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Latino Independents and Identity Formation Under Uncertainty

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Since the 1950s, there has been roughly a two-fold rise in the proportion of Americans who identify as political Independents. We argue that the ethnic and immigrant experiences of Latinos shed new light on why and how individuals self-identify with a political party. For Latinos, we argue, party identification is defined by social and political identity formation under uncertainty. We argue that for immigrant-based ethnic groups like Latinos, identification as Independent is a rationally adaptive strategy given uncertainty and ambivalence about one's social group attachments, one's core political predispositions, and the benefits of political and civic involvement to pursue the individual and group interests of Latinos in the US. Absent home-grown and well-grooved habits, the category of Independent affords a safe harbor for many Latinos from which to bank experiences and impressions about political life in the US. We test our account using data from 1989-1990 Latino National Politics Study, the 1993-1994 Multi-City Study of Urban Inequality and the American National Election Studies.

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According to conventional accounts of American politics, party identification is the bedrock of American democracy. Angus Campbell and his collaborators on *The American Voter* declare that “few factors are of greater importance for our national elections than the lasting attachment of tens of millions of Americans to one of the parties (1960, 121).” E.E. Schattschneider goes so far as to say “modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of the parties (1942, 1).” Yet one of the most significant trends in American politics over the last half century has been the growing number of Americans who identify neither as Democrats nor as Republicans. Since the late 1950s, the proportion of Americans who identify as a political Independent has roughly doubled. In the recent 2000 American National Election Study, almost 40 percent of Americans labeled themselves Independents.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Independents are today one of the most interesting and influential voting blocs in the country. Every election cycle, Independents are showered with attention from candidates, their consultants, and media commentators alike. We know a great deal about the voting patterns of Independents in any given election as a result. As we shall argue, however, much of what we know about why Americans choose to identify as an Independent in the first place is limited by three key assumptions. First, party identification is assumed to fit a single dimension from strong Democrats to strong Republicans, with Independents at the midpoint. Second, this linear party identification scale is further assumed to be anchored by a linear scale of ideological beliefs (from strong liberals to strong conservatives). Third, conventional accounts of partisan choice assume that all adults have a certain level of familiarity or experience with American party politics.

Against these assumptions, we argue that the key to explaining political Independents is to understand party identification as an expression of social group identity. Specifically, there are three dimensions to this form of social identification that conventional accounts ignore – the influence of non-partisan social group identities, non-mainstream political predispositions, and identity choice under uncertainty and ambivalence. To begin, there is a glaring absence of attention to group identity – especially to groups defined by race and ethnicity – and partisan choice among non-whites is either ignored or assumed to fit the same model as whites. We maintain that for racial and ethnic minorities,

one's attachment to political parties (or lack thereof) is mediated by group identity. Moreover, the assumption that ideological also fit a uni-dimensional scale from extreme liberals to extreme conservatives is especially ill-suited for racial and ethnic groups, whose political interests fall out of the main agendas of both parties and for immigrants, who often come from political cultures that do not fit easily under a single left-right dimension. Finally, we contend that even a basic understanding of the two-party system in the U.S. is not common to all adults. In particular, immigrants do not share the same knowledge and experience with the Democratic or Republican parties as do native-born Americans. Thus for some adults, uncertainty and ambivalence are key mediators of party identification.

These propositions suggest that immigrant-based ethnic communities represent a critical test case between our revised version and conventional accounts of partisan choice. Accordingly, we examine political Independents in the specific case of Latinos in the US. The paper begins with a review and critique of existing explanations of party identification and Independents. We propose an alternative model that incorporates multiple, divergent pathways to partisan affiliation among Latinos and test this account using data from the Latino National Politics Study, the Multi-City Study of Urban Inequality, and the American National Election Studies. We close with a discussion of the implications of this multi-dimensional model for Latino politics as well as its applicability to other racial/ethnic groups.

Independents and the Linear Model of Party Identification

Our starting observation is that the proportion of Americans who choose to identify as Independents has risen remarkably over the second half of the Twentieth Century. Figure 1 below shows data from the 1952 through 2000 American National Election Studies Cumulative File. The proportion of the mass public that identified as Independent ranged from 20 to 24 percent in the 1950s. In the 2000 ANES, that figure hit just under 40 percent. Independents are thus now the largest political group in America, outnumbering either self-proclaimed Democrats or Republicans. Even if we isolate so-called "pure Independents," those who acknowledged no partisan leanings whatsoever, it is clear that

Independence is a widespread and growing phenomenon in American politics. As Figure 1 shows, the proportion of pure Independents has more than doubled over the same period. **[Figure 1 about here]**

While there is a lively controversy over the significance of this trend for partisan voting habits (e.g., Wattenberg, 1990; Bartels, 2000), there is little controversy over how to measure it or why we think individuals identify as they do. The prevailing view assumes a linear scale of party identification, anchored by a linear scale of ideological orientation, from Republicans on the political right to Democrats on the political left and Independents at the midpoint. As Campbell et al note, “[t]he partisan self-image of all but the few individuals who disclaim any involvement in politics permits us to place each person in these samples on a continuum of partisanship extending from strongly Republican to strongly Democratic. We use the word ‘continuum’ because we suppose that identification is not simply a dichotomy but has a wide range of intensities in each partisan direction (1960, 122-3).”

This continuum is usually constructed from the following three items (or similar versions of the three) and is employed in almost every study of American voting behavior:

Q1. Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?

Q2. [IF REPUBLICAN OR DEMOCRAT] Would you call yourself a strong (Republican/Democrat) or not a very strong (Republican/Democrat)?

Q3. [IF INDEPENDENT] Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican or Democratic Party?¹

Most often, these or similar party identification questions are used to construct a uni-dimensional variable comprised of seven ordered categories, such as the one below:



¹ There is a modest amount of disagreement between the typical NES party identification question above that measures enduring attachments and a version most commonly associated with Gallup which begins (“In politics as of today ...”) that allows for more fleeting associations with a party. See Converse and Pierce (1985), Elms (2001).

Strong Democrat	Moderate Dem	Weak Dem	Pure Independent	Weak Rep	Moderate Rep	Strong Republican
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“Moderate” Democrats and Republicans are those respondents who identify as a Democrat or Republican in Q1 above but who do not identify strongly to their party affiliation in Q2. “Weak” Democrats and Republicans are those respondents who identify as an Independent in Q1 but who will acknowledge that they lean towards either the Democratic or Republican Party in Q3. Although there is some debate around the proper operationalization of the ANES partisanship scale, the common element to almost all accounts is that Independents are placed squarely in the middle of the scale.²

Two views of Independents arise from this simple, linear model. First, Independents are seen as ideological moderates. They are presumed to hold few, if any, extreme views about politics and what opinions they do hold are “middle of the road.” A second, more normative view is that Independents are seen not simply as individuals with moderate views but rather as non-ideologues who are politically unattached because they are uninvolved, uninformed, and uninterested (Campbell et al, 1960). Some scholars go so far as to decry Independents as “an unstable vote ... that is basically unpredictable over time, and introduces into elections an increased volatility that today’s fluid politics do not need ... The independent vote ... has no allegiances. Its volatility and malleability does little to ease the concern of those who value stability and order in American politics (Crotty, 1983, 37).”³

² Fiorina (1981), for example, argues that, whether seven or five or three categories, the assumption of equal intervals between categories is faulty. As noted below, Keith et al (1992) and others propose a five point scale with weak and moderate identifiers collapsed together.

³ Dennis (1988) offers a more nuanced and multi-dimensional alternative to these views of Independents. Specifically, Dennis argues that people choose to be Independents because they 1) dislike the parties, 2) feel indifferent about the parties, 3) perceive their own voting patterns to be non-partisan, or 4) identify

This conventional linear model has not gone uncontested. One line of research has been to test how distinct Independents are from partisans in their political behavior. Keith, et al (1992) and Miller and Wattenberg (1983), for instance, demonstrate that in terms of voting behavior there is little to distinguish Independent leaners from weak partisans (cf. Dennis 1992). Others have challenged the unidimensionality of party identification. Claggett (1981) and Shively (1979) argue that partisanship is better represented by two dimensions, party acquisition and partisan intensity. A third set of studies have focused less on the ideological underpinnings of partisanship and more on the enduring role of childhood and early adulthood socialization in childhood and early adulthood (Campbell, et al, 1960; Beck and Jennings 1991).⁴

In the end, however, the linear measurement scale of party identification remains essentially unchanged (Green 1988). Indeed almost every study attempting to understand voter behavior or some other aspect of political behavior includes this basic linear model. As Petrocik notes, “[t]he index of party

with the ideals of independent thinking (see also Craig 1985 and Rosenstone et al 1984). However, each of these four factors is really only a proximate cause of Independence. What we still lack is a more general account of why people have these attitudes in the first place.

⁴ This view of party identification has been sharply criticized, especially from rational choice perspectives that purport to show how party identification varies as a function of macroeconomic conditions as well as one’s own candidate preferences, issue positions, and vote choice in any given election (Franklin 1983; Allsop and Weisberg, 1988). But others counter that while party identification is clearly not unaffected by campaigns and other political events throughout one’s lifetime, it remains an enduring, stable self-classification and (when measurement error is explicitly taken into account) largely exogenous to candidate evaluations, issue positions, and vote choice (Green et al 2002, Green and Palmquist, 1990; Beck and Jennings, 1991).

identification is so universally accepted as the variable around which to organize a discussion of political behavior in the United States that it is difficult to find a monograph or research article which does not introduce party identification as a consideration in the analysis” (1974:31). Similarly, Keith et al conclude, more succinctly, that “[w]e see no problems with the traditional measure” (1992:196).

Independents and Social Group Identity

The first limitation of the conventional linear model is that almost all of the studies examine the behavioral implications of identifying as an Independent (e.g., Wattenberg, 1990; Bartels, 2000). In particular, the principal focus is on how Independents vote and whether segments of this non-partisan population act like dyed-in-wool partisans come election Tuesday. To these questions, there is ample evidence on the strength of partisan voting and the behavioral likeness of Independent leaners to partisan identifiers. Our purpose in this paper is not to contest this evidence, but rather to underscore the fact that this focus on behavioral implications ignores the vital prior question of why some choose to identify with a political party and others do not.

On this point, we follow Campbell and his colleagues (1960), who argue that there is a conceptually meaningful distinction between identifying with a party (agreeing to the statements “I am a Democrat” or “I am a Republican”) and acting like a partisan (vis-à-vis one’s vote choices and evaluations of political parties). As the authors of *The American Voter* put it, party identification is a “psychological identification which can persist without legal recognition or evidence of formal membership and even without a consistent record of party support (1960, 121).” Importantly, if we are to speak of party identification as a cause of anything, it cannot be conflated with partisanship (i.e., it cannot be measured behaviorally, as the putative “effects” of the cause).⁵

⁵ We follow Miller and Shanks (1996) lead in using the term “party identification” to refer exclusively to the psychological identification and “partisanship” to refer to the strength of partisan behavioral patterns.

Viewed thus, party identification is a form of affective attachment to a political group, and “Democrat,” “Republican,” and “Independent” are important social identity categories, irrespective of their behavioral implications. Given the growing salience of group identity in politics (Abdelal, et al 2001; Brubaker and Cooper, 1998), we contend that the act of identifying with a political party itself is an important social and political fact worthy of social scientific explanation.⁶ This move is similar to that taken by Green and his colleagues in *Partisan Hearts and Minds* (2002), with two important points of departure. First, Green et al focus primarily on one’s self-classification as a Democrat or a Republican. We obviously view Independent as a potentially consequential social identity as well. Second, Green et al examine one’s party identification qua social identity in isolation, that is, without regard to other primary social identities that might inform and influence’s a person’s political orientation. We are explicit about the fact that the multiplicity and interactive nature of social identities is central to a complete account of party identification.

On this point, conventional models of party identification are further limited by the fact that race and ethnicity are largely ignored, both theoretically and empirically. A standard approach is to exclude groups like African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans from the analysis. The authors of *The Myth of the Independent Voter*, for instance, note that “[b]ecause blacks are the most disaffected of any major population group, omitting them also avoids complications if one examines relationships between alienation and independence (32).” Latinos and Asian Americans receive no mention in their study. This omission is further justified on the grounds that Independents are a largely white phenomenon. Thus Keith et al assert that since “the increase in Independents was confined to the white population ... most of our analysis in subsequent chapters excludes blacks” (1992:26). In their study of Latinos, Alvarez and

⁶ On the political significance of social groups generally, see, for instance, Brady and Sniderman (1985), Brewer (2001), Huddy (2001).

Garcia-Bedolla conclude that “[d]espite the fact that party identification is a key element of American political behavior, we know little about the nature and stability of Latino party identification (2003, 33).”

Rather than exclude racial and ethnic minorities from an analysis of party identification because they are too small in number or too homogeneous in their partisan attachments and behavior, we instead argue that the processes of racial formation and immigrant acculturation offer novel insights into the meaning of party identification and Independence. Indeed we think that immigrant-based ethnic groups like Latinos provide a vital opportunity to better understand foundational political processes like socialization and party acquisition (Finifter and Finifter 1989; Cain et al 1991; Pachon and DeSipio 1994; Lien 2000; Wong, 2000). To some extent, this focus on race and immigration is not new. Others have examined the effects of immigrant status, age of entry, and time in the US on party identification (Cain et al 1991, Wong 2000, Welch and Sigelman 1993, Uhlaner and Garcia 1998, de la Garza et al 1992).

For the most part, however, these scholars continue to adopt the conventional, linear model of party identification, with the prevailing assumption that non-whites identify with a party for the same reasons as whites.⁷ In addition, while studying the significance of immigrant status and tenure in the US significantly advances our knowledge of immigrant political incorporation, such accounts lack sufficient specificity and generality as a theory of party identification. In the next section, we present what we hope is a more precise and general explanation of political Independence and party identification.

Immigration, Identity, and the Multiple Dimensions to Independence

How can the processes of racial and ethnic identity formation and immigrant political acculturation inform our understanding of party identification? We argue that, beyond ideology, there are two defining characteristics of Latino identity and immigrant experience that help to explain Latino party identification: uncertainty about political life in the US and assimilation into social life in the US. The

⁷ But see Dawson 2001, Cain et al 1991, Uhlaner and Garcia 1998).

broad framework of our alternative model of Latino party identification is captured in Figure 2. The upshot of this figure is that the greater the uncertainty and ambivalence about the substance and significance of party politics in the US (and therefore, about the relevance of liberal and conservative political ideologies), the greater the likelihood of identifying as an Independent; the greater the uncertainty and ambivalence about whether one's primary social group identity is racialized (defined around one's ethnic and pan-ethnic identity) or assimilated (defined by the absence of race and ethnicity as a relevant identity category), the greater the likelihood of identifying as an Independent. Below, we detail some finer-tuned hypotheses that come to light when Latino social and political identity formation under uncertainty is taken into account. **[Figure 2 about here]**

First, not all groups are equally familiar with the terrain of American politics. In particular, the relationship of Latinos with the US party system and with the choice of identifying as a Democrat or Republican is apt to be filled with uncertainty and ambivalence. We expect this for many reasons. A significant proportion of Latinos are foreign-born and foreign-educated. Moreover, Latinos face pervasive residential, cultural, and linguistic segregation and widespread stereotyping and discrimination (Lee, 2000; Bobo, et al, 2000; Massey, 2000; Mindiola, 2002; Santa Ana, 2002). As a result, Latinos have not assimilated effortlessly into democratic life in America and their primary political socialization is outside the US or within socially isolated contexts in the US (Portes and Rumbaut, 1996; Portes and Zhou, 1995; Wong, 2001). Ultimately, rather than make a choice between parties that they know little about or support a party they do not yet trust, we believe that many Latinos who identify as Independents do so in order to hedge their bets. This skepticism, we argue, is a distinctive pathway to self-identification as an Independent for immigrant-based groups like Latinos and notably different from one's ideological moderation or non-partisan socialization. Our first hypothesis about Latino Independents is thus:

Hypothesis 1: Latinos who are less knowledgeable and less interested in American politics should be more likely to identify as Independents.

Note that this is an expectation that comports perfectly well with the conventional “Independents as apolitical” account. What matters, however, is that the theoretical grounding for this expectation is quite different. Latinos do not identify as Independents in our account because they are apolitical or disaffected *per se*, but in addition, we think they do so because they are continually updating their burgeoning impressions of the substance and significance of political life in the US.

Importantly, skepticism about party identification is not solely grounded in uncertainty about relevant facts (e.g., policy positions of each party), but also moral ambivalence about the political ideology and core values that undergird partisan acquisition in the US (Alvarez and Brehm, 2002). We argue that the political orientation of Latinos is also guided by their degree of ideological assimilation – that is, by the absorption and adaptation of perceptions of political efficacy, trust in political institutions, and, ultimately, a liberal-to-conservative ideological continuum (de la Garza et al, 1998). Political trust and efficacy are critical mediators of individual political engagement, and we expect that

Hypothesis 2: Latinos with lower levels of political trust and efficacy should be more likely to identify as Independents.

On ideology generally, we expect that the political predispositions of immigrant-based ethnic groups like Latinos may not fit well into the standard ANES political ideology scale. For example, Dawson (2001) shows that in the case of African Americans, ideology is a multi-dimensional phenomenon best described by five distinct ideological dimensions – only a few of which correspond tidily with the conventional political ideology continuum. For Latinos, we posit that predispositions might instead be based upon religious and cultural values and issues that are based on a greater interest in the politics of one’s home country such as Puerto Rican statehood, the trade embargo with Cuba, Mexico’s economy health and trade policies. Such issue positions may weigh heavily whether Latinos choose to engage politically, but are likely to be, for the most part, orthogonal to the political interests and policy agendas of both major parties in the US. Thus,

Hypothesis 3: Latinos with deeply-rooted concerns about home country politics or deeply-held values that fit poorly under the conventional continuum of political ideology should be more likely to identify as Independents.

There is yet a third consideration about Latino Independents that emerges from our story about uncertainty and ideological assimilation. Here too, the conventional model of “Independents as moderates” may in fact work for Latinos. That is, Latinos may choose to identify as ideological “moderates” on the standard seven point liberal-to-conservative scale for the same reasons that lead them to identify as non-partisan Independents. So we may find the same statistical relationship that conventional models argue for – between ideological moderation and non-partisan Independence – but for entirely different reasons. Even if Latino moderates were more likely to be Independent, we think that our underlying critique about the diminished relevance of conventional measures of political ideology for Latinos and the multi-dimensionality of both party identification and political ideology scales still holds (Uhlener, Gray, and Garcia, 2000; see also Alvarez and Garcia-Bedolla, 2003). To the extent that concern about home country politics or non-mainstream core values defines the political orientation of Latinos, we further expect that

Hypothesis 4: Latino moderates may be likelier to identify as Independents, but the relationship between party identification and political ideology is not likely to be linear or as strong as it is for whites.

The second major defining characteristic of Latinos that guides our expectations is that, as an ethnic minority, one’s primary political identity is often anchored by one’s primary social group identity (Padilla, 1984). In Dawson’s (1994) account, collective choice among African Americans is defined by the sense of a racially linked fate and the application of a “black utility heuristic” in the decision-making process (Dawson, 1994). We elaborate on Dawson’s account by identifying four separable elements of this link between racial/ethnic and political identification: group consciousness, the pursuit of collective interests through political means, the affinity between those collective interests and a particular political party, and the absence of competing or cross-cutting identity claims. To illustrate these four in the case of

the interlocked tie between African American racial group identity and self-identification as Democrats: African Americans share a linked fate orientation; there is a long history of pursuing the collective interests politically; Democratic Party politics and these collective interests are closely aligned; there are few significant cross-cutting social group identities vis-à-vis party identification.⁸

With Latinos, the influences these factors are more multifaceted. Firstly, for an immigrant-based ethnic group like Latinos, uncertainty and ambivalence are characteristics not only of partisan identity formation, but also ethnic identity formation. Thus we expect Latino group identity to be strongly mediated by social interaction with co-ethnics, experiences with discrimination, and perceptions of the level of discrimination facing their ethnic in-group. Each of these kinds of experience and perception reflect learning about how race and ethnicity are lived in the US for Latinos. On social interaction, to the extent that Latinos live in residentially segregated and socially isolated in Hispanic neighborhoods and to the extent that they continue to interact primarily with members of their own national origin group, they will be less likely to be exposed to the mainstream American political issues and debates (Bobo, et al, 2000; Cohen and Dawson, 1993; Massey, 2000). That is, social isolation makes continued uncertainty and ambivalence about politics and racial order in the US more likely.

One might object that social isolation might also breed the conditions under which Latinos will develop a more racialized view of their group identity. But here we should more directly see the effects from personal experience with discrimination and the perception that Latinos face significant levels of discrimination. While greater interaction with one's ethnic in-group may engender social isolation and diminish one's incentives to learn about partisan politics, experiencing discrimination directly or

⁸ On other issues, such as collective mobilization to combat the AIDS epidemic, Cohen (1999) shows that racial group identity (closing ranks) and cross-cutting identity claims (e.g., around sexual orientation) can produce the de-mobilization of African American politics. On African American political Independents, see Hajnal and Lee (2003).

perceiving ethnic hostility ought to make clear the importance of collective political resistance to such negative treatment. Note that both ethnic in-group isolation and ethnic discrimination can engender ethnic identity formation rather than “straight-line” assimilation. Their effect on one’s partisan acquisition can also be opposite, however. Given the Democratic Party’s clear association with what is widely perceived to be a ‘pro-minority’ policy agenda, we expect that a stronger belief in the importance of race and a clearer recognition of one’s status as a racial minority will likely lead to greater Democratic allegiance and diminished Independence.

Hypothesis 4: Latinos who are socially isolated should be more likely to identify as Independents; Latinos with racialized experiences or perspectives will be less likely to identify as Independents.

With the pursuit of collective group interests through politics, as Padilla (1984), Espiritu (1990), Pardo (1998) and others have shown, organizational activism and one’s ethnic group consciousness are intimately linked. We also expect that such activism – in particular, with local and ethnic organizations – to influence party identification by increasing or decreasing uncertainty and ambivalences about the political stakes involved (Jones-Correa, 1998; Saito, 1998; Wong, 2001). The particular direction of influence, however, is likely to vary on the institution itself. Some forms of civic engagement – notably, religious participation – have a demonstrated impact on one’s political engagement (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, 1993; Kosmin and Keysar, 1995; Jones-Correa and Leal, 2001). With other forms of engagement, notably with non-political, ethnic and civic organizations, the relationship could be opposite. That is, civic engagement may instead reflect Latinos for whom there is a strong degree of ethnic group consciousness, but an absence of defined collective political interests or an assimilation of one’s political orientation (Dahl, 1961; Gordon, 1964; cf. Erie, 1990). Thus we expect that:

Hypothesis 5: Latinos active in religious organizations should be less likely than others to identify as Independents, but Latinos active in civic organizations should be more likely than others to identify as Independents.

Finally, for Latinos, one's overarching, "pan-ethnic" group identity is likely to compete against or interact with one's ethnic group identity. Studies of Latino identity, for example, suggest that one's ethnic attachments may prevail over one's pan-ethnic attachments as Latinos (Bobo et al, 2000; de la Garza et al, 1992; Jones-Correa and Leal, 1996). An implication that we draw from these and other more general studies of Latino politics is thus that our hypotheses about Independence are likely to vary by ethnic group. For Mexicans and Puerto Ricans, who tend to identify more with the Democratic Party, racial consciousness should reinforce existing partisanship cues and amplify this Democratic partisan preference. For Cubans, the opposite may occur. Racial consciousness should cut against the community's traditional allegiance to the Republican party and potentially result in greater Independence.

Moreover, Cain et al (1991), for example, demonstrate that the process of partisan acquisition is likelier (and identification as Independent less likely) when a group is clearly associated with one party or the other. Given the strong association of Cuban Americans with the Republican Party and of Puerto Ricans with the Democratic Party, there is reason to believe that members of both groups will be less prone to identify as Independents than members of other groups that are less clearly affiliated with either party (de la Garza et al, 1992). This leads to our final hypothesis about Independents:

Hypothesis 6: Puerto Ricans and Cubans should be less likely than other Latinos to identify as Independents, but racialized Cubans should be more likely than Mexicans or Puerto Ricans to identify as Independents.

Research Design

To test these hypotheses, we use data from two surveys. We begin with the gold standard among instruments to assess conventional models of party identification, the American National Election Studies, pooling election year samples from 1948 through 2000 (Miller et al 2000). These data turn out to be inadequate to fully examine our alternative model of party choice because they largely ignore questions of immigrant assimilation, political incorporation, and ethnic identity formation within U.S. society. Equally problematic to examining party affiliation for an immigrant-based group is the fact that

the ANES samples on citizenship in the US and, until recent election years, interviewed Latinos only in English.⁹

Thus our principal data come from the 1989-1990 Latino National Political Survey (LNPS).¹⁰ The LNPS is the first nationally-sampled survey of the political attitudes, values, and behaviors of the three largest Latino ethnic communities in the United States – Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Cuban. The LNPS completed 2,817 face-to-face interviews with Latinos between July 1989 and April 1990. Of this sample, 1,546 respondents were Mexican, 589 Puerto Rican, and 682 Cuban. The critical advantage of the LNPS over the ANES and other alternatives is its dual language instrument, its inclusion of questions about the social and political acculturation of Latinos into American society and questions about discrimination and ethnic group identity. Despite the fact that there have been several other nationally-sampled survey of Latinos in more recent years (most prominently, a 1999 survey by the *Washington Post* and a 2001 Pew Hispanic Center survey), the LNPS remains the most comprehensive survey of Latino political attitudes, values, and behaviors to date.

Dependent variable

Our dependent variable of interest is respondent self-identification as an Independent. As we noted at the outset, most opinion polls (and practically all academic surveys) ask about party identification as a multi-item sequence, beginning with whether respondents generally they think of themselves as Democrats, Republicans, or Independents. Those who identify as Independents are then

⁹ Lee (2001) shows that the language in which interviews of Latinos are conducted can significantly bias the inferences we draw about their attitudes and political behavior.

¹⁰ de la Garza, Falcon, Garcia, and Garcia (1998). See also de la Garza, et al (1992) and Garcia, et al (1989). The full sample includes 598 non-Latino subjects. The overall response rate for the Latino sample was 74 percent.

asked if they lean toward one party or the other; those who identify with one of the two primary political parties are then asked whether they so identify strongly or weakly. This means of measuring party identification leaves us with the choice of either examining all respondents who identify in the first instance as an Independent (including those who lean to one party) or examining only “pure Independents,” who lean towards neither party.

In the analysis that we present in this paper, we take the more inclusive measure. Conceptually, this choice is defensible on the grounds that we are principally interested in Independents as a form of group identification. Viewed thus, choosing to identify as an Independent (and not a Democrat or Republican) is meaningful in itself, irrespective of whether we can “back-out” the underlying partisan behavioral patterns of these Independent leaners. Empirically, this turns out (for the most part) to be a distinction without a difference. Despite the fact that studies find meaningful, systematic differences between leaners and pure Independents in terms of voting behavior, we repeat our analysis with pure Independents as well (Keith et al 1992, Dennis 1992, Miller and Wattenberg 1983), we find no striking differences to our model of party identification that result from estimating our model on only pure Independents.

The Independent Variables

Our analysis proceeds in three steps. First, we test our arguments against the conventional model using a pooled sample of the ANES. Specifically, we replicate a typical model of political Independents to demonstrate its limited power as an explanation of why racial and ethnic minorities choose to identify as Independents. Next we test our positive account of Latino political Independence using the LNPS. Then we test a more exacting test of our claims about uncertainty and ambivalence with the LNPS, using a statistical method that simultaneously estimates the choice of identifying as Independent and the error variance underlying that choice. As we shall see, the evidence against the conventional linear model and favoring our multi-dimensional model is quite strong. There are, however, some important caveats and limitations to our own analysis, and we conclude by discussing these.

In the first step of our analysis, we test for the explanatory power of three conventional views about identification as an Independent – because one is ideologically moderate, apolitical, or socialized into politically Independent parents. We use a pooled sample of the ANES, disaggregated into whites, Latinos, and African Americans to compare the explanatory power across racial and ethnic sub-groups. First, to determine if the Independents-as-ideological-moderates view is accurate, we include the basic seven point scale of political ideology (from liberal to conservative). Recall that there are two empirical claims folded into this account: first, that moderates are the ideological group most likely to identify as an Independent; second, that the remaining categories of party identification have a linear statistical relationship to the remaining categories of political ideology. To test both claims, we specify our model with dummy variables for each category, excluding moderates as the comparison group.

To test the Independents-as-apoliticals account, we included measures of political knowledge, efficacy, interest, trust, and participation. Political knowledge was measured as a dummy variable indicating that a respondent could correctly name the majority party in the House of Representatives. Responses to a question about one’s level of interest in “following the political campaigns (so far) this year” were used to measure political interest. Political participation was measured by whether respondents voted in the last national election, and how many different types of political acts a respondent had undertaken in the last year.¹¹ Finally, to assess the role of childhood socialization and the importance of any inter-generational transfer of partisan identification, we included a measure that indicated whether the respondent had two, one, or neither of his/her parents ‘generally identified’ as Independents.

Following this test of conventional accounts of political Independence, we next test for the explanatory power of three other dimensions that we argue are critical to party choice generally and to Independence specifically. To test our argument about the significance of uncertainty and ambivalence in

¹¹ Possible acts included attending a meeting, working for a party or candidate, contributing money, displaying a political sign, trying to influence others, and contacting a public official.

Latino Independents, we look at immigrant acculturation, social identity, and ideology. We start with three measures that examine time in the US: foreign-born status; second generation status; the number of years that foreign-born Latinos have lived in the United States. As we noted earlier, most studies of immigrant political acculturation begin and end with these three variables.

To dig deeper into the processes of immigrant acculturation than these measured, we assess the impact of social isolation on partisan attachments. We use three ethnic specific indices, measured as an additive index of: 1) frequency of contact with other members of one's own national origin group (ranging "none" to "a lot"), 2) the density of in-group population in the resident's Census Block Group, and 3) the perceived level of in-group social interaction "among friends," "at parties," and "for fun and relaxation."¹² In addition, we also tested for the role of political acculturation with the following seven measures. First we test for the assimilation of several core beliefs – trust in government, the belief in self-reliance, the belief in equality of opportunity, and affective ties to the United States (using a feeling thermometer). We also include the perception of "important differences" in what the parties stand and having registered to vote.

The second new dimension of party choice that we put forward highlights the link between social identity and political identity. To determine how a racialized Latino identity affects party choice, we included five different measures that tapped both racial identity and feelings of discrimination: personal experience with discrimination; perceptions of the level of discrimination facing one's own national origin group; self-identified race (dummy for Latinos who identified as white); interviewer-identified phenotype (skin color). To test this model, we include dummy variables for Cuban and Puerto Rican ancestry - with Mexican origin Latinos as the excluded comparison group.

¹² Scale reliability varied significantly (Alpha= .71, .54, and .48 for Cubans, Mexicans, and Puerto Ricans respectively)

In our discussion, we argued that the degree of uncertainty and racialization that Latinos exhibit is likely to vary as a function of three additional factors – ethnic specific differences, degree of civic engagement, and adherence to core beliefs and issue preferences that do not fit easily into conventional partisan or ideological scales. To test for ethnic-specific differences, we include dummy variables for Cuban and Puerto Rican ancestry - with Mexican origin Latinos as the excluded comparison group. On organizational ties, we tested for the influence of involvement in neighborhood groups, professional associations, charities, or other civic organizations; self-identification as a Catholic; religiosity. Testing for non-traditional core beliefs and issue preferences is more difficult. The LNPS does not permit us to specify this final piece of our theoretical argument about Independence as fully we would like, but it does contain the following four items: attitudes about Puerto Rican independence, diplomatic relations with Cuba, U.S. involvement in Mexican affairs, and general concerns about ‘home country’ politics. We test for whether these “orthogonal” issues can predict respondents’ likelihood of identifying as an Independent. In addition, as noted earlier, religiosity can also tell us something about core beliefs that may not fit well under a traditional political ideology scale.

Following convention, we control for a number of demographic characteristics that have been demonstrated to affect party identification in one form or another: gender, education, family income, age, and age squared (Norrande 1997, Keith et al 1992). Coding and descriptive statistics for all variables are included in Table A1 in the appendix.

Conventional Accounts of Party identification Across Racial and Ethnic Groups

Can conventional accounts of political independence explain the partisan choices of non-whites as well as whites or do we need to look to other dimensions to account for why blacks, Latinos, and other choose parties? To begin to answer this question we assess how well three traditional explanations for independence (‘ideological moderates’, ‘apoliticals’, ‘independent offspring’, and ‘disgruntled partisans’) are able to predict white, Latino and African American political independence.

In Table One we present the results of three separate logistic regressions modeling Independence for different racial and ethnic groups using the pooled sample of the ANES. As noted above, Independence is a simple dummy variable indicating whether or not respondents first identified as an Independent or as a partisan supporter.¹³ The first and most obvious conclusion to be derived from Table One is that conventional models do fit white partisan choices. **[Table 1 about here]**

First, the ‘Independents as moderates’ claim seems to fairly accurately depict the partisan choices of at least some white Americans. Moderates – the excluded comparison group in our regression model – are much more likely than conservatives and liberals to identify as Independents. The critical view of Independents as ‘apolitical’ also gets some support here. Those who are less interested, less knowledgeable, less efficacious, less trusting, and less active in politics are significantly more likely to be nonpartisans or Independents. The childhood socialization hypothesis is also borne out for whites. Even after controlling for one’s own ideological views and several other measures of an individual’s political orientation, one’s parent’s identification strongly predicts party choice.¹⁴

Traditional models of Independents may account fairly well for white party choice, but these models do not work nearly as well for racial and ethnic minorities. As the second and third columns of Table One demonstrate, the partisan decision-making processes of Latinos and African Americans seem

¹³ Alternate analysis of ‘pure Independents’ leads to essentially the same results.

¹⁴ Independents also tend to fit the account of disgruntled partisans posited by Dennis (1988) and Rosenstone et al (1984). The more that whites held negative views toward the two parties or are indifferent toward the two parties, the more likely they are to be Independents. Unfortunately, these two measures are only available in a small subset of the ANES surveys and are thus not included in the model in Table 1. If included, neither is significantly related to black or Latino Independence but sample sizes are too small to reach definitive conclusions.

to be only minimally related to the basic dimensions portrayed in the literature.¹⁵ In the case of Latinos, only one of the conventional accounts of party choice appears to clearly fit Independents. Despite their status as a largely immigrant group, parental socialization does affect Latino party identification. Specifically, having one or two parents who identified as Independent significantly increases the likelihood that Latino respondents identify as Independent. Even here, it is important to note that few Latinos have parents to cue off of. In most cases immigrant Latinos, who make up the bulk of the Latino population in the United States, will have no identifiable parental cue. In the ANES sample which under-samples more recent immigrants (especially those who are undocumented) only 3 percent had one or more parents that were identified as Independents. Thus, while the ‘Independents as offspring’ model fits Latinos, its effects are felt by only a small fraction of the Latino population.

Moreover, there is limited support for other conventional models of partisan choices among Latinos. First, there is some sign that ideological moderates are more likely than others to identify as Independent but the effects are inconsistent and those with strongly conservative views are really the only group that is particularly unlikely to be Independent.¹⁶ Even when we replaced the basic ideological scale with responses to more specific policy questions (eg government spending, assistance to African

¹⁵ It is important to note that the contrast between the results for whites on one hand and those for African Americans and Latinos on the other is not an artifact of the larger white sample size. Repeated iterations of the regression in Table One with a reduced white sample size confirm the significant ties between white Independence and the three conventional accounts of Independence.

¹⁶ This supports Uhlaner et al (2000) who find only a minimal relationship between liberal-conservative ideology and Latino party choice.

Americans, the government's role in ensuring full employment), we could find no link between more moderate policy views and Independence amongst Latinos (analysis not shown).¹⁷

Nor are Latino Independents overly concentrated in the ranks of apoliticals. Institutional trust is mildly related to Independence and Latinos who do not vote are significantly more likely than voters to be Independents. But Independence is not tied to a lack of interest in politics, a lack of knowledge of American politics, or low levels of political participation. We believe that this pattern, if anything, points to an Independents as 'rational skeptics' rather than as apoliticals.

The results for African Americans tell a similar story. For blacks, Independence is only loosely tied to conventional accounts of partisan choice. The notion of Independents as ideological moderates is not borne out here.¹⁸ In fact, there is some suggestion that for African Americans, the members of the community who are most likely to identify as Independents are those who consider themselves strongly conservative.¹⁹ In other words, African American Independents may not be at the center of the left-right

¹⁷ We did, however, find a strong relationship between white views on these same policies and white Independence. Having moderate or 'middle of the road' policy preferences substantially increased the odds of being Independent. The issues were the overall level of government spending, government's role in health insurance, financial aid to blacks, the merits of guaranteeing full employment, busing to achieve integration, defense spending, and strategies at dealing with urban unrest.

¹⁸ For blacks, moderate or middle-of-the-road positions on the basic policy questions summarized in footnote 17 also do not lead to Independence. Whether it is ideological self-placement or issue preferences, black moderates are not particularly inclined to identify as Independents.

¹⁹ Table One indicates that conservatives are not quite significantly different from moderates in their tendency to identify as Independents. However, alternate specifications of the model that single out strong conservatives as the excluded comparison group indicate that those who label themselves as

ideological continuum but rather at one extreme. And again, there is only mild support for the ‘Independents as apoliticals’ account of party identification. Political knowledge, overall participation, and trust in government are not significantly linked to Independence among African Americans but having lower levels of interest in mainstream politics and not voting are associated with being independent. Again, this could indicate that there is a link between apathy and Independence but it is also very possible that black Independence derives from an explicit, race-based rejection of a political system that has traditionally excluded African American interests. In other words, rational anti-institutional thinking could drive both African American party choice and African American propensity to not be involved in mainstream American politics. African Americans do, however, fit the ‘offspring of Independents’ account of party identification. In sum, while aspects of some traditional accounts of party identification do play a role for Latinos and African Americans, in most cases, these conventional theories fail to explain the partisan choices of either group.

The second main point to take from Table 1 is that conventional accounts appear to explain only a small fraction of Independent party choice – regardless of the group. While errors introduced in survey research often limit the predictive ability of attitudinal measures, it is worth noting that combined the conventional accounts explain at best eight percent of the variation in party choice across these three groups.²⁰ In other words, existing accounts probably do not capture all of the dimensions of party choice.

strongly conservative are significantly more likely to identify as Independents than any other group with the exception of moderates.

²⁰ To illustrate this point further one can calculate the probability that a given individual will identify as Independent under different scenarios. Specifically, we derived predicted probabilities of being Independent based on the regressions in Table One with a simulation procedure developed by King, Tomz, and Wittenburg (2001). In each case, we vary values on the dimension of interest (ie moving from moderate to strong liberal views) while holding constant all other factors at their mean value. What the predicted probabilities show is that, for whites (the group most likely to fit conventional models), each of

A Closer Look at Latino Independents

As we noted earlier, traditional accounts of party choice are flawed in that they fail to take into account an understanding of American politics that can be derived from the perspective of racial and ethnic minorities. When we begin to incorporate the choices and experiences of these ‘outside’ groups, our understanding of party identification and in particular of Independence quickly expands. To this end, we begin to assess a more multi-dimensional view of the partisan choices of Latinos using the LNPS. Specifically, in Table Two, we model Latino Independence comparing the impact of the ‘Independents as moderates’ account with three other dimensions of party choice related to immigrant socialization, political assimilation, and social identity.

The first and most obvious conclusion from Table Two is that an acculturation process is critical for Latino party choice. Without some degree of integration into American society and some incorporation into American politics, Latinos tend to remain Independent identifiers or as we describe it - rational skeptics. Only as Latinos move further away from an immigrant experience, as they leave ethnically isolated social environments, and as they become more engaged in the both formal political arena and in non-electoral organizations, do they become much less apt to identify as Independent.

Beyond this generalization about immigrant incorporation are a number of important distinctions between different aspects of the socialization or learning process. First, time in the United States and generational status, two factors that are often viewed as critical measures of immigrant assimilation are less consequential in acquiring partisanship than is the absence of social isolation. Regardless of time

the three different dimensions accounts for only a small part of white behavior. For example, strong liberals (and strong conservatives) are only 14 percent less likely to identify as Independents than are moderates. Similarly, having a parent who is an Independent increases the odds of being an Independent by either 14 percent (father) or 22 percent (mother).

spent in this country, those who remain socially isolated (defined as living and interacting with people primarily from one's own national origin group) are very likely to continue to identify as Independents.

As one might expect, political assimilation is also vital. Trust in government, more positive views of the nation, believing in the equal opportunity and hard work, and perceiving differences between the two parties all lead to greater party identification (as opposed to Independent identification). Also, as formal political activity increases, so does partisanship.

The second conclusion is that some, although certainly not all, aspects of social identity do play a role in determining party identification for Latinos. National origin itself has no effect on party identification. Moreover, all but one of the different measures of racialization that we include in Table Two fails to achieve significance. Identifying as Black, being darker skinned, experiencing discrimination, and feeling a sense of linked fate with one's national group all have little effect on party choice in this model. The only racial view that does lead away from Independence is the perception among Mexican Americans that they are as a group subject to high levels of racial discrimination. Again, this makes sense given that the Mexican American community traditionally leans heavily toward the Democratic Party. In this case, racialization serves to reinforce a likely partisan outcome.

Of the social identities we look at, organizational ties have the strongest link to Latino Independence. Religious attachments have a clear and positive effect on party identification. Likely, ties between the Catholic church and the Democratic Party push Latinos in a clear partisan direction. Interestingly, activism in voluntary association works against expectations and inclines Latinos toward Independence. We have no explanation for this finding other than the possibility that these associations tend to expose Latinos to a wide variety of conflicting signals about the two parties.

Finally, the conventional view of Independents as ideological moderates adds almost nothing to this model. Ideological moderates are not more likely than others to identify as Independents. Indeed, we see clear evidence of non-linearities along this dimension. Strong conservatives are, in fact, significantly *more* likely than moderates to identify as Independents. What this suggests is that for Latinos, ideology is not a parallel dimension to party choice.

Variance in Latino Party Identification

A second implication of our rational skeptics model of party identification is that Latinos are likely to be much more uncertain about their partisan choices. In addition to being more likely to choose Independence, immigrants and those who remain socially isolated and politically unassimilated are likely to have a much harder time choosing any of the three partisan options available to them. Empirically speaking, this means that some groups of Latinos are likely to exhibit *systematically* greater unexplained variance in their responses to partisan choices than others. Practically speaking, this means that some groups of Latinos are likely to exhibit greater instability in their party choices and thus may be susceptible to influence or manipulation. By explicitly modeling this variance we can determine if some groups are having a tougher time choosing a partisan preference and if so, which members of the Latino community are likely to have the most volatile and most easily manipulated partisan preferences.²¹

Conceptually, Michael Alvarez and John Brehm (2002) identify at least three different sources of unexplained response variance: (1) equivocation, in which respondents might manifest varying degrees of “sociability effects” (i.e., anticipating what interviewers expect to hear, especially on controversial issues like abortion and racial politics); (2) uncertainty, in which respondents might vary in their responses due

²¹ There is also a methodological justification for this detour into the netherworld of unexplained variance in survey responses. The clear-cut methodological rationale for examining error variance is to correct for “heteroskedasticity” – unequal and unexplained variance across data points (see, e.g., Greene, 1997). While heteroskedasticity is either ignored as an arcane methodological refinement or relegated to a footnote on inefficient estimates, it is a real concern when the analysis involves a categorical, discrete dependent variable. In these cases, such as with our party identification measure, heteroskedasticity can lead to inconsistent parameter estimates and an incorrect corresponding covariance matrix. If there are reasonable expectations for unequal variances in a model, then heteroskedasticity must be tested for.

to incomplete information; and (3) ambivalence, in which respondents might express varying ability to negotiate the conflict between underlying values at stake.

Each of these possible sources of response variance has clear bearing for a predominantly immigrant ethnic group like Latinos. Hurtado (1994) and Lee (2001) show that social psychological dynamics often play a key role in the opinions that Latinos give on surveys. We have already described multiple reasons why uncertainty and incomplete information about the American party system are apt to influence party identification among Latinos. Given the wide disparities in political knowledge and attentiveness among immigrant groups, these influences should also be reflected in the variance of party choices. Lastly, we have also described the multiple political and cultural values that are likely to matter. These too might lead to ambivalence, and therefore need to be tested for in our model of political Independence.

The method of modeling variance in responses is quite straightforward. Essentially, it entails specifying a second-stage “error variance” model along with the primary “choice” model of interest (see Alvarez and Brehm 2002 for an explication of the methodology). In Table 6 below, we test for ten different factors that might influence the variance in respondents’ choice of political Independence. Under the “equivocation” hypothesis, we posit three possible sociodynamic influences: (1) whether there was a third party adult present during the face-to-face interview; (2) the length of time during which another person was present; (3) whether the interview was a conversation conducted in English or in Spanish. Under the uncertainty hypothesis, we posit three possible influences: (1) the number of years an individual was educated²²; (2) the respondent’s primary language at home; (3) the age at which the respondent immigrated to the United States. Under the ambivalence hypothesis, we posit four possible conflicts in political and cultural values: (1) the belief that government is an important means for solving

²² The non-linear measure performed better empirically. Thus we use the squared value of the number of years of formal education.

one's in-group's problems; (2) the belief that immigration preferences ought to go to Latinos; (3) the belief that Latinos share a common cultural tradition; and (4) the belief that one's in-group faces a high degree of discrimination.²³

There are some compelling results in the variance models.²⁴ Presence of another adult during the interview increases the variances in responses. The length of time that another adult is present, however, decreases the variance in responses. Presumably, length of time implies the presence of an intimate acquaintance rather than a less familiar third party. Interviews conducted in English may reduce the response variance, although the effects fall below conventional levels of statistical significance.²⁵ Among the uncertainty measures, there was a *greater* variance in responses among respondents with higher levels of education (contrary to what Alvarez and Brehm find). Greater reliance on Spanish at home and immigration to the U.S. at an earlier age in life appear to reduce response variance. Finally, among the

²³ The model specification shown only includes the degree of perceived in-group discrimination for Cuban respondents. Empirically, the measure is only significant for this group. Conceptually, one can justify this selective inclusion on grounds that value conflicts about race in the United States are most likely to emerge for the most ideologically conservative of the Latino ethnic groups in the LNPS – that is, there is substantial dissonance to negotiate if one accepts the core tenets of conservatism in the U.S. yet believes there is systematic and widespread discrimination against Cuban Americans.

²⁴ Correcting for heteroskedasticity has little effect on the main estimates in the choice model. The results are fundamentally the same for the choice model when either a simple probit estimation is employed (Table Two) or a heteroskedastic probit specification is used (Table Three).

²⁵ This effect may reflect greater familiarity with expectations and norms about socially desirable responses for a conversation held in the dominant language of U.S. society. For conversations held in Spanish, there may be greater ambiguity about expectations and norms given the diversity of background ethnicities, nations, and cultures that communicate in Spanish.

ambivalence measures, we find that Latinos who reject the notion that government is an important means of addressing in-group problems, Latinos who agree that Latinos share a common culture, and Cuban Americans who believe that their in-group faces considerable discrimination are far less ambivalent about being a political Independent. Beliefs about immigration appear not to significantly adjudicate respondents' ambivalence about party choice.

What all of these error variance effects tell us is that Latino party identification choices are extremely complex. The equivocation, uncertainty, and ambivalence that help to shape Latino responses indicate that there are multiple, important considerations being undertaken before Latinos choose their party. Knowing this we can no longer try to model Latino party identification without taking into account the multiple dimensions affecting not only the choice of party itself but also the amount of error around that choice.

Conclusion

This research has important implications for Latinos and partisan politics. First, it suggests that existing accounts of Independence are incomplete. The two most common views of the Independents – as ideological moderates and as apoliticals – fit poorly as explanations of Latino political Independence. Even the more recent research which points to time in the U.S. as the central factor in partisan acquisition is imperfect. For Latinos, Independence is shaped, more than anything else, by two factors. How well they have become political and socially assimilated – a process that does not occur inevitably over time – and how much their social identity and personal ties connect them to either party. More than time itself, where and how one spends that time is critical to partisan identification.

The results suggest some important additional insights and implications about Latino partisanship. First, the fact that acculturation is so critical in determining where Latinos fall on the partisan spectrum suggests that we should pay strict attention to exactly which members of the Latino population we sample. Conclusions about Latino party identification derived from surveys of citizens (e.g. the ANES) or from surveys of registered voters (e.g. Alvarez and Garcia Bedolla 2002) will likely

differ markedly from conclusions derived from surveys that focus more heavily on recent immigrants. Second, the fact that Latinos are often highly uncertain about their partisan choice suggests that how we ask about party identification may be critical. Given that many Latinos have no clear, partisan preference, they are likely, if given the opportunity, to opt out of answering the question altogether. Thus, any survey that explicitly gives Latinos an option not to express a preference is likely to portray a different picture of Latino party identification than one that forces them to choose.

This point can be very powerfully demonstrated by comparing responses to the party identification measures in the ANES against that in the 1993-1994 Multi-City Study of Urban Inequality (see Bobo et al, 2000). The surveys differ in two key aspects. First, the ANES is a stratified random sample that seeks to replicate the national adult citizen population. In contrast, the MCSUI survey design focuses on large metropolitan areas which tend to be immigrant centers and explicitly over-samples areas with concentrated racial and ethnic minority populations and areas with a disproportionate number of low income households. Thus, the ANES sample is biased toward assimilated and acculturated Latinos, while the MCSUI concentrates on the population least likely to fit the standard models of party identification and most likely to be uncertain and ambivalent about partisan choice. The second key difference between the two surveys is a subtle change in question wording. In the MCSUI party identification question, respondents are explicitly offered an option of stating “no preference.” The ANES party identification gives respondents no such option.

These differences produce a dramatic change in what we make of Latino party identification. In the ANES, the strong majority of Latinos (63 percent) identify with a political party, with 34 percent identifying as Independent and only 3 percent who give a non-compliant (“Don’t Know”) response. In sharp contrast, the MCSUI data suggest that most of the Latinos surveyed are not partisans. Well under half of Latinos in the MCSUI survey (39 percent) claim allegiance to a party. Even more importantly, when given the chance, 43 percent of the respondents prefer to opt out of choosing even between Democrat, Republican, and Independent, indicating “no preference” on party identification.

Clearly, the MCSUI survey results are not representative of the national population of Latinos but they do demonstrate the dramatic changes in party identification as Latinos become more acculturated and assimilated into American political life. They also demonstrate that for a large number of Latinos classic views of party identification are inappropriate. For many whites and even some Latinos, party identification may be *the* stable foundation from which most of their political decisions flow but for many other Latinos partisan attachments are so weak that given the opportunity, they express no partisan preference at all. For this group, party identification, if it exists, is likely to be highly unstable – resembling more of a top-of-the head survey response than a primary political predisposition (see Zaller 1992).

More broadly, there may be differences not only in which party identification different racial and ethnic groups choose but also in how they choose between the various options in the first place. For whites, a unitary decision about where to place oneself on the traditional linear model still seems appropriate. But for Latinos, it appears that a three stage process may more closely approximate their partisan choices. Latinos are likely to begin their political journey in America by expressing ambivalence about party choice (don't know). In the second stage, rational skepticism about two parties that are not yet clearly trustworthy or distinguishable leads to Independence. And finally, in the third stage, if either party is able to demonstrate its value, there is the development of partisan attachment.

All of this should lead us to a very different normative view of Independents. Independents should not simply be dismissed as non-ideologues prone to apathy and inactivity. Rather, as we indicate, they are multiple routes to Independence - many of which suggest that Independents are anything but apolitical. In turn, this more positive view of Independents leads to a very different conclusion about the possibility that Independents will be important political actors. If Independents are seen as apolitical non-ideologues there is little reason to try to mobilize them. Everything we know about political participation suggests that such efforts will be futile. However, if we see Independents as being ambivalent or uncertain about parties that they know little about, that they do not trust, or that have not focused on the issues they care about, then there is every reason to believe that Independents can be integrated and mobilized. The

presence of widespread ambivalence and uncertainty also clearly suggest that many Latinos are up for grabs politically. If either party is able to reach Latinos and present a compelling reason for Latinos to support them, large numbers of Latino Independents may be swayed.²⁶

While there are clear implications in these findings for other racial and ethnic groups, we have only touched briefly on African American party choice and we have totally ignored Asian Americans. It seems unlikely that either of these groups will fit traditional accounts of party identification that are based on white choices but how closely the two groups resemble Latinos and what other dimensions govern their partisan choices is more difficult to tell. Although we have a long way to go, the arguments put forward in this research will hopefully bring us a step closer toward understanding why people choose to identify or not identify as Independents and perhaps even a step closer to being able to assess the likely future of the balance of power in American politics.

²⁶ Indeed, Proposition 187, the initiative designed to cut public services to illegal immigrants in California, has already demonstrated the possibilities. In response to Prop 187, an initiative that was pushed by a Republican governor and that clearly impacted Latino interests, Latinos in California substantially increased naturalization rates, voter turnout, and identification with the Democratic party. Thus, it seems clear that unaligned, uninvolved minorities can and will get actively involved in party politics if the right issues enter the partisan debate.

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Figure 1. Proportion of Independents in the Mass Public

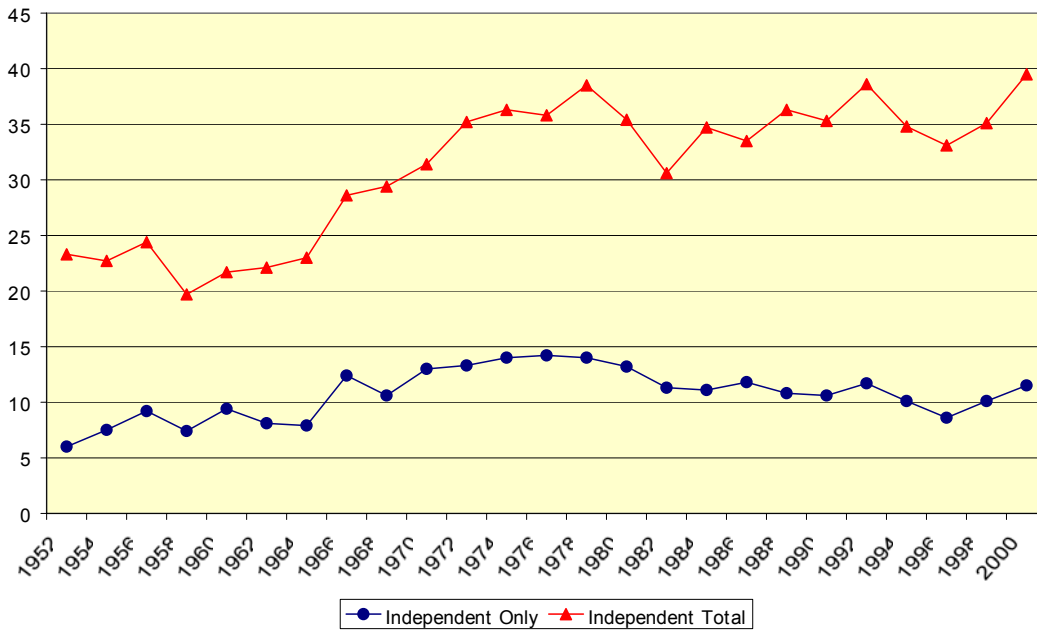


Figure Two

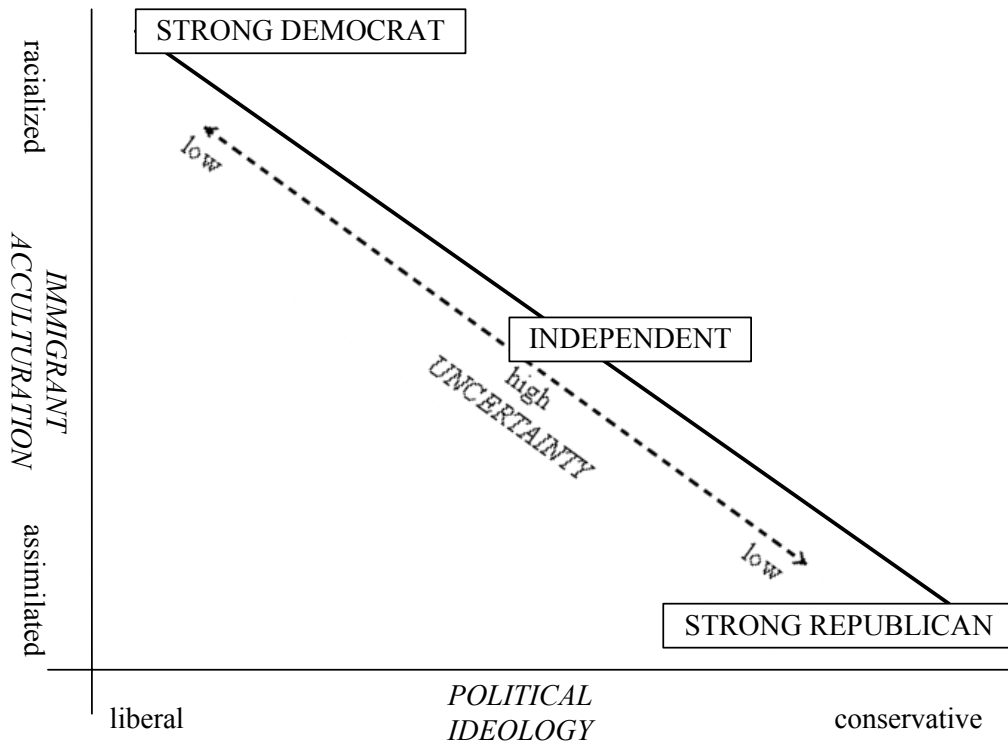


Table One: Testing Conventional Models of Independence (Logistic Regression)¹			
	Identify as an Independent		
	Whites	Latinos	African Americans
Independents as Moderates			
Strong Liberal	-.30 (.07)**	-.36 (.29)	-.17 (.19)
Weak Liberal	-.16 (.06)*	-.42 (.28)	-.26 (.23)
Weak Conservative	-.28 (.06)**	.15 (.24)	.01 (.23)
Strong Conservative	-.66 (.07)**	-.65 (.26)*	-.02 (.23)
Independents as Apolitical			
Political Knowledge	-.26 (.05)**	-.05 (.20)	.02 (.16)
Political Interest	-.13 (.03)**	-.07 (.14)	-.37 (.11)**
Political Efficacy	-.22 (.05)**	-.00 (.24)	.21 (.18)
Trust Government	-.07 (.00)**	-.11 (.03)**	.01 (.03)
Vote	-.22 (.05)**	-.72 (.20)**	-.38 (.16)*
Participation Count	-.15 (.02)**	-.18 (.11)	-.06 (.08)
Parental Socialization			
Parents Independent	.84 (.05)**	1.05 (.31)**	.97 (.19)**
Demographic Controls			
Age	.01 (.01)	-.04 (.03)	-.05 (.02)*
Age Squared	-.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)
Education	.08 (.02)**	.16 (.12)	.03 (.09)
Income	.03 (.02)	.20 (.09)*	.06 (.07)
Male	.33 (.04)**	-.15 (.18)	.53 (.15)**
Constant	.84 (.18)**	1.45 (.71)	1.38 (.61)*
Pseudo R-squared	.06	.08	.08
N	11846	682	1187

Table Two. The Determinants of Latino Independence (Logistic Regression)¹	
	Identify as an Independent
<u>ACCULTURATION</u>	
<i>Time in the U.S.</i>	
Foreign Born – Cuban and Puerto Rican	-.796 (.412)*
Foreign Born- Mexican	.527 (.366)
Years in US	.011 (.008)
Second Generation	-.356 (.241)
<i>Social Isolation</i>	
Social Isolation Index – Cubans	.481 (.192)**
Social Isolation Index – Mexicans	.390 (.175)**
Social Isolation Index – Puerto Ricans	-.066 (.178)
<i>Political Assimilation</i>	
Trust in Government	-.197 (.072) ***
Hard Work Achieves Success	-.114 (.061)*
Equal Opportunity	.122 (.061)**
Feeling Thermometer- United States	-.012 (.004) ***
Recognize Party Differences	-.989 (.161)***
Registered to Vote	-.434 (.169)**
<u>SOCIAL IDENTITY</u>	
<i>National Origin</i>	
Ethnic Cuban	-.905 (.702)
Ethnic Puerto Rican	-.934 (.767)
<i>Racialization</i>	
Black Racial Identification	-.187(.158)
Darkness of Skin	-.088 (.078)
Personal Discrimination	-.178 (.164)
Linked Fate (National Origin Group)	-.021 (.071)
Race Important – Cubans	.203 (.182)
Race Important – Mexicans	-.183 (.105)*
Race Important - Puerto Ricans	.034 (.174)
<i>Organizational Ties</i>	
Civic Organization	.223 (.083)***
Catholic	-.284 (.163)*
Religion as a Guide	-.126 (.061)**
<u>INDEPENDENTS AS MODERATES</u>	
Strong Liberal	.131 (.392)
Strong Conservative	.608 (.299)**
Liberal	.132 (.230)
Conservative	.277 (.213)
Weak Liberal	.116 (.254)
Weak Conservative	.324 (.222)
Demographic Controls	
Age	-.024 (.006)**
Education	-.044 (.023)
Income	.009 (.021)
Male	.379 (.156)*
Pseudo R-squared	.12
N	1919

Table Three. Heteroskedastic Probit Model of Latino Independence¹

<i>ERROR MODEL</i>	
<u>Equivocation Effects</u>	
Another Person Present	- .571 (.173)***
Length of Presence	.135 (.057)**
English Interview	-.181 (.140)
<u>Uncertainty Effects</u>	
Education Squared	.002 (.001)*
Speak Spanish at Home	.134 (.055)**
Age at Immigration	.009 (.004)**
<u>Ambivalence Effects</u>	
Gov't Can Solve In-group Problems	-.221 (.107)**
Latinos Share Common Culture	.137 (.069)**
Race Important-Cubans	.344 (.174)**
Immigration Preferences to Latinos	-.060 (.042)
Likelihood Ratio Test of Error Model	
Chi-squared (significance)	44.5 (p<.0000)
<i>CHOICE MODEL</i>	
<u>Acculturation</u>	
Time in the US	
Foreign Born – Cuban and Puerto Rican	-.771 (.513)
Foreign Born- Mexican	.006 (.392)
Years in US	.023 (.012)*
Third Generation Plus	-.116 (.222)
Social Isolation	
Social Isolation Index – Cubans	.491 (.248)**
Social Isolation Index – Mexicans	.405 (.195)**
Social Isolation Index – Puerto Ricans	.037 (.180)
Political Assimilation	
Trust in Government	-.124 (.077)
Hard Work Achieves Success	-.067 (.061)
Equal Opportunity	.082 (.063)
Feeling Thermometer- United States	-.011 (.006) **
Recognize Party Differences	-.995 (.307)***
Registered to Vote	-.465 (.209)**
<u>Social Identity</u>	
National Origin	
Ethnic Cuban	-.763 (1.21)
Ethnic Puerto Rican	-.954 (.749)
Racialization	
Black Racial Identification	-.233(.159)
Darkness of Skin	-.096 (.079)
Personal Discrimination	-.189 (.167)
Linked Fate (National Origin Group)	-.024 (.069)
Race Important – Cubans	-1.12 (1.24)
Race Important – Mexicans	-.085 (.098)
Race Important - Puerto Ricans	.148 (.177)
Organization Ties	
Civic Organization	.201 (.102)*
Catholic	-.330 (.180)*
Religion as a Guide	-.078 (.062)
Liberal-Conservative Ideology	
Strong Liberal	.074 (.421)
Strong Conservative	.728 (.344)**
Liberal	.356 (.252)
Conservative	.455 (.261)*
Weak Liberal	.414 (.266)
Weak Conservative	.519 (.266)*
Chi-squared (significance)	15.2 (<.0001)
N	1516

Controls for basic demographic factors (age, education, income, and gender) are also included in the model.