

# Mass Deportations and the Future of Latino Partisanship\*

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*Objective.* The U.S. government continues to deport large numbers of undocumented Latino immigrants. We address the likely effects of these policies on Latino partisanship. *Methods.* We use a survey experiment to test the effects of information about mass deportations on partisan evaluations among young second-generation Latinos. *Results.* Young U.S.-born Latinos view the Democratic Party as less welcoming when informed that deportations have been higher under President Obama than under his predecessor. Because most young U.S.-born Latinos are either weak partisans or political independents, there is wide scope for information effects among these potential voters. *Conclusion.* Mass deportation policies have the potential to reshape the partisanship and politics of Latinos for years to come.

In the first five years of the Obama Administration, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) issued removal orders to over 2 million people, at a rate 1.6 times higher than the average under President G. W. Bush.<sup>1</sup> Many of those deported in recent years have strong ties to people still living in the United States (Hagan, Castro, and Rodriguez, 2010). For example, recent deportees include hundreds of thousands of parents of U.S.-born American citizens (Dreby, 2013). In late 2014, the Obama Administration announced plans to temporarily remove the threat of deportation from nearly half of the country's undocumented residents. Nonetheless, the ongoing policy of mass deportations is reconfiguring U.S. society by excluding people who were once residents and by reshaping the families and communities that remain.

The long-term political implications of mass deportations remain unclear. These policies mainly affect Latinos, who make up around 80 percent of undocumented residents but over 95 percent of deportees.<sup>2</sup> Latinos are also a fast-growing segment of the U.S. electorate, in part because of high fertility rates but also because anti-immigrant policies since the

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<sup>1</sup>There is debate over how to count deportations (Thompson and Cohen, 2014). So-called returns of migrants apprehended at the U.S. border peaked at 2 million a year under President Clinton in the year 2000. The number of returns has since fallen but ICE has sharply increased the number of "removal" orders, which criminalize reentry. Under both G. W. Bush and Obama, this increase has been cited as evidence of more robust immigration enforcement, and the Obama Administration has publicized the "removal" figures. Thus, we focus on removals.

<sup>2</sup>Latin American citizens made up 97 percent of deportees in 2013 (ICE, 2013).

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1990s have spurred many Latino migrants to naturalize (Pantoja, Ramirez, and Segura, 2001). Latinos tend to support the Democratic Party (Segura, 2012), although, like other demographic groups that include large numbers of immigrants, rates of party identification and electoral participation are much lower than among whites (Hajnal and Lee, 2011).

In this article, we argue that mass deportations under a Democratic president can reduce Latino support for Democrats, without benefitting Republicans, with the overall effect of weakening Latino attachments to U.S. political parties. We use original survey data to assess Latinos' knowledge of deportations, and a survey experiment to estimate the partisan effects of information about the numbers deported by the Obama versus Bush administrations. We find that providing this information causes young Latinos to view the Democratic Party as less welcoming. We conclude the article by discussing these findings in the context of theory and data on Latino political behavior.

### **Unauthorized Immigration and Mass Deportations**

Whereas the United States imposed quotas to reduce migration from much of the world in the 1920s, there were no official limits on migration from Latin America, Canada, or the Caribbean until 1965 (Zolberg, 2008). Even as the first quotas for migrants from the Western hemisphere were enacted, demographic and economic conditions changed to increase both the supply of migrants from Latin America, and the demand for immigrant labor in the United States (Massey, 2013; Zolberg, 2008). Together, these changes in immigration laws and migration patterns produced the new phenomenon of mass unauthorized migration to the United States.

Despite a series of reforms to U.S. immigration law since the 1980s, population growth and poverty in Mexico and Central America, ongoing demand for cheap labor from U.S. employers, and the logistical difficulties of patrolling the U.S.-Mexico border have resulted in continued unauthorized border crossings. In addition, while most unauthorized migrants are from Mexico or Central America, the United States is also home to Asian-, European-, and African-origin undocumented migrants, who entered on visas but overstayed (Passel and Cohn, 2014).

Unauthorized migration grew in political salience in the 1990s, leading to additional funding for enforcement of U.S.-Mexico border controls (Andreas, 2009). This sharply increased the danger and cost of border crossings and made circular migration more difficult, prompting earlier migrants to stay in the United States rather than risk return journeys (Massey, 2013). Some undocumented residents eventually obtain legal status, for example, by marrying U.S. citizens or being sponsored as immigrants by family members (Jasso et al., 2008). However, this is often difficult for Mexicans and other Latinos because of a backlog in the supply of family-sponsored visas and bars on reentry for people who entered the United States without papers (Dreby, 2013). The result is that the United States is now home to a large population of settled but undocumented migrants, estimated at around 11 million people (Passel and Cohn, 2014). Today's undocumented residents have much stronger ties to U.S. society than was previously the case (Donato and Armenta, 2011).

In this context, immigration control has expanded beyond the U.S.-Mexico border, and ICE, often working with local police, has shifted from turning migrants back at the border to practices of detention and enforced removal (Leerkes, Bachmeier, and Leach, 2014). The mean annual number of removals under President G. W. Bush was 252,000, whereas the mean in the first five years of the Obama Administration was 403,000 (Gonzalez-Barrera and Krogstad, 2014). Obama has told ICE to focus on removing convicted criminals,

but, under current laws, this is a broad and ambiguous category, since many immigration-related offenses—such as not appearing for an immigration court hearing, or reentry after removal—are now classed as felonies.

### **From Deportation Policies to Latino Politics**

Since most undocumented migrants have lived in the United States for years, and the 14th Amendment confers citizenship on their U.S.-born children, undocumented migrants have close ties to millions of Americans who are *not* eligible for deportation. Thus, even setting aside the effects on the undocumented themselves, we can expect deportation policies to shape U.S. politics, especially for Latinos. According to recent survey data, around 60 percent of Latinos who are registered to vote in the United States are personally acquainted with undocumented migrants, whether as family members or close personal friends (Barreto, 2013). Research shows that Latinos overwhelmingly oppose policies of mass deportation, and that Latino voters evaluate political candidates based on this issue (Collingwood, Barreto, and Garcia-Rios, 2014).

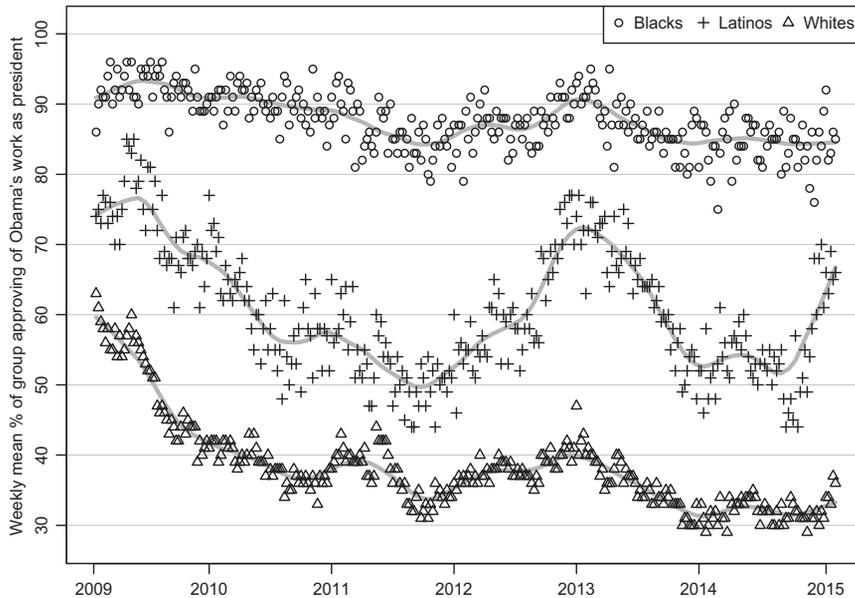
Prior research also implies that mass deportations may affect Latino partisanship. If deportation policies are seen as targeting those from Mexico and Central and South America, this could induce people to see “Latino” as a salient identity, forming the basis for distinctive political behavior (Lee, 2008; Zepeda-Millán and Wallace, 2013; Zepeda-Millán, 2014a). Scholars have found similar effects in the past, arguing, for example, that California’s anti-immigrant Proposition 187 increased Latino political participation by making Latinos more sensitive to racial issues in U.S. politics (Pantoja, Ramirez, and Segura, 2001; Pantoja and Segura, 2003).

When members of a politicized group think that their life chances are shaped by what happens to the group as a whole, this “linked fate heuristic” can serve as an individually rational basis for supporting the political party that is seen as better for the group. Dawson (1994) argues that linked fate explains African Americans’ solid support for the Democratic Party. There is evidence that pan-ethnic Latino identity has strengthened in recent decades, and that many U.S. residents with roots in Latin America now share a sense of linked fate (Fraga et al., 2012; Segura, 2012), particularly when immigration is politically salient (Sanchez and Masouka, 2010; Zepeda-Millán, 2014b). A belief in linked fate may strengthen Latino support for the Democratic Party, which has long been seen as friendlier toward immigrants than the Republicans. However, the Obama Administration’s role in continuing and extending policies of mass deportation could also weaken Latino support for Democrats.

In order for deportation policies to have broad consequences for Latino politics, Latinos must know about the personal costs of deportations, or must be aware of the scale of deportation policies. A large body of research shows, however, that levels of political knowledge among the public are generally low. Citizens typically know little about political processes or specific policies, even when these policies directly affect their lives (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1997; Gilens, 2001). Furthermore, people are generally not receptive to political messages that clash with their prior views or preferences (Bartels, 2002; Nyhan and Reifler, 2010). Resistance to uncongenial evidence is greater among strong partisans and those who pay more attention to politics (Taber and Lodge, 2006). Together, ignorance and bias appear to severely limit the scope for information to have political effects. Few people know about the relevant policies, and those who *do* know are among the least likely to update their views.

FIGURE 1

## Approval of Obama by Race/Ethnicity of Survey Respondent



SOURCE: Gallup.

Yet the conditions for information effects are quite favorable among Latinos. The U.S.-citizen Latino population is relatively young, and younger people have less stable party preferences (Green, Palmquist, and Schickler, 2002; Jennings, Stoker, and Bowers, 2009). The children of immigrants also tend to identify less strongly with U.S. political parties (Hajnal and Lee, 2011). This limits the scope for partisan bias. Concerning access to information, while second-generation Latinos tend to be less politically knowledgeable than native whites, the recent history of Latino politics demonstrates scope for engagement and mobilization. The huge protests around the issue of immigration reform in the spring of 2006 show that, although they lack many of the resources that facilitate political mobilization, Latinos can rapidly become politically engaged (Voss and Bloemraad, 2011; Wallace, Zepeda-Millán, and Jones-Correa, 2014; Zepeda-Millán, 2014b). Recent demands from Latinos for an end to deportations—and references to the president as “Deporter in Chief”—have increased the salience of the issue, providing a mechanism by which information on deportations may spread.

In practice, since Republicans have pushed for even harsher measures than Democrats, one should not expect deportations under Obama to boost Latino support for Republicans. Instead, we expect Latinos facing a choice between Democrats and Republicans to favor “none of the above.” When people feel that their interests are not well represented in political debates between the two dominant U.S. political parties they are less likely to form a stable attachment to either the Democrats or the Republicans, and nonpartisanship is often the result (Hajnal and Lee, 2011). As Figure 1 illustrates, in recent years the partisan evaluations of Latinos have fluctuated much more than those of either African Americans or whites (see Supporting Information at the lead author’s website for further discussion of the timing of these ebbs and flows).

## Data

In this article, we draw on original survey data to study knowledge of deportation policies and the effects of information about such policies. We focus on young U.S.-born Latinos with immigrant parents. Early adulthood is often the period in which partisan identities solidify, which means that the effects of current policies on the views of these young Latinos are likely to persist (Green, Palmquist, and Schickler, 2002; Plutzer, 2002). Thus, these young adults are best placed to help us understand the future of Latino partisanship. In addition, surveying Latinos born in the United States to immigrant parents means that while the individuals in the study are eligible to participate fully in U.S. politics, many have parents who are (or have been) at risk of deportation.

In order to avoid sampling mainly people whose parents were able to regularize their status due to the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act, we restricted the sample to people born in the United States after 1982.<sup>3</sup> Analysis of the March 2013 Current Population Survey (CPS) showed that 3.1 million U.S.-born citizens aged 18–31 had parents born in Latin America; this is about 1 percent of the U.S. population. Such a small group cannot be reached efficiently through random sampling. Thus, we turned to the Latino panel run by Knowledge Networks (now GfK), which uses mail addresses and random digit dialing to recruit a probability sample. Since this panel is limited in size, extra participants were recruited online via English- and Spanish-language websites, to ensure adequate statistical power.<sup>4</sup> The survey was fielded online in July and August 2013. One-third of the subjects were recruited from the probability sample, and the rest were opt-in participants, for a total of 1,050 people. In this article we present descriptive results with design and poststratification weights, based on the sampling procedures and the CPS data. Following Mutz (2011:123), we do not use weights to estimate experimental effects, since we did not have clear theoretical grounds for predicting heterogeneous treatment effects, and thus cannot be confident that the survey weights would yield appropriate average estimates. Missing data were replaced by multiple imputation (van Buuren, 2014).

## Results

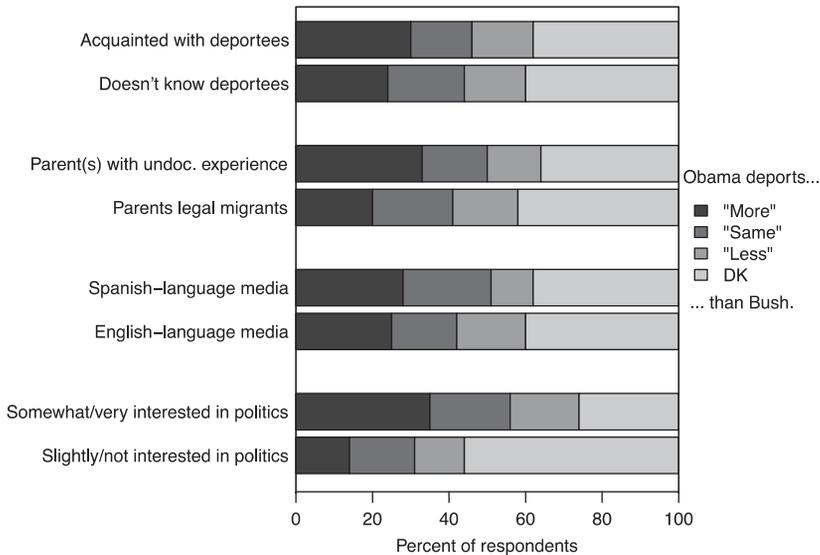
As expected, many of the U.S.-born Latinos in our sample have close ties to undocumented residents or people who have been deported. Twenty-one percent report that a close (5 percent) or more distant (16 percent) family member has been deported (see Supporting Information for question wording). This figure rises to 27 percent when we include friends. In addition, 45 percent have at least one parent who lived for a period as an undocumented migrant in the United States, around one-third of whom were still undocumented at the time of the survey. The mean length of parental undocumented residence was 17 years (for details, see Supporting Information). Survey participants were heavily in favor of legalization for undocumented migrants. Fully 83 percent supported the DREAM Act, which would give undocumented youth both legal status and a pathway to U.S. citizenship. And

<sup>3</sup>IRCA had two main provisions: for those who entered the United States before 1982 (1.8 million people regularized), and for those who worked at least 90 days in agriculture in 1986 (1.2 million).

<sup>4</sup>Opt-in subjects were recruited by the survey firms Cada Cabeza and Offerwise. Combining the probability and the opt-in samples costs more than an Internet-only sample, but allows for more reliable weighting (DiSogra et al., 2011). Thirty-four percent of those asked to participate (after screening questions about migration history) completed the survey. Even before weighting, the opt-in and probability samples are similar. Opt-in subjects are on average a year older ( $p < 0.01$ ), but similar shares have college degrees ( $p = 0.14$ ), and have parents with undocumented experience ( $p = 0.58$ ).

FIGURE 2

## Knowledge of Deportation Rates Under Obama Versus G. W. Bush



SOURCE: 2013 Second generation survey.

69 percent of our sample agreed, when asked, “Do you think how undocumented immigrants are viewed by the general public also affects how U.S.-born Latinos are viewed?”

Yet despite these ties to people at risk of deportation, knowledge of the effects of the Obama Administration’s deportation policies was limited. Survey participants were asked: “Do you know roughly how many undocumented migrants the Obama administration has deported each year? If you’re not sure, please give us your best guess. Is it less than under President Bush, about the same as President Bush, or more than President Bush?” Thirty-nine percent of those taking part in the survey opted for “Don’t know.” Of the remainder, 26 percent said “more,” 19 percent said “the same,” and 16 percent said “less.” The correct response is “more.”

Although accurate knowledge of mass deportations was scarce, some survey respondents were better informed than others. Figure 2 displays some of the variation (see Supporting Information for details). Each of the horizontal bars shows the breakdown of responses from a subset of survey participants. The darkest section of each bar, to the left, shows correct responses, followed by the incorrect responses and “don’t know” (labeled DK). There is some indication that people personally acquainted with deportees were better informed, though the difference in the share giving the correct answer, compared to those who do not know deportees, is not statistically significant at conventional levels ( $p = 0.31$ ). Those with parents with experience as undocumented migrants were more knowledgeable ( $p < 0.01$ ), as were those who were either “somewhat” or “very” interested in politics ( $p < 0.01$ ). Scholars have identified Spanish-language media as a tool in the mobilization against Republican proposals to criminalize undocumented migrants in the spring of 2006 (Ramírez, 2011). But Spanish-language media use is not associated with greater knowledge of deportation policies in our sample ( $p = 0.47$ ).

We tested the effect of information about mass deportations by randomly assigning half of the survey participants to be told, after answering the question on deportations under the last two presidents, that “In fact, the Obama administration has deported around one and half times *more* people each year than the average under President Bush” (emphasis in the original; see Supporting Information for details of experimental procedures).<sup>5</sup> We then asked survey participants whether they see the Democratic and Republican parties (we asked about both, in random order) as “welcoming, unwelcoming, or neither welcoming nor unwelcoming toward Latinos” (an item also used by ANES in 2012). This wording avoids repeating the partisanship question, which could dampen effects if people strive to give consistent answers, and serves to evaluate the effectiveness of political parties’ attempts to reach out to new or growing constituencies, such as Latinos (de la Garza and Cortina, 2007; Hajnal and Lee, 2011; Manzano, 2010).

When given the correct answer about the Obama Administration’s deportation policies, 45 percent of respondents rated the Democrats as “welcoming.” This compares to 55 percent among those in the control condition, who were not given any additional information; the difference is significant at  $p < 0.01$ .<sup>6</sup> Thus, being told that Obama deported more people per year than his predecessor makes young Latinos see the Democratic Party as less welcoming. We found similar results in the opt-in and probability samples (see the Supporting Information for tables with details of all the experimental results reported here). Just 9 percent of respondents saw the Republicans as welcoming to Latinos, with no significant effects of the experiment.

In order to better understand this aggregate effect we now present separate analyses for subsets of survey respondents. The interpretation of these results is necessarily more subtle than in the case of the average treatment effect. Whereas exposure to information on deportations is randomized, allowing for clean causal inference, survey participants were not randomized into the other categories. Hence, for example, while we can be confident that treatment effects are credibly estimated within subsets of respondents (e.g., by partisanship), we cannot be certain that differences among respondents are due to the features we emphasize (e.g., partisanship), rather than other, related factors. To enhance the credibility of our interpretations, it is important to relate our analysis to existing scholarship (Green, Ha, and Bullock, 2010). Because research suggests that preexisting levels of knowledge and party identity may serve as moderators of the treatment effect (e.g., Nyhan and Reifler, 2010; Taber and Lodge, 2006), we test these predictions.

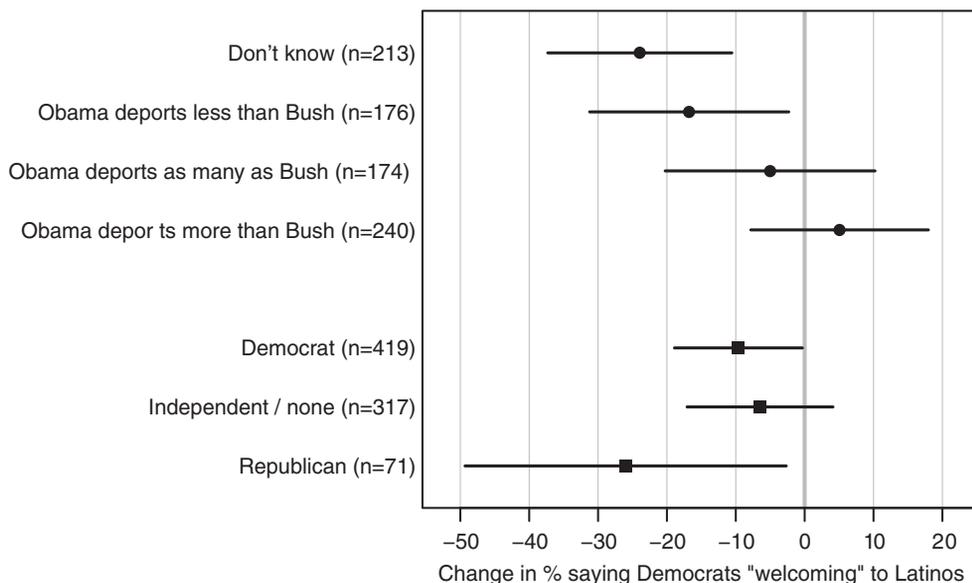
One would expect the effects of information on deportations under Obama versus Bush to be confined to those who did not already know the answer, and indeed this is the case. Figure 3 shows separate experimental effects for those who gave different answers to earlier questions in the survey. The points in Figure 3 show the effects of being told about the higher rate of deportations under President Obama, horizontal lines show 95 percent confidence intervals, and the  $y$ -axis labels show the sample size for each estimate. Results in the upper part of Figure 3 are reported separately for people who gave different answers to the question assessing knowledge of deportation rates. For example, the top result shows the effect—among people who admitted they did not know whether deportation rates were higher under Obama or G. W. Bush—of being told that Obama has been deporting

<sup>5</sup>Randomization yielded similar treatment and control groups, with no significant differences in demographic variables, such as age, gender, or the share with Mexican-born parents, nor in partisanship, political interest, or knowledge of deportations under Bush versus Obama (all  $p > 0.4$ ).

<sup>6</sup>Twenty-two percent of respondents in the control, and 21 percent of the treated, did not answer the item on whether Democrats are welcoming toward Latinos. We drop these observations, though we obtain similar results when we class “do not know” as not welcoming and use a binary outcome measure.

FIGURE 3

Effects of Information by Knowledge and by Party ID (Separately)



SOURCE: 2013 Second generation survey.

people at a faster rate than his predecessor. As the label on the vertical axis shows, this effect was estimated with responses from 213 people. The lower part of Figure 3 shows results among people who, earlier in the survey, identified as Democrats, Republicans, or independents/nonpartisans. Our sample is 43 percent Democrat, 48 percent independent or nonpartisan, and 9 percent Republican.<sup>7</sup> The effect of the information on deportations under Obama versus Bush is significant ( $p = 0.04$ ) for Democrats, insignificant for independents ( $p = 0.23$ ), and significant ( $p = 0.03$ ) but imprecisely estimated for the small sample of Republicans.

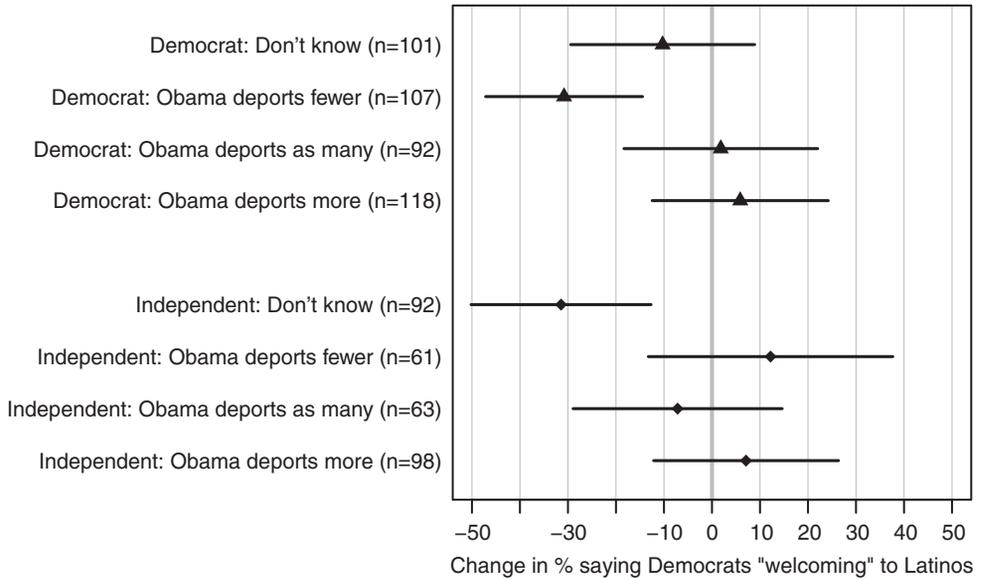
We now divide respondents by both party identification *and* answers to the knowledge question. The results are presented in Figure 4. The findings for Democrats show clear negative effects among those who gave the least accurate answer, and some sign of negative effects among Democrats who said they did not know. Among independents, we estimate a negative effect only among those who admitted they did not know about deportations under the Obama and G. W. Bush administrations. We cannot break down effects among Republicans by response to the knowledge question, since the number of responses in each cell is too small.

Finally, we test for varying responses by level of political sophistication and strength of party attachment. We compare Democrats who are "somewhat" or "very" interested in politics with Democrats who are "slightly" or "not at all" interested. We find negative effects of the experimental treatment among the less politically engaged ( $n = 135$ ,  $p = 0.05$ ), but not among the more engaged ( $n = 284$ ,  $p = 0.32$ ). Comparing those who describe themselves as "strong" versus "not so strong" Democrats, we find significant negative effects

<sup>7</sup>The latter rises to 20 percent when we include independents/nonpartisans who lean Republican. We obtained similar results when including leaners among Democrats and Republicans.

FIGURE 4

Effects of Information by Knowledge and Party ID (Combined)



SOURCE: 2013 Second generation survey.

among the weaker partisans ( $n = 239, p = 0.04$ ), but not among those with a strong party identity ( $n = 180, p = 0.58$ ). These results are consistent with research showing that more politically sophisticated citizens, and those with stronger political priors, are less responsive to uncongenial political information.

### Discussion and Conclusions

In this article, we have presented some of the first evidence on the political consequences of mass deportation policies by demonstrating the potential for partisan effects. We have shown that although Latinos tend to support the Democratic Party, many young potential Latino voters have limited information about one of the Obama Administration's most controversial policies. When told that Obama has been deporting people at a faster rate than G. W. Bush, young Latinos see the Democratic Party as markedly less welcoming. This effect is strongest among political independents, weaker partisans, and those who say they are not very politically engaged. These results, which reinforce what we know about the effects of information on voters' views (Nyhan and Reifler, 2010; Taber and Lodge, 2006), have additional implications for theories of partisanship and electoral behavior, Latino civic ties, and for U.S. politics more generally.

The share of Latinos in the U.S. population is projected to continue rising, from one in six today to one in three by 2060. Many commentators see this as a boon for the Democrats, or even as the basis for long-term electoral majorities. Yet these predictions are not well founded in existing research on immigration and partisanship. Most Latinos have a recent family history of migration. Since immigrant parents and peers tend to be less familiar

with U.S. politics and parties, and the parties themselves have only recently—and in the case of the Republican Party, haltingly—started to work on Latino voter mobilization, U.S.-citizen Latinos exhibit relatively low rates of turnout, voter registration, and party identification (Hajnal and Lee, 2011; Fraga et al., 2012; Segura, 2012). Furthermore, the Latino population is young, and partisanship is much weaker among young adults (Jennings, Stoker, and Bowers, 2009).

These findings have two key implications. First, Latino party evaluations will continue to fluctuate, and may be quite responsive to new policies or rhetoric. Second, rather than being a closed system in which lower support for one party leads directly to higher support for the other, Latino politics allows leakage to the nonpartisan category. Partisans participate in electoral politics at higher rates than nonpartisans (Bartels, 2000), and habits of political (non) participation acquired in early adulthood often persist into later life (Plutzer, 2002). In a context where the Republican Party proposes even harsher measures, policies that reduce support for Democrats among young Latinos may have a chilling effect on political engagement. If, as our results suggest, Obama's deportation policies have been pushing young Latinos away from the Democratic Party and toward political independence or nonpartisanship, this could mean lower rates of party identification and reduced electoral participation for decades to come.

One question for future research is whether inclusive and exclusive policies aimed at the undocumented have symmetrical effects, or whether this depends upon which party is behind such policies (see Cobb, Nyhan, and Reifler, 2013). Effects could also depend upon whether deportations are bundled with other policies, such as a path to citizenship. One might expect, for instance, that executive action to limit deportations under a Democratic president would have the opposite effect of the decision to increase deportations. President Obama authorized just this kind of administrative relief in late 2014, and this may help to draw Latinos into the Democrats' electoral coalition. However, about half of the undocumented population currently in the country will not qualify for relief. Thus, it remains to be seen whether ongoing deportations undercut the potential gains for the Democratic Party.

Another question for future research is whether (knowledge of) mass deportation policies has varying effects among Latinos who are more or less directly exposed to immigration issues (e.g., comparing across immigrant generations), or among those with a stronger or weaker sense of Latino linked fate. Our findings in this article could be due to a "linked fate heuristic," that is, a belief that policies that are bad for some Latinos (the deportees and their families) also affect the research subjects themselves. But the response could also be due to the kind of solidarity that arises even when one's own interests are not at stake. One intriguing possibility is that the effects of such policies are contingent on the political context. The political interpretation of mass deportation policies may depend on the frames advanced in anti-deportation activism, which was widespread in 2006 but has since tended to involve smaller groups of protestors. A promising way to advance our understanding of the political effects of deportation policies would be to connect this issue to the literature on the origins of Latino linked fate and to research on immigrant social movements (Bowler, Nicholson, and Segura, 2006; Sanchez and Masuoka, 2010; Zepeda-Millán and Wallace, 2013).

Finally, the results in this article show that deportation policies have effects that go well beyond the individuals who are deported. The great size and deep social connections of contemporary unauthorized migrants ensure that for every person who is deported, many others—such as U.S.-citizen children and partners, or members of the communities where they lived—are also affected. Indeed, some scholars argue that deporting undocumented

migrants fractures the social networks and communities of many U.S.-citizen Latinos (Hagan, Castro, and Rodriguez, 2010). The impact of deportations may be similar to that of mass incarceration, which also has concentrated effects on certain sectors of U.S. society. If so, one should expect mass deportations to reduce trust in government and to weaken community networks for political mobilization by plucking out many nodes in individuals' social networks (Burch, 2014; Wildeman, 2014). The act of deporting people is among the most direct ways in which state power is imposed upon society, and in an era of mass deportations this is an urgent topic for further research.

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