

# The Representational Deficit of Latinxs in the U.S. House of Representatives

Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences

1–24

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DOI: 10.1177/07399863231164857

journals.sagepub.com/home/hjb



Giovanny D. Pleites-Hernandez<sup>1</sup>  and Nathan J. Kelly<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

This paper explores the extent to which Latinxs were substantively represented in the 112th U.S. House of Representatives (2011–2013). We make use of a large national sample of Americans to tap into the congruence of the attitudes of constituents with actual roll call votes taken by their legislators in office. In doing so, we are able to make comparisons between constituent attitudes and legislative behavior for Latinx versus non-Latinx constituents. Using a more refined measure than previous studies of constituent-legislator dyads across congressional districts, we find that Latinx respondents face a representational deficit relative to non-Latinx whites and explore the various factors, individual- and contextual-level, that explain variation in that relationship. One such factor is the size of the Latinx population in a district. We find that larger Latinx populations are associated with decreased representation for Latinx respondents and, further, that this deficit is largely rooted in anti-Latinx attitudes and behavior on the part of non-Latinx whites in those districts. On the whole, the findings here are consistent with the backlash hypothesis.

## Keywords

representation, backlash, contextual threat, Congress, Latinx

<sup>1</sup>University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, NC, USA

<sup>2</sup>University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN, USA

## Corresponding Author:

Giovanny D. Pleites-Hernandez, Department of Political Science, University of North Carolina at Asheville, 1 University Heights, 204 Zageir Hall, Asheville, NC 28804, USA.

Email: [gpleites@unca.edu](mailto:gpleites@unca.edu)

Latinxs are currently the largest minority group in the U.S. and comprise nearly 20% of the population (Alonzo, 2018). While recent U.S. Congresses are the most ethno-racially diverse in our nation's history, there is still a disconnect between the size of the Latinx population and the number of Latinx legislators in office.<sup>1</sup> One lingering question that the available literature does not fully address is the extent to which Latinxs are substantively represented in Congress. Work on the subject is scarce, and that which is available does not provide adequate answers. In this paper we utilize a unique dataset to provide a more refined assessment of Latinx representation than is available in prior work of which we are aware.

Theoretical and normative scholarship on the practice of democracy implies that Latinx people will receive better substantive representation as the relative size of their group grows. Yet the limited number of empirical studies that exist on this question lead to mixed findings. Of particular note, some work suggests that an anti-Latinx backlash mobilization among non-Latinx whites can be created as Latinx populations increase (see Griffin & Newman, 2007). These uncertainties in existing scholarship motivate us to explore how the size of the Latinx population across contexts shapes the attitudes (and behavior) of non-Latinx whites as well as how subgroup population size affects the representation afforded to Latinxs more generally. There is reason to expect that certain demographic contexts may lead to a backlash effect, whereby non-Latinx whites in districts with larger Latinx populations are mobilized and take more anti-Latinx stances on public policy. Though this backlash explanation for diminished Latinx representation is a possibility, there is an alternative explanation rooted in Latinx behavior and attitudes across different demographic contexts that could explain variation in representation, and it is explored here as well. Work on representation has inadequately fleshed out the underlying mechanisms for any potential "backlash" effect, and that is one of our primary objectives here.

## **Theoretical Foundations of a Latinx Representational Deficit**

The relationship between elected officials and the individuals they represent is arguably one of the most important in a democratic system; the American people rely on officeholders at all levels of government to advance their interests in office (Fenno, 1978; Mayhew, 1974; Gilens, 2009, 2012). There are various ways to conceptualize (e.g., descriptive, substantive, symbolic (see Pitkin, 1967)) and operationalize (i.e., dyadic versus collective (see Miller & Stokes, 1963; Weissberg, 1978)) representation. But there can be no doubt that substantive representation—captured via congruence between legislator

voting behavior and public opinion—is one of the most prominent in the literature (Bartels, 1991, 2008; Clinton, 2006; Erikson, 1978; Hill & Hurley, 1999; Miller & Stokes, 1963; Wlezien, 2004).<sup>2</sup> This kind of representation is often referred to with the short hand of “dyadic representation,” and work that looks at this form of representation generally suggests that the behavior of legislators reflects the preferences of constituents at least some of the time (Clinton, 2006; Hill & Hurley, 1999; Miller & Stokes, 1963; Wlezien, 2004). Most existing work examines the mass public as a whole, so we know much less about how the preferences of Latinxs and other minority groups are mirrored (or not) by their legislators and about the factors that influence the extent to which legislator behavior matches Latinx preferences.

Our focus on substantive representation, of course, does not eliminate the relevance of descriptive representation—whether constituents from a particular population group are represented by someone from their group. Importantly, if there were no substantive difference in how minority and non-minority legislators represent their constituents, then the reality that minority populations are often not represented by someone who mirrors them racially or ethnically is less concerning from a representational standpoint, at least with regard to policy outputs.<sup>3</sup> The literature on minority behavior, however, suggests that there *are* relevant differences between the behavior of minority legislators and legislators from majority groups (see Griffin, 2014 for a review). When coupled with the literature showing disconnects between the preferences of minority and non-minority constituents (Griffin & Newman, 2008) and between minority constituents and their representatives (Griffin & Newman, 2007, 2008),<sup>4</sup> this strengthens the case for enhanced descriptive representation while at the same time providing an empirical foundation for understanding under-representation of minorities as a form of “representational deficit.” In this paper we explore whether or not such a deficit exists for Latinxs, and we examine some potential explanations. However, before moving on to the discussion of why we should expect to see a representational deficit, it is important to get a better handle on what previous scholarship teaches us about dyadic representation more broadly.

Though the legislative process literature suggests that minority legislators behave differently in various ways, what is of particular importance here is whether their roll call voting behavior is different and how this affects the representational prospects of the people and groups that put them in office. Prior work on the representation of African-Americans in Congress suggests that Black legislators not only display an awareness of the interests of their co-racial constituents—and members of the African-American population more broadly (Gamble, 2007; Grose, 2011)—but also show it in their voting

patterns (Canon, 1999; Grose, 2011; Lublin, 1997, 1999; Tate, 2003; Whitby, 2000). Similarly, studies of the representation of women suggests that women display a higher propensity than men to advance the interests of women more broadly (Dodson, 2006; Swers, 1998, 2002; Vega & Firestone, 1995; see also Reingold, 2008). Though not the only factor that has a bearing on the representation afforded to the individuals and groups that comprise the U.S. population, descriptive representation is one that has to be considered when looking at the Latinx population, especially in light of the representational deficit found by prior work (i.e., Griffin & Newman, 2007). In addition, though the noted differences between minority and non-minority legislators remain after accounting for other factors (e.g., size of the minority population, legislator age, etc.), it is difficult to ignore the role that partisanship plays in representation. For example, Cameron et al. (1996) note that in the absence of descriptive representation, blacks were generally better off when represented by Democratic legislators than by Republicans.

A prerequisite for variation in representation across ethnic groups is variation in the preferences of different ethnic groups, specifically for our purposes the Latinx population relative to the non-Latinx population. Indeed, if Latinxs and non-Latinxs see eye-to-eye on political issues, then a discussion of differences in representation—at least with respect to constituent preferences and legislator behavior—is unnecessary. While there is much work to remaining to fully understand the formation and expression of Latinx public opinion, there is sufficient research on the subject to indicate that the preferences of Latinxs and non-Latinxs often differ, and also that there is enough pan-ethnic cohesion in the preferences of Latinxs to consider them a group (Barreto & Segura, 2014; Leal, 2007; Segura, 2012). Latinxs differ from their non-Latinx counterparts in their preferences and in the relative importance they place on political issues.

Though immigration is routinely pegged as a “Latinx issue,” pigeonholing the Latinx population as a one-issue constituency is not warranted. Indeed, bilingual education, health care, the economy, crime, and income inequality, among others, are issues on which Latinx people demonstrate distinct preferences from non-Latinxs (Barreto & Segura, 2014; Leal, 2007; Segura, 2012). These issues also regularly top the “most important problem” lists among Latinx identifiers (Barreto, 2019; Barreto et al., 2018; H. E. Sanchez, 2016; Vargas, 2016). Thus, there is a basis for exploring variation in representation afforded to Latinx and non-Latinx people rooted in their diverging preferences on various issues. Here, we explore this by looking at congruence between respondents and their legislators on various issues ranging from tax cuts to ending “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell.” It should be noted that some of the issues we examine here are not necessarily high on the Latinx agenda, but we seek to explore as wide a range of issues as possible.

Prior work has failed to provide an adequate picture of the extent to which Latinxs are represented by their legislators. Welch and Hibbing's (1984) work examining Latinx representation provides a useful example. They use Conservative Coalition Support (CCS) scores as the dependent variable, which as a general indicator of legislator ideology is an inadequate measure of legislative action on Latinx-specific preferences. In addition, the legislators examined in this study served only as late as 1980—a fundamentally different period of American politics with less minority representation (only six Latinx legislators were present) and lower levels of partisan polarization. Similarly, several works building on Welch and Hibbing (1984) suffer from many of the same issues, though to a lesser extent. Hero and Tolbert (1995) explore the 100th Congress, which had more Latinx legislators and they use the Southwest Voter Research Institute (SWVRI) scores as the dependent variable. That measure, while still an imperfect measure for Latinx interests, provides more votes to explore the relationship between legislator ethnicity and voting behavior. However, even at that time, there were only 10 Latinx legislators in the study (see also Kerr & Miller, 1997). Casellas' (2010) work provides a departure from the measurement strategies mentioned above; he uses Poole and Rosenthal's DW-NOMINATE scores, which provide an assessment of legislator ideology based on all roll call votes taken in a given session, but again the measure focuses on general ideology rather than congruence with specific constituency policy preferences (see also Griffin & Newman, 2007; Lublin, 1997). Griffin and Newman (2007) use respondent self-placement on an ideological scale, which while representing a major step forward, is problematic in its own right in light of what we know about measurement error in ideological self-identification as an indicator of issue preferences (see Ellis & Stimson, 2009). While this research has expanded our understanding of Latinx representation in Congress, there is a key part of the equation left out by earlier work: *the policy preferences of actual constituents*. In using aggregate voting records of legislators and other proxies for Latinx interests, scholars have imposed views on the Latinx population that may not be appropriate—especially when we consider the potential for variation in individual preferences across contexts.<sup>5</sup>

### *Reasons to Expect Variation in Latinx Representation*

Earlier research shows that the race and ethnicity of legislators is associated with their voting behavior (see Griffin, 2014) and that legislators tend to be more ideologically distant from Latinx than non-Latinx white constituents (Griffin & Newman, 2007). However, legislator ethnicity is but one factor that needs to be considered when looking at the representation of the

electorate—there are additional individual and contextual level factors that should be accounted for when looking at the Latinx population.

Research on the subject has long acknowledged that the size of the Latinx population in each legislative district is important theoretically and empirically (see Welch & Hibbing, 1984).<sup>6</sup> However, exactly how population composition influences the representation of Latinxs is less clear. From one perspective, a larger Latinx population should increase legislator responsiveness to their constituents (Welch & Hibbing, 1984). Another perspective is rooted in group threat, whereby larger minority (here Latinx) populations lead to a backlash in the attitudes and behavior of the non-minority population (Allport, 1954; Berg, 2015; Blalock, 1967; Hajnal & Abrajano, 2015; Hood & Morris, 1997; Key, 1949; Quillian, 1995; Rocha & Espino, 2009; Taylor, 1998; Tolbert & Grummel, 2003). From this perspective, larger Latinx populations—instead of leading to heightened responsiveness—would be associated with less responsiveness to Latinx interests. This is exactly what Griffin and Newman (2007) find, providing evidence that ideological congruence between Latinx constituents and their legislators is reduced as the Latinx proportion of the district population increases.<sup>7</sup>

While Griffin and Newman (2007) report a finding consistent with a backlash effect, they do not consider a possible alternative to backlash that could produce the empirical pattern they uncover. That Latinxs may threaten non-Latinxs and thus limit representational gains that come with increased numbers is a theoretical possibility, but it isn't the only scenario that might explain the aforementioned patterns of Latinx representation. Another possibility, one that is not connected to backlash among non-Latinx whites, is that the political behavior Latinxs may change as the Latinx population increases. Specifically, it is worth considering how Latinx participation and preferences might change alongside the size of the Latinx population in ways that might hamper the substantive representation of Latinx constituents.

Scholars have long noted the connection between socioeconomic status and participation (Milbrath, 1965; Verba et al., 1995; Verba & Nie, 1972), a relationship that has implications for the Latinx population, which generally tends to be lower in socioeconomic status relative to non-Latinx whites (Amenta & Smith, 2016; Barreto & Segura, 2014). In turn, Latinxs—because of their lower propensity to participate in the political process (Barreto & Segura, 2014; De La Garza, 2004; Shaw et al., 2000; see also Jones-Correa et al., 2018 for a review)—may experience lower levels of representation, even when comprising a plurality or a majority in a district. However, this cannot directly explain variation in the ideological distance between Latinxs and their legislators, unless Latinxs in districts with larger Latinx populations display a lower propensity to participate in the political process than those in

districts with fewer Latinxs. This is an interesting possibility because if Latinxs in those districts with higher Latinx populations tend to participate less than others, then participation deficits would be partially negating any representational gains that raw numbers would warrant. Prior work has noted that Latinx participation, at least in majority-minority Latinx districts, increases, which—though it doesn't speak to those districts with less than a majority of Latinxs—casts doubt on the notion that Latinxs will participate less in districts where they constitute a larger share of the population (Barreto et al., 2004).

The backlash theory posits that there is a change in the attitudes and behavior of the majority group (see Hajnal & Abrajano, 2015) when minority groups become larger. But the backlash found in prior work on representation could also be attributable to changes in Latinx preferences. We are thinking of the possibility that Latinxs in districts with larger Latinx populations have less homogeneous preferences, which in turn could make it harder for legislators to adequately represent them (Clifford, 2012). As we move from districts where Latinxs are a clear minority to those where they constitute a plurality (or close to a majority), we might see that Latinx preferences become more similar to non-Latinx whites. Whether due to sub-ethnic diversity, a desire to assimilate, or some other dynamic, the possibility that Latinx preferences change with growth in the population is something that needs to be accounted for empirically, as it can potentially explain the empirical patterns in earlier work via a theoretical mechanism other than backlash.

## Hypotheses

As discussed above, prior work suggests that the policy preferences of Latinxs and non-Latinx whites differ (Leal, 2007; Barreto & Segura, 2014; Sanchez, 2006; Segura, 2012). When paired with the fact that non-Latinx whites maintain a privileged status, the idea that Latinxs will be afforded less representation than whites is not a controversial one. Prior work has found support for this conclusion, but earlier work has consistently focused on general ideological congruence between constituents and representatives. We seek to re-examine these prior results with a new measure (discussed more thoroughly below) that taps issue-specific preference congruence. Thus, the first hypothesis we seek to test is related to the presence or absence of a representational deficit for Latinx constituents:

*Hypothesis 1: The issue-specific policy attitudes of Latinxs are less congruent with those of their representatives than are the issue-specific policy attitudes of non-Latinx whites.*

While we are interested in the presence or absence of a Latinx representational deficit in general, we are also keen to assess *variation across districts* in Latinx representation. The size of the Latinx population in a district might also play a role in how Latinxs are represented relative to non-Latinxs. Theoretically, a larger Latinx population should lead to increased representation. However, the literature on the subject is mixed. In an earlier era, Welch and Hibbing (1984) found that larger Latinx populations are associated with more liberal voting records by legislators, yet subsequent works (i.e., Casellas, 2007; Hero & Tolbert, 1995) find no such relationship. Griffin and Newman (2007) find that the size of the Latinx population only influences representation in districts where Latinxs get close to a majority—in so-called “threat districts.” They attribute this effect to backlash coming from the non-Latinx white population. As a result, we seek to examine how the size of the Latinx population influences the congruence between Latinxs and their legislators relative to non-Latinx whites.<sup>8</sup>

*Hypothesis 2: Congruence between the attitudes of Latinxs their representatives declines as the Latinx proportion of the district population increases.*

The backlash theory posits anti-minority group (here, toward Latinxs) sentiment rooted in an ethnic threat posed by the size of that minority population on the attitudes and behavior of the white population (Hajnal & Abrajano, 2015). We seek to test for empirical patterns that shed light on the presence of backlash. First, we focus on potential attitudinal change among non-Latinx whites.

*Hypothesis 3: Non-Latinx white respondents hold more anti-Latinx positions as the Latinx proportion of the district population increases.*

Next, we examine the potential for non-Latinx political mobilization that would be consistent with the backlash mechanism.

*Hypothesis 4: White respondents will become more active as we move from districts with a low number of Latinxs to those districts with larger Latinx populations.*

Backlash may explain Latinx representational deficits to the extent that they exist, but it could also be the case that the preferences and (or) behavior of the Latinx population change in districts where Latinxs have few co-ethnics in their geographical region as compared to those where those



individuals have many co-ethnics living around them. This motivates our fourth hypothesis regarding Latinx attitudes.

*Hypothesis 5: Latinx respondents hold attitudes more consistent with non-Latinx respondents as the Latinx proportion of the district population increases.*

Finally, we consider whether the political participation of Latinx constituents might be undermined by a growing Latinx population.

*Hypothesis 6: Latinx respondents become less active as the Latinx proportion of the district population increases.*

## Data and Methodology

The 2012 iteration of the Cooperative Election Study (CES) survey—with more than 5,000 Latinx respondents<sup>9</sup> across congressional districts—allows for the testing of the abovementioned hypotheses.<sup>10</sup> Not only does the survey capture a nationally-representative sample of Latinxs, but it also provides their preferences, as well as the roll call votes of their respective legislators across several policy issues, which makes it ideal for exploring the representation afforded to this segment of the population.<sup>11</sup> In addition, the survey provides data on non-Latinx respondents to allow for comparison.

Individual respondents are nested within their districts, and we must account for this in the modeling. Theoretically, there is reason to expect that the individual contexts in which respondents are nested will influence the representation afforded to them. Multi-level modeling allows for the exploration of individual-level characteristics (i.e., ethnicity, education, income, etc.), contextual-level factors (i.e., size of the Latinx population<sup>12</sup>, co-partisan district, etc.), and their interaction.

Representation—the primary dependent variable—is conceptualized as policy preference congruence between constituents and their legislators. In order to capture this, a congruence index (see Ellis, 2013) is created which sums the instances where legislators and constituents have the same response (or do not) on a given policy to create a variable that ranges from 0 to 1, with zero being a situation in which the respondent and their legislator are never in agreement and one being the opposite.<sup>13</sup> For each respondent in the data set, we take their position on a series of policy issues and match it with the roll call vote of their legislators in the House of Representatives. A binary variable is created for each of the issues where 1 represents congruence

between respondents and legislators and 0 means that the two take different positions. Those variables are then used to create the index mentioned above.<sup>14</sup> This congruence index has a mean of about 0.52, which indicates that, on average, the preferences of constituents and their legislators are congruent about half of the time (see Table 1 in Supplemental Appendix A).

The individual issues used to construct the index come from the survey item that asks respondents the following: "Congress considered many important bills over the past 2 years. For each of the following tell us whether you support or oppose the legislation in principle." That prompt was followed by issues including then-U.S. House Speaker Paul Ryan's budget bill aimed at cutting spending in Medicare and Medicaid, immigration reform, the repeal of the Affordable Care Act, and the Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy for the military, among others (Ansolabehere & Schaffner, 2013, p. 63).<sup>15</sup>

Respondent ethnicity (Latinx) is the key explanatory variable, and it is captured in a binary variable which takes the value of 1 when a respondent self-identifies as Hispanic, and 0 when they identify as white and state that they are not of Hispanic origin.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, legislator ethnicity (Latinx MC) is captured with a binary variable using information from the Office of the Historian of the U.S. House of Representatives and it also takes the value 1 when a given legislator is identified as Hispanic (Wasniewski et al., 2013). Legislator partisanship (Democrat MC) is captured by a binary variable that takes the value of 1 when the legislator is a Democrat and 0 when that individual is Republican.<sup>17</sup> Other individual-level variables used are respondent gender, family income, intention to vote, and educational attainment.<sup>18</sup> At the contextual-level, variables capturing whether respondents are nested in districts where they are represented by co-ethnic legislators and Democratic legislators, respectively are created as dummy variables. At that same level, the size of the Latinx population in a district is operationalized as the percentage of Latinxs in each district with data from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2011 American Community Survey (ACS) population estimates. This variable ranges from 0.6 to 81.9%, but on average, Latinxs comprise approximately 15% of a district (see Table 1 in Supplemental Appendix A).

To explore the level of congruence afforded to Latinxs relative to non-Latinx whites, we make use of multi-level modeling because it allows us to account for the fact that individual respondents are nested in their congressional districts. This is important because it allows for the exploration of how geographic (and congressional) context (i.e., district population and being in a district in which a respondent is represented by a Latinx legislator) influence the effect of respondent ethnicity and other respondent characteristics. In order to allow for that possibility in the models, we use a district-specific

intercept and allow the effect (the slope-estimate) of respondent ethnicity to vary across districts.<sup>19</sup>

## **Results**

In order to capture the representation of Latinxs, we explore respondent characteristics, contextual factors, and multiplicative interaction terms (both within and across levels of analysis) to assess whether Latinxs face a representational deficit with an issue-specific measure of legislator-constituent congruence (see Table 1). A consistent finding across specifications is that Latinxs face a representational deficit relative to non-Latinx whites, as evidenced by negative and statistically significant coefficients for respondent ethnicity (first row in Table 1). In essence, these estimates suggest that the congruence between Latinxs and their legislators is about 1% less than the congruence between non-Latinx whites and their legislators. This seems small at first glance. However, when we consider that members of the U.S. House of Representatives vote hundreds of times each year, even a 1% difference is likely to be consequential for Latinxs when compounded across votes. This provides support for the first hypothesis.

The second column in Table 1 adds several individual-level interactions between respondent ethnicity and other respondent characteristics, which are included to explore how intersections of ethnicity and categories of disadvantage affect the representation of Latinx respondents. A context-level control for legislator partisanship is also included. The most important result from this model is the negative coefficient for Democratic legislator partisanship, indicating that congruence between constituents and legislators (whether Latinx or not) is higher in districts with a Democratic legislator. While the individual-level interactions do not produce any statistically significant results, we chart the interaction effects in Supplemental Appendix A for readers particularly interested in intersecting identities and political power.

The next four columns of the table focus on Latinx identity at the individual level and additional context-level variables and context-level interactions. Column 3 includes individual-level Latinx identity, legislator partisanship, legislator ethnicity, and district-level Latinx population. Again, the clearest result is for legislator partisanship. The fourth column introduces a cross-level interaction between legislator partisanship and individual-level Latinx identity. The positive coefficient on this interaction term indicates that Latinx constituents represented by Democratic legislators face a smaller representational deficit relative to non-Latinx whites than Latinxs represented by Republicans. In fact, the representational deficit for Latinx constituents is essentially erased when they are represented by Democrats. The fifth column

Table 1. Models of Constituent Preference-Legislator Roll Call Congruence.

Individual	1	2	3	4	5	6
Latinx	-.006 <sup>†</sup> (.003)	-.025 <sup>**</sup> (.009)	-.011 <sup>***</sup> (.003)	-.016 <sup>***</sup> (.004)	-.012 <sup>***</sup> (.003)	-.008 <sup>†</sup> (.005)
Female	-.015 <sup>***</sup> (.002)	-.016 <sup>***</sup> (.002)				
Family income	.0001 <sup>***</sup> (.000)	.0001 <sup>***</sup> (.000)				
Education	-.0001 <sup>*</sup> (.001)	-.0001 <sup>*</sup> (.001)				
Voted	.004 (.002)	.004 (.002)				
Latinx × Female	.012 <sup>*</sup> (.006)	.012 <sup>*</sup> (.006)				
Latinx × Income	-.0001 (.0001)	-.0001 (.0001)				
Latinx × Education	.002 (.002)	.002 (.002)				
Latinx × Voted	.004 (.006)	.004 (.006)				
District						
Democrat MC		.069 <sup>***</sup> (.003)	.067 <sup>***</sup> (.003)	.067 <sup>***</sup> (.003)	.068 <sup>***</sup> (.003)	
Latinx MC			-.001 (.009)			
% Latinx			.000 (.000)	.013 <sup>*</sup> (.006)		
Latinx × Democrat MC					.018 <sup>†</sup> (.009)	
Latinx × Latinx MC						-.001 (.000)
Latinx × % Latinx						.512 <sup>***</sup> (.003)
Constant	.540 <sup>***</sup> (.005)	.499 <sup>***</sup> (.004)	.491 <sup>***</sup> (.002)	.494 <sup>***</sup> (.002)	.44091	44990
Individuals	44861	44389	44091	44516	44091	44990
Districts	435	431	425	431	425	435
Level 1 R <sup>2a</sup>	.0015	.0335	.0314	.0316	.0313	.0027
Level 2 R <sup>2a</sup>	-.0094	.5112	.5141	.5108	.5125	.0388

Note. The dependent variable is an index measuring congruence between respondents and their legislators on all available issues in the 2012 CES. This measure ranges from 0 to 1, with one being perfect congruence between the two actors (see Table 1 in Supplemental Appendix A for descriptive statistics). Multi-level regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.

<sup>a</sup>Snijders and Bosker R-Squared estimate.

<sup>†</sup> $p < .10$ . \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

again includes a cross-level interaction, between legislator ethnicity and constituent ethnicity in this model. The positive interaction term coefficient shows that the representational deficit for Latinx constituents is eliminated when they are represented by a Latinx legislator. This is an indicator of the importance of descriptive representation for substantive representation. In Column 6 we interact district-level Latinx population with individual-level ethnicity. The interaction term coefficient, though not statistically significant, points in the direction that an increasing Latinx population in a district increases the Latinx representational deficit relative to non-Latinx whites. We plot the effect of Latinx ethnicity at the individual level on congruence across observed values of district-level Latinx population in Figure 1. The relationship is consistent with backlash, with Latinxs in districts with larger Latinx populations facing greater representational deficits when compared to non-Latinx whites. This result also runs contrary to a majoritarian view of representation and lends support to the second hypothesis—larger Latinx populations do not lead to increased Latinx representation.

Having confirmed an effect consistent with backlash, we next seek to explore whether this change in the representation afforded to Latinxs in those districts with higher Latinx populations is rooted in anti-Latinx-motivated behavior and/attitudinal change on the part of non-Latinx Anglos or in the Latinx population itself. To explore the underlying mechanism(s), we created two additional dependent variables, the first is an index designed to measure pro-Latinx attitudes. This is constructed by determining the relative position of Latinxs and non-Latinxs for each of the individual roll calls, then recoding each one so that the position more favored by Latinxs relative to non-Latinxs is positive, and finally summing them into an index where higher values indicate that respondent attitudes are more consistent with the preferences of Latinxs relative to non-Latinx whites.<sup>20</sup>

Figure 2 shows how pro-Latinx attitudes change among (non-)Latinxs moving from the low- to the high-end of the percentage of Latinx distribution. There is a clear divergence, with non-Latinxs less likely to take pro-Latinx positions in districts with more Latinxs. This pattern is reversed for Latinxs in the sample. Another potential manifestation of the backlash hypothesis can be a change in the behavior of non-Latinxs, though we also look at the behavior of Latinxs across congressional districts to test whether the Latinx population also behaves differently across contexts. To explore these possibilities, we create a political participation index—like the others, this participation index ranges from 0 to 1, with higher values indicating more participatory acts (see Table 1 in Supplemental Appendix A).<sup>21</sup> This relationship, for both groups, is displayed in Figure 3, and it shows that non-Latinxs participate at higher rates in districts with larger Latinx

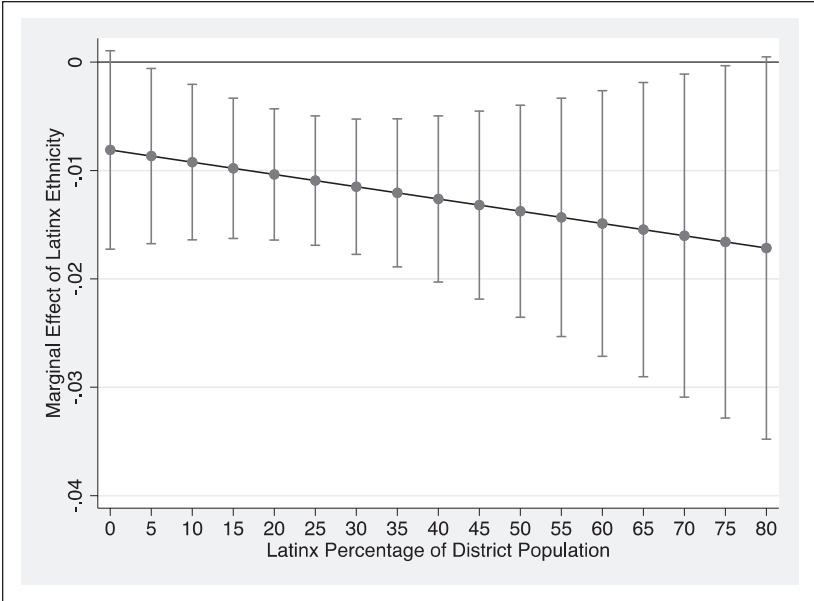


Figure 1. Latinx representation as Latinx population size increases.

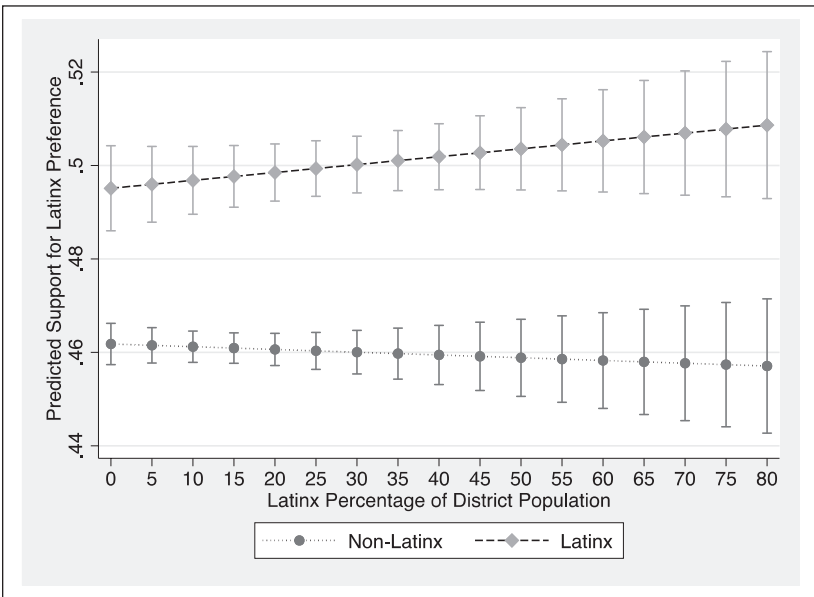


Figure 2. Attitudinal change across districts.

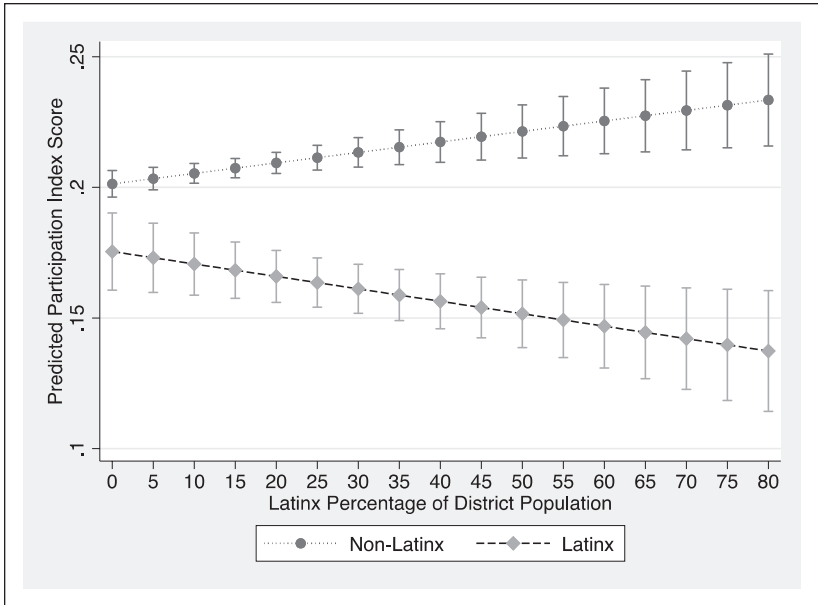


Figure 3. Political participation across districts.

populations—a finding that is consistent with a backlash explanation. However, when looking at the Latinx population, the opposite seems to be taking place—Latinx respondents in districts with larger Latinx populations are less likely to engage in the political process. Together, these findings provide support for the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth hypotheses.

### Discussion

In this paper, we have tested several hypotheses related to the representation of Latinxs relative to their non-Latinx white counterparts. The results show that Latinxs are at a representational deficit that is slightly exacerbated in districts where Latinxs make up a larger share of the population. Prior work has relied on imperfect measures of Latinx interests, and of legislator voting behavior, that fail to directly tap the relationship between constituents and their representatives. Our work leverages a unique dataset to match the actual preferences of constituents to corresponding votes taken by their representative, a strategy that provides substantial empirical and theoretical leverage when trying to explain the extent to which Latinxs are substantively represented in Congress. Nevertheless, as other scholars

exploring representation have noted (e.g., Grose, 2005; Welch & Hibbing, 1984) we are limited in our ability to fully disentangle the effects of the native and foreign-born populations on representation, as the populations are linked in practice. From a majoritarian perspective, we should not expect Latinxs who are ineligible to vote to be afforded the same representation as voting-eligible and voting Latinxs, as these subgroups do not have the same electoral connection to their representatives (see Griffin & Newman, 2005). As the second and third generations of U.S.-based Latinxs continue to grow it will be easier to explore whether the differences we find here are linked to the sheer size of the Latinx population and/or the size of the voting-eligible Latinx population in congressional districts. Still, the findings here provide some evidence that the underrepresentation faced by Latinxs cannot be solely attributed to participatory patterns or immigration status.

In addition to the issue of homogeneity in district composition with respect to the Latinx native and foreign-born population, another key limitation is the age of our data. Since 2012, we have seen changes in immigration policy, political rhetoric, and political behavior in the American public, all of which could have a bearing on the findings uncovered here.<sup>22</sup> In a related vein, the CES only captures the preferences of English-speaking Latinxs, which arguably provides an incomplete picture of the relationship between Latinxs and their representatives. Notwithstanding these limitations, the theoretical and empirical contributions presented here add to our understanding of the extent to which Latinxs are represented and prospects for increasing said representation in the future.

While it is important to establish whether there is in fact a representational deficit, our primary contribution is exploring the underpinnings of this deficit. Our work suggests that even though legislators play an important role in the representation afforded to Latinxs, there is a need to look at the intergroup dynamics (McLeod, 2008; Tajfel & Turner, 2001) that structure the level of congruence between Latinxs and their legislators. Indeed, while other work on the relationship between constituents and their legislators suggests that there is a disconnect (and distortion) in the representation afforded to minorities as a result of variation in the propensity of minorities to contact non-minority representatives (Broockman, 2014) and of legislators to contact constituents when they're minorities (Butler & Broockman, 2011; Mendez & Grose, 2018), at least some of this deficit seems to be rooted in a backlash effect on the part of non-Latinx whites. Our findings suggest that Latinxs, activists, reformers, and candidates can take action to lessen (or close) the representational gap. Efforts to do so could be in the form of Latinx mobilization, reform to provide more educational attainment opportunities, and the election of Democratic and Latinx legislators, since all of these factors have a bearing on the representation afforded to Latinxs quite aside from the behavior of Anglos.



## Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## ORCID iD

Giovanny D. Pleites-Hernandez  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5579-8636>

## Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

## Notes

1. Latinxs hold 54 seats in Congress, which is about 10% of the total membership in the 118th Congress, a number that lags behind their share of the population, which is currently above 18% of the total population (NALEO Educational Fund, 2019; Schaeffer, 2023).
2. Work in this vein of the literature has explored behavior in other areas of the legislative process such as agenda-setting (Bratton, 2006; Bratton & Haynie, 1999; Sinclair-Chapman, 2002; Wilson, 2010), committee work (Gamble, 2007; Rouse, 2013), and oversight (Minta, 2011; Rouse, 2013), but roll calls are arguably more visible, and easier to access and evaluate by researchers.
3. This is not meant to discount the symbolic or psychological benefits associated with descriptive representation. However, we focus on substantive representation and that is the lens through which this argument is being made.
4. In addition, some research also suggests that there are disparities in communication between constituents and legislators, where the former are less likely to reach out to their representatives when they don't share the same race (Broockman, 2014) and the latter are less likely to respond to requests from constituents that aren't of their own racial group (Butler & Broockman, 2011), neither of which bode well for the representation of minorities.
5. Though not quite in the image of Miller and Stokes' (1963) seminal work—because we don't have direct measures of legislator preferences—the dataset we utilize allows for the exploration of dyadic representation of Latinxs with a nationally representative sample.
6. An inherent issue in studying the Latinx population is that it is difficult to disentangle the influence of the undocumented population from that of the U.S.-born (and naturalized), especially as it relates to representation. A case can be made that even the undocumented Latinx population should be afforded representation that their native and/or enfranchised co-ethnics are entitled to (Lipman, 2006;

Mendez, 2018). Writing decades ago, Welch and Hibbing note that “[t]he numerical strength of the Hispanic population in electing representatives is diluted by the fact that many Hispanics are non-citizens” (Welch & Hibbing, 1984, p. 329). We use estimates of the undocumented population at the district level to account for the role that this might play empirically (see Supplemental Appendix A for additional modeling, which shows that the results reported below remain substantively unchanged when controlling for the district-level undocumented population).

7. More specifically, Griffin and Newman (2007) find that Latinxs were more ideologically distant from their representatives when compared to Anglos and their representatives (i.e., a 0.08 point gap on a zero to one scale; a difference larger than that between other groups such as men and women, low versus high income, and young versus older individuals, see pp. 1037–1038), a difference that was larger in districts where Latinxs approached a majority (i.e., 40–50% of district).
8. Though that discussion may suggest that there is a need to model the effect of the population as curvilinear, no such relationship exists. Therefore, we address it here instead of in the modeling section later.
9. Sub-ethnic variation does—in some cases—lead to differences in the preferences of Latinxs (e.g., Puerto Ricans holding different positions than Cubans; see De La Garza & Jang, 2011). In larger districts, this could be more likely to come into play as sub-group competition could have a bearing on who gets what. Unfortunately, the data do not allow for sub-ethnic exploration, but, if this is happening, then it should manifest itself at the aggregate level and provide at least suggestive evidence for whether this is the case.
10. This data set is supplemented with the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS) estimates and information about individual legislators from their official house websites, personal websites, and other publications, when necessary.
11. The CES is an amalgamation of the research efforts of various scholars—several different research teams across the United States—with the purpose of studying how “Americans view Congress and hold their representatives accountable during elections, how they voted and their electoral experiences, and how their behavior and experiences vary with political geography and social context” (Ansolabehere & Schaffner, 2013, p. 7).
12. We define the Latinx population as the total number of individuals within a given district/area that identify as “Hispanic, Latinx, or Spanish origin” since we rely on the U.S. Census Bureau’s estimates (see Casellas, 2010; Griffin & Newman, 2007; Lublin, 1997, 1999).
13. Other dependent variables are used for auxiliary analysis and they will be described below.
14. The index accounts for how many times the roll call votes of legislators matched up with the positions taken by their constituents. So, for an individual and a legislator that share the same preference on every issue, the main dependent variable takes a value of 1.

15. The complete list of roll call votes available are: Paul Ryan's 2011 House Budget Plan, which would cut Medicare (and Medicaid) by 42%; the Simpson-Bowles Budget Plan, which would make cuts of about 15% "across the board in Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, and Defense, as well as other programs. Eliminate many tax breaks . . . [and] reduce debt by 21% by 2020"; the Middle Class Tax Cut Act, which would "extend Bush era tax cuts for incomes below \$200,000. Would increase the budget deficit by an estimated \$250 billion"; the Tax Hike Prevention Act, which would "extend Bush-era tax cuts for all individuals, regardless of income. Would increase the budget deficit by an estimated \$405 billion"; the U.S.-Korea Free Trade Agreement, which "would remove tariffs on imports and exports between South Korea and the U.S."; a repeal of the Affordable Care Act; a bill to approve the Keystone XL Pipeline; a bill to end "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" in the military (Ansolabehere & Schaffner, 2013, pp. 63–65).
16. This variable is constructed using the question "Are you of Spanish, Latinx, or Hispanic origin or descent?" (Ansolabehere & Schaffner, 2013, p. 29). Individuals that answered "Yes" were categorized as Hispanic and those that no weren't.
17. There were no independents in the 112th U.S. House of Representatives.
18. Respondent gender is a binary variable which takes the value 1 for female respondents and 0 otherwise, family income is an ordinal variable ranging from \$0–10,000 to \$500,000 and up, educational attainment ranges from no education to completion of a graduate degree, and intention to vote in the 2012 election takes a value of 1 for yes and 0 for no.
19. The models used here are random slope, random coefficient models, which are estimated using Stata 14's *mixed* command. All of the models computed here include only Latinx and non-Latinx white respondents in an attempt to stop comparisons from being additionally complicated by race.
20. This variable ranges from 0 to 1 and has a mean of about 0.49 (see Table 1 in Supplemental Appendix A).
21. This index is created using a principal components analysis of political attendance meetings, political sign displays, having worked for a candidate, and monetary donations to candidates and political organizations in the last 12-months leading up to the survey.
22. Indeed, as the work of Gutierrez et al. (2019) demonstrates, the 2016 election and the Trump presidency activated Latinxs in the electorate, which could have—at least theoretically—influenced their representation in Congress.

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### Author Biographies

**Giovanni D. Pleites-Hernandez** is an assistant professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of North Carolina Asheville. His research explores minority group political behavior and public opinion, legislative behavior and communication in Congress, and political representation in American politics.

**Nathan J. Kelly** is a professor of political science. He was awarded an Andrew Carnegie Corporation Fellowship, and his co-authored book *Hijacking the Agenda* received the Gladys M. Kammerer Award from the American Political Science Association. His research focuses on American political economy, inequality, and democracy in the United States and cross-nationally.