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# Ricochet: How Elite Discourse Politicizes Racial and Ethnic Identities

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**Abstract** Political elites often discuss racial/ethnic outgroups in a critical light. I claim this discourse raises the salience of group identity while impugning its worth, thus inducing differential political reactions among high and low identifying group members. Specifically, high identifiers will engage in political efforts that restore their identity's positive value by displaying ingroup favoritism and challenging the source of their group's devaluation. In contrast, low identifiers will actively decline political opportunities to bolster their group's devalued status. Using a national survey experiment, I randomly assigned eligible but unregistered Latino voters to a *control* group without elite discourse; a *non-devaluing* condition with elite discourse focused on illegal immigration; or, a *devaluing* condition with elite discourse focused on illegal immigration and critical of illegal immigrants. High identifying Latinos in the *devaluing* condition expressed greater pro-Latino political attitudes and a stronger intention to register and vote in a pending presidential election. This dynamic was absent in the other conditions and unrelated to Latinos' partisan identity. These results suggest an identity-to-politics link is robustly forged among high identifying group members when they sense a devaluation of their group.

**Keywords** Social identity theory (SIT) · Racial and ethnic politics · Latino politics · Survey experiments

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## Introduction

The connection between group identity and politics has proven vexing for researchers. Many scholars have documented the prevalence of racial and ethnic identities among members of minority groups, including African Americans, Latinos, and Asians (e.g., Dawson 1994; Jones-Correa and Leal 1996; Lien 1994). Yet the relationship between group identity and political attitudes and behavior has been hard to consistently reproduce, with some studies detecting robust evidence (Shingles 1981; Dawson 1994; Chong and Rogers 2005; Sanchez 2006; Junn and Masuoka 2008; Kinder and Dale-Riddle 2012) and others finding weak or null results (Uhlaner et al. 1989; Tate 1991; Lien 1994; Leighley and Vedlitz 1999).

This mixed pattern presents a puzzle. Many scholars believe group identity matters politically, yet a fog hangs over *when* and among *whom* it is politicized. This paper dissipates some of this fog by proposing and testing one psychological mechanism that explains how group identity is catapulted into politics, thus heeding a growing chorus of scholars urging analysts to clarify the conditions under which group identity is politicized (Lee 2008; Junn and Masuoka 2008; Chong and Rogers 2005). As Junn (2006, pp. 34–35) advises, "(r)ather than assuming a relationship,…research should…systematically observe situations under which social identities become political, how consciousness is forged, and when participation is mobilized".

I illuminate some of these circumstances by drawing on social identity theory (SIT) (Tajfel and Turner 1979), which teaches that threats to a group's worth elicit specific reactions from people based on their level of identification with a group (Ethier and Deaux 1994; Ellemers et al. 1997).[1] Specifically, high identifiers respond to group devaluation by engaging in collective efforts that restore their group's positive worth (Ellemers et al. 1997; Branscombe et al. 1999a; Leach et al. 2010), while low identifiers react by shunning opportunities to bolster their group's status (Spears et al. 1997; Doosje et al. 2002; Garcia Bedolla 2005).

Seizing on these insights, I argue that elite discourse can threaten one's racial/ethnic identity, thereby forging a strong link between group identity and politics. Scholars have observed that political elites often discuss policies in terms of racial outgroups who are presumed beneficiaries (Nelson and Kinder 1996; Brader et al. 2008). This group-centrism is meant to engage white Americans by organizing their political judgments around visible outgroups and their alleged moral failings (Kinder 1998). It is plausible, however, that such rhetoric might ricochet by politicizing members of the non-white group it highlights.

I therefore theorize that when elites discuss racial/ethnic minorities in a critical light, they raise the salience of group identity and devalue its worth. Consequently, high identifiers will engage in political efforts to affirm their identity's positive value by displaying ingroup favoritism and challenging the threat's source (Ellemers et al. 1999; Doosje et al. 1999). In contrast, low identifiers will actively decline political opportunities to bolster their group's devaluation (Doosje et al. 2002; Garcia Bedolla

[1] I use *identification*, *commitment*, and *attachment* interchangeably throughout the paper (cf. Ellemers et al. 2002).

2005). In these ways, disparaging elite discourse triggers an identity-to-politics link among high identifiers in a racial/ethnic outgroup (Lee 2008).

I test my claims in the realm of Latino politics. Sustained immigration from Latin America has transformed Latinos into the largest U.S. racial/ethnic minority (Census Bureau 2011). Yet despite this growth, Latino political participation lags behind whites and non-whites (Abrajano and Alvarez 2010; Arvizu 1994; Verba et al. 1993; Calvo and Rosenstone 1989). This trend is partly fueled by a deep pool of eligible but unregistered voters: individuals who formally meet voting requirements, but remain politically disengaged (DeSipio 1996). Short of campaign outreach or other mobilization efforts (Michelson 2005; Ramírez 2005; Shaw et al. 2000), this gap in Latino political behavior lacks a quick solution, for the factors that promote it—e.g., relative youth, less education—improve only gradually with time (Abrajano and Alvarez 2010; Arvizu and Garcia 1996). I claim, however, that the focus and tone of elite discourse can compel some Latinos to offset these deficits by politicizing group identity.

To this end, I examine elite rhetoric on illegal immigration. For more than two decades, Latinos have been the focus of immigration discourse (Valentino et al. 2013), with much of it centering on illegal immigrants (Chavez 2001; Santa Ana 2002). The issue of illegal immigration therefore makes ethnic identity salient for many Latinos (Garcia Bedolla 2005). Based on this insight, I commissioned a national survey experiment that identified eligible but unregistered Latino voters and randomly assigned them to one of three conditions: (1) a *control* group without elite discourse; (2) a *non-devaluing* condition with elite discourse simply focused on illegal immigration; and (3) a *devaluing* condition with elite discourse focused on illegal immigration and criticizing illegal immigrants. I find that relative to low identifiers, high identifying Latinos in the devaluing condition report greater pro-Latino political attitudes and a stronger intention to register and vote in a subsequent presidential election. This dynamic is absent in the remaining experimental conditions and unaffected by Latinos' sense of partisan identity. These results show the interplay between elite discourse and group attachment can politicize racial/ethnic identities. I conclude by explaining how my framework supplements current understandings of Latino politics, while helping to clarify the politicization of identity among non-Latinos.

## The Puzzle: A Sporadic Link Between Group Identity and Politics

Scholars have long suspected a tie between racial/ethnic identity and politics, with some studies confirming this link. Consider the case of African Americans. In the 1960s, scholars began finding a strong association between racial identity and political participation (e.g., Verba and Nie 1972; Olsen 1970; Danigelis 1978; Miller et al. 1981; Shingles 1981). Racial identity seemed to heighten group consciousness, thus boosting Black political behavior. This *identity-to-politics link*—as Lee (2008) dubs it—manifests itself today in scholarship on linked fate (Dawson 1994), which shows that political choice is often shaped by a belief that one's fortunes are tied to those of one's racial group.

Two lasting lessons emerge from this literature. First, there is rich heterogeneity in racial identity. Individuals—here, African Americans—differ incrementally and reliably in their degree of group attachment (e.g., Verba and Nie 1972; Miller et al. 1981; Dawson 1994; McClain et al. 2009; Lee 2008). Second, individual differences in group identity can help to explain variation in political behavior. That is, racial/ethnic identity can be politically consequential.

But as Chong and Rogers (2005) point out, the joining of racial/ethnic identity to politics is inconsistently supported by data (cf. Junn 2006; Lee 2008; McClain et al. 2009). For example, while Dawson (1994) and others (Verba and Nie 1972; Shingles 1981; Kinder and Dale-Riddle 2012) show racial identity shapes Black political behavior, Leighley and Vedlitz (1999) find it is unrelated to voting and other participatory acts (cf. Tate 1991; Marschall 2001; Verba et al. 1995). These null results extend to Latinos and Asians (Leighley and Vedlitz 1999), with additional studies on these latter groups sometimes finding a substantial relationship (e.g., Sanchez 2006; Junn and Masuoka 2008; Manzano and Sanchez 2010) and other times finding inconsistent or null associations (e.g., Uhlaner et al. 1989; Lien 1994; Verba et al. 1995).

These mixed results suggest the identity-to-politics link is difficult to anticipate and detect. As a result, some political scientists argue group identification and group consciousness are distinct, rather than interchangeable concepts (Chong and Rogers 2005; Lee 2008; McClain et al. 2009). Identification is the degree of group attachment. Consciousness is a sense of attachment *plus* an awareness of the status of one's group and strategies for enhancing this standing. Seizing on this distinction, some scholars have proposed measures to capture a fuller sense of the ideas and tactics to improve a group's status that follow from heightened group consciousness (Miller et al. 1981; Shingles 1981). For instance, Chong and Rogers (2005) predict Black political behavior with richer measures tapping racial identity and ideological beliefs about blacks' status (e.g., racial disparities are produced by discrimination and are illegitimate). They find that while racial identity is modestly associated with participation, group consciousness exerts a strong influence. Junn (2006, p. 41) explains, however, that despite gains in measurement, many scholars still find it hard to unearth this link, especially beyond Black Americans, where research often focuses: "(t)he effects of consciousness are either not there to begin with or wash out after including other potent predictors of political activity".

This checkered evidence on the identity-to-politics link makes it tempting to conclude that racial/ethnic identity is not as politically relevant as many scholars suspect. But this inference would be premature, for sporadic evidence can also result from the choice of research design. The identity-to-politics link is often studied via a regression-based approach, where scholars look for an association between group identity and political behavior, net of confounding factors. A significant association here implies that group identity shapes political behavior. Nevertheless, such a result averages across varied elite rhetoric about political issues.

Elite messages about issues are not uniform, however. These communications vary, and with them, the reactions people have toward them. If we acknowledge this fluidity in elite rhetoric, then we might learn that the sporadic link between identity and politics stems from overlooking variation in the influence of group identity in

light of specific types of elite discourse. That is, the joining of group identity to political attitudes and behavior perhaps emerges only under specific conditions (Junn and Masuoka 2008; Lee 2008). Conceding this possibility arguably positions scholars to better explain *when* group identity is politicized.

Furthermore, we know that people who strongly identify with their racial/ethnic group are more willing to act on its political behalf because these individuals value their group that much more than other group members (Doosje et al. 1999). By focusing on individual differences in group attachment rather than group membership (Lee 2008), we might learn more precisely among *whom* racial/ethnic identity is politicized under specific political circumstances.

Seizing these twin sources of heterogeneity demands a flexible theory to explain when and among whom group identity affects politics. This is a tall order, but the challenge is not unique to minority politics. As Elster (1989, p. 9) explains, scholars "can isolate tendencies, propensities, and mechanisms and show that they have implications for behavior…What they are more rarely able to do is to state necessary and sufficient conditions under which the various mechanisms are switched on". I propose below some conditions that "switch on" the link between group identity and politics. Specifically, I trace the elusiveness of this link to its situational character. By my account, group identity is not necessarily political by nature. Yet for some people, under some circumstances, identity is politicized, thus motivating them toward political engagement. From this view, group consciousness is a phenomenon emerging under some political conditions among some individuals, rather than a mindset generally held by group members. Thus, strategies to improve a group's status follow from a politicized identity, not necessarily from identity itself. In some cases, then, the mystifying absence of an identity-to-politics link arises from not observing the "right" people under the "right" circumstances.

## Identity, Elite Discourse, and Political Engagement: A Social Identity Approach (SIT)

To explain the politicization of racial/ethnic identity, I draw on SIT (Tajfel and Turner 1979) and its offshoot, self-categorization theory (Turner et al. 1987).[2]

SIT posits that people are strongly motivated to uphold a positive image of themselves (Tajfel and Turner 1979). Toward this end, individuals preserve the positive distinctiveness of groups they belong to—in other words, they ensure one's ingroup(s) compares favorably against an outgroup(s). Yet positive distinctiveness is not an innate group trait. As Ellemers et al. (2002, p. 165) explain, "it is the social context, rather than specific group features, that determines the evaluative flavor of any given group membership." Hence, threats to a group's worth elicit specific reactions from group members—reactions that hinge on one's level of identification with a group (Ethier and Deaux 1994; Doosje et al. 1995; Ellemers et al. 1997, 1999; Spears et al. 1997; Doosje et al. 2002; Leach et al. 2010).

[2] My use of social identity theory and self-categorization theory emphasizes the synergy between both lines of work. This does not mean there are no differences between them (Huddy 2001).

In particular, high identifiers are more invested in a group because it is critical to their self-image. Hence, they generally react to group devaluation by engaging in collective efforts that affirm their group's positive worth (Ellemers et al. 1997). As Leach et al. (2010, p. 548) observe, "the response to evidence that 'others devalue us' [is] to assert that 'I value us' (Leach et al. 2010, p. 548)". This comports with Branscombe et al.'s (1999a) rejection-identification model, which shows that affirmation of one's group in the wake of social devaluation allows high identifying group members to preserve the positive self-image so many individuals deem important (cf. Armenta and Hunt 2009; Cronin et al. 2012). In contrast, low identifiers are not as committed to a group because it is less central to their self-image. Thus, they often abstain from bolstering their group's impugned status and, if possible, dissociate themselves from a devalued group (Spears et al. 1997; Doosje et al. 2002; Garcia Bedolla 2005).

Building on these insights, I claim elite discourse can sometimes threaten the positive worth of racial/ethnic identity. When deliberating over policy proposals, political elites often center their discussions on racial outgroups who are likely to benefit from these measures. These group-centric discussions are designed to politically galvanize members of a white racial majority (Nelson and Kinder 1996; Brader et al. 2008). As Kinder (1998: 805) explains, such group-centrism reduces "…complex and increasingly technical questions of policy by turning them into judgments on the moral qualifications of the groups involved". Consider Ronald Reagan's use of the *welfare queen* to build public opposition to social welfare policy (Hancock 2004; Gilliam 1999; Gilens 1999). Reagan first used this phrase in the 1976 campaign trail, when he recounted the story of a South Side Chicago woman charged with welfare fraud:

> *She has 80 names, 30 addresses, 12 social security cards and is collecting veteran's benefits on four non-existing deceased husbands. And she is collecting social security on her cards. She's got Medicaid, getting food stamps, and she is collecting welfare under each of her names* (*quoted in* Gilliam 1999, p. 50)

These rhetorical flourishes were designed to win over white conservative voters. Yet by raising the specter of a *welfare queen*, Reagan was also arguably raising the salience of black racial identity while impugning its worth—a feat accomplished by making negative allegations about a marginalized segment (black women on welfare) of a larger group (African Americans). Indeed, despite objective evidence to the contrary, a stereotype persists that the majority of welfare recipients are black (Gilliam 1999; Gilens 1999).

Thus, I claim that when political elites discuss issues by focusing on a marginalized segment of a larger racial/ethnic group and alleging negative qualities about it, they raise the salience of an identity while devaluing its worth (Branscombe et al. 1999b; Steele et al. 2002; Garcia Bedolla 2005). Since this identity threat arises in the political sphere, it will provoke differential political reactions among high and low identifying members of the disparaged group (Jackson et al. 1996; Ellemers et al. 1997). Specifically, I hypothesize (H1a) that in light of elite rhetoric that devalues a group, high identifying group members will

engage in political efforts that reinforce ingroup favoritism and challenge the source of the threat (Ellemers et al. 1999; Doosje et al. 1999; Leach et al. 2010). In contrast, I expect (H1b) that low identifiers will actively decline political opportunities to counter their group's devaluation and, if possible, dissociate from the ingroup (Spears et al. 1997; Ellemers et al. 2002; Garcia Bedolla 2005).

## The Empirical Case: Eligible but Unregistered Latino Voters

Using SIT, I locate an identity-to-politics link in the interplay between identity strength and varied political discourse, thus allowing me to identify situations under which group identity is politicized. But political applications of SIT are not beyond reproach (Huddy 2001). SIT often centers on trivial identities easily manipulated in experimental labs. In seminal SIT work, for instance, social groups were based on frivolous distinctions, like whether one over-/under-counted dots on a screen (Tajfel et al. 1971). This example is a far cry from the more durable and socially consequential identities that race and ethnicity are known to be (Horowitz 1985). Thus, if my SIT-inspired framework is to have any use for political science, I must show that non-trivial identities (race/ethnicity) can affect people outside a laboratory setting (the polity).

With this in mind, I test my claims on eligible but unregistered Latino voters. Despite sustained population growth, Latino political involvement often lags behind non-Latinos (e.g., Abrajano and Alvarez 2010; Arvizu and Garcia 1996; Hero and Campbell 1996; Calvo and Rosenstone 1989). DeSipio (1996) teaches us that this occurs in part because Latinos are segmented into various subgroups that diminish the potential size of the Latino electorate, including individuals who are eligible but unregistered to vote (i.e., "Reluctants"); individuals who are registered to vote but are not voting (i.e., "Reticents"); and non-U.S. citizens who are eligible to naturalize and, hence, vote (i.e., "Recruits"). Here "Reluctants" are especially hard to mobilize since they are eligible to vote yet remain outside of the formal political system due to their relative youth and lower levels of education and wealth (DeSipio 1996). These characteristics generally keep any person from voting, but they are especially prevalent in the Latino community, which has deep immigrant roots (Abrajano and Alvarez 2010). Thus, while eligible but unregistered Latinos are a subset of the larger Latino electorate, they are a stringent test case because such individuals are strongly predisposed toward political *dis*engagement.[3]

Political disengagement of this variety has often been explained in terms of the costs people face (e.g., studying political candidates), as parsimoniously illustrated by the calculus of voting, $R = PB - C + D$ (Riker and Ordeshook 1968). Here R is the reward one gains from voting, $P$ is the probability one's vote decides an election, B is the benefit one derives from a candidate winning over another, C is the

[3] This is not to say that "Reluctants" and "Recruits" are not worthy of systematic study. However, time and resource constraints limited my ability to simultaneously examine all three of these Latino sub-electorates within a single study. For example, studying "Reluctants" would require items (e.g., decision to naturalize) that could not be added without removing other questions essential to my hypothesis tests (i.e., Latino identity).

cost of voting, and D is the psychological benefit to voting, such as a personal sense of efficacy or civic duty. Since *P* is small, it is generally believed a person will be unlikely to vote given its high cost C, unless a psychological benefit D can defray it. Nevertheless, Fowler and Kam (2007) show the size of B can grow if a person senses their ingroup will benefit from her participation, thus increasing political involvement. From this angle, then, my theory addresses B by suggesting some Latinos will psychologically offset identity threats by engaging in political efforts that bolster their group's status.

The merit of testing my theory in the realm of Latino politics is further affirmed by two research areas hinting at a link between identity threat and political behavior, yet leaving unaddressed the interplay between elite discourse and group identity. First, some studies find anti-immigrant politics boost Latino political involvement (e.g., Ramírez and Fraga 2008; Merolla et al. 2012). Specifically, Pantoja et al. (2001) show that Prop. 187—California's 1994 anti-immigrant ballot initiative—led many Latino immigrants to naturalize and become active voters: a pattern unmatched by co-ethnics in states with less hostile reactions to foreigners (cf. Pantoja and Segura 2003). Evidence from other states supports this insight. In Nevada's 2010 senatorial election, for example, about 90 % of Latino voters supported Democratic incumbent Harry Reid—an outcome many observers attributed to the anti-immigrant rhetoric of his rival, Republican Sharron Engle (García 2012, p. 117; Grier 2010). Clearly, then, threatening contexts can affect politics. What is less clear, however, is why these contexts are threatening and why people respond to them along ethnic rather than partisan lines. I contribute to this work by stressing the positivity of group identity and threats posed to it by political elites through group-centric discourse.

Second, García Bedolla (2005) shows Latino perceptions of social stigma can affect one's sense of identity. Specifically, she marshals powerful evidence that in *intra*-group settings, some Latinos dissociate themselves from the ethnic group to create distance from negative Latino stereotypes, thus undermining collective political action. By focusing on an *inter*-group context, I will show that even if some Latinos disengage from their ethnic group to counter its stigmatization, others will come to its "political rescue" if they sense it is devalued: a process rooted in the interplay between identity strength and political threats to a group.

## Research Design

I expect an identity-to-politics link will emerge among some group members in light of threat to the worth of one's group. To test my claim, I commissioned a 12-minute nationally representative survey of 1,203 Latino adults. The survey contained an experiment that is the basis for my analysis. This experiment (1) identified eligible but unregistered Latino voters ($n = 192$), and (2) randomly assigned them to one of three conditions manipulating the focus and tone of elite rhetoric on illegal immigration (details to follow below). By design, this experiment is sufficiently powered to detect a medium-sized effect (Table A, in Supporting Information).

## Sample

Survey experiments blend the causal inferential power of laboratory experiments with the generalizability allowed by representative opinion surveys (Mutz 2011). My survey experiment was conducted via Internet by Knowledge Networks (KN), which maintains an online research panel that is representative of the U.S. Latino population. Panel members are first recruited through probability-based sampling and furnished with access to the Internet and computer hardware to complete a study, if needed. Unlike online "opt-in" research panels, which are comprised by persons with web access who volunteer for research, KN respondents are not self-selected Internet users. Rather, KN samples are both randomly drawn and representative of a given U.S. population. KN fielded this specific study from September 23 to October 3, 2011. The study was administered in English or Spanish and had an overall completion rate of 53.7 %.

Similar to other Latino surveys, most respondents in my KN study were of Mexican origin (57 %). Furthermore, my KN subsample of eligible but unregistered Latino voters resembles the same type of respondents identified by the benchmark 2006 Latino National Survey (LNS) (Fraga et al. 2006), which was administered via telephone. Table 1 shows that 10 % of the LNS sample was identified as eligible but unregistered to vote, compared with 16 % in the KN survey. The median age in this LNS subsample was 33 years; in the KN study, it was 34. Moreover, despite item wording differences, respondents in each subsample displayed comparable median levels of education and income.

## Protocol and Measures

Like other surveys (e.g., Fraga et al. 2006), KN identified eligible but unregistered Latino voters by asking adult respondents with U.S. citizenship the following item at the beginning of the survey: "Are you currently registered to vote?" Those answering "no" comprise the sub-sample under study ($n = 192$).[4] Following this question, respondents answered a 4-point item gauging their degree of Latino identity: "Being Latino is unimportant to my sense of what kind of person I am." Responses ranged from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (4), with higher values indicating greater levels of Latino identity. This basic identity measure has two virtues. First, it is part of a larger battery of extensively tested items used by psychologists to gauge identification strength in several contexts (cf. Luhtanen and Crocker 1992; Spears et al. 1999), including among Latino subjects (Ethier and Deaux 1994). This means I can test my claims with a valid and reliable measure of individual differences in group identification—a key component of my theory. Second, the item is reverse-worded to minimize social desirability pressures to over-

[4] Besides age and citizenship status, prior criminal history can bar people from voting, though there is wide variation in how states apply this last criterion (Uggen et al. 2012). Given this topic's sensitivity, I did not ask about criminal history to avoid affecting data quality through lower cooperation rates and/or attrition. Using available data, I assess some of the tradeoffs of my decision (Table B, in Supporting Information). Those results suggest the effects I uncover are, at worst, conservative estimates of the phenomenon I am interested in.

**Table 1** Comparison of basic demographics among eligible unregistered Latinos: the 2006 LNS and 2011 KN Survey

| | LNS (2006) | KN Survey (2011) |
|---|---|---|
| % Unregistered (in survey sample) | 10 % | 16 % |
| Median education | High school | High school |
| Median income | $25,000–$34,999 | $30,000–$34,999 |
| Median age | 33 years old | 34 years old |
| % Male | 46 % | 43 % |

For the LNS, $N = 8{,}634$. For the KN Survey, $N = 1{,}203$. Some comparisons are approximate because the items have different response categories (i.e., education and income; see below). In the case of education, the LNS item was recoded to roughly approximate its KN analog, which runs from 1 (Less than high school) to 4 (Bachelor's degree or higher). All other variables were left in their raw metric

Education (LNS): 0 = none, 1 = eighth grade or below, 2 = some high school, 3 = GED, 4 = high school graduate, 5 = some college, 6 = bachelor's degree, 7 = graduate/professional degree

Education (KN): 1 = less than high school, 2 = high school, 3 = some college, 4 = bachelor's degree or higher

Income (LNS): 1 = less than $15 K to 7 = greater than $65 K

Income (KN): 1 = less than $5 K to 19 = $175 K or more

report one's level of identity. Thus, any emergent relationship between identity and politics cannot be charged with being an overestimate produced by individuals who report more attachment to their group than they actually feel. In fact, when we examine responses to this item, we see they are fairly evenly distributed: 27 %-(strongly agree); 27 %-(somewhat agree); 22 %-(somewhat disagree); and 24 %-(strongly disagree).[5]

In the middle of the study, respondents completed the actual experiment, which randomly assigned them to one of three conditions: (1) a *control* group, which provided no elite message to respondents; (2) a condition exposing respondents to elite communication focused on illegal immigration, without making negative allegations about illegal immigrants (*non-devaluing condition*); and (3) a condition exposing respondents to elite communication focused on illegal immigration, while making negative allegations about illegal immigrants (*devaluing condition*).

Since the issue of illegal immigration is known to make Latino identity salient for many Latinos (Garcia Bedolla 2005), the non-devaluing condition is designed to simply cue Latino identity.[6] In contrast, the devaluing condition raises the salience of Latino identity while impugning its positive distinctiveness by making negative

[5] In the full sample, the distribution of identity strength is: 26 %-(strongly agree); 27 %-(somewhat agree); 21 %-(somewhat disagree); and 26 %-(strongly disagree), with no reliable difference in identity levels between unregistered Latinos ($M = 2.42$) and all other Latinos in the survey ($M = 2.48$) ($t = 0.68$, $p = 0.50$).

[6] Beyond Garcia Bedolla (2005), others have shown that the association between Latinos and illegal immigration is regularly transmitted by news media. For example, in other research, I show that news reports on Latino illegal immigration outweigh reports on Latino legal immigration by a ratio of about 90–10 % (Pérez 2013a). This pattern is part of a larger trend in contemporary U.S. immigration news coverage, which often focuses on Latino rather than non-Latino groups (Valentino et al. 2013).

charges against illegal immigrants. This combination of identity salience and threat is theorized to stimulate differential political reactions among high and low identifying Latinos. The inclusion of a non-devaluing condition, moreover, allows me to test whether raising the salience of Latino identity is enough to trigger a political reaction among Latinos, or whether identity salience must be coupled with identity devaluation to induce this response. For example, it is plausible that the very use of the phrase *illegal immigration* is sufficiently inflammatory to provoke a political response among high and low identifiers. Thus, comparing any observed effects between these two treatments is critical. The wording for both treatments is below, with the bolded language denoting the devaluing comments:

> *Before moving on to the next set of questions, I want you to read a comment made recently by a politician in our nation's capital. A prominent member of Congress made the following statement to reporters the other day: The issue of illegal immigration needs to be addressed by this Congress.* ***Illegal immigrants are taking away American jobs, threatening American culture, and endangering America's national security. We need to secure our borders immediately.***

As can be seen, the fundamental difference between the non-devaluing and devaluing condition is their respective focus and tone. The non-devaluing condition simply indicates the issue of illegal immigration needs to be politically addressed. The devaluing condition also casts attention on the issue of illegal immigration, but does so by making negative allegations about illegal immigrants and proposing a vigorous policy solution.

After the experiment, eligible but unregistered Latinos answered items gauging their political attitudes and intention to register and vote. This approach enables me to establish whether devaluing rhetoric induces a pro-Latino political orientation that is matched by a parallel inclination toward greater political action on behalf of Latinos. To these ends, respondents answered two items explicitly designed to tap pro-Latino political attitude. The first of these asked whether "Latinos should always vote for Latino candidates when they run," while the second asked whether "Latino children should study and maintain the Spanish language." Both items ranged from (1) strongly disagree to (4) strongly agree. As expected, the items were substantially correlated and combined into an additive index where higher values reflect stronger pro-Latino attitude on a 0–1 interval ($M = 0.47$, $SD = 0.25$).[7]

Besides political attitudes, respondents answered an item gauging their intent to register and vote in a presidential election: "How likely is it that you will register and vote in the 2012 presidential election?" This item ran from very likely (1) to not at all likely (4). Responses were recoded so that higher values reflect a greater likelihood to register and vote. As such, the item is designed to capture the heightened motivation to engage the political process that is theorized to arise from

[7] The polychoric correlation between both items is robust and reliable ($\rho = 0.42$, $P < 0.001$). This index originally ran continuously from 2 to 8 in 1-point increments. I transform this scale to run continuously from 0 to 1 to facilitate the interpretation of my pending interactive results (Kam and Franzese 2007, p. 20–21; Achen 1982, p. 77).

an identity threat. Critically, item responses were well distributed: 37 %-(not at all likely); 17 %-(slightly likely); 23 %-(somewhat likely); and 22 %-(very likely).[8]

Of course, one can reasonably argue that there is nothing to prevent respondents from over-reporting their intention to register and vote in a presidential election that is months away. Yet, by including a control group and a non-devaluing and devaluing condition, we can observe whether and by how much this propensity to register and vote increases under varied elite discourse. If the hypothesized link between this propensity and ethnic identity arises in light of devaluing rhetoric, but not in the other conditions, then we can be more confident that the force behind this result is the interplay between identity and elite discourse—and not a general inclination to over-report one's likelihood of registering and voting.

## Estimation

In light of devaluing rhetoric, I expect a differential political response between high and low identifying Latinos, with high identifiers engaging in political efforts to restore their group's positive worth. This claim reduces to a statistical interaction between Latino identity levels and exposure to devaluing rhetoric, while using randomization to hold constant all other differences among eligible but unregistered Latino voters (e.g., education, age, etc.).[9] I model this relationship as:

$$\begin{aligned} Y = {} & \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Latino identity} + \beta_2 \text{Devaluing rhetoric} + \beta_3 \text{Non-devaluing rhetoric} \\ & + \beta_4 \text{Identity} \times \text{Devaluing rhetoric} + \beta_5 \text{Identity} \times \text{Non-devaluing rhetoric} \\ & + \varepsilon. \end{aligned} \tag{1}$$

The parsimony of this model derives from my experimental design. Random assignment to the three conditions means the treatments are uncorrelated with respondents' attitudes and dispositions. Thus, there is less need to control for spurious relationships as is common in analyses of observational data (Shadish et al. 2002; Mutz 2011). My inclusion of Latino identity as a covariate, on the other hand, is theoretically motivated. Indeed, failure to include it would produce a mis-specified model since group identity is theorized to condition my treatment effects (Druckman and Kam 2011, p. 45; Kam and Franzese 2007, pp. 13–19).

To estimate Eq. 1, I rescale my predictors to run from 0 to 1. This is done to facilitate the interpretation of my results, while preserving the original categories of my variables (Kam and Franzese 2007, pp. 19–22; Achen 1982, p. 77). *Latino identity* is coded to range from 0-(low identity strength) to 1-(high identity strength). In turn, devaluing and non-devaluing rhetoric are captured by dummy variables, with the control group as the omitted condition. In my model, the key quantities of interest are $\beta_4$ and $\beta_5$, which provide the change in the relationship between identity and politics in light of devaluing and non-devaluing rhetoric, respectively. Evidence

[8] Due to rounding, these percentages sum to 99 %, rather than 100 %.

[9] That is, individuals in each experimental condition are alike in all observable and unobservable characteristics, chance variations aside (Mutz 2011). Hence, there is less need to control for attributes that do not vary between individuals.

supporting my hypothesis will therefore emerge insofar as $\beta_4$ is substantively positive and statistically significant. This would suggest that in light of devaluing rhetoric, ethnic identity is politicized, thereby propelling high identifying Latinos toward (a) greater pro-Latino political attitudes; and (b) a stronger intention to register and vote.[10]

## Results: Politicized Identity and Pro-Latino Political Attitudes

Column (a) in Table 2 displays the raw results of an OLS regression used to estimate Eq. 1, where Y is respondents' level of pro-Latino political attitude. There we find evidence supporting my theoretical claim. Take the coefficient for Latino identity, which represents the effect of Latino identity on one's level of pro-Latino attitude in the *absence* of devaluing and non-devaluing rhetoric. This effect is negative and reliably different from zero, which means high identifying Latinos are 0.15 units less pro-Latino than low identifiers. Now consider the intercept for this model. This value tells us that when Latino identity is at its lowest level (0), the level of pro-Latino attitude comes in at 0.55, which is just above the scale's midpoint. This level drops to 0.40 when Latino identity climbs to its highest level (1). Together, these results suggest that in the absence of either type of rhetoric, pro-Latino attitude is a mildly endorsed position among eligible but unregistered voters, with high identifiers being relatively less enthusiastic.

The level of pro-Latino attitude among high identifying Latinos changes in the wake of devaluing rhetoric. Specifically, the interaction between identity and devaluing rhetoric is positive and reliably different from zero, just as hypothesized. This means that in light of devaluing rhetoric, high identifying Latinos display a systematically higher level of pro-Latino political attitude than low identifiers. Moreover, while the interaction between Latino identity and each rhetoric type is positive and reliable, the change in the relationship between Latino identity and pro-Latino attitude is statistically significant only in the devaluing condition. This is reflected by the marginal effect of Latino identity in each experimental condition. In the non-devaluing condition, $\Delta$pro-Latino attitude/$\Delta$Latino identity $= 0.12$, s.e. $=$ 0.08, *ns*. In the devaluing condition, $\Delta$pro-Latino attitude/$\Delta$Latino identity $= 0.19$, s.e. $= 0.08$, $p < 0.05$. This suggests Latino identity is politicized when elite rhetoric focuses on illegal immigration and makes negative allegations about illegal immigrants. The focus and tone of elite communication matters.

In an effort to more clearly show how Latino identity is politicized in the wake of devaluing rhetoric, I take the raw results from the model under column (a) in Table 2 and transform them into predicted values of pro-Latino attitude for Latinos with low and high levels of ethnic identity under each experimental condition. Figure 1 displays these estimates and their 90 % confidence intervals.

[10] Given the directional nature of my hypothesis—i.e., a *positive* interaction between identity and devaluing rhetoric—and the fact that this type of dynamic has been observed in independent lab studies done by social psychologists (Ellemers et al. 2002; Branscombe et al. 1999b), I use one-tailed significance tests when interpreting the pending interactive results. However, using two-tailed tests of significance leaves my conclusions unchanged.

**Table 2** Devaluing rhetoric moderates the effect of Latino identity on political attitude and the intention to register and vote (eligible unregistered respondents)

| | Pro-Latino attitude (a) | Pro-Latino attitude (b) | Pro-Latino attitude (c) | Register to vote (d) | Register to vote (e) | Register to vote (f) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Latino identity | −0.15* (0.09) | −0.12 (0.09) | −0.16* (0.09) | −0.60 (0.66) | −0.53 (0.66) | −0.61 (0.67) |
| Devaluing rhetoric | −0.22* (0.08) | −0.21* (0.07) | −0.24* (0.11) | −1.29* (0.58) | −1.35* (0.58) | −1.85* (1.09) |
| Non-devaluing rhetoric | −0.12 (0.08) | −0.11 (0.08) | −0.09 (0.12) | −0.44 (0.54) | −0.38 (0.53) | −0.40 (1.15) |
| Identity × devaluing | 0.34* (0.12) | 0.29* (0.12) | 0.33* (0.12) | 2.03* (0.93) | 1.96* (0.94) | 1.93* (0.94) |
| Identity × non-devaluing | 0.27* (0.12) | 0.25* (0.11) | 0.28* (0.12) | 0.55 (0.90) | 0.47 (0.90) | 0.56 (0.90) |
| Second generation | – | −0.11* (0.04) | – | – | −0.46 (0.30) | – |
| Third generation | – | −0.20* (0.04) | – | – | −0.67* (0.36) | – |
| Partisanship (Democrat) | – | – | 0.07 (0.13) | – | – | 0.24 (1.04) |
| Partisanship × devaluing | – | – | 0.05 (0.17) | – | – | 0.97 (1.55) |
| Partisanship × non-devaluing | – | – | −0.05 (0.18) | – | – | −0.07 (1.60) |
| Intercept | 0.55* (0.06) | 0.64* (0.05) | 0.51* (0.09) | – | – | – |
| $R^2$ | 0.07 | 0.18 | 0.07 | – | – | – |
| LnL | – | – | – | −254.86 | −252.60 | −254.13 |
| $X^2$ | – | – | – | 6.21 | 9.24 | 7.79 |

$N = 192$ for all equations. All predictors in these models run on a 0–1 interval. Entries under columns (a), (b), and (c) are OLS coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses. Entries under columns (d), (e), and (f) are ordered logit coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses. Cut points from the ordered logit models are removed from the table for parsimony of display. See text for relevant F-tests and Wald tests concerning the null effect of partisanship and its interaction with the experimental treatments

* $p < 0.05$, one-tailed

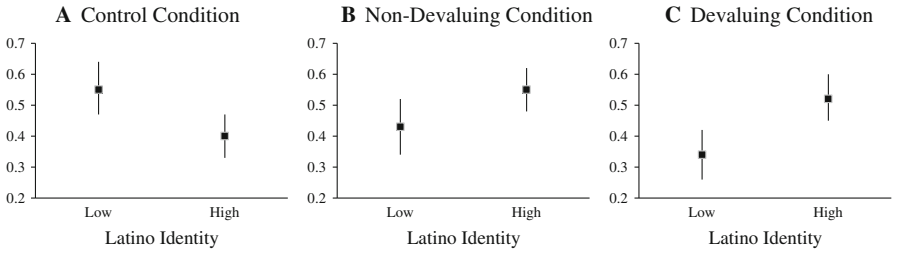


**Fig. 1** Predicted Pro-Latino political attitude among low and high identifying Latinos by experimental condition (with 90 % confidence intervals)

Panel A shows that in the absence of devaluing and non-devaluing rhetoric, high identifying Latinos are less likely to express pro-Latino attitude (0.40) than low identifying Latinos (0.55), a difference that is reliably different from zero. This pattern changes somewhat when we examine high and low identifying Latinos in the presence of non-devaluing rhetoric, which is depicted in panel B. Low Latino identifiers in that condition display a pro-Latino predicted value of 0.43, while high Latino identifiers display a 0.55 value, though this gap is indistinguishable from zero, given the overlap in the confidence intervals around each value. Thus, when exposed to rhetoric simply focusing on illegal immigration, there is no reliable difference between low and high Latino identifiers.

The story changes dramatically, however, when we turn to the devaluing condition depicted in panel C (Fig. 1). When political elites focus on illegal immigration and make negative allegations about illegal immigrants, low and high identifying Latinos systematically part company. In this circumstance, low Latino identifiers display a pro-Latino predicted value of 0.34. Among high Latino identifiers, this predicted value jumps to 0.52—an 18-point difference between both types of individuals. Put differently, high identifying Latinos in the devaluing condition display a predicted value of pro-Latino attitude that is about 1.5 times larger than their low identifying counterparts in the same condition, a gap that is reliably distinguishable from zero, as evidenced by the non-overlapping confidence intervals around each estimate. To put a finer point on this result, the interplay between ethnic identity and elite discourse systematically emerges only when the latter focuses on and makes negative allegations about a marginalized segment (i.e., illegal immigrants) of a larger racial/ethnic group (i.e., Latinos). Hence, the focus and tone of elite discourse does appear to hold one key to the politicization of ethnic identity.

My confidence in this uncovered dynamic is increased by the results under columns (b) and (c) in Table 2. Latinos are a heterogeneous group (García 2012), with individual differences in acculturation serving as a key influence on political attitudes (cf. Branton 2007; Miller et al. 1984). Given this insight, it is reasonable to wonder what remains of my original estimates if we account for acculturation. Prior measurement analyses show that generational status is a reliable indicator of acculturation (Cruz et al. 2008). Thus, column (b) estimates my original model while adding second and third generation status as covariates. To retain all cases

under analysis, second generation ($n = 57$) captures U.S.-born individuals with at least one foreign-born parent (Fry and Passel 2009), while third generation ($n = 58$) denotes U.S.-born individuals with U.S.-born parents. This analysis reveals two reassuring patterns. First, both generational covariates are generally negatively related to each dependent variable, thereby underscoring the political influence of acculturation. Second, even after accounting for acculturation, my original results remain largely intact. In particular, the hypothesized interaction between identity and devaluing rhetoric is still in the same direction and reliably different from zero.

The results under column (c) provide an additional robustness check. I have claimed that ethnic identity is politicized in light of devaluing rhetoric. Yet it is plausible that one's level of pro-Latino political attitude is increased by one's *political*, rather than *ethnic*, identity. Illegal immigration is a charged issue, with Republican politicians increasingly taking strong stances against it (Knoll et al. 2011). If eligible but unregistered Latino voters associate devaluing discourse with Republicans, then the dynamic I uncovered might be driven, not by Latinos with high ethnic identity levels, but by strongly partisan Latinos reacting to elite discourse on illegal immigration. Thus, the more Latinos identify as Democrats, the stronger their reaction to devaluing rhetoric, which they sense has Republican origins.[11]

To reconcile these two theoretical alternatives, I modify Eq. 1 by adding three new terms: partisanship and its relevant interactions with devaluing and non-devaluing rhetoric, respectively. Partisanship is assessed with a traditional 7-point scale, where higher values indicate greater attachment to the Democratic party ($M = 4.67$; $SD = 1.48$). Column (c) in Table 2 displays the relevant results. There we see that the original findings remain virtually the same. Indeed, the raw coefficients for these quantities hardly budge as a result of accounting for the interplay between partisan identity and rhetoric on illegal immigration. More importantly, partisanship is unrelated to one's level of pro-Latino political attitude. It is unrelated to it in the absence of both types of rhetoric. And, it is unrelated to it in the presence of either type of discourse. In fact, an F-test confirms that one's level of pro-Latino attitude does not depend in any way on partisanship or its interaction with devaluing rhetoric ($F = 0.87$; Prob $(F_{2,\ 183}) > 0.87 = 0.42$) (Kam and Franzese 2007), with a similar result for partisanship and its interaction with non-devaluing rhetoric ($F = 0.13$; Prob $(F_{2,\ 183}) > 0.13 = 0.88$). It appears, then, that ethnic identity is politicized in the wake of devaluing rhetoric, with high identifying Latinos displaying a systematically higher level of pro-Latino political attitude.[12]

[11] This proposed test is especially relevant here because ethnic and partisan identities are not randomly assigned, as it is difficult to experimentally manipulate identity levels in a way deemed externally valid by political scientists. Thus, consistent with prior studies utilizing SIT (e.g., Doosje et al. 1995, 1999), I examine the extent to which observed levels of Latino and partisan identity condition the response to my randomly assigned treatment.

[12] In fact, ancillary analyses reveal that this conclusion does not change if we compare Mexican Latinos to non-Mexican Latinos (Table C, in Supporting Information).

## Results: Politicized Identity and the Intention to Register and Vote

So far, my results appear to suggest that a sensed derogation of one's group politicizes one's identity, in this case, by boosting the level of pro-Latino attitude among high identifying Latinos. But is this dynamic confined to the realm of expressed political attitude, or does it spill over into one's intention to register and vote? To clarify this point, I re-estimate Eq. 1 by substituting in our item gauging the propensity to register and vote. This item, recall, ranges from 1 to 4, with higher values indicating a greater intention to register and vote. If my theoretical reasoning is correct, high identifying Latinos in the devaluing condition should display a significantly greater intention to register and vote than their low identifying counterparts.

Column (d) in Table 2 reports the raw results of an ordered logit regression used to estimate Eq. 1. There we see evidence that is highly consistent with my theoretical claim. Consider once again the coefficient for Latino identity, which represents the effect of Latino identity on the propensity to register and vote when devaluing and non-devaluing rhetoric are absent. This effect trends in a negative direction, that is, stronger Latino identity appears to reduce the intention to register and vote among eligible but unregistered Latinos. Nevertheless, this gap between low and high Latino identifiers is indistinguishable from zero, which means that in lieu of either type of rhetoric, Latino identity is unrelated to one's intent to register and vote. However, when we turn to the interaction term between identity and devaluing rhetoric, we see that it is positive and reliably different from zero, just as hypothesized. This tells us that in light of devaluing rhetoric, high identifying Latinos report a stronger intention to register and vote. In fact, while devaluing rhetoric reliably conditions the connection between Latino identity and the intention to register and vote, this effect fails to emerge when Latinos encounter non-devaluing rhetoric. Thus, Latino identity appears to become politicized only when the worth of the group is being explicitly denigrated by political elites.

To illustrate this dynamic, I take the raw results from the model under column (d) in Table 2 and transform them into predicted probabilities for being very likely to register and vote in the 2012 presidential election. I then graphically display these predicted probabilities for Latinos with low and high levels of ethnic identity under each experimental condition. Figure 2 displays these estimates, along with their 90 % confidence intervals.

Panel A shows that in lieu of devaluing and non-devaluing rhetoric, no reliable difference emerges between low and high Latino identifiers in their reported likelihood of registering and voting. Low Latino identifiers display a 30 % chance of registering and voting, while high identifiers display a 19 % chance of doing so. Yet this gap is indistinguishable from zero given the overlap in the 90 % confidence intervals around each probability. A similar story emerges in the presence of non-devaluing rhetoric (panel B, Fig. 2). There, low Latino identifiers display a 22 % chance of registering and voting, while high Latino identifiers display a 21 % chance—a one point difference that is indistinguishable from zero. Thus, when exposed to rhetoric just focusing on illegal immigrants, there is no discernible difference between low and high Latino identifiers.

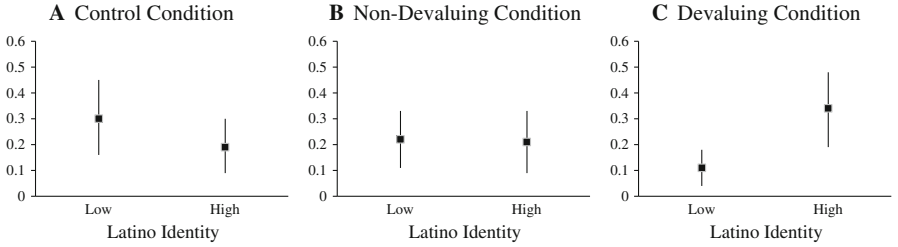


**Fig. 2** Probability of "very likely to register and vote" among low and high identifying Latinos by experimental condition (with 90 % confidence intervals)

The story changes, however, when we turn to the devaluing condition (panel C, Fig. 2). When political elites focus on illegal immigration and make negative allegations about illegal immigrants, low and high identifying Latinos part company. Here, low Latino identifiers display a reported 11 % chance of registering and voting. Among high Latino identifiers, this likelihood jumps to 34 %—a 23 % point difference between both types of individuals. Put differently, high identifying Latinos are three times more likely than their low identifying counterparts to report registering and voting in the presence of devaluing rhetoric, a gap that is reliably different from zero. Thus, the interplay between ethnic identity and elite discourse emerges only when the latter focuses on and makes negative allegations about a marginalized segment (illegal immigrants) of a larger racial/ethnic group (Latinos).

The robustness of these findings are underlined by the results in columns (e) and (f) in Table 2. Under column (e), I re-estimate my original model by adding second and third generation as covariates, on the basis of prior work showing that individual differences in acculturation are associated with Latino political attitudes (cf. Branton 2007; García 2012; Miller et al. 1984). These results once again demonstrate that, even if we account for individual differences in acculturation, my theorized interaction between devaluing rhetoric and Latino identity remains substantively and statistically intact.

In turn, the results in column (f) show that the heightened propensity to vote is unrelated to the interplay between partisan identity and elite rhetoric on illegal immigration. Again, the reasoning behind this alternative model is that partisan, rather than Latino, identity is responsible for the greater intention to register and vote: a patently political dependent variable. Thus, the more Latinos identify as Democrats, the stronger their reaction to devaluing rhetoric, which they sense has Republican origins (Knoll et al. 2011). Yet partisanship is unrelated to one's intention of registering and voting across all three experimental conditions. Indeed, a Wald test confirms this dependent variable does not depend on partisanship or its interaction with devaluing rhetoric ($H_0$: partisanship = devaluing × partisanship = 0, $X^2 = 1.15$, Prob $X^2(2) > 1.15 = 0.56$), with a similar result obtained for partisanship and its interaction with non-devaluing rhetoric ($H_0$: partisanship = non-devaluing × partisanship = 0, $X^2 = 0.07$, Prob $X^2(2) > 0.07 = 0.97$). It appears, then, that ethnic identity is what becomes politicized in the wake of

devaluing rhetoric, with high identifying Latinos displaying a stronger intention to register and vote.[13]

## Summary and Implications

The connection between racial/ethnic identity and politics has been difficult for scholars to consistently pin down empirically. I have argued this identity-to-politics link might be less a matter of whether group identity is joined to politics, and more a matter of when and among whom. My proposed framework locates the politicization of group identity in the interplay between elite discourse and group attachment. I predict that an identity-to-politics link emerges when elite discourse raises the salience of a racial/ethnic outgroup and makes negative allegations about it. In this situation, high identifying group members sense their identity is impugned. Thus, they engage in collective efforts to bolster their group's political standing.

I confirmed the operation of my framework in the realm of Latino politics. Despite large demographic growth, Latino political participation lags relative to non-Latinos. The power of the Latino electorate is especially diminished by eligible but unregistered voters (DeSipio 1996). My framework shows how the interplay between devaluing rhetoric and Latino identity compels some of these individuals to offset their disposition toward political disengagement. When elites threaten the worth of Latino identity through devaluing rhetoric, high identifying Latinos in this pool of unregistered voters become politically engaged, as captured by stronger levels of pro-Latino attitude and a greater intention to register and vote in a presidential election.[14] This heightened sense of political engagement does, in fact, arise from a politicized sense of ethnic identity—and not from a partisan reaction to elite rhetoric on illegal immigration.

My framework and the results it has yielded cast new light on the study of racial/ethnic politics, more generally, and scholarship on Latino politics, specifically. In terms of the former, my framework adds to the kit of theoretical and methodological solutions to the sporadic link between group identity and political behavior. Some scholars have tried to resolve this challenge through better measures of group identity and group consciousness, with some improvements in the detection of the identity-to-politics link. My framework, in contrast, locates an identity-to-politics link in the interplay between identity and sensed political threats. Thus, I recast group consciousness as a phenomenon that emerges among some people under specific political circumstances, instead of a frame of mind possessed to some degree by all group members.

[13] Once again, ancillary analyses reveal that this conclusion does not change if we compare Mexican Latinos to non-Mexican Latinos (Table C, in Supporting Information)..

[14] Indeed, for *pro-Latino attitude* and *register to vote*, the interaction between ethnic identity and devaluing rhetoric yields effect sizes that are on the strong side. Cohen's $d$ values around 0.20, 0.50, and 0.80 are considered small, medium, and large, respectively (Cohen 1988). Both of my analyses yield Cohen's $d \geq 0.75$. For further information, see Table A (in Supporting Information)..

My results, however, do not supplant prior work on the identity-to-politics connection. Instead, they provide an alternative approach to a persisting challenge in applied work within the study of racial/ethnic politics. The spirit behind my theoretical framework is therefore constructive. In fact, I believe my approach can be used to create fruitful synergy with previous work on the identity-to-politics link. For instance, having found that group consciousness can emerge spontaneously in the wake of immediate political circumstances, my framework further underscores the conceptual independence of group identity from group consciousness (e.g., McClain et al. 2009; Lee 2008; Chong and Rogers 2005). At the same time, if group consciousness can follow from a politicized group identity, as my framework suggests, then my results imply that in some cases at least, group consciousness might be endogenous—not exogenous—to political behavior. Identifying and testing those conditions will be necessary to strengthen our understanding of the identity-to-politics link among racial/ethnic minorities, and the experimental approach I have employed can help guide some of those efforts.

In terms of Latino politics, my framework identifies a set of conditions under which Latino political engagement is heightened by delving into the psychology behind the political decisions Latinos make. I have shown that when some Latinos sense a threat to their ethnic identity, they become more politically engaged. These individuals come to the rescue of their group because of how elite discourse is interpreted and how it makes them feel. Hearing negative allegations about a subgroup (i.e., illegal immigrants) within the larger Latino community, those with high levels of ethnic identification sense their ethnic identity is besmirched. And, since they strongly value this identity, these individuals strive to restore the positive distinctiveness of their group's worth. Taken together, these insights suggest the road to heightened Latino political engagement is sometimes paved with deep psychological motivations and reactions.[15]

Of course, psychological process is not everything in politics. But as Taber (2000) explains, scholars' knowledge about political engagement is deepened when we develop a better sense of the psychology behind it. In this spirit, my study verifies some of the cognitive processes animating Latino reactions to politics. While this is a known advantage of experiments like mine, it does not imply my research design is irreproachable. Consistent with the larger literature on Latino voting behavior (cf. Calvo and Rosenstone 1989; Arvizu and Garcia 1996; DeSipio 1996), my study uses *self-reported* preferences and behavioral intentions as dependent variables. Scholars have amended established work on Latino voting behavior by validating self-reported variables with independent data (e.g., public voting records), finding that established findings are weaker but still substantively and statistically significant (Shaw et al. 2000). I believe something similar should eventually occur to the theoretical framework I have offered.

[15] One might wonder whether the dynamic I have unearthed explains other aspects of politics among *all* Latinos—not just those that are unregistered to vote. It appears to. In a separate study that examines registered and unregistered Latinos (Pérez 2013b), I find that devaluing rhetoric produces greater ethnocentrism among high identifying Latinos. Statistically, this pattern is no different among unregistered Latinos than among the fuller sample of Latinos (Table D, in Supporting Information). I thank reviewer 2 for constructive advice on this point.

One of the hallmarks of a viable theory is its accumulation of supporting evidence *across* different research settings. Future work might therefore consider reproducing and expanding the thrust of my research findings by using observational research designs. For example, scholars might zero in on states like California and Texas, which have large and heterogeneous Latino populations. Researchers could then gather data on respective Members of the U.S. House of Representatives and their public positions on immigration, hewing closely to the theoretical distinction I have made between devaluing and non-devaluing discourse on group identity. By matching such data to large Latino opinion surveys that contain measures of group identity and sundry political outcomes (e.g., 2006 LNS), scholars can assess whether the interaction between stronger identity levels and exposure to devaluing discourse from one's elected representative influences both electoral and non-electoral forms of political involvement, including participation in social protests and attendance of political meetings (e.g., Barreto et al. 2009; Verba et al. 1995).

Though I have empirically focused on a key aspect of Latino politics, my proposed framework is flexible enough to help illuminate the conditions under which an identity-to-politics link might emerge among non-Latino groups, whether of a racial variety or not (e.g., religious, partisan). There are, in other words, no proper nouns in my approach. To illustrate this, consider its application to other U.S. racial/ethnic groups, such as Asian Americans and whites.

Scholars have struggled to explain why, in contrast to blacks, racial identity seems less strong among Asian Americans: a minority group with deep U.S. roots. Recently, however, scholars have found the level of racial identity among Asian Americans is higher when primed with political information (e.g., highlighting descriptive representation) (Junn and Masuoka 2008). Such results highlight the link between political conditions and racial identity within this group. My framework can help advance this budding literature by clarifying when identity becomes politicized and among whom by accounting for the changing tone and focus of elite discourse on Asian Americans (e.g., Junn 2007; Chang 2001; Lee 1999). In a similar vein, scholars have found that while racial identification is prevalent among whites (Wong and Cho 2005), its influence on political outcomes is mixed (e.g., Sears et al. 1997; Sears and Victoria 2006; Hutchings et al. 2011). My framework can help extend this fledgling scholarship by further identifying specific conditions under which white identity might be tied, not only to political attitudes (Hutchings et al. 2011), but to political behavior as well.

Beyond the U.S., we might consider Muslims in Western Europe, where many political elites have decried the increased presence and reputed political insularity of this group (e.g., Sniderman and Hagendoorn 2007; Zolberg and Woon 1999). My framework can help illuminate whether elite rhetoric about Muslims affects the level and character of political engagement. Indeed, we may learn that if Muslim immigrants, in fact, display an insular politics, this stance might emanate from a sense that their religious identity is derogated by political elites.

These examples underline the promise of my framework. They also acknowledge the benefits of further testing it with other cases and with different groups. Although additional evidence suggests the same dynamic I uncover here emerges for other dependent variables in a broader sample of Latinos (e.g., ethnocentrism) (Pérez

2013b), I have firmly centered my attention on devaluing rhetoric. Prior SIT research, which finds comparable dynamics across diverse domains, leads us to expect a similar general pattern irrespective of the topical domain (Ellemers et al. 2002). Nevertheless, skeptical political scientists might demand further evidence that reaches beyond the politics of immigration. For the sake of deeper and broader understanding of this phenomenon, subsequent research should indulge this request.

In conclusion, I have suggested the intermittent connection between racial/ethnic identity and political behavior might arise from looking in the "wrong" place at the "wrong" times. By relaxing the aspiration to uncover a *regular* connection between group identity and politics, I have shown how we can yield finer-grained knowledge about when and among whom group identity heightens political engagement. This is a more piecemeal approach to uncovering an identity-to-politics link. But in the long run, incremental gains like these can be more revealing than a string of null results, for they allow us to better appreciate the conditions under which racial/ethnic identity will have political effects and—just as importantly—when it will not.

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**Conflict of interest** The author declares he has no conflict of interest.

**Ethical standards** This study complies with relevant U.S. laws.

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