

Spring 5-4-2015

Linking Language to Latino Turnout

Alexander C. Ervin

Bowling Green State University, acervin@bgsu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/honorsprojects>



Part of the [American Politics Commons](#), and the [Spanish Linguistics Commons](#)

Repository Citation

Ervin, Alexander C., "Linking Language to Latino Turnout" (2015). *Honors Projects*. 191.
<https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/honorsprojects/191>

This work is brought to you for free and open access by the Honors College at ScholarWorks@BGSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Projects by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@BGSU.

Linking Language to Latino Turnout

Assessing the Impacts of Spanish-Language Electoral Advertisements on Latino Voting Behavior

Alexander C. Ervin

Submitted to the University Honors College at Bowling Green State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with University Honors

May 4, 2015

Advisors: Nicole Kalaf-Hughes, Ph.D., Department of Political Science
Amy Robinson, Ph.D., Department of Romance and Classical Studies
Marc Simon, Ph.D., Department of Political Science

Linking Language to Latino Turnout

Alexander C. Ervin

ABSTRACT

After Latino-Americans demonstrated their power in the 2012 presidential election, securing increased minority support at the polls has become a primary goal for both major U.S. political parties. A reliable bloc of Latino voters on one's side could mean more wins, yet Latinos have a low voter turnout rate. This paper explores how to increase Latino turnout and argues that the use of the Spanish language in electoral advertising will have a positive effect and actually raise the rate of Latino participation. By comparing statewide Latino turnout data during both the 2002 midterm elections and the 2008 presidential election, I find states with a sizable amount of Spanish-language get-out-the-vote messages do see increased rates of Latino voter turnout even when controlling for other variables, suggesting Spanish-language advertising could possibly be a useful supplemental tool in future political campaigns.

Immediately after the Republican Party's decisive defeat in the 2012 presidential election, GOP leaders scrambled for answers as to what went wrong. A relatively unpopular Democratic incumbent presiding over high unemployment rates and a mediocre economic recovery had managed to survive a brutal and unfathomably expensive campaign against him and his record; with the odds seemingly stacked against him, the GOP had not expected to lose. As demographic data from the election trickled in, however, it became clear that the political power of one particular voting group had been severely underestimated by both sides, a group that ended up having what was arguably the most influential role in the result of the presidential election: Latino-Americans.

A record 11.2 million Latino-Americans, or simply Latinos, voted in the 2012 presidential election, and did so overwhelmingly in favor of Barack Obama, who received 71% of their votes

(Lopez and Taylor 2012). This lopsided support proved crucial in turning important swing states like Colorado, New Mexico, and Florida blue, and as Clarissa Martinez De Castro, a top official of the Hispanic group National Council of La Raza, succinctly put it: “Latino voters confirmed unequivocally that the road to the White House passes through Latino neighborhoods” (Preston and Santos 2012). Following this election it became evident that increased Latino outreach and mobilization would be vital in future campaigns by both parties. However, Latinos have historically had some of the worst turnout rates of any demographic group in the nation, and 2012 was no exception, as only 48% of eligible voters made it to the voting booth on Election Day (Lopez and Gonzalez-Barrera 2012). With over half of the demographic still “up for grabs,” getting even part of that 52% on one side or the other can potentially alter the national political landscape even further. This, of course, then leads to one of the greatest questions still baffling scholars, politicians, and pundits today: how exactly does one go about getting more Latino voters to the polls?

Of course, the most widely-used (and perhaps the most widely-hated) method politicians currently use to attract voters is through media advertisements, usually by television or radio. While these advertisements have been, historically, predominantly broadcasted in English, a growing number has actually been transmitted in Spanish (Goldstein 2005) in a not-so-subtle attempt to reach America’s primary Spanish-speakers and get them to the polls. These people, of course, are Latinos, and it is becoming increasingly obvious that political campaigns are viewing Spanish-language advertisements as a viable possibility for increasing Latino turnout. The true question, then, is now that many Latinos are leaving the American Southwest, is Spanish-language advertising a viable mobilization option for campaigns in all parts of the country?

Naturally, there is considerable disagreement within the political community as to whether these advertisements are actually worth the time and money put into them. One theory argues that Spanish-language advertising is no more effective at mobilizing voters than English advertising—those who were not planning on voting are not going to magically change their minds just because they saw and heard an ad in Spanish (de la Garza and DeSipio 1997; Hopkins 2011, Binder et al. 2013; Bueker 2013). Conversely, another suggests both the deep-rooted cultural history and daily presence of the Spanish-language in many Latino-Americans’ lives could cause advertisements in Spanish to be especially effective in mobilizing their target audience (Barreto et al. 2011; Panagopoulos and Green 2011; Oberholzer-Gee and Waldfogel 2009).

A gentler theory falls somewhere in-between, asserting Spanish-language ads can serve as a helpful tool in mobilizing Latinos but are far from the ultimate solution to campaign organizers’ woes (Abrajano and Panagopoulos 2011; Abrajano 2010; Defrancesco Soto and Merolla 2006). This moderate argument seems to be the most reasonable and logical, as a limited correlation between ad language and turnout is more likely than either extreme. Using Spanish probably cannot hurt, but it seems rather naïve to put a substantial amount of faith in simply replacing “vote” with “voto.”

As many elections, most recently and notably the 2000 presidential one, have been decided by a very small number of voters living in key areas, even a limited impact on Latino turnout could be worth using to one’s advantage. To see just how limited the effect of advertising in Spanish actually is, however, I will compare the overall presence of Spanish-language electoral

advertisements to the level of Latino voter turnout in each state during the 2002 midterm elections and the 2008 presidential election cycle, expecting to find a slight, yet positive, correlation between the two variables. The differences between turnout during midterm and presidential election cycles will be an interesting point of comparison, as will the variation in ad prevalence during different cycles. While the research does take place on a rather large scale and there are certainly other factors that could be mobilizing Latinos along with the presence of these ads, a simple correlation could be enough to indicate that the topic truly is deserving of closer examination.

For political scientists, for instance, this question of linkage between language and participation could lead to more knowledge about how to increase voter turnout among all multilingual Americans, not just Latinos. Perhaps using Chinese, Japanese, and Korean in campaigns in areas heavily populated by Asian-American would make a difference, too. From this information, policymakers could learn to use languages to their advantage when championing a particular cause, whether it is an election, a policy, or an issue where they need as much support from the Latino community as possible. It could potentially change the appearance of the entire political landscape in areas heavily populated by Latinos, with outreach strategies being drastically rethought and restructured to incorporate all sorts of Spanish-language media in order to win over those who are arguably the most hotly contested voters available in the country.

Instead of Spanish-speakers getting their information from a filtered-down English-language translation or from a friend who might misinterpret or twist the words, the policymakers could rally the Latinos to their side by speaking to them directly in a Spanish-language advertisement. And fear of electoral repercussions could lead to more policy changes; a senator who knows that

the unified Latino bloc back home can and will take him out of office if he misrepresents them will likely vote and make policy a little differently than one who can count on poor oppositional voter turnout.

As for the general population, this issue should be of interest because it could drastically change the way we view and experience the election season. What if suddenly every third political ad on television was in Spanish? Would it “alienate” the English-speaking population and lead them to retaliate? Would it gradually become so common that after enough time, nobody would give it a second thought? Or would it impress the general population by showcasing the candidate’s desire to reach out to all Americans, not just English-speaking ones?

If there truly is a positive and significant relationship, the power of the Latino bloc could become practically unstoppable as more and more Spanish-speaking Latinos were motivated to become politically active. In fact, we could very well have some more leaders who try to actively serve the interests of all of their constituents, including Latinos, throughout their whole political career instead of selling out to the highest bidder. Essentially, having a positive connection exist between Spanish-language usage in campaigns and Latino voter turnout could potentially change the way American elections work as a whole, and that is a change that will affect every American, not just Latino ones.

Getting Latinos to the Polls: Three Perspectives on whether Spanish-Language Electoral Advertising is Actually Worth the Effort

Increasing support at the polls from Latinos has recently been a high priority for leading members of both the Republican and Democratic parties. Playing off of the bilingualism of many Latinos, one suggested method that has been getting some attention would increase the use of Spanish in electoral advertising in order to get more Latinos to the voting booth. But does hearing and seeing Spanish-language ads actually result in an increased turnout rate among Latinos?

Some research has suggested face-to-face, interpersonal contact is the best way to mobilize Latinos (Binder et al. 2013; Barreto et al. 2011), while other studies point to co-ethnic Latino candidates as the “secret weapon” for increasing turnout (Barreto 2007). But these methods are costly, difficult to implement on a nationwide scale, and, in the case of Latino candidates, rather unpredictable and impractical. Instead, due to the staggering rates of bilingualism among the Latino American population (Abrajano and Panagopoulos 2011) and its widespread consumption and favorable view of Spanish-language media (Barreto et al. 2011; Panagopoulos and Green 2011), political campaigns have been eyeing Spanish-language electoral television advertisements. In fact, they have been doing more than eyeing them: the first campaign ad primarily featuring Michelle Obama in 2012, for instance, was targeted to Latino audiences and aired in Spanish in five swing states (Wheaton 2012). Ads can easily be translated into Spanish and aired in virtually any area in the country for an incredibly low cost-per-viewer price

(Panagopoulos and Green 2011), making them quite enticing to budget-conscious campaign staff looking for the best way to spend precious funds.

Of course, some scholars argue that simply airing commercials in Spanish encouraging Latinos to vote does not provide enough of an incentive for those who were not planning on voting to do so (de la Garza and DeSipio 1997; Hopkins 2011, Binder et al. 2013; Bueker 2013). Other scholars, however, argue “yes,” Spanish-language advertising does have a significant effect on voter turnout, believing the use of Spanish often provides valuable electoral information to those who may not have had access to it previously and mobilizes Latinos by appealing to a nearly universal ethnic trait (Barreto et al. 2011; Panagopoulos and Green 2011; Oberholzer-Gee and Waldfogel 2009). And still yet are those scholars who argue that Spanish-language advertising has a limited effect on turnout because they believe that exposure to Spanish-language get-out-the-vote campaigns may motivate some Latinos to vote, but with varying degrees of success; that is, it is not a “one-size-fits-all” solution (Abrajano and Panagopoulos 2011; Abrajano 2010; Defrancesco Soto and Merolla 2006).

It seems frankly illogical to believe Spanish-language electoral advertising has absolutely no effect at all on Latino turnout, as the first school attests (de la Garza and DeSipio 1997; Hopkins 2011, Binder et al. 2013; Bueker 2013). If English advertising works for English-speaking voters to some extent, it is reasonable to assume Spanish-language advertising would work for Spanish-speaking voters to some extent. Likewise, those who conclusively say “yes” in the second school seem overly optimistic about the impact on Latino turnout by Spanish-language advertising, especially when there has been a relatively small amount of research done on this

topic thus far (Barreto et al. 2011; Panagopoulos and Green 2011; Oberholzer-Gee and Waldfogel 2009). Whether the ads are actually worth their cost is somewhat unclear as well; while their study did find that Spanish-language advertising did boost Latino turnout, Barreto et al. (2011) actually admit that there are other methods of voter mobilization for Latinos that are far more effective, including co-ethnic candidates and door-to-door canvassing.

Instead, the third school of thought appears to be the most logical by positioning itself somewhere in the middle, leaning towards a limited positive correlation between Spanish-language electoral advertising and Latino turnout rather than taking a hardline stance on either side. These scholars assert that Spanish-language advertising may have its place in mobilization strategies, but it is hardly a universal solution (Abrajano and Panagopoulos 2011; Abrajano 2010; Defrancesco Soto and Merolla 2006). It is a reasonable approach, and though there is no real consensus on what “limited” actually means, it does not automatically imply “insignificant;” even a “limited” bump in Latino turnout due to Spanish-language advertising in close elections could sway the outcome.

Scholars in the first school of thought, those who say “no,” base their assertions on the apparent lack of importance that language alone plays in political mobilization. Early research by de la Garza and DeSipio (1997) suggests language, unlike education and age, is not a primary impediment to political participation, with Hopkins (2011) agreeing with the plausibility of this statement, writing, “Immigrant voters are a selected group that has chosen to naturalize and to vote, and this highly motivated subset may well be able to cast ballots in English” (815). While Hopkins’ (2011) research focused more on the effects of multilingual ballots on turnout, his

point still stands; essentially, the argument here is that those Latinos who are the most likely to vote usually speak English anyway.

Additionally, Binder et al. (2013) found that while sending English-language postcards encouraging them to vote did increase Latino turnout among those who predominantly spoke English by 2.5%, the Spanish-language postcards had essentially no effect on turnout for Latinos who predominantly spoke Spanish (14), leading them to conclude that “...simply varying the language of outreach efforts will not be sufficient [to increase Latino voter turnout among those who mainly speak Spanish]... (17).” Similarly, research on Latino mobilization by Catherine Simpson Bueker (2013) concludes that ads using Spanish have an insignificant effect on turnout, especially when compared to other mobilizing forces like unemployment and discrimination (404). But Binder et al.’s (2013) research admits mailed postcards are generally not a terribly effective way to mobilize voters (6) and Bueker (2013) reaches her conclusion only by comparing the total number of Spanish-language ads aired in the state to Latino turnout overall (401); she does not take into consideration where or how often the advertisements were broadcast, or what content they shared.

Conversely, scholars from the second school argue that the popularity of advertising-friendly mediums like radio and television among Latinos makes Spanish-language ads a highly effective way to boost turnout. Barreto et al. (2011) points out that some 62% of Latinos reportedly watch television news daily, so the chance of exposure to ads is relatively high (314). Similarly, Panagopoulos and Green (2011) argue Latinos view Spanish-language media more favorably than they do English-language media (589), and Oberholzer-Gee and Waldfogel (2009) have

linked the availability of Spanish-language television news in an area to increased Latino voter turnout (2120).

Barreto et al.'s (2011) study found Spanish-language television ads with a positive tone to have a significant and positive effect on Latino voter turnout in the studied area, regardless of the dominant language spoken by said Latinos. They also found the likelihood of turnout was significantly greater due to Spanish-language ads than to English-language ones, regardless of tone (317). Similarly, Panagopoulos and Green (2011) discovered Spanish-language GOTV radio advertising increased Hispanic voter turnout by 4.3 to 5.3%, regardless of the primary language spoken by the individual (593).

However, this “yes” school is not without its problems. Barreto et al. (2011) concede at the end of their report that it would take 27 ad viewings to have the same mobilizing effect as being directly contacted in person a single time by another Latino (319). Additionally, the radio advertising in Panagopoulos and Green's (2011) study consciously excluded districts heavily populated by Latinos around Los Angeles and New York. Instead, it focused on uncompetitive districts, where a bump in turnout could be rather insignificant in actuality due to traditionally low turnout rates in these areas. Consequently, it may be a bit early to start the mass implementation of Spanish-language advertising during the next election season.

Research from the third school finds Spanish-language advertising can be effective in increasing Latino turnout to a limited extent. However, it is certainly not a universal solution, as different groups of Latinos respond to it in dramatically different ways. Abrajano and Panagopoulos

(2011), for example, sent direct mail cards in both English and Spanish to nearly 7000 registered Latinos in Queens, New York, urging them to vote. Their study determined that the cards in both Spanish and English did mobilize the voters and increase turnout (644). However, the English-language cards effectively mobilized Latinos across the board, with both primarily English-speaking and primarily Spanish-speaking Latinos indicating higher turnout in response to the cards, while the Spanish-language cards only boosted turnout among those Latinos who only spoke Spanish; in fact, the English-language cards increased their turnout as much as the Spanish-language cards did (653).

In a different study, Abrajano (2010) asserts that Spanish-language advertisements do have a significant effect on getting Spanish-dominant Latinos to the polls. Her study determined that compared to general English-language ads with a 3% increase in likelihood of voting, Spanish-language ads boosted that likelihood by 28% (95), leading her to conclude that ethnic identity, as shaped by language usage, has a significant role in electoral participation (98). Similarly, Defrancesco Soto and Merolla (2006) determined that political ads on television specifically-targeting Latinos had a much greater chance of actually mobilizing Latino voters, and Spanish-language ads had a positive and significant effect on mobilizing Latino voters who predominantly spoke Spanish (295). A key difference from the findings of Abrajano and Panagopoulos (2011), however, was that these results did not demonstrate that English-language ads had any positive effect on Spanish-dominant voters—the Spanish exclusively mobilized them (301).

Unfortunately, a significant problem limiting the effects of these findings seems to be that Spanish-language advertising only really increases turnout among those Latinos who primarily speak Spanish. Both Abrajano (2010) and Defrancesco Soto and Merolla (2006) actually found English-dominant Latinos actually had a decreased likelihood of voting after exposure to Spanish-language ads, which may be attributed to a general lack of substantive information in Spanish-language ads compared to English-language ones or even offense due to “pandering” (Abrajano 97). Additionally, Abrajano’s discovery that Spanish-language advertisements are no more effective than English-language ones in getting Latinos to vote certainly casts doubt on the case for their use. While there certainly does seem to be some sort of positive relationship between Spanish-language advertising and Latino turnout, these scholars suggest that putting an end to low voting rates may not be as simple as switching languages.

Consequently, those scholars who argue that Spanish-language advertising positively influences Latino turnout, albeit in a limited way, are the most logical and reasonable in their approach to assessing the effects of language-targeted electoral advertising. Arguing that Spanish-language advertising has no significant effect on getting Latinos to vote is clearly shortsighted, as it seems hard to believe Spanish-dominant Latinos would not respond at least a little positively to advertisements in their primary language. If the first school of thought was correct, there would be no point in regular commercial advertising in Spanish as English-language advertisements would be just as effective in selling the product to Spanish-dominant consumers. Clearly, this is simply illogical.

Conversely, to argue unequivocally that Spanish-language advertising has a significant effect on boosting Latino turnout, as the second school does, essentially suggests that Latinos are relatively simple-minded; supposedly, all it would take for them to come to the polls en masse is a television ad in Spanish telling them to do so. Latinos are a particularly complex and diverse group of voters, so to assert the language of electoral advertising received is either a main impediment or driver for their participation seems to underestimate their grasp of politics as a whole. As Nicholson et al. (2006) proclaims, Latinos are not fools— they are not merely waiting for someone to say “¡Vamos!” (269).

Instead, the third school’s limited approach tentatively agrees Spanish-language electoral advertising can have somewhat of a positive effect on increasing Latino turnout. However, these scholars assert that Spanish-language advertising does not work for all Latinos, especially those who primarily speak English. Of course, even when it does work in certain situations, there are other forms of mobilization which may work better, but the effectiveness of different types of advertising varies depending on the market. To a limited extent, however, Spanish-language electoral advertising does appear to work, and research by Michelson (2003) may provide some insight as to why this might be the case.

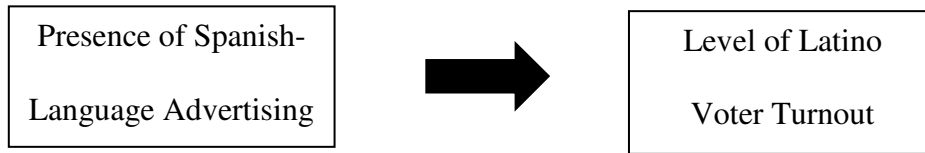
Michelson (2003) writes that as Latinos (Mexican-Americans in particular) become more acculturated into American society, the more cynical they become towards government and the less likely they are to trust in the system and participate politically (929). Because many Latinos switch their primary language to English as generations pass, preferred language often becomes associated with a level of acculturation. If one is to believe that this research is correct,

deductively it is possible that Spanish-language advertising may be effective because it draws out those Spanish-speaking Latinos who have not yet reached the cynical level of acculturation— they are not necessarily against voting but had never really been urged to do so. Additionally, exposure to Spanish may even be appealing to some Latinos because it almost tugs them back away from acculturation and cynicism and into a more trusting, familiar state of mind, compelling them to vote. More research should be done, of course, but Michelson may be on to something.

In all, scholars from this school assert that Spanish-language electoral advertising can be helpful and has the capability of bringing more Latinos to the polls, but is far from the universal election-winning trump card solution that Republicans and Democrats seem desperate to find. Essentially, it seems Spanish-language advertising is more of a useful supplementary tool for increasing Latino turnout than a “secret weapon.” Even if it only succeeds in getting Spanish-dominant Latinos to the polls, in a close election those votes could be all that is needed to tip the scale. Whether the ads could actually lead to such a tip, however, is debatable, and this research aims to find the answer.

The Link between Spanish-Language Ads and Latino Votes: Does it Exist?

Consequently, based on the research conducted thus far the most logical connection between Spanish-language electoral advertising and Latino voter turnout is a positive, though limited in scale, correlation. More clearly, this argument can be defined as:



Essentially, the basic presence of Spanish-dominant Latinos living among the United States’ Latino-American population suggests that Spanish-language electoral advertising will have some sort of effect on voter turnout—if an ad is telling someone to vote, it is imperative that the targeted audience receive that message in a comprehensive and understandable way. It would make little sense to advertise to the English-dominant American general public entirely in Spanish, so it makes little sense to advertise to Spanish-dominant Latinos entirely in English. As a result, it is incredibly reasonable to assume that Spanish-dominant Latinos would respond better to Spanish-language ads. Simply put, the language of transmission does make a difference.

Additionally, with over 70% of Latinos being bilingual (Abrajano et al. 2011), it seems reasonable to believe the electoral messages would be received and understood by more Latinos than just those who predominantly speak Spanish. As most Latinos cite television and radio as their major sources of information and tend to trust Spanish-language media more than English-language media (Barreto et al. 2011; Panagopoulos and Green 2011), it deductively follows that advertising to Latinos in Spanish over these mediums, notably instead of by direct mail or postcards, certainly has the potential to be seen and heard by its target audience. In basic terms, without Spanish-language advertising, those who speak Spanish are simply less likely to be reached and are less likely to respond positively to the ads when they actually are reached.

While there are certainly a plethora of ways to increase voter turnout, encouraging a members of a group to get out the vote in their own language (or a language with which they are very familiar) seems incredibly rational. During his short 2008 presidential campaign, New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson, a Latino himself, frequently gave speeches and advertised in Spanish as a way to reach out to “bilingual and bicultural Americans” (Barreto et al. 2008, 754).

Notably, Richardson was successful to the point of forcing the other candidates to recognize the political importance of Latinos even after his campaign’s concession (Barreto et al. 2008).

Clearly, Richardson used Spanish for a reason: Latinos responded positively to it and used it to connect with him. It seems as though the use of Spanish is simply something received by Latinos as a kind gesture, and they may very well respond more positively to ads telling them to vote in Spanish instead of English (Panagopoulos and Green 2011).

Consequently, if English-language ads can boost turnout for English speakers, Spanish-language ads should logically boost turnout for Spanish-speakers. This analysis does not, however, expect to find an incredibly strong correlation, as it recognizes person-to-person contact is often much more effective at mobilizing voters than impersonal advertisements, regardless of the language used (Barreto et al. 2011; Binder et al. 2013). Similarly, it is known that the implementation of Spanish-language ads can also come off as shallow and pandering if they are overused and not carefully trimmed to a specific audience (Abrajano 2010; Abrajano and Panagopoulos 2011; Defrancesco Soto and Merolla 2006), so their actual impact on voter turnout walks a fine line. Clearly, Spanish-language ads are simply not the often-sought-after ultimate campaign weapon.

However, Spanish-language electoral advertisements do have the potential to be a useful tool for campaigns and could certainly compel Latinos, particularly those who are predominantly Spanish-speaking, to vote at a higher rate. This, of course, would be incredibly positive, as Latinos would surely have an easier time promoting their interests if more of them voted. Spanish-language ads may also simply seem more appealing and compassionate to both bilingual and Spanish-dominant Latinos than English-language ones, and might suggest to them that the candidate is someone who genuinely cares about their interests and is worth heading to the polls to support, as they did for Richardson (Barreto et al. 2008). With the recent prevalence of close elections in states heavily populated by Latinos like Florida, even a small percent increase in Latino voter turnout could be enough to tip the election, and perhaps even the presidency, one way or another. With this level of potential power, it is certainly worth investigating, and as a result this research will seek to prove a high presence of Spanish-language electoral television ads leads to higher rates of Latino voter turnout in the corresponding market, at least to a limited extent.

The Research Design

Previous literature has suggested that Spanish-language electoral advertising may have somewhat of a positive effect on increasing Latino voter turnout (Barreto et al. 2011; Abrajano and Panagopoulos 2011), but much of the research has been intentionally confined to Latino population centers (Abrajano and Panagopoulos 2011; Barreto et al 2011; Panagopoulos and Green 2011). However, not all Latinos live in these regional clusters, and the nationwide population has been steadily dispersing across the country. Now that many Latinos are leaving

the American Southwest, is Spanish-language advertising a viable mobilization option for campaigns in all parts of the country? All signs seem to point to “yes,” so consequently it is reasonable to expect to discover a positive correlation between Latino turnout and Spanish-language advertising at the state level. Therefore, the hypothesis can be written as:

| |
|--|
| <p>H₁: States with higher numbers of Spanish-language advertisements have higher rates of Latino voter turnout</p> |
|--|

To find out, I will first explore Latino turnout data by state and Spanish-language advertising during the 2002 midterm election. I chose the 2002 election cycle largely because voter turnout is always more pronounced during presidential years, so a midterm election might paint a more accurate picture as to why Latinos, who tend to have the lowest turnout rate among any racial or ethnic group in any given year, turned out to the polls. It may be easier to notice factors affecting Latino turnout like Spanish-language advertising without the added frenzy provided by a presidential campaign; that is, we can be certain those Latinos who did turn out in 2002 did not do so in part because of the hype surrounding the election of a new President, which in itself does serve as a significant control. Additionally, after the successful implementation of Latino-targeted outreach by both major parties during the 2000 presidential election (Barreto et al. 2011), the presence of such ads two years later seems plausible.

To get a better view of the impact these ads may have on Latino turnout, I will also then examine the same variables for the 2008 presidential election cycle. I will then be able to look at the difference in turnout between a midterm cycle and a presidential one; perhaps there is a stronger

Latino voter presence during a presidential cycle due to its tendency of having increased voter participation among all American subgroups. Comparing turnout and advertisement data for each state side-by-side for both cycles may provide some more insight as to what did and did not change after six years of elections.

To explore the possibility of a relationship between these variables, I will first calculate the total number of Spanish-language electoral ads broadcasted in each state during both election cycles, using data from the University of Wisconsin's Wisconsin Advertising Project. Essentially a giant database that tracks and records all broadcastings of campaign ads in a certain media markets across the country during an election cycle, the Wisconsin Advertising Project sorts the ads according to tone, message, and, most importantly for this study, aired language. I count each ad in Spanish, regardless of tone or message, as "1," while all ads in English are scored as "0." In addition, I also determine the total number of English-language ads aired in each state to serve as a control.

From here, I will take Latino voter turnout rates provided by the U.S. Census Bureau's 2002 and 2008 "Current Population Survey" for each corresponding state and then compare this rate to both the total number of Spanish- and English-language ads broadcasted within that state. I will then estimate the correlation coefficient between my collective findings for both variables to quantitatively measure the relationship between them, as well as determine the statistical significance of my findings.

After this, I will estimate a linear regression for both cycles comparing the turnout rates and the number of ads in both languages in a state to said state's respective level of educational attainment for Latinos, defined as the percentage of the Latino population who holds a bachelor's degree or higher. As education is widely known to have a positive effect on voting rates regardless of race, it will be interesting to see if even after controlling for the variable, Spanish-language ads still seem to have an impact on Latino turnout. Additionally, I will use this information to see just how pronounced the effect of presidential elections is on Latino voters. The variables from my earlier model operationalize quite easily. My dependent variable is the rate of Latino voter turnout in a given state, which is expressed as the percentage of all registered Latino voters who actually voted in said state. The independent variable in this study, the prevalence of Spanish-language electoral advertising, is even more-easily operationalized: it is simply the counted number of Spanish-language ads broadcasted in the media market within a given state during the 2002 and 2008 election cycles. Later, during the regression, educational attainment will be added in as an additional dependent variable.

Finding and using educational attainment rates by state by race is similarly straightforward: using additional data from the Census Bureau, I will take the percentage of Latinos with a bachelor's degree or more in each state and compare this to the prevalence of advertisements in both languages as well as Latino turnout rates in each corresponding state through a linear regression.

Ultimately, I expect to find a positive correlation between the variables: those states with higher numbers of Spanish-language advertisements should also have higher rates of Latino voter

turnout. Conversely, states that rely primarily or entirely on English-language advertisements should see lower rates of Latino turnout in comparison. Additionally, I expect to see that states with higher rates of educated Latinos will also see higher turnout rates, and that these rates will be the highest in states with more of both educated Latinos and Spanish-language ads. While I do not expect to necessarily prove causal relationship, and though there will likely be other factors present in the studied states that could influence voter turnout (Abrajano and Panagopoulos 2011; Binder et al. 2013), I contend that the discovery of a solid link between Spanish-language electoral advertisements and Latino voter turnout would be significant enough to at least suggest that this is an area deserving of further investigation by the political community.

An Assessment: Does Spanish Actually Matter?

My thesis only asserts that Spanish-language electoral advertisements have a limited, though positive, correlation with Latino voter turnout, and at the state level it seems that such a relationship does exist. However, whether this relationship is actually significant and would justify increased spending on Spanish-language advertising by political campaigns is debatable, to say the very least.

Latino voter turnout, expressed as a percentage, is an ideal dependent variable because it helps control for the different sizes of Latino populations across every state. For example, just because California has more Latino voters as a whole does not mean they actually show up to vote at the rate they do in New Mexico. Additionally, turnout rates are an excellent indicator of whether a political ad succeeded in its mission to get the viewer to the polls. Though there are certainly a

plethora of reasons why turnout rates might be higher in one state than another, when higher Latino voting rates are found in a state that received significantly more Spanish advertisements, it could suggest the advertisements have had an effect on that subgroup of voters.

Part 1: Correlation Examination

To see if higher numbers of Spanish-language political ads in a given state actually do lead to higher percentages of Latino voter turnout in that same state, I first use 2002 and 2008 U.S. Census data to determine the turnout rate by race for thirty states (in the other twenty states, the Census considered the base to be too small to show the derived turnout measure). I then compare this data to both the number of Spanish-language ads aired in each corresponding state and the number of English-language ads aired in each state to serve as a control for each year (Table 1, Table 2). Next, I plot the data pairs on a graph and calculate the correlation coefficients between each set of variables. Finally, I determine the statistical significance of the correlation to see if the results actually validate my hypothesis, or if I need to reject it.

Table 1: Statewide Presence of Spanish-Language Advertisements, 2002

| State | # of Spanish Ads | # of English Ads | Latino Turnout (%) | State | # of Spanish Ads | # of English Ads | Latino Turnout (%) |
|-------|------------------|------------------|--------------------|-------|------------------|------------------|--------------------|
| AZ | 39 | 15155 | 16.4 | NJ | 0 | 7301 | 16.9 |
| CA | 3547 | 59347 | 17.3 | NM | 2954 | 22583 | 35.4 |
| CO | 517 | 31033 | 20.7 | NV | 115 | 6747 | 13 |
| CT | 0 | 12157 | 23.5 | NY | 2604 | 60953 | 19.5 |
| FL | 2329 | 58367 | 27.4 | OH | 0 | 17208 | 16 |
| GA | 0 | 44470 | 14.5 | OK | 0 | 17467 | 27.7 |
| IL | 267 | 44232 | 18.2 | OR | 0 | 13636 | 11.1 |
| IN | 0 | 17718 | 12.9 | PA | 0 | 77389 | 21.4 |
| KS | 0 | 15488 | 15 | SC | 0 | 42495 | 17 |
| LA | 0 | 9483 | 28 | TN | 0 | 57286 | 3.4 |
| MA | 0 | 14009 | 14.7 | TX | 7701 | 97163 | 19.1 |
| MD | 0 | 15912 | 13.8 | UT | 0 | 5282 | 9 |
| MI | 0 | 32016 | 23.5 | VA | 0 | 2474 | 6.6 |
| MN | 0 | 22973 | 24 | WA | 0 | 1554 | 13.8 |
| NC | 0 | 33250 | 8.2 | WI | 0 | 26699 | 10 |

Source: US Census Bureau (2002); Wisconsin Advertising Project (2005)

Table 2: Statewide Presence of Spanish-Language Advertisements, 2008

| State | # of Spanish Ads | # of English Ads | Latino Turnout (%) | State | # of Spanish Ads | # of English Ads | Latino Turnout (%) |
|-------|------------------|------------------|--------------------|-------|------------------|------------------|--------------------|
| AZ | 301 | 26067 | 23.7 | NJ | 36 | 10517 | 33.4 |
| CA | 1489 | 24417 | 33.4 | NM | 2502 | 70457 | 45.2 |
| CO | 3392 | 91638 | 33.1 | NV | 2431 | 54703 | 30.4 |
| CT | 122 | 8408 | 35.2 | NY | 70 | 51179 | 36.4 |
| FL | 3610 | 115025 | 42.2 | OH | 0 | 154990 | 35 |
| GA | 0 | 52976 | 23.6 | OK | 0 | 14651 | 19.5 |
| IL | 0 | 19909 | 29 | OR | 0 | 90155 | 14.9 |
| IN | 0 | 109779 | 18.3 | PA | 165 | 138380 | 44.6 |
| KS | 0 | 18750 | 28.8 | SC | 0 | 37725 | 16.4 |
| LA | 0 | 59009 | 32 | TN | 0 | 9360 | 19.2 |
| MA | 0 | 2237 | 26.9 | TX | 3974 | 55366 | 27.2 |
| MD | 0 | 11661 | 34 | UT | 0 | 2310 | 15.4 |
| MI | 0 | 86971 | 35.5 | VA | 85 | 83025 | 22.5 |
| MN | 0 | 94343 | 27.6 | WA | 0 | 48888 | 36.6 |
| NC | 71 | 186763 | 20.7 | WI | 0 | 88826 | 26.9 |

Source: US Census Bureau (2008); Wisconsin Advertising Project (2011)

As Table 2 demonstrates, Latino turnout for most states actually increased during the presidential election cycle in 2008 when compared to 2002 (Table 1). Of course, this is not terribly surprising, as this is the trend in participation among all American subgroups—presidential elections are always more popular than midterm elections. As a result, it is to be expected that many (though not Spanish-language ads, interestingly enough) values are higher in 2008 than in 2002. It is also interesting to see that it is essentially the same set of states utilizing Spanish-language advertising six years apart, though there are some surprises: Connecticut is not usually thought of as a Latino stronghold, yet ads in Spanish were present there in 2008, while the similarly-viewed Oklahoma had consistently strong Latino turnout data between the two years. These oddities aside, however, it is clear that Spanish-language advertising is, for the most part, concentrated in Latino-heavy areas like California, Texas, and Florida.

Correlation Between Latino Voter Turnout and Spanish-Language Advertising

Figure 1: Spanish, 2002

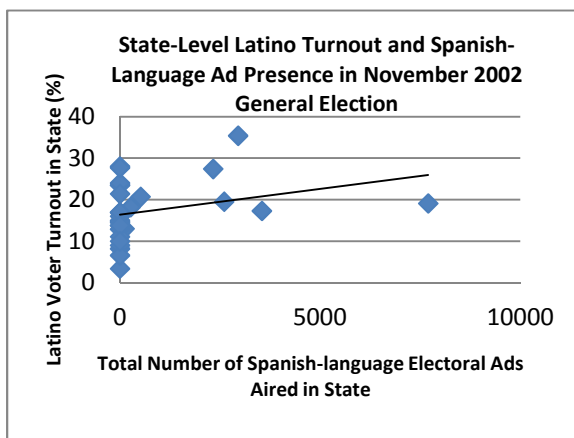


Figure 2: English, 2002

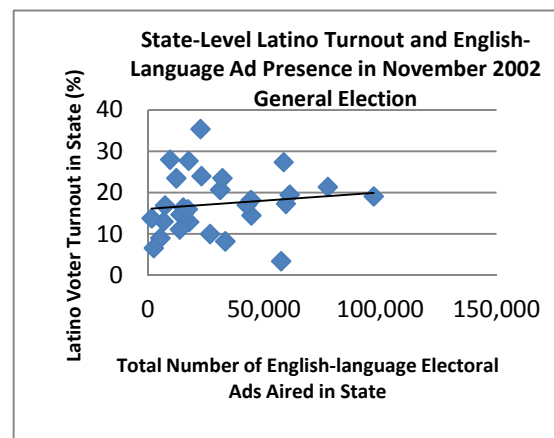


Figure 3: Spanish, 2008

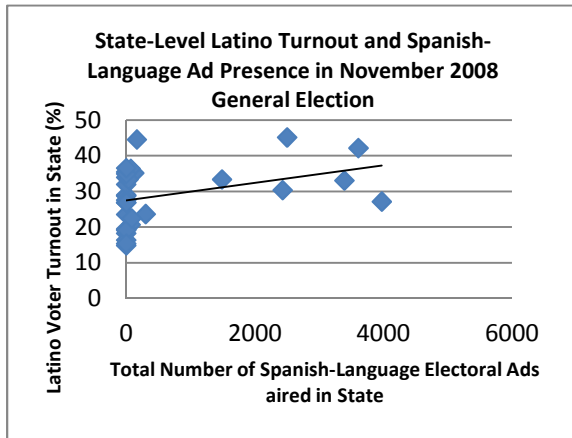


Figure 4: English, 2008

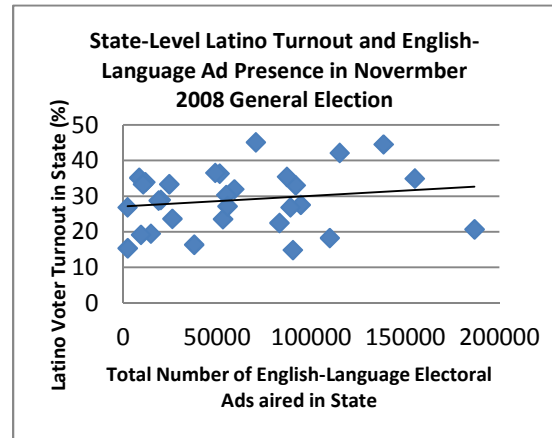


Table 3: State-Level Correlation between the Variables

| | Calculated Correlation Coefficient, "r" | | "p" value when N=30 | | Correlation is Statistically Significant? | |
|--|---|-------|---------------------|----------|---|------|
| | 2002 | 2008 | 2002 | 2008 | 2002 | 2008 |
| Between Spanish-Language Ads and Latino Voter Turnout | 0.296 | 0.361 | p < .10 | p < .025 | Yes, slightly | Yes |
| Between English-Language Ads and Latino Voter Turnout | 0.132 | 0.169 | p > .10 | p > .10 | No | No |

As can be seen in Figures 1-4 and Table 3, it appears that at the state level for both elections there is a positive correlation between both Spanish-language ads and English-language ads and Latino turnout. However, in both cases there is a significantly greater correlation between Spanish-language electoral ads and Latino turnout than there is between English-language electoral ads and Latino turnout. This result suggests Spanish-language ads may be more effective at mobilizing Latino voters, to an extent, than English-language ads; the language of transmission evidently can make a difference, at least at the state level.

However, for the 2002 cycle the correlation is not terribly strong, nor does there seem to be a particularly solid linear relationship between the variables in either case, which is likely due in part to the massive amount of variables that can influence voter participation other than

advertisements. For example, at first glance it may seem like New Mexico in 2002 is a state working against the hypothesis, as its incredibly high rate of Latino voter turnout is not proportionate to its number of Spanish-language ads. Notably, 2002 was the first year Bill Richardson ran for governor in the state, and if we are to believe Barreto's (2007) assertion that candidate co-ethnicity is a major cause of Latino mobilization, it is likely that his status as a Latino brought more Latinos to the polls even without as many Spanish-language ads as other states. Additionally, Texas is singlehandedly skewing the data away from a higher correlation with more than double the number of Spanish-language ads of the closest state and a disproportionately-small Latino turnout rate; without Texas included in the dataset, the correlation coefficient between Spanish-language ads and Latino turnout rises dramatically to 0.420, which would decrease the probability of the relationship occurring by chance to just about 1%.

However, even with Texas and New Mexico skewing the data, the calculations show that the probability of this relationship happening by chance in 2002 is about 10% (Table 3). While this probability is not exactly at conventional $p < .05$ level, the correlation derived from this particular research is statistically significant at least at the $p < 0.1$ level. Essentially, this means that for 2002 the positive relationship between the number of Spanish-language advertisements and Latino voter turnout, while not overwhelmingly strong, is both real and meaningful—having more ads in Spanish at the state level could evidently lead to a slight increase in statewide Latino voter turnout. 2008, on the other hand, paints a slightly different picture.

Due to the fact that voter turnout increases in general during presidential elections, it is not surprising to see that the “r” values for both languages are higher than in 2002. Additionally, Spanish-language ads still have a larger “r” than English-language ads as well, which further supports the idea that some sort of positive connection between ads and language does exist. What is particularly notable, however, is that even with a slightly smaller number of Spanish-language ads than in 2002, the correlation between Spanish-language ads and Latino turnout rates for 2008 is conclusively significant at the $p < .025$ level, while English remains insignificant. Again, as is the case with 2002, this could be attributed to several other factors (most obviously the election cycle), but the presence of said correlation—and an even stronger one at that—does seem at least somewhat promising. Consequently, it makes sense to run a linear regression of the variables for both years to further explore the possibility of a relationship between language and turnout.

Part 2: The Regression Data

Using the turnout and ad data from earlier, I added in the variable “educational attainment,” quantified as the percentage of Latinos in a given state with a bachelor’s degree or higher to serve as a control. There is an established link between level of education and voter participation, with the more education one has generally leading to a higher rate of voting (Milligan et al. 2004). It should be noted that due to changes in Census recording, I was unable to find these attainment rates for all of the states in 2002, reducing my N to 20 for that year. After organizing these variables, I then estimated a linear regression using the old variables in addition to educational attainment for three different cases: 2002, 2008, and both years together.

For the final model, I control for the year of the election to account for variation in turnout between 2002 and 2008.

Table 4: Latino Educational Attainment by State

| State | % Latinos with 4 year degree or greater | | State | % Latinos with 4 year degree or greater | |
|-------|---|------|-------|---|------|
| | 2002 | 2008 | | 2002 | 2008 |
| AZ | 9.7 | 9.7 | NJ | 14.1 | 16.1 |
| CA | 8.1 | 10.2 | NM | | 12.7 |
| CO | 8.8 | 11.8 | NV | | 9.1 |
| CT | | 14.8 | NY | 12.9 | 15.4 |
| FL | 19.5 | 21.3 | OH | 17.6 | 17.8 |
| GA | 11.7 | 14 | OK | | 10.4 |
| IL | 9.3 | 11.5 | OR | | 11.3 |
| IN | | 10.2 | PA | 11.2 | 13.6 |
| KS | | 13 | SC | | 10.7 |
| LA | 20.1 | 17.2 | TN | | 11.9 |
| MA | 10.5 | 15.9 | TX | 9.2 | 10.9 |
| MD | 25.1 | 20.1 | UT | | 11.5 |
| MI | 8.5 | 14.3 | VA | 23.5 | 23.8 |
| MN | 7.1 | 17.2 | WA | 13.8 | 11.4 |
| NC | 6.9 | 12.8 | WI | 8.3 | 12 |

Source: US Census Bureau (2003, 2009)

Table 5: Summary Statistics for Spanish-Language Ads, 2002

| | N | Mean | Std. Dev. | Min. | Max. |
|------------------------|----|-------|-----------|------|-------|
| Latino Turnout | 30 | 17.2 | 7.06 | 3.4 | 35.4 |
| Spanish Ads | 30 | 669 | 1658.2 | 0 | 7701 |
| English Ads | 30 | 29395 | 23788.4 | 1554 | 97163 |
| Educational Attainment | 20 | 17.3 | 5.52 | 6.9 | 25.1 |

Table 6: Summary Statistics for Spanish-Language Ads, 2008

| | N | Mean | Std. Dev. | Min. | Max. |
|------------------------|----|-------|-----------|------|--------|
| Latino Turnout | 30 | 28.9 | 8.3 | 14.9 | 45.2 |
| Spanish Ads | 30 | 608 | 1228.5 | 0 | 3974 |
| English Ads | 30 | 60616 | 48164.1 | 2237 | 186763 |
| Educational Attainment | 30 | 13.7 | 3.6 | 9.1 | 23.8 |

As Table 4 shows, Latino educational attainment for most states in both years is less than 20% of the Latino population, with the noticeable exceptions being Virginia and Maryland. Interestingly enough, both of these states had relatively high rates of Latino turnouts for 2008 (Table 2), reinforcing the idea that there is a link between education and turnout (Milligan et al. 2004). Furthermore, Tables 5 and 6 prove that, on average, Latino turnout did experience a significant increase in 2008 when compared to 2002, and that the average number of English-language ads ran also increased. However, the average number of Spanish ads remained relatively constant between both years, which may suggest that there are other forces at work, including the presence of a presidential contest, when it comes to the higher Latino turnout in 2008.

The Regression Results

Table 7: OLS Estimates of Latino Turnout, All Years

| | 2002 | 2008 | Combined Years |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------|
| # of Spanish Ads | -0.0004 (0.0011) | 0.0026* (0.0011) | 0.0013 [†] (0.0011) |
| # of English Ads | 0.0001 (0.0001) | 0.0000 (0.0000) | 0.00002 (0.0000) |
| Educational Attainment | 0.1136 (0.2684) | 0.7986* (0.3993) | 0.3312 (0.3258) |
| Year 2008 | | | 10.9406** (1.9960) |
| Constant | 12.8281** (4.8338) | 15.8092** (5.6909) | 11.3057** (3.8743) |
| N | 50 | 60 | 50 |

[†]p<0.10 *p<0.05 **p<0.01

OLS coefficient, standard error, clustered by state

Stata 13's "Margins" command used to estimate the predicted turnout across the range of the variables

These results contain some very interesting information. Most obviously, it is quite clear that when controlling for educational attainment and even election year, English-language ads have a virtually nonexistent effect on Latino voter turnout. Spanish-language ads, on the other hand, seem to have a small but positive effect on turnout during presidential election years, while education has a similar limited but positive effect as well. At first glance, such miniscule coefficients may not seem important, but when compounded over and over, a different picture is painted. In 2008, for example, if no Spanish-language ads or English-language ads had been aired in a given state with an average rate of Latino educational attainment (about 13.7%), the estimated Latino turnout percentage would likely hover around 26% (Table 6). If 7700 ads in Spanish were aired in the otherwise-static conditions, however, the estimated turnout rate would increase to about 42% (Table 6). Consequently, it seems reasonable to believe Spanish-language ads make somewhat of a positive difference in Latino turnout.

What is especially telling, however, is that when controlling for both languages and educational attainment rates, in a presidential election year Latino turnout experiences a nearly 11% surge when compared to a midterm election year (Table 5, Table 6). As mentioned earlier, it is common knowledge that turnout rates are higher among all American subgroups during a presidential election when compared to a midterm election, but the discrepancy in this case is particularly interesting. Spanish-language ads were actually less-prevalent in 2008 than in 2002, and educational attainment hovered at about the same, but overall Latino voters turned out in significantly higher numbers in 2008. While this could be influenced by other factors like co-ethnic candidates, it again seems clear that the type of election (a presidential year) also makes an important difference in getting Latinos to the polls.

In short, from this data we can see that educational attainment and the year of the election do matter in addition to Spanish-language. While 2002 suffered from low Latino turnout and no neither ad language nor educational attainment were significant (Table 3), in 2008 this all changed with both Spanish-language ads and educational attainment exhibiting a significant effect on Latino turnout (Table 7). Ads in Spanish plus educated Latinos plus a presidential election year seems to be a sort of interdependent trifecta that has the definite ability to boost Latino turnout. Essentially, it appears that if a campaign wants to get more Latinos to the polls, they might be wise to, in the short term, air ads in Spanish as well as, in the long term, encourage Latinos to go to college. And, of course, it would definitely help if the White House was up for grabs.

Conclusions and Discussion: Hablar Español es una Buena Idea

As Latinos continue to spread out across the country, their potential to influence politics at every level of government will increase dramatically. A unified, reliable, multimillion-member-strong Latino voting bloc would be an incredibly powerful force to be reckoned with and would likely be able to wield influence on many important issues. Additionally, as most Latinos tend to vote Democratic (de la Garza and Cortina 2007; Barreto et al. 2008), such a bloc could effectively doom the current Republican Party's prospects for occupying many public offices indefinitely and would likely cause a dramatic shift in the American political system as both parties scrambled to accommodate the newly awakened giant. However, such a bloc does not exist primarily because an incredibly high percentage of eligible Latino-Americans simply do not vote. The question then becomes how to get them to the polls.

While interpersonal contact (Binder et al. 2013; Barreto et al. 2011), co-ethnic candidates (Barreto 2007) and relevant issues (Nicholson et al. 2006) have all been linked to higher rates of Latino voter mobilization, these methods are costly, uncontrollable, and unpredictable, respectively. Instead, due to the low cost-per-viewer and the prevalence of Spanish-language media in the lives of many Latino-Americans, the possibility of using Spanish-language electoral television and radio advertisements has become a popular topic among those interested in increasing Latino voter turnout.

As those scholars possessing the most convincing argument believe that Spanish-language ads should have a positive, though limited, effect on getting Latinos to the polls due to high rates of bilingualism and incredibly strong cultural ties to the language (Abrajano and Panagopoulos 2011; Abrajano 2010; Defrancesco Soto and Merolla 2006), I set out to see if it would actually be worth the time and money of campaigns to air Spanish-language get-out-the-vote messages. Using political advertisement data from the Wisconsin Advertising Project and Latino turnout data from the U.S. Census Bureau for the 2002 midterm elections as well as the 2008 presidential election, I compared the prevalence of both English-language and Spanish-language ads in 30 states to their respective Latino turnout rates, expecting to find that those states with more Spanish-language ads had slightly higher rates of Latinos heading to the polls.

Essentially, the findings of this study suggest that using Spanish-language advertisements in order to increase Latino voter turnout may actually be worth the cost and effort, at least at the state level. The correlation between statewide Spanish-language ad presence and statewide Latino turnout is both positive and significant, allowing us to confirm the hypothesis and

conclude that increasing the amount of Spanish-language advertising in a state may actually lead to a boost in the number of that state's Latinos showing up to the polls.

Moreover, the correlation between English-language ad presence and Latino turnout was less than half as high as it was for Spanish-language ads, suggesting that language does actually make somewhat of a difference to Latinos; evidently, they do react positively to Spanish usage.

Perhaps seeing Spanish-language ads allowed Latinos to better understand the candidate or group's intended message, or maybe Latinos simply trust news they hear in Spanish more than in English. Regardless of the reasoning, however, a relationship between the two variables is clearly present. It should be noted that at just 0.296 in 2002 and 0.361 in 2008, the correlation is not terribly strong, which confirms the original assertion by the thesis that such a relationship between the variables, if actually present, would only be a limited one.

In addition, the linear regression suggested more conclusively that advertisements in Spanish have a noticeably greater effect on Latino turnout than advertisements in English, and that educational attainment and the election cycle are important as well. While the small coefficients may not seem impressive at first glance, for every ad aired in Spanish, regardless of education, the potential for a higher Latino turnout rate increases slightly. At 10 ads the difference is miniscule, of course, but at 7,000 the subsequent boost in turnout could be the deciding factor in a close election. When a higher number of Spanish-language ads is combined with higher levels of Latino educational attainment, this effect increases even more, and when the election is taking place when the White House is being contested the impact is even greater. Though there are

surely many other factors in addition to Spanish-language ads driving Latinos to the polls, it seems that those ads may play a bigger part than previously thought.

Of course, this research is not without its setbacks. Access to data was relatively difficult to find, as the Wisconsin Advertising Project is more or less the only institution formally tracking the prevalence of political advertisements. Because of this, I was only able to take those ads caught by the Project into account for the purposes of this research, and because the Project only looks at certain media markets, it is undoubtable that there were more advertisements in both languages present in the states than were reported.

Furthermore, data for Latino turnout rates at local or congressional district levels is sparse at best, so I had to aggregate up to the state level as it is the lowest level reported by the Census Bureau. As a result, the impact of Spanish-language advertisements was likely a little watered-down due to the massive amount of other factors that play a role in increasing voter turnout at the state level. Had I been able to acquire congressional district turnout data for Latinos, I would have likely been able to paint a more specific picture of the relationship between Spanish-language ads and Latino turnout rather than the relatively broad picture provided by the state-level data.

Even the availability of state data was limited and likely impacted this research—the Census Bureau did not have Latino turnout rates for 20 of the 50 states because the numbers reported were too small to derive an accurate number. As all of these states were ones without any Spanish-language ads and likely had rather low rates of Latino turnout, it is quite possible that

the determined correlation would have been much higher and much more significant if I had been able to almost double my amount of data. Furthermore, the lack of educational attainment data for 2002 likely had a somewhat negative effect on the overall regression results.

Even with these limitations, however, this research was still able to conclude with reasonable confidence that broadcasting electoral advertisements in Spanish is not a complete waste of time or money and can possibly lead to a bump in Latino voter turnout. Obviously, given its admittedly limited impact, using Spanish-language advertising should be viewed as less of a secret weapon and more of a helpful tool, but it seems safe to say money spent on advertising in Spanish will not be money wasted. Those states with larger numbers of Spanish-language ads did generally have higher rates of Latino turnout than their solely-English-language counterparts, with the notable exception of Texas, so although there are certainly many other factors that play a role in mobilizing Latinos, using Spanish-language advertising is clearly an option that ought to be considered by campaigns looking to increase Latino turnout.

As this is an issue that certainly deserves more attention, future research ought to make a greater effort to acquire data at a level smaller than statewide to serve as a stronger control. Ideally, one would be able to compare the number of Spanish-language ads in multiple congressional districts with similar racial composition and demographics to see if Spanish-language advertising really does have a relationship with Latino turnout. It might also be interesting to measure the effects of other mobilization methods like co-ethnic candidates and interpersonal canvassing and compare them to the effects of Spanish-language advertising; perhaps one method really does make more of a positive difference than the others. Additionally, the research would likely

benefit by looking at a more recent election season where more than just 20,000 Spanish-language advertisements were aired across the nation and recorded by an ad tracking institution like the Wisconsin Advertising Project, such as the national elections in 2010 or 2012.

Additionally, it might be interesting to scale down the entire study even further to simply statewide or local elections, as previous research has suggested that this level may provide the most “bang for the buck” when it comes to implementing Spanish-language ads (Oberholzer-Gee and Waldfogel 2009; Panagopoulos and Green 2011; Barreto et al 2011). If a solid relationship between Spanish-language ads and Latino turnout could be conclusively and undoubtedly established in the future and was incorporated effectively into campaigns, it could lead to some incredibly dramatic changes in the way the United States operates politically.

For politicians and their campaigns, for example, increasing the number of ads they air in Spanish could be an incredibly easy and cost-effective way to increase, however slightly, their standing with Latino voters. Scholars could look to see how this relationship between language and turnout might apply to other languages and ethnic groups, and the general public could expect to see a more diverse array of political advertisements that look and sound more like the steadily-diversifying America we now live in. Higher rates of Latino turnout could lead to a more-representative government, increased assimilation of non-whites into mainstream society, or even a significant political shift to the left as a nation (de la Garza and Cortina 2007), all of which would have enormous effects on every single person in the country. If the secret weapon to mobilizing Latinos is ever found, it will almost certainly be momentous.

With the prevalence of close high-profile races in American politics, a small bump in Latino voter turnout could be enough to radically affect elections. President Obama's 2012 margin of victory in several swing states like Colorado, Virginia, and Florida was only around 100,000 votes, and all three of these states have both large and increasing numbers of Latinos. If Republicans could learn to somehow use Spanish-language advertising to their advantage in order to sway more Latinos to vote for GOP candidates, their chances of winning national office might increase significantly. Who knows? Perhaps if a few more Spanish-language ads had aired in Florida before the 2000 presidential election, there would have been a large enough increase in the state's 31.4% Latino turnout (U.S. Census 2000) to hand the presidency to Gore rather than Bush. If Latinos had the potential to dramatically alter election outcomes in the past, they could certainly have the potential in the future. All in all, it seems Spanish-language electoral advertising could help Latino-Americans and the candidates who wish to represent them at least begin to make the most of that incredible power by getting more Latinos to the voting booth.

WORKS CITED

- Abrajano, Marisa. *Campaigning to the New American Electorate: Advertising to Latino Voters*. California: Stanford University Press, 2010. Print.
- Abrajano, Marisa, and Costas Panagopoulos. "Does Language Matter? The Impact of Spanish Versus English-Language GOTV Efforts on Latino Turnout." *American Politics Research* 39.4 (2011): 643-63. Print.
- Barreto, Matt A. "¡Sí Se Puede! Latino Candidates and the Mobilization of Latino Voters." *American Political Science Review* 101.4 (2007): 425-441. Print.
- Barreto, Matt A., Jennifer Merolla, and Victoria Defrancesco Soto. "Multiple Dimensions of Mobilization: The Effect of Direct Contact and Political Ads on Latino Turnout in the 2000 Presidential Election." *Journal of Political Marketing* 10.4 (2011): 303-327. Print.
- Barreto, Matt A., Luis R. Fraga, Sylvia Manzano, Valerie Martinex-Ebers, and Gary M. Segura. "Should They Dance with the One Who Brung 'Em?' Latinos and the 2008 Presidential Election." *PS: Political Science & Politics* October (2008): 753-760. Print.
- Binder, Michael, Vladimir Kogan, Thad Kousser, and Costas Panagopoulos. "Mobilizing Latino Voters: The Impact of Language and Co-Ethnic Policy Leadership." *American Politics Research* September (2013): 1-23. Print.
- Bueker, Catherine Simpson. "What Wakes the Sleeping Giant? The Effect of State Context on Latino Voter Turnout in the 2004 Election." *Latino Studies* 11.3 (2013): 388-410. Print.

- Defrancesco Soto, Victoria M., and Jennifer L. Merolla. "Vota por tu Futuro: Partisan Mobilization of Latino Voters in the 2000 Presidential Election." *Political Behavior* 28.4 (2006): 285-304. Print.
- de la Garza, Rodolfo O., and Jeronimo Cortina. "Are Latinos Republicans but Just Don't Know It? The Latino Vote in the 2000 and 2004 Presidential Elections." *American Politics Research* 35.2 (2007): 202-223. Print.
- de la Garza, Rodolfo O., and Louis DeSipio. "Save the Baby, Change the Bathwater, and Scrub the Tub: Latino Electoral Participation after Twenty Years of Voting Rights Act Coverage." In *Pursuing Power: Latinos and the Political System*, ed. F. Chris Garcia. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997. Print.
- Goldstein, Kenneth, and Joel Rivlin. "Political Advertising in 2002." Combined File [dataset]. Final release. Madison, WI: The Wisconsin Advertising Project, The Department of Political Science at The University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2005. Web.
- Goldstein, Kenneth, Sarah Niebler, Jacob Neiheisel, and Matthew Holleque. "Presidential, Congressional, and Gubernatorial Advertising, 2008" Combined File [dataset]. Initial release. Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Advertising Project, the Department of Political Science at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. 2011.
- Hopkins, Daniel J. 2011. "Translating into Votes: The Electoral Impacts of Spanish-Language Ballots." *American Journal of Political Science* 55.4 (2011): 813–829. Print.
- Lopez, Mark Hugo, and Ana Gonzalez-Barrera. "Inside the 2012 Latino Electorate." *Pew Research Hispanic Trends Project*, June 3, 2013. Web.
- Lopez, Mark Hugo and Paul Taylor. "Latino Voters in the 2012 Election." *Pew Research Hispanic Trends Project*, November 7, 2012. Web.

- Michelson, Melissa R. "The Corrosive Effect of Acculturation: How Mexican Americans Lose Political Trust." *Social Science Quarterly* 84.4 (2003): 918-933. Print.
- Milligan, Kevin, Enrico Moretti, and Philip Oreopoulos. "Does Education Improve Citizenship? Evidence from the United States and the United Kingdom." *Journal of Public Economics* 88.9 (2004): 1667-1695. Print.
- Nicholson, Stephen P., Adrian Pantoja and Gary M. Segura. "Political Knowledge and Issue Voting among the Latino Electorate." *Political Research Quarterly* 59.2 (2006): 259-271. Print.
- Oberholzer-Gee, Felix, and Joel Waldfogel. "Media Markets and Localism: Does Local News en Español Boost Hispanic Voter Turnout?" *The American Economic Review* 99.5 (2009): 2120-2128. Print.
- Panagopoulos, Costas, and Donald P. Green. "Spanish-Language Radio Advertisements and Latino Voter Turnout in the 2006 Congressional Elections: Field Experimental Evidence." *Political Research Quarterly* 64.3 (2011): 588-599. Print.
- Preston, Julia, and Fernanda Santos. "A Record Latino Turnout, Solidly Backing Obama." *The New York Times*, November 7, 2012. Web.
- U.S. Census Bureau, November 2000 Current Population Survey. Internet Release date: February 27, 2002. Web.
- U.S. Census Bureau, November 2002 Current Population Survey. Internet Release date: July 28, 2004. Web.
- U.S. Census Bureau, 2008. American Community Survey. Web.
- Wheaton, Sarah. "Michelle Obama Debuts in Spanish-Language Ad." *The New York Times*, October 24, 2012. Web.

HONORS PROJECT ADVISOR ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Nicole Kalaf-Hughes, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Bowling Green State University.

Primary Advisor.

Amy Robinson, Ph.D.

Associate Professor, Department of Romance and Classical Studies, Bowling Green State University. Secondary Advisor.

Marc Simon, Ph.D.

Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, Bowling Green State University.

Tertiary Advisor.