

# Who's Talking about Latinos? How Democrats and Republicans Target Latinos in Televised Campaign Advertising from 2000 to 2016

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## Short Description

Research on campaign outreach to Latinos on TV is limited beyond 2004. We content analyzed ads from 2000-2016 for Latino identity content. We find both parties engage in Latino targeting, although by 2016 immigration is highly polarized.

## Abstract

Campaigns seeking to engage Latino voters frequently use television ads that reference one or more aspects of Latino identity. These include Spanish-language advertising, pro-immigrant rhetoric, descriptive representation of Latinos, and explicit (pan)ethnic cues. Additionally, Latinos are also often the target of anti-immigrant rhetoric. For elections more recent than 2004, however, research on these types of ads remains limited. To address this gap, we content-analyzed all available CMAG ads aired in House, Senate, and Presidential races in the United States for Latino identity references. Our results show modest change from 2000-2012, when both parties engaged in targeted but low-volume deployments of mostly symbolic appeals. In 2016, however, polarized immigration stances dominated with Republicans airing many more ads in English with anti-immigrant rhetoric, and Democrats airing Spanish ads with pro-immigrant rhetoric. Both parties also aired many more ads with Latino characters in 2016. We further find that Democrats target both symbolic and inclusionary immigration strategies in Spanish and towards states with more Latinos; Republicans also target their symbolic appeals but air English ads with exclusionary rhetoric across states. Our findings indicate just how polarized the issue of immigration has become, but also hint that both parties will use other forms of identity content when targeting Latinos in future elections.

Keywords: Latino Politics, Television Ads, Campaigns, Ethnic Targeting, REP, Identity, Partisanship

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## Introduction

In recent years, U.S. citizens of Hispanic or Latino<sup>4</sup> origin have grown significantly as a share of the total U.S. population (Krogstad 2020), and in the process significantly increased their political salience and weight in U.S. presidential and Congressional elections (Barreto, Collingwood, and Manzano 2010; de la Garza and Yang 2020). In response, well-funded candidates for U.S. president and the U.S. Congress, both of the major political parties, numerous grassroots organizations, and other third-party interests with stakes in the outcome of U.S. elections have sought to persuade and mobilize Latino voters with varying degrees of success (Francis-Fallon 2019; Mora 2014). While some of these strategies use personal outreach techniques that date back to the 1960s and 70s (Abrajano 2010; Barreto, Merolla, and DeFrancesco Soto 2011), research also indicates that candidates from both parties increasingly use television ads to reach Latino voters (Abrajano 2010; Nteta and Schaffner 2013; Subervi-Velez 2009).

Campaign appeals towards Latinos often reference specific aspects of a Latino pan-ethnic identity<sup>5</sup> such as Spanish language use, Latin American ancestry, or the immigration experience

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<sup>4</sup> In this paper we use the terms “Hispanic” and “Latino” interchangeably to refer to individuals currently in the U.S. who trace their national origin or ancestry to the Spanish-speaking nations of Latin America or Spain.

<sup>5</sup> A pan-ethnic identity is defined as “the construction of a new categorical boundary through the consolidation of ethnic, tribal, religious, or national [sub-]groups.” (Okamoto and Mora 2014, p. 221). “Latino” pan-ethnic identity entails the consolidation of individuals from various areas in Latin America— there is no single set definition, although it is often described as a “constellation”

(Barreto 2010; Oboler 1995). Supporting inclusionary (positive) policies towards immigrants is another strategy that presidential candidates from both parties—including Ronald Reagan and Barack Obama—have historically used to court Latino voters (Barreto and Collingwood 2015; Mora 2014). However, in the contemporary political period, and especially since Donald Trump’s 2016 presidential campaign, the issue of immigration has become intensely polarized along partisan lines such that virtually all Republicans support exclusionary (i.e., anti-immigrant) policies while virtually all Democrats support more inclusionary (i.e., pro-immigrant) policies (Abrajano and Hajnal 2015; Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck 2019).

Relatedly, a consequence of the growing U.S. Latino population is the ease with which candidates can activate racial threat among whites through exclusionary (negative) messages about Latinos and immigrants (Brader, Valentino, and Suhay 2008; Hopkins 2010; Pérez et al. 2022; Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck 2018). The Republican Party’s strategy on this issue, highlighted by former president Trump’s 2016 campaign, involves the use of both implicitly threatening images of Latino immigrants and explicitly negative messages about Latinos, immigrants, and Latino national origin subgroups like Mexicans (Garcia-Rios, Pedraza, and Wilcox-Archuleta 2019; Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck 2019). By causing whites to feel intense competition and status threat from Latino immigrants and associating that threat with the Democratic Party (Huddy, Mason, and Horwitz 2016; Newman et al. 2021; Newman, Shah, and

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of multiple traits (Jones-Correa and Leal 1996; Padilla 1985). Instead, the category is intentionally vague to maximize the group’s reach (Mora 2014), but typically includes individuals from Spanish-speaking nations—such as Mexico, Cuba and Puerto Rico—under a single label.

Collingwood 2018; Nteta and Rice 2021), such messages can generate significant white opposition to Democratic candidates (Abrajano and Hajnal 2015; Reny, Valenzuela, and Collingwood 2019; Valenzuela and Reny 2021; Ostfeld 2019).

On the other hand, leading Democrats appear to worry about generating white backlash (Ostfeld 2019), contributing to frequently half-hearted Democratic efforts to outreach to Latinos even as party interests regularly tout the importance of the Latino vote (e.g., Rocha 2020; Sanchez 2021). Indeed, older research finds televised campaign advertising to Latinos and other communities of color typically contains more symbolic than substantive content (Abrajano 2010; Nteta and Schaffner 2013), potentially contributing to deficits in political information and engagement among Latinos (Velez and Newman 2019). This approach, however, may be a strategic choice by mainstream Democrats to engage Latino voters while minimizing the chance of whites associating Latinos with the policy priorities of the Democratic Party.

Yet despite these widespread and politically consequential changes in the size and influence of the Latino population, deepening partisan polarization in general and especially on issues of race and immigration, and the politicization of Latino campaign targeting, we know precious little about recent patterns in televised political advertisements targeting Latinos because existing research is limited to ads from 2004 or earlier (Abrajano 2010; Nteta and Schaffner 2013; Subervi-Velez 2009). This leaves crucial questions regarding the types of partisan political messaging that Latino (and other) voters are exposed to on television unanswered. For example, from 2000 to 2016, have partisan campaigns shifted their television ad strategies in response to growing Latino political influence, the polarization of immigration, and the ensuing white backlash? How do ads that discuss the issue of immigration differ from those with less polarizing Latino identity content such as Spanish-language messaging or the inclusion

of Latino identities in the characters represented? How have Democratic and Republican campaigns shifted their Latino targeting strategies over time? And finally, to what extent are these strategies related to Latino population change?

We develop a theory of “multiple audiences” arguing that campaigns strategically target their televised campaign advertisements based on the ethnic makeup of the ad’s likely viewers. In general, campaigns from both parties will see the growing Latino population as a potential source of electoral support, so we expect that audiences with more Latinos will generally have more Latino identity content. However, with immigration becoming so intensely polarized along partisan lines, each party also fears backlash—Democrats from white voters exposed to inclusive immigration messaging (Abrajano and Hajnal 2015; Ostfeld 2019), and Republicans from Latino voters exposed to exclusionary immigration messaging (Gutierrez et al. 2019). We predict that while both parties will use more symbolic (non-immigration) Latino identity cues in areas with more Latinos, they will diverge significantly on immigration: Democrats will target Latinos with positive immigration ads while trying to hide such ads from whites, while Republicans will similarly target whites with exclusionary immigration ads while hiding them from Latinos.

To test this theory, we analyzed all available Kantor/Campaign Media Analysis Group (CMAG)<sup>6</sup> television advertising aired in U.S. House, U.S. Senate, and U.S. Presidential races that took place during presidential election years spanning 2000 to 2016 (Fowler et al. 2020b; Fowler, Franz, and Ridout 2015; Goldstein, Franz, and Ridout 2002; Goldstein et al. 2011; Goldstein and Rivlin 2007b). We used existing Kantor/CMAG codes indicating if the ads were

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<sup>6</sup> Access was provided through the Wisconsin Advertising Project (2000-04) and the Wesleyan Media Project (2008-16).

aired in Spanish and if the issue of immigration was mentioned in the ads. We additionally worked with several research assistants to provide substantially more detail about the Latino identity content included in all of the advertisements. We coded each ad for whether the issue of immigration was mentioned in a manner that was inclusionary (positive) or exclusionary (negative) in tone. We also coded for the presence of Latino characters and candidates, and for the use of explicit pan-ethnic and national origin identity references. We then merged data from the U.S. Census Bureau on the percent Latino in each state to analyze how Latino population dynamics affect when and where campaigns use Latino identity content in their televised advertising.

We show that while both parties deployed a modest amount of Latino identity content from 2000-2012, with Republicans deploying relatively more Latino identity content in the 2000-2004 period and Democrats increasing their use of Latino identity content more rapidly from 2008-2012, such content skyrocketed in 2016. Republicans in 2016—Donald Trump as well as other candidates—aired a high volume of exclusionary immigration rhetoric in English ads specifically, while Democrats aired a much more modest volume of inclusionary immigration rhetoric in Spanish advertisements. In 2016, therefore, Democrats largely ceded English-language airwaves to a very vocal Republican opposition to immigration, leaving attacks against immigrants aired in English largely unanswered.

Crucially for our questions about potential backlash, both parties also avoided mentioning immigration to audiences where their views are dissonant—Democrats in English, Republicans in Spanish. However, while Democrats concentrated their inclusionary immigration targeting in areas with relatively more Latinos, exclusionary immigration airings by Republicans are uncorrelated with Latino population contexts. For the other, less politically polarized, Latino

identity cues included in political advertising such as Spanish-language use and Latino characters or candidates, we find that both parties have expanded such targeting efforts over time, and this targeting is more extensive in states with more Latinos. These results confirm that while immigration remains deeply polarized, with candidates from both parties frequently choosing not to air their immigration rhetoric to unsympathetic viewers, both parties continue to seek Latino support through more symbolic—and thus less polarizing—Latino identity cues.

These findings contribute broadly to our understanding of racial and ethnic politics in the U.S., as well as campaigns and elections more generally, because they clarify the decision-making of partisan political campaigns in a context of growing racial and political polarization. Such decisions regarding the usage of racial political rhetoric, of course, have demonstrable consequences for voter attitudes and mass behavior (Abrajano and Hajnal 2015; Carmines and Stimson 1989; Mendelberg 2001; Stephens-Dougan 2020; Tesler 2016). We provide new evidence that Democratic immigration-related outreach (and xenophobic Republican attacks) spiked massively in 2016, both of which can push Latino voters towards the Democratic Party (Barreto and Collingwood 2015; Gutierrez et al. 2019; Huddy, Mason, and Horwitz 2016). Similarly, while the issue of immigration is closely linked to Latinos and xenophobic stereotypes of immigrants, whites will experience heightened levels of anxiety and threat from Latino newcomers when primed to do so by vocal politicians (Abrajano and Hajnal 2015; Farris and Silber Mohamed 2018; B. Newman et al. 2021; Valentino, Brader, and Jardina 2013). Indeed, numerous recent studies show that the growing size of the U.S. Latino population is closely tied to growing white support for the Republican Party and conservative approaches to public policy (Abrajano and Hajnal 2015; Craig and Richeson 2017; Mutz 2018; Reny, Collingwood, and Valenzuela 2018), especially when candidates and elected officials link these immigration-led

demographic changes to false claims about cultural and political threats to the nation (Hopkins 2010; Newman, Shah, and Collingwood 2018). Similarly, Democratic appeals to Latinos run the risk of sparking similar anxiety among whites and reducing their support for the Democratic Party (Ostfeld 2019). But while immigration is a highly polarized topic sparking divergent strategies from each party, we find that the use of Latino identity cues is less polarized politically—as the Latino population grows, both parties increase their deployment of Spanish-language ads, and the use of Latino characters and explicit Latino and national origin identity cues in English ads. Thus, while the substantive issue of immigration has increasingly become a polarized political issue similar to other racial issues (Reny, Valenzuela, and Collingwood 2019; Tesler 2016), both parties still appear to view symbolic Latino identity cues as a way to gain Latino support.

In the remainder of the paper, we first discuss what previous literature on the topic of political appeals towards and about Latinos has found in order to establish a historical baseline. We then address contemporary political trends regarding Latino voters and the immigration debate, which have changed significantly since the most recent research on televised advertising towards Latinos was published. We next develop our theory of multiple audiences and produce a set of hypotheses regarding how we expect partisan campaign use of Latino identity content to differ by language, over time, and as a function of Latino and white population contexts. We then provide an overview of our ads data and test our hypotheses with descriptive graphs showing partisan and temporal trends, along with analyses of how Latino identity content in ads differs based on local context. We conclude by discussing the implications of these results for the future of campaign outreach to Latinos, and for the political engagement of Latinos overall.

## **Appeals Towards (and About) Latinos**

Latino pan-ethnicity has become a powerful political and social identity for many Latinos (Junn and Masuoka 2013; Sanchez and Masuoka 2010; Valenzuela 2022). Campaigns seeking to engage Latino voters often rely on messaging that draws on one or more aspects of Latino pan-ethnic identity, which includes multiple traits such as Latin American ancestry, Spanish-language use, and immigrant identity (Barreto 2010; Mora 2014; Padilla 1985; Sen and Wasow 2016). Consequently, campaigns often deploy Latino targeting strategies that use either symbolic appeals rooted in Latino pan-ethnicity (e.g., explicit pan-ethnic or national origin cues, Spanish-language use, co-ethnic representation) or more substantive appeals focusing primarily on immigration (Nteta and Schaffner 2013). We discuss each of these two targeting approaches in turn below.

### Symbolic Appeals

Symbolic appeals towards Latino voters demonstrate an attempt by campaigns to affirm their support for Latinos as a group (Dovi 2002). These efforts are an appeal to a social identity (Tajfel 1982) and also address a history where Latinos have been politically disempowered and marginalized (Barreto 2010; Bobo and Gilliam 1990; Francis-Fallon 2019; Mora 2014). These symbolic appeals can thus be a signal that a campaign wants to address these inequities, although there is also the risk that symbolic appeals are seen as merely cheap talk (Anguiano 2016). Below, we focus on three types of symbolic appeals in political advertisements: explicit identity references, descriptive representation, and Spanish-language use.

Explicit identity references are direct references to Latino pan-ethnicity or relevant national origin identities.<sup>7</sup> Historical efforts to cultivate Latino political engagement and Latino pan-ethnic identity often emphasized the labels themselves as important ways to gain political and social recognition (Calderón 1992; Mora 2014; Padilla 1985). For example, to raise awareness about a new Hispanic origin question on the 1980 Census, Spanish-language television stations included informational segments showing images of the question and explaining how more people identifying as Hispanic would result in greater political power and recognition (Mora 2014). Campaigns took note and began using pan-ethnic labels in their Spanish-language outreach (Cadava 2020; Subervi-Velez 2009). Over successive elections, Latino voters exposed to such messaging express stronger attachment to their pan-ethnic identity, suggesting that campaigns can help to cultivate Latino political cohesion (Valenzuela 2022).

The descriptive representation of Latinos entails the presence of Latinos in the televised ad, either as candidates or simply as characters in the ad (Barreto 2010; Sathwani and Mendez 2018). While positive portrayals can have an empowering effect (Mastro 2015), these portrayals may also be negative in nature, such as ads depicting Mexicans or undocumented immigrants in a demeaning manner (Collingwood and O'Brien 2019; Garcia-Rios, Pedraza, and Wilcox-Archuleta 2019; Wroe 2008). These symbolic representations can shape individual Latino attitudes and voting behavior. Indeed, regular exposure to pan-ethnic cues locally has been found

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<sup>7</sup> Pan-ethnic references in ads include “Latino,” “Latina,” “Hispanic,” and “Latinx.” National origin identities include those from a variety of countries in Latin America such as Mexican, Peruvian, Dominican, etc. Other explicit references include hyphenated identities (Mexican-American), colloquialisms (Boricuas), and group-specific labels (e.g., Chicanos).

to be associated with stronger Latino pan-ethnic identity (Wilcox-Archuleta 2018). By contrast, Latinos exposed to negative portrayals of fellow group members are more likely to mobilize against the purveyor of such portrayals (Gutierrez et al. 2019; HoSang 2010; Pérez 2015a; Zepeda-Millán 2017).

Spanish-language messaging draws on Spanish as a symbol of Latino identity and also as a language disproportionately spoken by Latinos, which is especially important given the high share of Latinos in the US who are either Spanish-dominant or bilingual (Barreto, Reny, and Wilcox-Archuleta 2017; Tran 2010). Because its audience is disproportionately Latino (Abrajano 2010; Mora 2014; Wilkinson 2015), Spanish-language television is used by campaigns seeking to target Latino voters while limiting potential backlash from white and other non-Latino voters (Abrajano 2010; Hersh 2015; Ostfeld 2019). As we discuss in greater detail below, this ability to target Latinos by language is important to campaigns because it is significantly easier than targeting by a voter's race or ethnicity (Hersh 2015).

### Substantive Immigration Appeals

Campaigns may also focus on more substantive policy issues in their Latino voter outreach. While substantive policy outreach can include a variety of topics, in this paper we focus on immigration because it is both an important Latino identity cue and an important policy issue that affects white voters especially (Reny, Collingwood, and Valenzuela 2019; Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck 2019). Immigration as a policy area and as a lived experience is a key aspect of Latino identity (Barreto 2010; Garcia 2016; Junn and Masuoka 2013; Lee 2008). As such, when candidates support inclusionary immigration policies, e.g., Reagan/amnesty and Obama/Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), they tend to gain Latino electoral support (Barreto and Collingwood 2015; Cadava 2020). However, white voters exposed to such

rhetoric—including white Democrats—tend to react negatively, so campaigns engaging in Latino targeting attempt to do so “outside the gaze of whites” (Abrajano and Hajnal 2015; Hersh and Schaffner 2013; Nteta and Schaffner 2013; Ostfeld 2019).

The effects of exclusionary immigration policy rhetoric and positioning is more uneven among Latinos. While many Latinos respond to anti-immigrant threat by countermobilizing (Gutierrez et al. 2019; Zepeda-Millán 2017), those with weaker pan-ethnic ties may be demobilized due to their desire to dissociate from stigmatized outgroups like undocumented immigrants (García Bedolla 2005; Pérez 2015b, 2015a). And while exclusionary immigration rhetoric is primarily oriented towards gaining support from racially conservative whites (Reny, Collingwood, and Valenzuela 2019), these negative immigration messages can also appeal to some Latinos, especially those who identify as Republican (Alamillo 2019; Cadava 2020).

### **Historical and Contemporary Trends in Televised Latino Targeting**

Historically, political campaigns from both major parties have been engaging Latino voters on television since the early rise of the Latino pan-ethnic movement in the 1970s (Francis-Fallon 2019; Mora 2014). By the 1980s, there emerged numerous media firms that worked closely with Spanish-language broadcasting companies and political campaigns to produce Spanish-language campaign advertisements with explicit pan-ethnic identity references and descriptive representation of Latinos (Mora 2014; Subervi-Velez 2009).

A crucial technological change that occurred during this time period is the rise of cable television, which replaced a small selection of channels (and thus only a few captive audiences) with thousands of options (Prior 2007). By separating television watchers into multiple, highly segmented, and demographically concentrated audiences, cable television gave campaigns

enormous power to target their messages (Franz 2018). While targeting specific groups is difficult and risky without accurate consumer data (Hersh 2015; Hersh and Schaffner 2013), the proliferation of Spanish-language programming gave campaigns more opportunities to try and reach Latinos through targeted campaign ads (Mora 2014; Wilkinson 2015).

Federico Subervi-Velez (2009) and contributors provide an encompassing overview of televised campaign outreach to Latinos during the 1984-2004 period (also see Abrajano 2010, ch. 3). Perhaps surprisingly based on the contemporary political context, Republican candidates in the 1980s such as Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush massively outspent their Democratic opponents on both Spanish-language and English-language airwaves in states with large Latino populations. While Democrat Bill Clinton increased Democratic outreach efforts in his 1996 re-election campaign, Republican candidates maintained an edge in terms of spending on Latino outreach through George W. Bush's 2004 campaign (Subervi-Velez 2009, chs. 12-13). The defining feature of this period is what Constantakis-Valdés and Subervi-Velez (2009, ch. 5) call a “dual orientation” towards Latino outreach that bifurcates into two distinct types of targeting. The first type entails effectively word-for-word translations of English-language television ads, while the second type entails ads specifically tailored for Latinos that emphasize specific aspects of Latino identity. In our *multiple audiences theory*, we extend this framework to also include English-language ads that are seemingly targeted towards Latinos as well.

Our approach also builds on Marisa Abrajano's (2010) work that analyzed the effects of the “dual-orientation” political environment on Latino voter attitudes and behavior by content-analyzing ads from the 2000, 2002, and 2004 elections and classifying them based on whether they included any policy content, how complex that content was, and whether Latinos specifically were mentioned in the ad. Using her theory of information-based advertising, she

argues that campaigns tend to view Latinos as politically uninformed and primarily motivated by symbolic rather than policy concerns (see also Bedolla and Michelson 2012; Hersh 2015), which leads to Spanish-language ads that include less complex policy information and more symbolic ethnic identity cues (Abrajano 2010, ch. 4). She then demonstrates that this persistent use of simple policy and symbolic content in political ads targeting Latinos has resulted in Latino voters receiving significantly less political information from campaigns relative to white voters (Abrajano 2010, ch. 6). We extend Abrajano's (2010) analyses into the contemporary period and advance her theoretical inquiries into how campaigns may expose Latino voters to a systematically different political information environment than white voters.

Finally, in a study directly relevant to our study, Tatishe Nteta and Brian Schaffner (2013) content-analyzed ads from the 2002 midterm election and examined when, where, and how campaigns advertised to Black and Latino voters. They found that while outreach to racial minorities is associated with minority population size and is especially common on minority-oriented television—e.g., Spanish-language channels—these targeting efforts are significantly less likely when the audience includes more white viewers (e.g., during prime-time programming). Even when campaigns appeal directly to Latinos, these appeals are kept “outside the gaze of White voters” (Nteta and Schaffner 2013, p. 233) to minimize potential backlash. We draw inspiration from this insight in particular to develop our theory regarding how campaigns deploy Latino identity content in their messages based on the television advertisement's potential to reach Latino and white viewers.

### Beyond 2004 through 2016

While these works are helpful as historical overviews and theoretical motivation, they are limited by their timeframe; the most recent analyses of Latino targeting on television were conducted by Abrajano (2010) and use data from 2004. As discussed above, the Latino population has grown substantially since 2004 and it is now the largest non-white racial group in the nation (Igielnik and Budiman 2020), which helps drive the intense and polarized political rhetoric around race and immigration we have seen in recent years (Abrajano and Hajnal 2015; Tesler 2016). To our knowledge, there is no similar systematic analysis of campaign advertising to Latino voters in the post-2004 time period despite these major changes in the political and demographic environments.

In 2006, for example, Republican support for a harsh anti-immigrant bill targeting undocumented immigrants (HR 4437) sparked one of the largest mass mobilizations of Latinos in American political history (Barreto et al. 2009; Zepeda-Millán 2017; Zepeda-Millán and Wallace 2013). The nativist wing of the GOP, which coalesced into the Tea Party movement and drove Donald Trump's first campaign for president, would soon take over the party (Abrajano and Hajnal 2015; Reny, Collingwood, and Valenzuela 2019). In contrast to the generally pro-immigrant stances of former Republican presidents Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush and George W. Bush, Republican politicians increasingly use xenophobic language towards (Latino) immigrants, especially the undocumented (Cohen 2020; Santa Ana et al. 2020; Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck 2019). On the other side of the aisle, Democratic candidates have become more attuned to how they can maximize Latino voter outreach, such as emphasizing support for inclusionary positions on immigration (Barreto and Collingwood 2015). Given the massive shifts that have occurred since 2004, an updated analysis of partisan campaign outreach towards (and about) Latino voters is sorely needed.

## Theory and Hypotheses

Given the foregoing discussion and review of prior scholarship in this area, we propose a theory of “multiple audiences” to explain where, why, and how campaigns use television advertising to target Latino and white voters based on their potential as sources of electoral support.<sup>8</sup> As the Latino population continues to grow, campaigns will have increasingly strong incentives to seek their support (Barreto and Segura 2014; Mayhew 1974). However, as Nteta and Schaffner (2013) observed, the threat of backlash from white voters viewing such messages applies a secondary set of considerations to campaigns fearful that Latino outreach, especially that which uses inclusionary immigration rhetoric, will diminish white voter support (Abrajano and Hajnal 2015; Hersh and Schaffner 2013; Ostfeld 2019). Given that white voters remain more influential than Latinos in most elections, the threat of white backlash is likely to frequently forestall Latino outreach (Frymer and Skrentny 1998).

This is where the “multiple audiences” of English and Spanish-language television are theoretically important: while English-language audiences resemble the general population, the Spanish-language viewing audience is disproportionately Latino (Abrajano 2010; Mora 2014). Campaigns interested in reaching Latino voters—and only Latino voters—can run a Spanish-language ad and feel secure that few whites will be incidentally exposed. Advertisements in English can also be targeted based on the relative percent of white and Latino voters in the area: an English-language television station in a majority-Latino state or city will still reach a

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<sup>8</sup> We focus primarily on Latino and white voters (viewers) because these groups are the most clearly affected by positive and negative Latino identity targeting.

disproportionately Latino audience, while an English-language television station in an area with fewer Latinos is likely to reach relatively more whites.<sup>9</sup>

These perceptions of where campaigns can potentially win votes with the right message—and where they might lose votes if they use the wrong message—should lead to differential targeting strategies by language and demographics. Campaigns are often attempting to engage voters with fairly limited information (Hersh 2015), so the ability to target messages to two distinct audiences is a major boon. The strategies used by campaigns in relation to the “multiple audiences” of Spanish and English-language television thus reveals their underlying perceptions of which messages they expect to work among Latino and white voters, and which messages should remain hidden. Based on our theory of multiple audiences, we develop several hypotheses regarding how we expect campaigns to modify their use of Latino identity content in televised campaign advertisements.

Our first hypothesis addresses the general incentive that campaigns have to seek support from Latino voters through the deployment of Latino identity content, which all else equal will increase as the Latino population grows larger. However, because of how polarized the issue of immigration has become, we theorize that only non-polarized Latino identity cues—i.e., symbolic cues such as Spanish-language use, descriptive representation, and explicit identity references—will be used by both parties as the Latino population grows larger.

H1: Higher Latino population density is associated with greater use of non-immigration Latino identity content by both Democratic and Republican campaigns.

Conversely, for the issue of immigration, we expect to observe even stronger evidence supporting our “multiple audiences” theory because there is significantly greater threat of

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<sup>9</sup> Explain why not Black/Asian American here?

backlash—either from Latinos exposed to exclusionary immigration rhetoric, or from whites exposed to inclusionary immigration rhetoric. Our second hypothesis predicts that Democrats will emphasize inclusionary immigration rhetoric in Spanish while hiding it in English, and our third hypothesis predicts that Republicans will emphasize exclusionary immigration rhetoric in English while hiding it in Spanish.

H2: Democratic candidates will air more ads with inclusionary immigration messaging in Spanish and in areas with more Latinos, and will avoid using such ads in English and in areas with less Latinos

H3: Republican candidates will air more ads with exclusionary immigration messaging in English and in areas with less Latinos, and will avoid using such ads in Spanish and in areas with more Latinos

## **Data and Methods**

We test our expectations using an novel dataset built on CMAG advertising data from presidential election years spanning 2000-2016 and originally compiled and coded for certain attributes by the Wisconsin Advertising (2000-2008) and Wesleyan Media (2012-2016) Projects (Fowler et al. 2020a; Fowler et al. 2020b; Fowler, Franz, and Ridout 2015; Goldstein, Franz, and Ridout 2002; Goldstein et al. 2011; Goldstein and Rivlin 2007a, 2007b).<sup>10</sup> In 2000 and 2004, the

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Wisconsin Advertising Project (WAP) compiled CMAG television advertising data from all stations in the top 75 and top 100 largest media markets, respectively. In 2008, the WAP compiled CMAG advertising data from all stations in all 210 media markets in the U.S.<sup>11</sup> In 2012 and 2016, the Wesleyan Media Project (WMP) compiled CMAG television advertising data from all stations in all 210 media markets in the U.S.<sup>12</sup>

For both sets of data, the projects included ads aired in U.S. Presidential, U.S. Senate, U.S. House, and gubernatorial races. We exclude gubernatorial advertising from our analyses because many of these races take place outside of presidential election years; our focus on presidential election years means we would have an inaccurate picture of gubernatorial advertising only in these years. These data represent the most comprehensive set of televised political advertising available in 2000-2016. The WAP and WMP coded the ads for a number of attributes that we rely on in our analyses. Of these, the most important for our project include whether the ad was a candidate, party, or non-party and non-candidate ad; which candidate or political party the ad was run in support of; what issue or issues were mentioned in the ad; the tone of the ad; the media market in which the ad was run; the date, time and station on which the ad was run; and whether the ad was aired in English or Spanish.

We additionally employed human coders to identify attributes of the advertising that were not originally collected by the WAP and WMP. These additional attributes include whether the tone of immigration-related messaging was inclusionary (pro-immigrant) or exclusionary (anti-immigrant); the use of descriptive representation (Latino characters or images) in the advertising; and the inclusion of explicit identity content (mentions of “Latinos,” “Hispanics,” or any Latin

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<sup>11</sup> See <https://elections.wisc.edu/wisconsin-advertising-project/>.

<sup>12</sup> See <https://mediaproject.wesleyan.edu/>.

American national origin group). Both the WAP and WMP included information about whether the advertisements were aired in Spanish; our coders confirmed this information and additionally coded for any inclusion of Spanish in the English-language advertising. To examine variation across states, we include estimates of the share of the Latino population for each state in which an ad was aired. These estimates are drawn from the American Community Survey (ACS) from each presidential election year between 2000 and 2016. Our final dataset consists of over 10 million individual ad airings across Presidential, Senate, and House races from 2000 to 2016, corresponding to 18,793 unique televised ads.

The long temporal range of these data, and the additional coded attributes of the advertisements, allow us to address two major limitations of existing analyses of political advertising intended for Latino audiences. The first is that all previously published studies on this question that we are aware of were conducted using data from elections that took place more than a decade ago (Abrajano 2010; Farris and Silber Mohamed 2018; T. M. Nteta and Schaffner 2013; Subervi-Velez 2009). This is particularly problematic in light of the massive changes in the politics of immigration that have occurred since the prior time period, which as we discussed previously include major changes in discourses about race, immigration, and Latino voters in this country (Abrajano and Hajnal 2015; Tesler 2016). Studies that analyze more recent elections, by contrast, tend to focus on Latino voter *perceptions* of campaigns, or have a narrower geographic scope (Garcia-Rios, Pedraza, and Wilcox-Archuleta 2019; Gutierrez et al. 2019; Ocampo, Garcia-Rios, and Gutierrez 2021). Our data provide the most comprehensive view of televised political advertising targeting Latinos during the 2000-2016 election period.

Second, because the WAP and WMP do not include our more detailed codes for tone of immigration advertising, the use of descriptive representation, the inclusion of explicit identity

content, and the inclusion of any Spanish in English-language ads, researchers have been limited in their ability to answer detailed question about the manner in which Latinos have been targeted in national elections over time. Prior studies that employ a similar approach using human coders are limited to one or two elections that took place more than a decade and a half ago (Abrajano 2010; Nteta and Schaffner 2013), so they cannot tell us how advertising intended for Latinos may have shifted in more recent elections, or what impact major changes in the political landscape may have had on trends in advertising. By coding these attributes of advertisements aired in all media markets across the country in presidential election years spanning 2000-2016, we are able to assess how the use of specific Latino identity content may have changed over time, by party of the candidate or interest group airing the ad, and language of the advertisement.

Our goal in this analysis is primarily descriptive. First, in order to address H1-H3 at the nationwide level, we rely on time-series graphs to identify these trends among the population of all presidential election-year national campaigns from 2000 to 2016. As Latino voters have increased in their share of the electorate over this period, have campaigns shifted their symbolic and immigration messaging accordingly? Our dependent variable of interest is the *volume* of ad airings. In any given election, campaigns create few unique ads but air each one many times in different media markets, depending on the race. The number of times these ads were aired is therefore the appropriate indicator of campaign behavior. While some prior work has highlighted issues with using ad volume (Prior 2001), our results are robust to using spending — measured by the sum of the cost of each ad airing — as the dependent variable instead.

To examine H1-H3 at the statewide level, we employ the logistic regression model below:

$$Y_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 L_{st} + \beta_2 R_{it} + \beta_3 S_{it} + \beta_4 L_{st} * R_{it} + \beta_5 L_{st} * S_{it} + \beta_6 R_{it} * S_{it} \\ + \beta_7 R_{it} * S_{it} * L_{st} + \beta_8 X_{ist} + \lambda_t + \epsilon_{it}$$

Here, the unit of analysis is the individual ad airing.  $Y_{it}$  is a binary variable taking a value of 1 if ad  $I$  aired in year  $t$  included the kind of content in question, either symbolic or immigration-related, and 0 if not.  $L_{st}$  is a continuous variable ranging from 0 to 1 which represents the percent share of the Latino population in the state  $s$  in which ad  $i$  was aired in year  $t$ .  $R_{it}$  is a binary variable taking a value of 1 if ad  $i$  in year  $t$  was aired by a Republican candidate and 0 if it was aired by a Democratic Candidate.  $S_{it}$  is a binary variable taking a value of 1 if ad  $i$  in year  $t$  was aired in Spanish and 0 if it was aired in English. We include higher order interactions to examine whether the relationship between symbolic and immigration messaging and the percent Latino population varies by party and language. Finally,  $X_{it}$  is a vector of additional covariates --- including office (Senate or President), election type (general or primary), the log of the cost of airing the ad, and the percent white population in the state --- and  $\lambda_t$  represents time fixed effects by year. We exclude House races from this analysis because they occur at the district level.

We do not include fixed effects for states in our primary model specification, so we focus on between state variation in Latino population rather than within. Our model addresses the question: What is the relationship between the share of the Latino population in a state and the likelihood of airing an ad with symbolic or immigration content? We interpret  $\beta_1$  descriptively rather than causally because it accounts only for time-varying shocks common to all states ( $\lambda_t$ ) and *not* for time-varying factors that *differ* between states or time invariant differences between states. We focus on between rather than within state variation because the relatively short length of our panel (5 data points per state for the presidential election years from 2000 to 2016) does

not enable us to obtain a precise estimate of within state responsiveness. However, we do report the results of the same models including fixed effects clustered by state ( $\alpha_s$ ) in our Appendix B table.

## **Results**

Before evaluating our hypotheses, we provide an initial overview of trends in campaign television advertising – both in general and in terms of Latino identity content – during the 2000-2016 time period. Figure 1 displays the total number of ads aired by political campaigns per year and per office. The left graph uses the full CMAG dataset, although these visuals are misleading because data from the years 2000 and 2004 were recorded using only 75 and 100, respectively, of the ~210 total media markets in the country. As such, there are significantly more observations in 2008, 2012, and 2016. To correct for this, in the right graph we restrict the entire dataset to just the 75 media markets recorded in 2000. Our subsequent descriptive figures only show data from these 75 media markets as well. Even with this correction, it is clear that the overall volume of television advertising has steadily increased over time. The volume of presidential campaign advertising more than tripled from 2000 to 2012, although it dropped off slightly in 2016. Advertising in Senate campaigns remained steady from 2000 to 2008 but increased significantly in 2012 and continued increasing in 2016. Relative to these trends, campaign advertising for House elections experienced only modest increases over time while the volume of gubernatorial advertising had the least number of airings and minimal change over time. These findings show that television advertising by political campaigns, especially in presidential and senatorial elections, have consistently increased during the 2000-2016 time period.

We next focus on campaign advertising that includes Latino identity content. Such content includes rhetoric about immigration, Spanish-language messaging, descriptive representation of Latinos, and explicit (pan-)ethnic identity cues. Figure 2 displays the volume of Latino identity content across the 2000-2016 time period. The top line shows the volume of ads containing any form of Latino identity content.<sup>13</sup> We then differentiate between three combinations of Spanish-language and immigration messaging: English-language ads with immigration rhetoric, Spanish-language ads with immigration rhetoric, and Spanish-language ads without immigration rhetoric. Finally, we show the number of ads that include major Latino characters (i.e., they have a speaking role, are on-screen for three seconds or more, and/or are a Latino candidate) and that use an explicit (pan-)ethnic cue. What is strikingly clear from this plot is that, compared to previous years, campaign advertising in 2016 had a significantly greater volume of ads that contained Latino identity content, which is driven predominantly by ads containing English-language immigration rhetoric and descriptive representations of Latinos. The other main takeaway is that, for the 2000-2012 time period, there was relatively little change in the overall volume of Latino identity content. There are notable shifts in which aspect of Latino identity are deployed most frequently each year – in 2000 it was Spanish-language ads without immigration, in 2004 it was Latino descriptive representatives, and in 2008 it was

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<sup>13</sup> Ads frequently include multiple types of identity content, but each ad airing is counted only once in our analyses. The line for “any Latino identity content” is an indicator of whether an ad has any identity content rather than the sum of all identity content in a single ad (e.g., an ad airing with immigration rhetoric and a Latino character would count as 1 for “any Latino identity content”).

English-language ads with immigration. However, by 2016, the volume of both English-language ads with immigration and ads with Latino descriptive representatives had more than quadrupled from their volume in 2012. Other forms of Latino identity content, such as Spanish-language immigration messaging and explicit ethnic cues, were more common in 2016 as well relative to other years. Overall, these results show that the deployment of Latino identity content on campaign television advertising was modest and stable through the 2000-2012 period but spiked significantly in the 2016 election. These trends were driven especially by English-language immigration rhetoric and Latino descriptive representatives.

### Partisan Trends Over Time

We now move to testing our hypotheses. For Democratic campaigns, we first posited that their usage of symbolic Latino identity content will increase over time, and that they will especially focus on inclusionary immigration rhetoric in Spanish to maximize the Latino audience (H1). For Republican campaigns, we posited that their usage of symbolic Latino identity content will decrease over time and that they would instead focus on exclusionary immigration rhetoric in English to avoid exposing such rhetoric to Latino audiences (H2).

Figure 3 displays the volume of ads containing any immigration content in English (left) and in Spanish (middle) along with the number of Spanish-language ads that do not contain any immigration content (right). The solid line shows volume for Democrats while the dashed line shows volume for Republicans. By far the highest volume of immigration rhetoric recorded was in 2016 for both English and Spanish, but there are clear partisan trends. Republicans in 2016 aired more than four times as many ads containing immigration rhetoric in English than in any previous year, while Democrats in 2016 aired almost three times as many immigration ads in Spanish than previously. The usage of Spanish-language messaging without immigration content

by both parties, meanwhile, actually experienced a slight drop in 2016 relative to 2012, which was itself not a huge increase from previous years. We next evaluate how exclusionary and inclusionary these immigration messages are.

Figure 4 displays the volume of ads containing immigration rhetoric separated by English-language ads (left) and Spanish-language ads (right). Each line shows the volume of ads with a different combination of party (Democrat, Republican) and immigration tone (exclusionary, inclusionary). Republican usage of immigration rhetoric is almost entirely exclusionary and in English, with a small spike in 2008 and a massive increase in 2016. While Democrats deployed small amounts of ads with exclusionary immigration rhetoric in English in 2008 and 2016, in 2012 and especially in 2016 they were airing a proportionately much larger volume of inclusionary ads in Spanish. As with Figure 3, there is a massive spike in the usage of immigration rhetoric in 2016, and this figure confirms that these trends were primarily driven by Republican usage of exclusionary rhetoric in English and Democratic usage of inclusionary rhetoric in Spanish. This figure confirms that partisan divergence on immigration results in differential targeting by language and tone – Democrats air more inclusionary rhetoric in Spanish, while Republicans air more exclusionary rhetoric in English.

For our final figure addressing changes over the 2000-2016 time period, we examine the descriptive representation of Latinos as candidates and characters. Figure 5 displays the volume of ads containing descriptive representations of Latinos, separated by whether the Latino descriptive representative was only onscreen briefly (left) or was a major character (right).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Latino characters are coded as “Major” if they are candidates, if they are on-screen for more than 3 seconds, or if they have a speaking role. Otherwise, they are coded as “Brief”.

From 2000-2008, most Latino representation on television was brief. During this time period, Republicans actually aired more ads with Latino characters than Democrats. Trends begin shifting in 2012, when Democrats begin airing more ads with brief and major Latino characters, while Republican usage of such strategies plummeted. In 2016, Latino descriptive representation in general increased tremendously, mirroring what we observed for immigration rhetoric. Democrats in particular began airing massively more ads with brief Latino characters – more than seven times the volume of previous years – and they also doubled the number of major Latino characters from 2012 to 2016. Republicans, meanwhile, still aired significantly less ads with Latino characters overall compared to Democrats, but they still aired a modest number of both brief and major Latino characters.

Taken together, these results provide strong support for our first hypothesis, where we argued that Democrats will increase their usage of Latino identity cues overall during this time period, and that on the issue of immigration they would primarily air inclusionary rhetoric in Spanish. Our results show that from 2000-2016, Democrats dramatically increased their usage of both symbolic cues, such as descriptive representatives and Spanish-language ads, and their deployment of substantive appeals, such as inclusionary immigration rhetoric. We also find strong support for our second hypothesis, where we argued that Republicans will decrease their usage of Latino identity cues overall and that, on immigration, they would primarily air exclusionary rhetoric in English. We find that Republicans aired very few ads in Spanish or with inclusionary immigration rhetoric. One challenge to our claim is that they were more likely to use Latino descriptive representatives in their ads, with peaks in 2004 and 2016 indicating that there is not a consistent positive or negative trend. Where we do find strong evidence supporting our hypothesis is on the targeting of exclusionary immigration rhetoric. In 2016, Republicans

aired a huge amount of exclusionary rhetoric in English while their overall Spanish ad numbers lagged behind those of Democrats. Altogether, it is clear that Democrats have become more likely to use Latino identity content overall and are especially more likely to use inclusionary immigration rhetoric in Spanish. Contrarily, Republicans have become less likely to use Spanish-language ads but continue to use Latino descriptive representatives. Meanwhile, on immigration, they have become much more likely to air ads with exclusionary rhetoric in English.

### Trends by State

We next address our hypotheses related to how trends in campaign activity differ across states, and how this difference corresponds with Latino and white population trends. We previously posited that both Republicans and Democrats will be more likely to use ads with any form of Latino identity content in states with higher percentages of Latinos (H3), but that Republicans will be significantly more likely to deploy exclusionary immigration content in states with small Latino populations and larger white populations (H4).

Table 1 displays the likelihood that ads with different kinds of Latino identity content are aired in a given state based on the percent Latino in a state along with other control variables and interaction terms with the percent Latino variable.<sup>15</sup> As this is a logit model, the coefficients represent log odds. The primary coefficients of interest are State Percent Latino for columns 1, 2, and 3. The results broadly support our hypotheses: the coefficients are in the expected direction

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<sup>15</sup> The data used in these analyses is drawn from the entire dataset as opposed to just the 75 media markets recorded in 2000.

— positive for symbolic and inclusionary immigration and negative for exclusionary immigration — though they are imprecisely estimated and not statistically significant. This means that we expect campaigns to be more likely to air ads including symbolic or inclusionary immigration content and less likely to air exclusionary immigration content in states with higher Latino population shares.

For symbolic ads (i.e., ads with descriptive Latino representatives and/or explicit ethnic cues), while the primary coefficient on State Percent Latino is insignificant, we do find a significantly positive relationship for the Spanish variable and for the interaction variable between state percent Latino and Spanish, indicating that symbolic ads in Spanish (but not English) are much more likely when a state has a greater proportion of Latinos. We also find that presidential campaigns are significantly more likely to use symbolic ads than those for House, who are in turn more likely to use symbolic ads than campaigns for Senate.

For inclusionary immigration rhetoric, we only observe significant effects for the Spanish variable, and marginally significant effects ( $p < 0.1$ ) from state percent Latino. Furthermore, there is not a significant effect from any of the interaction terms. We therefore do not find that the percent Latino in a state is associated with the relative frequency of inclusionary immigration rhetoric. Such rhetoric is significantly more likely to be aired in Spanish-language ads regardless of the state context. Substantively, what this indicates is that campaigns target their inclusionary immigration rhetoric based on language, not based on the percent Latino in a state — i.e., even in states with few Latinos, campaigns will likely air Spanish-language ads with inclusionary immigration rhetoric.

Lastly, for exclusionary immigration rhetoric, we do not find a significant main effect from percent Latino in a state, but several interaction terms are significant. We find that for

Spanish-language ads, there is a significant negative relationship between exclusionary rhetoric and the state percent Latino, although the relationship is weaker for Republicans. The positively significant result for Spanish indicates that exclusionary rhetoric in Spanish is more likely in areas with few Latinos – however, given that the interaction term for Spanish by state percent Latino has a larger coefficient than the single-variable term, the takeaway is that Spanish-language ads generally include less exclusionary rhetoric. We also find in general that ads by Republicans and House candidates are more likely to include exclusionary rhetoric.

We next explore these relationships visually, since log odds do not have as straightforward of an interpretation. Figure 6 displays the predicted probability that an ad in a given state-year is aired with ads that include exclusionary and inclusionary immigration rhetoric and symbolic cues, drawn from the models in Table 1. For exclusionary rhetoric, we observe starkly different trends by language and party. In English, there is effectively no relationship between Latino population shares and exclusionary airings – regardless of state context, Republicans are predicted to use a large amount of exclusionary rhetoric, and Democrats are predicted to use it minimally if at all. In Spanish, Republicans become precipitously less likely to use exclusionary rhetoric as the Latino population increases from 0 to 20% of a given state’s population, while Democrats continue to use a minimal amount. Republicans are predicted to target their exclusionary rhetoric in Spanish towards areas with less Latinos overall.

For inclusionary rhetoric, we observe similar partisan trends but less differences by language. As with exclusionary rhetoric, one party (in this case, Republicans) are predicted to avoid the strategy entirely regardless of state percent Latino. Democrats, meanwhile, are more likely to use inclusionary rhetoric in both languages as state percent Latino increases, although Spanish ads are much more likely to include inclusionary rhetoric than those in English. On the

other side of the aisle, Democrats are predicted to target their inclusionary rhetoric in both English and Spanish towards areas with more Latinos overall.

We lastly address the predicted probability of ads containing purely symbolic content, i.e., descriptive representatives and ethnic cues. The relationships here are all positive, indicating that the usage of ads with Latino characters and references to Latino panethnicity is more likely in states with more Latinos across campaigns and language. Republicans are slightly more likely to air such ads in English while Democrats are slightly more likely to air such ads in Spanish, but the overall difference in probability between parties is not large. In terms of language, Spanish ads are much more likely to include symbolic cues than English ads overall.

These results provide some support for our hypothesis regarding the usage of ads with Latino identity content in states with more Latinos (H3) and the usage of exclusionary ads by Republicans in areas with small Latino populations (H4). The results for symbolic ads demonstrate that both parties were more likely to use ads with Latino characters and references to Latino identity in states with more Latinos. Furthermore, this was more apparent when looking at Spanish-language ads, which are in and of themselves a form of Latino identity content. We observed similar trends for Democratic usage of inclusionary rhetoric, indicating that Democrats are likely to tie their symbolic efforts to their substantive positions on immigration as well. Finally, we find only minor support for our argument that Republicans will air more exclusionary rhetoric in areas with smaller Latino populations. This relationship is apparent only for Spanish-language ads, not those in English, which indicates that efforts to avoid showing Latinos exclusionary rhetoric are only significantly apparent for the primarily Latino Spanish-language television audience. We fail to find support for our arguments that these trends are related to a state's percent white or a state's Latino population growth (these results

are not reported but available upon request), although further analyses are needed to determine whether this result holds across model specifications.

## **Discussion**

Despite ongoing debates in political science about whether televised campaign advertising has measurable effects on political behavior (Gerber et al. 2011; Green and Vavreck 2008; Kalla and Broockman 2018), our results clearly show that campaigns have continued to increase the volume of their television advertising significantly over the 2000-2016 time period. We also find that campaigns from both parties increased their usage of Latino identity content over time as well (T. M. Nteta and Schaffner 2013), but that these patterns differed in crucial ways for symbolic appeals and for substantive appeals on the issue of immigration. Targeting efforts for symbolic appeals were similar for both Democrats and Republicans, who were more likely to air ads with Latino characters in states with more Latinos. However, on immigration, they diverged significantly in terms of tone and whether the ad was in Spanish or English due to the increasing amount of partisan polarization on the issue (Abrajano and Hajnal 2015).

Trends in overall rates of Spanish-language advertising were as expected, with Democrats using more Spanish-language ads overall and Republicans using a modest but significantly lower number. For symbolic appeals, both Democrats and Republicans at different periods used significant numbers of Latino characters. Republicans aired a large volume of ads containing Latinos in 2000 and 2004, years when George W. Bush also won significant Latino support (Wroe 2008), and while such efforts decreased in 2008 and 2012, the number of

Republican ads containing Latino characters picked up again in 2016.<sup>16</sup> At the same time, Donald Trump and many other Republicans greatly increased their usage of exclusionary immigration rhetoric (Gutierrez et al. 2019; Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck 2019). While this is puzzling if symbolic ads and exclusionary immigration content are mutually exclusive, these results suggest that Republicans may try to have their cake and eat it too by simultaneously airing ads with rhetoric attacking immigrants, while also airing ads with positive images of Latinos. This strategy shows that Republicans are still attempting to court (conservative) Latino voters regardless of their increasingly exclusionary positions on immigration.

The patterns we observed in immigration targeting demonstrate that polarization in Democratic and Republican rhetoric translates into differential targeting by language and Latino population as well. Over our observed time period, Democrats began using more ads with inclusionary rhetoric in Spanish language ads and in states with more Latinos. Meanwhile, Republicans aired exclusionary rhetoric regardless of the state's Latino population share.<sup>17</sup> These strategies reflect the targeting opportunities presented by linguistically-segmented television

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<sup>16</sup> We examine whether these Latino portrayals are combined with an exclusionary immigration message, and they are disproportionately not exclusionary in nature, even for the Trump campaign or other Republican candidates (see Figure A1 in Appendix B).

<sup>17</sup> The exception for Republicans is Spanish-language television, where we observe that Republicans reduce their exclusionary rhetoric in states where the Latino population is 20 percent or more of the total population. However, these airings are extremely rare (>2000 airings per year) relative to the large volume of inclusionary Democratic rhetoric (30,000 in 2016) and the even larger volume of exclusionary Republican rhetoric in English (90,000 in 2016).

audiences, given that Spanish-language audiences are disproportionately more likely to be Latino (Abrajano 2010; Subervi-Velez 2009).

These opportunities for campaigns may come at a cost for Latino voters, however. The ability for Democrats to focus their ads by language also makes it increasingly likely that Latinos who watch Spanish-language television are receiving an entirely different, more symbolic and immigration-oriented set of political messages from Democrats than those who only watch English-language television. This is especially concerning given previous research has shown that an overemphasis on symbolic over substantive appeals can have negative effects on Latino political engagement (Abrajano 2010), and that the expansion of Spanish-language television into an area may not result in increased Latino voting rates (Velez and Newman 2019). While well-received symbolic representation can have an empowering effect, less is known about symbolic representation that is not received positively. The descriptive representation of Latino characters, while still communicating an effort at inclusion, may not have positive effects on Latinos if they are perceived as overly symbolic (Anguiano 2016). Additionally, compared to their Spanish-language efforts, Democrats aired proportionately many fewer ads in English that included inclusionary immigration rhetoric, indicating an attempt to hide their positions from white voters to avoid potential backlash (Abrajano and Hajnal 2015; Ostfeld 2019).

Republican efforts are concerning for Latinos, and especially immigrants, as well. Republicans appear to be using exclusionary rhetoric (in English) effectively everywhere. While we cannot determine whether this follows white population patterns despite Latino population trends (Abrajano and Hajnal 2015), or whether Republicans perhaps believe such messages may still appeal to some Latinos (Alamillo 2019; Cadava 2020; Cortez 2020), what is clear is that Republicans were not shy about sharing their exclusionary views on immigration in political ads

across the country regardless of potential backlash. Exclusionary immigration rhetoric, especially xenophobic and racist stereotyping, can produce intense political alienation and anger from many Latinos (Gutierrez et al. 2019; Pérez 2015b). While there are important silver linings to remain aware of – for example, such rhetoric can have the potential to produce significant Latino countermobilization (García Bedolla 2005; Gutierrez et al. 2019; Zepeda-Millán 2017) – rhetoric demeaning immigrants corresponds with a broader shift among Republicans towards supporting increasingly punitive and enforcement-oriented immigration approaches (Abrajano and Hajnal 2015; Wong 2014). The increased volume of such rhetoric is a troubling indicator that Republican candidates are more comfortable with such exclusionary immigration policies than ever before. Lastly, our findings demonstrate significant – and worrying – differences in the volume and audiences of both sides of the immigration debate. In 2016, the volume of Republican ads with exclusionary rhetoric was double that of Democratic ads with inclusionary rhetoric. Furthermore, nearly two thirds of the Democratic ads with inclusionary rhetoric were in Spanish while almost all Republican ads with exclusionary rhetoric were in English.

Regardless of the underlying political calculations for campaigns, these findings are concerning in terms of democratic accountability. Each party is airing completely different images of themselves to different groups of voters, especially for Latino voters. Incomplete – or even worse, inaccurate – political information from campaigns causes democratic accountability and representativeness to break down, especially when considering the political representation of minority groups who already experience significant political alienation and marginalization (Dovi 2002; Mansbridge 1999; T. M. Nteta and Schaffner 2013). Political campaigns who are genuinely interested in reaching Latino voters should avoid repeating such mistakes and instead incorporate Latino voters, and Latino outreach, throughout their campaign. Exploring those

strategies is beyond the scope of this paper, so we urge campaigns and scholars alike to examine the effects of a broader range of messages and strategies for mobilizing Latinos (e.g., Bedolla and Michelson 2012; Ocampo, Garcia-Rios, and Gutierrez 2021) to avoid falling into the recurring trap of the Latino monolith.

## Appendix A: Figures

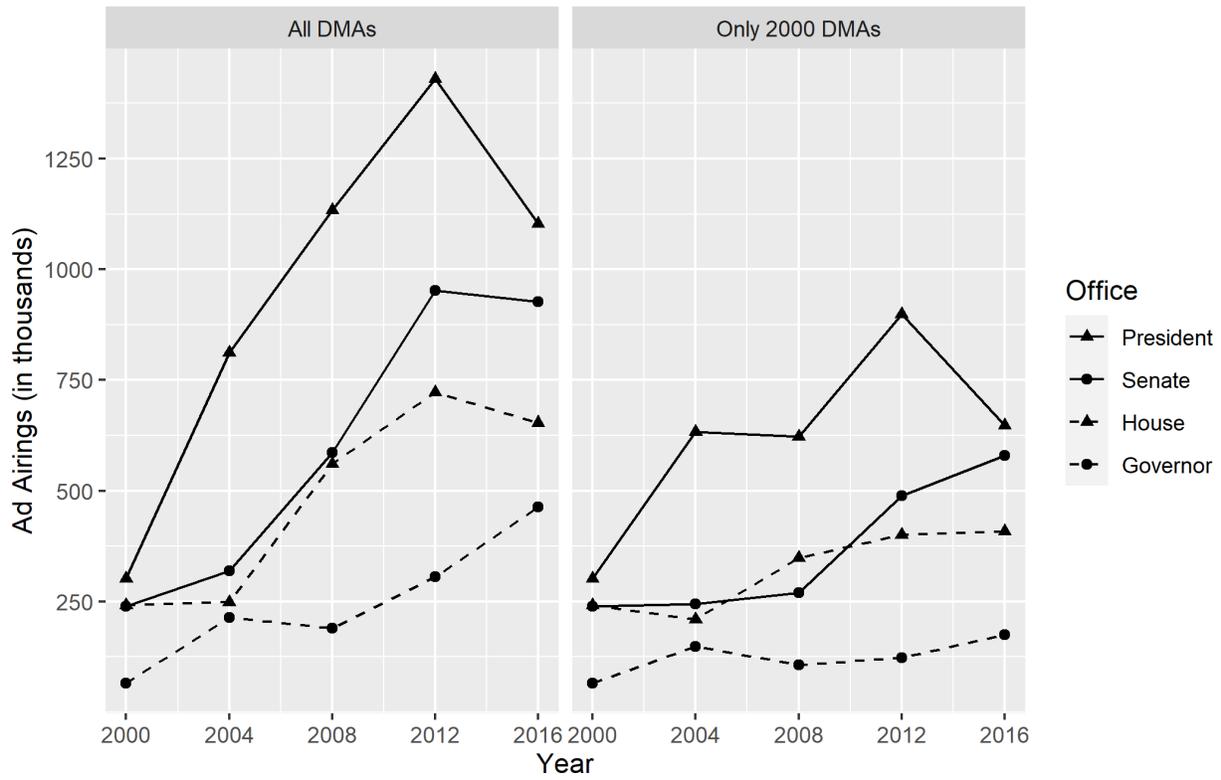
**Table 1: Relationship between State Context and Likelihood of Ad Containing Latino Identity**

### Content

Dependent Variables:	Binary (0 to 1) including content:		
	Symbolic (1)	Inclusionary Immigration (2)	Exclusionary Immigration (3)
<i>Variables</i>			
State Percent Latino	1.924 (1.435)	3.636* (2.035)	-1.232 (2.913)
Party–Republican	0.0412 (0.1858)	0.3390 (0.6239)	2.163*** (0.3981)
Language–Spanish	2.185*** (0.8090)	5.635*** (0.8800)	2.571** (1.254)
Office–President	1.236*** (0.3409)	0.1801 (0.3454)	-0.8511*** (0.2332)
Office–Senate	-0.9235** (0.3614)	-0.5811 (0.4596)	-0.2196 (0.3191)
log(Cost)	-0.0104 (0.0403)	0.0777 (0.0487)	0.0046 (0.0468)
State Percent White	-1.570 (1.080)	-2.138 (1.379)	-1.518 (1.612)
State Percent Latino × Republican	0.5850 (1.062)	-4.300 (3.251)	0.7683 (1.439)
State Percent Latino × Spanish	8.344** (3.767)	-2.034 (3.069)	-11.34*** (3.790)
Republican × Spanish	-0.3985 (0.5111)	-0.8375 (1.303)	0.5578 (1.272)
State Pct Latino × Republican × Spanish	-1.669 (2.510)	2.170 (5.106)	-8.265* (4.615)
<i>Fixed-effects</i>			
Year	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Fit statistics</i>			
Observations	7,570,086	7,570,086	7,570,086
Squared Correlation	0.23648	0.43750	0.04579
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.30152	0.56191	0.18902
BIC	2,128,194.2	373,477.3	1,045,287.8
<i>Clustered (state) standard-errors in parentheses</i>			
<i>Signif. Codes: ***: 0.01, **: 0.05, *: 0.1</i>			

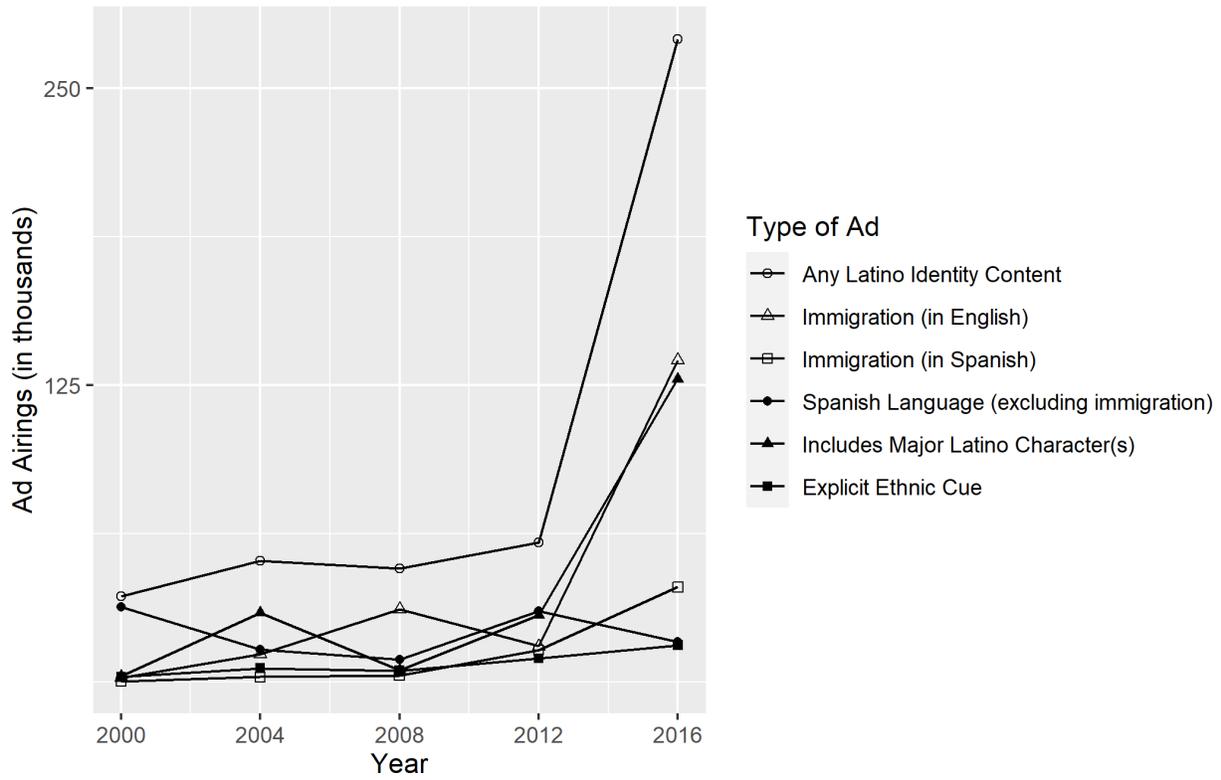
**Caption:** This table shows the relationship between different state and campaign-level variables and the likelihood that an individual ad that was aired contained different types of Latino identity content (Symbolic, Exclusionary, Inclusionary). Coefficients are log odds from a logit model. Fixed effects are included for year, and standard errors are clustered by state and robust to heteroskedasticity.

Figure 1: Total Volume of Televised Political Ads by Office, 2000-2016



**Caption:** This graph shows the number of ad airings for the entire 2000-2016 CMAG dataset (left), and for a subset that only includes observations from the 75 media markets recorded in the 2000 CMAG dataset (right). Total number of ad airings (in thousands) are displayed on the Y axis. Different years are displayed on the X axis. Each point-line pair corresponds to ads from elections for different offices (see legend).

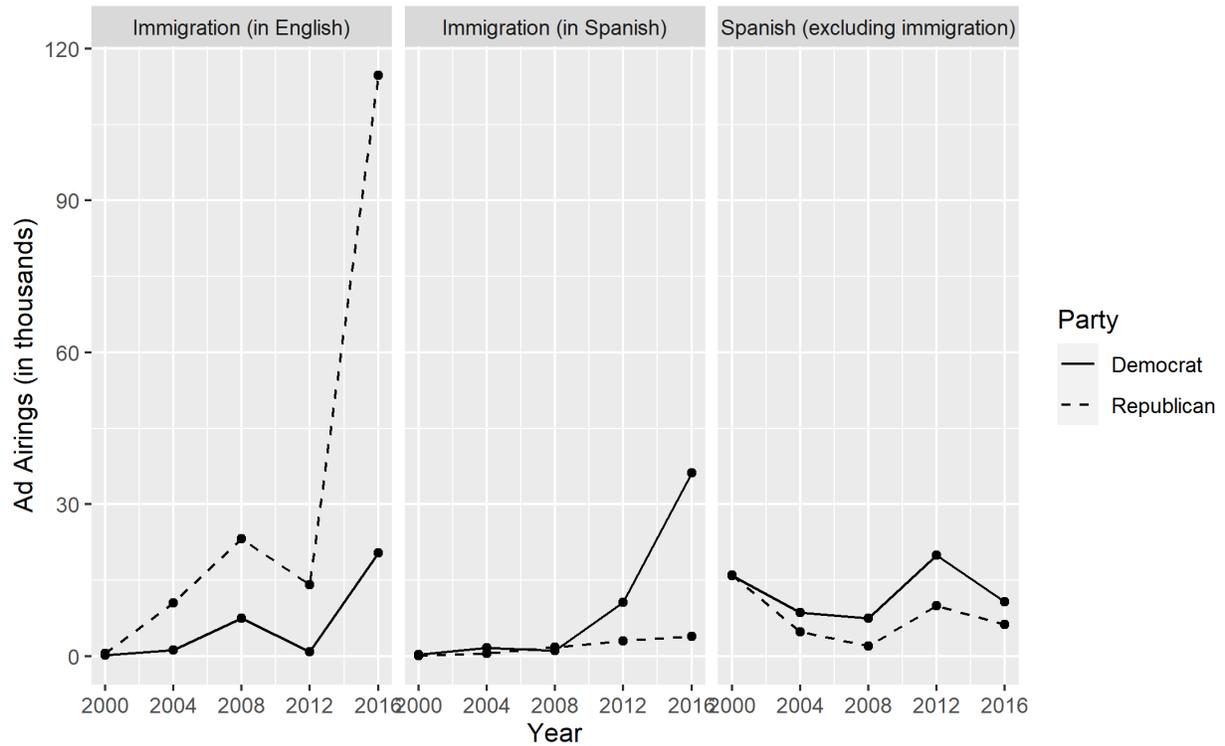
Figure 2: Televised Political Ads with Latino Identity Content, 2000-2016



**Caption:** This graph shows the total number of ad airings (in thousands) on the Y axis. Different years are displayed on the X axis. Each point-line pair corresponds to a different type of Latino identity cue. “Any Latino Identity Content” refers to ads that include at least one type of Latino identity cue. An ad may contain multiple cues, but each ad airing counts only once. “Immigration (in English)” refers to ads in English that mention immigration or address some aspect of the issue of immigration. “Immigration (in Spanish)” refers to ads that are at least 50% in Spanish that mention immigration or address some aspect of the issue of immigration. “Includes Major Latino Character(s)” refers to ads that include either a Latino candidate or a Latino character who is on-screen for at least 3 seconds and/or has a speaking role. “Spanish Language” refers to ads that are at least 50% in Spanish. “Explicit Ethnic Cue” refers to ads that include explicit mentions of Latino pan-ethnic or national origin identities through one or more verbal or written references.

**Note:** Figure uses data from the top 75 media markets (DMAs) in the 2000 CMAG/Wisconsin Media Project datasets.

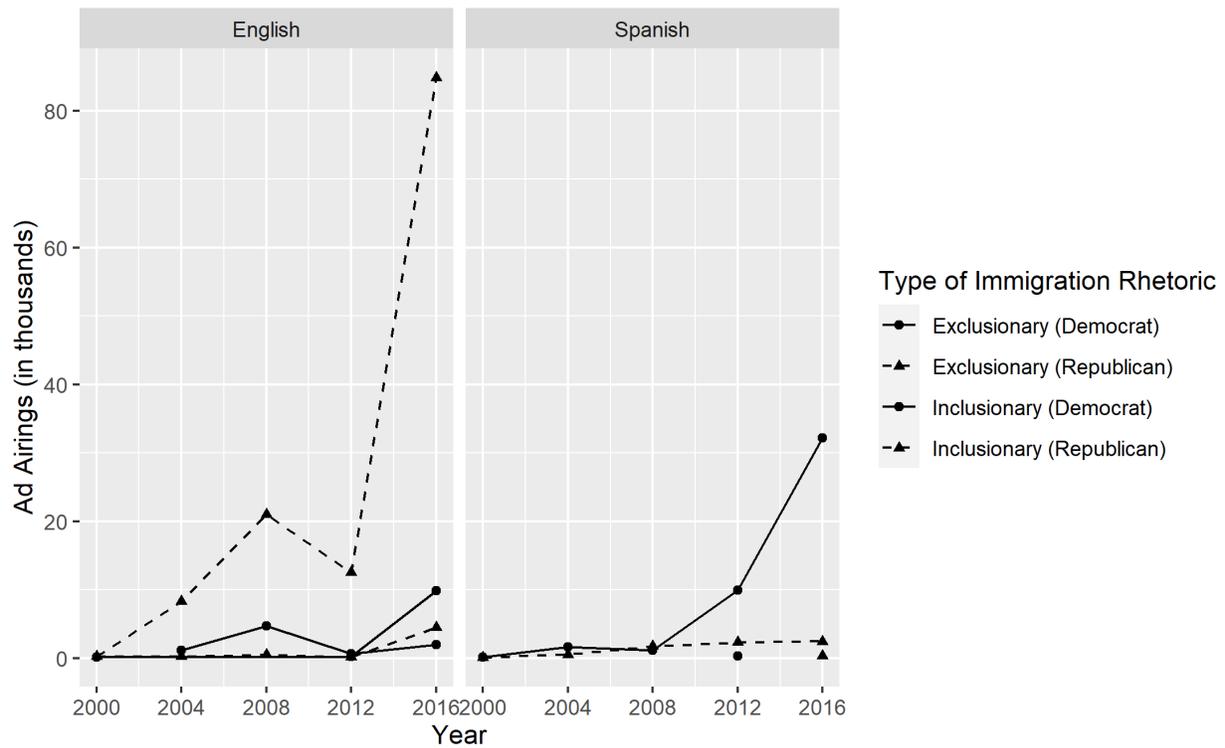
**Figure 3: Televised Political Ads with Immigration and Spanish-Language Content by Party, 2000-2016**



**Caption:** This graph shows the total number of airings (in thousands) on the Y axis. Different years are displayed on the X axis. The top “Immigration (in English)” graph shows all immigration airings in English, the middle “Immigration (in Spanish)” graph shows all immigration airings in Spanish, and the bottom “Spanish (excluding immigration)” shows all Spanish-language airings that do not include any immigration content. Solid lines show airings by Democratic candidates, while dashed lines show airings by Republican candidates.

**NOTE:** This figure only uses data from the 75 DMA’s (media markets) that were recorded in the 2000 CMAG/Wisconsin Media Project datasets.

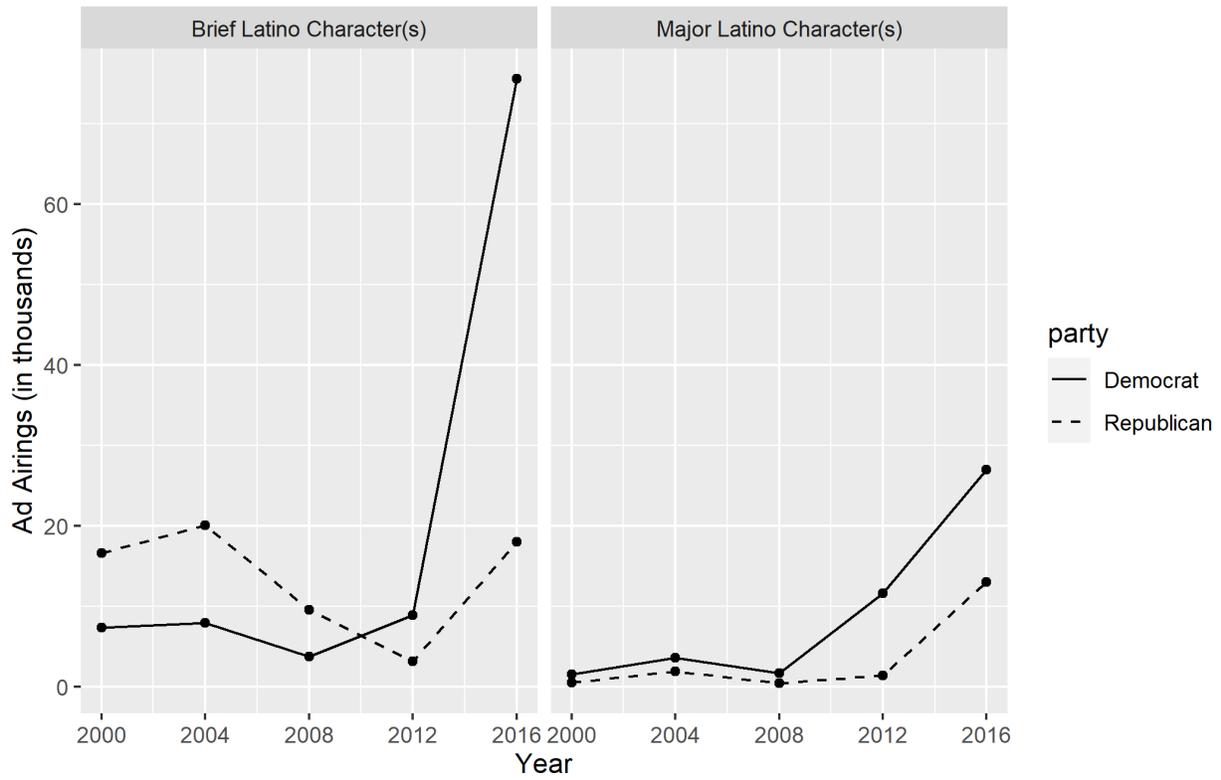
Figure 4: Televised Political Ads about Immigration by Party and Tone, 2000-2016



**Caption:** This graph shows the total number of airings (in thousands) on the Y axis. Different years are displayed on the X axis. Each colored line corresponds to a different type of ad by its party and by the tone of its immigration content. “Inclusionary” refers to messaging that celebrates immigrants and/or supports increasing immigration rates, providing resources for immigrants, and protecting undocumented immigrants. “Exclusionary” refers to messaging that denigrates immigrants, supports policies that target (undocumented) immigrants and seek to reduce immigration rates, and any other messaging that reflects negative views towards (undocumented) immigrants. Messaging regarding non-Latin American refugees (e.g., Syrian refugees) are excluded from these analyses.

**NOTE:** This figure only uses data from the 75 DMA’s (media markets) that were recorded in the 2000 CMAG/Wisconsin Media Project datasets.

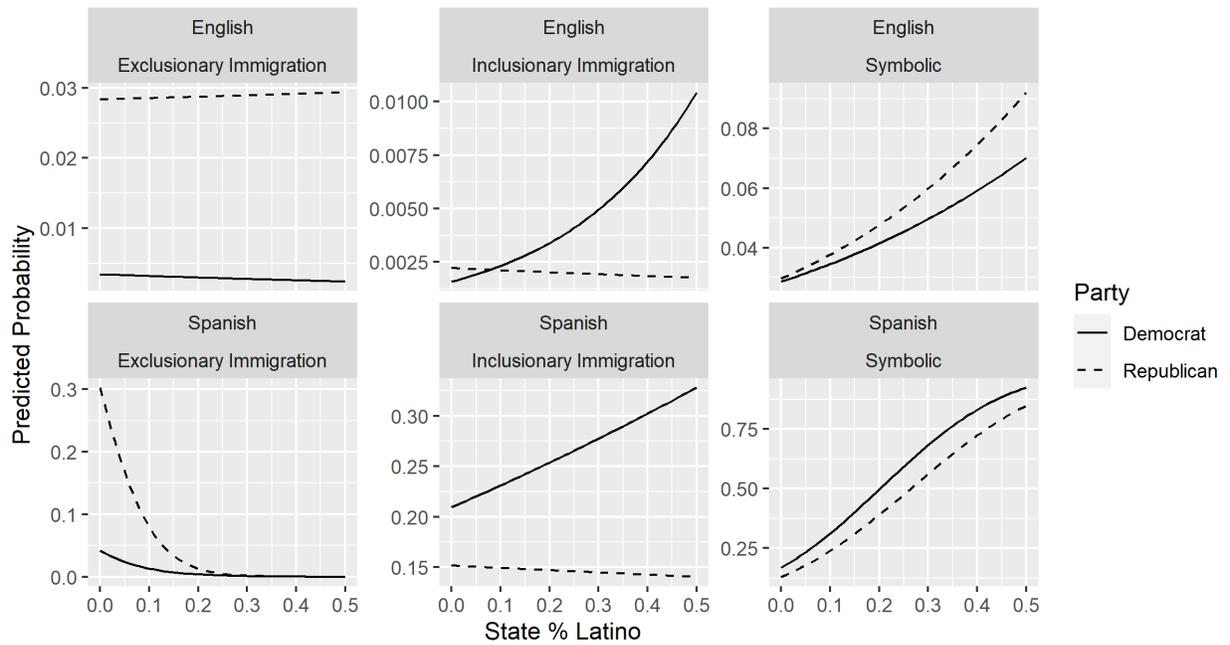
Figure 5: Televised Political Ads with Latino Characters by Party, 2000-2016



**Caption:** This graph shows the total number of airings (in thousands) on the Y axis. Different years are displayed on the X axis. The left “Brief Latino Character(s)” graph shows all ads with a brief Latino character (on-screen for less than 3 seconds), and the right “Major Latino Character(s)” graph shows all ads with a long Latino character (more than 3 seconds of screentime and/or speaking role). Solid lines show airings by Democratic candidates, while dashed lines show airings by Republican candidates.

**NOTE:** This figure only uses data from the 75 DMA’s (media markets) that were recorded in the 2000 CMAG/Wisconsin Media Project datasets.

**Figure 6:**



**Caption:** These graphs show the predicted probability of an ad contains different forms of Latino identity content as a function of the state that the ad was aired in, the party airing the ad, and the language used in the ad. Predicted probabilities are drawn from the models in Table 1 and hold all other covariates at their means.

**NOTE:** This figure uses data from our full dataset.

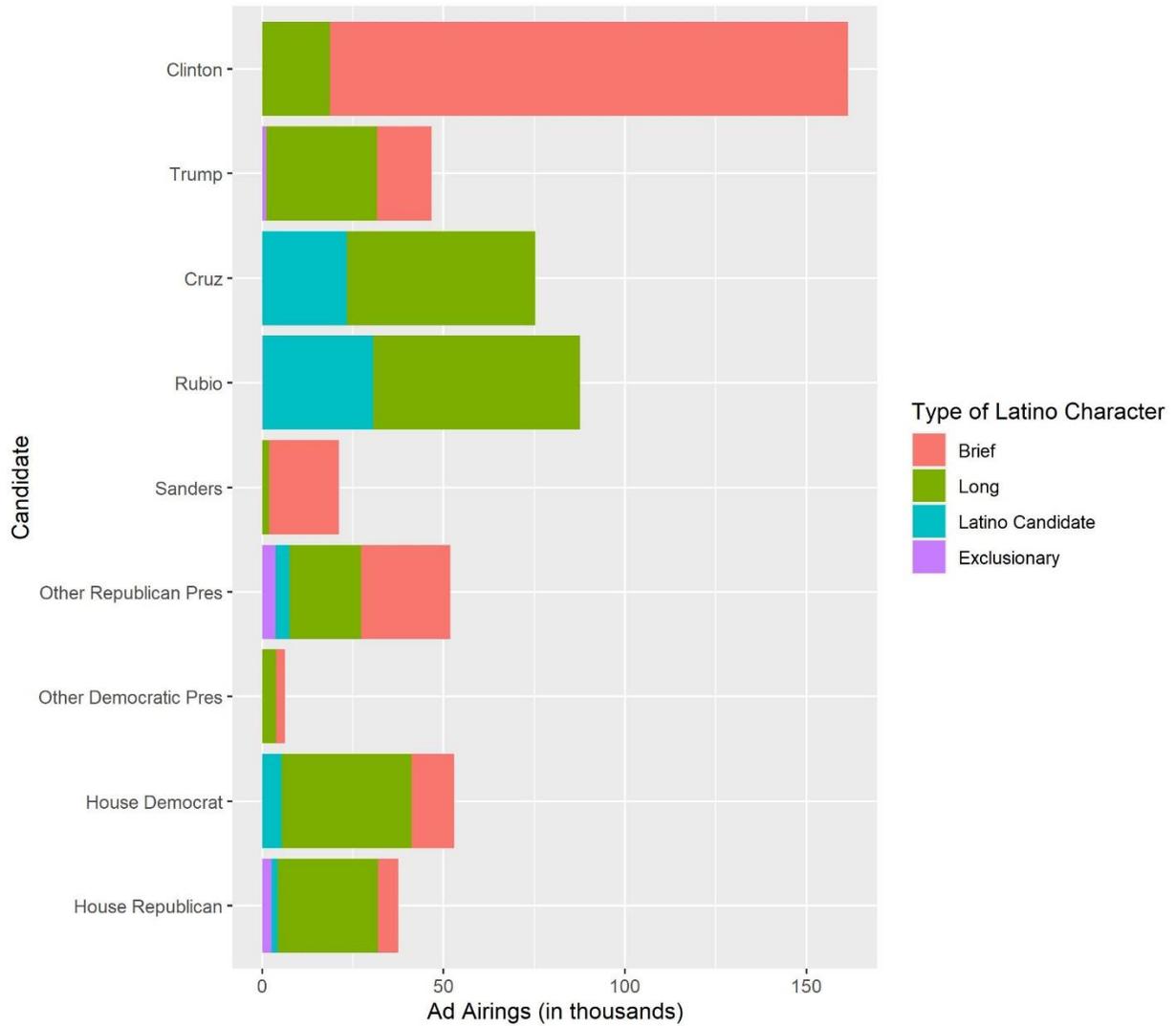
## Appendix B: Additional Figures

**Table B1: Relationship between State Context and Likelihood of Ad Containing Latino Identity Content, within states**

Dependent Variables:	Binary (0 to 1) including content:		
	Symbolic (1)	Inclusionary Immigration (2)	Exclusionary Immigration (3)
<i>Model:</i>			
<i>Variables</i>			
State Percent Latino	9.016 (12.31)	10.16 (17.39)	69.11*** (19.96)
Party–Republican	0.0794 (0.1905)	0.1458 (0.4344)	2.128*** (0.4348)
Language–Spanish	2.094*** (0.7907)	6.198*** (1.016)	2.721* (1.516)
Office–President	1.092*** (0.3975)	0.6067** (0.2665)	-0.7331*** (0.2328)
Office–Senate	-0.8140** (0.3636)	-0.2595 (0.3373)	-0.4220 (0.3067)
log(Cost)	-0.0261 (0.0375)	0.0751** (0.0347)	-0.0452 (0.0404)
State Percent White	4.877 (7.274)	17.13 (26.85)	30.08 (19.61)
State Percent Latino × Republican	0.1965 (1.104)	-3.556 (2.636)	0.5927 (1.671)
State Percent Latino × Spanish	8.692** (3.900)	-4.197 (3.729)	-11.16** (4.705)
Republican × Spanish	-0.3361 (0.4945)	-0.7510 (1.358)	-0.1916 (1.391)
State Pct Latino × Republican × Spanish	-1.434 (2.488)	2.111 (5.403)	-5.702 (4.025)
<i>Fixed-effects</i>			
Year	Yes	Yes	Yes
State	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Fit statistics</i>			
Observations	7,570,086	5,472,508	7,570,086
Squared Correlation	0.24842	0.45684	0.08771
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.32068	0.57033	0.27498
BIC	2,070,584.3	345,314.4	935,274.0
<i>Clustered (state) standard-errors in parentheses</i>			
<i>Signif. Codes: ***, 0.01, **, 0.05, *, 0.1</i>			

**Caption:** This table reproduces the models from Table 1 with fixed effects clustered by state. It shows the relationship between *within* state variation in Latino population shares and the likelihood that an individual ad that was aired contained different types of Latino identity content (Symbolic, Exclusionary, Inclusionary). Coefficients are log odds from a logit model. Fixed effects are included for year and state, and standard errors are clustered by state and robust to heteroskedasticity.

**Figure B1: Usage of Latino Characters during 2016 Election, by Candidate Type**



**Caption:** This figure shows the number of ad airings containing different types of Latino characters for candidate ads during the 2016 election. Candidates are then separated by office type and party. The “Latino candidate” variable refers to ads where only the Latino candidate is present, while “Long” in that case refers to an ad where there is BOTH a Latino candidate and at least one other Latino individual.

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- Derek notes
  - Dual orientation (General market translations, vs. Made-for-Spanish TV ads; Subervi-Velez 2009 and Abrajano 2010)
  - Analyses of both Spanish and English ads for Latino ID cues
  - Existing large-scale overview (Subervi-Velez) does not have large-scale geographic analyses (since they didn't have CMAG data) and instead relies on interviews, historical data, and smaller slices of ad data
- Derek snippets
- 
- While well-received symbolic representation can have an empowering effect, less is known about symbolic representation that is not received positively. Research shows that Latinos with a strong (pan)ethnic identity are significantly more favorable towards coethnic candidates, while those with weaker ethnic ties are less favorable (McConnaughy et al. 2010; Schildkraut 2013). Descriptive representation of Latino characters, while still communicating an effort at inclusion, may fall short if they are perceived as overly symbolic (Anguiano 2016). To address these concerns, we differentiate between brief Latino characters who are on-screen for less than three seconds, and long Latino characters who are on-screen for longer and/or have speaking roles. Brief Latino characters represent a minor effort at Latino descriptive representation, while long Latino characters demonstrate a more clear (and costly) commitment.
- 
- The effects of inclusionary immigration rhetoric are difficult to disaggregate from the broader immigration debate, which includes a large amount of exclusionary rhetoric towards immigrants as well. While inclusionary immigration rhetoric has a generally positive effect on Latino engagement, exclusionary rhetoric has more divergent effects. Latinos with a strong ethnic identity respond to such anti-immigrant threat by mobilizing, while those with a weak ethnic identity tend to become less engaged (García Bedolla

2005; Pérez 2015b, 2015a). There remain questions regarding the overall tone of the contemporary immigration debate. Are Latinos more likely to be exposed to inclusionary rhetoric that is generally mobilizing, or to exclusionary rhetoric that has more divergent effects? To separate these theoretically distinct message types, we coded each immigration ad as either inclusionary, exclusionary, or unclear. This allows us to separately analyze inclusionary and exclusionary immigration messages. Inclusionary messages should be targeted towards Latino voters but away from white voters whenever possible. And while advertising with exclusionary rhetoric is primarily targeted at white voters, especially those who are racially conservative (Abrajano and Hajnal 2015; Mutz 2018; Reny, Collingwood, and Valenzuela 2019), Latino voters can also be incidentally exposed. This is even more likely given that anti-immigrant sentiment is stronger and more politically impactful in areas where the Latino population is larger and growing (Brader, Valentino, and Suhay 2008; Craig and Richeson 2018; Hopkins 2010), which would also imply a greater number of Latinos being exposed to anti-immigrant rhetoric targeted primarily at conservative whites.

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- Despite their ubiquity, there remains an ongoing debate about whether ads actually affect individual voting behavior. The first large-scale experimental studies on the topic found generally positive effects on voter persuasion and mobilization from television advertisements (Gerber et al. 2011; Green and Vavreck 2008). However, in a meta-analysis and replication of these studies, Kalla and Broockman (2018) argue that the effect of televised advertisements on voter preferences is, on average, zero. Despite this, campaigns continue to spend a significant share of their budgets on television advertising – 2020 was a record-setting year for campaign spending on television even as there were also large increases in internet spending (Ridout,

Fowler, and Franz 2021). Rather than litigating whether televised political ads actually have an effect on voting behavior

- These findings contribute to our understanding of racial and ethnic politics in the U.S., as well as campaigns and elections more generally, because targeted advertising with implicit and explicit identity content has demonstrable consequences for voter attitudes and mass behavior. White Americans, for example, experience greater anxiety and feelings of threat specifically from Latino immigrants and the growing Latino population (Brader, Valentino, and Suhay 2008; Craig and Richeson 2017), which for many Americans has become inextricably bound-up with the issue of immigration because of the Latino-centric focus and negative tone of news coverage about immigration (Abrajano and Hajnal 2015; Farris and Silber Mohamed 2018; Valentino, Brader, and Jardina 2013). Indeed, numerous recent studies show that the growing size of the U.S. Latino population is closely tied to growing white support for the Republican Party and conservative approaches to public policy (Abrajano and Hajnal 2015; Craig and Richeson 2017; Mutz 2018; Reny, Collingwood, and Valenzuela 2018), but especially when candidates and elected officials link these immigration-led demographic changes to false claims about cultural and political threats to the nation (Hopkins 2010; Newman, Shah, and Collingwood 2018). Similarly, but from the other side of the aisle, explicit Democratic appeals to Latino voters can limit white Democrats' support for their putative party affiliation (Ostfeld 2018), which makes understanding the partisan source, nature, and over-time patterns of implicit and explicit political advertising to Latinos over immigration and other issues especially important for making sense of recent and future U.S. elections.