
By Stacey L. Connaughton and Sharon E. Jarvis

By the year 2050, Latinos will represent the dominant ethnic minority in the United States, and researchers are just beginning to examine the campaign messages targeted to this voting bloc. This article employs identification theory to understand the rhetorical approaches used in campaign advertisements designed for these voters. Through a content analysis of campaign spots targeted to Latinos over four presidential elections (1984, 1988, 1996, 2000), we find that the invitations for party identification sent to this group tend to be positive, focus on the Latino (not the candidate), and depict Latinos as an emergent force in American politics. In trying to foster identification from this desirable voting population, it appears that campaign forces encourage Latinos to view themselves, and politics, as valuable and consequential—a marked alternative to most advertising strategies at the close of the 20th century.

Latino voters received unprecedented media attention in the 2000 presidential campaign. Print media headlines portrayed them as (a) vital to electoral success—“Mad Grab for Latino Votes” (Business Week, April 10, 2000), “The Ñ Factor: Latino Voters Can Make the Difference in Battleground States” (PR Newswire, October 27, 2000); (b) as a desired constituency for both parties—“GOP Shows Spanish as Rising Language in U.S. Politics” (UPI, August 3, 2000), “Democrats Not Working Hard Enough for the Latino Vote” (Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, August 30, 2000); and (c) as a group that merits unique appeals—“Bush Adds Latin Flavor to GOP” (San Francisco Chronicle, August 6, 2000), and “But Where’s the Salsa?” (Newsweek, September 4, 2000). Central to their coverage was a sense that Latinos were empowered, and that they should be addressed and not eschewed in campaign strategies.

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In the year 2000, however, this was no easy task. As scholars have revealed, Latinos constitute a complex voting population. Consider the following data: Demographically, Latinos are the fastest growing ethnic group in the United States and by 2050 will represent the dominant ethnic minority in this country (NALEO, 1996). With regard to education levels, 25% of U.S. Latinos drop out of high school, compared with attrition rates of 13.4% for African Americans and 7.6% for Anglos (Muñoz, 2000). Culturally, Latinos vary according to their nations of origin, social class, and generation (DeSipio, 1996; Hero, 1992), and politically, they (a) are highly concentrated in key electoral states such as Florida, New York, Texas, and California, (b) have the greatest “no show” record of any ethnic group at the polls (DeSipio, 1996), and (c) display fluid and unpredictable voting behaviors and commitments to the two major parties (DeSipio, 1996; Hero, 1992). It is this last point regarding partisan identification that received the bulk of media attention during the 2000 campaign. Latinos were portrayed in the news as shopping for a political party, and political analysts critiqued partisan and candidate tactics to court this group.

This paper examines efforts by the parties to target Latino voters by exploring a set of public messages (televised political advertisements) created for Latinos over four presidential campaigns (1984, 1988, 1996, 2000). These spots have been selected because (a) even in a candidate-centered era, parties continue to work to mobilize voting blocs, to provide continuity across elections, and to allocate resources for voter outreach, and (b) such resources have been increasingly given to Latinos over the past 20 years. Because previous studies have focused on the political aspects of the Latino vote (i.e., who turns out, how they vote, when they vote), the rhetorical nature of public messages directed toward this group has been given short shrift. The purpose of this paper, then, is to locate the rhetorical strategies used to foster Latinos’ identification and to discern how Latinos are constructed in these messages. Attending to presidential campaign ads created by the Democratic and Republican national parties will not allow us to speak to subtle nuances that might appear in regional or lower level spots. Nevertheless, this article takes a first step at investigating the invitations for partisan identification extended to Latinos in electoral politics.

**Current Literature**

Political ads serve important functions during campaigns. Spots give potential voters information about issues, perhaps more so than the news (Kern, 1989; Patterson & McClure, 1976); they inspire learning about politics (Just, Crigler, & Wallach, 1990); and they influence both strong and weak partisans (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995). Although there is a substantial amount of research on campaign spots, scholars tend to focus on two dimensions of ads: negative versus positive spots and issue versus image ads (see Benoit, 2001).

To date, most major studies of ads have been restricted to “general market” spots (Benoit, 2001; Hart, 2000; Kaid & Johnston 2001), and so much is known about patterns in ads created for traditional English-speaking audiences. In one
longitudinal analysis of 918 general market ads during 1952–2000, Benoit found
that ads were more likely to focus on policy than on character (61% to 39%,
respectively) and featured more acclaims (self-praise, 60%) than attacks (39%) or
defenses (1%). In another longitudinal analysis of 1,204 general market spots
during 1952–1996, Kaid and Johnston found that these ads tend to be positive (62%),
candidate-centered (35% about candidates’ issue concerns; 34% about candidates’
personal characteristics), and that Republicans have run more positive spots than
have Democrats (66% to 57%, respectively). Intriguingly, however, they reported
that negative spots are becoming more common over time and had begun to domi-

Our longitudinal investigation differed from Benoit’s and Kaid and Johnston’s
in two notable ways. First, our study focused exclusively on Latino-oriented tele-
vision ads and constitutes, to our knowledge, the only longitudinal investigation
to examine campaign spots created in two languages. Second, race is one of the
most divisive and controversial issues facing the U.S., and these ads have been
created by party professionals to hail a new constituency without offending cur-
rent party stakeholders (Connaughton, 2002). In this study we felt it was impor-
tant to trace both the overt invitations for identification extended to Latino viewers
and the more covert cues that speak to the political and cultural context in which
the ads are sent. Because identification takes place in a political and cultural
setting, focusing on identification and its context should help us better understand
these spots. Third, our approach employs three coding units—the spot, the mes-
sage unit, and the cut—a methodological choice that has been regarded superior
to using the “ad” as a unit of analysis (Benoit, 2001). Although our study departs
in these ways from earlier works, the aforementioned literature on general market
ads is invaluable to our efforts as it presents a standard against which these Latino-
focused ads can be compared.

Political Ads and Identification Theory
Political parties are intent on fostering identification with key constituency groups,
especially during political campaigns. They attempt to do so by nurturing psycho-
logical connections between themselves and members of these groups, designing
message appeals and visual images that they hope will persuade voters to per-
ceive similarities between themselves and the party or candidate, and mobilizing
them to vote. Political scientists have long viewed partisan identification as central
to understanding the dynamics of American politics (Campbell, Converse, Miller,
& Stokes, 1960; Fiorina, 1980; Key, 1948), and despite patterns of party decline
late in the 20th century (Wattenberg, 1998), partisanship continues to be the key
predictor of the vote (Aldrich, 1995).

How, though, do parties rhetorically inspire such bonds in television ads? In
Dramatism and Development (1972) Kenneth Burke outlined three ways in which

1 There were some partisan differences, however, as Republicans acclaimed more frequently than Demo-
crats (64% to 57%) whereas Democrats attacked more than the GOP (42% to 35%).

2 Other longitudinal analyses have been conducted, although the representativeness of their samples
and the reliability of their content analyses have been questioned (see Benoit, 2001).
rhetors may foster identification: They may engage in explicit identification when, for example, “a politician who, though rich, tells humble constituents of his humble origins” (p. 28); they may use identification through antithesis, such as when “allies who would otherwise dispute among themselves join forces against a common enemy” (p. 28); or they may utilize a more subtle approach, implicit identification, which may occur in “the word ‘we,’ as when the statement that ‘we’ are at war includes under the same head soldiers who are getting killed and speculators who hope to make a killing in war stocks” (p. 28). In Burkean terms, political parties seek votes by associating themselves, their candidates, or both with groups, symbols, or individuals that are perceived as favorable by those whose votes and allegiances they target.

Benoit (2000) applied Burkean identification theory to presidential advertisements in the 1996 campaign and found that Bill Clinton and Robert Dole tried to foster identification through association with policies, the candidates’ characters, and liked or disliked groups. Our approach is inspired by Benoit’s work but differs from it as we (a) examine ads created in two languages over a 20-year period, and (b) employ variables that explore rhetorical identification as well as the political context more broadly. Because these attempts at identification take place in a political setting, it is important to examine the rhetorical nature of these invitations as well as other cues about the political contexts in which they are extended.

To learn more about the ways in which party strategists attempted to connect with Latino voters in their spots, we posed this research question:

RQ: What is the nature of the invitations for identification extended to Latinos in presidential campaign advertisements?

Answering this question will unearth how the two major parties attempt to engage Latino citizens in the political process during presidential campaigns and will inform what is known about identification theory, particularly as it relates to campaigns directed to ethnic groups in the U.S.

Method

We examined 36 Latino-oriented television spots produced by the Democratic National Committee, the Republican National Committee, and individual candidates for the 1984, 1988, 1996, and 2000 general election presidential campaigns. Table 1 presents our sample.

At first blush it might seem that 36 ads is a small sample, especially when compared to studies of general market television spots. It is important to note, however, that our sample constitutes most of the Latino-oriented television spots developed for presidential campaigns since 1980. We selected television advertisements because during presidential campaigns the parties developed few Latino-

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3 Ads from the 1992 campaigns were inaccessible to the authors.
oriented print advertisements and employed decentralized methods with their radio ads, making such communications difficult to record and study.

We examined these ads by conducting a content analysis of the spots, and following Devlin (1989), we analyzed their verbal and visual content. Like Benoit (2000), we were interested in the forms of identification that the party organizations use in these Latino-oriented ads. According to Burke (1969), identification occurs when an individual's interests are dramatized (talking “his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your ways with his,” p. 55), and so we included the variables language (a verbal category) and symbols (a visual category). With a Latino audience, the spoken language of the ads could be English or Spanish, and the visual symbols could be those commonly used in campaign discourse (e.g., U.S. flag, Statue of Liberty) or they could be Latino cultural symbols (e.g., traditional dress, cultural music). Benoit (2000) extended Burke's concept of identification to include the rhetor's attempts to create division between audiences and opponents, as well as other methods of fostering identification (association with policies, character, and liked or disliked groups). Following his lead, we used the variable associations (a verbal and visual category) and coded for associations with other Latinos, with non-Latinos, and with persons of various ethnic groups. We also coded for two additional variables: issues (policies, see Benoit, 2000; issues, see Hart & Jarvis, 1999) and image (character, see Benoit, 2000); because of space constraints, those results are reported elsewhere.

Our methodological approach differs from Benoit's in that we also examined how the Latino audience is constructed in a broader political context in these ads.4 To assess how the parties did so, we utilized Hart and Jarvis's (1999) coding scheme, looking for the qualities potency, position, context, and time of the Latino in these ads (see appendix for definitions and examples). In their study, Hart and

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Table 1. Latino-Oriented Ads in Sample

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4 Burkean identification theory is an audience-centered approach, for a rhetor persuades by “identifying your [the rhetor’s] way with his [the persuadee]” (Burke, 1969, p. 55). It has been argued that individuals will identify with an organization when they see themselves in it (Pratt, 1998). In Burke’s words, “You persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your ways with his” (1969, p. 55). Drawing from Burke, we suggest that the ways in which Latinos are constructed in discourse may influence whether or not they will identify with the parties/candidates.
Jarvis traced the political opportunities and constraints for U.S. citizens as constituted in discourse. Their variables, derived from political theory, serve as a helpful way to track the political and cultural forces facing minority group members as they are portrayed in these ads. All coding decisions were mutually exclusive for each variable.

Because of the rich nature of these ads, we used three coding units to examine them: the spot, the message unit, and the cut. We first utilized the spot as the message unit and coded two variables at this level (language, context). Next, we examined the ads’ verbal messages more closely and analyzed all ads (variables: associations, quality, potency, context, and time; see appendix for definitions and examples) with the message unit as the unit of analysis (Just, Crigler, & Buhr, 1999, p. 27). Then, we examined the ads’ visual content (variables: symbols, associations, quality, potency, position, and context; see appendix) and, following Griffin and Kagan (1996), we used the cut (camera shot) as the unit of analysis. In most instances, there were very few differences between the message unit and the cut; in others (e.g., quality, potency; see Table 2), Latinos were more likely to be active (potency) and to be feeling positive emotions (quality) in the cut than in the message unit. Research on how individuals process televised symbols suggests that viewers are more attentive to visual images than the spoken word (Graber, 1990). Perhaps the ad makers opted to pad the ads with empowering visuals of Latinos (rarely seen on television) and craft narratives that would inspire Latinos, but with words that would not alarm other ethnic groups.

Similar to Benoit, Blaney, and Pier (2000) and Burgoon, Pfau, and Birk (1995), we opted not to approach the texts in a traditional way, coding independently and running a correlation coefficient on our coding decisions (Neuendorf, 2002). Instead, we analyzed each text independently and then came together to discuss and reach agreement on coding decisions. Like Benoit et al., we viewed this approach to feature several benefits for the descriptive nature of this study. Descriptive and nonparametric statistics were run on these data, and textual and visual examples from the advertisements are used to illuminate this study's quantitative findings.

Results: Invitations for Identification

Table 2 summarizes our results. The descriptive nature of our research encourages presenting our findings thematically rather than variable by variable. That is, these ads are positive, Latino-centric, and empowering. The following paragraphs present these claims, draw distinctions between these ads and previous longitudinal studies of general market spots, and comment on the political consequences of such invitations for Latinos and for the parties.

5 A message unit is a simple sentence or clause of a complex sentence or idea (Just et al., 1999). There were fewer camera cuts in the early ads than in those later in our study.

6 See Benoit et al. (2001) for the advantages of discussing items and reaching consensus.
These Invitations Are Positive

Although use of the terms “positive” and “negative” to characterize ads has recently been questioned (Richardson, 2001), sharp contrasts can be found between our Latino-oriented spots and those that have been studied by Kaid and Johnston.
(2001). That is, despite an increase in negative appeals in general market ads, Latinos in our sample are consistently constructed as living in an uplifting environment in which they regularly experience positive emotions (variables: context, quality, potency, symbols).

Examples from the spots’ visual images illustrate the positive tenor in these ads. Consider one DNC ad from 1996 that begins with a shot of Latino boys and girls in their primary school classroom. The subsequent frame shows a Latina girl smiling. Then, the entire classroom is cast with the students calmly reading books. Afterward, we see a stately picture of the U.S. Capitol building, followed by a close-up of a “Drug Free School Zone” sign. The camera then pans to primary school kids of various races running down the steps below. Next, the children are back in the classroom enthusiastically raising their hands to participate. The only ominous portion of the ad is done in black and white, showing a policeman emerging from a police car. The ad concludes with a close-up of a Latina woman who is smiling and holding what appears to be her baby. The camera widens to include a Latino man, presumably the baby’s father. In every cut of this ad, the Latinos depicted are happy, active, and protected. The shots that incorporate governmental images, even in the black-and-white frame, are designed to show that the current administration has taken steps to ensure Latinos’ safety and welfare.

Most of the ads’ verbal messages also evoke positive sentiments. In 1988, for instance, the Republican National Committee sent an elevating and patriotic verbal message to Latinos. Here, the GOP asks Latinos to reflect on the prosperity they have achieved during the GOP administration. Note the three mentions of “more,” comparing Latinos’ education, employment, and income levels to the period before President Reagan took office (emphasis added):

Children: I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America.

Narrator: Today, three times more Hispanics are completing college than eight short years ago. More Hispanics are employed than ever before, earning more than ever before. That is progress in an environment of opportunity created under a Republican administration.

Children: With liberty and justice for all. (RNC, 1988)

The Latinos featured in these political advertisements are unlike Latinos commonly depicted or discussed in the mass media. Researchers have identified several unpleasant stereotypes of Latinos, including being portrayed as lazy, violent, macho, poor, unintelligent, and less patriotic than other Americans (Garcia, 1997), or crazed for sex, money, or power (Fox, 1996). In these ads, however, Latinos are constructed as home owners, fair-skinned, educated, and living the American Dream. These are affirmed Latinos (Waldren, 1998), good citizens who do not ask much from government, but are proudly connected to American culture and values.

Latinos were also linked to cherished American symbols, most notably the U.S. flag. The use of the flag is intriguing when one considers Burke’s (1972) notion of implicit identification (e.g., borrowing symbols from a targeted group). Indeed, few Latino cultural symbols are integrated into the visual images in these cam-
campaign ads. It seems that both parties want Latinos to identify with the U.S. flag more so than with their Latino cultural symbols, a strategy with which the Latino actors in these ads seem comfortable. They appear to enjoy displaying U.S. symbols and seem pleased to be assimilated into American political culture.

There were just a few differences between the parties’ strategies in the ads, the most notable of which is that the only negative portrayals or messages emerged in Democratic ads (specifically, those run in 1988 and 1996). For example, three of Clinton’s 1996 ads ominously portrayed Bob Dole and Newt Gingrich on a black-and-white screen with the narrator commenting on the GOP’s lack of concern for Latinos. Given the Democratic Party’s history with Latinos, these ads seem reactive, as if the Republicans’ efforts to court this voting population somehow threaten the Democrats. That the Democrats utilized negative spots in 1988 is not surprising; previous research had suggested that challengers tend to use such tactics more frequently than incumbents. That the Clinton campaign would utilize negative ads was unexpected considering that candidates who are ahead in the polls by a comfortable margin (as Clinton was in 1996) usually do not attack their opponents (Jamieson & Campbell, 1997). One wonders why the DNC selected such an approach in 1996. They may have feared losing Latino voters. In Burkean terms, they may have felt compelled to construct the GOP—Dole and Gingrich, in particular—as “the enemy” (as they did in general market spots; Burkean “identification through antithesis”). Or, they may have felt comfortable enough with Latinos that they would risk running threatening messages (as they did to general market audiences). Any or a mixture of these reasons seems possible. What is notable is that just 7 of the 36 ads were negative.

The positive nature of these ads may invite Latinos to feel connected to a vibrant and fulfilling political system. At a time when many U.S. citizens feel cynical, uninvolved, and detached from politics, parties could be trying to sell a positive political system to Latinos. By reminding Latino viewers of the American story and the deeply embedded American values of liberty, freedom, and democracy, the parties’ use of patriotic symbols assists Latinos in feeling “love of country” (Viroli, 1995) and reminds them of aspects of America that are conveniently free of scandal. It is therefore notable that Latino-oriented advertisements are positive, for the parties are inviting Latinos to celebrate that which is good about the United States of America, curiously at the very time in which they are delivering negative attack advertising to their general market viewers (Kaid & Johnston, 2001).

These Invitations Focus on the Latino
Research on general market spots suggests that campaign advertisements normally focus on candidates and not on political parties, citizens, or broader con-

7 In this data set, the differences between the parties were mostly in degree rather than in kind (i.e., Republicans allocated more resources to recruiting Latinos as seen in Table 1). Whereas both parties featured largely positive ads that were Latino centric and focused on the future, Republicans were a bit more likely to verbally construct Latinos as members of their party (39.3% versus 15.7% for Democrats; variable: quality), to visually represent Latinos as feeling positive emotions (82.0% versus 67.8%; variables: quality, context), and to feature Latinos holding or standing next to U.S. flags (26.8% versus 9.6%; variable: symbols).
cerns (Kaid & Johnston, 2001). Our data reveal a departure from this trend: The parties are attempting to connect with this demographic by employing an audience-centered approach. Table 2 shows that the Latino focus in these ads is unmistakable (see variables: associations, position, language, potency).

Examples from the ads further illustrate this Latino focus. In this 1984 Republican spot, a Latino relates the story of his family’s voting history. Notice the Latino’s allusion to his family members and their historical connection to Democratic Party politics as he narrates:

Voting around this house is almost tradition. We’re Democrats. My father started it, I picked up on it, and so did my kids. But this year, it doesn’t feel like voting only for tradition, especially now that my business is up and my wife and daughter can shop again for those little extras. That’s the kind of tradition I like. So this year, I’m starting a new tradition. I’m voting for President Reagan.

In this spot, the Latino is the only spokesperson and he appears empowered. He is making a conscious decision to break with his extended family’s historical tie to the Democrats so that his nuclear family can prosper in the present and future. The viewer is focused completely on the Latino, both aurally and visually, and does not even see the candidate, President Reagan, until the still photo shown in the spot’s last frame, underscoring how these ads focus on Latinos.

The parties also focus on Latinos by addressing them in two languages—English and Spanish. In the Spanish-language ads, Latinos are often main characters or narrators of these political messages. In one RNC ad from 1980, for instance, a young Latino conservatively dressed in khaki pants and a yellow sweater narrates while sitting next to a nicely dressed Latino man and woman in front of a fountain on what is presumed to be a university campus. As the camera zooms in on the narrator, he suggests that Latinos can succeed in education if given the opportunity, as they did under the previous Republican administration. He says:

As a teacher, I see how well our young people do when given an opportunity. Since 1980, under a Republican administration, three times more Hispanics are completing college. And, we have a friend in Washington: Lauro Cavazos, Secretary of Education. That makes me feel good. He knows these kids as well as I do. And, he knows what opportunity means to them [emphasis added].

The use of collective pronouns also suggests that the speaker seeks to prime the Latino audience to their “Latino-ness,” connecting them in a positive way to the GOP. His message seems to draw the Latino viewer’s attention to other Latinos by referring to “we” (Latinos) who have one of “ours” (other Latinos) in the current administration, listening to “our” (Latino) needs.

In addition to the Latino citizen-narrated ads, some candidates spoke Spanish in these ads. Perhaps the most authentic of the Spanish-speaking candidates was Michael Dukakis, who in 1984 became the first presidential candidate to run a talking head ad in Spanish (Devlin, 1986). Twelve years later, Al Gore courted
Latinos by discussing the “important issues” with them in two Spanish-language ads. Gore’s accent was critiqued as unbelievable and inauthentic (Ostrom & Thomma, 2000), and it is possible that his ads were less warmly received than those of Dukakis.

What might these patterns tell us about the invitations for identification that the parties extend to Latinos? Rhetorically, the parties seem to employ two tactics that resemble Burke’s notion of explicit identification: (a) become involved with the audience (showing the candidate interacting with Latinos and participating in activities with them); and (b) adapt language to the audience (literally, engaging the audience in their preferred language). Strategically, when Latinos view these spots, it might be difficult to counterargue the messages because they see themselves in the ads. The spots may be perceived favorably for another reason: Latinos have been reported to respond positively to messages emanating from the Latino community about Latino-focused issues and Latino-oriented visual images (Brischetto & de la Garza, 1985).

These Invitations Present the Latino as an Emergent Force in Politics

Because this project employed a longitudinal approach, it captured a finding that might have gone unnoticed had its focus been restricted to one campaign: Latinos are continually constructed as an emergent force in politics (see variables: time, potency). These depictions become more powerful when they are interpreted alongside the other findings presented in this study. Unlike general market ads that focus primarily on the sponsor or the opponent, most of the visual images from these ads feature Latino citizens. In a sense, Latinos are twice made to feel empowered: verbally—because they are told so directly, and visually—because they (rather than the candidate) are portrayed in a majority of the cuts.

Different generations of the Bush family have constituted Latinos as an emergent and powerful political group in GOP ads. First, in 1988, Columba Bush (daughter-in-law of then Vice President George H. W. Bush and a native of Mexico) spoke in one ad. Notice the temporal reference in the first sentence and the weight she places on the Latino vote in that moment:

Columba Bush: For Hispanics like me, this present election may be the most important in our history because Hispanics everywhere have a real chance to be heard. To elect a president who cares about our needs, our proud traditions, our strong family values. But don’t take my word for it, ask my father-in-law.

Bush: As president, I’ll have a lot of reasons to help Hispanics everywhere because I’ll not only be answering to my grandchildren, I’ll be answering to history.

Then, 12 years later, ads created for George W. Bush featured one of Columba’s children who had been sitting with his back to the camera in the 1988 ad: George P. Bush. The Republicans designed four ads featuring this young Bush: a talking head spot, produced in English and in Spanish, in which he endorsed his uncle, and a second splashier ad featuring both color and black-and-white clips, reminis-
cent of a MTV Rock the Vote spot, also produced in English and Spanish. The following ad is of the latter style, and here, George P. Bush, like his mother in 1988, also reminds Spanish-speaking Latinos that they are a critical voting bloc:

**English Translation:** Why vote for George Bush? Because he is a family man and a man of his word. Because he knows that Latinos will be the most important electoral bloc [emphasis added]. Because he believes in opportunity for every American, for every Latino.

Although most of the Spanish-language ads in this study are direct translations of the English versions, the RNC added another phrase to this ad—“Como Latinos nosotros seremos el bloque electoral más importante (‘As Latinos we will become the most important voting bloc’). This ad and others featuring George P. Bush show a desire to empower Latinos, encouraging them to think of themselves as Americans whose votes are particularly salient on voting day and will be increasingly so in the future. The way the ad is worded also seems to suggest that Latinos should attach themselves to the Republican candidate and implicitly to the GOP because George W. Bush recognizes that Latinos will be a critical political group in the near future. In saying “As Latinos we will become the most important electoral bloc,” George P. encourages Latinos to think of themselves as a group that will influence the outcome of future elections.

It is uncertain how Latinos have responded and will respond to such empowering messages. On one hand, Latino turnout has steadily increased from nearly 2.1 million in 1976 to over 4.9 million in 1996 (de la Garza & DeSipio, 1999). As more Latinos assume leadership roles within the parties and within presidential administrations, and as more Latinos are elected to office, perhaps Latino citizens will come to believe that their voice can be heard and that they too can contribute to U.S. politics. On the other hand, a cynical response to partisan pandering might be to wonder what the parties hope to gain from such proclamations. This response may be of particular concern to Republicans, who continue to be considered an Anglo-dominated party, despite the GOP’s efforts. Latinos may not believe that a party dominated by Anglo leaders is genuinely happy that Latinos are emerging as an influential political group.

**Discussion**

This study unearths three patterns in Latino-oriented advertisements: The invitations for identification forecast a positive political arena, offer a Latino-centric political worldview, and highlight Latinos as an emergent political force. Our findings bear similarities and contrasts to work on general market ads. Like Benoit (2001) and Kaid and Johnston (2001), we found positive appeals in the ads and a slight tendency for Republicans to offer more positive spots (largely because they spent more money on their efforts). Unlike these earlier studies, however, the spots focused on this target population (not on policy- or candidate-centered topics) and we see no systematic patterns of increased negativity over time. At a
time when many bemoan negativity in politics, these ads demonstrate that a more vibrant polity can be imagined.

In reflecting on these advertisements and in using identification theory as a lens, two implications emerge. First, the ads seem to create and recreate a pan-Latino assimilated community. Latinos seen in these national ads are all-inclusive Latinos. Viewers do not see markers of subethnic cultural differences, such as unique traditional dress or varied music. Nor do they detect variation in the Spanish dialects used by the speakers in the ads. Instead, in these ads, Mexican Americans, Cuban Americans, Puerto Ricans, Central Americans, and South Americans are discursively and visually homogenized and politically assimilated. Unlike Chicano politics of the 1960s in which some Latino activists organized outside of the two-party system, Latinos in these ads are merrily engaged with or actively participating in either the Democratic or Republican Party events. In this regard, the ads depict Latinos as feeling an affinity toward the U.S. political system and toward a particular political party. Latinos are also portrayed as a community, speaking and interacting with other Latinos as they do. Intriguingly, however, this community fits comfortably inside a larger American community. Thus, although the ads were both discursively and visually “Latino centered,” these Latinos are happily engaged in “Americana” as noted by the American symbols that surround them.

Second, these ads suggest that both parties appear to be quite cautious when meeting a new stakeholder group: Latinos. At a time when general market ads are negative and candidate centered, these Latino ads are positive and Latino-centered. When viewed in contrast to how they approach general market groups, it appears that the two major political parties are flattering members of this emerging constituency and are working hard not to offend them.

It is important to recall that these ads were created in a context in which parties had another audience to satisfy: current stakeholders, the traditional party faithful whom they hoped would not be threatened by their attentiveness to these potential new stakeholders. Both parties sought to invite identification from new stakeholders without antagonizing or upsetting individuals or coalitions who had supported them in the past. The parties did this by portraying an uncontroversial Latino in their ads, a depiction that was nonthreatening to existing stakeholders. Multiple audiences can tune in to campaign spots, and these invitations were carefully constructed to intrigue a new group without offending an older one.

Results of this project both validated and extended identification theory. The data showed the parties utilizing identification tactics that follow from Burke: (a) adapting the ad’s language to the audience (Spanish and English spots); (b) using the transcendent “we” to send a message of Latino “groupness”; (c) including unifying symbols, although predominantly American ones; and (d) incorporating group member testimonials. The findings also encourage us to consider extending identification theory by focusing on three characteristics of these ads: their positive tone, the use of flattery, and the focus on the audience’s future. This study, then, marks a few contributions to earlier work on identification in ads: We have examined spots targeted to a special context, in two languages, over time, and in political context. Examining identification in context allowed us to see that Latinos
are not promised anything that interferes with the current identity or resource base of Democrats or Republicans; rather, they are encouraged to think positive thoughts, to view themselves in the polity (a strategy that may be so subtle that it is missed by some ethnic groups that are used to being in the media, but may be noticed by Latinos long left out of programming), and to consider the future. Researchers should consider the extent to which these tactics engender identification from individuals, both in political and organizational contexts. In addition, how much credibility Latinos perceive the parties and their candidates to have will become a critical issue in upcoming elections, as will the perceived genuineness of the parties’ and candidates’ messages to Latino audiences. Although issues of credibility and genuineness are beyond the scope of the present paper, they are important areas for future research to address.

In the ads in this study, we have located a polity in which Latinos are happy U.S. citizens, engaged group members, and an emergent force in U.S. politics. Indeed, if all Latino voters knew about politics is what they learned in these television spots, they would likely hold an optimistic opinion of U.S. politics. And as both parties politely attempt to win their allegiances, they might feel empowered politically—or they might not. We encourage future researchers to test the direct effects of these positive spots, as well as other messages created for Latinos, and to assess relationships between them and Latino voters’ attitudes toward the parties, their partisan identification, and their intent to vote.

Appendix
Coding Categories

Symbols: Visual symbols featured in ads targeted to Latino citizens.
(a) no symbols
(b) American symbols: U.S. Flag, Statue of Liberty, American soldiers
(c) Latino symbols: Mexican/Puerto Rican/Cuban flag, traditional Latino costumes/dress, traditional Latino music.

Associations: A reference to or portrayal of some social entity with which Latinos interact.
(a) no groups; e.g., Dukakis in tie and dress shirt sitting in living room, speaking.—Dukakis, 1988
(b) Latinos; e.g., “Today, three times more Hispanics are completing college than eight short years ago.”—RNC, 1988; e.g., Latinos, of all ages, with hands over their heart, looking up at the U.S. flag.—Bush, 2000.
(c) non-Latinos; e.g., “[President Clinton] increased the minimum wage, even though Bob Dole and the Republicans opposed it.”—Clinton, 1996; e.g., Gore walking with two medical professionals, man and woman, neither are Latino.—Gore, 2000.
(d) Latinos and non-Latinos; e.g., “… He [Gov. Bush] believes in opportunity for every American, for every Latino.”—Bush, 2000; e.g., Clinton picks up Latina baby.—Clinton, 1996.

Quality: What qualities of the citizen are stressed by the speaker in verbal or visual ways?
(a) none: no Latinos in ad
(b) undistinguishable: unable to discern quality of Latinos
(c) thinker: Latinos portrayed as intellectual, thinking agents; e.g., “Dad taught me to think for myself. My vote will be for President Reagan.”—Spanish ad, Reagan, 1984; e.g., Cut of primary school classroom with kids raising their hands.—Clinton, 1996.
(d) feeler: psychological aspects of Latinos stressed; e.g., “Look at our children. They are happy because they don’t have to worry about being safe.”—Clinton 1996; Two white-haired Latinas greeting & hugging each other –RNC, 2000.
(e) joiner: social aspects of Latinos stressed; e.g., “Democrat all the way. It’s our party, Grandma said.”—Reagan, 1984; e.g., Dukakis shaking hands with Latinos at Democratic National Convention—Dukakis, 1988.

Potency: The ad’s calculation of the force exerted by, or upon, the Latino.
(a) none
(b) undistinguishable
(c) as actor: Latinos act in ad; e.g., “This is reason why I’ll vote for him. How about you?”—Bush, 2000; e.g., Latina instructor with Latino students working at computers—Clinton, 1996.
(d) as recipient: Latinos are recipients of action in ad; e.g., Bush talking with Latina listening seated next to him.—Bush, 2000.

Position: The Latino’s position in the ad as implied by the speaker. Visual only.
(a) no Latinos
(b) undifferentiated
(c) as elite: depicted as a candidate, bureaucrat; e.g., U.S. Rep. Katherine Ortega shown speaking—Reagan, 1984.
(d) as masses: depicted as voter, citizen; e.g., Governor Bush and Ms. Bush sitting with primary school kids of various races—Bush, 2000.

Context: The ad’s attribution of the social scene affecting the Latino.
(a) positive: Latinos live in a great community or country; e.g., “Things are getting better and America is getting strong again.”—Reagan, 1984; Latina in business suit smiling, holding an “open” sign.—Clinton, 1996.
(b) negative: Latinos live in a troubled community or country; e.g., “Republicans say that everything is okay. But, is everything okay when Hispanic families earn 30% less than other families?”—Spanish ad, Dukakis, 1988; e.g., Black-and-white shot of Bob Dole and Newt Gingrich.—Clinton, 1996.
(c) undifferentiated.

Time: The Latino’s moment in history as implied by the ad. Verbal only.
(a) in present; e.g., “For Hispanics like me, this present election may be the most important in our history.”—Bush, 1988.
(b) in past; e.g., “Four years ago, I voted for the first time. The same way the family voted, Democrat.”—Reagan, 1984.
(c) in future; e.g., “Why vote for George W. Bush? Because he knows that we are the future.”—Spanish ad, Bush, 2000.

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