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Latino Opinion and Action in the Struggle for America's Political Future

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Abstract

Nearly 20 years have passed since this journal's last review of Latino politics. Today, American politics have shifted dramatically, even alarmingly, with Latinos absorbing and contributing to many of these changes. Yet American politics research still overwhelmingly privileges non-Hispanic Whites and their political opinions and behavior. We argue that this marginalization of Latino politics research has even fewer excuses in this era when data, methodologies, and other resources have expanded, making theory-based, empirically grounded research on Latino politics more feasible. We also argue that to better grasp what happens in contemporary politics today and tomorrow, a deeper understanding of Latinos' political psychology is indispensable because they are a highly diverse, minoritized group whose members are acutely sensitive to structural, temporal, and situational pressures. Finally, in an overwhelmingly quantitative, empirically oriented field, we urge Latino politics scholars to more earnestly consider the normative implications of research on this growing pan-ethnic population.

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary study of US political behavior is primarily a quantitative endeavor, motivated to test broadly generalizable theories. Yet despite this ambition, behavioral scholars continue to pay an inordinate amount of attention to the majority of non-Hispanic White Americans, brushing aside the perspectives of minoritized populations through (c)omission. Many excuse this trend by noting that "minorities" are too hard and expensive to sample, and too distinct from average Americans. But these rationalizations are inexcusable in light of a growing demographic tide of people of color (PoC) (Pérez 2021). If behavioral scholars want to continue producing a valid social science, deeper engagement with the politics of racially minoritized groups is needed.

One way to reach this goal is by earnestly engaging the insights of Latino politics (LP) research. In 1977, the US federal government released Statistical Directive 15, which recognized as "Latino" various national origin groups from Latin America, for the purpose of government data collection. It was the culmination of elite efforts to render Latinos visible and equip them with a public voice (Mora 2014). But it did not start out promisingly. Political analysts—sometimes Latino themselves—highlighted the cultural and historical diversity of Latino peoples to question the new category's meaning (Beltrán 2012). Nearly 50 years later, we can hardly imagine a United States without this pan-ethnic group.

Beneath this long arc from the entry of "Latino" into our lexicons all the way to the current era, when Latinos are nearly 20% of the US population, a deep cache of LP research exists (García & Sanchez 2022). Yet the integration of LP insights into mainstream political science reflects Latinos' broader incorporation into the US—uneven and incomplete. **Figure 1** depicts the estimated yearly number of LP articles published in top political science journals (*American Political Science Review*, *American Journal of Political Science*, *Journal of Politics*) and specialty journals (*Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*; *Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Politics*; *Political Behavior*; *Politics, Groups, and Identities*; *Political Psychology*; *Social Science Quarterly*). These data encompass

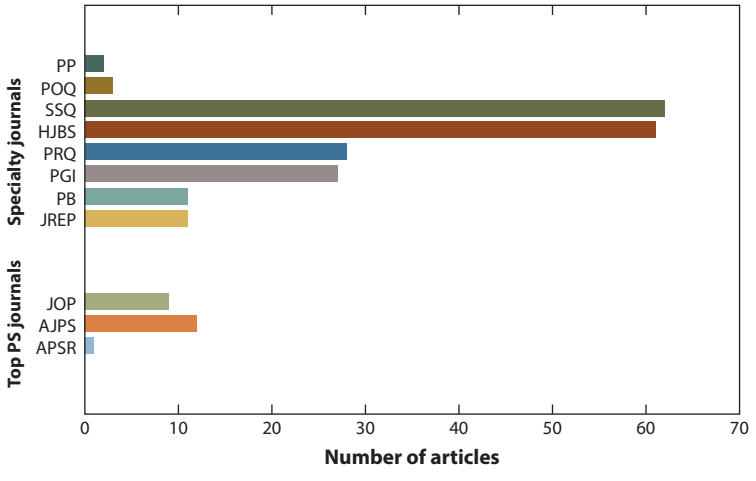

Figure 1

Distribution of journals publishing on Latino politics (2005–2022). Abbreviations: AJPS, *American Journal of Political Science*; APSR, *American Political Science Review*; HJBS, *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*; JOP, *Journal of Politics*; JREP, *Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Politics*; PB, *Political Behavior*; PGI, *Politics, Groups, and Identities*; PP, *Political Psychology*; PS, *Political Science*; SSQ, *Social Science Quarterly*.

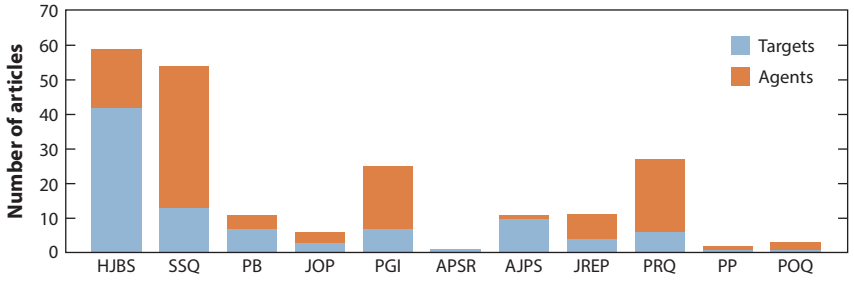

Figure 2

Distribution of journals centering Latinos as targets versus agents (2005–2022). AJPS, *American Journal of Political Science*; APSR, *American Political Science Review*; HJBS, *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*; JOP, *Journal of Politics*; JREP, *Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Politics*; PB, *Political Behavior*; PGI, *Politics, Groups, and Identities*; PP, *Political Psychology*; POQ, *Public Opinion Quarterly*; PRQ, *Political Research Quarterly*; SSQ, *Social Science Quarterly*.

the period since this journal's last LP review (de la Garza 2004). Notice how few LP articles major journals publish relative to specialty journals. Many factors affect this. To name only two, some LP scholars might withhold their work from journals deemed hostile to LP research, and shallower pools of expert LP reviewers produce gross mismatches between LP papers and anonymous referees. The main result is that LP research is treated as boutique, rather than broadly relevant.

Figure 2 differentiates between LP articles that center on Latinos as political targets versus political agents. Research that treats Latinos as political targets yields a view of them as scapegoats and outsiders to US politics (Abrajano & Hajnal 2015, Ramirez & Peterson 2020). It provides a perspective of Latinos as immigrants, with less clarity about when, exactly, Latinos cease being immigrants. LP scholars must broaden this view, which requires bracketing the received wisdom on LP in order to meet the conceptual and theoretical demands of a new era when Latinos are increasingly US-born and pulled in different directions by US society and politics (Alamillo 2019, Cortez 2021, Hickel et al. 2021, Jiménez 2010, Silber Mohamed 2017, Telles & Ortiz 2008).

We have three goals in this article. First, we review LP research since 2004, explaining how new insights align with canonical LP scholarship. Because more LP scholarship has been published than we have space to discuss, we organize this vast literature into three analytic themes: (*a*) Latino identities, (*b*) immigration as a unifying and divisive Latino force, and (*c*) Latino collective action via protests and coalitions with other PoC. Our objective here is to provide some conceptual guidance in a field teeming with new findings and theories. We then pinpoint areas of theoretical and empirical uncertainty in LP scholarship, including a tentative grasp of political causes and mechanisms. Throughout, we urge greater investment in illuminating Latinos' political psychology, given their acute sensitivity to temporal, structural, and situational pressures. Specifically, we recommend greater clarification of the content of Latino identities, their links to proximate concepts (e.g., linked fate), and their ties to intra- and intergroup politics in a polity where PoC are demographically rising as White people's dominant status comes into further question and disrepute. We conclude by urging LP scholars to more carefully appraise the normative implications of LP research in the era before us.[1]

[1]Readers who are interested in a fuller panorama of the LP literature can consult the **Supplemental Bibliography**.

Supplemental Material >

LATINO POLITICS SCHOLARSHIP SINCE 2004: THREE MAIN TRIBUTARIES AND SEVERAL OFFSHOOTS

Latino Identity

The growing nuances of LP are aptly captured by research on their pan-ethnic identity. Although political scientists now take for granted that Latino identity is politically consequential, this sense is owed to research since 2004 (e.g., Barreto 2010), which expanded earlier work (de la Garza 2004). This scholarship reveals how a pan-ethnic classification transformed into one of the more reliable predictors of LP. One way this occurred is through the imagination and efforts of political candidates (e.g., Fraga et al. 2020). For example, research on municipal elections (Barreto 2010) reveals how political candidates mobilize Latinos as ethnic voters—an inference drawn from precinct data and in-depth interviews with political elites. These insights align with comparative politics research, which conceptualizes politicians as identity entrepreneurs (Chandra 2012), who use ethnic categories to build support for their candidacies. Further work documents the political consciousness that Latino identity produces, with greater consciousness increasing pro-Latino opinions and behavior, but primarily when a policy domain implicates Latinos (e.g., immigration) (Sanchez 2006). This last point is key: Latinos are not always politically conscious as ethnics, which would be cognitively overwhelming (Taber 2003). Instead, Latinos' political consciousness is triggered by political stimuli (e.g., issues, candidates, rhetoric) (e.g., Valenzuela & Michelson 2016). In the absence of these features, group consciousness is latent.

Additional research further establishes that Latino identity's political effects are a function of "person × context" dynamics, where a given situation activates pan-ethnicity from Latinos' larger suite of identities, allowing it to shape how they interpret the political world (García-Rios et al. 2019, Gutierrez et al. 2019). For instance, in light of xenophobic rhetoric, individuals for whom being Latino is central to their self-definition display aggressively pro-ingroup attitudes—an effect that is independent of Latinos' partisan identity (Pérez 2015). This means Latino identity is a continuous variable, not a dichotomy. All Latinos identify with their pan-ethnic group to some measurable degree—ranging from a low (or nonexistent) level of identification to a very high one. These individual differences shape LP. Second, Latino reactions to ingroup threats—e.g., xenophobic rhetoric—are not uniform, but rather are driven by those for whom Latino identity is central to their sense of self.

One major takeaway here is that, while LP scholars now have a relatively firmer sense of when and among whom pan-ethnic identity operates, further research is needed to clarify whether and how much the meaning of Latino identity expands and contracts with political dynamics and contexts.

American Identity

Several studies also highlight the growing relevance of American identity for immigrant Latinos and their (grand)children (e.g., Hickel et al. 2021, Schildkraut 2005, Tafoya et al. 2019). This work generally depicts an inevitable but slow-forming trend in American self-identification across Latino generations. But as Silber Mohamed (2017) demonstrates, extraordinary political situations can also catalyze this process. Amid 2005's pro-immigrant mobilizations, many Latinos began laying claim to their American identity to justify their pleas for more flexible immigration policies for (undocumented) immigrants. This insight reiterates how Latinos' reading of a context influences which of their identities structures their political engagement. For example, Pérez et al. (2019) show that Latinos' American and pan-ethnic identities are modestly correlated ($r \sim 0.20$), rather than zero-sum. Thus, while Latinos highly value their pan-ethnic identity, they are "learning as they go" to be American.

Some research also explores the normatively darker side of Latinos' American identity. As a minoritized group, many Latinos occupy a social station similar to that of African Americans, which sometimes produces politically cooperative relations with them (Wilkinson 2015). But as a population that, today, increasingly consists of US-born descendants of immigrants, many Latinos are especially sensitive to their inclusion in society as new *Americans*. Specifically, when Latinos sense they are losing their marginal position as American, they express anti-Black racism as a way to bolster their American status and create distance from an allegedly un-American group (i.e., Black people) (Pérez et al. 2023b). This is part of a larger pattern highlighting how some Latinos' adoption of American identity can produce attitudes and behaviors that seemingly undermine their pan-ethnic group's interests. For example, Flavio Hickel et al. (2021) show that many Latinos prioritize their American identity over their Latino identity. The greater this prioritization is, the stronger Latino support for nativist politicians becomes. As this research stream grows, further investigation into Latinos' psychological and structural motivations for prioritizing their American identity is warranted.

Partisan Identity

LP scholars have also renewed their efforts to grasp the origins and impacts of Latino partisanship and related attitudes (Hajnal & Lee 2011, McCann & Jones-Correa 2020). Latinos generally self-identify as Democrats by a stable margin of 2 to 1 (Abrajano & Alvarez 2010). The received wisdom about partisanship is that individuals acquire it through parental socialization, which assumes that parents are mostly, if not entirely, socialized in the United States. This tenet is problematic for Latino adults (Carlos 2021). Although most of them are US-born, the majority of these individuals have foreign-born parents. So how do they become (and remain) partisans?

Some scholarship suggests many do not. Hajnal & Lee (2011) observe that Latinos generally receive less attention from party elites than do other PoC, which can dampen Latino political engagement (Ramírez 2015). This produces large numbers of Latinos who self-identify as Independent or who simply are unsure or do not care about their party self-identification. Additionally, survey experimental evidence suggests some Latinos' partisanship is relatively malleable and responsive to policy decisions, such as mass deportations of immigrants (Street et al. 2015). More recent work, however, finds that partisan identities are more crystallized and intense than prior work indicates (Saavedra Cisneros 2016). Specifically, panel survey data reveal that Latinos' partisan identifications are substantial, stable, and highly predictive of their politics—even during Donald Trump's nativist presidency, which should have dramatically shifted Latinos' partisanship if it was weak and fledgling (Hopkins et al. 2023).

One reason these perspectives seem at odds is period and cohort effects. While Hajnal & Lee (2011) detect substantial party unaffiliation rates among Latinos, these data are from an earlier period when some of the downstream consequences of party polarization perhaps had not yet reached Latinos (Levendusky 2009). Measurement also plays a role. Work documenting high rates of Latino partisan unaffiliation uses survey data that do not probe noncompliant answers for partisan leaners (Hajnal & Lee 2011). When noncompliant responses are probed (Hopkins et al. 2023) or when expressive partisanship is assessed (i.e., partisanship as a direct reflection of the self) (Huddy et al. 2016), Latinos are a highly partisan population.

These accumulated insights suggest further investigation into the manifold sources and variance of partisan learning among Latinos across time and contexts (Carlos 2021, Huddy et al. 2016, Street et al. 2015). We also believe it behooves LP scholars to revisit the traditional model of partisan development. Although this framework falls flat when grafted, wholesale, onto Latinos, we

think some of its elements are salvageable and adaptable to Latino partisanship, especially its more psychological components (e.g., self-party associations) (Green et al. 2002).

NATIVIST POLITICS UNIFIES AND DIVIDES LATINOS

Another large cluster of work addresses the varied effects of nativist politics on Latinos (e.g., Cortez 2021, García Bedolla 2005, Jiménez 2010). This scholarship reveals how nativist politics—which, in principle, is about foreign-born Latinos—has metastasized into efforts that strongly implicate the broader US-born Latino population. By assembling administrative and survey data, this research illustrates how the salience of nativist public debates and policies is, variously, (in)sufficient to energize greater Latino political engagement and turnout (e.g., Jiménez et al. 2021, Pérez 2015, White 2016). For example, Gutierrez et al. (2019) marshal the 2016 Collaborative Multi-Racial Post-Election Survey (CMPS) to show how, in light of Donald Trump's nativist rhetoric, a robust set of associations emerges between Latino perceptions of discrimination and (*a*) negative evaluations of candidate Trump, (*b*) heightened expressions of anger, and (*c*) reports of greater political participation (i.e., voting, donating to candidates). Although these patterns emerge across Latinos of varied national origins, García-Rios et al. (2019) use the same survey data to show that negative appraisals of Donald Trump were more acute among Mexican-origin Latinos than other Latinos. This begs for more focused research into when and how political threats produce (dis-)engagement among which Latinos (Cruz Nichols & Garibaldo Valdéz 2020).

One way to make progress here is to be more mindful that group identities can be undermined in several ways, each with different attitudinal and behavioral implications (Pérez & Vicuña 2023). For example, a group's positive value can be impugned, as when White politicians call attention to undocumented immigrants as a way to devalue Latinos more generally (García Bedolla 2005). Or a group's distinctiveness can be imperiled by calling into question its unique attributes and traits, as when White politicians publicly criticize Latinos for holding dual identities (Pérez et al. 2019, Tafoya et al. 2019). Latinos can also feel their identity is jeopardized when there is a mismatch between how they view themselves (e.g., Salvadoran, Cuban) and how others view them in a specific setting (i.e., Latinos) (Flores & Huo 2013), which is dubbed "categorization threat."

These nuances matter. "Value threat" spurs high-identifying Latinos to mobilize to politically defend their coethnics (Pérez 2015). However, categorization threat generally undermines loyalty to coethnics. For example, an estimated 33% of Latinos self-identify as Republican. This is a substantial minority, not an outlier. Many of these right-leaning individuals openly deny the existence of racism and enthusiastically support nativist candidates—in contrast to the majority of their coethnics (Alamillo 2019). Thus, when politics or politicians publicly characterize Latinos in terms of their central tendency—rather than their wide-ranging variance—we should expect internal divisions like these to pop politically (Cortez 2021). Indeed, the framing of Latinos as primarily Democrats, with progressive political views, is severely misaligned with how a nontrivial share of Latino conservatives view themselves (Cadena 2023). Going forward, we believe there is much scientific value in better grasping when, how, and for whom Latinos' political heterogeneity is threatening, and with what specific action tendencies (e.g., dissociation from the ingroup or outgroup favoritism).

LATINO COLLECTIVE SOCIAL PROTESTS AND INTERMINORITY COALITIONS

Latinos' collective action in politics is quite impressive in light of their enormous internal diversity. One example involves Latinos' mass reactions to 2005's Border Protection, Antiterrorism and Illegal Immigration Control Act. On paper, this proposed bill aimed to tighten immigration

enforcement. In spirit, many Latinos interpreted the bill as an effort to further marginalize them. Using in-depth interviews, Zepeda-Millán (2017) carefully shows how Latino activists and media personalities organized and sustained various social protests against this exclusionary bill, thus revealing how these protests were intentionally coordinated from the ground up.

Various studies have yielded quasi-experimental evidence on these rallies' political effects. These protests caused Latinos to prioritize the issue of undocumented immigrants (Carey et al. 2014) and boosted support for flexible policies toward them, especially among Latinos who were spatially and temporally proximate to protests. These rallies also causally impacted Latinos' political efficacy and attitudes toward government (Wallace et al. 2014). They also sharpened perceptions of Latinos' racialization (Zepeda-Millán & Wallace 2013) and their sense of commonality with African Americans (Jones-Correa et al. 2016), with recent evidence suggesting solid Latino support for immigrant rights activism a decade after the original protests (Wallace & Zepeda-Millán 2020). The most critical lesson from this literature, we think, is the power of harnessing theoretical perspectives (e.g., mass-level view, elite views) and methodological approaches (e.g., in-depth interviews, quasi-experiments) to assiduously study a phenomenon of interest to Latinos and LP scholars—a constructive blueprint to apply to other research frontiers in LP scholarship.

Research has also extensively investigated Latino collective action through interminority coalitions (e.g., Benjamin 2017, Corral 2020, Wilkinson 2015). The dilemma for a minoritized group, like Latinos, is that insofar as it is stigmatized and oppressed by mainstream society, the sources of its marginalization are distinct from those of other minoritized groups—especially in terms of their arrival to the United States, their treatment by law enforcement agencies, and their political goals (García & Sanchez 2022). Consequently, the modal outcome in Latinos' political relations with other PoC has been one of indifference or conflict, especially in zero-sum settings (e.g., Gay 2006, Wilkinson 2015). Under what conditions, then, will Latinos form political coalitions with other PoC?

Recent work suggests that one answer involves greater appreciation for the precise locations of PoC within the US racial hierarchy and the discrimination they endure based on these stations. These positions depend on how "foreign" and "inferior" a minoritized ingroup is perceived to be (Zou & Cheryan 2017). **Figure 3** shows that Whites are perceived as the most "superior" and "American" group in this racial order. However, although Asian and Latino people are each

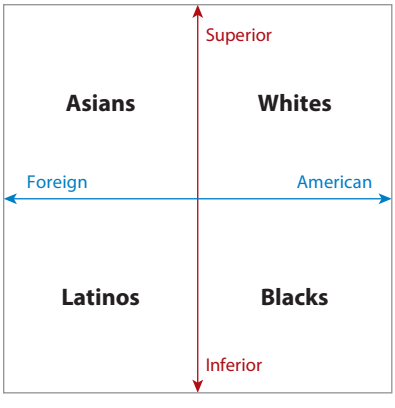

Figure 3

Two axes of subordination (adapted from Zou & Cheryan 2017). The figure reflects differences in US racial stratification. It indicates the degree to which Asians, Whites, Blacks, and Latinos are stereotyped as "inferior" and "foreign" in the United States.

stereotyped as foreign, Asian individuals are considered a more superior group than Latino and Black individuals. Moreover, although Black people are stereotyped as a more American minority than Latinos and Asians (Carter 2019), both Black and Latino people are deemed more inferior than Asians, as highlighted by the "model minority" myth (Zou & Cheryan 2017).

Prior work finds that despite these differences in racial stratification, a sense of shared discrimination as PoC improves interminority relations (Chin et al. 2023). Indeed, evidence for a solidarity-to-shared-politics pathway has accumulated across several experiments. Specifically, exposure to information that Latinos, Asian Americans, and MENAs (people of Middle Eastern and North African descent) are similarly discriminated against as foreigners causes individuals to express greater solidarity with PoC (Eidgahy & Pérez 2023, Pérez et al. 2023b). This heightened solidarity then increases their support for policies that benefit outgroups beyond their own (e.g., MENAs become more pro-Latino; Latinos become more pro-Asian). A similar chain reaction emerges among Black and Latino individuals when they sense they are similarly perceived as inferior (Pérez et al. 2023b). Indeed, a meta-analysis of various experiments establishes the viability of this solidarity mechanism across varied communities of color (Pérez et al. 2023a). Since many conflicts between minoritized groups spring from zero-sum competitions in settings where scarce resources are at stake (e.g., jobs) (Gay 2006), this proposed mechanism contributes to LP scholars' ongoing efforts to isolate pathways that mitigate Latino conflict with other minoritized groups.

One open question in this literature involves dimension extension. That is, although PoC inhabit specific stations, are there ways to build coalitions across more difficult differences? For example, Asian Americans are distinct from Latinos and African Americans insofar as they are stereotyped as a model minority. But the COVID-19 pandemic has shown that Asian Americans can sometimes be positioned as closer to the inferior dimension that Black and Latino individuals share, raising the prospect of broader and more robust cross-racial coalitions (Reny & Barreto 2022).

DEEPER DIVES INTO LATINO IDENTITIES AND THEIR (POLITICAL) CONTENTS

Accumulated LP research since 2004 clearly indicates that Latinos have multiple, politically relevant identities. Nonetheless, LP scholars still emphasize single identities, with pan-ethnic identity receiving the bulk of this attention. This raises inferential challenges because pan-ethnic identity is often correlated positively and significantly with other forms of self-identification, such as partisan or American identity (Pérez 2021, Silber Mohamed 2017, Valenzuela & Michelson 2016). Thus, a nontrivial risk exists in attributing political effects among Latinos to pan-ethnic identity, when the real driver of these effects is another form of attachment, such as partisan identity.

Methodologically, we think it behooves LP scholars who study pan-ethnic identity to measure other politically relevant forms of self-identification in their data-collection efforts. It would be even more effective if those multiple identities are reliably appraised—a move requiring multiple measures for multiple constructs (e.g., Pérez et al. 2019). For example, if one's theory attributes an effect to pan-ethnic identity, what is the closest alternative identity that can, in principle, yield the same pattern? Those identities should then be assessed with multiple measures, such as survey questions. Fortunately, new user-friendly technologies can streamline the reliable assessment of multiple constructs with as few as two measures each, thus reducing a key barrier to this challenge in LP research (Montgomery & Rossiter 2022).

We also think LP scholars—ourselves included—should invest in deepening our conceptualization of the multiple identities we study by attending more closely to how the content of these identities is produced and politicized. We see an unspoken assumption in LP research that

identities exist with political content baked into them already. But at a fundamental psychological level, an identity is nothing more than an individual difference reflecting the degree to which a collective category—e.g., Latino, Democrat, American—is crucial to one's self-definition (Ellemers et al. 1997). The more crucial a category is to a person's self-definition, the more likely it drives individual attitudes and behaviors. In turn, the content of any identity is heavily informed by situational dynamics (Turner et al. 1987). For example, the meaning of "Latino" in a setting depends on (*a*) who non-Latinos are, what they think, and how they act; and (*b*) how Latinos decide to position themselves against this outgroup(s). This comparative process is a well-established phenomenon that produces greater intragroup homogeneity (reflected in an ingroup's cohesion and unified activity) and greater intergroup distance (reflected in an ingroup's differentiation from an outgroup) (Tajfel 1981).

Two examples illustrate this recommendation. Given Latinos' increased heterogeneity, intergroup pressures have intensified for ingroup members to (re)define themselves in a changing field of racial groups. These dynamics have produced a new pan-ethnic label, Latinx, which finds stronger support among younger Latinos (Mora et al. 2022). In comparison to the labels Latino and Hispanic, the specific content of Latinx calls on coethnics to uphold a more gender-inclusive outlook, with a direct nod to salient LGBTQ diversity within the Latino population (Guidotti-Hernández 2017). Vicuña & Pérez (2023) report a meta-analysis of three experiments showing that, compared to participants who are asked to define themselves as Latino or Hispanic, those who are instructed to define themselves as Latinx express heartier support for pro-LGBTQ policies (e.g., gender-neutral restrooms). Furthermore, Latinx individuals who self-identify as LGBTQ are more likely than their cisgender counterparts to engage in a variety of forms of political participation (Moreau et al. 2019). This suggests that coethnics can reconfigure their ingroup's attributes to achieve collective political goals (Turner et al. 1987). The extent to which these identity configurations are durable remains an open question, however.

Increasing Latino diversity has also introduced intragroup pressures affecting the content and direction(s) of pan-ethnic identity. In light of California's Proposition 187—a 1994 anti-Latino ballot initiative—García Bedolla (2005) illuminated the reactions of Latinos in neighborhoods densely populated with immigrant coethnics. She established that many Latinos (some US-born) reacted to this proposition by excluding undocumented Latinos from their mental representation of being Latino, while others disidentified with Latinos because this category included undocumented coethnics. These intragroup dynamics significantly undermined pan-ethnic unity against this ballot measure.

These dynamics are resurfacing in studies of Latino conservatives (Cadena 2023). Although often presented as an outlier to mass Latino politics, about one-third of Latino adults self-identify as politically conservative and Republican (García & Sanchez 2022)—a trend not fully explained by Florida Cuban-origin Latinos, who are steadfast Republicans (Bishin & Klofstad 2012). This strong current highlights the broad political heterogeneity of Latinos, with many of them inhabiting quite distinct political worlds and media ecosystems (Velez et al. 2023). Consider Alamillo's (2019) research on the peculiar case of Latino support for Republican Donald Trump, who campaigned and governed as an avowed nativist politician. Alamillo (2019) reasons that some Latinos' attraction to a candidate who seemingly contradicted their pan-ethnic interests was his ideological worldview—one where race and racism play no role in American life. This denial of racism suggests that the general construal of Latinos as a racially minoritized group, whose life chances are heavily shaped by race and racism, is anathema to Latino conservatives (García Bedolla 2005). Hence, these individuals are less likely to view themselves as Latino, per se, and more likely to view themselves as Latino members of other groups, such as Republicans or Americans (Cadena 2023).

Taken together, these examples beg for more focused work on why these inter-/intragroup pressures select some attributes over others to define Latinos, and the conditions under which these shifts in identity content become long-lasting, an effort that requires paying close attention to the correspondence between Latinos' psychology and the social structures they inhabit.

EMBARRASSMENT OF CONCEPTUAL RICHES: LATINO IDENTITIES AND RELATED CONSTRUCTS

We defined an identity as an individual difference reflecting the degree to which a category (Latino, American, Democrat) is central to a person's self-definition. Some LP scholars hew to this parsimonious psychological conceptualization by measuring ingroup identities with survey items capturing the importance of a category to a Latino person (e.g., Silber Mohamed 2017). But most LP scholars operationalize Latino identity as "linked fate"—the notion that one's personal fortunes are intimately tied to the perceived fortunes of the ingroup (e.g., Gutierrez et al. 2019, Sanchez & Masuoka 2010, Zepeda-Millán & Wallace 2013). Although ingroup identity and linked fate are positively correlated, they are not synonyms. This produces theoretical and empirical slippage in applied research (Gay et al. 2016). Whereas ingroup identity is a stable individual difference that conditions ingroup members' responses to stimuli, linked fate is a byproduct of inter- and intragroup processes (Leach et al. 2008). In other words, linked fate is better seen as an outcome than as a predictor of ingroup dynamics. As a form of solidarity and bonding, linked fate is highly situational. Individuals are not constantly feeling a sense of linked fate. Rather, it is latent or heightened due to inter- and intragroup processes (Doosje et al. 1995, Turner et al. 1987). This implies that linked fate is not the stable individual difference that many scholars assume it is, so it should be unsurprising that linked fate is more variable and many times unreliably predictive of Latino politics (Sanchez & Masuoka 2010). The heightening of average linked fate levels and the generation of tighter variance around a higher mean are matters that LP scholars can investigate, empirically, by further theorizing when we should or should not expect to observe this sense of common fate.

A related challenge affects the relationship between ingroup identity and group consciousness. Careful LP scholarship since 2004 has established the influence of group consciousness on Latino public opinion, demonstrating that it heightens support for policies that strongly relate to Latinos (e.g., immigration) (Sanchez 2006). Conceptually, however, group consciousness is not ingroup identity. They are positively correlated, but, like linked fate, group consciousness is the outcome—not the trigger—of inter- and intragroup processes (Turner et al. 1987). Before one can become conscious about a group, one must first know which group is relevant in a situation and how relevant that group is to the self (e.g., Vicuña et al. 2022). In the parlance of social identity theory, some categorization process (e.g., institutions, elite discourse, campaign communications) privileges one identity category out of the many that Latinos hold in their identity portfolios (García-Rios et al. 2019), with the centrality of that category moderating one's responses to subsequent stimuli in a situation (Ellemers et al. 1997). That processing of stimuli is what produces group consciousness, particularly when one's appraisal leads one to conclude that the interests (objective or subjective) of the ingroup are at stake (Sanchez 2006). This implies that, conceptually, group consciousness might also be better construed as an outcome of Latino politics rather than a cause. Alas, Latinos cannot always be group conscious, because of human constraints in cognitive resources and information-processing capacity (Taber 2003). But Latinos can be steered toward group consciousness, and our recommendation is to further clarify when this phenomenon emerges, among whom, and with what downstream consequences.

Our discussion risks giving the impression that identity centrality is beyond reproach. We conclude this section by addressing how intersectionality bears on LP scholars' understanding of Latino identities (Mügge et al. 2018). First introduced by Crenshaw (1989), the notion of intersectionality proposes that systemic oppression works through multiple, overlapping identity categories that individuals possess. In psychological terms, intersectionality "posits that identities such as race, gender, and class (among others) are interdependent, deriving meaning from one another and reinforcing systems of inequality and privilege within society" (Remedios & Akhtar 2019, p. 180). Thus, whereas many LP scholars treat identities as having a monocausal influence on Latino attitudes and behavior, intersectional scholars propose the more radical idea that several identity categories can be collectively, simultaneously consequential for Latino political behavior.

Some LP scholars have usefully adapted this intersectional lens (e.g., Gershon et al. 2019). In her groundbreaking volume on Latina elected officials, Bejarano (2013) develops a novel intersectional framework that explains the steady increase of Latina legislators in Washington, DC and statehouses across the United States. Focusing on gender and pan-ethnicity identities, Bejarano (2013) contends that for Latina legislators, the usual disadvantages attached to being a woman and Latino in US politics are offset by their combination, allowing Latina legislators to uniquely yield greater electoral support than expected (but see Dyogi Phillips 2021). This aligns with García Bedolla's (2007) plea to use intersectionality not only as a way to document new forms of oppression among minoritized populations, such as women of color, but also as a conceptual tool to uncover less visible forms of privilege within some marginalized communities (e.g., Latinas with greater socioeconomic status). Here, Matos (2022) shows that native-born Latinas and Afro-Latinas are more likely to identify as women of color and see it as an important part of their identity, which reflects the differential experiences with gender, race, and intersectional experiences in the United States.

Complications nonetheless remain in how these intersectional identities are conceptualized and empirically appraised. The modal approach in intersectional research is to establish (usually through some form of linear regression) that individuals who inhabit several overlapping categories (e.g., poor women of color) display statistically distinct attitudes and behaviors. Setting aside the issue that these concatenations of categories often yield relatively low numbers of observations, the more fundamental challenge is that categories are not identities. Categories denote classification into a group, without any pretense that said classification is important to an individual. In contrast, an identity captures the subjective importance of a category to a person's self-definition. One complication this raises is that documented patterns in intersectionality exist in data but have little emotional and cognitive value to the individuals who are analyzed in this way. To untie this delicate knot, LP scholars should engage in deeper conceptual and measurement work. For instance, one conceptual unknown is whether intersectional identities exist as a concatenation or whether they exist as single identities that are then fused in response to political stimuli (Vicuña 2023). Clarifying this will require collaborative research efforts to understand when and how intersectional identities emerge and become politically consequential.

LANGUAGE AND LATINO POLITICAL DECISION MAKING

Another research frontier worthy of further investigation involves language and Latinos' expressed political beliefs and attitudes. There was a time when LP scholars treated language either as a basic demographic attribute that was collected during opinion surveys (Latino National Political Survey 1989, Latino National Survey 2005) or as a defining component of Latino culture (García & Sanchez 2022). Beginning around 2010, some LP scholars started reorienting our understanding of language as a crucial force that conditions what Latinos think politically (Pérez

2011). This gradual shift started with innovative work examining the political effects of English and Spanish campaign ads and recruitment efforts (Abrajano 2010), followed by methodological research on the validity of survey items in English/Spanish surveys of Latinos (Velez et al. 2023). Both research streams highlight the substantive role of language in the formation and expression of Latino political opinion (Zárate et al. 2023).

Flores & Coppock (2018) report three experiments showing that exposure to campaign ads in Spanish causally increases support for political candidates (by five percentage points) among bilingual Latinos but not among monolingual Latinos. This suggests that the language of political communication can shape Latino candidate evaluations. Indeed, Zárate et al. (2023) find that such patterns are not simply language effects masquerading as cultural effects. In two experiments that vary the ethnicity and language proficiency of political candidates, Zárate et al. (2023) find that Latino support for coethnic and White candidates increases when candidates (Latino and White) communicate with voters using native-sounding Spanish. Since these experiments build on previous work with less methodological control over language (e.g., Pérez 2011), this convergence of evidence boosts confidence in this language–opinion connection among Latinos.

These linguistic effects emerge via language's role in the belief-sampling process that drives people's formation and expressions of opinions (Pérez & Tavits 2022). The assumption here is that on most things political, individuals have hardly any preformed opinions to report. What they have instead is a lattice-like network of considerations—values, identities, knowledge, etc.—that they sample from to construct an opinion when asked to report their attitudes (Zaller 1992). Accordingly, structural and lexical features of a language privilege some considerations in memory, thus affecting the attitudes that people report. For example, languages vary reliably by how gendered they are, with some languages grammatically obliging individuals to attend to the gender of objects (e.g., Spanish) and others not doing so to the same degree (e.g., English). Thus, in experiments that assign individuals to interview in a genderless (versus gendered) tongue, the former report reliably stronger support for policy proposals addressing gender disparities, with conceptually similar effects on pro-environmental opinion, perceptions of ethnic conflict, and candidate evaluations (Pérez & Tavits 2022). This work also shows that these language effects are independent of culture, since language effects also emerge among individuals who inhabit the same culture and speak the same language but use different words (e.g., Latinx) (Vicuña & Pérez 2023).

What is left to do in this area? Plenty, actually. Most of the research just discussed reveals that interview language has *average* effects on Latino opinion. This leaves much room to illuminate the various mechanisms behind language–opinion effects. Indeed, more extensive work is needed to clarify when, how, and among whom these language effects emerge (Pérez & Tavits 2022, Zárate et al. 2023). Specifically, it would be useful to examine the moderating role of individuals' bilingual proficiency.

Finally, more theory-driven work is needed on the implications of language effects among Latinos. If a substantial share of Latino adults can report their opinions in two languages, what influences which tongue they choose in a survey; how different are their opinions in each language; and what does this variance suggest for the strength and direction of Latino public opinion? These delicate questions require steady and collaborative research efforts by LP scholars.

THE POLITICS OF ACCULTURATION: WILL LATINOS EVER STOP BEING LATINO?

As Latinos are a minoritized population with deep immigrant roots, the question of acculturation has rightfully taken a spotlight among LP scholars (e.g., Cruz et al. 2008, Jones et al. 2019, Telles & Ortiz 2008). The dominant view is that all immigrant populations eventually acculturate to

some degree. In its strongest form, immigrants acculturate via assimilation: a gradual, temporal process whereby subsequent generations of individuals from an immigrant population shed their stigmatizing attributes and acquire those of the dominant population, with differences between the immigrant outgroup and native-born ingroup losing their salience and power (Jiménez 2010). In short, assimilation describes how subsequent generations of US immigrants become White (Pérez et al. 2019)—a phenomenon that we think is more about adopting an ideological worldview than displaying or acquiring the "right" demographic traits.

Plenty of research suggests that some Latinos are on track to assimilate by various metrics, even if they are taking longer than previous immigrant waves, with various zigs and zags (e.g., Pedraza 2014, Telles & Ortiz 2008). Indeed, a marquee finding is the increased importance of American identity and decreased importance of (pan-)ethnic identity among Latinos over time. This is reasonable evidence of assimilation. But it is not incontrovertible. Assimilation stipulates a linear process—with some allowances for variation—whereby one "loses" one's stigmatizing attributes and replaces them with a majority's attributes, thus reducing majority–minority tensions. However, assimilation is framed here as a process that either happens to or is undertaken by a minoritized ingroup, which unhelpfully shifts attention away from this process's intergroup nature (Pedraza 2014). When taking a more generous view, assimilation is only one of several processes that describe majority–minority relations.

Hindriks et al. (2015) suggest that two simultaneous issues are at stake for a minoritized outgroup when considering its relationship to mainstream society: (*a*) Is it valuable to advocate for our ingroup's interests?) (*b*) Is it valuable to advocate for mainstream society's interests? **Figure 4** displays four answers to these questions. Assimilation is the preferred acculturation strategy when immigrant minorities deem it unimportant to advocate for their ingroup's interests but prioritize advocating for mainstream society's interests. An abundance of published work establishes the opposite of this trend among Latinos (García-Rios et al. 2019, Gutierrez et al. 2019, Zepeda-Millán 2017), suggesting assimilation is inadequate to characterize contemporary Latino politics. In contrast, sometimes a minoritized ingroup advocates for its own interests and society's interests. This is a condition where Latinos wish to remain ethnically distinct while also partaking in US politics and society, including through elected leadership roles at various levels of government

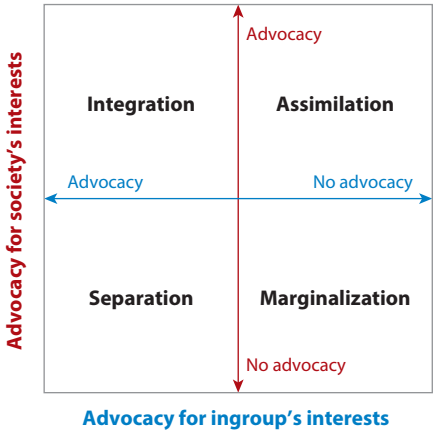

Figure 4

Acculturation strategies for immigrants and their descendants (adapted from Hindriks et al. 2015). The figure shows the anticipated acculturation strategy for immigrants and their descendants depending on their degree of advocacy for society's interests and their own ingroup's interests.

(e.g., Fraga et al. 2020, Gonzalez Juenke 2014). The remaining strategies include separation, which results when immigrant minorities champion their ingroup's interests without attention to mainstream society's interests (e.g., 1960s Chicano activism), and marginalization, yielding a case where a minoritized group advocates for neither their ingroup nor society's interests (e.g., some late-generation descendants of earlier Mexican immigrants) (Telles & Ortiz 2008).

This introduces more nuance into LP researchers' grasp of acculturation processes among Latinos, suggesting these dynamics are characterized more by fits and starts, as immigrants and their descendants cycle in and out of these states depending on the politics of the day, year, or era (Mora 2014, Zepeda-Millán 2017). One way for LP scholars to build on these insights is by specifying the political implications of these acculturation strategies. Specifically, how will LP scholars know when they are observing one of these strategies in politics—and what are their attitudinal and behavioral signatures?

Beyond conceptualization, there are also theoretical challenges in the study of Latino acculturation. We focus on one: the relationship between ethnic identity and American identity. In our discussion, we include national origin identity and pan-ethnic identity under the broader rubric of ethnic identity. In some influential literature, American identity increases in salience and importance across generations, with attendant declines in ethnic identity (Citrin & Sears 2014; but see Silber Mohamed 2017). Yet the acculturation strategies described above, coupled with heavy use of cross-sectional data to draw this inference, raise alternate possibilities. Consider recent scholarship documenting the continued importance and renewed salience of ethnic identity among later-generation Latinos (Jiménez 2010, Telles & Ortiz 2008). This evidence makes it difficult to conclude that ethnic identity disappears among later-generation Latinos, suggesting, instead, that it remains dormant and ready to respond to specific political contexts. Following this lead opens a door to learning more about why certain identities (e.g., Mexican, American) become important on their own or in combination (e.g., Mexican-American) at certain points in time for immigrants and their descendants, which can yield insight into the changing character of society, its institutions, and its norms (e.g., Agadjanian 2022). One productive way to document these dynamics is to follow the same individuals, and their descendants, across long spans of time (Telles & Ortiz 2008)—an expensive methodological investment justified by the theoretical and conceptual dividends it is likely to pay, especially if it is done collaboratively.

FROM CORRELATIONS TO CAUSES AND MECHANISMS

One major characteristic widely shared by LP research is its primary use of an individual-differences approach using a selection-on-observables methodology. This generally entails using survey sample(s) of Latino adults, estimating the relationship between a theorized predictor and outcome, while holding constant various other differences between individuals.

As LP scholars, we are told *ad nauseam* that this approach cannot definitively establish causality (i.e., correlation is not causation). But this type of scholarship is essential for description and theory building: It teaches us about the world of Latino politics and lets us carefully develop hypotheses about relationships between specific variables. The real challenge, instead, is our hesitation as a field to complement this work with more research that, in firmer fashion, establishes causes of LP politics and illuminates their mechanisms. Although some of this weakness can be corrected methodologically through more intricate research designs, we stress that no amount of methodological sophistry can substitute for coherent and internally consistent theories (Elster 1989).

To this end, we invite LP scholars to engage more energetically with two concepts that can pay theoretical dividends as we continue striving to isolate the various mechanisms behind Latino

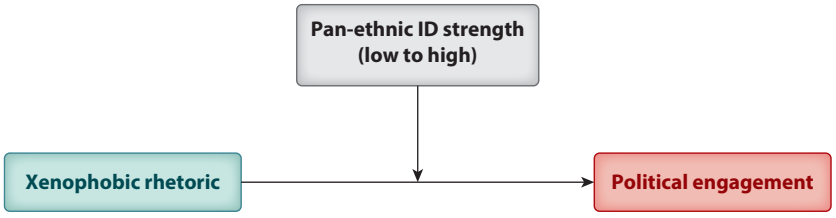

Figure 5

Pan-ethnic identity (ID) strength moderates the relationship between xenophobic rhetoric and Latino political engagement.

politics. These are moderators and mediators (Hayes 2022). Long considered social psychology's purview, these terms refer to the types of variables that can explain when, why, and how certain real-world relationships exist. A moderator is, simply speaking, a variable that strengthens (weakens) the relationship between two other variables. For example, if we hypothesize that xenophobic rhetoric increases Latino political participation, then identity strength—i.e., the degree to which being Latino is central to one's self-definition—is a moderator of that relationship, because it increases the correspondence between xenophobic rhetoric and political engagement. In this way, a moderator clarifies when or among whom this xenophobic rhetoric–participation relationship should manifest, thus injecting more nuance into theoretical explanations (see **Figure 5**). A good rule of thumb is that moderators are stable dispositions or contexts that are hard to change, which is why they influence relationships between other variables. If you are an LP scholar who often wonders whether a relation between two variables is uniformly displayed by all Latinos, then you are already thinking in terms of moderators.

In contrast, a mediator transmits the influence of one variable onto another. For example, if we agree that political context matters for Latino political participation, then a mediator informs us about how and why that context–politics connection matters. Unlike a moderator, a mediator does not condition the strength of relations between variables. Instead, it clarifies the link(s) connecting one variable to another. For example, group consciousness can be thought of as a crucial mediator of the relationship between xenophobic rhetoric and Latino political engagement (**Figure 6**). A good rule of thumb is to view a mediator as carrying or channeling the charge of one variable onto another, which means a mediator is malleable enough to change but durable enough to affect other variables. If we suppose that xenophobic rhetoric threatens Latino individuals and leads them to greater political engagement, then group consciousness is a plausible catalyst of that change. Here, xenophobic rhetoric heightens group consciousness, which then has a downstream effect of increasing Latino political participation.

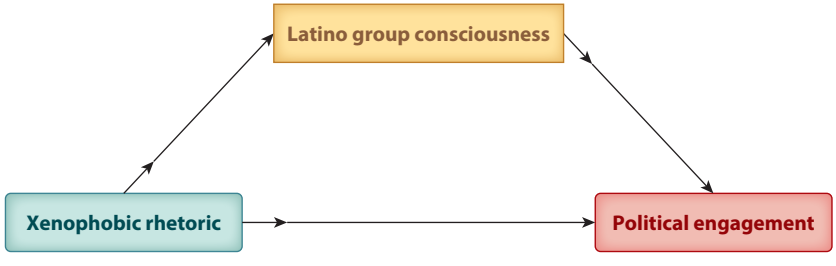

Figure 6

Group consciousness mediates the impact of xenophobic rhetoric on Latino political engagement.

CODA: THE NORMATIVELY GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE UGLY OF LATINO POLITICS

Having reached our review's end, we call attention to an often neglected but key aspect of LP research—the normative implications of our largely quantitative endeavor. Beltrán (2012) and many others urge LP scholars to grapple with important questions: What is the price of (pan-)ethnic unity among Latinos? Is it such a good thing that Latinos are also polarized in partisan terms? Is it in Latinos' interests to build (or smash) alliances with other minoritized groups? Why should it be so important to preserve one's ethnic identity? Are there better ways to build an epistemology of Latino politics than through quantitative tools? These questions are highly select examples of what is at stake if LP is to remain a vibrant research field. They certainly deserve continued scholarly attention—and for the sake of LP research, we think they merit their own systematic review. There are no easy answers here, of course. Our concluding thought is simply that a more credible and public-facing science of Latino politics should more aggressively aspire to conduct research that not only empirically describes how the political world actually is for US Latinos, but also takes more concrete steps to reimagine, normatively, how the world can and should be for them in light of that evidence.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

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