**The Impact of the 2020 U.S. Presidential Election on the Mental Health of Hispanics**

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**Abstract**

Every election is important; however, the 2020 presidential election was especially important for a variety of reasons. On the campaign trail, Mr. Trump has stated that if re-elected, he would continue to enact anti-immigrant, anti-Latino policies such as building a “great wall” along the entire US southern border to keep Latinos out of the US. In addition to the policies, his rhetoric has continuously been anti-Latino by calling Latinos “criminals”, “rapists”, and “drug dealers.” As a result of these behaviors and policies, many Latinos in the US feel as if their place in the US has gotten worse under Trump’s administration and that his presidency has affected their psychological and physiological health. Thus, the purpose of the current study was to investigate how the 2020 election would impact Latino’s psychological and physiological health before, during, and after the election. Through various separate piecewise growth models, we found that depression, negative affect, and anxiety increased in anticipation of the election winner. This effect was found to be moderated by voting intention such that non-Trump Latino supporters reported higher levels of the above-mentioned variables in anticipation of the election, whereas Trump supporters did not. Those health outcomes stabilized after the winner was announced. We also report on individual difference factors such as nativity, ethnic identity, and familism that act as moderators of the aforementioned effects. Future directions are discussed.

**The Impact of the 2020 U.S. Presidential Election on the Mental Health of Hispanics**

Elections can be stressful, particularly for those who are disproportionately impacted by the outcome and resulting policy changes (Williams & Medlock, 2017; Zeiders, Nair, Hoyt et al., 2019). The 2020 U.S. presidential election in particular was stressful for many, as the incumbent Donald Trump was up for re-election, whose campaign rhetoric in 2016 heavily featured immigration and denigration towards Mexico and Mexican-Americans, including emphasis on building “a great wall” and making “Mexico pay for that wall” (Time, 2015). Following Trump’s election in 2016, hate crimes and hostility toward people from racial/ethnic minority groups, immigrants, and Muslim people increased significantly (Lopez, 2017), contributing to feelings of anxiety, stress, and fear among individuals targeted (Wray-Lake et al., 2018). Anti-immigration policies were additionally enacted, affecting the lives and livelihood of immigrants and their communities (Martin, 2017). Given the impact the election of Trump in 2016 on the health and wellbeing of Latinos in the U.S., including Mexican-Americans, the current study examined how the 2020 presidential election (and the possibility of Trump’s re-election) affected daily affect and mental health among Latinos/Hispanics, specifically focusing on anticipatory processes leading up to the election.

**Impact of elections and policy on individuals**

Macrolevel factors impact the health, wellbeing, and development of individuals, as highlighted by the bioecological theory of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998) and other studies showing the influence of macrolevel factors on individuals’ wellbeing and mental health (Andoh-Arthur & Adjorlolo, 2021; Elia et al., 2020; Ottova et al., 2012). Bronfenbrenner’s (1977) bioecological systems theory conceptualizes factors of influence as ranging from the more proximal (microsystem: closest to the individual that the individual has direct contact with) to the more distal (macrosystem: cultural environment including economic, social, and political systems) and emphasizes interactions between levels as essential in understanding individual development. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) similarly emphasize interactions between environment and individuals in determining the impact of stress on individuals. Thus, we conceptualize national elections as macrolevel events that influence stress and wellbeing among individuals.

Prior research has documented the activation of a physiological stress response surrounding an election, including disturbances in both cortisol cycles (Stanton et al., 2010; Trawalter et al., 2011; Waismel-Manor et al., 2011; Hoyt et al., 2018; Zeiders et al., 2020) and testosterone levels (Stanton et al., 2009; Trawalter et al., 2011). The impact of elections on the individual’s physiological response has been shown in some cases to be contingent on whether one’s supported candidate is expected to win (Stanton et al., 2009; Stanton, LaBar et al., 2010). Other research has focused on psychological responses, showing complicated patterns of effects on positive and negative affect, mood, and other psychological outcomes (Scheibe et al., 2011; Marx et al., 2009; Williams & Mohammed, 2013; Williams & Medlock, 2017; Waismel-Manor et al., 2011; Hoyt et al., 2018; Neupert et al., 2019; Roche & Jacobson, 2019; Zeiders et al., 2020), suggesting elections can be both exciting and stressful events that influence individuals’ psychology and physiology.

The candidates and policies involved in the election play an important role in how they affect individuals (Craig et al., 2006; Waismel-Manor et al., 2011). Research suggests elections may have a particularly negative effect on individuals and communities who are direct targets of hostility during an election cycle (Williams & Medlock, 2017). Hispanics compose the largest growing ethnic/racial minority group in the US, the majority of whom—over 60%—are Mexican-American (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). In his 2016 presidential campaign, Trump repeatedly referred to Mexican immigrants in a denigrating way, calling Mexican immigrants “criminals” and “rapists” in his campaign announcement speech and repeatedly saying he would “build a great wall” along the U.S.-Mexico border and that Mexico would pay for it (Time, 2015). On August 31, 2016, Trump gave a campaign speech in Phoenix, AZ, where he described “criminal aliens” that “freely roam our streets, walk around, do whatever they want to do, crime all over the place,” and suggested policy solutions to restrict immigration, including ending “catch and release” policies, which would increase the number of border patrol agents on the border, and immediately deporting anyone without documentation (Los Angeles Times, 2016). Some of these campaign promises came to fruition in the first 100 days of Trump’s term in the form of 4 anti-immigrant executive orders that included directives to extend the wall along the U.S.-Mexico border, expedite deportations, remove protections in “sanctuary cities”, increase the number of ICE agents along the border, block entry for refugees and citizens from a number of countries in the Middle East, and restrict the issuance of H-1B visas, which are primarily issued to college-educated foreigners to fill US jobs that require a college degree (Martin, 2017).

Unsurprisingly, research has shown that the anti-immigration rhetoric around the 2016 election and other anti-immigration legislation and policies have had a negative effect on Hispanic/Latino individuals and communities (Toomey et al., 2014; White et al., 2014; Hatzenbuehler et al., 2017). In several studies, Latino youth reported emotional symptoms including anxiety, stress, fear, anger, and immigration-related worries, along with physical symptoms including sleep disturbances and somatic symptoms before and after the 2016 election (DeJonckheere et al., 2018; Wray-Lake et al., 2018). One study specifically examined the effect of the 2016 election on physiological stress responses of Latino adolescents, showing changes in bedtime cortisol and diurnal cortisol slopes within the 5 days surrounding election day (Zeiders et al., 2020).

Other research has shown negative effects of restrictive anti-immigrant policies on Latinos, including legislation passed in the Arizona state senate in 2010 requiring individuals to carry documentation at all times and allowing law enforcement officials to check the immigration status of anyone they suspected was undocumented, often resulting in racial profiling (Ayon & Becerra, 2013; Salas et al., 2013). This kind of legislation and other immigration raids result in elevated fear, anxiety and other negatively-valanced emotions, less use of public assistance or preventative health care, and lower birth weight among Latina mothers related to stress (Ayon & Becerra, 2013; Salas et al., 2013; Toomey et al., 2014; White et al., 2014; Novak et al., 2017; Wray-Lake et al., 2017). Additionally, a state-level analysis showed that Latinos in states with more exclusionary anti-immigrant policies report poor mental health at higher rates (Hatzenbuehler et al., 2017), suggesting anti-immigrant policies have an effect on both psychological and physical outcomes among Latinos. Thus, it is no surprise that many Latinos feel their place in America has gotten worse under Trump’s presidency (Lopez et al., 2018; Armenta et al., 2021).

**Anticipation and appraisal of the 2020 election as a stressor**

Given the impact that Trump has had on nation-wide anti-immigrant and anti-Mexican rhetoric and legislation, the prospect of his re-election in 2020 was likely a significant source of stress for Latinos and in particular, Mexican-Americans. Thus, the current study examined psychological responses during the period of time surrounding the 2020 U.S. Presidential election. Specifically, we focused on anticipatory processes leading up to the election, which play an important role in individuals’ health and wellbeing. When anticipating a stressful event, individuals prepare for the stressor, especially when the event is appraised as threatening or personally relevant (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Monat et al., 1972). This anticipatory stress can help mobilize a coping response following the stressor (Neupert & Bellingtier, 2019), but may be detrimental when vigilance or anticipatory stress occurs chronically. Research focusing on vigilance in anticipation of race-related discrimination, for example, has found effects on cardiovascular function, hypertension, obesity, sleep difficulty, depression, and anxiety, even when controlling for previous experiences of discrimination (Clark et al., 2006; Gordon et al., 2020; Hicken et al., 2013, 2014, 2018; Watson-Singleton et al., 2019; Himmelstein et al., 2015; LaVeist et al., 2014; Lewis et al., 2019; Powell et al., 2016).

Given the importance of anticipatory stress for physical and physiological health, especially for individuals from racial/ethnic minorities that experience high daily stress burdens, the current study examined the emotions and mental health of Latino young adults close to the U.S.-Mexico border before, during, and after the election. To do this, we used a daily diary approach to repeatedly measure affect and symptoms of anxiety and depression every day for two weeks surrounding the election. Daily diary and other ecological momentary assessment methods are beneficial in that they allow for examination of within-person variation in outcomes over time (Ebner-Priemer & Trull, 2009; Trull & Ebner-Priemer, 2013). Through repeated quantitative measurement of outcomes, we could examine linear trends of change in affect and mental health over meaningful periods of time surrounding the election (e.g., separately examining trajectories before and after the election). Additionally, daily diaries allow for the examination of how fluctuations in daily activities affect outcomes. For example, we examined how daily engagement with the news over this period contributed to daily outcomes, as daily engagement with politics and news, even outside of election cycles, has been conceptualized as a daily chronic stressor (Ford & Feinberg, 2020; Tang & Oh, 2020).

Last, we examined individual differences that may exacerbate negative responses in anticipation of the election. The impact of a stressor is heavily dependent on one’s appraisal of the stressor (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), which depends in part on the relevance of the stressor to one’s important commitments, goals, and values (e.g., Lash et al., 1991). In an exploratory fashion, we examined how factors such as nativity (i.e., whether someone was born in the U.S. or not), ethnic identity, and cultural values of familism impacted psychological outcomes in anticipation of the election. We hypothesized that these factors were important in determining the personal relevance of the election and thus would increase the perception of the election as a stressor and be reflected in heightened anticipatory coping, although we did not have specific hypotheses for which outcomes would be affected and which facets of each factor would influence anticipatory processes.

**Current study**

The current study examines the effect of the 2020 U.S. presidential election on the psychological wellbeing of Latinos/Hispanics in the U.S.-Mexico border region. This region and the city of El Paso in particular is unique because of continued ties between Mexican-Americans living in the US and family members living in Mexico, familiarity and contact with the border and border regulations, and the majority status of Latinos in this region (the population of El Paso County is 82.9% Latino, the majority of whom have Mexican heritage; U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). We specifically examined the effect of the election on young adults, many of whom voted in this election for the first time, as it is an important stage of ethnic and political identity development (Johnson & Ferguson, 2018; Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2004; Walker & Iverson, 2015).

In addition to being a unique population among which to examine these effects, this was a particularly unique election for several reasons. Because of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott extended the early voting period to allow for less crowding at the polls on Election Day, resulting in a record high number of voters on the first day of early voting (Texas Secretary of State, n.d.). El Paso also experienced its worst COVID-19 outbreak in October and early November of 2020 with a record high number of cases requiring hospitalizations and intensive care treatment and a record high number of deaths from COVID-19, resulting in the use of several mobile morgues (Booker, 2020; El Paso Strong, 2021). Thus, this was a unique time and place to examine how macrolevel factors, including the 2020 U.S. national election, impacted individuals’ mental health and wellbeing. This study was not preregistered.

**Method**

**Participants**

One hundred and ten participants (28 men, 81 women, and 1 trans/non-binary person) who identified as Hispanic or Latino were recruited using the Psychology Department SONA system at the University of Texas at El Paso and word of mouth. The majority of the participants were Mexican-American (95%) and ranged in age from 18 to 51 years old (*M* = 23.6). Participants received $20 for participating in an onboarding session prior to the beginning of the daily diary period. Then, participants received $40 for participating in the 2-week daily diary period. Participants received bonus compensation ($10) for completing at least 85% of the daily diary surveys, resulting in a maximum of $70 in compensation. Compensation was distributed via online Target gift cards following the daily diary period. Compliance was acceptable (*M* = 88.6% of total surveys completed, min = 35.7%, max = 100%).

**Procedure**

The entire study took place online and all surveys were administered using Qualtrics. The onboarding session was facilitated via Zoom, where the details of the study were described, informed consent was obtained, and participants completed the onboarding questionnaire. All onboarding sessions took place prior to the daily diary period (Oct. 19, 2020 – Oct. 23, 2020). The daily diary period began one week prior to the election and ended one week following the election (Oct. 28, 2020 – Nov. 10, 2020), during which participants were sent a daily survey link via email every day at 6:00 pm MT. Participants were instructed to complete that survey within 8 hours (i.e., before 2:00 am the next day). Each daily survey took less than 10 minutes to complete.

**Measures**

**Onboarding.** In the onboarding questionnaire, participants completed a number of trait measures, including measures of trait anxiety (Generalized Anxiety Disorder-7 [GAD-7]; (Spitzer et al., 2006), trait depression (Patient Health Questionnaire-9 [PHQ-9]; (Kroenke & Spitzer, 2002), ethnic identity, including subscales related to identity exploration and identity commitment (Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure-Revised [MEIM]; Phinney & Ong, 2007), and cultural values of familism, including support (example items: “Family provides a sense of security because they will always be there for you”; “It is important to have close relationships with aunts/uncles, grandparents, and cousins”), obligation (example items: “Older kids should take care of an be role models for their younger brothers and sisters”; “Parents should be willing to make great sacrifices to make sure their children have a better life”), and referent subscales (example items: “When it comes to important decisions, the family should ask for advice from close relatives”; “It is important to work hard and do one’s best because this work reflects on the family”; Mexican American Cultural Values Scale [MACVS]; Knight et al., 2010). Additionally, participants rated their agreement to two items we created assessing associations between Trump and ICE (“Donald Trump has had a huge impact on border policy” and “I associate ICE with Donald Trump”), which we created because of the emphasis Trump’s campaign and administration have had on immigration issues and border policy. Last, participants indicated which presidential candidate they were leaning towards voting for (Response options: Trump, Biden, Other candidate, Not voting, Haven’t decided) and whether they had already voted, either by mail or by early voting, since the onboarding questionnaire was administered two weeks before the election. Other measures were administered that are not relevant to the current analyses, along with several demographic variables (e.g., age, gender, nativity, and parents’ nativity). A complete list of all measures administered can be found in the Supplementary Material.

**Daily diary period.** In each daily diary survey, participants were asked to first rate the degree to which they felt 26 different emotions that day. We used items from the PANAS-X (Watson & Clark, 1994) to assess positive and negative affect and added 3 items to assess anxiety (anxious, worried, restless) and 3 items to assess depression (depressed, sad, downhearted). Additionally, participants were asked “How many times did you read or engage with political news TODAY” which included reading political news articles, seeing political news on social media, watching a political news video or clip, or reading a political news headline (response options: 0 = not at all; 1 = 1-5 times; 2 = 6-10 times; 3 = 11-15 times; 4 = 16-20 times; 5 = more than 20 times). Several other measures were administered, including items assessing in-person and vicarious forms of racial/ethnic discrimination, but will not be discussed here. A complete list of all measures administered can be found in the Supplementary Material.

**Analytic Approach**

First, to examine trends in psychological outcomes (negative and positive affect, depression, and anxiety) during different periods of time within the study, we used multilevel piecewise growth models (Singer & Willet, 2003). To fit these models, we first determined three distinct time periods or stages over the course of the study: Days 1-6 (before the election), days 7-10 (after the election but before the winner was announced), and days 11-14 (after Joe Biden was announced the winner). To estimate a separate trajectory for each stage, we created three unique time-varying predictors to include in the model, one for each stage: S1 coded Days 1-14 as {0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 6, 6, 6, 6, 6, 6, 6}, S2 coded Days 1-14 as {0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 4, 4, 4}, and S3 coded Days 1-14 as {0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 1, 2, 3}. The model parameter associated with each time-varying predictor describes the trajectory in the outcome for each respective stage. Additionally, we estimated the initial intercept for Stage 1. For the random effects structure, we included participant as a random factor and let the intercept vary randomly by participant.[[1]](#footnote-1) Thus, the model (without covariates) is described as:

Outcome ~ 1 + S1 + S2 + S3 + (1|SubID)

A separate model was estimated for each of the four outcomes. We first report the results of piecewise growth models with no covariates to estimate general trends across the whole sample. Then, we report the results for models that include voting intention as a moderator of the trajectory in each of the three stages to account for differences between those intending to vote for Trump and those not intending to vote for Trump[[2]](#footnote-2). Last, to examine risk factors for increases in negative outcomes in anticipation of the election, we report the results of models exploring the effects of individual difference variables (e.g., ethnic identity, nativity) on Stage 1 trajectory.[[3]](#footnote-3)

In addition to examining trajectories in outcomes using piecewise growth models, we examined the effect of news engagement from day to day using same-day and lagged multilevel models. To separate between-person and within-person effects, we used the disaggregation method (Curran & Bauer, 2011), which creates two separate predictors that capture the between- and within-person effects. The predictor capturing the between-person effect is simply the mean level of news engagement for an individual across all days. Thus, this predictor has no within-person variance and only captures the between-person effect (i.e., whether the average amount of news a person engages in predicts psychological outcomes relative to other people). The predictor capturing the within-person effect is the person-centered level of news engagement reported each day (since the mean for each person is zero, there is no between-person variance). This variable only captures the within-person effect (i.e., whether news engagement on a particular day predicts psychological outcomes relative to a person’s average news engagement). These two predictors were included in models that predicted the outcome on each day (negative affect, positive affect, anxiety, or depression), along with the following covariates: day of the week (to account for weekend effects) and the outcome on the previous day (to account for stability in affect from day to day).[[4]](#footnote-4) In all models, participants was used as a random factor and only the intercept was allowed to vary randomly by participant, as models would not converge when random slopes were included.

De-identified data and code for analysis can be found at [URL].

**Results**

**Multilevel Piecewise Growth Models**

First, we fit four separate piecewise growth models (one for each outcome of interest) with no covariates to estimate overall trends in each of the four stages. As Figure XX illustrates, depression and negative affect significantly increased in anticipation of the election (*b* = 0.08, 95% CIs [0.05, 0.11], *p* < .001, *f*2 = .02, and *b* = 0.06, 95% CIs [0.04, 0.06], *p* < .001, *f*2 = .03, respectively). Then, following the election but before the winner was announced, there was significant changes in all four outcomes. Depression, negative affect, and anxiety significantly decreased, *b*s = -.07 – -0.15, *p*s < .001, *f*2 = .01 – .04, while positive affect significantly increased *b* = 0.06, 95% CIs [0.04, 0.06], *p* < .001, *f*2 = .03. Finally, following the announcement of the winner, all outcomes remained stable except for positive affect, which significantly decreased, *b* = -0.13, 95% CIs [-0.18, -0.08], *p* < .001, *f*2 = .02.

**Voting intention as a moderator.** To examine the effect of voting intention, we created a binary variable that coded for whether participants intended to (or had already) voted for Trump (1 = Intending to vote or voted for Trump, 0 = All other response options).[[5]](#footnote-5) Like in the aforementioned analysis, we fit four separate piecewise growth models (one for each outcome of interest) but included the binary voting intentions variable as a moderator of the trajectory in each stage. As Figure XX illustrates, Trump supporters and non-Trump supporters differed significantly in their trajectories in anticipation of the election. While Trump supporters did not demonstrate any significant change in any of the outcomes, non-Trump supporters reported significant increases in negative affect, *b* = 0.08, 95% CIs [0.06, 0.10], depression, *b* = 0.11, 95% CIs [0.08, 0.14], and anxiety, *b* = 0.03, 95% CIs [0.00, 0.06].

Following the election but before the winner was announced, Trump supporters once again differed significantly from non-Trump supporters. Trump supporters did not report any significant changes in any of the outcomes whereas non-Trump supporters reported decreasing negative affect, *b* = -0.12, 95% CIs [-0.15, -0.09], depression, *b* = -0.18, 95% CIs [-0.22, -0.13], and anxiety, *b* = -0.08, 95% CIs [-0.12, -0.04], as well as increasing positive affect, *b* = 0.11, 95% CIs [0.07, 0.15]. Finally, following the announcement of the winner, we found no significant differences in trajectories between Trump and non-Trump supporters, although positive affect did significantly decrease among non-Trump supporters, *b* = -0.14, 95% CIs [-0.20, -0.08]. Thus, support for different presidential candidates affected outcomes in primarily the first two stages, although the outcomes affected differed across stage.

**Individual differences as moderators.** In an exploratory manner, we tested a number of individual differences and attitudes as moderators of the trajectories of the negative outcomes (negative affect, anxiety, and depression) prior to the election, where we see the greatest increases in negative outcomes. Specifically, we tested the moderating role of nativity, ethnic identity, and three sub-scales of familism (support, obligation, referent). Of these variables, all had some moderating effect, although not all on the same outcomes (see Table XX). Nativity significantly moderated trajectories for anxiety, such that non-US-born participants had steeper positive trajectories than US-born participants. Ethnic identity significantly moderated trajectories for negative affect and depression, such that higher levels of ethnic identity were related to steeper positive trajectories in anticipation of the election. Familism (but only the support sub-scale) significantly moderated anxiety, such that higher levels of familism support values were related to steeper positive trajectories. We additionally examined attitudes associating ICE and Trump but found no moderating influence.

**Table XX.**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Ethnic identity | | | Nativity | | | Familism (support) | | | Familism (obligation) | | | Familism (referent) | | |
|  | *b* | *p* | *f2* | *b* | *p* | *f2* | *b* | *p* | *f2* | *b* | *p* | *f2* | *b* | *p* | *f2* |
| Negative affect | *.*01 | **.018** | .05 | -.03 | .139 | .00 | .01 | .054 | .01 |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Anxiety | .01 | .169 | .00 | -.08 | **< .001** | .01 | .03 | .**004** | .01 |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Depression | .03 | **.021** | .05 | -.03 | .257 | .01 | .02 | .156 | .01 |  |  |  |  |  |  |

**Impact of Daily News Engagement**

We used disaggregated multilevel models to examine the effect of daily news engagement on same-day negative affect, positive affect, anxiety, and depression. These models included both between-person and within-person predictors along with covariates (day of the week and the relevant outcome on the previous day).

**Between-person effect.** Between-person variance in news engagement was positively related to negative affect, *b* = 0.11, 95% CIs [0.04, 0.17], *p* = .002, *f*2 = .03 and depression, *b* = 0.17, 95% CIs [0.08, 0.27], *p* = .001, *f*2 = .03, but not positive affect or anxiety. The relationship was in the positive direction, such that individuals who engaged in more news overall reported higher levels of negative affect and depression over the course of the study.

**Within-person effect.** Within-person variance in news engagement was positively related to all same-day outcomes. More news engagement on a particular day relative to a person’s mean level of news engagement, was related to higher negative affect, *b* = 0.10, 95% CIs [0.07, 0.13], *p* = .001, *f*2 = .04, higher positive affect, *b* = 0.08, 95% CIs [0.05, 0.12], *p* < .001, *f*2 = .03, higher anxiety, *b* = 0.08, 95% CIs [0.04, 0.12], *p* = .001, *f*2 = .03, and higher depression, *b* = 0.14, 95% CIs [0.09, 0.18], *p* < .001, *f*2 = .04, on that same day.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Between-person effect | | | Within-person effect | | |
|  | *b* | *p* | *f2* | *b* | *p* | *f2* |
| Negative affect | *.*11 | **.002** |  | .10 | **< .001** |  |
| Positive affect | .09 | .074 |  | .08 | **< .001** |  |
| Anxiety | .04 | .470 |  | .08 | **< .001** |  |
| Depression | .17 | **.001** |  | .14 | **< .001** |  |

**Discussion**

Elections are stressful events, and this is especially so for vulnerable communities that are impacted by potential policy changes (Williams & Medlock, 2017). The current study examined the impact of the 2020 U.S. presidential election on Latino young adults living on the U.S.-Mexico border. There were several reasons that made this election particularly unique. First, it took place during a global pandemic and during a time that El Paso was experiencing a spike in cases, hospitalizations, and deaths due to COVID-19. Because of the pandemic, the state of Texas extended the period for early voting and relaxed requirements for mail-in voting, such that XX of all votes cast in El Paso were cast prior to election day. Because of these unusual factors, it took much longer to count votes nationwide—thus, it was not clear who won the election until several days after the polls closed, instead of several hours after the polls closed as has been the case for prior elections. Thus, we examined how psychological outcomes fluctuated during three distinct periods of time: the week leading up to the election, the several days following the election but before the results were known, and several days following the announcement of Joe Biden as the winner of the election.

As expected, we saw increases in negative affect, anxiety, and depression during the week prior to the election, although the increase in anxiety was only present among non-Trump supporters. Then, following the election, we saw these negative outcomes decrease while positive affect increased in anticipation of the announcement of Biden as the winner. Finally, positive affect returned to baseline following the announcement of Biden as the winner and trajectories for negative affect, anxiety, and depression were flat. This pattern of results suggests Election Day itself was anticipated as a stressor and even though the outcome of the election was not known for several more days, negative outcomes decreased following Election Day. Our findings are consistent with previous work demonstrating the negative impact of elections, particularly those with a heavy anti-immigrant, anti-Latino rhetoric and behavior, on Latino’s psychological and physiological wellbeing (Toomey et al., 2014; White et al., 2014; Hatzenbuehler et al., 2017; DeJonckheere et al., 2018; Zeiders et al., 2020). However, we extend these findings by employing a daily diary design and analyzing our data utilizing piecewise growth models to separate the effects before, during, and after the election.

In an exploratory fashion, we additionally investigated individual differences that moderated the increase in negative affect, anxiety, and depression in anticipation of the election, as individuals’ appraisal of a stressor is important in determining both the consequence of the stressor and how one mobilizes resources to cope in anticipation of the stressor (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). One such factor was nativity, such that non-US-born participants had steeper positive trajectories than US-born participants. This is consistent with the idea that those who will be disproportionately negatively impacted by the outcome of an election (in this case, the continued presidency of Donald Trump) will experience the most stress in anticipation of the election. In this case, non-US-born participants may have felt particularly uneasy about the prospect of Trump’s continued presidency and its effect on immigration policy, crossing the border to work or visit family, and continued encouragement of prejudice against immigrants and Mexicans. The deadly impact of anti-immigrant prejudice was felt keenly in El Paso on August 3, 2019, when a White man from Allen, Texas drove 10 hours to El Paso and shot and killed 22 people in a Walmart. The shooter told police he targeted Mexicans and prior to the shooting released an anti-immigrant manifesto online saying he was carrying out the attack in “response to the Hispanic invasion of Texas” (Murphy, 2019). Thus, the moderating effect of nativity on increases in anxiety prior to the election is unsurprising.

Ethnic identity and familism (specifically, familism values related to support) additionally moderated negative outcomes, such that individuals with stronger ethnic identity experienced steeper increases in negative affect and depression and individuals with stronger familism support values experienced steeper increases in anxiety. In past research, these two factors have typically been seen as protective for both mental and physical health (Ai et al., 2014; Campos et al., 2014; Love et al., 2006; de Heer et al., 2011). For example, ethnic identity—and especially strong commitment to one’s identity—is typically protective (Mossakowski, 2003; Stein et al., 2014; Yip et al., 2019), including when individuals face the stress of ethnic/racial discrimination (Romero et al., 2014), although ethnic identity is sometimes associated with negative outcomes, particularly when individuals are in developmental phases of identity exploration (Torres & Ong, 2010; Yip, 2018). Familism has additionally been linked to positive physical and psychological outcomes (Santiago et al., 2016; Valdivieso-Mora et al., 2016). In the current study, rather than being protective, these factors seem to exacerbate the stress experienced in anticipation of the election, although in the case of familism, this was only the case for the support subscale and not the obligation or referent subscale.

From a cultural inertia perspective, ethnic identity and familism could be considered psychological anchors (i.e., individual difference factors that prevent an individual from accepting change; Zarate et al., 2019). For example, Hispanic people higher on ethnic identity have reported higher levels of prejudice against White individuals believed to be changing their cultural tapestry (Zarate et al., 2012). In line with those findings and in the context of the election, Mr. Trump was viewed as a perpetuator of cultural change that has made Latino’s place in the US worse (Lopez et al., 2018; Armenta et al., 2021). Thus, it makes sense why those higher on ethnic identity and familism reported higher negative affect leading up to the election – the possibility of re-electing Mr. Trump for many Latino non-Trump supporters was a direct attack on various important components of their self-concept such as their ethnic identity and their family.

Last, we examined how daily fluctuations in news engagement surrounding the election were related to psychological outcomes. Engagement in politics daily is generally considered a stressor (Ford & Feinberg, 2020), and thus, we expected that both between- and within-person variance in news engagement would predict higher negative outcomes. We found that individuals who engaged in more news overall reported higher levels of negative affect and depression over the course of the study (i.e., the between-person effect). Daily fluctuations in news engagement had a similar effect, such that days on which individuals engaged in more news than they usually did, they reported higher levels of negative affect, anxiety, and depression (i.e., the within-person effect). However, we also unexpectedly saw an increase in positive affect on days when individuals engaged in more news than they usually did. Although unexpected, this pattern may be consistent with prior research suggesting elections are not just stressful events, but also exciting (Waisel-Manor et al. 2011), and that engagement with the news during this time is similarly both stressful and exciting. In their study examining psychological responses to the 2009 parliamentary election in Israel, Waisel-Manor and colleagues observed higher levels of both negative and positive affect on the morning of Election Day relative to the day after Election Day, along with higher levels of cortisol. The interesting effect found in our study may also be due to the content of the news, such that engaging in negative news resulted in increases in negative affect but that engaging in positive news (such as news that one’s preferred political candidate won, following the election) resulted in increases in positive affect. Unfortunately, we did not ask participants about the content of the news they engaged in each day. Thus, future research should seek to replicate this finding and investigate it further before any strong theoretical conclusions are made.

**Conclusion**

The 2020 election was stressful for many US residents, especially those who are negatively impacted by the new administration and their policies. Thus, it is imperative that researchers study how those types of events/policies impact the wellbeing of those impacted the most. The current study investigated how affect changes across time in the context of the 2020 election. We find the Latino non-Trump supporters experienced a significant increase in negative affect leading up the election and that nativity, ethnic identity, and familism exacerbate those findings.

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1. Only a random intercept was used as models would not converge when random slopes were included. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Outcome ~ 1 + VoteInt + A1\*VoteInt + A2\*VoteInt + A3\*VoteInt + (1|SubID) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Outcome ~ 1 + A1\*IndDiff + A2 + A3 + (1|SubID) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Outcome.sameDay ~ DailyNews.between + DailyNews.within + DayWeek.d + Outcome.prevDay + (1|SubID) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. We tested other coding schemes as well, including one that coded people intending to vote for Biden separately from all other categories. However, the coding scheme reported here showed the greatest contrast and was determined to be the most theoretically appropriate. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)