Reexamining the "Politics of In-Between": Political Participation Among Mexican Immigrants in the United States

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This article undertakes a multivariate analysis of political participation among Mexican American immigrants. Traditional forms of participation such as registration and voting are not adequate tests of civic engagement for a population including 7 million noncitizens. Rather, this article examines nonelectoral participation including attending a meeting or rally, volunteering for a campaign, or donating money to a political cause. This research employs a national sample of Mexican Americans, including immigrants and noncitizens, and the models reveal that Mexican American immigrants are politically active. The authors find that the foreign-born are not less likely to be active than native-born respondents and, furthermore, among the foreign-born, noncitizens are just as likely to participate as naturalized citizens. Although traditional SES variables remain important, language fluency, percentage of life in the United States, and immigrant attitudes toward opportunities in the United States contribute additional predictive capacity to models of political participation among Mexican immigrants.

Keywords: *immigrant political participation; civic engagement; political incorporation; noncitizen participation*

Introduction and Theoretical Development: Immigrants and Political Involvement

A review of the literature on political involvement among immigrants has uncovered a dearth in the understanding of the "new immigrant" in terms of their participation in American politics (Jones-Correa, 1998; Sierra, Carrillo, DeSipio, & Jones-Correa, 2000). As Jones-Correa has pointed out, the study of Hispanic politics has been primarily on Latinos as a minority, not as immi-

Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences, Vol. 25 No. 4, November 2003 427-447
DOI: 10.1177/0739986303258599

grants. More specifically, persons of Mexican ancestry have grown to 21.5 million, which accounts for more than 60% of the country's 35.3 million Latinos. Furthermore, the 2000 Census revealed that there are now nearly 9 million immigrants from Mexico living in the United States. There are multiple issues surrounding the level of political involvement among immigrants, including socioeconomic status, how the circumstances that brought masses of people to this county shaped/hindered their incorporation into the political system, as well as naturalization rates, years in the United States, age, gender, education, and income, which have been well covered in the literature (Jones-Correa, 1998; Portes & Rumbaut, 1996). Indeed, much has been written on immigrants and politics; however, most of this research is primarily focused on naturalized and native-born Latino citizens (DeSipio, 1996; DeSipio & Pachon, 2002; Ramakrishnan & Espenshade, 2001; Sierra et al., 2000). This article is an investigation of the degree to which Mexican immigrants—citizens and noncitizens—participate in political life in the United States.

Jones-Correa (1998, p. 147) stated that immigrants choose to maintain their positions outside the traditional political sphere as a way of balancing the demands by the host country and the country of origin. He described this process as the practice of the "politics of in-between," whereby the political participation is negotiated on the immigrants' own terms, which is done by keeping some distance and ties to both polities. Jones-Correa wrote of organizations observed in his study; we propose his idea about immigrants who navigate a "politics of in-between" to our political behavior data. That is, is it possible for immigrants, particularly noncitizens, to participate in American politics, even as they remain "officially" outside the polity as noncitizens? Given this notion of a "politics of in-between," the following sections will explore how many of the variables in the literature vary in relation to this idea.

AUTHORS' NOTE: Author names are presented alphabetically. An earlier version of this article was prepared for the American Sociology Association annual conference in Anaheim, California, August 2001. The authors would like to thank the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation for the use of data from the 1999 National Survey on Latinos in America and Nathan D. Woods and Mario Villarreal for their helpful comments and suggestions regarding the models presented in this article. All remaining errors are the authors' own. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to mbarreto@uci.edu and jmunoz@ic.sunysb.edu.

Socioeconomic Status

Most scholars concur that socioeconomic status (SES) corresponds directly with higher political participation; however, there are some that have shown that SES variables do not in themselves explain why Latino immigrants do (or do not) naturalize (Jones-Correa, 1998), cast a vote (Tam, 1999), or participate in nonelectoral activity (Garcia-Bedolla, 2000). The theories behind the SES variables have been described as overly general. This is not to say that SES is not important. There is, of course, substantial literature that shows how socioeconomic variables are significant with political participation among Latinos (Garcia, 1997), although typically SES best accounts for participation among native-born Latinos.

Given what has been accounted for thus far, most scholars might expect that

- immigrants with higher levels of education are more likely to participate than those with lower levels of education;
- immigrants with higher income levels are more likely to participate than those with lower income; and
- older immigrants are more likely to be politically involved than younger immigrants.

However, Jones-Correa (1998) pointed out that the relationships between citizen/noncitizen immigrants and SES level exist as a positive relationship but that those relationships are rather weak. Furthermore, SES level is likely to be a stronger predictor among native-born Mexican Americans, and with regard to immigrants, where many different lifestyle influences may exist. Nonetheless, as the traditional literature suggests, immigrants who are naturalized citizens are more likely to be socially and politically involved than those who are not. Here, our research begins to question these traditional notions of participation. We suggest that because a majority of Mexican immigrants aspire for citizenship, and there are many in the process of becoming citizens, noncitizen immigrants are equally likely to participate than those who are already citizens. Furthermore, because they cannot yet vote, their only outlets for political participation are in the nonelectoral capacity. To begin, we offer the following two hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Foreign-born Mexican Americans are not less likely, ceteris paribus, to participate politically than those born in the United States.

Hypothesis 2: Noncitizen Mexican immigrants are not less likely, ceteris paribus, to participate politically than those immigrants who are naturalized citizens.

Consider the following: Of the Mexican-born respondents in the sample, 27% indicated they were legal U.S. citizens, whereas an additional 15% answered that they were currently applying for citizenship. Furthermore, 41% responded that they were planning to apply for citizenship, leaving only 14% that said they were not planning on becoming a U.S. citizen. Given the proposed Immigration and Naturalization Service reforms to the naturalization process and rising fees, it is expected to take much longer for immigrants to become naturalized citizens (DeSipio, Pachon, & Moellmer, 2001). Thus, there exists a large pool of Mexican American noncitizens who are either in the citizenship process or planning on becoming citizens, that we expect are interested in civic engagement in America. In addition, there is no sound reason to believe that those immigrants not interested in becoming U.S. citizens are not taking part in civic life. Whether they are legal permanent residents, temporary guest workers, or undocumented, noncitizen immigrants are still impacted by public policy in America and are not passive bystanders. And because noncitizens cannot express themselves in the traditional voting booth, they should have more incentive to participate in nonconventional forms of participation as we detail here. Given these expectations, traditional SES predictors may not be as applicable.

In his case study of Latin American immigrants in New York City, Jones-Correa (1998) noted that many immigrants who came to the city with a significant amount of educational and human capital did not participate in formal political life. Furthermore, Tam (1999) stated that that the reasoning behind SES and political participation assumes that it applies equally across various segments of the population. She noted that participation among these communities may be further understood once we realize that there are segments of the population that are socialized through different mechanisms or networks that change how political participation works in America.

The differences in socialization among Latinos are attributable to the characteristics of the communities they are a part of. Jones-Correa (1998) wrote of another kind of cost to participating in political life. In reference to Latin American immigrants in Queens, he stated that socioeconomic or bureaucratic hurdles do not explain why this community is on the fringes of political life, and further that there are costs that this community deals with that do not affect the average voter. These costs, which can be both social and psychological, are found within their communities. By acquiring full membership within the American polity, immigrants would lose rights, privileges, and forgo obligations to their home country. These concerns are reinforced by a community that can be hostile to full political incorporation. This hostility is attributable to the fact that the new immigrant in Jones-Correa's analy-

sis still clings to what he called the "myth of return," whereby some immigrants feel that one day, they will return to their home country. Whether Jones-Correa's analysis of Queens, New York, is consistent across the nation, there seems to be a huge burden on the part of immigrants to deal with pressure from within their own community. It is compounded by the fact that these communities are often ignored by politicians and their political machines. Although Latin American immigrant organizations are primarily "oriented toward the home country, the autonomous space they create here lends itself (perhaps unintentionally) to the expression of multiple identities that allow them to avoid the closure demanded by formal politics" (Jones-Correa, 1998, p. 132).

If such a community were composed of a significant amount of foreign-born and non-English speaking people, then these factors would affect socialization (Tam, 1999). For example, high levels of English proficiency have been shown to be positively associated with voter turnout (Pantoja & Woods, 1999). Massey (1995) made a similar argument about the clustering of immigrant communities both linguistically and geographically. In reference to Mexican immigration, he stated that the new immigration will lead to communities in which Spanish is the dominant language,

> which will lower the economic and social costs of not speaking English while raising the benefits of speaking Spanish. . . . The emergence of immigrants—a process already well advanced in many areas—also reduces the incentives and opportunities to learn other cultural habits and behavioral attributes of Euro-American society. (p. 647)

The outcomes of non-English proficiency are likely to affect the dissemination of information into immigrant communities given that media sources are often only in Spanish, thus "ethnic clustering has a large impact on the types of informational and social networks within minority communities" (Tam, 1999, p. 1148). Therefore, given all the issues, what does language and length of stay have to do with the type of political involvement being measured here? Our expectation is that language ability would not limit those who are English deficient from participating politically, especially with an increase in the number of Latinos running for office. Opportunities to attend political meetings or volunteer for campaigns are now likely to exist in heavily immigrant Spanish-speaking communities. However, limited language skills could decrease access to employment and other forms of social engagement. Also, as length of life lived in the United States is a key predictor for explaining why someone would naturalize (Jones-Correa, 1998), it would not necessarily explain why someone would attend a rally or volunteer for a political campaign. If anything, new immigrants may be more optimis-

tic and less apathetic about political participation. As such, we would not expect those who have been here longer to necessarily participate more. Therefore, we add the following hypotheses to be considered:

Hypothesis 3: Mexican immigrants with lower English fluency are not less likely, ceteris paribus, to participate politically than those with higher English fluency.

Hypothesis 4: Mexican immigrants who have spent less of their lives in the United States are not less likely, ceteris paribus, to participate politically than those who have spent more of their lives in the United States.

Generational Differences

It is important to take into account what experiences the immigrant brings with him or her and the context of his or her arrival as compared to native-born minority populations (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Although the typical image of the Mexican immigrant is of the poor, uneducated, job-seeking migrant, many immigrants bring with them an understanding and appreciation of democracy. Immigrants from Mexico during the 1980s and 1990s were not only escaping a depressed economy but also a democratically depressed polity in which one-party rule had been the norm for 70 years. Rural farmers in Northern Mexico were very aware of the political process in the country where their membership and dues in the PRI was essential to receiving crop subsidies the next year. Thus, although a large number of immigrants from Mexico come to the United States in search of better economic opportunities, they are often aware of the political opportunities that exist as well (Massey, 1986, 1999). Therefore, generation is an important variable to consider.

There has been some work done by Portes and Mozo (1988) in their exploration of the political adaptation of Cubans. Among the more interesting points they made is that the shift in attitude from returning home toward permanent settlement is attributable to an increase in ethnic awareness. They argued that such a shift may affect political behavior away from Cuba to the "emerging problems and interests of Cubans as a domestic minority." One other point raised was that the differences in participation between groups sharing the same "cultural origins" are attributable to beliefs held prior to immigration and may have very little to do with material concerns (p. 166). Elsewhere, Portes and Rumbaut (1996) have considered the importance of the characteristics and events within a particular country that shape the politics of the immigrant. Portes and Rumbaut stated that

> Immigrants differed in their past political socialization, commitment to return, and national situations left behind. The combination of these factors affected not only their stance in American domestic politics but also their orientations and behavior toward the homeland. (p. 107)

Along the same vein, Karpathakis (1999) questioned the assumption behind the straight-line assimilation theory that immigrant incorporation is prompted by host society institutions and secondly that the immigrants shed their home society allegiances. In her case study, Karpathakis found that the Greek immigrant community's incorporation into American political structures is attributable to its connection and interest of affairs back home. Also, the Greek immigrant community attempts to influence the host society's foreign policy regarding the home country and prompts immigrants and their associations to take part in the political system. Likewise, de la Garza and Pachon (2000) uncovered that Mexican immigrants show considerable interest in U.S. policy toward Mexico. As such, it is possible for noncitizen immigrants to play an active role in social and political arenas in the United States even if they cannot vote for president.

Park (1999) put a different spin on the effect of generation in his study of the increasing impact of the "postimmigration" generation on the political incorporation of the Korean Community. Park argued that the "post" generation (U.S.-born Korean Americans) has brought new resources (e.g., language, American social and educational experiences) to community politics that have made Korean Americans more effective in the political sphere. Many immigrant communities are experiencing a generational shift in politics attributable to demographic factors that have raised the possibility of more rapid political incorporation. In essence, the increased participation by the postgeneration will increase the political impact of immigrant communities on the mainstream political system. The research we undertake here examines this variable within the Mexican American community to determine what impact, if any, generation and percentage of life lived in the United States has on participation.

Civic Engagement

As Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) have demonstrated, community associations and civic volunteerism are important building blocks for political incorporation and participation. In their study, the authors found that this civic involvement is low for Latinos and even lower for foreign-born Latinos and leads them to conclude, in part, that this deficit of civic skills is partially responsible for the low levels of political participation among foreign-born Latinos. However, there are additional types of community associations and

different forms of civic volunteerism than those measured by Verba, Schlozman, and Brady that are engaging immigrant populations. Although new Mexican immigrants might not be active in the Elk's Club or bowling league, they are typically connected to hometown associations and close-knit communities. Further opportunities for building social capital may exist in ESL classes and naturalization courses in which immigrants may establish connections and learn of an upcoming meeting, rally, or campaign event of interest (Hondegneu-Sotelo, 1994).

Much of the literature with respect to civic engagement stresses the importance of the role immigrant organizations have in the process of adapting to the United States. Previous research shows that Mexican immigrants do hold some political orientation toward support for collective activities. As Garcia (1987) has shown, this orientation has some association among predominant Spanish-speakers and those with extensive family ties. The literature provides several examples of immigrant involvement in political and civic life (see Graham, 2001; Pardo, 1997; Portes & Rumbaut, 1996).

Sassen-Koob (1979) provided multiple examples of the types of associations formed within Dominicans and Colombians in New York, which included recreational, civic, and professional organizations. Sassen-Koob found that Dominican communities had more expressive or recreational associations (soccer leagues, cultural events), whereas Colombian communities tended to develop associations with an instrumental purpose. This is explained in part by the racial, class, and urban/rural distinctions found between these groups. Instrumental associations were described as organizations that interacted within the receiving society or home country. These organizations worked to rectify public image of these communities, provide legal assistance, and lobby for political rights in the home country. Instrumental organizations mobilize immigrant communities to make connections with educational and social welfare institutions to deal with community concerns (Garcia, 1986).

There are, of course, multiple factors to consider in the formation of these organizations, such as the influence by the home country, in the development of civic and political life of immigrants (Goldring, 1998; Graham, 2001; Hagan, 1998; Itzigsohn, 2000) or the political context in which some groups have arrived to the United States (Portes & Rumbaut, 1996), such as is evident in the Cuban community. Immigrant organizations have some degree of adeptness at protecting members from the "trauma of cultural adaptation or in dialoguing with home governments; but to the extent that they are formed by non-citizens, they have little voice in America" (Portes & Rumbaut, 1996).

The political structure in cities that serve as ports of entry for immigrant communities is also important in measuring how the community associations help transfer their demographic strength to political presence. In his discussion of city-level differences, Waldinger (1996) explored New York City and Los Angeles. A key difference between these two cities is the extent to which the structure of politics provides mechanisms for political expression. New York City has a structure in place that provides opportunities for immigrant leaders to serve as representatives at the city council and state assembly levels (Waldinger). Also, at the neighborhood level, noncitizens in New York City can run for planning councils. Newcomers in Los Angeles have a difficult time participating formally given the lack of decentralization in the Los Angeles political structure; furthermore, political organizations have less autonomy because of their dependence on statewide political elites (Waldinger), however the more recent political climate in California has produced a greater sense of Latino political mobilization that may yield multiple opportunities for participation, especially among immigrants (Pantoja, Ramirez, & Segura, 2001; Segura, Falcon, & Pachon, 1997).

Methods

The survey data utilized in this study are drawn from a nationally represented sample of 4,614 adults, 18 years and older, including 2,217 Latinos and 2,197 non-Latinos. The survey was administered by *The Washington Post*/Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University and is titled, The National Survey on Latinos in America and was conducted by telephone between June and August 1999. This research focuses solely on respondents of Mexican ancestry, which include 457 Mexican immigrants and 355 native-born Mexican Americans. Although previous research efforts cited in this article have typically been regional in scope, these data allow us to test a random national sample of Mexican Americans and make conclusions about social and political participation that are far reaching, rather than state specific. In addition, we limit our focus to Mexican Americans for two reasons: First, as the largest group of Latinos in the United States, Mexican immigrants have a potentially larger base of community associations to draw on and, second, they share a similar political background in their home country of Mexico. If we included all Latin American groups, we would have difficulty accounting for the different home-country experiences of Cubans, Salvadorans, Nicaraguans, Colombians, and more that have undoubtedly influenced their decision to come to the United States and their perceptions of democracy. Although the survey offers many benefits, we must keep in mind

that all data are self-reported by respondents and thus less accurate than official records of voter registration or turnout. Although these types of data sources do exist, they would preclude an analysis of noncitizen immigrants and thus are not suitable for this exercise.

The dependent variable analyzed here measures the level at which an individual is politically involved. Political involvement or participation is measured as both an ordered and dichotomous variable. The political participation index was created out of three questions in the survey regarding nonvoting forms of participation. These questions were used because they represent types of political activities that are open to all residents of the United States, not just citizens. Respondents received a 1 for answering yes to each of the following questions:

1. Have you worked as a volunteer or for pay for a political candidate?
2. Have you attended a public meeting or demonstration?
3. Have you contributed money to a candidate or political organizations?

The political participation variable was coded 0 through 3 depending on the number of activities each respondent participated in and has an acceptable Cronbach alpha of .55. This 4-point index is used in the ordered probit regressions below. We then recoded political participation into a dichotomous variable of 1 (*did participate in something*) or 0 (*had not participated in anything*). By coding political participation in this way, we can determine what predictors are important in influencing participation, rather than levels of participation. Furthermore, with postestimation analysis (Long, 1997; Long & Freese, 2001), the probit models used for the ordered and dichotomous dependent variable allow us to determine the impact that each particular independent variable has on the predicted probability that the dependent variable will change. The political participation variable does not draw distinctions between each of the possible types of participation; rather, it measures the quantity of involvement.

Demographic Control Variables

Standard demographic variables were used in this study including age, gender, income, and education. Age is a continuous variable derived from the respondent's year of birth and ranges from 18 to 76, with a median of 34 years old. Gender is coded dichotomously with 0 (*male*) and 1 (*female*). The sample is equally split, with 50.4% of respondents being male and 49.6% being female. For income, we used the traditional categorical 7-level income bracket question in which low-income respondents (*less than $20,000*) were coded as 1 and upper-income respondents (*more than $100,000*) were coded

as 7. Education is coded as a trichotomous variable, with 0 (*less than an 8th-grade education*), 1 (*some high school or high school graduate*), and 2 (*some college/vocational school or college graduate and higher*).

Family status is measured by asking how many children under the age of 18 are living in the home. Anyone with one or more children received a 1 and those without children received a zero. In this sample, 69% of all respondents had children living at home.

A social engagement variable was also created to account for the degree of incorporation. We pooled the responses to five questions and generated an index of social incorporation to increase the degrees of freedom. The index includes having a driver's license, credit card, job, and attending church.

Two dummy variables were also constructed to test the influence of living in either California or Texas. These two states have considerable Mexican immigrant populations, and we expected to find more opportunities for political involvement; our dummy variables will control for this.

Partisanship is measured using self-reported party affiliation and is more concerned with having an affiliation as opposed to being a Democrat or Republican. As such, we code those who identified as Democrats or Republicans as 1 and those who reported no affiliation, declined to state, or other as zero. We account for partisanship in this manner because we are not looking for differences in participation between the two parties, but rather we expect that persons affiliated with one of the two major parties are more likely to participate than those outside the mainstream political arena. This is particularly important for immigrants (and even more so for noncitizens), who are less likely to have formed identification with a political party. In addition, we measure the respondents' external political efficacy by way of three questions, merged into an index: "Political leaders do not care much what people like me think," "Politics and government are so complicated that a person like me cannot really understand what's going on," and "Voting is a waste of time." Respondents that disagreed with each question were given a 1, and on that basis, a 4-point scale was created, from 0 (*low levels of political efficacy*) to 3 (*high levels of political efficacy*).

Independent Variables

Language proficiency is constructed based on the respondent's ability to carry on a conversation in English. This variable is a trichotomous measure with respondents who can speak English pretty well or very well coded as a 2, respondents who can speak "just a little" English coded as a 1, and respondents with no English proficiency coded as a zero.

Given the relevance of immigrant-specific variables in the findings of Ramakrishnan and Espenshade (2001), we also included controls for nativity and assimilation. In the sample with all Mexican American respondents, a dummy variable for U.S.-born was included, and in the immigrant sample, a dummy variable for citizenship was included. Furthermore, we included a measure of generational status in the full sample with values for first generation (immigrant), second, third, and fourth or higher generation. This was constructed using a question about the birthplace of the respondent, the respondent's parents, and the respondent's grandparents. For the immigrant sample, a variable called percent of life in USA was constructed, which divided the number of years an immigrant has been in the United States by his or her total age. For example, a respondent who is 20 years old and has lived in the United States for 5 years receives a value of .25 (5/20 = .25), whereas a respondent who is 50 years old and has lived in the United States for 5 years receives a value of .10 (5/50 = .10). Even though both respondents have been in the United States for the same amount of time, the second respondent has spent a considerably smaller percentage of his or her entire life in the United States, suggesting he or she is less integrated or assimilated.

Two attitudinal variables were included: life better for kids, which simply asked respondents whether they feel life for their children will be better than it was for them (this was asked of all respondents, even those without children), and life better in U.S., which pooled the responses of seven questions regarding opportunities and values in the United States as compared to Mexico (this was asked only of immigrants and is therefore only included in the immigrant model). Immigrants were asked to compare their experiences in the United States with their home country on the following seven items: friendliness of people, educational opportunities, treatment of the poor, political freedom, morals, race relations, and family strength. The Cronbach's alpha for the seven variables is .57. To further test the "politics of in-between" theory, we included a measure of whether the respondent sends money to family members back in Mexico. This allows us to identify those immigrants who maintain a connection to their host country and determine what impact this has on participation in the United States. Finally, a dummy variable was included for immigrants as to their primary reason for immigration to control for the human capital variable. Those who indicated they immigrated to the United States to join family members were coded as 1 and all others were coded as zero.

Results

At first glance, the traditional predictors of political engagement stand out as significant influences among Mexican American participation. However, beyond the well-documented demographic variables, this research isolates additional immigrant-specific variables that help prove and disprove new theories of social and political participation. Here, we present the results of two levels of analysis: (a) political participation among respondents of Mexican ancestry and (b) political participation among Mexican immigrants. We split the sample and analyze only Mexican immigrants to test the influence of immigrant-specific variables such as naturalized citizen, reason for immigration, percent of life in the United States, life better in United States, and send money home, whereas the entire sample of people of Mexican ancestry is necessary to test the impact of nativity and generation.

The models employ ordered probit regression for the categorical dependent variables and probit regression for the dichotomous analysis of political participation. Examining first the sample of all people of Mexican ancestry, there appears to be no difference between native and foreign-born respondents in determining nonelectoral political participation as we have conceptualized it. Although there is a positive and significant bivariate correlation between the dummy variable U.S.-born and political participation in the multivariate analysis, the significance washes out, meaning that respondents born in Mexico are not less likely to participate in the three political activities than those born in the United States, holding other variables constant. In addition, generational status confirms this by not resulting in a significant relationship with the dependent variable. Neither being born in Mexico nor being the second or third generation born in the United States is a statistically significant predictor of the political activity of a person of Mexican ancestry. Although these results may not seem robust, they do highlight the fact that political parties and candidates should not focus attention only on native-born communities and dispel the myth that immigrants participate at lower levels. Furthermore, because more than half of the foreign-born sample is of noncitizens, it is even more surprising to note that no statistical difference exists when compared to the native born. Thus, we can accept our initial hypothesis that Mexican immigrants are not less likely to participate politically than native-born Mexican Americans.

More interestingly, Table 1 reports the variables that do have a significant relationship on political participation. Not surprising, age and higher levels of education are the best indicators of participation, consistent with previous

Table 1. Predictors of Political Participation Among all Mexican Americans

	Participation Index			Participation Dummy		
Independent Variable	O-Probit	*SE*	Min → Max	Probit	*SE*	Min → Max
Have children	–.1086	.1021	–.0060	–.1641	.1104	–.0596
Age	.0114**	.0041	.0472**	.0078*	.0044	.1597*
Female	.1252	.0952	.0066	.1661	.1021	.0594
Education level	.2596***	.0796	.0258***	.2569**	.0848	.1783**
Income	.0072	.0300	.0023	.0038	.0326	.0082
Partisan	.1799*	.0980	.0095*	.2184**	.1047	.0780**
Political efficacy	.0388	.0516	.0061	.0447	.0551	.0478
U.S. born	.1646	.1886	.0090	.1091	.2040	.0392
Generation	–.0186	.0973	–.0029	–.0346	.1056	–.0367
English fluency	.1843*	.1067	.0163*	.2002*	.1123	.1353*
Life better for kids	–.0210	.1100	–.0011	.0928	.1187	.0329
California	–.1611	.1146	–.0079	–.1178	.1224	–.0416
Texas	–.2050	.1141	–.0100	–.2478**	.1226	–.0862**
Social incorporation	.0200	.0372	.0061	.0327	.0396	.0688
Cut 1/constant	1.624***	.2848	—	–1.6095***	.3016	—
Cut 2	2.359***	.2898	—	—	—	—
Cut 3	3.171***	.3027	—	—	—	—
N		733			733	
Pseudo R^2		.0528			.0686	
Percentage predicted correctly		NA			67.26	

*$p < .050$. **$p < .010$. ***$p < .001$.

research. In addition, partisanship also plays an important role, with those respondents self-identifying with a major political party being statistically more likely to participate in the three political acts. For the probit models, we use postestimation analysis (Long, 1997; Long & Freese, 2001) to calculate the contributions of each variable. We report the influence that a change from the minimum to maximum (min → max) value of each independent variable has on the dependent variable. Specifically, the postestimation analysis in the probit model reports that partisan identifiers are about 8% more likely to report having done one of the three acts. This is not unexpected considering the recent increase in outreach to Latinos by both the Democratic and Republican Parties prior to the 2000 presidential election.

Furthermore, respondents from Texas, and to a lesser extent California, are not more likely to participate, which is surprising considering that there should be more opportunities for political participation targeting Latinos in both states. Not only are the results for California and Texas not positive and significant as we might expect but both dummy variables yield a negative relationship, although one that is not quite significant. This may suggest that as the Latino population continues to grow in the Midwest and East Coast, political parties and candidates will need to increasingly target this segment of the constituency.

Although we anticipated that opportunities to participate might exist in predominantly Spanish-speaking communities, English fluency is an important asset in political participation. Those respondents with high levels of English proficiency were 13.5% more likely to take part in at least one political act. Although being native born was not significant, this may capture some of its effect as more than 95% of the native-born sample reported that their English skills were "very good" (as compared to just 34% of the Mexican-born respondents).

Finally, the notion that social incorporation influences political participation is not supported by the data. Although it seems intuitive that persons who are more engaged in society are more likely to participate politically, there is no significant relationship between the two in the multivariate analysis.

The analysis of all people of Mexican ancestry has shown that there is a need to include foreign-born Mexicans in an analysis of political participation. In both the index and dummy variable models, native-born respondents are not statistically more likely to engage the system. The second part of this analysis examines the patterns and predictors of participation among just Mexican immigrants, citizens and noncitizens alike.

Table 2 reports the results of the participation models for Mexican immigrants. For both the ordered and dichotomous models, the citizenship variable appears to have no meaningful impact. In neither the ordered probit nor

Table 2. Predictors of Political Participation Among Only Mexican Immigrants

	Participation Index			Participation Dummy		
Independent Variable	O-Probit	*SE*	Min → Max	Probit	*SE*	Min → Max
Have children	–.1331	.1665	.0218	–.1980	.1754	–.0656
Age	.0103	.0066	.1003	.0062	.0069	.1175
Female	.2978**	.1480	.0475**	.2764*	.1554	.0880*
Education level	.2646**	.1048	.0851**	.2033*	.1108	.1305*
Income	–.0117	.0509	.0111	–.0474	.0552	–.0853
Partisan	.3855**	.1408	.0620**	.4565**	.1480	.1466**
Political efficacy	.0407	.0703	.0195	.0582	.0742	.0554
Citizen	.1979	.1487	.0318	.2195	.1575	.0706
Percentage life in United States	–.1585	.3469	.0256	–.1313	.3684	–.0423
English fluency	.1524	.1293	.0476	.1912	.1365	.1183
Life better for kids	–.1543	.1823	.0255	–.1179	.1936	–.0386
Life better in United States	.0854**	.0414	.0969**	.0640	.0434	.1447
Immigrated to join family	.1460	.1514	.0238	.2405	.1598	.0790
Send money home	.2543*	.1467	.0410*	.2913*	.1545	.0939*
California	–.2582	.1634	.0396	–.2746	.1725	–.0838
Texas	–.2140	.1716	.0328	–.1869	.1811	–.0576
Social incorporation	–.0303	.0563	.0297	–.0136	.0589	–.0264
Cut 1/constant	1.789***	.5387	—	–1.651**	.5622	—
Cut 2	2.664***	.5456	—	—	—	—
Cut 3	3.713***	.5819	—	—	—	—
N		421			421	
Pseudo R^2		.0780			.1011	
Percentage predicted correctly		NA			73.40	

*$p < .050$. **$p < .010$. ***$p < .001$.

probit regressions does the citizenship variable demonstrate a significant relationship with political participation. Thus, we cannot say with certainty that immigrants who are naturalized citizens are more likely to participate than those who are noncitizens, as we have speculated. This is an important finding when coupled with the first hypothesis because we find that native-born Mexican Americans are not more likely to participate than immigrants, and among immigrants, noncitizens are just as likely to participate as naturalized citizens. Given that we are measuring nonelectoral forms of participation, the only option available to noncitizens, we should not be surprised that they are equally likely to take part. Because voting is seen as the penultimate form of civic participation, there may be an overemphasis on the ballot box among native-born and naturalized citizens at the expense of other forms of participation, such as volunteering for a campaign, donating money to a political organization, and attending a meeting or rally. It is much easier to simply show up once every 2 years and cast a ballot. However, for noncitizens, to be politically engaged can only mean to take part in nonelectoral acts.

Furthermore, percentage of life in the United States is also not significant, meaning that immigrants who are newly arrived are not statistically less likely to participate than those who may have spent 20 years of their life in the United States. Also noteworthy is the nonsignificant relationship between English fluency and political participation among immigrants. This suggests that there is ample opportunity and motive for newly arrived, Spanish- speaking immigrants from Mexico to participate in political activities. Although these variables are not significant, this finding is still quite important. What does motivate immigrant participation? We find that some traditional predictors of political participation are relevant as well as two immigrant-specific variables. Although age and income do not bear significant influences on participation, education, gender, and partisanship do account for some variance in measuring political participation. Similar to the model for all people of Mexican ancestry, education and partisanship are positive influences for participation among immigrants.

In addition, among immigrants, we find that females are more likely to take part in one or more of the political acts. This stands in contrast to the findings presented in model 1 for all respondents, suggesting that immigrant women, not all women, are the ones likely to be politically active. Less likely to have a full-time job, female immigrants have more time to participate and, as the primary caretaker, they may be more aware of political issues confronting education, health care, and public safety. Similarly, Pardo (1997) noted that Latina immigrants were a powerful force behind the Mothers of East LA,

a group of women who organized politically to successfully protest plans to put a power plant in their neighborhood.

Finally, immigrant attitudes toward opportunities in the United States appear to influence participation. The variable life better in the United States is positive and significant in the ordered model, which indicates that those immigrants who feel there are more prospects for advancement in the United States as compared to Mexico, are more likely to get involved politically in the United States. Although the measure of political efficacy is not significant, the variable life better in the United States might be capturing some of its effect, acting in a way as an overarching measure of efficacy for immigrants. Those immigrants who feel there are more opportunities in America than Mexico are more likely to be active politically to protect their rights and economic opportunities.

Interestingly, we uncover an additional layer of the "politics of in-between" in that those immigrants who send money home to relatives in Mexico are statistically more likely to take part in political acts in the United States than those who do not send money home. Holding everything else constant, immigrants who send money home are 9.4% more likely to participate in one or more political acts according to the postestimation analysis. Thus, we find an immigrant who has come to the United States for more opportunities, but continues to stay in close contact with his host country by sending money home, as someone who is more likely to get involved in politics in America.

Discussion

This article investigated the extent to which noncitizen Mexican immigrants are politically active in the United States. Many studies have focused on naturalization and voter turnout to measure political participation, but few have focused on nontraditional forms of participation with respect to noncitizens. Previous studies have typically ignored the role of the noncitizen, and this analysis identifies participation outside of voter activity as a key arena for noncitizen participation. In particular, we have focused on working for a political campaign, attending a public meeting or rally, and donating money to a political candidate or organization. By analyzing these three measures of political participation, we find that immigrants are just as likely to participate as native-born Mexican Americans and that among immigrants, noncitizens are not less likely to take part than naturalized citizens. Although traditional demographic factors play a role in predicting participation, we have also isolated factors such as percentage of life in the

United States, English fluency, and attitudes toward opportunities in the United States, and sending money back home that can influence immigrant participation. With these findings, conventional notions of minority participation should be revisited with particular attention to immigrant communities. We find that a majority of noncitizens plan to apply for citizenship and that this segment of the Mexican American community is participating in American political life.

Our data and results suggest that there is no reason to suspect that Mexican immigrants and noncitizens are not active participants in political life. Immigrants and noncitizens are impacted by public policy and socioeconomic trends in America just as native-born Latinos and White non-Hispanics are, thus we would expect them to react to the political and social environments, rather than withdraw. Because traditional avenues of participation are limited (such as voting), we expect such groups to focus more on those nontraditional forms of participation that are viable options.

We hope that future research will focus on noncitizen Latino participation as this segment of the population grows and eventually becomes part of the citizenry and the electorate. Research on Latino politics should not be limited to surveys of registered voters but instead should include large enough samples of foreign-born respondents, including noncitizens, to fully examine the scope of political participation among all Latinos. Further studies should expand the reach to all Latin American, and also Asian immigrants to determine what, if any, influences country of origin may have on participation. We should not lose sight of the noncitizen immigrant population in America, because they make important contributions to our civic society and economy and are active participants in social and political life.

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