How to Sound the Alarms: Untangling Racialized Threat in Latinx Mobilization

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he presidency of Donald Trump puts into evidence the precarious place that Latinxs¹ occupy in American politics. The presidential campaign that began by equating undocumented Mexican immigrants with rapists is now an administration shaping the lives of Latinxs (Washington Post 2015) both citizens and noncitizens-through immigration enforcement (Ryo 2019), welfare regulations (Scott 2018), census guidelines (Schneider 2019), and myriad other policy tools. In this sense, the Trump administration represents not a break but rather an acute worsening of a reality that scholars of Latinx politics consistently describe-namely, that racialized threat is a mainstay of Latinx political history. Whether in the form of onerous legislative policies or xenophobic speech, threat has occupied a central role in motivating Latinxs to engage in collective action to defend their material interests and group standing (Jones-Correa, Al-Faham, and Cortez 2018; Zepeda-Millán 2017). By reconstituting a racialized and perilous political environment, existing political responses to the Trump Era have revealed the shortcomings of our own scholarly understanding of the catalyzing effects of threat on political behavior.

We find two important blind spots in the literature. First, research on the effects of threat in Latinx political behavior has shown an overt focus on national-level episodes of threat where mobilization has taken place. Two historical moments mark the beat of the literature: California's mid-1990s nativist turn and the 2006 immigrant-rights protests. Both periods saw the welfare of Latinxs directly threatened by exclusionary policy proposals-Propositions 187, 209, and 227 in the mid-1990s and federal bill H.R. 4437 in 2006-that galvanized targeted populations into oppositional action (Bloemraad and Voss 2011; Hosang 2010). The importance of these two periods for the formation of a Latinx political conscience cannot be understated; however, theories of mobilization built around these peaks of engagement overpredict the incidence of collective action around threat. Threat may have prompted the largest episodes of Latinx political mobilization in recent US history, but threat alone is not enough to bring about collective action. A holistic theory of threat should account for both mobilization and demobilization as well as for the mechanisms that enable political actors to transform the latter into the former (Prieto 2018).

Second, the state of the literature often has consisted of a binary and narrow understanding of threat, wherein one lives in either a threatening or nonthreatening political environment. For example, to explain the catalyzing effects of California's political context in the 1990s, threat often is measured at the aggregate level (e.g., based on aggregate-level residence in a state or city with punitive immigration politics) rather than perceptions of threat at the individual level. Although existing observational and crosssectional studies allow us to account for the interplay of states' political contexts and aggregate voters (Barreto and Ramirez 2004; Bowler, Nicholson, and Segura 2006; Pantoja, Ramirez, and Segura 2001; Pantoja and Segura 2003), it is difficult to conclude that threat alone motivates previously observed peaks in political activism (Reny, Wilcox-Archuleta, and Cruz Nichols 2018). Without verifying perceptions of one's environment at the individual level, we do not know if the effects capturing peaks in activism during threatening political environments also are conflated with efforts by immigrant advocates attempting to provide more integrative policies.

If threat is expected to foster Latinx mobilization, why are some instances of racialized threat met with a failure to mobilize (Reny, Wilcox-Archuleta, and Cruz Nichols 2018; Zepeda-Millán 2017) or with an outright withdrawal from public life (Okamoto and Ebert 2010)? In summary, the straightforward notion that racialized threat mobilizes Latinxs is weakened by the literature's tendency to overpredict political mobilization, overlook individual responses to threat, and disregard the role of mobilization structures. In this critical review, we analyze the existing literature on threat in Latinx politics. We also offer a research agenda for the study of racialized threat in Latinx mobilization that considers the emotional underpinnings of collective action and the role of mobilizing structures in framing calls to action. In conclusion, we draw on Cruz Nichols (2017) to recommend a coupled threat-and-opportunity strategy for collective-action appeals that calls attention to onerous political changes while also raising the possibility of an improved status quo.

RACIALIZED THREAT AND IDENTITY: THE LITERATURE AND ITS FUTURE DIRECTIONS

If research on Latinx political behavior were to be summarized in one sweeping statement, it would be that threat prompts

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Latinxs to mobilize politically. The logic described by the threat-appraisal literature centers the role of racialized threat —that is, attacks on an individual's racial identity or group status—in activating a sense of solidarity and subsequently prompting political engagement (Jones-Correa, Al-Faham, hinder immigrant-organizing efforts. Political participation also is driven by group boundaries and collective identities, which is an iterative process as hosts and newcomers interact with one another (Alba 2005; Okamoto and Ebert 2010; Zepeda-Millán 2017). When the negotiation process between

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and Cortez 2018; Okamoto and Ebert 2010). Studies have shown the power of threat in motivating Latinxs to apply for US citizenship (Pantoja, Ramirez, and Segura 2001), seek political information (Pantoja and Segura 2003), turn out to vote (White 2016), and participate in mass protests (Zepeda-Millán 2017). Racialized threat may come in the form of xenophobic rhetoric (Perez 2015), racialized immigration enforcement (White 2016), and onerous legislative proposals (Zepeda-Millán 2017). What types of racialized threats and contexts facilitate political participation among Latinxs? As explained in further detail herein, the effects of threat hinge on the nature of the threat, the institutional environment, one's perceptions of threat and opportunity, and various aspects of one's identity.

When legislative threats against undocumented immigrants are racialized, those feeling targeted-including naturalized and US-born citizens-are more likely to mobilize politically and civically (Okamoto and Ebert 2010; Zepeda-Millán 2017). Zepeda-Millán (2017) and Mora et al. (2018) posit a distinction between small-scale repressive threats (e.g., raids) and large-scale policy threats (e.g., anti-immigrant proposals). The former make mobilization more difficult whereas the latter's prospective dimension facilitates it. Zepeda-Millán (2017) also argues that the source of the threat is critical because those that come from a single source are easier to mobilize around than those that come from multiple actors. When trying to understand the social movement surrounding the contentious topic of immigration, we turn to the role of political opportunity structures. Political opportunity structures are "consistent-but not necessarily formal or permanent -dimensions of the political environment [...] that provide incentives for collective action, affecting expectations for success and failure" (Gamson and Meyer 1996, quoted in Tarrow 2011, 163). These commonly may include the relative openness of political institutions-that is, how easily those out of power may influence those in power-and the presence of sympathetic elites (Klandermans 2001). A supportive political environment can improve the prospects for collective organizing among groups that traditionally have been excluded, including immigrant groups in the United States and Europe (Koopmans et al. 2005).

Open institutions do not suffice to foster mobilization; identity provides groups with the impetus to act politically. Focused on the incorporation of Asian and Latinx immigrants, Okamoto and Ebert (2010) argued that an open political opportunity structure can create a sense of contentment and newcomers and established groups bolsters the boundary between "us" and "them," "immigrants begin to recognize their shared interests, see themselves as a larger group, and participate in group action based on this shared minority status" (Okamoto and Ebert 2010, 534). The ebb and flow between immigrant and native-born groups often are driven by various racialized threats, including anti-immigrant rhetoric and restrictive immigrant legislation. Individual factors that influence the likelihood of being mobilized by threat include proximity to the migration experience and to those who are most vulnerable, as well as a strong sense of selfidentification with the targeted group (Sanchez et al. 2015; Valenzuela and Michelson 2016; Zepeda-Millán 2017). For example, when compared to US-born Latinx respondents, naturalized citizens were more mobilized to vote by racialized threats (Michelson and Pallares 2001). Individuals with high levels of group identification also are more likely to mobilize in response to racialized threat, with low identifiers failing to mobilize due to fear that doing so will further highlight their group stigma (Perez 2015).

As mentioned previously, however, threat may prompt political demobilization and isolation. Sanchez et al. (2015) showed that individuals who are close to an undocumented person prioritize immigration issues in making political decisions; however, such attention may not translate into political action. Threat may create risk-averse behaviors among racialized populations, hindering civic or political involvement. "Cautious citizenship,"² for example, involves strategic decision making before exposing oneself or one's family and friends to the risk of being questioned about their immigration status (Cruz Nichols, LeBrón, and Pedraza 2016; Pedraza, Cruz Nichols, and LeBrón 2017). To deter this risk to their family and friends, the fear of deportation permeates the everyday decision making of naturalized and US-born Latinxs. At times, cautious citizenship brings avoidance of authority figures into various domains of civic life, including making doctor's appointments, reporting crime to police, using public transportation, and engaging with children's school teachers (Pedraza, Cruz Nichols, and LeBrón 2017). Similarly, Hobbs and Lajevardi (2019) found compelling evidence about the ways in which perceived discrimination throughout the 2016 presidential election season correlated with a reticence from civic and public life among Muslim Americans. Among other studies focused on the divergent effects of threat, Oskooii (2018) found that Muslim Americans who are exposed to interpersonal discrimination participate in politics less often,

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whereas those who are exposed to political discrimination show an increase in political participation.

Although these newer studies allow for a more nuanced account of threat in nativist policy contexts, their focus remains on exploring the role that grievances play in mobilizing the Latinx community rather than the simultaneously motivating role of more promising or desirable policy goals in these contexts. Departing from much of the threat research, we suggest an approach that examines (1) individual-level perAmong various racialized groups, scholars found a positive correlation between anger and a willingness to vote among Black Americans (Banks 2014; Towler and Parker 2018) and Latinx Americans (Gutierrez et al. 2019). However, Phoenix (2019) and Valentino et al. (2011) found that anger is not politically mobilizing in the absence of skills and resources. Without this access, anger can have a deterring effect on participation, especially due to political fatigue amid several losses (Phoenix 2019). There is less consensus on the effects of

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ceptions of threats and opportunities, and (2) frames developed by mobilizing structures to make sense of threat.

EMOTION IN COLLECTIVE-ACTION APPEALS

Research on threat and political action cannot be devoid of the study of emotions (Kahneman and Tversky 1979). Because threat appeals are overwhelmingly aversive to one's interests, the existing public opinion literature typically correlates and operationalizes an indication of threat with the presence of negative-valence emotions, which may include anger, fear, and/or anxiety (Brader 2006; Valentino et al. 2011). In this critical literature review, we argue that a study of threat and political action should center the ways that both negative and positive emotions serve as cues to inform people's decisionmaking behavior (Vasi and Macy 2003)-also known as "affect-as-information" (Nabi and Gall Myrick 2018). By accounting for affect-as-information in political mobilization strategies, future messaging appeals should incorporate a sense of hope while alerting an audience of potential threats (Cruz Nichols 2017; Nabi and Gall Myrick 2018). Those who face a threat and feel hopeful-known as "uplifting fear appeals" (Nabi and Gall Myrick 2018)—would be more motivated to pursue protective behaviors than those who simply are facing a threat, which easily can induce a spiral of negativity and despair.

Overall, the effect of one's emotions on subsequent behavior can be summarized under the leading theory of affective intelligence (Marcus, Neuman, and MacKuen 2000). Anxiety and anger are processed through a more alert state of mind (i.e., surveillance system), which triggers vigilance and a disruption in one's typical behavior (Marcus, Neuman, and MacKuen 2000). Enthusiasm and positive emotions are processed through a calmer state (i.e., disposition system), and one is more likely to rely on previously learned habits, requiring no change in levels of attention, mode of engagement, and subsequent decision making (Marcus, Neuman, and MacKuen 2000). Because of these two different processing modes, experimental designs behind the emotions literature involve triggering or inducing discreet emotions-often only one emotion at a time by designthrough external vignettes or open-ended writing tasks. Political scientists have overlooked the simultaneous emotions-positive and negative-in a threat-appraisal situation.

fear because it can "stimulate constructive action to deal with a threat, withdrawal, or immobility, depending on the person and situation" (Brader 2005, 390) or context of one's racialgroup history (Greene 2020; Phoenix 2019). For example, among Arab immigrant communities, Azab and Santoro (2017) found curvilinear effects of threat, in which high levels of perceived fear deter Arab Americans from engaging in political participation and mid-range levels of fear are correlated with a greater likelihood to act.

The rationale for the motivating effects of threat appeals in politics is based on the human desire to survive and protect one's self-interests (Lazarus 1991; Marcus, Neuman, and MacKuen 2000). Although loss-aversion scholars expect the public to be more motivated by threats and more free-riding to happen under hope or opportunity appeals (Kahneman and Tversky 1979; Meyer and Staggenborg 1996), Valentino et al. (2011) and Brader (2006) found that enthusiasm (i.e., a combination of pride and hope) significantly boosts political action, including attending a rally, working for a campaign, and donating money. Hope could serve as a motivator to act while enhancing the influence of self-efficacy or behavioral outcomes (Cohen-Chen and Van Zomeren 2018). Thus, it is important not to discount the motivational effect of hope, especially in the face of stress-inducing adversity (Nabi and Gall Myrick 2018). Phoenix (2019, 160) points to the transformative effect of hope within the black body politic and its ability to spark the imagination. As people envision a different reality, hope shifts the focus away from what they possess or lack to that which the group can gain from the "Promised Land" of racial equality.3

MAKING SENSE OF THREAT: THE ROLE OF COLLECTIVE-ACTION FRAMES

One way to create hope from an otherwise treacherous political environment, as in the case with racialized threat, is through "framing." Framing refers to the ways in which political actors create schemata to interpret happenings in the public sphere to "mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists" (Snow and Benford 1988, 198).⁴ All social movements and mobilizing structures engage in framing work by naming an injustice (i.e., "diagnosis"), proposing a solution to it (i.e., "prognosis"), and mobilizing individuals to actualize a theory of change (i.e., "motivation") (Benford and Snow 2000). Frames must speak in the cultural repertoire of an intended audience in a way that sounds "natural and familiar" (Gamson 1992, 135; McCammon 2013). Framing is not the exclusive domain of political actors; to the extent that frames are prospective, single-origin threat such as an exclusionary immigration bill. Rather, Not1More confronted the everyday legal violence (Menjivar and Abrego 2012) of President Obama's immigration regime. The campaign's framing strategy succeeded in turning the routine workings of a policy apparatus into a disruption of everyday life by publicizing the human

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designed to interpret "the world out there," all mobilization structures⁵ are engaged in framing (Benford and Snow 2000).

Frames do not merely echo the cultural repertoire of their audience or call attention to a threat. Indeed, racialized populations may experience multiple routine grievances, but only some will spur mobilization. Furthermore, knowledge of institutional inequalities or racialized law enforcement may result in demobilization by emphasizing powerlessness and by raising the costs of political engagement (Prieto 2018; Weaver, Prowse, and Piston 2019). Frames instead should achieve a balance between "cultural resonance and contestation" by "tapping into or bolstering feelings of discontent or a sense of injustice or unfairness" and articulating "alternative responses or challenges to the usual routines and practices" (McCammon 2013, 1). Framing will connect individual emotions and group affect with larger values-whether justice, diversity, or equality-to foster political mobilization (Berbrier 1998).

Within Latinx communities, various histories, migration patterns, and contextual factors converge to create heterogeneous visions of Latinidad. Some of these visions may emphasize past injustice and constrain collective action, whereas others may foster political engagement through an emphasis on group agency (Garcia Bedolla 2005). An effective frame resonates with distinct group "imaginaries" (Benford and Snow 2000; Schmidt-Camacho 2008) by relating to their experiences and understandings of injustice. An example of framing is in the Not1More ("Not One More") campaign. Led by immigrant rights activists and labor organizations, the Not1More movement was borne in protest of President Obama's two-million deportation record (i.e., diagnosis) and sought an extension of executive immigration relief for individuals who would otherwise benefit from legislative immigration reform (i.e., prognosis). Not1More promoted a break from past immigrant-rights campaigns by emphasizing the dignity of all migrants regardless of citizenship status (i.e., motivation) (Abrams 2016).

The key to an effective frame lies in articulating threats as an onerous change to everyday life—a "disruption of the quotidian" (Snow et al. 1998, 2)—that nonetheless represents an opportunity to engage with the political system to improve one's interests. Unlike the 2006 immigrant-rights marches, the Not1More campaign in early 2013 did not confront a costs behind the Obama administration's two-million deportation record. Every single deportation was framed as an injustice to be confronted, an appeal sustained by the discourses of religious institutions, workers' groups, and civil rights advocates. The campaign went beyond calling attention to wrongdoing. Not1More motivated people to engage in protest to lower the rate of deportations and strive toward an improved status quo through an extension of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program.⁶ As such, the Not1More campaign framed collective-action appeals that turned a potentially demobilizing structure into a force for mobilization, moving past the terrain of fear into one of hope (Abrams 2016; Cruz Nichols 2017; Nabi and Gall Myrick 2018).

The Not1More movement succeeded in capitalizing on the available political and discursive opportunity structures. The political environment provided a combination of institutional threats and opportunities, a simultaneity embodied by the Obama administration. Although the immigrationenforcement practices of the executive branch were an onerous threat to the lives of immigrants, President Obama's precedent of using executive power to provide large-scale immigration relief represented an institutional opportunity for meaningful policy gains.7 Furthermore, Not1More came into prominence as the opportunities for comprehensive immigration reform dwindled in late 2013. Such an institutional closing on the congressional front rendered the campaign's push for executive action more feasible and appealing (Abrams 2016). This political setting enabled a coupled threat-and-opportunity frame, as provided by Not1More. Ultimately, the movement achieved significant policy victories through the enactment of the Deferred Action for Parent Arrivals (DAPA) program and the Priority Enforcement Program (PEP) (American Immigration Council 2014).⁸

Parallel to political opportunity structures, discursive opportunity structures are a "set of variables...which may be seen as determining which ideas are considered 'sensible,' which constructions of reality are seen as 'realistic,' and which claims are held as 'legitimate' within a certain polity at a specific time" (Koopmans and Statham 1999, 228). As such, the discursive opportunity structure determines the substance of the framing message(s), and the political opportunity structure provides the incentives and signals for potential successes and failures. The Not1More movement fostered mobilization

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by embracing a collective-action frame based on territorial personhood (Abrams 2016; Nicholls 2019). The mainstream immigrant-rights movement and the Democratic Party at the time held on to a liberal nationalist frame on immigration issues. Under this vision, belonging to the polity is conditional on national citizenship; therefore, the most effective way to protect the rights of undocumented immigrants is to create a legal pathway under which they-or at least those seen as "deserving" by the nation-state-may become citizens. In contrast, the territorial personhood perspective argues that undocumented immigrants are entitled to civil rights, including protection from deportation, based on their long-standing presence in the United States (Nicholls 2019). Not1More achieved frame resonance with its audience by rejecting the liberal nationalist frame and embracing a territorial frame that centered the rights of noncitizens and the urgency of stopping a deportation crisis with onerous consequences for Latinx communities. In addition to its policy gains, the Not1More movement attained a long-term victory by expanding the discursive opportunity structure for future iterations of the immigrant-rights movement, making territorial-personhood frames easier to enunciate successfully (Abrams 2016).9

EXPANDING OUR APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF RACIALIZED THREATS

In summary, ideal forms of political communication such as informative collective-action frames will alert an audience to potential threats without demobilizing them, transforming a hostile environment into an opportunity for political mobilization to improve the status quo. Cruz Nichols (2017) proposes a coupled threat-and-opportunity strategy involving two simultaneous components: (1) the threat signals that evoke a sense of loss for one or one's group, and (2) the accompanying opportunity signals that evoke a sense of benefit and greater access. By relying on survey experiment designs to isolate the effects of coupled threat-and-opportunity appeals on one's political behavior, Cruz Nichols (2017) directly tested the causality behind one's individual-level perception of threat and various forms of political participation. Again, threats capture the audience's attention by pointing to the looming peril or the way one's status quo could be derailed by pointing to a policy goal intended to improve the group's status quo or provide relief if the threat is not diffused. Finally, beyond simply countering threats, the accompanying policy opportunities aimed toward systematic progress give the group reason to hope. Of course, achieving or striving toward "progress" varies depending on the context and the respective racial group (Greene 2020). As opposed to feeling motivated to fight to protect an unsatisfactory status quo in the present (Cruz Nichols 2017), the opportunity signal is akin to providing hope for an ideal status quo toward which minority groups want to strive.

Our hope is that this review and critique of the scholarly literature may help community organizers, party leaders, and civic institutions. In developing appeals to collective action whether in the form of protest campaigns, voter-registration drives, or community-engagement projects—it is not enough to sound the alarms of trouble. Anger, fear, and uncertainty are emotions that lead to isolation and disengagement; awareness of injustice is barely the first step to political agency. The key is pairing fear with hope, enunciating messages that center both the urgency of the present and the possibilities of the future. Moving forward, we suggest two directions for the literature. First, future research should consider individuals' perception of their environment and move beyond a binary treatment of threat. Scholars should allow for a cognitive and emotional appraisal process of opportunities, not only threats. By considering individuals' perception of threat, we can speak to the causality behind a contentious political environment.

Second, accounts of individual appraisals of threat and opportunity should be complemented by studying collectiveaction frames, being mindful of how advocates draw attention to threats while also charting a path forward for political mobilization. In an era of heightened racial threat against Latinxs (i.e., immigrants and people of color, more generally), how are activist organizations, political parties, and community institutions making sense of their place within American politics? Through these two directions, we may better understand when, how, and whether threat and the transformative effect of hope-inducing opportunities mobilize.

NOTES

- The American Political Science Association (2020) guidelines recommend avoiding the use of gender-specific pronouns when referring to a group or society at large. Therefore, we use "Latinx" (pronounced "Latinex") as a descriptor for those of Latina/o/x or Latin American descent. For peerreviewed articles on the evolution of the term "Latinx" in academia, online, social media, and higher-education institutions, see Salinas and Lozano (2019). For more on the analytical debate behind what we gain and lose with the term, see de Onís (2017).
- 2. Exercising cautious citizenship does not necessarily mean cowering from all forms of public and civic engagement. To the contrary, Cruz Nichols, LeBrón, and Pedraza (2016) argued that cautious citizens can be, and in many instances are, mobilized to participate in politics, including nonelectoral forms (e.g., group activities such as protesting and joining a meeting), for the purpose of advancing or protecting their self-interest and group interests while simultaneously observing patterns of reticence in more daily-life activities (particularly those with less anonymity available).
- 3. Phoenix (2019, 182) outlines that, as a movement, Black Lives Matter provides a counter-narrative to the existing negative, dehumanizing, and stigmatizing portrayal of black lives. Calls to action within the movement rely heavily on the shared victories from the past and present to create a sense of motivating group pride in black achievement. In its efforts to "repudiate a criminaljustice system believed by many black people to devalue black lives," *Black Lives Matter* itself is an affirmation that the value of black lives boosts people's self-worth and efficacy, thus providing an impetus for political action.
- 4. To a greater extent than non-Hispanic whites, ethnic minorities rely on formal and informal mobilization structures to gather information about politics and to coordinate their political behavior (Leighley 2001).
- Mobilizing structures may range from formal advocacy organizations to informal networks and organizations without explicit political goals (Tarrow 2011). These may include religious congregations (Yukich 2013), nonprofit organizations (de Graauw 2016), and even soccer leagues (Zepeda-Millán 2017).
- 6. Not1More demanded an extension of the DACA to all undocumented immigrants at risk of deportation (Abrams 2016). The eventual movement victory fell short of its demand, with an expansion of DACA for people who had been in the United States continuously since 2010—as opposed to the previous 2007 cutoff—and the creation of Deferred Action for Parent Arrivals (DAPA) for the parents of US-citizen children (American Immigration Council 2014).
- 7. The Obama administration's use of executive power through the DACA program was itself a movement victory—namely, the Dream Movement obtained the policy concession after two years of mobilization. Therefore, this is a case in which one movement's victory (i.e., DACA) broadened the political opportunity structure for another movement (i.e., Not1More) (Gupta 2017; Wides-Muñoz 2018).

- 8. DAPA, which would have granted deportation relief to the undocumented parents of US citizens, was struck down by the US Supreme Court before going into effect (Chishi and Hipsman 2016). The PEP replaced the Secure Communities (S-Comm) program, switching local-federal immigration collaboration to reduce the number of immigrants considered a priority for deportation. S-Comm and its deportation priorities were restored by the Trump administration in early 2017 (Department of Homeland Security 2017).
- 9. There is evidence of tradeoffs in adopting a human-rights frame, as opposed to an economic or family-unity frame, across various political ideologies among Latinxs (Bloemraad, Silva, and Voss 2016). Thus, mobilizers must proceed strategically because one frame may be effective in mobilizing one constituency while also decreasing support among another.

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