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# Assessing the Causes and Effects of Political Trust Among U.S. Latinos

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This article examines why Latinos are more trusting of the federal government than Anglos and Blacks. We address this puzzle by turning to previous research on racial politics and political trust. Consistent with previous research, discrimination and generational status are important predictors of Latinos' political trust, with first-generation Latinos more trusting than later-generation Latinos. Encounters with racial discrimination also make Latinos and Blacks less trusting of government. In contrast, Anglos' political trust can be explained by their economic evaluations as well as their partisanship. Although these findings are insightful, they do not directly address why intergroup differences arise when it comes to their trust in government. We argue that combined with generational distinctions among Latinos in their trust of government, the heavy flow of Latino immigration in the past 30 years has changed the Latino population in such a way that the views of the foreign-born are disproportionately represented in survey questions related to trust in government. This is producing a Latino population that is more inclined to trust government than Anglos or Blacks. We then examine the impact of political trust on individuals' opinions toward redistributive policies. Political trust has a strong and positive effect on Latinos' attitudes toward such policies.

**Keywords:** *Latino voters; political trust; public opinion; racial discrimination; trust in government; redistribution*

Over the past 35 years, many scholars have been concerned about a noticeable decline in the trust that Americans have in their government,

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a decline starting during the 1960s. The amount of trust one places in government also influences an individual's political attitudes and opinions (Baldassare, 2004; Hetherington, 1998, 1999, 2005). Yet what if Latinos, the fastest growing segment of the U.S. population, projected to make up more than a quarter of the population in less than 20 years, are consistently more trusting in government than non-Latino Americans? What implications might this have on the landscape of American public opinion and political behavior? Interestingly enough, this is not a mere thought exercise but an empirical puzzle of contemporary importance.

The primary focus of this article is to understand the political trust of Latinos, as compared with Anglos and Blacks. Drawing on the racial politics literature, where the bulk of the work focuses on the Black–White dichotomy, we might expect Latinos to possess levels of political trust comparable to Blacks. Latinos' status as racial minorities in America, and the structural and political inequalities that follow, resulted in more cynical and pessimistic views toward government (Hero, 1992). However, given the unique historical experience of Black Americans, a history that Latinos do not share, this framework may be insufficient to explain Latino trust in government (Dawson, 1994). The few empirical studies conducted in the political science literature find that immigrants who have not fully assimilated into American society are more trusting of government than those who are more assimilated in the American political system (Michelson, 2001, 2003). Immigrants who are new to the American political system may not only perceive it as being better than their homeland government but also give credence to the "American dream" and everything associated with this idea—freedom, democracy, and transparency. The provision of public goods may also serve as clear and positive signals to immigrants. As such, we would expect foreign-born immigrants to possess more optimistic and positive views of government than later-generation immigrants.

Scholars have also found that experiences with racial discrimination affect immigrants' political attitudes and behaviors (Garcia Bedolla, 2005; Michelson, 2001, 2003; Pantoja, Ramirez, & Segura, 2001; Portes & Rumbaut, 1996). The segmented assimilation theory (Portes & Rumbaut, 1996; Zhou, 1999) suggests that immigrants who have experienced racial or ethnic discrimination in either their personal or daily lives are less likely to assimilate at rates comparable to immigrants with no experiences of racial or ethnic discrimination. Thus, we might expect immigrants who report being discriminated against because of their ethnicity to be less politically trustful than those with no experiences of discrimination. Such encounters may lead second- and later-generation Latinos to possess more

pessimistic and negative views of American society and government, which in turn may lead to a dislike for big government, and government involvement in general (Garcia Bedolla, 2005). But even if later generations do not experience discrimination, their longer presence in America (relative to their parents') may cause them to assimilate or acculturate into all aspects of American society, thereby adopting a more cynical and distrustful view of government.

These theories, however, cannot fully explain why Latinos tend to be more trusting than other Americans. For instance, according to the 2002 Pew National Hispanic Survey, 15.3% of Latinos always trust the government, relative to 9.2% of Blacks, 13.4% of Whites, and 5.8% of Asians.<sup>1</sup> If Latinos were indeed assimilating at normal or predicted rates, then their rates of political trust should be similar to the levels of political trust for Anglos and Blacks. However, the Pew Survey data show that as a general matter, the trust in government by Latino respondents is greater than for both White and Black respondents. Thus, although these assimilation theories may be able to explain the differences in one's trust in government within the Latino community (a question that we return to later), they clearly cannot explain why Latinos are more trusting of government than are Anglos and Blacks.

In this article we offer two reasons as to why Latinos are more trusting in government than Anglos and Blacks. First, as the racial politics literature suggests, first-generation immigrants tend to possess more optimistic and favorable views of the government than later-generation immigrants. Thus when asked how much they trust the federal government, immigrants may be more positive and optimistic than nonimmigrants. The second reason relates to immigration trends in the United States. Focusing on approximately the same time period as the one for trust (1964-2000), the proportion of the Latino population that is foreign-born has continually increased. In 1970, only 19.9% of the Latino population was foreign-born, but by 2000, almost half (45.5%) of the Latino population in the United States was foreign-born.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, along with generational differences in immigrants' trust in government, the steady influx of foreign-born Latinos may explain why, over time, Latinos have been more politically trusting than Anglos and Blacks.

Our first step at explaining these variations in political trust is to examine the determinants of trust in government for Latinos, Blacks, and Anglos. We contend that even if assimilation or selective disassociation theory can explain Latinos' attitudes toward the government, we would still expect Latinos to be more politically trusting than Blacks or Anglos as a result of

the steady rates of Latino immigration in the past 30 years. We then go on to explore how political trust influences individuals' attitudes toward policies that the government is directly responsible for (e.g., redistributive policies). We predict that Latinos' high levels of trust in government will make them more supportive of these policies than non-Latinos. The following section reviews previous research on political trust and political assimilation. We then discuss our research design and methods, followed by a section that presents our findings. We conclude by discussing the policy implications from our research, in particular, the future of public support for redistributive policies in the United States.

## Political Trust in America

Levi and Stoker broadly define trust as a relationship that "involves an individual making herself vulnerable to another individual, group or institution that has the capacity to do her harm or betray her" (2000, p. 476). Political trust or trust in government, however, does not equate to the same type of trust that one might bestow on a friend. Instead, one's trust in government may suggest a belief that the government or elected official possesses the ability to perform a good job (Hardin, 2002). It can also be conceived of as a one-way form of trust, because it is the individual who trusts the political institution, with no expectations that the institution will reciprocate (Hardin, 2002). Over the early span of the time-series data on political trust, we see that political trust hit its peak in 1964, followed by an overall decline. Scholars attribute this downward trend to events such as Vietnam, Watergate, and the Civil Rights Movement (Abramson, 1983; Markus, 1979). But even when the administrations responsible for these events changed, this decline still continued. As a result, scholars pointed to the growing cynicism of television news reporting as the reason for these decreasing levels of trust (Chan, 1997; Patterson, 1994). The electorate's negative evaluations of Congress, and by default the national government, further contributed to this downward trend in political trust (Feldman, 1983; Williams, 1985).

Concern about the decline in political trust results from the belief that trust is intricately linked to political behavior. The conventional wisdom is that individuals who are more trusting should also be more likely to participate and to be involved in politics (Almond & Verba, 1963; Stokes, 1962). According to Putnam (2000), individuals who trust in their fellow citizens should be more willing to meet and interact with others than those

with less trust in government. The politically trusting should also be the ones that volunteer, participate in political events, and in general be the most engaged in civic affairs. Despite the logic of this argument, little empirical support exists for the relationship between trust and participation. Rosenstone and Hanson (1993) find no difference in the likelihood of voting and levels of political interest among the most and the least trusting individuals. Miller (1974) reaches a similar conclusion, failing to observe a relationship in the decreasing turnout rates and low levels of government trust. However, Shingles (1981) finds that politically distrustful individuals participate in more policy-related politics than more politically trusting individuals.

Instead of focusing exclusively on the relationship between trust and political participation, Hetherington (2005) examines the importance of political trust in one's support for policies where risk or sacrifice on the part of the individual is involved, for example, redistributive policies. Thus, political trust is a crucial determinant of public opinion when it pertains to policies that only benefit a small group in society (e.g., racial minorities, the poor) as well as redistributive policies. Anglo parents' support of affirmative action policies in the university admissions process provides a good test of Hetherington's argument. He finds that a parent's support for affirmative action is contingent on his or her level of political trust, because one has to have enough faith in the federal government's ability to implement these policies in an impartial and race-neutral manner.

The importance of political trust, however, diminishes when it pertains to one's attitudes on policies that require little personal sacrifice or risk, such as social security and crime prevention. The implications of Hetherington's findings for our research question are timely and important. In several decades, the American public will largely be composed of individuals who may directly benefit from redistributive policies, the reasons for which are discussed in the next section. Latinos are expected to constitute 25% of the U.S. population by 2050 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002). Thus it is worthwhile to examine whether political trust plays a role in Latinos' attitudes toward redistributive policies.

Turning to the factors that influence an individual's trust in government, one's political views and perceptions are more strongly associated with his or her level of political trust than socioeconomic status and demographic attributes (Citrin & Muste, 1999; Craig, 1996; Hetherington, 2005; Stokes, 1962). An individual's partisanship, economic evaluations, policy satisfaction, and retrospective assessments of the incumbent are the primary political factors that influence trust in government (Citrin & Green, 1986;

Miller, 1974). The critical role of the media (Patterson, 1993), personal qualities of the president (Citrin & Green, 1986), times of war (Parker, 1989), and major political scandals (Weatherford, 1984) have also been found to influence an individual's trust in government.

Several studies have found differences in the levels of political trust between racial minorities and nonminorities, specifically between Blacks and Whites. For instance, Blacks are less trusting of the government than Anglos when it pertains to government's efforts at racial equality (Abramson, 1983). Moreover, Shingles finds that political trust and efficacy play an important role in the participation rates of Blacks, though it depends on the particular policy issue. But why Blacks are less politically trusting than Latinos, as the trends from the NES data suggest, has not received much attention in the research literature. One reason may be that Blacks hold a more pessimistic outlook on the future of race relations than Latinos, Whites, and Asians (Hajnal & Baldassare, 2001). Blacks are also the least satisfied of their job opportunities and local government efforts in the employment sector, when compared to the other three racial groups (Hajnal & Baldassare, 2001). Given that race relations, civil rights, and employment are so closely linked with the actions of the federal government, this may help to explain why Blacks' levels of political trust are lower than those of Latinos.

Although these research findings are important, they suffer from the conceptualization of race as a purely Black–White dichotomy.<sup>3</sup> As such, our knowledge of Latinos' attitudes toward government is quite limited. A local study conducted by Michelson (2001) finds that recent Puerto Rican immigrants in the Chicago area are more trusting of the government than are long-time Puerto Rican residents. Her research on Mexican Americans produce similar results, where the greater one's level of acculturation into American society the lower his or her level of government trust (Michelson, 2003). Moreover, a 2001 Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) survey of California residents finds that American-born Latinos are less trusting of government than naturalized Latinos, a pattern that is consistent with the assimilation theory (Hajnal & Baldassare, 2001). However, this survey finds that Latinos, overall, are more trusting of government than Blacks and Anglos. A similar pattern exists in the Latino National Political Survey; although 25% of the foreign-born Latino respondents always trust government to do what is right, only 7.3% of the American-born Latinos always trust government (de la Garza & DeSipio, 1992). Unfortunately, these studies, and the data they are based on, are limited by an insufficiently small national sample of Blacks and Latinos for detailed comparative study.

Others are limited by geographic constraints or by exclusively focusing on the Latino population, without comparing them to other racial or ethnic groups. Our analysis uses data from national surveys, with large samples of Anglos, Blacks, and Latinos, so that we can statistically compare the determinants of political trust across the three major racial and ethnic groups in the United States. Furthermore, we contribute to both the racial politics and political trust literature by exploring how Latinos' and non-Latinos' trust in government influences their attitudes on government-sponsored initiatives, one aspect of the literature that has been overlooked. This is important because it is unclear what role political trust plays on Latino policy attitudes and how it compares to the role that political trust plays in the behavior of non-Latinos.

## **Assimilation, Discrimination, and Immigration Trends**

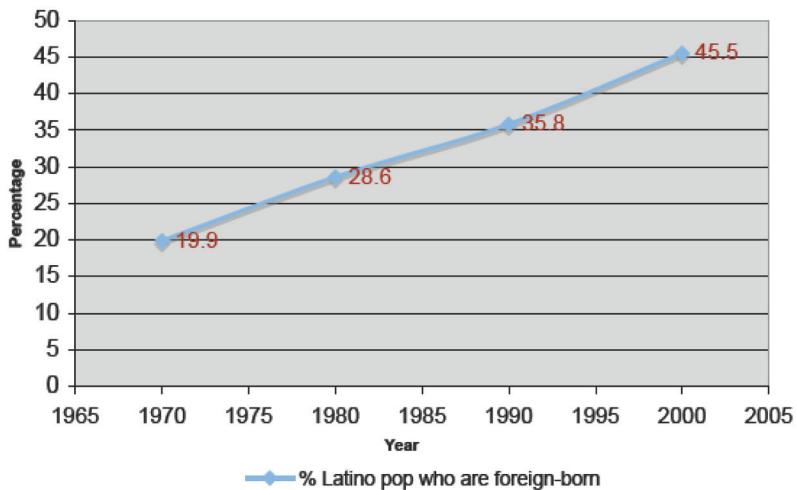
We argue that the rates of assimilation among Latinos (as measured by their generational status and language proficiency), combined with U.S. immigration trends, explain why they are more trusting of government than non-Latinos. Typically, the immigrant experience is described in terms of the classic assimilation model, which focuses on socioeconomic factors as the primary determinant of social and economic, as well as political, incorporation (Dahl, 1961; Wolfinger, 1974). This model associates increased levels of socioeconomic well-being with one's rate of integration into the political system. Based on this model, Latinos, over time, should become more politically cynical and skeptical of the federal government as they become increasingly exposed and familiar with the dominant culture and adopt the views held by most Americans. But when Latinos first arrive to the United States, they may possess a great amount of political trust for a number of reasons. As discussed earlier, the majority of immigrants from Latin America and Mexico immigrate to the United States for economic reasons (Portes & Rumbaut, 1996), knowing full well both the economic and quality of life opportunities available to them in America relative to their homeland. This optimistic outlook should go hand in hand with their beliefs about the American government, therefore causing first-generation immigrants to hold the American government in high regard. Moreover, recent immigrants have yet to become incorporated into mainstream American culture. This would suggest that the more assimilated an individual is, as measured by traditional measures such as generational status and language proficiency, the less likely she or he will be more politically trusting.

An additional factor that affects racial minorities' attitudes toward government is their experience with discrimination. For immigrants who are considered to be a racialized group in the United States (Glazer & Moynihan, 1970; Greeley, 1971; Portes & Rumbaut, 1996; Zhou, 1999), their experience with discrimination serves to reemphasize the distinctive nature of the ethnic group, and perpetuate ethnic patterns and customs. Thus, despite advancements at the socioeconomic level, discrimination may cause immigrants to feel less politically empowered and efficacious. This is known as the segmented assimilation theory. Some empirical support for this argument exists; Mexican Americans with higher socioeconomic status and longer residency in America who report encounters with discrimination are less likely to become politically incorporated (Hero, 1992). Moreover, Garcia Bedolla (2005) finds that participation in electoral politics and trust in government decline with one's generational status. Although first-generation Mexican Americans in Los Angeles strongly believe that the government should solve community problems like crime, education, and after-school programs, later-generation Mexican Americans view their own community as the primary way to resolve their issues and concerns. In fact, the most acculturated Mexican Americans (third-generation or later) feel that the government should not be expected to solve the problems of Latinos. Such attitudes are formed, in part, as a result of their experiences with discrimination and their perceptions of the federal government's willingness to help their community (Garcia Bedolla, 2005). Thus, Latinos who have experienced discrimination may be less trusting of government than those with no experiences of discrimination. One factor, however, that could possibly offset these negative attitudes for racial and ethnic minorities is if they live in politically empowered areas. The research by Bobo and Gilliam (1990), Griffin and Keane (2006), and Barreto et al. (2004) find that minorities' residing in areas represented by coethnic politicians can have a positive impact on their political behavior. In particular, Bobo and Gilliam's (1990) research finds that Blacks living in Los Angeles during Mayor Tom Bradley's tenure reported higher levels of political trust and efficacy than did Whites.

These theories of assimilation, along with U.S. immigration trends over the past 30 years, offers several predictions pertaining to Latinos' and non-Latinos' trust in government. As Figure 1 demonstrates, the percentage of immigrants originating from Latin America has gradually increased from 1970 to 2000. This means that the foreign-born (or first-generation) segment of the Latino population is constantly being replenished. Although less than 20% of the Latino population in 1970 were foreign-born, there has

**Figure 1**  
**Percentage of Foreign-Born Latinos in the**  
**United States, 1970 to 2000**

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Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

been a steady increase through 2000: in 2000, the foreign-born component of the Latino population is more than 45%.<sup>4</sup>

If less acculturated Latinos are more trusting than those who are more fully assimilated into the United States, then over time we would expect a larger and larger share of the Latino population to view the American government in a positive manner. Those who are the least assimilated, which is measured here by the percentage who are foreign-born, may have also had little to no experience with discrimination, as this generally does not occur until the second and third generation (Portes & Rumbaut, 1996). But even if Latinos experienced discrimination, the constant influx of new Latino immigrants would dominate opinions from later-generation Latinos in surveys. As such, analysis of Latino public opinion may predominantly come to reflect the views of the foreign-born population. The following section outlines our research design, followed by a discussion of the results emerging from our analysis.

## Hypotheses and Research Design

Altogether, we test three primary hypotheses; Hypothesis 1 expects individuals who have experienced racial discrimination to hold less favorable views of the government, relative to those with no experiences of discrimination. This would be consistent with the segmented assimilation model described by Zhou (1999) and others (e.g., Portes & Rumbaut, 1996). Our second hypothesis (Hypothesis 2) only pertains to Latinos; we expect those who are more assimilated and acculturated to be less politically trusting than recently arrived Latinos. The third and final hypothesis (Hypothesis 3) examines the role of political trust on public opinion toward government-sponsored initiatives; here, we expect political trust to play a positive and significant role on Latinos' attitudes toward redistributive policies.

We test Hypotheses 1 and 2 using data from the 2002 Pew Hispanic Center and the Kaiser Family Foundation National Survey of Latinos. This telephone survey took place from April 4 to June 11, 2002, and is composed of a nationally representative sample of randomly selected individuals 18 years and older. Altogether, more than 2,900 Latinos (composed of individuals from Mexico, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Central and South America) are interviewed, as well as 1,284 non-Latinos. The survey includes the most general question pertaining to political trust: how much do respondents "trust the government in Washington to do what is right." The possible responses are just about always, most of the time, some of the time, and never. This measure of trust serves as our dependent variable, and given its ordinal nature, we use ordered logit analysis.

To test our first hypothesis, we account for a respondent's experience with racial discrimination within the past 5 years. In addition, we account for instances when a respondent faced workplace discrimination (e.g., promotion or hiring) because of his or her ethnic or racial background. Encounters with discrimination, especially of the job-related kind, may cause Latinos and Blacks to be less trusting of the government in general when compared to those who have not experienced any racial discrimination, because they may feel that government efforts to resolve this problem have been ineffective. Each of these discrimination variables is treated as a dichotomous variable, with a 1 indicating that they had experienced the discrimination in question, 0 otherwise.

Recall that Hypothesis 2 examines the relationship between acculturation and political trust; we therefore test this hypothesis by focusing exclusively on Latino survey respondents. As measures of acculturation, we use generational status and language proficiency, which are considered to be

standard indicators in the immigrant assimilation literature (see Alba & Nee, 2003; Ramakrishnan, 2005; Zhou, 1999). A respondent's generational status, or nativity, is determined by his or her parents' birthplace along with his or her own place of birth. Latinos who are not born in the United States are considered to be first-generation, and those who are born in the United States but whose parents are born elsewhere are referred to as second-generation. Third-generation Latinos are those born in the United States as well as their parents. Those possessing fourth-generation status indicate that they, their parents, and their grandparents, are U.S.-born. We generate four dummy variables to capture generational status, with the baseline category being first-generation respondents. Our measure of language proficiency is based on several questions pertaining to a respondent's reading, writing, and speaking ability in English and in Spanish. This variable is composed of three categories, with a 1 denoting a respondent who is English dominant, 2 bilingual, and 3 Spanish-dominant.

The remaining independent variables used in this analysis control for the respondent's demographics, political beliefs, and economic evaluations. More specifically, one's marital status, partisanship, education and income level, gender, and age are accounted for. We code marital status as a dummy variable, with a 1 indicating that the respondent is married, 0 otherwise. One's gender is coded in the same manner, where a 1 indicates that the respondent is a woman, 0 a man. Age is treated as a continuous variable, ranging from young to old. We create three dummy variables for low, medium, and high income, with high income being the omitted category. We also create three dichotomous variables capturing the respondent's level of education: no high school degree, high school degree, and some college or beyond. The latter category serves as the baseline. In light of previous research finding that one's political views, especially those of the current administration, influence one's trust in government (Citrin & Muste, 1999; Craig, 1996), we control for a respondent's economic evaluations by using a question about his or her pocketbook finances. Respondents were asked whether their current financial situation, compared to a year ago, was better, the same, or worse. Each of the responses are coded as dummy variables, with those responding that their financial situation was worse being the omitted category. Finally, for our Black and Latino respondents, we take into account whether they reside in a politically empowered area; we wish to control for the important role that political empowerment might play in shaping one's trust in government. For Latino respondents, we measure political empowerment as the number of Latino elected officials in the state where they reside; for Black respondents, we use the number of Black

elected officials for our measure of political empowerment. These measures include all public elected officials at the state, county, and municipal levels as well as those in judicial, law enforcement, and education.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, to compare the effect of the independent variables on political trust for each ethnic and racial group, we estimated the model that tests Hypothesis 1 separately on Latinos, Anglos, and Blacks.<sup>6</sup> And because Hypothesis 2 specifically focuses on the relationship between levels of political trust and degree of assimilation into U.S. culture and society, we estimate this model only on those respondents who identified themselves as being Latino or Hispanic in the Pew Survey.

## Assessing the Impact of Political Trust on Public Opinion

Our third hypothesis (Hypothesis 3) turns to the potential impact of political trust on Latinos' and non-Latinos' attitudes toward redistributive policies. Thus we estimate a model where political trust is now on the right-hand side of the equation and a respondent's views on government-sponsored policies serve as the dependent variables. Focusing on redistributive policies allows us to test Hetherington's (2005) central findings that political trust plays an important role when it pertains to policies that the government is responsible for and also those where the benefit goes to a specific group.

Unfortunately, the 2002 Kaiser/Pew data did not include any questions pertaining to opinions on redistributive policies. As such, we test Hypothesis 3 using data from the National Annenberg Election Survey (NAES, 2004), which interviewed a sizable number of Latinos and non-Latinos prior to the 2004 general election (Romer et al., 2006).<sup>7</sup> Although the survey did not include a specific question pertaining to welfare, several redistributive questions are available. These questions focused on a respondent's support or opposition to (a) "the federal government trying to reduce the income differences between rich and poor Americans"; (b) "the federal government giving tax credits or vouchers to help parents send their children to private schools"; (c) "providing financial assistance to public elementary and secondary schools—should the federal government spend more on it, the same as now, less, or no money at all?"; (d) "providing health insurance for people who do not already have it—should the federal government spend more on it, the same as now, less, or no money at all?" Individuals' responses to the first two questions ranged from strongly oppose, somewhat oppose, neither favor or oppose, somewhat favor, and strongly favor. For these two questions, we create dummy variables, with a 1 indicating those who oppose

the policy and 0 for those who are in support of the policy. The third and fourth questions offered respondents with four choices (more, the same, less, or none). We again create dummy variables, with a 1 indicating those who favor less or no federal spending, and a 0 for those who favor either the same or more spending by the federal government. These four questions serve as the dependent variables of our model and we estimate each using logit analysis.

Clearly, the first question most directly captures an individual's attitudes toward redistributive policies and it also requires a large amount of sacrifice on the part of the individual, as those who would reap the benefits are concentrated to a few. The remaining three questions also have a redistributive component, though the amount of sacrifice is less, as more individuals would reap the benefits from such policies. There is some reason to believe that a moderate number of Latinos might benefit from these redistributive efforts. Slightly more than 22% of Latinos currently live in poverty, whereas 32.7% lack health insurance (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002).<sup>8</sup>

Although some may not perceive of vouchers as redistributive in nature, with the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act, the federal government plays an increasingly larger role in the funding of public schools. A greater amount of federal funding toward public education as well as school tax credits and vouchers would also assist Latinos, given that the gap in per pupil funding between minority and White school districts is more than \$1,000 (Carey, 2003); thus a greater amount of federal assistance could improve the schools Latino students attend or they could turn to tax credits or vouchers as alternatives to public education. Based on Hetherington's argument, we expect the high levels of political trust within the Latino population—along with the fact that a portion would benefit from these redistributive policies—would lead them to be more supportive of these policies than non-Latinos. On the other hand, as Latinos assimilate both socially and economically, they too may grow to oppose redistributive policies, unless a shared sense of linked fate (Dawson, 1994) compels them to base their political decisions on the interests of Latinos as a whole. But if the rates of Latino immigration to the United States continue at their current levels, the number of Latinos who become assimilated may be replenished by an equal number of newcomers.

Our main independent variable of interest in this analysis is political trust, which is coded as a categorical variable ranging from never to always trusting the government in Washington to do what is right. To determine whether a Latino's high levels of trust influences his or her attitudes toward redistributive policies, we include an interaction term for a Latino respondent and his or her level of political trust. We also control for a respondent's demographics

and political attitudes. Of course, one's political affiliation may influence one's views on these policies; thus we create dummy variables indicating a respondent's partisanship as Republican, Democrat, or Independent, with those responding as Independents being the comparison group. We also account for a respondent's ideology, ranging from very conservative to very liberal. Along with these political variables, a respondent's socioeconomic status may influence their attitudes toward redistribution. We include several dummy variables to indicate a respondent's educational level and his or her income category.<sup>9</sup> Age and gender are also controlled for, with age being a continuous variable and gender coded as a 1 for female, 0 for male. Finally, we account for a respondent's economic evaluations, as these could potentially influence his or her support or opposition to redistributive policies (Hetherington, 2005).

## Findings

We present our analyses in the following order. First, we examine how political trust varies with ethnicity, and for Latinos, how it varies across generational status, using both the 2002 Pew and 2004 NAES surveys. We follow this simple presentation of the data with our multivariate models that test for both hypotheses. The first set of analyses examines the determinants of political trust for Anglo, Black, and Latino respondents; we follow that analysis and discussion with our multivariate analysis of the factors influencing Latinos' and non-Latinos' redistributive policy attitudes.

### Political Trust by Race, Ethnicity, and Acculturation Measures

Table 1 gives a snapshot of respondents' attitudes toward government, by ethnicity, generational status, and language use; this is based on the 2002 Pew Hispanic Survey data. Table 2 presents respondents' trust in government and elected officials using the 2004 NAES data. The distributions presented in Table 1 indicate that a greater percentage of Latinos always trust government to do what is right, relative to the other ethnic or racial groups. Likewise, the percentage of Latinos who never trust government to do what is right is smaller than the percentage for White, Black, Asian and "Other race" respondents (3.2% versus 3.4%, 7.3%, 5.8%, 8.7%, respectively). As a point of comparison, the other large immigrant population in the United States, Asian Americans, are not as politically distrustful as Blacks, but are

**Table 1**  
**Opinions on Political Trust and Role of Government**

Variable: Trust Government to Do What Is Right	Race or Ethnicity				Generational Status				Language Use		
	White	Asian	Latino	Asian	First	Second	Third	Fourth	English	Bilingual	Spanish
Always	13.4	9.2	15.3	5.8	11.5	18.6	11.2	8.4	4.6	8.6	13.6
Most of the time	35.7	23.4	29.3	48.1	31.7	29	35.1	35.7	29.4	35.5	34.2
Some of the time	47.5	60.1	52.2	40.3	48.1	49.7	47.9	48.2	56	47.9	48.1
Never role of government	3.4	7.3	3.2	5.8	8.7	2.7	5.8	7.7	10	8.1	4.1
Lower taxes; smaller government	45.9	38.7	31.6	47.4	37.9	30.2	38.8	41	37.8	57.6	67.1
Higher taxes; bigger government	54.1	61.3	68.4	52.6	62.1	69.8	61.2	59	62.2	42.4	32.9
Provision of public services	46.3	41.7	59.9	41.2	48.9	62.3	49.6	36	40	59.6	43.9
Government better	53.7	58.3	40.1	58.8	51.2	37.7	50.4	64	60	40.4	56.1
Church and groups better	2,030	328	1,175	57	589	2,014	526	251	111	677	903
<i>n</i>											1,187

Note: Values are column percentages and are calculated using the Pew National Hispanic Survey of 2002.

**Table 2**  
**Opinions on Political Trust: 2004 Elections**

Variable: Political Trust	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Other
Trust government to do what is right					
Always	1.6	2.5	6.3	2.8	4.6
Most times	25.8	15.4	26.2	26.5	21.1
Sometime	64.7	66.1	56.8	63.7	59.8
Never	7.9	15.4	7.6	5.1	11.7
<i>n</i>	15,121	1,508	1,432	317	717
Trust in the honesty of elected officials					
Great deal	3.0	3.0	7.4	10.4	7.4
Fair amount	45.3	35.9	46.4	44.4	38.6
Not much	42.6	43.9	35.2	35.7	38.8
None	7.9	15.9	8.8	7.0	11.3
<i>n</i>	7,222	660	619	115	363

Source: 2004 National Annenberg Election Survey. Values are column percentages.

more distrusting than Latinos; 5.8% of Asians never trust government to do what is right, compared with 3.2% for Latinos and 7.3% for Blacks. In addition, when we examine the other two questions on government's role in society, we again see that Latinos are more trusting and supportive of government than are members of any other racial or ethnic group: 68.4% of Latinos stated that they prefer more taxes and a bigger government, and 59.9% stated that a bigger government is better for the provision of public services. The 2004 Annenberg survey also includes a question pertaining to an individual's trust in the honesty of elected officials. As the distribution from Table 2 demonstrates, Latinos and Asians are more trusting of the honesty of their elected officials than Whites and Blacks. Consistent with their levels of trust in government, we see that Blacks are the least trusting of politicians (15.9%), when compared to the other three racial groups.

By comparing the rates of political trust for the three dominant racial groups in the United States using both the 2002 Pew and the 2004 NAES data, we see again that Latinos are the most politically trusting, followed by Asians and Blacks. Although one may have expected Asian Americans to follow the same trajectory as Latinos, because both groups share in the immigrant experience, it appears that they are not as trustful as Latinos. Why this is the case is not entirely clear, but perhaps generational status does not explain their levels of political trust as well as it does for Latinos.<sup>10</sup> Unfortunately, we cannot test this hypothesis with the data from the 2002 Pew survey, as the

**Table 3**  
**Ordered Logit Estimates: Determinants of High Political Trust**

	Coefficient (STD Error)
Female	0.05* (-0.02)
Age	-0.001 (0.001)
Education	-0.002 (0.01)
Black <sup>a</sup>	-0.08* (-0.04)
Latino <sup>a</sup>	0.26** (-0.04)
Liberal	0.00† (-0.01)
Democrat	0.13** (-0.03)
Republican	0.21** (-0.03)
Economic indicators	
Poor economic evaluation	0.25** (-0.02)
Personal finances worse	-0.10** (-0.01)
Country going in right direction	0.47** (-0.03)
N	13,730
Log likelihood	11321.45

a. The omitted category is Anglo respondents.

Source: 2004 National Annenberg Election Survey.

\* Estimate significant at  $p < .01$  level. \*\* Estimate significant at  $p < .05$  level. †Estimate significant at  $p < 10$  level.

generational status question was only asked to Latino respondents.<sup>11</sup> To confirm that Latinos are more trusting than other ethnic or racial groups, we estimate a multivariate model using the 2004 NAES data, where political trust is the dependent variable and explanatory variables consist of demographic and political indicators.<sup>12</sup> Table 3 presents these estimates.

These logit estimates confirm the bivariate distributions; Latinos are more likely to be politically trusting than are Anglos. And consistent with previous research in the race and politics literature, we see that Blacks are more likely to have low trust in government when compared to Anglos. Our

multivariate estimates from the 2004 NAES are in line with the patterns of political trust from the NES data and the Pew Hispanic Center, and thus serve to confirm this basic result.

## Determinants of Political Trust for Latinos, Whites, and Blacks

Although these findings confirm that Latinos are more politically trusting than other Americans, it still does not explain why this is so. The distributions given in Table 1 can once again provide us with several insights. When we examine levels of political trust by our two indicators of assimilation, the most politically trustful Latinos are those who have most recently arrived, and as we move toward more distant immigrant arrival, this high level of political trust gradually declines. At the opposite end of the political trust scale, those responding in the *never* category, a much larger percentage of fourth-generation Latinos are distrustful when compared to earlier generations. Thus, a strong pattern emerges when we examine Latinos' rates of political trust by their generational status; those who have newly arrived in the United States tend to hold the highest levels of political trust, but those Latinos whose families have had a longer presence in the United States are more cynical and pessimistic toward the U.S. government. When we look at political trust by language use, a similar pattern emerges. A larger percentage of Latinos whose primary language is Spanish always trust the government to do what is right (21.6%) relative to Latinos who are bilingual (13.6%) as well as for Latinos whose primary language is English (8.6%). At the other end of the trust scale—those who never trust the government—we see that more Latinos whose primary language is English feel this way, followed by bilingual and then only-Spanish-speaking Latinos.

Along with these indicators of acculturation, recall that the segmented assimilation theory placed a strong emphasis on the impact of discrimination on an immigrant's political incorporation. Thus we control for the possible effects of a respondent's encounters with discrimination, as well as other predictors of trust. We use the 2002 Pew Hispanic Survey to estimate the coefficients of this model, because it includes information on respondents' experiences with discrimination and their generational status, whereas the 2004 NAES data do not. Table 4 presents these estimates and Table 5 provides the estimated marginal effects from these logit models. Estimating the model separately on Anglo, Black, and Latino respondents makes it possible to compare the effect of the explanatory variables on the levels of political trust by a respondent's ethnic or racial identity.

**Table 4**  
**Ordered Logit Estimates: Determinants of High Political Trust**

Variable	Latinos		Anglos		Blacks	
	Coefficient	Standard Error	Coefficient	Standard Error	Coefficient	Standard Error
<b>Political/financial</b>						
Democrat	.04	.10	-.21 <sup>†</sup>	.12	.15	.28
Republican	.75**	.11	.56*	.11	.94	.61
Finances better	.50**	.12	.58*	.13	.75*	.38
Finances same	.24*	.11	.30*	.12	.27	.33
<b>Demographics</b>						
Women	.13	.08	.20*	.09	.51†	.27
Married	.05	.09	.06	.10	-.52†	.27
Age	-.00	.00	-.00	.00	.01	.01
Low-income	.05	.12	.01	.13	.21	.37
Medium-income	.13	.12	.09	.12	-.01	.36
No high school degree	.26*	.12	.23	.15	-.11	.43
High school degree	-.08	.11	-.01	.11	-.51	.31
Mexican	.22*	.10	—	—	—	—
Cuban	.69**	.14	—	—	—	—
<b>Experiences with discrimination</b>						
No discrimination	.38**	.09	.46*	.12	.42	.29
Workplace discrimination	-.28**	.12	-.05	.15	-.74*	.30

(continued)

Table 4 (continued)

Variable	Latinos		Anglos		Blacks	
	Coefficient	Standard Error	Coefficient	Standard Error	Coefficient	Standard Error
<b>Acculturation measures</b>						
Spanish is primary language	.12*	.07	—	—	—	—
Second generation	.05	.12	—	—	—	—
Third generation	-.07	.17	—	—	—	—
Fourth generation	-.60**	.24	—	—	—	—
Political empowerment						
No. of Black/Latino elected officials	.18**	.07	—	—	-.01	.68
<i>n</i>	2,261		1,703		255	

Note: The dependent variable is political trust, which is a categorical variable, ranging from least to most trusting. Although these models were estimated separately on Latino and Anglo respondents, we also ran a pooled model interacting each of the independent variables with the respondent's ethnicity (Anglo and Latino). A Chow-test of this pooled model yielded a  $\chi^2$  test statistic of 49.27, which is statistically significant at the  $p < .01$  level.

As such, these coefficients, which are estimated on a subset of the data, would produce the same coefficients if the data were pooled.

Source: The data are from the Kaiser/Pew Latino Survey of 2002.

\* Estimate significant at  $p < .01$  level. \*\* Estimate significant at  $p < .05$  level. †Estimate significant at  $p < .10$  level.

**Table 5**  
**Marginal Effects: Likelihood of Always Trusting the Government**

Variable	Latinos		Anglos		Blacks	
	Coefficient	Standard Error	Coefficient	Standard Error	Coefficient	Standard Error
<b>Political/financial</b>						
Democrat	.001	.01	-.02 <sup>†</sup>	.01	.01	.02
Republican	.10 <sup>**</sup>	.02	.06 <sup>**</sup>	.01	.10	.08
Finances better	.06 <sup>**</sup>	.02	.07 <sup>**</sup>	.02	.06 <sup>†</sup>	.04
Finances same	.03 <sup>*</sup>	.01	.03 <sup>**</sup>	.01	.02	.02
<b>Demographics</b>						
Women	.02	.01	.02 <sup>*</sup>	.01	.04 <sup>†</sup>	.02
Married	.01	.01	.01	.01	-.03 <sup>†</sup>	.02
Age	-.00	.00	-.00	.00	.00	.00
Low-income	.01	.01	.00	.01	.01	.03
Medium-income	.01	.01	.01	.01	-.00	.03
No high school degree	.03 <sup>*</sup>	.01	.03	.02	-.01	.03
High school degree	.01	.01	-.00	.01	-.03	.02
Mexican	-.02 <sup>*</sup>	.01	—	—	—	—
Cuban	.10 <sup>**</sup>	.02	—	—	—	—
<b>Experiences with discrimination</b>						
No discrimination	.04 <sup>**</sup>	.01	.04 <sup>**</sup>	.01	.42	.29
Workplace discrimination	-.03 <sup>**</sup>	.01	-.00	.02	-.05 <sup>*</sup>	.02

(continued)

Table 5 (continued)

Variable	Latinos		Anglos		Blacks	
	Coefficient	Standard Error	Coefficient	Standard Error	Coefficient	Standard Error
Acculturation measures						
Spanish is primary language	.01 <sup>†</sup>	.01	—	—	—	—
Second generation	.01	.01	—	—	—	—
Third generation	-.00	.02	—	—	—	—
Fourth generation	-.06 <sup>**</sup>	.02	—	—	—	—
Political empowerment						
Number of Black/Latino elected officials in state	.02 <sup>**</sup>	.01	—	—	-.00	.05
<i>n</i>			1,703		2,261	255

Note: The dependent variable is political trust, which is a categorical variable, ranging from least to most trusting. Although these models were estimated separately on Latino and Anglo respondents, we also ran a pooled model interacting each of the independent variables with the respondent's ethnicity (Anglo and Latino). A Chow-test of this pooled model yielded a  $\chi^2$  test statistic of 49.27, which is statistically significant at the  $p < .01$  level. As such, these coefficients, which are estimated on a subset of the data, would produce the same coefficients if the data were pooled.

Source: Data are from the Kaiser/Pew Latino Survey of 2002.

\* Estimate significant at  $p < .01$  level. \*\* Estimate significant at  $p < .05$  level. <sup>†</sup>Estimate significant at  $p < .10$  level.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that an individual's experiences with discrimination will influence his or her political trust. For Latinos, those with no experiences of discrimination are more likely to be politically trusting, relative to Latinos who have encountered discrimination. Likewise, a Latino who has encountered workplace discrimination is less likely to be politically trusting when compared to a Latino who has never encountered workplace discrimination. Interestingly, the effect of general discrimination on political trust is slightly greater than the effect of workplace discrimination (.04 vs. .03). This may suggest that Latinos who have had any experiences with discrimination may project these encounters on their views toward the government. For whites, we see that discrimination appears to operate in the same way—no experiences with racial discrimination make them more politically trusting. However, for Blacks, only those events relating to workplace discrimination affect their levels of political trust. Blacks who are discriminated against in the workplace are less likely to be politically trusting than those with no experiences of workplace discrimination. Workplace discrimination also has a bigger impact on the likelihood of being most trustful for African Americans (−.05) than it did for Latinos (−.03). It is unclear why this might be the case, but perhaps given African Americans' history of institutional discrimination in the United States (Dawson, 1994), such experiences may be more closely correlated to their attitudes toward the government than it is for Latinos.

Moving on, our second hypothesis (Hypothesis 2) focused on the extent to which assimilation affects political trust. Again, because this hypothesis pertains to immigrants, we focus solely on Latino respondents from the survey. The coefficient indicating those Latinos who are fourth generation is statistically significant and negatively signed. This estimate suggests that Latinos who are the most assimilated into the United States, as measured by their generational status, are less likely to be politically trusting than the most recent arrivals, first-generation Latinos. To place this into substantive terms, a fourth-generation Latino is .06 times less likely to be politically trusting than a first-generation Latino. Moreover, our other measure of acculturation, language proficiency, is also statistically significant and signed in the expected direction. Latinos who describe themselves as Spanish-dominant in their language skills are more politically trusting than English-dominant Latinos. Overall, both measures of assimilation support the expectation that as immigrants become more assimilated and integrated into the culture and practices of their host country, they too will begin to adopt their political attitudes and perceptions.

Along with these key variables of interest, we see that a Latino's partisanship, financial situation, demographics, as well as whether they reside in politically empowered areas help to explain their levels of political trust.

For instance, Latinos with no high school degree are more likely to be politically trusting than are college-educated Latinos. Those with a college education may be more cynical and critical of the government, relative to those with less schooling, as a function of their greater levels of knowledge of U.S. politics. In terms of subgroup differences, we see that Cubans are more politically trusting than Puerto Ricans. Mexicans, however, are less politically trusting than Puerto Ricans. Considering the large amount of federal assistance provided to Cubans both in the past and in the present (Garcia, 1996) as well as their strong alliance with the Republican Party, it is understandable why they might have more faith in the federal government than would other Latino groups. Though given the Clinton administration's handling of the Elian Gonzalez case in 2000, we may have also expected Cubans to have become less trusting of the government by 2002. Moreover, one's economic evaluations influences one's levels of political trust; a Latino who considers his or her financial situation to be the same rather than worse when compared to that a year ago is more trusting in government (.03). Those who perceive their financial situation to have improved, relative to that from a year ago, are more likely to always trust the government by an even greater amount (.06). Consistent with previous work on political trust, one's economic evaluations, in this case measured by pocketbook finances, affects one's levels of political trust. Finally, confirming the previous research of Barreto et al. (2004), Latinos who reside in politically empowered areas are more trusting of government than those living in areas with lower levels of Latino political empowerment. Thus, the greater the number of Latinos elected to public office, the more likely will a Latino exhibit higher levels of political trust.

For Anglos, their partisanship, financial situation, and gender affect their levels of political trust. The largest factor driving their trust in government is their party identification; Republicans are more politically trusting than Independents. Again, this is consistent with previous research that finds partisans to be more trusting of the current administration when it is their political party (Citrin, 1974). In this case, those who identify themselves as Republicans, rather than as Independents, are more trusting of the current Republican administration. Economic evaluations also explain Anglos' trust in government. Those who view their financial situation as either better or the same are more trusting than those who perceive their financial situation to be worse. Turning to the estimates for Black respondents, personal finances affect their attitudes toward government. Blacks who perceive their finances to be better, as opposed to worse, increase their probability of highly trusting the government. Moreover, among Black respondents, we see that women are more trusting of government than men;

those who are married are also more likely to exhibit high rates of political trust than those who are not married. Rather surprisingly, Black political empowerment has no impact on Blacks' levels of political trust. The coefficient capturing the effect of political empowerment for Blacks is statistically insignificant and signed in the opposite direction. Thus, although political empowerment proved to be an important determinant to Latino political trust, the same dynamic does not appear to hold for Blacks.

## **Political Trust and Latino Attitudes About Redistribution**

The variation in political trust we see across racial and ethnic groups in America may also produce differences in policy views and opinions. In light of Hetherington's research (2005), we focus on the impact of political trust on federal governmental policies. Table 6 presents the logit estimates from models examining the impact of political trust on individuals' opinions toward redistributive policies. Of these four policies, a Latino's trust in government is important in his or her attitudes toward school vouchers or tax credits and federally sponsored health insurance. Consistent with Hetherington's findings, high levels of political trust positively influence a Latino's support of federally sponsored policies. The coefficient on the variable that interacts a Latino respondent with his or her level of political trust is negative and statistically significant (-.81); thus a Latino with a high level of political trust is less likely to favor a reduction in health insurance spending than a non-Latino with a low level of political trust. This result supports our hypothesis; given that Latinos' levels of political trust are higher than those of Anglos and Blacks, their trust in government make them more supportive of federally sponsored initiatives than non-Latinos. In addition to their high levels of trust, recall that approximately one of three Latinos lack health insurance in the United States; such a combination makes it understandable why Latinos would be more supportive of federal spending on health insurance than would non-Latinos.

Trust in government also determines one's support for tax credits or vouchers for schools. The coefficient on the variable that interacts Latino identity with political trust is statistically significant and signed in the expected direction (-.26). Thus, a politically trusting Latino is less likely to oppose federal efforts at offering school tax credits or vouchers than a less politically trusting non-Latino. Although school vouchers or tax credits are not redistributive policies in the classic sense, they are directly attributable to the federal government. This result is similar to Hetherington's findings on public support for affirmative action, where political trust plays a critical

**Table 6**  
**Logit Estimates: The Impact of Political Trust on Redistributive Policy Opinions**

	Oppose Tax Credit/Vouchers			Oppose Helping the Poor			Less Federal Spending on Public Schools			Less Federal Spending on Health Insurance		
	Estimated Coefficient	Standard Error	Estimated Coefficient	Standard Error	Estimated Coefficient	Standard Error	Estimated Coefficient	Standard Error	Estimated Coefficient	Standard Error	Estimated Coefficient	Standard Error
Constant	-2.84*	0.15	0.22	0.21	4.49*	0.44	1.83*	0.48				
Political												
High political trust	0.04	0.03	0.00	0.05	-0.61*	0.09	0.23**	0.10				
Latino high trust	-0.26**	0.11	-0.08	0.15	-0.40	0.36	-0.81**	0.35				
Very liberal	0.33*	0.01	-0.35*	0.03	0.58*	0.06	0.48*	0.06				
Democrat	0.21*	0.04	-0.43*	0.07	0.96*	0.17	0.77*	0.19				
Republican	-0.25*	0.05	0.27*	0.06	-0.17	0.11	-0.22	0.13				
Poor economic evaluation	0.30*	0.03	-0.33**	0.04	0.29*	0.07	0.51	0.08				
Demographics												
Education	0.02**	0.01	0.01	0.01	-0.04	0.02	0.02	0.03				
Income	0.05*	0.01	0.11	0.01	-0.08	0.03	-0.11	0.03				
Female	-0.11	0.04	0.13*	0.05	-0.57*	0.10	-0.58*	0.11				
Age	0.02	0.00	0.01*	0.00	-0.03*	0.00	-0.01*	0.00				
Latino	-1.52*	0.31	-0.30	0.41	-1.00	0.99	-1.89*	0.86				
Log likelihood	-9,268.07		-4,762.48		-1,568.72		-1,176.94					
n	14,433		7,903		7,426		4,705					

Source: Data are from the 2004 National Annenberg Election Survey.

\*  $p = .01$ . \*\*  $p = .05$ .

**Table 7**  
**First-Difference Estimates**

Probability of Opposing Federal Spending on	Latino Goes From Never Trusting to		
	Sometimes Trusting the Government	Most of the Time Trusting the Government	Always Trusting the Government
Health insurance	-.01 (.00)	-.02 (.01)	-.02 (.01)
School tax credits or vouchers	-.06 (.02)	-.12 (.05)	-.17 (.06)

Note: Values outside parenthesis are first-difference estimates and indicate the likelihood of opposing one of the scenarios in the row entries, based on the given column scenarios. Values in parentheses are standard errors. These estimates were calculated based on the logit estimates from Table 5.

role in one's support for a policy that is closely linked to the federal government. Also, given the caliber of public education available to most Latinos, they may view school vouchers and tax credits as viable alternatives.

We next calculate first-difference estimates to determine the impact of political trust on Latino's attitudes toward these two policies. To do so, we use a hypothetical Latino respondent by setting all variables other than political trust to their mean or mode. We then focus on several counterfactual scenarios: (a) when the respondent goes from never to sometimes trusting the government; (b) when the respondent goes from never to most of the time trusting the government; (c) when the respondent goes from never to always trusting the government.

For the first scenario, we estimate the hypothetical respondent's probability of opposing federal spending on health insurance or vouchers when he never trusts the government and then calculate the same probability when he trusts the government some of the time. The second scenario estimates the hypothetical respondent's probability of never trusting the government and then the probability when he trusts the government most of the time. Finally, the third counterfactual scenario calculates the probability of never trusting the government to always trusting the government. The difference between these two probabilities, for each of the scenarios, produces the first-difference estimates. They are presented in Table 7.

These first-difference estimates demonstrate the importance of political trust in a Latino's views on school vouchers and government efforts to assist the uninsured. As we expected, more trust in government leads to greater support for these federally sponsored policies, though political trust has a

larger impact on a Latino's attitudes toward school vouchers than it does for federally sponsored health insurance. For instance, we see that a Latino who goes from never to sometimes trusting the government decreases his likelihood of opposing federal spending on vouchers by .06. And when this hypothetical Latino goes from never to most of the time trusting the government, his probability of opposing federal spending on vouchers drops by .12. The biggest impact of political trust on a Latino's policy views occurs when he shifts from being the least to the most politically trustful; this reduces his likelihood of opposing government spending on vouchers by .17. On the policy of federally assisted health insurance, we see how political trust plays a smaller role on our hypothetical Latino's attitudes. Regardless of a change in one's trust in government, its greatest impact is minimal at .02. Nonetheless, we do find evidence that how trusting a Latino is in government affects his or her policy opinions and attitudes. And given that Latinos have greater trust in government than the rest of the American population, this may shape the overall distribution of American public opinion in the years to come.

## Conclusion

At the onset of this article, we presented a rather straightforward but perplexing empirical puzzle: Why are Latinos more trusting of government than Anglos or Blacks? Our answer to this puzzle rests on two factors—patterns of assimilation and immigration trends. First, we find strong evidence that a Latino's generational status plays a significant role in determining how politically trusting they are: First-generation Latinos are much more trusting of the federal government than are later-generation Latinos. The reason for this is straightforward; first-generation immigrants are generally more optimistic and enthusiastic about the economic opportunities that await them in their host country. As such, we expect their views and attitudes toward government to be more positive than those of later-generation immigrants. Classic assimilation theory also predicts that as immigrants become more acculturated and integrated into the dominant society, their opinions will begin to mirror those of the majority, thereby gaining a more skeptical and cynical outlook of the federal government.

The second factor relates to immigration trends; according to the U.S. Census, the rate of Latino immigration has consistently increased from 1970 to 2000. Because the Latino population is being continually replenished with a large percentage of foreign-born individuals, Latinos' overall levels of political trust may be overrepresented by the opinions and attitudes of the foreign-born population. And although Latinos' levels of political trust follow

the general pattern of Anglos and Blacks, it is consistently higher over the time period that we focus on. Thus, when these two factors are combined, we see why Latinos are more politically trusting than Blacks and Anglos. And in light of the terrorist attacks that took place on September 11, 2001, we may expect these patterns to continue in the years to come.

We also demonstrate the importance of political trust on Latinos' attitudes toward redistributive policies. More politically trusting Latinos supported government assistance in providing help to the uninsured as well as offering school vouchers and tax credits. Thus, the fact that Latinos' levels of political trust are higher than Anglos' and Blacks' is nontrivial; political trust is a significant predictor of Latinos' policy views, particularly on those that their group stands to benefit from. Now one possibility is that once Latinos become incorporated into society, their support for such policies will also decline, but if they believe that their political well-being is linked to Latinos as a whole (Dawson's concept of linked fate), then we may see continued support for these policies. Although we were unable to determine whether this was the case because of data limitations, this would certainly be a worthwhile project for future research efforts.

## Notes

1. We also note a similar pattern over time (1972-2004) using data from the American National Election Studies. Although we recognize the shortcomings associated with these data in analyzing racial group behavior, we find a similar pattern to that in the Pew National Hispanic Survey of 2002. These data are available on request from the authors.

2. These figures are from "Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign-Born Population of the United States: 1850-1990" by Campbell J. Gibson and Emily Lennon, Population Division, U.S. Bureau of the Census.

3. The extremely limited number of Latinos interviewed in the National Election Studies could also be another potential reason.

4. These figures are from "Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign-Born Population of the United States: 1850-2000" by Campbell J. Gibson and Kay Jung, Population Division, U.S. Bureau of the Census, Working Paper No. 81, February 2006.

5. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2008. The estimates for Black elected officials are based on 2002 figures, whereas the estimates for Latinos are based on 2006 figures.

6. We also ran a pooled model interacting each of the independent variables with the respondent's ethnicity (Anglo and Latino). A Chow-test of this pooled model yielded a  $\chi^2$  test statistic of 49.27, which is statistically significant at the  $p < .01$  level.

7. The NAES was conducted by Daniel Romer, Kate Kenski, Kenneth Winneg, Christopher Adasiewicz, and Kathleen Hall Jamieson of the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania. Although use of the American National Election Survey (ANES) would allow us to compare our results more directly with Hetherington's, very few Latinos are interviewed each year. For instance, 89 respondents were interviewed who were

of Hispanic or Latino descent in 2002. In 2000, the number interviewed was only slightly higher at 113. From 1972 to 2002, a total of 1,399 Latinos were interviewed by the ANES.

8. <http://www.cbpp.org/8-29-06health.htm>.

9. These variables were coded in the same manner as the previous model.

10. The percentage of Asians who are foreign-born is somewhat comparable to that of Latinos. From 1990 to 2000, 39.5% of Asians were foreign-born, 28.3% from 1980 to 1989, and 16.2% from 1970 to 1979.

11. Also, because the sample of Asian respondents is so small ( $n = 57$ ), any conclusive statements of trust, by generational status, would have also been difficult to make had a question about generational status been posed to Asian respondents.

12. We also estimated a similar model on the Pew data, which produced similar results. The reason we present the Annenberg results is it more closely follows Hetherington's model of the determinants of political trust. In particular, the Annenberg Survey included several questions pertaining to the economy, whereas the Pew did not.

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