



Priming the Sleeping Giant: The Dynamics of Latino Political Identity and Vote Choice

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Latinos are commonly referred to as the “sleeping giant” in American politics, and interest in the political potential of this fastest-growing American ethnic group has risen in recent years. This article examines the influence of Latino political identity on voting preferences in the 2006 California gubernatorial election. A survey experiment linking Latino identity to support for either the Democratic or Republican candidate finds that vote preferences were influenced by group cues and that this effect was strongest in increasing support for the Democratic candidate among Latino Republicans and independents. The influence of Latino political identity is modeled as a two-step process of social identification and group influence, both of which are found to interact with prior partisanship. These findings support a model of political identity that views identity as malleable and subject to contextual influences.

KEY WORDS: Latinos, social identity, political identity, voting

Introduction

The political influence of Latinos in USA has become a topic of great interest in recent years as Hispanics make up the fastest-growing ethnic group in America, already comprising over 30% of the populations of California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas (Pew Hispanic Center, 2010). However, despite accounting for nearly half of total U.S. population growth in recent years, Latinos continue to lag behind whites and blacks in voter eligibility, registration, and turnout (Hero, Garcia, Garcia, & Pachon, 2000; Leal, Barreto, Lee, & de la Garza, 2005; Suro, Fry, & Passel, 2005).

Latinos' reputation as the “sleeping giant” in American politics has garnered the attention of both major political parties, with Democrats appealing to issues such as immigrant rights and economic security, and Republicans emphasizing

social issues like abortion and same-sex marriage in their efforts to court Latino voters (Alvarez & Garcia Bedolla, 2003; Garcia, 2003; Segal, 2004). While the Democratic Party gained an advantage in party identification and voting among Latinos in the 2006 and 2008 elections, Latino political engagement remains lower than other racial and ethnic groups in the United States (Lopez & Taylor, 2009; Pew Hispanic Center, 2007).

The importance of Latinos as the largest and fastest growing minority ethnic group in the United States, combined with their continued political underrepresentation, invites further study of the implications of Latino identity for political behavior. It is not only a matter of increasing Latino participation, but also of defining Latino political interests, and the meaning of Latino political identity, that makes this a topic of theoretical and practical interest. The struggle over how Latinos interpret their political interests in the American context is already a significant factor in a handful of border states with large Latino populations and promises to exert an increasing influence over national politics in coming years. The political impact of Latino identity is therefore ripe for political contest.

Exploring Latino Political Behavior

Much of the research on Latino political behavior to date has focused on issues of participation and voter turnout (e.g., Barreto, Segura, & Woods, 2004; Leighley, 2001; Michelson, 2003; Shaw, de la Garza, & Lee, 2000). Voting rates among Latinos have been historically low due to the large number of noncitizens within this population, as well as lower average age, income, and education levels (DeSipio, 1996; Highton & Burris, 2002; Leal, 2002). Recent studies have found, however, that when these socioeconomic factors are controlled for, Latino voting is actually on par with whites and African Americans, and that Latino noncitizens do participate in the political process in many other ways such as volunteering and donating to political campaigns, attending meetings and rallies, and joining civic groups (Barreto & Muñoz, 2003; Highton & Burris, 2002; Leal, 2002). The widespread marches that took place across the United States in the spring of 2006 to protest the harsh legislative proposals targeting undocumented immigrants are an excellent example of just such political engagement (Barreto, 2007).

Latino voter turnout has been shown to increase in response to targeted mobilization (Barreto, 2005; Michelson, 2003, 2005; Shaw, de la Garza, & Lee, 2000), and contextual factors such as living in majority-minority Latino districts (Barreto, Segura, & Woods, 2004), and the presence of Latino candidates on the ballot (Barreto, 2007; Barreto, Villarreal, & Woods, 2005; Leighley, 2001; Pantoja, Ramirez, & Segura, 2001). In addition, group identification with Latinos has been shown to increase voter turnout and other forms of political participation (de la Garza, DeSipio, Garcia, Garcia, & Falcon, 1992; Sanchez, 2006; Schildkraut, 2005; Stokes, 2003). While several studies have focused on pan-ethnic identification with Latinos or Hispanics (Garcia, 2003; Masuoka, 2006; Sanchez, 2006),

subgroup differences based on national origin, generational status, and language use are also common in this literature, reflecting the heterogeneity of the Latino community in the United States.

There has been less focus on the determinants of Latino vote choice, although Nuño (2007) found that Latino voters contacted by Latino Republicans were more likely to report voting for George W. Bush in the 2000 presidential election, whereas this was not the case for those contacted by non-Latinos. There is some evidence then that Latino group identification, in the form of politicized group consciousness or campaign contact from a fellow group member, can affect both participation and vote choice. But the relative salience and political influence of ethnic identification, for Latinos and other groups, deserves further consideration.

The present study focuses on the influence of ethnic identification on Latino vote choice in the 2006 California gubernatorial race. Shifting the focus from voter turnout to the voting calculus, this study utilizes a survey experiment to investigate the extent to which Latino individuals' political preferences can be manipulated through information about group norms. Rather than assuming that the political meaning of Latino identity is fixed or inextricably tied to partisanship, this study explores the interactions between identity and political context. In doing so, it draws upon an understanding of political identity that combines insights from social identity theory with the political behavior tradition.

Exploring Political Identity

Political scientists have long recognized the importance of social groups such as race and ethnicity, religion, and social class in shaping individual citizens' political thinking and behavior (e.g., Berelson, Lazarsfeld, & McPhee, 1954; Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1944). However, the *processes* by which individuals come to identify with groups and by which those identities in turn shape thoughts and actions have not been widely studied in political science (Huddy, 2001, 2003). In part this is because scholars of political behavior have tended to view political identity primarily through the lens of partisanship, which has been characterized as a product of early socialization and relative stability over the life span (e.g., Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960; Miller & Shanks, 1996; Green, Palmquist, & Schickler, 2002).

This article takes a different perspective on political identity, drawing on psychological insights from social identity theory (Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and self-categorization theory (Turner, 1985; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). Relying mainly on experimental work in social psychology, these theories view identity as much more fluid and contingent upon short-term contextual influences than the traditional political behavior literature has assumed. In a series of "minimal group paradigm" experiments, Henri Tajfel and his colleagues found that even apparently meaningless group memberships, randomly assigned by the researchers, led subjects to exhibit ingroup favoritism and

outgroup bias in the laboratory (Billig & Tajfel, 1973; Tajfel & Billig, 1974; Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, & Flament, 1971). Self-categorization theory also focuses on the interaction between situational cues about relevant group memberships and an individual's "readiness" to adopt a group identity, based on predispositions and immediate motivations (Turner et al., 1987). In this perspective, the way one thinks about oneself at any given moment depends upon identity cues in the immediate environment—and will change from moment to moment, as these informational cues change.

One criticism of applying these theories directly to political behavior is that they are based primarily on laboratory experiments using fictional identities, rather than real-world identities such as race, ethnicity, or gender (Huddy, 2001). We might therefore expect that Latino ethnic identity, with which group members have a lifetime of experience, would be stronger, more closely held, and less easily manipulated than a novel identity presented in an experimental setting (Huddy, 2001, 2003). However, the salience and political meaning of Latino identity may still be subject to short-term contextual influences. For example, the presence of a Latino candidate on the ballot has been found to increase the salience of ethnicity to Latino voters and to increase both voter turnout and co-ethnic voting (Barreto, 2007).

A Model of Political Identity Influence

Media coverage of political campaigns provides one of the most important sources of informational cues for voters, and the preferences of different groups within the electorate are a frequent topic of interest. In recent years we have learned about the political leanings of "soccer moms," "NASCAR dads," and "Millennials," for example, as well as the standard group differences based on gender or ethnicity. When we read or hear a news report about a particular group's political preferences and influence on an upcoming election, this serves to prime our own group identities and interests, making these considerations more salient. Political psychologists have identified priming effects at work in the relationship between media exposure and presidential performance ratings, for example, with issues that are emphasized in news reports having a greater impact on overall evaluations (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Krosnick & Kinder, 1990).

A model of political identity is presented in Figure 1 (Jackson, 2005) in which identity is viewed as relatively malleable and subject to priming effects, with group identities that are made salient by cues in the political environment having a greater impact on the definition of political identity at a given point in time. Rather than representing a fixed and stable long-term influence on political behavior, political identity is seen as a fluid construct that is responsive to short-term contextual cues. Priming a particular group identity and increasing its salience in relation to politics should therefore have the potential to influence political attitudes, including vote choice.

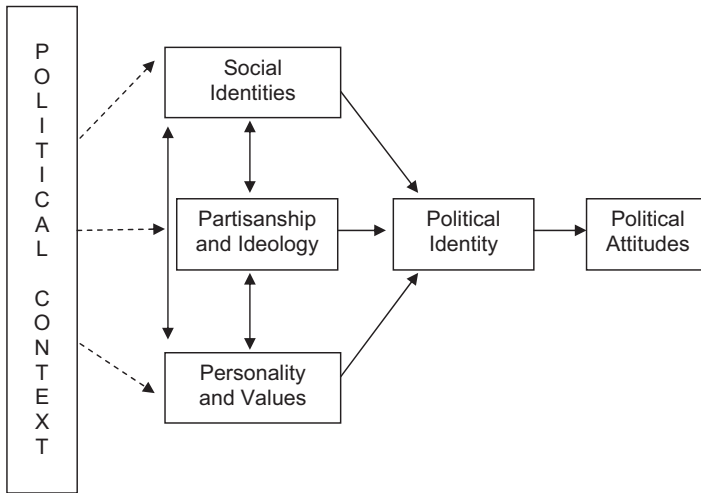


Figure 1. A model of political identity influence (Jackson, 2005).

Another important consideration in this model is the role of individual differences and the influence of prior characteristics such as partisanship and ideology on political identity. In the present study, rather than assuming that all Latinos will identify equally with this group, we explicitly measure variability in identity strength, as well as its subsequent impact on political attitudes. Identity influence is therefore modeled as a two-step process, with social identification with the group representing the first step, and this identity's influence on political attitudes as the second step.

The tendency of individuals to conform to group norms is well-established in social psychology (Group norms theory, Sherif, 1936; Normative social influence, Asch, 1951, 1956). In one early application of these social influence theories to political attitudes, Kelman (1961) found that group identification can bring about conformity based on incorporation of the group membership into the self-concept and a desire to maintain a positive relationship to the group. Evidence from the political attitudes literature also supports the concept of social identity influence. In a series of studies focusing on the role of social groups in structuring political thinking, Conover (1984, 1988) found that group identification influenced political thinking by making issues related to the group's interests more salient. Similarly, Nelson and Kinder (1996) found in a set of experimental studies that framing policy issues in group-based terms led to group-centric attitudes on these issues. Price (1989) directly explored the application of social identity theory to the study of public opinion, finding that messages emphasizing conflict between social groups enhanced the salience of recipients' group membership and increased conformity to perceived group norms.

The role of salience in these theories of group influence fits nicely with the concept of priming discussed above. The model presented in Figure 1 assumes that those considerations that are primed by the political context will determine the content of political identity, which will in turn influence political attitudes and behavior. Political context includes both long-term and short-term factors, each of which can provide information about individual and group political interests.¹ Features of the political context will interact with individual-level factors including social identities, partisanship and ideology, and personality and core values, with the mix of these various ingredients combining to determine political identity—how one sees oneself in relation to the political world—at a given point in time. The relative influence of partisanship, or a particular social group identity, on political identity and subsequent political attitudes will therefore vary based on the particular considerations made salient by the political context.

Latinos and the 2006 California Gubernatorial Election

The current study focuses on Latino identity in relation to the 2006 California gubernatorial election. California is both the largest state in the nation—with a total population of nearly 37 million—and the state with the nation's largest Latino population, currently estimated at 13.7 million (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Mirroring the political underrepresentation at the national level, in 2006 California Latinos made up approximately 32% of the state's population but only 14% of its voters (Public Policy Institute of California, 2006). The Latino population in California is largely of Mexican origin (84%) and strongly Democratic in partisanship (Pew Hispanic Center, 2004).² Among Latino voters in California, Democratic partisanship outnumbers Republican partisanship more than three to one, with 64% registered Democrats, 18% registered Republicans, and 14% independents or minor party supporters (Public Policy Institute of California, 2009).

The 2006 California gubernatorial election featured Republican incumbent Arnold Schwarzenegger versus the Democratic state treasurer Phil Angelides. Schwarzenegger enjoyed a comfortable lead in the polls throughout the 2006 campaign, eventually winning with 56% of the vote (California Secretary of State, 2006; Field Poll, 2006). A poll conducted one week before Election Day showed 40% of Latinos in California supporting Angelides and 36% supporting Schwarzenegger (Field Poll, 2006). Democratic support was significantly greater among Latinos in the state compared to non-Hispanic whites, 55% of whom

¹ Drawing upon the classic “funnel of causality” model of vote choice first proposed in *The American Voter* (Campbell et al., 1960), long-term factors include structural aspects such as the party system and differences in group status and resources. Short-term factors include aspects such as economic indicators, current policy issues, candidate evaluations, and informational cues related to a specific election.

² The Democratic bias in Latino partisanship in the United States is well-documented for those who trace their origins to Mexico and Puerto Rico, while the opposite is true of those with Cuban origins, who tend to identify with the Republican Party (Uhlaner & Garcia, 2004).

supported Schwarzenegger, while just 31% supported Angelides (Field Poll, 2006).

This electoral context provided an excellent setting in which to study the influence of Latino political identity on vote choice. While the demographics of the Latino population in California would indicate that the Democratic candidate would enjoy an advantage among this group, the overall dynamics of the 2006 campaign favored the Republican incumbent. The susceptibility of Latino social identification to political manipulation was therefore of great interest. Would Latino voters in California respond to a group identity prime that attempted to shift their political preference toward either the Democratic or Republican candidate? And to what extent would the effectiveness of the group cue depend upon social identification, and prior characteristics such as partisanship?

Hypotheses

It was expected that reading a mock newspaper article focusing on Latinos in relation to the upcoming election would prime this group membership, increasing its salience for political identity. Social identification was in turn expected to influence vote choice, with those who identified more strongly with Latinos reporting a greater preference for the candidate supposedly favored by the group majority.

However, because this study utilizes a preexisting group identity in a real-world election context, our predictions become a bit more complex. Both social identification with Latinos and identity influence on vote choice were also expected to be moderated by partisanship. The predictions for political independents are relatively straightforward, as they can be expected to respond to a group cue in either a Democratic or Republican direction. But for the Democrats and Republicans in the sample, prior partisanship must be taken into account as well as the informational cues about group preferences.

Step One: Social Identification Hypotheses

The *partisan matching hypothesis* holds that individuals who read that a majority of Latinos support their own preferred party will increase their sense of identification with the group, since their similarity to other group members has been confirmed by the information about political preferences.

In the *mismatched partisan* situation, individuals who read that a majority of Latinos support the opposite political party are faced with two options to reduce the conflict that is set up between their own partisanship and the group norm. These mismatched partisans can either discount their partisanship and increase their ethnic identification (*partisan override hypothesis*), or they can prioritize their partisanship and reduce their sense of ethnic identification (*partisan priority hypothesis*).

Which of these processes will occur may also depend upon the majority or minority status of each political party within the group. Majority groups typically induce conformity through normative social influence, with group members conforming to the majority opinion to avoid ostracization or psychological discomfort (Asch, 1955; Sherif, 1936). According to social influence theory, groups that are important to you, close in space and time, and larger in size are most likely to induce conformity (Latané, 1981). Group minorities are usually less able to change individual opinions, but can have an impact through informational social influence when the information presented is novel or especially strong and consistent (Moscovici, 1985; Wood, Lundgren, Ouellette, Busceme, & Blackstone, 1994).

Because the Latino population in California skews strongly toward the Democratic Party, Democratic partisans are in the majority within this group. The congruence between these two group identities may lead Latino Democrats to develop a stronger, more secure, and less easily swayed party attachment. When faced with a conflict between partisanship and ethnic identification, Latino Democrats might therefore choose to prioritize party over ethnicity. Latino Republicans in California, by contrast, find themselves in the chronic minority within their ethnic group and may therefore develop weaker party ties. Indeed, the earliest studies of voting behavior identified cross-pressures from different social group memberships, such as social class and religion, as leading to lower political interest, conflicting attitudes, and split-ticket voting (Berelson et al., 1954; Lazarsfeld et al., 1944). Presented with a conflict between partisanship and ethnicity, Latino Republicans may thus be more susceptible to ethnicity-based appeals, which can serve as a way for them to reaffirm their ethnic identification.

The predictions for those in the mismatched partisan conditions are therefore moderated by partisanship. Latino Republicans in the mismatched partisan situation are expected to increase their social identification with Latinos, consistent with the *partisan override hypothesis*. Latino Democrats in the same situation are expected to be more secure in their partisanship and therefore to decrease their social identification with Latinos in response to the group cue, consistent with the *partisan priority hypothesis*.

Step Two: Identity Influence Hypotheses

In the second step—the influence of Latino identity on vote choice—a three-way interaction is predicted. Vote preference is expected to be influenced by the combination of prior partisanship, experimental condition, and ethnic identification. For matched partisans, those who identify strongly with Latinos are expected to increase the strength of their candidate preference, consistent with the group norm, while those who do not identify strongly with the group should be unaffected by the information about group preferences. For mismatched partisans, those who identify strongly with Latinos are expected to decrease their preference for their

preferred party's candidate, also moving toward the group norm, while those who do not identify strongly with the group should retain a stronger preference for their party's candidate, prioritizing party over ethnicity. Both matched and mismatched partisans are therefore expected to respond to the group cue (*group influence hypothesis*), as a function of their level of Latino social identification.

For example, Democrats who read that a majority of Latinos support the Democratic candidate, and who identify strongly with the group, are expected to show an increased preference for this candidate, consistent with the group norm. For Republicans who read that a majority of Latinos favor the Democrat, those who identify strongly with Latinos are expected to report a decreased preference for the Republican candidate, while those who do not identify strongly with Latinos should be unmoved.

Political independents are expected to show the greatest responsiveness to group influence, since preexisting vote preferences are presumably weaker among this group compared to adherents of the two major parties. Independents in the Democratic condition who identify strongly with Latinos are therefore expected to increase their vote preference for the Democratic candidate, while those in the Republican condition who identify strongly with Latinos should increase their preference for the Republican candidate.

Methods

Procedures

To test these hypotheses, I conducted a survey experiment in which participants were presented with information intended to prime Latino identity in the context of the 2006 California gubernatorial election campaign. The first sample of participants included 148 Latino undergraduate students at a large, ethnically diverse California public university, recruited from psychology and Mexican-American studies classes, and fliers around campus. The second sample of 150 nonstudent Latino adults was recruited through targeted emails to university staff members with Hispanic surnames, tabling outside the main branch of the local public library, and a subset of respondents from a statewide random sample telephone survey.³

³ Respondents to the statewide quarterly California Consumer Confidence Survey, conducted by the Survey & Policy Research Institute at San José State University, were asked if they would be willing to be contacted in the future by a researcher or journalist. Latino respondents who agreed to be contacted were invited to participate in the current study, and completed the survey by phone ($N = 23$). Because the experimental manipulation provided deceptive information about Latino preferences in the context of an upcoming real-world election, it was deemed necessary to conduct a face-to-face debriefing giving participants the opportunity to ask questions and receive accurate information after completing the survey. All telephone respondents were therefore assigned to the control condition, receiving no information about Latinos' purported attitudes toward the upcoming election. Although this did affect the randomness of assignment to experimental conditions, there

In brief experimental sessions conducted during the four weeks prior to the 2006 election, participants completed a paper-and-pencil survey containing an embedded mock newspaper article purportedly copied from the *Los Angeles Times*. Surveys were completed in English (89%) or Spanish (11%), according to the participant's preference. The treatment article was formatted and photocopied to appear as if it had been printed from the *Los Angeles Times* website and described the significant impact that Latinos could have on the outcome of the California gubernatorial election (see Appendix).

Participants were randomly assigned to one of two treatment conditions or a control condition.⁴ In the Republican treatment condition ($N = 98$), participants read an article that described a majority of Latinos as supporting Republican incumbent Arnold Schwarzenegger for governor and having the potential to decide the election in his favor. In the Democratic treatment condition ($N = 89$), participants read an article that was identical in all respects, except that it described a majority of Latinos as supporting the Democratic candidate Phil Angelides for governor. Participants in the control condition ($N = 111$) completed the same survey, but did not read an article about the upcoming election. The first section of the survey included measures of political interest and attention, ideology, party identification, and an eight-item political knowledge scale. The second section presented the treatment article (for the two treatment conditions), followed by measures of Latino social identification. The remaining sections included questions about issue positions, vote choice, and demographics. In the control condition the Latino social identification questions were placed at the end of the survey, to avoid possible contamination effects. After completing the survey, all participants were thanked and fully debriefed.

Measures

Latino social identification was measured by two items modified from the Collective Self-Esteem Scale (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992): "How glad are you to belong to this group?" and "How important is this group to your sense of who you are?" These two items were combined into a Latino social identification scale ranging from 0 to 1 (Cronbach's $\alpha = .75$).⁵

Vote preference was measured by asking, "If the election for governor were held today, which candidate would you vote for?" followed by, "How strong is

were few significant differences in demographics across the three conditions (see footnote 4), and these variables were controlled for in subsequent analyses.

⁴ As noted above, all telephone respondents ($N = 23$) were assigned to the control condition. All other respondents were randomly assigned to one of the three experimental conditions.

⁵ Although participants were recruited based on Latino ethnicity, the survey also asked them to indicate their ethnicity in the demographic section of the survey. All participants selected the Hispanic/Latino option, confirming their membership in this group.

your preference for this candidate?" with response options on a 5-point scale ranging from "Not at all strong" to "Extremely strong." The strength of candidate preference variable was calculated from these two items, and ranged from -1.0 indicating extremely strong preference for Republican candidate Arnold Schwarzenegger, to +1.0 indicating extremely strong preference for Democratic candidate Phil Angelides.

Results

Table 1 lists the basic demographic characteristics, ideology, and partisanship of participants in the student and adult samples. The adult sample was somewhat more conservative than the student sample, but also contained a greater number

Table 1. Participant Demographic Characteristics

Student Sample			Adult Sample	
Age Range	18–24		25–85	
Mean Age	20.35		37.04	
(Std. Dev.)	(1.96)		(11.32)	
Gender	Female	54%	Female	63%
	Male	46%	Male	37%
Foreign Born	26%		31%	
Year in school	1st year	20%		
	2nd year	30		
	3rd year	25		
	4th year	11		
	5th + year	8		
	Grad study	7		
Education level			Less than high school	9%
			High school grad	14
			Some college	30
			College grad	22
			Some grad school	13
			Grad degree	12
Income			Less than \$25K	18%
			\$25K – \$49K	39
			\$50K – \$74K	18
			\$75K – \$99K	13
			\$100K – \$124K	7
			\$125K +	6
Ideology	Liberal	59%	Liberal	45%
	Moderate	26	Moderate	33
	Conservative	15	Conservative	21
Partisanship	Democrat	60%	Democrat	76%
	Independent	25	Independent	12
	Republican	8	Republican	9
N	148		150	

of Democratic partisans, whereas the student sample contained more political independents. Both samples were heavily skewed in terms of partisanship, with 60% of the Latino students and 75% of the Latino adults identifying as Democrats. In the analyses that follow, the two samples are combined to maximize sample size, while controlling for relevant differences such as age, education, and political knowledge.⁶

Predicting Latino Social Identification

First, let us examine the levels of Latino social identification across the three conditions. In the control condition, which received no information about Latino political preferences and serves as a baseline for the two experimental conditions, Latino identification is moderately correlated with partisanship ($r = 0.38$, $p < .001$), with Democrats identifying significantly more strongly with Latinos ($r = 0.84$), than independents ($r = 0.67$, $p < .001$) or Republicans ($r = 0.64$, $p < .01$). Thus, in the absence of an explicit group prime, Latino Democrats do report a stronger sense of ethnic group identification than Latino Republicans, perhaps due to cross-pressures between these two identities, as hypothesized.

The next question we are interested in is whether the experimental manipulations had the expected effects on ethnic identification. Did the priming of Latino identity in the first step of the model succeed? Table 2 presents a series of OLS regression models examining the predictors of Latino social identification, and the interactions between experimental condition and partisanship. Model 1 estimates main effects for a set of demographic (gender, age, education, foreign born) and political (political knowledge, ideology, partisanship) control variables, along with dummy variables for the Democratic and Republican experimental conditions. Model 1 finds that education, liberal ideology, and Democratic partisanship were positively related to Latino social identification, while political knowledge and Republican experimental condition negatively predicted Latino identification.

Model 2 extends the analysis to include the interaction terms between the Democratic and Republican experimental conditions and party identification. This allows us to test the differential effect of the experimental manipulation on Latino social identification among Democrats, independents, and Republicans in each condition. Both interaction terms were statistically significant, indicating that the experimental effect differed by partisanship, as expected.

⁶ Demographics were also relatively evenly distributed across the three conditions, as expected with random assignment. The control condition did include more men, a slightly higher mean age, and slightly lower average education level among the adult sample, compared to the other conditions. There were no other statistically significant demographic differences across conditions, and all of these factors were controlled for in subsequent analyses.

Table 2. Predicting Latino Social Identification

	Model 1		Model 2	
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE b</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE b</i>
Gender	.01	.04	.003	.04
Age	-.02	.10	-.04	.10
Education	.16**	.07	.18**	.07
Foreign born	.003	.04	.007	.04
Political knowledge	-.10*	.06	-.12**	.06
Ideology (liberal)	.15*	.09	.15*	.09
Partisanship (Democrat)	.13#	.08	.31***	.11
Democratic condition	-.004	.04	-.01	.04
Republican condition	-.11***	.03	-.11***	.04
Democratic condition × Partisanship			-.28*	.15
Republican condition × Partisanship			-.33*	.19
Constant	.80***	.03	.81***	.03
F (degrees of freedom)	2.75 (9, 226)***		3.22 (11, 224)***	
R ²	.11		.13	
N	236		236	

$p < .15$ * $p < .10$ ** $p < .05$ *** $p < .01$

Note. Entries are unstandardized OLS regression coefficients and Huber-White robust standard errors. All continuous predictor variables are centered (see Aiken & West, 1991).

Simple Slope Analyses—Latino Social Identification

Figure 2 illustrates this interaction effect, plotting the simple slopes for Latino social identification among Democrats, independents, and Republicans in each experimental condition compared to the control condition. Figure 2a shows the predicted values of Latino social identification for Democrats, independents, and Republicans in the Democratic and control conditions.⁷ The slopes comparing Latino social identification for Democrats and independents in the Democratic condition to the control condition were not statistically significant. For these matched partisans and independents, ethnic identification neither increased nor decreased significantly in response to the group cue.

However, for Republicans in the Democratic condition, predicted Latino social identification was substantially higher ($r = 0.78$), compared to the control condition ($r = 0.63$), and this slope was marginally significant ($b = .16$, $SE b = .10$, $p = .12$). In other words, Republican participants in the Democratic condition, whose partisanship was in conflict with the group cue given in the treatment article, reported a *greater* sense of social identification with Latinos compared to their counterparts in the control condition. Latino Republicans faced with

⁷ All predicted values reported in this paper were calculated using the CLARIFY simulation module in STATA (Tomz, Wittenberg, & King, 2001).

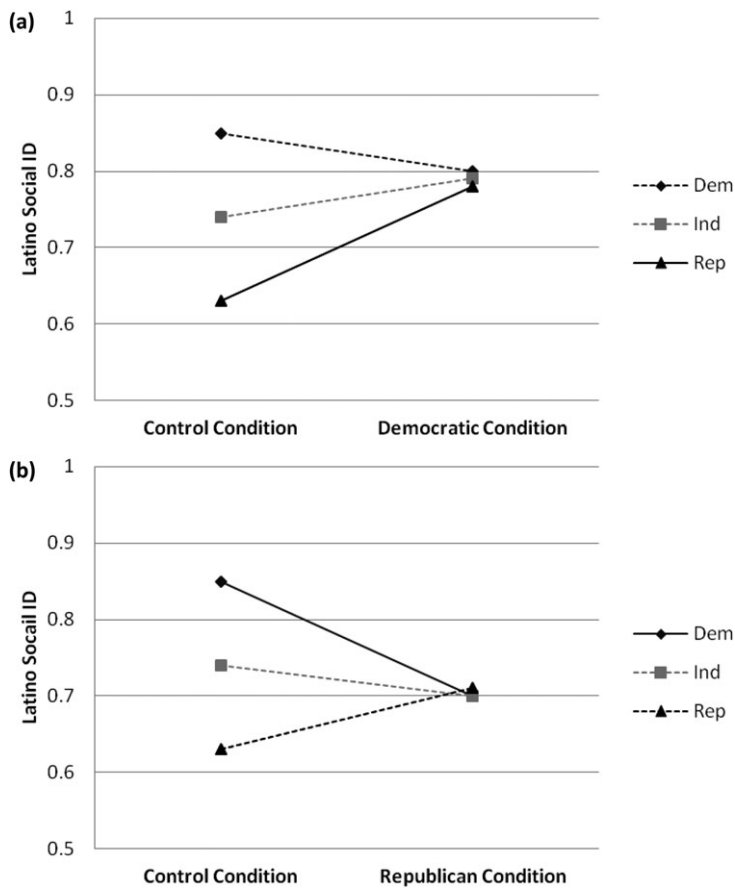


Figure 2. Predicted levels of Latino social identification by experimental condition and partisanship; (a) Democratic vs. Control conditions; (b) Republican vs. Control conditions.

conflicting information about group preferences therefore appeared to privilege ethnic identity over partisanship, consistent with the *partisan override hypothesis*.

Figure 2b illustrates the predicted values of Latino social identification for the three partisan groups in the Republican condition compared to the control condition. The slopes comparing Republicans and independents in the Republican condition to the control condition were not statistically significant, as with Democrats and independents in Figure 2a. However, for Democrats in the Republican condition, the predicted level of Latino social identification was substantially lower ($r = 0.70$) than in the control condition ($r = 0.85$), and this slope was highly statistically significant ($b = -.16$, $SE\ b = .04$, $p < .001$). Democrats in the Republican condition, faced with the same conflicting information

about group preferences as Republicans in the Democratic condition, responded differently. When confronted with a counterpartisan ethnic group cue, Democrats in the Republican condition *decreased* their level of identification with Latinos, privileging partisanship over ethnicity, consistent with the *partisan priority hypothesis*.

One possible explanation for this asymmetric effect hinges on the majority or minority status of the parties within the Latino community, which may influence the strength of party ties. Because Democrats make up a strong majority of the Latino population in California, it was expected that Latino Democrats would report a stronger sense of partisanship than Latino Republicans. This was in fact the case. Participants in all three conditions were asked to indicate their party preference in the first section of the survey (before reading the treatment article, for the experimental conditions), using the following 5-point scale: (1) Strong Democrat, (2) Mild Democrat, (3) Independent, (4) Mild Republican, (5) Strong Republican. Examining strength of partisanship alone, recoded on a 3-point scale ranging from 0 (independent) to 1 (strong partisan), the mean for Democrats (0.71) was significantly higher than for Republicans (0.58, $p < .01$). The mismatched Latino Republicans in this study, who find themselves in the chronic minority within their ethnic group, may therefore have prioritized ethnicity over partisanship due to these weaker party ties.

The Effect of Latino Social Identification on Vote Preference

To test the second step of the model examining the effect of Latino identification on vote choice, a second series of OLS regression models was estimated. A three-way interaction model was utilized to jointly investigate the influence of the experimental manipulation, Latino social identification, and partisanship. This model allows us to test whether the effect of social identification with Latinos on vote preference differed for Democrats, independents, and Republicans in each of the three experimental conditions. The dependent variable is strength of candidate preference, with -1.0 indicating extremely strong preference for the Republican candidate and $+1.0$ indicating extremely strong preference for the Democrat.⁸

Table 3 presents the series of regression models comparing the two experimental conditions to the control condition, adding hierarchical terms in successive models. Model 1 includes the main effects for the Democratic and Republican conditions, party identification, and Latino social identification variables, along with the set of control variables (gender, age, education, ideology, and political knowledge). In Model 1, education was negatively related to candidate preference,

⁸ Candidate preference was chosen as the primary dependent variable rather than simple Democratic or Republican vote choice, due to the skewed distribution of vote choice (60% and 14%, respectively). However, probit models examining vote choice as the dependent variable with the same set of predictors yield virtually identical results.

Table 3. Latino Social Identification, Partisanship, and Experimental Condition as Predictors of Strength of Candidate Preference

Predictor	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE b</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE b</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE b</i>
Gender	−.02	.06	−.05	.06	−.05	.06
Age	.10	.25	.08	.24	.04	.23
Education	−.27*	.15	−.26*	.15	−.28*	.15
Ideology (liberal)	.39**	.15	.42***	.14	.40***	.14
Political knowledge	−.03	.11	−.05	.11	−.05	.11
Partisanship (Democrat)	.98***	.15	1.33***	.18	1.32***	.17
Democratic condition	−.02	.07	−.05	.07	.01	.07
Republican condition	−.14*	.08	−.15*	.08	−.11	.08
Latino Social ID	.01	.12	.01	.23	.17	.20
<i>Two-way interactions</i>						
Democratic condition × Partisanship	—	—	−.69**	.32	−.55**	.27
Democratic condition × Latino social ID	—	—	.54*	.31	.33	.28
Republican condition × Partisanship			−.54*	.30	−.52#	.31
Republican condition × Latino social ID			−.29	.28	−.45*	.26
Partisanship × Latino social ID	—	—	.55	.50	2.21***	.72
<i>Three-way interactions</i>						
Democratic condition × Partisanship × Latino social ID	—	—	—	—	−3.54***	1.12
Republican condition × Partisanship × Latino social ID	—	—	—	—	−1.80#	1.10
Constant	.36***	.06	.38***	.06	.33***	.06
F (degrees of freedom)	12.18*** (9, 192)		14.08*** (14, 187)		14.19*** (16, 185)	
R ²	.31		.35		.38	
N	202		202		202	

Note. Dependent variable is strength of preference for gubernatorial candidate, coded from −1.0 (strong preference for Republican candidate) to 1.0 (strong preference for Democratic candidate). Entries are unstandardized OLS regression coefficients, with Huber-White robust standard errors. All continuous predictor variables are centered (see Aiken & West, 1991).

#*p* = .10 **p* < .10 ***p* < .05 ****p* < .01

with higher levels of education associated with more Republican leanings. Partisanship and ideology exhibited strong positive effects, with Democrats and liberals showing greater preference for the Democratic candidate. The Republican experimental condition also significantly predicted preference for the Republican candidate.

Model 2 adds the two-way interaction terms combining the Democratic and Republican conditions with party identification and Latino social identification. Both of the interaction terms including Democratic condition were statistically significant, indicating that the effects of both partisanship and Latino social identification on vote preference varied for participants in this experimental condition compared to the control condition. The interaction term combining Republican condition and partisanship was also statistically significant, though the term combining Republican condition and Latino social identification was not.

Model 3 adds the two three-way interaction terms between the Democratic and Republican conditions, partisanship, and Latino social identification. Both of the three-way interactions were statistically significant, although the Democratic condition term ($b = -3.54$, $SE\ b = 1.12$, $p < .01$) was stronger than the Republican condition term ($b = -1.80$, $SE\ b = 1.10$, $p = .10$). This indicates that in order to best explain candidate preference, we must consider all three of these variables simultaneously.

Simple Slope Analyses—Vote Preference

To illustrate the three-way interaction effect, simple slope analyses of the effect of Latino social ID on candidate preference, as a function of experimental condition and partisanship, are presented in Figure 3.

Let us start by examining the control condition, in which participants received no information about Latino political preferences. This condition represents most closely the baseline impact of Latino social identification on candidate preference and serves as a comparison for the two experimental conditions. For purposes of the simple slope analyses, low and high Latino social identification are defined as one standard deviation below and above the mean, respectively (Mean = 0.77 on a 0–1 scale, $SD = 0.25$).

For Democrats in the control condition, stronger identification with Latinos was associated with a stronger preference for the Democratic candidate, increasing from .36 for those with low Latino social ID to .62 for high Latino social ID, and this slope was marginally statistically significant ($b = .49$, $SE\ b = .33$, $p = .13$). For political independents in the control condition, there was a small and nonsignificant relationship between Latino social ID and candidate preference, changing from .09 for those with low Latino social ID to $-.08$ for those with high Latino social ID ($b = -.34$, $SE\ b = .27$, $p = .22$). But for Republicans in the control condition, stronger identification with Latinos was associated with a much stronger and statistically significant preference for the Republican candidate ($b = -1.17$, $SE\ b = .51$, $p = .02$). For Republicans in the control condition, predicted preference for their party's candidate increased more than four-fold as a function of Latino social identification, from $-.19$ for those low in Latino social identification to $-.78$ for those who identified strongly with Latinos.

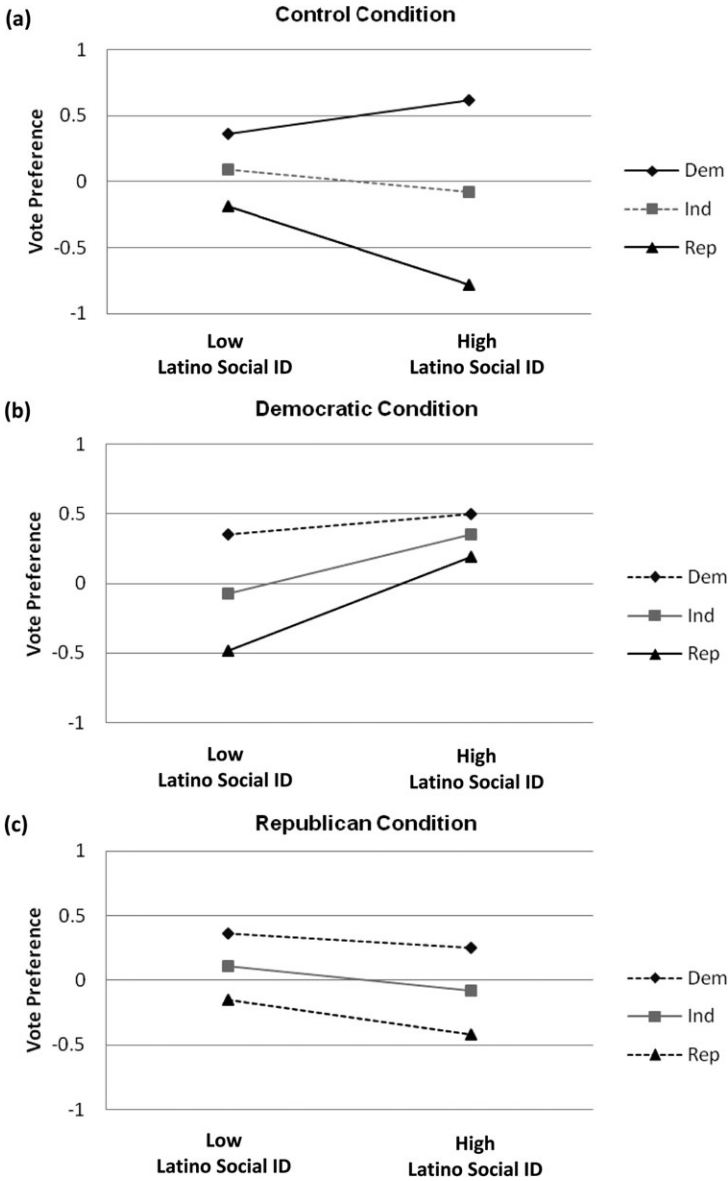


Figure 3. The relationship between Latino social identification and strength of candidate preference in the 2006 California gubernatorial election, as a function of partisanship and experimental condition; (a) Control condition; (b) Democratic condition; (c) Republican condition.

In the two experimental treatment conditions, a very different pattern of results emerged. For independents in the Democratic condition, candidate preference increased from a slight Republican preference ($-.07$) for those low in Latino social ID to a moderate Democratic preference ($.35$) for those high in Latino social ID, and this slope was statistically significant ($b = .81$, $SE\ b = .32$, $p = .01$). Republicans in the Democratic condition exhibited an even stronger effect of Latino social identification, changing from a solid Republican vote preference ($-.48$) to a moderate Democratic preference ($.19$) as a function of increasing ethnic identification, and this change was statistically significant ($b = 1.31$, $SE\ b = .63$, $p = .04$). For Democrats in the Democratic condition, the predicted strength of candidate preference increased slightly from $.35$ for those with low Latino social ID to $.50$ with stronger Latino social ID, although this slope was not statistically significant ($b = .32$, $SE\ b = .30$, $p = .29$), perhaps due to a ceiling effect.

For participants in the Republican condition, the effect of Latino social identification was reversed, so that higher levels of identification were associated with a weaker preference for the Democratic candidate for Democratic partisans, and a stronger preference for the Republican candidate among independents and Republicans. The simple slopes illustrating these effects were not statistically significant for either Democrats ($b = -.22$, $SE\ b = .19$, $p = .25$) or Republicans ($b = -.53$, $SE\ b = .53$, $p = .32$) in the Republican condition. The effect for independents was somewhat stronger, though still falling short of conventional levels of statistical significance ($b = -.37$, $SE\ b = .27$, $p = .16$). The direction of change was consistent with the experimental manipulation, however, as independents in the Republican condition who identified weakly with Latinos expressed a slight preference for the Democratic candidate ($.11$), while those who strongly identified with Latinos shifted to a slight Republican preference ($-.08$).

Discussion

The first notable finding in this study is that Latino social identification was shown to both respond to the experimental priming of group preferences and influence subsequent vote choice. Consistent with the model of political identity presented in Figure 1, a social group membership was found to have a differential impact on political identity and attitudes when made salient through an experimental manipulation of the short-term political context. Despite the challenges of manipulating a preexisting group identity in a real-world election context, a single informational cue about group preferences was found to have a significant effect on vote choice. This effect was moderated, however, by both partisanship and the degree of group identification.

The first set of findings with regard to Latino social identification produced an asymmetrical result. Mismatched partisans, who read that a majority of Latinos

supported the opposite political party, responded differently depending on party affiliation. Mismatched Democrats responded to the conflict between their own partisanship and the supposed group norm by *decreasing* their identification with Latinos, while mismatched Republicans responded to the same conflict by *increasing* their ethnic group identification.

The differential status of the two parties within the Latino community provides a possible explanation for this asymmetry, consistent with psychological theories of social influence (Latané, 1981; Moscovici, 1985). As noted above, the Latino population in California is heavily Democratic, and this was the case among the sample in this study as well. Latino Republicans in California are in the chronic minority within the Latino community and thus may be more susceptible to pressure to conform to the group norm when reminded that they are out of step with the majority. Latino Democrats, on the other hand, were able to resolve the conflict presented by the counterpartisan group cue by slightly decreasing their ethnic group identification.

The analyses of identity influence on vote preference also produced an interesting set of results. Republicans and independents who read an article claiming that a majority of Latinos supported the Democratic candidate in the upcoming 2006 California gubernatorial election, and who identified strongly with Latinos, shifted their candidate preference toward the group norm. Meanwhile, Democrats and Republicans who identified strongly with Latinos as a group, but did not receive any information about Latino political preferences, were driven by partisanship alone in their vote choice.

In the control condition then, in the absence of any immediate informational cues about group preferences, Latino social identification was consistent with partisanship. That is, Democrats who identified strongly with Latinos demonstrated a stronger preference for the Democratic candidate, and Republicans who identified strongly with Latinos preferred the Republican candidate more strongly. This is an intriguing result, suggesting that social identification and partisanship may work together in some cases to strengthen political preferences. It may reflect the false-consensus effect, whereby individuals assume that a majority of others share their views, which has been well-documented in social psychology (Marks & Miller, 1987). In this case, both Democratic and Republican Latinos in the control condition may have projected their own individual political preferences onto the group, resulting in the observed pattern of partisan polarization. Alternatively, some individuals may simply tend toward stronger opinions in general, with regard to both group identification and political preferences. Further investigation of the dynamics of social identity and political polarization is clearly warranted to sort out these various possibilities.

In the Democratic condition, as expected, identification with Latinos increased preference for the Democratic candidate among all three partisan groups. Democrats' preexisting preference for the Democratic candidate was strengthened slightly, although this effect was not significant. Independents' slight

preference for the Republican candidate—who was the front-runner in the campaign—was reversed to a moderate preference for the Democrat, as a function of Latino identification. For Republicans, the effect was even more dramatic, with vote preference moving from a solid Republican vote to a moderate Democratic preference. In other words, Republican participants who read that a majority of Latinos in California were supporting the Democratic candidate for governor, and who identified strongly with Latinos, actually switched their vote preference from the Republican to the Democrat.

Although the identity effect on vote preference was weaker in the Republican condition, it was consistent with the stronger effect in the Democratic condition in that all three partisan groups shifted toward the primed group norm. It should also be noted that the Republican condition presented a more difficult case since the overall sample was skewed in a Democratic direction in terms of both partisanship (68% Democrat, 11% Republican), and vote choice (60% Democrat, 14% Republican). This Democratic bias among the sample, combined with the minority status of Latino Republicans in California, made the attempt to influence participants in a Republican direction a more difficult experimental test. Nevertheless, the trends were consistent with theoretical predictions.

It is also striking that in both experimental conditions, political independents were influenced by social identification with Latinos to switch their candidate preference from Republican to Democrat, or vice versa, in the direction consistent with the purported group norm. This finding is of particular interest, given that the number of registered independent voters in California (termed “decline-to-state”) has been increasing in recent years. In 2006, 19% of California voters were registered as “decline-to-state,” up from 14% in 2000 and just 10% in 1992 (California Secretary of State, 2006).

This trend toward political independence is particularly prevalent among younger voters nationwide. In 2006, Americans in the 18–29-year-old age group were much more likely to identify as independents (26%) than those over 30 (18%) (Lopez, 2006). This was also reflected in the present study, with the student sample exhibiting more than twice as many independents (25%) as the adult sample (12%). The fact that independent voters appear to be especially susceptible to group influence effects, coupled with the large percentage of the U.S. Latino population under 18 years of age (34%, compared to 21% among non-Hispanic whites, Pew Hispanic Center, 2010) reinforces both the potential for significant growth in Latino political influence in the coming years, and the competition over how Latino political identity will be framed.

Conclusions

Latino political identification and participation is often presumed to benefit the Democratic Party, due to the higher levels of Democratic partisanship among most Latinos in the United States. However, the political meaning of Latino

identity, as with other group identities, is not static. The political influence of group identification depends crucially on the dynamic interactions between partisanship, group identification, and political context. Most important for predicting the influence of political identity are individual differences in group identification, combined with perceived group norms at a given point in time.

The model of political identity proposed and tested here views identity as a fluid, shifting construct that arises from a combination of individual and contextual factors. While ethnicity represents just one aspect of an individual's self-concept, the present study demonstrates that priming Latino identity can have a significant effect on group identification, particularly among those who are politically out of step with the group majority, and that this identification can in turn have a significant impact on voting preferences. This study suggests that the political contest over Latino votes in the coming years will involve more than simply "waking the sleeping giant"—it will also extend to defining the political meaning of Latino identity. The current findings suggest that those political actors who are best able to prime and effectively link Latino identity to specific political preferences will benefit most from Latino votes.

Appendix

Sample Treatment Article

2006: The Year the Sleeping Giant Wakes?

LATINOS MAY BE DECIDING FACTOR IN GOVERNOR'S RACE

By David E. Sampson, Times Staff Writer

October 4, 2006

SACRAMENTO—Political analysts have been watching California's growing Latino population for years, wondering when this "sleeping giant" will wake up and begin to flex its political muscle in the state.

More than one in three Californians today is Latino—a total of about 14 million residents. Latinos also now make up nearly 20% of all registered voters in the state, up from just 10% in 1990.

But who stands to benefit from this powerful new political force?

Democratic Advantage among Latino Voters

Nearly 6 in 10 Latino voters (57%) are registered Democrats, 21 percent are Republicans, and 22 percent are registered as independents, according to a recent poll by the Public Policy Institute of California.

In the governor's race, polls show that Latinos in the state favor Phil Angelides, the Democratic candidate for governor, by a wide margin over Republican Arnold Schwarzenegger.

According to the latest Los Angeles Times poll, 58% of Latinos say they plan to vote for Angelides, while just 34% say they will vote for Schwarzenegger.

"Latino votes could very well decide the governor's race this year," said Jack Mitchell, a political science professor at the University of California San Diego. "Angelides' huge advantage with this group may turn out to be the secret weapon that wins him the governor's office."

Education, Jobs, Immigration Issues Expected to Drive Voter Turnout

But the question remains: will Latinos show up at the voting booth on Election Day?

Voter turnout among Latinos tends to be much lower than among whites in California. But issues can play a big role in getting people excited enough to vote.

The polls show that Latino voters in California are most concerned about education, jobs, and immigration. And their opinions on these issues are driving Latinos' strong support for Angelides.

This much is certain: if Latino voters are the group that puts Phil Angelides over the top this year, this waking giant will be a political force to be reckoned with from now on.

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