Does Ethnicity Trump Party?
Competing Vote Cues and Latino Voting Behavior

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ABSTRACT. It is well known that voters prefer candidates of their own race or ethnicity, but in general this preference does not have to compete with partisanship. In other words, most voters are given consistent voting cues from both race or ethnicity and partisanship. But in rare cases the partisanship of minority candidates is out of sync with those of most voters of their shared race or ethnicity, e.g., a Republican Mexican-American or a Democratic Cuban-American. In such instances, will Latino voters choose to support their co-ethnic? Or will they instead vote for the candidate of their political party? This paper examines the attitudes and behaviors of Latino voters faced with such a choice in a recent Central California Congressional election. In this instance, partisan
group identification cues predominated over ethnic group identification cues, and most Latinos chose to support the Democratic Anglo candidate. [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <http://www.HaworthPress.com> © 2005 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

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It is well known that voters prefer candidates of their own race or ethnicity (Wolfinger, 1965; Parenti, 1967; Hahn and Almy, 1971; Pettigrew, 1972; Lieske and Hillard, 1984; Cain and Kiewiet, 1984; Vanderleeuw and Engstrom, 1987; Hero, 1992; Moreno and Rae, 1992; Moreno and Warren, 1996; Brischetto and Engstrom, 1997; Sonenshein and Valentino, 2000; Graves and Lee, 2000). Polarized voting along racial or ethnic lines is even more prevalent in nonpartisan elections, such as city council or judicial elections (Pomper, 1966; Bullock and Campbell, 1984; Lovrich, Sheldon and Wasmann, 1988; Vanderleeuw, 1990; Stein and Kohfeld, 1991; Legge, 1993; Bezdek, Billeaux and Huerta, 2000). Bullock notes that “voting for a candidate of one’s own race may be a product of racism, or it may be the result of reliance on a simple, readily available cue” (1984: 240). In other words, voters may support a candidate of their own race or ethnicity based on the assumption that a candidate who shares their racial or ethnic background also shares their basic political views. Cain and Kiewiet (1984) and Graves and Lee (2000) argue that while ethnicity influences partisanship (e.g., Mexican-Americans are more likely to be Democrats), which in turn influences vote choice, ethnicity does not directly influence voting.

In most partisan elections the minority candidate in question shares the partisanship of the majority of the voters of his or her racial or ethnic group. Most are African-American or Latino Democrats appealing to a majority Democratic African-American or Latino electorate, or Cuban-American Republicans appealing to a majority Republican Cuban-American electorate. In rare cases the partisanship of a minority candidate is out of sync with that of most voters of their shared race or ethnicity—e.g., an African-American or Mexican-American Republican or a Cuban-American Democrat. In these elections, race is not always the deciding factor, although candidates may appeal to voters to cross party lines. Lorinskas, Hawkins and Edwards (1969) found that last
name cues prompted some ethnically oriented voters to forsake party identification in order to support a fellow ethnic. Racial and partisan cues were also crossed in the 1996 mayoral election in Dade County, Florida, which included a black Republican candidate and a Cuban-American Democratic candidate. Although the election was officially non-partisan, “voters were largely aware of the candidates party affiliation” (Hill, 1997: 7). In a county where 80% of registered black voters are Democrats and 60% of Cuban-American voters are Republicans, “ethnicity was an overwhelmingly more powerful predictor of vote choice than partisanship” (Hill, 1997: 1).

Anglos are noticeably less reluctant to vote for candidates of other races and ethnicities. In recent years, several majority-Anglo areas have elected black Republicans. J.C. Watts, Jr., for a long time the only black Republican in the U.S. House of Representatives, resigned in 2002 after serving eight years in office. Watts represented the fourth Congressional district of Oklahoma, which is over 84% white and only 7.2% black (U.S. Census, 1990). Paul C. Harris, Sr., also a black Republican, represented the 58th district in the Virginia House of Delegates from 1998-2001. The district includes parts of Albemarle, Greene, and Rockingham Counties. Albemarle County is 85.2% white and 9.7% black, Greene County is 91% white and 6.4% black, and Rockingham County is 96.9% white and 1.4% black (U.S. Census, 2000).

There are also several areas with considerable Latino populations that have elected Latino Republicans. Manuel Luján, Jr. represented New Mexico’s First Congressional district from 1969-1989, when he became Secretary of the Interior. The district was 38.1% Hispanic in 1990 (U.S. Census, 1990). Henry Bonilla was first elected in 1992 to represent Texas’ 23rd Congressional district, which is 62.5% Hispanic (U.S. Census, 1990). Bonilla won reelection in 2000 with 59% of the vote; Democratic challenger Isidro Garza, Jr. took 39%. However, in both of these cases it is not clear whether the victories of the Latino candidates were due to support from Latino voters or from non-Latino Republicans.

In a few instances, majority-minority districts have been faced with an Anglo, Democratic incumbent and a black or Latino Republican challenger. In 1982, for example, a black Republican ran against a white Democratic incumbent for the fifth Congressional district in Georgia. The election, along with that for the fourth Congressional district, was postponed from the Nov. 2 general election until Nov. 30 due to a redistricting court battle with the U.S. Justice Department. The state lost its battle over the two Atlanta-area districts; blacks from the fourth were
added to the fifth before the balloting was allowed to progress. Despite the last-minute addition of even more blacks to the majority-black district, and despite the appeals to racial loyalty made by his two black opponents, white fifth district incumbent Wyche Fowler, Jr. won reelection with 80.8% of the vote. His black Republican opponent, Paul Jones, received 5.5%, and a third candidate, State Representative J.E. “Billy” McKinney, a black Democrat who ran as an independent, received 13.7% (Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report, Dec. 4, 1982).

The paucity of research on the power of shared race or ethnicity to lead voters to cross party lines reflects the rarity of such electoral contests. This paper takes an in-depth look at one recent example. In 2000, a Latino Republican ran against an Anglo Democratic incumbent to represent the 20th Congressional district in California. The district is 55% Latino, as is 40% of the electorate, but incumbent Cal Dooley won reelection with 52.4% of the vote. His Latino opponent, Rich Rodriguez, received 45.5%. Poll results from just days prior to the election indicate that Dooley likely received 60% of the Latino vote, while Rodriguez received only 29%. Given competing cues of partisanship and ethnicity, why did Latinos in the district choose Dooley over Rodriguez? Why did partisanship matter so much, and ethnicity so little?

SOCIALIZATION THEORY AND GROUP MEMBERSHIP

The outcome of the Dooley-Rodriguez contest is best understood within the framework of socialization theory. Political opinions are “badges of social membership;” they are “declarations, to others and to ourselves, of social identity” (Kinder, 1998: 803). Moreover, there is considerable evidence that citizens use references to broad social groupings to assess candidates and parties (Kinder, 1998; Klingemann, 1979; Rhodebeck, 1986). Because individuals can belong to multiple groups, the potential exists for these memberships to provide competing cues about political candidates. Kinder notes: “Which aspect of identity predominates depends, in part, on political circumstances. . . . Identity is fluid: defined by situation and reactive to politics” (1998: 803).

Whether Latinos in the 20th district chose to support Dooley or Rodriguez can be seen as the result of their choosing to vote based on their ethnic group identification or on their partisan group identification. Kinder and Sears claim that “party identification has been and continues to be the single most powerful predictor of voting in partisan contests” (1985: 673). Several factors in place in 2000 made it even more likely
that party group membership would predominate. Like most Latinos in
the country, Latinos in California have historically voted strongly Dem-
ocratic (García and de la Garza, 1977; de la Garza, et al., 1992; DeSipio,
1996). But citizens are known to shift their partisan affiliations based on
what the parties do. Voters adjust their loyalties when the parties nomi-
nate popular or hideous candidates (Jennings and Markus, 1984), pro-
mote attractive or repellent policies (Gerber and Jackson, 1993), or
deliver or fail to deliver peace, prosperity and domestic tranquility
(Fiorina, 1981). Latinos in California similarly responded to Republi-
can Party support for Proposition 187. The measure, approved by voters
in 1994 with the support of Republican Governor Pete Wilson, denied
social services to undocumented immigrants, and was seen as an attack
by Republicans on all Latinos. Since then, Latinos in California and na-
tionwide have been even more strongly identified with the Democratic
Party (DiCamillo, 2000; Rodriguez, 1999). Voter News Survey exit
polls taken in November 2000 found that 60.3% of Latino voters in the
U.S. were Democrats, while only 25.8% were Republicans. The parti-
san gap was even wider looking at presidential vote choice: 67.6% of
Latino voters nationwide cast their ballots for Al Gore, while only
27.7% voted for George W. Bush (Gimpel & Kaufmann, 2001). The
passage of the GOP-sponsored proposition in 1994 increased the likeli-
hood that Latinos in 2000 identified the Republican Party as the enemy
and strengthened their attachment to the Democratic Party.

Because most Latino voters saw Proposition 187 as an attack on all
Latinos, the initiative also reasserted their ethnic group identification
(Rodriguez, 1999). Some campaigns blatantly encourage this sort of be-
havior, such as the 1982 Congressional election in Georgia mentioned
above, the 1988 Bush campaign’s appeal to racially conservative Ang-
glos through coded racist appeals designed to activate racial animosity
(Jamieson, 1992; Kinder and Sanders, 1996), and Jesse Jackson’s at-
tempts to activate racial unity in his appeals to blacks (Tate, 1991). The
impact of ethnic group affiliation on political attitudes and vote choice
is also apparent in work that demonstrates that Latinos often have dis-
tinctive political opinions (Cain, Kiewiet and Uhlman, 1991; de la
Garza et al., 1992; Uhlman, Cain and Kiewiet, 1989; Leal, 2002), and
that Latinos are favorably disposed towards Latino candidates (e.g.,
Arteaga, 2000). If the salient group attachment for Latinos in 2000 was
their ethnicity, then voters may have been more likely to support the La-
tino candidate (regardless of his partisanship) to assert their mem-
bership in that group.
In sum, the 2000 contest between an Anglo Democrat and a Latino Republican activated for Latino voters two strong group affiliations. As Democrats in the wake of anti-Latino legislation sponsored by Republicans they were predisposed to consider their partisanship when making their vote choice. As Latinos who had recently been singled out for discriminatory treatment, they were predisposed to focus on their ethnic group membership. The choice individual Latino voters made can be seen as a response to those two group memberships and the corresponding competing vote cues.

THE DOOLEY-RODRIGUEZ CONTEST

Overview

The Dooley-Rodriguez contest was to represent California’s 20th Congressional district, which in 2000 stretched across the lower San Joaquin Valley from Fresno to Bakersfield. It was redrawn after the 1990 census to maximize the voting power of Latinos, and was estimated to be 55% Latino. The district was also strongly Democratic; in 2000, 53% of voters were registered as Democrats and 33% were registered as Republicans. After the 1992 redistricting, the area consistently voted Democratic in both Presidential and Congressional races (Politics in America, 2000). In 1998, 40% of the district’s registered voters were Latino. Fraga and Ramirez (2001) have shown that in California State Assembly elections in 1992, 1994, 1996 and 1998, Latinos were elected in every district where Latinos were at least 40% of the electorate. They conclude, “40%+ Latino registration in an Assembly district guarantees the election of a Latina/o to office” (2001: 16). Although there are considerable differences between Assembly and Congressional elections and candidates, this suggests that a Latino candidate might be guaranteed election to the district’s Congressional seat. However, due to the imposition of term limits in California in 1990 (Proposition 140), most of the contests examined by Fraga and Ramirez were for open seats; Congress is not subject to such limits, and incumbents still enjoy strong electoral advantages. The election of a Latino candidate to the seat, then, is less certain than might be expected otherwise.

Calvin M. Dooley has represented the district since 1990, when he replaced six-term Republican representative Charles Pashayan, Jr. The district was then redrawn by the California Supreme Court, which removed some Republican areas. Dooley won with 55% of the vote in
1990, but increased his share of the vote in subsequent elections, winning in 1998 with 61% (Politics in America, 1998, 2000). In 1998, when Latinos made up 40 percent of the district’s registered voters, Dooley was challenged in the primary by Latino activist John Estrada, who took 18% of the Democratic vote to Dooley’s 78%. This suggested to the Republican Party that they could take the district with a Latino candidate (Washington Post, Sept. 12, 2000).

In 2000, Republicans found that Latino candidate in Rich Rodriguez. Rodriguez was until December of 1999 the principal evening and late-night news anchor for Fresno ABC television affiliate KFSN Channel 30. He resigned that position in order to run for Congress. The Rodriguez candidacy was hailed by the Republican Party as one that was sure to lead to victory. Although he had never held political office, the party expected his former position as a local newscaster to give Rodriguez considerable name recognition among voters. The GOP website bragged, “Top-tier candidates like Rich Rodriguez are the reason House Republicans will increase their majority this fall” (www.nrcc.org). Rodriguez’s performance in the open primary on March 7, 2000 seemed to legitimize the Republican Party’s strategy: Dooley received 52% of the vote (43,608), while Rodriguez received 46% (38,661). (The open primary meant that all candidates regardless of party appeared on the same ballot. Voters, regardless of their party registration, could vote for any candidate.)

The battle for endorsements in the race was heated. Rodriguez was endorsed in late August 2000 by the California Farm Bureau Federation, which had remained neutral since Dooley was elected in 1990 (Fresno Bee, 8/25/00). The local newspaper, the Fresno Bee, endorsed Dooley in mid-October, noting that Dooley’s “lack of endorsement by the Farm Bureau says more about that group being out of touch with the best interests of farmers than it does about Dooley’s representation” (Fresno Bee, 10/19/00). Predicting (correctly) that Dooley would be endorsed by the Mexican-American Political Association (MAPA), Rodriguez’s campaign manager Joe Galli claimed that he did not expect to win the endorsement because MAPA was filled with “liberal, UFW, César Chávez-types” who were not representative of the district’s overall Latino population. The comment was sharply criticized by local Latino leaders, most of whom had already endorsed Dooley, and many others. After several days of criticism about the remark, Rodriguez promised that if Galli said anything like it again he would be fired. Criticizing Rodriguez’s handling of the incident, a Fresno Bee editorial commented:
The Republicans are targeting Hispanic voters in the 20th, as they attempt to take out Democratic Rep. Cal Dooley. But offering up a Latino candidate and thinking that he will be supported merely because of his heritage and the celebrity that came from his years on local television is bad politics and, what’s worse, it’s an insult to Hispanics. (*Fresno Bee*, 10/19/00)

A day after the MAPA endorsement, Rodriguez held a series of news conferences to announce his endorsement by the Hispanic Business Roundtable. Dooley showed up at several of the news conferences and challenged the group’s credentials, while displaying a list of 21 Latino Fresno County leaders who had endorsed him, ranging from small-town mayors to Fresno County Supervisor Juan Arambula (*Fresno Bee*, 10/17/00).

Both candidates campaigned hard for Latino support. According to California Republican consultant Alan Hoffenblum, Rodriguez needed to attract at least 33 percent of Latino voters away from Dooley in order to win (*Washington Post*, 9/12/00). Much of the battle was waged in television advertisements and direct mailings. Advertising by Republicans and Republican-affiliated organizations argued that Dooley’s attacks on Rodriguez were equivalent to attacks on Latinos. One California Republican Party mailing to Latino voters claimed, “When Cal Dooley and his supporters insult Rich Rodriguez, they insult the entire Latino community.” A mailing from the League of Hispanic Business Owners charged, “If you thought anti-Mexican talk was a thing of the past . . . you haven’t heard from Cal Dooley lately.” Advertising by Democrats sent the message that Rodriguez was not an authentic Latino, and reminded voters that he was running as a member of the party that had supported recent anti-Latino measures. One mailer from the California Democratic Party claimed, “It’s what’s inside that counts . . . Rich Rodriguez turned his back on Latino Families by supporting the Pete Wilson-like Republican Congressional agenda.”

The importance of the race to the national parties was evident in the amount of money spent on the race and by the fact that both Rodriguez and Dooley were given time at their party’s national conventions to address the nation. Overall, the race generated about $5.2 million in contributions, including $2.5 million in soft money, a record for the California Central Valley (*Fresno Bee*, 3/4/01). At the party conventions, Rodriguez used his 60 seconds to highlight his Mexican heritage; Dooley cited the Valley’s agricultural success (*Fresno Bee*, 8/18/00).
At a “sometimes nasty and extremely partisan debate” held on Sept. 29, Rodriguez accused Dooley of being “out of touch with the Valley,” while Dooley said Rodriguez was “a naive candidate offering simplistic solutions for complex problems” (Fresno Bee, 9/30/00). Television advertisements attacked Dooley as “Too Liberal for Our Valley,” while Rodriguez was criticized for having no political experience. Describing the flurry of negative advertisements released a few weeks before the campaign, a Fresno Bee article noted, “The congressional contest between Cal Dooley and Rich Rodriguez is now unquestionably down and dirty, mean and ugly” (Fresno Bee, 10/14/00).

In the end, Dooley was reelected by a solid margin, including a majority of Latino votes. Redistricting following the 2000 Census left him with an even more strongly Democratic district, which he went on to win easily in 2002. Rodriguez returned to newscasting as anchor for local NBC affiliate KSEE Channel 24.

**Incumbency**

The importance of the incumbency factor, of course, cannot be overlooked. The overwhelming majority of House incumbents are re-elected, most by landslide margins, and rates of reelection and margins of victory have been increasing over time (Abramowitz, 1991). Congressional scholars disagree about the exact source of this advantage, but have identified a number of suspects, including name recognition, candidate quality, the incumbent’s ability to scare off high-quality challengers, and direct and indirect officeholder benefits such as franking privileges, opportunities to provide constituent services, media exposure, fund-raising advantages, and experience in running successful campaigns (see, e.g., Ansolabehere, Snyder and Stewart, 2000; Johannes and McAdams, 1981; Krasno, 1994; Levitt and Wolfram, 1997; Serra and Moon, 1994).

Dooley doubtless benefited from the incumbency advantage, although it is difficult to estimate precisely to what degree. Although his incumbency increased his name recognition, Rodriguez also had considerable name recognition due to his years as a network news anchor. While Dooley was more successful at raising campaign funds, the Republican Party’s contributions to the race on Rodriguez’s behalf, in the form of soft-money advertising, eliminated any net financial advantage.

Dooley spent $1,793,089 during the 2000 race, while Rodriguez spent $1,257,145 (www.fec.gov). Funds raised by Dooley included $1,099,483 in PAC contributions and $577,736 from individuals. Rod-
riguez reported $344,300 from PACs and $809,173 from individuals. This level of spending gave Rodriguez a good chance of victory. Exam-
inining winning challengers for 1972-1998, Jacobson (2001) finds that those who spent more than $800,000 (in 1998 dollars) won one-third of their races. Furthermore, while how well challengers do on Election Day is directly related to how much campaign money they spend, spending by incumbents is reciprocally related to the vote. In other words, “spending a great deal of money on the campaign is a sign of weakness rather than strength. In fact, the more money they spend on the campaign, the worse they do on election day” (Jacobson, 2001: 43). So while Rodriguez’s large campaign war chest was a sign of strength and an indication of his quality as a challenger, Dooley’s was a sign that he considered Rodriguez a serious threat.

Even more spending in the race came from soft money. About $2.5 million in soft money, including much of what was used for the television advertisements and direct mailers which deluged voters, came from the national party committees. According to the Fresno Bee (3/4/01), “The Republican Party made the commitment after internal and external polling, along with Rodriguez’s own fund-raising success, indicated it would be a worthwhile investment. The Democrats responded in kind, helping Dooley with about $1 million.” Overall, about $5.2 million was spent on the race. While this amount is dwarfed by that spent in larger markets, it set a record for the California Central Valley. The large amount of soft money spending by the two political parties indicates that Rodriguez was considered a quality challenger, and that both parties believed that he had a reasonable chance of upsetting the incumbent.

Another strong incumbency advantage is name recognition. “Only those challengers who can overcome their ‘invisibility problem’ and create a favorable image stand a chance of winning” (Herrnson, 2000: 182). Dooley had strong name recognition as a 10-year incumbent, and he had been reelected in 1998 with a comfortable 61% of the vote. According to statistics compiled by Jacobson (2001), this gave Rodriguez a very low chance of victory. Examining elections from 1946-1998, he finds that among inexperienced challengers running against incumbents whose vote in the last election was between 60.0-64.9%, only 4.4% were successfully elected (Jacobson, 2001: 37). In a poll of 408 registered voters conducted for the Fresno Bee from Sept. 13-20, Dooley’s favorable rating was 56%, and 63% among Latinos. Rodriguez did not have as much name recognition, despite his celebrity as a news anchor. “Almost one-quarter of Republicans have no impression of him. Of
Hispanics across the district, that number is 45%” (Fresno Bee, 9/26/00). The gap between Republican hopes for Rodriguez’s name recognition, and the reality revealed by the Bee poll, stems from the limited reception of KFSN Channel 30, where Rodriguez worked. In Kern County, the southernmost area of the 20th Congressional district and the area least likely to receive KFSN broadcasts, more than 70% of respondents to the Bee survey had no impression of Rodriguez.

**Issue Ownership**

Both major political parties have made efforts in recent years to court Latino voters, and issue positions taken by both major political parties often appeal to individual Latinos. In general, however, Latino policy preferences best align with positions taken by the Democratic Party, including economic and immigration issues, education, health care, and social services (de la Garza et al., 1992; Gimpel and Kaufmann, 2001). The notable exception to this rule, of course, are Cuban-Americans, who tend to prefer the Republican Party due to that party’s historically hard line on diplomatic relations with Cuba.

Republican strategists have argued for years that Latinos are “natural Republicans” because they are more likely to identify themselves as conservatives than as liberals, and because they tend to be closer to the GOP on traditional family issues such as abortion and school prayer (de la Garza et al., 1992; Abrajano, Nagler and Alvarez, 2002). However, GOP hopes of Latino conversion to the Republican Party have been “more rhetoric than reality” (DeSipio, de la Garza and Setzler, 1999: 7). While Latinos may consider themselves conservative and may hold some “naturally” Republican issue preferences, the issues on which they decide to vote have tended to favor the Democratic Party. In other words, although many non-Cuban Latinos are closer to the Republican Party on abortion and other social issues, they are unlikely to make their partisanship and vote choice decisions based on those policy preferences. Instead, they are likely to make such decisions based on their opinions about education, health care, and social services, which generally translates into support for Democratic Party candidates. In general, Democrats have been more successful than Republicans in raising the saliency of issues on which Latinos agree with their platforms.

Petrocik (1996) argues that candidates try to frame electoral choices “as a decision to be made in terms of problems facing the country that he is better able to ‘handle’ than his opponent” (1996: 826). In other words, because it is unlikely that a campaign will be able to change the policy
preferences of voters, candidates are more likely to be successful if they can increase the saliency of issues on which they already agree with the majority of voters. Both the Dooley and Rodriguez campaigns clearly pursued this strategy in their effort to win Latino support. Democratic Party advertisements focused on issues on which Latinos were likely to agree with the party platform, such as jobs, education, and health care. They claimed that Rodriguez opposed plans for more teachers, after school programs, Medicare prescription drug coverage, a patients’ Bill of Rights, and a crime bill which would put more police officers in Valley neighborhoods. They emphasized Dooley’s support for those bills, as well as his record on agriculture, economics, crime, taxes, safer transportation for farmworkers, and fighting discrimination. In addition, Democratic advertisements reinforced the Wilson/Proposition 187 legacy of Rodriguez’s political party.

Republican Party advertisements claimed that Dooley did not respect the Hispanic community, that he had voted numerous times against tax cuts and for tax increases, that he was out of touch with the Valley, due in part to having moved his family to Virginia. One mailer specifically appealed to the tendency of Latinos to hold conservative opinions on traditional family issues. It announced, “The Boy Scouts are being denounced by Gay and Lesbian Organizations. And Congressman Cal Dooley is an ally of these organizations. After 10 years in Congress Cal Dooley has become too liberal.”

The fight for the Latino vote between Dooley and Rodriguez was mirrored at the national level to some extent by the fight between presidential candidates Al Gore and George Bush, both of whom actively sought the Latino vote. Gore spoke in Spanish at many campaign appearances, and both campaigns ran Spanish-language televisions advertisements (Abrajano, Nagler & Alvarez, 2002). The National Republican Committee focused on their pro-life position on abortion in an effort to attract Latino votes. Because abortion plays a prominent role in individual vote choice (Abramowitz, 1995; Adams, 1997; Alvarez and Nagler, 1995, 1998) and because Latinos are Catholic and tend to be ideologically conservative (Alvarez and Bedolla, 2002; Alvarez and Nagler, 1999; de la Garza et al., 1992), this was seen as a strategy which would lead to more Latino support for Bush. However, Abrajano, Nagler and Alvarez (2002) have shown that the strategy was not effective. Latinos tend to be conservative on social issues, but support government sponsored policies even if that means higher taxes (Alvarez and Nagler, 1999; de la Garza et al., 1992). Other issues, such as the economy, public safety, and education, are more salient to the La-
tino public, perhaps because they tend to be of lower socioeconomic status and do not have the “luxury” of basing their vote choice on social issues.

Interviews

Preliminary work in the 20th district led us to believe that Latino voters would initially be receptive to the Rodriguez candidacy, but that they would be less supportive when they learned his partisanship. Short interviews were conducted in the summer and fall of 2000 with 75 Latinos in the cities of Avenal and Stratford. These are small largely-Latino farming towns. Avenal is a city of 14,674 people, 65.9% of whom are Latino; Stratford has a population of 1,264, 75.9% of whom are Latino. Respondents were chosen randomly from visitors to a local supermarket and gasoline station. The interviews constitute a convenience sample, and the respondents are not representative of Latinos in the Congressional district, which also includes the large cities of Fresno and Bakersfield. However, we also expected that this population would be less likely to be aware of the Rodriguez candidacy and his partisanship, allowing us to control the introduction of that information and observe the results on individual voter’s opinions. This expectation was well met, as respondents did not know until informed by us that Rodriguez was running as a Republican.

Most respondents said that they felt Latinos were underrepresented in politics, even when they knew that the Lieutenant Governor of the State, Cruz Bustamante, is Latino. One respondent noted, “Having one or a few Latinos in powerful government positions is a good step for Latinos, but when you compare that in terms of population percentages, we are far behind.” More importantly, all of the respondents said that they would vote to elect a Latino in the fall elections, and initially said that they supported Rich Rodriguez over Cal Dooley. However, when informed that Rodriguez was running as a Republican, most withdrew their initial statement of support, saying they were not interested in voting for a Latino that was part of the Republican Party, or that they would only vote for a Latino if he was running as a Democrat because Republicans did not represent their beliefs. In other words, while in the absence of partisan information Latinos were motivated by ethnic cues, after partisan information was available they tended to use partisanship rather than ethnicity to choose their preferred candidate. Interview comments revealed a definite partisan bias against the Republican Party based on perceived treatment of immigrants and minorities. Latinos in
the 20th district associate the Republican Party with Proposition 187 and with Former Republican Governor Pete Wilson, and they believe that the party is anti-Latino. Some comments were:

“[Democrats] are more tolerant about immigrant issues than Republicans.”
–female naturalized Mexican-American

“Democrats are more interested in issues affecting the Latino community. Republicans are against immigrants—especially Wilson.”
–male naturalized Mexican-American

“Democrats are more interested in minority issues.”
–female naturalized Mexican-American

“Republicans have a long history of being against Latinos and minorities.”
–male naturalized Mexican-American

“The Republicans hate Mexicans and Latinos.”
–female naturalized Mexican-American

While Latinos in the 20th district were interested in more Latino political representation and were personally interested in supporting Latino candidates, they did not value ethnicity more than partisanship. Latino voters are interested in candidates who will help Latinos, and in 2000 the Democratic Party was seen as the party most likely to do so.

Two days before the election, on November 5, another set of short interviews with 18 registered Latino voters was conducted outside of a local supermarket. The interviewer did not mention the partisanship of the two candidates, but many respondents said that they were more interested in voting for the better candidate than for a Latino. Latino voters seemed to have heard and adopted messages from the Dooley campaign and the California Democratic Committee. Several voters echoed advertising themes in their comments. For example, one woman, a 29-year old naturalized Mexican-American, said that she was going to vote for Dooley because she had heard on television that Rodriguez was supporting Wilson. Some other examples are:

“[Rodriguez] should not have run yet. He doesn’t have a lot of experience.”
–51-year-old native-born female

“He escuchado que no defiende a César Chávez [I have heard that he (Rodriguez) doesn’t defend César Chávez].”
–38-year-old naturalized female
“Rodriguez doesn’t know what he’s talking about.”
–37-year-old native-born male

On the other hand, a few respondents said that they were planning to vote for Rodriguez because of his ethnicity. One, a 42-year-old native-born male, said that Rodriguez would do more for the Latino community because of his ethnicity. Another respondent, an over-40 native-born female, commented simply, “As a Latino I would like to see more Latinos in office.”

Public Opinion Polls

We looked at various public opinion polls to track support for Rodriguez among likely Latino voters. All of the available poll data that distinguish Latino respondents from non-Latino respondents, however, are from surveys that identify the partisanship of the candidates. In other words, there is no record of Latino opinion of the Rodriguez candidacy–aside from our informal interviews–which might be used to separate out support based on his ethnicity from support based on his political party. What the polls do confirm is that Latino support for Rodriguez was never very strong.

Tracking polls conducted on behalf of the Dooley campaign by Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin and Associates distinguish between Latino and non-Latino respondents, yielding valuable information about the pre-election preferences of area Latinos. The question wording specifically primed respondents about the candidates’ partisan affiliations:

If the general election for your member of Congress were held today and the candidates were Cal Dooley, farmer/Congressman and Democrat, Rich Rodriguez, T.V. news anchor and Republican, Arnold Kriegbaum, Spanish Teacher and Libertarian, and Walter Kenneth Ruehlig, Educator and Natural Law Party, for whom would you vote?

About two months before the election (August 27-31, 2000), 500 registered voters were surveyed, including 244 Latinos. Overall, 45% of respondents said that they were planning to vote for Dooley or were leaning towards Dooley, while 39% of respondents were planning to vote for Rodriguez or were leaning towards Rodriguez. Of Anglos, 34% were supporters of Dooley, while 50% supported Rodriguez. Among Latinos, 57% supported Dooley and 24% supported Rodriguez.
A mid-September survey of the 20th district commissioned by the Fresno Bee found that Rodriguez was leading Dooley 42.4 to 38.3%, a difference well within the poll’s margin of error of 4.9% (Fresno Bee, 9/26/00). The survey did not specify the political partisanship of each of the candidates, but unfortunately it did not track the ethnicity of respondents. The Bee poll also found that Rodriguez did not have the name recognition for which the Republican Party might have hoped. As noted above, part of this is due to the fact that the television station for which Rodriguez had been news anchor does not serve the entire Congressional district.

A second Dooley campaign poll was conducted three weeks before the election (October 15-16, 2000). 400 registered voters were surveyed, including 112 Latinos. Overall, 44% of voters said they supported Dooley, while 38% preferred Rodriguez. Of Anglos, 40% supported Dooley and 44% supported Rodriguez. Among Latinos, 55% were Dooley supporters and 23% were for Rodriguez. A second Bee poll conducted Oct. 25-Nov. 1 found that the two candidates were separated by only two percentage points of support, but that among Latinos support for Dooley had increased to 60% (Fresno Bee, 11/3/00).

Just prior to the election, we conducted an independent telephone survey of Latino registered voters, using random-digit telephone numbers for exchanges that fall in the 20th district. Interviewing was conducted by bilingual undergraduate students, using the Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) system. Interviews were conducted from October 18, 2000-November 5, 2000. A total of 107 interviews were completed. The average respondent was 37 years old, with 10 years of education and an annual family income of between $30,000 and $39,999; 91% of respondents were Mexican-American; 22.4% were naturalized citizens and 77.6% were native-born citizens; 37.4% were male and 62.6% were female.

Respondents were asked two questions about the Dooley-Rodriguez race. The first question asked, “For whom are you planning to vote for U.S. House of Representatives, Cal Dooley or Rich Rodriguez?” No mention was made of partisanship. In response to this item, 48.6% of respondents said they planned to vote for Dooley, 17.1% said they planned to vote for Rodriguez, and 30.5% were undecided. A second item asked, “As you may know, Rich Rodriguez is running as a Republican. Does this make you more likely to vote for him, less likely to vote for him, or does it not matter to you?” In response to this item, 18.1% of respondents said it made them more likely to vote for Rodriguez, 21.0% of respondents said it made them less likely to vote for Rodriguez, and 48.6% said it didn’t matter. Unfortunately, there are not enough re-
responses to determine whether those who initially said that they planned to vote for Rodriguez were less likely to support him based on his political partisanship. Of 18 Rodriguez supporters who answered the second item, five said that they were more likely to vote for him, two said that they were less likely to vote for him, and nine said that it didn’t matter.

More detailed survey results are shown in Table 1. Although many respondents declined to choose either of the two candidates, Dooley leads Rodriguez in all categories, including not only Democrats and liberals, as might be expected, but also among Republicans and conservatives. Naturalized citizens were more likely to prefer Dooley than were native-born citizens, and women more than men. There was no discernable difference in candidate preferences between those who spoke mostly English or mostly Spanish at home. While these differences are suggestive, none of them are statistically significant.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 1. Fresno Latino Survey Results</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dooley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native-born citizens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naturalized citizens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republicans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberalsa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English-dominant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fully bilingual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish-dominant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Survey of 20th District Latinos, conducted by the author 10/18/00-11/5/00. N = 107. None of the differences are statistically significant. aQuestion wording for this survey item was, “Generally, how would you describe your views on most political matters—do you think of yourself as liberal, moderate, or conservative?”
Statistical analysis of the survey data illustrates the important role played by partisanship in the election. Of Latinos who claimed to be Republicans or independents leaning towards the Republican Party, 60% said that they planned to vote for Rodriguez. Of Latinos who claimed to be Democrats or who leaned towards the Democratic Party, 72% said that they planned to vote for Cal Dooley. In a logistic regression analysis controlling for age, education and income, political partisanship is still a large and statistically significant predictor of vote preference (Table 2).

Results from all available surveys are displayed in Table 3. There is a clear pattern when looking at responses from all registered voters, and a distinctly different pattern among responses from Latinos. For the general population, the race was very close, with the percentage point difference between the two candidates falling well within the margins of error of the various surveys. For Latinos, the preference for Dooley is clear and consistent, with Dooley receiving more than 30 percentage points more support than his Mexican-American challenger in almost every survey.

**DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

A number of studies have shown that Latinos prefer to vote for Latino candidates, but in California’s 20th Congressional District in 2000, La-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>(s.e.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Partisanship</td>
<td>-.331*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>.179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>-.082</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-squared</td>
<td>.160</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: *p ≤ .05. The dependent variable, “Vote for Congress,” is coded 1 = Dooley, 2 = Rodriguez. The question wording was, “For whom are you planning to vote for U.S. House of Representatives, Cal Dooley or Rich Rodriguez?” (No information about the candidates’ partisanship had yet been given to respondents.) Partisanship is coded 1 = strong Republican to 7 = strong Democrat.
Source: Survey of 20th District Latinos, conducted by the author 10/18/00-11/5/00. N = 107.
tino voters overwhelmingly chose not to do so because the Latino candidate available was running as a Republican. In the wake of the Wilson gubernatorial administration of 1990-1998, California Latino voters prefer the Democratic Party. The administration’s support for anti-Latino measures, most notably Proposition 187, reasserted their identities as members of an oppressed and discriminated against ethnic group, but to an even greater degree it strengthened their identities as Democrats. Six years later, the lingering negative reputation of the Republican Party was too great for Rodriguez to overcome.

This conclusion is supported by multiple sources and types of data. Although the small sample size and non-random convenience sampling aspect of the interviews make them a heuristic, they are still a powerful one for dissecting the results of the Dooley-Rodriguez race. The sample size for the independent survey is also quite small. However, that both of these independent sources of data, as well as others utilized in this study, point to the same conclusion, mitigates the weakness of each individual source. While each on its own might not be sufficient grounds to make these conclusions, that multiple types of data support the same conclusion makes for a stronger case.

In personal interviews conducted a year after the election, both candidates acknowledged Wilson’s legacy. “They’re still talking about [Proposition] 187 in Mexico,” Rodriguez said. “Until the day Pete Wilson dies I don’t think they’re gonna forget.”4 Dooley noted that “There’s still a Pete Wilson hangover among Latinos in California. The Republicans re-

### TABLE 3. Dooley-Rodriguez Poll and Election Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Dooley All Respondents/Voters</th>
<th>Rodriguez All Respondents/Voters</th>
<th>Latino Respondents/Voters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aug. 27-31</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept. 13-20</td>
<td>42.4</td>
<td>38.3</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct. 15-16</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct. 18-Nov. 5</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>48.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct. 25-Nov. 1</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election Day</td>
<td>52.4</td>
<td>45.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ally haven’t done a good job of overcoming that to date.” Rodriguez said it was an uphill battle running as a Republican. “I’ve been a Republican all my life, [but] some people look at me and say, ‘Oh, he’s one of those who’s forgotten where he came from.’”

Which group membership, and therefore which voting cue, will be more salient for voters depends on the context of the electoral contest. “Group identifications take time and effort to build, but their relevance to the world of politics can change rapidly, practically overnight” (Kinder, 1998: 840, emphasis in original). In California in 2000, memories of 1994 and the Republican Party’s role in that year’s attacks on Latinos were on the minds of Latino voters. Although the anti-Latino mood of the proposition reignited their ethnic group identity, the extremely partisan nature of the measure, combined with the natural predominance of partisanship in determining vote choice, combined to cause their identities as members of the Democratic Party to be more salient than their identities as members of an ethnic group. In fact, the two were intertwined, in that for many Latinos in 2000 it was not even considered legitimate for a Latino to be a Republican. As has been found by Cain and Kiewiet (1984) and Graves and Lee (2000), ethnicity influenced partisanship, which in turn influenced vote choice, but there was little direct impact of ethnicity on the vote.

Despite the saliency of ethnicity, partisanship remains a more powerful predictor of vote choice for California Latinos. They remember the anti-Latino, anti-immigrant measures supported by former Republican Governor Pete Wilson. Until that legacy fades, Mexican-American voters in California will continue to be more likely to vote for Anglo Democrats than for Latino Republicans. Although Dooley probably benefited from his incumbency, the strength of the Latino Democratic vote and the vehemence with which local Latinos continue to condemn the Republican Party suggest that a Latino Republican would be unable to win much support from Latino voters even for an open seat.

This is not to say that ethnic group identification can never predominate in vote choice calculations. The case of the 1996 mayoral election in Dade County seems to represent an important counterexample to the Dooley-Rodriguez case. The mayoral election was officially nonpartisan, but Hill (1997) claims that campaign advertising (direct mail and broadcast media advertisements) effectively communicated the partisanship of the candidates to the public. However, it is possible that Hill overestimates the degree to which voters in that election were aware of the partisan affiliations of the candidates. Hill offers no evidence that these messages were heard or absorbed by voters. If voters were not ac-
tually aware of the partisanship of the candidates, then they likely relied on race and ethnic group membership alone to make their vote choices, and the results do not contradict those of this study. On the other hand, it is possible that voters were aware of the competing vote cues presented to them in the mayoral race, but that the political context of South Florida at the time was one in which ethnicity was more salient than partisanship. While in Central California in 2000 the electoral context was defined by the partisan nature of Proposition 187, in Dade County ethnic bloc voting has dominated since the early 1980s (Moreno and Rae, 1992; Moreno and Warren, 1996).

The salience of different issues to different populations affects vote choice and election outcomes. Proposition 187 still matters to Mexican-American voters in California, but not to Cuban-American voters in Florida. Similarly, the strong anti-Communist stance of the Republican Party is salient to Latino voters in Florida, many of whom are Cuban-American, but not to Latino voters in California, who are overwhelmingly Mexican-American.

The larger conclusion to be drawn is that when citizens are faced with competing vote cues prompted by their membership in various social groups, context is likely to determine which group membership is more salient. In California, the salience of partisanship may fade over time as memories of Proposition 187 and Pete Wilson are forgotten. Future research is needed to determine whether the Dooley-Rodriguez case was an anomaly or an example of the rule, and whether Latinos in other elections are similarly willing to choose partisanship over ethnicity. Republicans have been recruiting Latinos to run for various offices more frequently in recent years, hoping to attract Latino votes. This will provide more opportunities to study the effect of competing group membership voting cues, and should allow researchers to develop more definitive answers about how Latino voters resolve such conflicts.

NOTES

1. However, these analyses may be overestimating the responsiveness of party identification, see Green and Palmquist, 1990; Schickler and Green, 1993-1994.
2. The author thanks Enia León for her excellent help in conducting these interviews.
3. The author thanks Teresa Plascencia from Cal Dooley’s office for sharing this survey data.
4. Personal interview, 10/2/01.
5. Personal interview, 12/10/01.
REFERENCES


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