

**Immigration and Drug Violence (with Peter Siavelis)**  
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*This week the Southern Poverty Law Center released a report documenting a rising tide of hostility against Latinos across the South. It shows that low-income Latino immigrants in the South are frequent targets of racial profiling and other abuses that affect their everyday lives and workplaces. The report shows how this hostile environment has been exacerbated by a growing and troubling anti-immigrant climate in the South and in the United States in general. The racial roots of this hostility are well demonstrated by the fact that it has been documented to harm all Latinos regardless of their immigration status. Part of this growing anti-immigrant climate is certainly driven by the economic anxiety generated by the US's deep economic recession. However, an important additional part of this sentiment is driven by a pernicious trend in the media and in American minds that ties together growing drug violence to all Mexicans. News reporters in all media make easy and troubling transitions in their coverage between the so-called “war on drugs” and America’s “immigration problem.” It is neither legitimate nor helpful to collapse together the Mexican drug war and the issue of illegal immigration from Mexico, or to suggest that building a wall to keep out illegal immigrants will keep out Mexican drug cartels as well. It will not. Drugs, drug-related crime, and drug-linked gang membership collectively constitute a growing American problem, one of concern both to indigenous law enforcement here in the United States and to the leaders of recently arrived Latino communities. But it is a problem which is predominantly indigenously created and driven. Drugs do not arrive here by accident. Not are they forced on a reluctant American population. On the contrary, as Hilary Clinton said so clearly in Mexico City in March 2009, it is “our insatiable demand for illegal drugs [that] fuels the drug trade” and it is “our inability to prevent weapons from being illegally smuggled across the border to arms these criminals [that] causes the deaths of police officers, soldiers and civilians.”<sup>i</sup> To stop the drug trade, we need to stop the illegal demand for drugs from legal US citizens. To stop fueling the drug war, we need to cut off the illegal flow of American guns supplied by legal US citizens. There is illegality here. There is a flow across the border; but the illegality is anchored more in American demand and American guns than it is in Mexican immigration; and a flow is one that begins with demand and guns moving south before the drugs move north. The drivers of the drug problem are predominantly home grown. They will not be terminated by demonizing the flow of hard-working, non drug-taking, non-drug dealing, non-violent Mexican immigrants into the base of the American labor market, and we need to say so.*

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<sup>i</sup> Quoted in *The New York Times*, March 26 2009