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# **BREAKING THE MONOLITH: AN APPROXIMATION OF CONTEMPORARY LATINO POLITICAL IDENTITY**

*por José Cisneros Tirado\* y Melva Navarro Sequeira\*\**

## **An approximation to contemporary political identity**

In demographic terms, according to the United States census<sup>1</sup>, the population self-identified as Hispanic, grew 2 percent year-on-year between 2015 and 2016 to reach 57.5 million as the nation's largest minority. The US Census Bureau defines Hispanic or Latino as a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture, or origin regardless of race. Hence, people choose to self-identify according to these categories. Since the 1960's Latino population increased almost nine times, growing from 6,3 to 56,5 million back in 2015. According to the Pew Research Center<sup>2</sup>, it is projected the Latino population will grow to reach 107 million by 2065, representing 24% of the US population. This data shows how relevant is trying to gain further insights on Latino political identity, as they will constitute the majority of the United States population in a few years.

The first aspect of political identity we would like to explore is the meaning of group identity. We begin reviewing this concept as we adhere to the notion that groups are an essential part of every person's identity, the social and collective group where each person grows and learns how to interact with society within a specific context. This paper draws from Iris Young's

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<sup>1</sup> United States Census Bureau (2017), Hispanic Origin. Website visited 15/10/2017. [www.census.gov/topics/population/hispanic-origin/about.html](http://www.census.gov/topics/population/hispanic-origin/about.html).

<sup>2</sup> Pew Research Center (2017), "Facts on U.S. Latinos, 2015". Website visited 15/10/2017. [www.pewhispanic.org/2017/09/18/facts-on-u-s-latinos/](http://www.pewhispanic.org/2017/09/18/facts-on-u-s-latinos/).

definition of group identity as a collective of persons different to others based on cultural practices, but also from different positions of power or privilege within a specific community (Martínez-González 2008). Moreover, we consider the existence of these groups to be fundamental for democracy as these social subunits provide meaning and substance to social interaction. The increase of different ethnicities in today's global societies is nothing but an inescapable fact. Contrary to considering such differences being detrimental, the public sphere of contemporary political identity contains this intersection of social categories which according to Kaufman (2004), leads to identity being considered as a continuous process rather than a fixed entity or even as the property of specific social actors. Group members identify themselves as part of a larger collective and construct their own views of society and community using this differentiation to accept or reject this category as part of a larger social context. Such identification is not static but shifts and becomes more complex over time as people face different types of social interaction.

In terms of this social interaction with the mainstream of American society, Alba and Nee (2003), consider contemporary immigrants face a different challenge compared to previous European immigration during the XIX and early XX centuries. According to different studies performed by Warner and Srole (1945) or Myrdal (1944), immigrants were pressured to choose either maintaining their cultural and communal distinctiveness, thus partially isolating themselves from mainstream America, or being forced to remain racial minorities and placing their children at a disadvantage with their peers. Alba and Nee reviewed how the assimilation process has evolved for contemporary immigrants, thus providing a recount of the mechanisms affecting how immigrants relate to mainstream America (Alba & Nee 2003).

According to these authors, assimilation as a concept has dramatically changed over time, as it no longer requires solely embracing middle-class, white American values, and it does not simply imply shedding a person's original values. This previous vision of assimilation (Warner & Srole 1945) considered ethnic groups would eventually be suppressed by American egalitarian values and social mobility. It is worth mentioning these ideas also supported a hierarchy of racial and cultural acceptability, with English-speaking protestants at the top and "Negroid mixtures" at the bottom. Alba and Nee (2003) reject this ethnocentric vision of assimilation, as these authors consider immigrants to have largely contributed to the ever-changing American political and cultural ethos.

For Alba and Nee (2003), there are three definitive elements in the composition of a contemporary concept of group political identity; ethnicity remains a social boundary, a physical distinction shaping social interaction and still plays an essential role in building individual mental orientations in relation to others. Second, there is a cultural element based on a person's heritage, which provides meaning to the differences in how people relate to individuals outside or within their cultural group. Finally, assimilation understood as the decline of a person's ethnic distinction concerning its interactions with others in social life. The logic conclusion posed by these authors is American mainstream is constantly evolving with contributions made by all types of immigrants and the construction of a multicultural and more inclusive society, where ethnic differences no longer pose a challenge for social mobility (Alba & Nee 2003). In this paper, however, we also review other voices that consider power and ethnicity still play a dramatic role in social interaction.

It is important to clarify that collective identity does not mean equal representation, as just imposing a single group identity denies the complexity in people's lives and that individuals may self-identify to different categories depending on their own personal experience. Hence, we must outline the features of the social group we are studying and our understanding as Latinos. According to Oboler, Latinos emerged as a grassroots term coined as a progressive alternative to the government label 'Hispanic' used in the national census for demographical purposes (Oboler 1995). For this study, we use the term Latinos and Latino Americans interchangeably to represent various social groups with personal ties to Latin America. The term Hispanic can potentially be misleading as it reflects a personal connection with Spain, for this study, however, we do not consider European Spaniards to be part of this category. For Latinos in the United States, there is a personal or familial experience with immigration from Latin America, and this phenomenon leads to continuous confrontation to the cultural and linguistic differences with other nationalities and ethnicities. Hence, we consider Latinos those persons living in the United States, being born either in the US or abroad, with a shared cultural or ancestral heritage to any Latin American nation. Latinos living in the United States undergo diverse processes of adaptation with many levels of assimilation; however, they reaffirm their identity based on their personal or ancestral ties to provide a sense of community and belonging according to their social settings (Brick, Challinor & Rosenblum 2011).

Latinos receive a pan-ethnic label for an artificially created identity, which tends to be reinforced by the media and the bureaucratic system. However, this label groups many different ideas, ethnic backgrounds, religious and diverse degrees of attachment to their countries of origin. In addition, we could hardly argue Latinos have acted as a single entity throughout the history of the United States, but at specific times and under specific issues such as immigration reform (González-Gutiérrez 2002). During the 1990s, different groups self-identified as Latino-American formed lobbying groups seeking further representation, but Latinos are still perceived by different authors as the “sleeping giant” of American politics (Doval & Garza 2016).

According to Garcia-Bedolla (2005), Latinos’ political identity in the United States must be interpreted as the intersection of power, collective identity and place. These factors affect how Latinos position themselves in their identification as Americans in the sense of who they are and what they must become or accomplish to be considered full citizens of the United States. Many Latinos face structural factors and stigmatization throughout their lives within a racially charged socioeconomic environment. The presence of power relations is essential to the experience of stigmatization in society, being imposed on individuals who possess specific inherent features, thus conveying a negative connotation and sometimes posing a burden for personal development. According to self-categorization theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher & Wetherell 1987), this imbalance in power relations is reinforced as people in majority groups tend to create a prototype of this superordinate identity based their own group’s characteristics. Thence, this majority comprised by white European-Americans have constructed an idea of what it means to be American, which is contrasted by a sense of otherness perceived in minorities, in this case, Latinos.

One of the key aspects about Latino political engagement is the interaction between collective identity and structural position. Hence, for Latinos to consider themselves as full members of the United States’ political community they must develop a significant attachment to their group and a belief that said collective is worthy of their political efforts (Garcia-Bedolla 2005). As an example of collective political efforts, on February 2017, “A day without immigrants” was a massive protest orchestrated through social media, where thousands of workers went on strike to voice their concerns against president Trump’s immigration policies. Restaurants throughout the United States were shut down by immigrants in a display of their labor’s impact on the American

economy. This movement used the *#DayWithoutImmigrants* tag on social media to organize demonstrations; something notable about this protest was the participation of legal residents and citizens demonstrating alongside illegal immigrants from diverse minorities. Latinos had a very significant presence in these demonstrations<sup>3</sup>.

Another relevant historical feature of Latinos in the United States is their forging of real and imaginary communitarian collective identities and their engagement in sector country-specific organizations. This was the case, for example, of the Cuban and Puerto Rican diaspora collaboration in the struggle to obtain the independence from their respective insular nations from Spain at the end of the XIX century. In addition, we can observe this same behavior in Chicanos and other Latin American heritage in various regions of the Southwest. These grassroots organizations, such as *La Raza Unida* Party and the United Farm Workers Union contributed to maintain the cultural inheritance of these groups and to fight against discrimination and the persistent exclusion from equal political and civil rights in the United States in the 1970s (Gutiérrez 1999).

According to different studies in political psychology, there is a growing consensus of what it means to be “American”. According to different authors (Citrin, Haas, Muste & Reingold 1994; Citrin, Reingold & Green 1990; Devos & Banaji 2005; Schildkraut 2007; Wright, Citrin & Wand 2012), there are three common traits about contemporary American identity; the first is liberal political principles, such as self-reliance, liberty and democracy. The second is the attachment to the nation, which includes emotional ties to America, defending the country from criticism or exerting patriotism. Finally, nativism includes certain exclusionary features such as command of the English language and being Christian. For Pehrson and Green (2010), the above-mentioned characteristics are the primordial constructions of national identity. On the other side of the equation, these facets define the criteria for inclusion and exclusion of a national American identity. Thus, adherence to liberal political principles is considered a soft boundary, since there are many degrees in which a person can partially accept or reject these ideas. However, things like Christianity and a native use of English are re-

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<sup>3</sup> Day without immigrants’ protests close restaurants across the US (2017), *The Guardian*, data accessed: 02/10/2017. [www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/feb/17/day-without-immigrants-protest-restaurants-economy-trump](http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/feb/17/day-without-immigrants-protest-restaurants-economy-trump).

garded as hard boundaries as they easily leave specific individuals out of the group (Alba 2006).

Following this line of thought, we face another important aspect in the formation of political identity, of this socially constructed paradigm, which evolves over time. In the case of the United States, since its inception, the power relationships between the majority and minorities have affected the construction of this identity as in the case of the nativism component. The fight for inclusion in the United States has been a continuous phenomenon where minorities have struggled to be recognized as full citizens, thus receiving equal rights as other Americans. From the women and civil rights movements to the LGBTER and Black Lives Matter struggles, minority Americans have fought to be recognized as full American citizens with equal protection under the law. Thence, as proposed by Sidanius and Pratto (1999), the dominant group in a multi-ethnic society regards itself as having ownership of a nation, its resources and symbols; consequently, minorities face a certain degree of exclusion from the national identity. These ideas comprise a theory of social dominance, which suggests all ethnic minority groups can be excluded from mainstream exclusion to some extent. Hence, white, European Americans enjoy a greater sense of inclusion in the American political identity and minorities tend to be marginalized, as they do not fully embody the features of this socially and historically constructed identity.

The United States has and continues to be a nation of immigrants, however, there are two paths for how society moves forward into accepting this changing reality. According to the melting-pot view, any immigrant coming to the United States must embrace the aforementioned American values, thus relinquishing his own in order to gain acceptance as a full member of society. However, another pathway is possible according to multiculturalism, where ethnic and cultural differences should be not only recognized but also celebrated and incorporated into American society. These different acculturation ideologies carry contrasting implications for the balance of power relations between European Americans and all other minorities. To incorporate minorities into mainstream America, different policies such as affirmative action have been implemented, striving to provide a level playing field for minorities, considering the existence of structural and historical discrimination in society (Huynh, Devos & Altman 2015).

However, these policies have incurred negative reactions from European Americans, based on the idea that this ethnically aware policy effectively

discriminates against white Americans. For example, in 2016, the Supreme Court of the United States upheld an affirmative action program at the University of Texas at Austin. In this case, a white woman, Abigail Fisher filed a lawsuit against UTA claiming she was discriminated against and denied acceptance based on her ethnicity<sup>4</sup>. The University of Texas at Austin implements a holistic system to assess their applicants, race and ethnicity is just one of them and this system has indeed increased diversity with more Latino and black students accepted into the University. This policy reflects diversity as a priority for the current Supreme Court of the United States; however, this could change in years to come after elder justices retire. This case just highlights the continuous nature of the struggle for diversity and integration.

Another concept, ethnoculturalism, has been part of American national identity (Schildkraut 2007) and it needs addressing as is contrary to multiculturalism. In contrast to liberalism, the ethnocultural thought sets hard boundaries on group membership by maintaining American identity defined by white Protestantism grounded in northern European heritage and ancestry. According to Smith (1997), only some racial groups, religions or cultures are indeed “American This stereotype of American as white Christians have been internalized and are present in people’s attitudes towards non-white persons living in the United States. This is important as people pose specific features as criteria for who is being considered as a full citizen of the US. In the case of Latinos, authors such as Samuel Huntington (1997) consider immigration from Latin America poses a threat to the political cohesion of the United States. This author claims Latin American immigrants threaten American cultural integrity and even the future of the country, as Latinos are relatively non-committal to the best national interest of the United States as this group does not primarily identify to the country (Huntington 1997). However, Fraga and Segura (2006) challenged these theoretical claims, as these authors argue immigrants are not a threat to the fabric of American society but a conduit towards its transformation. Nonetheless, even these academics recognize there is a substantial lack of scholarly research in terms of how Latinos engage in adopting an American identity.

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<sup>4</sup> Supreme Court Upholds Affirmative Action Program at University of Texas (2016), *The New York Times*, data accessed: 02/01/2017. [www.nytimes.com/2016/06/24/us/politics/supreme-court-affirmative-action-university-of-texas.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/24/us/politics/supreme-court-affirmative-action-university-of-texas.html?_r=0).



Scholars have centered their studies on white Americans and their understanding of what being American means (Citrin, Pearson, Sides & Sears 2002) or how minorities regard their own group identities (Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind & Vedder 2001).

These factors are contained in the concept of identity, which according to Cuéllar, Nyberg, Maldonado & Roberts (1997) are the psychological aspects of identification as reflecting an individual's understanding of his membership to a particular group. According to their findings, in the case of Mexican Americans, the process of acculturation into American society reduces the sense of belonging to a certain social group. Hence, contrary to Huntington's theoretical proposition, Latinos embrace American ideals and assimilate into society due to the socialization processes such as education. If we consider Latinos as a social group by 2050, will nearly triple to 133 million from 47 million and will account for 30 percent of Americans, compared with 15 percent back in 2008<sup>5</sup>.

Thus far, evidence shows that Latinos are willing to assimilate and adopt American ideals; Barboza (2007) found a high level of consensus exists among Latinos concerning the importance of believing in the United States Constitution, perfecting the use of the English language and voting in elections. Henceforth, contrary to some views, Latinos of second and third generations are indeed taking part in the socialization process of becoming American and do share the core beliefs agreed by scholars on this subject. Thus forth, it is essential to gain a better understanding of how contemporary Latino-American identity coming into shape.

Different studies performed by Dávila (2001), Ricourt and Danta (2003), Santiago-Irizarry (2001), Lavariega-Monforti (2007), Suárez-Orozco and Paéz (2002), De la Garza (1990) and DeSipio (1996) have contributed to a more specific conceptualization of what it means to be Latino in the present United States. Driven by continuous immigration and the growth of US-born Latinos, different areas have witnessed a process of increased "Latinization", thus helping create a reconfiguration in ethnic and even pan-ethnic identities of Latinos. It remains unclear whether these changes will result in the creation of pan-Latino alliances between different groups. None-

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<sup>5</sup> Minorities in U.S. set to become a majority by 2042 (2008), *The New York Times*, data accessed: 02/05/2017. [www.nytimes.com/2008/08/14/world/americas/14iht-census.1.15284537.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/14/world/americas/14iht-census.1.15284537.html).

theless, DeSipio (1996) defines some mutually reinforcing features for the construction of a shared identity in the concept of *hispanismo*. According to this scholar, Latinos have common cultural characteristics; they also share a mandated common ethnicity and self-recognition as Latino rather than a national-origin based ethnicity concerning their social interaction with other ethnicities. However, DeSipio also believes specific national origins are still significant in differentiating each person's group identity within Latinos. Thence, Mexican-Americans tend to self-differentiate versus Cuban-Americans or Puerto Ricans. The use of the Spanish language remains to be one of the most important cultural features in the construction of *Latinidad*, this growing sense of pan-Latino group identity. There is a difference between Spanish-speaking immigrants and second or third generation Latinos, where Spanish is the dominant language used by immigrants and English for US-born Latinos (DeSipio 1996).

This relation to the Spanish language is not limited to dominant use but is also serves as a cultural and symbolic link to the larger Latino community (Pérez-Monforti 2001). US-born Latinos continue to support bilingual education for Spanish speakers as well as providing social services for non-English speakers. Another very important factor is the dynamic conception of race provide by *Latinidad*, as Latinos share an inherited racially mixed origin with their ancestral roots coming from Europe, Africa, or native Latin-American indigenous people. Hence, Latinos naturally challenge society's dominant dichotomized understanding of race in terms of just white or black. This evolving conceptualization of race contributes to Alba and Nee's idea of a more culturally embracing society (Alba & Nee 2003).

The third contribution of this idea of pan-Latino identity is a shared past due to political socialization in Latin America. Many immigrants fled their countries after suffering under totalitarian corporatist governments and highly unarticulated class systems, which of course clashes with American liberal and individualistic values. This unifying trend in Latinos substantiate their preference for larger governments and their deeper involvement in a wide range of policy areas. This trend is not definite, nor engulfs all different Latino groups, but it does reflect on their political preferences for politicians with this type of platform (De la Garza et al. 1992).

A final feature of *Latinidad* is a direct experience with migration, as most Latinos can trace their roots to such an experience. This relation with immigration greatly differs among Latinos; for example, it can be drastically dif-

ferent between Mexican Americans and Cuban Americans. Nonetheless, the continuous nature of immigration allows Latino communities to maintain linkages with the rest of their community, thus providing another element of *latinidad* (Lavariega-Monforti 2007).

In this paper, we use critical discourse analysis (CDA) to examine two in-depth interviews carried out with community leaders from Cuban and Mexican-American communities in Miami, Florida and Fort Worth, Texas. Drawing from the concepts detailed above, we use this method to find some of the elements present in the discourse from these two stakeholders on contemporary political identity.

### **Dealing with power relations through critical discourse analysis (CDA)**

According to Fairclough (1995), language is a social practice and CDA takes consideration of its context with a particular interest in the relation of language and power. Scholars use this method to find specific units of text embedded in political, media or gender discourses, thus providing insights into the internal dynamics of struggle and conflict. In human matters, the correlations between cause and effect may be distorted in our vision; hence, a critique of discourse makes biases visible and provides a pathway to analyze different social phenomena (Fairclough 1995).

Critical discourse analysis is fundamentally concerned with analyzing opaque and transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power, and control expressed in language. CDA critically investigates social inequality as is verbalized, signaled, constituted and legitimized by language and discourse. This method follows Habermas' premise of language being a medium of domination and social force. Discourse serves to legitimize power relations, as language is fundamentally ideological (Habermas 1977). CDA focus not only on texts, spoken or written, as objects of study; a critical account of discourse requires a theorization and description of the social processes and the context structures which give rise to the production of said texts. Consequently, individuals are members of social groups as historical subjects; they create meanings in their interaction with others. Thence, three key aspects arise in CDA, the concept of power, history, and ideology (Wodak & Meyer 2001).

On a basic level, CDA functions under certain theoretical assumptions:

- Language is a social phenomenon;
- Not only individuals but also institutions and social groupings have specific meanings and values, which are expressed in language in systematic ways;
- Texts are the relevant units of language in communication;
- Readers are not passive recipients in their relationship to texts (Kress 1989).

In CDA, the “critical” component is understood as having a distance to the data, thus embedding the data in its social context and taking a political stance explicitly. Critical theory, following Max Horkheimer’s school of thought, saw the role of academic scholars in helping to develop class-consciousness in society. Academics have a responsibility to partake in the struggle for the emancipation of those marginalized by helping define the nature of critical thinking itself. The relation between theory and practice is dynamic, as theory guides human actions within ever-changing societal systems. Hence, no single method of research can produce final and reliable results about any specific subject of inquiry and taking a single approach result in a distorted picture. Several methods of inquiry should complement each other; thus, using an eclectic theoretical approach is highly desirable to gain deeper insights into the multi-dimensional nature of phenomena (Blommaert & Bulcaen 2000).

Thompson (1990) discusses the interactions of ideology and culture in certain aspects of mass communication; for this author, ideology refers to social forms and processes within which, symbolic forms circulate in the social world. In CDA, ideology is essential to establish and maintain unequal power relations. The study of ideology provides ways in which meaning is constructed and conveyed by different symbolic forms (Thompson 1990). This type of study investigates the social contexts where these symbolic forms are deployed; this method provides ways to further understand relations of domination. Thence, the study of ideology needs considering a variety of theories that have examined the relation between thought and social reality. Eagleton further explains that all theories assume there are certain historical reasons to explain why people feel, desire and imagine in specific ways (Eagleton 1994).

Critical theories such as CDA, aim at producing enlightenment and emancipation, these theories not only describe and explain but also seek to root out particular kinds of delusions. Critical theory intends to create awareness in agents of how they are deceived about their own needs or interests. In CDA, language is not powerful on its own, it gains power as used by people in positions of power. Critical theory often chooses the perspective of the marginalized and analyzes the language of those in power is responsible for the existence of inequalities and with the opportunity to improve the conditions of those suffering. Hence, power is a defining feature of CDA, as this is a central condition in social life, and it is present on the effects of differences in social structures. Language is entwined in social power in different ways, it expresses and categorizes power but is also inherent in those challenging power, trying to subvert it and alter its distributions over time (Wodak & Meyer 2001).

Norman Fairclough applies CDA viewing language as an integral element of the material social process, his version of CDA is based on a thorough analysis of the context where the discourse takes place and the processes that are shaped by said discourses. Another dimension of Fairclough's analysis is discourse as social practice, delving into the ideological effects and hegemonic processes in which discourse is an essential element (Blommaert & Bulcaen 2000). CDA's critical locus is the connection between language, discourse, speech and social structure; this method allows uncovering ways in which discourse impacts social and power relations and generates ideological effects. Researchers using CDA do not only uncover the social dimensions of language use but these dimensions are the object of moral and political assessment of its effects on society. Ultimately, the teleological object of CDA is empowering the powerless, providing a voice for the marginalized, exposing power abuse and mobilizing people to remedy social wrongs (Wodak & Meyer 2001).

The categories and indicators are drawn from the different theories of political identity described in the first section. In this analysis, we dissected the texts obtained in two in-depth interviews with Latino stakeholders from Mexican and Cuban descent and identify the utterances related to the concepts of these concepts. Hence, the categories to be identified are as shown in Table 1.

## **CDA Analysis' Results**

In this study, we analyze two in-depth interviews carried out with Latino community leaders, both with a history of public service and a life-long

commitment to their respective communities. To protect their identities, we do not disclose their names as both are active in their corresponding political public spheres. One respondent is a Cuban-American (CA), a resident of Miami and the other interviewee lives in Fort Worth from Mexican origin (MA); both are full American citizens and politically active in their communities. Table 2 shows our CDA analysis of their interviews; in the final section, we discuss our findings.

## **Conclusion**

Talking to these Latino activists, we could confirm some insights in the construction of political identity as expressed in the reviewed theories. First, there is not such a thing as a single pan-Latino collective identity and there is a considerably robust attachment to their particular communities, based on shared experiences as a specific minority in American society. These could possibly explain why Latinos are considered the “sleeping giant” of American politics, since there is not a single identity as communities with the same country of origin tend to group together, without establishing a single social unit. A perfect example of this can be observed in our interviewees’ views on immigration; having opposite experiences in terms of a path to citizenship for Cuban and Mexican Americans, this issue further limits the possibility of developing a pan-Latino agenda. It is worth noting, however, that our respondents consider there should be fair legislation for all immigrants and it is a relevant issue in their minds.

Based on our analysis we could also conclude there is a common experience in regards to stigmatization. Our interviewees have faced negative stereotypes about being Latino, and they have had to struggle with this issue in their personal and professional careers. Facing discrimination has to be a constant in our respondent’s lives, and both of them have had to learn to live with discrimination; however, both of them have outstanding political careers and are highly active in their communities, serving as positive role models for younger generations. To some extent, we found our respondents have had experiences with assimilation, which is being forced to behave in certain ways in order to be accepted into higher political or economic echelons. However, both men are highly proud of their roots and they have chosen to defend their culture and to improve their communities through

political activism. In addition, these individuals decided to participate in politics because they did not feel represented by people on the ballot.

If we consider Latinos are a growing demographic this could lead to more Latinos running for public office in the future. Finally, our respondents fully embrace American values of self-reliance, liberty and democracy, they believe in hard work and improving their communities by participating in the political process. In the case of our Mexican American respondent, he also promoted multiculturalism and believes the increasing number of Latinos will most definitely influence the sociopolitical configuration of America going forward.

As stated before, this is by no means a generalization of the views of Latinos in the United States, and these two respondents are highly empowered and politically engaged individuals; however, we gained some insights of the salient issues about their political identity. We could confirm nonetheless, that there is no monolithic pan-Latino identity, as this is socially constructed based on specific societal experiences. This paper creates a pathway for further research with a larger number of respondents from diverse backgrounds in order to expand our understanding of Latinos in the United States of America.

**TABLE I**  
Concepts and indicators

Concept	Indicators
<b>Group identity</b>	Expressions of collectivity, both to own group and/or Latinos as a whole.
<b>Immigration</b>	Personal or familial experience with immigration
<b>Stigmatization</b>	Personal or familial experiences with stigmatization, marginalization or abuse due to the personal ethnic background.
<b>Assimilation</b>	Conscious or tacit personal or group efforts to assimilate into American Society.
<b>Political activism</b>	Participation in electoral campaigns, parties, grassroots or community organizations.
<b>American identity</b>	Expressions reflecting adherence to liberal political principles is an attachment to nation or nativism.
<b>Acculturation</b>	Terms regarding their preference for multiculturalism vs melting pot.

Source: prepared by the authors.

**TABLE 2**  
Analysis of interviews

Concept	Indicators
<b>Group identity</b>	<p>CA - There are many different types of Mexican Americans: recent arrival Mexicans, Mexican Americans who feel Latino, Mexican American that is Americanized, there's no general of Mexican American. To classify a group as just four Mexican American does not work.</p> <p>CA - The one thing about Latinos, you do not generalize.</p> <p>CA - What Obama is doing is dividing the Latino community generationally. And that to me is an insult. He is putting children against parents, and Latinos are very family-oriented. What Obama is doing is insulting us. He is not respecting our family unit.</p> <p>CA- The last thing is not about immigration. The last thing is that we're becoming more of a majority. By the year 2025, most of the Americans will be speaking Spanish. We, since 1986 more Latino babies that have been born every day than any other group in this country. So the majority of Latinos for the first time in this decade are American born not foreign-born.</p> <p>CA - The Cuban is not a staunch Catholic like the Mexican Americans; Cubans are considered Catholics an "American Catholic" because of weddings, baptisms, but does not go to church every Sunday like the Mexican or Central American.</p> <p>MA - I believe that there is not such a thing as a Pan-Latino agenda. You know I am trying to figure out that you have Chicanos in Texas, you have people in East L.A., and you have people on the east coast, and you have Puerto Ricans and Dominicans in the east coast, but I do not see many similarities; politically wise, I mean we look similar, well sort of. What I am saying is that I do not buy into this monolith of Latinos. I see differences in behavior, different characteristics, different ways of seeing the world, and politicians seem to be pandering to Latinos, which I don't think is going to be very effective because we are not the same.</p> <p>MA - Understanding how we were founded as a country can help you understand the complexity of why we are struggling with an identity even as an entire group; we are all bunched up. The government chose to put us; it was not until 1980 that the term Hispanic was implemented into the United States Census. So, my birth certificate says that I am white Caucasian.</p>
<b>Immigration</b>	<p>CA – Cuban Americans get special treatment because of immigration because the United States failed them. The United States promised them something and did not deliver, that's why they're getting that treatment... It's not the fault of the Cuban that they're getting special treatment, it's the fault of the United States, and they only get special treatment because they were abandoned.</p> <p>CA - Janet Reno wanted to limit how Cubans got to this country, so she discriminated even further and tried to get around the Cuban Adjustment Act. Alright? And she said, well if I catch them out in the sea they're not coming in if they land on the beach, they're in. That did not change the reason they were coming, you know? That only made it easier for her to discriminate under the</p>



	<p>law. The Wet Foot, Dry Foot only started in 1994; it did not start back in 1961. The Cuban Adjustment Act, which gives Cubans the right after being here for one year to get to apply for American residency that started in 1965.</p> <p>CA - Why you get many immigrants from Central America is because of gang violence because, you know, you risk your lives just like Cubans do. It is a violation of human rights, in order to prove that you a defense. Do you understand that? That's where you should be doing, that is what the person is debating. It should not be Latino against Latino; it should us all demanding better immigration rights.</p> <p>MA - People want fair immigration laws for them, they really are not against anybody else. What happens is that racist bring it up and extremist brings it up to divide Latinos.</p>
<b>Stigmatization</b>	<p>CA - The recent arrival Mexican Americans has very little relationships with Cuban American.</p> <p>CA - The reason that Cuban Americans are special or get a different treatment is due to an American favor, not of being Cuban. In 1961 there was a Bay of Pigs and in which my father was involved and over 1500 Cubans were captured by Castro in an ill invasion sponsored by the United States. At of that came the Cuban Adjustment Act because of their failure, not because we were Cubans, but American failure in an expedition that cost a lot Cubans their lives.</p> <p>CA - So educate people because they are misinformed, and they are very misinformed because of the division in politics, and hate, and anti-immigrant. We should not hate someone for immigration, we should not hate someone for being treated more fairly, and we should all want to be treated fairly. You understand me? By attacking someone who is getting a better chance at immigration and human rights, we are only dividing ourselves because we are serving the ones who are anti-immigrant. What we should say is, if you're doing this for them, please do it for us too. But you must apply good reason, not because you want to come here.</p> <p>CA - They'd be rioting because Black Lives Matter and Latinos lives don't and Latino families don't and it goes back to America society discriminating against somebody for their Spanish name. It has come to the point where we are required to prove that we are American citizens and that we're here legally. Yet, nobody goes to ask everyone else if they are here legally. We have to prove to everyone else, that is total social discrimination.</p> <p>CA - I remember when I was applying for a job as a police officer when I came to Miami, and I was asked to bring my citizenship and if you read the bottom of your citizenship it says you cannot make a photocopy because it is against federal law. Yet, the city made me get a copy. I made a copy and had to break federal law to give them a copy of my citizenship. I've seen racism, and I am a white Latino. I've seen racism. And white Latinos are discriminated just because of our last name; it's not about color anymore. It is about our ethnicity and our culture. It is not about color anymore. Latino is not brown; Latino is a culture. They'll come asking Argentinean who has brown or blue eyes because of the last name, right? It's not even color anymore, it's ethnic.</p>

	<p>MA - This is what I say in my speeches, I say, excuse me if I take it personally that I happen to belong to a group of people who you happen to blame for the dropping of the economy. The median income right now is \$54,000 in the state of Texas. In 2050, they're saying it's going to go down to \$47,000 because Latinos are going to be 65% of public school education, and I tell them, you're going to blame us for the economy, but I am telling them that it is on all of us because we are in charge of the system to be educating my population. And I tell them, this is personal for me because I have Latino sons, and I never apologize for my ethnicity and my heritage. If anything, I think they love seeing me be proud of my heritage, and I always give them the line, I that I cannot love true if I do not love the root. I love my roots. I love who I am, I love my indigenous blood.</p> <p>MA - And you were fighting stereotypes as well because it's not only your kids who are not used to seeing a Mexica guy in power, but I am sure it's the whole establishment, senators, and public officials, cops because they are used to see people who look like you and me in many other positions.</p> <p>MA - It was the Spanish and the Portuguese who brought slaves, so that helps me understand when I have a conversation with a black person in the United States that is telling me that they are treated worse than I am— I have to understand that systemically, they're right. They are at the bottom, but we are less than them as a Latino in the United States of America.</p>
<b>Assimilation</b>	<p>CA - The upper-class Latinos, I mean upper income, are not as strong on immigration as they are on business opportunities. That why a report shows 20% support among Latinos and that is in the upper-class. Moreover, the Latino that tends not speaking Spanish is more likely to support that policy.</p> <p>CA - There are Latinos that are removed from the Latino experience, removed from the Latino culture. And there are also Latinos are so brainwashed that it used to be with the blacks that if you're a Democrat, you're good. You're not good if you're Republican, you're a racist.</p> <p>MA - I know how to maneuver and code switch, but not sell out, not assimilate, I acculturate. And my role has been to have the white community understand that we are not a threat. That we are the solution; we are part of the solution.</p> <p>MA - What they are asking me are questions they haven't been able to ask Latinos in the past: What are we missing as a society? I am telling them, the demographics are changing and they've already changed. You're behind. I am telling them the economy is going to take a hit if you do not make us part of your equation. My sons will be part of the table because you are opening the doors for my sons and the kids in the neighborhood to genuinely and legitimately become part of the system to bring about the change.</p>
<b>Political activism</b>	<p>CA - People want fair immigration laws for them, they really are not against anybody else. What happens is that racist bring it up and extremist brings it up to divide Latinos.</p>

	<p>CA - I know there were Cubans that abused, I know there were bad Russians, there were groups that abused it but not the majority, and it's the minority. It's like you might say someone in the Mexican mafia has abused and, how can I say, privilege. There are always exceptions to every rule and I agree with that; But I also think that remember, there is a law on immigration, and do you know who sponsored it? The ones that gave Central Americans a chance—it was the Republicans. There was a temporary permission was given to Salvadorians and Hondurans and it has been done every time after for disasters. Republicans from Miami. I wasn't sponsored by Mexican Americans. No Mexican American has made legislation for Central Americans; the only major legislation made to help Central Americans for a temporary status was done by a Cuban Republican.</p> <p>CA - How can either party convince Latinos, that they support Latinos when one of the party is taking a strong immigrant stance and the other is creating the biggest inquisition in American history? Both parties are not meeting the needs, they are giving you, with all courtesy, political rhetoric.</p> <p>MA – Dr. José Angel Gutiérrez was my professor at UT Arlington, one of my all-time favorites, that is when my social consciousness began to awaken. It still wasn't to the point where I'd go out and vote because candidates on the ballot didn't look like me. When early voting can happen, I didn't even know early voting was an option anywhere in the county. All that was new to me, I just remember that he sent his team to pick people up to go vote and they look everything up on a computer to see where our voting location was.</p> <p>MA - When I met with the education board member, he didn't care what I had to say. I remember I bought him breakfast and I told him, you have to be careful because one day someone is going to run against you and will be more aware, and he could care less. Three months later people are asking me to run. I was so upset, and I said, I don't know anything about this, but I'll do it. And we won with 85% of the votes.</p> <p>MA - Being a community coordinator for juveniles, I had a vision and an aim for helping children in bad situations. Families walking them through the criminal justice system and then being very involved in the church gave me the confidence and it and gave me the training grown because I based everything off the book based of a Chicano militant.</p> <p>MA - So because he was my professor and I started reading that book before the campaign I said, this is my blueprint this is what I am going to do, I am going to mobilize young people and I am going utilize the senior citizens. My senior citizens were the ones making the phone calls; they were the ones mobilizing the vote by mail packets. They're the ones going to the senior citizen centers getting them outside saying we need to support this young guy, and the young people were the ones knocking on doors, especially my Dreamers and my young people who couldn't vote.</p> <p>MA - I looked at my wife and looked at my family and said this is why I have to run. I have to demonstrate and have to be visual to the community that we are prepared to handle power and that we're equipped and we can do it. So when we won the campaign, I remember sitting, we have <i>Banda</i>, we have good music, we have the beer, we have food, and I take a step back and scan the whole party that we had and thought we actually pulled this off.</p>
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<p><b>American identity</b></p>	<p>CA - I am talking about the United States. I have not had anyone approach me, knowing that I am Cuban, and start arguing Wet Foot, Dry Foot to me, never, in my forty years. What they have asked me is why do Cuban get this treatment and I explain to them why when they ask for a reason. There have only been four instances when people in the world have gotten the treatment in the United States.</p> <p>CA - Power for me is the way Dr. Martin Luther King describes it, I don't shy away from it because I believe is given and is meant to be used, but what I tell young people that power without love is reckless and abusive.</p> <p>CA - I have to educate myself, but what I told young people was that I was more than ready because I had been taught how to listen and how to not overreact and emotional intelligence because I don't have the social capital like the person next to me does. I have to be calmly and collect, I have to be rational, I am supposed to be the mediator in the room, and that's how I was able to get the president role in less than two years.</p> <p>CA - I am a Democrat to a certain extent. I am still Roman Catholic and cannot be publically fighting the issues of the hard leftover here wants to do.</p>
<p><b>Acculturation</b></p>	<p>CA - The Mexican American who has been established herefor a while, due to business interest, has worked very closely with the Cuban American.</p> <p>MA - My issue was I moved out of the neighborhood and moved to the suburbs and you know I went into an environment where everything was white, and I removed myself from the inner city. I got a great understanding of the education system, my career as a probation officer and social justice trainer, and as I am learning and growing, I am thinking I need to move back to my neighborhood. As I moved back to my neighborhood, I saw the low education standard we were giving our kids. I went to go meet with the school board members at that time mum and he could care less what I had to tell him.</p> <p>MA - And that doesn't mean that it is an either or to both ends. It does not mean that I have to pick Mexico over the United States or the United States over Mexico. I am telling them to be bicultural. Research tells us in the multicultural role allows us to function at a much higher level and a higher capacity. So I tell them, why would you want to limit me and my children?</p> <p>MA - I know who I am and where I come from, and I know this role is bigger than me, but I've learned how to code switch, not be a chameleon, not assimilate. I have learned how to acculturate, not assimilate.</p>

Source: prepared by the authors.

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## Abstract

Contemporary political identity has been studied from different perspectives according to each relevant field of study; in this paper, we analyze this concept from multiple theoretical approaches. For Latinos in the United States, political identity reflects not only their personal or familial ties to any Latin American country but also an individual level of engagement within a specific societal and political environment. In

this study, we present two in-depth interviews carried out with political activists from different Latino communities in Texas and Florida. This paper does not provide a definitive or normative assessment of Latino political identity in the United States, but it attempts to clarify existing monolithic conceptions of Latinos and to provide specific insights on the types of issues most relevant to contemporary Latino Americans.

## Key words

Contemporary Political Identity – Latinos – United States – *Latinidad* – immigration

## Resumen

La identidad política contemporánea ha sido estudiada desde diferentes perspectivas acorde a cada uno de los campos relevantes de estudio; este trabajo, analiza el concepto desde múltiples enfoques teóricos. Para los latinos en los Estados Unidos, la identidad política no solo refleja su personalidad o lazos familiares con cualquier país latinoamericano sino también un nivel de compromiso individual dentro de un ambiente social y político específico. En este estudio, se reali-

zaron dos entrevistas en profundidad con activistas políticos de diferentes comunidades latinas en Texas y Florida. Este documento no proporciona una evaluación definitiva o normativa de la identidad política latina en los Estados Unidos, pero intenta aclarar las concepciones monolíticas existentes de los latinos y proporciona ideas específicas en el tipo de cuestiones más relevantes para los latinoamericanos que viven en Estados Unidos.

## Palabras clave

Identidad política contemporánea – latinos en los Estados Unidos – *latinidad* – inmigración