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Voto Latino...in Rural America?

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When discussing the voting behavior of Hispanics in the United States, members of the media and scholars of political science rarely make a distinction between rural and urban voters. It is possible that rural Hispanics vote at a different rate than both their urban counterparts and the surrounding non-Hispanic rural population. Considering the different social context that exist in rural and urban areas of the United States, I hypothesize that living in a rural location will decrease the likelihood for Hispanic residents turning out to vote. Using CPS November 2012 data, the results of the logistic regression analyses indicate that geographical location is important in determining Hispanic voter turnout in the United States. In fact, the model predicts certain rural Hispanics, Puerto Ricans and Central/South Americans, will turn out to vote at a rate 36% and 30% less than other rural Hispanics (e.g. Mexican-Americans), and that this effect of location is significant for both rural Hispanics and non-Hispanics, generally.

Introduction

The demographic trend in the United States away from non-metropolitan, rural areas that began in the post-World War II era has continued well into the 21st century. This migration of the US population into cities and their surrounding suburbs has left the United States increasingly less and less inhabited outside of the major metropolitan areas. Roughly 83% of the US population lives in these major metropolitan areas, leaving 17% of the population to inhabit about 75% of the land area of the United States (Johnson 2012). However, this “emptying out” of the United States’ rural areas conceals a simultaneously occurring demographic shift. Those that remain outside the major metropolitan areas of the US are not simply those that are left behind as this migration proceeds. In fact, from 2000 to 2010, minority groups accounted for 82.7% of the growth in the rural US population (Johnson 2012). And although they only account for 21% of the total rural US population, the movement of these minority groups into rural America is fundamentally changing its social and political structures. From the increasing and unique demands placed on public schools to changes in the labor market, minority populations are causing distinct issues to rise to the top of the public and private sectors’ agenda. Moreover, if these trends continue, Hispanics (the major minority group in the rural US) will become

more and more consequential, in every conceivable way, to political life in non-metropolitan areas. Therefore, understanding their political behavior is imperative if we, as social scientists, wish to fully and accurately conceptualize 21st century American politics.

However, when discussing political participation – specifically, the voting behavior – of minority and ethnic populations in the United States, both members of the media and scholars of political science rarely make a distinction between rural and urban voters. Demographic factors are emphasized and they are given the same weight in both rural and urban minorities' voting decisions. That is to say, the context within which these decisions are made is rarely given any independent effect. For example, in the media it is generally expected that minorities and members of ethnic groups are more likely, given the option, to vote for a Democratic candidate than a Republican candidate. This expectation holds for both rural and urban minorities, with no distinction being drawn between them. In the scholarly literature on ethnic politics and minority voting behavior, theories of political mobilization expect contextual factors affecting minority turnout to hold true in all geographic locales. For instance, it is expected that group concentration – for Hispanic voters – will increase participation regardless of their physical location (Leighley 2001). There is simply no convincing empirical or theoretical reason to expect all minorities in all areas to act in a politically monolithic manner. It is exactly this that I propose to explore in the following analysis. More directly, the research question I will address is as follows: is Hispanic/Latino voter turnout dependent on geographical location?

Teasing out any distinction between rural and urban Hispanic voting behavior is important not only for positive, scholarly reasons, but is also important for more normative reasons. That is to say, the equitable participation of all citizens in the politics of a democratic society is fundamental in maintaining procedural and substantive consistency with its foundational values and norms. Should one group of individuals not participate – or participate at a relatively minimal rate compared with other groups – in the institutions of the public sphere, then that democratic system is at risk of becoming shallow, and democratic-in-name-only. Therefore, it is imperative that we as citizens and scholars understand the dynamics behind any lack of participation of specific societal groups in democratic processes. Moreover, for more practical electoral reasons, given the large and increasing population of Hispanics in the politically competitive western states of Nevada and Colorado, for example, understanding how geography

and voter turnout interacts is of the utmost importance. If, for instance, campaigns simply conclude that they can reach both rural and urban Hispanics in the same manner (i.e. with GOTV and other mobilization techniques) and this is in fact an invalid conclusion, they will suffer electorally. And although admittedly they comprise a small proportion of the total US population, rural voters do measure more substantially in many electorally competitive states (i.e. Iowa and New Hampshire, where over 50% of the population is considered rural by the US Census), and are therefore more politically consequential both at the local and national/presidential level.

In order to address both the positive and normative concerns raised above, the following analysis will first explore the existing scholarly literatures on both rural and Hispanic voting behavior, indicating what limitations will be directly addressed by this article. Based on this review, I will develop a theoretical framework that accounts for the hypothesized varying levels of voter turnout among rural and urban Hispanic populations. Next, the data and methodology used to test this framework will be presented and the results discussed. Finally, based on these results, some general conclusions will be drawn concerning the voting behavior of rural Hispanic/Latino populations in the United States.

Literature Review

The study of Hispanic voting behavior has a relatively short tradition in the discipline of political science, which in some ways mirrors the relatively recent rise in importance of Hispanics to the electoral process (Garcia 1988; de la Garza, DeSipio, and Leal 2010). Moreover, most scholarship says little about the direct effects of geographical location on Hispanic turnout, although some in the discipline argue that social context matters a great deal in determining political participation. One vein of research on Hispanic voting behavior derives its theories and explanations for the varying level of Hispanic turnout directly from the individual-level, demographic-centric explanations of political behavior. These scholars point to socioeconomic status as indicative of an individual's voting behavior. They argue that high socioeconomic status correlates strongly with participation, which includes voting, contacting representative officials, and participating in campaigns (Verba and Nie 1972; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). That is to say, individuals with a higher socioeconomic status have higher levels of education, more time to devote to costly information gathering, and will therefore have more resources available to

facilitate the act of voting. The opposite is true of those with a lower socioeconomic status. And although some scholars have found socioeconomic factors (i.e. income, education, and immigrant status) have little or a differing effect on Hispanic voter turnout and public opinion in particular (Cho 1999; Claassen 2004; Hritzuk and Park 2000; Leal 2002), the preponderance of literature on voter turnout consistently finds that these factors matter for Hispanics (Arvizu and Garcia 1996; DeSipio 1996; Hero and Campbell 1996; Jackson 2003; Uhlaner, Cain, and Kiewiet 1989). However, the fact remains, as Birnir states, that “we know very little about how members of ethnic groups vote and why and how their votes shape democratic party systems” (2007, 6).

Another line of research into Hispanic political behavior focuses on the external/social context influencing voter turnout. Much of this literature is influenced by Uhlaner’s (1989) theoretical conception of *relational goods*; that payoffs from interactions among individuals is an essential and powerful predictor of political behavior. In other words, this scholarship recognizes the reality that non-demographic, outside factors influence an individual voter’s decision on whether he or she will turn out to vote. For instance, mobilization is shown to consistently play an important role in determining voter turnout among Hispanics (Barreto and Nuno 2009; Bedolla and Michelson 2012; Michelson 2003; Ramirez 2005). In addition, Leighley (2001) and Barreto (2007) argue that mobilization of minorities requires strong ethnic leadership, usually found in ethnic candidates. Diaz (1996) similarly argues that membership in organizations increases the likelihood that Hispanics will participate in the political process, while both de la Garza (2004) and Cho (1999) demonstrate the importance of Hispanics’ unique political socialization process in determining the specifics of their voting behavior. And while there is some literature examining Hispanic political behavior at the local and state levels (Barreto, Villarreal, and Woods 2005; Rocha 2007; Rocha et al. 2010), an underlying and unaddressed question remains: does a voter’s geographical location have an independent effect on his or her decision to vote?

There is scant literature on developing a theory of rural political participation – as opposed to urban political participation – in political science. In fact, rural politics is rarely, if ever, seriously studied by scholars, with the exception of comparative scholars of Latin American, European, Asian, and African politics, for example (Bates 1978; Castillo, Hernandez, and Furio 2006; Oi 1985; Richardson 1973; Tarrow 1971). When it is studied in the American context, rural political behavior is usually captured as a

control in statistical and theoretical models; that is to say, scholars of voting behavior may find variation between rural and urban locations, but no specific causal effects are theorized (Gronke, Galanes-Rosenbaum, and Miller 2007; Karp and Banducci 2000; Key 1955; Key 1959; Patterson and Caldeira 1985; Richardson and Neeley 1996). While some scholars have found that urban voters are more likely to turnout than their rural counterparts (Milbrath 1965; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980), others claim the opposite is the case (Johnson 1971; Lawrence, Wise, and Einsohn 2012; Monroe 1977). In contrast, some find that no difference exists – save for party identification – between the two populations (Nie, Powell, and Prewitt 1969).

There is, however, a small number of studies that exist on rural political behavior in the United States, which provide for specific theoretical location effects. For instance, Gimpel and Karnes (2006) and McKee (2008) demonstrate that rural and urban voters are distinct, not only in political identification, but also their social context. Sociologists Knoke and Henry (1977) also acknowledge the unique political culture found in rural America; most importantly, with the recent demographic trends described above comes increased heterogeneity in rural America; this alters the rural political socialization process (Lay 2012). More specifically, Lay finds that in rural areas of increasing diversity, younger and older non-Hispanic inhabitants are more tolerant of new comers (2012). Given these distinctions, then, it follows that rural political participation and voting behavior may not coincide exactly with its urban counterpart.

In sum, in order to add clarity to the political science literature on the subject, the following will address the question of whether Hispanic voters act identically in both rural and urban areas. In the section below, I will present an explanatory framework that addresses this question, demonstrating that a rural/urban distinction exists among the US Hispanic population.

Explanatory Framework

In constructing the theoretical framework underlying the analysis that follows, I draw directly from the insights of the literature reviewed above and highlight the differences that exist between urban and rural Hispanic populations. More specifically, I construct a narrative model of the theoretical relationship between geographical location and other variables as determinants of voter turnout.

Various socioeconomic factors (e.g. income and education) and campaign mobilization contact are theorized to have a specific and constant effect on the decision of an individual to vote. However, given the fact that the social context and external influences are distinct in rural and urban areas of the United States, geographical location is theorized to have a moderating effect on these individual-level determinants of voter turnout. For example, the mobilization of minority voters could suffer if there is no local minority leadership, candidates or political organizations, where voters would be forced to proactively seek out costly interactions instead of passively relying on co-ethnics. In more urbanized areas of the United States, the concentration of Hispanic populations is much higher than in rural America, and there are more dedicated Hispanic political organizations; this indicates that residing outside of metropolitan areas may hinder Hispanic mobilization efforts.

In sum, because of a lower mobilization potential resulting from the unique social context that exists, rural Hispanic voters are theorized to turn out to vote at a lower rate than their urban counterparts. In other words, this “geographic filtering” matters. More specifically, from this model of the relationship between geographical location and Hispanic voting behavior, I derive the following hypothesis:

H₁: Residing in a rural locale will have a negative effect on voter turnout for Hispanics.

In the section that follows, I will first operationalize these concepts – geographical location, ethnicity, and socioeconomic factors – and proceed in testing the veracity of the hypothesis. Doing so will help further justify the theoretical model described above, adding clarification to the relationship between ethnicity and geographical location with regard to voting behavior.

Data and Methods

In order to test the validity of my hypothesis, I use as my data both the Current Population Survey (CPS) from November 2012 as produced by the US Census (Bureau of the Census 2012), and the Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES) data from 2010 (Ansolabehere 2012), to which I added the United States Department of Agriculture's 2013 Rural-Urban Continuum Code (Parker 2013). I chose these data sets for several reasons. First, they correspond to the time period in question; namely, the first decade of the 21st century in which the rural US began to see a large growth in its Hispanic

population. Second, they include measures of geographical location, metropolitan/non-metropolitan in the CPS data and a 1 through 9 geo-code in the CCES data. And third, they include measures for voter turnout, various socioeconomic indicators, and other relevant variables.

While I use the CCES data to identify basic relationships between geographical location and social context, I chose to statistically model my explanatory framework with the CPS data because the number of non-metropolitan/rural Hispanics is relatively large. Only 221 rural Hispanics are included in the CCES data, while the CPS data set includes 1,407 non-metropolitan Hispanics. That is to say, while the CCES data are useful for making limited, descriptive inferences, the small number of rural Hispanic respondents fails to provide enough statistical power to make any correlational or causal inferences. I also chose to use the CPS data because it includes a measure of Hispanic respondent national origin. As will become clear in the discussion below, these distinctions are critical in determining the exact relationship between geographical location and Hispanic voter turnout.

The main limitation of the CPS data is the non-inclusion of any political variables. Direct measures of party identification, mobilization, religiosity, political interest or ideology are simply not available. However, given that my main variables of interest – geographical location, ethnicity, and voter turnout – are present in the CPS data, I argue that it is the most appropriate data to use for my statistical modeling purposes. And although, the Latino National Survey (Fraga et al. 2006) data set is available, I chose not to use it because it does not include a survey respondent geo-tag easily converted to a rural/urban measure, nor does it include one of its own.

With regard to the specific statistical model, I chose to use a logistic regression. I use this particular statistical model because the dependent variable is dichotomous. More specifically, the dependent variable in the model, voter turnout, is measured by a dichotomous, self-reported turnout measure, with 1= yes, the respondent voted in the November 2012 election and 0= no, the respondent did not vote in the November 2012 election (I dropped three categories of non-substantive responses – don't know, refused, and no response – out of statistical convenience). Using other available modeling techniques (e.g. probit) did not alter the substantive results of the regression analysis.

Now before specifying the operationalizing of the key variable in my framework, geographical location, I must address how *ruralness* and *urbanness* are defined. Both the CPS data (metropolitan and non-metropolitan) and the CCES data (1 through 9 USDA Rural-Urban Continuum) define these two concepts similarly. Specifically, the USDA's 9-point continuum - where 1 is completely urban and 9 is completely rural - takes into account both *population size* and *proximity to metropolitan areas*. For example, category 4 in the continuum identifies those respondents residing in an urban location of 20,000 or more people, adjacent to a metro area, whereas category 5 identifies those respondents residing in an urban location of 20,000 or more people, *not* adjacent to a metro area. The CPS data also takes into account both factors; metropolitan areas consist of a central population nucleus (at least 50,000) *and* the adjacent communities that are tied together economically and socially. These adjacent communities are defined by the economic and social ties to the central city, as well as their population density and growth. In other words, while these two measures are not perfectly correlated in terms of measurement specifics, I argue that they both capture similar relationships between geographical location and Hispanic voter turnout.

In the CPS data, therefore, to capture geographical location and any differences that may exist between rural and urban populations, I use the variable identifying each respondent's location as either metropolitan or non-metropolitan as determined by the US Census. Although not as detailed a measure of the rural-urban dichotomy as the USDA Rural-Urban Continuum used in the CCES data, the lack of zip code or complete county identifiers gives me little choice. To capture the effects of geographical location on Hispanic respondents, I included in the model five dummy variables indicating national origin: Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central/South American, and other Spanish, with Anglos/non-Hispanics as the comparison category.

In addition, because immigration/citizenship status has been demonstrated to be an important determinant of voter turnout I have included an ordinal measure of it as well. It is coded as follows: 1= native, born in the United States, 2= native, born in Puerto Rico or other US island area, 3= native, born abroad of American parent or parents, and 4= foreign born, US citizen by naturalization. I dropped all non-citizens from the data set because they are ineligible to vote. As controls, I include in my model two ordinal variables measuring educational attainment and family income, two continuous variables capturing the effects of age (age and aged-

squared), one dichotomous variable measuring sex, and five occupational dummy variables (with management/professional as the comparison category). These are included in order to capture the socioeconomic effects on voter turnout. Again, the nature of the CPS data set did not allow me to include the more substantive political variables mentioned previously, and more will be said about this in the conclusion that follows. In the next section, I will present both a descriptive analysis and the results of my logistic regression model, hopefully making these operationalizations and the corresponding theoretical concepts more clear.

Results and Discussion

Using the supplemented CCES data, the cross tabulation below (Table 1) displays the number of Hispanic respondents who were contacted and not contacted by a political campaign during the 2010 election. Although the data are not conclusive and the number of rural Hispanics included in the data is quite limited, the cross tabulation seems to indicate that campaign

Table 1: 2010 Campaign Contact by Geographical Area

Rural-Urban Continuum (USDA)	Yes, Contacted by Campaign		No, Not Contacted by Campaign	
	N	%	N	%
Counties in metro areas of 1 million pop or more	596	44	752	55
Counties in metro areas of 250,000 to 1 million pop	170	51	159	48
Counties in metro areas of fewer than 250,000 pop	53	54	45	46
Urban pop of 20,000 or more, adjacent to metro area	22	51	21	49
Urban pop of 20,000 or more, not adjacent to metro area	2	20	8	80
Urban pop of 2,500 to 19,999, adjacent to metro area	14	45	17	55
Urban pop of 2,500 to 19,999, not adjacent to metro area	4	26	11	73
Completely rural or less than 2,500 urban pop, not adjacent to metro area	3	100	0	0
Total	864		1013	

Pearson chi2(7) = 17.5371 Pr = 0.014

Note: the gray area indicates how the United States Department of Agriculture defines rural or non-metro.

contact rate may be effected by where a voter resides. Moreover, as the chi-squared test indicates, the differences in contact rate among Hispanics residing in different locations is statistically significant at the 0.05 level. Interestingly, those Hispanic voters in the middle of the Rural-Urban Continuum (i.e. suburban/exurban) report the highest contact rate; and moreover, two of the rural areas not adjacent to metropolitan areas report the lowest rate of campaign contact. In other words, geography may indeed matter.

Moreover, because the social context is different in rural areas, the urban-centric electoral messages promulgated during election cycles may not diffuse as strongly outside the metropolitan areas. It is also possible that these urban-centric messages may not be completely received by those Hispanics living in rural areas of the US, even if they reach them fully intact. Again, given the distinct political culture that exists in the rural US, racial solidarity messages could fall on deaf ears of rural Hispanic voters who may

Table 2: Hispanic Self-reported Ideology by Geographical Area

Rural-Urban Continuum (USDA)	Very Lib- Lib		Moderate		Very Con- Con	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Counties in metro areas of 1 million pop or more	561	35	602	37	424	26
Counties in metro areas of 250,000 to 1 million pop	119	29	151	37	137	33
Counties in metro areas of fewer than 250,000 pop	30	24	45	36	48	39
Urban pop of 20,000 or more, adjacent to metro area	17	32	18	33	18	33
Urban pop of 20,000 or more, not adjacent to metro area	3	17	7	41	7	41
Urban pop of 2,500 to 19,999, adjacent to metro area	11	32	8	23	15	44
Urban pop of 2,500 to 19,999, not adjacent to metro area	4	22	9	50	5	27
Completely rural or less than 2,500 urban pop, adjacent to a metro area	1	100	0	0	0	0
Completely rural or less than 2,500 urban pop, not adjacent to metro area	1	33	2	66	0	0
Total	747		842		654	

Pearson $\chi^2(16) = 27.9848$ Pr = 0.032

Note: the gray area indicates how the United States Department of Agriculture defines rural or non-metro.

not share the same level of ethnicity-based political motivating behavior as their urban counterparts. Or rather, as a function of their different social contexts, perhaps rural and urban Hispanics simply do not hold the same ideological positions. This also has the potential to hinder the reception of any urban-centric messages sent during campaigns and in turn effect their voter turnout rates.

Again, using the CCES data, the table above (Table 2) displays the self-reported ideological positions of Hispanics during the 2010 election. This cross-tabulation reveals an ideological distinction between those Hispanic voters living in rural and urban/suburban areas. Although not very clear-cut – again, most likely a function of the low number of rural Hispanics in the data – a pattern can be seen indicating that a higher percentage of respondents identifying as moderate or conservative reside in rural areas compared to urban/suburban areas. And, again, the chi-squared test indicates the differences in ideology among Hispanics residing in different locations is statistically significant at the 0.05 level. At the very least, then, it is clear that ideology is not geographically independent.

The results of my logistic regression model are found in the table below (Table 3). The total number of respondents in the model is 54,292, and my main independent variable of interest – the rural measure – is statistically significant at the 0.05 level, and the variable coefficient falls in the hypothesized direction. However, interpreting this variable coefficient is less than straightforward, as here we are dealing in probabilities, not numerical movement on a continuous scale. More specifically, according to the model, for all residents in a rural area as opposed to an urban area the log odds of a respondent indicating that they voted in the November 2012 election decrease by 0.06. These geographic location effects on voter turnout are even more interesting when both ethnicity and Hispanic national origin are controlled for. Among the five Hispanic national origin variables, only the interaction terms *Rural x Puerto Rican* and *Rural x Central/South-American* are statistically significant. These coefficients indicate that compared with Anglo/non-Hispanic rural residents, both rural Puerto Rican and Central/South-American respondents are less likely to indicate that they voted in the November 2012 election. For Mexican-Americans, Cuban-Americans, and other Spanish-speaking Americans, geographical location does not effect them any differently than Anglos/non-Hispanics. That is to say, among all rural residents the likelihood of voting is less than among urban residents; yet among Hispanics, specifically, the effects of residing in a rural location differ in magnitude depending on national origin. I will

discuss these distinctions among Hispanics in more detail later in this section.

Table 3: Determinants of Hispanic and Non-Hispanic Voter Turnout

	Coeff.	Std Error
Age	0.0178***	0.00476
Age-squared	0.000257***	0.0000558
Sex	0.150***	0.0233
Education	0.236***	0.00588
Citizenship	-0.217***	0.0139
Family Income	0.0637***	0.00299
Service ^a	-0.253***	0.0334
Sales/Office ^a	-0.106***	0.0303
Farming/Fishing/Forestry ^a	-0.458***	0.130
Construction/Maintenance ^a	-0.528***	0.0418
Production/Transportation ^a	-0.484***	0.0372
Rural/Non-Metropolitan (1/0)	-0.0607*	0.0268
Mexican-American^b	-0.221***	0.0481
Rural x Mexican-American^b	-0.135	0.134
Puerto Rican^b	-0.0973	0.101
Rural x Puerto Rican^b	-1.574***	0.461
Cuban-American^b	0.224	0.186
Rural x Cuban-American^b	-0.0930	0.682
Central/South-American^b	0.438***	0.0898
Rural x Central/South-American^b	-1.212*	0.526
Other Spanish^b	-0.125	0.140
Rural x Other Spanish^b	-0.172	0.324
Intercept	-10.23***	0.260
<i>N</i>	54292	
<i>LR chi-squared(22)</i>	8977.56	
<i>Prob>chi-squared</i>	0.000	
<i>Pseudo R-squared</i>	0.1417	

Note: ^a compared to management/professional; ^b compared to Anglos; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

As for the control variables, I will discuss their results only briefly. Age, age-squared, sex, education, citizenship, family income, and the five occupation variables are all statistically significant at the 0.001 level, and the coefficients tell a story similar to that found in the literature; namely, that as Hispanic respondents age, belong to later generations of Hispanic-Americans, increase their educational attainment and family income, but are female, the log odds increase they will indicate that they voted in the November 2012 election. In addition, when compared to Hispanic respondents in management or professional occupations, office, service

sector, transportation, construction, and agricultural workers are increasingly less likely to indicate that they voted in the November 2012 election.

From these regression coefficients, however, it is not obvious how exactly the relationship between geographical location and voter turnout functions. More interesting and intuitive is their substantive significance.

Table 4: Predicted Probability of Hispanic Voter Turnout by National Origin and Geographical Location (in percentage)

Ethnicity/National Origin	Probability of Voting in November 2012 Election	
	Urban	Rural
41 year-old male, native-born, <i>Mexican- American</i> with mean levels of family income and education working in the transportation industry	52.6	47.7
41 year-old male, native-born, <i>Puerto Rican</i> with mean levels of family income and education working in the transportation industry	55.7	19.7
41 year-old male, native-born, <i>Cuban-American</i> with mean levels of family income and education working in the transportation industry	63.4	59.8%
41 year-old male, native-born, <i>Central/South American</i> with mean levels of family income and education working in the transportation industry	68.2	37.5
41 year-old male, native-born, <i>Other Spanish</i> with mean levels of family income and education working in the transportation industry	55	49.2

More specifically, in the table above (Table 4) I present the predicted probabilities of voter turnout highlighting the effect of geographical location on the probability of voting for a 41 year-old, native-born male, with mean levels of family income and education working in the transportation industry. For example, a Puerto Rican respondent is roughly 36% less likely to vote if he lives in a rural location compared to an urban location; for Central/South Americans the difference between rural and urban respondents is over 30%. Among the other rural Hispanic respondents - Mexican-Americans, Cuban-Americans, and Other Spanish-Americans - the effects are much less and not statistically different than Anglos/non-Hispanics. What could account for this substantive difference among national origin?

Again, as I discussed in the explanatory framework section, the relatively small size and comparatively few direct political activities of co-

ethnic groups and their leaders in a rural setting may both moderate the effects of mobilization efforts by campaigns, as well as inhibit certain rural Hispanics from even being contacted. In a locale dominated by a conservative Anglo political culture, as is much of the rural US, it is not unreasonable to suggest that in a Zaller-esque (1992) manner, some Hispanics are unable to *receive* elite messages that are disseminated from urban centers and therefore turnout to vote at a lower rate. This is especially true of rural Hispanic groups whose members originate from Puerto Rico and Central and South America. As a percentage of the rural population, these two groups overall are significantly smaller than Mexican-Americans, for example. Perhaps the rural Mexican-American population is large, concentrated, and politically active enough to help insulate the elite messages as they travel from urban to rural locations, mitigating any ethnicity-specific location effect. Smaller groups, like Guatemalan-Americans, could simply be too small and dispersed to help magnify elite messages, and they become diluted and supplanted by other messages when they reach these rural locations.

On the other hand, certain Hispanic groups, like Mexican-Americans, may be more integrated into the rural economic community than others. Take the importance of the energy industry in the rural US. While it is true that in cities like Houston, Texas and Tulsa, Oklahoma, the energy industry is critical to economic success, the energy sector's impact in rural areas is increased tenfold. For example, the area in and around Midland, Texas had the lowest unemployment rate in the nation at 3.1% in 2013, thanks primarily to expansion of oil and gas exploration in the Permian Basin.¹ More impressive, the state of North Dakota, a predominately rural state, has been transformed by the oil and gas boom of the past 5 years. It should be no surprise then, that those individuals living in rural areas who are deeply integrated into the economic community, *irrespective of their ethnicity*, would view any regulation that may dampen energy development as a threat to their personal well-being. Additionally, because Hispanics living in rural areas of the United States are more likely to identify as moderate-to-conservative than liberal, ideological anti-regulatory positions could affect their *acceptance* of elite mobilization messages. In some sense, then, there could be an internal tension between an individual's ethnicity/national origin and his economic security, which is more pronounced in *less* integrated groups leading to an increased negative effect of rural location on voter turnout.

¹ http://www.mrt.com/top_stories/article_13fe1d78-b28a-11e2-924f-0019bb2963f4.html

Teasing out the possible causal relationships between political and economic integration, ethnicity/national origin, and elite message reception and acceptance, is beyond the scope of this study, however. Future research must address these questions in a more deliberate and concentrated manner. Nevertheless, the results of this analysis indicate that living in a rural area has real and important consequences for both Hispanic and non-Hispanic voters. As a population, rural voters are less likely to indicate that they turnout to vote, while among Hispanics specifically there is quite significant variation in geographic location effects. Rural Mexican-Americans, Cuban-Americans, and other Spanish-speaking Americans turn out to vote at a rate no different than their fellow rural-dwelling Anglos. Rural Puerto Ricans and Central/South Americans, however, are predicted to vote at a rate roughly 36% and 30% less than rural Anglos, respectively.

Conclusion

As stated above, the results of this analysis indicate that geographical location is important in determining variation among rural Hispanic voter turnout in the United States. However, I must state emphatically that these results are not definitive, nor should they be accepted without a critical eye. That is to say, the data used for this study is limited in two ways. First, the proportion of Hispanic rural dwellers is quite small (10% of total Hispanic respondents), which contributed to the inefficiency of the estimators as shown in the large confidence intervals in the tables. Second, theoretically speaking, this simple data model is unable to flesh out exactly why rural Hispanics differ from urban Hispanics, or why geographical location has the effect that it does on voting behavior. For example, to flush out how and why exactly the voting costs are higher and benefits are lower for Hispanics in rural America, identifying the differences in socialization and mobilization is key. Nothing in this data can conclusively determine the origins of these differences. Third, self-reported voter turnout measures are notoriously over inflated; the CPS is no exception, where 71.9% of respondents reported that they voted in the November 2012 election. In my future research, I plan on exploring these issues and addressing the data limitations mentioned above. I would like to try to tease out a rural/urban measure from the Latino National Survey data, as it is a rich source of survey data for specifically Hispanic-Americans.

Nonetheless, the results of this analysis indicate that there is an important area left unexplored in the minority political behavior literature. The intersection of population size, density, location, integration, and

mobilization through elite messaging is something that needs to be addressed in the literature. Moreover, given the increasing importance of the Hispanic population to our electoral system, and especially their demographic transformation of rural America, understanding how these groups differ is essential for the discipline and for our democracy. The results also indicate, based on their interpretation through the lens of integration, that some Hispanic groups may exist on the edges of broader American political and economic society. This phenomenon must be better understood in order for Hispanics to be fully integrated into American society, wherever they may live.

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