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# Determinants of Rural Latino Trust in the Federal Government

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## Abstract

Trust in government is essential to democratic practice. This article analyzed the factors shaping trust in the federal government using a survey of 260 Mexican immigrants living in rural Illinois and in-depth interviews with 32 participants. To analyze these data, we drew a distinction between support for the regime (system of government that is relatively stable in a political system) and support for authorities (those who temporarily occupy positions of power) to test whether regime or authorities' considerations shaped respondents' political trust. The results showed that both considerations influenced trust in the federal government. We also found that a perception of current leaders as being concerned with issues affecting Latinos and an increased optimism about the economic situation were key determinants in explaining trust in the federal government. Further, our in-depth interviews showed that respondents thought about economic issues, immigration, and overall assessments of the Obama administration when determining their level of trust in the federal government.

**Keywords:** rural Latinos, trust in government, Mexican Americans, political attitudes.

## Introduction

Political trust is essential for democratic government (Fukuyama, 1995; Gershtenson & Plane, 2012; Nye, Zelikow, & King, 1997), and a democratic society is unlikely to endure without political trust (Dahl, 1971). Trust influences certain political attitudes and behaviors (Gershtenson & Plane, 2012) such as citizens' likelihood of voting (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002) and their decisions when casting a vote (Hetherington, 1999). Trust in government has attracted attention by scholars for many years (Citrin, 1974; Easton, 1965; Fukuyama, 1995; Herreros, 2004; Hetherington & Husser, 2012; Miller, 1974a; Nye et al., 1997). However, few works have studied trust in government among Latinos (Abrajano & Alvarez, 2010; Michelson, 2001, 2003, 2007; Wenzel, 2006). In addition, this prior research has tended to examine populations that are located in areas with a substantial and long-standing Latino presence, such as South Texas or the Central Valley of California. This article, by contrast, looks at trust among Mexican immigrants in an area new to immigration in the rural Midwest.

More specifically, this article is based on two identical surveys ( $N = 260$ ) of Mexican immigrants in Beardstown and Monmouth, Illinois, conducted in 2006 and 2011. To follow up, 32 in-depth interviews were conducted in 2011 with immigrants who participated in the second wave of the survey, in order to get a better explanation of attitudes toward the federal government that determine trust. Studying Latinos is increasingly important because this group makes up about 16.9% of the population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011) and has an increasing influence on politics in the United States (de la Garza, 2004; Garcia, 2011; Lopez, 2008). In addition, Latinos have increasingly moved to new destinations of immigration such as the rural areas studied here. For instance, the Latino population in Beardstown went from 20% in 2000 to 32.6% in 2010 and in Monmouth from 4.2% in 2000 to 14.4% in 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). Thus, these towns are ideal for studying Latinos in new immigrant destinations and their levels of trust in the federal government.

### *Determinants of Trust*

Trust has been defined a basic evaluative orientation toward the government (Hetherington, 1998). Authors disagree on the ways for measuring political trust (Hardin, 2006; Nannestad, 2008), and numerous measures have been developed over the years (Gershtenson & Plane, 2012; Levi & Stoker, 2000; Maloy, 2009; Newton, 2001). The U.S. literature, based on four questions of the National Election Studies, emphasizes elements of ethics,

honesty, and integrity of government officials and legislators (Catterberg & Moreno, 2006). Because using multiple items to measure trust can lead to endogeneity (Catterberg & Moreno, 2006), in this article, we employ only one item of political trust based on the question, "How much of the time do you trust the government in D.C. to do what is right?"

Political trust is essential for democracy (Fukuyama, 1995; Hetherington, 1998). However, research shows that trust in the federal government has declined substantially among Americans since the 1960s (Alford, 2001; Nye et al., 1997). This period coincided with increased levels of immigration and a rise in ethnic diversity in the U.S. population. Thus, understanding the determinants of political trust among immigrants is crucial. Numerous factors have been identified in the literature as determinants of political trust. Catterberg and Moreno (2006), for instance, considered nine types of factors, including social capital, well-being, democratic attitudes, material versus post-material values, political interest, external efficacy, political radicalism, moral, and socioeconomic. Chanley, Rudolph, and Rahn (2000), in turn, included three types of determinants of trust in their research, comprising economic, sociocultural, and political factors. Maybe because these factors differ considerably across societies, so have the levels of trust in government across them (Blind, 2006; Hetherington, 1998, 1999; Nannestad, 2008).

The decrease in social participation since the 1960s led Putnam (1993, 2000) to develop his thesis that declining interpersonal trust leads to lower levels of trust in government institutions. The argument behind this thesis is that civil society and voluntary associations can increase interactions among people, and these interactions can lead to higher levels of trust among community members. In turn, a declining level of interpersonal trust can also lead to a decreased trust in government officials. Some studies supported the civil society explanation of trust (Fennema & Tillie, 1999, 2001), but some with the caveat that people who join voluntary associations may also be more trusting to begin with (Herreros, 2004; Knack & Keefer, 1997). Furthermore, culture has also been offered as an explanation for trust in government. More specifically, Protestantism and egalitarianism were hypothesized as being determinants of trust (Bjornskov, 2006; Uslaner, 2002, 2005).

Although potential explanations of trust have ranged quite widely, many of them derive from a common conceptual framework (Bowler & Karp, 2004). Easton (1965), for example, drew a distinction between support for the regime (diffuse) and support for authorities (specific). The regime is the system of government that is relatively stable in a political system (Easton, 1965). Other works have also shown that levels of trust are responsive to authorities or government performance (Catterberg & Moreno, 2006; Chanley

et al., 2000; Kim, 2005; Mishler & Rose, 2001; Newton, 2001). Authorities are those decision makers who fill the political roles stated by the regime. Authorities are temporary, and support for them is less important than the support for the regime because authorities can change. Opposition to the regime, in turn, itself is more serious and can undermine democracy.

Miller (1974b) argued that the observed decline in political trust from 1964 to 1970 was the result of political alienation of those on the far right and left who no longer perceived the American political system as a way to advocate for their desired policies. According to this view, American electoral institutions reward centrist policymaking, which increasingly became unsatisfactory to a large proportion of the population (Miller, 1974b). Citrin (1974) built on Easton's (1965) conception of regime and authorities. He argued that Miller's (1974b) view that the American regime is becoming increasingly unpopular is wrong. Citrin (1974) believed that people in the United States are becoming distrustful of authorities because of poor government performance and partisanship differences. However, according to the author, this distrust does not necessarily reflect a permanent opposition to the American system of government itself. This research draws on the debate concerning whether regime or authorities/policies related considerations shape political trust and attempts to discover the factors shaping political trust among Mexican immigrants in Central Illinois.

### *Latino Determinants of Trust*

Despite the dominant cynicism in American society, the degree of trust among different groups varies. Anglos, for instance, have higher levels of trust than African Americans (Wenzel, 2006). The evidence for Latinos, however, is more mixed (Wenzel, 2006). Early studies of trust among Latinos identified a lower level of trust among Latinos when compared with Whites (de La Garza et al., 1992). Other studies, however, found that Latinos trust the federal government at a higher level than both Anglos and African Americans (Bonner, 2009; Jackson, 2009). Abrajano and Alvarez (2010) argued that this finding is the result of the overrepresentation of younger Latinos in research samples. According to the same authors, younger Latinos have more optimistic expectations about the United States.

Latinos are not a homogeneous group. Furthermore, because socioeconomic factors, level of political influence, and historical experience are likely to differ considerably among members of the same ethnic group, the levels of trust in government are also likely to vary (Barreto, Segura, & Woods, 2004; Bonner, 2009; Charles, 1996). Some factors, however, have been identified in the literature as more influential among Latinos. Trust for the Mexican government led to a higher level of trust in the United States's

government among immigrants, indicating that political socialization and ideology may matter across contexts (Wals, 2011, 2013). Acculturation, that is, the process by which Latinos acquire the norms and attitudes of the host society, can also influence political trust (Michelson, 2001, 2007; Wenzel, 2006). More specifically, as immigrants stay in the country longer, they tend to adopt the dominant culture, and thus, they can adopt the skepticism about the government prominent in the American society (acculturation theory). Further, Latino immigrants trusted the government more than non-immigrants (Correia, 2010; Michelson, 2001). For these reasons, our model on the determinants of trust in government controlled for acculturation by using the number of years immigrants spent in the United States.

Perceptions about the existence of discrimination and personal experiences with discrimination (Abrajano & Alvarez, 2010; Schildkraut, 2005) can also reduce Latinos' trust in government. For example, those who consider discrimination to be widespread in the United States may trust the government less. In addition, those who have been discriminated against can project their experience with discrimination onto government institutions (Brehm & Rahn, 1997). However, general perceptions of the existence of discrimination may be less important than a personal experience with discrimination. More specifically, some studies showed that whereas experiencing discrimination as an individual had a strong influence on reducing trust in government, individual perceptions of discrimination against Latinos as a group had little effect (Schildkraut, 2005). Because of the possible influence of discrimination on political trust, our research controlled for personal or close experience with discrimination.

## **Method**

### *Participants, Procedure, and Method*

The data set contains the responses from a survey conducted face-to-face in two waves during 2006 and 2011 among Latinos living in West Central Illinois, in the towns of Beardstown and Monmouth, who were 18 years or older. Each survey was supported by a separate Western Illinois University research grant, and the lack of funding in between accounts for the 5-year gap in the two waves. The 260 respondents were of Mexican ancestry. Our sample was not randomly selected but was chosen in a way consistent with methods and techniques that help identify potential members of this type of targeted community (Wampler et al., 2009). We located participants in different venues where members of the Hispanic community gathered together, such as a local church that offered Spanish masses, Mexican grocery stores, and a field where men played soccer on weekends. All

of our interviewers were bilingual college students and whenever possible, of Mexican ancestry. Respondents were given the choice of taking the survey either in Spanish or English, thus mitigating the effect of a potential language barrier. All chose the Spanish option. Unfortunately, the resulting uniformity precluded the opportunity to compare whether language choice correlated with response patterns. For the analysis of the survey data, we used descriptive statistics and linear regression models.

In addition, we conducted 32 in-depth interviews in 2011, during President Obama's first administration. Respondents in the second wave were asked if they had more time to participate in additional questioning. The interviews took about 1 hour, and participants were offered compensation for their participation. In these interviews, participants were asked to expand on their answers to the main survey. More specific to the purpose of this article, we asked interviewees for the reasons why they trusted or did not trust the government. All the in-depth interviews were conducted in Spanish by the same researcher and independently coded by two researchers. When disagreements about coding were identified, the coders discussed their differences until they could reach an agreement. All the disagreements during the coding process were resolved.

### *Dependent Variable*

Our study used a dependent variable reflecting trust in the Federal Government derived from the original battery of five questions included in the American National Election Study survey of 1958. The question used was, *How much of the time do you trust the government in Washington, D.C., to do what is right—just about always, most of the time, some of the time, or never?* This was coded 1 (*never*), 2 (*some of the time*), 3 (*most of the time*), and 4 (*just about always*).

### *Control Variables*

In this study, we used ordinary demographic control variables. We asked respondents to identify which range their age fell into: 1 (18-29), 2 (30-39), 3 (40-54), 4 (55-64), and 5 (65+). For gender, we built a dichotomous variable: 1 (male) and 2 (female). Education was coded according to the highest grade attained: 1 (*none or elementary incomplete*), 2 (*middle school incomplete/complete*), 3 (*high school incomplete/complete*), 4 (*general education development [GED]*), 5 (*technical*), 6 (*some college*), 7 (*college*), and 8 (*graduate degree*). We asked respondents the following question: *What is your total annual household income from all sources, and*

before taxes? We coded their responses 1 (*less than US\$10,000*), 2 (*between US\$10,000 and US\$20,000*), 3 (*between US\$20,000 and US\$30,000*), 4 (*between US\$30,000 and US\$40,000*), 5 (*between US\$40,000 and US\$50,000*), 6 (*between US\$50,000 and US\$60,000*), and 7 (*more than US\$60,000*). Length of stay in the country was a continuous variable. To measure attention to politics, we asked the following question: *How much attention would you say you pay to politics and government? A lot, a fair amount, not much, or none at all.* This was coded as 1 (*none at all*), 2 (*not much*), 3 (*a fair amount*), and 4 (*a lot*). The final control variable used in this study was based on the following question: *In the past 5 years, have you or a family member experienced discrimination?* We coded this variable dichotomously: 1 (*no*) and 2 (*yes*).

### *Independent Variables*

This study used two independent variables to capture the evaluations of the regime or system of government (diffuse support) and evaluations of the authorities and their policies (specific support). To assess the support for the regime/system of government, we asked the following question: *Based on your experience, do you think political leaders are interested in the problems of particular concern to Hispanics/Latinos living here or not?* This was coded dichotomously: 1 (*no*) and 2 (*yes*). This question is appropriate for assessing diffuse or regime support because we were asking respondents to think of those who fill positions in politics/government, which stay constant, and their assessment of how responsive these institutions were (Blendon et al., 1997; Miller, 1974a, 1974b; Miller & Listhaug, 1990; Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 1995, 2002). Some studies used a similar measure for regime support (Muller, Jukam, & Seligson, 1982; Seligson, 1983).

To reflect support for political authorities and their performance (specific support), we asked the following question: "Now I am going to ask you about the economic situation of the United States. Do you think the economy is doing very well, well, not so well, or not at all well?" This is coded 1 (*not at all well*), 2 (*not so well*), 3 (*just well*), and 4 (*very well*). Economic evaluations are a common way for assessing trust for current authorities (Abrajano & Alvarez, 2010; Chanley et al., 2000; Citrin & Green, 1986; Hetherington, 1998; Hibbing & Patterson, 1994; Lane, 1965; Lipset, 1987). We acknowledge that determinates of trust for a regime or temporary authorities can be endogenous (Hetherington, 1998); however, our measures serve as appropriate proxies for better understanding trust in the Federal Government.



## Results

Our survey included a total of 260 Mexican immigrants living in Beardstown and Monmouth, Illinois. Not every respondent answered each question, so the total number of responses to various items in Table 1 falls short of the 260 total. Almost half of those surveyed were between 18 and 29 years of age, and thus, our sample was considerably young, a common occurrence among immigrant communities (Table 1). Only 20% of them were 40 years of age or older. As for gender, 56% of our respondents were male, which is consistent with towns of recent immigration where the proportion of men coming to work without their families is high (Table 1). Sixty-six percent of our interviewees had an education of middle school or less, and only about 6% had an education beyond high school (Table 1). The income among our respondents was considerably low, and 70% of them had an income of US\$30,000 or less. Finally, most of our interviewees were of recent arrival, and the average time spent in the United States was close to 11 years.

The extent to which our respondents paid attention to politics and government was somewhat evenly distributed. In this sense, 55% of them declared paying a fair amount or a lot of attention to politics and government, whereas the other 45% declared paying none or not much attention to politics and government (Table 1). Our survey asked respondents if they or a member of their family had experienced discrimination in the previous 5 years. Almost half of our interviewees expressed having had a close experience with discrimination (Table 1). Our interviewer also asked respondents if they thought political leaders were interested in the problems of particular concern for Latinos. Close to half of our sample declared thinking that political leaders showed no interest for the problems affecting Latinos (Table 1). Finally, our questionnaire also asked respondents about their evaluation of the economic situation in the United States. More than 60% of our respondents evaluated the state of the economic situation in the United States as not so well or not at all well. The rest of our interviewees believed the state economic situation in the United States to be well or very well.

Descriptive accounts of the dependent variable suggest levels of trust that, while low, are comparable with the U.S. population as a whole. Almost 65% of our interviewees declared trusting the government in D.C. never or only part of the time. The other 35% stated trusting the government in D.C. most of the time or almost always.

### *Model Predicting Trust in Government*

This article analyzed whether when evaluating their trust in government, respondents thought about the regime, or the particular authorities

**Table 1.** Select Demographic Characteristics and Political Variables.

Variable	Statistic
Age	
18-29	44.5% (113)
30-39	33.5% (85)
40-54	17.7% (45)
55-64	4.3% (11)
65 or more	—
Gender	
Male	56.2% (146)
Female	43.8% (114)
Education	
None or elementary incomplete	26.1% (67)
Middle school incomplete/complete	40.1% (103)
High school incomplete/complete	23.0% (59)
GED*	3.5% (9)
Technical	5.4% (14)
Some college	0.8% (2)
College	0.8% (2)
Graduate degree	0.4% (1)
Income (US\$)	
Less than 10,000	12.7% (28)
Between 10,000 and 20,000	29.9% (66)
Between 20,000 and 30,000	28.1% (62)
Between 30,000 and 40,000	19.05% (42)
Between 40,000 and 50,000	7.2% (16)
Between 50,000 and 60,000	2.3% (5)
More than 60,000	0.9% (2)
Length of stay in country	
<i>M</i>	10.92
<i>SD</i>	6.95
Attention to politics	
None at all	9.6% (22)
Not much	34.9% (80)
A fair amount	47.2% (108)
A lot	8.3% (19)
Experience with discrimination	
No	51.6% (128)
Yes	48.4% (120)
Concern leader for Latinos	
No	49.8% (104)
Yes	50.2% (105)

*(continued)*

**Table 1.** (continued)

Variable	Statistic
Economic situation in the United States	
Not at all well	15.2% (35)
Not so well	47.2% (109)
Just well	19.9% (46)
Very well	17.7% (41)

\* GED = general education development.

in government at the time and their policies (diffuse trust versus particularized trust). For this purpose, we built a linear regression model including concern of leaders for problems affecting Latinos and evaluations of the economic situation in the United States to reflect diffuse and particularized trust, respectively. In addition, our linear regression model controlled for length of stay in the country (Michelson, 2001), education (Hetherington, 1998), income (Hetherington, 1998), age, attention to politics (de la Garza & Cortina, 2007; Leal, 2002), and experience with discrimination (Abrajano & Alvarez, 2010; Brehm & Rahn, 1997; Schildkraut, 2005).

Our results showed that our control variables for education, income, and attention to politics were significant in predicting trust in government (Table 2). More specifically, those with higher income and higher education tended to trust the government less. In turn, those who paid more attention to politics and government trusted the government more. However, age, length of stay in the country, and experience with discrimination were not associated with political trust (Table 2). We conducted a supplementary analysis using our continuous age variable instead of the age range and found the same results. In addition, we tested whether the perception about prevailing discrimination in the country (Schildkraut, 2005) as opposed to personal experience with discrimination was associated with political trust, but we found no association between the two. This examination was based on the following question: *In general, do you think discrimination against Latinos is a major problem, minor problem, or not a problem in preventing Latinos in general from succeeding in America?*

As for our independent variables concerning diffuse and specific regime support, our analysis showed that our proxies for both the evaluation of the regime and the current authorities and their policies were significant in predicting trust in government. Further, the effect of both variables on trust in government was very similar (Table 2). More specifically, those who believed political leaders show interest in the problems affecting Latinos

**Table 2.** Model for Trust in Government.

Variables	Standardized beta	
	Coefficient	t statistic
Control variables		
Age	.081	0.946
Education	-.137*	-1.759
Income	-.152*	-1.912
Length of stay in country	.099	1.147
Attention to politics	.280***	3.643
Experience with discrimination	-.054	-0.702
Independent variables		
Concern leaders for Latinos	.179**	2.349
Economic situation in the United States	.171**	2.226

\*  $p < .1$ ; \*\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .01$

trusted the government more, and those exhibiting a positive evaluation of the economic situation also trusted the government more. Thus, it seems that both regime and authorities and their policies may influence trust in government. To understand this relationship better, we used in-depth interview data as explained in the next section.

### *Regime Versus Authorities/Policies: Qualitative Data*

The last section showed that our indicators of both regime and authorities/ policies evaluations predicted trust in government. Our qualitative data corroborated this finding, but the comments made by respondents to the question, "why do you or don't trust the government?" showed that most people were thinking about the current administration and its policies when answering this question. More specifically, out of the 34 comments from 32 respondents we obtained during our in-depth interviews, 11 pointed to reasons for trusting/not trusting the government related to the regime and 23 to reasons related to the administration at the time (Table 3).

Out of those who gave reasons for not trusting the government related to the regime, more than half expressed a general distrust for the government. For instance, one respondent stated, "the day I can vote I won't vote because I can't trust either political party." Another interviewee stated, "politicians promise things they don't deliver" and another one "politicians says things like that they'll help people but they only do it to get votes." As these comments show, some Mexican immigrants seemed dissatisfied with the

**Table 3.** Reasons Why People Trusted or Did Not Trust the Government.

Regime		Sample comment
General distrust of government	7	Politicians promise things they don't deliver I don't believe in government
Government in Mexico was worse	2	They treated me worse in Mexico
Other	2	I trust them because they have to follow the rules
<hr/>		
Authorities/policies		
Does not like immigration policies/ criticizes lack of reform	17	Laws like the ones in Arizona hurt families Obama hasn't helped with amnesty
Welfare/health	2	Healthcare reform helps
Other	4	They should concentrate on the US instead of fighting wars

way politicians and political parties work. One other comment was even more skeptical of politics, and this interviewee stated that he does not believe in government. As these comments show, Mexican immigrants had many criticisms directed to the regime and American political system.

To be sure, some of the Mexican immigrants interviewed trusted the government, and they gave reasons for this trust. Two comments made a comparison between the U.S. government and the Mexican one and concluded that the government in the United States was "less bad." More specifically, one respondent stated, "they treated me worse in Mexico," and another one, "it was the same in Mexico." As these statements show, some interviewees trusted the system of government in the United States because it compared favorably with the Mexican one. One other interviewee had a positive comment about the U.S. government. In this sense, this person stated, "I almost always trust the government because politicians follow the rules." As this comment shows, this immigrant thought the political system and its rules warrant against wrongdoings by politicians.

The in-depth interviews took place in 2011 during President Obama's first administration. More than 70% of the interviewees who were dissatisfied with the administration at the time of the interviews were dissatisfied with the lack of immigration reform and government immigration policies. For instance, some Latinos in our sample were frustrated with the lack of approval of an amnesty for undocumented immigrants, immigration reform,

and the Dream Act. In this sense, one person stated that "the President promised many things but he didn't deliver, like the amnesty papers." Another interviewee stated, "we are waiting for the amnesty and nothing," and still another one stated, "Obama promised he would help Hispanics and he's not doing anything . . . Many Hispanics may not vote for Obama again." As these sample comments show, Latinos were very disappointed that the promises of an immigration solution for Hispanics was not delivered.

Further, our Mexican and Mexican American interviewees also felt the government was attacking immigrants. Many of these comments were referring to state decisions passed in Arizona as well as five other states, which allowed state police to ask for identification to likely undocumented immigrants, and the spike in deportations by the Obama administration, which reached a record of 392,862 over the year 2011. For instance, with reference to the state decisions, two interviewees stated that "there are many Hispanics battling to get jobs and there's discrimination like in Arizona" and "Hispanics are hurt by laws like the one in Arizona because we all have family in other states." As these statements show, when interviewees were asked about the federal government, they may have been thinking about the state ones. As for deportations, one interviewee stated he did not trust the government because "the government separates families. They leave the kids here and send the parents back." As these comments show, not only were Mexican immigrants up to date with government affairs related to immigration, but they also disapproved of the harsh measures against immigrants.

Logically, some of our respondents were thinking of other government policies when evaluating their trust in government. In this sense, one interviewee stated, "health reform helps." Still another responded said, "The things they do make me trust like the public helps they give us." As these statements demonstrate, the evaluation of the government and government performance occasionally went beyond the immigration policies of the government. However, the comments were dominated by immigration policy evaluations because of their relevance for Mexican immigrants (Schilckraut, 2005; Sierra, Carrillo, DeSipio, & Jones-Correa, 2000) and because the Obama administration had promised to pass an immigration reform.

## **Discussion**

Citizen trust in government is a critical measure of the health of democratic societies. Changing demographics and increased levels of immigration to the United States demand that political scientists understand variations in trust among sub-groups of the population. This understanding is especially important, given debates about whether trust/distrust relates to diffuse opposition to the governmental system, or specific resistance to

the regime in power. Greater familiarity with another governmental system, as well as specific policies targeting a particular ethnicity, may shape how particular groups express trust or distrust.

This article focused on levels of trust among rural Latinos, a group that exhibits both of the characteristics noted above, in that they are often familiar with another government, and can be a target of federal and state immigration policies. The analysis, based on a sample from Illinois, showed that both diffuse and specific factors shape overall trust, which is low, but not out of line with the U.S. population overall. In addition, perceptions that leaders are concerned about Latinos, and positive views of the nation's economic situation, led to higher trust among this group. Some control variables also had explanatory power. For example, socioeconomic status in the form of both income and education levels affected trust negatively, while those who were more politically engaged were more trusting. Length of time in the country had no impact on trust.

The initial interview sample was questioned in 2006 and 2011, which may affect the generalizability of some of the study's findings. During this time, there was a change in presidential administration (although both were putatively in favor of immigration reform), the economy collapsed in 2008-2009, and anti-immigration sentiment increased due to different factors, including the rise of the Tea Party and the negative portrayal of immigrants by the right wing media. The follow-up interviews from 2011, however, revealed that specific opposition to President Obama's initiatives might have been more important in creating distrust among rural Latinos than more diffuse regime-level concerns. This latter finding suggests, as one would expect, that party and electoral loyalties among Latino voters partly depend on performance in office. More importantly, however, the research implies that the debate surrounding the politics of immigration policy has implications beyond the widely discussed partisan electoral realm. In other words, specific government actions on an issue important to rural Latinos may affect their level of political trust.

More broadly, our research demonstrated that the distinction in the American politics literature between citizen distrust based on regime type (Miller, 1974a) versus suspicion of specific office holders (Citrin, 1974) may be a false dichotomy. Many of our respondents, especially in the indepth interviews, highlighted aspects of both when explaining their overall attitudes toward government. It is clear that disappointment in specific policies of the Obama administration was a driving force determining distrust, and economic perceptions were prominent. Many respondents also showed an overall distrust, not just in specific policies, but in the political process generally defined. It was a common view among those who did not trust

the federal government that our institutions produce policies that demonstrate a lack of concern for the challenges that Latino immigrants face. This is in line with other studies of Latinos that have shown that a lack of political efficacy, or a perception of American government as ignoring Latino interests, is a strong predictor of distrust in government (Abrajano & Alvarez, 2010; Schildkraut, 2005). Our findings suggest that among many Latinos who distrust the federal government, it is not just specific policies or politicians that lead to distrust, although this may be also the case, but a sense that American institutions are incapable of taking their desires seriously.

We also find in our study that both age and length of stay in the country were not significant predictors of trust in government among our respondents. This finding is different from what has been found in studies that largely use respondents from urban areas (Michelson, 2001, 2007; Wenzel, 2006). This may be because acculturation in rural areas does not include accepting a negative view of the federal government to the same extent that exists in urban areas. Furthermore, it is less likely that rural immigrants could turn inward and maintain their own neighborhoods, which has been a dynamic that has been found to make Latinos less likely to trust the government in urban areas (Michelson, 2001, 2007). Thus, the pathways that other scholars have found lead to distrust do not seem as salient in our sample, but more indepth research is needed to better understand what is driving these differing pathways. Our research also did not find a significant effect of discrimination on government trust, unlike past research (Abrajano & Alvarez, 2010; Schildkraut, 2005). Although around half of the respondents reported having experienced discrimination, it might be that these experiences were not projected onto evaluations of the federal government. This suggests that experiences of discrimination may have been of a more isolated nature as opposed to an assessment of racism in society overall that can more easily be projected onto government institutions (Brehm & Rahn, 1997).

Ultimately, our results suggested that the experiences and attitudes of rural Latinos might be different from those who immigrate to large cities and more traditional immigrant destinations. As immigrants increasingly move to these areas, changing the nature of rural America, the question of what determines their attitudes toward the government will be a particularly salient one. Further research may also be necessary to examine which issues are particularly relevant to trust for other emerging demographic groups in the U.S. population.



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