

Latino Politics

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction: Latinos and US Politics

Objectives

- Understand the definitions of agency and structure
- Understand what it means for race to be a social construction
- Understand the historical meaning and privileges that have been attached to whiteness in the United States
- Understand how Latinos fit (or not) into the US racial structure
- Understand the political, social, and economic implications of how Latinos were categorized racially
- Understand the effect US foreign and economic policy has on Latin American countries, on Latinos' decisions to migrate, and on their treatment upon arrival

Latinos, Immigration, and Politics

Scholars studying Latinos in the United States focus a great deal on issues of immigration and of political participation. Interestingly, both these issues most often are conceptualized as individual acts. Immigration is seen as a personal decision made by an individual or family, with little consideration of the macroeconomic context that influences that decision. Similarly, political engagement is most often discussed as (by and large) an individual choice. Individuals choose to vote, contact their elected officials, or run for political office. If they do not do so, it is because of a lack of interest rather than because of any sort of larger, structural constraint.

Yet the fact of the matter is that none of us, as individuals, can act with complete freedom, or with *agency* – defined as ‘the capacity, condition, or state of acting or of exerting power’.¹ In other words, agency is about how much we, as individuals, can accomplish on our own; about our ability to determine, by ourselves, the direction of our lives. Yet there are also institutional structures that may impede our ability to exercise that agency – to do exactly what we want, when we want it, and the way we want it. On

the most basic level there are rules and laws which limit our freedom of action. But, more importantly, there are also other kinds of institutional structures, social, political, or economic, which may constrain an individual's ability to act. Those structures include, but are not limited to, the employment and the housing markets, the legal system, including immigration rules, the political system, the educational system, and so on. How these structures operate within an individual's life varies over time and by geographic location. They are not static, yet they are not always easy to change either. Thus structures have an important impact on the individuals' ability to change their life for the better.

In this book I will explore the migration processes and political activity of the population of Latin American origin in the United States, placing an emphasis on the interaction between agency and structure. For example, during the Central American solidarity movement, the United States government refused to characterize Central American migrants as political refugees, despite the violence and political upheaval that existed in their home countries. These migrants were able to exercise agency in deciding to leave their homelands, yet were structurally constrained by the US government when they attempted to regularize their migration status in the United States. Yet, as we will see in Chapter 6, in coalition with other migrants and political organizations, they mobilized to change the US government's position and were partly successful, thus changing the institutional structure which future Central American migrants would face when arriving in the United States.

The Central American case is a good example of the interplay between agency and structure and of why it is important. When considering political activity and engagement, particularly that of minority groups, we must realize that there is a historical background and an institutional context which frame an individual's decision-making process. In order to decide to act politically, an individual must feel empowered to do so and must feel that her action can make a difference. If that person comes from a community or group which, historically, has not had much influence in the political system, it is less likely that she will feel that that is the best way to spend her time; or it is more likely that she will choose non-traditional forms of engagement (like protesting) in order to express her political views. Thus individuals do not make decisions in a vacuum.

The purpose of this book is to give the reader the historical and institutional context within which to situate US Latino politics. Understanding that context will help the reader also to understand why Latinos make

the decisions they do and what structural factors influence these choices. Only to look at one or the other is to miss an important part of the story.

Defining Latino: What's in a Name?

This text examines the history, migration, and politics of different groups of Latin American origin living in the United States. To begin with, it is important to consider what these groups should be called. The title of my book uses the word 'Latino', which is meant to describe all individuals, foreign and US born, who have ancestry in any of the Spanish-speaking nations of Latin America.² The term 'Hispanic' was adopted by the United States government during the 1970s and has the same definition as 'Latino'. 'Chicano' is meant to describe, specifically, individuals of Mexican origin in the United States. This term came directly out of the political organizing within the Mexican American community in the US south-west during the 1960s; hence its usage often presumes a certain political consciousness, in addition to being a national-origin identifier. 'Boricua' is a term used to describe Puerto Ricans in the United States (it comes from the name of an indigenous group native to the island), and 'Nuyorican', more specifically, is sometimes used to denote individuals of Puerto Rican origin living in New York City. Thus there are many terms which are used to describe individuals of Latin American origin; some of them are national-origin specific, others spring directly from the political mobilization of the community or from the desire of group members to come up with new terms to describe themselves. For the sake of simplicity, this text uses the term 'Latino' to refer to groups of Latin American origin generally, and national-origin specific terms to describe the experiences of individuals from particular countries. But it is important to note that these labels can be politically or personally important. Many Latinos choose to use different words to describe their identities – terms that are grounded in their particular historical, personal, and political experiences.

Latinos' 'Ethnicity' and 'Race'

The fact that this book focuses on the experiences of Latinos in the United States also implies that Latinos constitute a social group, one that should be the focus of the present study. But what does it mean for something to be a social group? Political theorist Iris Young described

a social group as 'a collective of persons differentiated from others by cultural forms, practices, special needs or capacities, structure of power, or privilege' (Young 2000: 153). According to Young, what makes a collection of people into a group is 'less some set of attributes its members share than the relation in which they stand to others'. In other words, defining Latinos as a social group does not mean that we need to assume that all Latinos are the same, share the same experiences, or have the same goals or aspirations. We will see in the next chapters that this is not the case. Latino national-origin groups have had very different experiences in the United States. They arrived at different points in American history, migrated for very different reasons, settled in different geographic settings, and have been treated in disparate ways by the United States government. There are important experiential differences within Latino national-origin groups as well; these are due to geographic location, class status, gender, sexual orientation, and other factors. Despite this heterogeneity, what is similar about the experiences of all US Latinos, however, is where they were placed in the US racial hierarchy and how that placement has affected their social, political, and economic opportunities.

Yet, given their differences of experience and background, if Latinos are a social group, are they also a racial group or an ethnic one? The distinction between these two characterizations has been the source of ongoing debates among scholars – debates which will not be resolved here. The term 'race' presupposes a common biological or genealogical ancestry among people. 'Ethnicity' places more of an emphasis on culture than on common genetic traits. In an attempt to bring together both concepts, sociologists Michael Omi and Howard Winant (1994) define 'race' as 'a concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies'. They emphasize social conflicts in order to get us away from biological understandings of what race is. There is no biological foundation for separate 'races' of humans. As recent DNA tests have proven, many individuals whom we see as 'black' are in fact more European than African in terms of their DNA. For example, Henry Louis Gates, a prominent African American intellectual, found he has as much European DNA as West African DNA (most African Americans are about 20 per cent European). This kind of testing forces us to reconsider what 'race' means and to see how these categorizations have more to do with society than with biology.

Feminist philosopher Linda Alcoff suggests using the term 'ethnorace' to describe the Latino experience in the United States. For her, ethnorace

is a concept which combines the experiences of both ethnicity and race. She argues that 'using only ethnicity belies the reality of most Latinos' everyday experiences, as well as obscures our own awareness about how ethnic identifications often do the work of race while seeming to be theoretically correct and politically advanced. Race dogs our steps; let us not run from it else we cause it to increase its determination' (Alcoff 2000: 246). Through this concept of ethnorace, Alcoff is attempting to make us recognize that racialized group members sometimes share common cultural practices, which is not part of how race is typically understood. In general, scholars like Omi, Winant, and Alcoff are attempting to find ways to define a social phenomenon which has historical roots and important material consequences but which is nevertheless artificial in that its underlying reality is fluid and changes over time.

In order to study race in a way that recognizes this fluidity, scholars describe racial processes as social constructions. Social construction means that the values attached to particular external attributes, such as skin color, are defined, or constructed, by society. Put another way, the problem is not that of the recognition of racial/ethnic differences among people, but rather that of the values, or hierarchies, attached to those differences. For the bulk of United States history, being defined as 'white' gave members of that group access to social, legal, economic, and political privileges which were closed to those not defined as 'white.' For example, one of the first laws passed by the United States Congress in 1790 was a citizenship law which stipulated that no non-white person could become a naturalized citizen of the United States. This restriction remained in force until 1948, when individuals of Chinese origin were allowed to be naturalized for the very first time. This racial restriction on naturalization was finally removed completely for all groups in 1952, with the McCarran Walter Act. In addition, many states made it illegal for a non-white to testify in court against a white; to serve on juries; to live where they wanted to live; or to work in the most skilled jobs. These restrictions limited both non-whites' access to the protection of the legal system and their possibilities for social, political, and economic mobility. Thus racial constructs have been directly related to access to fundamental items like resources, citizenship rights, and the protection of the state (that is, to having a criminal justice system which actually defends your person and/or your property). Therefore race may be constructed, but which category an individual belongs to has had, and continues to have, significant material and political implications for their life chances.

Because racial categorizations determined access to resources, US federal and state governments had to come up with schemes in order to determine to what 'race' individuals belonged. Often referred to as the 'one-drop rule', these schemes attempted to define who was white and who was not. The 'one drop' refers to the fact that, in much of the country and particularly in the south, having one drop of black blood made it impossible by law to claim 'whiteness'. For example in California, in 1849, having half or more of 'Indian' blood would lead to one's being considered not 'white', and half or more of black blood made a person 'mulatto'. In 1851, the law was changed so that only one fourth of Indian blood would make a person not 'white'. Yet many of these laws were challenged, leading the courts to have to determine what constituted being 'white'. An especially good example is that of the prerequisite cases. These were cases brought by individuals who wanted to contest the 1790 law barring non-whites from being naturalized in the United States. Looking at petitions by Asian Indians from 1909 to 1923, we see that in 1909 the court in *Balsara* ruled that Asian Indians were *probably* not white, because the people on the jury thought it unlikely that Congress intended for Asian Indians to be considered white under the 1790 law. Yet in 1910 the court ruled in two cases that Asian Indians were white, on the basis of the petitioner's skin color and of scientific evidence regarding the origins of the Caucasian race. This ruling was reaffirmed in 1913, with appeal to legal precedent. Yet in 1917 the court ruled that Asian Indians were *not* white, on the basis of common knowledge and congressional intent. The same court reversed this position in 1919 and 1920, deciding again that the Asian Indians involved in those cases were white. Then in 1923 the Supreme Court ruled again, on the basis of common knowledge, that Asian Indians were not white. From that point on, on the basis of the 1923 legal precedent, the court ruled that Asian Indians are not white and therefore ineligible for naturalization.³ The Asian Indian case shows how difficult it was for the courts to maintain these kinds of racial categorizations in the face of any sort of systematic scrutiny. Yet that is exactly what the United States government did; and its action had important consequences for those US groups which were considered non-white. Latinos were one of those groups.

When Latinos became part of the United States, either through immigration or through conquest (as in the case of Puerto Ricans, or of Mexican Americans in the nineteenth-century southwest), they were inserted into this established racial order. Even though many Latinos are recent immigrants, it is important to realize that this historical

racial hierarchy continues to influence the playing field upon which their community sits today. For example, one complication for Latinos was that one-drop rules presupposed a strict, biological understanding of what race is. Under those schemes a person was black, white, or Indian, and there was no legal representation for intermediate categories like *mulattos* (people of black and white ancestry). Latinos, on the other hand, come from a variety of racial backgrounds. When the Spaniards arrived in Latin America, that continent had an indigenous population which numbered millions of inhabitants. Although a large proportion of this native population perished through disease and wars of conquest, a significant part survived, particularly in Mexico, Central America, Colombia, Perú, and Bolivia. The Spanish mixed with these groups, as did the Africans, creating what is called *mestizos* – individuals of mixed European, African, and indigenous descent. In the Caribbean, little of the indigenous population remained, which made it necessary for Spaniards to import African slaves to use as the bulk of the labor force. Those Africans mixed with the Spaniards and with the indigenous groups who remained on the islands, creating a new racial admixture; this is often called *mulatto*. After the end of slavery, Caribbean plantation-owners imported hundreds of thousands of Chinese laborers to work in the fields. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, large numbers of Asians from other countries, including Japan, settled in other parts of Latin America, adding to its racial mixture. This is why, in the early twentieth century, José Vasconcelos called Latin Americans *la raza cósmica*, 'the cosmic race' – one made up of the blood of all the world's races.

During the colonial period the Spaniards developed a complex *casta* system which laid out the racial hierarchy according to how much European, black or indigenous blood a particular individual had. Like the American system, the Spanish system had placed the white Europeans on top; but the remainder included many more racial options than were available in the United States. Most Latin American countries abolished the Spanish system after independence. But they still maintained the racial hierarchies. The difference was that their understanding of race included mixed race as a possibility, which was not true in most parts of the United States after the late nineteenth century.⁴

Thus, when Latinos arrived in the United States, they had to fit into a relatively rigid racial hierarchy, where it was very important whether a person was defined as 'black' or 'white'. Yet many Latinos are of mixed race. Those of Mexican or Central American origin tend to be of mixed

indigenous background and those from the Caribbean are more likely to have African origins. But are they 'Indian'? Or are they 'black'? Or something else? The problem with people of mixed race is that often there can be significant differences in skin color even within the same family. One sibling can be quite dark-skinned, another one quite light-skinned. Since the US racial structure did not allow for the possibility of admixture, what often happened was that the lighter-skinned sibling would be treated as 'white', the darker as 'black'. At the height of segregation, this meant that they would go to separate schools, get to use separate bathroom facilities, and in general would have a very different set of opportunities, simply because one was seen as white and the other was not. Latinos, then, complicated the US racial structure and did not fit neatly into any of its racial categories. This racial ambiguity meant that the place they chose to settle in, and the particular history of that place, had an important impact on the kinds of opportunities open to them. There was no one, uniform response to, or treatment of, Latinos as a 'race'.

For example, there were large numbers of Latinos, mostly of Mexican origin, living in the state of Texas during the nineteenth century. Many had been there originally when Texas was part of Mexico. Texas turned into a slave state once it became part of the United States, and after emancipation it developed and enforced strict Jim Crow laws, requiring racial segregation in neighborhoods, schools, and public facilities. Like the rest of the south, Texas also passed laws to keep the blacks from voting. Yet in Texas African Americans were not the only large minority group; there were Mexican Americans as well. Jim Crow Laws were applied to the Mexican population because they too were seen as non-white, despite their legal categorization as white under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. This was not true in New Mexico, however, where Latinos of Mexican origin remained in the majority until the twentieth century: in New Mexico segregation was not as extreme as in Texas. Mexican Americans were allowed voting rights. Moreover, they held public office positions and much of the political power until the mid-twentieth century. Thus local context had an important impact on racial definitions and racial restrictions, even in the case of the same national-origin group. These differences were possible because of Latino racial ambiguity.

Thus race is not 'real' in a biological sense, but racial categories still have important implications for the opportunities which various groups have in our society. Without an understanding of the historical

legacy of race, it is difficult to understand the current distribution of resources and opportunities within American society. Being white gave individuals access to citizenship; access to land under the homestead act in the nineteenth century (which was restricted to whites); access to legal protection and the right to organize unions, which significantly increased unionized workers' wages and benefits (many unions prohibited non-white membership, and many people of color worked in industries not covered under the National Labor Relations Act); access to subsidized federal home loans (the FHA program redlined and excluded African American, Mexican American, and mixed race neighborhoods); and access to public education of quality.⁵ Recent studies have shown that whites and African Americans with similar levels of income and education still have very different levels of total wealth because whites are much more likely to inherit real estate and other funds from their parents.⁶ That inheritance is the fruit of a highly exclusionary racial history. Because of this history, 'color-blindness' will not erase the inequality which has accumulated from racial categorizations. It is only by looking at race that we can begin to address its negative legacy.

Latino Political Incorporation

But how does racialization relate to Latino politics? Racialization is important in terms of having shaped the way Latinos are seen by non-Latinos, the opportunities they have been afforded, and the kinds of restrictions which have been placed on their incorporation into political life. Some Latinos living in the United States have been present in their communities since before they became part of the United States. We will see in the following chapters the significance of that long-term relationship. Yet a very large proportion of Latinos in the United States have arrived there since 1970. So, even though not all Latinos are immigrants or recent immigrants, the community contains enough immigrants that thinking about how immigrant politics varies from non-immigrant politics is an important part of learning about the Latino political experience in the United States. Immigrant political incorporation is different from non-immigrant political incorporation because of two factors:

- 1 Immigrants choose to be part of the United States, and therefore must overcome important structural hurdles before they can even consider engaging politically.

2 Immigrant inclusion is about defining the boundaries of the US polity, and therefore speaks in important ways to issues of race, inequality, and power within American society, in ways that are somewhat different from (but related to) what is happening with US born racialized groups.

Yet immigrants do not arrive in their new country as a clean slate. They bring a set of resources and a historical experience that shape their decision to migrate and their opportunity structure once they arrive. Thus the study of immigrant incorporation needs to begin with the international structural context which embeds the decision to migrate. Immigrants' decisions to migrate are embedded in macro-geopolitical processes over which their subjects have little control, such as economic recession or dislocation, war, or natural disaster. Once immigrants arrive in the United States, they must deal with an immigration bureaucracy which, as we will see in the following chapters, does not treat them all the same. The country an immigrant comes from, and the relationship the US government has with that country at the time of migration, strongly affect how easy or difficult the legal aspects of the migration process are going to be. Hence not only the immigrants' legal and economic status upon their arrival, but even their tendency to come from particular countries and their choice to go to particular countries are intimately related with US foreign and economic policy.

US Foreign Economic Policy and Latino Politics

The United States' relations with Latin America have been deeply affected by two important US principles: manifest destiny and the Monroe doctrine. The idea of manifest destiny – that the United States was 'destined' to be an Anglo-Saxon Protestant nation that stretched from coast to coast – had its roots in colonial political thought. In 1811, John Adams summed it up like this:

The whole continent of North America appears to be destined by Divine Providence to be peopled by one nation, speaking one language, professing one general system of religious and political principles, and accustomed to one general tenor of social usages and customs. For the common happiness of them all, for their peace and prosperity, I believe it is indispensable that they should be associated in one federal Union.

Like Adams, many Americans believed that it was God's will that the United States should control the north American territory, and that the

nation needed to be based on a common set of political ideals, religious beliefs, and cultural practices. This creed was one of the main justifications underlying US territorial expansion through the US–Mexican War. We will see that it also had important consequences on how the US dealt with the incorporation of the Mexican population present in those territories when they were annexed into the United States. Over time, this idea that it was the US' destiny to control a particular geographic sphere would expand beyond the North American continent and extend across the western hemisphere through the Monroe doctrine.

James Adams' son, John Quincy Adams, developed the Monroe doctrine in 1823, when he was President James Monroe's secretary of state. The main thrust of the doctrine was that, as countries in the Americas were becoming independent from the imperial European powers, the United States did not want Europe to re-colonize the western hemisphere. In his State of the Union message in December of that year, President Monroe declared that the United States would not interfere in European wars or internal affairs and expected Europe to stay out of the affairs of the new world. European attempts to influence the new world would be interpreted by the United States as threats to its 'peace and safety'.

President James Polk invoked the principle of manifest destiny and the Monroe doctrine in an 1845 address to Congress in support of westward expansion into Mexican territory. In 1904, President Theodore Roosevelt added the 'Roosevelt corollary' to the Monroe doctrine, which defined US intervention in Latin American domestic affairs as necessary for US national security:

All that this country [the United States] desires is to see the neighboring countries stable, orderly, and prosperous. Any country whose people conduct themselves well can count upon our hearty friendship. If a nation shows that it knows how to act with reasonable efficiency and decency in social and political matters, if it keeps order and pays its obligations, it need fear no interference from the United States. Chronic wrongdoing, or an impotence which results in a general loosening of the ties of civilized society, may in America, as elsewhere, ultimately require intervention by some civilized nation, and in the Western Hemisphere the adherence of the United States to the Monroe Doctrine may force the United States, however reluctantly, in flagrant cases of such wrongdoing or impotence, to the exercise of an international police power.

This corollary was used to justify US intervention in Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua, and the Dominican Republic. It was officially reversed in 1934 with the advent of Franklin D. Roosevelt's 'good neighbor' policy towards Latin America. Yet the principle that the United States' political and economic interests are intimately related to that of Latin America

remained. Throughout the twentieth century, the United States' economic interests played a central role in the development of Latin American banking, infrastructure, and industry. Similarly, the US government, particularly after the start of the cold war, continually intervened in Latin American internal governmental and military affairs.

This US involvement is critically important for understanding Latino migration flows to the United States. Many Latin American migrants worked for US companies in their home countries. Many were directly recruited by those companies to come to the United States, and those companies often lobbied the US Congress to ensure that these migration flows would continue. The economic development policies pursued by Latin American governments, and therefore the economic opportunities available to their populations, particularly employment, often were strongly influenced by the US financial sector and by the US government. After the advent of the cold war, US strategic concerns and levels of military aid often affected the success or failure of social movements to redistribute wealth in these countries. Thus the way the United States expressed its political and economic interests in the region affected the Latin Americans' economic and political situation on the ground, the facility with which they were able to migrate to the United States, and the legal terms under which they were accepted under US immigration policy.

Conclusion

We will see in the following chapters that there were important domestic and international political reasons why the US government involved itself in the politics of Latin American countries and encouraged or discouraged migration from them. For different reasons, the US government has made immigrant settlement much easier for some national-origin groups than for others. This, in turn, has affected how quickly and under what terms Latino immigrants have been allowed to join the polity. These decisions also have affected the immigrants' choice of places to settle, the kinds of transnational and co-ethnic social networks available to them in those places, and what political and economic opportunity structures were present in those communities. It follows that that experience has had an important impact on these immigrants' trust in government, feelings of personal efficacy, and willingness to become engaged politically. These opportunity structures also affect their socio-economic mobility; immigrants of higher socioeconomic

status are more likely to engage politically. This means that having more economic opportunities also affects political incorporation. This is a good example of how agency and structure interact. A particular immigrant brings a set of skills (education, funding, personal drive) which affect her ability to succeed in her new country. But that success is also affected by the institutions she must interact with on the ground. How open those institutions are, and how much they will enable her to take advantage of their resources, is outside of her control.

What this interaction looks like for immigrants from each national-origin group also varies over time. Each community has faced particular challenges, has organized so as to improve their position, and all have achieved important successes. That mobilization, in turn, has changed the structural context for new immigrants. Therefore nothing in these stories is 'static'; there is constant movement across historical time. It is only by looking at the historical trajectory of each national-origin group that we may understand fully the Latino political incorporation process today. This is what we will be doing in the following chapters.

CHAPTER TWO

Latina/o Participation: Individual Activity and Institutional Context

Objectives

- Understand Latino demographics, particularly national-origin differences in socioeconomic status, age, and nativity
- Understand Latino participation patterns, including national-origin differences and differences in the types of activities Latinos engage in
- Understand the political institutional context in the United States, its majoritarian nature, and what that means for the participation and representation of minority groups

Latino Political Engagement

In the 2000 presidential election, for the first time the Republican candidate, George W. Bush, outspent his Democratic rival, Al Gore, in the amount his campaign spent on Spanish-language advertising targeting Latino voters. The Bush campaign hired veteran political strategist Lionel Sosa to develop a sophisticated and well run Spanish-language outreach campaign. This effort is credited with significantly increasing Latino support for Bush by comparison with support for the 1996 Republican candidate, Bob Dole. In 2007, candidates competing for the Democratic presidential nomination participated, for the first time ever, in a bilingual presidential debate televised on the most popular Spanish-language channel, Univisión. Why are we seeing increased attention being paid to Latino voters by both political parties, at the national level? The answer is simple: demographics.

Demographics

According to the 2007 Current Population Survey, there are 45.5 million Latinos currently living in the United States, making Latinos 15 percent of the total US population and the nation's largest minority group. Between 1980 and 2000 the rate of growth among Latinos was

nearly four times higher than that of the general population. Future estimates of population growth in the US posit that this trend will continue at least until 2030, ensuring that Latinos will continue to represent a growing and significant proportion of the US population. In terms of the national-origin distribution of the US Latino population, individuals of Mexican origin constitute by far the largest group, at 65.5 percent. They are followed by Puerto Ricans (8.6 percent), Central Americans (8.2 percent), South Americans (6 percent), and Cubans (3.7 percent). Thus, although there is substantial national-origin diversity within the Latino population in the United States, it is important to keep in mind that almost two-thirds of US Latinos are of Mexican origin.

The Latino community varies from the US population at large along a number of parameters which include age, income, and education and which, we will see below, are important when considering the factors driving their participation patterns. Table 2.1 compares Latinos to the American population along several dimensions. We can see that the Latino population is significantly younger than the US population overall; in particular, there are more Latinos under the age of 18 and fewer aged 65 and over than there are among Americans generally. Latinos earn significantly less than other Americans, although, interestingly, there is less of a gender gap in earnings among Latinos than there is among the total US population. The poverty rate among Latinos is almost twice that of the general population, and is particularly high among children (those under 18). Latino households also tend to be larger, which means that household income for the Latino population is expected to support a larger number of people than income for the rest of the population. Latino educational attainment is also lower on average: many more Latinos than other Americans have less than a 9th grade education, and the number of Latinos with a college degree is less than half of that found in the general population.

This demographic information is important not only in terms of getting a snapshot of the community, but also in terms of how it may affect Latino public policy preferences. Given the relative youth of the community, one can imagine educational attainment and educational quality being very important issues, along with policies aimed at decreasing poverty rates among children. On the other hand, given the small number of Latinos over the age of 65, issues such as social security and retirement may not be as immediate. Because of these demographic differences, it is unlikely that voters from the general US population

Table 2.1 Age, Birth, Income, Household, and Education for Latinos and Total US Population

	Latinos	Total US Population
Age		
median age	27	36
population under 18	34.3%	25.2%
population aged 65 and over	5.4%	12.1%
Birth		
foreign population	39.9%	12.1%
Income and poverty		
median annual earnings for men	\$26,769	\$41,386
median annual earnings for women	\$24,214	\$31,858
percentage of overall population living in poverty	21.8%	12.6%
population under 18 living in poverty	28.3%	17.6%
Household size		
population living in household with 2 persons or fewer	37.7%	59.6%
population living in household with 4 people or more	42.7%	23.8%
Educational attainment		
population with less than a 9th grade education	24.4%	6.1%
population with a high school diploma or more	59.3%	85.5%
population with one college degree or more	12.4%	28%

Source: Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement 2006

will have the same political concerns and policy preferences as Latinos. That is why it is important that Latinos have a voice in the political process which is equal to their demographic numbers. As we will see below, there are a number of reasons why that has yet to be established.

Not only do Latinos differ from the general US population; they also differ on a number of important parameters across national-origin groups. Table 2.2 summarizes age, nativity, income, and educational attainment across the Latino national-origin groups we will be studying

Table 2.2 Age, Birth, Income, and Education by Country of Origin

	Mexican	Puerto Rican	Central American	Cuban
Age				
population under 18	36.7%	33.6%	27.7%	23.3%
population aged 65 and over	4.3%	6.7%	3.6%	18.1%
Birth				
foreign population	38.6%	NA ^a	68.8%	61.8%
Income				
households earning less than \$25,000 a year	34.9%	38.7%	25.8%	30.4%
households earning more than \$75,000 a year	15.1%	17.4%	18.1%	24%
Educational attainment				
population with a high school diploma or more	53.1%	72.3%	50.5%	74.9%
population with one college degree or more	8.5%	15.1%	10.2%	24.4%

a Since Puerto Rico is a US territory, no Puerto Rican is 'foreign-born', although those born on the mainland have a different legal status from those born on the island (see ch. 4)

Source: Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement 2006

in this book. In terms of age, Cubans stand out as the oldest national-origin group, with the largest proportion falling into the over-65 category. Mexicans have the largest under-18 population and Central Americans the smallest over-65 group. Central Americans and Cubans are also much more likely to be of foreign origin than Mexicans. In terms of income, Mexicans and Puerto Ricans look quite similar, with over a third of their populations earning less than \$25,000 a year. Almost a fourth of the Cubans make over \$75,000 a year, which is probably related to the fact that the community is older overall; older individuals tend to have higher earnings. Thirty percent of the Cubans still make less than \$25,000 a year, despite the fact that Cubans have the highest levels of educational attainment overall.

Understanding these differences is important because they highlight the fact that the Latino community is not monolithic, but rather is made up of disparate national-origin groups. As we will see in the following chapters, each of those groups has a unique history and a distinct set of

social, political, and economic challenges. Those differences can and do affect the kinds of public policies each group supports, their partisan attachments, and their political engagement.

Understanding Political Participation

Since the 1960s, political scientists have been studying American political behavior – what factors explain why individuals turn out and vote, or why they engage in other kinds of political activity such as contacting elected officials, contributing to campaigns, engaging in political protest, and so on. This work, which has focused mainly on the general US population, has found that a person's socioeconomic status (SES) – their education, income, and occupation – is the best predictor of their likelihood to vote. In other words, those who are more educated, have higher incomes, and come from professional occupations (versus more blue-collar jobs) are more likely to vote than those who are less educated, poorer, or do manual labor. This is intuitively logical. Higher SES individuals have more resources in terms of personal capacity, time, and flexibility; they can use to help towards paying the 'cost' of engaging in politics.

Yet when this work has been extended to minority communities it seems not to be able to explain all the aspects of their engagement. Katherine Tate finds that education and income are only occasionally related to African American participation, and studies of Latinos have found that SES can explain only part of the gap between Latino and Anglo electoral and nonelectoral participation.¹ Scholars attempting to find other explanations have turned to psychological resources – feelings of efficacy, trust in government and civic duty – as the explanatory factors. Studies using these approaches have found that levels of political interest and efficacy have a significant effect on participation. These models center around the idea that feelings of 'linked fate', 'political alienation', 'group identity', and 'group conflict' have an impact on minority groups' political attitudes and behavior.² In other words, individuals feel (or do not feel) connections to particular groups, and their political attitudes and levels of participation are influenced in important ways by those feelings.

So what do we know about Latino participation levels in particular, and in relation to other groups within the US political system? Table 2.3 compares registration and voting rates among non-Latino whites, non-Latino blacks, and Latinos over the age of 18 from 1972 to 2004.

Table 2.3 Reported Registration by Race and Birth, 1972–2004

Year	White		African American		Asian American		Latino	
	Total population ^a	Citizens	Total population	Citizens	Total population	Citizens	Total population	Citizens
2004	67.9%	73.6%	64.4%	68.7%	34.9%	51.8%	34.3%	57.9%
2002	63.1%	67.9%	58.5%	62.4%	30.7%	49.2%	32.6%	52.5%
2000	65.7%	70.4%	63.6%	67.5%	30.7%	52.4%	34.9%	57.4%
1998	63.9%	68.2%	60.2%	63.6%	29.1%	48.9%	33.7%	55.2%
1996	67.7%	72.0%	63.5%	66.4%	32.6%	57.2%	35.7%	58.6%
1994	64.6%	68.4%	58.5%	61.3%	28.7%	51.9%	31.3%	52.9%
1992	70.1%	76.3%	63.9%	70.0%	31.2%	61.6%	35.0%	62.5%
1990	63.8%	69.1%	58.8%	63.5%	28.4%	56.0%	32.3%	55.2%
1988	67.9%	72.8%	64.5%	68.8%	NA	NA	35.5%	59.1%
1986	65.3%	69.5%	64.0%	67.3%	NA	NA	35.9%	56.4%
1984	69.6%	74.5%	66.3%	72.0%	NA	NA	40.1%	61.4%
1982	65.6%	69.4%	59.1%	62.6%	NA	NA	35.3%	53.7%
1980	68.4%	73.4%	60.0%	64.1%	NA	NA	36.4%	56.0%
1978	63.8%	67.5%	57.1%	60.6%	NA	NA	32.9%	50.1%
1976	68.3%	NA ^b	58.5%	NA	NA	NA	37.8%	NA
1974	64.6%	NA	54.2%	NA	NA	NA	34.9%	NA
1972	73.4%	NA	65.5%	NA	NA	NA	44.4%	NA

a 'Total population' refers to the population over 18. 'Citizens' refers to the citizen population over 18.

b Data not available

Source: Current Population Survey, November 2004 and earlier reports

As is clear from Tables 2.3 and 2.4, nativity is a big issue for the two largest immigrant groups in the United States: Latinos and Asian Americans. If one looks only at the citizen population, their registration and voting rates are somewhat similar to those of whites and blacks, albeit still lower. Yet when these rates are compared to those of the general population, we see that the proportion of individuals over 18 who are registered and voting within these groups represents a significantly lower percentage than for the US population as a whole. This is due to the fact that Latinos have lower registration rates than whites or blacks, combined with the fact that about forty percent of the community consists of non-citizens, which means that they are ineligible to vote. Mexican immigrants, in particular, have some of the lowest

Table 2.4 Reported Voting by Race and Birth, 1972–2004

Year	White		African American		Asian American		Latino	
	Total population	Citizens	Total population	Citizens	Total population	Citizens	Total population	Citizens
2004	63.8%	65.4%	56.3%	60.0%	29.8%	44.1%	28.0%	47.2%
2002	44.1%	47.5%	39.7%	42.3%	19.4%	31.2%	18.9%	30.4%
2000	56.4%	60.5%	53.5%	56.8%	25.4%	43.4%	27.5%	45.1%
1998	43.3%	46.3%	39.6%	41.8%	19.3%	32.4%	20.0%	32.8%
1996	56.0%	59.6%	50.6%	53.0%	25.7%	45.0%	26.8%	44.0%
1994	47.3%	50.0%	37.1%	38.9%	21.8%	39.4%	20.2%	34.0%
1992	63.6%	69.2%	54.1%	59.2%	27.3%	53.9%	28.9%	51.6%
1990	46.7%	50.5%	39.2%	42.4%	20.3%	40.0%	21.0%	36.0%
1988	59.1%	63.4%	51.5%	55.0%	NA	NA	28.8%	48.0%
1986	47.0%	50.1%	43.2%	45.5%	NA	NA	24.2%	38.0%
1984	61.4%	65.7%	55.8%	60.6%	NA	NA	32.7%	50.0%
1982	49.9%	52.8%	43.0%	45.5%	NA	NA	25.3%	38.5%
1980	60.9%	65.4%	50.5%	53.9%	NA	NA	29.9%	46.1%
1978	47.3%	50.1%	37.2%	39.5%	NA	NA	23.5%	35.7%
1976	60.9%	NA	48.7%	NA	NA	NA	31.8%	NA
1974	46.3%	NA	33.8%	NA	NA	NA	22.9%	NA
1972	64.5%	NA	52.1%	NA	NA	NA	37.5%	NA

Source: Current Population Survey, November 2004 and earlier reports

rates of naturalization in any immigrant group of the United States.³ Thus a smaller proportion of the population is eligible to vote than in other populations, and then a smaller proportion of that group chooses to register and vote than is true among whites or blacks. The result is that Latino voters do not come close to representing the demographic power of the Latino population as a whole. In the rest of this book, we will explore the historical and institutional reasons why this is the case, focusing specifically on the five largest Latino national-origin groups: Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Salvadorans, and Guatemalans.

Those national-origin groups vary in terms of their group histories and of the kinds of political activity they have chosen to engage in. Table 2.5 summarizes voting levels in the 2004 presidential election among the citizen population – registration reported by national origin.⁴ Mexicans and Salvadorans report the lowest levels of registration and the lowest

Table 2.5 Reported Registration and Voting in the 2004 Presidential Election by National Origin, among Citizens

	Registered	Voted	Total Number
Mexicans	78.1%	62.2%	2881
Puerto Ricans	85.2%	72.0%	819
Cubans	91.3%	83.5%	321
Salvadorans	72.1%	53.9%	154

Source: 2006 Latino National Survey

levels of overall voting. Puerto Ricans fall in the middle, and Cubans are the most likely group to report being registered and voting. In fact, studies have found that Cubans turn out to vote at higher rates than the general US population. Although some of these differences are attributable to differences in socioeconomic status among the groups, they also highlight important differences in the kinds of activities each chooses to engage in. These differences are due to history, geography, and the US institutional context.

Institutional Context

When Latinos decide to incorporate themselves into the US political system, they must do so within the context of a specific set of electoral and legislative rules which affect how much power a minority group will be able to muster within that system. These rules fall into two broad categories: *electoral rules* and *legislative rules*. We will explore each in turn.

Electoral Rules

Electoral rules are the rules which underlie the American electoral system. The most important rules with regard to Latinos are: majority rule; rules surrounding voting rights; and citizenship requirements for voting.

Majority rule The most basic electoral rule underlying the American political system is the idea of *majority rule*: If you can get more than 50 percent of the vote, you win the election. That is why scholars describe the American political system as *majoritarian* – you must have a majority in order to win. Other democracies around the world are not organized

this way. Some have proportional, representational rules which guarantee a certain number of parliamentary seats, for example, to a particular minority group or party. Others have quota systems to ensure the representation of women or minority groups. The fact that the United States' electoral rules are majoritarian places important structural constraints on the electoral participation of minority groups like Latinos.

Since Latinos constitute a minority community within the United States, majority rule significantly affects their ability to express their interests through voting. Nationally, Latinos make up about 15 percent of the total US population. Yet, because of the demographic issues discussed above – namely the community's significant non-citizen population, large under-18 population, and low registration and voting rates – exit polls estimated that Latinos made up only about 9 percent of the voters in the 2008 presidential election. The story is similar at the state level. In California, for example, Latinos make up over one third of the state's population, yet only about 15 percent of likely voters. Similarly, in New Mexico – the state with the largest Latino population: 42 percent of the state total – Latinos make up less than 30 percent of voters. Of course, at the municipal level, in cities with over 75 percent Latino population, Latinos can and often do make up the majority of voters. But that is rare. In most places and in most electoral races, for Latino voters to meet the 50 percent threshold they must build coalitions with like-minded groups in order to ensure the success of their chosen candidate or of their preferred policy proposal. This means that, in the electoral arena, Latinos are not in complete control of their destiny. As a minority group within a majoritarian system, they can win elections only if they join coalitions large enough to surpass the 50 percent threshold. This, of course, means that they must compromise with those groups regarding their policy preferences and their choice of candidate. Thus majority rule makes it difficult for US minority groups like Latinos to win elections.

The Voting Rights Act Voting rights are important because, within a Republican democracy, voting is the main way citizens may express their political preferences. Voting is also substantively important because it has *instrumental* value; it is an instrument that citizens use in order to determine who gets to make the laws and what kinds of public policies are put into place. For most of American history, the majority of the country's population – women and people of color – was denied the right to vote. This is why achieving the ability to exercise that right was

a centerpiece of the civil rights movement. One of the greatest successes of the civil rights movement was the passing of the Voting Rights Act (VRA) in 1965. This act was designed to outlaw the mechanisms – direct intimidation, poll taxes, literacy tests – which had been used to suppress African American voting in the south (we will see in Chapter 3 that these methods were also used to disenfranchise Mexican Americans). The VRA, although originally conceived to address the African American case, positively affected the Latino community's ability to exercise the right to vote and to elect Latino candidates to public office.

In addition to outlawing the voting restrictions listed above, the VRA also made a number of counties with histories of minority voting exclusion subject to federal electoral supervision. That supervision included 'preclearance' of county districting rules and other electoral logistics. Initially, these rules targeted largely African American jurisdictions. Yet when Congress renewed the VRA in 1970 the rules ensured that the number of counties subject to federal supervision expanded. As a result, for the first time counties with significant Latino populations were included under the preclearance rules, which provided important protections to Latino voting rights. In 1975 the VRA was renewed again, and this marked the first time when Latinos were included directly under its provisions. From 1975 forward, the VRA was expanded so as to cover the protection of 'language minorities', which included Latinos, Asian Americans, Alaska natives, and native Americans. Under the 1975 rules, jurisdictions with a language minority population of 5 percent or more were eligible to request federal election observers. The law also required that jurisdictions meeting this population threshold provide bilingual ballots to language minority voters. Latinos were not included under the law by accident; these changes were the direct result of political organizing on the part of Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans in the late 1960s and early 1970s, which is discussed in chapters 3 and 4.

The VRA has had an important impact on Latino political activity and representation. First, it removed the most overt structural barriers to voting. It outlawed things like overt intimidation of voters, capricious changes in voting rules and/or polling places, English language requirements for registration and voting, lengthy residential requirements for voter registration, the manipulation or control over the Latino vote by economic elites, and the drawing of district lines so that they diluted the minority vote – a practice known as racial gerrymandering. Requirements of long-time residence for voter registration were especially detrimental to migrant workers, many of whom are Latino,

because of their need to move regularly as part of their job. Most of these barriers existed for Mexican Americans in Texas, but variants of them were used also to exclude Puerto Ricans from voting in New York City.

Second, the VRA significantly increased the number of Latino elected officials across the country. Although Latinos, unlike African Americans, were never excluded from public office entirely, because of racial gerrymandering Latino officeholders were relatively rare before 1975. In 1973 there were 1,280 Latino elected officials serving in the six most heavily Latino states: Arizona, California, Florida, New Mexico, New York, and Texas. By 2007, there were 4,539 Latino elected officials serving in those states – more than three and a half times the number in 1973.⁵ This was largely due to legal changes in districting practices that occurred under the VRA. By 1982, the federal courts and Congress had established that states and localities with large and concentrated minority populations had an affirmative responsibility to create districts from which minority groups could elect the candidates of their choice. The VRA urged the creation, when possible, of majority-minority districts, which in practice guaranteed the election of minority representatives from a particular area. The downside to this move, however, was that it only allowed for minority representation from areas with high levels of racial segregation. That being said, even though African American candidates still find it difficult to be elected in majority white districts, Latino candidates generally need a Latino registration rate of over 35 percent of the majority party in order to have a strong chance of taking that seat. This is a big change, which is due in large measure to the VRA.

Thus legal changes under the VRA constitute an important structural change, which has had a positive impact on Latinos' ability to exercise the right to vote and to be represented by Latino elected officials.

Citizenship and voting rights Over forty percent of the Latino population in the United States is of foreign origin. This means that the Latino community continually has a large percentage of non-citizens. Since citizenship is, in most places in the United States, a requirement for voting, this means in turn that a large proportion of the population has no formal say in the US political system. Yet for much of US history citizenship was not a requirement for voting; this is a fairly recent phenomenon. During the nineteenth century over twenty states and territories had alien voting rights. During the colonial era, non-citizens voted and held public office throughout the colonies. These policies were maintained

after independence. Instead of citizenship, the key criteria for granting voting rights were race, gender, property, and residence. As the country expanded westward, states used non-citizen voting rights to encourage immigrants to settle in their areas. For example, Congress approved non-citizen voting⁷ in Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Nevada, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Dakota, Washington, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. The year 1875 marked the height of non-citizen suffrage in the United States, with twenty-two states and territories granting immigrants the right to vote. Most of these states only required that voters be white, male, and express an intent to naturalize. States saw the provision of non-citizens voting rights as a way to teach civic ideals to future citizens.

Around the end of the nineteenth century, concerns arose regarding the power and influence exercised by immigrant groups. As anti-immigrant sentiment grew, states began to retract their support of non-citizen suffrage. Many states passed constitutional amendments limiting the franchise to United States citizens. By the late 1920s most states required that individuals must be citizens in order to vote. But non-citizen voting is not illegal. Currently a number of municipalities allow non-citizen voting. One of the most liberal statutes exists in Takoma Park, Maryland, where, since 1992, non-citizens have been allowed to vote in local elections and hold municipal office regardless of their migration status.

For the Latino community, the issue of non-citizen voting is not simply an academic one. Because non-citizens tend to be concentrated in particular geographic areas, their formal exclusion from the political process raises questions about democracy and representation in the United States. For example, the state of California has twelve municipalities where the foreign population makes up more than 50 percent of the adults living there.⁶ These individuals work, pay taxes, have children in school, and yet have no formal say in who represents them in government. This is why many scholars and activists have called for non-citizen voting to be allowed at the local level, particularly in school-board and municipal elections. They argue that this helps to teach non-citizens about participation and democracy and ensures that their voices are heard in matters which affect them or their children directly. Given that Latinos make up such a large share of the non-citizen population in the United States, any changes in this direction would have an important impact on their participation rates and ability to influence the political process.

Nonelectoral participation Yet political participation is not solely about voting. There are many other ways in which individuals and groups can engage in the political process. These form what is called *nonelectoral participation*, which can include activities such as engaging in political protest, working for a community-based organization, contacting elected officials, signing petitions, boycotting a particular company or product, and so on. Any sort of collective activity aimed at addressing a political problem can be defined as nonelectoral activity. Other than giving contributions to elected officials (which may only be done by US citizens or permanent residents), non-citizens can engage in any of these types of activities. Thus nonelectoral participation is an important way through which non-citizen Latinos can express their political views. Nevertheless, the factors which determine who engages in nonelectoral participation have been found to be the same as for electoral participation: those who have higher incomes, higher levels of education, and are older are more likely to participate in these kinds of activities than those who are young, less educated, and have lower income levels. Since the Latino community in the United States is younger and less affluent than non-Latino whites, Latinos are less likely than whites to engage in these kinds of political activities, even though there are no legal barriers (such as citizenship status) to their participation.

Table 2.6 summarizes Latino political interest and engagement in some nonelectoral activities. As we have seen with electoral participation, there are differences among Latino national-origin groups in terms of their preferred forms of engagement. Salvadorans are the least likely to report interest in politics in general, while about two-thirds of the Mexicans and Puerto Ricans say they find politics interesting. Cubans seem to be the group most interested in politics. Puerto Ricans are the most likely to report contacting an elected official and Salvadorans are the least likely. Just under a third of the respondents from all the groups prefer to use existing organizations to solve problems. All the group members seem slightly more likely to prefer to resolve problems informally, except for Salvadorans. Other studies have shown that Mexicans and Puerto Ricans are more likely than Cubans to engage in political protest. Thus, not all Latinos are the same in terms of their attitudes towards politics and the kinds of activities they choose to engage in. These differences reflect individual-level preferences combined with structural factors such as organizational density, local electoral rules, and the group's political history.

Table 2.6 Political Engagement by National Origin among the Total Population

	Mexicans	Puerto Ricans	Cubans	Salvadorans
somewhat interested to very interested in politics	66.2%	68.6%	73.3%	47.7%
have contacted public official to express concerns	30.3%	45.1%	38.8%	22.9%
prefer to resolve problems through existing organizations	27.5%	28.6%	24.0%	30.2%
prefer to resolve problems informally	31.1%	29.4%	30.0%	26.3%
Total Number	5704	822	420	407

Source: 2006 Latino National Survey

Therefore the US political system operates under a set of electoral rules which either limit or facilitate minority participation and representation. When considering the political incorporation of a minority group like Latinos, it is important to keep these rules in mind and to understand the consequences they may have on the strategies which groups choose to employ in order to express their political interests and on the chances that these tactics may enjoy success.

Legislative Rules

Legislative rules are the rules which govern decision-making within legislative institutions such as the United States Congress or the state legislatures. As with electoral participation, the emphasis on majority rule is very important within legislatures and dictates how decisions are made at the committee and floor levels. Party agendas and leadership are much more important within legislatures than they are within American politics at large, and they affect elected officials' abilities to serve their constituents' interests.

Committee rules Most legislative bodies rule through committees. This means that the responsibilities of a body in terms of policy-making are divided up across a number of standing committees. Each legislator serves on a few committees which are in charge of issues which are of importance to the committees in question. For example, at the federal level, the Education and Workforce Committee is responsible for all legislation related to educational and workplace issues. Those legislators

who serve on that committee have more of an impact on drafting legislation related to such issues than legislative members who do not serve on that committee have. The committee system is meant to streamline the law-making process. If all the members were able to have a say on every piece of legislation, the law-making process would be unmanageable. Instead, the proposed law is brought before the relevant committee, amended as the committee members see fit, and then voted on by the committee, which has to determine whether or not the revised legislation should be subject to a vote by the entire legislative body.

The committee system is an important part of the legislative process and is what makes law-making possible. However, for representatives of minority communities, it does have some important negative effects on their ability to pursue their political agenda. As we have seen with the electoral system in general, majority rule makes it difficult for minority communities to cross the 50 percent threshold necessary to win elections. This limitation is only compounded when majority rule is applied within the legislature itself. For example, from 2006–8 there were twenty-four Latinos serving in the US House of Representatives, which contains a total of 435 members. In order to get any legislation passed, a Latino member first has to obtain the support of the majority of the relevant committee. Then they have to persuade 217 other representatives to support their proposal for the floor vote. We saw above how majority rule in the electoral system often makes coalition-building necessary for being elected. Once representatives are elected, coalitions become an absolute requirement in order for legislation to be passed. Thus crossing the majority threshold in an election is only the very first step in the multiple levels of majority rule which affect the policy-making abilities of Latino elected officials.

Party influence and agendas Majority rule is important not only within legislative bodies, but also within the two major political parties. For most Americans, political parties and their platforms have little relevance to their day-to-day lives. Within legislatures, however, parties are very important. In the United States, the political party system was created within Congress during the eighteenth century in order to help politicians to muster the number of votes necessary to pass legislation. This imperative remains valid today. To be successful, parties need their members to stick together and support the bills which the party leadership wants passed. Thus party loyalty is very important within legislatures, and this is something that party leaders spend a great deal of time

working to develop. They do it through carrots and sticks – incentives and disincentives to following the party line.

On the side of incentives, the strongest incentive which party leaders have at their disposal is committee assignments. Who gets to sit on what committee is determined by the leaders of each party. And some committee assignments are much more popular than others. For example, within the US House of Representatives, the Appropriations Committee is responsible for all the appropriations (that is, spending) that go through the House. For obvious reasons, this is a very powerful committee and one that members want to join. If a member does what the leadership asks and votes with the party, the party leaders can reward him or her with a seat on a coveted committee. Conversely, if a member does not vote with the party on an important issue, their leadership can punish them by removing them from a particular committee or by denying them the committee assignment they want. Another incentive the parties can muster is support for a particular member when the time comes for reelection. Both political parties have national and statewide committees whose job is to raise money for the party's candidates. A loyal party member is more likely to receive this kind of financial support than a disloyal member. This is another way parties can encourage their members' support in legislative voting.

The question then arises: What are the members actually supporting? Individual representatives are focused on responding to the needs of their particular district or constituency. Party leaders, on the other hand, represent their districts but also have to consider the needs of the party in general. Because of the majoritarian electoral requirements both in electing representatives and in the legislatures themselves, party leaders need to develop policy proposals which appeal to the broadest possible number of people. Remember, any proposal must get over 50 percent of the vote. This makes parties often reluctant to take positions which can be seen as targeting the needs of a specific group. They would rather be seen as being as broad and inclusive as possible. The kinds of proposals which have this sort of broad appeal tend to represent the ideological center – to be not too extreme either in the liberal or in the conservative direction. Yet from a political ideology standpoint Latinos in general, and Latino elected officials in particular, tend to hold policy positions which are more liberal than those of Americans generally. For example, Latinos are more likely than other Americans to say they support increased government programs, particularly for education and health-related services. Thus, from a policy standpoint, the kinds

of proposals Latino representatives are likely to advocate often fall to the left of the political center in the United States. Since party leaders want to put forward proposals which will be successful, the kinds of policy proposals advocated by Latino representatives will often not be included in the final legislation, or will be watered down so as to appeal to a broader number of people. In other words, the ability of Latino representatives to influence the party's agenda depends on the degree to which their policy preferences coincide with what will appeal to the party leadership and to a majority of the legislative members as a whole. Again, we see how having political influence can be difficult for minority group members within legislative bodies.

Representation

The issue of party leaders, elected officials, and their policy agendas raises the question of representation in general. When the founders were writing the US Constitution, the only democracies they had as models were those of ancient Greece and Rome. Both of those systems allowed all citizens to engage in decision-making.⁷ Yet in a country the size of the United States this approach was not feasible. Instead, our founders developed a Republican system of government – one in which citizens choose representatives to uphold their interests in the decision-making process. If the citizens do not agree with their elected representatives, they can remove them in the next election. Yet the founders never truly answered the question of what representation means within a majoritarian context. James Madison argued that the 'tyranny of the majority' – the tendency of the majority to impose their will on the minority – could be avoided if the majority shifted continually. In other words, a particular individual may be in the majority on religious issues, but in the minority on economics; and, as long as the majority is made to shift across issues, this form of tyranny can be avoided.

Yet this formulation does not address the question of what a democratic system might do in a situation where a particular population, like Latinos, could potentially have different economic or educational preferences from the majority population. How can such a minority make its interests represented? And, more importantly, what happens if those interests can never be represented? Does that affect the legitimacy of the system? The VRA is meant to address this question by ensuring a minimal level of *descriptive representation* for minority groups – representation by an individual who shares the same race, gender, class, or

national origin as the voter. But is this all that matters? Can we assume that a poor female representative can represent the interests of all poor females? The fact of the matter is that, at the state and federal levels, our elected representatives are predominantly male and much richer than the general population. Does that mean that they cannot represent the majority's interests?

This remains an open question – which is why some scholars argue for the idea of *substantive representation*: representation by someone who agrees with the voter ideologically and in terms of their public policy interests. The idea is that the voters have a representative with congruent policy views acting as their advocate. Yet how do we know what a voter's policy views are? And which voters should have their policy views represented? Any representative at any level of government will have constituents with opposing views. How should that representative decide which views 'matter'? Also, is an elected official's job simply to echo her constituents' opinions, or should she vote according to her own judgment? These are important, and to a large extent unanswerable, questions. Yet they go to the heart of the problem of defining and measuring 'representation'. It is likely that most voters want their representative to represent their substantive interest, and they use descriptive representation as shorthand, on the basis of the assumption that, if an individual has had similar life experiences, they probably have similar policy preferences. But it is important to point out that this is not always the case and that continually questioning representation and what it means is crucial within the context of a republican democracy.

For minority groups, the issue of representation also raises a number of other questions, in particular about authenticity and accountability. In terms of authenticity, the pertinent question is: how often do minority voters get represented by the people they want (that is, how often does the candidate they support win?). If the minority group votes as a bloc and continually loses, this threatens democratic legitimacy. As Madison pointed out, avoiding the tyranny of the majority requires that everyone should win every once in a while. This is why one of the factors taken into consideration in VRA litigation is the presence of racial bloc voting in a particular jurisdiction. This reflects authenticity; but accountability is equally important. If a politician has a very 'safe' seat, how driven will he be to protect his constituents' interests? This is a growing problem in American politics in general, as the political parties regularly draw district lines which insure very little party competition within legislative districts. For example, of the 435 seats up for election

every two years in the US House of Representatives, only about forty are truly competitive. This issue is only exacerbated in majority-minority seats. Since most of the minority groups subject to VRA scrutiny (African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, and native Americans) vote overwhelmingly for the Democratic Party, creating a majority-minority seat often means creating a safe Democratic Party seat. This means, further, that those representatives are elected easily and have little competition for reelection. In addition, many of their constituents, for important historical reasons, are not as engaged politically as the general population. Within this context, who ensures that those representatives truly are accountable to the people that they represent? This remains one of the major challenges within American democracy and a particular problem for members of minority groups.

Minority representation also raises the problem of institutional compromise. To get their issues on their party agenda, minority representatives often need to make compromises in order to build coalitions. Yet many Americans, in the majority and in the minority alike, complain that their representatives forget them, or forget their promises, when they achieve political office. How much should minority representatives be willing to compromise? Democracy is built on the principle of compromise; yet is there a point, if they compromise too much, at which elected leaders cease to be 'representative'? This too is an open question, and one which applies to all US representatives. But in the case of individuals who represent groups which have continually been the 'losers' in terms of their public policy agendas, these questions take on additional salience.

Levels of Government and Regional Differences

The previous discussion was not meant to imply that all government is created equal. The scale required for election, funding, and success at the national level is exponentially greater than at the local level. This is one of the reasons why the majority of Latino elected officials is found at the local level. In general, it is easier for minority groups to be represented at the local level because it takes a smaller number of people to surpass the 50 percent threshold. From a districting standpoint, the creation of majority-minority districts at the local level still encourages segregation, but the size of overall community can be smaller and the community may still have representation. Thus it is much easier for minority groups to be represented, and to have political influence, at the local

level. Local governments, in turn, through their provision of basic services like putting up stop signs, fixing sidewalks, picking up trash, and establishing zoning rules, can have huge direct effects on individuals' lives. For minority groups, the municipal level is the level where they are most likely to have a direct influence on political decision-making. Yet, ironically, most Americans do not vote in their municipal elections.

But not all governments across the United States are organized the same way. The structure of state and local governments in the United States vary significantly by region. Almost 27 percent of Latinos in the United States live in the west, 14.5 percent live in the south, 11.3 percent in the north-east, and 5.3 percent in the mid-west. Most of the western Latinos live in the southwest, which by and large is made up of 'post-reform' cities - cities whose government structures were reorganized after the progressive movement in the early twentieth century. The progressive movement arose out of concerns with the corruption that characterized many of the party machines which ran cities in the northeast, such as Tammany Hall in New York City. Progressives wanted to reduce the power of those machines and of the immigrants who ran them. To do so, they advocated the bureaucratization of city government; this included the use of civil servants instead of political appointees, the enlargement of city council districts, and the weakening of city mayors (so they could not use the office to appoint their friends, or use city resources to support their pet projects).

The progressives were highly successful, and most local governments in the south-west remain organized according to their ideals. Their reforms did diminish political corruption. But they had other consequences as well. Having larger districts means that candidates need to raise more money to run for public office and to have larger numbers of people supporting them. This situation has some negative effects. First, it makes it very difficult for a candidate to be successful without personal wealth, party backing, or corporate support. Second, voters are more distant from their representatives because they represent a larger number of people, which makes it nearly impossible for elected officials to have personal contact with a significant proportion of their constituents. For example, each Los Angeles County Supervisor represents about 2 million people, and it costs more than \$5 million to run for a seat on the board. This clearly makes it difficult for constituents to feel connected to their government or to have any personal contact with their supervisor. It also puts the cost of running for a supervisory seat outside of the realm of most people. The need to raise large amounts of money to run for office

and to have large-scale name recognition also privileges incumbents. Few challengers other than the independently wealthy are up to the task of raising the funds necessary to compete with a well-funded incumbent within this context. This makes turnover for elected officials very low, which decreases representational accountability.

Another local-level factor of importance is whether or not a locality has at-large or single-member districts. At-large districts mean that a city is defined as one large district, and a certain number of individuals are elected 'at large' to serve on the city council. A single-member district system means that the city is broken up into a set number of districts, with non-overlapping geographic boundaries, and each district receives one representative. Studies have shown that cities with single-member districts are much more likely to elect minority representatives, because it is easier for the latter to surpass the 50 percent threshold within a small district than to do it within the city at large. As a result, under the VRA, courts have often ordered cities to adopt single-member districting when there is a geographically concentrated minority community which consistently supports candidates who lose under an at-large districting system. That being said, this remedy again requires residential segregation in order to ensure minority representation.

Conclusion

Voting is important because this is how we choose our representatives. Electoral rules have a significant effect on which groups are able to win elections and hence on which groups are able to have the representatives of their choice. Once in office, legislative rules affect those representatives' ability to represent their constituents' interests. But how do we know if these representatives are doing a good job? 'Representation' is one of the most difficult ideas to define or to measure. What exactly does it mean to be represented? It is likely that all members of the polity feel that their elected representatives reflect their interests on some issues but not on others. Looking from the outside, how can elected officials know what a particular constituency favors in terms of public policy? We cannot have ongoing surveys of every community in the United States. And, even if we did, the ranking of issues in order of importance would probably vary from month to month. In any case, even if representatives have perfect information about their constituents' preferences, they may choose to vote in a different way, according to their conscience. Are these representatives supposed simply to echo

the beliefs of their constituency or to take principled positions based on their own political preferences? Is a representative still 'representing' her community if she supports a minority position on the basis of a moral principle? These are very difficult questions to answer. Given that fact, many analysts use descriptive representation as a proxy for substantive representation, on the basis of the assumption that individuals with similar life experiences are better able to represent one another. On the descriptive side, Latinos remain significantly underrepresented at all levels of government, in relation to their population. This is due to the fact that US institutional structures, with their majoritarian rules and historical exclusion of people of color and women, make it difficult for minorities to get elected. It is unlikely that the situation will change in the future. The question is: To what extent does the US political system represent Latino substantive interests? We will see in the following chapters that the answer to this question varies across time, national-origin group, and geographic context.