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## Changes over Time in Media Framing of Voting Rights for Hispanic Americans

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# Changes over Time in Media Framing of Voting Rights for Hispanic Americans

## Abstract

This paper is an analysis of the changes in media framing of Hispanic Americans' voting rights in the Chicago Tribune from 1965 through 1975, following the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and from 2016 through 2021. The specific frames that will be mentioned are those surrounding Spanish language assistance in voting, political and racial redistricting or gerrymandering, voter fraud, and voter ID laws.

## Keywords

Voting Rights, Media Framing, Hispanic Americans

## Disciplines

Gender, Race, Sexuality, and Ethnicity in Communication | Latina/o Studies | Political Science

## Comments

Written for POL 201: Race and the Right to Vote

CHANGES OVER TIME IN MEDIA FRAMING OF VOTING RIGHTS FOR HISPANIC  
AMERICANS

Leslie Wolfe

POL 201: Race and the Right to Vote

December 7, 2021

I affirm that I have upheld the highest principles of honesty and integrity in my academic work  
and have not witnessed a violation of the Honor Code.

## **INTRODUCTION**

This analysis seeks to understand the changes in media framing of voting rights for Hispanic Americans over time. This topic will be analyzed using the research question: How has media framing of voting rights for Hispanic Americans differed between the late 1960s and 1975 following the passage of the VRA and 2016 through 2021? This paper will analyze newspaper articles from a single newspaper, the Chicago Tribune, during the indicated time periods to determine the similarities and differences in how the media has framed voting rights for Hispanic Americans. Examples of framing will include the type of language used, talking points of interest, and references to public opinion on talking points, among others. This analysis will be in the context of existing research on the history of and challenges to voting rights for Hispanic Americans and the frames that have accompanied those challenges.

Media framing of voting rights for Hispanic Americans has shifted between the time following the passage of the VRA and 2016 through today. This paper will examine media frames used from 1965 through 1975 and 2016 through 2021 in the Chicago Tribune, specifically the frames of Spanish language assistance in voting, political and racial redistricting or gerrymandering, voter fraud, and voter ID laws. This analysis will also include the ways that media framing evolved between these periods for frames that occur in both time periods, as well as possible reasons for why certain frames are not shared between the time following the passage of the VRA and recent years.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Existing research indicates that media is the way in which most people learn and understand politics and that media framing sets the agenda for the news that people are exposed to and feel is important (McCombs and Shaw 1972, 184-85). Dennis and Druckman (2017)

describe framing as the phenomenon in which small changes in the way that information is presented can result in large changes in opinion (104). They mention how a “frame in communication” is how information can be presented in a way that encourages the recipient to think about a topic based on a certain value or set of values (106), which is the way that media framing influences public opinion (Dennis and Druckman 2017). Gonzales-Sobrino (2020) discusses the ways that the media commonly frames Latinx voters, namely as politically homogeneous, sharing many common views, equivalent to black voters in terms of mobilization, and as specifically interested in immigration (1019-39). Smith’s (2017) article addresses how older, whiter voters are presented with the media frame of the “illegal Latino voter threat,” claiming that voter fraud occurs commonly among Latinx voters and influences these voters to believe that stricter voting laws, especially voter ID laws, need to be implemented to stop this framed threat (148-50). Smith (2017) also mentions that this frame perpetuates the belief that Latinx voters are less deserving of the right to vote or less ‘American’ than white voters (148).

Challenges to Hispanic American’s voting rights will also affect the media frames present in the Chicago Tribune articles. Udani and Kimball (2018) discuss how immigrant resentment, which strongly applies to Hispanic immigrants because of the impact of race on these beliefs, is related to increased support for voting restrictions, especially voter ID laws, as well as increased belief that immigrants are committing voter fraud (402-06).

Another important challenge that Hispanic voters have faced, though some progress has been made to improve upon it, is Spanish-language assistance with voting. Arnau (2015) discussed the Arroyo vs Tucker court case in Philadelphia, PA, which guaranteed residents bilingual voting after members of the Puerto Rican community felt that their right to vote was infringed upon by the all-English ballots (34-35). The defense’s objection to providing

translators and bilingual ballots was the difficulty that would face polling stations, but this reasoning was shot down by the judge presiding over the case (35). This article represents two potential frames that could occur in news articles about Hispanic Americans' voting rights, one of added burden to the election system, and another of the importance of protecting everyone's right to vote. Jones-Correa's (2005) article discussing the impacts of the VRA's language provision, passed in 1975, which protects "linguistic minorities'" voting rights, on Asian American and Latinx Americans' ability to vote (549). This study found that for Latinx Americans, the language provision of the VRA has a notable positive effect on voter turnout, though this applies most to first-generation immigrants (561). Related to this, later research by Marschall and Rutherford (2016) indicated that not only does the language provision of the VRA increase voter turnout among Latinx Americans, it also increases Latinx representation in elected positions (602-05). Fraga's (2017) article that details how the language provision of the VRA came to be describes in detail the struggles that faced Hispanic Americans trying to vote that led to a court case in Texas that eventually translated to the language provision (16). These challenges include gerrymandering, discrimination in whose votes were counted, economic disadvantages to Latinx American political candidates, lack of representation, and language discrimination (16-17). Because the first time period that this analysis will cover occurs before the passage of the language provision of the VRA, many of these issues could be used to frame Hispanic Americans' voting rights.

Finally, research on the factors that affect Latinx Americans' ability to vote indicates that partisan redistricting is an important factor (Gul and Wolfgang 2016, 1616). Political parties intentionally gerrymander district maps that are politically advantageous for their own party, combining voters that are likely to favor their own party and segregating voters that will likely

vote for the opposing party (1616-17). This affects more liberal voters more because they are geographically sorted to a greater degree (1618). Because the majority of minority populations within the United States tend to vote liberal, this means that minority voters could face greater disadvantages due to partisan gerrymandering.

## **HYPOTHESES**

Based on the prior research done on media framing, especially media framing of Hispanic American voters and voting rights and the barriers that affect or have affected Hispanic Americans' voting rights, I am able to make some hypotheses about common frames in the Chicago Tribune news articles. I expect that Spanish language voter assistance will be a more prominent frame in the first time period than the second because of the passage of the VRA's language provision in 1975. I expect that a racial or political redistricting frame will be used more in the second period because of the increased Hispanic American population across the United States since the mid-1970's. For a similar reason, I also expect voter fraud to be a more common frame in the second period because increased immigrant populations cause the resentment that leads to fears of voter fraud, and the immigrant population of the United States is higher now (Udani and Kimball 2018, 402-06). Because of the relation between perceived voter fraud and support for voter ID laws, I expect that articles from 2016 through 2021 will mention voter ID laws more than articles from 1965 through 1975 (Udani and Kimball 2018, 402-06, Smith 2018, 148-50).

## **METHODS**

The news articles analyzed in this paper will come from the Chicago Tribune. This paper was chosen because it has the highest online availability of articles related to voting rights for Hispanic Americans in both selected time ranges on the academic databases provided by

Gettysburg College. Though many of the related articles in the Chicago Tribune focus on local, statewide, or regional issues rather than national news stories, the articles will be discussed as somewhat representative of what media frames were common for the given time period. This is a possible source of error for this research, as frames chosen by the Chicago Tribune may not be entirely representative of frames chosen in other newspapers in the same periods. However, those frames that will be mentioned in this analysis occur within multiple news articles for each of the chosen time periods to assure their relevancy to some degree.

News articles for the late 1960's through 1975 and 2016 through 2021 were found in the ProQuest database for historical newspapers. The keywords used in searching for the articles were "Hispanic" and "vote" as well as "Latin" and "vote." I used the keyword "Latin" because, though not all immigrants from Latin America are Hispanic, the terms Latino/a/x and Hispanic are often used interchangeably. Hispanic Americans are also often included or referenced in articles discussing Latinx voting rights, as many specifically discuss Spanish language assistance for voting. The keyword "Latin" was also especially useful when searching the database for news articles from the earlier era because "Latins" was a commonly used phrase to refer to both Hispanic and Latin American immigrants, which I discovered when reading some of the results from the keyword combination "Hispanic" and "vote." The results of these key word searches were then restricted to exclusively the Chicago Tribune and the chosen time periods I intended to search, being 1965 through 1975 and 2016 through 2021 respectively.

The articles that I chose to include for this paper from each time period were chosen based on how high they ranked on the results page generated by ProQuest when sorted for relevancy. These top results were then either saved as a data point for this analysis if a result displayed any frame regarding Hispanic or Latinx Americans' voting rights or disregarded. I did



not exclude any articles based on the frames that were presented, just verified that the article contained pertinent material.

The references for the Literature Review portion of this analysis were chosen to cover the topics of media framing, challenges to Hispanic and Latinx Americans' voting rights past and present, and media frames specific to Hispanic and Latinx Americans' voting rights. The key terms used to find these sources were "frame," "media frame," "Hispanic" and "frame," "Latin" and "frame," "Hispanic" and "vote," and "Latin" and "vote." The results of these key word searches were narrowed down to peer-reviewed articles, then the sources were chosen based on where they appeared on Musselman Library's generated list of results and their relevancy to the Literature Review portion of this Analysis.

## **ANALYSIS**

Regarding the first hypothesis, that Spanish language assistance with voting will be a more common frame of Hispanic Americans' voting rights in articles from 1965 through 1975, this appears to be true. While Spanish language assistance in voting is only mentioned in one of the articles from 2016 through 2021, it is mentioned in five of the articles from 1965 through 1975. Spanish language assistance is also the main frame or one of the main frames presented in the 5 articles from 1965 through 1975, which ensures that the frame is meaningful (Medina 2020, LaVelle 1974, "Generals' Emerging in Latins' Struggle for Political Power: Latins in U.S. Entering Political Power Picture" 1971, "Latin Voter Drives Slated here" 1974, Young 1972, "Vote Drive for Latins Falts" 1974). Examples of these references to Spanish language assistance in the articles include phrases such as "Spanish-speaking volunteers," "voter registration drive in the Spanish-speaking communities," "Spanish-speaking people are learning that the battles are fought with the ballots," "taught in Spanish how to cast their ballot," and

“Spanish-speaking elections judges” among others (Medina 2020, LaVelle 1974, “Generals' Emerging in Latins' Struggle for Political Power: Latins in U.S. Entering Political Power Picture” 1971, “Latin Voter Drives Slated here” 1974, “Vote Drive for Latins Falts” 1974). This effect can be attributed to the articles from the first time period being written before the language provision of the VRA was passed in 1975, which significantly increased Hispanic Voters’ turnout and registration, as well as the number of Hispanic representatives elected to office (Jones-Correa’s 2005, 561, Marschall and Rutherford 2016, 602-05).

The second hypothesis, that a frame of racial or political redistricting will be used more between 2016 and 2021 than 1965 and 1975, is supported by the data points. Redistricting or gerrymandering are not mentioned in any of the articles from the earlier period, but three articles from 2016 through 2021 frame racial gerrymandering as an issue facing Hispanic American voters (Pearson 2021, Neumeister and Sherman 2021, Davies 2021). This frame is exemplified in quotes such as “Democrat-drawn map...diluting the votes of a growing Latino population,” “Republican gerrymandering...citizenship question on the census... restrict the political power of Democrats and Latino communities,” and “new Indiana congressional and legislative districts...dilute the influence of minority voters” (Pearson 2021, Neumeister and Sherman 2021, Davies 2021). The articles from 2016 through 2021 mention both Democratic and Republican redistricting that affects Hispanic Americans’ right to vote and voting power (Pearson 2021, Neumeister and Sherman 2021, Davies 2021).

The third hypothesis, that a voter fraud frame will occur more between 2016 and 2021 than between 1965 and 1975 is not supported by the data points. Three of the selected articles between 1965 and 1975 mention voter fraud, while two of the selected articles from 2016 through 2021 mention voter fraud (“Coalition Will Fight Vote Fraud” 1972, Bliss and Zekman

1972, "Harassment of Gary Minorities Charged" 1972, Rutenberg and Corasaniti 2021, Byrne 2021). However, for this hypothesis it is important to mention that voter fraud frames are used differently between the two times in a way in which they are not for the frames discussed in the first two hypotheses. The three articles from the first time period reference voter fraud in the context of polling places not counting minorities' votes and not allowing Hispanic voter to register rather than voters committing fraud ("Coalition Will Fight Vote Fraud" 1972, Bliss and Zekman 1972, "Harassment of Gary Minorities Charged" 1972). Examples of the frame used in these articles are "'insure[sic] that votes get counted as cast,'" and "'recognize 40 years of vote fraud history in Chicago...attempting to keep minority groups from registering to vote,'" ("Coalition Will Fight Vote Fraud" 1972, Bliss and Zekman 1972). However, the two articles from 2016 through 2021 discuss voter fraud claims related to illegal immigrants as a cause of increased support for voting restrictions (Rutenberg and Corasaniti 2021, Byrne 2021). Examples of this frame in the articles are "in the name of combating fraud, have restricted voting in ways that often place a disproportionate burden on Black and Latino voters," and "'They may not have citizenship. Voter fraud would be my biggest concern,'" (Rutenberg and Corasaniti 2021, Byrne 2021). This shows how framing of voter fraud in relation to Hispanic Americans' right to vote has changed over time, from a frame of institutional fraud that disadvantages Hispanic voters to a frame of Hispanic people causing fraud by voting illegally.

The last hypothesis that this analysis seeks to test is if voter ID laws are mentioned more in the second time period than in the first. This hypothesis is supported by the chosen articles, as voter ID laws are not mentioned in any articles from the first time period, but three articles from the second period mention voter ID laws (Byrne 2021, Rutenberg and Corasaniti 2021, "News Briefing" 2017). These more recent articles reference voter ID laws in contexts such as

“Municipal ID cards...will be a valid form of identification for people both registering to vote and voting,” “new voting laws, such as requirements that voters at the polls show types of official photo identification that Black and Hispanic people were disproportionately less likely to have,” and “The Supreme Court on Monday rejected an appeal from Texas...to restore its strict voter identification law...held the law was discriminatory,” (Byrne 2021, Rutenberg and Corasaniti 2021, “News Briefing” 2017). As mentioned by Smith (2017), heightened immigrant populations lead to stronger immigrant resentment, and therefore more support for voting restrictions, especially voter ID laws (148-50). The United States has a higher immigrant population in recent years than from 1965 through 1975, and therefore it makes sense that voter ID laws are a common frame in the more recent Chicago Tribune articles than those from the mid-60s through the mid-70s.

## **DISCUSSION**

The changes that these hypotheses represent are indicative of a number of structural and social changes relating to frames of Hispanic Americans’ right to vote. The changes in the incidence of the first frame, Spanish language assistance with voting, from five articles in the first time period to one in the second period show the great effect that the 1975 addition of the language provision of the VRA had on Hispanic Americans’ voting rights (Medina 2020, LaVelle 1974, “Generals' Emerging in Latins' Struggle for Political Power: Latins in U.S. Entering Political Power Picture” 1971, “Latin Voter Drives Slated here” 1974, Young 1972, “Vote Drive for Latins Falts” 1974). That the second frame, redistricting, only occurred in the second time period may be due to increased populations of Hispanic Americans across the United States, which gives the group more political power to be protected when redistricting. Also, the common frame that Hispanic Americans have often been viewed as homogeneous with

other minority groups could lead to the lack of articles in the first time period that relate to Hispanic Americans when redistricting (Gonzales-Sobrino 2020, 1019-39). Voter fraud framing has significantly changed between these eras, both in message and the groups that are concerned about fraud. The earlier time period's voter fraud focused on the voter discrimination that Hispanic voters were taking steps to prevent in order to protect their own right to vote ("Coalition Will Fight Vote Fraud" 1972, Bliss and Zekman 1972, "Harassment of Gary Minorities Charged" 1972). However, the voter fraud frame from 2016 through 2021 was reactionary messaging from white voters who feel that non-white voters, especially Latinx voters, are making elections less secure, the "illegal Latino voter threat" frame mentioned by Smith (Rutenberg and Corasaniti 2021, Byrne 2021, Smith 2017, 148-50). This change in frames may be reflective of a change in the attitudes of whites in the United States, from recognition of discrimination against minorities in voting following the VRA and Civil Rights Movement, to a feeling of victimization due to increasing minority populations. This change in sentiment relates to the results of the analysis of the last hypothesis, which show that framing of voter ID laws is fairly prevalent in news between 2016 and 2021, but not in news articles from 1965 through 1975. Smith (2017) discussed that white voters feeling threatened by Latinx voters led to increased support for voter ID laws that make it more difficult for Hispanic Americans to vote, which would agree with the idea that attitudes towards the groups affected by voting discrimination have changed between 1965 through 1975 and 2016 through 2021 (148-50).

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