

## Chapter 1

# Latino Politics: Both a Growing and Evolving Political Community (Retrospective Essay)

Almost two decades ago, I was part of research group effort to explore more systematically the public worlds of the Mexican origin, Cuban and Puerto Rican communities in the U.S. More specifically, the scope of the research endeavored to identify the underlying bases for community among these Latinos and how that interfaces with their civic and political engagement on behalf of that community. Part of this endeavor entailed a detailed inventory of the extant social science research on the growing Latino communities. While the general mantra of researchers then was a paucity of available research, the end product- *Latino Politics: A Research Bibliography* produced an extensive compilation of research articles. Now, in conjunction with a new generation of Latino scholars (Profs. Sanchez and Peralta), we have undertaken to review the growth of the substantive field of Latino Political Studies. This introductory essay serves three purposes: a) to identify what have been the primary foci of this systematic research on Latinos; b) the extent and bases from which research has been conducted to understand the Latino communities; and c) persistent challenges confronting contemporary scholars for future research efforts.

If any consistent characterization has accompanied the discussions of Latinos, the primary one has been the incredible growth and national presence of this population. By Latinos, we are referring to those individuals whose ancestral origins come from Latin America (south of the U.S.–Mexico border) and the countries of the Iberian Peninsula. We are already noting dimensions of national origin, language, culture and its manifestations, and experiences living in America. The growth factor has resulted in Latinos having the highest population growth rates when compared to other racial/ethnic groups such that Latinos now exceed fourteen percent of the total U.S. population. By mid–decade, Latinos are accounting for more than two-fifths of the national population increase. At the same time, the nationalization reference deals with the geographical dispersion of Latinos throughout all of the fifty states (Census, 2004). Earlier works on Latinos focus on specific national origin groups (i.e. Mexican origin, Puerto Ricans or Cubans) focused upon their “traditional” areas of settlement. Now the variation and size of many more Latino national origin groups can be found in newer areas of settlement in the South, New England, upper regions of the Midwest, Rocky Mountain states, and suburban and rural communities in every region. The seemingly pervasiveness of Latinos has both accentuated their adaptation, adjustments, and maintenance of some forms of community. In addition there have been more visible societal responses to such an influx of people and traditions. So what are and have been the primary foci of research conducted on Latinos in the U.S.?

## Who Are They and Where Are They Going?

One of the persistent themes and research queries has been defining this population. Historically, this query was concentrated on the Mexican origin population, largely residing in the Southwest and their political development. Structural approaches such as internal colonialism, cultural nationalism, and political liberation became the theoretical frameworks to understand the bases for Chicano politics and ultimate aims of political advancement and empowerment. The nature and strength of a critical community lied with strong sense of group affinity and attachment and collectivist orientations toward social change. A Chicano ideology included a sense of political and personal efficacy, political cynicism toward

entrenched power structures, and orientation toward circumventing cooptation via direct action/confrontation to produce social change. Political institutions and official political representatives were part of the oppressive forces limiting Chicanos' opportunities and maintenance of community was a survival response from assimilation, conquest, and colonialization.

Research on the Mexican origin community continues into the present, with many of the similar themes pursued in both qualitative and quantitative analyses. Thus our contemporary examination of the extant research since the 1990's and before, continues to focus upon the bases of community for Latinos. The most prevalent development, in this regard, lies with the expanding boundaries of community. Whereas national origin groupings served more of a primordial connection among Latinos, the development of a pan-ethnic concept of community has gone beyond a symbolic and media-driven idea. The concept of pan-ethnicity entails a sense of commonalities (i.e. culturally, linguistically, experientially, status and circumstances, etc.) among persons of Latin American ancestry living in the U.S. Part of the current work emphasizes that this phenomenon is an American one and represents Latinos' responses to life in the U.S.

## Pan-Ethnicity and Community

An extensive research literature on the Latino communities has explored the concept of pan-ethnicity and its components. To what extent do individuals have or develop an affinity and/or attachment with other Latinos of different and, even, of the same national origin? How much of this process is affected by individuals' experiences, sense of self in relation to social categories, and pre-dispositions? How do contextual factors such as place of residence, demographic compositions of the communities in which they reside and societal stereotypes affect the Latinos' self-perceptions and associations? What is the role of public policies and political actors and institutions in defining community or treating the aggregation of Latinos as if they constituted a dynamic community? An examination of the social science articles identified in this collection addresses many aspects of these general questions with a variety of approaches and theoretical frameworks. Central to this growing body of research lies with the public effects of the broader community configuration. Clearly, the accounting of an emerging pan-ethnicity among Latinos prior to 1990 reflected more of a nominal sense of community. The extant literature points more to its pervasiveness both among a wider array of Latinos and its structural incorporation of this larger grouping (i.e. via political parties, public policies, public opinion, etc.).

In addition to the expansion of the notion of community beyond national origin boundaries, societal effects (i.e. anti-Latino ballot initiatives, restrictive immigrant policies, organizational efforts to limit Latino advancement, etc.) have had their impact on Latinos by affecting the extent and strategies of their mobilization, lobbying/protesting governmental policy initiatives, and pursuing greater political incorporation into American institutions. What are the bases for community and how does that affect the public life of Latinos? By bases of community, we are referring to "connectors" that bridge individual Latinos to others and enhance as sense of commonality and affinity. The research literature indicates it is a combination of individual factors, experiential occurrences, and structural conditions/events that impact the community-based actions and attitudes of Latinos. For example, a number of statewide referenda/propositions directed toward Latinos (primarily immigrants) had a catalytic effect of politically mobilizing that community and raising political awareness.

## Group Identification and Public Life

Concomitant with our previous discussion, the presence of a community is reflected by members of that community identifying with it. The heading for this section included the identification and “definition” of who are Latinos. A major theme of research in this area focuses upon the social construction of group identification. It is the cognitive process by which an individual develops a sense of group affinity and affiliation that has been one of the mainstays of Latino oriented research. Concepts of group identity, group identification and consciousness have been integral in understanding the development of community and responses to differential treatment, limited access and participation, political incorporation, and representation. A significant amount of work, both in volume and theoretical advancement has been made in the past twenty years. In addition, with the substantial portion of this community that is foreign/immigrant, part of that adaptive process entails racial and ethnic identification within the American societal context. The latter segment maneuvers from the racial and ethnic systems of their countries of origin to a predominantly black-white paradigm. As a result, a research focus on the inter-sectionality of race and ethnicity constitutes a theoretical and measurement challenge for researchers. Given the social construction of both of these concepts, raises the question whether they become inter-changeable, or are they still distinct, or, now, the result of a blending of phenotypical and cultural components that is situationally influenced? Certainly, the rubric of social identity, its manifestations among Latinos, and linkages for collective activities continues to receive considerable research attention.

## Assimilation and Acculturation

The question about what does Latinos want from American society and its institutions can take one along many different paths. The concepts of assimilation and acculturation are usually applied in this context. That is, how do Latinos fit into American society and if they are changing it, is consistent with foundational principles of the American polity? Long before Samuel Huntington raised major reservations about the capabilities of Latinos, especially Mexican origin persons, to fit into the American social-cultural fabric, the extent and patterns of group members’ assimilation into American society has been a major focus of study. The contemporary public and “intellectual” discourse deal more with the possible detrimental impact of Mexican values and practices that undermine core American values and principles. Thus, while the earlier discussions tended to concentrate on cultural, marital, and linguistic assimilation, today’s queries focus upon the extent of political incorporation and integration possible for Latinos, and whether that is desirable. As a result, developing bodies of research has been manifested by examining and defining national identity, patriotism, divided allegiances, and bonded social capital investments.

In terms of the general concept of assimilation, there is a substantial literature that confirms that Latinos have and are assimilating with such indicators of English language proficiency, increased rates of exogamy, affinity and identification with the U.S., and religious affiliation. At the same time, Latinos reflect the nature of a pluralistic society such that acculturation is more the “norm”. That is, retention of ancestral practices and traditions as well as integrating American values and mores is the modal response for Latinos. Similarly, research indicates that Latinos inculcate the core values of egalitarianism, civil liberties, and freedoms as other Americans. These patterns are more evident the longer Latinos live in the U.S. and with the succeeding generations. Thus, the contemporary research literature reflects extensive examination of the adaptive and integrative process that Latinos experience as well as the structural factors that affect that process.

Finally, a growing body of research literature has directed its attention to the “societal and political consequences of less than expected levels of assimilation by Latinos. Our earlier references to works by Samuel Huntington, which have posited that fundamental American societal principles and values are in direct contradiction with those embedded in Latinos’ value system. Most of these queries center on national identity, American nationalism and political chauvinism. What are the forms and scope of American national identity? Are there multiple components involved with being an American and how does that interface with political attitudes and behaviors? How do the notions of global citizenship and transnationalism affect Latinos’ national identities, political engagement and direction of political interest? What is reflected in the continuing development of research on Latinos is the integration of more general social science concepts and theories which not only includes the application of such concepts and theories to Latinos; but adds to the theoretical development of political behavior, political incorporation and other facets of public life.

## What do Latinos Want? – Opinions and Policies

While much attention has been directed toward the assimilation – acculturation processes, a different path of what Latinos want deals more with their views about government, levels of trusts and efficacy regarding political engagement and the public policies. The world of Latino public opinion and systematic research seek to replicate the established predictors of public opinion (i.e. socioeconomic status, partisan affiliation, ideology, etc.) and their applicability for Latinos. As a result, the extant research has broadened the scope on contributing factors to incorporate nativity, national origin group, language use, generational distance from the immigration experience, and cultural indicators. In addition, the concepts of group identification and levels of perceived discrimination serve to mediate the predispositions of Latinos. The objects of Latino public opinion range from the role of government to governmental responsiveness to specific policy preferences. In the case of the latter, the characterization of many Latinos as being socially and morally traditional is factored as a contributing element to a policy agenda that is more conservative.

Specific policy areas such as immigration reform, bilingual education, job training, school vouchers, and English only initiatives are focused upon to a greater extent. In a way, the comparison of Latino public opinion serves to compare or contrast their views with other segments of American society, as well as assessing the extent of consensus or commonality among Latinos themselves. The latter aspect relates to the development of a possible Latino agenda. Given our previous comments about the nature and extent of community among Latinos, the presence of a common political agenda is viewed as crucial indicator of a developing political community. To the extent, that a political community exists for Latinos, research on the bases and modes of political involvement represent a major development of research.

## Organizations, Mobilization, and Representation

While a greater degree of focus has been placed upon the individual experiences and attributes among Latinos, the political process, which entails political sentiments, preferences, and concerns, is mediated by collective actions and organizations. Thus, another corpus of research examines the development and roles of Latino-based organizations and their interface with political institutions and representatives. What are Latinos’ proclivity to be part of voluntary associations, and those with objectives for the betterment of the Latino community? Do varying levels of social capital or socio-economic status, or cultural practice facilitate or impede this communal orientation and activities? What are the positive

linkages between Latinos and these organizations and the congruence of a political agenda and strategies? The leadership –member relationship is a primary linkage that impacts organizational effectiveness, longevity, and resource development. Finally, the effect of organizational efforts regarding the selection of policy-makers and adoption (or perhaps prevention) of policy serve as benchmarks for Latino political development.

In addition, the greater degree of under-representation of Latinos as policy-makers furnishes researchers with a substantial research agenda to pursue. Concepts of representation, responsiveness, access, system support, descriptive and substantive representation, political trust and efficacy, and political incorporation embody the central relationships examined between Latinos and the U.S. political system. Legal and structural reforms such as the creation of minority–majority electoral districts can affect what kinds of candidates present themselves, the development of ethnically oriented campaigns, patterns of racial voter polarization, formulating de-racialization and/or coalitional efforts, and devising voter mobilization strategies. All of these dimensions constitute the scope of more contemporary research. As with more research, some debates occur as to differing interpretations of political developments. For example, besides legal interpretations of the constitutionality of majority-minority districts, a debate exists as to the participatory benefits of such jurisdictions. One body of work identifies characteristics of a safe district for Latino elected officials and declining voter turnout rates, and immeasurable policy changes. On the other hand, other researchers gauge the effects of increasing numbers of Latino elected officials as stimulating more Latinos to be politically engaged and supportive of the political system. One of the consequences of a more active Latino politics research agenda is the challenges to long held conventional “wisdoms” and more systematic research analysis.

Clearly this expanding realm of Latino politics research encompasses the many facets of political participation. How Latinos try to influence what government does and who serves as decision-makers is most heavily dominated by electorally oriented research. Latino voting is examined in terms of their comparability to other segments of the electorate and explanations for lower rates of registration and turnout. Whereas socio-economic status serve as good predictors of levels of participation overall; it is less of a factor among Latinos as education is the better forecaster than the other aspects of social status. Additional contributors such as nativity, naturalized status, language use/proficiency, generational distance from the immigration experienced, and group consciousness have now become a fuller complement of estimating Latino registration and turnout.

In addition to these aspects of electoral activity, Latino vote choice and stimuli used by organized efforts constitute a major corpus of participatory oriented research. Are Latinos more inclined to support the candidacy of fellow co-ethnics and be more electorally engaged (i. e. higher registration levels, more interested, involved in campaigns and other organizations, etc.)? Do candidates, irrespective of ethnic background, who make direct appeals to Latino issues and/or use cultural cues, prove to be more successful in receiving Latino voter support? In terms of partisanship, the traditional characterization has been a relatively weak association with the Democratic Party. More recently directed research has differentiated both tendency for specific partisan affiliation and saliency of that identification as impacted by critical political orientations, political ideologies, association with voluntary organizations, and cultural measures. Appeals by political parties have either been targeted to perceived group values and policy positions (i.e. abortion, same sex marriage, less or more government, civil rights, etc.) and/or partisan inclusiveness and responsiveness. Partially due to the rapidly growing segment of voting age Latinos and their geographic location in key electoral states, there has been more attention by political parties to gain the support of the Latino electorate. At the same time, the extant research indicates that it may be more portions or segments of the Latino electorate that is the strategic object of partisan endeavors rather than wholesale



support of the entire Latino electorate. In this regard, factors such as national origin, partisan contextual settings, size of the naturalized segment, and acculturation are viewed key profiles to activate Latinos in particular partisan directions.

One of the more challenging research queries lies with the connection of increased Latino political participation and resultant public policies and substantive representation. That is, what are the indicators of system responsiveness and influence as a result of greater Latino political involvement? Has increased participation resulted in fuller access to the political process, and receptive lines of communication of Latino policy preferences to policy-makers? One of the challenges is establishing direct patterns of influence. Whereas, influencing the policy-making process is more commonly viewed as pursuing the adoption of a specific policy proposal, much work has been focused upon Latinos' efforts to block policy initiatives. Immigration reform proposals for the past twenty-five plus years have seen Latino organizations and activists oppose perceived punitive measures that were disproportionately impacting Latinos, especially its foreign-born segment. Research on the 1980's Immigration and Reform Control Act and more contemporary immigration reform initiatives demonstrate the range of Latino participation, strategies, and organizational efforts. Interestingly, in 2006, massive public demonstrations occurred throughout American cities, largely comprised of Latino and other immigrants (both undocumented and legal residents) to protest what they considered very punitive and unfair policies. The more visible participation by a relatively unheard and unseen segment of the Latino community marked a broadening of the Latino political community. By mentioning the foreign-segment of the Latino community, we are opening up a very key dimension of who are Latinos—the foreign-born.

## Foreign-born Latinos and Politics

The more recent population counts and characteristics of Latinos reaffirm the significant portion that is born outside the U.S. Among Latinos adults that percentage approaches fifty-five to sixty percent. As a result, more research has been directed toward Latino immigrants in a wider variety of substantive areas. The conventional queries regarding their political incorporation/integration, degrees of acculturation/assimilation and political knowledge/information are part of the growing research literature. Both experiences in their country of origin (i.e. regarding political socialization, participatory value systems, regime characteristics, etc.) and experiences in the U.S. (i.e. isolation or integration, stereotypes and discrimination, ethnic enclaves, etc.) shape the political life of Latinos. To some extent, the extant literature would place the socio-economic adaptation of immigrants as taking priority over matters political. Nevertheless, events and examination of societal responses to immigrants have assisted the politicization of this Latino segment. Research on a number of California initiatives in the mid to late 1990's has demonstrated a level of activism not previously seen. Similarly, local and state governments' responses to undocumented immigration have provided Latino organizations and activists the impetus to organize and activate this segment. Thus the research now focuses upon the political participatory patterns of the Latino immigrant community.

Other realms of research deal with the formal attachment to the American political system via naturalization for Latino non-citizens. While previous studies of naturalization have dealt with individual attributes and orientations, the contemporary research efforts have integrated contextual and event related data to explain the naturalization decision. In addition, the political consequences of an expanding naturalized segment of the Latino population are examined in terms of partisanship, voting and registration, and overall political activism. This has resulted in differentiating the Latino population along a number of vital dimensions- native vs. foreign-born, English vs. Spanish speakers, residential areas of concentration and national origin groups. Given the migration histories of the various groups falling

under the Latino umbrella, variations as to periods of migration, U.S. foreign policies to the countries of origin and extent of continued contact with their home countries are key considerations necessary to be familiar with Latino immigrants.

In the case of the latter factor, a whole area known as transnationalism has evolved in the past ten years. The extent of globalism, interactions and relations between the immigrant communities and formal and informal sectors of their home countries has become quite important. For example, the extent and amount of remittances sent to one's home country has not only major financial impacts on economic growth and development, but also on the support for families and hometowns of immigrants. Institutional facilitation is supported by major financial institutions and governments. This economic tie has political ramifications. For example, émigrés have lobbied political institutions in their home country to insure representation there as well as adopting dual citizenship options to protect rights in their homeland and pursue U.S. citizenship. The concepts of globalism have incorporated broader notions of global citizenship and multi-countries of citizenship and affinity. While Latinos are not unique in these kinds of relationships, scholarship in this area is making major contributions to this emerging field.

Another realm of transnationalism deals with the development of hometown associations that engage, primarily, with assistance to family members and their communities. These efforts require organizational skills and coordination, as well as knowledge bases (i.e. of financial transactions, purchasing, etc.) to accomplish organizational objectives. Some research has examined these efforts as the acquisition of political resources that has utility in both one's country of origin and residence. Continued interest and contact with one's country of origin also can have implications with foreign policy advocacy in the U.S. Congress. This is truer of expatriates pursuing policies of regime change, or economic policies (i.e. trade embargoes, free trade zones, etc.), or security pacts. What is the role of Latinos as specific foreign policy advocates and how does country of origin affect this area?

## Context Matters for Latinos

Whereas, most of the research efforts have use the individual or actions of societal institutions as the unit of analysis, the adage of "place matters" emphasize the inclusion of contextual factors into the political equation of Latino politics. Unmistakably, the inclusion of context as a major force affecting the political life of Latinos is becoming more reflected in the more contemporary research literature. Examples of such factors would the characteristics of the communities of residence, contextual policy climates, the content of public opinion, mass media's reporting and characterization of Latinos, as well as more punitively oriented public policies help to frame the public directions of a more visible and operable Latino community. A wider range of political engagement by Latinos is reflected by the contemporary research, as well as more complex analyses. As far as the settings for Latino political behaviors, the contemporary research has augmented regional or more localized studies, with the availability of national surveys and studies. While the paucity of substantial data sources was a mantra for persons trying to study Latino sub-groups as well as the pan-ethnic grouping, there is a much wider array of national surveys, public opinion polls, census/governmental data sources, and exit polls on hand.

## Future Latino Research and Challenges

Our discussion of who Latinos are and what do they want has tried to establish the scope of contemporary research on Latinos, especially since the 1990's. The resultant sections of this book document the extensiveness of the expanding Latino research. Yet with its remarkable growth, challenges

still remain for researchers in this area to where Latinos are going. While the aggregation of the many Latino national origin groups has become the dominant mode of analysis, there are necessary substantive questions that can determine what are the appropriate units of analysis and bases for comparisons. Or, in other words, what is the focus and objective of the research inquiry and what aggregation is best suited. When should research efforts be directed toward particular national origin groupings and their political “realities” as opposed to the combination of all elements of Latino communities as research question(s) are posed? Comparisons have been commonly made between Latinos and non-Latinos (i.e. Anglos, African Americans, other minorities, etc.). This pattern of research will continue; yet intra-group comparative studies are also warranted to understand the dynamics of their political development and how common or different circumstances can affect political orientations, participation, and behaviors. Comparative based research has been a trademark of Latino politics research, but the comparative context will vary.

As we mention context, the recent directions of Latino research has sought to incorporate contextual factors as bases for political behaviors and mobilizations. Characteristics about the Latino community itself (i.e. socioeconomic status, national origin mix, immigrant segment, etc.) and that of the larger community (i.e. population mix, partisan climate, inter-group contact, political representation and responsiveness, etc.) provide the setting for any number of political activities and developments. Thus, there is a broadening of the participatory schema to extend beyond the individual. This approach will require also analytical techniques to take into account these different types of contributory factors.

Our earlier discussion of community and the identification process would suggest a dynamic process such that multiple bases of community can exist and manifest themselves in a variety of political modes and expressions. At the same time, the long-standing research on group identity needs to take into consideration a multiplicity of identities within the Latino community. Thus research needs to take into account situational factors, linkages across different social and political statuses, overlapping communities and the like for a fuller compilation of the makeup of Latinos and their community. For example, there is a large extant literature on the inter-sectionality of race, ethnicity, class, and gender. In consideration of both conceptual and methodological concerns, what are the processes involved with the acquisition of multiple group identifications and how are they utilized. If multiplicity is present, does this facilitate the bridging of distinctive, yet inter-related communities to engage in cooperative political actions? How does one measure these multiple identities and the capture their individual and interactive effects on political phenomena?

The more active immigrant segment of the Latino community presents some important challenges in the conceptualization of political incorporation and integration. We are living in a much more inter-related world where traditional national boundaries that have defined political citizenship is undergoing marked changes. Nationalism, national identities, political allegiances, and political involvement are not dichotomous phenomena, nor mutually exclusive conditions.

The traditional queries of identifying a “common” Latino political agenda, the extent of political responsiveness, impact of greater political representation on the well-being of this community, and impact on the American political system as a minority group or more recognized interest group will be developed with greater sophistication and complexities. In the case of the latter area (i.e. as a minority), the distinction of a racialized minority or marginalized group in American politics is part of the evolving nature of Latino politics. The intersection of racial and ethnic identification is a complex and interesting process in light of the longstanding black-white racial classification system in America. Again, will Latinos restructure the racial system to a more multi-racial society and what does this mean for group politics in the future?



## *Chapter Two: Methodology and User Guide*

Ultimately, the development of research on Latinos and the American political system is an examination of the nature and dynamics of U.S. politics. The scope of Latinos is bi-directional in terms of understanding the changes occurring within the Latino community itself and the changes that take place with the American socio-political system. It has been the intent of this introductory essay and for this contemporary research collection more generally, to characterize the breadth and scope of systematic queries into the public life of Latinos in the U.S. This compilation can benefit the most “seasoned” researcher, as well as the intellectually curious scholar as to the diversity of scholarly outlets, content, analyses, and theoretical foundations of Latino orientated research.