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Predictors of Political Orientation among US-born Mexican Americans: Cultural Identification, Acculturation Attitudes and Socioeconomic Status

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Abstract

With each passing election, U.S. political campaigns have renewed their efforts in courting the “Latino vote,” yet the Latino population is not a culturally homogenous voting bloc. This study examined how cultural identifications and acculturation attitudes in U.S. born Mexican Americans interacted with socioeconomic status (SES) to predict political orientation. Individuals who held stronger Mexican identity and supported biculturalism as an acculturation strategy had a more liberal orientation, while belonging to a higher SES group and holding stronger assimilation attitudes predicted a less liberal orientation. Mexican cultural identification interacted with SES such that those who held a weaker Mexican identity, but came from a higher social class were less liberal and more moderate in their political orientation. Weak Mexican identification and higher SES also predicted weaker endorsement of bicultural acculturation attitudes, which in turn, mediated the differences in political orientation. The acceptance of one’s ethnic identity and endorsement of bicultural attitudes predicted a more liberal political orientation. In light of these findings, political candidates should be cautious in how they pander to Latino constituents—referencing the groups’ ethnic culture or customs may distance constituents who are not strongly identified with their ethnic culture.

Keywords

political orientation, biculturalism, ethnic identity, cultural identity, Hispanics, Latino, acculturation, SES

Author's biographical note

Laura P. Naumann is Assistant Professor in the Sonoma State University at California. She received her PhD in Personality and Social Psychology from the University of California, Berkeley. Her research examines cultural differences in self-perception and self-enhancement bias among Asian Americans. More specifically, she examines how different processes such as cultural values, standards, and motivations to improve may influence the Asian self-concept. Most recent publication: with John, O.P. (2010) "Surviving Two Critiques by Block? The Resilient Big Five Must Have emerged as the Paradigm of personality Trait Psychology". *Psychological Inquiry*, and "Judgements of personality based on physical appearance". *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 35, 1661-1671 with Vazire, S., Rentfrow, P.J. and Gosling, S.D.

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Predictors of Political Orientation in US-born Mexican Americans:

Cultural Identification, Acculturation Attitudes, and Socioeconomic Status

Latinos make up the largest minority group in the United States and are the fastest growing cultural group in the American electorate. Of the 50 million Latinos currently living in the U.S., there were 19.5 million eligible Latino voters in 2008 and this estimate has risen to 23.7 million eligible Latino voters in 2012 (11% of the eligible 2012 electorate; Lopez, Motel, & Patten, 2012). Importantly, the Latino population is not a culturally homogenous voting bloc; Mexican Americans make up 65% of the Latinos in the U.S., and of those 33 million Mexican Americans, 73% are U.S. born citizens (Motel & Patten, 2012). Thus, understanding what predicts political orientation among the largest subgroup, U.S. born Mexican Americans, has important consequences for culturally informed political science as well as political psychology.

Latino Political Orientation

In the past several election cycles, both the Democratic and Republican parties have actively courted “the Latino vote.” However, numerous polls suggest that approximately 70% of Latinos identify with or lean toward the Democratic Party while 22% of Latinos identify with the Republican party (Lopez & Gonzalez-Barrera, 2012). The 2002 Latino Voter Survey reported similar percentages among eligible Mexican American voters (67% Democrat, 13% Republican, and 13% Independent; Alvarez & Bedolla, 2003). In spite of the fact that the Latino group as a whole overwhelmingly swings in the Democratic direction, many social scientists have been interested in what predicts political orientation within each Latino subgroup.

Since the New Deal, the Democratic Party has received much support from Latinos, especially among Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans, because the party showed strong support for programs that provided government assistance and policies that were welcoming of immigrants (Uhlener & Garcia, 2005). Cuban Americans, on the other hand, have a long history of supporting the Republican Party who has shown greater opposition to Fidel Castro’s communist policies in Cuba than the Democratic Party (Uhlener & Garcia, 2005). Several studies have examined predictors of political orientation within the Latino subgroups (Cain, Kiewiet, & Uhlener, 1991; Coffin, 2003; Dutwin, Brodie, Herrmann, & Levin, 2005; Uhlener & Garcia, 2005): Latinos who identify with the Democratic Party typically are of Mexican or Puerto Rican origins, earn less income, hold less traditional values, and are more likely to identify themselves

as Latino or Hispanic. In contrast, Latinos who identify with the Republican Party are typically of Cuban origin, earn higher incomes, hold more traditional values, and are more likely to identify themselves as American.

Dutwin and colleagues (2005) identified an interesting paradox where identification with being Latino does not always equate with holding social values traditionally associated with Latino culture (e.g., endorsement of patriarchy, religiosity, and collectivism). For example, they found that Democrat-identified Latinos were more likely to self-identify using the label 'Latino/Hispanic' over 'American' to categorize their cultural identity, but less likely to hold traditional Latino values. In contrast, Republican-identified Latinos were strongly wedded to traditional social values, yet opted to identify themselves using the 'American' category over the 'Latino/Hispanic category'. Not surprisingly, Latinos who held liberal social values were more likely to identify with the Democratic Party and Latinos who held conservative social values were more likely to identify with the Republican Party. The authors could not explain why Latinos who held conservative values were less likely to categorize themselves as Latino or Hispanic, but they suggested that these Latinos may have minimized their Latino identity in favor of adopting a more conservative or Republican identity.

Acculturation, the process of cultural change following intercultural contact (Berry, 1990), can account for differences in how strongly Latinos identify with their ethnic culture compared to American culture. Contemporary acculturation theories suggest that individuals with dual cultural exposure can identify positively with both cultures (a bicultural identity) or more strongly with either their original culture or the new culture (see Sam & Berry, 2006 for a review). Acculturation processes can also affect behaviors, values, and identity at different rates or not at all (Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga, & Szapocznik, 2010). For example, a Spanish-speaking Latino may have to adopt English to navigate daily American life, come to endorse more liberal values, yet maintain a strong identification with Latino culture.

One limitation to Dutwin and colleagues' (2005) study was that the participants could only choose one cultural identifier, either 'Latino/Hispanic' or 'American', to categorize their cultural identification. This either-or choice implies that if an individual selects one identity, he or she also denies identification with the other identity. In this scenario, Republican-identified Latinos may still identify with their ethnic culture, but to a lesser degree than Democratic-identified Latinos. We propose that different

acculturation attitudes can explain how differences in cultural identity relate to different political orientations.

Acculturation Attitudes

Early models of acculturation implied that the learning of and adaption to a new culture involved abandoning the heritage culture (e.g., Cuellar, Harris, & Jasso, 1980; Rotheram-Borus, 1990; Suinn, Rickard-Figueroa, Lew, & Vigil, 1987). This one-dimensional approach to acculturation implied a zero-sum: the individual assimilated to the mainstream culture and gave up attachment to the original culture (Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2007). In other words, this now-outdated model equated acculturation with assimilation to the dominant culture.¹

Over the last 25 years, a wealth of empirical studies show that acculturation is a bidimensional, two-directional, multi-domain complex process in which there are several modes of acculturation beyond assimilation (e.g., Flannery, Reise, & Yu, 2001; Ryder, Alden, & Paulhus, 2000; Sam & Berry, 2006; Schwartz et al., 2010; Thomson & Hoffman-Goetz, 2009). In the bidimensional model of acculturation, acculturating individuals (e.g., immigrants and their descendants) must navigate: (1) the degree to which they are motivated or allowed to retain identification and involvement with the culture of origin, now the non-majority, ethnic culture; and (2) the extent to which they are motivated or allowed to identify and participate in the mainstream, dominant culture (Berry, 2003). The negotiation of these two central issues results in four distinct acculturation orientations: marginalization, separation, assimilation, and integration. Individuals who distance themselves from both the ethnic and dominant cultures fall within the *marginalization* category. Individuals who want to maintain their ethnic culture only (i.e., have low interest in involvement with the dominant culture) fall into the *separation* category. Individuals who minimize the maintenance of their ethnic culture and instead adopt only dominant cultural practices fall into the *assimilation* category. Individuals who hold positive attitudes towards involvement with both the ethnic and dominant culture fall in the *integration* (or biculturalism) category. From this point forward, we adopt the alternative label—*biculturalism*—that some researchers

¹ Another critical limitation of the one-dimensional approach is that the middle point of the assimilation-separation continuum confounds biculturalism and low levels of involvement with either culture (Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2007).

have suggested better captures the process of integrating both ethnic and dominant cultures into a unified identity (Flannery et al., 2001).

Using Berry's (2003) acculturation framework, one can reinterpret Dutwin and colleagues' (2005) findings showing that Democratic and Republican-identified Latinos aligned themselves differently vis-à-vis the Latino/Hispanic and American identity labels. For example, the Republican-identified Latinos may have more strongly identified as being American (vs. Hispanic) because of their stronger assimilation attitudes. Democrat-identified Latinos, on the other hand, may have identified more strongly with their heritage Latino culture because of their stronger bicultural attitudes.

The Present Study

We propose that differences in political orientation among U.S. born Mexican Americans result from several factors including cultural identification with the ethnic culture and American culture, attitudes towards acculturation, and socioeconomic status. The present study extends previous work in three ways. First, we use a bidimensional approach to measure participants' strength of identification with the ethnic culture and also with American culture (instead of forcing them to choose American or Latino). We predict that identification with the ethnic culture (i.e., feeling "Mexican/Mexican-American/Chicano") will be positively linked to having a liberal political orientation while identification with the dominant American culture will be negatively linked to liberal attitudes.

Second, we measure Berry's (2003) four acculturation strategies and test whether these different attitudes mediate the differences in cultural identification and political orientation. This acculturation theory suggests that bicultural acculturation attitudes will predict identification with one's Mexican identity as well as one's American identity, while assimilation attitudes will only predict identification with one's American identity. However, given that all of our participants are U.S.-born Mexican Americans (second-generation), we suspect that most individuals will have a strong American identification. Thus, we believe differences in political orientation will be better predicted by differences in identification with Mexican culture. That is, individuals who hold bicultural attitudes may demonstrate a greater willingness to add their Mexican identity to an already stable American identification, while individuals who hold assimilation attitudes likely want to minimize their identification with

Mexican culture. These differences in biculturalism and assimilation will mediate the relationship between cultural identification and political orientation.

Finally, we also included socio-economic status (SES) as a relevant predictor of political orientation. Prior research suggests that individuals from higher social classes or who earn higher incomes are more likely to identify themselves as Republican and vote against social programs that increase taxes (Coffin, 2003; Dutwin et al., 2005). Thus, we measured SES and tested whether cultural identification and SES interacted to moderate the effects of acculturation attitudes or political orientation.

Method

Participants

Our sample consisted of 323 US-born Mexican American undergraduates from large universities in the Midwest and Southern parts of United States (200 females, 123 males; $M_{age} = 21$ years, $SD = 4$). We recruited our participants through campus fliers soliciting individuals of Mexican American decent to participate in a larger study which examined how people explain ambiguous social events (i.e., make attributions); each participant was paid \$12 for his/her participation. Participants all self-identified either as 'Mexican American' or 'Hispanic/Latino' and were born in the United States. The average generational status of participants was 2.5 generations ($SD = 1.4$), where 1 = 1st generation (US-born, but both parents and grandparents born outside of the US), 2 = 2nd generation (at least one parent born outside of US; all grandparents born outside of the US), 3 = 3rd generation (both parents born in the US and all grandparents born outside of the US), 4 = 4th generation (both parents born in the US; at least one grandparent born in the US), and 5 = 5th generation (both parents and all grandparents born in the US).

Procedure

In addition to social attribution questions (the focus of a different study with this sample), participants completed a questionnaire that included standard demographic questions (gender, age, country of birth, and parents' country of birth) as well as questions regarding their: (1) socio-economic status (SES), (2) cultural self-identifications, (3) acculturating attitudes, and (4) political orientation.

Predictor Variables

SES. Participants were asked to report their (or their family's) social class, where 1 (*working class*), 2 (*lower middle-class*), 3 (*middle-class*), 4 (*upper middle-*

class), and 5 (*upper class*). On average, the sample reported being middle-class ($M = 2.94$, $SD = 1.00$).

Cultural identification. Participants rated the strength of their identification with their Mexican culture (a broad term defined to include Mexican-American, Chicano, or Tejano cultures—whichever was most applicable) as well as with mainstream U.S. culture (defined as “Anglo-American”). Specifically, participants responded to two separate items that asked: “Please rate the strength of your cultural identification with Mexican [Anglo-American] culture.” Responses were measured on a 6-point scale and ranged from 1 (*very weak*) to 6 (*very strong*). Overall, participants reported holding a stronger Mexican identity ($M = 4.92$, $SD = 1.17$) compared to a U.S. identity ($M = 2.93$, $SD = 1.56$), paired $t(304) = 14.69$, $p < .01$. Still, because participants’ level of identification with U.S. (Anglo-American) culture is moderate, the sample can overall be described as bicultural. The correlation between the two items was $-.43$, $p < .01$.

Acculturation attitudes. The four possible acculturation attitudes—assimilation, biculturalism (integration), separation, and marginalization—were measured using the scale developed by Berry, Kim, Power, Young, & Bujaki (1989). Endorsement of each strategy is measured with five items tapping five domains: marriage, cultural traditions, language, social activities, and friends. Sample items measuring attitudes towards cultural traditions include “*I feel that Mexicans should adapt to Anglo-American cultural traditions and not maintain their own*” [assimilation], “*I feel that Mexicans should maintain their own cultural tradition, but also adapt to Anglo-American customs*” [biculturalism], “*I feel that Mexicans should maintain their own cultural traditions and not adapt to those of Anglo-Americans*” [separation], and “*I feel that it is not important for Mexicans either to maintain their own cultural traditions or to adapt to those of Anglo-Americans*” [marginalization]. Each item was rated with a scale that ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Reliabilities were .61, .48, .66, and .58 for the assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization subscales.² Supporting previous findings with college-age ethnic minority samples in the U.S. (e.g., Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005), our participants overall strongly

² These relatively low levels of reliability are somewhat problematic and suggest that scores on the four acculturation strategies should be interpreted with caution (see also Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005). At the same time, given the integration scale’s low alpha, the significant and meaningful effects for this scale reported later in the paper should be taken as conservative estimates of the effects one would obtain with more reliable measurement.

supported biculturalism acculturation attitudes ($M = 5.53$, $SD = .77$), compared to all three other acculturation attitudes: assimilation ($M = 2.70$, $SD = .82$), separation ($M = 2.85$, $SD = 1.01$), and marginalization ($M = 1.67$, $SD = .72$), all $ps < .01$.

Outcome Variable

Political orientation. We asked participants to characterize their political orientation along a continuum: 1 (*Republican/conservative*), 3 (*moderate*), and 5 (*Democrat/liberal*). The sample overall leaned towards a more liberal orientation ($M = 3.84$, $SD = 1.27$) with a breakdown of 44% liberal democrats, 17% moderate democrats, 25% moderates, 7% moderate republicans, and 8% conservative republicans. Our two subsamples differed in that participants from the Midwest were slightly more liberal ($M = 4.06$, $SD = 1.26$) than their Southern counterparts ($M = 3.70$, $SD = 1.26$), $t(321) = 2.43$, $p = .02$, *Cohen's d* = .28. Therefore, campus location is included as a covariate in all analyses to control for sample differences.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

The means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations among all the study variables are reported in Table 1. In support of our predictions, cultural identification, acculturation attitudes, and SES all predicted political orientation: holding a stronger Mexican identity ($r = .20$) and supporting biculturalism as an acculturation attitude ($r = .15$) predicted a more liberal orientation, while belonging to a higher SES ($r = -.24$) and holding stronger assimilation attitudes ($r = -.20$) predicted a less liberal orientation. Importantly, strength of U.S. identity, separation attitudes, and marginalization attitudes did not predict political orientation.

Higher SES predicted weaker Mexican identification ($r = -.21$), stronger U.S. identification ($r = .14$), and stronger assimilation attitudes ($r = .17$). Stronger Mexican identity predicted weaker U.S. identity ($r = -.43$), weaker assimilation attitudes ($r = -.44$), stronger biculturalism attitudes ($r = .13$), stronger separation attitudes ($r = .30$), and weaker marginalization attitudes ($r = -.12$). Stronger U.S. identity predicted stronger assimilation attitudes ($r = .23$) and weaker separation attitudes ($r = -.29$). Assimilation and biculturalism attitudes were independent of each other ($r = -.08$). Because separation and marginalization attitudes did not significantly correlate with

political orientation or SES, we excluded these variables from the remaining analyses and focused our attention to biculturalism and assimilation.

Regression Analyses

The pattern of zero-order correlations suggest that the primary variables are, to some extent, conceptually interrelated and share explanatory power. To further explore the predictors of political orientation, we regressed political orientation on SES, Mexican heritage identification, U.S. identification, assimilation, integration, and included campus location as a covariate. The total variance explained including all predictors was $R = .35$ (or 12% of the variance); however, only strength of Mexican identity ($\beta = .17, p = .01$) and SES ($\beta = -.19, p = .001$) remained significant predictors when all variables were included in the model.

To further explore the joint effects of Mexican identity and SES in predicting political orientation, we next conducted a moderated multiple regression using Hayes' (2012) PROCESS macro for SPSS (model 1 = simple moderation). The PROCESS macro uses an ordinary least squares regression-based path analysis approach to estimate moderation and mediation models, as well as perform conditional process modeling (i.e., moderated mediation and mediated moderation; Hayes & Preacher, *in press*). The benefits of using PROCESS include the ability to probe interactions with simple slopes and regions of significance in a moderation model, as well as estimate the conditional direct and indirect effects in complex moderated mediation models. Note that all estimated effects reported by PROCESS are *unstandardized* regression coefficients.

Both Mexican heritage identification ($B = .18, p < .01$) and SES ($B = -.24, p < .01$) predicted political orientation; however, these main effects were qualified by a significant interaction ($B = .13, p = .03$), $\Delta R^2 = 0.014, F(1, 314) = 4.93, p = .03$. Note that these *unstandardized* coefficients appear in Figure 2 as paths c_1 , c_2 , and c_3 respectively.

To probe this interaction, PROCESS produces the simple slopes at the 10th, 25th, 50th, 75th, and 90th percentiles of the moderator (i.e., SES) when estimating the conditional effects of independent variable (i.e., Mexican identification). Importantly, the estimated effects reported by the program are always within the range of the data and can be interpreted as very low, low, moderate, high, and very high.

For those who identified themselves as working class (10th percentile = -1.94 centered SES) or lower middle-class (25th percentile = -0.9436), the degree of Mexican identification had no effect on political orientation, with non-significant conditional effects of SES (-0.0753 and 0.0544, respectively, both $ps > 0.50$). For those who identified themselves as middle-class (50th percentile = .0564) or upper middle-class (75th percentile = 1.0564), the degree of Mexican identification interacted with SES to predict political orientation, with significant conditional effects (0.1842 and 0.3139, respectively, all $ps < .01$).

Figure 1 depicts the interaction between Mexican cultural identification and SES predicting political orientation using simple slopes of SES (plotted at 25% (low), 50% (mid), and 75% (high) percentiles) at low and high degrees of Mexican identification. As shown in Figure 1, those who were of middle-class (political orientation $\hat{y} = 3.70$) or upper middle-class (political orientation $\hat{y} = 3.36$) status and held a weak Mexican identification were considerably *less* liberal than their counterparts with a stronger Mexican identification.

Moderated Mediation Analyses

Using the PROCESS model, we next tested whether or not the two acculturation attitudes (biculturalism and assimilation) could mediate the interaction between Mexican identification and SES predicting political orientation. Hayes and Preacher (*in press*) use the term *conditional process modeling* to encompass terms such as moderated mediation and mediated moderation (Edwards & Lambert, 2007; Muller, Judd, & Yzerbyt, 2005; Preacher, Rucker, & Hayes, 2007). Hayes (2012) suggests using PROCESS model 8, which simultaneously tests mediated moderation and a specific type of moderation called “first stage and direct effect moderation” (see Edwards & Lambert, 2007; Preacher et al., 2007). This model allows the direct and indirect effects of an independent variable (X) on a dependent variable (Y) through a mediator (M) to be moderated (W). First stage moderation refers to the moderation of the a -path in a mediation model and is denoted by significant $a3$ -path. Direct effect moderation refers to the moderation of the c -path in a mediation model and is denoted by a significant $c'3$ -path.

Hayes (2012) strongly discourages the interpretation of the output through the lens of mediated moderation because this interpretation takes the focus off X and places it on the interaction of XW and its indirect effect. Instead, Hayes suggests focusing on

the moderation of the indirect and direct effects of X by W , which returns the focus back to X as the causal agent of interest and how its causal effect depends on W . In moderated mediation, the indirect effect through the mediator is constructed as the product of the $X \rightarrow M$ effect, which is conditional on W (i.e., $a_1 + a_3W$) and the $M \rightarrow Y$ effect (b_1). Thus, the indirect effect of X on Y through M is no longer a single quantity but is, instead, a function of W and hence is conditional: $(a_1 + a_3W)b_1$.

Biculturalism attitudes. Using PROCESS model 8, we first tested whether the indirect effect through biculturalism attitudes mediated the interaction of Mexican identification and SES on political orientation. The significant interaction between Mexican identification and SES provides evidence for a moderation of the indirect effect through biculturalism (see the dotted lines in Figure 2). In this model, $a_1 = .0617$, $a_3 = .0807$, and $b_1 = .1942$ (rounded to two decimals in Figure 2); therefore, the indirect effect $(.0617 + .0807W)(.1942) = .0277$.

Using the output from PROCESS, we again probe the moderation of the indirect effect using the quartile estimates and inferential tests of the conditional indirect effect at those values. The indirect effect of Mexican identification on political orientation through biculturalism was negative at the lowest levels of SES, but increased and became positive at middle-class and upper class levels. A 95% bootstrap confidence interval for the conditional indirect effect was entirely above zero only among those who identified themselves as upper middle-class (75th percentile = 1.06 centered SES). Thus, biculturalism attitudes mediated the effect of Mexican identification on political orientation only for those who identified themselves as belonging to a higher SES (upper middle-class or above), point estimate = .2082, $CI_{95} = [.0003, .0685]$, but not for those of lower social classes (middle-class and below).

Figure 3 depicts the interaction between Mexican cultural identification and SES predicting biculturalism attitudes using simple slopes of SES (plotted at 25% (low) and 75% (high) percentiles) at low and high degrees of Mexican identification. As shown in Figure 3, those who were of higher SES and held a weaker Mexican identification also held weaker biculturalism attitudes ($\hat{y} = 5.40$) compared to those of higher SES with stronger Mexican identification ($\hat{y} = 5.67$).

The conditional direct effect held (path c'_3 in Figure 2), even after including biculturalism attitudes in the model ($c'_3 = 0.1166$, $p = .05$). These results suggest that the primary process that links strength of Mexican heritage identity to political

orientation depends on the participant's SES. In general, holding a stronger Mexican identity predicts a more liberal political orientation and this is true regardless of one's SES (see right side of Figure 1). However, for individuals who hold a weaker Mexican cultural identity, one's SES does matter. Individuals at the highest SES ranks with weak Mexican cultural identities hold weaker bicultural attitudes (see left side of Figure 3), which in turn, predict a less liberal political orientation (mediation in Figure 2).

Assimilation attitudes. Stronger assimilation attitudes predicted higher SES ($r = .17$), a weaker Mexican cultural identity ($r = -.44$), and a less liberal political orientation ($r = -.20$). Thus, we next tested whether the indirect effect through assimilation attitudes also mediated the interaction of Mexican identification and SES on political orientation. There was a significant interaction between Mexican identification and SES predicting assimilation attitudes (path $a_3 = -.0708$, $p = .04$). However, assimilation attitudes no longer predicted political orientation (path $b_1 = -.1049$, $p = .27$). Thus, the indirect effect of the highest order interaction (a_3*b_1) was not significant (point estimate = .0074, $CI_{95} [-.0091, .0276]$), suggesting that the total indirect effect did not mediate the Mexican identity by SES interaction.

Although assimilation attitudes did not mediate differences in cultural identity and political orientation, we explored the significant moderation effect between Mexican cultural identification and SES predicting assimilation attitudes. As shown in Figure 4, Mexican cultural identification ($B = -.31$, $p < .01$) predicted lower assimilation attitudes; however, this main effect was qualified by a significant interaction ($B = -.07$, $p = .04$), $\Delta R^2 = 0.01$, $F(1, 322) = 4.18$, $p = .04$. Individuals who held a weaker Mexican identification held stronger assimilation attitudes (average $\hat{y} = 2.97$) compared to those with a stronger Mexican identification (average $\hat{y} = 2.34$). Noticeably, individuals with weak Mexican identities and high SES held the strongest assimilation attitudes ($\hat{y} = 3.09$).

Discussion

U.S. born Mexican Americans are varied in how they culturally self-identify and the attitudes they hold towards acculturation; these differences influence political orientation. Replicating prior research (Dutwin et al., 2005), we demonstrated that holding a stronger American identity or a weaker Mexican identity predicts having a less liberal political orientation. We also showed that acculturation attitudes can explain

differences in political orientation. In general, stronger assimilation and weaker biculturalism attitudes predicted a less liberal political orientation.

Socioeconomic status (SES) was also a relevant predictor of political orientation. We demonstrated that SES interacts with strength of Mexican cultural identity to predict political orientation, but also biculturalism and assimilation attitudes. The strongest effects occurred for individuals who had weaker Mexican identities, but belonged to a higher SES. Specifically, these individuals are much more moderate (i.e., closer to the midpoint) in their political orientation, hold weaker biculturalism attitudes, and stronger assimilation attitudes compared to individuals who have stronger Mexican identities. In contrast, for those individuals who are strongly identified with their Mexican identity, SES is not an important predictor of political orientation. Put in another way, if you are a highly ethnically-identified Mexican American, you are likely to hold a more liberal political orientation, stronger biculturalism attitudes, and weaker assimilation attitudes, regardless of SES.

Acculturation Attitudes and Party Affiliation

When taking into account differences in cultural identification and attitudes toward acculturation, the differences in political orientation are more easily understood. For example, Mexican Americans who endorse bicultural attitudes seek to integrate both their Mexican and American customs into a unified identity. Bicultural acculturation attitudes comport well the Democratic Party platform (e.g., support for multiculturalism, affirmative action, and immigration). The values and attitudes associated with being bicultural are likely to supersede any identification with one's class status (i.e., the importance of belonging to the middle- or upper-class), mirroring our findings that SES did not interact with holding a stronger Mexican cultural identity.

In contrast, Mexican Americans whose ethnic identity is not central or important to them are likely to invest in other social identities. Our study shows that Mexicans with a weak cultural identification hold stronger assimilation and weaker biculturalism attitudes, and that these differences are exaggerated the higher one's SES is. This pattern of findings reaffirms the notion that individuals who assimilate do minimize their ethnic identity in order to adopt the dominant American identity. Not surprisingly, this stronger identification with the superordinate American identity, combined with a higher SES, also comports with ideals of the Republican Party (e.g., patriotism, personal responsibility, and meritocracy). In a related vein, Sears and Henry (2003) demonstrated

that conservatives are more likely to exhibit symbolic prejudice—underlying prejudice towards groups that violate traditional White American values such as hard work, independence, and personal responsibility. Mexican Americans who minimize their ethnic culture and adopt the American identity may be trying to distance themselves from stereotypes that Latinos are lazy and do not want to learn to speak English (see also System Justification Theory; Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004). They may instead adopt these “traditional White American” values as a way to emphasize their commitment to the broader “American” identity and to be accepted by other White Republicans. Interestingly, this cultural distancing from one’s ethnic group to solely endorse an American identity may come with a price. Results from a recent meta-analysis (Nguyen & Benet-Martinez, 2013) shows that assimilation, relative to biculturalism, is linked to lower levels of psychological (i.e., wellbeing) and sociocultural (i.e., academic and career success) adjustment.

Cultural Identification and SES

Another notable finding was that individuals with a weak Mexican identity, but who also belonged to a lower SES, showed similar levels of liberal political orientation to those strongly-identified Mexican participants (see Figure 1). One potential explanation is that the class identity of these working class individuals fills the hole left by a weak Mexican identity. In this instance, jobs, social security, and upward mobility may be most important to working class individuals’ needs, and may seem better served by the Democratic Party. Another potential explanation is that these individuals are still negotiating their competing identities, but may feel that the Democratic Party likely has their best interests in mind. For example, as predicted, working class (low SES) individuals with weak Mexican identities held weaker assimilation attitudes (Figure 4) yet stronger bicultural attitudes than their high SES counterparts (Figure 3).

Implications

When a political candidate references the customs or speaks the native language of a cultural group, is this type of campaigning a good practice? Our findings suggest that this type of cultural pandering might be effective for liberal candidates hoping to monopolize on their constituents’ pride and positive feelings towards their heritage culture. A candidate who demonstrates cultural awareness and genuine sincerity in referencing a group’s cultural traditions, practices, or language demonstrates that he or she values multiculturalism and will satisfy those with dual cultural identities. On the other hand, our findings suggest that conservative candidates should resist the urge to

reference a group's cultural heritage in order to curry favor of those constituents. In highlighting a group's cultural practices or language, the political candidate highlights the threatened cultural identity of the constituents and effectively lumps them in with the cultural group they have actively sought to minimize. Conservative candidates would have more success just presenting the prominent issues of their party's platform—issues that align with individuals trying to assimilate to American culture.

Limitations

Although we have shown that cultural identification, acculturation attitudes, and socioeconomic status are important predictors of political orientation in U.S. born Mexican Americans, there are some important limitations to our study. First, the average political orientation in the entire sample was more skewed in the liberal direction. This skewed distribution does reflect real trends within the Mexican American population (approximately 67% of Mexican Americans are Democrat-identified). However, future research should oversample more conservative or Republican-identified Mexican Americans. A second limitation is that our sample has limited generalizability—participants were college-aged so they may still be developing their political preferences, but they may also have more access and exposure to political information. Finally, we only examined identification and acculturation attitudes in U.S. born Mexican Americans. The benefit of this design allowed us to examine acculturation attitudes of bicultural Mexican Americans who were not also dealing with the stress of being a recent immigrant; however, immigration status likely plays an important role in one's cultural identification and acculturation strategies. Future research should examine predictors of political orientation in adults from all Latino subgroups (Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, and Central/South Americans), as well as the impact of immigrant status on political orientation.

Conclusion

In the 2012 Summer Olympics, Mexican-born Leo Manzano won the silver medal for the United States in the 1500-meters final. To celebrate his victory, he waved both the American and Mexican flags as he made his victory lap; he later tweeted, "Silver medal, still felt like I won! Representing two countries USA and Mexico!" (Navarette Jr., 2012). CNN Contributor and fellow Mexican American, Rubin Navarette Jr., wrote, "Leo, con todo respeto (with all due respect), you should be proud of your

accomplishment. You deserve it. But when you're an Olympic athlete, you don't get to have your cake and eat it, too. Sooner or later, you have to choose which country you're going to represent. And you did. You made that choice, when you put on the jersey for Team USA” (Navarette Jr., 2012).

This example illustrates how two self-identified Mexican Americans hold different attitudes about acculturation. We might describe Manzano’s proud statement of representing both Mexico and America as adopting attitudes in favor of biculturalism, while Navarette’s opinion that you “can’t have your cake and eat it too” emphasizes a strong attitude of assimilation—you must choose your an American identity over your Mexican identity. Not surprisingly, liberals of all ethnicities were more likely to support Manzano’s actions while conservatives sided with Navarette. Our study shows that understanding the complexity of a person’s cultural identity and attitudes towards acculturation opens a window into his or her political orientation, or said differently, into how he or she perceives the world and what he or she thinks is just.

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Appendix

Table 1

Means, standard deviations, and correlations for all variables.

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Political orientation	3.84	1.27							
2. Socio-economic status	2.95	1.00	-.24**						
3. Mexican heritage culture ID	4.92	1.17	.20**	.21**					
4. U.S. culture ID	2.96	1.56	-.03	.14*	-.43**				
5. Assimilation attitudes	2.70	.82	-.20**	.17**	-.44**	.23*			
6. Biculturalism attitudes	5.53	.77	.15**	.05	.13*	.03	-.08		
7. Separation attitudes	2.85	1.01	-.04	.06	.30**	.29*	.19**	-.35**	
8. Marginalization attitudes	1.67	.72	-.10	.04	-.12*	.08	.21**	-.16**	.11

Note. $N = 323$. Political orientation is coded where higher numbers indicate more liberal orientation.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

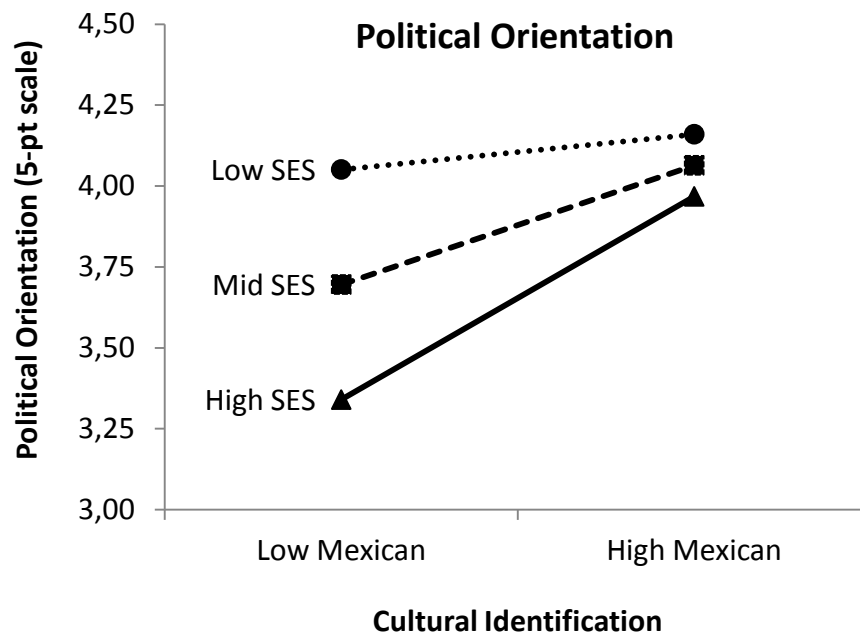


Figure 1. Political orientation as a function of strength of Mexican identification and socio-economic status (SES), where low SES is the 25% percentile (lower middle-class), mid SES is the 50% percentile (middle-class), and high SES is the 75% percentile (upper middle-class). Political orientation is coded where higher numbers indicate more liberal orientation.

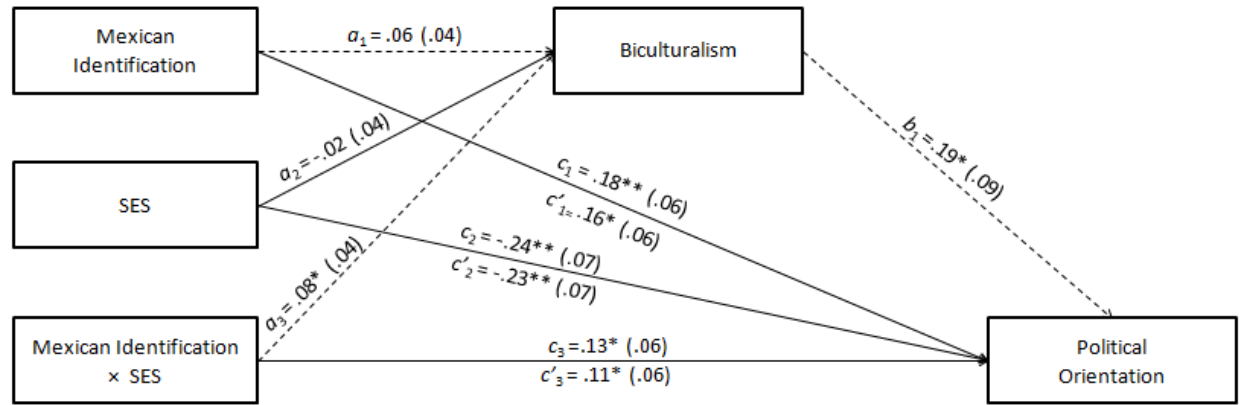


Figure 2. Estimates of the unstandardized regression weights (standard errors in parentheses) in the moderated mediation model with socio-economic status (SES) as moderator and biculturalism attitudes as a mediator. Political orientation is coded where higher numbers indicate more liberal orientation. Coefficients for the c -paths reflect the unstandardized regression weights from the simple moderation model. Coefficients for the c' -paths reflect unstandardized regression weights from the moderated mediation model. Solid lines refer to direct effects and the dotted lines to indirect effects.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

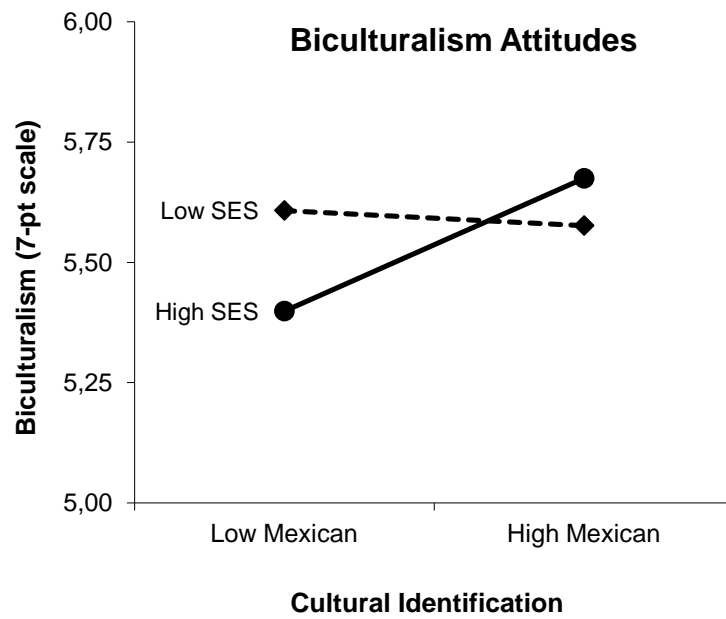


Figure 3. Biculturalism attitudes as a function of strength of Mexican identification and socio-economic status (SES), where low SES is the 25% percentile (lower middle-class) and high SES is the 75% percentile (upper middle-class).

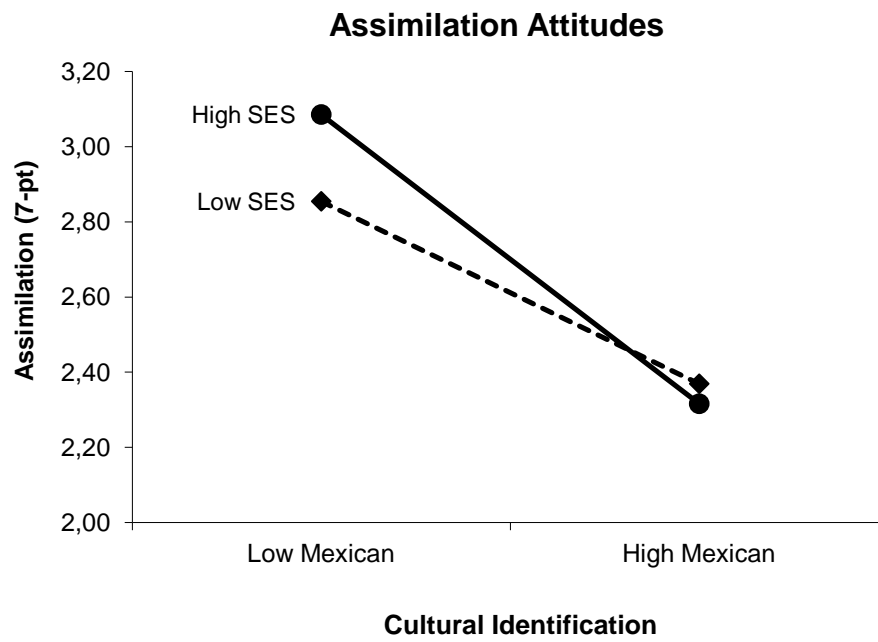


Figure 4. Assimilation attitudes as a function of strength of Mexican identification and socio-economic status (SES), where low SES is the 25% percentile (lower middle-class) and high SES is the 75% percentile (upper middle-class).