



Political Knowledge and Issue Voting Among the Latino Electorate

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How informed is a Latino vote? Though recent scholarship has improved our understanding of Latino political participation, partisanship, and policy preferences, relatively little is known about how Hispanics make electoral decisions. In this effort, we evaluate the role policy issues, candidate affect, and symbolism play in the electoral choices of Latino voters. In particular, we are interested in how these factors affect the vote across voters with varying levels of political information. Using the 2000 Tomás Rivera Policy Institute pre-election poll, we explore the degree to which Latino voters relied on issue-positions to judge the two major party candidates and compare the effect of such considerations with symbolic and candidate-specific appeals. We find that policy issues played an important role in shaping voting preferences, but only among politically knowledgeable voters, while among uninformed voters, symbolism and long-standing partisan preferences matter most. We conclude by discussing the implications of these findings for political representation and Latino politics.

The vitality of a democracy depends on the quality of its citizens, especially the amount of knowledge they have about politics. Nowhere is the concern about knowledge more important than in electoral politics. Without an adequate understanding of politics, citizens are less capable of voting in a way that furthers political representation. Although there are myriad ways to define political representation, candidates, voters, democratic theorists, and many political scientists pay homage to policy representation as a, if not the most, desirable type of representation (Berelson 1952). Simply put, voters should choose candidates that best represent them on a variety of important policy issues.¹

Although there is certainly a variety of other criteria on which people can, and do, vote, we are interested primarily in whether the vote serves to maximize the policy interests of the citizens *as they identify them*, i.e. their own preferences on issues. Yet, political knowledge research continues to paint a dismal picture of what the average American knows about politics (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). Even with the increase in education rates and access to round-the-clock news, the American public today is no more informed about politics than it was fifty years ago. The requisite information for issue voting is thus in short supply among the average voter.

¹ Implicit in this evaluation is an admittedly normative assumption that voters are best served by politicians who serve their views, an assumption rooted in the long-standing preference among political scientists for issue-based voting and responsible parties.

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An ill-informed electorate is troublesome for proponents of issue voting, especially among some racial and ethnic minority groups. Indeed, political information levels are lower for Latinos and African Americans (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; de la Garza et al. 1992) and some have argued that groups that are largely apolitical are incapable of effectively receiving and processing political communications (Neuman 1986) much less engage in issue voting. If voters from minority groups form political judgments on other considerations such as candidates' image or political symbolism, then there is a greater likelihood that they may vote contrary to their policy preferences.

In recent years, perhaps no minority group has been as heavily courted by candidates and political parties as Latinos, and for good reason. Latinos are an emerging political force in U.S. politics and one that both parties see as a viable constituency given that two-fifths of Latinos are foreign-born (Garcia 2003: 40). Yet, given the generally low levels of political knowledge found in the Latino population, it is unclear what considerations make up the primary ingredients of Latino voting preferences. Thus, although scholars know much about the factors that shape Latino political participation, partisanship, and policy preferences, relatively little is known about how they make electoral decisions.

In this effort, we evaluate the role policy issues played in the presidential choices made by Latino voters with a focus on the 2000 contest. The candidates' appeals, in particular those by George W. Bush, to win over Latino voters generated much media buzz. The key issue surrounding many of these stories was whether Bush had transformed the image of the Republican Party, a party traditionally seen as inhospitable to Latino interests, through his use of Spanish and other symbolic appeals (Sabato and Scott 2002). Would Latinos be swayed by symbolism or would substance, e.g., policy issues, as Latino activists argued, matter most in their political judgments?

Using the 2000 Tomás Rivera Policy Institute pre-election poll to address this question, we find that policy issues played an important role in shaping the voting preferences of politically informed voters, while among uninformed voters, symbolism and long-standing partisan preferences mattered most in their evaluations. We conclude by discussing the implications of these findings for political representation and Latino politics.

POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE AND ISSUE VOTING

Political scientists often use the terms political information and knowledge interchangeably. Although we build on research using these terms (and a variety of others such as political sophistication, expertise, and awareness), we distinguish between information and knowledge. We define information as a single element (Loasby 2005) or nugget (Mayer 2005) of data about the world. Information can be correct or incorrect, related to other pieces or unrelated. The integration and organization of information, on the other hand, is knowledge (Loasby 2005; Mayer 2005; Yeager 2005). In political science, scholars have found the accumulation of correct information to be a valid proxy for political knowledge (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1993; Zaller 1992). Yet, whereas most scholars use general factual questions about American government and politics (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Zaller 1992), our approach directly measures the amount of information (and if there is enough of it, knowledge) voters have about candidates' policy positions. What we look at, then, is political knowledge-in-use. Later, we elaborate on how we measure political knowledge, explain the factors that account for it, and demonstrate how it shapes the types of considerations voters use to evaluate candidates.

Why is the distinction between information and knowledge important? By imparting understanding, political knowledge better enables voters to make decisions based on relatively demanding criteria such as candidates' policy positions. There is a bias among democratic theorists and behaviorists that voting decisions based on candidates' policy positions are superior to those based on most other considerations. Voting on candidates' policy positions, or "issue voting," requires that a voter "(1) assess his or her own issues preference and (2) calculate the relative position of parties and candidates" (Carmines and Stimson 1980: 82). Although the degree to which policy issues shape voters' political judgments is hotly contested (Miller and Shanks 1996; Abramowitz 1995; Miller and Wattenberg 1985; Conover, Gray and Coombs 1982; Margolis 1977), a consensus has emerged that issue voting is conditioned by the level of information individuals possess (Goren 1997; Abramowitz 1995; Carmines and Stimson 1980).

Regrettably, political knowledge among the mass public, in particular African Americans (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996) and Latinos, is disturbingly low (de la Garza et al. 1992; DeSipio 1996; Neuman 1986). That Latinos have few political resources is well documented (DeSipio 1996). Lat-

nos have lower levels of income and education, which are usually associated with information levels, political attention, and sophistication. Moreover, this deficit is compounded by over half of all Latino adults in the US being foreign-born, in many instances denying them the benefits of political socialization and US civics education provided to children raised in the United States.

The inevitable result of this resource disadvantage is lower levels of information and participation. Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995), for example, report that Latinos score the lowest of all groups on political information, interest, participation, efficacy, and strength of partisanship when compared to African-Americans and non-Hispanic whites. It is no surprise then that "the politically knowledgeable tend to be well-educated middle-aged white males. . ." (Bennett 1989: 429).

Levels of political information are critical in affecting the quality and quantity of political participation. Political information is a resource that enables its possessors better to articulate their political interests and reward or punish leaders for their actions (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). Being politically uninformed becomes a liability, putting ethnic minorities at a disadvantage when it comes to monitoring representatives. Swain (1993: 73) has noted that electoral accountability is often weak in historically black districts because constituents lack information, or are politically ignorant. As one black representative told her unabashedly, "One of the advantages and disadvantages of representing blacks is their shameless loyalty to their incumbents. . . . You don't have any vigilance about your performance." Beyond the ability to exercise vigilance over representatives, politically informed individuals tend to be more interested and engaged in politics (Verba and Nie 1972); more resistant to agenda setting and priming by the media (Iyengar and Kinder 1987); and tend to rely on policy issues rather than symbolic displays or candidates' personas in deciding how to vote (Goren 1997). Finally, political knowledge is found to be predictive of other democratic values such as political tolerance and efficacy (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996).

The lack of political information among Latinos and other politically underrepresented groups undermines the quality and level of their engagement in the political system generally, and more specifically their ability to select candidates with matching policy preferences. In short, politically uninformed groups run the risk of "voting incorrectly" by supporting candidates who, once elected, may not necessarily articulate and support the group's policy needs (see Lau and Redlawsk 1997).

Although Latinos fall on the lower end of the political knowledge distribution curve not all are uninformed of course. Since political knowledge is a critical prerequisite for issue voting, we expect that these differences will shape their propensities to rely on candidates' policy positions when making a decision. This proposition seems obvious, yet some argue that it may not necessarily hold true for politically uninformed populations such as Latinos. In fact, these populations have often been labeled as "apolitical" and

according to Neuman (1986: 172), “The apolitical can be thought of as fundamentally illiterate, so they are naturally immune to repeated attempts to politicize and mobilize them. They lie below a critical threshold which puts them outside the flow of meaningful political communication.” Clearly, not all Latinos are equally politically uninformed, yet most are relative to non-Hispanic whites. Hence, the patterns found in studies of the non-Hispanic white electorate may not hold true for populations within the lower bounds of the information curve. If this assessment is true, then there is good reason to believe that most Latino voters will be swayed by candidates’ symbolic gestures rather than issue positions.

The ability, or inability as may be the case, to engage in issue voting is constrained by a second factor; an absence of socialization in American society and polity among foreign born Latinos (Tam Cho 1999). It is well-established that foreign-born Latinos participate in electoral and non-electoral political activities at lower rates than their native-born counterparts (Leal 2002; DeSipio 1996). The argument guiding these findings is that political participation is a learned behavior whereby increased exposure and knowledge of American political processes induces political participation (DeSipio 1996). Leal (2002) finds evidence in support of this argument, observing that among non-citizens, political awareness exerted a powerful effect on political participation while socio-demographic factors, traditionally associated with political disengagement, had a minimal effect. An absence of socialization and familiarity with American political processes explains why foreign-born Latinos are less politically knowledgeable and thus participate at lower rates than the native-born population.

Taken together, these observations make for a gloomy forecast. Not only is political information among Latinos generally low, but it is even lower among the foreign-born. Thus, despite repeated claims by Latino activists during the 2000 Presidential election that Latinos voters are concerned more with issues than candidate-specific appeals or symbolic politics, there is good reason to believe that policy issues may not have played a significant role in their decisionmaking calculus. Yet, the claims of Latino activists may not be without merit since the variance in political information levels among Latinos that account for differences in participation might also do the same for issue voting. Specifically, politically informed Latinos should be more likely to use policy issues in forming candidate evaluations and less likely to be swayed by symbolic gestures and candidate image.

Only one study with which we are familiar has attempted an examination of this question, whether symbolism displaces issue voting among Latinos (Abrajano 2005). Abrajano examines the effect of education on Latino voters’ responses to symbolic cues, and examines the effect of issue positions on vote choice. Unfortunately, she examines each of these in separate models without ever testing symbolic and issue-based effects in the same model. As a consequence, we do not know the effect of each controlling for the other, nor can we adjudicate claims regarding the rela-

tive impact of either on voter choice. The paucity of controls in the vote choice models, then, inflates the impact of her selected variables.

Furthermore, she uses education as a proxy for measuring political information, the key question in this line of inquiry. Our concern is with political information as it relates to candidate choice. While Abrajano relies on education as a proxy of political information, political knowledge research largely dismisses this strategy (Deli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Goren 1997; Luskin 1990). If education is a proxy for political information, then, given the dramatic rise in education among the American public, we would expect them to be highly informed about politics. Regrettably, decades of survey research reveal that the American public are no more informed about politics today than they were over fifty years, leading Popkin to write (1991: 36) “the hope for ‘deepening’ the electorate has not occurred, because an increase in education is not synonymous with an increase in civics knowledge.” We show here, as others have, that education is an important predictor of political information among Latinos but it is not the *sole* predictor.

In this effort, we offer comprehensive models of Latino information levels and vote choice that consider both the impact of policy issues along with symbolic appeals rather than considering these factors in isolation. The strategy enables us to assess the relative impact of policy issues, symbolism, and individual demographic characteristics in shaping Latino political judgments. Furthermore, we look at the distinction between political information and knowledge. We next turn to the data and analyze the degree to which policy issues informed Latinos’ vote choice in the 2000 Presidential election.

POLITICAL INFORMATION LEVELS: DATA AND ANALYSIS

In the fall of 2000, the Tomás Rivera Policy Institute conducted a pre-election poll of self-identified Latino registered voters in five states with large populations of Latin-American ancestry: California, Florida, Illinois, New York, and Texas. The sample size in each state was approximately 400. Respondents were selected within each household randomly, allowed to complete the survey in English or Spanish, and surveyed about a variety of political matters, their presidential preference, and demographic information.

Among the attitudinal questions was a battery of nine issue-specific questions regarding three issues perceived to be highly salient among Latinos: gun control, school vouchers, and abortion. Social issues, generally, and abortion specifically, are frequently identified as opportunities for the GOP to reach out successfully to Latinos through a shared issue position. Gun control and vouchers represent two specific aspects of the general issue areas of education and crime, regularly identified as among Latinos most important three issues (Nicholson and Segura 2005).²

² The third is the general area of the economy or jobs.

≡ TABLE 1
CORRECT AND INCORRECT ATTRIBUTIONS OF ISSUE POSITIONS TO CANDIDATES AMONG LATINO REGISTERED VOTERS,
2000 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

Issue	Correct Attributions	Incorrect Attributions			Total
		To Preferred Candidate	To Other Candidate	Undecided Respondents	
Gun Control	1137 (58%)	413 (21%)	174 (9%)	237 (12%)	1961
Abortion	1113 (58%)	445 (24%)	138 (7%)	214 (11%)	1910
School Vouchers	1016 (53%)	551 (29%)	119 (6%)	225 (12%)	1911

Note: Data Source: TRPI 2000 Pre-Election Survey

Although these three issues in no way represent the universe of issues, they represent issues of importance to Latino voters and those pursuing them. In each instance, respondents were asked their specific opinion on the issue as framed in the prompt,³ how important the issue was to them, and which of the two major party candidates held the position closest to their own.

This combination of questions allows us to assess the general level of political information for each respondent. We assume that, in general, informed respondents would associate George Bush with support for vouchers and opposition to both gun control and abortion, whereas Al Gore would be associated with the converse.

We coded whether respondents correctly or incorrectly attributed their issue preferences to the right candidate for each issue. In Table 1, we report the frequency of correct and incorrect attributions, and the specific nature of errors. For both gun control and abortion, about 58 percent of respondents correctly matched the issue position to candidate. For vouchers, the number was slightly less, at 53 percent. Among incorrect attributions, the vast majority were in the direction of the respondent's preferred candidate. That is, the most common error was to attribute one's issue preference to one's preferred candidate, which is consistent with Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee's (1954) findings on projection effects. For each of the three issues, among respondents with a candidate preference, between 70 and 83 percent of those who incorrectly matched position to candidate did so by attributing their own opinion to the candidate they preferred. There is at least modest evidence,

then, that voters are swayed by preferences that precede issue-based information. That is, an a priori preference for a particular candidate seems to be associated with incorrectly attributing one's own beliefs to those of the candidate.

In order to model the level of information held by respondents, and the role that these non-issue-based preferences might play, we created a single variable called *Political Information*, which is simply the total of the correct attributions, and varies from 0 to 3. Respondents scoring a 3 correctly linked issue position with candidate on all three issues. Here, we conceptualize political information and knowledge along a continuum and seek to explain why respondents fall along the continuum where they do. In the next section, we will explore the distinction between information and knowledge and whether the ingredients of vote choice differ for those with low and high levels of political information.

This measure, of course, is not without some problems. Incorrect attributions can occur in two ways—respondents believing a candidate holds a position he does not hold (projection), or a respondent without any correct or incorrect beliefs simply guessing incorrectly. By extension, correct attributions themselves could be either through information or guessing.⁴ The evidence presented in Table 1 is encouraging, in that the frequency of incorrect attributions that favored preferred candidates suggest that erroneous beliefs, rather than random guessing, are driving the incorrect responses. The level of pure guessing, we suspect, is quite low. Pure guessers should be distributed across the range of the variable *Political Information* in a binomial distribution. As a consequence, their presence is likely to cause us to underestimate the strength of our findings (reliability) by introducing random measurement error in our dependent variable but will not bias the direction (validity).

We model *Political Information* as a function of demographic and political variables, the self-reported salience of the issues we used to measure it, the self-reported importance respondents attach to a candidate's ability to speak

³ Only these three specific issues were used in the instrument in the manner described here. The text of the actual question was as follows. For vouchers, the question read "How strongly do you support the government providing parents with funding to send their children to private or religious schools, even if this takes away money from the public school system? Do you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose?" For gun control, the question was, "How strongly do you support more restrictions on gun ownership? Do you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose?" For abortion, the question read "Some people argue that it is up to a woman to decide whether or not she would have an abortion. How strongly do you support such an argument? Do you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, strongly oppose?"

⁴ Some of the uninformed did not attempt to identify which candidate was closer. Respondents who volunteered that their positions were closer to "someone else," or that the candidates held the same position, were coded separately and, for our purposes, kept as missing data.

Spanish (an important symbolic appeal of the Bush campaign), and the respondents' attachments to the two candidates. *Candidate's Spanish* ranges from 0 to 3 with the latter indicating that Spanish speaking ability is "Very important" while the former indicates it is "Not at all important." Since this symbol could be used as a substitute for "hard" political information, we expect the coefficient on this variable to be negative, indicating that the importance Latinos attributed to this characteristic is negatively related to their information levels.

In addition to Spanish speaking, voters also form impressions of candidates as individuals, a factor we label candidate likeability (see Funk 1996). Central to candidate likeability is the idea that respondents have a gut feeling about the candidates that exists apart from policy considerations. We measure this opinion by assessing respondents' perceptions of the likeability of the two candidates. The question reads as follows: "Because of the kind of person George W. Bush (Al Gore) is, how much do you like or dislike him? Would you say that you very much like, somewhat like, somewhat dislike, or very much dislike him?" *Like Al* and *Like George* range from -2 to 2, representing the responses of "Very much dislike him" to "Very much like him", with a 0 indicating no feelings positive or negative. Since erroneous attributions are often associated with the likeability of a candidate, we expect both of these variables to produce negative coefficients if likeability is, indeed, driving misperception. One important note is that these two measures of likeability, though negatively correlated at $r = -.31$, do not reach the threshold for multicollinearity—suggesting that they do, in fact, measure different phenomena.

Control variables include the usual array of demographic and political measures, including SES, partisanship, interest in politics, and state of origin. Appendix A contains the variable definitions and coding for the control variables.

POLITICAL INFORMATION LEVELS: TESTING AND RESULTS

Since *Political Information* is a count of the frequency of correct attributions of position to candidate and takes on only four discrete values, the assumptions of OLS are violated. For this reason, we use a Poisson regression, which is the appropriate functional form for event-count data.⁵ The results are presented in Table 2.

First, and foremost, the likeability of George W. Bush was negatively and significantly related to the level of information possessed by the respondent. That is, the stronger the respondent's assessment of Bush, the less information s/he

≡ TABLE 2

POISSON REGRESSION ESTIMATIONS OF THE DETERMINANTS OF POLITICAL INFORMATION AMONG LATINOS

	Coefficients and Robust Standard Errors	Simulated Effects, Std. Errors Min->Max
<i>Education</i>	.059*** (.013)	.491 (.103)
<i>Income</i>	.007 (.009)	.086 (.107)
<i>Age</i>	-1.7*10 ⁻⁴ (.001)	-.026 (.137)
(Sex) Male	.083** (.032)	.137 (.054)
<i>U.S. Born</i>	.092** (.035)	.155 (.059)
<i>Partisanship</i>	.014 (.011)	.141 (.101)
<i>Like George</i>	-.044*** (.013)	-.292 (.091)
<i>Like Al</i>	.003 (.016)	.017 (.103)
<i>Candidate's Spanish</i>	-.024† (.014)	-.120 (.073)
<i>Political Interest</i>	.083*** (.022)	.386 (.101)
<i>Voucher Important</i>	-.003 (.015)	-.020 (.077)
<i>Abortion Important</i>	.067*** (.021)	.309 (.094)
<i>Gun Control Important</i>	-.002 (.022)	-.007 (.109)
<i>Non-Latino Contact</i>	.116* (.053)	.205 (.096)
<i>Latino Contact</i>	-.103† (.061)	-.168 (.091)
<i>Spanish Media</i>	-.022 (.014)	-.110 (.069)
<i>Texas</i>	-.023 (.050)	-.032 (.085)
<i>Illinois</i>	-.049 (.051)	-.079 (.080)
<i>New York</i>	-.072 (.050)	-.112 (.077)
<i>Florida</i>	.029 (.055)	.056 (.092)
<i>Constant</i>	-.058 (.121)	—
Model test	Chi ² = 156.89	
Significance	.000	
N	1247	

Note: Significance levels: † $p < .075$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$, two-tailed. Data Source: TRPI 2000 Pre-Election Survey

⁵ Since we are estimating this as an event-count model, we do not assume either constant variation or difficulty across the individual items which comprise the dependent variable. In addition, Poisson is the appropriate model unless there is evidence of under- or over-dispersion in the dependent variable. Tests for these problems in the dependent variable were negative, so we are confident we have chosen the correct functional form. Replication of this analysis using either negative binomial regression or a Generalized Event Count model does not appreciably change any of the results reported.

appeared to have. Examining the change in the expected value,⁶ we see that moving from the most negative to most positive assessment of Bush lowered the expected number of correct attributions by .29. Only *Education*, *Political Interest*, and the *Importance of Abortion* had a greater effect—all positive. Moving from the least to the most educated categories increases the number of correct attributions by .49, while moving from the lowest to the highest levels of self-reported interest in politics increased the correct attributions by .39. By contrast, the likeability index for Al Gore appears to be completely unrelated to correct and incorrect attributions.

The *Candidate's Spanish* also appears to be negatively related to information levels, though it is only marginally significant using a two-tailed test. Respondents who thought this characteristic "Very Important" had an average of .12 less correct attributions of issue position to candidate. This is consistent with our expectations that reliance upon such symbols will be negatively associated with the gathering of hard political data upon which to make decisions.

Among the three measures of issue salience, only *Abortion Importance* is positive and significant, an indication that people for whom abortion is an important issue make approximately .31 more correct attributions. The salience of the other two issues does not appear to affect the overall levels of information.⁷

Contact by non-Latino organizations did appear to have an effect, raising the number of correct attributions on average by .21. *Latino Contact*, however, was negative and marginally significant, lowering correct attributions on average by .17. This result was contrary to our expectations and potentially the result of its correlation with the other contact variable ($r = .48$) as well as the tendency of Latino voter mobilization efforts to target low turnout—and usually low SES—communities (Pantoja and Woods 1999).

The reliance on *Spanish Media* for the provision of political information, as we expected, appears to be negatively associated with information levels though it fails to reach the conventional level for significance. Moving from the lowest to highest levels of reliance on this medium lowered the number of correct attributions an average of .11.

Finally, the results show that holding all other variables constant, U.S.-born respondents were more politically informed. Being a U.S.-born Latino raised the number of correct attributions by .15. This finding is consistent with our expectations and previous scholarship showing that

foreign-born Latinos are less politically interested and engaged (DeSipio 1996; Leal 2002). *Age*, *Income*, and *Partisanship* appeared to have little measurable effect. Similarly, there are no significant differences across the five states in the sample.⁸

POLITICAL INFORMATION: DISCUSSION

What conclusions, if any, might we draw from analyses of our measure of political information? First, the likeability of Bush, and not Gore, appears to be associated with erroneous attributions of issue positions to candidates, a finding we find provocative.

Bush's appeal—particularly to voter groups not usually associated with Republican preferences—has often been described as a personal one, and our results here are consistent with that assessment. Among registered Latino voters, strong positive affective orientations to George W. Bush are consistently associated with the incorrect attribution of issue positions to candidates. This tendency is, if anything, exacerbated by the role of George Bush's Spanish skills, the importance of which to voters has a negative effect on information levels. But as we alluded to earlier in the article, there has also been considerable discussion of whether Latino loyalty to the Democratic Party had issue content, or was merely a learned, affective orientation. Perhaps so, but the likeability of Al Gore and respondent information levels appear unrelated. While not alone sufficient to draw firm conclusions, these findings—the negative relationship between likeability of Bush and information, the absence of the same for Gore, and the negative effect that the symbolic appeal of Bush's Spanish skills appears to have—are suggestive that Latinos votes cast for Gore were not, en masse, uninformed votes, while some votes cast for Bush may have been. To assess the likelihood of this conclusion, we test these relationships directly.

PRESIDENTIAL PREFERENCE: DATA AND ANALYSIS

Without question, the vast majority of all poll respondents preferred Gore to Bush. Of those stating a preference, almost 66 percent preferred Gore. Only in Florida was the majority preference reversed, and this is likely more an ethnic (read Cuban) factor than a geographic one. Perhaps most interestingly, a decisive majority of those polled in Texas also preferred Gore to Bush. Of those stating a preference, 65 percent preferred Gore to Bush, a result that mimics that of the other states and that raises considerable questions about Bush's much vaunted ability to appeal to Latinos in his home state.

Our central question here, though, is whether these preferences are informed preferences, that is, whether there is an issue-preference basis for the respondents' articulated

⁶ Changes in predicted values estimated using CLARIFY (King, Tomz; Wittenberg 2000; Tomz, Wittenberg, and King 2001). CLARIFY estimates specific changes, in either predicted values or probabilities in discrete choice models, associated with specific changes in the value of each independent variable, while holding the value of all other variables at a specified level, usually the mean or median. For example, in Table 2, we report the change in the value of the dependent variable from varying the predictor from its minimum to its maximum value, holding all others at their means.

⁷ Abortion, because of its unique status, longer political life and emotive nature may give its followers greater opportunities for exposure and information about politics generally.

⁸ Controlling for the various Latino ethnicities had no appreciable effect on the findings.

≡ TABLE 3
PRESIDENTIAL PREFERENCE, BY STATE AND TOTAL, IN THE TOMÁS RIVERA POLICY INSTITUTE 2000 PRE-ELECTION POLL

Preference	New York	California	Illinois	Texas	Florida	Totals
Gore	251	244	214	212	98	1019
Bush	55	60	77	114	222	528
Undecided	52	62	67	63	44	288
Totals	358	366	358	389	364	1835

Data Source: TRPI 2000 Pre-Election Survey

vote intentions. One quick way to examine this question is to assess the level of policy agreement between volunteered issue preferences and the preferred presidential candidate. Since we queried respondents about three issues, the respondents with an articulated preference could have agreed with their preferred candidate anywhere from three times to zero. The results are presented in Table 4.

As is readily apparent, a significant majority of those with a presidential preference appear to hold an informed preference. That is, about 51 percent of Bush supporters and a surprising 70 percent of Gore supporters articulate issue preferences that are consistent with the beliefs of their preferred candidate either two of three times, or on all three issues.⁹ Further, when we confine the analysis to those voters who are better informed¹⁰ we see that informed Latino voters appear to vote their issue preferences. Over 78 percent of politically informed Bush identifiers and over 90 percent of similarly informed Gore supporters shared the issue preferences of their preferred candidate. While we do not have the data to make comparisons to other racial/ethnic or social groups, we find this result mildly encouraging with regard to Latino engagement in the U.S. political system.

Of note is the consistent difference between Bush and Gore supporters. Whether we look at the entire sample, or the subsample of those with more correct political information, the level of issue agreement among Gore voters is significantly greater than for Bush voters. Among all voters, Bush supporters agreed with him on an average of 1.53 issues, while Gore voters agreed with him on an average of 1.94 issues, a difference whose F-statistic (67.41) is significant at $p = .0000$.¹¹ For informed voters, the respective means are 1.93 for Bush and 2.29 for Gore, a difference whose F-statistic (45.80) is again significant at $p = .0000$. These results suggest that, on average, a preference for Gore is more likely to be an informed preference than one for Bush. Of course, this bivariate comparison does not allow

us to control for any of a variety of potential intervening effects. To that end, we turn our attention to a fully specified model of presidential preference.

The dependent variable in this analysis is *Prefer Gore*, coded 1 if the respondent articulated an intention to vote for Al Gore, and 0 if the respondent indicated a preference for George W. Bush. Respondents describing themselves as undecided are excluded from this analysis.¹²

A number of variables used in the earlier analysis are used again here, including *Political Information*, *Education*, *Income*, *Age*, *Male*, *U.S.-Born*, *Partisanship*, *Candidate's Spanish*, *Like George*, and *Like Al*. Each is defined and coded exactly as before. *Education*, *Income*, *Male*, *US-Born*, *Candidate's Spanish* and *Like George* should be associated with a Bush preference and hence yield negative coefficients. *Age*, *Partisanship* (where Democrats are higher values), and *Like Al* should be associated with a Gore preference and hence yield positive coefficients. *Political Information* again captures how accurately the respondent maps issue preferences to candidates. In principle, if higher information is associated with a preference for Gore, the coefficient on this variable should be positive. To these, we add a number of variables potentially helpful in predicting vote preference.

First, we use the three issue positions about which respondents were queried. *Pro-Vouchers*, *Pro-Choice*, and *Pro-Gun Control* are each coded 1 if the respondent holds those positions, and 0 if they do not. In general, if the issue preference mattered to the ultimate vote choice, we would expect a negative coefficient on *Pro-Vouchers*, since this is contrary to Gore's publicly held view, while we would expect positive coefficients on the other two.

To these issues and symbols, we add two long-standing predictors of vote choice: *Sociotropic* and *Pocketbook Evaluations* of the economy. Each is a trichotomous retrospective evaluation of the economy, with the sociotropic question referring to the "economy in the country as a whole" and the pocketbook question referring to "your personal financial

⁹ Totals in Table 4a differ from those in Table 3 due to missing data on the issue-preference questions (i.e. respondents replying "Don't Know").

¹⁰ We split the sample between those with two or three correct attributions, who we categorized as better informed, and those with zero or one correct attribution, that is, low information voters.

¹¹ Results computed using a one-way analysis of variance among voters with an expressed presidential preference.

¹² An alternative would have been to use a trichotomous dependent variable including undecided as a middle position. We opted for the dichotomous approach for two reasons: ease of interpretation and uncertainty with regard to what "undecided" meant in this context. In results not presented, we replicated all of the following analyses using Ordered Logit on the trichotomous dependent variable and the results and their interpretation were essentially unchanged. Results available from the authors.

≡ TABLE 4A

LATINO REGISTERED VOTERS' ISSUE AGREEMENT WITH PREFERRED CANDIDATES, IN THE TOMÁS RIVERA POLICY INSTITUTE 2000 PRE-ELECTION POLL

	R's Preferring Gore	R's Preferring Bush	R's Who are Undecided	Total
Agree with Gore twice or three times	618 (70.2%)	214 (48.6%)	227 (63.4%)	1059 (63.1%)
Agree with Bush twice or three times	262 (29.8%)	226 (51.4%)	131 (36.6%)	619 (36.9%)
Total	880	440	358	1678

Data Source: TRPI 2000 Pre-Election Survey

≡ TABLE 4B

LATINO REGISTERED VOTERS' ISSUE AGREEMENT WITH PREFERRED CANDIDATES AMONG BETTER INFORMED RESPONDENTS, IN THE TOMÁS RIVERA POLICY INSTITUTE 2000 PRE-ELECTION POLL

	R's Preferring Gore	R's Preferring Bush	R's Who are Undecided	Total
Agree with Gore twice or three times	494 (90.1%)	53 (21.8%)	109 (65.7%)	656 (68.5%)
Agree with Bush twice or three times	54 (9.9%)	190 (78.2%)	57 (34.3%)	301 (31.5%)
Total	548	243	166	957

Data Source: TRPI 2000 Pre-Election Survey

situation." In both cases, 1 indicates that respondent believes it has "Gotten better," -1 indicating a belief that it has "Gotten Worse," and a 0 indicating no perceived change. The importance of economic evaluations in presidential voting is long demonstrated (Fiorina 1981). In general, if they matter here, we would expect positive coefficients, since Al Gore was carrying the standard of the incumbent party, usually perceived to be the beneficiary of good economic evaluations.

Finally, as before, we control for state of residence. As we demonstrated in Table 3, the level of preference did vary somewhat across states, with Florida reporting decidedly different preferences. While we cannot be sure that there are fixed geographic effects not accounted for with systematic variables, we include them to test for this difficulty. Apart from Florida, where we anticipate a negative coefficient, we have no firm *ex ante* expectations regarding the signs of the coefficients on these variables, once we control for systematic factors.¹³

We enter these 19 independent variables into a model predicting *Prefer Gore*. Since the dependent variable is dichotomous, we use Logistic regression. The results are reported in Table 5.

The first column reports the coefficients and standard errors for the estimation on the full sample of respondents. The second column estimates the net effect on the estimated

probability of a Gore vote for shifting each independent variable from its minimum to maximum value, holding all others constant at their mean.

In the full sample, *Political Information* appears to have no effect on vote choice. Better-informed people do not appear to be more or less inclined to support Gore, *ceteris paribus*. Further, issues do not appear to have much influence either, as none of the three issue variables or two economic evaluations yield a significant parameter estimate.

By contrast, and not surprisingly, candidate likeability does extremely well. The likeability of both Bush and Gore are powerful predictors of vote preference, exceeding even partisanship in their net effect. A change in the evaluation of George W. Bush from "very much dislike" to "very much like" reduces the likelihood of a Gore preference by almost .71, while a similar shift for Gore increases the probability of a Gore preference by .91. The effect of *Partisanship*, by comparison, is smaller. Strong Democrats are approximately 68 percent more likely to support Gore than self-described strong Republicans.¹⁴ The other candidate-centered variable,

¹³ Dropping the state dummies does not change the results.

¹⁴ It is important to note that collinearity does not appear to be an issue. None of the correlations between the key regressors approach the usual level for concern, and the correlation between the likeability of the two candidates, while negative, is a modest -.33. *Education* and *Income* are correlated at .47, while the economic evaluations are correlated at .42, neither sufficiently high for concern.

≡ TABLE 5
 LOGIT MODELS OF LATINO POLITICAL INFORMATION AND VOTE CHOICE IN THE 2000 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

	Full Sample		Low Information Rs		High Information Rs	
	Coefficients Std. Errors	Simulated Effects Std. Errors Min->Max	Coefficients Std. Errors	Simulated Effects Std. Errors Min->Max	Coefficients Std. Errors	Simulated Effects Std. Errors Min->Max
<i>Political Information</i>	-.005 (.151)	-.002 (.052)				
<i>Education</i>	-.196 (.125)	-.113 (.076)	-.014 (.190)	-.015 (.114)	-.292 (.199)	-.137 (.101)
<i>Income</i>	.036 (.088)	.025 (.069)	-.177 (.151)	-.171 (.160)	.091 (.136)	.053 (.081)
<i>Age</i>	.031** (.010)	.232 (.074)	.022 (.015)	.160 (.116)	.043* (.018)	.242 (.105)
<i>Sex (Male)</i>	-.057 (.283)	-.006 (.034)	-.820† (.454)	-.096 (.057)	.187 (.459)	.019 (.045)
<i>U.S. Born</i>	.372 (.317)	.043 (.039)	-.126 (.509)	-.019 (.061)	.935 (.545)	.094 (.064)
<i>Partisanship</i>	.707*** (.084)	.688 (.077)	.629*** (.129)	.599 (.129)	.944*** (.150)	.806 (.089)
<i>Like George</i>	-1.66*** (.206)	-.706 (.054)	-2.47*** (.456)	-.830 (.067)	-1.34*** (.257)	-.552 (.090)
<i>Like Al</i>	1.61*** (.185)	.909 (.036)	1.83*** (.328)	.932 (.049)	1.57*** (.274)	.870 (.080)
<i>Pro-vouchers</i>	-.184 (.290)	-.022 (.034)	.388 (.479)	.051 (.066)	-1.16* (.463)	-.107 (.050)
<i>Pro-choice</i>	.389 (.290)	.047 (.036)	-.506 (.451)	-.061 (.057)	1.06* (.471)	.111 (.063)
<i>Pro-gun control</i>	-.416 (.359)	-.043 (.034)	-1.44* (.617)	-.118 (.053)	1.04† (.581)	.132 (.086)
<i>Candidate's Spanish</i>	-.209 (.129)	-.071 (.046)	-.489* (.221)	-.164 (.078)	.124 (.193)	.033 (.056)
<i>Sociotropic evaluations</i>	-.095 (.256)	-.017 (.054)	.250 (.379)	.073 (.105)	-.109 (.376)	-.008 (.070)
<i>Pocketbook evaluations</i>	.030 (.237)	.009 (.055)	.339 (.374)	.082 (.100)	-.328 (.384)	-.045 (.066)
<i>Texas</i>	-.667 (.446)	-.094 (.070)	.479 (.650)	.044 (.067)	-1.93* (.790)	-.267 (.136)
<i>Illinois</i>	-.242 (.454)	-.038 (.059)	1.07 (.774)	.088 (.064)	-1.01 (.721)	-.126 (.105)
<i>New York</i>	-.090 (.474)	-.017 (.058)	1.03 (.716)	.086 (.063)	-.527 (.802)	-.067 (.101)
<i>Florida</i>	-.627 (.494)	-.092 (.076)	-1.12 (.819)	-.175 (.141)	.201 (.800)	.009 (.073)
<i>Constant</i>	.086 (.887)		2.48† (1.38)		-2.19 (1.40)	
<i>PPC</i>	93.7%		93.5%		95.8%	
<i>PRE Lambda</i>	.808		.822		.859	
<i>N</i>	1052		413		639	

Significance levels: † p<=.075, * p<=.05, ** p<=.01, ***p<=.001, two-tailed.

Data Source: TRPI 2000 Pre-Election Survey

Importance of Spanish, is marginally insignificant, though in the predicted direction. Respondents who place importance on a candidate's Spanish-speaking ability appear to be modestly more likely to vote Bush.

Among the demographic variables, only *Age* appeared to make much difference, with older respondents significantly preferring Gore. None of the state-specific dummies are significant, suggesting that once we account for systematic variation, geography has little effect. Overall the model predicts almost 94 percent of the cases correctly, and reduces the error by almost 81 percent.

At first blush, these results seem modestly inconsistent with those presented in Table 4. Information levels do not appear to shape presidential preference, and the issues appeared to be of little importance to the choices of Latino voters. Nevertheless, the results from Table 4 were so persuasive that a majority of all voters, and the vast majority of better informed voters, manifested considerable issue agreement with the candidate of their choice. The difference manifested by informed voters suggests that the level of information, then, may structure some of the remaining relationships.

To evaluate whether information has a moderating effect, we subdivide the sample just as we did for Table 4, into two groups. Those we describe as low information voters correctly attributed issue position to candidate once or never, while those we describe as high information voters correctly attributed two or all three issue positions to the appropriate candidates. We hypothesize that high-information voters are better able to evaluate the candidates based on policy issues whereas low-information voters are more likely to do so on the basis of symbolic appeals. We reran the analysis on these two sub-samples, dropping *Political Information* as an independent variable since it was used to bifurcate the sample. The results are presented in Columns 3-6 of Table 5.

Columns 3 and 4 report the results for low-information voters. In general, the results are largely consistent with those of the first model. The model predicts 93.5 percent of the cases correctly and reduces the error by .82. *Partisanship* and likeability are again the strongest predictors of vote choice. Looking at their estimated effect, the two likeability measures appear to be even stronger than in the general model, while partisanship is slightly weaker. In addition, candidate Spanish speaking is now significant and in the hypothesized direction.

The results from the three issue variables are consistent with our expectation that low-information voters do not rely on issues. Neither *Pro-Choice* nor *Pro-Vouchers* matter a whit in determining the vote choice of low information voters, and being *Pro-Gun Control* is negatively associated with a preference for Gore—a result in the opposite direction from our expectations. That is, among low-information voters, agreement with a candidate's position on school vouchers and abortion had no effect on vote choice, while agreement with Gore on gun control decreased the probability of preferring him. Among low-information Latino voters, symbolic considerations overpower issues in determining candidate choice.

Columns 5 and 6 report the results among high-information respondents. This model predicts almost 96 percent of the cases correctly, and reduces error by .86. Here, *Partisanship* is considerably more powerful than among low-information voters, and the relative effect of the two likeability measures is smaller. In addition, the symbolic measure capturing the salience of *Candidate's Spanish* ability is not statistically distinguishable from zero. Together, we would conclude that while likeability is still significant and powerful, non-political variables and symbols play a smaller role among high-information voters.¹⁵

A note about the results on *Pro-Gun Control* is appropriate. The odd negative coefficient among low-information voters, and the one-tailed rather than two-tailed significance of the result among high-information voters, may well be the result of Gore's more moderate, less clear position on the issue. In our own check of the journalistic record, we found numerous quotes from Gore supporting "tough gun control laws," registration laws, assault weapons bans, and the Brady Bill, but opposing out-right bans, and protecting the interests of sportsmen and hunters.

Among the demographic and control variables, *Age* is positively associated with *Prefer Gore* among high information voters but not low, while *Male* is negatively associated with a preference for Gore among low information voters but not high. None of the rest of the control variables reaches significance, with the exception of the *Texas* dummy for high-information voters. We attach no particular importance to this finding except for the possibility that high-information voters in Texas might be somewhat aware of potential benefits to that state of having their governor elected president.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The widespread use of ethnic symbols by both parties during the 2000 presidential election in their efforts to woo Latino voters and the unique TRPI survey we employ gave us the opportunity to extend research on issue voting to the Latino electorate. Our interest was in assessing the degree to which Latinos are issue voters, or whether partisan identity, the likeability of candidates, and the symbolic appeal of Spanish-language usage overwhelm issues in shaping their electoral preferences. The answer, we found, depends on political information or the political knowledge (or lack thereof) of individuals. To be sure, voters with both low and high levels of information made use of party identification and candidate likeability when forming political judgments about the candidates. Yet, when compared to politically knowledgeable voters, low-information voters appeared to rely more heavily on candidate likeability than party identification. Furthermore, candidate likeability was negatively related to identifying correctly the candidates' issue positions

¹⁵ Including variables controlling for ethnic differences had no effect in any specification.

for low-information voters. This finding is meaningful, especially as it relates to previous research on issue voting.

We also found that it takes “smarts” for voters to use issues in making candidate judgments. In contrast to low-information voters, the politically knowledgeable went beyond an exclusive reliance on symbols or party-identification and considered “hard data.” This finding is not surprising. Latino voters with high levels of information have the ability and inclination to evaluate candidates using policy-based criteria whereas their counterparts with low levels of information do not. Lacking information, these voters are more likely to rely on other types of easily obtained information. They may rely on a pre-existing partisan identification to choose a candidate or, in 2000, might have used the personal affability and Spanish-language skills to choose Bush. Yet, sophisticated non-Cuban Latinos apparently recognized that, vis-à-vis Al Gore, Bush is more likely to take positions contrary to Latino interests.

These results almost certainly inform our thinking about other low-information populations. Immigrants of other national origin groups, young voters, and voters with few socioeconomic resources are each likely faced with much the same information shortfalls as many Latinos. That is, this question, of whether symbolism can triumph over substance among citizens with lower levels of information, goes far beyond the experiences of Latinos and may actually characterize the dynamics of vote choice among a significant share of the population. These results, then, have broad significance.

What do these results say about Latino voters and, by extension, others like them? First, they show that contrary to some earlier expectations and surveys measuring “text-book” political knowledge (de la Garza et al. 1992), Latinos are relatively well informed about policy issues (at least those explored in the survey) and the candidates’ positions on them. For a resource-disadvantaged ethnic group, this bodes well for Latinos making informed decisions.

George Bush’s symbolic appeals to Latino voters, whether motivated by personal or strategic concerns, suggest that Republican Party leaders believe the Latino vote is “up for grabs” (Martin 2002; Mason 2002). More importantly, Republican Party appeals may also be driven by the realization that their inclusion will not distance key coalition members (Frymer 1999). That is, symbolic outreach (as opposed to substantive policy changes) has the potential of yielding

additional Latino votes without alienating other members of the GOP coalition—who might have reacted negatively to a shift in policy. If these assessments are correct, then we are likely to see continued efforts by Republican Party candidates and leaders to woo Latino voters. Under pressure not to ignore their base, Democrats may have to redouble their own campaigns to retain their loyalty. If history is a reliable guide, the end result of party competition for the Latino vote is likely to lead to greater levels of mobilization, participation, and incorporation of Latinos in the American political process (Aldrich 1995; Frymer 1999).

Further, these findings suggest that the campaigns of both parties, in attempts to appeal to Latinos and non-Latinos alike, will be multifaceted. That is, the segmentation of the electorate by levels of information and sophistication imply that general election campaigns need to communicate several messages simultaneously, crafting different appeals to distinct audiences while always remaining cautious about not becoming internally contradictory.

Our findings here, however, suggest that a purely symbolic approach will have only limited success among Latinos if it is not accompanied by a substantive change. Latino voters are not uniformly swayed by symbols but, rather, appear to be better informed than we might have guessed. And those better informed voters appear to have looked to issues as well as symbols in determining preference. Partisanship is enduring and symbols matter, but the effect of symbols on vote preference is strongest for those lacking the resources to evaluate candidates in other ways. And their impact, we have shown, is not uniformly positive for maximizing policy representation—some less-informed voters allowed the symbolism of a Spanish-speaking candidate and his general likeability to mislead them into voting for a candidate with whom they largely disagreed.

But, the fact that non-Cuban Latinos, even those residing in Texas, largely “stayed home” with the Democratic Party in 2000, suggests that ultimately the candidates’ stance on issues trumps symbolism, at least among a significant share of the Latino electorate. While some low-information respondents did appear to be swayed, the majority of all respondents, and the vast majority of those with political information, articulated a presidential preference consistent with their beliefs. In short, we observe as V. O. Key (1966) did over thirty years ago, that *Latino* voters are not fools.

≡ APPENDIX A
CONTROL VARIABLE DEFINITIONS AND CODING

Variable Name	Definition
<i>Like George and Like Al</i>	Affective responses to George Bush and Al Gore, ranging from -2 (dislike him very much) to 2 (very much like him);
<i>Candidate's Spanish</i>	Importance R reports attaching to a candidate's ability to speak Spanish, from zero (0) "not at all important," to three (3) "Very important."
<i>Voucher, Abortion, and Gun Control Importance</i>	R's assessment of the importance of each issue ranging from 0 (not at all important) to 3 (very important);
<i>Pro-Voucher, Pro-Choice, and Pro-Gun Control</i>	R's position on each issue, with 1 indicating that they hold a "pro" position and 0 indicating that they do not;
<i>Sociotropic and Pocketbook Evaluation</i>	R's assessment of the economy as a whole and their personal situation, ranging from 1 (Gotten Better) to -1 (Gotten Worse), with 0 indicating no change;
<i>Partisanship</i>	Seven point scale ranging from -3 (strong Republican) to 3 (strong Democrat)
<i>Political Interest</i>	Interest in politics ranging from 0 (not at all interested) to 3 (very interested)
<i>Latino Contact</i>	Contact by Latino candidates or organizations = 1 and 0 otherwise
<i>Non-Latino Contact</i>	Contact by non-Latino candidates or organizations = 1 and zero otherwise
<i>Income</i>	Categorical, Up to \$15,000 = 0, \$100,000 and above equals 7
<i>Age</i>	Age in number of years
<i>Sex (Male)</i>	Male = 1, Female = 0
<i>Education</i>	Categorical with grade school or less = 0, post-graduate = 5
<i>US Born</i>	Born in U.S. = 1, otherwise = 0
<i>Spanish Media</i>	Importance of Spanish media as an information source, 3 = very important
<i>Texas, Illinois, Florida, and New York</i>	Resident of that state = 1, not = 0, Californians are the unexpressed category

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