

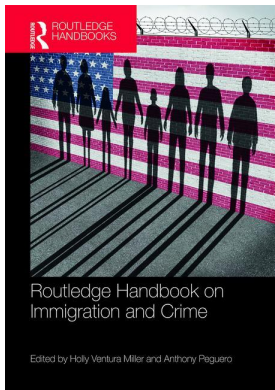
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### **Immigration Within the Contemporary Political Discourse**

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# IMMIGRATION WITHIN THE CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL DISCOURSE

*Yalidy Matos*

In the contemporary post-9/11 era, political discourse has discursively woven terrorism, national security—and security more broadly—and immigration together. Examining political discourse is important because discourse helps define the scripts of politics through public documents, elite speeches, legislation, and mass media (Ackleson, 2005, p. 166).<sup>1</sup> At the same time that discourse about national security emphasizes the unity of the American people, contemporary political discourse in the United States also coincides with the scapegoating and blaming of those deemed responsible for feelings of national insecurity. After the attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, U.S. political discourse depended on the rhetorical use of an “us” versus “them” message. On September 20, 2001, former President George W. Bush declared: “Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists.” In his Address to the Nation on September 11, 2001, President Bush sought to unite the country. In his short speech, the fourth most-used word was “our”—after the words “and,” “the,” and “of.” In all, words that signaled a unified country, such as “our,” “us,” and “we,” appeared just as much as the word “the” appeared in the entire speech. President Bush juxtaposed “our” with “they,” “them,” and “these,” which appeared as many times as the word “in.” “They” were painted as un-American, un-patriotic terrorists and criminals.<sup>2</sup> The aftermath of 9/11 provided a space in which America could reiterate its identity as a country—a democratic, global power—to the rest of the world, but especially to its “enemies.” Domestically, however, America also worked to police both its physical and figurative borders (see Chang, 1997; Rosas, 2006), by conflating immigration and national security, especially by framing immigrants as security threats.

The tragedy of 9/11 led to the War on Terror, which singled out and criminalized Arabs, Arab Americans, Muslims, and others profiled as terrorists (see USA PATRIOT ACT of 2001; Alsultany, 2012; Jamal & Naber, 2008; Paden & Singer, 2003). The War on Terror, an issue of national security, however quickly became the War on Immigrants (Chacón, 2006). More specifically, national security became a matter of border security, with keen attention paid to the U.S.–Mexico border.<sup>3</sup> In the wake of 9/11, immigration more broadly, and border security in particular, became a vessel through which to fight terrorism (see Ackleson, 2005; Garcia, 2003; Waslin, 2003). Although the events of 9/11 involved no terrorist behavior along the U.S.–Mexico border, a permanent fear arose that terrorists may be lurking in Mexico and waiting to enter the United States, even though undocumented immigration declined between 2000 and 2003 (see Chacón, 2006; Massey & Pren, 2012b).

Immigration became the issue through which the United States could exercise its power tangibly, whereas terrorism was and continues to be intangible (see Purcell & Nevins, 2005). As argued by Ali Behdad, “the rhetoric of illegality and transgression at the border, coupled with the fear of terrorism, has broadened and legitimized the extent of the federal government’s disciplinary power” (Behdad, 2005, p. 9). At a time when America needed to show not only itself but the world that it was, indeed, a global power, enhancing border security and continuing to militarize the border proved to be a strategy to display power, because borders mark “a space that American power proceeds from” (Dudziak & Volpp, 2005, p. 593).

The literature on the political discourse surrounding immigration, and the framing of immigration within the contemporary political discourse, is vast (see Abrajano & Singh, 2009; Bloodsworth-Lugo & Lugo-Lugo, 2010, 2011; Chavez, 2001, 2013 [2008]; Dunaway, Branton, & Abrajano, 2010; Fryberg et al., 2012; Kim, Carvalho, Davis, & Mullins, 2011; Knoll, Redlawsk, & Sanborn, 2010; Lahav & Courtemanche, 2012; Lakoff & Ferguson, 2006; Nielsen, 2009; Pratto & Lemieux, 2001; Santa Ana, 2002; Watson & Riffe, 2013; Westen, 2009). This chapter uses this literature and supplements it with official state discourse from the Bush and Obama administrations to shed light on immigration within contemporary political discourse. The chapter will focus on immigration discourses as a whole; however, the discourse of Latino immigration, in particular, overpowers America’s imaginary. In the wake of 9/11, political discourse focused on Arabs, Arab Americans, Muslim Americans, and Middle Eastern countries. Years after 9/11, however, many policies and discourses continue to focus on and conflate terrorism with border security, and, as a result, tend to focus almost exclusively on the U.S.–Mexico border, which then leads the public to conflate immigration, terrorism, and national security solely with brown bodies—especially Mexican bodies. What follows is organized into two sections. The first, *Historical Contextualization*, provides a brief historical contextualization of immigration, terrorism, and the discourse of national security. The second section, *Immigration and the Post-9/11 Political Discourse*, covers the current political discourse and the move from terrorism and national security to immigration and border security, the immigrant “other,” and the geopolitics of immigration vis-à-vis political discourse. I conclude the chapter by expounding on the broader implications of political discourse and immigration studies, and discuss what they suggest about the politics of belonging. Ultimately, the conflation of immigration and national security through discourse masks a “slippage between racism and patriotism” (Winders, 2007, p. 934). Precisely because the language of race is absent in the debates about immigration, and, more importantly, missing within the larger discourse, it “encourages those embracing its principles to see themselves not as racists, but as protectors of the national patrimony” (Stoler, 2002, as cited in Winders, 2007, p. 934). According to Winders, this slippage “carries new currency post 9/11 and allows . . . anti-immigrant discourses and practices to cloak the workings of racism by drawing on a *national* reservoir of post-9/11 border anxieties” (Winders, 2007, p. 934).

### Historical Contextualization

The discourse of immigration as a national security concern is not a new feature of contemporary political discourse. It dates back to the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798 and immigration policies that came afterward (see Waslin, 2003). More recently, the explicit conflation of immigration and terrorism dates back to the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>4</sup> In 1986, Ronald Reagan—who supported military intervention in Central America under the pretext of fighting communism—explicitly linked undocumented immigration to terrorism and national security when he stated that “terrorists and subversives are just two days of driving time from [the border crossing at] Harlingen, Texas” (Aysa-Lastra & Cachon Rodriguez, 2015; Chacón, 2010; Kamen, 1990). The rhetoric of a border “out of control” and the likelihood of an “invasion” brought about the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA)

of 1986. The IRCA further militarized the U.S.-Mexico border, criminalized the hiring of undocumented workers, and legalized a portion of the undocumented population in the United States. Instead of curtailing immigration to the United States, however, the IRCA decreased the chances that Mexican immigrants would return to Mexico, causing an unprecedented increase in the number of Mexicans staying (Massey, 2009). After 1986, unauthorized entries by Mexicans decreased drastically, while legal entries increased. By 1990, however, the number of illegal entries started to rise again, leading to the passage of the 1990 Immigration and Nationality Act and a series of immigration operations (Operation Blockade in 1993 and Operation Gatekeeper in 1994). The passage of California's Proposition 187 occurred in 1994, which, although eventually found unconstitutional, framed undocumented immigrants as criminals and freeloaders. Proposition 187 eventually led to the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, which discursively categorized and constructed immigrant and black women as freeloaders (Hancock, 2004; Schram, Soss, & Fording, 2003). The 1980s and 1990s also saw an increase in the immigration of non-Mexican Latinos from Central and South America and the Caribbean. During this time, a "Latino threat" rhetoric increased portrayals of immigrants as dangerous and the U.S.-Mexico border as "under attack" by "alien invaders" (see Chavez, 2001; Dunn, 1996).

As the early 1990s immigration laws, especially the IRCA, increasingly militarized illegal immigration, the middle of the decade saw the passage of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) of 1996 and the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act (AEDPA) of 1996, which provide the legal foundations for the criminalization of undocumented migrants as terrorists. The IIRIRA enhanced border enforcement by authorizing the hiring of thousands of additional border patrol agents, constructing more walls and fences along the U.S.-Mexico border, and increasing border technology.

One key provision of the IIRIRA is Section 287(g), which delineates the performance of immigration officer functions by state officers and employees. Section 287(g) authorizes the Director of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to enter into agreements with state and local law enforcement agencies, permitting designated officers to perform immigration law enforcement functions (Department of Homeland Security). However, it was not until 2002 that Florida signed a 287(g) agreement with the federal government, the first state to do so. According to Coleman (2007), 287(g) agreements allowed for "the most significant aspect of post-9/11 immigration lawmaking" (p. 69). The post-9/11 focus on a national security discourse understood immigration to be a vessel through which to adopt harsher immigration laws under the pretext of security.

Among other things, the AEDPA gave the federal government police powers to expedite removal of any "alien" who had crossed the border without proper documentation, regardless of legal status, or who had ever committed a felony, regardless of how distant in their past. The AEDPA also created secret procedures to allow the Department of Justice to petition for special deportation hearings and to establish a special court comprised of federal district judges to consider the cases. In essence, the AEDPA "rendered thousands of legal resident aliens deportable" and institutionalized the conflation of immigrants and terrorists (Massey, 2009, p. 20). Although the Antiterrorism Act of 1996 predates the 9/11 attacks, it helped conflate immigration, terrorism, and national security in political discourse.

### **From Terrorism to Immigration: The Case for National Security**

The discourse surrounding immigration as a national security concern gained increased traction after 9/11 by linking terrorism and immigration through border security. On November 25, 2002, President Bush signed the Homeland Security Act, which established the Department of Homeland Security (DHS; Office of the Press Secretary, November 25, 2002). "The new department," Bush outlined, "will analyze threats, will guard our borders"(Securing America's Borders Fact Sheet, 2002). From the outset, the DHS's establishment not only prioritized the security of "our borders"

but also worked to create a discourse that linked terrorism, national security, and border security. The DHS took over the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) from the Department of Justice. It was the largest federal government reorganization of departments since the Department of Defense was created via the National Security Act of 1947 (as amended in 1949).

The move expressed an ideological shift: immigration is not about labor or justice but first and foremost about national security—about the homeland.<sup>5</sup> National security is both rhetorically and discursively tied to the protection of the homeland. According to Amy Kaplan, “homeland” constitutes especially salient and evocative spatial metaphors, “which in public discourse do not appear metaphoric at all, but as literal descriptions of actual places” (Kaplan, 2003, p. 82). By using immigrants as a symbol of breaches at the border, the discourse seeks to provide a reminder of “our” porous borders. The U.S.–Mexico border became the literal place that needs to be controlled and policed. The word *homeland* works in many ways vis-à-vis immigration. It does some of the political and cultural work of distinguishing between those who are a part of the homeland and those who are not, and the breach between the two. In fact, Kaplan argues that the political work of the discourse of the *homeland* “is actually about breaking down the boundaries between inside and outside, about seeing the homeland in a state of constant emergency from threats within and without . . . to generate forms of radical insecurity” (p. 90). Homeland evokes a sense of urgent patriotism and nationalism among its “homeland” members, especially in the wake of a traumatic event and in anticipation of a war. Those who cannot claim the United States as their “homeland” become suspiciously foreign. And that which is foreign is viewed as dangerous.

As Ole Wæver points out, “something is a security problem when the elites declare it to be so” (Wæver, 1995, as cited in Ackleson, 2005, p. 168). After 9/11, the administration of President George W. Bush tied terrorism, national security, border security, and undocumented immigration. On January 25, 2002, President Bush’s Office of Homeland Security issued an *Action Plan for Creating a Secure and Smart Border*, noting that the “massive flow of people and goods across our borders helps drive our economy, but can also serve as a conduit for terrorists, weapons of mass destruction, illegal migrants, contraband, and other unlawful commodities.” The plan continued, “The new threats and opportunities of the 21st century demand a new approach to border management” (Securing America’s Borders Fact Sheet, 2002). National security and internal, domestic security have been increasingly tied together in the national discourse (Bigo, 2002, p. 177). President Bush reiterated this sentiment in his 2003 State of the Union Address and made sure to point out that “this government is taking unprecedented measures to protect our people and defend our homeland. We have intensified security at the borders and ports of entry” (George W. Bush Second Presidential State of the Union Address, 2003). In essence, protecting the American people and defending the homeland requires border security, even though, as previously mentioned, 9/11 did not involve any breaches of U.S. borders. A vast number of scholars have documented the post-9/11 obsession with border security (see Ackleson, 1999; Andreas, 2009; Bigo, 2002; Dunn, 1996; Nevins, 2010; Purcell & Nevins, 2005; Tichenor, 2002).

On December 16, 2005, the House of Representatives passed the Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005 (H.R. 4437)—known as the Sensenbrenner Bill—which attempted to further define immigrants as felons and, among other things, would have made assisting undocumented immigrants a crime punishable by law. The bill did not pass the Senate and was the catalyst for the 2006 immigrants’ rights movement. However, the discursive damage had been done. If nothing else, the title of H.R. 4437 explicitly linked discourses of borders, terrorism, and (undocumented) immigration. In essence, immigration became a political and ideological site on which to fight terrorism. In fact, the War on Terror and the subsequent discourse of national security gave way to the ideological rationale behind anti-immigration legislation, raids alongside deportations, and the detaining of noncitizens (and sometimes citizens) of color, specifically Mexicans (see Camarota, 2001; Dinerstein, 2003; “Invitation to terror,” Federation for American Immigration

Reform (FAIR), 2002; Martin, Mehlman, & Green, 2003). According to De Genova, “immigration law enforcement is deployed selectively, ‘preventively’—indeed ‘preemptively’—in the production of pretexts for surveillance and detention.” (Unauthorized) immigration became the “domestic War on Terrorism” (Genova, 2007, p. 434). After major protests, H.R. 4437 failed to pass the Senate; however, the Secure Fence Act of 2006 passed, which provided the authorization for the construction of hundreds of miles of additional fencing along the southern U.S. border, more vehicle barriers, checkpoints, lighting, and increased use of advanced technology at the border (Fact Sheet: The Secure Fence Act of 2006, 2006). Legislation, public speeches by President Bush and President Obama, public documents—such as Malkin’s (2004) *Invasion: How America Still Welcomes Terrorists, Criminals, and Other Foreign Menaces to Our Shores* (2004)—all declared the southern border an issue of national security. Undocumented immigrants—and all immigrants of color, as documentation status is not a visible identity—in effect became potential terrorists (Genova, 2007). Immigrants were seen to be threatening to the national security of the United States, as well as U.S. national identity.

### The Immigrant “Other” and the Threat to U.S. Identity

Security “is meaningless without an ‘other’ to help specify the conditions of insecurity” (Lipschutz, 1995, p. 9). As Ackleson argues, the “‘other’ is constructed, in part, through discourse” (2005, p. 168). Once something is declared a security threat, it becomes a priority within the socio-political imaginary. As a result, extraordinary response, whether it be policy or social responses, is justified. “Public discourse and political symbolism, combined with these material developments, have thus served to help reconstruct America’s Southern border through the securitization of migrants as a threat” (Ackleson, 2005, p. 174; Garcia, 2003). Migrants, especially Mexican and Central American migrants, have been and continue to be constructed within U.S. political discourse as a security problem.

According to Behdad (2005, p. 17), “the immigrant is at once a critical supplement and a threatening other through whom American identity is imagined and reproduced.” Hence, as insiders construct the immigrant other, they discursively pit the immigrant against the U.S. citizen. Behdad continues by saying that:

What we encounter in every anti-immigrant claim is a differential mode of national and cultural identification that posits a fundamental difference between the patriotic citizen and the menacing alien. The project of imagining a homogeneous nation is never complete. It requires the continual presence of the immigrant as other, through whom citizenship and cultural belonging are rearticulated.

(2005, p. 11–12)

In essence, U.S. national identity has, and continues to be, advanced through the discourse of “us” versus “them.” Americanism becomes discursively constructed as a security issue. U.S. national identity must be secured from *others* who do not share U.S. values and principles. According to Ackleson (1999, 2005), the merging of societal and state security in contemporary discourse dates back to the 1970s, but has remained a key aspect of the ways immigration fits into the contemporary political discourse.

At the national level, both Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama used two terms to communicate how immigration fits into the larger contemporary political discourse and the ongoing war on terrorism, although President Bush used these terms primarily toward the end of his presidency. They defined America as both a “nation of laws” and a “nation of immigrants” (see, for examples, George W. Bush Address to the Nation on Immigration Reform, 2006; Barack Obama Speech at NALEO on Immigration, 2008; Barack Obama Remarks by the President on Comprehensive

Immigration Reform in El Paso, Texas, 2011; Building a 21st Century Immigration System, 2011). Although seemingly not contradictory, the discourse placed each on opposite ends of a spectrum. In addition, this discourse allowed for an open interpretation of what is most important—either America's laws or its history as a nation of immigrants. During his Address to the Nation on Immigration Reform, delivered on May 15, 2006, President Bush stated, "We're a nation of laws, and we must enforce our laws. We're also a nation of immigrants, and we must uphold that tradition, which has strengthened our country in so many ways" (George W. Bush Address to the Nation on Immigration Reform, 2006). Prior to this statement, however, President Bush's actions painted a picture of immigration that fell short of his bolstering of the tradition of immigrants in the United States. He reiterated that for decades the nation has not been in control of its borders, and that, consequently, many had been able to "sneak across our borders." He went on to say that illegal immigration puts a strain on "public schools and hospitals, it strains state and local budgets, and brings crime to our communities." Although this discourse is supposed to be one that reconciles the United States as a nation of immigrants, and its principles and values as a nation of laws, immigration is often painted first, as a one-sided affair with most of the attention on the U.S.-Mexico border, and second, as straining the U.S. economy and bringing in crime, drugs, and possibly terrorists. The result of the two discursive descriptions is the conflation of brown bodies with criminality, terrorism, drugs, and economic freeloading (Rosas, 2006).

First, the dialogue on immigration within the contemporary discourse on threat, national security, sovereignty, rights, and identity is often conflated with the southern border, which the United States shares with Mexico. In the same 2006 address to the nation, President Bush states that the United States "Must secure its border . . . an urgent requirement of our national security." In the next paragraph, he states, "I was a governor of a state that has a 1,200-mile border with Mexico. So I know how difficult it is to enforce the border." Not once in the entire address was Canada or the northern border mentioned. Thus, protecting "our borders" as a matter of national security went from borders to "the border"—the southern border to be precise. In 2010, in an immigration address delivered at American University, President Obama stated: "our borders have been porous for decades. Obviously, the problem is greatest along our Southern border, but it's not restricted to that part of the country." However, as he continued to talk about the broken immigration system, it does seem that U.S. efforts to secure the borders is restricted to that part of the country. Obama stated, "Today, we have more boots on the ground near the Southwest border than at any time in our history" (Transcript of President Obama's Immigration Address at American University, 2010). In May 2011, prior to his visit to El Paso, Texas, to give a speech about comprehensive immigration reform, the Obama administration released a blueprint for "Building a 21st Century Immigration System." Within this blueprint, words that point to the southern border (that is, Mexico, Mexican, southern, and Southwest) were used 18 times in total. On the contrary, words that point to the northern border (that is, Canada, Canadian, northern) appeared six times. Political discourse signaling the conflation of national security, border security, and the southern border abounds (see George W. Bush Address to the Nation from Atlanta on Homeland Security, 2001; DeLaet, 2007; Gadarian, 2010; Huddy, Feldman, Taber, & Lahav, 2005).

Second, at the same time that national security and threat are actively conflated with the southern border and those who "sneak across," the southern border region is also being described, explicitly and implicitly, as overflowing with brown-bodied "criminals, drug dealers, and terrorists" (George W. Bush Address to the Nation on Immigration Reform, 2006). In the same 2006 address, President Bush stated that "More than 85 percent of the illegal immigrants we catch crossing the Southern border are Mexicans." The average person is cognitively connecting the southern border to criminality at all times (for more on spreading activation, see Anderson, 1983; Collins & Loftus, 1975; Taber, 2003; Taber & Lodge, 2006; Taber, Lodge, & Glathar, 2001). In 2013, President Obama presented his Address on Comprehensive Immigration Reform at Del Sol High School in Las Vegas,

Nevada. In this address, he reiterated the conflation of illegal immigration with the southern border, and promised to “strengthen security at the borders so that we could finally stem the tide of illegal immigrants . . . [by putting] more boots on the ground on the Southern border than at any time in our history” (Barack Obama Address on Comprehensive Immigration Reform, 2013). Additionally, that was the only time Obama used the term “illegal immigrants” in the entirety of the speech at Del Sol High School. Similarly, in his speeches at American University and in El Paso, Obama also used the term “illegal immigrant” only once in each of those speeches. In both speeches he uses “illegal” as a descriptor of immigrants who are in the United States without documentation; however, he does not refer to those who are in the nation as “legal immigrants” but as immigrating legally—albeit the proper use of the term (for more on these terms, see Merolla, Ramakrishnan, & Haynes, 2013; Newton, 2008).

In all, this kind of discourse only worked to define the parameters of immigration as a strictly southern border affair. And because “the vast majority of illegal residents are workers, and the majority of illegal workers are of Mexican or Latin American origin, this group now bears the brunt of DHS policies” (Garcia, 2003, p. 2). However, it is important to note that many groups and individuals were profiled and made targets of new laws, such as the USA PATRIOT Act, in the wake of 9/11 (see Bayoumi, 2008; Iyer, 2015; Jamal & Naber, 2008; Nguyen, 2005). Immigration raids became a DHS tool within the U.S. immigration regime that seemed to work without legal constraints after 9/11 (Hing, 2009). In 2004, President Bush implemented the current U.S. ICE raid strategy to garner support for his guest worker program. On December 12, 2006, ICE’s federal agents conducted a massive military-style raid of six Swift & Company meatpacking plants across the country (Feds Raid 6 Swift and Company Meatpacking Plants in Apparent Illegal Immigration Search, 2006). Bill Ong Hing states that even though ICE had warrants for only a handful of workers, it rounded up nearly 13,000 workers, the vast majority U.S. citizens. Moreover, with few exceptions, ICE raids target Latinos, and Mexicans in particular. Workers are often separated by nationality. In fact, John Bowen, general counsel for the United Food and Commercial Workers Commission Local 7, said, “race was, almost without question, the sole criteria for harsher interrogations” to which the workers were subjected at the Greeley, Colorado, plant (see Hing, 2009). Raids, deportations, and detaining workers “were justified under the broad post-9/11 umbrella of securing the border region and protecting national security, even as they targeted exclusively Mexican nationals suspected of working without papers in the US” (Coleman, 2007, p. 60).

In a post-9/11 world, a discourse of “a nation of laws” prevailed over a discourse of “a nation of immigrants.” Restrictive and punitive immigration laws, increased deportations, increased use of detention centers, and ICE raids throughout the country, continue to challenge and shed light on America’s mythical reputation as a “nation of immigrants” and a “nation of laws,” immigration law enforcement at the state level has been less concerned about the convergence of these discourses, and has been “anything but ‘hospitable’ toward immigrants, since they regulate and control their practices [of] everyday life” (Behdad, 2005, p. 15).

### **The Geopolitics of U.S. Immigration Law Enforcement and Its Effects on Discourse**

The immigration law enforcement regime defines the discursive parameters of security at the state and local levels of society and politics. The border the United States shares with Mexico has been a key space in which discourses on immigration and national security collide (Ackleson, 2005; Garcia, 2003; Waslin, 2003). The policing of the U.S.-Mexico border predates 9/11; however, according to Matthew Coleman, the most significant immigration-related outcome to come out of the war on terrorism has been the movement from an emphasis solely on the southern border and into the



interior (2007, p. 55). A number of border studies or border theory scholars conceive of or theorize borders as beyond an inactive and fixed physical landmark, and instead characterize borders as “active, constructed forms of limits, of identity, and culture” (Ackleson, 2005, p. 169; see also Anzaldúa, 1987; Barth, 1998; Hicks, 1991). Likewise, various social scientists have written about the geopolitics of immigration within the contemporary era as moving beyond the southern border (Coleman, 2007; Hopkins, 2010; Newman, 2012; Newman, Johnson, Strickland, & Citrin, 2012b; Rosas, 2006; Sabia, 2010). State and local immigration-related laws, policies, resolutions, and debates do more than help solidify the discourse of immigration as a national security threat. Localizing the discourse of immigration (and, consequently, immigrants) as a national security threat simultaneously materializes the threat. In other words, the more abstract concept of national security becomes something tangible, something able to be policed, arrested, apprehended, detained, and deported. And the borders that *are* being policed become more visible: state lines, counties, neighborhoods, and bodies.

As early as 2002, the Department of Justice had abandoned its long-held belief that immigration is a federal issue and proclaimed that state and local officials have the “inherent authority” to enforce federal immigration law. In the same year, Florida became the first state to sign a 287(g) agreement with the federal government.<sup>6</sup> This section tackles the geopolitics of immigration law enforcement and argues that programs such as 287(g) agreements,<sup>7</sup> Secure Communities,<sup>8</sup> and state-level immigration laws<sup>9</sup> blur the line between external and internal security (Bigo, 2002).

The discourse surrounding the 287(g) program targeted “violent crimes, human smuggling, gang/organized crime activity, sexual-related offenses, narcotics smuggling and money laundering” (Capps, Rosenblum, Rodriguez, & Chishti, 2011). However, by late 2006, jail enforcement models started to become the norm, and the discourse became one tied to unauthorized Latino immigration in particular.<sup>10</sup> In certain jurisdictions, the focus of the program expanded beyond criminals and security threats. This expansion was ignited by a 287(g) program signed with Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, by Sheriff Jim Pendergraph who described the county’s goal as “apprehending as many unauthorized immigrants as possible, on the belief that unauthorized immigrants were more likely to commit more crimes” (Capps et al., 2011). This assumption that undocumented immigrants commit more crimes than citizens remains deeply criticized and also unfounded in the literature (Butcher & Piehl, 1998a, 1998b; Ewing, Martínez, & Rumbaut, 2015; Hagan & Palloni, 1999; Warner, 2001). The literature does find an overrepresentation of Latinos caught up in state and local immigration enforcement as targets (Arnold, 2007; Capps et al., 2011; Lacayo, 2010; Romero, 2011; Wishnie, 2004). A study conducted by the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) found that in addition to short-term outmigration of Latino populations in four counties with 287(g) agreements—Cobb and Gwinnett Counties in Georgia, Frederick County in Maryland, and Prince William County in Virginia—Latino populations also avoided public spaces (Capps et al., 2011). The avoidance was due to the rise in traffic stops and subsequent processing of traffic violations through the 287(g) program. In essence, 287(g) agreements have caused the borderlands condition to migrate beyond the U.S.–Mexico border (see Flagg, 2017; Rosas, 2006), resulting in a convergence between discourses on security and immigration, particularly Latino immigration.

The 287(g) program is only one of three major programs in which ICE and state and local agencies work together. Secure Communities and the Criminal Alien Program (CAP)<sup>11</sup> are the other two that also work to identify removable immigrants. The Secure Communities program has been criticized on various fronts by policy makers, law enforcement officials, and advocates.<sup>12</sup> Critics cite racial profiling and a deviation from the goal of focusing on serious offenders as particularly objectionable. In fact, one of the reasons for the spike in deportations during the Obama administration is the Secure Communities immigration enforcement program (Hesson, 2012). The data by the MPI report, along other studies (Volpp, 2002; Wishnie, 2004), show how disproportionately men and Latinos are impacted by Secure Communities. Although 43 percent of the U.S. undocumented

population are women and 57 percent are men, in the MPI sample population, 93 percent of individuals impacted by Secure Communities were men. Furthermore, the MPI report found that only 23 percent of their sample were issued a Level 1 Secure Communities offense (the most violent), 12 percent a Level 2 issue, 23 percent a Level 3 issue, and the largest percentage, 37 percent, were issued a no-offense (non-criminal) level. (For level offenses definitions, see Capps et al., 2011.) In essence, 72 percent of the individuals in the sample were non-Level 1 offenders, but the public at large does not make these kinds of distinctions. If the discourse surrounding Secure Communities is that your neighborhood and your community are in danger, then those being arrested, apprehended, detained, and deported are the “threat,” the insecurity. The “threat” is given a face when it disproportionately targets Latinos, even though Secure Communities did not effectively focus on Level 1 offenses, which are the most violent and dangerous crimes. It is not surprising, then, when the everyday, more localized, discourse on immigration within the contemporary political discourse becomes wrapped in conflation of Latinos as uniquely dangerous and criminal (Chavez, 2001, 2013 [2008]; Welch, Payne, Chiricos, & Gertz, 2010).

Alongside federally mandated immigration enforcement programs are state-based immigration laws, which have furthered the discursive construction of immigration as a security issue that exists beyond the southern border. In the post-9/11 years, increasing state-based immigration-related legislation indicates a focus on the internal discourse of insecurity vis-à-vis immigration and immigrants. For example, in 2005, 45 immigration-related laws were enacted in 25 different states, and by 2015, there were 490 laws enacted in 49 states.<sup>13</sup> Among these enacted pieces of legislation were six that stood out as state omnibus immigration legislation, which includes Arizona’s SB 1070 and its five copycat laws. The unintended consequences of anti-immigrant legislation can hardly be challenged. The anti-immigrant, and, some would argue, anti-Hispanic/Latino, sentiments that have erupted due to the equivalence of “illegal immigrant” with the Hispanic/Latino population have had serious and negative consequences on Latinos nationwide. For example, U.S. District Judge Myron Thompson cited the use of “illegal immigrant” and “Hispanic” as interchangeable by various politicians in his December 12, 2011, ruling on Alabama’s HB 56. Judge Thompson described the debates as “laced with derogatory comments about Hispanics.” In addition, he stated that it is likely that HB 56 was “discriminatorily based.” Thompson also cited that HB 56 drafter and Alabama representative Mickey Hammon conflated immigration status with ethnic identification, where he used Hispanic growth in Alabama as a way to justify his concerns over illegal immigration. In other words, he assumed that Hispanics are “illegal immigrants” (Bauer, 2011). Moreover, the assumptions made by Hammon alongside HB 56 further the conflation of national and societal insecurity with Latino communities (see Alabama’s shame: HB 56 and the war on immigrants, 2012). The securitization of immigration is given a Latino figurative body that is policed at both the southern border and in the U.S. interior, where Latino communities bear the brunt of apprehension, detention, and deportation (Massey & Pren, 2012a, 2012b).

## Conclusion

Immigration within the contemporary political discourse is situated as a main source of insecurity. As an issue, immigration is deployed to address the insecurity of U.S. borders: the international boundaries, state-, neighborhood-, and county lines, as well as the more figurative borders, such as bodies. Conversations about immigration, borders, and national security, upon closer examination, are actually about belonging. In fact, immigration in the United States has been and continues to be about delineations of boundaries and belonging. By definition, immigration delimits U.S. national identity (see Hing, 1997, 2004; Zolberg, 2006). U.S. national identity is a cultural and political identity that defines the discursive parameters of who belongs and who does not. Immigration defines the boundaries of U.S. citizenship racially and in relation to the boundaries of the U.S. nation-state, in the

contemporary era, in part, through the conflation of borders and national security. From its inception, the nation-state has been concerned with the politics of borders. They are sites defined by the politics of exclusion, where we see the contestation of U.S. nationalism. At the root of the discourse of national security are subdiscourses of belonging, rights, and deservingness. Who deserves to be an American? Who deserves the fundamental inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness? Who deserves to belong? Who deserves to be free? Who deserves to feel security? The discursive interaction between terrorism, security, and immigration, on the one hand, *and* belonging, rights, and deservingness, on the other hand, has always existed simultaneously.

Amid the politics of belonging and exclusion, immigrants and organizations have found ways to counter the dominant national and local discourse of securitization and criminality. Immigrants have claimed a space in the U.S. imaginary and have subsequently fought for belonging. For example, during the 2006 immigrant rights movement, immigrants and supporters claimed their space in the United States by participating in protests across the country. Large-scale mobilization erupted in response to the proposed legislation, the Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005 (H.R. 4437)—the same one that discursively linked immigration, border/national security, and terrorism. From an estimated 100,000 people in Chicago on March 10, 2006, more than 500,000 people in Los Angeles on March 25, 2006, and 350,000 to 500,000 demonstrators in 102 cities across the country on April 10, 2006, immigrant communities and their allies claimed their space. The demonstrations, including “A Day Without Immigrants” on May 1, 2006, countered the discourse of immigrants as criminals and as security threats and replaced it with immigrants as contributors to the economic prosperity of the United States, as hardworking, as exercising their rights, and as seeking opportunity (Martínez, 2011).

More recently, we have seen DREAMers—those eligible under the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act—use U.S. values to counter the discourse of immigrants as lawbreakers. In fact, the DREAMers movement has been more successful precisely because the discourse it uses aligns with U.S. values and principles. The discourse and supporting images around DREAMers is one of hardworking college graduates in their school regalia who self-identify as American. Ultimately, it is a discourse of deservingness. President Obama’s discourse surrounding DREAMers helped construct a narrative of deservingness by emphasizing their “allegiance to our flag,” and the fact that they are “Americans in their heart, in their minds” (Transcript of Obama’s Speech on Immigration Policy, 2012). Although the discourse around the DREAM Act and DREAMers does not rest on criminality and national security, it does, in fact, embolden these exact discourses for all other immigrants not considered DREAMers. The DREAMer discourse works to create a narrative of “good immigrants,” versus “bad immigrants.” Counter-discourses, nevertheless, become an important element of immigration debates, and especially within the larger U.S. political discourse.

What makes research on political discourse, and in particular, immigration within U.S. political discourse important is its effect on public opinion and political behavior. The conflation of immigration and national security becomes a way of thinking, and perceiving the events of the world, both nationally and locally. The borders become a spatial site where “national security [is] enacted and performed” (Winders, 2007, p. 933). And because the border works “everywhere” (Coleman, 2007), the protection of American-ness happens everywhere. From the southern border to the borders of Albertville County, Alabama, a discourse of rights has emerged alongside a discourse of national security. Alongside this emergence has been an emergence of vigilantism by both authorized members of the community but also by private individuals. In fact, President Bush’s words continue to weave through U.S. states and towns: “Our citizens have new responsibilities. We must be vigilant” (George W. Bush Address to the Nation from Atlanta on Homeland Security, 2001). Americans have been especially vigilant against those who do not fit their imagined community, which then gets described as protecting U.S. values rather than the more accurate description of racism. Episodes

of everyday people “protecting” or policing Americanism have become normalized across the country (see Ali et al., 2011; Doty, 2009; Hing, 2011; Holthouse, 2005; Kurz & Berry, 2015; Southern Poverty Law Center Hate Map, 2017). In fact, official acts, such as legislation and formal speeches by presidents encourage private individuals to engage in acts of discriminatory and racist vigilantism (Hing, 2002). Official legislation—whether enacted or not—like the USA PATRIOT Act, 287(g) and Secure Communities programs discursively construct South Asians, Muslim and Arab Americans as well as Latinos as the prime targets of vigilantism. This, then, results in the treatment of such groups as un-American and thus not deserving of rights, security, and protection. Discourse becomes an avenue of both change and resistance, of both forward movement and backward steps in the United States. Discourses around immigration within the larger U.S. political landscape straddle America’s understanding of itself as “a nation of immigrants,” but ultimately privileges an understanding of itself as “a nation of laws,” which are often discriminatory and punitive. Moreover, conceptions of these laws often define the parameters of an imagined community that places *immigrants*—regardless of immigration status or birthplace—on the outskirts of U.S. national identity.

### Notes

- 1 Political discourse analysis focuses on discourse in political forums (such as debates, speeches, and hearings). For more on discourse, see Gamson and Modigliani (1989) and Schiffrin, Tannen, and Hamilton (2001).
- 2 The USA PATRIOT Act of 2001 is a good example of this, alongside other post-9/11 legislation, including the REAL ID Act of 2005 and the Secure Fence Act of 2006.
- 3 Post-9/11 attention to the border the United States shares with Canada also increased, however (see Andreas, 2009).
- 4 During the late 1970s and 1980s, a reawakening of Cold War tensions arose, usually labeled the “Second Cold War” (Halliday, 1986). During this time, President Reagan supported counterinsurgencies in countries of the Global South, including countries in Latin America.
- 5 Prior to the INS being under the Department of Justice, it was part of the Department of Labor.
- 6 Although Florida was the first state to sign an agreement, it was not the first state to want to do so. In 1998, the Salt Lake City, Utah, council voted 4–3 to refuse to approve a 287(g) agreement that would have deputized 20 Salt Lake City police officers to identify, detain, and transport undocumented immigrants (see Foster, 1998).
- 7 Although 287(g) agreements became legal in 1996 with the passing of IIRIRA, the first agreement did not come until 2002. The 287(g) program allowed additional enforcement authority to selected state and local officers to charge undocumented immigrants with immigration violations and to begin the proceedings of removal. After Florida’s Department of Law Enforcement became the first agency to sign a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with ICE; in 2003, Alabama’s Department of Public Safety followed suit.
- 8 Under Secure Communities, ICE can run federal immigration checks on every individual booked into a local county jail and fingerprints are sent from the Federal Bureau of Investigation to DHS if the jurisdiction is under Secure Communities. The program was advertised as focusing on Level 1 offenders, the most violent. Secure Communities was piloted in 2008 under the Bush administration. By October 2011, under President Obama, the program had expanded from 14 jurisdictions to 1,595 jurisdictions in 44 states and territories. (See Kohli, Markowitz, & Chavez, 2011).
- 9 Examples include Arizona’s SB 1070 and its five copycat laws: Alabama (HB 56), Georgia (HB 87), South Carolina (SB 20), Utah (HB 497), and Indiana (SB 590).
- 10 According to the most up-to-date ICE fact sheet, Delegation of Immigration Authority Section 287(g) Immigration and Nationality Act, ICE has 287(g) agreements with 37 law enforcement agencies in 16 states, all of which are jail enforcement models.
- 11 The Criminal Alien Program’s (CAP), primary goal is to identify incarcerated immigrants within federal, state, and local facilities and secure final orders of removal prior to the termination of their sentences so that they cannot be released into the community (see Saunders, Lim, & Prosnitz, 2010).
- 12 This was happening primarily due to localities and states opting out of the program. The government then made it a requirement. In other words, once a state had signed an MOA, localities under that state could not “opt out” of the program (see Jordan, 2011; Preston, 2011).
- 13 National Conference for State Legislatures 2005 and 2015 Report, [www.ncsl.org/research/immigration/state-laws-related-to-immigration-and-immigrants.aspx](http://www.ncsl.org/research/immigration/state-laws-related-to-immigration-and-immigrants.aspx).

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