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Ballots del Barrio: An Investigation of Latino Participation

Abstract

This research examines the disjuncture between Hispanic strength in population and Hispanic participation in politics. This paper examines the nature of this disjuncture: its severity, its causes, and its consequences. Hispanics currently comprise 11.2% of the U.S. population, but the Hispanic vote in the 1998 elections comprised only 4.7% of all ballots cast.

Keywords

Hispanics

John Hennessy

Ballots *del Barrio*: An Investigation of Latino Participation

This research examines the disjuncture between Hispanic strength in population and Hispanic participation in politics. I examine the nature of this disjuncture: its severity, its causes, and its consequences. Hispanics currently comprise 11.2% of the U.S. population, but the Hispanic vote in the 1998 elections comprised only 4.7% of all ballots cast. The situation is even bleaker when considering Hispanic representation in Congress. Currently, less than four percent of U.S. House members are Latino. Add to that clear disjuncture the fact that two of the Hispanic Congressmen do not even possess the ability to vote and that there is not a single Hispanic Senator, and we see that Hispanics lack a substantial voice in lawmaking.^[1] Surely, the scarcity of Hispanic voters who vote accounts for much of this under-representation in Washington, D.C.

Since the number of Hispanic voters severely understates recent Hispanic population increases in the last two decades, an in-depth investigation into the possible explanations of this disjuncture is needed in order to ensure Hispanics achieve a more active voice in American government. Yet, the causes of this disjuncture are not easily collapsed into a single explanation. Why do Latino participation levels not reflect relative strength in population? Is the discrepancy due mainly to the traditionally low socioeconomic characteristics of many minority adults, or is it due more to Latino-specific issues of language barriers and non-citizenship statuses? In this work, I investigate these central questions in an analysis of Hispanic political behavior.

Previous Research

A contemporary explanation of political participation is perhaps most comprehensibly given by Verba et al. in *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics* (1995). Verba and his co-authors examine the import of participation, both voting and non-voting, in our American society. According to their argument, the typical citizen activist “tend[s] to be drawn disproportionately from more advantaged groups—to be well-educated and well-heeled and to be White and male” (Verba et al., 1995: 231). Indeed, Verba et al. explore participation along both gender and racial lines and concludes that both women and minorities are comparatively less active than men, especially white men, who stand peerless both in terms of affiliation with a political organization, contributing to a campaign, contacting their Representatives, and more direct forms of participation like voting.

Verba et al. also speak to the impact of income level on political participation, a topic often repeated by political scientists (DeSipio 1996, McClain and Tauber 1998). The conclusion: “for each kind of participation, affluence and participation go hand in hand” seems rather obvious (Verba et al. 1995: 189). Indeed, if a Latino parent works two low paying jobs and worries about paying the bills every month (as many do) he or she will likely have little incentive to travel to the polling place to ensure Hispanic representation in Washington. Additionally, Hispanics encounter further impediments to political participation: lower ages and education levels, coupled with language difficulties and illegal and non-citizen statuses further enlarge the gap between numerical strength in population and corresponding strength in the electorate. Consequently, Latinos tend to participate less than both whites and African Americans. While African Americans tend to experience the same socioeconomic disadvantages of Hispanics, language difficulties and legal impediments to participation unique to Hispanics greatly decreases their position among the three ethnic groups.

While *Voice and Equality* examines Latino participation vis á vis whites and blacks, several political studies of the 1990s have focused on more intra-Hispanic questions. Louis DeSipio provides an sound theoretical framework for many questions about Latino politics. His *Counting on the Latino Vote* (1996) examines the political distinctions between the three strongest Latino subgroups—Mexicans, Puerto Ricans and Cubans—and details their relative socioeconomic strengths, partisanship and policy preferences. Cubans, he posits, traditionally have higher incomes, education, and employment levels. Throughout most of the relevant literature, these factors are positively correlated with increased tendencies to register and to vote.

Additionally, Cuban immigrants, at an average age of 25 years, immigrated to the United States at later than both Mexicans (13 years old) and Puerto Ricans (19 years old) and tend to be more conservative than other Latinos. Moreno and Warren (1999) echo this sentiment in their analysis of the 1996 elections in Florida, yet they qualify their claim citing a recent swing among Cubans to look beyond Cuba-exclusive issues and join other Latinos on social welfare and bilingual education concerns. The only two Republican House members who refused to sign the Contract with America

were both Cuban-Americans, demonstrating this recent development.^[2] Although there has been a shift toward more liberal social policy alongside conservative foreign policy preferences, Cubans still remain dramatically loyal to the Republican party compared to other Hispanic groups. Unlike Cubans, most Hispanics still align themselves with the Democratic party, whose histories of social welfare programs and urban party machine's reliance upon immigrant vote has equated into long-lasting loyalties among non-Cuban Latinos.

Hero and Campbell (1996) studied non-voting participation among Latinos utilizing results from the Latino National Political Survey. They included measures of rally attendance, volunteering for a party or candidate, monetary donations, petition signing, and Representative contacts in their analyses. And although they found it was the younger, poorer, and less educated Latinos who were more likely to attend a political rally, for most other forms of participation, the socioeconomic theory held true. That is to say that education, employment, income, etc. are positively related to political participation, and in some cases, at statistically significant levels. Unlike previous studies on Cuban voting, Hero and Campbell found evidence to claim that in terms of rally attendance, Cubans were actually the least likely to attend, just as they were the least likely to contribute to a campaign despite being the most financially well-off of the three Latino sub-groups. Still, this particular study acknowledges that in terms of more direct participation, Cuban-American citizens are by far the most likely subgroup to cast a vote.

Research Design

Influenced by these and other studies on Latinos, I sought to study Latino political behavior in terms of Latino participation defined as registration and voting, not in the manner employed by Hero and Campbell (1996). Also, aware that a large portion of the Hispanic population cannot vote because of illegal or non-citizen status, I seek also to identify demographic factors that might promote citizenship, which would in turn enable the vote. For that reason, I have constructed three main models: a citizenship model, a registration model, and a voting model (which is comprised of four separate elections' data) to explain which Latinos become citizens, which register to vote, and which actually vote. I employ multivariate analyses in order to determine which variables—socioeconomic, language, issue, or others—determines Latino participation. My data, the Latino National Political Survey (LNPS), are widely used in this field and to date this remains the only national survey focusing on Latino political life (de la Garza et al. 1990). The LNPS was administered, both in English and in Spanish to over 3,400 Latino respondents. The survey limited its scope in terms of including only Mexicans (54.9% of the sample), Cubans (24.2%) and Puerto Ricans (20.9%), yet its large sample size and presence in most pieces of research on Latinos in the 1990s made it an obvious and reliable data source for my analysis. It is important to consider another important characteristic of the LNPS' 3,415 respondents: the ratio of citizens to non-citizens. While just 11% of total respondents were U.S. citizens, an awesome 57.2% of the total Latino respondents were non-citizens. The remainder of respondents were either currently applying or planning to apply for citizenship.

Regardless of education, employment, and income, a Latino still cannot vote unless he or she is a citizen. Naturalized Latino immigrants are outnumbered three to one by those Latinos who choose not to naturalize (DeSipio 1996). To determine which demographic factors were linked to the drive to naturalize, I constructed a model to test which socioeconomic variables determine citizenship. For this survey, the legal construct of citizenship was derived by posing the following question to respondents: "Are you now a U.S. citizen, currently applying for citizenship, planning to apply for citizenship, or do you not plan to become a citizen?"^[3]

This notion of citizenship will be the dependent variable for my first model. My dependent variables include sociodemographic indicators of the respondents: gender, education level, annual income, employment status, and number of years since immigration, and a proxy of how long Latino respondents have lived in the United States. Also included in the multivariate analysis is a self-determined measure of language ability, an indicator of affect toward the U.S., and country of origin.⁴ In this model, country of origin only includes Mexico and Cuba, since all Anglos and Puerto Ricans are US citizens.

Hypotheses

H1: Latinos of higher levels of education/employment/income will be more likely to seek citizenship.

H2: As Latinos become more fluent in English, they will be more likely to begin to seek citizenship.

H3: Latino men will be more likely than Latina women to seek citizenship.

H4: Latinos who have lived in the United States longer will be more likely to seek citizenship than newly-

arrived Latinos.

H5: Cubans will be more likely than Mexicans to seek citizenship.

Findings

The model explains 44.9% of the variance of citizenship and includes eight independent variables.

Table 1: Determinants of Extent of US Citizenship Seeking

Variable	Beta coefficient (standard errors in parentheses)
Education	-.081*** (.009)
Income	.047*** (.000)
Language	.107*** (.007)
Affect toward the US	.043** (.008)
Years since arrival	.262*** (.001)
Gender	-.015 (.015)
Country of origin	.379*** (.007)
Employment status	-.110*** (.008)
Constant	1.859
N	3,415
Adj. R ²	.449

*** p<.001

** p<.01

Judging from the multivariate analysis, the socioeconomic formula endorsed by many political science researchers (Verba et al. 1995, McCain and Tauber 1998) applies to the naturalization drives of Hispanics as well. Hispanic respondents of higher incomes were more likely to apply for and obtain citizenship. Also, Hispanics with better English abilities and those employed full-time were the most inclined to apply for citizenship. Each of these variables was significant at the .001 level. Surprisingly, as education increased, likelihood of citizenship decreased. This finding contrasts with the accepted SES formula and may have been skewed by the relative scarcity of respondents who had obtained a college or post-graduate degree. Whereas 33.1% of respondents had completed less than high school and 43.5% completed their high school degree, the percentages of respondents' education were much reduced beyond the high school level (19.9% who completed college and just 3.5% who completed graduate school).

Language, a variable more specific to Latino minorities than for example, African-Americans, also proved significant. As hypothesized, Latino likelihood of citizenship increases as respondents become more fluent in English. This finding supports other data obtained from the LNPS, where the question "why haven't you applied for citizenship?" was met most frequently by the response "por el inglés" ("because of English"). That is to say that Hispanics listed language difficulties ahead of legal issues, economic concerns, and loyalties to their previous countries as the most important reason for not applying for citizenship. The finding of language's effects on citizenship may also speak to why so many Latino residents in the United States (some 44%) do not pursue citizenship (DeSipio 1996). Although the gender variable was not statistically significant, the pattern in the raw data still shows that males were more likely than females to apply for citizenship. Numbers of years since immigrating to the US proved to be a significant variable, as likelihood of citizenship increased positively with number of years since immigration. In other words, the longer a Hispanic lived in the United States, the more likely he or she was to start the processes of citizenship. The strength of this variable demonstrates how the number of years as resident of the United States affects citizenship.

Country of origin also helps explain citizenship seeking. Cubans are much more likely than Mexicans to start the processes of citizenship. Again, remember that Puerto Ricans and Anglos were excluded from the analysis due to their automatic citizenship. Cross-tabular analysis also supports the trend of Cubans being more likely than Mexicans to

apply and complete citizenship.

Table 2: Percentages of citizenship status by Latino sub-group (N values in parentheses)

Citizenship status	Mexican respondents	Cuban respondents
<i>Non-citizen</i>	50.5% (780)	10.4% (71)
<i>Not planning</i>	8.5% (132)	13.1% (89)
<i>Planning to apply</i>	22.1% (342)	31.9% (217)
<i>Currently applying</i>	6.7% (103)	5.3% (36)
<i>U.S. citizen</i>	6.8% (105)	34.5% (235)

Source: Latino National Political Survey (1990)

Although Cubans also lead Mexicans in terms of those planning to naturalize, the statistic that Cubans are over five times as likely to be United States citizens than Mexicans may speak volumes as to why Cuban-Americans always lead both Mexican-Americans and Puerto Ricans in both non-voting and voting participation (DeSipio 1996, Moreno and Warren 1999). As Cubans continue to distance themselves from other Latinos, country of origin proved to be the single most important factor in determining which Latinos become citizens. Still, other characteristics like income, employment, language ability, and years spent in the United States proved to be positively correlated (and statistically significant) to likelihood of citizenship. These determinants of citizenship should be important indicators in determining which Latinos can participate legally in our political system.

The Registration Model

In order to explain which Latinos register to vote, I constructed a model again including ascriptive variables of respondents such as gender, annual income, education level, predominant language, and age. Additionally, I sought to determine if and to what extent partisanship played upon registration levels, wondering if Republican citizens still registered more often than Democratic ones inside of the Latino classification as they do for Anglos. Country of origin was again considered for the registration model, only here, this variable spoke to Puerto Ricans as well as Mexicans and Cubans since despite their automatic citizenship, Puerto Rican immigrants still need to register in order to vote.

Also, in light of recent research into the rise of issue-specific Latino voters in the 1990s (Panchon et al. 1999, Montoya 1999), I included two measures designed to gauge single-issue import among Latinos. The first measure, support of bilingual education, was taken from respondents' answers to the question "How strongly to you support or oppose bilingual education?" The second measure, support of immigration, was measured by the question "How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statement: There are too many immigrants coming to this country." Both these issues proved to be very important to Latino voters, and several recent Congressional races that highlighted these issues saw an incredible upswing in Latino registration and participation levels.⁷ Though registration and voting may be positively influenced by public opinion on such Latino issues, discrepancy within the Latino label is not so threatening, according to recent research. Recent research speaks to Hispanic support of immigration policy and finds little substantive difference in opinion among nationalistic subgroups, only between immigrant and acculturated Hispanics (Hood et al. 1997: 3). In this model, I hypothesize that Latinos more interested in the issues of bilingual education and immigration will be more likely to register to vote in order to express their (often intense) opinions on these issues.

Hypotheses

H1: Latinos of higher levels of education/income/age will be more likely to register to vote.

H2: As Latinos become more fluent in English, they will be more likely to register to vote.

H3: Latino men will be more likely than Latina women to register to vote.

H4.: Latinos who are more issue-orientated will be more likely to register to vote than those not so issue-orientated.

H5: Cubans will be more likely than Puerto Ricans and Mexicans to register to vote.

Findings

The model explains 46.7% of all the variation in voter registration considering the ten dependent variables.

Table 3: Determinants of Voter Registration

Variable	Beta coefficients (standard errors in parentheses)
Education	.018 (.014)
Income	-.03* (.01)
Language	.156*** (.009)
Affect toward the US	-.003 (.011)
Age	-.001 (.001)
Gender	.022 (.02)
Country of origin	.235*** (.01)
Partisanship	.483*** (.006)
Support bilingual education	-.019 (.01)
Support immigration	-.013 (.009)
Constant	.019
N	3,415
Adj. R2	.467

*** $p < .001$

** $p < .01$

* $p < .05$

In this model, the hypothesis predicated upon expected increases in registration relevant to increases in education and income is not significant at the .001 level. Moreover, annual income's negative coefficient suggest an inverse relationship between income and registration. Hence, the expected SES influences upon voter registration were *not* supported in this model. Inversely, partisanship *does* indeed seem to relate to voter registration in the aforementioned manner and with significance at the .001 level and relatively high beta coefficient, it appears that indeed partisanship is an important factor in Latino registration, even when holding all other variables constant. The strong relationship between partisanship and turnout may be exaggerated due to the fact that fully 50% of all self-identified Republican respondents to the NLPS were Cubans. Since Cubans only totaled 19.9% of all respondents and since they are also the most likely Hispanic subgroup to participate, the partisan effect upon registration might also speak to the Cuban influence. Indeed, the bivariate correlation between partisanship and country of origin was rather high, .433 ($p < .01$). A more conservative analysis of the high strength indicators of partisanship is therefore encouraged.

Country of origin values again showed that Cubans tend to register more often, even with respect to both Mexicans and Puerto Ricans. With high strength indicators and significance at the highest level, the relationship between Latino subgroups and registration shown here through LNPS survey data supports previous research by DeSipio (1996) among many others. In contrast, an accurate interpretation of the data cannot reject the null hypothesis related to the idea that increased Latino participation (defined in this model as voter registration) is linked to the importance of Latino-specific issues. Both indicators that seemingly would promote increases in Latino registration did so, just not at statistically significant levels.⁸ This may be due, in part, to the fact that the majority of all LNPS respondents were drawn from heavily Latino areas, which, according to some researchers, promote decreased levels of support for immigration as

citizens feel their economic securities threatened by illegals (Hood et al. 1997). Another possible explanation for the failure to reject the null hypothesis of H4 related to the issues of immigration and bilingual education is the lag time between the LNPS' interviews (conducted in 1989-1990) and the national attention brought by anti-Latino referendums of the late 1990s.⁹

Voting Models: 1984-1988

Regardless of the size of a minority group within a given population and any improvements of registration drives among those minority citizens, a population's subgroup cannot play a substantial role in its government unless it votes. Despite substantial improvements of Latino turnout in recent elections, participation levels among Latinos do not reflect their numbers in the population. Analysts' accounts disagree over the real import of the Hispanic vote. Some politicians point to the fact that "since 1960, only one president has been elected without carrying two of the three Hispanic "Mega states" (Cisneros 1999). This, of course, may have little to do with the relatively small percentage of the Hispanic vote within California, Texas, and Florida and everything to do with their collective 111 electoral votes. Other political scientists like Rodolfo de la Garza take a more pessimistic view of the *impacto latino*: "the actual impact of the Latino vote has been less than the rhetoric surrounding it" (Radelat 1998). Still, few disagree there exists a large disparity between Latinos (even eligible ones) and the Latinos who vote. Although naturalization legally enables the vote, which other factors determine which Hispanics vote?

The LNPS asks its respondents if they voted in four different elections: the Presidential contest of 1984 between Ronald Reagan and Walter Mondale, the 1986 congressional election, the 1988 congressional elections and the Presidential contest of the same year between George Bush and Michael Dukakis. In an attempt to determine what drives Latinos to vote in these national elections, I again selected a combination of socioeconomic, Latino-specific, and issue-orientated variables and placed them in a multivariate regression model. Because I had to omit "citizenship" as an independent variable (as it skewed the results since it was a preexisting requirement to voting) and because determining why someone votes is a difficult construct to define, my voting models could only account for 13.9% to 20.0% of the variance in the dependent variable. Despite the low R² values, each model was valid and statistically significant at the .001 level. Additionally, these four models produced several statistically significant independent variables and a unique opportunity to observe different variables' effects on voting over a four-year time period.

Although it has not seen perfectly statistically significant success in the previous models, I once again expect to see a positive correlation between socioeconomic factors and Latino voting patterns. Based on the surprising findings respect to age found in the registration model (see *Table 1-3*), I will now hypothesize that *younger* Latinos will be the ones more likely to vote. Also, I will test the effects of gender, partisanship, language ability, the idea of "love of the U.S." and support for the Latino-friendly initiatives of immigration and bilingual education upon the dependent variable of participation. The formal hypotheses are stated below.

Hypotheses

- H1: Latinos of higher levels of education/income will be more likely to vote in national elections.
- H2: As Latinos become more fluent in English, they will be more likely to vote in national elections.
- H3: Latino men will be more likely than Latina women to vote in national elections.
- H4: Latinos who are more issue-orientated will be more likely to vote in national elections.
- H5: Cubans will be more likely than Puerto Ricans and Mexicans to vote in national elections.
- H6: Younger Latinos will be more likely to vote in national elections than older Latinos.

Findings: 1984 Vote

The results based on participation in the 1984 presidential election explain 17.5% of all variation in vote choice.

Table 4: 1984 Voting Results (President)

Variable	Beta coefficients (standard errors in parentheses)
Education	.023*** (.023)
Income	-.03 (.017)
Language	.151*** (.015)
Affect toward the US	.008 (.019)
Age	-.086*** (.001)
Gender	.023 (.033)
Country of origin	.241*** (.017)
Partisanship	.122*** (.01)
Support for bilingual education	-.01 (.016)
Support for immigration	-.036* (.015)
Constant	.1
N	3,415
Adj. R ²	.175

*** p<.001

** p<.01

* p<.05

Analysis

Similar to the findings of the registration model, the measures of education level, language, country of origin, partisanship and age were all found to be significant at the .001 level. After readjusting my proposition of the relationship between age and voting, it is indeed the younger Latinos who are participating more often than older Latinos. For an extremely young population (with one third of the total population under 18), this is an important finding for when campaigners look to recruit a pool of potential voters. Any distinction that can be implied between the political participation of Hispanics and Anglos can be an important contribution in this field of study. Respondents' age, Cuban status, and Republican party ID were strong determinants of the Latino vote in 1984. It is also noteworthy that support for the Latino-friendly issue of immigration plays a significant role in determining the Latino vote.

Findings: 1986 Vote

The results based on participation in the 1986 congressional elections explain 12.4% of all variation in vote choice.

Table 5: 1986 Voting Results (Congress)

Variable	Beta coefficients (standard errors in parentheses)
Education	.077*** (.034)
Income	-.021 (.025)
Language	.136*** (.021)
Affect toward the U.S.	.003 (.027)
Age	-.123*** (.002)
Gender	.031 (.048)
Country of origin	.175*** (.024)
Partisanship	.099*** (.014)
Support bilingual education	.014 (.023)
Support immigration	-.005 (.022)

Constant	.187
N	3,415
Adj. R ²	.124

*** p<.001

** p<.01

* p<.05

Just like two years earlier, the notion of the socioeconomic model determining Latino participation can only be supported through education and not through annual income. Once again, proficiency in English proves to be a significant determinant of the Latino vote, in this particular case, in the congressional contests of 1986. In 1986, as in 1984, younger Latinos vote more often than older Latinos, which may promote newer investigations on the predominant characteristics of minority voters. Issue-orientation seems to be a mixed bag in terms of the 1986 vote, as supporters of bilingual education actually voted *less* than those who did not support the issue as strongly. Conversely, Latinos who supported immigration were more likely to vote, although neither relationship was statistically significant at the .001 level. Again, this failure to reject the null hypothesis is surprising considering the amount of attention dedicated to the rise in participation surrounding specific hotbed Latino issues in the 1990s (Montoya 1999, Panchon et al. 1999). At the same time, this discrepancy should prompt additional investigation in the area of single-issue importance and Latinos.

Findings: 1988 Vote (Presidential)

The results based on participation in the 1988 presidential election explain 13.5% of the variation in vote choice.

Table 6: 1988 Voting Results (President)

Variable	Beta coefficients (standard errors in parentheses)
Education	.102*** (.024)
Income	.056** (.017)
Language	.167*** (.015)
Affect toward the US	-.026 (.019)
Age	-.216*** (.001)
Gender	.041* (.034)
Country of origin	.14*** (.017)
Partisanship	-.011 (.01)
Support bilingual education	-.009 (.016)
Support immigration	-.003 (.016)
Constant	.335
N	3,415
Adj. R ²	.135

*** p<.001

** p<.01

* p<.05

Findings: 1988 (Congressional)

The results based on participation in the 1988 congressional elections explain 19.7% of the variation in vote choice.

Table 7: 1988 Voting Results (Congress)

Variable	Beta coefficients (standard errors in parentheses)
Education	.105*** (.02)
Income	-.032 (.014)
Language	.1688** (.012)
Affect toward the US	.031 (.016)
Age	-.134*** (.001)
Gender	.03 (.028)
Country of origin	.219*** (.014)
Partisanship	.146*** (.008)
Support bilingual education	-.014 (.014)
Support immigration	-.042** (.013)
Constant	.162
N	3,415
Adj. R ²	.197

*** p<.001

** p<.01

* p<.05

Analysis

The multiple regression models measuring Latino Presidential and congressional vote in 1988 yielded very similar results to previous examinations of the Latino vote in 1984 and 1986. Once again, as education, percent Republican, and English ability increased, so too did Latino voting increase, and each relationship was at a statistically significant level. Also, younger Latinos proved more likely to participate in the elections of 1988 than older Latino voters did, again at a statistically significant level. In the 1988 models, country of origin proved to have the largest impact upon Latino participation. This trend is consistent across all five voting models. Despite the difficulties Cuban immigrants must encounter to achieve citizenship and the vote, Cubans are still by far the most likely Hispanic subgroup to vote in national elections, according both sets of 1988 election results.

Summary of All Models

The impressively strong relationships among the variables demonstrate that, in most cases, country of origin exerts the most influence on the dependent variable (voter participation in *Tables 1-4* through *1-7*). Consistent with the previous research of DeSipio (1996), Cubans appear more likely to become citizens than Mexicans and appear more likely to

register and vote than both Mexicans and Puerto Ricans, even though the latter group face no legal impediments to participation. In fact, further cross-tabular data from the National Latino Political Survey reveal similar participation trends among the three largest ethnic components of the Hispanic classification. In most surveys respondents will over-report their voting turnout. Despite this bias, it is still profitable to look at the trends among those who claimed they participated. Just as was found in the various regression models, Cubans are the most likely of all Hispanics to vote once they are registered. In fact, the number of Cuban registered non-voters is lower than that of not only all other Latino subgroups, but also of Anglos. According to the LNPS, while 81.1% of all eligible Anglos reported voting, fully 90.9% of eligible Cubans cast ballots. This figure far exceeded Puerto Rican and Mexican levels (68.6% and 75.0%, respectively).

These levels are indeed impressive. Surely the inherent bias in the survey cannot account for the enormous discrepancy between a group that reported voting at 79% when eligible yet has achieved neither “voice” nor “equality” in the American political system despite exponential growth in the late twentieth century. One must wonder why Latino participation levels do not reflect relative strength in population. The six models demonstrated the importance of country of origin, partisanship, age, and issue orientation among Latinos. Additionally, lower income and education levels, coupled with the language difficulties, prevent many Latinos from registering and voting. In fact, language and educational variables both proved statistically significant determinants of voting across all four voting models.

Although increasing levels of education, income, employment, Republicanism, and English competency can indeed increase voter registration and participation in national and state-wide elections, no one can vote without citizenship. Citizenship could not be placed alongside other socioeconomic variables in a regression analysis to determine who registers and who votes because it acts as an obligatory prerequisite for both. Yet this in no way means that its significance should be overlooked or underestimated. No matter how wealthy, educated, young, issue-orientated or bilingual a Hispanic is, all these variables are trumped if non-citizenship accompanies them. Again, of all 3,415 respondents in the National Latino Political Survey, only 11% were citizens: thus just 11% were legally eligible to register and to vote. An incredible 57.2% of total Latino respondents were non-citizens, with the rest of the respondents currently applying or planning to apply. These figures are consistent with national percentages of Latino citizenship. Currently, a full 44% of all legal U.S. Latino residents are non-citizens, which means that annually, millions of adult Latinos are barred from voting, not because of lack of interest or information, nor because of educational or economic handicaps, but because of non-citizen status.

Conclusions

There are several reasons for continued study of Latino political behavior. As of 1999, there are over thirty million reasons. Yet, if Latinos are ever to achieve what Sidney Verba terms “voice and equality,” efforts must be targeted at naturalization and citizenship drives. Ignoring illegal aliens, over seven million adult Latinos are ineligible to vote each year because of their non-citizenship status. Yet non-citizenship is not the only impediment to political participation for Hispanics. Unlike the severely complicated issue of leveling the socioeconomic field for Hispanics and other minorities, language obstacles to naturalization, the single most-cited impediment by Latinos in the LNPS, can be easily overcome. Additionally, in all five models in this research, English ability proved to be a statistically significant measure of participation. With Latinos currently comprising 11.2% of the U.S. population and poised to compose a quarter of all Americans in a mere fifty years, bilingual measures may become a prerequisite for increasing Latino participation.¹⁰

Indifferent to language discrepancies, this growing young Latino population has been shown to hold dear the same basic political beliefs as Anglos. “Regardless of what language they speak, whether they were born in Mexico or the United States and whether or not they are developing an intense ethnic consciousness, Mexican-Americans support American core values at least as much as Anglos do” (de la Garza et al. 1996b: 349). Other researchers support this finding. Hero and Campbell conclude that once socioeconomic disadvantages are controlled, Latinos are no different than Anglos in terms of political participation. Indeed, the fact that 79.0% of eligible Hispanics reported voting compared to 81.1% of Anglos speak to this issue by demonstrating that when referenced to work ethic, individualism, and patriotism, Latinos are not that different from us. The main difference, in terms of participation, is that 44% of Latino adult population is currently unable to vote.

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[1] Rep. Carlos Romero-Barcelo (D) of Puerto Rico and Rep. Robert Underwood (D) of Guam.

[2] Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen and Rep. Diaz-Balart did not sign the Contract.

[3] Question #43 from LNPS (ICPSR survey #6841)

4 Respondents were asked if they speak more Spanish than English, are equally bilingual, or speak more English than Spanish. Question #46 from LNPS: “How strong is your love for the U.S.? Is it: extremely/very/somewhat or not very strong?”

7 For a demonstrative case study, see coverage of the 1996 & 1998 congressional race between Loretta Sanchez and Bob Dornan for California’s 46th District seat.

8 Negative values in the beta weights and t-score values of “support bilingual” and “support immigration” may reflect the phraseology and response coding of survey questions 163 and 167b, in which responses are coded from strong support to low support.

9 I refer here to the anti-immigration referendums of the late 1990s, like Proposition 187 and 209 in California.

10 U.S. Census Bureau projections (1999)

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