Inclusive but Not Integrative: Ethnoracial Boundaries and the Use of Spanish in the Market for Rental Housing

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Abstract: Increasing Spanish fluency in the United States likely shapes ethnoracial group boundaries and inequality. We study a key site for group boundary negotiations—the housing market—where Spanish usage may represent a key source of information exchange between landlords and prospective renters. Specifically, we examine the use of Spanish in advertisements for online rental housing and its effect on White, Black, and Latinx Americans' residential preferences. Using a corpus of millions of Craigslist rental listings, we show that Spanish listings are concentrated in majority-Latinx neighborhoods with greater proportions of immigrant and Spanish-speaking residents. Furthermore, units that are advertised in Spanish tend be lower priced relative to non-Spanish ads in the same neighborhood. We then use a survey experiment to demonstrate that Spanish usage decreases White, Black, and non-Spanish-speaking Latinx Americans' interest in a housing unit and surrounding neighborhood, whereas Spanish-speaking Latinx respondents are less affected. We discuss these findings in light of past work on neighborhood demographic preferences, segregation, and recent theorizing on within-category inequality.

Keywords: race and ethnicity; immigrants; housing; segregation

ACCORDING to 2020 Census data, 13 percent of the U.S. population speaks Spanish at home, making Spanish the second most common language after English (Thompson 2021). A growing Spanish-speaking population has, at times, prompted anti-immigrant sentiments (Davis and Moore 2014; Enos 2014; Hopkins, Tran, and Williamson 2014; Jiménez 2016), underscoring how language is a crucial dimension of cultural and ethnoracial boundary formation in the United States. Many Americans associate Spanish with Latinx ethnoracial category membership and identity (Castañeda 2019; Jiménez 2010; Lacayo 2017; Mora 2014; Roth 2010, 2012; Schachter, Flores, and Maghbouleh 2021; Waters 1999; Zolberg and Woon 1999). However, Spanish usage varies significantly among Latinx Americans: whereas more than 90 percent of first-generation Latinx adults in the United States are Spanish-dominant, 75 percent of the third generation are English-dominant (Lopez et al. 2018). In a recent Pew survey 71 percent of Latinx respondents said it was not necessary to speak Spanish in order to be considered Hispanic or Latino (Lopez 2016), suggesting Spanish fluency and Latinx identity are increasingly decoupled. Moreover, some later-generation Latinx Americans report avoiding using Spanish for fear of being stigmatized (Jiménez 2010)—non-Hispanic Whites associate speaking Spanish not just with Latinx categorization but also with being undocumented (Flores and Schachter 2018).

Motivated by recent work advocating for more research on within-category inequality (see Lamont, Beljean, and Clair 2014; Monk 2022), in this article we examine if and how Spanish language use operates as both an inter- and intra-categorical distinction in the market for rental housing. The housing market is a central institution where ethnoracial boundaries are negotiated and reinforced (Besbris 2016; Besbris and Korver-Glenn 2023; Korver-Glenn 2021; Pattillo 2013; Taylor 2019) with significant consequences for segregation and socio-spatial inequality (Besbris 2020; Krysan and Crowder 2017; Massey and Denton 1993). The rental market in particular is a key site of ethnoracial inequality: whereas about half of all renters in the United States are non-Hispanic White, the majority of non-White residents find their housing in the rental market, and various rental market processes (e.g., eviction, marketing, uptake of government assistance, and search strategies) are stratified by race/ethnicity (Besbris, Schachter, and Kuk 2021; Boeing et al. 2021; Desmond 2012, 2016; Hepburn, Louis, and Desmond 2020; Krysan 2008; Lee 2014; Lu 1999). Despite a growing focus on the information homeseekers receive during their searches (Krysan and Bader 2009; Krysan and Crowder 2017) little work has examined how the impact of information about housing and neighborhoods may vary *within* ethnoracial groups. We posit that Spanish operates as a source of information about housing and neighborhoods for all racial/ethnic groups and elicits heterogeneous responses from Latinx Americans.

Specifically, we ask: in what kinds of neighborhoods are rental units advertised in Spanish, and what are the (potentially disparate) effects of seeing ads in Spanish among non-Hispanic White, non-Hispanic Black, and Spanish- and English-speaking Latinx Americans? To answer these questions, we combine descriptive analyses of digital data with a survey experiment. We find that the use of Spanish on Craigslist—the most popular rental market site (Boeing and Waddell 2017)—is rare overall but more common in predominantly Latinx neighborhoods, particularly those with high concentrations of immigrants. We also find that in places with small Black populations and growing Latin American immigrant concentrations, advertisements are disproportionately likely to use Spanish—potentially indicating landlord preferences for immigrant/non-Black American tenants. Moreover, within neighborhoods, relative to otherwise similar units, advertisements posted in Spanish are systematically lower priced.[1] If these ads are concentrated in certain kinds of neighborhoods, what are the subsequent effects on individuals' residential preferences? Our survey experiment demonstrates how both race/ethnicity and Spanish language ability affect reactions to seeing Spanish. White, Black, and non-Spanish-speaking Latinx respondents express significantly less interest in a unit advertised in Spanish relative to Spanish-speaking Latinx adults. Additionally, when White, Black, and non-Spanish-speaking Latinx respondents see an ad in Spanish, they form negative perceptions of the neighborhood, whereas Spanish-speaking Latinx Americans do not.

Our findings highlight how Spanish potentially operates as a tool of inclusion by attracting Spanish-speaking Latinx homeseekers to neighborhoods where they can access lower-priced rental housing. At the same time, prospective White, Black, and non-Spanish-speaking Latinx homeseekers may choose to avoid these units and neighborhoods. Critically, these patterns cut both across and within formal ethnora-

cial groups, demonstrating the importance of considering how language intersects with the U.S. ethnoracial hierarchy to shape group boundaries and perpetuate socio-spatial inequality.

Spanish and Infracategorical Difference in the Rental Housing Market

A wide body of research points to the role of Spanish in creating, maintaining, and breaking down group boundaries in the United States. For example, among Latinx Americans, Spanish can serve as a mobilizing force for a shared panethnic identity (Mora 2014) but can also create barriers within multigenerational Latinx communities (Jiménez 2010). Spanish can also operate as a boundary between ethnoracial groups, marking someone as Latinx and not White or Black (Castañeda 2019; Lacayo 2017; Mora 2014; Roth 2010, 2012; Schachter et al. 2021; Waters 1999; Zolberg and Woon 1999), and/or elicit negative reactions from non-Hispanic White (Enos 2014) and Black (Jiménez 2016) Americans. Motivated by this work demonstrating how Spanish operates as a powerful cultural cue, we explore two ways that Spanish may operate as a source of distinction and inequality in the housing market.

First, we conceptualize Spanish-speaking Latinx Americans as a *subcategory* of Latinx individuals who may hold distinct housing market preferences compared with those who do not speak Spanish. Following a long tradition of intersectionality research (Collins 2015), in his model of infracategorical inequality, Monk (2022) underscores the importance of subgroup analyses because formal categories—for example, Hispanic Americans—can obscure important within-group variation in experience. Although we know that Latinx immigrants (who are more likely to be Spanish-dominant) experience higher rates of segregation compared with their native-born co-ethnics (Iceland 2009), little work to date has specifically examined whether and how language ability might differentiate the neighborhood and housing preferences of Latinx homeseekers.

Second, Spanish can also operate as a *tool that cues categorization* (Monk 2022). In the housing market, landlords may use Spanish as a way to mark their rental unit and/or the surrounding neighborhood as attractive to a particular group—those who speak Spanish. Similarly, regardless of their own racial/ethnic identity or categorical membership, prospective renters may interpret Spanish usage in advertisements as a signal (positive or negative) of the characteristics of the housing unit, landlord, and/or surrounding neighborhood and use this information to inform their housing search. In both cases, landlords and prospective renters are using Spanish as a heuristic to categorize the unit and the neighborhood. Critically, unlike other language that violates the 1968 Fair Housing Act (e.g., "No Mexicans"), the use of Spanish language in rental housing advertisements is in no way legally discriminatory. And it can be inclusive, offering access to information about potential housing to searchers who are not fluent in English. But regardless of landlord intent, it may provide cues about a housing unit and/or neighborhood to prospective renters.

Information and Online Rental Housing Advertisements

When looking for housing, renters have relatively established choice sets of known and acceptable neighborhoods, and these are updated as new information arises during the search process. The racial demographics of a neighborhood are highly salient, signaling what Krysan and Crowder (2017) call a set of correlated characteristics—assumptions about neighborhood and housing quality derived from the ethnoracial makeup of a given place. Because it can operate as a signal of race/ethnicity (Schachter et al. 2021), seeing Spanish in an advertisement for rental housing may lead prospective renters to believe a neighborhood is predominantly Latinx and/or that the unit is intended for Latinx renters, but it could also evoke a broader set of ideas about what a given neighborhood is like, for example, the quality of its schools, public safety, and so on. Assumptions and preferences differ across ethnoracial groups with Whites often holding negative stereotypes about Latinx people (Quillian 2006; Schachter 2021) and desiring neighborhoods with few Latinx residents (Charles 2006; Lacayo 2016; Lewis, Emerson, and Klineberg 2011; Meyerhoffer 2015). Some studies suggest that White Americans' negative reactions to immigrant neighbors are particularly strong (Rugh and Massey 2014), with evidence that non-Hispanic Whites are more likely to move away from places with growing local immigrant populations (Crowder, Hall, and Tolnay 2011; Hall and Crowder 2014; although see Bader 2022). Less work has focused on Black, Latinx, or immigrant Americans' preferences regarding neighborhoods with large shares of Latinx residents or Latinx immigrants (although see Asad and Rosen 2019). More generally, past work indicates that Latinx adults are more willing to live in predominantly White neighborhoods than are Black adults, but Latinx housing searchers prefer predominantly Latinx neighborhoods compared with those with large numbers of Black residents (Charles 2000, 2006; Swaroop and Krysan 2011; Zubrinsky and Bobo 1996).

And yet, it is a longstanding finding that stated preferences do not generally match up with mobility patterns. Previous research has pointed to a number of factors to explain this discrepancy, including racially segregated social networks, housing affordability, and racialized preexisting knowledge of potential destination communities (Bruch and Swait 2019; Carrillo et al. 2016; Krysan and Crowder 2017). Indeed, knowledge about neighborhoods has moved to the forefront of theorizing mobility and segregations processes—information shapes housing search—but little work examines the actual availability of information or how different information may affect residential decision-making processes.

Online rental housing advertisements are a source of information that is uniquely positioned to influence housing searchers. Across ethnoracial groups, renters in urban areas and central cities are more likely to find their housing through websites like Craigslist than any other source of information, including word of mouth, real estate agents or listing agencies, and physical advertisements (Besbris et al. 2021). Sites like Craigslist, Zillow, and other online repositories of housing advertisements have transformed the information environment and structure of the rental housing market, which has changed how renters find a place to live. By serving as the point of connection between landlords and prospective renters, rental housing

advertisements may influence the types of households that do and do not apply. For example, housing voucher holders scan online advertisements for listings that specifically welcome applications from renters using government assistance and avoid applying to ones that discriminate by source of income (Rosenblatt and Cossyleon 2018).

To be sure, online listings are not the only source of information available to home searchers. However, as a prominent and growing source of information about the rental market, housing websites not only influence individual searchers; they also have the potential to affect the reputations of different places (Kennedy et al. 2021). Previous research has shown that information from various forms of media affects homeseekers' understandings of different neighborhoods as more or less appropriate places to live (Korver-Glenn et al. 2020; Krysan and Crowder 2017; Weininger 2014), and the information homeseekers obtain during the search is extremely consequential (Besbris 2016, 2020; Lareau 2014). If information from online advertisements for rental housing from different neighborhoods is spatially patterned, then seekers may form impressions about some neighborhoods as desirable and others as less so.

Critically, the effects of Spanish-language ads are the same regardless of landlord intent, and so rather than investigate why landlords post in Spanish, our focus here is on the consequences of such listings. In particular, our aim is to first examine where landlords use Spanish and then test if Spanish influences prospective renters' assumptions about a neighborhood or interest in a housing unit. Put another way, we first identify where and how Spanish is used on Craigslist and then examine how both race/ethnicity and Spanish ability shape responses.

Analytical Strategy

Much of the past research on neighborhood and housing preferences has relied on experiments that explicitly state and then independently randomize a hypothetical neighborhood's ethnoracial composition, socioeconomic status, crime rate, and school quality in order to disentangle the relative importance of these highly correlated neighborhood characteristics for housing searchers' decisions (e.g., Krysan and Bader 2009). More recent work on residential and neighborhood decision-making underscores the limitations of this approach—homeseekers generally have incomplete information regarding available destinations, and the information they do have tends to vary by race/ethnicity (Bruch and Mare 2012; Bruch and Swait 2019; Krysan and Crowder 2017). Moreover, any information about a potential destination neighborhood's ethnoracial demographics is highly consequential for its inclusion in a homeseeker's choice set, but homeseekers are rarely presented with such clear demographic information in housing advertisements (Besbris et al. 2021; Oliveri 2010). As a result, they rely on other, more implicit signals during their search. This represents a clear disconnect between how experimental methods typically represent the neighborhood selection process and the actual ways in which homeseekers gather information and make decisions. In addition, most work either examines particular ethnoracial groups (often, non-Hispanic Whites) or

makes comparisons among ethnoracial groups. In both cases, studies tend to rely on formal ethnoracial category membership to identify subgroups.

Our research design moves beyond these limitations by combining descriptive and experimental analyses and testing for subgroup differences in addition to formal ethnoracial category membership. First, our descriptive data allow us to create a novel experimental instrument that better reflects the reality of available information in the market for rental housing. And although, like previous experimental studies, our experiment may be limited in how it captures real-world decision-making, by pairing it with large-scale descriptive data, we can better surmise how homeseekers' decisions may lead to particular patterns of mobility and segregation. Put another way, we are simultaneously able to understand the causal effects of seeing rental housing ads in Spanish on Americans' stated housing preferences and link these back to data on where such ads actually exist. This allows for more robust inferences about the potential effects of Spanish on residential sorting. Second, our experimental sample is nationally representative and includes oversamples of non-Hispanic Black and Latinx Americans and both English and Spanish speakers, allowing us to test for differences not just by race/ethnicity but also by language ability.

Craigslist Analysis

Craigslist is the dominant English-language platform for today's metropolitan rental housing market and the primary source of information for the vast majority of rental housing searches (Boeing and Waddell 2017). Although Craigslist cannot provide a census of all rental housing in the United States, it is more comprehensive and timelier than any other existing source and includes not just information on location and price, but also housing unit characteristics. Additionally, the advertisements contain textual descriptions (Schachter and Besbris 2017). We include all Craigslist sites that correspond to the 49 largest metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs) in the United States.[2] About 55 percent of the entire U.S. population, and a far greater share of the U.S. Latinx population, lives within the included metros. We use the geocodes to assign each advertisement to a Census tract using the spatial overlay function from R's sp package. From late May of 2017 through the end of 2019, we collected 21,129,873 listings across all 49 MSAs. We eliminate listings missing geocodes (about four percent of the 21.1 million), listings missing price information (about one percent of all listings), and listings with prices lower than $100 or prices higher than $10,000 (about one percent of all listings), for a final data set of 20,332,253 unique, geocoded listings.[3] We then merge our data with the corresponding year's American Community Survey five-year pooled data on neighborhood (i.e., tract) racial/ethnic composition, poverty status, nativity, and other characteristics relevant to rental market dynamics. We aggregate every variable up to the Census tract-year level. Our final sample size is 121,829 tract-years, which consists of on average 40,610 Census tracts per year for three years.

We use a language detection algorithm provided by Google to classify each listing as Spanish (=1) or not Spanish (=0). Google uses this algorithm for Chrome, its web browser, to detect the language used in websites. We use the cld2 package

in R to implement the language detection algorithm and classify the language of the listing as Spanish when the cld2 package suggests the listing language as Spanish. As a robustness check, we also use an alternative classification method by detecting the use of common Spanish words such as "para," "casa," or "apartamentos." The aim of this analysis is to identify descriptive patterns in the usage of Spanish in housing advertisements. Thus, we begin by using a general additive model to generate smoothed bivariate plots that show where Spanish listings tend to be more or less common.[4] We also estimate linear models with Census tract and year fixed effects to test whether changes in ethnoracial composition and the percentage of foreign-born residents predict the percentage of Spanish listings in each Census tract-year, even when we consider other demographic, socioeconomic status, and rental market related variables. For this analysis standard errors are clustered at the Census tract level.

Craigslist Results

First, we examine whether neighborhood Latinx or immigrant concentration is associated with the prevalence of Spanish housing advertisements. Even though overall Spanish listings are relatively rare—only 0.44 percent of all listings are in Spanish—their prevalence is almost six times higher in majority-Latinx tracts (2.6 percent). As shown in Figure 1, as the concentration of Latinx or immigrant residents increases, the percentage of housing advertisements in Spanish also increases. Moreover, rather than simply a linear relationship, it appears that the correlation is stronger in neighborhoods where a majority of residents are Latinx or foreign born. Thus, although they are relatively uncommon in general, Spanish listings do appear to accurately signal that a neighborhood has a larger Latinx and/or immigrant population.

Figure 2 repeats the same analysis but examines the relationship between Spanish listings and percentage of the population that is foreign born separately for neighborhoods that are and are not majority Latinx. We can see that the positive correlation between the percentage of Spanish listings and the percentage of the tract's population that is foreign born only exists in majority-Latinx neighborhoods. We find a curvilinear relationship that exhibits a stronger correlation in majority foreign-born neighborhoods, similar to Figure 1. This clearly demonstrates that listings in Spanish are more common in majority-Latinx neighborhoods in general, and those with more immigrants in particular.

Moreover, Table 1 suggests that additional measures of neighborhood ethnoracial composition, including socioeconomic status, cannot account for these trends.[5] The models include year fixed effects to account for unobserved differences over time. Bivariate results in models 1 and 2 demonstrate that neighborhoods with greater proportions of Latinx or foreign born residents are more likely to have Spanish listings. The coefficients indicate neighborhoods that have one percentage point higher concentrations of Latinx or immigrant residents are likely to have 0.07 to 0.08 percentage point more Spanish listings. To put this effect size in context, a one standard deviation increase in Latinx residents—a 21.7 percentage point increase—is associated with a 1.5 percentage point increase in Spanish
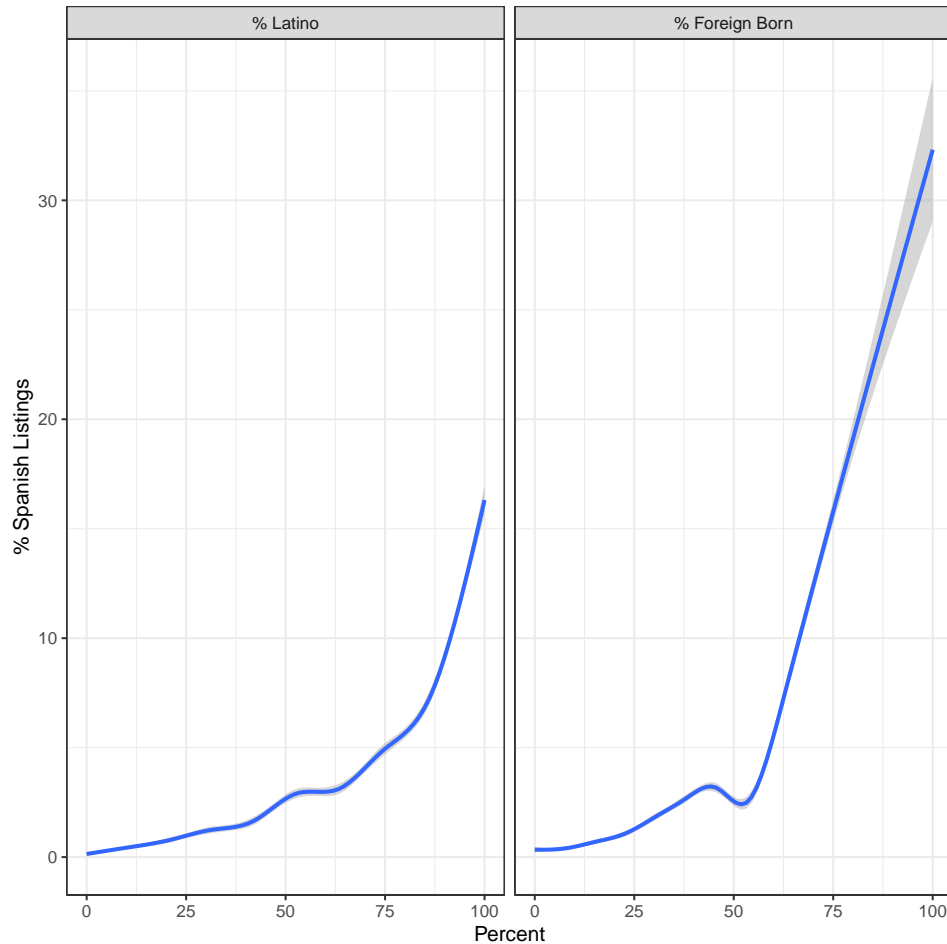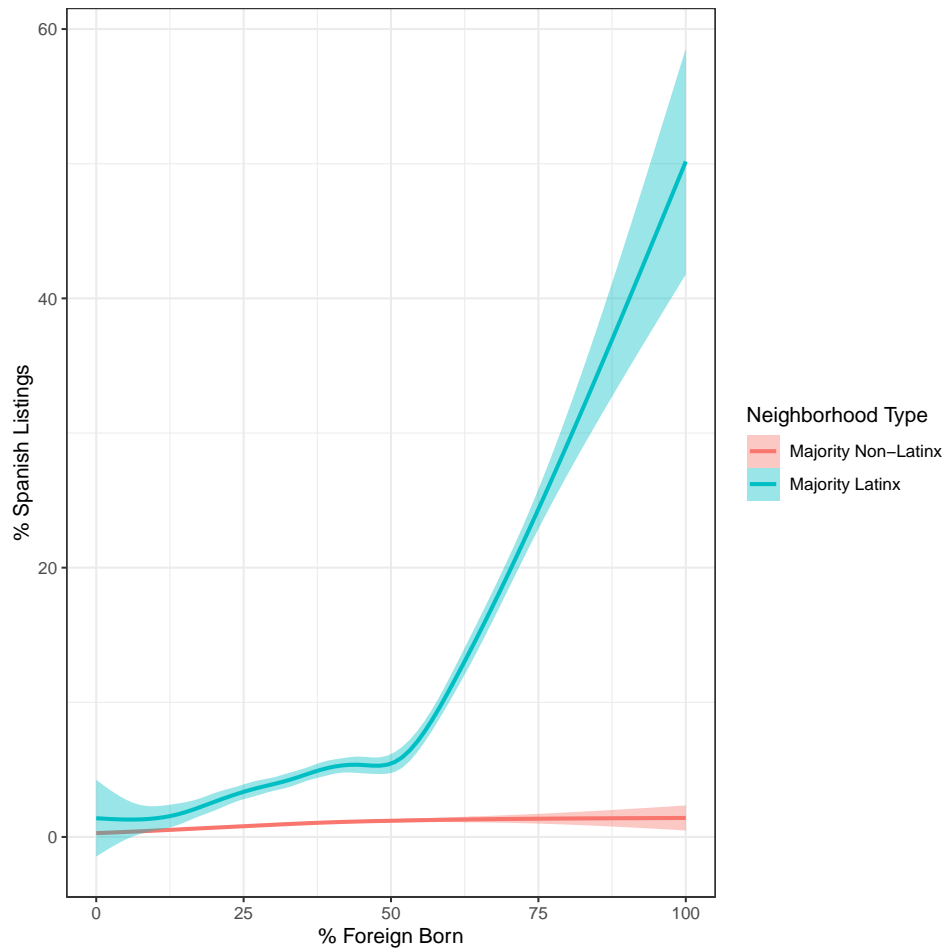
Figure 1: Percentage of Spanish listings and percentage of the tract that is Latinx (left side) and percentage foreign-born (right side).

listings, which is about 0.22 standard deviations. Given that only five percent of our sample's total tract-years contain greater than one percent Spanish listings, a 1.5 percentage point increase is substantial. Multivariable models that include neighborhood racial composition (model 3) and socioeconomic status indicators (model 4) reveal a slightly smaller but statistically significant relationship between the percentage of Latinx residents and the percentage of Spanish listings, as well as the percentage of foreign-born residents and the prevalence of Spanish listings.

Although models that only include year fixed effects capture the cross-sectional relationship between the use of Spanish and our covariates, they do not take into account any changes over time. Not only do ethnoracial composition and the percentage of immigrants in each neighborhood change over time, but the use of Spanish in rental listings is also likely to change across years. A two-way fixed effects model that includes both Census tract and year fixed effects controls for tract-level time-invariant confounders and year-level confounders, which allows us

Figure 2: Percentage of Spanish listings and percentage foreign born by neighborhood type.

to estimate how variation in the covariates over time is correlated with the outcome variable.

Table 2 demonstrates the results of two-way fixed effects models. Unlike the previous analyses, we do not find a statistically significant relationship between a change in Latinx concentration and Spanish usage, which suggests that although Spanish is used more frequently in majority-Latinx neighborhoods, after accounting for time-invariant neighborhood characteristics and year-level changes over time, increases in the Latinx population do not explain variation in Spanish usage across neighborhoods.[6] Only two variables are statistically significant across four models: percent foreign born and percent Black. These models indicate that neighborhoods with growing proportions of immigrants and of non-Hispanic Black residents over time tend to have higher proportions of Spanish listings.

Why would an increase in Black residents be associated with higher rates of Spanish usage? To better understand the results of the two-way fixed effects models, we estimate two additional models that include interaction terms between the percentage of immigrants and ethnoracial composition. We first interact percent foreign

Table 1: Socioeconomic measures and Spanish listings

	Dependent Variable: Percentage of Spanish Listings			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Percentage Latinx	0.071[†]		0.063[†]	0.056[†]
	(0.001)		(0.001)	(0.001)
Percentage Foreign Born		0.079[†]	0.023[†]	0.031[†]
		(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Median Household Income ($10,000)				0.030[†]
				(0.010)
Percentage Black			0.011[†]	0.009[†]
			(0.001)	(0.001)
Percentage Asian			0.016	−0.003
			(0.008)	(0.009)
Percentage of Tract Pop with College Degree				−0.018[†]
				(0.002)
Percentage of Tract Pop Living in Poverty				−0.009[†]
				(0.003)
Year Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	121,278	121,278	121,278	120,942
R^2	0.049	0.028	0.051	0.053
Adjusted R^2	0.049	0.028	0.051	0.053
Residual Standard Error	6.854	6.930	6.844	6.821

Notes: *$p < 0.05$, †$p < 0.01$.

born with neighborhood percentage Latinx and then with neighborhood percentage Black. We dichotomize ethnoracial composition for the ease of interpretation. As shown in Table 3 model 2, in neighborhoods where Latinx residents make up the minority, a one percentage point increase in the immigrant population predicts 0.025 percentage point more Spanish listings. The relationship is almost twice as large in Latinx-majority neighborhoods. The marginal effect in Latinx-majority neighborhoods is a 0.046 percentage point increase and is statistically significant. Model 3 also demonstrates differences when we compare Black-majority and -minority neighborhoods, but they are different than the results of model 2. The positive relationship between percentage foreign born and percentage Spanish listings is only statistically significant across Black-minority neighborhoods. The marginal effect sign flips and loses statistical significance in Black-majority Census tracts. Together these findings indicate that growing immigrant concentrations predict increased Spanish usage in neighborhoods where Black residents are in the minority but not the majority.

When we take the results from models 1, 2, and 3 together, we get a comprehensive understanding of the factors associated with the use of Spanish in rental listings. Census tracts that have greater Latinx and immigrant concentrations are more likely to have a higher percentage of Spanish listings. This straightforward relationship becomes more nuanced once we examine change over time. Neighbor-

Table 2: Two-way fixed effects models predicting proportions of Spanish listings

	Dependent Variable: Percentage of Spanish Listings			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Percentage Latinx	−0.012		−0.011	−0.013
	(0.009)		(0.010)	(0.010)
Percentage Foreign Born		0.023*	0.029†	0.031†
		(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)
Median Household Income ($10,000)				0.009
				(0.043)
Percentage Black			0.024*	0.025*
			(0.010)	(0.011)
Percentage Asian			−0.006	−0.013
			(0.049)	(0.055)
Percentage of Tract Pop with College Degree				−0.003
				(0.010)
Percentage of Tract Pop Living in Poverty				−0.007
				(0.008)
Census Tract Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	121,278	121,278	121,278	120,942
R^2	0.647	0.647	0.647	0.646
Adjusted R^2	0.409	0.409	0.409	0.408
Residual Standard Error	5.403	5.403	5.403	5.394

*Notes: *$p < 0.05$, †$p < 0.01$.*

hoods with increasing proportions of immigrant and non-Hispanic Black residents, but not increasing proportions of Latinx residents, are more likely to have higher proportions of Spanish listings. We also that find that Census tracts where Black residents are the minority, but the immigrant population is increasing, are likely to see growing use of Spanish listings. In additional analyses in the online supplement, we use place of birth data to confirm that the immigrant effect in these models is driven by immigrants from Latin America.[7] These results show that landlords are more likely to use Spanish in majority-Latinx neighborhoods with large shares of immigrant renters. And they suggest that landlords may use Spanish to attract Spanish-speaking renters (rather than non-Hispanic Black renters) in neighborhoods where Black residents are in the minority and the Latin American immigrant population is increasing.

Our final Craigslist analysis explores whether units being advertised in Spanish are systematically different compared with other units *within* the same neighborhood. Within a neighborhood there may be idiosyncratic reasons why some listings are posted in Spanish and others in English. Spanish-speaking landlords may be motivated to provide affordable housing to co-ethnic, Spanish-speaking tenants. Alternatively, it is possible that landlords see Spanish-speaking prospective tenants as more exploitable and market less desirable housing units to them (Korver-Glenn 2018).

Table 3: Models interacting percentage foreign born and neighborhood type

	Dependent Variable: Percentage of Spanish Listings		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Percentage Foreign Born	0.023*	0.025*	0.037[†]
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.012)
Latinx Majority × Percentage Foreign Born		0.021	
		(0.016)	
Black Majority × Percentage Foreign Born			−0.064[†]
			(0.021)
Latinx Majority		−0.752	
		(0.545)	
Black Majority			0.738
			(0.455)
Percentage Black		0.029[†]	
		(0.010)	
Percentage Latinx			−0.022*
			(0.009)
Percentage Asian		−0.010	−0.019
		(0.055)	(0.055)
Percentage of Tract Pop with College Degree		−0.001	−0.005
		(0.009)	(0.010)
Percentage of Tract Pop Living in Poverty		−0.007	−0.006
		(0.008)	(0.008)
Median Household Income ($10,000)		0.009	0.006
		(0.043)	(0.043)
Census tract fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	121,278	120,942	120,942
R^2	0.647	0.646	0.646
Adjusted R^2	0.409	0.408	0.408
Residual Standard Error	5.403	5.394	5.394

Notes: $*p < 0.05$, $†p < 0.01$.

As shown in Table 4, we find that listings posted in Spanish are significantly lower priced, with asking rents of more than $130 less on average, than English listings in the same neighborhood. When we control for the number of bedrooms, square footage, and number of pictures included in the listing, the lower asking rents persist; we find that listings advertised in Spanish have an asking rent of more than $75 less per month. This analysis suggests that even within neighborhoods where Spanish usage is more common, landlords are more likely to advertise individual units in Spanish when they have a relatively lower-priced housing unit for rent.

Although the ultimate intent of landlords is unknown and likely heterogenous, the patterns we have uncovered highlight the potential for Spanish usage to convey information about the ethnoracial and immigrant composition of a neighborhood and to steer Spanish-speaking renters (who are disproportionately likely to be

Table 4: Rent asking prices for listings posted in Spanish compared with others in same neighborhood

			Dependent Variable: Price			
	Full	Full	Majority Latinx	Majority Latinx	Majority Foreign Born	Majority Foreign Born
Spanish	−131.63[†]	−76.53[†]	−172.98[†]	−55.57[†]	−190.95[†]	−65.64[†]
	(1.40)	(1.43)	(2.33)	(2.78)	(4.59)	(5.66)
N of Bedrooms		344.30[†]		376.39[†]		541.04[†]
		(0.14)		(0.50)		(1.08)
1,000 Square Feet		0.08[†]		0.20[†]		86.28[†]
		(0.01)		(0.03)		(0.98)
N of Pictures		10.24[†]		8.61[†]		7.37[†]
		(0.02)		(0.07)		(0.14)
Census Tract Fixed Effects	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Year Fixed Effects	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Observations	19,915,375	14,465,539	1,940,482	1,263,886	789,454	499,548
R^2	0.613	0.746	0.570	0.715	0.438	0.665
Adjusted R^2	0.612	0.745	0.568	0.714	0.437	0.663
Residual Standard Error	529.37	408.74	551.23	430.51	730.69	564.43

Notes: $*p < 0.05$, †$p < 0.01$.

Latinx immigrants) into lower-priced housing units. Given previous research on the neighborhood preferences of Black, Latinx, and White homeseekers (Charles 2003; Krysan and Farley 2002; Lewis et al. 2011; Swaroop and Krysan 2011), such information likely influences where people chose to live as they proceed through the housing search. To test this hypothesis, we next explore the reactions of multiple subgroups of Americans to Spanish in housing advertisements.

Reactions to Spanish

Experimental Design

In our survey experiment, respondents read an advertisement for a generic rental housing unit where we manipulated the amount of English and Spanish text. The housing ad was composed of common descriptions derived from textual analyses of Craigslist data (see the online supplement for details).

The experiment contained four conditions: *English only*, *Bilingual—English first* (ad first appears in English, then Spanish translation), *Bilingual—Spanish first* (ad in Spanish first, followed by English), and *Spanish only*. Respondents were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions. After viewing the advertisement, everyone was asked whether they would apply to rent the listing they viewed, how desirable they perceived the listing to be, and their perceptions of neighborhood crime and safety levels, school quality, income levels, and ethnoracial and immigrant composition (see the online supplement for full wording and coding of all measures).

Table 5: Treatment effects on applying to rent unit by respondent race/ethnicity

	White Respondents	Black Respondents	Latinx Respondents
Treatment (ref=English Only)			
Bilingual—English First	0.14†	−0.07	−0.13*
	(0.04)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Bilingual—Spanish First	0.06	−0.10	−0.07
	(0.04)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Spanish Only	−0.31†	−0.34†	−0.19†
	(0.04)	(0.06)	(0.07)
Constant	0.44†	0.49†	0.64†
	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.05)
Observations	893	480	492
R^2	0.12	0.07	0.02

*Notes:* Standard errors in parentheses. $*p < 0.05$, $†p < 0.01$.

Our experiment, which we preregistered with Evidence in Governance and Politics (EGAP), was included in a larger omnibus survey administered by NORC using their AmeriSpeak panel. The survey consisted of a nationally representative sample of U.S. English- and Spanish-speaking adults, with oversamples of Black and Latinx Americans. The survey was fielded between November 19 and December 10, 2021, and was accessible online and by phone. Only web-based respondents were included in the experiment ($n = 1,966$), with 48 percent of respondents identifying as non-Hispanic White ($n = 893$), 26 percent as non-Hispanic Black ($n = 480$), and 26 percent as Hispanic ($n = 492$). We exclude all other respondents due to our focus on comparing reactions among White, Black, and Latinx Americans, as well as those missing values for our dependent variables for a final sample size of $n = 1,865$. See the online supplement for additional descriptive statistics of our sample.

Experimental Results

We first examine treatment effects for applying to rent the listing by respondent race/ethnicity. As shown in Table 5, relative to the English-only treatment, viewing the ad only in Spanish decreased interest for all groups. However, the effect is almost twice as large for White (31 percentage points) and Black (34 percentage points) respondents compared with Latinx respondents (19 percentage points). We also find small effects for the English-first bilingual treatment.

To better understand the magnitude of these effects, we estimate predicted probabilities of applying to rent the unit by treatment assignment and respondent race. As shown in Figure 3, compared with White and Black respondents, Latinx respondents report higher overall rates of interest in the unit regardless of treatment assignment. Whereas White and Black respondents demonstrate a lower probability of applying to rent the unit when the listing is presented in Spanish only compared with all other treatments (about 15 percent of the time), Latinx respondents react less negatively to the Spanish-only text and still report being interested in the rental unit about 45 percent of the time when it is advertised in Spanish only. These patterns

## Treatment Effects by Respondent Race/Ethnicity
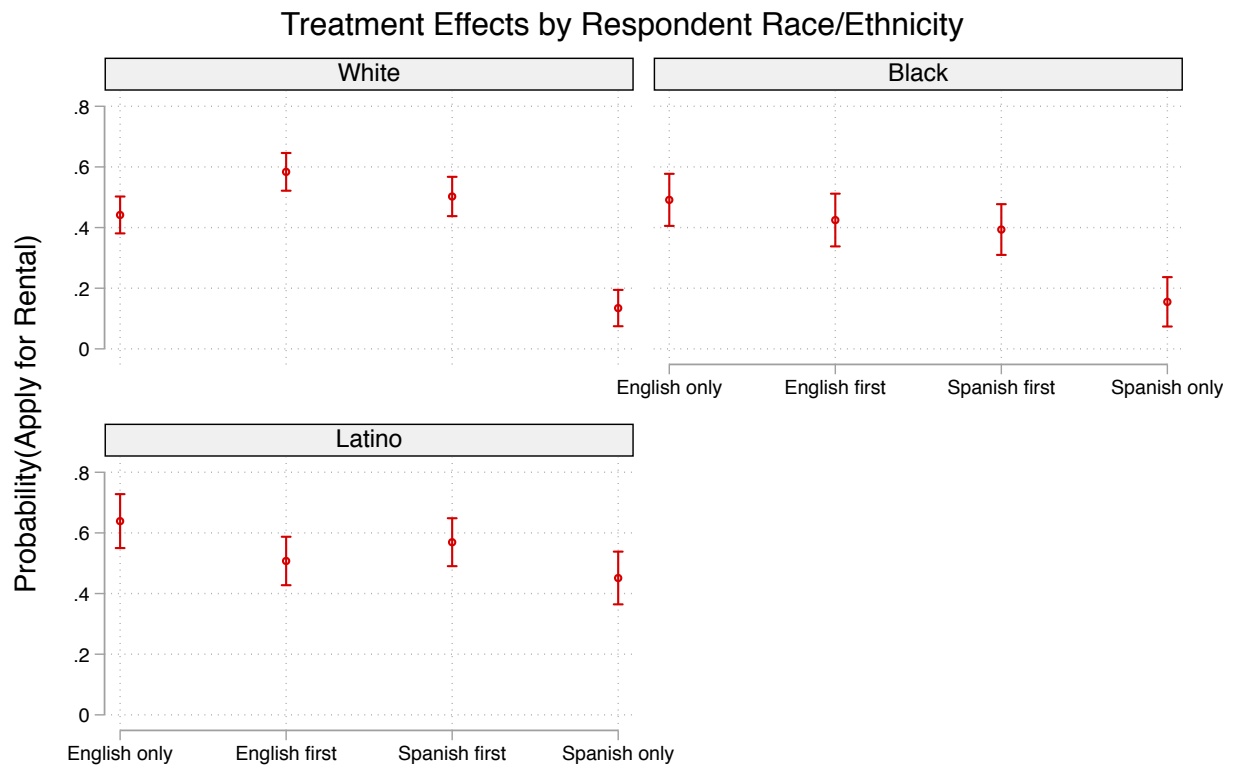
Figure 3: Treatment effects on interest in applying to rent the unit by respondent race.
Note: Based on Table 5.

are echoed in respondents' assessments of the listing's overall desirability (see the online supplement). In additional analyses presented in the online supplement, we test for heterogeneity in responses among White respondents by partisanship but find no significant differences.

Next, we estimate separate treatment effects to compare responses among Latinx respondents who do and do not report speaking Spanish. We find that non-Spanish speakers react more negatively to the Spanish-only ad compared with Latinx adults who speak Spanish. This suggests that like White and Black Americans, Latinx adults who do not speak Spanish may be less attracted to neighborhoods where Spanish listings are common. This pattern is consistent with prior work finding that Latinx Americans' reactions to Spanish advertisements vary depending on their own Spanish fluency (Chapa and Becerra 2014).

Although language clearly shapes interest in the rental unit itself, we also wanted to explore how Spanish usage might affect perceptions of the surrounding neighborhood. To this end, in Table 6 we examine whether the language of the housing listing shapes perceptions of neighborhood ethnoracial composition, immigrant concentration, crime level, income level, or school quality. We focus on these dimensions because a large body of work has found that residents often
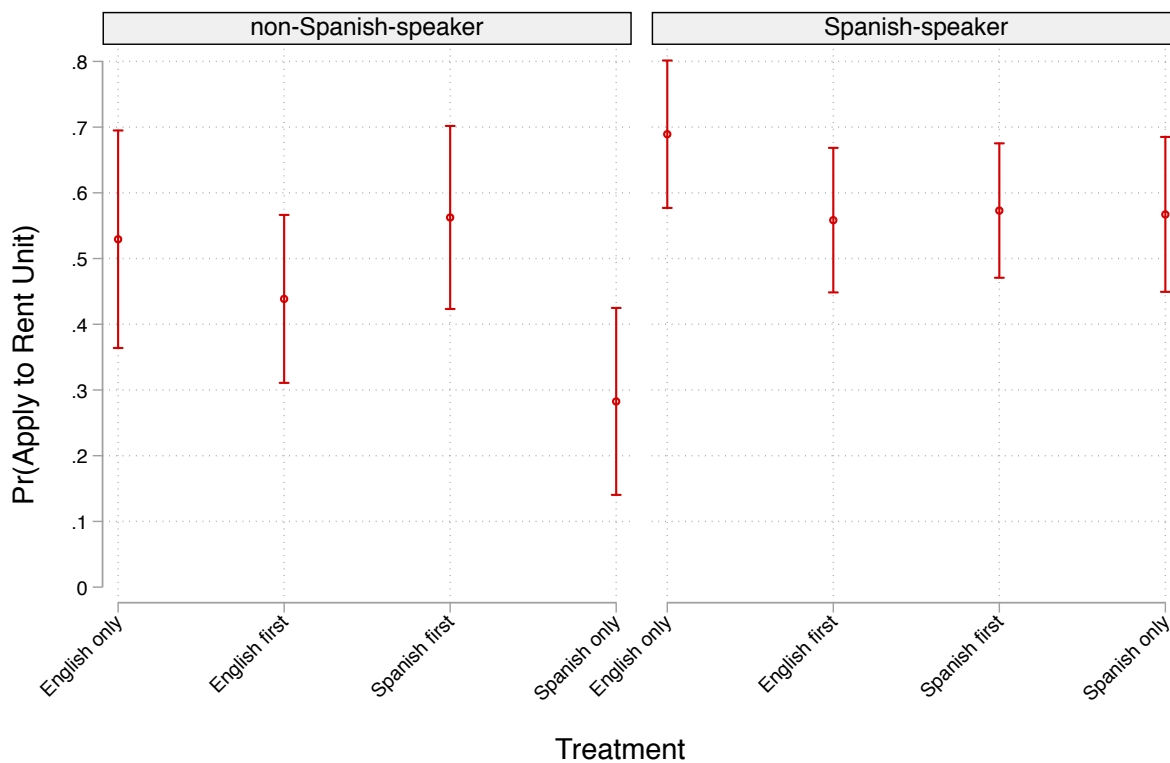
Figure 4: Treatment effects on interest in applying to rent unit among Latinx respondents by Spanish-speaking ability.

describe these factors as correlated, and they subsequently determine interest in and knowledge about different places (Krysan and Crowder 2017).

Interestingly, we find no effect on perceptions of neighborhood crime levels across all ethnoracial groups. However, among Black and White respondents, exposure to the Spanish-only listing increases the perception that the nearby schools are of a lower quality. We find no substantive effect of Spanish-only listings on Latinx respondents' perceptions of nearby schools. Similarly, viewing the listing in Spanish significantly increases the perception among Black and White respondents that neighborhood residents earn below-average incomes. Among all Latinx respondents we observe a similar trend, but the effect size is much smaller and not statistically significant. However, when we disaggregate by Spanish-speaking ability, we find that, like White and Black respondents, non-Spanish-speaking Latinx adults viewing the Spanish-only ad are more likely to perceive the neighborhood to be low-income, whereas the treatments have no effect for Spanish-speaking Latinx respondents (see the online supplement).

Among all respondent groups, viewing a rental listing in Spanish markedly increases the probability of perceiving that the surrounding neighborhood is com-

Table 6: Predicted values for perceived neighborhood characteristics by respondent race/ethnicity and treatment assignment

Respondent race × treatment	Crime problem	Poor schools	Mostly low income	Mostly immigrants	Mostly Latinx
White respondent, English-only treatment (ref)	0.21	0.42	0.36	0.03	0.17
White respondent × Bilingual—English first.	0.15	0.45	0.37	0.02	0.26*
White respondent × Bilingual—Spanish first.	0.17	0.46	0.43*	0.04	0.42*
White respondent, Spanish-only	0.16	0.56*	0.52*	0.27*	0.79*
Black respondent, English-only treatment	0.27	0.41	0.34	0.03	0.11
Black respondent × Bilingual—English First	0.24	0.46	0.32	0.06	0.23
Black respondent × Bilingual—Spanish First	0.27	0.51	0.29	0.07	0.25
Black respondent, Spanish-only	0.27	0.58*	0.50*	0.36*	0.63*
Latinx respondent, English-only treatment	0.26	0.35	0.31	0.06	0.38*
Latinx respondent × Bilingual—English First	0.27	0.41	0.28	0.07	0.47*
Latinx respondent × Bilingual—Spanish First	0.22	0.44	0.33	0.07	0.51*
Latinx respondent, Spanish-only	0.26	0.42	0.40	0.25*	0.80*
Observations	1,865	1,864	1,864	1,863	1,835

*Notes: *$p < 0.05$.*

posed mostly of immigrants, with the effect most notable among Black respondents. Compared with the English-only treatment, when viewing the Spanish-only ad Black respondents are 33 percentage points more likely to perceive that the surrounding neighborhood is predominantly immigrant. White and Latinx respondents are also more likely to perceive the neighborhood as predominantly immigrant, but the differences are not as large (White respondents experience a 24 percentage point increase and Latinx respondents experience a 19 point increase relative to the English-only treatment).

We observe the largest effect sizes when it comes to perceptions of the neighborhood being composed of predominantly Latinx residents. White respondents viewing the Spanish-only ad have a 79 percent chance of perceiving the neighborhood to be majority Latinx, compared with a rate of just 17 percent in the English-only condition. Similarly, Black respondents move from perceiving the neighborhood as majority Latinx just 11 percent of the time when viewing the ad in English to 63 percent of the time when viewing the ad in Spanish.

Spanish-only ads also significantly increase the probability that the neighborhood is perceived as predominantly composed of Latinx residents by Latinx respondents (38 percent with English-only ad, 80 percent with Spanish-only ad). On this outcome, we observe similar patterns among Latinx respondents regardless of their Spanish-speaking ability (see the online supplement). Taken together, these findings confirm that the use of Spanish broadly influences perceptions of a neighborhood's ethnoracial and immigrant composition and suggest that, among White, Black, and non-Spanish-speaking Latinx housing searchers, Spanish rental listings can affect broader perceptions of a neighborhood in ways that prior research has shown will decrease neighborhood desirability. Indeed, school quality is an oft-discussed reason parents give for selecting their homes, and perceptions of school quality

and race/ethnicity are highly intertwined (Lareau 2014). More generally, White Americans attribute a host of negative qualities to immigrants and describe them as less desirable neighbors than native-born residents (Flores and Schachter 2018; Schachter 2016, 2021).

Finally, to test whether our findings for White and Black respondents could be driven by an inability to understand the advertisements altogether rather than negative perceptions of Spanish, we test for differences among White and Black respondents based on their self-reported ability to read Spanish. In this analysis, presented in Figure 2 in the online supplement, we combine White and Black respondents to increase statistical power because our previous findings for these two groups were similar. As shown in that figure, all findings hold for White and Black Americans who are able to read Spanish. Although we find some differences in the magnitude of our treatment effects, compared with the English-only condition, Spanish-reading White and Black Americans remain less interested in renting a unit when it is advertised in Spanish and are more likely to believe that the schools are poorer quality, the neighborhood has more low-income residents, and the neighborhood is predominantly immigrant and Latinx. These findings underscore how White and Black Americans interpret Spanish usage as a key signal about a rental unit and neighborhood even when Spanish is not a barrier to their reading comprehension.

Overall, our results suggest that the use of Spanish decreases Black, White, and non-Spanish-speaking Latinx Americans' interest in a rental unit because it serves as a signal that the neighborhood is predominantly Latinx and/or immigrant. For these respondents, Spanish listings also appear to tap into stereotypes of Latinx/immigrant lower socioeconomic status (Flores and Schachter 2018; Korver-Glenn 2018; Schachter 2021). These findings suggest that the impact of Spanish advertisements is greater than simply decreasing interest in a specific rental unit; rather, such ads shape perceptions of the surrounding neighborhood for these homeseekers. On the other hand, for Spanish-speaking Latinx adults, Spanish-only ads are not a negative signal regarding neighborhood quality but still serve to increase perceptions that the surrounding neighborhood is home to more immigrant and Latinx residents. These perceptions help explain why Spanish-speaking Latinx respondents report higher interest in renting units advertised only in Spanish compared with White, Black, and non–Spanish-speaking Latinx respondents.

Discussion and Conclusions

Our results demonstrate the potential for the use of Spanish to act as a mechanism of ethnoracial boundary reinforcement and residential sorting. Spanish listings are most prevalent in majority-Latinx neighborhoods with growing concentrations of Latin American immigrants. Our survey experiment reveals that White, Black, and non–Spanish-speaking Latinx Americans are broadly uninterested in housing units when they are advertised in Spanish and that Spanish causes many members of these groups to perceive the neighborhood as predominantly Latinx, immigrant, and low-income. The patterns we have uncovered highlight how Spanish-speaking

Latinx households have distinct preferences in the rental market compared with both other Latinx Americans and members of other ethnoracial groups.

Latinx Segregation and Housing Information Environments

Since the start of twenty-first century, Latinx–White and Latinx–Black segregation has declined only slightly—driven in part by large influxes of immigrants—and its persistence reveals the racialization of Latinx residents in general and Latinx immigrants in particular (Frey 2021; Lichter, Parisi, and Taquino 2015). Latinx immigrants—who are far more likely to be Spanish speakers compared with later-generation Latinx Americans—also appear to be unable to convert income and educational advantages into attaining residence in integrated neighborhoods (Akresh and Frank 2018; Lichter et al. 2010). These patterns suggest that mobility processes remain segregated and distinct by race/ethnicity and immigration status. That is, multiple dimensions of structural racism funnel White, Black, and immigrant and native-born Latinx movers to segregated places.

We have uncovered a unique mechanism that may drive differential mobility decisions across and among White, Black, and Latinx homeseekers. As segregation researchers have increasingly turned their attention to the information environments in which individuals find their housing, it has become clear that information on available units and appropriate neighborhood destinations is itself ethnoracially segregated (Besbris et al. 2021; Boeing et al. 2021; Bruch and Swait 2019; Kennedy et al. 2021; Krysan and Crowder 2017). This burgeoning line of research argues that individuals use various cues about a place's demographic makeup to make assumptions about its quality of life and desirability as a place to live. Spanish in housing advertisements is one such cue.

Crucially, as we have shown, Spanish does not just operate as a distinctive signal *across* ethnoracial groups but also drives differentiation *among* Latinx Americans. White, Black, and non–Spanish-speaking Latinx Americans react negatively, indicating that Spanish ads—seemingly because they communicate high levels of Latinx/immigrant residents, poorer-quality schools, and low-income neighbors—may drive away these homeseekers. Because Spanish-speaking Latinx residents are less negatively affected, ads in Spanish may indeed be a signal of inclusion. But this inclusion for some comes at the cost of maintaining residential segregation.

The ads that are most inclusive to Spanish-speaking Latinx residents, who face language and other barriers to navigating the housing market (Hanson and Santas 2014), are for the cheapest housing stock in un-integrated neighborhoods. On the one hand, this may serve to connect Spanish-speaking renters with affordable housing. On the other hand, the use of Spanish in housing ads may also operate as a tool of predatory inclusion—targeting disadvantaged groups for participation in the housing market but in ways that are more exploitative (Besbris et al. 2022; Taylor 2019). However, more research is needed to understand landlords' motivations for advertising in Spanish. More generally, our findings confirm that the information available during the housing search is key for understanding broader patterns of mobility and segregation. Not only is the information environment segregated,

but homeseekers react to the same information differently depending on their race/ethnicity and language fluency.

Language as a Tool of Infracategorical Inequality

Our research underscores the value of paying closer attention to how processes of social categorization (re)produce inequality (Monk 2022). First, by focusing on comparisons among Latinx Americans, we show that Spanish-speaking ability is associated with hetereogenous responses *among* members of the same formal ethnoracial category, with implications for understanding residential inequality. We also demonstrate how Spanish operates as a cue of categorical distinction for White, Black, and Latinx Americans.

Combined, these findings highlight the importance of understanding how formal, state-defined ethnoracial boundaries intersect with other characteristics to form contemporary group relations and create inequality. More specifically, our findings align with past research that finds that ethnoracial categories are a key boundary in the housing market while also encouraging future research to look within these categories. Indeed, there are limits to treating ethnoracial groups as monoliths and assuming uniform experiences (Collins 2015). We have focused on language, but other subgroups and cues may also matter for housing market outcomes, for example, skin tone, phenotype, nation of origin. Such within-group differentiation should not be ignored.

Moreover, exploring the complexities of ethnoracial boundaries in a key field—the rental housing market—allows us to illuminate an underappreciated, legal mechanism of segregation—the use of Spanish in housing advertisements. And yet, Spanish also operates as a tool of inclusion, attracting Spanish-speaking renters who otherwise face barriers to navigating the market. This duality underscores the importance of bringing a nuanced approach to scholarship and policy focused on reducing segregation and residential inequality.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Although understanding the intentions of landlords is beyond the scope of this article, landlords likely post housing advertisements in Spanish for various reasons. First, in communities with greater Spanish-speaking populations, there should be more demand for Spanish-language advertising. Thus, landlords seeking to maximize the size of their potential renter pool would be more likely to advertise in Spanish in heavily Latinx neighborhoods (although not all Latinx residents speak Spanish and not all Spanish speakers are Latinx immigrants). Put another way, market conditions could matter more than any personal preferences landlords may have for or against Spanish-speaking tenants. Second, landlords may use Spanish because they prefer Latinx/immigrant/Spanish-speaking tenants. Latinx tenants are associated with some desirable renter characteristics like being hardworking or more easily exploitable due to stereotypes about their financial illiteracy or undocumented status (Korver-Glenn 2018; Oliveri 2009). Latinx landlords may prefer co-ethnic tenants and use Spanish to attract Latinx renters. Given research on landlords' racialized preferences (Desmond 2016; Roscigno, Karafin, and Tester

2009; Rosen, Garboden, and Cossyleon 2021), we suspect that in many cases, the decision to advertise in Spanish— on an English-language website like Craigslist— is an intentional attempt to influence the characteristics of potential tenants. Of course, landlords may also use Spanish in an effort to be inclusive and welcoming to a wider variety of prospective tenants, or because it is the language they feel most comfortable using when they conduct business.

Although combining our experimental analyses with a descriptive data set on behavior (i.e., where landlords post in Spanish) improves upon past work that only uses vignettes and stated ethnoracial preferences, we do not fully overcome issues of external validity. For example, although recent surveys reveal housing websites to be one of the most common information sources in housing searches, we lack specific data on how Spanish speakers navigate the online housing market, including the extent to which they visit English-dominant sites like Craigslist. In addition, not only are we unable to examine landlord intent, we also don't know the extent to which the preferences expressed by respondents to our survey experiments matter for their mobility decisions. However, given past work that shows that individuals generally state a preference for *more* diverse neighborhoods than the ones in which they search and reside, our results may actually underestimate the effects of Spanish on different ethnoracial groups' housing outcomes. We hope our work will motivate further scholarship focused on understanding both landlords' (and other market actors') intentions as well as the relationship between homeseekers' stated preferences and housing outcomes in the rental market.

Notes

1 It is possible that Spanish-speaking landlords are seeking Spanish-speaking tenants, whom they assume are lower-income relative to non-Spanish speakers (Korver-Glenn 2018; Oliveri 2009) and are therefore more interested in lower-priced units.

2 For most metros, the corresponding Craigslist site closely matches Census definitions, but some are more distinct. For example, the "SFBay" Craigslist site covers both the San Francisco–Oakland–Hayward, California MSA and the San Jose–Sunnyvale–Santa Clara, California MSA. We consider these MSAs together as the San Francisco Bay Area. Similarly, whereas the Census treats Miami, Fort Lauderdale, and West Palm Beach, Florida as one MSA, in May of 2017 when we began data collection, each of these areas had its own Craigslist site. During data collection, Craigslist switched to using just one site, with the Fort Lauderdale and West Palm Beach sites now redirecting to the main Miami site. We combine all unique listings from these three sites as the Miami metro area. The Los Angeles Craigslist covers the Los Angeles County area rather than the Los Angeles–Long Beach–Anaheim MSA, which includes Orange County. Craigslist has a separate site for Orange County, which we do not include as part of our Los Angeles metro area. Although these examples demonstrate that Craigslist and Census data do not follow identical definitions of metro areas, in our article we only use Census data at the tract level, and we follow Craigslist market definitions to determine metro area boundaries for our MSA fixed effects, so these discrepancies do not affect our results.

3 Including duplicates increases our statistical power but does not substantively change any of our findings. We use the reduced, non-duplicate data set to produce more conservative estimates.

4 The general additive model is the default smoothing method for the ggplot2 package of R.

5 See Table 1 for the full list of covariates.

6 Although the models account for time-invariant unobserved confounders and year-specific differences, because they do not control for time-variant confounding variables, the relationship is not causally identified.

7 American Community Survey self-reported race/ethnicity by nativity data are not available at the tract level. Instead we use place of birth as a proxy. We recognize the limitation of this measures as some immigrants born in Latin America do not self-identify as Latinx.

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