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## Background

The Voting Rights Act (VRA) has provisions for language assistance.

- Jurisdictions with certain levels of low-English proficiency (LEP)
- All voting materials must be provided in language of LEP groups
- These provisions significantly increase registration and turnout

Prior research demonstrates group status threat: When a majority group feels threatened, it takes action to protect its status.

- Statistics showing increases in Hispanic immigration, candidates with darker skin, or the mere presence of Spanish speakers can trigger group status threat
- Threatened groups tend to express more support for conservative policies and candidates

## Research Question

**Does the presence of Spanish on an ordinarily monolingual English ballot affect the policy preferences of voters?**

## Hypotheses

1. The presence of Spanish on a ballot will increase conservative policy preferences and anti-immigrant sentiment.
2. White, monolingual English voters who vote on a bilingual ballot will perceive a higher threat to their racial identity than those who vote on a monolingual English ballot.
3. Non-Hispanic racial minorities will also perceive a higher threat when voting on a monolingual English ballot, but to a lesser degree than white voters.

Proposition 1:	Propuesta 1:
The city shall implement legal protections for recipients of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, sometimes referred to as "Dreamers."	La ciudad deberá implementar protecciones legales para los destinatarios del programa de Acción Diferida para los Llegados en la Infancia (DACA, por sus siglas en inglés), a veces denominado "Soñadores".

Shall the proposition pass? / ¿Pasará la proposición?

Yes (For the proposition) / Sí (Para la propuesta)

No (Against the proposition) / No (Contra la propuesta)

Figure 1. Bilingual English/Spanish Condition

## Methods: MTurk and Qualtrics

We conducted our study using Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk), an online survey platform (n = 723; 371 men, 352 women; mean age = 40.18 years). Participants from MTurk were directed to a survey hosted on Qualtrics (www.qualtrics.com) and paid \$0.50 for their participation.

Participants were randomly assigned to either the monolingual English condition (Figure 1) or the bilingual Spanish/English conditions (Figure 2).

Analyses were run to detect the impact ballot language had on:

1. Perceived threat to racial status (Scale of 1 to 7)
2. Political preference for mayoral candidate (Republican or Democrat)
3. Political preference for protecting DACA recipients (Yes or No)

## Results: Significant for Some Groups

**Threat perception:** White self-identified conservatives voting on bilingual ballots expressed threat at a notably higher level (M = 3.93) than those voting on monolingual English ballots (M = 3.69); this result was significant at the 0.1 level ( $\chi^2 = 11.052$ ; df = 6;  $p = 0.08678$ ).

**DACA:** There was a 14.47% difference in support for DACA between white self-described moderates in the bilingual condition and those in the monolingual condition ( $M_0 = 21.15\%$ ;  $M_1 = 35.59\%$ ;  $p = 0.0915$ ).

**Mayoral race:** We did not find any significant effect for preferences in the mayoral race.

Figure 2. Bilingual Ballots Depress Support for DACA Among white, English-speaking moderates

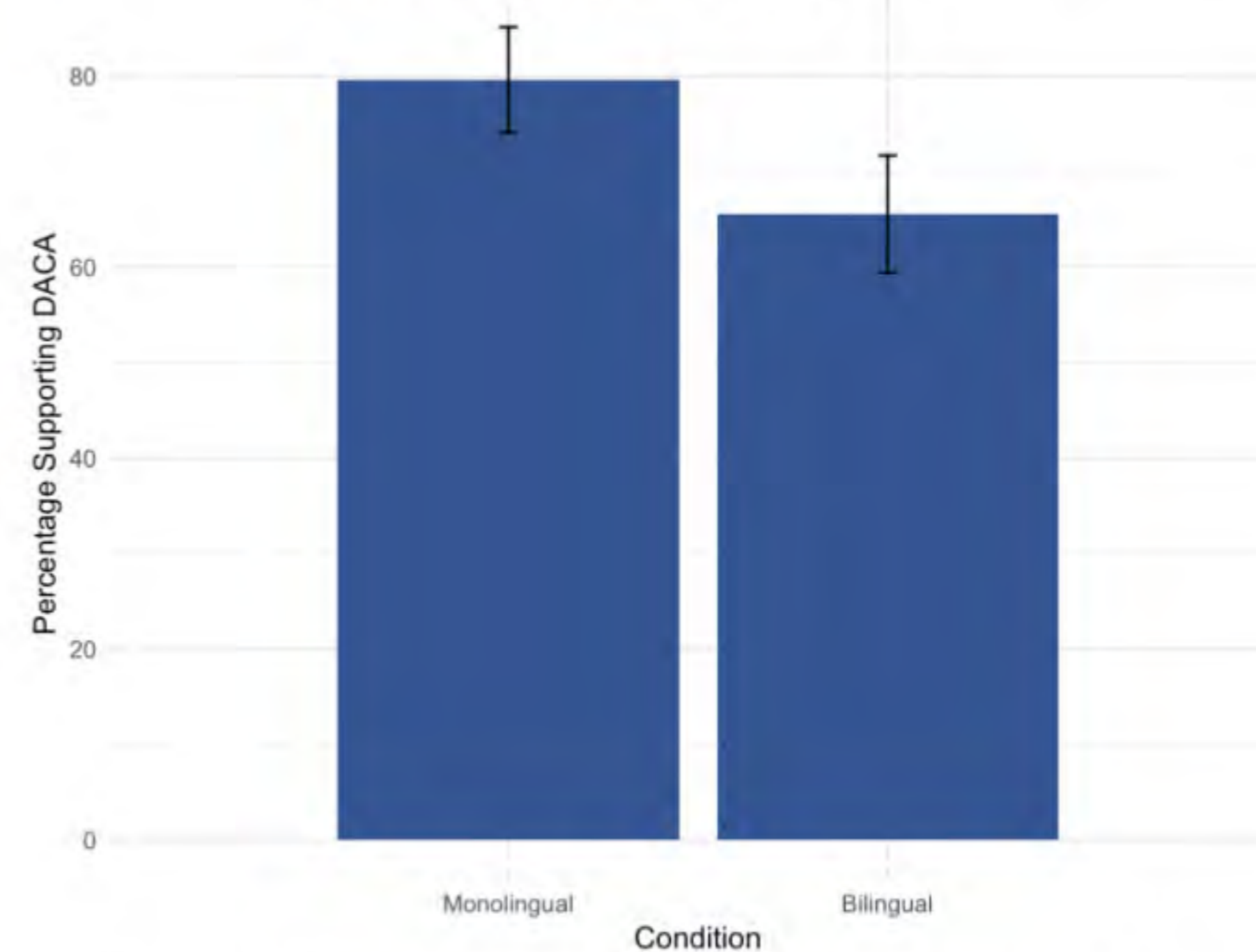
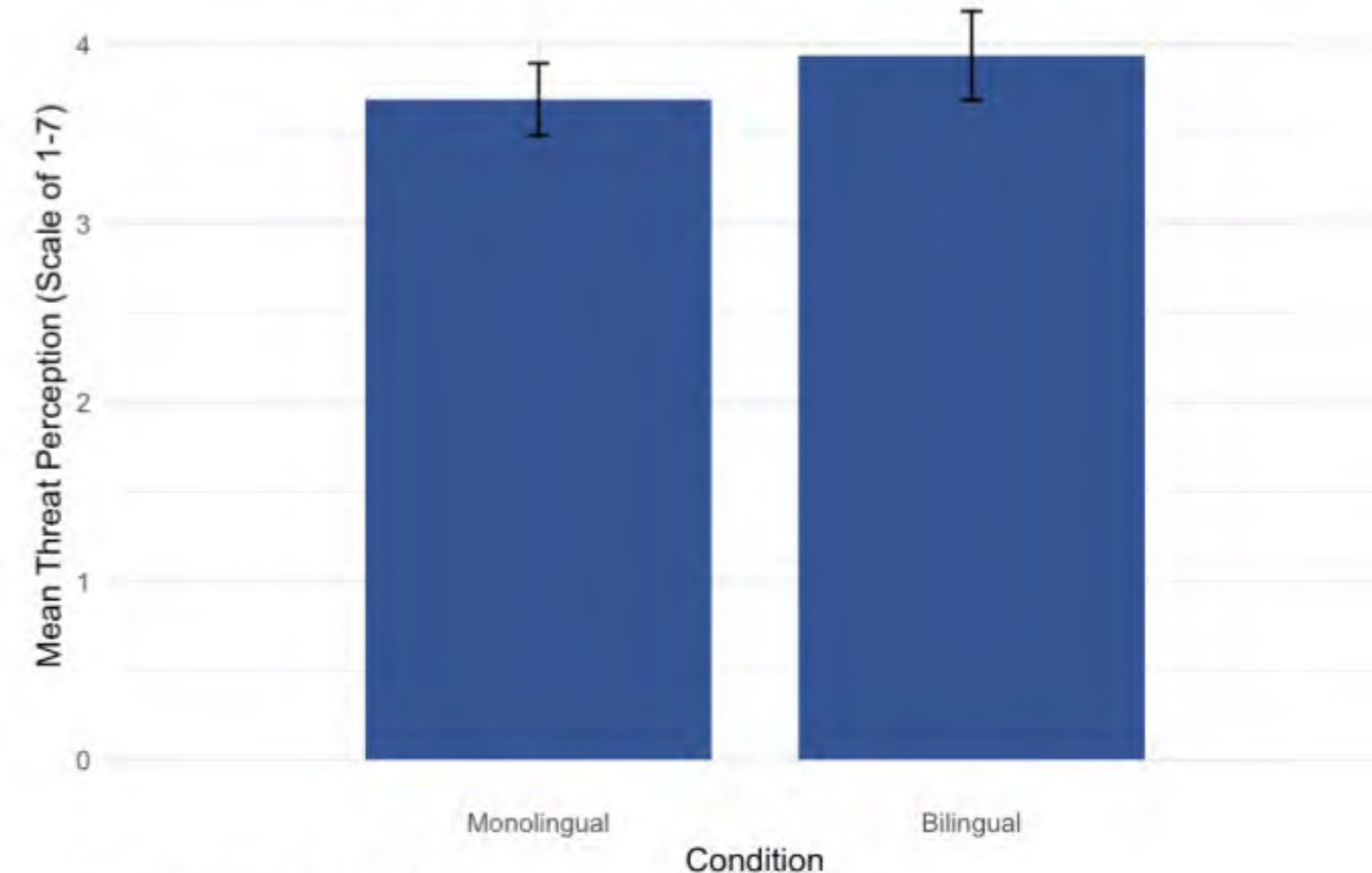


Figure 3. Bilingual Ballots May Evoke Feelings of Threat Among white, English-speaking conservatives



Note:  $p = 0.09239$

## Discussion

Only the policy preferences of moderates were affected by the presence of Spanish, perhaps due to less rigid party identification than conservatives or liberals.

While moderates exposed to bilingual ballots expressed less support for DACA, there was no shift in preferences for the mayoral race. Voter preferences for policy may be more flexible than on partisanship.

We did not observe group status threat among racial minorities exposed to the bilingual ballot, in line with previous literature which indicates that majority groups are most susceptible to threat.

## Implications and Further Research

Though our results were only significant at the  $p < .10$  level, the risk of small changes in an election due to voting materials should be closely scrutinized.

Further research should explore these questions with more of a focus on specific groups (e.g. moderates in a larger sample) in environments which more closely mimic the real world (e.g. an in-person experiment).

Finally, the incorporation of languages other than Spanish could reveal interesting insights about biases and election outcomes.

## Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the Rice Political Science Undergraduate Research Fund for funding this project, as well as Dr. Bob Stein and Dr. Michael Byrne for their funding and guidance.

Read the paper

