Descriptive Representation as a Mechanism to Mitigate Policy Backlash: Latino Incorporation and Welfare Policy in the American States

Author(s): Robert R. Preuhs


Published by: Sage Publications, Inc. on behalf of the University of Utah


Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at [http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp](http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp). JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at [http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=sage](http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=sage).

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.
Descriptive Representation as a Mechanism to Mitigate Policy Backlash

Latino Incorporation and Welfare Policy in the American States

Robert R. Preuhs
University of Colorado at Boulder

While the election of racial/ethnic minority lawmakers has diversified American legislative institutions, scholars continue to find evidence of racial backlash in public policy decisions. This seems to undermine the Madisonian conception of the ability of minority interests to offset majoritarian resentment through representation and raises the question, Can minority group representatives influence policy decisions in majoritarian institutions? Using evidence from the American states, this study shows that the fastest-growing ethnic minority group, Latinos, do benefit from descriptive representation, as increases in Latino representation and legislative incorporation offset the negative effects of Latino population size on social welfare policy.

Keywords: racial politics; ethnic politics; Latino politics; state politics; legislators; welfare; descriptive representation

In addition to Latinos surpassing African Americans as the largest racial or ethnic minority group in the United States, growth in Latino membership in representative policy-making bodies outpaced black gains during the past two decades and most likely will do so for decades to come. This increase in Latino representation coincides with recent evidence that the racialization of welfare policy extends beyond white reaction to African Americans, with Anglo reaction to higher proportions of Latino welfare recipients lowering levels of welfare generosity in the American states (Fellowes and Rowe 2004; Soss et al. 2001). Since a major potential benefit of minority descriptive representation is the ability to alter the direction of public policy that, in their absence, leaves minority groups worse off, the confluence of the growth in Latino representation and welfare state “Hispanicization” provides fertile ground to test hypotheses regarding the effects of descriptive representation on public policy.¹

Within this backdrop, this study addresses a fundamental question regarding descriptive representation: can minority group representatives influence policy decisions in majoritarian institutions? To do so, the study relies on time-series cross-sectional analyses spanning the mid-1980s to the early 2000s, and demonstrates that Latino descriptive representation does influence welfare policy, primarily by offsetting the degree to which larger Latino populations are met with lower levels of welfare provision. The effects, however, are not uniform, with the ability of group representation to overcome majoritarian resentment realized at levels of Latino population currently observed in only a handful of states.

While other studies address this issue, this study adds to the literature in several important ways. First, the analysis accounts for both the direct effect of Latino population size on welfare policy and the indirect effect of population size that acts through Latino legislative influence. Second, the data set includes a dynamic component that better fits the theoretical expectations of minority legislative influence and significantly expands the number of observations compared to previous studies. Third, redistributive policies are generally neglected in studies of the impact of Latino descriptive representation, and minority descriptive representation broadly, which is an important oversight given the negative reaction to Latinos in welfare policy reported in recent studies (Fellowes and Rowe 2004; Soss et al. 2001). In short, the positive results of this study counter some previous findings on Latino descriptive representation and welfare policy, add a nuanced interpretation of the relationship between population, incorporation and policy, and provide a much-needed layer of evidence regarding descriptive representation and public policy decisions.
The Rise of Latino Representation in the States

In addition to being the largest racial or ethnic minority in the United States, Latino participation in electoral politics has increased greatly. The Latino vote more than doubled from 3.1 million votes cast in 1984 to 6.9 million votes cast in 2000 (U.S. Census Bureau 2004a, 2004b). Coupled with the rise in electoral participation, Latino representation continues to climb in the states (also see Bullock 1992; Pachon and DeSipio 1992). Figure 1 presents the trends in the numbers of representatives, committee chairs, and states with Latino representatives from 1984 to 2002. The ranks of Latino representatives rose from 106 to 196 during this time, an increase of 84 percent. Committee chairs held by Latinos more than doubled over the same period, from twenty Latino chairs in 1984 to forty-one in 2002, with a high of forty-six in 1997 and 1998. Moreover, while the increase in representation remains concentrated in states with large Latino populations, the trend in representation includes the diffusion of descriptive representation across states. The number of states with Latino representatives grew from eighteen to thirty in the eighteen-year period.

Latino legislators, however, remain far below the benchmark of parity between population and representation. With more than 7,400 state legislative seats nationwide, the 196 Latino legislators in 2002 account for about 2.7 percent of those seats, well below the 13 percent of the total population that is Latino. Latino membership in state legislatures is also much lower than that of black legislators, which numbered more than 580 in 1999 (Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies 2004). Given the increasing size of the Latino population, a greater degree of underrepresentation—relative to African Americans—and the continuing trend of increasing Latino representation, Latino descriptive representation in state legislatures will soon move beyond an emerging, geographically constrained, phenomenon.

Descriptive Representation, Incorporation, and Influence

Descriptive representation is generally defined as the representation of groups by individuals who share the same ascribed qualities (Pitken 1967). The ability of democratic institutions to respond to previously excluded interests is the overriding issue in a discussion of descriptive representation. But should we expect the inclusion of Latinos, or any racial or ethnic minority group, to alter state welfare or other general policies? The theoretical and empirical evidence fails to provide a clear answer, which only serves to add to the need for additional investigation.

Several lines of argument suggest we should not expect policy responsiveness from minority descriptive representation. First, in all of the American states, Latinos remain numeric minorities in state legislative bodies; and exerting influence in the face of majoritarian representative institutions, even as members, is not a straightforward endeavor (Guiner 1992). Given a differentiated set of group preferences, and an undercurrent of racial resentment that coincides with the same jurisdictional demographics that would produce more minority legislators (i.e., a
larger minority population leads to both higher numbers of minority representatives and lower levels of welfare provision), the ability of a numeric minority to move policy is certainly questionable. Moreover, racism within the lawmaking institution may preclude or mitigate any minority influence even when minority lawmakers align themselves with nonminority interests (Hawkesworth 2003). A second line of argument posits that structural determinants are the basis for policy response to civil rights and minority interests (Klinkner and Smith 1999). While primarily applied at the national level, states may not respond, even in the face of growing representational or coalition participation, if there is not a fundamental threat to security or federal intervention does not force such an action. Third, it may be that minority interests are substantively represented regardless of their representatives’ racial or ethnic background (Hero and Tolbert 1995; Swain 1995). Finally, Lublin (1997) argued that the creation of majority-minority districts, which have led to increases of both black and Latino representatives, may lead to losses in substantive representation. This occurs as minority voters are packed into relatively few districts, resulting in overall losses in Democratic seats and, subsequently, in Democratic majorities that otherwise champion black or Latino causes. These arguments suggest that an increase in Latino elected officials does not automatically lead to greater policy influence and could reasonably explain why such electoral success fails to counter the effects of racial resentment. And indeed, the one comparative study of state expenditures to examine the effects of Latino representation in state legislatures found that greater Latino representation is associated with lower per capita welfare expenditures (Nelson 1991).

Yet there is an ample theoretical basis, and empirical evidence, that leads one to expect that descriptive representation transcends symbolic inclusion and alters public policy. On its face, inclusion of previously excluded groups should change the dynamics of lawmaking, even if it does not change the pivotal median voter. The shared experiences of minority group members translate into a unique ability of minority lawmakers to represent the interests of constituents from their respective racial or ethnic group. A minority voice in representative bodies, in turn, provides a mechanism for interest representation that would not otherwise be available. As Luis Fraga (1992, 281) argued, “Latinos and Blacks are strategically placed as elected officials to call to question the rhetoric of the ‘interests of the larger community’ that usually only reflect whites’ interests as told by their representatives” (emphasis added). Reducing racism within the representative institution, providing more responsive case work, and legitimizing the institutions of civil society in the eyes of minority citizens are among the potential benefits offered by advocates of descriptive representation (Mansbridge 1999). Yet as Dovi (2002) pointed out, the descriptive representatives must then reflect the particular concerns of the minority group they represent, rather than advocating for nondifferentiated policy positions. Finally, numbers ought to matter; and even a few descriptive representatives can alter policy if they act through strong coalitions. Browning, Marshall, and Tabb’s (1984) theory of incorporation best captures this argument by suggesting that it is the combination of representation and membership in the dominant coalition that produces policy gains for minority groups as group members join the ranks of elected officials. Dominant coalition membership at the state level provides additional benefits, such as the power of committee chairs and majority party and chamber leadership positions. Since these positions grant additional influence to office holders (Francis 1989; Jewell and Whicker 1994), the combination of representation and incorporation should induce policy movement toward minority interests.

Empirical support for the influence of minority descriptive representation is quite ambiguous. Individually, minority descriptive representatives tend to propose and support minority interest legislation to a greater degree than their white counterparts, but also tend to be less successful in seeing their policy agenda’s pass through the legislative process (Bratton and Haynie 1999; Hedge, Button, and Spear 1996; Hawkesworth 2003; Tate 2001). Research specifically addressing legislative behavior of Latino representatives is less developed, but one early study suggests that heightened advocacy coupled with lower success rates is reflected in the Latino experience as well (Mindiola and Gutierrez 1988).

There is, however, evidence that increasing minority representation can lead to policy responsiveness. Studies of local regimes find that incorporation of minority representatives leads to greater policy responsiveness in administrative decisions regarding the hiring of educators, police officers, and other civil servants (Browning, Marshall, and Tabb 1984; Fraga, Meier, and England 1986; Meier and Stewart 1991; Meier et al. 2005). At the state level, Latino legislators are able to block specific legislation that is adverse to Latino interests, such as passage of Official English laws (Preuhs 2005; Santoro 1999; Tatalovich 1995). But blocking power is much easier to exert, and
Official English, while heavily opposed by Latinos, may be considered as much a symbolic policy decision as a substantive policy decision.

In terms of welfare and other state policies, the evidence of minority influence is less convincing. Examining five states over three 10-year intervals, Haynie (2001) demonstrated that black incorporation into state legislative bodies is associated with increases in state per capita education, health, and social services expenditures. This is the only study that presents evidence at the state level of the positive effects of minority descriptive representation on budgetary decisions. However, given the relatively few degrees of freedom (fifteen cases, four independent variables, and a constant term), there is clearly a need to attempt some confirmatory analysis. More recent studies support these findings for black representation by employing state-level pooled cross-sectional designs to demonstrate that increases in black representation are associated with higher percentages of state budget allocations to welfare (Owens 2005) and under certain conditions welfare benefit levels (Preuhs 2006). Nevertheless, Nelson’s (1991) study of Latino descriptive representation found little support for the positive influence hypothesis. The empirical evidence regarding the policy effects of minority descriptive representation is thus characterized as providing a strong reason to believe minorities can overcome racial resentment but lacks clear evidence that Latinos can do so in large jurisdictions and within the scope of racialized redistributive policies.

While the effects of Latino descriptive representation on state welfare outputs are not well understood, a consistent finding in the recent literature on welfare policy is a decreasing expenditure level associated with larger minority populations. From Hero’s (1998) broad study of the impact of racial and ethnic diversity, to more focused studies of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) provisions (Fellowes and Rowe 2004; Soss et al. 2001), larger Latino populations are associated with lower welfare program benefit levels. Racial resentment, as suggested by group conflict models, is often cited to explain this relationship (Blalock 1967; Giles and Evans 1986), as is the racialization of welfare policy over the past several decades (Gilens 1999). The important issue here is whether descriptive representation can indeed offset negative responses to growing minority populations.

The above discussion raises two major hypotheses regarding the policy impact of Latino population size and Latino representation. First, if racial resentment is a basis for state welfare policy decisions, then larger Latino populations should be associated with decreases in welfare support and welfare benefits. This is a classic hypotheses derived from the group conflict literature. Second, if descriptive representation can affect public policy and overcome racial resentment, greater levels of political incorporation should be associated with increases in state support for liberal welfare policies and benefit levels, or at least significantly offset the negative effects of population size.

The Paths to Influence

Three causal paths should be accounted for to understand the potential for incorporation to offset racial resentment in legislative decisions. Figure 2 presents a stylized model of these paths to influence as suggested by a theory of minority incorporation that illustrates the basic components of a process that leads from population groups directly to policy outcomes, and indirectly via incorporation of descriptive representatives into legislative bodies (Browning, Marshall, and Tabb 1984). These paths include A—from population to political incorporation; B—from incorporation to public policy outputs; and C—directly from population to policy. C is the path suggested by models that examine only the effects of minority population on public policy. This “population to policy” conception overlooks paths A and B, and thus potentially misses an important aspect of real-world politics in representative democracies.

The theory of minority incorporation argues that paths A and B represent theoretically important relationships (Browning, Marshall, and Tabb 1984; also see Haynie 2001). That is, population size positively influences levels of political incorporation, and in turn, incorporation allows minority groups to affect public policy, albeit through institutionalized representation. The path from population to policy output,
C, however, may still lead to negative effects since minorities, by definition, will be at a disadvantage when competing over broad policy decisions in majoritarian institutions. Thus, two issues should be addressed beyond the simple impact of minority population size. The first issue, and the guiding concern of this study, is the degree to which incorporation, path B, offsets the negative effects found between group size and policy, or path C. Second, the nature of the relationship between population and incorporation, path A, is generally overlooked in studies of policy influence, but clearly links the population to policy via minority incorporation into decision-making bodies. All three relationships will be examined in the following sections to determine the impact of minority population size and representation on welfare policy in the states.

State Legislative Representation and the Theory of Incorporation

The empirical analysis that follows focuses on state legislative incorporation of racial or ethnic minorities, defined broadly as the election of minority representatives and the degree to which those representatives hold institutional positions of power within legislatures (see Haynie 2001). The states are a valuable venue from which to investigate the effects of minority representation and its potential ability to offset racial resentment since race and ethnic population size are well-established determinants of state policy and social welfare policy in particular (Brown 1995; Fellowes and Rowe 2004; Fording 1997; Hero 1998; Key 1949; Soss et al. 2001). The states also hold an advantage over local and national levels for the study of minority representation’s impact on public policies. While local administrative decisions are affected by incorporation (Browning, Marshall, and Taub 1984; Fraga, Meier, and England 1986; Meier and Stewart 1991), state budgeting policies provide a broader test for the theory of incorporation, where redistributive policies are more prominent policy issues (Peterson 1981). At the national level, structural determinants of racial politics (Klinkner and Smith 1999) and a lack of substantial variation in descriptive representation preclude valid inferences regarding the relationship between representation and welfare policy. In sum, a focus on the states provides the benefit of jurisdictions with authority over redistributive policy decisions with clear racial undercurrents as well as adequate variation in Latino incorporation.

Latino Population and Incorporation

The analysis of the effects of population and representation is based on the path model presented in Figure 2. The first step in the analysis is to estimate the effects of population on incorporation, or path A. The dependent variable of minority political incorporation is measured as a combination of both relative minority descriptive representation and the degree to which descriptive representatives hold institutional positions of power within the state legislature. This accounts for both the unique level of minority advocacy exerted by descriptive representatives and for the fact that committee and chamber leadership positions provide additional power over public policy (Deering and Smith 1990; Francis 1989; Haynie 2001; Jewell and Whicker 1994; Preuhs 2005). The variable used to capture incorporation, Latino Legislative Incorporation, is a factor score based on the percentage of state legislative seats held by Latinos and a weighted sum of Latino committee chairs and chamber leaders. Higher scores on the Latino Legislative Incorporation scale indicate greater levels of political incorporation. Details of the scoring coefficients and descriptions of all variables are described in Appendix A.

The primary determinant of interest for the level of political incorporation is the relative size of the Latino Population, measured as the Latino population as a percent of the total state population. To estimate the effect of population on incorporation, separate ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions were analyzed for each year from 1985 to 2001 (results are summarized below). In addition, a Prais-Winston regression with panel-corrected standard errors, correcting for first-order autocorrelation and including yearly dummy variables, was performed on the pooled data from 1984 to 2001 (reported in Table 1). Both estimates relied on a model that included variables for Latino population size and its squared term, a dummy variable for multimember district (MMD) states, Mass Liberalism, the percentage of the legislature that is Democratic (Democratic Legislature), and Party Competition. In addition, since MMDs hold the potential to reduce minority electoral success and policy influence (Leal, Martinez-Ebers, and Meier 2004; Meier et al. 2005), interaction terms between the Latino population size and MMD states are included. In each analysis, the functional form of the relationship was found to be curvilinear. For the yearly regressions, the baseline Latino population term and the squared term were significant, with the exceptions of the regressions for 1995 to 1997, in which only the squared term was significant. Outside of liberalism’s significant positive effect in 2001, and a weak negative effect of MMDs in 1998 and 2000, the remaining variables failed to reach a traditional level of statistical significance ($p < .05$). Interaction
terms between Latino population variables and MMDs were not significant in any of the yearly analyses. The principal variables of Latino population and its squared term are nonetheless strong predictors, with the models explaining between 88 to 96 percent of the variation in the sixteen yearly regressions.

Table 1 presents the results of the pooled cross-sectional time-series regression. The pooled analysis confirms the effects of Latino population on incorporation found in the yearly regressions. However, the influence of MMDs is stronger than the yearly regressions suggest. Moreover, states with competitive parties are revealed to have higher levels of Latino incorporation. As reported by previous scholars, and shown in model 2, MMDs dampen the population effects. However, the interaction effects of MMD on the Latino population relationships with incorporation are modest at best. The interactions fail to add to the explained variation (there is actually a slight decrease in variance explained). And as Figure 3 points out, the predicted effects follow a path identical to that which is predicted by a model without the interaction. Moreover, differences between MMD and non-MMD states emerge only in states with large Latino populations. Since Arizona is the only MMD state with a Latino population above 15 percent, or about where interaction effects become apparent, it would be a very loose interpretation of the results to say that MMDs clearly affect the nature of the relationship between minority population and incorporation. Removing Arizona from the sample renders the MMD interactions insignificant (model 3). Therefore, the general functional form used in the following section to estimate the indirect effect of Latino population on incorporation (path A) is calculated from the pooled estimators presented in model 1, and thus makes no distinction between MMD and non-MMD states. Since the focus of this article is on the effects of incorporation on redistributive policy, the important results from this analysis are that incorporation follows from population and that the relationship is curvilinear with a minimal threshold of about 4.1 percent Latino population in a state needed before population positively affects incorporation.

**Effects of Population and Incorporation on Welfare Policy**

Before estimating the effects of incorporation on welfare policy, the use of welfare policy as a proxy for Latino interests warrants a brief justification. Beyond a counteraction to established racial resentment, there is good reason to expect that Latino representatives hold preferences for relative increases in state welfare provisions. In 2004, 62 percent of Latinos would pay more taxes to support a government providing additional services (Zogby and Wittman 2004, 10). Moreover, 21 percent of Latinos live below the poverty line, compared to 8 percent of Anglos; and by 1999, Latinos made up 24.5 percent of TANF recipient families (Lower-Basch 2000, Table 2). Finally, even including the Republican-dominated Florida legislative delegation, between 84 and 93 percent of Latino legislators were Democrats.
during the study's timeframe. Omitting Florida uniformly increases those numbers by 5 percent, and thus a substantial liberal tilt in Latino representatives exists that would be expected to push for increasing, not decreasing, welfare provisions. Even without a Latino preference for increased welfare, the previous research's findings of a negative reaction suggests that Anglos view Latinos as disproportionate or undeserving beneficiaries of welfare policies and react negatively to their presence on state welfare roles (cf. Fellowes and Rowe 2004; Hochschild 1995, 114). Thus, even a very cautious expectation is that Latino elected officials, who are overwhelmingly Democratic, will seek to offset the negative reaction to their constituents, who are objectively in greater need of redistributive welfare support.

The guiding question of this study is whether Latino incorporation can offset the general negative relationship between Latino population size and the extent of welfare policy provision in the states. To examine this relationship, three dependent variables are employed. First, Welfare Expenditure Effort is measured as the state’s per capita expenditure on public welfare as a percentage of per capita income. This measure captures the general size of the welfare state relative to personal income. Second, Welfare Generosity is measured as the maximum Aid for Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) benefit for a family of four as a percentage of mean income for a family of four (following Radcliff and Saiz 1995). The 1996 TANF reforms greatly changed the nature of welfare policy, but not necessarily a state’s overall commitment to the welfare state. Thus, welfare generosity’s time series spans from 1986 to 1996, while the welfare expenditure effort indicator is more appropriate for a longer time frame, from 1986 to 2001. Finally, to examine the impact of incorporation on monetary welfare benefits after the implementation of TANF, while providing a general comparison to previous findings, Fellowes and Rowe’s (2004) Welfare Benefit Index is used as a dependent variable. Their score is based on the 1997 dollar value for a family of three, divided by a state’s cost of living index (p. 372). The welfare benefit analysis employs the first difference to evaluate effects on changing policy and is thus limited to the years 1997 and 1998.

These three measures provide distinct proxies for welfare generosity and thus allow for a fairly robust test of the effects of incorporation. The pooled correlation coefficients are only .09 between welfare generosity and effort and .14 between the welfare benefit index and welfare effort. The welfare generosity and welfare effort variables are transformed to moving averages based on the current year, as well as forward lags of one and two years. The moving averages refocus the study on broad policy trends, rather than yearly disturbances that may lead to spurious results. The time frame employed for the moving average calculation compliments the lags employed for the independent variables discussed below. The short time series of the post-TANF welfare benefit index (three years of data) requires a slightly different approach that is explained in more detail below.

Key independent variables include Latino population and Latino legislative incorporation. Both are measured as described above, but smoothed with a moving average that includes the current year and values for the previous one and two year lags. This construction of the moving average for the independent variables alleviates concerns regarding the temporal causal sequence given that forward lags are applied to the dependent variables. Including three years in the average also fits the reality that legislative power is most likely exerted over a longer period than one discrete year. Again, negative coefficients for the population variables will indicate the presence of racial resentment. Positive coefficients for the legislative incorporation variable provide evidence of the ability of Latino representation to influence welfare policy outputs. If both coefficients reflect these anticipated directional relationships, the analysis will support the claim that incorporation can mitigate the effects of racial resentment.
In addition to the independent variables used to test theories of racial resentment and incorporation, controls for a number of plausible alternative explanations are included in the models. First, *Black Population*, the percentage of the state’s population that is black, is included since racial resentment regarding welfare policy is commonly attributed to racialized perceptions of welfare recipients (Gilens 1999), and white resentment toward blacks is a consistent factor in welfare policy and provision (Fellowes and Rowe 2004; Fording 1997; Soss et al. 2001). Second, party control is accounted for by including the percentage of the legislature that is Democratic (*Democratic Legislature*) and a dummy variable coded 1 if there is a Democratic Governor. *Party Competition* is included in the models since greater competition is associated with more generous welfare benefits (Barrilleaux, Holbrook, and Langer 2002; Key 1949; Holbrook and Van Dunk 1993). Third, since liberal states, outside of party control, also tend toward greater support for public welfare, the models add Wright’s (2004) ideology score that provides a yearly indicator of an earlier pooled measure (Erikson, Wright, and McIver 1993). This *Mass Liberalism* score is coded such that higher values indicate more liberal states. Fifth, given the unique cultural politics of the southern states and their propensity to provide less generous welfare policies, a binary variable, *South*, is included and coded as 1 if the state is one of eleven former members of the Confederacy, and 0 otherwise. Sixth, the model controls for general sociodemographic factors of *Unemployment, Education, and Population Density* since high unemployment may lead to greater demand, high education is associated with more generous policies, and population density is associated with less generous welfare provisions (see Radcliff and Saiz 1995). Unemployment, education, and population density are averaged over the current year and following two years, the same time frame as the dependent variables, to capture the more likely contemporaneous effects of these variables. The remaining independent variables are averaged over the current year and two previous years to reflect the sequence in which the political variables affect policy decisions.

Adding to these substantive control variables, the statistical models for welfare generosity and welfare effort include nominal variables for each year and also the lagged dependent variables. The addition of yearly variables captures national trends that are experienced in different time periods. The lagged dependent variable serves three purposes. First, Beck and Katz (1995, 1996; also see Keele and Kelly 2005) suggested that pooled time-series models that deal with serial correlation through a specification that includes a lagged dependent variable perform better than non-dynamic models when cross-sectional observations are more numerous than time-series observations. Second, these variables control for potential explanatory factors that are not explicitly specified in the model. Third, it changes the interpretation of the independent variables in that the coefficients estimate the independent effects of each variable on the amount of change in the dependent variable. That is, since the lagged dependent variable captures the previous year’s level in the model, any effects of the other variables apply to the difference between the impact of the lagged dependent variable and contemporaneous dependent variable. The dynamic aspect of this model closely matches the theoretical expectations since incorporation and population ought to affect how states change their policies, rather than the usual cross-sectional analysis where baseline variation is set long before short-term factors could substantially alter cross-sectional variation. Examining cross-sectional data would then capture what could be long-term effects, rather than more immediate effects of changing demographics and minority representation.

The welfare benefit index requires a different approach to empirical modeling since the time series only includes three years of available data. First, the model’s dependent variable is the first difference of the welfare benefit index. The first difference allows the model to omit the lagged dependent variable which otherwise swamps the effects of all predictors given only three time periods. Differencing also resembles the theoretical emphasis on change. Second, without the lagged dependent variable, a Prais-Winston regression model is employed that accounts for the serial autocorrelation of the panel data. Finally, the population and incorporation variables are smoothed as in the other models. The remaining variables are measured in contemporaneous levels since forward lags are not feasible with the shortened time period.

**The Effects of Incorporation: Results and Discussion**

Does minority incorporation affect policy and help to mitigate the negative effects of racial resentment? If so, a positive coefficient for the Latino legislative incorporation variable is expected for each model of the welfare policy indicators. The coefficient for the Latino population variable should be negative, as suggested by previous studies (Fellowes and Rowe 2004; Soss et al. 2001), or insignificant, as incorporation overcomes
Table 2
Estimated Effects of Latino Incorporation on Indicators of the Welfare State

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>Welfare Effort (t + 1)</th>
<th>Welfare Generosity (t + 1)</th>
<th>ΔWelfare Benefit Index (t + 1) – t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b</td>
<td>PCSE</td>
<td>b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino Legislative Incorporation</td>
<td>.050***</td>
<td>.012</td>
<td>.067*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino Population</td>
<td>-.006***</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Population</td>
<td>-.002***</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>-.078***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Legislature (%)</td>
<td>-.002*</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Governor</td>
<td>.037**</td>
<td>.016</td>
<td>-.059*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mass Liberalism</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Competition</td>
<td>-.001</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>-.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>.073***</td>
<td>.021</td>
<td>-.068**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>.036***</td>
<td>.010</td>
<td>-.024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>-.004*</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>-.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population Density</td>
<td>-.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.0001*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welfare (t)</td>
<td>.990***</td>
<td>.023</td>
<td>.894***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-.803***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.265</td>
<td>0.233</td>
<td>0.593</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>.946</td>
<td>.989</td>
<td>.989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N (states/years)</td>
<td>752 (47/16)</td>
<td></td>
<td>517 (47/11)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Unstandardized ordinary least squares (OLS) estimates are reported, along with panel corrected standard errors (PCSEs). States excluded: AK, HI, NE in models of Welfare Generosity and Welfare Effort; ID and ME are also excluded in the model of ΔWelfare Benefit. Yearly Dummy Variables were included in the Welfare Effort and Welfare Generosity Measures, but not reported here. Baseline years for nominal yearly variables are 1986 for Effort, 1996 for Generosity, and 1997 for Welfare Benefit. Rho for the Welfare Benefit model is .105. *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001 (one-tailed test).

racial resentment. Table 2 presents the results of the regression for the three welfare indicators: welfare expenditure effort, welfare generosity, and the welfare benefit index. Unstandardized coefficients are reported along with panel-corrected standard errors (Beck and Katz 1995, 1996).8

The coefficients for Latino Legislative Incorporation are positive and significant in all three models. Confirming previous studies’ findings of racial resentment, the coefficients for the Latino population variable are negative and significant in the models of welfare effort and the welfare benefit index. A positive but insignificant coefficient (b = .0001) was found in the generosity model. These findings give strong support to the theory of incorporation but also suggest that undercurrents of racial resentment continue to tug at welfare policy decisions.

The influence of each of the remaining predictors differs in significance, and sometimes direction, across the three indicators of the welfare state.9 Higher black populations tend to lower welfare effort and generosity but did not change welfare benefits. Democratic legislatures and governors had mixed effects, with both positive and negative coefficients across welfare policy indicators. Mass liberalism had no effect in any model. Southern states, however, tended to have higher welfare effort but lower welfare generosity. Party competition was not significant in any models. Higher unemployment rates tend to lead to increases in welfare effort, and reduce post-TANF benefits, but have no significant effects on pre-TANF generosity. States with higher proportions of high school graduates did, however, tend to reduce post-TANF welfare benefits and have lower welfare effort levels. More densely populated states tended to have higher welfare generosity levels but were otherwise no different from other states. As expected, the lagged dependent variables explain much of the variance when they are included in the estimation procedure, and provide a strong control for testing the incorporation thesis. Finally, many of the yearly dummy variables are highly significant, demonstrating national trends in welfare provision.10

In sum, the analysis supports the incorporation model of minority influence. The population, through a number of possible mechanisms not explored here, is subject to what has been termed racial or ethnic resentment, but often considered backlash in the
group conflict literature (Giles and Evans 1986). As Latinos increase in population, there is a reaction to this growth through a general reduction of state spending on welfare spending and generosity. However, the positive coefficient for the indicator of incorporation demonstrates that the election of Latino representatives influences policy in the face of majoritarian resentment, with the direct effects of population and incorporation acting in opposite directions.

Interpreting the Total Influence of Latino Population Size

Latino population size affects the level of Latino legislative incorporation; and recall that the relationship is quadratic, with a slight dip in the early range of Latino population and climbing thereafter. This relationship leads to a slightly more complicated picture of the influence of both population and incorporation than suggested by simply interpreting the independent effects of the regression coefficients. An accurate description of the overall effect of population requires an accounting of both the direct and indirect effects as they act on policy decisions through incorporation.

Figure 4 presents the estimated direct and indirect effects of the size of state Latino populations on the indicators of redistributive policies examined in the analysis. The dashed line in each of the graphs depicts the direct impact of Latino population size on the welfare policy variables (path C from Figure 2), by holding incorporation at zero and all other variables at their means. The downward slope in Figures 4A and 4C reflects the general relationship found in previous analyses and highlights the group conflict model’s predictions.

The total effects are estimated by inserting into the welfare models the predicted level of incorporation derived from modeling incorporation as a function of population and its squared term. The solid line in each graph represents the total effects of Latino population on the welfare policy indicators (paths A, B, and C combined). Subsequently, the solid line illustrates the influence of population and incorporation, as variation in population leads to variation in incorporation.

The distance between the solid line (total effects) and the dashed line (direct effects) can be interpreted as the degree to which Latino incorporation offsets racial resentment. Until the population approaches approximately 10 percent Latino, the total effects track closely to the direct effects. Regardless of incorporation, welfare effort and post-TANF benefits decline

![Figure 4](image)

Population and Incorporation Effects

A

B

C

Note: AFDC = Aid to Families with Dependent Children.
as the Latino population grows from a nominal size to 10 percent of the population.\textsuperscript{12} After that point, however, incorporation influences policy in a distinct manner. In dollar amounts, the degree of mitigation varies across policies. Based on the average per capita income of the sample, the difference between states with Latino legislative incorporation and those without equates to about $9 in annual per capita welfare expenditures when Latinos make up 20 percent of the population, and about $58 at 40 percent. The overall average per capita welfare expenditure was $563 for the entire sample. For welfare generosity, the difference in monthly AFDC maximum benefits for a family of four was $6 at 20 percent Latinos, and $26 at 40 percent. Average AFDC maximum monthly benefits were $596 during the period of the study. Finally, the difference in estimated changes in the corresponding dollar amount for the welfare benefit index (maximum monthly TANF benefits for a family of three) between unincorporated states and incorporated states was $14 at 20 percent Latino and $91 at 40 percent, relative to an overall average monthly benefit during this period of $641. Thus, when Latinos constitute relatively high percentages of the population (about 20 percent), the effects are real. The estimated effects are also effects on yearly change, which over a period of several years can mean substantial differences between states with incorporation and those without.

Overall, the evidence suggests that descriptive representation matters and that incorporation in legislative bodies provides a democratic process that responds, rather than reacts, to minority groups. The important caveat is that while incorporation is a function of population, it is by no means a perfectly responsive one. During this time period, states with Latino populations beyond the point that incorporation potentially benefits Latinos (greater than 10 percent) spanned from only five states in 1984 to ten states in 2001. The remaining states tended to exhibit the negative relationship between Latino population and welfare generosity, and legislative incorporation did not overcome this phenomenon.

**Conclusion**

Does descriptive representation of previously excluded minority groups offset the impact of racial resentment in redistributive macro-policy decisions? The answer seems to be yes, with some important qualifications. As the analysis revealed, incorporation of Latino descriptive representatives in state legislatures leads to relative increases in welfare expenditure effort, welfare generosity, and welfare benefits in the states. Unlike previous findings related to Latino incorporation (Nelson 1991), yet mirroring the results for black incorporation (Haynie 2001; Owens 2005; Preuhs 2006), state representative institutions respond to the inclusion of Latino members. This finding differs significantly from recent interpretations of racial backlash in redistributive policies by demonstrating that racial resentment can indeed be offset by minority inclusion in democratic institutions.

However, the 10 percent departure point implies that the pattern of racial resentment is not overcome in the majority of state contexts; and the relationship between Latino population and welfare policy is the same, with or without Latino representation, in the lower ranges of Latino populations. To some extent, Guiner’s (1992) concern that minority representation is subject to the tyranny of the majority is justified. The finding also implies that previous studies positioning direct positive effects of incorporation, measured either as the relative size of Latino representation, or by institutional position, may be overestimating the effects of incorporation when Latino populations are relatively small. Backlash is not offset immediately and may require minority populations of greater magnitude than many jurisdictions, particularly states, will experience for some time. Moreover, the results question the linear nature of incorporation, suggesting that greater attention be paid to the form of the relationship between group size and incorporation when estimating the effects of incorporation (also see Leal, Martinez-Ebers, and Meier 2004).

The important implication of the results is that state-level democratic institutions are able to respond to previously excluded groups. And after a critical mass of minority population is reached and incorporation is attained, there is a degree of influence generated, even beyond traditional factors such as party control and state liberalism. In short, descriptive representation matters to policy outputs; and inclusion of Latinos into the exclusive ranks of representative institutions holds promise for more responsive policies. Or, at least, the findings demonstrate that democratic institutions, as per design, can offset majoritarian inclinations.

Finally, the other studies presented in this symposium suggest some interesting implications for the results presented here. First, the central finding that representative institutions hold promise for minority group influence seems to be extended beyond racial and ethnic minority groups by Haidel-Markel, Querze,
and Lindaman's (2007 [this issue]) findings on gay and lesbian rights. The fact that both this study and theirs point to Madison's arguments regarding representative institutions underscores the long-standing trade-off between the benefits to minority groups offered by such institutional arrangements and majority rule (or tyranny). Second, Rene Rocha's (2007 [this issue]) study speaks to the electoral findings presented here and the need for further accounting of the electoral context that produces Latino (and other minority) elected officials. In particular, as immigration emerges as an issue that, at least symbolically, enters statehouse debates, the threshold and degree to which Latino population affects the election of Latino legislators should be examined. It is quite possible that immigration, and particularly concerns over undocumented immigration, leads to a realignment of the coalitional forces that support Latino candidates and undermines the ability of Latinos to gain state-level elective office, and subsequently the population threshold needed for representation. While the dominance of partisan politics should offset some of these effects, as Roche points out, there is still concern that shifting coalitions may reduce the incidence of minority representation and policy representation in legislative bodies. Third, Branton (2007 [this issue]) provides some striking evidence regarding the differentiation of Latino attitudes across generational lines. The forces of acculturation tend to move Latino attitudes closer to Anglo attitudes. In light of the present study, this finding suggests that Latino elected officials may vary in their support for social welfare policies with the degree to which their constituents are predominately first, second, or third generation immigrants. While recurring waves of immigration from Mexico and Latin America make it unlikely that in the near future first-generation immigrants will no longer make up significant portions of Latinos in the United States, scholars should recognize that the distinct policy representation assumed here may be less differentiated from pure party politics in areas with predominately second and third generation constituencies. Each of these articles thus provide rich fodder for future research on the effects of descriptive representation on policy outputs.

**Appendix A**

**Data**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Mean/SD/Range (for Data Included in Effort Model, 1986-2001)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Welfare Expenditure Effort</td>
<td>Per capita welfare expenditure as a percentage of per capita income</td>
<td>2.54/0.84/0.83-5.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welfare Generosity</td>
<td>Aid for Families with Dependent Children (AFDC)</td>
<td>8.10/2.73/2.73-18.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΔWelfare Benefit Index</td>
<td>Change in 1997 dollar value of the benefit for a family of three, divided into state cost of living, in 1997 dollars (Fellows and Rowe 2004, 372)</td>
<td>0.038/0.827/-3.39-3.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino Legislative Incorporation</td>
<td>Factor score of (1) percentage legislature that is Latino and (2) Latino incorporation score. Factor scores used to construct the measure were .49 for each standardized component. The unstandardized Latino incorporation score is the weighted sum of all committee chair and leadership positions held by Latinos, where weights were 1 if the committee was a regular standing committee, 2 if it was a fiscal policy committee, and 3 if Latino was a chamber leader.</td>
<td>0.005/0.95/-0.31-6.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino Population</td>
<td>Latino population as percentage of total state population</td>
<td>6.23/8.27/0.42-42.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Population</td>
<td>Black population as percentage of total state population</td>
<td>10.21/9.44/0.25-36.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Legislature</td>
<td>Percentage of legislative seats held by Democrats</td>
<td>56.56/15.78/13.97-94.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Governor</td>
<td>Dummy variable coded 1 if the governor was a Democrat and 0 otherwise</td>
<td>.48/.44/0-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mass Liberalism</td>
<td>Percentage of respondents in a state identifying as liberals</td>
<td>20.21/4.18/8.63-37.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Competition</td>
<td>Higher numbers indicate more even partisan distribution of legislative seats. Calculated as 50 -</td>
<td>36.40/10.43/5.17-50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: See the online version of this article for complete data tables.*

(continued)
Appendix A (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metric</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>1 if state is one of eleven former members of the Confederacy, 0 otherwise</td>
<td>.23/42/0-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>Unemployment rate</td>
<td>5.26/1.44/2.57-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Percentage of population older than twenty-five with at least a high school diploma</td>
<td>76.53/5.40/64.3-87.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population Density</td>
<td>Total population per square mile</td>
<td>177.24/240.69/2.04-1128</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix B


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>Welfare Effort</th>
<th>Welfare Generosity</th>
<th>Welfare Benefit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino Legislative Incorporation</td>
<td>.087***</td>
<td>.028</td>
<td>.113*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino Population</td>
<td>-.011***</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>-.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Population</td>
<td>-.003</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>-.011**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Legislature (%)</td>
<td>-.002</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Governor</td>
<td>.028</td>
<td>.019</td>
<td>-.046</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mass Liberalism</td>
<td>-.001</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Competition</td>
<td>-.001</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>-.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>.071*</td>
<td>.042</td>
<td>-.102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>.052***</td>
<td>.009</td>
<td>-.019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>-.001</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population Density</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagged DV</td>
<td>.952***</td>
<td>.028</td>
<td>.858***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>.206</td>
<td>.230</td>
<td>.630</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall R²</td>
<td>.945</td>
<td>.988</td>
<td>.256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rho</td>
<td>.076</td>
<td>.237</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N (states/years)</td>
<td>752 (47/16)</td>
<td>517 (47/11)</td>
<td>90 (45/2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Models are essentially fixed effects models in that they include the static indicators of south for each state and yearly dummy variables (not reported here).

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001 (one-tailed test).

Notes

1. Racialization is more commonly used to describe the way welfare policy is perceived as benefiting a particular racial group, predominantly blacks (Gilens 1999). Hispanicization is used here to describe the reaction to Latinos. This connotation is distinct from that of Samuel Huntington’s (2004) use of the term to describe a cultural threat to prominent Anglo-Saxon Protestant cultures.

2. The National Association of Latino Elected Officials (NALEO; n.d.) has published a directory of Latino elected officials since 1984. The names of each state legislator were collected from this source and mapped to the names of committee chairs and chamber leaders published by the Council of State Governments (CSG; n.d.) biannually from 1984 to 2002. NALEO did change their survey protocol in 1996. Prior to this date, all Latinos who served in office during the annual year were included in the directory, resulting in double-counting in some districts as Latino incumbents were replaced by newly elected Latino legislators. To overcome this problem, the names of Latino legislators during the entire period included in the study were checked against the membership lists published by the CSG. Names appearing on NALEOs directory, but not on the CSG’s directory, were dropped from the data set.

3. Note that the hypothesized relationships are between levels of population or incorporation and changes in welfare indicators. This type of relationship best fits the reality of the budgeting process since relative levels of the dependent variables are most likely set well before the dramatic rise in Latino representation in statehouses, and the budgeting process is to some extent incremental (Wildavsky 1988). For instance, even with higher levels of Latino political incorporation, Texas’s welfare expenditures should not be expected to exceed Massachusetts’s. Incorporation affects budgeting policy at the margins, with levels of incorporation leading to increases in policy provision and expenditures.

4. Most of the research on descriptive representation and electoral structure is based more precisely on district size (Grofman and Handley 1989) and district versus at-large elections (Davidson and Korbel 1981; Engstrom and McDonald 1987, 1986, 1981; Karnig and Welch 1982; Meier et al. 2005). Since none of the states relied on at-large districts, and multimember
districts (MMDs) impose similar electoral dynamics, a test of a multiple representative districting scheme must rely on MMDs as the key structural element in this analysis. In addition, interactions between party competition and the population variables were examined to evaluate if highly competitive party structures increased the degree of Latino incorporation. None of these interactions were significant.

5. This is similar to the 5.2 percent threshold found in a recent study of school board elections and, given a one-standard-error shift in the intercept of the models reported here, it is actually statistically indistinguishable from that study (Leal, Martinez-Ebers, and Meier 2004, 1232).

6. While Latino legislator data is available from 1984, the starting point of 1986 is due to the use of a three-year moving average of the Latino Legislative Incorporation index, which requires 1986 to be the first year included in the statistical analysis.

7. Analyses not employing moving averages produce coefficients for the key independent variables that are in the same direction as those reported here, but significance levels generally only approach or just reach the $p < .10$ level, and thus highlight the utility of a broader, and arguably more accurate longer-term conception of the basis of legislative power.

8. Given the relationship between Latino population and Latino legislative incorporation variables, inclusion of both in the same model leads to some potential concerns. First, the variables are highly collinear, with a pooled correlation coefficient of .85. Collinearity, however, tends to make standard errors inefficient, which actually leads to a stronger test of the independent effects. Moreover, variance inflation factors (VIFs) for a pooled regression do not exceed 6.2 for the benefit index model, 4.9 for the effort model, and 4.2 for the generosity model. All are well below the cautionary level of 10. Second, one could conceive of the incorporation score as an endogenous variable, determined primarily by population size and its squared term. One way to deal with this issue is to use an instrumental variable model, with incorporation modeled as a function of the population and population-squared, purging the effects of population on incorporation within the model. A fixed-effects generalized two-stage least squares estimator was used to deal with this potential endogeneity problem, with results reported in Appendix B. The results are substantively similar to those reported above, with the benefit index model losing efficiency in the estimates, but maintaining the signs of the reported model. Given the temporal causal sequence between the two variables, the general interpretation is based on the estimates reported in Table 2.

9. Recall that the indicators were not highly correlated, and thus alternative processes may be the cause of this result.

10. The significance of both the lagged dependent variable and many yearly variables may be another cause of the lack of significance for some of the other substantive variables. Since the models are well specified, and the goal is to test the theory of incorporation, the insensitivity of these variables is not very disconcerting.

11. From Table 1, Predicted Latino Legislative Incorporation = $-.225 + .029$ (Latino population) + .004 (Latino population)$^2$. Predicted Latino Legislative Incorporation is then inserted into the welfare policy models to account for the indirect effects of Latino population.

12. Notably, the inflection point approximates the population size where Fording (1997) found insurgency to increase welfare benefits when blacks had access to electoral institutions. While only speculative, it may be that this is where black representation could respond to black demands.

---

References


