The Racialization of Latino Immigrants in New Destinations: Criminality, Ascription, and Countermobilization

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This article analyzes patterns in Latino immigrant racialization in the U.S. South. Drawing on a unique dataset of more than 4,200 news stories from the region, we find that Latino immigrants face multifaceted racialization in the news media and that this racialization shares substantive similarities with African American racialization processes. The most dominant negative characterizations of Mexican and Latino immigrants focus on their perceived criminal tendencies. Claims of Latino criminality apply implicitly coded racial language about black criminality to new Latino arrivals. A close qualitative analysis of these trends reveals an ongoing cycle of racialization in which immigration foes challenge Latino or Mexican immigrants as criminal elements and immigration advocates respond with charges of racism and discrimination. Supplemental analyses from four African American newspapers suggest that black elites perceive Latinos as sharing a common experience of racial discrimination at the hands of whites.

Keywords: race, immigration, South, Latinos, criminalization, racialization

Due in large part to immigration, the Latino share of the U.S. population has increased dramatically in recent years. Latinos now make up 16 percent of the U.S. population, accounting for half of the nation's growth demographic in the past decade (Passel, Cohn, and Lopez 2011). By 2050, demographers project that the Latino population will have doubled to more than one hundred million (Krogstad 2015). Thanks to these transformations, a vigorous debate has

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emerged about the role that Latino immigrants occupy in the U.S. racial hierarchy (Bonilla-Silva 2004; Chavez 2008; Lee and Bean 2004). Will Latinos join African Americans as collective minorities? Are they assimilating into whiteness? Or will Latinos occupy a distinctive racial position between whites and African Americans? These questions have taken on particular importance in the U.S. South, a region long characterized by stark black-white divisions and now home to the fastest growth Latino population in the nation (Kochhar, Suro, and Tafoya 2005).

Most work on these questions draws either from large-scale analyses of survey data (Frank, Akresh, and Lu 2010; Golash-Boza 2006) or on qualitative case studies focused on a single locale (Marrow 2011; Ribas 2015). Recognizing that the media are a critical site of racial formation (Omi and Winant 1994) and an important aspect of the context of reception (Menjívar 2016), we analyze patterns in Latino immigrant racialization in Southern news coverage. Our analyses of immigrant racialization draw from a unique dataset of more than 4,200 news stories from 2003 to 2013 from eight newspapers across four new destination states: Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, and North Carolina.

Results indicate that Latino immigrants face multifaceted racialization in the news media and that this racialization is, in key ways, consistent in substance and form with that faced by African Americans. Rather than focus on immigrants as economic threats, the most dominant negative characterizations of Mexican immigrants and of Central and South American immigrants focus on their perceived criminal tendencies. Moreover, claims of Latino criminality apply implicitly coded racial language about black criminality to new Latino arrivals (Alexander 2012; Mendelberg 2001). Our results further suggest that pro-immigration forces also racialize Latinos, albeit differently. Despite much evidence that immigrants use economic arguments to make claims for various rights (Deckard and Browne 2016), we find that an equally if not more common argument made to defend Latino immigrants in Southern newspapers is that they face racism and discrimination. The writers, editorial board members, and

political figures making these arguments routinely draw parallels between immigration enforcement efforts and the South's historic commitment to racial inequality, Jim Crow, and segregation. A close qualitative analysis of these trends reveals an ongoing cycle of racialization in which immigration foes challenge Latino or Mexican immigrants as criminal elements, and immigration advocates respond with charges of racism and discrimination. Supplemental analyses of 476 news stories from the largest African American newspapers in these states reveal that these newspapers portray immigrants much more positively than mainstream newspapers do. Our results further suggest that African American political and cultural elites perceive Latinos as sharing a common experience of racial discrimination at the hands of whites.

These findings suggest that, at this historical juncture, Latinos are not uniformly assimilating into whiteness. Rather, in key ways, Latinos in the South face racialization as collective minorities. Our results also suggest a need for renewed attention to the role that the social distinctions of place play in shaping ideas about race. Moreover, they indicate that making sense of the racially transformative effects of immigration requires a nuanced understanding of the racialization process. Existing research largely emphasizes explicit micro patterns of immigrant racial self-identification and macro patterns of state ascription (but see Mora 2014). Although important, this focus neglects the effects that pro-immigration forces, meso-level organizations, and implicit racial appeals have on immigrants' place in and adjustment to U.S. race relations and racial hierarchies.

RACIALIZATION, IMMIGRATION, AND NEW IMMIGRANT DESTINATIONS

Over the course of U.S. history, racial dynamics and immigration trends have been closely intertwined (Calavita 2007; Lee 2002; Molina 2013). Immigration patterns not only affect individual and collective self-identification, they influence intergroup relations, racial hierarchies, and racialized public policies (Lee and Bean 2004, 2012). Contemporary questions

about Latino racialization emerge from this broader entanglement of racial formation processes and immigration trends and settlement patterns.[1]

To assess the effect of immigration on racial formation requires a foundational recognition of the socially constructed nature of racial categories and groups. Racial meanings vary from society to society as well as overtime within a particular geographic and social context. These shifts arise in part due to racialization processes that make racial distinctions and schemas "common sense—a way of comprehending, explaining, and acting in the world" (Omi and Winant 1994, 60). Racialization, in Frantz Fanon's formulation of the term, referred to colonialism's erasure of intragroup differences and its imposition of racial categories onto previously distinct groups (2004). Today, racialization "signals the processes by which ideas about race are constructed, come to be regarded as meaningful, and are acted upon" (Murji and Solomos 2005, 1).

Race and stratification scholars generally concur that racialization involves the mutually constitutive processes of ascription and identification (Brodkin 1998; Brown and Jones 2015; Nobles 2000). Ascription involves the application of arbitrary and usually phenotypic characteristics to lump together individuals into a meaningful social category. This process creates a common sense assumption of shared characteristics used to legitimate specific patterns of resource allocation and exploitation (Lacayo 2017). The identificational element of racialization involves acceptance of this designation, often for mobilization or identity construction (Espiritu 1993; Okamoto and Mora 2014; Omi and Winant 1994).

U.S. research on racialization has focused heavily on black-white racial dynamics, but racial formation involves groups such as Latinos as well. Since at least the mid-nineteenth century, Latino racialization patterns have shifted in response to political, legal, and demographic actions (Jimenez 2009; Mora 2014; Oboler 1995; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Rodriguez 2000;

Rumbaut 2011; Sommers 1991). The 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo classified Mexican-origin people as legally white regardless of ancestry. However, this classification did not translate into social acceptance as whites (Gutiérrez 1995; Haney-Lopez 1997; Montejano 1987). As a result, the first half of the twentieth century involved constant social and political negotiations over the racial status of Latin American and Caribbean origin individuals. Latin American and Caribbean origin peoples in the United States found themselves alternately subject to Jim Crow, segregation, and exclusion on the one hand, and the beneficiaries of resource access and protections not afforded to African Americans and Asian Americans on the other, depending on origin, phenotype, and location of settlement (FitzGerald and Cook-Martin 2014; Hattam 2007; Ngai 2005). The racial positioning of Mexican Americans in particular varied by geography, by time period, and even by institutional setting (Fox and Guglielmo 2012).

After the passage of the 1965 Immigration Act, migration from Latin American countries swelled, and Latino identity and racialization took on new political significance. Motivated in part by a desire to eliminate legalized racial discrimination in both civil rights and immigration law, the law shifted the allocation of visas. With few visas available to immigrants from the Western hemisphere, Latinos, especially Mexicans and Central Americans, became further connected in the collective imaginary to "illegal" or undocumented immigration. In the 1990s and 2000s, various geopolitical and economic shifts such as the North American Free Trade Agreement set off unprecedented migration flows, marking an explosive period of Latino population growth in the United States that was compounded by high fertility rates among U.S.-based Latinos (Massey, Durand, and Malone 2003).

This period also witnessed a fundamental shift in the settlement patterns of Latino individuals in the United States. Thanks to new economic opportunities and heightened immigration enforcement in some traditional des-

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1. Whether Latinos constitute a race is much debated. We argue that Latinos experience racializing processes that homogenize a diverse population, institutionalize categories in a status hierarchy, and unevenly distribute resources along those lines (Browne and Odem 2012, 322).

tinations, Latino immigrants began settling in large numbers in small towns and suburbs across the nation (Massey 2008; Singer, Hardwick, and Brettell 2008). Southeastern states such as Georgia and North Carolina saw massive increases in their Latino and foreign-born populations and now rank in the top ten in terms of states with the highest population of unauthorized immigrants (Massey 2008; Singer 2004; Singer, Hardwick, and Brettell 2008). These demographic transformations raise old questions about Latino racialization but in a new context—the U.S. South. Given that racial dynamics in the South have largely revolved around black-white relations and inequalities, what position do Latinos occupy in the region's racial landscape? Some hypothesize that Latinos will join African Americans as collective minorities (Jones 2012; Smith 2014). Others highlight the possibility that Latinos will assimilate into whiteness (Alba 2016; Alba and Islam 2009; Gans 2017; but see Vargas 2015) or occupy a distinctive and possibly elevated racial position between whites and blacks (Bonilla-Silva 2004; Frank, Akresh, and Lu 2010; Gans 1999; Alba and Islam 2009; Lee and Bean 2004; Marrow 2011).

To address this question, a collection of pathbreaking researchers have examined emergent racial dynamics on the ground in new immigrant destinations like the U.S. South. Focused largely on the early 2000s or periods prior, these studies present evidence of black-brown tensions, conflict, and distancing. Although both blacks and whites at the time perceived Latinos as outsiders, African Americans did so thanks in part to perceptions of resource competition and long histories of interracial hostility and resource competition (LeDuff 2000; Marrow 2011; Ribas 2015; Rich and Miranda 2005; Stuesse 2009). These results provide empirical support for the view that Latinos occupy a racial middle. However, this interpretation depends on whether distancing is understood as a short-term mobility strategy used by immigrants throughout history to avoid association with blacks or a more lasting trian-

gulated position in which Latinos are neither accepted by whites nor demoted to collective blacks (Kim 1999; Roediger 2006). Further, shifts in immigration enforcement priorities and racial politics in the mid-2000s may have altered Latino racial incorporation trajectories since these earlier studies were conducted (Jones 2012; Marrow 2017; Williams 2016). Indeed, in the South today, traditional indicators of racial incorporation, such as intermarriage rates and residential segregation patterns, show clear similarities between blacks and Latinos, suggesting possible shifts in racialization processes on the ground in recent years (Frey 2015; Lofquist et al. 2012).[2]

Existing studies on these questions draw largely on in-depth ethnographic research that provides a nuanced and powerful picture of emergent race relations in individual communities. Although these are essential contributions to our understanding of the racializing facets of immigration, the emphasis on individual community relations offers limited insights into the broader context in which the dynamics of racialization and intergroup relations occur, suggesting a need for cross-regional work. Moreover, because few of these studies account for cultural and institutional discourses, further work is required to understand the broader practices that drive ascriptive racialization and the location of Latinos in the racial hierarchy (Chavez 2008; Chavez 2012; Mora 2014; Santa Ana 2002). This gap in the research is consequential not only because ascription is an essential component of racialization, but also because it plays an important role in shaping race relations and social policy (Browne, Deckard, and Rodriguez 2016; McConnell 2011).

Because the news media are an important part of the context of reception (Menjívar 2016), media analysis provides a useful opportunity to address these gaps. As Eileen McConnell notes, the mass media actively construct metaphors, ideologies, and beliefs about nonwhites in the United States, often emphasizing a narrow range of negative topics that link racial mi-

2. Out-marriage rates for blacks and Latinos are similarly low in the four states under study here (Lofquist et al. 2012). Hispanic and black residential segregation rates are also similar, with Hispanic-white segregation indices revealing increasing segregation in recent years (Frey 2015).

norities with social problems (2011). This focus shapes public perceptions of nonwhites as racialized nuisances and social threats. News media shape both conscious and unconscious biases about immigrants and racial minorities (Haney-Lopez 1997; Kaufmann 2003). For example, the media have powerfully shaped popular understandings of African Americans, portraying them as dangerous outsiders, predators, and public menaces. These portrayals occur at rates that are disproportionate to the actual crime rate among African Americans, arise in both fictional and nonfictional contexts, and perpetuate stereotypes of pervasive criminality and social threat (Chiricos and Eschholz 2002; Dixon and Linz 2000b; Smiley and Fakunle 2016). The media in traditional immigrant destinations have also constructed Latinos and immigrants as existential threats to U.S. culture and the nation-state (Chavez 2008; De Genova and Ramos-Zayas 2003; McConnell 2011; Rodriguez 2000; Santa Ana 2002). Such representations characterize Latinos as unassimilable, foreign, and an economic threat.

These media characterizations are not mere expressions of grievances. They shape the ideologies and social understandings of local residents toward racial groups and toward immigration (Brown 2013; Domke 2000; Flores 2003; Hopkins 2010). Because the media construct and disseminate cultural frames that give meaning to critical issues, they play a crucial role in the racialization process and in immigration politics (Gilens 1999; Menjívar 2016; Rodriguez 2018). They also shape the attitudes of bureaucrats, and policymakers who shape opportunities and access for these groups, closing off opportunities for incorporation and upward mobility (Dunaway, Branton, and Abrajano 2010; Sohoni and Mendez 2014). Examining newspaper coverage in Oregon, José Padín argues that news media play a critical role in shaping what he calls the "climate of new immigrant reception," asserting that the media frames Latinos relationally, positioning them according to a set of normative racialized codes

that are used to distinguish or establish similarities to other groups (2005). Such processes are deeply implicated in the construction of local racial hierarchies and in the identity formation of Latinos, who may decide to contest or accept this new set of ascriptive meanings and definitions assigned to them (Dávila 2012; Mora 2014).

DATA AND METHODS

To assess Latino racialization in new destinations, we conducted a news media content analysis of more than 4,200 news stories from 2003 to 2013 from eight newspapers across the South. The use of newspapers to analyze public discourse is a long-standing trend in the social sciences. In recent years, newspaper circulation has decreased, suggesting that newspaper framing may have less public impact than previously. That said, ample evidence suggests that that declining print subscriptions are counterbalanced by increases in online subscriptions and readership (Mitchell and Rosenstiel 2012). Studies also reveal that the content and framing of mainstream print, online, and social media news sources are relatively similar (Janssen 2010; O'Neill et al. 2015; Smith 2005). Given these trends and parallel framing processes, print media sources continue to present useful data for the analysis of cultural framing and public discourse.

We analyzed newspapers from four Southern states: Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, and North Carolina.[3] As table 1 shows, these four states have witnessed rapid growth in their Latino and foreign-born populations since 1990 (Migration Policy Institute 2012). Using Access World News Database and the online archives of the *Jackson Clarion-Ledger*, we randomly sampled news stories per year from 2003 to 2013 from each of the two largest newspapers in each state. To create these samples, we searched for articles including the term *immigra* and retained only those that discussed immigration-related issues in the United States. We then sampled from the eligible stories to retain fifty

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3. The eight newspapers are the *Jackson Clarion-Ledger*, the *Biloxi Sun-Herald*, the *Birmingham News*, the *Mobile Press-Register*, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, the *Augusta Chronicle*, the *Charlotte Observer*, and the *Raleigh News and Observer*.

Table 1. Foreign-Born Population and Change by State, 1990–2010

Region	1990 Estimate	2000 Estimate	2010 Estimate	1990 to 2010 Percent Change
United States	19,767,316	31,107,889	21,419,957	8.4
Alabama	43,533	87,772	168,596	287.3
Georgia	173,126	577,273	942,959	444.7
Mississippi	20,383	39,908	61,428	201.4
North Carolina	115,077	430,000	719,137	524.9

Source: Migration Policy Institute 2012.

stories per state per year for analysis. We did so by taking every Nth story, where N equaled the number of eligible stories that year divided by fifty.

After compiling the dataset, we used Dedoose, a cloud-based qualitative content analysis software, to code these stories. All codes with less than 80 percent intercoder reliability were dropped from the analysis. The average for the retained codes was 98 percent agreement. The coding scheme included codes for racial labels, immigrant country or region of origin, speaker characteristics, positive and negative characterizations of immigrants, and article type and date. In addition to this specified analysis, we used the full universe of news stories on immigration (approximately twenty-three thousand stories) to construct broader histories of immigration and immigration policy in each state to provide context for the study. We supplemented this analysis with content analysis of immigration-related stories published in the one of the largest African American newspapers from each state.[4] Following the same sampling and coding procedures as for the mainstream newspapers, we compiled and analyzed a dataset of 476 additional news stories from the African American newspapers. In what follows, we present results first from the mainstream newspapers, highlighting trends in reporting of immigrants over time. We follow that discussion with results from the African American newspapers.

LATINO RACIALIZATION IN MAINSTREAM NEWSPAPERS

Results reveal consistent patterns in the characterizations of immigrants in mainstream newspapers in the U.S. South. Table 2 presents descriptive statistics for the most frequently occurring themes for each code category. Overall, news stories contained slightly more negative characterizations of immigrants than positive ones. Approximately 31 percent of stories contained at least one negative characterization; 29 percent characterized immigrants positively. The relative balance between positive and negative characterizations may well reflect the long-standing journalistic practices of seeking multiple competing viewpoints to demonstrate "objectivity" (Schudson 1981; American Press Association 2017). Our results suggest, however, that even if journalistic norms encourage reporters to balance both negative and positive viewpoints on immigrants, the substance of these viewpoints varies in important ways. Immigration advocates and opponents used distinct portrayals of immigrants that reveal complex and contested debate about the specific characteristics of immigrants worthy of discussion.

The most common negative claim about immigrants emphasized the perceived criminal tendencies of noncitizens; economic threat claims were far less common. Nearly 60 percent of the negative arguments made about immigrants involved judgments about immigrants' involvement in criminal activities or their crim-

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4. These newspapers include the *Jackson Advocate*, the *Birmingham Times*, the *Atlanta Daily World*, and the *Charlotte Post*. Only the *Atlanta Daily World* is publicly available for our entire period, from 2003 to 2013. We acknowledge these limitations when discussing our data from these newspapers.
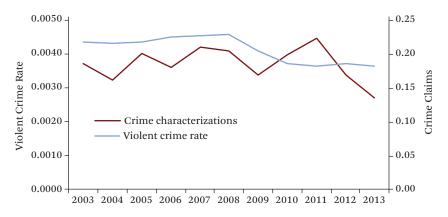
Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Key Codes

Code	Total (N)	Frequency
Article type		
Letter to editor	320	0.08
News reporting	2,857	0.68
Opinion	1,033	0.25
Total articles in category[a]	4,208	1.00
Immigrant country or region		
Central or South America	125	0.03
Mexico	864	0.21
Vietnam	73	0.02
Total articles in category[a]	1,527	0.36
Negative immigrant		
Crime	779	0.19
Drain collective resources	367	0.09
Steal jobs	194	0.05
Total articles in category[a]	1,323	0.31
Positive immigrant		
Hard work	401	0.10
Make collective resources	318	0.08
Racism or discrimination	582	0.14
Total articles in category[a]	1,227	0.29
Race		
Asian	104	0.02
Black	428	0.10
Latino or Hispanic	982	0.23
Total articles in category[a]	1,245	0.30
Speaker		
Federal official or politician	384	0.09
State, local elected official	535	0.13
Advocacy, service, nonprofit	464	0.11
Immigrant member of public	365	0.09
Total articles in category[a]	1,590	0.38

Source: Authors' compilation.

[a] *Total* is the total number of articles with codes for that category. Because an article might have references to multiple subcodes within a category, totals are not the sum of all subcodes for the code category.

inal predispositions. This argument is exemplified by a 2005 piece in the *Raleigh News and Observer*, which reported on crimes involving local immigrants. The article noted that "Eight illegal immigrants from Honduras pleaded guilty Tuesday to federal charges related to a multistate scheme to steal and resell more than $2.5 million worth of baby formula and over-the-counter drugs" (Weigl 2005). An article from the *Jackson Clarion-Ledger* in Mississippi similarly highlighted the fact that the perpetrator of a local crime was an undocumented immigrant: "A police report shows the suspect in the Wheaton hit-and-run is Jaime Martinez, an illegal immigrant wanted for a homicide in Mexico, who was driving a borrowed 1997 white Cadillac" (Apel 2011). Like constructions of African Americans, these news stories portray im-

Figure 1. Crime Claims by Year and Violent Crime Rate

Source: Authors' calculations.

migrants as dangerous menaces. Further, media elites opted for language and contextual associations that depict illegal status as a criminal violation, despite the fact that unauthorized presence in the United States is a civil, not a criminal, infraction. Although illegality could be framed as a bureaucratic, legal, or administrative issue, by and large the news media chose to frame illegality as a form of criminality. These discussions of crime dwarfed the other negative stereotypes about immigrants, despite the fact that crime rates for immigrants and in immigrant-heavy areas are consistently lower than in other areas (Ewing, Martinez, and Rumbaut 2016; Nowrasteh 2015; Rumbaut 2009). Indeed, as figure 1 shows, the prevalence of criminality claims in our data do not reflect any shifts in the crime rate in these four states under the study period.[5] Although crime characterizations rose and fell between 2003 and 2013, the violent crime rate trend remained stable from 2003 to 2008 and gradually declined between 2008 and 2013. Moreover, the largest spike in crime characterizations in 2011 occurred despite a dip in the violent crime rate the same year.

The crime characterization was so dominant in our data that the second most frequent negative characterization of immigrants (that they drain collective resources) constituted only 28 percent of all negative characterizations. A story from Georgia typified the "drain collective resources" argument when it reported that residents in the state "want the law to clear the state of illegal immigrants, who they say are taking advantage of Georgia's schools, hospitals and workplaces, draining public funds as they take jobs that could help the unemployed" (Schneider 2011). Only 15 percent of articles contained the claim that immigrants steal jobs from citizens, despite prior scholars pointing to economic threat as a dominant anti-immigrant sentiment (Wilson 2001; Deckard and Browne 2016; Fryberg et al. 2012). A news story from Raleigh, North Carolina, conveyed this argument in a 2011 story on opposition to immigration. The story quoted Ron Woodward, president of an North Carolina–based advocacy group called N.C. Listen, as saying, "If we had half of those people here illegally and those jobs were freed up, that's 100,000 Americans today that would have a job that don't have one . . . That would be a great improvement" (Barrett 2011). That the steal jobs argument appears so rarely in the data is surprising given the wealth of academic and public attention to the presumed economic costs of immigration to American-born workers (Newton 2000; Simon and Sikich 2007; Stuesse 2009; Wright, Levy, and Citrin 2015).

Although negative and positive characterizations appeared at similar frequencies in our

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5. The trends in crime rates are not driven by a single state. In Alabama, the per capita violent crime rate remained the same from 2003 to 2013, but in the other three states it declined over the same period.

sample, positive characterizations and countervailing arguments about immigrants took a variety of forms. The most common counterpoint offered did not address crime but instead asserted that immigrants in the region face racism and discrimination. Indeed, nearly 50 percent of stories that portrayed immigrants positively made the case that immigrants experience racism or discrimination.[6] The second most common positive argument made about immigrants characterized noncitizens as hard workers who contribute to the U.S. economy. These arguments about work ethic and economic contributions made up approximately 33 percent of all positive arguments made about immigrants. The third most common positive argument (26 percent) identified immigrants as contributors to the public good or as individuals who make collective resources from which others benefit. Around 14 percent of positive claims argued that immigrants have strong family values or that immigrant children are deserving members of society. If immigration opponents attempted to steer public discourse toward the assumed criminality of immigrants, supporters focused instead on racism and discrimination and on work ethic.

To understand media trends in immigration coverage, we also examined the countries of origin noted for those immigrants discussed in the mainstream newspapers. Country of origin proved an important device for writers in framing their arguments about immigration. A full 36 percent of news articles noted immigrants' country or region of origin. Of these articles, 57 percent focused on immigrants from Mexico, an unsurprising trend given the demographics of the newly arrived noncitizen population in these states. No other region or country of origin made up more than 8 percent of the total. Because public and media discourse about immigration also relies at times on racialized framing to make arguments about immigrants, we also coded for the use of racial
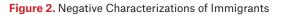
labels in immigration-related news coverage (Brown 2013). Approximately 30 percent of all articles used at least one racial descriptor in their reporting on immigration. The most commonly used racial category was Latino-Hispanic (nearly 80 percent of all racial labels applied), suggesting that Southern media discourse on immigration is overwhelming centered on Latinos rather than other, in some cases, sizable populations such as Asian Americans.
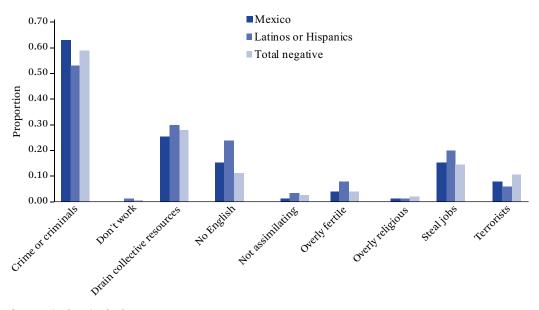
To assess news media depictions of Latino and Mexican immigrants specifically, we examined the co-occurrence of negative and positive characterization codes with country of Mexican origin and Latino-Hispanic race codes (see figures 2 and 3). First, we examined the most common negative characterizations made in articles that discuss Mexican immigrants. Surprisingly, only 15 percent of negative immigrant characterizations in our data set asserted that Mexicans newcomers steal jobs or otherwise threaten the economic stability of nonimmigrants.[7] Rather than highlight the economic effects of immigration, the most common attacks levied against Mexican immigrants during this period characterized these newcomers as criminals. Nearly two-thirds of all negative characterizations in these stories labeled Mexican immigrants as perpetrators of crime. These stories took multiple forms, including news reporting on individual instances of criminal activity perpetrated by noncitizens, groups of immigrants implicated in gang activity and the illegal drug trade, and undocumented immigrants as inherently criminal due to their unauthorized status. Consider the following quote from a 2011 *Augusta Chronicle* story:

> U.S. Attorney Ed Tarver said Wednesday that 51-year-old Oscar Lazo and 35-year-old Eva Ramos were charged with conspiring to sell the stolen identities of U.S. citizens and harboring illegal immigrants. Prosecutors also charged Maurcio Cruz and Manuel Cruz—

6. Racism or discrimination claims appear at similar rates in Alabama, Mississippi, and North Carolina (around 50 to 52 percent of all positive claims and 14.1 percent to 16.6 percent of all stories) but are slightly less common in Georgia (36 percent of all positive codes and 38 percent of all published stories).

7. By contrast, the most frequently made negative claim in stories about Middle Eastern immigrants involved terrorism; Southeast Asian immigrants were chided for their lack of English skills.

Figure 2. Negative Characterizations of Immigrants

Source: Authors' calculations.

Figure 3. Positive Characterizations of Immigrants

Source: Authors' calculations.

both citizens of Mexico—with using the sto-
len identities to get hired at the restaurant.
(*Augusta Chronicle* 2011)

As is typical in the data, this story not only
reports on law-breaking activities by Mexican

immigrants, but also stresses the criminal
schemes hatched by those immigrants.

Whereas the most common negative char-
acterization of Mexican immigrants focused on
criminal tendencies and activities, the two
most common positive characterizations em-

phasized immigrants' hard work and strong work ethic (44 percent) or claimed that immigrants face racism and discrimination (46 percent).[8] Although the aggregate measures show the hard work and racism claims as equally prevalent, time-series analyses reveal that arguments about Mexicans' work ethic were most common in the earlier years of our sample, and racism-discrimination arguments remain consistently high. In only one year (2006), did the hard work argument appear more frequently than the racism or discrimination argument, suggest that the latter argument about Mexicans was more dominant than the aggregate numbers reveal.[9]

These results indicate that, since 2003, immigration discourse in Southern news media has crystallized around two themes: the criminality of Mexican immigrants and the discriminatory treatment these immigrants face.[10] But are these discussions primarily about race or primarily about country of origin? To answer that question, we examined characterizations of Latinos-Hispanics in our dataset (see figures 2 and 3). Results reveal similar patterns. Again, the most common negative characterization in these articles involved crime and criminality. More than half (53 percent) of the stories that discussed Latinos also made assertions about their supposed criminal tendencies. Virtually

the same proportion of stories with positive characterizations (47 percent) argued that Latinos face ongoing racism and discrimination. Notably, news stories were more likely to make claims of racism and discrimination when discussing Latinos or Hispanics (52 percent) than when discussing Mexicans specifically (46 percent). Arguments about immigrant work ethic were also far more common in stories about Mexicans (44 percent) than in stories about Latinos or Hispanics (34 percent). These linguistic distinctions may signal differences in an ethnic versus a racial framing, the former intended to construct and denote population characteristics that are cultural and more positive than the latter (Hattam 2007).[11] Despite these distinctions, these findings suggest a deep racialization of immigration discourse in the news media, with media coverage focused on constructions of Latino criminality and anti-Latino racism.

In at least three respects, this media characterization of Latino newcomers parallels the long-standing associations between African Americans and criminality (Alexander 2012; Mendelberg 2001). First, the emphasis in our data on Latinos as dangerous outsiders with inherent criminal tendencies mirrors the long-standing characterization of African Americans as dangerous outsiders, predators, and public

8. These same patterns hold for stories that discussed Central American immigrants. We do not report this data because references to Central American immigrants were rare in our data set (fewer than two hundred references total or less than 5 percent of all stories).

9. These shifts do not appear to reflect increases in the employment of Latino journalists by newspapers in our data set. Our story-by-story analysis suggests that only 2 percent of all stories in the dataset were written by Latino journalists, with no increase overtime in the publication of Latino-authored pieces.

10. Additional analyses suggest these patterns do not reflect significant differences in code distribution across article types (news reporting, letters to the editor, and opinion pieces). The majority of crime and racism codes appear in news stories. News stories constituted 68 percent of our total sample. Approximately 64 percent of racism claims and 72 percent of crime claims occur in news stories. Opinion pieces, which constituted 25 percent of the sample, contained 33 percent of the racism codes and 23 percent of the crime codes. Both codes are underrepresented in letters to the editor. A breakdown of results by state shows that these trends are not driven by a single state. Rather, trends appear regionally.

11. Whether there is an analytic distinction between *race* and *ethnicity* is heavily debated (see Brown and Jones 2015). Here, we follow panethnicity researchers and colloquial usage in treating national-origin labels as *ethnic*, in contrast to *panethnic* or *racial* labels that homogenize diverse national origin groups (Okamoto and Mora 2014). In using the terms *racial* and *ethnic* in this fashion, we do not suggest a clear analytical distinction between the two concepts but rather argue that the two concepts conjure different "associative chains" that produce distinct discourses in the United States (Hattam 2007)
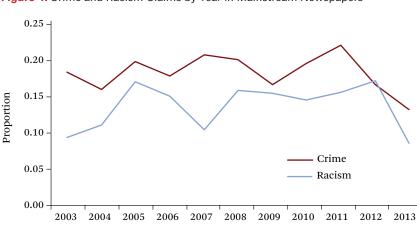
Figure 4. Crime and Racism Claims by Year in Mainstream Newspapers

Source: Authors' calculations.

menaces (Russell-Brown 2008; Alexander 2012). Second, just as assumptions of black criminality often precede any actual criminal actions (Yancy 2016), news coverage of Latinos in our data typically assume criminality on the basis of a civil violation: unauthorized presence. Third, media portrayals of African American and Latino crime are disproportionate to the actual levels of crime committed by those groups (Dixon and Linz 2000a).

Our results further suggest that Latino racialization originates not only from critics of immigrants who characterize Latinos and Mexicans as criminals but also from pro-immigration forces. Rather than make pro-immigrant arguments grounded in economic or human rights claims (Bloemraad, Silva, and Voss 2016; Deckard and Browne 2016; Fujiwara 2005; Lawlor 2015), immigration news stories more often asserted that immigrants, Latinos and Mexicans in particular, faced widespread racism and discrimination. The writers, editorial board members, and political figures making these arguments routinely drew parallels between immigration enforcement efforts and the South's historic commitment to racial inequality, Jim Crow, and segregation. For example, in a column focused on immigration, Sid Salter of the *Jackson Clarion-Ledger* dispelled common myths about Latino immigrants and argued, "Now that a measure of progress has been made in race relations between blacks and whites in Mississippi, it seems some

among us are encouraging new avenues for racism and bigotry, and adding a side order of misplaced nationalism" (Salter 2003). Another article in the same newspaper quoted Bill Chandler, a Mississippi immigration advocate, as saying, "[Anti-Latino racism] is the same kind of racism that has been perpetuated against African Americans for years" (Crisp 2010).

Time-series data show that these two racializing arguments (that of Latino criminality on one hand and of racial discrimination on the other) are not independent of each other. As figure 4 shows, these arguments about racism and discrimination rise and fall in tandem with criminality assertions. More specifically, both Latino criminality and racial discrimination claims rise and then decline from 2004 to 2006. Criminalization arguments rise again in 2007, followed closely by a steep increase of racial discrimination arguments the following year. This parallel relationship continues throughout the period of analysis—declining slowly after 2007, rising again between 2010 and 2012, and declining steeply through to 2013.

Although these claims rise and fall concurrently, our data suggest that different actors make each argument. News stories highlighting the criminality of Mexicans and Latinos most commonly quoted state and local government officials, whereas those focused on racism and discrimination relied most often on reports from representatives from advocacy

and nonprofit organizations that serve local immigrants. Taken together, these trends suggest an ongoing and multifaceted cycle of racialization in which elected and appointed government officials challenge Latino or Mexican immigrants as criminal elements, and immigration advocates respond with charges of racism and discrimination. As counterpoints to racializing claims of Latino immigrant criminality, publishers choose to feed this racialization by citing claims of Latino-targeted racism and discrimination. Although these two discourses have different implications and goals, both are "racial projects" that construct, emphasize, and give primacy to racial distinctions between Latinos and other groups (Omi and Winant 1994).

AFRICAN AMERICAN NEWSPAPERS

Do the same patterns present in African American newspapers in the region? To answer this question, we turn to results from our content analysis of immigration-related stories published in four African American newspapers. Slightly different patterns are evident. First, although positive and negative characterizations of immigrants appeared at the relatively same frequency in the mainstream newspapers (31 percent and 29 percent, respectively), African American newspapers portrayed immigrants in strikingly more positive terms. African American newspapers published more than twice as many positive characterizations of immigrants than negative. Approximately 15 percent of stories in the database contained at least one negative characterization versus 33 percent containing positive characterizations. Although the balance of positive and negative characterizations differed from the mainstream press, the content of immigration characterizations was quite similar.
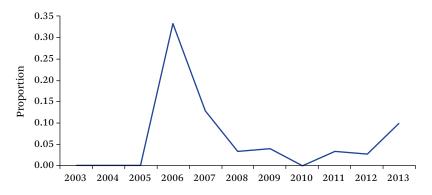
As in the mainstream press, the most common negative characterization of immigrants was the argument that immigrants perpetuate crime. Negative arguments made up only 15 percent of the total stories, but nearly 60 percent of the negative arguments about immigrants in African American newspapers involved judgments about immigrants' involvement in criminal activities or their criminal dispositions. For instance, the *Birmingham Times*

published a story in 2010 that reported on the criminal dealings of local Mexican immigrants:

> A federal grand jury today indicted two undocumented aliens for providing counterfeit identification documents, announced U.S. Attorney Joyce White Vance and Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement Resident Agent in Charge Jesse Blakeman. The indictment filed in U.S. District Court charges Adalberto de la Cruz-Angeles, 42, a Mexican citizen, with two counts of transferring counterfeit Social Security and Permanent Resident cards, once in July and once in November. (*Birmingham Times* 2010)

Although the African American papers focused on the supposed criminal tendencies and behaviors of immigrants, they differed from the mainstream papers in their secondary focus on immigrants as an economic burden. The claim that immigrants steal jobs appeared in approximately 39 percent of the articles that negatively characterized immigrants. Assertions that immigrants drain collective resources appeared in 21 percent. These articles typically asserted that immigrants drained public coffers by virtue of their overrepresentation in local prisons, their mental and physical health issues, and their reliance on various welfare programs. These claims echo popular arguments that African Americans see immigrants, particularly Latinos, as their direct competition for resources and employment (McClain et al. 2006). Rather than appearing as a dominant narrative in the African American press, however, these arguments represented only a small proportion of the total articles in the newspapers under study. The economic threat claims were also concentrated in the early years of our sample, peaking in 2006 and tapering off by 2008 (see figure 5).

Despite commonly made claims about conflict between Latinos and African Americans, our results reveal that positive characterizations of immigrants, Latinos in particular, far outpaced negative ones in the African American press. Consider the following excerpt from the *Atlanta Daily World* in 2006. The author of the article included a quote from a nationally re-

Figure 5. Steal Jobs Claims by Year in African American Newspapers

Source: Authors' calculations.

nowned Latino advocacy group to advocate for humane immigrant policies: "Undocumented immigrants contribute about $850 billion more per year than they cost—a huge net gain for the United States," said Brent Wilkes, national executive director of the League of United Latin American Citzens. "It's about time that we provide a legal avenue for them to come here in recognition of their tremendous contributions to our country" (Curry 2006). The article not only emphasized the positive economic contributions of immigrants, it also advocated for policies that would facilitate authorized immigration to the United States.

Although such arguments were common in African American papers, by far the most common defense of immigrants offered in the African American newspapers asserted that immigrants face discrimination or racism. Racism-discrimination claims constituted approximately 50 percent of all positive immigrant characterizations in the mainstream papers and higher than 70 percent in African American papers. An article from the *Jackson Advocate* illustrates these claims in its discussion of law enforcement and motorists. Quoting a local immigrant advocate, the article argued, "The past reports of 'driving while black' have been supplemented with accounts today of 'driving while brown'. . . with the new focus being on Latino immigrants" (Vern 2010). This quote illustrates not only the common trend in black papers to argue that immigrants face racism but also the parallel trend of equating black-targeted discrimination with discrimination

targeting Latino immigrants. So common were references to racism and discrimination in this dataset that these claims dwarfed other two most commonly occurring positive characterizations: of immigrants as hard workers (22 percent) and of immigrants as contributing to the public good (17 percent). As in the mainstream press, racism and crime claims rise and fall in tandem over the study period, spiking concurrently in 2006, 2010, and 2013 (see figure 6).

Results from the African American newspapers also reveal distinct trends in the racial labels used in immigration-related news stories, particularly when compared to the mainstream press. Whereas 30 percent of mainstream newspaper articles used at least one racial descriptor in their coverage of immigration, 67 percent of articles from African American newspapers used at least one racial descriptor. The most commonly used racial category was African American–black (87 percent), followed by Latino-Hispanic (nearly 54 percent of all racial labels applied versus 80 percent in mainstream newspapers). These findings suggest that though immigration coverage focuses on Latinos in both venues, African American newspapers are far more likely than mainstream newspapers to also discuss immigration as it affects or connects to African American communities.

To assess African American press descriptions of Latino immigrants, we examined the application of negative and positive characterizations of Latino immigrants. Characterizations of immigrants as criminal were the majority (73 percent) of negative characterizations,
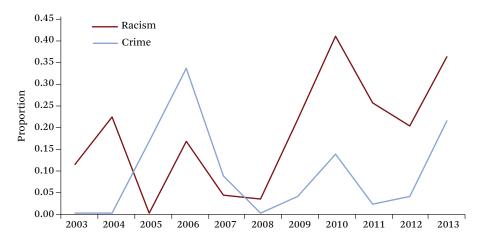
Figure 6. Racism and Crime Claims by Year in African American Newspapers

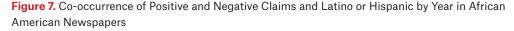*Source:* Authors' calculations.

followed distantly by the claim that Latino immigrants drain collective resources (27 percent).
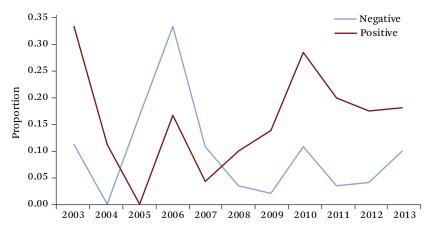
These patterns indicate that the dual racialization of Latinos as criminals and as victims of racism and discrimination appears in the African American as well as the mainstream press. The same time-series patterns from the mainstream press also arise in African American newspapers. Like in the mainstream press, the racialized arguments about Latino criminality and anti-Latino racism rise and fall in tandem, again suggesting a pattern in which immigration foes attack Latinos on the basis of perceived criminal tendencies and advocates respond with targeted claims of Latino immigrants facing racism and discrimination. The key difference between the mainstream and African American newspapers involves the prevalence of each argument and the timing of shifts in each argument. In the mainstream newspapers, criminality claims occur more frequently than racism claims in all but one year of the dataset (2012).[12] And, as noted, in the African American press, racism arguments surpass criminality arguments in 2008 and remain more frequent through the end of our analysis period. Coupled with the fact that the African American press offered more positive than negative characterizations of immigrants than did the mainstream press, these trends may evidence broader shifts in black-Latino relations in the South over the last decade and a half. As figure 7 makes clear, over the period of study, articles about Latinos became less likely to invoke negative characterizations of immigrants over time. The opposite pattern holds for positive portrayals, trending broadly upward after 2005. These patterns are specific to the African American newspapers. Mainstream newspaper articles about Latinos show slight declines in both positive and negative characterizations of immigrants during the study period. Time-series data indicates that characterizations of immigrants as criminal, followed by stealing jobs, diminish over time, and are less prominent than in the mainstream press, suggesting a shift in public discourse about black-Latino relations over the last decade and a half, characterized by increasingly positive characterizations of Latino immigrants as they increased in size and visibility across the region.[13]

12. This year marked widespread state and national-level attention to anti-immigration laws such as Alabama's HB56. Critics of these bills regularly cited them as evidence of racism and discrimination targeted at immigrants (Brown, Jones, and Dow 2016; Campbell 2016; Mohl 2016).

13. In the last years of our data, crime and racism claims also follow different patterns in the two data sets, both claims trending upward in the African American press and downward in the mainstream press. Our close read of the stories from these years does not suggest that these shifts were event driven.

Figure 7. Co-occurrence of Positive and Negative Claims and Latino or Hispanic by Year in African American Newspapers

Source: Authors' calculations.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In both the mainstream press and African American press, results indicate that since 2003 immigration discourse in Southern news media has crystallized around two themes: the criminality of Latino immigrants and the discriminatory treatment these immigrants face. Across both sets of newspapers, negative arguments about Latinos focus on their perceived criminal tendencies rather than characterizing immigrants as labor market competitors or economic threats. These claims arise in stories reporting disproportionately on Latinos under investigation for possible criminal offenses, suggesting the prominence of a racial threat narrative centered on public safety. These same characterizations also appear in news coverage about gang activity and in stories claiming that undocumented Latinos are criminals, by virtue of nothing more than their mere presence in the United States. Paralleling this criminality argument is the equally common claim that Latinos face mounting racism and discrimination akin to that African Americans face. That these trends are particularly pronounced for stories about Latinos and Hispanics (versus stories about Mexicans) further illustrates the racializing effects of these narratives. These trends appeared in both the mainstream and the African American press, with one important difference. Pieces in the African American press were far more positive toward immigrants rel-

ative to the mainstream press. These findings cast doubt on claims that Latinos in the region are assimilating into whiteness or occupying an elevated position in the racial hierarchy.

Our findings indicate key similarities between the racialization of Latinos and that of African Americans. The criminality claims that appear in our data are similar to patterns of media-driven racialization of African Americans in at least three respects: they emphasize Latinos as dangerous outsiders, assume inherent criminal tendencies among Latinos, and overrepresent the proportion of crimes committed by this demographic group (Alexander 2012; Mendelberg 2001; Dixon and Linz 2000a). The central difference between constructions of black criminality and of Latino criminality in our data is the emphasis on Latino illegality as evidence of criminality. There is, to our knowledge, no corresponding narrative about black illegality in the media; however, definitions of *criminal* and *illegal* are elastic (Gilroy 2008). Unauthorized presence in the United States is not a criminal violation but rather an administrative one. The assumption that unauthorized presence is somehow criminal is a social construction, and historical immigration debates in the United States have not always equated unauthorized presence with criminality (Ngai 2005). A key finding from our study is that the news media in our sample *choose* to portray illegality as reflective of criminality ten-

dencies inherent to Latino immigrants rather opting to portray illegal presence as an administrative, human rights, or legal-bureaucratic issue. This choice is similar to constructions of black criminality that have long been used to demonize African Americans as unfit for legal, social, and other forms of citizenship (James 2010). In our data, the constructions of Latino illegality as criminality do the same work.

Our findings not only indicate similarities in the racialization of African Americans and Latinos, they also suggest that black political leaders and cultural elites perceive Latinos as sharing a common experience of racial discrimination at the hands of whites. The pronounced emphasis on anti-Latino discrimination in the African American press may be coincidental, but taken alongside new work on black-Latino alliances (Brown, Jones, and Dow 2016) and shifts in black elite public opinion (Williams and Hannon 2016) it may also reflect a strategic choice to shore up a sense of shared minority status between African Americans and Latinos. Although characterizations of Latinos as victims of discrimination and racism may spur alliances between minority groups, such claims may also feed a sense of racial threat among whites by emphasizing the challenges of Latino immigration to existing resource distributions. Regardless of the intent and consequences, these patterns indicate that media-driven racialization occurs through both negative characterizations of specific racial groups and through positive defensive pro-immigrant claims. As a counterpoint to the heightened racialization of Latinos as criminals, newspaper editors and journalists choose to publish stories that defend immigrants as the targets of racism and discrimination. In the latter instance, racialization may serve as a defensive resource, in which advocacy efforts draw on histories of civil rights activism to make their case. These results suggest that to make sense of the racially transformative effects of immigration requires a nuanced understanding of the racialization process. Existing research largely emphasizes explicit patterns of immigrant racial self-identification and state ascription. This focus neglects the effects that pro-immigration forces, meso-level organizations,

and implicit racial appeals have on immigrants' place in and adjustment to U.S. racial hierarchies.

Although our use of the term *racialization* refers to discursive constructions, these discourses are meaningful in a racialized social system, characterized by systemic inequalities and the primacy of racial hierarchies and divisions (Bonilla-Silva 1997). As a result, these racialized appeals likely have important consequences for immigrant-native relations. Efforts to frame immigrants positively as racialized minorities and victims of discrimination serve different purposes and may even serve different purposes for different groups. In the case of nonwhites, the framing of Latino immigrants as racialized minorities and targets of discrimination may spur interminority sympathies and intergroup coalitions, particularly in the U.S. South, where civil rights organizations and language have unique political visibility. Collaborative efforts by civil rights organizations, immigrant rights organizations, and African American representatives to pass sanctuary city ordinances in Jackson, Mississippi, and Birmingham, Alabama, may be evidence of such effects. Such efforts may also stimulate a sense of threat among whites (see also Schildkraut and Marotta 2018; Craig and Richeson 2018) and may yield renewed local and state immigration enforcement.

Because these results are regional rather than constitutive of a single case, they have significant implications for the context of reception facing new immigrants. In using normative racial codes to situate Latino immigrants in relation to existing groups (Padín 2005), media not only discursively situate Latinos as most similar to blacks but also shape the patterns by which community and local level bureaucrats will extend access to services and social resources on the one hand, or engage in punitive behaviors on the other. In establishing the parameters by which Latinos are situated and understood in Southern communities, media discourses may play a significant role in shaping mobility opportunities for Latinos. A lingering question from this study involves the discursive tropes used by the Spanish-language press to characterize Latino immigrants in the region. Given our interest in ascriptive processes of ra-

cialization, this article focuses only on English-language sources. Further, at the time of our analysis and writing, Spanish-language media in the South was unavailable in digitized news databases. Future analyses of Spanish-language media in the region would provide a more detailed analysis of shifts in Latino racial identity, racialization, and incorporation during this period.

Media racialization of Latinos may affect Latino identities, producing new in-group meanings, boundaries, and political mobilization. A sense of proximity to blackness may play a significant role in shoring up a sense of Latino identity (Jones 2012; Sanchez 2008). This shared sense of group position can serve as a basis for political coalitions with long-term implications (Kaufmann 2003). Still, our results may reflect racialization processes particular to the South. Indeed, the often contradictory conclusions about the location of Latinos in the U.S. racial hierarchy may reflect regional differences in racialization and racial hierarchies. Greater attention to place-based variation in immigrant racialization will illuminate the mechanisms of Latino racialization across contexts.

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