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*Political Research Quarterly* published online 30 April 2014

DOI: 10.1177/1065912914532374

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://prq.sagepub.com/content/early/2014/04/30/1065912914532374>

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# Revisiting Latino Voting: Cross-Racial Mobilization in the 2012 Election

Loren Collingwood<sup>1</sup>, Matt A. Barreto<sup>2</sup>,  
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Political Research Quarterly  
1–14  
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DOI: 10.1177/1065912914532374  
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## Abstract

Traditional vote-choice models include variables such as party identification, assessments of the economy, as well as other demographic characteristics. We argue that variables that tap shared racial/ethnic identity or some such similar dimension can enhance Latino vote-choice models beyond the traditional model. We evaluate Barack Obama and Mitt Romney's cross-racial mobilization of Latino voters during the 2012 Presidential election. Using a survey of several thousand Latino voters, we find that these candidates' policy stances vis-à-vis immigration and their ability to convey care and concern to the Latino community are important variables that guide Latino vote choice. Implications are discussed.

## Keywords

Latino politics, Latino voting, 2012 presidential election

## Introduction

Among Latino voters, Barack Obama outpaced Mitt Romney by a margin of seventy-five to twenty-three<sup>1</sup> in the 2012 election—the highest rate of support for any Democratic candidate among Latinos. While turnout declined nationally from 2008 to 2012 by 2 percent, among Latinos there was a 28 percent increase in votes cast in 2012 (from 9.7 to 12.5 million) and Obama further increased his vote share among Latinos in 2012 compared to 2008.<sup>2</sup> However, this was not a foregone conclusion, and many theories circulated since 2009 suggested the Latino vote might be underwhelming in 2012 (Ross 2012; Quinton 2012). Looking to the core Political Science theory on presidential voting, it remains unclear why Obama did *so well* among the Latino bloc, especially given the high rate of Latino unemployment and record number of immigrant deportations during Obama's first administration (Bennett 2011). While historic party identification with the Democratic Party was strong evidence that Obama would win a majority of Latino votes (Alvaraez and Garcia Bedolla 2003; Bowler, Nicholson, and Segura 2006; Pantoja, Ramirez, and Segura 2001; Tolbert and Hero 2001; Uhlaner and Garcia 2005), our other theoretical mainstays in the voting literature should point toward lower turnout and less enthusiastic support for Obama (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Nie, Verba, and Petrocik 1979). Latinos are younger, lower resourced, and less connected to mainstream networks of political elites, all signs that point toward low turnout

(Lewis-Beck et al. 2008). As late as September 2012, a common headline in the popular press was “Latinos’ enthusiasm gap worries Dems” and that the Latino “seemed to be fading” (Garofoli 2012).

Despite the somewhat nebulous academic expectation vis-à-vis Latino presidential vote choice, post-election media accounts of the 2012 Latino vote have suggested that Obama performed so well among Latino voters precisely because of their unique demographic characteristics: Latino voters are younger than average voters (younger voters tend to vote Democratic), have lower income (historically, poorer voters side with Democrats), and, perhaps as a result, tend to identify as Democrats (Lopez and Taylor 2012). Still, others have suggested that Obama did so well among Latinos because he supported the DREAM Act and initiated an executive order—“deferred action”—for undocumented Latino youth (Chait 2011). Finally, some activist organizations have also suggested that Romney's move to the right on immigration negatively impacted him among the Latino electorate (Le 2012).

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This article puts these accounts to the test by evaluating whether traditional vote-choice models adequately explain Latino voting behavior, or whether an enhanced model—which takes into account the candidates' specific Latino outreach and policy stances, as well as voters' perceptions of the candidates—better explains the 2012 Latino presidential vote. To be sure, traditional vote-choice models may well explain much of the Latino vote. These models include items such as partisanship, political ideology, gender, age, religion, presidential approval, views on the economy, and most important issues. For fifty years from Campbell et al. (1960) to Lewis-Beck et al. (2008), these models have “worked.” But we argue that as the electorate continues to diversify, scholars need to begin to ask how vote-choice models can be improved to better explain minority vote choice. Reflecting on the 2008 election, Political Scientist Robert Erikson (2009, 467) noted “it is difficult to challenge the conventional wisdom that the economy contributed to the transfer of the White House from Republicans to Democrat Obama.” While this may be true, we nevertheless think candidate stances on specific issues directly focused on minority groups and targeted outreach/mobilization can explain additional variance in Latino vote-choice models, perhaps even better than stalwarts like perceptions of the national economy (Lewis-Beck 1988).

This article begins with a brief review of the vote-choice literature. Which variables are important in predicting vote choice? How do these models apply to minority voters? While existing models can explain much variance in Latino vote choice, we suggest that candidate messaging, policy positions, and campaign events are also important. Especially when the candidate and voters are of different racial groups, these political communications connote concern and help bridge sociopolitical barriers that may exist between candidate and voter. We outline a theoretical framework—which we call cross-racial mobilization (CRM)—to understand why certain candidates may incorporate positive or negative policy stances and outreach/mobilization vis-à-vis Latino voters, and to understand why voters may perceive candidates favorably or unfavorably. This framework places our following analysis of the 2012 election into a theoretical context. We analyze Latino vote choice with a 2012 Latino Decisions Election Eve Poll. We conclude with a discussion of our findings and their relevance to the general field of political behavior and presidential elections.

## Vote Choice

One of the best studied phenomena in American politics is presidential vote choice. Not only does cable television provide obsessive coverage of presidential debates,

primaries, speeches, and election night, but also scholars of American politics have spent considerable time unpacking the question of why more people voted for the winning candidate. By now, our models predicting vote choice among the national electorate are quite robust.

As a starting point, our models perform well because party identification is an exceptionally strong predictor of vote choice. People develop partisan attachments over their lifetime, any may change in strength, or even the party to which they are attached, but in any given election, cross-sectional data quite clearly identify partisanship as a main predictor of presidential vote (Campbell et al. 1960; Lewis-Beck et al. 2008; Miller and Shanks 1996; Nie, Verba, and Petrocik 1979). In an analysis stretching nearly four decades, Warren Miller (1991) finds that “party line voting by party identifiers did not decrease between 1952 and 1988.” Beyond clear partisan identifiers, Petrocik (1974, 2009) has added evidence that even so-called independents are often partisans in disguise, once we know which party they “lean” toward.

In addition to partisanship, there is also good evidence that ideology and ideological policy issues are highly related to presidential voting (Jacoby 2009; Markus and Converse 1979). For example, even controlling for partisanship, voters who strongly oppose abortion are more likely to vote Republican (Abramowitz 1995), while voters who support universal health insurance are more likely to vote Democrat (Alvarez and Nagler 1998). Even pushing back somewhat on partisanship, Page and Jones (1979) find that policy preferences are consistent and strong predictors of the vote over time, and in panel data.

Within the realm of policy evaluations, nothing has absorbed more attention than the economy. Kinder and Kiewiet (1981) find consistent evidence that evaluations of the national economy, often called sociotropic attitudes, are highly predictive of presidential vote choice. While pocketbook issues and evaluations of a voters' own personal finances also matter, confidence or anxiety in the larger national economy are critical. Markus (1988) adds to this literature and accounts for both personal and national economic conditions, relying on both individual-level data, and also aggregate markers of the economy, and concludes that such economic models are quite accurate in forecasting presidential vote and presidential election outcomes. As Bill Clinton famously quipped, “It's the economy stupid!” While the electorate and issues have changed, there has been a steady following of the traditional American National Election Studies (ANES)-derived models, with a particular focus on the economy. And with good reason, they appear to work at the national level.

For example, drawing on extensive findings predicting presidential elections, and a weekly tracking poll of registered voters, Sides and Vavreck argue that in 2012,

our traditional models that emphasize partisanship and economic evaluations still work well but that we need to be asking the right questions about the economy (see Klein 2012, summarizing Sides and Vavreck). While some argued that the national economic statistics pointed to trouble for Obama, Sides and Vavreck (2012, 2013) found clear evidence that the slow growth in the economy eased voters' anxiety and bolstered support for Obama.

However, we offer a note of caution. As political pundits obsessively pointed out in the days that followed the November 6, 2012, election, the American electorate is undergoing a "demographic" realignment before our eyes. Whites constituted 72 percent of all voters, their lowest percent ever. Younger voters and minorities appeared to turn out at rates higher than anticipated by most seasoned election experts. What does this changing landscape mean for our understanding of American politics? Dawson (1995), for example, posited the existence of a "black utility heuristic," which can be used by individual African American citizens as both a perceptual lens and an organizing principle for engaging the various issues at stake in the political system—in short, an "ideology" that might work better in models than variables like political ideology or income. While white voters may put a premium on sociotropic evaluations of the economy, for minorities, these sociotropic evaluations may be based on shared race and ethnicity, that is, Dawson's concept of linked fate. It stands to reason, then, that the candidate who can best tap into this shared identity and improve a voter's perception that the candidate is "on their side" should do best among minority voters.

Indeed, the existing research suggests that ethnic identification, ethnic attachment, and ethnic appeals may be an especially salient feature of minority politics (Barreto 2010; Barreto and Pedraza 2009; Barreto and Segura 2010; Dahl 1961). Even in the case when the candidate is of a different race, scholars have shown that certain appeals may work to tap into voters' sense of shared identity. In what is coined *messenger politics*, Nuño (2007) and Barreto and Nuño (2011), for instance, find that using Latino campaign volunteers for campaign mobilization can improve Grand Old Party (GOP) prospects at the national level. Ramírez (2005) and Michelson (2003) find similar results in that Latino voters are more susceptible to co-ethnic Get Out The Vote (GOTV) mobilization. Thus, we argue that a new lens is needed to understand not just minority politics but to correctly understand all of American politics in the twenty-first century.

## Theoretical Framework

We analyze Latino vote choice in the context of a theoretical framework—which we call cross-racial mobilization (CRM)—that accounts for candidates' ability to tap

into shared racial/ethnic identity, as well as voters' perceptions of outreach aimed at them. The framework is not postulated as an alternative to standard vote-choice models, per se, but rather seeks to improve standard vote-choice models by including candidate behavior and voter response in the multiracial context. CRM is designed to explain both variation in candidate positioning on minority-specific issues and variation in candidate outreach aimed at members of different racial groups. Incorporating this type of candidate behavior—we argue—can improve our analysis of minority vote-choice models by tapping into how candidates exploit shared ethnic/racial identity. This section reviews CRM theory and predicts how Obama and Romney will use CRM to tap into Latino shared identity.

CRM takes many forms, for example: racial appeals in advertisements, public positions on racial issues, registration campaigns, and GOTV efforts targeted at members of a specific racial group. However, we argue that two general CRM forms exist: policy CRM and outreach CRM (Collingwood 2013). The former regards candidate positioning on key minority issues whereas the latter involves various forms of voter mobilization. Assuming that candidates are rational vote-seekers (Mayhew 1974) with adequate financing, the framework articulates conditions under which candidates should strategically engage in high levels of positive CRM as opposed to conditions under which candidates should strategically engage in low levels of positive CRM or even negative CRM.

The relevant conditions—or variables—that influence candidate behavior include minority group size, minority growth rate, extent of minority vote cohesion, competitiveness of the election, the racial hostility and size of the candidate's white supporters, and—in the context of a presidential election—whether the minority group resides in battleground states (Collingwood 2013; Barreto, Collingwood, and Manzano). For instance, Latinos as a group become more important if they are located disproportionately in battleground states. These external conditions should guide candidates' CRM strategies and determine how much effort they expend on tapping into shared minority-group identity. In turn, the candidate that most successfully taps into shared minority-group identity will be the candidate who Latinos are likely to view most favorably. This process, we argue, may enhance voters' political efficacy thereby increasing their likelihood of not only voting but also voting for that candidate (Finkel 1985; Niemi, Craig, and Mattei 1991). In other words, what the candidates do and say in this context will bear on Latino vote choice above and beyond demographics, most important issues, party affiliation, and ideological bent. Voter response to candidate behavior (e.g., whether candidates utter positive or negative statements about Latino voters) may play just as important a

role in the CRM context because, we argue, voter perceptions on a variety of topics—regardless of accuracy—can drive behavior.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, recent research has shown that voter perceptions of electoral competition can increase levels of political participation above and beyond actual levels of competition (McDonald and Tolbert 2012).

While campaigns have witnessed a significant increase in pressures to reach out to Hispanic voters, CRM is not new for African American candidates. Most notably, Jesse Jackson ran a very serious campaign for the president in which cross-racial appeals to white, and to a lesser extent Latino voters, were the centerpiece of his 1988 campaign. Focusing primarily on themes of equal opportunity for African Americans in 1984, the Jackson campaign added a strong focus on the mobilization of white voters in 1988 as he became a leading challenger for the Democratic nomination (Gurin, Hatchett, and Jackson 1989; Tate 1991).

In the context of the 2012 presidential election, the CRM framework suggests that Obama should appeal to and mobilize Latinos. First, Latinos are located in several important battleground states including Nevada, Florida, Colorado, New Mexico, and to a lesser extent Virginia. Second, Latinos comprise a significant percentage of the population in these states, including 26.5 percent in Nevada, 22.5 percent in Florida, 20.7 percent in Colorado, and 46.3 percent in New Mexico. Third, the U.S. Latino growth rate has been on the rise over the past ten years. Between 2000 and 2010, Latinos moved from 12.5 percent of the population to 16.3 percent (Ennis, Rios-Vargas, and Albert 2011). Growth rate is important not only in targeted states but also in terms of overall, long-term party strategy. Fourth, despite Obama's deportation program, Latinos have demonstrated an increasing propensity to vote Democratic in recent years such that they can be considered a Democratic base group. Fifth, white Obama voters—and white Democrats generally—tend to be more favorable with respect to minority issues when compared to conservative Republicans, for example (Kinder and Sanders 1996). Finally, the 2012 election was extremely competitive, so there was an increased premium on mobilizing all core Democratic base groups.

In short, theory suggests that Obama and his campaign would spend considerable effort mobilizing the Latino vote as well as taking policy positions favorable to the majority of Latino voters. Beginning with policy commitments, first, the Obama Administration challenged Arizona's SB-1070 in court, arguing that it was unconstitutional. Second, in December, 2011, Obama supported and pushed for the passage of the DREAM Act. However, this legislation was killed by the Republican House. Third, in June 2012, Obama signed a memorandum that directed the Department of Homeland Security to grant deportation relief to certain *Dreamers*—successful young

adults illegally brought into the country when they were still children.<sup>4</sup> This issue was well reported in both the Latino and mainstream media (Lilley 2012). Based on these well-publicized events, it stands to reason that many Latinos, despite the somewhat unstable economy, could perceive Obama as caring about their community.

The theory of CRM that we rely on (Collingwood 2013) was originally developed thinking about how white candidates may seek to mobilize African American voters; however, we believe it applies equally well across different racial and ethnic settings. It builds upon earlier work by Fraga and Leal (2004), who argue that both Democrats and Republicans will, given the right conditions and particular motivations (under the assumption of a Downsian framework), court Latino voters. In particular, Barack Obama may have been in a better position to employ CRM as a candidate who was both African American, but also biracial. Add to that his immigrant lineage on his father's side, and his time growing up in Hawaii—the most racially diverse state. Thus, cross-racial appeals may have been more natural and rational to Obama when thinking about courting the Latino vote first in 2008 and then again in 2012. In fact, Obama himself suggests as much in his 2007 autobiography, *Dreams from my Father*.

With respect to Obama's outreach-based CRM, Obama aggressively courted the Latino vote using a variety of CRM approaches. For example, his campaign website is easily translated into Spanish. He maintains a Latinos for Obama section where Latinos can join Obama "friend groups." Obama yard signs were translated into Spanish, and the Democratic National Convention was chockablock with Latinos of various backgrounds. Furthermore, early in the election cycle, Obama's campaign convened important meetings on Latino strategy and hired several staff as communications experts on Latino and immigration politics.<sup>5</sup> Finally, and perhaps most tellingly, Obama also spent \$20 million on Spanish-language advertisements and other outreach programs in key battleground states.

The expectations for Romney are more complicated because the primary and general electorates—and his coalitions within each—are theoretically quite distinct. In the former, Latinos comprise a very small percentage of GOP primary voters in most states—with the exception of Florida—whereas conservative whites make up a large percentage of voters. Thus, a rational strategy may be to appeal to conservative white voter's racial resentment, which comprises the base of the GOP coalition. Indeed, in an effort to attract a perceived anti-immigrant voting bloc in the conservative primary elections, the leading Republican candidates took very hardline stances against undocumented immigrants, bilingual education, and bilingual voting materials. Most of all, Mitt Romney

feared being called a moderate by the more conservative primary candidates, and thus he staked out a firm, unwavering, and unforgiving position on immigration. In explaining how he would address the issue of eleven million undocumented immigrants living in the United States, during a Republican presidential debate (Madison 2012),<sup>6</sup> Romney stated the answer is “self-deportation.” In repeated follow-up interviews and debates when explaining what this actually meant, Romney expanded that he wanted to institute a series of laws cracking down on unauthorized immigrants, to make it impossible for them to work, impossible for them to make ends meet, and that their lives would be so hard in America that they would have no choice but to “self-deport.” While this may have sounded reasonable to some Republican primary voters, the statement, and the continued explanation, sounded ridiculous to most Latinos. In other words, on the face of it, Romney failed to activate little, if any, shared ethnic identity among Latinos in support of him.

However, the “self-deport” comment was not Romney’s only trouble with Latinos. During a presidential debate, Romney was asked if he would sign the DREAM Act, and he said “no, I would veto the DREAM Act.” About the same time, he named Kris Kobach, Secretary of State of Kansas, as his principal advisor on immigration. Kobach is the architect of the Arizona SB-1070 anti-immigrant legislation, as well as copycat legislation in Alabama, and is a widely despised politico among Latino activists. In addition to Kobach, Romney appeared alongside Sheriff Joe Arpaio from Maricopa County, Arizona, who perhaps more than any other figure today embodies anti-immigrant and anti-Latino policy. During a primary debate in Arizona, Romney called the myriad anti-immigrant legislation in Arizona a model for the nation and said he wanted to implement mandatory e-verify, a workplace program that would crack down on undocumented immigrant workers. Thus, on perhaps the largest minority-specific issue relevant to Latinos—immigration—Romney engaged in negative CRM. We submit that this had major consequences for his ability to win the Latino voter during the general election.

In the general election, the CRM framework would theorize that Romney should move more to the middle on his immigration stances and outreach given that his electoral coalition was now different than his primary coalition. Latinos now made up a larger share of potential Romney voters and their location in key states suggests that Romney should engage in at least some positive policy and outreach CRM. To some extent, this happened. Romney did spend about \$10 million on Spanish-language ads and outreach in key battleground states. Romney did appoint many high-profile Latino Republicans to his advisory committee including three governors—Luis Fortuño of Puerto Rico, Brian Sandoval

of Nevada and Susana Martinez of New Mexico Senator, as well as U.S. Senator Marco Rubio (Rucker 2012) and dispatched them to speak on his behalf. However, while Romney attempted to minimize the negative effects of his earlier immigration stance by airing Spanish-language ads and appearing at a Univision forum during the general election campaign (Bailey 2012), his earlier self-deportation comments continued to plague him throughout the general election with respect to how Latino voters viewed him. Referring to undocumented workers as “illegals” during his Univision appearance did not exactly help matters either. Moreover, Romney did not disavow his earlier statements—probably because he was worried he would be painted as a flip-flopper. Finally, the positive outreach CRM that he did do—mainly just airing ads in Spanish—was not as effective or culturally sensitive as Obama or even George W. Bush’s ads. For instance, Romney’s first Spanish-language ad was simply translated from English to Spanish and criticized Obamacare—a program that a majority (61% left to stand—25% repeal) of Latino voters supported (Latino Decisions, n.d.).

In the end, both candidates exhibited behavior more or less consistent with the CRM framework. Obama heavily courted the Latino vote and took favorable policy stances with respect to immigration (positive policy CRM), whereas Romney engaged in mostly negative policy-based CRM during the primary and general but attempted to mitigate this with mediocre positive outreach-based CRM in the primary and general. Overall, however, Romney’s CRM strategy seems to have been more negative given the impact of his earlier proclamations. Indeed, the perception among a majority of Latinos was that Romney and his proposed policies were hostile toward them.

Above and beyond the traditional models, then, we expect that each of the candidate’s well-publicized policy positions on immigration to explain additional variance in vote choice. Furthermore, voter-perceived CRM (i.e., voter trust in the candidate) will also influence Latino’s vote choice. In the next section, we review our data and methods to evaluate Latino vote choice during the 2012 election.

## Data and Method

We use an election eve telephone survey of Latino registered voters conducted by Latino Decisions<sup>7</sup> in November 2012, to evaluate whether CRM has effects above and beyond the traditional vote-choice variables. The total sample size of the survey is  $N = 5,613$  Latino voters spread across the United States and contacted on both landlines and cellular phones. All interviewers are bilingual; as such, the survey was conducted in both Spanish

and English with 39 percent of respondents preferring to take the Spanish-language version versus 61 percent in English.

Our statistical analysis takes the traditional model as a starting point, and then we compare it against models accounting for perceived outreach CRM and policy CRM. For both of these models, we use logistic regression analysis. The dependent variable is vote for Obama, where Obama is coded one and Romney zero. The few respondents who failed to answer the question are dropped from the analysis. As discussed above, party identification is a very strong predictor of vote choice, so we include dummy variables for Republicans and Democrats, which also account for leaners. In addition, we control for policy evaluations with two dummy variables, one for those who think that the main issue facing the community is the economy or the creation of jobs and another variable for those who see immigration as the most important issue.

We also take account of other traditional predictors of vote choice. A variable “Contacted by Democrat” receives a one if the respondent was contacted by the Democratic Party and zero otherwise. Likewise, a variable “Contacted by Republican” receives a value of one if the respondent was contacted by the GOP and zero otherwise. We include traditional socioeconomic status (SES) variables, including dummy variables for income categories, where highest earners are the comparison group. An indicator variable for college education captures Latinos with a college degree or greater (1) versus those who have not graduated college (0). Other standard vote-choice models include age, gender (1 for female, 0 for male), and a dummy for marriage. To capture the importance of religion, we include a dummy variable for whether the respondent is Catholic, a separate indicator for Protestant, and a third religion variable indicating whether the respondent is a born-again Christian.

Finally, we include variables relevant to the Latino community that better account for the changing demographics discussed above. These variables include generation (1 = *first generation*, 2 = *second generation*, 3 = *third generation*), country of origin (from Puerto Rico = 1, else = 0; from Cuba = 1, else 0; from Mexico = 1, else 0), and whether the respondent took the survey in Spanish.

There are many ways to capture CRM, but since we are interested in comparing an enhanced CRM model with a more traditional model of vote choice, we use CRM indicators that can be operationalized in the survey context. Thus, while being contacted by a political party is a common predictor used in models, our theory suggests that the type of outreach performed is relevant. Therefore, our first measure of CRM asks the following question:

Thinking about the 2012 campaign for President, would you say that Barack Obama/Mitt Romney is someone who truly cares about the Hispanic/Latino community, that he didn't care too much about Hispanic/Latinos, or that Obama/Romney was hostile towards Hispanic/Latinos?

This variable allows us to distinguish how the outreach is perceived, which is a key element of CRM. Indeed, being contacted with a hostile message should produce a different outcome than being contacted by someone who cares about the Latino community. We coded this variable so that 3 = *truly cares*, 2 = *did not care too much*, and 1 = *was being hostile*.

Second, we embed Obama and Romney's most publicly discussed positions on immigration policy. Obama's immigration position is referred to as deferred action. Obama's Executive Order in June, 2012, to defer action on deporting *Dreamers* is viewed as positive CRM. We hypothesize that this variable will increase the fit of our vote-choice models. We ask respondents the following question:

In June President Obama announced a new Department of Homeland Security policy to stop the deportation of any undocumented immigrant youth who attends college or serves in the military and to provide them with a legal work permit that is renewable. Did this announcement make you feel more enthusiastic about Obama, less enthusiastic about Obama, or did it have no effect on how you feel about Obama?

The variable is coded 1 = *less enthusiastic*, 2 = *no effect*, 3 = *more enthusiastic about Obama*.

Romney's immigration position is referred to as self-deportation. As with the variable describing Obama's CRM policy stance, we hypothesize that this variable will increase the fit of our vote-choice model. Below is Romney's statement read to respondents:

During the campaign Mitt Romney stated that we need a nationwide system in place so that undocumented immigrants are not allowed to work here in the United States. If they can't work here, Romney has said immigrants should choose to quote—self-deport. If elected, Romney has said he will not grant any new work permits to undocumented immigrant youth. Do these statements make you feel more enthusiastic about Romney, less enthusiastic about Romney, or have no effect on how you feel about Romney?

Like the Obama CRM policy variable, this variable takes on the values of 1 = *less enthusiastic*, 2 = *no effect*, 3 = *more enthusiastic about Romney*.

These variables are ideal to test our theory of CRM because they pose direct and specific questions to a group of minority voters about how both candidates conducted

**Table 1.** Vote-Choice Models.

	Base model	Perceived CRM	CRM Obama	CRM Romney
Obama Policy CRM (Deferred Action)			1.04** (0.20)	
Romney Policy CRM (Self-deportation)				-1.10*** (0.19)
Obama Outreach CRM (Cares about Latinos)		2.68*** (0.15)	2.41*** (0.23)	2.48*** (0.22)
Romney Outreach CRM (Cares about Latinos)		-2.47*** (0.17)	-2.43*** (0.27)	-2.25*** (0.25)
Immigration/DREAM Act—Main Issue	0.51*** (0.19)	0.27 (0.23)	0.29 (0.35)	0.24 (0.34)
Jobs/Fix the Economy—Main Issue	-0.32*** (0.15)	-0.20 (0.19)	-0.29 (0.29)	0.02 (0.29)
Democrat	3.08*** (0.18)	2.43*** (0.24)	2.44*** (0.36)	2.11*** (0.35)
Republican	-2.52*** (0.18)	-2.16*** (0.24)	-2.20*** (0.37)	-2.20*** (0.35)
Contacted by Democrat	0.15 (0.21)	0.36 (0.27)	0.44 (0.44)	0.26 (0.39)
Contacted by Republican	0.20 (0.20)	-0.11 (0.25)	-0.02 (0.40)	-0.11 (0.36)
Generation	-0.41*** (0.10)	-0.46*** (0.12)	-0.31* (0.18)	-0.50*** (0.18)
Survey in Spanish	0.14 (0.17)	0.27 (0.20)	0.35 (0.31)	-0.02 (0.30)
Mexican	0.25* (0.15)	0.30 (0.19)	0.02 (0.29)	0.35 (0.28)
Cuban	-0.88*** (0.24)	-0.76*** (0.29)	-0.86** (0.43)	-0.49 (0.43)
Puerto Rico	0.32 (0.23)	0.20 (0.30)	0.02 (0.45)	0.19 (0.43)
Married	-0.14 (0.14)	0.07 (0.17)	0.31 (0.27)	-0.15 (0.25)
Age	-0.02*** (0.004)	-0.01* (0.005)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)
Catholic	-0.21 (0.20)	-0.28 (0.25)	-0.22 (0.36)	-0.51 (0.39)
Protestant	-0.76*** (0.24)	-0.62** (0.30)	-0.27 (0.45)	-1.09** (0.45)
Born-again	-0.58** (0.27)	-0.69* (0.35)	-0.76 (0.53)	-0.83 (0.51)
Income less than 40,000	0.38* (0.22)	0.34 (0.29)	0.46 (0.43)	0.12 (0.42)
Income 40,000–80,000	0.05 (0.21)	-0.04 (0.28)	0.40 (0.42)	-0.43 (0.41)
Income 80,000–100,000	-0.11 (0.28)	0.15 (0.35)	-0.03 (0.56)	0.07 (0.49)
Income missing	0.29 (0.23)	0.50* (0.31)	0.91** (0.46)	0.16 (0.46)
Female	0.18 (0.13)	0.17 (0.17)	0.22 (0.25)	0.16 (0.25)
College	-0.14 (0.14)	-0.09 (0.18)	-0.38 (0.28)	0.06 (0.27)
Constant	2.10*** (0.43)	0.38 (0.68)	-1.90* (1.08)	2.91*** (1.05)
N	4,664	4,664	2,317	2,348
Log likelihood	-887.07	-555.68	-253.66	-261.81
AIC	1,820.15	1,161.35	559.32	575.63

"In the election for president, did/will you vote for Democratic candidate Barack Obama (1), Republican candidate Mitt Romney (0), or someone else?" CRM = cross-racial mobilization; AIC = Akaike information criterion.

\* $p < .1$ , \*\* $p < .05$ , \*\*\* $p < .01$ .

cross-racial outreach. Historically, the ANES has not asked these types of questions limiting the opportunity for theoretical and empirical explanations of CRM; however, the 2008 and 2012 ANES data do contain robust oversamples of African American and Latino voters as well as some questions that could start to measure CRM.

## Results

We begin our discussion of the results with an analysis of a traditional vote-choice model (Base Model column in Table 1; the x line of Figures 1 and 2). Beginning with "most important issues," we see that those respondents who say that immigration/DREAM Act is the most important issue to the Latino community are more likely

to vote for Obama than respondents who do not agree that immigration is the most important issue. However, respondents who say that jobs/economy is the most important issue are actually more likely to vote for Romney than respondents who do not check jobs/economy as the most important issue. Turning to party identification, Democratic Party identifiers are considerably more likely to vote for Obama and Republican Party identifiers more likely to vote for Romney. Not surprising, these are the most substantively important variables. However, in a multivariate setting, contact appears to not make any difference in vote choice. This is not entirely surprising as contact is designed more to increase turnout rather than persuade voters to support one candidate or the other.



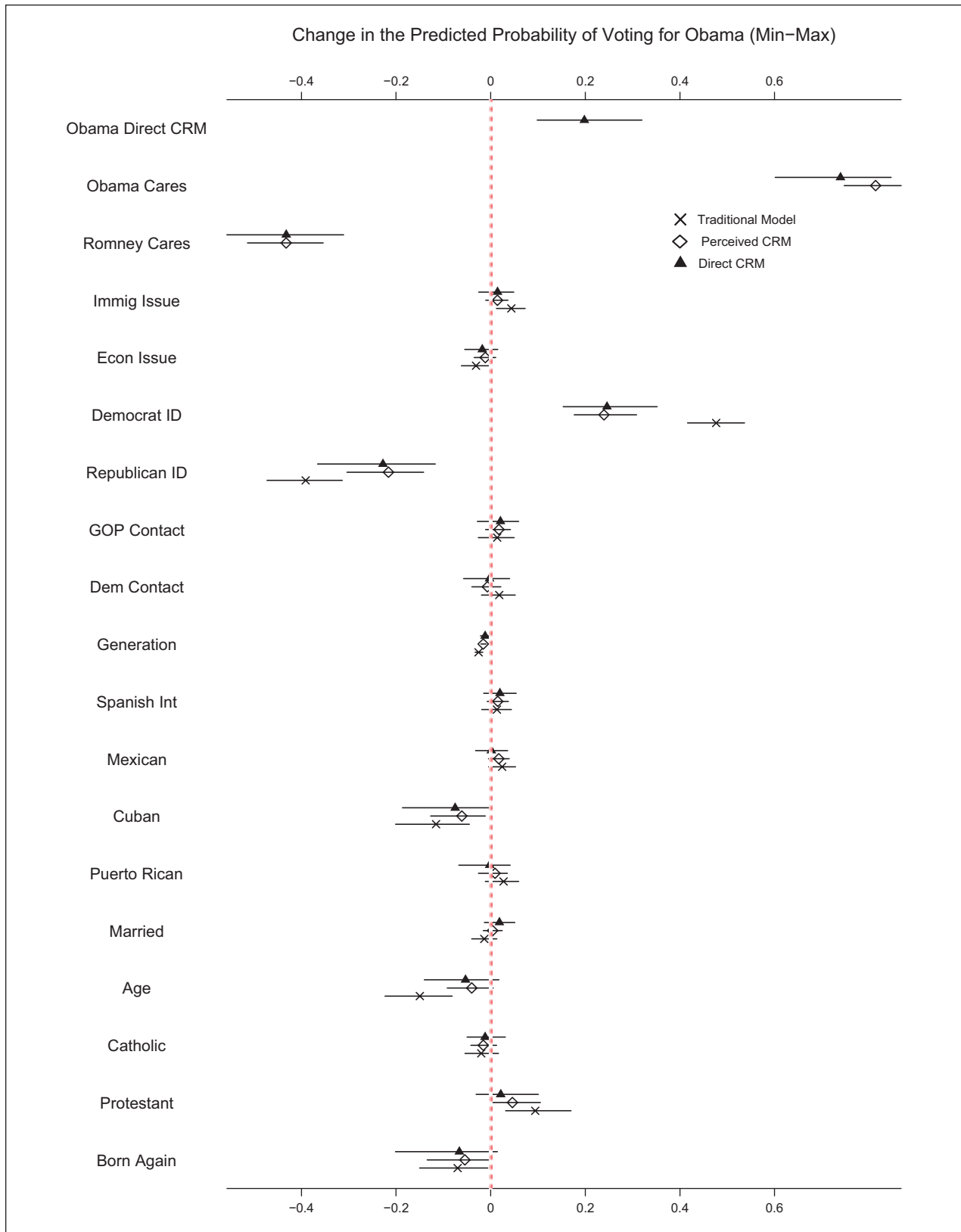


Figure 1. Obama split-sample models post-estimation rope ladder plots.<sup>8</sup>

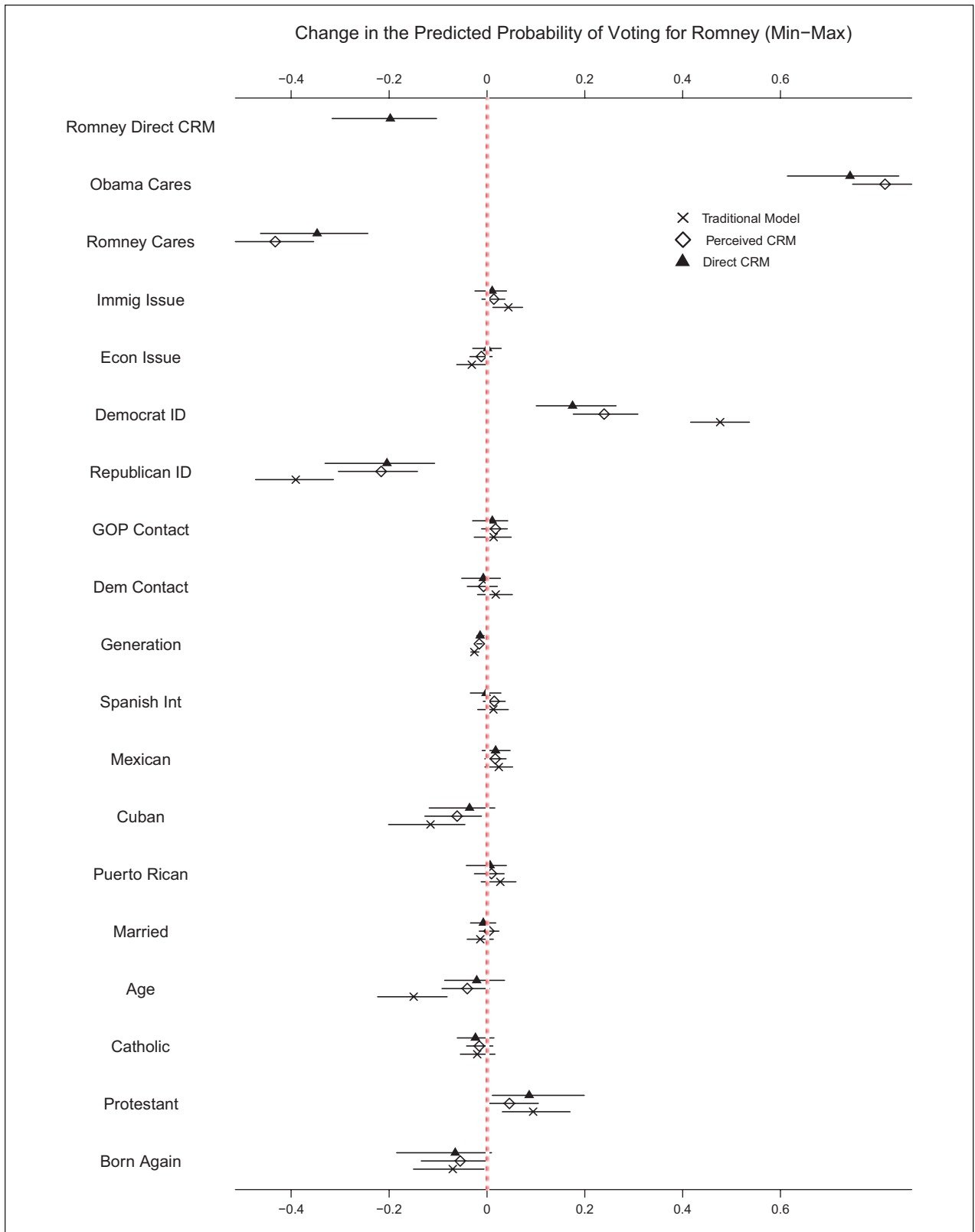


Figure 2. Romney split-sample models post-estimation rope ladder plots.

The Latino-oriented variables also operate in the expected direction. Second- and third-generation Latinos are more likely to vote for Romney than first-generation Latinos. This fits with theories of assimilation and acculturation, which intimate that immigrants become more like the general population the longer they and their offspring reside in the country. Taking the survey in Spanish—while statistically correlated with vote choice—is not statistically significant in the multivariate base model. We see that Mexican Americans are more likely to vote for Obama relative to their other country of origin counterparts. Conversely, and fitting with the literature, Cuban-Americans are more supportive of Romney relative to other Latinos. Puerto Ricans, however, are indistinguishable in their voting behavior.

Finally, we see predictable outcomes for the standard demographic and religious variables. Age tends to decrease the likelihood of voting for Obama, Catholicism makes no difference, Protestants and born-again Christians are less supportive of Obama relative to other Latinos, and poor Latinos are more supportive of Obama than rich Latinos. We find no statistically significant effects for gender or education.

Turning to Model 2 (perceived CRM in Table 1; the diamond in Figures 1 and 2), we find statistically significant and relatively large effects for perceived outreach CRM (Obama and Romney care about Latinos). The traditional vote-choice variables all keep their direction and statistical significance with the exception of the issue variables. Thus, controlling for traditional vote-choice variables, we nonetheless see that “Obama cares about Latinos” and “Romney cares about Latinos” each increase the likelihood in voting for Obama or Romney, respectively. These findings make sense given our theoretical framework, which suggests Obama would make a considerable attempt to appeal to Latino voters. Our findings substantiate this expectation. Our framework also suggests Romney would spend fewer resources appealing to Latinos—and in some cases he would even say negative things about Latinos. In other words, Romney would conduct more of a mixed message campaign—a dual strategy approach. This appears to have led to a lower than typical vote for a Republican among the Latino electorate as a whole, fitting with our expectations. However, because he did engage in some positive CRM, apparently some Latinos evidently intuited “Romney cares for them,” as evidenced by our findings here for Romney.

Regarding model fit, as our models begin to incorporate more CRM variables, fit increases substantially, as indicated by the log likelihood and Akaike information criterion (AIC). Both of these criteria are used to measure the relative goodness-of-fit model, with the latter addressing the trade-off between model complexity and

**Table 2.** Model-Fit Statistics: Obama Split Samples.

	Base model	Perceived CRM	Direct CRM
<i>N</i>	2,317	2,317	2,317
AIC	925.44	584.45	559.32
BIC	1,454.26	1,159.25	1,157.11
logL	-370.72	-192.22	-175.66

CRM = cross-racial mobilization; AIC = Akaike information criterion; Bayesian information criterion.

goodness of fit where a smaller value indicates a superior model. The log likelihood increases from  $-887.07$  to  $-555.68$  and the AIC drops from 1,820.15 to 1,161.35. This is a remarkable improvement in model fit.

Finally, we find statistically significant effects for specific policy-oriented variables in Models 3 and 4 (these variables were split sampled). Voters who view the Obama policy statement favorably are more likely to vote for Obama, and same for Romney. While both variables are significant, it is important to note that the Obama policy variable is overall more impactful because 58 percent of respondents said his stance makes them more supportive of Obama, whereas just 7 percent of respondents said the same about Romney. In other words, the pro-Romney respondents are only the truly hardcore, whereas the pro-Obama respondents are the majority of Latino voters. In terms of other variables, Cuban is statistically insignificant in the Romney policy CRM model, age drops from significance in both models, Protestant drops significance in the Obama policy CRM model, and Income Missing drops from the Romney policy CRM model. Evidently, adding the policy CRM variables has soaked up these variables' statistical significance. Figure 1 displays these changes in a graphical form; this figure shows the change in predicted probability (or first difference), from minimum to maximum, as well as 95 percent confidence intervals for each variable on the traditional, perceived CRM, and direct CRM models. Thus, as the points deviate from zero, the more significant they are. As can be seen, both policy issues (economy and immigration) are only significant in the traditional model. Similarly, partisanship loses significance once the CRM variables have been introduced.

Furthermore, since our policy-oriented variable was split sampled and to provide a more robust comparison of model fit, we also estimated the base model and our two CRM models using the split samples. In other words, using the split sample for Obama, we estimated the base model, perceived CRM model, and the direct CRM model; Table 2 displays different model-fit statistics for the three models. Similarly, we used the Romney split sample and estimated our three models. Table 3 displays the model-fit statistics. Both Tables 2 and 3 show

**Table 3.** Model-Fit Statistics: Romney Split Samples.

	Base model	Perceived CRM	Direct CRM
N	2,348	2,348	2,348
AIC	928.79	606.90	575.63
BIC	1,458.83	1,183.03	1,174.81
logL	-372.39	-203.45	-183.81

CRM = cross-racial mobilization; AIC = Akaike information criterion; Bayesian information criterion.

significant model-fit improvement, particularly the Bayesian information criterion (BIC), which provides a robust measure for model fit since it penalizes more than the AIC for the number of parameters used (Raftery 1995). As Tables 2 and 3 show, the use of our CRM models variables enhances model fit significantly. These findings support our theoretical framework that CRM enhances the salience of co-ethnic identification and thus improves vote-choice models among Latino voters.

## Discussion and Conclusion

Despite record deportations of Latino immigrants during the Obama Administration and the high rate of unemployment, Latinos nevertheless turned out in high numbers for Obama during the 2012 election. Moreover, Latino's total share of the electorate not only rose, but also, their preference for the Democratic candidate actually increased. According to the analysis by political scientist Gary Segura, for the first time in history, the Latino vote was nationally decisive (Sarlin 2012; Segura 2012). That is, the margin Latinos provided to Obama exceeded the overall margin he won by, suggesting that if the Latino vote had not been mobilized, Obama would have lost. How can this be? Obama's share of the vote declined in nearly every state and among most demographic groups, yet Latinos bucked this trend and very likely were the group of voters most responsible for swinging the election to Obama.

From Campbell and colleagues (1960) to Lewis-Beck and colleagues (2008), models of vote choice routinely stress Party ID, economic concerns, and a variety of other relevant but less substantively important variables. While Party ID and economic concerns operate as expected in our models of Latino voting behavior, other ethnic/racially oriented variables are also very relevant. We argue that Obama's ability to tap into Latino's sense of shared ethnicity/identity via his deferred action policy commitments and Romney's concomitant commitment to a harsh self-deportation approach explain not only why Latino turnout increased but also why their vote for Obama increased relative to the 2008 election. Each candidate sent clear signals to Latino voters through their

well-publicized policy commitments. These policy positions, along with long-standing attitudes toward the two major parties, produced affective responses among Latinos that have clear implications on voting behavior. Indeed, one of the major questions that divide Latinos on sentiments toward each candidate is care: "Would you say that Barack Obama/Mitt Romney is someone who truly cares about the Latino community, that he didn't care too much about Latinos, or that Obama/Romney was being hostile towards Latinos?" Fully, 66 percent of Latino voters say Obama cares, whereas just 14 percent say Romney cares. These numbers are astounding and speak directly to Obama's ability, and Romney's lack thereof, to tap into the shared ethnic concerns of Latino voters. On a topic of growing concern among Latinos—immigration—Obama took the "right" position whereas Romney took the "wrong" position.

In the context of CRM, both candidates appear to have been acting rationally, but Romney's move to the right on immigration during the primary probably sealed his fate with respect to the fast-growing crucially located Latino vote. No doubt, his campaign operated on an old turnout model of elections, where minorities would actually compose a smaller portion of the electorate than in 2008 given the state of the economy and the relative lack of enthusiasm over the nation's first non-white president. Even though white voters gave more of their vote to the Republican than four years prior, this calculation nevertheless backfired. Moreover, his blundering Spanish-language television ads—where he strongly attacked Obamacare—seem almost nonsensical given that only 25 percent of Latinos supported repealing Obamacare when polled on Election Day.

This study, and indeed the growing study of minority politics, comes at a decidedly important time in the broader study of voting behavior in general and vote choice in particular. It used to be the case that, because minority voters composed such a small share of the electorate, that they could largely be ignored in the broader study of vote choice. That is, including a variable that captures shared identity/ethnicity in a general population turnout model would most likely be insignificant because that variables' relevance pertained to such a small percentage of the sample. Now, however, that is becoming increasingly less the case, as this study demonstrates. The electorate will only continue to diversify, contrary to what the Romney strategists may have thought prior to the 2012 election. Political scientists should heed this blunder.

## Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## Notes

1. National Data Set Cross Tabs. Latino Decisions. [http://www.latinodecisions.com/files/9313/5233/8455/Latino\\_Election\\_Eve\\_Poll\\_-\\_Crosstabs.pdf](http://www.latinodecisions.com/files/9313/5233/8455/Latino_Election_Eve_Poll_-_Crosstabs.pdf)
2. Latino Decisions/NALEO/ImpreMedia National Post-Election Survey—November 2008. Latino Decisions. <http://www.latinodecisions.com/files/2913/3749/5067/NALEO.Nov08.pdf>
3. This is an important point because our survey data are, necessarily, individual-level data, so we do not have direct measures of candidate CRM. Nevertheless, the present framework and analysis is important because it highlights the centrality and provides a framework for understanding the multiracial context between candidate and voter in modeling minority political behavior. In other words, our analysis is a good start point that sets the stage for future analyses of CRM.
4. <http://i2.cdn.turner.com/cnn/2012/images/06/15/s1-exercising-prosecutorial-discretion-individuals-who-came-to-us-as-children.pdf>
5. Based on our off-the-record interviews with members of Obama's campaign staff.
6. The statement was made during Florida's GOP presidential debate on January 23, 2013.
7. Latino Decisions is a consulting firm specializing in public opinion analysis and election trends concerning primarily Latino voters. The company regularly works with universities, non-profit organizations, and media outlets such as Univision Noticias, impreMedia, and the Los Angeles times. During the 2012 election, the company did several tracking and baseline surveys for impreMedia and Univision to track attitudinal changes in the Latino electorate.
8. For each model, holding all variables at their mean values, the rope ladder plot shows the predicted probability change in each independent variable's (going from minimum to maximum) impact on the dependent variable.

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