

Mayors and Migration Policies[♥]

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Abstract

This chapter provides an overview of research on the role of mayors in immigration and integration policies in the context of the United States and Europe. It describes why mayors have become important actors in the migration policy arena and why they deserve attention from migration and public policy scholars, for both theoretical and empirical reasons. It also describes how this area of research has developed, focused on (1) efforts to typologize mayoral leadership on migration issues, (2) determinants of mayoral leadership on migration issues, and (3) methods and data used to understand the role of mayors in the migration policy arena. It provides an overview of what mayors have done on immigration and integration issues, discussing also the situations when mayors can lead inclusively on migration issues and when instead they struggle to do so. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion of fruitful directions for future research.

Key Words

Mayors, cities, immigration, federalism, multi-level governance, leadership

Introduction

Recent media reporting makes clear that mayors are prominent actors in discussions and policies about immigration, immigrants, and refugees. A growing number of mayors in U.S. cities, for example, have created and institutionalized city immigrant affairs offices to promote local immigrant integration efforts (Kushner 2024), while the mayors of several French towns have been targeted by xenophobic far-right groups opposed to their decision to host refugees in their communities (Ganley 2024). A Catalan mayor wants to ban Halal menus for Muslims in public school canteens (McMurtry 2024), and a Canary Islands mayor refuses to pay for the burials of African migrants who die at sea while traveling the perilous route to reach Spain (Badcock 2023). Defying national authorities, an Italian mayor supports granting citizenship to immigrant children who have completed at least one school cycle in Italy (Januzi 2024), while the mayor of Chicago wants work permits for all undocumented immigrants (Feurer 2024). Finally, while engaging with supra-national authorities, the mayor of Istanbul has criticized EU policymakers for the large number of refugees in his city (Sanderson 2024). While recognized in these and many other media accounts as notable policy actors, mayors and their role in migration issues have not received much attention in academic scholarship.

This chapter provides an overview of research on the role of mayors in immigration and integration policies, highlighting scholarship in the context of the United States and Europe. I start by briefly describing why mayors have become important actors in the migration policy arena and why they deserve attention from migration and public policy scholars, for both theoretical and empirical reasons. After briefly describing how this area of research has developed, focused on (1) efforts to typologize mayoral leadership on migration issues, (2) determinants of mayoral leadership on migration issues, and (3) methods and data used to understand the role of mayors in the migration policy arena, I provide an overview of what mayors have done on immigration and integration issues. I next discuss the situations when mayors can lead inclusively on migration issues, or the conditions that typically advance an inclusive policy agenda, followed by a discussion of when mayors struggle to lead on and influence migration policies and practices in an

inclusive manner. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion of fruitful directions for future research.

Why Study Mayors and Migration Policies?

Mayors' activism on migration issues is tied to what has been called the 'local turn in migration.' Whereas earlier studies of immigration and integration policies have focused on the role of national actors, national policy regimes, and national models of incorporation (e.g., Brubaker 1998), scholars in both the United States and Europe have increasingly paid attention to the local dimension of migration policymaking (e.g., Filomeno 2017; Schiller 2017, 2023; Zapata-Barrero, Caponio, and Scholten 2017). Several societal and political transformations have elevated the local level in migration policymaking. Globalization, for example, has contributed to urbanization and connected cities directly to major global challenges, such as when climate change, political conflicts, and rising inequalities in the Global South have produced growing numbers of voluntary and forced migrants who often end up settling in cities in the Global North (e.g., Betts, Memişoğlu, and Ali 2021). Also, the decentralization and rescaling of governance in Europe has enhanced local government autonomy in key policy domains, including health, education, housing, and law enforcement, all areas that directly impact immigrants' lives. And the prolonged stalemate over comprehensive federal immigration reform in the United States has led to growing migration activism by cities (and states) that cannot afford to ignore the many immigrants in their jurisdictions (e.g., Varsanyi 2010).

Scholars studying this local turn in migration have sought to typologize local government responses to migration issues, often along a policy continuum from pro- to anti-immigrant (e.g., Pham and Van 2014). They have documented the great variety of local policies that address immigration and integration issues across different areas, including education, housing, access to health care and other public benefits, workplace rights, and law enforcement (e.g., Gleeson 2012; Marrow 2012; Provine et al. 2016; Spencer and Delvino 2019). They have also noted that while city policies address different types of immigrants, many target undocumented, irregular, or

otherwise precaritized immigrants. These include both anti-immigrant exclusionary and pro-immigrant integrative measures.

Scholars have also analyzed what factors explain either pro- or anti-immigrant local policymaking. There is considerable research, for example, highlighting the relevance of local contextual factors, in what might be termed the *localist approach* to understanding local migration policies. Besides the composition of local immigrant populations (Vicino 2013), city immigration policymaking is also influenced by the competition between immigrants and natives for local resources (including jobs and affordable housing) (Light 2008; Singer, Wilson, and DeRenzis 2009), local political and partisan dynamics (Fennelly 2006; Ramakrishnan and Wong 2010), the density and activism of local civil society and social movement organizations (de Graauw 2016; Steil and Vasi 2014), and the state of the local economy. Other scholars, in what might be termed the *supra-local approach*, have instead focused on how local policies relate to, and are shaped by, national policies targeting immigrants and refugees. This approach is evidenced by the burgeoning scholarship on multi-level governance, which highlights that local governments have room to pursue their own policy agendas, notwithstanding their hierarchical subordination to provincial, state, and national governments (e.g., Çağlar and Schiller 2021; Campomori and Ambrosini 2020; Scholten 2013). Increasingly, scholars on both sides of the Atlantic are combining the localist and supra-localist approaches for a more comprehensive understanding of the assorted drivers of local migration policymaking (e.g., Bazurli and de Graauw 2023).

Scholars of the local turn in migration tend to treat local government as a monolith, glossing over the polycentric nature of migration governance where multiple local actors and institutions—including mayors, city council members, assorted city agencies, community organizations, and ordinary community members—shape local migration policies and programs. Mayors in particular are overlooked and undertheorized actors in migration policymaking even though they increasingly feel they can ill-afford to ignore the needs and interests of the many immigrants who live and work in their communities (Bazurli, Caponio, and de Graauw 2022). When mayors *are* mentioned, they tend to be discussed as the targets of pro- or anti-immigrant advocacy, not as

agentic actors in their own right (de Graauw 2022). While the formal authorities of mayors vary within and across countries, many have some power and resources with which to influence local migration policymaking. In the context of U.S. cities, for example, many mayors have formal budget, veto, and appointment powers, and they also possess informal powers as the top elected city official, occupying the bully pulpit and garnering media coverage in an increasingly mediatized policy world. At the same time, however, mayors have little formal authority over migration issues, which tend to be the dominant or exclusive domain of the federal or national government.

Indeed, it is mayors' unique position at the crossroads of the localist and super-localist dimensions of governance referenced before that makes their role in the governance of migration theoretically important to study and understand. Mayors must, first of all, navigate the institutional, social, economic, and political contexts of their own municipalities as they try to determine how to respond to the growing numbers of immigrants and refugees in their jurisdictions. In trying to influence migration policies, mayors have to reckon with the formal powers of the mayoralty, the often antagonistic media framing of migration issues, the municipal resources they can draw on, the preferences and ideology of local legislative and administrative officials and of the general public, and the demands and capabilities of local community organizations. At the same time, mayors must also reckon with their subservient role in national policymaking more generally, and in migration policymaking more specifically. Migration issues tend to be the dominant or exclusive policy domain of national or federal governments to which mayors are subservient, and mayors must consider their limited degree of autonomy as local government sits at the bottom of this multi-level institutional landscape and the increasingly exclusionary nature of national immigration and citizenship regimes. These different and often contradictory local and supra-local forces shape both opportunities and constraints for mayors to influence local migration policymaking.

There are also more empirical reasons for studying the role of mayors in migration policies. More generally, cities and towns are the places where immigration and immigrant integration meet, and few institutions have a more direct impact on immigrant and refugee well-being than

municipal governments, notably through the services they offer and the policies they create. As such, mayors can play important roles in how immigrants and refugees are treated in the communities where they live and work and how immigrants and refugees engage with their host communities. Some research, for example, has shown that in Italian municipalities with far-right mayors, who tend to publicly support anti-immigrant agendas and policies, there is a greater likelihood of both hate crimes and public service discrimination against immigrants (Romarri 2020). Other research, also in the context of Italy, has shown that the election of far-right mayors discourages immigrants from settling in their municipalities (Bracco et al. 2018). In all, there are both theoretical and empirical reasons for studying the role of mayors in migration policies.

Development of Research on Mayors and Migration Policies

In discussing the development of research on mayors and migration policies, I summarize two sets of concerns that have motivated many scholars and the methods and data they have used in addressing them.

Typologizing Mayoral Leadership on Migration Issues

Following in the footsteps of the urban politics and political leadership literatures on mayors more generally (e.g., Holli 1999), one focus has been on *typologizing mayoral leadership on migration issues*. One distinction that scholars have made is between mayors who are influential and successful in developing and executing migration policies (e.g., Sabchev 2022), as opposed to those who are weak policy actors, with little influence in the migration policy arena (e.g., Caponio, Donatiello, and Ponzo 2022; Trucco 2021). A second distinction is between mayors who are practical actors on migration issues, who—because of their proximity to the issue—address in a pragmatic way the opportunities and challenges that migration poses for their jurisdiction (e.g., Weikart 2021), as opposed to ideological actors, who instead address migration issues through a partisan lens that reflects the ideological and partisan politics of migration regionally or nationally (e.g., Bracco et al. 2018; Romarri 2020). And a final distinction that scholars have made is between

mayors who support or develop inclusive migration policies and practices that welcome immigrants and refugees and that promote immigrant integration (e.g., de Graauw 2022; Wilson 2013), compared to mayors who support or develop exclusive migration policies that deter immigrant settlement and limits or denies immigrants' local rights and access to local services (e.g., Allegrini 2024; Longazel 2016; Thom and Skocpol 2020).

A review of existing scholarship makes clear that mayoral leadership on migration issues can and should be problematized. Existing scholarship, for example, cautions against the idea that mayors are notably influential and able to address complex migration issues with innovative solutions due to their central position in local government and outstanding leadership qualities (e.g., Barber 2013). For example, de Graauw (2022) analyzes how successive mayors in San Francisco have had to recalibrate city sanctuary policies designed to shield undocumented immigrants from deportation in response to scrutiny from California state and U.S. federal authorities, forces clearly outside their control. Existing scholarship also cautions against romanticizing mayors and assuming they tend towards inclusive change and inclusive migration policies (e.g., Barber 2013). Trucco (2021), for example, discusses how a left-leaning mayor in an Italian border town supported the exclusionary stances of far-right opponents, possibly as a defensive electoral strategy. Finally, existing scholarship also cautions against expecting that mayors tend to be pragmatic, rather than ideological, actors when dealing with migration issues (e.g., Penninx and Martiniello 2004). Pettrachin (2022), for example, shows how migration crises drove Tuscan mayors to make decisions that reinforce their own biases, thereby detracting from their ability to solve migration-related problems pragmatically.

Determinants of Mayoral Leadership on Migration Issues

A second focus has been on identifying the *determinants of mayoral leadership* on migration issues. One set of determinants focuses on mayoral personality, style, or skill. The urban politics and political leadership literatures on mayors more generally have found that what sets great mayors apart from fair or weak ones is their “inimitable” personal style, “limitless” energy, varied

“strategic and tactical skills,” and activist posture in office (Sayre and Kaufman 1960, p. 690). Also, driven, task-oriented mayors appear to be better suited for the rigors of especially big-city politics than softer, relationship-oriented ones (Holli 1999). Similarly, research on mayors and migration policies suggests that mayors who are skillful negotiators, astute interpreters of their policy environment, and active coalition-builders (e.g., Glorius 2017; Miellet 2022; Sabchev 2022), not afraid of intergovernmental conflict (e.g., Allegrini 2024; Betts, Memişoğlu, and Ali 2021), and committed to immigrant rights or instead immigrant exclusion (e.g., de Graauw 2022; Longazel 2016)—are better able to lead on local immigration issues, in either an inclusive or exclusive way, than those lacking these skills.

Other studies have highlighted the structural determinants of mayoral leadership, notably the form of urban government and relations between the mayor, administrative city agencies, and city council. Research on mayors in U.S. municipalities has found that mayors tend to lead in executive, top-down ways to manage and resolve governmental conflict in mayor-council systems characterized by separation of powers between the separately elected executive mayor and the legislative city council. In contrast, in council-manager governments, where the mayor is the first among equals on the city council that has both legislative and executive powers, mayors are predisposed to a facilitative leadership approach that guides, nurtures, and enhances cooperative efforts (Svara 1990). Similarly, in the context of mayoral leadership on migration issues, mayors in mayor-council systems appear more impactful on migration issues compared to mayors in council-manager systems (de Wilde and Nicholls 2022). Mayor-council systems provide mayors with notable administrative and budgetary authority as well as electoral incentives to heed migrants’ interests, while council-manager systems often focus on managerial efficiency that makes addressing migrants’ interests less attractive or less lucrative. In all, the institutional design of local government influences mayoral leadership, including on migration issues (Greasley and Stoker 2008).

Still other studies have offered more contextual accounts of mayoral leadership that also impinge on mayors’ ability to lead on migration issues. In the United States, for example, several

long-term contextual changes have made it challenging for mayors to consolidate power and govern effectively, including the decline of well-organized urban political parties and the rise of autonomous, merit-based urban bureaucracies since the early 20th century, as well as the proliferation of interest groups since the 1960s (e.g., Ferman 1985; Gruber 1987; Svava 1995). Other, more contemporary contextual variables that shape mayoral leadership and performance include the political culture of a city (e.g., DeLeon 1992), local market dynamics and the availability of fiscal resources (e.g., Fuchs 1992; Huang and Liu 2016; Vogelsang-Coombs 2007), economic elite activity (e.g., Stone 1987), and an increasingly adversarial media (e.g., Janecky 2012; Sørensen and Torfing 2018). Scholars focused on mayoral leadership on specifically migration issues have similarly noted that the growing criminalization of migration in political discourse (Bracco et al. 2018; Trucco 2021), local demographic and political factors (de Wilde and Nicholls 2022), local economic conditions (Haselbacher and Segarra 2022; Miellet 2022), and both local and international civil society organizations (Allegrini 2024; de Graauw 2022; Hillmann 2022) shape mayoral leadership on assorted migration issues.

These contextual approaches tend to focus on local context. In the case of migration issues, however, national and supra-national policy contexts also matter (Bazurli, Caponio, and de Graauw 2022). Not only do national (or federal) governments have dominant or exclusive power over migration issues, but in recent years these governments—both in the United States and Europe—have focused heavily on immigration enforcement and restricting migrant rights. This environment can make it difficult for mayors, especially those governing big cities with often large immigrant populations, relatively progressive political cultures, and active immigrant rights and civil society organizations, to exercise leadership on local migration issues (de Graauw and Vermeulen 2016). While all local migration policies—regardless of their pro- or anti-immigrant content or intent—are possibly suspect for infringing on national or federal powers (Rodríguez 2017), those that are clearly pro-immigrant and appear designed to frustrate national or federal enforcement policies and practices are especially likely to face pushback from higher government levels. In the U.S. context, President Donald Trump’s repeated threats to defund sanctuary cities

during his first administration epitomize the federal antagonism that contemporary U.S. big-city mayors have faced (Correal 2020). But national and even supra-national governments such as the European Union also influence the leadership of mayors of smaller towns in rural areas, which typically lack the resources, knowledge, and governmental and nongovernmental infrastructures to respond to migration issues (Caponio, Donatiello, and Ponzio 2022; Haselbacher and Segarra 2022).

Methods and Data to Study Mayors and Migration Policies

Scholarship on mayors and migration policies often uses qualitative methods and data, with most research focused on U.S. and European mayors. Many scholars rely on a single municipal case study or a small number of carefully selected comparative municipal case studies to typologize mayoral leadership and to identify its determinants (e.g., Betts, Memişoğlu, and Ali 2021; Caponio, Donatiello, and Ponzio 2022; de Graauw 2002; Driel and Verkuyten 2019; Glorius 2017; Haselbacher and Segarra 2022; Miellet 2022; Myrberg 2017; Sabchev 2022; Trucco 2021). They draw on interviews with mayors and the various other government officials—including other local officials and officials at higher levels of government—and assorted civil society actors that mayors routinely interact with. Content analysis of different textual sources, including municipal archival documents, other city government files (e.g., mayoral press releases and mayoral speeches), and local newspaper reporting, is also used frequently (e.g., Hombert 2020). Some scholars have also used more ethnographic approaches, including volunteering in the community, and participant observation of and informal conversations with a range of local actors including mayors. Combined, these studies have produced rich scholarship offering nuanced—though often place-specific and not always generalizable—analyses of different aspects of mayoral leadership on migration issues.

Less common is research employing quantitative methods and data to study the role of mayors in migration policies across a large number of municipalities within one country or comparatively across different countries. A key reason is the scarcity of, and the challenges in

creating and collecting, data that could be used for these purposes. There is, however, growing interest in larger-N data, and several scholars have started to create it. In 2014-2015, for example, Williamson (2018) conducted a national survey of local government responses to immigrants across a random sample of about 500 small and mid-size immigrant-receiving municipalities in the United States. Included among the respondents are mayors as well as various city agency bureaucrats and police chiefs who are accountable to mayors. de Graauw (2018), furthermore, has created a database of city immigrant affairs offices in the United States, offering insights into when and where mayors choose to develop municipal institutions to promote immigrant integration. And Romarri (2020) studied the mayoral elections from over 1,800 Italian municipalities between 2008 and 2018 to analyze whether the election of far-right mayors, who tend to publicly support anti-immigrant agendas and policies, affects the probability of hate crimes against immigrants. While more such data is needed, these larger-N studies can offer more comprehensive, and perhaps more generalizable, insights into the role of mayors in migration policies.

What Mayors Have Done on Migration Issues

In providing an overview of what mayors have done on immigration and immigrant integration issues, I discuss mayors in U.S. and European cities. While mayors on both sides of the Atlantic have acted as important figureheads and advocates for their cities on a host of migration issues, I focus on how they have addressed policies and practices related to (1) immigrants' access to services, (2) immigrant rights protections, and (3) immigrant participation and representation. These include both pro-immigrant integrative interventions as well as anti-immigrant exclusionary ones.

Mayors and Immigrants' Access to Services

One way in which mayors have engaged with migration issues is through services to immigrants, either by enabling their provision or instead by limiting them. Given the challenges that immigrants face in accessing services for which they are eligible, mostly due to language and identification

barriers, mayors in several U.S. cities have promoted access to services by making city government multi-lingual. Partly due to an executive order that Mayor Michael Bloomberg signed in 2008, public-facing city departments and agencies in New York City today provide information and services in 11 languages (de Graauw, Gordon, and Mollenkopf 2016). Similarly, Mayor John Street of Philadelphia issued an executive order in 2001 to promote equal access to city services, regardless of residents' linguistic ability (Wilson 2013). Many other U.S. cities have followed suit, with mayors or city administrative staff directly accountable to the mayor supporting policies and programs that promote linguistically inclusive city information and services (de Graauw 2015).

To ease access to city services and promote immigrant civic engagement, a growing number of U.S. cities have issued ID cards to city residents, regardless of citizenship and documentation status. These municipal ID cards have no validity outside these cities, and they do not confer legal status, give authorization to work or permission to drive, prove legal age to purchase alcohol or tobacco, establish new city benefits for cardholders, or change cardholders' eligibility for any existing local, state, or federal benefits or services. However, a municipal ID card makes it safer notably for undocumented immigrants to interact with frontline city workers, including police, and move around in the city. It also makes it easier for them to participate in local commerce (i.e., opening a bank account) and access municipal facilities, including recycling centers, public schools, city-run health clinics, and libraries (de Graauw 2014). In 2007, New Haven (Connecticut) was the first U.S. city to create a municipal ID card program. Mayor John DeStefano, the program's biggest government champion, developed the "Elm City Resident Card" as an administrative rather than legislative initiative, and his administration secured a private grant in the amount of about \$250,000 from a local community development bank to fund the program's implementation. Many other U.S. cities—including San Francisco, New York City, Chicago, Detroit, Kansas City, Oakland, Minneapolis, Philadelphia, and Milwaukee—have since developed municipal ID card programs with strong mayoral backing and advocacy. Similar municipal ID card initiatives can be found in several European cities, including Zurich, Barcelona, and Paris,

with mayors and their administrations playing key roles in program implementation (e.g., Stadt Zürich 2020).

Many American mayors, however, have also sought to shut out immigrants, and especially undocumented immigrants, from city services and city life more generally. Scholars have given considerable attention to Hazleton (Pennsylvania), located in a declining rustbelt area, as the first city to enact, in 2006, a local law mandating that all government business be conducted only in English and barring undocumented immigrants from working and renting homes in the city (e.g., Longazel 2016; Thom and Skocpol 2020). Mayor Lou Barletta was the key champion of this local law, rising to political fame by attacking the city's Hispanic immigrants as criminals. While this law was ruled unconstitutional (and never enforced) on preemption and equal protection grounds, it inspired mayors and city councils in at least 130 other municipalities in 30 different states to propose or enact similar city laws aimed at driving undocumented immigrants out of town by cutting them off from services, employment, and housing (Esbenshade et al. 2010). Many of these copycat laws have also been blocked in court.

In European municipalities, many mayors have had to grapple with the reception and housing of forced migrants following the 2015-2016 refugee crisis, when Europe saw an inflow of over 1.3 million asylum seekers mostly from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq (Connor 2016). Responding to national policies aimed at distributing the burden of asylee reception within countries, mayors of cities as well as small towns in more rural areas have had to respond to the opening in their jurisdictions of nationally mandated shelters and reception centers for asylum seekers. With local residents often ambivalent or outright opposed to these shelters and reception centers, mayors embraced interactive and facilitative strategies in efforts to defuse conflict and increase the acceptance and integration of the asylee newcomers (Sørensen and Torfing 2018). Research in the context of Italy, France, Germany, Austria, and the Netherlands shows that some mayors spearheaded or expanded local coalitions of governmental and nongovernmental actors to strengthen their position in local and multi-level negotiations about how to address the sudden influx of asylum seekers (Caponio, Donatiello, and Ponzo 2022; Haselbacher and Segarra 2022;

Hillmann 2022). Other research highlights that mayors also engaged in venue shopping, such as by joining or creating networks of mayors or civil society actors that span different municipalities, to find decision settings more favorable to their objectives related to the influx and settlement of asylum seekers (Haselbacher and Segarra 2022; Miellet 2022).

Mayors and Immigrant Rights Protections

Mayors have also engaged with migration issues by way of immigrant rights protections, particularly in relation to interactions with law enforcement. In U.S. cities, many mayors have adopted and implemented sanctuary policies aimed at shielding undocumented immigrants from federal immigration authorities. In 1989, New York City Mayor Ed Koch (1978-1989) issued an executive order that prohibited all city employees—including local police—from sharing information about noncitizens with federal immigration authorities, unless required by law. Subsequent Mayors David Dinkins (1990-1993) and Rudy Giuliani (1994-2001) reaffirmed this order, but Mayor Michael Bloomberg (2002-2013) issued a new one in 2003 when federal officials scrutinized the city's sanctuary practices. Bloomberg's executive order was instead a general privacy policy, stating that no city employee can disclose to any entity, unless required by law, *any* confidential information for *any* city resident—including someone's immigration status, sexual orientation, income tax records, welfare assistance history, and crime victim status—while also reassuring federal authorities of the city's cooperation in investigations involving criminal noncitizens (de Graauw 2021). In San Francisco, which became a sanctuary city in 1985, mayors from Dianne Feinstein (1978-1988) through London Breed (2018-2025) have developed, defended, and adjusted sanctuary protections in the face of repeated attempts by California state and U.S. federal officials to end San Francisco's lenient treatment of undocumented city residents (de Graauw 2022). Similarly, the mayors of many European cities—including Berlin (Germany), Athens (Greece), Barcelona (Spain), Lucerne (Switzerland), Amsterdam (the Netherlands), Vienna (Austria), Milan (Italy), Leeds (United Kingdom), and Lyon (France)—have joined the

solidarity cities or refuge cities movement to underscore the rights of refugees and asylum seekers in their cities.

Some mayors of U.S. cities, however, have also authorized or condoned greater cooperation between local law enforcement and federal immigration authorities to find, apprehend, and deport undocumented immigrants—a clear move to *limit* immigrant rights protections. At times, this cooperation is formalized through a 287(g) agreement, a formal contract between the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and a local (or state) law enforcement agency, allowing designated officers from that agency to perform certain immigration enforcement functions, such as identifying and processing individuals suspected of being in the country illegally, under ICE supervision. While 287(g) agreements are much more common at the county level, the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department (Nevada), the Kodiak Police Department (Alaska), the Phoenix Police Department (Arizona), the Mesa Police Department (Arizona), and the Framingham Police Department (Massachusetts) have or recently had such agreements, entered into by their chiefs of police who are directly accountable to the mayor (ILRC 2023). While ICE argues that 287(g) agreements promote public safety by removing criminal undocumented immigrants from communities, research shows that they actually impose significant fiscal burdens on cities, result in widespread racial profiling and immense human costs to immigrant families, and undermine public safety by damaging community trust and making immigrants less likely to report crime (Lopez 2018).

Mayors and Immigrant Participation and Representation

A third way in which mayors have engaged with migration issues is through addressing immigrant participation and representation in city government. Most notably they have done this by using the bureaucracy under their purview to develop temporary or more permanent migration-focused municipal structures or institutions. In U.S. cities, mayors have convened temporary immigration task forces, which typically include also representatives of leading immigrant organizations, to provide input on assorted migration issues. For example, after Mayor Sylvester Turner proclaimed

that Houston was a “Welcoming City” in 2016, he formed a multi-sector “Welcoming Houston Task Force” responsible for recommending city policies that would make the vision for a welcoming city a reality (Welcoming Houston 2017). Similarly, in 2019, Mayor John Cooper of Nashville convened an immigration task force, consisting of city legislators, local law enforcement officials, and immigrant advocacy organizations, to offer recommendations on how city officials should interact with federal immigration authorities (Mayor Cooper’s Immigration Task Force 2019). And in Chicago in 2015, Mayor Rahm Emanuel formed a Municipal ID Task Force, consisting mostly of immigrant and other community organizations, to study the feasibility of a municipal ID card program (Mayor’s Press Office 2015). In these instances, mayors initiated new issue and governance networks that not only democratized local governance by widening participation, but also helped them to develop innovative solutions to assorted local migration challenges (Sørensen and Torfing 2018).

An increasing number of U.S. mayors have also developed more permanent city immigrant affairs offices, with one or more dedicated staff, to promote immigrant diversity and integration. Mayor Ed Koch was the first mayor to create such an office in New York City in 1984, but today more than 40 cities across the United States have such offices, all created under the auspices of the mayor and located in the city’s executive branch of government (de Graauw 2018). While city immigrant affairs offices differ in when and why they were created, their structure and organization, their degree of institutionalization, and their staff and programmatic resources, they have commonalities in what they do and seek to accomplish. All offices welcome newcomers and work on changing the public discourse on immigration, immigrants, and refugees. They make the case that immigrants and refugees are of current and future economic importance to cities as well as the larger metropolitan regions and states of which they are part. City immigrant affairs offices coordinate and streamline existing city efforts that can foster immigrant integration. They also encourage immigrant civic engagement, invest in immigrant leaders, and nurture new community organizations that serve immigrants. Finally, city immigrant affairs offices seek to develop, implement, and evaluate policies that promote immigrant integration (de Graauw 2018).

Cities in many European countries—including Norway, Germany, Spain, Poland, Italy, Austria, France, the Netherlands, and Belgium—have created similar immigrant councils to offer immigrants and their organizational representatives a say in local policymaking (Schiller 2023). It is not always clear what role mayors and their staff (as opposed to city legislators) had in creating these councils, but in several instances they have notable ownership, with a clear role for mayors in participating in or managing them. In Mannheim (Germany), for example, the mayor meets with the immigrant council (created in 1999) four times a year to discuss their proposals for addressing immigrant issues in the city (Schiller 2023). In Oslo (Norway), the vice mayor manages the immigrant council (created in the 1980s) (Takle 2015), while a member of the mayor’s office serves as deputy chair of the immigrant council in Barcelona (Spain), which was created by city council in 1997 (CMIB n/d). Finally, the task of the immigrant council in Gdansk (Poland), created in 2016, is to advise the mayor on how city officials can best go about local migration governance (European Website on Integration 2016).

In another instance of mayor-initiated governance networks, in both the United States and Europe, mayors have also collaborated with mayors in other cities and other countries in efforts to promote immigrant representation and immigrant civic engagement, to share best practices that promote immigrant inclusion, and to advocate for national and international policies that advance immigrant integration. In the United States, the Cities for Action coalition was created in 2014 with leadership of New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio to support stronger cities through policy advocacy and resource sharing that promote immigrant inclusion. Today, nearly 180 mayors and executives at the county level support the work of Cities for Action (Cities for Action 2024). Similarly, in Europe, many mayors have joined the Solidarity Cities initiative created by Mayor Georgios Kaminis of Athens in 2016 and launched as part of the Eurocities network to promote local government actions that seek to guarantee the protection and socio-economic inclusion of immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers (Solidarity Cities 2024). And worldwide, mayors have joined the Mayors Migration Council, created by Bristol (UK) Mayor Marvin Rees in 2018 during negotiations of the UN Global Compact for Migration and the UN Global Compact on Refugees,

as a vehicle to help cities play a role in turning these landmark policies into reality (Mayors Migration Council 2024).

What Explains Mayors' Inclusive Migration Governance?

Existing research provides several insights into when mayors take action on migration issues in an inclusive, pro-immigrant way and when instead they struggle to do so. Conditions that facilitate inclusive mayoral action or intervention include (1) favorable institutional settings, (2) the presence of civil society allies, and (3) crises and opportunities for mayoral involvement. Conditions that instead make inclusive mayoral action on migration issues more challenging include (1) multi-level governance dynamics, and (2) lack of resources. I will briefly discuss each in turn.

Conditions That Facilitate Inclusive Action on Migration Issues

It appears easier for mayors to lead on migration issues in an inclusive manner when they operate in favorable institutional settings, especially as it pertains to relations between the mayor, city administrative agencies, and city council. In the U.S. context, for example, mayors in a mayor-council form of government—where an executive mayor is independently and separately elected from the legislative city council—appear more impactful on inclusive migration issues than mayors in a council-manager form of government—where the mayor is the first among equals on the city council that has both legislative and executive powers (de Graauw 2022; de Wilde and Nicholls 2022). Mayors in mayor-council systems generally have more administrative and budgetary powers as well as clearer electoral pressures to respond to the needs and interests of immigrant communities in an inclusive manner. Mayors in council-manager systems, on the other hand, find their attention more drawn to issues related to managerial efficiency, with addressing immigrant integration issues deprioritized (de Wilde and Nicholls 2022). It also appears easier for mayors to lead on migration issues in an inclusive manner when city council members and city

agency heads share the mayor's political orientation and commitment to immigrant integration (de Graauw and Vermeulen 2016, 2022).

Second, mayors also have an easier time leading on migration issues in an inclusive manner when there are local civil society organizations for them to collaborate with and receive input and support from (Caponio, Donatiello, and Ponzio 2022; de Graauw 2022; Hillmann 2022; Pettrachin 2022). In large and established gateway cities, which tend to have well-developed civil society infrastructures, civil society organizations have long been critical allies to mayors who want to develop and implement immigrant integration policies and initiatives (de Graauw 2022). Yet also in more suburban and rural areas, where there generally is more public concern or opposition to immigrants for fear that they might upset the area's cultural homogeneity, civil society organizations—while relatively fewer in numbers—can offer key “relational and reputational resources” that help mayors to minimize conflict over migration issues, preserve community cohesion, and involve local residents in newcomer integration (Caponio, Donatiello, and Ponzio 2022).

Finally, it appears easier for mayors to act inclusively on migration issues in times of crisis, as has been the case in recent years when many European municipalities confronted the overnight arrival of large numbers of refugees and asylum seekers fleeing war in the Middle East and Ukraine. During migration crises, intergovernmental institutional coordination needed for an effective and timely response can fail or be non-existent, and both the formal framework of authority and the division of labor between different levels of government can become muddled. As migrants increasingly have been offloaded to municipalities, this has created opportunities for mayors—often the only local political actor who represents an entire municipality and who can take decisive centralized action—to step into the governance vacuum and devise policies, initiatives, and programs to address the local consequences of migration crises. This characterizes how mayors have responded to forced migrant arrivals during the European refugee crisis of 2015-2016 in rural communities and assorted cities and towns in Italy (Caponio, Donatiello, and Ponzio

2022; Pettrachin 2022), rural and small urban municipalities in the Netherlands (Miellet 2022), and mid-sized municipalities in Greece (Sabchev 2022).

Conditions That Hinder Inclusive Action on Migration Issues

In contrast, multi-level governance dynamics can make it more challenging for mayors to act inclusively on migration issues. Mayors are uniquely positioned at the crossroads of the localist and super-localist dimensions of governance referenced before, and they constantly need to navigate contrasting multi-level forces from below and above. Local government officials, local residents, and community activists rarely view migration issues the same way as higher-up government officials at the provincial, state, national, and supra-national levels (de Graauw 2022; de Wilde and Nicholls 2022; Miellet 2022; Trucco 2021). Not often do mayors simply *find* opportunities to create inclusive migration policies and programs, such as the establishment of an immigrant affairs office, the creation of a local language access policy, or the opening of refugee and asylee reception centers (de Graauw 2018; Driel and Verkuyten 2019; Haselbacher and Segarra 2022; Wilson 2013); rather, they need to *actively pursue, create, and sometimes force* such opportunities for inclusive migration policy change. This understandably is more challenging when government officials higher up in the intergovernmental hierarchy challenge mayoral decisions and policies, such as when California state and U.S. federal officials pressured San Francisco mayors to end their lenient treatment of undocumented city residents (de Graauw 2022) or when President Donald Trump threatened to withhold federal funding from sanctuary cities (Correal 2020).

Second, mayors can also find it challenging to act inclusively on migration issues when they lack the resources to do so. That is notably the case for mayors who govern immigrant-receiving municipalities that have lost out to globalization (Trucco 2021) or have fragile, weak, or declining economies, such as those in post-industrial regions (Hillmann 2022) or deprived rural areas (Caponio, Donatiello, and Ponzio 2022). Often struggling with population loss and high unemployment, these municipalities are fertile grounds for right-wing politicians and community

activists who want to foment nativist backlash among local residents. For example, in the Italian border town of Ventimiglia, the local economy declined when the Schengen Agreement reduced local employment related to customs and money exchange transactions in the late 1990s, leaving the mayor with few resources to address the needs of migrants passing through town on their way to elsewhere in Europe (Trucco 2021). Similarly, mayors in smaller and economically restructuring cities ringing Berlin (Germany), struggled to act as “glocal bureaucrats” in responding to refugee newcomers in their jurisdictions (Hillmann 2022).

Directions for Future Research

Despite growing scholarly interest in mayors and migration policies, there are still many fruitful directions for future research that can push forward more robust theorizing on these issues while building bridges between the migration, urban politics, and public policy literatures. Here, I highlight three: (1) the need for more comparative research, (2) the need for more analysis of mayoral leadership on migration versus other issues, and (3) more attention to the impact of mayoral actions and policies on immigrant communities.

The existing research on mayors and migration policies draws heavily on single case studies or a comparison of a small number of municipalities in the same country. These offer lots of nuance in when and how mayors act on migration issues, and they help identify important local, national, and intergovernmental factors that shape mayoral leadership on migration issues. Yet, for more robust theorizing, we also need scholarship that investigates mayoral leadership on migration issues in similar municipalities in different countries and in different municipalities in the same country, as well as scholarship that tracks mayoral leadership on migration issues over time and engages in cross-temporal comparative research. Such comparative research projects can offer more generalizable lessons about why, how, and to what end mayors seek to address migration issues in their municipalities and beyond.

So far, scholars have often asked how established theories of mayoral leadership can be applied to the specific case of mayoral leadership on migration issues. Instead, it might be fruitful

to ask also what we can learn about mayoral leadership more generally by studying how mayors govern on migration issues in particular. Mayors who want to govern on migration issues face unique challenges because these issues increasingly attract negative media attention and involve many governmental and nongovernmental actors at different levels of government. This likely results in complex and polycentric governance arrangements less likely to be seen when mayors seek to govern on less “wicked,” less complex, or less unruly issues that involve only local actors and are not as much in the media spotlight (Sørensen and Torfing 2018). Given the particular challenges posed by migration issues, is it easier, more difficult, or perhaps more necessary for mayors to lead in a facilitative way (Greasley and Stoker 2008), in a centralized way (Sancino, Carli, and Giacomini 2023), or in a way that involves governance networks (Sørensen and Torfing 2018)? Can the leadership styles that mayors have developed to successfully respond to migration issues transfer to other policy arenas?

Finally, existing research often focuses on clarifying the scope of mayoral agency and analyzing the conditions under which mayors can exert leadership on migration issues. But we also need more research on what mayoral action on migration issues means for immigrants. How have mayors improved, or perhaps weakened, immigrants’ access to critical social services, rights protections, and modes of democratic participation? How do mayors compare to municipal legislative officials and to officials at other levels of government in addressing immigrants’ needs and in protecting, or perhaps undermining, their fundamental rights? Are mayors better or worse, compared with other governmental actors, at involving immigrants in civic life and the governmental process? Given that immigrants’ daily lives are directly affected by the policies, initiatives, and programs that mayors may or may not decide to promote and create, more research is needed on the outcomes, and not only mayoral leadership styles, of mayoral migration policies and initiatives.

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