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## Abstract

The purpose of this research is to find out whether political party identification is learned or inherited in Latino voters in the United States. Latino voters are the largest growing minority group in the United States. Understanding this growing block of voters will yield dividends in elections to come. I utilized a 2008 dataset from a post-election survey by Pew Research group on Latino voters. I hypothesize that recent immigrants learn their party identification while more established Latino voters are more likely to have inherited their political views. If Latino party identification is learned it is more likely that they can be influenced by friends and media in the course of a campaign. "Learned Behavior" is when a voter spends more time in an area and becomes more familiar with each political party or group and picks up on what each represents. As more time is spent in an area and the individual becomes more familiar with each party, they then formulate their views and become more loyal to one party or group over the other. "Inherited behavior" on the other hand, is when an individual gets their party ID from their parents or other close relatives. This party ID then becomes permanent and unchanged as time progresses.

I have found a connection between the different groups of Latino voters (Dominican, Cuban, El Salvadoran, etc.) and party identification. I have also found a tentative connection between media use and party identification amongst Latino voters. These findings provide the connection between specific groups of Latino voters and party identification and also the answer to the question of whether party identification amongst Latino voters is inherited or learned.

# Introduction

The study of Latino party identification is a long and historic one. The growth of the Latino voting block from 6.5% of the United States population in 1980 to 16.6% of the population in 2010, presents us with a very unique opportunity to analyze and dissect this new influential block of voters. In the most recent Presidential election in 2012, we saw President Obama win re-election with the help of Latino voters, winning them by a wide margin over his competitor, Mitt Romney, 71%-27%. Mitt Romney won the white vote 59%-39% but still lost the election because he did not have the support of many minority groups. Had Romney won more of the white vote than he did, he may have been able to offset Obama's victory with the Latino vote, but that will become increasingly difficult in years to come.

## **Why Political Parties want to understand the factors that influence Hispanic Party**

### **Affiliation**

Ever since 2004, the Latino vote has been in favor of the Democratic Party and continues to represent a major voting block in Presidential elections as well as some congressional elections. By 2025, it is projected that that number will exceed 21% of the overall vote. This is in contrast to the shrinking share of the white vote which has seen a steady decline from 79.9% in 1980 to 64% currently. By 2025, that number is expected to drop below 58%. This is why it is very important to understand whether Latino party ID is learned or inherited. Political parties are always looking for new blocks of voters to win over and since Latino voters are the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest voting block in the United States, it makes sense to spend money on trying to

win over these voters. The easiest way to do this is to find out what factors influence their voting behavior and then to apply those findings to your candidate.

## Literature Review

The makeup of the United States' population is changing every year with the continued population growth of minority groups like Asians, Blacks, and especially Hispanics. This change is detailed in the article by Greenblatt. Greenblatt details the ever changing electorate and describes all of these changes in great detail, thus allowing for analysis and conclusions to be drawn, suggesting that this change will lead to both parties targeting Latinos as they grow in number and consume a larger share of the vote. The United States, once primarily populated by Caucasian voters, is now becoming more of a mixed country with all races involved in everyday activities and government. This is detailed even further by Peter Katel (2008) in his article, "Race and Politics" where he discusses the voting behavior of each racial group (Caucasians, African Americans, Latinos) in the United States and provides much needed insight into those voters. Knowing the philosophy or beliefs of Latinos suggests linkages with the political party they may lean towards supporting.

The study of what affects voter party affiliation among Latinos has been done a few times over the last 30 years but, the one thing that has not been done is tying those factors together to determine if Latino political party identification in the United States is either learned or inherited.

## **Learned and Inherited behavior, The Traditionalist and Revisionist view of how party identification is formed**

Kroh (2009) studied the two views (Traditionalist vs Revisionist) that later came to form what is known as “Learned” vs. “Inherited” voting behavior that causes voters to identify themselves as a Democrat or Republican. Traditionalists view party identification as being a result of parental influence that was established at an early age (Kroh, 2009) and continued into adulthood. Individuals are most often heavily impacted by the way their parents vote and over time, these views get cemented into that individual’s mind. This “Inherited behavior” forms the basis for how they will vote and make decisions in life. Kroh suggests that even though an individual may vote on who they think fits their own beliefs, their choices may still be a result of the family beliefs that were given to them from the moment they were born. This forms the definition for “Inherited” party identification. Revisionists, on the other hand, view party identification as being a result of information gathered by each individual over time where that individual then makes a decision, based upon the information collected, as to what party they identify themselves as being part of or closer to. This forms the definition for “Learned” party Identification

### **Factors influencing Party Affiliation**

Janelle Wong (2000) finds that there is a very strong relationship between the number of years an immigrant has lived in the U.S. and the development of partisanship. Partisanship is defined as: devotion or loyalty to a party or group. Wong finds that, in addition to living in the U.S. for an extended period of time, naturalization, gains in English skills, and media use also

contribute to the establishment of partisanship in Latino and Asian voters. Wong's study shows that, over time, reinforcement of these views through exposure to the U.S. political system is what ultimately cements partisanship in Latino and Asian voters. This is highly indicative of a "Learned" party identification.

Katel (2008) suggests that each cultural group (Latino, African American, Caucasian, etc) has their own sets of beliefs and ideas of what should and should not be done on a variety of issues such as abortion, gay marriage, taxation, etc. This could lead to some of these groups being more predisposed to supporting a particular party or group that shares their views. There will always exist a couple of outliers in every group and you cannot label any group as being purely supportive towards one party or the other but, research suggests that the majority of any group, based on their beliefs, can be more supportive of the party that reflects these beliefs. (Katel, 2008)

Dutwin (2005) provides a detailed picture of Hispanic voters and provides valuable insight into what Hispanic voters find important in a candidate. Knowing what Hispanics find "ideal" in a candidate or political party could present information that can lead to a direct correlation with their party identification. It is the middle and lower class voters that define the large base of the Democratic Party and Republican Party.

Alvarez and Bedolla (2003) researched the 2000 election between Bush and Gore and found a number of intriguing factors to Latino partisanship. They found that partisanship developed and evolved over time as they lived in the U.S. In addition to this, younger, newer Latino voters had a tendency to lean more independent while older Latinos are more partisan.

As more time is spent and Latino voters learn more about the political parties in the U.S., they tend to become more partisan. This is indicative of a learned party ID.

Another interesting conclusion that can be drawn from this article is that, unless the Republican and Democratic parties change their issue positions, party ID amongst Latinos should remain increasingly more stable because, as they learn more about both parties, they tend to align themselves with the party they think cares more about their concerns and ethnic issues. The question is also raised by the authors about why national origin matters so much, especially in the case of Cuban Latino voters. The authors argue that it could be because Cuban voters have had a unique experience in regards to immigration and settlement. Cuban voters, over time due to the integration process in politics and the various constraints on various levels of government and institutions, have thus moved them into becoming strongly more Republican. Alvarez and Bedolla are betting that political experience is replacing parental socialization as the primary way of transmitting partisanship from generation to generation. This is indicative of “Learned” party identification.

Evans, Franco, Polinard, Wenzel, and Wrinkle, (2012) find that Latino voters look at a variety of things in each political party including, concern for Latino ethnic interests. There also exists a pattern between the various Latino groups. Cubans tend to lean more Republican while Mexican voters tend to lean strongly Democrat. The authors also find that there is a strong movement towards the Democratic Party after the 2004 election between Bush and Kerry. The article concludes that, the party that can best persuade Latino voters of their concern for issues important to Latino interests, will be the party that will gain the loyalty of Latino voters.

It can be said that since 2004, the tide has turned very strongly in favor of the Democratic Party in that regard. Democrats won 58.5% of the Latino vote in 2004, 67% in 2008, and 71% in 2012. These findings seem to continue along the lines of what Alvarez and Bedolla found and are again pointing towards party identification being a “Learned” characteristic.

Bishin, Kaufmann, and Stevens (2011), find that the reason many new Latino voters tend to move towards the Democratic Party is because of their economic status when they first arrive in the U.S. They are at an economic disadvantage and it is theorized that because of this, they will flock to the party that offers them a stronger social welfare system to help get them on their feet. So far, this theory has proven true. The implications of this remaining true are huge. It indicates that ongoing Republican attempts to woo Latino voters may be a waste of time. It appears that the numbers we are seeing in each election with Latino voters moving strongly towards the Democratic Party, is here to stay much the same way as how Black voters tend to side strongly with the Democratic Party. (58.5% Democratic party support in 04’ vs 71% in 12’)

Research provides a solid background in the many aspects of party affiliation including, but not limited to: cultural beliefs, economic beliefs, and familial beliefs. Surveys are a major help in finding out connections between the various cultural groups and identifying what is important to each. Some authors pointed towards length of time spent in the United States as a leading factor towards development of partisanship (Wong, 2000), others pointed towards economic factors (Bishin, Kaufmann, and Stevens, 2011).



When you boil it all down, it seems that every statistical finding indicated a “Learned” partisanship amongst Latino voters over time. Wong (2000) found that as more time is spent in the US, Latinos become more partisan and less independent. Katel (2008) found this as well in his work. Some reports (Bishin, Kaufmann, and Stevens, 2011) also indicated that specific Latino groups moved more towards one party over the other such as the case of Cuban Latino voters whom tend to move towards the Republican Party due to their being historically anti-Castro and thus being more in line with Republican Party views.

The majority of the articles utilized surveys and data sets from a number of reliable sources and used a combination of cell and land line communication. All of these things come together to provide evidence that Latino political party affiliation is primarily learned through experience and time spent as well as socialization through media and exposure to politics in the United States and partially inherited through some ethnic concerns and genetic features.

With all of this literature compiled and reviewed, the question of whether party ID in Latino voters is “learned” or “inherited” can now be posed. Much of the research indicates that party ID in Latino voters comes from whether a candidate is perceived as having concern for Latino ethnic concerns and issues, time spent in the United States, and ethnicity.

## Analysis

Table 1.1 describes the relationship between Political Party Identification (Nominal variable) and Household Income (Ordinal variable). The variables that were used to accomplish this were: Question 58 (Ordinal) and VAR 02 (Nominal). Question 58 asks respondents what

their total household income was before taxes. It further breaks it down by different levels of income (\$20,000 or less, \$20,000-74,000, and \$74,000+) VAR02 breaks down all the respondents by political party identification (Republican Party, Democratic Party, and Independent)

(Table 1.1 here)

This crosstabs was run because I sought to identify a link between Party ID and Household Income since sometimes income has an effect on voter behavior. The findings show that income does have an effect on Party ID in that the majority of Latinos support the Democratic Party at every level of income up to that \$74,000+ mark where it narrows dramatically to 58.8% of respondents reporting support for the Democratic Party. I checked for Gamma measures of association to find significance in these findings. The results indicate a -.895 T value and a .371 approximate significance. .371 essentially means that there is no significance in these findings.

(Table 1.2 here)

Table 1.2 describes the relationship between Ethnicity and Political Party identification. The variables used were VAR02 and Question 4. As mentioned, VAR02 breaks down all respondents by Political Party identification. Question 4 asks respondents about their ethnicity (Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Dominican, El Salvadoran, Central American, and South American).

My hypothesis was, ethnicity would have an impact on Latino party identification in the United States because, as numerous studies have shown, where you or your parents are from, can have an effect on your party identification. The findings showed that, in every ethnicity except for Cubans, Political Party identification stays relatively constant in terms of identifying as a Democrat. The only real fluctuations were from Cuban, Mexican, and Central American respondents. Cuban respondents were more split in their identification (52.1% Democrat, 39.6% Republican). This might be because historically, Cubans are more anti-Castro and are thus more likely to identify with the Republican Party because of the party's support of a free market economy and enterprising individuals (Bishin, Kaufmann, Stevens)

(Table 1.3 here)

Table 1.3 describes the relationship between the number of years lived in the United States (Ordinal) and Political Party identification (Nominal). The variables used were VAR02 and a binned variable called Yearsmod, where I broke down all the time spent by each respondent into 6 categories (Less than 0 years, 1-10 years, 11-20 years, 21-30 years, 31-40 years, and 41+ years).

I wanted to analyze this relationship because, work by Alvarez and Bedolla stated that the length of time spent in the US does have a substantial impact on Latino party ID. The data indicates this as well and holds consistent with the research done by Alvarez and Bedolla. Independence drops as time goes on and Latino voters become more partisan. This is very consistent with findings from Alvarez and Bedolla's work as well as Wong's. In addition I found that, initially, when Latino immigrants first enter the United States, they start with a 50/50 split

between identifying as part of the Republican Party and Democratic Party. After 1-10 years, party ID takes a sharp change to more of a 65/20 split in favor of the Democratic Party. It narrows slightly to 63/28 in favor of the Democratic Party after 31 years.

I looked for Gamma measures of association and found a -1.243 T Value which indicates that this finding was very significant.

(Table 1.4 here)

Table 1.4 describes the relationship between citizenship and Party identification. The variables used were VAR02 and Question 7. Question 7 was a nominal variable that asked respondents whether or not they were a citizen of the United States. Respondents answered Yes or No to the question and the results were recorded accordingly.

I chose to run a cross-tabs on this because I wanted to see if being a citizen or not added to why a respondent identifies themselves as a Democrat or Republican. Citizenship takes, on average, 6-8 years to complete and could add substance to why respondents in Table 1.3 identify as evenly split between Democrats and Republicans early on in that first decade of being in the United States. The results showed a 1.792 T value and a .073 approximate significance. This suggests that, because of the relatively high T value, there is some connection there but again, not significant.

# Conclusion

I have researched the contributing factors in Latino Political Party identification (Ethnicity and time spent in the United States). I examined the work done by other authors and found that party ID can either be learned or inherited. Learned is when you pick things up about each party over time and as you get older you decide that you tend to relate more to one party than the other and choose whom you want to vote for based upon Party. Inherited means that you pick up your party ID from your parents and it becomes a constant over time. The point of this thesis was to find that link towards one of those two categories in Latino voters.

I relied on a 2008 post-election dataset from the Pew Hispanic Center. I ran cross-tabulations to find connections and looked at the significance of each one. The Research came together to show these findings: Latino party ID is learned over time as the voter spends more time in the United States. This was shown when we saw the amount of Independent voters drop as time went on and partisanship was established. In the first year, party ID in Latino voters is split evenly 50/50 between Democrats and Republicans. Party ID truly starts to take hold at the 10 year mark and moving forward, it has an even stronger effect. We also looked at ethnicity and its relationship to party ID. When looking at this, it was found that Cubans tend to vote more Republican than any other Latino group. It was an almost even split 52%-39% in favor of the Democratic Party. This is in stark contrast to any of the other groups where it was 70-80% in favor of the Democratic Party. This might be because Cuban voters tend to be more anti-Castro and so they identify more as a result with the Republican Party due to its backing of a

free market economy and entrepreneurs. I also sought to tie in household income to it all but the findings were inconclusive. The last thing I researched was the link between citizenship and party ID. Those findings were also inconclusive. However, a lot of these findings were consistent with other findings done by other authors.

In the future, someone will find what exactly determines a Latino voter's party ID. My research indicates strongly that party ID in Latino voters is related to time spent in the United States and Latino groups being exposed more to politics. The implications of these findings are that, as the Latino population grows and reflects an even greater vote share, the political party that learns what it takes to gain the Latino population's loyalty, will win elections down the road. The white vote is shrinking as the Latino vote is growing and political parties need to pay attention to this and evolve. We saw the growth start to happen between 1980 and 2010 and it is projected to exceed 25% of the population by 2050.

# Appendices

Table 1.1 Latino Party Identification by Annual Household Income Cross-tabulation

Political Party Identification	Annual Household Income			Total
	<\$20,000	\$20,000-74,000	\$75,000+	
Republican Party	93 21.0%	105 18.7%	49 32.0%	247 21.4%
Democratic Party	313 70.8%	403 71.8%	90 58.8%	806 69.7%
Independent	36 8.1%	53 9.4%	14 9.2%	103 8.9%
Total	442 100%	561 100%	153 100%	1156 100%

Gamma: -  
.895

Significance: .371

		Table 1.2 Latino Party identification by Ethnicity Cross-tabulation						
Table 1.2	Mexican	Puerto Rican	Cuban	Dominican	Salvadoran	Central American	South American	Total
Republican Party	189	15	19	4	5	21	14	267
Percent	22.80%	12.00%	39.60%	6.90%	10.00%	22.60%	16.30%	20.70%
Democratic Party	562	101	25	43	40	63	67	901
Percent	67.90%	80.80%	52.1%	74.10%	80.00%	67.70%	77.90%	70.00%
Independent	77	9	4	11	5	9	5	120
Percent	9.30%	7.20%	8.30%	19.00%	10.00%	9.70%	5.80%	9.30%
Total	828	125	48	58	50	93	86	1288
Percent	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Gamma: 1.829

Significance: .067

		Table 1.3 Party Identification by Years spent in US cross-tabulation					
	<= 0 Years	1 - 10 Years	11 - 20 Years	21 - 30 Years	31 - 40 Years	41+ Years	Total
Republican Party	5	46	31	18	21	20	141
	50.0%	20.9%	14.6%	13.6%	28.8%	26.3%	19.5%
Democratic Party	5	144	157	104	46	51	507
	50.0%	65.5%	73.7%	78.8%	63.0%	67.1%	70.0%
Independent	0	30	25	10	6	5	76
	0.0%	13.6%	11.7%	7.6%	8.2%	6.6%	10.5%
Total	10	220	213	132	73	76	724
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Gamma: -1.243

Significance: .058



Table 1.4. Latino party identification by citizenship cross-tabulation	Are you a citizen of the United States?		Total
	Yes	No	
	Republican party	53 21.4%	78 18.4%
Democratic party	176 71.0%	294 69.2%	470 69.8%
Independent	19 7.7%	53 12.5%	72 10.7%
Total	248 100.0%	425 100.0%	673 100.0%

Gamma: 1.792

Significance: .073

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