Angela X. Ocampo*, Sergio I. Garcia-Rios and
Angela E. Gutierrez

Háblame de tí: Latino mobilization, group dynamics and issue prioritization in the 2020 Election

Abstract: What motivated Latinos to turnout in 2020 in the middle of a global health pandemic that has devastated their community financially, physically and mentally? How might we explain Latino support for each one of the Presidential candidates in the context of these crises? In this paper, we tackle these questions through an investigation of the factors that drove Latino turnout in 2020 and what might explain Latino favorability for Joe Biden and Donald Trump. To contextualize these findings, we compare these results to the 2016 election. We find that the most predictive factors of Latino turnout in 2020 were perceived group discrimination and mobilization efforts by campaigns and other organizations. We also find that Latino candidate preference in 2020 can be best explained by issue prioritization. Latinos for whom the economy was the most important issue were more likely to support Donald Trump. However, Latinos for whom COVID-19 and racism towards the Latino community were the top pressing political priorities were more likely to favor Joe Biden. These findings continue to shed light on the diversity and heterogeneity of the Latino vote and speak to the significance of outreach efforts by political parties, candidates and community organizations.

Keywords: Latino vote, 2020 Presidential Election, mobilization, campaigns and elections, identity

The 2020 Presidential Election was quite unprecedented, with the COVID-19 pandemic not only creating a significant public health crisis, but also a substantial economic downturn. The pandemic plunged the U.S. economy into the worst

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*Corresponding author: Angela X. Ocampo, Assistant Professor of Political Science, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, USA, E-mail: axocampo@umich.edu
Sergio I. Garcia-Rios, Assistant Professor Government and Latina/o Studies, Cornell University, Ithaca, USA, E-mail: garcia.rios@cornell.edu
Angela E. Gutierrez, PhD Candidate in Political Science, University of California, Los Angeles, USA, E-mail: aegutierrez@ucla.edu

recession since the Great Depression.[1] According to Pew, unemployment rose higher in three months of COVID-19, from February to May, than it did in two years of the Great Recession. Surges in coronavirus cases and the devastating increasing death toll prompted many states to provide modifications to their voting mechanisms to make it easier for people to vote. These modifications included distributing automatic mail-in ballots, sending out absentee voter applications, extension of registration deadlines and expansion of mail-in voter eligibility.[2] The 2020 Election was record-breaking not only because it took place under the unparalleled circumstances of a pandemic but also because it was the highest turnout election, with approximately two-thirds of eligible voters casting a ballot, since 1900.[3]

Latino voters in the 2020 election were just as pivotal as they have been in recent elections. The 2020 election marked the first election that Latinos made up the largest ethnoracial minority group in the electorate. It was estimated that heading into the election there were 32 million Latino eligible voters. The Latino share of the U.S. electorate had reached an all-time high and made up 13.3% of the overall U.S. eligible voters.[4] Record-breaking Latino turnout across the country, particularly in key battleground states, was critical in handing Joe Biden the presidency. Estimates from a number of different sources indicate that Latinos overwhelmingly supported the Democratic Presidential ticket, somewhere between 63 and 70%.[5] Nonetheless, several narratives emerged after the election about the *surprising* support that Trump received from Latino voters.

Political scientists and scholars of Latino politics have shown that approximately one third and in some cases as high as 44% of the Latino vote has gone to Republican presidential candidates (Leal et al. 2005). It is also well established in the literature that the Latino vote is not a monolith despite a tendency by pundits and scholars alike to treat them as such (Alamillo 2019; Beltran 2010; De La Garza et al. 1992; DeSipio 1998; Garcia-Rios 2015; Garcia-Rios, Pedraza, and Wilcox-Archuleta 2019; Jones-Correa 1998; Jones-Correa et al. 2018; Ocampo and Ocampo 2020). Therefore, the support that some Latino voters exhibited for Trump is not

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1 https://blogs.imf.org/2020/04/14/the-great-lockdown-worst-economic-downturn-since-the-great-depression/.

2 https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/election-emergencies.aspx.

3 https://electproject.github.io/Early-Vote-2020G/index.html and http://www.electproject.org/.

4 https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/01/31/where-latinos-have-the-most-eligible-voters-in-the-2020-election/.

5 https://www.npr.org/2020/11/03/929478378/understanding-the-2020-electorate-ap-votecast-survey https://latinodecisions.com/blog/the-latino-vote-ready/ and https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/11/03/us/elections/exit-polls-president.html.

surprising and was expected giving what existent research tells us about this vastly diverse community.

What is less clear is exactly what motivated Latinos to turn out to the polls in 2020, especially in the backdrop of a global health pandemic that has ravaged the Latino community financially and physically, as well as how we might explain the support that some Latinos displayed for Donald Trump vis-à-vis Joe Bien in the context of this crisis. In this paper, we tackle these questions through an examination of the factors driving Latino turnout in the 2020 election, as well as factors that might explain Latino favorability for Joe Biden and Donald Trump.

Conventional wisdom holds that political threat is an important mobilizer for Latinos (Gutierrez et al. 2019; Pantoja, Ramirez, and Segura 2001; Pantoja and Segura 2003; Ramirez 2013). However, a host of factors beyond threat have also been identified as critical in mobilizing the Latino vote. Scholars have also shown that identity appeals specifically tailored to Latino communities are more effective in getting out the Latino vote (Valenzuela and Michelson 2016). Others have shown that threat, coupled with opportunity messaging, can be particularly important in mobilizing Latinos (Cruz Nichols 2017; Nichols and Valdéz 2020; Reny, Wilcox-Archuleta, and Cruz Nichols 2018). And recent work suggests that notions of belonging to U.S. society are associated with greater turnout among Latinos (Ocampo 2018).

In this article, we examine the political mobilization of Latinos in 2020, a time when Latinos continued to be threatened by Trump's anti-immigrant and anti-Latino policies, but also a time when Latinos faced imminent threats to their livelihoods as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic recession. Using survey data from 2016 to 2020, we compare Latinos' motivations for turning out in each contest. We find that the most predictive factors of Latino turnout in 2020 were perceived group discrimination and mobilization efforts by campaigns and other organizations. While Trump's campaign continued to center around xenophobic attacks, particularly against Mexicans (Garcia-Rios, Pedraza, and Wilcox-Archuleta 2019), we find that mobilization was as consequential for turnout as perceived group discrimination as one of the most relevant predictors for 2020 turnout. While other scholars have found that Latinos mobilized in response to threat by Donald Trump's campaign in 2016 (Gutierrez et al. 2019), we find that mobilization was also vastly important in both the 2016 and 2020 elections, suggesting that mobilization efforts are consistently important for getting out the Latino vote. We also find that Latino candidate preference in 2020 can be best explained by issue prioritization. Latinos for whom the economy was the most important issue were more likely to support Donald Trump. However, Latinos for

whom COVID-19, and racism towards the Latino community, were the pressing priorities were more likely to favor Joe Biden.

1 Latino Political Behavior

Understanding the factors that motivate or deter people from participating in elections has been one of the most studied topics in political science. Prior research has found that socioeconomic resources, socialization, social networks, civic skills, political predispositions, campaigns and political mobilization are among the most important factors in driving turnout (Brady, Verba, and Schlozman 1995; Campbell 1960; Campbell, Gurin, and Miller 1954; Gerber 2004; Green and Gerber 2008; Leighley 1996; Niemi and Junn 2005; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Sears and Funk 1999; Verba and Nie 1971; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980).

For Latinos, it has been demonstrated that in addition to socioeconomic factors, citizenship, generation, group consciousness, national origin and political and social contexts also matter for political participation (Barreto 2007; DeSipio 1996, 1998, 2003; Hero and Campbell 1996; Jones-Correa and Leal 2001; Pantoja, Ramirez, and Segura 2001; Ramirez 2013; Sanchez 2006; Schildkraut 2005; Stokes 2003). More specifically, scholars have focused on understanding how group dynamics and threats to the group play an important role in driving Latino political participation (Gutierrez et al. 2019; Pantoja, Ramirez, and Segura 2001; Ramirez 2013).

One of the most prevalent factors for Latino mobilization has been political threat. Following the threatening context that Latinos experienced in California due to the passage of Proposition 187, Latinos were more likely to naturalize and turnout to vote (Pantoja, Ramirez, and Segura 2001). In the 2000s, Latinos also faced another political threat, this time stemming from the passage of the HR 4437, also known as the Sensenbrenner Bill. The passage of this resolution in the U.S. House of Representatives prompted mass mobilization of Latinos in the form of protests and also heightened participation in the voting booth (Barreto and Segura 2014; Zepeda-Milan 2017). In 2016, scholars argue that Latino mobilization stemmed from the anger that emerged from Donald Trump's xenophobic campaign against Mexicans and the Latino community (Gutierrez et al. 2019). It would be expected that in the 2020 election, after years of enduring anti-immigrant policies, countless deportation raids, separation of children at the border, multiple attempts to end the DACA program[6], the forced sterilization of women in custody of the Department of Homeland Security,[7] and countless other efforts against the Latino

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[6] https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/19/us/politics/trump-daca.html.

[7] https://www.npr.org/2020/09/18/914465793/ice-a-whistleblower-and-forced-sterilization.

community that Latinos would mobilize in the face of the this continued assault to their community.

However, emerging research suggests that other factors beyond threat are critical in mobilizing Latino voters. Recent work suggests that threats to the Latino community must be accompanied with opportunity messaging by interest or political groups in order for mobilization to materialize and result in greater levels of engagement (Cruz Nichols 2017; Nichols and Valdéz 2020). In fact, scholars show that threat alone was not enough to mobilize Latinos in 2018, but that mobilization of parties and other organization coupled with threat were in fact the factors that propelled greater turnout among Latinos in the 2018 (Reny, Wilcox-Archuleta, and Nichols 2018). As such, scholars call for a more nuanced undertaking of how threat and anti-Latino sentiment might trigger different psychological responses among Latinos (Ocampo 2018), potentially lead to varying levels of engagement and disengagement (Nichols and Valdéz 2020), including potential detachment from the political system. This suggests that a close examination of the factors that propelled Latino turnout in 2020 is warranted.

2 Persuasion and Mobilization

The other important pillar for motivating people to vote has to do with the efforts of the candidate and campaigns themselves. Campaigns employ get out the vote (GOTV) strategies as a way to persuade and mobilize potential voters to the polls. The key difference between mobilization and persuasion is the message that GOTV efforts emphasize. While mobilization typically focuses on convincing your supporters to vote, persuasion messages convince potential voters that you are the right candidate to be supporting. GOTV is an important part of campaigning that involves a great deal of grassroots organizing and one-on-one contact with voters and campaign staff or volunteers. The two most effective GOTV strategies are door-to-door canvassing followed by live phone banking (Green and Gerber 2008).

Door-to-door canvasing is considered the most effective way to reach out to and mobilize voters. The effects of door-to-door canvassing on Latino voters have been documented in a number of studies. Bedolla and Michelson find that voter outreach in Latino communities can have mobilizing effects (Bedolla and Michelson 2012). Additionally, Michelson (2003) also finds that when Latino voters are contacted by co-ethnics, voters were more likely to turn out and vote than when they are contacted by non-co-ethnics. Whether the message being delivered is based on an ethnic appeal, or a broader message that voting is a person's civic

duty, the simple act of reaching out to Latino voters by someone of a similar background produces meaningful increases in turnout. More recent findings on Latino GOTV find that tailored identity appeals can be more effective at increasing turnout (Valenzuela and Michelson 2016). However, the effectiveness of this messaging may vary regionally. One of the particular challenges of the 2020 election is that fewer voters were contacted using door-to-door messaging due to safety concerns. This led to a greater reliance of phone banking and text messaging to engage with voters at the individual level.

The effectiveness of phone banking is somewhat mixed with many studies finding little to no noticeable increase in turnout (Green and Gerber 2008). Looking at the effects of phone banking on low propensity Latino voters, research finds that among respondents who received a phone call, turnout increased by 4.6% (Ramírez 2005). But other studies have found much smaller effects. Focusing on phone banking in Latino communities, Bedolla and Michelson find that phone banking had a negligible effect on turnout (Bedolla and Michelson 2012). Some studies suggest that a more interactive approach to phone banking will modestly increase turnout (Ha and Karlan 2009).

Scholars have also examined the effect of using longer versus shorter scripts. While Bedolla and Michelson saw a greater increase in turnout among the Latino respondents who received the longer script, when comparing respondents in the treatment group to the control, they found no statistically significant effect of the GOTV effort (Bedolla and Michelson 2012). While phone banking is generally considered to be less effective than door-to-door canvassing, many campaigns were forced to increase their phone banking, texting and mailing campaigns in order to increase turnout during the pandemic. Whether or not the modified deployment of these mobilization techniques were effective with Latino voters in 2020 remains an open question. But we argue that just as it has previously been the case, mobilization was of critical importance in driving Latinos to turnout in 2020.

3 Latino Vote Choice

To better understand how Latinos decide on their preferred political candidate in a presidential contest, we must first consider their political leanings and partisanship. On average, Latinos are more likely to identify as Democrats, and support Democratic candidates, than identify as Republican and support GOP candidates. This is mostly explained by socioeconomic status and length of time in the United States (Cain, Kiewiet, and Uhlaner 1991; De la Garza 2004). Issues and policy preferences are also important in driving Latino partisan identification (Alvarez

and Garcia Bedolla 2003; Uhlaner and Garcia 2005). And it is also well documented that national origin shapes Latino partisan affiliations (De la Garza 2004).

Prior work has shown that anti-Latino policies have pushed Latinos away from the Republican party and closer to the Democratic party (Barreto, Ramirez, and Woods 2005; Bowler, Nicholson, and Segura 2006; for a different viewpoint see: Hui and Sears 2017). But there is also evidence that despite the large support that Democrats enjoy from Latinos, the share of Latinos that support Republicans is not negligible (Jones-Correa, Al-Faham, and Cortez 2018; Leal et al. 2005). Latino conservatives and Latinos who support Republican candidates' makeup a considerable group that deserves attention and further inquiry (Jones-Correa, Al-Faham, and Cortez 2018). Emerging work on Latino conservatism suggests that the key driver of support for Trump among Latinos in 2016 was the denial of racism (Alamillo 2019). Other scholars argue that prioritizing certain issues such as the economy and social issues, as well as American identity, are important factors shaping Latino conservatism and Latino support for Republicans (Alvarez and Garcia Bedolla 2003; Uhlaner and Garcia 2005). However, the role of these factors driving candidate favorability and support in the 2020 election has yet to be explored.

4 The 2020 Presidential Election

The 2020 election provided a unique challenge for political campaigns. Mitigating the potential spread of the coronavirus was a top priority for many candidates. While the Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump continued campaign rallies and door-to-door canvassing, the traditional campaign events that are typically the cornerstone of electioneering were either done in a very limited capacity or completely forgone by the Democratic candidate Joe Biden.

Contact is important for persuading and mobilizing people to vote on Election day. This is especially true for Latinos who have historically had lower participation rates when compared to other racial groups. Studies on Latino mobilization have found that the impact of door-to-door canvassing efforts are especially felt among those who vote occasionally but do not always turn out, otherwise known as episodic voters (Matland and Murray 2012). In an election when many were concerned that the pandemic would hurt mobilization efforts and depress turnout particularly among young new voters and low propensity voters, it was especially important for campaigns to shift their political strategy while trying to reach these potential voters. Despite these concerns, it appears that an increasing number of Latinos may have been contacted in the days and months leading up to the 2020 election.

5 National Latino Outreach

Before delving into multivariate analysis, we first examine what Latino outreached looked like in 2020. The National Association for Latino Elected Officials (NALEO) ran a nine-week election poll tracker that surveyed 400 new Latino respondents nationally, every week up to the election. By the first week of October, as shown in Figure 1, over 50% of the survey's respondents indicated that they had been contacted to register or vote in the 2020 election. When asked who contacted them, roughly 30% of respondents each week said that they were contacted by someone from a Democratic organization, while the percent of Latinos contacted by Republicans was in the high teens to low 20s (Figure 2). These numbers increased in the final two weeks leading up to the campaign, when between 34 and 42% of respondents indicating they were contacted by the Democrats, whereas between 24 and 23% of Latinos saying they were contacted by the Republicans (as shown in Figure 2). Despite the lack of face-to-face canvassing, it appears that the Biden campaign's efforts to double down on phone banking and texting helped increase contact rates among Latino voters nationally.
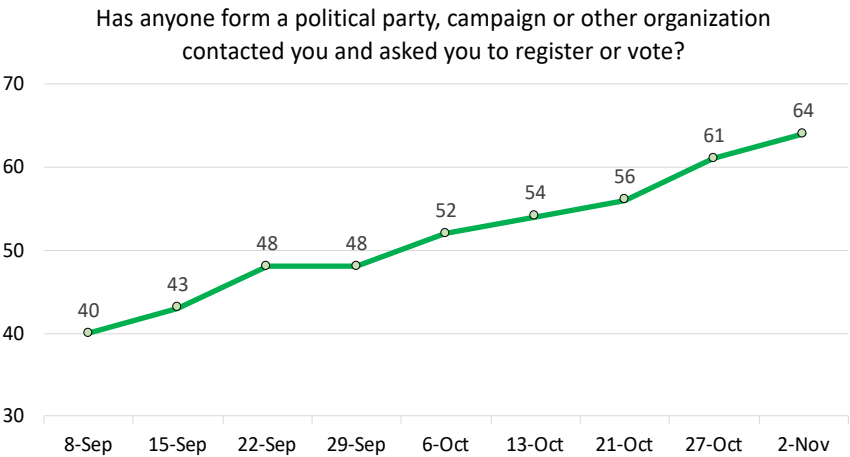

Has anyone form a political party, campaign or other organization contacted you and asked you to register or vote?

Figure 1: Reported Latino contact in the 2020 presidential election. NALEO education fund tracking poll. Week 1 – 9.[8]

8 https://latinodecisions.com/polls-and-research/naleo-educational-fund-9-wave-weekly-tracking-poll-sept-nov-2020/. Toplines: https://latinodecisions.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/NALEO-Week-9-Toplines_weekly_p.pdf.
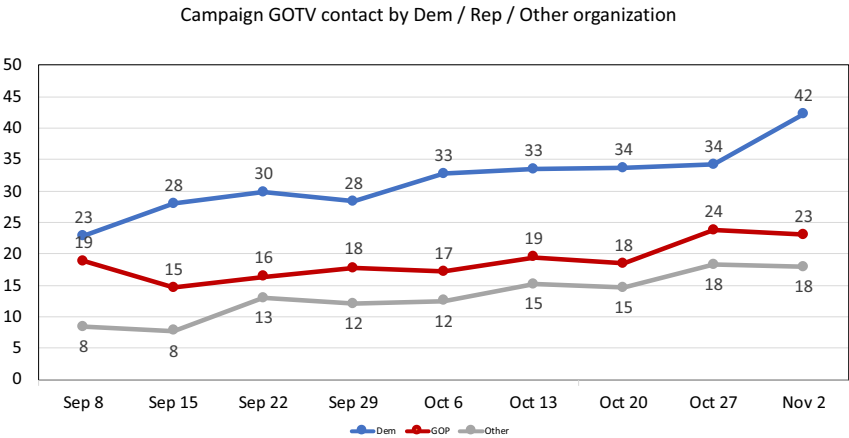
Campaign GOTV contact by Dem / Rep / Other organization

Figure 2: Reported Latino contact in the 2020 presidential election by entity. NALEO education fund tracking poll. Week 1 – 9.

6 State Level Latino Outreach

While Latino contact was high nationally in the weeks leading up to the election, it is important for us to also examine how successful campaigns were at the state level. This is especially true given the winner-take-all system used in presidential elections at the state level. In October of 2020, Univision conducted statewide surveys of Latino voters in Arizona, Florida, Pennsylvania, and Texas. These polls asked not only which party was contacting Latino voters, but how they were being contacted, and the ethnicity of the people who were conducting the outreach on behalf of the party or community organizations. We rely on these polls to provide a brief descriptive overview of state outreach to Latino voters.

In Arizona, 44% of Latinos were contacted by the Democratic Party, whereas 29% were contacted by the Republican Party. Another 16% said they were contacted from nonpartisan community groups or Latino-based community groups. In terms of method of contact, 25% of respondents in Arizona were contacted by door-to-door canvassing, 60% were contacted via phone, 54% received a text message, 35% received an email, 10% received a direct message on social media, and 32% said they received a mailer, or were contacted outside in the community. Interestingly, when asked about the ethnicity of the person who contacted them, 19% were contacted by a fellow Latino and 38% said they were contacted by both Latinos and non-Latinos. Another 18% were said they were contacted by someone who was not Latino, and 24% did not know the race or ethnicity of the person who contacted them.

In Florida, 66% of Latinos surveyed were contacted about voting. 38% of respondents said they were contacted by Democrats while 29% said they were contacted by Republicans. An additional 18% said they were contacted by nonpartisan community groups or by members of Latino community groups. When looking at method of contact, 31% of respondents said that someone knocked on their door. Among registered Republicans, 27% had someone come to their door, while 18% of registered Democrats said someone came to their door. Registered Democrats were more likely to receive a phone call compared to registered Republicans (54 vs. 41%), with 56% of Latinos contacted saying they received a phone call. 43% of Latinos who were contacted received text messages, while 32% said they were contacted via email. An additional 9% said they received a direct message on social media. Only 7% of those contacted said they were contacted by a person outside of a store or in the community, while 44% said they received campaign mail encouraging them to vote. When looking at who contacted Latino voters, 27% said they were contacted by a fellow Latino, 45% said they were contacted by Latinos and non-Latinos, 14% said they were contacted by someone who was not Latino, and another 15% said they did not know the race or ethnicity of the person who contacted them.

In Pennsylvania, 62% of Latinos surveyed said that they were contacted about voting or registering to vote in the 2020 election. Of respondents who were contacted, 36% were contacted by Democrats, 23% were contacted by Republicans, and 12% were contacted by Latino-based community groups or nonpartisan groups in Pennsylvania. In terms of method of contact, 21% of respondents said that someone came to their house, 58% received a phone call, and 42% received text messages, 28% received email, and 28% had mail sent to their house encouraging them to vote. There were also differences by party in terms of method of contact in Pennsylvania. Registered Democrats were more likely to receive text messages than registered Republicans (51 vs. 37%). However, registered Republicans were more likely to report receiving a phone call (59% of Republicans compared to 49% of Democrats). When considering who contacted them to vote, 27% of Pennsylvania respondents who were contacted indicated that contact was made by fellow Latinos, 29% said they were contacted by both Latinos and non-Latinos, 20% said they were contacted by non-Latinos only, and an additional 24% said they did not know if they were contacted by Latinos or non-Latinos.

In Texas, 54% of Latinos had been contacted leading up to the presidential election. Of those contacted, 40% said they were contacted by Democrats, 24% were contacted by Republicans, and 11% were contacted from community groups. Of those contacted, 13% said that someone went to their house and knocked on their door. Similar to the reported contact by Latinos in Florida, only 16% of registered Democrats said someone knocked on their door, compared to 23% of

registered Republicans. Republicans were also slightly more likely to receive a phone call (47% of Republicans vs. 39% of Democrats). Democrats were more likely to receive texts, with 57% of Democrats contacted saying they received texts, compared to 42% of Republicans. Among all Latinos in Texas who were contacted, 34% received email, 12% received direct messages on social media, and 28% received mail that encouraged them to go vote.

These trends indicate that the campaigns made an effort to reach voters, and despite the pandemic, the 2020 election had historic levels of turnout. At the same time, a critical question is how influential outreach efforts were on turnout, relative to other motivating factors or concerns. We believe that mobilization efforts mattered a great deal for Latino turnout in 2020 and that in addition to some of the key factors known to drive Latino political participation, mobilization efforts by campaigns and third parties was equally as important.

7 Methods and Data

In order to more thoroughly examine Latinos' political motivation in 2020, we rely on two datasets. First, we draw from the 2016 Collaborative Multiracial Post-Election Survey (CMPS), a self-administered post-election survey conducted shortly after the 2016 Presidential Election. This survey contained a sizable sub-sample of Latinos (n = 3003) and series of items on political preferences and behaviors that allow us to make a comparison with the 2020 election. The 2016 CMPS was conducted both in English and Spanish and was fielded by the firm Latino Decisions.

We also rely on the 2020 Univision Latino Presidential Poll conducted five days prior to the November election. This was a national survey with oversamples in the key battleground states with large Latino populations (Arizona, Texas, Florida and Pennsylvania). The survey was commissioned through a partnership between Univision News, UnidosUS and SOMOS. The National Latino Voter Poll interviewed a representative sample of all Latino registered voters nationwide, and the Florida, Texas, Arizona and Pennsylvania Voter Polls interviewed a representative sample of all registered voters in each state with an oversample of Latino registered voters. The survey was fielded by the firms Latino Decisions and North Star Opinion.

The similarity of items across both the 2016 CMPS and the 2020 Univision News Poll allow us to make important comparisons, particularly in considering factors shaping attitudes toward the presidential candidates and likelihood of participation. The analysis that follows relies on items that were worded almost exactly the same or close to the same in both surveys.

8 Latino Political Priorities

Before assessing vote choice and turnout, we begin by looking at the most important issues of Latino voters heading into the 2020 Presidential Election. To better understand those political priorities, we took advantage of a question asked in both of the aforementioned surveys which asked to name the most important or pressing issue facing their community that the U.S. President or Congress needed to address. Respondents were able to list 2 to 3 issues. Table 1 shows percentages for the most important issue named by respondents. It is important to note that respondents were not given a list of items, rather their responses were open and were then coded into a set of categories. As the results suggest, in 2016, the most important political priorities for Latinos were the economy (39%), immigration (30%) and healthcare (24%). On the other hand, when looking at priorities in 2020, the findings show that Latinos prioritization of the economy, jobs and wages was much higher than in 2016. The remarkable importance of the economy (52%) – topping the list as the most important issue listed by a majority of Latinos–is indicative of COVID-19's economic downturn and its impact on Latinos. Research by the Pew Research Center shows that unemployment rates rose drastically for Latino men, from 4.3 to 16.9% between February and April of 2020. For Latinas, the jump in unemployment was even greater, from 5.5 to 20.5%.[9]

The political priorities of Latinos heading into the 2020 Presidential Election were also marked by the ongoing pandemic. 48% of respondents reported that handling COVID-19 was the most important issue. Concerns over falling ill and

Table 1: Most important issues for Latino voters in 2016 and 2020.

	2016 CMPS	2020 Univision
Jobs/Economy/Wages[a]	39%	52%
Immigration	30%	22%
Education	19%	12%
Healthcare	24%	32%
Taxes	11%	10%
Discrimination against Latinos	–	18%
COVID-19	–	48%
	(n = *3003*)	(n = *2608*)

[a]Includes open-ended responses on creating jobs and improving wages.

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9 Krogstad, Jens Manuel and Lopez, Mark Hugo. Coronavirus Economic Downturn Has Hit Latinos Especially Hard https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/2020/08/04/coronavirus-economic-downturn-has-hit-latinos-especially-hard/ August 4, 2020.

dealing with the public health crisis were also evident by how much Latino prioritization of healthcare as a key issue. Healthcare was the third most important issue at the top of the minds of Latino voters. The Latino community has been hit especially hard by COVID-19. According to the CDC, the rate of hospitalization for Latinos is four times that of whites.[10] Overall, we find a consolidation among Latinos around the political importance of both the economy and addressing the coronavirus pandemic. These figures show that the ravaging impact of the pandemic in the Latino community has most certainly shaped the political outlook of Latino voters heading into the Presidential Election.

To examine the role of these issues in Latino electoral decisions, we first provide a descriptive assessment of candidate favorability in 2016 and 2020. Figure 3 shows each candidate's level of favorability among Latino voters. In 2016, Latinos showed high levels of unfavorability toward Trump. Based on the CMPS, 60.9% of Latinos felt very unfavorable and 13.5% felt somewhat unfavorable, resulting in a combined 74.4% unfavorability rating for Donald Trump. In 2020, although the majority of Latinos still held unfavorable views toward Trump, they were slightly more in favor of President Trump. According to the Univision 2020 Survey, 48.2% of Latinos viewed Trump very unfavorably and 11.2% regarded him somewhat unfavorable, resulting in a combined 59.4% unfavorability rating. On the contrary, favorability toward the Democratic candidate only increased slightly between the two election cycles. About 57% of Latinos in 2016 rated Hillary Clinton favorably, whereas 60% of Latinos viewed Joe Biden favorably (35.5% viewed him very favorably, while 24.9% viewed him somewhat favorably).

In order to more thoroughly examine the factors that drove candidate favorability, we modeled the results using logistic and ordinary least squares regression. Our key dependent variables are: candidate favorability and vote in 2016 or early vote in 2020.[11] We examine candidate favorability using the same items as above (ranging from 1–4, from very unfavorable to very favorable). To measure

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10 https://www.npr.org/2020/07/01/885878571/why-covid-19-disproportionately-impacts-latino-communities#:~:text=The%20CDC%20says%20Latinos%20are,the%20rate%20of%20white%20Americans.&text=Twenty%2Dsix%20percent%20of%20people,in%20this%20country%20were%20Latino.

11 The DV for 2020 is drawn from a question which asked respondents to report whether they had voted already or the chances that they will do so during election night. The response choices included (1) I already voted using absentee I have already voted using absentee or mail ballot by US Mail, (2) I have already voted– dropping an absentee or mail ballot in a Drop Box; (3) I have already voted – using early, in-person voting, (4) Almost certain I will vote; (5) Probably will vote; (6) Chances are 50–50; (7) Probably will not vote; (8) Certain that I won't vote. The items indicating that respondents had already voted early were combined into 1, all others were assigned a 0. We ran separate analysis with different coding schemes where we also included responses of almost certainly, probably will vote and 50–50 and the results are robust to these model specifications.
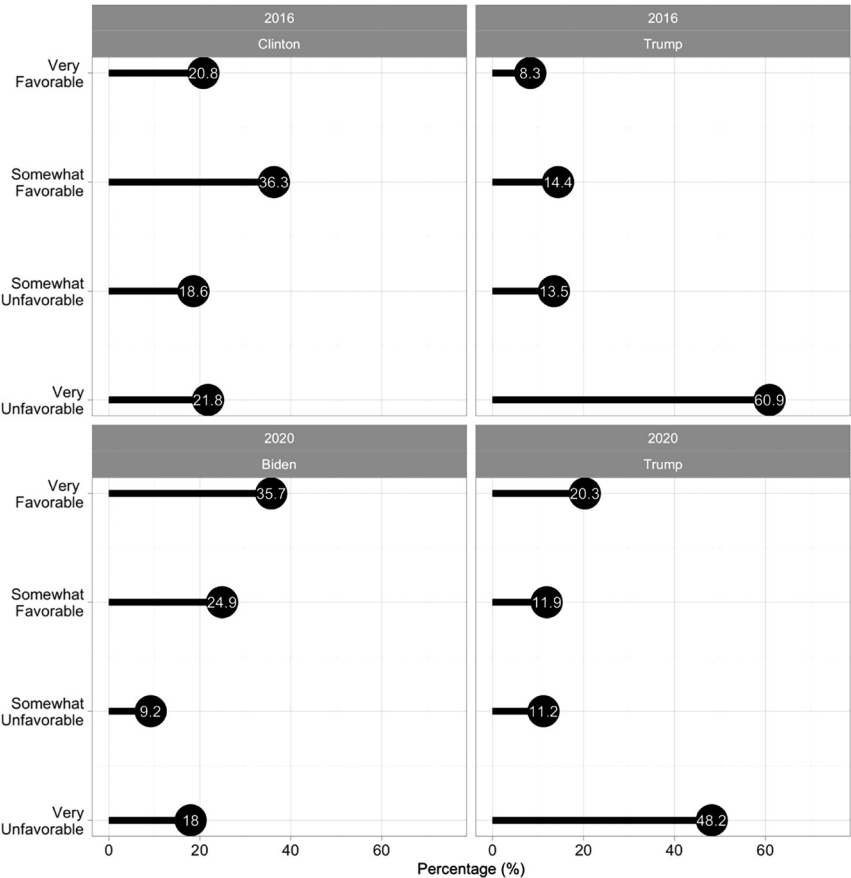
Figure 3: Favorability of Latino voters for presidential candidates in 2016 and 2020.

turnout, we examine respondent's reported turnout as a binary indicator (0 not voted, 1 voted).[12]

As mentioned above, persuasion and mobilization are one of the most important factors shaping turnout in any given election. To capture the role of mobilization, we use a measure that asked respondents whether or not they were contacted by an office or person working for a candidate, a representative of a political party, or someone from an organization working in the community (to ask

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12 Although we also have verified turnout for the 2016 CMPS, we rely on self-reported turnout since we are drawing comparisons with the 2020 Univision data, which only includes a self-reported measure of turnout.

them to register and/or vote in the election). This *contacted* variable is a binary indicator (0 not contacted, 1 contacted). Following the work of Collingwood et al. (2014), which expands on the traditional vote-choice model, and theorizes on the importance of candidates' policy stances and Latino voters' issue prioritization, we account for the most important issues of Latino voters in 2016. These included the economy, healthcare, and immigration. For these items, if respondents rated this issue as their top priority, the item was coded as 1, if not it received a 0.

Group-related variables and items that capture strength of identification have been consistent predictors of Latino turnout. To incorporate these, we rely on a number of items. First, as a proxy of group consciousness, we rely on a 5-point item that asked respondents the extent to which they believed that discrimination against Latinos was either not a problem or the primary problem preventing Latinos from succeeding in America. To capture strength in group identification, we use a 4-point item, ranging from not at all important to very important, asking respondents how much was being Latino or Hispanic an important part of how they saw themselves. Similarly, we examine respondents' strength of national origin identification. The survey asked respondents how much being from their respective country of origin was an important part of how they saw themselves, with answers ranging from not at all important to very important.

To measure political partisanship. We create indicator (dummy) variables for whether or not respondents identified as Democrats, Independents or Republicans. To measure ideology, we use a tradition 5-point item ranging from very conservative to very liberal. We also account for demographic variables including age of respondents, income and education. Income is measured categorically, consisting of 12 categories, the lowest consisting of those with family incomes less than $20,000 and the highest category representing family income of over $200,000. Education, a 6-point measure, ranges from finishing grade 8 or less (as the lowest category), to having achieved a post-graduate education (as the highest category). We also account for gender (female = 1, 0 = otherwise.)

Given how important acculturation and nativity are in predicting turnout and vote choice among Latinos, we include proxies for these in our models. We account for whether or not respondents are foreign-born and a binary indicator if the respondent took the survey in Spanish (as a proxy of acculturation). Lastly, we include several variables accounting for country of origin (from Mexico = 1, 0 otherwise; from Puerto Rico = 1, 0 otherwise; and from Cuba = 1, 0 otherwise).

In the 2020 Univision data, most items were exactly the same as in the 2016 CMPS.[13] However, we leverage some of the differences in key variables to examine

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13 Unless the items are listed in the text, they were worded the same and were measuring using the same categories or levels.

the role of mobilization and contact in shaping outcomes for respondents in 2020. Our 2020, analysis also includes variables that indicate whether a respondent was contacted by a campaign, and whether or not those who contacted them were Democrats, Republicans, Latinos, or someone from the community. We created separate indicator variables (0/1) for each one of these contact types and analyze them separately below.

Given how consequential the COVID-19 pandemic was, and because this issue emerged as one of the top 3 priorities of Latino voters in 2010, we included this item in our multivariate analysis. This item was captured with a binary indicator taking the value of 1 for those respondents that reported this as their top priority and 0 otherwise. For the 2020 vote choice models, we exploit a question that asked respondents who they had voted for (or would vote) in the 2020 Election.

In the 2020 Univision survey, education was measured using a 7-point categorical item ranging from (1) having achieved the highest schooling level of grades 1–8, or (7) having achieved a postgraduate degree. Income was measured categorically and it ranged from (1) having a total combined household income of less than $20,000 to (7) having an income of above $150,000. All other items with the exception of ideology were asked in the 2020 Univision survey. Fortunately, the survey did include traditional party identification and we coded these using binary indicators.

9 Results

First, we turn to the analysis that examines candidate favorability. We ran several ordinarily least squares regressions to estimate the factors associated with Clinton and Trump favorability in 2016 (Table 2) and Biden and Trump favorability in 2020 (Table 3). In Figure 4, we provide a graphical interpretation of the results in both of these tables. Figure 4 displays changes in the predicted favorability for each one of the contenders as a function of moving each covariate from its minimum to its maximum while holding all other covariates at their means.

The most important predictors of favorability toward Clinton and Trump in 2016 were group discrimination, partisanship and ideology. In 2020, the key drivers of favorability for Joe Biden and Trump were issue prioritization of COVID-19 and the economy, as well as perceived group discrimination, and partisan identification. It is important to mention how much more relevant group discrimination appeared to be for Latino voters in 2020 compared to 2016. Moving from the lowest level of group discrimination (not a problem at all for Latinos) to its highest level (most important problem for Latinos) yields a 0.46 change in predicted favorability for Clinton. In 2020, the change from the minimum to the

Table 2: Predictors of candidate Latino favorability in 2016.

Predictors	Clinton Favorability		Trump Favorability	
	Estimates	*std. Error*	*Estimates*	*std. Error*
(Intercept)	0.66	0.12	3.62	0.12
Contacted	−0.03	0.04	−0.00	0.04
Imp. Economy	−0.06	0.03	0.11	0.03
Imp. Protect Imm. Rights	−0.02	0.04	0.05	0.04
Imp. Health care	0.03	0.04	0.07	0.04
Group disc	0.12	0.02	−0.16	0.02
Group ID	0.04	0.03	−0.05	0.03
Country ID	0.04	0.03	−0.02	0.03
Ideology	0.16	0.02	−0.20	0.02
Democrat	0.93	0.05	−0.79	0.04
Independent	0.30	0.05	−0.53	0.05
Age	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.00
Female	0.05	0.04	−0.08	0.03
Income	−0.02	0.01	0.00	0.01
Education	−0.03	0.02	−0.02	0.02
Foreign-born	0.05	0.05	−0.02	0.05
Spanish survey	0.26	0.06	0.13	0.06
Mexican	0.06	0.04	−0.08	0.04
Cuban	−0.05	0.08	0.23	0.08
Puerto Rican	0.17	0.05	−0.13	0.05
Observations	2921		2912	
R^2/R^2 adjusted	0.304/0.300		0.288/0.283	

Ordinary least squares regression with standard errors.

maximum on group discrimination yields a 0.96 predicted favorability for Joe Biden. Perceptions of group discrimination were also associated with very unfavorable views toward Donald Trump and very favorable views of Joe Biden.

What explains favorability towards Trump among Latinos in 2020? Results from Table 3 and Figure 4 indicate that Latinos who felt that the economy was the most important issue were more likely to hold more favorable views of Donald Trump. To be precise, respondents who reported that the economy was the most important issue that the President or Congress needed to address, as opposed to reporting another issue, had a 0.12 predicted favorability rating toward Trump. On the other hand, the only policy issue that predicted support for Joe Biden was the COVID-19 pandemic. Latinos who reported that handling the coronavirus pandemic was their most important issue yields a predicted favorability of. Twenty three for Joe Biden and finally, as expected, partisan identification strongly

Table 3: Predictors of candidate Latino favorability in 2020.

Predictors	Biden Favorability		Trump Favorability	
	Estimates	*std. Error*	*Estimates*	*std. Error*
(Intercept)	0.87	0.15	2.97	0.16
Contacted	0.02	0.04	0.07	0.04
Imp. Economy	−0.03	0.04	0.13	0.04
Imp. Protect Imm. Rights	0.08	0.05	−0.08	0.05
Imp. Health care	0.03	0.04	−0.05	0.04
Imp. Coronavirus/COVID-19	0.22	0.04	−0.18	0.04
Group disc	0.34	0.02	−0.30	0.02
Group ID	0.04	0.04	0.02	0.04
Country ID	0.04	0.04	0.05	0.04
Democrat	0.68	0.04	−0.51	0.05
Independent	−0.71	0.06	1.23	0.06
Age	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Female	0.02	0.04	−0.15	0.04
Income	0.01	0.01	−0.01	0.01
Education	0.02	0.01	−0.02	0.01
Foreign-born	0.05	0.05	−0.09	0.05
Spanish survey	0.05	0.05	0.11	0.05
Mexican	0.03	0.05	−0.04	0.05
Cuban	0.04	0.08	0.08	0.08
Puerto Rican	−0.03	0.06	−0.00	0.06
Observations	2206		2302	
R^2/R^2 adjusted	0.448/0.443		0.466/0.462	

Ordinary least squares regression with standard errors.

predicts candidate preferences both in 2016 and 2020. Democrats were more likely to favor Clinton and Biden in 2016 and 2020, compared to Republicans.

We now turn to investigating the factors that motivated Latinos to turnout to vote. Results are displayed in Tables 4 and 5. Given the binary nature of the dependent variable, we model these results using logistic regression. To better interpret the results from these models, we employ a post-estimation strategy. We calculate predicted probabilities as a function of varying each covariate from its minimum to its maximum while holding all other covariates at their means. The predicted probabilities are presented in graphical form in Figures 5 and 6. Results from Table 4 indicate how consequential contact was for turnout both in 2016 and 2020, yet the results indicate how much more of a role it played in 2020. In 2016, Latinos who reported having been contacted by a political party or community organization had a 0.03 predicted probability of reporting that they voted in the election. On the other hand, in 2020, Latinos who reported having been contacted
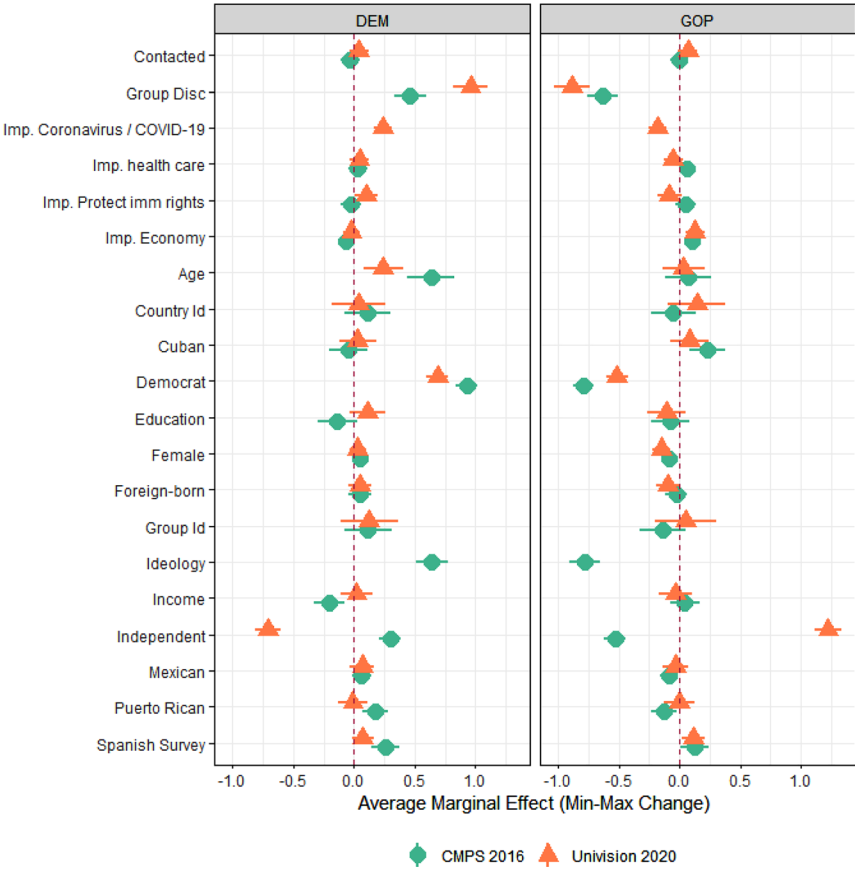
Figure 4: **Changes in predicted favorability of democratic and republican contenders in the 2016 and 2020 presidential election.** Point estimates represent predicted favorability levels toward the democratic and republican contenders in the 2020 presidential elections. Favorabilities are predicted using OLS estimates from Tables 2 and 3 and moving each covariate from its minimum value to its maximum while holding all other covariates at their means. Lines represent 95% confidence intervals.

or mobilized had 0.14 predicted probability of reporting that they had already voted in the 2020 election.

Some of the other most notable factors that shaped Latino turnout in 2020 were perceived group discrimination, issue prioritization of COVID-19, age, nativity status, and partisanship. We find that perceiving that their group was greatly discriminated against was associated with a greater likelihood for turnout. Moving from the lowest level on group discrimination to the highest level reporting that discrimination yields a 0.16 change in the precited probability of

Table 4: Predictors of 2016 and 2020 Latino turnout.

Predictors	Early Vote 2020		Vote 2016	
	Log-Odds	std. Error	Log-Odds	std. Error
(Intercept)	−2.75	0.36	−2.93	0.79
Contacted	0.61	0.09	0.57	0.28
Imp. Economy	−0.07	0.09	−0.12	0.22
Imp. Protect Imm. Rights	0.15	0.11	0.50	0.30
Imp. Health care	0.07	0.09	−0.07	0.25
Imp. Coronavirus/COVID-19	0.27	0.09		
Group disc	0.25	0.06	−0.09	0.12
Group ID	−0.09	0.09	0.68	0.20
Country ID	−0.01	0.09	−0.35	0.19
Democrat	0.50	0.10	0.74	0.31
Independent	0.45	0.13	−0.62	0.31
Age	0.01	0.00	0.04	0.01
Female	−0.05	0.09	0.01	0.23
Income	0.04	0.03	0.17	0.04
Education	0.02	0.03	0.54	0.12
Foreign-born	0.23	0.11	−0.42	0.31
Spanish survey	−0.17	0.11	−0.31	0.38
Mexican	0.22	0.12	0.34	0.26
Cuban	0.16	0.18	0.26	0.56
Puerto Rican	−0.07	0.14	0.84	0.44
Ideology			−0.09	0.11
Observations		2516		1815
R^2 Tjur		0.080		0.093

Logistic regression coefficients with standard errors.

reporting that respondents had voted. The relationship between reporting that Coronavirus was the most important issue that needed to be addressed as opposed to other issues was associated with a 0.06 change in the predicted probably of having voted in 2020.

Given how consequential contact by political parties and other organizations, we take advantage of an item that was asked in the 2020 Univision survey. As mentioned above, respondents were not only asked if they had been contacted but by whom. We use the detailed responses on contact to predict 2020 turnout as a function of these variables. The results are found in Table 5 and Figure 6. We find that contact by Democrats was a significant predictor of turnout for Latinos in 2020. Latino who reported having been contacted by Democrats had a 0.16 predicted probability of having reported that they turned out. On the contrary having been contacted by Republicans is negatively

Table 5: Predictors of 2020 Latino turnout.

Predictors	Early Vote 2020	
	Log-Odds	std. Error
(Intercept)	−2.65	0.36
Democratic contact	0.72	0.10
Republican contact	−0.29	0.11
Non-partisan contact	0.37	0.18
Latino based contact	−0.05	0.19
Imp. Protect Imm. Rights	−0.08	0.09
Imp. Health care	0.17	0.11
Imp. Coronavirus/COVID-19	0.05	0.09
Group disc	0.25	0.09
Group ID	0.25	0.06
Country ID	−0.09	0.09
Democrat	−0.01	0.09
Independent	0.46	0.11
Age	0.70	0.13
Female	0.01	0.00
Income	−0.06	0.09
Education	0.04	0.03
Foreign-born	0.03	0.03
Spanish survey	0.24	0.11
Mexican	−0.18	0.11
Cuban	0.18	0.12
Puerto Rican	0.08	0.18
Ideology	−0.12	0.14
Observations		2516
R^2 Tjur		0.087

Logistic regression with standard errors.

associated to turnout. Latinos who reported having been contacted by someone from the GOP were 0.06 less likely to have reported that they voted. Having been contacted by a community member emerges as a marginally significant predictor. Latinos who reported having been contacted by someone from their community had a 0.08 probability of having reported they had turned out.

Overall, these results suggest two patterns. Candidate favorability both in 2016 and 2020 was mostly driven by issue prioritization for Latinos. As a continuation of 2016, perceived group discrimination among Latinos was associated with lower levels of favorability towards Trump and a greater level of favorability toward Biden. Perceived group discrimination was important, and the data suggests that it was even more important than in 2016 in predicting support for the Democratic contender in 2020. It is worth noting that the most important issues driving support for the
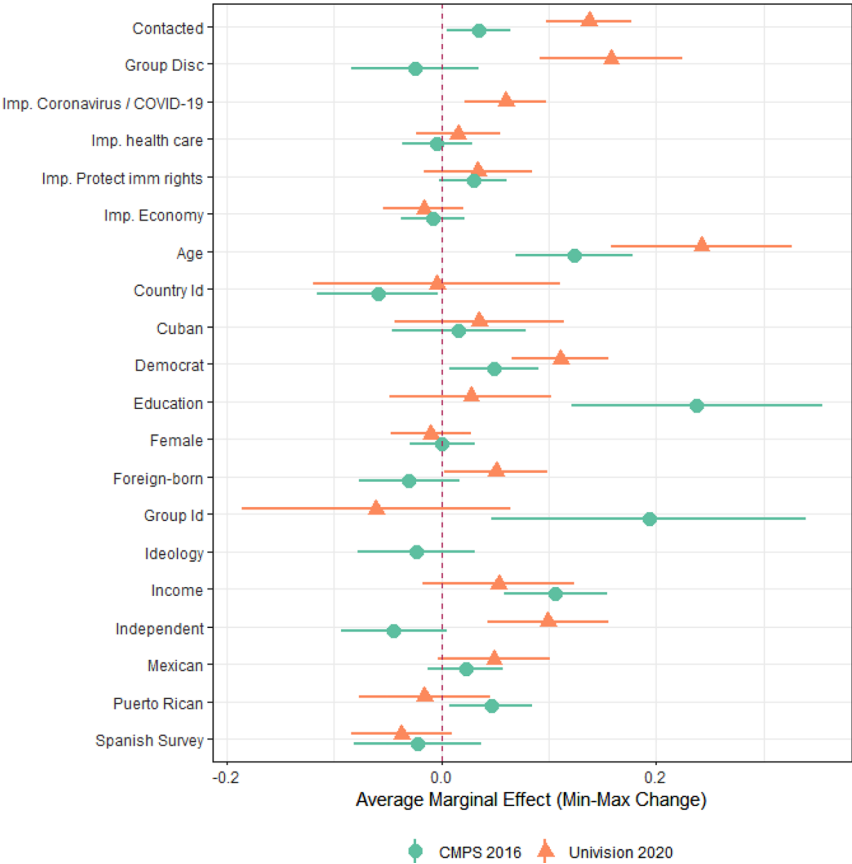
Figure 5: Changes in predicted probability of Latino turnout in 2016 and 2020 presidential elections. Point estimates represent predicted probabilities of turnout in 2016 and 2020 Presidential Elections as a function of each covariate. Predicted probabilities calculated from models in Table 4 for reach contest. Probabilities calculated by moving each covariate is from its minimum value to its maximum value while holding all other covariates at their means. Lines represent 95% confidence intervals.

Presidential candidates in 2020 were the economy and the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. Latinos who prioritized the economy were more likely to report favorable views of Trump. On the other hand, Latinos who indicated COVID-19 as their top issue were most likely to view Biden favorably (and Trump unfavorably). Latinos who perceived high levels of group discrimination were also more likely to favor Joe Biden and hold unfavorable views of Trump. Regarding turnout, Latinos who were contacted and mobilized were more likely to turnout in 2020. Group discrimination continued to play a role in pushing Latinos to the ballot box. Moreover, Latinos were greatly
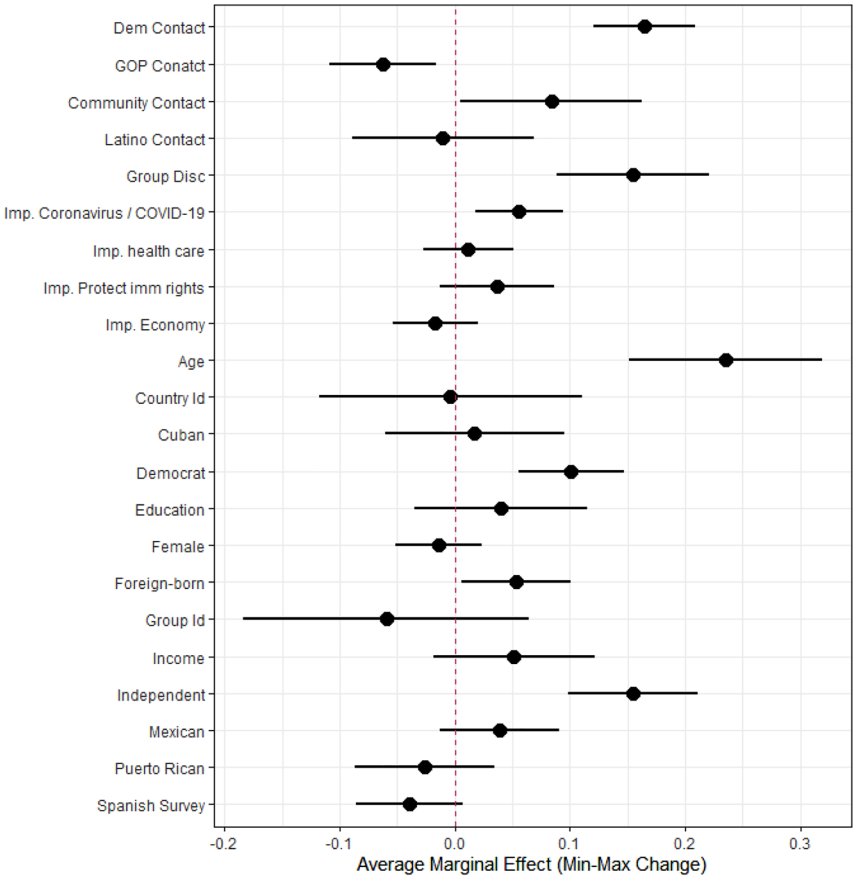
Figure 6: Changes in predicted probabilities of Latino early turnout in 2020 presidential election. Point estimates represent predicted probability of turnout in 2020 Presidential Election as a function of each covariate. Predicted probability calculated from model in Table 5. Probabilities calculated by moving each covariate is from its minimum value to its maximum value while holding all other covariates at their means. Lines represent 95% confidence intervals.

motivated by the dire circumstances brought by the coronavirus pandemic. This issue was critical in propelling Latinos to turn out in 2020.

10 Conclusion

Extensive research has shown the effectiveness of contact by political parties and other organizations in mobilizing voters. Outreach has been a consistent and

important predictor of political participation across racial groups. However, research focusing on Latinos has prominently featured the consequential role of political threat as a mobilizer. The 2016 and 2020 presidential elections presented unique scenarios where political threat was nationalized in a pronounced way. Political threat towards Latinos was a prominent feature of Donald Trump's 2016 campaign, and scholarly work shows that such threat, accompanied with anger, propelled Latino voters to the voting booth (Gutierrez et al. 2019). Latinos continued to face threats and an assault to their community over the course of the Trump presidency. The Trump administration pushed policies that undermined the wellbeing and stability of the Latino community and significantly hurt this population thus setting the stage for the 2020 election. At the same time, the 2020 election was uniquely shaped by the COVID-19 pandemic, both in shaping critical issues for the Latino community and in impacting how political parties and organizations engaged this group.

In this paper, we have presented a powerful story of Latino voters. They mobilized in a time of crisis. Group discrimination significantly contributed to greater favorability for Biden and was one of the main predictors of Latino turnout in the 2020 Presidential election. We believe that several factors made political threat proximal to most Latinos in 2020. After four years of being President, Trump's 2016 campaign xenophobic rhetoric turned into policies that targeted immigrants and Latinos. These policies included family separation, a consistent push to dismantle DACA, and large-scale deportation raids. Thus, after four years of an anti-Latino Trump administration it became evident that the rhetoric displayed during the 2016 campaign had turned into tangible policies that had had a negative impact on the Latino community as a whole. It is in this way that we believe perceptions of group discrimination was linked to the administration itself, prompting Latinos to turn out electorally in 2020.

Importantly, our paper highlights that political parties, and in particular the Democratic party, cannot rely only on perceived threat as a mobilizer. It seems that in 2020, this lesson was being put to practice. In the weeks leading up to the election, Latino voters reported that 64% of them had been contacted by a political party, a campaign, or any other organization. This was the highest rate of contact made to Latino voters in the 2020 Presidential cycle. We show important variation in contact by party across battleground and pivotal states and found that the rates of contact by Democrats was much higher than that made by Republicans to Latino voters. As this paper has shown, such contact was very consequential. In our results, contact stands as an important driver of Latino turnout in 2020. While we do find that threat was an important mobilizer, our results suggest that threat alone does not mobilize Latinos as much as it does when it is coupled with direct contact and mobilization efforts. In particular, our evidence shows that contact and

mobilization efforts by the Democratic party proved to be especially important in mobilizing the Latino vote in 2020.

This paper has shown that Latino favorability toward the 2020 presidential candidates must be understood in the context of policy preferences and issue prioritization. The most striking result from our analysis is the consolidation of two major issues for Latino voters, the coronavirus pandemic and the economy. Comparing this to 2016, we saw that there were a diverse set of issues that were important to Latino voters back then, suggesting that the Latino electorate responds to issues that are shaping their lives at any given time. In 2020, Latinos found themselves in the midst of the pandemic and an economic recession. Latinos were highly aware of this, as they felt the disproportionate impacts of the public health crisis and the economic downturn that ensued. However, we found that not all Latinos prioritized the same issues equally and those with different priorities had different affinities toward the presidential candidates. Latinos who felt that the most important issues were handling the pandemic had more favorable views of Biden. On the other hand, Latinos who believed the economy, jobs and wages needed to be prioritized politically were much more like to view Donald Trump favorably. We also found evidence that Latinos who believed their group faced a lot of discrimination were more likely to favor Joe Biden and least likely to favor Donald Trump. These results add to the vast research on the diversity and heterogeneity and also highlight complexity of the Latino vote. They also caution overgeneralizations of Latino voters as single-issue voters who might only care about immigration or as voters that only support Democrats.

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