

Special Section: Essays on Nationalism, Conflict and Media

Interregional Migration and Hybrid Media: From Postnational Imaginaries to National Contestation in Latin America and the Caribbean

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Abstract: Scholarship on migration and media in Latin America and the Caribbean has long emphasised how transnational connectivity sustains postnational imaginaries that unsettle the nation-state as the primary container of identity and belonging. This article argues that such frameworks now require significant revision. Contemporary migration across Latin America and the Caribbean increasingly connects South America, Central America, the Caribbean and North America through multidirectional corridors of transit, settlement and displacement. These developments are mediated through hybrid media environments that amplify xenophobic discourse, emotionally charged nationalism and the securitisation of borders. Drawing on recent empirical research, the article examines how states, commercial actors, migrant communities, and civil society organisations compete within these communicative landscapes. It shows that while solidaristic counter-narratives and practical support networks exist, digital connectivity increasingly operates alongside entrenched exclusionary mechanisms. Postnational imaginaries subsequently persist as contested possibilities within communicative environments shaped by national boundaries and struggles over belonging.

Keywords: nationalism and belonging, postnational imaginaries, interregional migration, hybrid media environments, Latin America and the Caribbean

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The study of media and contemporary migration in Latin America and the Caribbean (henceforth LAC) was until recently informed by a paradigm that highlighted the increasingly important role of diasporic communities in the Global North as key actors in the political, cultural and economic life of their countries of origin and residence. However, migration patterns in LAC have increased in complexity (Massey, 2022), characterised by multidirectional interregional movements connecting South America, Central America, the Caribbean and North America through overlapping routes of transit, settlement and subsequent forced displacements (Álvarez Velasco et al., 2026). These shifting migratory corridors have in recent years become the subject of increasingly fractious public disputes about belonging and rights, acting as a reminder of how migration has historically shaped national identities in the region (Goebel, 2022). Scholarship since the 1990s had suggested that geographic interconnectedness through flows of people, finance and trade were supported by the expansion of transnational media, creating the conditions for postnational imaginaries in which identities and forms of belonging were no longer the monopoly of the nation-state (Appadurai, 1996; Basch et al., 1993; Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004). Media technologies played a central role in this process, from satellite broadcasting to the emergence of transnational markets that enabled dispersed populations to sustain cultural and symbolic ties across borders (Moreno Esparza, 2011; Sinclair, 2003). In this view, communication media contributed to reframing migration outside forms of methodological nationalism (Moreno-Esparza & Martínez Téllez, 2017; Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002).

This article argues that this postnational orientation is now being forced back into a nationalist framework. While mediated connectivity is a central feature of migration, it is increasingly shaped by the securitisation and externalisation of borders, prioritising national sovereignty and control at the expense of human rights (Riggirozzi & Quiliconi, 2026). Migration is now frequently framed as a transnational risk, embedded in processes of “de-risking” that position mobility as a threat to national stability (Ayata, 2022; Deutsch et al., 2024). These developments constrain movement and reshape the communicative environments through which migration is understood. In this context, the hybrid media environment that Chadwick (2017) identified in the context of political communication is today a key site where competing imaginaries of belonging are articulated. Rather than extending postnational forms of identification, mediated discourse increasingly reflects and reproduces narrower, securitised notions of membership aligned with state and institutional agendas. At the same time, these narratives coexist with, and are challenged by, alternative discourses emerging from migrants and their allies, whether through banal, state-sponsored forms of representation (Billig, 1995) or through counter-narratives articulated in networked spaces (Ochoa Chávez, 2023). With a focus on LAC, this article examines how contemporary migration is mediated within the hybrid communicative environment, and how mediation complicates earlier notions of postnational belonging. In doing so, this essay contributes to ongoing debates in media and migration research by showing how the convergence of securitisation practices and

evolving media dynamics produces a contested terrain in which imaginaries of community, identity, and mobility are reconfigured to national frames of reference.

Postnational imaginaries and mediated belonging

Scholarship on migration and transnationalism since the 1990s gave strong analytical weight to the ways mobility unsettled the nation-state as the primary container of identity, belonging, and agency. Appadurai (1996) situated migration within broader global flows of media, ideas, and finance that intensified deterritorialised forms of cultural life. Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004) later reinforced this line of inquiry by conceptualising transnational social fields that linked migrants' everyday lives across borders. These interventions encouraged approaches that moved beyond methodological nationalism and treated mobility as a force that reconfigured the relationship between territory, identity, and community (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002). In this analytical shift communication media occupied a central place. With widespread circulation of people, cultural objects and transnational media flows, such as CD-ROMs, ethnic publications, VHS tapes and television programmes (Karim, 2003; Kolar-Panov, 1997; Moreno-Esparza, 2011; Naficy, 1993) regional audiovisual markets and geolinguistic spaces were formed that fostered belonging to imagined communities despite physical distance (Sinclair, 2003; Tsagarousianou & Retis, 2019). This horizon also shaped how scholars understood migrant voices and attachment to polities of origin. Migrants thus sustained political, economic, and affective ties across borders, while states and media institutions sought to address them as publics whose loyalties and identities extended beyond residence in a single nation-state (Hirschman, 1972; Roberts et al., 1999). Such dynamics gave substance to postnational imaginaries by showing how mobility and media could support translocal forms of belonging (Smith, 1998). Within this framework, media also provided the infrastructures through which migrants, broadcasters, and commercial actors articulated wider communities of meaning (Sinclair et al., 1996; Sinclair, 2005). While the transnational character of communication involving diasporic populations remains relevant to media and migration studies, shifts in migratory patterns have reconfigured the communicative environments in which migration is framed, debated and managed.

Interregional migration and securitisation

Recent migration in LAC is increasingly different from the south-to-north perspectives that were emphasised by postnational approaches to the study of media and migration. In this context, the continental landmass and islands are all points of 'origin, destination, return or transit' migration (Cecchini & Martínez Pizarro, 2023). As defined in the introduction, these movements are best understood as interregional in that they connect differentiated sub-regions within LAC while also extending toward Canada and the United States (International Organization for Migration, 2024). While the foreign-born population from LAC in Canada and the

United States is at a historical peak (McAuliffe & Oucho, 2024), the largest volume of international migration has been interregional, rising from 8.3 to 16.3 million between 2010 and 2022 (Selee et al., 2023). As is well evidenced, over seven million Venezuelans displaced by political strife and people from Colombia, Haiti, Central America and Africa are hosted across LAC (McAuliffe & Oucho, 2024, p. 89).

The region has become the stage for multidirectional migratory corridors and settlement hubs (Álvarez Velasco et al., 2026). These patterns can be linked to the widespread ‘political polarization, social turmoil, and instability’ (Feldmann et al., 2022, p. 7) that most societies in the region are presently experiencing and communicating about. One relatively new phenomenon in LAC has been the intensification of border and migration management practices or securitisation as policies, security and technologies are implemented at binational or multinational level to discourage, deter, and channel migrants before their intended destinations (Cobarrubias & Lemberg-Pedersen, 2025; Winters & Mora Izaguirre, 2019). Consequently, migration is increasingly framed in terms of control, instability, and threat, while narratives of belonging and exclusion, control and enforcement circulate in spaces previously reserved for international borders (Feldmann Pietsch & Sturino, 2024; Nicolosi, 2024; Stock et al., 2019). Migration thus enters public communication as a problem of governance, entitlement and social order that is leaving behind the aforementioned narratives of postnational fluidity.

Media hybridity in Latin America and the Caribbean

The definition of the hybrid media system as ‘built upon interactions among older and newer media logics’ (Chadwick, 2017, p. 4) is key to visualise societal actors as they ‘create, tap, or steer information flows in ways that suit their goals’. In the reflexively connected fields of media and politics, the impact of migration in LAC is necessarily mediated through discursive practices channelled through media by a diverse array of institutions and individual actors. The communicative terrain in LAC can be better understood as a complex of hybrid media environments shaped by a “braiding” process (Nederveen Pieterse, 2019) of diverse national realities and cultural/historical commonalities. Thus, external influences from the East and the West, interacting with national political cultures, help to account for Latin America’s hybrid media landscape. In this context, the long-debunked thesis of westernization (e.g., Straubhaar, 2007) has given way to a context of multidirectional media flows. Despite the continued dominance of content and storytelling formats originating in the Global North (Thussu, 2007), these flows are now shaped by adaptation processes where the transnational, regional and local recursively interact (Ribke, 2021). Such an understanding of hybridity is key to make sense of a media landscape where public agencies establish a digital presence (OECD & IDB, 2024) while national media conglomerates shed their skins as broadcasters and transform into “media techs” (Accenture, 2022). Simultaneously, consumers adopt online media for information, entertainment, banking, and regular consumption (Galileo, 2025). This landscape

is increasingly shaped by the evolving influence of Chinese firms in telecommunications infrastructure (Triolo et al., 2020), widespread adoption of American and Chinese video-sharing, messaging and social platforms, consolidation of national digital news sites (Pennacchio, 2025) and proliferation of novel cultural forms ranging from K-Pop fandoms to Latina Otaku and *narconovelas*. Together, these elements reveal patterns of structural and cultural hybridity that frame public discourse on migration today.

Nation-bound, xenophobic and emotionally-charged

As in other parts of the world, hybrid media structure the circulation of migration discourse and increasingly host communication that is nation-bound, xenophobic, and emotionally charged. Large-scale Venezuelan displacement since 2015 and the emergence of migrant caravans in Central America from 2018 have intensified migration as a subject of public communication across LAC. Social media activity has increasingly channelled anti-immigrant prejudice alongside more open and solidaristic responses. Drawing on media coverage, regional surveys, country-level polls, and Twitter data, an Inter-American Development Bank report found that ‘the conversation around migration is at one of its all-time highs and continues to grow’ (Luzes & Rodríguez Guillén, 2023, p. 14). The authors identified public concerns structured around security and employment, alongside rising xenophobic sentiment regarding migrants’ access to services and their right to remain in host countries (Luzes & Rodríguez Guillén, 2023, p. 4). The public opinion patterns traced by Luzes and Rodríguez Guillén are reflected in detail by studies such as Aguirre Zapata and Domahidi’s (2021), who document widespread presence of racial slurs and dehumanising speech across several countries directed towards Venezuelan migrants in particular as well as to nationals from Colombia, Peru and Chile. In another instance, Navarro López and Guerrero Martínez (2023) recorded evidence of Mexican Twitter users’ aggressive speech towards migrants from Central America as they formed dense human columns advancing along overland routes towards the United States, describing them as ‘invaders’ and their supporters as ‘Dogs with double morals’ (p. 186).

These patterns suggest that hybrid media environments function as technologies of social classification through which migrants are discussed, evaluated, and positioned within host societies. The report also revealed a differentiated communicative geography. In absolute terms, capital cities in Ecuador, Panama, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Peru, Chile, and Colombia generated the largest volume of migration-related discussion, reflecting their role as principal destinations with greater employment and educational opportunities. In relative terms, measured as tweets per 10,000 inhabitants, border cities often registered the highest density of xenophobic discourse. In the case of Venezuelan migration to Colombia, cities such as Arauca, Riohacha, Puerto Carreño, and Cúcuta exceeded Bogotá in the intensity of hostile speech, with similar patterns visible in border regions of Ecuador and Peru

(Luzes & Rodríguez Guillén, 2023, p. 15). Hybrid media landscapes therefore trace migratory routes and amplify anxieties concentrated around spaces of transit and arrival.

These dynamics coexist with older and more banal forms of nationalism. Ochoa Chávez's (2023) study of 94 online platforms across Colombia, Chile, Mexico, Ecuador, and Argentina found that governments, national media, and commercial actors used websites, blogs, forums, social platforms, and multimedia channels to address nationals abroad through music, humour, patriotic symbolism, and narratives of nostalgia. Such practices sought to preserve affective ties with diaspora communities while reaffirming bounded national imaginaries beyond territorial borders. Migration here becomes compatible with nationalism when it remains emotionally attached to the homeland via narratives of belonging. In contrast, migrant collectives, NGOs, religious organisations, universities, and legal support groups have been advancing alternative accounts that challenge official representations. These actors document experiences of displacement, precarious labour, xenophobia, human rights abuses, and violence as linked to securitised borders (Ochoa Chávez, 2023, p. 6). Their interventions often frame mobility through transnational solidarity and calls for broader forms of citizenship. Counter-discourses of this kind arguably challenge banal nationalism by exposing how borders operate as mechanisms of exclusion while asserting migrants' claims to dignity, safety, and membership.

A further layer of classification is rendered visible by Arriagada's regional report (2025) on the role of influencers and the ways they use hybrid media to create content of public significance. Highlighting the move away from traditional forms of public communication and adoption of crafted authenticity rewarded by social media platforms, the report highlights the prominence of the presidents of Argentina, Javier Milei, and from El Salvador, Nayib Bukele, as part of the ecosystem of political actors, activists, and commentators who deploy social platforms to compete for attention (Poell et al., 2021). Arriagada's report establishes how migration in this platformised context fuels highly polarised narratives and contestations (Arriagada, 2025). In these settings, while pro-migrant voices and migrant influencers are known to provide moral guidance, tactical support, and practical information for others in transit (Navarro López & Guerrero Martínez, 2023), their vulnerability to structural inequalities, harassment, and the threat of digital violence often constrains their visibility in favour of caution or self-censorship (Arriagada, 2025, p. 11).

Reconsidering postnational imaginaries

The evidence discussed above indicates that hybrid media environments generate discourses of exclusion and inclusion within nation-bound contexts. Recent scholarship arguing that cross-border communication brought a decisive move away from national frames therefore requires nuancing given that contemporary connectivity often intensifies struggles over membership, entitlement, and security. Hybrid

media in LAC increasingly reflects this shift as migration volumes become more visible and politically salient. The migrant caravans of Central America, large-scale Venezuelan displacement, and their sustained coverage and hybrid mediation have directed greater attention toward borders, governance, and public reactions to mobility (Canché, 2021; de Frutos García, 2021; Navarro López & Guerrero Martínez, 2023; Ramos Rojas & Arreola González, 2022). In this sense, changing migration realities are reshaping public discourse. They are also reorienting academic attention toward the renewed significance of national boundaries, rights, and state responses. The connected presence of migrants can still sustain transnational ties, information flows, and solidaristic networks. Yet digital connectivity now operates alongside entrenched mechanisms of exclusion (Candidatu et al., 2019). States and supranational actors increasingly use biometric registration, metadata tracing, and algorithmic risk assessment to extend control through forms of digital bordering (Chouliaraki & Georgiou, 2019; Everuss, 2024; Mattelart, 2019; Witteborn, 2021). These practices restrict mobility, expose migrants to surveillance, and reinforce symbolic distinctions between insiders and outsiders (Aziz, 2022; Leurs & Smets, 2018; Smets, 2019). At the same time, the region's longer traditions of comparatively open migration policies and cross-border mobility caution against uniformly exclusionary interpretations (Acosta, 2016, 2018). Hybrid media environments continue to host solidaristic narratives, practical support networks, and claims for inclusion alongside xenophobic reaction. Postnational imaginaries subsequently persist as contested possibilities within communicative landscapes increasingly shaped by national pressures and struggles over belonging.

Conclusion

This article reflected on how contemporary migration in Latin America and the Caribbean is increasingly mediated through national frameworks of control, belonging, and public contestation. Earlier scholarship on transnationalism and diasporic media captured an important period in which migration and communication unsettled the nation-state as the primary container of identity and community. Recent migration dynamics across LAC, marked by interregional mobility, multidirectional displacement, and heightened political salience, have reshaped the communicative environments through which migration is understood. Hybrid media environments now play a central role in these developments. They circulate xenophobic reactions, emotionally charged narratives, and exclusionary claims, while also enabling solidaristic networks, practical support, and counter-discourses that challenge bordering practices. Contemporary connectivity therefore sustains inclusion and exclusion simultaneously within communicative spaces shaped by unequal power and competing political projects. LAC offers an important setting for these debates because the region combines longer traditions of mobility and comparatively open policy imaginaries with contemporary pressures linked to securitisation, instability, and social polarisation. Postnational imaginaries have not disappeared. They persist as contested possibilities within nation-bound communicative environments where the meanings of identity, rights, and belonging remain actively disputed.

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