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Abstract

This study shows that both race and perceptions about one's personal economic situation can play a role in how voters assess the likely future of the city under a racially other mayor. Using the historic transition of the Providence mayoralty to a Latino mayor as the context, and new survey data collected in September 2010, our research show that Latinos—the ethnic “winners” of the contest, are more likely to express positive expectations about the city under Mayor Taveras'. On the other hand, whites have a less positive outlook for the city. Both those who lost economically and those whose fortunes improved during the recession express more pessimistic expectations for the city. Our study also shows that blacks who have been affected by the downturn are more likely to have a less optimistic outlook of the city under Taveras', an indication that intraminority competition is taking place in Providence among the city's poor minorities.

Keywords

Latinos, immigration, race, Providence, city politics, urban

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Angel Taveras' thinks he already won the election to be Providence's mayor. Jonathan Scott [the Republican candidate] has a good chance to win if the Italians who voted for John Lombardi and Steven Constantino [both defeated in the Democratic primary] and the people who didn't vote change things in November! I think Angel Taveras' ran on the ethnic card and his Latino voters support him 100 percent. So the old Providence voters should get out in November and defeat him.

Providence Journal, Letter to the Editor (October 9, 2010)

Introduction

Urban political transitions from one mayor to the next are never easy: change always gives rise to anxiety about what the future holds for the individual and for the city. Transitions are even more challenging when the torch is being passed from one ethnic or racial group to another in jurisdictions where race and ethnicity serve as key axes upon which social conflict is structured (Eisinger 1977; Schattschneider 1975 [1960]). How do various ethnic/racial groups respond to the upcoming change of the guard? How do they assess the future of the city itself in the context of a racial transition? Do expectations for the future prospects of the city conform to racial/ethnic lines? Urban mayoral transitions that occurred in recent years took place in the context of a major economic recession that hit many American cities hard. In this context, economic anxieties are overlaid with racial anxieties. This introduces the question of the economic context and its effects on citizens' perceptions of a political transition. When the transition takes place in the context of an economic downturn, are citizens more likely to form perceptions about the future of the city under the racially other new mayor on the basis of their pocketbook or their racial identity? In other words, are those who share a racial background with the mayor more likely to be optimistic about the future of the city? Or does an individual's assessment of his or her own economic future trump race when it comes to expectations about the city?

The literature in urban politics and race relations in America has little guidance to offer about how people assess the future of the city in the context of an ethnic/racial mayoral transition. Much of the research on ethnic/racial mayoral transitions is built on the black-white paradigm that dominates much of contemporary urban politics literature. Cities are now more complex. Recent research on the presence of feelings of threat among dominant whites or minority blacks in the context of demographic change (Taylor 1998; Gay 2006; Dixon and Rosenbaum 2004; Dixon 2006; Glaser 1994; Oliver and Wong 2003) suggests that the transition to a racially other mayor within a multiethnic/racial context is bound to be complex. As the demography

and economy of cities continue to change, the need for groups to consider rearranging their alliances increases.

That is not to say that there are no important studies of race politics and City Hall. Both history and political science have built a substantial body of knowledge of how city politics and city mayors both responded to and played off racial differences in urban centers (Erie 1988; Riordon 1995; Green and Holli 2003 [1985]; Colburn and Adler 2001; Hening and Rich 2004; Howell 2007; Eisinger 1977, 1980). Significant work has also focused on how race, as well as other factors, affects city dwellers' approval of their mayor (Howell 2007; Hajnal 2007).

This study uses new survey data from Providence, Rhode Island, to examine the question of whether race affects voters' assessment of the future of the city under a new racially other mayor. We are focusing on a critical event in the city's political and racial history: the Democratic primary in September 2010, which led to the ascendance of Angel Taveras' to the mayoralty. Because a large majority (62%) of Providence registered voters are Democrats, winning the Democratic mayoral primary is tantamount to being elected mayor. Very few general elections for the office of mayor have ever been effectively challenged by the Republicans. Taveras', a Dominican American, is the city's first Latino mayor following a long succession of Irish and Italian politicians. Taveras' was elected during a period of economic recession, with high unemployment and foreclosure rates. Faced with two prominent and experienced Italian American opponents, the Taveras' campaign built a winning coalition between the city's diverse Latino population and liberal whites. The significant changes in demographics that have taken place in Providence over the past two decades made Taveras' victory possible.

The city of Providence is a racially and ethnically diverse city. The city's Latino population rose from 30% in 2000 to 38.1% in 2010—an increase of 43.9%. Its demographic profile is different from the demography of U.S. cities when black candidates began to win election as mayors in the 1960s and 1970s and where much of the literature has concentrated. Our article seeks to explore whether findings derived from previous studies of mayoral transition in biracial contexts across parts of the country hold in the very different, multiethnic society of Northeastern cities such as Providence. Furthermore, we study the role that the economy and people's anxieties about their own economic future may play in likely voters' evaluations of the prospects of the city under a racially other mayor.

Race Politics and the Biracial City

The question of race relations has been central to the study of urban politics and American politics in general. Early theories of race in the context of

political power dynamics were derived from V.O. Key's (1949) theory of Southern politics which argued that racial hostility increases when the political position of the dominant racial group is challenged by a subordinate group. This "power threat" hypothesis has been extensively tested and validated in the context of black-white relations (Bobo and Hutchings 1996; Blalock 1967; Blumer 1958; Taylor 1998; Glaser 1994; Tolbert and Hero 2001). Some additional evidence exists in terms of Latino-white relations (Hero 1987; Taylor 1998; Dixon and Rosenbaum 2004).

At the city level specifically, a number of historical and quantitative studies that span the twentieth century show apprehension and bitterness on the part of the dominant group that sees its power diminish. When the Irish took over political leadership in Boston, many of the city's Anglo Protestant elites resented their displacement by the "Irish horde" (Beatty 1992, 169) and feared the consequences that this transition would have on the city itself and on them personally (Eisinger 1980). Many whites expressed fear about the prospect of black rule and its likely effects on the city when Cleveland, Newark, Gary, Detroit, Baltimore, Atlanta, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Chicago, New York, and other cities transitioned away from white rule (Hajnal 2007; Eisinger 1980; Kaufmann 2004; Kleppner 1985; Nelson and Meranto 1977; Colburn and Adler 2001).

In a seminal study of mayoral transitions, Peter Eisinger (1980) extended the "power threat" and "white backlash" approach to city politics and specifically to racial/ethnic transitions in city hall. Following this view, Eisinger argues that displaced ethnic elites will respond with both "strategic" and "psychological" adjustments to the new reality. Strategic adjustment refers to "taking action" in response to the transition, especially action designed to protect or promote one's position in the political and economic structure of the city. Psychological adjustment refers to "perceptions" that displaced elites develop about the racial/ethnic transition. These perceptions are focused on the future of the city and amount to "a generalized sense of optimism or pessimism about the prospects of the city" (Eisinger 1980: 72). Those who feel threatened by the ascendance of a different racial/ethnic group to the Mayor's office may express their feelings in the form of "fear or rejection" of the new Mayor and his or her prospects of improving the city. On the other hand, those who expect to gain from the new status quo may express satisfaction or a sense of gratification with the transition. Satisfaction may not be confined to those who are members of the same racial/ethnic group as the new Mayor. According to Eisinger, others may feel satisfied on ideological or normative grounds. For example, some liberal whites may feel that the election of a "racial other" represents "the realization of certain social justice

or equity values” (1980: 22). In addition, some people may express “satisfaction” not so much as a result of gratification for the outcome but as acceptance of the new reality and out of a sense of “equanimity” (1980: 22).

More recent studies have provided a more complex view of urban racial/ethnic political transitions. For example, research shows that depending on the social context, whites may exhibit not simply neutral but positive social responses to blacks and black leadership (Liu 2006; Oliver and Wong 2003). Similarly, Hajnal’s recent work (2007) strongly suggests that experience with black leadership may change white attitudes toward black leaders and that white voters may not be motivated simply by prejudice or “power threat.” In fact, white elites have joined black or Latino mayoral candidates in broad-based coalitions (Hero 1987; Eisinger 1977, 1980). Kaufmann (2004) has shown that the salience of race in urban voters’ perception of mayoral leadership is likely to heighten when the city is struggling under the weight of a slowing economy, when residents have fears about rising crime rates, and/or feel threatened by immigration. Taken together with Eisinger’s (1980) work, this suggests that ideology and economic factors—not just race—may play a role in how various racial groups assess the future of the city in the context of a racial/ethnic mayoral transition.

Race Politics and the Multiethnic City

In recent decades, Latino and Asian immigration has changed the political landscape in America’s cities. The increase in Latino residents has combined with a decline in the black population due to lower fertility rates and a drop in the white population as a result of both lower fertility rates and a continual move to the suburbs and ex-burbs. What is more, the Latino population in many locales, especially in the Northeast, is highly ethnically heterogeneous, hailing from a variety of countries of Central and South America in addition to Mexico. This makes for an ethnic landscape reminiscent of the white immigration of the early twentieth century.

The emergence of Latino political power in American urban centers complicates the tableau of racial relations in the city and introduces new challenges to traditional understandings of race conflict and cooperation. Significantly, as Chavez (2008: 177) argues, since the 1920s, there has been a pervasive “narrative” in the dominant public culture that characterizes Latinos (immigrants and U.S.-born) as “unable or unwilling to integrate into the social and cultural life of the United States” and who “somehow stands apart from normal processes of historical change” (Chavez 2008: 41, also see Huntington 2004a, 2004b). In the post-9/11 debate about immigration and

immigration reform, what Chavez (2008) calls the “Latino threat narrative” appears more pervasive. How do white city residents react to Latino political gains? Are they threatened to the same degree as the literature predicts for blacks? Or do Latinos occupy a different place in American racial hierarchies (Link and Oldendick 1996; Dixon 2006) and thus present a lesser threat for whites? And what is the relationship between blacks and Latinos in the context of Latino ascendance to power? Are blacks (or Latinos) more likely to view Latinos (or blacks) in competitive terms or perceive the other group as a coalition partner against white elites? Although Latino mayors have assumed power in a number of cities especially in the Southwest, very little is known about how city residents respond to a racial transition of this type, especially in the context of a multiethnic environment such as that of Northeastern urban centers.

Starting with studies of the anti-immigrant Proposition 187 in California (1994), researchers have shown that white–Latino relations have been structured by the growth of immigration. Research has documented the existence of high levels of white animosity toward Latinos in many settings across the United States (Hero and Tolbert 1996; Tolbert and Hero 1996; Campbell, Wong, and Citrin 2006). More recent work has linked race to immigrant exclusion from social welfare benefits and to anti-immigrant local ordinances targeting new Latino immigrants in a variety of towns across the country (Hopkins 2010; Graefe et al. 2008). However, the results are mixed. Other studies suggest that because of the structure of American racial hierarchies that place blacks at the bottom of the social structure and Latinos in a mid-dling point, whites tend to be less threatened by the presence of Latinos than by that of blacks (Dixon 2006).

A number of research studies indicate that black and Latino relations in American cities are not very easy and cordial either (Vaca 2003). Competition for housing, social services, economic opportunities, jobs, and educational resources has translated into political competition and acrimony. Data from Southern cities indicate that new Latino immigrants express negative and stereotypical views of blacks similar to those held by many in the white population (McClain et al. 2006; Mindiola, Niemann, and Rodriguez 2002). Black residents are also likely to express negative attitudes and feelings of threat, especially when they perceive Latinos as economic competition (Gay 2006). In a study of black support for Proposition 187, Morris (2000) also points to economic competition between blacks and Latinos as a source of racial animus.

In addition to intergroup conflict, there is some evidence that Latinos themselves have some mixed feelings about other Latinos. Social historians studying multiethnic cities have documented the tense relationships among

Cuban, West Indian, and Mexican communities in Miami (Shell-Weiss 2009). Political theorists have questioned *Latinidad* and its ability to translate into more political and social cohesion within the community (Beltran 2010). Studies of Latino identity formation show that although groups such as the Dominicans assume a Latino identity, the superseding identity remains their national group (Itzigsohn and Dore-Cabral 2000). This indicates that political decisions and perceptions in the context of a multiethnic city may be influenced by national rather than panethnic identifiers. The rifts in *Latinidad* are also evident when attitudes toward immigrants and immigration are considered. Surveys show that Latinos are skeptical about newcomers, believing that the arrival of undocumented immigrants has a negative effect on the economy (Pew Hispanic Center 2005). This is not a new phenomenon. In fact, since the early 1990s, surveys have shown that Latinos consistently mirror the rest of Americans' preference for fewer new immigrants (Garza et al. 1992). Unfortunately, smaller studies such as this one do not have the sample sizes necessary to investigate the effects of various conceptions of *Latinidad* or the significance of country of origin for urban politics.

Race Politics and the Economically Challenged City: Providence and the Election of Angel Taveras'

The "great recession" of 2008 hit hard in Providence. Once a declining industrial city, Providence had experienced a "renaissance" in the 1990s and early 2000s (Orr and West 2002; Leazes and Motte 2004). But by 2008, the picture was turning bleak, with Rhode Island posting the highest unemployment and foreclosure rates and the lowest personal income growth in New England and possibly the country (Peoples 2008). Unemployment rates in the metropolitan area stood at 11.4% in 2009 and passed 14% by 2010 (Figure 1). The downturn hit Latinos especially hard: a study by the Economic Policy Institute showed that 21.4% of Latinos compared to 10.1% of whites were in search of a job (Austin 2010).

Demographic change in Providence begun long before the recession took place. The city has a history of immigration that spans three centuries. The Irish, French Canadians, and Italians came in large numbers during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (McLoughlin 1986). A smaller group of Russians (mostly Jews), Scandinavians, Portuguese, Cape Verdeans, and blacks joined them. Since the 1960s, the arrival of Latinos from the West Indies, Central America, South America, and Mexico in combination with

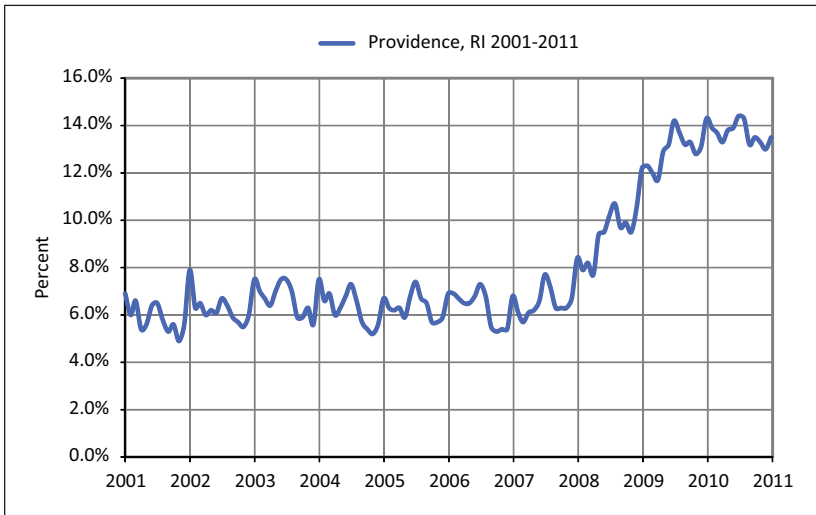


Figure 1. Unemployment rate in Providence, 2001-2011

the refugee resettlement programs that have brought to this city people from Southeast Asia, Africa, and the Middle East have added to the diversity and complexity of the ethnracial tableau. According to the Pew Hispanic Center (2002), the Latino population in the Providence metro area grew by 325% between 1980 and 2000, making Providence one of the fastest growing “new destination” cities for Latino immigrants. The recent 2010 Census data indicate that the Latino population grew a further 43.9% between 2000 and 2010. Already in 2000, Providence was a “majority minority” city; today, the non-Hispanic white population has dropped to less than half of the total, making Providence even more of a minority-dominated city. Figures 2 and 3 show the change between 2000 and 2010 in the Latino and white populations, respectively, of Providence. In most neighborhoods, the sharp decline in white residents was followed with a strong increase in Latinos.

Unlike many of the cities in the Southwest, the Latino population in Providence is extremely diverse in its ethnic composition and it is not dominated by Mexicans. In fact, such is the domination of Mexicans in the Southwest, that some early studies of Latino mayors in that region equated Latino with Mexican (see Hero 1987). By contrast, the largest Latino group in Providence is Dominicans, followed by Puerto Ricans and then Guatemalans. Figure 4 shows the ethnic distribution of the Latino population in Providence according to the 2000 and 2010 Census.

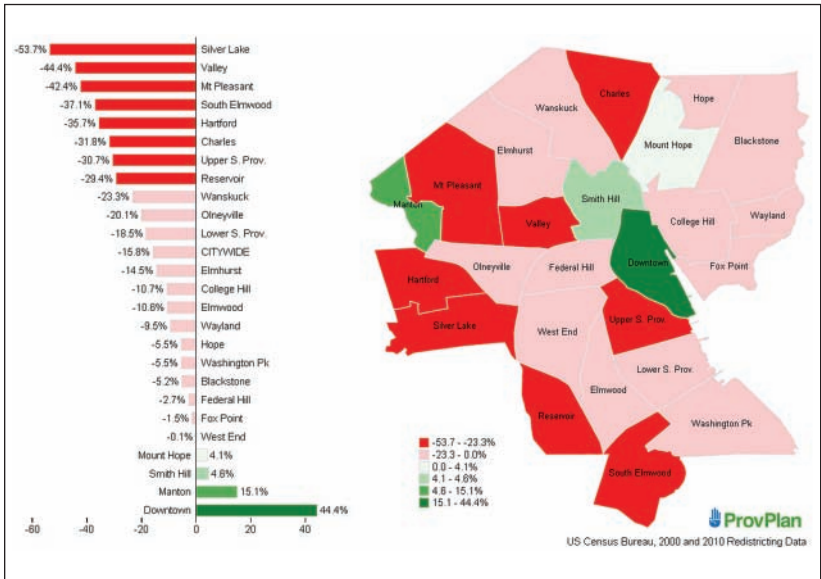


Figure 2. Change in non-Hispanic white population, 2000-2010

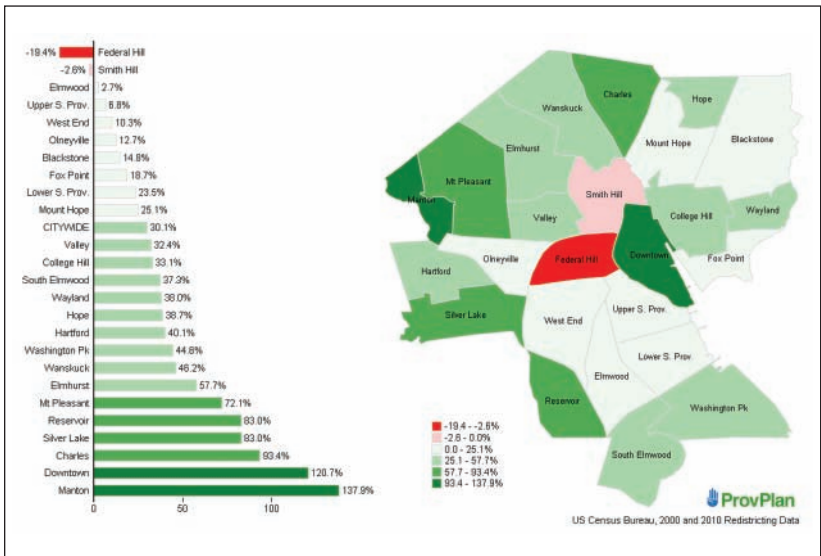


Figure 3. Change in Hispanic or Latino population, 2000-2010

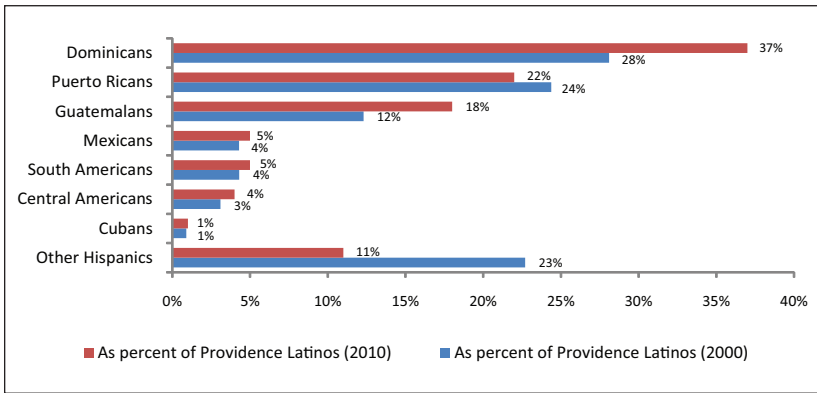


Figure 4. Ethnic distribution of Providence Latino population (2000 and 2010 U.S. Census, as compiled by the Providence Plan)

The city's black community is small by comparison to major cities, but very diverse: some members have roots that go back centuries, some have both black and Native American ancestry, and others are the products of the great black migration of the twentieth century that drove blacks out of the South and into Northern cities. In addition to those who have slaves in their family tree, Providence, as a refugee resettlement city, is home to a small but growing number of new black immigrants from Africa and South America: Cape Verdeans, Liberians, Nigerians, and Brazilians coexist in the same inner-city neighborhoods. Table 1 shows the demographic evolution by race/ethnicity of the population in the city of Providence since the Census of 1980.

Mayoral politics in Providence have followed a similar trajectory as in other Northeastern cities. The city's early industrial economy of textiles, metalworking, and jewelry-making, created a class divide between a Protestant Yankee elite and Catholic working class, which in turn was divided along ethnic lines (Sterne 2004). As Cornwell (1960) noted, the Yankees held on to power until they were displaced in the mid-1920s by the Irish. Since the later years of the nineteenth century, Providence has been a machine-politics city with a system of personal rewards permeating the electoral arena. For several decades, beginning around the mid-1930s, the Irish and Italians dominated the city's politics and competed with each other for political prominence and political spoils. The Irish built a strong Democratic political machine, dispensing patronage and gaining the allegiance of Italians, French Canadians, and Jews (Cornwell 1960; Daoust 1985). The Irish hold over City

Table 1. Providence Population by Race/Ethnicity 1980-2010

	1980	1990	2000	2010	Growth Rate (1980-2010)
Non-Hispanic whites	123,222 (78.5%)	103,698 (64.5%)	94,666 (54.5%)	88,623 (49.8%)	-7.91%
Hispanic/Latino	9,071 (5.8%)	24,982 (15.5%)	52,146 (30.0%)	67,835 (38.1%)	65.37%
Black	17,973 (11.5%)	20,259 (12.6%)	25,243 (14.5%)	28,557 (16.0%)	12.27%
Asian	9,890 (6.3%)	9,547 (5.9%)	10,432 (6.0%)	11,380 (6.4%)	3.57%
Native American	1,040 (0.7%)	1,495 (0.9%)	1,975 (1.1%)	2,412 (1.3%)	23.41%

Source: U.S. Census 1980-2010.

Hall ended in 1974 when Vincent “Buddy” Cianci was elected the city’s first Italian American mayor.

Since the 1980s, the city’s black and Latino communities started to gain political strength (Orr and West 2007). Cianci, the city’s first Republican mayor since the Great Depression, realized that maintaining his power in a Democratic stronghold required the development of a coalition that went beyond his Italian ethnic base of support.² Cianci was thus the first mayor to reach out to the black community and to express concern about discriminatory hiring in the city’s law enforcement units (Stanton 2003). Cianci also appointed black leaders to several city boards and other positions of authority.

Given their longer presence in the city, blacks were significantly better politically organized in the 1980s than were Latinos. As Wilbur Rich (2000: 200) has observed, for a long time blacks were “better organized politically” than the city’s growing Hispanic community, having arrived in Providence “during an era of strong parties and highly developed patronage systems.” blacks first gained representation on the city council in 1969, and they have held a number of top- and middle-level positions in city government. In fact, the local chapter of the NAACP and other local black organizations offered support and advice to the nascent Latino community in the 1980s, and the two groups worked together in developing Latino political capital.³

Beginning in the late 1990s, though, Hispanics began to flex their muscles. In 1998, to consolidate their growing numbers, Latinos formed Rhode Island Latino Political Action Committee (RILPAC). RILPAC launched voter registration initiatives and endorsed candidates for offices. In 1998, Luis Aponte became the first Latino to win a seat on the Providence city council. In October 2001, then Mayor Cianci created an “Office of Hispanic Affairs” in response to growing demands and improved political representation among Latinos. Even though he had once disregarded the Latino community because “Hispanics don’t vote,” he later asserted, “the Hispanic

community is playing a more prominent role in every aspect of our lives” (Smith 2001). Cianci appointed three Latinos to the nine-member school board, and in 1999, the school board named Diana Lam the city’s first Hispanic school superintendent.

The political importance of Latinos became evident in the new century. In 2001, Mayor Cianci was convicted and sentenced to five years in prison after a federal investigation, “Operation Plunder Dome,” uncovered corruption in the operation of city government. The investigation led to the arrest and conviction of several other city officials, including Cianci’s key assistant. The city’s 2002 election featured a mayoral campaign where the winning Democrat, Italian American David Cicilline made a major pitch for Latino votes. With Latinos representing 30% of the population and becoming more politically active, Cicilline established his headquarters in South Providence, the heart of the Latino community. He talked openly about issues of concern to Latinos and blacks, such as police brutality, inadequate housing, and a city workforce that remained more than 90% white. Cicilline stressed that if elected he would work to bring the Providence “renaissance” to the minority neighborhoods. Cicilline also styled himself as a municipal reformer, vowing to bring reform and integrity to city hall. Cicilline’s reform image was directed at the city’s liberal/reform white establishment, many of whom live on the city’s wealthy East Side, near Brown University. His major opponent, former Providence Mayor Joseph Paolino, ran a campaign that attempted to assemble the traditional white, working-class, ethnic coalition that long had dominated Providence city politics. Not only was this the coalition that had helped Paolino serve as mayor from 1984 to 1990, it was the alliance that sustained Cianci from 1991 until 2002.

In the primary, Cicilline beat Paolino and two other white contenders, with 53% of the vote. Cicilline ran strongly both in white and minority wards, but local observers emphasized his strong support in the Latino neighborhoods (Milkovits 2002; Silver 2001; Bakst 2003). In an environment where the incumbent mayor had been convicted and minorities felt they were being ignored politically, Cicilline overthrew the old white, ethnic, working-class coalition and created a new coalition based on white liberals, Latinos, blacks, and Asian Americans (Orr and West 2007). In 2006, Cicilline was reelected with the same coalition.

The rapid growth of the Latino population in Providence introduced new rifts in the fragile alliance between blacks and Latinos (Orr and West 2007). As Latinos grew in numbers and political power, members of the black community feared not only economic competition but also political marginalization.⁴ Although Latino electoral participation has been hampered by large

numbers of recent immigrants who have not yet reached the naturalization stage, demographic trends make Latino dominance in city politics all but inevitable. Divisions between blacks and Latinos have emerged recently in the context of proposed state legislation aimed to curb the practice of racial profiling by law enforcement. The original bill included stronger protections for juveniles stopped and searched by the police, a provision that all minority communities favored, as well as provisions designed to protect undocumented immigrant passengers in cars stopped for traffic violations. Strong police opposition to the original version of the bill and pressure to scale it down revealed the discord between blacks who proposed elimination of the undocumented immigrant provisions, and Latinos who argued that a stand-alone bill to protect undocumented car passengers would never pass through the legislature.⁵

Angel Taveras' election as the first Latino mayor of Providence represents a break in the long time of Irish and Italian political hegemony. As a long-time observer (Sorrentino 2010) of Rhode Island politics noted, "many Providence residents cannot remember the last time the mayor was not either Irish or Italian." She described Taveras' election as "the death of Irish-Italian political entitlement" in the city of Providence. Taveras' victory also came in the midst of the worst economic recession that Providence has seen in many decades. The city's deficit stands at \$110 million, about 17% of the total operating budget. The city has an unfunded pension and retiree healthcare liability of \$2.3 billion and its tax revenues have been lower than projected (Pina 2011). So difficult is the situation that in March 2011, the new Taveras' administration announced the closing of several inner-city public schools and the temporary firing of all city teachers.

Angel Taveras' is a second-generation Dominican American in a city with the largest proportion of Dominicans in the United States (Itzigsohn 2009). Between 1990 and 2000, the Dominican population of Rhode Island (mostly concentrated in the city of Providence) more than doubled from 9,473 people to 23,530 individuals (Itzigsohn 2009: 24-25). Along with Puerto Ricans, Dominicans make up a substantial portion of the Latino community in the city of Providence. Although of humble immigrant origins, Taveras' earned a degree from Harvard University and a law degree from Georgetown University Law School. Before being appointed to the city's Housing Court by former Mayor Cicilline, Taveras' worked for one of the city's most prestigious law firms. His education and legal career earned him a position among the city's liberal and reform-oriented white elite while his Dominican background allowed him to maintain his political ties to the inner-city Latino community. In 2000, in his first race for elected office, Taveres ran unsuccessfully

in the Democratic primary for Congress. Although he lost the congressional race, Taveres ran well in Providence, especially in the city's minority precincts. When Mayor Cicilline decided to run for Congress in 2010, key political leaders linked to the inner-city, working-class Latino–white liberal/reform coalition that had elected Cicilline tapped Angel Taveras' as his successor.

Taveras' principal opponents were two established Italian American politicians—State Representative Steven Constantino and City Council President John Lombardi. Constantino was elected to the legislature in 1995, where he rose to become the chairman of the powerful House Finance Committee. During the mayoral primary, Constantino focused on the city's finances. Lombardi was a familiar political face in Providence. He was first elected to the city council in 1984, becoming president of the council in 1999. In the primary, Lombardi stressed city services, including street repair, snow removal, and trash collection. During the campaign, Taveras' highlighted his humble roots, often noting that he had gone from "Head Start to Harvard" (Marcelo 2010a, 2010b). In terms of city policy, Taveras' stressed public education. He advocated creating "children's zones" modeled after the neighborhood revitalization program in Harlem, renovating school buildings, and expanding after school programs. In addition, Taveras' also developed a city environmental program he claimed would position Providence as a leader in the growing green economy. Tavares vowed to bring "the city's environmental and renewable energy activists into City Hall" (Marcelo 2010b). In the September 14, 2010, Democratic mayoral primary, the 40-year-old Taveras' defeated Costantino and John Lombardi. Taveras' won 51% of the vote and 11 of the city's 15 wards, including the 5th (Mount Pleasant) and 7th (Silver Lake) wards which once were the centers of Italian political power in the city. However, two thirds of his votes came from Providence's East Side wards, the city's most white and affluent neighborhoods, and from the South Side, where working-class Latinos have a strong presence.

Data and Methodology

Our study is based on new survey data collected in September of 2010, on the eve of the Democratic primary election in Providence. The key question that we seek to explore here is what drives Providence residents' outlook of the city's future under a racially other mayor. Specifically, we are interested in the role that race plays in residents' expectations about the future of the city under Taveras'. Because the transition took place in the middle of a

major economic downturn, and given that there is some evidence that economic insecurity, not just race, drives perceptions about Latinos and immigrants, especially among blacks (Gay 2006), we are interested in the role the economy plays in residents' expectations about the city's future under the first Latino mayor. Based on the theoretical framework described earlier, we are testing the following hypotheses:

Winner satisfaction (Hypothesis 1): Latinos are more likely than whites and blacks to express positive expectations of the city's future under a Latino mayor;

Dominant white racial threat (Hypothesis 2): white voters are less likely to express positive expectations of the city's future under a Latino mayor;

Intraminority competition (Hypothesis 3): black voters, threatened by the ascendancy of Latinos, are less likely to express positive expectations of the city's future under a Latino mayor.

Personal economic situation (Hypothesis 4): whites and/or blacks who have experienced a decline in their personal economic situation are less likely than other groups to express positive expectations of the city's future under Taveras'.

The model controls for a number of factors, which include political ideology, education, gender, age, and immigration status (foreign-born or U.S.-born).⁶

Brown University's Taubman Center for Public Policy and American Institutions conducted a survey of Providence registered voters between September 2 and 5, 2010, a few days before the September 14 primary election. This telephone survey was based on a random sample of 540 registered voters pulled from a list purchased from state authorities. The respondents include a sample of 142 Latino and 52 black registered voters. The data were subsequently weighted based on Current Population Survey (CPS) counts so that they would match the Providence population. Deviations from actual population distributions are common in survey research. For that reason, the raw data are weighted on the basis of the CPS, which provides information on actual distributions in a given population. To ensure correct representation, sample data are weighted on the basis of several demographic factors. Weighted sample distributions by race, gender, and education are presented in Appendix A. The survey included an income question, but because of missing values (25% of all respondents did not provide an income estimate), we use education as a proxy for income and social class.

The Dependent Variables

Our goal was to construct a single index that would measure people's outlook on the future of Providence under a Taveras' administration on a positive to negative scale. We call this scale the "city outlook scale." Our survey included a total of seven items that could be used for this purpose (Appendix A). All of the items were scored on a 10-point likelihood scale, where 10 corresponds to "highly likely" that the described event will occur and 1 corresponds to "not at all likely." Four of the items had a positive direction, indicating a good outcome for the city. Two items had a negative direction, connoting a bad outcome for the city. The seventh item ("the value of my home will go down") also had a negative direction but it reflected more of a personal consequence rather than a city-level outcome. In creating our composite dependent variable, we reversed the scale of the three items that had a negative direction so that all items reflect the same positive to negative direction. The value of each item was then standardized. Descriptive statistics on all seven items are presented in Appendix B.

Exploratory analysis using equal weights showed that the seven-item index had a low internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.5573). This indicates that not all items measured the same theoretical construct (in this case, outlook for the city under Taveras') and thus could not be combined into a single index. Especially the item referring to "home values" pointed toward a more generalized anxiety related to the economy, outside the scope of the authority of a mayor. By 2010, the housing market in Providence had suffered significant decline but not as a result of mayoral decisions or authority. Principal components analysis (PCA) confirmed the low reliability of the seven-item index (factor loadings and SCREE plots are in Appendix C). PCA results did indicate that four of the seven items can be effectively combined into an index. Factor loadings for the four-item score are in Appendix C. The Cronbach's alpha value is 0.8029 for the four items. We estimated regressions using (1) the seven-item PCA factor score (factor 1); (2) the four-item PCA factor score; and (3) an equal weights index constructed by summing up the values of the four items included in the PCA factor. Comparison of the model estimates showed no substantial differences. The regression results are generally the same across different indices, equally or unequally weighted, using four items or all the seven items. Normalcy assumptions are also met with either scoring methodology. We present here the regression results using the index constructed from the four items with equal weights for its simplicity and internal reliability (as measured by the Cronbach's alpha).⁷

Multivariate Analysis

The goal of our study was to explore the factors that drive voters' outlook for the city under a Taveras' administration. As specified earlier, the "city outlook" was measured using an index variable consisting of four items that measured expectations about the likely effect of a Taveras' administration on the city's economy, minorities, middle class, and overall quality of life. Lower scores on the composite dependent variable indicate less positive outlook about the city under Taveras' while higher scores indicate more positive outlook. We specified three ordinary least squares (OLS) regression models to estimate the correlates of the city outlook scale. The first model is a baseline model while the second model includes terms for subgroups defined by race/ethnicity and economic situation to help us explore our fourth hypothesis more fully (Table 2). The third model addresses the question of ideology and its role in combination with ethnicity. We assessed the robustness of these models with tests for linearity, heteroscedasticity, collinearity, omitted variable bias, and influential outliers. Diagnostic plots of residuals against the dependent variable and Q-Q plots were specified, both of which indicated no notable violations of the OLS assumptions.

In the baseline model, we find evidence that confirms our first hypothesis that Latinos (the referent group in the model) being the racial winners of the mayoral contest are more likely than whites and blacks to have a more positive outlook of the city under Taveras'. Contrary to the claim that "la genética, no hace la política" (genetics does not make good politics) which is the slogan promoted by local Latino organizations such as RILPAC (Rodriguez 2011), the city's Latinos recognized the Taveras' candidacy as a critical moment for their community and greeted positively the prospect of having a coethnic as mayor. Consistent with Eisinger's (1977) hypothesis, ethnicity became a driver for optimism among those who are the projected ethnic winners of the electoral race even when controlling for political ideology. The analysis also provides support for the "power threat" hypothesis, since non-Latino whites are significantly less likely than Latinos to have a positive city outlook under a Taveras' administration ($b = -.356; p < .001$). In the context of Providence, whites whose numbers and political power have been on the decline for more than a decade seem to perceive this transition to Latino control as a critical moment that induces trepidation for the future of the city. blacks are also significantly less likely than Latinos to associate the prospect of a Latino mayor with a positive outlook for the city of Providence. As the intraminority conflict hypothesis predicts and qualitative interviews suggest,

Table 2. OLS Regression Results, DV: City Outlook Scale (High Is Positive)

	Model 1 (Base)	Model 2 (Economic Situation and Ethnicity)	Model 3 (Ideology and Ethnicity)
	β /(SE)	β /(SE)	β /(SE)
Black (ref = Latino)	-.417***(.134)		
White (ref = Latino)	-.356***(.108)		
Personal economic situation worsened (ref = no change)	-.285***(.082)		-.258***(.080)
Personal economic situation improved (ref = no change)	-.093/ (.101)		-.051/ (.100)
Education beyond high school (ref = education high school or less)	.075/ (.082)	.080/ (.083)	.095/ (.080)
Liberal (ref = moderate)	.096/ (.086)	.085/ (.086)	
Conservative (ref = moderate)	-.135/ (.100)	-.134/ (.101)	
Male	-.107/ (.074)	-.107/ (.075)	-.084/ (.073)
Age	.015/ (.012)	.014/ (.012)	.021/ (.012)
U.S.-born	-.128/ (.105)	-.131/ (.108)	-.065/ (.104)
Change in personal economic situation (ref = Latino, no change)			
Latino, worsened (ref = Latino, no change)		-.218/ (.156)	
Latino, improved (ref = Latino, no change)		.104/ (.195)	
Black, no change (ref = Latino, no change)		-.364/ (.192)	
Black, worsened (ref = Latino, no change)		-.638*** (.237)	
Black, improved (ref = Latino, no change)		-.388/ (.260)	
White, no change (ref = Latino, no change)		-.257/ (.150)	
White, worsened (ref = Latino, no change)		-.567*** (.155)	
White, improved (ref = Latino, no change)		-.458*** (.172)	
Ideology (ref = Latino, moderate)			
Latino, liberal (ref = Latino, moderate)			.193/ (.145)
Latino, conservative (ref = Latino, moderate)			.167/ (.159)
Black, moderate (ref = Latino, moderate)			-.490**/ (.194)
Black, liberal (ref = Latino, moderate)			-.383/ (.209)
Black, conservative (ref = Latino, moderate)			-.232/ (.266)
White, moderate (ref = Latino, moderate)			-.325**/ (.149)
White, liberal (ref = Latino, moderate)			.193/ (.145)
White conservative (ref = Latino, moderate)			-.809*** (.170)
N	409	409	409
F	3.74	2.78	4.53
Adjusted R ²	.063	.058	.108

Entries are unstandardized regression coefficients. OLS = ordinary least squares; DV = dependent variable.

*Significance levels (based on two-tailed tests): ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$, **** $p < .001$.

the black voters of Providence seem to view the political ascendance of Latinos in competitive terms, expecting further erosion of their own power and access to resources. Although their numbers have grown since the 2000

Census, blacks constitute only 16% of the city's population. black leaders from both the native and the immigrant communities expressed concerns about whether a Latino mayor would be able and willing to represent their interests. As mentioned earlier, black and Latino organizations have expressed strong disagreements over proposed profiling legislation and disagreements also exist as to the best ways to pursue economic development. On the other hand, both groups were particularly hard hit by the foreclosure crisis.

The baseline model also provides strong confirmation of our fourth hypothesis, which states that voters whose personal situation worsened during the downturn are less likely to foresee positive developments for the city than are those who experienced no change in their personal situation during the recession. This relationship is statistically significant after controlling for both ideology and education. The experience of the recession influenced voters' expectations of the impact that a Latino mayor may have on the city. However, the economic downturn has affected ethnic groups very differently. As mentioned earlier, unemployment rates for Latinos are substantially higher than those for white Providence residents (8.3%). Unemployment among blacks is also high, hovering around 15% according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics 2011). Do Latinos who have seen their economic fortunes worsen have an equally positive outlook of a Taveras' administration, or does their economic insecurity lead them to break from other Latinos? Similarly, are there differences in expectations for the future of the city within whites and blacks that reflect the economic environment rather than racial concerns? In other words, does economic insecurity trump race when it comes to assessment of the city's future outlook?

Our second model sought to delve more deeply into the relationship between personal economic security, race, and hopes for the city's future. Here, we investigated whether the negative correlation between personal economic situation and expectations for the city's future under Taveras' can be attributed to specific racial/ethnic groups. Our results show that the impact of the economic downturn does not by itself explain Providence voters' orientation about the future of the city under a Latino mayor. Race seems to be the overarching driving factor. Model 2 shows no statistically significant difference across Latinos based on their personal economic situation. Latinos whose personal situation has worsened and those who have seen improvement are equally likely as Latinos not impacted by the recession to have a positive outlook for the city under Taveras'. By contrast, the city outlook is more negative for white Providence voters, regardless of their personal economic situation. whites whose personal fortunes have declined in recent years ($b = -567$; $p < .001$) as well as those who have experienced economic

improvement ($b = -458$; $p < .01$) are significantly *less* likely than Latinos to express a positive outlook for the city under Taveras'. Similarly, blacks whose pocketbook has been negatively affected by the recession are significantly less likely than Latinos ($b = -.638$; $p < .01$) to expect an optimistic future for Providence. Interestingly, there is no statistically significant difference between Latinos and blacks whose economic situation has improved or not changed. These results indicate that Latinos recognized the ascendance of Taveras' as a positive development for their group and associated their rise in power with positive outcomes for the city in general. In effect, this was perceived as a political victory for the group, regardless of one's personal economic insecurities. On the other hand, the prospect of a Taveras' administration produced anxieties for whites and blacks. A racial change of guard in the leadership of the city is associated with a negative outlook for Providence among all whites, not just those who experienced losses during the recession.

Since Providence is a predominantly liberal city and Taveras' campaigned as a liberal Democrat, it is likely that anxieties about the future of the city are associated not so much with ethnicity but with ideology. After all, the Taveras' campaign sought to create a liberal alliance between Latinos and East Side liberal whites. Conservative voters within ethnic groups may be expressing concerns about a liberal Democrat's plan for the city rather than his ethnic identity. If this is the case, conservatives across racial/ethnic groups should express more pessimistic expectations of the city than their more moderate counterparts. However, as model 3 shows, there are no statistically significant differences in the assessment of the city's future among Latinos. Regardless of ideological orientation, Latinos are positive about the prospects of the future under a Latino mayor. On the other hand, the expectations of white voters vary along ideological lines: Liberal whites are equally likely as Latinos to have a positive outlook for Providence under Taveras', while conservative ($b = -809$; $p < .001$) and moderate ($b = -325$; $p < .01$) whites are significantly less likely than Latinos to do so. Interestingly, it is black moderates ($b = -.490$; $p < .01$) who are significantly less likely than Latinos to expect positive results from a Taveras' administration; black conservatives and liberals are not statistically differentiated from Latinos in their expectations for the city. These results indicate that for whites, at least, ideology does have a moderating effect when considered in addition to race: liberal whites are no different than Latinos in their expectations, while conservative and moderate whites tend to be significantly more negative in their outlook for the city. This is consistent with the Taveras' campaign's strategy, which

sought to create an alliance between liberal, educated white voters and the city's Latino population.

Conclusion

In urban politics, the central event signaling a racial/ethnic transition is ascendency to the mayor's office. Today, a process of racial/ethnic transition is occurring in many communities as Latinos replace whites and blacks as key elected office holders. However, because it is a recent phenomenon, not much is known about how whites, blacks, and Latinos react to ethnic/racial transitions that usher in Latino political ascendency. In the context of a diverse city such as Providence where the Latino population hails from a number of different countries and no one nationality commands a majority, economic and ethnic differences can play a role in people's perceptions of others. In socially diverse cities, economic downturns are excellent breeding grounds for the activation of racial/ethnic-based hostilities (Kaufmann 2004). We have seen this in the results of our study. Those who have lost ground during the economic depression are the most pessimistic about the future of Providence. An ethnic transition of power in city hall during an economic downturn can produce significant anxieties in those who perceive or receive a benefit from the status quo. Even among those who are not major or direct beneficiaries, the prospect of change can lead to uncertainty and fear. Especially when the transition of power is taking place under conditions of severe economic uncertainty both for individuals and for the city itself, the prospect of change can bring to the fore racial tensions. As Mayor Taveras' works to address housing, jobs, taxes, and city services, he will have to be mindful that a number of communities feel anxious about what the future holds for them and their city.

In this article, we have found that at this key political moment in the history of the city, Latinos in Providence are the most positive about the future of the city under its first Latino mayor. The optimism among Latino respondents in our survey might be expected. Earlier research has shown that those who are part of the winning group when a racial/ethnic transition happens in city hall are typically positive and hopeful. This was the case among the Irish and other white ethnics after they ascended to the mayoralty displacing white Protestants. Similarly, the election of black mayors in the late twentieth century was accompanied by high levels of optimism among black voters. The optimism among Latinos in Providence, however, is interesting because the election of the city's first Latino mayor occurred during a major economic

downturn. Latinos have been disproportionately affected by high unemployment rates and the housing foreclosure crisis that gripped Providence and other cities. Perhaps the election of one of their own to city's top public office make for a sort of consolation for Providence's growing Latino community. Perhaps many of them see in Angel Taveras' election a promise of better days to come.

At the same time, our study shows that racial tensions persist and may be accentuated by the recession. Black voters and white voters whose economic future was affected by the economic downturn tend to be more reticent and least hopeful in their expectations of the Taveras' administration. Our findings confirm that downturns in the local economy, especially in a socially diverse city, can exacerbate group hostilities and strain relations between racial and ethnic groups. In Providence, this is reflected in the growing local tensions between the ascending Latinos and declining black minority. Future data collection and research will allow us to test Hajnal's (2007) theory that experience with a racially other mayor may alleviate racial tensions and suspicions about Taveras'. Undoubtedly, more research is needed in how race and economics intersect in critical political moments for cities and towns in America.

Appendix A

Weighted Sample Distribution by Key Demographic Variables

	Weighted Sample Percentages (n = 540)
<hr/>	
Gender	
Male	49
Female	51
Race	
Non-Hispanic whites	54
Latinos	28
Blacks	11
Education	
High school or less	34%
More than high school	66%

Appendix B

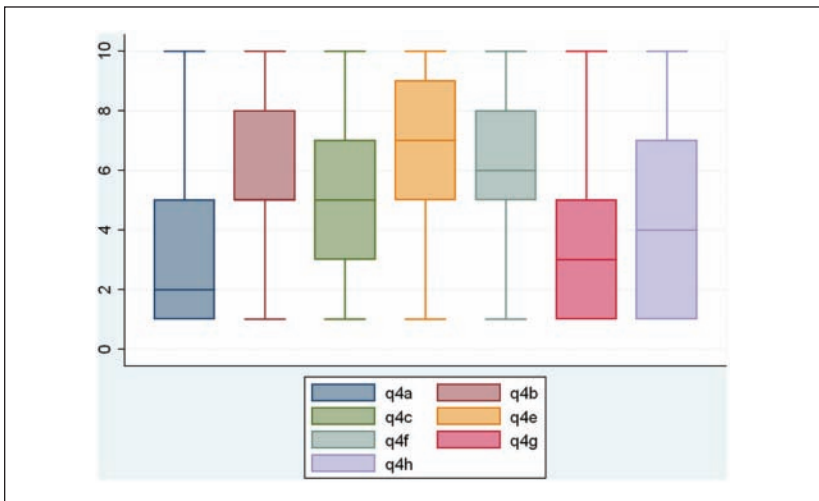
Descriptive Statistics for Items Considered for the Dependent Variable

On a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 means “not at all likely” and 10 means “extremely likely,” how likely do you think it is that under a Taveras’ Administration ...

	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Items included in final models					
4b. The quality of life in the city will improve	489	5.64	2.68	1	10
4c. More businesses will relocate to the city	489	5.23	2.70	1	10
4e. The city will be more sensitive to the problems of minorities	483	6.64	2.72	1	10
4f. The city will be more sensitive of the problems of the middle class	483	6.23	2.69	1	10
Items excluded from final models					
4a. The value of your home would go down	484	3.49	2.71	1	10
4g. The city will provide fewer services to all	477	3.94	2.78	1	10
4h. More middle-class people will leave the city for the suburbs	475	4.27	3.17	1	10
Index variables					
Four-item index with equal weights (used in models)	475	0.00	.76	-1.78	1.48
PCA-based index with seven items	475	0.00	.98	-1.98	2.38
PCA-based index with four items	475	0.00	.96	-2.25	1.88

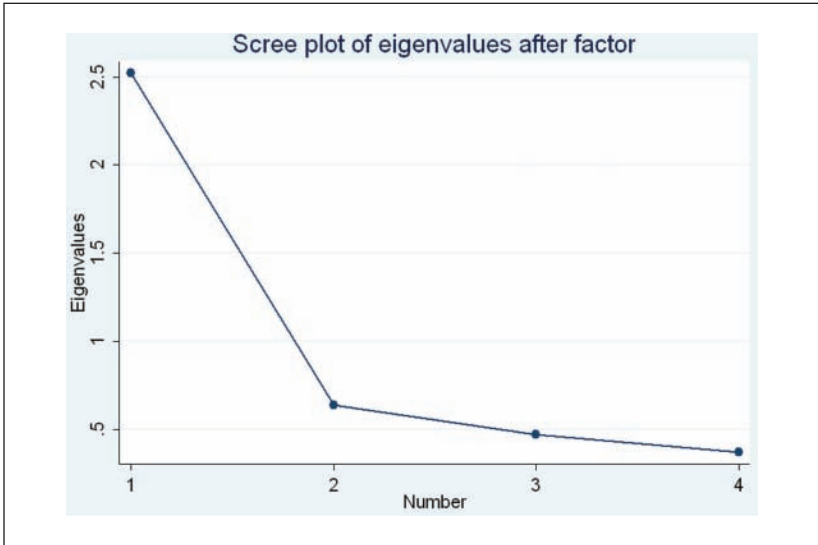
Note: PCA = Principal components analysis.

Box-plot of all seven items considered for the dependent variable

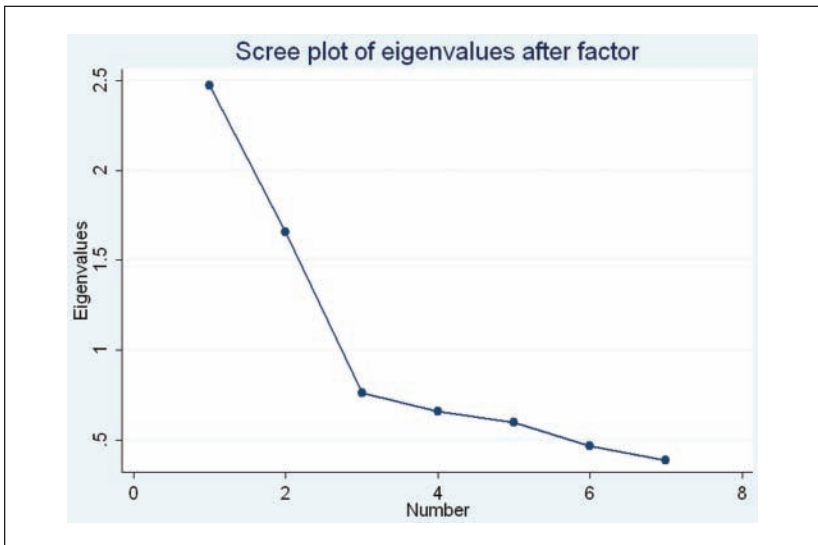


Appendix C

A. Scree Plot of Eigenvalues for Four-Item Factor



B. Scree Plot of Eigenvalues for Seven-Item Factor



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Notes

1. The data used for this study are available through the poll archive of the Taubman Center for Public Policy and American Institutions at Brown University.
2. In 1990, Cianci became an independent and run to win in a three-way race.
3. Interview with Marta Martinez, Director of Communications for Progreso Latino (May, 2010); interview with Roberto Gonzalez, retired Providence Housing Court Judge member of the Coalition of Advocates for Student Opportunities (April 2010); interview with Jim Vincent, President of the Providence chapter of the NAACP (June 2010).
4. Notes from meetings of the Rhode Island Civil Rights Roundtable (July–August 2010).
5. Notes from meetings of the Rhode Island Civil Rights Roundtable (July–August 2010).
6. Because of a problem with survey programming, we do not have data on partisan identification; therefore we cannot include a control for partisanship only for political ideology.
7. Regressions were also performed with the items excluded from the index dependent variable, both in a seven-item solution and individually. The results did not show substantial differences from those that we derived from the four-item solution.

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Bios

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