Paths to the practices of citizenship:

Political discussion and socialization among Mexican-heritage immigrants in the U.S.

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Abstract

Building on research on immigrant political socialization and social connections in politics, I advance a theoretical model for how immigrants develop their sense of political discussion in a new nation. This model, the Social Contact Model of Immigrant Political Socialization, focuses on the influences coming from close-knit social groups and wider-ranging social networks. I apply the model through a qualitative study of Mexican-heritage immigrants in the U.S. and the likely sources of socialization that influence their political discussion behavior. The findings provide some support for the theoretical model, and suggest there are important differences between Latino immigrants and native-born Whites in how they learn to engage in political discussion.

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Juan, a 22-year-old man living in Tempe, Arizona, was brought to the United States by his parents as a very young child. Living as an undocumented immigrant with modest means and no government support, Juan is not the sort of person who most would expect to be participating in politics and discussing public issues. But his interest in the political world was encouraged by a high school teacher who himself had once been undocumented. Now Juan and the rest of his family, particularly his three sisters, often discuss state and national politics—despite the fact that their undocumented status means they cannot vote here.

"[Now] me being older, we actually *comemos* [eat together]," said Juan in an interview about his political engagement. "We eat or whatever and we talk about Democrats, how…we had a democratic state before, and now it's Republican, or how President Bush was Republican and now [the President is] a Democrat." Juan helps his younger sisters understand American political parties by comparing and contrasting them with parties in Mexico, such as the Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) and Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), and explaining the parties' ideologies and key constituencies. Juan said his sisters "do get it now. So, yes, we talk about it with them. It's not like they're *really* interested in it. But it's a discussion, for sure."

Juan's story is somewhat common among the many participants interviewed as part of this project, which examined the experiences of Mexican-heritage immigrants[1] and their children as they learn to participate in politics and civic life in the U.S. Despite most of the interviewees having a tenuous political status in the United States (some were undocumented immigrants) and

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[1] A note about terminology: Though the research in this manuscript focuses on Mexican-heritage people living in the United States, for the sake of brevity this group is sometimes referred to as "Latinos" or "Latino immigrants."

others feeling left out of the political system due to lower socioeconomic status, many of them recount stories of talking about public issues with family, friends, and co-workers. Though in the past this community has lagged behind others in some forms of mainstream political engagement, such as voting and donating to candidates (Cho, 1999), Latino immigrants are becoming more involved in recent years (Barreto, 2005).

In this manuscript, I explore the phenomenon of immigrant political socialization through the results of a qualitative study of Mexican-heritage immigrants in the United States and their perceptions and recollections of their political discussions. First, I review research in the areas of political discussion, socialization, immigrant politics, and social connections in politics. Next, I present a new theoretical model showing how immigrants learn to engage in political discussion in their new country. This model, the Social Contact Model of Immigrant Political Socialization, focuses on the influences of close-knit groups and more distant social networks on the socialization process, and also suggests how political socialization might occur among U.S. Latinos. Finally, I provide support for and extension of this model through the results of a qualitative study exploring political discussion among Mexican-heritage immigrants living in the United States.

Political Engagement among Immigrant Populations

Political decisions in modern democracies typically come from the tallying of votes or other measures of support, but there are many political acts more concerned with the *process* than with the outcome—and one of the most important of those is political discussion. Conversations with other people help us learn more information and develop political opinions (Eveland, 2004), and they can help us make sense of society and grow closer together with like-minded people (Cramer Walsh, 2004). Before examining the process of political socialization for

people learning to engage in political discussion in their new country, I begin by reviewing research on political conversation and discussion.

Political Discussion and Conversation

Informal interpersonal discussion of politics can have many potential benefits for citizens in a democracy. First, it is easier for people to participate in this form of political discourse than many others; people can discuss an issue with a friend or family member fairly easily, compared with the effort needed to attend a town hall meeting or engage in another discursive act (Jacobs, Cook, & Delli Carpini, 2009). These discussions can help people learn more about an issue and help them crystallize their own views by exposing them to others' opinions (Cappella, Price, & Nir, 2002; Gamson, 1992; Jacobs et al., 2009). Political discussion can also encourage other forms of political participation among those who have spent time talking to others about issues (Nisbet & Scheufele, 2004). Studies of discussion in social networks also show that political talk can help people make stronger decisions overall. Huckfeldt, Johnson, and Sprague's (2004) studies on the persistence of political disagreement illustrate how citizens are individually interdependent upon each other for political information. Depending on an individual's social network, one may encounter varying levels of political disagreement among their discussion partners; some citizens have networks with very diverse opinions, while others have more uniform networks. By being exposed to disagreement in their social network, people can hear and consider alternative arguments and eventually make better decisions.

However, Mutz (2006) argues that most political discussion in the U.S. is among people who are politically like-minded, meaning that they are not exposed to cross-cutting opinions and are simply hearing their same views repeated back to them. Jacobs and colleagues (2009) take a more optimistic view, as their data suggest that a substantial portion of Americans are trying to

persuade others on an issue or candidate (about one-third to nearly half of the population, respectively), or are engaging in political debates online (about a quarter of the population). Even if many people are discussing politics with like-minded people, that can also have some benefits. Agreeable discussion can help generate political activism and participation, as people who talk to like-minded citizens can build up partisan fervor or create an activist group with others who are interested in an issue or candidate (Mutz, 2006).

In addition to studies of political talk in groups, other scholars have examined the civic and political roles of social groups that are not explicitly political. For instance, Gastil's (1993) study of a grocery store co-op illustrated how democratic procedures in the governance of the organization can help individual members learn how to act more democratically. Walsh's (2004) study of informal groups that often discussed politics, on the other hand, showed how some groups use those discussions to help individuals build a shared identity as members of that group, and in turn use that identity to help make sense of political issues. Members developed strong social ties and relationships, built camaraderie and trust with one another, had mutual respect for group members, and became interdependent on one another. Their discussions established a collective entity of sorts that promoted a certain view on political issues.

However, political discussion can often be a difficult process for individual citizens and can have some negative side effects. Political talk may activate connections to our particular social groups or social location and bring up core issues like race, ethnicity, religion, or socioeconomic status. Observational studies of political discussion (Gamson, 1992; Cramer Walsh, 2004) show that these conversations can often activate a participant's social identity in negative ways, by solidifying divisions between social groups and locking out alternative

viewpoints. This can lead to low-quality (and undemocratic) decision making, and it can provide an impetus for disengaging from politics and public policy (Eliasoph, 1998; Sanders, 1997).

Much of the qualitative research on political discussion has noted the importance of group identity in how people talk about and make sense of political issues. For people who are new to a political system, and who are learning how to participate and how to talk with fellow citizens, group identity seems to play an important role in their socialization into this new system (Flores, 1997; Landolt & Goldring, 2009). Latino immigrants in particular may face a tougher road in their political socialization because their social group is less powerful and not as prominent as, say, native-born Anglos (Ginieniewicz, 2010).

Immigrant Political Socialization

Immigrants have been studied extensively as a political entity in recent decades, with much attention on how naturalized citizens are driven to vote (or not) as well as how their political viewpoints and party loyalties develop and shift over time (Alvarez & Bedolla, 2003; Cain, Kiewiet, & Uhlaner, 1991; Cho, Gimpel, & Dyck, 2006). Research has identified several factors that can influence the political development of immigrants in a new society, such as the politics in their native country (Alvarez & Bedolla, 2003; Cho, 1999), a lack of familiarity with their new political system (Ginieniewicz, 2010), and ethnic and political threats in their new nation (Cho, Gimpel, & Wu, 2006; Flores, 1997; Ramakrishnan, 2005).

Early research on political socialization focused on how one's family and schooling help a young person develop a political identity and learn how to act in the political realm (Dawson & Prewitt, 1969; Garcia, 1973; Tedin, 1974), while more recent research in this area has noted the importance of peers (Ekström & Östman, 2013; Tedin, 1980) and the news media (Liu & Gastil, 2014; McLeod, 2000) in the socialization process. An individual's parents and other adults in

their life provide models of appropriate civic behavior and illustrate how a citizen can accomplish things in the civic, governmental, and political realms (Gimpel, Lay, & Schuknecht, 2003), as well as pass on political values (Beck & Jennings, 1991).

People who emigrate from their home country and settle in a place with a different political system are at a disadvantage in knowing the expected behavior of citizens (Ginieniewicz, 2010). Given the range of political systems and practices found in different nations, as well as cultural differences between countries, immigrants may simply have less understanding of the practices in their new nation. Without the background provided by many years of schooling about government and national history, immigrants may be at a loss when trying to determine how to communicate and otherwise take action in their new country's political system (Fraga et al., 2010; Ramakrishnan, 2005). The children of immigrants also face a challenge, as they may learn about the political system in school, but cannot benefit as much from the shared knowledge of their parents as native-born families (Cho, 1999; Garcia, 1973).

Though one key study of political socialization (Gimpel et al., 2003) focused on the general population, its findings could certainly be applicable to some immigrant populations, thus it provides some insight into the importance of small groups and social networks in immigrant political socialization. Through Gimpel and colleagues' work on political socialization they uncovered the major effects of three categories of variables: where one lives, whom one talks to about politics, and what is happening in one's community. The most important of these, they found, was the local context in which young people were becoming adults. When citizens grow up in an area that is less civically active, has elections that are less competitive, and in general is less connected to government, they will be socialized in a way that discourages them from participating in politics as they grow older. The converse is also true:

Children who are raised in an area that is more politically active or has competitive elections will be more likely to participate as they grow older. The authors argue that this is because when a young person sees a positive model of citizenship around them in adults she will be encouraged to participate as she transitions into adulthood.

A similar line of research from Ball-Rokeach and colleagues has illustrated the importance of interpersonal discussion partners to political socialization of immigrants (Ball-Rokeach, Kim, & Matei, 2001; Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006; Wilkin, Katz, & Ball-Rokeach, 2009). Their work has found that the people one talks to while growing up or becoming a citizen can be very important in the socialization process. For immigrant voters in California, the act of simply talking with other family members more regularly in the home was a strong predictor of civic and political engagement (Wilkin et al., 2009). Also important is the amount of connection one has to neighborhood discussions—the local 'storytelling network' in which neighbors talk about issues of importance to the local community (Wilkin et al., 2009). Recent related scholarship has confirmed that social interactions with both close and distant contacts can drive political participation and knowledge of politics among immigrants, as one of many influences on immigrant political socialization, such as news media use (Liu & Gastil, 2014). The Social Contact Model, described in more detail below, extends this scholarship in multiple ways, both in the mechanisms of influence and the forms of civic engagement being studied.

Together, these works illustrate the impact of small groups and social networks in affecting the political socialization process for the general population and for immigrants in modern democracies like the United States. It seems likely that groups and networks are also important in the process of first- and second-generation immigrants developing conceptions of political discussion and communication. For those immigrants who are growing up and

becoming citizens in more politically active ethnic enclaves, for instance, perhaps the contexts of their immediate friends and family and their wider social network, and the discussions that take place within both, are more important than formal civics classes in developing political norms (Ekström & Östman, 2013). Major social and political events may also travel through those groups and networks, perhaps encouraging new citizens about their political efficacy and modeling good democratic norms for them (e.g., the massive rallies for immigration reform in the U.S. in 2006; Barreto, Manzano, Ramírez, & Rim, 2009), or perhaps giving them negative views of the political system and discouraging democratic norms (e.g., divisive anti-immigrant political campaigns in the U.S., U.K., and Europe in the 1990s and 2000s; Cho, Gimpel, & Wu, 2006; Valentino, Brader, & Jardina, 2013). The next section will describe my theoretical model for how social contacts affect the political socialization of immigrants. This model builds on prior research on social networks and small-group norms, as well as how those social ties can affect immigrants learning how to communicate politically.

The Social Contact Model

Building on the scholarship on immigrant political socialization reviewed above, I have developed a theoretical model, dubbed the Social Contact Model of Immigrant Political Socialization, which synthesizes this research and other research on social connections in politics and provides likely sources of influence in the political socialization process for immigrants. The model suggests that one's close-knit social groups and more distant social contacts are instrumental in shaping how one becomes politically socialized and learns about political communication practices in a new nation. Socialization under the Social Contact Model is based on the spread of ideas through social networks and the influence of social group norms. In this model, the democratic practices of political discussion and discourse can travel through the weak

ties of social networks that connect tighter clusters of people, in both online and offline settings. In addition, they can take the form of norms of behavior within a particular social group, guiding new citizens towards those kinds of political discourse and encouraging them to abide by those norms.

INSERT FIG. 1 ABOUT HERE

Politics in Social Networks

Research on social structures has shown that interpersonal networks, in both online and face-to-face settings, can have significant effects on individuals—from giving them better resources for finding a job, to helping mobilize them for political causes, to encouraging unhealthy behavior (Christakis & Fowler, 2008; Klandermans & Oegema, 1987; Pfeffer & Para, 2009; Rainie & Wellman, 2012). Granovetter (1983) was among the first scholars who illustrated the importance of the weaker ties that people maintain beyond their immediate, more close-knit circle of family and friends. He identified the usefulness of bridging connections in helping individuals find jobs—more people who find employment reported finding out about their job opportunity through a weak tie than a strong one. A recent study found similar results among Latino immigrants looking for work (Pfeffer & Para, 2009).

Social networks have also proven very important in political contexts, with loose affiliations and weak ties serving a role alongside close-knit connections and media messages. Some early studies on public opinion formation noted that interpersonal influence could have a significant effect on people, by way of some knowledgeable and influential "opinion leaders" helping others in their social networks learn about politics (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, & McPhee,

1954; E. Katz, Lazarsfeld, & Roper, 1955). Many researchers have followed up on that research to examine how social networks can influence political choices (Huckfeldt et al., 2004; Jacobs et al., 2009; Zuckerman, 2004), encourage recruitment into political activity (Lim, 2008), and affect other political behavior like donations and election turnout (McClurg, 2003; Sinclair, 2012). Research on social networks in politics has also illustrated how these connections can exist both online and offline (Gil de Zúñiga & Valenzuela, 2011; Rainie & Wellman, 2012), and how heterogeneity in those social networks is connected with higher levels of civic and civil activity (Hampton, 2011).

Immigrants may rely on social networks for information and guidance on how to participate in politics and communicate with others about it. Older immigrants who cannot benefit from primary schooling or parental influences may instead turn to social contacts who are native-born, or are fellow immigrants who have been in their new country longer. Younger immigrants may be influenced by schooling, but likely get less influence from that and their parents than would children of the native-born (Garcia, 1973)—so they may turn to social contacts as well.

Cohesive Social Groups

Close-knit social groups to which people belong, much like wider-ranging social networks, can also have important effects on individual members. Connections between group members and to the group as a whole can become quite strong, giving a cohesiveness to the group that can help it function better (Mullen & Copper, 1994; Wheelan, Davidson, & Tilin, 2003). Individuals in a cohesive group may not wish to violate the norms of the group and face the judgment and criticism of other members (Hare, 1976). As a group develops a strong identity and well-defined norms, members may find it difficult to deviate from those norms, since they

would face ridicule and alienation from the group (Abrams, Hogg, Hinkle, & Otten, 2005).

Researchers have illustrated the influence of group connections in the context of political behavior, as when an individual receives a political message from a member of a familial or social group (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1991; Sinclair, 2012). In family groups, these messages can flow from older family members to younger ones, or the reverse direction, with young people influencing their parents and other older family members—particularly among Latino immigrant families (Bloemraad & Trost, 2008; V. S. Katz, 2014). People can also be influenced by perceived norms within a group, when they see others around them engaging in a behavior or espousing views and come to see those as appropriate or right (Huckfeldt, Beck, Dalton, & Levine, 1995; Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1991). For instance, an individual's perception of group norms related to political participation can affect the likelihood of that person voting or engaging in other political behavior (Glynn, Huge, & Lunney, 2009; Sinclair, 2012). In the case of immigrants, these social group norms may be particularly important as they learn how to become politically engaged.

Other Influences on the Socialization Process

Experiences from an immigrant's native country, while important (Bueker, 2005), may play a smaller role, since those experiences may be less applicable in a new political system. However, connections to people in their native countries may persist and affect their civic development (Lin, Song, & Ball-Rokeach, 2010). Media influences may be less important for many immigrants, since mainstream media outlets will tend to focus on the dominant population. However, the media may have indirect influences on immigrant socialization by affecting members of one's social group or network (E. Katz, 1957), and those media that focus on ethnic minority or nationality groups may play an important role for some immigrants (Barreto et al.,

2009; Rim, 2009). In contrast with recent research showing the media can have a pronounced effect on general political socialization for immigrants (Liu & Gastil, 2014), the Social Contact Model is focused on socialization related to political discussion behavior, which is likely influenced less by the media than by interpersonal contact (McLeod, Scheufele, & Moy, 1999).

Immigrant political socialization may also be a different type of process from native-born socialization, which has typically been conceptualized as an educational process in which people learn about these practices from parents and teachers. It may instead be a social process, driven by the people who make up an immigrant's close-knit group of companions and their wider network of acquaintances and contacts. This shift may also give them much more agency in shaping their own political socialization than is typically experienced by non-immigrant young people, who primarily learn about politics from authority figures—their parents and teachers—in a top-down model of instruction.

This qualitative study applies the Social Contact Model to a specific immigrant population—Latino immigrants in the United States—with the aim of determining how well the theoretical model fits that specific immigrant population, and how useful it might be in other contexts.

Method

This manuscript explores immigrant political socialization in the United States in general while also more specifically focusing on Mexican-heritage immigrants to the U.S. About 16 percent of the nation's population, or about 50 million people, is of Latino or Hispanic descent, and about two-thirds of the U.S. Latino population is of Mexican heritage, according to recent figures from the U.S. Census Bureau (2010) and the Pew Hispanic Center (2010). The same data show that about 40 percent of the Latino population is foreign born, making them first-

generation immigrants, and many others are second-generation immigrants who were born in the U.S. to foreign-born parents. In addition, the U.S. Latino population is playing an increasingly important role in American politics, whether as part of a political debate over immigration, as participants in campaigns and elections, and as candidates for public office at all levels. However, Latino immigrants may face some substantial challenges in becoming politically socialized into American political life, by encountering different schooling or parental influences than those seen by the native-born population.

Much of the research on the immigrant political experience in the United States has focused on aggregate-level quantitative analysis and testing long-standing theories of general political participation (Cho, 1999; Ramakrishnan, 2005). Qualitative research methods can explore a social phenomenon within the context of a community and its members and provide a deeper understanding of the beliefs, practices, and interests of that community's members than is afforded by quantitative surveys and experiments (Christians & Carey, 1981). This sort of research has provided important insight into American immigrant communities, especially Latinos (V. S. Katz, 2014).

Sample and Setting

This research project involved 11 focus group interviews and 79 individual interviews with Mexican-heritage immigrants living in the United States, with participants ranging from teenagers to elderly adults. To capture a wider picture of the immigrant experience, I sought out Mexican-born people who came to the U.S. as adults, those who were born in Mexico but came to the U.S. as children, and those who were born in the U.S. to Mexican-born parents, who are often referred to as the "second generation" (Portes & Rumbaut, 1996).

Starting in summer 2011, the research team (consisting of me and a colleague, partnering

together on data collection) began contacting community organizations and individuals to recruit participants in communities in Arizona and Washington state. Field interviews were conducted in several communities in those two states: Seattle, the Tri-Cities area, and Yakima in Washington state; and in Tucson, the Yuma/San Luis area, and the Phoenix/Tempe area in Arizona. These sites were selected both for convenience and difference in political climates, with Arizona having recently passed legislation targeting undocumented immigrants (Archibold, 2010) and Washington being known as a kind of "sanctuary" state that does not typically target undocumented immigrants (Frosch, 2012). Focus group meetings lasted approximately an hour, and individual interviews ranged from ten minutes to an hour. All group discussions and interviews were recorded and transcribed; those in Spanish were later translated into English by research assistants.

Interviews and Analysis

The focus groups and individual interviews focused on several aspects of the participants' lives: political and civic events and behaviors at different life stages, immigration background and reasons for them or their family for moving the U.S., sources from which they learned about political topics and behaviors, their recollections of times they have discussed politics and public issues with others, and their perceptions of political conversation in the U.S. and in Mexico. Each of these topics were brought up by the interviewer in a semi-structured way. However, the participants' interest levels in different topics were used to guide the discussion and dictate how much time was spent on each topic (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). Focus group interviews were also used to identify the topics that seemed most significant to participants, allowing those to be discussed in more depth during individual interviews (Morgan, 1997).

I conducted an exploratory theme-based content analysis on the focus group and

interview transcripts, looking for recurring themes that came up in the interviews (Lindlof &

Taylor, 2011). This method is the one typically proscribed for qualitative interviews (Holstein &

Gubrium, 1995) and other qualitative studies of political or civic behavior (Cramer Walsh, 2004;

Eliasoph, 1998) in which dominant themes and terminology are identified through a holistic

reading of the field notes or interview transcript. A similar method was used in a study of Latinos

aimed at understanding the immigrant experience in the U.S. (Fraga et al., 2010). Research

questions about the channels of political socialization for Latino immigrants, their experiences of

the socialization process, and their norms for political conversation and discussion were

addressed based on the presence or absence (and frequency of mentions) of different themes and

terms in the qualitative data. When themes and terms arose in multiple groups or multiple

individual interviews, or were clearly important to participants, those were noted and explored in

greater depth, sometimes being organized into categories or overall findings (Morgan, 1997).

These were mainly derived inductively, though my knowledge of immigrant and Latino political

engagement in general (as described in the above literature review) also informed this analysis.

For instance, the story at the beginning of the manuscript about Juan being surprisingly engaged

in U.S. politics was emblematic of a pattern seen across multiple groups and individual

interviews: Many immigrants were overcoming substantial obstacles to engage with and discuss

politics in the U.S. at a surprisingly high level.

Results

This section is organized into several sub-sections, each one addressing a research

question listed above,[2] with a final sub-section covering a theme in the results that cuts across the

categories related to those research questions.

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[2] These results include findings from both the focus group discussions and the individual
interviews.

Channels of Information and Socialization

An important theme mentioned in many of the focus groups and individual interviews was political discussion that occurred between spouses, particularly among first-generation immigrants, most of whom were married to opposite-sex partners. Those spousal discussions were often event-driven, in which spouses would talk about some notable political event such as an election or new policy, and they were typically low in disagreement between the spouses. On occasions when spouses disagreed, conversations were typically calm and not argumentative. For one woman, Maria, a first-generation immigrant and Phoenix-area resident in her thirties, a discussion with her husband helped change her mind about the 2008 presidential election, and it encouraged her to talk about the election with friends and co-workers:

Maria: [Recounting her husband's comments] "'Obama is going to make a change. Uh, he's getting our support, uh, because he is going to be the first African-American person to get to that position. We are going to make a change.' I say, 'So if we are going to vote, or rather, for a Black man, obviously, you believe there will be changes? And, well, the way he talked, that immigration, that we're going to do this, that we're going to try something, there, that part did convince me. Okay, well, maybe he does do, has a chance, right?"[3]

Interviewer: "So, you did change your mind?"

Maria: "So, I did change my mind. I changed my mind and I started to inform myself a little, a little more. For example, on the Internet, friends; at my work we also discussed, 'No, well, that I'm going to vote for Obama because of this, this and this.' 'No, that I'm going to vote for McCain and this, this' and…"

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[3] This exchange between Maria and the interviewer is translated from the Spanish.

Interviewer: "You also tried to convince your coworkers?"

Maria: "Not to convince, rather to discuss, I…"

Interviewer: "To inform?"

Maria: "More or less to inform…"

In the case of Maria, political discussion with her spouse served many purposes. It helped her become more informed about the two major presidential candidates, Barack Obama and John McCain, and it exposed her to her husband's opinion on the race. The conversation was not simply about building a shared identity between the two of them as Democrats, which stands in contrast with political discussion in other settings and with other participants—such as talking with co-workers and acquaintances, which will be discussed more below. This thoughtful, measured debate with her husband also encouraged Maria to talk to other people about the race, gathering information from others and sharing her information with them.

Many participants reported engaging in discussions with more distant social contacts, such as acquaintances, co-workers, and people they know through organizations. People mentioned that these contacts told them about important political events, such as the nationwide rallies for immigration reform in 2006, and that the exchanges also provided useful information about issues and elections. Some participants mentioned that they used online communication for these conversations, though others relied on face-to-face meetings or telephone calls. Jorge, a man in his 30s living in Tucson, is part of the "1.5 generation," which means he came to the U.S. as a child when his parents immigrated here. In his Tucson focus group, he talked about using online social networks, rather than face-to-face talk, to learn about and get involved in political issues:

Facilitator: "Do you guys ever get involved with your friends? Is that how you guys get

pulled into stuff, friends of friends or Facebook, like these sort of grassroots or Hispanic organizations?"

Jorge: "Yeah, I do more Facebook, kind of. There's [a] person or two that I know that know more than I do about these issues. I know more about science, and I try to get input from someone who knows more. One person that I try to follow a little bit because I know that she knows some. And she has worked at Congress offices… So, I agree with some of the stuff that she sends me on Facebook, and then there's a lot."

For many study participants, their social contacts were acting as both political discussion partners and sources of political socialization. Through these contacts, the subjects were learning about political topics and institutions, but they were also discussing politics and learning how to engage in conversation with others—or in some cases, how *not* to engage with others.

Experiences of the Political Socialization Process

Another common theme in the qualitative interviews is that political discussion between children and parents and the process of learning about American politics through discussion are decidedly two-way, with both parties helping the other find political information and learn about issues and candidates. Parents, particularly among the first generation, mostly reported following Spanish-language media and sharing information from that with their children. Some parents also reported seeking information, and asking their children to find that information online from English-language media—though interestingly, the parents reported this as first-hand information seeking, despite the children serving as a mediator in this behavior. They also reported that their children followed English-language media and shared that information with the parents. Younger participants, both foreign- and U.S.-born, reported that their parents would ask them for information about political issues. Juan, the young man in the excerpt at the

beginning of the manuscript, provides a useful example of how first-generation immigrant

parents often rely on their children for guidance:

> Interviewer: "So, let's go back to the conversation. So, it's over the dining table, it's
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> informal, it just kind of happens when something comes up on the news or do you
>
> sometimes sit down specifically with ideas about politics in mind that you want to tell
>
> them?"
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> Juan: "No, everything happens at the dinner table when the news is on, when the news is
>
> going on and something big happens or we're just watching the news and then something
>
> happens and they just ask. 'What does that mean?'"

Juan and many other younger study participants (or the children of older participants)

were often more acclimated to U.S. culture than their first-generation immigrant parents, which

is common for immigrant populations, particularly those from Latin America (Fraga et al., 2010;

Portes & Rumbaut, 1996). As a result, for first-generation immigrants with children born or

raised in the United States—as well as for the children themselves—political socialization seems

to be a two-way process in which children have a good deal of agency and control.

Norms of Political Discussion

The norms of political discussion reported by participants, as one might expect, seemed

to vary substantially depending on the context involved. Parent-child political interactions tended

to be informative, rather than argumentative. One participant, for example, recalled an awkward

conversation he had with his socially conservative father over a state ballot measure related to

gay rights. He went on to explain how he was worried that talking to both of his parents about

the referendum might exert peer pressure on the father to vote along with him and his mother,

who were both supportive of gay rights. Stories like this, in which an adult child of immigrants

overcame his reservations to share an opinion and debate a political issue with one of his parents, were fairly rare in the qualitative interviews. Instead, most people talked about avoiding this kind of topic in their political discussions, choosing to focus on information sharing over debating political views. Parent-child discussions may therefore play a different role in political socialization and incorporation than other political interactions. These conversations among family may be a site more for learning about politics than in developing an ideology or refining one's political views.

A common theme in the interviews was the avoidance of conflict in political discussion across many, though not all, contexts. This first became apparent during field interviews, when participants would take issue with interviewers using the Spanish word *discusión* to describe political discussion. Participants said that this word, with its connotation of debate or argumentation, did not fit with their experience of talking about politics. Participants typically preferred the term *plática* to describe their political discussions, as this word connotes an informal conversation or more calm discussion. For example, Isabel, a woman in her 30s in the Tempe area, used this term when mentioning the discussions that she and her college friends had when she was growing up in Mexico. "*Nosotros si teníamos pláticas con los amigos, no discusiones,*" she said. [We did have discussions among friends, not arguments.]

Many participants in both Arizona and Washington spoke this way about political discussion. Patricia, the woman mentioned in a previous section, was asked if her discussions with co-workers were heated arguments or more respectful debates. She replied, "No, no, they are *commentarios,*" (meaning roughly comments or commentaries).

However, the tone of discussions seemed to vary considerably depending on the ethnicity of the other conversational partners. Some participants reported that discussions with White co-

workers were accusatory or otherwise off-putting, with the whites pressing them to address issues about Latinos and immigration. Conversations with Latino co-workers were generally more positive experiences for most participants, and these discussions tended to be more informational. The conversations often covered immigration policy and related issues, but not exclusively, as the topic would sometimes turn to elections and other political issues. The conflict in discussion styles is expected based on previous research showing important differences in how different ethnic and cultural groups engage in conversation (Collier, Ribeau, & Hecht, 1986; Larkey, 1996).

The few participants who mentioned being comfortable with more argumentative forms of political discussion did so with an important qualifier. Those kinds of discussion were only mentioned as being acceptable among fellow Latinos who were friends or more distant family members, as opposed to parents and children. This reticence to argue with others about politics—especially within the nuclear family—may be connected to past experiences of politics in Mexico. Some participants recalled discussions back in Mexico in which friends or family members would argue heatedly, most often because of battles between the PRI and PAN, the two main political parties. Participants generally saw this kind of conflict as a bad thing and often mentioned it as a reason why they avoided politics in Mexico. Though participants did not explicitly make this connection, perhaps this past conflict was part of the reason why parents and children favored information seeking and learning about issues and frowned upon sharing their opinions or debating with one another.

Threats, Authority, and Participation

One of the most common themes that arose among participants at the research sites in Arizona—and one mentioned by some participants in Washington state—cuts across the

categories of results listed above: the threat posed to Latino immigrants by anti-immigrant attitudes and public policy. Several months prior to the field interviews, Arizona had passed and instituted a controversial law named SB1070, which mandated much stricter immigration enforcement. Though Washington had no such law in place, immigrants living there still had concerns about immigration enforcement and state and federal programs to strengthen enforcement. Participants talked about their fears that they or their family members could be deported for being undocumented immigrants, as well concerns that all Latinos were being unfairly targeted by law enforcement authorities because of immigration enforcement and ethnic profiling. Participants in two communities, Phoenix/Tempe and Yuma, mentioned that they sometimes avoided participating in politics because of these fears.

However, in the Tucson area and in eastern Washington, some participants channeled these fears into political activism and discussion of immigration reform. Most of those participants talked with other citizens about this issue, but a few people went outside their social circles to speak with government officials and community leaders about their concerns. One study participant in eastern Washington recalled a time when she joined other Latinos in her community to speak with the local sheriff about a new federal Homeland Security initiative that they believed could have negative implications for Latinos and immigrants, documented or otherwise. The threat posed by this public policy was enough to spur this young woman, to recruit others from the local Latino community to help approach public officials about it, even though some of those community members have a tenuous immigration status.

Participants in Arizona mentioned similar examples of responding to harsh immigration policies and enforcement by engaging in community activism and mobilizing people through social contacts. These efforts tended to be stronger in Tucson than in the Phoenix/Tempe or

Yuma/San Luis areas, and the differences seen across Arizona may be due to some of the organizational history of those areas. People in the Phoenix area may have had connections to community organizations that tried to encourage political and civic involvement, but the Tucson area—home to the University of Arizona and one of the birthplaces of the Chicano movement—has a stronger history of political activism and organizations that encourage outspoken forms of involvement.

Discussion

This study of political discussion and socialization among U.S. Latino immigrants improves our understanding of how people develop as members of a political culture, particularly those living in a new nation. Latino immigrants' socialization around political discussion seems to rely less on parental influences and school and more on non-parental family members, social contacts, and others. Discussion between spousal partners and between parents and children seem to be important sites of political learning, as do conversations with social contacts such as friends and co-workers. In general, participants seemed to prefer more calm discussion of politics and tended to avoid debating and arguing about politics, though a few participants were comfortable with argumentative discussion with fellow Latinos. The threat of immigration enforcement and law-enforcement intimidation was another prominent theme. Some people mentioned these threats as reasons why they were driven to engage in political discussion or action, while others were driven away from the public sphere by the fear of intimidation or deportation.

In addition to these findings, this study provides important theoretical and practical insights into political discussion and socialization scholarship, and could also give guidance to people and organizations trying to encourage civic engagement among Latino immigrants.

Though the Social Contact Model seems to be a useful model for understanding immigrant political socialization, it does have some flaws that were revealed by this qualitative study. Though the model downplays the local and societal context in which people are becoming socialized into political communication behavior, the interviews and focus groups showed how this context (and not just the social and familial connections within it) can be quite important in shaping one's sense of political discussion and participation. The context of communities dealing with rapid growth in the immigrant population, in which some native-born Anglos act aggressively toward Latinos, seems to be discouraging those Latinos from engaging in discussion with them. So too does the context of political and legal threats play an important role in political participation—though one that may vary based on the historical background of the community. Future research on socialization of immigrants and ethnic minority groups, as well as research on how people engage in political discussion in general, needs to account more for how the local and societal context affects behavior.

In addition, the Social Contact Model—as well as many other theories related to political discussion and socialization (e.g. Gimpel et al., 2003; Huckfeldt et al., 2004)—must adapt to include power differentials between different segments of society. Latino immigrants in this study struggled with a relative lack of power compared with Anglos and the native-born, and that heavily influenced their socialization into communicative behavior. Some communities were able to focus on their Latino immigrant identity and use this as a rallying cry for political action, but other communities were stifled by their lack of power in the public realm. Though some scholars have examined power differentials in political discussion and democracy (Dahlberg, 2005; Sanders, 1997), much more work needs to be done to incorporate this into my own

research and the wider scholarship on political talk, especially given the increase in ethnic minority and immigrant-derived populations in modern democracies.

The finding that social and familial contacts are important to the political socialization process lends support to the theories of small group and social network influences described above (Granovetter, 1983; V. S. Katz, 2014; Rainie & Wellman, 2012; Sinclair, 2012; Wilkin et al., 2009). But it also calls to mind an older theory of political communication: the two-step flow of communication (E. Katz et al., 1955). Much like the opinion leaders described in the two-step flow theory, there may be people in Latino immigrant communities who may be key in helping encourage civic and political participation. Further research on social networks within these communities may help us learn which people are most influential in socializing others; perhaps it is people who are most central in social networks, or those with a great deal of influence, or maybe even simply people who have been in the U.S. longer and are more grounded in the political system and culture here.

The theoretical implications of the political socialization and discussion occurring between children and parents is quite significant, as this finding differs from much of the previous research on these topics (Gimpel et al., 2003; Jennings & Niemi, 1968). As discussed earlier, traditional models of political socialization have typically treated socialization as a top-down process, rather than one in which young people play an active role in their own political learning and that of their parents. This finding might also shed light on both Latino political discussion norms and on the socialization process in general. Perhaps research on political socialization among all populations should pay more attention to the role that children play in helping their parents learn about and analyze political topics. Maybe the top-down model of socialization is less applicable among a native-born population than researchers have previously

believed, which is what more recent scholarship has suggested (Ekström & Östman, 2013; Hively & Eveland, 2009; Shah, McLeod, & Lee, 2009). A theory that could prove useful in future analysis of this part of the socialization process is Giddens' structuration theory (1984), which argues that individuals' actions are shaped by the rules and norms of their social context, and also help shape those rules and norms going forward. For example, perhaps one could analyze children's actions in discussing politics with their parents as a structurational process of shifting the norms around top-down political socialization over generations.

The findings about argumentativeness and debate making some Latinos uncomfortable suggest that the dominant "adversarial" model of American politics (Mansbridge, 1983) may not be ideal for encouraging Latino participation. The strong influence of news media on general political socialization of immigrants (Liu & Gastil, 2014) also raises the question of how media representations of political discourse, and not just politics in general, could affect socialization related to discursive practices. Prior scholarship on general communication rules has found some substantial differences between racial and ethnic groups (Collier, 1991; Collier et al., 1986; Larkey, 1996), which lends credence to the idea that such differences may arise in political conversation as well. In addition, research on conflict resolution styles and power distance has noted important differences between individualist cultures (like the U.S.) and collectivist cultures (like Mexico), which could be affecting how, for example, Mexican-origin Latinos in the U.S. communicate with others here (Gabrielidis, Stephan, Ybarra, Pearson, & Villareal, 1997; Gudykunst, Yoon, & Nishida, 1987; Shkodriani & Gibbons, 1995). Further research on some of the political discussion practices of Latinos—in both ethnically homogenous and heterogeneous gatherings—could provide insight into whether argumentative styles of political discourse are problematic for Latinos participating in public meetings and political gatherings.

Finally, this study also suggests a need for further development of the research on political socialization both in the U.S. and elsewhere, given how little work has examined the experiences of people who are not white, middle class, or native born. As the U.S. and many other nations become more diverse and as immigrant-derived populations continue to be a large source of growth, it will vital for social researchers to understand how different populations get involved in civic life and how the public sphere may change with the influx of new ethnic and cultural groups.

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Figure 1: The Social Contact Model of Immigrant Political Socialization