

Tuning In, Not Turning Out: Evaluating the Impact of Ethnic Television on Political Participation

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Abstract: *Despite the importance of ethnic television within immigrant communities, its effects on political participation are unclear. On the one hand, ethnic media can mobilize and inform voters. On the other hand, it can serve as a source of diversion and reduce the desire to participate. To evaluate these competing possibilities, we implement a geographic regression discontinuity (GRD) approach involving Federal Communication Commission reception boundaries for Spanish-language television stations in two states. Additionally, we replicate and unpack our GRD analyses using three nationally representative samples of Latinos. Across multiple studies, we find that access to Spanish-language television is associated with decreases in turnout, ethnic civic participation, and political knowledge. We conclude by discussing the implications of these findings on the ethnic politics, political communication, and social capital literatures.*

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As the tenure and size of an immigrant group increases within a receiving nation, the group and its members accrue resources that facilitate political participation (Bowler, Nicholson, and Segura 2006; Hero 2010; Rocha and Matsubayashi 2013). In the minority empowerment and participation literature, scholars have examined the effects of a variety of individual resources (e.g., education, wealth, language skills, and naturalization) and collective resources (e.g., majority–minority neighborhoods, ethnic civic organizations, and coethnic representatives) on immigrant incorporation, empowerment, and participation (Barreto 2005; Chávez 2002; Cho 1999; De la Garza 2004). However, one lesser explored yet potentially consequential group resource is ethnic media.

Ethnic media (e.g., ethnic television, radio, and internet content) can provide immigrant groups with an opportunity to stay abreast of events affecting their home country while also improving their understanding of their

receiving country’s politics (Viswanath and Arora 2000). For example, in areas of the Middle East, SAT-7 reports on news affecting Arab Christians, and in Cologne, Germany, Turkish exiles produce shows that are critical of President Recep Erdoğan’s regime on the television station Arti TV. The success of ethnic media has been striking in the United States: As Latino populations have grown, Spanish-language television (SLTV) has become a central feature of the Latino experience. In 2016, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) reported that 133 SLTV stations served 39 media markets, and SLTV stations covered 79% of Latino households who own a television.¹ The growth of these stations has coincided with the increasing importance of Latinos as a voting bloc, and political organizations have responded by producing group-targeted campaign messages (Barreto 2005; Barreto, Merolla, and Soto 2011; Panagopoulos and Green 2010).

Despite the growing prevalence of ethnic media (e.g., ethnic television), and evidence that short-term exposure

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¹See <https://www.fcc.gov/document/hispanic-television-study>.

to group-targeted foreign-language campaign advertisements can foster electoral engagement (Barreto, Merolla, and Soto 2011), our knowledge of how long-term access to ethnic media affects political behavior remains limited. Indeed, existing research on the political effects of ethnic media is characterized by competing theoretical expectations and inconsistent empirical results. From a theoretical perspective, the media effects literature provides a foundation for the dual expectations that routine exposure to ethnic media may empower, inform, and mobilize (Baum 2002; Bennett, Breunig, and Givens 2008; Newton 1999) or isolate, distract, and demobilize (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Prior 2005; Putnam 1995). Turning to empirical evidence, some studies find that consumption of ethnic media can increase engagement with politics (Garcia-Rios and Barreto 2016; Oberholzer-Gee and Waldfogel 2009), whereas other work uncovers either negative (Len-Ríos 2017; Nicholson, Pantoja, and Segura 2006; Wong et al. 2011) or null effects (Haynes and Ramakrishnan 2016). Accompanying competing theory and findings is the fact that extant studies rely on model-based inferences using observational data, which complicates our ability to estimate causal effects. In the end, competing theoretical expectations, inconsistent findings, and a lack of design-based approaches result in considerable uncertainty about the political effects of ethnic media. This may account for why prominent scholars in the field, such as Pantoja and Segura (2003, 447), report that their “priors are not strong” when theorizing about the impact of this important group resource.

In this article, we address whether ethnic media is a mobilizing force within immigrant communities using a design-based approach. We evaluate the relationship between ethnic media and political participation using the case of Latinos in the United States and employ a geographic regression discontinuity (GRD) approach involving FCC reception boundaries that demarcate points in space where stations are no longer protected from interference. Focusing on the introduction of SLTV stations in North Carolina and Florida, we examine turnout among Latinos who fall just inside and just outside the reception boundary for these stations. In both cases, we find that access to SLTV depresses turnout in subsequent elections. To illustrate the robustness and generalizability of these results, we replicate our GRD findings with traditional model-based analysis of nationally representative surveys of Latinos. Following this, we conduct auxiliary analyses using these survey data to adjudicate between possible mechanisms; these analyses provide tentative evidence that the negative effects we observe for ethnic media on electoral participation might be due to

a “cocooning” process (Putnam 2000), whereby watching television at home leads to a withdrawal from social life. We conclude the article by proposing directions for future research, such as considering the role of entertainment content on these stations and assessing whether these effects extend to other ethnic groups and media sources.

Ethnic Media: Group Empowerment versus Diversion

What is the effect of ethnic media on minority political engagement? We identify two bodies of work that provide theoretical guidance for answering this question. Importantly, these literatures offer competing expectations concerning the effects of ethnic media, which parallel the “malaise” and “mobilization” perspectives found in the overarching literature on media consumption and political involvement (Aarts and Semetko 2003; Newton 1999).

On one hand, research on minority empowerment (Bobo and Gilliam 1990; Gilliam 1996) and group resources (Wong, Lien, and Conway 2005) suggests that, similar to the acquisition of representation in the business community and government (Norrandner and Wilcox 1998), representation in mass media constitutes a group resource fostering political engagement. One assertion in this literature is that the introduction of ethnic media conveys the rising importance and power of an ethnic minority group. This symbolic empowerment may in turn reduce political alienation and enhance political efficacy, thus stimulating political incorporation and engagement (Johnson 2000; Riggins 1992). In addition to symbolic benefits, this literature points to a potential chain of instrumental benefits, such as transmitting group-relevant political information (Fowler, Hale, and Olsen 2009), rousing group consciousness (Kerevel 2011), reducing linguistic barriers (Uhlener, Cain, and Kiewiet 1989), and mobilizing group members (Barreto et al. 2009; Félix, González, and Ramírez 2008; Len-Ríos 2017; Oberholzer-Gee and Waldfogel 2009). In sum, the literature on empowerment yields a framework that views the introduction of ethnic media as indicative of increasing political incorporation and, as such, confers downstream benefits such as political engagement. This perspective is analogous to the mobilization framework advanced in the broader media effects literature, which holds that media consumption can contribute to political learning, interest, and involvement (Aarts and Semetko 2003; Newton 1999).

Countering this framework is a distinct school of thought that contends that increasing media access and choice can have a deleterious impact on social capital and political engagement. According to this perspective, routine consumption of mass media, especially television, may result in political cynicism or “videomalaise” (Newton 1999) and displace time previously spent on social activities (Putnam 1995). The expectation derived from this perspective is that increasing access to ethnic media will erode political engagement among immigrant minorities, causing them to substitute social interactions that facilitate political involvement (e.g., political discussion) with the passive activity of watching television (Putnam 2000). This perspective appears in scholarship specifically focusing on ethnic media, which argues that ethnic media outlets, at least in the United States, are business enterprises whose primary functions are commercial, not political (Johnson 2000). According to this view, the goal of ethnic media, such as SLTV, is to “use identity to sell goods to Latino audiences through advertising rather than to elicit political participation among Latino groups” (Len-Ríos 2017, 3). Importantly, this demobilization perspective is complemented by research on ethnic enclaves, which suggests that the isolation of ethnic minorities into enclaves, while providing important resources, can stymie the process of assimilation, political incorporation, and participation (Citrin et al. 2007; Uslaner and Conley 2003; Wong et al. 2011). One distinct possibility suggested by this work is that the introduction of ethnic media may create a “virtual enclave” where viewers spend increasing amounts of time alone with coethnic characters, milieus, and shared language and customs, which represents a zero-sum loss of time interacting with mainstream American society.

The demobilization potential of ethnic media is high in the United States, especially in the case of the most prevalent minority group—Latinos. Prominent Spanish-language stations devote more airtime to entertainment than politics, with the bulk of programming comprising sports matches, telenovelas, and comedy shows (Rodriguez 1997). Even during elections, these stations focus less on domestic politics than English-language stations (Fowler, Hale, and Olsen 2009). These differences in content match Latino viewers’ preferences for entertainment. According to a 2010 Pew Biennial Media Consumption survey, when asked how much time they spent watching non-news television programming, roughly 41% of Latinos, compared to 18% of whites and 28% of blacks, reported watching four or more hours. Moreover, additional surveys conducted by Pew suggest that, compared to whites and blacks, Latinos are less likely to watch news, and when they do watch news programming, they

are more likely to watch it primarily for entertainment purposes.^{2,3} These facts create a foundation for the applicability of the demobilization hypothesis to the case of ethnic media and Latinos in the United States.⁴

Reviewing the Evidence on Ethnic Media

Having explicated competing theoretical perspectives on the impact of ethnic media on political engagement, we now turn to a review of the empirical evidence. While existing research explores the effects of short-term Spanish-language campaign ads, we restrict our focus to studies that directly speak to our research question.⁵ To this effect, we sought to identify any published research analyzing the effect of long-term access to ethnic media on political engagement. We include in our review work analyzing indicators of psychological involvement with politics (e.g., efficacy) as well as behavioral involvement (e.g., voting).

In total, we were able to identify 11 studies that examined the effects of ethnic media on political attitudes and behavior (see Table L1 in supporting information [SI] Appendix L). Out of 24 statistical tests spread across these 11 studies, 41% find a positive relationship between

²See <http://www.people-press.org/2010/09/12/june-2010-media-consumption-survey/>.

³See <http://www.journalism.org/2016/07/07/the-modern-news-consumer/>.

⁴Studies show that “soft news” can educate people who would otherwise ignore political news (Baum and Jamison 2006). However, while English-language programs often discuss domestic politics, SLTV tends to focus on international themes (Subervi-Velez 2009). For instance, popular telenovelas such as *La Reina Del Sur* are not only filmed outside of the United States, but also dwell on issues facing Latin America.

⁵Numerous studies evaluate the effect of Spanish-language campaign advertisements and get out the vote (GOTV) messages on turnout and vote choice. This literature employs experimental (Abrajano and Panagopoulos 2011; Bedolla and Michelson 2012; Panagopoulos and Green 2010; Valenzuela and Michelson 2016) and observational methods (Barreto, Merolla, and Soto 2011) and largely finds that exposure to ads in Spanish increases turnout. This research, however, addresses a treatment that is substantially different from that of interest to our research question; indeed, this work concerns the effect of short-term media messages on turnout, with potential mechanisms being “ethnic identity activation,” perceptions of electoral pivotality (Subervi-Velez 2009), and overcoming linguistic barriers to participation (Uhlener, Cain, and Kiewiet 1989). In contrast, our interest is in the effect of the introduction of Spanish-language television, which represents an ongoing long-term treatment present in the day-to-day lives of Latinos. Importantly, the literature addressing this type of ethnic media effect is more scant.

ethnic media and political engagement.⁶ For example, Oberholzer-Gee and Waldfogel (2009) find that increasing access to ethnic news can increase turnout among Latinos. Moreover, Garcia-Rios and Barreto (2016) find that political news consumption is associated with increases in self-reported electoral and non-electoral participation among Latinos who speak Spanish at home. These findings are countered by studies that have uncovered negative effects, comprising about 29% of findings in the literature. Notable examples include Nicholson, Pantoja, and Segura (2006), who find that Spanish-language media consumption is associated with lower levels of political knowledge among Latinos; Len-Ríos (2017), who observes that Spanish-language television news consumption is also associated with decreases in Latino participation; and Wong et al. (2011), who find that ethnic television consumption among Asian Americans is associated with decreases in voting. The remaining 30% of statistical tests reveal either mixed or null findings, as in the case of Haynes and Ramakrishnan (2016), who find that ethnic media consumers are as knowledgeable about politics as those who do not consume ethnic media at all. In sum, the published work on the topic reveals a mixed picture with respect to the political effects of ethnic media.

These mixed results could be due to factors associated with the observational nature of the research designs utilized in this work. For example, existing research on ethnic media has either relied on self-reports of media consumption or objective measures of access. However, self-reports of media consumption can be contaminated by recall errors and social desirability bias. For instance, Guess (2014) finds that people often overstate how much attention they pay to political news, and Wonneberger and Irazoqui (2017) find that viewers are often unable to recall the frequency and duration of their viewing habits. Some studies overcome these issues by relying on objective measures of ethnic media access. Instead of directly comparing viewers to nonviewers using self-reported data, this approach contrasts individuals who reside in areas with access to media to those without access. This measure is employed in recent studies of media effects. Gentzkow (2006) estimates the effects of television on voter turnout by exploiting the timing of television's introduction within designated market areas (DMA) across the United States.

⁶Félix, González, and Ramírez (2008) present descriptive statistics on how participants in a 2006 Los Angeles citizenship workshop became aware of the event, and find that approximately 56% found out through Univision. Moreover, within this sample, they find that 88% of respondents learned about the 2006 immigration rallies through the media. Since the authors only present descriptive statistics, we do not count this toward the total number of statistical tests.

Oberholzer-Gee and Waldfogel (2009) conduct a similar analysis using the rollout of Spanish-language news stations across the United States and find mixed effects on political participation in local and national elections. Though these approaches overcome some of the limitations of media consumption measures, extant analyses assume that differences between high and low media access areas are attributable to access, and not any unobserved factors affecting access and participation.

In political science, scholars have increasingly employed regression discontinuity designs (RD) as a means of estimating causal effects in observational settings (Lee 2008). Regression discontinuity designs exploit known arbitrary thresholds determining treatment assignment, and compare units just above and just below these thresholds. The logic underlying RD designs is that units just above and below a threshold should only differ in their treatment status. Keele and Titiunik (2016) extend the RD design to geographic boundaries using a geographic regression discontinuity (GRD) design that treats spatial boundaries as thresholds for treatment assignment. If individuals do not sort precisely around the boundary, observed and unobserved confounding should decrease as one gets closer to the boundary, and valid causal effects can be recovered within some distance of the boundary. We employ an approach motivated by the GRD methodology to estimate the effect of SLTV on political participation. Specifically, we exploit the introduction of SLTV stations in two states, North Carolina and Florida, and compare turnout rates among Latinos residing just inside and outside of station reception boundaries.

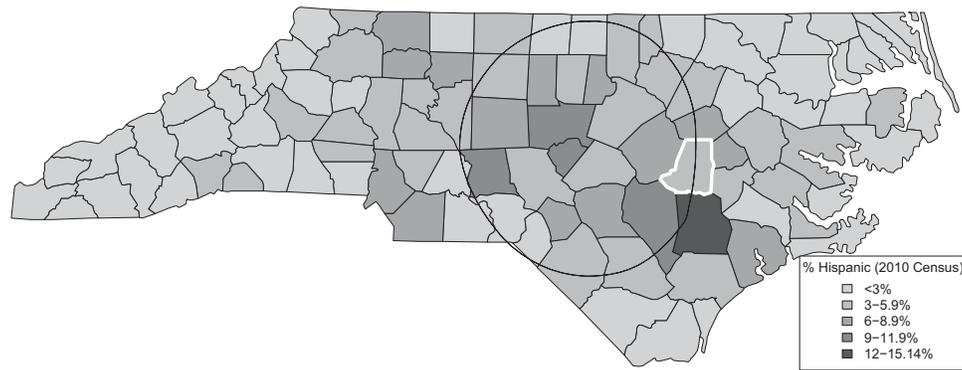
Study 1: North Carolina and WUVC

From 2000 to 2016, North Carolina's Latino population grew from 4.7% to 9.2%. In 2003, Spanish-language media conglomerate Univision purchased WKFT, a local news station serving the North Carolina Research Triangle, and began airing programming with the call sign WUVC. Shortly after its first news broadcast, WUVC reported "tremendous ratings" and strong performance within key demographic segments (Montaño 2004).⁷

We examine the case of WUVC for several reasons. First, approximately 9.2% of North Carolina (NC) residents identify as Hispanic, Latino/a, or Latin American. Second, it is one of several states that include racial and ethnic demographics in the voter file. Though recent work

⁷Though we do not have access to the original station lineup, as of September 23, 2018, the lineup involves a mixture of sports, telenovelas, and news programs.

FIGURE 1 Reception Boundary for WUVC and County-Level Hispanic Composition



Note: Wayne County is highlighted in white. The black circle that is bisecting Wayne County represents the FCC reception boundary for WUVC.

has improved the estimation of ethnicity in voter files using surname analysis (Imai and Khanna 2016), we reduce the possibility of measurement error by relying on voters' own reports of ethnic identification.⁸ Third, most states with Latino populations comparable to NC already have Spanish-language stations, and thus, NC is unique in that it possesses a relatively large Latino population and received its first Spanish-language station in 2003. Since WUVC is a relatively new station, we can include pretreatment voting behavior as a covariate. As is the case with RD designs in general, sample size and power decline as proximity to the threshold increases. Thus, controlling for pretreatment voting behavior improves the efficiency of our estimates. In addition, focusing on a state where Spanish-language television was recently introduced allows us to conduct placebo tests using pretreatment outcomes (Sekhon and Titiunik 2012).

Figure 1 displays the Federal Communications Commission's reception boundary for WUVC. According to the FCC, these boundaries "display the service contour for the FM or TV station that is generally protected from interference caused by other stations under the present FCC rules." Communication with broadcast engineers who specialize in interference and the construction of reception contours confirms the sharpness of the FCC boundaries with respect to signal interference: Viewers residing just inside the reception contour have guaranteed interference-free reception, whereas those residing just

outside the contour experience varying degrees of signal interference.⁹ In NC, we focus on Wayne County because the station boundary bisects Goldsboro, the county seat of Wayne County, and does not overlap with other important social or political boundaries—a key GRD assumption.¹⁰

Figure 2 displays the locations of Latino voters in Wayne County. In our analyses, we focus on voters in NC's first congressional district (CD-1) to minimize spatial heterogeneity. Whereas most voters in CD-1 are located in the center of Wayne County, the third district (CD-3) encompasses neighborhoods in the county's upper and lower regions. Moreover, fewer CD-3 voters reside near the boundary, complicating our ability to find comparable voters on both sides of the reception area. In SI Appendix A, we show that covariate balance improves with increasing proximity to the boundary in CD-1, as measured by χ^2 values including pretreatment covariates such as age, gender, partisanship, prior vote, population density, percent Hispanic, and satellite television subscriptions, thus satisfying an important GRD assumption.¹¹ In contrast, balance worsens with proximity to the boundary in CD-3. The fact that balance on pretreatment

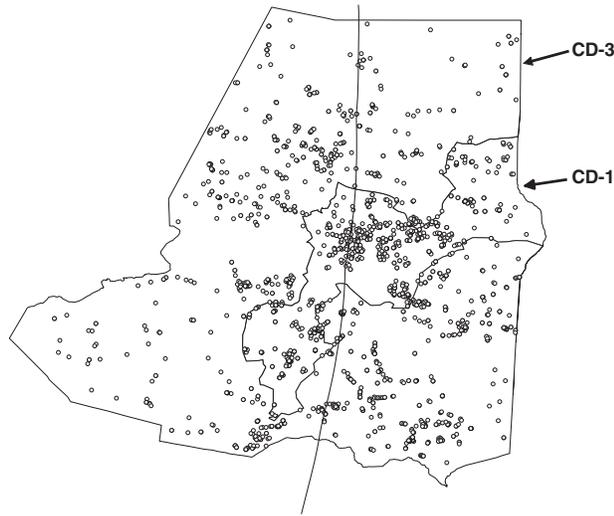
⁹Personal correspondence (see SI Appendix H).

¹⁰Though Duplin County has the largest percentage of Latino residents in North Carolina, many of its Latino residents live outside of the coverage area.

¹¹The inclusion of whether voters have satellite television subscriptions is important since it allays the concern that voters outside of the reception boundary are still obtaining Spanish-language television through other means. Even if we did not have these data, however, the possibility that voters outside of the reception area purchase Spanish-language television subscriptions would actually bias our treatment effect estimate toward zero since their outcomes would resemble those in the treatment group.

⁸In SI Appendix I, we examine whether station access alters Latino self-identification. We do not find any evidence that the station boundaries are correlated with a higher probability of self-identifying as Latino. Moreover, analyses conducted using the Latino National Survey reveal that greater access to Spanish-language television is not associated with ethnic identity strength.

FIGURE 2 Residential Locations of Latino Voters in Wayne County, North Carolina



Note: Voters to the left of the line are inside the reception contour for WUVC bisecting Wayne County.

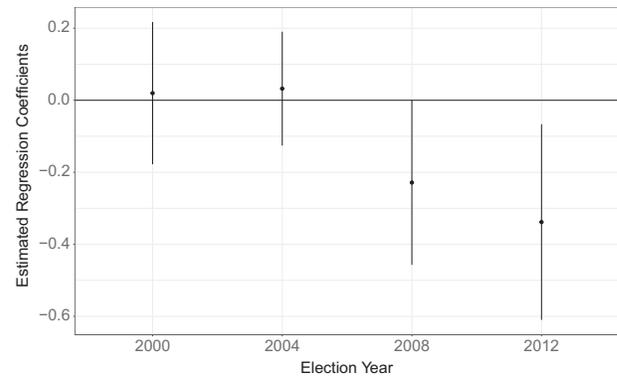
covariates improves in CD-1 as a function of proximity to the boundary gives us confidence that key GRD assumptions are being met in CD-1, and thus, we proceed to our analyses.

Data were collected from the voter file vendor L2 (formerly known as Labels & Lists). We specifically purchased data covering the full set of Latino voters in Wayne County, and no other voters in North Carolina.¹² Our analyses involve comparing Latino voters in the first congressional district who are within 500 meters of the reception boundary.¹³ In addition, we focus on the 2000–2012 general elections. The 2000 election serves as a placebo test since it took place 3 years prior to the introduction of WUVC. We conduct a simple t-test comparing treated and control units within 500 meters of the station boundary in 2000. If key assumptions are being

¹²In addition to providing information about voting history and key demographics, the L2 data include measures of various media subscriptions.

¹³We select this threshold because it is the point at which balance stabilizes, and selecting an even smaller buffer around the boundary leads to a substantial decrease in the effective sample size. In SI Appendix B, we estimate causal effects using different buffer sizes. The estimates presented here are consistent across buffer sizes. In SI Appendix C, we also evaluate whether our estimates are susceptible to differential registration bias due to our use of a voter file that was collected after the treatment was administered. We find that implausibly high differences in registrations between treatment and control units would be necessary for our findings to be affected by differential registration bias.

FIGURE 3 Effect of Access to Spanish-Language Television on General Election Turnout from 2000 to 2012 in North Carolina



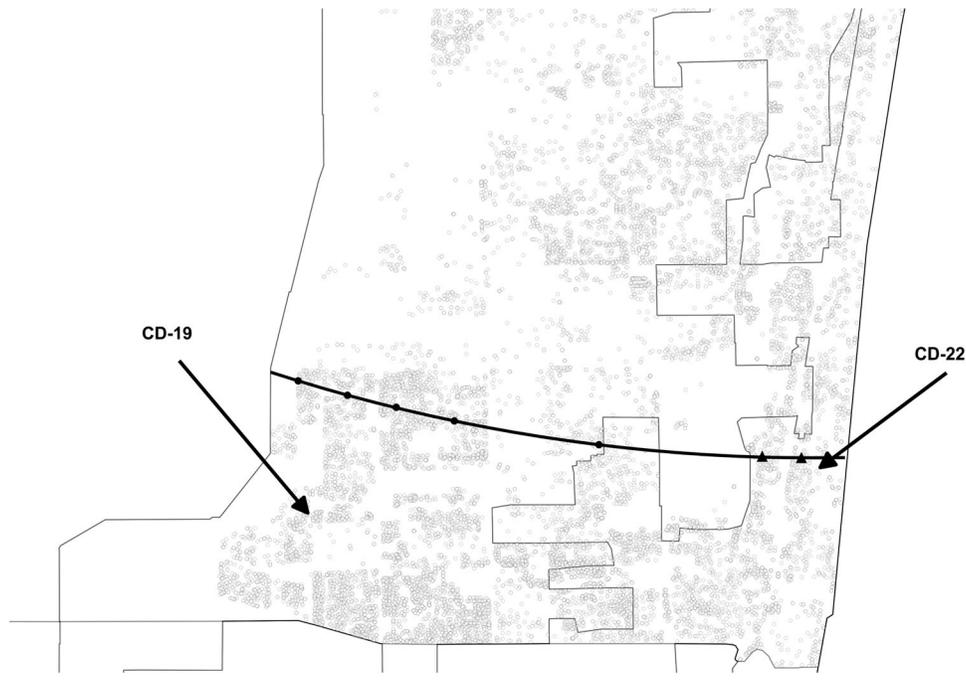
Note: Points represent adjusted difference-in-means estimates; vertical lines represent 95% confidence intervals. In the 2004–2012 models, turnout in 2000 is included as a control to maximize efficiency, given the small number of voters near the boundary ($N = 42$).

met, there should be no differences between treated and control voters with respect to prior turnout. After describing the placebo test results, we evaluate the effects of access to SLTV on turnout by estimating a linear model regressing turnout in the 2004–2012 elections on a treatment indicator and pretreatment turnout (e.g., 2000).¹⁴

Results

In Figure 3, we display point estimates and corresponding 95% confidence intervals for each election. The effect of access to SLTV is approximately zero in 2000 and 2004. However, in 2008 and 2012, the effect of access to SLTV leads to substantial decreases in turnout among those who reside just inside the station reception boundary. In 2008, the difference between Latino voters with and without access is -22 percentage points (± 11 percentage points). In 2012, the estimated difference between Latinos with and without access is -33 percentage points (± 13 percentage points). To put these numbers in context, the difference between Latino and white turnout was 15 percentage points in 2012. Though the estimated effects are quite large, these are local estimates, and the uncertainty around the point estimates is also consistent with a moderate reduction in turnout.

¹⁴Keele and Titiunik (2015) advocate for the use of simple models, except in cases where significant imbalances or compound treatments are present.

FIGURE 4 Congressional District Boundaries and Voter Locations

Note: The bold line represents the coverage boundary. The FCC reception boundary contains several neighborhoods and two congressional districts.

To address the issue of selection bias, we implemented a design-based approach using station reception boundaries. In two elections (2008 and 2012), we found that access to SLTV was associated with decreases in turnout, whereas in the elections immediately following and preceding the introduction of SLTV, the effect was approximately zero.¹⁵ Although our findings are consistent with a demobilization process, it is unclear whether the effects generalize to other contexts. In other words, what can a subset of Latino voters in NC tell us about Latinos elsewhere? In the following section, we perform a replication test using GRD to assess the generalizability of our results in a different state.

Study 2: Florida and WBWP

To provide a replication test of our GRD findings in NC, we focus on the case of Florida. In 2000, Hispanic media conglomerate MundoMax bought a station in the Lake Park community of West Palm Beach. In the sum-

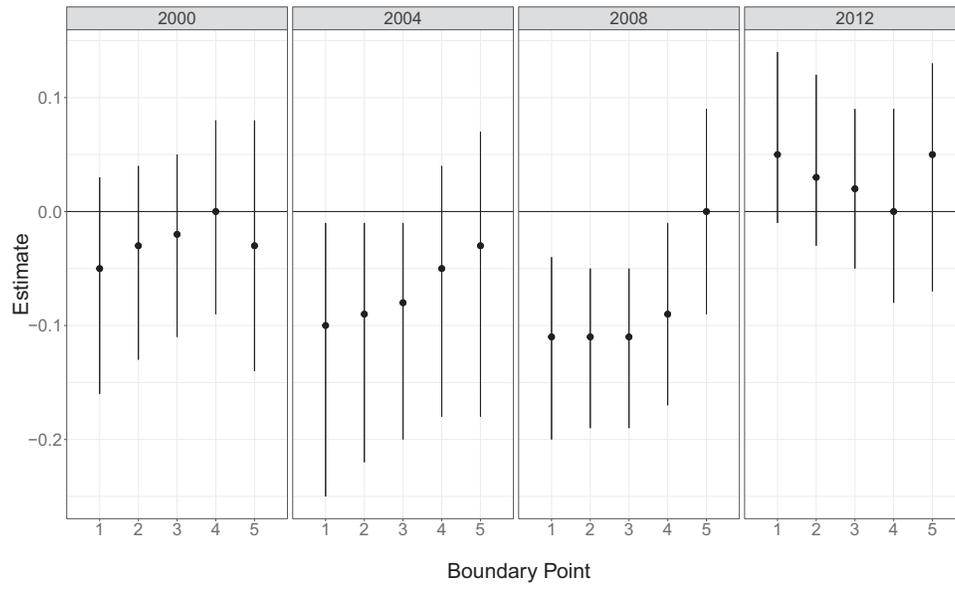
mer of 2004, WBWP began airing Spanish-language content including news, entertainment, and sports. WBWP was the second SLTV station to cover West Palm Beach, with Azteca America affiliate WWHB serving the area since 1988.

We choose to replicate our findings in Florida because the state also has a sizable Latino population (24% of residents are Latino). Moreover, although the area of West Palm Beach (WPB) was not introduced to its first SLTV station in the 2000s, assessing the effects of an additional station should indicate whether the negative effects observed in NC are restricted to moving from no access to some access to ethnic media. In addition, although Goldsboro's Latino population is predominantly Mexican and Central American (65%), WPB has a fairly diverse population of Latinos from various Latin American countries according to data from the 2011–2015 American Community Survey (Cuban: 19%; Mexican: 18%; Puerto Rican: 16%). Conducting our analyses in WPB therefore allows us to assess whether our results generalize to a more diverse context.

As shown in Figure 4, spatial heterogeneity in Latino voters' residential locations in WPB complicates the extent to which units will be comparable along each point of the boundary. Keele and Titiunik (2016) recommend

¹⁵To assess the possibility of spillover effects (Keele and Titiunik 2016), we present results from robustness checks in SI Appendices B and K, where we show that our findings hold across various distances from the reception boundary and potential spillover patterns.

FIGURE 5 Estimated Effect of Access to Spanish-Language Television on General Election Turnout from 2000 to 2012, with Corresponding Robust 95% Confidence Intervals



converting continuous spatial boundaries into boundary points and comparing voters within each boundary point. The seven boundary points are plotted as black circles and triangles. Keele and Titiunik (2016) state that researchers should choose “points where the placebo analysis indicates that pretreatment covariates are indistinguishable across treatment and control areas.” The boundary points that are depicted as triangles did not pass a placebo test using prior turnout. Therefore, in our analyses, we present results from the first five boundary points.¹⁶

We gather data from the “Voter File Extract” provided by the Florida Division of Elections.¹⁷ The data include voter registration, partisanship, ethnicity, and voter history for every registered voter in Palm Beach County. Due to the larger sample ($N = 155,438$ Latinos), we estimate several regression discontinuity models within each boundary point from 2000 to 2012. To minimize researcher degrees of freedom, we calculate optimal bandwidths using the procedure described in Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2014). As in our previous analyses, we expect differences between treated and control voters to be zero prior to the station’s introduction.

Results

In Figure 5, we can see that the estimated effects of access are statistically indistinguishable from zero in 2000.¹⁸ However, in 2004, voters who have access to SLTV and reside near the first, second, or third boundary point are between 8 and 10 percentage points less likely to turn out than those who do not reside in the reception area. In 2008, these effects become more pronounced and consistent: Access to SLTV produces about an 11 percentage point (± 5 percentage points) decrease in turnout among voters who reside near the first three boundary points, and a 9 percentage point decrease (± 8 percentage points) among voters who reside near the fourth boundary point. In 2012, these effects reverse and trend in a positive direction. However, none of the individual estimates attain statistical significance.

Across elections in two states, the general trend in turnout was negative among Latino residents who had SLTV access. In contrast to the NC case, however, the effect estimate was attenuated in 2012. According to Fowler and Ridout (2013), the Barack Obama campaign ran twice the number of ads aired by Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney and concentrated on battleground states like Florida, where pro-Obama advertisements

¹⁶We present additional balance checks in SI Appendix D.

¹⁷See <http://dos.myflorida.com/elections/data-statistics/voter-registration-statistics/voter-extract-disk-request/>.

¹⁸Robust confidence intervals are calculated using the data-driven procedure described in Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2014) and recommended in Keele and Titiunik (2016).

surpassed pro-Romney advertisements by a wide margin. This suggests that the effects of access to ethnic media are not uniform and that election-specific factors, such as group-targeted mobilization efforts, might offset the demobilizing effects we have observed. In the following section, we evaluate whether our results are contingent on the use of the GRD design, and whether more traditional methods recover effects similar to those observed in North Carolina and Florida.

Study 3: National Surveys of Latinos

To assess the generalizability of our GRD findings, we utilize two large samples of Latinos—the 2012 Latino Decisions Election Eve (LDEES) survey and the 2012 Pew National Survey of Latinos (NSL)—combined with data on Spanish-language station locations to examine whether residing in areas with a greater number of ethnic television stations is associated with decreases in electoral participation and political engagement. Following these replication tests, we turn our focus toward unpacking potential explanations for the observed demobilization effect using the 2006 Latino National Survey (LNS) and LDEES.

Replication Using 2012 Pew and Latino Decisions Surveys

To perform our replication tests, we relied on data from the NSL ($N = 1,765$) and LDEES ($N = 5,613$)—two nationally representative phone-administered surveys of Latinos that were conducted before the 2012 election. The NSL ran from September to October 2012. Latino participants were sampled from 50 states, including the District of Columbia, and were given the option to take the survey in English or Spanish. The 2012 LDEES collected responses from October 31, 2012, to November 5, 2012. The full sample included registered voters from 35 states and the District of Columbia, and it was merged with a validated vote history for each respondent.

We gathered data on Spanish-language station locations using the *TV and Cable Factbook* (Warren 2014).¹⁹ Following methods similar to those employed in Gentzkow (2006), we calculated the number of Spanish-language stations for each designated market area (DMA) and matched DMAs to counties. We then merged data

¹⁹This measure is indexed by time, such that only stations that existed as of 2008, for example, are included in the analysis of 2008 turnout.

from the *TV and Cable Factbook* into both surveys using county-level identifiers. This procedure allowed us to link each respondent to the number of Spanish-language stations in his or her county.

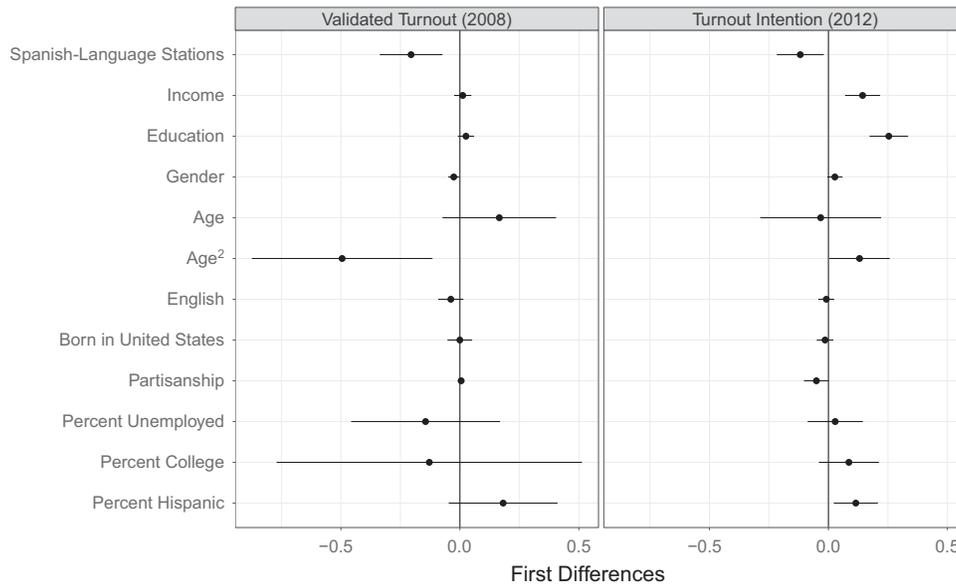
As the goal of this analysis is to assess the generalizability of our GRD findings, we use the NSL and LDEES to evaluate whether greater access to SLTV is related to turnout. The LDEES is matched with voter file data to include a validated indicator for whether each respondent voted on Election Day or during an early voting period during the 2008 general election.²⁰ The NSL includes an item measuring 2012 turnout intention ($\hat{p} = .79$).²¹ Our analysis controls for age, age², education, income, gender, partisanship, primary language, and birth in the United States. As the prevalence of Latinos in an area has been linked to both the presence of SLTV stations (FCC 2016) and Latino turnout (Oberholzer-Gee and Waldfogel 2009), we include controls for Latino composition using data from the 2010 Decennial Census. We also account for economic and educational context using the unemployment rate and percent with a college degree, as both contextual factors may be linked to the presence of SLTV and Latino turnout. Given the hierarchical structure of the data (e.g., individuals embedded within counties) and the binary nature of our dependent variables, we estimate random-intercept multilevel logistic regression models (Gelman and Hill 2007). For ease of interpretation, all variables were rescaled to range from 0 to 1.

Results. The results from this analysis are presented in Figure 6 (and SI Appendix F). As the number of local SLTV stations moves from its minimum to maximum value, the probability of voting in 2008 decreases by about 21 percentage points (± 14 percentage points). Moreover, the probability of reporting an intention to vote decreases by about 12 percentage points in 2012 (± 10 percentage points). This difference for SLTV is comparable to the maximal effects of age in 2008 and income in 2012, two variables that consistently predict participation among Latinos (Shaw, De La Garza, and Lee 2000). These effects are statistically and substantively significant, and they mirror the negative effects observed in the North Carolina and Florida GRD studies.

²⁰The survey includes the earliest registration date for each respondent. Therefore, we only include voters who were eligible to vote in the 2008 election.

²¹The question asked respondents, “Do you yourself plan to vote in the election this November?” Only voting-eligible citizens were asked this question.

FIGURE 6 First Differences in a Hierarchical Logistic Model Predicting Validated Turnout in 2008 and Turnout Intention in 2012



Note: Point estimates reflect first differences moving from the minimum to maximum value of each variable, and corresponding 95% confidence intervals.

Unpacking the Demobilization Effect

In this section, we explore three distinct processes that might be responsible for generating the observed demobilizing effects of access to SLTV. As with any exploration of mechanisms, these tests should be considered tentative, given the challenges in estimating causal mediation effects (Green, Ha, and Bullock 2010).

The first process is referred to by Putnam (2000, 238) as “cocooning,” which views the proliferation of television as “stealing time” and encouraging “lethargy and passivity,” with individuals spending more time at home watching television and less time engaging in activities that promote civic and political engagement. A second and distinct process is “enclaving” (Uslaner and Conley 2003), where the introduction and proliferation of ethnic media could lead members of the target audience to spend more time immersed in a virtual ethnic enclave, thereby increasing the salience of their ethnic identity and involvement with their ethnic community at the expense of engagement with American mainstream society. The third and final process is “differential mobilization,” whereby elites and parties respond to the presence of ethnic media by adopting different campaign strategies in areas where media access is more limited. If cocooning is the operative mechanism, then access to SLTV should also

be associated with a general contraction in social activities, including engagement with ethnic community life. If enclaving explains why access to Spanish-language television is associated with decreases in turnout, the negative effect of access to SLTV on voting should be countered with positive effects on ethnic identification and involvement with one’s ethnic community. Finally, if differences in elite mobilization are responsible for demobilization, we should observe decreased contact with campaigns as a function of ethnic media access.

To uncover potential evidence in support of cocooning and enclaving, we utilize the 2006 Latino National Survey (LNS), a nationally representative phone-administered survey of Latinos conducted before the 2006 midterm election ($N = 8,634$). The LNS ran from November 2005 to August 2006 and was conducted in 17 states with large Latino populations. As in the NSL and LDEES, Latino respondents were given the opportunity to take the survey in English or Spanish. We use the survey to examine three outcomes relevant to enclaving and cocooning: ethnic identity strength, political knowledge, and participation in ethnic organizations. We measure ethnic identity strength using a four-category ordinal scale that asks respondents how strongly they think of themselves as Hispanic or Latino. Political knowledge is measured using a binary item that asks

TABLE 1 Effect of Spanish-Language Television on Intervening Variables

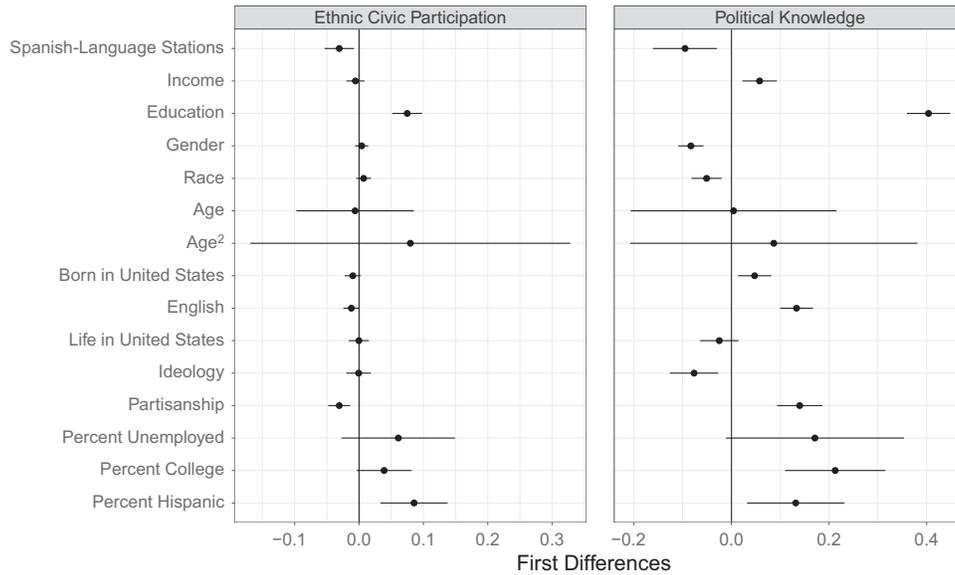
	<i>Dependent Variable</i>					
	<i>Enclaving vs. Cocooning</i>			<i>Elite Mobilization</i>		
	Ethnic Civic Participation (1)^a	Ethnic Identity Strength (2)^a	Political Knowledge (3)^a	Campaign Contact (4)^b	GOP Contact (5)^b	Dem. Contact (6)^b
Spanish-Language Stations	-0.672** (0.254)	0.074 (0.130)	-0.418** (0.148)	-0.064 (0.182)	-0.064 (0.222)	0.016 (0.204)
Income	-0.119 (0.155)	-0.104 (0.073)	0.249** (0.077)	0.168 (0.095)	0.218 (0.114)	0.184 (0.104)
Education	1.515*** (0.228)	0.289** (0.109)	1.854*** (0.116)	0.166 (0.089)	0.212 (0.110)	0.201* (0.099)
Gender	0.090 (0.113)	0.187*** (0.054)	-0.360*** (0.057)	0.082 (0.060)	-0.045 (0.074)	-0.062 (0.066)
Race	0.163 (0.135)	0.311*** (0.063)	-0.217** (0.067)			
Age	-0.286 (0.948)	0.257 (0.456)	0.004 (0.476)	0.509 (0.474)	2.545*** (0.605)	1.558** (0.530)
Age ²	0.665 (1.273)	-0.888 (0.626)	0.352 (0.658)	-0.907 (0.523)	-2.433*** (0.666)	-1.995*** (0.592)
English	-0.212 (0.144)	-0.418*** (0.071)	0.569*** (0.073)	0.609*** (0.072)	1.034*** (0.097)	0.792*** (0.083)
Born in United States	-0.270 (0.147)	0.066 (0.072)	0.203** (0.074)	0.366*** (0.072)	0.342*** (0.091)	0.336*** (0.081)
Life in United States	-0.002 (0.170)	0.037 (0.082)	-0.107 (0.087)			
Ideology	-0.010 (0.211)	0.271** (0.104)	-0.332** (0.109)			
Partisanship	-0.701*** (0.205)	-0.514*** (0.095)	0.599*** (0.101)	0.062*** (0.015)	-0.066*** (0.018)	0.126*** (0.017)
Percent Unemployed	0.203 (0.133)	0.113 (0.070)	0.143 (0.079)	-0.439 (0.348)	-0.604 (0.429)	-0.555 (0.391)
Percent College	0.764 (0.403)	0.295 (0.201)	0.920*** (0.227)	-0.145 (0.751)	-1.044 (0.940)	-0.449 (0.846)
Percent Hispanic	1.342*** (0.319)	0.037 (0.190)	0.559** (0.214)	-0.734** (0.260)	-1.074** (0.329)	-0.983*** (0.298)
Constant	-3.828*** (0.371)		-2.270*** (0.187)	-1.016*** (0.286)	-2.031*** (0.354)	-2.184*** (0.321)
Observations	6,182	6,072	6,182	5,188	5,188	5,188

^aModels estimated using data from the 2006 LNS.

^bModels estimated using data from the 2012 LDEES.

Note: *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

FIGURE 7 First Differences in Hierarchical Logistic Models Predicting Ethnic Civic Participation and Political Knowledge



Note: Point estimates reflect first differences moving from the minimum to maximum value of each variable, and corresponding 95% confidence intervals.

respondents to identify the most conservative party in the United States (1 = Republicans; 0 = Democrats). Given increased political polarization and ideological sorting (Levendusky 2009), this question allows us to assess whether respondents have rudimentary knowledge about the American political system. Approximately 36% of respondents answered this question correctly. Participation in ethnic organizations is measured using items which ask respondents whether they have participated in at least one “social, cultural, civic or political group” that is mostly Latino (1 = Participation in a mostly Latino organization; 0 = otherwise; $\hat{p} = .05$).²² Our analyses include individual-level controls for age, age², education, income, race, gender, ideology, partisanship, nativity status, years living in the United States, and primary language, and county-level controls for ethnic and socioeconomic composition obtained from the 2000 Decennial Census. To assess the differential mobilization explanation, we use data from the LDEES, since the survey includes binary measures of total and partisan campaign contacts during the 2012 election. Campaign contacts are measured using a question that asked respondents, “Over the past few months, did anyone from a campaign,

political party, or community organization ask you to vote, or register to vote?” ($\hat{p} = .40$). The survey also asked whether Republicans ($\hat{p} = .20$) or Democrats had contacted the respondent ($\hat{p} = .27$). Civic participation, political knowledge, and self-reported campaign contacts are measured using binary items, and thus, we estimate a hierarchical logistic regression model. For the ethnic identity measure, we estimate a hierarchical ordered logistic regression model.

Results. As shown in Table 1, the coefficient for SLTV is statistically significant and negatively signed for ethnic civic participation and political knowledge.²³ In contrast, the coefficients for SLTV in the ethnic identity strength and mobilization models are not statistically discernible from zero. As shown in the first-difference plots in Figure 7, as the number of local Spanish-language stations moves from its minimum to maximum value, the probability of participating in ethnic civic associations decreases by 2.3 percentage points (± 2 percentage points) and the probability of correctly identifying the ideology of the two major parties decreases by about 7 percentage

²²Our key results hold even if this is recoded as a trichotomous variable capturing whether respondents do not participate (0), participate in civic organizations that are not Latino (1), or participate in a Latino organization (2).

²³In SI Appendix J, we explored conditional effects using citizenship, being born in the United States, Hispanic composition, socioeconomic context, sex, income, education, and national origin as moderators. We do not find any consistent evidence of moderation across several models.

TABLE 2 Placebo Tests: SLTV and Home Country Political Participation

	<i>Dependent Variable</i>	
	Prior Civic Participation	Prior Electoral Participation
	(1) Hierarchical Ordered Logistic	(2) Hierarchical Logistic
Spanish-Language Stations	0.105 (0.156)	0.002 (0.159)
Income	−0.010 (0.083)	0.082 (0.087)
Education	0.464*** (0.124)	0.585*** (0.130)
Gender	−0.206** (0.065)	0.022 (0.069)
Race	−0.412*** (0.074)	−0.046 (0.080)
Age	−0.523 (0.580)	7.807*** (0.664)
Age ²	1.025 (0.806)	−7.980*** (0.903)
Born in United States	−0.121 (0.086)	−1.283*** (0.104)
Life in United States	−0.047 (0.099)	−0.214* (0.104)
Ideology	0.248 (0.128)	−0.038 (0.135)
Partisanship	−0.192 (0.125)	−0.294* (0.133)
Percent Unemployed	−0.070 (0.086)	−0.115 (0.088)
Percent College	−0.220 (0.235)	−0.115 (0.245)
Percent Hispanic	−0.113 (0.233)	−1.174*** (0.239)
Constant		−1.133*** (0.224)
Observations	3,868	3,965

Note: 2006 LNS.

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

points (± 6 percentage points).²⁴ Taken together, these findings suggest that the demobilizing effects of ethnic media are more consistent with cocooning than enclaving or differences in elite mobilization strategies. Still, future research is necessary to ensure that this is the primary mechanism underlying the effects we observe.

Placebo Tests. To assuage concerns that individuals who live in communities with greater access to ethnic media would have been less likely to participate even in the absence of Spanish-language television stations, we explore whether access to SLTV is associated with pre-immigration participation levels. Specifically, the LNS includes two items that capture respondents' levels of participation prior to arriving in the United States. These two items ask respondents about their levels of activity in "a political party, a political organization, or in any other type of organizations such as labor unions, student or-

ganizations or paramilitary organizations" and whether they voted in elections prior to coming to the United States. The first item is measured on a 5-point scale ranging from "Never joined" to "Very Active," whereas the second item is a binary item. As shown in Table 2, access to Spanish-language television is not associated with self-reported levels of political participation prior to arriving in the United States. Our failure to find an association between ethnic television and pretreatment political participation allays concerns that Latinos residing in environments with greater access to ethnic television are chronically less likely to participate in politics, regardless of whether stations are present, and strengthens the credibility of our observational findings.

Discussion

Across multiple studies using different methodological approaches (e.g., design- and model-based analyses) and data sources, we found that access to an increasingly prevalent and accessible group resource, SLTV, was associated with decreases in political engagement among Latinos. In addition, we uncovered preliminary support

²⁴In SI Appendix G, we show that these estimated coefficients are zero among Latinos who prefer to receive political information in English. Moreover, we report additional analyses in SI Appendix J, in which we do not find that citizenship or being born in the United States conditions the effects of Spanish-language television on ethnic civic participation.

for cocooning as the operative mechanism. Our findings illustrate the importance of differentiating between short- and long-term exposure to foreign-language political communication: whereas short-term and episodic exposure to Spanish-language campaign advertisements has been found to exert positive effects on engagement, our results highlight the importance of distinguishing such effects from long-term habitual consumption of ethnic media. Moreover, our findings suggest that the effects of long-term and routine consumption of ethnic media mirror patterns that have been observed among majority group members, where increasing access to media, namely, television, has been associated with decreased social and political engagement.

Given that a relatively small amount of SLTV programming is devoted to political news, viewers might be exposed to more entertainment than they otherwise would have seen in the absence of ethnic media access (Fowler, Hale, and Olsen 2009). Thus, the lack of explicitly political content might explain why ethnic television does not function like other collective resources. Still, although we observe more evidence of demobilization than mobilization, we do not view these patterns as an immutable feature of SLTV. Indeed, it is important to reiterate that the negative effects we uncover are likely connected to the entertainment focus of SLTV, and future studies could explore whether exposure to political shows increases political participation among Latinos. Moreover, future research could test additional mechanisms linking ethnic media to political behavior. In this article, we consider three promising candidates (e.g., enclaving, cocooning, and mobilization differences), but additional mechanisms are possible and could be explored using more causally credible designs (Imai et al. 2011). Finally, our focus is on Latinos; however, future work could explore additional groups that are rising to political prominence in the United States, such as Asian Americans.

Since some media scholarship argues that Spanish-language media conglomerates are driven by the goal of profit maximization rather than voter mobilization (LenRíos 2017), this might explain why we fail to find mobilization effects for SLTV. For example, CNN launched a 24-hour Spanish-language news station but modified its programming over time to incorporate “lifestyle” features for the purpose of increasing viewership, and MundoMax dissolved its news operations to focus on entertainment shows.^{25,26} Though these trends in television program-

ming do not bode well for immigrant incorporation and participation, our hope is that future research will continue to assess this vital resource. Moreover, since our focus is on the impact of ethnic television, future research could also consider whether other forms of communication such as ethnic radio and social media are more likely to mobilize Latinos and help them navigate an increasingly contentious political environment.

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²⁵See <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/13/arts/television/cnn-espanol-restructures-its-programming.html>.

²⁶See <https://variety.com/2015/tv/global/mundofox-shuts-down-news-division-now-mundomax-1201554102/>.

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information may be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of the article.

Appendix A: Balance Checks (North Carolina)

Appendix B: Estimates Across Buffer Sizes (North Carolina)

Appendix C: Differential Registration Bias (North Carolina)

Appendix D: Balance Checks (Florida)

Appendix E: GRD Model Output (Florida)

Appendix F: LNS and LDEE Full Model Results

Appendix G: Subgroup Analyses using Media Language Preferences (LNS)

Appendix H: Communication with Broadcast Engineers

Appendix I: Reception Boundaries and Ethnic Self-Identification

Appendix J: Interactions Between Spanish-Language Television and Covariates

Appendix K: Geographic Treatments and Spillover Effects