

## Racialization in times of contention: how social movements influence Latino racial identity

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This paper examines the effects of the 2006 immigrant rights protests on the strength of Latino racial identity. Utilizing the 2006 Latino National Survey and an original protest event data set, we test whether Latino perceptions of racialization changed during the series of demonstrations. We treat the marches temporally as a quasi-natural experiment to explore changes in Latino attitudes regarding their racial identities before, during, and after the protests. We find that both during and after the marches, Latinos possessed a greater sense of racialization than before the marches. Moreover, the effect of the demonstrations was not short-lived and did not dissipate immediately after the end of the protest cycle. Rather, the effect grew stronger as the number of days after the last protest occurred increased. These findings have important implications for our understanding of the impacts social movements can have on the strength of collective identities.

**Keywords:** immigrant rights movement; Latino politics; racial identity; 2006 marches

### Introduction

From the infamous “one drop rule” designating anyone with even a minute trace of African ancestry as racially black and the labeling of Americans of Irish descent as non-white, to the various “blood quantum laws” that continue to determine who legally qualifies as being Native American, throughout history notions of race in the USA have consistently changed. In line with this long-held American tradition, in early August of 2012 the *Los Angeles Times* reported that “in an effort to keep up with evolving perceptions about race and identity,” the “U.S. Census Bureau is considering changes in questions it asks Americans about race.”<sup>1</sup> One of the primary reasons given for this proposed alteration was that “Latinos are changing the way the U.S. Census is identifying race in America.”<sup>2</sup> Implied in these statements is the understanding that contrary to common belief, race is not a biologically fixed and static concept, but a dynamic and continuously evolving phenomenon.

Perhaps no other piece of scholarly work has done more to advance the notion of race as a politically and socially constructed concept than Omi and Winant’s (1994) theory of “racial formation.” In their seminal study, the authors contend that the development of racial identities in the

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USA is significantly influenced by state policies, various forms of discrimination perpetrated by members of the majority (white American) public, and the political activism of the minority groups being “racialized.” The politically contentious 2006 immigration debate provides an important opportunity to examine how proposed government legislation, an escalation in anti-immigrant sentiments across the nation, and Latino activism in response to this nativism potentially impacted the degree to which Latinos identified as a distinct race.

While most studies on the racialization of groups in the USA have been historically grounded (see e.g., Omi and Winant 1994; Nagel 1995; Carter, Green, and Halpern 1996; De Genova 2006; Junn 2007), this article examines Latino racial formation in action. Utilizing a national public opinion survey taken before, during, and after the unprecedented 2006 immigrant rights demonstrations, combined with a unique protest event data set to delimit the temporal stages of the protest wave,<sup>3</sup> we examine whether the historic marches impacted Latino racial identity.<sup>4</sup> We see racialization as a process and seek to examine the impact that social movements – one of the three main elements of Omi and Winant’s (1994) racial formation theory – can have on this process. We believe that whether, and to what degree, Latinos perceive their group as racially distinct (our dependent variable) is the outcome of the racial formation process and, accordingly, the focus of our study. As such, our hypothesis is that the protest wave should have increased the degree to which Latinos saw themselves as a racial group. The results of our analysis indicate that this was indeed the case. Latinos identified more as a distinct racial group during and after the 2006 demonstrations than they did before the protests occurred. These findings have important implications for how we understand the process of racial formation and the effects that social movements can have on the development of collective identities.

### **Racialization in action**

During the spring of 2006, the US Senate began debate on an anti-immigrant bill recently passed by the Republican-led House of Representatives. The proposed legislation, H.R. 4437, commonly referred to as the “Sensenbrenner Bill,” would have increased the penalty of being an undocumented person from a civil violation to a federal felony and penalized, with monetary fines and incarceration, anyone who assisted undocumented immigrants in the most basic ways. If enacted, the law would have potentially criminalized people and organizations from employers and churches to family members and service groups. Leading up to and during this period, there was a growing sense of anti-Latino nativism throughout the country, as noted by a rise in hate crimes targeting Latinos and the resurgence of an anti-immigrant countermovement (Potok 2008; Gonzales 2009; Navarro 2009). In response to this politically hostile environment, from coast to coast millions of US- and foreign-born Latinos participated in a series of mass mobilizations. Because all three of the major elements of Omi and Winant’s (1994) racial formation theory – hostile legislation, heightened levels of discrimination, and political activism – were present during the spring of 2006, this context provides an excellent opportunity to test whether the protests impacted the racial identities of Latinos, both as a single panethnic group and as individual national origin subgroups.

Despite the fact that race in America has traditionally been understood through a black–white racial binary (Bonilla-Silva 2004; Alcoff 2009), throughout US history the presence of groups such as Native Americans, Asians, and Latinos have always played important roles in the nation’s race relations and its understanding of racial identities (see Takaki 1994; De Genova 2006; De Tocqueville [1840] 2011, Chapter 11). With regard to Latinos in particular, research on Latino racialization has for the most part supported Omi and Winant’s (1994) theory of racial formation. These studies have shown that government policies, various forms of discrimination, and how Latinos have historically responded politically to these actions have all played

key roles in the development of their racial identities (Oboler 1995; Gracia and De Greiff 2000; Grosfoguel 2003; Munoz 2007; Cobas, Duany, and Feagin 2009).

But while each Latino national origin group has had its own unique path to racialization (see e.g. Duany 2009; Perez 2009; Rodriguez and Menjivar 2009), it is important to note that since Mexicans have had the longest presence and are by far the largest Latino subgroup in the USA, the ways in which they have been (and continue to be) racialized effect how Latinos *as a group* are viewed by the general American public (De Genova 2004; Chavez 2008; Massey 2009, 15). In terms of the potential impact of the racially and politically charged 2006 immigration policy debate, it is worth pointing out that a hostile anti-immigrant context – even if directed primarily at Mexicans, as it was in 2006 (Chavez 2008) – has been shown to increase political participation (Schildkraut 2005) and help solidify a collective identity among *all* Latino subgroups (Massey and Sanchez 2010, 2–18). This may explain why during the 2006 protest wave Latinos of *all* national origin groups expressed similarly high levels of support for the rallies, the vast majority of whom agreed with the statement that “the marches showed that Latinos – immigrants or not – are united and won’t put up with discrimination any longer” (Barreto et al. 2009, 756).

Given the research reviewed above, it is not surprising that recent quantitative evidence has shown that the majority of Latinos see themselves as part of a distinct racial group. In fact, Latinos born in the USA are actually *more likely* than foreign-born Latinos to view themselves as a racial group, suggesting “that assimilation ... may lead to racialization” (Fraga et al. 2012, 82). According to Stokes-Brown (2012), “Latinos choose to identify with particular race categories for both institutional and more personal social psychological reasons” (326). She argues that Latino racial identity is impacted by socioeconomic status, levels of acculturation, and the degree to which they feel discriminated against (309). Moreover, while Golash-Boza and Darity (2008) also find that perceptions of discrimination impact Latino racial self-identification, the results of their study indicate that skin tone can affect Latino racial identity as well (see also Bonilla-Silva 2004). Thus, examining the factors that contribute to the racial formation process of Latinos is key to understanding their identity, especially since evoking racial identities encourages political participation (Masuoka 2008, 33; McClain et al. 2009, 78).

As previously stated, Omi and Winant (1994) theorize that in addition to experiences of discrimination and government policies, social movements can also help shape the construction of collective identities, including racial ones (88). Students of contentious politics have found that the presence of a collective identity helps individuals “see themselves ... [as] linked by interests, values, [or] common histories” (Della Porta and Diani 1999, 109). Previous studies have demonstrated that the more individuals identify as part of a specific group, the more likely they are to participate in political activism on behalf of that group (Klandermans 2003, 687; Hunt and Benford 2004, 437). Moreover, research has shown that over time and through participation in political activism, collective identities are brought to the fore and reinforced (Morris 1992, 352; Melucci 1995, 48; Ayoub 2013). Yet despite these important findings, there are two major weaknesses in the social movement literature worth noting. More often than not, the units of analysis in most work on the relationship between social movements and collective identities are activists, not the general public (see Stryker, Owens, and White 2000; Reger, Myers, and Einwohner 2008). In addition, according to senior social movement scholars, there is a dearth of research on the actual processes through which collective identities are themselves constructed and shaped (Snow and McAdam 2000, 41; Polletta and Jasper 2001, 285, 298). As such, our study addresses both the gaps in the literature stated above in the hopes of enriching our understanding of the dynamics of the identity–protest nexus.

Scholars of Latino politics have found that the presence of anti-immigrant bills can cause Latino immigrants who naturalize during these politically hostile periods to see race as a salient issue and

increase their levels of participation in electoral politics (Pantoja, Ramirez, and Segura 2001; Pantoja and Segura 2003). In fact, racially charged legislative proposals can even contribute to shifts in Latino partisanship (Bowler, Nicholson, and Segura 2006). Much less, however, is known about the effects of social movements on Latino racial identity. Students of contentious politics have shown that hostile political contexts can increase the salience of group identities (Bernstein 2003, 244, 2008, 280; Klandermans 2003, 682). Whether this was the case with regard to Latino racial identity and the 2006 rallies has yet to be systematically demonstrated.

If in fact political activism and feeling discriminated against impacts a group's racial formation process, some evidence suggests that this may have occurred for Latinos during the 2006 protest wave. For example, in a survey taken subsequent to the historic marches, "Latinos far removed from the immigrant experience in their family histories [perceived the immigration] debate as a source of greater discrimination every bit as much as" recently arrived immigrants (Suro and Escobar 2006, 5, 9). Furthermore, polling conducted during the 2006 demonstrations revealed that "second-generation and third-generation Latinos" were "as likely to participate in the marches as the foreign-born" (Barreto et al. 2009, 753). Thus, since the vast majority of Latinos are either directly or indirectly connected to the immigrant experience (Pedraza, Segura, and Bowler 2011, 2), and given the racially charged nature of the 2006 immigration debate (Chavez 2008), we expect that the protest wave would have contributed to an increase in Latino racial identity both during and after the protest cycle.

Whether there is a relationship between the protests and Latino racial identity is an important question to examine because most research looking into the empirical effects of the rallies on Latino public opinion have focused on questions such as how Latinos viewed the demonstrations and why those who took part in the marches did so (Pallares and Flores-Gonzalez 2008; Barreto et al. 2009); what impacts the protests had on feelings of Latino panethnicity (Mohamed 2013); and what effects the series of demonstrations had on Latino political efficacy and trust in government (Pedraza, Segura, and Bowler 2011; Wallace, Zepeda-Millán, and Jones Correa, Forthcoming). Yet, with the exception of Wallace, Zepeda-Millán, and Jones Correa (Forthcoming) and Mohamed (2013),<sup>5</sup> studies that focus on the relationship between the marches and Latino political attitudes are limited in that the data they utilize are drawn from a single point in time, either from surveys undertaken during the demonstrations (Barreto et al. 2009) or after the protest wave had subsided (Suro and Escobar 2006; Pedraza, Segura, and Bowler 2011). Consequently, previous studies on the effects of the historic demonstrations on Latino public opinion have for the most part failed to capture the potentially important temporal impacts of the rallies.

The possible temporal effects of the protest wave are important to highlight because while social movements often seek to influence people's attitudes, the effects of mass mobilizations on public opinion is an under-examined area of research. The reason for this lacuna in the literature is because of the inability of social scientists to predict when social movements will emerge (Lee 2002, 42; Banaszak and Ondercin 2009, 12). As a result, studies that *do* examine the relationship between contentious politics and public opinion usually look at how people's attitudes influence social movements (see Burstein 1999; Giugni and Yamasaki 2009; Uba 2009) and not the reverse, how large-scale collective action impacts public opinion (for two exceptions, see Giugni 2004; Banaszak and Ondercin 2009). Our research helps fill many of the research gaps mentioned above and overcomes the methodological limitations of prior studies by combining public opinion data collected before, during, and after the protests, with an original 2006 protest event data set to define temporal periods.

Hence, because issues related to race and identity were central to the claims many Latino protesters made, how they framed their grievances, and the symbols they used during the 2006 demonstrations (Chavez 2008; Pallares and Flores-Gonzalez 2010; Voss and Bloemraad 2011), the effects of the protest wave on Latino racial identity is the focus of our analysis. Again, we

theorize that the primarily Latino social movement that occurred during the spring of 2006 contributed to the Latino racialization process by increasing the likelihood that Latinos would see themselves as part of a distinct racial group. The following section turns towards a more detailed discussion of our data and research design.

### Research design and results

The dominant paradigms in the study of social movements conceptualize their development as a process composed of several dynamic and interactive phases (McAdam 1999; Tarrow 1998). For example, in his authoritative examination of the civil rights movement, McAdam (1999) chronologically analyzed the “generation,” “heyday,” and “decline” of “black insurgency” (v). The activation and/or transformation of group identities are fundamental mechanisms in the development of social movements and the waves of protest they sometimes produce (Tilly and Tarrow 2007, 215–216). To analyze the impact of large-scale collective action on Latino attitudes towards their racial identity, we examine the 2006 immigrant rights protest wave by using the Latino National Survey (LNS) and our newly created *2006 Immigrant Protest-Event Dataset* to designate the time periods of the movement. The LNS was fielded in 17 states between November 2005 and August 2006 with 8634 respondents. Interviews were conducted by phone and respondents were given the option to take the survey in Spanish or English. The survey included over 165 items regarding demographic information, national origin, political attitudes, political participation, identity, and policy positions.

In this analysis, we focus on a survey item regarding perceptions of Latino racial identity as the dependent variable of interest. This is the only survey item with regard to Latinos’ perceptions of whether they are a racial group. The specific survey question asks: “In the U.S., we use a number of categories to describe ourselves racially. Do you feel that Latinos make up a distinct racial group in America?” Respondents were given the choice of answering yes, no, or don’t know. Respondents were also allowed to provide an answer choice of maybe; however, it was not read to them.<sup>6</sup> In particular, since the rhetoric surrounding the immigration bill (H.R. 4437) that led to the protests involved explicit targeting of Latinos as a group, we examine the impact of the demonstrations on Latinos’ perceptions of group racialization.

Our protest data set builds on a previous collection of the 2006 protest events (Bada et al. 2006) by substantially expanding the number of protest observations and the information collected regarding each demonstration using data collected both during and after the 2006 protest wave. In all, we verified and collected data on a total of 357 immigrant protest events that took place in 2006 in response to the proposed federal immigration legislation, H.R. 4437.<sup>7</sup> The first protest in our data set occurred on 14 February 2006 and the final series of demonstrations culminated on 1 May 2006. The protests were widely dispersed across the country, taking place in both urban and rural places.

As previously stated, one distinct advantage of this analysis over other work examining social movements and political attitudes is that the survey (the LNS) we rely on for our analysis was in the field before, during, and after the 2006 protest cycle. The LNS survey instrument contained an exact date of interview, which allows us to assess how Latino attitudes about their group’s racial identity were impacted by the marches. As such, we use the protest data set to define temporal periods of before, during, and after the protests. We created a variable “Before Protest Cycle” which consisted of all respondents interviewed prior to 14 February 2006. The dates of 14 February 2006 to 1 May 2006 were defined as “During Protest Cycle.” Finally, all respondents interviewed after 1 May 2006 were coded as “After the Protest Cycle.” We also created an additional protest variable, called “Days After Protest Cycle” measuring the number of days after the protest cycle ended on 1 May to the interview date for each respondent in that period.

Since the implementation of the instrument was not timed to coincide with the protest cycle, the size of each sample is not equally balanced. Nonetheless, due to the overall large size of the survey, there are still over 1000 respondents in each of our three groupings. The before group has 1835 respondents, the during group has 1987 respondents, and the after group has 4110 respondents. When examining the means across various demographic variables, the samples appear quite similar. The average age across each of the samples is 40 years old, the percentage of male respondents ranges from 44% to 47%, and the mean education level on a 7-point scale is between 3.2 and 3.8. Moreover, each sample has between 61% and 69% Mexican respondents. Thus, the samples across each temporal period do not vary substantially across age, national origin group, education, or geographic location, and we can be confident that bias in different samples is unlikely to be driving the results of our analysis.

In addition to our dependent variable, Latino racialization, and the protest variables, we also include discrimination variables.<sup>8</sup> As discussed in our review of the literature, the role of experiences with discrimination and perceptions of overall group discrimination are key because they can lead to feelings of racialization. Accordingly, two different variables measuring attitudes and experiences with discrimination were used in the models. The first variable, Group Discrimination, measures perceptions of discrimination towards Latinos as a group. The survey item asks whether respondents believe Latinos as a group can get ahead if they work hard. Higher values indicate respondents are more likely to agree with this statement, indicating lower levels of perceptions of group discrimination. The second variable, Individual Discrimination, is a composite measure constructed from four survey items that ask respondents about their individual experiences with discrimination in different contexts, such as employment, interactions with police, housing, and restaurants. This variable is a dichotomous measure and respondents were coded as 1 if they responded yes to any personal experience with discrimination in any of the four contexts. It should be noted that in the LNS respondents reported low levels of personal experience with discrimination, hence our rationale for aggregating across individual discrimination categories.

The models also include a host of additional covariates that may influence Latino views of their racial identity. We include education to analyze if respondents who have more education are more likely to perceive Latinos as a distinct racial group.<sup>9</sup> Age is also included to assess differences in whether older people are more likely to perceive racialization. We control for partisan differences by including a dichotomous variable for Democrat respondents. Given differences in Latino political attitudes based on national origin groups (Alvarez and García Bedolla 2003; Abrajano and Alvarez 2010), we also include dummy variables for Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Dominican, and Salvadoran respondents.<sup>10</sup> Finally, we also control for respondents who are first generation by employing an appropriate dichotomous measure. We include this variable assuming that new immigrants have not yet been racialized in the US context, while Latinos who have been physically present in the USA for a longer period of time are more likely to have a heightened racial identity.

Before returning to the statistical models, Figure 1 displays a bar graph of how respondents in each time period answered the question “Are Latinos a distinct racial group?” Respondents are grouped in the figure by answer choice and within answer choice by time period of the movement. The top bar represents people interviewed before the marches began. People who took the survey during the protest movement are represented in the figure by the second bar with the lightest shade of gray. Finally the last bar, the darkest shade of gray, represents those interviewed after the marches occurred. The figure demonstrates a marked increase in perceptions of racialization when comparing the before period to both during and after periods. Before the marches, 48.3% of respondents answered yes compared to 58.9% during and 56.4% after. This represents an increase in perceptions of racialization of about 10% once the marches occurred, which

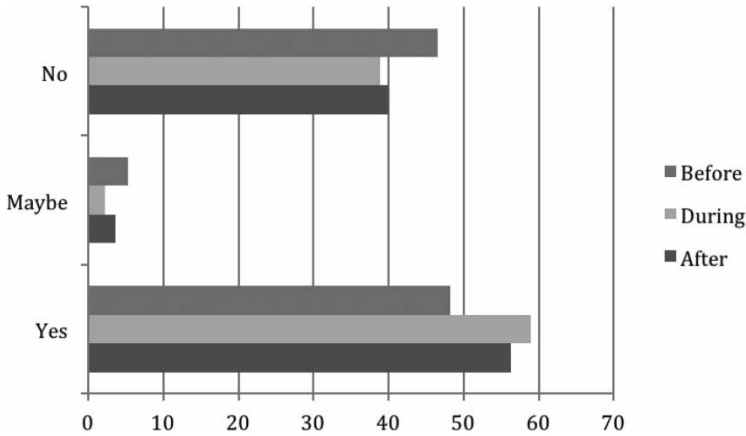


Figure 1. Percentage of each answer choice “Latinos are a distinct race” by protest period.

provides strong preliminary evidence that the marches likely impacted how Latinos felt about racial identity.

Due to the nature of the dependent variable, our statistical models use ordered logistic regression.<sup>11</sup> We created five different models to examine Latino attitudes towards racialization and the results are presented in Table 1.<sup>12</sup> Control variables such as education, age, male, Democrat, first generation, and all the national origin group variables are included in all five models. The difference between the models is the group of respondents analyzed. The first model, Model 1, is the main model of interest. It examines the role of the different time periods of the movement on attitudes and uses the largest sample of respondents. Variables for During and After the Protests are included in the analysis, whereas respondents in the Before period are treated as the baseline group.<sup>13</sup> Models 2–4 do not contain any specific protest period variables because each model is limited to respondents within a particular period. Model 2 is an analysis of the effect of the additional covariates on respondents before the marches occurred. Model 3 is limited to those interviewed during the protest movement, and Model 4 is limited to those interviewed after the last marches. The purpose of these models is to analyze the effects of the additional covariates on Latino perceptions of racialization and determine if they varied over the course of the movement. For example, was education significant across all three time periods or was its effect limited to during the protest cycle? Finally, Model 5 examines respondents after the marches were over, but also includes the variable counting the number of days after the last protest until the date of interview for each relevant respondent. This model is intended to explore whether the effects of the movement were short-lived and dissipated quickly after the movement ended.

Turning towards the results in Table 1, Model 1 “All Periods,” both time periods of the protest are significant and positive. This suggests respondents interviewed both during and after the protest wave are more likely to perceive Latinos as a distinct racial group. Respondents who experienced individual discrimination were also more likely to perceive Latinos as a racial group, as were those with greater senses of Latino group discrimination.<sup>14</sup> Education is also statistically significant with a positive effect. In essence, respondents with more education had a greater likelihood of viewing Latinos as a distinct racial group. Respondents who are Democrats were also more likely to view Latinos as a racial group, as are males. First generation is significant but is negative, indicating that those who are first generation are less likely to perceive racialization. This finding is consistent with Fraga et al.’s (2012) argument that racialization appears to be

Table 1. Perceptions of Latino racialization.

	(1) All periods	(2) Before protest cycle	(3) During protest cycle	(4) After protest cycle	(5) Days after protest cycle
Education	0.134** (0.014)	0.099** (0.027)	0.128** (0.028)	0.153** (0.020)	0.146** (0.020)
Age	-0.001 (0.002)	0.007* (0.004)	0.002 (0.004)	-0.006* (0.002)	-0.006* (0.002)
Male	0.076 (0.049)	0.120 (0.100)	0.247* (0.098)	-0.023 (0.070)	-0.027 (0.071)
Democrat	0.174** (0.054)	-0.064 (0.109)	0.151 (0.107)	0.285** (0.077)	0.280** (0.077)
First generation	-1.119** (0.066)	-0.841** (0.141)	-0.955** (0.128)	-1.284** (0.093)	-1.225** (0.093)
Mexican	-0.158 <sup>+</sup> (0.083)	-0.214 (0.136)	-0.282* (0.142)	-0.020 (0.160)	-0.095 (0.161)
Puerto Rican	-0.528** (0.123)	0.285 (0.310)	-0.665** (0.241)	-0.571** (0.198)	-0.724**
Cuban	-0.277* (0.134)	-0.264 (0.302)	-0.492 <sup>+</sup> (0.252)	-0.080 (0.208)	-0.236 (0.211)
Dominican	0.238 (0.146)	0.587 <sup>+</sup> (0.326)	-0.094 (0.284)	0.355 (0.221)	0.228 (0.223)
Salvadoran	-0.043 (0.135)	-0.001 (0.221)	-0.138 (0.229)	-0.098 (0.259)	-0.140 (0.260)
Group Disc.	-0.090* (0.040)	-0.015 (0.082)	-0.114 (0.086)	-0.104 <sup>+</sup> (0.056)	-0.103 <sup>+</sup> (0.056)
Indiv Disc.	0.448** (0.054)	0.534** (0.108)	0.342** (0.108)	0.457** (0.076)	0.453** (0.076)
During protest cycle	0.242** (0.070)				
After protest cycle	0.140* (0.062)				
Days after protest cycle					0.007** (0.001)
Cutpoint 1	-0.817** (0.210)	-0.162 (0.403)	-0.985* (0.414)	-1.136** (0.317)	-0.848** (0.324)
Cutpoint 2	-0.664** (0.210)	0.051 (0.403)	-0.885* (0.414)	-0.982** (0.317)	-0.693* (0.324)
Observations	7437	1695	1891	3851	3851
Log-likelihood	-5521.98	-1373.87	-1343.92	-2768.97	-2758.42
Chi-square	900.62	148.95	178.64	578.69	599.78
Pseudo- $R^2$	0.08	0.05	0.06	0.09	0.10

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. Before protest cycle refers to interviews taking place before 14 February 2006; during protest cycle refers to interviews during the period 14 February to 1 May 2006; and after protest cycle refers to interviews after 1 May 2006.

\*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$ , <sup>+</sup> $p < .10$ .

part of the assimilation process for Latinos since those who have been in the USA longer are more likely to view Latinos through a racial lens.

Latinos of Cuban descent were less likely to believe that Latinos are a distinct racial group than other subgroups. This result is not unexpected given the position of privilege Cubans have enjoyed because of the historically different treatment they have received as a group by both the dominant white majority and the US government (Portes and Rumbaut 1996; Grosfoguel 2003; Bonilla-Silva 2004; Garcia Bedolla 2009). A finding that *was* surprising to us is that Puerto



Rican respondents were *less likely* to believe that Latinos were a distinct racial group. This result was unexpected given that scholars have found Puerto Ricans to be among the most racialized minority groups in the USA (Grosfoguel 2003; Bonilla-Silva 2004). Overall, the results from Model 1 indicate that a host of covariates have a significant effect on perceptions of Latino racial identity in addition to the protest measures.

As discussed previously, Models 2–4 are similar models, but limited to respondents within each of the three respective protest time periods (before, during, and after). The statistically significant effect of individual experiences with discrimination remains strong across Models 2–4. Group discrimination, however, maintains the directionality from Model 1 but is no longer significant in Models 2–4. Education and first generation demonstrate statistically strong effects across all three time periods. Puerto Ricans in Models 3 and 4 (during and after the protest cycle) remain less likely to perceive Latinos as a distinct group. The negative and statistically significant effect of being Cuban is only observed in the “During Protest Cycle” model and is at the 10% level. Both age and party are limited in their effects across the different models. In sum, the results of the before, during, and after stand-alone models indicate that individual experience with discrimination, education, and first generation are the most consistent variables influencing perceptions of Latino racial identity.

In Model 5, which is an additional statistical analysis of respondents interviewed after the protests ended, we include a measure of the number of days after the end of the protest wave that each respondent was interviewed. We include this measure to assess if as the number of days after the marches ended increased, Latinos were less likely to believe Latinos were a racial group. The results indicate that the opposite was true. As the number of days after 1 May increased, respondents were *more* likely to answer yes to the question asking whether Latinos were a distinct racial group. This finding is contrary to the assumption that the effects of the protests would be short-lived and dissipate not long after the marches ended.

### ***Substantive effects***

We estimate substantive effects in order to get a better sense of the impact of the explanatory variables on the dependent variable of interest.<sup>15</sup> In Figure 2, substantive effects were calculated using Model 1, the main statistical model that includes the protest time period variables. The values report the difference for each variable of the probability a respondent will answer “Yes” on the survey item regarding Latinos as a distinct racial group, while setting protest variables to zero and all other independent variables to their medians.<sup>16</sup> For continuous variables, the estimate shows the first difference as a result of moving from the minimum to maximum values, while dichotomous variables are changed from 0 to 1; 95% confidence intervals are indicated by the lines in the figures and in brackets.

Both education and first generation have strong effects, albeit in opposite directions. Going from the minimum education level to the maximum is associated with a 22-point increase in the probability of answering yes Latinos are a distinct group. Going from 0 to 1 for first generation results in a 27-point decrease in the probability of answering yes on the same survey item. The magnitude of the effects of both of these variables is considerable. Turning to the protest period variables, the results are relatively more modest but still significant. Those interviewed during the protest wave are associated with a 6-point increase in perceiving Latinos as a distinct racial group. The effect after the protest is smaller with a 3-point increase in answering yes. Experience with individual discrimination is associated with an 11-point increase in perceptions of racialization, whereas weaker feelings of Latino group discrimination result in a 7-point decrease. Both Cuban and Puerto Rican respondents are associated with a marked decrease in the likelihood of believing Latinos are a distinct racial group, with respective 12- and 7-point

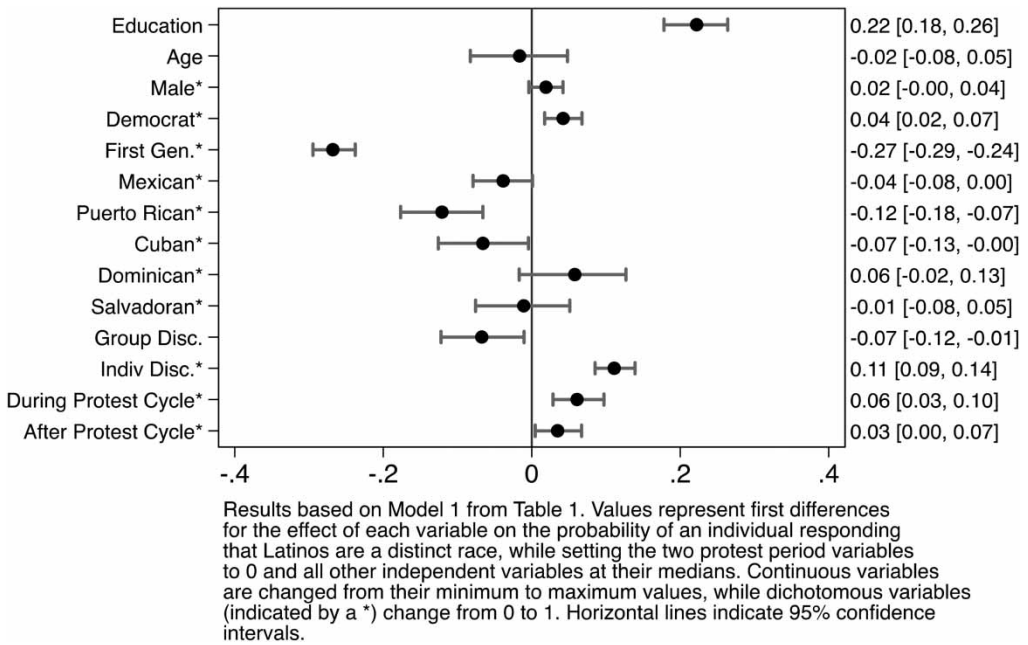


Figure 2. Substantive effects for perceptions of Latino racialization.

decreases. Thus, the results of our analysis provide strong evidence for the role of education and first generation status, some impact of national origin subgroup and relatively discrimination, and relatively modest though distinct effects for the temporal protest variables on Latino racial identity.

**Discussion**

To contextualize the results discussed above, it is critical to explore the factors that explain the role of the covariates on Latino racial identity. With regard to the impact of education, the findings of previous research on this topic are mixed (Golash-Boza and Darity 2008). For instance, Stokes-Brown (2012) notes that some studies suggest that “educational attainment may lead to a decline in social distance with whites because increased racial contact with whites for minorities provides opportunities for interracial interactions and the adoption of culturally dominant definitions of race.” Yet she also points out that other research has shown that “educated Latinos may be more aware of the issues surrounding their status as minorities and therefore retain a salient minority identity” (317). As explained below, we are inclined to agree with the latter argument as an explanation for our finding that more educated Latinos are more likely to see Latinos as part of a distinct racial group.

In their authoritative study, Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) argue that the ability to effectively process political information helps people discern their individual and group interests, connect their interests to larger notions of the collective good, and express their views through political action (1). According to Tarrow (1998), protests waves provide a context of heightened levels of political information among activists and the general public (24). With these two assertions in mind, given the highly anti-Latino nature of the 2006 immigration debate (Chavez 2008) and the national scale of the protest wave (Voss and Bloemraad 2011), we believe it makes sense that Latinos with higher levels of education would be more likely to possess the critical

thinking skills needed to make a connection between the racialized 2006 anti-Latino context and their own racial identities.

In terms of our finding that US-born Latinos are more likely than foreign-born Latinos to see themselves as a racial group, this result is also consistent with much current research. The literature on this area of inquiry has found that nativism in the USA is an important contributing factor to the formation of a collective Latino identity among US-born Latinos of various generations (Telles and Ortiz 2009; Jimenez 2010; Massey and Sanchez 2010). That this collective identity is seen as a racial one more by Latinos born in the USA than those born abroad supports previous research which suggests that assimilation leads to racialization among Latinos (Fraga et al. 2012, 82). In short, US-born Latinos saw the 2006 immigration debate “as a source of great discrimination against them” (Suro and Escobar 2006, 5–9). Consequently, we believe that just as discrimination teaches US-born Latinos that they are not considered fully American, it also reminds them that they are not white (Golash-Boza and Darity 2008, 31).

Related to the aforementioned finding, previous studies have shown that increased anti-immigrant sentiments that indiscriminately target Latinos as a *group* can increase their sense of linked fate (Sanchez and Masuoka 2010; Stokes 2003). Moreover, while prior research reveals that *individual* experiences with discrimination can augment both behavioral and attitudinal alienation (Schildkraut 2005), perceptions of discrimination against oneself can also increase Latino racial identity (Golash-Boza and Darity 2008; Stokes-Brown 2012). Consistent with this body of work, our results show that Latinos who reported experiencing individual-level discrimination and, to a weaker extent, perceived group discrimination were more likely to see Latinos as part of a distinct racial group. Thus, in line with racial formation theory, our results support the notion that discrimination is a key mechanism in the Latino racialization process.

The results for individual Latino subgroups are inconsistent across our models with the exception of Puerto Ricans. Our finding that Puerto Ricans were less likely to perceive Latinos as a distinct racial group is surprising and somewhat difficult to explain. According to work by prominent scholars of Puerto Rican racial identity (Bonilla-Silva 2004; Grosfoguel 2003), we would have expected this national origin group to have been *more*, not *less*, likely to see Latinos as a distinct racial group. This is especially so because, as mentioned above, previous research contends that *all* Latino subgroups are racialized by anti-immigrant contexts (Chavez 2008; Massey and Sanchez 2010).

Given that Puerto Ricans can be of various phenotypes (Bonilla-Silva 2004), a possible explanation for our unexpected finding is that our model did not adequately capture the skin tone of survey respondents, which has been shown to affect Latino racial self-identification (Golash-Boza and Darity 2008). Therefore, if our sample was composed primarily of light-skinned Puerto Ricans who identify as “white,” this may have biased our results. However, an empirical examination of the data reveals that Puerto Rican respondents were not significantly more likely to identify as a lighter skin tone compared to Mexican respondents, the largest national origin group in the sample. In contrast, more than half of Cubans were likely to describe their skin tone as very light. Moreover, we are also not persuaded by the “skin tone” explanation because of the fact that other Latino national origin groups are often composed of individuals of a variety of phenotypes as well. Nonetheless, we ran the models including skin tone and, as we expected, this factor was not significant nor did it change the effect of the Puerto Rican variable.<sup>17</sup>

Instead, taking note of Junn and Masuoka’s (2008) call “for more explicit consideration of the structural incentives and costs of adopting racial and ethnic identities” (730), we find more convincing the possibility that Puerto Ricans were less likely to see Latinos as a distinct racial group in our models because they are the only Latino subgroup who is automatically born with US citizenship. One of the primary mechanisms for the contemporary Latino racialization process is their

suspected “illegal” presence in the USA (Chavez 2008; Massey 2009). Because it is practically impossible for Puerto Ricans to be undocumented immigrants (due to their birth right citizenship), they arguably need not fear the specter of deportation and the many other vulnerabilities and forms of oppression that come along with it (see e.g. De Genova 2002). As a result, despite the fact that some Puerto Ricans did play important roles in the historic demonstrations (see Rodriguez Muniz 2010; Zepeda-Millán 2012), perhaps, in the context of the 2006 protest wave and politically charged immigration debate, their “US citizenship privilege” provided Puerto Ricans with a cognitive defense from the racializing mechanisms that impacted other national origin groups’ likelihood of conceiving Latinos as a distinct racial group. Unfortunately, the qualitative research needed to explore this tentative explanation is beyond the scope of our analysis and data, but it is an interesting area for further research.

While the results for Mexicans are only significant in one model, and weakly significant in our main model, we believe they are still worth briefly discussing. Given the emphasis in the literature on Mexicans being the quintessential undocumented immigrants and our belief that perceptions of “illegality” are fundamental to Latino racialization, the inconsistent effect and the negative directionality of our findings for this national origin group was also puzzling. Despite its negative impact, when examining the changes in Mexican respondents’ answers to the survey question regarding Latinos as a distinct racial group, there is an affirmative increase both during and after the protest period. Before the protests began, only 43.9% of Mexican respondents answered yes to this question. Yet, both during and after the demonstrations that percentage rose to 56%. While this result is not statistically significant, it may provide some evidence that Mexicans may have primarily identified with their national origin group, but as the protest wave progressed their feelings about Latino racialization as a group increased.

Our finding with the most significant implications for both the social movement and racialization literatures is that the 2006 marches were related to an increase in the degree to which Latinos believed they were part of a distinct racial group. This effect is important to note because not only did Latino racial identity increase *during* the series of rallies, but it continued to do so well *after* the marches had subsided. We believe that there are three possible reasons for this, all of which are likely to have played a role in explaining our results. The first factor is that 2006 was also a midterm election year in which immigration remained a hot button topic. During this period, Latino activists across the country attempted to use the momentum gained from the spring protest wave to mobilize the Latino vote. As such, we believe that ethnic voter mobilization drives targeting Latinos, combined with the contentious nature of the immigration issue, contributed to the continued racialization of Latino identity.

The last two factors we believe help explain our results are that previous studies have demonstrated that an anti-immigrant environment can make race a more salient issue for Latinos (Pantoja, Ramirez, and Segura 2001), and that political activism can bring collective identities to the fore and make them more pronounced (Morris 1992, 352; Melucci 1995, 48; Ayoub 2013). Accordingly, we believe that consistent with Omi and Winant’s (1994) claim that social movements help construct racial identities, our evidence supports the notion that large-scale political activism can play a role in this process. In short, our findings suggest that mass protests by a segment of a racialized minority group can contribute to making other members of that minority group more likely to see their identities as racial ones.

## Conclusion

In this analysis, we treated the 2006 immigrant rights protest cycle as a quasi-natural experiment in conjunction with the LNS to examine Latino perceptions of racial identity. Latino racial identity is an ever-changing concept, particularly in light of the current anti-Latino climate that contributes

to increasing feelings of racialization (Chavez 2008; Massey and Sanchez 2010). Scholars studying the immigrant rights marches of 2006 have minimally examined the impact of the protests on Latino attitudes. One of the major contributions of this article is to specifically analyze the impacts of the marches on Latino public opinion by utilizing temporal protest period variables.

We ask, do Latinos view themselves as a distinct racial group and what factors influence their attitudes on this matter? This article explicitly examines the factors that led to a heightened racialized Latino identity with particular attention paid to the role of contention in identity formation. We find that the spring 2006 marches in response to federal anti-immigrant legislation marked a critical juncture in Latino perceptions of racial identity. Our statistical analysis demonstrates that the marches had a substantial effect on Latinos' willingness to see their group identity as a racial one. Our research shows that both during and after the protest wave there was a marked increase in Latino identification as a distinct racial group. Consistent with previous studies that find that movements can help create and shape collective identities (Morris 1992, 352; Melucci 1995, 48), our results provide strong evidence that the 2006 marches played an important role in the racialization of Latino identity.

During the historic protest wave, activists went to great lengths to wrap American flags around themselves and carry signs that read "We Are America." Not surprisingly, Latinos were more likely to identify as "American" after the protests compared to before them (Mohamed 2013). Our results show strong evidence of the role of education and individual experiences of discrimination in increasing perceptions of Latino *racial identity*, and of the decreasing effect of first generation. We believe that these findings suggest that as Latinos assimilate and learn the critical thinking skills needed to understand the reasons why they are discriminated against, they come to view their "Americanness" through a racial lens. These results are particularly important for scholars of racial formation, political identities, and contentious politics.

The implications of our findings for public opinion scholars are both substantive and methodological. Methodologically, the impact of social movements on public opinion is an understudied phenomenon because the timing of protests and the administration of surveys rarely overlap (Banaszak and Ondercin 2009, 12). Consequently, research that does examine the relationship between contentious politics and public opinion usually looks at how public attitudes impact social movements (see Burstein 1999; Giugni and Yamasaki 2009; Uba 2009) and not how mass mobilizations impact public opinion. We help fill this vital research gap and overcome the aforementioned methodological barriers by using a survey fielded before, during, and after a protest wave, in conjunction with a protest event data set to delineate the periods for the same series of demonstrations.

Our findings also have important implications for public opinion scholars because they highlight the limitations of traditional polling when inquiring about political matters in *non*-politically conflictual contexts. Fantasia (1988) made this point over two decades ago when he critiqued survey research's ability to capture politicized collective identities. He asserted that "[a] sum of the opinions of individual respondents recorded at a given moment in time may appear wholly different from the 'consciousness' expressed by those same 'respondents' in the midst of collective action and interaction" (6). We agree with his assessment and believe that our quantitative data – which, again, analyzes a survey that was in the field before, during, and after the protest wave by explicitly considering those periods in the models – add credence to Fantasia's qualitatively based thesis.

The aforementioned point is related to our main substantive contribution to public opinion research. We believe that the results of our study demonstrate the cognitive power of social movements by showing that large-scale collective action can increase the salience of collective identities, both in the midst of a protest wave and, perhaps more importantly, well after a cycle of contention has subsided. These findings are vital for students of public opinion, race, and

social movements to take note of because they suggest that political protests can be a key mechanism in the dynamic and interactive process of the development of collective identities, especially racial ones.

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### Notes

1. <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/lanow/2012/08/census-bureau-considers-changes-to-race-ethnicity-questions.html>.
2. [http://nbclatino.com/2012/08/08/latinos\\_prefer\\_hispanic\\_as\\_a\\_race\\_category\\_says\\_census\\_stud/](http://nbclatino.com/2012/08/08/latinos_prefer_hispanic_as_a_race_category_says_census_stud/).
3. Tarrow (2011) defines protest waves (or cycles) as phases of “heightened conflict” across a social system “with rapid diffusion of collective action from more mobilized to less mobilized sectors” (199). For a more detailed definition of protest waves/cycles, see Tarrow (2011) and Koopmans (2004).
4. Protest waves are often composed of several “repertoires of contention,” including rallies, marches, and other types of collective action. Because the focus of our study is *not* the various types repertoires employed by immigrant rights activists, but rather the impact of the 2006 protest wave itself, for stylistic reasons we use terms such as mass mobilizations, large-scale collective actions, rallies, demonstrations, and protests synonymously despite the admitted loss of some analytic precision.
5. As a small side note, Mohamed Silber defines 10 April 2006 as the starting point of the protests wave. Our *2006 Immigrant Protest-Event Dataset* indicates that close to 2 million people had already taken part in over 100 protests by that date, including major marches in Chicago, Los Angeles, and Dallas that had up to half a million participants each. As will be explained in detail in the following section, we use 14 February 2006 as the starting date of the protest wave.
6. The coding scheme for the racial identity-dependent variable is 1 for No, 2 for Maybe, 3 for Yes, and Don’t know as missing. Given that Maybe was not actually read to respondents compared to the other three choices, this may explain why only 294 (3%) respondents provided this answer choice.
7. The data set includes pro-immigrant demonstrations and counts 106 more events than the earlier Bada et al. (2006) table of protest events.
8. We acknowledge that skin color could also affect perceptions of racialization, but do not include it in our models because respondents on the LNS vastly over-reported how light their skin is, thus limiting the variation of this variable. The skin color question asked respondents to rank their skin tone on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 represents very dark and 5 represents very light; 89% of respondents placed themselves in categories 3–5, with 25% rating themselves as very light. The results from this survey item are not consistent with the empirical research about skin tone variation in the Latino community. A larger percentage of respondents should have selected very dark or dark; however, only 11% combined did so. Thus, the survey instrument reveals Latinos’ desire to represent themselves as lighter than they are. We contend this is due to the problems with self-reporting on this question. Nevertheless, we ran all models including skin color and it was not significant in any model, nor did it change the results of the protest variables.
9. We do not include income in our models because of the high refusal rate of answering (20%). Coding refused as missing would result in substantially reducing the sample size in each protest time period examined. For robustness, we included income in all models with refused as missing and it did not change the effects of the protest variables.
10. LNS respondents could choose from 20 different countries in identifying their ancestry. We control for the five largest groups. Recent work published using the LNS also uses national origin control variables. See Barreto and Pedraza (2009), Perez (2011), Sanchez and Masuoka (2010), Stokes-Brown (2012), and Wallace (2013) as examples.
11. All models were run using Stata 12.
12. Some scholars may contend that H.R. 4437 specifically targeted Mexicans and would not have affected Latinos’ racialization as a group. Rather, they might argue that this analysis should focus only on respondents of Mexican origin. We contend that anti-immigrant sentiments during this period, which included the promotion of nativist legislation, essentially became anti-Latino. As such,

- examining the entire LNS sample is more appropriate. Nonetheless, we ran the entire set of models limited to Mexican respondents and their perceptions of Latino racialization, and the effects of the protest variables did not change in significance or direction.
13. An interesting avenue of inquiry would be to explore nonlinear temporal effects. However, it is beyond the scope of this paper.
  14. The negative coefficient for group discrimination in Model 1 and the in-text discussion of the effect of group discrimination may appear contradictory, however is consistent due to the coding of the variable. A detailed discussion of the coding is given in the Research design and results section.
  15. All simulations were performed using Clarify software (see King et al. 2000).
  16. We treat the before period as the baseline and present the results of the main model, Model 1. Since the protest variables are set to zero, the substantive effects of the non-protest explanatory variables are in reference to the before period. As the regression analysis from Table 1 indicates, however, the effects of the other explanatory variables do not vary significantly across Models 2–4.
  17. See Note 6 for a longer discussion on skin color in the LNS.

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