LATINO POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT:

A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF VOTER

INFORMATION SEEKING, POLITICAL OPINIONS,

AND INTENDED VOTING BEHAVIORS

By

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Abstract: This study analyzes how media coverage and interpersonal communication affect U.S. born Latinos and Latino immigrants in their evaluation of political issues and candidates. It employs the agenda-function of the media and the two-step flow of communication theory as primary evaluation frameworks. The researcher conducted in-depth interviews with U.S. born Latinos and Latino immigrants who have voted in at least one election to establish themes in terms of media consumption, language of media coverage and interpersonal communication. Respondents were divided into two tiers according to their level of political activity: more politically active and less politically active. Such aspects were analyzed in order to establish their influence on the respondents' perceptions about political issues and candidates, especially during a political campaign. The researcher found that the Internet and social media served as primary sources of information for respondents. More politically active respondents were likely to seek out information from various media sources online about political issues and candidates. These respondents were also likely to share information found online with friends and family members on social media. Less politically active respondents were likely to rely on the information posted by friends and family members on social media to learn about political issues and candidates. They only actively searched for information related to specific issues that they considered salient, such as immigration or immigration reform. Such findings suggested that the two-step flow of communication theory prominently applied to how study respondents learned about political issues and candidates. Agenda setting's influence on respondents was limited to more politically active respondents conducted their online searches for political information.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Demographic changes have established the Latino population as the fastest-growing

minority group in the United States: "Latinos are expected to become a majority in California by

the mid-21st century and to form an even more sizable minority group in several key

battleground states" (Hale, Olsen & Franklin Fowler, 2009, p. 27). Despite this accelerated

growth, political participation among members of this group has been minimal (Hale, Olsen &

Franklin Fowler, 2009). Previous studies that have attempted to explain this phenomenon have

found that mediated messages have significantly influenced Latino voter turnout and political

participation. Accordingly, the election cycles in 2008 and 2012 systematically developed

outreach programs specifically targeting the Latino demographic. President Barack Obama's

"Latinos for Obama" program proved successful as 71% of Latino voters supported his

reelection in November (Heavey, 2012). Latino support for President Obama substantially

increased during the 2012 campaign, and it reached its highest point since the 72% record

support President Clinton reached during his 1996 candidacy (DeFrancesco Soto, 2012).

Conversely, presidential candidate Mitt Romney's efforts to reach the Latino electorate,

including his outreach program "Juntos con Romney," proved insufficient in the face of a

shifting electorate in which Latinos played a significant role (Juntos con Romney, 2012; Heavey,

2012). Such disconnect between the Republican candidate and the Latino demographic was due

in part to his campaign's inability to directly bring attention to voters' concerns, and a widening

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empathy gap that reinforced Latino voters' belief that the Republican Party did not care about them (Cillizza, 2013). These factors worked greatly to Romney's disadvantage, insofar as Latino voters made up 10% of the electorate that attended the polls in November 2012, up from 8% and 9% during the 2004 and 2008 election cycles, respectively (Pew Hispanic Center, 2012).

Aside from the fundamental differences between their campaigns, both Obama's and Romney's outreach programs attempted to increase Latino voter turnout by establishing their positions in some of the most prominent issues the Latino demographic has been involved with in the past. The candidates consequently emphasized immigration reform as one of their main points when addressing the demographic. Nevertheless, a *USA Today/Gallup* survey showed that Latino voters (both immigrants and first generation U.S.-born Latinos) established unemployment and health care as more prominent issues than immigration during the 2012 campaign (Saad, 2012).

This study will examine how media coverage and personal contacts affect U.S. born Latinos and Latino immigrants in their evaluation of political issues and candidates. This study will also explore whether the language spoken in media (Spanish versus English) impacts such evaluations. Through in-depth interviews, this study will inquire about mediated messaging exposure, and which issues the two groups consider the most salient. This study will also seek to understand whether the issues the audience identifies coincide with those that receive the most coverage from the media. As stated by Hale, Olsen and Franklin Fowler, "studies have shown that the media have the power to set the agenda… prime particular attitudes… increase citizen knowledge… and they may also affect cynicism and social capital" (Hale, Olsen & Fowler, 2009, p. 28). Thus, this study will analyze the relationship that exists between exposure to local media coverage of issues and candidates and Latino voters' attitudes toward such issues and

candidates, as well as their likelihood to participate in the election. Furthermore, this study inquires about the idea of the two-step flow of information that suggests voters often look to their more politically active peers to learn about issues and candidates as they develop their perceptions toward voting. Such relationships may be of particular importance among Latino immigrants and U.S.-born Latinos who have had minimal exposure and activity in local politics.

Justifications for this study include the limited amount of empirical research that has been conducted regarding the media's influence on shaping the Latino population's perceptions about certain issues, candidates, and the political process. Moreover, scarce research exists around the different messages presented through different Spanish- and English-speaking media, which has posed further challenges to achieving an understanding of how members of the Latino population develop perceptions about the political process. Developing further empirical research in this area has become essential, insofar as the Latino demographic continues to grow. Latinos have represented the fastest growing demographic in the country through the beginning of the 21st century and, as of 2004, they have passed African Americans as the largest minority in the U.S. (Hale, Olsen, Franklin Fowler, 2009). This growth has emphasized the importance of Latino voters' involvement in the political process, which has also prompted the development of programs within Obama and Romney's 2012 presidential campaigns. These programs have focused on the issues that have traditionally proven significant among Latino voters, including immigration. Such efforts have been developed in recent years, and limited research has been done on how they have affected media coverage of the issues to which Latino voters have attached salience.

The rest of this study will include a detailed review of previous studies that have examined (a) Latino voters' exposure to certain media; (b) the two-step flow of communication;

(c) studies of message effects; (d) the two-step flow of communication; and (e) how Latino voters have traditionally participated in the political process. It will also provide research questions and it will discuss the methodology that will be employed to conduct the study.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Latino immigration represents the emergence of a "new U.S. immigration paradigm" (McCombs, Shaw, & Weaver, 1997, p. 183). During the first decade of the 21st century, the number of Latinos in the U.S. nearly doubled, making up more than 16% of the U.S. population (Casellas & Ibarra, 2012). The Latino demographic is diversified and its members' experiences are often based upon sub-ethnic factors, such as political incorporation, national origin, and language differences (Casellas & Ibarra, 2012). This significant growth within the Latino population has spurred academic curiosity in terms of its members' involvement and influence in U.S. politics. Nevertheless, only limited examples of empirical research exist focusing on the agenda-setting function of both English- and Spanish-language media on defining voting behavior among Latino immigrants and first generation U.S.-born Latinos. The following section will include a review of literature about (a) the agenda-setting function of media; (b) the two-step flow of communication; (c) defining characteristics of the Latino demographic; (d) Latino involvement in U.S. politics; and (e) Spanish-language media coverage.

The Agenda-Setting Function of the Media

McCombs and Shaw (1972) developed the notion of the agenda-setting capacity of mass media. Their study of the 1968 presidential campaign attempted to show a correlation between the issues covered by mass media and the issues study participants identified as most prominent (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). They hypothesized that "the mass media set the agenda for each

political campaign, influencing the salience of attitudes toward the political issues" (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p. 177). The researchers found evidence showing that voters relied on mass media as primary sources of political information and that media coverage of issues helped to shape the voters' views in terms of issue salience.

Based on the limitations encountered by McCombs and Shaw during their seminal agenda-setting study, Yyengar and Reeves (1997) suggested modifications to the existing theoretical framework. They focused on the second dimension of agenda setting, which argued that issues possessed attributes that helped to paint pictures or create perceptions about those issues in the audience's mind (McCombs, Shaw, & Weaver, 1997). Thus, by designating what aspects of a certain issue to pay attention to, agenda setting at the attribute level can influence how members of the audience see an issue in its totality (McCombs, Shaw, & Weaver, 1997). For instance, during the latter part of the 20th century, coverage of political campaigns became increasingly concerned with the private lives of presidential candidates, subjecting them to such scrutiny that even minor indiscretions could have a damaging effect on electoral prospects (Yyengar & Reeves, 1997).

The agenda-setting framework has been used extensively to explain the effects of media on the U.S. polity at large. Nevertheless, assumptions from such analyses have often overlooked the cultural nuances that have become increasingly common among members of the news audience (McCombs, Shaw, & Weaver, 1997; Rodriguez, 1997). In particular, it could be argued that consumers of U.S. Latino-oriented news media (namely Spanish-language media) are exposed to different perceptions about the world and nation from those presented in mainstream media. This could be caused by the assumption that "ethnic media play a dual role,

simultaneously assisting in the adaptation to the majority society, and encouraging the distinctive identity of the ethnic community" (McCombs, Shaw, & Weaver, 1997, p. 183).

Agenda setting has also been used to evaluate media effects across different media. However, television news has been one of the most extensively analyzed forms of media for agenda-setting effects. Iyengar (1991) posited that television news effectively set the political agenda because issues and themes portrayed in the news become priorities for viewers. Television news has also been particularly effective in covering a myriad of issues during a limited time frame.

Ghanem and Wanta (2001) evaluated the possible agenda-setting effects in Spanish-language cable media. They utilized Spanish cable network Univision and its newscast, *Noticiero Univision,* in an attempt to find out whether Latinos were influenced by this network's news coverage of certain issues. The researchers posited that high reliance on media could accentuate agenda-setting effects (Ghanem & Wanta, 2001). They found that consumers learned about the importance of issues from Spanish cable news' coverage of those issues (Ghanem & Wanta).

Similar to previous agenda-setting research, Ghanem and Wanta's study faced limitations in establishing the strength and plausibility of the relationship between issue coverage and perceived issue salience. The researchers struggled particularly in terms of explaining whether Spanish cable newscasts were not, in fact, responsible for providing their Spanish-speaking viewers with coverage of issues with which audience members were concerned (Ghanem & Wanta, 2001). This reverse agenda-setting effect could be the product of news directors' perceptions of issues of public concern, thus disproving the theoretical framework proposed in previous studies (Ghanem & Wanta).

Prior studies of agenda setting have consistently suggested a significant relationship between media coverage of issues and the audience's attitude toward those issues. The question, however, remains about whether such relationship will also develop between Spanish-language news coverage and the Latino audience. Moreover, the agenda-setting function might also indicate a difference between issues covered by mainstream English-language television news and Spanish-language television news primarily targeting Latino immigrants.

The Two-Step Flow of Communication

Voters become familiar with issues and candidates during an election through their exposure to the media. However, in their study of the 1940 presidential elections in Erie County, Ohio, Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet (1968) suggested it was necessary to also look at the interaction between voters and the people with whom they discuss politics. The researchers provided that the more politically active individuals in a community often acted as mediators between the information offered by the media and the public. These mediators were called "opinion leaders" and they were continually exposed to the media and were able to transfer that information to others in their community: "On any average day, at least 10% more people participated in discussions about the election – either actively or passively – than listened to a major speech or read about campaign items in a newspaper" (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1968, pp. 150-151). In this regard, the researchers found that such political discussions were happening more often and especially common among the politically active and those who had yet to decide how to vote: "This suggests that ideas often flow from radio and print to the opinion leaders and from them to the less active sections of the population" (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1968, p. 151). They found that such conversations offered a casual opportunity for people who were less politically active to become exposed to varying arguments

about the candidates and the most important issues of the campaign. The researchers also found that less active voters became directly exposed to information from the media as a result of personal influence from others in their community. This means that efforts by the less active to find additional mediated information about issues and candidates often were the result of their political discussions with opinion leaders in their community.

The same research discovered that political discussions with opinion leaders provided undecided voters with face-to-face interaction and personal connection that the traditional media could not offer. In this regard, Yang and Stone (2009) argued, "interpersonal communication plays some role in the agenda-setting process" (p. 59). Thus, they explained that though media played a significant role in setting the agenda for political discussions of the most salient issues and candidates, the two-step flow of communication allowed for further dissemination of those messages as they moved through members of the news audience and others in the community.

Latino Immigrants and the Development of Group Identity

Masuoka (2008) defined the Latino demographic as a group comprising of individuals of different Latin American heritages and with diverse immigration experiences. Latino immigrants have mixed-race backgrounds that support national origin loyalties. Latinos face a significant disadvantage in terms of political participation: A large percentage of the voting-age population within this demographic is ineligible to vote (Casellas & Ibarra, 2012). In fact, approximately 37% of Latinos are immigrants and only about 29% of those Latinos are U.S. citizens (Casellas & Ibarra, 2012).

Once Latino immigrants arrive in the U.S., they join U.S. born Latinos in the panethnic group consciousness – a cultural identity that focuses on Latinos' shared culture, religion, and language (Masuoka, 2008). This encompassing panethnic unity among members of this

demographic becomes possible because, regardless of the essential differences that exist among Latinos, a sense of community based on shared cultural mores prevails. Latinos have also developed a racial group identity that distinguishes them from the White majority and other minority groups. This group consciousness has allowed Latinos to work together to address issues that affect them, such as immigration and immigration reform, and to exert their influence on the U.S. political process (Masuoka, 2008). Ultimately, racial identity is a significant aspect of Latino vote choice and political participation (Stokes-Brown, 2006).

In an attempt to establish how the Latino demographic differs from others in terms of media consumption, Subervi-Velez, Herrera, and Begay (1987) utilized a model developed by Brusco (1981). Brusco (1981) identified three "acculturation influence groups" divided members of the Latino demographic in terms of "linguistic, psychometric, and sociocultural indicators" (p. 190). Each group included a measure of language and cultural comfort individuals possessed (Subervi-Velez et al., 1987). For instance, the first group included Latinos who were more comfortable with the Spanish language and culture, and less comfortable with U.S. mainstream culture (Brusco, 1981). Accordingly, the second and third groups portrayed higher levels of comfort with the English language and higher acculturation (Brusco, 1981). Through their study, Subervi-Velez et al. (1987) found that mass media play a significant role in the development of Latino political life in the U.S. media help to create party affiliations and perceptions about issues among Latinos, thus becoming decisive factors for voting registration and behavior.

Latino Political Involvement

Partisanship has traditionally been an important predictor of the vote (Connaughton & Jarvis, 2004). Among Latinos, national origin has traditionally played an important role in defining party affiliation. It can influence an immigrant's political choices in the U.S. because it

acts as a marker of shared origin, history, and experiences in their host country (Masuoka, 2008). For instance, Masuoka stated that, according to the Latino National Political Survey (LNPS), Cubans defined themselves as Republican, while Mexicans and Puerto Ricans were found to be solidly Democratic. Further, Latinos who affiliated with the Democratic Party were generally likely to be male, attend church, and older than Latinos who became associated with other parties (Dutwin, Brodie, Herrmann, & Levin, 2005). Conversely, Dutwin et al. (2005) found that Latinos who supported the Republican Party were usually younger immigrants or U.S. born Latinos. Republican Latinos were more likely to hold traditional values, self-identify as Americans, and to keep the values of their country of origin.

Each election year, both the Republican and the Democratic Party seek support from the Latino population by associating themselves and their candidates with symbols, groups, or other factors that Latinos perceive in a favorable manner (Connaughton & Jarvis, 2004). Nevertheless, efforts by these parties have focused less on subethnic differences, such as national origin, and more on appealing to the sense of unity – or panethnic group consciousness – that is associated with Latinos (Connaughton & Jarvis, 2004).

Latinos' panethnic identity has provided political parties with opportunities to politically empower Latinos, and to form favorable attitudes toward casting their votes for their candidates. To get Latinos to become involved, political campaigns have utilized resources that help them connect with Latino voters (Michelson, 2005). Political participation has been deeply influenced by personal and social constructs within the Latino identity, as well as how much they are exposed to political messages (Stokes-Brown, 2006).

Ramakrishnan and Espenshade (2001) argued that it was important to think about the process of political participation as having at least two temporal dimensions: These dimensions

included, across time within the immigrant generation and across generations: "For example, researchers have typically found that earnings and English-language ability improve the longer immigrants live in the United States" (Ramakrishnan & Espenshade, 2001, p. 875). Besides the benefits of the length of time these immigrants spend in the U.S. for their participation in the political process, the researchers also found that Latino immigrants and U.S.-born Latinos possessed significant differences in terms of their fluency in English. This was especially true because "Foreign-born individuals frequently do not speak English as well as their native-born children, and second generation immigrants often retained some understanding of their parents' mother tongue" (p. 875). Furthermore, the researchers found that the longer Latino immigrants have resided in the U.S., the more they will be inclined to participate in politics.

Similarly, Ramakrishnan and Espenshade (2001) suggested that Latino immigrants' prior experience with repressive or democratic regimes could affect the immigrants' propensity to vote. This factor, the researchers argued, transcended generations as children of foreign-born citizens could have also been exposed to political activities or discussions regarding the previous political experience of their parents (Ramakrishnan & Espenshade, 2001). However, Highton and Burris (2002) argued that Latino immigrants, as well as first generation U.S. born Latinos, were more prone to vote because they tended to have a better understanding of politics and more contact with the mainstream political system.

Political participation is influenced by the personal and social constructs that form the Latino identity combined with exposure to issues (Stokes-Brown, 2006). Michelson (2005) suggested that to achieve the best results in terms of getting Latinos to become involved, political campaigns should utilize resources that are able to make a connection with Latino voters. The researcher argued that voting and political participation appeals have been more effective among

Latinos voters when those appeals are made by other Latinos, and others who affiliate with the same political party (Michelson).

Moreover, Barreto, Ramirez, and Woods (2005) found that issues also play a significant role in encouraging Latinos to become involved in the political process. The researchers argued that, regardless of the ever-increasing number of Latino youth who were eligible to vote – including nearly 5 million in 2000 – Latinos who became involved in politics tended to do so in times of when political issues directly affected them. The researchers established that Latinos who came into the electorate during politically contentious times continued to be interested in voting and encouraged others to participate (Barreto et al., 2005). Felix, Gonzalez, and Ramirez (2008) established that the immigrant rights protests in 2006 were an example of Latino involvement in politics as a response to a specific issue. They stated that the national anti-immigrant political environment encouraged Latino immigrants who were eligible to vote to seek out ways to participate in the political process (Felix et al., 2008).

However, Barreto, Collingwood, and Manzano (2010) posited the Latino polity has only started to become part of the focus of campaigns and other political efforts during the first decade of the 21st century. This was especially the case during the 2008 election, when presidential campaigns, media outlets, and advocacy groups, described Latinos as the most important voting bloc in the presidential election. Barreto et al. (2010) found a connection between Latinos being defined as such prominent interest group and Latinos' mobilization during the campaign and participation in the political process.

Spanish-Language Media and Issue Coverage

The growing availability of Spanish-language media has made information about issues and candidates readily available to the Latino electorate and has provided increased opportunities

for political involvement. "Spanish-language media is a new tool that is being used to encourage and help immigrants begin the process of political incorporation" (Felix et al., 2008, p. 632). Latino mobilization during the 2006 immigrant rights movement provided an example of the influence Spanish-language media possesses in defining political involvement. Felix et al. (2008) found Spanish-language television played an especially significant role, with more than 80% of people citing this medium as the primary source of information (Felix et al., 2008).

The increased availability of Spanish-language media has made political information significantly more available to Latinos than ever before. Hale, Olsen, and Franklin Fowler (2009) established that "Spanish-language media are of growing cultural importance to Latinos in the U.S." (p. 28). Therefore, Spanish-language media are very capable of influencing political attitudes of Latino consumers. Although Spanish-language television, in particular, is extremely important in helping Latinos to develop their political and cultural identities, Hale et al. (2009) also found that during election years, Spanish-language television stations aired less coverage of U.S. elections than English-language media. This finding suggested that even though Spanish-language television coverage helps to create political identities, it does not necessarily enhance Latino voters' voting behavior (Hale et al.). This might be related to the fact that election coverage is limited and efforts to directly expose members of the Latino audience to the political candidates and their positions on issues are also reduced (Hale et al.).

Abrajano and Panagopoulos (2011) provided a differentiation between Spanish- and English-language appeals to Latino voters. They found that more acculturated Latinos (immigrants and U.S. born Latinos alike) were more likely to respond to English-language media coverage and outreach. However, researchers found that both Spanish- and English-language appeals were able to boost Latino voter turnout and participation (Abrajano & Panagopoulos,

2011). Spanish-language appeals were more effective among less active voters and Latinos whose primary language was Spanish (Abrajano & Panagopoulos, 2011).

In terms of coverage, Abrajano and Singh (2008) found that Spanish-language media sources differed from mainstream media sources in their coverage of particular issues. For instance, "[a]lthough the motivations in the production of news are the same for Spanish and English-language news organizations, their distinct audiences lead them to discuss immigration in different ways" (Abrajano & Singh, 2008, p. 23). In this case, researchers found that Spanish-language media covered immigration in a more positive and extensive manner than their English-language counterparts. Abrajano and Singh (2008) also found Latinos' sources of information play an important role in explaining their attitudes toward immigration. Latinos who consume Spanish-language news are generally more aware of recent changes in immigration law and other initiatives and to have a more positive perspective toward illegal immigration than Latinos who mainly consume English-language news (Abrajano & Singh, 2008).

Abrajano and Singh (2008) also suggested that an immigrant's exposure to either Spanish or English-language media would help determine their position about immigration. In an environment where immigration is at the forefront of political discussion, a mediated bias could affect how Latino voters participate and which political candidates they support (Abrajano & Singh, 2008). Monolingual Latinos (who only speak Spanish or English) may be receiving a different picture of immigration than bilingual Latinos. Latinos who only watch Spanish-language television are likely to be exposed to a more positive view of immigration, whereas Latinos who depend on English news may be encouraged to view immigration more negatively (Abrajano & Singh, 2008).

Kerevel (2011) argued that the language in which media are consumed might also affect how Latinos view U.S. politics. The researcher stated that due to the diverging goals of Spanish vis-à-vis English media, Spanish-language media might focus on more ethnically important issues and frame politics in ways that emphasize common interests with Latinos. Kerevel provided that Spanish broadcasts included more coverage of local, national, and international stories, and they dedicated much of their focus to coverage of immigration. This coverage has helped Latinos to develop their public opinion and to further establish a group consciousness around the similarities they share.

Prior studies have suggested media help to set the agenda during presidential campaigns. These studies have also provided that both Spanish- and English-language media help to shape the audience's perception in regard to the presidential campaigns and the political process. This research will further explore the effects issue coverage by Spanish- and English-language media on Latino immigrants who are eligible to vote as well as on Latinos who were born in the U.S. The study will also seek to identify what influence individuals wield in shaping voting decisions made by U.S. born Latinos and Latino immigrants. It will provide information about the effects of such coverage and political information portrayed by the media on Latino voting behavior.

Research Questions

Past literature has suggested media coverage of issues and candidates has played an important role in determining how audience members participate in the political process. Previous studies have also suggested that language of the media coverage (English versus Spanish) influences how Latino immigrants and U.S. born Latinos learn and develop perceptions about issues and candidates. Accordingly, the first two research questions will attempt to explain how exposure to certain media and how media language defines Latino voters' political activity:

RQ$_1$: What role does Latino voters' level of political activity play in their information

seeking efforts to learn about political issues and candidates?

RQ$_2$: What role do media play in forming Latino voters' opinions about political issues

and candidates?

RQ$_3$: What role does media language play in forming Latino voters' engagement in

politics?

In the 2000s, Latino immigrants and U.S. born Latinos emerged as an essential

demographic in the U.S. electorate insofar as their participation in each election cycle, both

locally and nationally, had continuously increased. Because of the growing presence of Latino

voters in the electorate, their participation in the political process may be influenced by other

factors besides media coverage of issues and candidates. In this regard, it seems plausible that a

relationship between such coverage and personal influences may exist in defining Latino voters'

development of perceptions and political participation. Therefore, the following research

questions will inquire about the plausible relationship between an agenda-setting function of the

media and the two-step flow of communication, as suggested by Yang and Stone (2009), where

the media and personal influences act jointly to define voters' political participation.

RQ$_{4a}$: What role does media coverage play in the level of engagement of Latino voters

during elections?

RQ$_{4b}$: What role does interpersonal communication play in the level of engagement of

Latino voters during elections?

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This study examined how media coverage and personal contacts affect U.S. born Latinos and Latino immigrants in their evaluation of political issues and candidates. This study also explored whether the language used in media (Spanish versus English) impacts such evaluations. The analysis employed in-depth interviews during which participants responded to a predefined series of questions in regard to media exposure, issue salience, personal influences, and voting. It utilized a similar interview framework to the one McCombs and Shaw (1972) employed during their study of agenda setting. These interviews evaluated how the media they consume and their relationships with others in the community affected their perceptions and political participation. Viewership of Spanish- versus English-language media might provide viewers with different levels of awareness about political candidates, issues, and the political process during an election cycle. This study's qualitative framework also allowed further examination of the respondents' perceptions and it provided an opportunity to explore other personal cues, such as body language, which would be difficult to obtain otherwise.

Sample

A purposive sample of 20 individuals included U.S. naturalized Latino immigrants who are registered to vote and U.S. born Latinos who reside within an urban area of a south central U.S. state. The sample included males and females, between 20 and 57 years of age, and who have participated in voting in at least one past election in the United States. Table 1 offers more a

detailed description of study respondents' demographic information. Subjects were identified

through local non-profit organizations, such as the Young Women's Christian Organization

Multicultural Center, as well as through word of mouth recommendations and other local

organizations.

Table 1: Study Respondents' Demographic Information

Subject	Gender	Age	Native Country	Dominant Language	Years in the U.S.
Subject 1	Female	43	Venezuela	Spanish	10 years
Subject 2	Male	38	Venezuela	Spanish	10 years
Subject 3	Female	54	United States	English	54 years
Subject 4	Male	57	United States	Spanish	57 years
Subject 5	Female	48	Ecuador	Spanish	31 years
Subject 6	Female	21	United States	Spanish	21 years
Subject 7	Female	48	Venezuela	Spanish	8 years
Subject 8	Female	28	United States	English	28 years
Subject 9	Male	24	Mexico	Spanish	21 years
Subject 10	Female	56	Puerto Rico	Spanish	33 years
Subject 11	Female	50	United States	English	50 years
Subject 12	Male	39	Peru	Spanish	20 years
Subject 13	Female	20	United States	English	20 years
Subject 14	Female	20	United States	Spanish	20 years
Subject 15	Female	20	United States	Spanish	20 years
Subject 16	Male	30	United States	English	30 years
Subject 17	Female	21	United States	English	21 years
Subject 18	Male	21	United States	English	21 years
Subject 19	Male	48	Venezuela	Spanish	31 years
Subject 20	Male	39	Colombia	Spanish	10 years

Instrument

The researcher submitted a questionnaire protocol to the Institutional Review Board for

approval (see Appendix A) along with a consent form outlining implications of respondents'

participation as well as the purpose of the study (see Appendix B) and text from a recruiting

email to local organizations and prospective study participants (see Appendix C). The consent

form also explained how the respondents' rights would be protected. It served as a way to assure

respondents that their information remained private throughout their participation and through the reporting of results as part of the analysis. The researcher asked participants to sign the consent form and informed them that their participation in the study was voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

The questionnaire protocol included eight open-ended questions. These questions inquired about (a) media exposure; (b) Spanish- versus English-language media consumption; (c) perceptions of coverage of issues and candidates in media; (d) their reliance on their peers and other leaders in the community to learn about issues and candidates during elections; and (e) their voting intentions in an upcoming local election. The researcher also gathered demographic information from a section at the end of the questionnaire including (a) age, and (b) level of political activity.

Procedures

Face-to-face interviews occurred over three weeks in a study room setting on the city campus of a state university. Each interview took approximately 30 minutes to complete. Prior to each interview, the researcher informed participants about the purpose and implications of the study. Participants were asked to sign the consent form. The researcher also informed participants that a voice recorder would be utilized to document their responses during the interview. The researcher also informed participants that recorded materials would be used to transcribe responses and to conduct the analysis.

The researcher went through the questionnaire protocol, which included eight open-ended questions, and asked any necessary follow-up questions according to the participants' responses. Once all questions from the questionnaire protocol and follow-up questions were completed, the researcher informed the respondent his or her participation was complete.

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Data Analysis

All responses were collected and transcribed by the researcher. Once transcribed, the researcher reviewed such responses to identify emerging themes that would help answer the study's research questions. Because of the multicultural nature of this study, a few interviews occurred in Spanish. In such cases, the researcher, who is fluent in Spanish, transcribed and translated all responses.

The researcher followed McCracken's (1988) framework in order to identify the main themes from the interviews. As indicated in McCracken's work, the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The analysis included categories, relationships and themes that allowed the researcher to recognize the themes that existed among respondents to this study.

Further, the researcher applied the five-stage process recommended by McCracken in order to compartmentalize such themes moving from the particular to the general aspects of such themes (1988). Following McCracken's process of analysis, the researcher moved from the particular to the general. The first two stages concerned a specific analysis of respondents' utterances in the transcripts and specific cultural cues from the interviews to assess specific relationships between the two. Moreover, the following stages focused in conducting general analyses of the information that resulted from the two first stages. Subsequently, the researcher began comparing these general observations and finally identified themes that could be applied in a final analysis of the information from study interviews (McCracken, 1988).

Verification and Credibility

According to standards offered by Berg (2009), conclusions drawn from the patterns found in this study have been verified to assure their existence and their credibility within the research framework. In this regard, the researcher reevaluated all of the steps followed through

the research process to ensure results from the data analysis fulfill the purpose of this research. The researcher searched for clarity in the way all steps of the research were articulated as part of the reporting process. This ensured all aspects of this qualitative analysis are well documented as a process, as well as it making plausible for other researchers to evaluate and replicate this study's analysis strategies (Berg, 2009). Verification was achieved through member checks, where subjects were contacted and asked to verify what was said and whether the researcher has factually presented the subject's opinions.

In regard to credibility, such qualitative research offered detailed descriptions, including the exact words of the subjects in order to provide better understanding for those reading the texts (Cresswell, 1997).

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Based on the interviews conducted, several significant themes were identified. First, respondents' level of political activity played a role in their search for information about political candidates and issues. The data suggested respondents fell into two tiers when it came to level of activity: more politically active and less politically active. More politically active respondents were identified as those who consistently identified that they participated in the political process by voting, actively seeking information from a variety of sources, and conducting research or contacting politicians. On the other hand, less politically active respondents were identified as those participants who would vote but were less interested in seeking information about candidates and issues from various sources.

Second, the Internet, and social media in particular, played essential roles in defining participants' information-seeking efforts in terms of political issues and candidates. Social networking sites also served as important forums for information distribution, exposure to differing opinions and for developing and participating in political discussions.

Third, respondents tended to actively seek information about specific issues they considered salient, such as immigration and immigration reform. Further, participants were likely to seek information from sources in the media regardless of media coverage language (English versus Spanish) and often preferred English-language media in order to learn about political issues and candidates that were a part of U.S. politics.

Fourth, respondents' participation in political discussions with friends and family members was an important part of their political perceptions development process. Such discussions happened in person and increasingly on social media. Finally, participants' exposure to media coverage in combination with their participation in political discussions with friends and family were pivotal in their defining their political decisions and ultimately their voting behavior.

Role of Media and Political Activity

RQ₁ inquired about the role of media in forming Latino votes' opinions about political issues and candidates. A majority of respondents suggested their level of activity was limited to voting in presidential elections and some established they also voted in local elections. A few respondents provided they were very active in local politics but had not been involved in politics at the national level.

Respondents were asked about their media preferences. Most cited the Internet, particularly social media networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, as their primary sources of political information. A majority of respondents provided they often read political information posted on such sites by their friends, politicians whose pages they liked or whom they followed, as well as traditional media outlets that had a presence on social networking sites. In this regard, social media has quickly become a primary source of political information for many in this study. Politically active and inactive respondents alike cited convenience and easy access as the main reasons for their consumption of political information through social media. For example, Subject 9 (Male, 24) a Latino immigrant who has been highly involved in politics at the local level stated he mostly visited websites of local newspapers and Facebook to find out about candidates and issues in the community. He followed what his friends posted on Facebook

because it helped him to see various political viewpoints and form his opinions from that information. He provided the following example of how this process worked for him:

So, say a friend posts something on their Facebook, and it shows up on my feed. I'll probably click on that, read it, and then if another friend posts something negative about said issue, I'll read that. And then usually that's when I'll go and look for a third article of my own, to see what's really going on, or if I need further help from that, that's usually how. But it's usually the beginning; it's never really a firm decision because I don't trust my friends to make my political decisions. Initial stages of choosing a side, I guess.

In this regard, Subject 9 used social media as an essential aspect of his opinion formation process. This was the case for many respondents who sought information on social media about candidates and issues. However, because Subject 9 was interested and involved in politics, his search for political information went beyond social media and he was able to use local newspapers' websites and other online media sources to further his understanding and to form his political opinions.

Subject 6 (Female, 21) is a first generation U.S. born Latino. Though her political participation has been limited to voting, she said she often used social media to find out about candidates and issues: "A lot of people post their opinions and... I want to see everyone's side and which one I agree with." Similarly, Subject 14 (Female, 20) provided that social media offered easy and portable access to information: "It's not like I have to just sit at home... But I can be... waiting for somebody at the library, having lunch, and at the same time just reading

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what's going on." For these respondents, and other participants with similar levels of political activity, social media has become an important source of political information through what others around them publish online. In this regard, social media acted as an important step in the opinion formation process by enabling access to various sources of media information in one place.

The Internet, and especially social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter, has also allowed those who are politically active to become involved in the information sharing process. Respondents who were more involved in politics also provided that they were more likely to post political information from media websites onto their profiles on social media in an attempt to share their positions on issues and candidates with those who had access to their online profiles. For example, Subject 9 stated he often posted links to articles and other information on his Facebook profile as a public announcement of his position on certain topics. He noted he shared such information in order to get people reading and thinking about the political environment in which they were: "My Facebook acts as a forum. And actually, a lot of times, when I post political stuff, my friends will get into, like [sic], really long debates." In this regard, Subject 9 acted as a facilitator of information from the media that allowed others to participate in public debates about issues and candidates on Facebook.

On the other hand, a few respondents who were less involved in politics expressed they were often on the receiving end of such posts by their friends on social media. Subject 18 (Male, 21) provided he frequently looked at political content from links to articles posted by his friends on Facebook: "I just come across it like, 'Maybe I should see that and find out what's going on' … During the [presidential election] it was all on Facebook. Someone posted this and someone posted that, so whenever I had time, I looked through the videos and saw what was going on." In

this regard, Subject 18 received mediated information through Facebook from a variety of sources, which provided him with a starting point to form his opinion about candidates and issues that were interesting to him during the presidential election in 2012.

Media Use and Salient Issues

Most respondents' information seeking efforts on media, both traditional and social media, related to specific issues they considered as salient. Subject 2 (Male, 38) became a U.S. citizen in 2010 and voted for the first time during the presidential election in 2012. Like many respondents, Subject 2 provided he followed media coverage about immigration. He also followed coverage about equality, health care reform, the economy and women's rights. Subject 2 actively followed both political issues and candidates. He frequently sought information from Internet sources, namely from the *New York Times*, CNN and MSNBC's websites. He also said he used social media, namely Facebook and Twitter, to find information about politics. He follows MNSBC and CNN on Twitter. Subject 2 explained he preferred using the Internet as his main source of political information because it provided easy access to relevant information in a timely manner. His activity on social media allowed him to access myriad sources of political information quickly and conveniently. This, according to Subject 2, was particularly the case during the 2012 election cycle: "If I know there is an election I follow the news but if I'm … interested in a particular candidate I go to their website and try to research what their background is and all that." This statement reflected on the relationship between this respondent's level of activity in politics and his ability and willingness to find information related to his political interests, including specific issues and candidates, and particularly during an election.

Other respondents who were less politically active also expressed interest in following specific issues (namely immigration) but stated their efforts to find such information was often

limited to media content that was linked to their friends' profiles on social media. For instance, Subject 14 followed information about the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act: "I … want the DREAM Act for personal reasons, and … just because I think it would benefit the country. Because I have friends who are really involved in politics… They can give you different views because they're listening… looking for this information." In this regard, Subject 14's friends who were more involved in politics provided access, through social media, to mediated information about a specific issue, which in turn increased her knowledge of the issue as she further developed her perception of the debate.

Such relationships between level of activity and seeking media sources for political information were also observed at the local level. Subject 8 (Female, 28) is another first generation U.S. born Latino. She considered herself as being highly active in local politics: "I keep up to date and I'm actually involved with city councilors and different groups… in the community… I've talked to [state] representatives that have them getting involved with some groups that I'm in." Therefore, Subject 8 focused her political involvement to issues and candidates that related to her personal and professional interests at a local and state level.

In terms of media preference, Subject 8 also preferred the Internet. She looked at the different representatives and candidates' profiles to learn about their political platforms. She said she preferred online content because it offered less biased information than television news. She looked at "whatever [she could] find on different candidates when it comes close to election time." She used Google to conduct searches of candidates' sites and other sources that offered both positive and negative perspectives about them. Subject 8 also used Facebook to find political information:

I'm Facebook friends with political figures in [the state]. I read

how they're being involved in the community. I read what issues

they're working on right now. And in doing so I can kind of

pinpoint which politicians I would like to engage with and bring

them in to become more involved in our communities in places

where I am.

In this regard, Subject 8 used social media to establish a direct connection with candidates, while also accessing immediate and relevant information about them and issues relevant to their position in the community. Moreover, subject 8 reinforced the notion of the easy access to information via the Internet. "If I want to look at certain topics I can just quick and easy reference and look to see who says what." Thus, for Subject 8, and many of the respondents, convenience and accessibility of political information continued to present itself as an important theme in supporting their political involvement and in forming their perceptions about the political process.

Some of these respondents referred to television, namely national and local cable networks, to form their perceptions about issues and candidates during an election. For instance, Subject 5 (Female, 48) indicated she preferred television news but seldom watched it because she had limited time to do so. She preferred a few local networks affiliates, such as CBS and NBC, and sometimes watched CNN. She stated television served as a way for her to relieve stress after she arrived home from work. "I like to hear the news and what's going on… around and who's doing what and what's going on." However, she was not inclined to further research political issues and candidates covered during a newscast. "I don't really put the time to find out more about whoever is running so I don't give it a lot of interest." Thus, when time arrived to

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vote at the national level, Subject 8 stated she was more likely to vote according to her party affiliation than to extensively research candidates in order to decide for whom to vote.

Conversely, Subject 4 (Male, 57),a U.S. born Latino, considered being active in politics and becoming informed were essential duties of citizenship. He provided that he tried to stay politically active and always become informed because he understood that forming his own opinions, based on accurate information, was important when making voting decisions. Subject 4 stated he preferred CNN because it offered less biased reports of the news at the national and international levels. For local news, Subject 4 preferred the main local newspaper. Furthermore, Subject 7 (Female, 48) is a Latino immigrant who became a U.S. citizen in 2011. She has lived in the U.S. for more than eight years and provided that since she completed the naturalization process, her interest in politics has considerably increased. For instance, Subject 7 stated that, in making her voting decision during the 2012 presidential election, she sought information from multiple media sources in order to understand each candidate and the issues being discussed as part of their campaigns. First, she watched CNN, Fox News and local stations for presidential and vice presidential debates. Then, she visited Google News online, the *New York Times* website, as well as *USA Today* and the main local newspaper websites. For Subject 7, becoming informed was an essential step to becoming politically involved.

Subject 7 also stated that accessing information about current events helped her gain a better understanding of how politicians managed certain issues and how those issues affected their political careers: "For example, the problem with Syria [in the summer of 2013], I watched … the president's speech. I know where he is coming from, what his position is." Therefore, having information about specific issues available might affect voters' perceptions about such issues, the politicians involved, and the entirety of the political process.

Similar to Subject 7, Subject 19 (Male, 48) is a Latino immigrant who has lived in the U.S. for more than 30 years. He provided his involvement in local and national politics was often limited to voting. However, Subject 19 explained he often relied on political news coverage to learn about specific issues and candidates. He preferred newspapers, magazines and the Internet to follow issues that were of interest to him. He subscribed to information from sources including *The Washington Post* and the *Wall Street Journal*, as well as he visited CNN.com and other media websites. Subject 19 noted he preferred using the Internet as one of his primary sources of information because "you can access whatever you like whenever you like." He also emphasized the Internet's ability to make information readily accessible in regard to salient and current issues from a variety of sources: "You have to be careful that… it is not just pointing you in one direction. If that's the case, then you have to a different [medium] to get the other side of the equation." This access to a variety of sources allowed Subject 19, and others who were not deeply involved in politics, to form their opinions about specific issues that they considered salient, as well as information about candidates, which would ultimately inform their voting decisions.

Similarly, Subject 15 (Female, 20) who is a first generation U.S. born Latino established her political involvement was limited. She also stated she preferred social media as a primary source of political information, insofar as she often relied on information posted on Facebook by friends who were more involved in politics: "I know when the presidential elections came around, there was [sic] a whole bunch of groups being started. But for the most part, that's pretty much it." For Subject 15, like many of the respondents, easy access and convenience defined her exposure to political information. In terms of Facebook and other social media, Subject 15 stated it was not necessarily what she preferred, but what was readily available: "It's there, so I'll read

it. It's not a choice that I actively make to go read about politics. But … when it is in my face, I do think it's interesting, and makes me want to get involved." This statement further reflected most respondents' attitudes toward accessing political information; if it was there and it was readily available, they would likely access it. Only rarely did they actively seek information to learn about specific issues and candidates of interest to them.

Subject 11 (Female, 50) expressed she remained politically active through her employer's political action committee and she followed national politics closely. She often sought political information from both traditional media and social media to learn about the issues and candidates that interested her: "I have Twitter and I follow certain people… I watch MSNBC and CNN, even though they're kind of opposites. And I listen to NPR every day." She used Twitter for easy access to information from various sources. For instance, she said, "during this last presidential election, I followed both Romney and Obama, and then things like *Huffington Post*." In this manner, Subject 11 further supported the notion of convenience and easy access to information insofar as social media allowed her to become informed with minimal effort.

Many participants who identified themselves as politically active provided that they frequently sought information from sources in the media with political views different than theirs. For instance, Subject 12 (Male, 39) established he often looks at various media outlets that offer differing views in order to develop his perception about political issues: "How I base my information is by… looking at MSNBC, CNN and Fox, and then … coming to a conclusion... And then between the three of them… I can come up with a somewhat informed decision." This statement emphasized the process through which some of the more politically active respondents scrutinized information across media in an attempt to shape their perceptions. This process also allowed these participants to become informed about significant political issues and informed

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their participation in discussions with others in their communities about such issues. According to Subject 4, keeping an open mind and seeking information from sources with differing views was essential to becoming informed. "There's [sic] always two sides to the story. Always, whether good or bad. And you have to not only just formulate what you think… but you also have to get your facts together from everybody else… so you can pro and con [on those issues]." Thus, seeking information from opposing sides enabled informed building of perceptions and decision-making to occur.

A few respondents who considered themselves less politically active expressed that they seldom sought information from media sources that held opposing views to their own. For example, Subject 1 (Female, 43) stated she was not interested in politics. Her level of political involvement since she became a U.S. citizen in 2011 has been limited to voting. She stated since her interest in politics was low, she did not spend much time seeking information from various sources to develop her perceptions about issues and candidates. Furthermore, Subject 5 indicated she rarely made an effort to find out what the other side was saying about current political issues. Accordingly, she stated, "I know what I am [in terms of political ideology] so I am not going to change from that." Thus, Subject 5 indicated that she did not feel the need to seek out information from sources in the media who held opposing views regarding political issues and candidates because she would likely vote according to her political party affiliation.

Language and Media Coverage

RQ$_3$ concerned media coverage language – English versus Spanish – and its role in informing and shaping Latino immigrants and U.S. born Latinos' engagement in the political process. Most participants responded negatively when asked whether language played a role in defining the media they consumed to learn about political issues and candidates. However, many

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of these respondents, including U.S. born Latinos and Latino immigrants, also indicated they often sought media coverage about politics in English and had close to no exposure to Spanish-language news coverage.

In this regard, Subject 19 stated he preferred English-language news coverage, at both the local and national level, because it was more readily available and easier to access. Subject 19 also added that choosing between English- versus Spanish-language political news coverage only occurs when he searches for political information at the international level: "For here [the U.S.] – yes – English, but if I want to get up to date in what's happening in Venezuela, Ecuador, or Argentina, then I go to that local media in that local language to learn about that." Thus, a differentiation between English- and Spanish-language political news coverage occurred depending on the language of the region to which such coverage pertained.

Other participants alluded to choosing between English- and Spanish-language news coverage about politics sometimes related to their attempt to find different angles around similar stories. For instance, Subject 20 (Male, 39) is a Latino immigrant who became a U.S. citizen in 2012. He stated that though he is able to understand both English and Spanish, he often sought information from media in both languages in order to develop his perceptions about political issues and candidates. In this regard, Subject 20 stated that "when you read international news about what's going on in the U.S. and politics, they can have a different point of view of what they use in the U.S. to inform about the same topic." For Subject 20, his ability to access and understand information from international outlets in both English and Spanish was a valuable asset, insofar as it allowed him to get a globalized view of how U.S. politics are viewed from a variety of viewpoints, both internal and external.

At the local level, Subject 3 (Female, 54) indicated she sometimes searched for information in Spanish from a few local outlets that target the Latino population in the area. She read a Latino-owned local newspaper that offered stories in English and Spanish and she watched a local television station that offered all of its content in Spanish. Nevertheless, some respondents expressed they were either unaware of any local Spanish-language media or they were not inclined to seek out information from such media because it was not readily available to them. This was the case for Subject 12, who stated he preferred English-language media coverage of politics at the local level because he did not have access to any local media in Spanish: "[At home] I don't really have any local Hispanic, or U.S. Hispanic channels to view. And at work, I've – or when I'm on a computer… I just automatically… type something in English instead of Spanish, and I get the results… on English sites." This reinforced the idea of respondents' exposure to media coverage in the language that was the most readily available to them when they were searching for information about political issues or candidates.

Moreover, Subject 5 stated that her Spanish-language news consumption was often limited to what she picked up on television stations where she watched soap operas. Nevertheless, she provided that she frequently found more in-depth information about issues that are of particular interest to the Latino population, such as immigration, which usually got limited coverage on local or national English-language television stations. Like Subject 5, Subject 14 provided she followed news coverage about immigration closely; thus she preferred Spanish-language media because they offered more specific coverage of why that issue was important than their English-language counterparts: "They're more personally connected to the situation…. On CNN it's just like data, information, bullet point… it's what it is without the emotional attachment to it." Therefore, for Subject 14, it was important to have both perspectives for

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coverage of such political issues as well as candidates, but she preferred to find more information about what issues, such as immigration mean to her and her family than the limited information that was often found on English-language coverage of the same issue.

Many respondents also indicated that though they preferred English-language news coverage of political issues and candidates, they often became exposed to news in Spanish because other members of their household consumed media, such as television and radio, from Spanish-language outlets. Subject 10 (Female, 56) is a U.S. born Latino who preferred English-language news coverage of political issues and candidates. However, Subject 10 stated her husband preferred Spanish-language television news, so she often found herself watching it as well. Subject 10 provided she did not like watching Spanish-language television news, namely from Telemundo, a U.S.-based Spanish-language television station, which her husband preferred.

Similarly, several U.S. born, first generation Latino participants stated they rarely chose to consume Spanish-language media for news, but are often exposed to such news coverage because others in their family prefer Spanish-language news coverage. For instance, Subject 15 provided that she watched television news in Spanish because that is what her parents watch. However, like Subject 11, Subject 15 stated that she prefers not to consume Spanish-language media: "I feel the Spanish news is a lot more gossip wise, not so much accuracy. It's just about getting the story out." Thus, Spanish-language media do not fulfill these respondents' expectations in terms of news coverage of political issues and candidates.

For others, like Subject 4, choosing English-language news coverage is a matter of being more comfortable with that language rather than Spanish. "I feel more comfortable with English, even though my first language is Spanish, but as I've discovered… my English overrules my Spanish because I speak it a lot… I feel comfortable with English broadcasts. There's [sic] a lot

of words in Spanish that I don't understand." Therefore, English-language media offered a safe, comfortable and convenient manner to learn about political issues and candidates. In this regard, those who preferred English-language news coverage ensured their understanding of political information shared through media is accurate.

Interpersonal Communication

This study asked about participants' discussions with others in their community about political issues and candidates. RQ_{4a} and RQ_{4b} referred to the roles media coverage, as well as interpersonal communication, play in defining Latino voters' level of engagement in politics during elections. Most respondents agreed they had people in their lives with whom they discussed political issues and candidates on a regular basis. In general, respondents who considered themselves more involved in politics as well as those who were less active expressed such discussions constituted an essential aspect of their process to develop perceptions about political issues and candidates. Most of these political discussions involved close friends and family members and often occurred in person.

For instance, Subject 16 (Male, 30) is a first-generation U.S. born Latino who described himself as active in politics. He stated he often discussed politics with friends because they are also politically active. Subject 16 stated these discussions have exposed him to different perspectives and interpretations of political issues and candidates, which has in turn helped him to become more active. He provided that for him, "it's easier to continue something where people around you are doing it." This means that because of these interactions with his friends – which happened mainly in person and at school – he feels inclined to continue to be involved in politics.

However, because these discussions often occurred only with people who were very close to some respondents, they also might be limiting in nature. This was the case for Subject 17 (Female, 21), who established she participated in discussions with friends about specific political issues that were of interest to her and her friends. Specifically, Subject 17 has been involved in the past with support groups for the DREAM Act, a legislation intended to help undocumented immigrants who have graduated high school to have access to higher education ("DREAM Act Portal," 2013). Subject 17 noted that she was passionate about the DREAM Act, a passion she shared with her friends who had also been involved with supporting the legislation. Subject 17 said she discussed politics with those friends because they were a lot more politically active. Such discussions occurred when the group gathered to talk about progress in regard to the legislation and current events: "It's mostly… a minority group… They helped me become more aware of the situation of what's going on and just different aspects, but I do feel that it's also limited because it's one-sided." Thus, because these discussions have only included others who shared similar interests, they had the ability to hinder the respondent's access to other perceptions on political issues and candidates that could play an important role in shaping the respondent's political perceptions.

Some respondents also indicated that they tried to avoid discussing politics with friends and family, but that when they did, they especially sought out information from people who were close to them and who held different views than their own. For instance, Subject 12 emphasized he rarely tried to engage in political discussions. However, he expressed that when he did, he found conversations with his wife and mother-in-law particularly informative and helpful. Subject 12 differed in political ideology from his wife and mother-in-law. Therefore, he stated, "a lot of times I feel like they're very influenced by one way or the other… And they see me as –

okay, so I'm from the right, and… they're from the left. So, they automatically believe that that's not right, you know, being a conservative." He believed their points of view were skewed by political ideology. That is why he stated having discussions with them about political issues and candidates has often encouraged him to try to understand a different perspective. Accordingly, Subject 12 noted, "I try to do as much research as I can from both sides of the story, left and right, so I could say, 'You know, even your own party is saying this is not good.' Plus, it's fun, actually. It brings excitement." These discussions served as further motivation for this respondent to learn about political issues and candidates from different perspectives than his own.

Similarly, Subject 2 stated he often participated in political discussions with close friends and family members, including his wife, his wife's uncle and with his mother-in-law. He provided that he enjoyed having these discussions, particularly with his wife's uncle because he held opposing political views to his own. Subject 2 said he believed in having healthy discussions: "We don't get into huge arguments, which is good because I think everybody has to find common ground." In this regard, Subject 2 believed those healthy discussions enabled people to form balanced opinions as a result of understanding their own beliefs and listening to others' perceptions. This was particularly important to Subject 2 for, as he stated, keeping an open mind and helping others to understand others' points of view was important for the political process.

For Subject 4, having political discussions with his close friends and family is essential to ensure they remain informed about issues and candidates that could influence how they vote.

> For one thing, what happens in politics, in one way or another…
>
> down the line is going to affect us, whether it's the Hispanic

culture or any culture in general in the United States at some point

it's going to feel the effects of, the outcome of whatever they rule.

So I have to discuss, I don't have to, but I choose to… discuss pros

and cons. I think that's the wise thing to do.

Subject 4 suggested that political discussions were a significant part of the democratic process,

insofar as they enabled better understanding of issues and candidates that have the ability to

influence the nation's political future. Having these conversations also allowed people with

different points of view to express how they perceived issues and candidates. He stated that

because not everybody agreed on every issue, these discussions helped people to keep an open

mind about different perspectives: "You just can't go into a discussion in politics and just present

our thought and only yours, and yours is right and everybody else is incorrect." In these terms,

politics was not about consensus, but about understanding other views in order to reach better

decisions and outcomes. The idea, thus, would be to appreciate input and feedback from others in

order to develop a better understanding and an informed perception of political issues and

candidates that would later become part of an informed voting decision-making process.

Subject 3 stated that having political discussions with her father, who is originally from

Cuba, has given her appreciation for the importance of understanding political issues, following

candidates and participating in the political process: "Both of my parents are Democratic, but I

have a sister who is Republican so we discuss [politics] in the family." These discussions have

helped Subject 3 to understand the viewpoints of her friends who held different views than her,

as well as to become more involved in politics at the local level. Similarly, Subject 5 limited her

political discussions to talking with her husband and other members of her family. She stated she

felt comfortable having those conversations with them and that she wanted to know how they felt

about political issues and candidates. For Subject 5, and many other respondents, these conversations were an important opportunity to understand why others around them felt a certain way about specific political issues. Subject 5 also indicated she has become more active in politics as a result of such discussions, especially her conversations with her husband. "He's a union guy and so I understand better… Coming from a different country I understand… why they formed a union and all that. So I feel comfortable with him discussing it because I know it's safe to do it there. And even my girls, they hear it and learn." These discussions have thus exposed Subject 5 to increased understanding of U.S. politics as well as they have acted as opportunities for her daughters to become familiar with politics.

Political discussions about local issues and candidates were of particular importance to Subject 8. She discussed politics with fellow members of professional organizations with which she has been involved, co-workers and people involved in local government. Subject 8 felt strongly about having these conversations often: "It's my community. It's important to me that things are going in the right direction that I think they should go." That way, Subject 8 believed those discussions helped her become involved in making an impact in her community. Becoming engaged in such conversations allowed her to become active at the local level because she believed she was a lot closer to the activities of local government than if those discussions did not happen. She kept up to date on the most important issues in the city by being connected with people who share her interest in local government.

Though most respondents provided they preferred to conduct their political discussions with friends and families in person or on the phone, some participants also cited social media as a forum within which they participated in political discussions. In this regard, social media's role in helping to define these voters' political perceptions based on mediated content published on

social networking sites, and has also become essential in enabling political discussions. In Subject 9's case, for instance, posting a new Facebook status about a certain issue or candidate served as his public announcement that often turned into an online debate among friends. He started these debates with a specific purpose in mind: "To get people reading, to get people thinking about the environment that they're in. I think it's healthy for everyone to do that sort of thing." He accomplished his goal to raise awareness of issues and candidates, especially at the local level, among his friends who chose to participate in such online political debates. However, Subject 9 stated those conversations only occurred on his social media profile. He noted there was a need for people to have these conversations and see what others had to say about them. Facebook acted as an effective forum to accomplish just that and, once you have exposed all of your points, the debate ends there. Therefore, there was no transference between a debate that happened online and one that occurred in person.

Media, Interpersonal Communication and Voting

Most study participants indicated media coverage of political issues and candidates as well as political discussions with friends and family members were essential aspects of their involvement in politics. RQ_{4a} and RQ_{4b} inquired about how media coverage and interactions with others about political issues and candidates influenced Latino immigrants' and U.S. born Latinos' voting behavior. Many respondents admitted these factors often worked together to help them develop their perceptions about political issues and candidates. Further, respondents agreed that media coverage and their interactions about politics with friends and family encouraged them to participate in the political process by voting and to make their decisions about for whom to vote. In fact, these factors – exposure to media coverage and discussions with family and

friends about political issues and candidates – proved particularly essential in informing and developing respondents' voting perceptions and behavior during an election.

Subject 2 asserted his reliance on media and political discussions with friends and family have played important roles in defining his voting behavior. Though Subject 2 qualified as a more politically active respondent, he understood having political discussions were essential of sharing information with others as well as learning more information about specific issues of interest to him. For instance, Subject 2 noted, "you get bombarded all the time so... I obviously try to apply the best judgment when I vote... I remember for the presidential elections I was talking to neighbors because I know there were other issues and I wanted to try to understand what the issues were and which candidate... where do they stand." Subject 2 thus used such discussions with people around him who could provide their perspectives on political issues in order to support his own information-seeking and sharing efforts, which happened mainly through the Internet and social media.

Furthermore, some respondents, such as Subject 9 stated that his exposure to media coverage and his political discussions on social media have made him switch sides during an election. Subject 9 argued those factors raised his awareness about issues of which he only had limited knowledge: "As far as the Internet is concerned, you get on there, you [search], you find out; you make your decision super fast, super easy… And then you can – if you feel strongly about it, you can inform people in any which way." This statement implied that searching for information about political issues and candidates allowed the respondent to make informed decisions that helped him to effectively participate in political discussions that further explored those issues. This process ultimately informed the respondent's voting decisions.

Similar to Subject 9, at the local level, Subject 8 argued her involvement in political discussions and following political information on media, and especially on social media, has influenced her voting behavior in the past. Subject 8 asserted that at the time of the last mayoral election she relied on her friends who were more involved in following what was happening in local government in order to develop her opinion about the candidates. She stated she started by looking at the candidates' websites and profiles on social media, but often looked at her friends' posts on Facebook to learn more information about the candidates and issues that she would have not found otherwise. She further added, "Since I have friends who are so closely rooted to the two major candidates that I was thinking of voting for I could have voted this way or I could have voted that way and I ended up being swayed one way versus the other because of who I was affiliated with."

Many respondents argued they benefitted from their interactions with such sources because they offered confirmation of the respondents' perceptions about issues and candidates during an election. For example, Subject 15 indicated that because political discussions in which she was involved included people with whom she shared similar values and background, the information she received often reaffirmed her political beliefs. In this regard, Subject 15 asserted that those conversations – along with the media coverage to which she was exposed – reinforced her desire to vote in accordance to her political beliefs.

Similarly, Subject 11 expressed that though she was not sure media coverage and her discussions about political issues and candidates have necessarily helped her become more politically active, she understands they helped her to become more knowledgeable and have encouraged her to do more research in order to make more informed decisions on how she would decide to vote. In this regard, Subject 11 stated, "it's always good to have a discussion with

somebody from another point of view because they can help you see things that maybe you

didn't see before. So, that either helps you change your mind or validates how you were leaning

and planning to vote in the first place." Subject 11's comment may suggest that being exposed to

discussions with people who hold different views and accessing information in the media in

order to become more informed about specific issues and candidates were valuable aspects of the

political decision-making process.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

During the first decade of the 21st century, Latino voters became increasingly influential in defining U.S. politics. The Latino population has been the fastest growing demographic in the U.S., which has positioned its members as key constituents within the nation's political process. As a result, political candidates have increased their focus in reaching members of the Latino demographic as an essential aspect to their political campaigns. Nonetheless, such outreach efforts by candidates have varied insofar as understanding of the Latino population as participants and influencers of the political process remains limited.

The purpose of this study was to determine how Latino immigrants and U.S. born Latinos who are registered to vote learn about political issues and candidates, as well as to define which factors influence their level of involvement in politics, which has the potential to ultimately affect Latino voters' voting behavior. The findings offer guidance in terms of the importance of making information about political issues and candidates readily available and easily accessible to Latino voters as they develop their perceptions on such matters.

RQ_1 and RQ_2 inquired about the role of media in Latino voters' perception development process about political issues and candidates. Respondents suggested social media have eclipsed traditional media as primary information sources for most study respondents. First, study respondents who indicated they were more involved in politics noted that they were more likely to seek out information directly from media that they believed would offer extensive information

about the most important political issues and candidates. Conversely, participants who expressed being less politically active provided that their efforts to seek out information from the media often were limited to finding out about certain issues that interested them, such as immigration, but that such efforts did not occur as frequently as those of respondents who were more involved in politics. Respondents were thus divided into two tiers: More politically active and less politically active. More politically active respondents were likely to seek out political information about issues and candidates in the media and to share such information with friends and family online, frequently through social media. On the other hand, less politically active respondents relied on information shared by friends and family members on social media in order to inform and develop their political perspectives.

Second, media consumption preferences varied among respondents who were politically active and those who were less involved in politics. Both highly active and less active participants referenced the convenience and easy access offered by the Internet and social media as a reason they used this medium as a primary avenue for accessing information about political issues and candidates. Politically active participants indicated that they were more likely to actively conduct searches for such political information online than those who were less active in politics. Politically active respondents used Internet sites for media outlets, candidates' websites and other political sites, namely social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter in their attempts to learn about the matters that they considered salient. On the other hand, less politically active participants relied heavily on political information that appeared on their social media profiles and on links to media coverage of issues and candidates provided by others in order to access such information.

Third, in terms of how respondents utilized information they found about political issues and candidates can be understood to a certain degree by analyzing respondents' social media use. For instance, politically active respondents indicated they often shared information they accessed through their searches for such information online. They considered their social media profiles would act as places – or forums – where they could share important information and their political opinions. On the contrary, less politically active respondents were often on the receiving end of such information on social media and seldom shared political information on their social media profiles.

These three emerging themes assisted in answering RQ_1 and provided guidance as part of this study's attempt to evaluate the two-step flow of communication and the agenda-setting frameworks. They helped to increase understanding about how such theoretical frameworks operate among respondents – both those more involved and those less involved in politics. In this study, most respondents suggested that there was increased reliance upon others, and therefore, the two-step flow of communication framework seems to be primarily at work among many of these respondents. This was especially true for respondents – especially less politically active respondents – in their efforts to access to information online insofar as they were frequently exposed to information that was shared by others, including friends, family and media outlets on the Internet.

Findings from this study also suggest that agenda-setting function of the media appears to have limited influence in informing and developing respondents' perceptions about political candidates and issues. In this regard, this study offered similar arguments to prior research of agenda setting, including McCombs and Shaw's 1972 study, which established members of the audience rely on media coverage to learn about the most salient issues, and which ultimately

affects the process by which they develop their political opinions based on such information. In this study, more active respondents utilized political information they found on media in order to help less politically active respondents, whose access to coverage of issues and candidates was limited to what was readily available to them, to become informed. On the other hand, less politically active participants are less likely to search information related to current events and from various sources. They are inclined to only actively seek information about specific issues, such as immigration, and from sources that provided coverage that reflects their political beliefs, which decreases the influence of agenda setting.

RQ$_3$ asked about the role media language in forming Latino voters' political involvement. Respondents indicated that they felt more comfortable with accessing information about political issues and candidates in English. This was especially the case when the information they sought pertained particularly to U.S. politics. Such findings support previous research in this area by Masuoka (2008), who established Latino voters who have been involved in U.S. culture for a long time – meaning that they're highly acculturated – are often fluent in English and are more likely to consume media in English. As stated by Masuoka, this included U.S. born Latinos and Latino immigrants, insofar as they are developing a panethnic group consciousness that helps them to differentiate themselves from other minorities and the White majority. For instance, some respondents stated they felt more comfortable accessing information that pertained to U.S. politics in English, and only consumed media in Spanish for news related to countries, such as Colombia and Argentina, where Spanish is the primary language. Findings from this study also suggest a relationship among Latino voters' level of acculturation, their identification as part of the Latino group and their exposure to media coverage that reflects their perceptions of issues that affect the Latino group as a whole, including the passage of the DREAM Act. As argued by

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Stokes-Brown (2006), Latinos' desire to become involved in the political process, especially through voting, was the result of a series of social and personal constructs – including their level of acculturation through their familiarity with the U.S. culture and language and their exposure to issues. Stokes-Brown further argued that racial identity (or Latinos' development of their panethnic identity) was also a significant aspect of Latino voters' vote choice and their political participation.

Some respondents established they accessed English-language media coverage of political issues and candidates in combination with coverage of the same matters from media outlets in Spanish. These respondents indicated that they accessed information from media outlets in Spanish because it offered more extensive reports on specific political issues that were of particular interest to Latino voters. Abrajano and Singh's (2008) findings in their research of English- and Spanish-language media and their influence on Latino voters. They found that Spanish-language media were more likely to cover issues that pertained to Latino voters more extensively, thus providing more detailed, targeted information on issues that voters considered salient. Study respondents described issues such as immigration and immigration reform received extensive attention in reports on Spanish-language media outlets, whereas coverage of the same issues on English-language media outlets was often limited. Spanish-language media outlets also served as providers of a Latino perspective on candidates and how their political platforms – especially during an election – specifically affected Latino voters. In this regard, it can be argued that because study participants were highly acculturated in the U.S., the language of media coverage only played a limited role in defining their political involvement and voting behavior.

RQ$_{4a}$ evaluated how exposure to media coverage of candidates and issues during a political campaign influenced Latino voters' voting behavior. Similar to the findings from RQ$_1$, study participants suggested their voting behavior was influenced by their level of involvement in politics and their efforts to seek out information from media outlets. More active respondents were thus likely to use the information they accessed in media in order to guide voting decisions. They were also more likely to share information about such voting behavior – including whether they voted and how they voted – with others. Highly active respondents said they felt a certain level of accountability in using the political information they possessed to influence others to vote. Highly active respondents were thus more inclined to believe their voting behavior had the potential to influence the outcome of an election and felt it was their duty to help others understand they shared that duty as well.

Further study findings portrayed less active respondents' efforts to seek out information about specific political issues, such as immigration and immigration reform, as well as the DREAM Act, supported previous research related to less politically active participants. As stated in a study by Barreto, Ramirez, and Woods (2005), media coverage of particular issues that are of interest to Latinos who were less politically active has served as encouragement for their participation in voting. In this regard, some respondents from this study identified immigration legislation, namely the DREAM Act, as a significant issue that has increased their awareness of U.S. politics and has encouraged them to participate in voting.

Latino voters' participation in the political process has also been influenced by their interactions with others about issues and candidates, particularly during an election. RQ$_{4b}$ referred to the role interpersonal communication, namely in the form of political discussions, played in defining Latinos' voting behaviors. Most study participants indicated their discussions

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with about political issues and candidates occurred, often in person, and with their close friends and family. Participants who were highly involved in politics were particularly passionate about the importance of their political discussions with others around them. Some of these respondents stated they frequently exercised caution in starting and participating in such discussions because they understood such conversations' potential to turn into great disagreements. However, they provided they still appreciated the opportunity to engage in these discussions as they allowed them to get more information about issues and candidates from other people's perspectives. Further, these respondents also felt that their efforts to search for political information in the media allowed them to bring important viewpoints to the table and to promote healthy discussions and to ultimately influence their own – and others' – political behavior.

More politically active respondents' roles in the dissemination of information from the media positioned them as opinion leaders, as suggested by Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet's (1968) theory of two-step flow of communication. Such respondents were continually exposed to media coverage of issues and candidates and were able and willing to participate in political discussions where they would transfer such information to others in their community. On the other hand, less politically active participants expressed they were inclined to participate in political discussions because they offered opportunities for them to learn more about issues and candidates from friends and family members who were more politically active. In these terms, such discussions allowed less active participants to receive important political information from sources that they trust, and with whom they felt safe expressing their points of view. These discussions also had the ability to ultimately influence respondents' perceptions about issues and candidates during an election and to enable them to make voting decisions.

Implications

These findings suggest respondents utilize media coverage on the Internet and social media in combination with their discussions with friends and family about political issues and candidates as part of their process to develop political perceptions and opinions. Such perceptions have the ability to influence voting behavior and to increase these Latino voters' participation in the political process. Some respondents were also likely to use their ability to access both English- and Spanish-language media coverage in their attempts to learn more about the issues and candidates that interest them, particularly during an election. This study also suggested that many respondents were inclined to make such efforts because they wanted to understand, from a personal standpoint, what these issues and candidates meant to them and their families.

Study respondents were divided into two tiers: More politically active (or politically active) and less politically active. More politically active respondents were identified as those participants who consistently participated in the political process by voting, actively seeking information about issues and candidates from a variety of sources at the national and local level, and conducting research or contacting politicians. More politically active respondents acted as opinion leaders in their communities insofar as they took responsibility in sharing mediated information with friends and family members as well as they started and engaged in political discussions in various forums. Conversely, less politically active respondents were identified as those participants who voted but were less interested in seeking information about candidates and issues from various sources. Less politically active respondents were more likely to rely on information that appeared readily available in their networks, especially on social networking sites, shared by their friends and family. Their contact with mediated content was often through

accessing such shared information. Further, less politically active participants followed information about specific issues they considered salient across media, but rarely sought information from sources that offered contradicting perspectives to their political beliefs.

Findings from this study emphasize the emergence of the Internet and social media as primary sources of political information about issues and candidates for Latino voters. Such findings suggest that these Latino voters' desire to find information about politics that is readily available online diminishes direct effects of communication – as evidenced in agenda setting – and augments indirect effects on the audience – as related to the two-step flow of communication framework. In this regard, more politically active respondents directly engaged in efforts to seek political information from traditional media and mostly through those media's Internet sites. However, these respondents also shared the information they found on media outlets' websites as well as on other sites containing political information with friends and family members on social media. More politically active participants became opinion leaders; they acted as mediators and analyzed the political information and shared it with others on Facebook and Twitter. These respondents also frequently started online discussions about political issues and candidates. These findings imply that politicians, political organizations, advocacy groups and media outlets as a whole should expand their outreach efforts during a political campaign to include Internet and social media sites that serve as primary sources of information for Latino voters. Furthermore, such findings put forward the need for political campaigns to include outreach efforts that involve tactics that allow Latino voters to talk with campaign representatives where they live. Findings about how social media is being used by the respondents of this study also suggest that efforts using the Internet and social media as primary platforms for outreach also may be applied to members of all demographics.

This study's findings also suggest that candidates and political organizations to reach Latino voters should seek greater understanding of Latino voters' identities and interests. They need to recognize the variety of backgrounds, political ideologies and even linguistic differences that prevail among members of the demographic. This study provides an important understanding of how Latinos receive and scrutinize political information. Such understanding should play an essential role in the planning of outreach efforts to members of the Latino demographic. Outreach efforts thus need to be based on appreciating that Latino voters' preferences vary in terms of learning about candidates and issues to form their political perceptions differ greatly depending on their level of political activity, their media consumption and their relationships with friends and family members.

Finally, this study suggested that efforts to reach the Latino population at large should begin by focusing on considerations of their level of acculturation into the U.S. culture and their participation – and development of their panethnic identities. Latinos now possess the ability to greatly affect the future of politics in the U.S. Therefore, political candidates, political organizations and media organizations should take the findings from this study in order to help Latino voters become informed and truly understand the impact of their political choices and behavior.

Limitations

Limitations of this study included the short period of time available to complete the research process. This prevented the researcher from reaching a larger, more diversified pool of respondents for the study, thus limiting the number of interviews conducted to only twenty. Further, a longer timeline to conduct this study would have allowed the researcher to find a sample that would have included more participants recommended by other study respondents.

Moreover, though the researcher was able to interview participants from a variety of backgrounds in terms of countries of origin, including Latino immigrants and U.S. born Latinos, as well as different ages, many of these respondents also possessed other characteristics that may not reflect the larger Latino population. For instance, due to the limited amount of time available to complete this study, the researcher was able to reach participants who were not older than 60 years of age, which limited access to more active voters within the demographic. Also, the researcher was mainly able to work with respondents who were involved in leadership positions within local corporate offices and a local private university.

Finally, a significant limitation to this study is its qualitative nature. Though this research provided some important insight into how Latino immigrants and U.S. born Latinos who are registered to vote use media coverage and interpersonal communications to become involved in politics, results from this study cannot be generalized to the Latino population at large, neither at the local nor at the national level.

Future Research

This study has provided useful insight about how Latino voters, both Latino immigrants and U.S. born Latinos, form their perceptions and opinions about political issues and candidates. The study also evaluated how the agenda-setting function of the media and the two-step flow of communication work together insofar as voters seek out information from the media and from others around them who are politically active in their efforts to inform their voting decisions. Future research inquiries about these aspects of Latino voters' political participation should develop a model for exploring how these theories work among Latino voters at large, especially when it comes to their participation in elections. Researchers should use the findings from this study as an important starting point to identify some of the questions that Latino voters need to

be asked at a larger scale, possibly as part of a quantitative examination of this subject. Researchers should also use the findings from this study as a starting point to evaluate which aspects of political outreach efforts during past elections, particularly at the national level during the 2008 and 2012 presidential campaigns, have worked to influence Latino voters' behaviors at the polls. In other words, future studies should explore the extent to which news coverage of particular issues and candidates, candidates' outreach efforts, as well as Latino voters' discussions with friends and family members about politics, influenced their voting decisions.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Questionnaire Protocol

1. How do you use media to learn about politics? [i.e. Do you use it to learn about issues and candidates during an election?]

2. How have you used media to learn about candidates? [Presidential vs. local elections]

3. What media do you most frequently use?

4. Why do you prefer those media? [Does language play a role in defining the media you consume?]

5. Do you have any people in your life that you consult to learn more about politics and voting?

    a. Why do you discuss politics and voting with them?

6. How have your relationships with those people and what you've learned in your discussions helped you develop your political viewpoint or your attitude toward voting?

7. Describe how your exposure to media coverage of politics and your discussions with others have influenced your voting behavior in the past.

8. Where do your discussions about politics and voting most often occur? [e.g. online, in person, etc.]

APPENDIX B

Consent Form

Project Title: Agenda Setting and the Two-Step Flow: How Latinos Make Voting Decisions

Researcher: Lizaimee P. Mata (B.A., University of Tulsa) is a student in the Master of Science in Strategic Communications Management program in the school of Media and Strategic Communications at Oklahoma State University.

Purpose: I am interested in examining how registered Latino voters (naturalized Latino immigrants and U.S. born Latinos) learn about candidates and issues prior to voting. This research is particularly interested in the agenda-setting function of the media, media language and personal influences to which the respondents are exposed.

Time: The in-person interview should take no longer than 30 minutes to complete. Follow-up interviews, if necessary, will take no longer than 30 minutes.

Compensation: No compensation will be offered for participation in the study.

Voluntary: Your participation is voluntary. If you wish to withdraw your participation, you may do so at any time and your data will not be included in the research.

Risk: There is minimal risk involved in this study. Because of the nature of this research, risks are no greater than in everyday conversation.

Confidentiality: An audio recording of the interview will be made and transcribed for research purposes. Your anonymity will be protected, as no names will be used in connection with the research data collected. The researcher will identify subjects only by randomly selected number (e.g. Subject 1) and gender. The researcher

will maintain the interview recordings in a locked cabinet and will be erased once the research project is completed.

Contact: If you have any questions, contact Liza Mata at 918-804-9912 or lizaimee.mata@okstate.edu, or Dr. John McGuire at 405-744-8279 or john.mcguire@okstate.edu

Questions: If you have any questions about your rights as a research volunteer, you may contact Dr. Sheila Kennison, IRB Chair, 219 Cordell North, Stillwater, Oklahoma 74078 or irb.okstate.edu

Signing this consent indicates that you understand and agree to the conditions mentioned above.

_____   _____

Signature   Date

APPENDIX C

Sample E-Mail Message to Local Organizations

Hello,

     My name is Liza Mata and I am a graduate student at Oklahoma State University – Tulsa. I am interested in conducting some research interviews with some of your members as part of a study that will serve as my Master of Science thesis. Through this research, I am interested in evaluating how Latino immigrants and U.S. born Latinos who are registered to vote in the Tulsa area learn about and become involved in politics.

     I will be collecting the data through one-on-one interviews. I would like to ask for your help in passing this information along to any of your members who may be interested and able to participate in this study. If possible, once you've identified possible participants for this study, please send their contact information to me and let them know I will be contacting them directly to set up an interview.

     Please note your members' participation in this study is voluntary and that they may withdraw from the study at any time or decline to answer any of the questions asked. The identities of the participants will remain confidential (comments will only be identified by a randomly selected designation [e.g., Subject 1]) and gender. My goal is to present the findings from this study as part of my thesis in November 2013.

     I hope you'll be interested in assisting in this study, as I hope it will help to increase understanding in academia as to how Latinos are becoming involved in politics. Please contact me at the email below with your customers' information or if you have any questions.

Thank you,

Liza Mata
Student
OSU School of Media & Strategic Communications, Tulsa
lizaimee.mata@okstate.edu

APPENDIX D

Approval Letter from Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: Tuesday, August 13, 2013

IRB Application No AS1376

Proposal Title: Agenda Setting and the Two-Step Flow: How Latinos Make Voting Decisions

Reviewed and Processed as: Exempt

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved   Protocol Expires: 8/12/2016

Principal Investigator(s):

Lizaimee Mata
7813 S Union Ave Apt. 419
Tulsa, OK 74132

John McGuire
310 Paul Miller
Stillwater, OK 74078

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.
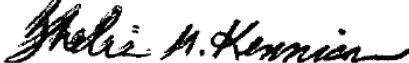
☐ The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval. Protocol modifications requiring approval may include changes to the title, PI, advisor, funding status or sponsor, subject population composition or size, recruitment, inclusion/exclusion criteria, research site, research procedures and consent/assent process or forms.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Dawnett Watkins 219 Cordell North (phone: 405-744-5700, dawnett.watkins@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,

Shelia M. Kennison

Shelia Kennison, Chair
Institutional Review Board

VITA

Lizaimee Patricia Mata

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Science

Thesis: LATINO POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT:

A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF VOTER INFORMATION SEEKING, POLITICAL

OPINIONS, AND INTENDED VOTING BEHAVIORS

Major Field: Mass Communications

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Master of Science/Arts in your major at Oklahoma State University, Tulsa, Oklahoma in December, 2013.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts in Communication at University of Tulsa, Tulsa, Oklahoma in 2010.

Experience:

Communications Specialist, Corporate Communications – Williams Companies, Tulsa, Oklahoma, March 2011 – Present

Intern, Corporate Communications – Williams Companies, Tulsa, Oklahoma, May 2010 – March 2011

Professional Memberships:

Treasurer – International Association of Business Communicators Tulsa Chapter, Tulsa, Oklahoma, 2013 – Present

Member – International Association of Business Communicators Tulsa Chapter, Tulsa, Oklahoma, 2010 – Present