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Life-or-Death: An Assessment of COVID-19 Messaging in the Linguistic Landscape of New Mexico and Potential Consequences for the Spanish-Speaking Population

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SPAN549: Spanish of the Southwest

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A common theme throughout history is that marginalized communities are typically the communities hit the hardest during times of crisis. When the fatal coronavirus put the entire world on lockdown in 2020, there were great concerns that marginalized communities would be the most affected by the disease. This was met directly with promises from government officials ensuring that minority populations would not be left out of COVID-19 relief efforts. These promises included some from New Mexico's own Governor Michelle Luján Grisham. However, our study shows that the state of New Mexico not only neglected but failed to provide equity for Spanish speakers regarding communication for COVID-19 testing and vaccine distribution.

With roughly 49% of its population identifying as Hispanic or Latino, one fourth of the New Mexico population speaks Spanish (United States Census Bureau). This project focuses on the linguistic landscape of New Mexico, primarily in its most populous city, Albuquerque. The project examines the quantity of English-language and Spanish-language COVID-19 messages in public and online spaces. Where Spanish is provided, it is analyzed to see if it provides an accurate translation for the region's Spanish speakers. We found that COVID-19 messages disseminated over DMS boards, at testing sites, at vaccination sites, and on the New Mexico Department of Health websites were more numerous in English than in Spanish. Some Spanish translations on the NMDOH website were found to be unintelligible, thus inhibiting Spanish

speakers in certain counties from registering for the COVID-19 vaccine. We interpreted these results as a prioritization of English speakers in New Mexico and a dismissal of Spanish speakers. We postulate that this carelessness resulted in higher COVID-19 infection rates as well as lower vaccination rates in New Mexico's Hispanic population.