

# E Pluribus Unum? How Ethnic and National Identity Motivate Individual Reactions to a Political Ideal

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Preserving national unity in light of diversity—*e pluribus unum*—is a challenge in immigrant-receiving nations like the United States. We claim that endorsement of this view is structured by the varied bond between ethnic and national identity among immigrant minorities and native majorities, a proposition we test across three studies of US Latinos and whites. Study 1 uses national survey data to show that ethnic and national identity are associated with support for this objective, though in varied ways, among these groups. Studies 2 and 3 sharpen these results experimentally by illuminating the role of elite rhetoric in forging these connections. We show that elite remarks about the (in-)compatibility of ethnic and national identity motivate support for *e pluribus unum* through the specific attachment it influences. That is, elite rhetoric causes shifts in ethnic or national identity, which then asymmetrically shapes support for *e pluribus unum* among Latinos and whites.

We have a country, where, to assimilate, you have to speak English. . . . To have a country, we have to have assimilation. This is a country where we speak English, not Spanish.

—Donald J. Trump, 2015<sup>1</sup>

We are a country where people of all backgrounds, all nations of origin, all languages, all religions . . . can make a home. America was built by immigrants.

—Hillary R. Clinton, 2015<sup>2</sup>

Only two remarks from two American political leaders, but they are not unlike the words spoken by other US politicians at different times (Gerstle 2001). At the heart of the matter: preserving national unity in the face of immigrant diversity—what we and others call “*e pluribus unum*” (Citrin and Sears 2014). Across both parties, political elites have fashioned two broad but opposing responses to this quandary throughout the eras (Tichenor 2002). Some elites argue, strenuously, that national unity must take precedent over immigrant diversity because it clashes with it. Other elites claim, just as vigorously, that enshrining diversity is a priority because it affirms national unity.

These poles bracket variable opinions about *e pluribus unum*, with immigrants and natives ranging from a stronger emphasis on diversity over national cohesion to a stronger emphasis on national unity over diversity (Citrin and Sears 2014; Gerstle and Mollenkopf 2001). Indeed, immigrant minorities sometimes express strong loyalty to America and endorse its values and institutions (Citrin et al. 2007; Silber Mohamed 2017), yet at other times they tepidly embrace the United States and actively reject its politics (Pérez 2015). Native majorities similarly vacillate between their views of *e pluribus unum*. While their vision of national unity sometimes accommodates the diversity immigration brings (Citrin

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1. Remarks made during the Republican presidential debate on September 16, 2015.

2. Remarks made at the National Immigrant Integration Conference (New York City) on December 14, 2015.

et al. 2001), on other occasions it curbs it (Abrajano and Hajnal 2015; Newman 2012). What explains these shifting perspectives?

This question is hard to answer for three reasons. First, scholars often use varied frameworks to explain minority and majority views of *e pluribus unum*, thus forfeiting a unified theory. Many researchers pin immigrant endorsement of national unity to a receding of ethnic identity and swelling of national attachment across generations within these groups (Citrin et al. 2007)—as evidenced by the glacial transition of Italians, Jews, and other “ethnics” to “Americans” (Roediger 2005; Waters 1990). In turn, scholars trace a native majority’s insistence on national unity over diversity to demographic shifts—as illustrated by white backlashes against immigration (Abrajano and Hajnal 2015; Hopkins 2010; Newman 2012). Yet in all this flux, minorities and majorities both experience transformations in identity (Danbold and Huo 2015; Portes and Zhou 1993), suggesting a shared source of individual views about *e pluribus unum*.

Second, research often elides the psychology behind minority and majority views of *e pluribus unum*, thus obscuring what motivates opinions about it. Received wisdom suggests that immigrant minorities place national unity above ethnic diversity when subgroup attachments—for example, identifying as “Mexican”—are less salient (Citrin et al. 2007). Conventional wisdom also suggests that native majorities curtail their hostility to immigrants when they view them as in-group members (Roediger 2005). This implies that opinions about *e pluribus unum* are inexorable. Yet studies on immigrants’ perceived discrimination show that these opinions change and respond to political rhetoric (Pérez 2015), policy feedback (Pedraza 2014), and out-group behavior (Oskooi 2016). Native majorities also shift their opinions toward *e pluribus unum*, with comparable external cues shaping it (Newman 2012; Theiss-Morse 2009). Thus, more attention to micro-foundations can clarify why minorities as well as majorities strive for this goal.

Finally, explanations of mass support for *e pluribus unum* often downplay politics while stressing long-run socioeconomic trends (Alba and Nee 2003). Here, immigrants and natives endorse national unity over diversity when the former secure better-paying jobs that yield higher status, the means to reside beyond ethnic enclaves, and the option to marry outside of one’s in-group—all of which mute sharp minority/majority divides. Yet this glosses over the impact of political discourse (Silber Mohamed 2017), public policy (Sniderman and Hagendoorn 2007), and elections (Dancygier 2010) on the sense of unity shared by minorities and majorities. Thus, casting a spotlight on politics can further expose some conditions under which this touchstone is attained or spurned.

We aim to resolve these tensions by developing a theory that explains minority and majority views of *e pluribus unum*: a broad orientation toward the relationship between national unity and ethnic diversity, as expressed in people’s opinions toward multiculturalism, identity politics, language policy, and the like (e.g., Citrin et al. 2001; McConaughy et al. 2010; Schildkraut 2005). We see it as an individual difference that captures a relative emphasis on national cohesion over diversity. Deeper faith in this ordering matters politically by forging stronger personal ties to the nation and its symbols. Like others before us (Citrin and Sears 2014), we think studying mass support for *e pluribus unum* is a worthy enterprise in its own right. Balancing national unity amid diversity is a source of heated debate in US politics (Gerstle and Mollenkopf 2001). Thus, clarifying what drives opinions here is key. For example, without a sense of unity, immigrant minorities may experience greater marginalization, while natives may resent them for what they view as rejection of US norms (Portes and Zhou 1993).

Our theory centers on the psychology behind people’s opinions about *e pluribus unum*. We argue that immigrant minorities imagine themselves to be distinctive insofar as they loosely combine an attachment to their ethnic group with a fledgling attachment to their host nation, making for a unique identity—for example, being “Mexican American” (Citrin and Sears 2014). Native majorities consider themselves distinctive insofar as they meld their ethnic (e.g., white) and national (e.g., American) identities (Devos and Banaji 2005), viewing these as mostly interchangeable. We think this varied bond between both identities affects one’s views of *e pluribus unum*, with elite rhetoric forging these links. Specifically, rhetoric affirming or threatening a group’s distinctiveness causes shifts in ethnic or national identity, which then shapes opinions of *e pluribus unum*.

We test our claims with a trio of studies on Latino and non-Hispanic white adults.<sup>3</sup> Study 1 uses national survey data to reveal a varied bond between ethnic and national identity among these groups. We also show that these identities are correlated with Latino and white views of *e pluribus unum* in asymmetric ways. Among Latinos, stronger ethnic identity weakens support for this criterion, while stronger national identity strengthens it. Among whites, stronger ethnic and national identity yield more support for *e pluribus unum*, with national identity showing a more consistent impact.

We then clarify elite rhetoric’s role in producing these links between group identity and personal support for *e pluribus*

3. Throughout, we use the label “white” to refer to non-Hispanic whites. We do this for ease of presentation.

unum. Study 2 randomly assigned adults to rhetoric defining ethnic and national identity as (in-)compatible for Latino and white subgroups (e.g., Mexican Americans, Irish Americans). Portraying ethnic and national identity as compatible affirms Latinos' ethnic identity, which weakens their emphasis on national unity. However, depicting ethnic and national identity as compatible threatens whites' national identity, which leads them to insist on national cohesion.

Study 3 also assigned Latinos and whites to rhetoric construing ethnic and national identity as (in-)compatible, but with remarks singling out Latinos (e.g., Mexican Americans, Cuban Americans). Describing ethnic and national identity as compatible actually boosts Latinos' national identity, prompting them to stress national unity over diversity. In contrast, defining ethnic and national identity as incompatible reinforces whites' national identity, leading them to press for greater national cohesion. We discuss these results in light of debates about diversity and immigrant integration.

### **THE POLITICAL PSYCHOLOGY OF E PLURIBUS UNUM: CONCEPT, THEORY, AND HYPOTHESES**

We view *e pluribus unum* as a constellation of attitudes about the proper relation between national and ethnic solidarity: a question many ethnically diverse polities confront (Sniderman and Hagendoorn 2007). These opinions are expressed in related, but empirically distinct ways that vary in the weight accorded to national versus ethnic unity. Prior work suggests at least four manifestations. The first is multiculturalism, or a "commitment to the value of cultural diversity" (Citrin and Sears 2014, 122). Greater faith in multiculturalism directly reflects an emphasis on ethnic differences above national commonality (Citrin et al. 2001). A second manifestation is co-ethnic preference, a "harder" version of multiculturalism, insofar as it reflects more enthusiasm for ethnic distinctions (Pérez 2015). One reflection of this is support for descriptive representation, or co-ethnic political leaders (McConaughy et al. 2010). Third is patriotism, which encourages fellowship among countrymen (Huddy and Khatib 2007). Stronger patriotism reflects deep affection for a nation: a marker of faith in national unity (Citrin and Sears 2014), though not strictly at diversity's expense. Finally, there is support for homogenizing social policies, such as declaring an official national language (Schildkraut 2005; Schmidt 2000). These policies vigorously affirm national cohesion over ethnic diversity by promoting an exclusive orientation toward the nation. Hence, when we refer to *e pluribus unum*, we have in mind this assemblage of opinions.

To better grasp minority and majority views of *e pluribus unum*, we mainly draw on social identity theory (SIT) (Tajfel and Turner 1979) and its offshoot, self-categorization theory

(SCT) (Turner et al. 1987). This research maintains that people are motivated to uphold a positive self-image, which they accomplish, in part, by ensuring that their in-group(s) compares favorably to sundry out group(s) (Tajfel and Turner 1979). This positive differentiation is not an innate group trait, however, since "social context . . . determines the evaluative flavor of any . . . group" (Ellemers, Spears, and Doosje 2002, 165). For this reason, manifold threats to a group elicit specific reactions from its members.

In ethnically diverse settings, where people juggle multiple affiliations like ethnic and national identity, distinctiveness threat is a well-established provocation (Ellemers, Barreto, and Spears 1999; Hornsey and Hogg 2000). Marilynn Brewer (1991) long ago taught us that people strive to belong to groups that are "optimally distinct": they satisfy one's thirst for belonging, while providing a strong sense of what makes an in-group special. Knowledge of an in-group's uniqueness is crucial because it clarifies intergroup boundaries and reduces cognitive uncertainty by answering questions like "how should I behave as an ingroup member?" (Ellemers et al. 2002).<sup>4</sup>

When a clear social order exists between minority and majority groups, an in-group's distinctiveness partly reflects its station in a hierarchy (Tajfel and Turner 1979). Hierarchies between immigrants and natives have emerged before and one exists today (Masuoka and Junn 2013), coalescing into what Omi and Winant (1994) would describe as a racial formation: a stable social arrangement infusing some groups (whites) with more prestige and power than others (Latinos). Jim Sidanius explains that hierarchies reflect structural inequities between groups, such as wealth, education, and civic disparities (Sidanius et al. 1997). Such gaps can lead immigrant minorities to undergo segmented assimilation, where foreigners and their progeny experience halting integration into a host society. This stresses their lower rank in an order, which affirms their ethnicity and undermines their national belonging (Portes and Zhou 1993).

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4. Based on SIT/SCT, we construe ethnic identity as degree of attachment to an ethnic category. For Latinos, we mainly operationalize this as one's national origin group: the Latin American nation one traces most of one's ancestors to. Prior work shows that this category is highly salient among foreign-born Latinos and their children (García 2012). National origin identity is distinct from national identity, which is attachment to one's nation of residence. For non-Hispanic whites, we define ethnic identity as degree of attachment to the category "white." Prior work guides this choice (Waters 1990), which we explain later. For Latinos and whites, we define national identity as degree of identification as American: the most common and least ideologically biased version of US national identity (Huddy and Khatib 2007).

Perceptions of one's group in a social order have varied attitudinal implications for minorities and majorities. A minority's lower rank in prestige, power, and resources means that favorable comparisons with relevant out group(s) are hard. Indeed, if one identifies with an in-group to boost self-esteem, then affiliating with a minority group is counterproductive. Thus, minorities will identify with their in-group, despite its lower status, by insisting on greater distinctiveness (Tajfel and Turner 1979). The more unique the group is, the more special it feels, the more one can bolster self-esteem with this cachet. For *e pluribus unum*, this implies that immigrant minorities will stress a unique combo of robust ethnic identity and fledgling national attachment (e.g., Mexican American), as reflected in a positive and modest correlation between these identities (hypothesis 1: modest bond hypothesis). This looser bond also means that these attachments can be sundered, potentially shaping immigrant views of *e pluribus unum* in offsetting ways.<sup>5</sup>

For a majority group in a hierarchy, favorable comparisons with a minority are more direct since they enjoy greater prestige, power, and resources. Studies show that majorities (e.g., whites) project their traits onto larger categories (e.g., nation) to enshrine themselves as prototypical members of shared groups, which reinforces their higher rank (Wenzel, Mummendey, and Waldzus 2007). Thus, heterogeneity in shared categories is threatening to majority groups (Dover, Major, and Kaiser 2016), leading them to display attitudes that bolster their privileged station. Danbold and Huo (2015) show that US whites who read forecasts about their demographic decline sense that their status as "prototypical Americans" is jeopardized, causing them to express opposition to multicultural diversity. For *e pluribus unum*, this means that majority members will generally meld ethnic and national identity, as revealed by a strong and positive correlation between them (hypothesis 2: strong bond hypothesis). This tighter bond also means, contra immigrants, that both identities should pull natives' support for *e pluribus unum* in similar directions.

We think variation in in-group distinctiveness allows political elites to shape whether minorities and majorities strive for *e pluribus unum*. Politics is a wellspring of elite messages about the reputed social standing of immigrants and natives (Abrajano, Hajnal, and Hassell 2017; Dunaway, Branton, and Abrajano 2010; Haynes, Merolla, and Ramakrishnan 2016;

Silber Mohamed 2017; Valentino, Brader, and Jardina 2013). Such discourse often centers on the (in-)compatibility of ethnic and national identity (Gerstle 2001). One theme struck by elites, captured by a "melting pot" idea, is that ethnic and national identity are incompatible, where attachment to the nation demands downplaying one's ethnicity. As former President Theodore Roosevelt once remarked: "The only man who is a good American is the man who is an American and nothing else" (Kennedy and Bailey 2009, 268). Another theme, captured by a "mosaic" notion, is that ethnic and national identity are compatible, as seen in former President Jimmy Carter's words: "we become . . . a beautiful mosaic. Different people, different beliefs, different yearnings, different hopes, different dreams" (Swainson 2000, 183).

If ethnic and national identity are distinctly configured in the minds of immigrant minorities and native majorities, then elite discourse will be processed differently by these groups. We think this occurs via priming, with elites' words making more accessible certain content in memory (Taber and Young 2013). Specifically, we claim that elites' construal of the bond between ethnic and national attachments yields identity-based reactions that then shape people's views of *e pluribus unum*. When elites pose ethnic and national identity as incompatible, we think it threatens the uniqueness of immigrant minorities—who loosely combine their ethnic and national identity—but affirms the distinctiveness of native majorities—who meld their ethnic and national attachments. Immigrants will reply to this threat by endorsing *e pluribus unum*, with national identity driving this response (hypothesis 3a: minority threatened = support hypothesis); or they will spurn this ideal, with ethnic identity motivating this reaction (hypothesis 3b: minority threatened = oppose hypothesis). But, since this rhetoric affirms the homogeneity that a native majority prizes, they will reply by endorsing *e pluribus unum*, with ethnic (hypothesis 3c) or national (hypothesis 3d) identity driving this response (majority affirmed = support hypotheses).

In contrast, when elites portray ethnic and national identity as compatible, the uniqueness of immigrant minorities is maintained but the distinctiveness of native majorities is jeopardized. Immigrants will react to this affirmation by backing *e pluribus unum*, with their national identity driving this response (hypothesis 4a: minority affirmed = support hypothesis); or they can spurn this ideal, with their ethnic identity animating this reaction (hypothesis 4b: minority affirmed = oppose hypothesis). However, since this rhetoric stresses the diversity that native majorities dislike, they will insist on *e pluribus unum*, with their ethnic (hypothesis 4c) or national (hypothesis 4d) identity inspiring this response (majority threatened = support hypotheses). Table 1 catalogs our

5. This hypothesis is also what one should expect if an immigrant minority is undergoing segmented assimilation (Portes and Zhou 1993), where uneven social integration highlights one's sense of ethnic identity, while undercutting one's sense of national belonging. We thank reviewer 4 for this insight.

Table 1. Hypotheses and Observable Implications

Group	Hypothesis	Observable Implications
Identity Bond		
Immigrant minority	<b>H1. Modest bond</b>	Positive, reliable, and modest correlation between ethnic and national ID
Native majority	<b>H2. Strong bond</b>	Positive, reliable, and strong correlation between ethnic and national ID
Incompatible Rhetoric		
Immigrant minority	H3a. Minority threatened = support	Incompatible rhetoric impacts national ID, which drives support of <i>e pluribus unum</i>
Immigrant minority	H3b. Minority threatened = oppose	Incompatible rhetoric impacts ethnic ID, which drives opposition to <i>e pluribus unum</i>
Native majority	H3c. Majority affirmed = support	Incompatible rhetoric impacts national ID, which drives support of <i>e pluribus unum</i>
Native majority	H3d. Majority affirmed = support	Incompatible rhetoric impacts ethnic ID, which drives support of <i>e pluribus unum</i>
Compatible Rhetoric		
Immigrant minority	<b>H4a. Minority affirmed = support</b>	Compatible rhetoric impacts national ID, which drives support of <i>e pluribus unum</i>
Immigrant minority	<b>H4b. Minority affirmed = oppose</b>	Compatible rhetoric impacts ethnic ID, which drives opposition to <i>e pluribus unum</i>
Native majority	<b>H4c. Majority threatened = support</b>	Compatible rhetoric impacts national ID, which drives support of <i>e pluribus unum</i>
Native majority	H4d. Majority threatened = support	Compatible rhetoric impacts ethnic ID, which drives support of <i>e pluribus unum</i>

Note. Bolded entries indicate hypotheses receiving support across our three studies.

hypotheses, with bolded entries denoting those expectations that receive empirical support across our three studies.

### STUDY 1: ETHNIC ID, NATIONAL ID, AND INDIVIDUAL VIEWS OF *E PLURIBUS UNUM*

We begin testing our claims by assessing the varied bond between ethnic and national identity among an immigrant minority and native majority, while demonstrating the asymmetric impact these attachments can have on each group's views of *e pluribus unum*. We use the 2016 American National Election Study (ANES), which has two unrivaled advantages. It contains measures of our main constructs and it probabilistically sampled Latino and white adults, which lets us compare both groups.<sup>6</sup>

We measure ethnic identity with an item pair asking "How important is being [Hispanic/white] to your identity?" each calibrated to Latinos and whites, and completed on a scale from 1 (extremely) to 5 (not at all). We recognize that "Hispanic" is an ethnic classification, while "white" is a racial one. For heuristic purposes, we join scholars who label them ethnic categories to stress that they are subjectively held group attachments in intergroup settings (Sidanius et al. 1997). We gauge national identity with an item using the same 1–5 scale: "How important is being American to your identity?" These items are coded such that higher values reflect stronger identities.<sup>7</sup>

6. In the appendix (OA.1), we more fully explain what we mean by "immigrant minority" and "native majority" with respect to all three studies.

7. Ideally, our measure of Latinos' ethnic identity would tap its national origin form (i.e., identifying as Mexican, Cuban, etc.), rather than the pan-ethnic version here. That measure is unavailable in the ANES. However, pan-ethnic and national origin identity tend to be positively correlated, sometimes remarkably so (Pérez, Deichert, and Engelhardt 2016). Studies 2 and 3 utilize measures of national origin identity among Latinos.

In turn, we gauge support for *e pluribus unum* with three outcomes aligning with our conceptualization: Blend into Society, Pro-Latino Preferences, and US Patriotism. The first two tap views about the emphasis one should give to ethnic solidarity over national unity, while the third assesses a centripetal force that prioritizes national cohesion. Blend into Society captures opinions toward multiculturalism by gauging agreement with the statement “Minorities should adapt to the customs and traditions of the United States,” completed on a scale from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). Pro-Latino Preferences uses the item “How important is it that more Hispanics be elected to political office?” with answers on a scale from 1 (extremely important) to 5 (not at all). Finally, US Patriotism is an item asking, “When you see the American flag does it make you feel . . . ?” with replies on a scale from 1 (extremely good) to 7 (extremely bad). We code all three outcomes so that higher values reflect stronger levels of each orientation.

## STUDY 1'S RESULTS

Part of what makes immigrants and natives distinct, we claim, is how they manage their ethnic and national identities. Immigrant minorities loosely mesh them, as captured by a positive and modest correlation between these attachments. But among a native majority, ethnic and national identity will be robustly correlated, indicating that they nearly fuse them. The 2016 ANES suggests that this is mostly true. For Latinos, the correlation between ethnic and national identity is positive, moderate, and reliable (.32,  $p < .01$ ), which validates our modest bond hypothesis (hypothesis 1). Yet for whites, it is positive, stronger, but still moderate (.38,  $p < .01$ ), which partially supports our strong bond hypothesis (hypothesis 2). We think this last wrinkle is due to measurement error, since we gauge these identities with single items. We revisit this issue with richer data in studies 2–3.<sup>8</sup>

Next, we run separate models for Latinos and whites to test the associations between both identities and each outcome, plus a suite of political, demographic, and (as needed) immigrant-related covariates. We display here only the identity estimates, with all variables rescaled to a 0–1 interval. Full results are in OA.2 (OA.1–OA.12 are available online).

What do we learn from these regressions? The answer varies by group. Among Latinos, table 2 generally shows that ethnic and national identity are reliably associated with views of *e pluribus unum*, but in offsetting ways. Higher ethnic identity levels are related to weaker belief in blending into

8. Hypotheses 1 and 2 align with the work of Sidanius and colleagues (Sidanius et al. 1997). However, we trace our expectations to a distinctiveness motive, while focusing directly on immigrant-native relations.

Table 2. Latino and White Views of *E Pluribus Unum* by Ethnic and National Identity

	Blend into Society	Pro-Latino Preferences	US Patriotism
Latinos:			
Ethnic ID	−.005 (.054)	.401** (.048)	−.118** (.039)
National ID	.191** (.062)	.012 (.056)	.319** (.044)
N	328	329	328
Whites:			
Ethnic ID	.055** (.017)	−.013 (.017)	−.016 (.010)
National ID	.184** (.021)	−.100** (.021)	.289** (.013)
N	2,475	2,460	2,478

Note. Entries are OLS coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. All variables run on a 0–1 interval. The analyses employ weights. 2016 American National Election Study.

\*  $p < .10$ , two-tailed.

\*\*  $p < .05$ .

society (−.005,  $p > .10$ ), stronger pro-Latino preferences (.401,  $p < .01$ ), and decreased US pride (−.118,  $p < .01$ ). Yet, stronger national identity levels are positively correlated with belief in blending into society (.191,  $p < .01$ ), uncorrelated with pro-Latino preferences (.012,  $p > .10$ ), and positively related to patriotism (.319,  $p < .01$ ). These patterns are intuitive and consistent with expectations.<sup>9</sup>

A distinct pattern emerges for whites. For them, higher national identity levels are positively associated with the view that minorities should blend into society (.184,  $p < .01$ ), negatively associated with pro-Latino preferences (−.100,  $p < .01$ ), and positively correlated with US pride (.289,  $p < .01$ ). These patterns, too, are both intuitive and align with expectations. Whites' ethnic identity roughly mimics national identity's influence on these indices of *e pluribus unum*, but these links are reliable only for Blend into Society (.055,  $p < .05$ ), with measurement error a likely culprit here, too.<sup>10</sup>

These results lend some support to our claim that a varied bond exists between ethnic and national identity among immigrant minorities and native majorities. These findings also generally show that ethnic and national identity can variably impact immigrant and native views of *e pluribus unum*. In

9. We find similar patterns using relevant outcomes in the 2006 Latino National Survey (OA.3).

10. Consistent with our conceptualization of *e pluribus unum*, table OA.4 reports theoretically meaningful correlations between our manifestations of this concept.

study 2, we clarify how the links between these identities and support for this ideal are forged by elite rhetoric.

### **STUDY 2: ELITE RHETORIC AND ETHNIC AND NATIONAL IDENTITY**

Insofar as the influence of ethnic and national identity on support for *e pluribus unum* is concerned, we expect elite rhetoric to play a role. We therefore partnered with Survey Sampling International (SSI) to run parallel surveys that randomly assigned 1,300 Latino and 1,300 white adults to (1) a control without elite rhetoric, (2) a treatment with rhetoric stressing the incompatibility of ethnic and national identity, or (3) a treatment with rhetoric stressing the compatibility of ethnic and national identity.<sup>11</sup>

Subjects assigned to treatment read a quotation from Congressman Jake Miller from a recent speech he made, titled “One America, One People” or “One America, Many Peoples.” We attributed this rhetoric to a white lawmaker so that subjects would imagine a similar politician when processing our treatments.<sup>12</sup> We also tied these comments to a hypothetical politician to rule out that any observed effect(s) is driven by familiarity with and/or (dis)liking of an actual politician, which makes our treatments conservative. In his remarks, Congressman Miller explicitly references Latino as well as white subgroups who balance their ethnic and national identities. Specifically, he states:

*Incompatible rhetoric* The only identity that matters in the United States is American identity. We are Americans and nothing else. There are no Mexican-Americans, Irish-Americans, Puerto Rican-Americans, Italian-Americans, Cuban-Americans, Jewish-Americans, or any other hyphenated Americans. We are one people united by the English language and a shared history.

*Compatible rhetoric* All of our identities matter in the United States. We are all Americans and something else. We are Mexican-Americans, Irish-Americans,

11. This study took place in March 2017; OA.5 reports sample demographics. While Latinos mostly chose to complete studies 2 and 3 in English, we found in an experiment reported elsewhere (Pérez et al. 2016) that interview language does not moderate a treatment like the one here. Nonetheless, Latinos in studies 2 and 3 still display meaningful variation by nativity and nativity of parents.

12. We picked the moniker “Jake Miller” based on pretests. The quotations are also hypothetical, with the aim of achieving high internal validity (i.e., cleanly manipulating our independent variable). Through feedback from Vanderbilt University’s RIPS lab group, we designed these quotations to construe ethnic and national identity as (in-)compatible, in line with our theory. We used this protocol for study 3’s treatments.

Puerto Rican-Americans, Italian-Americans, Cuban-Americans, Jewish-Americans, and other hyphenated Americans. We are one people united by many languages and different histories.

Posttreatment, subjects completed item batteries gauging ethnic and national identity, in random order. These were statements on scales from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree) (cf. Pérez 2015). To tap ethnic identity, Latinos reported their ancestry before the experiment, with answers piped into the statements: “Identifying as [e.g., Mexican] is central to who I am as an individual”; “Being [e.g., Mexican] is unimportant to my sense of what kind of person I am”; and “I feel good about being [e.g., Mexican].”<sup>13</sup> For whites, these items used the label “white.” We chose “white” instead of ancestry groups (e.g., Italian, Irish) on theoretical grounds (Jardina 2019; Roediger 2005). As Mary Waters (1990, 147) observes, for non-Hispanic whites, an ancestral identity “does not affect much in everyday life. It does not . . . limit choice of marriage partner. . . . It does not determine where you will live, who your friends will be, what job you will have, or whether you will be subject to discrimination.” What does seem to matter is white identity, especially for political and social judgments in diverse settings (Jardina 2019; Lowery et al. 2012). Finally, we tapped national identity among Latinos and whites with the same three items: “Identifying as American is central to who I am as a person”; “In general, being American is not important to my sense of what kind of person I am”; and “I feel good about being American.”

Subjects then completed four outcomes corresponding to our conceptualization of *e pluribus unum* as a class of inter-related attitudes. These outcomes let us fully tap all four reflections of *e pluribus unum* that we stipulate: (1) support for multiculturalism (Multicultural Education), (2) co-ethnic preferences (Pro-Latino Preferences), (3) patriotism (US Patriotism), and (4) support for homogenizing policies (English Only). We measured belief in multicultural education with a single item inviting subjects to report their agreement with the claim: “history classes in public high schools pay too little attention to the experiences of immigrant groups.” Replies to this item are arrayed on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). We tapped pro-Latino preferences with two items on the same strongly disagree/agree scale: “Latinos should always vote for Latino candidates when they run” and “Latino children should learn and maintain the Spanish

13. To align our treatments with Latinos’ ethnic identity, we tap the latter via national origin identity (e.g., identifying as Mexican, etc.), which is related to, but distinct from, Latinos’ pan-ethnicity (Garcia 2012).

language" (Pérez 2015). We gauged patriotism with the items: "When I hear the American national anthem, it makes me feel" and "When I say the American pledge of allegiance, it makes me feel," with replies from 1 (not proud at all) to 4 (very proud) (Huddy and Khatib 2007). Finally, we appraised support for English only policy via the items: "It is better for everyone if English is the only language used in public schools" and "All government business should be conducted in English only" (Citrin and Sears 2014), with reports on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). All items are coded to reflect greater endorsement of each orientation.

## STUDY 2'S RESULTS

We first revisit the bond between ethnic and national identity among Latinos and whites with three items per attachment, which reduces measurement error. Using confirmatory factor analysis (OA.6), we find that for Latinos, the correlation between these identities is positive, reliable, and moderate (.277,  $p < .01$ ), which reaffirms our modest bond hypothesis (hypothesis 1). Yet for whites, this correlation is positive, reliable, but much stronger (.637,  $p < .01$ ), which fully validates our strong bond hypothesis (hypothesis 2).

We claim that this varied bond between ethnic and national identity affects how immigrant minorities and native majorities react to elite rhetoric about these constructs. We expect ethnic or national identity to mediate the effect of rhetoric on *e pluribus unum*. We test for this via structural equation modeling (SEM) (Baron and Kenny 1986), which tames measurement error and simultaneously evaluates any treatment effects through ethnic and national identity. We scale these results in standard deviation units.

In study 2's treatments, Congressman Miller stresses the (in-)compatibility of ethnic and national identity, while focusing on Latino and white groups. How do Latinos react to these remarks? In terms of incompatible rhetoric, panels A–D in figure 1 reveal that they do not react at all (see italicized paths). Compared to the control, exposure to incompatible rhetoric fails to reliably impact Latinos' ethnic (.056,  $p > .49$ ) and national identity (−.063,  $p < .46$ ).<sup>14</sup> This is inconsistent with our minority threatened = support hypothesis (hypothesis 3a) and minority threatened = oppose hypothesis (hypothesis 3b) (see table 1).

However, what reaction does compatible rhetoric produce when it centers on Latino and white groups? Panels E–H in

figure 2 show that it steers away Latinos from *e pluribus unum*, which aligns with our minority affirmed = oppose hypothesis (hypothesis 4b) (see italicized paths). Compared to the control, compatible rhetoric boosts Latino levels of ethnic identity (.183,  $p < .05$ ), which prompts them to express stronger belief in multicultural education (.161,  $p < .01$ ), stronger pro-Latino preferences (.454,  $p < .01$ ), weaker patriotism (−.049,  $p < .31$ ), and weaker support for English only (−.350,  $p < .01$ ), with all four coefficients in the expected direction and three of them achieving statistical significance. These patterns imply a specific mediation pattern: compatible rhetoric affirms Latinos' ethnic identity, which then turns them away from *e pluribus unum*. OA.8 reports additional evidence that these mediated effects are distinguishable from zero (Judd and Kenny 1981), with three at the 5% level and one just above a 10% cutoff.

But how do whites react to the congressman's remarks? Figure 1 shows that compared to the control, exposure to incompatible rhetoric fails to impact their ethnic (.014,  $p < .87$ ) and national (.029,  $p < .71$ ) identity, similar to Latinos (see de-italicized paths). These results contradict our majority affirmed = support hypotheses (hypothesis 3c–hypothesis 3d). What catalyzes whites are the remarks that motivate Latinos: rhetoric posing ethnic and national identity as compatible. This affirms our majority threatened = support hypothesis (hypothesis 4d): compatible rhetoric affects *e pluribus unum* through whites' national identity.

More specifically, as shown in figure 2, panels E–H, we see that compared to the control, exposure to compatible rhetoric decreases national identity among whites (−.136,  $p < .09$ ), suggesting that this discourse threatens this attachment. This shift then steers them in the direction opposite to that of Latinos. That is, whites' jeopardized sense of national identity drives them to express weaker belief in multicultural education (−.075,  $p < .09$ ), weaker pro-Latino preferences (−.124,  $p < .27$ ), stronger patriotism (1.120,  $p < .01$ ), and stronger support for English only (.227,  $p < .01$ ). Three of these mediated effects are distinguishable from zero at the 10% level or better, with two of them just missing a 5% cutoff (OA.8). Thus, whereas compatible rhetoric affirms Latinos' ethnic identity, which leads them to spurn *e pluribus unum*, the same message threatens whites' national identity, which leads them to double down on this ideal.

## STUDY 3: REPRISING ELITE RHETORIC AND ETHNIC AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

In partnership with SSI, study 3 exposed 1,300 Latino and 1,300 white adults to the (in-)compatible rhetoric from study 2, but this time the congressman's remarks singled out Latinos (e.g., Mexican Americans, Cuban Americans, etc.).

14. Study 2's diagrams are based on SEMs with good fit (Latinos: comparative fit index (CFI) = .952, Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) = .921, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .040; whites: CFI = .930, TLI = .877, RMSEA = .062). OA.7 reports more details about these SEMs, including guards against possible confounding in the path from our mediator(s) to our outcome(s) (Imai, Keele, and Yamamoto 2010).

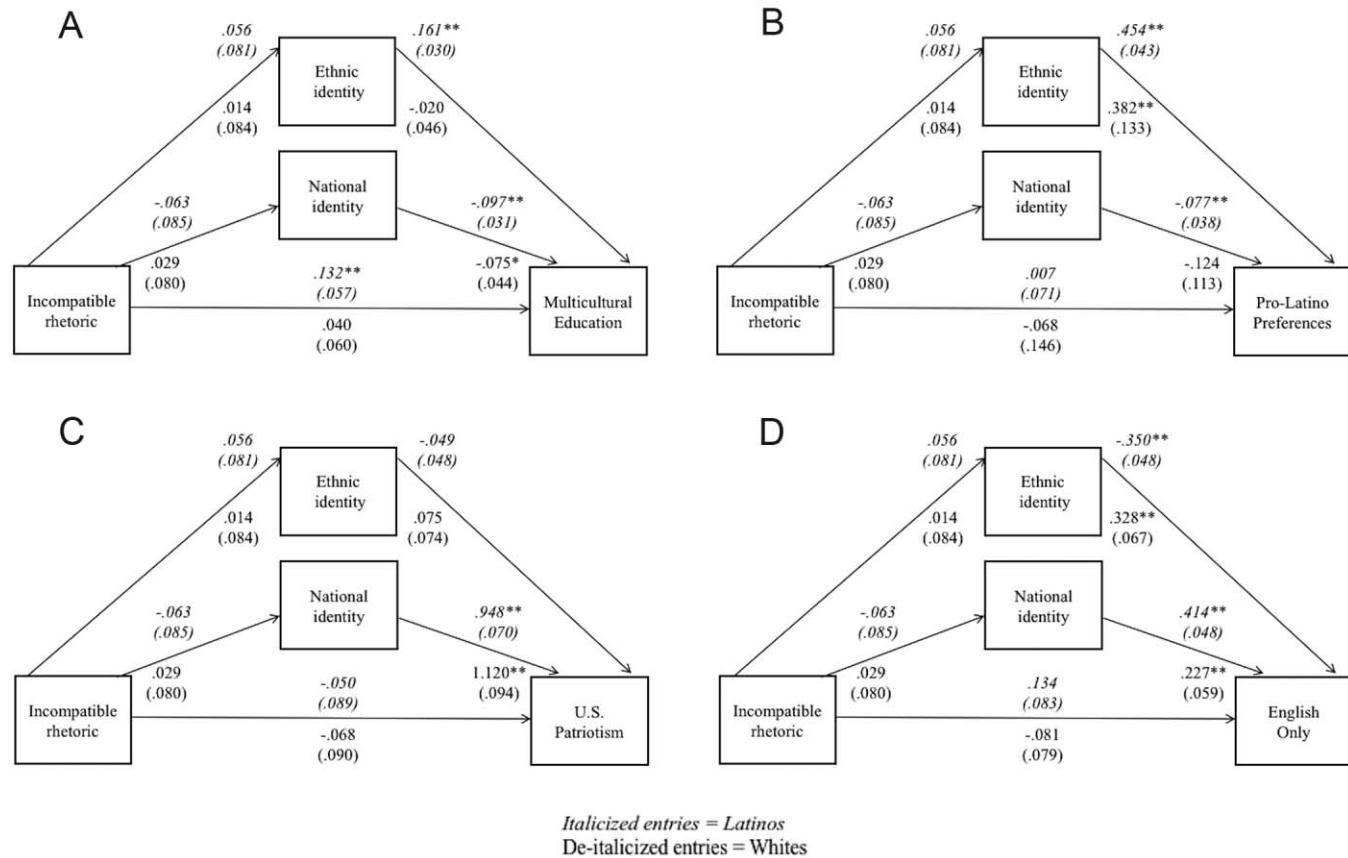


Figure 1. Indirect effect of incompatible rhetoric on *e pluribus unum*, study 2—Latinos and whites. *A*, Multicultural Education; *B*, Pro-Latino Preferences; *C*, US Patriotism; *D*, English Only.

Thus, our treatments here even more strongly underscore Latinos' distinctiveness.<sup>15</sup>

Following assignment to treatment or a control, Latinos and whites answered statements about their ethnic and national identity, which mimicked those in study 2. Next, subjects completed measures of four outcomes: Blend into Society, Pro-Latino Preferences, US Patriotism, and support for English Only. These resembled those used in the previous two studies. Given study 2's results, which supported our directional hypotheses, we report one-tailed *p*-values in the analysis below (cf. Hopkins 2015).

### STUDY 3'S RESULTS

Using confirmatory factor analysis, we uncover additional evidence on the varied bond between ethnic and national identity (OA.10). Among Latinos, ethnic and national identity are positively and modestly correlated (.190, *p* < .01), which supports our modest bond hypothesis (hypothesis 1). Yet among whites, this association is positive and remarkably

robust (.679, *p* < .01), which affirms our strong bond hypothesis (hypothesis 2).<sup>16</sup>

We claim that this varied association between ethnic and national identity mediates minority and majority reactions to elite rhetoric. But recall that study 3's treatments address the (in-)compatibility of ethnic and national identity, while singling out Latinos, which even more sharply stresses their uniqueness. How do they react to this? To answer this, we again assess the mediated effects of elite rhetoric in an SEM framework, with our results scaled in standard deviation units (full results in OA.11).

Consider figure 3, panels A–D (italicized entries).<sup>17</sup> Latinos are unresponsive to incompatible rhetoric, which, again, contradicts our minority threatened = support hypothesis

15. Study 3 took place in September 2017. Sample demographics are in OA.5. Full wording of our treatments, mediators, and outcomes is in OA.9.

16. Study 3's analyses exclude 182 Latinos and 279 whites flagged as inattentive. Our pretreatment covariates and experiment were designed to be completed in about three minutes. Inattentive subjects finished the entire survey—covariates, experiment, mediators, and outcomes—in three minutes or less, making it unlikely they were treated. These exclusions are unrelated to assigned treatment condition.

17. Study 3's diagrams are also based on SEMs with good fit (Latinos: CFI = .971, TLI = .952, RMSEA = .036; whites: CFI = .969, TLI = .949, RMSEA = .044).

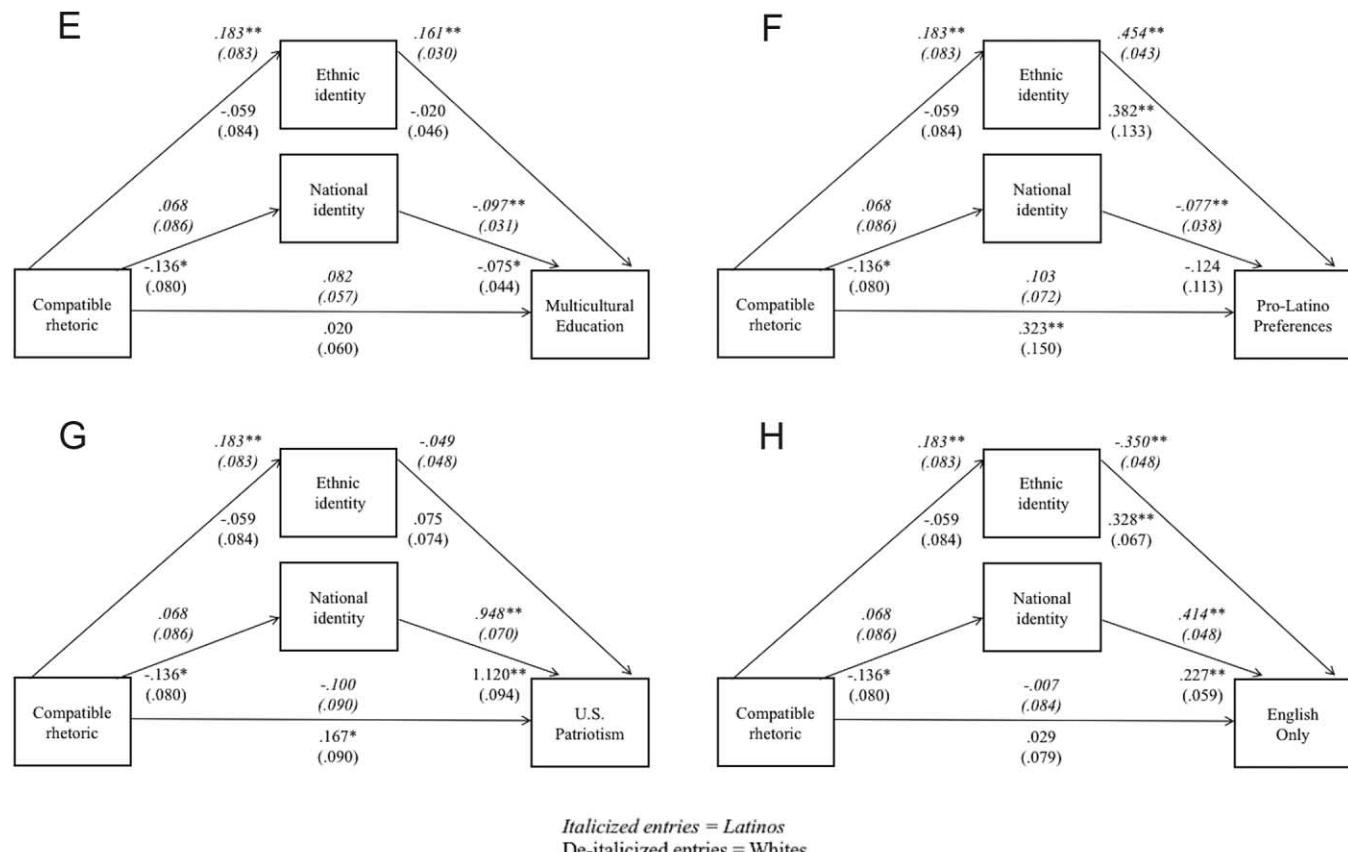


Figure 2. Indirect effect of compatible rhetoric on e pluribus unum, study 2—Latinos and whites. *E*, Multicultural Education; *F*, Pro-Latino Preferences; *G*, US Patriotism; *H*, English Only.

(hypothesis 3a) and minority threatened = oppose hypothesis (hypothesis 3b) (see table 1). Compared to the control, exposure to this rhetoric fails to shift their ethnic ( $-.023, p < .39$ ) and national ( $-.040, p < .31$ ) identity. What Latinos react to one more time is compatible rhetoric: the message that ethnic and national identity can coexist among Latinos (see fig. 4). Yet unlike in study 2, this Latino-focused version of compatible rhetoric boosts their national identity (.156,  $p < .03$ ), which drives them toward e pluribus unum. This supports our minority affirmed = support hypothesis (hypothesis 4a). Compatible rhetoric heightens Latinos' national identity, which increases belief in ethnic groups blending into society (.409,  $p < .01$ ), decreases pro-Latino preferences ( $-.118, p < .01$ ), increases patriotism (.707,  $p < .01$ ), and increases support for English only (.376,  $p < .01$ ). Two of these mediated effects are reliable at the 5% level, with the other two at the 10% level (OA.8).

How do whites react when elite rhetoric centers on Latino subgroups? Figure 3 shows that exposure to incompatible rhetoric elicits an effect, which supports our majority affirmed = support hypothesis (hypothesis 3d) (see table 1). Rhetoric portraying ethnic and national identity as conflictual (with Latinos embodying this tension) increases whites'

national identity (.145,  $p < .04$ ). This heightened national identity then increases belief that ethnic groups should blend into society (.203,  $p < .01$ ), increases patriotism (.820,  $p < .01$ ), and increases support for English only (.123,  $p < .02$ ). The exception here is that whites' national identity fails to shift pro-Latino preferences (.062,  $p < .11$ ). All three mediated effects are different than zero at the 10% level, with two just shy of a 5% cutoff (OA.8).

Turning to compatible rhetoric, a different pattern arises. Figure 4 shows that exposure to compatible rhetoric (focused on Latino subgroups) does not elicit a reaction among whites. Compared to the control, exposure to compatible rhetoric fails to impact their ethnic ( $-.010, p < .46$ ) and national identity (.045,  $p < .30$ ), which contradicts our majority threatened = support hypotheses (hypotheses 4c–4d) (see table 1). Thus, study 3 suggests that insofar as a minority and majority can be driven toward e pluribus unum based on their national identity, the rhetorical spark behind this reaction varies by group.

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

We have argued that immigrant minorities believe they are distinctive insofar as they blend a robust ethnic identity and burgeoning national attachment. Yet native majorities imagine

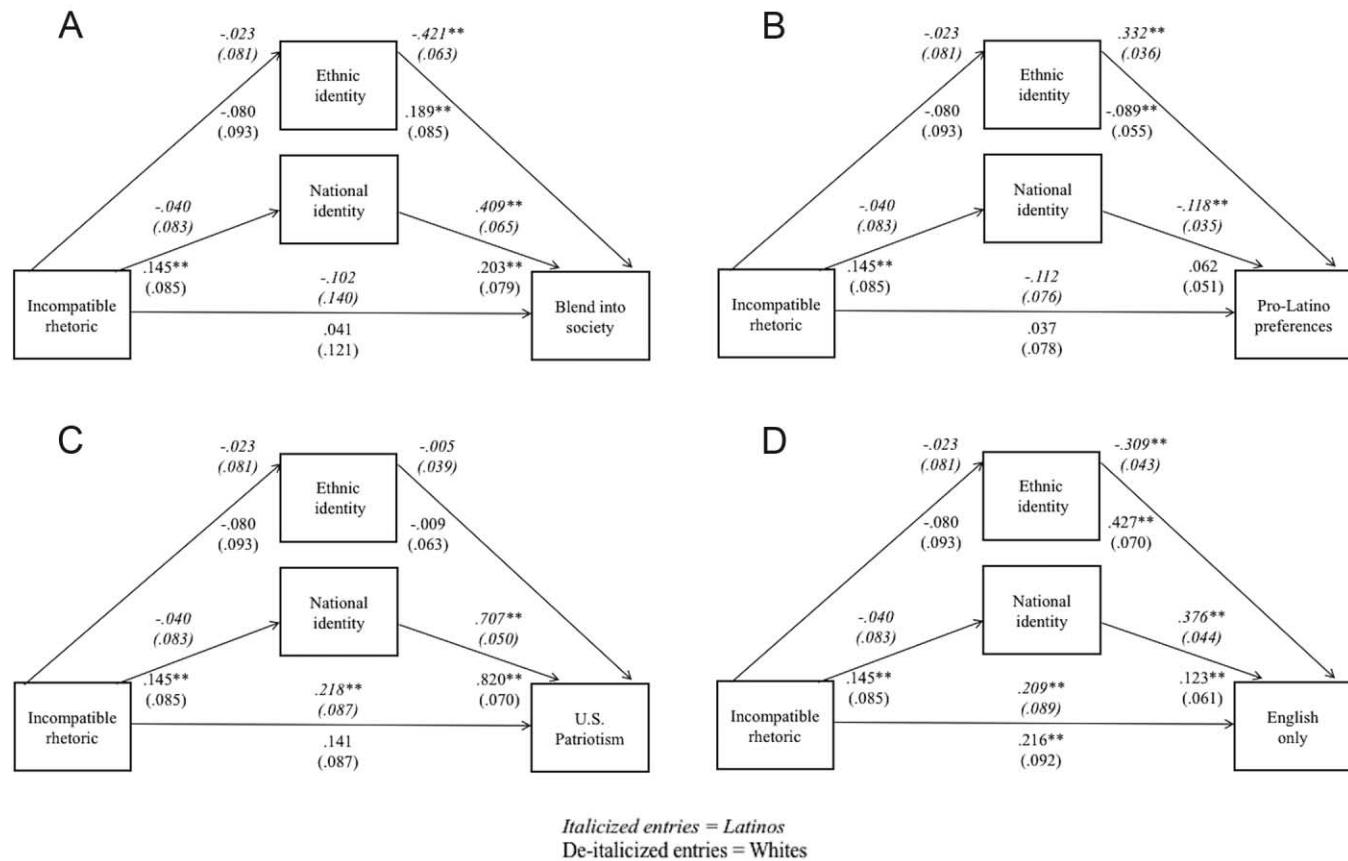


Figure 3. Indirect effect of incompatible rhetoric on e pluribus unum, study 3—Latinos and whites. A, Blend into Society; B, Pro-Latino Preferences; C, US Patriotism; D, English Only.

they are distinctive inasmuch as they fuse their ethnic and national identities. This varied interface, we say, shapes each group's endorsement or spurning of e pluribus unum. Across three studies, we found converging evidence for these claims.

Many nations like the United States have experienced growth in their share of immigrant minorities just as their stock of natives has dipped (Masuoka and Junn 2013). These trends should bear weakly on whether national cohesion is undermined, for immigrants and natives share an element to connect them: a sense of national attachment. But our work suggests that a country's unity partly depends on how elites describe the "right" balance between ethnic and national identity. Indeed, contemporary politicians, like President Donald J. Trump, have used immigrant diversity to politically galvanize whites, even as the president's detractors use the same subject to reaffirm what makes America quintessentially American (Collingwood, Lajevardi, and Oskooi 2018). Hence, immigrant diversity can be managed—or mismanaged—simply by the words political elites speak.

This is not the entire story. Our treatments suggest that politicians' words nudge immigrants and natives in varied directions with respect to e pluribus unum, which aligns with work on political discourse and public attitudes toward im-

migration (Abrajano et al. 2017; Haynes et al. 2016).<sup>18</sup> Less clear is whether elites' partisanship moderates these effects. We did not examine this because we sought conservative estimates about whether politicians' words alone could propel people toward or away from e pluribus unum, without other confounds. Having established this, future work might appraise how other elite attributes (e.g., partisanship) condition these effects.

Our studies also leave open whether only political elites can induce these effects. Our evidence shows that politicians' words can prime distinct identities, leading people to express varied views of e pluribus unum. Indeed, among whites, the effect of elite rhetoric on opinions toward e pluribus unum was consistently transmitted through their heightened sense of national identity. In contrast, the effects of elite rhetoric on Latinos were transmitted via their ethnic or national identity depending on elites' exact words, suggesting that their opinions on this matter are more context dependent. Still, we find it plausible that nonpolitical figures can induce similar

18. Our experiments cannot credibly assess which Latinos and whites react stronger to elite rhetoric, since they are powered to detect average mediation effects. Future work should clarify this aspect of our results.

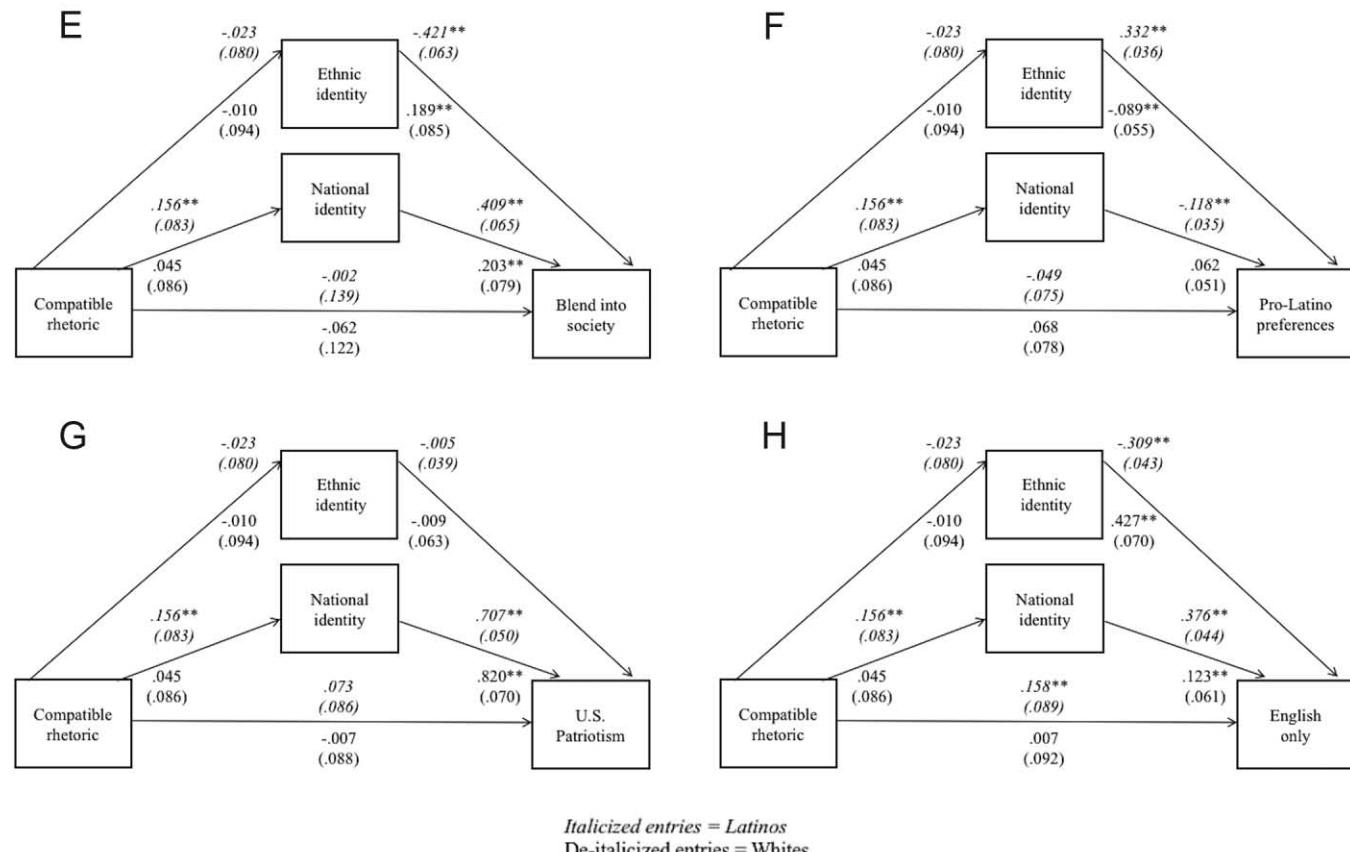


Figure 4. Indirect effect of compatible rhetoric on *e pluribus unum*, study 3—Latinos and whites. *E*, Blend into Society; *F*, Pro-Latino Preferences; *G*, US Patriotism; *H*, English Only.

effects (Silber Mohamed 2017). Yet this would not negate our results. Rather, it would show just how far-reaching words about the bond between ethnic and national identity really are.<sup>19</sup>

We also find sparse evidence for heterogeneous treatment effects by nativity among immigrant minorities (OA.12). While such heterogeneity is highly plausible (cf. García 2012; Pedraza 2014), our null results here do not rule them out. Our experiments were designed to detect meaningful average treatment effects. Thus, any analysis of heterogeneous effects will, perforce, undercut the statistical power of these studies, making it harder to detect robust interactions. This simply underlines a need for further research, with even larger sample sizes, that can unearth such heterogeneity.

Finally, although we find consistent evidence of our hypothesized mechanism in our Latino experiments, there is

still room for improvement here. Studies 2 and 3 tested our expectations in samples with a greater preponderance of US-born Latinos. This was by design, since juggling one's ethnic and national identity is acute among these members of immigrant groups (Alba and Nee 2003; Portes and Zhou 1993). But this raises a question of external validity, that is, to what degree can one detect similar effects across studies in varied settings and with different outcomes, subjects, and treatment operationalizations? Our experiments perform well on most of these dimensions, yet additional work could clarify how much stronger (weaker) our mechanism becomes in samples with a greater prevalence of foreign-born individuals.

Ultimately, though, we believe our results teach us something new about identity and *e pluribus unum*. Among immigrant minorities, elites' words force an uneasy choice between two attachments. Not all words. After all, rhetoric depicting these attachments as incompatible did not stir Latinos, implying that this is a prevalent message they already hear.<sup>20</sup> But when elites insist these attachments are compatible,

19. We also leave open whether our Latino results are conditioned by racial self-classification. US census data reveal that most Latinos categorize themselves as ethnically Latino but racially white (Ennis, Rios-Vargas, and Albert 2011). Debate exists about this trend's meaning (Garcia Bedolla 2009), yet we think it merits further study since our focus is self-identification with groups, not self-classification into groups.

20. This result meshes with the notion that Latinos, on average, are experiencing segmented assimilation (Portes and Zhou 1993), which stresses their ethnic identity yet undermines their national belonging.

Latinos decide between them. And, whether they choose national over ethnic identity depends on how “special” this rhetoric makes them feel, with greater affirmation of their uniqueness leading them to use national identity as a guide for *e pluribus unum*.

Among a native majority like whites, elites’ words seem to have less latitude. For whites, upholding *e pluribus unum* seems to be standard operating procedure, although their underlying motivation is different. They seek to preserve their hegemony in America’s ethnic hierarchy, as evidenced by their checks on diversity’s expressions. Indeed, irrespective of whether whites’ distinctiveness was affirmed or threatened, they consistently endorsed *e pluribus unum* to brush back social heterogeneity.

Perhaps our main lesson, then, is that elites face stark trade-offs when engaging the public in diversity’s shifting sands. Affirm immigrant minorities, and you risk roiling a native majority. Appease a native majority, and you risk further marginalizing immigrant minorities. Although we did not find one, we suspect elites could galvanize both groups toward *e pluribus unum* on the same motivational basis. But that message has its work cut out, for it must reassure two politically relevant groups that there is more cachet in being an integrated whole than coexisting in relative disarray.

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