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Ethnic Disadvantage vs. Straight-line Assimilation: How Well Do Two Competing Theories Predict Latino Political Participation?

Abstract

In this paper, I provide an empirical test of two competing theories derived from the sociological literature on immigrant assimilation as they are applied to patterns of Latino political participation. Classical or “straight-line” theory predicts a positive relationship between acculturation and political behavior while the Ethnic Disadvantage and Segmented Assimilation models predict an inverse relationship. This research expands the current literature on Latino political participation by examining three generations of Cuban, Mexican and Puerto Rican immigrants and by evaluating whether the predictions of these competing models hold to empirical scrutiny. Binary response and ordinary logistic regression models based on data from the *2004 National Survey of Latinos: Politics and Civic Participation Survey* fail to support the hypotheses of the Ethnic Disadvantage model over the Straight-line model in predicting electoral behavior among Latinos but context of reception variables explain more of the variance in non-electoral participation than does exposure to American cultural norms. The preliminary findings of this paper are that (1) an inverse relationship between direct or indirect discrimination and non-electoral political activity exists among Mexicans and Puerto Ricans; (2) the exposure hypothesis of the straight-line assimilation theory remains the best predictor of Latino electoral behavior; and that (3) third generation immigrants who perceive discrimination to be a problem are more likely to vote than similarly situated first generation immigrants in direct contradiction to the Ethnic Disadvantage perspective on immigrant political assimilation.

Introduction

During the period spanning 1991 – 1998 the average annual number of immigrants admitted to the United States was approximately 700,000 (Bean 2003). By the late 1990s, approximately 25.8 million immigrants resided in the United States, the majority of which came from Latin America. Driven largely by waves of new immigrants, the Latino population, which currently numbers approximately 40 million individuals, has increased dramatically since 1990, and now surpasses African Americans as the largest minority group in the United States (Wong, 2000). In contrast to pre-1965 immigrants who have gained economic and cultural parity with Anglos despite being economically disadvantaged and discriminated against, Latino immigrants have not fared as well (Wildsmith, 2005). Considerable debate among immigration scholars exists as to whether these “new” immigrants will also be able to fully assimilate economically, culturally and politically.

Proponents of the straight-line or classical assimilation theory argue that members of later generations and those immigrants residing the longest in the United States will show the greatest decline in differences in behavior compared to the majority group. This theory assumes that assimilation proceeds linearly -- with cultural assimilation preceding other forms of assimilation - - and that it is irreversible -- in other words once it happens it is permanent. In contrast, the Ethnic Disadvantage model predicts that discrimination and other institutional barriers will preclude successful assimilation into mainstream US culture (Portes, 1995; Portes and Zhou, 1994).

Literature Review

Among Latinos, there is substantial inter-group variation that characterizes whether or not to become a United States citizen or to participate in politics. Naturalization is an important issue for both Mexicans and Cubans; however, it is not an issue for Puerto Ricans because they are granted citizenship status due to their commonwealth origins (McClain and Garcia 1993). This highlights a major barrier to political participation among Latinos, namely the large proportion that are foreign born and ineligible to vote. Several studies have found that a process of reinforcement through exposure to the political system underlies the development of political attitudes among immigrant groups (Wong, 2000). Highton and Burris (2002), for example, studied the interaction between nativity status and exposure and report that nativity status has a powerful effect on turnout, but only when considered in conjunction with the number of years lived in the United States.

There exists a gender gap in participation rates among Hispanic men and women. For example, Montoya (2002) demonstrated that Mexican men and women are more similar than either Puerto Rican or Cuban men and women in their level of political activity (Montoya 2002). Mexican women are more likely to participate when they have additional monetary resources, as

they grow older or as their proficiency of English increases. In contrast, these factors are not as important for Mexican men or Puerto Rican and Cuban women, whose voting behavior is more aptly explained by the extent and quality of their work skills.

Paradoxically, Latinos on the whole seem to be more concerned about issues in the United States than they are about issues related to their country of origin (Dominguez 2002). Nevertheless, many Latinos are less politically involved in the United States than they are in their country of origin due to a lack of efforts to mobilize them and to their relative alienation in the United States as compared with their home country (McClain and Garcia 1993). Substantial differences in educational attainment and income explain, in part, these differences in political behavior. Generally speaking, Latinos are economically disadvantaged relative to other groups, with poverty rates being at least three times higher among Hispanics than whites (Wildsmith, 2005; Ramirez, 2000). The traditional model of voter participation, which views participation as being conditioned on income and other individual characteristics (Verba and Nie 1972; Abramson and Aldrich 1982; Cassel and Luskin 1988), has been the model of choice to explain patterns of Latino political behavior (Marschall, 2001; de la Garza 2004). Early studies predicting participation based on socioeconomic indicators such as income, education, age, gender, marital status, ethnicity and citizenship (Montoya 2002) have repeatedly shown that Latinos participate at levels lower than Anglos. Later studies have found that higher levels of political cynicism, lower rates of naturalization, structural barriers to registration and voting, and low levels of information and interest in the United States political system are largely responsible for low turnout rates (McClain and Garcia 1993). Lately, the empirical accuracy of the socio-economic model as a predictor of Latino political attitudes behaviors has been questioned and other factors besides socioeconomic have provided a richer explanation of political participation. Nevertheless, we know little about how alternative theories of acculturation explain modes of participation among Latinos (de la Garza, 2004) and much of what we do know comes from data that is now nearly 16 years old. Given the recent surge in immigration to this country, it is unclear whether findings from earlier studies, even those done as recently as 10 years ago, continue to hold empirically. In this paper, I attempt to address these shortcomings in the literature by examining alternative theories as predictors of Latino political participation and two of its components: electoral and non-electoral participation.

Two Competing Models of Latino Political Behavior

The Straight-Line Model of Assimilation

The conceptual framework of assimilation theory as a model of immigrant experiences with American culture was first proposed by Gordon (1964). Gordon identified seven assimilation dimensions: cultural assimilation, structural assimilation, marital assimilation, identificational assimilation, attitudinal receptional assimilation, behavior receptional assimilation, and civic assimilation (Aguirre, 1989). A defining characteristic of this model is that over time, immigrants are presumed to be able to overcome structural barriers that would otherwise prohibit full participation in U.S. politics.

Exposure to US customs can occur at either the inter-generational level or the intra-generational level. At the intra-generational level, the most important factor believed to encourage the acceptance of American political norms is time, or years lived in the United States. On the other hand, at the inter-generational level, the straight-line model conceives of immigrant political incorporation as occurring over the course of several generations with the implication that latter generations will be more highly politically incorporated than their predecessors. The expectation is that the members of later generations and those immigrants residing in the United States the longest will show the greatest decline in differences in political behaviors compared to the majority group. This theoretical insight leads to the following research hypotheses:

H_a^1 : Third generation immigrants are more likely to participate in politics than second generation immigrants who in turn should be more politically active than first generation immigrants.

H_a^2 : Latino immigrants who have resided in the United States the longest will be more politically active than those who have been here only a short period of time.

H_a^3 : Latino immigrants who are culturally and linguistically assimilated are more likely to participate in politics than those who are not.

Immigration scholars debate whether the process of assimilation among post-1965 immigrants has actually followed a straight-line model. This debate has motivated several alternative models to explain differences in assimilation trajectories over time.

The Ethnic Disadvantage Model of Assimilation

In contradistinction to the straight-line theory as Latino assimilation, the Ethnic Disadvantage Model, proposed by Portes et al. (1984), predicts that immigrants come to realize the presence of institutional obstacles that create barriers to engaging in political processes and

are therefore likely to become discouraged from participating in these processes over time. This model argues that ethnic awareness among immigrant groups is developed in the host country and is not derivative of one's country of origin (Aguirre et al. 1989). The main theoretical insight is that greater familiarity and economic success allows immigrants to gain a realistic understanding of inequality and discrimination against them as they compete against natives for resources (Aguirre et al. 1989).

With respect to political outcomes, the Ethnic Disadvantage model predicts that later generations' experience with *real or perceived* discrimination in the form of prejudice against themselves, their friends or their family members, together with a growing awareness of their lower socioeconomic standing compared to natives (Bean 2004) may undermine political attachments. Proponents of this theory argue that first generation immigrants will be less aware of their second-class status because for them socioeconomic opportunities are evaluated relative to those in their country of origin and not relative to those in the United States. Taken as a whole, if this model holds to empirical scrutiny, second and third generation immigrants should be more highly politically incorporated than their first generation counterparts, *especially if the second and third generation immigrants have experienced discrimination and other institutional barriers*. Importantly, proponents of this model believe that the mere *awareness* of discrimination will tend to discourage participation in the American polity. This leads to the following research hypotheses:

H_a^4 : There is an inverse relationship between political participation and amount of time lived in the United States.

H_a^5 : First, second and third generation immigrants who have been victims of prejudice and/or discrimination or who perceive discrimination to be problematic are less likely to participate in politics.

H_a^6 : Second and third generation immigrants who have been victims of prejudice and/or discrimination or who perceive discrimination to be problematic are less likely to participate in politics than similarly situated first generation immigrants.

H_a^7 : Cuban, Mexican and Puerto Rican immigrants who have been victims of prejudice and/or discrimination are less likely to participate in politics than first generation immigrants.

This paper contributes to the developing literature in political science on immigrant incorporation by evaluating these two competing theories in explaining Latino political behavior. To test the straight-line model, I focus on how cultural, structural and identificational assimilation affect two dimensions of political behavior, electoral and non-electoral, among three generations

of Latino immigrants of Cuban, Mexican and Puerto Rican descent. To test the Ethnic Disadvantage model, discriminatory and social context variables are used to provide insight for conceptualizing how institutional and social factors act to prohibit participation in the American polity.

Table 1 extends the model proposed by Xie and Greenman (2005) to reflect the different pathways of assimilation conditional on institutional barriers and level of assimilation. The different columns reflect the view that immigrants have differential experiences and that some immigrants will perceive discrimination in American institutions to be problematic while others will not. In accordance with the Ethnic Disadvantage model, it is further assumed that individuals in the same generation will have different perception of discrimination, which in turn reflects different immigrant experiences in the host country. The interest is in describing how levels of political participation differ among individuals based on cell occupancy. In other words, this classification system has implications for the political behavior. The straight-line assimilation model predicts that third generation immigrants will be fully incorporated irrespective of economic and discriminatory barriers while first and second generation immigrants will be at different levels but that the distance between second and third generation immigrants will be smaller than the distance between first and third generation immigrants. In the pictorial representation above, Group D immigrants are closer to Group C than to Group E immigrants in terms of political orientation toward United States politics. On the other hand, the Ethnic Disadvantage model predicts a strong intra-generational effect towards incorporation into American politics. Irrespective of generational status, Groups A and B are not completely assimilated culturally and economically. The difference between Group A and B lies in the perception of institutional barriers that tends to discourage participation in American politics. The theory predicts that immigrants who do not face economic and/or cultural barriers will tend towards lower levels of participation than those who do because lower socioeconomic status communities and discrimination offers “oppositional” models that can lead to “downward” assimilation. This potential for the presence of such divergent outcomes in political incorporation based on cultural and economic barriers provide the core argument of alternative models to classical assimilation theory (Xie and Greenman, 2005).

Assimilation Trajectory	Generational Status					
	Third Generation		Second Generation		First Generation	
	No Barriers	Institutional Barriers	No Barriers	Institutional Barriers	No Barriers	Institutional Barriers
Straight-line Assimilation Model						
Incomplete	-	-	D (Path 4)	D (Path 4)	E (Path 5)	E (Path 5)
Full	C (Path 1)	C (Path 1)	-	-	-	-
Ethnic Disadvantage Model						
Incomplete	A (Path 3)	B (Path 3)	A (Path 3)	B (Path 3)	A (Path 3)	B (Path 3)
Full	C (Path 1)	D (Path 2)	C (Path 1)	D (Path 2)	C (Path 1)	D (Path 2)

Table 1. Interaction Between Assimilation Trajectory, Generational Status and Perceived Institutional Discrimination.

The level of political participation will differ among individuals based on cell occupancy. A similar representation can be made for the interaction between assimilation trajectory, perceived institutional discrimination and years lived in the United States.

Data and Research Methods

Operational Definitions

Assimilation is operationalized as a multidimensional construct that characterizes the convergence of Latino economic, social and cultural values towards those of mainstream American society (Alba and Nee, 1997; Xie and Greenman, 2005). Following the work of Xie and Greenman (2005), which expanded the work of Gordon (1964), the measures of assimilation used in this paper are categorized under four separate headings corresponding to demographic, cultural, structural and identificational assimilation. The demographic approach quantifies exposure to American customs in terms of years lived in the United States and generational status, in accordance with the tenets of the straight-line model. The measure of generational status used here is binary and equal to unity if the immigrant is in generation $i = 1, 2, 3$ and zero otherwise¹. Years lived in the United States is a continuous measure ranging from less than 1 year to 81 years.

Cultural assimilation is multidimensional and includes both real and perceived levels of assimilation. First, linguistic assimilation is operationalized as being English dominant or bilingual and separate indicator variables are included for each measure. The referent category includes all respondents who reported being Spanish dominant. The second measure is a binary variable designed to assess whether the respondent believes that the United States has a single core Anglo-Protestant culture ($d = 1$) or is made up of many cultures ($d = 0$). The third measure is a scale ($\alpha = .601$) comprised of four items measuring the degree to which the respondent believes that in order to be part of American society, an immigrant should (1) speak English; (2) believe in the U.S. constitution; (3) become a U.S. citizen; and (4) vote in U.S. elections. Higher values indicate the respondent does not believe that an immigrant should do these things in order to be considered part of American society. Finally, a binary variable equal to unity was included to measure the importance that the respondent places on changing their cultural orientation so that they blend into the larger society, as in the idea of a melting pot of cultures.

Overall, the models include two measures of structural assimilation, which occurs when different cultural groups come into contact in institutional settings (Aguirre et al. 1989). First, two dummy variables measure educational attainment in the form of highest grade completed, with the omitted category being college educated. Second, low socioeconomic status is measured by a dummy variable equal to one if the respondent's current income level is below \$30,000. Finally,

¹ First generation immigrants are those immigrants who are foreign born. Second generation immigrants are native born with two foreign born parents. Third generation immigrants are native born with at least one parent born in the United States.

identificational assimilation is measured by the degree to which respondent prefers to identify as a Latino.

Because the Ethnic Disadvantage perspective presumes that ethnic awareness is developed in the host country, a measure designed to assess the relative difference in race relations between the United States and the respondent's country of origin was included in the analysis. Specifically, a dummy variable equal to one measures whether the respondent agrees that race relations are better in the United States than in their country of origin. The degree to which respondent agrees that the friendliness and openness of the people is better in the United States ($d = 1$) than in respondent's country of origin is used as an alternative measure of immigrant reception in the US.

Testing the predictions of the Ethnic Disadvantage model also requires including variables that measure real or perceived discriminatory conditions in the host country. Two variables were included to assess the affect of these variables on political participation. First, respondent was asked, "In the past 5 years, have you or a family member experienced discrimination?" (Yes = 1, No = 0). Perceived discrimination in the host country is measured by a second question that taps the degree to which respondent believes that discrimination in the United States is a major problem, a minor problem or not a problem. Responses "major problem" and "minor problem" were coded 1 and response "not a problem" was coded 0.

The analysis included several control variables. First, age is included to mitigate any confounding effect with years lived in the United States and also because research has shown that older individuals participate in politics at higher levels. Gender differences in participation rates highlight the need to include a binary variable equal to unity if the respondent is female. Likewise, differences among ethnic groups were allowed by estimating different slope coefficients for each of Mexicans, Puerto Ricans and Cubans. Finally, the degree to which respondent is interested and trusts political processes was added to the model because of their obvious relationship to political participation. Both variables were binary and equal to one if the respondent either pays a lot or a fair amount of attention to politics or trusts that the United States government will do "what is right" just about always or most of the time, respectively.

Recall that the Ethnic Disadvantage model assumes that institutional barriers to assimilation negatively impact political participation and that this result holds irrespective of exposure (i.e. time spent in the United States and/or generational status). Importantly, to effectively test the hypotheses of this model, interaction terms must be included. Therefore, to allow for differences in experiences due to structural barriers (in this paper conceptualized in accordance with the Ethnic Disadvantage models view regarding the importance of

discrimination), interactions between years lived in the United States, generational status, perceived discriminatory conditions in the host country, economic disadvantage and national origin group are included in the analysis.

Statistical Modeling

Statistical analyses were carried out using STATA, Version 9.0 (StataCorp, College Station, TX). The analysis of these data includes electoral and non-electoral participation as the response variables of interest and sociodemographic characteristics and assimilation indicators as independent variables. Logistic and ordinal logistic regression equations were used to model the effects of these variables on the propensity to participate in politics while accounting for sampling survey design effects and covariates related to both the frequency of participatory activity and other independent variables described above. Logistic regression was chosen for model 1 because the response variable assumes two categories corresponding to “voted” and “not voted.” The second model includes a dichotomous measure equal to unity if the respondent participated in at least one of the following political activities:

1. Attended a public meeting or demonstration in the community in which you live;
2. Contacted an elected official;
3. Contributed money to a candidate running for public office;
4. Attended a political party meeting or function; or
5. Worked as a volunteer or for pay for a political candidate.

Finally, the third model includes an ordered set of responses that quantify the level of each respondent’s non-electoral political participation, with higher levels corresponding to greater levels of involvement. Responses were recoded to indicate a range of possible participatory activity from no participation to frequent participation. The distribution of responses is shown in Table 2.

Frequency	Percentage
None of the time	69.73
Rarely	16.16
Often	7.99
Very Often	6.13
Table 2. Distribution of Responses of Non-electoral participation among a sample of $N = 2154$ Latinos.	

Model 3 favors ordinal logistic regression because it is designed to handle situations where an ordinal variable is ranked from low to high but the distance between adjacent categories is unknown. This method is preferable because by preserving the dependent variable in its current form we do not need to infer a lower bound classification cut-off point for estimation purposes

and we stay true to the responses given by survey respondents. Second, treating measures of non-electoral participation as if they were an interval level involves the implicit assumption that the intervals between adjacent categories are equal (Long, 1997). Finally, estimating simultaneous equations using proportional odds models takes advantage of the natural ordering of the outcome variable. A test of the proportional odds assumption, while stringent, was met in all models reported.

Results and Discussion

Before proceeding to the multivariate analysis, it is instructive to examine the distribution of the independent and dependent variables used in the analysis. Table 3 shows the group means for the participatory, assimilation and control variables. Level of participation in United States politics can be arranged on a continuum ranging from high to low. As can be seen from the table, the majority of Latinos have voted at least once in a United States election (73.5%) while very few have worked for a volunteer or for pay for a political candidate (4.8%) and this holds irrespective of ethnic origin group. Puerto Ricans have a slightly longer average stay in the United States than do Mexicans or Cubans. Very few Latinos believe in a single Anglo protestant culture but Mexicans are more likely to believe this than are either Puerto Ricans or Cubans. Slightly over half of the sample of Puerto Ricans report proficiency in two languages while Mexicans (.303) and Cubans (.361) are more likely to be dominant in either English or Spanish. Mexicans (.503) are more likely to prefer self-identifying as Latino than are either Puerto Ricans (.411) or Cubans (.447). About half of all Mexicans (.495) are of low socio-economic status while Puerto Ricans (.437) and Cubans (.478) fair only slightly better on this dimension. Less than 40% of Mexicans have attended college with similar but slightly larger percentages of Puerto Ricans and Cubans being college educated. Very few Latinos feel that the friendliness and openness of people is better in the United States than in their country of origin. Additionally, an overwhelming majority of Latinos believe that racial discrimination is a major or minor problem in the United States. Mexicans and Puerto Ricans are significantly more likely to be a victim of discrimination (meaning themselves or their family) than are Cubans but Cubans are significantly more likely to trust that the United States government will do what is right and to show interest in political processes. Cubans tend to be slightly older on average than Mexicans or Cubans. Exactly half of Mexican and Cubans in the sample are married compared to approximately 48% of Puerto Ricans. Finally, a slight majority of Mexicans, Cubans and Puerto Ricans are female.

Table 3. Means for Groups of Variables by Ethnic Origin					
	Mexican N = 854	Puerto Rican N = 282	Cuban N = 421	Other Latino N = 342	Mean All Latino
Dependent Variables					
Ever Voted in United States Election	.730	.820	.693	.686	.735
Contacted an Elected Official	.127	.150	.129	.091	.125
Contributed Money to a Candidate	.084	.078	.117	.067	.087
Worked as a volunteer or for pay for a political candidate	.054	.061	.040	.029	.048
Attended a public meeting or demonstration in the community where you live	.199	.204	.171	.158	.187
Attended a political party meeting or function	.097	.075	.109	.082	.094
Demographic Assimilation Variables					
Years Lived in United States	25.82	29.72	25.23	18.12	24.98
First Generation	.554	.525	.853	.822	.651
Second Generation	.213	.387	.126	.143	.208
Third Generation	.233	.089	.021	.035	.142
Cultural Assimilation Variables					
R. believes in a single Anglo Protestant Culture	.115	.076	.088	.092	.101
R. believes an immigrant must do X to assimilate	5.45	5.29	5.04	5.35	5.33
R. believes it is important to change to assimilate	.179	.199	.226	.211	.196
English Dominant	.256	.291	.069	.146	.207
Bilingual	.303	.518	.361	.339	.348
Identificational Assimilation Variables					
R. identifies as Hispanic or Latino	.503	.411	.447	.488	.478
Structural Assimilation Variables					
Low socioeconomic status	.495	.437	.478	.507	.486
Less than High School Education	.338	.270	.254	.290	.306
High School Education	.306	.251	.276	.255	.285
R. feels welcome in the United States	.152	N/A	.209	.237	.157
R. believes race relations in United States are good or better than country of origin	.266	.007	.361	.374	.268
R. or R.'s family has been discriminated against	.415	.428	.187	.332	.360
R. believes discrimination is a major or minor problem	.822	.874	.737	.816	.811
Sociodemographic Control Variables					
Political Trust	.361	.337	.584	.327	.396
Political Interest	.518	.621	.644	.520	.557
Sociodemographic Control Variables					
Age	37.10	40.32	51.55	37.56	40.36
Married	.500	.438	.500	.468	.487
Female	.522	.592	.568	.544	.544
Source: 2004 National Latino Political Survey					
Sample includes Mexican, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, South and Central Americans, Dominicans and El Salvadoran only					

Dependent Variable	Electoral Participation		Non-Electoral Participation	
	<i>Estimated Coefficient</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>Estimated Coefficient</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Mexican	0.0144	0.639	-0.002	0.936
Puerto Rican	0.0059	0.849	-0.0345	0.169
Cuban	0.0008	0.979	-0.0087	0.728
Age	0.1321	0.000	-0.0205	0.413
Married	0.0824	0.007	-0.0188	0.452
Female	0.0465	0.131	-0.0526	0.036
First Generation	0.004	0.896	0.0262	0.295
Second Generation	-0.0014	0.965	0.0148	0.554
Assimilation 1	-0.0249	0.418	0.0331	0.187
Assimilation 2	0.0015	0.961	-0.0482	0.054
Hispanic Identity	0.0591	0.055	0.0563	0.025
Low SES	-0.0888	0.004	-0.0426	0.089
Less HS	-0.1512	0.000	-0.0652	0.009
HS	-0.0835	0.007	-0.1063	0.000
Political Trust	0.0276	0.370	-0.0219	0.382
Political Interest	0.2614	0.000	0.2522	0.000
Years in US	0.0845	0.006	0.0702	0.005
Bilingual	0.0472	0.125	0.0655	0.009
English Dominant	0.0291	0.344	0.0398	0.112
Latino Change	0.0000	0.999	0.0268	0.284
US Born	0.0101	0.744	0.0309	0.218
Welcome	-0.0241	0.434	0.0664	0.008
Better	0.0361	0.241	-0.036	0.15

Table 4. Partial Correlation Coefficients of Electoral and Non-Electoral Political Participation and Predictor Variables

The Straight Line Assimilation Model

Participation in Electoral Politics

The partial correlation coefficients (Table 4) between the indicators of assimilation, discrimination and political activity lend preliminary support to the predictions of the assimilation perspective. For example, individuals with low socioeconomic status and lower levels of education are significantly less likely to participate in politics while individuals who have been in the United States longer are more likely to be politically active. Turning to the logistic regression analysis², which quantifies the relationship more precisely, for every 10 year increase in the number of years lived in the United States the odds of voting increase by $\exp(.041 \times 10) = 1.51$ or, in percentage terms by $100 \times \{\exp(.041 \times 10) - 1\} = 50.68\%$. Low socioeconomic status individuals are .657 times as likely to vote as those who are not. To continue, the odds of voting are 78% less for individuals who have less than a high school education and 43% less for those with a high school education than for those who are college educated, respectively. None of the other assimilation variables were statistically significant at conventional levels ($p \leq .10$).

It is important to note that political interest is extremely statistically significant at very small levels ($Z = 5.87, p < .001$). To assess the relationship between voting, exposure and interest in politics, predicted probabilities were generated for a range of values corresponding to years lived in the United States while the other covariates remained fixed at their means. Symbolically, the predicted probability is given by

$$\hat{\text{Pr}} = (\text{Vote} = 1 | x_1, I_1 = j, I_2 = k) = \Phi(\mathbf{x}_0 \hat{\boldsymbol{\beta}}), \quad j = 0, 1; \quad k = 0, 1,$$

Where x_1 = respondent's age, I_1 is an indicator variable corresponding to respondent's ethnic origin, and I_2 is an indicator variable = 1 if respondent is very interested or somewhat interested in politics. Table 5 shows the average of these probabilities for individuals who have lived in the US under 45 years and 45 years or more. Puerto Ricans who have lived in the United States less than 45 years and who show little interest in politics are significantly less likely to vote than similarly situated Mexicans and Cubans. Furthermore, Cubans who have lived in the United States 45 years or more and who are interested in politics have the highest average predicted probability of voting over all other combinations.

² In the analysis that follows, all variables are held at their mean values.

	Not Interested			Interested		
Years Lived in the United States	Mexican	Puerto Rican	Cuban	Mexican	Puerto Rican	Cuban
< 45 Years	0.612	0.538	0.708	0.856	0.812	0.902
> = 45 Years	0.898	0.868	0.934	0.974	0.962	0.982

Table 5. Average predicted probabilities of Voting By Years in the United States, Interest in Politics and Ethnicity

Participation in Non-Electoral Politics

I now turn to an examination of the hypotheses of the straight-line model with respect to non-electoral political participation. The model including the dichotomous measure of involvement shows very little support for the straight-line assimilation model. In fact, the results directly oppose the model's predictions. For example, respondent's who believe in a strong assimilationist orientation, meaning they feel it is necessary to assimilate culturally and/or politically, are *less* likely to participate in politics. Every standard deviation increase in the assimilation scale corresponds to a 1.15 *increase* in the odds of non-electoral participation and the result is significant at the $p = .05$ level. In addition, the odds of participating are 22% greater for respondents who report being bilingual than for those who are Spanish dominant, but there is no statistically significant difference between respondents who report being Spanish and those who report being English dominant. The most significant predictors of non-electoral political participation among the sample of Latinos correspond to education, gender, political interest and political trust. For example, the odds of participating in politics among Latinos who report trusting the government are 4.41 times that of Latinos who trust the government infrequently or never. Similarly, the odds of participating decrease by almost 40% for those who have a high school education as opposed to a college degree. Finally, the odds of non-electoral participation are 1.5 times as high for men, holding the other variables constant. The results of the ordinal logistic regression are consistent with the binary response model and similarly fail to support the straight-line assimilation model.

The Ethnic Disadvantage Model

Participation in Electoral Politics

I now turn to an examination of the hypotheses of the Ethnic Disadvantage model. Model 3 includes four measures of discrimination plus a dummy variable that measures whether the respondent lives in an urban neighborhood, tests the hypothesis that discrimination in the host

country is significantly related to voting behavior. The multivariate results lend no support whatsoever to this hypothesis as all coefficients are statistically insignificant at conventional levels. Years lived in the US remains significant despite the addition of these variables.

Importantly, these results are not conclusive because the Ethnic Disadvantage predicts that positive outcomes are relative, which suggests the addition of interacted variables. In other words, a statistical model designed to test the Ethnic Disadvantage model must include interaction terms in order to stay true to its hypotheses. Table 6 shows the results when interactions between years lived in the United States, generational status, ethnic origin and the variables measuring discrimination and the context of reception were included in the analysis.

Variable ^a	Logit Coefficient (Robust s.e.)	$P > Z $
<i>Third Generation</i>	-1.38 (.853)	0.105
<i>Third Generation X Perceives Discrimination to be a problem</i>	1.87 (.721)	0.010***
$\beta_{third} \times \beta_{third \times discprob} = 0$		0.0345**
a. A total of 4 (discrimination variables) X 3 (Ethnicity Variables) X 2 (Generational Variables) X 1 (Years Lived In the United States) = 24 interaction terms were included in 4 models. Only significant results are presented.		
Table 6. Testing the Ethnic Disadvantage Model for Electoral Participation with Interaction terms Between Exposure, Ethnicity and Discrimination		

The results directly contradict the hypotheses of the Ethnic Disadvantage model. The results show that third generation immigrants who perceive discrimination to be a problem are *more likely* to participate in politics but the Ethnic Disadvantage model predicts that third generation immigrants who perceive discrimination to be a problem are less likely to be politically active. Note that to examine the effect of discrimination on political participation for third generation immigrants versus first generation immigrants we cannot simply look at the coefficient on the interaction term, but rather must examine the effect of both the interacted variables and the variables as they appear in level form. The results show that the odds of voting among third generation immigrants who perceive discrimination to be a problem are 1.62 times that of first generation immigrants who perceive discrimination to be problematic. An alternative interpretation asks about the generational effect on participation among those who perceive discrimination to be a problem and those who do not. The results show that the odds of voting among third generation immigrants are 3.69 times higher if they perceive discrimination to be a

problem than if they do not, which is more evidence against the Ethnic Disadvantage perspective of immigrant political incorporation.

Participation in Non-Electoral Politics

Table 7 shows how the inclusion of the variables measuring discriminatory context yields several statistically significant results with respect to non-electoral participation. For example, the ordinal logistic regression model shows that, conditional on other covariates, the odds that political involvement is less than or equal to category j versus greater than j is estimated to be .681 times as high for respondents who perceive discrimination to be a problem as those who do not. In addition, the odds of participating in politics are almost twice as high if the respondent believes that people are friendlier in the United States than they are in their country of origin. On the other hand, those who have personal and real experiences with discrimination are *more* inclined to participate. Including the discrimination variables decreases the p -value of the variable measuring years lived in the United States, which is now statistically significant ($p = .077$). This implies a positive differential between individuals with similar perceptions of and experiences with discrimination and increasing exposure to American cultural norms.

<i>Hypothesis</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Wald Test</i>	
		<i>W</i>	<i>p</i>
$\beta_{perdisc} = 0$	1	3.31	0.069*
$\beta_{realdisc} = 0$	1	3.51	0.061*
$\beta_{welcome} = 0$	1	3.45	0.063*
$\beta_{racere1} = 0$	1	.150	0.698
$\beta_{perdisc} = \beta_{realdisc} = \beta_{welcome} = \beta_{racere1} = 0$	4	10.34	0.035**
$\beta_{perdisc} = \beta_{realdisc} = \beta_{welcome} = \beta_{racere1} = \beta_{urban} = 0$	5	11.57	0.041**

Table 7. Hypothesis tests of Ethnic Disadvantage.

Table 8 shows the results for the models that include the interaction terms. For Puerto Ricans, there is an inverse relationship between exposure and participation in politics. Mexicans who have experienced discrimination personally are significantly less likely to be politically active than are Mexicans who have not been discriminated against $\exp(0.778435 - 0.8731213) = .910$. A similar result holds for Puerto Ricans.

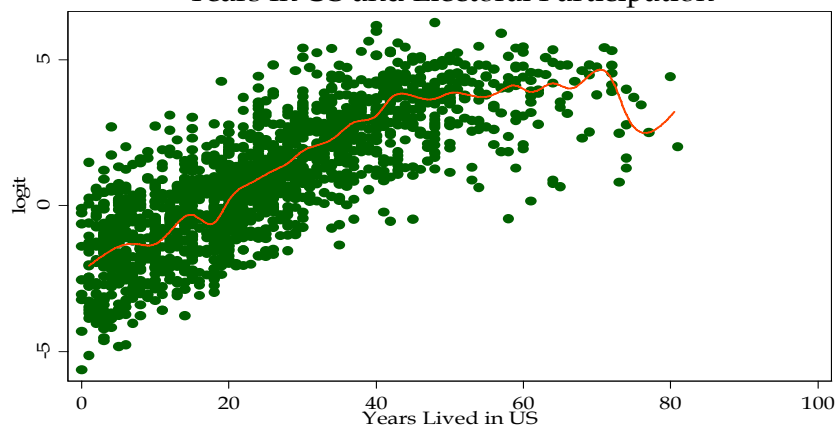
Variable ^a	Coefficient (Robust s.e.)	$P > Z $
<i>Mexican</i>	.778 (.468)	0.096*
<i>Experienced Personal Discrimination</i>	1.13 (.381)	0.003***
<i>Mexican X Personal Discrimination Problematic</i>	-.873 (.433)	0.044**
<i>Puerto Rican</i>	.451 (.958)	0.638
<i>Puerto Rican X Personal Discrimination Problematic</i>	-1.07 (.628)	0.088*
<i>Puerto Rican X Years Lived in US</i>	.950 (.023)	0.034**
a. A total of 4 (discrimination variables) X 3 (Ethnicity Variables) X 2 (Generational Variables) X 1 (Years Lived In the United States) =24 interaction terms were included in 4 models. Only significant results are presented.		
Table 8. Testing the Ethnic Disadvantage Model for Non-Electoral Participation with Interaction terms Between Exposure, Ethnicity and Discrimination		

With one exception, there is very little evidence suggesting that latter generation immigrants are significantly more likely to participate in politics, or that participation decreases with years lived in the United States.

Extending the Straight-Line Model

Overall, it appears that the straight-line assimilation model does better at predicting electoral participation among Latinos. The additive model shows that as years lived in the United States increases, so too does electoral participation and the result was significant at very small levels ($p = .039$). Additionally, low socioeconomic status and less education, which are measures of structural assimilation (Aguirre et al. 1989) were both inversely and significantly related to voting behavior. At the same time, there seems to be evidence indirectly supporting the Ethnic Disadvantage Model, namely that immigrants who experience discrimination have negative outcomes with respect to political involvement. A full examination of the straight-line hypothesis requires including a quadratic in years lived in the United States to the model testing straight-line assimilation theory's predictions. Incredibly, the quadratic was statistically significant and negative, implying a curvilinear relationship with electoral participation (o.r. = .998504, s.e. = .0005, $p = 0.002$). This result is inconsistent with the straight-line model, which predicts that participation will strictly increase over time.

Years In US and Electoral Participation



Quadratic Fit of Predicted Probabilities

Discussion and Conclusion

In this paper, I have tested several predictions derived from two competing models of assimilation as they pertain to participation in United States politics. Specifically, three hypotheses of the straight-line assimilation model were tested. Overall, with respect to electoral participation, after controlling for other factors, there was limited support for the predictions of the straight-line hypothesis. Specifically, the only exposure hypothesis that was supported was the one that predicts that political behavior will increase as a function of time. Moreover, despite the fact that the quadratic term was statistically significant, it is inconclusive as to whether the diminishing returns to participation are a result of age, of discriminatory conditions or some other unobservable condition. Since I found no evidence that third generation immigrants are more likely than first and second generation immigrants to perceive discrimination to be a problem, the observed result is likely due to an age effect. In addition, third generation immigrants who perceive discrimination to be problematic are *more* likely to vote than similarly situated first generation immigrants, which directly contradicts Ethnic Disadvantage. Overall, the Ethnic Disadvantage model, which hypothesizes an inverse relationship between exposure to US culture and political participation, was not supported. In contrast and with respect to non-political involvement, I found limited support for the straight-line assumptions. Only one of the assimilation variables was significant but in the opposite direction predicted by the theory. In contrast, the model including the discriminatory variables revealed several statistically significant results. The *Wald* test indicated that the addition of the discrimination variables were jointly statistically significant. The interactive model further revealed where any differences may lie. Mexicans and Puerto Ricans who experience direct discrimination are less likely to participate than those who do not. Finally, Puerto Ricans who live in the US longer are less inclined towards politics than those who have lived in the US a shorter length of time, a finding that contradicts the straight-line model while simultaneously and indirectly supporting the Ethnic Disadvantage perspective. Overall, the exposure hypothesis of the straight-line model was supported by the data and remains an important factor explaining voting behavior. On the other hand, feeling unwelcome and facing discrimination, either real or perceived, tends to suppress the non-electoral political activity of some groups.

Further elaboration regarding the plausibility of the issues addressed in this paper would benefit from future studies attempting to replicate these findings, as the conclusions are subject to several limitations. First, these data are cross-sectional and hence causality with respect to some of the findings is inconclusive. For example, while it is inconceivable that voting causes people to live in the US longer, it is possible voting precedes cultural and structural assimilation.

Nevertheless, proponents of the straight-line model argue that structural assimilation precedes other forms of assimilation, including political, which is what is assumed here. Another potential limitation is that more elaborate measures of discrimination and assimilation are warranted. For example, the addition of a dummy variable that measures skin color would have been desirable. Finally, having larger number of Puerto Ricans and Cubans included in the analysis may make the findings more robust. At the very least, this study has demonstrated that not all Latinos are treated equally and that this inequality may negatively affect incorporation into the American polity.

Independent Variables	Logistic Regression Odds Ratios Dependent Variable: Voted in US Election			Logistic Regression Odds Ratios Dependent Variable: Non-Electoral Participation			Percent Change in the Odds
	Model 1			Model 2			
	Electoral Participation OR (robust s.e.)	Electoral Participation OR (robust s.e.)	$P > Z $ (Model 2)	Non-Electoral Participation OR (robust s.e.)	Non-Electoral Participation OR (robust s.e.)	$P > Z $ (Model 2)	
Ethnic Origin							
Cuban	2.31** (.872)	1.58 (.770)	0.347		1.06 (.306)	0.829	
Puerto Rican	1.21 (.370)	1.53 (.755)	0.394		.848 (.349)	0.689	
Mexican	1.55* (.400)	2.10 (.783)	0.047**		1.46 (.335)	0.098*	
Other Latinos	--	--	--	--	--	--	
Demographic Assimilation Variables							
Years lived in US	--	1.04 (.020)	0.039**	--	1.02 (.012)	0.173	
First Generation	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Second Generation	--	1.14 (.747)	0.840	--	.597 (.335)	0.359	
Third Generation	--	1.05 (.739)	0.943	--	.849 (.219)	0.526	
Cultural Assimilation Variables							
R. believes in a single Anglo Protestant Culture	--	.939 (.389)	0.879	--	1.30 (.395)	0.390	
R. believes an immigrant must do X to assimilate	--	1.12 (.114)	0.282	--	.872 (.058)	0.041**	
Bilingual		1.22 (.524)	0.638		1.71 (.477)	0.055*	
English Dominant	--	1.82 (.887)	0.222	--	1.44 (.488)	0.286	
R. believes it is important for Latinos to change culture	--	.736 (.120)	0.128	--	.976 (.200)	0.906	
Identificational Assimilation							
Latino Identity	--	1.56 (.606)	0.253	--	1.25 (.289)	0.319	
Structural Assimilation							
Low SES	--	.657 (.162)	0.088*	--	.827 (.153)	0.303	
Less than HS	--	.224	0.000***	--	.752	0.190	

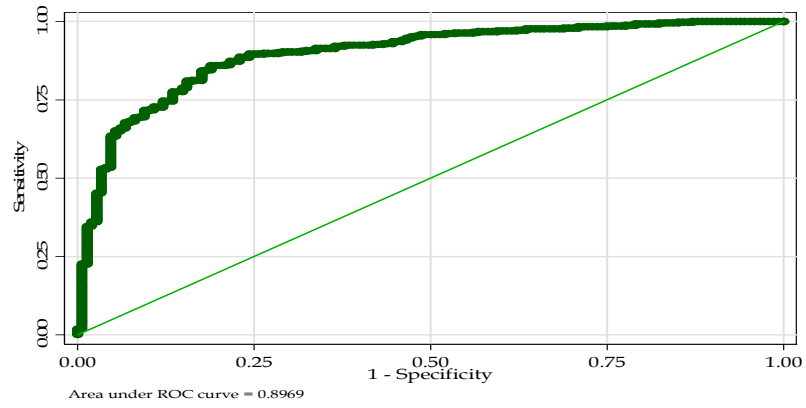
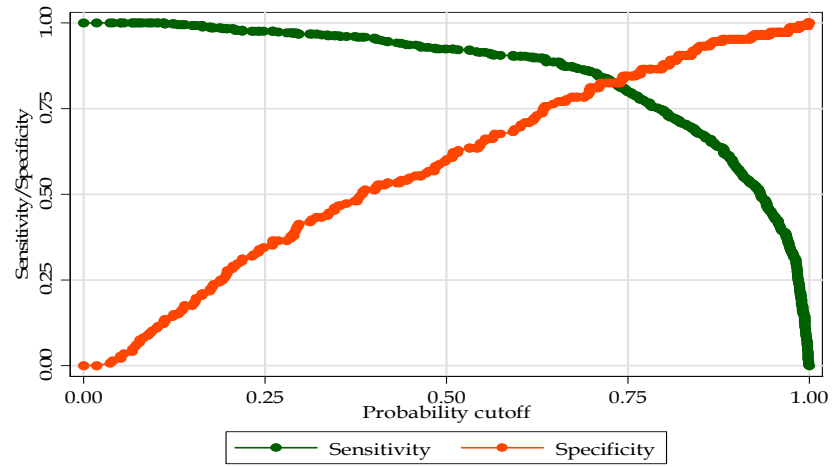
		(.071)			(.164)		
High School	--	.568 (.159)	0.044**	--	.603 (.122)	0.012**	
Some College or College Graduate	--	--	--	--	--	--	
Political Orientation							
Political Trust	--	1.40 (.324)	0.145	--	.716 (.125)	0.056*	
Political Interest	--	4.01 (.949)	0.000***	--	4.41 (.826)	0.000***	
Controls							
Age	--	1.06 (.019)	0.001***	--	.996 (.011)	0.708	
Married	--	1.51 (.361)	0.086*	--	.930 (.163)	0.680	
Female	--	1.23 (.295)	0.395	--	.656 (.110)	0.012**	
US Born		.661 (.398)	0.492		.885 (.476)	0.820	
	N = 1331 LL = - 796.28507 $\chi^2_5 = 6.87$, $p = 0.2305$	N = 1078, $ll = -427.06$, $\chi^2_{21} = 156.79$, $p = 0.0000$		N = 2121 LL = -1256.9694 $\chi^2_5 = 4.64$, $p = 0.4616$	N = 1618 LL = -822.87179 $\chi^2_{21} = 150.06$, $p = 0.0000$		
Table 6							

	<i>Model 3</i>			<i>Model 4</i>			Percent Change in the Odds
	Electoral Participation OR (robust s.e.)	Electoral Participation OR (robust s.e.)	$P > Z $ (Model 2)	Non-Electoral Participation OR (robust s.e.)	Non-Electoral Participation OR (robust s.e.)	$P > Z $ (Model 2)	
Ethnic Origin							
Cuban	2.31** (.872)	1.64 (.797)	0.302		1.04 (.293)	0.898	
Puerto Rican	1.21 (.370)	.985 (.549)	0.978		.839 (.403)	0.715	
Mexican	1.55* (.400)	1.94 (.711)	0.070*		1.46 (.327)	0.095*	
Other Latinos	--	--	--	--	--	--	
Demographic Assimilation Variables							
Years lived in US	--	1.05 (.019)	0.006***	--	1.01 (.011)	0.139	
First Generation	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Second Generation	--	.555 (.356)	0.358	--	1.26 (.688)	0.675	
Third Generation	--	.595 (.343)	0.368	--	1.46 (.697)	0.427	
Cultural Assimilation Variables							
R. believes in a single Anglo Protestant Culture	--	.885 (.363)	0.766	--	1.30 (.393)	0.393	
R. believes an immigrant must do X to assimilate	--	1.11 (.113)	0.286	--	.859 (.057)	0.021**	
Bilingual		1.06 (.462)	0.461		1.73 (.475)	0.043**	
English Dominant	--	1.49 (.759)	0.435	--	1.47 (.500)	0.256	
R. believes it is important for Latinos to change culture	--	.680 (.193)	0.173	--	.980 (.200)	0.924	
Identificational Assimilation							
Hispanic/Latino Identity	--	1.48 (.368)	0.107	--	1.34 (.218)	0.073*	
Education							
Low SES	--	.668 (.167)	0.106	--	.840 (.155)	0.345	
Less than HS	--	.218 (.070)	0.000***	--	.776 (.166)	0.236	
High School	--	.579	0.055*	--	.605	0.013**	

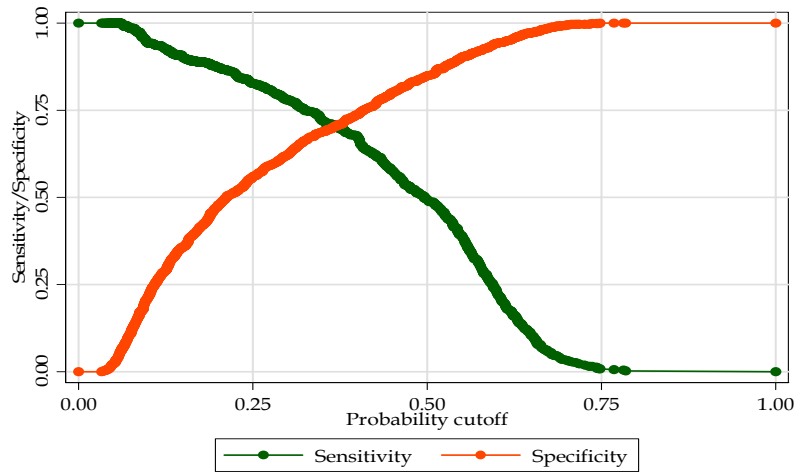
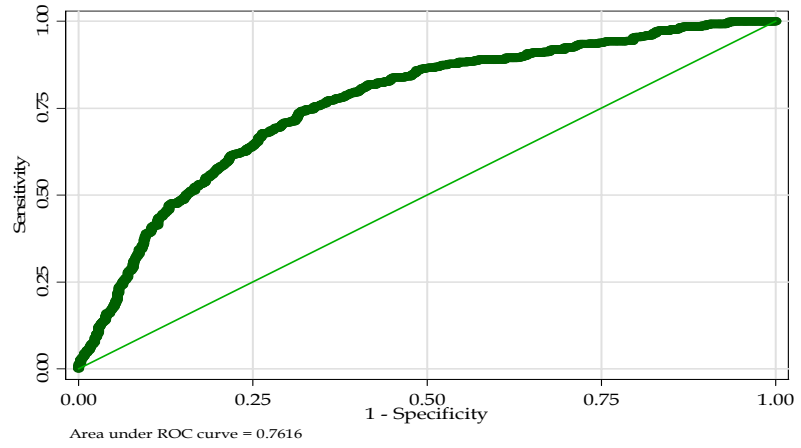
		(.165)			(.122)		
Some College or College Graduate	--	--	--	--	--	--	
Political Orientation							
Political Trust	--	1.41 (.341)	0.153	--	.718 (.125)	0.057*	
Political Interest	--	4.04 (.976)	0.000***	--	4.49 (.839)	0.000***	
Controls							
Age	--	1.06 (.017)	0.001***	--	.994 (.011)	0.609	
Married	--	1.47 (.353)	0.112	--	.948 (.164)	0.758	
Female	--	1.24 (.298)	0.379	--	.630 (.107)	0.007***	
US Born		.661 (.399)	0.492		.837 (.451)	0.742	
Discriminatory Conditions in the Host Country							
Perceives Discrimination to be a major or minor problem	--	.949 (.286)	0.862		.671 (.144)	0.064*	
Real discrimination faced by R. or member of R. family	--	1.40 (.356)	0.186	--	1.52 (.272)	0.018**	
Lives in Inner City	--	1.126 (.275)	0.626	--	1.15 (.192)	0.405	
R. feels welcome in the United States		1.39 (1.01)	0.649	--	1.82 (.625)	0.081*	
R believes race relations better in US		.917 (.584)	0.892	--	.923 (.291)	0.801	

Table 5. Estimated Odds Ratios from Ordered Logit Model of Non-Electoral Participation with $\beta_0 = 0$				
	Model 5		Model 6	
<i>Independent Variables</i>	OR^a (robust s.e.)	<i>P</i> > <i>Z</i>	OR^b (robust s.e.)	<i>P</i> > <i>Z</i>
Cuban	1.00 (.273)	0.987	.972 (.268)	0.919
Puerto Rican	.895 (.367)	0.788	.775 (.339)	0.560
Mexican	1.56 (.331)	0.036**	1.45 (.303)	0.073*
Other Latinos	--	--		
Years lived in US	1.02 (.012)	0.130	1.02 (.014)	0.077*
First Generation	--	--		
Second Generation	1.21 (.637)	0.707	1.04 (.568)	0.943
Third Generation	1.41 (.824)	0.570	1.21 (.735)	0.749
R. believes in a single Anglo Protestant Culture	1.46 (.434)	0.204	1.43 (.436)	0.236
R. believes an immigrant must do X to assimilate	.913 (.061)	0.175	.911 (.063)	0.175
Bilingual	1.76 (.453)	0.028**	1.62 (.440)	0.074*
English Dominant	1.55 (.528)	0.196	1.39 (.506)	0.359
R. believes it is important for Latinos to change culture	.927 (.173)	0.686	.90 (.174)	0.586
Latino Identity	1.21 (.264)	0.381	1.22 (.269)	0.351
Low SES	.931 (.170)	0.695	.885 (.166)	0.515
Less than HS	.706 (.146)	0.093*	.698 (.148)	0.089*
High School	.588 (.113)	0.006***	.597 (.597)	0.008***
Some College or College Graduate	--	--		
Political Trust	.810 (.137)	0.213	.825 (.140)	0.258
Political Interest	4.55	0.000***	4.42	0.000***

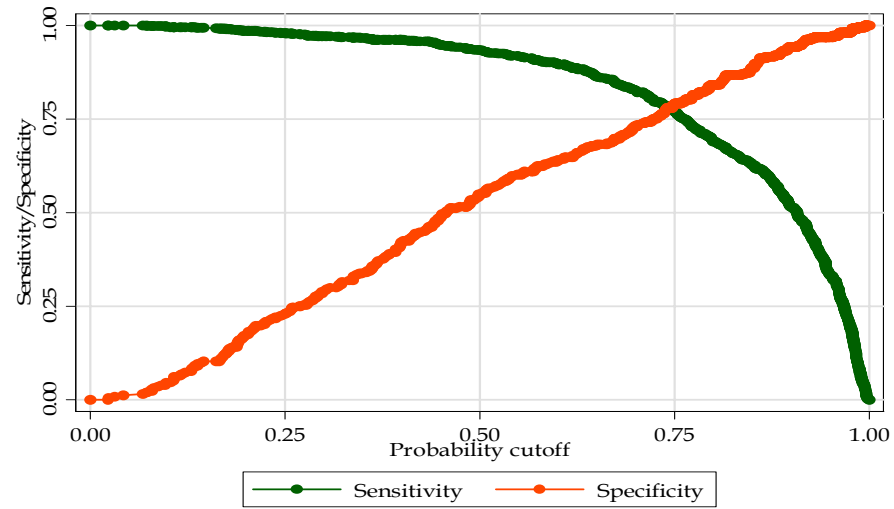
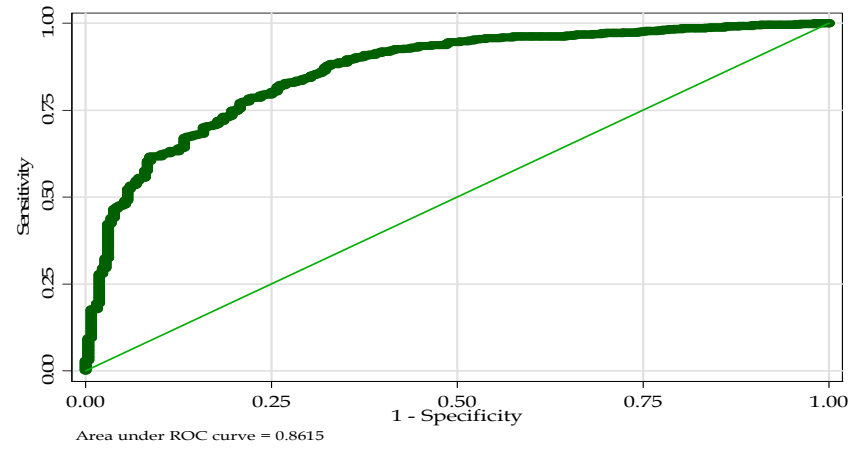
	(.845)		(.829)	
Age	.998 (.012)	0.843	.995 (.013)	0.712
Married	1.05 (.177)	0.752	1.00 (.172)	0.981
Female	.572 (.095)	0.001***	.577 (.095)	0.001***
US Born	.823 (.451)	0.722	1.05 (.615)	0.932
Perceives Discrimination to be a major or minor problem	--	--	.681 (.144)	0.069*
Real discrimination faced by R. or member of R. family	--	--	1.40 (.252)	0.058*
Lives in Inner City	--	--	1.19 (.194)	0.295
R. feels welcome in the United States	--	--	1.92 (.673)	0.064*
R believes race relations better in US	--	--	.887 (.289)	0.713
τ_1	1.954 (.614)	--	1.82 (.698)	
Z	3.18	.001***		
τ_2	3.11 (.605)	--	2.97 .694	
Z	5.14	.000***		
τ_3	4.05 (.628)	--	3.92 (.712)	
Z	6.45	.000***		
a. A score test for proportional odds yields a	a χ^2 of 43.99 with 42 degrees of freedom, which provides no evidence against the assumption ($p = .387$).			
b. A score test for proportional odds yields a	a χ^2 of 57.07 with 52 degrees of freedom, which provides no evidence against the assumption ($p = .292$).			



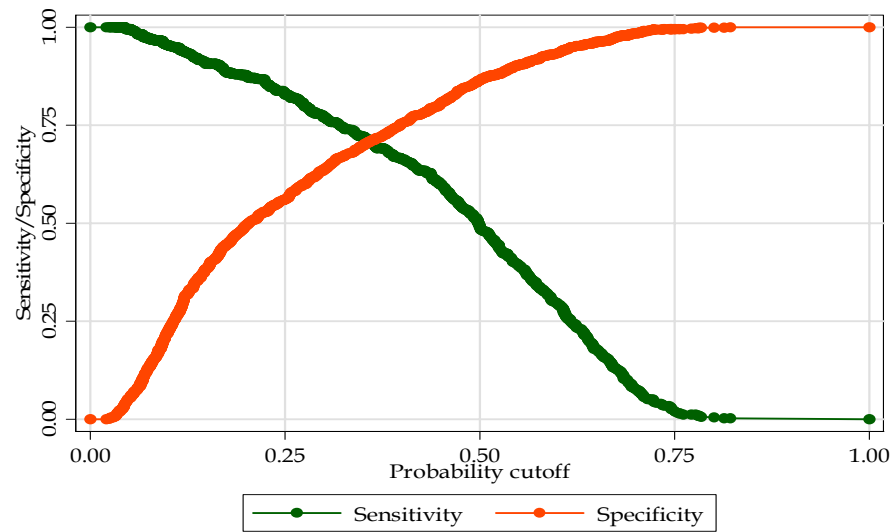
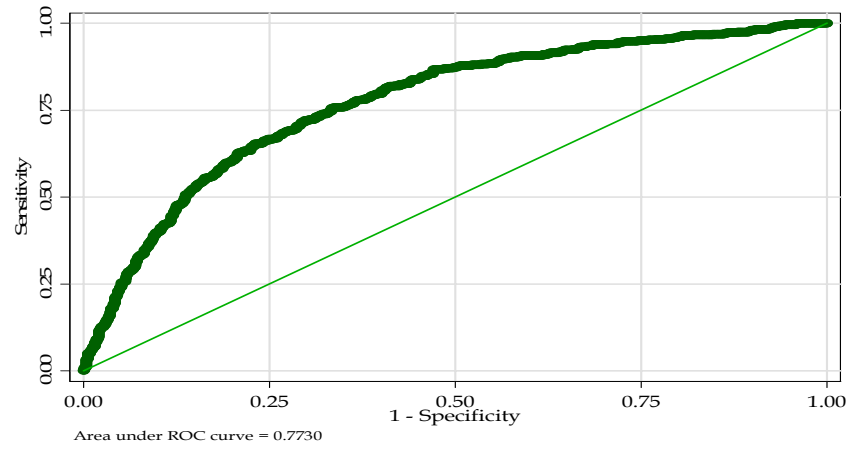
Assimilation Theory -- Vote



Assimilation Theory – Non-Electoral Participation



Ethnic Disadvantage – Voting Behavior



Ethnic Disadvantage – Non-Electoral Participation

Table 1. Question Wording and the corresponding concept being measured for Dependent, Independent and Control Variables used in the models.

<i>Type</i>	<i>Concept</i>	<i>Question Wording</i>
Dependent	Electoral Participation	1. Have you ever voted in a US election?
Dependent	Non-Electoral Participation	1. Attended a public meeting or demonstration in the community in which you live. 2. Contacted an elected official 3. Contributed money to a candidate running for public office 4. Attended a political party meeting or function 5. Worked as a volunteer or for pay for a political candidate
Dependent	Political Interest	How much attention do you pay to US politics
Independent	Cultural Assimilation	1. How important is it for Latinos to change so that they blend into the larger society, as in the idea of a melting pot of cultures 2. How important is it for Latinos to maintain their distinct cultures 3. How important is it to you that future generations of Latinos living in the United States speak Spanish
Independent	Identitfical Assmilation	Do you prefer 1. Hispanic/Latino 2. No Preference
Independent	Linguistic Assimilation (scale)	Spanish = Speak Spanish + Read Spanish English = Speak English + Read English Language = English - Spanish if Language > 1 Primary Language = 1 if Language = -1,0,1 Primary Language = 2 if Language < -1 Primary Language = 3 Primary Language 1. English Dominant 2. Bilingual 3. Spanish Dominant
Independent	Discrimination (Context of reception)	1. Do you think (HISPANICS/LATINOS) discriminating against other (HISPANICS/LATINOS) is a major problem, a minor problem or not a problem? 2. During the last 5 years, have you, a family member, or close friend experienced discrimination because of your racial or ethnic background, or not? 3. Was that you personally or someone else?
Independent	Neighborhood	1. Urban 2. Suburban

		3. Rural
Control Variables		Total Family Income Gender Education
Independent	Exposure	Years Lived In US Gen 1, Gen 2, Gen 3

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