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## Por Una Vida Mejor: Educational Attainment for Latinos in the Nuevo South in the Pursuit of a Better Life

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Por Una Vida Mejor: Educational Attainment for Latinos in the Nuevo South in the Pursuit of a  
Better Life

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Political Science

by

Maria Ana Sandoval  
University of Arkansas  
Bachelor of Arts in Political Science, 2020

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University of Arkansas

This thesis is approved for recommendation of the Graduate Council.

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## **Abstract**

Por una Vida Mejor, a sentiment that is shared amongst the Latino community. How this sentiment fares in the pursuit of higher education has been largely understudied. I analyze how Latino college students navigate the sociopolitical environment in Arkansas in their pursuit of middle-class certification to help their family and fulfill the American dream. In this thesis I offer an analysis to understand Latinos in the Nuevo South. I use data from the 2021 Latino College Students Navigating the Sociopolitical Environment in Arkansas survey through the lens of Funds of Knowledge (Velez-Ibanez and Greenberg 1992). I conduct a quantitative analysis of the different factors that influence the pursuit of higher education for Latinos in the new destination, Nuevo South. I find that linguistic assimilation plays a significant role in Latinos pursuit of higher education to help the family. I also find that experiences with discrimination among Latino students in the Nuevo South influence their assessments of their educational and political leaders.

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## Dedication

I dedicate my master's thesis to...

my parents quienes dejaron todo lo que sabían por la búsqueda de una vida mejor para ellos y para su familia.

To my siblings Angie, Fatima, and Jose, never stop dreaming.

And to Jorge Franco for encouraging me to stand up for everything that I believe in.

*para ustedes y por ustedes!*

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## Introduction

Latino<sup>1</sup>s have made significant advancements in educational attainment. However, they still drastically lag behind other races and ethnicities. Latinos are found to be less likely than others to obtain a four-year college degree (Pew Research Center 2017). In Arkansas, the Latino population has significantly grown, transforming the confederate south into what scholars have named the “Nuevo South” (Guerrero 2017). In this study I seek to investigate Latinos and their pursuit of higher education to obtain middle class certification for themselves and for their families.

I argue that, in comparison to non-Latino students, the college experience for Latinos in the Nuevo South is radically different. For a non-Latino student, it is a rite of passage and for Latinos their college experience is one of the ways to bring economic stability to themselves and their families. Some Latinos, commute to campus, work two jobs, just to keep up with their counterparts. Latinos pressured by their parent’s psycho-historical experiences (Álvarez 1973) attend college with hopes of fulfilling the American dream. The Latino immigrant experience is unique, and by default, children of immigrants also have an even more unique experience, one that manifests in various ways throughout their socialization and coming of political age. Despite the unique experiences children of immigrants have, little is known about how they perceive their relative status, and their perceptions of the American dream. The sacrifices immigrant parents make in pursuit of a better life for their children have characterized and defined the American dream. In the spirit of capitalism, immigrant parents left their homeland for better economic opportunities. The notion that if you work hard enough you will have a good life is a

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout my thesis I use the term “Latino” to refer to the subjects of my study. This thesis recognizes that Latino is a gendered term that does not accurately capture the ethnic or gender identity of all subjects, but it honors those that use the terms Latina and Latinx.

well-known shared belief within the Latino community, but hard work cannot overpower the systemic discrimination and racism that is rooted in the United States. For marginalized communities, hard work can only get you so far.

These “sacrifices”, and hardships Latino immigrant parents face are tainted in the United States by design. Parents sacrifice so much to be in a country that never once has accepted them. This exclusion creates a twisted relationship between the immigrant parent and the American child. The parent has the hope and the work ethic to achieve what people call the American dream. There comes a point in which the child realizes that there is no such thing as this dream and a twisted inversion happens. The child becomes the parent, and the parent becomes the child both navigating a system that excludes them. The dream then transforms. The child dreams of making sure their parents die with dignity in a country that never wanted them. I beg the question; how do we make this dream come true? The quest for stability cannot be ignored as we try to make this dream come true. The sacrifices that immigrant parents make in their choice of migrating to the US are often out of necessity from economic, social, and political hardship. I argue that the quest for stability is essential to understanding the emphasis that the Latino family places on their children’s pursuit of higher education. The Latino family thus plays a fundamental role in children’s perceptions of the American dream and how they may achieve it through pursuing higher education. Although this is the more common pathway of stability, it is important to note that education is not the only pathway for economic stability. I use the Funds of Knowledge (Velez-Ibañez and Greenberg 1992) framework to document the role that the family has on Latino's pursuit of higher education.

This research is guided by the main research question: what role does the Latino family play in the pursuit of higher education? “We came here for you to have a better life” is a saying

that constantly haunts me. Taking into account all of the sacrifices my parents have made for their children to have a better life is fueled by the shared belief that if you work hard enough this will be attainable. Since a young age I was constantly reminded of the sacrifices it took for us to be where we are. The dream of a “better life” for oneself and for one’s family is understudied in the pursuit of higher education amongst Latino college students in Arkansas.

My experience as a Latina college student pursuing higher education in the Nuevo South to help my family influenced my pursuit to understand what motivated other Latino college students in the same sociopolitical environment as me. The south has been analyzed as a racial binary, black and white (Guerrero 2017). Arkansas is a state situated in the Nuevo South. The Nuevo South is a manifestation of a place built on white supremacy, exploitation, and legal status, as citizens refugees and undocumented immigrants define these experiences (Guerrero 2017). This experience in the Nuevo South has been largely unexplored. To analyze the Latino college student experience, I employed the survey Latino College Students Navigating the Sociopolitical Environment in Arkansas. This survey was distributed amongst university institutions in Arkansas to obtain an understanding of Latino college students in Arkansas. To participate respondents had to meet the following criteria 1. Be 18 years or older 2. Identify as Latino or Hispanic 3. Attended high school in Arkansas and 4. Be enrolled in the Spring Semester of 2021. The survey used for this study was administered from March 2021- February 2022.

This thesis offers an analysis of Latino college students in Arkansas by employing a quantitative analysis to examine how Latino college students navigate the sociopolitical environment in the Nuevo South and to understand what education and representation mean to them and their families.

In what follows I situate this study in the larger body of research of social capital, education, middle class certification, political participation, familismo, and Latinos in Arkansas. Following the literature review I outline the Funds of Knowledge Framework and hypotheses relating to Latinos in their pursuit of higher education in the Nuevo South. Following I introduce the data used in this study and present a statistical analysis. I then discuss the boundaries of the pursuit of higher education to help the family and how Latino college students internalize experiences with discrimination. I discuss the relationship between experiences with discrimination and identity and in what ways can this be used as a predictor of support for political figures? In the final section, I conclude with discussion of potential avenues for future research.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Social Capital**

Amongst Latinos education is a pathway that is encouraged in the pursuit of the American dream. Perhaps this push may be due to low levels of formal education or disrupted education to begin working to provide for the family. I theorize that Latinos see higher education as a way to foster social capital and obtain upward upliftment for themselves and for their families. However, I acknowledge that education attainment is not the only way to foster social capital and obtain upward mobility. I argue that for Latinos, the college experience is guided by the sacrifices that their parents made to be able to achieve a better life than the one that they had back home. I argue that the ability for Latino students to achieve upward mobility through higher education can be severely impacted by the lack of social capital. Social capital has been used to understand who fares better than others. Social capital deals with relationships across generations, ensuring success through healthy outcomes, interdependence, and desirable family outcomes (Viramontez et al. 2010).

When analyzing the pursuit of higher education through the lens of social capital it is important to consider that lack of resources and social capital are a barrier Latino students must overcome in their pursuit. There is much emphasis on the relationship between social capital and resources passed among generations, but there is a lack of consideration when it comes to the economic disparities among marginalized communities and how these disparities affect generational wealth. Cultural characteristics of Latinos include a strong sense of family and collective commitment to the group for economic survival (Zambrana 1995) when attempting to foster social capital I argue that the family is a foundation for the development of social capital.

Social capital is a critical element of family systems and their communities in their advancement in American society (Viramotez et al. 2010). There is an effort to enhance the opportunities a person has, more access to resources and information, and social status within the community and society (Viramotez et al. 2010). I question if this effort includes the pursuit of higher education. When analyzing the family and society the literature on social capital does not account for the exclusion Latinos feel in the community in the pursuit of developing social capital for themselves and for their families. Latinos lack the generational capital that many already have. The lack of social capital amongst Latino social networks has been largely under studied. To move toward an understanding of how the lack of social capital impacts Latinos it is important to analyze how they fare in the education system.

### **Education**

When analyzing who fares better than others it is important to consider that many Latinos are the first of their family members navigating the education system due to this, they face many hardships. Bedolla and Fraga found that fewer than 20% of Latinos complete a 4-year degree (Bedolla and Fraga 2012). Latinos also face disproportionate dropout rates (Bedolla and Fraga 2012). These statistics are just minimal determinants of the hardships Latinos face when pursuing higher education. When evaluating the sociopolitical environment Latinos are in and how they fare in these environments, scholars have found that Latinos are experiencing a third-generation decline. The first generation had the full immigrant experience, the second generation grew up hearing their parent's immigration stories, and the third generation was less exposed and was found to be complacent with their conditions (Enchautegui 2014). While third generation decline centers on identity, I argue that perhaps the lack of social capital could also be an indicator of the third-generation decline. Shouldn't the third-generation fare better than the first?

A third-generation decline indicates that conditions are worsening for Latinos. A third generation decline amongst Latinos can be attributed to the lack of educational success that stems from the lack of social capital and inequalities within the institutions. When considering social capital, gender, costs, and financial resources Latino students are less likely than others to enroll in 4-year institutions (Perez and McDonough 2008). Latinos also lack pathways to higher education (Bedolla and Fraga 2012), the hardships Latinos face within educational institutions I argue, are attributed to the lack of social capital. This inability to succeed within the institutions is affected by their lived experiences.

When making the choice of attending college first generation students heavily rely on siblings, peers, relatives, and high school contacts (Perez and McDonough 2008) this finding on first generation college students does not consider the differences between social networks amongst marginalized first-generation students. Along the lines of this thesis, I seek to analyze the role of the family in the pursuit of higher education. Pearson and Rosenbaum in a mixed methods study found that out of 17 respondents 10 were more than likely to agree that family and friends were the main reason for enrolling into an institution (Pearson and Rosenbaum 2006). Ethnic and gender identity are high determinates of educational goals (Paulsen et al. 2001). When looking at Latinas in higher education, they are unrepresented in universities. Latinas also equate their experiences in universities with their connections to the family as a key contributor to their academic success (Fulgini and Pederson 2002).

According to Álvarez, when migrants from Mexico left a lower class in their home country to enter a lower caste status in the United States, they were unaware of the lack of social class mobility that was their destiny in the United States (1973). I argue that this was true in the 1900's but it is even more true today, despite the narratives of the American dream that inform

their decisions to migrate north. For many children of Latino immigrants, education is framed as the key to leaving the caste. Often pressured by the saying “we came here for you to have a better life,” these children of immigrants are highly influenced to pursue higher education in search of that life. By attending college, they can help reduce racial and economic inequalities.

Despite the educational opportunities Latino students have in comparison to the previous generations the third-generation decline is an alarming threat to the well-being of Latinos. How Latinos fare in educational institutions and their relationship to social capital has been a largely understudied field

### **Middle Class Certification**

The perception that the American dream is achievable is oriented by the belief that children of Latinos are faring relatively better than their parent’s generation. However, this comparison does not consider the relative status among Latinos and their peers in which they typically fare worse. Thus, Latinos are faced with what Álvarez describes as the plague of the middle class (1973). What plagues the middle class is having sufficient leisure time and affluence to contemplate one’s origin and potential future, sufficient education, and affluence to make it possible to have a noticeable impact on the course of one’s own life, but not a rich inheritance through which prominence in society is assured (Álvarez 1973). A question that remains unanswered is are Latino students enrolled in higher education institutions threatened by the redundancy at the bottom of the pyramid and the expectation that they can earn enough money to support a US standard of living due to having a college degree?

Latino parents like Álvarez advocate for the fight for professional and middle-class certification not only for themselves but for their children (Álvarez 1973). To my knowledge, these questions remain unanswered for today’s generation. Thus, I argue that there needs to be an



extension of Álvarez's work that focuses on today's generation in order to center the question where 50 years later there enough certified Mexican American and Latino professionals are who can articulate and defend a culture that educational and other institutions that the dominant society will reject. My thesis is motivated by a need to understand how Latino college students navigate the psycho-historical environment of their generation.

### **Political Participation**

Political participation is rooted in American political culture. This culture forces Americans to play a role in the political process (Garcia 2016). This civic duty tends to be actively exercised for the White majority, but for Latinos coming of political age, many are first-time voters in their families. I argue that Latino first-time voters and first-generation students experience civic duty and the US political culture in radically different ways from the majority or mainstream of US society. The fact that many in the Latino community are not eligible voters, approximately 8.3 million Latinos cannot vote (Ramirez 2013). Eligible voters can be defined as United States citizens 18 and older who may or may not be registered to vote (Medina Vidal 2018). The eligibility or non-eligibility for Latinos produces a sentiment that is widely shared among Latinos. "Vote for those that can't." Latino first-time voters are tied to their community and family (Medina Vidal 2018). Many studies focus on the voting behavior of the White majority of the United States.

To analyze college-going Latinos, it is important to also analyze their political beliefs and attitudes. Ethnic identities are complex, and intersections make these identities even more complex. Gender, culture, ethnicity, history, and national origin create different understandings of one's place in a group and one's place in society (Wals 2011). Pew Research Center found that 22% of Generation Z Latinos are more likely to be the children of immigrants (Mitchell

2020). In 2016, first-time voters, whether millennials, aging into the electorate, or older Latinos recently naturalized, entered electoral politics in a climate in which the lives and futures of immigrants are hotly contested (Medina Vidal 2018). Voters are socialized through their social networks (Dostie-Goule 2009), while youth are socialized by political innocence, a term coined by Greenstein (1977). His study concludes that parents, the school system, and educators are the main factors that foster political innocence (Greenstein 1977).

Ethnic identity plays a vital role in the political engagement of Latinos. Findings show that political engagement, information, partisanship, and efficacy are strong predictors of voting behavior rather than income or education (Shapiro et al. 1996). However, for immigrants, their involvement in politics is developed by their ethnic identity. To contextualize the sociopolitical environment that Latinos are in it is important to consider how education can influence and impact political participation.

I question if linked fate can also determine how Latinos fare in sociopolitical environments. Linked fate is the belief that people are more likely to act based on the view that their fates relate to those of their racial or ethnic group (Dawson 1994). Latinos are often seen as a monolithic group, and it is often assumed that Latinos share political views and behaviors (Escaleras, Kim, and Wagner, 2019). Linked fate stems from the behavior of African Americans and their traumatizing history in the United States (Dawson 1994). Linked fate is increasing for Latinos, and it's a predictor of vote choice, but since the Latino electorate is a mosaic of different origins and backgrounds, it is difficult to tie their voting preferences to voting behavior. Linked fate requires that members of the group see their futures tied to the others in the group (Dawson 1994) Escaleras, Kim, and Wagner attempt to test if Latinos share linked fate because of their differing origins and ethnicity. Keeping in mind that in the United States, Latinos are treated as a

single group both in the media and on the political agenda (Escaleras, Kim, and Wagner 2019). Their research provided support for the idea that linked faith in the Latino community is a strong indicator of participation. They found that Latino voters are rational actors, but they also vote based on shared concerns (Escaleras, Kim, and Wagner, 2019). A determinant of Latino participation is their shared experience in the United States.

Emotions also are key to mobilization scholars have found that regardless of generation, natural origin, or state of residence, Latinos were eager to engage politically because they recognized that they were connected to their immigrant counterparts (Gutierrez et al. 2019). The literature fails to consider how linked fate can impact the experiences of Latinos as they navigate educational institutions. I theorize that a relationship can be analyzed through linked fate, college students and representation. Perhaps when a Latino student sees another Latino student fare well, they may perceive a sense of linked fate, and a sense of “si se puede”. Substantive and descriptive representation are fields that have been largely explored in minority politics, and I question whether these forms of representation can help us gauge a better understanding of Latino college students. To contextualize the sociopolitical environment, it is important to consider how education can influence and impact Latino political behavior.

### **Familismo**

Familismo is a cultural norm, yet social capital is an operationalization of this norm that has helped explain why some Mexican origin youth experience academic success, while others struggle to keep pace with their peers. When speaking about the Latino electorate, it is also important to highlight a critical limitation, a large portion of Latinos cannot vote because of their legal status in the United States, yet there are other ways Latinos participate. Scholars have attempted to study theories of assimilation to understand the Latino electorate, mainly focusing

on the assimilation debate. The assimilation debate is synonymous with the "American mainstream" will Latinos fall into the mainstream, or do they have more segmented patterns? These segmented patterns are defined by Latino political information on how it is shaped by discrimination, power, and economic opportunities (Portes and Rimbaut 2001). These linear and segmented patterns reflect the zeitgeist, but also align with mixed evidence on immigrant and economic and social incorporation (Bocskor, Hunyadi and Vince 2017).

A sense of familismo is enforced when immigrants are attacked and criminalized by the media and propositions. For example, a first-generation Salvadoran voter named Veronica expressed the following "Even if you were born here, maybe your parents were or your grandparents or someone along the line, along with your heritage, so it's like you're a part of these people coming here" (Potochnick & Stegmaier 2021) this ethnic identity is connected to familismo in that it refers to the cultural importance of family unity, loyalty, and cooperation while placing family as the primary unit of importance even when it comes to voting. This study expands on this finding, placing the family as the primary unit of importance when it comes to voting and questions if placing the family as the primary unit of importance when it comes to the pursuit of higher education and the role that the family plays. Familismo is not just a strong family unit, but also a support network for adults (Valenzuela and Dornbusch 1994).

Rojas's findings suggest that Hispanic adults from immigrant families recognize hardship, and that migration is a needed step for a better future for the family. Rojas also defined a new social system which refers to the day-to-day struggles that Hispanic immigrants adapt and the many doubts that are brought to their decision as to why they migrated in the first place (Rojas et al. 2016). A key finding is that Hispanic adults from immigrant families interpret different stressors, which is a critical factor in improving the quality of life for the fastest growing

marginalized groups of the US population. For Latinos familismo has been described as a core cultural value with an emphasis on the priority that the family holds over other realities (Arditti 2006). Much literature frames familismo in a negative light. It fails to address how familismo can be seen as a tool, not as harmful to Latinos. The recognition of hardship and the conditions in which Hispanics adapt to the day-to-day struggles is important in our analysis if Latinos students pursue education as a means to achieve the American dream for themselves and for their families.

### **Latinos in Arkansas**

While the literature has looked at the intersections of Latino identity, there is much work to be done on the study of Latinos in the south. I propose a study looking at Latino college students in Arkansas. It is important to look at the history of Latinos in Arkansas. Latinos immigrated to Northwest Arkansas and quickly found jobs in the poultry plants. The focus on poultry plants is because it is a large source of employment for Latino families in Northwest Arkansas. It is important to analyze the history between Latinos and poultry plants. For many, Latino migrants Arkansas is a second or third settlement coming from California and Texas (Guerrero 2017). The poultry industry has exploited Latinos and has seen them simply as cheap labor. These companies search for low-wage exploitable workers, offering them year-round employment, and they do not check legal status (Guerrero 2017). Also, Arkansas has had a low cost of living which provided Latino's with upward mobility and homeownership that were unavailable in California and Texas (Guerrero 2017). For Latino families in Northwest Arkansas, upward mobility comes at a cost. The biggest cost of upward mobility is that over time there is damage to health and exposes workers to illness and permanent conditions for those

who work in the poultry industry. A question that remains unanswered is how children in these families perceive upward mobility?

Growth of Latino's in the Northwest Arkansas area began in the 1990's the areas concentrated with Latino population were Benton Washington and Sebastian countries with further concentration in the Fayetteville, Springdale, and Rogers area (Guerrero 2017). There was an understanding amongst Latino's the moved to Northwest Arkansas that the poultry plants do not check legal documentation (Guerrero 2017). The boom of Latino employees in poultry plants was due to social ties and recruitment amongst Latino's (Guerrero 2017). The Nuevo South framework is important because it allows the change in the political, economic, and social dynamics of a place to be studied with the arrival of new groups of people (Guerrero 2017). As the Latino population grows, Latinos are seen as newcomers in predominantly white spaces. In the Top College Institutions in Arkansas 57% of Latino were enrolled statewide (Arkansas n.d).

It would be a great contribution to the study of Latinos if the Nuevo South Framework was applied to college students in the Nuevo South. By applying this framework one can be able to study how a predominantly white space socializes Latinos.

Guerrero's project contributes to the study of race and ethnicity and allows scholars to understand the power that shapes the lives of people of color in the United States (Guerrero 2017). I argue that students in the Nuevo South are pursuing higher education in an attempt to take control of this power for stability not only for themselves but for their families as well.

The literature has looked at the limitations Latinos face and how they fare in terms of social capital, education, political participation, and how these intersections contribute to the pursuit of middle-class certification and the fulfillment of the American dream through educational attainment. Since I propose a study that looks at the role that the family has on the

pursuit of higher education as means to obtain middle class certification for themselves and for their families. It is important to look at the theoretical framework, Funds of Knowledge (Velez-Ibáñez and Greenberg 1992) that examines the extreme investments Latino families make in their children's education in the hope that their children will gain an entrée to primary labor markets (1992).

## Chapter 2

### Theoretical Framework: Funds of Knowledge

Knowledge is more than having academic expertise. For many Latino families, their funds of knowledge come from rural skills, experiences, and habitat knowledge (Velez-Ibáñez and Greenberg 1992). Survival is synonymous with stability. This quest for stability is framed as the American dream that can be achieved through an education (Velez-Ibáñez and Greenberg 1992). Velez-Ibáñez and Greenberg find that at the lack of employment within primary labor markets encourages the Latino family to make extreme investments in education in the hope that their children will gain such an entrée (1992). The irony is that educational institutions also serve as an essential mechanism of denial for access to such labor markets." (Velez-Ibáñez and Greenberg 1992). Velez-Ibáñez and Greenberg conducted a case study on funds of knowledge and the Mexican family. They found that each household has a characteristic emphasis or a type of cultural shape that differentiates one household from another, and these characteristics are derived from historical circumstances (Velez-Ibáñez and Greenberg 1992).

Previous research by Álvarez as successfully established characteristics that differentiate from one to the other. Funds of Knowledge can be used as a historical lens to understand the historical struggle of the household and control of economic security (Velez-Ibáñez, Greenberg 1992).

Funds of Knowledge incorporates the exchanges that occur between households, clusters of households, and networks, and it continues to provide access to historical funds of knowledge, but it provides a cultural matrix. These funds are shaped by the Mexican experience of structural changes in the economic and political environment (Velez-Ibáñez, Greenberg 1992). Working-class households have had from one sector of the labor market to another, holding multiple jobs



to make ends meet (Velez-Ibáñez, Greenberg 1992). I theorize that Latino students see college as a way to build social capital and obtain upward mobility.

## Chapter 3

### Research Hypotheses

I argue that the social identities developed in Arkansas are critical to understanding that Latinos have a complex and unique college going experience. I hypothesize that Latinos college going experience fares differently than non-Latinos and this may be due to their complex ethnic identities. I offer funds of knowledge as a theory to test the following hypotheses:

H1: Latinos who primarily speak Spanish on a regular basis are more likely to pursue higher education to help their families than Latinos who do not speak Spanish.

H2: Latino students who experience more discrimination are more likely to feel negatively toward university leaders than Latino students who experience less discrimination.

H3: Latino students who experience more discrimination are more likely to feel negatively toward non-Latino representatives than students who experience less discrimination.

H4: Latino students who experience more discrimination are more likely to feel positively toward Latino representatives than students who experience less discrimination.

To capture the experience of Latino college students in Arkansas I offer the concept of Funds of Knowledge (Velez-Ibáñez and Greenberg 1992). I argue that the Latino college experience is unique in comparison to non-Latinos, I hypothesize that different factors motivate the pursuit of education. I question if Latino students pursue college for a higher quality of life? I theorize that a major motivator for Latino youth in pursuing higher education is the saying, "We

came here for you to have a better life." Children of immigrants are highly influenced to pursue higher education in search of a better life by the pressures of their migrant families.

However, I theorize that this pursuit becomes increasingly difficult with the lack of social capital. Social capital is defined as the sum of resources, actual or virtual, that equal to a group having a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintanceship and recognition (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). The search for a better life is influenced and orientated by the social capital or funds of knowledge one has. For the purpose of this project funds of knowledge was more fitting than social capital due to the notion that funds of knowledge are essential for a home to survive. I seek to analyze and understand if Latino students see college as a way to build social capital and obtain upward mobility to help their families.

## **Methods**

### **Data**

To test these research hypotheses, I employ the data from the survey, *Latino College Students Navigating the Sociopolitical Environment in Arkansas*. The survey focuses on 11 different institutions in Arkansas. The survey was distributed between six 4-year institutions and five 2-year colleges, both private and public. The survey was distributed to institutions with at least 100 students who identify as Latino. Participants had to meet the following four criteria to participate. The survey was administered from March 2021, through February 2022.

1. Be 18 years or older
2. Identify as Latino or Hispanic
3. Attended high school in Arkansas

4. Be enrolled in the Spring Semester of 2020

## **Chapter 4: Linguistic Assimilation and the pursuit of Higher Education**

### **Dependent Variable**

The purpose of this study is to determine if the family plays a role in the pursuit of higher education. I utilize the mean of the strength that the role of the family has on Latino college students. This came from the survey item that asked “*We are interested in learning more about your motivation and goals associated with obtaining an education. To what degree do you agree with the following statement? I pursued higher education to help my family*”. Participants indicated the strength of each statement on a 5-point Likert scale. This was recoded into a dichotomous variable for the purposes of the model. “Strongly agree” and “agree” were recoded to 1= “agree” and “neutral”, and “disagree” and “strongly disagree were coded to 0 = “disagree.”

### **Independent Variable**

I operationalize *linguistic assimilation*, the independent variable of interest used in the probit estimates that predicts Latino respondent’s citing “to help the family” as the primary motivation for attending college. Spanish is coded as: 0= “no Spanish”, 1= “primarily English”, 2= “both languages equally”, and 4= “primarily Spanish”. I estimate the independent effects of Linguistic assimilation on educational attainment to help the family (0= “no”, 1= “yes”, attending college primarily to help the family), This independent variable was included to revisit previous literature that has analyzed Latinos but has not analyzed Latino college students in Arkansas specifically.

### **Covariates**

To control for other effects and explanations for Latinos and their pursuit of higher education to help their family. I control for the economic factors that might inform the quest of

higher education as the quest towards upward mobility socioeconomic class is coded as 1= “working”, 2= “lower-middle class”, 3= “middle”, 4= “upper-middle”, and 5= “upper”. Other controls that assume theoretical importance to any study of Latinos in the United States include ancestry Mexican origin (0= “not Mexican”, and 1= “Mexican”) Latino Identity ( 0= “no” and 1= “yes”), Party identification (0= “not dem”, 1= “dem”), gender (0= “not female”, 1= “female”), citizenship (0= “not US citizen”, 1= “US citizen”) and lastly ideology (1= “strong liberal”, 2= “liberal”, 3= “moderate leaning liberal”, 4= “moderate”, 5= “moderate leaning conservative”, 6= “conservative”, 7= “strongly conservative”). The descriptive statistics for all variables used in the statistical analysis are reported in Appendix A.

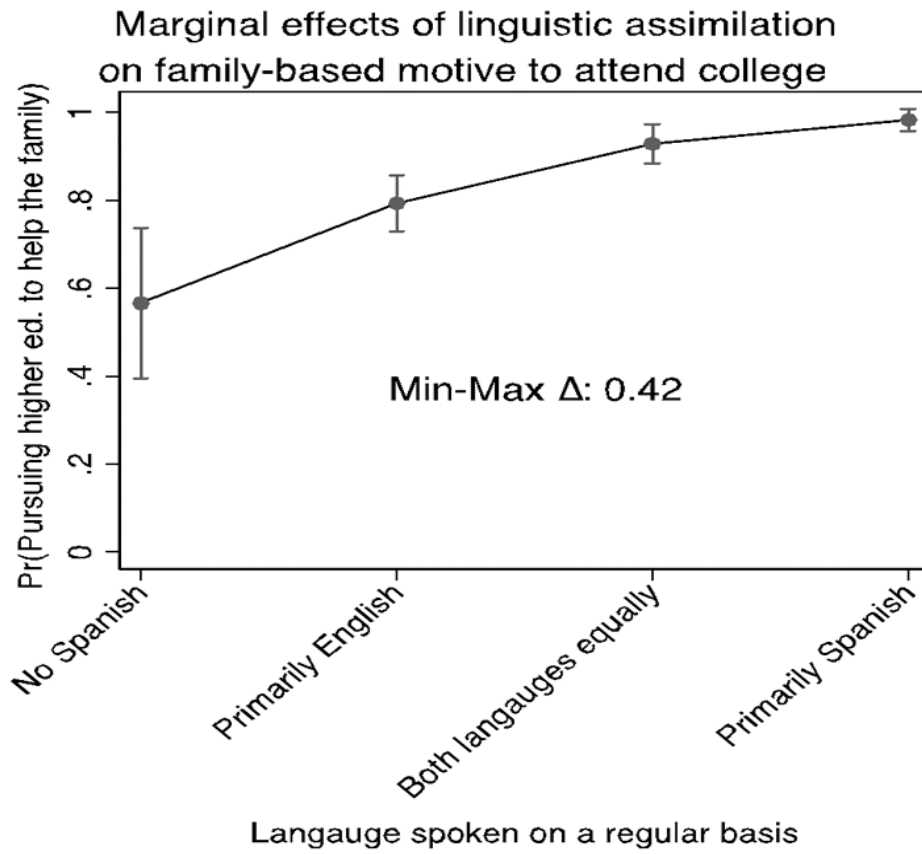
### **Statistical Tests**

To test for the hypothesized effects of linguistic assimilation on the pursuit of higher education I use probit regression to generate the likelihood that linguistic assimilation has on this pursuit. These findings are presented in Table 1. The probit regression estimates reveal a positive and statistically significant relationship between linguistic assimilation and family-based motive to attend college ( $p < .01$ ). The specified model explains 17 percent (pseudo  $R^2 = 0.172$ ) of the variation in the dependent variable. This coefficient holds statistical significance and provides support for my prediction in Hypothesis 1. The probit regression reveals that socioeconomic class, and ideology have a negative relationship, but it is not statistically significant.

**Table .1**

Probit Regression Estimates of Family-Based Motivation to Attend College	
Linguistic assimilation: <i>0=no Spanish, 1=primarily English, 2=both equally, 4=primarily Spanish</i>	0.651** (0.158)
Socioeconomic class	-0.155 (0.108)
Age	0.041 (0.032)
Mexican origin	0.215 (0.247)
Strength of Latino identification	0.135 (0.162)
Democratic Party identification	0.247 (0.329)
Female	0.144 (0.227)
US citizen	0.164 (0.291)
Political ideology	-0.016 (0.099)
Constant	-1.295 (1.048)
Observations	236
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.172
X <sup>2</sup>	37.93
Standard errors in parentheses * p<.05, ** p<.01	
<i>Source: (Latino College Students Navigating the Sociopolitical Environment in Arkansas, 2021)</i>	

Figure 1 illustrates the marginal effects of linguistic assimilation on family-based motive to attend college. Here, observe that the probability of Latino students' declaring that helping family is the primary reason for attending college is 42 percent higher among those who regularly speak primarily Spanish than for those who speak no Spanish at all. These findings of linguistic assimilation are significant to my study.

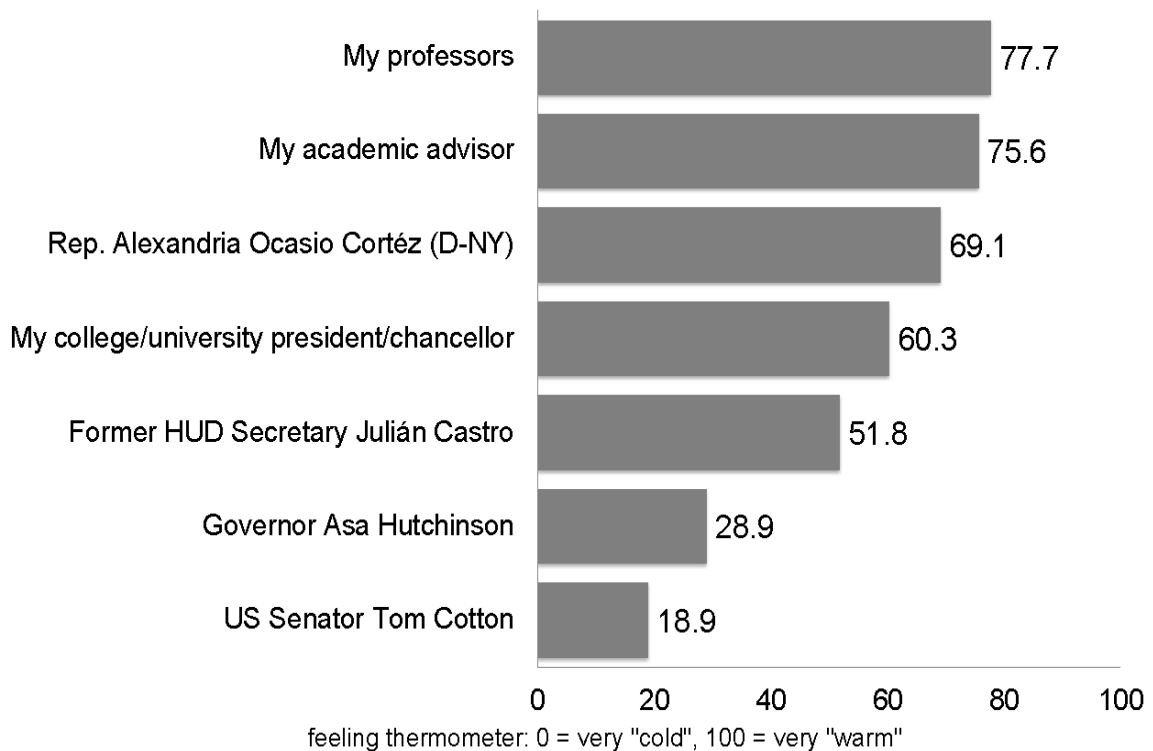


**Figure 1.** Source: Latino College Students Navigating the Sociopolitical Environment in Arkansas

## Chapter 5: Latino College Student Affect Toward Professors, Academic Advisors, and College/University Leaders

### Dependent Variable

This model seeks to understand how Latino students who experience discrimination versus those that experience less discrimination evaluate university leaders. I utilize Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression to compare support for university leaders. For this model the survey item asks, “Using a scale from 0-100, where 0 means that you have a very bad opinion and 100 means that you have a very good opinion, what is your opinion of the following: Your chancellor/president, your college professors, and your academic advisor”. Participants indicated support for their chancellor or university president (0= “very bad opinion”, “100=very good opinion”), for their professors (0= “very bad opinion”, 100= “very good opinion”), and for their academic advisor (0= very bad opinion 100=very good opinion).





**Figure 2.** Source: Latino College Students Navigating the Sociopolitical Environment in Arkansas, 2021

In Figure 2 I present the average values of the individual feeling thermometers for national and Arkansas political figures, and for persons of importance to the college-going experience for students. At 18.9 “degrees”, Latino college students reported the lowest or “coldest” feeling thermometer for US Senator Tom Cotton, a Republican representing Arkansas in the Senate since 2015. Republican governor Asa Hutchinson, also elected in 2015, earned the second-lowest feeling thermometer score, a 28.9. Between the two national Latino political leaders, US Rep Alexandria Ocasio Cortéz (D-NY) earned a higher feeling thermometer score (69.1) than Former Housing and Urban Development Secretary and presidential candidate Julián Castro (51.8). Among the persons who play a significant role in the college-going experience for students, professors (77.7) and academic advisors (75.6) respectively, earned the highest thermometer scores, while college/university presidents/chancellors earned an average of 60.3.

**Independent variable**

I operationalize *experiences discrimination*, the independent variable of interest, used in the OLS regressions that predicts Latinos support for their educational leaders among those who do not experience discrimination and those who do. This variable was coded from the survey item that asked “*In your day-to-day life, how often does the following thing happen to you because of your racial or ethnic background? You experience discrimination*” *Experiences discrimination* is coded on a 4-point scale, 0 “never” 1 “once in a while” 2 “fairly often” 3 “very often”.

**Covariates**

To control for other explanations of experiencing discrimination, I control for Latino identity which is coded (0= “no” and 1= “yes”). Other controls that assume theoretical

importance to any study of Latinos and their experiences with discrimination in the Nuevo South include Arkansan identity (0= “not at all”, 1= “somewhat”, 2= “strongly”, 3= “very strongly”), American identity (0= “not at all”, 1= “somewhat”, 2= “strongly”, 3= “soy gringo/a”, Mexican origin (0= “not Mexican”, and 1= “Mexican”), party identification (0= “not dem”, 1= “dem”), gender (0= “not female”, 1= “female”), socioeconomic class (1 = “working”, 2= “lower middle”, 3= “middle”, 4= “upper-middle”, 5= “upper”), linguistic assimilation ( 0= “no Spanish”, 1= “primarily English”, 2= “both languages equally”, and 4= “primarily Spanish”), citizenship (0= “not US citizen”, 1= “US Citizen”) and lastly ideology (1= “strong liberal”, 2= “liberal”, 3= “moderate leaning liberal”, 4= “moderate”, 5= “moderate leaning conservative”, 6= “conservative”, 7= “strongly Conservative”). The descriptive statistics for all variables used in the statistical analysis are reported in Appendix A.

### **Statistical Tests**

To test for the hypothesized attitudes towards educational leaders based on experiences with discrimination I use OLS regression to generate the estimates of perceived attitudes toward educational leaders.

In Table 2 I present results of ordinary least squares regression estimates of the feeling thermometer scores control for experiencing discrimination an affect towards university leaders. The OLS regression reveals a negative and statistically significant relationship between experiencing discrimination and affect towards professors and academic advisors ( $p < .01$ ). The specified model explains 29 percent (adjusted  $R^2 = 0.029$ ) of the variation in the dependent variable. This coefficient holds statistical significance and provides support for my prediction in Hypothesis 2.

The OLS regression reveals a positive and statistically significant relationship between socioeconomic status and feelings of affect towards academic advisors ( $p < .01$ ) and university chancellors/ Presidents ( $p < .01$ ).

**Table .2**

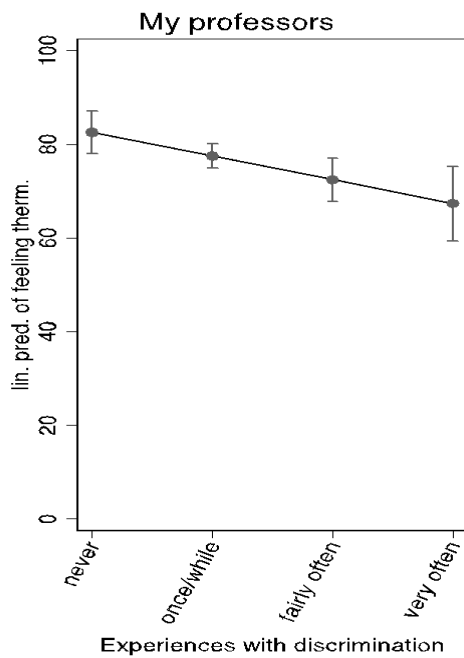
OLS Estimates of Latino College Student Affect Toward Professors, Academic Advisors, and College/University Leaders			
	Professors	Academic advisors	Chancellor/ president
Experiences discrimination	-5.073** (1.886)	-5.329* (2.327)	-1.515 (2.638)
Latino identity	3.119 (2.207)	-1.400 (2.723)	3.555 (3.087)
Arkansan identity	-1.013 (1.593)	-3.146 (1.966)	0.656 (2.229)
American identity	1.457 (1.768)	1.964 (2.182)	2.709 (2.473)
Age	0.605 (0.393)	0.404 (0.485)	-0.186 (0.550)
Female	2.227 (3.296)	0.294 (4.067)	2.450 (4.610)
Socioeconomic class	2.426 (1.456)	3.733* (1.797)	4.222* (2.036)
Spanish (ling. Assim.)	1.668 (2.045)	4.280 (2.524)	4.142 (2.861)
Mexican origin	5.123 (3.338)	0.0966 (4.120)	0.0906 (4.670)
Democrat	-1.880 (4.226)	-6.702 (5.215)	-4.578 (5.911)
Ideology	-0.374 (1.242)	0.219 (1.533)	0.915 (1.737)

**Table .2 (Cont.)**

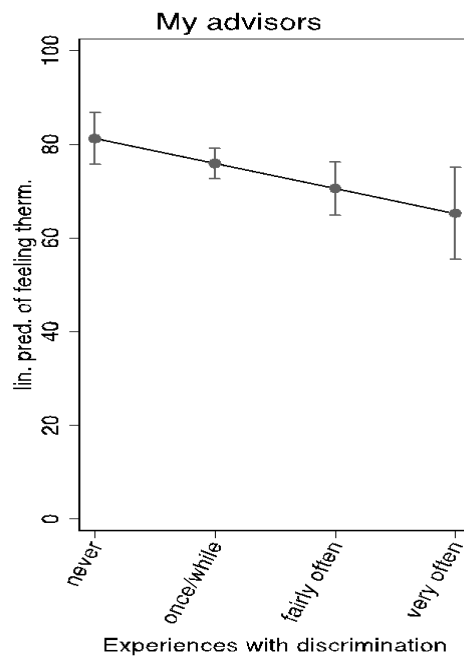
	Professors	Academic advisors	Chancellor/ president
US Citizen	-3.652	0.571	-6.819
	(3.621)	(4.469)	(5.065)
Constant	52.55**	66.41**	40.36*
	(12.79)	(15.79)	(17.90)
Observations	265	265	265
Adjusted $R^2$	0.029	0.025	0.020

*Source: (Latino College Students Navigating the Sociopolitical Environment in Arkansas, 2021)*  
 Standard errors in parentheses \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$

Figures 3 and 4 illustrate the respective linear predictions of professor and academic advisor feeling thermometers by the frequency of Latino college students' experiences with discrimination.



**Figure 3.**



**Figure 4.**

## **Chapter 6: Discrimination and support for Political Representatives**

### **Dependent Variable**

This model seeks to understand how Latino students who experience discrimination versus those that experience less discrimination evaluate non-Latino political representatives and Latino political representatives.

I utilize Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression to compare support for non-Latino representatives among Latinos who experience discrimination versus Latinos who experience less discrimination. For this model the survey item asks “*Using a scale from 0-100, where 0 means that you have a very bad opinion and 100 means that you have a very good opinion, what is your opinion of the following: Alexandria Ocasio Cortez, Julian Castro, Senator Tom Cotton, Governor Asa Hutchinson.* Participants indicated support for the political figures listed above on a scale of (0= “very bad opinion”, 100= “very good opinion”).

### **Independent variable**

I operationalize *experiences discrimination*, the independent variable of interest, used in the OLS regressions that predicts Latinos support for non-Latino political leaders and Latino political leaders among those who do not experience discrimination and those who do. This variable was coded from the survey item that asked “*In your day-to-day life, how often does the following thing happen to you because of your racial or ethnic background? You experience discrimination*” *Experiences discrimination* is coded on a 4-point scale, 0 "never" 1 "once in a while" 2 "fairly often" 3 "very often.

## **Covariates**

To control for other explanations of experiencing discrimination, I control for Latino identity which is coded (0= no and 1=yes). Other controls that assume theoretical importance to any study of Latinos and their experiences with discrimination in the Nuevo South include Arkansan Identity (0= “not at all”, 1= “somewhat”, 2= “strongly”, 3= “very strongly”), American identity (0= “not at all”, 1= “somewhat”, 2= “strongly”, 3= “soy gringo/a” , Mexican origin (0= “not Mexican”, and 1=“Mexican”) party identification (0= “not dem”, 1= “dem”), gender (0= “not female”, 1=“female”), socioeconomic class (1 = “working”, 2= “lower middle”, 3= “middle”, 4= “upper-middle”, 5= “upper”), Spanish ( 0= “no Spanish”, 1= “primarily English”, 2= “both languages equally”, and 4= “primarily Spanish”) citizenship (0= “not US citizen”, 1= “US Citizen”) and lastly ideology (1= “strong liberal”, 2=“liberal”, 3= “moderate leaning liberal”, 4= “moderate”, 5= “moderate leaning conservative”, 6= “conservative”, 7= “strongly conservative”). The descriptive statistics for all variables used in the statistical analysis are reported in Appendix A.

## **Statistical Tests**

To test for the hypothesized attitudes towards non-Latino and Latino political representatives based on experiences with discrimination I use OLS regression to generate the estimates of perceived attitudes towards Alexandria Ocasio Cortez, Julian Castro, Senator Tom Cotton, Governor Asa Hutchinson. In Table 3 I present results of ordinary least squares regression estimates of the feeling thermometer scores for the political representatives referenced above. In the model that estimates the perceived attitudes towards Arkansas Representatives there is a negative relationship between experiencing discrimination and the assessment of Governor Hutchinson, however this estimate is not statistically significant. There is a

statistically significant relationship between socioeconomic class and feelings of affect towards Governor Hutchinson ( $p < .01$ ). When looking at the regression estimates of the feeling thermometer scores for Senator Tom Cotton experiences of discrimination and estimates of affect towards Senator Tom Cotton there is not a statistically significant relationship, however there is a statistically significant relationship between social economic status and affect toward Senator Tom Cotton ( $p < .05$ ).

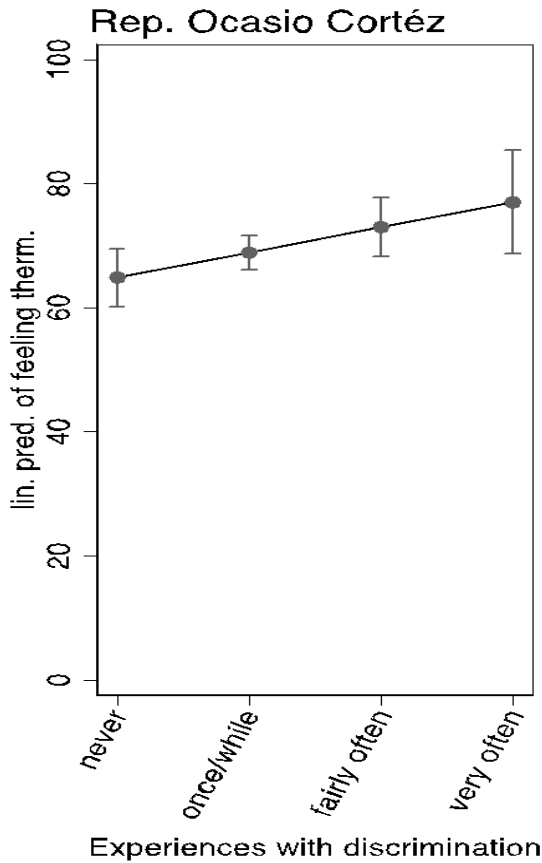
When looking at Latino representatives, Representative Alexandria Ocasio Cortez and Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, Julián Castro there is a statistically significant relationship between Latino college students' experiences with discrimination and gender on their assessments of Representative Ocasio Cortez ( $p < .01$ ). The specified model explains 49 percent (adjusted  $R^2 = 0.492$ ) of the variation in the dependent variable. When looking at assessments of Secretary Castro there is a statistically significant relationship with Latino identity and their assessment of Secretary Castro ( $p < .01$ ). The specified model explains 18 percent (adjusted  $R^2 = 0.176$ ) of the variation in the dependent variable.

**Table 3**

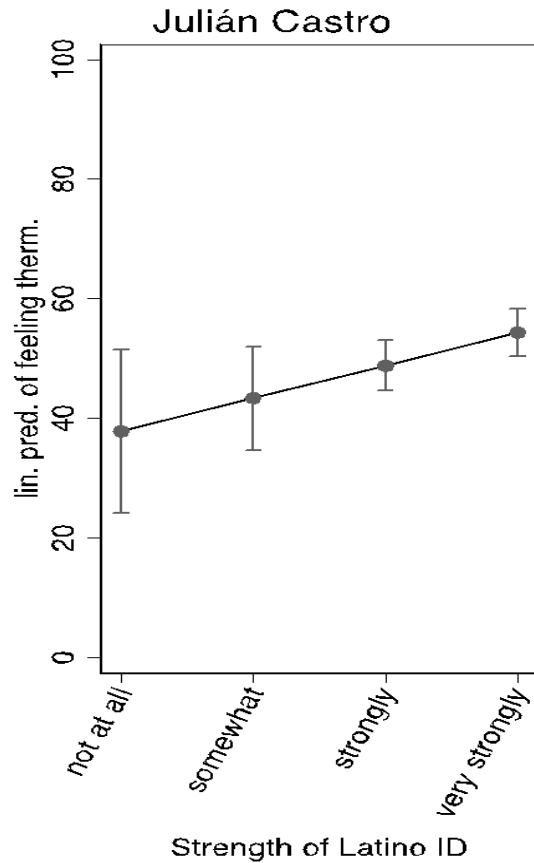
OLS Estimates of Latino College Student Affect Toward Political Elites				
	Rep. Ocasio Cortéz	Sec. Castro	Gov. Hutchinson	Sen. Cotton
Experiences discrimination	4.057* (1.968)	2.128 (2.276)	-3.823 (2.285)	1.391 (1.890)
Latino identity	2.937 (2.302)	5.484* (2.663)	1.917 (2.674)	1.455 (2.212)
Arkansan identity	-2.248 (1.662)	-2.534 (1.923)	1.195 (1.931)	-0.774 (1.597)
American identity	2.017 (1.845)	3.303 (2.134)	0.297 (2.143)	0.344 (1.772)
Age	-0.444 (0.410)	0.164 (0.475)	-0.550 (0.476)	-1.118** (0.394)
Female	8.238* (3.439)	7.481 (3.978)	-3.029 (3.994)	4.186 (3.303)
Socioeconomic class	-0.333 (1.519)	-2.436 (1.757)	5.297** (1.764)	3.610* (1.459)
Spanish (ling. Assim.)	-2.007 (2.134)	-1.906 (2.469)	0.591 (2.479)	0.595 (2.050)
Mexican origin	4.437 (3.483)	0.173 (4.029)	2.673 (4.045)	3.626 (3.346)
Democrat	28.49** (4.409)	18.62** (5.100)	-12.31* (5.121)	-12.82** (4.236)
Ideology	-8.363** (1.296)	-3.216* (1.499)	6.484** (1.505)	6.421** (1.245)
US Citizen	4.602 (3.778)	1.994 (4.370)	-0.413 (4.388)	-4.150 (3.629)
Constant	60.01** (13.35)	25.05 (15.44)	16.15 (15.50)	18.07 (12.82)
Observations	265	265	265	265
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.492	0.176	0.222	0.238
<i>Source: Latino College Students Navigating the Sociopolitical Environment in Arkansas, 2021</i>				
Standard errors in parentheses * p<.05, ** p<.01				



Figures 5 and 6 illustrate the respective linear predictions of Representative Ocasio Cortez and Julian Castro advisor feeling thermometers by the frequency of Latino college students' experiences with discrimination.



**Figure 5**



**Figure 6**

In the following section I seek to explain the significance of the statistical findings to our understanding of Latinos in Arkansas navigating the sociopolitical environment in the pursuit of higher education.

## Chapter 7 Statistical Findings

In seeking to identify the role of the Latino family in the pursuit of higher education in the Nuevo South I theorized that Latinos pursue higher education to build social capital, obtain upward mobility, and achieve middle class certification to help their family. The literature has demonstrated that Latinos have a difficulty in obtaining and developing their funds of knowledge and social capital. Even when they are successful in developing and obtaining funds of knowledge and social capital, they still fare worse in comparison to non-Latinos. My four hypotheses were evaluated by the respondent's answers. I sought to test if: Latinos who primarily speak Spanish on a regular basis are more likely to pursue higher education to help their families than Latinos who do not speak Spanish, if Latino students who experience more discrimination are more likely to feel negatively toward educational leaders than Latino students who experience less, if Latino students who experience more discrimination are more likely to feel negatively toward non-Latino representatives than students who experience less, and lastly analyze if the strength of Latino identity and experiences of discrimination will be a predictor of support for political figures.

### *Hypothesis 1 (Linguistic Assimilation)*

I began my analysis by hypothesizing that Latino college students would indicate that Latinos who primarily speak Spanish on a regular basis are more likely to pursue higher education to help their families than Latinos who do not speak Spanish. Funds of knowledge was reflected in the respondent's motivation to achieve higher education to help their family. The finding significantly aligns with the purpose of this research project. The results of the probit model of Latino students' family-based motivations to attend college showed that linguistic assimilation is statistically significant when predicting why Latino college students pursue higher

education. In this model I tested for identity by operationalizing the variable, linguistic assimilation. I included Latinos who do not speak Spanish on a regular basis because I wanted to capture the difference between those who speak Spanish on a regular basis and those who do not.

Figure 1 demonstrates the marginal effects of linguistic assimilation on family-based motive to attend college. Latinos who do not speak Spanish reported lower levels of their pursuit of higher education to help the family. Those who reported primary speaking Spanish reported high levels of pursuing higher education to help the family. This finding aligns with the literature that seeks to analyze the pursuit of the better life and the Latino family's emphasis on the pursuit of higher education. College has been seen as a place where identity formation occurs, it is place where students develop their social and personal identity, those that reported primarily speaking Spanish on a day-to-day basis demonstrate a positive correlation between the intersections of their linguistic and cultural identity and how it manifests itself in their pursuit of higher education to help their family. The results for this hypothesis were as I expected. I argue that this may be due to Spanish being a form of communication amongst Latino families, it could also be an indicator of generation and proximity to the immigrant experience.

*Hypothesis 2 (Discrimination and affect towards university leaders)*

When it came to experiences with discrimination, I found that Latinos who experience frequent discrimination reported lower favorability towards university leaders than those who experience less discrimination. This hypothesis was operationalized through feeling thermometers. I predicted that Latino students who did not experienced discrimination would report a lower favorability towards academic elites in their institutions. From the responses I found this to be true. Feelings towards professors and academic advisors obtained the highest thermometer scores, this may be due to the accessibility to these academic leaders as opposed to

university presidents and chancellors. Chancellor and university presidents earned an average feeling thermometry score of 60.3. Outside of the family, academic advisors and professors play a significant role in the college going experience.

*Hypothesis 3 (Discrimination and affect towards Political Representatives)*

For the third hypothesis I was able to determine if Latino students who experience more discrimination are more likely to feel negatively toward non-Latino representatives than students who experience less discrimination. The third hypothesis was operationalized through feeling thermometers. From the responses I found this to be true. Feelings towards Non-Latino representatives for those who experienced discrimination indicated lower levels of favorability towards Senator Tom Cotton and Governor Asa Hutchinson. When accounting for favorability towards these political figures from Arkansas, Arkansan identity did not have a statistical significance in our OLS estimates in Table 3. Citizenship is also not an indicator for feelings for favorability toward these figures. Surprising Latino identity did not hold any statistical significance. As expected, political party and ideology are determinants of favorability. The variable that produced statistical significance was socioeconomic class. This may be because those who have higher socioeconomic status have less experiences with discrimination, and perhaps are upper class students.

*Hypothesis 4 (Discrimination and affect towards Latino Political figures)*

In my final hypothesis I predicted that the strength of Latino identity and experiences of discrimination will be a predictor of support for political figures. From the respondents feeling thermometer responses I found this to be true. There was a positive and statistically significant relationship between the Latinos who experience discrimination and their feelings towards Representative Alexandria Ocasio Cortez and Secretary and former presidential candidate, Julian

Castro. Those who reported experiences with discrimination had high affect towards Representative Alexandria Ocasio Cortez. As expected, those who identified with the democratic party, also reported high levels of affect towards Representative Ocasio Cortez. Seventy-Five percent of our respondents identify as female, those who identified as female had higher levels of affect towards representative Ocasio Cortez. Gender and experiences of discrimination are higher indicators of affect than Latino identity. For Secretary Castro Latino identity was a strong predictor of affect.

## Chapter 8: Discussion

In seeking to understand if Latinos in the Nuevo South pursue higher education to help their family our findings show that in the sociopolitical environment of Arkansas when students gain entry into these predominantly white spaces, they do not fare as well as non-Latino students. Latino parents, through their sacrifices hope that through education, their children will gain entry into white collar labor markets (Velez-Ibañez and Greenberg 1992) so that one day they reap the benefits of middle-class certification and fulfill the American dream. The participants realize that they experience discrimination and that they do not fare as well as their counterparts, however they still pursue higher education for a number of reasons. These findings indicated the role that professors and advisors across universities in Arkansas have on Latino students and their college going experience. Feelings of experiences with discrimination and reported favorability potentially indicate the irony that funds of knowledge have found that educational institutions also serve as an essential mechanism of denial for access to such labor markets." (Velez-Ibañez and Greenberg 1992). These findings indicated the role that professors and advisors across universities in Arkansas have on Latino students and their college going experience. Feelings of discrimination and attitudes towards university leaders could be indicators of the third-generation decline, due to the lack of educational success that comes from lack of social capital and inequalities within institutions.

The OLS regression analysis reveals the estimates of Latino college student affect toward political elites. Representation is essential in determining how well groups fare in institutions especially for marginalized communities. How well groups are represented in institutions is especially important when it comes to those that are underrepresented (Hero and Tolbert 1995). Little attention has been given to how important representation matters outside of US politics

(Hero and Tolbert 1995). Representation is complex, has several dimensions and matters a great deal especially to Latinos who come from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds. In the Nuevo South there is a lack of descriptive and symbolic representation. For our model that analyzed perceived affect towards political representatives I had to employ national figures such as Representative Ocasio Cortez and Secretary Julian Castro to address substantive representation. High levels of affect were reported toward Representative Ocasio Cortez and gender played a statistically significant role in this finding. This reveals that Alexandria Ocasio Cortez is seen as a symbolic figure. Previous work has found that it matters to Latinos to have Latino representatives (Wallace 2014). Latino identity also showed to be a high indicator for support of Secretary Castro, but gender did not. Latino identity is a predictor of positive feelings towards Secretary Castro and gender is a positive predictor towards Ocasio Cortez this tells us that for Alexandria Ocasio Cortez there is symbolic representation due to her gender. These indicators of affect towards Alexandria Ocasio Cortez should not be overlooked. This finding is extremely important theoretically and has real life implications to Latinas in the Nuevo South Latinas in higher education are underrepresented in the US.

As Latinos navigate educational institutions in the pursuit of a better life for themselves and their families the findings in this study demonstrate the real-life implications and how the lack of representation is another barrier Latino Students in the Nuevo South must overcome. This implication begs the question, can lack of educational success be equated to the lack of representation within educational and political institutions? These real-life implications are plaguing Latinos students, similar to Álvarez plagues of the middle-class having leisure time affluence, sufficient education, and affluence to make it possible to have an impact on one's life but not a rich inheritance through which obtaining a college degree is assured (Álvarez 1973).

My results suggest the important implication that even when Latino gain entrance into educational spaces in the Nuevo South there are limitations to their success. Sure, in comparison to their parents they may be faring much better, but these implications are extremely important to analyze the wellbeing of Latinos pursuing higher education in the Nuevo South.

The results of these findings not only have theoretical implications for the study of Latinos, but also real-life implications and hardships to Latinos. These findings highlight the limitations Latinos face despite the extreme investments Latino families make in their children's education in hopes that their children will gain entrees in primary labor markets (Velez-Ibanez and Greenberg 1992).

Future work is needed to address and alleviate the struggles Latinos in the Nuevo South face. It is important to address the doubts that are brought by the decision as to why they are pursuing higher education in the first place. The hardships Latino students face tend to be minimized since their experience is oriented by the beliefs that they are faring relatively better than their parents' generation however in comparison to their peers they typically are faring worse. Latinos face limitations in how they fare in terms of social capital, education, representation, and political participation. Taken together these findings suggest that the importance of the family and the lack of social capital and representation play a role in the Latino College student experience.



## Chapter 9: Conclusion

Latino college students find themselves pursuing middle class certification to help their families, yet they lack the access to do so. Educational attainment has been framed as a pathway towards economic stability. “Por una Vida mejor” has been a cultural narrative shared amongst families in the pursuit of fulfilling the American dream. Latino college students in Arkansas and their motivations have been largely understudied by scholars in the fields of political behavior and higher education. The lack of social capital and resources is a constraint in the pursuit of a better life. The data from the 2021 survey, *Latinos Navigating the Sociopolitical Environment* offers an understanding of Latinos and their pursuits of educational attainment to help their family. I demonstrate that a main indicator of the pursuit of higher education is linguistic assimilation, those who primarily speak Spanish indicate that they are pursuing higher education to help their families. Future work should take deeper analysis into explaining why these differences between Latinos who experience and don’t experience discrimination are observed in their feelings toward university leaders and political elites.

My findings demonstrate that the Sociopolitical environment matters. Future work should seek to examine how Latinos outside of the Nuevo South frame the pursuit of higher education to see if the findings are consistent across more areas.

Ultimately this analysis attempts to understand the pursuits of higher education amongst Latinos in the Nuevo South. *Si se puede y la lucha sigue!*

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## Appendices

<b>Appendix A. Descriptive Statistics</b>					
2021 Latino College Students Navigating the Sociopolitical Environment in Arkansas					
<b>Variable</b>	Obs	Mean	SD	Min	Max
<b>Pursued Higher education to help my family</b>	236	.822	.383	0=agree	1=agree
<b>Experiences Discrimination</b>	272	.992	.749	0= never	3=very often
<b>Spanish</b>	285	1.435	.769	0=primarily english	3= primarily spanish
<b>Socioeconomic Class</b>	290	2.103	.943	1=working	5= upper-class
<b>Age</b>	290	21.934	3.641	18	48
<b>Mexican</b>	293	.782	.414	0=not mexican	1=mexican
<b>Latino Identification</b>	265	2.532	.651	0=somewhat	3= very strongly
<b>Arkansan Identity</b>	265	1.313	1.023	0=not at all	3=very strongly
<b>American Identity</b>	265	1.871	.976	0= not at all	3= very strongly
<b>Democrat</b>	285	.782	.413	0= not a democrat	1= democrat
<b>Female</b>	293	.747	.435	0= not female	1= female
<b>US Citizen</b>	293	.805	.397	0= not a us citizen	1= us citizen
<b>Ideology</b>	283	3.141	1.377	1= strong liberal	7= strong conservative

## Appendix B. IRB Approval



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**To:** Elsa Camargo  
BELL 4188

**From:** Douglas J Adams, Chair  
IRB Expedited Review

**Date:** 01/28/2021

**Action:** **Expedited Approval**

**Action Date:** 01/28/2021

**Protocol #:** 2008280111

**Study Title:** Latinos College Students Navigating the Sociopolitical Environment in Arkansas

**Expiration Date:** 01/06/2022

**Last Approval Date:**

The above-referenced protocol has been approved following expedited review by the IRB Committee that oversees research with human subjects.

If the research involves collaboration with another institution then the research cannot commence until the Committee receives written notification of approval from the collaborating institution's IRB.

It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to obtain review and continued approval before the expiration date.

Protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. You may not continue any research activity beyond the expiration date without Committee approval. Please submit continuation requests early enough to allow sufficient time for review. Failure to receive approval for continuation before the expiration date will result in the automatic suspension of the approval of this protocol. Information collected following suspension is unapproved research and cannot be reported or published as research data. If you do not wish continued approval, please notify the Committee of the study closure.

Adverse Events: Any serious or unexpected adverse event must be reported to the IRB Committee within 48 hours. All other adverse events should be reported within 10 working days.

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of this study, such as the procedures, the consent forms, study personnel, or number of participants, please submit an amendment to the IRB. All changes must be approved by the IRB Committee before they can be initiated.

You must maintain a research file for at least 3 years after completion of the study. This file should include all correspondence with the IRB Committee, original signed consent forms, and study data.

cc: Xavier M Vidal Medina, Investigator  
Maria Sandoval, Key Personnel  
Ricardo G Silva, Key Personnel