Back in the Shadows, Back in the Streets

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Although barred from voting in US elections, undocumented immigrants potentially can participate in the political arena in myriad ways, such as by attending meetings and joining protest marches and demonstrations. Previous research found mixed evidence of the degree to which such participation occurs in the undocumented Latino[1] community and that it varies with political context, age at immigration, and undocumented collective identity (see Terriquez 2017 for a review). This article explores responses from undocumented Latino populations to the rise of candidate and then President Donald J. Trump in comparison to other Latino subgroups, including citizens and non-citizen permanent residents. Using a series of public-opinion polls with large Latino samples and including undocumented respondents, we compared reported levels of political trust and rates of non-electoral political participation from 2012, after the reelection of Barack Obama, and from 2016 to 2017, after Trump was elected. Overall, we found significant evidence that Latinos, including undocumented Latinos, were more cynical (i.e., less trusting) and more politically active in 2016 than in 2012.

The degree to which all residents of the United States—including citizens, permanent residents, and undocumented immigrants—are politically engaged is a reflection of the health of our democracy. As Bloemraad (2006, 1) noted: "When residents of a country do not acquire citizenship or fail to participate in the political system, not only is the sense of shared enterprise undermined, but so too are the institutions of democratic government." Examining rates of participation among non-citizens, in particular, allows consideration of the degree to which these new members of society are being politically socialized into active membership.

During the past decade, Latinos "have experienced polar extremes in terms of societal messages about their degrees of belonging and political power. In 2006, Latinos were told that they did not belong. In 2012, they were told that they had the power to determine the outcome of the presidential election" (Michelson 2016, 61). In response to this shifting context, Latinos were consistently politically active (e.g., the 2006 immigration marches), but their political attitudes shifted from cynical to more trusting, particularly among US citizens. Non-citizens and especially undocumented Latinos, in contrast, remained outsiders with high levels of cynicism (Chávez Pringle, Lavariega Monforti, and Michelson 2014).

In 2016, the political context shifted once again, especially after Trump's electoral victory. Trump entered the political arena in mid-June 2015 with the following attack on Latinos (*Washington Post* 2015):

> The US has become a dumping ground for everybody else's problems….When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're not sending you. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.

To keep those unwanted Mexican immigrants out, Trump promised to build a wall:

> I will build a great wall—and nobody builds walls better than me, believe me—and I'll build them very inexpensively. I will build a great, great wall on our southern border, and I will make Mexico pay for that wall. Mark my words.

Chants of "Build the Wall" became a staple of Trump's campaign rallies. A year later, in the throes of the campaign, Trump claimed that the judge in the Trump University fraud case, US District Judge Gonzalo Curiel, might be biased against him because of his Mexican heritage and because Trump had spoken repeatedly of the need to build a wall on the US–Mexican border (Kendall 2016).

Trump continued to make racist comments through Election Day, and his anti-Latino rhetoric did not stop after he was sworn in as president. In addition to pursuing funding for a border wall, he directed the US Department of Homeland Security to step up detentions and deportations of undocumented immigrants. Removals even included those holding work permits through the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program launched by President Obama in 2012, as well as those checking in with immigration officials. Immigration raids under the Trump administration's executive order greatly expanded the universe of immigrants who are priority for removal, focusing more on undocumented immigrants without criminal records than under President Obama (Medina 2017; Schmidt and Holley 2017).

We hypothesized that the racism of the Trump campaign and administration affected Latino political attitudes and

doi:10.1017/S1049096517002360
https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096517002360 Published online by Cambridge University Press

behavior. Specifically, we hypothesized that Latinos were more cynical but also more active—cynical as a rational response to current events and more active to empower the community—in 2016 compared to 2012, including increased political interest and higher levels of reported political participation. We expected these shifts to be present for all Latinos regardless of immigration status, including citizens, legal residents (i.e., documented non-citizens), and undocumented immigrants due to feelings of political threat and linked fate (see Barreto et al. 2009; Pantoja and Segura 2003) and because so many Latinos live in mixed-status households (Taylor et al. 2011). We used the 2016–2017 Collaborative Multiracial Post-Election Survey (CMPS) and 2012 Latino Immigrant National Election Study (LINES) data to test these hypotheses.

DATA

We used two datasets with similar populations and survey questions to examine our hypotheses. The 2012 LINES is a nationally representative, bilingual telephone survey of foreign-born adult US residents who emigrated from one of the Spanish-speaking countries of Latin America, the majority of whom were not US citizens. We used the postelection survey data, which includes 888 participants.

The 2016 CMPS included 3,003 Latino respondents, of which 2,132 were native-born citizens, 150 were born in Puerto Rico, and 721 were immigrants. Overall, 88% were interviewed in English and 12% in Spanish (N = 359). Respondents traced their origin to more than 20 countries, including 50% to Mexico, 16% to Puerto Rico, and 5% to Cuba.

We hypothesized that the racism of the Trump campaign and administration affected Latino political attitudes and behavior. Specifically, we hypothesized that Latinos were more cynical but also more active—cynical as a rational response to current events and more active to empower the community—in 2016 compared to 2012, including increased political interest and higher levels of reported political participation.

RESULTS

Overall, the survey data support our hypotheses. Citizens, legal residents, and undocumented immigrants reported higher levels of political interest in 2016 compared to 2012, as well as increased levels of non-electoral political behavior and increased cynicism.

Table 1

Paying Attention to Government and Politics by Immigration Status, LINES 2012 (Percentages)

	Citizens (N = 337)	Documented Non-Citizens (N = 338)	Undocumented (N = 169)	Difference, Documented (Citizens + Legal Residents) vs. Undocumented	Z-test (*p*-value)
Always	28.8%	18.3%	11.8%	11.8%-pts. (23.6–11.8)	3.0* (0.003)
Most of the time	19.9%	13.6%	13.0%	3.7%-pts. (16.7–13.0)	1.2 (0.2)
About half the time	18.1%	21.3%	21.9%	1.2%-pts. (19.7–20.9)	-0.6 (0.5)
Some of the time	26.4%	36.4%	38.5%	-7.1%-pts. (31.4–38.5)	-1.7+ (0.08)
Never	6.8%	10.4%	14.8%	-6.2%–pts. (8.6-14.8)	-2.4* (0.02)

Notes: * = sig. at $p<0.05$; + = sig. at $p<0.10$, two-tailed. Pearson chi-square (4) = 17.5815, Pr = 0.001.

Table 2

Interest in Politics by Immigration Status, CMPS 2016 (Percentages)

	Citizens (N = 2,318)	Documented Non-Citizens (N = 568)	Undocumented (N = 81)	Difference, Documented (Citizens + Legal Residents) vs. Undocumented	Z-test (*p*-value)
Very interested in politics	23.4%	23.6%	13.6%	9.9%-pts. (23.5–13.6)	2.1* (0.04)
Somewhat interested	45.0%	51.1%	59.3%	-13.1%-pts. (46.2–59.3)	-2.3* (0.02)
Not that interested	18.7%	15.8%	19.8%	-1.7%-pts. (18.1–19.8)	-0.4 (0.7)
Not at all interested	12.9%	9.5%	7.4%	4.8%-pts. (12.2–7.4)	1.3 (0.2)

Notes: * = sig. at $p<0.05$; + = sig. at $p<0.10$, two-tailed. Pearson chi-square (3) = 7.8030, Pr = 0.050.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096517002360 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Latino Political Attitudes in 2012 and 2016

In 2012, the LINES asked respondents, "How often do you pay attention to what's going on in government and politics?"[2] Responses from our three subgroups of Latinos of interest (i.e., citizens, documented non-citizens [legal residents], and undocumented immigrants) are shown in table 1.

The mass media proclaimed 2012 the year that Latinos would decide the presidential election, and the phrase "demography is destiny" suggested an even stronger political voice for the community as their numbers continued to increase. Only four years later, however, the national mood shifted dramatically.

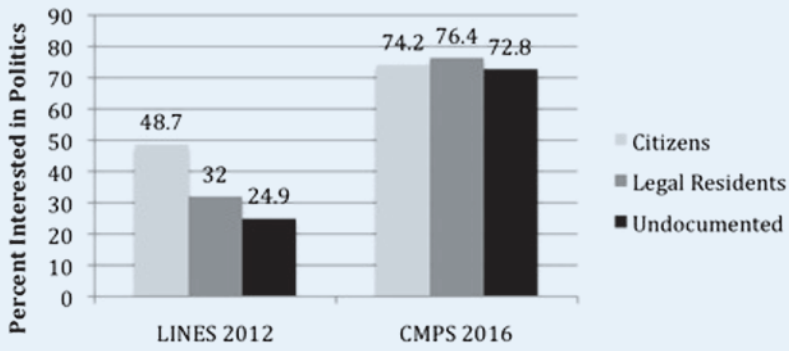
As shown in table 1, undocumented respondents reported in 2012 that they were less likely to pay attention to politics compared to citizens and legal residents; these differences were statistically significant at the ends of the Likert scale (i.e., *always* and *never* responses). Slightly less than 25% of undocumented respondents pay attention to government and politics always or most of the time in comparison to slightly more than 40% of citizens and legal residents.

The 2016–2017 CMPS data asked a similar question: "Some people are very interested in politics while other people can't stand politics. How about you? Are you…." As shown in table 2, interest in politics was much higher compared to the LINES respondents, as we hypothesized. The difference is illustrated in figure 1.

Moving beyond political interest to reported political behavior, both surveys asked respondents a similar set of questions about political activity across a number of types of political engagement and for a variety of timeframes (i.e., referencing the past year, the past four years, or during the current campaign period). The 2012 LINES data (table 3) show an overall low level of political activity for participants regardless of immigration status. Undocumented respondents were most likely to report attending a protest march and/or a rally in the past four years, whereas citizens reported higher rates of more conventional types of political engagement: wearing a campaign button, working for one of the political parties or candidates during the 2012 election, giving money to candidates, or signing a petition. It is important to note that it is illegal for undocumented people to contribute funds to a campaign.

Figure 1

Interest in Politics, 2012 and 2016



Notes: Interest in politics in 2012 includes responses of "always" and "most of the time." Interest in 2016 includes "very" or "somewhat" interested in politics.

Table 3

Reported Political Engagement, LINES 2012 (Percentages)

	Citizens (N = 181)	Documented Non-Citizens (N = 165)	Undocumented (N = 89)	Difference, Documented (Citizens + Legal Residents) vs. Undocumented	Z-test (*p*-value)
Joined in a protest march, rally, or demonstration? [past 4 years]	6.6%	13.9%	10.1%	0%-pts. (10.1–10.1)	0.001 (1.0)
Campaign button, campaign sticker on car, sign in window or in front of house? [2012 campaign]	15.5%	12.2%	4.5%	9.4%-pts. (13.9–4.5)	2.4* (0.01)
Work for one of the parties or candidates? [2012 campaign]	3.9%	2.4%	0%	3.2%-pts. (3.2–0)	n/a
Gave money to an individual candidate running for office? [2012 campaign]	3.9%	3.6%	0%	3.8%-pts. (3.8–0)	n/a
Signed a petition? [past 4 years]	10.6%	2.4%	4.5%	2.2%-pts. (6.7–4.5)	0.8 (0.4)

Note: * = sig. at $p<0.05$, two-tailed.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096517002360 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Table 4

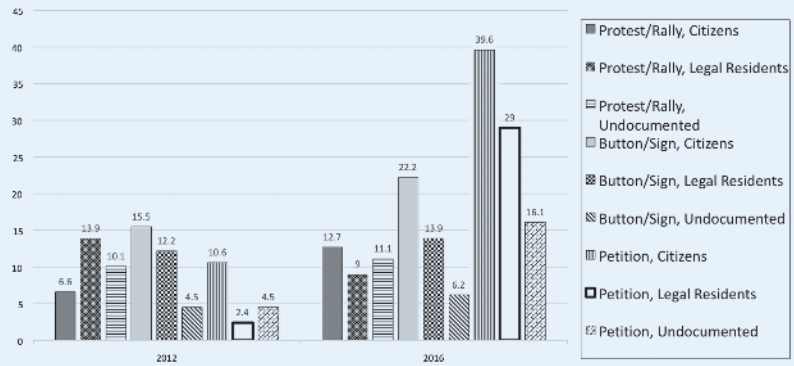
Reported Political Engagement, CMPS 2016 (Percentages)

	Citizens (N = 2,319)	Documented Non-Citizens (N = 568)	Undocumented (N = 81)	Difference Documented (Citizens + Legal Residents) vs. Undocumented	Z-test (*p*-value)
Attended a protest march, demonstration, or rally?	12.7%	9.0%	11.1%	0.9%-pts. (12.0–11.1)	0.2 (0.8)
Wore a campaign button or posted a campaign sign or sticker?	22.2%	13.9%	6.2%	14.2%-pts. (20.6–6.2)	3.2* (0.001)
Worked for a candidate, political party, or some other campaign organization?	7.2%	3.7%	0%	6.5%-pts. (6.5–0)	n/a
Contributed money to a candidate, political party, ballot issue, or some other campaign organization?	15.1%	7.9%	0%	13.7%-pts. (13.7–0)	n/a
Signed a petition regarding an issue or problem that concerns you?	39.6%	29.0%	16.1%	21.4%-pts. (37.5–16.1)	3.9* (0.000)

Note:* = sig. at $p<0.05$, two-tailed.

Figure 2

Non-Electoral Political Engagement, 2012 and 2016



Four years later, the CMPS asked respondents a similar set of questions about their non-electoral political engagement (table 4). Overall, there was a clear pattern of increased reported participation on all items in the 2016 CMPS data, including increased protest activity by citizens and increased activity of all types by both citizens and non-citizens. Among undocumented respondents, there was increased activity on some items but consistently no activity on contributing money (which is illegal) and working for a party or candidate. These shifts, illustrated in figure 2, provide additional support for our hypothesis about increased political activity in 2016 compared to 2012.

We also examined feelings of trust in government among LINES and CMPS respondents. As Lavariega Monforti and Michelson (2014, 106) noted:

> Cynicism is not just a result of being exposed to the "harsh reality" of racism and discrimination in this country, or to the political attacks on immigrants such as those experienced by the Latino community in 2006. Rather, cynicism (or trust) is a reflection of a sense of belonging and community, of social capital and interpersonal trust.

In 2016, Latinos again were under attack, as noted previously. Thus, we hypothesized that Latinos would report higher levels of cynicism in 2016 compared to 2012.

As shown in table 5, in 2012, trust was strong across all three subgroups of Latino immigrants—citizens, non-citizens with legal status, and undocumented immigrants: between one in four and one in five respondents responded that they trusted the government "just about always." In contrast, only four years later the 2016 CMPS registered much lower levels of trust in government, with fewer than one in 20 Latinos in any subgroup responding "just about always." This was a significant decrease in levels of political trust, as illustrated in figure 3.

These data support the last part of our hypothesis that Latinos in 2016 were simultaneously more interested and active in politics while also more cynical, compared to Latinos in 2012.

Latinos in the Era of Trump

The past four years have seen a dramatic shift in the national political mood. In 2012, Latinos were cautiously optimistic that a second term for Obama might bring immigration reform, and they welcomed his June 2012 announcement of the DACA program, which allowed hundreds of thousands of undocumented Latinos to come out of the shadows. The mass media proclaimed 2012 the year that Latinos would decide the presidential election, and the phrase "demography is destiny" suggested an even stronger political voice for the community as their numbers continued to increase. Only four years later, however, the national

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096517002360 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Table 5

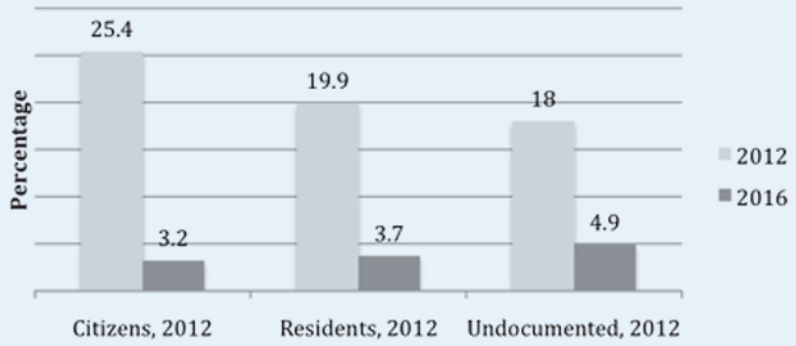
Trust in Government, LINES 2012 and CMPS 2016 (Percentages)

	LINES 2012			CMPS 2016		
	Citizens (N = 315)	Documented Non-Citizens (N = 312)	Undocumented (N = 156)	Citizens (N = 2,318)	Documented Non-Citizens (N = 568)	Undocumented (N = 81)
Just about always	25.4%	19.9%	18.0%	3.2%	3.7%	4.9%
Most of the time	16.8%	18.6%	18.6%	20.5%	28.3%	32.1%
Only some of the time	53.7%	59.6%	62.8%	54.3%	56.0%	56.8%
Never*	4.1%	1.9%	0.6%	22.0%	12.0%	6.2%

Note: "Never" is a regular response option in the CMPS and only a volunteered answer in the LINES.

Figure 3

Percentage of Latinos Who Always Trust the Government, 2012 and 2016



mood shifted dramatically. Trump's campaign and early presidency were notably anti-immigrant and anti-Latino, including increased internal enforcement of immigration law leading to front-page stories of deportations and congressional approval for the first sections of the border wall in Texas and California.

Latinos responded to this shift in national mood related to Trump's campaign and eventual presidency. Comparing data from surveys conducted in 2012 and 2016, we found that citizens, legal residents, and undocumented immigrants all reported increased levels of political interest, increased levels of non-electoral political behavior, and increased cynicism. This is not a coincidence: Latinos were listening—in both 2012 and 2016—and their responses were logical reactions to the rhetoric and actions of both Obama and Trump.

These data suggest that Republicans (and Democrats) would be wise to continue being attentive to the Latino vote. Hetherington (1999) demonstrated that low political trust leads to increased support for third-party candidates. Moreover, demographic trends cannot be denied: Latinos currently comprise 18% of the US population, and more than 66,000 Latinos reach age 18 every month (Pew Research Center 2015; US Census Bureau 2017). Latinos are an increasingly important and decisive group of voters, particularly in swing states such as Nevada, North Carolina, Virginia, Florida, and Colorado (Barreto and Segura 2014). In other words, both political parties would be wise to work to increase Latino trust in government, given that community's increasing political power and persistent political engagement.

These data also are an important reflection of how political rhetoric and policies reflect the country's values and its ability to live up to its reputation as a land of opportunity and a nation of immigrants. That Latinos across the spectrum of immigration status, including citizens, are currently so cynical about their government is a troubling reflection of the ability of the US to live up to these ideals. ■

NOTES

1. We use *Latino* as a gender-neutral term.
2. Question wording is provided here in English; however, the LINES and CMPS were administered in both English and Spanish, as preferred by each Latino respondent. For example, Spanish respondents were asked, "*¿Con qué frecuencia presta atención a asuntos de gobierno y política?*"

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096517002360 Published online by Cambridge University Press