated under a split or "purple" legislature in eleven of the 21 years, when the

House and Senate were controlled by opposite parties. In six of the remaining years, Democrats controlled both the House and Senate, while in four of the remaining years Republicans controlled both the house and the Senate. Since 2011 the governor's office has been led by a Democrat, but it was led by Republican Governor Pawlenty the eight years prior, and Independent governors the term before that. Looking specifically at immigration-related policy issues, the state of Minnesota also occupies a middle ground between Georgia and Washington (Samari et al., 2021). The state has, however, moved towards more inclusive immigration-related policies, including the passage of Driver's License for All legislation in 2023.

Methods: data collection and analysis

Semi-structured interviews

I conducted semi-structured interviews with thirty-four OIRA staff, city staff, elected officials, and OIRA partners both past and present (see Appendix Table 1). Some individuals were interviewed more than once, and in one instance an interviewee invited two co-workers to join a call. Interviews were based on a list of pre-authored, open-ended questions exploring the origin story of each OIRA, strategies and challenges to creating more welcoming communities, and – given the times – the effect of COVID-19 on OIRAs' work. I also included follow-up questions guided by participants. This style of "responsive interviewing" aims to elicit an in-depth understanding of participant experiences by making adjustments that respond to cues about what informants indicate is most important or interesting (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

Interview participants were first recruited from OIRA staff and city employees working closely with the offices. Initial participants varied by site due to differences in office structure, including departmental collaborations and the office staff size. Atlanta and Seattle have robust staff in an independent office, while Minneapolis has a single full-time staff member located within a broader department. Additional interviews were identified through snowball sampling based on the participants' recommendations. Most interviews were conducted via Zoom, recorded and transcribed using Otter.ti, and edited by hand for accuracy and clarity. A small number of interviews took place in person – over coffee or brunch at a local café or on a walk around the city as dictated by the realities of COVID-19 at the time.

Although this research posed a limited risk to participants, several steps were taken to protect the confidentiality of informants. First, informant names were removed and replaced with a number for use throughout the study. Small offices also provided a challenge. In some instances, I changed informant pronouns to offer protection in cases with limited informants. In the case of Minneapolis, although there is one full-time staff member, the office has supported a number of interns, fellows, and volunteers over the years who I included in my interviews. I refer to each of these positions simply as "OIRA staff." Finally, at times when there is cohesion in an approach across local contexts, I simply refer to OIRAs generally, rather than pointing out a specific OIRA location.

Participant Observation

Participant observation allowed me to act as both researcher and insider (Yin, 2003). Throughout my four-year engagement with OIRAs, I participated in approximately 60 public

meetings, representing around 90 hours of participant observation. I also participated in food distribution programs and medical-legal service provider events. I took notes during meetings that I later wrote up as field note experiences. When I participated in events, I reserved my notetaking and writing for after the event. As I will describe below, my role in these meetings and events varied from a highly engaged and embedded "complete participant" to the removed and unengaged role of a "non-participant observer" (Gold, 1958).

While interning at the Minneapolis OIRA, I worked alongside the OIRA director and other community actors with whom she engaged. This experience occurred prior to formally beginning my research, but it helped me understand the context, establish relationships with city staff, and form my initial research questions. During my research, I attended the virtual, bi-weekly public meetings hosted by the Minneapolis and St. Paul OIRAs, which brought together community partners serving immigrant communities across the Twin Cities. I also attended virtual meetings with a more selective invitation list that helped create the Journey to Belonging report, which is the welcoming plan created to guide integration work in the Twin Cities (Twin Cities G4G, 2022).

My interactions with the Seattle Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs looked different. Every month I attended the Seattle Immigrant and Refugee Commission meeting held online, where I heard updates on the work of the Seattle OIRA. Compared to community meetings in Minneapolis, this was a more intimate setting. I was generally the only guest at the meetings, I always participated in the ice-breaker activities, and there were times (though rare) when the commission called on me to offer my thoughts in meetings. I also had the opportunity to visit the commission in person and present during one of their monthly meetings, where I shared insights from my early research and answered questions about the work of other cities around the country.

In Atlanta, there was no monthly opportunity to engage with the office remotely. However, I spent time volunteering at food distributions organized by Welcoming Atlanta. This was an opportunity to engage with Welcoming Atlanta staff, community navigators employed by the city, as well as communities who received food at the events. During my time in Atlanta, I also had the opportunity to meet with staff one-on-one and follow up on interviews I had previously conducted via Zoom.

These differences across sites undoubtedly affected my data collection, but the fact that each office afforded different opportunities to engage was itself a form of data that informs my research. The forms of accessibility that I had to offices often mirrored the types of accessibility the offices provided to their communities.

Informal Archives

My research also relies on creating and examining what Auerbach (2018) calls "informal archives." These are materials produced or collected by OIRA staff and partners, rather than materials curated in formal archives. I limit my informal archive to materials created by or about OIRAs and the municipal governments they work within, including publicly available interviews with these staff members.

As with other forms of data collection, the types of materials available varied somewhat by site. Table 4 summarizes the types of documents included in my analysis. Materials include city welcoming plans and founding documents from roundtables that established the OIRAs, city

budget proposals, interviews with OIRA and city staff, city resolutions, city council presentations developed by OIRAs, and newsletters.

Table 4: Informal Archive of OIRA Materials

	Atlanta	Minneapolis	Seattle
Monthly newsletters	x	x	
Founding documents	x		
Welcoming plan	x	x	x
Published interviews & media	x	x	x
City budget	x	x	x
City council presentations	x	x	x
City resolutions & public comments	x	x	x

Analysis

The combined use of these methods is an important step toward a more robust understanding of the current immigration governance regime in the U.S. Dacine et al. (2002) describe similar approaches in their introduction of a special issue exploring scholarship of institutional change. In the words of Dacine et al. (2002) and Zilber:

intensive interviews, archival records, and participant observation...allowed these

> researchers to pursue the study of institutional change in a way that, as Zilber notes, "would have gone unnoticed with analysis by approaches that focus on the macro level and on structures and practices alone." (p. 250)

The benefit of such wide-ranging data collection is the ability to triangulate findings, provide rich descriptions of events, and to think about the meaning revealed in data from a number of perspectives. The challenge is bounding the data and the pure volume that must be reviewed. In this study, there were hundreds of pages of materials, including interviews, meeting notes, documents and reports, ordinances and public comments. Collecting this data was an interactive process. It began with a list of individuals to interview and basic documents to collect, but those interviews and documents informed additional data collection. Boundaries were set when there was a point of saturation and materials reflected expected findings or replicated other data already collected.

Analysis was also an iterative process. In this process, I moved between several activities. First, I read data, recorded and defined themes that emerged. Second, I wrote narratives using the data, organized around identified themes, as a way to understand the meaning that was being conveyed. This is in line with Bailey's (1984) "writing as thinking" approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). For example, I first coded data to broadly understand what was most meaningful or at least most often communicated by informants. I found strategies, motivations, and challenges to be common. Digging deeper into my research questions, I looked for themes related to federalism: what was happening at the local level, the state level, the federal level? I then wrote narratives for each chapter that explored the meaning that informants ascribed to this system of governance and how it aligned with their work in Atlanta, Seattle, and Minneapolis. I later coded

themes related to Scott's (1995) institutional pillars: when were informants describing challenges or strategies related to norms and values, to laws and regulations, to cultural patterns or assumptions? Again, I wrote narratives exploring these meanings. Through review and revision, I came to understand these themes through the lens of disruption, as informants consistently described challenges and their consistent, but varied, work toward change. This is the foundation of my analysis and my contribution.

As a launching point for my analysis, I note that my data illuminated the way OIRAs exist as both a strategy and a home for strategy. First, creating an OIRA was a strategy employed by cities to push back against restrictive immigration governance and to institutionalize welcoming work that would support the integration of immigrant and refugee communities. Second, once OIRAs were established, they became sites for strategic action, as they took on the work of institutionalizing welcome by disrupting restrictive and unwelcoming practices embedded in the U.S. immigration governance regime.

In Chapter 3, I explore the emergence of OIRAs in three cities that represent different intersections of social and political contexts, Atlanta, Minneapolis, and Seattle. I identify common strategies that define the emergence of these offices and then explore the different tactics employed in service of those strategies, based on each city's social and political context.

Chapter 3. Multiscalar Threat and Multisector Collaboration: A Dual Tensions Model of OIRA Emergence within the U.S. Immigration Governance Regime

Introduction

Offices of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs (OIRAs) have emerged as important actors within inclusive subnational immigration governance efforts in recent years. Pastor et al. (2015) note, "while initiatives such as task forces and commissions are important, immigrant integration efforts are most effective when housed in government" (p. 14). These offices are home to strategies for institutionalizing welcome through efforts to promote citizenship, celebrate cultural and ethnic diversity, encourage civic engagement, promote economic integration, support access to health, education, and other benefits, and work toward a reality in which immigrants can live without penalty of their nationality. But where do these offices come from? How have they been advanced as a part of the U.S. immigration governance regime? How do different local contexts shape their emergence? Before exploring what it means to institutionalize welcome and how OIRAs approach that work, which represent the primary motivations of this dissertation, this chapter considers how OIRAs emerged in cities situated differently in space and time within the U.S. immigration governance regime.

Conversations with OIRA and city staff, government officials, and community partners, as well as triangulation with written reports, meeting notes, and office artifacts, reveal common patterns in the tensions and strategies that lead to the creation of OIRAs at the local level. My research suggests that the emergence of OIRAs can be illuminated by what I call the Dual Tensions Model. This model is inspired by the Polarized Change model described by Gulasekaram and Ramakrishnan (2015) and Kingdon's (1984) Multiple Streams Approach (MSA) applied to the emergence of welcoming cities by McDaniel et al., (2019). Using the Dual Tensions Model, I highlight a common dual strategy central to the OIRA emergence narratives across the three sites, despite their diverse social, political, and historical settings. This strategy includes two elements: 1) leveraging multiscalar threats to motivate cities to act in response to restrictive immigration governance and 2) facilitating multisectoral partnerships that overcome local tensions and shape the OIRAs to fit within local contexts.

The first element of this strategy is what I call multiscalar threats. In each of the three cities, local actors identified restrictive immigration governance practices and framed them as a threat to immigrant and refugee communities. Threats were identified across scales of immigration governance, from adjacent local geographies to state and federal levels. The diversity of threats identified were tied to differences in temporality and political context that will be discussed below. These multi-scalar threats were leveraged to motivate cities to act on behalf of immigrant communities, with OIRAs being a common outcome across cities.

The second element of this strategy is what I call multisectoral collaboration. Efforts to create and shape local OIRAs depended upon the energies and alignment of local actors, organizations, and the city. Building multisectoral collaboration looked different in each city but

was founded on three themes. To create collaboration across sectors, there was an effort to embrace local frameworks, to utilize whatever networks were available and aligned with those frameworks, and to prioritize the creation of an office over political tensions.

Though diverse local contexts created meaningful nuances in the multiscalar pushback and multisectoral partnership, their use has general logic. Campaigns to establish OIRAs represent a step toward institutionalizing welcome within governance frameworks, and multiscalar threats were leveraged as powerful motivators. In addition, there was reluctance to alienate local community members, partners, or city officials. With some notable exceptions, efforts to establish OIRAs were primarily focused on collaboration and reinforcing local customs and norms. Given these trends, the emergence of OIRAs is perhaps best understood as a limited form of institutional change that also foreshadows or aspires toward more robust institutional change. While later sections will discuss challenges that OIRAs faced with local actors, this first step of institutionalizing welcome amounts to a seemingly benign foot in the door that bolsters multisectoral partnerships in a unified response toward multiscalar threats associated with the immigration governance regime.

The remainder of this chapter proceeds as follows: First, the chapter describes two concepts critical to understanding the emergence of OIRAs and their role in immigrant integration: the context of reception and immigration federalism. Next, I briefly explore the theoretical motivations that may compel local governments to act on behalf of immigrant communities. Finally, I use qualitative data from key informant interviews and publicly held meetings, triangulated with OIRA and city documents, to understand how OIRAs emerged at the local level in Atlanta, Seattle, and Minneapolis. Ultimately, I find that – while each city drew on diverse local resources – they

leveraged threats to immigrant communities at different scales of immigration governance and prioritized partnerships across local sectors to develop an OIRA, despite local tensions that inevitably emerged. Through this exploration, I provide a better understanding of the way local context shapes local strategies to make changes within the U.S. immigration governance regime.

Theoretical Underpinnings of OIRA Emergence

Context of Reception

The unique set of place-based institutional arrangements, histories, social norms, and ethnic communities, collectively known as the context of reception, is essential for understanding how and to what extent immigrants integrate into the receiving society. Welcoming or inclusive contexts are likely to facilitate the integration of newcomers, while hostile or more restrictive contexts are more likely to impede integration (Pastor & Mollenkopf, 2012). Scholars have described contexts of reception as creating either a "stepping stone" or a "sinkhole" for newcomers arriving (Mollenkopf & Pastor 2016, p. 4), illustrating the significant and divergent effects that reception may have for immigrant and refugee populations.

Perhaps the most influential contribution of the "context of reception" literature is its ability to "negate culturalist or genetic explanations" of immigrant integration outcomes by "demonstrat[ing] the importance of the modes in which they are incorporated" (Portes & Rumbaut 2014, p. 148). While assimilationist frameworks focus on individual characteristics and their association with social and economic outcomes (Alba & Nee, 2003), a turn towards the context of reception offers a structural view of immigrant integration that complicates simple ideas about

how migrant choices and skills are linked to integration outcomes. As Portes and Rumbaut (2014) write:

> Social context renders individualistic models insufficient because it can alter, in decisive ways, the link between personal skills and motivations and their eventual occupational and economic payoff. (p. 148)

Reitz (2002) suggests that receiving country characteristics impact integration outcomes as much or even more than the individual skills and capital of immigrants and refugees. In this way, it is possible to understand how and why immigrants and refugees may find themselves in difficult economic circumstances, regardless of their skill or motivation. Literature on context of reception is also intertwined with Portes and Zhou's (1993) introduction of segmented assimilation theory, which notes that "modes of incorporation" into different tiers of the labor market have significant impacts on the integration of immigrants, refugees, and their descendants.

Portes and Rumbaut (1990) provide the first robust description of the "context of reception" in *Immigrant America*. In their conceptualization, the context of reception is based on three main factors: government institutions and policies, labor market conditions, and the ethnic group characteristics in the receiving society (Portes & Rumbaut, 1990). Detailing these three main factors that make up the context of reception provides a greater understanding of the mechanisms at work, guiding the integration outcomes of new arrivals.

Government institutions and policies form a critical foundation for immigrant integration. They determine who can legally migrate and the range of benefits, services, and markets that are accessible to each immigrant population (Portes & Rumbaut, 2014). Broadly, Portes and Rumbaut (2014) describe possible government responses to immigration as fitting within one of three

categories: neutral or passive acceptance, restriction or active exclusion, or welcome or active inclusion. Government institutions and policies across levels of governance, from local to federal, differently target immigrant and refugee populations, often based on immigration status. For example, the Refugee Act of 1980 provides refugee populations in the U.S. with immediate access to the labor market and public benefits such as cash (TANF) and food assistance (SNAP). Alternatively, immigrants with other legal statuses must wait five years to access most public benefits, and unauthorized populations are permanently excluded from legally accessing most public benefits as well as the labor market.

Labor market conditions are a second factor that Portes and Rumbaut (2014) describe as contributing to the context of reception. Classic factors such as the demand for labor in specific sectors or the wage level of available positions contribute to the context of reception. However, Portes and Rumbaut (2014) also note that "the way in which particular immigrant groups are typified" by employers can play a significant role in how certain immigrant groups integrate into the receiving society (p. 140). For example, if a particular immigrant group is stigmatized or stereotyped as lazy or underperforming, they may face additional challenges to being successful in the labor market. Alternatively, there are times when employers intentionally seek out immigrant labor – although not always with noble intentions. Waldinger and Lichter (2003) quoted an employer who asserted, "Immigrant men are going to work much harder and take more crap than any black man" (p. 177). The unauthorized immigrant men interviewed by Waldinger and Lichter (2003) shared that their vulnerability to being fired meant that working the hardest was their only choice.

Finally, ethnic groups are often the front line of reception for newly arrived immigrants. According to spatial assimilation theory, it is common for ethnic communities to form and for ethnic communities to provide support that facilitates the integration of newcomers, but also potentially impedes broader integration and mobility (Massey, 1985). Scholars debate how and when ethnic enclaves shape outcomes for newcomers. Ethnic mobility entrapment suggests that the segregation of ethnic enclaves may result in missed opportunities and economic disadvantage, especially among ethnic groups that are small and under-resourced (Li, 2004; Xie & Gough, 2011). These groups may lack the social or financial capital to effectively access social services, benefits, or the labor market. However, ethnic enclaves or ethnic solidarity may also serve as mechanisms for accelerating integration and economic mobility, shielding ethnic communities from potentially discriminatory or unwelcoming labor markets and building and sharing resources that facilitate access to services, benefits, and advances in employment (Wilson & Portes, 1980). Depending on the characteristics of a particular ethnic community, these mechanisms often result in either higher-status or lower-status jobs and opportunities for newcomers with shared ethnic identities.

While each factor contributes to the integration of immigrant communities, this study focuses on receiving country government institutions and policies. In the U.S., immigration federalism is a critical concept for understanding the receiving government's role in immigrant integration. The system of federalism in the U.S. determines what powers lay only in the hands of the federal government and what powers devolve to subnational state or local governments. In the next section, I briefly describe U.S. immigration federalism and how immigration federalism shapes unique contexts of reception in diverse U.S. cities.

Immigration Federalism

Immigration federalism defines the operation of U.S. immigration governance and its ability to shape contexts of reception by explaining the law and policy-making powers of the federal and subnational governments. The plenary power doctrine, which stems back to legal cases excluding Asian immigrants in the late 19th century (Motomura, 1999), imbues the federal government with control over the admission of immigrants to U.S. territories. The U.S. Supreme Court has upheld this allocation of power under the logic that immigrant admission falls under powers of sovereignty assigned to the federal government (Martin, 2015). It is, therefore, often assumed that immigration governance is the federal government's exclusive domain in the U.S. However, the devolution of immigration policy through the federalist structure of immigration governance means that state and local governments play a significant role in immigration governance (Tichenor & Filindra, 2012). While the federal government retains exclusive power to determine who enters the U.S. and when, subnational state and local governments retain, and have increasingly employed, significant power to create, challenge, and implement laws and policies that shape the day-to-day lives of immigrants and refugees in the United States. Primarily, subnational governments do this through policies in areas adjacent to immigration, such as education or licensing, that directly affect immigrants and refugees but do not challenge the preemptive power of the federal government in issues related to immigration (Newton & Adams, 2009; Reich & Barth, 2012).

Varsanyi et al. (2012) note that the term "immigration federalism" was first coined by Hiroshi Motomura in a 1999 article that addressed a seemingly simple question: "What role should states and localities play in making and implementing law and policy relating to immigration and

immigrants?" (p. 1361). This question about subnational power to determine immigration-related policy and the correlating outcomes of that power being held at the subnational level have been debated in the literature ever since. Immigration federalism may act as a "steam valve" to allow frustrated subnational governments to engage in a cathartic degree of policymaking and avoid large swings in federal immigration policy (Spiro, 1996), or it may result in "laboratories for innovation" where immigration-policies are tested and fine-tuned (Skerry, 1995 in Newton, 2012, p. 131). These theories imply that immigration federalism may be primarily a benefit to immigrant and refugee communities and enable local governments to better serve their needs.

However, it is difficult to predict whether subnational policies will be primarily restrictive or inclusive. To some scholars, the insertion of subnational governments into the realm of immigration law and policy is rife with opportunities for exploitation of or discrimination against immigrant populations. Wishnie (2001) describes the potential for subnational immigration policymaking to act as "laboratories for bigotry" that expose immigrant and refugee communities to subnational experimentation with exclusionary practices (p. 553). Bolstering this warning, Romero (2001) highlights California's Proposition 187 as a "cautionary tale" for the restrictions that may emerge at the subnational level from the devolution of power to subnational governments in immigration federalism (p. 383).

However, immigration federalism may provide more opportunities for states to support, shelter, and welcome immigrant communities (Elias, 2013; Schuck, 2007; Spiro, 1996). Schuck (2007) has argued that immigration federalism has allowed for more inclusive policies, and "the evidence strongly suggests that the largest immigrant-receiving states, as well as some others, are consistently more generous to immigrants" (p. 60). In the early 2010s, several scholars highlighted

the reinvigoration of subnational immigration policies that are "grounded in immigrant-inclusionary rulemaking" (Elias, 2013, p. 704; Gulasekaram & Ramakrishnan, 2015; Steil & Vasi, 2014) and empirical studies have highlighted the growing ability of subnational governments to resist or respond to restrictive policies that emerge at the federal level (Reich, 2018).

While it is difficult to predict what types of policies will result from the devolution of power through immigration federalism, what can be sure is that devolution provides an opportunity for wide variation in immigration-related law and policy across the U.S. (Rodriguez, 2007). Devolution and the role of subnational governments in immigration governance can take multiple forms, including filling the void left by the federal government's "laissez-faire" approach to immigrant integration (Jiménez, 2011, p. 1), collaborating with federal immigration governance through policies such as 287(g) and E-Verify that use local resources for federal immigration enforcement, and combating federal immigration policies either directly (e.g., lawsuits, proclamations) or indirectly (e.g., local policies and practices that undermine or amend federal immigration policies) (Tichenor & Filindra, 2012). Examples of subnational governments challenging federal-level immigration law and policy reach back to the earliest immigration laws in the U.S. Tichenor and Filindra (2012) describe the way U.S. cities, such as New York City, pushed back against federal policy that stripped states of their ability to tax arriving steamships carrying immigrant passengers, depriving states of their mechanism for raising monies needed to support and integrate new immigrant populations.

These conversations about the role of subnational and federal governments in the integration of newcomers continue to this day with striking similarities. In response to the recent large influx of immigrants and asylum seekers arriving in the U.S., New York City Mayor Adams

issued a statement that acknowledged asylum seekers' right to enter and reside in U.S. cities but also highlighted his city's need for resources and help in receiving these newcomers:

> We are calling on the federal government to partner with New York City as we help asylum seekers navigate this process, and to provide financial and technical resources. By law, asylum seekers have a right to be in the United States while they seek humanitarian protection. In New York City, we are responsible for the provision of services and infrastructure for newly arrived asylum seekers and currently residing populations alike. We've been in discussions with our federal partners on this matter and look forward to a quick resolution (New York City Office of the Mayor, 2022, n.p.).

Other efforts to combat or challenge federal policies are also becoming commonplace. Reich (2018) notes that:

> Groups of like-minded states now routinely band together, via federal lawsuits and *amicus* briefs, to stymie and sometimes block presidential initiatives. Increasingly, city mayors and city councils are also offering resistance to presidential initiatives (p. 373).

For example, in 2015, Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton spearheaded a multi-state lawsuit that successfully challenged and blocked the implementation of Deferred Action for Parents of Americans (DAPA), the extension of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) that included temporary deportation relief for parents of U.S. citizen children and children who were lawful permanent residents. In another example, 12 states banded together in 2018 to sue the Trump administration over their intent to add a citizenship question to the United States Census (Wines & Baumgaertner, 2018). Other lawsuits have included cities and states challenging new rules related to refugee admissions (Bellisle & Sinco Kelleher, 2017), benefits provisions (Klar,

2019), and the restriction of federal aid to so-called sanctuary cities (Chappell, 2017). Instances of subnational litigation, driven in part by political polarization, have increased across a number of issue areas in recent decades, and is not unique to immigration-related policy alone (Lemos & Young, 2018; Nolette, 2014).

Motivating Subnational Governments to Act

The former actions have discussed different forms of devolution (filling the void, challenging federal policy, or collaborating with federal policy) and the potential outcomes of those actions (more restrictive subnational policies or more inclusive subnational policies). But what motivates a subnational government to engage in this work, and how do they accomplish their goals?

One school of thought has attributed growing subnational action within immigration federalism to the tension between local demographic pressures and federal inaction. These theories note that an increasing number or percentage of immigrants and refugees in local communities can motivate subnational governments to craft and implement new policies, especially when the federal government is inactive and fails to pass immigration reform at the federal level (see Boushey & Luedtke, 2011). Numerous studies have found a significant relationship between increasing immigrant populations and the implementation of restrictive policies (Hopkins, 2010; Marquez & Schraufnagel, 2013; Walker & Leitner, 2011).

These theories of subnational action are built on conflict and contact theory, with opposing outcomes. In line with a general understanding of Campbell's (1965) conflict theory, demographic pressures bring out natural tensions over scarce resources, making it likely that subnational governments engage in restrictive immigration-related policymaking. However, with respect to

Allport's (1954) classic contact hypothesis, demographic changes may result in a higher likelihood of engagement between foreign-born and native-born residents when it occurs in specific contexts, especially if it increases opportunities for shared experiences, mutual understanding, and the establishment of mutual respect.

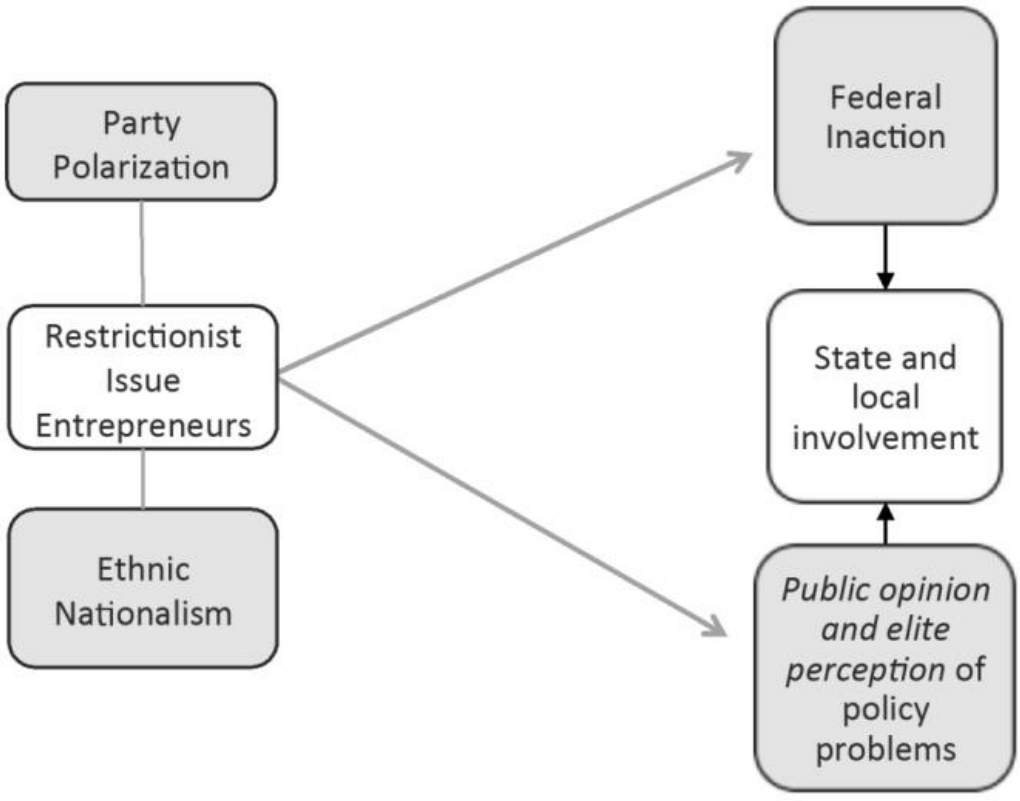
Another school of thought challenges the notion that demographic change and federal-level inaction can explain the proliferation of local immigration policies (Ramakrishnan & Wong, 2010; Ramakrishnan & Gulasekaram, 2012; Gulasekaram & Ramakrishnan, 2015). Gulasekaram and Ramakrishnan (2015) provide evidence against predictions of conflict theory, noting no evidence that rising levels of immigration result in restrictive policies or that governments only develop inclusive policies when immigration levels are decreasing. Restrictive and inclusive policies are correlated with Republican and Democrat electorates and levels of conservatism rather than changes in demographic characteristics (Chavez & Provine, 2009; Ramakrishnan & Wong, 2010). Additionally, Gulasekaram and Ramakrishnan (2015) describe federal inaction on immigration as a "dubious place to start" in creating theory related to subnational legislation, as federal immigration policy is hardly a "blank slate" (p. 88).

Rather than demographic change and federal inaction, this group of scholars highlights the role of politics in the emergence of subnational immigration-related policies. Gulasekaram and Ramakrishnan (2015) developed the Polarized Change Model which emphasized the importance of political polarization and the links between state and federal-level governance in motivating and shaping immigration policy at the subnational level. Issue entrepreneurs play a key role in this model. Borrowing from Kingdon's (1984) development of policy entrepreneurs, Ramakrishnan and Gulasekaram (2012) describe issue entrepreneurs as "those who do the work of promoting the

salience of a particular issue, offering particular frames for understanding those issues, providing particular solutions, and identifying opportunities and venues for policy change" (p. 1445). They can play particularly important roles in framing salient issues such as immigration.

According to the Polarized Change model, depicted in Figure 3, party polarization and ethnic nationalism provide fodder for restrictive issue entrepreneurs to encourage federal inaction and bi-partisan stalemate on comprehensive immigration reform while simultaneously leveraging that stalemate as motivation for addressing perceived problems related to immigration through restrictive policies at the local level (Ramakrishnan & Gulasekaram, 2012).

Figure 3: Polarized Change Model



From Gulasekaram & Ramakrishnan (2015)

However, Gulasekaram and Ramakrishnan (2015) found that several aspects of the Polarized Change Model did not fit the work of issue entrepreneurs seeking more inclusive policies. They found inclusive efforts were more fractured, lacking the ability to comprehensively approach federal reform or coordinate changes at the subnational level.

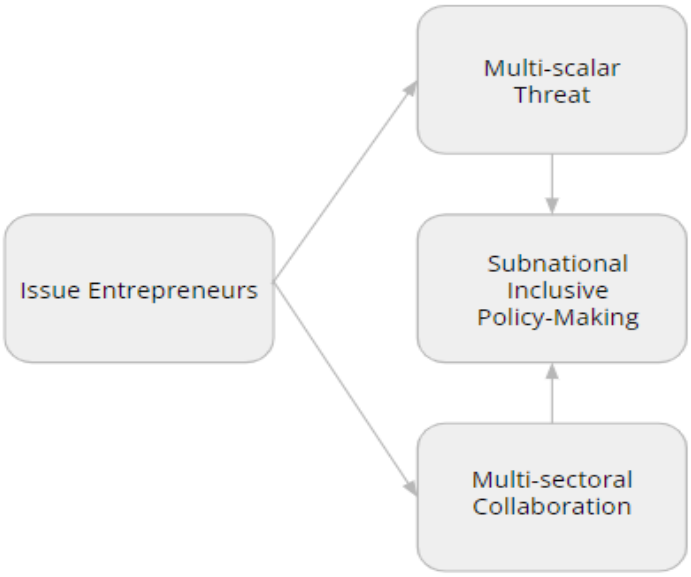
Another important contribution to this literature features Kingdon's (1984) multiple streams approach to analyze the formation of welcoming initiatives in three cities – Dayton, Nashville, and Chicago (McDaniel et al., 2019). This study introduces "multiscalar forces" and "multisectoral forces" to Kingdon's problem, politics, and policy streams to understand local welcoming initiatives and concludes that "various entities from different sectors and scales are involved in the welcoming city initiative formation process in ways that both help and hinder the process" (McDaniel et al. 2019, p. 1142-1143). However, despite masterfully framing welcoming initiatives using Kingdon's framework, this study does little to illuminate the strategic negotiation of the tensions produced across these scales and sectors. Problem streams are all identified at the local level and, while immigration federalism and partnerships across sectors are noted as important aspects of the welcoming initiatives in each city, readers are given scant insight into these mechanisms for change.

In theorizing the emergence of OIRAs at the subnational level, I found echoes of work by Gulasekaram and Ramakrishnan (2015), who discuss the importance of politics and polarization in welcoming initiatives. In addition, my data echoed findings by McDaniel et al. (2019), that problem streams related to restrictive immigration policies were highly motivating to local advocates of inclusive policymaking and used as leverage by inclusive policy entrepreneurs. However, I also found these accounts lacking a robust engagement with different scales of

immigration federalism and was left wanting a better understanding of how local tensions were navigated with respect to welcoming initiatives, not just restrictive initiatives.

Building on the models of Gulasekaram and Ramakrishnan (2015) and McDaniel et al. (2019), I define the Dual Tensions Model (see Figure 4) to explain the emergence of OIRAs within the immigration governance regime at the local level, analyzing both the motivations and the strategies involved in this process, and digging into the relationships and tensions that must be negotiated across levels of immigration governance. I consider the critical role of polarization and partisanship, the interconnectedness of actors within immigration federalism, and the role of issue entrepreneurs to describe the emergence of three OIRAs in welcoming cities but in different temporal, political, and socio-historical contexts. The key mechanism within the Dual Tensions Model is how issue entrepreneurs navigate tensions to push forward the development of OIRAs. In each city, this means identifying and positioning local immigration governance in opposition to some form of more restrictive immigration governance framed as a threat. In Atlanta, Seattle, and Minneapolis, issue entrepreneurs champion the emergence of OIRAs to push back against more restrictive approaches to immigration governance. Next, each city works to partner across differences at the local level despite tensions that arise throughout the process of establishing local OIRAs.

Figure 4: Dual Tensions Model



In each city in this study, issue entrepreneurs engage in these two strategies: leveraging polarization through multiscalar threat narratives and carefully negotiating and repairing tensions locally to promote collaboration. Despite these common strategies, each city's pushback and partnership strategies look different. The analysis below explores these two common themes and the nuanced tactics each case study highlights.

Dual Tensions: Multiscalar Threat and Multisectoral Collaboration

MultiScalar Threat Narratives: Surfing for Problems

Informants described opposition to anti-immigrant and anti-refugee rhetoric or policies as a key factor behind establishing OIRAs in Atlanta, Seattle, and Minneapolis. Multiscalar pushback in each city involved leveraging tension between polarized approaches to immigration policy: between local welcoming initiatives and multiscalar restrictive governance structures. The

diversity of threats leveraged to advance the emergence of OIRAs and inclusive policy agendas suggests a "problem surfing" process by issue entrepreneurs (Boscarino, 2009). Drawing on Kingdon's (1984) multiple streams approach to policymaking, problem surfing refers to the process by which issue entrepreneurs seek out and frame a particular problem to advance their agenda (Boscarino, 2009). In each city, the threat narrative varied according to the political context on multiple scales. Efforts at leveraging multiscalar threats included pushing back against immigration governance at the local, state, and federal levels. Such an approach highlights the role of policy diffusion in OIRA emergence. Policy diffusion refers to the "interrelated decisions of governments" and can include examples in which policies mimic or learn from those in other jurisdictions, but also examples in which policies challenge or intentionally diverge from those in other jurisdictions (Shipan & Volden, 2012, p. 789). In the section below, I use case studies to explore examples of divergent policy diffusion, as OIRAs employ tactics to engage with an adjacent local-level threat, a state-level threat, and a federal-level threat.

Adjacent Local-Level Threat

By 2011, the year before the city established the Seattle OIRA, the state of Washington was already championing many issues for immigrant and refugee communities. For example, in July of 2011 Washington lowered the maximum sentence for gross misdemeanors from 365 to 364 days (Pihl, 2011). Because a one-year sentence can result in deportation, changing the maximum sentence by one day provided a degree of protection to immigrants charged with a gross misdemeanor, such as a DUI. The state had also long been a place where residents could obtain driver's licenses regardless of immigration status, as the state does not require a social security

number for obtaining a license, and a 1993 law allows for alternative documentation to residency (Mendoza & Polkey, 2016).

Even though Seattle was not facing direct anti-immigrant pressures from the federal or state level government in late 2011, some city and community leaders felt uneasy regarding the implementation of anti-immigrant policies in cities, counties, and states adjacent to Seattle. Looking beyond the city boundaries, one informant described the impetus of the Seattle OIRA as stemming from "a lot of anti-immigrant stuff" that was "really gaining traction in the outlying areas of the Seattle area" (interview 20).

Informants named regional examples of anti-immigrant policies and practices as the impetus behind the city's desire to create an OIRA. Individuals specifically named E-Verify efforts in neighboring Pierce County as an example close to home that represented anti-immigrant sentiments. In 2010, Pierce County Council passed Ordinance 2009-74s, which required the use of E-Verify to verify work eligibility in the event of new hires and contracts through the county (Pierce County E-Verify Ordinance, 2011). This ordinance passed despite evidence that such programs can negatively affect perceptions of discrimination, particularly among Mexican workers (Amuedo-Dorantes & Pozo, 2019). In addition, informants spoke of the passage 2010 of SB 1070 in Arizona as a motivating factor behind Seattle's OIRA. SB 1070, known colloquially as the "Show Me Your Papers" law, was signed into law in April 2010. The bill was largely understood as anti-immigrant, and included provisions for law enforcement to investigate the immigration status of individuals they suspected were undocumented. The law was challenged and partially amended due to the potential for racial profiling, but the courts did not entirely strike it down.

These restrictive measures, in Pierce County and Arizona, motivated pushback by issue

entrepreneurs within the city of Seattle. One community advocate shared:

> There was such an anti-immigrant push. And I think Seattle was really trying to show that they were different. They were trying to show that they were progressive and they supported immigrant communities (interview 20).

In addition to supporting the creation of an OIRA, the city of Seattle City Council responded by approving a city resolution that denounced Arizona SB1070 and advised the city of Seattle to cut ties with Arizona. Specifically, the resolution directed the city to halt purchases from Arizona-headquartered companies and to deter city employees from traveling to Arizona on city-related business (Seattle Res. 31214, 2010).

Issue entrepreneurs framed adjacent geographies as threats to immigrant inclusion and used this threat to motivate welcoming work in Seattle. While McDaniel et al., (2019) provided examples of local level threats that could motivate this type of strong response, Seattle extends their work to demonstrate the possibility of a response even when the threat does not directly affect local populations. Rather than responding to local ordinances that would be unwelcoming to Seattle newcomers, the City of Seattle described establishing an OIRA and pursuing other welcoming work in response to a threat that targeted populations in adjacent geographies. This might be interpreted as a symbolic response, as it does not directly intervene on behalf of immigrant and refugee populations affected by 287(g), E-Verify, or SB 1070, but it led to significant benefits for immigrants and refugees residing in Seattle.

State-Level Threat

> We were all under attack and immigrants were under attack in Georgia by the state legislature and some counties. So this was really, let's get together. This is a way of

fighting back and giving voice to reason and the other side of the coin (interview 26).

In 2011, the Georgia state legislature passed HB 87: The Illegal Immigration Reform and Enforcement Act of 2011 (IIREA). The bill was built on anti-immigrant sentiments central to the Georgia Security and Immigration Compliance Act of 2006 SB 529 which required proof of citizenship by anyone seeking public benefits (Georgia Security and Immigration Compliance Act, 2006). HB 87 further targeted immigrants in Georgia by strengthening the role of employers, law enforcement, and social benefit providers to create a robust system of immigration surveillance and a hostile state climate for immigrants. To enlist employers in these efforts, HB 87 expanded requirements for the use of E-Verify, a system that checks for employment eligibility among job applicants. To enlist social benefit providers, the bill created a requirement that residents provide a "signed and sworn affidavit" verifying legal presence in the U.S. to obtain benefits (Georgia IIREA, 2011). This forced benefit providers, including city program administrators and contractors, to screen residents seeking access to services for their immigration status. Finally, HB 87 enlisted the help of law enforcement, allowing officers to check the immigration status of anyone suspected of committing a crime (Georgia IIREA, 2011).

State leaders did not mince words when defining the purpose of this legislation. According to Governor Nathan Deal, Georgia needed this bill in the absence of a "federal solution" that would "defend their taxpayers" from immigrants settling in their communities (Brown, 2011). The bill was a form of backlash against federal immigration policy and the lack of a more robust federal immigration enforcement system. Unable to physically exclude immigrant populations from Georgia due to the federal nature of immigration law, the state created a hostile environment that

would nonetheless surveil, restrict, and punish immigrant populations. Phil Kent, a member of the state's Immigration Enforcement Review Board (IERB) established under HB 87, described this hostility as the explicit intent of the state, and specifically it's capital city, as he "hope[d] that Atlanta [was] one of the tougher places" for immigrants to live, especially unauthorized immigrants (Rose, 2018a, n.p.).

A perhaps unexpected result of this state-level intervention in immigration governance was a response from the local level. While state leaders focused on generating a hostile context of reception that they hoped would deter new immigrants from arriving in Georgia or punish resident immigrants already living there, local leaders in Atlanta decided they wanted a more welcoming reality in their city. By 2013, at the behest of Mayor Kasim Reed, the City of Atlanta had joined Welcoming America as a Welcoming City and committed to "actively welcoming immigrants" into the fabric of Atlanta (City of Atlanta, 2013, n.p.). One year later, Reed and his administration developed a 21-member Welcoming Atlanta Working Group (WAWG) tasked with identifying "initiatives that will create a more welcoming environment for immigrants in Atlanta" (City of Atlanta, 2014, n.p.). The WAWG created a list of 20 recommendations to guide the city toward creating a more welcoming city.

One of the recommendations that emerged from WAWG was establishing a city office dedicated to welcoming immigrant and refugee communities – Atlanta's version of what is generally known as an OIRA. The city quickly embraced this recommendation, and in 2015 Atlanta created the Atlanta Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs[3] (MOIA). City staff and partners

[3] During the majority of my fieldwork, the Atlanta OIRA was known as either the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA) or Welcoming Atlanta (WATL). Toward the end of my field work, the office was integrated with the Mayor's Office of International Affairs to become the Mayor's Office of International and Immigrant Affairs. For simplicity I refer to the office primarily as the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs or MOIA.

described the development of the MOIA as a direct result of the state's anti-immigrant rhetoric. One WAWG member observed that they "were in the middle of [the] state legislature doing very anti-immigrant things" and the mayor was "trying to…use [the welcoming work] as a foil" (interview 26). Thus, the Atlanta MOIA emerged as a new element of the immigration governance regime at the local level in Atlanta not just in spite of stalled federal immigration reform and a hostile state context of reception for immigrants, but *because* of them.

Contrary to the case of Seattle, in which the city leveraged restrictive legislation in adjacent geographies to push for the establishment of the Seattle OIRA, the city of Atlanta responded to restrictive legislation that had direct implications for residents of their city. In addition, Atlanta was responding to a threat coming from a different scale of immigration federalism – one coming from above at the city level. However, both were established during the Obama administration, a much less threatening federal-level climate than that which spurned the creation of the Minneapolis office described in the next section.

Federal-Level Antagonism

While Atlanta battled the restrictive policies of the Georgia legislature, Minneapolis had a very different state-level experience. The Minnesota legislature was most often described as neutral or passively accepting of immigrant communities and usually more welcoming than not (Martinez et al., 2012). By 2016, the state had not passed the Driver's License for All bill, despite its introduction to the legislature numerous times. It also did not offer some health and social benefits to immigrants like other inclusive states (Samari et al., 2021). However, the state had instituted in-state tuition at state colleges and universities for unauthorized immigrants, implemented the Minnesota Dream Act to provide some state aid to unauthorized students

attending postsecondary education, and provided health insurance to pregnant unauthorized immigrants – policies that not all states have. In light of this neutral or inclusive approach to immigration-related policy at the state level, the city looked beyond state borders when leveraging a threat narrative.

Before the 2016 presidential election, Trump's campaign took a hard line on immigration. Anti-immigrant and anti-refugee rhetoric and policies proposed by Trump during his campaign meant that his election created ripples of fear and uncertainty in immigrant and refugee communities throughout the country. Minneapolis was no exception. In response, the community presented Resolution 2016R-516 ten days after Trump's election. The resolution reaffirmed Minneapolis's "commitment to be a sanctuary city" (Minneapolis Res. 2016R-516, 2016). It passed with a unanimous "aye" vote from the 11 present council members and was subsequently approved by the mayor (Minneapolis Res. 2016R-516, 2016). This was the beginning of a city campaign to confront and curtail the hostile actions of the federal government under the Trump administration.

In mid-April 2017, Mayor Hodges delivered a speech titled "One Minneapolis in the Time of Trump." Addressing a crowd of Minneapolites, Hodges (2017a) asserted:

> I have said repeatedly that if Donald Trump is coming after our immigrant community, he'll have to get through me first, through all the rest of Minneapolis first.

The rest of Hodges' speech described a battle between cities and the federal government in accusatory and defiant tones. Hodges (2017a) described disparagingly Trump's attack on marginalized communities but also defiantly described the rising importance of cities as protectors and defenders of their populations:

> In this unique moment, in the time of Trump, cities and the people who live in them are on the front lines. In the time of Trump, as the federal government abandons people, we who live in cities are the principal targets of attack.
>
> I am mayor of a city at a time when Donald Trump is the president of the United States. I am also mayor of a city whose people have made the commitment to come together as One Minneapolis, to build a city that now more than ever, will prove a beacon for the rest of the country.
>
> As a City government, our first order of business in the time of Trump is to stand firm with, defend, and support our people and our communities who are under attack.

Hodges's words illuminate tensions between the federal and local levels of immigration governance. While immigration federalism divides powers of immigration governance between federal and sub-federal levels, it also inextricably links them. Rather than separate spheres of action – with immigration regulated at the federal level and integration governed at the local level – actions at one level of immigration federalism are causally linked to actions at another level. While Trump made national and global statements about immigration, his comments were received at the local level. Hodges (2017a) explained:

> Donald Trump was very specifically attacking immigrants to the United States and very specifically attacking Somali people who are refugees as well as immigrants to Minnesota. He came after my constituents, which I was not pleased about.

In response, Hodges and the city of Minneapolis committed to supporting immigrant and refugee communities in both symbolic and practical ways.

In the rest of Hodges' April 2017 speech, she described the ways the Minneapolis city

government would "stand firm" in response to the Trump administration's threats against immigrant communities (Hodges, 2017a). Some of these were ongoing investments, and some of them were new. She described the separation ordinance put in place to prevent Minneapolis police from asking victims or witnesses of a crime about their immigration status. This decision, she hoped, would encourage immigrants and refugees to feel safe interacting with police when they were in danger. She described the decision for Minneapolis to sign onto a lawsuit alongside other cities and counties challenging Trump's threat to cut federal funding from so-called "sanctuary cities." She described increased monetary support of city services for immigrant and refugee communities, noting the city was not always meeting newcomers' needs. All these actions were meant to increase the successful integration of immigrant and refugee communities. These actions motivated by the Trump administration, and they were part of the groundwork for an OIRA to emerge in Minneapolis, a cause that was then pushed forward through multisectoral collaboration.

Multisectoral Collaboration

Threat narratives played a key role in motivating cities to prioritize the establishment of an OIRA, but the work to implement the creation of these OIRAs depended heavily on multisectoral partnerships. Multisectoral collaboration involved local allies working together to create a vision for the creation of an OIRA and determining what the office would look like, where it would sit in city government, and what it might prioritize.

While multisectoral collaboration was common in each city, it also took on context-specific roles. Local partners and their efforts varied according to local narratives, the maturity of immigration-serving organizational networks, and local power dynamics. In the section below, I use case studies to explore the importance of these multisectoral collaborations, but also how they

varied by city. First, I explore local narratives and the way city welcoming efforts embraced local values to set the stage for the particular kind of collaboration sought in each community. These narratives highlighted economic priorities in Atlanta, a history of stark disparities in Minneapolis, and a vision of welcoming exceptionalism in Seattle. Second, I explore the dynamics of local networks shaped by a city's history (or lack of history) serving immigrant and refugee populations. Finally, I explore forms of political opposition and the strategies used to align the interests of allies and adversaries in different political climates.

Embracing Local Values

Campaigns to establish OIRAs commonly chose to embrace local values. Embracing local values has been described as an "early priority and focal point" for communities working to develop more welcoming cities (Broadhead, 2018, p. 1). Through this strategy, efforts to promote welcome were meant to feel familiar and non-threatening to local communities. Across study sites, champions of the welcoming cause embraced local narratives that encouraged inclusion and also reflected the social and political values of the larger community.

In each city, participants emphasized different values and narratives familiar in their communities. In the anecdotes below, each narrative is briefly explored. In Atlanta, the "city too busy to hate," there was an emphasis on economic advancement (Kruse, 2005). In Minneapolis, home of the "Minnesota Paradox," there was an awareness of historic disparities and a desire to address those disparities (Myers, 2020). In Seattle, a city "where immigrants are thriving best," there was a desire to stand out and uphold the city's commitment to immigrant communities (Clark,

2022, p. 13). Thus, through the common strategy of embracing local values and narratives, cities took diverse approaches to OIRA formation in ways that shaped the offices and their priorities.

A City Too Busy to Hate: Economic and Entrepreneurial Narratives

Embracing a history of investing in economic advancement was a critical factor in the emergence of the Atlanta MOIA. Economic narratives and incentives can be especially compelling in advancing more inclusive policies in places where businesses and industries rely on immigrant labor (Blizzard, 2022; Blizzard & Johnston, 2020). While an economic framing of immigrant inclusion may come with tradeoffs including a "narrow definition of economic worth" for immigrant populations (Gleeson, 2015, p. 400), it is nonetheless one of the most prolific narratives used to promote immigrant and refugee inclusion.

Atlanta is known as the "city too busy to hate" – a slogan credited to Mayor Hatfield in 1955 and popularized in the 1960s during the mayoral administration of Ivan Allen (Kruse, 2005). In general, this narrative was about prioritizing business, economic development, and the city's growth over the preservation of racial segregation. As Kruse (2005) writes in a history of modern conservatism that developed in Atlanta, this was "a bold model that held that progress in race relations would create progress in economic growth, too" (p. 20). Desegregation of Atlanta was a more difficult matter than this slogan suggests. Racial tensions were high during the civil rights era and critics dubbed Atlanta "the city too busy *moving* to hate" in the 1970s when the city saw significant white flight (Kruse 2005, p. 5). Still, the idea that a pragmatic approach to social issues can allow for good business and a growing economy continues to thrive in Atlanta today.

Linking efforts to welcome immigrant communities with economic development was a way to embrace local values, prioritizing a healthy economy over associated social or cultural

challenges. Put bluntly, it was politically easy to pitch a more welcoming Atlanta when the initiative was described as an opportunity to increase Atlanta's workforce and economic output. The opportunity to embrace economic development was the "voice of reason" that allowed partners to come together in Atlanta in opposition to the state's legislative attack on immigrants (interview 26).

This narrative of economic development was promoted by Mayor Reed and embraced by the WAWG. From the beginning, attracting immigrants to support the growth of Atlanta was a high priority. In an interview with WAWG leadership, a spokesperson paraphrased Mayor Reed:

> One of the reasons I want to do this is we need to grow the city of Atlanta. The city of Atlanta is only 800,000 people. The city of Atlanta is small. I mean, that's why it never shows up in big city maps, because Atlanta has like 7 million people but the city of Atlanta is only 800,000 people. And so we need to attract people to the city. I want to attract immigrants (interview 26).

In a formal statement published when Atlanta joined Welcoming America, Mayor Reed shared this vision publicly by saying:

> In partnership with Welcoming America, the City of Atlanta will continue to work on welcoming, including, and supporting the economic and social contributions of immigrants to enhance our city's cultural fabric, economic growth, and global competitiveness. (City of Atlanta, 2013)

The statement aligns Atlanta with other welcoming cities, but welcoming is clearly described as a strategy rather than a goal. Reed's goals in this statement include cultural vibrancy, economic growth, and global competitiveness. Welcoming is a tactic for achieving those community goals,

a means to an end. Creating a welcoming city for immigrants is framed not as a standalone objective but as a strategic move that could benefit the whole city through economic gains.

The Minnesota Paradox: Historical and Contemporary Disparities

Narratives about values in Minneapolis were complex and conflicted. Even though Minneapolis is a large, liberal city, discrimination and barriers faced by racial and religious minorities were described as rooted in a history of racial disparities still reflected in contemporary policies and practices. Historically, while Minnesota is a top-ranked place to live, it has some of the worst disparities in the country for marginalized populations, particularly the state's black populations (Myers, 2020). This phenomenon has been labeled the Minnesota Paradox by University of Minnesota professor Dr. Samuel L. Myers (2020). According to Myers (2020), the "crux" of the Minnesota Paradox is "the simultaneous existence of Minnesota as the best state to live in, but the worst state to live in for blacks" (n.p.).

In Minneapolis, where African immigrants are the largest population of foreign-born residents, the Minnesota Paradox has significant implications for the experiences of immigrants as well. One former city official reiterated this idea throughout our conversation:

> The context of having most of the immigrants be black and brown people from the global south is a significant reason why they need special services at all (interview 10).

And also:

> The reason that we need the services for immigrant folks is not inherently because they're immigrants…but because the folks we were talking about were people of color, often low income – immigrants and refugees I should say – and in the case of Somali people, often Muslims, which in this country, folks face increased barriers just because of

> their religion (interview 10).

In other words, language and cultural differences are only some of the factors that may make it difficult for immigrant and refugee populations to integrate into Minneapolis. City staff and officials recognize a history that, particularly along racial lines, disenfranchised minority populations. That same former official stated,

> Most city policy is set up to get better outcomes for white people than people of color. Most city policy is designed to get better outcomes for people born in the U.S. than it is for immigrants, particularly if it's immigrants of color, or people who don't speak English, or both (interview 10).

Such comments highlight the role of intersectional identities in shaping the disparate outcomes of diverse populations in Minneapolis, despite the city often being understood as a welcoming city.

Combining archival evidence with informant interviews provided mixed views on the city, and a complex narrative. Digging into the archives provided evidence that, at least in public-facing comments, officials at that time painted the relationship between the city and immigrant communities in a positive light. For example, then-Mayor Betsy Hodges announced on Twitter, "I'm proposing the creation of the Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs to preserve our status as a welcoming city" (Hodges, 2017b). Her comments about the preservation of a welcoming city suggest that this welcoming work was well underway in Minneapolis.

However, these comments did not sit well with some advocates. One community member who partnered with the Minneapolis OIRA expressed clear frustration with this portrayal of Minneapolis as a welcoming city. This community partner shared:

> So Twin Cities…had this reputation of being very welcoming to immigrants…But you

> know, in some respects, I think it's kind of BS. It's almost like the inscription on the Statue of Liberty. Because I think that yes, there were good things that were done. But was the hard work that was really necessary to ensure the success of people, done? Probably not, because when you look at the poverty rate, and you look at all the different indicators, we have not been able to make the type of commitment to the success of people that's necessary to really truly be a welcoming community (interview 4).

These comments express frustration with what the advocate perceived as symbolic acceptance of newcomer communities, but a lack of substantive, discernible outcomes for those same communities. This comment is in tension with Hodges announcement of the city OIRA, but in line with the realities outlined in the Minnesota Paradox which described how the city, and state more broadly, had not upheld expectations as a welcoming city, resulting in significant challenges for minority populations. Interestingly, conversations with a former elected official were more in line with frustrated community advocates, suggesting that more positive comments, such as those by Mayor Hodges, may have been politically motivated.

Nonetheless, there was some alignment between city officials and community advocates in the narratives surrounding the emergence of the Minneapolis OIRA. Though disagreement was expressed around former efforts by the city to welcome diverse populations, there was a simple narrative in Minneapolis about needing to take action. In summary:

> The racial and religious makeup of immigrants in Minneapolis meant that they were going to face barriers, repression, lack of opportunity, all kinds of difficulties. And, at that stage, targeted attacks from the federal government meant that the city could take action in a way that was useful (interview 10).

Trump's anti-immigrant and refugee stance at the federal level created a window of opportunity for policymakers and advocates to unite around the idea that there were important ways for the city to support and invest in immigrant and refugee communities, including through the development of the Minneapolis OIRA. Overcoming differences in perceptions of Minneapolis' welcoming efforts prior to Trump's election, allies of the immigrant and refugee community came together around the idea that there was still significant work left to be done in order to institutionalize welcome at the local level.

While all informants acknowledged disparities in their respective communities, Minneapolis centered this as a community narrative that motivated collaboration. Admittedly, this may be in part due to the context of the interviews. Many of these conversations also took place in the months after the murder of George Floyd, an African American man murdered during arrest at the hands of the Minneapolis Police Department. These events resulted in renewed conversations about the role that race played in shaping local relationships between the city and its residents. Such a brutal event was a stark reminder of the different experiences of white and non-white residents in Minneapolis. Nonetheless, this was a central narrative described by informants in Minneapolis.

Where Immigrants Thrive: Narratives of Exceptionalism

The narrative of Seattle's exceptionalism created public sentiment that Seattle should strive to push back, at least symbolically, against restrictive immigration policies in other geographies by demonstrating a commitment to welcoming immigrant and refugee communities. This common local narrative asserted that Seattle stands out in comparison to other welcoming cities - a

perception recently formalized by a Bush Institute Report that ranked Seattle in the top five U.S. metro areas "where immigrants are thriving best" (Clark, 2022, p. 13). City and OIRA staff described Seattle as a place where welcoming immigrant and refugee communities was made relatively easy due to the local political context. One OIRA staff member shared that "being in a city like Seattle was definitely an advantage" because the city itself is "so progressive and so pro-supporting our immigrant populations" (interview 14). Many other cities "aren't as proactive as Seattle" (interview 14). OIRA staff members were aware of what they described as a privileged position in Seattle, where they were not confronted with some of the barriers to welcoming work faced by other cities, such as the anti-sanctuary laws passed in Georgia or Arizona's SB 1070.

Part of this narrative of welcome and exceptionalism in Seattle was the city's early adoption of initiatives that worked to champion immigrant and refugee communities. In 2007, before the Seattle Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs was established, Seattle created the Immigrant and Refugee Advisory Board[4] and the Immigrant and Refugee Report Action Plan (IRRAP). The IRRAP suggested numerous city actions to improve Seattle's integration of immigrants and refugees into the community (IRC, 2007). Priorities included bolstering the city's translation and interpretation services, a focus on recruiting bilingual staff, and a plan for the newly established Immigrant and Refugee Advisory Board to oversee the implementation of the IRAP (Brown et al., 2008). These priorities underscore the city's understanding of welcoming as a two-way process that involves educating immigrant and refugee communities and shifting the work of the city to better serve these communities. The focus also demonstrates the importance of representation through the recruitment of diverse city staff and a desire to serve immigrant and

[4] Later renamed the Immigrant and Refugee Commission.

refugee communities that may be more marginalized – specifically those that do not speak English fluently.

Seattle Ordinance 123822 established the Seattle Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs as an extension of this "proactive" work led by the Mayor and City Council to address challenges immigrant communities faced (Seattle Ord. 123822, 2012). According to the ordinance, the city's decision to create an OIRA was aimed at "strengthening the relationship between government and [immigrant] communities," highlighting the "value of cultural diversity" and also recognizing that "language and cultural barriers may compromise equal access to government services and programs" (Seattle Ord. 123822, 2012). This narrative focused on relationships, service, and cultural values.

Embracing local narratives and values was a common strategy used by Atlanta, Minneapolis, and Seattle as they worked to create welcoming cities and push for local OIRAs. Across each city, informants described the opportunity to engage with and build upon historical frameworks that would resonate with the broader communities. Because of their diverse historical contexts, this meant that narratives sounded very different and included promoting economic contributions, highlighting a need to address historical disparities, and embracing a role as a leader in the welcoming movement. Recognizable narratives proved to be a useful tool. They demonstrated community values and were a politically palatable approach for creating cohesion around OIRAs as an important welcoming strategy.

Local Networking in Re-Emerging and Newly Emerging Immigrant Gateways

Local networks were pivotal to the emergence of each OIRA. However, their strength, number of partners, and role varied by city. Local networks differed in part due to local histories of immigration and the landscape of immigrant-serving nonprofits and organizations. Seattle and Minneapolis are considered re-emerging gateways of immigration, or cities where low levels of immigration followed a period of significant immigration from the beginning of the 20th century until recently (Singer, 2013). In these cities, prior experience with immigration and refugee resettlement have resulted in well-established and active networks of local immigrant-serving nonprofits, and these organizations pushed for the creation of an OIRA. Atlanta is considered an emerging gateway of immigration, or a city with little history of immigration that is currently experiencing a rapid increase in the number of newcomers arriving (Singer, 2013). Compared to re-emerging gateways like Minneapolis and Seattle, Atlanta has a less well-developed network of local immigrant-serving organizations, and it was a national networking organization, Welcoming America, that first pitched the Atlanta OIRA. From there, a variety of predominantly business-oriented partners from the region helped to shape the OIRA and its mission despite less direct service experience. The cases below demonstrate the role that a history of immigration, or lack thereof, may play in shaping multisectoral collaboration and networking in support of OIRA formation.

Partnerships in Re-emerging Gateway Cities

"Our office came about from community pressure" (interview 11).

Local community partners pushed for the development of an Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs in Seattle and Minneapolis. Both cities have mature immigrant-serving nonprofit networks with deep local roots in the community. The energies of these nonprofits and local advocates were instrumental to the emergence of the cities' OIRAs.

"It was advocates" (interview 11). That was how OIRA staff in Seattle described who was responsible for the creation of the OIRA. In response to the external threat of restrictive policies in neighboring counties, advocates in Seattle pushed the city to create policy and a city governance structure that would demonstrate a commitment to welcoming immigrant communities. Foremost amongst those advocates was the Washington state-based advocacy organization OneAmerica. Formerly known as the Hate Free Zone and established by now-Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal in the wake of anti-immigrant sentiment after 9/11, OneAmerica focused on grassroots organizing to support the inclusion of immigrant and refugee communities and was well-positioned to push for change in Seattle.

Responding to anti-immigrant policies in neighboring geographies, OneAmerica was intent on identifying "some pro-immigrant policies [they] could pass" (interview 20). One of those policies included the creation of a city OIRA in Seattle. However, OneAmerica did not push for this office alone. In a Seattle City Hall Budget Meeting in 2011, OneAmerica joined forces with the Immigrants and Refugees for Action Coalition, composed of 32 local organizations advocating for the city to support immigrants and refugees and the creation of an OIRA in Seattle (OneAmerica, 2011).

This push for an OIRA in Minneapolis was dependent upon collaboration between community organizations and the city. Prior to the approval of an OIRA, the city appointed

Welcoming City Task Force and community partners came together in the Immigration and Refugee Convening. The community partners in this conversation demonstrate the diverse network of immigrant-serving organizations involved in these efforts, and a focus on the legal rights and protection of immigrant communities. The convening included 13 local organizations: Lao Assistance Association, United Cambodian Association of Minnesota, Hmong American Mutual Assistance Association, Lutheran Social Services, #ReleaseMN8, Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota, Advocates for Human Rights, Latino Communities United in Service (CLUES), Volunteer Lawyers Network, Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), International Institute of Minnesota, and the University of Minnesota Law School (meeting notes, 08.June.2017). Early conversations prioritized understanding the role that each organization was playing, the resources needed, and how to "maximize services and resources to best serve the Minneapolis community" (meeting notes, 08.June.2017). Over time, this advisory list would grow to include representatives from the healthcare sector, education sector, additional ethnic communities, immigrant and refugee service coordinators from local organizations such as the YMCA as well as state-level departments, local businesses and economic development, and more as the initiative strove to take holistic approach to addressing disparities in newcomer outcomes in Minneapolis (meeting notes, 31.March.2021).

One local immigrant-serving became a key networking organization in the push for a Minneapolis OIRA. An organization called the Minnesota Immigrant Rights Action Committee (MIRAC) spearheaded the efforts. MIRAC is an all-volunteer, grassroots organization focused on immigrant rights that formed in the spring of 2006 at the height of the most recent immigration reform protests in the United States (MIRAC, n.d.). MIRAC composed a 13-point Sanctuary

Platform, and other local organizations signed on. Supporting organizations included public and private sector unions, ethnic organizations and immigrant-serving organizations, churches, student groups, and more (MIRAC, n.d.)[5]. The Sanctuary Platform included a list of thirteen policy proposals that confronted immigration restrictions (City of Minneapolis, 2017). Proposals included funding interventions to combat legal, housing, and employment challenges faced by immigrant and refugee communities living in Minneapolis. In addition, the final proposal of the platform reads: "Establish a new municipal Office for Immigrant & Refugee Relationships" (City of Minneapolis, 2017).

Community advocates pushed hard for this proposal, calling for substantive action to address racial disparities and create a more inclusive city (FightBack! News, 2017). At one-point, advocates entered City Hall to demand action by chanting: "What do we want? Sanctuary! When do we want it? Now!" (FightBack! News, 2017). Ultimately, the city and community advocates found common ground, and the Sanctuary Platform was approved, including support for creating the Minneapolis Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs.

Negotiating New Partnerships in an Emerging Gateway City

In Atlanta, the narrative around community collaboration did not begin with grassroots movements led by advocates. According to local informants, the idea for a local immigrant and refugee-serving city office originally came from Welcoming America. While Welcoming America

[5] Organizations included AFSCME Local 3800, AFSCME Local 2822, Anti-War Committee, Asamblea de Derechos Civiles, Asian American Organizing Project, Centro Campesino, Communities United Against Police Brutality (CUAPB), Filipinxs for Immigrant Rights & Racial Justice in Minnesota (FIRM), First Congregational Church of MN, Immigrant Welcoming Team of Plymouth Congregational Church, Inquilinx Unidxs por la Justicia, Minnesota Conference of the United Church of Christ, Our Revolution TC, SEIU Healthcare Minnesota, SEIU Local 26, Students for a Democratic Society at UMN, TC COalition for Justice 4 Jamar, and Welfare Rights Committee.

is now a large and nationally recognized nonprofit that engages with hundreds of cities and organizations across the U.S. and even internationally, the organization was then only three years old. According to this informant, Welcoming America was "very new," and interested in "get[ting] into local communities to create these welcoming initiatives" (interview 26). The organization was also local, established in Decatur, just a 15-minute drive east of Atlanta.

The initiative to create a welcoming city gained momentum with Atlanta's then-mayor Kaseem Reed's endorsement, and so did new partnerships with local communities and organizations. Atlanta's strong focus on the relationship between immigration and fostering a robust economy was evident in these collaborations. Many partners that came together to form the Welcoming Atlanta Working Group (WAWG), tasked with creating a vision for Atlanta as a welcoming city, were from business-oriented organizations. Looking over the list of fellow working group members, one informant told me, "We had hot shots in here. We had lots of consular officers, big companies, Metro Atlanta businesses" (interview 26). The informant expressed pride in the powerful voices that came to the table for the WAWG. The connections and talents of the working group aligned with the "very business-driven" vision of welcoming in Atlanta (interview 30).

In total, the WAWG included members from 21 organizations, including the Latina American, Georgia Hispanic, German American, and Metro Atlanta Chambers of Commerce, the Consulate General of Mexico and Nigeria, the Georgia State House, Invest Atlanta, Coca-Cola, Atlanta Regional Commission, the Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta, Georgia Association of Latino Elected Officials, and the Atlanta Public School Board. Without a robust immigrant-serving nonprofit sector, these partnerships formed the backbone of Atlanta's

welcoming initiative. In addition, there were a small number of more traditional direct service organizations and advocacy groups, such as the Asian American Legal Advocacy Center, the Coalition of Refugee Serving Agencies, and Operation Hope.

The city carefully navigated partnerships with these organizations to preserve and build relationships. Institutional partnership was a cornerstone of these efforts, and so was showing approval of and reinforcing the work already happening in the city. A leader of the WAWG shared:

> I made a point to invite everybody into the tent. We weren't gonna step on anybody's toes. We were gonna compliment whatever they were doing. I mean, if somebody had a corner on the market on something and it was doing great, great. You become the arm of us (interview 26).

As described above, this was a chance for the city, businesses, and local immigrant-serving organizations to find common ground, not challenge one another. Economic growth was often a part of that common ground, as business and commerce were strongly represented at the table. With these partnerships, the city of Atlanta determined the "rank order kind of stuff that [they] needed to do" to create a welcoming initiative, and "number one was to put someone in charge…who would work for the mayor's office" in a newly created immigrant and refugee affairs office that would become known as the Atlanta MOIA (interview 26).

Prioritizing multisectoral harmony

Prioritizing multisectoral harmony is a final common theme in the emergence of OIRAs. This strategy involves negotiating for a new city office without rocking the proverbial boat. There was significant diversity in the way this theme emerged across cities, largely associated with local

political contexts. In this section, I use Atlanta and Seattle to understand two cases that represent the "extremes" in this study's cases – from the most politically conservative case in Atlanta to the most politically liberal case in Seattle. In Atlanta, inclusive issue entrepreneurs worked to harmonize political tensions between a more restrictive state context and the efforts to promote inclusion within the city. This is an example where the OIRA worked to harmonize political opposition from a higher level of immigration governance that was oriented toward more restrictive immigration policies. In Seattle, inclusive issue entrepreneurs encountered tensions within local power dynamics and worked to harmonize disagreements between allied partners about how to pursue inclusivity at the local level. Atlanta provides insight into the delicate balance issue entrepreneurs attempt to keep between leveraging threats without antagonizing restrictive retribution. Seattle provides insight into the care with which power dynamics must be negotiated, even when all parties are working toward inclusive practices.

Practicing Restraint in the Face of Political Opposition

While Atlanta informants described a desire to push back against the state's hostility toward immigrants as motivation for the creation of the OIRA, working group documents evidenced restraint in antagonizing actors that might disagree with the development of an OIRA and more inclusive policies. The Welcoming Atlanta Working Group (WAWG) framed the Atlanta MOIA as a carve out within a hostile state context. The office was a buffer for immigrant communities but not a direct challenge to state hostility. Documents the WAWG used for planning were focused on working *within* the hostile state context rather than directly confronting it. According to planning documents shared by a WAWG member, the working group posed questions such as "What are the gaps in equal access to services? *Given Georgia law*, what are

ways that we can address the gaps?" and "What can be done *under the Georgia climate*?" (emphasis added).

In addition to these questions about navigating a hostile state environment, the working group documents are filled with reminders that – whatever recommendations they create – the group must consider the city's context. Typical questions in the working group binder ask what practices "make sense for Atlanta" in service access, public safety, educational access, economic empowerment, and civic engagement. One example of the WAWG's efforts to pursue welcoming goals that "make sense for Atlanta" is the group's goal of ensuring equitable access to basic services. After describing challenges to service access, including HB 87, the WAWG goal statement reads: "Goal: To build a more customer service-oriented approach to the delivery of government services and to increase access to services where GA law is silent." Explicitly, the working group sought to avoid confrontation with state regulations that inhibited equitable service access for some immigrants in the community.

Ultimately, the same tension with state-level immigration governance that led issue entrepreneurs to push for the emergence of the Atlanta MOIA also set the parameters followed by the WAWG in setting the MOIA's priorities. This, too, came with challenges. The priorities set by the business-focused working group were not what many had imagined for the office. One MOIA staff member shared with me this description of the WAWG initial recommendations:

> When we started off, the recommendations…were largely focused around business and ensuring that business owners had access to city contracts. One was a language access plan which was great and helpful and luckily that was something that benefits all people. God it was so long ago. It was like seven or eight years ago we had those original

> recommendations. I just remember looking at them and being like 'ugh' (interview 31).

Similarly disillusioned, another MOIA staff member shared:

> What we soon realized is that those 20 recommendations were made, obviously, from outside partners, right? So a lot of the things that were recommended weren't practical, weren't applicable. Like they just couldn't be done in the way that they were foreseen, the way they were written, or just like, really, the community didn't need them in many ways, and there were other needs (interview 30).

The MOIA staff were clearly dissatisfied with several aspects of the WAWG's approach to welcoming. At the heart of these challenges was a fundamental difference in the way the office was conceptualized and who it was intended to serve. However, the MOIA staff again used restraint and initially followed this business-oriented mandate. Several years later, under the direction of a new mayor, the city would disband the advisory committee and "make a pretty big shift around people-centered work" (interview 31).

In the meantime, the office bid its time. The office found space within the hostile state context to pursue welcoming programs and policies at the local level and avoided state and local antagonism to the extent possible. Thus, in the face of political opposition, partners used restraint to prioritize harmony in their efforts to create a more welcoming Atlanta.

Palliating Internal Power Dynamics

In Seattle and Minneapolis, the creation of the OIRA was less politicized by subnational actors. In general, their state context and the local atmosphere supported the creation of the OIRA in each city. In place of political opposition, these cities emphasized the importance of carefully navigating power dynamics between groups, especially those linked to issues of representation in

decision-making. This tension reveals deep-seated differences related to pursuing a more inclusive city. Seattle serves as an insightful study of such tensions.

Community advocates and local champions prioritized quickly establishing an OIRA in Seattle, with, what felt to some, little regard for who was represented in that decision-making process. While some members of city government were instrumental to the office proposal, the city government's Immigrant and Refugee Advisory Board found their exclusion to be unsettling, and described the process as treating them as a figurehead rather than a partner in decision-making. Community advocates, meeting minutes, and office staff all described the multisectoral collaboration, but also multisectoral turmoil, behind the emergence of the Seattle OIRA.

Staff from OneAmerica, the primary advocacy organization behind the emergence of the Seattle OIRA, described their strategy for the development of the office in this way:

> Essentially, we got this idea [for an office of immigrant and refugee affairs] and we were like, "Okay, how do we make this happen?" Number one, we need a legislative champion who's going to put it in the budget…and then we can organize around that. We were really about creating vehicles for organizing…We knew if it was in the budget, right? If it was in the legislative budget, if they put it in there, they weren't going to cut it out. The mayor wasn't going to veto it. What a terrible message to send, right? We were like, "We need to get a champion who can put it in [the budget]" (interview 20).

The first step was to engage a champion, someone who would fight for the development of a city office to support immigrant and refugee integration.

Organizers with OneAmerica worked quickly to find a way to partner with city leadership and introduce the idea for the Seattle OIRA to council members. One informant speculated the

council members who were initially eager to sign on to this proposal did so as a "screw you to the mayor" who was described as initially uncommitted to the office (interview 20). Regardless of motivations, OneAmerica soon had a champion on the city council who was willing to advocate on behalf of the OIRA creation. Securing this champion, however, created rifts within local government beyond just tensions with the mayor. When OneAmerica approached the Immigrant and Refugee Advisory Board to propose the creation of the Seattle OIRA, they discovered challenges with local power dynamics they had not anticipated.

The Immigrant and Refugee Advisory Board was supposed to "advise the Mayor, City Council and other departments and offices" to improve access and opportunities for immigrant and refugee communities (Seattle Ord. 122441, 2007). Despite priorities that would appear to align with OneAmerica's proposal of the Seattle OIRA, the proposal received a cool reception by the IRAB, as recorded in the advisory board's October 2011 meeting minutes:

> OneAmerica met previously with different organizations throughout the community and has a meeting scheduled with the Mayor. The Commission was concerned about the steps taken by OneAmerica to include community input without seeking the Commission's input. The Commission was not provided enough information to either agree or disagree with the proposal and agreed to hold a special meeting to further discuss the proposal. (IRC, 2011)

The IRAB elaborated on these concerns in further detail when corresponding with the Seattle City Council and making recommendations later that month regarding the establishment of the Seattle OIRA. The IRAB listed three primary concerns with the emergence of the OIRA. Two of which highlight their concerns over issues of power, decision-making, and representation. First, the city

and OneAmerica asked the IRAB for "immediate endorsement" of the OIRA, which did not allow for real consideration of their input as a commission (Abdallah & Ybarra Rodriguez, 2011). Second, the IRAB wrote that the board was "frustrated that these discussions and decisions seem to be happening behind closed doors and that our endorsement is an afterthought" (Abdallah & Ybarra Rodriguez, 2011).

Arnstein's (1969) ladder of citizen participation provides a way of understanding the frustrations of the IRAB, despite the seemingly positive opportunity to create a city office focused on immigration. According to Arnstein (1969), consultative bodies like the IRAB can become symbolic and "allow the have nots to hear and have a voice" while at the same time "they lack the power to ensure that their views will be *heeded* by the powerful" (p. 217, italics original). The concerns raised by the IRAB regarding the Seattle OIRA demonstrate the unanticipated pushback that may come from assumed allies when leaders in those communities feel tokenized by the process.

Additional challenges came from city staff who believed the Seattle OIRA should be subsumed within the Office of Civil Rights rather than a new standalone office. Stemming from a long history of partnership between the Office of Civil Rights and the IRAB, some city staff asserted that this organization made intuitive sense and was preferable. However, clear language around the importance of multisectoral harmony eventually emerged. A former city employee shared:

> Two primary models that were looked at was incorporation into the Office for Civil Rights versus a standalone office. And at the end of the day…the most important thing was not about boxes on a table like an org chart, but really about the working relationship and really

> mutual success is what's most important, and that is not a matter of fighting over scraps, but really trying to figure out how our missions could be aligned in a way that was mutually beneficial (interview 24).

Though concerns over representation in decision-making featured centrally in narratives surrounding the emergence of the Seattle OIRA, there was a concerted effort to name these tensions and then move forward with actions that would ultimately support the creation of an OIRA and a more inclusive city in Seattle. Harmonizing complex relationships within city departments and consulting bodies was central to establishing an OIRA in Seattle.

Results

Atlanta Office

In 2015, the city of Atlanta hired a director and deputy director to lead the newly created Atlanta MOIA. There were many attributes that these leaders brought to the office, but their combined ability and willingness to tackle the challenge of institutionalizing welcome in the City of Atlanta topped the list. Referring to the daunting task of creating a more welcoming city for immigrants in Atlanta, one member of the WAWG shared that both leaders they hired "had fire for it" (interview 26).

The MOIA was initially established in the Office of the Mayor, as one of nine offices within the Office of the Chief of Staff. The initial general fund budget for the office was about $307,000. This general fund investment grew somewhat quickly over the first three years as staff was added to the office, reaching a budget of about $533,000 in 2018. However, this pace did not continue, and the 2023 general fund allocation for the MOIA was about $558,000 (Atlanta Budget Office

communications).

In November 2021, the MOIA came under its third mayoral administration with the election of Mayor Andre Dickens. Though both director and deputy director positions were vacant at the time, no new director was hired for the MOIA. Instead, the city combined the Atlanta Mayor's Office of International Affairs with the Atlanta Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs. Today, the City of Atlanta is home to a joint office called the Mayor's Office of International and Immigrant Affairs, initially led by the former director of the Mayor's Office of International Affairs.

The staff felt some hesitancy about this merger. "It might sound natural," a staff member shared, "but we have very different missions and very different work" (interview 27). The former International Affairs Office was small. The office was a team of three individuals focused on bringing international sports and athletes to Atlanta or working with the consulates around business, enterprise, and entertainment. While this might align with the MOIA's initial entrepreneurial priorities set by the WAWG, more recent staff at the MOIA prioritize working with people who do not necessarily have the resources to enjoy or engage with the programs affiliated with the International Affairs office. The two offices – now one – are serving two completely different clientele, according to MOIA staff.

The stress of this transition has made some wonder about whether the city really *is* the right place for the MOIA. One staff member mused about moving the MOIA to a non-profit setting. Leadership changes at the city often result in organizational changes and one staff member shared: "You just can't get anything done on these four-year cycles," (interview 32). MOIA staff described the frustration of promises made at the beginning of a mayoral term, many of which inevitably fall

through. They also describe the repetitive challenges as “every mayor says they’re going to re-work the mayor’s office” which can cause significant disruption and halt forward progress (interview 27). A former MOIA staff member shared:

> Administrative changes, you know, it's a battle, it's hard. And if you want to keep the momentum going, and you want your team to stay, it's hard because they are political offices, right. That's the issue with Atlanta. It's a mayoral office, it's not a standalone office, meaning that with the tides, a lot of things can change. And they did. And they made it like, you're kind of demonstrating yourself each time to a new boss (interview 30).

For now, the MOIA has established a working relationship with the International Affairs staff and there is a staff of 10 working in the office, in addition to a pool of community navigators that are a part of the team that will be discussed more in future sections.

Seattle Office

The initial proposal for the Seatle OIRA was to establish a small office with relatively few FTEs and a minimal budget. Informants discussed how a larger proposal might have resulted in significant pushback from city staff and elected officials, especially in light of other budget cuts proposed. To accomplish their goals, OneAmerica needed to be more strategic:

> The strategy was, once you create it, it will grow... Just create it, and then it's going to grow and it's going to get bigger because what's going to happen is, number one, you create a constituency, right? You create an advocacy vehicle where immigrant communities and refugee communities, which are incredibly diverse in Seattle, where they actually now have

> a voice and a vehicle through which they can advocate, right? You are creating a senior level position with advocacy and community and support behind it, to move it (interview 20).

Getting the office established and situated at the executive level was a key strategic move for the eventual growth and capacity of the OIRA. The goal was a seat at the table. Rather than risking the establishment of an office that might be tokenized, as the IRAB may have experienced, the goal was to move up Arnstein's (1969) ladder to a position from which the OIRA could effectively contribute to city conversations that would impact immigrant and refugee communities.

There were noted tradeoffs to this position that balanced access to power with the precarity of changing power. One former staffer shared:

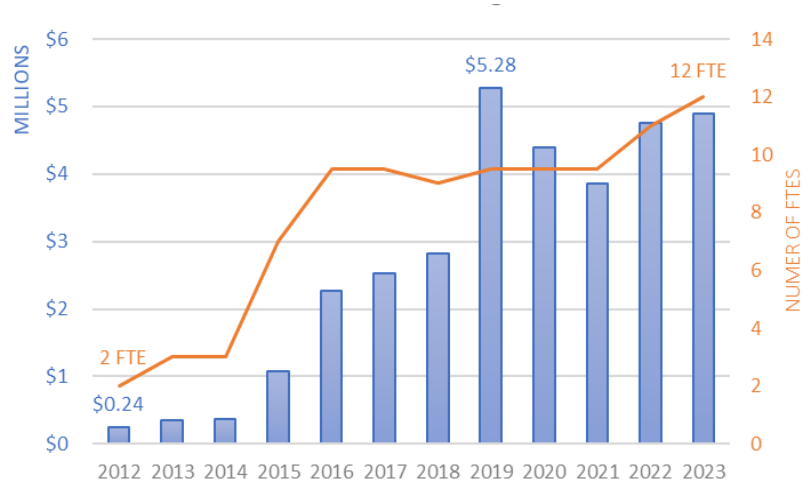
> In our office, [the director] is part of the mayor's cabinet. So she had direct access, she reported to a deputy mayor, and ultimately to the mayor directly. So we were organically, not a department of the city, we were an office of the mayor, which gave us a lot of vulnerability in terms of the whims of the mayor's - of various mayors. But it also gave us a tremendous amount of influence and juice with other city departments (interview 18).

These tradeoffs will be looked at more closely in subsequent sections, but the office was established within the Seattle Mayor's Office in the 2012 budget. There was significant community support and over the years, the office quickly grew. In 2012 the office was established with 2 FTE and a budget of $238,000. The office doubled to 4 FTE in 2014 under Mayor Murray, and by 2023 the Seattle OIRA was an office of 12 FTE with a budget of $4.9 million (Minard, 2014).

To understand this in the context of a growing city budget, I calculated the ratio of general funds allocated to the Seattle OIRA compared to the total city general fund over time. Though the

OIRA still represents only a small fraction of the city's 2023 general fund budget (0.31 percent), the OIRA's budget has seen significant growth in terms of both absolute and relative value. After three years (2012-2014) in which the OIRA received less than 400 thousand dollars from the general fund, the OIRA budget nearly tripled in 2015 to over a million dollars and has since increased to around 5 million dollars. At the same time, the general fund for the City of Seattle increased from just under one billion dollars in 2012 to 1.6 billion in 2023. One Seattalite summed it up this way: "power in government is funding, it's FTEs. That's how we demonstrate things as a priority" (interview 20). While still a very small percentage of the city's budget, this look at funding and FTEs indicates that the strategy of starting the Seattle OIRA small but at the executive level successfully opened the door for the office to grow as a city priority over time.

Figure 5: Seattle OIRA FTEs and Budget 2012-2023



Based on figures from City of Seattle Budget documents.

Minneapolis Office

The Minneapolis Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs was ultimately included in the 2018 Minneapolis Budget. The creation of the office was realized under Mayor Frye, who defeated

Mayor Hodges and began his term as Minneapolis mayor in 2018. The office was placed within the Neighborhood and Community Relations Department and allocated a general fund budget of $98,300 which included one FTE for a director position.

The location of the office within the Neighborhood and Community Relations (NCR) Department was a strategic move, mostly to try to build in some protection for the office. As one city official put it:

> You want to thoughtfully embed the work in a larger community so people have colleagues and allies and resources and it makes it harder to dismantle the work if it is allied with a whole bunch of people and programs that have a lot of community support. …How can you build in the work to sustain over time? Get it out of [the mayor's] office, put it somewhere; put a couple layers in between. It's no guarantee but it creates a greater likelihood (interview 10).

From this perspective, elected officials were a danger to the work of OIRAs. Even though executive level offices or stand-alone offices generally had more direct communication with elected leaders, there were pros and cons to this arrangement. Some officials in Minneapolis feared that if a separate office was created, rather than a position within NCR, it would open up vulnerabilities because it would be:

> …easy to take the funding away from, refuse to let it grow, or just disempower it by not giving that person any authority to do the things that would need to be done to change the disparate outcomes that are currently being gotten from city policy (interview 10).

The Minneapolis OIRA has remained a one-person office located within the Neighborhood and Community Relations Department from its creation in 2018 through its fifth anniversary in

2023, with the exception of intermittent interns or fellows. However, it is important to note that the Minneapolis one person office does have additional support. Located within the NCR, the Minneapolis OIRA has access to a variety of resources including the expertise of community specialists that represent the Latinx, Southeast Asian, and East African communities as well as support from staff focused on language access and grant writing.

Nonetheless, staff and community advocates alike expressed frustration by the stagnant level of low investment in the office. Ironically, the significant amount of work being accomplished by the office was in some ways identified as a handicap to future investments. As one staff member shared:

> I think sort of a blessing and a curse is that, at present, the office is involved in so many activities that it does seem like so much is being done by one person. And if everybody is getting what they want already, why do you need another person? (interview 36).

However, what wasn't always evident, according to this staff member, were the vast number of partnerships with "people across the city enterprise, working together" to make programming successful (interview 36). Without such a developed network of immigrant serving organizations, it would be difficult for the one-person office to serve immigrant and refugee communities in Minneapolis in any significant way.

At the conclusion of this study, this office was on the brink of some change. Council members have noted in recent 2024 budget amendments for the city of Minneapolis that a one-person office is "severely limiting" (Wonsley, 2023). The Council has proposed a $150,000 increase in the OIRA's 2024 budget, which would raise the budget to $330,000 to support a second staff person at the OIRA (Chavez, 2023). The amendment passed with an 11-1-1 vote, with one

member voting nay and one member absent (Chavez, 2023).

Discussion

Across diverse subnational contexts, advocates for offices of immigrant and refugee affairs framed and leveraged threats across multiscalar immigration governance to motivate the creation of OIRAs while relying on multisectoral collaboration to shape and implement these new offices. This study found that multiscalar threats can provide critical motivation and leverage for action, regardless of where that threat resides across scales of immigration governance, or if the threat poses any significant danger to local populations. “Problem surfing” by issue entrepreneurs can result in OIRAs emerging in opposition to differently positioned threats, dependent upon state and federal-level contexts of reception. This study also found that successful local collaborations focus on shared community values, locally available community support, and they must choose how to navigate tensions stemming from local contexts or power dynamics between similarly aligned actors.

Case studies in Atlanta, Seattle, and Minneapolis provide an opportunity to elaborate on former models of subnational policy formation and ways of understanding the emergence of local welcoming initiatives. A closer look at the process of OIRA formation in these cities provides more than three new descriptive cases. This analysis sheds light on the complex process and contextual factors that play a role in the creation of OIRAs. Adding cases to this literature contributes to empirical and theory building work, demonstrating how multiscalar threat operates within local initiatives and providing examples of state and federal-level threats to supplement previous literature that has primarily examined local-level policies that directly threaten the

integration of a local population of newcomers (McDaniel et al., 2019). The study also provides a greater perspective on the tensions that underlie local collaborations. Rather than assume monolithic welcoming strategies or cohesive partnership among similarly aligned local actors, this study demonstrates the significant work necessary to develop inclusive initiatives – even in some of the country's most welcoming metropolitan areas.

While there is no template for creating welcoming cities, these cases may provide practitioners and policymakers with a way to understand the landscape of tensions other cities have navigated when creating OIRAs. Because each city in this study was ultimately successful in creating an office, their experiences also suggest ways to navigate those tensions successfully. Theoretically, this work helps to illustrate that tensions between sectors and scales of immigration governance are not necessarily good or bad and do not necessarily inhibit the creation of more welcoming communities. Continued exploration of tensions within welcoming communities may provide a more robust roadmap for cities hoping to overcome their challenges and create receptive spaces through government institutions and policies.

Part II. Deliberate Disruption

The concept of deliberate disruption is central to the following analysis. It refers to the intentional and strategic ways OIRAs challenge or undermine restrictive elements of the immigration governance regime while working from within that institution. As demonstrated by Figure 1, the model of the U.S. immigration governance regime, each pillar of the immigration governance regime is a mixed bag, defined by both welcoming and restrictive elements. Across all combinations of time, scale, and place, U.S. immigration governance is defined by both its

extended hand of welcome and its restrictive wall excluding the other. Thus, disrupting elements of restrictive immigration governance and institutionalizing welcome is at times a delicate work of targeting and undermining certain aspects of institutional pillars that exclude or burden immigrant and refugee populations, while leaving in place those that functionally include immigrant and refugee populations.

This framework is used to explore patterns in OIRAs' approach to institutionalizing welcome in diverse city contexts. OIRAs take a multi-pronged approach to institutionalizing welcome, disrupting problematic policies and practices associated with normative, regulative, and cognitive pillars of an immigration governance regime that often contains elements that, explicitly or implicitly, intentionally or unintentionally, restrict, exclude, or distance immigrant and refugee populations.

In the chapters that follow, I elaborate on examples of restrictive institutional elements including 1) narratives of undeservingness (normative), 2) restrictive laws and policies (regulative), and 3) government and community distrust and disconnect (cognitive). I then use data produced in collaboration with my informants to provide examples of how these elements manifest in Atlanta, Minneapolis, and Seattle and to explore if, how, and when OIRAs chose to disrupt aspects of these pillars.

Chapter 4. Disrupting Newcomer Narratives of Undeservingness

Introduction

> At the end of the day, we just want everybody in the community to get what they deserve (interview 12).

Multiple narratives have developed to challenge the deservingness of immigrants and refugees. These narratives vary across time and levels of immigration federalism; they vary by place and target different characteristics of the foreign-born population. In my research in Atlanta, Minneapolis, and Seattle, informants mentioned a variety of narratives that OIRAs responded to which challenged the deservingness of immigrants and refugees. These narratives of undeservingness described immigrants as “second class citizens…without a doubt,” a sentiment made clear by community members who questioned, “Why are we even having resources put towards immigrants?" (interview 31).

This study explores what I call newcomer narratives of undeservingness that emerged, to different degrees, in Atlanta, Minneapolis, and Seattle. Newcomer narratives primarily associated deservingness with historical experiences of suffering and marginalization among racial or socioeconomic groups with long residency in the community. Drawing on the language informants use, the analysis highlights intersectional race, class, and socioeconomic status issues that inform

newcomer narratives. Thematic exploration of OIRA responses to these narratives illustrates if, when, and how OIRAs in each city disrupt newcomer narratives of undeservingness. Along the way, the analysis highlights how local histories of race relations, experiences with immigration, the development of nonprofit communities, and the level of resources dedicated to individual OIRAs shape both community articulation of newcomer narratives and OIRAs' responses.

In general, OIRAs avoid directly challenging newcomer narratives. Instead, OIRAs turn to practices of inclusivity, expanding services to include newcomers alongside other marginalized populations. I turn to literature on visibility to make sense of this tactic. Drawing on prior studies that demonstrate how noncitizens co-opt tactics of invisibility to avoid suspicion, further political agendas, and promote community wellbeing (Goldberg, 1996; Villegas, 2010), this study explores inclusivity as a form of "strategic invisibility" created by OIRAs to disrupt newcomer narratives of undeservingness and shield investment in newcomer communities (Goldberg, 1996, p. 184).

Narratives of Undeservingness and the Normative Pillar of Immigration Governance

Narratives of undeservingness are based on "moral boundaries" and value judgements about who belongs and who should benefit from social resources (Steensland, 2010 as cited in Romano, 2017, p. 1). Scholars have noted that determinations of undeservingness are associated with perceived "moral failings" of a particular person or group of people (Watkins-Hayes & Kovalsky, 2016, p. 193). Van Oorschot (2000) suggests that social determinations of

deservingness rest on five criteria: control, need, identity, attitude, and reciprocity (p. 36). In more detail, a person is more deserving if they have low control, high need, have an identity that is closer to the *haves* rather than *have nots*, and the ability to reciprocate support received (Van Oorschot, 2000, p. 36). More recent scholarship has noted that these five criteria fall into two categories: responsibility and membership (Harell et al., 2022). Control and need are linked to neoliberal ideas of responsibilization, determining deservingness based on an individual's circumstances and their role in creating those circumstances (Harell et al., 2022). Identity, attitude and reciprocity are what Harell et al. (2022) refer to as "membership-based deservingness criteria" that are based on social relationships (p. 988).

Judgements of deservingness are often used to determine benefits and burdens ascribed to a population (Schneider & Ingram, 1993). Specifically, narratives of deservingness are used to ascribe more access to benefits, while narratives of undeservingness are used to justify limited access to social benefits (Romano, 2017). This classification has a "very old" history according to Katz (2013), who describes the notion of the undeserving poor as a critical tool for determining who gets what and when in a world of finite resources distributed by elites (p. 1). Romano (2017), focused on the provision of welfare benefits, writes:

> From a normative point of view, the undeserving poor category includes all those who should not be eligible for welfare benefits (regardless of whether they actually receive the payments or not) because their behaviour, condition or socio-economic characteristics are considered unworthy of public support. (p.2)

Alternatively, the *deserving* poor are given more access to social benefits because their individual or group characteristics align with expectations for worthy support recipients.

In immigration governance, narratives of undeservingness play a critical role in agenda-setting, policymaking, and policy implementation concerning immigration and integration. Narratives of deservingness and undeservingness are shaped and contested by various actors, including advocates, policymakers, elected officials, community members, and immigrant and refugee communities themselves. These narratives often justify program and policy developments that determine immigrant and refugee access to social benefits or services. On one hand, narratives of undeservingness have been used to curtail immigrant and refugee access to public services and benefits (Yoo, 2008). These narratives often target certain categories of immigrants as particularly undeserving. Lipman (2007) describes the way U.S. policies and institutions have constructed unauthorized immigrants as what she calls "less than undeserving poor" – occupying an even lower rung in the U.S. social hierarchy than the undeserving poor (p. 742). Alternatively, immigration advocates have used deservingness narratives to promote increased access to public services, benefits, or pathways to citizenship for noncitizens (Andrade & Lundberg, 2022; Anguiano & Nájera, 2015; Nicholls, 2013; Sirriyeh, 2020; Viladrich, 2019). These narratives rely on characteristics such as perceived innocence, ability to contribute to society, and legitimate need for assistance (Viladrich, 2019). Such judgments are often made according to stereotypes about groups based on race, class, education, or religion (DeSante, 2013).

Employment of these narratives abound. Unauthorized immigrants are often cast among the undeserving poor. In some cases, narratives describe them as criminal threats (Chavez, 2008). In others, they are "impossible subjects" who "cannot be and a problem that cannot be solved" (Ngai, 2004, p.5). These narratives negatively impact their navigation of life in the U.S. and the U.S. immigration system (Levesque et al., 2023). Alternatively, narratives of deservingness

commonly construct DACA recipients as "the deserving poor" who were brought to the U.S. as children, enrolled in educational programs, and are free from involvement with the criminal justice system. Policymakers and immigration advocates have held up this image of DACA recipients as exemplary immigrants worthy of (temporary) legal status and work authorization (Andrade & Lundberg, 2022; Nicholls, 2013).

These narratives do not exist in isolation. Constructing one group as deserving may result in constructing another group as undeserving and vice versa. Embracing the narrative that Dreamers are deserving because they arrived with their parents and received education in the U.S. implies that immigrants without these characteristics are undeserving, resulting in what Yukich (2013) describes as "insidious consequences for the most vulnerable" (p. 302). In effect, positively constructing the young, educated unauthorized immigrant as a *good immigrant* worthy of legal status runs the risk of implicitly constructing other unauthorized immigrants as *bad immigrants*.

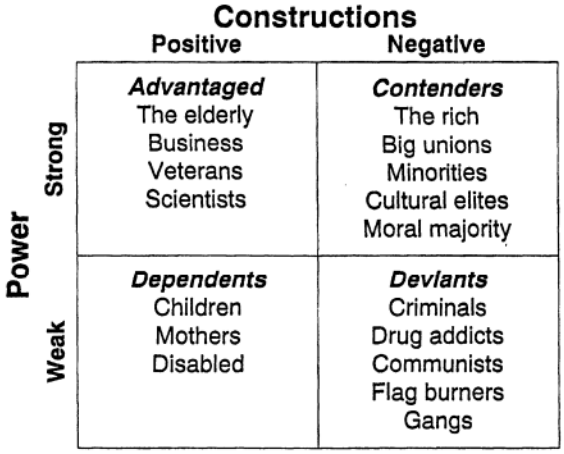
Social construction theory (Schneider & Ingram, 1993) helps illustrate why narratives of deservingness are important for shaping policies. In social construction theory (Figure 6), populations are generally divided into four groups, including the advantaged (higher power and positive construction), contenders (high power and negative construction), dependents (low power and positive construction), and deviants (low power and negative construction). Those constructed positively benefit from being seen as deserving, meaning those classified as dependents or as advantaged are more likely to be ascribed policy benefits. Those constructed negatively are burdened by being seen as undeserving, meaning those classified as contenders or as deviants are more likely to be ascribed policy burdens. In addition, those groups with more political power may have more ability to advocate for policy benefits. At the same time, so-called dependents and

deviants have less political power and are less able to advocate for policy benefits.

Disrupting narratives of undeservingness challenges the normative pillar of restrictive immigration governance. Disruption has the potential to move populations from one socially constructed category ascribed low benefits and high burdens to another category ascribed higher benefits and lower burdens. Such reconstruction may lead to shifts in the policies and practices that govern immigration and integration. In a life history study with high school students in Indiana, Perez and Ballinas (2023) demonstrate the possibility – and implications – of unauthorized students moving between constructions as more or less deserving. Students shared that revealing their unauthorized status could result in being quickly characterized as undeserving and "abruptly abandoned" by support networks (Perez & Ballinas, 2023, p. 23). However, moving from undeserving to deserving was possible, beneficial, but much more difficult (Perez & Ballinas, 2023).

Disruption of narratives of undeservingness implies telling a new story, developing a new narrative that constructs newcomers as deserving. There are examples of advocates, and OIRAs specifically, directly challenging some narratives of undeservingness. For example, each of the three OIRAs in this study have published information about the economic contributions of immigrants and refugees in their communities to challenge narratives about newcomers who do not contribute to the economy at the local level. To combat these narratives, cities publish information about tax contributions, entrepreneurship, and even property values (see Twin Cities G4G, 2022) for example). This is a counter narrative that directly confronts economic narratives of undeservingness. However, not all disruption operates in this way. In the section to follow, I explore strategic invisibility as a tool of disruption.

Figure 6: Social Constructions and Political Power: Types of Target Populations



Reproduced from Schneider & Ingram (1993)

Strategic Invisibility a Form of Disruption

Invisibility has been theorized as a dehumanizing tool of colonialism, enforced by institutions and used to relegate immigrant and refugee communities to the shadows and expose them to forms of exploitation (Chavez, 1992; Goldberg, 1996; Haile, 2020). Chavez (1992) describes the forced invisibility of unauthorized immigrants in southern California. Living such "shadowed lives" defined by irregular work and necessarily hiding from authorities leaves these individuals vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, especially by employers (Chavez 1992; Villegas, 2010). Visibility, on the other hand, is often understood as a way to gain recognition and receive the benefits of states (Landau, 2020). But as Goldberg (1996) points out, "the value and virtue of in/visibility are contextually determined" (p. 189). There are times when it is advantageous to be visible, and times when it is advantageous to be invisible. Power and agency come in the form of having a choice between visibility and invisibility – the power to choose "strategic invisibility" (Goldberg, 1996, p. 184).

Villegas (2010) theorizes strategic invisibility as a tool that can be employed by immigrant populations to determine what parts of their identity should be revealed, when, and to whom. In this way, strategic invisibility can be understood as an act of agency and adaptability (Lollar, 2015) through which immigrants may protect their own well-being (Rojas-Wiesner & DeVargas, 2014; Villegas, 2010, p. 159). Many scholars have discussed the use of strategic invisibility by a variety of populations including sex workers (Ham & Gerard, 2014), those with mental illness (Lollar, 2015), members of the LGBTQ+ community (Newton, 2016), and professional women (Ballakrishnen et al., 2019).

In addition, there scholars have explored the use of strategic in/visibility by immigrant and refugee populations (Caraus, 2018; Haile, 2020; Landau, 2020; Rojas-Wiesner & DeVargas, 2014; Villegas, 2010). Haile (2020), for example, explores strategic visibility as a way to challenge the "speechlessness-and-agency" paradigm that construe refugees as either victims or agents of resistance, to understand how refugees choose to be visible or invisible at different times or in different contexts (p. 34). Closely related is the concept of "invisible resistance" which Caraus (2018) describes as "escape, falsification of papers, destruction of identity documents, destruction of fingertips, and other forms of everyday resistance by which migrants render themselves unclassifiable, imperceptible, and unidentifiable" (p. 73).

However, strategic invisibility can come with negative consequences (Rojas-Wiesner & DeVargas, 2014; Villegas, 2010). Interviews with Guatemalan women im/migrants at the Mexico border revealed that strategic invisibility was a tactic employed to escape forms of abuse. Women faced violence related identity markers such as status, gender, or race. However, researchers reported that the women's use of invisibility, as a strategy for self-protection, also isolated women

by cutting them off from opportunities to create social networks (Rojas-Wiesner & DeVargas, 2014).

Missing from the literature, but explored in the case studies below, is how to understand strategic invisibilizing of newcomer populations *through the agency of the state.* In the former studies, strategic invisibility is described as a tactic used by immigrants and refugees to negotiate inhospitable aspects of the state. In the study at hand, it is the OIRAs that adopt the strategy of invisibilizing newcomers. On the one hand, as stated above, invisibilization by the state has been understood as an act of violence, dehumanization, and colonialism by the state when enacted against marginalized populations (Chavez, 1992; Goldberg, 1996; Haile, 2020). On the other hand, the OIRAs in this study argue that they engage in this strategy of invisibility, through the tactic of inclusion, to protect newcomer communities and provide for their wellbeing, much more in line with the goals of strategic invisibility understood as acts of resistance when employed by marginalized communities themselves. Ultimately, I theorize inclusion as a form of strategic invisibility deployed by the state, with the power to disrupt, at least indirectly, the newcomer narratives of undeservingness deployed by native-born communities.

Newcomer Narratives

In Atlanta, Minneapolis, and Seattle, OIRAs encountered newcomer narratives that described immigrants as less deserving of government support and services compared to groups with longer traditions of settlement in those communities. Primarily, divisions were cast along racial lines, with African Americans and poor whites pitted against immigrants and refugees who recently arrived.

Narratives in Atlanta primarily pitted African American communities against immigrant and refugee communities. The narratives of undeserving that OIRA staff and community members heard were primarily based not only on race but on the associated histories of trauma, struggle, and marginalization that African Americans had endured. MOIA staff described sentiments shared by community members or local politicians that immigrant communities were jumping the line by benefiting from government services or programs ahead of African Americans. Narratives functioned according to a zero-sum game, in which support for immigrant and refugee communities might take away from support needed in African American communities. One MOIA staff member shared:

> Something we were challenged by was people don't understand why we were giving all this money to immigrants when there are so many African American folks who are struggling. That was a constant, constant thing we were dealing with (interview 31).

MOIA staff acknowledged the historical underpinnings of these sentiments, noting that the "legacy of racism is very very strong" in Atlanta. This staff member continued by sharing, "You can feel [the legacy of racism] everywhere and it is so so so deeply embedded in every aspect of life here, into the culture, into the economy – it's very challenging" (interview 31). These sentiments align with literature that expects lower levels of support for immigrant and refugee inclusion in southern states where levels of social trust have been eroded through a history of racial oppression (Butz & Kehrberg, 2015). There is also an undercurrent of competition, as a staff member from the Atlanta MOIA described:

> And when you're talking about struggles you're almost competing, even though that's not how it should be. You shouldn't be competing for resources, you should be sharing

> resources and making things more equitable for all but - those conversations often were like that (interview 30).

Scholars have noted that competition, or perceived competition, between native-born and foreign-born groups is a persistent determinant of negative attitudes toward newcomers (Esses et al., 1998), as Esses et al. (2001) describe how Realistic Group Conflict Theory predicts that "perceived group competition for resources produces efforts to reduce the access of other groups to the resources" (p. 390).

Interviews in Seattle built upon these narratives about competition and conflict between newcomers and more established residents of the city. A city staff member in Seattle described serving immigrant and refugee communities as "tricky territory" (interview 24). Elaborating, he shared more about this tension, "There's historic black communities that…hadn't been supported by the city," he told me, "and then we've got new immigrant communities…trying to get funding." (interview 24).

While Seattle does not possess the same legacy of slavery and the Civil Rights movement that Atlanta does, staff members attributed narratives of undeservingness to race relations in the city. OIRA staff members spoke openly about the marginalization of African American populations in the city. One OIRA staff member described supporting immigrant and refugee communities in Seattle as "extremely sensitive" (interview 18). Candidly, he shared insights into the way displacement of African American communities had resulted in tensions between new arrivals and African Americans in Seattle:

> Seattle is a fucking racist place - excuse my English. In spite of - it has systematically depopulated the black population through gentrification for 30 or 40 years. There's more

> black immigrants than there are black African Americans, I think, at this point in the city (interview 18).

Though immigrant and refugee communities were not directly replacing African American communities, it was difficult not to see the change in the city's population.

An additional concern raised in Seattle is the marginalization of Native peoples. OIRA staff shared that there was a reticence to center the needs and struggles of immigrant and refugee communities without acknowledgement of the history of violence experienced by Native people. Similar to narratives in Atlanta, these narratives focused on the suffering endured by Native people as a claim on government investment that could come into conflict with the claims being made for investment in newcomer populations. Staff described the unparalleled struggles and "genocide" of Native people in Seattle (interview 11).

Similar to Atlanta, Seattle OIRA staff described newcomer narratives that constructed new immigrant and refugee populations as undeserving due to their recent arrival. Some members of Seattle's African American communities saw immigrants and refugees jumping the line and receiving services and benefits ahead of their own communities that had endured decades of marginalization in the city of Seattle.

Speaking with elected officials and staff members in Minneapolis was a reminder that these newcomer narratives could also be salient to other historically marginalized communities, including poor or rural white communities. In an interview regarding tensions in Minneapolis, informants described newcomer narratives used to demonstrate the deservingness of poor white communities who had long suffered marginalization and poor standards of living. One official shared, "people who are white and living in rural Minnesota and are not educated still suffer so

much" and described these residents as "just like immigrants and refugees" and in need of more access to benefits and services (interview 8). This official went on to explain:

> For us to actually sit here and say, 'Okay, we're advocating for immigrants and refugees' while actually what we're advocating for is something all Minnesotans need, makes it very difficult (interview 8).

In Seattle, staff there used similar language to describe the challenge of addressing the concerns of "economically distressed white folks" alongside marginalized African American communities.

In all three cities, newcomer narratives of undeservingness created tensions or challenges to OIRAs working to address the needs of immigrant and refugee communities. Newcomers were not seen as worthy of government resources needed by other historically marginalized communities, such as African American communities, Native communities, or poor white communities. The language of these newcomer narratives indicated that newcomers were not constructed as undeserving due to mistrust or fear that they might misuse funds, as some literature on poverty suggests (Butz & Kehrberg, 2015). Instead, they appeared to be constructed as undeserving because other marginalized social groups feared that immigrant and refugee communities might use benefits and services *too well,* jumping ahead of other communities who had earned the right to government support through their endurance of decades of marginalization and struggle. The following sections use thematic analysis to understand if, when, and how OIRAs chose to address or disrupt these newcomer narratives of undeservingness.

Disruption of Undeservingness: If, When, and How

Leveraging Inclusivity

Newcomer narratives of undeservingness in Atlanta, Minneapolis, and Seattle created an "us" and "them" dynamic between historically marginalized communities, such as African Americans or poor whites, and newcomers, including immigrants and refugees. Rather than fight against political leaders and community members whose narratives of undeservingness prioritized one struggling community over another, OIRA staff and community partners in each city described strategies of inclusivity. By focusing on inclusivity, OIRAs hoped to avoid situations in which their work was associated with only serving immigrant and refugee communities. Instead, they often attempted to frame their work as welcoming to *all* populations and serving the needs of newcomers and long-term residents alike. This study uses the lens of strategic invisibility to understand inclusivity as a tool for disrupting the *impacts* of newcomer narratives of undeservingness – though perhaps not the narratives themselves. The anecdotes below describe the different tactics of inclusivity used in Atlanta, Seattle, and Minneapolis, shaped by their local contexts.

Hiding in Plain Sight: Working with Frameworks of Black and White

Atlanta

> And then it was us so like, trying to frame it - this can - this *is* a part of the civil rights movement and expanding these rights for one is expanding them for all, including more African American communities. And so we had to have those conversations pretty constantly. And I would say in general, we had to push a lot in City Hall because the framework is so black and white (interview 30).

In Atlanta, the MOIA strategically employed inclusivity to disrupt local normative challenges to newcomer deservingness. The goal was to create allegiance between community members, erasing a focus exclusively on immigrant and refugee communities and incorporating other marginalized communities. In service of this strategy, a staff member said they created a "dual name" for the office (interview 31) – supplementing the "Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA) title with the title "Welcoming Atlanta (WATL). Further elaborating, she shared:

> In order to move beyond [tensions with the African American communities], having this 'Welcoming Atlanta' allowed us to work with communities beyond just the immigrant community and give a really positive connotation, I suppose, to the work that we do and the communities that we serve (interview 31).

When doing "policy-related" work, where the office needed to advocate specifically for immigrant and refugee communities, the Atlanta office embraced its official city name, the Mayor's Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs (interview 31). This name indicated that their work focused on newcomer communities. However, the office used the name "Welcoming Atlanta" when it was "more expedient" and to indicate a "much broader scope" of work (interview 31).

The office conducted its public-facing programming under the name Welcoming Atlanta (WATL), and it developed a WATL website external to the city government's website, WATL materials, WATL office t-shirts, and more. While the office has significant programming related to the specific needs of newcomers, such as language access and naturalization, it also created programming through Welcoming Atlanta that could serve individuals from any community,

regardless of their nativity. This addressed needs in immigrant and refugee communities, but it was also a way to be inclusive while strategically invisibilizing newcomer communities.

Community resource events exemplify the Atlanta office's "much broader scope." Community resource events often centered around food distribution, which were the primary focus of the events during COVID-19. The events included health, education, and housing resources. The MOIA/WATL held these events in neighborhoods and parks where there are significant immigrant and refugee communities, but community members of all backgrounds are encouraged to attend. One staff member described the expansive role of the office and these events despite the potentially more narrow framing of their office's work:

> For example, our food distributions are open to everybody. We are the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, but we serve people who are not necessarily immigrants. If you come to our distribution, we're not going to turn you away if you're not an immigrant. It's about building that type of culture, I think, rather than just having programs and services specifically for immigrants. It's about across the board making Atlanta a more welcoming place, and engaging people in that effort to make Atlanta more inclusive (interview 27).

Because Welcoming Atlanta put on these events and they include outreach to marginalized populations like African American and poor white communities, they helped to "shelter" the office and its work from those who disagreed with the premise of supporting immigrant communities in Atlanta at the expense of these more established but marginalized communities (interview 31). In this way, the name Welcoming Atlanta helped to disrupt deservingness narratives indirectly, trying

to address their concerns without engendering controversy. An informant shared this summary of the name:

> [Welcoming Atlanta] really clearly states, this is who we are and this is what we do, and it's totally noncontroversial. I don't find the word immigrant controversial at all. I know some people do though - so it provided us some shelter from that controversy (interview 31).

In general, MOIA/WATL staff negotiated these local politics of deservingness without explicitly challenging underlying norms that cast newcomers to the community as undeserving. Instead, their strategy of invisibility aimed to relieve tensions between marginalized populations: generally African American communities and newcomers. Rather than look for the upper hand, the MOIA/WATL staff found it most expedient to keep their head down and carve out space to provide for immigrant communities without "get[ting] too loud or shiny or tak[ing] away from others" (interview 31).

Direct Acknowledgment: Frameworks Beyond Black and White

The Seattle OIRA employed similar strategies to Atlanta, as staff and community partners hoped to support immigrant and refugee communities but expressed concern about creating conflict with other marginalized populations. In Seattle, conversations about other populations included native-born Latinos, African Americans, as well as Native American communities. A staff member at one of the Seattle OIRA's partner organizations described their concerns by stating:

> We don't want to make it seem like, from a public policy perspective, we're bending over backwards to serve people from out of the country and not extending the same opportunities for people who were born in the country (interview 19).

Similar concerns are evident in the language of the Seattle OIRA staff, who described always keeping in mind the needs and experiences of other marginalized communities when doing their work. A former OIRA staff member described balancing the needs of immigrant and refugee communities with the risk of estranging other marginalized communities:

> So there's a way of being very deliberate about identifying the unique needs of immigrant and refugee communities, but not at the expense of ignoring the needs of African American communities or Latino communities, or others (interview 18).

Conscious of the newcomer narratives of undeservingness in the community, the Seattle OIRA staff felt pressure to ensure that any provisions for members of the immigrant and refugee communities did not negatively impact other marginalized populations.

The OIRA staff also hoped to ameliorate other negative impacts beyond the material benefits that might be provided to newcomer communities at the expense of others. The office worked to incorporate language to acknowledge the pain and suffering communities had historically endured. This meant emphasizing welcome to immigrant and refugee communities while balancing the painful histories of other groups in Seattle. A staff member shared that his work included “showing and demonstrating that Seattle continues to be a welcoming city” while at the same time “tempering that with communications about Seattle’s Native community and issues around balancing that with issues around communicating to folks the history of Native

peoples in the Pacific Northwest as well as the settler colonial, basically, genocide of Native peoples in not only the Pacific , but in America" (interview 11).

The Seattle OIRA also used inclusive language and targeted neighborhoods to serve immigrants and refugees alongside a broader community in need. An OIRA staff member shared:

> When we develop programs and how we talk about them, we use terms like "economically disadvantaged zip codes," targeting people so that we're reaching out also to economically distressed white folks and African American communities (interview 18).

With these inclusive strategies, OIRAs were able to serve immigrant and refugee communities without dismissing the historical struggles of African American, poor white, and Native communities. The offices saw this as a way to disrupt newcomer narratives by invisibly serving newcomer communities and protecting their office from being "vulnerable" when "viewed just as an organization that is exclusively looking very particularly at the needs of immigrants and refugees" (interview 18). Targeting neighborhoods was a strategic approach to this work, still allowing for inclusion, but making services easiest and most accessible in places where immigrants and refugees, at least of a certain socioeconomic status, were most likely to reside.

Intentional Engagement: A Broader Conversation from the Start

Minneapolis

Inclusivity in Minneapolis looked different than in Atlanta and Seattle. The Minneapolis OIRA was a single-person office, located within a city department focused on diverse groups. The OIRA staff were consistently involved in conversations about allocating limited resources to diverse stakeholders. In some ways, it was impossible to invisibilize newcomer communities, and

the office often engaged in discussion of serving diverse communities. Staff described the arrangements like this:

> This office is located within a department that serves a variety of different cultural communities, including the Native American community, the African American, disability community, and the East African, Southeast Asian and Latino community. So those are cultural communities' specialists. And not to say there isn't like, you know, people who are members of multiple entities, but we have those specialists within the department and so, there is - in terms of allocation of resources - that is a department-wide conversation, and there's consideration of the entire department, including resources dedicated for the support and engagement with those different cultural communities (interview 36).

Rather than approaching challenges of resource allocation in the face of external narratives of undeservingness, the Minneapolis OIRA was positioned within the city in a way that allowed for these conversations to occur regularly and thoughtfully with other community leaders.

That is not to say that there was no tension. In response to a direct question about resource competition between these communities, city staff said yes, "that is a factor…there is some competition" (interview 36). In another interview, city staff shared:

> There's a tension between having offices [the Minneapolis OIRA] - which are the focus of immigrant inclusion, right, while at the same time thinking this is a piece with strategies to support all of our communities (interview 9).

Still, conversations that directly addressed inclusivity were the chosen strategy of disruption. That same city staff member continued by saying, "I've been hearing more and more about immigrant

rights not being a separate individual category but being a part of human rights" (interview 9). These comments suggest that inclusivity was not only a way to work around narratives of undeservingness that exclude immigrant and refugee communities, but a way to grapple with and address more fundamental questions about what it means to advocate for particular marginalized groups as opposed to fighting collectively for all marginalized groups. Such tactics still worked to erase differences between newcomer and native-born communities, but with a more overt goal of solidarity.

The COVID Window

Because this study took place over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, there was an opportunity during data collection to understand how crisis might impact the way OIRAs approach strategic negotiation of deservingness narratives. In Seattle, the COVID-19 pandemic seemed to usher in a new willingness to engage with the topic of immigration as a marker of deservingness. During COVID-19, the Seattle OIRA directly questioned the basic idea that citizenship defines an individual's access to rights and benefits. Referring to the way many immigrant households were shut out of CARES funding due to immigration status, one OIRA staff member posed the question:

> How is it fair for people who don't have valid social security numbers to be even further marginalized because they don't have access to those federal stimulus payments? (interview 17).

Frustration with this exclusion was channeled into action in Seattle. During the pandemic, the OIRA pushed the city to create a Disaster Relief Fund for Immigrants which provided stimulus payments to immigrant households who were shut out of CARES relief.

> That program was just really eye opening and seeing about how immigration status can

> create first class citizens and second class citizens. It's really, especially in a time of crisis – that just seems so wrong (interview 17).

In these statements, the OIRA staff members make arguments about the arbitrary nature of immigration status as a requirement for belonging and social citizenship within the city of Seattle.

Staff shared that the exclusion from the CARES program was, in some ways, a tipping point for the office. OIRA staff described the intentional and unabashed support offered to unauthorized immigrant populations through the Seattle Disaster Relief Fund for Immigrants:

> Most of the resources that we've given out should be to people who are undocumented. So that's a big win from our end. And then we are not really shy about like, 'Oh, should we not say this? Should we be more low-key?' I think the whole office, we felt very strongly about this. So we can really work really hard to partner with others and say, 'This is what we're doing.' And we're not afraid of other community members saying, 'Hey, how come? We are documented. How come you're not funding us?' (interview 12).

This approach was in tension with prior discussions in which the office had intentionally made newcomer communities invisible in their services through inclusivity. Rather than attempting to smooth over differences, the staff described COVID-19 as a time when they focused on highlighting the structural disadvantages faced by newcomers that were different from those faced by other marginalized groups in the city.

Nonetheless, OIRA staff described a careful navigation of this issue. While there were reasons to prioritize immigrant and refugee communities shut out of CARES dollars, the office described an intentional focus on equitable access in general. The development of a vaccine

program that would reach immigrant communities provided an opportunity for staff to elaborate on this approach:

> First-come, first-serve during high demand is an inequitable design because it relies on people having the time and access to technology to hunt down scattered appointments. Seattle knew this design wasn't going to reach our most vulnerable communities and developed a more equitable way to do vaccine outreach. (City of Seattle, 2021)

While taking a new approach would help immigrant and refugee communities, perhaps in particular unauthorized communities, the Seattle OIRA did not intend to exclude or out-compete other marginalized communities, or even mainstream communities, from vaccine access. The office worked under the auspices that increased accessibility had the potential to serve all communities equitably.

In line with this mission, the Seattle vaccination efforts focused on making sure that language and cultural barriers did not result in additional barriers for newcomer communities:

> You always gotta be careful. It's not like saying, 'Oh, immigrants get appointments before non immigrants.' But when it came to working with community groups, they'd be like, 'The city is going to use our vaccine supply and work with local community-based health organizations and have them set up the appointments, right?' So it's not saying that I, as a white non-immigrant, couldn't make that phone call to set up an appointment for a vaccine with a Latinx community organization, but it means that access is being given to the people who have less access to English-speaking sites, or less access to some of the more mainstream locations (interview 17).

Partnerships were critical, as the Seattle OIRA worked to distribute vaccines to locations where

immigrants and refugees would be comfortable accessing healthcare. This helped to assuage some of the fears related to government oversight, and it broke down language and cultural barriers that might prevent individuals from getting vaccinated. However, as this staff member pointed out, other populations were not excluded. Any community member could make an appointment at a Latinx community organization. Moving appointments to these organizations that were culturally and linguistically capable of serving immigrant and refugee populations helped to level the playing field. This effort was described by staff as one of their most important contributions, as they helped Seattle to become the first city to reach 70% vaccination, with nearly half of all vaccines allocated to BIPOC residents. (interview 13; City of Seattle, 2021)

The COVID-19 pandemic created new urgency to serve the "less than undeserving poor" (Lipman, 2007, p. 742). It was quickly evident that immigrant and refugee populations, and especially unauthorized populations, were vulnerable because of structures not set up to serve them, but also intentional exclusion from benefit programs. In Seattle, this resulted in a willingness to push back more directly on narratives of undeservingness. When it came to intentional exclusion of unauthorized populations from needed resources, the Seattle OIRA explicitly served this group through the creation of public funds. Such reactions to crisis demonstrate the way context can shift strategies of disruption.

Nonetheless, it would be a mistake to describe this more direct action as an uncomplicated result of a crisis. It is worth noting that in Atlanta, the food distributions during COVID-19 were intentionally very inclusive, and a sight of strategic invisibilization of immigrants by the OIRA. Such differences in responses across contexts will be further explored in future sections, but should be noted as an illustration of the important role that political and social dynamics can play in

determining strategic responses to crisis.

Discussion

Social constructions of deservingness have often focused on "cultural membership or moral blamelessness" (Bloemraad et al. 2019, p. 74; Bridges 2017). In newcomer narratives of undeservingness, immigrant and refugee communities' worthiness were challenged due to their recent arrival and presumed lack of suffering. OIRAs often chose inclusive welcoming strategies to address these newcomer narratives. In Atlanta, this took the form of hiding in plain sight: serving immigrant and refugee communities under a banner that welcomed all and with programming that could serve all. In Seattle, there was more direct acknowledgment of the unique experiences of suffering that other marginalized groups, including African Americans, poor whites, and Native peoples, had endured. The office made efforts to strategically engage in programming that balanced the needs of newcomers with a reflection on the needs of other communities. In Minneapolis, the office is in a department with leaders representing diverse communities. The office spoke of regularly engaging in difficult conversations about equitably serving all struggling communities.

These inclusive welcoming strategies can be understood as a form of strategic invisibility, meant to serve a dual function. First, they help OIRAs avoid challenges. As one OIRA staff member described:

> If you're viewed just as an organization that is exclusively looking very particularly at the needs of immigrants and refugees, it's very easy to be vulnerable to: "Well, why should we put those resources when there's these other things?" (interview 18).

They create an inclusive space for marginalized communities who need services and placate those who might challenge the work of the OIRAs if it was only focused on newcomers.

Second, inclusive welcoming strategies also directly benefit newcomer communities. Programming offered to a diverse group, rather than newcomers alone, may provide more anonymity for participants. By inviting everyone to the table, for example at food distributions in Atlanta, the MOIA avoided shining a spotlight on newcomer communities who may have been reluctant to be singled out.

While strategic invisibility has generally been considered a tactic of resistance employed by marginalized populations, this study explores how an arm of the state, such as an OIRA, might strategically invisibilize a population in order to serve their needs. Perhaps power and agency is still best understood as the ability to choose when to be visible and when to be invisible (Goldberg, 1996), indicating that community choice in this process is a critical consideration. However, there appears to be room for an OIRA to support strategic invisibility on behalf of newcomer communities.

The use of inclusivity to invisibilize support for newcomer communities still raises questions about whether OIRAs are disrupting or reinforcing institutional norms around deservingness. On the surface, inclusive welcoming strategies do not challenge newcomer narratives of undeservingness. There is little messaging about the deservingness of immigrant and refugee communities outside of the example from Seattle during the COVID-19 pandemic. OIRAs' first priority appears to be the basic needs of newcomer communities, regardless of how they must navigate narratives of undeservingness. However, contact theory also implies that strategically bringing groups together can begin the process of breaking down those institutional

norms that have divided populations into “us” and “them” (Allport, 1954). OIRAs may, therefore, be on the long road to shifting narratives about deservingness within immigration governance.

Chapter 5. Disrupting Restrictive Regulations

Introduction

Almost immediately after the U.S. Constitution was enacted, the country passed its first law regulating immigration through the Naturalization Act of 1790 (MPI, 2013). Over the next two centuries, the U.S. created a complex system of laws, rules, and regulations governing admission to the United States and how newcomers are integrated into social, political, and economic life in the U.S. This has included regulatory measures crafted and implemented across levels of governance and across a spectrum that includes welcoming, neutral, and exclusionary policies. The result is a “multi-jurisdictional patchwork” of ever-changing immigration-related laws and policies that govern the daily lives of immigrant populations (Varsanyi et al., 2012).

This chapter explores how OIRAs encounter and navigate regulatory measures that govern immigrant experiences at the local level. Focusing on the regulative pillar of immigration governance, it works to understand how OIRAs navigate the legal challenges of institutionalizing welcome at the local level. Examining the types of disruption these offices pursue provides insights into the strategic work of welcoming immigrant and refugee communities locally from within a hierarchical regulative system.

Prominent examples of regulative pillar disruption provided in interviews with OIRA staff

and partners allow for an expansion of the concept of "disconnecting sanctions" (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) define disconnecting sanctions as "working through state apparatus to disconnect rewards and sanctions from some set of practices, technologies, or rules" (p. 235). The most direct approach the authors describe is when courts challenge a practice, while more indirect approaches include "undermining the technical definitions and assumptions on which [institutions] were founded" (p. 236). In other words, disconnecting sanctions exist across a spectrum. They include, for instance, lawsuits directly challenging the legality of requiring law enforcement to check a driver's immigration status during routine traffic stops in the case of Arizona SB 1070. They also include service providers putting on Know Your Rights clinics or Public Charge informational events to ensure that immigrants and refugees are aware of their rights and the benefits they are eligible for, despite the fear instilled by political rhetoric or rule changes.

Acts of regulatory disruption, or the act of disconnecting sanctions, are further differentiated according to their proximal goals. At times, OIRAs used substantive disruption to create immediate and tangible change in the lives of immigrant and refugee communities. At other times, OIRAs used symbolic disruption to signal support for communities without there being any immediate tangible results for immigrants and refugees. These approaches are further differentiated by actions that directly challenge regulative elements, such as legal challenges to laws or policies, or indirectly undermine regulative elements, such as more subtle aversion to the intentions of laws or policies. These categories help to illuminate better the political work OIRAs do to continue serving immigrant and refugee populations from a position within immigration governance that enables and constrains actions that disrupt regulative elements of the institution.

The Regulative Pillar of Immigration Governance

As previously introduced, the plenary power doctrine establishes the federal government as the sole authority controlling the admission of immigrants to the U.S. (Motomura, 1999). In addition, the federal government sets certain guardrails concerning the support and integration of particular immigrant groups. For example, the federal government sets a cap for annual admissions of refugees to the United States but also sets minimum standards for the level of support provided for refugee resettlement. In addition, the federal government has made determinations related to work authorization, health care access, and access to primary and secondary education for immigrants and refugees in the U.S. Despite the undeniable impact of federal policy on the lives of immigrant communities, subnational governments have become increasingly involved in the governance of migration (Steil & Vasi, 2014; de Graauw, 2018; Reich, 2018). This includes actions at both the state and local levels.

At the state level, thousands of immigration-related laws and policies have been enacted in recent decades. Just over 3,000 were enacted between 2005 and 2015 alone (Gómez-Aguiñaga, 2016). Hundreds more have been added each year since, thought the rate of enactment has slowed since 2019 (NCLS, 2020). State-level immigration policy includes both restrictive and welcoming initiatives. In some U.S. locations, there was an upsurge of pro-immigration subnational legal challenges and legislation in response to restrictive federal policies under the Trump administration (Pham & Pham, 2019), including state lawsuits filed to hinder and block the implementation of restrictive federal immigration legislation (Nolette, 2019; Jordan, 2019). Emboldened by anti-immigrant sentiment at the federal level, other U.S. subnational leaders pursued additional restrictive policies. For example, in 2018, seven states sued the Trump

administration in an effort to terminate DACA (Gonzales, 2018), and in 2019, several conservative states petitioned the Trump administration to allow state refusal of refugee resettlement (Trump, 2019).

Local governments add another level of complexity to this system. Already beholden to the plenary power of the federal government on issues related to immigration, local governments have also long been characterized as "creatures of the State" in the U.S. (Coleman v. Miller, 1939), lacking power separate from that which is granted by their respective state (p. 441). States hold preemptive power over local governments, including regulating and veto power that allows states to "reign in local governments that have strayed from a preferred policy position" (Swanson, 2018, p. 27).

Nonetheless, local governments can often exercise considerable autonomy in local policymaking, leading some scholars to suggest that a top-down view of state and local policymaking is inaccurate. Berman (2003) writes that "there is a considerable gap between...what state governments under prevailing legal theories might do to local governments and what they have actually done" (p. 5), suggesting that cities are often able to play a more significant role in policymaking than expected within the structure of the state-local government relationship. Katz and Bradley (2015) go so far as to argue that local governments are drivers of "social transformation in the United States" (p. 1).

Thus, despite the federal government's plenary power over immigration and the preemptive power of state government, there remains significant room for local governments to grapple with policies related to immigrant integration. In the early 2000s, the "trickle" of subnational immigration policymaking "soon turned into a flood" (Varsanyi, 2010). This flood

included a slew of welcoming and restrictive policies that have emerged in alignment and tension with other subnational and federal-level policies (p. 3).

Restrictive Regulations within Immigration Governance

Immigration governance comprises laws, rules, and regulations categorized along a spectrum between welcoming and restrictive. To understand the type of policies that OIRAs might work to disrupt, it is helpful to focus briefly on restrictive regulations and characterize some of the less-welcoming elements contained within the regulatory pillar of immigration governance. This includes a historical look at immigration policies and an understanding of the types of restrictions across levels of immigration federalism.

A brief history of major national immigration legislation gives a glimpse into the country's legacy of restrictive immigration laws at the federal level. Beginning in the late 18th century, the U.S. restricted access to citizenship through the Naturalization Act of 1790 by specifying that "any alien, *being a free white person*" could pursue citizenship after two years in the U.S. (emphasis added). The role of restriction, particularly related to race, remained evident in subsequent legislation. As just a few examples, the U.S. government excluded Chinese immigrants (Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882) as well as other Asian populations and "other non-whites" (Immigration Act of 1917), and attempted to preserve population demographics from early waves of Northern and Western European immigration by implementing national origin quotas based on the 1890 census (Immigration Act of 1924) – this law was not revised until 1965. Today, restrictive legislation continues to be implemented at the federal level under the auspices of both Democratic

and Republican administrations, including restrictions ostensibly based on threats to the security and health of the U.S.

Restrictive policies have also emerged at the subnational level. Policies are categorized into several main areas, including enforcement, employment, and language (Visser & Simpson, 2019). Perhaps the most notorious policies exist under the category of enforcement, an area that "has witnessed an unprecedented involvement by state and local agencies" during the 21st century (Waslin, 2010, p. 97). This category includes programs such as 287(g), a program that allows the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to enter into formal agreements (Memoranda of Agreement or MOAs) with state or local law enforcement agencies and deputize selected state and local law enforcement officers to perform certain functions of federal immigration agents. As of February 2024, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) had established 287(g) partnerships with 61 law enforcement agencies in 17 states through the Jail Enforcement Model (JEM) and with 75 law enforcement agencies in 11 states through the Warrant Service Officer (WSO) program (DHS, 2024). Essentially, JEM uses state and local law enforcement officers to "identify and process removable noncitizens — with criminal or pending criminal charges" while WSO trains state and local law enforcement to act as federal immigration officers and "serve and execute administrative warrants on noncitizens in their agency's jail" (DHS, 2024, n.p.).

Additional restrictive policies have been proposed and passed locally in cities throughout the U.S. without federal involvement. These ordinances include declaring English the official language of a city (Walker, 2015), ordinances that target immigrant-owned businesses (Furseth et al., 2015), housing ordinances that aim to restrict renting to mixed-status families (Guzman, 2010), and ordinances that target employers of unauthorized workers (Varsanyi, 2010). Although some

of these ordinances have been challenged or revoked, their proposal signifies the hostile local atmosphere many immigrants navigate.

Studies have reached conflicting results when describing the impetus behind restrictive policies. Some research has shown that restrictive legislation is more likely in areas experiencing rapid immigrant population growth (O'Neil, 2010) and, in particular, the rapid growth of a location's Latino population (Steil & Vasi, 2014; Esbenshade & Obzurt, 2008). However, Hopkins (2010) moves outside a "localist" approach to posit that these demographic changes incite restrictive policies only in what he calls *politicized places* - when rapid growth in the immigrant population coincides with salient, hostile rhetoric regarding immigration in national media. Other studies have found that restrictive policies are correlated with a community's dominant political alignment, not with an increase in the immigrant or Latino populations. Ramakrishnan and Wong (2010), for example, found that majority-Republican areas are twice as likely to pass restrictive legislation compared to Democratic areas, and Esbenshade et al. (2010) found that widespread beliefs about migration and "illegality" were at the center of restrictive policy.

OIRA Framework for Regulative Disruption

OIRAs described their power to disrupt unwelcoming regulations as constrained and enabled by their position within immigration governance. OIRAs' position with immigration federalism and the bureaucratic realities of working within city government impacts their ability to challenge laws, rules, and regulations. At the same time, OIRAs described the ability to challenge some rules and regulations as emboldened by their position within city government. OIRA's reliance on the support of city leaders or institutions tempered this power, as this reliance required alignment of priorities. I briefly describe how layers of bureaucracy and access to local

power shape OIRA frameworks for regulative disruption.

Layers of Bureaucracy

Working within immigration governance can confer several restraints on OIRAs. The offices work within a hierarchical system of immigration federalism and must also work within the constraints of local city government. As previously described, OIRAs work at the city level, which is nested within the context of state and federal immigration governance. The federal level primarily controls admission to the U.S. and leaves integration to state and local governments. However, this hierarchical structure imposes significant limitations on work at the city level. First, local initiatives are always subject to preemptive regulations at the state or federal level. For example, a city cannot independently admit immigrants and refugees from outside the United States.

Similarly, state laws provide additional constraints. For example, laws prohibiting sanctuary cities in Georgia have challenged the City of Atlanta. One informant described this as "an inherent problem with being a non-federal entity in an area of law and policy that is largely federal and controlled by federal agencies and by the President" (interview 17). In her words: "I see the role of non-federal entities, like [the] city…as filling in the gaps wherever it's legally feasible" (interview 17). OIRA staff, at times, searched for ways to push the boundaries and expand where they could have influence, as described in the coming sections. However, they also described federalism's limitations on their work in the regulative dimension of immigration governance.

OIRAs described city government organization as a second type of constraint on regulative

disruption. Navigating city regulations significantly impacted if and how OIRAs engaged in disruption. In one prominent example, OIRA staff described the layers of approval required to communicate their position regarding immigration-related policies at the state or federal level. One OIRA staff shared:

> There are...some steps that need to be taken before I can communicate something as being City policy or being a position that the City advocates. So typically, what happens is I'll check in with the City Intergovernmental Relations Office to ensure that whatever it is that we would like to comment on as a City, or that I would like to comment on, clearly falls within the federal agenda for the City, and then take it from there (interview 9).

The OIRA's advocacy is filtered through the city's agenda, presenting challenges for quick, decisive action and independent messaging. However, it also provides the assurance and security that the OIRA's message brings with it the seal of city approval. This illustrates the access to power that OIRAs balance, described in the next section.

Regulative Disruption from Within: Access to Power, Dependent on Power

Working from within the city government provides some degree of what one informant called "soft power" (interview 32), which she described as the indirect reliance on the state's coercive powers. In one example, an OIRA staff member described her experience communicating with landlords who were taking advantage of immigrant or refugee populations:

> Being able to say "Hi, I'm calling from the Office of the Mayor" gives the office a kind of power. Sometimes that's all you need to say…Or being able to call the chief of police is also valuable – not everyone can do that (interview 32).

When OIRA priorities align with powerful state actors, offices may leverage those connections to enforce behaviors governed by regulatory elements within the institution.

However, challenges arise when this regulative power emanates from the state and is not inherent to OIRAs. Working within the city often means that OIRAs work from a position that relies on city leaders' goodwill.

> [The OIRA staff] are doing really good stuff in the city in their roles that they have and in the ways that they have influence. But it's never been a structure that has been set up for them to [have influence]... Inside the city, there could be an opportunity for someone like our Southeast Asian specialist to say, "Hey, city departments, if you're going to engage the Hmong community here is how you do it respectfully and thoroughly and welcoming." And put some teeth behind that because they're all city employees. But there has never been a set up that really has allowed for that. It has always been a department, or chair, or department head who was willing to listen and meaningfully engage (interview 2).

OIRAs have a limited ability to implement or enforce regulations directly. Disrupting regulative elements of immigration governance may be more difficult if their priorities are not in alignment with powerful allies within the city. This highlights the very political dimension to the work of challenging regulations. OIRAs must find ways to balance their desire to challenge restrictive regulations with their need for allyship and internal city champions.

Forms of Regulative Disruption

To understand the types of regulative disruption and the contextual factors that may be important in determining those forms of disruption, I created a categorization of disruptive institutional work by OIRAs. This categorization draws on the work of Lawrence and Suddaby

(2006), who describe the direct and indirect disruptive work performed by institutions. However, it adds a dimension that illuminates the intended proximal outcomes of disruption – an element that OIRAs described as a critical difference in disruptive strategies and strongly correlated with the types of constraints and advantages OIRAs gained working from within city government.

Disruption of the regulative pillar of institutions closely aligns with the disruptive form of institutional work that Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) categorized as "disconnecting sanctions." Disruption in the form of disconnecting sanctions "involved work in which state and non-state actors worked through state apparatus to disconnect rewards and sanctions from some set of practices, technologies or rules" (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006, p. 235). This type of disruption can be direct or indirect, and OIRAs consistently described disruptive actions that directly or indirectly disrupted the regulative pillar of immigration governance. Direct forms of regulative pillar disruption challenge legal or regulative constructs, while indirect forms undermine the grounding principles of laws or rules (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006).

A second dimension of regulatory disruption categorizes the intended proximal outcome of disruption. This categorization includes substantive and symbolic disruption. In *Symbolic Uses of Politics*, Murray Edelman (1985) writes:

> Basic to the recognition of symbolic forms in the political process is a distinction between politics as a spectator sport and political activity as utilized by organized groups to get quite specific, tangible benefits for themselves [or others]. (p.5)

In substantive disruption, the immediate intent is to create tangible, meaningful change in the daily lives of immigrant and refugee populations. In symbolic disruption, there is generally hope that substantive change will take place, but the most immediate intention is to demonstrate a

commitment to immigrant and refugee communities. Symbolic action "serve(s) as a vehicle for expression," according to Edelman (1985), "rather than as an instrument for changing the world" (p. 11).

Figure 7 illustrates the four conceptual categories created by thinking along two dimensions of this continuum. While literature often creates a dichotomy between direct and indirect or symbolic and substantive work, these categories operate on a spectrum and do not create fully discrete categories. As a simple introduction that provides conceptual clarity, this study highlights four categories that represent types of disruption institutions engage in with respect to the regulatory pillar, but it should be kept in mind that 1) these are not discrete categories and 2) these are categories created from the perspective of the OIRA working within the city.

In the first of the four types of regulatory disruption, OIRAs engage in actions that are primarily indirect and symbolic. These are disruptive efforts that act to undermine laws or rules but do not directly challenge them. At the same time, these disruptive efforts may hope to bring about conditions that provide tangible benefits, but they are not directly associated with tangible benefits to the immigrant and refugee community. These actions are often palatable to a wide audience. They are disruptive in that they work to undermine the intentions of restrictive immigration governance, but they do so quietly. Actions in this category often acquiesce to the laws or rules in place, and while they may contribute to new community narratives around resource distribution, informants do not describe the distribution (or redistribution) of resources as their primary purpose.

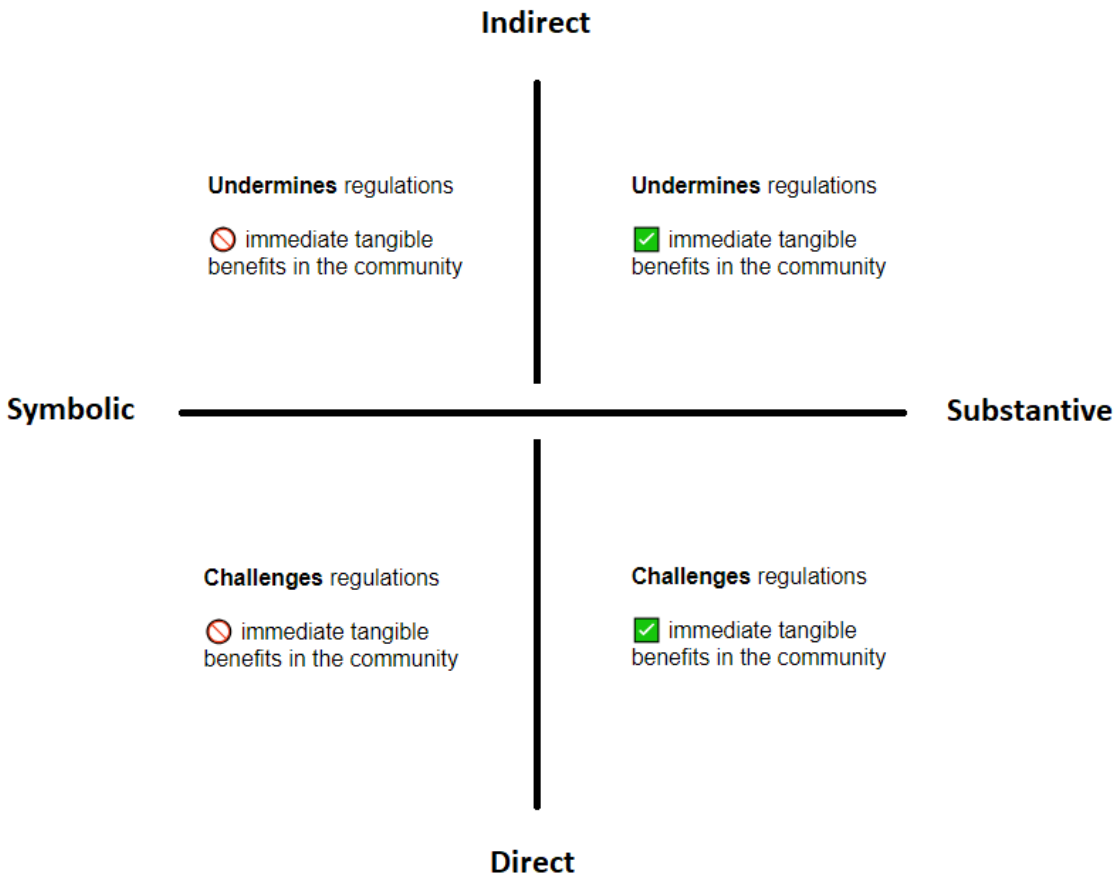
Second, some regulative disruptions are indirect but substantive. These are disruptive efforts that act to undermine laws or rules but do not directly challenge them, while providing

tangible benefits to the immigrant and refugee communities. These actions are also quiet. They are concerned with undermining the adverse outcomes experienced by the immigrant and refugee communities resulting from restrictive immigration governance, and they do so with an immediate eye toward the redistribution of tangible resources. However, they do not necessarily focus on calling out injustice rules and regulations.

Third, some regulative disruptions are direct but symbolic. These are disruptive efforts that act to challenge rules or laws directly but provide no immediate tangible benefits to the immigrant and refugee communities. At the extreme, these actions may be a form of virtue signaling. Direct but symbolic actions vocalize a commitment to a particular form of governance. These actions help an institution to be seen or understood in a certain way, even if they do not have immediate, direct impacts on the lives of immigrant and refugee populations.

Fourth, some regulative disruptions are direct and substantive. These disruptive efforts challenge rules and laws while also immediately addressing access to tangible benefits for immigrant and refugee communities. In these instances, institutional disruption is seen and heard while creating tangible change in distributional outcomes for immigrant and refugee communities.

Figure 7: Forms of Regulative Disruption



The following sections use data to explore examples of these four actions intended to disrupt restrictive regulatory aspects of immigration governance. This categorization provides deeper insight into the actions available to OIRAs as they balance a position within immigration governance that is subject to strict regulations but also proxy to significant power. Examining these types of actions and when they are employed suggests contextual factors that may drive the selection of certain forms of disruption.

Indirect and Symbolic

Welcome, Not Sanctuary

The legacy of sanctuary cities is long and often confused in public dialogue. The lineage of sanctuary cities dates to ancient times, appearing in multiple religions, including the "six cities of refuge" described in the Bible (Bauder, 2017; Bagelman, 2016; Darling & Bauder, 2019). A more modern lineage in the United States begins with the City of Refuge resolution passed by San Francisco in 1985, where policies first explicitly directed that city employees could not inquire into an individual's immigration status, nor could they refer them for federal immigration enforcement about their status (Peeck, 2021). Since the 1980s, additional cities have embraced these tenets and encouraged unauthorized immigrants to live as members of society without fear that local institutions will target them about their status (Bauder, 2017).

While there is no set definition of a sanctuary city policy, they are generally understood as policies that limit cooperation with federal immigration enforcement (AIC, 2020). Although sanctuary cities or states have been careful to craft policies that comply with federal law and do not shield unauthorized immigrants from prosecution or deportation, they do put boundaries around cooperation with immigration enforcement. These policies within so-called sanctuary cities have created tensions between levels of government, especially over the last decade. Recently, additional states have established anti-sanctuary city laws, including Texas, Florida, West Virginia, Iowa, Georgia, Arkansas, Tennessee, Idaho, Alabama, and more (ILRC, 2023). These laws differ in their comprehensiveness but generally require some form of local participation in immigration enforcement efforts. Many impose financial sanctions on cities that do not comply with legislation. Additional challenges to sanctuary policies came from the federal level when the

Trump administration targeted sanctuary cities with an executive order that attempted to withhold federal funds from sanctuary jurisdictions, and later when his administration threated these jurisdictions and targeted them for immigration raids (Westervelt, 2017).

The OIRA staff in Atlanta and Seattle described their experience navigating the crackdown on sanctuary cities. Despite significant differences in their context, one in a red state confronting a state-level anti-sanctuary ban and the other in a blue state confronting a federal-level ban, there were similarities in how they approached this regulative challenge. In general, they described an indirect and symbolic approach to disrupting the regulation of sanctuary cities. While immigrant and refugee communities were somewhat resistant to this seemingly performative response, it also allowed the offices to put their energies and social capital into addressing what they saw as more significant priorities.

Red and Blue Sanctuaries

Just a year after the establishment of the Atlanta MOIA, which was largely in response to restrictive legislation at the state level, Georgia passed further anti-immigrant legislation. In April 2016, the Governor of Georgia, Nathan Deal, signed SB 269, which entailed "the prohibition on immigration sanctuary policies by local governmental entities" and required local governments to certify compliance to receive certain state funding (Georgia SB 269, 2016). This restrictive legislation created tensions between the state and local levels, particularly with the Atlanta MOIA. As one MOIA staff member shared, state laws were "very different than local policies" and "in many cases hostile and unfriendly towards immigrants and their families" which "was a challenge for the office" (interview 33).

The MOIA staff took an indirect approach to disrupting this state-level anti-sanctuary law.

Rather than attack the regulation, they looked for a way to work around it while prioritizing the service of immigrant and refugee communities. According to one staff member:

> The state doesn't allow what they call ‘sanctuary cities.’ And so, the city had to essentially prove to the state that it was not a sanctuary city, but it was a welcoming city (interview 33).

Essentially, the city worked to rebrand what they were doing and fit their work within the regulative structure of the state. That same staff member continued:

> So as far as the framework, the nature of the work, and the goals of the work itself, they were able to - the city was able to kind of prove that this office does not violate the state's policy on sanctuary cities. And so it was allowed to continue.” (interview 33)

Another co-worker agreed. The term welcoming was “basically a way for us to fall short of being a sanctuary city while maintaining the tenants behind that, the values behind that” (interview 27). While there was hope that this approach would allow the MOIA to continue to provide tangible benefits to immigrant and refugee communities, the primary concern was avoid discipline by the state and to signal a continued dedication to welcome despite challenges from the state level.

This type of indirect disruption was a common strategy in the MOIA’s early work when confronted by the state. The staff described their efforts to avoid confrontation with state regulations and to negotiate space within the constraints of immigration governance to continue serving immigrant communities. When the state directly challenged the city as a sanctuary city, framing the MOIA’s work as welcoming became a strategy of avoidance, protecting the city’s initiative from the state’s anti-sanctuary city legislation.

One year later, and across the country, Seattle faced challenges from the federal

government concerning a sanctuary city designation. In November 2017, the Department of Justice sent letters to 29 jurisdictions that the federal government determined “may have laws, policies, or practices that violate 8 U.S.C. 1373, a federal statute that promotes information sharing related to immigration enforcement” (DOJ, 2017). The jurisdictions were given three weeks to provide evidence that they were in compliance with federal law.

Despite being positioned significantly differently from Atlanta regarding this regulative challenge's state and federal context, Seattle’s response largely mirrored Atlanta’s. An OIRA staff member in Seattle shared:

> I don't know what happened in those conversations at the politics level, but they decided not to use as strong language as a sanctuary city. So that's why they decided on being a welcoming city (interview 14).

The OIRA intentionally disassociated itself with the language of a sanctuary city. Under Frequently Asked Questions on the OIRA’s website, the first question reads: “What does being a “Sanctuary City” mean?” (Seattle.gov, n.d.b, n.p.). In response, the OIRA writes:

> The terminology of "Sanctuary City" can often be misused, misinterpreted, or misunderstood. To emphasize the true intent of Seattle, we prefer to use the term "Welcoming City," which means all City departments prioritize and consider policies, actions, and practices that help immigrant and refugee communities succeed. (Seattle.gov, n.d.b, n.p.)

The Seattle OIRA’s mission statement provides additional reinforcement for this decision. The mission statement decisively states that “Seattle is a Welcoming City” (Seattle.gov, n.d.a, n.p.) and a 2017 Seattle resolution begins with “A RESOLUTION affirming the City of Seattle as a

Welcoming City that promotes" and goes on to "recommit" to "its policy to be a Welcoming City" (Seattle Resolution 31730, 2017).

Like Atlanta, taking this more indirect approach to unsettling anti-sanctuary city laws was somewhat pragmatic. It allowed the office to do what it needed to do to support immigrant and refugee communities by working to avoid challenges at the federal level and by engendering the support of elected officials. An informant shared:

> That designation or that classification of being a welcoming city allowed us to do some of this work…being a welcoming city kind of gave us that – not legal mandate, but kind of support from our elected officials that this is the work that we want to be doing for our city (interview 14).

Aware of the constraints the federal government could impose and the value of local political support, the Seattle OIRA and the City of Seattle aligned their messaging to promote welcoming rather than sanctuary policies. In these instances, pushing back against anti-sanctuary policies at the state and federal level appeared to fall into the "not worth it" category, as city OIRAs found ways to continue serving immigrant and refugee populations without interruption.

This more indirect and symbolic approach to disruption was not welcomed by all constituents. In Seattle, for example, an OIRA staff member shared:

> The community was really advocating for the City of Seattle to be a sanctuary city. But because they decided to take a step back and be a more general Welcoming City, some community wasn't too happy about that (interview 14).

These confrontations with the community demonstrate the delicate balance OIRAs tried to find – negotiating from within the immigration governance regime, letting go of fights that did not seem

to provide significant benefits to their constituents, and acknowledging the desire in the community for more direct action.

Eventually, the City of Seattle signed on to a lawsuit started in other cities that directly challenged the Trump administration's sanctuary city attacks. This decision to more directly address sanctuary restrictions did not change Seattle's choice to use welcoming language. However, it does demonstrate the way disruptive responses to regulative action can shift over time and in response to efforts undertaken by other similarly positioned actors. Such shifts suggest that networks may be a key element in supporting more direct disruption of regulatory restrictions that exist at higher scales of immigration governance.

Direct but Symbolic

Public Comments: Promoting a Welcoming City

The inauguration of the Trump administration represented an abrupt, restrictive shift in federal policy toward immigrant communities. The Migration Policy Institute has documented 472 immigration-related policy changes that the Trump administration made during its tenure, an "unprecedented pace" of executive action on immigration that imposed restrictions or burdens on immigration and immigrant communities (Bolter et al., 2022). Because the federal government has preemptive power over immigration policy, local governments have limited formal avenues to push back against these actions and effect regulative change.

Nonetheless, the staff at the Seattle OIRA described a desire to step up and fight back against federal-level restrictive and punitive immigration-related policies. In part, this meant signaling support for immigrant communities by emphasizing welcome at the local level and

distancing Seattle from rhetoric at the federal level. Though this did little to change the experience of immigrant and refugee communities in their day-to-day lives, it did directly challenge restrictive immigration-related regulations. One former staffer shared:

> During the Trump administration, there was always some anti-immigrant administrative rule or policy or just something that, at least on the city level, whether or not we have any direct impact or influence over what that policy is - it seemed important to push back and to use whatever means possible to really speak out and say that Seattle is a welcoming city, Seattle is a city that really will go out of its way to promote and create a safe and welcoming environment for immigrant refugee populations (interview 17).

Directly confronting anti-immigrant policies was a significant goal in. This confrontation included "city statements" and "challenging actions by the federal government" that threatened immigrant and refugee communities (interview 9) as well as submitting public comments (interview 11).

To better understand this type of regulative disruption, we delve into work by the Seattle OIRA, which included a robust practice of writing public comments. According to the 1946 Administrative Procedure Act, the public must be given the opportunity to provide comments on significant changes in federal regulations (Fabi & Zahn, 2022). After a regulation is proposed, there is a set period during which anyone may submit comments related to the proposed change and its potential consequences. The agency proposing a regulations change must then review these comments before implementing said changes.

Engagement with this public comment process was a common strategy used by OIRAs to voice their concerns regarding restrictive regulations, especially at the federal level and during the Trump administration. According to one informant in Seattle:

> When it came to policies, and when it came to the executive orders, it was just nonstop us writing public comments. Prior to the Trump administration, I had written zero public comments as an office against an executive order or rule change. I think at the end of this last four years we wrote, I think almost 20 public comments - against public charge, against the increase of the fees for naturalization… (interview 11).

The Seattle OIRA website lists 25 public comments drafted by its staff and submitted on behalf of the City of Seattle, spanning 2018 to 2023 (see Appendix List 1). The OIRA submitted seventeen comments in response to immigration-related actions taken by the Trump administration (2018-2020) and another eight in response to immigration-related actions taken by the Biden administration in the first three years of his term (2021-2023). The OIRA website describes the purpose of these public comments as an opportunity to "assert the City's dissent on the public record" regarding immigration-related federal actions (Seattle OIRA, n.d.c). More specifically, OIRA staff shared that they used public comments to assert that federal policies were "not in line with [the OIRA's or the city's] values" and "to say why this policy is terrible" (interview 12).

Examining the language of these public comments provides insight into the values held by the Seattle OIRA and the city and the tensions between local and federal levels on these issues. Administrative burden was a common criticism levied against policies proposed by the Trump and Biden administrations in the Seattle OIRA's public comments. Administrative burden consists of the learning, compliance, and psychological costs of navigating a bureaucratic process (Herd & Moynihan, 2019). This burden includes investing the time, energy, and other resources necessary to 1) gain a functional understanding of the process, 2) abide by the rules and regulations, and 3) mentally and emotionally endure the process (Herd & Moynihan, 2019). In a 2018 public

comment, the office's Citizenship Program and Policy Specialist, Meghan Kelly-Stallings, describes how all three elements of administrative burden are heightened by the Trump administration's proposal to change document requirements for fee waivers used in the naturalization process:

> Applicants who file fee waiver requests are often overwhelmed by the documentation needed to establish eligibility. They will need extra time to collect these documents, lengthening the wait for them to become citizens. The time, confusion, and difficulty of completing income-based fee waivers at our clinics will now apply to all fee waiver applicants. (Seattle OIRA, 2017).

This description demonstrates how the elements of administrative burden can become entangled and compounding: difficulty learning can lead to difficulty executing, and both can lead to feeling overwhelmed. In addition, public comments noted psychological burdens of fear and discouragement felt by noncitizens and their families when the navigation of these processes may determine life-changing outcomes such as access to family reunification or deportability.

While there is evidence that public comments play a critical role in developing and revising regulations (Naughton et al., 2009), in recent years, some questions have been raised about the effectiveness of public comments, particularly in the realm of immigration-related law and policy. One study analyzed a sample of public comments submitted in response to the Trump administration's proposed Public Charge rule change and found that 96 percent of comments expressed opposition to the rule change. However, the practical and moral issues raised in these comments were not addressed before the rule was implemented (Fabi & Zahn, 2022). In light of these findings, Fabi and Zahn (2022) write, "it would be reasonable to ask what value, if any,

derives from the public comment process" (p.332).

Based on these questions raised by Fabi and Zahn (2022) and by the Seattle OIRA's own statements regarding the OIRA's intent to use public comments to go "on record" and demonstrate the city's welcoming intentions, this study classifies public comments as a direct but symbolic form of regulatory disruption. Determining the actual effectiveness of public comments in creating substantive changes is outside the scope of this study, but it is worth noting that, even without a formal pathway to change federal regulations, the Seattle OIRA saw value in symbolic work to "promote" Seattle as a welcoming city. Even without changing federal regulations, the OIRA hoped that signaling their dissent would help to separate the priorities and actions of the local government from the federal government.

It is also worth noting, however, that public comments may offer the opportunity to blur the line between symbolic and substantive disruption. Though they may have strong symbolic potential through encouraging and promoting welcome, they may also shift to more substantive work over time. Fabi and Zahn (2022) note that public comments can set up future actions that challenge federal regulations. For example, they can illustrate when "the government failed in its regulatory duties," and future efforts to mount regulatory challenges can use the language and data of comments. In addition, local actors use public comments to leverage the resource of time in the fight against regulative action. As Levesque et al. (2023) have noted, attorneys representing noncitizen clients in immigration proceedings often use time as a strategy "to resist an unjust system and delay or prevent the imposition of punishment" when faced with an immigration system that denies their ability to "negotiate substantively just outcomes" (p. 473). Similarly, public comment periods can be used strategically to delay and build cases against regulative

change when there is no other pathway for local governments to seek a more just policy formally, blurring the line between symbolic and substantive work.

Indirect but Substantive

We're Not Going to E-Verify People for Bagels

Indirect but substantive disruption relies on undermining the intent of regulations to provide tangible benefits to community. A staff member of the MOIA described this disruptive strategy when the office navigated tensions with the state's Immigration Enforcement Review Board. Some on the MOIA staff felt that the state created the IERB primarily to surveil the work of the city of Atlanta and the Atlanta MOIA to see "what [the MOIA] was doing" and "if [the MOIA] was following state immigration compliance laws" (interview 31). A primary tension between the state review board and the city of Atlanta was linked to the 2011 IIREA, which prohibited the provision of services to residents who could not prove they were lawful residents of the state.

Tension with this law emerged when the MOIA established a program called MyCity ATL. A staff member shared:

> We created MyCity ATL. We called it an academy in the beginning. But then the state, [the Immigrant Enforcement Review Board], came and sued us. So it's like, you can't call it an academy. It's in violation of this law (interview 30).

The state classified the MOIA's academy as a form of free education, which they defined as a public benefit being provided. According to state law, this would require the MOIA to check that all participants had an authorized presence in the U.S.

On behalf of the MOIA, there was little desire to directly confront the state IERB over the

MyCity ATL program. The goal for the MOIA staff was to keep providing education, empowerment, and – not insignificantly – breakfast. Rather than challenge the law and the fundamental assertion that non-residents were undeserving of public benefits provided by the city, the MOIA reframed their work but continued to offer all the direct benefits of programming to immigrant and refugee communities.

> What we were really doing was just Civics 101 with an ESL class that was already existing. We'd go in once a month and we'd talk about city government, how it works, what it does, how you can get involved. And it was our staff. We weren't hiring. They weren't getting certificates for it. It wasn't an actual education. Right? It was just Civics 101. And the only thing we gave them was bagels and coffee. So we weren't going to E-Verify people for bagels and coffee. But that's what that state organization would do (interview 30).

To avoid conflict, the MOIA renamed its program without the word "academy." This helped shield the program from state restrictions related to providing free education to residents without legal status. Rather than end the program, the MOIA continued to serve immigrants, regardless of status, by describing a program that welcomed immigrants through "MyCity ATL" and avoided language that referred to educating immigrant communities through the "academy."

The decision to rename the MOIA's civic education and avoid direct confrontation with the sate certainly echoes the approach that Seattle and Atlanta took in renaming themselves welcoming cities as opposed to sanctuary cities when confronted with federal and state regulations. The difference is slight, but meaningful to the MOIA staff. In the case of MyCity ATL, staff specifically referenced two benefits that they viewed as priorities: 1) civics education and 2) breakfast. These were tangible benefits that they were providing to the community, substantive

investments in the health and civic engagement of community members. Remaining a welcoming city, rather than a sanctuary city, was described first as a way to maintain a public commitment to immigrant communities, with the underlying hope that this would enable continued investment in welcoming work by local political leaders and continued positive relationships with newcomer communities.

Further conversations with MOIA staff illuminated some reasons why such substantive work, to provide education and breakfast, was approached indirectly. When asked about the motivation behind this indirect disruption, MOIA staff pointed to the newness of their office and inexperience of the staff as one contributing factor:

> …I think also because [we] were newer, we didn't push back as much. So we'd just be like, 'Oh, we'll change the name, whatever. It's fine.' But we didn't push back much because they would always hold this state regulation over our head - like you can't do this because of this. You can't do that, because of this" (interview 30).

Later, the office would participate in more direct and substantive disruption. These more direct efforts emerged as the office became more established, and the staff learned where they could push more aggressively. The significant community needs brought to light during the COVID-19 pandemic also emboldened their actions.

Dispelling a Cloud of Fear and Confusion

Additional indirect but substantive work emerged in response to the fear engendered by anti-immigrant language and policies. In addition to more direct and symbolic responses to restrictive legislation, such as public comments directed at the proposed change in the public

charge rule, the Seattle OIRA staff described a more indirect and substantive approach that focused on the needs and experiences of local immigrant and refugee communities. Many efforts were not aimed at making changes to regulations, but to providing access to benefits that immigrants and refugees might be hesitant use due to threatening and confusing restrictions at the federal level.

One thing the Seattle OIRA staff learned was that, even when federal policies did not directly threaten immigrant and refugee populations, policies still impacted those populations. A former OIRA staff member shared:

> Sometimes it wasn't like, 'Oh, this Trump policy will harm or directly harm this group of people,' but it was this climate of fear and uncertainty, and people just not knowing what - if anything - worse was coming next…. (interview 17).

In addition:

> We kind of had to not only determine the actual impact of certain policies and certain policy proposals, but also how people were feeling and the concern that certain things were engendering or creating among community members, and generally trying to be as receptive and responsive to that as we could be (interview 17).

Staff members described a "kind of cloud of fear and confusion" among immigrant communities, and the chilling effects of Trump administration rhetoric that resulted in eligible individuals avoiding government services and benefits for fear of retribution (interview 17). Scholars have confirmed the tangible effects of these feelings of fear in immigrant communities when they are faced with increased enforcement efforts or restrictive changes to immigration policy. Documented impacts include a decline in the reporting of crimes (Muchow, 2022),

decreased access to healthcare services (Friedman & Venkataramani, 2021), and lower enrollment in public benefit programs (Haley et al., 2020). By listening to local communities, the Seattle OIRA worked to be responsive to these fears, regardless of what the actual implementation of federal policies looked like.

One aspect of responding to these fears was to provide immigrant and refugee communities with education regarding the risks created by federal regulations, but also their limitations. One staff member said:

> So, helping people understand what public charge is, hosting workshops, talking about DACA and public charge – I think those are the more tangible initiatives that we took to overcome fear and directly support people who might need help (interview 12).

In the wake of the public charge rule change confusion in 2020, the Seattle OIRA sponsored a campaign that included 10 workshops intended to educate immigrant and refugee communities about their continued right to access many benefits, such as free COVID-19 testing and vaccines. This work was indirect, not aimed at changing federal-level policies, but substantive, as it did directly work to disrupt impeded access to a wide variety of benefits.

Direct and Substantive

Driver's Licenses for All

Minneapolis engaged in several tactics that supported direct and substantive disruption of state-level policy change related to driver's licenses. In Minneapolis, OIRA staff worked diligently to support the passage of the Driver's License for All bill. This state-wide bill provides access to driver's licenses regardless of an individual's immigration status. While this is legislation at the

state level, the director of the Minneapolis OIRA, Michelle Rivero, was explicitly commended for her advocacy on this issue alongside other immigrant rights attorneys, advocates, and local policymakers (Hilger, 2024). This state-level advocacy included several tactics from the local level office.

First, the Minneapolis OIRA leveraged media and community support to advocate for changes in state policies. In a 2019 interview with Minnesota's Women's Press, the director of the Minneapolis OIRA shared four recommendations for local community members who wanted to show support for immigrant and refugee communities. Her second recommendation explicitly called on changes in state regulations as she asked community members to "Call on local elected leaders to support measures that protect and support rights that benefit us all, such as driver's licenses for all and robust state-funded legal access to justice" (Duarte, 2019).

Second, the Minneapolis OIRA embraced community interest in implementing driver's licenses for all by including this legislative change in the office's strategic plan. In this strategic plan, developed with community stakeholders and presented to the city council and mayor, the OIRA identified driver's licenses and state identity documents for all residents regardless of immigration status as a priority and critical strategy for achieving "connected communities" and "safe communities" (Twin Cities G4G, 2022, p. 15-16).

Third, the Minneapolis OIRA educated local city leaders about the importance of state-level legislation. In addition to the driver's license for all bill, this has included other state-level policy changes such as expanding Minnesota Care to provide better access to health and wellness in immigrant communities as well as reducing the maximum incarceration penalty for gross misdemeanors from 365 to 364 days in order to avoid unintentional immigration consequences.

As an example of this work, the Minneapolis OIRA director, along with community partners, presented to the Minneapolis Policy and Oversight Committee regarding the importance of all of these bills (City of Minneapolis, 2021).

In these efforts, the Minneapolis OIRA was very direct in their disruption of state-level policies that they saw as interfering with the inclusion of immigrant and refugee populations. This was partly attributed to the more welcoming reception at the state level for immigrants and refugees. Despite there being policies in place that restricted immigrant and refugee communities, there were also significant allies at the state level who were interested in supporting the advocacy work of the Minneapolis OIRA. Most notably, the Assistant Commissioner for Immigrant and Refugee Affairs at the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) was a strategic partnership whose support was critical for the work of the local office.

This work produced substantive benefits for many unauthorized immigrants. In 2023, an estimated 81,000 unauthorized immigrants became eligible to apply for a driver's license in Minnesota (Watson & Williams, 2023; DPS, 2023). One former OIRA staff member described this as an example of "things that could be done and were actively being done that weren't necessarily constrained by the federal government" (interview 1).

Again, there is room for understanding a blurred line between symbolic and substantive work, or a dual purpose. The work on state-level policy not only provided safe transportation options for unauthorized immigrants in the state but also worked to demonstrate the OIRA's commitment to immigrant and refugee communities. This worked on a symbolic level to promote trust and partnership between the OIRA and communities. Even before the bill passed in 2023, OIRA staff described working on the Driver's Licenses for All campaign as critical to gaining trust

within the immigrant and refugee communities. One staff member commented:

> You know, it's interesting, the driver's license campaign of 2018-2019 was ***the*** way, really, that [the OIRA] developed intimate relationships with a number of different people who were advocates for immigrant communities and, themselves, members of immigrant and refugee communities. From that experience, [the OIRA] developed relationships that provide me with kind of a sounding board in understanding what issues are front and center for certain community members (interview 9).

In other words, symbolic and substantive disruption can work together. In addition, this anecdote suggests how disruption of one pillar can also result in disruption of other pillars. As discussed in the next chapter, OIRAs saw community distrust of and disconnect from government as a defining aspect of the relationship between the OIRA and newcomer communities. By disrupting regulations that negatively impacted newcomer communities, OIRAs were able to simultaneously able to show their alignment with community priorities which disrupted notions of distrust. Just as institutional pillars are co-constitutive of institutions, disruption of institutional pillars can be co-constitutive as well.

Shifts in Disrupting Restrictive Regulations

The categories of deliberate disruption, previously defined, are imperfect and in motion. Two elements illustrate challenges to starkly defined categories of deliberate disruption. First, the categories represent a range of actions rather than stark boundaries. As an illustration, substantive outcomes in the examples range from a free bagel to the ability to legally drive. Both may help to meet basic, tangible needs in newcomer communities, but the impact of the Driver's Licenses for All legislation, which provides access to legal IDs and the ability to legally drive to thousands of

Minnesota residents living in the state without authorization, is arguably much more significant than the provision of bagels and coffee to the few dozen participants in a civic participation program in Atlanta. Second, the categories are context specific, meaning the same action taken in different places might be categorized differently. Refusing to E-Verify individuals for a bagel in Seattle does not disrupt any laws on the books or law in action, while the same refusal in Atlanta undermined the state of Georgia's governance of migration. Even within the same example, disruption might have multiple purposes, as the Driver's Licenses for All work in Minnesota had both symbolic and substantive aims and outcomes.

Deliberate disruption of restrictive regulations is also a strategy in motion. The type of regulative disruption that OIRAs choose is shaped by their position within the immigration governance regime and the associated city-specific politics and power dynamics that shape their role within immigration governance. However, there were also times when OIRAs indicated a change in their regulative disruption strategies. Seattle, for example, practiced indirect and symbolic regulative disruption when the city protected its status quo of serving newcomer communities by asserting itself as a welcoming city rather than a sanctuary city in response to the Trump administration's threat to withhold funding from sanctuary cities. However, in the following months Seattle joined a lawsuit developed by other cities that directly challenged the legitimacy of that policy, demonstrating the role that networks and external systems of support may play in strategically choosing forms of disruption. There is also literature to support the idea that the direct but symbolic work of writing public comments might become more substantive if the comments are used to build a case against or delay implementation of restrictive practices, supporting the idea that intentions and outcomes of disruption may shift over time (Fabi & Zahn,

2022).

In the next section, I describe one example of a major shift in regulatory disruption that took place in Atlanta. I focus on this example for a number of reasons. First, it is a clear illustration of a significant change in regulatory disruption. Staff were reluctant to directly challenge certain regulations prior to COVID-19 but challenged those regulations head-on during COVID-19. However, there remained limitations to what regulations or rules they challenged, illuminating more persistent challenges to local, internal forms of disruption. Second, while there was a clear shift in regulatory disruption at the start of COVID-19, Atlanta MOIA staff offered insights into additional factors that shaped their decision to move from indirect to direct regulatory disruption.

COVID-19 Crisis

The first reported case of COVID-19 in Georgia was on March 2nd, 2020. Over the next several weeks, Atlanta's mayor, Keisha Lance Bottoms, gradually implemented more restrictive policies, closing businesses and issuing stay-at-home orders. Health, social, and economic impacts were widely felt, but immigrants were among the hardest hit – a common trend throughout the United States. In a survey of immigrants in Atlanta and Southwest Georgia conducted through a partnership that included the MOIA and the Latino Community Fund, it became clear that job loss, access to health care, fears about children falling behind in school, and worries about not being able to pay bills were higher among immigrant populations compared to the native-born (LCF, 2021).

These needs kickstarted significant pushback by the MOIA, particularly against local service providers that were not including immigrant and refugee communities in their distribution

of necessary resources. The MOIA staff described three buckets that were the focus of their COVID-19 response: food, housing, and COVID-19-specific resources such as vaccines and public health information. As one staffer described, “COVID was really the crux” of the barriers that the office chose to push back against (interview 30) as they tackled newcomer access to these resources.

The city of Atlanta was not initially on board with some of the measures the MOIA proposed. The MOIA staff recalled that the city was concerned with the state policies prohibiting services rendered to unauthorized residents. According to a staff member, "Well, first [the auditing team] said, ‘The law specifically says we cannot use this money if we do not check people's social security numbers’” (interview 30). The MOIA staff knew this was incorrect due to specific regulations attached to the federal funds provided for COVID-19 relief. A MOIA staff member asserted:

> Our local law was usurped by federal law which said that if you funnel the money through a nonprofit, then the state can't require that a nonprofit verify someone's immigration status, right? This was always in existence, and we'd always have some tentative conversations about it like, ‘Hey, well, the money is actually going to this organization, so you shouldn't check’ (interview 30).

Kate Walz, an attorney with the National Housing Law Project, described this tension in an interview with NPR: “A state or local government is not free to demand that a person, as a condition of receipt of those benefits, provide a Social Security Number” (Stokes, 2021, n.p.).

In part due to the legal background of some MOIA staff, the MOIA knew that immigrants were being turned away unnecessarily from resources that they were eligible for in Atlanta. The

staff pressed for change. One staff member described the frustratingly long and inefficient process of navigating the constraints of their position while pushing for urgently needed change:

> So we wrote legal memos, but I'm not allowed to give legal advice because I'm not under the insurance, right? So then we would go to outside counsel … and they would affirm. So they would say, 'Yes, that is what the law says. You don't have to require this.' And then we got national organizations that are partners with us to say the same thing with us. Then we would show them the laws. I think in Arizona, they were actually sued for requiring more than what the law allowed, right? So it was all these - and then the legal team would say, 'It's still not allowed.' Maybe they'd write two or three paragraphs in response to our 20 page memo. And then it finally came to the point where we did enough external pressure where, literally, we just got an answer that was one word in an email - or one sentence in an email sent saying, 'Okay, go ahead.' So that's your victory right? After all of that - it's like, 'Okay, go ahead' (interview 30).

The MOIA's position within the city government meant that, with pushback, the office could drastically shift services throughout the city and increase immigrant communities' access to much-needed resources. Unfortunately, it also meant that they had to navigate institutional barriers by not only identifying the legal opportunity but also convincing the city that nonprofits legally could – and should – be serving communities regardless of their status.

Partners were critical in pushing for this change in service and making sure that immigrants and refugees were able to access local resources. However, because the MOIA described a relatively undeveloped immigrant-serving nonprofit sector in the city of Atlanta (unsurprising given its relatively new increases in immigrant populations and the location of those populations

outside of the city boundaries), the MOIA found itself relying on somewhat less traditional advocacy networks including outside counsel, national organizations, and large funders to push back against an ingrained understanding of the need for proof of citizenship when providing services.

While receiving the (somewhat anticlimactic) blessing of the city's legal team was a relief, the MOIA quickly discovered their battle was not over. Though the MOIA had convinced the city that social security numbers were not required for services provided by nonprofits with COVID-19 federal funds, they still faced the challenge of convincing inexperienced nonprofits, unused to handling the needs of immigrant communities, that they could serve individuals without proof of citizenship:

> It wasn't just our auditing team, our risk assessment team, our legal team; it was also our nonprofits. Our nonprofits were very much used to working with this black and white binary. And these immigrant conversations they typically stayed away from or didn't want to get involved, or, you know, it was just like, not my problem.

> The nonprofits were still - when we would call them - they would still ask for socials. We had to push them and say, 'You cannot ask for a social security number when you're using our pots of money'.... Everyone just assumed we are required, it's legally required. It was not (interview 30).

Despite permission from the city, nonprofits continued turning immigrants and immigrant families away "because they didn't speak English," as one MOIA staffer noted, pointing out the association between language fluency and citizenship status. In addition, "Some [nonprofits] would require

identification, like a state ID" (interview 31).

Eventually, with the city's backing and motivated by the needs of the immigrant community, the MOIA broke down the institutional norms in Atlanta's nonprofit community. It was a large step forward in a community where immigration is relatively new and service providers are still working to understand the needs of immigrant communities and their ability to serve. One MOIA staffer chuckled as she concluded her story about this fight by sharing that, while they had convinced nonprofits in Atlanta that they were *allowed* to serve individuals regardless of citizenship status, they suddenly realized that their lack of "cultural competency" meant that – in reality – they didn't know *how* to serve these individuals in many ways, and cultural and language differences became the next hurdle (interview 30).

Despite the work that was clearly still necessary in supporting nonprofits' ability to serve immigrant communities, this extension of COVID-19 benefits to those who could not demonstrate legal status was a major win for the MOIA. They were able to change local nonprofit policies related to serving immigrant communities, bringing them into alignment with less restrictive federal policies that preempted state policies. While the urgency of the COVID-19 crisis was certainly at the crux of this work, it was also apparent that the tangible needs and suffering of immigrant communities motivated the MOIA to dig in and push back when the city and nonprofits initially clung to their status quo. As one staffer put it, they "had to keep pushing and pushing" because it was "the right thing to do for equity reasons" (interview 30). Unlike more symbolic fights, such as backing down from the anti-sanctuary city laws, this fight was linked to the immediate needs of food, health, and shelter in a global pandemic. The MOIA drew a line, leveraged preemptive regulations over more strict local regulations, and it made the difference.

Discussion

OIRAs are situated in a complex position, enabled and constrained by a hierarchical regulative system that governs immigration and integration in the U.S. This chapter uses a categorization of regulatory disruption to understand the role that OIRAs can and do play in unsettling immigration-related laws, rules, and regulations from the city level. Examples provide illustrations of disruptive actions that lie along a spectrum from symbolic to substantive, regarding whether the goal of disruption relates to tangible benefits for immigrant and refugee communities or not, and direct to indirect, regarding whether OIRAs choose to directly challenge or indirectly undermine laws as written or implemented.

Exploring shifts in regulatory disruption also provides some evidence of the types of factors that shape which strategies of regulatory disruption OIRAs choose. Policies or crisis that threaten the well-being of immigrant and refugee communities create a policy window. Conversations in Atlanta demonstrate that OIRAs may act more boldly with regard to regulatory disruption during a crisis, even when operating in a context that otherwise limits direct challenges to regulation.

A number of additional factors play a role in shaping the type of regulatory disruption that OIRAs chose, including the level of state support, integration with outside welcoming networks, the maturity of the OIRA and experience of staff, strong partnerships in the community or city, and a history of serving newcomer communities. These factors, however, are intricately intertwined, preventing overly simplistic connections between individual factors and the choices OIRAs make in engaging in a particular form of disruption. Such intricate connections echo the concept of "interactive intersectionality" which understands

intersectionality as “mutually constitutive relationships” that “cannot be disentangled” (Ferree, 2009, p. 85). Examinations of the way these contextual attributes intersect are thus what Ferree (2009) calls a “useful conceptual achievement of simplification” that provide insights into the role they play in OIRA strategic decision-making. At the same time, they cannot represent the range of “irreducible complexity” impacting the strategic choices OIRAs make (Ferree, 2009, p. 85).

Throughout each example, OIRAs tend to prioritize a form of disruption that balances access to basic needs and protection of basic rights with careful consideration of what is politically expedient and legally permissible. OIRAs often started with a less direct form of disruption that enabled continued service to immigrant and refugee communities. However, their tactics were flexible and adaptable when factors such as office maturity, network support, political will, or community engagement allowed for a more direct approach. Thus, not only should disruption of restrictive regulatory policies be understood along spectrums of directness and substantiveness, but they should also be understood as an ongoing and responsive process. Making sense of disruption strategies requires an understanding of context, but also the history of disruption that has already taken place in that setting.

Chapter 6. Disrupting Perceived Community Distrust and Disengagement

Introduction

> Because for the most part when people first meet one of us, they know we're from the government and they immediately are kind of like, I don't know if I want to talk to you, or if I trust you (interview 33).

This study examines the role that the pursuit of trust might play in disrupting less-welcoming aspects of the immigration governance regime. I theorize distrust as a cognitive element that patterns behavior and decision-making between newcomer communities and government. This approach engages with Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) once again, who describe "undermining assumptions and beliefs" as a core form of institutional work, and which I have described as a form of deliberate disruption. As this chapter will demonstrate, OIRAs work to deliberately disrupt a cognitive pillar of immigration governance defined by distrust and disengagement between newcomer communities and the government.

While some scholars have described trust as central to democracy's functioning (Mishler & Rose, 2001; Tilly, 2004), others have relegated the concept of trust to the sphere of interpersonal relationships, arguing that it is a complement to the more necessary element of collaboration in a well-functioning government (Cook et al., 2005). I do not argue here whether or not trust is *necessary* for a functioning democracy, the question is outside the scope of my research. However,

this study is motivated by the fact that, regardless of theoretical conversations about the necessity of trust, OIRAs prioritized the pursuit of community trust and described community trust as an important element for achieving positive outcomes for newcomer communities within a representative democracy.

Immigration scholars agree that trust, both general trust in others and institutional trust, is integral to the successful integration of newcomer communities. In a study of trust among recent Canadian immigrants, Bilodeau and White (2016) assert:

> The results are unequivocal: immigrants who express trust in their fellow new compatriots also express greater confidence in Canadian political institutions, are more interested in politics, feel happier and healthier, and more satisfied with their lives. Trust, then, is indeed a key component of a successful integration of newcomers, but that trust appears to be context-specific. (p. 1328)

Their work highlights the link between general trust, trust in political institutions, and better outcomes for immigrant and refugee communities. Alternatively, a study of trust among newcomers to large European cities found that immigrants who are overly trusting of host-country institutions may struggle to integrate (Örkény & Székelyi, 2009). Örkény and Székelyi (2009) write that "in the moment of arrival exaggerated trust is paired with a perfect lack of integration" (p. 146). The authors nonetheless note that there is an appropriate and necessary level of trust in government institutions for immigrants to realize successful integration outcomes (Örkény & Székelyi, 2009).

The present study uses examples from Atlanta, Minneapolis, and Seattle to explore how OIRAs understand their relationship with immigrant communities and how they pursue earning

the trust of immigrant and refugee communities from within the immigration governance regime. To disrupt the distrust and disengagement that they understand as a defining feature of their relationship with newcomer communities, OIRAs adopt a two-way approach in pursuit of trust. This two-way approach includes going into communities and bringing communities into city government in ways that intend to disrupt the patterns of distrust and disengagement that reinforce traditional relationships between government and immigrant and refugee communities.

The following sections describe the inherently mixed nature of the cognitive pillar of the immigration governance regime and distrust as a manifestation of unwelcoming aspects of this cognitive element. They also provide a theoretical introduction to the concept of trust and its potential role in democracy. Turning to the data, the study introduces signs of distrust between immigrant and refugee communities and the governments in Atlanta, Seattle, and Minneapolis before describing the dual forms of disruption OIRAs used to earn community trust: reaching out to the community and bringing the community into city government.

Political Distrust and the Cognitive Pillar of Immigration Governance

As discussed in chapter one, the cognitive pillar of institutions concerns assumptions, taken-for-granted patterns of action, and mental frameworks that shape both welcoming and unwelcoming contexts of reception for immigrant and refugee communities. As described in chapter one and in Figure 1, the cognitive pillar has some strands that are more restrictive and others that are more inclusive. This blend of restriction and inclusion evolves, varies considerably across geographies and scales, and is co-constitutive with the regulative and normative aspects of the immigration governance regime.

Such complexity is overwhelming from an analytical perspective. There are multitudes of mental frameworks and assumptions based on cultural logic that shape perspectives on immigration and integration, and each is subject to this intricate network of relations. Using a security framework to understand post-9/11 migration is one example of the change that the cognitive pillar of immigration might undergo. The events on 9/11 are by no means the beginning of the migration-security nexus (Faist, 2006). It is evident from immigration history that newcomers have long been understood as threatening in some way (Zolberg, 1987). Still, there was a considerable shift in how this framework shaped U.S. policy and behavior after 9/11. For example, this security framework resulted in federal-level policies that increased resources for border security, especially at the federal level. In this chapter, I pull on a different strand of the cognitive pillar that shapes the reception of newcomer communities in the US: taken-for-granted patterns of distrust and disengagement between newcomer communities and city government institutions in the U.S.

Before excavating distrust as a cognitive framework that shapes immigration governance, it is useful to first define the concept of trust and elaborate somewhat on the way scholars have thought about trust between communities and government institutions. Hardin (2004a) describes trust as a cognitive process defined by a three-part relationship in which A trusts B concerning X. In other words, Actor A decides if and when to trust Actor B in a specific context or regarding a particular action. An actor decides to trust, or distrust, based on two factors, according to Hardin (2004a). First, the decision is based on an alignment of interests or what has been called encapsulated interest theory. In other words, is there reason to believe that Actor B would be inclined to have the interests of Actor A at heart? If so, one would expect Actor B to act in a

trustworthy way. Second, the decision is based on capacity. In other words, does Actor B have the capacity or capabilities to act as needed? (Hardin, 2004a, p. 8).

Additionally, this decision is based on context. The trustworthiness of Actor B, according to aligned interests and available capacity, is a function of X. This does not mean that trustworthiness in one area might not influence subjective judgment of trustworthiness in another area, but it is to say that trusting Actor B in one context does not necessitate trusting Actor B in another context. I trust my dog to come when he is called to go for a walk, but I do not trust him to answer the phone in my absence nor to leave the chocolate candies alone on the table. Depending on the context, capacities and interests may align differently for the same set of actors. It should also be noted that trust and distrust are not the only options. Ullmann-Margalit (2004) writes:

> …if I distrust you, this surely means that I do not trust you. The converse, however, does not hold: if I do not trust you, I may actually distrust you, but this is not necessarily so. And what if I do not distrust you? Does this mean I trust you? Ordinary use would not quite accept that. (p. 61)

A brilliant brain teaser, Ullmann-Margalit (2004) clarifies with the addition of a middle category she calls “trust agnosticism” which refers to a relationship defined by neither trust nor distrust (p. 61).

Previous research on levels of trust in immigrant communities has helpfully differentiated between at least three types of trust: general trust, trust in specific others, and political trust. Trust in specific others refers to perhaps the most basic understanding of trust that was described by Hardin (2004a), where Actor A determines whether or not to trust Actor B. General trust can be thought of as “relatively positive expectations of the trustworthiness, cooperativeness, and

helpfulness of others" (Hardin, 2004b, p. 284). That is, in general, a person feels trusting of others. Hardin (2004a) points out that this definition comes with some challenges, as it does not allow for the specificity required to evaluate trustworthiness (i.e. it does not ask about individual interests, capacities, or the specific context). Nonetheless, it is a commonly understood notion that some feel more or less trusting toward others. Political trust, also at times referred to as institutional trust, represents the level of trust in government institutions. Again, scholars have raised concerns about how to apply such a concept, whether this form of trust in fact represents trust in institutional figureheads for example (Ullmann-Margalit, 2004).

Armed with an understanding of trust, it is possible to think more carefully about the cognitive framework of distrust (and resulting disengagement) between newcomer communities and local government. From the outset, this cognitive framework begs the question: do immigrant and refugee communities distrust OIRAs and local government? Research implies that, in fact, immigrants are more likely to trust government institutions when compared to the native born (del Barco, 2010; Weaver, 2003). Analyzing survey responses from 22 years of nationally representative survey data, Weaver (2003) found that Mexican American immigrants were more likely to trust U.S. institutions compared to Non-Hispanic Whites. Similarly, a Pew Center Research survey in 2010 found that immigrants were more than twice as likely than the native born to believe the government was having an overall positive impact and the likelihood of immigrants trusting the government was 10 percentage points higher than among native born (del Barco, 2010). This appears to hold true outside of the United States as well, as results from Röder & Mühlau's (2012) study of trust levels among European immigrants fall predictably in line, with higher levels of trust among immigrants compared to the native-born.

However, these studies may only be a partial answer to the question of whether newcomer communities trust government institutions. First, while newcomers may be more likely to trust the government when compared to the native-born, the portion of newcomers that trust the government remains unexceptional. In the Pew Center Research survey, around 50 percent of newcomers thought the government had an overall positive impact, and about 30 percent said that they trusted the U.S. government (del Barco, 2010). In addition, studies have found that acculturation lowers trust among immigrants (Röder & Mühlau, 2011; Bilodeau & White, 2016) and trust is also lower among second generation compared to first generation immigrants (Röder & Mühlau, 2011). In other words, there appears to be a relatively high level of trust among immigrants compared to the native-born and second generation, but in absolute terms there remains a significant amount of distrust, or at least trust agnosticism. At the same time, studies on acculturation indicate that there is a continuous backsliding happening, as newcomer communities lose their optimistic evaluation of the U.S. that is often present especially among those who have arrived from less democratic governments (Quaranta, 2024). Thus, low absolute levels of trust and on-going disillusionment with U.S. government institutions may help explain why OIRAs in this study described newcomer distrust and disengagement as important challenges to be addressed.

In general, scholars contend that there are at least two potential explanations for levels of political trust: structural or cultural mechanisms (Mishler & Rose, 2001). Structural mechanisms shape trust when institutions either fail, meet, or exceed individual expectations, while cultural mechanisms shape trust through socialization and cultural practices (Mishler & Rose, 2001). In some studies, scholars find that historical experiences, social identity, and cultural norms can be strong predictors of trust levels (Mettler, 2018; Uslaner, 2008). According to Mettler (2018), while

providing public welfare to populations in need should increase public trust in government institutions, there is little evidence that these programs are able to overcome historical, social, and cultural determinants of public trust.

However, studies have also found that – in general – trust is a malleable rather than a fixed relationship between actors. Trust in government institutions is continually shaped by new experiences (Helliwell et al., 2016; Mishler & Rose, 2001; Rocha et al., 2015). For newcomer populations, studies show that the relative importance of historical or home-country experiences versus new or receiving country experience depends upon age at migration and the types of home-country government institutions that serve as a point of reference (Superti & Gidron, 2022; Quaranta, 2024). Superti and Gidron (2022) refer to those "too old to forget" home-country institutions that act as a reference point for receiving country institutions moving forward (p. 624).

Distrust and Democratic Disengagement

The struggle to build trust between communities and government is widespread in the United States. Suzanne Mettler opens her work on what she calls the "government-citizen disconnect" with the phrase, "It was a time that government was despised" (2018, p. 1). She explores the hostility between U.S. communities and the U.S. government, describing actions that engender distrust and networks of social relations and historical experiences that shape the way individuals and communities learn to understand and relate to government institutions. Using seven decades of data from the National Election Survey, Pew Center Research (2023) demonstrates the steady decline in public trust in government. Results show that in the late 1950s

and early 1960s, between 70 and 80 percent of the U.S. public trusted the government to do what was right either always or most of the time. Data from 2023 shows that just 16 percent of the U.S. public has this level of trust in government today.

Scholars have long argued about the virtues of trust between the public and government. Hardin (2004a) tells us that "distrust is benign whenever it is justified" (p. 5) and cites philosophers such as Hume, who have long espoused the virtues of distrust in government and the need for the public to be vigilant and keep watch over the work of governmental institutions. Distrust, or at least a "healthy skepticism" about government institutions, has been described by some scholars as the safest and most discerning approach for the public (Ullmann-Margalit, 2004; Larson, 2004). Levi (1996) asserts that "healthy skepticism of citizens is a prerequisite of democracy" (p. 21).

Other scholars warn of the detrimental consequences of distrust. High levels of distrust can lead to disengagement, as communities withdraw their participation rather than engage with a government that they find untrustworthy. Charles Tilly warns that this lack of trust and disengagement undermines democratic governance when he writes: "extensive withdrawal of trust networks from democratic public politics threatens democracy in principle" (Tilly 2004, p. 4). Michelson (2007) adds that distrust undermines "government effectiveness" and serves as a negative indicator of "the health of civic society" (p. 21). These authors draw on a deep political trust literature that demonstrates trust's important role in allowing leaders to lead effectively (Hetherington, 1998) and the importance of trust for overall public well-being (Helliwell & Huang, 2008).

There may also be merit to a more nuanced approach to understanding the relationship between trust and democracy. A lack of trust in democratic institutions can have dramatically

different outcomes for differently positioned groups. For some groups, a lack of trust can be leveraged to generate political mobilization; in other groups, a lack of trust leads to withdrawal and disengagement (Butzlaf & Messinger-Zimmer, 2020). Butzlaf and Messinger-Zimmer (2020) use focus groups to understand when a group's lack of trust leads to activism and when it leads to disengagement. Primarily, they found the difference rooted in whether a group believed that their voices could make a difference. A lack of trust in institutions led to activism when groups believed they could make a difference, while a lack of trust in institutions led to withdrawal when groups "had a deep feeling of being exposed to changes in society but of not being in control or able to cope with them" (Butzlaf & Messinger-Zimmer, 2020, p. 258).

OIRAs' Conceptual Framework of Community Distrust

Interviews with Atlanta, Seattle, and Minneapolis OIRAs reveal a conceptual framework for trust between city government and newcomer communities. In this framework, trust is understood as lacking, necessary, and malleable. Lacking in the sense that – correct or not – OIRAs perceived that newcomer communities were skeptical of the OIRA, especially due to its connections with government institutions more generally. Necessary in the sense that OIRAs envisioned building community trust as an essential component in being able to effectively serve newcomer communities. Malleable in the sense that, despite the lack of trust that was seen as a barrier to service delivery, OIRAs believed that they could implement strategies to build trust and foster community engagement. Each of these elements is described in more detail below.

Lacking

Informants described trust as lacking between newcomers and the government in every city. One informant in Atlanta shared that, for the OIRA, "Being a part of the city [government] isn't a plus for the communities that they work with" (interview 25). Referring to these same communities, this informant said bluntly, "People don't trust the city" (interview 25). Informants in Seattle and Minneapolis shared similar sentiments.

Informants described this distrust as unsurprising. "The city government is, you know, not necessarily who you're going to listen to and trust," one informant told me (interview 17). That distrust toward the city often affected relations between newcomer communities and the OIRA itself. One OIRA staff member shared:

> [Being a part of the mayor's office] at times became contentious because as a representative of the city and as part of the executive branch, the decisions that our Mayor did, that was kind of a reflection on us and that's what - that's some of the feedback we got from community. Like, "You're doing it wrong." So it was challenging at times having to be in that place, being that government representative, knowing that those decisions were - not having a say or control over that, but then still keeping that trust and at times – when that trust got eroded – making sure that we're rebuilding that trust as we're building those relationships (interview 14).

While OIRAs felt distrust at the local level, it was often described as a distrust of government more broadly. Their position within government meant that there was a spillover effect, resulting in distrust between communities and OIRAs.

Part of the explanation for this more general distrust toward government stemmed from unwelcoming state and federal government actions and the lack of distinction between levels of government by newcomer communities. Throughout interviews, OIRAs described wanting to make sure that newcomers saw city government, and their office in particular, as separate from other levels of government when those levels espoused restrictive or punitive policies; their goal was for OIRAs and local government to be seen as a resource that could help meet newcomer needs in terms of services, benefits, or opportunities (interview 33, 14, 17). An official in Minneapolis shared:

> There are a lot of people who just don't have trust in government, and because also what's been happening in our state – it's just been – there's a lot of distrust (interview 8).

Another informant echoed these sentiments about the effects of punitive policies at the federal level under the Trump administration:

> There's so much distrust of government, particularly in this …. federal administration. You know, there's been purposeful effort to instill chaos and disinformation and so I think that's led to a lot of skepticism of any government office (interview 4).

Thus, distrust of the city, state, and federal government were all forms of distrust felt by OIRAs and their staff.

Necessary

In addition to describing a perceived lack of trust between newcomers and the government (which affected the OIRAs), OIRA staff understood establishing trust was a necessary or critical part of their work. Although theorists have described distrust of government institutions as benign,

prudent, or even advantageous at times (Hardin, 2004a; Larson, 2004; Levi, 1996; Ullmann-Margalit, 2004), OIRAs tended to see distrust solely as a problem to be solved. Trust was described as useful because it encouraged newcomers to turn to the OIRA or the city for needed support and resources. This, in turn, could result in better outcomes for newcomers, according to OIRA staff.

OIRAs worked to build trust between their staff members and newcomers to encourage participation in programs and events that support integration. For example, the OIRA staff described needing newcomer communities to trust them to start working on better relationships with the police department (interview 14) and to provide access to health and medical benefits (interview 28). OIRAs also saw trust as a necessary steppingstone to encourage a more trusting relationship with the city in general (interview 25). One informant told me that the OIRA was trying to build trust with newcomer communities to purposely serve as a bridge between the community and the city. The informant described:

> [OIRA staff are] trying to translate that trust into trust in the city, because one of their goals is to help immigrants navigate city services and city systems. So they were trying to translate that relationship that they had built, person to person, into this person to institution trusting relationship (interview 25).

Such aims may emerge from the belief that individuals can come to trust (or distrust) institutions based on their level of trust in institutional figureheads (Kramer, 1999). Scholars have questioned whether this is an appropriate application of the term "trust" and suggested that, instead, constituents may trust leaders of institutions, but have "notions of reliance and confidence but not trust" with respect to institutions (Ullmann-Margalit, 2004, p 77). Nonetheless, OIRAs described

establishing trust as a necessary element, particularly for connecting newcomers to city services and benefits that would support integration.

Malleable

Finally, staff at OIRAs understood distrust as a relationship with newcomer communities that was malleable and could change. This understanding was clear in the language used to describe "building trust" as an important activity for the offices (interview 14, 25, 27, 28). It was an active process but not an easy one. In Atlanta, a MOIA staff member shared that "it was really hard to build that trust" because often newcomers would not see the outcomes they were looking for, or at least not right away (interview 27). For example, staff described working on policies that would allow more newcomers to access housing vouchers during the COVID-19 pandemic. The city worked quickly, with respect to government timelines, but slowly with respect to newcomers' needs. One staff member shared, "Eight months when someone is about to get kicked out of the home is way too long. But eight months is fast when you're talking about government" (interview 30). Staff described their attempts to build trust as a "really uphill battle" when the office could not always meet the needs expressed by newcomers in the community (interview 27). In Minneapolis, an official summed it up like this: "It's not easy to create trust. But it's possible. And it takes time" (interview 8).

However, in addition to building trust it is also possible for trust to atrophy, and staff at OIRAs expressed their concern that even if they built trust with newcomer communities, they might lose that trust. There was a high value placed on trust in newcomer communities and a desire to protect that trust once it was established. One OIRA staff member told me:

> Trust is very easy to break and it's very easy to fall, and it's very hard to build. Because once you lose trust, it's extremely difficult and especially with the communities that we work with (interview 28).

This adds nuance to the idea that institutional actions, rather than cultural or historical experience alone, shape the public's trust in government. From the perspective of the OIRA staff, some institutional actions have a greater impact on public trust than others. Specifically, institutional actions that negatively impact a community might be more likely to shape attitudes toward government and have a more significant impact compared to institutional actions that positively affect those communities.

OIRAs' Disruption of Distrust

OIRAs described a framework for understanding community distrust in Atlanta, Minneapolis, and Seattle, emphasizing trust as lacking, necessary, and malleable. This framework drove OIRAs to act. In each city, OIRAs worked to disrupt what they understood as the perpetual distrust newcomers felt toward the government and the resulting disengagement of newcomer communities. The following sections describe two broad approaches OIRAs took to disrupt distrust and disengagement. First, OIRAs worked to reach out to communities in ways that brought OIRA staff face-to-face with community members and community-based nonprofits. This strategy included direct service to immigrant and refugee communities and organizing roundtables or listening sessions that prioritized hearing from the community. Second, OIRAs worked to bring immigrant and refugee communities and their experiences into city government. By focusing on hiring and highlighting the lived experience of immigrants and refugees working for the city, OIRAs worked to incorporate these perspectives into the working of immigration governance at

the city level. In both forms of disruption, this study demonstrates the careful navigation required to push for change while leaving space for the community to determine when change is necessary, how change looks, and how quickly it happens.

Reaching Out: Balancing Persistence and Patience

Being in the community helped OIRAs to disrupt cognitive barriers that divide government institutions from the community. In exploring what this study calls cognitive disruption, Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) write, “Institutions are kept in place by the costs associated with actors moving away from taken-for-granted patterns of practice, technologies and rules" (p. 237). This study explores two themes that emerged in OIRA narratives about efforts to break down these costs and barriers that engendered distrust and disengagement. First, OIRAs committed to a “persistent presence” in communities. OIRA staff spent time at community events and meetings; they met with immigrants, refugees, and community leaders and participated in providing direct service within immigrant and refugee communities. At the same time, OIRAs spoke of balancing this persistence with patience. They partnered with community organizations when it made sense, hesitated before asking the communities to dedicate time and resources to a city project, respected community contributions, and gave communities space when needed. Often, persistence and patience did not appear to prioritize efficiency for the OIRA or city government. Instead, it built trust by prioritizing the immigrant and refugee communities’ time, experience, and expertise.

Persistent Presence & Patience

OIRAs used persistent presence to build trust with immigrant and refugee communities. Persistent presence refers to regularly and reliably showing up and maintaining active involvement within immigrant and refugee communities. Specific tactics within this strategy differed by city, just as particular tactics uncovered in office emergence narratives and strategies of disruption aimed at other institutional pillars varied. Once again, office capacity and immigration history are the most evident factors contributing to differences in the tactics used by OIRAs in different cities. Higher office capacity was associated with more time in the community, directly serving and interacting with immigrant and refugee communities. In comparison, lower office capacity was associated with limited direct service capacity. The Atlanta MOIA, located in a newer, emerging immigrant community was more likely to depend on direct service by OIRA staff. In contrast, the Seattle and Minneapolis OIRAs that were in older immigrant communities often drew on the resources and capabilities of immigrant-serving organizations.

Kicking-Ass Because We Have To: Direct Service Provision in Atlanta

Direct service quickly emerged as a primary form of persistent presence used in Atlanta to address community needs and distrust. MOIA staff primarily described this choice a result of community-based organizations' low capacity to serve immigrant and refugee populations:

> A typical government process is, you create a program, you fund it, and you find nonprofits to do the direct services for you. But Atlanta, specifically the City of Atlanta, no matter how many RFPs we put out, there was no one to take it up, right? Because they didn't have City of Atlanta specific expertise. They were serving in Gwinnett. They were serving in Cobb County. They were serving in the surrounding areas. Which made sense, that's where you have higher immigrant populations. But it meant that inside the city of Atlanta, we

> weren't being served. And so we kind of found ourselves in a position of becoming direct service providers, which isn't really the role of a typical government in these situations (interview 30).

The Atlanta MOIA was not to be deterred by the lack of support from Atlanta-based community organizations. Instead, the office prioritized the needs of immigrant and refugee communities and stepped outside of traditional government roles to build trust with immigrant and refugee communities. The Atlanta MOIA filled direct service roles with its staff members, and they were proud of the trust they built in immigrant and refugee communities.

The direct service the MOIA staff did to build this trust was initially a literal door-to-door job. It was slow. It took incredible amounts of staff time and energy. But it also paid off. Not only did it create opportunities to serve immigrant and refugee communities in the early years of the MOIA, but it also translated into trust that allowed the office to better serve immigrant and refugee communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. One staff member shared:

> And why we're able to [reach so many communities] today (during COVID-19) is because three years ago, four years ago, we were building this infrastructure, we were building this capacity. And what has led us to understand what are the needs of the community, and then building programs around that is us being in the community, you know, three, four years ago, and so it was knocking on doors, it was doing surveys, showing up to places even though they didn't, you know, many people weren't willing. And a lot of this is because trust right, and so I think it's - that's one of the pieces that has allowed us to do the work is trust (interview 28).

The work of the Atlanta MOIA exploded during COVID-19. Trust built previously in the

community resulted in an outpouring of requests for support that the MOIA worked hard to address.

The Atlanta MOIA only pushed harder to directly serve immigrant and refugee communities during COVID-19 and to continue building relationships. Leaning into this direct service model, the office used COVID-19 as an opportunity to further invest in communities through direct provision of "basic necessities" and the creation of a community navigator program that they came to view as the "missing piece" for their office "in terms of engaging directly with communities and…building trust" (interview 28). Reflecting on their previous door-to-door engagement with the immigrant and refugee community, staff shared that "one of our biggest struggles" was that "we're working for the city. And so to get people to trust us was really hard" (interview 28). However, the community navigator program was a way to become a part of the community. A staff member shared:

> Once we built trust with one person that lives in the community, and then…they trusted us, we trusted them with the information. You know, at that point it is just capacity building. Because you just need one person to see the vision and understand the vision and to understand what we're doing to then kind of spread that forward (interview 28).

The community navigator program was not a replacement for the MOIA staff in the community, but a way to build on the office's ability to be in community regularly and directly serve the community despite having few community-based organizations to work with in Atlanta. One informant shared that, while newcomer communities often did not trust the city,

> They trust the community navigators and they trust the [MOIA] staff because they recognize them and they see them in the neighborhoods and they trust them because they

> come regularly (interview 25).

Community navigator programs have been shown to support integration outcomes of newcomers, primarily as a source of social capital (Thomas et al., 2016). These programs can provide three forms of social capital (bonding, bridging and linking) which support individuals connections, network connections, and resource connections that help newcomers navigate challenges related to integration such as language and cultural differences, discrimination and prejudice, learning and interfacing with new systems and institutions (Alba & Foner, 2015; Thomas et al., 2016).

Together with the MOIA staff, community navigators helped make a bridge between newcomer communities and the city, drawing on persistent presence as well as local familiarity. As one staff person put it:

> You know, we're trying to make those more meaningful and sustainable relationships that build trust, ultimately. And I think, across the board in all the communities we've been in, being able to engage specifically community volunteers, and learning people's names, and being able to show up for them, like, in their language and as people who look like them, I think there's a lot of value in that, as well as being, you know, physically accessible in terms of being in their neighborhood (interview 27).

The types of engagement were broad and always aimed at building trust. One staff member described being vaccinated for COVID-19 at a MOIA event held in a park where residents could come and watch (interview 33). Another staff member was head of regular community food distributions held in 14 locations throughout the city within walking distance of “neighborhoods that had a higher immigrant population or limited English speaking population” (interview 27) and that “mobilized food for 10,000 people a week” (interview 31).

These services weren't the traditional role of government, but Atlanta MOIA staff stepped up to directly serve immigrant and refugee populations before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Reflecting on the work, a staff member shared how impressed OIRAs were in other cities – and it sums up their work in the community quite well:

> Everybody was like, damn, look at Atlanta! Like they're really kicking ass. And we're like, "Oh yeah we're kicking ass because we have to." When you kind of don't have any external support and don't have any nonprofits to lean on - you get really tough and you develop like a rock star office staff with rock star people. Because it's like, kind of sink or swim (interview 30).

Paced Persistence: Taking Community Cues in Minneapolis

[The director] worked very hard to learn the community (interview 4).

The Minneapolis OIRA is positioned within the City of Minneapolis Neighborhood and Community Relations department, whose mission is to "connect the community to the City and the City to the community" (NCR, 2023). Community partners quickly pointed out that the Minneapolis OIRA staff was eager to engage with immigrant and refugee communities and to facilitate communication between the city and the community. Nonetheless, persistent presence took a different form in Minneapolis than in Atlanta. In Minneapolis, establishing trusted relationships with the community fell to a one-person office, but was supported by a team of partners that included city colleagues, Minneapolis-based immigrant-serving organizations, the neighboring City of St. Paul, and the immigrant-serving organizations in St. Paul as well. This work focused on establishing relationships with leaders and organizations affiliated with immigrant and refugee communities.

The development of the Twin Cities' Gateways for Growth (G4G) Journey to Belonging report, which took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, provides a further window into the type of persistent presence pursued in Minneapolis. The Minneapolis OIRA was barely two years old when it, in partnership with the Minneapolis Regional Chamber, applied for and received a Gateways for Growth (G4G) Challenge Grant in 2020. This grant provides "research support and technical assistance" from the American Immigration Council and Welcoming America, two major non-profit organizations focused on immigrant inclusion in the United States (G4G, n.d., n.p.).

The city of St. Paul Immigrant and Refugee Program received a G4G Challenge simultaneously. After a few months of Minneapolis and St. Paul working independently trying to engage community partners in the development of welcoming strategic plans, "it became pretty apparent that it wasn't going to be an efficient use of anyone's time…to have St. Paul and Minneapolis do these – literally the exact same work simultaneously" (interview 6). The goal was to be efficient, "not to add additional work for [community partners]" (interview 6). Newcomer communities did not see the division between Minneapolis and St. Paul as a meaningful boundary. One of the city OIRA leaders remarked:

> We were really serving one community even though we're two different cities. You know, our communities don't really see the city boundary as something that divides them...I mean, the people may live in one city, but they shop in the other city, they go to the grocery store in one city, but they work in the other city. So there's a lot of back and forth. People move back and forth a lot (interview 5).

The boundary between Minneapolis and St. Paul is rather arbitrary in daily life. Developing

different plans would not only have been an inefficient use of government and community partner time, but it would also have been an unhelpfully rigid approach to integration, prioritizing institutional boundaries over the lives of people in the community.

Considering this realistic assessment of the bordering between Minneapolis and St. Paul and valuing efficiency and respect of community organizations' time, the Minneapolis OIRA "started merging with St. Paul to do this jointly" which a community partner described as "the best decision [Minneapolis and St. Paul] possibly could have made" (interview 6). As a bonus, combining forces helped shore up two single-staff offices' efforts. One team member shared:

> [It] was realized early on that [Minneapolis and St. Paul] were one person offices and [they] had limited resources. But if [they] came together, [they] could actually do things together that made sense (interview 5).

This meant developing a joint engagement process in which G4G leadership, which included the Minneapolis OIRA director, the St. Paul OIRA director, Minneapolis and St. Paul chamber staff, and a university representative, worked together to engage and develop relationships with community organizations.

Some of this work was done in large group settings. In collaboration with St. Paul, Minneapolis created regular roundtable meetings with community members. As one community partner put it:

> [the Minneapolis OIRA] is very good at bringing people to the table…there was never [before] any perspective from the community's point of view, or the impact on community. And so I think that those round tables have been important for that reason, the ability to

> bring people together and to talk about complex issues in a neutral, respective environment (interview 4).

Meeting topics included "challenges and opportunities…but also immigration, public charge, some of the pressing issues that the community should be aware of" (interview 8). Often, community leaders and community-based organizations shared information about upcoming events, but they also shared concerns raised within their communities, concerns about the ability of the city to meet newcomer needs, challenges faced by the unauthorized community, or other populations that have felt stigmatized or marginalized due to their identities.

However, these large group round tables did not always function well when the OIRA staff tried to elicit direct feedback from community organizations. The G4G leadership team quickly learned that, while it sounded ideal and efficient to elicit community partner responses via large group Zoom calls made necessary by the advent of COVID-19, these calls resulted in little gain and, in fact, could be "massively frustrating" (interview 6). One of the G4G leaders, aware of my attendance at some of those meetings, lamented:

> I think you sat in on some of those calls. You are very aware of how painful those calls could be. We realized that those weren't always going to be the most effective ways to get information" (interview 6).

It was true. During G4G zoom calls, questions were often received by blank Zoom squares and silence. The G4G leadership team pivoted to a one-on-one strategy and met with leaders or community organizations individually. They described these meetings as "exponentially better" (interview 6). There was a tradeoff, as they were "more time consuming from [the G4G] perspective," but "people are much more willing to be candid" in one-on-one meetings (interview

6). The general takeaway was that personalized communication worked best, and it was a strategy that the OIRA continued to use after the G4G engagement process because the office had learned that "touching base one-on-one is a way that [the OIRA] learns more about what community concerns and community needs are" (interview 9).

The one-on-one strategy employed by the G4G leadership team and Minneapolis OIRA more generally resulted in richer conversations and helped to elicit honest responses. This was perhaps especially valued when community partners expressed differing ideas about priorities and programming. While the engagement process established significant consensus, the G4G leadership shared that there were times where a "tension point" or "fracture" emerged in the way groups wanted to address certain issues (interview 6). In one example, there were differing ideas and concerns about how to address the prosecution of hate crimes in Minneapolis. The G4G leadership team moved slowly through these conversations – noting that efficiency does not always mean moving quickly toward results. Instead, the team tread lightly and put forth significant effort to "look into it more" before making any recommendations that might alienate certain groups they hoped to support and represent (interview 6).

There were also times when the Minneapolis OIRA needed to pause or reconsider their persistent community engagement. Intentional community engagement was a cornerstone of the Minneapolis OIRA, but not when it became a danger to building trust and relationships in the community. At times, The Minneapolis OIRA found that it needed to step back and give the community space. The aftermath of the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis is one such example.

Police officers murdered George Floyd after arresting him for allegedly using a counterfeit

$20 bill. Floyd was lying face down and handcuffed, with arresting officer Dereck Chauvin kneeling on his neck for over 9 minutes while other officers prevented bystanders from intervening (Bogel-Burroughs, 2021). These actions resulted in Floyd's death. The murder created an uproar from the Minneapolis community, as it showcased police violence against minority communities. One government official spoke to the history of racism illustrated with Floyd's murder and the history of mistrust and fear this event crystalized:

> The killing of George Floyd really created somehow a major fear within the immigrant and refugee communities...And I mean, it's no joke that the racial history and background of the country is something that is still lingering and dividing people, which shouldn't be the case. But it is what it is. And it's a lack of trust between communities and government, between communities and the police. It's also lack of efforts of bringing communities together (interview 8).

A common strategy by local governments in these situations is to reach out and host listening sessions for the affected community. The Minneapolis OIRA and their partners were uniquely well-positioned for this work, based on the relationships that they had been building within the community.

However, the Minneapolis OIRA and its partners were also uniquely positioned to understand that this might not be the right time for those conversations, that those conversations may feel extractive and insincere in light of the lack of systems change they had previously wrought. One government official described how the Minneapolis OIRA and its partners, such as the St. Paul Immigrant and Refugee Program, were "expected to come in and hold conversations and hold circles and listening sessions" in the aftermath of George Floyd's death. The reality was

that people “may not necessarily want to hear that” and “people just want to kind of take the time to process all of that. Because when tragedy happens, it takes a while to really process it and kind of question what had happened, where did things go wrong?” (interview 8). The city recognized the “community trauma” linked to these events as well as the “frustration” with “over-engagement” by the city (Twin Cities G4G, 2022, p. 8).

The Minneapolis OIRA and its partners responded with flexibility, including changing timelines and changing sources of information. First, the OIRA slowed down. One partner working with the Minneapolis OIRA to develop office priorities said:

> In the more immediate aftermath of George Floyd, I think especially early on, we really didn't do that much engagement I want to say until like September. In part because it just – no one really had the bandwidth to do it. And even then, I think the sentiment that we heard early on, which influenced the way we did engagement and going forward, was communities were effectively burned out on giving advice or being interviewed about these types of things. And one of the things we kept hearing was that, we feel like we've done these surveys before, we have given this feedback before, and nothing has changed (interview 6).

Slowing down gave the OIRA time and space to hear more about what the community saw to be challenging about engagement with the city. Rather than experiencing the murder of George Floyd at the hands of city police and the subsequent rush for engagement as a one-off event, the community expressed their frustration that this was a pattern: a crisis, a conversation, and a dead end.

Listening to these frustrations shared by the communities led to the second strategy of

flexibility used by the Minneapolis OIRA: exploring non-intrusive ways of collecting data to understand the community better.

> We went and did an inventory of as many reports, like existing reports, that we could find… If you look through the [Gateways for Growth] report itself, you can see there's a lot of annotations within it and that's because we pulled stuff from existing reports, because if people were saying, "We've already said this," we want to not have to be annoying and ask them again. So then just go out and try to find the place where they said that (interview 6).

The work to better know the community continued using previously collected materials. This work honored community voices and investment without taxing a community in the middle of processing and grieving a tragedy. Such strategies were critical to maintaining and furthering community trust, they showcased respect for community space, and also informed future work of the office.

Persistent but Pragmatic: Mixing it Up in Seattle

Seattle provides an example of a more mixed approach to persistent presence. The Seattle OIRA is a large office with a diverse staff operating in a community with long-established immigrant-serving organizations. The Seattle OIRA drew on these resources strategically, at times operating directly in community and at times operating through immigrant serving nonprofits with well-established trust networks.

Attending in-person events was an important role for OIRA staff in Seattle. A staff member shared how breaking out of traditional bureaucratic roles was an important element of the OIRA's work:

> Going to community events and really being out there and connecting with community –

> I think that made me really effective in my role there at OIRA, not just being you know, a bureaucrat behind the computer screen…like really being a presence in in those community spaces where traditionally government employees don't (interview 14).

Like staff members in Atlanta, Seattle OIRA staff pointed to their involvement in the community as a role not traditionally taken up by government employees. Prioritizing relationships in the community was one way that the OIRA worked to disrupt traditional conceptualizations of how the city operates and how the city might (or might not) welcome immigrant communities.

But the Seattle OIRA never felt like it had to do this alone, nor that it should do this alone. The office's goal was to think broadly about integration and the needs of newcomer communities and to build a coalition that could show up for newcomers in various ways. An OIRA staff member told me:

> When you talk about immigrant integration, it is much larger than OIRAs mission alone, right? To improve the lives of immigrant and refugee communities, it includes jobs and transportation, it includes access to housing and being able to feel safe in a neighborhood. So when you get to a broad of a goal as immigrant integration is, you've necessarily both have to figure out what is the thing that you deliver and are responsible for and report to the mayor and council every day? And what is the thing that you tried to do in collaboration so that those things that might be out of your budget, but are still important continue to advance? (interview 13).

This was made possible by the large network of community partners familiar with serving immigrant and refugee communities. The office relied on these partnerships when it was most pragmatic.

At times, this meant setting aside the goal of establishing direct trust with newcomer communities, as sometimes OIRA staff saw that the most effective use of time and resources was leaning into the trust already developed by immigrant-serving nonprofit organizations. In Seattle, for example, staff members described some continued reticence among immigrant and refugee communities about working with government officials – even when they were from the community. One staff member, who had an immigrant background and grew up in a neighborhood with many other immigrants, shared:

> Once I started working in government, I did notice community members speaking to me differently or being treated a little bit differently because now I was one of *those* government employees, I was one of those bureaucrats. So I did notice a difference in how I was perceived in community (interview 14).

While trusted leaders can engender trust in institutions, the reverse can also be true. In this case, distrust of the city government impacted the credibility of OIRA staff.

Because the City of Seattle has a large and well-developed network of immigrant and refugee-serving nonprofit organizations that have developed deep ties with immigrant and refugee communities, these relationships were often most effective for service delivery. One OIRA staff member explained:

> I think the city - and the city directly - has a role to play in all that, but I think it can be really helpful to do that hand in hand, with the community-based organizations also doing the messaging, also doing the programming. It doesn't have to be just coming directly from the city. If the city government is, you know, not necessarily who you're going to listen to and trust, but maybe you're going to trust your local church or your community

> center or your neighbor who is affiliated with, you know, whatever. Just kind of like, it doesn't have to be one approach or the other. It can be both (interview 17).

This is what might be called pragmatic persistence. At times, the OIRA staff described an indifference about whether newcomer communities trusted them, and instead prioritized newcomer communities being served. Because nonprofits were prepared to serve newcomer communities in Seattle, there were times when trust in the city was not needed. When the Seattle OIRA's priorities shifted to an immediate or critical need in immigrant and refugee communities, it at times overshadowed the importance of trust in the short term.

The COVID-19 pandemic is one example of when the Seattle OIRA prioritized service provision and access over trust building. These are not mutually exclusive, but the office did invest in them differently at different times. For example, the OIRA tried to work around the lack of trust between newcomer communities and city government when there was an urgent need for financial assistance in the newcomer communities. When the CARES Act excluded many immigrant households from receiving financial support from the federal government, the OIRA staff quickly implemented a program that would provide stimulus checks to immigrant and refugee communities. While this may have been an opportunity for the office to build trust in communities by associating the program with city and state government efforts, the office chose instead to avoid questions of trust and implement the program through a third-party actor. One staff member shared:

> We did direct cash assistance to our local undocumented population. So, in order to really encourage people to apply for the resource, and of course, it's coming from a city so people

> might not want to share their information, so we did partner with a third-party partner to host that program (interview 12).

The website set up by Scholarship Junkies for Disaster Relief Fund Applications was explicit that this was a fund for individuals based on their lack of regularized immigration status. One eligibility criterion is that individuals applying: "Were ineligible for federal CARES Act Economic Impact Payment (also known as a "coronavirus stimulus check") due to immigration status" (Scholarship Junkies, 2021, n.p.). In addition, the site is clear about its separation from government entities. The website states that Scholarship Junkies "do not voluntarily share your data with government entities, including the City of Seattle" (Scholarship Junkies, 2021, n.p.). Thanks to a robust network of community organizations and the ability to step back from relief fund distribution in favor of perceived more neutral parties, the Seattle OIRA facilitated the distribution of nearly $8 million to eligible families in this first round of disaster relief.

In notes from one meeting of the Seattle OIRA's affiliated commission, the Immigrant and Refugee Commission (IRC), I wrote:

> The commission knows "the community doesn't trust the government." They want to promote the program but hesitate to do so from city email addresses (20.10.06).

Alternatively, the commission offered to use their private social media and networks to publicize the financial support program. They even asked guests – such as me – attending the meeting to spread the word using whatever networks were available. I noted, "[newcomers] do trust commissioners – part of the community."

OIRAs reached out to communities to disrupt newcomer distrust and disengagement in ways that made sense for their political, social, and historical context. In Atlanta, with its large,

well-staffed office located in a relatively new immigrant gateway and its relatively sparse network of immigrant-serving organizations, persistent presence took the form of staff members actively working door to door and in direct service. In Minneapolis, with its one-person office in a re-emerging immigrant gateway with a mature network of immigrant-serving organizations, persistent presence often looked more like outreach to community leaders and community-based organizations. In Seattle, with its large, well-staffed office, history of working in the community, and long-established partnerships with immigrant-serving organizations, strategies for persistent presence were more flexible and able to draw on both staff and community resources.

Bringing the Community In

In addition to perceived distrust between newcomer communities and the city, there was also a perception of disconnect, of misunderstanding and a lack of knowledge about how best to engage with newcomer communities. Building trust was a critical steppingstone to addressing this disconnect, but so too was bringing newcomers into city government. Immigrants and refugees are consistently underrepresented in federal, state, and local government positions throughout the U.S., primarily due to citizenship requirements for many positions (Lewis et al., 2014). Commenting on the lack of representation at the city level in Seattle, one staff member shared:

> One thing I did notice working in government, or local government is, you know, there's a lot of great people but unfortunately, historically, not a lot of people from the neighborhood that I grew up in get access to those types of jobs. So, you know, most of the people, really, really great, great, great people, but at the end of the day they get to go home to their comfortable home in, like, Medina, or one of the better off places (interview 14).

Staff in Atlanta voiced this struggle as well. MOIA staff members acknowledged that the state of Georgia's antagonism of immigrant and refugee communities was certainly heightened compared to many other states where welcoming cities were located, and this negatively impacted immigrant communities in Atlanta. Still, local politics and a lack of immigrant and refugee community representation at the city level left a gulf between newcomer communities and the city and were a major barrier to advancing the interests of newcomer communities. A MOIA staff member asserted:

> And you can blame the state to a certain extent, but at a certain point you have to really look at your internal leaders…until you have more Latino, African, and Caribbean voices elected - things aren't really going to change (interview 30).

Even when there were individuals from marginalized backgrounds within city government, there were serious concerns about representation. A city staff member in Minneapolis shared that while the Minneapolis OIRA did "incredible work" with the help of cultural community specialists, those specialists seemed symbolic from the standpoint of city resources and decision-making. The staff member shared:

> We have individual positions for each of these communities. So the African American community specialist (East African community specialist, Southeast Asian community specialist, Latinx community specialist). There is no thoughtful analysis of the number of people. It's just a tokenized position… (interview 2).

Of course, there were additional populations that did not even have these "tokenized" positions within the city. Staff noted, "There are some communities that are not represented within our

department. For example, South Asian community is one example, Eastern European would be another, West African is another" (interview 9). These types of gaps existed in every community.

Siemiatycki & Saloojee (2002) have noted that local elections "reflect and reinforce basic social power relations" (p. 259). While this narrative is specific to electoral politics, similar conclusions might be drawn regarding local civil servants. Working to change who sits in government positions, elected or hired, can disrupt the disconnect between city and community and begin to create change. When marginalized populations, such as immigrants and refugees, secure public sector jobs, their position within the government can provide both passive and active representation, according to Mosher's (2016) definition of representative democracy. Passive representation occurs through the mere presence of immigrants and refugees in public service, as this position lends some legitimacy to the public sector, engendering institutional trust and community visibility. Active representation occurs when immigrants and refugees in public sector employment use their position (consciously or unconsciously) to provide insight into the experience of marginalized communities in a way that guides policymaking. This work can help to bridge the disconnect between city and community and demonstrate an institutional commitment to change. The OIRAs worked to engage newcomer communities through passive and active representation as a strategy of disruption that would continue building trust through legitimizing city governance and strengthening city responsiveness to community needs.

Disruption through Passive Representation

Research on passive representation is often interested in whether the demographics of the leaders and bureaucrats match the demographics of the community they serve. In addition, studies ask if, when, and how passive representation results in active representation. Studies

suggest that the answer to both questions is “sometimes” and that contexts such as public demand for action, access to resources, and opportunity structures determine whether passive representation becomes active representation (Rosenthal & Bell, 2003).

One way that OIRAs thought about disrupting the distrust and disengagement of newcomer communities was through passive disruption. Simply focusing on bringing newcomers to the table of city government increased the legitimacy of city programming symbolically but also substantively, as newcomers provided insights into their communities.

Minneapolis OIRA staff explicitly described the importance of bringing newcomer voices into the city. In Minneapolis, the strategic plan outlined the goal: “Hire and compensate individuals with cultural competency through lived experience, including multicultural awareness and multilingual skills” (Twin Cities G4G, 2022). As a one-person office, the Minneapolis OIRA staff were aware that the director’s “own cultural background is not representative of a lot of the residents of the City of Minneapolis,” which meant that the director relied on the help of the community specialists from the East African, Southeast Asian, and Latinx communities (interview 9). A staff member of the OIRA shared:

> Ensuring that we're welcoming that expertise into the city feels like a really important way to accomplish what is ultimately one of the objectives of the office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs - which is to make the city of Minneapolis more welcoming to all residents, including our newest residents, and everyone has an opportunity to access success and the tools to achieve everything they want to achieve here in our city (interview 9).

The OIRA staff and G4G leadership team “really relied heavily on the community outreach specialists within the city” (interview 6). These members of the NCR team were described as vital,

and their expertise made building trusting connections with the community more possible. They were also important from a more symbolic standpoint, as one OIRA staff person noted:

> This is probably just me, being a person of color raised in the south…I was just very struck when I entered into the staff meeting and I saw so many different faces. And so just the simple fact that there were very diverse people in the room was shocking to me and it definitely felt more representative of the population of the city that I was living in than really any space that I had entered previously (interview 1).

This is a reminder that passive representation can play an important disruptive role within immigration governance. The presence of immigrant and refugee leaders within city government brought important visibility to newcomer communities, to efforts of the city to engage with newcomer communities, and it provided insights into the lived experiences of immigrant and refugees in the community.

Translating Passive to Active Representation

Research on active representation has shown that representatives from marginalized populations use their positions within policymaking bodies to create or implement policies that address the larger policy burdens placed on marginalized communities (Hindera, 1993). Hindera (1993) defines active representation as “bureaucrats' pressing of the interests of a particular group” (p. 95). Seattle provides an example of how emphasizing hiring, a form of passive representation, can lead to the realized benefits of active representation. Two Seattle OIRA staff members shared their perspectives about what it meant to be from the community they were serving.

> I think that was another key, at least for me - that was really valuable that I came from the neighborhoods that we were directly working with. So I knew the dynamics, I understood

> the businesses, the communities, the issues that people were facing, both through my lived experience, but also through my exposure growing up in those neighborhoods. I think that was really helpful for me to bring those perspectives into government as a program for redeveloping the policies (interview 14).

In addition:

> Lived experience is really important for our office. Because this is just simply, and frankly, if, someone has not really been there or, like a first generation – a lot of our co-workers and team members helped their parents go through those experiences, and I think that that is really critical in our work, that empathy piece and in our understanding of what people, what situation that people live in and what people are dealing with. That's very important and frankly, it is a lot of times overlooked by other city departments (interview 12).

These staff members saw themselves as bridges between newcomers and the city. They emphasized lived experience as a way to empathize with the community, and as a key element in pushing for change within the city. They served as translators for policymakers, overcoming language barriers and the significant divide in experience.

Newcomer community members saw staff from the community as trustworthy because of their shared history and lived experiences that matched their own.

> I think because I had that connection with all these communities, they immediately. you know, it was like a rock like - 'Okay, now we have somebody that we can refer concerns to' (interview 14).

However, the bridge built with newcomer community members was primarily one of particular trust rather than general trust in government. Newcomer community members began reaching out through individual and personal channels. “People that I've known over the years, would call me on my personal cell phone” one staff member told me (interview 14). Worried about the potential for a public records request, staff worked hard to establish boundaries to protect their privacy and the privacy of community members. But because particular trust had not translated into a more general trust of government institutions, this “became a little challenging, especially with communities that don't trust government, and would rather talk to me on my cell phone” a Seattle OIRA staff member told me (interview 14).

This was a two-way street in some cases. As insiders in immigrant and refugee communities, staff described not only providing insights to policymakers about the experiences of newcomer communities but also providing insights to newcomer communities about how to engage with the city. One Seattle OIRA staff member shared:

> I appreciate that opportunity to learn how the system worked from the inside because now…I'm able to share some of that information and that knowledge about how to do contract procurement with government agencies, how to look for resources, or how to advocate from the community level so that elected officials can allocate the resources to do the programming. Because it really is…the squeaky wheel gets the attention (interview 14).

Staff saw that immigrant and refugee communities often hesitated to reach out for resources, and part of the hope was to empower these communities to speak up and know how to engage with the city. This is an example of the two-way process of integration. The Seattle OIRA provided

information to community members that helped them change their approach to civic participation. At the same time, the Seattle OIRA provided information to the city that could help change structures within city government and the approach to integration.

A Third Way: Increased Visibility of Representation

OIRAs continually worked in a space of scarcity, making do with resources that were not always ideal for the job. Creativity was abundant in these situations, as OIRAs worked to find ways to disrupt unwelcoming practices when faced with significant resource and power constraints. For example, while the Minneapolis OIRA staff were adamant about the importance of passive representation, they realistically had little, if any, ability to affect passive representation within the city. One city staff member described the office as hardworking but without any "teeth" to create change in the city (interview 2). Instead, the Minneapolis OIRA got creative and leveraged existing representation.

Without a way to increase the number of individuals working within the city, the office instead focused on ways to increase the visibility of individuals working within the city. Over time, the Minneapolis OIRA staff described thinking more about "city staff who are immigrant and refugee connected, and who do outreach with community (number one) and (number two) how our city staff experience working for the city" (interview 36). The OIRA staff described these newcomer staff members as "untapped potential" to help the city better understand newcomer communities (interview 36).

Highlighting these experiences created a way to increase awareness of the diversity that already exists within the city. To elevate these experiences, the OIRA staff worked with city staff to create an "employee conversation series" that has allowed them to "talk about themselves and

share about their cultural backgrounds and journeys" (interview 36). Rather than limit the conversation to newcomer employees who work directly in immigrant-serving roles, this has expanded the conversation to integrate the experiences of immigrants and refugees employed in city departments. As the OIRA staff member summarized:

> This has been a really useful way for people to learn about each other, to learn more about immigrants in different cultures in a space that feels safe. And so that's one way in which the experience and the cultures of the employees themselves enrich our employee workforce and influence how people do their jobs (interview 36).

Discussion

In this study, I examine the disruption of a cognitive element within immigration governance defined by distrust and disengagement between newcomer communities and government institutions. OIRAs understand trust as a lacking, necessary, but malleable relationship between newcomers and the government. From this framework, OIRAs work to disrupt the distrust and disengagement of newcomer communities to move toward a more welcoming context, that more intentionally includes and collaborates with immigrant and refugee communities. To do this, OIRAs utilize a two-way approach: reaching out to the community and bringing the community into city government.

Reaching out to the community was a balancing act in each community. Generally, OIRAs used a combination of persistent presences and patience to navigate welcoming, but not forcing, the construction of more trusting relationships and more engagement with newcomer communities. Specific strategies differed according to office capacity and the maturity of immigrant-serving

nonprofit networks based on historical experiences with immigrant communities, varying from direct service to community partner engagement to a strategic blend of these two approaches.

Bringing community into the city consisted of efforts to enhance both passive and active representation at the local level. Given the relatively under-resourced position of OIRAs, this strategy also included creatively working to increase the visibility of representation to supplement passive and active representation. Further research on this strategy should be undertaken, as conversations suggest that there was hope that this might also encourage active representation among city employees who previously served a more passive role and an understanding that this approach would strengthen the relationship between newcomer communities and city government.

Reaching out and bringing communities in provides insights into how OIRAs work to balance building community trust with boundary work. Some boundary work is decidedly welcoming, disrupting disengagement, and trying to "increase permeability" of boundaries (Frederiksen & Grubb, 2023, p. 505) by bringing immigrant and refugee community perspectives into city government spaces and increasing access to benefits and services. On the other hand, OIRAs are also charged with boundary maintenance – protecting personal and community time and personal and community information.

Developing trust with newcomer communities took different forms in different contexts. At times, OIRAs worked to individually develop trust by working intentionally on the front lines with community members and organizations. At other times, developing trust was a less direct process, as OIRAs depended on community organizations to help build trust or relied on inclusion of newcomers in city governance to build connections and trust between newcomers and the city. None of this work developed in a straight line, as there were also examples where incorporating

newcomers into OIRAs or city government initially impeded trust in that individual, rather than increasing trust in the institution. Successful trust-building and connection-building included flexibility to respond to community concerns or needs, having a persistent presence that prioritized newcomer well-being over proscribed relationships, and patience to allow communities to share needs and see OIRA responses through newcomer inclusion or programming adjustments that reflected the opinions of the community. This was a slow process to disrupt often deeply held or long held feelings of distrust or experiences of disengagement, but each OIRA prioritized, and found some success, in addressing these cognitive frameworks with reflexive strategies.

Conclusion

Throughout the U.S., cities are working to create more welcoming communities for immigrants and refugees. OIRAs have become an important part of these efforts in many so-called welcoming cities. Working from within the U.S. immigration governance regime, they are faced with navigating a complex system of both welcoming and restrictive practices spanning time, place, and scale. This raises key questions about how and to what extent these offices can work from within such a complex institution to create a more positive context of reception for immigrant and refugee communities, and how this might look different across diverse welcoming cities in the U.S.

Multiple case study analysis, centered on OIRAs in Atlanta, Seattle, and Minneapolis, provides an opportunity to explore how OIRAs navigate the creation of more welcoming cities. Using a variety of qualitative methods including thematic coding of semi-structured interviews

and triangulation of themes with data created through participant observation and the compilation of informal archives, I have approached this exploration through two questions related to the emergence of OIRAs and the forms of disruption they use to challenge restrictive forms of immigration governance. Answering such questions is theoretically interesting for scholars engaged in questions related to integration, but answers to these questions can also provide practical insights, ideas, and guidance to local bureaucrats working to institutionalize welcome within their respective cities.

This study reveals that, across diverse contexts, advocates for offices of immigrant and refugee affairs may act as issue entrepreneurs to leverage threats, in the form of restrictive immigration policy measures, to motivate the creation of OIRAs. These threats were found across scales of immigration governance, including at the federal, state, and adjacent local geographies. Results supplement literature that finds demographic change and federal-level inaction cannot explain the proliferation of local immigration policies, and that political tensions play an important role in motivating action at the local level (Ramakrishnan & Wong, 2010; Ramakrishnan & Gulasekaram, 2012; Gulasekaram & Ramakrishnan, 2015). Results also add to literature that has named, but not explored, multiscalar forces (McDaniel et al., 2019) by illustrating how OIRAs navigate multiscalar threats in contexts defined by different social, political, and historical elements.

Multisectoral collaboration also plays a critical role in shaping OIRAs. As other studies have revealed, stakeholder collaboration can be supported using familiar local narratives that espouse local values (Broadhead, 2018). However, this work expands our understanding of the way these narratives and values intersect with important elements such as a city's history of

immigration and the political context defined by opposition either within local government or outside local government. Evident in each case study are the tensions that exist within welcoming cities. These are not homogenously welcoming spaces, nor do actors who are welcoming always approach this work in the same way. Issue entrepreneurs must carefully negotiate power dynamics to successfully establish partnerships across sectors.

Multiscalar threat and multisectoral partnership, employed by issue entrepreneurs in welcoming cities, are strategies that provide a framework for understanding the emergence of OIRAs in Atlanta, Minneapolis, and Seattle. Despite these commonalities, the primary takeaway from this framework is not a play book to follow for establishing OIRAs. Creativity is at the center of these emergence narratives, not a one-size-fits-all approach. Above all else, this study demonstrates the ability to adapt multiscalar threat and multisectoral partnership strategies to diverse times and places. Whether a context of reception is defined by a state that is welcoming or hostile, a federal government that is antagonistic or amicable, a community that has never experienced significant immigration or with a long history or immigration, a community that prioritizes economic growth, addressing disparities between populations, or continuing a reputation of exceptional welcoming – in all of these contexts, issue entrepreneurs found ways to leverage threatening, restrictive aspects of the immigration governance regime and overcome local tensions to prioritize moving welcoming initiatives forward. Examining these cases, welcoming cities across the U.S. can identify potential avenues for the establishment of additional municipal offices of immigrants and refugees.

Second, I have explored how OIRAs disrupt restrictive elements of immigration governance to institutionalize welcome. This work draws on an understanding of institutional

theory and immigration federalism to explore how OIRAs use both institutional pushback and institutional partnership – resistance and collaboration – to disrupt practices that are restrictive or unwelcoming. This work addresses norms, laws, and assumptions that sustain restrictive or unwelcoming practices within immigration governance. Again, there is no one-size-fits all approach. OIRAs described the importance of local context, including a city's immigration history, network of immigrant-serving nonprofits, leadership, organizational maturity, and history of marginalizing other groups as well.

In each city, OIRAs used a combination of strategies to navigate a deliberate disruption of these institutional elements. While some actions were more passive and others more active, some more symbolic and some more substantive, some more direct and others more indirect, OIRAs described a common logical approach that balanced the need for political and community buy-in with a mandate to create change. The balance changed in response to local context and was also responsive to crises, as the COVID-19 pandemic played out in communities.

The study first focused on newcomer narratives of undeservingness as an example of OIRA's disruption of unwelcoming norms and values. In newcomer narratives of undeservingness, the worthiness of immigrant and refugee communities was challenged, due to their recent arrival and presumed lack of suffering compared to other marginalized groups such as African Americans, poor whites, or Native peoples. OIRAs often chose inclusive welcoming strategies, a form of invisibilization, as a way to address these newcomer narratives. Inclusivity served a dual function. It helped avoid challenges from other communities that might feel they needed to compete for resources, and it provided more anonymity for participants who might otherwise feel exposed by immigrant-only events. This strategy raises questions about how government institutions can be

involved in strategic invisibility while working alongside marginalized populations, and whether this tactic can be understood as disruptive or reinforcing of institutional norms. While this tactic generally did not directly challenge the construction of newcomer narratives of undeservingness, it did allow OIRAs to serve the needs of immigrant communities and undermined the policy implications of narratives of undeservingness.

The study then moved on to consider regulative elements of the immigration governance regime, focusing on restrictive or unwelcoming elements OIRAs confronted across scales of immigration federalism. OIRAs engaged in distributive actions that range from symbolic to substantive, regarding tangible benefits for immigrant and refugee communities, and from direct to indirect, regarding willingness to challenge or more discreetly undermine laws as written or implemented. At times, offices boldly attacked rules and regulations, at other times they left them in place and concentrated on creating a welcoming public image or serving the needs of immigrant communities. Again, local contexts were critical to understanding the strategies OIRAs employed. OIRAs strategic forms of regulative disruption often prioritized meeting the basic needs of immigrant and refugee communities. When a form of disruption risked backlash, offices were more likely to prioritize protecting newcomer communities and their access to resources. Alternatively, when disparities were clear and provision of basic needs required direct intervention, OIRAs were more likely to challenge restrictive regulations, though they were limited by preemption at the state and federal levels.

Finally, this study explored OIRAs' perception of distrust and disengagement between city government and newcomer communities and their desire to change this relationship to one of trust and engagement. In general, OIRAs described trust as a lacking, necessary, but malleable

relationship between newcomers and the government. From this framework, OIRAs worked to disrupt distrust and move toward engagement by utilizing a two-way approach: reaching out to the community to build trust and bringing the community into city government to overcome disengagement. Once again, there was balance in the actions taken. Generally, OIRAs used a combination of persistent presences and patience to navigate welcoming, but not forcing, the construction of more trusting relationships and more engagement with newcomer communities. Bringing community into the city consisted of efforts to enhance both passive and active representation at the local level, building up the legitimacy of OIRAs and city government and incorporating newcomer perspectives to guide policymaking.

Case studies reveal that these common strategies of disruption encompass nuanced tactics, perhaps most impacted by a city's immigration history, local politics, network of immigrant-serving organizations, and crisis. In response to each element, and in each context, OIRAs were likely to demonstrate a balance of partnerships and pushback, oftentimes choosing to work around existing challenges to inclusion in order to prioritize newcomers' access to resources necessary to fulfill basic needs such as food, shelter, and health.

This meant that at times, disruption was more symbolic, indirect, or reinforcing of elements within the immigration governance regimes. These strategies raise the question: is that disruption at all? I have argued that, yes, this is a form of deliberate disruption. While some forms of deliberate disruption may perpetuate, or at least not directly address, aspects of the immigration governance regime they do work toward change incrementally. There are instances when OIRAs found a more dynamic and direct approach was effective, but also instances where the prioritized

outcomes – often very immediate or at least imminent impact on immigrant and refugee populations – were thought to be best attained through less radical approaches.

Recommendations

This study suggests a number of policy recommendations or approaches to policymaking. The study focused on welcoming work, within welcoming cities. Thus, learning and policy recommendations are most relevant for other welcoming cities or at least democratic-leaning cities, and specifically for bureaucrats and advocates who might work together to push for more welcoming policies in their own cities.

First, this study demonstrates the important role of informal and indirect disruption, as tools wielded by local welcoming initiatives. There is significant latitude for change within immigration governance that does not require formal policymaking and direct disruption. While there were examples of formal policy change in this study, OIRAs described how informal and indirect disruption played a critical role in welcoming work, balancing limitations on local power, political, social and demographic context, and the mission of OIRAs to provide increased access to local resources and opportunities.

Second, diverse networking is a critical tool for welcoming initiatives. There is no simple playbook for this work, and new challenges continue to confront welcoming cities. This makes diverse, ongoing networking critical for OIRAs. There was at times resistance to this idea. For example, one Seattle staff member told me they avoided Welcoming America networking because of it's so-called "southern strategy" that did not sit well (interview 11). However, I also heard Atlanta MOIA staff describe their role in providing insights and strategies to OIRAs across the

country when Trump was first elected. One staff member recalled the day after Trump's election like this:

> It was just a Wednesday…welcome to the party, everybody! We've been doing it like this for a long ass time. So we ended up coaching our colleagues in other cities a lot through that process because we are so accustomed to working in such a hostile place (interview 31).

These words hang in the air as the next election season approaches, and Trump is once again in contention. OIRAs must continue to seek out opportunities to network and learn from one another, networking across differences, with cities or OIRAs that may be situated in what appear to be very different local contexts.

Second, issue entrepreneurs and advocates should prioritize collaboration with diverse stakeholders that support integration efforts. These collaborations need not be constrained to OIRAs. A wide variety of governmental and non-governmental actors are involved in work that intends to integrate newcomer communities, from refugee serving organizations to local ethnic organizations to neighborhood boards and city commissions. There are lessons to be learned across diverse actors working toward more welcoming communities. The diversity of actors can produce tensions and challenges even among parties similarly aligned in their goals to integrate immigrant communities. There are often instances when advocates and issue entrepreneurs are faced with difficult choices, about when to directly challenge norms or practices and when to take less aggressive approaches to institutionalize welcome. Centering the needs communicated by newcomer communities can provide a way to align different stakeholders and move welcoming practices forward.

Finally, while this study focuses on immigration policies and practices being developed at the local level, there is no escaping their entanglement with other scales of immigration policy. There is a need for collaborations across cities and jurisdictions – at the county, state, or regional level. Though not a focal point in this study, staff and partners in Atlanta, Minneapolis, and Seattle all talked about a city, county, or regional group that helped build local capacity to serve immigrant populations that were outside city boundaries. Atlanta worked with partners at the regional level, Minneapolis partnered with neighboring St. Paul, and Seattle prioritized partnerships at the county level. As immigrants are pushed out of city centers, especially in places like Seattle and Atlanta, there will be a growing need for capacity to serve newcomers who live and work in suburban and rural areas as well.

Limitations

There are limitations with every study, and this study is no different. The study represents a limited number of perspectives on welcoming work, institutionalization, and the disruptive work of OIRAs. Informants provide an exciting range of perspectives, but there will always be perspectives left out. This is perhaps even more true in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, which impacted my ability to travel to sites and engage with offices and programming, but also impacted the capacity of offices to engage with my research.

There are also tradeoffs to conducting a comparative case study. These cases provided significant breadth, including a wide range of examples related to the types of challenges offices were facing. This provides ample opportunity for comparison but leaves out some of the richness that would be possible with a single case study. Drilling down into individual cases and even individual examples of challenges and forms of disruption provides fertile ground for additional

research in the future, as the complexity of each case could provide deeper insights into the navigation of relationships and actions that facilitate disruption.

Nonetheless, this study provides insight into the emergence of new institutional settings and the disruption of old institutional settings. It explores the state of immigration governance and reform at the local level in the United States. Trends in immigration and integration governance have made it critical to understand the role of subnational actors, and the complex ways they interact with wider governance structures in specific contexts. Research findings will support continued exploration of ways to approach change within complex institutions and can also provide insights to local governments working through challenges to institutionalizing welcome. Rather than highlight only the resources and collaborations that support these initiatives, it is useful to also share the barriers and challenges so that offices can learn from one another about what works, when, and why.

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Appendix

List 1. Seattle OIRA Public Comments

1. Modifications to fee waiver (Nov 2018)
2. Public charge rule change (Dec 2018)
3. SSA removal of “inability to communicate in Eng” education category (Apr 2019)
4. Changes in SNAP requirements (Apr 2019)
5. USCIS Tip Form (April 2019)
6. Response to modification of fee waiver (May 2019)
7. Failed response to fee waiver comments (July 2019)
8. Oppose HUD “Eligible status” verification (July 2019)
9. Oppose changes to LPR renewal form (August 2019)
10. Medical Certification for Disability Exceptions (Oct 2019)
11. Oppose EOIR reorganization (Oct 2019)
12. Oppose fee schedule rule (Dec 2020)
13. Credible Fear and Reasonable Fear review (July 2020)
14. Asylum Security Bars and Processing (Aug 2020)
15. Biometric data (Oct 2020)
16. Affidavit of Support for Immigrants (Nov 2020)
17. Civics Educational Requirement for Purposes of Naturalization (Dec 2020)
18. Changes to Application for Naturalization (March 2021)
19. Asylum Officers power to screen asylum claims (Oct 2021)
20. Support (but expand) DACA (Nov 2021)
21. Support public charge rule changes (Apr 2022)
22. Further revision to Asylum screening (May 2022)
23. Simplify application for naturalization (July 2022)
24. Oppose citizenship fee increase (March 2023)
25. Barriers to seeking asylum (March 2023)

Appendix Table 1. Interview Participants

	Atlanta	Minneapolis	Seattle	Total
Current OIRA staff	4	1	4	9
Prior OIRA staff	2	2	3	7
City staff		2	1	3
Elected official		1		1
Community partner	4	4	6	14
Total	10	10	14	34