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The Language of Immigration Coverage: *The Arizona Republic* and Media's Role in the Production of Social Illegality

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Abstract

Recently, several mainstream media organizations have moved away from using "illegal immigrant" in their immigration coverage. While this shift in immigration coverage is positive, seemingly positive language may still be exclusionary, particularly if the content of stories remains the same. We investigate whether newspaper articles that describe immigrants as "illegal" are more negative in content than articles that present immigrants as "undocumented" by analyzing 1,616 newspaper articles and letters to the editor in *The Arizona Republic* between 2000 and 2016, a critical period of immigration legislative activity in Arizona. We find that *The Arizona Republic* inundated readers with negative news coverage and that this coverage is baked into the content of stories and transcends the use of either term, "illegal" or "undocumented." We then draw on letters to the editor and original interview data to consider how social forces outside of the media may influence coverage.

Keywords

international migration; technologies and media sociology; political sociology; Latina/o sociology

Introduction

On April 25, 2006, *The Arizona Republic* published reader Sam's letter to the editor. Sam was responding to a story about Maricopa County sheriff deputies seizing 70 pounds of meth, an "illegal drug," and arresting four "undocumented immigrants." In the letter, Sam rhetorically wonders,

> What is the difference? Should it have read illegal immigrants suspected of smuggling the undocumented drugs, or undocumented immigrants suspected of smuggling the undocumented drugs, or illegal immigrants suspected of smuggling the illegal drugs? This is a real question. I am confused how it is supposed to read.

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Likewise, another reader, Hazel, asked in a July 8, 2005, letter to the editor, "Why do the news media use the term 'undocumented' immigrants? It gives a certain legitimacy to an illegal act. It doesn't sound like an undocumented immigrant has done anything wrong."

Media are characterized by symbolic struggles between advocates of different policy persuasions who attempt to pressure the media (such as the journalists, reporters, and editors) to adopt their meaning and framing of events (Gamson et al. 1992; Gamson and Modigliani 1987). Of the many political struggles over immigration, the distinction between "illegal" and "undocumented" has drawn considerable debate.

While forms of unauthorized immigration have existed since the first immigration laws, the construction of "illegality" is more recent, only taking on public salience starting in the 1970s (Ackerman 2014; Masuoka and Junn 2013). But contrary to most public discourse, legal status is not a straightforward dichotomy between "legal" and "illegal"; and legal status is not derived from an individual's innate characteristic or selected by choice. Instead, legal status is a product of law and generates a spectrum of legal statuses (De Genova 2004; Menjívar 2006); as such, it is a "preeminently political identity" (De Genova 2002:422). But "illegality" is also socially produced through stereotypes and perceptions (Flores and Schachter 2018). The media play an outsized role in this process, often reproducing the false dichotomy of "legal" and "illegal" (or deserving and undeserving) immigrants (Villegas and Villegas 2019), in ways that cement "social illegality" (Flores and Schachter 2018), or the social construction of illegality (De Genova 2002).

This is significant because not only do the terms "legal" and "illegal" frame immigration in an overly simplistic way, but they also activate different psychological responses (Wright, Levy, and Citrin 2016). For instance, the term "illegal alien" activates a threat response when compared with the term "undocumented worker" (Pearson 2010). (e.g., "It doesn't sound like an undocumented immigrant has done anything wrong.") Likewise, the term "illegal immigrant" elicits an even more negative response compared with "illegal alien" (Ommundsen et al. 2014).[1] Discourse around "illegality" also impacts how immigrants themselves understand and experience "illegality" (Abrego 2014:141; Menjívar 2016; Menjívar and Kanstroom 2014).

Recently, several mainstream media organizations revised their guidelines for covering immigration. In 2013, the *Associated Press* updated its stylebook to no longer sanction the term "illegal" to describe a person. Other media outlets such as the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times* followed suit, changing their editorial policy to no longer use "illegal" when referencing people. These changes were driven, in part, by efforts from the National Association of Hispanic Journalists and social movements like the "Drop-The-I-Word" campaign that raised awareness of the dehumanizing effects of using phrases such as "illegal immigrant" (Haynes, Merolla, and Ramakrishnan 2016:148). The goal of such campaigns is to bring about broader social changes through shifts in language; in other words, that

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[1]·This is surprising given that "illegal alien" appears much more frequently in conservative news outlets compared with mainstream or liberal media (Haynes, Merolla, and Ramakrishnan 2016:152–154). While we do not have data to fully disentangle this counterintuitive finding, the comparative positive association of "illegal alien" to "illegal immigrant" is likely associated with the overall frequency that "illegal immigrant" is used across all media outlets, thus creating saturation beyond only conservative media.

by moving away from dehumanizing language, the media can help moderate the political climate surrounding immigration.

While this shift in immigration coverage away from the use of "illegal" is positive, seemingly positive language may still create exclusionary effects, particularly if the content of stories remains the same (Estrada, Ebert, and Lore 2016; Flores Morales and Farago 2021; Menjívar and Kil 2002; Viladrich 2019). We investigate this possibility by examining how these terminological differences are associated with content of coverage. Drawing on an original data set of newspaper articles and letters to the editor in *The Arizona Republic*, we examine the content of newspaper articles and letters to the editor to understand the association between frames and coverage which contribute to a social and political climate increasingly receptive to harsh immigration laws. Specifically, we ask whether newspaper articles that describe immigrants as "illegal" are more negative in content than articles that present immigrants as "undocumented." We focus on Arizona because of its uniquely hostile political climate. The Immigration Climate Index, for instance, which generates a score for how welcoming or hostile a state is to immigrants, rated Arizona as the most hostile state in the country (Pham and Pham 2014). The state's anti-immigrant climate is exemplified by SB 1070, a law passed in 2010 that made it a state crime to be in the country without lawful documentation and allowed the police to detain anyone suspected of being an undocumented immigrant. We exploit the anti-immigrant context of Arizona to argue that the media's role in the production of "social illegality" (Flores and Schachter 2018) transcends nomenclature. We argue that *The Arizona Republic*'s immigration-related news coverage between 2000 and 2016 was overwhelmingly negative and importantly, with a few exceptions, was negative *regardless* of whether immigrants were referred to as "illegal" or "undocumented."

We do not make causal claims; we do not argue that media coverage was the *sole* or *direct* cause behind Arizona's hostile political and legal climate toward immigrants. Our intent, rather, is to call attention to how the negative framing of immigrants goes beyond the terminology used to describe unauthorized immigration and to also attend to *content*, an observation which, in the current national context, is applicable beyond Arizona. Our examination of *The Arizona Republic*'s immigration coverage in the context of a series of increasingly harsh and punitive state laws, capped off by SB 1070, may represent a pre-context for the national surge in anti-immigrant politics and support for the Trump administration's extreme immigration policies and practices (Alamillo, Haynes, and Madrid 2019).[2]

After briefly discussing the policy context in Arizona (with an emphasis on SB 1070), we review the scholarship on the role of media in immigration debates. Next, we present our substantive findings on how instances of "illegal" and "undocumented" relate to the type and tone of immigration coverage in *The Arizona Republic*. We find that, regardless of which term the paper used, *The Arizona Republic* consistently framed immigrants negatively. We then draw on letters to the editor and original interview data to consider how social forces

[2].Although the Biden administration promised to reverse many of the previous administration's policies, many Trump-era immigration policies remain in place and thus they, will continue to have an effect for some time.

outside of the media may guide a certain type of coverage. We conclude the paper by discussing broader implications for understanding the political role of media in immigration policy.

Immigration Policy Context of Arizona

In the past decade and a half, Arizona has created one of the most hostile political environments for immigrants in the United States (Elcioglu 2017; Flores 2017; Leerkes, Leach, and Bachmeier 2012; Schildkraut et al. 2019). As changes in federal enforcement strategies in the 1990s diverted traditional border crossing routes to more remote and environmentally hostile locations, such as the Arizona desert (Massey, Durand, and Pren 2016), state lawmakers began passing a variety of anti-immigration laws and policies, culminating with the 2010 passage of SB 1070, known as the Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act. While a 2012 U.S. Supreme Court decision invalidated much of this law, the bill generated a considerable amount of controversy as well as many "copycat" laws around the country.[3] Importantly, while the passage of this law might have come as a surprise outside of Arizona, those in the state were "keenly aware that its passage by the Arizona legislature and its signing by Governor Brewer were in the making for the better part of the last decade" (Campbell 2011:1–2). SB 1070 therefore was a capstone to a series of laws that targeted immigrants, Latino/a immigrants in particular (Menjívar 2014; Santos, Menjívar, and Godfrey 2013).[4] We contend that the context that made state residents "keenly aware" of passing SB 1070 is, in part, attributable to the state's media climate.[5]

SB 1070 was breathtaking in its scope and strictness. It gave local law enforcement the authority to determine the immigration status of anyone they encountered during routine policing whom they suspected of being in the country undocumented. The law also made it a crime for residents to transport or conceal undocumented immigrants. Although the U.S. Supreme Court blocked three of the four major provisions of the law, the court still allowed Section 2(B), the "show me the papers" component, to become law. There is still much confusion about the law's implementation and in 2016 the Arizona Attorney General issued an opinion on guidelines on how to implement the remaining portion of SB 1070.

Despite its uneven rollout, in the hostile context of Arizona the signing of the law still produced a staggering array of negative effects (Nill 2011). Importantly for our argument,

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[3] For example, in 2011, lawmakers enacted copycat laws in five states: Utah (HB 497), Georgia (HB 87), Indiana, South Carolina, and Alabama's infamous HB 56, a law called "Arizona on steroids" (Mohl 2016:377).

[4] Notable other laws passed in Arizona include the 2004 "Arizona Taxpayer and Citizen Protection Act," or Proposition 200, which required proof of eligibility to receive public benefits and to register to vote. In 2005, the Anti-Smuggling Law was signed, which was interpreted by the then Maricopa County attorney to charge undocumented immigrants as co-conspirators in their own smuggling. In 2006, Arizona voters approved a package of laws: Proposition 100, which denied bail to undocumented immigrants accused of felonies; Proposition 102, which barred undocumented immigrants from collecting damages in punitive lawsuits; Proposition 103, which established English as Arizona's official state language (this had already been done twice before; and Proposition 300, which denied in-state tuition to immigrants who cannot produce proof of residency and barred undocumented immigrants from accessing subsidized child care programs. In 2008, the Legal Arizona Workers Act was signed, which prohibited businesses from intentionally or knowingly hiring undocumented immigrants; and in 2009 HB 2008 was passed, which required anyone who receives public benefits to produce proof of citizenship.

[5] While we focus on SB 1070, Arizona has been at the center of other high-profile cases relevant for our discussion. For instance, in a federal court case in 2014, the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office (MCSO) was found to systematically violate the constitutional rights and to racially profile Latinos during traffic stops and was ordered to monitor its patrol activities. In October 2019, an MCSO study found that despite the monitoring and the dismissal of its Sheriff five years earlier, the agency still engages in such unconstitutional practices https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/c866a6_10709d505bae454a9840d6194b86c5ff.pdf.

researchers have documented that mere *awareness* of the law was associated with a variety of negative outcomes for children and youth, such as decreased self-esteem among youth and an increase in perception of discrimination (Santos and Menjívar 2013; Santos et al. 2013), effects that held even among non-Latino youth in ethnically diverse school settings in metro Phoenix (Santos and Menjívar 2013:13). The media attention generated by Governor Brewer signing SB 1070 was found to negatively affect public health use among Latina mothers, even U.S.-born Latinas (Toomey et al. 2014) and to negatively affect birthweight in the Latino/a population (Torche and Sirois 2019). Moreover, immigrants reported increasing vulnerability in public places (Menjívar 2011; Menjívar and Abrego 2012). While positive views toward undocumented Mexican immigrants had been declining in Arizona in the years leading up to 2010 and SB 1070 (Diaz, Saenz, and Kwan 2011), the signing of this law created feedback effects, further souring public opinion toward immigrants and Mexicans (Flores 2017).

Thus, while the courts blocked many parts of SB 1070, the law still produced negative effects, many of which were associated with *awareness* of the law's intent (Flores 2017). The effects of merely being aware of the law highlight the power of media to "enact" laws and policies. The signing of Arizona's SB 1070 demonstrates that media coverage can approximate the intended outcomes of a law, even if the law itself is invalidated, especially if the social context where the law is passed has been negatively primed. While media organizations may feel it is their duty to cover legal decisions, coverage alone without context may amplify lawmaker's intentions. While SB 1070 was compromised legally (though still hostile in its own right), media coverage contributed to bring about the law's intended social and political outcomes (Flores 2017). Thus, in many ways, the realization of SB 1070 was a *media phenomenon*.

Media and Anti-immigrant Policies

Media discourse is important for both political debates and the formation of public opinion (Gamson and Modigliani 1989), particularly in immigration (see Bleich, Bloemraad and de Graauw 2015; Chavez 2001; Menjívar 2016). Media help shape immigration attitudes and policies by reinforcing the cultural distinction between "deserving" and "undeserving" immigrants (Dhaliwal and Forkert 2016; Dunaway, Branton, and Abrajano 2010; Estrada et al. 2016; Mohamed and Farris 2020; Newton 2005; Sohoni and Mendez 2014; Sohoni and Sohoni 2014). Media can facilitate the passage of harsh enforcement policies, such as Arizona's SB 1070, because negative media portrayals of immigrants prompt the public to see harsh and punitive tactics as the only answer to the problems that immigrants supposedly bring (Menjívar 2016:598). Moreover, newspaper agendas are strongly correlated with lawmaker's policy agenda, particularly at the state and local levels (Butz and Kehrberg 2019; Tan and Weaver 2009). For instance, lawmakers have leveraged negative media portrayals of immigrants to block in-state tuition (Jefferies 2009) and driver's licenses for undocumented immigrants (Stewart 2012). Media offer interpretive frames meant to provide meaning to policies and events (Gamson and Modigliani 1987:376) and the language used to describe an event is a significant part of framing.[6] The words that journalists and editors choose to use

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[6]·Media images, along with words, are also important in framing immigrants as a threat (Chavez 2001; Mohamed and Farris 2020).

"carry with them emotional affect and stereotypes" which can influence opinion and policy (Merolla, Ramakrishnan, and Haynes 2013:793). In the case of immigration, disagreements over framing come down partly to different connotations associated with "illegal" and "undocumented." "Illegal" framing, for instance, prompts readers to think about issues such as legality and national identity (Alamillo et al. 2019; Masuoka and Junn 2013). As Jennifer Merolla et al. (2013) argue, conservative media tend toward using the word "illegal," suggesting it is the more accurate phrase to describe a legal violation. However, by using "illegal," conservatives also tilt the debate toward enforcement and criminalization.

The term "illegal" dehumanizes immigrants, specifically Latinos/as, whether they are documented or undocumented (Chavez 2001, 2013). Media representations of undocumented immigrants "make immigrants' very presence in the country hypervisible —but only through the lens of illegality" (Abrego 2014:140). While some media outlets have signaled their intention to stop using the term "illegal" in their immigration coverage (Edgar 2013; Haughney 2013), many still do. A 2013 Pew Research study found that media organizations use the term "illegal immigrant" to describe undocumented immigrants 49 percent of the time. Comparatively, media used the phrase "undocumented immigrant" only 14 percent of the time (Guskin 2013). Likewise, Merolla et al. (2013) find that 41 percent of stories on immigration between 2007 and 2011 used the phrase "illegal," while only 1 percent used the phrase "undocumented." More recent research shows that among AP-publishing outlets, mentions of "illegal immigrants" declined 28 percent and among outlets that heavily published AP stories, mentions of "illegal immigrants" declined 60 percent after 2013 (Djourelova 2020). This effect, however, holds *only* for AP articles published in local outlets, and not for locally generated stories on immigration.[7]

While terms like "illegal immigrant" undoubtedly dehumanize immigrants and elicit hostile reactions, terminology is only part of the media's role in the production of "social illegality." Stigmatized immigrant groups, such as Latino/as, also trigger hostile attitudes (Brader, Valentino, and Suhay 2008) through what Chavez describes as the "Latino Threat Narrative" (Chavez 2013). According to this narrative, Latina/o immigrants are "unwilling or incapable" of integrating into U.S. society and, instead, are viewed as "part of an invading force from south of the border" (Chavez 2013:3). This narrative is part of a cohesive ideology and discourse that has become the "cultural dark matter filling space with taken-for-granted 'truths'" in debates over immigration (Chavez 2013:4). We argue that this narrative persists even in the absence of certain terms or language, such as "illegal." Thus, by drawing on elements of the Latino Threat Narrative, media further dehumanize the Latino population, making it easier to treat them without empathy (Chavez 2013:6) and grease the wheels for hostile laws and policies (see also Mohamed and Farris 2020).

The Present Study

We focus empirically on Arizona and *The Arizona Republic* to understand how struggles over language and meaning in media facilitate and sustain hostile political and legal climates

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[7.]Moreover, while Milena Djourelova (2020) finds that public support for increased border security declined after the AP ban was issued, this effect is small (1.25 percent). We suggest that, in part, public attitudes changed so little following the change in terminology because nativist and racist framing of immigrants in the media go deeper than specific mentions of "illegal immigrants."

for immigrants. Our research examines the content of newspaper articles and letters to the editor to understand (1) the association between frames and coverage, and (2) the interactive relationship with readers which may influence frames and coverage to disentangle the mechanisms by which media create a climate receptive to passing harsh immigration laws such as SB 1070. Specifically, we ask whether articles that describe immigrants as "illegal" are more negative in content than articles that frame immigrants as "undocumented." We draw from articles and letters to the editor published in *The Arizona Republic* newspaper between January 1, 2000, and December 31, 2016. This 16-year span of coverage allows us to trace immigration coverage before and after SB 1070, a period of increased immigration-related legislative activity.

We justify our focus on Arizona and *The Arizona Republic* in three ways. First, Arizona's status as a border state means immigration news coverage is particularly salient. Scholars have documented that immigration coverage is more prominent in local newspapers closer to the U.S.-Mexico border (Branton and Dunaway 2009a, 2009b; Dunaway et al. 2010); and across all four border states similar negative metaphors are used to depict migration flows (Kil 2019).[8] Moreover, previous research has noted that media in Arizona racializes Latina/o immigrants at a much higher rate compared with other states, like California (Brown 2013:300). Furthermore, media in Arizona consistently overestimate the population of undocumented immigrants (McConnell 2014), especially by exaggerating wording around numbers (McConnell 2011).[9] Second, Arizona represents an immigration policy environment considered to be an extreme case (Leerkes et al. 2012). While similar social and structural elements found in Arizona exist elsewhere, they may not have been leveraged (especially with media support) to the same extent. By understanding how these elements work in an extreme case, our findings are relevant to other contexts in which these same structures are present. Finally, *The Arizona Republic* is the state's largest newspaper, with a circulation of approximately 130,000 reaching 1.1 million readers a week. State newspapers, such as *The Arizona Republic*, face less market competition and are more influential in setting the state's political agenda (Tan and Weaver 2009). Although television outlets still dominate as a news source, seven percent of Phoenix area residents report getting their local news from *The Arizona Republic*, which is comparable to several of the local television stations.[10] While we did not have access to demographic data for *Republic* readers, it is likely that the readership resembles newspaper readership nationally. On average, newspaper readers tend to be older, whiter, and more educated.[11]

[8.]However, immigration-related coverage is now a national concern and media in non-border states, such as Georgia and Virginia, also depict immigrants in similarly negative ways (Brown, Jones, and Becker 2018; López-Sanders and Brown 2020; Sohoni and Mendez 2014).

[9.]This is true more broadly as well. Latinas/os, for example, do not receive coverage commensurate with their share of the U.S. population, but when they do, the coverage is disproportionately negative (Santa Ana 2013; see also Hopkins, Sides, and Citrin 2019). Conversely, Vietnamese and Indian immigrant groups receive far less coverage compared with their proportion of the population (Bloemraad, de Graauw, and Hamlin 2015).

[10.]Other reported news sources in the Phoenix metro area include 3TV (8 percent) and KNXV, the local ABC affiliate (10 percent) (Pew Research Center 2019). The largest single news source for Phoenix residents is the local Fox affiliate, KSAZ, with 18 percent (Pew Research Center 2019).

[11.]While newspaper readership across all demographic groups has declined, 33 percent of whites claim to read a newspaper daily (compared with 28 percent Black/African American and 20 percent Spanish/Hispanic origin) (Pew Research Center 2014). In addition, 67 percent of those aged 65 and older report reading a newspaper compared with 45 percent of those 35 to 45 years, and 35 percent of those 25 to 34 years (Pew Research Center 2007a). In terms of education, 64 percent of post-graduate degree holders read newspapers compared with 47 percent of high school graduates (Pew Research Center 2007b).

Data and Methods

Data Collection

We gathered data using *The Arizona Republic*'s online archive accessed via the newspaper's website, azcentral.com. We searched for articles, editorials, and letters to the editor between January 1, 2000, and December 31, 2016, containing the terms "illegal immigrant" and "undocumented immigrant" and used Python, a web program, to scrape the search results from the archive's website. We did not include derivatives of these two main phrases, such as "illegals" or "illegal aliens." Including these terms would have been challenging methodologically, with search results for "illegal" returning many non-immigration-related stories. In addition, these other phrases are used infrequently and thus return far fewer articles.

Using these parameters, our search returned a total of 16,325 articles, 327 letters to the editor, and 196 editorials. Of these, we found 9,322 articles using the phrase "illegal immigrant" and 7,003 articles using the phrase "undocumented immigrant." The search also returned footnotes (145 for "illegal immigrant" searches and 7 for "undocumented immigrant" searches) which we removed from the data set. The final data set consists of 16,173 articles: 9,177 articles from the "illegal immigrant" search, and 6,996 articles from the "undocumented immigrant" search. From the final data set, we coded and analyzed data based on a 10 percent stratified random sample. We stratified by term ("illegal" and "undocumented"). Our stratified sampling procedure resulted in 1,616 total articles; 917 articles using the phrase "illegal immigrant" and 699 using the phrase "undocumented immigrant." Only 16 articles in our sample use both "undocumented" and "illegal" to describe undocumented immigrants.

Coding and Data Analysis

We began our analysis by focusing on themes related to crime, laws, policy, violence, and rights. We focused initially on these themes because of their theoretical importance in the literature (Chavez 2013). However, we also allowed for inductively generated themes to emerge during coding. While most research has examined negative media framing (McConnell 2011; Sohoni and Mendez 2014; Stewart 2012), scholars have more recently turned their attention to the role of positive immigration frames that could themselves have negative consequences (Estrada et al. 2016). We continue this line of inquiry and coded themes in each stratum as either positive, neutral, or negative in order to compare coverage.[12]

Following Emily P. Estrada et al. (2016), we identified an article as positive or negative depending on whether it criticized or endorsed immigration or immigrants. We considered an article to be negative if it contained language or assertions that opposed immigration or immigrants and positive if it contained language or assertions that supported immigration

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[12].This coding scheme is inspired by Rodney Benson's (2013) five categories of victim, beneficial, problem, other, and ambiguous. Our coding scheme also focused on thematic distinctions that developed through an iterative process. Our undergraduate student researcher assisted with coding and, to ensure inter-coder reliability, we made sure that the same understanding of codes was applied across categories and across coders. This process was checked regularly.

or immigrants. For example, an article from July 14, 2000, was coded positively because it heaped praise on a local woman (described as an "illegal immigrant"), calling her a "model citizen" for cooperating with the police in "helping to chase away bad people and cleaning up her neighborhood." We coded an article as neutral if it was written in a "matter-of-fact" way, such as describing an event or content of a law. An article may contain multiple themes; thus, the total number of themes exceeds the total number of sampled articles. For instance, among the 699 articles in our sample that mention the word "undocumented," we coded 801 negative mentions, 1,125 neutral mentions, and 567 positive mentions across all themes. (Table 1 shows a more detailed breakdown of mentions of themes).[13] We then compared and contrasted themes within and across our sample. For further analysis, we then converted the number of positive mentions and negative mentions for each theme into a percentage and divided the percentage of positive articles by the percentage of negative articles to arrive at a ratio.

Finally, to complement our content analysis of *The Arizona Republic*, we include an interview that Cecilia Menjívar conducted with the then Maricopa County Sheriff, Joseph Arpaio (in office from 1992–2016) about his relationship to the media. While we do not have interview data from a full range of media and policy actors, the interview with Arpaio, who best embodied Arizona's approach to immigration, points to the symbiotic relationship that helped sustain the anti-immigrant context. The interview took place in his downtown Phoenix office on December 9, 2011. The full text of this interview is archived in the Chicano/a Research Collection, Hayden Library, Arizona State University.[14]

Analysis and Results

Description of Data

Our analysis proceeds along two lines: term and tone. By term we mean the choice of word ("illegal" and "undocumented") and by tone we mean the tone of coverage (positive, negative, or neutral). However, before analyzing how the terminology of "illegal" and "undocumented" is related to tone of coverage, we provide an overview of the frequency with which immigration-related articles appeared in *The Arizona Republic*. Figure 1 displays the overall frequency of immigration-related articles between 2000 and 2016. As the figure shows, Arizonans were saturated with immigration news. In 2006, for instance, there were over 2,000 articles that used the term "illegal" or "undocumented" when referencing immigrants, an average of nearly 5.5 articles every day. *The Arizona Republic*, in line with the agenda-setting function of media, forced attention to immigration on its readers.

The Arizona Republic's coverage also created total media saturation around the issue of immigration during a time when Arizona lawmakers were enacting several anti-immigration laws in the state, culminating in the passage of SB 1070 in 2010. Thus, the ratcheting up

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[13.]Also included is the row's chi-square score. Chi-square tests the null hypothesis that there is no association between the tone of coverage and the particular term used to describe immigrants in the coded newspaper articles. Thus, a significant chi-square indicates that there is an association between term and tone.

[14.]The archived material includes an autographed poster the Sheriff gave to Menjívar at the end of the interview, as he kept a stack of posters and other promotional materials in his office as part of his media campaigns.

of media coverage and immigration lawmaking activity created dynamic feedback effects that reinforced each other. The saturation of immigration coverage, particularly negative coverage, has considerable effect on public attitudes. However, as René D. Flores (2018) has demonstrated, effects of media rhetoric tend to diminish over time, especially when time intervals between messages are long. In the Arizona context, where people were saturated on a daily basis with negative immigration rhetoric, there was no time for this effect to wear off, resulting in heightened and sustained media influence on public opinion which created favorable conditions for the passage of even more restrictionist legislation.

Article Tone: "Illegal" and "Undocumented"

Immigration coverage in *The Arizona Republic* between 2000 and 2016 can be divided into two periods: one when coverage was dominated by the phrase "undocumented," and another where coverage was dominated by "illegal" (see Figure 1). However, while there are distinguishable periods in each term's usage, there is not a corresponding shift in tone. Thus, regardless of which term dominated, articles in *The Arizona Republic* tended to cover immigration in a mostly negative way.

Figure 2 illustrates the difference between positively coded and negatively coded articles that use the term "illegal" or "undocumented." To arrive at this number, we counted each positively and negatively coded article by theme. We then turned these into percentages and divided the percentage of positive articles by the percentage of negative articles. The further above zero, the more positive articles in any given category; the further below zero, the more negative articles in a category. This figure shows that, with a few exceptions, coverage of immigration that uses the term "illegal" tends to be highly negative. This is particularly widespread in stories about welfare, crime, and property-related news stories. For instance, 72 percent of the 110 articles about welfare that referenced "illegal" immigrants were negative.[15] Property-related stories, likewise, were also negative largely because of reporting on so-called "drophouses," properties where human smugglers would hide immigrants while they awaited payment. For example, a March 13, 2008, article reports that police "detained 135 suspected illegal immigrants found in two Avondale drophouses in two days." And while welfare and property-related stories were among the most negative, the total number of these stories pales in comparison to crime-related stories. For instance, there were nearly 350 total articles covering immigration and crime. Of these 350 articles, 159 (45 percent) were negatively coded. This is not surprising since recent research has shown that whites tend to overwhelmingly view Latina/o immigrants as criminals, and those portrayed in the media as "illegal" tend to be Latinas/os (Flores and Schachter 2018; Mohamed and Farris 2020).

Similarly, stories referencing "undocumented" immigrants also tended to be mostly negative. With a few exceptions, the use of the term "undocumented" does not necessarily translate into more positive coverage. The notable exceptions are articles related to enforcement and the border which both showed statistically significant associations between negative tone and the term "illegal."[16] Among all articles that use the term "illegal" to refer to

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[15] An example includes an article from September 26, 2002, that focused on the amount of money local hospitals lost due to unpaid medical bills from "illegal immigrants."

immigrants, 38 percent were negative, 43 percent were neutral, and 19 percent were positive. Among articles that use the term "undocumented," 32 percent were negative, 45 percent were neutral, and 23 percent were positive. These are averages for the total of each set of articles; however, across themes, the pattern holds. And, importantly for our argument, among the most theoretically significant themes (welfare, drugs, violence, and crime) there was no statistically significant difference observed between term and tone, meaning not only that these were among the most negative articles, but they were just as likely to be negative if the articles made reference to "undocumented" immigrants rather than "illegal" immigrants (Table 1). Articles on crime most clearly illustrate a similar pattern across stories using the terms "illegal" or "undocumented" referencing immigrants (Figure 3). Overall, there are fewer crime-related articles that reference "undocumented" immigrants (349 to 215); however, the percentages of positive and negative stories are similar (Figure 4). Furthermore, a chi-square test showed no significant association between term and tone of crime-related articles, $\chi^2(1, N = 309) = 3.11$, $p = .078$. This pattern also holds over time. For both sets of articles (those that use the term "illegal" and those that use "undocumented"), crime-related stories are negative in every year of our sample. And in many years, the frequency of negative crime-related articles that use the term "undocumented" immigrants actually outnumbered negative crime-related articles that use the term "illegal" (Figure 4). For example, a March 3, 2007, article, filed under the heading "Crime Briefs," reports that "An undocumented immigrant living in Mesa pleaded guilty Thursday to faking information when applying for a U.S. passport so he could travel back and forth to Mexico, according to the U.S. Attorney's Office." This is telling because the association between immigrants and criminality is an enduring feature of anti-immigrant rhetoric and media coverage (Farris and Mohamed 2018; Sohoni and Sohoni 2014; Valentino, Brader, and Jardina 2013; Villafañe 2019); this is despite the fact that studies have consistently shown that immigrants have lower rates of crime compared with a similar demographic profile among the native-born (Stowell and Gostjev 2018).

However, media reports also linked immigration and crime through stories that highlighted drug trafficking and human smuggling, a concern that manifested in the 2005 Arizona Anti-Smuggling Law which was interpreted by the then Maricopa County attorney to charge undocumented immigrants as co-conspirators in their own smuggling. Indeed, smuggling stories that mentioned "undocumented" immigrants were more likely to be negative, $\chi^2(1, N = 71) = 4.02$, $p = .045$. For instance, an October 19, 2003, article reports on a shooting that "initially looked like a case of road rage," but according to the police source, "A preliminary investigation revealed the three were likely involved in an undocumented immigrant smuggling operation." Here, even though the article references "undocumented" immigrants, the *content* of the story still associates immigrants with criminal activity. Thus, perceived criminality, a key feature of the Latino Threat Narrative, was persistent even in articles that used the term "undocumented." Moreover, Pew Research Center (2019) data show that 45 percent of Phoenix metro area residents indicated that local coverage of crime was important for daily life, second only to weather coverage (62 percent). Thus, the public in Phoenix metro was primed for (but also demanded to read) crime-related stories.[17]

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16. Enforcement $\chi^2(1, N = 462) = 7.64$, $p = .006$; Border $\chi^2(1, 374) = 10.21$, $p = .001$.

Patterns for positively coded "illegal" and "undocumented" articles are also similar across themes. Articles related to labor and immigrant rights that use "illegal" and "undocumented" are predominantly positive. This reflects, on one hand, the trope of the hardworking immigrant willing to do jobs Americans will not do (labor) and, on the other, the effect of immigrant rights activists on public discourse (rights).[18] An exception to the similarity between articles using "illegal" and "undocumented" emerges in relation to education. Education-related articles that use the terms "illegal" or "undocumented" immigrants tend to both be positive, although the ratio is much higher for articles that use "undocumented." Among articles using the term "illegal," 40 percent of education-related articles are positive while 70 percent of articles are positive among education-related articles that use the term "undocumented." A chi-square test showed that there was a significant relationship between term and tone of education coverage. Positive education stories are more likely to make reference to "undocumented" immigrants than negative stories, $\chi^2(1, N = 114) = 14.98$, $p = .000$. The large positive effect among education-related articles that use "undocumented" is likely the result of stories featuring DREAMers (see Nicholls 2013) and stories on Proposition 300, passed in 2006, that required undocumented students to pay out-of-state tuition.[19] For instance, one story from May 31, 2007, covers a DREAMer named Griselda, identified in the article as an "undocumented immigrant," whose "dream was to attend Arizona State University, but the dream was slipping away." Another article, from January 26, 2007, reports that "Undocumented immigrants enrolled in adult-education classes in public schools could be kicked out soon because of Proposition 300." Though, consistent with the insight that media reinforce immigrant illegalization as one-dimensional representations (Villegas and Villegas 2019), the three areas that tended to be more positively presented (rights, education, and labor) reflect the persistent cultural distinction between deservingness and undeservingness (or "good" and "bad" immigrants) which has historically characterized immigration narratives in the United States (Dhaliwal and Forkert 2016; Newton 2005).

With the exception of certain themes, such as education, we do not find a clear or statistically significant relationship between the term used and the tone of deserving/undeserving. Interestingly, articles on education show a dissociation from tone and term. As Figure 5 illustrates, prior to 2007, articles on education that use the term "illegal" are primarily negative. This pattern shifts after 2007 when education-related articles using "illegal" or "undocumented" become positive, which is arguably evidence of the terminological impact of DREAMers' actions. The positive and negative tones attached to terms are dynamic, not static, and malleable to political influence. In other words, while

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[17.]For local news sources, coverage of crime is often economically motivated (Gilliam, Valentino, and Beckmann 2002). However, compounding local interest in crime is the tendency of media to disproportionately highlight nonwhites and immigrants as criminals (Brown et al. 2018; Farris and Mohamed 2018; Gilens 1999; Gilliam et al. 1996). Newspapers "are basically creations of the communities they serve" and coverage reflects the characteristics and interests of that community (Tichenor, Donohue, and Olien 1980:49). Thus, these forces work together to drive crime coverage.

[18.]While the trope of the hardworking immigrant has been co-opted by both sides of the immigration debate, as Caitlin Patler and Roberto G. Gonzales (2015) note in their study of how media covers anti-deportation cases, selective positive or empathetic coverage may reinforce public support for stricter immigration policies and provide justification for apathy toward those who do not strictly conform to these tropes.

[19.]Proposition 300 prohibits tuition parity; however, in 2019, the Arizona Board of Regents amended this policy and lowered tuition for undocumented students to 150 percent of the in-state rate (Figuera 2019).

"undocumented" did not overtake "illegal" in education-related stories, the *tone* associated with "illegal" shifted.

Thus far, we have only compared positively and negatively coded articles. However, at 45 percent of all articles that used the term "undocumented" and 43 percent of all articles that use "illegal," articles coded as neutral were the single largest group. We coded articles as neutral they it presented a policy or event in a "matter-of-fact" way, such as reporting that a certain event occurred, such as a border-crossing death from vehicle rollovers. Language used in these stories also shifts. For instance, a June 13, 2003, article reported that "Five undocumented immigrants were killed in a rollover accident west of Yuma on Interstate 8." By 2010, however, journalists and editors at *The Arizona Republic* framed this type of story in terms of "illegality." For example, a June 5, 2010, article reports that "Authorities in Cochise County say an illegal immigrant died and four others were seriously hurt when a pickup overturned outside Benson. All seven in the truck bed were illegal immigrants." Even if the content of these articles is neutral on its face, these articles still serve a powerful agenda-setting function that focuses and sustains the public's attention on immigration.

Moreover, because journalists and reporters rely heavily on official state sources (Cook 1998:91–97), sources such as politicians or local law enforcement agents play an outsized role in media. *The Arizona Republic* and the local Maricopa County sheriff's office, then led by controversial Sheriff Joseph Arpaio, exemplify this relationship. In an interview with Menjívar, Sheriff Arpaio, who earned (and enjoyed using) the nickname "America's toughest sheriff," lamented the negative coverage he received from local media. "The media will never print anything good we do" (Arpaio interview, December 9, 2011). However, he understood the mutually beneficial relationship[20] between his office and the media:

> I'm not going to shut off the media. One of the reasons I have my popularity is because of the media. I gotta have somebody to say what I'm saying . . . I could probably survive without the media just by the way I go out every day and talk to everybody, but the media is important too. It's a love hate relationship . . . I give them soundbites to make their story look great. But I think some of these people are smart enough to know every time they hit me it's helping me. It's helping them too to sell newspapers . . .

Here, Arpaio acknowledges not only *The Arizona Republic*'s commercial interest in covering him (Gilliam, Valentino, and Beckmann 2002), but also the nearly unrestricted platform it provides him to promote his views on immigration. "I think all this heat I'm taking actually helps me," Arpaio explained (Arpaio interview, December 9, 2011). By providing a greater public platform for the Sheriff's views, the media justified and reinforced his enforcement strategies to a public already primed to see enforcement as a solution to the "immigration problem." Thus, even "matter-of-fact" news stories may exert negative effects. The Sheriff's comments to the media, which were later broadcast several times a day throughout the area, in English and in Spanish language outlets, created a "reign of terror" in Latino neighborhoods, as then Phoenix mayor, Phil Gordon, observed (Finnegan 2009).

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[20]·The relationship between *The Arizona Republic* and the Maricopa Sheriff's office is remarkable in another way. At the time of the interview, Sheriff Arpaio's son-in-law was the head of *The Arizona Republic*'s editorial board.

Semantic Shifts over Time and Reader Response

The Arizona Republic inundated its readers with immigration content between 2000 and 2016, adopting a clear agenda-setting function that focused the public's attention to the issue. And despite changes over time in articles using the terms "illegal" or "undocumented" in *The Arizona Republic*, the tone of the paper's coverage was (with the few exceptions mentioned earlier) mostly negative. Interestingly, despite consistently portraying immigrants negatively, terminological shifts in the paper were met with some reader resistance.

Between 2003 and 2006, articles using the term "undocumented" to refer to immigrants dominated coverage. The switch in terminology also corresponds with an absolute increase in the number of immigration-related articles. However, starting in 2007 (when the Legal Arizona Workers Act[21] passed), articles featuring the word "illegal" began featuring more frequently—a trend that persists even as the overall number of immigration-related articles starts to decline after 2010.

These two inflection points—2003 and 2007—are noteworthy. As mentioned earlier, media are a contested space where various groups vie for influence over public discourse (Gamson et al. 1992:385) and these inflection points evince this struggle. For instance, in 2006, immigration reform marches and protests were held across the United States (López-Sanders and Brown 2020; Voss and Bloemraad 2011). Immigration coverage during such a "critical discourse moment" (see Gamson 1992) increased media coverage, but also reflected the language ("undocumented") that the marchers used.

During this period, many *Arizona Republic* readers noticed and resisted the paper's semantic shift from "illegal" to "undocumented." Indeed, one columnist for *The Arizona Republic*, David Howell, observed in his April 5, 2003 column that he "now knows how to find out how many folks read these columns. Just write something positive about undocumented immigrants." Media consumption is an active process in which "context, social location, and prior experience can lead to quite different decoding" of media messages (Gamson et al. 1992:375). Letters to the editor and editorial responses highlight this active aspect of media.[22]

Moreover, we contend that the content of many letters to the editor is further evidence that *The Arizona Republic* contributed to a political climate conducive for incrementally harsher and more restrictive immigration policies. For instance, readers noticed the paper's semantic shift around 2003, the year before Arizona voters approved one of the first omnibus anti-immigrant laws, the "Arizona Taxpayer and Citizen Protection Act." In a July 14, 2003, letter to the editor, Pamela writes,

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[21.]This law prohibits businesses from knowingly or willingly hire an undocumented immigrant (thus repeating the content of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1987) with penalties that include fees and the loss of a business license on a second offense. This law was heavily discussed in the media before and after it passed.

[22.]Letters to the editor remain a poorly understood form of political participation (Cooper, Knotts, and Haspel 2009). Letter writers tend to be older, whiter, and more male than the general population (Cooper et al. 2009). However, while there is not a large partisan split in who writes letters, there are gendered differences. Letters directed toward local issues tend to be written by women and also display a more rational and respectful tone (Perrin and Vaisey 2008:801). Those writing about national issues are often older and male and tend to display more anger (Perrin and Vaisey 2008:802).

> For the past several years your readers have been subjected to endless glowing articles about the plight of the "immigrant," who only wants to come to the United States to work the jobs that Americans don't want. Often your articles cannot even call these illegal immigrants "illegal." You refer to them as "undocumented immigrants" or just plain "immigrants."

Another reader, Mike, echoed this sentiment in a March 13, 2004, letter to the editor:

> *The Arizona Republic* does a disservice to the community and its readers by allowing its reporters to refer to illegal aliens as "undocumented immigrants." . . . Undocumented immigrant is a politically correct term that does not accurately describe who these people are. They are illegal aliens who have broken the law by entering our country illegally.

And on March 20, 2004, Gene wrote to the editor,

> I do not like the fact that you try to mellow the serious problem with illegal aliens by calling them undocumented immigrants. Then, in your March 16 article on a drop house you wrote, "Authorities may have stopped a suspected immigrant drop house before it become home to many others." So now you've gone from calling them undocumented immigrants to immigrants. What are you going to call them next, legal immigrants? Tell it like it is and call them what they are: illegal aliens.

Letters like this continued into 2005. Roger, in a January 7, 2005 letter, wrote,

> *The Republic* appears to have bowed to the dictates of Hispanic journalist organizations by using the term "undocumented immigrants" to describe illegal aliens. This was a rather Orwellian feat in and of itself, but dropping the word "illegal" altogether, takes this disturbing trend to a new level. If this were a single occurrence, one could chalk it up to sloppy editing. This is a pattern however, and *The Republic*'s use of this racially motivated terminology is an affront to the issues themselves, journalistic independence and *The Republic*'s credibility as a journalistic institution.

And in an April 6, 2006, letter, the year the anti-smuggling bill was passed, Mary pleaded,

> In addition, will *The Arizona Republic* stop referring to illegals as "undocumented immigrants"? They are illegal immigrants!

And on March 7, 2007, the year LAWA passed, R.D. wrote,

> Your publication continuously uses "undocumented workers" or "undocumented immigrants" or "migrants" when actually discussing illegal immigrants. The latter is specific, meaningful, accurate and appropriate, but too rarely used, apparently intentionally in a biased manner to avoid using "illegal immigrants."

While readers submit letters, editors must ultimately choose which letters to publish.[23] From an editor's perspective, letters serve two purposes; first, they offer opportunities for readers

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[23.]The gatekeeping and curating function of editors varies dramatically by size of newspaper. *The New York Times*, for instance, only publishes approximately six percent of the letters it receives (Wahl-Jorgensen 2002:70). Newspapers in smaller towns, however, will easily publish over 90 percent of received letters (Hart 2001).

to respond to stories in the paper and second, they provide a public forum for discussion of current events (Perrin and Vaisey 2008:786). Editors do not necessarily publish letters that best foster democratic debate on an issue. Rather, editors select letters they believe to be relevant as well as entertaining (Wahl-Jorgensen 2002). Moreover, editors have a strong preference for emotionally charged letters from individuals rather than activist groups (Wahl-Jorgensen 2001). Thus, editors tend to favor angrier letters (which also tend to come from older and whiter writers); they also strive to maintain a "spirit of debate." This means that editors are not inclined to reject hostile letters unless they are deemed irrelevant or if they are openly discriminatory (Wahl-Jorgensen 2004).

These excerpts from letters to the *The Arizona Republic* editor are suggestive of the bias toward more hostile and angrier letters. They are also indicative of larger trends in our data. When compared with regular newspaper articles, letters to the editor routinely featured the term "illegal" in reference to immigrants. Indeed, for regular news articles, there was a near equal divide in the use of "illegal" or "undocumented" 527 (48 percent) "illegal," and 566 (52 percent) "undocumented." However, of the 327 letters to the editor in our sample, 282 (86 percent) used the term "illegal" while only 45 (14 percent) contained the word "undocumented." The difference between letters to the editor and regular news articles here is statistically significant, $\chi^2(1, N = 1,420) = 148.44$, $p = .000$.[24]

In some ways, the response from readers to *The Arizona Republic*'s use of "undocumented" is puzzling considering that reports and editorials that used the term were still, on the whole, negative. However, the letters underscore two key points: the ownership that readers take of their newspaper, and the fact that immigration-related news coverage in U.S. media is geared toward non-immigrants (Estrada et al. 2016). Readers' insistence that *The Arizona Republic* use the "more accurate" adjective "illegal" suggests that, in their eyes, "undocumented" has become politicized while "illegal" has become a depoliticized term. Furthermore, research suggests that media framing of immigrants using the term "illegal" does not lead individuals to perceive immigrants in relation to their legal permission to be in the country (Blinder and Jeannet 2018:1455). Rather, readers shape a publication's content, which in turn feeds certain political positions and debates.[25] Readers' insistence that *their* media source (*The Arizona Republic*) use a word that they view as more accurate and less political (and thus more "objective") reveals the complex struggle over meaning and language in media (Gamson et al. 1992).

Discussion and Conclusion

In this article, we analyzed immigration coverage in *The Arizona Republic* between 2000 and 2016, a period that corresponds with an excess of restrictionist immigration policies in Arizona, culminating in the signing of SB 1070. We analyzed the content of immigration news stories and the language used to discuss immigrants and immigration to understand the relationship between terminology and tone in immigration coverage. We have argued, in line with the media's agenda-setting function, that *The Arizona Republic* inundated

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[24.]Editorials were also more likely to use the term "illegal." Of the 196 Editorials in our sample, 108 made reference to "illegal" immigrants while 88 referenced "undocumented" immigrants.
[25.]We are indebted to a reviewer for this insight and suggested wording.

Arizonans with negative stories about immigrants. However, the negative aspect of the media's coverage was found more in the content of the stories than in the wording used to describe immigrants. Thus, we have shown that negative framing of immigrants transcends the adjectives used to describe undocumented immigrants. Whether the articles used "undocumented" or "illegal," the content of the coverage largely remained negative.

We advance scholarship on immigration and media coverage in substantive ways. First, we expand the scholarship situating media in relation to the policy process in immigration (see Patler and Gonzales 2015:1455). The agendas of media organizations in large part drive the agenda of local and state policymakers (Tan and Weaver 2009). This puts media organizations in a position of relative power and influence. (While recognizing that media agendas are also shaped by forces outside media, such as local market competition.) In the case of Arizona, this suggests that *The Arizona Republic*'s focus on immigration played a pivotal role in reinforcing a climate conducive for the support and passage of laws like SB 1070. And second, we draw attention to the need for a more expansive understanding of anti-immigrant framing in the media. While media organizations have signaled a willingness to stop using the term "illegal" in their immigration coverage, our analysis demonstrates that the negative framing of immigrants is deeply embedded in the *content* of immigration stories. In line with "dog-whistle politics" (López 2015) and "colorblind racism" (Bonilla-Silva 2018), anti-immigrant bias persists in media regardless of semantics. In other words, media's use of "undocumented" is suggestive of a "benevolent rhetoric" that is still exclusionary (Menjívar and Kil 2002). Our findings also affirm results of other studies that argue that seemingly "positive" framing of immigration still serves to create symbolic boundaries in their coverage (Estrada et al. 2016; Flores Morales and Farago 2021; Viladrich 2019). The negative content of immigration coverage gives disproportionate weight to the role of agenda-setting. If, for example, the media ran numerous stories on immigration and crime, this still focuses public attention on immigrant criminality regardless of whether the article describes immigrants as "illegal" or "undocumented." In short, the media's role in the production of "social illegality" (Flores and Schachter 2018), which facilitates a context conducive to incrementally harsher immigration policies by constructing immigrants (especially Latino/as) negatively, transcends nomenclature. While our focus on Arizona and *The Arizona Republic* means we cannot compare across states or across media within Arizona, future research should expand these findings comparatively by exploring how different media in different states describe undocumented immigrants.[26]

This research raises at least two relevant issues for contemporary immigration debates. First is the power of agenda-setting, particularly relevant given former President Trump's use of Twitter to simultaneously bypass many traditional news outlets and set his agenda. According to a *New York Times* analysis, President Trump tweeted over 11,000 times between his inauguration in January 2017 and October 2019.[27] Moreover, 570 of his tweets attacked immigrants and an additional 851 attacked minority groups (Shear et al. 2019). The effectiveness of Mr. Trump's tweets might be in their frequency. As Flores (2018) shows,

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[26.]For instance, research has found that those who get their news from TV sources (especially Fox News viewers) are more likely to support restrictive immigration policies (Gil de Zúñiga, Correa, and Valenzuela 2012).
[27.]The *New York Times* has compiled a complete list of Mr. Trump's Twitter insults (Quealy 2021).

elites' messages have an immediate effect but dissipate over time. However, because the former President tweeted multiple times a day, the effect remained constant. Moreover, the news media, which often reported on every tweet, amplified his rhetoric even further (as the case of Arizona's Sheriff Arpaio shows) thus helping to lay the groundwork for draconian anti-immigrant laws (Mohamed and Farris 2020).

Second, while large media outlets, such as the *Associated Press* and *The New York Times*, have recently made editorial decisions to not use the phrase "illegal immigrant" in their news coverage, this is still not enough (see Djourelova 2020). Based on our analysis, we have found that this change may be superficial, largely symbolic. While the terminology might shift, the *content* of the stories remains remarkably similar. Our findings do not change the well-established role that the term "illegal" has in dehumanizing immigrants (Chavez 2001). And, while the non-immigrant population may not view "illegal" in an overtly political way (Blinder and Jeannet 2018:1455), this type of language has detrimental effects on immigrant populations (Abrego 2014:141; Menjívar 2016; Menjívar and Kanstroom 2014). Thus, by seemingly accommodating their readers' demands, the media furthered the production of social illegality and helped create an increasingly hostile climate for immigrants in Arizona.

Funding

Biographies

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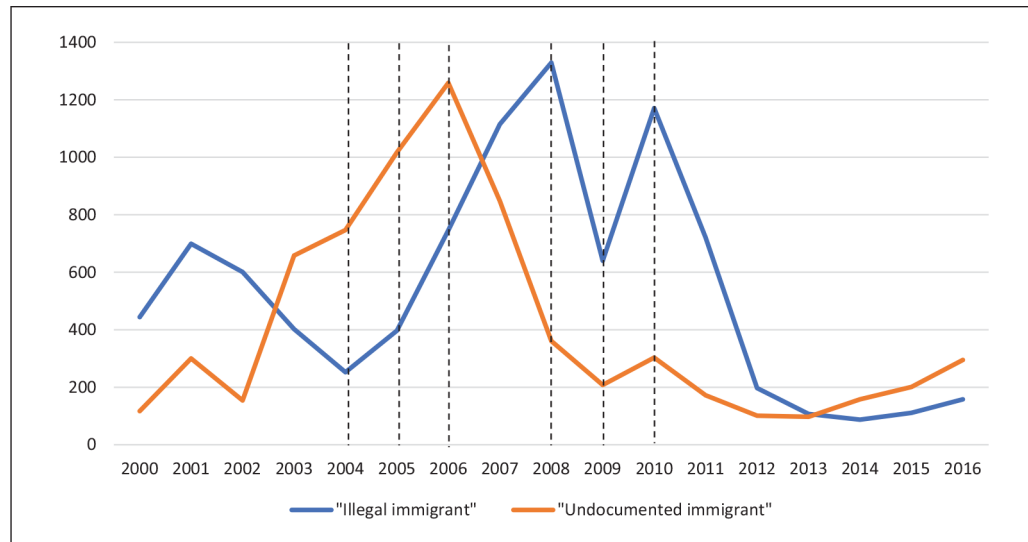
Figure 1.

Instances of "illegal" and "undocumented" in *The Arizona Republic*, 2000–2016.

Note. Dashed lines represent significant anti-immigrant laws passed in Arizona during the study's timeframe. 2004 Proposition 200 (Arizona Taxpayer and Citizen Protection Act); 2005 Anti-Smuggling Law; 2006 Proposition 100, Proposition 102, Proposition 103, Proposition 300; 2008 Legal Arizona Workers Act (LAWA); 2009 HB 2008; 2010 SB 1070.
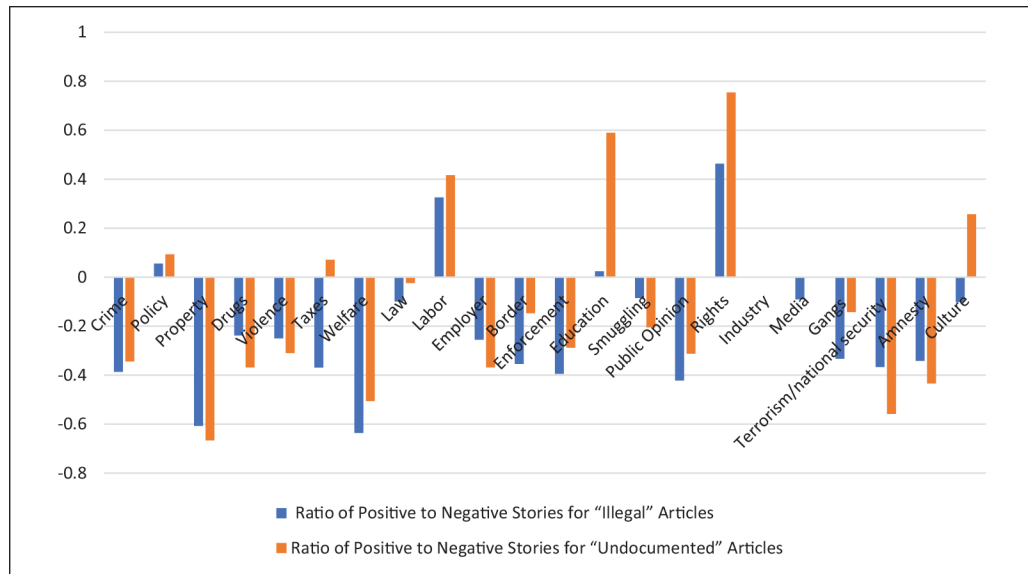
Figure 2.

Ratio of positive to negative stories for "illegal" and "undocumented" articles.

Note. Chi-square tests of independence between Positive and Negative articles only showed a statistically significant association at the .05 in the following themes: Enforcement, Border, Smuggling, Rights, Taxes, Education, and Culture. Compared with the chi-square results presented in Table 1, the only theme that was not statistically significant when dropping neutrally coded articles was Law.
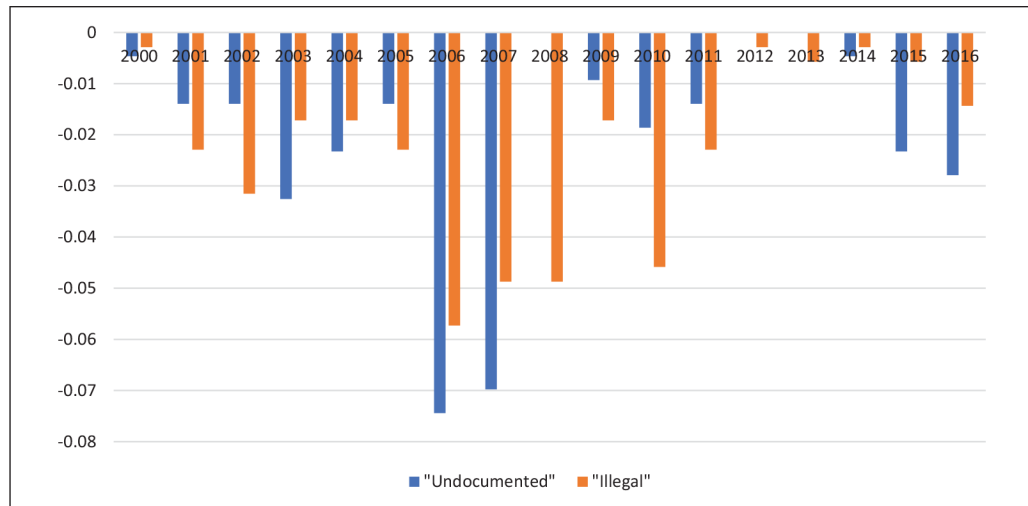
Figure 3.
Ratio of positive to negative crime-related stories for "undocumented" and "illegal," 2000–2016.
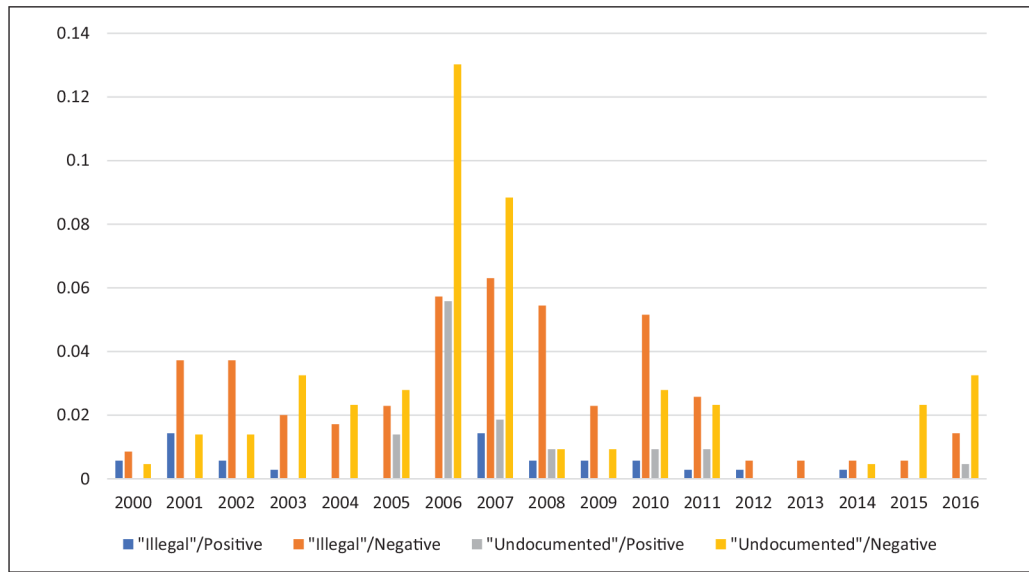
Figure 4.
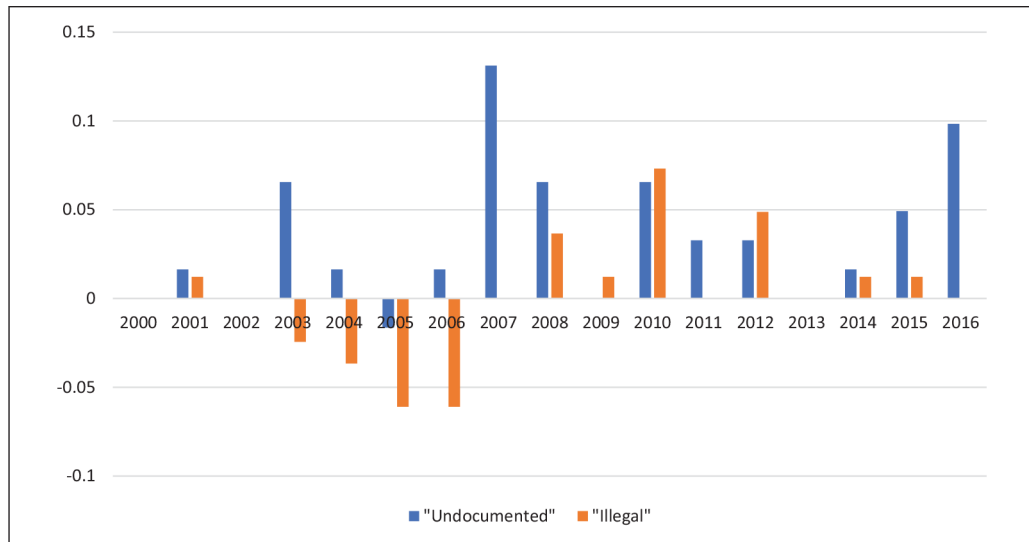Frequency of positive and negative crime-related articles by term, 2000–2016.

Figure 5.
Ratio of positive to negative education-related articles for "undocumented" and "illegal,"
2000–2016.

Table 1.

"Illegal" and "Undocumented" Articles Coded by Theme.

| Theme | Mentions of "illegal" by theme | | | | Mentions of "undocumented" by theme | | | | χ² |
	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Total	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Total	
Enforcement	240 (47%)	227 (45%)	40 (8%)	507	161 (42%)	170 (45%)	51 (13%)	382	7.65 *
Law	152 (36%)	161 (38%)	110 (26%)	423	102 (27%)	181 (48%)	93 (25%)	376	9.71 *
Border	187 (47%)	161 (41%)	47 (12%)	395	91 (32%)	145 (51%)	49 (17%)	285	16.67 **
Crime	159 (46%)	166 (48%)	24 (7%)	349	100 (47%)	89 (41%)	26 (12%)	215	5.23
Labor	48 (21%)	55 (25%)	121 (54%)	224	27 (14%)	62 (31%)	110 (55%)	199	5.37
Policy	42 (21%)	103 (52%)	53 (27%)	198	30 (19%)	85 (53%)	45 (28%)	160	0.35
Smuggling	24 (13%)	156 (83%)	8 (4%)	188	36 (22%)	122 (76%)	3 (2%)	161	6.78 *
Employer	88 (48%)	55 (30%)	41 (22%)	184	56 (42%)	44 (39%)	14 (12%)	114	5.45
Rights	26 (16%)	37 (22%)	103 (62%)	166	2 (2%)	22 (21%)	82 (77%)	106	14.23 **
Violence	42 (33%)	76 (59%)	10 (8%)	128	26 (37%)	41 (58%)	4 (6%)	71	0.770
Welfare	79 (72%)	22 (20%)	9 (8%)	110	51 (60%)	26 (31%)	8 (9%)	85	3.27
Drugs	25 (24%)	80 (76%)	0 (0%)	105	21 (37%)	36 (63%)	0 (0%)	57	3.09
Taxes	47 (56%)	21 (25%)	16 (19%)	84	12 (29%)	15 (36%)	15 (36%)	42	8.77 *
Education	31 (38%)	18 (22%)	33 (40%)	82	7 (11%)	11 (18%)	43 (70%)	61	15.41 **
Terrorism	32 (41%)	44 (56%)	3 (4%)	79	26 (60%)	15 (35%)	2 (5%)	43	0.087
Amnesty	39 (49%)	28 (35%)	12 (15%)	79	26 (49%)	24 (45%)	3 (6%)	53	0.191
Culture	18 (37%)	18 (37%)	13 (27%)	49	4 (11%)	18 (51%)	13 (37%)	35	6.76 *
Public Opinion	24 (53%)	16 (36%)	5 (11%)	45	8 (50%)	5 (31%)	3 (19%)	16	0.61
Property	17 (61%)	11 (39%)	0 (0%)	28	10 (67%)	5 (33%)	0 (0%)	15	0.15
Gangs	6 (33%)	12 (67%)	0 (0%)	18	5 (36%)	6 (43%)	3 (21%)	14	4.66
Media	2 (18%)	8 (73%)	1 (9%)	11	0 (0%)	3 (100%)	0 (0%)	3	1.04
Total	1,328 (38%)	1,475 (43%)	649 (19%)	3,452	801 (32%)	1,125 (45%)	567 (23%)	2,493	

*
$p < .05$.

**
$p < .001$.