

**THE POLITICS AND POLICY OF THE ECONOMIC
DETERMINANTS OF CIVIC PARTICIPATION ON
LATINO COMMUNITIES**

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ABSTRACT

Economic vitality is an essential component of political participation and the structural impediments to economic stability among Latinos have long been seen as a barrier to the social and political resources that are important to becoming fully integrated members of society. In turn, we know that ethnic identity also has an impact on participation and that perceived assaults on that identity can be an impetus for action. Given the recent downturn in the economy and resulting negativity toward Latinos and immigrants we find it important to evaluate the impact that economics has on Latino political behavior and the role national politics plays on Latino ethnic identity. In particular we argue that the recent economic downturn is likely to have complex impact on Latinos' level of participation. We argue that while the negative economic situation may decrease Latino political participation the resultant political discussion may replace that lost participation with a greater identity-based political response. Finally, we discuss the policy implications and argue for a postmodern alternative to public administration that allows for greater self-governance.

INTRODUCTION

The enormous demographic growth of the Latino population is the engine of Latino politics (de la Garza 2004, 91), and while demographic growth hasn't translated into significant national clout for Latinos, it has resulted in enormous speculation by pundits and the media regarding the "Latino vote". The 2004 Presidential election left some Latino scholars exasperated by a common pattern in Latino politics; early conjecture about the emerging strength of Latinos, a period of political flirtation between Latinos and the Parties and then a ubiquitous desertion of Latino interests after the election is over. Leal et al. (2005, 41) note that Latino voter turnout "surged from 5.9 million in 2000 to at least 7 million in 2004". These numbers continued to rise throughout the decade, but the 2008 election still left scholars ambiguous about the contribution Latinos had on President Obama's victory. However, a focus on the sheer numbers obscures the complexity of Latino voting behavior and there is a long stream of literature that grapples with the question of participation and Latinos. The objective of this paper is illustrating the complexity of the impact that economics has on Latino participation. While it has long been known that economic vitality has a positive impact on participation, the relationship between Latinos and American society in the depressing economic times may change the character of Latino participation.

THE ECONOMIC IMPACT ON LATINOS AND ITS POLITICAL SIDE-EFFECT

The direct impact of a slumping economy can be illustrated by a report published by Pew Hispanic Research, which found that Hispanic household wealth fell by 66%

from 2005 to 2009, compared to whites who lost 16% of their wealth during the same time period. While this disparity in loss is great, the disparity in wealth itself is even greater. The median household wealth for Hispanics fell from \$18,359 in 2005 to \$6,325 in 2009. This has a devastating impact on the resources available to Hispanic families to do much beyond subsistence. By comparison, median household wealth of whites dropped from \$134,992 to 113,149 (Taylor, Fry and Kochar, 2009). Hard economic times have a political impact on minority groups, particularly immigrants. As the majority population feels the impact of a depressing economy, attention often drifts towards seeing some explanation and immigrants are particularly susceptible to becoming the focus of collective ire. As jobs become scarce, the accusation that immigrants are taking American jobs becomes a tangible argument. This gives rise not only to political attempts to preserve jobs, such as the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, but these nativist sentiments are often reinforced by cultural arguments against foreigners and minorities (Santa Ana, 2002). It is thus not surprising to see a similar calls attacking Hispanic groups and other minority groups during the latest recessionary period. These threats are filtered through a barrage of rhetoric and metaphors that connect Latinos with negative connotations and imagery (Chavez, 2008)

The political discussion becomes more heated when legitimate research organizations, like Pew Hispanic Center, report that foreign born workers gained employment from 2009 to 2010, while native born workers lost jobs (Kochar, 2010). However, the story, as Mr. Rakesh Kochar testified before Congress, was more complex than that. Immigrants tend to be more flexible, more mobile and are more likely to absorb job losses with lower wages. In fact, during the same period that foreign born workers gained jobs, they also lost wages (Kochar,

2010). But nuance often gets lost in the discussion. During the collapse of the mortgage crisis in 2008, popular commentators such as Rush Limbaugh and Lou Dobbs of CNN repeatedly blamed the crisis on the Community Reinvestment Act, a federal program meant to assist low-income families with loans for their homes. The Southern Poverty Law Center reported that these political commentators were citing false stories of up to five million undocumented immigrants defaulting on their mortgages, and that these people had received these loans through false identifications (Keller, 2009). A right-wing columnist, Steve Sailer, accused banks of using mortgages to recruit minorities and implied that Washington Mutual's recognition as a top employer for Hispanics was proof that "racial activists" had a hand in the economy's downturn (Sailer, 2009).

LATINO IDENTITY

There is a practical consideration that should be addressed when discussing Latinos and economics. The terms Latino and Hispanic are the most accepted words for a diverse population of people with linguistic, geographic and historical similarities, but wrought more for practical convenience than descriptive clarity. This is not to say that Latinos do not share a common identity or that the public at-large does not see Latinos as a coherent group. After an economic recession in the 1990s and a growing impatience with increasing budgetary problems, California voters went on a full frontal attack against illegal immigrants, which in California largely means Mexicans. Proposition 187 sought to reel in government spending by eliminating public services to illegal immigrants and giving public officials, such as doctors and teachers, the official capacity to report suspected illegal immigrants to the Immigration and Naturalization Service. While Proposition 187 might have

been seen by Whites as a good-faith effort to cut waste, the debate separated along heated racial lines, creating urgency among Latinos to become politically active (Pantoja et al. 2001, 730). Although, it may be a positive sign to see an increase in political activity by Latinos, particularly when they feel politically isolated or under attack by the electorate at large (Pantoja and Segura, 2003; Pantoja, et al. 2001), economic events that result in isolating Latinos, such as Proposition 187, may encourage Latinos to distinguish themselves in ethnic terms “*against* the existing political order” (DeSipio 1996, 7). The Proposition 187 debate demonstrated that despite their diversity, Latinos are a group of people distinguishable, for better or worse, by both Latinos and the electorate at large.

Similar to the 1990’s, the United States has faced a severe economic downturn since 2008. An important difference is that Latino immigration and fertility rates have contributed to a growing and spreading Latino population. Every other person who was born or migrated into the United States last decade was Latino. Latinos, for the first time, also made up a majority of the population under the age of 2. Latinos are also comparatively young, with the average age varying by state, but generally about 28 years old. By contrast, the average age of non-Hispanic whites is 46 years old. With rapid growth in states like Indiana, Alabama, Georgia and North Carolina, Hispanics are more visible than ever, forcing a national discussion on the public’s commitment to education, the social safety net, health care, and other vital areas of economic support. With a majority of the recipients to aid becoming increasingly Latino and a majority of those paying the bill being non-Hispanic white, the economic downturn has suddenly worn the public’s commitment to national investment.

LATINOS AND THE POLITICAL SYSTEM

Are Latinos an equal partner in the struggle to compete for limited resources? Should organized efforts on the part of Latinos to influence the political system be expected to yield the desired results? Do Latinos have much agency in controlling their destiny, or is the American political system stacked against them? In an attempt to answer these kinds of questions, F. Chris Garcia and Rodolfo de la Garza classified three perspectives of Latino politics; pluralism, internal colonialism, and elitism (1977, 2-10). In addition, Rodney Hero's (1992) two-tiered pluralism adds considerably to these perspectives in Latino politics. How one sees the relative power of various groups determines the framework one would choose to describe our political system. The pluralist framework argues that groups compete with one another on a competitive field, each with their own advantages, resources and centers of power where there are multiple access points from which they can influence the political system for change. The most compelling argument for a pluralistic model is Lawrence H. Fuchs' (1990) *The American Kaleidoscope*. In his encyclopedic text, Fuchs details the irony of an American culture that is defined both by its flowering racial diversity and its historical resistance to cultural modifications. Fuchs argues that the hyphenated American has triumphed not as a repudiation of American values, but as an expression of them (1990, 72). He concludes with a persuasive parallel between the Latino immigrant experience and past immigrants that are now largely integrated into the political power structure.

Pluralism is not solely about minority groups from a racial perspective, but minority groups in its broadest sense. The literature on minority politics views pluralism from an ethnic or racial nexus, but this is not to say that the literature on Latino politics approaches the political system

with the impression that racial groups are rigidly cohesive units of observation. Much of the political science literature has emphasized the heterogeneity of the racial groups themselves. One of the most important conclusions to come out of the Latino National Political Survey was that Latinos defied “simple categorization” (de la Garza et al. 1992, 15). Yet when speaking about political participation, Latino political behavior can be seen as distinguishable from other ethnic or racial groups even while taking demographic and socio-economic factors into account (Calvo and Rosenstone 1989, 22).

Another model, the internal colonialism perspective, claims a socio-political system in which Latinos are dominated and exploited by other groups, even though they may have the same formal legal status of the dominant group (Garcia and de la Garza 1977, 8). Internal colonialism emphasizes the integration of a historically racist relationship between the dominant Anglo majority and Latinos into the fabric of the political system. Racial distinctions from the dominant group are seen to have negative or inferior qualities, and the stereotyping of Latinos is embedded into the institutions of the social and political system, from the electoral system to the financial and education systems, which serves to disadvantage Latinos or exclude them entirely from accessing the resources necessary to advance.

Similar to internal colonialism, the elitism model asserts that there are privileged classes of people that enjoy superior resources, albeit with racially generated attachments which serve to further appropriate the privileged class their position at the top (Hero 1992, 16). The elitism model is similar to internal colonialism, but depends less on racial distinctions and more on class differences to explain the unequal distribution of power and resources that characterizes the Latino masses. Although there is a theoretical difference between elitism and internal

colonialism, both theories are used to explain the paucity of growth in influence and wealth among Latinos in the political system. Elitism is also different in that it does account for some growth in Latino influence, but Latino elites are not likely to resemble the Latino masses and are more likely to resemble their elite cohort.

While elitism is able to account for the growth in Latino power and wealth, the undeniable upward mobility of some Latinos poses a greater challenge to the internal colonialism model. Some argue that the power of ethnic cohesiveness as a unit of study may have already given way to multi-ethnic units of class (Valle and Torres 2000), but Rodney E. Hero (1992) writes that there is a large segment of Latinos which are structurally cut off from the opportunities that are available to the mainstream, despite the success stories. Hero describes the most compelling perspective on Latinos' relationship with the American system, a two-tiered pluralistic society in which there is a conventional population that operates in the traditional patterns that most immigrant groups do, and a second tier which consists of a political and social sub-class whose position is supported largely by historical and cultural inequalities that have become embedded into the fabric of the structural system (1992, 192). Hero's theory of two-tiered pluralism is not clear on how the system differentiates between the Latino upper-tier and the Latino second-tier or how many first-tiered Latinos are allowed to exist by the system. However, two-tiered pluralism is not simply a model of two types of Latinos, those who succeed and those who cannot, but of a more complex framework that consists of a political system which is formally unrestricting within a social system which is informally constraining because of negative historical relationships (1992, 194).

The Proposition 187 debate illustrates Rodney Hero's model well, as Latinos were politically fully

engaged, but largely helpless in their efforts to prevent Proposition 187 from passing quite decisively. Although Proposition 187 was deemed unconstitutional, the ruling by the court did not do much to improve the social status of Latinos. Indeed, the anti-immigration movement in California is still quite robust and has not shown signs of waning since the 1990's. This is precisely the relationship Hero argues that Latinos have with the American political and social systems. Latinos may enjoy a legal status that is equal to the majority, but the continued poverty and social status of Latinos is a function of continually having to defend themselves by the mainstream, preventing them from tapping into valuable social resources of the system.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

The study of political behavior presents political scientists with the substantial problem of manufacturing theoretical mechanisms to help predict or explain the action of participating in politics. We begin with the fact that people do in fact participate in a variety of ways. V.O. Key's *Politics, Parties, and Pressure Groups* (1942) explored the impact various structural inputs had on the political process, from regional economic characteristics to interest groups, and Robert Dahl's (1961) seminal case study of New Haven politics began a substantial interest in the political activity of the citizen in a pluralistic society. Dahl observes that political activities had to compete with other sources of activity and concludes that the notion of "the primac[y] of politics in the lives of the citizens of a democratic order are ancient, manifold, and complex" (1961, 280). While Dahl's case study emphasized the many aspects of political participation that an individual could partake, Key focused on the institutional elements of political participation, from the media to labor unions. V.O. Key's structural analysis provided a foundation for

future inquiry into identifying pressure groups, how they operate, who mobilizes them and why people take part in them in the first place. In conjunction, both Key and Dahl provide a good beginning to exploring political participation, but Key's analysis left out many of the details while Dahl's case-study method obscured the forest through the trees.

The social, economic and political changes in New Haven chronicled by Dahl suggests that politics is far from a spectator sport, but the study of political behavior, which began in earnest with Campbell et al's *The American Voter* (1960) and Anthony Downs' *Economic Theory of Democracy* (1957), challenged the view in political science that the citizen was an interested, dispassionate and judicious political actor. In Lester W. Milbrath and M.L. Goel's (1977, 11) review of political participation they observed that the political world consists not only of spectators, but also apathetics and gladiators. Apathetics, persons who were largely unconcerned with politics, and spectators, the situationally interested persons, made up the vast majority of the people they identified, while a very small percentage made up the deeply involved and committed participants in the political system. Campbell et al note that, "far from being more attentive, interested, and informed, independents tend as a group to be somewhat less involved in politics" (1960, 134). Similar to Milbrath and Goel's spectators, independents have poorer knowledge of the issues, a less clear image of the candidates, low interest in campaigns and their electoral choices have less to do with personally engaged evaluations of the candidates. Strong partisans, however, are active, knowledgeable and vested in the political system. Along with various social, economic and political contextual phenomena, the American voter makes their electoral decisions through a spectacle of personal loyalties that are used to distill the information necessary to make their

electoral decisions; the greatest of which is partisanship. To the American voter, partisan identification is not only the greatest source of reliable information, but a stable force in the political life of their immediate family (1960, 148).

The informative studies of political participation, such as Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba's *Civic Culture* (1963), Sidney Verba and Norman H. Nie's *Participation in America* (1972) and Sidney Verba, Norman H. Nie and Jae-On Kim's *Political Participation* (1978), established the foundational role socioeconomic status (SES) plays on political participation. They found a pattern of political participation where people with higher levels of income, education, and social and job status were more likely to participate (Verba et al. 1995, 281), and that this relationship was consistent across various political systems (Verba, Nie and Kim, 1978). Although Verba et al's (1978) study determined that institutional effects unique to the various political systems could reduce or accentuate the disparity of political participation within SES demographics, the overarching theme was consistent with the scholarship on the impact socio-economic status had on participation. This was consistent with Almond and Verba's *Civic Culture* (1963, 190), which compared citizen participation across five countries and found that a citizen's sense of their competence to participate increased the chances that they would participate. Competence was seen as an essential ingredient of participation because it increased the likelihood that the individual would not only be approached to participate, but would initiate participation him/herself.

The connection between socioeconomic status and greater participation is not new. Connelly and Field (1944) found that there was a connection between higher economic levels and turnout, and Hyman and Sheatsley (1947, 421) wrote that it was difficult to get less educated people to

participate because they were less available to the system at-large via literacy rates and familiarity with the political system. Verba and Nie substantiated the socioeconomic connections with participation in their classic work *Participation in America* (1972), by outlining the characteristics of the super active participants and their relationship with civic attitudes which led to a skewed level of political participation by those with higher levels of SES. Higher SES individuals are presumed to be greater benefactors of the political system and therefore are more likely to have a greater allegiance to it. A valuable perspective on why allegiance and competence would lead to greater participation can be found in Albert O. Hirschman's *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty* (1970). Hirschman argues that a member of an organization has two options when dissatisfied with its policies or performance; to exit the organization or to voice his/her dissatisfaction with the organization.

It becomes more difficult to exercise the exit option when the organization in question is the government, however, in more liberal governments, abstaining from participation can be seen as exercising the exit option. Consistent with this, Almond and Verba (1963, 198) found that the relationship between allegiance to the system and participation had a strong relationship in the United States and Britain; "...the Democratic government that fosters a sense of ability to participate in decisions does appear to reap the benefit of this participation".

LATINO ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION

The litmus test of political participation for any group is to measure their levels of electoral turnout. Increasing levels of electoral participation may suggest a comparative increase in socio-economic status, higher levels of personal interest, greater levels of civic

engagement and participation, and a greater effort on the part of the establishment to recruit Latinos. The apparent surge in Latino voters from 2000 to 2008 may indicate an improvement in these areas, and may suggest a leveling of the disadvantages that have traditionally created low levels of turnout (Garcia 1997, 44). However, the facts on the ground paint a considerably different picture. Table 1 illustrates that the U.S. Census Bureau (2005) reports that while more than seventy-five percent of non-Hispanic Whites were registered to vote in the 2004 Presidential election, only sixty-four percent of Hispanics were registered to vote¹. Only forty-seven percent of Hispanics voted, compared to over sixty-seven percent of non-Hispanic Whites.

When considering the large non-citizen population of Hispanics, the numbers are change dramatically. Taking into account non-citizens, less than thirty-five percent of Hispanics were registered to vote compared to seventy-four percent of non-Hispanic Whites, and only twenty-eight percent of Hispanics voted in the 2004 Presidential Election compared to sixty-six percent of the non-Hispanic White population. These numbers also exclude the considerable number of migrant undocumented workers in the Hispanic population. A recent study by Pew Hispanic Research (2005) reported that there were more than 2.4 million undocumented Hispanics in the United States. These numbers have also hardly moved since 1980. While eighty-five percent of Whites² were registered, only fifty-six percent of the Spanish population was registered, and while sixty-six percent of the White population voted, only forty-six percent of the Spanish population voted. In other words, the increase in raw numbers of Hispanics voting from 1980 to 2004, from 2.5 million to 7.6 million, is attributable almost entirely to population growth, not a deeper incorporation of Latinos into the political system.

Table 1
 Registrations and Voting of Non-Hispanic Whites and
 Hispanics in the 2004 and 1980 Presidential Elections³

	2004			
	N/H White		Hispanic	
	Citizens Only	Non- Citizens included	Citizens Only	Non- citizens included
Registered	75.1%	73.5%	64.0%	34.9%
Voted	67.2%	65.8%	47.2%	28.0%
	1980			
Registered	84.7%	70.3%	56.0%	36.3%
Voted	66.2%	62.8%	46.1%	29.9%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

LATINOS AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS

Latinos are uniquely affected by a variety of institutional, social and demographic factors that have a significant impact outside the margins. SES variables provide a powerful predictor for determining who votes, and it has been greatly substantiated in a variety of empirical studies, but it also opens up a discussion that is central to Latino politics. Socio-economic factors such as job status, education and income are not only interrelated but they are mutually reinforcing. Education and income have a substantial effect on participation (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980, 35) and it has a large impact on Latino

political participation because they are far more likely than Anglos to occupy the lower rungs of the socioeconomic ladder (de la Garza, et al. 1994, 155).

Rakesh Kochhar reported for the Pew Hispanic Center that Latino households enjoyed less than ten cents per every dollar of wealth owned by Anglo households (2004). While Latino household wealth was \$7,932, Anglo household wealth was \$88,651 (Kochhar 2, 2004). The National Center for Education Statistics reported that Hispanics born out of the United States had a dropout rate of 44%, Hispanics born in the U.S. with at least one foreign-born parent had a 14.6% dropout rate and Hispanics with both parents born in the U.S. had a 15.9 dropout rate. By comparison, Non-Hispanics (including African-Americans) had a 7.4%, 4.6% and 8.2% dropout rate, respectively (Llagas and Snyder 2003). Latino job status is equally low. Pew Hispanic Research reports that 76% of new jobs for native-born Latinos and 81% of foreign-born Latinos were in occupations requiring minimal formal education” (Kochhar 4, 2005). By comparison, 64% of new jobs for native-born Anglos were in occupations requiring a college degree or more (Kochhar 2005, 4). Socio-economic status is not entirely about issues affected by wealth, but also of other social characteristics that may impede or enhance the tendency for Latinos to participate. Gender has been viewed to have a long-standing impact on political participation (Milbrath and Goel 1977, 116) and it has been suggested that cultural factors may cause differences in political participation within the various Latino groups (Wrinkle et al. 1996, 151). Carol Hardy-Fanta (1993, 154) attributes some of these differences to be a function not only of a sexist mainstream social structure, but also of sexist components within Latino society that require women to be less assertive and passive than their male counterparts.

Another substantial SES characteristic is institutional engagement. Milbrath and Goel (1977, 111) found that organizational involvement was a strong predictor of political participation, because organizations not only instill a sense of duty into their members, but also give them opportunities to develop the social skills necessary to participate. Verba and Nie (1972, 192) argued that trade unions provided such a resource for its members. Latinos may gain similarly from integrating with existing social organizations. David Leal (1999) found that membership in the military service helped increase the levels of participation among Latinos, and Campbell (1996) concluded that Latinos integrated into organizational groups were *more* likely than Anglos to participate in certain non-voting activities, such as attending rallies. William A. Diaz made a similar conclusion (1996, 169) calling for the government to provide programs that would encourage an increase in Latino involvement in civic organizations.

Time factors also have an impact on Latino participation, and the pervasive impact of the immigrant experience within the Latino community will continue to manifest itself in generational and life-cycle differences. Hill and Moreno (1996) found substantial differences between second and first generation Cubans where subsequent Cuban generations identified less with the Republican Party, and Shaw et al. found that life-cycle effects had a significant impact on political participation (Shaw et al. 1996, 343). The relatively young population of Latinos has a strong influence on the low levels of political behavior. The disparity in socio-economic status between Latinos and non-Latinos and the strong predictive power of the SES model make a compelling argument that Latinos are severely under-represented (Tolbert and Hero 1997) by the political system. However, a better picture of Latino political participation would be gained by

connecting those SES characteristics with their levels of participation. By doing so, we may begin to address whether or not Latino political behavior is a unique feature of Latinos *as Latinos*. Members of the same socio-economic status among Anglos may indeed participate at the same levels as their Latino cohort, but it may well be for very different reasons.

LATINOS AND CIVIC VOLUNTEERISM

The Civic Voluntarism model (CVM) provides a clearer picture of political participation by exploring the non-political activities of people who involve themselves in politics. CVM is particularly useful in understanding Latino political participation because it captures phenomena that disproportionately affect Latinos, such as language barriers, citizenship status, and religion and as an extension, their country of origin. The Civic Voluntarism model, or resource model, improves on SES theory by filling the gap between socio-economic status and political participation. The Civic Voluntarism model has high regard for social connectedness and builds on previous suppositions on psychological factors like civic duty (Almond and Verba 1963; Verba and Nie 1972). However, Civic Voluntarism is ambiguous regarding other psychological factors that may be pertinent to Latinos, such as strength of partisanship⁴, that were seen as central to Campbell et al.'s analysis in *The American Voter* (1960). Verba et al. note that, "issue engagements constitute a wild card with respect to their impact on participatory stratification" (1995, 522). It is not clear by the Civic Voluntarism model whether an issue such as immigration is an engagement issue with rational actor cost/benefit calculations or an important factor in the strength of partisanship for Latinos.

Moreover, there are considerable structural barriers to participation for Latinos, such as the immense number of Latinos who cannot vote because of citizenship status (DeSipio and de la Garza 2002; DeSipio 1996; DeSipio and de la Garza 1998; Pantoja et al. 2001). Citizenship is a prerequisite for participating in the most basic political expression, voting. However, a large number of Latinos have not taken the necessary steps to naturalize (DeSipio 1996, 124), either because of a confusing bureaucratic process or because of they have become discouraged by the process. SES factors become a significant influence in the ability of Latinos to naturalize, with higher SES Latinos better equipped to handle the process. The literature following the Latino National Political Survey places considerable emphasis on the distinctions between the subgroups (de la Garza et al. 1992), such as Mexicans, Cubans and Puerto Ricans. Although there are shared linguistic and historical similarities between the three groups, there are important distinctions between them that result in considerable differences in local politics (Arvizu and Garcia 1996; Hero and Campbell 1996; Hill and Moreno 1996; de la Garza et al. 1994): Puerto Ricans are automatically American citizens and therefore have a different incorporation process; Cubans who arrived after the Castro regime came into power are considered political refugees; and Mexican Americans are both the newest and oldest Latino group in the United States with a legal foundation dating back to the Treaty of Guadalupe after the Mexican-American War.

CVM helps distinguish the various experiences that Latinos have with the political system by focusing on the civic resources individuals have that would make them better able to effectively participate in the American system, such as skills developed in the workplace, civic organizations and religious activities (Brady, Verba, and Schlozman 1995). Since, SES does not fully account for

variations in participation that occur because of differences in language skills (Schmidt 2000) or religious affiliation (Jones-Correa and Leal 2001), because these characteristics in and of themselves do not explain levels of participation, the civic volunteerism model gives us a more nuanced picture of participation. Viewed as a resource, these factors can be seen to provide the necessary tools a Latino would need to effectively function in the political system.

ASSESSING LATINOS' RELATIONSHIP WITH THE AMERICAN SYSTEM

The ratio of Latino electoral participation and their population has not seen much of a change since 1980, which was just three years after de la Garza wrote his book on the relationship between Latinos and the American system. The perspectives discussed earlier would have different explanations for the consistently low voter turnout on the part of Latinos, and it seems as though the greatest burden would now be on pluralism to explain how the rates of Latino participation have not increased since 1980. If Fuchs (1996) is correct, the ratio of Latino participation should be on the rise by now. But one way to explain this is that the rapid growth in the Latino population, because of immigration, has overshadowed what would otherwise be a significant growth in electoral participation by the Latinos who have resided in the United States for a longer period of time.

Latinos have a considerably different immigrant experience than the European immigrants because of the pervasive nature of the immigration bureaucracy and its lightning rod status in American politics, and because institutional and social mechanisms, such as the immigration process, skew levels of participation. DeSipio and de la Garza (1998) outline the contradictory nature of U.S. immigration policies and the historical struggle within

America on how to incorporate its newest members. The large number of immigrants being received by the United States ultimately forces immigration to become a highly politicized process, and in the context of a highly charged political environment, Pantoja, Ramirez and Segura found that Latinos in California had a shared perception that their racial group was under attack. These immigrants were more likely to naturalize out of a necessity to protect their individual interests (2001, 747) rather than because of a sense of civic duty to their new country.

The various theoretical visions of Latino Politics have been guided by a string of literature that has matured since Garcia and de la Garza first outlined their own views of the political system. Nearly three decades later, de la Garza reflected on his experience since 1977, and after a long investigation of Latinos within the political system that he helped start and grow, his reading of the literature suggests that Latinos do indeed fit into the pluralistic model (de la Garza 2004, 116). He points out that this wasn't always the case, and if he were to make the same assessment back in 1977, pluralism would not have been his first choice. It is important to see how the empirical evidence since 1977 might have swayed his opinion, because it suggests that the "distasteful" (de la Garza 1977, 10) realities of the Latino experience have indeed improved. One reason for de la Garza's initial judgment might have been the available models at the time that were used to explain the how, why and whom of political participation. Up until 1977, the field of political behavior had largely settled into two general camps, rational actor theory and socio-economic status theory. These theories are not exclusive, but in their stages of development before 1977, both could not sufficiently explain the position of Latinos in the American system.

The literature on Latino participation up to that point had also been guided by many of the same

perspectives in Black politics, and focused on grass roots movements which tended to skew the perspective, not unjustifiably, towards the inequalities which were borne out of the social and political systems of the time. These perspectives focused on the effects of socioeconomic status, social capital, institutional trust, group identity and group relations (Leighley and Vedlitz 1999). The development of these models and subsequent spin-offs, however, have provided researchers with more tools to better understand the forces that explain Latino political behavior, and thereby, their position in America. Up until 1977, the strong impact that SES had on political participation was a truism in the field. The rational actor model assigned higher stakes to the socially better off, because they had a greater incentive to take an active role in the system they gained so much benefit from, and the socioeconomic model had established the connection between participation and higher levels of SES in a variety of national and international surveys with broadly similar results. Whether it was out of civic duty or personal interest, Latinos could hardly be seen to have much of an incentive to participate, because the anecdotal evidence from the Latino social movements of the time provided little hope for change.

Given the low SES of Latinos, it wasn't difficult to speculate why Latinos didn't participate, and given the vast uniformity of these characteristics, it was easy to see that Latinos simply didn't have the resources to effectively participate. From a theoretical perspective, however, one could only speculate how Latinos would be able to exact change on the political system, because the empirical models had yet to capture the depth of this dimension in Latino politics. This gap in the literature left a heavy burden on pluralism to explain the unequal distribution of resources, and the literature had hardly given much promise in Latinos' ability to traverse the social barriers that were

clearly evident at the time. Elitism and internal colonialism offered the best explanation at the time for the position of Latinos in the American system, almost by default. But if the relative participation rates have not changed much since 1977, what evidence have the empirical data and behavioral models provided that might convince de la Garza that Latinos live in a pluralistic society?

The best answer to this is that we have learned that Latinos behave no differently than Anglos do and that ethnicity in and of itself has little direct effect on the participation rates of Latinos.⁵ Uhlaner *et al* concluded that “Latino activity rates appear no lower than those of non-Hispanic whites once demographic factors and related determinants of participation are controlled” (1989, 217). The behavioral models had taken a greater account of the experiences and obstacles that faced Latinos, and were able to control for many of the speculative factors which had not been accounted for. Rosenstone and Hansen’s mobilization model also added a rich perspective on how practical elite decisions could have an impact on political participation. More important, events since 1977 have provided many examples of Latino political success and the large Latino population has made it easier to see a growing Latino middle class. Because of this, it is difficult to justify the internal colonialism model, and in some ways, Hero’s two-tiered pluralism was an attempt to rectify the internal colonialism model with the facts on the ground. Two-tiered pluralism concedes what at that point could not be argued anymore, that Latinos had indeed reached legal parity with the majority, but it still relies on historical racism to explain the differences in socio-economic status. The future may indeed prove two-tiered pluralism to be wrong, but until then, it is still the best framework we have to explain why Latinos behave the same as Anglos given the same characteristics, and why they do not reap identical benefits that Anglos do from the same types of political

actions. Recent literature on the relationship between Latinos and the American system paint a mixed picture. Some argue that the demographic growth and maturing population shows promise for a movement into the political mainstream (Garcia and Sanchez, 2008), while some see this mainstreaming as movement away from identity-based segmentation and a towards a class-based struggle between the haves and have-nots (Valle and Torres, 2000).

PUBLIC SECTOR RESPONSE TO LATINOS AND THE ECONOMY

The role of the public sector has changed dramatically over the last century. Not only has the government and non-governmental organizations taken on more responsibilities, but also the public has come to expect more from their government. This can be seen in the shifting relationship between the federal and state bureaucracies, as the center of power has slowly drifted towards Washington D.C., but the imposition of responsibilities by the federal government on State governments over since the 1980's, particularly through the unfunded mandates, creates an inducement to be as efficient as possible with limited resources. The literature has encouraged the public sector to go beyond their role as experts and facilitators and to become more innovative and entrepreneurial in order to find solutions to their changing responsibilities. But more importantly, it has been encouraged to view the role of the public sector as educators and facilitators (Barth 1996, 169). An important discussion began in the 1980's with Rosenstone and Hansen's (1993) *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America*. They explained the important role that the system itself played in facilitating participation, and ultimately, integration. Prior to their discussion, agency in participation had largely been placed on the

citizen. But political relationships are two-way street. Participation is not only about people “going to politics”, but “politics going to people”. High resource populations take their political integration for granted. Their high participation rates reduce the costs associated with outreach, education and mobilization on Election Day. High rates in participation with established associations and groups serve to further minimize the costs to politicians and the system. Cultural barriers and unfamiliarity with the communications systems of low-income communities make mobilization a high-risk, high-cost, and low-payoff situation for politicians and the public sector.

Yet, assuming a greater role in education and facilitation presupposes knowledge of the target population and the changing dynamics of participation. In an increasingly cosmopolitan world, the Latino demographic illustrates the complexity involved in our past notions of citizenship for which our bureaucracy was set up to serve. With almost half of the Latino population within a generation of the immigrant experience, it is not unusual for a Latino family to sit at the dinner table with its members in various statuses, from legal permanent resident or citizen to undocumented. The fluidity of the Latino family poses a challenge to the rigidity of modern bureaucracy for which postmodern theory may prove more useful in how we view solutions to the economic impact on participation (Frederickson and Smith 2003,154). Transnational organizations may need to take on post-national characteristics, where citizenship has less meaning to the availability of resources and the facilitation of economic and social integration.

As discussed above, the economy exerts two political forces on the Latino population. The first being the most direct influence over the resources needed to participate. However, the second impact on Latinos is the response to the economy by the majority population.

Minority groups must weather the loss in resources, which almost always disproportionately affect them, but they must also weather the temptation by society to blame minorities for the poor economic conditions. This was evident during the real estate crash in 2008, where many claimed that poor performance on government backed loans to minorities, were the primary cause of the crash. Some went so far as to claim that the main culprit in the loan crisis was “illegal immigrants”. These claims are usually associated with bizarre calls to return the country to the gold standard, destroy the Federal Reserve or repeal the 14th Amendment’s citizenship clause. Regardless, our notion of citizenship, or civic participant, may compel the public sector to transform its role into a centripetal service-orientated facilitator of movement along with its role as a hub for education (Denhardt and Denhardt 2007). As a facilitator that relinquishes more decision-making power to the dynamics of international movement, communication channels can better inform the organization on up the ladder so that it may be more responsive and effective in achieving its goals.

CONCLUSION

We began our discussion by examining the complexity and practicality of Latino identity. We then saw that the economic environment not only has a direct effect on Latinos, but is also combined by a set of reactions from the general electorate that can compound the negative impact of the economy. Bad economic times not only decreases voter participation and outreach into the Hispanic community, but bad economies make for an explicitly negative environment for Latinos as they must face scapegoating and political forces that seek to blame the bad economy on them. The policy reaction to this political environment is readily visible throughout the country.

From Arizona's SB1070 to similar laws enacted in Alabama and Georgia, Latinos often find themselves caught in a phalanx of negativity from within and without. The fluidity of our borders, wholly encouraged by the US government in its generation-long argument for economic interdependence and the free flow of goods, complicates the public sectors' ability to deal with conceptions of citizenship in a system that has difficulty outside of set parameters of identity that are cosmopolitan in nature. As we continue to grapple with the public sector's role in servicing and facilitating growth, greater research in the viability of semi-public or post-national networks are needed to assist this population in our changing world.

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ENDNOTES

¹ These numbers are of the Voting Age Population among Hispanics and non-Hispanic Whites only

² The comparison between 1980 and 2004 is an approximation because the changes in ethnic and racial categories by the census does not allow a true apples to apples comparison.

³ The comparison between 1980 and 2004 is an approximation because the changes in ethnic and racial categories by the census does not allow a true apples to apples comparison

⁴ Partisan strength is a variable in the Civic Voluntarism model; however, this might have different applicability for Latinos.

⁵ For a contrary conclusion, see George Atunes and Charles M. Gaitz, "Ethnicity and Participation: A Study of Mexican-Americans, Blacks and Whites."