

A Place at the Lunch Counter:  
Latinos, African-Americans, and the Dynamics of American Race Politics

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## **Abstract**

We offer a conceptual framework for understanding Latino/African-American relations and developing an approach for inquiry on the subject. We argue that the important and interesting questions on black-brown relationships can be asked across multiple dimensions and at multiple levels of analysis. We review the existing literature, and outline the conflicting findings across these dimensions and levels. Finally, we offer some evidence of our own with regard to prospects for inter-group coalitions. Using survey data from a 1999 national sample of Latinos, African-Americans and non-Hispanic whites, we find that Latinos perceive little in common with either of the other two groups, while African-Americans clearly perceive Latinos as sharing similar circumstances and experiences. Nevertheless, policy agreement between Latinos and African-Americans is generally high, and clearly higher than levels of agreement between either group and non-Hispanic whites. We conclude with some thoughts on what this exploratory data might imply for future coalitional prospects.

## **A Place at the Lunch Counter: Latinos, African-Americans, and the Dynamics of American Race Politics**

This society, and scholars who study it and its politics, arguably have an historical construction of a racial dynamic that is binary and largely black/white. That is, when we approach questions of race, it has been through the analytic lens of a black/white dynamic. And when our discussions moved beyond these issues, we generally viewed the emerging issues as analogues of the first, i.e. a Latino/white dynamic, a Native American/white dynamic, and an Asian/white dynamic, each of which we assumed would mimic—to one degree or another—the black experience.

The rapid growth of the Latino population has upset these approaches in two important and distinct ways. First, Latino population growth can be seen by African-American political and intellectual elites as a serious threat to the place African-Americans hold in the conscience of the nation, and our national self-conception. If the race problem has always been a “black” problem, the presence of a new player (or at least newly powerful and sizable) is sure to change those dynamics, and in unpredictable ways.

Second, the presence of two sizable and politically important minority groups, of necessity, raises questions about their relationships with one another. That is, whether we are more interested in African-Americans’ relations with white America, or Latinos’ relations with white America, we can no longer ignore the importance and implications of Latinos and African-Americans relations with one another.

It is to that relationship that we turn in this essay. What is the nature of black-brown relations in America? What is the future? Are Latinos and African-Americans

likely to emerge as two players on the same political team, or will their relationship prove more complex?

That Latinos and African-Americans are likely, even inevitable, coalition partners in American politics is broadly and commonly accepted. Observers across the political spectrum speak of black-brown coalitions as the natural and expected course of evolution in minority group politics. This may, in fact, turn out to be the case. Latinos and African-Americans share a number of politically relevant common characteristics. These include education and income levels significantly below the national averages with all of the attendant correlates, such as lower home-ownership rates, higher than average unemployment rates, higher likelihood of being victimized by both violent and non-violent crime, and often significant residential segregation in inner-cities or inner-ring suburbs. Occasionally, this residential concentration is co-located, that is, where African-Americans and Latinos are living in shared or adjacent neighborhoods. In addition, both groups face historically high obstacles to election to public office, not the least of which is racial hostility among non-Latino whites.

Beyond shared objective conditions, Latinos<sup>1</sup> and African-Americans are more Democratic in partisanship than non-minority Americans. Non-Cuban Latino voters are stable Democrats at rates exceeding 60 percent (DeSipio and de la Garza 2002), and Democratic identification seems to be positively associated with length of time in the United States, as well as age-related increases in partisan strength (Cain, Kiewiet, and Uhlaner 1991). Latino Democratic partisanship favors the formation of biracial coalitions with African-Americans because, of all the partisan social groups in the United States, African-Americans are the most loyal to the Democratic Party (Rosenstone, Behr,

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<sup>1</sup> With the exception of Florida, where Cubans are equally loyal Republicans

and Lazarus 1984: 169-170), a result that is consistent across gender, region, and a variety of demographic categories (Tate 1993).

But a contrary view would suggest that there are any number of factors—political, social, and economic—which may well serve to undermine this commonality. Recent political events provide anecdotal evidence for both viewpoints. Mayoral races in America’s two largest cities offer excellent examples of both Latino/African-American cooperation *and* rivalry. And competition for economic resources and the attention of political parties and actors may well pit the interests of each group against the other.

Unfortunately, the amount of scholarship devoted to these issues has been modest. We’ll survey the extant work further on. Fortuitously, however, the relative absence of an extensive literature allows us to think more broadly about how a comprehensive research program on this topic might proceed. That is, we can offer a systematic appraisal of what questions should emerge and how we might address them.

In this essay, we will offer a conceptual framework to shape this new research program. We will argue that the important and interesting questions on black-brown relationships can be asked across multiple dimensions and at multiple levels of analysis. In so doing, we’ll review the existing literature, to outline what progress has been made on any of those dimensions and where future work is most needed. Finally, we’ll offer some evidence of our own with regard to which direction this inter-group relationship might evolve.

We are governed, here, by our own perceptions of human decision-making and our take on the nature of Latino and African-American interaction. Loosely stated, our perception is rationalist in nature. That is, Latinos and African-Americans will cooperate

when, at the mass or elite level, they perceive that it is in their interest to cooperate—and not otherwise. We see significant evidence that there are sufficient points of commonality between the groups and their political positions that coalition, if carefully orchestrated, is clearly possible. We also see, however, sufficient evidence of affective indifference or distance, a general lack of affinity—particularly on the part of Latinos toward African-Americans—that this coalition is neither inevitable nor, in some cases, even likely. These outcomes, of course, are endogenous to more than individual attitudes and elite strategies, but will be the product of the interaction of both within each group and between these groups, and are clearly going to be affected by the policy actions and political strategies of Anglos in the system, with interests of their own.

### **A Framework for Considering Issues of Black-Brown Relations**

Interactions between African-Americans and Latinos, we have suggested, will evolve as a consequence of the preferences, interests, and attitudes of each group. But, in fact, the outcomes may also vary across social strata and issues. We have identified three particularly salient dimensions in Figure 1.

Figure 1 here

Figure one arrays the conflict and cooperation points between the two groups across three dimensions: elite vs. mass behavior, attitudinal factors vs. political actions, and distinctly electoral or political concerns vs. more generally socioeconomic issues. The resulting eight cells each represent potential areas of inquiry.

*Political, Social, and Economic Elites and Mass Publics*

The role of political elites in shaping the preferences and attitudes of the mass public is, by now, well known if not well understood (Page and Shapiro 1992; Stimson 1990; Ginsberg 1986; Kuklinski and Segura 1995). The information asymmetries that favor elected officials, interest group entrepreneurs, party leaders and community activists can, under reasonable circumstances, allow elites to mobilize opinion behind strategies that they, the leadership, have agreed to pursue. The effort isn't always successful (Carmines and Kuklinski 1991), and there are certainly occasions where elite unanimity can break down (Page and Shapiro 1992), but political leadership often has the capacity to shape mass opinion and action.

On the other hand, political coalitions—of necessity—will need to operate at the mass level, at least instrumentally, in order to have impact on electoral and policy outcomes. Antipathy, or at least indifference, among the people can severely undermine efforts at coordination agreed to at the elite level. For example, if Latino and African-American office-holders jointly supported an African-American candidate for public office, perhaps as a consequence of a political exchange, there would be no guarantee that Latino voters would follow such a suggestion if the local communities were at odds. That is, it will not always be clear that elites can deliver the policy support—much less the actual votes—of the communities they represent.

Similarly, as economic and political conditions have improved for these two groups, some middle and upper class Latinos and African-Americans have used their newfound resources to augment both power and opportunity for themselves and their respective group (Landry 1987; Jennings 1992; Dawson 1994). This opportunity, however, need not facilitate biracial cooperation. In fact, the coalitional efforts of blacks

and Latinos are likely undermined if an influential leader of either group advances only the interests of his or her own group to the exclusion of others (Betancur and Gills 2000).

Political scientists interested in the emergence of conflict or cooperation between African-Americans and Latinos may choose to focus their inquiry on either level of analysis. They may, in fact, be better served by looking at the internal politics of coalition within each group, an approach that would cause them to look at both the elite and mass strata. In either event, we are cautioned to understand the possibilities of similarity *and* difference when we shift our attention from one to another.

#### *Attitude ≠ Action*

We have just suggested that elite leadership in coalition formation will be more successful in the fertile ground of mass support, and severely constrained when popular attitudes do not favor such an alliance. Attitudinal support for coalitions is an area of focus in extant research on black-brown relations, specifically the individual orientations of Latinos and African-Americans toward coalition behavior. Dissatisfaction with economic realities has been found to contribute to the likelihood of support for such cooperation. Tedin and Murray (1994), for example, have found that individual level concern over economic conditions, such as poverty and unemployment, is associated with support for biracial coalition activities among both African-Americans and Latinos, though to different degrees.

There is evidence, however, that these expectations have their limits. While the most vulnerable in each group, for instance those with less material wealth and political resources, may, by virtue of greater shared circumstances, be more supportive of biracial

cooperation, this may not be the case if competition over scarce jobs and resources comes to characterize a particular environment. In that instance, poorer and less-educated respondents are *less* likely to favor coalitional strategies (Jackson, Gerber, and Cain 1994). Attitudinal support for coalitions, then, is clearly not a given, and potentially problematic.

Attitudes, on the one hand, and political actions on the other are, however, quite distinct, and the mere presence of supportive attitudes—which we have suggested may not be in place—is not alone sufficient to ensure cooperative action. There is often a significant disjuncture between individual preferences and the actions they take. We may find, for example, instances where African-Americans and Latinos pursue the same policy option or support the same candidate for very different reasons, or because circumstances structure choices, not as a consequence of widespread policy agreement. For example, African-American political leaders may choose to support a more permissive immigration policy—perhaps an amnesty plan—not because they share the same attitudes and incentives on immigration that Latino elected officials do, but because they might believe that black wages would increase if undocumented labor became legal, or because the value of that inter-group cooperation is important for securing reciprocity on an issue of importance to African-Americans at a later date. That is, the commonality of behavior reflects strategic or individual calculations of utility and is not a reflection of shared preferences.

Similarly, we may find circumstances where general attitudinal agreement between the two groups does not result in similar actions. For example, Latino and

African-American voters might agree on a wide variety of issues, yet still choose to support different candidates at any level of government.

The aforementioned 2001 New York and Los Angeles mayoral elections are a good example of how attitudes and actions are occasionally disconnected, and whether or not black-brown coalitions can or will emerge. In New York, Latino and African-American voters united to support Bronx Borough President Fernando Ferrer in the Democratic Primary. His loss to Mark Green, in what was perceived to be a racially polarized campaign, prompted majorities of both groups to abandon the Democratic nominee and ensure the election of Michael Bloomberg in the general election. By contrast, in the Los Angeles election, African-American and Latino voters backed rival candidates, each of whom made it to the general election in the non-partisan system. In the end, a white Democrat was elected on the strength of African-American and Republican support, over a Latino candidate with a primarily Latino and liberal base.

We have no reason to believe that policy preferences or attitudes varied widely across the settings. Presumably, in both locations, both African-American and Latino voters prefer candidates of their own ethnicity rather than from the other group, or at the very least, candidates with significant loyalty to their own community. Rather, the manner in which choices were structured—available candidates and the nature of the local electoral system—resulted in different actions in the two cities. On the other hand, it is likely that voters from both groups in Los Angeles shared many policy preferences, but did not agree on who best could actualize those preferences.

A second distinction between the cases is the strategic conditions faced by minority voters. African-Americans and Latinos are both sizable communities in New

York, whereas in Los Angeles, Latinos are on the verge of becoming an outright majority in a city whose black population and their political influence is perceived to be shrinking. While both minority groups in NY felt their interests would jointly be served with a Ferrer mayoralty, in Los Angeles, the outcome of the election was perceived as zero-sum. In short, the prospects for political coalition will be inexorably tied to the relative size of two groups, their joint local political history, the perception of rivalry or cooperation with respect to resources, and the available candidates. We'll return to this issue shortly.

Political circumstances will vary widely across the United States and over time. The cases of NY and LA illustrate how context matters in shaping the individual and collective political decisions of minority voters and their elites. The specificity of circumstances necessary for one outcome or the other should not be underestimated. For example, absent the white candidate's historic familial ties to the African-American community in Los Angeles, it is unlikely in the extreme that African-Americans and Latinos would have been separated by a political divide. Another mayoral election in Los Angeles may well see the emergence of a black-brown coalition as circumstances change.

Scholars seeking to explore the mechanics of black-brown coalitions will, therefore, have to address whether emerging cooperation is the product of genuinely shared values and preferences, or rather the result of circumstances and structured choices. Similarly, when points of conflict emerge, we will need to differentiate whether the source of that conflict is really in divergent values and preferences or, rather, the product of more tactical or strategic considerations by community leaders.

### *Socio-Economic Circumstances and Political Implications*

The final dimension is, perhaps, the most familiar. As scholars, we need to distinguish between the purely political aspect of black-brown relations, and the more socio-economic. As political scientists, we naturally focus most of our attention on policy preferences and outputs, and electoral behavior. To be sure, the degree of cooperation or conflict between Latino and African-American voters and elected officials is of critical importance to determining the level of impact either group has on the political system.

But the economic and social realities of Latinos and African-Americans alike, some of which were described above, create two realities. The first is that shared circumstances work to define common interests. That both groups find themselves near the bottom of most social hierarchies suggests at least the possibility of shared economic and social interests with regard to income distribution, educational equity and job opportunities, and the entire array of civil and voting rights protections.

Shared socio-economic circumstances, however, lead to shared positions only when the similarity of circumstances and their root causes are accurately perceived. And, of course, not all Latinos and African-Americans share socio-economic circumstances emblematic of the average experience of the other group. Specifically, middle class Latinos or higher educated African-Americans might not necessarily perceive their own co-ethnics, let alone the other group, as sharing needs and, hence, political interests. To the extent that social location varies at the individual level, so too should the sense of shared political goals, *ceteris paribus*.

Another complication is that the recognition of common interests between African-Americans and Latinos is also influenced by the level of immigrant incorporation or assimilation into the US polity or society. The shared economic and material circumstances, the history of African-American political exclusion, even the contemporary circumstances of blacks in the United States is not necessarily familiar to the newly arriving immigrant. The realities and origins of social relations in this society are learned, just as the laws, business practices, and language are learned. Those most familiar with the US political system, and more completely incorporated into US society, should have a clearer perception of how their interests and those of African-Americans might be consonant.

While common circumstances may lead to the perception of shared interests, there is simultaneously a second likely effect—the very high likelihood that these groups will be forced to engage in competition over jobs, over control of labor unions and sectors of the economy, and even over demographic hegemony at the neighborhood level. This competition in society and in the economy, we believe, is very likely to foster some degree of resentment between the groups at the mass level. Issues such as competition for resources and status, stereotypes, and cultural differences have already been found to influence the perceptions and behaviors of these two groups (Robinson 2002). These same forces may even trigger hostile rhetoric and outright economic discrimination at the elite level. Racial resentment between African-Americans and Latinos would not bode well for effective political coalition.

Also, the belief that members of one's particular group are collectively oppressed and unfairly treated by society has been found to be associated with the propensity to see

other groups as competitive threats (Bobo and Hutchings 1996). These perceptions may develop from simple self-interest, orthodox prejudice (i.e. negative stereotyping), and beliefs about social stratification and inequality (Bobo and Hutchings 1996). On the question of whether Latinos have suffered less discrimination in the United States than blacks, one must consider notions of the “invisibility” of the Hispanic community and the long practice of not counting “Hispanics” as a separate group on the U.S. Census. Among the arguments is that discrimination against Latinos is not as well-documented as that suffered by blacks, and further, that sometimes this discrimination took the form of local practice rather than state-enforced laws, e.g. “No Mexicans or Dogs Allowed” (Kamasaki and Yzaguirre 1995).

The emergence of political coalitions between African-Americans and Latinos is thus dependent on both the presence *and* the perception of shared circumstances. Political coalition and collective action requires individuals to perceive that their fate is linked, first, to others in their own social group and, second, between their group and another (Dawson 1994: 77). That is, for Latinos and African-Americans to coalesce politically, Latinos must perceive a sense of “linked fate” or common interests with other Latinos, and perceive a similar, albeit weaker, link to the interests and fates of African-Americans. Absent this sense of group solidarity and sentiment of inter-group shared interests, and even in the presence of shared socio-economic circumstances, coalition is far less likely.

### **Evidence of Extant Cooperation?**

There are a variety of anecdotal accounts of cooperation between Latinos and African-Americans. For example, a recent news story documented the formation of an alliance between local LULAC and NAACP chapters in, of all places, Spokane, Washington (Graman 2004). It is clear that there are occasions where leaders or members of the two groups cooperate. It is less clear how pervasive this is.

There is a modicum of literature examining whether and when black-brown coalitions have emerged. In what is perhaps the first scholarly attempt to discuss the formation of these coalitions, Charles Henry (1980) describes how both groups “suffer” similar social inequalities, such as median household incomes, unemployment, and college completion rates. These similar inequalities should naturally lead to the formation of political alliances, Henry argues, but he finds that Latinos have little interest in forming an alliance with African Americans (Ambrecht and Pachon 1974).

Studies of political context and the creation of inter-ethnic coalitions have generally focused on whether the demographic or institutional circumstances were most likely to result in cooperative or competitive behavior. For example, some municipal-level case studies have focused on elections and candidates and detailed the success or failure of biracial coalitions (Henry 1980; Falcon 1988; Sonenshein 1989). Others have identified the factors predicting the formation of black-brown coalitions (Browning, Marshall, and Tabb 1984; Meier and Stewart 1991).

According to Sonenshein (1989), visionary group leaders, especially those who supervise strong community organizations, are essential for developing and sustaining multiracial political coalitions between African Americans and Latinos. Further, the

most effective coalitions are those that begin building in communities with strong political organizations already in place. Kaufmann, like Sonenshein, also argues that the prospects for future coalitions between African-Americans and Latinos rests in part on the role that Latino leadership and political organizations play, in this case by promoting strong pan-ethnic identities (Kaufmann 2003).

In a more recent discussion of the coalition prospects between African Americans and Latinos, Vaca (2004) argues few formal or even informal coalitions exist between Latinos and African Americans because these two disenfranchised groups should not be presumed political allies. Using case studies from New York, Los Angeles, Miami, Washington, D.C., Compton, and Houston, Vaca describes how language barriers, competition over affirmative action, and the overlooked contributions of Latinos during the American Civil Rights movement have prevented the formation of coalitions. African Americans, Vaca defends, view Latinos and their growing numbers as a threat to their social, economic, and political benefits. Further, Latinos do not view African Americans as an oppressed group in the same way other Americans may view them and their experiences. Such contrasting perceptions of each other inevitably lead to strained relations.

Other work offers a similar perspective. Despite similar histories of inequality, African Americans and Latinos have forged only tenuous partnerships. Hochschild and Rogers (2000: 6-7) argue that the more a multiracial coalition focuses on issues of racial and ethnic equality, the less stable it will be and the more likely it will be to fragment into competitive factions. Further, the benefits of biracial coalitions are sometimes unattainable as a consequence of past political disagreement, individual attitudes about

the other group, and fear the other minority group might gain the upper political hand (Tedin and Murray 1994).

Guinier and Torres (1999), however, disagree and reason the most effective way to involve minorities in racially inclusive coalitions is to organize them around political issues that are explicitly race-specific. Racial minorities are less likely to respond to calls for coalition building, Guinier and Torres maintain, if their leaders do not speak first to them about matters that relate to their racial experiences. Only then would it be possible to get racial minorities to expand their concerns and embrace issues that interest all groups (Guinier and Torres 1999).

Cooperation and biracial coalitions are most likely to emerge when the two groups face equal circumstances in terms of status and class. This strategy is less likely to be successful if the relative positions of the two groups are different (Giles and Evans 1985). If the two groups are unbalanced in size or relative political power, the racial or ethnic group with the most representation in city and county government may fare better than the other racial or ethnic groups, in terms of public service jobs and other government benefits. Thus, the better-positioned group might reasonably be less than eager about forming a coalition (Deutsch 1985; see also Browning, Marshall, and Tabb 1984; Sonenshein 1986; Warren, Stack, and Corbett 1986; Butler and Murray 1991; Meier and Stewart 1991). Such an environment will produce far more competition than cooperation.

Evidence of competition, not surprisingly, is significant. For instance, Latinos have been found to make less progress in terms of socio-economic well-being and political power in cities with black majorities or pluralities (McClain and Karnig 1990).

Further, African-American and Latino municipal employment outcomes co-vary negatively with Anglo municipal employment, suggesting even more competition for these jobs (McClain 1993).

Competition extends to other segments of the environment as well, including political representation and the drawing of electoral districts. For example, while election results from 118 large, multiracial school districts indicate that as the black population increases, political representation of Latinos increases, the reverse is not true. When the population of Latinos grows, blacks do not gain, but in fact lose political representation (Meier and Stewart 1991). With respect to the drawing of district lines, the lack of cooperation might intensify because of redistricting, particularly in states such as New York and Texas where black and Latino leaders have debated the vote-dilution of Latinos and the drawing of new majority-black districts (Tate 1993).

### **Exploratory Data Analysis**

What do Latinos think of African-Americans? Do they perceive themselves as having more in common with African-Americans or with whites? To what degree do these two groups share positions on issues of importance? To answer these questions, we turn our attention to the analysis of opinion data that may provide some insight into these issues.

In the summer of 1999, the Washington Post, in cooperation with the Kaiser Foundation and the Kennedy School of Government conducted a national survey of Latinos. In addition to more than 2400 Latino respondents, the survey also included companion samples of approximately 1800 non-Hispanic whites and 285 African-

Americans. The presence of companion samples allows us to make comparisons across groups on attitudes about commonality with others.

### *Cross-Minority Sense of Commonality*

All respondents were asked a battery of questions regarding their perception of commonality with other groups. Specifically, respondents were twice asked “How much do <<respondent’s group>> have in common with <<one of the other two groups>>?” Respondents could offer a response from “a lot in common” to “nothing at all in common.” Each of these variables ranges, then, from zero (0) to three (3) with the higher values serving as an indication of a perception of greater commonality. Group means for perceptions of other groups, as well as between groups ANOVA and t-tests, are reported in Table 1.

Table 1 about here

Neither non-Hispanic whites nor Latinos distinguish between other groups in their self-reported perceptions of commonality. The Latino average toward both African-Americans and Whites hovers just above one (“only a little in common”) and the between variable difference of means is insignificant in both instances. For non-Hispanic whites, their perceptions of both African-Americans and Latinos are both slightly above two (“a fair amount in common”), again with between variable differences highly insignificant. By contrast, African-Americans make clear and significant distinctions between whites and Latinos. The average self-reported commonality towards whites was approximately 1.7, while the average towards Latinos was 2.1. That is, African-American respondents

were significantly more likely to perceive commonality with Latinos than with non-Hispanic whites.

Looking at Table 1 for cross-group comparisons is also informative. While African-Americans and whites hold similar attitudes about Latinos, each group holds a higher view of commonality with the other than views held by Latino respondents, who are significantly less likely to see commonality with each of the other groups.

The results from Table 1 have important potential implications for the likelihood of black-brown coalitions. Latinos systematically see in their circumstances less in common with *both* African-Americans and whites than those groups see in Latinos. They are the reluctant parties in these potential coalitions. Importantly, there appears to be no difference in Latino perceptions of commonality with the two other groups. That is, Latinos as a group appear indifferent between their potential suitors, a result that should suggest considerable caution when evaluating the attitudinal support for black-brown coalitions among Latinos.

Curiously, non-Hispanic white assessments appear to be similarly not differentiated by group. It is occasionally suggested (Meier and Stewart 1991) that whites would generally prefer to coalesce with Latinos but, at least in terms of self-reported perceptions of shared circumstances, that does not appear to be the case. Whites claim to perceive very similar levels of commonality with African-Americans and Latinos.

Finally, there does appear to be some distinction drawn among African-Americans on average. Black respondents report a higher sense of commonality with Latinos than with non-Hispanic whites, though the difference was modest (albeit

significant). That is, while African-American responses, on average, appear to be more akin to white attitudes than Latinos, these respondents do draw distinctions between their perceptions of Latinos and whites. This is suggestive of, at least, some modest support among black Americans for black-brown coalition building.

### *Race/Ethnicity and Shared Issue Positions*

The perception of how much one group has “in common” with another is an important element in the building of political coalitions. But it is not necessarily the case that this perception translates into a shared political orientation. In Table 1, we saw that Latinos perceived whites and blacks more or less the same in terms of how much they have in common, but this perception may not reflect the underlying political reality, with respect to shared positions on important political issues. In principal, we would expect that the likelihood of black-brown coalitions would be higher should African-Americans and Latinos share numerous issue preferences—or at least more numerous than either share with non-Hispanic whites.

We examined this question by looking at a variety of issue preferences about which respondents were queried in the 1999 survey. Specifically, we looked at eleven different issues, including eight issues of national concern and three specifically of interest to various Latino populations. The mean opinion on these issues by group is reported in Table 2, along with between-groups ANOVA results.<sup>2</sup>

Table 2 about here

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<sup>2</sup> A highly technical question on HMO's was not included.

Focusing first on the eight issues of national concern, differences between average opinion among Latinos and non-Hispanic whites are significant in seven of eight instances. Similarly, Black/White differences were significant on seven of eight issues.

By contrast, differences between African-American and Latino mean opinion were significant only three times and marginally so a fourth. In one instance—*Abortion*—Latinos hold the most conservative opinion of the three groups and African-Americans the most liberal. In the cases of *Assisted Suicide* and *Gun Control*, Latinos hold opinions between those of non-Hispanic whites and African-Americans, closer to whites on *Gun Control* and closer to African-Americans on *Assisted Suicide*. And on *School Vouchers*, both Latinos and African-Americans appear to be more supportive than whites, though the difference between the two groups is also significant. On the remaining four issues—*Military Spending*, *Affirmative Action*, *Death Penalty* and *Government Health Plan*—Latino mean opinion is statistically indistinguishable from African-American mean opinion.

What can we conclude from the distribution of group opinion on each of these eight national issues? It is relatively clear that both Latinos and African-Americans, choosing strictly on the basis of issue positions, would be better suited to black-brown coalitions than the alternative. On six of eight issue positions, Latino and African-American opinion was closer than either group was to non-Hispanic whites. This similarity of issue preference should enhance prospects for inter-ethnic coalition politics. Again, we need to caution that the degree to which a respondent holds these “common” opinions will vary greatly, as will the relative salience attached to each issue. Nevertheless, the similarity of mean responses suggests coalitional possibilities.

*National Origin Groups—Does Within-Latino Variation Shape Coalitional Opportunities?*

The last three issues reported in Table 2 are different than the others on two dimensions. First, these are issues in which the Latino population is likely to have much more interest. Second, and importantly, there may be considerable variation in this opinion across the national origin groups among Latinos.

Results in Table 2 include only those Latinos NOT from the sub-group most directly affected by the policy at hand. That is, Mexican-Americans are not included in our mean opinion regarding NAFTA, Puerto Ricans are not included in Latino opinion about the island's future status, and Cuban-Americans are part of the mean Latino response to re-establishing diplomatic relations with the island. As you can see, Latinos excluding the most affected groups are closer to African-Americans than whites on both NAFTA and Cuba. Non-Mexican Latinos appear significantly more supportive of NAFTA, and non-Cuban Latinos marginally more supportive of relations with Cuba, than blacks, though in both instances their opinion is closer to African-Americans than whites. The status of Puerto Rico, however, appears to be different. In that instance, non-Puerto Rican Latinos hold opinions very different from blacks, while insignificantly different from whites.

If, however, we look again at the national origin groups most affected, a somewhat different picture emerges. The mean response on the NAFTA question was .483 among Mexican-Americans, that is, Mexican-Americans are less supportive of

NAFTA than other Latinos.<sup>3</sup> This mean is insignificantly different from African-American opinion. Similarly, and as expected, Cubans are far less supportive of re-establishing ties with the island-nation, with a mean response of .487, a number significantly lower than both white and black support, and now closer to the opinion of whites than blacks. By contrast, Puerto Rican support for statehood is much higher than among other Latinos,<sup>4</sup> with a mean score of .276, a value significantly higher than whites and, here, much closer to black opinion on the issue.

Disaggregation of Latino opinion into nationality groups is important for two reasons. First, ethnicity and black-brown relations are largely “lived” on a local level, and local Latino communities are often dominated by a single nationality group, e.g. Mexican-Americans in Southern California and South Texas, Cubans in Miami, Salvadorans in DC, and Puerto Ricans and Dominicans in New York. In such instances, coalition with African-Americans will not depend on the similarity of black opinion to *all* of Latino opinion but, rather, to the sentiments of those *Latinos most proximate*. Second, on these nationality specific issues, a change of focus from all Latinos to just the relevant nationality group actually changes our conclusions about the impact of the issue in fostering cooperation or stirring conflict. Looking at just the relevant groups, black and Latino opinion are closer on NAFTA and Puerto Rican status, increasing the possibility of cooperation in those instances, and further apart on Cuba, where we would anticipate more conflict than cooperation on this issue, an expectation consistent with the recent history of metropolitan Miami where black-brown relations are best described as tense.

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<sup>3</sup> This is an interesting finding in itself, and worthy of further inquiry.

<sup>4</sup> Another interesting finding and contrary to the prevailing wisdom in certain sectors of the academy.

## Summary and Conclusion

So, what can we say about the prospects for Latino and African-American political cooperation? We have suggested that answering this question requires us to look at both attitudes and actions, of elites and members of the mass public, over both socio-economic issues and expressly political concerns. While most research will, of necessity, focus on a specific aspect of this relationship, we have cautioned the reader not to draw grand conclusions about the future of black-brown relations without surveying the effects across each of these dimensions.

We may find different answers in different places. In fact, we would expect as much, an expectation supported by the very conflicted and inconsistent findings within the existing work. There is only mixed evidence of successful coalition building, and when they emerge, they do so because the perceived interests of each group are facilitated in the arrangement, not merely on principle alone. The substantial evidence of competition at all levels and across social, economic, and political facets of American life, are clearly suggestive that interests of the two groups are not always consonant, and with predictable effects.

Our own exploratory analysis was most revealing as well. Latinos show little collective perception that they have much in common with any other group in the society. By contrast, African-Americans clearly see Latinos' experiences as closer to their own. What this suggests about the likelihood of coalition is not entirely clear, though clearly *not* encouraging.

Despite their reluctance to identify with other groups, Latinos do share considerable policy agreement with African-Americans, a more positive sign and one

clearly at the center of the partisan cooperation that already exists. We did, however, raise the importance of sub-group differences as a crucial contextual element, since black-brown relations will evolve across a variety of local environments.

One could argue that the future of African-American and Latino political fates are inexorably tied, one to the other. The struggle for racial and ethnic equality is changing as a consequence of the country's changing demography. How exactly this will evolve is a large and fertile field of inquiry, which deserves considerable attention.

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**Table 1: Mean Perceptions of Commonality\* Between Groups by Race/Ethnicity**

	<i>Target Group</i>			
<b>Respondent Ethnicity</b>	<i>Latino</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>White</i>	<b>Between Target Difference of Means</b>
<i>Latino</i>		1.186 (0.988) n = 1943	1.205 (0.975) n = 1943	t = -0.796 t-prob. = 0.426
<i>Black</i>	2.108 (0.864) n = 269		1.714 (0.844) n = 269	t = -6.715 t-prob. = 0.000
<i>White</i>	2.096 (0.752) n = 1690	2.094 (0.756) n = 1690		t = 0.12 t-prob. = 0.905
<b>Between Group ANOVAs F-test</b>	F = 0.03 F-Sign. = 0.860	F = 963.39 F-Sign. = 0.000	F = 70.68 F-Sign. = 0.000	

Source: Washington Post/Kaiser/Kennedy School 1999 National Survey of Latino Attitudes

Rodrigues and Segura, 2004.

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\* Variable ranges from zero (0) to three (3), with three indicating “a lot in common.”

**Table 2: Mean Issue Preferences by Race/Ethnicity and Interethnic Differences**

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Group Means (Std.Deviations)</i>			<i>Between Group Analyses of Variance</i>		
	<i>Latino</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>Latino-Black Difference</i>	<i>Latino-White Difference</i>	<i>Black-White Difference</i>
<b>Military Spending</b> (-1 = decrease) (1 = increase)	0.016 (0.681) n = 2312	0.083 (0.735) n = 277	0.265 (0.669) n = 1753	F = 2.24 F prob.= 0.135	F = 136.08 F prob.= 0.000	F = 15.14 F prob.= 0.000
<b>Affirmative Action</b> (1 = support) (0 = oppose)	0.220 (0.414) n = 2361	0.260 (0.439) n = 277	0.182 (0.386) n = 1755	F = 2.67 F prob.= 0.102	F = 7.88 F prob.= 0.005	F = 10.00 F prob.= 0.002
<b>Abortion</b> (1 = pro-choice) (0 = anti-choice)	0.481 (0.500) n = 2354	0.604 (0.490) n = 273	0.594 (0.491) n = 1747	F = 13.33 F prob.= 0.000	F = 46.53 F prob.= 0.000	F = 0.05 F prob.= 0.818
<b>Assisted Suicide</b> (1 = support) (0 = oppose)	0.440 (0.497) n = 2319	0.392 (0.489) n = 268	0.633 (0.482) n = 1699	F = 3.44 F prob.= 0.064	F = 137.38 F prob.= 0.000	F = 60.22 F prob.= 0.000
<b>Death Penalty</b> (1 = support) (0 = oppose)	0.580 (0.494) n = 2277	0.537 (0.500) n = 270	0.779 (0.415) n = 1714	F = 2.27 F prob.= 0.132	F = 175.95 F prob.= 0.000	F = 71.11 F prob.= 0.000
<b>School Vouchers</b> (1 = support) (0 = oppose)	0.693 (0.462) n = 1558	0.526 (0.500) n = 196	0.448 (0.497) n = 1381	F = 19.25 F prob.= 0.000	F = 176.17 F prob.= 0.000	F = 4.08 F prob.= 0.044
<b>Government Health</b> (1 = support) (0 = oppose)	0.853 (0.355) n = 2340	0.877 (0.329) n = 276	0.642 (0.480) n = 1685	F = 1.73 F prob.= 0.189	F = 246.89 F prob.= 0.000	F = 59.71 F prob.= 0.000
<b>Gun Control</b> (-1 = weaker) (1 = stronger)	0.653 (0.629) n = 2345	0.77 (0.506) n = 282	0.642 (0.553) n = 1777	F = 9.42 F prob.= 0.002	F = 0.20 F prob.= 0.653	F = 13.77 F prob.= 0.000
<b>NAFTA</b> (-1 = bad) (1 = good)	0.517 (0.840) n = 735	0.322 (0.934) n = 87	0.212 (0.963) n = 945	F = 4.10 F prob.= 0.043	F = 46.43 F prob.= 0.000	F = 1.05 F prob.= 0.306
<b>Puerto Rican Statehood</b> (-1 = independent) (1 = state of the U.S.)	0.112 (0.869) n = 1727	0.300 (0.828) n = 233	0.189 (0.814) n = 1380	F = 9.73 F prob.= 0.002	F = 6.34 F prob.= 0.002	F = 3.71 F prob.= 0.054
<b>Relations w/ Cuba</b> (1 = support) (0 = oppose)	0.675 (0.469) n = 1842	0.623 (0.486) n = 244	0.604 (0.489) n = 1605	F = 2.62 F prob.= 0.106	F = 18.94 F prob.= 0.000	F = .33 F prob.= 0.562

Source: Washington Post/Kaiser/Kennedy School 1999 National Survey of Latino Attitudes

[For Military Spending, Gun Control, and Puerto Rican Statehood respondents preferring no change are coded zero (0).]

Rodriguez and Segura, 2004.

Figure 1:  
A Conceptual Framework for Understanding the Dimensions of Black-Brown Relations

