Assimilation, Acculturation & Political Participation

Dale C. Nelson
Fordham University

*It is generally believed that, once assimilated into American society, a person's ethnic identity becomes largely irrelevant to his or her political attitudes and behavior. Professor Nelson has found that such is not the case. His study of six ethnic groups in New York City leads him to the conclusion that ethnic group membership—regardless of assimilation, length of residence in the city, educational level, or socioeconomic mobility—continues to make for substantial differences between ethnic groups with regard to political attitudes and participation.*

*Dale C. Nelson is Associate Professor of Political Science at Fordham University. He has published several articles on aspects of ethnic politics in the United States.*

Events of the 1960's and 1970's shattered the illusion that ethnic and racial groups were moving toward complete assimilation into the mainstream of American society. Soon after the major political triumphs of the civil rights movement, the "new ethnicity" manifested itself in black urban riots, the black power movement, the rise of brown power among Hispanics, a brief but poignant assertion of political rights by American Indians, and the so-called resurgence of white ethnics. Many recent works have appeared on the new ethnicity, and a variety of explanations have been offered for the new ethnic politics. The most common among them are the following: lack of assimilation, lack of socioeconomic mobility for second and later generations, rise of ethnic group political consciousness, ethnic character of public policy leading to group mobilization for federal funds, continued vitality of ethnic political cultures, and the view that ethnic politics is really class politics in disguise.

But despite the outpouring of contending theories, one can identify
elements of agreement on the role of assimilation. Analysts may disagree about the inevitability, rapidity, or desirability of assimilation, but most would probably agree that when individuals become assimilated into American society, their ethnic group membership no longer determines their political behavior. So well accepted is this interpretation that few, if any, have subjected it to rigorous empirical testing. Instead, writers typically address either the sources of nonassimilation or the implications of nonassimilation for current ethnic politics.

I will argue below that assimilation has very little direct influence on the political attitudes and participation patterns of individuals. That is, regardless of the level of assimilation, significant differences in individual political behavior can still be attributed to ethnic group membership. This thesis will be tested in a two-stage process. The first stage involves an examination of the literature on assimilation and ethnic political participation. Two contending theories in the literature will be identified and labelled as the "assimilation-mobility" thesis and the "acculturation-without-assimilation" thesis. Although at first glance the two models appear to be incompatible, I will show that they can be integrated into a single, unified theoretical model, which I will call the "standard assimilation model" of ethnic political participation. The second stage involves testing the validity of the theoretical model with survey data. The empirical analysis will demonstrate the inadequacy of the standard model as an explanation of ethnic political participation and therefore the need for alternative explanations. Implications of the findings for the study of ethnic politics will be discussed in a concluding section, along with possible alternative theories.

Survey data from a sample of 379 respondents of American black, Cuban, Dominican, Irish, Jewish, and Puerto Rican backgrounds residing in New York City will be used to test the standard model. The data came from the Ethnic Block Survey, a 1973 study of 466 residents of the Washington Heights-Inwood section of Manhattan. It is one of several surveys conducted by the New York City Neighborhood

1. By assimilation I mean the development of multiethnic primary and secondary social relationships, as indicated by interethnic marriages, multiethnic friendship groups, and ethnically diverse social organizations and institutions. The most extensive discussion of the various meanings assigned to the term assimilation can be found in Milton M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964). Gordon distinguishes seven different meanings of assimilation. Mine comes closest to what he calls "structural assimilation."

Project in the Bureau of Applied Social Research at Columbia University between 1972 and 1974. Washington Heights-Inwood is a large residential area of approximately 200,000 residents, and, except for its relatively small number of Italian-Americans, it is an ethnic microcosm of the city. It is essentially a middle-income area, although some of its sections could be described as poor or well-to-do. As of 1973, its family income levels were about average for the city as a whole, as were its various indicators of crime rates.³

The sheer number of ethnic groups represented in the residential area and sample survey provides ample diversity for testing the standard model. Since the survey was conducted in only one residential area, one must be cautious in generalizing the empirical findings to New York City as a whole, and especially beyond New York. However, data based on a single community enable us to focus on ethnic similarities and differences, without simultaneously having to cope with environmental-contextual factors. It might be interesting to examine contextual variation in ethnic political behavior, but it would be difficult to identify the elements of different contexts which produce ethnic differences. Thus, while there are advantages and disadvantages to both types of study sites, the selection of a single residential area appears to be adequate and appropriate for purposes of this study.

The high quality of the survey instrument and the careful procedures followed in sample selection are two other advantages of the Ethnic Block Survey. Since it was created specifically to examine the relationships between ethnicity, assimilation, political attitudes, and participation, questions were constructed for the purpose of measuring these and other relevant concepts. What is sometimes a problem in secondary survey analysis, that is, finding relevant variables, is not salient for the present study. A combined probability and nonprobability sampling procedure was employed to insure that roughly equal numbers would be sampled from each of the six ethnic groups (the actual range was 50 to 78), and that each group would be sufficiently varied in terms of the social background variables of sex, age, occupation, income, and education to allow for comparisons of ethnic and other background characteristics.⁴ The procedure worked well for age, sex, income and


⁴ Census data and interviews with community, religious, educational, business and civic leaders allowed for the identification of specific blocks (five in all) which contained different ethnic groups but were otherwise fairly similar in eco-
education. But occupational differences between ethnic groups in the sample were skewed, reflecting the "real world" occupational stratification of these six ethnic groups. Nevertheless, there was a sufficient split in working-class and middle-class occupations among all ethnic groups so that the separate political impacts of occupation could be examined.

I. The Standard Assimilation Model

Much of the assimilation literature maintains that exclusive social subsystems produce common values and behavioral uniformity. Without the infusion of new people and new ideas, members internalize the values, beliefs, norms and attitudes current in the group. Peer group and family pressures bring the wayward and the deviant back to the prevailing cultural patterns and dominant norms of the group.

American ethnics have rarely practiced extreme forms of social isolation. However, in varying degrees and in different historical periods, they have acted to preserve ethnic social cohesion. By choice or by force of circumstance, individuals have limited many of their important social relationships to those who share similar racial, religious and/or nationality characteristics. It is unlikely that group members would have kept their ethnic identities had they not been able to maintain some degree of social cohesion.

Assimilation and Mobility

The assimilation-mobility thesis asserts that so long as ethnic groups exhibit high levels of social cohesion, they will continue to possess distinctive cultures (values, beliefs, norms, and attitudes) and exhibit distinctive behavioral patterns. The more socially cohesive an ethnic group, the more distinctive the cultural and behavioral patterns of its members. When group cohesion begins to break down, group culture and behavior become progressively less distinctive until they become indistinguishable from those of the larger society.

Two possibly interrelated processes are said to accelerate the assimilating ethnic's social and cultural integration into the social mainstream.

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nomic level, physical appearance, and residential character. Once comparable blocks were selected, a systematic sample procedure was used. Each apartment was listed and a sampling quotient used to randomly draw approximately 100 respondents from each block. Using 1970 Census data, the sample was also stratified by age, sex, and employment status to insure a sufficient variability in the social background characteristics of respondents from all ethnic groups.
Greater social contact with individuals outside one's own ethnic group leads to new value cues and social pressure to conform to an alternative behavior pattern. Not wishing to be out of step with their new social intimates, many assimilating ethnic groups forsake their old values and behaviors for new, more "American" ones. The second process is mobility—economic, social, and residential. Almost all immigrant groups to the United States have begun their American existence at the bottom of the socioeconomic stratification system. Socioeconomic mobility, or the acquisition of greater material wealth and more prestigious occupational status, brings the ethnic into contact with middle- and upper-class people who, according to the assimilation theorists, serve as the chief conveyors of dominant social norms. Upwardly mobile ethnic groups confront such agents of Americanization in the workplace, new residential neighborhoods, and new organizations and social situations. Thus, when individuals engage in closer social contact with people of different ethnic (racial, religious and/or national) characteristics, and especially when such contact is coupled with upward socioeconomic mobility, mainstream cultural and behavioral patterns are likely to prevail.

Nowhere are the political manifestations of this assimilation-mobility thesis more clearly stated than in Robert Dahl's *Who Governs?*. Dahl introduces the concept of political assimilation, arguing that "ethnic politics . . . is clearly a transitional phenomenon." Ethnic groups, he claims, go through three stages en route to political oblivion. First the group exhibits a high degree of political homogeneity, shown by "similarity in political attitude, and . . . a pronounced tendency toward voting alike." He attributes it to low levels of social assimilation and lack of economic mobility. "Political homogeneity," he says, "is a function of socioeconomic homogeneity."

By the third stage, the ethnic group is socially and economically heterogeneous. Large segments have been assimilated and are economically mobile. Politically too the group is now heterogeneous as a result of disintegrating ethnic social cohesion (assimilation) and upward socioeconomic mobility (middle-class status). The new ethnic middle class has adopted a new culture and lifestyle at the same time that it eschews intimate social contact with lower-status ethnic groups. The political ramifications of this process are predictable: "To these people, ethnic politics is often embarrassing or meaningless. Political attitudes and loyalties

6. Ibid., p. 34.
7. Ibid., p. 35.
8. Ibid.
have become a function of socioeconomic characteristics. Members of the group display little political homogeneity."

Acculturation without Assimilation

A number of writers have recently challenged the assimilation-mobility thesis or at least some of its assumptions. They stress acculturation (the adoption of dominant American cultural norms and values) as a source of social and political homogenization, independent of the assimilation process. Milton Gordon appears to have been the first to explicate this thesis in its general social and economic context. He argues that assimilation is a sufficient but not a necessary condition for the acculturation of ethnic groups to mainstream American society. He agrees with Dahl, Laumann, Lenski and others that if "structural assimilation" (the diversification of social structures into multiethnic forms) occurs, acculturation will inevitably follow. But he observes that acculturation will occur rapidly despite strong ethnic social structures, because outside forces which induce cultural homogenization penetrate even the most socially cohesive ethnic groups. The most common agents of the national (largely white Anglo-Saxon Protestant) culture are the educational system, religious institutions, and the mass media. Thus, even when ethnics do not interact in a socially meaningful way with bearers of the national culture, they nevertheless come to adopt its values, customs, and cultural symbols, usually by the second generation.

Political implications of this thesis are discussed in a variety of works. But Michael Parenti makes what is perhaps the most cogent argument for adapting Gordon's thesis to ethnic politics. He claims that the political acculturation of the ethnic proceeds hand in hand with general cultural adaptation to American life and that it is largely com-

9. Ibid.
13. Parenti, "Ethnic Politics."
pleted by the advent of the second generation. In his view, ethnic politics thrives in contemporary America not because of low levels of acculturation, but in reaction to the slowness of assimilation. Ethnic politics is alive and well, and will continue into the indefinite future, because ethnics (working- and middle-class alike) continue to maintain their separate identities both socially and psychologically.

**Assimilation and Acculturation Models: A Synthesis**

The assimilation-mobility and acculturation-without-assimilation theses need not be regarded as contending explanations of ethnic political behavior. They can be integrated into what I am calling the standard assimilation model (or simply the standard model), represented by Figure 1.

![Figure 1 The Standard Assimilation Model of Ethnic Political Participation](image)

For the most part, the standard assimilation model is a straightforward fusion of the two theses. For instance, the model's portrayal of participation and acculturation as dependent on levels of social assimilation and socioeconomic mobility represents the major thrust of the assimilation-mobility thesis. The model also clearly presents the acculturationist view that exposure to Americanizing educational institutions produces greater political acculturation which, in turn, leads to increases in ethnic participation.

Some adjustment of both arguments was necessary to produce the desired synthesis. Whereas Dahl's assimilation-mobility thesis treats political acculturation (which he calls "similarity in political attitude") and participation as separate dependent variables, the standard assimilation model views acculturation as a direct cause of higher participation. Dahl, however, does not reject the argument that political beliefs and attitudes affect participation and the fact that many studies have forcefully documented the correlation between certain political attitudes and participation would seem to justify the model's assertion that political accultur-
tion is a cause of participation. Similarly, the model’s presentation of assimilation and mobility as key sources of acculturation and participation appears to conflict with the acculturation-without-assimilation viewpoint; however, proponents of this thesis accept the notion that if assimilation and greater mobility occur, political acculturation and higher levels of participation will also occur. Thus, there are differences in emphasis between the two theses, but these can be usefully reconciled for purposes of empirical investigation.

The standard assimilation model generates six major hypotheses that will be tested in this study:

**Sources of Political Acculturation**

H1: The more socioeconomic mobility, the higher the level of political acculturation.

H2: The more social assimilation, the higher the level of political acculturation.

H3: The more education, the higher the level of political acculturation.

**Sources of Political Participation**

H4: The more socioeconomic mobility, the higher the level of political participation.

H5: The more social assimilation, the higher the level of political participation.

H6: The more political acculturation, the higher the level of political participation.

Among proponents of the standard model there would also be consensus concerning the following null hypothesis:

H7: Once social assimilation, socioeconomic mobility, and education are held constant, ethnic group membership will be unrelated to political acculturation and participation.

Supporters of the standard model would strongly reject the view that ethnic group membership has any political relevance for individuals who are middle class, highly educated, and socially assimilated into mainstream American society. They believe that distinctive ethnic political cultures disappear as a result of assimilation and mobility. Thus, if the model is valid, there should be no significant ethnic group impact on

political attitudes and participation once assimilation, mobility, and education are controlled.

**Operational Measures**

The dependent variable, *political participation*, will be measured by survey questions tapping the respondents' political activity in the local community over the past few years. Five specific acts will be examined: voting in local elections, signing petitions for community improvement projects, joining community problem-solving organizations, contacting local public officials regarding community problems, and attending community protest demonstrations. An overall cumulative index will be constructed from these five items to determine the respondent's level of community political participation.\(^{15}\)

*Political acculturation*, the major intervening variable, will be examined in terms of four types of political attitudes—psychological involvement in politics, community political awareness and knowledge, sense of personal political efficacy, and political cynicism. An overall political acculturation index will be constructed by standardizing the attitude variables and adding them together.\(^{16}\)

This cluster of attitudes does not directly measure political acculturation, for acculturation is a process of learning that takes place over many years. Instead, the attitudes are indicators of how successful the political acculturation process has been. In particular, those who exhibit greater psychological involvement, community political awareness and knowledge, personal political efficacy, and political cynicism will be viewed as the most politically acculturated. Since Tocqueville, analysts have singled out Americans for their comparatively high levels of political participation. More recent comparative political study has confirmed this judgement, and some observers have explained it partly by reference to the "participatory attitudes" that many Americans hold.\(^{17}\) Political

15. The index is a simple additive one, counting the number of different acts performed; it ranges from 0 to 5.

16. Twelve specific attitude questions (variables) were selected from the survey. Factor analysis (PA2 with varimax rotation) confirmed that the four attitude dimensions existed in the data, and four standardized attitude indexes were therefore constructed. Correlations (\(r\)) between the four indexes ranged from .17 to .45, supporting the construction of an overall standardized political acculturation index from the four initial indexes. The variables were first standardized and then combined to form the index. For a description of the specific wording of the twelve attitude questions, see Dale C. Nelson, "Ethnicity and Socioeconomic Status as Sources of Participation: The Case for Ethnic Political Culture," *American Political Science Review* 73 (December 1979): 1024–1038.

17. See, for example, Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1965).
acculturation in the standard assimilation model, therefore, means that assimilating and mobile ethnics tend to acquire attitudes that predispose them to become politically active.

There are three major independent variables represented in the standard model. Educational level is measured simply by the number of school years completed. Socioeconomic mobility is an index of the occupational prestige of the head of household (based on the National Opinion Research Center scale), and the level of 1972 family income from all sources. Finally, social assimilation is an index composed of four items: (1) intermarriage, that is, marriage outside of the ethnic group; (2) multiethnic friendship, number of the respondent's best friends who do not share her or his ethnic identification; (3) low primary-group ethnocentricty, the extent to which the respondent discusses problems with those outside of close family and friendship circles; and (4) low ethnic religiosity, the extent to which the respondent attends religious services at institutions that are not model to the ethnic group, or the situation where one attends no religious services. These four items do not exhaust all aspects of social assimilation, but they do substantially convey the meaning sociologists have attached to the term.

Having elaborated the standard model and provided operational definitions of its key concepts, we can now proceed to analysis of the data. The first step involves correlational analysis. The Pearson \( r \) correlations between dependent and independent variables, as well as between independent variables, are examined to determine whether the model's causal assertions are at least initially plausible. Path analysis is then employed for a more rigorous testing. Analysis reveals that social assimilation has little effect on either political acculturation or political participation. Three new variables (length of New York City residence, generation in the United States, and American citizenship), thought to measure the time dimension of assimilation, are then introduced into the analysis. Since proponents of the standard model maintain that assimilation, higher educational achievement, and socioeconomic mobility will eliminate differences of political attitudes between ethnic groups, the last stage of the data analysis examines the possible effects of ethnic group membership on political participation and political acculturation.

II. Testing the Standard Model

The first step in the data analysis is to examine the zero-order (Pearson \( r \)) correlations between the dependent variable, political participation, and the various independent variables identified in the standard model. Table I is a simple correlation matrix reporting the zero-order relationships between participation and political acculturation, educational level,
socioeconomic mobility, and social assimilation. The correlations between independent variables are also displayed in this table for purposes of analysis.

Table 1 reveals many interesting findings worthy of discussion. First, the index of political acculturation exhibits a very strong correlation with the political participation index \((r = .596)\). Education and mobility are also highly correlated with participation, although not as highly as is acculturation. Social assimilation exhibits virtually no relationship to participation; in fact, although the relationship is not statistically significant, social assimilation has a slightly negative association with participation \((r = -.027)\).

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<td>.524</td>
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<td>.051</td>
<td>.132</td>
<td>.060</td>
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Based on the zero-order correlations reported in Table 1, we can provisionally accept some and reject other predictions derived from the standard model. The hypothesis that political acculturation will lead to greater participation finds strong initial support in the data. The proposition that socioeconomic mobility will be positively associated with higher levels of political participation also finds support in the correlation matrix. The standard model did not predict a high positive correlation between educational level and participation, and the absence of any zero-order correlation between assimilation and participation appears to suggest rejection of at least part of the assimilation-mobility thesis. That no single item of the social assimilation index (intermarriage, multiethnic friendship patterns, primary-group ethnocentricity, and low ethnic religiosity) exhibits a correlation higher than \(r = .065\), provides even firmer support for the notion that social assimilation is not directly related to political participation.

The correlations reported for independent variables again provide support for some and not other predictions based on the standard model. The high association reported for the relationship between education and political acculturation and the low correlation between social assimilation
and acculturation tend to support the claim of the acculturation-without-assimilation theorists that the educational system promotes acquisition of political culture norms, regardless of assimilation level. The high correlation between socioeconomic mobility and acculturation tends to support the assimilation-mobility argument.

However revealing, the zero-order correlations are not collectively an adequate test of the standard model, because they provide insufficient causal evidence. Path analysis was therefore employed to examine the plausibility of causal assertions in the standard model. Figure 2, a path diagram, reports the results in terms of path coefficients.

The data in Figure 2 make for clarity in our empirical testing. First, the high association between education and participation discovered in correlational analysis ($r = .40$) all but disappears when level of political acculturation is held constant ($p_{51} = .12$). This would appear to confirm the acculturation-without-assimilation hypothesis that the effect of education on participation is mediated by political acculturation. Controlling for political acculturation has the same effect on the relationship between socioeconomic mobility and participation ($r_{52} = .34; p_{52} = .09$) that it has on the relationship between education and participation. However, the path analysis leads us to reject one of the propositions of the assimilation-mobility thesis—namely, that social pressure to conform will lead to

\[
\begin{align*}
1 & \quad \text{Socioeconomic Mobility} & .18 (.40) \\
2 & \quad \text{Educational Level} & .40 (.50) \quad 4 & \quad \text{Political Acculturation} & .51 (.60) \\
3 & \quad \text{Social Assimilation} & -.01 (.05) \\
5 & \quad \text{Political Participation} \\
\end{align*}
\]

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<th>Actual</th>
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<td>$p_{51} &gt; 0$</td>
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<td>$p_{53} &gt; 0$</td>
<td>$p_{53} = -.07$</td>
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**Figure 2** Path Diagram of the Standard Assimilation Model of Ethnic Political Participation* ($n = 379$)

* Figures in parentheses are Pearson r's. Correlation between independent variables are as follow: $r_{12} = .52 ; r_{13} = .06 ; r_{23} = .13$. 
a direct correlation between socioeconomic mobility and political participation. The path coefficient between mobility and participation (.12) is too weak to sustain the assimilation-mobility thesis on this point.

The small size and negative direction of $p_{53}$ ($-.07$) leads us to reject the hypothesis that social assimilation leads directly to higher political participation, and since $p_{43}$ is miniscule ($-.01$), we have even stronger support for the finding, discovered in correlation analysis, that social assimilation is unrelated to political acculturation. In short, social assimilation (as measured in this study) appears to have no direct impact on either political acculturation or participation.

To summarize, several hypotheses of the standard model have been supported while others have not been supported by the correlation and path analyses. Confirmed are the propositions that higher educational achievement and socioeconomic mobility lead to greater political acculturation, which in turn leads to higher levels of political participation (the acculturation-without-assimilation thesis and part of the assimilation-mobility thesis). Several hypotheses have not been supported by the data to this point, namely, that socioeconomic mobility and social assimilation lead directly to higher levels of participation and that greater social assimilation leads indirectly to higher levels of participation through its effects on political acculturation.

**The Effects of Length of Residence, Generation, and Citizenship**

Let us now see if other measures of social assimilation will validate propositions in the standard model which the above analysis has failed to confirm. Three other possible measures come to mind: length of residence (in years), generation in the United States (first, second, third or later), and American citizenship. Assimilation takes place over time, inasmuch as it requires familiarity with and acceptance of current social and political institutions and processes. Both length of residence and generation appear to capture this time dimension. An argument

18. Length of residence in New York City was created from a single question which simply asked in what year the respondent first came to New York; for respondents who were born in New York City, their present age was considered their "length of residence." Generation in the United States was created from questions that asked where the respondent and the respondent's father were born. If neither was born in the United States, the respondent was considered to be "first generation"; if the respondent (but not the father) was born in the United States, he or she was counted as "second generation"; if both the father and the respondent were born in the United States, the respondent was counted as "third-or-later generation." The variable "United States citizenship" was created from a single question asking whether the respondent was an American citizen.
could also be made that lack of American citizenship leads to low levels of psychological involvement and political efficacy. Citizenship is required for one of the measures of political participation used in this analysis, namely, voting, and although it is not required for the other four mentioned earlier, its absence may nevertheless inhibit participation.

Accordingly, these three additional measures were introduced into the data analysis along with the variables of the standard model. We first examine length of New York City residence, since all respondents can be measured on this variable. Figure 3, a path diagram, reports its effects on participation directly, and indirectly through its relationship with political acculturation. We ask whether length of residence adds anything to our understanding of political participation, once the other independent variables are controlled. By examining the path coefficient in the diagram we can also determine whether any of the original relationships between independent and other variables is rendered spurious as a result of introducing length of residence.

Figure 3 shows that length of residence has a substantial impact on political acculturation. Among the other independent variables, only

![Path Diagram]

\[ P_{01} > 0 \]
\[ P_{02} > 0 \]
\[ P_{03} > 0 \]
\[ P_{04} > 0 \]

\[ P_{01} = .10 \]
\[ P_{02} = .12 \]
\[ P_{03} = .07 \]
\[ P_{04} = -.08 \]

**Figure 3** Path Diagram of the Standard Assimilation Model, Including Length of New York City Residence\(^*\) (\(N = 379\))

* Figures in parentheses are Pearson r's. Correlation between length of residence and other independent variables are as follows: \(r_{12} = .36\); \(r_{13} = .34\); \(r_{14} = .14\).
educational level exhibits a higher path coefficient \((p = .38)\) with political acculturation. The influence of socioeconomic mobility on political acculturation is lessened somewhat by the introduction of length of residence. The fact that the path coefficient for its relationship with political acculturation is considerably lower than the zero-order relationship between these two variables \((p_{51} = .31; \ r_{51} = .50)\) suggests the possibility that the effects of length of residence are contaminated with socioeconomic mobility and, to a lesser extent, educational level. Despite the introduction of length of residence in the model, social assimilation continues to exhibit virtually no relationship to political acculturation \((p_{54} = -.02)\). Thus, at this stage of the analysis, length of residence can be viewed as an indirect indicator of social assimilation, and as a possible addition to any revised version of the standard model.

To include the measures of generation and citizenship in the data analysis requires a substantial adjustment in the size of the study sample. Black-Americans \((n = 63)\) in the sample are all at least third-generation Americans, and Cubans \((n = 78)\) and Dominicans \((n = 61)\) in the sample are all first-generation. There are substantial numbers of first-, second-, and third-generation Jewish \((n = 69)\) and Irish \((n = 58)\) respondents, and 12 percent of Puerto Rican \((n = 50)\) respondents are second-generation. There are no third-generation Puerto Ricans in the sample. Only three of the Jewish and Irish respondents are not citizens, whereas all Black and Puerto Rican respondents are, of course, citizens. Thus, approximately 99 percent of the noncitizens in the six ethnic groups under examination are Dominican or Cuban. Therefore, generation in the United States will be examined only among Jewish, Irish, and Puerto Rican respondents \((n = 177)\), and American citizenship only among Cubans and Dominicans \((n = 139)\). Since voting requires citizenship, a new participation index was constructed which excludes voting in local elections. The revised participation index will also be used for analysis pertaining to generation in the United States, because first-generation respondents are the only noncitizens in the sample, and second- and later-generation respondents are American citizens by birth. Table II reports the path coefficients for both citizenship and generation, along with other independent variables from the standard model.

Table II provides some very interesting findings. First, neither citizenship nor generation has any significant direct effect on participation once other variables in the standard model are controlled. However, both appear to have an impact on political acculturation: the path coefficient for citizenship and acculturation is .22, and that for generation and acculturation is .21. Interpretation becomes more complicated, however, when the relationship between citizenship and acculturation is examined
Table II  Path Analysis of the Effects of Citizenship and Generation on Political Participation

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<td>( p ) = .22 ( r ) = .36</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social mobility</td>
<td>( p ) = .08 ( r ) = .22</td>
<td>( p ) = .12 ( r ) = .29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social assimilation</td>
<td>( p ) = – ( r ) = .06</td>
<td>( p ) = – ( r ) = .02</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a Participation Index excludes voting in local elections.
b Cubans and Dominicans only.
c Jews, Irish, and Puerto Ricans only.

separately for Cubans and Dominicans. Among Cubans the relationship is strong \((r = .47)\), but among Dominicans it is very weak \((r = .10)\). An inquiry into why this should be so would be interesting but not germane to our empirical investigation of the standard model. But it is clear that the finding precludes any simple interpretation of the effects of citizenship.

A similar problem arises when the effects of generation on political acculturation are examined separately for Jews, Irish, and Puerto Ricans in the sample. For Jewish and Irish respondents, generation exhibits only a weak relationship with political acculturation \((r = .19\) and \(.26\), respectively). Second-generation Puerto Ricans are not more acculturated \((r = -.05)\). When the effects of generation on acculturation are controlled for educational level, socioeconomic mobility, social assimilation, and ethnic group membership (represented by dummy variables), the path coefficient for generation becomes insignificant \((p = .08)\). It follows that consideration of generation adds little to our understanding of political acculturation.

To summarize, as an indicator of social assimilation, length of residence appears to be a candidate for inclusion in a revised standard model because of its strong correlation with political acculturation. However, it is clear that generation in the United States and citizenship should not be brought into such a revised model, because their effects
are not strong nor are they uniform across all ethnic groups in the sample.

The Effects of Ethnic Group Membership

The final step in testing the standard model involves analysis of the effects of ethnic group membership on political participation and acculturation. This is necessary in view of the assimilationist argument noted earlier that the more assimilated, upwardly mobile, and highly educated members of all ethnic groups will eventually adopt the same attitudes and values, become politically more acculturated, and participate at higher levels. If ethnic group differences are found to persist even after assimilation, education, and economic mobility have been taken into account, the standard model would have to be considered inadequate.

Nominal ethnic group membership\textsuperscript{19} was introduced into the standard model via path analysis. Using multiple classification analysis (MCA), a partial beta (path coefficient) was generated to measure the effects of ethnic group membership directly on political participation and on political acculturation, controlling for education, mobility, and social assimilation. The results of the analysis are reported in Figure 4 (path coefficients).

We can see from Figure 4 that the effects of ethnic group membership are very substantial. Compared to the independent variables in the standard model, such membership is the best single predictor of political acculturation ($p_{51} = .46$). Stepwise regression analysis indicates how important it is to political acculturation. Education, mobility, and assimilation were introduced in step one and produced an $R^2$ of .27; when ethnic group membership was introduced second in the stepwise procedure it produced an additional $R^2$ of .19. The standard model, then,

\textsuperscript{19}To determine ethnic group membership, respondents to the survey were handed a sheet listing fifteen ethnic groups and the category “other.” The question asked them was: “Here is a list of several groups. Which \textit{one} group best describes the background of most of your ancestors?” Respondents who answered “Cuban,” “Dominican,” or “Puerto Rican” posed no problems for the analysis. Other questions in the survey on “present religious affiliation” and “religious identification as a child” were used to identify Jewish respondents who, for example, indicated that most of their ancestors were “German” or “Russian,” etc. All respondents (with one exception) who indicated that their ancestors were Irish were Catholics, or raised in the Catholic church, so the category “Irish” excludes respondents whose ancestors were Protestant and from Ulster. Respondents who selected the category “American Blacks” were also checked on questions identifying their generational status, so as to separate West Indian and African blacks from native American blacks. Of the 466 respondents to the survey, 379 could be easily classified into one of the six ethnic groups under analysis.
Figure 4  Path Diagram of the Effects of Ethnic Group Membership on Political Participation* \((N = 379)\)

*Figures in parentheses are Pearson \(r\)'s. Data for ethnic group membership was obtained from MCA. Correlations between ethnicity and other independent variables are as follows: \(\text{Eta}_{12} = .46; \text{Eta}_{13} = .42; \text{Eta}_{14} = .31.\)

does not “explain away” ethnic group differences in political acculturation or, therefore, political participation.

If variations in educational level, rate of socioeconomic mobility, and social assimilation do not account for ethnic group differences in levels of political acculturation, what does account for them? One possibility is length of residence. As noted earlier, compared to other independent variables in the standard model, it exhibited a strong impact on political acculturation. Length of residence and ethnic group membership are highly correlated \((\text{Eta} = .656), so that length of residence could account for ethnic group differences in political acculturation. To test for this possibility, length of residence and ethnic group membership were introduced into path analysis, along with education, mobility, and assimilation. The results are reported in Table III.

The results in Table III tend to confirm the importance of ethnic group membership to political acculturation. It continues to be the best predictor of political acculturation, despite the inclusion of length of
Table III  Path Analysis of the Effects of Ethnic Group Membership and Length of Residence on Political Acculturation in the Standard Model ($N = 379$)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>$p$</th>
<th>$r$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic Group Membership$^a$</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of Residence</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Level</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socioeconomic Mobility</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Assimilation</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$^a$ Path coefficient (beta) obtained from MCA.

New York City residence in the analysis. Since the path coefficients (partial betas) in the table are lower than the Pearson $r$'s for ethnic group membership, and especially for length of residence, a stepwise regression procedure known as commonality analysis was employed to examine the unique and common variances in political acculturation explained by these two measures. The results of the commonality analysis indicated the possible spuriousness of the relationship between length of residence and political acculturation. Thus, we can conclude with even greater confidence than before that ethnic group membership has a major impact on political participation through its relationship to political acculturation, and that the effects of group membership are not simply the result of ethnic differences in educational level, socioeconomic mobility, social assimilation, or length of New York City residence.

20. Commonality analysis is a stepwise regression procedure for determining common (or shared) and unique variances explained among two or more independent variables. Jointly, length of New York City residence and ethnic group membership exhibited a multiple $R^2$ of .350 with political acculturation. Approximately .163 of the total $R^2$ of .350 (or 46.6 percent) proved to be shared variance. However, .183 (or 52.3 percent) of the explained variance in political acculturation was uniquely accounted for by ethnic group membership, whereas only .004 (or 1.1 percent) was uniquely explained by length of residence. It is on the basis of these finding (and the size of the path coefficients for length of residence compared to ethnic group membership) that I would claim possible spuriousness for the relationship between length of residence and political acculturation.

21. The variable "ability to speak and read English" was also examined for its possible impact on participation and political acculturation among Hispanics in the sample. This language variable proved to have virtually no impact on participation or political acculturation, once variables in the standard model, ethnic group membership and length of residence were controlled.
III. Conclusion

Only two of the seven hypotheses stated earlier were strongly supported by the data: that higher educational achievement leads to greater political acculturation (H3) which, in turn, leads to greater political participation (H6). Variables measuring social assimilation and socioeconomic mobility had little or no impact on acculturation or participation. Equally significant is the fact that holding socioeconomic mobility, various measures of social assimilation, and education constant failed to eliminate the substantial correlation between ethnic group membership and level of political acculturation.

One should hesitate to generalize the above findings beyond the six groups examined and, perhaps, beyond the boundaries of New York City. However, they do seem to be reasonable. For example, my findings on the relationship between education, occupation, and income on the one hand, and political attitudes on the other conform to many previous studies, as do those on the relationship between political attitudes and political participation.22 Nor is this the first study to find that ethnic group membership is strongly related to political attitudes and participation.23 The measures chosen to represent social assimilation (with the single exception of the item indicating low and higher levels of primary group ethnocentricity) are well established in assimilation research.24 If the study were methodologically flawed, there would be signs of this in the data. It is more likely that the problems of verification we encountered are theoretical in nature.

The rather poor showing of variables measuring concepts in the standard model, as well as the finding that ethnic group membership explains much variation in individual political behavior, has important implications for interpreting the continued salience of ethnic politics. The dominant view has been that ethnic political resurgence results

22. See Milbrath and Goel, Political Participation, for a summary of the numerous studies on this topic.


from a failure of the American dream (low rates of upward mobility) and the absence of social assimilation into mainstream society. The results of this study raise serious doubts about the validity of this viewpoint and suggest the need for an alternative theory.

One such theory identifies ethnic group political consciousness as the major proximate cause of variation in ethnic group participation. However, group political consciousness is itself viewed as a function of blocked upward socioeconomic mobility and the lack of social assimilation. Thus, in one possible revision of the standard model, assimilation and mobility would appear as indirect sources of political acculturation and participation, that is, as ones mediated by ethnic group political consciousness.

A second theory appears to deny any significant role to assimilation and mobility. It is another version of the group consciousness thesis, and it maintains that ethnicity is merely a politically convenient strategic symbol (devoid of substantive cultural content), which allows ethnic elites to mobilize supporters and compete with other ethnic groups for government benefits. Successes of the civil rights movement and Great Society programs geared to ethnic minorities are thought to be the chief reasons for the development of such an ethnic political subsystem. Low levels of social assimilation and slow rates of upward socioeconomic mobility are irrelevant to the development of such strategic group consciousness; adoption of this theory would therefore necessitate a rejection of the standard model. The new ethnic participation model would emphasize the strategic skills and mobilizing tactics of ethnic elites, along with the nature and amount of government incentives for participation.

A third theory stresses the development of distinctive ethnic political subcultures as the primary explanation for ethnic group variation in participation rates. A prominent role is accorded to assimilation and mobility, but it is opposite to that identified in the standard model: rather than reduce culture differences between ethnic groups, assimila-


26. For the best brief description of this model, see the editors’ introduction in Glazer and Moynihan, eds., Ethnicity.

tion and mobility may actually increase them. Andrew Greeley’s “ethnogenesis” model, for example, argues that contact between immigrant and mainstream American cultures need not result in the destruction of the immigrant culture. Instead, a unique blend of the two cultures develops, so that as time goes on ethnic cultures actually become more rather than less distinctive. Ironically, inasmuch as social assimilation and upward social mobility cause this mutual adjustment of cultures, they also indirectly lead to greater heterogeneity in the participation rates of ethnic groups through their effects on ethnic political cultures. Thus, embracing an ethnic political culture perspective forces adoption of a radically different theory of ethnic participation than the standard assimilation model.

The present study has analyzed a dominant paradigm in the study of ethnic politics, one which views assimilation, mobility and acculturation as the chief sources of variation in ethnic political participation. For heuristic purposes, a standard assimilation model was constructed, its underlying assumptions were made explicit, hypotheses were derived from the model and tested with appropriate data, and possible alternative theories were identified. Whether any of the three alternative theories sketched above is a worthy replacement for the standard model awaits further study. But the results of the present study strongly suggest that it should be dropped in favor of a more satisfactory model.