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# Latino Attitudes toward Various Areas of Public Policy

## The Importance of Acculturation

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The growth of the Latino population and the increasing political importance of this group leads to questions about the potential political importance of this group. As such, it is important to gain a better understanding of political attitudes among Latinos. This study focuses on the relationship between Latino acculturation and attitudes toward immigration- and non-immigration-related public policies. The results indicate that Latino attitudes toward immigration related issues as well as other more general policy items vary as a function of one's level of acculturation.

**Keywords:** *Latino attitudes; public opinion; public policy*

As well noted, the Latino population in the United States has grown dramatically in recent decades. Indeed, the Latino population increased 57 percent between 1990 and 2000. The growing Latino population has had an increasing impact on politics in the United States at the local, state, and national level (Hero et al. 2000; McClain and Stewart 2006). For example, increased voter participation rates among Latinos in recent years have resulted in increased levels of Latino descriptive representation.<sup>1</sup> Further evidence of the growing political importance of Latinos is reflected in the vigorous attempts by Republicans and Democrats to capture the "Latino vote" in recent elections. If the Latino population continues to grow rapidly, as demographers predict, the role of Latinos in American politics may likewise increase (Suro and Pasel 2003).

The growth of the Latino population and the resulting impact on politics naturally gives rise to questions regarding the potential political power of this group. The ability of Latinos to increase their political power depends in part on the cohesion of attitudes among Latinos.<sup>2</sup> There is evidence that there are differences in Latino attitudes toward immigration-related issues as a function of acculturation (Binder, Polinard, and Wrinkle 1997; de la Garza et al. 1993).<sup>3</sup> If these differences extend beyond the issue of immigration, attempts to increase Latino political power may be hindered by a lack of unified goals. Therefore, it seems important to gain a better understanding of the structure of Latino attitudes.

In this study, I examine the impact of acculturation into U.S. society on Latino attitudes regarding policies that target immigrants as well as other areas of public policy. The findings indicate less acculturated Latinos are more likely to support less restrictive immigration policy than are more acculturated Latinos, which is consistent with existing research. The real contribution of this project is derived from extending the analysis beyond immigration policy preferences to other areas of public policy such as education, affirmative action, and social services. Substantively, the results indicate that less acculturated Latinos are more likely to support these non-immigration-policy issues when compared to more acculturated Latinos.

The article will proceed in the following way. In the next section, I examine the relevant literature on Latino attitudes toward immigration policies. Next, I discuss and outline expectations regarding Latino public policy attitudes. Following this, I discuss the data and methods used to examine Latino public opinion. Then I present the analysis and discuss the findings from the models of Latino attitudes. Finally, I conclude with a discussion regarding the implications of these findings for future research and "real-world" politics.

## Latino Attitudes toward the Issue of Immigration

The existing literature on Latino public opinion research is small, especially when compared to the

voluminous literature on Anglo public opinion. This body of work is not only limited in size but centers largely on Latino attitudes toward immigration issues.<sup>4</sup> This line of research examines the impact of generational status and acculturation on Latino attitudes toward immigration related policies (e.g., de la Garza et al. 1993; Garcia 1981; Miller, Polinard, and Wrinkle 1984). The research asserts that more recent immigrants and individuals with stronger cultural ties to their country of origin (or descent) are more supportive of policies that benefit immigrants.

Several works note the significant relationship between generational status and Latino attitudes toward immigration and immigration related issues. Miller, Polinard, and Wrinkle (1984) and Polinard, Miller, and de la Garza (1984) found that newer generations of Mexican immigrants are more supportive of policies benefiting illegal immigrants than when compared to older-generation Mexican Americans. Polinard, Miller, and de la Garza found that first-generation Mexican Americans are more supportive of educating children of undocumented immigrants (see also Miller, Polinard, and Wrinkle 1984), providing amnesty to undocumented workers, and allowing undocumented workers access to welfare service than second-generation or third-plus-generation Mexican Americans. Miller, Polinard, and Wrinkle found that third-plus-generation Mexican American respondents are more supportive of penalizing employers of undocumented workers than are first- or second-generation Latino respondents. Binder, Polinard, and Wrinkle (1997) found that first-generation Mexican Americans are less likely to support restrictive immigration reform when compared to second-plus-generation Mexican Americans.

Additionally, several works find that acculturation<sup>5</sup> is associated with Latino attitudes toward immigration related issues (de la Garza et al. 1993; Hood, Morris, and Shirkey 1997; Binder, Polinard, and Wrinkle 1997). de la Garza et al. (1993) found that Latinos who are more acculturated into U.S. society are more supportive of hiring preferences for citizens, less supportive of immigration preferences for individuals from Latin America, and more supportive of decreasing funds for programs targeting immigrants and refugees than are less acculturated Latinos. Hood, Morris, and Shirkey (1997) and Binder, Polinard, and Wrinkle (1997) found that Latinos with weaker cultural attachments are more likely to support restrictive immigration policies than those with stronger cultural attachments to their native country.

## The Nature of Latino Policy Attitudes

The extant research establishes that generational status and cultural assimilation are related to Latino attitudes toward immigration policies and illegal immigrants. These findings indicate that foreign-born and less acculturated Latinos are more supportive of policies that provide benefits to immigrants than are native-born and more acculturated Latinos (Miller, Polinard, and Wrinkle 1984; Polinard, Miller, and de la Garza 1984). Essentially, over time Latino immigrants and their descendants begin to accept and assume U.S. cultural practices; these practices replace or diminish their former cultural traits. As later generations of Latino immigrants become acculturated, their affect for immigrants and support for policies benefiting immigrants declines (de la Garza, Falcon, and Garcia 1996; Hood, Morris, and Shirkey 1997; Miller, Polinard, and Wrinkle 1984). Given this evidence, I propose that Latinos that are more acculturated into American society are more likely to support restrictive immigration related policies than are less acculturated Latinos. Explicitly stated,

*Hypothesis 1:* Less acculturated Latinos are more likely to support policies that benefit immigrants when compared to more acculturated Latinos.

As noted, there is a considerably smaller body of research that explores the relationship between acculturation and Latino attitudes across a wider range of policy issues. As such, the impact of acculturation on Latino attitudes regarding public policies other than immigration-related issues is less clear-cut. In an effort to develop expectations regarding Latino attitudes on the issues examined in this study, I rely not only on the previously noted literature but also on information regarding Latino partisan preferences, political trust, and socioeconomic characteristics. Considered concurrently, this information suggests that the importance of acculturation may emerge across a range of public policies beyond immigration (Segura, Falcon, and Pachon 1997; Pantoja, Ramírez, and Segura 2001; Muñoz, Navarrete, and Martínez De Castro 2002).

Existing research suggests that there are partisan differences among native and foreign-born Latinos. Segura, Falcon, and Pachon (1997) found that naturalized Latinos in California are more likely to identify with the Democratic Party than are native-born Latinos. Nationally, there also is evidence that foreign-born Latinos identify with the Democratic Party more than native-born Latinos (Calmes 2000; Suro et al. 2002).<sup>6</sup>

Together, these findings illustrate that political differences exist between Latino immigrants and native-born Latinos.

Recent research on political trust likewise lends some evidence that leads one to expect variability in attitudes toward a range of public policies as a function of acculturation. Michelson (2001) argued that more recent Mexican immigrants formulate their opinion of government in the United States by comparing it to Mexico's politics, which results in a more positive view of American government than when compared to more assimilated Mexican Americans. Michelson also found that acculturation into American society is associated with lower levels of Latino political trust. Acculturated Latinos are more likely to view the government as wasteful, more likely to view government officials as crooked, more likely to think that government officials do not know what they are doing, and less likely to view the government as working for the interest of all than are less acculturated Latinos. As such, this research highlights differences in Latino political attitudes toward the government as a function of acculturation.

Socioeconomic differences among Latinos likewise lead to the expectation that political attitudes among Latinos may differ across generations. There are large socioeconomic differences between foreign-born Latinos and native-born Latinos. For example, 2003 Census data indicate that only 44.7 percent of foreign-born Latinos hold a high school degree compared to 73.5 native-born Latinos. Furthermore, 9.8 percent of the foreign-born Latinos hold a college degree compared to 13.5 percent of the native-born Latinos. These educational differences mean that a larger portion of the foreign-born population is ineligible for more lucrative job opportunities. As a result, there are also earning differences between native-born and foreign-born Latinos. There is also evidence that the socioeconomic differences exist not only between foreign-born and native-born Latinos, but also among second- and third-generation Latinos. Borjas (1999) indicated that second-generation Mexican Americans earn 19.7 percent less in 1998 than did the "typical" third-generation Mexican American; and second-generation Cuban Americans earn 18.0 percent less than the "typical" third-generation Cuban American. One potential implication of these socioeconomic differences is variability in political attitudes.

Finally, research regarding Latino attitudes toward immigration-related public policies lends some guidance. This research indicates that as Latino acculturation into American society increases, Latino attitudes

increasingly resemble Anglo attitudes toward the issue of immigration (Binder, Polinard, and Wrinkle 1997). Furthermore, de la Garza, Falcon, and Garcia (1996) indicated that the impact of the acculturation process may extend beyond the singular issue area of immigration. This piece lends some evidence that Latinos who exhibit heightened levels of acculturation are more supportive of American core values than are Latinos that are less acculturated. According to Hood, Morris, and Shirkey (1997, 640), "As Hispanics become more attuned to American cultural traits and practices there is a corresponding shift in their attitudes to mirror more closely those of the dominant group—Anglo citizens." As such, this research implies that acculturation into U.S. society may lead to differences in Latino political attitudes beyond the realm of immigration.

Concomitantly, the research regarding partisan preferences, political trust, socioeconomic characteristics, and Latino attitudes highlights differences within the Latino community. The research implicitly suggests that variability in attitudes among Latinos as a function of acculturation may exist across a range of policy items. Given that less acculturated Latinos are more likely to identify with the Democratic Party, more trusting of the government, and have a lower socioeconomic position, it is plausible that less acculturated Latinos hold more liberal policy preferences than more acculturated Latinos. Thus, I offer the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 2:* Less acculturated Latinos are more likely to support government spending on services and policies that benefit minorities in general when compared to more acculturated Latinos.

## Data

This project utilizes two survey data sets: the Pew Hispanic Center and the Kaiser Family Foundation's 2002 National Survey of Latinos (NSL) and the 2004 National Survey of Latinos: Education (NSLE). The 2002 NSL and the 2004 NSLE are both random-digit-dialed national telephone surveys.<sup>7</sup> These two data sets satisfy the three key elements necessary to address the substantive research question of interest. First, both data sets encompass a nationally representative sample of Latinos. Second, the data sets have an adequate sample of first-, second-, and third-plus-generation Latinos. Third, the data sets both include information regarding not only Latino attitudes toward immigration but also other areas of public policy. These data sets allow one to draw generalizable

conclusion about impact of acculturation on Latino attitudes on immigration related issues *and* other areas of public policy. Additionally, each data set includes a sizeable number of Anglo respondents, which allows for comparing the impact of acculturation on Latino attitudes to Anglo attitudes.<sup>8</sup>

The 2002 NSL survey contains two immigration policy items: immigration and illegal immigration. The *immigration* item asked if the number of Latin Americans coming to the United States should be increased, stay the same, or be decreased. The *illegal immigrant* item asked if undocumented or illegal immigrants help or hurt the economy. The 2002 NSL survey also contains two non-immigration-policy questions: government spending and services for the needy. The *spending* item asked respondents if they would rather pay higher taxes to support larger government for more services or lower taxes for less government and less services. The *service* item asked whether nongovernmental organizations or the government can do the best job of providing services to people in need. The 2004 NSLE survey offers two non-immigration-policy questions: affirmative action and No Child Left Behind (NCLB). The *affirmative action* item asked respondents if they favor or oppose university admissions programs that give special consideration to Latinos, African Americans, and other minority groups. The *NCLB* item asked respondents if the top priority when a school repeatedly fails to meet standards should be helping the school improve and requiring students to stay or allowing parents to send their child to another school.<sup>9</sup>

### The Model

Latino attitudes toward these policy items are treated as a function of a series of individual-level attributes. The covariate of specific interest is a measure of a respondent's level of *acculturation*. Two indicators are used to operationalize the measure of acculturation: generational status and language competence. Generational status is an indicator of whether a respondent is foreign-born (first generation), native-born with foreign-born parents (second generation), or native-born with native-born parents (third-plus generation). The language competence measure is based on combined response to a series of questions regarding ability in English and Spanish. Based on these two indicators, a scale is generated to measure a respondent's level of acculturation. The 8-point scale ranges from 0—*foreign-born, Spanish language dominant* to 7—*third-plus generation, English language dominant*.<sup>10</sup> As

noted, I expect for less acculturated Latinos to be more supportive of policies favoring immigrants, social spending, and policies benefiting minorities than when compared to more acculturated Latinos.

The model includes several variables representing demographic characteristics: education, age, sex, partisan affiliation, income, and Latino subgroups. *Education* is measured by a four-category variable ranging from less than a high school education to a college graduate, with higher values reflecting higher levels of education. *Age* is a continuous measure of each respondent's actual age in years. A respondent's sex is represented by a dichotomous variable (*female*) with 1 indicating female and 0 indicating male. A respondent's partisan affiliation is measured by two dichotomous variables: *Democrat* and *Independent*. Democrat is coded 1 if the respondent identifies herself or himself as a Democrat and 0 if not. Independent is coded 1 if the respondent identifies herself or himself as an Independent and 0 if not. *Income* is a 16-category measure, with higher values representing higher levels of income. Finally, the model includes a series of dichotomous variables reflecting a Latino respondent's country of origin or descent: *Mexico*, *Puerto Rico*, *Cuba*, and *South America*.

### Examining the Structure of Latino Attitudes

Table 1 presents the parameter estimates for the two models regarding attitudes toward immigration-related policies. As noted, the immigration response item is an ordered categorical variable; thus, ordered logit is used to estimate this model. The ordered logit estimates and robust standard errors are presented for Latinos in the first column and for Anglo attitudes in the second column of Table 1. The illegal immigrant item is a dichotomous dependent variable; thus, logistic regression is used to estimate this model. The results regarding attitudes toward illegal immigration are reported for Latinos in the third column and for Anglo attitudes in the fourth column of Table 1.

Note that the estimates indicate that acculturation is significantly related to Latino attitudes toward immigration and illegal immigrants. The positive parameter estimates indicate that more acculturated Latinos are more supportive of decreased immigration levels than less acculturated Latinos. Likewise, more acculturated Latinos are more likely to indicate that undocumented or illegal immigrants hurt the economy than less acculturated Latinos. These findings lend strong evidence

**Table 1**  
**Latino and Anglo Attitudes toward Immigration Issues: Ordered Logit and Logit Estimates**

Covariate	Immigration Levels		Illegal Immigrants	
	Latino	Anglo	Latino	Anglo
Age	0.01*** (.00)	0.01 (.01)	-0.00 (.01)	-0.00 (.01)
Female	-0.16 (.10)	0.08 (.14)	0.07 (.14)	0.33* (.16)
Education	-0.03 (.06)	-0.48*** (.14)	0.10 (.08)	-0.40*** (.09)
Democrat	0.04 (.12)	-0.29 (.15)	-0.07 (.05)	0.08 (.18)
Independent	-0.15 (.15)	-0.15 (.23)	0.13 (.19)	-0.16 (.24)
Income	-0.02 (.02)	-0.02 (.02)	-0.01 (.02)	-0.02 (.02)
Acculturation	0.16*** (.02)		0.29*** (.03)	
Mexico	-0.14 (.13)		-0.63*** (.17)	
Puerto Rico	0.39* (.17)		0.80*** (.22)	
Cuba	0.41* (.20)		1.18*** (.23)	
South America	0.10 (.21)		0.43 (.26)	
Cut-1	0.41 (.24)	-2.96*** (.40)	-1.94*** (.32)	1.99*** (.42)
Cut-2	2.35 (.25)	-0.57 (.37)		
Wald $\chi^2$	90.26	51.96	216.57	31.26
Observations	2,340	852	2,336	852

Note: The response variables measuring individual-level attitudes on immigration policy issues are taken from the Hispanic Center/Kaiser Family Foundation 2002 National Survey of Latinos. The coefficient estimates for the models involving immigration levels are based on ordered logit estimates, while the coefficient estimates for the models regarding illegal immigrants are based on logit estimates. Robust standard errors are presented in parentheses. All Wald  $\chi^2$  scores are significant at the .0001 level.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

supporting Hypothesis 1 and confirm the findings of existing research regarding Latino attitudes toward immigration-related issues.

The model estimates also indicate that Latino attitudes toward these immigration related issues vary as a function of one's country of origin or descent. Cuban Americans and Puerto Ricans are more likely to prefer decreased immigration levels. Furthermore, the estimates suggests that Mexican Americans are less likely to indicate that illegal or undocumented immigrants hurt the economy, while Puerto Ricans and Cuban Americans are more likely to indicate that illegal or undocumented immigrants hurt the economy. These differences are plausibly due to the differences in how these groups tend to immigrate to the U.S.<sup>11</sup>

To illustrate the impact of acculturation, predict probabilities are computed for a foreign-born and Spanish-language-dominant Latino (nonacculturated), a second-generation and bilingual Latino ("moderately" acculturated), and a third-plus-generation and English-language-dominant Latino ("fully" acculturated). Additionally, predicted probabilities are calculated for a Republican Anglo and a Democratic Anglo to offer a comparison among Latinos at varying levels of acculturation.<sup>12</sup> The predicted probabilities for the immigration response item reflects the likelihood of preferring decreased immigration levels, while the

predicted probabilities for the illegal immigrant item reflects the probability of indicating that illegal or undocumented immigrants hurt the economy. The probabilities are presented in Table 2.

The probability that a foreign-born, Spanish-speaking (nonacculturated) Latino supports decreased immigration levels is .12; the predicted probability for a second-generation, bilingual Latino is .21; while the predicted probability for a third-plus-generation, English-speaking Latino is .30. As such, a "fully" acculturated Latino has a .18 higher probability of supporting decreased immigration levels than a nonacculturated Latino and a .09 higher probability of supporting decreased immigration than a "moderately" acculturated Latino. Substantively, this indicates that as Latinos become more acculturated into U.S. society, attitudes toward immigration-related issues become less supportive. This is further illustrated by comparing Latino attitudes to Anglo attitudes toward immigration. Notably, the difference in probabilities between a "fully" acculturated Latino and an Anglo, regardless of partisanship, is smaller than the difference between a "fully" and "moderately" acculturated Latino. For instance, the change in predict probability between a third-plus-generation, English-speaking Latino and an Anglo Democrat is .04 and an Anglo Republican is .11.

**Table 2**  
**Predicted Probabilities:**  
**Immigration-Related Issues**

	Immigration Levels: Decrease	Illegal Immigrants: Hurt Economy
1st generation, Spanish dominant	.12	.13
2nd generation, Bilingual	.21	.32
3rd generation, English dominant	.30	.53
Anglo, Democrat	.34	.73
Anglo, Republican	.41	.71

A similar pattern emerges on the subject of illegal immigration. The probability that a foreign-born, Spanish-language-dominant Latino perceives that undocumented or illegal immigrants hurt the economy is .13; the probability for a second-generation, bilingual Latino is .32; and the probability for a third-plus-generation, English-speaking Latino is .53. The differences among the Latino respondents on this issue are greater than when compared to the difference between “fully” acculturated Latino and Anglo respondents. The change in probability between a nonacculturated Latino and a “fully” acculturated Latino is .40, while the difference between a “fully” acculturated Latino and an Anglo Democrat is .20. On the issue of the impact of illegal immigration, it appears that “fully” acculturated Latinos are in greater agreement with Anglos than with less acculturated Latinos.<sup>13</sup>

The impact of acculturation is clearly evident when considering Latino attitudes toward immigration-related issues. The looming question that this study seeks to address is, Does the impact of Latino acculturation surface in other areas of public policy? Although immigration is an important issue confronting the Latino population, according to survey research it is not necessarily perceived to be the most important issue. Indeed, the Pew Hispanic Center’s 2004 NSL indicates that Latinos perceive education, the economy, and health care to be the most pressing issues facing the nation,<sup>14</sup> which naturally leads to the consideration of impact of acculturation on Latino attitudes on issues beyond immigration.

Table 3 presents the results of Latino attitudes on a series of nonimmigration public policies: government spending, services for the needy, affirmative action, and the NCLB. Each of these response items is a dichotomous dependent variable; thus logistic regression is used to estimate each model. Again, each model

is estimated separately for Latino and Anglo respondents. The first two columns in Table 3 contain the estimates for the government spending, the third and fourth columns contain the estimates for the services to the needy item, the fifth and sixth columns contain the estimates for the affirmative action item, and the last two columns contain the estimates for the NCLB.

The estimates uniformly indicate that acculturation is significantly related to Latino attitudes toward these nonimmigration policy issues. The negative parameter estimates indicate that more acculturated Latinos are less supportive of increased government spending, less likely to indicate that the government can do the best job of providing services to the needy, and less likely to support affirmative action when compared to less acculturated Latinos. Furthermore, the results indicate that more acculturated Latinos are less likely to suggest that the top priority when a school repeatedly fails to meet standards should be helping the school when compared to less acculturated Latinos. Together, these results lend consistent evidence supporting Hypothesis 2.

To demonstrate the impact of acculturation on Latino attitudes toward these policy issues, predicted probabilities are computed and presented in Table 4. These calculations indicate that the probability that a third-plus-generation, English-dominant Latino supports paying higher taxes for a larger government and more services is .58; the predicted probability for a second-generation, bilingual Latino is .63; and the predicted probability for a foreign-born, Spanish-speaking Latino is .69. Additionally, a Democratic Anglo has a .46 probability and a Republican Anglo has a .24 probability of supporting higher taxes for more services. As such, a “fully” acculturated Latino has a .11 lower probability of supporting more taxes for more services when compared to a nonacculturated Latino, a .05 lower probability than a “moderately” acculturated Latino, and a .12 higher probability than a Democratic Anglo. Substantively, this indicates that as the level of acculturation increases support for government spending on services declines, but the level of support among a “fully” acculturated Latino is higher than an Anglo, regardless of partisan affiliation.

The same pattern holds for Latino attitudes toward providing services to the needy. There is a .40 probability that a “fully” acculturated Latino agrees that the government can do the best job of providing services to the needy compared to a .48 probability for a “moderately” acculturated Latino and a .58 probability for a nonacculturated Latino. Interestingly, when comparing the predicted probabilities with Anglo respondents the

**Table 3**  
**Latino and Anglo Attitudes toward Various Public Policies: Logit Estimates**

Covariate	Spending		Services		Affirmative Action		No Child Left Behind	
	Latino	Anglo	Latino	Anglo	Latino	Anglo	Latino	Anglo
Age	-.02*** (.00)	-.02*** (.01)	-.00 (.00)	-.00 (.01)	-.02** (.01)	-.02*** (.01)	-.00 (.01)	-.01 (.01)
Female	0.03 (.12)	0.29 (.17)	-.08 (.11)	-.21 (.17)	-.14 (.15)	0.27 (.17)	-.15 (.14)	-.10 (.16)
Education	0.01 (.06)	0.03 (.09)	-.07 (.06)	0.03 (.10)	0.06 (.08)	0.03 (.09)	-.19* (.08)	-.05 (.09)
Democrat	0.23 (.13)	1.01*** (.15)	0.03 (.13)	1.11*** (.18)	0.76*** (.18)	1.13*** (.20)	0.12 (.18)	0.81*** (.18)
Independent	0.23 (.16)	0.69*** (.26)	-.08 (.16)	0.56* (.26)	0.51** (.20)	0.31 (.23)	-.22 (.19)	0.33 (.21)
Income	0.00 (.02)	-.03 (.02)	-.03 (.02)	-.02 (.02)	-.07** (.02)	-.03 (.02)	-.05* (.02)	-.05* (.02)
Acculturation	-.07** (.02)		-.10*** (.02)		-.13*** (.03)		-.12*** (.03)	
Mexico	-.08 (.14)		-.05 (.14)		0.26 (.22)		0.03 (.20)	
Puerto Rico	-.45* (.19)		-.18 (.19)		0.21 (.31)		-.25 (.30)	
Cuba	0.10 (.20)		0.19 (.23)		0.04 (.40)		-.35 (.40)	
South America	0.45 (.23)		0.51* (.22)		0.62 (.33)		-.44 (.31)	
Cut-point	1.14*** (.27)	-.07 (.42)	0.72*** (.27)	-1.03*				
(.45)	1.42*** (.37)	-.29 (.42)	1.84*** (.36)	-.08 (.41)				
Wald $\chi^2$	40.95	55.58	53.69	39.98	66.7	48.84	68.03	28.21
Observations	2,316	838	2,317	845	1,208	994	1,209	

Note: The response variables measuring individual-level attitudes on policy issues are taken from the Hispanic Center/Kaiser Family Foundation 2002 National Survey of Latinos and the 2004 National Survey of Latinos: Education. The coefficient estimates are based on logit estimates. Robust standard errors are presented in parentheses. All Wald  $\chi^2$  scores are significant at the .0001 level.

\* $p < .10$ . \*\* $p < .05$ . \*\*\* $p < .01$ .

**Table 4**  
**Predicted Probabilities: Various Policy Issues**

	Spending: Increase	Services: Government	Affirmative Action: Support	No Child Left Behind: Help Schools
1st generation, Spanish dominant	.69	.58	.75	.74
2nd generation, Bilingual	.63	.48	.64	.63
3rd generation, English dominant	.58	.40	.54	.55
Anglo, Democrat	.46	.47	.47	.49
Anglo, Republican	.24	.23	.22	.30

results indicate that a “fully” acculturated Latino has a lower probability of agreeing that the government does the best job or providing services to the needy than an Anglo identifying with the Democratic Party, yet a higher probability than an Anglo identifying with the Republican Party. On this issue, the results suggest that as a Latino becomes more acculturated their attitudes not only compare to Anglo Democrats, but shift closer to more conservative Anglos.

Next, the calculations indicate that as acculturation increases the probability of supporting affirmative action declines. In fact, the probability slips from .75 for nonacculturated Latinos to .54 for a “fully” acculturated Latino. Again, a “fully” acculturated Latino appears more in line with an Anglo Democrat on this issue than a less acculturated Latino. The difference in probability between a “fully” acculturated Latino and an Anglo identifying with the Democratic Party is .06, while the difference between a “fully” acculturated Latino and a “moderately” acculturated Latino is .10; and the difference between a “fully” acculturated Latino and a nonacculturated Latino is .21.

Finally, considering attitudes toward the NCLB, we see that acculturation has a significant impact on Latino attitudes. Across the range of the acculturation measure, support for helping improve failing schools versus allowing parents to transfer their children to another school declines from .74 to .55. Again, the predicted probabilities indicate that a “fully” acculturated Latino is more similar to Anglo Democrats than less acculturated Latinos.

## Discussion and Conclusions

The existing Latino public opinion research provides some evidence that there are differences in attitudes toward immigration policies as a function of generational status and acculturation. This study attempts to extend the research regarding Latino public opinion by examining Latino attitudes toward immigration related issues as well as other public policies. The findings

confirm expectations that the impact of acculturation emerges not only on issues that explicitly target immigrants but extends to other issue areas as well. Substantively, the results highlight that there are differences in Latino policy attitudes associated with one’s level of acculturation into U.S. society. The results indicate that less acculturated Latinos are more likely to support policy positions that distribute benefits to immigrants, the needy, and minority groups in general than when compared to “fully” acculturated Latinos.

These findings coupled with research regarding Latino political behavior lead to broader questions regarding the position and future of Latinos in American politics. As noted previously, recent research highlights the apparent generational differences in voter participation and partisan preferences among Latinos (National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials [NALEO] 2002; Pantoja, Ramírez, and Segura 2001; Segura, Falcon, and Pachon 1997; Sierra et al. 2000). These works indicate that naturalized Latinos have participated at higher rates in recent years than native-born Latinos. Additionally, this research indicates that naturalized Latinos are more likely to affiliate with the Democratic Party than are native-born Latinos. The results presented herein reveal a similar pattern regarding Latino policy preferences.

This research highlights division among Latinos. The findings raise questions regarding the ability of the nation’s largest minority group to coalesce as a group to gain increased political power. The results seemingly suggest that the greatest potential political “coalition” within the Latino population will occur among less acculturated Latinos. The differences in attitudes toward various public policies are considerably smaller among less acculturated Latinos than when compared to the “fully” acculturated Latinos. If the projected pattern of population growth among Latinos transpires, the greatest growth will occur among first- and second-generation Latinos. Together, this suggests that although there are differences among Latinos there still exists huge potential for the group to play an increasing role in American politics.<sup>15</sup>

Furthermore, this study potentially holds implications for two articles included in this volume of *Political Research Quarterly* that address Latino political representation (Pruehs 2007 [this issue]; Rocha 2007 [this issue]). Pruehs (2007) considers that policy implications of Latino descriptive representation, while Rocha (2007) considers black-brown coalitions in local school board elections. Future research building on these works might consider if (and how) Latino acculturation is associated with Latino political representation. For example, research building on Rocha might account for the generational makeup of the Latino (citizen) population. The findings presented in this study suggest that a black-brown coalition may be more likely in areas with a more acculturated Latino population than in areas dominated by a less acculturated Latino population. Additionally, Pruehs indicates that states characterized by a sizable Latino population and some degree of Latino political incorporation have more generous social welfare policies. Again, the findings presented in this study suggest that future research might account for the makeup of the Latino population. The generational status of a state's Latino population may influence the level of Latino political incorporation and thus the degree of welfare generosity. Alternatively, states containing a more acculturated Latino population may have greater political incorporation and potentially more generous redistributive policies.

Another related implication of this work involves the behavior of political parties. Over the past decade, both political parties have placed increased focus on the "Latino vote." In recent presidential and congressional campaigns, both parties have waged the language war in an attempt to woo the Latino electorate. The results presented in this study and the recent participation research (Pantoja, Ramírez, and Segura 2001; Segura, Falcon, and Pachon 1997) suggests that the Republican Party may need to refocus its efforts to increase support among the Latino population. Specifically, based on the structure of policy attitudes among Latinos as a function of acculturation, it appears if any segment of the Latino population can be swayed by the Republican Party, it will be the third-plus generation and more acculturated Latinos. If this is the case, one adjustment to the Party's strategy would be to focus on mobilizing the third-plus generation and the more acculturated Latino population. This portion of the Latino population has participated at lower levels than newer generations of Latinos in recent years. However, the

results also suggest the Democratic Party maybe able to maintain and potentially gain support among more acculturated Latinos by focusing on those issues that do not serve as a divide within the Latino community. For example, the Democratic Party might consider emphasizing the issues that Latinos as a group perceive to be the most important such as education, the economy, and health care and walk a fine line on issues that divide the Latino community such as immigration. Finally, the Democratic Party might benefit from increased efforts to naturalize the noncitizens and mobilize first- and second-generation eligible voters.

The findings also hold implications for future research regarding Latino attitudes. This area of research can be extended by considering a broader range of policy issues. A natural extension to the existing research and this study would be to examine the structure of Latino attitudes across a variety of public policy areas. Second, the results lead to questions regarding the implications for elected officials. Are there unique campaign strategies employed when candidates seek to represent districts with a large Latino population? Are there representational difficulties associated with representing a legislative district characterized by nontrivial differences within the Latino population?

## Notes

1. Latino voter participation increased 50 percent between the 1996 and 2000 presidential elections. The overall share of Latino vote increased from over 4 percent in the 1996 presidential election to 7 percent in the 2000 election. This increased participation is reflected in the number of Latino elected officials. According to the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO 2002), there are approximately fifty-one hundred Latino elected officials at various levels of government.

2. The level of agreement among the Latinos with regard to political matters is important as it serves as an indicator of the groups ability to gain increased political participation and political representation (McClain and Stewart 2006).

3. Acculturation, or cultural assimilation, refers to the process whereby immigrants assume the cultural values and norms of mainstream U.S. society (Fuchs 1990).

4. A small, yet growing, body of empirical research examines Latino attitudes toward issues such as abortion (Bolks et al. 2000; Ellison, Echevarría, and Smith 2005) and the gender gap (e.g., Hardy-Fanta 2000; Montoya 1996; Welch and Sigelman 1992).

5. The existing research measures acculturation, or "cultural ties," by factors such as generational status, English language competence, feelings toward their native country, and commitment to native country traditions.

6. There is mixed evidence regarding partisan differences among native and foreign-born Latinos. Cain, Kiewiet, and Uhlaner (1991) found that the longer Latinos reside in the United

States, the more likely they are to identify with the Democratic Party. Alternatively, Alvarez and Bedolla (2003) found no partisan differences between native-born and foreign-born Latinos; however, they do find that older Latinos are more likely to identify with the Democratic Party when compared to young Latino voters and new Latino voters.

7. The respondents were allowed to complete the survey in either English or Spanish.

8. The 2002 data set includes 2,929 Latino respondents and 1,008 Anglo respondents. The 2004 data set includes 1,508 Latino respondents and 1,193 Anglo respondents.

9. One aspect of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act establishes that when schools repeatedly fail to improve, parents have the right to transfer their children to a passing school. Many critics argue this provision leaves minority students behind. A 2004 report by the Citizen's Commission on Civil Rights (<http://www.cccr.org/ChoosingBetterSchools.pdf>) stated that minority students are more likely to live in districts lacking high-performing schools, thus limiting their ability to transfer to better schools in their own district. Furthermore, high-performing schools rarely accept transfer students from other school districts. As such, for minority students to improve their academic performance, helping the school to improve is a more effective option.

10. Specifically, the categories are as follows: 0 for foreign-born and Spanish-dominant, 1 for foreign-born and bilingual, 2 for foreign-born and English-dominant, 3 for second-generation and Spanish-dominant, 4 for second-generation and bilingual, 5 for second-generation and English-dominant, 6 for third-plus-generation and bilingual, 7 for third-generation and English-dominant. As the level of acculturation increases, values on the acculturation measure increase.

11. Many Cuban Americans legally migrated to the United States under the special provisions of political refugee status; while Puerto Ricans, as U.S. citizens, can travel freely and legally to the United States (See Portes and Truelove [1987] for a discussion).

12. To compute the predicted probabilities, the following scenario was used: high school educated, average age, average income, and male.

13. Note that Latino attitudes vary as a function of country of origin or descent. The probability of a "fully" acculturated Puerto Rican or Cuban American supporting decreased levels of immigration is .41. The probability of a "fully" acculturated Mexican American perceiving that illegal immigrants hurt the economy is .38; alternatively, "fully" acculturated Puerto Ricans have a .72 probability, and "fully" acculturated Cuban Americans have a .79 probability.

14. The 2004 National Survey of Latinos: Politics and Civic Participation queried Latino registered voters about the most important issues in the 2004 election.

15. The ability to increase the Latino political power depends on naturalization, voter registration, and voter participation.

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