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# Latino Mobilization and Vote Choice in the 2000 Presidential Election

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Previous scholarship on Latino politics has demonstrated that mobilization has a statistically significant effect on voter turnout, suggesting the importance of get-out-the-vote campaigns to increase Latino political participation. Although nonpartisan organizations exist to mobilize Latino voters, most of the phone calls are made by political parties and candidates. I argue that the real test of effectiveness for partisan mobilization is vote choice. Using data from the 2000 presidential election, I model vote choice to determine whether or not Latinos who were contacted by Democrats and Republicans were more likely to vote for Al Gore and George W. Bush. I find that party mobilization by other Latinos is crucial to influencing vote choice. Specifically, Latinos who were contacted by Latino Republicans were significantly more likely to prefer Bush, whereas Latinos who were contacted by non-Latino Republicans were significantly less likely to prefer Bush. Several models are explored.

**Keywords:** *Latino voters; political participation; presidential elections; voting; political mobilization*

More than 1 in 8 Americans are of Latino background, and Latinos now compose the largest minority population in the United States. The number of Latino citizens registering and voting more than doubled between 1980 and 2000. Although Latino voters possess common characteristics, the Latino electorate cannot be categorized as a monolithic group (Hendricks, 2002). However, during the 2000 presidential campaigns, Latinos were sometimes characterized as “up for grabs” by pollsters, party officials, and academics (Neal, 2000; Rodriguez, 2000; Vitucci, 2000). This has two consequences for state and national politics as they relate to our

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understanding of Latino political behavior. First, do mobilization efforts by parties and civic organization lead to increased voter turnout by Latino citizens? And second, is the Latino vote really up for grabs? With much of the focus on explaining persistent low turnout rates among Latinos, the first question consumes more energy as we are eager to understand what stimulates Latino voting behavior. Recent literature has demonstrated that mobilization efforts have a positive and significant effect on Latino turnout (Michelson, 2003; Ramírez, 2002; Shaw, de la Garza, & Lee, 2000), but less is known about the impact of partisan mobilization on Latino vote choice. Building on the outreach strategies in 2000, both political parties implemented aggressive plans to contact Latino voters in 2004 (Segal, 2004), even as campaign managers discovered more dynamic strategies were needed to adjust to the complexity of the Latino electorate (Kasindorf, 2004).

Nationally, Latinos are geographically concentrated in the states with the most electoral votes: Texas, New York, California, Illinois, and Florida. The five most populous Latino states alone possess more than half of the electoral votes necessary to win a presidential election, making them attractive to presidential candidates. Even though Florida was the only real competitive state among the five in 2000, other states with sizable Latino populations, such as New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, and Oregon, were decided by less than 6 percentage points in 2000, when Latino voters may have cast deciding ballots. Furthermore, in highly competitive states with small Latino populations such as Iowa and Wisconsin, decided by less than half of 1%, the number of Latino registered voters far exceeded the margin of victory for Al Gore. Both major parties put significant resources into mobilizing the Latino vote because even small shifts in voting patterns could sway the final result. As a consequence, party outreach efforts to Latinos in 2000 “devoted millions of dollars to voter registration, education, mobilization efforts and even Spanish-language proficiency courses for elected officials, candidates and activists” (Segal, 2003, p. 2).

Previous literature has shown that Latino contact has a positive and significant impact on mobilizing Latino voters (Shaw et al., 2000) and that a shared ethnic attachment is an important mobilizing variable (Barreto & Woods, 2005; Leighley, 2001). A. K. Stokes (2003) has shown that a coethnic candidate can influence vote choice. This article is thus concerned with partisan mobilization efforts that influence Latino vote choice and poses the question of whether or not party mobilization by Latino party members had a substantively different, and perhaps more effective, impact than party mobilization by non-Latinos on candidate preference among Latino voters. To answer this question, the literature on mobilization and vote choice are reviewed and are reflected on the current notions of Latino political behavior.

The data and methodology employed and a review of the findings of the multivariate analysis are described. This article concludes with a discussion of the significance of the findings with respect to current research on Latino politics, and several questions are posed for future research to consider.

## Explaining Vote Choice

In his classic work *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, Downs (1957) expanded the model of political competition, arguing that voters have ordered and stable preferences which allow them to be placed on a "linear scale running from zero to 100 in the usual left-right fashion." These preferences "can be ordered from left to right in a manner agreed upon by all voters" (p. 115). These early attempts to describe voter preference characterize voters as rational decision makers, for whom issue positions served as the key determinant of their vote choice. Although the single-dimension structure is theoretically sound, scholars have rejected it as too simplistic. In politics, the location along a linear dimension in which parties and voters are placed is often unclear leaving voters in search of other cues to make their decision (D. Stokes, 1963).

Scholars also contend that partisanship is a critical predictor of vote choice (Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960). Similar to issue position, this theory suggests that voters will sometimes overlook misaligned issues and support the candidate of their same party. At least since *The American Voter*, this theory has been accepted and party identification continues to be one of the best indicators of vote preference today. However, some research suggests that a voter's partisanship may not be as stable as previously thought, and the role of the party may be on its decline. Being contacted by the party chairman before an election may thus not be as relevant to the voter as in the past, and new strategies to win votes need to be developed.

Tedin and Murray (1981) argue that with respect to state elections, voters are not static and that considerable instability exists in voter preference regardless of the candidates' partisanship. This stands in contrast to studies conducted by Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet (1945) that concluded that because of strong party ties, voters made their minds up early and did not waiver. To the relief of campaign strategists, Tedin and Murray find that voters are indeed persuadable by campaign appeals and that the media's focus on candidate characteristics matters. They find ideology and issue position to be influential but that candidates can overwhelm these factors in persuading voters:

The declining importance of party cues, coupled with the absence of salient issues that divide the electorate along stable lines create opportunities for candidates to gain or lose sizable elements of the electorate in their campaign . . . such being the case, electoral success thus comes to depend more than ever on the personal attributes of the candidates. (p. 455)

Although the personal attributes of the candidate may be important, Latino campaign volunteers may also enjoy success in convincing undecided Latino voters that the candidates care about people like them.

Candidates seek to capitalize on voter calculations of personality and symbolism. Popkin (1991) argued that savvy candidates know the importance of symbolic politics and will often make religious, racial, and ethnic appeals during campaigns. Popkin extends Dahl's (1961) theory of "ethnic politics," which found immigrant communities beleaguered by home-country campaign appeals in Italian and Irish boroughs as far back as 1900. In addition to the millions of dollars both candidates spent on Spanish-language advertising, the Bush and Gore voter mobilization campaigns utilized Latino volunteers to walk precincts and make phone calls in Latino neighborhoods. Non-Hispanic candidates take such actions because voters may rely on candidates' characteristics, such as their race, ethnicity, gender, religion, or social origin, as "information shortcuts" in estimating the policy stands of competing candidates. Lionel Sosa (2004) remarks that "with the exception of the knee-jerk voter (Democrat or Republican), the undecided Latino must like and trust a candidate before they can listen to, and believe, what they have to say." This article argues that party contact by Latinos is one way to build such trust.

## **The Impact of Ethnic Mobilization**

Much of the research on Latino politics is focused on political mobilization and the range of interests that reflect the variety of experiences in the Latino community. By comparison, there have been relatively few efforts devoted to determining who Latinos actually vote for and why. Hero, Garcia, Garcia, and Pachon (2000) write that "very little analysis has been conducted on the reasons underlying Latinos preference for the Democratic Party." They indicate that "Latinos become less Democratic as they become more incorporated into the American political, social, and economic systems" (p. 532). Cain, Kiewiet, and Uhlaner (1991) suggest that the immigrant experience may sway movement of Latinos toward greater

loyalties to the Democratic Party, but DeSipio (1996) found that there may be an "openness" to the Republican program on the side of Latino immigrants.

The ambiguity of the literature is understandable for several reasons. Given the inherent obstacles to participate in the political, economic, and social environments, priority is on simply opening up the franchise to greater participation. Data from the U.S. Census Bureau from the 1992, 1996, and 2000 presidential elections indicate that Latinos still vote at relatively lower rates than non-Latinos, and as a result scholars of Latino politics have been wrestling to identify methods of mobilization that are salient in the Latino community.<sup>1</sup>

The mobilization literature improves on the traditional resource models of voter turnout that fail to identify significant differences between Latinos and non-Latinos. For almost all groups of voters, studies find that increases in income, education, age, and civic skills lead to higher rates of turnout (Arvizu & Garcia, 1996; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). Mobilization though can help low-resource groups of voters by reminding them that the election is approaching and of the significance of their vote for a specific candidate. As early as Gosnell and Merriam's (1924) study of nonvoting in Chicago, we have known that contact by party officials greatly improves the chances of voting among minorities and the foreign born.

However, limited resources compel candidates to focus on turning out more reliable voters, leaving Latino neighborhoods with less attention.

Mobilization explanations presume that non-Latino turnout rates exceed those for Latinos because most issue agendas, candidates, and party and group activities are geared towards mobilizing non-Latinos voters. Accordingly, increases in Latino turnout are seen as a function of the few concerted efforts that have been made to mobilize large numbers of Latino voters. (Shaw et al., 2000, p. 339)

Using a similar data set to that used in this article, the authors tested a model of validated Latino turnout in 1996 and include an interaction variable for mobilization by the ethnicity of the mobilizer to differentiate the effects of Latino and non-Latino outreach. With regard to mobilization, Shaw et al. (2000) note that "the significance of Latino group mobilization efforts for validated turnout strikes us as especially noteworthy" (p. 342) given that mobilization by non-Latinos did not have a significant effect on turnout. Ramírez (2002) and Michelson (2003) also found that Latino voters were more susceptible to Latino mobilization. Their analysis of official

voting records suggested that Latinos have a sense of shared political achievement and are more likely to respond when other Latinos ask them to engage in politics. Building on these findings, there may be a similar expectation of partisan mobilization by Latino party members to have a significant effect on vote choice but party mobilization by non-Latinos to have no discernable effect.

Relational goods theory (Uhlener, 1989) suggests that group members may share common values and beliefs that they can use as leverage to gain policy victories. By acting cohesively, minorities increase the chances that political candidates will pay attention to them as an important voting block. One of the underlying arguments of this theory is that in-group members have a set of group-based issues that are of concern to the group. Building on Uhlener's (1989) theory of relational goods, Leighley (2001) demonstrates that traditional models of political behavior do not fully capture the dynamics at play in minority communities. Latinos interact with the political system at a more local level in which group-based variables such as group size, ethnicity of local office holders, and mobilization or outreach help explain their tendency to become active in politics. Because of common interests, Latinos are more likely to participate in light of larger ethnic- or community-based themes, as opposed to isolated individual ideas. Given the impact coethnics have on turnout, Latinos could also be more open to the recruitment appeals by other Latinos.

There have been great strides in the past decade in understanding the diversity of the Latino electorate and creating opportunities for Latino candidates (Pachon & DeSipio, 1991). In addition, we must also focus our attention on gaining a more accurate view of Latino voters so that both major parties understand the complexities of the Latino community and do not fall victim to myths and stereotypes. Although Latino voters are often described as liberal on issues of gun control, health insurance, and public education, they demonstrate more conservative tendencies on abortion and social values (Gimpel & Kaufmann, 2001). Therefore, issue positions may only go so far in explaining Latino vote choice, providing an opportunity for personal contact and mobilization by the Democratic and Republican parties to play an important role in influencing the final vote decision, and appeals by coethnic party members may be an avenue of success in the Latino community. Unfortunately, most studies of mobilization (e.g., Gerber & Green, 2000; or for Latinos, see Pantoja & Woods, 2000) have focused only on turnout as the dependent variable.

## Explaining the Latino Vote

As mentioned above, most of the academic discourse regarding Latino politics focuses on representation and mobilization. However, there is relatively little information on reasons that may compel Latinos to vote for one party's candidate over another. Cain et al. (1991) suggested that there were partisanship patterns among Latinos by national origin group and also that the longer an immigrant stays in the United States, the more likely he or she is to be Democrat. Although income and education are significant predictors of party choice among Anglos, the same patterns do not hold for Latinos (Uhlener & Garcia, 2004). Uhlener and Garcia (2004) found that "income is irrelevant to direction of partisanship, and education is either irrelevant or, in the case of the Mexicans, has an effect opposite to its impact on Anglos" (p. 149). Perhaps the most relevant finding of Uhlener and Garcia to this article is the effect of ethnic group social networks. They find that Latinos with more coethnic social group contacts are more likely to identify with the dominant political party of the group: Democrat for Mexicans and Puerto Ricans, Republican for Cubans. This suggests that partisanship can transcend ideology, issue, and policy and instead gain its strength from social networks based on ethnic attachments that have persisted in minority communities (Parenti, 1967).

Findings from the Latino mobilization literature can help guide questions regarding Latino vote choice. In a three-state, validated survey, Shaw et al. (2000) conclude that "Latino voting in 1996 [had a] significant and positive effect on contacting by a Latino group, which suggests that mobilization efforts may be critical to eradicating the turnout gap and incorporating Latinos into the existing party system" (p. 338). Their research seeks to answer why, with an increasing population and increasing voters, Latino voter turnout is still relatively weak.

Prior to the 1996 election, there was great expectation that Latinos may finally make their numbers known by significantly influencing the election. Although Latino turnout in 1996 was low, some findings supported the view that future attempts to mobilizing the Latino electorate may be successful. Shaw et al. (2000) concluded that "political, life-cycle, socio-economic, and Latino group mobilization variables had a greater impact on Latino voting than other group mobilization or ethnicity based variables" (p. 345). Although these variables explain voter turnout, the scope did not include vote choice.

Examining the 2000 election, Alvarez and García Bedolla (2003) argue that "there will continue to be large groups of Latinos leaning toward independence

or waiting to attach themselves to a political party.” The authors concluded that Latinos’ political “attachments will be defined by their policy preferences and the historical political experiences of their national origin groups” (p. 45). Historical voting patterns may then present a potential problem for GOP recruitment efforts within the Latino community.

## **A New Theory of Latino Vote Choice**

Aside from Cubans, Latinos have traditionally preferred the Democratic Party, even as they hold many conservative beliefs on issues such as abortion, gay marriage, school prayer, and family values. One reason for strong Latino support of the Democratic Party outside of Florida, however, may be the historic use of an anti-immigrant message by the Republicans to mobilize their existing base (Cain et al., 1991). Many Latinos are foreign born, and many more are within a generation or two from the immigrant experience: More than 40% of Hispanics are foreign born, and of those, only 22% entered the United States before 1980 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003). Their stance on immigration notwithstanding, past attempts by the Republican Party to recruit Latinos has resulted in some success in Texas and New Mexico (Fraga & Leal, 2004), but the high immigration rate in California created tension between the large demographic growth of Latinos and the Republican Party’s dependence on a high Anglo voter turnout necessary for electoral victory. This became a considerable obstacle to any cooperation among Latinos and Republicans under the rubric of common social issues.

Because of high levels of block voting among African Americans, assumptions have been made that Latinos may be more monolithic in their voting patterns than they really are (Cothran, 1997). With low voter turnout among Latinos and the perception that Latinos were “locked up” for Democrats, the Republican Party in California attempted to attract moderate White Democrats by using populist messages on immigration and affirmative action as wedge issues. During the 1990s, Republicans, lead by Governor Pete Wilson, supported legislation that created a hostile environment for immigrants, repealing driving privileges for undocumented immigrants, supporting statewide ballot measures that rolled back social benefits, repealing affirmative action, and attacking bilingual education programs.

In California, where Pete Wilson had been out of office for 2 years, a majority of Latinos still associated his negative image with that of the Republican Party (Tomás Rivera Policy Institute, 2001). Bowler, Nicholson,

and Segura (2006) found that racially charged ballot propositions sponsored by the Republican Party in California had benefited the Democratic Party and has helped reverse the trend of any growing GOP Latino polity that might have existed. Barreto and Woods (2005) also found that this Republican strategy had stimulated an increase in political participation to the detriment of the GOP the years following the Proposition 187 debate.

This hostile stance took on a national flavor at the 1996 Democratic National Convention when Latino leaders argued that Republicans were “trying to win by running against Latinos . . . trying to repeat the formula successfully used by” Pete Wilson (Davidson, 1996, p. A7). This followed a national surge in anti-immigrant sentiment, directed primarily at Latinos in the previous years. In 1992, Ross Perot began a strong populist campaign around the theme of job loss, which he blamed on free trade for exporting jobs to Mexico and on Mexican immigrants for stealing jobs in the United States. Ross Perot won more than 19% of the national popular vote, largely composed of the young, middle-class, and White, while performing poorly in cities with large minority populations (Lewis & McCracken, 1994).

Republicans in Congress then amended the Improving the School Act of 1994, denying public funding to schools whose students were born in the United States if their parents were undocumented immigrants. Following the Northridge Earthquake in California in 1994, Republican Congressman Dana Rohrabacher declared, “We have to lay down the principle that illegal aliens will not receive the same benefits as American citizens and legal residents, whether it’s emergency aid or anything else” (Sandalow, 1994, p. A3). At a public meeting in 1995, Republican Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich called for the national guard and state police from Texas and California to secure the border from illegal aliens from Mexico and Central America. In the 1996 Republican presidential primary, Pat Buchanan proposed building a 250-mile wall between Mexico and the United States to keep out Latino immigrants because they were a drain on our welfare system.

Although Buchanan lost the 1996 primary to Dole, his influence was felt, as Dole proposed to end bilingual education and to make English the official language in defense of U.S. cultural heritage. Not surprisingly, there was considerable detachment from the GOP in the years following the divisive elections among Latinos (Hero & Tolbert, 2001; Pantoja, Ramírez, & Segura, 2001; Segura, Falcon, & Pachon, 1997). Thus, as the media began to portray Latinos as the swing vote in the 2000 presidential election, the Republican Party arguably had a steeper hill to climb than Democrats recruiting in Latino communities.

The added ethnic component to party recruitment may make traditional modes of mobilization insufficient if a Republican president desired to succeed in garnering Latino votes. The data used here show that only focusing on mobilization without concerns for the ethnicity of the recruiter may even have negative results. The image of hostility generated prior to 2000 required a conscious effort to placate suspicions developed because of the fresh political wounds, but ideological compatibilities may not necessarily require the message to be changed as well. However, the same may not be necessary for Democratic candidates, who did not have similar baggage. I call this new theoretical framework *messenger politics* because it places an emphasis on who the messenger of the political party or candidate is, not on the message itself.

Although the message will certainly remain important for many voters, as Sosa (2004) reminds us, Latinos need to trust and like the messenger before they listen to the message. For example, if an undecided Latino voter gets a visit from an Anglo Republican Party official, it is probable that the contact will not have a positive effect and may even have a negative effect. However, if a Latino Republican contacts the undecided Latino voter, in Spanish if necessary, he or she may be more receptive to the recruiter's message and may ultimately support the Republican candidate. For Democrats, either form of contact (by Latinos or non-Latinos) should be productive in gaining Latino votes for the party as opposed to no contact at all.<sup>2</sup>

## Data and Method

Three probit regressions are modeled predicting vote choice in the 2000 presidential election for Latino registered voters in five states: California, Texas, New York, Florida, and Illinois. Voters in these states compose 75% of the Latino electorate and provide a good distribution of partisan preference. In all models, the dependent variable is a vote for Bush,<sup>3</sup> and the sample is adjusted to compare results for (a) all Latino registered voters, (b) Republicans and Independents, and (c) Democrats. The models include four general categories of independent variables used to determine Latino vote choice in the 2000 presidential election. The first category includes the standard socioeconomic status variables—age, education, income, gender, homeownership, marital status, and church attendance—and they are coded in a traditional manner. Education is categorical and ranges from 1 for grade school education or less to 6 for earning a graduate degree. Income is split into five dummy variables, each with the correlating income bracket

to account for the potential nonlinear effect of income on vote choice. Female, homeowner, and married are dummy variables, and age is continuous. Church attendance ranges from 1 to 6, with 1 reflecting never attending church or religious service and 6 reflecting respondents who report attending church or religious service once a week or more.

The second category includes political variables: political interest, whether or not the respondent believes his or her vote matters, and the traditional 7-point party identification variable ranging from strong Democrat to strong Republican. Third, ethnic-specific variables, such as language, nativity, generation, and national origin, are used to account for known differences in partisanship and vote choice, as detailed above. The language variable is coded 1 if the respondent speaks only English at home, 2 if the respondent says he or she speaks both Spanish and English equally in the home, and 3 if the respondent says Spanish is the only language spoken at home. National origin is divided into three dummy variables for respondents of Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Cuban ancestry. Respondents who are not Mexican, Cuban, or Puerto Rican are the comparison group.

Finally, three mobilization variables are included that take into consideration the ethnicity of the contact person. Voters were asked whether, during the past 12 months, they had been contacted and asked to register or vote.<sup>4</sup> Those who said yes were asked follow-up questions about the partisanship and ethnicity of the messenger doing the contact. Whether or not the voter was contacted by Democrats or Republicans was controlled for. Whether or not the voter was contacted by another Latino was controlled for, and an interaction term for ethnic party contact was controlled as well. With the interaction terms in the model (contacted by Latino Republican, contacted by Latino Democrat), the two partisan contact variables take on the value of non-Latino party contact, providing for a direct comparison between the two modes of mobilization.

The data were obtained from the Tomás Rivera Policy Institute 2000 Post-election Survey of Latinos. This was a five-state survey conducted by the Tomás Rivera Policy Institute, a nonprofit, nonpartisan research center at the University of Southern California, and was conducted between February and April 2001. The survey targeted Latino adult citizen voters from registered voter lists in each of the five states. There were 2,131 completed interviews, which lasted between 15 and 17 minutes each, and the respondents were interviewed in both English and Spanish. Including the initial questions establishing eligibility for the survey, there were a total of 60 questions asked, including demographic, ethnic, and political questions. I further excluded those respondents who reported that they did not vote in

**Table 1**  
**Distribution of Party × Ethnic Contact by State**

	<i>n</i>	Democratic Contact		Republican Contact	
		Total	Ethnic	Total	Ethnic
California	432	91	69	62	52
Florida	430	38	26	47	29
Illinois	432	101	67	59	38
New York	436	64	38	32	22
Texas	401	62	43	56	34
Total	2,131	356	243	256	175

the 2000 election because I am interested in explaining why Latinos vote the way they do, not why Latinos decide to vote at all.

Although I would have preferred a field experiment similar to Gerber and Green (2000) to measure the impact of mobilization, their method is only suitable for studies of turnout given that vote choice is never revealed by checking the official vote results, only whether the participant cast a ballot. To assess vote choice at the individual level, survey research is necessary. Although there is a risk that respondents will selectively remember whether or not they were contacted, based on their party identification (i.e., Republicans will report Republican contact and vice versa), there is no reason to believe that voters would selectively recall ethnic contact. There is no reason to suspect the data are unreliable. In fact, the mobilization variables employed here are the very same as those employed in other works (Pantoja et al., 2001; Shaw et al., 2000).

Table 1 provides a breakdown of the sample size in each state and the number of partisan and ethnic partisan contacts that were made. Because of significant Latino outreach efforts by both candidates, there were a considerable number of ethnic partisan contacts in all five states for both the Democratic and Republican parties. Overall, 17% of respondents reported being contacted by Democrats ( $n = 356$ ), and 12% reported being contacted by Republicans ( $n = 256$ ) before the election. Of those who received either form of partisan contact, about 70% reported that it was by Latinos, providing a sizable number of respondents to test.

Table 2 reports the vote choice among those who received partisan and ethnic partisan contact, as compared to the overall sample. Overall, 32% of Latinos reported that they voted for George W. Bush, compared to 59% for Al Gore. Furthermore, party contact appears to have a positive effect, with

**Table 2**  
**Vote Preference by Party and Ethnic Contact**

	Bush %		Gore %
Overall	32	Overall	59
Contacted by GOP	39	Contacted by Dem	66
Contacted by Latino GOP	41	Contacted by Latino Dem	65
Contacted by non-Latino GOP	36	Contacted by non-Latino Dem	66

both Republican and Democratic contact providing a 7-point boost to the respective candidates. However, the interaction of Latino party contact only yields additional benefits for Republicans. Latinos who were contacted by Latino Republicans reported a 41% vote for Bush, compared to only 36% among Latinos who were contacted by non-Latino Republicans. For Democrats, the difference is not statistically significant.

Although this assessment is only bivariate, it suggests a pattern of aggregate voting behavior for Latinos in the sample and lends credence to the theory advanced above. Building on these results, three probit regressions are modeled to estimate the effect of Latino partisan contact on the vote choice of Latino voters in the 2000 election. The full results are detailed below.

### Multivariate Findings

To fully assess the impact of partisan and ethnic partisan mobilization on Latino vote choice, multivariate probit regressions are estimated along with a postestimation analysis of the coefficients (Long & Freese, 2001). Although the coefficients in a probit cannot be substantively interpreted, changes in predicted probability can be determined through postestimation analysis, specifically the likelihood that the dependent variable will take on a value of 1, given a change in the independent variable from its minimum to maximum value (min-max). The full results are presented in Table 3. After assessing the effect of ethnic and partisan contact on vote choice for all Latino voters, the models for partisan subsamples are reestimated.<sup>5</sup> The overall results are suggestive, but more than likely, partisan outreach is intended to mobilize copartisans. Thus, whatever effects exist among all voters should be amplified in the partisan subsamples.

Among the demographic and resource variables, several patterns are observable. Increases in age increase the likelihood that a Latino voted for

**Table 3**  
**Predictors of Latino Vote for Bush in 2000 Presidential Election**

Independent Variables	Dependent Variables					
	All Voters	Min–Max	GOP or Ind.	Min–Max	Dem.	Min–Max
Age	0.005* (0.003)	0.1520	0.017*** (0.005)	0.2770	-0.001 (0.004)	-0.0040
Education	0.019 (0.033)	0.0309	0.022 (0.058)	0.0271	0.013 (0.043)	0.0108
Income 25k to 35k	-0.388** (0.155)	-0.1148	-0.141 (0.283)	-0.0367	-0.465** (0.193)	-0.0598
Income 35k to 50k	-0.167 (0.145)	-0.0526	-0.009 (0.262)	-0.0022	-0.274 (0.182)	-0.0387
Income 50k to 80k	-0.330** (0.143)	-0.1006	-0.349 (0.256)	-0.0950	-0.316* (0.175)	-0.0447
Income greater than 80k	-0.338** (0.165)	-0.1014	0.025 (0.280)	0.0060	-0.552** (0.225)	-0.0662
Income not disclosed	-0.245* (0.126)	-0.0768	-0.112 (0.228)	-0.0282	-0.300* (0.160)	-0.0429
Female	-0.029 (0.086)	-0.0095	-0.122 (0.151)	-0.0305	-0.028 (0.109)	-0.0046
Married	-0.111 (0.094)	-0.0368	-0.124 (0.165)	-0.0300	-0.107 (0.118)	-0.0177
Church attendance	0.044* (0.026)	0.0708	0.077* (0.045)	0.1031	0.039 (0.033)	0.0298
Homeowner	0.257** (0.102)	0.0826	0.289* (0.172)	0.0746	0.269** (0.135)	0.0420
Vote matters	0.082* (0.046)	0.0778	0.186** (0.075)	0.1572	-0.001 (0.059)	-0.0006
Interest in politics	0.062 (0.056)	0.0589	0.166* (0.092)	0.1411	0.018 (0.073)	0.0085
Party scale	0.498*** (0.022)	0.8629	0.451*** (0.064)	0.3664	0.364*** (0.077)	0.1429
Spanish at home	-0.068 (0.063)	-0.0445	-0.068 (0.104)	-0.0332	-0.060 (0.082)	-0.0195
Foreign born	-0.232** (0.107)	-0.0764	-0.267 (0.186)	-0.0642	-0.209 (0.135)	-0.0340
Third generation	0.311** (0.125)	0.1081	0.303 (0.231)	0.0672	0.345** (0.153)	0.0647
Mexican origin	0.101 (0.106)	0.0334	-0.076 (0.182)	-0.0188	0.244* (0.141)	0.0396
Puerto Rican origin	-0.017 (0.138)	-0.0055	-0.295 (0.241)	-0.0810	0.160 (0.176)	0.0277
Cuban origin	0.684** (0.151)	0.2514	0.420* (0.217)	0.0934	0.848*** (0.234)	0.2135

Table 3 (continued)

Independent Variables	Dependent Variables					
	All Voters	Min–Max	GOP or Ind.	Min–Max	Dem.	Min–Max
Contacted by GOP	–0.281 (0.240)	–0.0859	–0.750** (0.369)	–0.2269	0.260 (0.320)	0.0479
Contacted by Democrat	0.118 (0.214)	0.0395	0.024 (0.423)	0.0058	0.001 (0.261)	0.0002
Contacted by Latino	–0.072 (0.159)	–0.0233	–0.420 (0.271)	–0.1168	0.111 (0.196)	0.0188
Contacted by Latino GOP	0.622** (0.314)	0.2284	1.281** (0.581)	0.1808	0.081 (0.394)	0.0137
Contacted by Latino Democrat	–0.134 (0.301)	–0.0427	–0.067 (0.612)	–0.0170	–0.117 (0.360)	–0.0179
Constant	–2.881*** (0.344)		–3.827*** (0.655)		–2.068*** (0.472)	
Observations	1,701		540		1,161	
Max likelihood $R^2$	.422		.245		.058	
Percentage predicted correctly	.865		.811		.890	
Prop. reduction error	.577		.177		–.016	

Note: Coefficients are probit regression values; standard errors are in parentheses.

\* $p < .10$ . \*\* $p < .05$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

the Republican candidate (Bush). However, increases in income corresponded to a greater likelihood that a Latino voted for Gore, not Bush. In part, these results dispute the findings on income by Uhlaner and Garcia (2004), who claim there was no significant effect, and also dispute the findings on education of Cain et al. (1991), who concluded that education was correlated with Democratic partisanship (here, I find no significant effect for education on vote preference). In addition, regular churchgoers and homeowners were more likely to support Bush. Gender and marital status did not have a statistically significant effect on Latino vote choice.

Consistent with the seminal findings of *The American Voter*, partisanship had the largest impact on Latino vote choice in 2000. Party scale, a 7-point variable ranging from strong Democrat to Strong Republican, proved to be a significant predictor of vote choice. The min–max result for party scale indicates that shifting a voter from the minimum value (strong Democrat) to the maximum value (strong Republican) makes the individual 86.3% more likely

to vote for Bush. For Latino voters, knowing their strength of partisanship is by far the best predictor of presidential vote choice. Furthermore, voters with a sense of political efficacy, measured by the notion “my vote matters,” were also more likely to prefer the Republican candidate. Given the positive relationship between efficacy and turnout (Abramson & Aldrich, 1982), this finding may help explain the Bush margin in competitive states such as Florida.

Nativity, generation, and national origin also influenced Latino vote choice in an expected direction. Foreign-born naturalized citizens were less likely to vote for Bush, and third-generation, native-born Latinos were more likely to vote for Bush, as compared to the control group, second-generation Latinos (native born, whose parents are foreign born). Although neither Mexican nor Puerto Rican origin was related to voting Democrat, Cuban origin was significantly related to voting Republican.<sup>6</sup> In fact, holding all other effects constant, Cubans were 25% more likely to vote for Bush than other Latinos in the sample.

## The Effect of Mobilization on Vote Choice

The key independent variables in the model relate to partisan mobilization. It was speculated above that being contacted by Latino party members prior to the election would have a positive effect on candidate preference, and the results provide mixed evidence of such an effect. In predicting a vote for Bush, Latinos who were contacted by Latino Republicans were significantly more likely to vote for Bush. In contrast, Latinos who were contacted by non-Latino Republicans were not more likely to vote for Bush, despite the partisan contact. The control variable, contacted by GOP, takes on the effect of non-Latino GOP contact once the interaction term is introduced. With Latino GOP contact in the model, the control variable GOP contact mathematically becomes non-Latino GOP contact (for more on interaction effects, see Aiken & West, 1991; Jaccard, 2001). Beyond the statistical significance reported in Table 3, this result carries substantive and practical significance as well. The min-max column indicates that Latino Republican contact resulted in a 22.8% increase in the probability that a respondent voted for Bush.

For Democratic contact, there is no significant relationship with voting for Gore. Neither the contacted by Democrat nor the contacted by Latino Democrat variables are statistically significant predictors of voting for Gore (indicated by a negative result in the model). Latino Democratic contact does yield a negative coefficient, but it does not reach statistical significance.

Although party mobilization should be expected to have a positive effect on vote choice, this is not the case for Democratic contact. One possible reason may be that for most Latinos, the Democratic Party is the preferred party, and thus there is less need for winning over Latino voters through ethnic connections. It is possible that the Democratic contact had a positive effect on voter turnout, indirectly resulting in more votes for Gore; however, the vote choice model suggests there is no direct relationship. Finally, the overall performance of the model is quite good, with 86.5% of the cases predicted correctly, a 57.7% proportional reduction in error and a maximum likelihood  $R^2$  of .422 in the overall model.

### The Effect of Mobilization on Partisan Voters

The results presented in the overall model are quite informative and go far to support the messenger hypothesis, that ethnic mobilization can help overcome partisan image problems. To test the model further, the sample was split by partisanship, and the models were replicated to determine whether the effect of partisan mobilization was stronger or weaker among copartisans. Although Republicans are unlikely to win over voters who identify as strong Democrats, their message is most appropriate for Independents and Republicans who may have voted Democrat in the past. Likewise, Democratic contact had no effect in the overall model, but it may be that among Democrats mobilization helps secure votes.

The secondary results presented in Table 3 for Republicans, Independents, and Democrats reaffirm the general findings, with one exception. Among Republican and Independent registered voters, both forms of Republican contact had statistically significant effects. Being contacted by Latino Republicans made this subsample of voters 18% more likely to vote for Bush. However, being contacted by non-Latino Republicans (the effect of contacted by GOP) actually reduced the likelihood that Latino Republican and Independent voters would vote for Bush by almost 23%. Despite receiving copartisan contact, the messenger may have obscured the message. Still looking at the Republican or Independent sample, the results for Democratic contact indicate that Democrats did not pick up any "enemy" votes through their outreach to Latino Republicans or Independents. Among Democratic registrants, the effect of partisan mobilization was still insignificant. Neither Latino nor non-Latino Democratic contact made Democratic Latinos more likely to vote for Gore (i.e., less likely to vote for Bush in the table).

## Discussion

Party mobilization is known to play an important role in getting out the Latino vote; however, far less is known about the effectiveness of partisan contact on Latino vote choice. In general, mobilization is an effective way to increase voter turnout, but for Latinos, being contacted by other Latinos is the secret to success. Building on the work of Shaw et al. (2000), this study demonstrates that ethnic mobilization plays an important role in Latino vote choice, particularly in voting for the Republican candidate. Controlling for partisanship, past voting tendencies, and demographic and ethnic factors, being contacted by Latino Republicans greatly increases the likelihood that a Latino voted for George W. Bush in the 2000 election. Furthermore, partisan contact alone is not sufficient to win votes, and if the wrong messenger is sent, party contact may have an unintended effect for Republican candidates. Latino Republicans who were contacted by non-Latino Republicans were significantly less likely to prefer Bush. Although there is a complicated relationship among Republican outreach efforts, there is no statistically significant effect by Democratic outreach. Why is this the case?

As outlined above, for the party with the steeper hill to climb (here the GOP), the messenger and not the message is a critical component for success. Animosity between Republicans and Latinos, particularly immigrants, may have generated something of an image problem for the GOP. Even as Latinos were being courted as the swing vote, new outreach strategies that emphasize coethnic messengers were needed. On the other hand, Democrats were largely the beneficiaries of Latino retreat from the Republican Party and thus do not have the same problem to overcome. Still, it is surprising that party contact by Democrats to potentially undecided voters did not increase votes for Gore in the 2000 election. This should have been a concern for Democrats going into the 2004 elections because even though this model confirms that party identification is a strong predictor of voter choice, a large number of Latinos do not see themselves as strong party identifiers, and more Latinos are choosing "decline to state" on their registration forms. Of Latino Republicans, 53% did not see themselves as strong party members, and 48% of Latino Democrats did not see themselves as strong party members in 2000 (Tomás Rivera Policy Institute, 2001). This suggests a great necessity within the field of American politics to delve deeper into the complexities of Latino political identity as it relates to both parties. Future research is welcomed on this topic to determine how Latino vote choice is formed and how it may be swayed before an election.

## Notes

1. Based on results of the Current Population Survey, November supplement, accessible online at <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/voting.html>.
2. In both cases (contact by a Latino and contact by a non-Latino), the bias should be in favor of a positive finding because parties are likely to only conduct outreach efforts to those voters they feel they can persuade.
3. The dependent variable is dichotomous, with 32% of respondents voting for Bush.
4. The exact question wording was: "Over the past year, were you asked to register or vote by a candidate for office or a person working for a candidate, a representative of a political party, or someone in your community?"
5. Because of sample size considerations, I combine Republicans ( $n = 373$ ) and Independents ( $n = 376$ ) instead of presenting separate models for each. In 2000, Republicans attempted to contact and mobilize Latino Independents and Republicans to attract Latino "swing" votes, and their inclusion in a combined sample is reasonable.
6. Because of multicollinearity between national origin and state, such as Cuban origin and Florida, only national origin dummies are included in the model. For example, of the 217 Cubans in the data, 200 reside in Florida. Overall, 46% of the sample are of Mexican origin, 17% Puerto Rican, 11% Cuban, and 4% Dominican. In a separate model, state dummies are included rather than national origin, and all results remain the same. In addition, I ran split sample analysis for each of the five states, and the coefficient directions all remain the same.

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