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Media use, acculturation, and support for the death penalty : a study of Mexican Americans

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In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Judith Adele Bandermann

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ABSTRACT

MEDIA USE, ACCULTURATION, AND SUPPORT FOR THE DEATH PENALTY A STUDY OF MEXICAN AMERICANS

By Judith A. Bandermann

The United States stands alone among Western democracies in its retention of capital punishment. Overwhelming public support for the death penalty has been explained as the result of increasing media and political sensationalization of the "crime problem." According to some acculturation theorists, the mass media help facilitate assimilation by exposing non-dominant groups to the dominant values of the culture in which they reside. The present study juxtaposed these two lines of research by exploring whether support for the death penalty was greater among more acculturated Mexican Americans and Mexican Americans who were exposed to greater amounts of television and news media. Chi-square and regression analyses showed support for the first hypothesis, as more acculturated Mexican Americans showed greater support for the death penalty than Mexican Americans who were less acculturated. Positive news media effects were shown among U.S.-born respondents and respondents who immigrated to the United States before the age of 18. Negative news media effects were shown among respondents who came to the United States after their 18th birthday.

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Thanks to my family for their patience and devotion.

Thanks to Tim for all of the above.

DEDICATION

To Mom, for keeping Dad from becoming too “Americanized.”

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables	vii
I. Introduction	1
II. Literature Review	2
American Exceptionalism	2
The Mass Media as Facilitator of Punitive Attitudes	5
Acculturation	11
Acculturation, The Mass Media, and Death Penalty Attitudes: A Study of Mexican Americans	15
Hypotheses	19
Methods	21
Sample	21
Operationalization of Variables	22
Results	26
Preliminary Analyses	26
Regression Analyses	31
Discussion and Conclusion	39
References	45

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Means and Standard Deviations of Variables: Entire Sample.....	26
Table 2: Country of Birth, Age at Immigration (18 and Over), and Death Penalty Support	27
Table 3: Sex and Death Penalty Support.....	29
Table 4: Mean Scores for U.S. Born Respondents, Respondents Who Immigrated Before the Age of 18, and Respondents Who Immigrated at Age 18 and Over	30
Table 5: Linear Regressions Predicting Death Penalty Support Among Mexican Americans: Entire Sample.....	32
Table 6: Linear Regressions Predicting Death Penalty Support Among U.S. Born Respondents (Model 2), Respondents Who Immigrated Before the Age of 18 (Model 3), and Respondents Who Immigrated at Age 18 and Older (Model 4)	35

I. INTRODUCTION

The United States is the only Western industrialized nation with the death penalty. Researchers (e.g., Poveda, 2000; Haney, 1997; Johnson, 1998) have been in search of the cultural and historical dynamics that have kept capital punishment alive in America amidst the international movement to abolish it. Many have pointed to the images of crime, criminals, punishment proffered by politicians and the mass media (Austin & Irwin, 2001; Beckett, 1997; Beckett & Sasson, 2000; Haney, 1995; Haney, 1998; Steiner, Bowers, & Sarat, 1999). These images, these scholars claim, generate false beliefs or myths surrounding the nature of punishment, which consequently compel Americans to demand severe sanctions.

While these researchers assign mediated and politicized images of crime and punishment significant power over viewers' attitudes, they, and other researchers of death penalty attitudes, have focused only on the attitudes of native-born Americans; none have suggested nor examined the impact of these images on newcomers to the United States. By contrast, a wide body of literature exists within the field of acculturation (or assimilation) which examines immigrants' use of the mass media as an adaptation tool (e.g., Kim, 1978; Kim, 1988; Khan, 1992; Johnson, 1996; Reece & Palmgreen, 2000). Thus, it seems plausible that immigrants to the United States may internalize the images and beliefs about crime, criminals, and punishment, and subsequently adopt attitudes in favor of the death penalty. The present study seeks to bridge the gap between the fields of death penalty research and assimilation research by examining the death penalty attitudes of a group of Mexican Americans.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review is divided into four sections. The first two sections provide the setting onto which the research hypotheses have been superimposed by (i) describing the international movement to abolish capital punishment and the “anomaly” of the U.S. death penalty, and (ii) discussing the media’s role in the death penalty’s survival in the United States. A third section discusses research on acculturation. A final section brings together the previous ones and poses the hypotheses with respect to the population used for this study, Mexican Americans.

American Exceptionalism

As of 2003, more than half the world’s nations have abolished the use of the death penalty within their borders. Among these countries the abandonment of capital punishment is considered a hallmark of a civilized society in which all humans, however incorrigible, retain the right to live (Hood, 2002). The modern movement to abolish the death penalty began during the Enlightenment in eighteenth century Europe. The Enlightenment thinkers argued that reason, rather than barbarism, could be used to rid society of its ills. It was during that time that Cesare Beccaria proposed some of the arguments against the death penalty that are still used today: that the swiftness and certainty of a punishment, rather than its severity, determine its ability to deter crime (Poveda, 2000); that the death penalty “legitimizes the very behavior –killing- which the law seeks to repress” (Hood, 2000, p. 332); and, that capital punishment has no place in a civilized society (Hood, 2000).

However, capital punishment remained widespread well into the twentieth century, with only nine countries abolishing it before the end of World War II (Hood, 2002).¹ The end of World War II marked the beginning of the death penalty's end in the West, seemingly a reaction to the millions of lives that were lost at the hands of the Nazi regime. Since 1947, seventy-five countries have officially abolished the death penalty, another thirty-four have not carried out an execution in ten or more years (*de facto* abolishment), and many who still have death penalty are proposing legislation to abolish it (Hood, 2002). The European Union, whose member states are by treaty obligations abolitionist, has been a major force in the movement to abolish the death penalty in Europe and works with international organizations to abolish the death penalty worldwide (Hood, 2000; 2002). Several other international organizations, including the United Nations and the Council of Europe, have issued international treaties prohibiting the death penalty. These include:

- Protocol Number Six to the European Convention on Human Rights, issued in 1982, calling for abolition for all crimes during peacetime
- Article One of the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1989), a worldwide treaty issued by the United Nations prohibiting the death penalty for peacetime crimes
- Protocol to the American Convention on Human Rights to Abolish the Death Penalty, issued by the General Assembly of the American States in 1990.

¹ They are: San Marino (1848), Netherlands (1870), Portugal (1867), Norway (1905), Sweden (1921), Denmark (1933), and Switzerland (1942) for crimes during peacetime; Venezuela (1863), San Marino (1865), and Uruguay (1907) for all crimes.

Additionally, in 1998 the International Criminal Court excluded capital punishment from its list of criminal sanctions (even for crimes against humanity, such as genocide), and in 1999 the United Nations Committee on Human Rights voted in favor of a moratorium on executions in all member states which still allowed for the death penalty (Hood, 2002).

Much abolitionist effort is aimed at eradicating capital punishment in the United States. Besides censuring the United States for lagging behind modern standards of civility that recognize the sanctity of every human life, these international associations fault the United States for claiming the right to adopt “reservations” to their human rights treaties, namely, the retention of various forms of capital punishment (Dieter, 1999).² More detrimentally, the United States has been faulted for denying foreign nationals’ right to consular assistance from their home countries, and thereby violating Article 36 of the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations. Recently, the United States was found to have violated Article 36 after it had executed two German nationals who had not been informed of their right to contact their German consulate. In early February of 2003, the International Court of Justice ruled that the United States must halt the impending executions of three Mexican nationals and, as of this writing, is reviewing Mexico’s allegations that the United States denied these nationals their consular rights (Amnesty International, 2003). Further actions against the United States include European Union members’ refusal to extradite criminals to U.S. jurisdiction absent the assurance that the death penalty will not be sought, and the Council of Europe’s June 2001 resolution to

² For example, the United States reservation to Article 6 of ICCPR (prohibiting the execution of juvenile offenders) reads: “The United States reserves the right, subject to its Constitutional constraints, to impose capital punishment on any person (other than a pregnant woman) duly convicted under existing or future laws permitting the imposition of capital punishment, including such punishment for crimes committed by persons below eighteen years of age” (cited in Dieter, 1999).

revoke the United States' observer status until it takes steps to abolish capital punishment (Hood, 2002).

Despite international condemnation, the United States continues to employ the death penalty. Opinion polls and social science research indicate that public support in the U.S has remained between 65 and 80 percent since 1976 (e.g., Bohm, 1998; Ellsworth & Gross, 1994; Jones, 2002).³ Additionally, the number of annual executions began a relatively steady climb in 1984 from 21 to a high of 98 in 1999 (Death Penalty Information Center, 2003), the most executions since 1951 (Bedau, 1997).⁴

The Mass Media as Facilitator of Punitive Attitudes

The origin and nature of support for the death penalty has interested social scientists for several decades. Much of the literature on death penalty attitudes debates whether death penalty support reflects the public's desire for vengeance or retribution, or whether the death penalty is perceived by its supporters to be an effective measure of crime control through deterrence or incapacitation. These studies typically ask respondents to report their support or opposition along with their reasons for supporting or opposing the death penalty.

Somewhat removed from these opinion poll-type studies are researchers who assert that during the last half century, when other Western countries tamed their penal policies by abolishing capital punishment, American politicians and media began

³ Recent polls have shown a slight decrease in support, down from a high of 80% in 1994 to 67% in 2001 (Jones, 2002).

⁴ Executions steadily decreased between 1951 and 1967, no executions were carried out between 1968 and 1976, and only 11 were carried out between 1977 and 1983 (Bedau, 1997).

sensationalizing the crime problem and by doing so have fueled support for harsh criminal sanctions, including the death penalty (Ansolabehere, Behr, & Iyengar, 1993; Austin & Irwin, 2001; Beckett, 1997; Beckett & Sasson, 2000; Haney, 1995; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987).

Beginning in the 1960s, politicians have campaigned on being “tough on crime” because it has provided them with a strong political foothold (Austin & Irwin, 2001; Beckett, 1997; Beckett & Sasson, 2000). Responding to an increase in crime, conservative politicians in the 1960s rejected social conditions, such as poverty, as causes of crime, and instead blamed the civil rights movement, lenient courts, innate criminal propensities, and overly generous welfare policies. They advocated a “law and order” approach, emphasizing personal accountability and proposing harsher penalties as solutions to rising crime rates (Austin & Irwin, 2001; Beckett, 1997; Beckett & Sasson, 2000). While this discourse lost some salience in the 1970s, it reemerged with Reagan’s presidential campaign and the “crime issue” has been a pivotal topic during elections ever since. The success of the “law and order” or “tough on crime” approach is evidenced not only by its continued dominance in political discourse despite a decrease in the crime rate over the last decade, but also by the fact that it is now endorsed by both sides of the political spectrum (Austin & Irwin, 2001; Beckett, 1997). Support for the death penalty is a key component of the law and order rhetoric, as endorsing capital punishment has become *de rigueur* for candidates at all levels of government.

News media have been politicians’ liason in the “war on crime.” In addition, the news media have developed their own interest in crime and punishment. Both politicians

and the mass media tend to focus on violent crime, prison escapes, and offenders released from prison who commit heinous acts to justify increasing punitiveness (Beckett, 1997; Graber, 1980; Surrlette, 1984; Steiner et al., 1999).

What is portrayed in news media is of great consequence because the general public relies primarily on the media for information on crime and politics (Ansolabehere et al., 1993; Beckett, 1997; Iyengar, 1998). Research on the “agenda setting” function of the news indicates that the public considers important issues that appear on television and in the newspaper (e.g., Ansolabehere et al., 1993; Beckett, 1997; Iyengar, 1998; Iyengar and Kinder, 1987; Surrlette, 1984). Experimental studies have indicated that “only a modest degree of news coverage can induce significant shifts in viewers’ beliefs about the importance of issues” (Ansolabehere et al., 1993, p. 143). For example, in one study viewers shown zero, three, and six news stories on U.S. energy problems reported energy problems as one of the three most salient in the nation 24%, 50%, and 65% of the time, respectively (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987).⁵ From a slightly different angle, Beckett (1997) compared media coverage of drugs, public concern about drugs, and the incidence of drug use between 1985 and 1992, and found that levels of public concern about drugs fluctuated with the amount of media coverage, while the actual incidence of drug use during that time resembled neither media coverage nor public concern. She found similar results regarding media coverage, public concern, and actual rates of crime between 1967 and 1974.

⁵ Correlational studies have shown a positive relationship between news media use and issue salience. The advantage of experimental studies, however, is that they solve the inevitable problem of cause and effect in simple correlational studies (Ansolabehere et al., 1993).

Importantly, public support for increased punitiveness has much more closely followed news media and politicians' attention to crime than changes in the rate of crime (Beckett, 1997). Support for the death penalty began an uphill climb at about the same time crime became an "issue," rising from an all-time low of 42% in 1966 and reaching an high of 80% in 1994 (e.g., Bohm, 1998; Ellsworth & Gross, 1994; Jones, 2002). Several authors contend that because of politicians' and news media's attention to crime the public has remained fearful of violent crime, agrees with politicians that increased penalties are the only way to curb crime, and supports punitive measures offered by politicians (Austin & Irwin, 2001; Beckett, 1997). Indeed, news media consumption has been found to be positively correlated to fear of crime (Chiricos, Eschholz, & Gertz, 1997; Gebotys, Roberts, & DasGupta, 1988; Gordon & Heath, 1981; Heath, 1984; Heath & Petraitis, 1987; Liska & Baccaglini, 1990; O'Keefe & Reid-Nash, 1987; Smith, 1984; Williams & Dickinson, 1993)⁶ and support for more punitive policies (Iyengar, 1991; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Roberts & Doob, 1990; Stanlans, 1993), including the death penalty (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Moy, Scheufele, Dietram, Eveland, & McLeod, 2001). Fear of crime has also been found to be related positively to support for the death penalty (Tyler & Weber, 1982).

The way crime stories are "framed" in news reports may also be the source of punitive attitudes. According to Iyengar and colleagues (1991, 1998; Iyengar & Kinder,

⁶ In many studies, the relationship between media use and fear of crime was contingent upon several factors, such as age, gender, income, news source (television versus newspaper), location of the crime reported, and the content of the message. However, in many cases studies produced contradictory results. For example, Chiricos et al. (1997) found effects for women only, while Heath and Petraitis (1987) found effects for men only. In addition, it should be noted that most of these studies were correlational rather than experimental.

1987), the vast majority of crime news appears in “episodic” news bites which report the details of specific offenders and events rather than place crime stories in broader social contexts. Lacking social or contextual explanations for criminal episodes (e.g., poverty, unemployment), viewers develop individualistic attributions for offenders’ behavior (e.g., laziness, evilness) which stimulate demand for punitive sanctions. In several experimental studies Iyengar & Kinder (1987) demonstrated that viewers exposed to episodically framed newscasts tended to assign responsibility for crimes to individual offenders and to support harsher punishments, while viewers exposed to newscasts depicting criminal acts within larger social contexts tended to find society at fault and to support social welfare programs over sanctions aimed at individual offenders. They concluded that news media influences public opinion through a four-stage process: (i) learning: providing the audience with information; (ii) agenda setting: defining which social issues and problems are the most salient; (iii) framing responsibility: suggesting who is responsible for these social issues and problems; and (iv) persuasion: conveying particular attitudes or messages regarding solutions to these problems.

Haney (1998) agrees that “decontextualized” depictions of crime facilitate punitive attitudes, as capital violence in particular is perceived as the product of “free and unencumbered evil choices, on the one hand, and monstrosly deranged, defective traits on the on the other” (p. 352-353). These and other media messages foster the public’s belief that society contains inveterate super predators from which there is no other escape, and no other just response, than their extermination:

Conditioned by repeated exposure to these manipulative morality plays, the mass audience has come to regard anything less than these ‘moments of purifying

violence' as a denial of justice. The violence of the death penalty gives cathartic voice to a public frustrated by the real world's inability to deliver the 'definitive reply' they have been lead by the media to expect (p. 351).

Lynch's (2002) analysis of pro-death penalty internet web sites tells this same story. Throughout these websites "capital punishment is represented as an unproblematic method and symbol of justice by reducing the underlying social problem to a battle between good (an innocent victim) and evil (the capital murderer)." Lynch concludes that the demands for executions, even violent ones, and even at the expense of racially discriminatory practices and executions of innocent people, resonate with popular sentiment and with what is presented about crime in all areas of the media.

Data from public opinion surveys support these assertions. Over the last thirty years as support for the death penalty has risen, so has the proportion of people giving "retribution" (e.g., "an eye for an eye") as their primary reason for support. While "deterrence" was the primary reason given for death penalty support in the 1970s, by 1980 "retribution" surpassed "deterrence" as the number one reason given by survey respondents (Ellsworth and Gross, 1994) and continues to remain at the top. A 2001 Gallup Poll reported that fully 56 percent of death penalty supporters named retribution as their primary reason for supporting the death penalty, while only 16 percent named deterrence (Jones, 2002).⁷

Finally, media attention to crime also appears cause among the public a lack of faith in the criminal justice system's ability to follow through on sentencing, which in

⁷ While Ellsworth and Ross (1984) suggest that this increase reflects not a more vengeful public but greater social acceptability of expressing vengeance, the increase fits well with popular themes expressed in the media.

turn contributes to increased demand for punitiveness. Like fear of crime, the proportion of people agreeing that the courts are “too lenient” rose substantially between the 1960s and the 1980s (from 48% in 1965 to 82% in 1988; see Beckett, 1997), and mass media use does appear to contribute to this belief (Stanlans, 1993). The most direct evidence comes from Steiner et al. (1999), who interviewed jurors who had imposed death sentences in recent capital trials. Steiner et al. found that many jurors in their study reported that they voted for the death penalty because they had heard of offenders being released and recommitting violent acts, and feared that the alternative punishment, life imprisonment, would not sufficiently incapacitate the offender. Further, they found that the fewer years jurors predicted convicted defendants would spend in prison the more likely they were to sentence the defendant to death. Steiner et al. conclude that legal procedures popularized in the media constitute “folk knowledge” upon which critical judgments of the law, and judgments about appropriate penalties, are made. For example, knowing that inmates spend a long time on death row before they are executed (averaging now 11 years) and receive a number of appeals also contributed to jurors’ willingness to impose the death penalty. Similarly, Haney (1995) suggests that folk knowledge of the legal system has resulted in the “myth of super due process,” the belief that legal protections guaranteed to capital defendants eventually spare those not deserving of death, and has contributed to support for the death penalty by absolving the consciences of both jurors and average citizens.

Acculturation

Acculturation, also known as assimilation, is the process during which newcomers adopt the beliefs, values, and behaviors that are central and unique to the host culture. Acculturation theorists posit that newcomers to the United States, over time, think and behave progressively more like native-born citizens (e.g. Alba & Nee, 1997; Kazal, 1995; Rumbaut, 1997). Two of the earliest acculturation theorists, Robert Park and Ernest Burgess (1969), articulated the process as one “of interpenetration and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons and groups and, by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated with them in a common cultural life” (p. 735).

Early studies of acculturation included Thomas and Znaniecki’s early 20th century study of Polish peasants who immigrated to urban areas of the United States. Polish peasant families became “disorganized” as they moved to cities and came into contact with other peoples, and although attempts were made to “reorganize” or establish a Polish-American community, shifts toward American culture were already in place (Alba & Nee, 1997). In the end, Thomas and Znaniecki concluded, acculturation was inevitable. In the late 1930s, Cressey also focused on the impact of the industrial revolution and urbanization on the American immigrant. Using Burgess’s concentric zone model of the city, in which the inner circles of the city contained the central business district and cheap housing, and the outer circles comprised of the middle class and commuters’ homes, Cressey argued that as immigrants moved from the inner zones to the outer zones over time they became “less concentrated physically, less united

culturally, and more accepting of American standards of living” (quoted in Alba & Nee, 1997).

This “straight-line” approach to acculturation in the United States has been the subject of some dissent since its conception, in particular because it did not appear to adequately explain the experiences of non-European immigrants. Milton Gordon revised the acculturation model in *Assimilation in American Society*. Writing in 1964, Gordon pointed to the maintenance of the English language and English-based institutions as evidence of homogeneity, while at the same time acknowledged varying degrees of acculturation among individuals and the difficulty of shedding “vital ingredients of the group’s cultural heritage,” such as religious beliefs and practices (p. 79). Gordon distinguished seven stages of the acculturation process, to be differentially achieved and which he did not expect to be mastered by first the generation of immigrants. For example, he believed that immigrants could live in the United States without identifying themselves as “American” or interacting with those in the core culture outside of the workplace, and yet share the basic beliefs and behaviors of all Americans.

More recently, acculturation theorists have continued to refine acculturation theory by providing specific typologies of acculturating groups based on various characteristics. Segmented assimilation theorists, for example, delineate three patterns of assimilation according to immigrants’ economic achievement (Zhou, 1997). In the first, immigrants follow the classical assimilation pattern by adopting the core American values and achieving upward economic mobility; in the second, immigrants integrate into

the middle class; and in the third, immigrants experience downward mobility and integrate into the lower class.

Berry and Sam (1997) classify acculturating groups along two lines, whether groups consider maintaining (1) their cultural identity, and (2) continued contact with the host society important. Four groups result from the combination of Yes and No answers: *assimilationists* and *integrationists* both consider contact with the host society important, but the former lose their cultural identities in the process; *separationists* maintain their cultural identities while rejecting the host society, and *marginalized* groups reject both their former and the host culture.

Indeed, acculturation is more complex and differentiated than originally thought. For example, the degree to which immigrants and immigrant groups adopt American values and become involved in American institutions may depend on a variety of factors, such as “(1) similarity between the original culture and the host culture, (2) age at the time of immigration, (3) educational background, (4) various personality characteristics such as gregariousness and tolerance for ambiguity, and (5) familiarity with the host culture” (Kim, 1982, p. 366). And, research suggests that the mass media appear to play an important role in facilitating the acculturation process. According to Kim (1977), “cultural learning occurs through communication in one form or another,” and “interpersonal communication and mass media consumption are the two most salient forms in the cultural learning process” (p. 68). The mass media promotes acculturation by providing immigrants with knowledge about the values, current events, and cultural issues in the destination country (Chaffee, Nass, & Yang, 1990; Chaffee & Tims, 1982;

Kim, 1977,1988). Chaffee and his colleagues (Chaffee et al., 1990; Chaffee & Tims, 1982) conceptualize the role of the media as “bridge” that facilitates learning and passage into the dominant culture. A number of studies over the years have attested to the relationship between media use and various measures of acculturation (e.g., Chaffee et al., 1990; Chaffee & Tims, 1982; DeFleur & Cho, 1957; Graves, 1967; Kim, 1977,1988; Reece & Palmgreen, 2000; Shah, 1991; Subervi-Velez, 1986). Immigrants may deliberately use the media, especially television, in order to become more familiar with American culture and become more acculturated (Reece & Palmgreen, 2000).

Acculturation, The Mass Media, and Death Penalty Attitudes: A Study of Mexican Americans

The aforementioned literature suggests a line of inquiry into the effects of acculturation and the mass media on immigrants’ attitudes toward the death penalty. Given that support for the death penalty is at present a decidedly American value, that this value appears to be in part media-driven, and that the mass media serve as a “bridge” for acculturating immigrants, it is possible that immigrants who utilize the mass media and become acculturated develop more favorable attitudes toward capital punishment than they had when they arrived. Research on the media’s role in immigrants’ political socialization has unfortunately been limited to the relationship between media consumption and political knowledge and political participation, rather than political beliefs per se. These studies generally find a positive relationship between media consumption and political participation and knowledge (e.g., Chaffee et al., 1990).

Public support for capital punishment tends to wane over time after abolishment (Zimring & Hawkins, 1986). Mexican Americans were chosen for this study because Mexican immigrants may have a low baseline of support for capital punishment as a consequence of the length of time Mexico has been without the death penalty. Mexico first abolished capital punishment in 1917, long before most nations (Amnesty International, 1989), and although the death penalty has been reinstated several times over the last century, there has not been a state-sanctioned execution there since 1939 (Hood, 2002).

The degree to which Mexican Americans as a group have assimilated into American culture is debated among researchers. As the fastest growing minority group in the nation, Mexican Americans comprise a unique combination of families who have been in the United States since the late 19th century, those who have arrived since the passage of the 1965 Immigration Act, and the continued flow of Mexican Americans into the United States has enabled traditional Mexican culture to maintain a presence in the United States (Moore & Pachon, 1985; Saenz & Greenlees, 1996). Generally speaking, it appears that Mexican Americans have acculturated in some respects but not others (Keefe & Padilla, 1987). For example, Mexican Americans tend to maintain the Catholic faith and close family networks, or "familism" (Keefe & Padilla, 1987; Moore & Pachon, 1985). On the other hand, research shows that they speak less Spanish, are less interested in Mexican history, and have less traditional sex roles than in the past (Bean & Tienda, 1987; Keefe, 1980; Keefe & Padilla, 1987; Penaloza, 1994; Valentine & Mosley, 2000). Most importantly for this paper, they also appear to share some of the "core"

American values, such as economic individualism and patriotism (De la Garza, DiSipio, Falcon, & Garcia, 1992; De le Garza, Falcon, & Garcia, 1996).

Whether or not Mexican Americans' political beliefs match those of their Anglo counterparts has been little researched, though in recent years their political participation has come under close scrutiny. Mexican Americans have the lowest voter turnouts among all Latinos (Mexican Americans, Cubans, and Puerto Ricans), perhaps because they tend to be younger than the general population (Arvizu & Garcia, 1996). However, like Anglos, participation rates are higher among homeowners, those who are older, more educated, and have higher incomes (Arvizu & Garcia, 1996; Hero & Campbell, 1996; Wrinkle, Stewart, Polinard, Merier, & Arivzu, 1996). Examinations of Mexican Americans' political beliefs are usually limited to party affiliation, and it is well established that Mexican Americans overwhelmingly identify themselves as members of the Democratic and Independent parties. But, a few surveys have revealed that Mexican Americans, like minorities in general, have substantially lower levels of support for the death penalty. For example, in a November, 2000 *Los Angeles Times* survey less than half of Mexican Americans (45%) supported the death penalty and fully one third (34%) strongly disapproved, while two-thirds (66%) of Whites supported the death penalty and less than one-fifth (19%) strongly disapproved (Meersman, 2000).

The most comprehensive survey of Mexican Americans' political behavior and attitudes is the National Latino Political Survey (NLPS), from which the data for the present study are drawn. The NLPS was a survey conducted in 1989 and 1990 of 2817 Latinos across the United States, 1546 of which were foreign- and native-born Mexican

Americans. A cursory examination of the data reveals that Mexican Americans who are U.S. citizens are more supportive of the death penalty than are non-citizens, providing support for the acculturation thesis. Specifically, 82.6% of Mexican American citizens voiced some support for the death penalty, while only 62% of Mexican American non-citizens did (De la Garza, et al., 1992).

The media's role in Mexican Americans' acculturation and political socialization process is less well studied than it is among other immigrant and minority groups, and a major problem with studies on Mexican Americans' media consumption is that they have failed to distinguish the language of the media consumed (Subervi-Velez, 1986). Studies which do distinguish between ethnic and Anglo media have found support for the assimilationist perspective. Greater English language ability (Dunn, 1975; Duran, 1980; Eiselein, 1973; Greenberg, Burgoon, Burgoon, & Kozenny, 1983; Lopez & Enos, 1974; O'Guinn, Faber, & Meyer, 1984), longer residence in the United States (Greenberg et al., 1983), and greater socioeconomic indicators such as education and income (De la Garza & Brischetto, 1983; Dunn, 1975; Duran, 1980; Lopez & Enos, 1974; O'Guinn et al., 1984) "are associated with greater exposure to and/or preference for English language media" (Subervi- Velez, 1986, p. 79). Use of Anglo mass media is also associated with greater political knowledge (Tan, 1983) and participation (De la Garza & Brischetto, 1984; Tan, 1983). Additionally, like other Americans, Mexican Americans' primary source of news and political information is Anglo media (De la Garza & Brischetto, 1983).

III. HYPOTHESES

Two hypotheses were made on the basis of the existing literature. First, the lack of literature on acculturation with respect to death penalty attitudes warranted a basic hypothesis that more acculturated Mexican Americans would show greater support for the death penalty. In this study, seven variables measured acculturation: (i) place of birth; (ii) for respondents born in Mexico, their age at immigration; (iii) usual language spoken at home; (iv) support for individualism; (v) language of respondents' primary news source; (vi) U.S. citizenship; and (vii) love for the United States. Thus, (i) native-born Mexican Americans were expected to show greater support for the death penalty than foreign-born Mexican Americans; (ii) respondents who immigrated at earlier ages were expected to show greater support than those who immigrated at later ages; (iii) English speakers were expected to show more support than Spanish speakers; (iv) respondents who held more individualistic beliefs were expected to show more support than respondents who held more fatalistic beliefs; (v) respondents who consumed more English news media were expected to show greater support than respondents who consumed Spanish news media; (vi) U.S. citizens were expected to show more support than non-U.S. citizens; and (vii) respondents who voiced more love for the United States were expected to show more support than respondents who voiced less love for the United States.

Second, it was expected that Mexican Americans with greater exposure to English language news media would show greater support for the death penalty than respondents with less exposure to English language news media. Although this hypothesis was

targeted at foreign-born respondents who came to the United States as adults in order to test the “bridging effects” hypothesis of news media consumption on adult immigrants, it was tested on all Mexican Americans to examine the effects of media consumption on death penalty support in general. Three variables measured news media consumption: (i) language of news source (as above); (ii) the number of days respondents watched television news each week; and, (iii) the number of days respondents read the newspaper each week. Thus, among all groups it was expected that (i) respondents who consumed more English news media were expected to show greater support for capital punishment than respondents who consumed more Spanish news media; (ii) respondents who watched television news more often would show greater support for capital punishment than respondents who watched television news less often; (iii) respondents who read the newspaper more often would show greater support for capital punishment than respondents who read the newspaper news less often.

IV. METHODS

Sample

Data were gathered from the National Latino Political Survey (NLPS), a nationwide survey of 2817 Latinos (1546 Mexican Americans, 589 Puerto Ricans, and 682 Cubans) age 18 and older conducted between August of 1989 and April of 1990. The purpose of this survey was to fill a substantial void in the literature on Latinos' political beliefs and values, and to challenge claims that had been made about Latinos' beliefs that had been made without adequate empirical evidence. De la Garza et al. (1992) asserted that Latino diversity had been neglected in opinion polls, and lumped together in one group, preventing meaningful analyses of their opinions, or simply assumed to resemble prominent political figures such as Cesar Chavez. The NLPS was designed to assess a wide range of political behaviors and attitudes, cultural practices and values, and demographic characteristics of the three major Latino populations living in the United States. It consisted of almost 200 questions that were administered in person in the language of the respondents' choice (60% chose Spanish). Locations from which the sample was drawn were selected based on 1980 census data and contained 90 percent of the Latino population, producing a sample representative of 91 percent of the Latino population (see De la Garza et al., 1992 for a detailed description of sampling techniques).

The present study included only those respondents who indicated that they were "Mexican," who were born in either the United States or Mexico, and who provided usable answers for all variables in this study. One hundred and six participants were

excluded for failing to provide an answer for one or more variables, leaving the final sample size at 1,450 respondents (742 U.S.-born and 708 foreign-born). The excluded group showed slightly lower support for the death penalty than the included group, but this difference was not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 2.455$, $p < .208$).

Operationalization of Variables

Death Penalty Support

The dependent variable, *death penalty support*, was conceptualized as the degree to which respondents support the death penalty. It was measured by asking respondents whether they favor the death penalty for persons convicted of murder. Respondents could answer “yes,” “no,” “depends,” or “don’t know.” “Don’t know” responses were deleted prior to the analysis.

Acculturation Measures

The independent variable, *level of acculturation*, was conceptualized as the degree to which Mexican Americans were exposed to and participated in Anglo-American practices, and held Anglo-American beliefs. Six independent measures measured *level of acculturation*: *country of birth*, *citizenship*, *age at immigration*, *love for the United States*, *home language*, and *individualism*.

Country of birth was a categorical variable measured by asking respondents to indicate in which country they were born. The present study included only those respondents who indicated either the United States or Mexico. Country of birth was represented as the dichotomous variable *US Born*, where respondents who were born in

the U.S. were coded as “1,” and respondents who were born in Mexico were coded as “0.” Respondents who were born in the United States were considered more acculturated than respondents who were born in Mexico.

Citizenship was a dummy variable where U.S. citizens were coded as “1.” U.S. citizens were considered more acculturated than citizens of Mexico.

Age at immigration was measured in years by asking foreign-born respondents to indicate the age at which they came to the United States. Respondents who came to the United States at younger ages were considered more acculturated than those who came to the United States at older ages. *Age at immigration* was also constructed as the dichotomous variable, *18 and Over*, for purposes of the chi-square analyses and the initial regression analysis, where foreign-born respondents who immigrated to the United States at age 18 or older were coded as “1” and respondents who immigrated before the age of 18 were coded as “0.”⁸

Love for the United States was measured by asking respondents to indicate whether their love for the United States was extremely strong, very strong, somewhat strong, or not very strong. Their answers were arranged on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = not very strong to 4 = extremely strong. For all variables measured on a Likert scale, responses on the higher end of the scale were assumed to show a higher degree of acculturation than ones on the lower end of the scale (e.g., a response assigned

⁸ Three groups of respondents were of interest in this study: respondents who were born in the U.S. (“U.S. Born,” N = 742), respondents who were born in Mexico and came to the U.S. before age 18 (“Under 18,” N = 274), and respondents who were born in Mexico who came to the U.S. at age 18 or over (“18 and Over,” N = 434). In the initial regression analysis, the two dummy variables, *U.S. Born* and *18 and Over*, accounted for a membership in one of these three groups. In the later regression analyses, acculturation and media effects on each of these groups are analyzed separately.

the number 5 was considered to show a higher level of acculturation than one assigned the number 1 on the same scale).

Home language was measured by asking respondents to indicate whether they spoke Spanish or English at home. Answers were arranged on a five-point scale ranging from 1 = only Spanish to 5 = only English.

Individualism measured respondents' degree of belief that success in life is determined primarily by forces within their control. The question was posed in the opposite context by asking respondents their level of agreement that success in life is determined primarily by forces outside of their control. To be consistent with the other scaled variables (higher scale number = higher acculturation), answers were reverse coded so that higher values indicate greater acculturation.

News Media Consumption Measures

The independent variable, *news media consumption*, was conceptualized as respondents' level of exposure to printed and/or televised newscasts and/or politically-centered media. *News media consumption* was measured using three variables.

Television news media consumption was measured by asking respondents how many days in the last week they watched national network news. Answers were arranged on an eight-point scale ranging from zero to seven days.

Printed news media consumption was measured by asking respondents how many days in the past week they read about politics and public affairs in the newspaper. Answers were also arranged on an eight-point scale ranging from zero to seven days.

Language of news media measured the language of their preferred news media was English, Spanish, or both English and Spanish. Answers were arranged on a three-point scale where 1 = Spanish, 2 = both English and Spanish, and 3 = English.

Other Variables

Female was a dummy variable where 1 = female and 0 = male.

Age was a continuous variable measured in years by subtracting respondents' year of birth from the year in which the study took place, 1989 (the LNPS did not directly measure age).

Education level was measured in years and ranged from zero to seventeen years.

Political Ideology measured respondents' self-reported political outlook on a 7-point Likert scale where 1 = very liberal and 7 = very conservative.

V. RESULTS

Preliminary Analyses

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations of Variables: Entire Sample

	Mean	Std. Dev.
Death Penalty Support	2.334	0.824
(1 = No, 2 = Depends, 3 = Yes)		
Home Language	2.821	1.482
(1 = Only Spanish, 5 = Only English)		
Individualism	3.014	1.135
(1 = Strongly Agree, 5 = Strongly Disagree)		
Love for the United States	2.959	0.868
(1 = Not Very Strong, 4 = Very Strong)		
Language of News Source	2.204	0.823
(1 = Only Spanish, 3 = Only English)		
Days per Week Watch Television News	4.008	2.506
Days per Week Read Newspaper	2.2	2.624
Age (in years)	37.316	14.739
Education (in years)	9.154	4.084
Political Ideology	4.213	1.512
(1 = very liberal, 7 = very conservative)		
% Female = 56.7 (822)		
% U.S. Citizens = 57.7 (836)		
% Native Born = 51.2 (742)		
N = 1,450		

Table 1 contains the means and standard deviations of the variables used in the study. To test the hypotheses that native-born respondents would show greater support for capital punishment than would foreign-born respondents, and that foreign-born respondents who immigrated to the United States before the age of 18 would show greater support for capital punishment than those who immigrated at age 18 or over,

individual chi-square analyses were run for *country of birth* and *18 and Over* with the dependent variable, *death penalty support*. (See Table 2 below)

Table 2

Country of Birth, Age at Immigration (18 and Over), and Death Penalty Support

Death Penalty	Country of Birth		Total
	U.S.	Mexico	
Yes	63.5% (471)	48.7% (345)	56.3% (816)
No	18.5% (137)	27.4% (194)	22.8% (331)
Depends	18.1% (134)	23.9% (169)	20.9% (303)
Total	100.0% (742)	100.0% (708)	100.0% (1450)
$\chi^2 = 32.535$ $p < .000$ $gamma = -.256$			
Mexican Born Respondents: Age at Immigration			
	Under 18	18 and Over	Total
Yes	56.7% (155)	43.8% (190)	48.7% (345)
No	23.4% (64)	30.0% (130)	27.4% (194)
Depends	20.1% (55)	26.3% (114)	23.9% (169)
Total	100.0% (274)	100.0% (434)	100.0% (708)
$\chi^2 = 11.006$ $p < .004$ $gamma = -.201$			

Results were as expected, with the greatest differences between respondents occurring in the “yes” category of death penalty support. Thus, U.S.-born respondents were more likely than respondent born in Mexico to unequivocally support the death penalty (63.5%

versus 48.7%, $\chi^2 = 32.535$, $p < .000$) and respondents born in Mexico were less likely to support the death penalty if they came to the United States at age 18 or over than if they came when they were 17 or younger (56.7% versus 43.8%, $\chi^2 = 11.006$, $p < .004$).

Next, because surveys consistently reveal lower support for the death penalty among females compared to males (Lester, 1998), chi-square analyses were run on *gender* and *death penalty support* to examine whether these differences hold true for Mexican Americans (see Table 3 on p. 32). The entire sample of Mexican Americans revealed no significant differences between females' and males' responses ($\chi^2 = 3.532$, $p < .187$). However, since the above analyses showed that death penalty support varied according to country of birth and age at immigration, separate chi-square analyses for each of the three groups—U.S. Born, under age 18 at immigration, and age 18 or over at immigration—were run for *gender* and *death penalty support*. Chi-square results were not significant for U.S. Born ($\chi^2 = 3.199$, $p < .202$) and 18 and Over ($\chi^2 = 2.372$, $p < .305$) respondents born in Mexico, and just fell short of significance for the Under 18 group ($\chi^2 = 5.783$, $p < .055$).

Next, because death penalty support clearly differed according to *country of birth* and age at immigration (*18 and Over*), and because common sense suggest that these differences would accompany differences in the independent measures as well (that is, it was assumed that these groups were not homogenous), the average score on each of the independent measures for the three groups of respondents (U.S. Born, Under 18, and 18 and Over) were laid out on a table for comparison. (See Table 4 on p. 33)

Table 3*Sex and Death Penalty Support*

U.S. Born			
	Male	Female	Total
Yes	67.3%	61.0%	63.5%
	(194)	(277)	(471)
No	17.0%	19.4%	18.5%
	(49)	(88)	(137)
Depends	15.6%	19.6%	18.1%
	(45)	(89)	(134)
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	(288)	(454)	(742)
$\chi^2 = 3.199$ $p < .202$ $\gamma = -.115$			
Respondents Born in Mexico: Under Age 18 at Immigration			
Yes	59.4%	53.9%	56.6%
	(79)	(76)	(155)
No	17.3%	29.1%	23.4%
	(23)	(41)	(64)
Depends	23.3%	17.0%	20.1%
	(31)	(24)	(55)
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	(133)	(141)	(274)
$\chi^2 = 5.783$ $p < .055$ $\gamma = -.158$			
Respondents Born in Mexico: Age 18 and Over at Immigration			
Yes	43.0%	44.5%	43.8%
	(89)	(101)	(190)
No	27.5%	32.2%	30.0%
	(57)	(73)	(130)
Depends	29.5%	23.3%	26.3%
	(61)	(53)	(114)
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	(207)	(227)	(434)
$\chi^2 = 2.372$ $p < .305$ $\gamma = -.024$			

Table 4

Mean scores for U.S. Born Respondents, Respondents Who Immigrated Before Age 18, and Respondents Who Immigrated at Age 18 and Over

	U.S. Born		Under 18		18 and Over	
	Mean	(SD)	Mean	(SD)	Mean	(SD)
Death Penalty	2.450 ^c	(.786)	2.332 ^c	(.832)	2.138 ^a	(.849)
Home Language	3.709 ^a	(1.081)	2.336 ^a	(1.426)	1.611 ^a	(1.050)
Individualism	3.063	(1.163)	2.985	(1.122)	2.947	(1.091)
Love for the U.S.	3.220 ^a	(.780)	2.704 ^b	(.875)	2.673 ^b	(.870)
Age at Immigration	-	-	11.763 ^b	(5.040)	25.412 ^d	(8.015)
Days Watch T.V.	4.015 ^a	(2.502)	3.938 ^a	(2.418)	4.041 ^a	(2.573)
Days Read News	2.782 ^a	(2.740)	1.723 ^b	(2.425)	1.507 ^b	(2.297)
Language of News	2.730 ^a	(.504)	1.916 ^a	(.796)	1.486 ^a	(.624)
Age	38.305	(15.532)	32.602	(14.208)	38.601	(13.016)
Education	10.772	(3.476)	8.431	(3.888)	6.843	(3.929)
Political Ideology						
N	742		274		434	

^a = differed significantly from all other groups

^b = differed significantly from U.S. Born

^c = differed significantly from 18 and Over

^d = differed significantly from Under 18

Note: all significant differences are at $p < .05$

As Table 4 indicates, respondents indeed formed three fairly distinct groups according to the independent measures. ANOVAs revealed significant differences between all three groups on *Home Language*, and *News Language*, and significant differences between foreign- and native-born respondents on *Love for the U.S.* Support for the death penalty also differed in the expected direction, as Mexican American immigrants who came to the United States as adults showed significantly lower support for the death penalty than

Mexican Americans born in the United States and Mexican Americans who immigrated to the United States before the age of 18.

Table 4 shows that respondents in all groups watched television newscasts for an average of about four days per week. Differences were found in the amount of printed news groups consumed, with U.S. Born respondents reporting reading the newspaper almost twice as many days as 18 and Over immigrants and Under 18 immigrants falling in between. The U.S. Born group watched and read the most news in English, followed by the Under 18 and 18 and Over immigrants, respectively.

The results reported in Tables 2-4 lend tentative support for the hypotheses. Differences in death penalty support across the three groups generally accompanied differences on acculturation measures, with the more acculturated groups showing a higher percentage of respondents unequivocally supporting the death penalty. Although there were no differences in television news media consumption among the three groups, these findings did not necessarily contradict the hypothesis that more news media consumption leads to greater death penalty support. First, the language of the news media needed be taken into account, as English, not Spanish media, was expected to increase death penalty support. And as Table 4 shows, the three groups showed substantial differences on this measure in the expected direction. Second, that differences in news media consumption were not *between* groups did not preclude the possibility that differences in news media consumption *within* each group would correlate with death penalty support.

Regression Analyses

Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression was used to examine the independent effects of acculturation and news consumption measures on support for the death penalty. Eight linear regression analyses were run: two which included the entire sample and used dummy variables to distinguish between U.S. Born, Under 18, and 18 and Over immigrants; and two regression analyses for each of the three subgroups. Four interaction terms were tested in each of the subgroup models.

Table 5

Linear Regressions Predicting Death Penalty Support Among Mexican Americans: Entire Sample

Model 1	A			B		
	β	Beta	Sig.	β	Beta	Sig.
Home Language	-.016	-.029	.438	-.018	-.032	.398
Individualism	.006	.008	.760	.005	.007	.795
Love for the U.S.	.098	.104	.000	.121	.128	.014
News Language	.134	.134	.001	.207	.207	.001
Days Watch T.V. News	.004	.013	.638	.066	.200	.049
Days Read Newspaper	.001	.002	.953	-.006	-.018	.887
Female	-.063	-.038	.150	-.063	-.038	.148
Age	.003	.049	.111	.002	.043	.161
Education	-.005	-.026	.448	-.005	-.027	.438
Political Ideology	-.002	-.004	.882	-.003	-.005	.842
Citizen	.160	.096	.101	.160	.096	.102
U.S. Born	-.109	-.066	.237	-.108	-.066	.242
Over 18	-.110	-.061	.098	-.113	-.063	.089
Days Read Newspaper X News Language	—	—	—	-.016	-.135	.186
Days Read Newspaper X Love for the U.S.	—	—	—	.014	.157	.204
Days Watch T.V. News X News Language	—	—	—	-.011	-.094	.300
Days Watch T.V. X Love for the U.S.	—	—	—	-.013	-.138	.229
Constant	1.708	—	.000	1.519	—	.000
	$R^2=.046$	$F=6.362$	$p < .000$	$R^2=.048$	$F=5.257$	$p < .000$

Starting with the entire sample of Mexican Americans, Model 1A in Table 5 (above) displays the coefficients and significance levels of each of the independent variables predicting death penalty support for this group. Table 5 shows that in Model 1A, respondents' love for the United States and the language of their news source significantly increased support for the death penalty at $p < .000$ and $p < .001$, respectively. The unstandardized regression coefficients (β) indicate the change in *Death Penalty Support* units produced by a one-unit increase in each independent measure. Thus, holding all other variables constant, a respondent with a *Love for the U.S.* score of 3 would have a *Death Penalty Support* score .098 points higher than a person with a *Love for the U.S.* score of 2. Likewise, a respondent with a *News Language* score of 3 would have a *Death Penalty Support* score .268 points higher than a respondent with a *News Language* score of 1. None of the other acculturation variables, nor the amount of television or newspaper consumption, independently altered death penalty support in Model 1A. Model 1A reached statistical significance ($p < .000$) and together the independent variables explained just under five percent of the variance in death penalty support ($R^2 = .048, p < .000$).

Because neither *Read* nor *Watch* independently contributed to death penalty support in the first model, four interaction terms were created combining these two variables with *News Language* and *Love for the U.S.*. Model 1B in Table 5 shows the results of the regression analysis including the four interaction terms. The overall significance level and amount of variance in death penalty support explained by Model 1A were virtually the same as in Model 1B ($R^2 = .046, p < .000$). But adding the

interaction terms substantially raised the independent contribution *Days Watch T.V. News* provides to *Death Penalty Support* ($p < .049$) so that for each day a respondent watched television news his or her *Death Penalty Support* score increased .066 points. This number may appear small, but the small size of the *Death Penalty Support* scale (three points) and the larger size of the *Days Watch T.V. News* scale (eight points) must be taken into account when interpreting its impact; a move from 0 to 7 on the *Days Watch T.V. News* scale amounted to almost a half of a point increase in a respondent's *Death Penalty Support* score (in other words, a respondent who watched television news seven days a week would have a *Death Penalty Support* score .462 points higher than if he or she watched no television news at all). Additionally, *News Language*'s independent contribution to death penalty support almost doubled, while *Love for the U.S.*'s contribution also increased. Model 1B provides strong support for the hypothesis that Mexican Americans who watch or read more English language news express considerably greater support for the death penalty than Mexican Americans who watch or read less news, or primarily news in Spanish.

Table 6 shows the results of the regression analyses run on all three subgroups of respondents (U.S. Born, Under 18, and 18 and Over) individually, with (A) and without (B) the interaction terms (see Table 6 on p. 38). Model 2A presents the results obtained when the independent variables were regressed on respondents born in the United States ($N = 742$). As in Model 1A, respondents with greater levels of Love for the United States expressed higher levels of support for the death penalty. Also, primarily speaking English at home increased support for the death penalty compared with respondents who

Table 6

Linear Regressions Predicting Death Penalty Support Among U.S. Born Respondents (Model 2), Respondents Who Immigrated Before Age 18 (Model 3), and Respondents Who Immigrated at Age 18 and Over (Model 4)

	Model 2			Model 3			Model 4		
	A	B		A	B		A	B	
	β	Beta	Sig.	β	Beta	Sig.	β	Beta	Sig.
Homelang	-.038	-.052	.174	.105	.181	.029	-.058	-.072	.195
Individ	-.005	-.007	.844	-.075	-.101	.092	.052	.067	.170
Love	.082	.082	.036	.209	.220	.001	.053	.055	.297
Newslang	.204	.131	.001	.060	.058	.500	.073	.054	.358
Watch	.004	.013	.734	-.019	-.055	.358	.018	.055	.279
Read	-.008	-.028	.483	.006	.019	.784	.016	.042	.430
Female	-.078	-.048	.193	-.149	-.090	.141	.024	.014	.777
Age	.001	.020	.642	.005	.085	.275	-.001	-.008	.906
School	.007	.030	.510	-.044	-.207	.012	-.005	-.023	.667
Ideology	.036	.069	.062	-.010	-.019	.749	-.054	-.094	.056
Ageimm	—	—	—	-.001	-.003	.965	-.010	-.099	.107
Citizen	—	—	—	.167	.085	.223	.040	.012	.819
Reanew	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Realone	—	—	—	-.018	-.178	.450	—	—	—
Tvnew	—	—	—	.000	-.001	.998	—	—	—
Tvlove	—	—	—	-.010	-.088	.673	—	—	—
Constant	1.566	—	.000	1.097	—	.003	2.280	—	.000
	$R^2=.020$	$N=742$	$p<.005$	$R^2=.021$	$N=742$	$p<.009$	$R^2=.014$	$N=434$	$R^2=.028$
	$F=2.546$	$p<.005$	$F=2.140$	$F=3.402$	$p<.000$	$F=3.040$	$F=1.505$	$p<.119$	$F=1.786$
									$p<.031$

Note: Homelang = Home Language, Individ = Individualism, Love = Love for the U.S., Newslang = Language of News, Watch = Days Watch T.V. News, Read =

Days Read Newspaper, School = Education, Ideology = Political Ideology, Ageimm = Age at Immigration, Citizen = U.S. Citizen (1 = "yes," 0 = "no"), Reanew =

Days Read Newspaper X Language of News, Realone = Days Read Newspaper X Love for the U.S., Tvnew = Days Watch T.V. News X Language of News, Tvlove =

Days Watch T.V. News X Love

primarily use English. All four interaction terms were tested among U.S. Born respondents, and while none reached statistical significance, they boosted the independent contributions made by *Love for the U.S.* and *News Language*. Consistent with the hypothesis, respondents who watch or read English language news had *Death Penalty Support* scores over half a point (.548) higher than those who watch or read Spanish only news.

Model 3 contains the regression analyses run only on respondents who immigrated to the United States before the age of 18 (N = 274). In Model 3A respondents' home language and, again, love for the United States significantly increased death penalty support. Each unit increase on the *Love for the U.S.* scale resulted in over one-fifth of a point increase in support for the death penalty so that, like *News Language* in Model 2B, a respondent at the highest end of the scale would have a *Death Penalty Score* over half a point higher than a respondent at the lowest end of the scale. Each additional year of education lowered death penalty support among this group of respondents. Again, the small coefficient assigned to Education should be understood with respect to the small Death scale and the much larger Education scale; not taking other variables into account, having 16 years of education lowered respondents' *Death Penalty Support* score by almost three quarters of a point (.748) compared to respondents with no formal education. Inserting the interaction terms (Model 3B) enhanced the effects of *Home Language* and *Love for the U.S.*. *Love for the U.S.*'s regression coefficient of .303 demonstrates that respondents' reported love for the United States contributes considerably to their support for death penalty. In other words, taking the

other variables into account, a choice of “very strong” over “not very strong” on the *Love for the U.S.* scale was almost enough to move a respondent from “no” to “depends,” or from “depends” to “yes,” on the *Death Penalty Support* scale. One interaction term, *Days Read Newspaper X Love for the U.S. (Realove)* reached statistical significance ($p < .045$). This indicates that respondents who had greater love for the United States read the newspaper more often, and together, showed greater support for the death penalty.

Models 4A and 4B show the regression analyses run only on respondents who came to the United States after their 18th birthday ($N = 434$). In Model 4A none of the variables significantly contributed to *Death Penalty Support*. Only *Political Ideology* came close to significance ($p < .056$) and in the opposite direction as was expected; the negative regression coefficient indicates that more liberal respondents showed greater support for the death penalty. Model 4A was the only one of all the Models which did not as a whole achieve statistical significance ($p < .119$). It explained less than a percent and a half of the variance in death penalty support among Mexican American respondents who came to the United States after their 18th birthday ($R^2 = .014$). Introducing the interaction terms (Model 4B) increased the strength of several of the independent variables, and explained 2.8% of the variance ($p < .031$). While *Political Ideology*’s contribution remained the same, *News Language*’s contribution increased substantially and reached statistical significance ($p < .004$) in the expected direction. For Mexican American immigrants who immigrated after the age of 18, consuming English language news media raised their *Death Penalty Support* score three quarters of a point (.774) over consuming Spanish only news media. Further, *Days Watch T.V. News* reached just under

statistical significance ($p < .051$), and had the second highest regression coefficient of all the models (.116). Model 4B shows that when the interaction between the language of respondents' news source and amount of television news consumption was taken into account, television news consumption provided a large independent contribution to death penalty support; taking other variables into account, respondents who reported watching television news seven days in the last week experienced an increase in death penalty support over three quarters of a point (.812) over respondents who reported watching no television news. Contrary to the hypotheses, the negative coefficient attached to the interaction term *Days Watch T.V. News X News Language* indicates that 18 and Over immigrants who watched more English language television news actually showed less support for the death penalty than respondents who watched less, and Spanish language, news.

VI. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

To reiterate, the present study made two predictions: first, that more acculturated Mexican Americans would show greater support for the death penalty; second, that greater amounts of news media consumption would facilitate greater support for the death penalty. The latter prediction was based on both general theories of the effects of news media on consumers' attitudes toward punishment and acculturation theories which identify the mass media as a tool which many immigrants use to facilitate the acculturation process. I shall discuss each of these issues in turn.

Both the preliminary analyses and the regression analyses lent support for the first hypothesis. Beginning with the preliminary analyses, death penalty support was greatest among Mexican Americans who were born in the United States, lower among those who immigrated to the U.S. before the age of 18, and lowest among those who came to the U.S. after their 18th birthday. Further, differences in the average scores on several of the acculturation measures accompanied these differences in death penalty support such that death penalty support was highest in the group with the highest average acculturation scores, midrange in the group with midrange average acculturation scores, and lowest in the group with the lowest average acculturation scores.

In each regression model except Model 4A, a higher level of acculturation on at least one of the variables produced greater support for the death penalty; *News Language*, *Love for the U.S.*, and *Home Language* significantly contributed to support for the death penalty across populations and models. In six of the eight analyses, greater love for the United States increased respondents' support for the death penalty; *Love for the United*

States was insignificant only among respondents who immigrated to the United States after their 18th birthday, among whom no acculturation variable independently predicted death penalty support. Of the three groups of respondents, those who were born in Mexico but came to the United States before the age of 18 were the most affected by the acculturation variables identified in the study. This makes sense theoretically, as one would expect persons born and raised to adulthood in the same country (i.e., U.S. Born and 18 and Over immigrants) to waiver less on a cultural value (i.e., views on the death penalty) than those who “switched” cultures during childhood. Model 4A lends support to this because the only acculturation variable that could be considered even marginally significant was respondents’ age at immigration; the negative coefficient indicates that respondents who immigrated at an earlier age showed greater support for the death penalty. However, because *Age at Immigration* measured both the age of the respondent when she or he came to the United States and the length of time the respondent had been in the United States at the time of the survey, the exact cause of slightly greater support for the death penalty is unclear. Although acculturation theory supports both concepts—the younger a person comes to a country and/or the longer she or he stays in a country, the more acculturated she or he will become—the data did not differentiate between the two. Nor are these concepts easy to tease apart operationally, as younger persons would probably require fewer years in the country to achieve the same level of acculturation as older persons. Thus, it is uncertain whether 18 and Over immigrants who came to the United States at younger ages showed more support for the death penalty because they had been in the country longer, or because their minds were more malleable, or both.

The clear *insignificance* of *Age at Immigration* among child immigrants to the United States is also noteworthy, especially because this group of respondents showed higher support for the death penalty than adult immigrants. This suggests that Mexican American immigrants who came to the U.S. as children were in some ways more similar to U.S. Born respondents than adult immigrants, as their support for the death penalty was not affected by how old they were when they came to the United States or how long they had been in the United States.

Exactly why acculturation measures contributed to death penalty support are left relatively unanswered in the data, other than to suggest that there is something about being more a part of Anglo American culture that bolsters support for the death penalty. According to the above models, this “something” is not a devotion to individualism, as was predicted by the theory presented in the literature review. Qualitative analyses using interviews with Mexican Americans would provide much greater insight into the reasons behind Mexican American anti-death penalty sentiments.

Before addressing the second hypothesis, the theoretical background of this study should be addressed. This study did not directly test whether Mexican Americans used news media specifically for the purpose of acculturation, nor whether greater news media consumption caused greater levels acculturation in general. The analyses used in this study were not sophisticated enough to directly test whether news media use, acculturation level, and death penalty support existed in a sequence such that news media use led to greater levels of acculturation, which in turn lead to increased death penalty

support. The second hypothesis merely sought to identify a relationship between news media consumption and death penalty support.

Consistent with the hypothesis, greater use of news media in English increased support for the death penalty in five of the eight models. In Models 1B and 4B both *News Language* and *Days Watch T.V.* predicted support for the death penalty (although *Days Watch T.V.*'s significance level was marginal at $p < .051$), providing support for the hypothesis that greater news consumption, especially English language news, accompanied greater support for the death penalty. However, the negative coefficient assigned to *Days Watch T.V. News X News Language* in Model 4B contradicted this effect among immigrants who came to the United States as adults: among adult immigrants who consumed primarily Spanish language news media, greater T.V. news consumption accompanied greater support for the death penalty, while greater English language T.V. news consumption accompanied lower support for the death penalty. One possible explanation is that consumers of English T.V. news are relative newcomers to the United States attempting to familiarize themselves with the English language and American culture, but while maintaining the anti-death penalty views from their Mexican upbringing. Finally, reading the newspaper had no effect on death penalty support in any of the models except Model 3B, as it interacted with *Love for the U.S.*

This study has several shortcomings which should be noted. First, because of the low response rate to the income and religiosity measures in the LNPS, they were not able to be included in the above analyses as control variables. The significance of education in Model 3, suggest that socioeconomic status may have affected death penalty support in

ways that go unnoticed in the above analyses. Also, because Mexican Americans tend to be Catholic and the Catholic church adamantly opposes capital punishment, religiosity might be a factor in support for or opposition of the death penalty among Mexican Americans. Future analyses should include income/SES and religiosity measures in their analyses.

Second, the present study did not control for generational differences within each group of respondents. Although it did control for age in years, it did not control for the contribution a respondent's membership in a particular generational cohort might have provided. For example, one might expect that the different collective life experiences between twenty to forty, forty-one to fifty-nine, and sixty to eighty-year-old U.S. Born respondents might affect their support for the death penalty, and not necessarily in a linear fashion so that, as a hypothetical example, forty-one- to fifty-nine-year old respondents might have had higher support for the death penalty than both twenty- to forty- and sixty- to eighty-year old respondents, by virtue of their unique generational experiences.

Finally, it is impossible to resolve the inevitable problem of cause and effect in an analysis such as this. That is, it is impossible to know whether greater death penalty support was in fact a by-product of acculturation or whether those who chose to participate in Anglo American culture, especially adult immigrants, already held American values such as death penalty support. Similarly, greater support for the death penalty may not have been an effect, but a cause, of greater news media consumption.

But, the results of the present study should not be understated. At the very least the results clearly showed that, for whatever reasons, the more acculturated (as defined by this study) Mexicans were, the more they were in favor of the death penalty. This finding suggests that support for the death penalty indeed is an American value, perhaps one which younger immigrants adopt if/as they become more assimilated into Anglo American culture.

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