

Political discussion and deliberative democracy in immigrant communities

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**Abstract**

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In this dissertation, I set out to build our understanding of how Latino immigrants learn to participate in and talk about politics in the United States. First, I develop a framework for analyzing political discussion from the perspective of social norms, and speculate about what may be the prevailing political discussion norms in the American public sphere. Next, I unite the literatures on political socialization, Latino and immigrant politics, and political discussion, along with scholarship on social groups and networks, to create a theoretical model for how Latino immigrants become socialized into a political system. I test this model with three empirical studies. In the first, I use quantitative survey data to test whether Latino immigrants report different sources of political socialization than the general population. The second study relies on qualitative interviews and focus groups with Mexican-heritage immigrants in Arizona and Washington aimed at their early and notable political experiences. The final study reports the results of a national quantitative survey of Mexican-heritage Americans and a comparison sample of whites. My key findings are that Latinos rely less on the traditional socializing influences of parents and teachers, and rely more on spouses, children, and the media. Many Latinos focus on learning about issues rather than debating in their political discussion, though those talking with other Latinos were open to arguing. Overall, I find notable differences in both the socialization channels and discussion norms between Latinos and whites in the U.S.

## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

During a focus group session in the Tri-Cities area of eastern Washington, I ask the participants about some of the different ways that people talk about politics and public issues. I encourage them to talk about how they have approached different kinds of conversations they have had with people. One of the participants is Josefina, a woman in her late 20s who was born in the U.S. after her parents emigrated from Mexico. Josefina<sup>1</sup> begins by talking about the differences between discussing politics with her fellow students in high school and college and with her Anglo husband's family members. Talking to Anglos or non-Latinos about immigration can be quite challenging, Josefina says, because Latinos feel so passionately about the issue, and it can be difficult for others to understand that. She continues:

For example, if you talk to someone, if I talk to someone that's white, and it's happened to me time and time and time again in high school when I have this conversation and (then) there are people that I don't speak to. ... But, you can walk away from those people. I can't walk away from my husband's family. Do you know what I mean? And even though they would more likely, I would think, would agree with me. I still wouldn't necessarily have that discussion because I don't – that's not something I can walk away from. Does that make sense? So, I use other avenues to educate.

Josefina goes on to describe how she tries to strike a balance between being diplomatic with people who are close to her and ensuring she educates them about an issue like immigration or immigrant rights:

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<sup>1</sup> The names provided here are pseudonyms, to protect the identities of study participants.

I talk about it to where – like, what we were saying about depending on who you’re talking to, you’re going to take a different avenue; you’re going to take a different approach of how you bring up the conversation, what you introduce and that type of thing. So, the way that I approach that to educate is—and it’s worked so far—I bring it up to where they don’t feel defensive, does that make sense? So it’s very, it’s safe to talk about and it’s safe to agree or to disagree with me. So, little by little those conversations get deeper and deeper and deeper where you get to the point where I can talk about that to them and I’m not afraid that it’s going to end in some big blow out where they completely hate me...

These comments from Josefina raise several important issues related to Latino politics, political discussion and socialization, and immigrant life in the United States. Josefina talks about the difficulty in discussing immigration, an issue of great controversy in the U.S. but also one that represents fundamental civil rights for many in the Latino community. She and many other Latinos struggle with being an under-represented ethnic minority group that is often ostracized, even as they feel impassioned to speak out about their civil rights. Josefina recognizes the importance of trying to educate Anglos about the immigration issue, but notes that this controversial topic can cause anger and disengagement. She notes some of the different ways of talking about politics, pointing out that more diplomatic and less argumentative styles may be helpful in talking to someone about a controversial issue – especially if one has a personal relationship to maintain with them. In her comments just after the quotes above, she goes on to talk about the difficulty of navigating two identities, that of a young Latina woman facing discrimination and that of an honor student in school who is expected to fit in.

But how does someone like Josefina, a second-generation immigrant, learn how to fit into society and how one should talk to Anglos about political issues? How do people like her parents, first-generation immigrants from Mexico, develop an understanding of American politics and how to participate in their new country's public sphere after being raised in a different political system? How do people learn expectations about proper forms of political discussion—the social norms of political talk—when they are new members of that society? These are the questions guiding this research project. Though these questions are driven in part by the importance of Latino immigrants in the United States and its political system, they are also motivated by a theoretical concern. One useful way to gain insight into the social norms that are embedded within a society or political culture is to focus on a group that is unfamiliar with that culture and learning those norms anew. My hope is that this project, by studying the process through which newcomers to American political culture learn about the political norms in the United States, will yield insight into the prevailing political norms here. In addition, in this project I will strengthen the connections between theory and research on political discussion and social norms, and I will advance a theoretical framework describing how social groups and networks can influence how individuals learn to participate in a political system.

### **Immigration and Political Participation**

The question of immigrant political socialization warrants careful study because in recent decades, the United States and other democratic nations around the world have seen a large influx of immigrants from less democratic countries, along with growth in associated immigrant-derived communities. People who emigrated from nations with autocratic or corrupt political systems may have less experience with political ideals valued in democracies, such as citizen involvement in governance, political leaders who are responsive to public will, and a respectful

discussion of issues and ideas within a vibrant public sphere. Political socialization research has shown that young people in the native-born population rely on parents and schools to help them learn democratic values like these as they grow up. People who immigrated without their parents or after adolescence, however, would not be affected by those two important channels of socialization—presenting the questions of where immigrants learn the values and norms of their new political system, through what channels, and to what end.

One of the most important political acts in American democracy is political discussion, whether taking the shape of a formal interaction in a town hall or government meeting, or an informal chat with friends or family members. How, then, do immigrants develop an understanding of this form of political behavior? More specifically, what do immigrants see as the norms of political discussion in the U.S., and what sources and settings do they rely on to understand these norms?

To make the scope of this project manageable, I decided to focus my research on Mexican-heritage immigrants<sup>2</sup> and their children, the largest and fastest-growing immigrant group in the United States. Immigrants from Mexico provide an interesting case for studying the questions posed above. Mexico was a single-party quasi-democracy for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and it retains some of its anti-democratic traditions (Freedom House, 2012). Many people emigrating from Mexico to the U.S. do so as younger adults without their parents. When those immigrants and their children and grandchildren begin to participate in public life in their new nation, they may face some challenges in doing so without having a strong grounding American

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<sup>2</sup> A note about terminology: Though this dissertation focuses on Mexican-heritage people living in the United States, for the sake of brevity I sometimes refer to this group as “Latinos” or “Latino immigrants.”

political culture. Thus, this focal population provides a good context in which to study newcomer socialization to political discussion norms.

### **Project Outline**

To complete this research project, I used drew on existing theory in developing a new socialization model, and I conducted empirical research to test and further refined that model using both qualitative and quantitative data. I begin my review in Chapter 2 with a review of research on political discussion and deliberation, as well as scholarship on how social norms shape our behavior during our interactions with other people. I integrate these literatures to develop a general theoretical framework for describing behavioral norms in the context of political discussion and conversation.

In Chapter 3, I review scholarship on immigrant and Latino politics, political socialization, small group behavior, and social networks. I use these different areas of research to develop a theoretical model that guided my research in the rest of this dissertation project. This model, which I dubbed the Social Contact Model of Immigrant Political Communication, suggests that one's close-knit social groups and more distant social contacts are instrumental in shaping how one becomes political socialized and learns about political practices in a new nation.

Chapter 4 describes an initial test of some of the concepts examined in this dissertation. I use data from two public opinion surveys, one of Latinos and another of the general population, to begin to answer questions about different sources of political socialization, from parents and teachers to friends and co-workers. The data allow me to identify some interesting differences between Latinos and the general population in who they perceive to be their role models for how they learned to talk about politics.

In Chapter 5, I examine Latino immigrant socialization in much greater depth by describing a qualitative study of how Latino immigrants talk about politics and learn how to participate in public life in the United States. I use a series of focus groups and individual interviews with first- and second-generation Latino immigrants in Arizona and Washington to learn more about how Latinos discuss politics here and become socialized into American political culture.

Chapter 6 revisits some of the findings from the qualitative study, as well as questions posed in previous chapters, by looking at Latino political socialization and discussion in a national sample. In addition, I use a small national sample of whites as a comparison group to determine some of the similarities and differences between Latinos and Anglos in how they discuss politics and learn how to participate in public life. By analyzing these phenomena with a national sample of Mexican-heritage immigrants, I determine whether some of the findings from the situated qualitative study in Chapter 5 are limited to those groups and communities or whether they resemble the experiences of the larger Mexican-heritage community around the United States.

I conclude in Chapter 7 by summarizing the key findings from the dissertation and suggesting future avenues for research on immigrant political socialization and political discussion. Both my qualitative and quantitative data provide support for the Social Contact Model and suggest that there are important differences between Latino immigrants and the white population in their sources of political socialization and their typical political discussion partners. In addition, my data show that Latino immigrants in Arizona and Washington tend to avoid arguments and debates in political discussion, whereas Latinos around the nation were not significantly different from whites in this regard.

## CHAPTER 2

### Toward a set of norms of political discussion

A group of Mexican immigrants, many undocumented, have gathered for a focus group discussion about politics and public engagement. The event is hosted at a day laborer center in Seattle, Washington, that they all attend regularly as they try to find more stable work in the United States. My collaborators and I have asked them to talk with us so that we might better understand their experience of American politics. Chapter 5 will present the details of these qualitative interviews, but I draw on this particular focus group by way of introduction.

The topic at this moment is political discussion, and one participant talks about a recent political conversation that got sidetracked by a Salvadoran man at the work center who likes to joke about politics. The moderator asks for more details. When you talk about politics here at the center, she asks, how do you reach agreement? Do you like having a lively discussion, like you're arguing or fighting?

"No, well, there is not an understanding," replies Carlos, a man in his 30s who works at the center. "What they have here, you don't come to an understanding, when the people are not united, right? It's all arguing. At the end they even come out on bad terms and are angry and all that. No, no, no. Instead you withdraw."<sup>3</sup>

With this comment, Carlos expressed his displeasure with contentious, argumentative political discussion—a sentiment shared by others in his focus group, as well as many others interviewed in this study. Participants talked about how they preferred talking about politics in less argumentative ways, with the aim of building agreement and shared understanding, but that

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<sup>3</sup> Translated from the Spanish.

they sometimes encountered discussion partners who took the opposite tack. These conflicting views of appropriate behavior, or even the *purpose* of political discussion, foreground an important concept in the study of social life: the unwritten rules that guide our conduct when we interact with others, which scholars commonly refer to as “behavioral norms.”

Scholars in sociology and many other social sciences have studied behavioral norms extensively, detailing how these social rules affect individuals, groups, and larger collectives in a wide range of settings (Hogg & Reid, 2006; Rimal & Real, 2003; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Though some research has explored political behavior through the lens of social norms, that work has tended to focus on practices like voting and general political engagement (Glynn, Huges, & Lunney, 2009; Shulman & Levine, 2012), rather than political discussion. Since conversing about politics is by its nature a social act—happening in dyads, small groups, or larger collectives—the course of political conversation will likely be guided by the behavioral norms that exist in those social settings. But what sorts of norms exist for the context of political discussion and conversation? In identifying the salient norms in a particular context—political discussion in a modern Western democracy, in this case—what are the different dimensions of behavior that should inform one’s analysis?

In my dissertation, I will address this gap in the literature by reviewing research on the social act of political discussion and creating a framework for describing behavioral norms in political talk. My framework will lay out the different ways of engaging in political discussion, the variety of settings and discussion partners for those conversations, and the different motivations for participating in this kind of behavior. This approach provides a strong foundation for my study in two ways. First, it will provide researchers a common conceptual language for comprehensive norms-based analysis of the act of political discussion itself, which has typically

been examined in the context of larger theories of democracy or social identity (Gamson, 1992; Walsh, 2004), or studied with an eye toward the effects of political discussion on other political behavior (Eveland Jr, 2004). The framework I develop will instead help scholars analyze political conversation in the context of norms of behavior, which have been shown to be pivotal in shaping many social acts. Second, this framework will also allow me to study the political development and engagement of immigrants who are new to a society. These individuals navigate a set of social norms that may be quite different from those in their native country, as I will discuss in Chapter 3.

To begin, I will first review scholarship on social and behavioral norms, which are socially embedded rules that shape individual behavior. Norms provide general guidelines about what people expect of others and give us a sense of what behaviors are unacceptable. Second, I will review the literature on political discussion and conversation and identify key findings from previous research that can help in analyzing political discussion norms. Third, I will describe and explain my framework for the different dimensions of political discussion norms to show how one can analyze political conversation through the lens of social norms. I will conclude by summarizing the key points from this chapter and connecting them to the later sections in my dissertation.

### **Social and Behavioral Norms**

Norms of behavior in social interaction, which are often called “social norms” or “behavioral norms,” have long been a subject of study in the social sciences, particularly in sociology, psychology, and communication. Early studies in political communication behavior showed that political decision making was profoundly shaped by social interaction and by behavioral norms within large-scale social groupings, such as particular demographic groups

(Berelson, Lazarsfeld, & McPhee, 1954; Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1948). Contemporary researchers have since examined the social act of political discussion (Walsh, 2004), whereas others have studied the effects engaging in political discussion on other phenomena, like opinion formation or community engagement (Eveland Jr, 2004; Klobstad, 2007). Scholars have noted different kinds of categories or features of political discussion behavior (Gamson, 1992; Walsh, 2004), and researchers have also examined whether social norms shape various forms of political behavior (Glynn et al., 2009). However, there has not been a systematic and wide-ranging analysis of behavioral norms in the context of political discussion, which, as a social act happening in dyads or small groups, is likely governed by social norms (Shulman & Levine, 2012).

Before further exploring the application of the social norms approach to political discussion, I wish to review scholarship on norms in general. Norms have been conceptualized as operating at different levels, such as at the individual or collective levels (Lapinski & Rimal, 2005), or as operating in different ways, such as descriptive versus injunctive norms (Rimal & Real, 2003). Descriptive norms are based on the perceived prevalence of an act—an individual's belief that some behavior is what most other people in society or in a social grouping are doing or not (Shulman & Levine, 2012). The more widespread a behavior, the more socially acceptable it is to engage in that behavior. Descriptive norms can sometimes be based on individual misperceptions, as is the case with social projection, which is when someone engages in a socially unacceptable or counter-normative behavior and mistakenly believes that behavior to be quite common (Rimal & Real, 2003).

Injunctive norms are based on social approval or disapproval of a particular act. People may be more likely to engage in some behavior because they believe it will receive the approval

of others, or they may avoid a behavior because they believe it will result in disapproval (Rimal & Real, 2003). People are pressured into acting a particular way because of injunctive norms, as they fear being sanctioned for unacceptable behavior or seek the social credit given for acceptable behavior. The threats associated with norm violations can include sanctions as harsh as expulsion from a social group, since violating a behavioral norm is a de facto violation of the group's identity (Rimal & Real, 2003; Sherif, 1972).

In the case of both descriptive and injunctive norms, the strength of the norm derives from the individual's desire to belong, either in a particular social grouping or in a wider society; engaging in socially acceptable behavior improves one's chances of being welcomed into desirable social groups (Shulman & Levine, 2012). Individuals' perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of following social norms are just as important as the real effects; some individuals may perceive these effects quite differently, which can result in variation in how closely they follow a norm (Rimal & Real, 2003).

In addition to descriptive and injunctive norms, another useful distinction between different kinds of norms is the level on which those norms operate. Collective norms operate on the level of large social entities, like groupings, communities, and entire cultures, whereas perceived or individual norms are how individual people interpret those collective norms (Lapinski & Rimal, 2005). Collective norms are the shared guidelines that exist in a collective and emerge through social interaction within that entity. Perceived norms, on the other hand, are each individual's interpretation of the collective norms in their social grouping or culture (Lapinski & Rimal, 2005). Since individual interpretations of collective norms may vary significantly within a collective, simply measuring the aggregation of individual views on norms does not provide an accurate view of a collective norm; instead, that requires measuring norms at

higher collective levels. Lapinski and Rimal suggest studying how the media depicts the trends around a particular subject or issue, for example, to see norms operating on a collective level. This distinction between perceived and collective norms can be helpful when thinking about how to conceptualize particular norms, as well as when trying to measure norms at various levels in society.

Some scholarship on social norms has focused on the importance of normative pressure within smaller-scale groups, rather than larger collectives like cultures and social groupings (Hare, 1976). These may be of particular use in studies of political discussion, since some—though certainly not all—of this behavior typically occurs in dyadic or small group settings with family members, friends, and acquaintances (Huckfeldt, Beck, Dalton, & Levine, 1995; Jacobs, Cook, & Delli Carpini, 2009).

In addition to thinking about the distinctions between different kinds of norms, other important areas of consideration are the effects of norms on behavior and the driving force behind those effects. Norms within social and familial groups can have powerful effects on the behavior of individual members. Ties within small groups such as these can strengthen over time and build up the cohesiveness within the group (Mullen & Copper, 1994; Wheelan, Davidson, & Tili, 2003). Individuals may then become increasingly reluctant to violate norms within such a cohesive group (Hare, 1976). The pressure to conform to group norms can be strong, and it can lead individuals to take actions that are in line with the rest of the group members' actions, and this effect is not necessarily limited to very cohesive groups (Bond & Smith, 1996). Normative pressure was powerfully documented in Solomon Asch's famous conformity experiments, in which many individuals discounted their first-hand visual information to go along with their group's collective judgment, and more recent studies have found similar results (Cruz,

Henningsen, & Williams, 2000). Higher-level norms, such as those at the cultural or religious levels, can also have a powerful effect on the behavior of small-group members who belong to those cultures or religious communities, as seen in many different studies of cultural practices and social behavior (see, for example, Basso, 1996; Duneier, 1999; Philipsen, 1992).

At the level of the small group, some scholars have relied on social identity theory to help explain the power of social norms (Hogg, 2005; Postmes, Haslam, & Swaab, 2005). In this conception of norms, small groups develop a strong internal identity and individual members work to exemplify that identity in their interactions within the group (Hogg & Reid, 2006). Following the group's norms is simply the process of enacting the group identity in one's behavior—members are careful to follow social norms to ensure they are maintaining harmony with the group's identity.

Another important question to consider when studying social norms is what happens when individuals, by virtue of their membership in multiple groups or collectives, encounter conflicting norms. How do people negotiate the differences between the norms in two or more social groupings or small groups to which they belong? This issue is particularly salient in the context of my dissertation, which focuses on people steeped in one culture who have to learn to navigate another culture. The results of research on this issue are decidedly mixed. Scholars have found that individual responses to conflicting norms can vary quite a bit depending on the context and the culture and beliefs of the individual herself (Stoodley, 1959) and whether she believes it is possible to reconcile or compromise between the conflicting norms (Stouffer, 1949). The salience of the group or norm in question also plays an important role, as an individual facing a conflict between different group memberships may prioritize the norm of the group most salient in a particular situation (Postmes et al., 2005). Translating this to my own research

context, scholars studying Latinos and immigrant culture in the United States have noted the importance of conflicting and competing norms among members of those communities, who may face additional problems when negotiating these differences because of lower socioeconomic status and societal position (Flores & Benmayor, 1997; Holling & Calafell, 2011).

Social and collective norms have also been shown to shape individual behavior in political contexts. Schudson's (1999) research on political behavior in the US from colonial to modern times, for example, has illustrated how politics is often a sort of cultural practice. Our political actions reflect the social norms of the time period and context—whether that means fiercely protecting the privacy of one's voting choices in our modern system, or proudly announcing in the public square how one planned to vote for someone in a colonial election. Norms in one of the political groups studied by Walsh (2004) had both positive and negative effects. The strongly regimented behavior and tightly controlled membership of the group led members to develop a strong collective identity that they used to help make sense of public and political issues, but those norms also prevented outside beliefs and opinions from being voiced and led to the denigration of those who were different from the group members. In the case of the social groups studied by Eliasoph (1998), the norms of those groups actually *limited or prohibited* the discussion of political issues—even when they were engaging with issues that overlapped with the political realm, such as public school funding or environmental regulation. Even research that has examined political discussion more indirectly, such as the work of Mutz (2006) and Huckfeldt, Johnson, and Sprague (2004), has addressed what is likely the influence of political discussion norms, whether a general norm against voicing political disagreement or one that allows for disagreement in some situations.

Later in this chapter, I will explore further the concept of social norms in the context of

political discussion. My intention in this section was to review relevant literature on social norms to explain why we study norms of behavior. I also aimed to show the importance of understanding the different social norms at play in Western democracies that are becoming more ethnically diverse in recent years. In the next section, I will review scholarship on political discussion and conversation. I will then synthesize these findings in a discussion of norms of political talk that leads to my conceptual framework thereof.

### **Political Discussion and Conversation**

Political decisions in Western democracies typically come from the tallying of votes or other measures of support, but there are many political acts more concerned with the *process* than with the outcome. Some of these are kinds of political discourse, whether in the form of a political leader's speech broadcast on television, a city council meeting open to the public, a consultative gathering between citizens and leaders on a public project, a protest group trying to raise awareness of their cause, or a group of voters talking to each other about an upcoming election. Even though these acts are important in a robust democracy, some high-profile studies have noted their decline in the U.S., coupled with reduced public interest in politics and civic life (Eliasoph, 1998; Putnam, 2001). Other research on American public discourse is more optimistic, especially with regard to political discussion online and in person (Jacobs et al., 2009; Neblo, Esterling, Kennedy, Lazer, & Sokhey, 2010). One of the most prevalent forms of political discourse is when citizens discuss politics with other citizens—and Jacobs' study found that about two-thirds of the U.S. population engages in informal political discussion or conversation on a regular basis, whereas eighty percent of Americans engage in one of several different kinds of 'discursive participation,' like attending a public forum or discussing politics online (Jacobs et al., 2009).

Political discussion is an important context of political behavior in democratic societies. Conversations with other people help us learn more information and develop political opinions (Eveland Jr, 2004), and they can help us make sense of society and grow closer together with like-minded people (Walsh, 2004). To start to understand the importance of social norms in the context of political discussion, I begin by reviewing some of the research that has examined political conversation and discussion in great depth. Though some of the scholars mentioned below do not explicitly mention social norms, per se, their work still provides valuable insight that helps us understand the social construction of political norms.

At this juncture, it is important to provide some clarity about the terminology used in this chapter and throughout this dissertation. Though this study is ultimately about *political discourse*, that term is fairly broad and captures other political phenomena that are not considered herein, such as the rhetorical messages produced by a national leader in their speeches to the public (Coe & Domke, 2008) or a media ‘debate’ on political issues that can influence public opinion (Page, 1996). The term *political discussion*, however, focuses more specifically on the conversations and discussions of political or public issues that occur between people, whether in an interpersonal (that is, one-on-one) or small group setting. This phenomenon has served as the subject of a range of studies, from Walsh’s analysis of small-group discussions of politics among groups of friends and acquaintances (2004) to survey-based studies of the prevalence, predictors, and effects of talking about politics with other people, like that of Jacobs and colleagues (2009) and Huckfeldt and colleagues (2004). In the interest of engaging writing, I will use the term political discussion interchangeably with *political conversation* and *political talk*, and I do not make finer distinctions among those three terms.

Informal interpersonal discussion of politics can have many potential benefits for citizens

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

However, there is some debate over whether people in the U.S. are, indeed, being exposed to disagreement. Mutz (2006) points out that most political discussion in the U.S. is among people who are politically like-minded, meaning that they are not exposed to cross-cutting opinions, and are simply hearing their same views repeated back to them. Jacobs and colleagues (2009) take a more optimistic view, as their data suggest that a substantial minority of Americans are trying to persuade others on a candidate or issue, or engaging in political debates online. Even if many people are discussing politics with like-minded people, however, that can also have some benefits. Agreeable discussion can help generate political activism and

participation, as people who talk to like-minded citizens can build up partisan fervor or create an activist group with others who are interested in an issue or candidate (Mutz, 2006). Despite theories that closely contested elections can help drive up turnout, Mutz pointed out that partisans turn out to vote in much higher rates in areas dominated by their party.

In addition to studies of political talk, other scholars have examined the civic and political roles of social groups that are not explicitly political. Gastil's (1993) study of a grocery store co-op, for instance, illustrated how democratic procedures in the governance of the organization can help individual members learn how to act more democratically. Walsh's (2004) study of informal groups that often discussed politics, on the other hand, showed how some groups use those discussions to help individuals build a shared identity as members that group, and in turn use that identity to help make sense of political issues. Not all groups were able to build such identity-based political understanding. Those that were less explicitly linked to a social category or group (e.g. the women's arts and craft group she studied) had less reason to connect their shared identity as women to the topics that arose in discussion. For identity-based groups, though, civic life remains quite vibrant. Members developed strong social ties and relationships, built camaraderie and trust with one another, had mutual respect for group members, and became interdependent on one another. Their discussions established a collective entity of sorts that promoted a certain view on political issues, making their group a safe place for members.

Political discussion, however, can often be a difficult process for individual citizens and can have some negative side effects. Political talk may activate connections to our particular social groups or social location and bring up core issues like race, ethnicity, religion, or socioeconomic status. Observational studies of political discussion (Gamson, 1992; Walsh,

2004) show that these conversations can often activate a participant's social identity in negative ways, by solidifying divisions between social groups and locking out alternative viewpoints. This can lead to low-quality (and undemocratic) decision making, and it can provide an impetus for disengaging from politics and public policy (Eliasoph, 1998; Sanders, 1997).

Political discussion based on a group's social identity is fueled by group prototypes and social categorization. Groups with a strong in-group identity develop a prototype, or an idealized group member that embodies many or all of the qualities associated with the group identity. This prototype becomes the benchmark against which group members are measured. People begin to socially categorize themselves and others, viewing them not as individuals but instead seeing them "through the lens of the prototype, measuring them against the prototype and assigning prototypical attributes to them," and they become "depersonalized" (Hogg, 2005, p. 138).

Categorization and norm formation helps people reduce their uncertainty about the social world, as they "like to know who they are and how to behave, and who others are and how they might behave" (Hogg, 2005, p. 141).

In the case of groups like the "Old Timers" studied by Walsh (2004) in the medium-sized Ann Arbor, Michigan, these men gathering at a corner store to talk about politics and many other topics develop an identity as conservative, working-class, Midwestern Americans. They explicitly contrast their patriotic and pro-military views and self-assessed "common-sense" against that of "professors" from the University of Michigan, residents of the nearby metropolis of Detroit, political liberals of any stripe, and women ethnic minorities (Walsh, 2004). This process of categorization and prototype development helps establish a kind of social norm for the Old Timers.

A similar dynamic arose in the political discussion groups studied by Gamson (1992), in

which group members converged on a shared identity based on race, socioeconomic status, or shared interest in an issue, and the group processed politics topics through that identity. Their social category was a place from which they could make sense of the world, see where they stood in it, and understand how their standing related to political issues. However, a group norm seemed to develop that prevented group members from addressing an issue from the viewpoint of another identity—one that might have been salient for some of the group members, but not all of them. For example, when an individual brought up the issue of race in a mixed-race group focused on its shared working-class identity, other members guided the discussion back to class and socioeconomic status (Gamson, 1992).

This process is self-reinforcing: As groups become more cohesive and the norms are repeatedly enacted over time, individual members may find it difficult to act in ways counter to those norms, even if they might otherwise be inclined to do so. In the case of the social groups studied by Eliasoph, members show pride in being ignorant of and disconnected from politics (1998). In those groups, a cultivated identity of “cynical chic” encourages group members to be cynical about and disengaged from politics, preventing people from sharing earnest appeals for particular candidates or public policies, and even precluding people showing any serious interest in politics. In private discussions with the researcher, group members would occasionally discard their cynical anti-politics identity to express interest in political issues and discuss connections between those issues and their lives.

The aim of this section was to review and analyze the in-depth research that has been conducted on political discussion and conversation and highlight those findings that can be useful in studying social norms in the context of political discussion. In this next section, these findings will be put to use in developing a set of dimensions of political discussion norms.

## **Understanding the Norms of Political Discussion**

Though there have been many studies examining political discussion in groups and dyads, as well as the effects of discussing politics, few scholars have systematically and comprehensively examined the discursive norms present in political conversations. Two problems exist because of this gap. First, researchers in political communication do not have a comprehensive framework through which to describe particular instances or contexts of political discussion and compare those with others. Normative theoretical frameworks, such as deliberative democracy, can be useful in determining whether a particular discussion meets some ideals related to the aims of a political system—for example, whether people are given equal opportunity to voice their opinions, which is in keeping with the democratic value of equal representation in politics. However, scholars may also benefit from a theoretical framework that is not normative—that is, one that merely seeks to catalogue the features of political discussion, the reasons people engage in discussion, and the outcomes of discussion.

A comprehensive framework of discussion norms serves a second function when it helps us see the power of social norms in shaping human behavior. Individuals and groups are influenced by the actions of others around them, and may be reluctant to violate the norms of behavior within the groups to which they belong (Bond & Smith, 1996; Hare, 1976). Political behaviors like discussion of politics can be based on social norms within societies, cultures, and groups—and understanding those norms may provide a deeper understanding of the behavior in question (see, for example, Schudson, 1999).

In this section, I will develop a framework of the key dimensions of political discussion norms—the important aspects of political discussion that are likely affected by the pressure of social norms. I will use this framework later in this dissertation, when I analyze political

discussion and the socialization process for Mexican-heritage immigrants in the United States and contrast their experiences with those of Anglos in Chapters 5-6. Before describing this framework, however, I briefly revisit the relevant scholarship on political discussion that has more explicitly addressed discussion norms. This review will provide insight into the categories and features of discussion that have already been analyzed in this communication context.

Some researchers who have looked at norms of political discussion in the U.S. have tended to focus on a single dimension or continuum within discursive norms. Tannen's (1998) research on argumentativeness in American politics is focused on the contentious nature of political discourse, and how it stands in stark contrast with a more productive, collaborative kind of dialogue on public issues. Similarly, Mansbridge's (1983) pioneering work on the dichotomy in democracy between adversarial and unitary orientations focuses on the contrast between arguing over trade-offs and alternatives on the one hand, and collective decision-making on the other. Mutz's (2006) research has tended to focus on the level of agreement or disagreement in political discussion, and how that may affect individual citizens' desire to engage with (or disengage from) politics. Others have studied multiple elements of political discussion: Eliasoph's (1998) study of the avoidance of politics in public, for example, addressed other social norms like humor, cynicism, and political expertise. Scholars of communication and discussion in general, meanwhile, have dealt with norms of behavior within discursive settings (Hymes, 1974; Philipsen, 1992).

However, there has not been a comprehensive collection of the key dimensions of discursive norms in political discussion and conversation. By reviewing research on political talk and on norms of general communication, I will create a preliminary list of these dimensions for future analysis of political discussion norms. In addition, for some of those dimensions I will

speculate about what may be the prevailing norm in American political discourse, or how the norm may differ between the white and Latino populations in the U.S. Given the cultural differences between those populations, as well as the additional differences between native-born and immigrant groups (Flores & Benmayor, 1997; Portes & Rumbaut, 1996), we might expect some differences between whites and Latino immigrants in how they discuss politics and public issues. Studies on how cultural norms affect social interaction, such as Kochman's (1981) analysis of how black and white people approach conflict, suggest that different sub-groups in the American population may have very different prevailing norms in discussing politics. Basso's (1979, 1996) studies of Native American culture and interactions between Western Apache and white people, as well as Philpsen's (1992) analysis of speech patterns and political discourse in different Chicago subcultures, provide telling examples of differing communication norms between social and cultural groups.

### **Tone of speech**

One of the strongest distinctions between different kinds of political discourse, as mentioned above, is the continuum between *contentious and amicable speech*; a similar distinction is between a focus on argument and disagreement on the one hand, and building agreement and compromise on the other (Mansbridge, 1983). These can be operationally defined in a study of political discussion norms as the perceived (or observed) balance between contentious political statements and amicable ones, or as the perceived (or observed) balance between argumentative statements and compromise-building statements.

Is there an agreed-upon norm in American political discourse that stipulates appropriate levels of contentiousness, or compromise-building speech? The work of Tannen and Mansbridge suggests that in larger-scale politics, such as in media-based discussions of issues or town hall

gatherings of citizens, argumentativeness and disagreement is the norm, and compromise and conciliation are pushed aside. However, the work of Mutz and Eliasoph suggests that in smaller-scale discussions, citizens tend to talk to people with whom they generally agree, and in any case would try to avoid conflict of a political nature for fear of alienating friends. Since this dissertation focuses on Latinos and Mexican-Americans more specifically, a useful point to consider is how Anglos or whites may approach political disagreements. Kochman's (1981) study of the contrasts in communication styles of black and white people found that whites tended toward more conciliatory speech; we might see similar differences when comparing Anglos and Latinos.

### **Setting and participants**

Two other important concepts in the norms of both general and political conversation are the *setting and participants*. Philipsen's (1992, pp. 39-40) study of communication in a blue-collar neighborhood in Chicago pointed out the importance of places in determining appropriate actions and ways of speaking. People in this neighborhood did not view one's living room as an appropriate place for vibrant group discussion, rather unlike the middle-class norm of the living room as open gathering space for all family members, friends, and even newcomers. In addition, members of this blue-collar neighborhood saw homogeneous gatherings—a group of only men, for instance—as the appropriate group of participants for discussion. Eliasoph's (1998) study of civic gatherings saw similar construction of norms about places and discussion partners with whom one could talk about politics. Such conversations were off-limits in social gatherings like the “Buffaloes” club, and in non-political settings. This research raises the question of what are appropriate (and inappropriate) venues or contexts for political discussion, as well as who are appropriate discussion partners for talking about politics.

### **Approach to authority and expertise**

The works of Philipsen and Eliasoph also bring up the importance of *authority and expertise* in discussion. Philipsen (1992, pp. 53-55) points out that authority figures in the blue-collar “Teamsterville” neighborhood that he studied do not respond well to challenges to their authority, and that outsiders who do not understand this hierarchy will face reprobation. The subjects in Eliasoph’s (1998) study avoid challenging political authority figures and are nervous about entering political debates because of their lack of technical expertise on public issues. This suggests a norm of deference to authority in discussing politics, especially in issues with any technical or esoteric background. Kochman’s (1981) study on black and white conflict styles found that whites tended to be more accepting of evidence from authority figures and experts than blacks did, raising the possibility that deference to authority may be more the norm among Anglos when discussing politics.

### **Humor**

Eliasoph’s (1998) study, as well as Walsh’s (2004) analysis of political discussion in a blue-collar group of friends in an Upper Midwest town, both point to the importance of *humor and cynicism* in discussion of civic and public issues. In both studies, citizens express cynicism about politics and government leaders, and bond with one another over this unfortunate element of American political life. Participants in both studies also rely on humor and joking in discussing politics—suggesting that it is normal for political discussion to shift occasionally between seriousness and humor.

### **Purposes of discussion**

Another important area of distinction between different kinds of political talk is the *purpose* that talk serves for participants. Most studies of political discussion have portrayed this

phenomenon as a setting for learning facts about political matters, or being exposed to a range of opinions, other studies have focused on factors like identity building (Walsh, 2004) and venting about political frustrations (Eliasoph, 1998). In this case, there may not be a norm related to the purpose of political discussion in the U.S., so much as there are many norms held by different social and ethnic groups that have different purposes for discussing politics.

The preceding section provided an exploratory analysis of some of the discursive norms that may be found in the context of political conversation and discussion in the United States. These are summarized below in Table 2.1 (see next page), which also notes where these norms will be discussed further in this dissertation. (A brief note about Table 2.1: I will provide similar tables in Chapters 3 and 7 that list some of the key aspects of political discussion and socialization addressed throughout the dissertation.) The first category listed above is the tone of speech, which can be conceptualized as a continuum between contentious and conciliatory speech. Argumentativeness and fierce debating are on one end of the spectrum, and peacemaking, consensus seeking, and calm, reasoned discussion are on the other end. The second category focuses on appropriate settings for discussion. Private settings, such as the home, contrast here with more public settings, such as workplaces and churches. Next, appropriate or typical discussion participants are another category of discussion norms. People may see close contacts, such as family members and close friends, as appropriate discussion partners, or they may prefer to talk politics with more distant contacts, such as co-workers or acquaintances. The next category is the approach to authority and expertise, which contrasts hierarchical approaches with more egalitarian ones. Hierarchical political discussions feature deference and respect toward authority and the valuing of expertise, whereas egalitarian approaches to authority lead to challenging the views of experts and powerful figures.

Table 2.1 Categories and examples of political discussion norms, along with the norms addressed in different dissertation chapters

<b>Category</b>	<b>Continuum and examples</b>	<b>Chap 3 Explored in past research on immigrant politics</b>	<b>Chap 4 Explored in national survey</b>	<b>Chap 5 Explored in qualitative interviews/ discussions</b>	<b>Chap 6 Tested in original national survey</b>
Tone of speech	Contentious versus amicable; argumentativeness, peacemaking, seeking common ground			X	X
Appropriate settings for discussion	Public versus private; Home, work, church	X	X	X	X
Appropriate participants in discussion	Close contacts versus more distant contacts; Spouse, close family, extended family, co-workers, friends	X	X	X	X
Approach toward authority and expertise	Hierarchy versus egalitarianism; Deference and respect, questioning and challenging			X	
Type and level of humor	Humor versus seriousness; Joking, cynicism, earnestness			X	
Purpose of discussion	Advocacy versus identity; Information gathering, exposure to varying opinions, persuading others, building identity, venting frustrations			X	X

Next, the category of humor addresses the appropriate type and level of humor in political discussion. People may prefer political conversation to remain serious and earnest, while others may accept joking about political topics or expressing cynicism over political processes. The final category above, the purpose of discussion, contrasts between advocacy-based and identity-based political talk. Debating with others, seeking information, and exposing yourself or others to political opinions are all related to political advocacy, as opposed to seeking out like-minded people, venting frustrations, and bonding with others in one's social grouping, which focus on building a shared political identity.

The table and description above provide an initial simplified examination of several normative dimensions of political discussion. The aim of this section is to initially describe

several dimensions on which political discussion behavior may vary and identify the likely norms that appear in political conversation. One area that I do not examine here is how these dimensions may interact with each other. For example, the purposes of discussion may shift considerably depending on the discussion partners. When talking with a spouse or close family member, perhaps identity building is the driving force behind the discussion, in contrast to the political advocacy one might attempt when talking to a co-worker with very different views. At this point in my exploration of this area, I can merely speculate about such interactions. I will explore these in more detail later in this dissertation through my empirical analysis, which will help refine this theoretical exploration.

Though this dissertation will focus on political discussion norms among Latino immigrants in the U.S., the preceding analysis is intended to provide the beginnings of a set of the key dimensions of discussion norms, which may prove to be a helpful lens for analyzing political discussion in future studies. This groundwork may also help us compare political discussion practices with the ideals of deliberative democracy, which values open-minded discussion of public issues and solutions oriented toward common ground. Norms of democratic political discourse are all the more important now, given the rising importance of deliberative democratic practices around the world, and scholars' interest in identifying ways to make political systems more deliberative while keeping them representative and inclusive (Fishkin, 2009; Gastil, 2008; Jacobs et al., 2009).

### **Summary and Discussion**

In this chapter, I have described a set of the key dimensions of social norms in political discussion, both as a framework for analyzing political discussion in a range of contexts and cultural settings, and as a tool for understanding the factors that help shape political behavior.

This framework includes some of the features of political discussion, such as the tone of speech, the level and type of humor used by speakers, and the approach toward authority and expertise in the discussion. In addition, the framework suggests considering the settings and participants of political discussion, as well as the purposes of the discussion for its participants.

Grappling with the wide range of variables that have been analyzed in political discussion research and trying to distill those into a cohesive set of key dimensions of discussion norms can help this research area develop a strong framework for analyzing this phenomenon in non-normative ways that contrast with and complement important normative research, such as analysis through the lens of deliberative democratic theory. For those scholars interested in developing a more democratic (and perhaps more deliberative) public sphere, this kind of analysis could help identify not just deficiencies from a normative framework, but also the presence of other behaviors that do not fit within such a framework. For instance, analyzing the use of political humor—such as expressing frustration at an unresponsive system—could help deliberation scholars understand how a behavior that is orthogonal to deliberative theory could offer a point of entry for a deliberative reform, thereby making a political system more responsive to its citizens.

In addition, a more thorough analysis of the norms of political discussion can help scholars understand the reasons why individuals and groups engage in some kinds of political behavior but not others. Research on the prevalence of agreement or disagreement in political discussion, for example, has tended to speculate about the reasoning behind those phenomena, rather than trying to understand the social and cultural forces that could affect the propensity of some individuals to seek out agreement in their discussion partners. Seeing individual- or societal-level behavior as more than just the prevalence of a phenomenon, and instead as the

enactment of behavioral norms, may help scholars understand the reasons why people engage in such political behavior.

The research in the following chapters is focused on the Latino (and more specifically Mexican-heritage) immigrant population. Chapters 3-6 explore political communication phenomena in the Latino context and provides a counterpoint to existing research and anticipated results for the mainstream population of the United States. Political discussion and other forms of political discourse are vital to democracy and civic life, and scholars of politics and communication have not directed their attention toward the way immigrants develop their understanding of these practices in their new nation. In addressing these areas, this project may also shed light on how political discourse may change over time in diversifying societies. As Western democracies become more and more ethnically and culturally heterogeneous, it will be important to understand how discursive practices may adapt from ones based on a homogeneous population (LaFever, 2008). Analyzing immigrants' conceptions of political conversation could also yield an important benefit besides a better understanding of the immigrant political experience: How they differ from the native-born population could help illustrate in more general terms some of the norms of political discussion across American society.

### CHAPTER 3 - Immigrant Political Socialization

During a focus group of several Mexican-American parents that my colleague and I have convened at an elementary school in Tempe, Arizona, the subject turns to political conversation. The facilitator asks about the times the participants have debated political issues with others—when they have engaged in *discusiones*, or argumentative discussions. “We did have discussions (*platicas*) among friends, not arguments (*discusiones*),” said a young woman named Isabel, speaking in Spanish. “But, yes, among friends—what proposals this one (politician) has, what proposals that one (politician) has, what do you think.” In an individual interview with Rosa, another woman in Tempe, she voices a similar sentiment after a question about political conversations in her family. In your *discusiones* with your brother, the facilitator asks, did you argue or quarrel much? Was he teaching you things about politics? “No, it was just like a conversation (*conversación*),” Rosa replied. So it was calm, and informal, the facilitator asked? “Yes, informal.”

Rosa and Isabel were two of many interviewees in this study (see Chapter 5) who expressed a discomfort with argumentative political discussion. Despite the fact that engaging in a political debate or argument is fairly common in American political discourse, the Mexican-Americans interviewed in this study preferred not to engage in those kinds of talk. They spoke of the calmer discussions they remembered in their native country. This represents but one of the conflicting norms of political discussion in the United States, in which an immigrant experiences social norms in their new nation distinct from those they recall following in Mexico. Because of conflicts like this, it is important to understand how people learn political behavioral norms, particularly for those who must navigate a non-native political culture.

In Chapter 2, I discussed at length the importance of social norms in shaping individual behavior in dyads, groups, and larger collective entities, particularly in socially oriented political behavior like discussion of politics. As shown in that chapter, social norms develop through social interaction and strengthen over time as individuals enact those norms. However, little attention has been paid to how social norms are learned in political contexts—how people come to understand the prevailing political norms in their social grouping or culture. This process of learning may be especially important for immigrants, who have a truncated political socialization/education history to help them learn these norms in their new nation. Studying immigrants may also help bring into relief the prevailing norms among native-born people living in the United States, as immigrants bring their native country's social norms into play as they adapt to a new culture. Immigrants may also be better able to consciously identify political norms, by virtue of having had to learn new norms that supplant those they learned earlier in life and perhaps took for granted.

Though social norms have been studied extensively in communication and other social sciences, research on political norms and socialization has tended to focus on expressive actions (e.g., voting, letter-writing, protest, opinion formation) but not on highly interactive behaviors, let alone the details of the discourse in these activities. However, scholarship on norm socialization in political contexts can help us better understand in a broader sense how immigrants navigate a new political culture, which may be helpful in asking how they learn about discussing politics in their new country.

To that end, I begin this chapter by reviewing literature in the area of political socialization, turning next to the more specific areas of immigrant politics and socialization. Next, I turn to literature on politics in small groups and social networks, examining how social

connections can be an important channel for political communication and socialization. Finally, I present and develop my theoretical model for how immigrants develop their understanding of political discussion norms in their new country—the social contact model of immigrant political communication, which focuses on the influences of close-knit groups and more distant social networks on the socialization process.

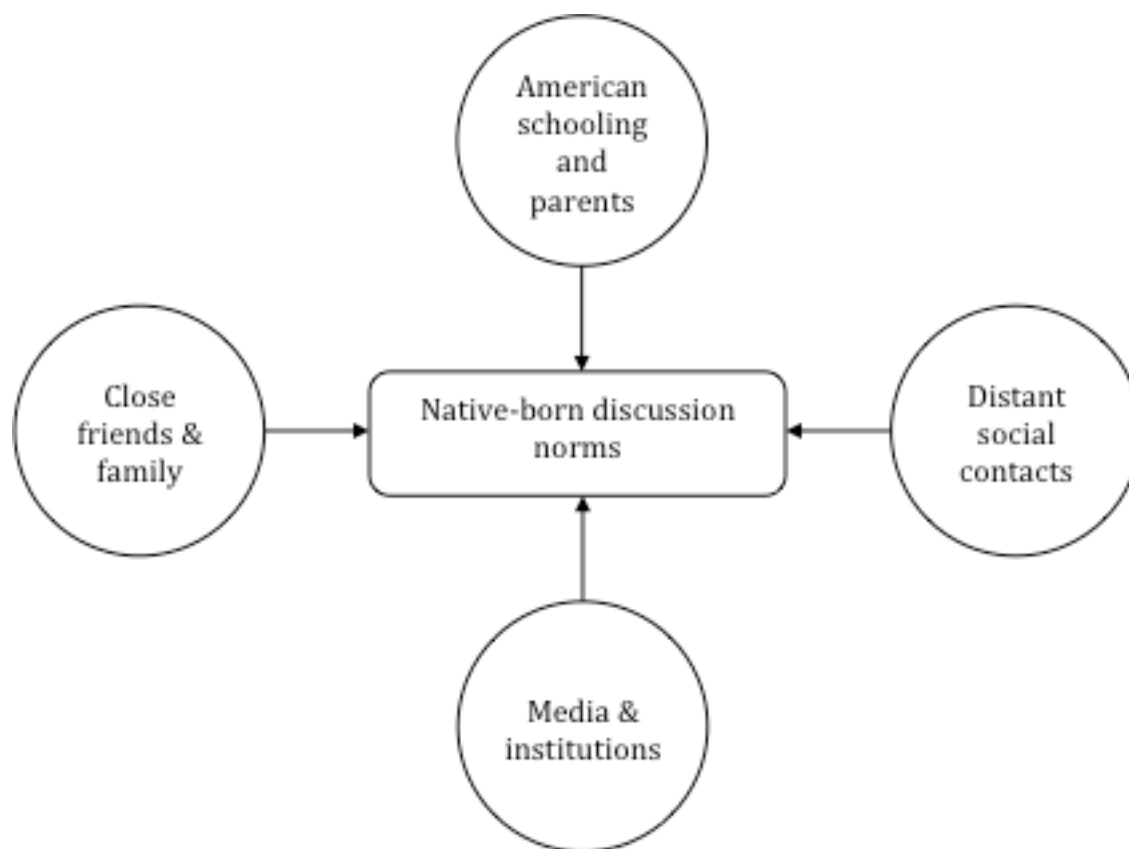
### **Political Socialization Through Family, Schooling, Peers, and Media**

Scholars studying the socialization of political norms have focused on a range of behaviors and variables, from development of political ideology (McDevitt, 2006) to instilling the importance of voting and political engagement (Gimpel, Lay, & Schuknecht, 2003). By reviewing this broad area of research outside the topics of political talk and discussion norms, we can get some general understanding of how socialization can affect a wide range of political behaviors through many different kinds of learning, from the adoption of social norms to the shaping of political opinions.

Early research on political socialization focused on how one's family and schooling help a young person develop a political identity and learn how to act in the political realm (Dawson & Prewitt, 1969; Tedin, 1974), while more recent research in this area has noted the importance of peers (Tedin, 1980) and the news media (McLeod, 2000) in the socialization process. An individual's parents and other adults in their life provide models of appropriate civic behavior and illustrate how a citizen can accomplish things in the civic, governmental and political realms (Gimpel et al., 2003). In addition, they help pass on political values, influencing the party identification and political ideology that young people will develop as they grow older (Beck & Jennings, 1991). This traditional model of political socialization is shown in Figure 3-1, which illustrates the influences on political discussion norms from parents, schooling, close-knit social

groups (close friends and other family), more distant social networks (acquaintances and distant relatives), the media, and other public institutions.

Figure 3-1: A traditional model of political socialization



### **Influences of Family**

Socialization researchers have theorized that the proximity of, and intimacy between, family members make it the most likely site for the transmission of political values and norms (Dawson & Prewitt, 1969). Dawson and Prewitt's (1969) widely-read text on political socialization relies mostly on data from earlier studies of political attitudes, which examined how young people match up with their parents on party identification, vote turnout, and other

measures. Using this information, Dawson and Prewitt advance a theory about the main agents of socialization, including schools, peer groups, and families. The family is one of the most important sites for social learning—people learn here how to be part of the larger society—and that extends to the political realm, they argue. Some people are closer to their family members than anyone else in their lives, so they trust the views and beliefs of those family members and are more likely to be influenced by them.

Socialization research has not typically focused on the actual *social phenomena* that can occur within the process of political socialization, instead focusing on the congruity or incongruity of parent and child political views, values, and behavior. However, one important study of family-based effects on political socialization did examine the role of discussion in the home (Jennings & Niemi, 1968). Their nationwide survey of high school seniors asked students questions about their political views and attitudes and those of their parents, as well as the frequency of political discussion and the sort of interaction environment exhibited in their family. Political discussion in the home seemed to make the effects of familial socialization stronger: Young people who see their parents talking about politics more often are more likely to share their parents' party loyalties and levels of political cynicism or trust. Deeper political values, however, seem less connected to parental discussion frequency.

Another important study in family-based political socialization examined the role of a family's general social environment, based on the assertion that more authoritarian families may affect socialization differently than more open, debate-centered ones (Chaffee, McLeod, & Wackman, 1973). In this study, authors used data from children *and* their parents, asking both groups questions about their political behavior and engagement and the kind of social environment in their household. Children who are encouraged to discuss controversial issues and

express their own views, even if they are also urged to adopt parents' values, exhibit greater interest and participation in politics. Those children who are encouraged to be vocal but are not urged to match their views with those of their parents—living in what the authors dub “pluralistic” families—see similar effects, as well as higher political trust and admiration of leaders (Chaffee et al., 1973). More recent analysis has extended these findings by examining the factors that may affect the discussion environment in the home (Verba, Schlozman, & Burns, 2005). This research showed that families of higher socioeconomic status provide their children with a better education and are better able to establish favorable political discussion environments in the home—both of which help their children learn about politics and stay more politically engaged later in life.

These studies point to the importance of the family and household in shaping a young person's political persona. How might the family's influence on socialization be different for immigrants? Certainly, adults in immigrant families may play an important role in helping instill particular political values in younger generations; studies of immigrant political views show that national origin plays an important factor in party loyalty, and presumably some of those loyalties are passed down to younger generations (Alvarez & Bedolla, 2003). However, this research does not address how immigrants learn democratic practices and political communication behavior, focusing instead on their partisan development or rates of participation.

### **Influences of Schooling and Peer Groups**

Political socialization research has also pointed out the importance of the school system in affecting the development of political views and attitudes. Most political socialization scholars asserted that classes in politics and government can help young people learn how to participate in politics, as well as promote order and obedience to authority and help instill nationalistic values

(Dawson & Prewitt, 1969). Two exhaustive reviews of later research in this area found that school curricula can improve students' knowledge and awareness of politics but have less effect on political values and participation (Ehman, 1980; Galston, 2001). Different classroom environments seem to have an effect on this process, as well: An open-minded, less authoritative environment can promote positive attitudes about politics and positive political behavior (Ehman, 1980).

Socialization research has not typically focused on the effects of peer groups as an agent of socialization. Dawson and Prewitt (1969) argued that a young person's peers and friends could affect their socialization, but they provide little data to support that view. A later study attempted to weigh the relative effects of parents and peers on socialization by interviewing recent high school graduates, their parents, and their best friend in school, again looking for attitude consonance and self-reported influence (Tedin, 1974). Both groups seem to have an effect on socialization, Tedin found, but parents typically have a greater effect on shaping a young person's views; these effects were moderated by issue salience and a student's accuracy in perceiving the other person's views.

### **Influences of Mass Media and Online Communication**

Other studies of political socialization point to the importance of the news media in helping people develop a base of political knowledge, if not necessarily in promoting political activity (Chaffee, Ward, & Tipton, 1970). More recent studies of Americans' understanding of politics also suggest that news media outlets provide useful political facts and help improve citizens' knowledge of the political world, whether as children (McLeod, 2000) or as adults (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996). More than just providing situational information related to a single election cycle or pressing issue, the news media may help people build up an

understanding of their political system—helping them learn differences between political parties and ideologies, the values and concerns associated with public issues, and the specifics of governance and policy-making.

As online media and communication has become more widespread in recent years, scholars have also noted the importance of these channels in informing and mobilizing people, whether through online news consumption (Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010) or through discussion in online ‘comments’ sections or on social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter (Gil de Zúñiga, Jung, & Valenzuela, 2012). Much of the research on politics in online media and social networking has focused not on political socialization *per se*, but on how new media channels can boost information acquisition, encourage a vibrant public debate, give citizens a stronger sense of political efficacy, and perhaps encourage greater engagement with politics and in other areas of public life (M. Nisbet & Scheufele, 2004; Shah, Cho, Eveland, & Kwak, 2005; Tolbert & McNeal, 2003; Velasquez, 2012; Xenos & Moy, 2007). Some of these phenomena can in fact be part of a process of political socialization—participating in a political debate or getting exposed to information about a public issue could help an individual orient themselves within the public sphere, determining where they stand on issues.

Studies of people engaging with politics online have shown relationships between the use of online media and political behavior (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012), suggesting that online politics may be an important channel of socialization as adolescents and young adults learn about their political system (see, for example, Shah, McLeod, & Lee, 2009)—and by extension, perhaps also for immigrants who are new to a political system. One study of college students found that seeking news online and engaging in online political expression were both related to higher rates

of political involvement, though general social media use was not related (Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010).

A context that similar to immigrants being socialized into a new political system is that faced by people in countries with few political freedoms and those in fledgling democracies. In countries that are democratizing or otherwise facing tension over political freedom, citizens are struggling to understand a new or rapidly changing political environment, much like the situation faced by an immigrant moving into a new political system. There are limits to this comparison, of course: citizens of autocratic or less democratic countries may also be trying to effect massive change in the government, and are likely part of a large majority of citizens with limited understanding of democratic practices countries with fewer political freedoms. Despite those limitations, it is useful to note that research on political involvement in developing democracies and less-free nations has shown that online communication and media use is often related to interest in democratic reforms and even engaging in protest activity. A study of youth protesters in Chile, for instance, found that the use of social networking sites like Facebook for socializing and for seeking out news was associated with engaging in protest activity (Valenzuela, Arriagada, & Scherman, 2012). An analysis of 28 nations of varying political freedom showed that Internet use among citizens was associated with higher demand for and commitment to democratic governance (E. C. Nisbet, Stoycheff, & Pearce, 2012). Studies such as these help illustrate that online forms of communication, whether the consumption of news and other media or connecting with other people through social networking sites, can play an important role in helping encourage the spread of democratic behavior and interest in democracy, raising the question of whether online communication can play a similar role for immigrants who are new to a democratic political system.

### **Integrative Approaches to Socialization Influences**

Some of the latest studies on political socialization have taken an integrative approach to various socialization influences, trying to determine how mass media influences, family and peer connections, and schooling in social studies and civics can all work together to affect socialization of young people (McDevitt, 2006; Shah et al., 2009). Hively and Eveland (2009) used this approach in surveying students, their parents, *and* their teachers, trying to determine the amount of and types of discussion that take place in the home and classroom, the diversity of discussion networks to which students belong, how often students tie political issues to their own lives, and what types of media are used by students. They found that discussion in both classroom and home environments, and the nature of that discussion, can affect students' knowledge and understanding of politics: Students in more open communication environments discussed politics more frequently than those in authoritarian environments, and frequency of discussion predicted political knowledge (Hively & Eveland, 2009).

As illustrated above, it is clear that children pick up many of their conceptions of their political system, form some of their political views, and develop their participatory habits through the family, peer groups, their schooling, and the news media. Unfortunately, most research on political socialization has focused simply on those variables: political views, attitudes towards the government, and likelihood of voting or engaging in other forms of participation. Though some research on political socialization has worked to integrate this area into political communication (e.g. Hively & Eveland, 2009; Shah, McLeod, & Lee, 2009), that work has focused on communication behavior as independent variables, rather than as dependent variables. That is, this research has examined how communication behavior may shape political views, but has not typically looked at what factors shape that communication behavior in the first

place. One's ideas of democratic discussion and political communication likely develop through some of the same channels addressed in socialization research, but the process may differ for immigrants.

### **Immigrant Politics, Participation, and Socialization**

As previously discussed, immigrant children may not receive some of the same benefits of family political discussion seen among native-born people, even if they do take civics classes in school. Those people who immigrate later in life may miss out on both familial and educational influences. The following review of research on immigrant politics and socialization will help illustrate the challenges faced by immigrants in assimilating into a democracy, and the factors that likely affect how they develop democratic habits.

Immigrants have been studied extensively as a political entity in recent decades, especially by researchers in American politics. Many scholars are interested in how naturalized citizens are driven to vote—or stay away from the polls, in the case of many—as well as how their political viewpoints and party loyalties develop and shift over time (Alvarez & Bedolla, 2003; Cain, Kiewiet, & Uhlaner, 1991; W. K. T. Cho, Gimpel, & Dyck, 2006). Studies of political socialization in immigrant communities have tended to focus on a limited range of outcomes: whether immigrants participate in elections, and how they typically vote. Most of these studies have assumed that the family and the school system can help some immigrants become assimilated into the political system, but some researchers have looked at these agents of socialization in more detail (W. K. T. Cho, 1999; Garcia, 1973). Given the issues that could limit the impact of traditional agents of political socialization in the immigrant context, it is important to review the other factors that can affect the process through which immigrants learn how to take part in politics, and how this shapes their conceptions of political discourse. The following

sections will review some of the factors that have been studied in immigrant political socialization and political participation; those factors may shape new citizens' connections to their political system and affect their behavior within that system.

### **Nations of Origin and Politics Back Home**

An immigrant's country of origin can certainly play a major role in shaping his conceptions of democracy. Consider, for example, the different party allegiances between Cuban Americans and most other Latinos (Alvarez & Bedolla, 2003), or the markedly higher rates of political participation among Asian Americans than other immigrant groups in the United States (W. K. T. Cho, 1999). Immigrants' norms of political discussion and communication might also be affected by their home nation and ethnic group (see, for example, Portes & Rumbaut, 1996). Might immigrants from Mexico, for instance, be less likely to criticize the party in power, given their home country's rule by a single political party for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century? Perhaps they take on some democratic norms of political discourse, like lobbying for local political causes or donating to campaigns, but avoid things like writing to members of Congress because of cynicism about leaders' receptiveness to citizen concerns.

One natural extension of this reasoning is that the politics 'back home' in an immigrant's homeland could have an impact on political socialization. Portes and Rumbaut (1996) provide an extensive historical account of immigrants' experiences in the U.S., and their work shows the connections that immigrant groups have developed to the American political system through different historical eras. For instance, some early immigrants to the U.S. worked from afar to help fight political strife in their homelands, or even to help establish a nation or safe haven for their ethnic group, as Czech immigrants did in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Portes & Rumbaut, 1996).

These kinds of actions could give immigrants a sense that they can effect change in the political system, and perhaps activate their political identity within their new nation.

In addition, if immigrant families are discussing the politics back home and their efforts to stay involved, perhaps this could become a new channel for family members—especially young people—to learn about civic life and political engagement. Might this also work in concert with civics classes taken by younger family members? As they learn in school about how one is supposed to act within their new political system, they may also be watching their parents and adult family and friends talk about political issues in their home country. If those discussions are more influenced by, say, Mexican social and cultural mores, then perhaps the children will pick up a hybrid of Mexican and American political communication norms.

### **Ethnic and Political Threats**

Immigrants have often become targets of ethnically and politically motivated attacks, but those attacks can also drive political behavior. Anti-immigrant sentiment in the U.S. in the 1990s—including California's Proposition 187, which aimed to deny state benefits to undocumented immigrants—helped spur political participation by Latinos (Ramakrishnan, 2005). Latino immigrants turned to the ballot box, Ramakrishnan and other scholars argue, to protect their own interests and counter-act the efforts of anti-immigrant groups. Likewise, Arab-American immigrants in the U.S. faced political threats after the Sept. 2001 terrorist attacks, in the form of the Patriot Act and demonizing of Islamic people. Research on this immigrant group has suggested that these political threats likely spurred more Arab-Americans into participating in politics in the U.S. (W. K. T. Cho, Gimpel, & Wu, 2006).

Could these kind of threats also serve as catalysts for political socialization? If a political threat arises, it would surely be a topic of conversation for at least some immigrant families,

especially if those citizens later protested about the issue or turned out to vote in related elections. Much like the refugees who needed to learn democratic norms to bring about the change they sought, so too would immigrants facing a threat need to learn how to better communicate and participate in the political world to stave off that threat. This phenomenon would be an interesting one to uncover in studying political socialization of Latino immigrants, but given its weaker connection to norms of political discussion and the socialization of discursive practices, it may fall outside the scope of my study. However, it is important to note, should some research subjects in the qualitative portion of this study mention political threats as being important in the process of them learning about political discussion in the U.S.

### **Geographic Factors**

Many immigrants settle within their new countries in ethnic enclaves, or geographical areas that are dominated by their particular ethnic group (Portes & Rumbaut, 1996). Cho and colleagues (2006) set out to find the effects of ethnic population concentration in affecting political participation, by using multilevel modeling that analyzed individual-level ethnic and political characteristics along with neighborhood-level variables of ethnic population and concentration (Cho, Gimpel & Dyck, 2006). They found that in some cases, ethnic enclaves can insulate immigrants from the world around them, setting up situations in which immigrants require less contact with the dominant society and political actors (Cho, Gimpel & Dyck, 2006; but see also Cho, Gimpel & Wu, 2006). However, in other cases those groups can develop into a critical mass that helps form an ethnic political movement or voting bloc (Cho, Gimpel, & Dyck, 2006).

## **Summary**

Research on the immigrant experience in the U.S., particularly Latinos and Mexican-heritage immigrants, has shown a range of potential factors that could affect their socialization into a new political system. Those who emigrate bring with them their native-country experiences, which may have been in undemocratic or quasi-democratic systems that place devalue citizen involvement and input. Though we might wish that new citizens of a democracy will strongly value opportunities for political engagement, they may instead find it challenging to adapt to this new civic environment. Immigrants may also be targeted by political attacks in their new nation by virtue of their immigrant status or membership in a minority ethnic group. Latinos living in the U.S., for example, have come under fire in many communities because of the large influx of undocumented immigrants from Mexico and other Latin American nations in recent years. In addition, immigrants often settle in geographic clusters, which causes immigrant enclaves and socio-cultural groups to affect the political socialization of their members, for good or ill. In this next section, I will extend the previous discussion of immigrant socialization to address more specifically the group that is at the center of my research: Mexican-heritage immigrants living in the United States.

### **A Focus on Mexican-Heritage Immigrants and Political Discussion**

Though in this chapter I advance a general theory of immigrant political socialization to discussion norms, the scope of my research in Chapters 4-6 narrows to study a particular group. I focus principally on Mexican-heritage immigrants in the United States, as they are the largest share of Latino immigrants, who in turn constitute the largest and most prominent immigrant group in the country where I can most readily complete my research. About 16 percent of the nation's population, or about 50 million people, is of Latino or Hispanic descent, and about two-

thirds of the Latino population is of Mexican heritage, according to recent figures from the U.S. Census Bureau and the Pew Hispanic Center (2010). The same data show that about 40 percent of the Latino population is foreign born, making them first-generation immigrants, and many others are second-generation immigrants who were born in the U.S. to foreign-born parents. In addition, the Latino population is playing an increasingly important role in American politics, whether as part of a political debate over immigration, or participants in campaigns and elections, or as candidates for public office at all levels of government.

To see some of the implications for choosing this particular target population for my dissertation, consider the following generalizations one encounters in reading the political socialization literature. Citizens in Western democracies such as the U.S. engage in political actions more or less on a regular basis, writing letters to their government representatives, following local and national struggles over educational and infrastructure spending, weighing in on political issues with their families and friends, and filling out their ballots at election time. People are not born with the knowledge of how to engage in those behaviors, but they instead develop those skills over time as they grow up in their society and learn what it *means* to be a citizen—in a process of political socialization. Scholars have long believed that two of the most important sites for this kind of learning are the school, where young people take classes about politics and government, and in the home, where children learn about politics and political values from their parents and other people in their lives (Hively & Eveland, 2009; Jennings & Niemi, 1968).

However, people who emigrate from their home country and settle in a place with a different political system are at a disadvantage in knowing the expected behavior of a citizen. Given the wide range of political systems and practices found in different nations, as well as

cultural differences between countries, people who are new to those practices may simply have less understanding of the practices in their new nation. Without the background provided by many years of schooling about civic practices, government, and national history—as well as that provided by the older generations around them who grew up within the system—new immigrants to a democracy may be at a loss when trying to determine how to communicate and otherwise take action in the political system (Ramakrishnan, 2005). Second-generation immigrants also face a challenge, as they may learn about the political system in school, but cannot benefit as much from the shared knowledge of their parents as native-born families (see, for example, Garcia, 1973; and Tam Cho, 1999).

This problem seems especially important for the United States, as its immigrant population has soared in the past two decades following immigration policy reforms. The country's Latino population is growing rapidly and becoming a powerful voting bloc, especially in states like California and Florida that have large Latino populations (Barreto, 2005). There are also significant immigrant populations of other ethnic and religious backgrounds—people originally from south and east Asia, eastern Europe, and Africa make up large portions of the nation's minority population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001), and the Muslim American population has rising prominence in the public eye and political world (Arab American Institute, 2009; Tam Cho, Gimpel & Dyck, 2006). Other Western democracies are also seeing large influxes of immigrants in recent decades. Some immigrants to the U.S. and other democratic countries are originally from, or have parents who emigrated from, countries that may have been only quasi-democratic, ruled by a single dominant party, struggling with civil war, or even governed by a totalitarian regime. These factors drive down political participation for some immigrant sub-

populations (Ramakrishnan, 2005), raising the question of whether this also makes discursive participation difficult for them as newcomers to a democracy.

Though the political experiences of Mexican-heritage immigrants living in the U.S. are certainly not identical to those of other immigrant groups, there may be similarities between ethnic minority groups in their struggles to understand a new political system and how those groups learn to participate in American politics. In addition, analyzing Mexican-heritage immigrants' experiences may help illuminate how differences in political culture, not just national or ethnic culture, can shape immigrant socialization—which could make the results of this study useful in understanding the experiences of immigrants from other quasi-democratic or autocratic countries elsewhere in Latin America or in the Middle East, Asia, Africa, and Europe.

### **Politics in Small Groups and Social Networks**

In Chapter 2, I explained the importance of discussion norms in understanding political discussion. In this chapter, I have shown how different socialization processes can shape political practices, habits, and norms—especially the norms of political discussion. For those who are immigrants living in a new political system, the process of learning discussion norms is mostly social, with close social contacts and networks of fellow immigrants playing as much or more of a role than the traditional influences of schools and parents. I will present a more detailed theoretical model of this process later in this chapter. First, however, I will explore how these social contacts can be important to the socialization process, and how political discussion can serve a role as both an outcome or dependent variable *and* as a cause for political socialization.

When immigrants come to a new nation like the U.S., they are faced with the challenge of learning how to engage in the details of democratic politics under a new system—a feat that may be even tougher for those from repressive or undemocratic nations (Ramakrishnan, 2005).

Much like how American colonists in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries tackled the big issues of democracy by engaging in small-scale community building and self-governance (Tocqueville, 1835/2004), perhaps immigrants to democratic nations are helped by the kind of small-scale democracy that can be seen in the activities that come with becoming part of a community: meeting people around you, relying on family and close friends, entering the workforce, experiencing first-hand the effects of government, and talking to people in your community about issues of importance.

The common thread that runs through all of these activities is that they all involve the social groups and networks to which people belong. Even though group affiliations and social networks have occasionally arisen in political research as important factors in the process of political socialization, this work has not been incorporated well with existing theories of communication in groups and networks. Research on political socialization has tended to focus on the resources afforded by one's family or social standing—access to better education, or better socioeconomic position—and how those resources can help people in the political realm (e.g. Dawson & Prewitt, 1969; Cho, 1999). Research in other areas, however, has illustrated the many additional effects of membership within those groups and social networks.

### **Local Social and Political Environment**

Some contemporary political socialization research has moved beyond economic and educational resources, and examined other possible effects of membership within groups and social networks. One recent addition to the research on general political socialization is the work of James Gimpel and colleagues (Gimpel, Lay, & Schuknecht, 2003) in disentangling the various effects of family influences, school curricula, and other social and political variables. Though this study focused on political socialization for the general population, its findings could

certainly be applicable to some immigrant populations, especially second-generation immigrants, and provides some insight into the importance of small groups and social networks in immigrant socialization. Gimpel and his colleagues set out to clarify the effects of previously unexamined factors that may affect youth political socialization, using survey data on individual students combined with neighborhood- and community-level data, collected in several communities with widely varying levels of political engagement. Through their work they uncovered the major effects of three categories of variables: where you live, who you talk to about politics, and what is happening around you. The most important of these, they found, was the local context in which young people were becoming adults. When citizens grow up in an area that is less civically active, has elections that are less competitive, and in general is less connected to government, they will be socialized in a way that discourages them from participating in politics as they grow older. The converse is also true: Children who are raised in an area that is more politically active or has competitive elections will be more likely to participate as they grow older. The authors argue that this is because when a young person sees a positive model of citizenship around them in adults—even if their area is relatively poor or has lower education levels that typically predict lower participation—he will be encouraged to participate as they transition into adulthood.

A similar line of research has illustrated the importance of interpersonal discussion partners as important to political socialization (Wilkin, Katz, & Ball-Rokeach, 2009). The people one talks to while growing up or becoming a citizen can be very important in the socialization process—a finding that was also noted in the study by Gimpel and colleagues (Gimpel et al., 2003). A study among immigrant voters in California showed that the act of simply talking with other family members more regularly in the home was a strong predictor of civic and political

engagement (Wilkin et al., 2009). Also important is the amount of connection one has to neighborhood discussions—the local ‘storytelling network’ in which neighbors talk about issues of importance to the local community (Wilkin et al., 2009).

Together, these works illustrate the impact of small groups and social networks in affecting the political socialization process for the general population and for immigrants in modern democracies like the United States. It seems likely that groups and networks are also important in the process of first- and second-generation immigrants developing conceptions of political discussion and communication. For those immigrants who are growing up and becoming citizens in more politically active ethnic enclaves, for instance, it bears asking whether the contexts of their immediate friends and family and their wider social network, and the discussions that take place within both, are more important than formal civics classes in developing political norms. Major social and political events may also travel through those groups and networks, perhaps encouraging new citizens about their political efficacy and modeling good democratic norms for them (e.g. the massive rallies for immigration reform in the U.S. 2006), or perhaps giving them negative views of the political system and discouraging democratic norms (e.g. divisive anti-immigrant political campaigns in the U.S., U.K., and Europe in the 1990s and 2000s). To better understand the effects of social contacts on political socialization, the next two sections will review research on social networks and small-group norms, respectively, and examine how these contexts may affect immigrants who are learning how to communicate politically in the U.S.

### **Politics in Social Networks**

Research on social structures has shown that interpersonal networks can have significant effects on individuals—from giving them better resources for finding a job, to helping mobilize

them for political causes, to encouraging unhealthy behavior (Christakis & Fowler, 2008; Klandermans & Oegema, 1987; Pfeffer & Para, 2009). Much of the research on social networks in recent decades has followed in the footsteps of Granovetter (1983), whose work has illustrated the importance of the weaker ties that people maintain beyond their immediate, more close-knit circle of family and friends. The “strength of weak ties” theory of social networks suggests that people have limited resources available to them when they rely only on their close social circle of family members and good friends. Instead, Granovetter argued, people can use their weak ties—to social and professional acquaintances, for example—to gain connections with those other individuals’ close social circles. Though these weak ties may not provide the same social and emotional bonds that we typically seek from our closest companions, they can serve as bridges between close-knit circles of people. Through those weak ties, individuals can pick up new information they might not have otherwise seen, or develop business contacts that might not otherwise be accessible, or find out about a new innovation that they might otherwise have missed.

Social network research has shown the importance of weak ties in many different contexts. Granovetter (1983) illustrated the usefulness of bridging connections in helping individuals find jobs—more people who find employment reported finding out about their job opportunity through a weak tie than a strong one—and a social network study found similar results among Latino immigrants in the U.S. looking for work (Pfeffer & Parra, 2009).

This brings up an important axiom of the strength of weak ties theory: People hear about a limited range of information and innovations within their close-knit circle of friends, but with a wide network of weak ties, their bridging connections with many other clusters of people will expose them to some of the things that come up in those clusters (Granovetter, 1983). This

results in them being exposed to a wider range of information, innovations, and ideas than what would come up within their own cluster. Similar studies of public health interventions, new technological innovations, changes in fashion have shown much the same thing: Social networks can help information, ideas, and resources flow between people who are only loosely connected with one another (Centola & Macy, 2007; Kincaid, 2004). Some researchers have seen the spread of ideas and innovations as more of a kind of social contagion, in which people pick something up by virtue of their connections with others who have adopted those ideas or innovations (Centola & Macy, 2007; Christakis & Fowler, 2008). The transfer here relies on people seeing those around them adopting an idea, innovation, or behavior, and seeing that as normal or wanting to mimic that behavior.

Social networks have also proven very important in political contexts, with loose affiliations and weak ties serving a role alongside close-knit connections and media messages. Some early studies on public opinion formation explored the idea that interpersonal influence could have a significant effect on people, by way of some knowledgeable and influential “opinion leaders” helping others in their social networks learn about politics. (Berelson et al., 1954; Katz, Lazarsfeld, & Roper, 1955). Though the findings of these early studies are less influential than they initially were, they proved quite influential on the field of public opinion, as many researchers followed that line of research to examine the phenomenon of social influence on political choices (e.g. Jacobs et al., 2009; Zuckerman, 2004). For example, studies of the partisan makeup of social networks has suggested that more homogeneous, strongly partisan networks may be more likely to affect individuals’ vote choices (Campus, Pasquino, & Vaccari, 2008), despite the expectation that cross-cutting political discussion may be more important to

opinion shifts (Huckfeldt et al., 2004). Social networks have also been shown to influence individual members' political knowledge (J. Cho & McLeod, 2007).

Another study of discussion networks and their effect on political participation has suggested that some kinds of networks—volunteer organizations, for instance—can promote participation, but in some cases, other kinds of organizations can encourage political behavior as well (Scheufele, Nisbet, Brossard, & Nisbet, 2004). Meanwhile, one of the most robust studies of the effects of social networks on political participation showed that widely differing social clusters expose people to many different opportunities and incentives for participating in the political realm, making it more likely that people with diverse networks will take part in politics in some way or another (Kotler-Berkowitz, 2005).

Given the importance of social networks and the weak ties that people maintain with acquaintances, distant relatives, and coworkers, these networks are probably also quite important to immigrants who are assimilating into a new culture. When new citizens in a democracy are learning how to talk about politics and communicate within their new political system, where will they turn? As mentioned above, they are less likely to have access to democratic norms that are developed through schooling and handed down from older generations of citizens. Instead, they will rely on the people they see around them in their lives, and the actions that those people are taking, to decide what is appropriate and effective. No doubt many of those people will also be immigrants, given the geographic clustering of immigrant groups and formation of ethnic enclaves common in Western nations (Portes & Rumbaut, 1996). However, this is where a new citizen's weak ties can become an important asset. Some neighboring clusters of social contacts may have a more developed sense of how to communicate in democratic politics—by virtue of more experience in the political system, say, or mobilizing outreach from an activist group—and

an individual may pick up that information through their bridging connections and share it within their cluster of close contacts. Mediated connections can also have important effects, as seen with the 2006 immigration reform rallies around the U.S., a case in which people learned about the events through a range of media, from Spanish-language radio, to internet-based news media, to online social networks like Myspace (Wilkin et al., 2009).

A more concrete example can help illustrate this phenomenon: An immigrant from a fairly repressive, dictatorial regime in Latin America has moved to the United States and earned citizenship, and has even begun voting in elections. Because of the nature of his home country's regime, however, perhaps he has felt reticent to criticize government officials and their policies, choosing to voice his concerns at the ballot box. During the 2006 debate over national legislation on immigration policy, however, he hears from several people at work, in his neighborhood, and among more distant friends and family that they plan to take part in a national movement in favor of lenient immigration policies and amnesty for undocumented immigrants. They intend to write letters to their congressional representatives and senators, and take part in one of the massive rallies planned for cities across the nation, all in an attempt to have their voices be heard by government leaders and effect political change on the issue of immigration. Though this fledgling citizen might have avoided such behavior in the past because of the repressive policies of his former country, he may strongly consider taking part in these communicative acts because he has seen others in his social network doing so and may also see some social benefits from joining this political movement. In addition, this sort of scenario may serve as a reminder to him that American democracy, while it values the secret ballot and private nature of individual opinion, also places importance on public discussion and debate of important issues. So even though this new citizen may be more likely to participate in protests and write-ins for future

political campaigns, he may also pick up information about *how* some Americans engage and communicate with their government and fellow citizens in the public sphere.

### **Cohesive Social Groups and Conformity to Norms**

Though research on social networks has illustrated the strength of weak ties in affecting individuals, the closer-knit social groups to which people belong can also have profound effects on individual members. In the setting of a small group—generally ranging from 3 or 4 people to no more than 25 or 30 people—the connections between individual members and the connections each member has to the group as a whole can become stronger, giving a cohesiveness to the group that can help it function better (Mullen & Copper, 1994; Wheelan et al., 2003). Individuals in a cohesive group may not wish to violate the norms of the group and face the judgment and criticism of other group members (Hare, 1976).

Group cohesiveness and acceptance of group norms have also been tied closely to social identity theory (Abrams, Hogg, Hinkle, & Otten, 2005). In this theoretical perspective, a group can develop an identity as an ‘ingroup’ that differentiates members from a much different ‘outgroup’—and in the process develop a better sense of their own identity as individuals and as a group through that sharp contrast (Abrams & Hogg, 1988). As a group develops a strong identity and well-defined norms, members may find it difficult to deviate from those norms, since they would face ridicule and alienation from the group (Abrams et al., 2005). The upshot of this connection between group norms and social identity theory is that individuals can be affected by pressure from other group members to conform, and that pressure may be stronger and more pervasive in groups with well-formed ingroup and outgroup identities than in less cohesive groups or those that are hastily constructed.

Researchers have also examined the influence of group norms in the context of political behavior, as when an individual receives a political message from a member of a familial or social group (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1991). This influence can be stronger if an individual's contact with other group members is close and intense, or if they are getting that message from many trusted sources (Latane, 1981). People can also be influenced by a perceived norm within a close-knit group, when they see others around them engaging in a behavior or espousing a view and come to see those behaviors or views as appropriate or right (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1991). These norms can have profound effects in the political realm: A study of college students' voting behavior found that their perception of group norms related to political participation had an independent effect on the likelihood of voting (Glynn et al., 2009).

In all of these theoretical perspectives, the group as a whole can profoundly affect individual members' views and behavior through social influence, group norms, conformity, and fear of rejection and reprobation. How might this apply in the context of immigrants becoming assimilated in a democratic system? Given the likelihood that political socialization of immigrant citizens will be less influenced by the school system, as mentioned above, their families may be even more important to them in learning how to engage with fellow citizens and the political system. In addition, some immigrants may come to their new nation with only a few, or none, of their immediate family members, and often live in very small family groups or non-family households, as seen with Latino immigrants to the United States (Pew Hispanic Center, 2010). For some foreign-born people, then, their housemates, friends, or extended family members may become their closest social contacts.

This close-knit circle of people could, in turn, affect individuals' political socialization through the creation of norms of political communication and discussion. It is plausible that this

could in fact *discourage* participation and communication among some immigrant groups: Some people may go through the acculturation process and develop connections with segments of society that see political and civic activity as outside of normative behavior—and in fact may brand it as outgroup behavior, or acting “white” (Portes & Rumbaut, 1996). However, for some new citizens who are assimilating into populations that value political activity, or those who belong to family and social groups that do the same, they may encounter group norms that encourage not just political participation but particular kinds of political discourse.

Two studies of social influences on political activity help illustrate this point: Gimpel and colleagues’ (2003) research on socialization of young Americans, and Opp and Gern’s (1993) study of anti-government rallies in the former East Germany. The first study notes the importance of both the local context surrounding a young person and their discussion partners—or immediate social and familial circle—in encouraging political participation and engagement with the political realm. As young people grow up in a particular community, Gimpel argues, they see their parents and other adults engaging with the political world, and they develop a sense of what is expected and appropriate with regard to political participation. They referred to this influence as the “local context,” which is essentially a de-personalized version of the social groups and networks to which people belong. Much like the young people in Gimpel and colleagues’ study, immigrants who are joining a new political system should also be affected by the political participation of their family members, close friends, and others within their community. Given the challenges they face in learning how to engage in politics in a new nation, they may also be influenced by the *ways* that their close social contacts are participating in politics—that is, the methods of political communication and kinds of discourse they are using. For example, if a new citizen sees close friends and family members avoiding contentious issues

and focusing on consensus building when they talk about politics, they may in turn be reluctant to break that pattern within the group.

Opp and Gern's (1993) study of protestors in East Germany gives further insight into the idea that social groups can affect immigrants' norms of political discourse. Their study examines the factors that predicted participation in anti-government demonstrations in the summer and autumn of 1989, before the fall of the Berlin Wall and Germany's eventual reunification. They found that, contrary to expectations, opposition and dissident groups had little independent effect on participating. Rather, they found that individuals' sense of political discontent was the most important incentive to participate, and that incentives were clustered within close-knit social groups and around more distant social contacts, such as work colleagues. Opp and Gern speculated that the transfer of information and critical opinions within groups and networks provided incentives for people to protest.

However, this influence can also be conceptualized as being based on norms of political discourse, rather than just on information transfer. Recall that East Germany faced political repression and upheaval at the time, and citizens were going through a period in which norms of discourse were shifting—opposition factions were on the rise, protests were becoming a viable option, and people were even talking about problems with the regime in state-sponsored groups (Deess, 1997). In this situation, people might have turned to their trusted friends and family members for guidance about the appropriate action to take in sharing their concerns about the government. An immigrant learning how to act within a new political system faces similar uncertainty: Having been raised and socialized in a different social and political culture, she will naturally look for cues from others nearby before deciding how to act. Perhaps she would more strongly consider joining a protest or political rally if her family members agree that it is an

appropriate form of political discourse; conversely, if she strongly values her family's opinions of her and they caution her not to protest the sitting government, she may turn away from this political behavior.

### **Conflicting Identities and Norms**

An additional factor may come into play in shaping how social groups affect the political socialization of immigrants: their potentially conflicting group identities and the norms that go along with them. First-generation immigrants may find it difficult to defuse the tension between their identity as a citizen in their new nation (that is, their local social group) and their identity associated with their former home country (their familial and social connections in their country of origin). Some immigrants spend time and energy working on social and political causes in their former home countries (Portes & Rumbaut, 1996). Might this make it difficult for them to think of themselves as citizens of their new nation and, in turn, employ the kinds of political discourse that are common there? Or will they will work on those boundaries between their identities, working within their new political system to effect change in their homeland?

Second-generation immigrants could also be affected by this phenomenon, as they may face conflicting group norms and ideas because of their first-generation parents and older family members. What occurs when a young adult is learning about expected and appropriate ways of communicating politically from their close friends and classmates, but is learning about different ways of communicating from their family members? Research in organizational communication offers some insight: In the case of conflicting social group identities, one way to overcome this conflict is to foster a group identity associated with the new group, and work to make the old group identity less salient (Riedlinger, Gallois, McKay, & Pittam, 2004). However, the weak connections between workplace communication and the context of immigrant political

communication limit the utility of that study's findings; in addition, it seems unreasonable to urge new citizens to cut ties with their homelands.

In general, research indicates that for some immigrants, one's ties to the familial country of origin decrease as their length of stay in their new nation increases, and that those ties will often decrease with each passing generation (see, for example, Ramakrishnan, 2005). Does that process make it more likely that younger immigrants, and those of the second generation, will choose to identify more closely with democratic political norms? Perhaps, but it is also possible that this tension may be too difficult to resolve for some new citizens. The multiple influences shaping their norms of political discourse may leave those new citizens feeling unsure of how to act, or in doubt about their political efficacy, leading them to disengage from politics.

In any case, research is needed to examine closely how immigrants learn to navigate the tension between conflicting group identities and norms. An important context in which norms of political behavior and discourse may come into play—and in which conflicting identities may be especially important—is in discussion and conversation about politics. As I argued above, political discussion may be both an outcome *and* a cause of political socialization. In the later chapters of my dissertation, I will explore this issue further by studying the perceptions of political discussion behavior and norms held by Mexican-heritage immigrants. First, though, I will present the theoretical model I have created that addresses the different socialization processes that affect political discussion among immigrants and their native-born counterparts.

### **The Social Contact Model of Immigrant Political Communication**

In the preceding sections of this chapter, I have examined how different kinds of political socialization processes and forms of learning can affect political practices and norms. A similar analysis showed how specific aspects of the immigrant experience for Latinos and Mexican-

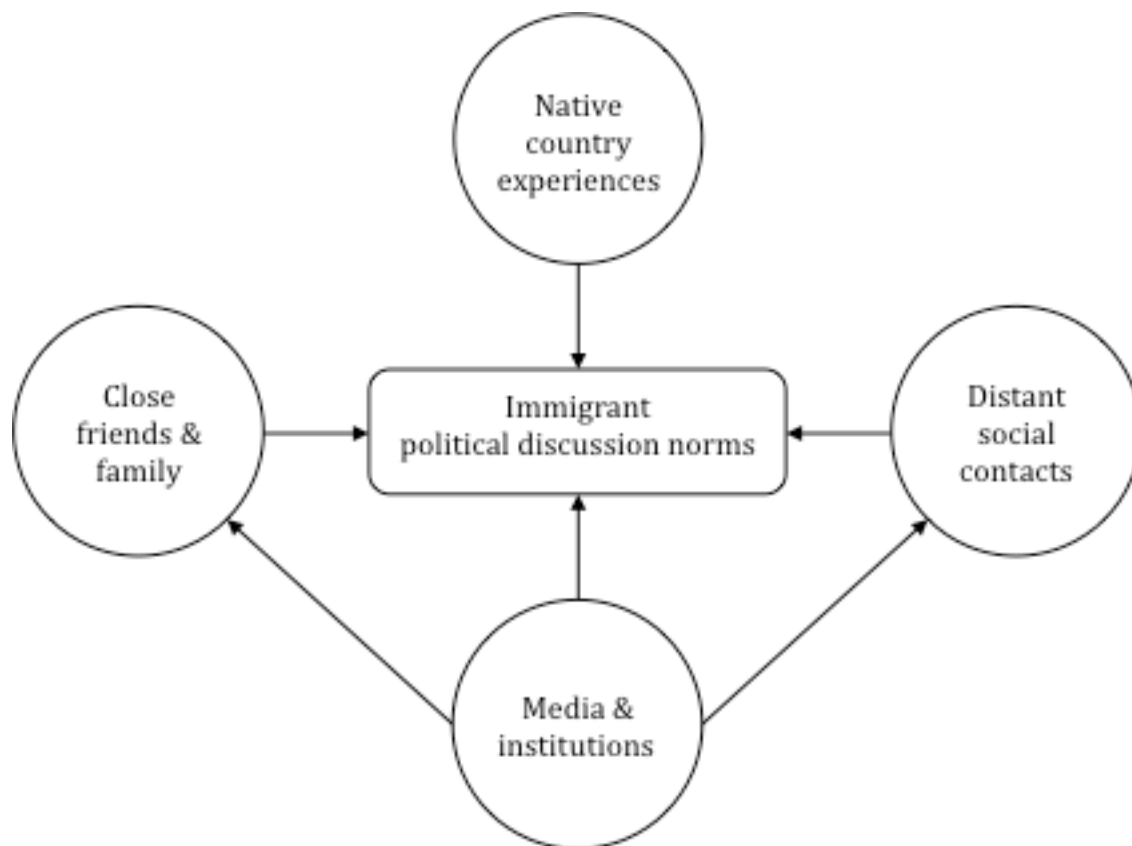
heritage people can affect political socialization and the development of political discussion norms. In addition, I illustrated how connections to close-knit social groups and more distant social networks may impact political practices and norms.

In light of the many factors that shape the immigrant political experience in the U.S., as well as the differences that may exist between native-born and immigrant populations in how they are socialized within a political system, a theoretical framework unifying these different influences would help guide my research in this area. Much of the focus of this framework is on socialization channels—how, where, and from whom do Latino immigrants get a sense of norms of political discussion. What channels of political socialization shape their ideas about political discourse in the U.S.? As addressed earlier in the manuscript (and in Figure 3-1), research on political socialization has typically assumed an educational process, in which people learn about these practices from their parents and civics teachers—but for immigrants, this process could be quite different. First-generation immigrants typically move to the U.S. after adolescence, meaning they would miss out on years of civics education in the American school system. That would leave them reliant on other sources for socialization: friends, co-workers, or other family members who have been in the U.S. longer. Second-generation immigrants, who are people born in the U.S. to foreign-born parents, may benefit from American civics education during their schooling, but may get less influence from their parents than would children of the native-born. They may turn instead to friends and non-parental family members, as well, or could even help influence their parents in a reversal of the traditional socialization model.

For either generation, political socialization may also shift from being an *educational* process to a *social* one, driven by the people who make up a new citizen's close-knit group of companions and their wider network of acquaintances and contacts. This shift may also give the

new citizen much more agency in shaping their own political socialization than is typically experienced by non-immigrant young people, who primarily learn about politics from authority figures—their parents and teachers—in a top-down model of instruction. I summarize these assertions in Figure 3-2, which illustrates a new model of political socialization for Latino immigrants—one in which socialization is a bi-directional process between an individual and both their close-knit social groups and wider social networks, with native country experiences and the influences of the media and institutions (such as schools) playing secondary roles. Some elements of this new model, which I have dubbed the social contact model of immigrant political socialization, will be tested in this research project.

Figure 3-2: The social contact model of immigrant political communication



The social contact model of immigrant political communication is based on the spread of ideas through social networks and conformity to social group norms. In the social contact model, social networks and close-knit social groups are the main channels through which immigrants become politically socialized in their new nation and develop the democratic practices of political discussion and discourse. In this model, such democratic practices can travel through the weak ties of social networks that connect tighter clusters of people. In addition, they can take the form of norms of behavior within a particular social group, guiding new citizens towards those kinds of political discourse and encouraging them to abide by those norms. Experiences from an immigrant's native country (which are the equivalent of the parental and educational influences seen in Figure 3-1) will play a smaller role, since those experiences are less applicable in a democratic system. So, too, could media influences have less influence for many immigrants, since mainstream media outlets will tend to focus on the dominant population; however, the media may have indirect influences on immigrant socialization by affecting members of one's social group or network. In addition, Spanish-language or Latino-focused media may an important role.

An important question that arises in reviewing the social contact model is what will be the relative effects of small-group norms on the one hand, and network-spread ideas and behavior on the other. Based on research confirming the powerful effects of group cohesiveness and conformity to norms, political behavior encouraged by one's close-knit social group will carry more weight. Individuals likely trust their close friends and family more than distant social contacts, and the political norms of a group will be a stronger influence than behavior modeled by people with whom you are weakly connected. However, social networks may be a better

catalyst for change for particular individuals and their close-knit social group: Since weak ties can help connect one's cluster of close friends with distant clusters of people, they can provide a diversity of views and ideas that may not come up within one's own friend circle.

Returning to our previous example of a new citizen of Latino heritage, his close circle of friends and family might not have considered participating in a large rally in the United States, perhaps seeing it as futile for a minority group to stand up to a powerful government body. However, once people within his wider social network expressed interest in rallying for immigration reform, along with what proved to be millions of fellow immigrants, he may realize the importance and effectiveness of such public displays of mass opinion. Might his social group of friends and family members begin to take this on as a norm of discourse, engaging in other rallies and public protests in the future? The reverse of this process could also be possible, of course—a particular small group of immigrants developing a norm of political discourse that is then shared through weak ties with other clusters of people, diffusing through a social network over time.

### **Summary and Discussion**

In this chapter, I developed a model of how immigrants learn to communicate politically in their new nation. In the social contact model, immigrant political socialization is not an educational process, but a social process that develops through the small group context of one's social and familial circle, as well as one's wider social networks of acquaintances and distant friends and family. Advancing this model does not settle the question of how immigrants develop their ideas of democratic discourse and political communication in their new country, but it provides a new way of seeing how immigrant socialization takes place.

Combined with the discussion norms framework provided in Chapter 2, the social contact model provides sufficient theoretical focus to conduct the studies I present in Chapters 4-6. Those studies examine immigrant political participation by looking at how they engage with fellow citizens, interest groups, and government officials. In-depth and survey interviews with new residents of the United States will illuminate their perceptions of democratic discourse and political communication in their new nation, and these data will provide insight into how they developed those perceptions. In light of the many areas covered by my two theoretical chapters, Chapters 2 and 3, I will now provide a table that collects the many aspects of political discussion and socialization covered so far and notes where these will be addressed in the remaining chapters.

Table 3.1 Aspects of political discussion and socialization mentioned in Chapters 2 and 3, addressed in remaining dissertation chapters

<b>Aspects of political discussion and socialization</b>	<b>Chap 4 Explored in national survey</b>	<b>Chap 5 Explored in qualitative interviews/discussions</b>	<b>Chap 6 Tested in original national survey</b>
Political discussion partners and settings		X	X
Purposes and tone of political discussion		X	X
Influence of non-parental family members	X	X	X
Influence of close-knit social groups	X	X	X
Influence of distant social contacts	X	X	X
Native country experiences		X	

Given the rise in the immigrant population in many nations around the world, this dissertation is hopefully just one of many studies<sup>4</sup> examining how new citizens are developing their ideas about how to participate in politics, discuss issues, and communicate their views and concerns with the government and the public. As the 2012 election just concluded shows more clearly than ever (Preston & Santos, 2012), their voices matter in the new public sphere to which they belong. Researchers—and conventional polling practices (Barreto, 2012)—discount or overlook them at their peril, if they wish for their theories to account for American political communication patterns in the early twenty first century.

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<sup>4</sup> Further research in this area could focus on several different areas. One could examine the social groups and networks to which immigrants belong, and attempt to trace the effects of those contacts in encouraging particular forms of political discourse. One could also observe political discourse and communication within immigrant communities, and try to find possible sources for the communicative norms that have developed within those communities.

## CHAPTER 4

### **Role models for political discussion: Channels of socialization among the immigrant-derived and general populations**

Studies of political socialization have traditionally focused on the importance of parents and schools in helping young people learn about their political system and develop themselves as citizens within that system (Ehman, 1980; Jennings & Niemi, 1968). In recent years, scholars have taken a more holistic view, noting the influences that friends and acquaintances, the news media, and the social and political environments have on the socialization process (W. K. T. Cho, Gimpel, & Dyck, 2006; Gimpel et al., 2003; Shah et al., 2009).

Researchers, however, have paid little much attention to how people who are living in something other than their native country—that is, immigrants who have moved to a new nation—learn to engage in a new political system, let alone how the immigrant experience alters the importance of different socialization channels. In this chapter, I will begin to address this gap by comparing the general U.S. population with Latino immigrants. After a brief reprise of the relevant literatures and presenting questions and hypotheses, I will present a comparative analysis of survey respondents' perceptions of the factors that influence their political communication behavior. This will constitute merely a first step, but it will provide an important glimpse of potential differences between immigrant and general political socialization.

#### **Political Socialization and the Immigrant Experience**

Though immigrants come to the U.S. with some political experiences in their native country, those experiences provide a grounding in a different culture and political system. Because many Latino immigrants typically move to the United States without their parents and after primary schooling, traditional channels of political socialization may have less influence for

them. How they develop their understanding of the American political system may, in turn, be different from native-born and non-immigrant-derived Americans. These differences may be the most pronounced for first-generation immigrants, who often face the toughest challenges in adapting to a new society (Portes & Rumbaut, 1996). Children and grandchildren of immigrants also deal with issues of acculturation and socialization, but are typically more incorporated into their family's new nation than their forebears (Portes & Rumbaut, 1996).

Immigrant socialization likely hinges on different influences than we would expect in the general population (see, for example, Ramakrishnan, 2005; Wong, 2000). Research on Latino immigrant communities suggests that, instead of parents and schooling, immigrants may turn to other sources of information and influence available to them, such as more distant family members, friends, co-workers, and community organizations (Pfeffer & Para, 2009; Wilkin et al., 2009). Thus, in the social contact model of immigrant political socialization that I presented in Chapter 3, I theorized that close-knit social and familial groups and more distant social contacts will be more important in the immigrant political socialization process than the traditional channels of parents and schools.

Another significant gap in political socialization scholarship relates to political communication behavior. Scholars have tended to focus on how people learn political facts (Garcia, 1973), choose to support a political party (Wong, 2000), or develop voting and political engagement habits (Barreto, 2005; W. K. T. Cho, Gimpel, & Dyck, 2006). Just as important as many of these factors, though, is how people actually *discuss* public subjects. Political discussion is an important site in which people learn about issues (Eveland Jr, 2004), form their opinions, develop connections with fellow citizens (Jacobs et al., 2009; McLeod, Scheufele, & Moy, 1999), and build ties to societal groups (Walsh, 2004). The research that has attempted to integrate the

areas of political socialization and communication has focused on how communication influences other factors (Gimpel et al., 2003; Shah et al., 2009), rather than on how other factors influence communication behaviors like political discussion.

In this chapter, I will present some preliminary tests of the differences in the political socialization process between the Latino immigrant population and the general population. I will utilize data from two telephone-based political surveys asking a range of questions about demographics and political behavior. In this initial testing, I set out to determine whether some of my hypotheses about the channels of political socialization were correct. More specifically, I wanted to test whether the immigrant population had different perceptions than the general population about the influences of socialization channels on their political discussion behavior. In addition, I wanted to determine whether there are any differences from what one might expect based on past research on political socialization. To do so, I will analyze data from two surveys—one of the general population in Washington state and another of the Latino population in the United States. In both surveys, interviewers asked respondents who has influenced the way they discuss political topics.

### **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

There are several hypotheses I will address in this chapter. The overarching questions guiding this chapter relate to different socialization channels affecting individuals' ideas about political discussion: What differences are there between Latino immigrants and the native-born population in the socialization channels that affect how they discuss politics and public issues? More specifically, who are the people or entities that they think have shaped how they talk about politics?

The hypotheses related to that research question also focus on socialization channels: who are the sources of these norms of political discussion for Latino immigrants? What channels of political socialization shape their ideas about political discourse in the U.S.? As addressed earlier, my theoretical model predicts that the immigrant population will be affected less by the traditional socialization channels of their parents and schooling, and more by non-parental family, close friends, and more distant social contacts.

**H4-1:** Non-parental family members will play a more important role in political socialization for Latino immigrants than they do with the general population.

**H4-2:** Social contacts, like friends, acquaintances, and co-workers, will play a more important role in political socialization for Latino immigrants than they do with the general population.

**H4-3:** The influence of parents and civics education in the political socialization process will be lower for Latino immigrants than it is for the general population.

In addition, these differences may be more pronounced among those Latino immigrants who are in the first generation. Those who were born in other nations and moved to the United States are the ones who face the biggest challenges in adapting to a new society, whereas their children and later generations find it easier to adapt to the society.

**H4-4:** Non-parental family members will play a more important role in political socialization for first-generation immigrants than they do with other Latinos.

**H4-5:** Social contacts, like friends, acquaintances, and co-workers, will play a more important role in political socialization for first-generation immigrants than they do with other Latinos.

**H4-6:** The influence of parents and civics education in the political socialization process will be lower for first-generation immigrants than it is with other Latinos.

## **Method**

### **Sample**

To answer the research question and test the hypotheses posed above, I analyzed data obtained as part of two telephone-based political surveys conducted in 2010: the Washington Poll (a poll of voters in Washington state done in May) and the Latino Decisions poll (a nationwide tracking poll of Latino voters in October).

The Latino Decisions tracking poll called Latino-surname households in the 21 states around the U.S. that comprise more than 90 percent of the country's Latino population. The data analyzed here are from two weeks of the tracking poll (Oct. 16-28), when a series of questions related to political socialization were added to the poll and asked of 303 respondents. Latino Decisions, a polling organization affiliated with the University of Washington that specializes in Latino public opinion and political research, partnered with Pacific Market Research in Renton, Wash., to conduct telephone survey interviews in either English or Spanish, depending on the respondents' preference. Latino Decisions used a combination of voter registration databases and random-digit dialing of land-line and cell phone numbers, focusing on households with Latino surnames. The tracking poll asked respondents a wide array of questions about political topics,

mostly related to the midterm Congressional campaigns taking place that fall, as well as immigration- and Latino-related issues and demographic factors.

The Washington Poll, a project of the University of Washington, was conducted by telephone through the Center for Survey Research in the Department of Political Science. The May 2010 poll lasted for nearly the entire month, with calls going to randomly selected households based on registered voter lists in Washington state, resulting in a total of 1,695 completed interviews. The poll that spring, much like the Latino Decisions poll later in the year, covered the midterm elections, general political topics and specific public policy issues, the direction of Washington state politics, and approval levels of two proposed statewide ballot measures. Washington state had an election coming that fall for one of its two U.S. Senate seats, with the longtime Democratic incumbent, Patty Murray, facing a challenge from Republican candidate Dino Rossi, a former state senator and two-time gubernatorial candidate. In addition, voters faced choices on two high-profile public policy measures: an initiative that would have instituted a state income tax for very high-income residents (while reducing property taxes and business and occupation taxes), and a pair of closely related initiatives that would have privatized the liquor distribution and sales operations run by the state government.

### **Measures**

**Political discussion role models.** Respondents were asked the following question about the people and entities who they believe have influenced how they learned to talk about political issues:

“We all have role models that have taught us different things about politics. When it comes to discussing politics, some people have heated arguments about politics, and

some people have more cool-headed discussions about issues. Who would you say had the most influence on how you learned to discuss politics?”

Respondents could select any of several choices read by the interviewer: parents/older family, children/younger family, a friend or co-worker, a teacher, the news media, a religious leader, or the option of someone else or other (the only option not read aloud). The responses on this question were used to create a single categorical variable, Role Models, with a category for each answer option, as well as a series of dichotomous variables indicating whether a given answer was selected by each respondent (means and standard deviations listed in Table 4-1 below). For instance, 44.3% ( $M = 0.443$ ) of all respondents across the two surveys said that their parents were their primary role models for political discussion (though this figure differs quite a bit between Latino respondents and the general population).

Table 4.1: Role Models variables, means and standard deviations in the combined dataset for both the 2010 Latino Decisions Poll and Washington Poll.

Variable name	Mean	Standard Deviation
Role Models – Parents/Older Family	0.443	0.497
Role Models – Children/Younger Family	0.043	0.202
Role Models - Friends	0.137	0.344
Role Models - Teacher	0.097	0.296
Role Models - Media	0.142	0.349
Role Models - Church	0.039	0.193
Role Models - Other	0.100	0.300

**Immigrant generation.** Respondents in the Latino Decisions poll were asked if they were born in the United States or in another country, and native-born respondents were then given follow-up questions to ask if one or more of their parents or grandparents were born in

another country. These questions were then used to create a categorical variable of immigrant generation, as well as a dichotomous variable, foreign born, indicating whether the respondent was born outside of the United States or not (54.7% of the sample was foreign born).

**Other measures.** A dichotomous variable measured whether respondents were part of the Washington Poll (N=1527) or Latino Decisions poll (N=303), with the small pool of Latino respondents in the Washington poll removed from the analysis ( $M = 0.162$ ,  $SD = 0.368$ ).

## Results

To begin to test the first set of hypotheses, I conducted a cross-tabulation of Political Discussion Role Models with the dichotomous variable indicating the general population Washington Poll sample or the Latino Decisions Poll sample. In addition, I conducted paired  $t$ -test analysis on these data to determine whether the differences seen between the general population and Latino participants were statistically significant at the level of  $p < .05$ . The results of those analyses are included in Table 4-2 below. I also conducted a series of logistic regressions on the dichotomous variables created from the Discussion Role Models categories, controlling for gender, income, education, and party affiliation. Those results are not shown in a table and are instead described in the text below.

Contrary to H4-1 and H4-2, no significant differences were detected between Latinos and the general population in mentioning children and younger family members, or friends and co-workers, as the most important role model in learning about political discussion. These findings did not change when using a logistic regression model to control for the demographic and political variables mentioned above. One other finding lends some partial support to H4-2, though. More Latino respondents (6.9%) than respondents in the general population sample (3.3%) reported the church or a church leader as an important role model (a finding confirmed

when controlling for other variables in a regression analysis). This suggests that social contacts there—whether the priest or pastor, church leaders, or fellow church members—may be important for socialization.

Table 4.2: Results of cross-tabulations and t-tests between general population (Washington Poll sample) and Latino population (Latino Decisions sample)

<b>Role Models</b>	Mean	SD	t	df
<b>Parents</b>				
General Population	0.466	0.499	4.67**	447.9
Latinos	0.327	0.470		
<b>Children</b>				
General Population	0.041	0.199	-1.04	396.2
Latinos	0.056	0.231		
<b>Friends</b>				
General Population	0.140	0.347	1.74+	467.8
Latinos	0.106	0.308		
<b>Teachers</b>				
General Population	0.103	0.304	2.02*	489.4
Latinos	0.069	0.254		
<b>Media</b>				
General Population	0.120	0.325	-5.30**	370.1
Latinos	0.261	0.440		
<b>Church</b>				
General Population	0.033	0.178	-2.39*	362.9
Latinos	0.069	0.254		
<b>Other</b>				
General Population	0.097	0.296	-0.81	1828 <sup>^</sup>
Latinos	0.112	0.316		

\*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$ , +  $p < .10$

<sup>^</sup> Levene's test not significant, so equal variances assumed for this test. All other tests had significant values for Levene's test, so equal variances not assumed.

As hypothesized in H4-3, more general population respondents than Latino respondents reported that their parents were the most important role model to them in learning how to talk about politics (47% vs. 33%, respectively). This was consistent with the regression analysis findings. A similar result was seen for the other socialization channel typically believed to be very important: teachers, who were indeed less likely to be mentioned by Latino respondents

(6.9%) than by the general population (10.3%), though this finding was not confirmed through the regression analysis. One interesting finding that I did not hypothesize is that the news media was reported as an important role model in political discussion by many more Latinos (26.1%) than by the general population (12.0%). This was also a significant relationship when controlling for other variables through a regression model.

Table 4.3: Results of cross-tabulations and t-tests between foreign-born and native-born Latino populations (Latino Decisions sample)

<b>Role Models</b>	Mean	SD	t	df
<b>Parents</b>				
Native Born	0.295	0.458	-1.13	294.5
Foreign Born	0.356	0.480		
<b>Children</b>				
Native Born	0.014	0.120	-3.14**	216.8
Foreign Born	0.094	0.292		
<b>Friends</b>				
Native Born	0.173	0.380	3.36**	213.7
Foreign Born	0.050	0.219		
<b>Teachers</b>				
Native Born	0.101	0.302	1.88+	237.7
Foreign Born	0.044	0.205		
<b>Media</b>				
Native Born	0.230	0.422	-1.01	295.3
Foreign Born	0.281	0.451		
<b>Church</b>				
Native Born	0.065	0.247	-0.35	297 <sup>^</sup>
Foreign Born	0.075	0.264		
<b>Other</b>				
Native Born	0.122	0.329	0.61	297 <sup>^</sup>
Foreign Born	0.100	0.301		

\*\* p<.01, \* p<.05, + p<.10

<sup>^</sup> Levene's test not significant, so equal variances assumed for this test. All other tests had significant values for Levene's test, so equal variances not assumed.

To test the last set of hypotheses above, H4-4 through H4-6, I conducted a cross-tabulation of Political Discussion Role Models with the dichotomous variable Foreign Born, to compare first-generation immigrants with other Latinos in the Latino Decisions Poll sample (see

Table 4-3 above). The results were mixed. More foreign-born Latinos (9.4%) than their native-born counterparts (1.4%) mentioned their children or younger family members as role models in discussion. The same result was found when controlling for demographic and political variables through a regression analysis. More native-born Latinos (17.3%) than foreign-born Latinos (5.0%) mentioned their friends or co-workers as role models. The regression analysis also found a significant relationship between being native-born and reporting friends or co-workers as discussion role models. There were no significant differences between foreign-born and native-born Latinos on the measures for parents and older family, the news media, or the church. Somewhat more native-born Latinos mentioned teachers as role models in discussion, but the difference between them and foreign-born Latinos only approached statistical significance ( $p < .10$ ), and the regression analysis did not indicate a significant relationship.

### **Discussion**

The initial tests of the research question and hypotheses posed above show that there are important differences in individuals' perceptions about the role models for how they learn to talk about politics. As predicted by the Social Contact Model I presented in Chapter 3, Latinos are less likely than the general population to report that teachers or parents were the most important role model in discussing politics. However, no differences were detected between the Latino and general populations in reporting children or younger family, or friends or co-workers, as important role models for discussion. Perhaps my theoretical model has insufficiently accounted for the importance of younger family and social contacts in helping the general population learn how to discuss politics—as some research has shown, discussion of politics between parents and children can help younger people develop politically, but maybe this discussion also provides benefits for parents (McDevitt, 2006). Or perhaps this particular question about “role models”

for political discussion is not specific enough to capture this level of detail in the political socialization process.

One notable difference between Latinos and the general population among more distant social contacts is the church, which 6.9% of Latinos said was an important role model for discussion. As I speculated above, this could indicate that Latinos are relying more on their priests, other church leaders, and friends and acquaintances they know through their church. This finding is an intuitive one, as other research has shown how Latino immigrants in the United States—particularly the first and second generations—typically attend Catholic churches, and how church attendance among Latinos and other groups is often a cultural and social practice, not just a religious one (Flores & Benmayor, 1997; Fraga et al., 2010). In addition, other research has shown how religion can have an important role in shaping political attitudes among Latinos (Lee & Pachon, 2007).

The finding that the news media was more likely to be mentioned by Latinos than by the general population as a role model for discussion is intriguing. This could indicate that the media is filling the void left when Latino immigrants come to the U.S. with few or none of their family members and find themselves navigating an unfamiliar society—and political culture—while also dealing with cultural and language barriers (Rios & Gaines Jr, 1998). Spanish-language media seems to help Latino immigrants develop their partisan identity and can also help encourage election turnout (Oberholzer-Gee & Waldfogel, 2009; Wong, 2000).

The differences seen between foreign-born and native-born Latinos in their perceived role models for discussion lend support to the theoretical model I proposed in Chapter 3. Foreign-born Latinos were more likely than the native born to report that their children were important role models for political discussion. Since many first-generation immigrants come to

the U.S. as younger adults and have children who complete some or all of their schooling here, it makes sense that their children or other younger family members—who are likely being socialized into the American political system through their classes (Garcia, 1973)—would be an important resource for them as they learn about political culture in the U.S.

By contrast, friends and co-workers were mentioned less often by foreign-born respondents than by their native-born counterparts. Perhaps those among the first generation find it difficult to converse with their non-Latino co-workers and acquaintances because of language barriers and cultural differences, while those in the later immigrant generations are more acculturated to American society and are more able to engage in political discussion with their social contacts (Fraga et al., 2010).

To reiterate a statement from earlier in this chapter, the tests presented here represent a *first step* in the process of answering the overarching research questions in my dissertation. Before proceeding to later phases of my project, I believed it was important to prove some of the concepts underlying this project. Namely, I wanted to conduct simple tests of the differences between Latinos and the general population in how socialization occurs for political discussion behavior. The analyses conducted here certainly do not put any of these questions to rest, but they do suggest that there are important differences between Latinos and others in how they learn about political discussion.

This chapter suggests that this area of inquiry is a fruitful one, and the remaining portions of my dissertation project will further address the research questions raised here and in the preceding chapters. The next two chapters will move beyond analyzing the primary sources of socialization for learning how to discuss politics. First, I will present a qualitative analysis focused on a range of socialization sources and on political discussion behavior itself. Then, I

will present another quantitative analysis revisiting these phenomena in a national sample of whites and Latinos.

## CHAPTER 5

### **Political discussion among Mexican-heritage immigrants: A qualitative analysis**

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

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

Juan’s story is somewhat common among the many participants interviewed as part of this project. Despite most of the interviewees having a tenuous political status in the United States (because of being undocumented immigrants) and others feeling left out of the political system due to lower socioeconomic status, many of them recount stories of talking about politics

or public issues with family, friends, and co-workers. Though in the past this community has lagged behind others in some forms of mainstream political engagement, such as voting and donating to candidates (W. K. T. Cho, 1999), Latino immigrants are becoming more involved in recent years (Barreto, 2005). They may also be participating in other forms of engagement, like political discussion, that previous studies have not measured routinely.

In this chapter, I will explore this phenomenon further by presenting the results of a qualitative study of Mexican-heritage immigrants in the United States and their perceptions and recollections of their political discussions. First, I will review scholarship in the area of qualitative inquiry, explaining the benefits of methods like qualitative interviews for learning more about immigrant populations and political behavior. After laying out my research questions and general aims for this study, I will review the research setting, participants, and methods I used to investigate these. I will then describe my findings from this qualitative analysis exploring political discussion and the norms of behavior among Mexican-heritage immigrants living in the United States. Finally, I will discuss the implications of these findings. Some of these lead directly the next chapter in this dissertation, which presents a survey of political discussion among Mexican immigrants.

### **Qualitative Interviewing and Immigrant Politics**

Much of the research on the immigrant political experience in the United States has focused on aggregate-level quantitative analysis and testing long-standing theories of general political participation (W. K. T. Cho, 1999; Ramakrishnan, 2005). Given the paucity of research into immigrant political discussion, however, a qualitative approach utilizing open-ended interviewing and focus groups can explore new research questions and generate new ideas in this context. Analysis of aggregate-level survey data can still be helpful, however, especially in doing

more robust, generalizable testing of the ideas generated through qualitative research. In Chapter 6, I will do just that by analyzing immigrant political discussion and socialization and revisiting some of the findings from this chapter at the aggregate level through a public opinion survey.

Before turning to such survey methods, however, I employ qualitative research methods because they can explore a social phenomenon within the context of a community and its members and provide a deeper understanding of the beliefs, practices, and interests of that community's members than is afforded by quantitative surveys and experiments (Christians & Carey, 1981). In the political realm, for instance, qualitative studies have given insight into how democratic practices manifest in ideologically self-conscious decision-making groups (Evans & Boyte, 1992; Gastil, 1993), and they have shown how many citizens in a modern democracy can disengage from politics, even as they seem to believe they are taking part (Eliasoph, 1998). Qualitative research can help researchers study social phenomena in a situated way and see those phenomena develop in context; this is especially important because researchers will be hard-pressed to understand the symbols and meanings that accompany social phenomena without situated knowledge of a community or population (Christians & Carey, 1981).

Qualitative analysis can also help uncover connections between social phenomena that may not be readily apparent. For example, Walsh's (2004) study of informal social groups and the political discussions that can arise within them provided a picture of how politics can arise in settings that may not be explicitly political—a fact that might be missed by survey questions aimed at political contexts. Her study also illustrated how seemingly innocuous behavior like old men grouching about liberals and out-of-touch professors can be seen as much more—an expression of ingroup/outgroup identity—when a researcher has a deep understanding of the population.

Qualitative research can be especially useful in settings that have not been well theorized or studied in depth. In-depth interviews or extended direct observation can help researchers build theoretical models about such communities (Duneier, 1999). This can also help a researcher develop new research questions and hypotheses that can be studied through other methods. Returning to Eliasoph's (1998) work, her study gave her insight into how much (or how little) people talk about public issues and politics in civic groups. This allowed her to develop a theory of how people in modern democracies can engage in civic life even as they avoid talking about anything remotely political.

Immigrant politics could benefit from such qualitative research. As I showed in Chapter 3, most studies of how immigrants become part of a political system have focused on aggregate-level data and have often utilized general theories of political participation and assimilation. Research has pointed to the benefits of education, income, length of stay, and English proficiency as the keys to immigrant political participation (W. K. T. Cho, 1999), whereas some recent studies of the immigrant political experience have advanced new theories about how other factors like political threats and the presence of immigrant candidates on the ballot can encourage participation (Barreto, 2007; Ramakrishnan, 2005).

These same studies have not typically addressed political communication and discourse—how immigrants talk about politics, communicate with other citizens, share their opinions in the public sphere, or engage with the government. The situation with immigrant politics is similar to the one seen by Eliasoph (1998) in studying civic groups. Political communication research had mostly turned away from situated, small-scale analysis, focusing instead on media influences and analysis of large populations through surveys, experiments, and similar methods. Just as Eliasoph was able to gain fresh insight into the role of civic groups in

public and political life, so too could qualitative research on immigrant politics aid in the development of new theories on political socialization and discursive norms.

One qualitative method that could be particularly productive for studying immigrant political socialization and discussion is that of in-depth, face-to-face research interviewing. In this method, the researcher selects a population for study and finds individuals, dyads, or small groups to interview, asking purposeful questions and encouraging subjects to share their perceptions about a social phenomenon or issue (Fortner & Christians, 1981; Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). This method may not provide as rich a portrait as an ethnographic study, but it does allow for deeper understanding of an issue or group of research subjects than many quantitative methods and requires a less intensive research period than the many months or years required for ethnography (Fortner & Christians, 1981).

Much like ethnographic and observational research, open-ended interviewing can help researchers build theoretical models and generate research questions for later analysis (Weiss, 1994). For example, Basso's (1996) study of Apache place names was originally planned as merely an atlas of important locations in Apache cultural history. Introductory interviews, however, helped the researcher learn how community members used place names and the mythological, cautionary tales associated with them to communicate social norms and guidance, and the study morphed into a deeper analysis of this cultural practice through ethnographic research and further interviews. Open-ended interviews can also be used to provide more depth to analysis generated by quantitative methods like broad surveys, as Doppelt and Shearer (1999) did in a study of non-voters and their reasons for not participating in elections.

Though qualitative interviewing has, in the past, been conceptualized as a pre-structured question-and-answer session aimed at accessing the knowledge that is held by the interviewee,

some scholars are suggesting a more interactive view of the process (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). In this view, the researcher and interviewee work together to jointly create meaning and narrative, rather than following a script of pre-structured questions that may hold less meaning for an individual subject. Instead of working to “strip interviews of interactional ingredients,” interviewers should use the interactions to guide the subject toward the appropriate topic and help them uncover meanings and perceptions during the interview (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p. 4). In this view, interviewees are not just sources of knowledge for researchers to access. Instead, respondents have many different areas of knowledge and experience that are dynamic and shifting; researchers should work to help them access those in ways beneficial to the study.

One of the most important benefits of interviewing as a research method is that it allows a researcher to study a setting or phenomenon that she was unable to observe first-hand (Weiss, 1994). By talking to people who experienced a past phenomenon, or lived in that setting, a researcher may learn more about it than through other methods, such as historical and archival research. In the case of immigrant political socialization and communication, interviewing could be beneficial in analyzing past events, interactions, and behavior that may have helped shape immigrant citizens’ view of their new political system and developing political identities. Though ethnographic or observational research might allow for direct observation of those events and phenomena, it could be quite difficult to capture those experiences most important to an individual interviewee. By having interviewees recount their experiences and perceptions about pivotal political acts and events, the researcher can develop a picture of what they might have been like and why they are important to them.

In conclusion, qualitative interviews can give an in-depth look at social phenomena like immigrant political socialization and political conversation, though not at the level of depth

afforded by other methods like ethnography. The research method of face-to-face interviewing will allow me to develop nuanced, culturally situated analyses of these phenomena, without the logistical constraints of longer ethnographic studies. It will give me the opportunity to discover emergent issues and variables that I may not have foreseen in crafting my hypotheses for the analyses in Chapters 4 and 6—such as another channel of socialization that I initially overlooked. Some forms of qualitative research may drive a researcher to be too culturally situated, meaning one may miss some patterns and connections that participants themselves cannot see (Hymes, 1982, p. 26). Qualitative interviewing strikes a balance between objective and culturally situated forms of analysis, allowing some protection against this pitfall.

Ideally, this method will allow me to note any overlooked connections and patterns in the Latino immigrant community, just as Eliasoph (1998) did when she noticed how public groups were staying away from political issues in their actions and discussions even as they saw themselves as politically involved. Much like Eliasoph and other scholars using qualitative research to study political practices, I will pose some general research questions that will guide my analysis of immigrant political socialization. In addition, I will list several hypotheses originally posed in Chapter 4 that are relevant to my qualitative analysis in this chapter. I will also describe the details of this phase of my dissertation project, including the setting and sample that I selected and the particular methods I used for analyzing the interview data.

### **Research Questions**

My analysis in this chapter flows from the overarching questions guiding this dissertation project: How do Latino and Mexican-heritage immigrants in the United States discuss political issues, and what sort of differences exist between them and the rest of the population? What sorts

of norms of political behavior in the U.S. are followed (and/or perceived) by Mexican-heritage immigrants, and how do these norms develop?

My analysis in this chapter is entirely qualitative, and as such, I will not explicitly test any hypotheses here. However, some of the hypotheses posed in Chapter 4 are relevant to the analysis here, and my qualitative findings may provide additional support or may even contradict some of those statements. The relevant hypotheses from Chapter 4 are listed below:

**H4-1:** Non-parental family members will play a more important role in political socialization for Latino immigrants than they do with the general population.

**H4-2:** Social contacts, like friends, acquaintances, and co-workers, will play a more important role in political socialization for Latino immigrants than they do with the general population.

**H4-3:** The influence of parents and civics education in the political socialization process will be lower for Latino immigrants than it is for the general population.

**H4-4:** Non-parental family members will play a more important role in political socialization for first-generation immigrants than they do with other Latinos.

**H4-5:** Social contacts, like friends, acquaintances, and co-workers, will play a more important role in political socialization for first-generation immigrants than they do with other Latinos.

**H4-6:** The influence of parents and civics education in the political socialization process will be lower for first-generation immigrants than it is with other Latinos.

In addition, there are two general research questions guiding my analysis here, examining the nature of the political socialization process and how it differs from what has typically been

found in the general population. Recall that my theoretical framework developed in Chapters 2-4 holds that close-knit social groups and more distant social contacts play a more important role in the socialization process for Latino and Mexican-heritage immigrants. However, unlike in Chapter 4, the data in this chapter may allow me to examine the socialization process in more depth and could shed light on how the process may be different in nature for Latino immigrants.

This raises two questions:

- Could the political socialization process for Latino immigrants be more social than educational, influenced more by social interactions than by the instilling of ideas by parents and teachers?
- Might this process also give the individual who is learning about politics more agency than the individual in the traditional model of socialization?

In the next section, I will describe the research methods that I used to address the questions posed above.

## **Method**

### **Sample and Setting**

For this portion of the dissertation, I worked with a colleague and a research assistant<sup>5</sup> to conduct several focus group interviews and dozens of individual interviews with Mexican-heritage immigrants living in the United States. To capture a wider picture of the immigrant experience, the research team sought out Mexican-born people who came to the U.S. as adults, those who were born in Mexico but came to the U.S. as children, and those who were born in the

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<sup>5</sup> My colleague on this project is Marcela Garcia-Castañon, a doctoral candidate in political science at the University of Washington. Our research assistant was Victoria Rosas, a woman living in the Tempe, AZ, area who has worked in a similar capacity for researchers at Arizona State University.

U.S. to Mexican-born parents, who are often referred to as the “second generation” (Portes & Rumbaut, 1996).

Starting in summer 2011, the research team began contacting community organizations and individuals to recruit participants in communities in Arizona and Washington state. Field interviews were conducted in (or with people from) several communities in those two states: Seattle, the Tri-Cities area, and Yakima in Washington state; and in Tucson, the Yuma/San Luis area, and the Phoenix/Tempe area in Arizona. These sites were selected both for convenience and difference in political climates, with Arizona having recently passed legislation targeting undocumented immigrants (Archibold, 2010) and Washington being known as a kind of “sanctuary” state that does not typically target undocumented immigrants (Frosch, 2012).

Within Arizona, Tucson is home to the University of Arizona and has historically been involved with Chicana/o and Latina/o rights movements (Winerip, 2012). The city and surrounding communities have about 1 million residents, of which 34.6 percent are Hispanic or Latino (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The Phoenix/Tempe area is a very large metropolitan center with more than four million residents, and 29.5 percent of the population is Hispanic or Latino, most of which is of Mexican heritage (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The area is also the location of a high-profile campaign by public officials strongly opposed to undocumented or “illegal” immigration, such as the Maricopa County Sheriff, Joe Arpaio (Santos, 2012). The Yuma/San Luis area, with about 200,000 residents, is a smaller population center than either Tucson or Phoenix, is majority Hispanic or Latino (59.7 percent) and is only a few miles from the border between Arizona and Mexico (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

The communities in Washington state have important distinctions between them, as well. Seattle is the largest population center in the state, with about 3.4 million residents, but the

proportion of the population that is Latino (or of Mexican heritage) is fairly small—only 9 percent, most of which is of Mexican heritage (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The Tri-Cities and Yakima areas, however, are in more rural eastern Washington, and their history as farming communities has led to an influx of immigrants from Latin America for many years. Both of those communities have a Latino population that is proportionally larger than in Seattle—45 percent in Yakima, and 28.7 percent in the Tri-Cities area (which consists of the cities of Kennewick, Pasco, and Richland). However, both communities are somewhat more hostile to Latinos and immigrants than Seattle due to the conservative political environment in eastern Washington (Barreto & Perez, 2012).

For this phase of the project, there were 11 focus group discussions involving 90 participants, of whom 79 were then interviewed individually. Focus group meetings lasted approximately an hour, and individual interviews ranged from ten minutes to an hour. All study participants received \$20 to reimburse them for their time, and all consented to participate following University of Washington Human Subjects Division protocols established for this study.<sup>6</sup>

The interviews started at two recruitment sites in Seattle: three focus groups occurred at a day-laborer center primarily serving Spanish-language immigrants, and one was held at a Catholic church with a mixed Latino congregation. In late 2011 and early 2012, we also recruited study participants from Eastern Washington, which has a large population of Latino and Mexican-heritage residents. A focus group was held at a community college in the Tri-Cities area of Eastern Washington, as well as a focus group of primarily Eastern Washington (Yakima and Tri-Cities) residents enrolled at the University of Washington in Seattle. Follow-up

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<sup>6</sup> This research protocol was approved by the UW Human Subjects Division under Certification of Exemption #39823.

interviews were conducted with 21 of the Seattle and Tri-Cities focus group participants; the focus group with University of Washington students was longer and more extensive than the other group interviews, so those participants did not have follow-up interviews.

Fieldwork was conducted in Arizona in late 2011 and early 2012. Working with a community organization in Arizona, participants were recruited for three focus groups conducted in the Phoenix/Tempe area. Yuma and Tucson were each the site of one focus group, and individual interviews were conducted with three people living in San Luis, a small town just outside of Yuma. Follow-up interviews were conducted with 58 of the focus group participants from the research sites in Arizona, aided in part by a paid research assistant. In both Washington and Arizona, the focus groups and interviews were conducted in either Spanish or English, depending on the preference of the participants; some discussions switched between the two languages periodically.

My Spanish-language ability was somewhat limited at the time of the fieldwork, so interviews and focus groups conducted in Spanish were coordinated by my colleague, Marcela Garcia-Castañon, or our research assistant, both of whom are fluent in Spanish (whereas I conducted more of the English-language interviews and group sessions). Though this did introduce some barriers between me as the researcher and some of my Spanish-speaking (or Spanish-preferring) study participants, I took steps to reduce the effects of those barriers. I had limited conversations in Spanish with some participants to build understanding and affinity between us; I also worked closely with both my colleague and our research assistant to ensure the interview questions and focus group discussions related to my research questions were adequately covered during Spanish-language sessions. Ultimately, I owe a great debt to both Marcela and our assistant, Victoria, for their help in studying this particular population.

## **Interviews and Analysis**

The focus groups and individual interviews focused on several aspects of the participants' lives: political and civic events and behaviors at different life stages, including childhood, notable times in their past, and current day; immigration background and reasons for them or their family for moving the U.S.; sources from which they learned about political topics and behaviors; their recollections of times they have discussed politics and public issues with others, and their perceptions of political conversation in the U.S. and in Mexico. Interviewers used a script as a starting point and rough outline for focus group and individual interviews. (See Appendix A for the complete script.) However, the participants' interest levels in different topics were used to guide the discussion and dictate how much time was spent on each topic (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). As explained earlier, this allowed researchers to be guided as much by the interpretations and recollections of the interviewee as by the pre-established script. Focus group interviews were also used to broadly identify the topics and ideas that seemed most significant to participants, allowing those to be discussed in more depth during individual interviews (Morgan, 1997).

For the purposes of obtaining a full transcript of interviews, each focus group was recorded on video and audio and most of the individual interviews were recorded on audio. These recordings were then transcribed by student research assistants at the University of Washington, a paid research assistant in Arizona, or a professional transcription firm that worked as a sub-contractor on the project. In the case of Spanish-language interviews, student research assistants or the paid assistant in Arizona translated these transcripts into English.

After the interviews were transcribed, I conducted an exploratory theme-based content analysis of the transcripts, looking for recurring themes that came up in the group and individual

interviews. This method is the one typically proscribed for qualitative interviews (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995) and other qualitative studies of political or civic behavior (Eliasoph, 1998; Walsh, 2007) in which dominant themes and terminology are identified through a holistic reading of the field notes or interview transcript. A similar method was used by Luis Fraga and his colleagues in their focus group interviews with Latinos aimed at understanding the immigrant experience in the U.S. (Fraga et al., 2010). Research questions about the channels of political socialization for Latino immigrants, their experiences of the socialization process, and their norms for political conversation and discussion were answered based on the presence or absence (and frequency of mentions) of different themes and terms in the qualitative data. In addition, phenomena and themes that arose in this analysis were examined further in the quantitative portion of this project, described in Chapter 6.

## **Results**

This section is organized into several sub-sections, each one addressing a major theme or phenomenon I found in my analysis, with a final sub-section summarizing the results. I will revisit the relevant hypotheses from Chapter 4 periodically as I present my qualitative findings.

### **Spousal and Family Discussion**

An important theme mentioned in many of the focus groups and individual interviews was political discussion that occurred between spouses, particularly among first-generation immigrants, most of whom were married to opposite-sex partners. Those spousal discussions were often event-driven, in which spouses would talk about some notable political event such as an election or new policy, and they were typically low in disagreement between the spouses. On occasions when spouses disagreed about an issue or topic, participants said their conversations were typically calm and not argumentative. For one woman, Maria, a first-generation immigrant

and Phoenix-area resident in her thirties, a discussion with her husband helped change her mind about the 2008 presidential election, and it encouraged her to talk about the election with friends and co-workers:

Maria: [Recounting her husband's comments] "'Obama is going to make a change. Uh, he's getting our support, uh, because he is going to be the first African-American person to get to that position. We are going to make a change.' I say, 'So if we are going to vote, or rather, for a black man, obviously, you believe there will be changes? And, well, the way he talked, that immigration, that we're going to do this, that we're going to try something, there, that part did convince me. Okay, well, maybe he does do, has a chance, right?'"<sup>7</sup>

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

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

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

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

Interviewer: "To inform?"

Maria: "More or less to inform..."

In the case of Maria, political discussion with her spouse served many purposes. It helped her become more informed about the two major presidential candidates, Barack Obama and John McCain, and it exposed her to her husband's opinion on the race. The conversation was not

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<sup>7</sup> This exchange between Maria and the interviewer is translated from the Spanish.

simply about building a shared identity between the two of them as Democrats, which stands in contrast with political discussion in other settings and with other participants—such as talking with co-workers and acquaintances, which will be discussed more below. This thoughtful, measured debate with her husband also encouraged Maria to talk to other people about the race, gathering information from others and sharing her information with them. Again, the outcome of this discussion stands in contrast with other contexts mentioned below, such as more argumentative conversations with white co-workers.

The gender dynamics between spouses seem to play an important role in the kind of social norms that develop in these settings. Wives were more likely to report multiple kinds of political involvement, but often said that their husbands were more political. Wives also tended to be more involved in structural and logistic ways, such as having connections with organizations and taking part in community meetings. Husbands tended to be more involved in sharing their opinions with other people and taking part in political discussions.

In this case of different roles for adult men and women, we can see a behavioral norm that is shifting for this immigrant population. Mexican culture tends to be fairly conservative in gender roles, and many female participants recalled their experiences in Mexico, where men typically talked about politics without women taking part. That norm has shifted for many female participants now that they live in the United States.

“It is very different,” explained Patricia, a woman in her 30s who was born in Mexico City and lives in Tempe. “Back in Mexico, women are not entitled to talk about these things. ... [In Mexico] women should be at home, and here...you already give us the freedom that we are all equal.” [Translated from the Spanish.] As cases like this illustrate, people are both learning how to discuss politics *and* developing a sense of political norms in play in the United States.

Though my theoretical model (in Chapter 3) did not explicitly mention spouses as prominent influences in the political development of immigrants, I did hypothesize in H4-1 that familial contacts—particularly those other than parents of adult immigrants, who are often still in Mexico—would be more important in helping people learn about politics. The qualitative interviews are consistent with this hypothesis.

### **Children and Parents Sharing Information**

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

Interviewer: “So, let’s go back to the conversation. So, it’s over the dining table, it’s informal, it just kind of happens when something comes up on the news or do you sometimes sit down specifically with ideas about politics in mind that you want to tell them?”

Juan: “No, everything happens at the dinner table when the news is on, when the news is going on and something big happens or we’re just watching the news and then something happens and they just ask. ‘What does that mean?’”

Juan and many other younger study participants (or the children of older participants) were often more acclimated to U.S. culture than their first-generation immigrant parents, which is common for immigrant populations, particularly those from Mexico and other parts of Latin America (Fraga et al., 2010; Portes & Rumbaut, 1996). As a result, for first-generation immigrants with children born or raised in the United States—as well as for the children themselves—the process of political socialization seems to be a two-way process in which children have a good deal of agency and control. This is in line with hypotheses H4-1 and H4-3, which suggested that non-parental family members would be particularly important sources of socialization for Latino immigrants and that parents and schooling would be less important for Latino immigrants than they are for the general population.

The results of the qualitative analysis are more nuanced, and in keeping with the Social Contact Model that I described in Chapter 3. That model predicts that the top-down process of parental influences on children would be less applicable for Latino immigrants and that instead the process would be more mutual between parents and their children as each party develops an understanding of American political culture. These results are consistent with what was predicted by H4-4 through H4-6, which suggested that these differences in socialization channels will be more pronounced with first-generation immigrants than with subsequent generations. This is evident from how the children of first-generation immigrants are learning more about American political culture from their schooling than their parents.

The kind of political discussion happening between parents and children was somewhat different from conversations between spouses. Both parents and children said their political discussions often focused on sharing information with each other, and that expressing opinions and engaging in debates was less common or even avoided entirely.

For instance, Marcos, a man in his 20s who is a second-generation immigrant living in Phoenix, talked about how he rarely discussed political topics with his somewhat conservative father. When he did discuss issues with his parents, it was only to give them information, not to share opinions. In one instance, though, Marcos recalled being strongly opposed to a state referendum banning gay marriage and felt driven to talk to his father about, despite knowing it would be a difficult conversation to have:

Yeah, so, like, I've always just told my parents that I would translate the pros and cons of, you know, the propositions... So, that one was kind of -- what do you call it -- I don't want to say that it was uncomfortable, but it was just kind of, like, because I knew them - - I know that my mom is very progressive. I mean she has no problems with gays or gays adopting, you know, children or anything like that. But I'm not so sure about my dad.

You know, I mean he's never come out and said, you know, I hate gays or anything like that, but, at the same time, he's never -- I mean we've never had a -- because I don't -- you know, we don't -- yeah, he's just being weird.

Simply recalling how the conversation would be difficult was a challenge for Marcos. He went on to explain how he was worried that talking to both of his parents about the referendum might exert peer pressure on his father to vote along with Marcos and his mother. Even stories like Marcos's, in which he overcame his reservations to share an opinion and debate a political issue with one of his parents, were fairly rare in the qualitative interviews. Instead, most people

talked about avoiding this kind of topic in their political discussions, choosing to focus on information sharing over debating political views. Parent-child discussions may therefore play a different role in political socialization and incorporation than other political interactions. These conversations among family maybe a site more for learning about politics than in developing an ideology or refining one's political views.

This also raises the interesting possibility that younger people may be learning a norm of behavior that frowns on debate and argumentation. Some research on political discussion has suggested that many people avoid talking about politics with those who have opposing viewpoints (Mutz, 2006), or simply disengage from politics entirely because of partisan bickering (Eliasoph, 1998). Perhaps Latino immigrants who develop a norm against debate and argumentation are even more likely than the general population to avoid political disagreement. This finding does not relate to any of the hypotheses posed above, and instead represents a new finding that will be explored further in the quantitative portion of my analysis in Chapter 6.

### **Discussion with Social Contacts**

Participants reported engaging in discussions with more distant social contacts, such as acquaintances, co-workers, and people they know through organizations. Those discussions varied considerably depending on the ethnicity of the other conversational partners. Some participants reported that discussions with white co-workers were accusatory or otherwise off-putting, with the whites pressing them to address issues about Latinos and immigration. Luis, a second-generation immigrant in his 30s who lives in Yuma, recalled these sort of argumentative discussions in his workplace:

I get with it with people at work because at work is very direct. I deal with, working at a military base, hardcore Republicans. ...Hardcore NRA people who are into guns and

stuff like that. So, it gets thrown out there like, ‘So, your people want to become citizens just like that.’ You know, this is just an example, ‘My people; the ones that you brought over because you didn’t want to do the work--yes, they do want citizenship.’ It comes aggressive at me, so I have to get aggressive back. It’s not a good thing, but it’s kind of getting old. I respond exactly how they direct their questions at me. ... It could be an article on the paper that says, ‘Look at what you people want today?’

Many participants mentioned being put off by such argumentative discussion, and talked about trying to avoid such conversations. Luis, for instance, goes on to talk about how strong partisanship (like that he saw from his co-workers) and efforts by other people involved in political movements were off-putting for him. “It’s all about separating people,” he said of this kind of political discourse.

Conversations with Latino co-workers were generally more positive experiences for most participants, and these discussions tended to be more informational. The conversations often covered immigration policy and related issues, but not exclusively, as the topic would sometimes turn to elections and other political issues. Patricia, the young woman in Tempe mentioned above, recalls talking to the women who are her Latino co-workers, discussing a wide range of topics:

Interviewer: “And do you form opinions, for example, did you have an opinion and now these talks with your friends changed your opinion?”

Patricia: “For example, discussions about the Bush administration. One would say, ‘OK, he was a good president in his time and all that.’ ‘No, he was not a good president.’ Well, when we talked to see the pros and cons of each candidate. Such talk is good, for me it is not always great, sometimes it is good sometimes not. Or, I do not like what you think

and we talk until we reach the agreement we have in common.” [Translated from the Spanish.]

Conversations with fellow Latinos seemed to offer a safe setting for discussing politics, even when discussants disagreed on issues. Perhaps this reflects a variation on Mutz’s research (2006) suggesting that like-minded political discussion is less mentally jarring for people, except Latinos find that ethnic divisions are tougher to overcome than divisions based on political ideology. Another possibility is that Latinos in the United States are engaging in a kind of small-scale, self-created enclave deliberation (e.g. Karpowitz, Raphael, & Hammond, 2009), in which a disempowered societal group discusses issues within an environment that values its views, before sharing the group’s views with the larger society.

Political discussion with other friends, acquaintances, and family members—more distant social contacts—was also a common theme from the interviews. People mentioned that these contacts told them about important political events, such as the nationwide rallies for immigration reform in 2006, but the exchanges also provided useful information about issues and elections. Some participants mentioned that they used online communication for these conversations, though others relied on face-to-face meetings or telephone calls. Jorge, a man in his 30s living in Tucson, is part of the “1.5 generation,” which means he came to the U.S. as a child when his parents immigrated here. In his Tucson focus group, he talked about using online social networks, rather than face-to-face talk, to learn about and get involved in political issues:

Facilitator: “Do you guys ever get involved with your friends? Is that how you guys get pulled into stuff, friends of friends or Facebook, like these sort of grassroots or Hispanic organizations?”

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

For many study participants, their social contacts were acting as both political discussion partners and sources of political socialization. Through these contacts, the subjects were learning about political topics and institutions, but they were also discussing politics and learning how to engage in conversation with others—or in some cases, how *not* to engage with others. The Social Contact Model, presented in Chapter 3, predicted just such a process of learning about political interaction through one's social contacts. In addition, these findings are consistent with H4-1, which argued that social contacts and social interaction will be important for political socialization among Latino immigrants.

### **Avoiding Conflict and Debate**

A common theme in the interviews was the avoidance of conflict in political discussion. This first became apparent during fieldwork, when participants would take issue with interviewers using the Spanish word *discusión* to describe political discussion. Participants said that this word, with its connotation of debate or argumentation, did not fit with their experience of talking about politics. Participants typically preferred the term *plática* to describe their political discussions, as this word connotes an informal conversation or more calm discussion. For example, Isabel, a woman in her 30s living in the Tempe area, used this term when mentioning the discussions that she and her college friends had when she was growing up in Mexico:

Isabel: “*Nosotros si teníamos pláticas con los amigos, no discusiones.*”

[We did have discussions among friends, not arguments.]

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

The few participants who mentioned being comfortable with more argumentative forms of political discussion did so with an important qualifier. Those kinds of discussion were only mentioned as being acceptable among fellow Latinos who were friends or more distant family members, as opposed to parents and children.

This reticence to argue with others about politics—especially within the nuclear family—could be connected to past experiences of politics in Mexico. Some participants recalled discussions back in Mexico in which friends or family members would argue heatedly, most often because of battles between the PRI and PAN, the two main political parties. Participants generally saw this kind of conflict as a bad thing and often mentioned it as a reason why they avoided politics in Mexico. Though participants did not explicitly make this connection, perhaps this past conflict was part of the reason why parents and children favored information seeking and learning about issues and frowned upon sharing their opinions or debating with one another. If so, that would provide some support for the Social Contact Model from Chapter 3, which argues that first-generation immigrants will have some native-country experiences that will help shape their sense of political norms in their new nation.

### **Threats, Authority, and Participation**

One of the most common themes that arose among participants at the research sites in Arizona—and one mentioned by some participants in Washington state—was the threat posed to Latino immigrants by anti-immigrant attitudes and public policy. Several months prior to the fieldwork, Arizona had passed and instituted a controversial law named SB1070, which mandated much stricter immigration enforcement. Though Washington had no such law in place, immigrants living there still had concerns about immigration enforcement and state and federal programs to strengthen enforcement. Participants talked about their fears that they or their family members could be deported for being undocumented immigrants, as well concerns that all Latinos were being unfairly targeted by law enforcement authorities because of immigration enforcement and ethnic profiling. Participants in two communities, the Phoenix/Tempe and Yuma areas, mentioned that they sometimes avoided participating in politics because of these fears.

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

also led to Angelica talking about the challenge of discussing politics with an authority figure, particularly one who is not Latino:

When you're talking to someone like this...you can have this conversation and I'm very passionate about it so, all the time – like, at the end of the conversation I'm either yelling at you or, you know, doing something that I'm like – 'No!' [Group laughs.] But, when you're talking to somebody...like a sheriff or a representative or something, it's different. You can't just push this stuff in their faces and be like – 'Here are the facts, why aren't you paying attention?' So, that was a real eye-opener for me as far as learning how to talk to them...They don't know how other people are suffering because of them and once you touch that subject I am pleased to know that some of them do start to get it, and want to get more involved or, at least, will have some kind of conversation with somebody else who maybe will also be interested about it.

In Angelica's case, the immigration issue and her concerns about unfair treatment of Latinos spurred her into engaging in a very challenging form of political discussion—discussing a policy issue directly with government officials. Her comments above are indicative of the challenge that Latino immigrants, in particular, face when trying to discuss politics with those holding power in society. Angelica recognizes that her community's more tenuous status, and the lower profile of the community's problems, means that they must be more diplomatic and patient with whites who are in positions of governmental power.

Participants in Arizona mentioned similar examples of responding to harsh immigration policies and enforcement by engaging in community activism and mobilizing people through social contacts. These efforts tended to be stronger in Tucson than in the Phoenix/Tempe or Yuma/San Luis areas, and the differences seen across Arizona may be due to some of the

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

These findings related to political threats and public authorities are only loosely related to the hypotheses posed above. However, the mobilization of Latino immigrants by their social contacts, and the way that such contacts can introduce people to new forms of political discourse (such as contacting public officials directly), are in line with H4-2 and H4-5. Those hypotheses and the Social Contact Model suggest that social contacts will be important part of the socialization process, and that this process will be more of a social than educational one. The fact that some communities are responding to political threats by disengaging from public life, while discouraging about American democracy, is also in line with the Social Contact Model. People in Arizona, in particular, seem to be responding to the threat of immigration or law-enforcement action by withdrawing from the outside community, and enacting this as a sort of social and political norm.

### **Disengagement and Limited Engagement**

Some participants, particularly those who are first-generation immigrants, reported that they paid little attention to politics and rarely discussed it with their family members and friends. For many of these participants, engaging in politics was very difficult because of their tenuous immigration status or their lack of citizenship, either of which means they do not have voting rights in the United States. This sentiment was shared by Oswaldo, a first-generation immigrant in his 30s who lives in the Phoenix area, as he participated in a focus group in Tempe:

Group facilitator: “And you never happen to talk about politics with your children. Is that something that happens?”

Oswaldo: “Well, not politics, because in reality, how can I put it, we don’t have a vote. Why? Because we don’t have a way to vote. We only listen. The news reports come out, but we never talk like that with them. Well, at least, I don’t.” [Translated from the Spanish]

However, as this group interview went on, Oswaldo and other participants recounted talking to their children and other family members about public issues like local school funding and political topics like immigration policy and enforcement. This was a common refrain in group and individual interviews, as participants initially identify as not being politically involved or knowledgeable, but then mention talking about political or public issues or recall engaging in some forms of political engagement. This behavior is reminiscent of Eliasoph’s findings about political disengagement and the building of identity as a group of people who are *not* interested in politics (1998). In the case of Latino immigrants, though, this identity of disengagement is based more strongly in a harsh reality: many of them cannot vote in the United States because they are undocumented or are merely permanent residents. However, many immigrants in the study who lack voting rights still reported engaging in political behavior, such as discussing issues with others and engaging in public protests.

A similar phenomenon arose among participants who mentioned their status as, essentially, non-citizens in either Mexico or the United States. These participants talked about feeling trapped between Mexico and the U.S., unwilling to return to their native country but unable to live as a full citizen in their new country. People cited this feeling of being in between countries, or of being second-class citizens of either nation, as a reason why they did not get very

invested in American politics. For instance, Jose Carlos, a college student who moved to the U.S. with his parents at age 15, mentioned this during a focus group meeting at his college in eastern Washington:

But I think [about] the country that we belong to, and I think it just comes back to the same thing, you have this idea that you want to come back to a country and that you betrayed them. And then you come to a point when, you know—I came here when I was almost 15 and I was like, ‘OK, that’s my country because that’s where I lived, I used to live better over there than over here.’

However, he then went on to talk about how living in the United States makes him feel that he has to work within the American political system:

So, I say, O.K. that’s my country. And now I come here and start looking at the system, how can I progress and everything... And I see and I say, I’m not from here but also I don’t belong there anymore. So, what am I going to do? I have to adopt the system.

Jose Carlos and other similar participants talked about their disconnection from American society, even as they talked about how they can work within the U.S. system to take political action. Some even said they did not participate in politics here but then mention actions they have taken on public issues, much like the participants mentioned above who say their lack of voting rights prevents them from participating politically.

These Latino immigrants are not being disingenuous or melodramatic, though. Their marginalization from society and politics is real. Not having voting rights significantly limits one’s political power, and being an immigrant and a member of an ethnic minority group can negatively impact one’s social standing in the U.S. The participants’ views on political participation should instead be interpreted as pragmatic, in that they recognize their political

situation but still try to participate however they can, such as by talking to fellow Latinos about public issues, or by organizing small-scale campaigns to bring about change. Rather than simply viewing groups like Latino immigrants as less politically engaged or as having lower participation, scholars would be well served to recognize other forms of political participation and public engagement favored by groups with less social and political power.

### **Summary**

In my analysis, I identified several themes and phenomena of interest, some related to my hypotheses from Chapter 4 and the Social Contact Model described in Chapter 3 and others covering new areas not addressed in my previous theorizing. I had previously hypothesized that Latino immigrants' socialization of political discussion behavior would be different from that of the general population, and would rely less on parental influences and school and rely more on non-parental family members, social contacts, and others in learning about politics and political talk. In addition, I hypothesized in Chapter 4 that foreign-born Latinos would exhibit this behavior the most strongly. The qualitative data findings are consistent with these hypotheses.

I found that spousal partners are some of the most significant influences of political learning and socialization among participants, especially those who are first-generation immigrants. Latino immigrants are also developing what seems to be a new political norm in their U.S. community, as women were not always welcomed into political discussion in Mexico. I found that parent-child political discussion and socialization is more of a two-way process for Latino immigrants than is traditionally scene in the native-born population. I also found that these discussions tended to focus on learning and information around politics, and avoided debating, arguing, and sharing of opinions. My qualitative analysis also explored the importance of social contacts such as friends and co-workers in the political socialization process. Many

Latino immigrants reported learning about and discussing politics with their social contacts, but these connections were stronger with fellow Latinos. Some people avoided getting into arguments or debates with non-Latino social contacts, or even tried to avoid talking to them about politics at all.

In general, participants seemed to prefer more calm discussion of politics and tended to avoid debating and arguing about politics, though a few participants were comfortable with argumentative discussion with fellow Latinos. This could be connected with past experiences in Mexico seeing friends and family members have heated arguments connected to the intense party divisions there. The threat of immigration enforcement and law-enforcement intimidation was a prominent theme in my qualitative analysis. Some people mentioned these threats as reasons why they were driven to engage in political discussion or action, while others were driven away from the public sphere by the fear of intimidation or deportation. Latino immigrants also face difficulties in discussing public issues with authority figures because of their more tenuous status. Study participants often reported that they were not very engaged in politics because of their lack of voting rights or their existence between the societies of the U.S. and Mexico. However, I found that many participants did indeed participate in politics and discuss public issues, though not necessarily in the ways traditionally noted in studies of political engagement.

### **Discussion**

My qualitative analysis of political discussion and socialization among Mexican-heritage people living in the United States has identified some important things about how this group talks about political issues and learns about the political culture here. These findings have significance for understanding the political participation of immigrants and the immigrant-derived population in the U.S., as well as for Mexican-heritage people and Latinos in general.

Some of the results above will be revisited in Chapter 6, in which I will describe the results of a national telephone survey of Mexican-heritage people with questions focused on political socialization, learning about politics, and discussing political and public issues. The results from the survey will help me determine whether some of the findings from this chapter may be applicable to a wider national population or if they are more situated in the contexts studied here. Before turning to wider-scale tests of these findings, though, this section will speculate on some of the larger implications of the results of the qualitative analysis.

My findings highlighting the importance of social contacts and non-parental family members suggest that political and civic groups trying to encourage Latino participation would be well-served to find community members with strong social connections. Groups hoping to make civic life more vibrant and improve democratic participation may want to identify and target people who are central to social networks, or perhaps people who have been in the U.S. for some time but can reach family members who are newer immigrants. Research on social networks within Latino communities could yield deeper insights into how these distant social contacts may help immigrants become involved in the U.S. political system and culture.

In light of my findings on spouses and children being important discussion partners and sources of political socialization, perhaps community entities that work with Latino immigrants can focus some efforts on these sorts of relationships. That is, schools hoping to improve civic participation among parents could give students homework that is explicitly designed to connect with the entire family and encourage conversation about public issues. The theoretical implications of the political socialization and discussion occurring between children and parents is quite significant, as this finding differs from much of the previous research on these topics. As discussed in the preceding theory chapters, traditional models of political socialization have

typically treated socialization as a top-down process, rather than one in which young people play an active role in their own political learning and that of their parents. This finding might also shed light on both Latino political discussion norms and on the socialization process in general. Perhaps research on political socialization among all populations should pay more attention to the role that children play in helping their parents learn about and analyze political topics; maybe the top-down model of socialization is less applicable among the native-born population than researchers have previously believed.

The findings about argumentativeness and debate making some Latinos uncomfortable suggest that the dominant, adversarial model of American politics (Mansbridge, 1983) may not be ideal for encouraging Latino participation. Political groups and governmental entities may want to explore other forms of discussion and engagement when trying to connect with Latino communities; the findings here suggest that argumentative public hearings or debates would make many Latinos uncomfortable and could discourage them from participating at all. Further research on some of the political discussion practices of Latinos—in ethnically homogenous and heterogeneous gatherings—could provide insight into whether argumentative styles of political discourse are problematic for Latinos participating in public meetings and political gatherings.

As for the influence of political threats and limited power on Latino political engagement, these findings are discouraging but offer some hope for improving the situation for Latino immigrants. Communities with a strong history of political activism seem to respond positively to political threats, as do those in which immigration enforcement is less strict and targeting of Latino immigrants by law enforcement is less intensive. Groups that want to encourage greater engagement among the Latino population could try to soften their local community's approach toward the immigrant community and encourage strong political activism among Latinos. It also

seems that Latino immigrants without voting rights are nonetheless interested in participating in public life and talking about political issues. Perhaps governmental entities and organizations could channel that interest into forms of political participation that do not require citizenship, such as public advisory groups related to changes happening in the community.

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

## CHAPTER 6

### **Political discussion and socialization among Mexican immigrants and whites: An analysis of national survey data**

Analyzing the political experiences of Latino immigrants in a state like Arizona, which has a complicated and often hostile relationship with immigration, provides important insight into how people cope with such an environment and still manage to participate in public life. However, the sometimes sharp contrast between Latinos' experiences there and in a more accommodating state like Washington raises some questions about the representativeness of these findings for the wider Latino community around the United States. For instance, how well do the findings from my qualitative analysis in Chapter 5 relate to Latinos' experiences in places like California, which has a very large Latino population and has strong bases of both pro- and anti-immigrant sentiment? Or how might the experiences of Latinos in Arizona differ from their counterparts in the Midwest, the South, or the Northeast? Those areas of the U.S. typically have smaller but rapidly growing Latino communities and a wide range of pro- and anti-immigration policies from state to state. In addition, my focus on Latino political socialization and discussion raises the question of how these findings may differ from the rest of the American population or from Anglos. One way to address these questions is to analyze data on a national scale.

In this chapter, I will conduct more extensive tests of the differences in political discussion and the socialization process between Latino immigrants<sup>8</sup> and Anglos in the United States. Much like in Chapter 4, in this chapter I will address my research questions by analyzing

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<sup>8</sup> A brief reminder about terminology in this chapter: For ease of writing, I will occasionally use the term Latinos to describe the subjects of my study. More accurately, my study focuses on Mexican-heritage people living in the United States.

survey data, this time from a single national telephone-based survey focused on political learning, socialization, and discussion. Whereas Chapter 4 consists of preliminary analysis of Latino political socialization, in this chapter I will delve deeper into this phenomenon and determine whether findings from my situated qualitative analysis are applicable across a national population of Mexican-Americans. The analysis in this chapter is also meant to complement that from Chapter 5, which provided a rich qualitative description of political discussion and socialization among Mexican-heritage people in the U.S. In some cases, that means testing specific hypotheses generated from those qualitative findings, whereas in others it simply means revisiting a phenomenon noted in Chapter 5 and analyzing it on a wider scale. Together, these chapters give a deeper picture of how Mexican-Americans in specific communities learn to engage in and talk about politics, as well as a wider view of Latino political engagement across the United States.

In this chapter, I will begin by exploring some of the reasons for conducting mixed-methods research involving both qualitative and quantitative analysis. Second, I will provide the overarching research questions guiding my analysis in this chapter, as well as the specific hypotheses I will test herein. Next, I will describe the methods used to collect and analyze the data in this chapter. Finally, I will spell out the findings of my data analysis and the conclusions drawn from it.

### **Mixed-Methods Research**

The study of social and political phenomena can take many different forms, from analysis of aggregate-level survey data to intense ethnographic study. One particularly powerful form of research is mixed-methods inquiry, which combines two or more research methods that complement one another. Social science researchers have used many different combinations of

methods in multi-method studies. One of the most common methods is inductive research using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. In this form of research, qualitative analysis is first used to create new theory or hypotheses in the context of study, and then those hypotheses are tested inductively through quantitative study (Bryman, 2008). This method was used by Walsh (2004) in her study of political discussion in everyday groups. The combination of methods allowed her to illustrate how some groups of people were engaging in identity-based discussion of political issues based on the identity of their particular group, and then in turn show how people around the U.S. who belong to explicit identity-based groups may also be engaging in similar discussions of political issues.

In the context of immigrant political engagement, which has typically been studied with only aggregate-level data, an inductive approach of qualitative study followed by analysis of survey data can be very productive. Like the combination used by Walsh (2004), this multi-method approach could provide useful exploration of an under-analyzed social phenomenon, while gaining the benefits of studying a phenomenon across a larger population that is more representative. This chapter represents the final phase in the mixed-methods approach employed in this dissertation. After completing a preliminary study to confirm some of my initial impressions about Latino political socialization (Chapter 4), I conducted an in-depth qualitative study to help build my understanding of Latino socialization and political discussion (Chapter 5). That qualitative analysis helped me identify important phenomena and generate hypotheses that will be analyzed further in this chapter using a large national sample of Mexican-heritage immigrants and a smaller national sample of non-immigrant whites for the sake of comparison.

### Research Questions and Hypotheses

In this chapter, I will test several hypotheses related to the qualitative findings from Chapter 5. In general, the hypotheses are oriented toward testing whether trends seen in my qualitative findings are similar to the trends in a national sample. Those hypotheses can be divided up into four main areas related to political discussion and socialization: avoiding political arguments and debates, the importance of information and identity-building in political talk, discussion partners for political conversation, and role models for learning how to talk about politics.

First, recall that in Chapter 5, I found that many Latinos (especially first-generation immigrants) were uncomfortable with and avoided political arguments and debates. These findings helped me generate the following hypotheses:

**H6-1:** Latinos will report being more amicable and less argumentative in their political discussion compared to whites.

**H6-2:** Latinos who are talking politics with fellow Latinos will report being somewhat more open to arguing and debating in their political discussion.

**H6-3:** Those Latinos who discuss politics with whites or other non-Latinos will be more likely to report trying to avoid conflict and debate.

The next set of hypotheses will focus on the importance of information-seeking and identity-building in political talk. In Chapter 5, I noted that Latinos tended to focus their political discussion on learning information, rather than on engaging in debates or sharing opinions. This concentration on information sharing was particularly common in discussions between parents

and children. Later generations of Latino immigrants seemed more open to both opinion sharing and information seeking in their discussions, though, perhaps because those generations were becoming more integrated into American political culture. An interesting question, though one not generated directly by the findings in Chapter 5, is to ask whether this kind of behavior in political discussion is related to other forms of political participation, such as taking part in deliberative events or engaging in collective action on a public problem (Jacobs et al., 2009).

**H6-4:** Latinos will be more likely to report relational and identity-building behavior in their political discussions, and less likely to report advocacy-related behavior, compared with whites.

**H6-5:** Latinos who are first-generation or foreign-born immigrants will be more likely to report relational and identity-building behavior in their political discussions, and less likely to report advocacy-related behavior, compared with other Latinos.

**H6-6:** Those who discuss politics with their children will be more likely to report that their discussions are more informational and identity-based and less advocacy-based.

**H6-7:** Those respondents who report having participated in deliberative events or other collective political actions will be more likely to report that their political discussions are more informational and identity-based and less advocacy-based.

Next, these hypotheses will focus on the discussion partners that people have when talking about politics and public issues. In the previous chapter, I noted that first-generation Latino immigrants tended to talk politics with their spouses and non-parental family, and that

they sometimes avoided talking about politics with non-Latino co-workers. Are these the same patterns that exist when looking at the overall Latino population?

**H6-8:** First-generation or foreign-born Latino immigrants will be more likely to report that their political discussion partners are close family members, such as children or a spouse, compared to other Latinos and whites.

**H6-9:** Latinos will less likely to report that their political discussion partners are co-workers, compared to whites.

The last section of hypotheses centers on sources of political socialization, in the form of role models that one relies upon when learning how to talk about politics (the focus of Chapter 4). In this case, however, I speculate on how different role models for learning about discussion could be related to reporting different kinds of political discussion behavior. In light of the qualitative findings on parents and children focusing their political discussion on information and identity-building, perhaps those who look to their parents or children as role models for discussion will focus their political conversations in these areas. Given the political news media's focus on conflict and partisan debate, perhaps those who rely on the media as a role model for discussion will focus on such themes in their political conversations.

**H6-10:** Those who report that their parents or children are their role models for political discussion will be more likely to report that their political discussions are more informational and identity-based and less advocacy-based.

**H6-11:** Those who report that the news media is their role model for political discussion will be more likely to report that their political discussions are more advocacy-based and argumentative and less informational and identity-based.

Now that I have laid out the specific hypotheses that I will test in this chapter, the next section will focus on the methods used to test those hypotheses, including the kind of data collected for this project and the variables created using that data.

## **Method**

### **Sample**

For this phase of the study, I worked with a research collaborator (a fellow graduate student) to design and implement a national telephone survey focused on political socialization, discussion of politics, and general political engagement. The survey targeted two national samples: a group of several hundred Mexican-heritage people and a smaller comparison group of whites. The survey was conducted by undergraduate student assistants working through the UW Department of Political Science Center for Survey Research and the Washington Institute for the Study of Ethnicity, Race and Sexuality (WISER). The survey callers worked in a computer lab at the main University of Washington campus in Seattle, using computer-based telephone calling and a computer program to record responses. Calls were conducted for several weeks in the spring of 2012, from late April to late June, and collected a total of 801 completed surveys, with 583 Mexican-heritage respondents and 218 respondents in the white population comparison group. There were approximately 150 additional participants who partially completed the telephone survey, and data from those interviews will be included in some analyses.

The calling samples for the survey were provided by WISER and the Center for Survey Research. The Mexican-heritage sample was distilled from a national sample of Latino last names, using initial screening questions to screen out non-Mexican-heritage Latinos, such as those from Puerto Rico, Cuba, or other Latin American nations. People of mixed Latino heritage who traced some of their ancestry to Mexico were included in the study. Respondents were allowed to complete the survey in English or Spanish, as they preferred.

The comparison sample was created from a national general population sample donated by the survey center, again using initial screening questions to screen out non-white respondents. Given the modest size planned for the comparison sample, my colleague and I decided to focus on white respondents only, since any ethnic or cultural sub-groups within this sample would be of insufficient size to yield any insights into those groups' attitudes and behaviors.

The survey itself consisted of up to 179 question items, counting all full and sub-questions and splits, and survey interviews typically lasted 20-40 minutes. Respondents were asked about their ethnic and national heritage, immigration status and experiences, political participation and engagement, sources of information and learning about politics, and demographic characteristics such as income and education.

## **Measures**

**Political discussion role models.** Respondents were asked the following question, identical to the one described in Chapter 4, about the people and entities who they believe have influenced how they learned to talk about political issues:

“We all have role models that have taught us different things about politics. When it comes to discussing politics, some people have heated arguments about politics, and

some people have more cool-headed discussions about issues. Who would you say had the most influence on how you learned to discuss politics?”

Respondents could select any of several choices read by the interviewer: parents/older family, children/younger family, a friend or co-worker, a teacher, the news media, a religious leader, or the option of someone else or other (the only option not read aloud). As with this variable in the data described in Chapter 4, the responses on this question were used to create a single categorical variable, Role Models, with a category for each answer option, and a series of dichotomous variables indicating whether a given answer was selected by each respondent. The mean values for those variables, listed below in Table 6.2 in the Results section, indicate what percentage of the group in question said that person was their primary role model for political discussion. (For instance, 48.5% [mean value = 0.485] of white respondents said that their parents were their primary role models for learning how to discuss politics.)

**Political discussion partners.** Respondents were asked an initial question about how often they discussed politics or public issues with other people. Those who responded “A few times a month” or more often were then given follow-up questions asking about the person who they talked with the most in these discussions. Respondents were asked to recall the person’s name (which was not recorded), and then asked for that person’s party identification, race or ethnicity, and their relationship to the respondent. These categorical variables were then recoded into dichotomous variables for each category within the larger variable, yielding, for example, Discussion Partner Latino and Discussion Partner White, as well as Discussion Partner Parents, Discussion Partner Children, and so on. Just as with the Role Models variables, the mean values, listed below in Table 6.1 in the Results section, indicate what percentage of the group in question listed that person as their primary discussion partner.

**Political discussion characteristics.** Respondents who answered the questions about their most frequent political discussion partner were asked several questions about the typical characteristics of those discussions and how closely a word or phrase described a typical conversation with their discussion partner. Those questions were used to create three-point scale variables, from “very well” (set to 2), to “somewhat well” (1), to “not at all” (0), with “don’t know” answers or refusals set to missing values. They were asked whether or not they tried to change the other person’s mind (variable name: Discussion - Change Mind), whether they vented frustrations or anger (Discussion - Vent), whether the two of them got into an argument (Discussion - Argument), whether they tried to learn something new about the topic (Discussion - Learn), whether they and their discussion partner were bonding together over common views (Discussion - Bond), and whether they found common ground about the topic (Discussion - Common Ground). I conducted a factor analysis on these variables, and as expected, two factors arose from them. The first factor consisted of the first three variables listed above, Discussion - Change Mind, -Vent, and -Argument; the second factor consisted of the other three variables, Discussion - Learn, -Bond, and -Common Ground. These two standardized scales were dubbed the Discussion Analytic Scale and Discussion Relational Scale, respectively.

**Political engagement and participation.** Respondents were asked about different forms of political engagement and participation. First, one question asked people if they have ever joined with others to resolve a problem or make something happen in their community. This question was aimed at measuring forms of collective social and political action that are less formalized than, say, attending government meetings or writing to one’s congressional representative (which many Latino immigrants, as non-citizens, cannot do). It was coded as Political Participation - Collective.

In addition, respondents were asked about their behavior related to political deliberation—attending deliberative forums or other gatherings of this sort. The question wording here was established by a recent national study of deliberation (Jacobs et al., 2009).

“In the past year or so, have you attended a formal or informal meeting, organized by you or someone you know, or a religious, social, civic, government or political group to discuss a local, national, or international issue? For instance, neighborhood crime, housing, schools, social security, election reform, immigration, terrorism, or any other public issue that affects people.”

This was coded as a dichotomous yes or no variable, dubbed Deliberation.

**Immigrant generation.** Respondents in the Mexican-heritage sample were asked if they were born in the United States or in another country, and native-born respondents were then given follow-up questions to ask if one or more of their parents or grandparents were born in another country. These questions were then used to create a categorical variable of immigrant generation, with participants divided up into first generation (born in Mexico and living in the U.S.), second generation (born in the U.S. to one or more foreign-born parents), or third generation or other (participant and both parents born in the U.S., trace heritage to Mexico). I created a dichotomous variable, Latino foreign born, indicating whether a Latino respondent was born outside of the United States or not.

**Other measures.** The dichotomous variable Race measured whether respondents were white or Latino (recall that non-white and non-Latino respondents were screened out of the survey at the beginning). I also created another dichotomous variable for comparison purposes, Latino Foreign Born Versus White, which set foreign-born Latinos at 1 and whites at zero, and those in other categories set as missing values.

## Results

To test most of the hypotheses above, I conducted paired *t*-tests on the variables in question to determine whether there were statistically significant differences between the mean values of those variables for different comparison groups. For some hypotheses, I tested correlations between variables and conducted regression analyses; the details of those analyses will be described as I cover each hypothesis below.

H6-1 suggested that Latinos would be less argumentative and more amicable in their political discussion than whites. This hypothesis was not supported, and in fact, the opposite seems to be true for at least some variables (see Table 6.1). Latinos were significantly higher than whites in reporting that they argued with their discussion partner. Whites and Latinos were very similar in reporting that they were bonding, finding common ground, venting frustrations, and trying to change others' minds. There were no significant differences between whites and Latinos on the analytic or relational scales, though whites were somewhat higher on the relational scale in comparison with foreign-born Latinos.

H6-2 and -3 suggested that Latinos talking to fellow Latinos would be more open to arguing, while those talking to whites would avoid conflict and debate. To test these hypotheses, I split the data file between whites and Latinos and conducted a paired *t*-test on the discussion-related variables, comparing those whose discussion partners were white with those whose partners were Latino. H6-2 and H6-3 were supported by the data. Those Latinos whose primary discussion partner was white were significantly less likely to say they got into an argument with their discussion partner than those talking to fellow Latinos (data not shown in table).

Table 6.1: Results of t-tests between different population groups for discussion-related variables (values are means with standard deviations in parentheses).

	<b>Whites</b>	<b>Latinos</b>	<b>NB Latinos</b>	<b>FB Latinos</b>
Discussion - Change Mind	0.61 (0.774)	0.50 (0.779)	0.55 (0.764)	0.46 (0.738)
Discussion - Vent	1.15 (0.852)	1.07 (0.868)	0.94 (0.878) <sub>y</sub>	1.17 (0.850) <sub>y</sub>
Discussion - Argument	0.36 (0.661) <sub>xz</sub>	0.62 (0.830) <sub>x</sub>	0.41 (0.734) <sub>y</sub>	0.79 (0.864) <sub>yz</sub>
Discussion Analytic Scale	-0.029 (0.964)	0.012 (1.013)	-0.154 (0.988) <sub>y</sub>	0.139 (1.016) <sub>y</sub>
Discussion - Learn	1.62 (0.619) <sub>z</sub>	1.51 (0.708)	1.63 (0.582) <sub>y</sub>	1.41 (0.779) <sub>yz</sub>
Discussion - Bond	1.55 (0.639)	1.55 (0.656)	1.58 (0.635)	1.53 (0.672)
Discussion - Common Ground	1.65 (0.567) <sub>z</sub>	1.55 (0.667)	1.60 (0.617)	1.50 (0.701) <sub>z</sub>
Discussion Relational Scale	0.113 (0.911) <sub>z</sub>	-0.034 (1.017)	0.071 (0.947)	-0.115 (1.064) <sub>z</sub>
Discussion Partner - Parent	0.121 (0.327)	0.164 (0.371)	0.149 (0.357)	0.175 (0.381)
Discussion Partner - Child	0.076 (0.267) <sub>xz</sub>	0.171 (0.377) <sub>x</sub>	0.182 (0.387)	0.162 (0.370) <sub>z</sub>
Discussion Partner - Friend	0.319 (0.467)	0.255 (0.436)	0.240 (0.429)	0.266 (0.443)
Discussion Partner - Coworker	0.070 (0.256)	0.095 (0.293)	0.091 (0.289)	0.097 (0.297)
Discussion Partner - Teacher	0.000 (0.000) <sub>x</sub>	0.015 (0.120) <sub>x</sub>	0.025 (0.156)	0.007 (0.081)
Disc. Part. - Religious Leader	0.000 (0.000)	0.004 (0.060)	0.000 (0.000)	0.007 (0.081)
Discussion Partner - Spouse	0.357 (0.481) <sub>xz</sub>	0.236 (0.426) <sub>x</sub>	0.248 (0.434)	0.227 (0.420) <sub>z</sub>
N	149	265	115	150

Common subscripts indicate statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ) differences in means when comparing the groups indicated. Lack of subscript indicates no significant difference detected. Comparisons conducted were: whites versus Latinos (subscript x), native- versus foreign-born Latinos (y), and whites versus foreign-born Latinos (z).

In the next set of hypotheses, I argued that Latinos may be more oriented toward relational aspects of political discussion and less oriented toward analytic aspects than whites, and that those Latinos talking primarily with their children will even more disposed to this pattern. In addition, I hypothesized that those who have participated in deliberative events or other forms of collective action will be more likely to report that their discussions are oriented toward relational aspects of discussion. H6-4 was not supported by the data, as Latinos and whites were not significantly different on the analytic or relational scales (see Table 6.1). H6-5 was also not supported by the data, as foreign-born Latinos were not more likely than the native-

born to report relational and identity-related aspects of discussion and less likely to report analytic and advocacy-related aspects of discussion. In fact, foreign-born Latinos were somewhat more likely to report venting frustrations or arguing with their discussion partner, and scored somewhat higher on the analytic scale, than their native-born counterparts.

H6-6 was not supported by the data, as there were no significant differences found between Latinos who discussed politics primarily with their children and those who talked primarily with others (see Table 6.1). H6-7, which argued that attending deliberative events or engaging in political action would correlate with reporting more relational aspects of discussion, was not supported by the data. However, the opposite finding was true for Latinos, and those variables were negatively correlated to the relational discussion scale: participating in a deliberative public event (the variable *Deliberation*,  $r = -.204$ ,  $p = .001$ ) and engaging in collective action on an issue (the variable *Political Participation – Collective*,  $r = -.225$ ,  $p = .000$ ).

The next set of hypotheses dealt with political discussion partners. I hypothesized that foreign-born Latinos will be more likely to talk about politics with close family members than whites or other Latinos, and less likely to talk about politics with co-workers. H6-8 was partially supported by the data: Foreign-born Latinos were much more likely to report talking to their children about politics than whites, but were about as likely as other Latinos to report this (see Table 6.1). H6-9 was not supported, as Latinos were somewhat more likely to report talking to co-workers, but the differences between the comparison groups were not statistically significant.

The final set of hypotheses were related to political discussion role models (for descriptive statistics and basic group comparisons, see Table 6.2) and the connections of different role models to different styles of political discussion.

Table 6.2: Results of t-tests between different population groups for role models for learning about political discussion (values are means with standard deviations in parentheses).

	<b>Whites</b>	<b>Latinos</b>	<b>NB Latinos</b>	<b>FB Latinos</b>
Role Model - Parent	0.485 (0.501) <sub>xz</sub>	0.322 (0.468) <sub>x</sub>	0.366 (0.483)	0.287 (0.453) <sub>z</sub>
Role Model - Child	0.046 (0.209)	0.061 (0.239)	0.049 (0.216)	0.071 (0.257)
Role Model - Friend	0.076 (0.265)	0.110 (0.313)	0.112 (0.316)	0.110 (0.314)
Role Model - Coworker	0.035 (0.185)	0.032 (0.177)	0.005 (0.070) <sub>y</sub>	0.047 (0.213) <sub>y</sub>
Role Model - Teacher	0.076 (0.265)	0.091 (0.288)	0.151 (0.359) <sub>y</sub>	0.043 (0.204) <sub>y</sub>
Role Model - Media	0.106 (0.309) <sub>xz</sub>	0.197 (0.398) <sub>x</sub>	0.146 (0.354) <sub>y</sub>	0.240 (0.428) <sub>yz</sub>
Role Model - Religious	0.020 (0.141)	0.026 (0.159)	0.020 (0.139)	0.032 (0.175)
Role Model - Spouse	0.091 (0.288)	0.084 (0.278)	0.063 (0.244)	0.102 (0.304)
Role Model - Other	0.066 (0.248)	0.078 (0.268)	0.088 (0.284)	0.067 (0.250)
N	198	459	205	254

Common subscripts indicate statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ) differences in means when comparing the groups indicated. Lack of subscript indicates no significant difference detected. Comparisons conducted were: whites versus Latinos (subscript x), native- versus foreign-born Latinos (y), and whites versus foreign-born Latinos (z).

To test these hypotheses, I conducted a pair of linear regressions on the relational and analytic discussion scales, with several control and predictor variables: discussion role models, political participation variables, race, immigrant generation, gender, education, and income (see Table 6.3). H6-10 and -11 were partially supported by the data. The relational discussion scale was positively related to reporting one's parents or the media as role models for political discussion. Deliberation and Political Participation – Collective were negatively related to the relational discussion scale, lending further support to the earlier finding on H6-7, which showed that political participation was negatively associated with the relational scale. The regression model for the analytic discussion scale was not significant.

Table 6.3: Results of regression analysis testing controls and predictors for Political Discussion Relational and Analytic Scales (values are unstandardized betas with standard errors in parentheses).

	<b>Discussion- Relational Scale</b>	<b>Discussion- Analytic Scale</b>
Constant	0.459 (0.505)	0.868 (0.553)
Gender	0.042 (0.134)	-0.160 (0.147)
Education	0.000 (0.008)	-0.001 (0.009)
Income	-0.006 (0.002)*	-0.001 (0.002)
Immigrant generation	0.053 (0.091)	-0.230 (0.100)*
Political Participation-Collective	-0.252 (0.140)#	-0.058 (0.153)
Deliberation	-0.008 (0.003)*	-0.001 (0.004)
Political Participation - General	-0.317 (0.156)*	0.109 (0.171)
Role Model - Parent	0.617 (0.226)**	-0.323 (0.247)
Role Model - Child	0.345 (0.315)	-0.542 (0.345)
Role Model - Friend	0.434 (0.289)	-0.151 (0.317)
Role Model - Coworker	0.350 (0.437)	-0.156 (0.479)
Role Model - Teacher	0.267 (0.297)	-0.439 (0.325)
Role Model - Media	0.662 (0.254)*	-0.429 (0.278)
Role Model - Spouse	0.292 (0.299)	-0.402 (0.328)
$R^2$	.165***	.060
N	229	229

#  $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$  two-tailed tests.

## Discussion

In this chapter, I had two primary goals. I wanted to examine further some of the findings from Chapter 5's qualitative analysis in the context of a national survey comparing Latinos and whites, and I sought deeper insight into political discussion norms and the socialization of norms among Mexican-heritage immigrants and the immigrant-derived population. The results of my analysis here give a wider-ranging picture of how Latinos talk about political issues, how they

are socialized into political culture in the U.S., and how both political socialization and discussion may be somewhat different for them than for the white population.

First off, the data here suggest that at the national level Latinos are somewhat more argumentative than whites, contrary to my hypothesis and the findings in Chapter 5. This may be due to the differences between the populations studied in Chapter 5 and the national sample analyzed here. In Arizona and parts of eastern Washington, Latino immigrants face a hostile political environment that may result in them censoring themselves in political discussion for fear of being further ostracized. Additional analysis of this finding shows that Latinos are more likely to say they argue with their discussion partners when those people are fellow Latinos. This suggests that the Latino community provides a safe space for people to argue over political issues, whereas the wider community with non-Latinos may be a place where Latinos are more cautious and less argumentative. This finding is in keeping with the data from Chapter 5, in which respondents recalled avoiding arguments with their white friends, co-workers, and extended family. It is also in line with my theoretical model, the Social Contact Model, which suggests that one's close-knit groups and wider social networks will influence one's political socialization. Latino immigrants seem to be responding to arguing and debating among their white social contacts by becoming more withdrawn there, even as they open up to argumentative political talk among fellow Latinos.

Next, my findings in this chapter on relational- and identity-based aspects of political discussion show fewer differences between whites and Latinos than I expected. Though some differences did appear in the analysis, they did not rise to the level of statistical significance. Future studies of these phenomena may benefit from an oversampling of those people who discuss politics often or somewhat often. The strongest differences were seen between native-

and foreign-born Latinos, as the foreign-born were higher on the analytic scale and more likely to report venting frustrations and arguing than were their native-born counterparts. The reasons for this may be similar to the findings above with argumentativeness and the ethnicity of one's discussion partner. Most foreign-born Latinos are talking about politics with other Latinos, so perhaps they are simply more likely than the native-born to reside mostly in the safe space of the Latino community, where they feel comfortable arguing and venting frustrations over political issues.

Some other important areas where whites and Latinos seem to differ in political socialization and discussion are the role models they cite for learning how to talk about politics and the people who they report are their primary discussion partners. Latinos, particularly the foreign-born, were more likely to talk about politics with their children compared with the white population. They were also less likely to cite their parents as role models for learning about discussion than were whites, and that difference was more pronounced with foreign-born Latinos. These findings are in keeping with my hypothesis and the findings in Chapter 5, as well as the Social Contact Model, with its focus on close-knit familial and social groups. It seems logical that Latino immigrants trying to learn about American history and political culture would turn to their children, who tended to be born in the U.S. or brought here at a young age and therefore educated in American schools. Another interesting difference in reported sources of socialization for political discussion is that the media was mentioned by far more Latinos than whites. In light of the findings above about avoiding discussions that are argumentative when talking to whites, perhaps Latinos are turning to less jarring sources of political socialization than their white social contacts. The media may provide a window into mainstream American political discourse to

Latino immigrants without them needing to engage in a discomfiting argument with a friend or co-worker.

My rather speculative hypotheses on how different role models for discussion could shape one's political discussion styles found mixed results. However, the findings are interesting and somewhat surprising. I expected that looking to one's parents as a role model might encourage relational aspects of political discussion, particularly because of the findings in Chapter 5 showing that parents and children said they often focused on these aspects of politics when talking with each other. I did not expect that citing the media as a role model for discussion would be related to relational forms of political talk, though, given how much political news coverage focuses on horse-race aspects of campaigns and argumentative discussions of policy issues. Perhaps people are focusing on those aspects of the news media that encourage and valorize the seeking of common ground, learning about issues, and bonding over shared views.

A related finding, and one that was also quite unexpected, was that participating in political events, deliberative forums, and collective action were all negatively related to engaging in relational aspects of political discussion. This may represent a negative aspect of political socialization at work. Perhaps Latinos who attend political gatherings or town meetings are having bad experiences there and encountering hostility, argumentativeness, political polarization, which in turns makes them less likely to seek common ground and bond over shared views when talking to others about politics. Scholars generally believe that participating in deliberative forums and other gatherings on public issues have positive benefits for citizens (Jacobs et al., 2009), but for Latinos facing a somewhat hostile public sphere this may not be the case. Perhaps enclave deliberation or some other form of in-group political discussion, like that seen in Walsh's (2004) study of informal political talk in social groups, could be more beneficial

for Latino immigrants. In such spaces, they seem to feel safer debating and arguing over political issues, and they do not face the same anti-immigrant sentiment that is more common in the wider public sphere.

Overall, the results of this study suggest that the findings from Chapter 5 are only somewhat representative of the wider Latino community around the United States, especially those findings about avoiding arguments. In addition, the findings offer some support and some rejection for my Social Contact Model of political socialization. Though social and familial contacts do seem to be important for Latinos, the strongest findings in support of my model are the importance of children as discussion partners and the lower influence of parents as role models for discussion. An area that my theoretical model did not address is the role of the media as a channel of political socialization. The findings about the media serving as a role model and the connection to relational aspects of political discussion suggest that my Social Contact Model should be revised to incorporate the media as an important channel of socialization.

## CHAPTER 7

### Conclusion

When I undertook this doctoral research project, I sought to better understand the political socialization process and political discussion practices of Latino immigrants in the United States. In addition, I wanted to develop original ideas about the immigrant experience in the U.S. and perhaps other democratic societies. I also hoped that my research would generate insights about political discussion and deliberation by looking at these communication practices through new theoretical frameworks and in relatively under-examined contexts. In a series of two theoretical and three empirical chapters, I hope to have advanced our knowledge in these areas. This conclusion reviews those chapters, suggests future research, then offers some final reflections on the implications of my findings.

### Summary of Theoretical Advances and Empirical Findings

I developed two theoretical chapters to help guide my research project in different ways. In one of those chapters, I developed a way of studying and understanding political discussion as a phenomenon shaped by social norms in that particular context. Though my primary goal with that chapter was to aid my analysis of Latino political discussion behavior, the framework that I developed could be used for future studies of political conversation as a new way to analyze and understand this communication phenomenon. In my second theory chapter, I developed a theoretical model to explain how Latino immigrants in the U.S. learn how to participate in and talk about politics in their new nation. This model, the Social Contact Model of Immigrant Political Communication, predicts that close-knit familial and social groups and more distant social contacts will be the most important channels for immigrants to learn about political discussion and conversation in the U.S. In the next several paragraphs, I will summarize my

empirical findings related to these theoretical models. In addition, Table 7.1 (see below) reprises a similar table from Chapter 3, listing the different areas of political discussion and socialization covered in this dissertation and my key findings in each of those areas.

Table 7.1 Aspects of political discussion and socialization mentioned in Chapters 2 and 3, addressed in remaining dissertation chapters.

<b>Aspects of political discussion and socialization</b>	<b>Chap 4 Explored in national survey</b>	<b>Chap 5 Explored in qualitative interviews/ discussions</b>	<b>Chap 6 Tested in original national survey</b>
Political discussion partners and settings		Latinos talked to spouses and children	Latinos talked to their children more than whites
Purposes and tone of political discussion		Latinos focused on learning and avoided arguing	National sample of Latinos more open to arguing, mainly with other Latinos
Influence of non-parental family members	Foreign-born Latinos rely on their children	Children and spouses were primary sources of socialization	Two-way parent-to-child socialization very important
Influence of close-knit social groups		Friends and co-workers had some influence	
Influence of distant social contacts	More Latinos look to media as role model, but not friends and religious leaders	Latinos learned from community members and organizations	Media or parents serving as role models related to relational aspects of discussion
Native country experiences		Debate and arguing in Mexico may discourage that behavior in U.S.	

My initial empirical analysis of the question of how Latino immigrants learn to talk about politics in the U.S., detailed in Chapter 4, examined whether Latinos differed from the general population in their perceived role models for how they talk about politics. That quantitative analysis confirmed some of my expectations and hypotheses related to political socialization and also generated some surprising results. As expected, fewer Latinos relied on teachers and parents as socialization sources compared to the general population, and foreign-born Latinos relied

more heavily on their children for learning about politics than did their native-born counterparts. However, Latinos did not report relying more on their social contacts, like friends and religious leaders. This finding ran contrary to the prediction of the Social Contact Model. In addition, Latinos were far more likely than the general population to use the media as a role model for political discussion. Overall, this initial survey validated an underlying concept of my dissertation, which is that the political socialization process for the Latino immigrant-derived population is different from the process for the general population. In addition, the results supported some aspects of the Social Contact Model and also suggested possible revisions.

My qualitative analysis described in Chapter 5 looked more closely at immigrant political socialization and discussion. The findings in that chapter provided strong support for the Social Contact Model, confirming that the Mexican-heritage people who were study participants did indeed rely heavily on non-parental family members and on community contacts to learn about politics and political talk in the United States. Spousal relationships and two-way parent-to-child relationships proved quite important for the Latino immigrants in my study, in contrast to the traditional top-down relationships with teachers and parents found in other studies of political socialization.

The qualitative study also generated interesting findings about the prevailing norms of political discussion in these particular Latino immigrant communities. Participants in the qualitative study tended to avoid arguing and debating about politics, especially with their more combative non-Latino coworkers. They tended to focus on learning about topics and issues rather than sharing opinions, in particular when talking in family groupings. The threat of contact with law enforcement and immigration authorities was a strong negative influence on many participants in the qualitative study. The Latinos in the communities I studied worried about

intimidation by law enforcement and governmental authorities who were targeting Latino immigrants, and those participants who were undocumented or were not U.S. citizens were concerned about contact with immigration authorities and the threat of deportation. These threats often suppressed political engagement and limited the contact that Latinos had with the wider community about public issues and politics.

The final study, presented in Chapter 6, revisited some of these findings by analyzing quantitative data from a national survey of Mexican-heritage Americans and a small comparison sample of whites. In part, the survey data checked whether some of the qualitative findings were applicable for a national sample of Latinos. My findings in this chapter were somewhat mixed, however, in that they confirmed some of the previous findings but conflicted with others. The national sample of Latinos were actually *more* likely to report engaging in an argument with their discussion partners than were their Anglo counterparts. However, this was limited to those who were talking with other Latinos and felt comfortable enough to express themselves this way. The data also confirmed my hypotheses about the importance of close-knit familial groups in political socialization and discussion, suggesting that a decidedly two-way parent-to-child relationship is important for Latino immigrants learning about political culture here. Relational aspects of political talk were related to having looked to one's parents or to the media as a role model for discussion, which confirmed some of the qualitative findings but also suggests the need for further analysis of the media as a source of socialization. Those Latinos who participated in deliberative forums or other forms of collective political action were somewhat less likely to report having relational aspects of political talk in their conversations. This surprising finding suggests that some Latinos may be encountering debates, arguments, and perhaps even outright hostility when they engage in public gatherings related to politics.

### **Assessment of the Social Contact Model**

Overall, the findings from my three data chapters provide a measure of support for the Social Contact Model of Immigrant Political Communication. The traditional top-down models of political socialization, in which teachers and parents instill their wisdom to young people, are clearly insufficient to describe and explain how Latino immigrants in the U.S. are socialized into political culture here and learn how to talk to others about politics. My findings suggest that the socialization process is based more on a two-way relationship between children and parents, and on connections with spouses, the media, and for some people, their social and community contacts. The role of the media as a source of political socialization is something that needs further study, however, as the Social Contact Model did not initially place much emphasis on it.

My findings related to the prevailing political discussion norms among Latino immigrants are somewhat mixed. On the one hand, Latinos in Arizona and some parts of Washington seem to be trying to avoid being argumentative in their political discussion, and even trying to dodge political conversations with their combative white co-workers. On the other hand, the national sample of Latinos was somewhat more argumentative in their political conversations than the Anglo comparison sample. Foreign-born Latinos at the national level were also less likely than whites to report relational aspects of political discussion, which contrasted with the findings from the qualitative study.

Some of these differences may be due to Latinos feeling safer in their discussions with fellow Latinos to express themselves in more argumentative styles, but that may not explain all of the differences between Anglos and Latinos and between the qualitative study and national quantitative study. Another explanation could be that the discussion norms are quite different in environments like Arizona and eastern Washington, where rapid immigration growth and public

policy debates have strained relations between Anglos and Latinos, than they are in the nation overall. It may also be the case that foreign-born Latinos around the nation are more strongly influenced by Mexican political culture than the people included in the qualitative sample, many of whom openly rejected the argumentative, contentious politics that they recalled from Mexico.

### **Future Research**

My findings in this dissertation, though they provide a great deal of insight into the Latino political socialization process and political talk among Latinos in the U.S., also lead to interesting questions for future research. As I continue to adapt and revise the Social Contact Model, one important area for analysis is the role of media in how Latinos learn about politics and political discussion in the United States. A follow-up study could examine more closely how Latinos use a combination of Spanish- and English-language media and the kinds of norms they learn from following those political media outlets.

Another fruitful area of research would be to conduct additional qualitative research on Latino political socialization and discussion in other contexts and communities. Such a study could help resolve some of the contradictions between my qualitative study in Arizona and Washington and the national Latino sample. California and Texas both offer interesting test cases, in light of both states' large and longstanding Latino population and their historical shifts from being anti-immigrant to being more accommodating of immigrants.

Future studies could also revisit some of these questions for other immigrant groups in this country, or in other nations. The experience of Mexican-heritage immigrants and their descendants in the U.S. surely has some things in common with the experience of immigrants from other parts of Latin America, but perhaps has fewer commonalities with immigrants from other areas of the world. People coming to the U.S. from Asia, Africa, and Europe probably have

face some challenges that are unique to their cultural background and immigrant experiences here. How might those factors affect how they develop as political actors in their new nation? Such follow-up research would also continue one overarching mission of my dissertation, which is to explore the experiences of ethnic and cultural minority groups in the United States. A great deal of research in the social sciences has focused on the general population, or more specifically the white population, but as the U.S. becomes more ethnically diverse it is important to understand the experiences of other groups in our society. The voices of these groups may not always be heard in the public sphere, but they still matter to American democracy. As the strong ethnic minority voter turnout in the 2008 and 2012 elections has shown, these groups can join with others to gain a great deal of political power in the United States.

### **Reflections and Implications**

Looking back on my dissertation project, I am glad to have chosen to this particular area of study. My focus on political socialization and discussion has been fruitful for me. Delving deeper into how people participate and communicate in the political realm, as well as how people *learn how* to do so, will give me a useful perspective as a scholar going forward. Political communication scholars are beginning to pay more attention to the process of socialization, as seen for example, in the 2009 special issue of *Political Communication* devoted to this topic. Understanding the processes that shape how we discuss politics may yield important insights into the prevalence of some kinds of communication behavior and the effects it can have on people.

In addition, focusing my dissertation on Latinos (and more specifically Mexican-heritage people) in the U.S. has helped me greatly expand my cultural knowledge beyond my white, working-class background. I feel that it has given me a much deeper understanding of an ethnic group that is one of the largest in the nation, and it afforded me the opportunity to improve my

Spanish language skills. As a communication scholar, I have also gained valuable experience in studying communication within a specific cultural community. I hope to put this to use in future studies of communication among Latinos, other immigrant groups, and many other segments of society. This may also help me and other scholars understand how communication norms may shift over time as the makeup of the public sphere changes to accommodate more people from ethnic minority groups and more people with immigrant backgrounds.

In the course of completing this dissertation project, one of the most significant and challenging experiences that I had was listening to the frustrations and fears of Mexican-heritage people living in the United States. As I mentioned in Chapter 5, many of the participants in the qualitative study spoke about their fears of deportation or intimidation, particularly those who lived in eastern Washington and Arizona. In addition to the concerns voiced by undocumented immigrants who faced deportation, though, even documented immigrants, naturalized citizens, and American-born people of Mexican heritage face discrimination in the U.S. because they are Latino. Participants talked about how government authorities intimidated them, ignored or dismissed the interests of their communities, and otherwise marginalized them from the larger society. They told harrowing stories of friends and family members being detained and deported (sometimes wrongfully) by immigration authorities, and of how families were torn apart by these events. Participants also shared experiences of shocking discrimination and bigotry at the hands of others in their towns and cities. The worst of many such stories was the elementary school-aged Mexican-American girl who, on her walk to school, was taunted by an adult neighbor telling her to go back home to Mexico—this despite the fact that she was only a child, and a native-born American citizen.

The many stories of discrimination and marginalization faced by Mexican-heritage people in the U.S. were depressing and infuriating for me. However, this project also provided me with some optimism for the future. Even though the Latinos participating in this study faced numerous barriers to participating in American democracy, many still strive to take part in public life. They were talking to other people about politics at multiple levels, and they worked with others to bring about political change. I sincerely hope that as the United States becomes more ethnically diverse and generations of Latinos become more incorporated into American culture, the political and social climate will be more welcoming and Latinos will be better able to participate in the U.S. public sphere.

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## APPENDIX A:

### Qualitative Interview Scripts

#### Focus Group Script

Hi. My name is \_\_\_\_\_. First, thank you all for taking the time to participate in our study. The goal of today, and of our project, is to understand what makes up your politics: Who taught you about politics, what experiences you had with politics growing up, and how do you practice politics today. Are they similar or different, and how so? These are just some of the questions we'll be asking you all to explore and discuss.

We also understand that it can be a very personal experience, so we won't be asking about your specific political views, but rather the process you went through to get where you are today. We encourage all perspectives, as everyone here is different and has had a different experience. We'll go through three different sections: your childhood, your ties to the immigrant experience, and your current political practices. Feel free to ask clarifying questions if you don't understand or need further explanation. With that in mind, let us begin.

Think back to when you were about 10-15 years old. Where did you live? Who did you live with? What did your parents do? Did you have any pets? Were you in school, and if so, what grade? Okay, now that you remember better what happened when you were this age, let's begin some of our questions

Do you remember any elections or political events from that time, and did these affect you or your family? How so?

Did any of these events encourage you to participate in politics at the time? Maybe you talked to your friends or other family members about this, or got involved in some other way at church or school? Or perhaps you were encouraged to NOT get involved?

If you did talk to other people about this issue, or you remember seeing your family or friends discuss this issue, can you tell us more about that discussion? If not, maybe tell us about some other time that stands out in your memory from when you or your family talked about a political event or issue.

That was great. We've learned a lot about what you were exposed to growing up. Now, let's take a minute to think about what brought you or your family to the United States. When did you or your family come here? Why did you come? Did you plan on staying?

Do you remember any major political events or anything else related to politics around the time when you or your family migrated to the US? What were your impressions of that event or issue? How was that affected by your experiences in Mexico, or your exposure to politics when you were growing up?

That was great. We've learned a lot about what brought you or your family here. Now we're going to change the focus to your political practices today. Take a minute to think about how you interact with politics today in the United States.

Do you remember any elections or political events in the past couple of years that stand out in your mind? Did these affect you or your family? How so? Did any of these events encourage you to participate in politics at the time?

If you did talk to other people about this issue, or you remember seeing your family or friends discuss this issue, can you tell us more about that discussion? If not, maybe tell us about some other time that stands out in your memory from when you or your family talked about a political event or issue.

Let's talk a little more about that discussion you had. Why does it stand out in your memory? Can you tell us who you talked to, what you talked about, where you were? How about

the conversation itself – why was it memorable? Maybe it was upsetting, or very informative, or generated some strong feelings?

### Individual Interview Script

Hi. My name is \_\_\_\_\_. First, thank you all for taking the time to participate in our study. The goal of today, and of our project, is to understand what makes up your politics: Who taught you about politics, what experiences you had with politics growing up, and how do you practice politics today. Are they similar or different, and how so? These are just some of the questions we'll be asking you today.

We also understand that it can be a very private and personal experience, so we won't be asking about your specific political views, but rather the process you went through to where you are today. We will be asking you to recall some events, but share only what you feel comfortable sharing. All of this will be confidential, and if you have any questions during the interview, please let me know. With that in mind, let us begin.

Starting questions	Probe questions
Think back to the last year you were in school in Mexico, or in the US if you were born here or moved here when you were very young. What do you remember? Where did you live? Did you own any animals? Who did you live with? Do you remember what your parents did for work? Do you remember any elections or political events from then? Specifics aren't important, but try to remember what happened around that time.	Can you elaborate on whether you ever talked to your family about politics or some kind of public issue? What did you talk about?  Who is it that you recall talking to? (If family member, clarify nature of relationship.)  Did anything important or significant happen to you around that time? Did it change your view of politics? How?
<i>(If yes on talking to family above.)</i> Do you recall what or who prompted the conversation? What is it they told you?	Did you agree? Was it something that taught you something about politics? Did it explain or educate you on politics?
<i>(If no on talking to family above.)</i> Do you remember anything about your parent's politics?	Anything at all? Did this affect you at all? Did you agree/disagree with them? Did you learn anything from them? What?

<p><i>(For those born in Mexico)</i> When you lived in Mexico, do you recall talking to other people about political topics or public matters?</p> <p><i>(For those born in the US)</i> Can you recall an instance in the past couple of years when you might have talked to other people about political topics or public matters?</p> <p><i>(Go to section on 'Describing Political Discussion')</i></p>	<p>Things like an upcoming national election, or something closer to home, like the election for mayor or local taxes or crime. Maybe there were situations when someone else brought up an issue like this – maybe at a family gathering, or a local club or organization? Can you think of times when that happened?</p>
	<p>Follow-up probe: OK, were there other situations where these kinds of things came up? Maybe with your co-workers, or friends, or at a club or organization meeting? <i>(Go to Describing Political Discussion)</i></p>
<p><i>(For those born in Mexico)</i> Since you've been in the US, do you recall ever talking to other people about political topics or public matters?</p> <p><i>(Go to Describing Political Discussion)</i></p>	<p>Things like an upcoming national election, or something closer to home, like the election for mayor or local taxes or crime. Maybe there were situations when someone else brought up an issue like this – maybe at a family gathering, or a local club or organization? Can you think of times when that happened?</p>
	<p>Follow-up probe: OK, were there other situations where these kinds of things came up? Maybe with your co-workers, or friends, or at a club or organization meeting? <i>(Go to Describing Political Discussion)</i></p>
<p><i>Describing Political Discussion</i> <i>[Repeat for different situations or different discussion partners.]</i></p>	
<p>Who do you usually talk with about politics or public issues? Can you tell me just the first names of at least one, and up to three people who you talk with about politics?</p>	<p>Tell me about your relationship to (1, 2, or 3) — Is that person a family member, or a friend, a co-worker? Tell me a little more about this person or group you think you talked to most often – what kinds of topics did you talk about?</p>
<p>When you talked with this person, who typically brought up the political topic, or was that split fairly equally?</p>	
<p>Were there some places or situations where you usually talked about topics like this? Were there were some situations where you</p>	<p>Like with some groups of people or at some places? For example, maybe your local social club would talk about politics, but only at</p>

knew you should <u>not</u> talk about politics?	normal meetings, and not at special events.
When some people talk about public matters or political topics, they tend to be more argumentative or passionate, while others are more calm or composed. When you talked with this person, did the conversations tend to be more argumentative or more calm?	Can you give me an example of a situation like this?
What are some of the reasons you talked to this person about public issues or politics?	Some people talk to friends about public issues because they want to try to sway their opinions or change their minds, while others may talk about public matters because they want to learn more about them. What was your motivation for talking to this person?
What kinds of things do you think you have gotten out of your discussions?	Did you pick up more information, or maybe succeed in changing the other person's mind, or feel better about your own position? Did you come away with any ideas about what to do about this issue?
Did your discussions ever lead to you do something political, or take some kind of action?	Maybe it changed your mind about voting, or encouraged you to go to a rally or tell other people about an issue?
Did you and this other person agree on this issue, or disagree? Would you say that you tend to talk to people who agree with you, or people who disagree with you?	Some people like to talk to people who they know they will disagree with, but other people like to talk to people who will agree with them. How about you?
What are your conversations usually like with this person? Or perhaps there's one that is particularly memorable?	Why was it memorable? Was it upsetting, or maybe help you let out some frustration? Can you tell me a little more about what happened?
How about the way you both approached the conversation and talked about the issue and about the government. Was it very serious and solemn, or did you joke around?	Some people stay fairly serious when talking about politics, but other people sometimes like to make jokes about politicians or the political situation. How about you?
Did you talk at all about the government or about politicians?	How did you talk about them, and what kinds of things do you recall saying? Were you pleased with them, or maybe somewhat frustrated?
<i>Mexico-US Contrast, for those born in Mexico</i>	
Now shifting gears a little bit, let's talk about the time you've spent here in the US. Are there some similar situations you've had here, where you talked to other people about public issues or political topics?	Or maybe you've been in a situation where someone else brought this up. What kinds of similarities do you see between those situations and the ones you recall from Mexico? What about differences? Thinking about the discussion we talked about before, did you see more or less disagreement, or was it about the

	same? Were people less argumentative or more, or do you think it was about the same?
<i>Mexico-US Contrast, for those born the US or who moved to the US while very young</i>	
Now shifting gears a little bit, let's talk about politics back in Mexico. Have you talked to older friends or family members, or people who still live back in Mexico, about public issues or politics?	What kinds of similarities do think there are between your political discussions here, and those ones that happen in Mexico? What about differences – maybe people are more or less argumentative, or tend to agree or disagree more?
Did you ever participate in any rally, political event, meeting or other such activity?	Which activities? Can you tell me a little more about those?