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## ABSTRACT

The large and growing Hispanic population in the United States is rapidly changing the ethnic composition of the country. In 1982 there were close to 16 million Hispanics in the United States and, according to U.S. census projections, 16 million more Hispanics are expected to join the U.S. population by 2010, raising the total Hispanic population to 31 million. In addition, legalization provisions contained in the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 could eventually grant amnesty to close to two million undocumented immigrants, more than 70% of whom are of Mexican origin. In light of their growing presence, Hispanics have the potential to become a politically powerful and influential force in American politics. This paper focuses on the process of political adaptation by the U.S. Hispanic population. The paper assumes that it is possible to construct objective indicators to measure the degree of political integration. Much of the available evidence suggests that Hispanics have not been successful in mobilizing a substantial proportion of their population into political activity. For example, data from the 1980 census reveal that the failure to naturalize is most pronounced among Hispanic immigrants. Furthermore, Mexican-Americans are found to register and vote less than Blacks or Whites even after controlling for citizenship and age. The future potential of Hispanics in the American political arena, however, is more difficult to estimate. It is important to know the degree of political activity among Hispanics and which factors have facilitated or retarded this progress. Additional research could uncover such factors. (TES)

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POLICY

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Hispanic Immigrants to the United States

by

Tracy Ann Goodis

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## FOREWORD

Issues concerning the level and composition of immigration to the United States have assumed prominent positions on the agendas of many policymakers. Perhaps nowhere are immigration's effects more keenly felt than in California, where one-quarter of all foreign-born persons in the United States currently reside.

This Policy Discussion Paper series is aimed at improving the quality of the policy-making process through a broad distribution of research findings on the consequences of immigration to California. These dissemination activities are part of The Urban Institute's larger project, Study of the Impacts of Immigration in California, funded by the Weingart Foundation, the Atlantic Richfield Foundation, the Ahmanson Foundation, and the Times Mirror Foundation. Important policy issues being addressed include (a) economic and fiscal issues associated with immigration, (b) the character and tempo of assimilation processes, and (c) the impact on California of proposals for immigration reform. All major immigrant groups to California—not just Mexicans—are being included, as are the comparative effects in northern as well as in southern California.

The Urban Institute's objective is to make a positive contribution to the policy process. It is committed to getting its work into the hands of people who can use it and rely upon it to make judgments of their own on future policy directions. Related titles are listed at the end of this paper.

Michael J. White  
Director, Study of the Impacts  
of Immigration in California

# THE POLITICAL ADAPTATION OF HISPANIC IMMIGRANTS TO THE UNITED STATES

## Executive Summary

The large and growing Hispanic population in the United States is rapidly changing the ethnic composition of the country. In 1982 there were close to 16 million Hispanics in the United States, and according to projections of the U.S. Bureau of the Census, 16 million additional Hispanics are expected to be added to the U.S. population by 2010, raising the total Hispanic population to 31 million. In addition, the legalization provisions contained in the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 could eventually grant amnesty to close to 2 million undocumented immigrants, over 70 percent of whom are of Mexican origin. In light of their growing presence in the United States, Hispanics have the potential to become a politically powerful and influential force in American politics.

This paper focuses on the process of political adaptation in the Hispanic population in the United States. We have assumed that it is possible to construct objective indicators to measure the degree of political integration. Much of the available evidence suggests that Hispanics have not been successful in mobilizing a substantial proportion of their population into political activity. For example, data from the 1980 census reveal that the failure to naturalize is most pronounced among Hispanic immigrants. Furthermore, Mexican-Americans are found to register and vote less than blacks or whites even after controlling for citizenship and age. The future potential of Hispanics in the American political arena, however, is more difficult to estimate. It is important not only to know the degree of political activity among Hispanics, but also what factors have facilitated or retarded this progress.



## INTRODUCTION

The large and growing Hispanic population in the United States is rapidly changing the ethnic composition of the United States. In 1982 there were close to 16 million Hispanics in the United States and, according to the middle series of projections prepared by the U.S. Bureau of the Census (1986), 16 million additional Hispanics are expected to be added to the U.S. population in 30 years, raising the total Hispanic population to over 31 million in 2010. Thus the Hispanic population may double within 30 years and triple in 60 years (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1986). Furthermore, as the fertility of non-Hispanic white women in the United States continues to drop below the level of 2.1 births per woman needed to replace the population in the long run, immigration will have an even greater effect on the ethnic composition of the United States (Bouvier and Gardner, 1986). For example, holding fertility constant at 1.8 births per woman and immigration at a level of 500,000 annually, Bouvier and Gardner project that the population of non-Hispanic whites would fall from 80 percent of the total population in 1980 to approximately 60 percent in 2080. Hispanics, on the other hand, would increase from 6.4 percent of the total population to over 16 percent over the same period.

In addition, the legalization provisions contained in the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 could eventually grant amnesty to close to 2 million undocumented immigrants, the majority of whom are of Mexican origin. These newly legalized immigrants will be eligible for U.S. citizenship beginning in 1992. In light of their growing presence in the United States, Hispanics have the potential to become a politically powerful and influential force in American politics. However, some researchers feel that the Mexican

population is detached from the American political system and likely to stay that way. Garcia and de la Garza (1985), for instance, claim that "there is little reason to conclude that Mexican immigrants will in the very near future involve themselves in Mexican-American issues or in American political life" (p. 563). Others disagree with this outlook. Speaking of the Mexican-American experience in the United States, Pachon and Moore (1981) state that a "hopeful sign for the future is the high level of political activity, both real and potential, now present in this community" (p. 111).

The available evidence suggests that Hispanics have not been successful in mobilizing a substantial proportion of their population into political activity. Even the optimistic Pachon and Moore admit that the political progress made by Mexican-Americans has fallen short of their potential. However, Pachon and Moore also point out that barriers erected by the majority society, such as "outright disenfranchisement in the southwest", have accounted for at least part of the historical lack of political clout experienced by Hispanics. This sentiment was also expressed in a 1986 article in the London-based publication, The Economist, which pointed out that although Hispanics are the largest ethnic group in Los Angeles, there are no Hispanic congressmen representing the county and only one Hispanic on the city council. The article began with the statement, "no one disputes that Hispanics are poorly served politically in Los Angeles" (p. 21). Other researchers have examined socioeconomic factors such as occupation and English language ability as a way of explaining the political behavior of Hispanics and still others have looked at their motivation for coming to the United States in the first place for additional clues.

This paper focuses on the process of political adaptation in the Hispanic population in the United States. Marston and Van Valey (1979) define immigrant adaptation as "the process whereby ethnic group members become increasingly similar to majority group members with respect to basic values, norms, and behavior patterns" (p.15). For the purposes of this paper, we are assuming that it is possible to construct objective indicators to measure the degree of immigrant adjustment. One underlying presumption is that the presence of adjustment or adaptation is suggested by a narrowing of the gap in numerical values of objective indicators between immigrants and/or their descendants and the majority population. For example, the degree of political participation among the Hispanic population in the United States can be determined by examining the rate at which different segments of this population naturalize and how often this group registers and votes in elections in comparison to the majority population.

The future potential of Hispanics in the American political arena, however, is more difficult to estimate. It is important to know not only the degree of political activity among Hispanics, but also what factors have facilitated or retarded this progress. As a first step in understanding both the responsibility of the majority society and of the Hispanic population this paper presents a review of the literature on the political adaptation of Hispanic immigrants to the United States and their descendants. The first part of what follows presents a discussion of the political socialization of Hispanics. The next section contains an examination of the propensity of different segments of the Hispanic population to become U.S. citizens and what factors influence the decision to naturalize. Finally, a discussion of the voting behavior and patterns among Hispanics is presented.



## POLITICAL SOCIALIZATION

The term political socialization refers to the process of mobilizing the Hispanic population into an active and influential political force. Several factors may influence the likelihood of achieving this goal. For example, as Mexican-Americans come to identify with and appreciate the role they can play in the U.S. political system they may decide that it is in their best interests to become politically active. Furthermore, involvement in organizations such as unions, civic groups, church, and neighborhood groups also promotes political involvement (Garcia and de la Garza, 1985). According to Verba and Nie (1972), both formal and informal organizations serve as an intermediary between the individual and the government. Also, involvement in organizations provides the individual the opportunity to develop new skills and to gain information about local or national affairs, thereby promoting political involvement. However, there are also several factors that can depress political participation. Among these factors are low education and low income. Research on the political socialization of Mexican-Americans has also focused on the influence of pressures from both inside and outside the Mexican-American community.

For example, researchers have formulated two hypotheses in an attempt to explain the political behavior of Mexican-Americans. The "ethnic community" hypothesis states that persons belonging to ethnic minorities may become politically active due to social pressures exerted upon them within their ethnic community to conform to the norms of that community. If the minority group is discriminated against, then this discrimination can serve as a spur to strong cohesiveness among members of the minority group (Atunes and Gaitz, 1975). Thus, according to Atunes and Gaitz (1975), "social participation is

an expression of cultural solidarity and an affirmation of membership in a group which is the target of discrimination" (p. 1195). Or as Welch, Comer, and Steinman (1975) state, "political and social participation asserts the importance of the group within the larger society". (p. 364).

The "compensation" hypothesis focuses on the origin of group norms. For example, members of minority groups may participate in political groups comprised of members from their own ethnic background in order to compensate for discrimination they may face from members of the majority group. For example, Welch et al. explain that for blacks the compensation hypothesis would suggest that "by participation with other blacks, blacks could find themselves in situations where they were accepted and esteemed; they could let off steam in an acceptable way and find means to cope with the outside world" (p. 365). The compensation hypothesis was originally proposed by Myrdal, Steiner, and Rose (1944), and later by Babchuk and Thompson (1962) and Orum (1966) as an explanation of the political behavior of blacks.

Welch, Comer, and Steinman (1975) analyzed the political and social participation of Mexicans and Anglos while controlling for five structural variables--ethnicity, sex, income, education, and age--within the framework of both the ethnic community and compensation hypotheses. Their study was based on data drawn from two samples of residents from four geographic areas in Nebraska. The researchers found that rates of political and social participation by Mexican-Americans were much lower than those of Anglos. Political participation included a number of activities ranging from talking to others about public problems, candidates, or issues to attending a political rally, whereas social participation referred to membership in a voluntary nonpolitical association. Moreover, political participation rates

did not become greater relative to Anglos when controlling for class, age, and sex. However, social participation rates did become greater when controlling for class, age, and sex. In terms of nonchurch participation, Mexican-American levels of participation equal those of Anglos when structural variables are controlled. On a more general level, Welch et al. found that Mexican-American-Anglo differences in social participation resemble black-white differences of fifteen years ago more than current black-white differences. On the other hand, the political participation differences found among the sample did not display the same early trends in black-white comparisons. Even with controls for structural variables, Mexican-American participation did not move toward Anglo levels.

The researchers concluded that Mexican-Americans are lagging behind the participatory norms of Anglos more than blacks lagged behind whites fifteen years ago. Although political participation among Mexican-Americans was found to be minimal, there were also signs that social participation was beginning to approach the participation rates found among Anglos of similar class, age, and sex. This finding provided Welch et al. with evidence that social participation precedes political participation among Mexican-Americans. Thus the researchers found that the compensation hypothesis seemed to be useful for explaining the origins of group socialization patterns but not as an independent explanation for current participatory patterns. Furthermore, the ethnic community hypothesis was found to be an incomplete explanation for participation rates unless factors explaining the roots of group socialization norms are taken into account.

Atunes and Gaitz (1975) also attempted to determine whether elements of the ethnic community and compensatory hypotheses could be used to explain the

political behavior of Mexican-Americans. Their data comes from a survey conducted in late 1969 and early 1970 of over 1,300 adult white, black, and Mexican-American residents in Houston, Texas. Drawing on the findings of Orum (1966) and Olsen (1970), Atunes and Gaitz hypothesized that because of a process of "compensation" or "ethnic identification," members of disadvantaged minority groups would have higher levels of social and political participation than members of the majority group with similar socioeconomic characteristics. The basic idea is that because minority group members may face discrimination from the dominant social group and exclusion from mainstream activities, minority group members would join together in order to buffer themselves against this discrimination and compensate for their lack of power in the larger community.

Atunes and Gaitz found that with social class controlled Mexican-Americans were most active relative to whites in activities that relate principally to participation at family and primary group levels such as church attendance and recreational interaction with friends. However, for activities relating to mainly policy-oriented or public arena behaviors such as political discussions or voting, they exhibit lower rates of participation than whites. Blacks, on the other hand, had the highest rates of participation in activities relating to the public arena. Thus the researchers rejected the ethnic community and compensation hypotheses for Mexican-Americans. Results for blacks were as predicted.

Atunes and Gaitz offered several explanations of why participation among blacks is so high while it is frequently so low among Mexican-Americans. For instance, the researchers felt that through the experiences of the Civil Rights movement blacks learned the value of organized political effort,

whereas Mexican-Americans have not had a comparable experience. Also, Atunes and Gaitz felt that "perceived" relative social distance was an important factor in influencing political participation. They found that blacks perceived whites as maintaining a much greater social distance from them than whites actually do. Mexican-Americans, however, overestimated the degree of social proximity between themselves and whites. Atunes and Gaitz found a strong association between ethnicity and perceived social distance; however, when ethnicity was controlled the association between perceived social distance and participation was weak and unstable. They concluded that the relationship was spurious, resulting from the prior relationship between ethnicity and both participation and perceived social distance. Although the researchers admit that their findings are limited, their analysis did reveal the importance of distinguishing between "public" participation--behaviors taking place in large-scale social contexts--and "private" participation--behaviors which occur primarily in a family or peer group context.

The various dimensions of public, or political, participation were explored by Welch, Comer, and Steinman (1973). The researchers defined direct involvement with the political structure and in the political process as "active" behavior, whereas discussing public problems with friends or people in general was seen as "passive" behavior. Their data was based on a sample drawn from four communities in Nebraska with large numbers of Mexican-American residents. Welch, Comer, and Steinman found that Mexican-Americans showed an interest in discussing politics with friends and associates, but they were less likely to involve themselves in active participation.

Moreover, the researchers speculate that increasing levels of education and other attributes of higher socioeconomic status will not necessarily lead

to increasing levels of participation in the political process because education and other socialization agents do not prepare a minority member for a political role. They feel that political participation might not be seen as "natural" for a minority member. Political participation among minority members will be encouraged if such involvement yields a productive and satisfying reward. In other words, Welch, Comer, and Steinman believe that political participation among minority group members will not increase until the benefits of political activism are perceived by the group.

Research on the political behavior of immigrant groups has also focused on the role of generational status. For example, Lamare's (1982) analysis of the political orientation of five generations of Mexican-Americans investigated the importance of national origin on political integration. Interviews with 700 Mexican-American children ages 9 to 14 residing in El Paso, Texas were conducted. Based on generational status, respondents were classified as belonging to one of the following groups: newcomers--respondent, respondent's parents, and grandparents were born in Mexico; first generation--respondent born in the United States, respondent's parents and grandparents were born in Mexico; mixed generation--respondent and one parent born in the United States, respondent's other parent and grandparents were born in Mexico; second generation--respondent and both parents were born in the United States, respondent's grandparents were born in Mexico; or third generation--respondent, respondent's parents and grandparents were born in the United States.

Lamare examined the degree of psychological assimilation among the survey participants through a series of questions designed to evaluate how closely the respondent identified with the American political community. Although



newcomers were the least psychologically assimilated, a linear progress in identifying with the American political community proceeded through the second generation. Third-generation Mexican-American children, however, were less likely than their second-generation counterparts to identify with the American political community.

Similarly, Lamare found the second generation to be by far the most politically acculturated. Respondents were asked to evaluate key American political institutions (i.e., Congress, the Supreme Court, and the U.S. Constitution), highly visible authority figures (i.e., the president and policemen), democratic procedures and viewpoints (i.e., voting, acceptance of free speech). The pattern of political acculturation was somewhat curvilinear across the generations with the process most complete by the second generation. For example, the degree of support for most of these items increased across the generations with the highest degree of support found among second-generation Mexican-American children. However, Lamare found a perceptible drop in the degree of support for the items mentioned above from the second to the third generation.

The curvilinear pattern across generations was still evident even after controlling for the effects of social status, language, and schooling. Lamare concluded that the process of political assimilation and acculturation proceeds until the third generation, where a notable decline occurs. According to Lamare, the implications of this decline depend upon the intensity of the dissatisfaction with American political institutions and processes felt by the third-generation respondents. He does not rule out the possibility of a reversal by the fourth and later generations, nor does he eliminate a scenario in which the negative perceptions of the third generation will manifest themselves in "disintegrative behavior".

Portes and Bach (1985), on the other hand, argue that negative perceptions of certain facets of life in the United States actually represent a "first and necessary condition for incorporation into a new social order" (p. 298). Their study was based on data from surveys of both Cuban and Mexican immigrants conducted at the time of their arrival in the United States and conducted again in 1976 and 1979. A total of 590 Cubans were originally interviewed in Miami and 822 Mexicans were interviewed along two major entry points along the Texas-Mexico border in Laredo and El Paso.

Portes and Bach found both immigrant groups reported a high level of satisfaction and commitment to the United States; however, both groups also reported perceptions of discrimination against their perspective ethnic groups. These negative perceptions were consistently associated with higher levels of education, English language ability, and years of residence in the United States. Portes and Bach do not see a contradiction between the immigrants' satisfaction with life in the United States and their increasing negative perceptions of American society. Instead, they feel that heightened perceptions of discrimination is a function of greater participation in American society and a realization of how the society actually functions. Immigrants who say that they are content with their lives in the United States and who also feel discriminated against are merely offering a realistic appraisal of their situation. As Portes and Bach explain:

This process includes the demise of the original idealized image of the receiving country and the increasing grasp of its social dynamics and problems, including the reality of discrimination. Adaptation to American society does not consist of ignoring its many contradictions and conflicts, as implicitly suggested by assimilation theorists. It consists instead of grasping these constraints and reacting to them as part of the struggle for social recognition and ascent (1985, p. 298).

Guzman (1976) agrees that negative perceptions of the American political system is not necessarily detrimental to the political integration of Mexican-Americans. According to Guzman, although the conditions of social contact between Mexicans and the majority may be less abrasive today than they were for previous generations, a "cultural renaissance" among Mexican-Americans may be necessary to reestablish feelings of self-worth, thereby promoting political participation. For instance, as Mexicans make known their views and their criticisms of the American political system Guzman believes the ideological balance will shift as the larger society becomes aware of the Mexican presence. Guzman concedes that "unlike other minority groups, Mexican-Americans have failed to make substantive use of the political system in order to improve the quality of their lives" (p. 205), but he adds that the traditional southwestern attitudes towards Mexicans are changing. The resulting improvement in the conditions of social contact will enable future generations of Mexican-Americans to gain a greater voice in the American political system.

Garcia (1987) investigated the degree of political integration among Mexican immigrants. He defines the indicators of political acculturation for immigrants as the acceptance of the prevailing beliefs, norms, attitudes, and activities regarding the political process. His analysis was based on interviews conducted in 1979 with a subsample of 367 Mexican immigrants. Garcia found that education was an important factor in promoting a favorable view of the political system among immigrants. Cultural factors, however, did not have uniform effects. For example, Garcia concluded that cultural preferences may have an isolating effect, thereby creating a greater distance from any level of awareness or information about the host country's political

system. On the other hand, Mexican immigrants with family members still living in Mexico were more likely to be "politically oriented" and aware of the political process. Garcia speculated that this finding may be due to a Mexican immigrant's concern over immigration practices and policies and how these might eventually effect family members in Mexico. Overall, Garcia concluded that the process of political integration among Mexican immigrants moves at a slow pace, most likely occurring after immigrants have made some initial progress in the sphere of economic integration.

Teske and Nelson's (1976) examination of the political orientations of "middle-class" Mexican-Americans does not lend support to Garcia's hypothesis that economic gains may proceed political socialization. Teske and Nelson define middle class based on occupations that include white collar, managerial, clerical, professional, semi-professional, and major product sales jobs. Generally, these positions indicate mobility beyond working-class status. The analysis was based on data collected from a sample of Mexican-Americans residing in Waco, Austin, McAllen, and Lubbock, Texas. Questions regarding membership in and support for political organizations were used to indicate the respondent's attitude toward political involvement. Teske and Nelson found that the middle-class Mexican population did not support either traditional or ethnic political organizations through membership. In fact, only 15 percent of the sample belonged to a political organization, and in only two cases did a respondent claim membership in two organizations. The more politically oriented an organization was considered to be, the less it was supported and the more negative were the respondents' attitudes toward the organization.

Teska and Nelson conclude that upwardly mobile Mexican-Americans do not identify with Mexican subculture, nor are they likely to join or support ethnically based organizations that are competing for political power. Thus Mexican-American organizations do not have the support of the educated, influential individuals who would be capable of providing financial support. According to the authors, the loss of the resources available from the Mexican-American middle class--both financial and managerial--poses a barrier to the creation of "bloc type" political action.

In a similar study, Garcia and de la Garza (1985) examined the influence of membership in Mexican-American organizations on political participation among Mexican immigrant noncitizens compared to that of Mexican-American citizens. They based their analysis on the results of two surveys of Spani - surnamed adults conducted in San Antonio and unincorporated east Los Angeles during November 1981 to January 1982. They found that both citizens and noncitizens of Mexican origin had very low rates of organizational involvement; however, the participation rate among noncitizens was significantly lower. Based on a multivariate analysis, low levels of involvement in organizations were explained to a significant degree by socioeconomic factors. However, citizenship status had an independent effect on organizational involvement. For example, Garcia and de la Garza claim that the psychological orientations of Mexican noncitizens has a dampening effect on organizational participation, which in turn has a negative effect on levels of political involvement, independent of socioeconomic status.

Garcia and de la Garza conclude that efforts to mobilize Mexican-origin noncitizens will be of little use due to their extremely low rates of organizational affiliation. Moreover, low rates of organizational membership

were even found in traditional organizations such as church groups. The combination of low levels of organizational involvement and low socioeconomic status suggest that Mexican-origin noncitizens make up an isolated segment of the Mexican population in the United States and prompts Garcia and de La Garza to state "there is little reason to conclude that Mexican immigrants will in the very near future involve themselves in Mexican-American issues or in American political life" (1985, p. 563).

Although the Mexican-American population is characterized by low levels of organizational involvement, there is also evidence that this population is fairly well-informed regarding public policy issues and that Mexican-Americans as a group have a specific set of priorities regarding national issues. For example, de la Garza and Weaver (1985) found that Mexican-Americans were more concerned than Anglos with issues that affect them directly, such as social welfare and minority issues. Anglos, on the other hand, were more concerned about international problems. The analysis was based on data from two surveys conducted in San Antonio, Texas between November 1981 and March 1982.

In the same study, de la Garza and Weaver found that Mexican-Americans and Anglos differ in their evaluation of government spending practices. Mexican-Americans support increased spending on social service and other minority-related issues, whereas Anglos support spending on defense, space exploration, and "social control" programs--crime and drug control. Overall, the researchers found that Mexican-Americans as a group expressed a strong concern related to spending on Hispanic and bilingual education issues, suggesting that ethnicity shapes Mexican spending priorities primarily within a relatively narrow range of issues. De la Garza and Weaver conclude that ethnicity may be the most important factor affecting Mexican-American attitudes toward issues explicitly related to the Mexican-American population.



De la Garza and Brischetto (1983) examined the media exposure patterns among Mexican-Americans and the degree to which these patterns are associated with particular public policy views. The authors chose to examine media use patterns because they believed that knowing the level of media exposure among Mexican-Americans would reveal how well-informed Mexican-Americans were regarding world affairs. Furthermore, knowing these patterns might also suggest how well the Mexican-American population was integrated into their sociopolitical environment.

The analysis revealed that a large proportion of the survey population was well-informed concerning local affairs, and a sizable minority was aware of national and international issues. Regarding policy orientations, the researchers found that overall most respondents were concerned about social and economic issues and felt that the government should allocate more money to address problems in these areas. De la Garza and Brischetto also found that Mexican-Americans were not a homogeneous group in regard to their media use patterns. For example, more-educated respondents read newspapers more frequently; however, there were no significant differences among educational groups in how often they watch the evening news on television. Furthermore, more-educated respondents were less likely to utilize Spanish-language media than were less-educated respondents, and they were also less likely to view unemployment as the most serious public policy issue nationwide. On the other hand, more-educated respondents considered unemployment to be the most serious problem for the Mexican-American population in their own communities. Finally, Spanish-speaking respondents considered Spanish-language television and radio to be the most trusted sources of political or community news, whereas English speakers--both monolingual and bilingual--thought that English

news sources were the most trustworthy. The researchers concluded that overall the Mexican-American respondents made extensive use of the media to inform themselves about local, national, and international issues.

#### NATURALIZATION

Data from the 1980 census revealed that the failure to naturalize was most pronounced in the Latino community. With the exception of Cuban Americans, Latinos naturalize at one-half the rate of non-Latino immigrant groups (Pachon, 1987). One of the most important consequences of noncitizenship is the powerlessness associated with having no voice in the political process. DeSipio (1987) identified several factors that may affect the propensity to acquire U.S. citizenship for Mexican immigrants. For example, proximity and ties to Mexico, a sense of Hispanics being considered "outsiders" subject to arbitrary and discriminatory treatment, the inability to meet or confusion about statutory naturalization requirements, and obstacles in the bureaucratic process of naturalization were identified as having a negative effect on an immigrant's decision to naturalize.

Several researchers have studied these factors in depth and have developed additional explanations for the low rates of naturalization found among some segments of the Hispanic population. Grebler (1966), for example, measured and analyzed the naturalizations of legal immigrants from Mexico in comparison with all other immigrants to the United States. Based on data from the Annual Reports of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), he speculated that several factors affected the naturalization rate of Mexican immigrants. The physical proximity and relatively low cost of movement between the United States and Mexico, for instance, had a negative effect on the propensity for Mexican immigrants to naturalize. Furthermore, because

applicants for citizenship must be at least 18 years of age and Mexican immigrants have an unusually large number of foreign-born children, the naturalization rate for Mexicans may appear to be lower than it would be if only eligible persons were included. However, even with provisions made for these two factors, Grebler found large differences in the naturalization rate for Mexican and other immigrants. For instance, between 1959 and 1965, annual naturalization rates for persons of Mexican origin varied between 2.4 and 5.0 percent, compared with 27.2 and 32.8 percent for all other immigrants.

Portes and Mozo (1985) also used data from the INS to analyze naturalization rates for cohorts entering the United States in 1969, 1970, and 1971 by comparing the numbers changing nationality for different immigrant groups over a period of ten years. The researchers found that the Mexican naturalization rate was the lowest--one-seventh of the average for all countries--and that Canadians also naturalized at a low rate--one-fourth to one-fifth of the average for all countries. Cuban naturalization rates, on the other hand, were quite high and consistently exceeded the rate for all countries and regions except for Asia. The number of immigrants from all countries changing nationality was found to peak after seven years in the United States; however, the number for Mexican immigrants peaked after the ninth or tenth year.

Portes and Mozo hypothesized that the national differences found in the rate of naturalizations were due to three factors: (1) geographical distance from places of emigration, (2) the immigrant's reason for his departure from his home country, and (3) the educational and occupational background of each immigrant group. The researchers constructed three categories based on the home country's proximity to the United States and the immigrants' reason for

leaving. . The "low propensity to naturalize" category was made up of immigrants from countries in close proximity to the United States and immigrants whose emigration was not politically motivated, such as immigrants from Mexico and Canada. The "intermediate" group was composed of immigrants from countries that are a considerable distance from the United States and, again, when the immigration flow to the United States was not politically motivated. Countries in Western Europe and Central and South America fit into this category. Finally, the "high" propensity category contained immigrants from countries that are typically a great distance from the United States and when the immigration flow was politically motivated. Most Asian countries and Cuba fit into this category. In the case of Cuba, the physical proximity to the United States could be counteracted by the political character of the emigration, whereas the opposite could be true for Asian countries because, excluding Vietnamese refugees, most Asian immigration is not politically motivated. However, the researchers did not feel that the necessity of making a long distance journey to return home provided a sufficient explanation for the high rates of naturalization found among Asian immigrants. Portes and Mozo thought the third causal factor--educational and occupational composition--was more important in explaining the patterns of naturalization found among the Asians.

Porte and Mozo conducted a more systematic examination of the differential effects of educational and occupational composition and other factors on the propensity to change citizenship. They found that a strong educational effect explained much of the high rates of naturalization among Asian immigrants; however, this explanation was not satisfactory for Cubans. Instead, the political origins of Cuban migration played a central role in the

propensity to naturalize, counteracting the heavy negative effect of geographic proximity on citizenship change.

Garcia (1981) also explored the process of naturalization among Mexican immigrants by focusing on contributing factors. His analysis was based on data from a Chicano survey of 995 respondents residing in the the Southwest region—Arizona, California, Colorado, New Mexico, and Texas—and the Chicago standard metropolitan statistical area (SMSA) during 1979. Garcia found that for those respondents who intended to naturalize, only 27 percent thought that citizenship would provide them with added privileges and benefits. The author concludes that "an examination into the low rate of naturalization among Mexican immigrants within the context of costs and benefits would suggest a real lack of perceived benefits" (p. 618).

Garcia did identify several sociodemographic variables that had a significant effect on the propensity of Mexican immigrants to naturalize. For instance, age and length of residence in the United States tended to be associated with a naturalized status among older persons and longer residents in the United States. However, length of residence was only significant when asked: Are you naturalized, do you plan on naturalizing, or do you have no intention of naturalizing? When the variable was dichotomous—naturalized versus non-naturalized—then length of residence was not significant. Educational attainment was also related toward a tendency for naturalized status with higher levels of education completed. On the other hand, low identification with being an American and strong identification with being a foreigner was highly associated with non-naturalized status. Also, a critical evaluation of the U.S. sociopolitical system on the part of an immigrant served as a negative inducement toward naturalization.

Grebler, Moore, and Guzman (1970) found that a low propensity for naturalization among Mexican immigrants was also indicated by a long period of residency in the United States preceding the acquisition of citizenship. For example, 79 percent of Mexican aliens who were naturalized in 1966 resided in the U.S. ten or more years, compared with only 34 percent among all aliens acquiring citizenship that year. Grebler (1966) also found that Mexican aliens showed a pronounced tendency to delay naturalization in comparison to all aliens. Among those Mexican immigrants who naturalized in 1965, more than one-third had entered the United States prior to 1940, compared to 6.5 percent of all other immigrants naturalized in that year.

Furthermore, in Alvarez's (1987) study of 38 recently naturalized Hispanics, only 5 percent of the sample had completed the naturalization process after five years. Of the 95 percent who completed the process after at least 10 years, almost 80 percent had lived in the United States over 15 years and close to 40 percent had resided here over 25 years. Alvarez also looked at factors that might influence the decision to acquire U.S. citizenship. The presence of friends or family in the United States had a positive effect on the propensity to naturalize. Eighty-four percent of the survey respondents were received in the United States by family members or friends when they arrived in the United States. In addition, marriage and children were positively associated with a naturalized status. For example, two-thirds of the sample were married at the time of their citizenship interview. Of this number, 34 percent arrived in the United States married and 32 percent were married here. Seventy-three percent of the married respondents had children, and 58 percent of the children were born in the United States.



Alvarez found that for the survey respondents, early (primary) education provided a foundation from which adaptation to the United States was made easier. Fifty-five percent of the respondents attended primary school in their home country but had not attended secondary school. Alvarez concluded "many individuals received a basic social foundation which helped form strong self identities through the early enculturation at school during their formative years" (p. 345). According to Alvarez, the most important aspect of completing the naturalization process is a supportive context for the individual. This "individually supportive context" includes support networks of friends and relatives, stable economic livelihoods, nurturing of the family, and the enjoyment of a relatively stable standard of living. Finally, INS Help Centers staffed with knowledgeable personnel are another necessary ingredient in gaining citizenship for a majority of Hispanics.

Portes and Curtis (1987) analyzed data from a survey of legal Mexican immigrants interviewed upon arrival in the United States in 1973 and re-interviewed in 1976 and 1979 in order to ascertain the determinants of the decision to naturalize. They developed four categories of predictors: (1) background characteristics, (2) skills and resources acquired in the United States, (3) residential patterns and social relations, and (4) attitudes and orientations. The researchers found that only 5 percent of the sample had become citizens after six years in the United States. This is considered a noteworthy finding because almost 70 percent of the respondents had lived in the United States prior to legal entry--most for an extensive period--and because 60 percent had wives awaiting them in the United States. Both of these facts should have increased the probability of naturalizing.

Upon further investigation, the researchers found that variables such as knowledge of English at arrival, parental occupation, early occupation in the United States, and education acquired since arrival in the United States had no relationship with intentions to acquire U.S. citizenship. On the other hand, spouse's country of birth was found to have a strong effect on the decision to naturalize. Furthermore, significant causal effects for intentions to acquire U.S. citizenship were associated with home ownership, ethnicity of neighborhood, urban-rural origins in Mexico, and attitudes toward U.S. society. For actually acquiring U.S. citizenship, length of prior U.S. residence, number of children, knowledge of English, home ownership, and type of visa issued were found to be reliable predictors. According to these findings, a Mexican immigrant whose spouse is U.S.-born, who has three children, who has a home in the United States, and who speaks English fluently is about 30 percent more likely to have naturalized by the end of the sixth year of residence in the United States than his non-English speaking counterpart who lacks a U.S.-born spouse, has less than three children, and doesn't have his own home.

The authors conclude that their results are less noteworthy for positive than for negative implications. Portes and Curtis state that their results are preliminary and verification in the future may present evidence that many "common-sense" explanations are not likely to be found valid. Instead, less obvious and more complex interpretations are likely to be required to understand the intricate forces at play in the decision to acquire U.S. citizenship.

## VOTING BEHAVIOR

Another area of political activity that has received considerable attention from researchers is voting behavior among Hispanics. According to Garcia, de la Garza, and Torres (1985), the findings of some studies conducted prior to 1974 of Mexican-American electoral behavior must be viewed with caution. Apparently many researchers did not distinguish between citizens and noncitizens when calculating the segment of the Mexican population that was eligible to vote. Thus, the voting-eligible Mexican-American population tends to be overstated, and the registration and voting rates of this population tend to be understated in these earlier studies. However, later studies that have taken into account citizenship status as well as the age characteristics of the Mexican-American population have continued to find a lower voter turnout among Mexican-Americans compared to Anglos. Why does the gap persist? In order to answer this question, researchers have looked at the influence of various demographic variables such as socioeconomic status, age, language ability, and education.

For example, de la Garza and Brischetto (1982) created a demographic profile of the Mexican-American electorate based on data from the Southwest Voter Registration Project (SVREP). They also identified factors that promoted nonvoting behavior among Mexican-Americans. The SVREP survey was conducted in 1981-1982 in east Los Angeles and San Antonio and had a sample universe of 903 respondents. De la Garza and Brischetto speculated that language ability and age interacted with socioeconomic status in determining the relative probability of voter participation. Thus, Mexican-Americans who were least likely to register, vote, and participate in electoral politics were most likely older citizens of foreign stock who spoke only Spanish and

were low in education and income relative to other Mexican-Americans. Spanish speakers who were more likely to vote included younger citizens who were mostly of foreign stock and had somewhat more education and income than the previous group. The researchers found that for English speakers, age was more important than economic status in determining who would be most likely to vote. Therefore, despite lower levels of education and income and a higher proportion of foreign stock, English speakers over age 45 were more likely to participate in elections than those English speakers who were younger. De la Garza and Brischetto caution that the profiles they have created only suggest the relative probability of voting; they feel that consideration should also be given to geographic distribution and density of the group and to the availability of communication and organizational channels.

In a later study based on the same SVREP data, Brischetto and de la Garza (1983) explored the differences in political attitudes and behavior of various subgroups of Mexican-American citizens. The researchers found that registering to vote and voting increases with age and reaches a peak in the forties and fifties and then levels off. However, age group differences diminish regarding the more demanding political activities such as attending a political rally or working on a political campaign. On the other hand, educational attainment--especially college attendance--did make a significant difference for the more active forms of political involvement. For example, about one-half of the college-educated respondents attempted to talk to others about voting and have attended a political meeting or rally compared to only 20 percent of those with eight or less years of schooling. Moreover, interest in politics was also found to be directly related to educational attainment. Whereas 45 percent of the respondents with sixteen years of schooling said

that they were "very interested" in politics, a similar proportion (42 percent) of the respondents with eight or fewer years of school said that they were "not interested".

In another phase of research using the SVREP data, de la Garza, Brischetto, and Weaver (1984) identified factors that have led to an increase in rates of political participation among Mexicans in the Southwest. For instance, they found that the most important variables associated with registering to vote for Mexicans were age, education, language, and being employed. Also, Mexican-Americans who vote were found to be older, have more education, be members of organizations, watch television newscasts, and be employed. Factors associated with political involvement—the frequency with which respondents talk to others about the way they will vote, attend political rallies, and work in political campaigns—were age, efficacy, and organizational membership.

The authors found that age and language are important in influencing registration and voting as compared to not participating at all, but they do not account for the active behaviors associated with political involvement. De la Garza, Brischetto, and Weaver conclude that, because of the strong effect of age and language on registering to vote and voting, these two variables "may define the boundary between the segment of the electorate that is inactive and likely to remain so, and that segment of the electorate that is active or may be activated" (p. 9).

Buehler (1977) chose to examine the relationship between voter turnout and political efficacy as indicated by a belief in self-determination and a lack of indifference regarding political activities among Mexican-Americans. The study was based on a survey of 465 native-born adult males of Mexican

origin residing in Michigan between October 1967 and March 1968. In order to test her hypothesis that political fatalism and apathy are part of the Mexican-American subculture, Buehler compared those Mexicans who were the most assimilated into Anglo culture with those who were least assimilated. Four measures of assimilation were used: language spoken, ethnicity of friends at work, ethnicity of neighbors, and a measure of cultural and social assimilation based on the way individuals spend their leisure time.

Buehler found that when education was controlled, differences in voting rates between Mexican-Americans and the general population nearly disappeared, suggesting that Mexican-Americans are not apathetic and do not vote less than other Americans of similar status. Also, assuming that the least assimilated Mexican-Americans are most strongly influenced by the Mexican-American subculture, no evidence was found to support the theory that the Mexican-American subculture produces a low sense of political efficacy. Finally, Buehler found that variations in degrees of assimilation--both social and cultural--were not useful in predicting variations in voter turnout. Instead, low socioeconomic status, lack of organizational participation, and infrequent exposure to the mass media were found to be useful as predictors of participation. Education, income, and occupational status were all found to be positively associated with voter turnout; exposure to mass media was found to be directly related to voter turnout.

Buehler concluded that the Mexican-American population did not differ from the rest of the general population with respect to apathetic and fatalistic orientations toward politics. Furthermore, nonvoting behavior was found to be a response to low status, a lack of social pressure or stimulation, and a lack of political information.



McCleskey and Merrill (1973) agree that low rates of electoral participation among Mexicans could reflect the effect of low socioeconomic status, but they also argue that the political parties have failed to mobilize Mexican-Americans in Texas. In their study based on survey data obtained from the Office of the Secretary of State in Texas, McCleskey and Merrill found that higher proportions of Anglo and black respondents had been asked to work for the Republican and/or Democratic party than were Mexicans. For example, 20 percent of the Anglo respondents and 29 percent of the black respondents had been asked by Democrats to work on a political campaign whereas only 16 percent of Mexicans reported that they had been asked.

McCleskey and Merrill also found that Mexican-American political participation was somewhat below the average for whites and blacks in Texas. However, they found conflicting evidence as to whether the low rates of participation were due to a failure to register to vote or a failure to turn out on election day. For instance, Cain and Kiewiet (1986) surveyed over 1,600 California residents and found that in 1984 53 percent of the Latino respondents reported that they had registered to vote and 44 percent of Latino respondents actually voted. However, Cain and Kiewiet point out that when an adjustment is made for noncitizens, the proportion of eligible Latinos who voted rises to 61 percent.

#### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In terms of political socialization, researchers found little support for the compensation or ethnic community hypotheses. Most researchers did agree, however, that the level of participation in political organizations among Mexican-Americans was low relative to Anglos and blacks. On the other hand, Mexican-Americans were found to be fairly well-informed regarding public

policy issues (de la Garza and Weaver, 1985). Interestingly, Portes and Bach (1985) found that feelings of satisfaction with life in the United States and perceptions of discrimination against their respective ethnic groups were reported simultaneously among the Cuban and Mexican immigrants in their multi-year study. Portes and Bach explain this apparent contradiction "a necessary condition for incorporation into a new social order" (p. 298). In other words, these immigrants had learned how society actually functions and were offering a realistic appraisal of their situation. Finally, there was some disagreement as to whether economic gains precede political socialization and over the importance the role of education plays in the process of political socialization.

Data from the 1980 census revealed that the failure to naturalize is most pronounced among Hispanic immigrants. With the exception of Cubans, Latinos naturalize at one-half the rate of non-Latino groups. Several researchers offered various explanations for the low rates of naturalization found among Hispanics. Portes and Mozo (1985), for instance, speculated that the propensity to naturalize is influenced by three factors: (1) geographic distance from place of emigration, (2) immigrant's reason for departure from home country, and (3) educational and occupational background of each immigrant group. Hispanic immigrants were also found to experience a long period of residency in the United States before naturalizing. Alvarez (1987) found that only 5 percent of recently naturalized Hispanics completed naturalization after five years, whereas 95 percent of this group resided in the United States at least ten years before naturalizing. Garcia (1981) found that for Mexicans intending to naturalize, many did not perceive the benefits and privileges associated with a naturalized status. Overall, no general

consensus among researchers was reached as to what promotes or retards the tendency to naturalize. Perhaps, as Portes and Curtis state, as "common sense" explanations fail to provide answers, less obvious and more complex explanations may be required to understand what motivates the decision to naturalize.

There was unanimous agreement among researchers that Mexican-Americans tend to register and vote less than black or whites, even after controlling for citizenship and age. There was less agreement as to why Hispanics visited voting booths less often than other citizens. For example, Buehler (1977) found that education, income, and occupational status were positively associated with voter turnout. Nonvoting behavior was found to be a response to low status. Although McCleskey and Merrill (1973) agree that low socioeconomic status plays a role in nonvoting behavior, they argue that outreach on the part of political parties is also important. Also, de la Garza, Brischetto, and Weaver (1984), identified age, education, language, and being employed as the most important factors associated with registering to vote.

This review of the literature has shown that whereas identifying patterns in the political behavior of Hispanics and analyzing that behavior in comparison to other groups is a relatively uncomplicated task, determining the reasons for this behavior and the influence of various factors on the political adaptation of Hispanics is more difficult. Beyond the statements regarding levels of participation in political organizations, voter turnout, and rates of naturalization, there is little agreement to be found in these studies regarding the motivation behind the political behavior of Hispanics. Thus it is difficult to determine with any degree of certainty the best course

of action to take in order to mobilize this segment of the population into the political arena.

The process of immigrant adaptation has several dimensions including the demographic, social, economic, and political. Much of the literature on the subject of immigrant adjustment has focused on the first three dimensions; however, the importance of the political dimension can not be underestimated. Immigrants who fail to naturalize and who fail to register and vote are in effect powerless and have no voice in American political institutions. Thus they may continue to feel like "outsiders" in their new homeland, frustrated by what they perceive as injustices such as discriminatory treatment, yet they are unable to affect social change through the political process.

It is difficult to predict what effect the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 will have on the political behavior of Hispanics. Preliminary figures from the Immigration and Naturalization Service indicate that there has been a recent increase in the number of Hispanic immigrants applying for naturalization. Employer sanctions and tighter security at the border may have influenced the naturalization rate among legal residents who are finding illegal entry and securing jobs for family members more difficult. The INS also speculates that in light of discussions on Capitol Hill to revamp the legal immigration system and the passage of the Kennedy-Simpson bill in the Senate, many of these applicants are hoping to bring family members into the United States under the current preference system which is geared toward family reunification. The Kennedy-Simpson bill would cap legal immigration, eliminate the preference of married brothers and sisters of U.S. citizens, and establish a category in which immigrants wishing to enter the United States would be awarded points based on occupational skill and language ability.

Thus if benefits of acquiring U.S. citizenship, namely bringing relatives into the United States legally, had some influence on the decision to naturalize, then it appears that there are ways to encourage immigrant participation in the political process. Additional research could possibly uncover additional factors that could motivate increased participation and lead to the full incorporation of a large segment of the population into the American political system.

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