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D. Xavier Medina Vidal

University of California, Riverside, dxmedina@gmail.com

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Changing Faces, Changing Voices: Hispanics and Georgia's Spanish-Language Media Environment

D. Xavier Medina Vidal

University of California-Riverside
dxmedina@gmail.com

Nathan Deal's successful 2010 campaign to become Georgia's 82nd governor included a promise to enact an Arizona-style immigration enforcement law in Georgia, a promise he kept when he signed HB 87 into law in May 2011. To be sure, the high saliency of immigration law enforcement and policy reform in Georgia has much to do with rapid growth of the state's Hispanic population in recent years.

While tempers may flare over the appropriate role for Georgia's state and local governments in enforcing federal immigration laws, such debates also push policymakers to become more interested in the qualities of Georgia's increasingly civically-engaged Hispanic population and in the potential contributions Hispanics/Latinos make to state politics and policymaking.

As a window into the world of socially and politically relevant issues affecting Georgia Latinos, the Spanish-language news media are an important tool available to policymakers and to the public for understanding this increasingly politically relevant group. The growth in Georgia's Spanish-language media environment in recent years provides us with more opportunities than ever to learn about the policy issues affecting the Georgia Latino community and to learn about Georgia Latinos' attitudes about politics and policy.

Latinos, like other groups in American politics, depend to a significant degree on the news media to develop the public policy attitudes necessary to influence agenda setting and policymaking. Along with the notion that the news media provide the best often only easily available approximation of political realities, individuals and communities have the power to construct a public policy agenda by selecting from the media's set of socially relevant issues pre-selected by the media (McCombs and Shaw 1972). For Latinos, the news media content they watch, listen to and read is as important as the delivery of news and information in various mediums and languages given the role news media play in shaping public policy attitudes.

In what follows I discuss the growth of Georgia's Latino population in recent years. I then introduce Georgia's Spanish-language media environment as a measure of Latino presence in Georgia, contributing to existing literature examining the process of Latinos' incorporation into American politics and policymaking. Next, I analyze survey data reporting Georgia Latinos' media exposure and preferences, identifying a shortcoming of self-reported media use and offering an alternative indicator of the Spanish-language

media’s potential effects on Georgia politics. Building on evidence that the news media play an important role in facilitating knowledge and political behavior, and on the notion that having an informed Hispanic public is desirable, I conclude with a discussion of the significance of Georgia policymakers’ appreciation for the Spanish-language media environment.

The Changing Face of Georgia

In 2000, 5.3 percent of Georgia’s total population was Latino/Hispanic, while nationally Hispanics made up 12.5 percent of the total population (U.S. Census Bureau). Much of Georgia’s Hispanic population was concentrated in the Atlanta metropolitan area and in Hall and Whitefield counties (See Figure 1).

Figure 1: Georgia Spanish Media 2000

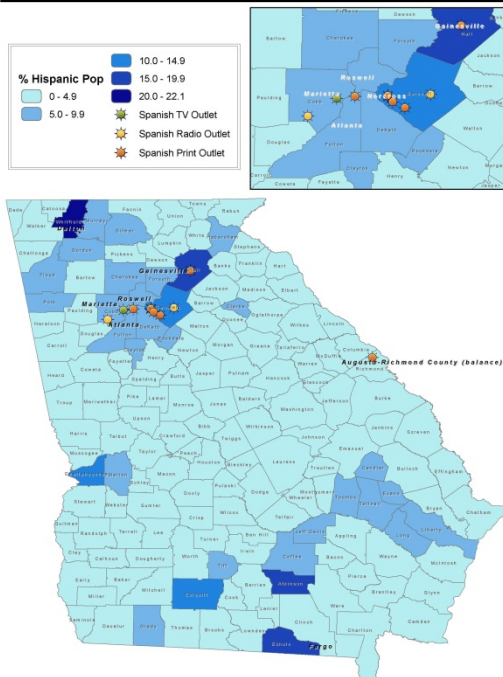
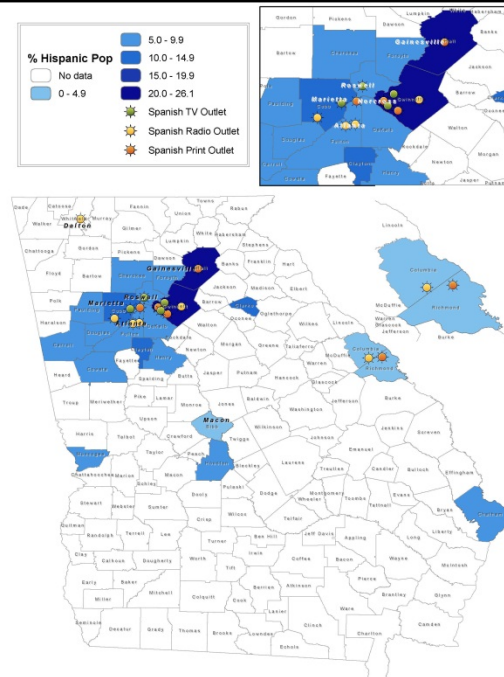


Figure 2: Georgia Spanish Media 2010



Georgia’s Hispanic population grew from 435,227 (5.3 percent of the state population) in 2000 to 853,689 (8.8 percent of the state population) in 2010. This 96 percent increase in the Hispanic population significantly outpaced the growth in the total U.S Hispanic population for the same period (U.S. Census). The size (in percent) of the Hispanic population in 2010 in the counties for which data are available are reported in Figure 2. Note the significant growth in the Hispanic population in Hall, Gwinnett, Clayton, Clarke, Chatham and Houston counties.

Latino immigration in the South in recent years has created a new social context in which multi-racial/ethnic coalition building is becoming more complex yet also more necessary (Smith 2001). The relative newness and increasing ubiquity of Latinos in Georgia, as in any place experiencing demographic change, generates concerns about Latino social

mobility (Atiles and Bohon 2003) and political incorporation (Hernández-León and Zúñiga 2003) and raises questions and debates about the role this group will play in Georgia politics. The rate at which the Latino/Hispanic population grew between 2000 and 2010 in Southern states, including Georgia, has contributed to pressuring state officials toward engaging in debates and enacting legislation such as the controversial “Illegal Immigration Reform and Enforcement Act of 2011” (HB 87), legislation that has contributed to the national immigration reform debate. In Georgia, the HB 87 law has engaged immigrant rights groups, fruit and vegetable growers, and the Georgia business community in debates on the merits and effects of the anti-immigrant legislation (Baxter 2011). With the economic impact of immigrant Latino labor at the core of these debates, the role of the growing Latino population in shaping Georgia politics has begun to take shape.

The Spanish-Language Media and an Informed Latino Public

The growth in Georgia’s Hispanic population between 2000 and 2010 has attracted the attention of not only state and local policymakers but also that of news media outlets and advertisers hoping to capitalize on keeping Georgia’s Spanish-speaking Hispanics informed. Just as public officials are right to be concerned with how to communicate messages of political representation to Hispanic constituencies they should also be concerned with how Spanish-language media are shaping Latino perspectives on the phenomena shaping the politics and policies around them. As a growing presence in Georgia, Latinos are wielding increasing levels of political influence in local and state politics and policymaking.

As Latinos become more a part of the political landscape in Georgia it is critical to recall that the more politically informed individuals are the more they tend to be interested and engaged in politics (Verba and Nie 1972); and that the politically informed also tend to rely on policy issues rather than symbolic displays from charismatic politicians in making decisions about politics (Goren 1997). Thus, it is important to understand how Georgia Latinos use the news sources they traditionally use to become informed about current affairs and politics and how different media affect their levels of political knowledge and sophistication. Having an informed Latino public in Georgia, one exhibiting that political knowledge can be predictive of democratic values such as political tolerance and efficacy (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996), is in the best interest of all Georgians as it can only lead to better public policy outcomes for the state.

In spite of evidence of rapid linguistic assimilation among immigrant Hispanics (Pew Hispanic Center 2006; Rumbaut et al. 2006), the Spanish-language news media play an important role in keeping U.S. Latinos informed on public affairs and public policy matters. Thus, Latinos’ stated preferences for Spanish-language media and the availability of Spanish-language media are key to understanding how best to communicate political messages to Georgia’s growing and dynamic Hispanic population. As a primary source of political information for Latinos, the Spanish-language media also serve an important function in facilitating Latino engagement in politics and policymaking.

Table 1: Georgia's Spanish-language Media Outlets

Year	Outlets			
	Television	Radio	News Print	Total
2000	1	2	7	10
2010	5	12	10	27
Percent increase	500%	600%	143%	270%

Source: New America Media NAM National Ethnic Media Directory

The presence of Spanish-language media outlets in Georgia mirrors the growth and potential political influence of the Latino community. The increase (from 2000 to 2010) in the number of Spanish-language media outlets in Georgia (Table 1 and Figures 1 and 2) reflects this growing media influence. According to New America Media's Database of Ethnic Media (New America Media 2010), the number of Spanish-language television, radio and print media outlets in Georgia has increased from 10 total outlets in 2000 to 27 outlets in 2010. It is not surprising that much of this growth has taken place in areas experiencing the highest rates of growth in Latino population including Cobb and Gwinnett counties.

Language and Media Preferences

To be sure, individual media preferences play a critical role in determining the utility of and influence of Spanish-language news media for shaping Latinos' information environment and political knowledge among Latinos. A look at the Georgia subsample of the 2006 Latino National Survey (LNS) (Fraga et al. 2006), which recorded the opinions and political behaviour of Georgia Latinos, reveals the stated preferences among Latinos for Spanish-language news media as the primary source of becoming informed about political news and events.

To begin, Hispanics in Georgia tend to prefer Spanish to English at a higher rate than U.S. Hispanics generally. Note in Table 2 that nearly 3 out of 4 (73.8 percent) Georgia Hispanics surveyed preferred using the Spanish language over English in 2006. It follows that a significant proportion of Georgia Hispanics surveyed also prefer to retrieve their news about politics from Spanish-language sources.

Table 2: 2006 Language Preference among Latinos

Language Preference	U.S.	Georgia
English	3,291 (38.1%)	105 (26.2%)
Spanish	5,343 (61.9%)	295 (73.8%)
Total	8,634	400

Source: Latino National Survey

Table 3: Reads Newspaper Daily (with a Spanish Media Preference)

Spanish-language Print Available	No	Yes	Total
No	191 (64.1%)	66 (67.4%)	257
Yes	107 (35.9%)	32 (32.6%)	139
Total	298	98	396

Sources: Latino National Survey, New America Media NAM National Ethnic Media Directory

Table 4: Watches TV News (with a Spanish Media Preference)

Spanish-language TV Available	No	Yes	Total
No	99 (54.4%)	131 (61.2%)	230
Yes	83 (45.6%)	83 (38.8%)	166
Total	182	214	396

Sources: Latino National Survey, New America Media NAM National Ethnic Media Directory

Print media, and not television nor radio, best facilitate the acquisition of factual information about politics (Graber 1993, Davis 1992, Owen 1991). It follows that Spanish-language newspapers would play a significant role in shaping political knowledge for Georgia's Hispanic population. According to the LNS, which includes data on Latinos' print and television media use, 98 of 396 (about 25 percent) Georgia Latino survey respondents read the newspaper on a daily basis and prefer to read the Spanish-language newspaper (See Table 3). However, for the 98 Latinos self-reporting their use of Spanish-language print media, such a source of printed news in Spanish is only available for 32 (one third) of them according to the New America Media Database (2010)¹.

To be sure, television news media are a vitally important and accessible source of information on current events and politics (Bimber 2001) and Georgia Hispanics take advantage of the accessibility of Spanish television news. The LNS data on Hispanics' use of television news in Spanish (Table 4) reveal that of 396 Georgia Hispanics surveyed, 214 (54 percent) prefer watching television news in Spanish. As with the self-reporting of print media use, many Georgia Latinos surveyed reported watching Spanish-language television when it was not necessarily available to them. Of the 214 respondents who report watching Spanish-language television, only 131 (61.2 percent) had it

¹ While there are limitations to the inferences we can draw from comparing the media environment data in the New America Media 2010 database and media use and opinion data from the 2006 LNS, these two sources are representative of the most comprehensive data available on Spanish-language media availability and on the attitudes, preferences and behavior of U.S. Latino opinions.

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available to them to watch. This discrepancy between Latino *preferences for* and *access to* Spanish-language media is fundamental to our understanding of the importance of the Spanish-language media for Georgia Latinos.

Spanish-Language Media Effects on Latino Knowledge and Behavior

This analysis of preferences for different types of media reveals the importance of Spanish media, print media in particular, to Georgia Latinos. Print media, the principal source of remembered information, is more influential in developing political knowledge than either television or radio (Graber 1984). Conversely, people tend not to remember information broadcast in television newscasts, and thus television news media may contribute less to political knowledge and sophistication (Mondak 1995). Unlike either print or television media, radio does not contribute to building a long-lasting bank of political knowledge (Medina Vidal 2011). Still, as Ramírez (2007), Félix et al. (2008) and Barreto et al. (2009) find, the “real-time” information that radio provides is invaluable to mass mobilization campaigns, which is important to political action if not long-term political knowledge for Latinos. Understanding the implications of various types of media exposure for Georgia Latinos’ political knowledge and behavior ought to be of interest to analysts and policymakers alike.

Access to Spanish-Language Media

Important public opinion research has shown that African-Americans interviewed by researchers inquiring about political preferences have been shown to *over-state* their preferences for African-American politicians to an African-American interviewer, while stating political preferences when interviewed by a white individual (Davis 1997). The self-reported media use data presented here indicate a similar phenomenon in place among Latinos. I argue that the over-reporting of Spanish-language media use among Latinos suggests exists a potential for social desirability bias associated with identity-oriented media consumption built into Latinos’ self-reporting of Spanish-language media use. That is, Latino survey respondents likewise *over-report* their use of Spanish-language media in an effort to appear “more Hispanic/Latino” and more knowledgeable, generally, about any “Latino/Hispanic issues.”

Evidence from Georgia Latinos’ self-reported use of Spanish print and television media—when not even available—provides important information regarding the appetite for news about politics and current events in Spanish among Georgia’s Latino population. It also suggests that the availability of and access to Spanish-language media are better indicators of the media’s potential impact on Latino opinion, behavior and political knowledge than self-reported use. Above all, our understanding about the importance of news media *in any language* to informing and shaping knowledge about politics is improved by taking into account the level of access individuals have to news media.

Conclusions: Toward an Understanding of Latinos and the Spanish-Language Media

In this brief discussion of the Spanish-language media environment in Georgia and Hispanic media preferences and use I draw attention to two important phenomena impacting the politics and policies surrounding the Latino community in Georgia. Equipped with an appreciation of the media's role in shaping political knowledge (Mondak 1995) and Latino political behavior (Ramírez 2007; Félix et al. 2008; Barreto et al. 2009), I point to the significant growth in Spanish-language media outlets in Georgia in recent years as a critical sign of Georgia Latinos' political potential. An understanding the role of Georgia's Spanish-language media in shaping Latino political knowledge and public opinion and how these media outlets can contribute to existing debates involving the rights and interests of Georgia Latinos is important for the policymakers and groups involved in these debates.

Refining our understanding of Georgia's Spanish-language media environment and Hispanic media preferences, I also introduce the Spanish-language media as an indicator of Latino preferences. Highlighting the finding that Latinos over-report their use of Spanish-language media I make a contribution to existing research demonstrating that individuals tend to over-report their use of identity-based media. By augmenting Latinos' self-reported use of Spanish-language media as recorded in the Latino National Survey, with the characteristics of respondents' actual Spanish-language media environment, I point to the importance of refining our understanding of the existing and potential role Spanish-language media play in informing political knowledge among Hispanics in the interest of fostering a well-informed Georgia public.

As Georgia's Latino population becomes more integrated into state and local-level politics and policymaking, public officials will continue to take more of an active interest in how to communicate with and serve this new and dynamic constituency. The demands that demographic change places on Georgia coupled with a general goal of having a well-informed public be a fundamental part of Georgia's growth and prosperity should encourage policymakers toward a deeper interest in becoming informed about how the Spanish-language media contribute to this goal.

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