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Unity Versus Uniformity: Effects of Targeted Advertising on Perceptions of Group Politics

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While a great deal of attention has been paid to how political media can divide and polarize politicized groups in the U.S., little is understood about its effects within those groups. In this study, I use a population based survey experiment to explore whether targeted political media are affecting two factors associated with political voice – perceptions of political homogeneity and perceptions of political power. Drawing on theories from social psychology, I outline and test a set of theoretical predictions to explore this relationship in the context of Spanish-language political ads. The results suggest that Spanish-language political ads do, in fact, increase perceptions of collective political power among Latinos, but not in a way that unequivocally promote perceptions of political homogeneity. In doing so, the findings provide some of the first evidence of a causal relationship between targeted political media and perceptions of targeted political groups.

Keywords media effects, Spanish-language media, political homogeneity

Over the past 30 years, academics, journalists, and public leaders have drawn attention to a shift in American mass media, and particularly advertising, away from mass marketing and toward micro-targeting. Individual viewers and voters are no longer sought as part of a larger national audience, but segregated into niche markets and interest groups that can be targeted as cohesive blocs (Shea & Burton, 2001; Turow, 1997). In doing so, some of the most influential forms of political information address, engage, and represent individuals as members of distinctive, homogeneous collectives. So while much attention has been given to the polarizing between-group effects of these general media trends (Mutz, 2006; Prior, 2007; Sunstein, 2001; Turow, 1997), this trend raises questions about its within-group effects.[1] In this article, I take up this question and explore whether mass-mediated appeals targeting specific groups—and particularly those that have limited political resources—heighten perceptions of within-group political homogeneity among those targeted.

The answer to this question is of broad import. Recognizing and engaging with political difference has long been a key concern of political theorists, and has played a central role in conceptions of a healthy democracy (Calhoun, 1988; Fishkin, 2010; Habermas, 1989;). Yet discussions of the significance of "cross-cutting exposure" and "public spheres" tend to focus on concerns about intergroup polarization, with little

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attention to the ways in which groups are often characterized as internally homogeneous. Such generalized notions of intragroup similarity—detached from a specific goal or objective—can serve to further suppress the now widely cited democractic ideals of debate and difference, *within* a group (Beltrán, 2010; Butler, 1992; Young, 1990).

These effects are particularly consequential among populations that have relatively few resources to draw upon to advance their political interests (Strolovich, 2007). For these individuals, the potential to elicit attention from those in power through depictions of a cohesive collective is especially valuable. At the same time, such claims of unity can introduce significant costs by reducing the space available for intragroup difference, reifying notions of authenticity, and further marginalizing subgroup members (Butler, 1992; Cohen, 1999; Beltrán, 2010; Young, 1990). In turn, the manner in which political messaging appeals to and represents individuals as members of unified collectives raises particularly important questions in the context of politically marginalized or disadvantaged groups.

In this article, I consider the effects of targeted political media on group perceptions in the unique context of Spanish-language televised political ads. Political advertising has been shown to be an influential source of political information in the modern information economy, and ads with Spanish-language content, in particular, constitute a growing source of such information (Abrajano, 2010; Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995; Zhao & Chaffee, 1995). Yet at the same time that Spanish-language ads may offer positive signals to a population that has historically been ignored in American politics, and position them as important actors in the political process, they may also heighten notions of the population as a politically uniform set of individuals (Dávila, 2001; Rodríguez, 1999). The result is an influential form of information and representation that embodies this democratic tension between power and difference.

In the following sections, I draw upon this example and consider conflicting theories on whether exposure to targeted political media might heighten perceptions of intragroup political homogeneity, thereby narrowing the range of political views perceived to be represented among those identified in the collective. Building off of past work looking at interpersonal contexts, I argue that the effects of targeted media on perceptions of political homogeneity will principally turn on the level of representation of those targeted in the individual's media context. Using a population-based, survey experiment of Latino adults, I present evidence in support of this theory. Political ads targeting Latinos are having important effects on how Latinos think about a pan-ethnic political collective, but in different ways depending on individual levels of exposure to media in which the targeted collective is represented. Overall, my results illustrate the central role that targeted political media play in how individuals perceive the political collectives with which they are identified. In doing so, this study sheds new light on the within-group effects of targeted media, and how these effects intersect with notions of American democracy.

Why Perceived Homogeneity Matters

The nature of American democracy tends to privilege groups with larger numbers and more resources, over groups with smaller numbers and fewer resources. This tendency has created a unique challenge for individuals identified as belonging to this latter type of group. Because there are fewer individuals identified as a part of these collectives, and because they have fewer resources to use as leverage in the political process, getting each individual to be counted as a part of the collective can be important to ensuring they have the numbers necessary to receive attention by those in positions of power. Movements

built around such appeals to unity can and should be credited for a range of important reforms: from the expansion of voting rights; to obtaining the bureaucratic recognition necessary to access philanthropic and government resources; to the election of an increasingly diverse pool of political representatives; to news media options in multiple languages and addressing multiple interests (Mora, 2014).

Yet the importance of these achievements can gloss over the challenges that can also become entangled with appeals to unity. In particular, broad perceptions of unity—detached from a specific goal or objective—can serve to suppress the democratic ideals of debate and difference within a group. Engaging with this type of intragroup difference is important for two principal sets of reasons. First, perceived norms can have powerful effects on actual attitudes and behavior. People are highly responsive to social cues about majority opinion and those who believe that they hold a minority opinion often fall silent and conceal their views in public to avoid isolating or stigmatizing themselves(Mutz, 1998; Noelle-Neumann, 1974). This propensity toward self-censorship among those with minority viewpoints can cause these views to be excluded from mass representations of public opinion. This, in turn, restricts the spectrum of public debate and grants majority opinion—both within and between groups—a disproportionate share of attention and legitimacy in mass discourse. It limits exposure to different viewpoints that can benefit the inhabitants of a public sphere by encouraging greater deliberation and reflection (Arendt, 1968; Calhoun, 1988; Habermas, 1989).

Second, images of unity can devolve into "defensive, exclusionary behavior" in which those who don't fall in line with the majority are further marginalized (Cohen, 1999; Beltrán, 2010; Young, 2000, p. 229). Examples of this dynamic can be found in a range of collective action efforts (Anzaldúa, 1987; Cohen, 1999; Lorde, 1984; Young, 2000). In an effort to not compromise a political agenda, or stigmatize a collective by attending to the more socially marginalized members of the collective, the initial ideals of unity can serve to silence those holding a position different from that of the majority[2,3] (see Strolovich, 2007).

Targeting Latinos

With these concerns about perceptions of political homogeneity in mind, the emphasis on cohesive political blocs in American politics—and especially in American political media—raises questions about its relationship to such perceptions. When an individual routinely hears herself addressed as part of a politicized group, how does it affect how she thinks about the range of political views and interests represented by that group? The significance of this question is heightened by the fact that the symbolic mechanisms relied upon to engage a group of individuals are often deeply intertwined with their commercial, bureaucratic, and political recognition (Dávila, 2001; Mora, 2014). In turn, such targeted appeals can tap into very broadly institutionalized notions of entitativity. The Spanish language serves as one such example.

Dating as far back as the early 20th century, the U.S. government began to group together individuals from across the United States based on whether or not they spoke Spanish (Rodríguez, 2000). Over time, the link between the Spanish language and panethnicity has not only permeated formal institutions, such as news media, advertisements, and bureaucratic agencies, but also informal institutions, such as colloquial terms, lyrics in contemporary music, and discriminatory language and behaviors targeting Latinos (Flores, 2000; Mora, 2014; Zentella, 1997). This use of the Spanish language as a tool to delineate a sprawling population and render them recognizable to the broader American public has helped to formalize a Latino collective and definitively link it to the Spanish language. So even though all Latinos don't speak Spanish or even have Spanish spoken in

their homes, the widespread association of Latino pan-ethnicity with the Spanish language has permeated public understandings of elite use of Spanish (Huddy & Sears, 1995; Rodríguez, 1999; Zentella, 1997). It is no longer simply a mechanism for communication, but in many ways, it has become the paramount symbol of a Latino collective.

This pattern is particularly evident when Spanish is employed or referred to by individuals who do not identify as Latino. In these types of ads, the individual spokesperson(s) depicted is generally not relying upon Spanish as his or her standard means of communication, but as a mechanism for engaging and appealing to Latinos. In doing so, it draws attention to the use of the language as a symbolic cue that differentiates Latinos from those typically addressed in English. Taken together, existing literature offers reason to believe that the use of Spanish in political appeals—and particularly when employed by non-Latinos—would heighten the salience of a unified, pan-ethnic Latino collective. This brings us to our first hypothesis.

H1: Exposure to Spanish-language ads will increase perceptions of Latino political homogeneity, among all Latinos.

Social Identity Theory and Perceptions of In-Group Similarity

Spanish-language political appeals may heighten the salience of a Latino political collective, but is this really enough to heighten perceptions of Latino political homogeneity? While intuition might lead one to believe that a more salient identity would cause one to also see the group as more homogeneous, theoretical predictions are actually quite mixed. In fact, the bulk of research that originally explored perceptions of group homogeneity offered evidence suggesting that it would do just the opposite. Simply making a collective identity salient, it was argued, would generally lead to heightened perceptions of in-group *heterogeneity*—particularly when compared to other groups (Brewer, 1993; Jones, Wood, & Quattrone, 1981; Park, Ryan, & Judd, 1992). These findings supported the general premise of social identity theory, which claimed that people are motivated to achieve a positive self-esteem, and that one way to achieve this is to identify oneself as unique relative to others identified as part of the collective (Brewer, 1991). Support for this theory was found in a range of contexts, including groups that are relatively unfamiliar with one another (Linville, Fischer, & Salovey, 1989), highly familiar groups (Park & Judd, 1990; Park & Rothbart, 1982), and groups created in an arbitrary fashion (Judd & Park, 1988; Mullen & Hu, 1989).

However, this was found to not always be the case. Subsequent considerations of this relationship offered strong evidence that individuals will often magnify notions of intragroup similarity when they are identified with a subgroup that is in the minority of a larger group (Boldry & Gaertner, 2006; Mullen & Hu, 1989; Simon, 1992; Simon & Brown, 1987; Simon & Pettigrew, 1990). The relative lack of power associated with being identified with such groups can feel threatening. In turn, thinking of one's in-group as homogeneous rather than heterogeneous can enhance perceived social support (Stott & Drury, 2004). Several empirical findings are supportive of this account—particularly for high-identifying members of marginalized groups (e.g., Castano & Yzerbyt, 1998; Doosje, Ellemers, & Spears, 1995; Simon, 1992).

Identifying with a group that is in the majority, in contrast, generally does not produce a sense of threat. Members of such groups tend to have a lesser need for affiliation, and

often desire a greater degree of within-group differentiation. In turn, those who identify with a group that is in the majority in a given context should respond to group appeals in a manner consistent with the general tenets of social identity theory—that is, by emphasizing intragroup heterogeneity. I expect this to hold not only in the interpersonal contexts that have been the focus of previous research, but also in the media contexts that help shape our understanding of U.S. politics. This is to say, those who identify with a group that is in the majority of those represented in their media context should respond to political ads targeting that group by perceiving greater within-group political heterogeneity, while those who identify with a group that is in the minority of those represented in their media context should respond by perceiving greater within-group political homogeneity. This brings us to Hypotheses 2 and 3.

H2: Among Latinos who are *infrequently* represented in their media context, Spanish-language ads will increase perceptions of Latino political homogeneity.

H3: Among Latinos who are *frequently* represented in their media context, Spanish-language ads will reduce perceptions of Latino political homogeneity.

A limitation of much of this work, however, is that the relative size of one's group in a given context and their perceived power are often equated and considered interchangeably. Put differently, because poorly represented groups are often assumed to be less powerful, power, like size, has also been theorized to be inversely correlated with political homogeneity (Guinote, Judd, & Brauer, 2002). Along these lines, one might argue that smaller groups tend to be associated with stronger perceptions of political homogeneity *because* of the lack of power they conjure. Yet it is not clear that perceptions of a group's power and size would be affected in the same way by mass-mediated appeals. Spanish-language political ads may be seen as a sign of the group's significance, thereby increasing levels of perceived political importance while not necessarily affecting perceptions of their size. To better understand the effects of mediated appeals on perceptions of political homogeneity, as well as to disaggregate the effects of representation in one's media context from that of power, I also include measures of Latino political power. In doing so, I consider two additional hypotheses, the latter of which is a competing hypothesis.

H4: Exposure to Spanish-language ads will increase perceptions of Latino political power, among all Latinos.

H4: Greater perceived Latino political power will be associated with lower levels of perceived Latino political homogeneity, among all Latinos.

To summarize, I hypothesize that those who principally consume media in which the targeted collective is infrequently represented will be more likely to perceive the collective as politically homogeneous after viewing a targeted political ad. Those who principally consume media in which the targeted collective is frequently represented, on the other hand, will be more likely to perceive the collective as more politically diverse after viewing a targeted political ad. In addition, I explore the alternative hypothesis that the effects of exposure to targeted ads on perceptions of Latino political homogeneity will be driven by perceptions of political power, such that higher perceptions of political power will result in lower perceptions of political homogeneity. By addressing these points, I add to earlier work demonstrating relationships among group identities, perceived group norms, and political attitudes to explore how the targeting of those group identities through

political media can frame perceptions of membership in these groups, as well as how these groups fit into the larger American political environment.

Methods

To test the effects of targeted political advertisements on perceptions of a collective's level of political homogeneity, I used a population-based survey experiment. The stimulus was a 30-second Barack Obama campaign ad. Subjects were randomly assigned to see the ad broadcast entirely in English, referred to as the *General-Audience Ad* (coded as 0), or with both English and Spanish content, referred to as the *Latino-Targeted Ad* (coded as 1), neither of which would be unusual for English- or Spanish-dominant Latinos to see (Barreto, DeFrancesco Soto, Merolla, & Ricardo, 2008).[4] The topics of the political ad were education, the war in Iraq, and health care (see supplemental Online Appendix 1). Both of the ads used were original ads from Obama's 2008 presidential campaign, and therefore, realistic. The visual content of the ads was identical, as was the meaning of the audio content.

The survey experiment was administered in June 2012 by Knowledge Networks (now GfK) of Menlo Park, California. The sample included 829 Latinos overall, and was administered in Spanish or English based on the preference indicated by the respondent in a profile survey taken in advance of this particular survey.[5] Respondents were recruited to join the panel using random-digit-dialing and address-based sampling methods. To ensure the data were representative, weights based on the 2012 Current Population Survey were applied. Such data have been shown to be of very high quality, and comparable to other random samples (Chang & Krosnick, 2009).

In addition, this study avoids priming respondents with the design of the study. I was able to identify Latino respondents and their preferred language using the initial screening survey conducted by GfK when respondents joined the panel, far in advance of my study. So subjects participating in the study did not know it was a study of "Latino" opinion; they were recruited to take part in a study on "how people learn from political media." This avoids accidentally priming them to "think like a Latino" (Zaller & Feldman, 1992).

To capture the degree to which Latino respondents are exposed to media in which they are represented, referred to as *Extent of Latino Media Exposure*, I relied on levels of exposure to Spanish-language relative to English-language media. There is a long history of traditionally English-language media outlets grossly underrepresenting Latinos in their programming, while Spanish-language media, and particularly news media, presents a "daily capsule of reality in which Latinos are seemingly everywhere" (Mastro & Elizabeth, 2005; Rodríguez, 1999, p. 1). This variation contributes to significant differences in the degree to which Latinos see themselves represented in the media they consume. About 28% of Latinos only consume television media in Spanish, 26% consume both English- and Spanish-language television media, and about 45% consume only English-language media (Taylor, Lopez, Martínez, & Velasco, 2012).[6] Levels of exposure to Spanish-language media were assessed through questions asking about the frequency with which respondents consume print, radio, and televised media from English and Spanish sources, and coded so higher values signify higher levels of exposure to Spanish-language media (see supplemental Appendix 2 for details on question wording and variable construction). Of the 829 respondents, 372 were classified as principally consuming English-language media, 190 as principally consuming media in Spanish, and 217 as consuming about an even mix of Spanish- and English-language media. Fifty respondents did not answer the

language-of-media questions on the profile survey and were therefore excluded from those analyses.

All of the measures of perceived political homogeneity (described next) were administered just after exposure to the video stimulus, as is standard in these sorts of experiments. This means that the effects recorded may be larger than they would be as a result of any single exposure. That said, in real life, subjects would be repeatedly exposed over time to multiple ads, so the cumulative effects might be large as well. These results should be viewed as an important benchmark, and later studies can consider the effects of messages over time.

There were three principal considerations in selecting issues for the survey. First, I sought issues on which views of Latino political homogeneity were unlikely to be based on strong reasoning or evidence that Latinos would have a unified position. Thus, I did not choose "Latino-salient issues," issues on which there is evidence that Latinos have a relatively unified position, or issues that have a clear or disproportionate effect on Latinos (Sanchez, 2006). In doing so, it allows insight into how targeted political media affect group perceptions in the absence of more complete information. In line with this consideration, I asked questions about support for gays and lesbians serving openly in the military, and U.S. recognition of Palestine as an independent state (Pew Research Center, 2010, 2011). Second, because the content of the advertisement was clearly intended to persuade viewers to support Barack Obama, the democratic presidential candidate, two additional questions were included to gauge how the language of the ad affected response to this content. These questions included one asking about perceptions of Latino party identification and perceptions of Latino support for Obama.

This study also introduces a new measure of the perceived homogeneity of opinion. Previous studies that have explored perceptions of opinion have largely relied upon quantitative estimation techniques, such as asking people to estimate the percentage of people who would endorse a given attitude statement (Park & Rothbart, 1982), or to indicate how many out of 100 group members would choose each of the response options (Linville et al., 1989). However, when asked to produce such percentages or distributions of large numbers, responses are extremely unreliable and often produce distributions that do not result in the correct total (Krosnick & Fabrigar, in press). Other measures have asked respondents to label important points of a distribution, such as how the average and most extreme group members might view an issue (Jones et al., 1981; Simon & Brown, 1987). These approaches rely on a concept of distribution and statistical concepts that are not particularly intuitive to the general public.

To get around these barriers, I created a measurement tool that asked respondents to stack each of 10 stick figures, representing people, into one of four or five response columns. The columns, and the corresponding people stacked in them, were then displayed in a format akin to a vertical bar chart. This allowed people to clearly visualize the distribution of opinions on a single screen (see supplemental Appendix 3). It also ensured that they did not need to understand percentages or any statistical concept in order to answer the question.

Respondents were given an opportunity to practice using the question format prior to measuring the principal issues of interest in order to ensure that the homogeneity questions served as accurate measures of their perceptions. This process entailed (a) showing the respondents the question format prior to being asked to answer it, including an example of what one response might look like with the people assigned to categories; and then (b) asking them to complete a practice question on perceived attitudes toward affirmative action.[7] This question was used because it is a frequently discussed and relatively familiar

issue, and therefore one that would somewhat easily conjure a respondent's perception of public attitudes. At the same time, surveys show a lot of division on the issue (Pew Hispanic Center, 2004).

Following the practice question using the people-sorting format, I sought to validate the measure by testing for convergence with a separate descriptive measure of the perceived distribution of public opinion. To do so, respondents were asked in a multiple choice format—"Just to make sure we understood what you indicated with the stick figures"—whether they thought the majority of people in the United States supported, opposed, or were evenly split on affirmative action. If their responses to the question using people-sorting and the descriptive, multiple choice format were consistent, they were then asked to move on to the next question. If the responses were not consistent, respondents were told that their two responses were not consistent and asked to respond to the question using the people-sorting format again.

My goal was to ensure, so far as possible, that respondents understood how to use the novel technique that I had developed for tapping perceived opinion distributions. Following the first people-sorting question, 84% of respondents stacked the stick figures in a manner consistent with their descriptive response. After those respondents who offered inconsistent responses were given a second attempt to try the people-sorting question, 93% of respondents offered consistent responses to the multiple choice and people-sorting questions.[8] Regardless of their response on the trial questions, respondents were retained in the sample so as to maintain a nationally representative sample. To the extent that repeated practice questions did not correct those respondents' understanding of the question, the additional noise this produces in the data should work against the likelihood of finding systematic results.

Subjects were asked to rate their perceptions of the homogeneity of Latino public opinion on the four aforementioned issues: support for gays and lesbians serving openly in the military, support for U.S. recognition of an independent Palestinian nation, support for Obama, and partisan identity. To calculate this quantity, I used the following formula:

$$\text{Perceived Homogeneity}_i = \frac{\sum \left(\begin{array}{l} \left(Strongly\ Oppose_i - \frac{\alpha}{b}\right)^2 + \left(Somewhat\ Oppose_i - \frac{\alpha}{b}\right)^2 + \\ \\ \left(Somewhat\ Support_i - \frac{\alpha}{b}\right)^2 + \left(Strongly\ Support_i - \frac{\alpha}{b}\right)^2 \end{array} \right)}{b}$$

where i was the issue, α was the number of people sorted (a small number of respondents did not complete the sorting of all 10 figures), and b was the number of response options on the attitude distribution scale. A high score on this scale thus represented greater perceived homogeneity of Latino opinions for that issue, whereas a low score represents greater perceived diversity of Latino political opinion on that issue. Respondents repeated this same process for perceptions of opinion on each of the four issues. All four items were combined into an index of *Latino Political Homogeneity*. The *Latino Political Homogeneity* index had a Cronbach's alpha score of .89, thereby indicating that the index was highly reliable.

In addition to measures of homogeneity, an index of questions assessed perceptions of the political power of Latinos. To explore this relationship, respondents were asked about their perceptions of Latino political importance in presidential elections and perceptions of

Latino political influence on presidential election outcomes. These two items were combined into an index, *Political Power*, with a Cronbach's alpha of .75.

A manipulation check was included at the end of the survey to ensure that respondents observed the ad and that those exposed to the Spanish ad thought it was targeted toward Latinos by virtue of including Spanish. To verify this, they were asked whether they thought the ad was targeted toward a "specific group of voters, such as a specific region, ethnic group, or age group." If they answered affirmatively, they were then asked in an open-ended format which group of voters they thought the ad was targeting. Respondents who saw the Spanish ad were significantly more likely to say that the ad was targeting Latinos, Hispanics, Spanish-speakers, or Mexicans than those who saw the ad entirely in English ($F = 165.79$; $p < .005$).[9]

Findings

Do mass-mediated political appeals to targeted collectives cause the targeted individuals to perceive their collective as more politically homogeneous? And how does this vary by levels of exposure to mass media targeted toward one's own identity group? To address this question, I began by running an ordinary least squares regression with perceptions of *Latino Political Homogeneity* as the dependent variable, and *Latino-Targeted Ad* as the main independent variable. The effect of exposure to a *Latino-Targeted Ad* on Latinos, as a whole, revealed no such effect on perceptions of *Latino Political Homogeneity*. However, when looking at Latinos broken down by *Extent of Latino Media Exposure*, a clearer relationship between *Latino-Targeted Ad* exposure and perceptions of *Latino Political Homogeneity* was found.

As is displayed in the second column of Table 1, one's *Extent of Latino Media Exposure* had a significant effect on the relationship between exposure to the *Latino-Targeted Ad* and perceptions of *Latino Political Homogeneity*. Latinos who principally consume English-language media, and who see infrequent appeals to and representations of Latinos in their media context, were significantly more likely than those who principally

Table 1
Effect of *Latino-Targeted Ad* on perceptions of Latino political homogeneity, among Latinos

	MODEL 1	MODEL 2	MODEL 3
Constant	–.004 (.098)	.043 (.100)	.884 (.271)***
Latino-Targeted Ad	.003 (.061)	–.045 (.062)	–.073 (.061)
Extent of Latino Media Exposure		.426 (.119)***	.421 (.121)***
Latino-Targeted Ad * Extent of Latino Media Exposure		–.258 (.073)***	–.266 (.073)***
HouseholdIncome			–.017 (.008)*
Education			–.035 (.013)**
Generation			–.005 (.049)
Language Primarily Spoken			–.144 (.064)*
R squared	.000	.017	.043
N	828	779	776

Note. Entries are OLS regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.
*** $p < .005$. ** $p < .01$. = $p < .05$.

consume Spanish-language media to perceive Latinos as politically homogeneous after viewing the *Latino-Targeted Ad*, compared to after viewing the *General-Audience Ad*. In the third column, I show the same model but with additional measures of income, education, generation, and dominant language due to their widely documented relationship with Latino political attitudes and behavior. Similar to the model displayed in the second column, the interaction between *Extent of Latino Media Exposure* and *Latino-Targeted Ad* remains a highly significant predictor of *Latino Political Homogeneity* when including the covariates as well.

Looking at Figure 1, one can see how these results varied by *Extent of Latino Media Exposure* more clearly.[10]Using a one-way analysis of variance, I illustrate that those Latinos who generally consume English-language media were significantly more likely to perceive Latinos as politically homogeneous when viewing the *Latino-Targeted Ad* relative to when viewing the *General-Audience Ad* ($F = 7.629$, $p = .006$). Put another way, exposure to political messages targeting one's identity group in a context in which that individual is infrequently recognized heightened perceived political similarity among the targeted collective, relative to when seeing the same message in a way that does not rely on symbolic targeting. This is consistent with the tendency for individuals to perceive greater in-group homogeneity when their position as a minority in a given context is made

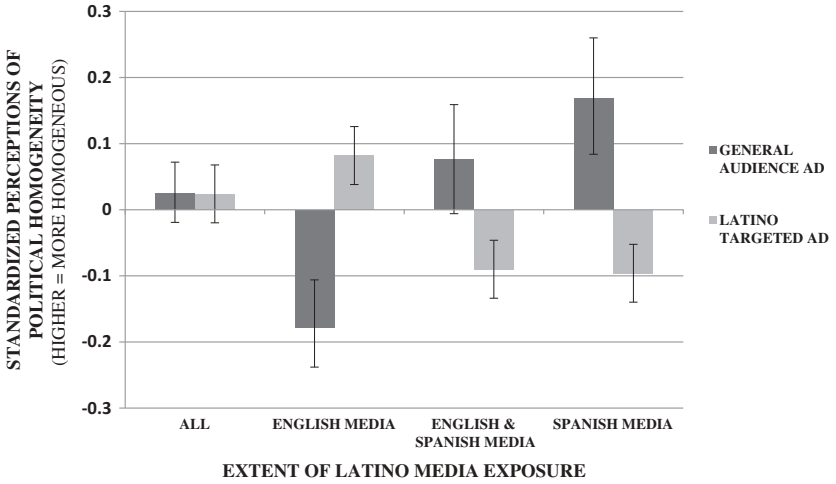

Figure 1. Effect of *Latino-Targeted Ad* on perceptions of Latino political homogeneity, by extent of Latino media exposure among Latinos.*Note:*The impact of the *Ad Type* on perceived *Latino Political Homogeneity* by *Extent of Latino Media Exposure* was tested using analysis of variance. Entries are means by experimental condition. Latinos who generally consume English-language media were significantly more likely to perceive Latinos as politically homogeneous when viewing the *Latino-Targeted Ad* relative to when viewing the *General-Audience Ad* ($F = 7.629$, $p = .006$). Latinos who generally consume Spanish-language media were significantly more likely to perceive Latinos as politically heterogeneous when viewing the Spanish ad relative to when viewing the English ad ($F = 4.55$, $p = .033$). There was no significant effect on Latinos who consume an even mix of Spanish- and English-language media ($F = 2.044$, $p = .153$).

salient (Boldry & Gaertner, 2006; Mullen & Hu, 1989; Simon, 1992; Simon & Brown, 1987; Simon & Pettigrew, 1990).

Among those who principally consume Spanish-language media, the effect of exposure to the *Latino-Targeted Ad*, relative to the *General-Audience Ad*, went in the complete opposite direction ($F = 7.112$, $p = .001$). My expectation was that when one is frequently exposed to representations of their identity group in their media context, political messages targeting that identity group would produce an effect consistent with the tendency to perceive greater in-group difference when well-represented. In line with this expectation, these respondents were significantly more likely to perceive Latinos as politically heterogeneous when viewing the *Latino-Targeted Ad* relative to when viewing the *General-Audience Ad* ($F = 4.55$, $p = .033$). In contrast to these effects of exposure to the ads among those who principally consume English-language media, those who principally consume Spanish-language media and routinely see Latinos represented in their media context perceived Latinos as significantly more politically diverse when viewing the *Latino-Targeted Ad.*

Latinos who consumed a mix of English- and Spanish-language media were, unsurprisingly, least affected by whether they saw a *Latino-Targeted Ad* or *General-Audience Ad*. Because these individuals consume the most even mix of Spanish- and English-language media, they are exposed to fewer representations of Latinos in the media than those who principally consume Spanish-language media, and may have felt less of a desire for greater within-group differentiation. However, they are exposed to more representations of Latinos in the media than those who principally consume English-language media, and may feel less of a need to situate themselves in a clearly defined group. With that being said, those among this subset who saw the *Latino-Targeted Ad* were slightly, albeit not significantly, more likely to perceive Latinos as more politically heterogeneous than those who saw the *General-Audience Ad* ($F = 2.044$, $p = .153$). This may signify that one does not need to see media represent and/or acknowledge his or her identity group *a majority* of the time to avert heightened perceptions of group homogeneity when that group is made salient, but that a significant amount of such exposure can also have this effect.

While the demonstrated interaction between *Latino-Targeted Ad* and *Extent of Latino Media Exposure* on perceptions of *Latino Political Homogeneity* is consistent with evidence that individuals who are underrepresented in a given context are more likely to perceive higher levels of in-group homogeneity, this raises questions about the role of power. Presumably, being targeted by a political ad will heighten perceptions of the group's political power. And like those who are underrepresented in a given context, low-power groups have also been linked to higher perceptions of group homogeneity (Guinote et al., 2002). Thus, one might anticipate that by heightening perceptions of political power, exposure to the *Latino-Targeted Ad* would also diminish perceptions of *Latino Political Homogeneity.* Yet, according to earlier analyses, this did not appear to be the case among those who principally consume English-language media.

To better understand this relationship, I verified that the inversely correlated relationship demonstrated between *Political Power* and *Latino Political Homogeneity* in past work was also shown in this study. A simple regression revealed a consistent relationship between *Political Power* and *Latino Political Homogeneity.* Those who perceived greater political power among Latinos also perceived the group as more politically diverse ($b = –.488$, $SE = .144$, $p = .001$). Going from the lowest to highest values on the scale of *Political Power* is associated with a .488, or about half a standard deviation, decrease in perceptions of *Political Homogeneity.*

I next looked at how the *Latino-Targeted Ad* affected perceptions of *Political Power*. Using a one-way analysis of variance, I show that exposure to the *Latino-Targeted Ad* did, in fact, increase perceptions of *Political Power* among all Latinos by about 4 percentage points ($F = 6.451$, $p = .011$; see Figure 2). Yet while perceptions of *Political Power* were associated with lower perceptions of *Political Homogeneity*, the effect of the *Latino-Targeted Ad* on perceptions of *Political Power*, while significant, had much less powerful implications for perceived levels of *Latino Political Homogeneity*. Seeing the *Latino-Targeted Ad* versus the *Genera- Audience Ad* was associated with about a .04-point increase in perceptions of *Latino Political Power* on a scale ranging from 0 to 1. That is associated with about one one-hundredth of a standard deviation reduction in perceptions of *Latino Political Homogeneity*. This contrasts with an increase in *Latino Political Homogeneity* of about one-quarter of a standard deviation when those who principally consume English-language media see a *Latino-Targeted Ad* as opposed to a *General-Audience Ad*.[11] Thus, while exposure to the *Latino-Targeted Ad* did increase perceptions of *Latino Political Power* among all Latinos, the dominant effect of the *Latino-Targeted Ad* on perceptions of *Latino Political Homogeneity* was driven by one's general media context.

Discussion

Several important points can be inferred from these findings. First, the use of group symbols in targeted campaign ads clearly affected how the targeted individuals saw their

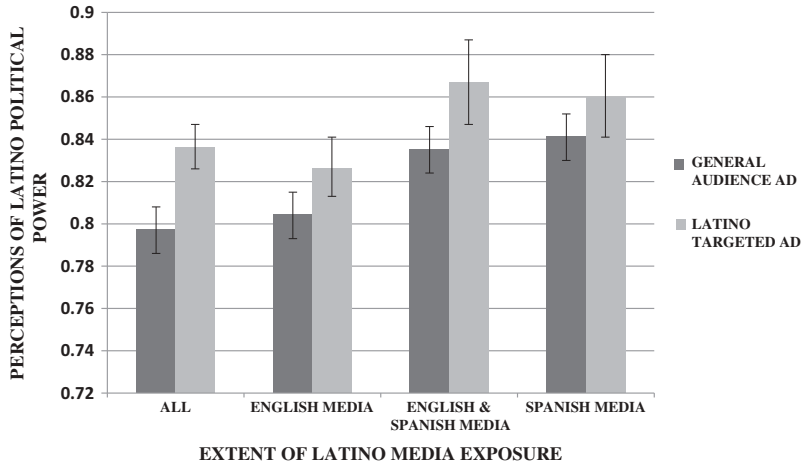

Figure 2. Effect of *Latino-Targeted Ad* on perceptions of Latino political power, among Latinos. *Note:*The impact of the *Ad Type* on perceived *Latino Political Power* by *Extent of Latino Media Exposure* was tested using analysis of variance. Entries are means by experimental condition. Latino respondents, as a whole, perceive Latinos as having significantly more *Political Power* after viewing a *Latino-Targeted Ad* relative to after viewing a *General-Audience Ad* ($F = 6.451$, $p = .011$). This effect was directionally consistent, but not significant when looking at Latinos who consume English-language media ($F = 1.171$, $p = .280$); those who consume Spanish-language media ($F = .474$, $p = .492$); or both English- and Spanish-language media ($F = 1.30$, $p = .256$), separately.

position in American politics. Repeated exposure to targeted appeals and group depictions can contribute to the narrowing or expansion of who and what is perceived to be included in a collective. Latinos who were regularly exposed to media in which they were represented tended to recognize their identity group as including a broader range of political views after seeing a single targeted political appeal. Among these individuals, exposure to targeted political appeals heightened perceptions of political diversity within the targeted group. The importance of this can be found in evidence on how perceptions of others shape one's attitudes and behavior (Mutz, 1998; Paluck, 2009), as well as how it can affect forms of secondary or intersectional marginalization (Cohen, 1999; Strolovich, 2007).

Yet many Latinos had just the opposite reaction. In particular, those Latinos who typically consume English-language media and are infrequently represented in their media context perceived greater *Latino Political Homogeneity* following exposure to the *Latino-Targeted Ad*. For these individuals, exposure to targeted political advertising narrowed the range of political views perceived to be included among Latinos. Just as commercial representations of Latinos have been used by Latinos to assert their own and others' place and level of belonging in the American sociocultural landscape, it appears that, in contexts in which they are rarely represented, Latinos may be internalizing or employing narrow ideas of *Latinidad* to place themselves in American politics (Dávila, 2001). Such a pattern should raise concerns about the voices and views that could be silenced as a result. This is particularly noteworthy because this is also the subset of Latinos most likely to have access to influential resources in the American political process, such as voting rights and wealth (Hakimzadeh & Cohn, 2007).

It is important to note, however, that those who consumed a more even mixture of Spanish and English media responded to targeted political advertisements in a way that was more consistent with those who principally consumed Spanish-language media. That is to say, even a moderate amount of exposure to media depicting one's own identity group was enough to cause respondents to perceive the collective as more politically inclusive after seeing a targeted appeal. These findings consequently speak to the importance of seeing one's own identity group consistently—and not sporadically—represented in mass media to American democracy.

Furthermore, while the effect of *Ad Type* on perceptions of *Latino Political Power* was small, it should not be overlooked for its independent value. The impact of the targeted appeal on the sense that the targeted group carries weight in the American political process is particularly important when considering populations that have historically been excluded from positions of influence and power. Heightening the sense that one can shape political outcomes is an important consideration in determining whether or not one will participate politically, making this a notable effect in and of itself (Abramson & Aldrich, 1982).

Thinking about the broader significance of the demonstrated relationship between the use of Spanish in political targeting and perceptions of Latinos as a political body naturally raises questions about external validity. In particular, it is necessary to explore how different types of Latino appeals may or may not contribute to this effect. As the number of Latinos in the United States has grown, so have the ways that candidates seek to garner their support (Abrajano, 2010; Barreto et al., 2008). There is both a broader array of symbolism used in appeals (e.g., celebrities, music, food), as well as a broader range of complexity in the types of policy statements included. Given the unique role of language in U.S. history, and particularly in the development of *Latinidad*, these alternative forms may produce distinct effects, and merit further exploration. Furthermore, additional research is needed to verify

that these findings hold across other groups that have faced political marginalization (e.g., sexual minorities), as well as among those with more institutionalized access to political power (e.g., political parties and political interest groups).

Ultimately, these findings speak less to the normative implications of using symbolic appeals in political advertisements, and more to the important complexities involved in using corporatized identities as a tool in political outreach. The use of such symbolism in political appeals may fortify or detract from the traditional democratic ideals of debate, difference, and inclusion. This has implications that are particularly important to account for when considering populations that have historically been marginalized in the American political process.

Notes

1 By targeted political media, I refer to all forms of media communicating political content (e.g., ads, news programs, etc.) which seek to communicate with a particular subset of the general American public. These often include media targeted by gender, religion, ethnicity, race, etc. (Gans, 2011).

2 Dávila (2001) nicely summarizes this point: "The homogenization of a heterogeneous population into a single 'Latino' market, for instance, while increasing the visibility of Latino populations coincides with larger processes of partial containment and recognition of ethnic difference that are at play in other spheres of contemporary U.S. society such as at the level of politics and social and cultural policies" (pp. 8–9).

3 To be clear, recognition of the diversity within a group should not be interpreted as challenging the validity of a given identity or whether it is politically meaningful. An identity group can be politically meaningful and powerful (and arguably more so) without there being uniformity in opinion across issues. To the contrary, a powerful, and politically significant, Latino identity has been well-documented (Barreto, 2007; Fraga et al., 2010; Sanchez, 2006; Wallace, 2014). In particular, a shared experience of social marginalization and imposed otherness has fortified a sense of a shared Latino experience and agenda (Sanchez, 2006; Sanchez & Masuoka, 2010; Stokes, 2003).

4 There are many examples of political advertising on traditionally English-language networks that included Spanish-language content, including the frequently cited 1988 Bush ad (Connaughton & Jarvis, 2004). Often referred to as "crossover advertising," this pattern has received a fair amount of attention in the realm of commercial advertising but limited attention in the context of political advertising (Castañeda Paredes, 2001).

5 To verify that the questions were comparable in the English and Spanish versions, it was drafted in English, translated into Spanish, and then translated back into English by four individuals (two native Spanish-speakers and two raised in bilingual homes in the United States). Both versions were also checked by the translation team at GfK.

6 The language in which Latinos consume news media, specifically, is divided into roughly similar size groups: About 18% of Latinos only consume news media in Spanish, 50% consume both English- and Spanish-language news media, and about 32% consume only English-language news media (Lopez & Ana, 2013).

7 While it is plausible that the use of this particular issue drew attention to race and ethnicity, it did so uniformly among all respondents regardless of the ad they saw. It therefore could not be responsible for any effects resulting from ad exposure. To the extent that it did draw attention to one's race or ethnicity, it would likely work against the likelihood of finding any results by calling more attention to race/ethnicity among those who saw the English-language ad than it otherwise would. This, in turn, would likely reduce the difference in ethnic salience among those who saw the English- and Spanish-language ads, which I argue is behind any such effects.

8 The validity of this measure was further verified using the same multiple choice follow-up measure in a second study administered to 875 Latinos by YouGov in July of 2012. In this second study, 88% of respondents—about 4 percentage points more respondents—offered a response to the first follow-up question that was consistent with how they sorted the stick figures. Given evidence from this study that the validity of the homogeneity measure was higher after the initial practice question, its validity may be even stronger than estimated in this article.

9 This was assessed in an open-ended question in which respondents were asked whether or not they thought the ad was targeted toward a specific subgroup, and if so, which subgroup they thought was being targeted. This allowed me to gauge how respondents perceived the treatment while minimizing the degree to which I might lead them with responses, and artificially inflate the manipulation check. With this benefit in mind, it served as a conservative test for two reasons. First, responses to open-ended questions are notoriously low compared to closed-ended questions (Couper, Traugott, & Lamias, 2001; Reja, Manfreda, Hlebec, & Vehovar, 2003). Second, the perceived target of an ad may not have been an intuitive way of discussing it. Despite these conservatizing factors, 29.1% of respondents who saw the Spanish-language ad said they thought it was targeted toward Latinos, Spanish-speaking individuals, Mexicans, or Hispanics, compared to 2% of those who saw the English-language ad. To the degree that respondents did not perceive that the Spanish-language ad was targeting a Latino collective, this should work against my hypotheses.

10 Supplemental Appendix 4 shows this relationship with *Extent of Latino Media Exposure* as a continuous variable.

11 Furthermore, there is no evidence that *Latino Political Power* is mediating the relationship between the *Latino-Targeted Ad* and perceptions of *Latino Political Homogeneity*. When *Latino Political Power* is added to the regression reported in the third column of Table 1, *Extent of Latino Media Exposure* and the interaction between *Extent of Latino Media Exposure* and *Latino-Targeted Ad* remains highly significant (see supplemental Appendix 5).

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Supplemental Material

Supplemental data for this article can be accessed on the publisher's website at http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2017.1288183.

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