

**What are the Processes by Which Latino Immigrants Form Party Affiliations?**

Rocio Guenther

Trinity University

Cities of Immigrants: Latinos in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Dr. David Spener & Dr. Katsuo Nishikawa

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**Abstract**

The main goal of this paper focuses on the hypothesis that in regard to Latino immigrant party affiliation, those who increase their years of residence in the United States, gain control of the English language, and have more political exposure will be more likely to have stronger partisanship (party affiliation) than those who do not. I am interested in these relationships, as Latino immigrants have become an important factor in the political sphere because of their population increase. Strength of partisanship is an important factor that correlates with political participation. Through the use of LNS (Latino National Survey) data, I chose to analyze the effect of increased years of residence on Latino immigrants' strength of partisanship. In order to do this, I had to perform various cross-tabulation analyses to create graphs highlighting the data that supported my hypothesis.

I will begin by discussing the literature by Segura and Nicholson (2012), and Darmofal and Nardulli (2010) that speak about the processes by which individuals form party affiliations. Following that, I discuss Buunk & Rothengatter's (2008) explanation of the Michigan model of voting and Fraga's (2006) view that Latinos arrive as blank slates into the United States. I will also discuss the research of Abrajano and Alvarez (2010), Leal (2008), Wrinkle et al (2009), which deal with the results of past elections and corner the issue of assimilation as well as partisanship. Next, the findings from Wong (2000), and de la Garza (2004) pertaining to Cuban immigrants and the specific processes of partisanship formation that differ between different Latino groups is discussed. Finally I discuss findings from de la Garza (2004), Kelly et al (2008), and (Barreto 2010) which deal with the role that race and religious traditionalism take in acquiring partisanship. I

will then present data from the 2006 Latino National Survey (LNS) and explain the data after cross-tabulations were completed. I conclude by explaining the implications of my findings and whether or not it lines up my hypothesis.

## **Introduction**

What causes immigrants to form party affiliations? Latinos and immigrants form party affiliations depending on how assimilated they are, whether or not they speak English well, the amount of time they have resided in the U.S., their exposure to politics, and levels of religiosity (Segura, Nicholson 2012; Darmofal, Nardulli 2010; Wong 2000; Wrinkle, et al. 2009; de la Garza 2004; Kelly et al 2008). In comparison of immigrant party affiliation, those who increase their years of residence in the United States, gain control of the English language, and have more political exposure will be more likely to have stronger partisanship (party affiliation) than those who do not (Segura, Nicholson 2012; Darmofal, Nardulli 2010; Wong 2000; Wrinkle, et al 2009; de la Garza 2004; Kelly et al 2008).

## **The Process of Partisanship**

The results of elections in the United States have varied over time, and the country's two respective parties have changed their views on how they want to be perceived and they have been constantly evolving throughout the country's history (Segura, Nicholson 2012). Consequently, the public has also evolved when it comes to choosing a side in the political arena; many voting changes have occurred with relation to the effect of social conservatism and the need to reject past preferences depending on the country's situation, be it economic or social (Segura, Nicholson 2012, and Darmofal, Nardulli 2010). Darmofal and Nardulli elaborate on this idea even further by claiming

that the Michigan model of voting recognizes events that produce these sudden changes such as a political or economic crisis. The Michigan model analyses the factors that influence party identification. In a general context, most voters have six factors that influence their preference: (1) attitudes toward candidate A, (2) attitudes toward candidate B, (3) domestic issues in policy, (4) foreign policy issues, (5) group related attitudes, and (6) attitudes toward the government management (Buunk & Rothengatter 2008). Although Segura and Nicholson argue that certain socialization patterns shape political preference, Darmofal and Nardulli specify that preference can change when there are political or economic crises. There are arguments that Latino immigrants arrive to the United States as blank slates, without any preference to a party (Fraga et al. 2006) as most experience influence and form opinions while living in other places before arriving to the U.S.

However, recent analysis of the 2004 and 2006 elections show a Democratic preference among Latinos (Abrajano and Alvarez 2010; Leal 2008; Wrinkle et al 2009). Wrinkle stresses, however, that although this is true, there has also been a growth in “independence” among voters. Adding to this, not only are Latinos going independent, but they are claiming to be uncertain of any preference (Abrajano and Alvarez 2010; Fraga et al. 2006; Wrinkle et al. 2009). This is due to lack of political assimilation, uncertainty, and ethnically based social isolation. Again, as explained in the introduction, Wrinkle’s survey data supports the view that as Latinos become more assimilated, they increase their partisanship feelings. Interestingly enough, Leal et al. mentions that Latino’s usually support those candidates who are also popular with the Anglos and that the partisanship of Latino’s has been stable, generally speaking.

Among Latinos and their immigrant counterpart, Cubans pose a caveat to the idea that Latinos mostly go Democratic; another difference is that Cubans form their party affiliations through different processes than other Latino groups, meaning their choices depend on different factors when compared to other groups such as Mexicans or Puerto Ricans (Wrinkle et al 2009, Wong 2000). The specific processes for Latino groups will be discussed below.

The years of an immigrant's or a naturalized Latino's residence in the United States greatly influences an acquisition of partisanship (Wong 2000, de la Garza 2004) and also correlates with naturalization and political participation (Abrajano and Alvarez; 2010; Ramakrishnan and Espenshade 2001). Wong specifically adds that naturalization and gains in the skill of speaking the English language contribute to immigrants acquiring partisanship. Both Wong and de la Garza stress that there is a strong relationship between these two factors, and thus political preference among Latinos depends largely on their experience with the polity. Both authors also observe that in party identification immigrants' years of residence are positively associated, whereas age is negatively associated. This catapults "time" as an important factor in the process, as reinforcement fosters the development of political attitudes (Wong 2000).

### **The Cuban Caveat**

Cuban immigrants are the only Latino group where age is a "positive and statistically significant predictor of party acquisition" (Wong 2000). For Puerto Ricans and Mexican immigrants it is not the case. The most powerful predictors of partisanship for Cubans are age, education, income, and citizenship (Wong 2000). This idea shows us how groups of immigrants have different experiences in their home countries, which in

turn influence their political inclinations (de la Garza 2004, Wong 2000). Most immigrants who come from countries where there was a Civil War or a dictatorship differ in choice and strength of partisanship when compared to those who come from more stable countries (de la Garza, 2004). Wong agrees with Garza by further specifying how different immigrant groups are “socialized through different channels.”

### **Ethnicity and Religious Traditionalism**

There are conflicting opinions about the role of ethnicity in partisanship (De la Garza 2004, Kelly et al., 2008). While de la Garza claims ethnicity does not have a direct impact on vote choice, Kelly et al. highlights ethnicity’s role when she says that when it comes to the effect of religious traditionalism on political attitudes, it all varies based on ethnicity (Kelly et al., 2008). De la Garza claims that Hispanics do not stand behind co-ethnic candidates automatically, but rather see other factors (such as policy, likeability, etc.) as more important than ethnicity. However, others agreeing with De la Garza’s points say that although many factors influence an electoral choice, identity also plays a role for naturalized and U.S. born Latinos (Abrajano and Alvarez 2010; Barreto 2010).

Can we say that ethnicity’s impact on partisanship changes once religious traditionalism is involved? According to Kelly et al. religious traditionalism is a stronger mechanism than ethnicity, and de la Garza claims ethnicity plays no significant role in vote choice. In relation to religious traditionalism’s role in partisanship, Kelly et al. says that results may differ for those who report a Hispanic ethnicity and “other” than those who identify as Hispanics, but racially consider themselves “white.” Kelly’s main point is that although religious traditionalism does encourage conservative attitudes and greater ideological conservatism, it does so merely in moral and ideological issues, and it does

not necessarily translate into direct support for the Republican Party. Other facets to be considered when it comes to religious traditionalism are those such as the denominational and ethnic context (Kelly et al., 2008). Religious traditionalism does mobilize a Latino group's identity, but its effect on any sort of preference is moderate. It does influence political attitudes and behavior, but there must be more focus on assimilation and ethnic identity to fully understand the ramifications.

The Latino population's rising numbers and influence has garnered much attention in the United States. Thus, it is no surprise that political parties are taking more notice of the Latino population. Analysis of political preference and growing partisanship feeling can help us explain patterns of Latino immigrant movement in politics. How are political preferences formed? What influences how you vote, or develop partisanship? How do immigrants specifically react to the choices they are given, what are the processes by which they develop any sort of party affiliation? The literature shows us that there are many facets that influence political preference among Latino immigrants, starting from the Michigan model of voting to the underlying specifics involving religion, language acquisition, and years of residence in the United States. We find that ethnicity is a controversial factor when it comes to its significance in influencing Latino's choice of party. Cubans are a group that differs greatly from other groups of Latino immigrants. They have overwhelmingly sided with the Republican Party and the strength of their partisanship depends on other factors that create a positive correlation. Every immigrant group has different factors that may influence their political preference and the strength of their partisanship. Not only that, but there is also the belief that these individuals

arrive as blank slates and that a rising number are siding “independent” instead of choosing a specific political party.

The areas that I find need more analysis are the role of religious traditionalism and ethnicity in regard to voter preference, because I believe they are pivotal to Latino identity. The Michigan model is already complex in itself, but adding the status of Latino immigrants to the mix makes it even broader. Concepts such as naturalization and assimilation come into play, two terms which are greatly connected to understanding the Latino immigrant influence in politics overall. The research for immigrants must always include these factors. Without understanding how assimilation and naturalization relates to the opinions or involvement of Latino immigrants, we could never get the full picture and the reasons why.

I hypothesize that in regard to Latino immigrant party affiliation, those who increase their years of residence in the United States, gain control of the English language, and have more political exposure will be more likely to have stronger partisanship (party affiliation) than those who do not. We know the Latino population matters, as it is a population that is quickly growing within the United States and will have a tremendous political impact in the future. It is important to understand what drives Latino immigrants to attain a strong partisanship, in order to analyze the factors that influence this strength. The general population follows the Michigan model when it comes to making political choices, they consider such factors as, attitudes toward candidate, domestic issues in policy, foreign policy issues, group related attitudes, and attitudes toward the government management (Buunk & Rothengatter 2008). However, there is a different trend going on with Latinos. One possibility is that partisanship, and other

aspects that have to do with assimilation such as years of residence, influence the strength of partisanship. For example, a person who has recently arrived to the U.S. will have less partisanship than somebody who has lived ten years in the United States. Why is this? Well, we must remember that assimilation is closely tied to partisanship. As the assimilation process goes on, Latinos are more prone to be influenced by presidential campaigns, and will be more susceptible to political campaign commercials, which increases their partisanship feelings. As they continue to be more prone to these commercials, their partisanship increases. It is possible that Latino immigrants arrive to the U.S. with a political preference, but once they create a life in the U.S. they try to choose or form any sort of affiliation to a political party.

In order to analyze the effect that assimilation has on partisan formation among Latino immigrants, the dependant variable is partisanship and the independent variable is years of residence. Politicians are using the media to communicate with Latinos in order to gain the community's trust. All this contact with the media increases Latinos' political partisanship, and thus as the years of residence increase so does their contact with the media, which in time creates a stronger partisanship among Latinos. I argue that years of residency affect immigrants' level of assimilation, which in turn affects the level of partisanship. I expect that as years of residency change they will affect the strength of partisanship. In order to test this relationship I used data from the 2006 Latino National Survey (LNS). The Latino National survey's<sup>1</sup> principal investigators for the 2006 survey were Luis R. Fraga, John A. Garcia, Rodney Hero, Michael Jones-Correa, Valerie Martinez-

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<sup>1</sup> More information on how the LNS was conducted and who it catered to can be found at: <http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/ICPSR/studies/20862#summary>

Ebers, and Gary M. Segura. The survey was conducted on 8,634 self-identified Latino/Hispanic individuals through a series of interviews. All the interviewers were bilingual and the analysis contains about 87.5% of the Hispanic population in the U.S.

I ran a cross-tabulation analysis comparing immigrants' level of partisanship and the time they have lived in the U.S.. Before performing the analysis, I dropped respondents who said they were born in the U.S. mainland, Puerto Rico, and Spain. I ran a cross-tabulation analysis of Partisanship on years in the U.S. and Citizenship. I also had to generate a variable called "lived in the US" and had to collapse it. The categories that came out of that were "newly arrived," "moderate arrival," and "long-term arrival."

In order to test that those individuals who increase their years of residency in the United States, gain control of the English language, and have more political exposure are more likely to have stronger partisanship (party affiliation) than those who do not, a cross-tabulation analysis was done and the results are discussed below. We cannot say that years of residence directly cause strong partisanship among Latino immigrants, but we can say that these two variables correlate with one another, meaning they have a strong relationship. There is evidence that supports my hypothesis as we look at the data between citizens and non-citizens as well as the numbers that vary depending on "new arrival," "moderate arrival," and "long term arrival" when it comes to years of residence.

The data found was expected, as past research stresses that years of residence, citizenship, and other factors such as English language acquisition and exposure to politics influence partisanship. The data gathered from the LNS shows the specific correlation related to years of residency. This data was relevant as it isolated those solely born outside the U.S. and brought variables together to create the categories of Partisan,

Independent, and not independent or partisan through the combination of “partyid3<sup>2</sup>” (party identification) by “arriveus3<sup>3</sup>” (arrival to U.S.) and “natuscit<sup>4</sup>” (naturalized citizen). Wrinkle’s survey data supports the view that as Latinos become more assimilated, they increase their partisanship feelings and my data specifically analyzes years of residency, not just the general notion of assimilation. Wong specifically adds that naturalization and gains in the skill of speaking the English language contribute to immigrants acquiring partisanship and I analyze the combination of citizenship with years of residence.

Years of residence directly affects the level of Latino partisanship, the results analyzed through LNS data prove that these two relationships are statistically significant. Thus, Again, let us remember that assimilation is tied to years of residency; they go hand in hand. My chi square in both tables one and two show that all these relationships between strength of partisanship and years of residency are statistically significant. The results are statistically significant at the .001 level. The results are shown in the tables below.

Cross Tabulation Analysis of the Effect of **years of residence** (IV) on **partisanship** (DV) Among Latin American Immigrants

**TABLE 1: Latino Immigrant Citizen Partisanship**

	Newly arrived	Moderate arrival	Long term arrival	Total
Partisan	37.6%	47.5%	62.2%	54.7%
Independent	18.2%	20.0%	15.4%	17.1%

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<sup>2</sup> **PARTYID:** Generally speaking, do you usually consider yourself a Democrat, a Republican, an Independent, some other party, or what?

<sup>3</sup> **ARRIVEUS:** When did you first arrive to live in the US [mainland]?

<sup>4</sup> **NATUSCIT:** Are you a naturalized American citizen?

Non-Partisan 44.2% 32.5% 22.4% 28.2%

$\chi^2=72.305$   $p= <.001$

**TABLE 2: Latino Immigrant Non-citizen Partisanship**

	Newly arrived	Moderate arrival	Long term arrival	Total
Partisan	23.1%	29.5%	38.9%	27.6%
Independent	18.3%	19.0%	16.6%	18.3%
Non-Partisan	58.6%	51.5%	44.5%	54.1%

$\chi^2=61.927$   $p= <.001$

If we look at table one, we see that partisanship for citizens with a long-term arrival in the U.S. is at 62.2% whereas partisanship for non-citizens with a long-term arrival in the U.S. sits at 38.9%. This tells us that there is also a strong correlation between citizenship and partisanship, not just years of residency. Also, it is important to note that the increase of years of residency increases the probability for citizenship. Even for newly arrived citizens being a citizen and not being a citizen influences partisanship greatly. As table one specifies, 37.6% of newly-arrived citizens show partisanship strength, and as table two specifies, 23.1% of newly-arrived non-citizens show partisanship strength. We clearly see with these numbers that those who are citizens have a greater sense of partisanship. Even if we analyze partisanship in both the citizen group and the non-citizen group, we see that increased years of residency correlates with an increase in partisanship. There are a high percentage of individuals who consider themselves “independent” but those who are partisan and non-partisan still make up a bigger percentage than those who consider themselves independent.

For Latino immigrants, the more time spent in the U.S. the more partisan they become. The same is for citizens and non-citizens, but as explained before the effect is less for non-citizens. When they are citizens they have a higher probability of stronger partisanship feelings. My findings are consistent with the findings in the literature, especially those of Abrajano and Alvarez 2010; Fraga et al. 2006; and Wrinkle et al. 2009. As the literature shows, there has been a substantial growth in “independence” among Latino voters. They are also claiming to be uncertain of any preference, as our tables above clearly show.

The current literature and the research completed with the cross-tabulation analyses through the use of LNS data rectify my hypothesis that in regard to Latino immigrant party affiliation, those who increase their years of residence in the United States, gain control of the English language, and have more political exposure will be more likely to have stronger partisanship (party affiliation) than those who do not.

The high statistical significance of the study shows the strong relationship between years of residency and assimilation. It also links citizenship and years of residency to strength of partisanship. For future research on this topic, I would concentrate more on religious traditionalism and how different denominations may have an effect in political participation or strength of partisanship. Because religion plays a very important role in the Latino immigrant community, I think the relationship between Latino religious conservatism and the population’s past preference for the Democratic Party should be investigated. These different variables could all be combined through research in order to show what relationship they have with partisanship acquisition.

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