

## Look Back in Anger?

### Voter Opinions of Mexican Immigrants in the Aftermath of the 2006 Immigration Demonstrations

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In the spring of 2006, an unprecedented mobilization of undocumented immigrants and their advocates sent shockwaves across the U.S. political landscape. Whether the demonstrations did more to advance the interests of undocumented residents and other immigrants or to harden nativist sentiments remains an open question. Examining data culled from a three-county exit poll of more than 4,300 voters in three urbanized western counties, we employ multivariate analysis to examine how the immigration rallies impacted voters' perceptions of Mexican immigrants. Our results indicate that the demonstrators failed to win the hearts and minds of American voters, most of whom reported that the rallies tended to negatively impact their perceptions of Mexican immigrants. The depth of this negative reaction varied across the sociopolitical contexts represented by the three counties as well as voters' individual attributes including party identification, ethnicity, nativity, and other characteristics.

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In the spring of 2006, an unprecedented mobilization of undocumented immigrants and their advocates sent shockwaves across the U.S. political landscape. Months before congressional elections, throngs of mostly peaceful demonstrators—construction workers and cooks, gardeners and garment workers, clerks and domestics, grandparents and school children, natives and naturalized—took to the streets in some 50 cities across the nation. Urged on by Spanish-language media, demonstrators rallied against

a bill proposed by House Judiciary Chair, Wisconsin Republican James Sensenbrenner, which would have imposed harsh new penalties for immigration violators and those who aid them. Waving banners proclaiming “We Are American,” marchers called instead for legislation offering millions of undocumented immigrants the opportunity to obtain legal status and citizenship. One of the largest immigrants’ rights events, the “national day of action for immigration justice” on April 10, drew 500,000 in Los Angeles and Dallas; 200,000 in Washington, D.C.; 100,000 in Phoenix; 50,000 in Denver; and tens of thousands in New York and other major cities (McFadden 2006). Chanting, “Today we march, tomorrow we vote,” thousands of mostly Latino protestors also rallied in other cities that have not been traditional immigration gateways—Atlanta, Madison, Boise, Birmingham, and elsewhere.

Emboldened by the demonstrators, several mainstream leaders took visible, pro-immigrant political stands. In Los Angeles, Cardinal Roger Mahony donned a T-shirt emblazoned with “We Are America” in English, Spanish, and Korean. Addressing marchers in Chicago, Illinois Governor Blagojevich said, “You are not criminals. You are workers.” In New York, Senator Hillary Clinton denounced Sensenbrenner’s punitive immigration measure.

Other public figures reacted less favorably to the marchers’ demands. Soon after the rallies, an ordinance introduced in Hazleton, Pennsylvania, sought to penalize landlords who rent to undocumented immigrants and employers who hire them inspired similar measures in cities across the country. “Illegal immigrants are destroying the city,” Hazleton’s mayor charged at the time (Savage and Gaouette 2007). In the midst of an unpopular war, the spring demonstrations catapulted the issue of illegal immigration onto the top of the national political agenda. With the November midterm elections just around the corner, poll-watchers wondered whose message would prevail—the marchers’ insistence that immigrants embody the most hopeful aspects of the American dream, or the nativists’ view that illegal immigrants are criminals, welfare cheats, and the like (see Bean and Stevens 2003). Exit polls of more than 4,300 voters conducted in Orange County, California; Bernalillo County, New Mexico; and King County, Washington during the November 2006 midterm congressional elections provide an interesting data set to examine voters’ reactions to the demonstrations.

Initially, immigrant rights activists hailed the dawn of a new civil rights movement. Buoyed by the largest collective action by immigrants in recent memory, one protestor proclaimed, “This is a movement! . . . We’re sending a strong message that we are people of dignity. All that we want is to have a shot at the American Dream.” One euphoric organizer in Washington, D.C., enthused, “Immigrants are coming together in a way that we have never seen

before, and it's going to keep going" (Swarns 2006). Professor Armando Navarro, who helped organize marches in California, declared, "The idea we were a sleeping giant, sitting under a cactus saying manana, is gone" (Archibold 2006a). Roaring from a podium outside of Los Angeles City Hall, nationally syndicated Los Angeles radio personality Eddie "El Piolin" Sotelo proclaimed the "start of a new era" (Hernandez 2007).

The demonstrators' jubilation was all the more heartfelt coming amidst a growing tide of anti-immigration measures introduced at the state and local levels, and polls indicating wide margins perceived illegal immigrants as a burden (Connelly 2006). In California, a provision to allow undocumented residents to obtain driver's licenses helped Republican Arnold defeat Democrat Gray Davis in a 2003 gubernatorial recall election. As undocumented immigrants leapfrogged traditional ports of entry such as California and Texas for places like Georgia, Nevada, and North Carolina, illegal immigration became a tangible issue in locales where it had previously seemed an abstraction. Residents in those jurisdictions were confronting for the first time the often disquieting impacts of illegal immigration on everything from public services to the character of established neighborhoods—and raising concerns that have long plagued border state policy makers (Hoefler, Rytina, and Campbell 2006; Mahtesian 2006). Anti-immigrant activists used populist rhetoric to mobilize support. "The issue is about elites, major financial interests and global economic forces arrayed against the average American voter," charged Dan Stein, president of the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR). "The depth of anger should not be underestimated" (Katel 2005, 396). Under pressure from anti-immigration activists, several non-border state legislatures, including Utah, Tennessee, and New York legislatures, weighed measures to bar illegal immigrants from obtaining driver's licenses (Templin 2005). Goaded by FAIR and similarly inclined organizations, policy makers in Arizona, Colorado, Georgia, North Carolina, Vermont, and elsewhere considered measures to deny undocumented immigrants eligibility for in-state college tuition and bar them from applying for various other public benefits.<sup>1</sup>

These and other punitive state and local measures indicate anti-immigrant sentiment had fomented for some time when the demonstrators took to the streets, but illegal immigration reached the national political agenda as early as 2004 when a handful of Republican members of Congress faced primary election challengers whose sole focus was illegal immigration. No member of Congress lost a seat over the issue, but a Grand Old Party (GOP) split over driver's licenses for illegal immigrants threatened to derail intelligence reform legislation during a lame-duck conference session in the final days of the 108th Congress (Everett 2005; Intelligence System Overhaul 2006; Kady

2004). Anti-immigrant hardliners opened a significant rift in the Republican Party, holding up a national security measure, openly defying President Bush's more moderate stance on immigration, undermining inroads the GOP had enjoyed among Latino voters, and disregarding the party's traditional business constituency. In April, Sensenbrenner and other Republican hardliners dug in again, this time by attaching his anti-immigrant legislation to a "must-pass" supplemental spending bill (Katel 2005, 410). Colorado Representative Tom Tancredo, then chair of the House Immigration Reform Caucus, was among those "immigration hawks" that broke ranks with Republican Party leadership. "The reason we do not have secure borders is because of an insatiable demand for cheap labor," he argued. "The Democratic Party sees massive immigration—legal and illegal—as a massive source of voters. The Republican Party looks at the issue and says, 'Wow, that's a lot of cheap labor coming across the border'" (Katel 2005, 395).

Succinct though simplistic, Tancredo's characterization nevertheless highlighted the divergent political implications the issue of illegal immigration posed for the two major parties. Democratic leaders and pro-immigrant community organizers managed to effectively silence or moderate those elements of the Democratic Party's liberal coalition that have voiced concerns over illegal immigration, in particular that low-skilled undocumented immigrants depress wages for organized labor, low-skilled African-Americans, and more recently arrived legal immigrants (see Borjas 2000). For example, an effort to mobilize African-American support for a vigilante border patrol never gained momentum (Martinez 2006). The Republican Party, however, was unable to heal the fissure that had opened in its own ranks between, on one hand, populists, nativists, and social conservatives who view illegal immigration as a breakdown of law and order and, on the other hand, traditional business interests. With Sensenbrenner and fellow immigration hardliners digging in their heels, not even President Bush or House Majority Leader Bill Frist were able to put Humpty Dumpty together again (Katel 2005, 410).

Organizers used the punitive measure to mobilize thousands to march for immigrants' rights. The demonstrators, in turn, brought the Republican rift beyond the beltway. Groups calling for more restrictive immigration policies blasted the spectacle of protestors demanding reform of the very laws they had violated. The political landscape became all the more incendiary as spring turned to summer, and congressional hardliners staged field hearings portraying illegal immigration and the nation's porous southern border as national security risks (Bumiller 2006; Weisman 2006; Will 2006).

Illegal immigration quickly emerged as “the foremost political piñata in the election year of 2006” (Rich 2006). An early test of the immigration issue came in a highly contested June special election to replace San Diego’s disgraced Republican Representative Randy “Duke” Cunningham. In a tight race many political odds-makers regarded as a bellwether for the midterm elections, victory went to the Republican candidate who called for the end of automatic citizenship for children of illegal immigrants after the Democratic candidate stumbled when she made a comment that seemed to suggest she was encouraging illegal immigrants to vote (Mahtesian 2006). One of the most outrageous spectacles of the campaign season came in North Carolina where an ad for the Republican challenger warned voters that if the Democratic incumbent had his way, “America would be nothing but one big fiesta for illegal aliens and homosexuals” (Rich 2006). Although polls of likely voters indicated that not even Republicans had much stomach for the restrictionist measure advanced by the congressional hardliners (Manhattan Institute 2006), even some Democratic challengers pledged, “No amnesty for illegal immigrants” as Election Day approached (Gaouette 2006).

Did the immigrants’ rights demonstrations serve undocumented residents’ best interests? Did they engender public sympathy and respect or did they fuel nativist sentiments? As with any social movement, assessing the consequences of mobilization is no simple matter. Consequences may, of course, be measured against the claims advanced by activists and participants themselves, such as political and policy objectives, voter turnout, electoral outcomes, and swaying public opinion as a means to advance these goals (Giugni 1998, 380; Tarrow 1996). Even here, the demonstrations’ consequences are not unambiguous. Organizers of the demonstrations may claim vindication for their tactics to the extent that the mobilization in favor of immigrants’ rights against the earlier mobilization against immigrants led to a stalemate, allowing the election to be contested on issues other than illegal immigration.<sup>2</sup> Congressional Republicans who bet that a hard line against immigration violations would suffice to distance themselves from an increasingly unpopular president and the war in Iraq were disappointed. At least 10 members of the House Immigration Reform Caucus lost their seats, approximately 10% of the caucus’ membership (Right Web 2007; Archibold 2006b). Exit polls conducted nationally and in states with large Latino populations indicated that the GOP lost support from Latinos and non-Latinos in House, Senate, and gubernatorial races (Gaouette 2006; Pew Hispanic Center 2006; Watanabe and Gaouette 2006). When the new Congress convened, the Senate took up a bipartisan proposal that would have granted citizenship to most of the nation’s estimated

12 million undocumented immigrants and boosted the number of visas for high- and low-skilled workers, an outcome that seemed unthinkable months earlier.

Nevertheless, the Senate's sweeping immigration reform bill died when opponents successfully portrayed it as an amnesty for lawbreakers. Like the characters in Osborne's (1956) play, *Look Back in Anger*—some "hurt because everything's changed," and others "hurt because everything's stayed the same"—Americans remain highly polarized over the issue of illegal immigration. As of this writing, the federal government has abandoned its effort to enact a comprehensive overhaul of U.S. immigration laws, the Department of Homeland Security has announced tough sanctions for employers who hire illegal immigrants, immigration officials have stepped up raids of worksites, construction has begun on a new security fence along the U.S.–Mexican border, and a surge in state and local measures hostile to immigrants promises to impose new miseries on undocumented residents (see Preston 2007a; Preston 2007b; Preston 2007c).

However, the consequences of the spring rallies go beyond those directly related to activists' stated objectives. As Giugni (1998, 386) observes, "the effects of social movements are often indirect, unintentional, and sometimes even in contradiction to their goals (see also Tarrow 1996). Social movements may inspire counter-movements, mobilizing other interests to resist or reverse social change (Lo 1982; Mottle 1980). The demonstrations may have improved attitudes toward immigrants and softened ethnic boundaries, but they may have also provoked more negative sentiments, or they may have stimulated some combination of conflicting reactions (see Nagel 1994). It is also possible that consequences are unfolding differently in different urban settings levels, depending in part on the types of inter-ethnic contact in the area (Nagel and Olzak 1982, 131). In the long term, the dynamics set in motion by undocumented residents' allies and adversaries may have had a substantial effect on the way immigrants view themselves and the way America views immigrants. To paraphrase Meyer (2004, 141), the responses both sides provoked or inspired surely altered the grounds on which they can mobilize in the future.

A snapshot of voter opinion in the 2006 elections suggests the contours of the terrain that lies ahead. Drawing on exit polls conducted in three disparate urbanized western counties, we analyze voter evaluations of the impact the demonstrations had on their perceptions of Mexican immigrants, who constitute the nation's largest group of undocumented residents. Variation in the social and political landscape of the three counties enables us to examine how environmental context, in combination with voters' own personal traits, filtered through the prism which they viewed the immigrant rights demonstrations.

Orange County, birthplace of the John Birch Society and the place where Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan cut their teeth as novice politicians, has been transformed by a vast wave of Mexican immigration. This transformation has not come easily, and Orange County's political debate about illegal immigration has been one of the most acrimonious in the nation. It is here where James Gilchrist launched the vigilante Minutemen Project to patrol the U.S.–Mexico border and where a local police department became the first in the nation to train its police officers in immigration enforcement. In a context where anti-immigrant sentiments have figured prominently, we anticipate that the immigrant-rights demonstrations did little to engender voter sympathy or to inspire warm opinions of Latino immigrants.

By contrast, tolerance toward illegal immigrants has been the watchword of the debate in King County. The Seattle area, where many residents wore their support of earlier World Trade Organization protestors as a badge of honor, has had its own struggles to accommodate a sizable population of new immigrants. Most of King County's immigrants, however, are refugees from war-torn Asian countries. Mexicans and Central Americans constitute a miniscule proportion of the area's recent immigrants. In addition, with Microsoft and other high-tech companies dominating the local economy, chief executive officers (CEOs) including Microsoft's Bill Gates became outspoken spokespeople for loosening U.S. visa restrictions. In the relatively liberal King County, where recent Mexican and Central American arrivals are scarcely visible, we anticipate voters recall the immigrant rights rallies as reinforcing their tolerant attitudes toward Mexican immigrants.

Bernalillo County represents a more nuanced, intermediate context between the political and demographic extremes of King County and Orange County. Like other Sunbelt economies, rapid population growth and a boom in housing construction has fueled a demand for unskilled immigrant labor. However, though the Albuquerque area has a much larger proportion of Latinos than either Orange County or King County, the vast majority of Bernalillo County's Latinos are native-born citizens. In this demographic context, we have no prior expectations as to whether recollections of the demonstrations would tend to evoke ethnic solidarity and voter sympathy or social distancing and negative appraisals on the part of native-born and assimilated Latino immigrants.

## **Expected Relationships**

Because of the partisan tone of the national political debate over illegal immigration and the fact that congressional Republicans led the charge for

**Table 1**  
**Demographic Profiles of Exit Polling Locations**

	Orange County, CA	Bernalillo County, NM	King County, WA
Party Identification			
(% Democrat in 2004 Election)	40	60	65
% Recent Mexican Immigrants (1990 or later)	7.2	3.6	1.6
% Latino	32.7	44.3	6.8
% Foreign Born	30.4	10.6	18.8

Source: County party identification statistics were taken from each county's clerk office. All other county demographic data comes from the United States Census 2005 American Community Survey. Note: All variables are weighted to reflect population size of each location. All numbers are percentages and are in column percents. Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

more restrictive immigration policies, we anticipate finding voters in Republican-leaning jurisdictions to be more likely to report more negative attitudes toward immigrants following the rallies. Specifically, we anticipate voters in Orange County, where the Democratic vote share in 2000 was only 40%, to have responded more negatively to the immigration rallies, compared to the more Democratic Bernalillo and King Counties, where the Democratic vote share in 2000 was 60% and 65%, respectively (see table 1).

Other elements of the local political context are likely to have influenced voters' perceptions of the rallies. Some of the most draconian policy responses to illegal immigration emerged from states and localities that have experienced high levels of immigration from Mexico and Central America (Morse et al. 2006). We expect voters in jurisdictions marked by high levels of recent Mexican immigration to react more negatively when recalling the rallies; including images of marchers unfurling Mexican flags on U.S. soil. We anticipate finding voters in King County to be less likely to report negative reactions to immigrants following the spring rallies compared with their counterparts in Bernalillo and King Counties. In King County, post-1990 Mexican immigrants constitute a minute 1.6% of the population. Recent Mexican immigrants have a more visible presence in Bernalillo County, where they comprise 3.6% of the population and in Orange County, where they comprise 7.2% of the population.

We also expect voters' individual level characteristics to influence their evaluations of the spring demonstrations. Party identification remains one of the strongest predictors of Americans' political opinions (Erikson and Tedin 2005). It is likely that Democrats and Republicans viewed the immigration



rallies through different lenses, particularly because congressional Republican leaders made a tough stance against illegal immigration a centerpiece of their electoral strategy. We expect Republican voters to report more negative responses to immigrants in the aftermath of the rallies than their Democratic counterparts. The partisan mix in each of the three exit polls enables us to test this possibility (see table 1).

In addition to party identification, we expect voters' ethnic identities to color their opinions regarding immigrants. Latinos in particular have been found to possess greater tolerance toward recent immigrants than members of other racial or ethnic groups (De la Garza et al. 1991). During the 1980s, another period when the issue of illegal immigration catapulted onto the national political agenda, Latinos were more likely to support amnesty for illegal immigrants (Cain and Kiewiet 1987). More recently, Mexican-Americans have been more supportive than other groups of public policies facilitating the social and political integration of Mexican immigrants, including bilingual education, access to public services, and opportunities for citizenship (De la Garza 1998). Similarly, a sense of ethnic attachment or group consciousness among Latinos has been linked to greater levels of support for increased immigration (Sanchez 2006). Although a diverse assortment of ethnic and racial groups participated in the spring rallies, media coverage of the events featured Latino demonstrators most prominently. Indeed, 2006 national exit polls suggest that xenophobic campaign rhetoric undermined gains the GOP had enjoyed among Latino voters (Pew Hispanic Center 2006). All of this leads us to expect White voters to report more negative responses to immigrants in the aftermath of the rallies than Latino voters.

Like race and ethnicity, nativity constitutes an important aspect of personal identity that we expect to filter voters' perceptions of the spring demonstrations. For Latino voters, the effect of their nativity in mediating their perceptions of the rallies is likely to be particularly complex. At least one study found Latinos born in the United States more likely than foreign-born Latinos to favor restrictive immigration policies (Binder, Polinard, and Wrinkle 1997). In the 2006 election, for example, almost half of Arizona's Latino voters—most of whom are native-born—backed a referendum declaring English the state's official language (Pew Hispanic Center 2006, 3). Therefore, because the strong presence of immigrants during the spring rallies was one of the most noteworthy elements of those events, we anticipate native-born voters to report more negative reactions to immigrants as a result of the demonstrations compared to naturalized voters. Although voter samples include only those foreign-born residents who participate in elections, the proportions of foreign-born respondents from each county are sufficiently large and varied to provide

insights into the voting patterns of this group: 5% in Bernalillo County, 7% in King County, and 21% in Orange County.

## Methodology and Data

This analysis utilizes a unique dataset from the 2006 elections. The exit polls were conducted by teams led by scholars from universities located in the polling areas.<sup>3</sup> Different survey instruments were used in the three jurisdictions, but all three focused extensively on the immigrants' rights rallies. Taken together, we know of no better data set to examine the ramifications of the demonstrations on voter opinion. For example, exit polls in each county asked voters to indicate how closely they followed news stories regarding the immigration rallies; the source of immigration rally information they followed; if they or a family member participated in any rally events; as well as how the rallies impacted their perceptions of Mexican immigrants. In addition, despite the regional proximity of all three locations to each other, the electorates of the three counties differ widely in their demographic and political characteristics, facilitating our examination of how voters' retrospective evaluations of the immigration demonstrations varied according to their local context and their individual characteristics.<sup>4</sup> A total of 4,347 voters participated in the exit polls, including 2,487 in King County, 1,226 in Bernalillo County, and 634 in Orange County. Like many urban areas in the United States, the three jurisdictions where the exit polls were conducted have relatively high levels of residential separation along lines of race and ethnicity. To sample voters who were most representative of the general population of voters in the jurisdiction who shared their race or ethnicity, precincts were selected according to a stratified homogenous sampling method described by Barreto et al. (2006). This approach seeks to sample voters in predominantly racially concentrated neighborhoods and then weight the final results to reflect the racial and ethnic populations in each county.<sup>5</sup>

Pollsters were carefully trained to approach voters exiting polling locations according to a random skip pattern and to solicit their participation in the opinion survey. Those voters who agreed completed a self-administered questionnaire (see Appendix). Survey items were closed-ended to limit the amount of time required for completion. Voters had the opportunity to complete the survey in either English or Spanish, and pollsters remained present at voting precincts throughout the entire day to avoid any biases associated with partial interviewing (see Busch and Lieske 1985).

Although the exit poll questionnaires in the three counties differed slightly, the immigration-related measures most critical to this analysis were created from identically worded questions on all three surveys. This consistency enables us to compare voters' assessments of the immigration rallies across different sociopolitical contexts. The dependent variable in our analysis comes from the following survey question soliciting voters' retrospective evaluation of the demonstrations: *Did the immigration rallies give you a positive or negative view of Mexican immigrants in the United States?* The King County and Orange County surveys use a 5-point scale to measure the respondents' answer; (1) *definitely positive*, (2) *somewhat positive*, (3) *no difference*, (4) *somewhat negative*, and (5) *definitely negative*. The Bernalillo County survey use a 3-point measure: (1) *more positive*, (2) *neither*, (3) *more negative*. The Orange County and King County codes were then converted to a 3-point scale similar to the one featured on the Bernalillo County survey.

The exit poll data employed here also contains several control variables that allow for an overall assessment of how perceptions of the immigration rallies varied across several important individual level factors. These variables include age, gender, income, education, housing tenure, race, generation, political ideology, and a contextual question that asks the respondent how things are generally going in their county. All of these measures are drawn from identically worded questions from the surveys conducted in the three counties. The survey questions used to construct the independent variables, as well as the values of these measures, are included in the appendix.

Our analysis consists of a discussion of bivariate relationships among several independent variables we anticipate shaping voters' evaluations of the demonstrations and voters' perceptions of the broader issue of illegal immigration, including: county of residence, partisanship, ethnicity, and nativity. Following the bivariate analysis, an ordered probit regression is conducted using a more extensive set of independent variables, including a measure drawn from the respondent's assessment of the state of affairs in his or her county. This multivariate regression analysis provides a clearer picture of the relative impact these factors have on perceptions of the rallies and Mexican immigrants, as well as to help determine what difference, if any, the sociopolitical context of each county had on the attitudes of voters. Our dependent variable, voters' evaluation of how the demonstrations affected their views of Mexican immigrants, constitutes a categorical variable taking on values that may not be equidistant (Long and Freese 2005). We therefore employ an ordered probit regression analysis. Coefficients for independent variables in ordered probit regressions elude direct interpretation

beyond sign and significance. Therefore, we conclude the analysis by calculating predicted probabilities for several variables of interest. Predicted probabilities are calculated by allowing each variable of interest to run its full value while holding all other variables at their means. This allows for interpretation of the relative substantive impact of each independent variable has on our dependent variable.

## Results—Bivariate Analysis

Our bivariate results presented in table 2 suggest that the local context does influence how voters in the three counties perceived the rallies, and highlight a general pattern of Orange County voters reporting the most negative reactions to the rallies, King County voters reporting the least negative reactions, and Bernalillo voters falling between these two extremes. Approximately 53% of respondents in Orange County, which has the highest proportion of recent Mexican immigrants of the three counties included in this analysis and where the debate over illegal immigration has been particularly rancorous, reported that the rallies had given them more negative impressions of Mexican immigrants. In King County, where recent Mexican immigrants compose a minuscule proportion of the population and where a few thousand people participated in a Seattle immigration rally, most voters—46%—reported that the rallies had made no impact on their opinions of Mexican immigrants. Bernalillo County stands out as an intermediate case, both in terms of its population of recent immigrants from Mexico and in terms of how voters reacted to the demonstrations. In that county, 33% of voters indicated that the rallies gave them more negative impressions of Mexican immigrants. The apparent impact of local political context motivates further examination of this trend with the inclusion of dummy variables for each county in our multivariate analysis.

Voters' evaluations also varied in the manner we anticipated according to partisan affiliation, ethnicity, and—in the more heavily Latino Orange and Bernalillo Counties—nativity. Table 3 summarizes these voter-level differences. The results attest to the endurance of party identification as a powerful predictor of voter opinion. As anticipated, Republican voters in all three counties reported more negative reactions to the rallies than did Democratic voters.<sup>6</sup> In Orange County, 72% of Republican voters reported more negative views of Mexican immigrants following the demonstrations, compared to 41% of Democrats who reported a negative reaction. A significant partisan divide also emerged in Bernalillo County, where 50% of

**Table 2**  
**Impact of Immigration Rallies on Voter Opinion by County**

	Orange County, CA	Bernalillo County, NM	King County, WA
Positive	23	18	34
No Difference	24	33	46
Negative	53	36	33

Note: All variables are weighted to reflect population size of each location. All numbers are percentages and are in column percents. Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

**Table 3**  
**Impact of Immigration Rallies on Voter Opinion by County  
 and Voter Characteristics**

	Orange County, CA		Bernalillo County, NM		King County, WA	
<b>Partisanship</b>	Democrat	GOP	Democrat	GOP	Democrat	GOP
Positive	34	9	25	6	51	12
No difference	25	19	51	44	34	27
Negative	41	72	25	50	16	61
<b>Ethnicity</b>	Latino	White	Latino	White	Latino	White
Positive	43	7	24	17	60	40
No difference	21	23	44	49	26	35
Negative	37	71	32	33	13	25
<b>Nativity</b>	Immigrant	Native	Immigrant	Native	Immigrant	Native
Positive	37	17	33	20	41	41
No difference	24	24	39	48	34	34
Negative	44	56	29	32	25	25

Note: All variables are weighted to reflect population size of each location. All numbers are percentages and are in column percents. Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

Republicans reported more negative views of Mexican immigrants following the demonstrations, compared to 25% of Democrats. In King County, 61% of Republican voters reported more negative reactions to the rallies compared to only 16% of Democrats. This gap—45% age points—is the widest difference of any factor for any category in our analysis.

Consistent with our expectations, Latino and White voters had markedly different reactions to the immigration demonstrations. In each county included in our analysis, White voters were more likely to report negative reactions to the rallies than were their Latino counterparts. The

ethnic gap was the widest among Orange County voters. An overwhelming 71% of White voters in Orange County reported that their perceptions of Mexican immigrants had deteriorated following the demonstrations, compared to only 37% of Latino voters. In King County, where neutrality was the modal reaction to the demonstrations, 25% of White voters reported negative reactions to the rallies, compared with only 13% of Latino voters. Ethnic differences were less pronounced in Bernalillo County. Although Latino voters were slightly more likely to report positive reactions, White and Latino voters in that county were equally likely to report negative reactions.

Nativity had a smaller influence on voters' perceptions of immigrants following the demonstrations.<sup>7</sup> The largest difference between native-born and foreign-born voters emerged in Orange County, where only 17% of Orange County's native-born residents reported positive reactions to the rallies, compared with 37% of naturalized voters. The pronounced differences along lines of nativity we observe among Orange County's voters reflect the divisiveness of the immigration debate in a place where foreign-born residents compose 30% of the population, and a relatively large portion of these residents are recent immigrants from Mexico. Among Bernalillo County voters who reported negative reactions to the rallies, native and foreign-born voters are separated by a scarcely noticeable 3% gap—32% among native voters and 29% among foreign-born voters. Bernalillo County has a considerably smaller foreign-born population, a factor that may account for the smaller gap between that county's foreign and native-born voters. In King County, native and foreign-born voters are indistinguishable in their reactions to the rallies, with fully 41% reporting favorable reactions—more positive reactions than were tallied in either Orange or Bernalillo County. We attribute these more tolerant attitudes, at least in part, to the relatively small presence of recent Mexican immigrants in King County and to the larger share of Democratic voters in this area.

In sum, the voters' retrospective evaluations of the 2006 rallies reflect differences in local contexts and voters' own demographic characteristics. The general pattern to emerge from this analysis is that to the extent voters reported a shift in their views of Mexican immigrants as a result of the rallies, the impact tended to be negative. As anticipated, the depth of this negative reaction varies according to local partisan vote patterns and levels of recent Mexican immigration as well as voters' party identification, ethnicity, and—to a lesser extent—nativity. These poll results underscore the demonstrators' failure to win the hearts and minds of most voters, including sizable portions of Democrats, Latinos, and naturalized citizens.

## Results—Multivariate Analysis

Although suggestive, the bivariate relationships do not fully express the relative influence respondents' demographic traits, attitudes, and sociopolitical context exercised on their evaluations of the demonstrations. To control for the host of individual factors that may shape these evaluations, we specify a multivariate ordered probit regression model revealing trends across the three counties. With the inclusion of dummy variables for Orange and King counties, moreover, we can also determine if the variation by county observed in the bivariate analysis holds even after controlling for individual level factors.<sup>8</sup>

The full model indicates that locale exercised a statistically significant impact on the voters' response to the immigration demonstrations. As expected, Orange County respondents were more likely than their counterparts to report a negative view of Mexican immigrants following the rallies, and King County respondents were significantly less likely to report a negative view of Mexican immigrants following the rally than the omitted group of Bernalillo County. These results are consistent with our expected relationships as well as with the trends presented in the bivariate analysis. We believe that the sociopolitical context of each county explain this trend. Orange County, where voters were 5% more likely than Bernalillo County voters to respond negatively to the rallies, has the greatest share of Republican voters, the greatest proportion of recent Mexican immigrants among the population, and has experienced a particularly rancorous debate over illegal immigration—making voters in that jurisdiction more likely to have been exposed to anti-immigrant messages. In contrast, King County, where voters were nearly 10% more likely than Bernalillo County voters to respond positively to the rallies, leans strongly Democratic in partisan voting patterns, has a very small proportion of recent Mexican immigrants and a relatively small Latino population, and has a political culture marked by tolerance for immigrants. The varied demographic profiles and political cultures of the three jurisdictions included in this analysis make us reasonably confident that voters in locations that have not experienced high rates of recent Mexican immigration and are more Democratic in party attachments responded more positively to the immigration rallies than those from localities more similar to the sociopolitical context of Orange County.

The full model also indicates that individual-level demographics help explain how voters responded to the immigration rallies. Socioeconomic status and age significantly influenced the respondents' reactions to the demonstrations. Specifically, older respondents, those whose income level

**Table 4**  
**Impact of Explanatory Factors on Reactions to Immigration Rallies**

Explanatory Variable	Coefficient (Standard Error)	Predicted Probabilities for Significant Factors (%)
Age	-0.089** (0.027)	6
Female	0.028 (0.040)	
40k to 80k income	-0.225** (0.056)	5
More than 80k income	-0.092 (0.062)	
Unspecified Income	-0.049 (0.094)	
Education	0.047* (0.021)	5
Tenure	-0.035† (0.018)	
Homeowner	-0.056 (0.051)	
White	-0.292** (0.058)	15
Latino	0.305** (0.068)	8
Orange County	-0.201** (0.063)	5
King County	0.391** (0.066)	9
U.S. born	-0.150* (0.065)	1
Ideology	-0.310** (0.020)	31
Republican	-0.360** (0.055)	6
Independent	-0.214** (0.059)	6
Direction of County	-0.117** (0.025)	4
McKelvey & Zavoina's R2	0.330	
Observations	3,661	

Note: Predicted probabilities the changes in predicted probability when each respective factor is allowed to take on its full range of values while holding all other factors to their means.

† Significant at .10 level. \* Significant at .05 level. \*\* Significant at .01 level.



was between \$40,000 and \$80,000 per year, and those with lower educational attainment levels reacted more negatively to the immigration demonstrations. Interestingly, predicted probabilities indicate that those with incomes in this middle range were approximately 5% more likely to report negative reactions to the rallies than those with lower incomes, whereas upper-income voters did not differ significantly from lower-income voters in their evaluations of the demonstrations. We suspect that middle-income earners, who have experienced considerable income volatility in recent years, may tend to blame illegal immigrants for their economic woes (see Dobbs 2006; *Inequality and the American Dream* 2006, p. 13).

Other demographic traits proved significant in shaping voter reactions as well. Older voters and voters who have lived in their communities for a relatively longer period of time were more likely to report more negative views of Mexican immigrants following the rallies. It is plausible that older and longer-residing voters are more cognizant of how immigration has altered their communities and the nation as a whole and that they are likely to regard the demographic shift as a turn for the worse. With respect to education, our results are consistent with previous literature suggesting that attitudes toward immigration policy and immigrants generally become more positive with increased education (Binder et al. 1997; Hood, Morris, and Shirkey 1997).

Our multivariate results also confirm the role of race and ethnicity established by the bivariate analysis. Consistent with our expectations, White voters responded more negatively to the immigration rallies than other racial/ethnic groups, and Latino voters more positively. The changes in predicted probability suggest that race/ethnicity had a strong substantive effect on reaction to the rallies, with Whites 15% more likely to report a negative impact of the rallies on their views of Mexican immigrants and Latinos 8% more likely to report a positive impact. The immigrant rights' demonstrations included a broad spectrum of racial and ethnic participants, but our results suggest that race and ethnicity exerted a powerful impact on how the rallies were perceived. Nativity also had a statistically significant impact on evaluations of the rallies, with U.S.-born respondents more likely to report a more negative view of Mexican immigrants as a result of the rallies. This result is consistent with the trend established with our bivariate analysis, but the small substantive impact of nativity—a mere 1% change in predicted probability—indicates that nativity was far from the largest contributor to voters' evaluations of the demonstrations.

Partisanship and ideology appear to exert far more influence on voters' reactions to the rallies. Notwithstanding some polls of likely Republican voters conducted prior to the 2006 elections indicating high levels of support for

some sort of legalized status for illegal immigrants, our results indicate that the demonstrations reinforced negative perceptions of Mexican immigrants among conservatives and Republicans (see Manhattan Institute 2006). After controlling for other individual and contextual factors, conservative and Republican voters remain much more likely to report negative reactions to the immigration rallies than more liberal and Democratic voters. Holding all other variables at their mean values, Republicans were 6% more likely to report a negative reaction to the demonstrations, and conservative voters were more than 30% more likely to report a negative reaction to the demonstrations. Independent voters also reacted more negatively to the rallies than did Democrats, indicating that the negative response to the immigration rallies crossed partisan boundaries and that the demonstrations failed to sway independent voters to their cause. Finally, voters who felt that their communities were heading in the wrong direction were approximately 4% more likely to respond negatively to the rallies than voters who perceive a turn for the better in their communities.

### **Which Direction Did They March?**

Although the immigrants' rights demonstrators aroused the sympathies of some, our results suggest that the rallies did not endear immigrants among those who turned out to vote in 2006. Particularly among Whites, conservatives, and Republicans, organizers' efforts to virtually wrap the marchers in the American flag proved insufficient to improve perceptions of Mexican immigrants. Our results also suggest that voters who are older, those who have resided in their communities for a relatively longer period, those who perceive their communities are headed in the wrong direction, and voters with moderate incomes were less inclined to look favorably on the demonstrators' demands. Perhaps these voters fault immigrants for their community's decline and for their own economic woes.

Our analysis also highlights the profound impact of place in mediating opinions and attitudes. The distinctive sociopolitical milieu of the three jurisdictions under examination here resulted in stark differences. We are particularly intrigued by the relatively small opinion gap between Whites and Latinos in Bernalillo County. In the absence of additional analysis, we can only speculate that the convergence stems from greater levels of Latino incorporation in that jurisdiction. New Mexico has the highest level of Latino descriptive representation in state and local government in the nation, including a Latino governor and mayor for Albuquerque, and a

much lower percentage of foreign-born residents than other southwestern states. We suspect these factors help explain the lack of ethnic fragmentation in this area. We look forward to future research that examines these and other local differences in greater detail than present space constraints allow.

More broadly, the still unfolding consequences of the mobilization on all sides of America's immigration debate await future analysis. The most profound impacts of the demonstrations may be those experienced by the participants themselves, the millions of bystanders who watched in solidarity, and the countless children who will grow up hearing tales of the day millions emerged from the shadows to declare their determination to pursue the American dream.

## Appendix

### Presentation of Survey Items and Independent Variable Measures

**Age**—*What is your age group?* The values of the age variable are (0) 18-29, (2) 30-44, (3) 45-65, and (4) over 65.

**Gender**—*What is your gender?* The values of the gender variable are (0) female, (1) male.

**Household Income**—*What was your total combined household income in 2005 before taxes?* The values of the income measure are (0) < 40 thousand (excluded group), (1) 40-80 thousand, (2) > 80 thousand, (3) unspecified income.

**Education**—*What is the highest level of education you completed?* The values of the education variable are (0) <high school, (1) high school graduate, (2) some college/technical school, (3) college graduate, (6) post-graduate training.

**Tenure**—*How long have you lived in the (insert respondent's county of residence)?* The values of the tenure variable are (0) <5 years, (1) 6 to 10 years, (2) 11 to 20 years, (3) 20 to 40 years, (4) > 40 years.

**Homeowner**—*Do you currently own or rent your home?* The values of the homeowner variable are (0) rent (1) own.

**Race/Ethnicity**—*What is your race or ethnicity?* The values of the race variable are (0) White, (1) Latino, (2) Other Race (excluded group).

**County**—There are three county variables used in the analysis: King County, Bernalillo County (excluded group), and Orange County.

**Nativity**—*Where were you born?* The values of nativity are (0) United States, (1) another country.

**Ideology**—*How would you describe your political ideology or beliefs?* The values of the ideology variable are, (0) very conservative, (1) somewhat conservative (2) moderate, (3) somewhat liberal, (4) very liberal.

**Partisanship**—*What is your party registration?* The values of the partisanship variable are, (0) Republican, (1) Independent, (2) Democrat (excluded group).

**Direction of County**—*Do you think things in (insert respondent's county of residence) are generally?* The values of the direction of county variable are (0) seriously off on the wrong track, (1) going in the right direction.

## Notes

1. A few states and localities have considered measures friendly to the interests of undocumented residents—extending state health benefits to illegal immigrants, issuing identity cards giving any resident access to parks and libraries, and declaring themselves “sanctuary cities”—but the vast majority of immigration-related measures considered or adopted at the sub-national level reflected the positions of anti-immigrant groups. (Broder 2007; National Conference of State Legislatures 2007; Savage and Gaouette 2007).

2. We thank an anonymous reviewer of an earlier version of this manuscript for suggesting this point.

3. Scholars from University of Washington, Loyola Marymount University, University of California at Irvine, and the University of New Mexico designed and managed the implementation of the exit polls.

4. This variation in sociopolitical characteristics motivated the selection of these three counties from the western United States where the immigration debate has been particularly salient.

5. The data was weighted to reflect population sizes of each location.

6. A similar pattern emerged when we examined the impact of ideology on voter opinion. Only 18% of respondents who identified themselves as “very liberal” indicated that their views of Mexican immigrants became more negative following the rallies, compared to 72% of those who identified themselves as “very conservative.”

7. It is important to note that exit poll data enable analysis solely of those foreign-born residents who are naturalized voters.

8. We chose to use Bernalillo County as the comparison group as a result of the bivariate analysis indicating that Bernalillo County residents have attitudes between the two extremes of Orange and King Counties.

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