

# Assessing Latin@ Public Opinion on Foreign Affairs and its Potential Impact on the 2012 Presidential Election

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## ABSTRACT

As the Latin@<sup>1</sup> population of the United States grows and the “Sleeping Giant” is expected to play a more significant role in the nation’s elections and governance more attention must be paid to the factors influencing Latin@ public opinion and political behavior on a myriad of issues. While there is a growing literature addressing Latin@ partisanship and opinion on issues such as morality and social welfare programs, there is a dearth of information regarding their opinion on foreign affairs and policy outside of Latin America. We review the limited studies that exist examining Latin@ opinion on policy issues and then explain why this can and will matter in Latin@ voting behavior and finally, using data from the 2006 Pew Hispanic Center survey on Latin@s and Religion in the U.S., we explain how such factors as religion, country of origin and ideology influence Latin@ public opinion on foreign affairs demonstrating a need for much greater study in this area.

Keywords: Public Opinion, Voting Behavior, Latinos, Foreign Affairs, Foreign Policy, Religion, U.S. Presidential Elections, Israel, Palestine, War in Iraq.

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## RESUMEN

A medida que la población latina de los Estados Unidos crece, se espera que el "gigante dormido" desempeñe un papel más importante en las elecciones presidenciales y el gobierno debe prestar más atención a los factores que influyen en la opinión pública latina y el comportamiento político de una gran variedad de temas. Si bien existe una bibliografía cada vez mayor para abordar el partidismo latina y opinión acerca de asuntos tales como la moralidad y programas de bienestar social, hay una escasez de información acerca de su opinión sobre los asuntos exteriores y la política exterior de América Latina. Examinamos los estudios limitados que existen en el examen de la opinión latina en temas de política y para luego explicar por qué esto puede y será importante en el comportamiento del voto latino y, por último, utilizando los datos de la encuesta de 2006 del Pew Hispanic Center sobre los latinos y la religión en los EE.UU., se explica cómo tales factores como la religión, país de origen y la ideología influyen en la opinión pública hispana en asuntos exteriores que demuestren una necesidad de un estudio mucho mayor en este área.

Palabras clave: opinión pública, comportamiento electoral, latinos, relaciones exteriores, política exterior, religión, elecciones presidenciales en los Estados Unidos, Israel, Palestina, guerra de Irak.

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While the economy was the dominant issue of the 2008 presidential election, the 2004 election revolved around the issue of homeland security and thus by extension foreign policy. Despite continued slow economic growth in the U.S., foreign policy is poised to be a salient issue in the 2012 elections for myriad reasons including the incumbent president's successful mission to find Osama Bin Laden, the blame placed on Europe for the world economic crisis and continued tensions in the Middle East. However, we have little knowledge of the fastest growing racial/ethnic group's beliefs regarding foreign affairs.

The results of the 2010 U.S. Census present clear evidence that the nation's population growth is being driven by growth in the Latin@ population. Among the states that gained congressional seats in the 2010 Census most of them, including Florida, Nevada, Arizona and Texas, had significant Latin@ populations and growth therein. Recent estimates find that the Latin@ population will account for more than a quarter of the nation's population by 2050 (Passel and Cohn). Further, as the Latin@ population grows, so does their presence in the electorate, despite the relatively young

age of the population compared to other racial and ethnic groups. As these demographic changes transform the composition of the U.S. electorate, it necessitates an understanding of Latin@ public opinion and voting behavior. Of course, this is not a groundbreaking proposition. However, it is a proposition nascent enough that significant gaps exist in our understanding of Latin@ public opinion and voting behavior.

One cause of this is that research on Latin@ public opinion has focused mainly on domestic policy issues such as abortion, education and immigration and not on matters of foreign affairs. To address this gap in the literature we use data from the Pew Hispanic Center to examine Latin@ public opinion on matters of foreign affairs, specifically their attitudes on the War in Iraq and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Our analysis of Latin@ opinion on these two issues focuses on the influence of two key factors: religion and country of origin. We begin with a general review of Latin@ public opinion research and then discuss the specific influence of religion and country of origin on Latin@ public opinion and political behavior. From there we will present our hypotheses and discuss the results from a series of logistic regression models assessing the factors influencing Latin@ opinion on the War in Iraq and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We conclude the paper with a discussion of the implications of our results for the 2012 presidential election.

## 1. LATIN@ PUBLIC OPINION, RELIGION & FOREIGN POLICY

In the introduction to his edited volume, *Ignored Voices: Public Opinion Polls and the Latino Community*, de la Garza (1987) mentions the 1980s as the “Decade of the Hispanic” and highlights the more significant role Hispanics were playing in politics and the greater level of attention they were receiving from both major political parties. At the same time, this work highlights the difficulties in measuring Latin@ public opinion as well as the limited attention paid to the data that exists. Further, Uhlaner and Garcia posit that prior to 1990 dedicating a book chapter to the topic of Latin@/a public opinion would have been impossible given the lack of data. Fast-forward 20 years and much remains to be examined regarding the sources of Latin@ public opinion; as evidenced by the misrepresentation of the Latin@ vote in the 2004 and 2010 national exit polls (Segura and Barreto). Therefore, continuing to examine Latin@ public opinion is paramount to the study of American politics and democracy in general because as de la Garza notes and Leal reiterates, given the importance of polls in influencing candidate choice and issue positions ignoring Latin@ opinion could be characterized as disenfranchisement.

Despite this continuing problem in measuring Latin@ public opinion, starting with de la Garza’s edited volume, a great deal of scholarship has examined the area and

provided some insight. For example, early work by Cain and Kiewiet find that Latin@s were more likely to support bilingual education and amnesty for undocumented immigrants. Further, early literature and recent election results demonstrate that Latin@s are more likely to identify themselves as Democrats and tend to support the Democratic Party in presidential elections more than Republicans (Cain, Kiewiet, and Uhlaner; Uhlaner and Garcia). In regards to ideology, Leal points out that when it comes to ideological self-identification, some polls have found Mexican Americans more likely to identify themselves as conservative rather than liberal.<sup>2</sup> The source of what appears to be an anomaly is the more conservative positions held by many Latin@s on social issues as compared to economic or social welfare issues. For example, using 1999 data from the National Survey of Latinos in America Leal found that Latinos were less supportive of abortion rights and assisted suicide than Anglos but favored government provided health insurance and a larger government more than Anglos. Overall, however he found that the issue positions held by Latinos including less support of the death penalty and more government regulation of HMOs were more likely to be characterized as liberal which are findings that have been corroborated by other scholarship such as Garcia Bedolla and Lavariega Monforti (2009).

In returning to Leal's 2007 work he also addresses the notion that Latin@ public opinion is not monolithic. While it is common in the U.S. to use pan-ethnic terms such as Hispanic or Latino, the people who make up this demographic have varying backgrounds and countries of origin. A burgeoning field of research addresses this issue of the limitations of pan-ethnicity and how country of origin and associated factors such as nativity, English language ability, length of time in the United States and race can lead to the identification of varied political beliefs and behaviors among people that would be collectively identified as Hispanic or Latin@ (Lavariega Monforti 2006). In this regard, Leal (38) disaggregates policy issues by country of origin and finds divergent opinions on a variety of issues but states that, "No one group is the most conservative or the most liberal across the items." On abortion for instance 36 percent of Mexican Americans supported abortion rights while 67% of Puerto Ricans did. Cuban Americans were also the most supportive of the death penalty, assisted suicide and were the only national origin group to identify more as Republicans than Democrats.

These findings clearly demonstrate that country of origin matters in measuring Latin@ public opinion as compared to simply using panethnic identifiers in public opinion research but this does not mean that Latin@s do not hold shared experiences which serve to influence the opinions they hold regardless of their country of origin. For example, Lavariega Monforti and Sanchez find that the belief that discrimination is a significant

problem for Latin@s creates a group consciousness no matter one's country of origin, especially for those individuals whose dominant language is Spanish and have been in the United States for shorter periods of time. Sanchez also finds that this group consciousness can serve to influence public opinion on issues that are salient to Latin@s as a whole. Specifically, he finds that Latin@ opinion on bilingual education and immigration are influenced by the group consciousness which is created by the perceived discrimination felt by the Latin@ community. Branton examines the issue of acculturation and policy positions and found that even after controlling for country of origin, Latin@s who were more acculturated (as measured by generational status and language competency) were less supportive of increased immigration. Further, she found that acculturation influenced policies that were not specific to Latin@s as acculturated Latin@s were less supportive of more government spending, affirmative action and government provision of services. Finally in bringing our issue of interest foreign affairs together with country of origin effects, research has shown that one's partisanship is influenced by foreign policy towards their home country. Uhlaner and Garcia find that, Puerto Ricans, Mexican Americans and Cuban Americans who are interested in the politics of their countries are more likely to be Republicans than their co-ethnic counterparts. This was especially true for Puerto Ricans who cared about statehood and Cuban Americans who did not want the U.S. engaged in diplomatic relations with Cuba. Recent work finds that the opinion of Cuban Americans in Miami-Dade on the issue of Cuba is shifting, and that foreign policy including U.S. involvement in the Middle East ranks high on their list of the most important issues facing the nation (Lavariega Monforti 2010).

Much of the more recent literature has moved to focus on issue-specific public opinion and identifying the factors that influence these particular policy areas rather than focusing on the myriad factors that influence overall public opinion. Religion has taken on a primary role in this type of analysis because of its pervasive effect on political attitudes and behavior (Pew Hispanic Center). Among Latin@s in the United States, less than ten percent do not identify with any religion and more than two-thirds identify themselves as Roman Catholic (Pew Hispanic Center). Further, the Catholic Church — through the Pope — does not shy away from taking clear policy stances on everything from abortion to military action. Additionally, the next largest group (approximately 15 percent) of affiliated Latin@s identify themselves as born-again or evangelical Protestants. This group of religious social conservatives has also asserted itself on a variety of policy issues which means that over 80% of Latin@s identify with a religion that takes an active advocacy role on issues of government and politics. In just one example, Espinosa found that religious leaders in Hispanic communities used religious

rhetoric and teachings to help mobilize political activity against House Bill HR 4437 in 2006 which sought to criminalize undocumented immigrants.

Further, research has shown that the effect of religion on public opinion and political behavior can operate in a multitude of ways. Jones Correa and Leal find that regardless of religious affiliation Latin@s who participate in church more frequently demonstrate greater levels of political participation. Martini also finds that greater levels of religiosity also lead to a greater belief in and support for church involvement in politics. There is also a body of research which demonstrates how religious denominations do influence public opinion. Ellison, Echevarria and Smith for example examine Latin@ opinion on abortion specifically through the lens of religion and find that committed Protestant Latin@s took stronger positions against abortion than did Catholic Latin@s. In a similarly executed study on the issue of same-sex marriage, Ellison, Acevedo and Ramos-Wada find that evangelical Protestant Latin@s opposed same-sex marriage more vehemently than did Catholic Latin@s. Several other studies have examined the role of religion in political behavior or public opinion. Kelly and Morgan Kelly found that evangelical Protestant Latin@s tended to identify with the Republican Party, and Catholic Latin@s identified most with the Democratic Party; those Latin@s who were unaffiliated or members of mainline Protestant denominations were the most likely to identify themselves as Democrats.

Having demonstrated the connection between religiosity and religious beliefs with public opinion and political behavior, we make our case as to why religion may be important in examining opinion on foreign affairs. First, in matters of life and death, which one can easily make the case applies to war, churches, especially the Catholic Church have been open about their positions. As just one example which applies to our study, both Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI have spoken out against the War in Iraq. Further, many foreign military and political conflicts to which the United States must reply either militarily or diplomatically are religious in nature. This principle applies to our research as one of central conflicts in post-war Iraq revolved around the Sunni and Shi'a denominations of Islam and of course, at the heart of the Israel-Palestinian conflict is creating a nation-state for Palestinians from sacred religious land now belonging to Israel (which was created to protect a religious minority). Therefore, we expect that foreign policy opinions as measured by opinions on the War in Iraq and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will be influenced by religiosity and/or religious beliefs given the salience of religion in these conflicts.

In moving specifically to foreign policy, the connection between Latin@ opinion, religion and country of origin may seem tenuous at first. One of the reasons,

we have seen greater attention paid to social issues, is the perceived catch-22 faced by Latin@s in that in general, their positions on social or moral issues lend themselves to the Republican Party while their positions on economic issues and social welfare align more closely with the Democratic Party (Lavariega Monforti and Garcia Bedolla). While that predicament does not necessarily apply to foreign policy, there are multiple reasons why understanding Latin@ opinion on foreign policy is vital moving forward. First, as most students learn in introductory U.S. government courses, the president is endowed with the most independent powers when it comes to foreign and military affairs. The president's ability to enact executive agreements, their role as commander-in-chief and the information asymmetry between them and Congress on national intelligence creates a scenario where evaluating the president on foreign policy is necessary to have a complete picture of their job performance and thus should play a significant role in candidate evaluation and presidential approval polls.

In looking at the 2012 presidential contest, volatile gas prices due to the possibility of Israel attacking Iran over Iran's developing nuclear program, and unrest in both Syria and Egypt have all been a source of campaign rhetoric and none of these situations appear to be headed to a swift resolution before the November election. Further, as the United States and Israel have publicly disagreed over the best course of action in dealing with Iran, how Latin@ voters view Israel as related to their conflict with the Palestinians may help explain how they view the current strife in the Middle East and how this may influence their voting behavior in the upcoming election (especially in important purple states like Florida). Overall then, given Latin@ population increases and the probable saliency of events in the Middle East region for the 2012 election, understanding Latin@ opinions on foreign affairs is necessary to understand how they evaluate presidents and vote for presidential candidates.

When it comes to policy knowledge and an informed electorate on these kinds of issues, there are immediate red flags raised. Powlick and Katz for example find that foreign policy issue positions are often latent and opinions on these issues arise only after being made salient by the media. In applying this to our study, we have two salient policies in the form of Iraq as prior to the economic recession in 2008; Iraq was among the top issues in voters' minds and the ever present Israel-Palestinian conflict. The literature shows that informed Latin@ voters use issue positions when voting and that the foreign policy positions of presidential candidates are in fact used by voters. Using National Election Study (NES) data, Aldrich, Sullivan and Borgida find that the electorate was able to distinguish between the foreign policy issue positions of presidential candidates, specifically when candidates made this information accessible

in their campaign messages. The authors find that the salience of foreign policy and the difference between candidates' foreign policy positions (or the lack thereof) contribute to the influence of foreign policy opinions on voting. Further, using the 2000 Tomas Rivera Institute pre-election poll Nicholson, Pantoja & Segura (259) find that informed Latin@s rely on issue positions to make their voting decisions as compared less-informed Latin@s who may rely more on "symbolism and long-standing partisan preferences." Taking these two studies together presents a strong case for why Latin@s can and will use foreign policy issue positions to make their voting decisions and necessitates scholars having a greater understanding of Latin@ public opinion in this area as we approach the 2012 presidential election.

## 2. DATA, METHODS AND HYPOTHESES

To examine Latin@ opinion on foreign affairs we analyze survey data from the Pew Hispanic Center and Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. The project entitled *Changing Faiths: Latinos and the Transformation of American Religion* consists of over 4,600 respondents, constituting one of the largest data collection efforts conducted on this subject (4,016 of whom were Latino)<sup>3</sup>, who were questioned on their religious beliefs, practices and their political beliefs and issue positions (Pew Hispanic Center 2007). The survey was conducted from August to October of 2006 and used a Computer Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI) system to conduct the phone interviews, which were offered in English and Spanish. As this survey focused on Latin@s and the issue of religion it provides a wealth of information to use in assessing whether the influence of religion extends beyond social and moral issues. The question which serves as our first dependent variable is whether the respondent believed that using force in Iraq was the right choice and our second dependent variable comes from a question asking respondents if they sympathize more with Israel or the Palestinians in their conflict. As both variables are dichotomous, we employ a logistic regression model to analyze the factors influencing the responses to the two questions.

Given the size of the sample and its preponderance of Latin@s rather than include country of origin as an independent variable, we estimated four logistic regression models for each question by disaggregating our sample into four sub-samples of those respondents who identified themselves as being of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban and Dominican descent. Our other predicting variable of interest, religion is measured through a series of religious opinion and identification questions. These questions include whether the respondent believes the church should stay out of politics, whether religion influences their political views, how important religion is to them, how

often they attend church and whether they identify themselves as catholic, protestant or born again. We include a series of control variables to account for the other factors that could influence the respondents' issue positions. These control variables include gender, language spoken by the respondent, veteran status, income, political ideology, race, education, age, and whether they believe discrimination is still a problem for Latin@s (see appendix for question wording and coding).

Generally speaking, we hypothesize that Latin@s who are more religious will be more likely to think the U.S.'s decision in Iraq was right and sympathize with Israel. Specifically, we posit that Latin@s who attend church more frequently, believe religion is important in their lives, say that religion influences their politics, that churches should express political views and who are born-again Christians, are more likely to think the U.S. made the right decision and support the position of Israel in their conflict with the Palestinians. Previous work that examined the role of religion in foreign policy opinions for the general population found that evangelical Christians were more likely to support the War in Iraq and Israel in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Baumgartner et al.) which helps form the basis of this hypothesis.

Moving to the effects of country-origin yields a more complex picture. We hypothesize that the significant variables will differ across the models on both questions because, as previous work has demonstrated, each group has experienced a different political socialization, home country political history, and immigration/incorporation experience in the U.S. (Lavariega Monforti and Garcia Bedolla). There are some hypotheses we can make with confidence, such as ideology being a significant factor in predicting support for the war in Iraq and for Israel in the model of Cuban Americans given their greater level of identification with the Republican Party. However, recent analyses of the relationship between the Latin@ and Jewish community provides evidence that despite Israel being considered a staunch ally of the United States, support for Israel may not be as cut and dry among Latin@s. In discussing why the Latin@ and Jewish community should be supportive of one another, Dennis Sasso (np) states, "Both groups see themselves as diaspora communities. Both have histories of immigration, discrimination and negative stereotyping. Both place high value on family, education and religion-cultural traditions." However, in a Guest Commentary for the National Institute of Latino Policy, Natasha Lycia Ora Bannan discusses reasons Latin@s could sympathize with Palestinians due to shared experiences in the battle for human and political rights. She explains that many nations in the Caribbean, South and Central America have recognized Palestinian statehood and Puerto Ricans protesting bomb testing in Vieques compared their experience to that of the Palestinians. As such, we expect to find varied effects of the independent variables across the Israel-Palestine models.

### 3. RESULTS

In looking at the descriptive statistics, we find that approximately 35% of Mexican-origin and Puerto Rican respondents thought the War in Iraq was the right decision, however only 26% of Dominican-origin respondents felt this way. In line with our hypothesis, we found that 55% of Cuban-origin respondents supported the decision. In our first logistic regression model (see Table 1), we see diverse results across country-of-origin groups. For Mexican-origin respondents there are six statistically significant predictors: language, discrimination, Protestant, ideology, household income and education. All of the coefficients are in the expected direction and provided some support for our hypotheses. Mexican-origin respondents who are Spanish-speaking, believe that discrimination is not a problem, and are Protestant, conservative, in a relatively higher household income bracket, and have relatively less education are likely to think that the U.S. made the right decision regarding the war in Iraq. Protestantism seems to have the largest marginal change; as a hypothetical respondent moves from non-Protestant to Protestant she is .21 more likely to say that the U.S. made the right decision regarding the war in Iraq. However, language and education also have sizeable marginal effects, .20 and -.13, respectively.

For Puerto Rican respondents, there are five statistically significant variables: discrimination, importance of religion, ideology, age, and race<sup>4</sup>; sharing only discrimination in common with Mexican-origin respondents. Puerto Ricans who believe discrimination is not a problem, that religion is relatively important, are younger, more conservative, and do not identify as racially black are likely to think that the U.S. made the right decision regarding the war. The direction of these relationships comport with expectations, with the exception of age. It is curious that relatively younger Puerto Ricans are supportive of the war in Iraq, especially given the general trend in society that youth are anti-war. While there is no clear explanation, there are several hypotheses one could make for this finding including generational effects such as being more supportive of the military given the increasing numbers of enlisted Hispanics. Nevertheless, it is essential to point out that just as is the case for Mexican-origin respondents, the religion/religiosity variable has one of the strongest impacts for Puerto Rican respondents. As a hypothetical Puerto Rican moves from saying religion is not very important, she is .34 more likely to say the U.S. made the right decision regarding the war. Identifying as racially black has a larger effect, at -.37, while political ideology and discrimination, also have substantial impacts -.42 and -.36, respectively. Race and feelings of alienation based on race and ethnicity are essential to understanding Puerto Rican opinion regarding U.S. action in Iraq.

**Table 1:** Logit Analysis of Opinions of the Iraq War by Country of Origin

|                        | Mexican Origin     |                            | Puerto Rican       |                            | Cuban Origin       |                            |
|------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------|
|                        | Coefficient (S.E.) | Predict Prob. <sup>@</sup> | Coefficient (S.E.) | Predict Prob. <sup>@</sup> | Coefficient (S.E.) | Predict Prob. <sup>@</sup> |
| Female                 | .01 (.13)          |                            | -.42 (.41)         |                            | .42 (.74)          |                            |
| Language               | .47*** (.12)       | .20                        | -.51 (.36)         |                            | .01 (.9)           |                            |
| Discrimination         | -.21* (.10)        | -.08                       | -.85** (.31)       | -.15                       | -.36 (.5)          |                            |
| Political Church       | .02 (.13)          |                            | .06 (.21)          |                            | -.06 (.37)         |                            |
| Religious Influence    | .13 (.09)          |                            | .048 (.2)          |                            | .32 (.3)           |                            |
| Attendance             | .02 (.05)          |                            | .04 (.16)          |                            | .01 (.24)          |                            |
| Importance of Religion | .15 (.13)          |                            | .85+ (.479)        | .34                        | .34 (.54)          |                            |
| Catholic               | .04 (.38)          |                            | 1.34 (1.22)        |                            | 2.70 (2.89)        |                            |
| Protestant             | .96* (.4)          | .20                        | 1.11 (1.27)        |                            | 2.15 (3.03)        |                            |
| Born Again             | .09 (.15)          |                            | .12 (.5)           |                            | -1.15 (.81)        |                            |
| Veteran                | .00 (.25)          |                            | -.29 (.82)         |                            | 1.20 (2.44)        |                            |
| Income                 | 0.3* (0.1)         | .15                        | -.00 (.03)         |                            | .02 (.05)          |                            |
| Nativity               | .09 (.20)          |                            | -2.38 (2.44)       |                            | 2.23+ (1.33)       | -.07                       |
| Ideology               | -.17** (.07)       | -.12                       | -.47* (.21)        | -.42                       | -.75* (.38)        | -.41                       |
| Education              | -.38* (.10)        | -.13                       | -.28 (.29)         |                            | .44 (.52)          |                            |
| Age                    | -.05 (.06)         |                            | -.51* (.19)        | -.47                       | .60+ (.36)         | -.30                       |
| Black                  | --                 |                            | -2.08* (.80)       | -.37                       | _#                 |                            |
| Constant               | -.61 (.61)         |                            | 5.10 (3.14)        |                            | -4.34 (4.11)       |                            |
| N/Log likelihood       | 690/-685.16        |                            | 187/-86.81         |                            | 160/-30.20         |                            |

Nota de tabla: + p < .10, \*p < .05, \*\* p < .001, \*\*\* p < .000.

Dominican-origin respondents are excluded because the sample size drops to only 34 when using these variables.<sup>#</sup> Omitted; predicts success perfectly.<sup>@</sup> Represents the change in probability as the independent variable moves from its minimum to maximum value holding all other variables at their median.

For Cuban-origin respondents, three variables approach traditional levels of statistical significance: ideology, nativity, and age. In this model, Cubans who are U.S.-born, conservative, and older are likely to think that the U.S. made the right decision regarding the war. The direction of these relationships comport with expectations, with the exception that no religious variable is significant in this model. It appears that for Cuban-origin respondents, life experiences and ideology drive opinions on the war despite the strong presence of religion in their lives. Overall, in terms of the role of religion and religiosity in predicting Latin@ attitudes about U.S. action in Iraq, being a Protestant is key for those of Mexican origin, whereas religion being relatively important is significant for Puerto Ricans.

On the question of Israel and the Palestinians, we again see diversity in our descriptive statistics. As expected more Cuban-origin respondents supported Israel (57%) than any other group. Forty-nine percent of Puerto Ricans respondents supported Israel followed by Mexican-origin respondents (47%) and Dominicans (29%). In our next set of logistic regression models we found that for Mexican-origin respondents, being female, religion having relatively more influence on one's politics, being a Protestant, foreign-born, and relatively conservative are significant predictors of support for Israel in the Israel/Palestine dispute (see Table 2). All of the coefficients for the substantive variables are in the expected direction. However, we find that women are .03 more likely than men to support Israel; even though previous work has shown women to be less hawkish than men generally (Conover and Sapiro). This relatively small finding may be explained by informal, female-oriented Hispanic-Jewish coalitions and interactions in the United States. There has been some outreach on behalf of Jewish women's and community organizations, and the two communities share a common history of immigration and have shared beliefs in the area of civil rights and education (The American Jewish Committee 2002).<sup>5</sup> Ideology clearly has the largest impact on Mexican-origin respondents' views of the Israel/Palestinian dispute (-.15), followed by being foreign born and Protestant (-.08 and .07, respectively). In comparison then, religion/religiosity is less important for the Mexican-origin population here as opposed to on the question of Iraq. This demonstrates that opinion formation in this community vary as they move from one specific foreign policy issue to another.

In the model for the Puerto Rican subsample, we find three statistically significant variables in predicting support for Israel: not being a born-again Christian, being conservative, and relatively less educated. Clearly, being ideologically conservative has the largest magnitude of change (.33), signifying that as for Mexican-origin respondents, being relatively more conservative leads to a greater likelihood of support for Israel. Further, those Puerto Rican respondents who are not born again Christians

are -.03 less likely than those who identify themselves as born-again Christians to support Israel over the Palestinians. What we see here is Puerto Ricans demonstrating attitudes similar to the general populace in that not being a born-again Christian combined with more liberal political views and greater education may lead one to have a greater cognizance of the complexities surrounding the Israel/Palestine conflict thus not necessarily showing sympathy towards Israel.

**Table 2:** Logit Analysis of Opinions of the Israel/Palestinian Dispute by Country of Origin<sup>^</sup>

|                           | Mexican Origin           |                                       | Puerto Rican          |                                       |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------------|
|                           | Coefficient<br>(S.E.)    | Predicted<br>Probability <sup>@</sup> | Coefficient<br>(S.E.) | Predicted<br>Probability <sup>@</sup> |
| Female                    | .35 <sup>+</sup><br>(.2) | .03                                   | .02<br>(.57)          |                                       |
| Language                  | -.27<br>(.18)            |                                       | -.91<br>(.60)         |                                       |
| Discrimination            | -.16<br>(.15)            |                                       | -.40<br>(.44)         |                                       |
| Political Church          | .06<br>(.11)             |                                       | -.51<br>(.33)         |                                       |
| Religious Influence       | .21*<br>(.10)            | .06                                   | .31<br>(.26)          |                                       |
| Attendance                | .05<br>(.07)             |                                       | -.02<br>(.25)         |                                       |
| Importance of<br>Religion | .04<br>(.17)             |                                       | -.1<br>(.71)          |                                       |
| Catholic                  | -.19<br>(.64)            |                                       | -1.25<br>(1.39)       |                                       |
| Protestant                | 1.51*<br>(.72)           | .07                                   | 1.50<br>(1.59)        |                                       |
| Born Again                | -.28<br>(.21)            |                                       | -1.39*<br>(.72)       | -.03                                  |
| Veteran                   | .29<br>(.35)             |                                       | -1.09<br>(.97)        |                                       |
| Income                    | .04<br>(.02)             |                                       | .04<br>(.04)          |                                       |
| Nativity                  | -.8**<br>(.27)           | -.09                                  | --#                   |                                       |

|                  |                   |       |                  |       |
|------------------|-------------------|-------|------------------|-------|
| Ideology         | -0.45***<br>(.10) | -0.15 | -0.9*<br>(.32)   | -0.33 |
| Education        | -0.02<br>(.14)    |       | -0.95*<br>(.49)  | -0.8  |
| Age              | 0.04<br>(.08)     |       | -0.16<br>(.28)   |       |
| Black            | --                |       | 0.13<br>(.89)    |       |
| Constant         | 2.4*<br>(.95)     |       | 10.96*<br>(3.38) |       |
| N/Log likelihood | 1023/ -383.34     |       | 179/ -49.10      |       |

**Nota de tabla:** +  $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\*\*  $p < .000$ . ^Cuban and Dominican origin respondents are excluded because each sample, respectively, is less than 100. # Omitted; predicts success perfectly. @ Represents the change in probability as the independent variable moves from its minimum to maximum value holding all other variables at their median.

#### 4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This research began with the question, of what impact, if any, do country of origin, religion and religiosity have on foreign policy opinion formation in Latin@ communities. We find that both factors do have an impact, but the findings provide mixed support for our hypotheses. As found in previous research, Protestantism and not Catholicism is the driving force behind the effect that religious beliefs have on policy opinions whether foreign policy or otherwise (Ellison, Echevarria and Smith 2005). This is essential to understand, as we see the number of Protestant Latin@s growing over time; the increase is substantial from the 1970s to the 1990s and as we move from first to third generation U.S. citizens (Hunt). Further, we see that in accordance with the research discussed previously on pan-ethnicity, religion plays varied roles in the policy opinions of Latin@s of different heritage. In looking at the Iraq question, we see that Protestantism and how important they view religion and whether they are born again Christians as the religious factors that most influenced opinion for those of Mexican-origin, and Puerto Rican heritage respectively. In the question of the Israel-Palestinian conflict, we again see different aspects of religion being influential as Protestantism was a significant predictor for those of Mexican-origin but it was born-again Christianity status that was influential for Puerto Ricans. We also find differences across country of origin subgroups in the influence of control variables such as race, education, income, ideology and gender. As well, we see that opinions on foreign affairs cannot be classified according to any specific ideology or worldview as we transition from one issue to another. Overall then when it comes to Latin@ opinions on foreign

affairs we see a complexity that defies simple, traditional stereotypes about Latin@s as a whole.

The question now becomes why this matters for the upcoming election. As discussed previously, the Latin@ vote will be crucial in 2012 as many swing states including Florida, Nevada and Colorado have significant Latin@ populations. The Latin@ vote in Florida may be especially interesting as it relates to foreign affairs as while the Cuban-origin population has made up the majority of the state's Latin@ population for decades, recently we have since a sharp rise in the number of Dominicans moving to the state and these two groups possessed the most polarized positions in this survey. However, other swing states such as Pennsylvania for example saw most of its population growth come from Latin@s meaning that in a relatively close race there, Latin@s could play a decisive role. Foreign policy could be pivotal in Latin@ voting decisions given the newfound salience of foreign issues and the ideological gridlock associated with moral and economic issues. For example, while voters may not be happy with the health of the economy, one could theorize that the Democrats' inability to solve a problem created under a Republican administration would make it difficult to base one's voting decision on the economic platforms of either candidate. Here is where foreign policy, under the ever present discussion of globalization, could enter into one's voting calculus. Can one candidate's platform stem further escalation of hostilities in the Middle East to keep gas prices stable or work to push Europe towards economic stability? Yet another reason why foreign policy may matter to Latin@ voters is the dramatic increase over the last 20 years in the number of enlisted Latin@ men and women in the U.S. military. As enlistments continue to grow, so should the influence of foreign affairs in their voting decision. Therefore, in an election where the candidate's and in many cases the voter's positions on health care and abortion are entrenched, foreign policy is an area where Latin@ voters could look to make their voting decisions.

Based on our results, we strongly believe this line of research deserves greater study. The primary barrier to this type of research is the lack of Latin@-specific (or data with oversamples) public opinion studies which ask a variety of questions on foreign policy. Many polls pose questions on foreign policy and we see an increasing number of polls targeting the Latin@ population regarding domestic policy issues, but few polls which put both together. In our analysis here of only two questions we find a wealth of information in how religion, country of origin and ideology influence Latin@ public opinion on foreign affairs. As such, we should expect similar opinion divergence on other matters of foreign policy including trade policy, the recent rise of democracy in North Africa, and nuclear proliferation, among others. Our findings here create a need for more

extensive polls of Latin@ opinion on matters of foreign policy, which will foster a greater understanding of Latin@ voting behavior in presidential elections.

## APPENDIX

| VARIABLE            | QUESTION  | CODING  |
|---------------------|---|---|
| Iraq                | Do you think the U.S. made the right decision or the wrong decision in using military force against Iraq?   | 0=wrong decision, 1=right decision  |
| Israel/Pal          | In the dispute between Israel and the Palestinians, which side do you sympathize with more, Israel or the Palestinians?   | 0=Palestinians, 1=Israel  |
| Female              | Gender?   | 0=male, 1=female  |
| Language            | Recode using questions 59/60/61/62 about language ability   | 0= Spanish dominant, 1=bilingual, 2=English dominant  |
| Discrimination      | In general, do you think discrimination against (HISPANICS/LATINOS) is a major problem, minor problem, or not a problem in preventing (HISPANICS/LATINOS) in general from succeeding in America?  | 0=not a problem, 1=minor problem, 2=major problem   |
| Political Church    | In your opinion, should churches and other houses of worship keep out of political matters – or should they express their views on day-to-day social and political questions?   | 0=church should keep out of politics, 1= don't know, 2=church should express political views              |
| Religious Influence | Generally speaking, how important are your religious beliefs in influencing your political thinking? Would you say your religious beliefs are a very important influence on your political thinking, somewhat important, not too important or not at all important? | 0=not at all important, 1=not too important, 2=somewhat important, 3=very important                       |
| Attendance          | Aside from weddings and funerals how often do you attend religious services...more than once a week, once a week, once or twice a month, a few times a year, seldom, or never?  | 0=never, 1=seldom, 2= a few times a year, 3=once or twice a month, 4=once a week, 5=more than once a week |
| Impt of Religion    | How important would you say religion is in your own life – very important, fairly important, or not very important?   | 0=not very important, 1fairly important, 2=very important   |

|            |  |  |
|------------|--|--|
| Catholic   | What is your religion —Catholic, Evangelical or Protestant Christian, Jehovah’s Witness, Mormon, Jewish, Muslim, or an orthodox church such as the Greek or Russian Orthodox Church? | 0=no, 1=Catholic   |
| Protestant | What is your religion —Catholic, Evangelical or Protestant Christian, Jehovah’s Witness, Mormon, Jewish, Muslim, or an orthodox church such as the Greek or Russian Orthodox Church? | 0=no, 1=Protestant   |
| Born Again | Would you describe yourself as a “born-again” or evangelical Christian, or not?  | 0=no, 1=yes  |
| Veteran    | Are you yourself (or is your husband/wife) a veteran of the armed services?  | 0=no, 1=yes (self or family member vet or currently serving)               |
| Income     | Is your total annual household income from all sources, and before taxes:  | 1=less than \$5K -> 29= more than \$50K                                    |
| Nativity   | Were you born in the United States, the island of Puerto Rico or in another country?   | 0=foreign born, 1=US/PR born   |
| Ideology   | In general, would you describe your political views as...?   | 4=very liberal, 3=liberal, 2=moderate, 1=conservative, 0=very conservative |
| Education  | What is the last grade or class that you completed in school?  | 1=less than high school, 2=High school grad/GED, 3=beyond hs               |
| Age        | What is your age?  | 1=18 – 29,2=30 – 39, 3=40 – 54, 4=55 – 64, 5=65+                           |
| Black      | What race do you consider yourself to be? White, black or African-American, Asian, or some other race?   | 0=non-Black, 1=Black   |

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Latin@ will be used in this paper as gender neutral reference to Latinos and Latinas.

<sup>2</sup> For other work on Latin@ ideology also see Alvarez and Garcia Bedolla 2003.

<sup>3</sup> The sample included over samples of the non-Mexican countries of origin so that we're able to look at differences among Hispanics who come from countries other than Mexico.

<sup>4</sup> The Black variable is included in analyses for Caribbean populations only, based on the racial diversity therein.

<sup>5</sup> For more see: [http://www.jewishjournal.com/articles/item/forging\\_a\\_common\\_future\\_19981030/](http://www.jewishjournal.com/articles/item/forging_a_common_future_19981030/)