Cracks in the Rainbow: Group Commonality as a Basis for Latino and African-American Political Coalitions

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The focus of this article is on mass attitudes and the propensity of blacks and Latinos to build electoral coalitions. The theoretical argument is that perceived commonality between Latinos and African-Americans is essential to constructing mass political alliances. Using recent public opinion data, this research explores the levels of perceived commonality between blacks and Latinos and in particular studies the process by which Latinos come to feel close to African-Americans. This article tests four main hypotheses: pan-Latino affinity, acculturation, perceived discrimination, and racial identity. Findings suggest that pan-Latino affinity is a robust predictor of Latino/black commonality, but that long-term Latino political acculturation, in its current form, is unlikely to result in particularly high levels of closeness to blacks. The conclusion of the article points to the important role that Latino leadership and political organizations play in promoting strong pan-ethnic identities and suggests that the prospects for future coalitions between African-Americans and Latinos rest, in part, on the development of these more inclusive Latino orientations.

There is power in numbers, and the increasing proportion of ethnic and racial minorities in the United States could represent significant consequences for its electoral politics. Urban settings have long been seen as the primary locus of minority power and minority politics, however election outcomes in large states such as Texas, California, Florida, Illinois, and New York now also frequently hinge on the political decisions of their growing non-white communities. And given the size and importance of these states to the electoral college, minority voters are also salient to presidential candidates. We are in an era of electoral politics where minority voters will not only be increasingly more prevalent, but undoubtedly more consequential as well.

In spite of these growing numbers, political alliances are still essential for the full force of the minority vote to be felt at the ballot box. And yet notwithstanding the apparently rational incentives for minority coalition building, there is little evidence of formal or even informal coalitions between the nation's two largest minority groups, African-Americans and Latinos (Meier and Stewart 1991; Rich 1996). The focus of this article is on mass attitudes and the propensity of African-Americans and Latinos to build electoral alliances. The theoretical premise of this work is that perceived commonality between blacks and Latinos is integral to constructing political associations as the mass level.

Recent public opinion data point to an asymmetry in the affinity that African-Americans and Latinos have for one another; blacks see much greater levels of intergroup commonality than do Latinos (Kaufmann 2003). Understanding the factors that lead to this asymmetry motivates this research. In essence, the article looks at two central questions: (1) What factors correspond to higher levels of Latino affinity for African-Americans? (2) How much future potential is there for Latino participation in minority oriented political alliances?

The Basis for Minority Coalitions

From a theoretical basis, the question of whether or not Latinos and African-Americans will join political forces has often been approached from the standpoint of shared interests versus intergroup competition (Meier and Stewart 1991; McClain and Karnig 1990; McClain and Tauber 1998; Kaufmann 2003). As many students of minority politics aptly suggest, Latinos and African-Americans share similar objective circumstances in the United States. Both are economically disadvantaged relative to whites; both experience substantial discrimination in housing, education, and employment; and both advocate for enlarging the social welfare state. In spite of these shared interests, competition over jobs, educational resources, housing, and political power often place blacks and Latinos in conflict against one another, and this conflict can act as a powerful barrier to political alliance (Garcia and de La Garza 1977; Henry 1980; Johnson and Oliver, 1989; Waldinger 1996; Borjas 1999).

More telling, perhaps, than this theoretical debate, is the empirical observation that there are few, if any, real examples of strong political coalitions between blacks and Latinos, while there are many examples of political conflict.
between these two groups. Recent mayoral elections in Miami, New York, Los Angeles, and Houston, for example, all point to intensified competition between urban blacks and Latinos, and bear out little to support the notion that shared public policy preferences translate into political alliances at the ballot box or elsewhere. In fact, the political competition between these two groups was so apparent in recent Miami and Houston elections that it resulted in blacks in Miami and Latinos in Houston abandoning otherwise long standing Democratic party affiliations to support Republican candidates. While these two cases are at best only anecdotal support for the competition thesis, they are a stark reminder that the battleground between African-Americans and Latinos in some urban settings is intensifying, making the study of these intergroup relations all the more timely and consequential.

The development and maintenance of biracial, multiracial, or minority coalitions is contingent upon elite actors and their organizations as well as mass beliefs and mass behavior (Hinkley 1981; Sonnenshein 1993). At one level, elite actors communicate important values and objectives to group identifiers. They provide an essential socializing force within and across racial and ethnic groups that can promote common cultural, social and political linkages. Visible leadership and robust mobilizing organizations are thus essential to the shaping of mass attitudes and to the creation of intragroup solidarity and intergroup political alliances. Elite organizations and elite coalitions alone, however, cannot sustain broader minority political and social movements. Durable political coalitions must be founded on mass belief systems that both accept and promote these elite agendas. In particular, this article points to the role of perceived commonality and shared fate as critical to the development of mass based political coalitions.

**COMMONALITY AS A BASIS FOR COALITIONS**

While much of the academic literature on minority politics points to the shared interests of minorities as a positive basis for coalition, this argument tends to discount or ignore the symbolic content of much American political behavior (Edelman 1971; Sears and Funk 1991; Sears 1993). One only needs to look to the relative compositions of the Republican and Democratic parties to appreciate the limits of self-interest as an organizing feature. According to American party scholars, what sustain mass political parties, given the heterogeneity of their social group bases, are the shared values that result from their membership in and commitment to religious and ethnic groups (Kleppner 1970; Formisano 1971; Petrocik 1981). These values, shared commitments and life experiences then form the basis for durable symbolic attachments. The perspective of this article is that sustainable minority coalitions, at the mass level, require similar symbolic “glue.” Obviously a shared political agenda is not inconsequential to political alliances and, in particular, minority alliances. Further, public opinion data confirm that blacks and Latinos often have similar political preferences. Nonetheless, I suggest that beyond the rational incentives of shared political interests, a sense of shared fate or commonality between members of different minority groups is essential to building successful coalitions and generating mass support for each others’ political candidates.

Of particular relevance to this argument is the research conducted on black politics and the role of common fate perceptions. Certainly an empirical puzzle of African-American political behavior has been the notable political homogeneity of blacks in spite of their increasing social and economic heterogeneity. Perceptions of common or linked fate are credited for the relative unity in the policy preferences of African-Americans (Gurin, Hatchett, and Jackson 1989; but see Gilliam 1996) and well as their homogeneity in partisanship and voting behavior (Tate 1993; Dawson 1994). In particular, Dawson’s notion of the “black utility heuristic” argues that African-Americans can and do infer self-interests from African-American group interests more generally. The rationale for this, according to Dawson (1994:61) is “that as long as African-American life chances are powerfully shaped by race, it is efficient for individual African Americans to use the perceptions of the interests of African Americans as a group as a proxy for their own interests.” The commonality thesis that I propose in this article applies the idea of the black utility heuristic to the more amorphous realm of minority politics. In particular, I maintain that the extent to which Latinos see their social, economic and political opportunities tied to the status of minorities generally in the U.S., the more likely they are to participate in minority-led political coalitions. Thus just as common fate perceptions have successfully unified the diverse black community politically, perceived commonality among Latinos and blacks should be similarly consequential to the creation and maintenance of broader minority alliances.

It is important to note that the main theoretical concern in this article is the process of developing sustainable minority coalitions that are comparable in cohesiveness and durability to a powerful interest group. Unlike much of the academic research on minority coalitions that focuses almost exclusively on the strategic behavior of minority leaders, however, this research looks at individual-level dispositions and what they tell us about the future potential for mass based electoral alliances. If there is power in numbers, and if American minorities wish to take advantage of their increasing electoral clout, then African-Americans and Latinos need to build reliable mass support for their respective candidates. It is not enough for them both to be part of the larger Democratic party coalition, as competition between these two groups for political power can certainly strain party loyalties. Furthermore, elite level coalitions may also provide an insufficient basis for durable minority coalitions

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1 For example, the Washington Post, Kaiser, Harvard Latinos survey show that regarding the size of government, 60 percent of blacks and 64 percent of Latinos agree that the government should be larger and offer more services, compared to only 28 percent of whites.
as voters are neither bound to elite arrangements nor are they uniformly responsive to elite cues. Rather electoral coalitions derive their power from mass attitudes and mass behavior. And these mass coalitions are really only politically consequential if they are both reciprocal and durable. The symbolic nature of politics for most voters suggests that a mass alliance between African-Americans and Latinos necessitates symbolic commitments in addition to pragmatic considerations. Thus until blacks and Latinos see their respective groups as having much in common, they are unlikely to engage in sustainable political coalitions. Commonality from this theoretical perspective is then a necessary, though not sufficient, basis for intergroup affinity and for successful political appeals and mobilization efforts.

Using public opinion data from a recent survey of Latinos, this article investigates the process by which Latinos come to feel close to blacks. Levels of pan-Latino affinity, the extent of Latino acculturation, the amount of perceived discrimination against Latinos, and Latino racial identity are posed as potential explanations for how Latinos develop a sense of commonality with African-Americans. The conclusions from this research suggest that pan-Latino affinity is a powerful predictor of Latino/black commonality, whereas Latino acculturation in its current form is unlikely to result in strong alliances between Latinos and African-Americans. The concluding sections of this article also point to the political development of Latino organizations—their historically nationalistic orientations, regional concentrations, and lack of mass membership base—as a rationale for continuing low levels of pan-Latino solidarity. In as much as these organizations are yet to foster more inclusive Latino identities, I point to the future role that Latino leadership may play in promoting collective Latino identities as well as broader minority alliances between African-American and Latino voters.

Theoretical Background: The Four Hypotheses

Immigration and Acculturation

While Latinos have yet to form many durable mass alliances with African Americans, they nonetheless comprise relatively new immigrant groups whose political identities are constantly evolving. Over 40 percent of American Latinos are foreign born and continued immigration from these countries implies an ongoing and ever-changing dynamic within Latino communities (DeSipio 1996). As immigrants, foreign born Latinos go through a process of acculturation to the host country, and understanding this process will likely tell us a great deal about the nature of future of Latino/black relations.

There are two conflicting strains of thought as to the likely outcome of Latino political acculturation. On the one hand, proponents of the assimilation perspective such as Gordon (1964) and Fuchs (1990) would suggest that in the long run Latinos are likely to become less “minority” centered in their political orientations. Increasing socioeconomic status, decreasing perceptions of discrimination and social isolation will, according to this point of view, eventually result in Latino political attitudes and behaviors that are increasingly similar to majority whites. Recent studies by Aguirre, Saenz, and Hwang (1989), Hwang and Murdock (1991) and Sears, Citrin, Cheleden, and van Laar (1999) all support the assimilation hypothesis noting that perceptions of discrimination, levels of ethnic identity and distinctive political attitudes on Latino issues tend to be lower among later generation Latinos.

An opposing point of view, the ethnic conflict hypothesis, suggests that Latino acculturation results in a greater sense of affinity for minorities, more robust pan-ethnic identity, and heightened ethnic group consciousness (Greeley 1971; Glazer and Moynihan 1963; Portes, Parker and Cobas 1980; Portes 1984; Portes and Bach 1985; Portes and Rumbaut 1990; Jones-Correa and Leal 1996). From this point of view, immigrants become more aware of social inequalities and discrimination with longer tenure in this country and that this heightened awareness leads to stronger ethnic identification and minority group affinity. Theoretical perspectives by Chavez (1991) and Skerry (1993) would also lend support this conclusion as they argue that American political and legal institutions, like the Voting Rights Act, socialize Latinos to view themselves in minority conscious terms.

If the assimilation perspective is correct, then in the long-term Latinos will likely be less inclined to politically align with blacks. Unlike African-Americans who have not followed the traditional trajectory of immigrant assimilation, Latinos are expected to become less distinctive from whites, both in their self-perceptions and in their political orientations. If the conflict hypothesis is correct, however, Latinos should be more inclined to adopt minority political orientations over time, and thus become more ardent coalition partners for black Americans.

Pan-Latino Affinity

Numerous Latino scholars have noted that a strong pan-ethnic identity among Latino subgroups is not yet evident (de la Garza et al. 1992, Lopez and Espiritu, 1990; Calderon 1992; Gimenez 1992; Hero 1992; DeSipio 1996; Jones-Correa and Leal 1996). While cultural factors such as common language and religion are assumed to provide a natural basis for Latino commonality, there are nonetheless a host of structural barriers to greater Latino solidarity. Racial differences among different Latino groups pose one possible challenge, with lighter skinned Latinos of Native-American or European descent seeing little in common with dark skinned or black Latinos. Socioeconomic heterogeneity as well as the geographic insularity of nationality subgroups, also work against the development of a more vigorous pan-ethnic Latino identity (Lopez and Espiritu 1990). Even the increasing mass usage of Latino or Hispanic pan-ethnic identifiers among Latinos does not necessarily imply a growing sense of cultural solidarity. As noted by
Jones-Correa and Leal (1996), "... identifying panethnically does not have a very pronounced effect on how respondents perceive cultural commonalities."

In spite of these barriers, the social-construction of pan-Latino identity continues to be promoted in the United States through political institutions and the media. Latinos, as a group, are accorded protected status in most civil rights legislation, and they are acknowledged as a "group" by most public and private entities. Increasingly popular Latino media—newspapers, television and radio—cater to the vast range of nationalities that comprise the Latino collective. And while these media may appreciate nationality differences, they nonetheless market their products to a fairly undifferentiated Latino mass, reinforcing the cultural commonalities that unify the Latino community. Why should an El Salvadorian immigrant, living in Los Angeles, feel much in common with a Cuban living in Miami? Perhaps because, after years of living in this country and being categorized by others, she has come to see herself as Latina. Or perhaps, after years of watching Cristina on Univision, she has come to appreciate the limits of national differences.

The pan-Latino affinity hypothesis suggests that a sense of pan-Latino commonality is a necessary pre-cursor for Latino/black solidarity. In essence, this perspective presumes that, for Latinos, black affinity is rooted in a larger pan-minority affiliation, and that in the absence of closeness to other Latinos, individuals are then particularly unlikely to feel any affinity for blacks.

**Perceived Discrimination**

The discrimination hypothesis maintains that Latino/black affinity is rooted in perceived discrimination and shared outsider status (Cain, Kiewiet, and Uhlaner 1991; Uhlaner 1991). Many Latinos experience severe social and economic discrimination. Like African-Americans, they often see their opportunities for upward mobility and political inclusion thwarted by a larger culture that discriminates against them and others like them. To the extent that African-Americans and Latinos both perceive high levels of discrimination, these experiences arguably become the basis for feelings of shared fate and commonality. Thus, from this perspective, Latinos who perceive high levels of anti-Latino discrimination, would also be the most likely to sense a commonality with blacks.

**Non-White Racial Identity and Minority Group Consciousness**

Many surveys, including the one used in this analysis, ask Latinos to self-identify as white, black, Latino or other. De La Garza et al. (1996) maintain that these self-selections reflect the underlying racial identities of the respondents; that Latinos who self-identify as Latino as opposed to white in essence are demonstrating a higher degree of minority group consciousness. In this vein, the racial identity hypothesis suggests that Latinos with a sense of non-white racial identity, are more likely to identify with African-Americans than are Latinos who see themselves as white.

**DATA AND ANALYSIS**

While Latino voters are undoubtedly of great interest to political scientists and politicians alike, the lack of current and well-designed survey data has been an ongoing obstacle to academic research. The Latino National Political Survey, conducted from 1989 to 1990, was arguably the most exhaustive survey available for the study of Latino political attitudes and dispositions (de la Garza et al. 1992). But the political landscape for Latinos—their own political coming of age as well as their perceived relevance by the non-Latino political world—has changed greatly over the past ten years. Current assessments of Latino attitudes are certainly warranted. With this in mind, this project utilizes a 1999 survey of 2,417 Latinos conducted jointly by the Washington Post, the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, and Harvard University. The random-digit dialed telephone survey was conducted from June 30 to August 10, 1999, and is a nationally representative sample with 1,802 white respondents, 285 African-American respondents and an over sample of 2,417 Latinos. The Latino sample is comprised of 318 Puerto Ricans, 818 Mexicans, 312 Cubans, 98 Dominicans, 170 Salvadorans, 423 other Central and South Americans, and 242 other Latinos primarily of European descent.

The first part of this analysis looks at relative levels of perceived commonality among Latinos and African-Americans. While the larger concern of this work is to identify the factors that may either facilitate or hinder group solidarity between Latinos and African-Americans, an important antecedent question is how much commonality do Latinos of different nationalities see with one another? Is the social-construction of "Latino" salient to the individual nationalities that comprise the Latino collective? And does Latino identification necessarily imply perceived political and cultural similarities among sub-nationality groups?

In the Washington Post/Kaiser/Harvard survey, Latinos were asked how much in common they have with other Latino nationality groups, African-Americans and Anglos.

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2 Cristina Zaralege is the Oprah Winfrey of Spanish-speaking television and her talk show, Cristina, has been one of Univision's most popular programs for many years.

3 Subsequent analyses in this article include self-identified Latinos of Mexican, Cuban, Puerto Rican, El Salvadorian, and Dominican descent. Other Central Americans, South Americans, and Latinos of European descent are not included.

4 The "commonality" survey question asks the respondents to gauge "how much" they have in common with other groups. Commonality is subject to individual interpretation, however, as the question is entirely vague as to what dimension of commonality the respondent may be referring to. It would be enormously interesting were we able to ascertain the relative...
The results from this set of questions are found in Table 1, and there are several striking findings. First, the data overwhelmingly indicate that a strong sense of Latino commonality is not the norm within these nationality groups. On average, approximately half of the respondents in any given sub-group feel that they have a fair amount or a lot in common with Latinos of other nationality groups, which equally implies that the other half sense they have little to nothing in common with these other groups. These data are quite consistent with earlier findings from the Latino National Political Survey, and seem to suggest that the past ten years have not resulted in an increasingly robust pan-Latino affinity (de la Garza et al. 1992). Second, there are clear and interesting patterns within the data which suggest that Latinos of Puerto Rican, Cuban, and Dominican descent see more in common with each other, than with Mexicans, Salvadorans and Guatemalans. Mexicans have relatively low levels of commonality with all other Latino subgroups and Salvadorans see more in common with their Central American neighbor Guatemalans than with other nationality groups. While the variance in sub-group affinity is interesting, the demographic realities of the U.S. Latinos are that Mexican-Americans constitute the vast majority. That sub-groups such as Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and Dominicans exhibit higher levels of pan-Latino affinity may reflect some localized promise for political alliances. In the larger scheme of things, however, national Latino solidarity will rest heavily on the attitudes and dispositions of Mexican-Americans toward these other groups.

With regard to Latino perceptions of commonality with African-Americans and Anglos, there are distinctive nationality differences as well. Half of the Puerto Ricans see themselves as having a fair amount or a lot in common with blacks, with the Dominicans having the next highest affinity at 39 percent. Mexicans, Cubans and Salvadorans perceive somewhat less affinity for blacks with 30 percent, 22 percent, respectively. Interestingly, the magnitude of perceived commonality with whites among all groups is similar to that of blacks, albeit on average slightly lower. In general, these findings suggest neither a particularly strong pan-ethnic or racial affinity among Latinos. One might interpret these data to suggest a certain amount of insularity on the part of these nationality groups in spite of their common language and especially in spite of the proclivity of American politicians, the academy and the media to treat them as a homogenous group. These data are also particularly noteworthy when viewed in comparison to comparable commonality data for African-Americans.

Table 2 presents commonality results for both blacks and Latinos (aggregated). These findings indicate that 61 percent of African-Americans feel that they have a fair amount or a lot in common with whites, while a larger 75 percent feel this way about Latinos. On average 33 percent of Latinos feel close to both blacks and whites showing no distinction between the two. With regard to African-Americans and Latinos, there is a notable asymmetry in these findings. While 75 percent of blacks feel a significant amount of commonality with Latinos only 33 percent reciprocate such feelings. And while blacks feel notably closer to Latinos than whites, there is no such distinction apparently made among Latinos.

This asymmetry appears to be quite consequential for the prospects of coalition building. Understanding the factors that promote a sense of closeness with blacks among Latinos, then, seems essential to assessing the future potential for minority based political coalitions.

Modeling Commonality

Of the many possible factors that contribute to Latino/black affinity, the following analyses particularly explore the four previously described: (1) Pan-Latino affinity, (2) Acculturation, (3) Discrimination, and (4) Racial Identity. These factors are not mutually exclusive, in that potentially all four can contribute to commonality. Nonetheless, the measures that have been constructed to test these explanations are independent of one another and do not suffer from meaningful collinearity problems.
Table 2: Interracial and Inter-ethnic Commonality

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Whites</th>
<th>Blacks</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Latinos</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent who perceive a fair amount/ a lot in common with</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blacks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent who perceive a fair amount/ a lot in common with</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In order to explore the source of Latino perceived commonality with blacks, I utilize an ordinary least squares regression analysis. The dependent variable in this analysis is a survey question that asks Latinos to assess how much as a group they have in common with African-Americans. The scale ranges from 0 (nothing) to 100 (a lot in common). The independent variables in this analysis include measures for the four main explanatory factors as well as sub-nationality dummy variables, demographic controls (education, income, age), and political variables (party identification and ideology). All of the independent variables are scaled from 0 to 1 to facilitate direct comparisons. Thus the unstandardized regression coefficients represent the predicted increase in the Latino/Black commonality score when one moves from the lowest value (0) to the highest value (1) of a given independent variable.

The Pan-Latino Affinity measure is constructed from the separate sub-nationality responses to the group closeness question. Answers to these questions were aggregated, using simple addition, to construct a scale ranging from 0 (nothing in common with any other group) to 1 (a lot in common with every other group). As this measure is scaled from low to high, a positive and significant coefficient suggests that higher levels of pan-Latino affinity correspond to greater perceived commonality with blacks.

The Latino Acculturation measure combines Latino nativity (foreign born versus born in the U.S.) with self-reported language proficiency (English only, bilingual, Spanish only) into a six point scale. Foreign born, Spanish only speakers represent the low end of Latino acculturation while native born, English only speakers are the high end. A positive and significant coefficient suggests that greater acculturation corresponds with a greater sense of closeness to blacks and supports the ethnic conflict hypothesis, while a negative coefficient would indicate that more acculturated Latinos are less likely to feel an affinity for African-Americans (the assimilation hypothesis).

The Latino Discrimination measure was constructed from two survey questions and reflects individual responses as to whether discrimination against Latinos is a big problem, a small problem or no problem. The measure is scaled from low to high, and a positive and significant coefficient would indicate that higher levels of perceived discrimination correspond with greater closeness to blacks.

Racial Identity is conceptualized in two dummy variables for Latinos that identify "racially" with blacks or with Latinos. White identification is the baseline. The supposition is that Latinos who self-identify as non-white will have higher levels of perceived commonality with African-Americans than will white identifiers. Positive and significant coefficients would indicate support for this hypothesis.

The analysis also includes a series of sub-nationality dummy variables to test for differences in sub-group affinity for blacks. Cuban, Puerto Rican, Dominican, and Salvadoran differences are estimated with Mexicans as the baseline group. Thus positive and significant coefficients imply sub-group perceived closeness to African-Americans that is higher than that of Mexicans, all else being equal.

Finally, I include two sets of control variables. The first set of demographic factors (education, income, and age) test for the likelihood that perceived commonality is related to relative status; that less educated, less affluent or younger Latinos may have greater affinity for African-Americans than their higher status counterparts. The second set of variables (party identification and political ideology) explore the possibility that Latino/black commonality may derive from a more general set of political orientations and beliefs. Thus positive and significant coefficients for either of these political factors suggests that Latino affinity for blacks reflect political sentiments as well as social or economic ones.

The regression analysis exploring the sources of Latino/black commonality is found in Table 3. The results in Model #1 suggest that of the four main explanations, pan-Latino affinity is the most robust predictor of Latino/black commonality. In essence, Latinos who feel close to one another as a group are much more likely to feel close to African-Americans, while Latinos who identify more with their own sub-group than the Latino collective are substantially less to likely to identify with blacks. Holding all other factors constant, the difference in perceived closeness to blacks between Latinos at the bottom of the Latino commonality scale (0) versus those at the top (1) is approximately 66 points out of a 100 point scale! This is more than three times as large as the relative effect of Latino acculturation.

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5 Note that "African-American" and not black is used in the question wording.
6 The scale used in this analysis replicates the scale used in de la Garza, et al. (1996).
7 This measure of racial identity was also adapted from de la Garza et al. (1996) where it was conceptualized as a measure of group consciousness.
8 Earlier versions of this model included a full range of interaction effects; however, as none of these, individually or collectively, reached statistical significance, they have been omitted from the final version. The possibility of important regional differences resulting from the sampling technique was also tested in all of the statistical analyses. These regional coefficients did not achieve statistical significance have been omitted.
Table 3

Perceived Latino Commonality with Blacks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regression Resultsa:</th>
<th>Model #1</th>
<th>Model #2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>SE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pan-Latino Affinityb</td>
<td>66.59**</td>
<td>4.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino Acculturationc</td>
<td>20.44**</td>
<td>2.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Discrimination</td>
<td>-3.3</td>
<td>2.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Racial Identificationd</td>
<td>7.73**</td>
<td>3.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino Racial Identification</td>
<td>4.12*</td>
<td>2.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cubanf</td>
<td>11.61**</td>
<td>2.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puerto Rican</td>
<td>18.31**</td>
<td>2.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominican</td>
<td>15.26**</td>
<td>3.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salvadoran</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>3.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educationf</td>
<td>-2.32</td>
<td>1.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>-2.66</td>
<td>3.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>2.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Identificationg</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>2.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideologyh</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>2.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino/White Commonalityi</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>-6.49</td>
<td>3.96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 1163
Adjusted R Square = .26

N = 1134
Adjusted R Square = .32

* p < .05
** p < .01


Notes:

a Dependent variable question wording, "Just thinking about groups living in the United States, how much do you have in common with African Americans?" DV is scaled from 0 to 100. All independent variables are scaled from 0 to 1. Unstandardized regression coefficients represent the total increase or decrease in the Latino/Black commonality score moving from the lowest (0) to the highest (1) value of the independent variable.

b Cumulative score for Latino respondents regarding how much they have in common with other Latino subgroups (0 = nothing in common with any other group; 1 = a lot in common with all other groups).

c Acculturation scale combines country of birth (foreign versus native born) with language proficiencies (English only, bilingual, Spanish only) into a 0 to 1 scale.

d Racial identity coefficients (black and Latino) represent dummy variable scores with white as the Latino baseline group.

e Latino ethnic group coefficients represent dummy variable scores with Mexican-Americans as the Latino baseline group.

f The education measure ranges from 0 = less than 8th grade to 1 = post-graduate.

g Party identification is a 7-point interval scale from 0 to 1, Strong Republican to Strong Democrat.

h Ideology is a 3 point interval scale from 0 to 1, Conservative to Liberal.

i Latino/White Commonality is a four point interval scale from 0 = nothing in common to 1 = a lot in common.

The Latino Acculturation coefficient is also significant suggesting that nativity in the U.S. and English language acquisition also have a positive effect on Latino affinity toward blacks. The difference between foreign born, Spanish speakers (the low end of the scale) and native born, English speakers (the high end) is approximately 20 points on a 100 point scale. This finding supports the ethnic conflict perspective in that greater acculturation leads to greater perceived group commonality with blacks. The effect, nonetheless, is less pronounced than that of pan-Latino affinity.

Perceived discrimination does not appear to correspond with closeness to African-Americans, as Latinos who see Latino discrimination as a "big problem" are no more likely to feel close to African-Americans as are those who see Latino discrimination as no problem at all. Similarly, racial identity does not appear to influence Latino/black commonality to a great degree. Latinos who self-identify as black or Latino are only slightly more likely to feel close to blacks as are Latinos who identify as white.

By contrast, there are clearly meaningful differences between Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and Dominicans and the Mexican reference group in terms of their sense of commonality with African-Americans. Puerto Ricans scored the largest difference; 18 points higher on the commonality scale. Dominicans and Cubans were also significantly higher, 15 and 12 points respectively Salvadorans, on the other hand, were no more likely to see commonality between their group and African-Americans than were Mexicans. At first blush, these findings may seem to reflect the underlying racial differences between Cubans, Puerto Ricans and Dominicans—many of whom are black—with Mexican Americans and Central Americans who generally
are not. Yet only a very small percentages of these groups self-identify as black (5 percent of Puerto Ricans and Cubans and 10 percent of Dominicans). Furthermore, as the regression procedure controls for individual differences in racial identity, these findings should not be interpreted as a surrogate for varying levels of black racial identity. Rather, it seems that even though Puerto Ricans, Cubans and Dominicans don’t necessarily see themselves as black, as groups, they feel more connected to African-Americans than do either Mexicans or Salvadorans. These findings also seem to suggest that black/Latino coalition prospects may not be equal across nationalities, as opportunities within the Puerto Rican and Dominican communities appear greater than elsewhere.

Finally, none of the demographic or political variables was statistically significant. These null findings strongly suggest that commonality, as such, does not result from political solidarity. Well-educated and wealthy Latinos are no more likely or unlikely to feel close to blacks than their less educated, less affluent counterparts. Further, commonality does not appear to derive from political solidarity either. While this article argues that perceived commonality has important political consequences, it nonetheless does not appear to be a component of other broad political identities and ideologies.

Before making any strong conclusions regarding the importance of pan-Latino affinity to Latino/black commonality, it seems important to rule out an important alternative explanation for these findings. In particular, it seems plausible that some respondents may feel close to every group, while others consistently feel close to only a few or none. In order then to confirm that pan-Latino affinity is particularly important to Latino/black commonality and not simply a correlate to some generalized out-group affinity, I re-ran the regression analysis in Model #1 including a measure of Latino/white commonality with the previous set of independent variables. If indeed Latino/Black commonality is nothing more than a manifestation of general out-group receptivity, then Latino/white commonality should be as similarly robust as pan-Latino affinity when predicting Latino/black commonality. These findings are reported as Model #2. Clearly for some Latinos, commonality with whites is linked to an affinity with blacks, and perhaps with outgroups more generally. Nonetheless, while the inclusion of the Latino/white measure reduces the size of the pan-Latino affinity coefficient from 66 to 50, and slightly diminishes the effect of acculturation from 20 to 18, pan-Latino affinity remains a large and significant predictor of Latino/black commonality. If anything, the addition of the factor adds to the overall explanatory power of the model. It does not, however, invalidate the earlier finding that pan-Latino unity is an important predictor of Latino affinity for blacks.

In general, the conclusions drawn from this research do not speak promisingly for strong black/Latino coalitions in the near term. As argued earlier in this article, perceived intergroup commonality among Latinos generally is an important prerequisite for a more inclusive minority consciousness. To the extent that many Latinos continue to identify with their own nationality group and do not adopt a more inclusive pan-ethnic orientation, they then are unlikely to identify, in any meaningful way, with the more general cause of minorities and minority politics. But as also argued earlier, many Latinos are still quite recent immigrants to this country. It is certainly plausible, then, that long-term acculturation may result in greater prospects for minority coalition building.

The relatively small effect of acculturation on black/Latino commonality suggests that long-term prospects will be only slightly enhanced. The acculturation measure, however, only distinguishes between foreign born and native-born Latinos. It is nonetheless possible that acculturation over multiple generations may represent continuing changes in the political and social attitudes of Latinos; that heightened levels of pan-Latino affinity and greater solidarity with African-Americans are particularly manifest in later generations. In order to explore this possibility, I re-ran the regression analysis in Table 3 substituting generational dummy variables for the acculturation variable. Foreign born Latinos were designated as the baseline group with dummy variables included for second generation Latinos (n = 566) and third generation or more (n = 373). The results are reported in Table 4.

Two important findings are evident from this exercise. First, the acculturation variable which combines nativity with language usage is a significantly more powerful predictor of Latino/black affinity than the are the more simple generational distinctions. The acculturation coefficient is over twice as large as either of the coefficients for the generational dummy variables, and confirms both theoretically and empirically the complex nature of immigrant acculturation. Mere length of residency does not adequately capture the subtle process by which immigrants and their offspring blend new identities with family history. The acculturation variable, which combines nativity with language usage, appears to be a more robust measure.

Second, while notable changes in Latino orientation were observed between the first and second generation, approximately 10 points on the 100 point scale, no additional gains in Latino/black commonality were evident in later generations. The coefficient for the third generation and beyond dummy variable was statistically indistinguishable from the second generation (9.7 vs. 10.0). It appears then that the most significant changes wrought by acculturation are realized by the second generation, confirming the previous conclusion that the multi-generational acculturation of immigrant Latinos poses only minor gains in terms of greater Latino/black commonality.

**Discussion**

It would be rather easy and quite simplistic to conclude that there is little basis for a sustained minority coalition between African-Americans and Latinos. Presuming that commonality is the necessary symbolic “glue” for the construction
of such alliances, the evidence in this article suggests that African-Americans are more readily attached to such coalitions than Latinos. Nonetheless, black affinity for Latinos is most certainly not innate. Several generations of African-American leadership, not to mention the powerful socializing force of the civil rights movement, have linked the fate of African-Americans to other racial and ethnic minorities. The nature of African-American political organizations in this country, the strategic decisions of many visible black leaders and the content their political rhetoric, in particular the notion of the rainbow coalition, has arguably socialized many African-Americans to see themselves as part of a larger collective. It is from these experiences that perceived closeness is learned, and from this history that powerful political symbols emerge.

The political history of Latinos in the United States poses an interesting contrast to African-American political development, and can in part explain both the absence of a strong pan-ethnic Latino identity as well as weak Latino affinity for blacks as a group. The findings from this research seem to suggest that Latinos have weak ties to one another, and this may speak to the insularity of their political leadership as much as anything else. The development of Latino political organizations over the past one hundred years has been largely regional and nationality specific (Gonzales 1985; Garcia et al. 1988; De Sipio 1996; Apontes-Pares 1999; Santillan 1999). It is really only within the past 20 years that a large immigrant influx from Central America, the Caribbean and other Latin American countries, have placed pressure on Latino political organizers to broaden their concerns and their appeal. It is really only within the past few decades that Latino issues have come to national prominence, and it is only within the past few years that Latino voters have become recognized as "pivotal" or "key" constituencies. With this recognition comes an enormous impetus within Latino communities to organize and to maximize their political leverage. This is yet to fully happen.

To a large extent, "the new black politics" began after the implementation of the Voting Rights Act, because the absolute numbers associated with black suffrage in the South dictated newly found political opportunities (Preston et al. 1987). Latino political development, like that of African-Americans, has also reacted to changes in their political fortunes. For this reason, Mexican American, Puerto Rican and Cuban political organizations sprung up in regions where their relative numbers justified political attention and spurred optimism in their likely success (Gonzales 1985). Nonetheless, Latino political development differs in large part from that of African-Americans in its degree of fragmentation, the relative absence of visible national leadership, and the low rate of Latino participation in mass membership organizations. Important Latino organizations such as the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), the American G.I. Forum (AGIF), the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF), the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund (PRLDEF), the National Puerto Rican Forum (NPRF)

and the National Council of La Raza (NCLR), historically advocated on behalf of Mexican Americans or Puerto Ricans, however few Latino organization had ethnically integrated leadership or ethnically diverse policy agendas. And while many contemporary Latino organizations have sought to develop a more nationally diverse membership over the past ten years, they have yet to become an effective socializing agent within the larger Latino community. Unlike mass membership organization like the NAACP, most of the Latino political organizations are top-down elite alliances. As such, they do not rely on mass membership for their support, and have few active members (DeSipio 1996).

\[ \text{TABLE 4} \]
\text{BLACK/LATINO COMMONALITY: TESTING FOR GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES} 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regression Results$^a$:</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pan-Latino Affinity$^b$</td>
<td>67.59**</td>
<td>4.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Generation Latino$^c$</td>
<td>10.03**</td>
<td>2.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Generation Latino$^c$</td>
<td>9.70**</td>
<td>2.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Discrimination</td>
<td>−1.93</td>
<td>2.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Racial Identification$^d$</td>
<td>6.89*</td>
<td>3.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino Racial Identification</td>
<td>4.38*</td>
<td>2.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuban$^e$</td>
<td>10.83**</td>
<td>2.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puerto Rican</td>
<td>19.03**</td>
<td>2.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominican</td>
<td>14.12**</td>
<td>4.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salvadoran</td>
<td>2.16</td>
<td>3.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education$^f$</td>
<td>−1.07</td>
<td>1.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>3.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>2.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Identification$^g$</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>2.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideology$^h$</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>2.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>−1.56</td>
<td>3.87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 1448
Adjusted R Square = .24

Notes:
$^a$ Dependent variable question wording, "Just thinking about groups living in the United States, how much do you have in common with black people?" DV is scaled from 0 to 100. All independent variables are scaled from 0 to 1. Unstandardized regression coefficients represent the total increase or decrease in the Latino/black commonality score moving from the lowest (0) to the highest (1) value of the independent variable.
$^b$ Cumulative score for Latino respondents regarding how much they have in common with other Latino subgroups (0 = nothing in common with any other group; 1 = a lot in common with all other groups).
$^c$ First generation (foreign born) is the baseline comparison group.
$^d$ Racial identification coefficients (black and Latino) represent dummy variable scores with white as the Latino baseline group.
$^e$ Latino ethnic group coefficients represent dummy variable scores with Mexican-Americans as the Latino baseline group.
$^f$ The education measure ranges from 0=less than 8th grade to 1=postgraduate.
$^g$ Party identification is a 7 point interval scale from 0 to 1, Strong Republican to Strong Democrat.
$^h$ Ideology is a 3 point interval scale from 0 to 1, Conservative to Liberal.
Also of consequence, there has been no national Latino social movement, nor nationally recognized leadership to provide an impetus for unity across nationality groups and across regions of the country. Latino civil rights organizations and protest movements, like the United Farm Workers Union and the La Raza Unida party, were small and regionally localized activities in comparison to the larger Civil Rights Movement that socialized and mobilized African-Americans. Furthermore, the vast amount of new Latino immigration over the past twenty years virtually guarantees a weak collective memory within the mass public of these and other important historic Latino activist associations.

In sum, the organization and practice of Latino politics to date in the United States has not socialized the Latino mass to see itself as part of a larger minority collective, and there is no guarantee that future generations of Latino leadership will either. However, the national recognition that is currently being accorded Latino voters by the two main political parties presents an enormous opportunity, and may very well create a political environment ripe for the development of more inclusive Latino identities. Party competition over the growing Latino vote may become the impetus for a Latino political movement that has yet to fully define itself, its members, or its powerful political symbols. And given the enormous opportunities that have only begun to be realized by Latino elites, it seems that contemporary studies of Latino political socialization are at best instructive. A different kind of Latino political socialization may take place in the future should Latino leadership change their course. The extent to which Latinos will become more unified among themselves and more inclusive of other minority groups thus relies largely on the choices that current and future generations of Latino leadership will make.9

CONCLUSION

This article began by noting the changing American landscape and the increasingly consequential role that racial and ethnic minorities will play in its electoral politics. In spite of their increasing numbers, African-Americans and Latinos need to build mass coalitions in order to wield substantial electoral clout. Yet in spite of the obvious incentives for building coalitions, there is little evidence of sustained alliances among Latinos and blacks. Using current public opinion research, this article explores the social attitudes at the foundation of such alliances.

The core theoretical idea in this article is that perceived commonality is essential to the process of building political associations. While political elites may construct coalitions based on instrumental agreements, politics for the masses requires symbolic attachments as well as pragmatic ones. A sense of shared fate, common life experiences and shared values all contribute to perceived intergroup commonality, and they are requisite for durable political coalitions on a mass level. Public opinion data suggest that African-Americans perceive much greater commonality with Latinos than visa versa. Thus this research focuses on the process by which Latinos come to feel close to blacks.

The main finding in this article is that a strong sense of Latino commonality corresponds with higher levels of affinity toward African-Americans. Latinos who see much in common between themselves and the larger Latino collective are more likely to feel close to blacks as well. Latino acculturation also contributes to black affinity, although in a less substantial way. All else being equal, Puerto Ricans and Dominicans see more in common with African-Americans than do Mexicans and Salvadorans. These inter-nationality differences suggest both opportunities and barriers for future Latino/black alliances. Levels of perceived discrimination and the nature of Latino racial identity do not, however, appear to contribute significantly to Latino/black commonality.

An analysis of Latinos by different generations supports an earlier conclusion that acculturation has minimal consequences for perceptions of closeness to African-Americans. While there are significant differences between first and second generation Latinos with regard to black affinity, there is no evidence that Latinos become any closer to African-Americans in subsequent generations.

While I argue that it is "rational" for African-Americans and Latinos to build political alliances based on the fact that they share many political preferences, I have tended to ignore the role that white political leaders and white voters play in the viability and likelihood of these coalitions. Especially in the realm of urban politics, where the proportion of white voters in many cities is clearly shrinking, Latinos are increasingly being courted by white leadership in search of a coalition. And as noted by Meier and Stewart (1991), Latinos are typically a more attractive coalition partner for moderate whites than are African-Americans. Given that Latinos appear somewhat indifferent between blacks and whites, it is little wonder that Latino/white coalitions have become ever more prevalent in big city politics.10 Only time will tell, however, if these Latino/white alliances produce the kinds of policy outputs that satisfy the political needs of what are often disadvantaged Latino publics.

The findings from this research should be particularly interesting to both academics and political activists alike, as they indicate several important lessons. First, there is ample evidence that Mexican-Americans, Cuban-Americans, Puerto Rican-Americans, etc. do not share a strong sense of cultural solidarity. Like many waves of immigrants before them, national identities continue to resonate for many generations. Political and social acculturation is complex, incomplete and slow. Yet if minority political clout rests on

9 For a more detailed discussion on the role of Latino leaders and organizations in the development of pan-ethnic identity, see DeSipio (1996). Also, for a somewhat different perspective on the role of leadership in developing and sustaining biracial and multi-racial coalitions, see Sonenshein (1993; 1997).

10 I am grateful to one of my anonymous reviewers for pointing out this rather important omission in my earlier draft.
the formation of coalitions, and if the development of black/Latino coalitions rests on Latino unity, then leaders of the Latino movement must look to foster a greater sense of common culture and common identity.

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