

**Aliens, Amnesty, and Anchor Babies:
The Framing of Immigrants and Immigration Policy
in News Media and its Effects on Public Opinion**

Jennifer L. Merolla
Claremont Graduate University

Karthick Ramakrishnan
Chris Haynes
University of California, Riverside

Immigration has been a salient and contentious topic in the United States, with a great deal of Congressional debate, advocacy efforts, and media coverage devoted to the issue. The past decade, in particular, has seen a raft of legislative proposals and news media coverage of ways to solve the growing problem of illegal or unauthorized immigrants living in the United States. While policy debates over illegal immigration has taken on several new and interesting dimensions since 2000, much public opinion research still analyzes American views on immigration policy in a fairly blunt manner: as the extent to which immigration is an important issue to voters, and whether Americans want to increase, decrease, or maintain the current levels of immigration into the country. In this project, we analyze how the issue of illegal immigration has been covered in a range of news media outlets since 2001, paying particular attention to the ways that both immigrants are framed (“illegal,” “undocumented,” etc.) as well as the ways that immigration policies are framed (“path to citizenship,” “amnesty,” “anchor babies,” etc.) across conservative, liberal and mainstream media outlets. Using survey experiments, we then test whether these various frames affect voter preferences on a host of immigration-related policies: legalization, provisions of the DREAM act, birthright citizenship, and greater enforcement and deportation. By analyzing the framing of illegal immigration as a policy issue, both in the context of news media coverage and in the context of survey experiments on the consequences of frames on opinion, this project has important implications for understanding how attitudes toward immigration policy are formed and can shift over time in response to the information environment, which has become more diverse since the last major immigration reform in 1986.