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Understanding Public Perceptions of Immigrant Criminality

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ABSTRACT

This project works to uncover the ways in which Latinx immigrants who have committed crimes are represented in popular media and White House correspondence through a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods, namely word counts, content analysis, and coding. The data consists of news articles and White House correspondence related to several high-profile immigrant criminal cases and policy decisions. News articles were selected at random from a pool of articles written in the aftermath of the immigrant cases being analyzed. Quantitative analysis in this study consists of word counting and context observation through word trees and reveals that the words used to describe Latinx immigrants in the data are largely negative. Content analysis and coding reveal three dominant narratives: immigrants as a threat, immigrants as a burden, and immigration as a bargaining chip. Along with each dominant narrative exists an accompanying counter-narrative, which opposes the main theme but is significantly less perceptible. This study contributes to important dialogue about immigrant criminality, a topic which is often conflated and misunderstood in the United States.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The rhetoric surrounding immigration in the United States has grown increasingly divided in recent years. One anti-immigration argument that seems to arise a great deal is that immigrants are criminals who pose a threat to the communities they reside in. However, existing data and literature on this subject consistently shows that a higher population of foreign-born individuals does not increase crime rates of communities into which they settle; in some cases, these locations may have even lower crime rates after the arrival of newcomers (Butcher and Piehl, 2007; Adelman, Williams, Reed, Markle, Weiss & Jaret, 2016; Ousey & Kubrin, 2009; Rumbaut, 2015; Light & Miller, 2018; Nowrasteh, 2018). Despite these realities on the ground, the discussion within American culture, politics, and media remains focused on illegality and criminality and has far-reaching consequences, affecting national policy decisions and influencing the ways in which much of the American population views immigration. Surveys have shown, for instance, that Americans often associate immigration with crime in negative ways (McCarthy, 2017; Rumbaut, 2008). A great deal of literature already exists which focuses on how this perception affects immigrants who have not committed crime, but there is limited research which looks at how media and political correspondence discuss immigrants who have committed crimes. This research begins to fill that gap.

Although immigrants and refugees from many different origins are often portrayed as criminals, this project focuses on Latinx immigrants and the “Latino Threat” narrative specifically. The choice to look at Latinx immigrants in particular was made for several reasons. Partially, this decision came from my own interests and the progression that my research has taken over the past several years. When I first began the preliminary research that eventually led to this thesis, I was looking at the perceptions of immigrant criminality in Vermont and did a

great deal of investigating into the failed efforts to resettle Syrian refugees in Rutland, Vermont in 2017, which is discussed further in the following chapter. In doing so, I found that there was a significant amount of fear from Rutland residents about the impact this group of refugees would have on their city, much of which revolved around the fear of terrorism. Although this research proved very interesting, I eventually decided that the focus was too narrow, as there is very little data or prior research available about immigration in Vermont. I shifted my focus to the United States more broadly and began to notice, particularly while watching news coverage of the murder of Mollie Tibbetts in the summer of 2018, that Latinx immigrants seemed to receive significant attention in the media. While both Syrian refugees and Latinx immigrants in the United States constitute foreign-born peoples of color, factors such as documentation status, proximity, and population size appeared to differentiate the way Americans perceived the “threat” each group presented. I observed that Latinx immigrants were associated with drug use and with committing violent crimes such as murder or rape more frequently than other populations, such as Syrian refugees were. Furthermore, the sheer number of Latinx immigrants, many of whom reside in the country without legal documentation, seemed to frighten and even enrage many Americans a great deal. Intrigued by this phenomenon, I decided to focus on this particular group for my research.

It is important to highlight that race plays an extremely significant role in all aspects of this study, from methods to results. Race is central to the research findings, and a study designed around White immigrants or other groups of immigrants of color would likely yield very different results. Above and beyond the common belief that they may be dangerous criminals, many Americans see Latinx immigrants as threatening to nearly every aspect of our society, a

concept that many scholars refer to as the Latino Threat Narrative. Chavez (2013), defines the Latino Threat Narrative as the belief that:

Latinos are unable or unwilling to integrate into the social and cultural life of the United States...Latinos are represented as an unchanging people, standing outside the currents of history, merely waiting for the opportunity to revolt and to reconquer land that was once theirs. They live to destroy social institutions such as medical care and education. They dilute the privilege and the rights of citizenship for legitimate members of society (p. 209).

The importance of Latinx immigrants in the United States, combined with the pervasive idea of the Latino threat, was an important factor in my decision to focus my study on this population and was very influential on the outcomes of the research.

With all of this in mind, I designed this research to combine quantitative methods and qualitative coding to analyze 26 articles from news media sources covering stories on Latinx immigrants who committed crimes in the United States and four documents from the White House relating to policies which affect Latinx immigrants, including the construction of a border wall on the US-Mexico border, the termination of sanctuary city status, the implementation of tougher penalties for immigrants who break the law, and the cancellation of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. News articles were selected from the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, *Fox News*, and the *Huffington Post*, sources which span multiple political affiliations ranging from very conservative to very liberal. All of the selected articles focus on or at least mention one of three relatively high-profile cases involving crimes committed by immigrants within the past five years: the killing of Kathryn Steinle in 2015, the disappearance and killing of Mollie Tibbetts in 2018, and the Long Island quadruple homicide

orchestrated by MS-13 in 2017 (see Appendix A for more detail on these incidents). Every article written about these crimes within the first 30 days of their occurrence was collected from each news media source. The articles were then separated into two categories: those written within the first five days after the occurrence, and those written after the first five days. Each article was assigned a number, and one article from each category was chosen using a random number generator for each news source. For some sources, there were no articles written within the first five days or no articles written after the first five days. In those cases, two articles were chosen at random from the same category. In a few cases, there were no articles written by one of the news sources about a particular crime. Thus, there are four fewer articles included in the data than there would have been if articles had been found from every news source for every category. From whitehouse.gov, the executive order or official statement released in regards to each of the following events were collected: the “Border Security and Immigration Enforcement Improvements” order, the “Enhancing Public Safety in the Interior of the United States” order, the H.R. 3004 bill also known as “Kate’s Law,” and the decision to end Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, all announced in 2017 by the Trump administration (see Appendix B for descriptions of these documents). In total, 30 articles and documents were selected for this study.

The main research questions this project seeks to answer are: how are immigrants who have committed crimes represented in the media and in White House correspondence? What dominant narratives and secondary counter-narratives are present in the data? How are immigration and crime linked to each other in the data? What kinds of words and phrases are often used to describe immigrants in the data?

The 30 points of data selected for this study were imported into Nvivo, a qualitative data analysis software program which also includes a variety of features that are useful for quantitative analysis. Nvivo was used to organize the data and to code words, phrases, and selections from the articles and documents. Nvivo's word count and word tree features were also utilized to quantitatively analyze how many times particular words appeared in the data and what the context surrounding those words was. Coding methods for this project were largely informed by UVM professor Meghan Cope's "Coding qualitative data" from *Qualitative Research Methods in Human Geography*. Four descriptive codes and five analytical codes, each with a number of sub-codes, were used to categorize important pieces of data. These categories were then examined for common themes, ideas, and arguments.

After analyzing the data, some general conclusions were apparent. Quantitative analysis revealed that the words and phrases used to describe immigrants were largely negative in connotation. "Illegal," "gang," and "criminal" were the most common words used to describe Latinx immigrants in the data, while "alien" and "undocumented" were also used but with less frequency. Qualitative analysis showed that Latinx immigrants were largely represented in three distinct ways in the data: as a threat, as a burden, and as a bargaining chip. Three underlying counter-narratives, which tended to be pro-immigrant in nature, were also present, although uncommon, in the study.

These research findings were supported by four key texts which informed, supplemented, and complimented the conclusions of this study. These texts included: *The Latino Threat* by Leo Chavez (2013), which discusses how Latinx immigrants, particularly those from Mexico, are often seen as a threatening force in the United States; *Brown Tide Rising* by Otto Santa Ana (2002), a sociolinguistic study of metaphors that are frequently employed to describe Latinx

immigrants and the consequences of that type of language; *Framing Immigrants* by Chris Haynes, Jennifer Merolla, and S. Karthick Ramakrishnan (2016), which focuses on news coverage and media framing of immigrants and immigration in the United States as well as how media coverage impacts public opinion; and *Undocumented Fears* by Jamie Longazel (2016), a case study on immigration debates in the town of Hazelton, Pennsylvania.

This study compliments existing literature by providing an analysis of the ways Latinx immigrants are portrayed in both news media and White House communications which specifically deal with immigrants who have committed crimes. The themes identified in this research have potentially dire consequences for immigrant communities across the United States and more research should be done to gain a deeper understanding of where these perceptions come from and how they may affect the populations involved. Further study in this field may reveal ways in which media representation could be used in a positive manner to bring greater awareness to facts and data surrounding immigration in the United States.

This paper is organized into seven chapters, the first being this introduction. The second chapter is a literature review, which provides a comprehensive overview of important work in the immigration and crime fields. The literature review begins by discussing the multitude of scholars who have shown that immigrants are not more likely to commit crimes than the native-born population and do not raise crime rates in the areas they reside (Butcher and Piehl, 2007; Adelman, Williams, Reed, Markle, Weiss & Jaret, 2016; Ousey & Kubrin, 2009; Rumbaut, 2015; Light & Miller, 2018; Nowrasteh, 2018). In some cases, immigration may even lower crime rates. The literature review then turns to a select few sources which have attempted to explain why this is the case, which may include family structure or self-selection (Ousey & Kubrin, 2009; Butcher & Piehl, 2007). The chapter continues with a discussion of public opinion

surrounding immigrant criminality and the disconnect that exists between public opinion and empirical reality, with some possible explanations for why this is the case including social distance and perceptions of demographic characteristics (McCarthy, 2017; Rumbaut, 2008, Parillo & Donoghue, 2013; Butcher & Piehl 2007). Case studies of existing media analysis research are examined, including some studies on news media and others on popular television/movies (Sohoni & Sohoni, 2016; Farris & Mohamed, 2018; Branton & Dunaway, 2008; Odigie-Turley, 2017). Next, the literature review discusses other ways in which public opinion about immigrant criminality can be swayed or impacted and finally concludes with a brief consideration of why Latinx immigrants are viewed as particularly dangerous in the United States (Kahn & Kenney, 2002; Nelson, Clawson & Oxley, 1997; Barreto, Noriega, Manzano & Segura, 2012; Flores, 2018; Chavez, 2013; Green, 2016).

Chapter three consists of an explanation of the significance of this research and why it is a relevant, important topic to study. This chapter begins with a discussion of the current political climate and, in particular, how the politics of President Trump have brought a great deal of attention to issues surrounding Latinx immigration in recent years. Chapter three also presents some historical context of the fear of immigrant criminality, as well as some local and international examples that highlight the wide range and scope of the issues at hand. Chapter four focuses entirely on methods, with a detailed description of how data was collected for this study, what codes were used to analyze the data, and why the study was designed the way it was. Chapter five presents the results of the study. This chapter is split up into two main subsections, quantitative results and qualitative results. The quantitative section reveals the results of the word tree and word count component of the research. The qualitative section then goes into detail on the three thematic groupings found to be present in data. This section is further divided into three

subchapters: “Immigrants as a Threat,” “Immigrants as a Burden,” and “Immigration as a Bargaining Chip.” Each of these subsections also includes a portion outlining the counter-narratives present in the data.

Chapter six is a discussion of the results. Each major finding is examined in relation to similar findings that other scholars have seen in previous research. Included in this discussion is some of the possible ways that these results can impact Latinx immigrant communities in the United States. Finally, chapter seven presents some conclusions to the research and to the paper, as well as limitations to the study and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

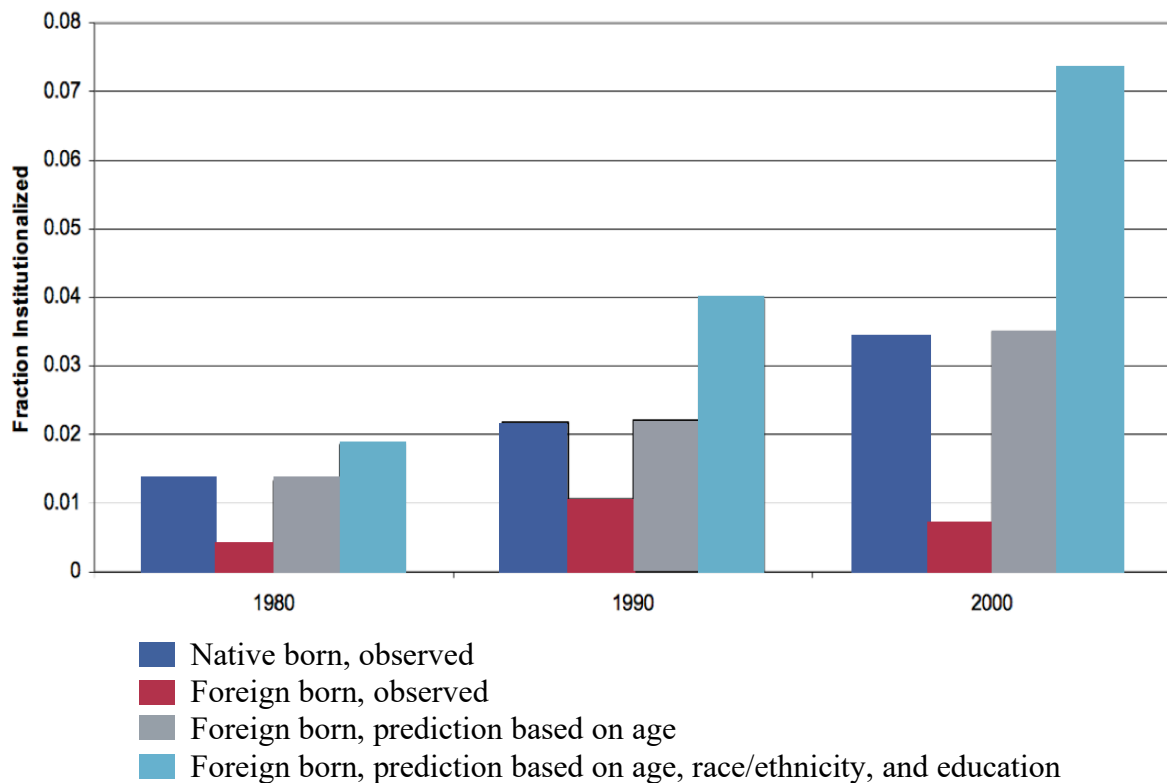
Literature within the fields of immigration studies and crime studies consistently shows that immigration does not result in higher rates of crime in the United States. Despite these findings, the American public often views immigrants, particularly Latinx immigrants, as criminals. This phenomenon is frequently fueled by media coverage and policy rhetoric that inaccurately and unfairly portrays immigrants residing in the United States as criminals. These misperceptions are dangerous and are likely preventing America from providing a welcoming environment in which migrants can resettle safely and with dignity.

Before diving into a review of the existing literature, it is important to clarify how the issue of documented versus undocumented immigration is addressed throughout this section. Many researchers note that it is extremely difficult to separate out undocumented and documented individuals when looking at statistics and data, as the documentation status of immigrants is often not readily available. Many of the studies that will be discussed below utilize Census data, which provides information about whether an individual was born in the United States or outside of the country but does not include legal status. This makes it nearly impossible for researchers using Census data to make conclusions based on documentation status. For the sake of this research, however, separating out these two groups of immigrants is not vital, seeing as studies have shown that both documented and undocumented populations tend to exhibit similar characteristics when it comes to crime. Butcher and Piehl (2007), for example, compare the institutionalization rates of naturalized citizens, who are not subject to deportation, and undocumented residents, who are. They find that those who are foreign-born but are not subject to deportation exhibit nearly the same characteristics as those who are not naturalized, meaning the fear of deportation is likely not impacting crime rates and showing that there are not

significant differences in the institutionalization rates of these two groups. A study localized to Texas which utilized Texas Department of Public Safety data also found very little difference in the violent crime rates of documented and undocumented immigrants (Nowrasteh, 2018).

Studies which demonstrate that immigrants do not bring higher rates of crime to the United States are abundant. A 2007 study by Butcher and Piehl, for example, uses microdata from four waves of the United States census to calculate the actual and the predicted institutionalized rates of both the native-born population and the foreign-born population in 1980, 1990, and 2000 (see figure 1 below). Here, “institutionalized” is defined as those incarcerated as well as those in “mental institutions, hospitals, drug treatment centers, and long-term care facilities” (Butcher & Piehl, 2007, p. 5). The authors find that for all three years, a significantly lower fraction of the foreign-born population was institutionalized than the native-born population. Butcher and Piehl then control for age, race/ethnicity, and education level to calculate what the institutionalization rates should be for the foreign-born population based on its demographic characteristics, if that population had been born in the United States. For the year 2000, the predicted rate is double that of the actual incarceration rate of the native-born and ten times the actual rate of incarceration of the foreign-born. Thus, in theory, the institutionalization rate for the foreign-born should be significantly higher than it actually is based on demographic characteristics. The authors conclude that “immigrants have characteristics that in the native-born population are highly correlated with institutionalization. This exercise reveals just how low the observed rates of institutionalization for immigrants are, considering their lower educational attainment and other characteristics” (Butcher & Piehl, 2007, p. 7-8).

Figure 1: Actual and Predicted Institutionalization Rates
Butcher and Piehl, 2007



Studies such as this one by Butcher and Piehl demonstrate that an individual is not more likely to be institutionalized in the United States if he or she is born outside of the country, but some argue that a positive relationship exists between immigration and crime at a macro, societal level. Several large-scale studies attempt to address this claim through examinations and comparisons of city-wide immigration data and crime rates. In 2015, for instance, five sociologists from universities across the country published the results of a study which examined the change in the number of immigrants and in the crime rates in 200 metropolitan areas between 1970 and 2010. The cities represented in the study were drawn from a sample of 200 Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs) as defined in the 2010 census and were representative of all regions in the United States. For each metropolitan area, the authors examined the percentage

of the population that was born outside of the United States, the violent and property crime rates of that city, and the pertinent economic variables (Adelman, Williams Reed, Markle, Weiss, & Jaret, 2016). The results of this research suggest not only that there is no evidence that a higher percentage of immigrants in a metropolitan area leads to greater levels of crime but also that larger foreign-born populations may actually lower crime rates in some cities. The study finds that immigration has a negative effect on property crimes, robbery and murder, and no effect on assault, which the authors find to be “strong and stable evidence that, at the macro-level, immigration does not cause crime to increase in U.S. metropolitan areas, and may even help reduce it” (Adelman, Williams Reed, Markle, Weiss, & Jaret, 2016, p. 70).

A similar study by Ousey and Kubrin published in 2009 presents comparable findings. This study pooled 1980, 1990, and 2000 US Census data on crime, immigration, and various demographic, economic, and social factors for 159 large U.S. cities to assess the nature of the longitudinal relationship between immigration and violent crime. The researchers controlled for changes in factors such as demographic structure, economic deprivation, labor markets, illegal drug markets, police force capacity, and family structure, which could account for the observed longitudinal immigration-crime relationship, in order to isolate the immigration variable for each city. The authors again find that, on average, cities which experienced increases in immigration from 1980 to 2000 also experienced a decrease in violent crime rates (Ousey & Kubrin, 2009).

Another study from 2015 by Rumbaut analyzed US Census data from 2000 to measure the institutionalization rates of the native-born and the foreign-born. Rumbaut (2015) found that for every ethnic group in the United States, immigrants within that ethnic group have the lowest incarceration rates, even if they are the least educated. This is especially true for Mexicans, Salvadorans, and Guatemalans, according to Rumbaut (2015). The above studies represent a

large pool of research which tends to agree strongly with the findings that immigrants are not responsible for more crime than the native-born population and that a growing population of foreign-born individuals does not increase crime in a geographic location and may even lower it.

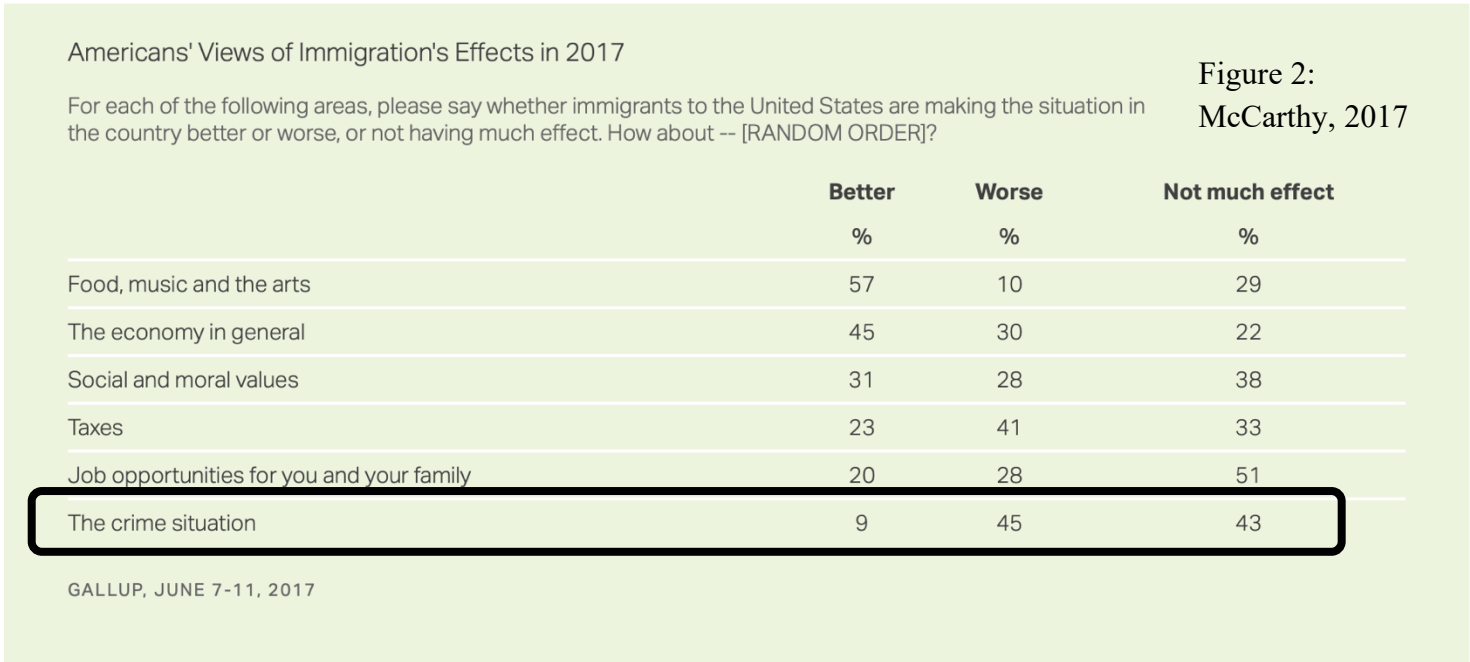
Other, smaller-scale studies have produced similar results. In a longitudinal study from 2018, Light and Miller use data from the FBI Uniform Crime Reports program from 1990 to 2014 to examine the macro-level relationship between violent crimes and undocumented immigration. They find that this relationship is generally negative and do not believe that their results can be attributed to decreased reporting of immigrant crimes (Light & Miller, 2018). A study by Light, Miller, and Kelly (2017) finds a negative association between increased undocumented immigration and drug problems/drunk driving. Finally, a 2018 report by the CATO Institute finds that in Texas in 2015, “illegal immigrants had a criminal conviction rate 50 percent below that of native-born Americans” (Nowrasteh, 2018, p. 5). Thus, smaller and more localized studies are also in agreement with these findings.

It is clear that immigrants do not bring crime to the United States, but why is this the case? Literature that attempts to provide explanations for these patterns is relatively sparse, with the exception of a few studies. In the 2009 report by Ousey and Kubrin cited above, for instance, the authors performed a longitudinal study in which they examined immigration patterns and violent crime rates in cities across the United States and found that family structure appears to play an important role in keeping violent crime rates low among the foreign-born. The authors explain that “it appears the negative relationship between immigration and violent crime is due, in part, to the fact that immigration is negatively associated with divorce and single-parent families, which in turn, are positively related to violent crime rates” (Ousey & Kubrin, 2009, p. 466).

Butcher and Piehl find that one reasonable explanation for the lower crime rates of the foreign-born is a process similar to self-selection, meaning that those who choose to immigrate to the United States are not likely to commit crimes simply because of their own characteristics. According to the researchers, “there is evidence that the process of migration selects individuals who have lower criminal propensity or are more responsive to deterrent effects than the average native” (Butcher & Piehl, 2007, p. 25).

Despite all of the above evidence, the opinions of the American people do not necessarily match up with this data. A recent Gallup poll asked Americans whether they believed immigration was making particular conditions in the country better or worse, one of which was “the crime situation” (see figure 2 below). In 2017, 9% of respondents answered “better,” 45% said “worse,” 43% believed there was “not much effect,” and 4% had no opinion (McCarthy, 2017). Comparatively, 58% of respondents in 2007 said they believed immigration was making the crime situation worse, demonstrating that this number has gone down over the past ten years or so. Regardless, this poll shows that Americans are five times more likely to believe that immigrants make the crime situation worse rather than better, and 45% of respondents viewing immigration as worsening crime in the United States is still substantial (McCarthy, 2017).

Another survey from 2008 revealed that approximately 73% of respondents “believed that immigration is causally related to more crime” (Rumbaut, 2008, p. 2).



Several researchers offer potential explanations for why this is the case. In 2011, for example, Parillo conducted a large-scale social distance survey which replicated similar studies done in the past that utilize the Bogardus social distance scale. The social distance scale measures the level of acceptance Americans feel towards certain racial or ethnic groups that live in the United States (Parillo & Donoghue, 2013). This particular study surveyed 3,166 college students whom varied by gender, geographical region, place of birth, class, race, religion, ethnicity, class year, and more. Parillo’s results turned out to be very similar to the results of past surveys, with groups that exhibit the most “racial and cultural differences” experiencing the most social distance from native-born Americans. In other words, humans are naturally drawn to those most similar to themselves, a concept Parillo refers to as the similarity-attraction paradigm, and the most distance is kept between oneself and someone who looks and acts differently, such as a non-white immigrant from a different culture (Parillo & Donoghue, 2013). While social distance

is not directly related to the fear of crime, these findings can help explain why Americans may be less trusting of and less informed about certain groups of immigrants.

Butcher and Piehl also point out that foreign-born individuals tend to resemble the population of Americans that is most often associated with high crime and incarceration rates. “That is, immigrants have low average levels of education and very low average wages, and many are young, male, and Hispanic” (Butcher & Piehl, 2007, p. 1), the authors argue. In associating immigrants with groups within the United States that are disproportionately incarcerated, it is not surprising that many Americans consequently view immigrants themselves as having a higher propensity for committing crimes.

An alternative theory regarding how misconceptions regarding immigrant criminality formulate and disseminate centers around media coverage. A 2016 study by Sohoni and Sohoni included a media analysis of news articles, op-ed/column pieces, letters to the editor, and Last Word entries in a Williamsburg, Virginia newspaper and found that the three most common themes in articles related to immigration were “immigrant illegality,” “immigrant criminality,” and “aiding and abetting” (Sohoni & Sohoni, 2016, p. 55). Upon further analysis, the researchers attributed these overwhelmingly negative themes to the “conflation of key terms, assumptions of the legal status of immigrants, and a focus on high-profile criminal acts” (Sohoni & Sohoni, 2016, p. 49). In other words, the researchers found that the newspaper was exaggerating immigrant crime through assumptions and disproportionate reporting of criminal acts committed by immigrants as opposed to those committed by non-immigrants. The authors argue that this creates a negative view of immigrants as criminals, particularly since “any crime committed by immigrants, regardless of their legal status, is seen as crime that would not have occurred had

there been stricter regulations, or greater enforcement of current laws” (Sohoni & Sohoni, 2016, p. 63).

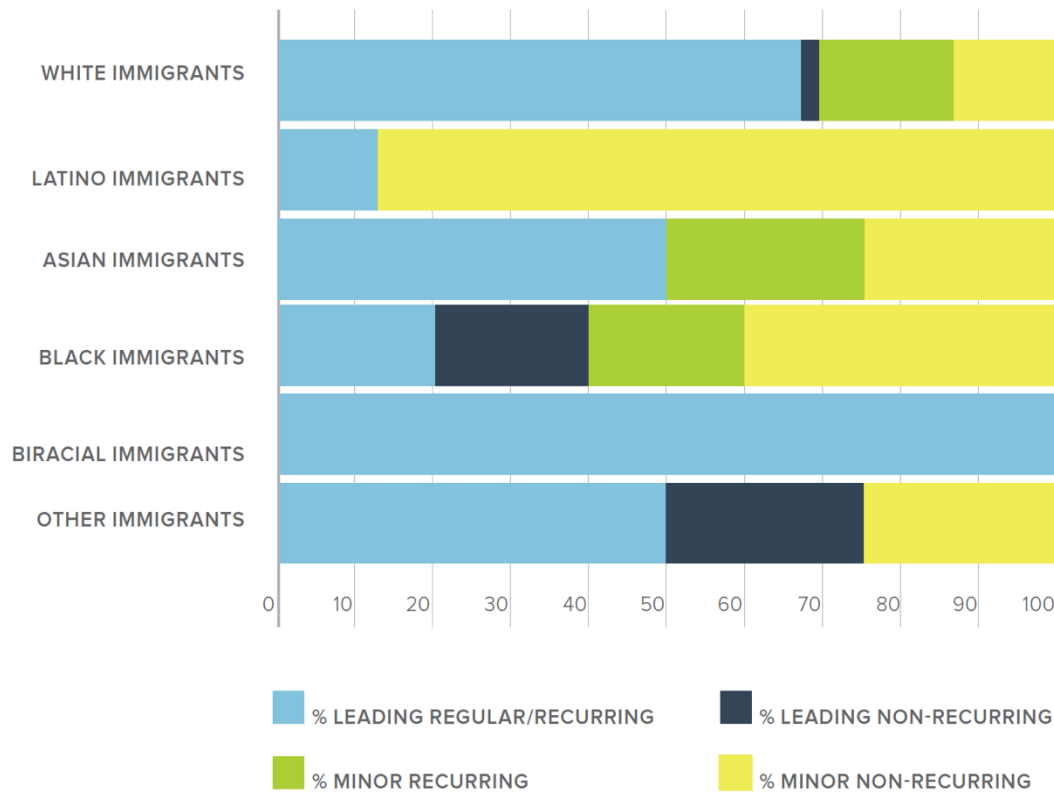
A similar study from 2018 examines the images that accompany news articles about immigrants in *Time*, *Newsweek* and *U.S. News and World Report* from 2000 to 2010. The researchers find that “the press is likely to feature negative aspects of immigration through images in a way that is inconsistent with immigrant demographics” (Farris & Mohamed, 2018, p. 2). These aspects generally focused on criminal behavior or illegality, often through images of border control, immigration enforcement, and more. Many images also portrayed immigrants performing low-wage jobs (Farris & Mohamed, 2018). The authors argue that when the media frames immigrants in such a negative light, it not only perpetuates false ideas of immigrants as “threats,” it also has the potential to affect national immigration policy leanings (Farris & Mohamed, 2018).

A comparative study of Spanish-language versus English-language news outlets from 2008 also supports these findings. This study, which looked at the quantity and focus of immigration coverage among these two types of news outlets in California, finds that while the Spanish-language news sources covered more stories related to immigration, the English-news stories related to immigration featured a negative slant much more frequently (Branton & Dunaway, 2008).

These types of negative portrayals are not only found in news media, they can also be clearly seen in popular media, such as television episodes and films. A report by The Opportunity Agenda published in 2017 revealed the results of a study which examined this phenomenon. The authors gathered 640 episodes from 53 popular shows that aired between April 2014 and June 2016 and then used a randomizer to choose 40 of those episodes, which were then

coded by two different researchers. Upon analyzing this data, the researchers discovered many similarities in the ways immigrant characters were represented and the storylines and themes these characters were involved in across the various episodes and shows. To begin, immigrant characters were very underrepresented in these episodes, as only 6% of the characters the researchers encountered were immigrants whereas over 13% of the US population is comprised of foreign-born individuals. This number fell to just 3% when considering only shows which take place in contemporary America (Odigie-Turley, 2017). Interestingly, when immigrant characters were present in the shows, they were likely to occupy important, leading roles, depending on their race (see figure 3 below). Of the immigrant characters identified in the 40 episodes, 56% were recurring, lead characters and 4% were lead characters in that particular episode but were not recurring. The remaining 40% of immigrant characters held minor roles, both recurring and non-recurring. However, only a small percentage of Latinx immigrant characters held lead, recurring roles (Odigie-Turley, 2017). The researchers also found that the race and ethnicity of immigrant characters had a large impact on representation. For instance, although immigrants as a whole were found to be underrepresented in this study, white non-Hispanic immigrants were found to be largely overrepresented within the group of immigrant characters, comprising 66% of these characters. On the other hand, non-white immigrants were found to be underrepresented. Latinx and Hispanic characters, for example, constituted only 11% of immigrants present in the sample despite making up approximately 45% of the American foreign-born population (Odigie-Turley, 2017).

Figure 3:
Odigie-Turley, 2017



PERCENTAGE OF IMMIGRANT CHARACTER REPRESENTATION BY ROLE TYPE AND RACIAL/ETHNIC GROUP

The researchers also observed interesting patterns regarding the ways immigrants were portrayed in television shows. Most of storylines involving immigrant characters revolved around historical immigration or colonialism, often depicting the stories of white, European immigrants. However, 25% of the immigrant storylines observed in this study involved unlawful activities in some capacity. In some cases, this consisted of non-immigrant characters questioning whether or not an immigrant character was lawfully residing in the United States or not while in other cases these storylines referenced terrorism. More common, though, were instances in which immigrant characters were tied directly to illegal activity, apart from residing in the country unlawfully (Odigie-Turley, 2017). This trend was particularly striking when looking at Latinx immigrant characters, 50% of whom committed an unlawful act and 38% of

whom were incarcerated in the episodes examined. Even when Latinx characters were not directly tied to criminal activity in some way, the authors found that many held lower-skilled jobs or were unemployed due to previous involvement in illicit activity (Odigie-Turley, 2017). This study, although somewhat limited in scope, reveals that in popular media, “the overall representation of immigrants from specific regions of the world, particularly Latin America, is currently limited to a very narrow and harmful set of storylines that tend to reinforce negative stereotypes and justify anxiety concerning the supposed threat immigrants pose to community safety in the United States” (Odigie-Turley, 2017, p. 37).

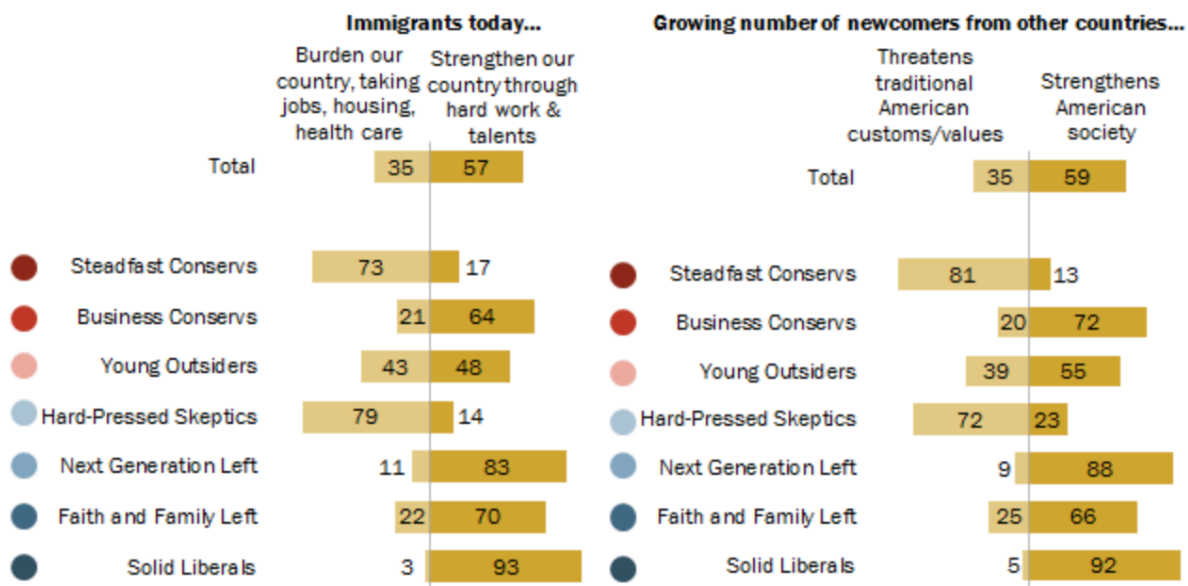
Theories surrounding media coverage are particularly important seeing as the media is a very tangible, easily transformable way that immigrants are portrayed in a negative light, and it has been found to have an impact on the views of the general public. For example, media coverage driven by endorsements was found to sway the public’s preferences in Senate campaigns in the United States, while the framing of a KKK rally as positive or negative by the news media significantly altered how the public viewed the rally (Kahn & Kenney, 2002; Nelson, Clawson & Oxley, 1997). Furthermore, a 2012 study by the National Hispanic Media Coalition found that non-Latinx Americans who were exposed to news or entertainment media with unfavorable or negative opinions towards Latinx and/or immigrant populations had a less favorable opinion of those groups and were more likely to stereotype Latinx individuals as unintelligent than those who were not exposed to this type of negative media (Barreto, Noriega, Manzano, & Segura, 2012). For these reasons, it is important to gain a greater understanding of how media coverage plays into the inaccurate portrayal of immigrants as criminals, as it is very likely that this phenomenon has a significant impact on the way the United States as a whole views immigrants.

Apart from media outlets, political parties and political leaders may also influence public opinion. Party affiliation, for example, has been found to impact an individual’s view of immigrants. A 2014 Pew Research study published by People Press looked to expand on the typical notions of “red versus blue” in politics and investigate how specific subgroups of each political party viewed important issues (see figure 4 below). The results of the study reveal that not every group within the two major political parties agrees on these matters, including on the issue of immigration. For example, 73% of “Steadfast Conservatives” viewed immigrants as a burden to society while only 21% of “Business Conservatives” held this view (Beyond Red vs. Blue, 2014). Thus, the specific subgroup one identifies with within the overarching political parties can have an impact on his or her views on immigration.

Figure 4:

Steadfast Conservatives, Hard-Pressed Skeptics View Immigrants Negatively

% who say...



2014 Political Typology. Q25g & Q50dd.
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Another study investigates how political elites can shape public opinion, particularly focusing on the 2016 United States presidential election and Trump's campaign announcement speech which referred to immigrants in a very negative light. Using public opinion surveys on minority rights from the period around Trump's speech, the author finds "evidence that Trump's statements negatively affected public opinion toward immigrants particularly among groups with restrictionist tendencies" (Flores, 2018, p. 1649). The researcher finds that these negative effects are not lasting and instead only affect public opinion in the short term, which may help explain why the issue of immigration became such a prominent and frequent element of Trump's campaign and subsequent presidency. Interestingly, the author also conducts a panel survey experiment in which respondents read statements on immigration written by both prominent politicians and by local residents who are not politicians and finds that respondents were not more likely to buy into the arguments of elite politicians than they were local residents (Flores, 2018). However, political leaders have the resources and the power to spread their opinions farther and wider than the average citizen, particularly with the assistance of mass media, meaning it is important and relevant to focus on the rhetoric of the Trump administration rather than of average Americans.

There is little research which looks at the effects of actual policy decisions made by political elites on public opinion. Although measuring such a relationship is outside of the scope of this thesis, it is worthwhile to examine how policy memos released by the administration represent and portray immigrants. Doing so can provide a glimpse into the views of some of the most powerful political elites in the United States.

Any immigrant group within the United States is at risk of being unfairly portrayed as criminally-inclined, particularly non-white groups. However, immigrants from Latin America

and especially from Mexico have perhaps been subjected to this phenomenon more than other groups in the United States in recent decades. America's general fear of Latinx immigrants, often referred to as the "Latino threat narrative," has permeated throughout the country for decades. According to Chavez (2013), much of this fear arose due to racial anxieties and ideas surrounding "illegality," a concept which was frequently associated with Latinx immigrants in the wake of immigration restrictions in the 1920s and continues to be associated with this group today. Negative ideas surrounding Latinx immigrants have been exacerbated by scores of prominent anti-immigration authors over the past several decades who have framed immigration from Latin America as a threat to the fabric of American society in their writings (Chavez, 2013).

The current presidential administration has again brought this issue to light in a very blatant way. While announcing his campaign for president in 2015, now-president Trump stated "When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best . . . They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems to us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people" (Green, 2016). Green (2016), refers to this collection of statements as the "Trump Hypothesis" and, although disproven time and time again by researchers, it was a critical aspect of Trump's campaign and continues to be important to him and his administration. This intense focus on immigration has not been inconsequential, with one study finding that the number of news articles linking immigrants to crime spiked in the days and weeks following Trump's campaign announcement (Flores, 2018). For these reasons, this thesis will focus specifically on Latinx immigrants and will examine policy rhetoric from the Trump administration, although examples from the media will also be pulled from earlier years.

A great deal of literature exists which discusses immigrant crime rates, explanations for low crime rates among immigrant populations, public perceptions of immigrant criminality, and the origins of misconceptions of immigrants as criminals. However, many gaps in the literature still exist. For instance, many current studies focus on groups of non-criminal immigrants who are portrayed as criminals due to race or country of origin, but there is significantly less literature examining immigrants who have committed crimes. By focusing on news stories and policy memos which were written in direct response to Latinx immigrants who committed crimes, this thesis will fall within the aforementioned gap in the literature and will shed light on the potential effects of a previously unexplored explanation for how all immigrants have become criminals in the eyes of many Americans.

CHAPTER 3: SIGNIFICANCE

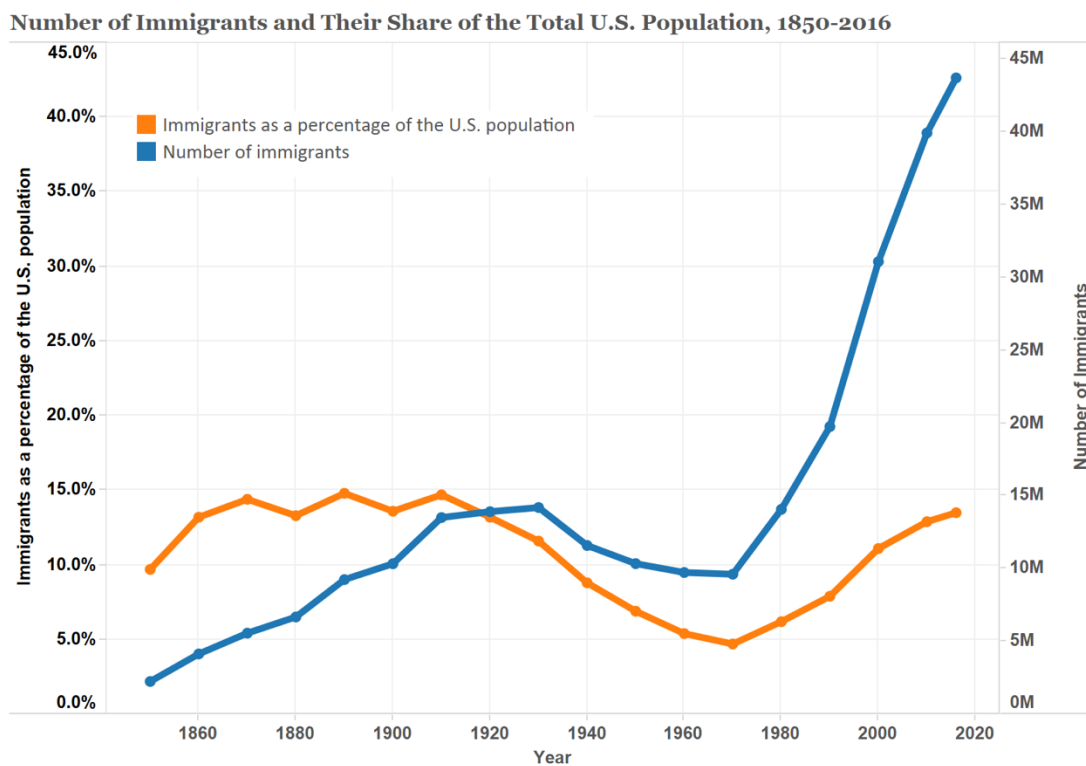
The research questions for this study include: how are immigrants who have committed crimes represented in the media and in White House correspondence? What dominant narratives and secondary counter-narratives are present in the data? How are immigration and crime linked to each other in the data? What kinds of words and phrases are often used to describe immigrants in the data? These questions were selected based on their importance and significance in modern-day America. This chapter provides some examples as to why it is evident that this type of research matters and why the results should be considered and expanded upon.

Immigration has always been an important part of the history of the United States and continues to play an important role in politics, society, and economics. With the current presidential administration as well as many other politicians and media sources throughout the country focusing heavily on issues related to immigration, it seems as though debates surrounding migration are incredibly pervasive in American society right now. While a good deal of the rhetoric around immigration in the United States is positive, much of it takes an anti-immigrant stance rooted in fear, stereotypes, and misconceptions, often focused on the idea that immigrants are frequently criminals. Studying the portrayal of this important subset of the population in the United States is incredibly relevant, particularly at a vital time such as this when this country's attitude towards immigrants seems to be growing increasingly hostile.

The foreign-born population makes up an important part of the overall population of the United States. According to the Migration Policy Institute, in 2017 the number of immigrants in the United States totaled a little over 44 million, or approximately 13.7% of the American population as a whole (see figure 5 below). These statistics include all individuals whom were not United States citizens at birth, including "naturalized citizens, lawful permanent residents

(LPRs), certain legal nonimmigrants (e.g., persons on student or work visas), those admitted under refugee or asylee status, and persons illegally residing in the United States” (“U.S. Immigrant Population,” 2017). The percentage of the United States population that is foreign-born is increasing and the number of foreign-born individuals residing in the United States has grown substantially over the past forty years or so and will likely continue to rise. Thus, it is important to study the economic, political, and social effects of this population, such as its relationship to crime.

Figure 5:



Migration Policy Institute (MPI) Data Hub
<http://migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub>

“U.S. Immigrant Population,” 2017

In addition to making up a significant portion of the United States population, the foreign-born are also the subject of a great deal of legislation, discussion, and debate within the United States government. Recent efforts by the current administration, such as the 2017 travel ban and the ongoing effort to build a wall along the southern border with Mexico, are targeted at

the foreign-born population in an effort to prevent individuals from entering the United States. Studying immigration and crime can help inform this type of policy, which is likely influenced by ideas about immigrants as criminals, both on the national level and on a more local level as individual states and cities make decisions about sanctuary status, refugee allowances, and more.

The fear of crime committed by immigrants is by no means a new phenomenon. At the beginning of the twentieth century, immigrants from all origins were seen as “inferior” and, consequently, dangerous. This paradigm was reflected in immigration policy, particularly with legislation such as the Emergency Immigration Act of 1921 and the Immigration Act of 1924, both of which reduced the number of immigrants that would be allowed in the United States (Martinez & Valenzuela, 2006). Just as it does today, this paranoia took place despite evidence that immigration did not lead to more crime. The US Immigration Commission issued a report in 1911 which found that the “presence of newcomers had not increased violent crime and may have actually buffered it” in the early 1900s, yet fear persisted, and immigrants were continually labeled as criminals (Martinez & Valenzuela, 2006, p. 8).

This fear was originally targeted at all immigrants, with a particular focus on those of European origin. However, the passage of immigration quota acts such as the ones mentioned above severely limited the number of European immigrants coming to the United States, whereas these acts did not address immigrants from Latin America. With a limited pool of newcomers of European origin, many immigration critics turned to the Latinx population as a new target for their fear (Martinez & Valenzuela, 2006). Nowadays, other non-white immigrant groups have come to be included as scapegoats as well.

Present examples of this fear of immigrant crime are also incredibly important for understanding how the United States treats the relationship between crime and immigration.

Beyond the border wall and the travel ban, the United States government has implemented other, lesser known programs which address this type of fear. One of the most salient is the creation of the Victims of Immigration Crime Engagement (VOICE) office in January of 2017. VOICE is an initiative to support American victims of crimes committed by undocumented immigrants, ranging from murder to theft, in the United States. The program provides a toll-free support hotline for victims as well as assistance reporting and handling the crime (US Immigration and Customs Enforcement, 2018). Clearly, this notion of “immigrants as criminals” is strong enough to warrant differential treatment of crime committed by the foreign-born from crime committed by the native-born.

Local examples from the state of Vermont demonstrate that this ideology goes far beyond the federal government – it is very present on a community and an individual level as well. In 2017, for example, Rutland, Vermont was preparing to welcome 100 refugees from Syria who were set to be resettled in the small city under the guidance of then-Mayor Christopher Louras. A group of Rutland citizens quickly organized themselves in opposition of refugee resettlement, holding town-wide debates and hosting anti-immigration speakers at the local library (Hauslohner, 2018). A Facebook page organized by those fighting against resettlement, called “Rutland First,” reveals that the opposition to welcoming refugees was largely rooted in fear. The “about” section of the Rutland First page states “we have a severe heroin epidemic, economic issues, over taxation issues, and social issues with our current citizens. We all have a desire to help people but not at the cost of our own citizens” (“Rutland First,” n.d.). A quick glance at the posts and comments that fill the page is also indicative of these fears. Some examples of the rhetoric include: “it takes a special kind of lunatic to think that importing welfare recipients who want to kill us is a good idea,” “wake up Rutland, the idiot Louras is

obsessed with endangering your family and mine flooding our town with improperly vetted refugees,” and “there is ample [sic] evidence of the crimes and dangers of this migrant group” (“Rutland First,” n.d.). Now, over a year after Rutland began preparing for the arrival of the refugee families, only 14 refugees have made it to the city and Mayor Louras has lost reelection to a candidate that he had previously defeated twice (Hauslohner, 2018). While the lack of refugees in Rutland is ultimately due to the travel ban, the anti-immigrant debate undoubtedly had an enormous impact on Rutland, even beyond costing Christopher Louras his position as mayor.

This trend is not unique to the United States, either, as the fear of immigrants can also be seen internationally and is often reflected in political decisions. In recent years, for example, far-right, conservative, nationalist political parties have found a great deal of success across Europe. Many of these parties run on platforms closely linked to anti-immigrant sentiment, often attracting Europeans who feel that their governments have put their needs aside to cater to the growing group of migrants now living in many European countries. However, the issues Europeans take with immigration are not only economic; BBC argues that these issues also have much to do with “long-standing fears about globalisation [sic] and a dilution of national identity” (“Europe and nationalism,” 2018).

Far-right political parties in countries such as Italy, Germany, Austria, Sweden, France, Hungary, Slovenia, and Poland have all experienced varying degrees of success in recent elections across the continent. In Germany, for example, the Alternative for Germany party just entered parliament for the first time in 2017. This party campaigned on very strict anti-immigration policies, likely as a reaction to the open-door policy that has characterized Germany’s immigration policies in recent years under the leadership of Chancellor Angela

Merkel (“Europe and nationalism,” 2018). Elsewhere in Europe, Italy saw two conservative parties, the Five Star Movement and the League, come together to form a coalition government in 2018. Mirroring the situation in Germany, these parties arose shortly after a large influx of immigrants arrived in Italy, largely from northern African countries (“Europe and nationalism,” 2018). These parties, as well as similar parties rising in all of the countries mentioned above, all run on very similar platforms which frequently incorporate “hostility to immigration, anti-Islamic rhetoric and Euroscepticism” (“Europe and nationalism,” 2018).

Debates on immigration have also been widespread in the United Kingdom, where Brexit has brought many strong opinions to the forefront of British politics. Economic concerns amid a rising population of foreign-born individuals and anxieties over a loss of national identity are often cited as potential reasons why so many Brits voted to leave the European Union, and Theresa May and David Cameron have both prioritized the ability to restrict immigration between the United Kingdom and continental Europe in their post-Brexit policies. Garvan Walshe, writing for *Foreign Policy*, argues that Brexit, particularly the Leave campaign, revived an anti-immigrant attitude that had been present in the United Kingdom for decades. Walsh maintains that “leavers didn’t mainstream the ideas of the far-right; they amplified, in propitious circumstances, a theme that had always been part of British rightwing politics” (Walsh, 2018). Thus, the United States is certainly not the only country which has seen an intensification in already existing anti-immigrant attitudes and policies in the past few years.

This phenomenon, which is large in scope and important in consequence, is permeating throughout the globe. It is incredibly important to engage in research which examines how these perceptions persist, how the existence of these perceptions affect both immigrant and non-

immigrant populations worldwide, and what steps could possibly be taken to ensure the discourse surrounding immigration becomes rooted in reality.

CHAPTER 4: METHODS

This research incorporated a mixture of qualitative and quantitative methods, as detailed in this chapter. To begin, I selected samples of media coverage and political rhetoric to analyze. Media samples were selected from periods immediately following the killing of Kathryn Steinle in 2015, the quadruple-murder perpetrated by MS-13 gang members on Long Island in 2017, and the murder of Mollie Tibbetts in 2018 (see Appendix A for descriptions of these three events). These recent high-profile violent crimes all involved Latinx immigrants and all incited vehement debates about various aspects of immigration in the United States. Articles were gathered from five different national media sources: *The Huffington Post*, *The New York Times*, *Fox News*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *USA Today* (see figure 6 below). I chose these five sources in order to represent a variety of political leanings, including liberal, conservative, and neutral, as well to represent multiple categories of types of media sources, as demonstrated in the figure below. Additionally, all five of these news sources are popular and well-known in the United States.

Figure 6:	The Huffington Post	The New York Times	Fox News	The Wall Street Journal	USA Today
Political Leaning	Liberal	Liberal	Conservative	Conservative	Neutral
Source Categorization	Online aggregator	Flagship print media	Broadcast news (online print version)	Flagship print media	Online aggregator

To find articles, I relied largely on archive search systems from media sources' websites and on the Google search engine. Some websites offer features which allow readers to search the archives, filtering by key words and specific time periods, which made finding all of the articles pertaining to a certain event very simple. Other websites did not offer this feature, which made it nearly impossible to find the necessary articles. In these cases, I turned to google and simply searched for key words and the name of the news source (i.e. "Kathryn Steinle New York Times") in order to locate articles. When selecting articles, I decided to include news stories

written by reporters as well as op-ed and opinion pieces, as all of these types of print media are equally accessible to readers and all have the potential to influence the public. I also decided to include any article that merely mentions the event in question, even if it was not the main subject of the article.

Once I had found all the articles related to a specific event from one of my sources, I pulled only the articles written within the first thirty days following the incident, then separated them into those written within the first five days and those written after the first five days. This was done to get a sense of what the general reactions were both immediately following the incident and in the weeks that followed, after the public and media sources had formed stronger opinions about each occurrence. In some cases, I could not find any articles covering a specific event from one of the sources. Other times, I was unable to find articles from the first five days *and* from the following thirty days, so I chose two from the same time period instead. I assigned a number to each article being considered for the study and used a random number generator, random.org, to select one article from each group (or two articles from one group, if necessary). I ended up with 26 articles in total.

Next, I gathered four executive orders and official statements from the Trump administration from whitehouse.gov announcing or promoting the following: the “Border Security and Immigration Enforcement Improvements” order, the “Enhancing Public Safety in the Interior of the United States” order, the H.R. 3004 bill also known as “Kate’s Law,” and the decision to end Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, all announced in 2017 (see Appendix B for descriptions of these documents). These particular laws/policies were chosen because they address some of the most well-known and widely debated aspects of President Trump’s immigration policy, including sanctuary cities, the border wall, DACA, and deportation. These events also reflect interesting differences in public opinion. For example, a recent Gallup study found that 41% of Americans favored expansions of the wall along the US-

Mexico border, whereas only about 15% disapproved of allowing DACA recipients to gain citizenship (Newport, 2018).

After selecting my samples, which totaled 30 pieces of data, I focused on coding articles and governmental documents in order to determine how immigrant criminality is portrayed in my samples. I largely utilized inductive coding, meaning I started by skimming the articles I had selected and jotting down some common words, themes, and patterns that I noticed with somewhat frequency. Using these notes, I identified codes that I felt were important in portraying the tone and subject of the selected articles, then organized them into broader categories in order to create a codebook consisting of both descriptive and analytical codes and sub-codes (see figure 7 below).

Figure 7:	Code	Sub-Codes
Descriptive	Crime and Violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gang activity/Suspicion of gang activity • Violent crime (homicide, sexual violence, etc.) • Random violence
	Laws	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Laws/policies regulating immigration and immigrants • Sanctuary City policies • Border security
	Politics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political debates surrounding immigration • Political parties' reactions to immigration • Using immigrant crime to prove a political point
	Background on Immigrant Perpetrators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Previous convictions or encounters with law enforcement (criminal record) • Nation of origin • Mental health • Previous deportations • Documentation status

Analytical	Ways Immigrants Are Described	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Illegal, fugitive, criminal, undocumented, etc.
	Immigrants and Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • References to immigrants being dangerous or not dangerous • Mentions of immigrant crimes being preventable
	Immigration and American Society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patriotism/nationalism • Immigration reported to be impacting culture or society
	Pro-Immigrant Sentiment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explicit support of immigrants in the United States
	Anti-Immigrant Sentiment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explicit dissatisfaction with immigrants in the United States

To organize my coding, I utilized a software called Nvivo, which allowed me to easily organize, code, and analyze my data. To code the data, I read through each article or document once and assigned each important word, phrase, or passage a code (or codes) which I felt was fitting. The creation of the above code book and the coding itself was largely informed by Meghan Cope's "Coding qualitative data" which is a chapter from *Qualitative Research Methods in Human Geography*.

After coding each article, I analyzed my coded data to identify important patterns. As most of the data was qualitative, this mostly consisted of examining quotes and passages to find similarities and patterns among different aspects of the data. For the quantitative aspect of this study, I used the "word count" and "word tree" tools built into Nvivo to reveal how often and in what context certain words were used.

Once I had analyzed the data and obtained my results, I conducted some secondary research in order to situate my results in the broader context of immigration studies and further inform my analysis. For this, I relied heavily on the following texts: *Framing Immigrants* by Chris Haynes, Jennifer Merolla, and S. Karthick Ramakrishnan; *The Latino Threat* by Leo R. Chavez; *Undocumented Fears* by Jamie Longazel; and *Brown Tide Rising* by Otto Santa Ana.

Other research methods that I considered including in this study were in-depth, qualitative interviews and primary analysis of FBI and census data. However, there are several reasons I ultimately decided against utilizing these methods for this particular project. For one, the conditions surrounding this project are somewhat restrictive considering the short timeline of the research and the limited resources available. Conducting, transcribing, and analyzing several lengthy interviews, for example, would have taken many hours and likely would have prevented much time from being put towards the media analysis portion of the study. Primary analysis of databases such as FBI crime information and United States census data also would have been time consuming and would have required some additional research training to ensure accurate results. Although this would have been possible, it also would have taken up valuable time that was ultimately put towards coding and analyzing. Seeing as many of the peer-reviewed journal articles cited in the literature review utilize these, or very similar, databases, I ultimately decided secondary review of existing studies was sufficient in informing readers about the realities of the empirical data surrounding immigrant criminality. Additionally, the data that I would have had access to through my thesis advisor, Professor Pablo Bose, mostly focuses on refugee-receiving communities rather than strictly immigrant-receiving communities, which is slightly outside of the scope of this research.

Another very important factor which motivated many of the decisions I made in this study was the ethical considerations of this type of work. Immigration is a very divisive topic that is often discussed and debated by politicians, media reporters, and ordinary citizens. However, these discussions and debates do not only impact ideas surrounding immigration, they also have very real consequences for millions of individual human beings. Thus, it is important for anyone doing research on immigration to consider what kind of contribution the work would

add to the greater immigration debate and what kind of impact that contribution would have on immigrant communities in the United States. This is particularly true for research such as this, which involves immigrant criminality. For me, it is imperative that my research is not only thorough and accurate but also makes a positive impact on an often-misunderstood topic.

After considering the possible implications of interviewing immigrants themselves on these topics, I ultimately decided the risk was too great. Although I think it is important to include voices from the communities in question in research such as this, interviews did not seem like the right fit for this particular project. When talking about crimes committed by immigrants, the tone of a conversation or an interview can quickly and unintentionally cross a line to accusatory or critical, and I certainly did not want interview participants to feel as though they needed to defend their communities in any way.

Another consideration I had when designing my study was the political climate. I believe that this type of research is particularly urgent in light of the current political situation of the United States, which is often very anti-immigrant in nature and has real potential to make immigrants feel unsafe and unwelcome in this country. As my ideas for this study have taken shape over the past couple of years, I have watched the political climate grow increasingly divided and increasingly hostile towards immigrants. It is for this reason that I decided to include a political component to this study on top of the media component and chose to include policy statements and executive orders from the White House regarding a few of the most important decisions the current administration has made that impact Latinx immigrants.

CHAPTER 5: RESULTS

This chapter details the results gathered from the research. It is split up into two subsections, chapter 5.1 which outlines the results from the quantitative analysis portion of the study, and chapter 5.2 which focuses on the qualitative portion. Chapter 5.2 is further divided into three subsections, one for each main qualitative finding.

Chapter 5.1: Quantitative Analysis – Language

Quantitative analysis for this study mostly consisted of examining the words and phrases used to describe immigrants in the data. Below is a list, although not exhaustive, of some of the words used to describe the Latinx immigrants referenced in the data.

Figure 8:

Alien	Undocumented immigrant	Felon	Undocumented individual
Immigrant	Immigrant with a record	New Americans	Gang member
Entered country illegally	Illegal immigrant	Immigrant without proper legal documentation	Killers
Mexican	A man who happens to be undocumented	Fugitives	Illegals
Members of violent groups	Dangerous criminal aliens		

To get a better idea of how frequently these terms were used, a word count tool was employed. Some of the most note-worthy word frequencies of immigrant descriptors included:

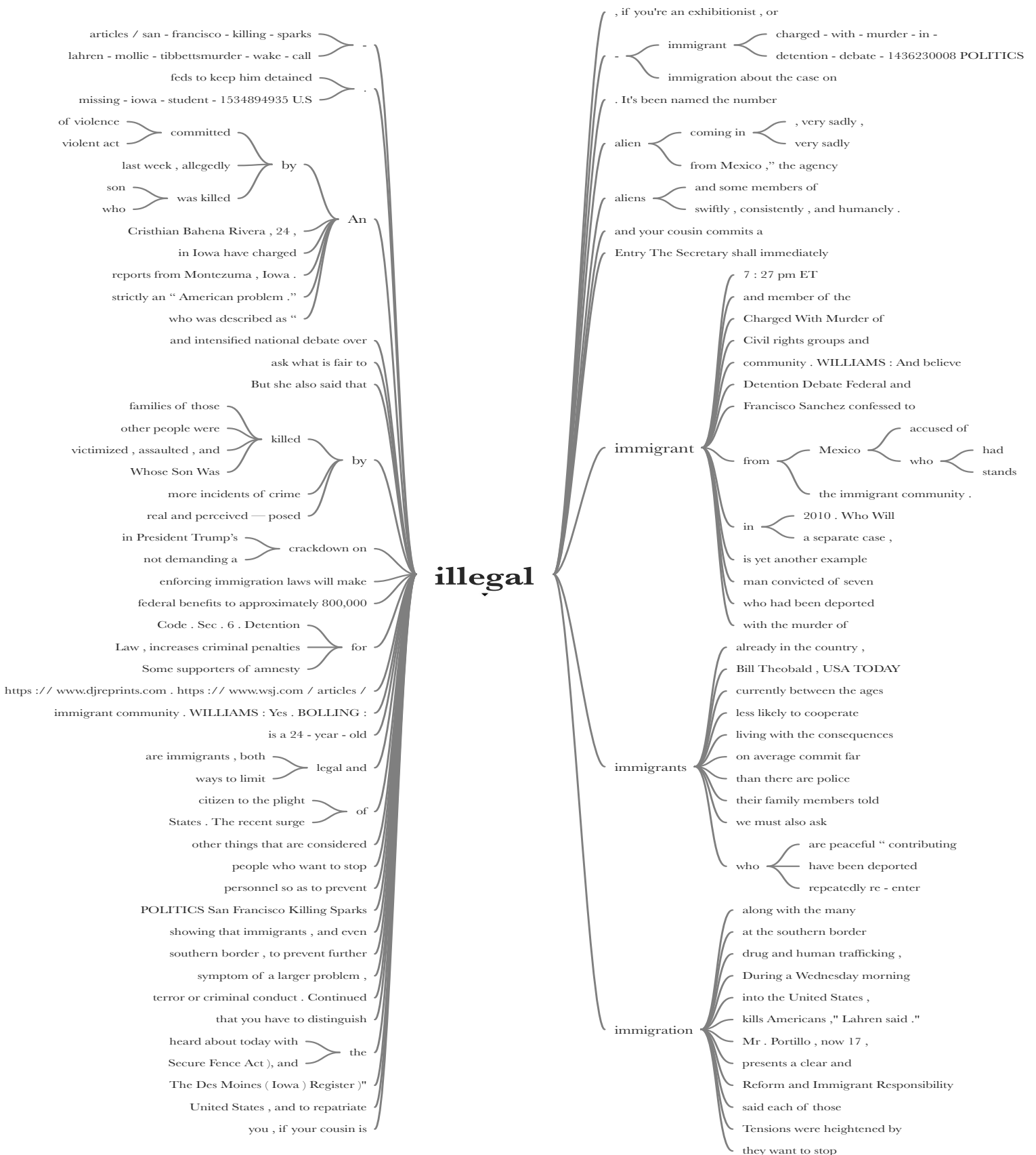
Figure 9:

Word	Word Count	% of coverage
Illegal	88	0.4
Gang	82	0.37
Criminal	71	0.32
Alien	46	0.21
Undocumented	26	0.12

*Note: these word counts include stemmed words as well as exact matches, meaning word counts for the word “illegal” also include instances of the words “illegals,” “illegally,” etc.

These words were not necessarily being used to directly describe immigrants every time they occurred. Therefore, in order to get a better idea of the context surrounding these words, word trees were created which show the words commonly used directly before and after each occurrence of one of the core words. The image on the following page is an example of a word tree for the word “illegal.” (Note: for word trees, only exact matches of the words are included, stemmed words are not included.)

Figure 10:



Using word trees for all of the words mentioned in the table above, it was possible to get a better idea of the context surrounding each word. Some of the descriptor words or phrases used after the core words in question (or before, in the case of the word “alien”) are listed below, with the most common ones in bold.

Figure 11:

Word	Context Words
Illegal	immigrant, immigrants, immigration , alien/aliens
Gang	member, members, violence , 's criminal activity
Criminal	aliens, immigrants, actions committed by aliens, activity, conduct, investigation, offense, record , organizations
Aliens	removable, criminal , illegal
Undocumented	immigrant, immigrants , individual

Thus, the words most frequently employed to describe immigrants in the selected articles generally have a negative connotation and often describe the legal status of the individuals.

Overall, quantitative analysis showed that the words most frequently used to describe immigrants in the data included “illegal,” “gang,” and “criminal,” with “aliens” and “undocumented” proving to be less common but still noteworthy and that most language surrounding immigrants had a negative connotation.

Chapter 5.2: Qualitative Analysis – Themes

Analysis of the coded qualitative data revealed three dominant narratives and three underlying counter-narratives present in the thirty articles selected for this research. These narratives categorize the ways in which immigrants, immigration, and immigrant acts were represented and portrayed in the data and include “Immigrants as a Threat,” “Immigrants as a Burden,” and “Immigration as a Bargaining Chip.”

Chapter 5.2.1: Immigrants as a Threat

By the very nature of the articles analyzed for this project, violent criminal acts committed by Latino immigrants were commonly discussed. These included abduction, murder, torture, shootings, homicide, drug/arms trafficking, gang violence, and more. The context surrounding these crimes was also a very important aspect of these articles, and often involved examining the backgrounds of the immigrants who perpetrated the crimes in question, describing the crimes in great detail, and proposing solutions that may reduce this type of crime. Including these kinds of details effectively created an even larger cloud of fear around these immigrants.

The man who shot and killed Kathryn Steinle, Francisco López-Sánchez, is an undocumented immigrant from Mexico who was deported back to his native country several times for a variety of other, less-violent crimes prior to Steinle’s death. The man who killed Mollie Tibbetts, Cristhian Rivera, had never been deported back to his native Mexico prior to his crime, but was living in the United States without documentation. Nearly every article regarding Steinle and Tibbetts discussed the history of these two men, including past deportations, previous charges, and past criminal records, or lack thereof. Many articles also went into details about their country of origin, time of entry into the United States, reasons for migrating, employment

history, and documentation status. Sometimes these discussions were very specific, particularly those regarding the criminal history of López-Sánchez. Some articles went into detail about the dates of past criminal events or the amount of bail López-Sánchez was held on for a particular crime. Interestingly, many articles reporting on Steinle mentioned that just prior to her death, López-Sánchez had been in police custody facing a drug charge. However, only two of the ten articles regarding this case revealed that this drug charge was 20 years old and involved only a \$20 marijuana deal.

Articles discussing the Long Island quadruple-murder often gave some historical background on the gang, including when and where it formed, who its members are, and what its mottos are. Often, articles would include data on how many deaths MS-13 is reportedly responsible for and would describe other crimes that the gang had committed, particularly in the Long Island area. The descriptions of the crimes committed by MS-13 are very detailed and included information about how victims were killed and what kind of murder weapons were used. The following quotes are a sampling of some of the language surrounding MS-13's violence:

“In addition to using machetes and knives, the attackers beat their victims that night with tree limbs, the documents show” (Robbins, 2017b).

“The gang has been allegedly responsible for at least 25 killings since January 2016 across a wide swath of Long Island. Many other people have been reported missing” (Mikelionis, 2018).

“According to the federal account, more than a dozen gang members emerged and surrounded the victims, who were ‘engulfed in a horrific frenzy of violence as they were brutally bludgeoned, sliced and stabbed to death’” (Robbins, 2017a).

In the documents released from the White House, President Trump is very explicit in his belief that “illegal immigration presents a clear and present danger to the interests of the United States” (Trump, 2017a). Trump claims that illegal immigrants bring violent crime and dangerous drugs to the United States. Many, he argues, are looking to harm Americans through acts of terror. He focuses on the victims of crimes committed by undocumented immigrants, stating “every year, countless Americans are victimized, assaulted, and killed by illegal immigrants who have been deported multiple times” (Trump, 2017c).

Trump, along with other politicians and respondents quoted in the articles analyzed, propose several policy measures which they believe would make America safer, including stricter deportation laws, building a border wall along the United States/Mexico border, and eliminating the concept of “sanctuary cities.” One theme that came up frequently in the data was the idea that crimes committed by undocumented immigrants are preventable or perhaps more senseless than crimes committed by others seeing as, from a legal perspective, undocumented immigrants should not be in the United States. In other words, many people quoted in the articles suggest that by cracking down on illegal immigration, many Americans could be spared from death or injury at the hands of an undocumented immigrant. One *New York Times* article claims that many Americans believe that “the murder of Mollie Tibbetts was not only ugly and evil, it was unnecessary and utterly preventable by government action” (Buskirk, 2018). In the case of the death of Kathryn Steinle, Dianne Feinstein, who was a California senator at the time of

Kathryn Steinle's death, was quoted in one article as saying that "the tragic death of Ms. Steinle could have been avoided" (Medina & Preston, 2015).

Thus, the notion that immigrants, particularly those who have entered the United States illegally, pose a threat in some way to America and its citizens is commonly reported on, implied, or explicitly stated in the data. However, to some extent, a counter to this narrative is present in the articles. Although rare, a few of the articles analyzed in this study utilized statistics from immigration experts and academic researchers to demonstrate that immigrants are not more likely to commit crimes than native-born citizens. These articles argue that immigration debates ignore actual statistics and data and aim to introduce that key information into the discussion. For instance, one *USA Today* article written in the aftermath of Mollie Tibbett's murder utilizes data from the Department of Justice and the CATO Institute to make this point, and one *Wall Street Journal* column briefly mentions that many studies have found that immigrants commit fewer crimes than the native-born population. Another *Fox News* article quotes a San Francisco resident who argues that "U.S. citizens also kill people" and that the focus should be shifted away from documentation status and onto the way mental health is approached in the United States ("Family of woman killed," 2015). Other articles allude to some of the benefits of policies such as sanctuary cities, a concept frequently attacked in much of the data. Some quote key law enforcement officials arguing that sanctuary city status is essential in creating trust between law enforcement and the immigrant communities within a given city and actually makes that city safer in the end.

Chapter 5.2.2: Immigrants as a Burden

Another theme that was pervasive in the data was the idea that immigrants and immigration are a burden to American society. This narrative suggests that not only are immigrants potentially dangerous to American families, they are also potentially threatening to the integrity of American culture and present a problem that must be dealt with in some way. Although the articles used in this analysis largely revolve around Latinx immigrants, it is clear that this narrative extends to the broader immigrant community as well. The notion of immigrants as a burden is created by evoking patriotism and through arguing that the needs of native-born Americans must be prioritized above all else.

While testifying during a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing, the mother of one man killed by an immigrant was quoted as saying “this is our family's 9/11 terrorist attack...you are either for Americans or you are not” (Theobald, 2015). This statement not only evokes feelings of patriotism by mentioning one of the worst attacks on Americans in history, it also suggests that a pro-immigrant stance is inherently anti-American. Another article, discussing the same hearing, states “Ms. Wilkerson said [sanctuary] cities send a message to foreign criminals: ‘Come to our town U.S.A., and we’ll protect you.’ She urged the senators to crack down on such criminals. ‘You’re elected by Americans, not any other country, and you should be for Americans,’ she said, drawing applause from the chamber” (Preston, 2015).

In her Senate Judiciary Committee hearing, Wilkerson brings up the idea that Americans should be prioritized above foreign-born individuals, a concept which President Trump relies heavily on in his statement explaining why he decided to end DACA. Below is a sampling of quotes from that statement:

“...while at the same time ensuring that any immigration reform we adopt provides enduring benefits for the American citizens we were elected to serve” (Trump, 2017d).

“Our first and highest priority in advancing immigration reform must be to improve jobs, wages and security for American workers and their families” (Trump, 2017d).

“Congress now has the opportunity to advance responsible immigration reform that puts American jobs and American security first” (Trump, 2017d).

These examples suggest that currently in the United States, native-born Americans are not sufficiently prioritized in comparison to foreign-born individuals residing in the country. This notion complements the idea that immigrants are flooding into American communities, causing chaos by committing violent crimes, and straining the already limited resources available in these towns and cities. These assertions help create the narrative that immigration is burdensome in the United States because immigrants take away key resources and attention from native-born Americans.

Once again, the articles analyzed in this study do provide a counter-narrative which, in this case, largely disputes the idea that supporting immigrants is inherently anti-American. One prominent example can be seen in articles about Mollie Tibbetts which feature quotes from her family. Tibbetts' father is particularly vocal on this issue and released a statement asserting that he does not believe Tibbetts' death should be used as a piece of ammo in America's fight against immigration. Tibbetts' states, “do not appropriate Mollie's soul in advancing views she believed were profoundly racist” and goes on address the Hispanic community in the United States, saying “my family stands with you and offers its heartfelt apology. That you've been beset by the circumstances of Mollie's death is wrong. We treasure the contribution you bring to the

American tapestry in all its color and melody” (Papenfuss, 2018). In the articles that discuss this statement from Tibbetts’ father, immigrants are portrayed in a different way. Rather than arguing that immigration is a burden on America, Tibbetts’ father celebrates the contributions that immigrant communities can bring to American society.

In one article discussing Kathryn Steinle’s death, a quote from a California state senator also warns against blanket statements that affect entire populations due to the criminal acts of one immigrant. Ricardo Lara, the state senator, says “We’re not going to allow the scapegoating or have the deplorable actions by one deranged individual stop our effort to include the millions of hard-working immigrants who call California home” (Medina & Preston, 2015). Again, however, this counter-narrative is largely buried within the dominant narrative that immigrants and their acts are a burden on America.

Chapter 5.2.3: Immigration as a Bargaining Chip

The final dominant narrative found in the data is that immigrants, particularly those who commit crimes, can serve as bargaining chips in political debates to push a particular view or ideology. This arises from coverage of politicians mentioning immigrant crimes on campaign trails, from political actors criticizing each other on the way they handle immigrant criminality, and from President Trump’s use of examples of immigrant crime in forming policy.

Many of the articles in this study discuss the ways American politicians have used crimes perpetrated by immigrants to push their political views. For example, one article wrote that “Trump repeatedly mentioned Steinle's death on the campaign trail. And during his State of the Union Address in January, he introduced the parents of two teen girls killed by undocumented immigrants allegedly belonging to the MS-13 gang, an international gang formed in Los Angeles

and mostly made up of Salvadoran immigrants” (Gomez, 2018). Another piece points out that “Mr. Trump, a Republican presidential candidate, seized on the Lopez-Sanchez case as proof of his assertion that scores of immigrants coming from Mexico are ‘criminals, drug dealers, rapists’” (Medina & Preston, 2015). Countless other articles mention similar situations in which these types of events were brought up to prove a point about immigration. Jeb Bush, Mike Pence, Edwin Lee (the mayor of San Francisco), Hillary Clinton and others were all cited in various articles as either criticizing a city’s policies on immigration in the wake of a crime committed by an immigrant or as citing the crime as proof that a certain policy needed to be implemented.

In some cases, it was politicians’ reactions to crimes committed by immigrants, rather than a city’s response, that faced criticism. Elizabeth Warren, for example, faced condemnation following an interview in which she was asked her thoughts about Mollie Tibbett’s case. In her response, Warren quickly changed the subject to the humanitarian crisis along the border, stating that the United States should focus on “where the real problems are” (Buskirk, 2018). A *New York Times* opinion writer reporting on this interview stated that “callous disregard for families like the Tibbettses is one of the reasons that President Trump’s commonsense talk about immigration reform resonates with many Americans” (Buskirk, 2018). This “commonsense talk,” however, was also criticized by several of Trump’s fellow republicans, including Marco Rubio, George Pataki, and Rick Perry, according to one *USA Today* article (Stanglin, 2015).

Apart from politicians capitalizing on crimes committed by immigrants to push political agendas, many articles commented on how these events became critical points of disagreement in country-wide debates on immigration. In other words, according to several sources, it is not just politicians who use these events to push one view or another but also average Americans

who feel strongly that they can use crimes committed by immigrants to argue a point about immigration.

The counter-narrative to the idea that immigration can be used as a bargaining chip in immigration debates boils down to the fact that many believe this is exploitation, not only of immigrant communities but also of the families who have experienced tragedy due to these crimes. The *Wall Street Journal*, in an article about Kathryn Steinle's death, writes "'during a time of unspeakable tragedy, there is something fundamentally wrong about demagogues who quickly seek to exploit tragedy for political gain,' said Chris Newman, legal director for the National Day Laborer Organizing Network" (Jordan & Elinson, 2015). Mollie Tibbetts' father, in the same statement mentioned above regarding the way his daughter's death had been publicized, also laments the way politicians have used the situation "to promote their own political agendas." (Papenfuss, 2018). Tibbetts specifically calls out Donald Trump Jr., who wrote an opinion piece in the *Des Moines Register* using Mollie Tibbett's death to justify his stance on immigration.

Regardless of whether or not one thinks that using crimes committed by immigrants to promote a political agenda is exploitative, the articles in this study largely represent immigration as a tool that can be utilized in these kinds of debates.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

The data provides evidence that Latinx immigrants who have committed crimes are presented by the media and White House correspondence in a largely negative light. The actions of these individuals are often used as examples or proof of the ways in which immigrant populations as a whole are burdensome or present a danger to the United States.

The idea that Latinx immigrants are threatening to the United States is relatively new. Prior to the 1990s, Latinx populations were often viewed as lesser but were rarely seen as a danger (Santa Ana, 2002). As immigration from Mexico and Latin America continued to rise and Latinx populations in the United States continued to grow more visible, attitudes began to shift. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001, the United States saw heightened fear of immigrants from all origins (Chavez, 2013). Seeing as Latinx immigrants represented one of the most populous immigrant groups in the United States, much of this fear was directed towards Latinx persons. The border between the United States and Mexico became threatening in a whole new way, with many viewing it as a possible gateway for terrorists to enter the United States (Chavez, 2013).

It is clear from this study that even now, nearly 20 years after 9/11, this fear has persisted. In some of the data, particularly that released by the White House, the threat of terrorism still appears to be a concern. Mostly, however, this fear has shifted from terrorism to other types of violent crime, such as murder or gang violence. One important qualifier of this fear is that it seems to be heightened when the victims of these crimes are White. In the articles analyzed for this study, two of the victims, Mollie Tibbetts and Kathryn Steinle, were White Americans. The victims of the MS-13 quadruple murder on Long Island were Latino. Although the MS-13 murders still elicited a great deal of fear, the other two murders certainly garnered much more attention in the media. Some of the media sources used in this study did not have even one article

on the MS-13 quadruple homicide, while every source had multiple stories on both Mollie Tibbetts and Kathryn Steinle. The articles on Tibbetts and Steinle also seemed to go into a lot more detail about the backgrounds and personal stories of the two women than the articles on MS-13.

This phenomenon is not unique to this study. In *Undocumented Fears*, Longazel (2016) writes about two homicides committed by Latino immigrants in Hazleton, Pennsylvania, a small town which passed a controversial and well-known anti-immigrant policy called the Illegal Immigration Relief Act (IIRA). These two crimes occurred under very similar circumstances and many aspects of the cases were nearly identical, but one victim was White while the other was Latino. Longazel notices that the community's reactions to these two crimes were very different, with local news sources taking on a much more panicked tone in the articles related to the White man's death. This suggests that the public seems to be most afraid of immigrant crime when it specifically targets White victims.

Most of the data from this study specifically focused on immigrants who had committed crimes, therefore it does make sense that the threat of crime was a common theme found in the articles. However, entire immigrant communities above and beyond those who actually committed crimes were often portrayed as criminals. This type of representation, according to Haynes, Merolla, and Ramakrishnan (2016), is referred to as the "criminal frame, which associates undocumented immigrants with crimes (DUIs, drugs, theft, murder, the proliferation of gangs, and the violent activities associated with gangs)" (p. 61). In the authors' study, this type of frame accounted for approximately 21% of news stories about immigrants and was often used to argue against immigration legalization policies (Haynes, Merolla & Ramakrishnan,

2016). In this study, comprised almost entirely of stories about crime, the criminal frame is present much more frequently.

Part of this phenomenon may be explained by the fact that some Americans see undocumented individuals as inherent criminals simply because of their existence in the United States as immigrants without proper legal documentation. Longazel (2016) notices this in his case study of Hazleton, Pennsylvania, particularly while observing City Council meetings in Hazleton. Longazel (2016) quotes one councilman as stating, “if you are illegal, you are a criminal; that is the gist here” (p. 35). If undocumented Latinx immigrants are seen as criminals simply for existing in the United States and not for actually committing violent criminal acts, narratives portraying these populations as dangerous criminals will have more “proof” to work with.

This phenomenon may also be explained by the lack of clear and accurate data regarding immigrant criminality, a trend which is also found in other studies. Haynes, Merolla, and Ramakrishnan (2016) write:

Importantly, most social science research on the topic indicates that immigrants are less likely to commit violent crimes than the native-born population, and that immigration tends to reduce crime, but we find very little instance of this kind of positive framing on immigration associated with crime in our content analysis (p. 66).

Other studies have also found plentiful evidence that Latinx immigrants are often viewed as a burdensome group which threatens to take resources away from Americans and destroy non-immigrant communities. Chavez (2013) argues that Latinx immigrants are viewed in a unique way when it comes to this phenomenon. He writes:

The Latino Threat Narrative posits that Latinos are not like previous immigrant groups, who ultimately became part of the nation. According to the assumptions and taken-for-granted ‘truths’ inherent in this narrative, Latinos are unwilling or incapable of integrating, of becoming part of the national community. Rather, they are part of an invading force from south of the border that is bent on reconquering land that was formerly theirs (the U.S. Southwest) and destroying the American way of life (Chavez, 2013, p. 3).

The idea that Latinx immigrants take away important resources within American communities, something seen in this study, is also a concept that Longazel (2016) observes in Hazleton. Longazel finds that some city officials argued that the more time law enforcement spent investigating crimes committed by immigrants, the less time it could be spending protecting citizens. City officials also asserted that immigrants were draining resources in schools, hospitals, public services, and more which “diminishes [the native-born citizens’] overall quality of life” (Longazel, 2016, 37).

Importantly, this type of discourse results in native-born, White populations being painted as victims of illegal immigration (Longazel, 2016). By arguing that Latinx immigrants are taking over American communities and causing disruptions to the American way of life, which many of the articles in the dataset for this study mentioned or implied, White, non-immigrant Americans are turning focus to themselves as the bearers of the “burden” that undocumented immigrants bring to the United States. While it is true that some of those quoted in articles in this study were the family members of victims of crimes committed by immigrants, victimization was often taken one step further to more closely resemble that which Longazel writes about.

The ideas embedded in the “immigrants as a burden” narrative likely arise largely from fear. According to Chavez (2013) one scholar has claimed that “demographically, socially, and culturally, the reconquista (re-conquest) of the Southwest United States by Mexican immigrants is well underway” and that “the single most immediate and most serious challenge to America’s traditional identity comes from the immense and continuing immigration from Latin America, especially from Mexico, and the fertility rates of those immigrants compared to black and white American natives” (p. 24). In a similar example, Santa Ana (2002) argues that in the 1990s, it was common to refer to Latinx immigration using metaphors which evoke an image of a flood of people, such as “brown tide,” “relentless flow,” and “like waves on a beach” (p. 7). The sheer number of Latinx immigrants in the United States, combined with the fact that many do not believe this particular immigrant group has assimilated well into American culture, heightens the idea for many that Latinx immigrants are burdensome and are here to take over. Furthermore, research on group dynamics has shown that individuals within dominant groups are more likely to view racial and ethnic minorities negatively if the members of the minority group demonstrate a strong shared identity with other members of the minority group (Haynes, Merolla & Ramakrishnan, 2016, p. 26). Thus, when White Americans look at Latinx immigrants and see a group with strong ethnic ties that has, by their standards, not assimilated well into the United States, they may be even more likely to view immigrants negatively due to an “us” versus “them” mentality.

Researchers have also found evidence, as was present in this study, that politicians and particularly passionate citizens will use immigration, immigrant acts, and immigrants themselves to push policies or ideologies. In many of the examples from this study which portray immigrants as a “bargaining chip,” the data includes individual stories detailing very specific

crimes with the context surrounding the incident and the histories of the perpetrators and victims. This type of media coverage, which focuses on singular stories rather than on broad, wide-reaching topics or national trends, is referred to as an episodic frame (Haynes, Merolla & Ramakrishnan, 2016, p. 31). Haynes, Merolla, and Ramakrishnan (2016) argue that in their research, episodic frames which feature undocumented immigrants are often used to sway audiences in favor of immigration, perhaps by demonstrating ways that an individual immigrant has made a beneficial impact on their community or by explaining one person's reasons for immigrating to the United States. The authors argue that this type of story has a humanizing effect and may be able to convince readers to support efforts such as legalization policies. In this study, however, episodic frames are used more frequently to paint a picture of the lives lost to crimes committed by immigrants. For example, in several of the news articles and White House correspondence analyzed in this study, President Trump often references the stories of families who lost someone due to a crime committed by an immigrant, using their personal, individualized stories to convince Americans of the need for stricter immigration policies. In this way, episodic frames are used to turn readers against immigration rather than towards it.

Haynes, Merolla, and Ramakrishnan also raise the idea that the use of the word "illegal" is another way that policy makers attempt to sway public opinion in one way or another. The use of this word, whether as a way to describe immigrants and immigration or as a noun itself (i.e. "illegals"), uses the fact that someone has entered the country unlawfully to define that person. The authors cite a *New York Times* editorial which states "since the word [illegal] modifies not the crime but the whole person, it goes too far. It spreads, like a stain that cannot wash out. It leaves its target diminished as a human, a lifetime member of a presumptive criminal class" (Haynes, Merolla & Ramakrishnan, 2016, p. 147). Those who do use the word illegal argue that

it is simply an accurate description of undocumented populations, not a political statement.

Nevertheless, portraying immigrants as illegal, a trend very common in this study, represents individuals in a negative light, which can have an impact on public opinion.

One possible explanation for the frequent use of the word illegal as seen in this study and in other similar studies is restrictive style guidelines. For many news sources, guidelines are put in place instructing reporters to use specific words when covering certain topics to ensure cohesiveness among articles (Haynes, Merolla & Ramakrishnan, 2016). Thus, some reporters may be required to use the word illegal when writing about immigration. This explanation cannot, however, defend the frequent use of the word illegal in data taken from the White House, as this type of correspondence is not subject to style guidelines. Therefore, it is reasonable to speculate that the use of the word illegal in at least some of the data is meant to push a particular viewpoint on readers. Regardless, activists still assert that this language is divisive and dehumanizing, and some are hoping to encourage news publications to transition from the use of the word “illegal” to the word “undocumented” through campaigns such as the 2010 “Drop the I-Word Campaign” (Haynes, Merolla & Ramakrishnan, 2016). Although use of the word “undocumented” was much less common in this study than the use of the word “illegal,” some reporters and some of those quoted in the articles have made this switch in language.

Overall, the results of this study are largely consistent with trends that other studies have seen regarding the perceptions of Latinx immigrants as threatening, burdensome, and controversial and regarding the language often used to describe Latinx populations. The news media and government documents analyzed in this study play a large role in informing nationwide discussions and debates regarding immigration, and the authors of these articles and documents have the power to sway what kind of impact they will make based on the information,

quotes, language, and statistics they choose to include—or not include. It is important that the news media takes this power into account when making decisions about how they will represent immigrants in the future.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

A wide array of literature exists on the subject of immigrant criminality, particularly regarding Latinx immigrants. Many studies have found that immigrants are not more likely to commit crimes than native-born Americans and may be less likely to do so. Other studies reveal that, for a variety of reasons, Americans still fear that immigrants will worsen crime in the United States. Some researchers demonstrate that immigrants are likely to be portrayed as criminals or associated with crime in popular media, but little research has examined the way Latinx immigrants who have committed crimes are represented. This study worked to fill part of this gap in the literature by utilizing both qualitative and quantitative methods to analyze news articles and White House correspondence which focused on different aspects of immigrant criminality.

Several key themes emerged from the analysis of 30 different articles and documents from *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, *Fox News*, *The Huffington Post*, and the White House. Initially, from the quantitative analysis of this data, it became clear that throughout the data the words and phrases used to describe immigrants were largely negative in connotation. The most common immigrant descriptor words included “illegal,” “gang,” and “criminal” with “alien” and “undocumented” present but less common.

From the qualitative analysis portion of the study, three main narratives arose. First, Latinx immigrants were represented as a major threat to the safety of Americans. Much of the data included detailed descriptions of the threatening backgrounds of the immigrants in question as well as comprehensive accounts of the crimes committed by these individuals. Immigrant crime was often depicted as being preventable if certain other actions, such as strengthening border security or eliminating sanctuary cities, were taken. A counter-narrative present in some,

albeit very few, articles used data and statistics to assert that immigrant crime is not any more of a threat than crime committed by the native-born.

A second narrative present in the data presented Latinx immigrants as a burden to Americans and their communities. According to this narrative, immigrants are overwhelming towns and cities across the country and draining already limited community resources. Much of the data mentioned that Americans and their needs should be prioritized over immigrants, particularly when it came to political choices or policy decisions. Again, a small counter-narrative which celebrated the diversity and skill that immigrants bring to American culture was present in the data.

Lastly, the idea that immigration could be used as a bargaining chip, particularly in political or ideological debates, was common in the data. In this narrative, examples of immigrant crime and the tragedy these crimes have beset upon Americans were used to promote particular views, such as the belief that America needs to invest in stronger border security. This was particularly common in articles discussing politicians on campaign trails or local officials defending their policy decisions. The counter to this idea was that using these events to push political views is exploitation of tragic situations and is inappropriate and inconsiderate.

These findings were consistent with other research that has been conducted on similar topics, meaning that it is even more important to gain an in-depth understanding of these dominant themes. This study compliments other studies by providing an analysis of the ways Latinx immigrants who have specifically committed crimes, rather than immigrants as a whole, are portrayed.

With greater resources and more time, I would have improved upon this research in a few different ways. For one, I would have expanded the data pool to include more sources and more

articles as well as greater variety in the events being covered. I also would have recruited another researcher to assist in coding the data in order to develop more accurate results (due to intercoder reliability) and help eliminate my own bias in the analysis. Finally, I would have expanded the quantitative analysis aspect of this study, perhaps by analyzing word count information for more terms or utilizing more of the tools available in Nvivo, such as word clouds.

Future research on this subject should build off of studies such as this one to continue learning about the ways immigrants are represented in the United States. Comparison studies would be particularly useful in this field. For example, researchers could compare articles written about Latinx immigrant criminals to those written about White native-born criminals to gain a better understanding of how the results of this study are unique or not unique to Latinx immigrant populations. Another way to expand on this data would be to design a study which compares the results based on the political leaning of the news source the data originated from. Lastly, research which compares the coverage of Latinx-on-Latinx crime versus the coverage of Latinx-on-White crime, a concept briefly mentioned in this study, would be beneficial.

Latinx immigrants constitute an incredibly important part of America—culturally, socially, economically, and politically. We must continue to work towards a greater understanding of how we as a nation perceive immigration, as we cannot allow misconceptions and fallacies to overshadow reality when it comes to our understanding of immigrant populations in the United States.

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APPENDIX A:**Killing of Kathryn Steinle – July 1, 2015**

Juan Francisco López-Sánchez, also known as José Inez García Zárate or Francisco Sanchez, shot Kathryn Steinle, 32, in the upper torso while she walked along a pier in San Francisco with her father. Steinle later died from her injuries in the hospital. Steinle and Sánchez did not know each other prior to the incident. Sánchez was an undocumented immigrant from Mexico who had previously been deported several times. He had also previously served a federal prison sentence and had just recently been released from a San Francisco jail after being arrested on a minor drug charge. Immigration and Customs Enforcement had issued a detainer for Sánchez, but local authorities were able to release him without honoring the detainer because San Francisco is a sanctuary city. Steinle's death caused a great deal of debate surrounding sanctuary cities and criminal sentencing for undocumented immigrants (Jordan & Elison, 2015).

Disappearance and Killing of Mollie Tibbetts – July 18, 2018 (Kidnapping), August 21, 2018 (Found)

Mollie Tibbetts was a 20-year-old college student from Iowa who was abducted and killed by Cristhian Rivera in July 2018. Rivera abducted Tibbetts while she was out for a run in Brooklyn, Iowa. Tibbetts was missing until August, when Rivera admitted to being involved in her disappearance and led police to her body. Rivera was also an undocumented immigrant from Mexico who had been working on an Iowa farm and did not have any substantial previous run-ins with law enforcement. Tibbetts' case once again ignited a passionate immigration debate in the United States about the danger of undocumented immigrants (Lohr, 2018).

MS-13 Quadruple Homicide – April 11, 2017

More than a dozen members of MS-13 were reportedly involved in this crime, which ended in the death of four young Latino men in Long Island. The men were lured into the woods and then beaten to death by the gang members present. There were four main people charged with this crime, including Alexis Hernandez, 20; Santos Leonel Ortiz-Flores, 19; Omar Antonio Villalta, 22; and a juvenile whose name was not released by authorities. Police also announced the arrest of 15 other gang members they believed were involved in the quadruple homicide or in other gang crimes in the area. MS-13, or La Mara Salvatrucha in Spanish, is a gang which mostly consists of Latinx members, some native-born and some immigrants. The organization first arose in Los Angeles and El Salvador but has spread around the country and around Central America, including to Long Island (Robbins, 2017a).

APPENDIX B:**Executive Order: Border Security and Immigration Enforcement Improvements – January 25, 2017**

This executive order released by President Trump in January 2017 called for greater security along the southern border and for stricter enforcement in regard to illegal immigration. The main goal of the order was to demand the immediate construction of a southern border wall to combat illegal immigration, the trafficking of humans and drugs, and acts of terrorism. The executive order also called for stricter apprehensions of those believed to be in violation of Federal immigration laws, faster review of whether or not those apprehended are in the country legally/illegally, prompt deportation of those determined to be in the country illegally, and more cooperative Federal-State partnerships in terms of enforcing immigration laws (Trump, 2017a).

Executive Order: Enhancing Public Safety in the Interior of the United States – January 25, 2017

In this executive order, President Trump declares that sanctuary jurisdictions in the United States are in direct violation of Federal law and are dangerous to the well-being of the United States and its citizens. President Trump reiterates that it is the duty of the executive branch of the United States government to ensure immigration laws are executed throughout the country and declares that cities and jurisdictions which do not comply with the Federal government in deporting undocumented immigrants will no longer receive Federal funding, except as mandated by law. President Trump also mentions the Federal government's responsibility to support the victims of crimes committed by immigrants and their families in this executive order (Trump, 2017b).

Statement from President Donald J. Trump on House Passage of Kate’s Law and No Sanctuary for Criminals Act – June 29, 2017

This brief statement expresses President Trump’s praise of the House of Representatives in passing two bills which both played important roles in his campaign. The first bill is H.R. 3004, also known as Kate’s Law. This law aims to increase penalties for undocumented immigrants who re-enter the United States after being deported and was named after Kathryn Steinle. The second bill is the No Sanctuary for Criminals Act which restricts taxpayer grant money from entering sanctuary jurisdictions across the United States (Trump, 2017c).

Statement from President Donald J. Trump (on DACA) – September 5, 2017

President Trump utilizes this statement to explain some background on the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program and why his administration is choosing to end it. Trump begins by explaining that in 2012, President Obama “bypassed congress” to give amnesty to 800,000 DACA recipients. Trump states that officials from ten different states are trying to sue over the program, and he and his administration must decide whether or not DACA is legal. Trump writes that DACA has created a humanitarian crisis, with many unaccompanied minors attempting to enter the United States upon learning of the program and claims that it complicates immigration enforcement. Thus, Trump announces that his administration will begin to gradually “wind-down” the DACA program in the hopes that Congress will pass new immigration reform (Trump, 2017d).