

Introduction

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This book is a truly collaborative effort, allowing the final whole to be more than the sum of its initial parts. In a continuing spirit of cooperation, we now offer this book to scholars, students, policymakers, and community leaders, toward a better understanding of Latinos, in our nation's rapidly evolving plural society.

Our collection of original essays culminates the Latino National Survey–New England Extension project, which was generously funded by the Rhode Island Foundation. The book consists primarily of research papers first presented at our “National Conference on Latino Politics, Power, and Policy” held at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island, during October 2009. These papers were then substantially revised and updated for publication. All of the conference presentations were original research using data from the Latino National Survey (2006), which, with a sample of 8,634 respondents, is the largest Latino-specific survey available to researchers and the general public. Six distinguished political scientists led the Latino National Survey project: Luis Fraga (University of Washington), John García (University of Michigan), Rodney Hero (University of California, Berkeley), Michael Jones-Correa (Cornell University), Valerie Martinez-Ebers (University of North Texas), and Gary Segura (Stanford University).

The New England project added 1,200 respondents surveyed in 2007 and 2008, from Latino populations in Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and Connecticut. Because the original LNS sampled from Latino populations of Washington, D.C., and seventeen states—Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Nebraska, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Texas, Virginia, and Washington—when the New England states were added, the cumulative sample of 9,834 had been drawn from a combined Latino population of nearly 40 million—a coverage area comprising 89.6% of all Latinos residing in the United States in 2006, including all of the states with the largest Latino populations (see table 1.2, “Sample Sizes—Latino National Survey/New England Extension, 2005–2008,” in chapter 1).

The survey consisted of 165 question items, yielding 275 variables; some items were unique, while many others were adopted from widely used national surveys including the General Social Survey (GSS) and American National Election Study (ANES). The items addressed topics ranging from basic demographics to questions about local and national politics, religiosity, education, discrimination, race relations, level of integration and acculturation, and many more. The resulting data give us detailed and extensive insights into experiences, beliefs, and attitudes of Latinos across the nation, at a crucial moment in U.S. history and in the development of the national Latino political community. Respondents were offered the option of being

interviewed in Spanish or English and were not queried directly about immigration status. For a detailed description of survey items, see appendix A, “The Latino National Survey Questionnaire,” at the end of this book.

In addition to the LNS’s broad national coverage and survey depth, it was also designed to facilitate comparison; at least 400 respondents were interviewed in each of eighteen subsamples, and for larger states, as many as 1,200—making possible a wide range of statistical comparisons across states and metropolitan areas, allowing researchers to identify contextualized variations in political attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors. It thus rectifies an important weakness of other national surveys, which have in effect oversampled more populous states and thus homogenized our picture of the Latino experience, as though Latino experiences in all states and regions were the same, making it harder for scholars to see important differences in state-level political cultures, opportunity structures, or social conditions. Additionally, the project’s complex design captured a wide range of differences among Latinos’ immigration histories, citizenship, national origins, gender, education, income, places of residence, population concentrations, and political affiliations, as well as state-level partisanship and institutional structures.

In sum, the Latino National Survey has provided a timely and much-needed empirical foundation for understanding a segment of the American population whose continued political incorporation is intimately tied to the future of the country, while also providing a substantially improved baseline for Latino attitudinal data, on which systematic policy analysis can rely and from which future scholars can build new theoretical understandings.

We in Rhode Island who led the New England extension of the national survey are grateful for the opportunity to add three distinctive states to the national dataset. Data for all twenty-one subsamples, and for both the national and New England surveys, are available to the public through the Resource Center for Minority Data (RCMD) of the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) at the University of Michigan. See appendix 1B, “Data Repositories and Datasets for Latino Political Studies (1979–2014),” in chapter 1, for links to datasets and documentation.

Plan of the Book

In chapter 1, Tony Affigne frames our authors’ contributions, showing how today’s scholars represent something of a third generation in the field, after earlier periods in formal political analysis (political science) which were characterized first by *exclusion* of Latino subjects before 1970. A second period from 1970 to 1998 represents a time of *emergence* for Latino political movements and for Latino political studies. And now, in the years since 1998, like the Latino political community itself, the study of Latino politics is experiencing a period of *empowerment*. The research chapters in this book, Affigne writes, reflect some of the best work from this new period, exploring questions about Latino identity (*latinidad*), the nature of Latino assimilation and community, racial identities, interminority relations, and more.

In chapter 2, Jessica Lavariega Monforti explores mechanisms for building a pan-ethnic identity among Latinos. Once largely of Mexican and Puerto Rican descent,

the Latino population in the U.S. is increasingly diverse. Latinos in the U.S. now have heritages from Cuba, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, and other Latin and Central American countries. Some earlier research suggested that the diversity among Latinos was one of the reasons why low levels of panethnicity existed among Latinos. Latinos living in the U.S. were more likely to identify with their nation of origin and/or ancestral home (“Mexican” or “Colombian”) rather than embrace a panethnic identity. Results from the LNS show that this is changing, and more and more Latinos are now panethnic identifiers. In chapter 2, Lavariega Monforti systematically accounts for those factors that are critical in the process of Latinos developing a panethnic identity.

In chapter 3, Sarah Allen Gershon and Adrian Pantoja examine the controversial issue surrounding the relationship between transnational ties and Latino political incorporation in the U.S. Some critics of immigration argue that the ties that bind Latino immigrants to their home countries (e.g., visiting the home country, sending remittances, calling friends and relatives by telephone) inhibit the naturalization process and impede the incorporation of Latinos into American civic and political life. Utilizing a unique set of questions in the LNS about transnational activities, Gershon and Pantoja show that transnational ties influence Latino immigrants in different ways. For example, owning property in the home country decreases significantly the likelihood that a Latino immigrant will seek to become a U.S. citizen. However, Gershon and Pantoja’s findings call into question the argument that transnational ties negatively influence the level of civic engagement in the U.S. In fact, Gershon and Pantoja’s findings suggest that maintenance of transnational ties may positively influence the political incorporation process of Latino immigrants. Gershon and Pantoja show that immigrants from Latin America can maintain ties to their country of origin and simultaneously become incorporated into American political and civic life.

In chapter 4, Jessica Lavariega Monforti and Melissa Michelson provide a detailed empirical examination of political trust among Latinos. Political scientists have long argued that trust in government and government institutions is critical for functioning democracies. Since the 1970s, survey research has shown a considerable decline in the percentages of people who say that they have a high level of trust in government. Lavariega Monforti and Michelson report that recent surveys show that only about 5 percent of respondents in national surveys say that they trust the government “just about always.” Latinos, however, are more trusting of government. Among respondents in the LNS, 12 percent reported that they could trust government “just about always.” Lavariega Monforti and Michelson explore political trust among Latinos generally and within the various Latino subgroups. They show that increased trust in government is related to how Latinos are acculturated into a racialized subgroup and their level of linked fate with other Latinos. In other words, this research shows that for Latino immigrants, feelings of linked fate and a strong sense of community can serve as an antidote to political cynicism.

Before the LNS, we knew little about Latinos’ stances on many of the key public policy issues facing the nation. In chapter 5, Regina Branton, Ana Franco, and Robert Wrinkle examine how acculturation and political knowledge influences

Latino attitudes across several public policy domains. Branton and her colleagues are able to provide these important insights because of the richness and range of the policy issues covered in the LNS. Their research shows important ways in which the level of political knowledge among Latinos mediates how acculturation influences Latino public opinion on education, abortion, same-sex marriage, immigration, and other policy matters. Branton, Franco, and Wrinkle's exploration of policy preferences among Latinos shows that acculturation matters. Their unique insight, however, is that political knowledge interacts with acculturation to influence Latino public opinion and the impact of the interaction varies across different policy domains.

In chapter 6, Heather Silber Mohamed explores the meaning of being an "American" to Latinos. The chapter examines differences in the boundaries of Americanism among individuals from distinct ancestral-origin subgroups, levels of integration, and regions of residence across the United States. Silber Mohamed measures how country of origin, place of resident, and acculturation into the U.S. shape whether or not Latinos perceive "American" to be an open category that they are able to be a part of. She finds, for example, that Latinos typically believe that speaking English is an important component of being American. Among the various Latino subgroups, Salvadorans have the most restrictive view of what it takes to be considered an American. This chapter provides researchers with a better understanding of the conditions under which Latino immigrants view "American" as an open or closed designation.

In chapter 7, Marion Orr, Domingo Morel, and Katrina Gamble make use of the New England extension of the LNS. They focus on the factors that predict whether or not Latinos in New England believe they have something in common with African Americans. A considerable amount of research focuses on competition between Blacks and Latinos. In this chapter, Orr, Morel, and Gamble, shift the focus from competition between Blacks and Latinos to political and economic commonality. Instead of analyzing potential hurdles to coalition building, this chapter helps us understand what contexts encourage coalition building. If Blacks and Latinos recognize that they are both politically and economically marginalized, they may decide to work together rather than fight over limited resources. Orr, Morel, and Gamble explore those factors that make Latinos more likely to believe they have something politically or economically in common with African Americans.

In chapter 8, Atiya Kai Stokes-Brown explores the ways in which racial identity influences Latino policy attitudes. Racial identity in the U.S. has typically been shaped along a Black-white paradigm. This racial paradigm is embedded in the nation's institutional structures. However, in the LNS, large majorities of Latinos responded that they consider themselves to be "some other race" than "Black" or "white." When asked to explain their "some other race" response, 75 percent identified "Latino" or "Hispanic" as their race. Stokes-Brown provides a broad overview of the controversial issues related to racial classification in the U.S. Using the responses from a unique set of questions in which LNS interviewers probed deeper into the respondents' self-identification, Stokes-Brown shows how racial identification shapes Latinos' opinions across of range of policy issues.

In chapter 9, Matt Barreto and Gabriel Sanchez expand the discussion of race by focusing on how variation in the state and local context influences Latinos' perceptions of group competition with African Americans. Barreto and Sanchez focus their analysis on Latinos in the South. As they note, the South has seen an explosion in the growth of the Latino population, creating new intergroup dynamics in a region in the country where group relations have largely been between Blacks and whites. Their work shows that nationally, Latinos tend to perceive that they are in competition more with other Latinos than with any other group. However, when the southern states are isolated, Latinos tend to perceive that Blacks are their nearest competitors. Barreto and Sanchez also note the significant role that having multiracial social networks plays in lowering Latinos' perceptions of group competition with African Americans and how Black population density influences Latinos' perceptions of group competition.

In chapter 10, Manny Avalos and Tony Affigne explore real-world lessons we should take from these research findings. Does it help us understand the 2012 elections, for example, to know how strongly, and for what reasons, individuals feel a sense of a panethnic (i.e., Latino or Hispanic) identity? Could the nation better navigate contentious immigration politics if it were widely understood that immigrants' home-country attachments have *countervailing* effects on their choice to pursue U.S. citizenship, with some transnational activities appearing to *promote* naturalization? Research questions like these, Avalos and Affigne argue, answered with empirical evidence and hypothesis testing, move students and scholars directly into the world of Latino communities, leaders, and political empowerment, armed with knowledge, separating political fact from fiction.

From one perspective, of course, that could be said to be the mission of the book itself: demonstrating the power of political analysis to inform our understanding of politics-in-the-world, showing how, when used properly, the rich LNS dataset—or any comparably robust social data—can educate as well as motivate, giving Latinos and others, but especially Latinos themselves, a clearer and more honest understanding of the Latino political condition, to better prepare ourselves and the nation for the challenging years ahead.