

Tyler Reny*, Bryan Wilcox-Archuleta and Vanessa Cruz Nichols Threat, Mobilization, and Latino Voting in the 2018 Election

<https://doi.org/10.1515/for-2018-0041>

Abstract: Throughout the 2016 US presidential campaign and the first 2 years of his presidency, Donald Trump has repeatedly dehumanized immigrants in pursuit of more restrictive immigration policies. Despite the common perception that this threat should increase the political mobilization of Latino voters, existing research has yielded mixed findings. In this article, we argue that attention has to be paid to both threatening climate and mobilization. We examine Latino voting in the 2018 midterm election using both aggregate election data from 2014 and 2018 as well as a large 10-week tracking poll ($n=2767$) of Latinos during the last 2 months of the 2018 election. We show that, compared to 2014, the number of ballots cast by Latinos increased substantially. Using the tracking poll, however, we show that threat alone did not appear to be sufficient to mobilize Latino voters in the 2018 election. It is threat combined with mobilization, rather, that increased Latino voting. We discuss implications for future Latino political participation in the US.

Introduction

In June of 2015, Donald Trump launched his campaign for the Republican Party's presidential nomination with a now infamous speech decrying immigration to the US and singling out undocumented Mexican immigrants, in particular, as threatening to the nation. Throughout the remainder of his presidential campaign and subsequent first 2 years in office, Trump and his administration have continued to single out Latino¹ immigrants as particularly dangerous and threatening.

¹ Throughout this article we will use Latino and Hispanic interchangeably.

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These statements have been backed up with concrete actions – including an attempt to end the Obama-era Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, the separation of undocumented children from their families at the southern border, the expansion in criteria of those targeted for deportations, the re-drafting of rules regarding asylum, and drastic reductions in the numbers of refugees resettled to the US.

Throughout the Fall of 2018, President Trump escalated enforcement rhetoric as the mid-term elections neared, fearing a potential loss of both the Senate and the House. As one New York Times article summarized: “President Trump’s closing [midterm election] argument is now clear: build tent cities for migrants. End birthright citizenship. Fear the [Central American migrant] caravan. Send active-duty troops to the border. Refuse asylum.” (Shear and Davis 2018).

This combination of punitive rhetoric and the widespread immigration surveillance has created a greater sense of dread within the US Latino community, regardless of their citizenship status or nativity (Cruz Nichols, LeBrón, and Pedraza 2018a,b). An emerging literature has found that increases in local immigrant policing, and the salience of immigration concerns, carries vast and spillover effects for the Latino community, including but not limited to harming one’s mental and physical health, decreasing trust in government, and a reluctance in engaging with health care professionals and police (Rocha, Knoll, and Wrinkle 2015; Novak, Geronimus, and Martinez-Cardoso 2017; Pedraza, Cruz Nichols, and LeBrón 2017; Cruz Nichols, LeBrón, and Pedraza 2018a,b). According to a recent Pew Survey (Lopez, Gonzalez-Barrera, and Krogstad 2018), half of Latinos say their situation in the US has worsened over the last year, 49% have concerns about their place in US society, 55% are worried that they, a family member, or a close friend could be deported, and 67% say that the Trump administration’s policies have been harmful to Hispanics.

It is clear that Trump is having an effect on the Latino community in the US. What is less clear, however, is whether outrage toward Trump was enough to increase rates of Latino voting in the 2018 election. To guard against cynicism and disillusion in a threatening political environment, Cruz Nichols (2017) argues that mobilizers and interest groups seeking to spur greater levels of political participation are more effective in spurring various forms of political activism if they counter threats with a policy opportunity message that emphasizes the possibility of more desirable policy goals. Thus, building off of Cruz Nichols (2017), Barreto (2018) and Barreto and Collingwood (2014), we hypothesize that threat alone is insufficient to increase Latino political participation absent mobilization efforts from political actors. We test this hypothesis using aggregate electoral data from the 2014 and 2018 midterm elections and individual level opinion data from the 2018 midterm. We find that the number of ballots cast by Latinos

did indeed increase substantially in 2018 compared to 2014. Using the individual level tracking poll data, however, we found that threat alone was insufficient to increase turnout among Latinos in 2018. Threat together with mobilization, however, was associated with an increase in likelihood of voting.

Latino Political Behavior

The question of who votes and why has dominated behavioral political science research for the better part of the last half decade (Leighley and Nagler 2013). This research has identified two factors that tell us a lot about whether an adult votes or not. The first is whether the individual was socialized to be politically active by their parents and peers (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954; Niemi and Jennings 1991). The second is whether the individual has the requisite resources – broadly conceived to include money, time, and civic education – that facilitate participation (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995).

For both of these factors, Latinos in the US are at a disadvantage. With respect to socialization, over a third of Latinos in the US were born abroad and therefore learn about the US political system as adults. This process of re-socialization has led to weaker attachments to American political parties which could weaken mobilization efforts by political parties and actors (Hajnal and Lee 2011).²

Latinos also have far fewer resources to participate. Young Latinos have lower levels of average education, face higher high school dropout rates, and have lower levels of college education (Lopez 2009; Garcia Bedolla 2014). Wealth disparities between whites and Asians on the upper end of the scale and blacks and Latinos at the bottom have only grown after the 2007 recession (Kochhar and Cilluffo 2017; Tran and Valdez 2017). These resource disadvantages have also been shown to translate into lower levels of political knowledge and participation among racial minority groups (DeSipio 1996; Tam Cho 1999; Michelson 2005).

To more fully explain how racial minorities overcome socioeconomic disadvantages and other forms of exclusion to participate in politics, scholars have often turned to one's group identification and group consciousness (Miller et al. 1981; Garcia 1982; Dawson 1994; Masuoka 2006; Sanchez 2006; Sanchez and Masuoka 2010). Group dynamics, these scholars argue, can incentivize and shape

² Though an exciting line of research is identifying ways that children of immigrants socialize their parents to engage in US politics (Wong and Tseng 2008; Terriquez and Kwon 2015; Carlos 2018).

a variety of political behaviors (Gurin, Miller, and Gurin 1980; White, Laird, and Allen 2014).

Over the last few decades, individuals of Hispanic origin – an incredibly diverse group – have been increasingly identifying with a pan-ethnic Latino identity (Garza et al. 1989; Jones-Correa and Leal 1996). While the potential reasons for this shift are numerous (Sanchez 2006; Jimenez 2009; Fraga et al. 2012), the impact of group consciousness and linked fate on Latino political attitudes and behaviors has been well-documented (Barreto, Segura, and Woods 2004; Masuoka 2006; Sanchez 2006; Barreto 2007). Understanding the power of pan-ethnic identity and analyzing political participation through a group lens opens up two avenues of research into how group-based appeals, whether threatening or mobilizing, can change levels of participation among Latinos in the US.

Threat

Past literature has suggested that political threat can be a highly mobilizing force. With regards to threat and Latino participation, scholars frequently point to the political consequences of California's Proposition 187 and subsequent racialized ballot propositions, as evidence of Latino backlash (Suárez-Orozco 1996; Bowler, Nicholson, and Segura 2006; HoSang 2010; Robinson et al. 2016).

In 1994, California voters approved Proposition 187, a ballot proposition that, among other things, banned undocumented immigrants from accessing public services like health care and public education. While the campaign was initially fueled by political activists, and not parties, the incumbent governor Pete Wilson embraced the measure during his re-election bid (HoSang 2010). Opponents to the campaign – noted for its anti-Mexican rhetoric (Ono and Sloop 2002) – perceived it as an attack on all immigrants.

Scholars have shown that Proposition 187 had a significant impact on the state's Latino population, including increases in naturalization rates (Pantoja, Ramirez, and Segura 2001), desire to learn about politics (Pantoja and Segura 2003), voting (Pantoja, Ramirez, and Segura 2001), and Democratic party identification (Bowler, Nicholson, and Segura 2006; but see Hui and Sears 2018).

Other political events catalyzed by threat have been shown to be politically mobilizing as well. The 2006 immigration debates over a comprehensive immigration reform bill in Congress spurred large protests, which in turn have been associated with increased political participation among Latinos (Barreto et al. 2009; Jordán Wallace, Zepeda-Millán, and Jones-Correa 2014; Zepeda-Millan 2017). Similar mobilization effects are found among Latinos who are

more geographically proximate – and therefore threatened – by deportations (White 2016).

Political psychologists suggest that the mobilizing effects of threat, however, are not uniform across the Latino population. Pérez (2014), for example, finds that threatening xenophobic rhetoric is linked to political mobilization, but only among those who have strong group identities that they feel they need to protect. Among Latinos with weak group identification, threat can be politically demobilizing (Jimenez 2009; Pérez 2014).

This demobilizing, or “chilling effect” of threat is well documented in the sociological literature. Sociologists have found ample evidence that anti-immigrant enforcement can drive Latinos into the “shadows” (Menjívar 2006; Chavez 2013), because scholars suggest these policies negatively shape their sense of belonging to the US (Ocampo 2018). This chilling effect is evident in other populations, as well. In research on Muslims, for example, Oskooii (2016) finds that social discrimination can increase feelings of powerlessness, hopelessness, and sadness – all demobilizing emotions. These findings correspond with a larger literature in political psychology on the demobilizing effects of fear (Brader 2005; Valentino et al. 2011) and disgust (Cassese and Holman 2018), while also pointing to the mobilizing effects of anger (Banks 2014; Towler and Parker 2018). As opposed to fear, anger stems from a greater sense of pinpointing the cause of one’s anger and makes one feel capable of righting the wrong (Banks 2014; Phoenix 2015).

Threat and the 2016 Election

For decades, political pundits have suspected that the Hispanic political “giant” is just on the verge of awakening – ready to cast ballots en masse and close the participation gap (Godsell 1980). If much of the literature on threat and participation is correct, the 2016 presidential election – where the Republican candidate engaged in widely reported and repeated attacks on Latinos and immigrants – seemed particularly likely to spur a large and growing Latino community to political action.

And yet, results fell short of expectations. While Latino turnout was up slightly in 2016 over 2012 (somewhere between 2 and 4 percentage points according to Fraga et al. 2017; McDonald 2017), and Clinton clearly improved on her margins with Latinos compared to Obama (Valenzuela and Reny 2016; Barreto, Reny, and Wilcox-Archuleta 2017; Dominguez and Reny 2017; Garcia-Rios and Reny 2017; Griffin and Wilcox-Archuleta 2017; Pedraza and Wilcox-Archuleta 2017a,b), the turnout gap between Latino and non-Hispanic whites was still

nearly 20 points. Garcia-Rios, Pedraza, and Wilcox-Archuleta (2018) show that Trump's election and xenophobic rhetoric, in particular, was responsible for a strong aversion towards Trump from Latinos with strong in-group identities, but most pronounced among Mexican heritage Latinos, though Barreto et al. (2017) show that aversion was still present among Latinos from other national origins, across generations, and across geographic areas. While compelling, these findings beg the question as to whether threat alone is sufficient to mobilize Latino voters. Or, as Cruz Nichols (2017) argues, whether Latinos need both threat *and* opportunity signals to increase political participation.

Mobilization

Ample evidence has documented that mobilization – traditionally conceived as a physical action like phone calls, mailers, and door knocking to encourage political participation – increases political participation (Green and Gerber 2000). Mobilization in the form of policy messaging, what Cruz Nichols (2017) calls opportunity messaging, can also trigger mobilizing effects (Miller and Krosnick 2004). Direct mobilization of Latinos, like other groups, increases turnout (Abra-jano 2010; Garcia-Rios and Barreto 2016), particularly co-ethnic in-person mobilization (Michelson 2003; 2005; Barreto, Merolla, and Defrancesco Soto 2011), and if the population shares a strong in-group identity (Valenzuela and Michelson 2016).

Despite the political potential of the Latino community, formal mobilization of Latinos has lagged (Jones-Correa 1998; Wong 2006; Ramírez, Solano, and Wilcox-Archuleta 2018). In 2016, as the presidential campaign entered its final month, polling found that only about 2 in 5 registered Latinos had been contacted by a party (Pantoja 2016). In the absence of formal party mobilization, community-based organizations and other groups such as *Mi Familia Vota* and *Latino Victory Project* focused on mobilization efforts. In 2018, Latino Decisions polling found that, even days before the election, only slightly more than 50% of Latinos had been contacted by a political party, candidate, or organization, indicating that we again entered a campaign cycle where threat is high but mobilization efforts, while higher than past elections, are still lagging behind.

Given the Trump Administrations's rhetoric and actions, we anticipate that Latino political participation will be higher in 2018 compared to 2014 (H1). We expect, however, that at the individual level, Latino participation in the 2018 election will be contingent on both threat *and* mobilization (H2).

Data, Methods, and Results

This analysis relies on two datasets. First, we collect aggregate precinct-level 2014 and 2018 election returns from individual county board of elections websites for a subset of counties in states with large Latino populations – Arizona, Texas, Nevada, Florida, California, New Jersey, New Mexico, and New York (approximately $n=20,000$ electoral precincts). We pair this electoral data with demographics for each precinct to estimate changes in ballots cast among Latino voters. This approach has a number of limitations that we detail in subsequent paragraphs.

We pair this aggregate analysis with 10 weeks of tracking poll survey data conducted via the Internet by the Latino polling firm, Latino Decisions (LD). This tracking poll includes numerous questions about President Trump, the Trump Administration's rhetoric and actions, mobilization, and a variety of participation measures. On September 5th, LD contacted a national random sample of 500 Latino registered voters to complete a web survey. Each subsequent week, 250 registered Latino voters were added and combined with the previous 250 interviews to create a rolling weekly average yielding a total sample size of $n=2767$. The surveys were self-administered in English or Spanish in an online panel, at the discretion of the respondent, and final results were weighted to be representative of the registered Latino population.

Setting the Agenda: Immigration in the Campaigns and in the News

Before we analyze the election data, we briefly show how the presence of immigration related content increased over the last 10 weeks of the election campaign. As aforementioned, immigration emerged as one of the most salient issues of the 2018 midterm elections. In addition to President Trump's rhetoric on the issue, a Wesleyan Media Project analysis of October broadcast advertising data shows that immigration was the topic of 1 in 10 ads aired, and nearly 2 in 5 of all pro-GOP ads aired (Wesleyan Media Project 2018).

This amplification of immigration as an issue of importance by the President and congressional candidates similarly corresponded with increased news coverage of the issue and subsequently spilled over into the mass public periphery. Drawing from Crimson Hexagon's database of news articles³ from

³ Crimson Hexagon draws from a variety of English language large and small, national and local online news sources including The Washington Post, the New York Times, Yahoo, sfgate and The Tampa Bay Times among others.

September 5 through November 6, 2018, we show in Figure 1 that both the volume (rescaled between 0 and 100) of news coverage mentioning salient immigration-related terms as well as the subsequent aggregate Google search data increased steadily over the last 10-weeks of the election, confirming that politicized

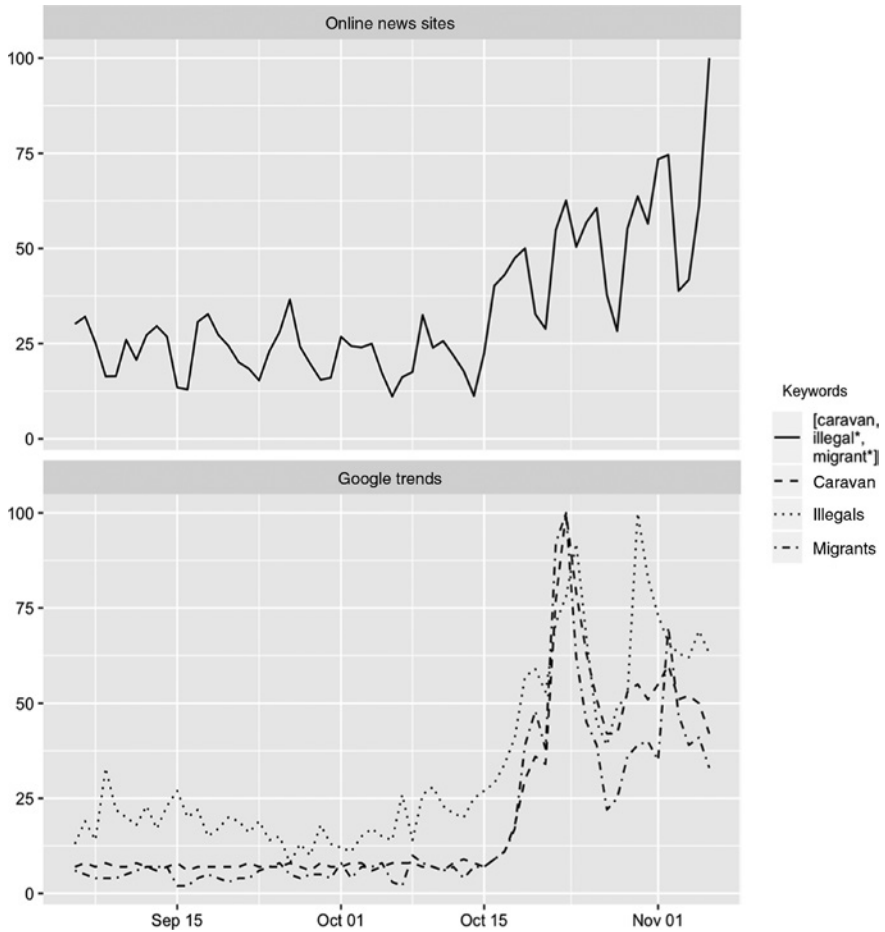


Figure 1: Immigration News and Google Trends.

Note: Lines indicate trends in news (panel A) and Google searches (panel B) of immigration related search terms from September 5, 2018 to election day, November 6, 2018, via Crimson Hexagon. Trends are re-scaled between 0 and 100. Results indicate rapid increase in both news coverage and Internet search activity regarding the Central American immigration caravan during the final weeks of the 2018 midterm election, consistent with President Trump's rhetoric.

immigration threat was salient during the 2018 election and increased as the Election Day approached. Indeed, when Latino respondents in the LD survey asked what the Republican Party stood for, many responded that the party was “hostile toward Latinos,” “promoted xenophobia, racism, discrimination, and white supremacy,” and existed to support Trump and his agenda.

Aggregate Data

Next we turn to aggregate election data to assess whether Latino voting increased in 2018 compared to the 2014 midterms. Estimating turnout by racial and ethnic subgroups is a difficult endeavor. Because voting registration policies vary by state, and data is collected and distributed at the county level, there is significant variation in the quality and quantity of data across localities. Ideally, every state would collect self-reported race of registrant and a simple calculation of Latino votes cast divided by Latino registered voters using a post-election voter file would give us an accurate estimate of Latino turnout for that election. Yet, most states do not collect race of registered voters and access to post-election voter files is prohibitively expensive for most.

As an alternative, researchers often collect precinct level election results and pair these with demographics within the precinct. Using statistical procedures like ecological inference (King 1997), Latino voting trends can be estimated. With voter turnout, however, individual registered voters’ race and ethnicity is unknown. While an individual’s race or ethnicity can be estimated (Imai and Khanna 2016), this process requires a national voter file which can take considerable time and cost to acquire. Further, different jurisdictions vary in the frequency at which new elections are added to the voter file.

Despite these limitations, precinct level information is useful in understanding Latino voting behavior shortly after elections. We rely on a variant of homogeneous precinct analysis, one of the early forms of ecological inference used to determine the voting habits of racial and ethnic groups. Instead of examining candidate vote shares, however, we examine the number of ballots cast in a precinct. To estimate change, we calculate the percent change in ballots cast between the 2014 and 2018 in Latino-heavy precincts.

In Figure 2 we display the percent change in ballots cast between 2014 and 2018 on the y-axis and the percent Latino in the precinct on the x-axis. Each point represents the percent change in ballots cast for each precinct, with the size of each point being proportional to the number of votes cast in the precinct.

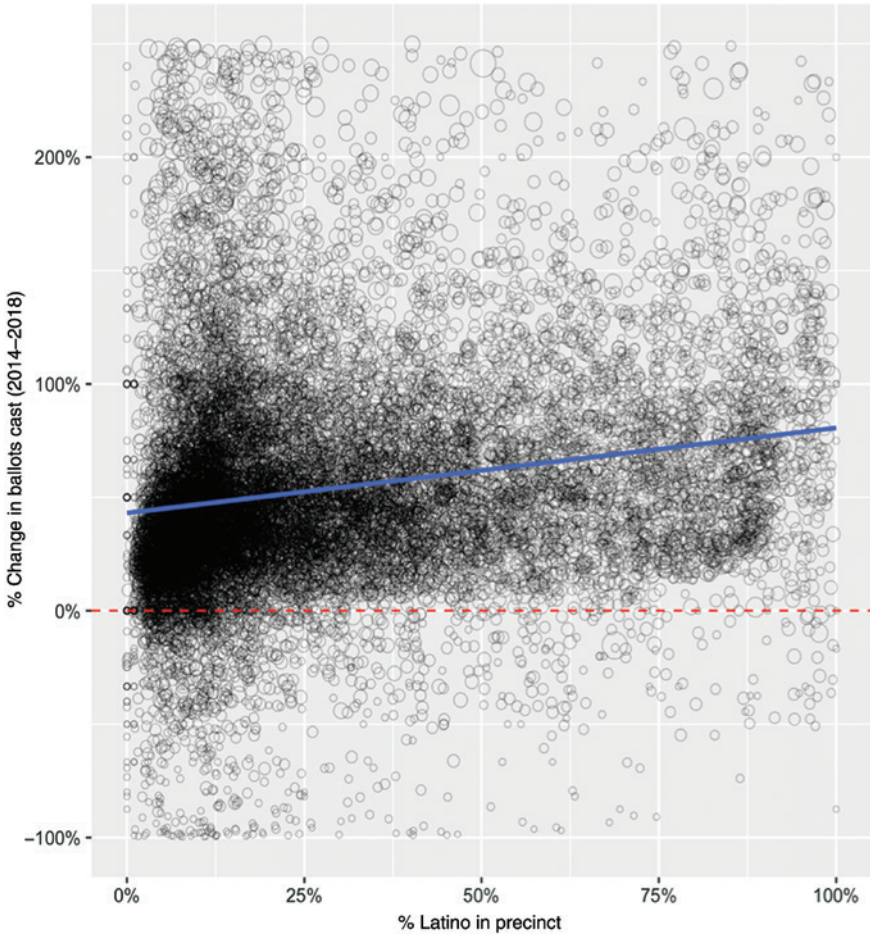


Figure 2: Increase in Ballots Cast 2014 and 2018.

Note: Change in ballots cast in 2014 and 2018 in a sample of electoral precincts from Arizona, Texas, Nevada, Florida, California, New York, New Jersey, and New Mexico ($n \sim 20,000$) and conditional on number of voting eligible or registered Latinos in each precinct. Size of circle corresponds to number of votes in each precinct. Fitted OLS line indicates that while the number of ballots cast increased in nearly all precincts between 2014 and 2018, the increase was significantly larger in precincts with larger Latino populations.

As the precincts get more heavily Latino, we can better understand the behavior of those members compared to the other precincts. The figure shows that the change in ballots cast between 2014 and 2018 was generally higher across all precincts, though as precincts become increasingly composed of Latinos, the percent

Table 1: Percentage Change of Ballots Cast in 2014 and 2018 Across Comparable Precincts, by Latino Population Density.

	% Change in Precinct Ballots Cast 2014–2018			
	Under 10%	10%–39%	40%–79%	80% and Over
Low Latino Precincts (<10%)	14% (n = 829)	26% (n = 1537)	25% (n = 1456)	34% (n = 1982)
High Latino Precincts (>80%)	6% (n = 58)	18% (n = 190)	25% (n = 266)	51% (n = 531)

Cells display percent by their Latino population (rows) and by changes in ballots cast (columns) between 2014 and 2018.

change in ballots cast increases. This suggests that the number of ballots cast by Latinos in 2018 increased relative to 2014.⁴

Table 1 shows the results from a homogeneous precinct analysis.⁵ To do this, we split the precinct up into two bins: precincts where less than 10% of the precinct is Latino and those where 80% or more of the precinct is Latino. We also split each of these bins by the mean level percent change in ballots cast. This gives us a 2×4 table.

In the first two rows, we present the results among low density precincts given various changes in ballots cast (columns). This includes the total number of precincts in each cell and the percent of precincts.⁶ The last two rows show the results from the high-density Latino precincts across the different columns. In our multi-state sample, 14% of low-density Latino precincts had less than a 10% change in ballots cast compared to 6% of high-density Latino precincts. In the final column, which shows the percent and number of precincts with more than 80% change in ballots cast, 34% of low-density Latino precincts demonstrated

⁴ Part of this change could be driven not by increased turnout of Latino voters but the entrance of voting eligible Latinos into the electorate. Bernard Fraga estimates that Latino citizen voting age population (CVAP) increased by 16.5% since November 2014 compared to 4% overall, a large increase, but clearly not entirely responsible for the sizable boost in ballots cast among Latinos (Fraga 2018).

⁵ The logic behind homogeneous precinct analysis is simple. If a precinct is composed of 100% of one group, say Latinos for example, and 75% of that precinct supports a given candidate, we can estimate that 75% of Latinos supported that candidate. While there certainly could be idiosyncratic features of the precinct that make Latinos living there different, we can use this same logic across multiple precincts to understand Latino voting behavior in 2018.

⁶ The percentages are based on row totals. For each type of precinct (low or high density) we divide the number of precincts in each cell by the total number of precincts in the row.

this level of growth. Among high density Latino precincts, there is a 17-percentage point difference. More than half of all high-density Latino precincts showed a more than 80% increase in ballots cast between 2014 and 2018.

In sum, the aggregate data shows that compared to 2014, precincts with high proportions of Latino voters cast significantly more ballots in 2018. This finding confirms our prediction that Latinos were more active in 2018 compared to 2014 and are more active than those living in precincts with fewer Latinos. Even with the fine-grained nature of precinct level data, however, we are unable to fully explore our hypotheses and test whether the spike in Latino voting behavior in 2018 is related to perceptions of threat among Latinos, mobilization, or as we expect, an interactive effect between threat and mobilization. To test this, we turn to individual level survey data.

Polling Data

In this section, we begin with descriptive statistics exploring threat and mobilization independently before analyzing multivariate regression models. First, we explore perceptions of and reaction to threat from the Trump Administration both in discrete snapshots and overtime. We then look at the likelihood of voting and self-reported contact from campaigns throughout the 10-week poll. Finally, we use multivariate regression – leveraging several potential variations in threat – to estimate the interaction between threat and contact on self-reported vote.

Trump and Threat in the 2018 Election

We begin by examining whether Latino respondents respond emotionally and politically to President Trump's actions and rhetoric. Figure 3 exploits the cross-sectional time series nature of the LD Tracking Poll. Respondents were asked how they felt after reading a statement explaining that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) had failed to reunite hundreds of migrant families separated at the border. Figure 3 plots the weighted average percent of respondents that felt angry, disgusted, afraid, proud, and/or happy in response. Over the final 5 weeks of the election, the highest percentage of responses were consistently anger and disgust, followed by fear. A very small percentage of respondents ever mentioned pride of happiness in response.

A central finding in literature on emotions and political behavior is that while fear and anxiety can demobilize (Brader 2005; Valentino et al. 2011), anger is

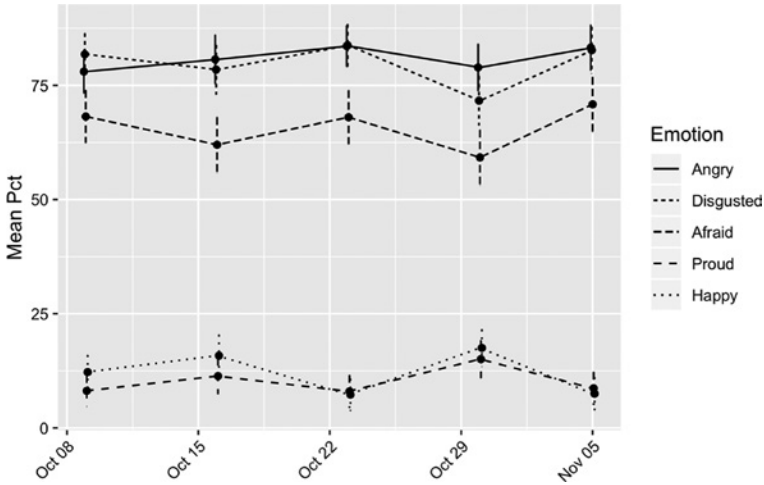


Figure 3: Trump Administration Action and Emotional Response.

Note: Response to “A federal judge ordered the Department of Homeland Security to reunite all children with their parents, who had been separated from their family while trying to seek asylum or refugee status during immigration. According to the latest data reported to the courts, there are still hundreds of children living alone in detention centers without their parents, including some who are younger than 5 years old. How does it make you feel to learn that the Trump Administration still has not reunited hundreds of children with their parents?” (Weeks 6–10).

mobilizing (Banks 2014; Cassese and Holman 2018; Towler and Parker 2018). As such, building off Cruz Nichols (2017), while the Trump Administration’s actions may demobilize some Latinos, a greater proportion will potentially be mobilized by ways to counter his actions and rhetoric and improve the status quo. Indeed, when respondents were asked whether Trump’s rhetoric regarding the migrant caravan⁷ made them more or less likely to vote, 75% stated that it made them much more or somewhat more interested in voting in the 2018 election.

The rolling cross-section also allows us to examine how President Trump’s favorability changed throughout the final weeks of the election campaign. As shown in Figure 1, immigration became a far more prominent issue in the final weeks of the campaign as Trump increasingly highlighted the caravan of migrants moving through Mexico and toward the US. We can assess whether this spike in immigration rhetoric led to a subsequent drop in Trump favorability among Latinos in the US.

7 “Does President Trump’s statements calling Central American migrants ‘violent criminals pouring into our country’ make you more interested or less interested in voting in this year’s election? (Week 10 poll, n=250).”

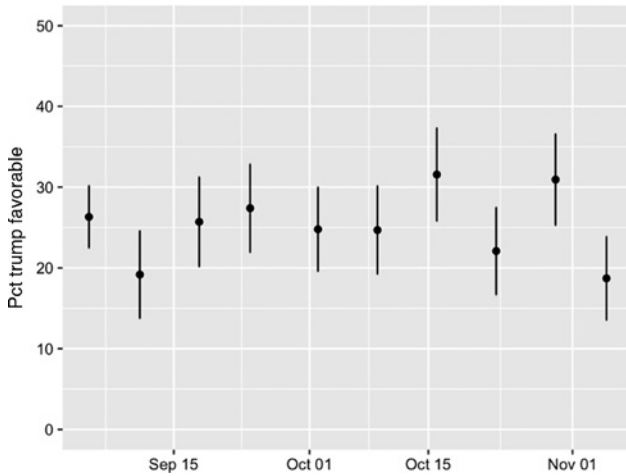


Figure 4: President Trump Favorability.

Note: Points indicate weighted mean of respondents who said their impression of Trump was either somewhat or very favorable by week with 95% confidence intervals. Full question: “For each of the names below, please indicate whether you have heard of the person, and if your impression is very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, or very unfavorable?”

Figure 4 plots the weighted percentage of respondents who view Trump either somewhat or very favorably. Over the course of the survey, the proportion of Latinos who viewed Trump unfavorably hovers around 25%. In the final weeks of the campaign, as President Trump’s rhetoric heated up, however, there is a small but distinguishable decrease in the percentage of Latinos viewing the President favorably, suggesting a potential correlation between the President’s rhetoric and political evaluations.

Figure 5, which plots the weighted percentage of Latinos who indicate that they either already voted early (in final weeks of polling) or are “almost certain to vote” over the course of the tracking poll, shows that Latino vote intention increased as the election drew to a close. While there are a number of factors, like mobilization efforts, that could increase vote propensity toward the end of an election cycle, this rise occurs at the same time that the President’s rhetoric on immigration began to dominate news headlines.

In sum, while it appears that the Trump Administration’s actions and rhetoric had an emotional and political impact on Latinos, and is correlated with increased vote intention, it is not clear whether this relationship is spurious or if threat alone is sufficient to incentivize behavior. In this next section we assess the correlation between mobilization and voting before using multivariate regression to isolate the interactive effect of threat and mobilization on Latino political participation.

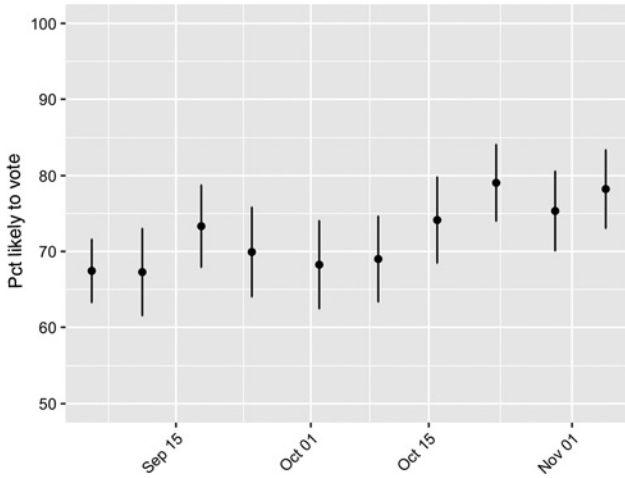


Figure 5: Latino Vote Intention Throughout the Campaign.

Note: Points indicate weighted percentage of Latino respondents who indicate that they have either already voted early or are “almost certain to vote” by week with 95% confidence intervals.

Mobilization and Voting

Another explanation for this increase in voting intentions toward the end of the 2018 election is increased mobilization efforts. In Figure 6, we plot the percent of Latinos who report being contacted by political parties, campaigns, or other political organizations. We show a slow but steady increase in self-reported contact, from under 40% to over 50% by political actors during the final weeks of the 2018 election.

We can combine this self-reported contact measure together with self-reported vote intention to estimate correlations over time between those who received contact and those who did not. In Figure 7, we display the percentage of Latinos who intend to vote conditional on whether they were contacted (dark circles) or not (white squares). We show that over the final weeks of the campaign, those who were contacted were consistently more likely to indicate a likelihood to vote than those who were not, suggesting that mobilization was a key factor in increasing turnout in the 2018 election among Latino voters.

Multivariate Analysis: Threat and Mobilization

We have shown that threat increased throughout the final weeks of the 2018 election, that such threat is correlated with emotions known to be mobilizing such

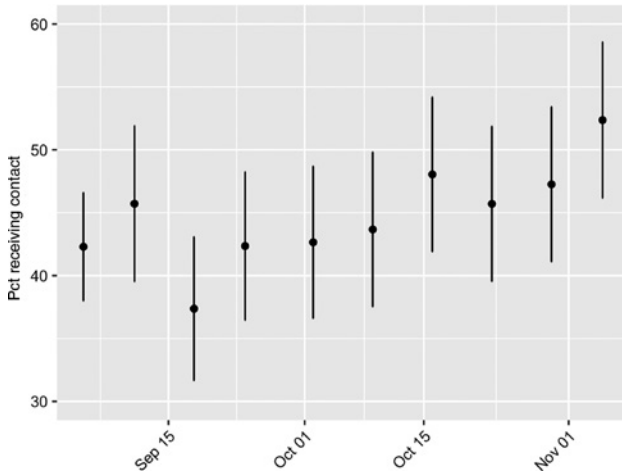


Figure 6: Reported Contact by Parties, Campaigns, and Other Political Organizations. Note: Points indicate weighted percentage of Latino respondents who indicate that they have been contacted during the 2018 election with 95% confidence intervals. Question: “So far in this election, has anyone from a political party, campaign or any other organization contacted you and asked you to register or vote? Either by knocking on your door, calling you, sending you something in the mail, by e-mail or text, or while you were out in the community?”

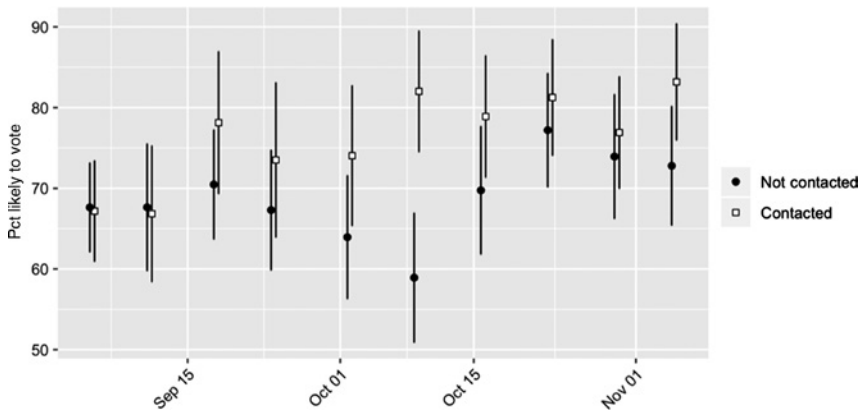


Figure 7: Likelihood of Voting Conditional on Contact. Note: Points indicate weighted percentage of Latino respondents who indicate that they have either already voted early or are “almost certain to vote” conditional on contact and by week with 95% confidence intervals.

as anger and disgust as well as self-reported vote intention, and that the overall vote intention increased over the final weeks of the election. We also showed, however, that mobilization efforts increased throughout the final weeks of the

campaign and that mobilization is correlated with greater self-reported vote intention. To tease out the independent and interactive effects of threat and mobilization, we turn to multivariate regression. We model intention to vote as a function of the interaction between threat and contact while controlling for a host of demographic variables.

While the rhetoric and actions of the Trump Administration serve as a clear source of threat for many Latinos in the US, measuring variation in exposure to political threat is a difficult task that we approach in a few different ways. First, consistent with the approach of this analysis so far, we assume that perceived threat increases throughout the final weeks of the election. As such, in Model 1, we operationalize threat as the week of survey (1–10, with 10 being the final week of the election).

In the remaining four models, we take advantage of geographic variation in the distribution of political information, messaging, and state political climate to insert some variation in levels of threat. In Model 2, we leverage the fact that the volume of political messaging, including messaging about Trump and immigration, will be higher in states with competitive and expensive state-wide races (Cox and Munger 1989). Thus, we include a state-level dummy for whether the state had a competitive Senate race in 2018 (Phillips 2018). In Model 3, we leverage the fact that President Trump held a number of news-generating political rallies in the final weeks of the election where he talked extensively about immigration. To capture this, we include a state-level dummy for whether the state received a visit from Trump (1) or not (0). Because state-level Republicans are associated with punitive immigrant and immigration rhetoric and policy (Gulasekaram and Ramakrishnan 2015), in Model 4 we operationalize threat as whether the respondent resided in a state that had unified Republican control of government in 2018 (1) or not (0). Finally, in Model 5 we operationalize threat as the number of punitive immigration bills passed at the state level between 2005 and 2012 as coded by Vargas, Sanchez, and Valdez (2017), rescaled between 0 and 1.

For each model, we interact the threat measure with a dummy for whether the respondent was contacted by a campaign (1) or not (0), our measure of mobilization. We include controls for age, education (1=college, 0=less than college), partisanship (7-pt party ID; 7=Strong Dem), whether the respondent was foreign born (1) or not (0), and finally income (excluded reference <20 K). Our dependent variable is whether the respondent voted already or is “almost certain to vote” (1) or not (0). We model this outcome using a linear probability model (estimated via OLS) with heteroskedastic robust standard errors. Robustness checks using a probit regression are substantively identical. Data is pooled across surveys. All descriptive statistics and additional models are provided in the Online Appendix at: <https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=doi:10.7910/DVN/4LEKNJ>.

In Table 2, we display the results of our five models. Looking across all five models, we see that contact (mobilization), absent threat, is associated with a 6–10 percentage point increase in the probability of voting. The impact of threat, absent contact, is slightly mixed. While it has a small positive association with voting when operationalized as proximity to the election,⁸ threat alone is negatively associated with about a 3–6 percentage point reduction in voting in the other four models, suggesting that threat absent contact is more likely demobilizing than mobilizing.

Looking next to the interactions of threat and contact, we again find mixed results, though they are suggestive that threat and contact together are mobilizing for Latinos. When threat is operationalized as proximity to the election or Republican control (models 1 and 4), the coefficient is positive but there is no statistically significant relationship between the interaction term and voting. In models 2, 3, and 5, however, when threat is operationalized as amplified threatening state-level political rhetoric or punitive immigration laws, we find that threat and contact together are associated with a 7–15 percentage point increase in the probability of voting.

These findings provide general support for our hypothesis that threat, by itself, does not increase turnout; rather threat *and* mobilization is correlated with Latino voting. We also see strong support highlighting the importance of mobilization, regardless of threat, from political parties and related organizations (Barreto 2018; Ramírez, Solano, and Wilcox-Archuleta 2018).

Discussion and Conclusion

In this paper, we sought to understand and characterize Latino voting behavior in the 2018 midterm election. Given the Trump Administration's xenophobic rhetoric and punitive actions, we asked if threat alone was enough to motivate Latinos turnout in 2018 or whether threat along with campaign contact were stronger predictors of electoral participation.

Using precinct-level vote returns for 2014 and 2018 across 8 states matched with demographic data, we found that the percent change in ballots cast was amplified across all precincts. The aggregate data, however, show that those precincts with high proportions of Latinos showed a greater percent change in ballots

⁸ This finding could be confounded with other factors like increased enthusiasm as the election nears.

Table 2: Threat, Mobilization, and Latino Turnout 2018.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Contacted	0.106*** (0.034)	0.090*** (0.019)	0.089*** (0.019)	0.100*** (0.023)	0.060** (0.027)
Proximity to Election	0.014*** (0.004)				
Contacted * Prox	-0.001 (0.005)				
Competitive Senate Race		-0.058** (0.029)			
Contacted * Senate		0.071* (0.041)			
Trump 2018 Speech			-0.064** (0.030)		
Contacted * Trump Speech			0.072* (0.043)		
R Control State Leg				-0.045* (0.023)	
Contacted * R Control				0.008 (0.034)	
Punitive Immigration Laws					-0.029 (0.048)
Contacted * Punitive					0.147** (0.068)
Age	0.091*** (0.010)	0.091*** (0.010)	0.093*** (0.010)	0.092*** (0.010)	0.092*** (0.010)
College	0.068*** (0.020)	0.065*** (0.020)	0.064*** (0.020)	0.064*** (0.020)	0.060*** (0.020)

Table 2 (continued)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
PID 7 (Dem)	0.010*** (0.004)	0.010*** (0.004)	0.010** (0.004)	0.009** (0.004)	0.010*** (0.004)
Foreign-Born	-0.030 (0.019)	-0.026 (0.019)	-0.029 (0.019)	-0.029 (0.019)	-0.029 (0.019)
Income 20–39 (ref = <20)	0.110*** (0.027)	0.113*** (0.027)	0.106*** (0.027)	0.110*** (0.027)	0.109*** (0.027)
Inc 40–59	0.134*** (0.028)	0.137*** (0.028)	0.132*** (0.028)	0.133*** (0.028)	0.135*** (0.028)
Inc 60–79	0.136*** (0.030)	0.136*** (0.030)	0.134*** (0.030)	0.135*** (0.030)	0.133*** (0.030)
Inc 80–99	0.169*** (0.034)	0.168*** (0.034)	0.166*** (0.035)	0.166*** (0.035)	0.167*** (0.035)
Inc 100–150	0.177*** (0.035)	0.178*** (0.035)	0.173*** (0.035)	0.175*** (0.035)	0.179*** (0.035)
Inc over 150	0.169*** (0.042)	0.168*** (0.042)	0.159*** (0.042)	0.157*** (0.042)	0.167*** (0.042)
Constant	0.316*** (0.037)	0.396*** (0.031)	0.399*** (0.031)	0.405*** (0.032)	0.399*** (0.033)
n	2767	2767	2733	2733	2733
Adjusted R ²	0.075	0.068	0.068	0.068	0.068
Residual Std. Error	0.438 (df = 2753)	0.440 (df = 2753)	0.439 (df = 2719)	0.438 (df = 2719)	0.438 (df = 2719)
F Statistic	18.154*** (df = 13; 2753)	16.524** (df = 13; 2753)	16.329*** (df = 13; 2719)	16.396*** (df = 13; 2719)	16.374*** (df = 13; 2719)

OLS regression coefficients with heteroskedastic robust standard errors in parentheses. *p < 0.1, **p < 0.05, ***p < 0.01 (two-tailed).

cast, suggesting that Latino voting was up in 2018 over 2014 and this increase was greater than those living in precincts with fewer Latinos.

Pairing this with individual level survey data from a 10-week tracking poll, we tested whether threat, mobilization, or an interaction between the two was related to self-reported voting. Varying our operationalization of threat in five ways, we find general support that: (1) contact absent of threat is associated with voting; (2) threat absent contact is generally demobilizing; and 3) threat *and* mobilization is positively associated with voting.

As we mention, measuring and understanding subgroup voting behavior is challenging, particularly immediately after elections. While aggregate data and predicted racial and ethnic composition can help us understand broad trends among groups, it does little to help us understand individual level motivations. For this, we turned to individual level survey data, which allows us to dig into individual level variation in a variety of potential correlates of participation.

Using this individual level survey data is not without its own limitations. First, we rely on self-reported voting behaviors, which have been shown to be inflated (Holbrook and Krosnick 2010). Second, given the nationalized character of political threat for Latinos under the Trump Administration's rhetoric and policies – and therefore lack of variation – we are forced to rely on broad proxies of threat at lower levels of aggregation, a “treatment” that may or may not be received by individuals in the state, which will bias the effect of threat in a conservative direction. Finally, our survey lacked an important strength of pan-ethnic group identity variable, which has been shown (Pérez 2014) to be very important in understanding diverging responses to xenophobic politics. We would likely find stronger threat and mobilization effects if we were able to separate or control for those Latinos with high-levels of pan-ethnic group identity.

Looking forward to 2020, it is important for political practitioners to understand that threat alone does not appear to increase the vote propensity of groups at the receiving end of this threat. Both policy opportunity messages (Cruz Nichols 2017) and formal mobilization efforts are crucially important to increase the political participation of marginalized groups.

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