**Background**

Hispanics face the lowest high school and college completion rates out of all major ethnic and racial groups in the US. Compared to their white (Asian) classmates, they are 17% (66%) less likely to pass AP tests, 6% (33%) less likely to take the SAT/ACT, and 31% (54%) less likely to be enrolled in advanced math. The Hispanic achievement gap is vast and it is imperative that we find tools to close it.

**Research Question**

Can identity reduce inequality? In this paper, I investigate the causal impact of Spanish Language Television (SLTV) on Hispanic students in public schools. I find that SLTV improves academic performance, and suggest that an amplified Hispanic identity is a primary mechanism driving these results.

**Data Sources**

I make use of television contour data from the FCC, the American Time Use Dataset, the Civil Rights Data Collection, archive.org’s television transcript database, Safegraph’s foot-traffic data, and the American Community Survey.

**Method**

To identify the causal effect of SLTV, I exploit a spatial regression discontinuity arising from a FCC regulation. This regulation grants federal protection of a TV station’s broadcast signal only within a certain distance of a station’s main antenna. Thus, households and schools just inside a TV station's coverage contour should be observably similar to those just outside the contour, except for the presence of TV. To further dispel concerns over potential confounds, I employ a difference-in-discontinuities design, comparing outcomes for Hispanic students against Asian (and not white as they may also identify as Hispanic) students in schools with and without SLTV based on a 100 kilometer cut-off to SLTV coverage contours.

**Findings**

To verify that this instrument works, I employ this difference-in-discontinuities approach with time use data and find that Hispanics watch 10 more minutes of TV within these boundaries, a lower bound for SLTV viewership if Hispanics substitute English programs with Spanish ones. Notably, non-Hispanics do not exhibit differential TV viewership across SLTV coverage contours.

Next, I utilize the CRDC to analyze the effect of SLTV on Hispanics in public schools. Academic outcomes for Hispanics improve across the board: the presence of SLTV closes the Hispanic-Asian gap in passing AP tests by 5%, reduces the SAT/ACT participation gap by 18%, and the calculus enrolment gap by 4%. These gains are present in absolute terms, extend to other academic outcomes, and also remain qualitatively similar under a variety of robustness checks, including a wide range of controls at the school and county level, varying the distance to coverage contour cut-off, accounting for spatial autocorrelation, and a host of other tests. This establishes that SLTV closes the Hispanic achievement gap.

I next marshal three of sources of evidence that each indicate an identity mechanism is at play. First, using the same data, I show that Hispanic students are differentially classified as having ‘limited English proficiency’ under SLTV despite greater general academic achievement, a likely outcome if these students shift from English to Spanish mastery due to the presence of SLTV. Furthermore, Hispanic students are also differentially bullied more on the basis of their ethnicity, directly indicating a more salient identity that other students may target. Second, I use archive.org’s TV transcript database to classify the proportion of programs in each SLTV station that focus on the Hispanic identity. I show that locales with a greater amount of SLTV programming focused on the Hispanic identity are associated with stronger Hispanic academic performance when compared against locales with fewer such programs on identity. However, a greater amount of programming focused on education & schools or positive role models for children each have a null effect on Hispanic performance. This indicates that the content of these television programs matter, and that identity is a primary channel through which these gains are attained. Finally, I use foot-traffic data from Safegraph to demonstrate the general strengthening of the Hispanic identity under SLTV. Hispanics with SLTV are differentially more likely to visit Hispanic branded restaurants and recreation establishments. However, Hispanics with SLTV are no more likely to visit Brazilian, Greek, and Korean establishments. This speaks to the specific strengthening of the Hispanic identity versus a broader Latin American one.

Collectively, these results suggest that identity is a mechanism through which SLTV reduces inequality and the Hispanic achievement gap. This paper shows the potential power of television in bolstering academic performance, with its findings on identity widely applicable to policy beyond TV itself.

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* Background/Significance
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