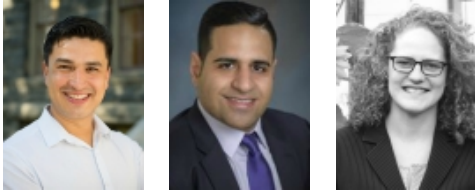


# Allies in name only? Latino-only leadership on DACA may trigger implicit racial biases among White liberals



*At the beginning of September, President Trump announced the end of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program within six months. Activists mobilized immediately in response to protect the program which provides temporary shelter from deportation to those covered by the DREAM Act. In new survey research, [Sergio Garcia-Rios](#), [Kassra AR Oskooii](#) and [Hannah Walker](#) find that when efforts to protect DACA and the DREAM Act are mobilized and led by Latinos and immigrant organizations, this may actually diminish support among white liberals, a group which otherwise is in favor of efforts to support undocumented immigrants.*

Even before Attorney General Jeff Sessions officially [announced the end of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals \(DACA\) program](#), activists began mobilizing. They have a brief window: President Trump delayed the end of [DACA](#) for six months, giving Congress that long to legislatively resolve the status of DACA recipients. Without such legislation, the [nearly 800,000 individuals](#) covered under DACA face deportation and the end of their ability to work lawfully.

Despite claims by Sessions during his September 5<sup>th</sup> speech, research has found no evidence that the DACA program increases [threats to national security](#) or [public safety](#). What it has found, overwhelmingly, is that the program [has net benefits](#), such as boosting home ownership and creating jobs – and that ending DACA would actually [hurt the economy](#).

But DACA was never intended as a permanent immigration solution for the young people who are enrolled in it. Instead, President Obama initiated the program via executive order in the wake of Congress' failure to pass the DREAM Act in 2010, or take any other meaningful steps to correct an immigration system [widely regarded as broken](#). The DREAM Act would have provided a path to legal residency via higher education and military service for undocumented young people brought to the United States by their parents. Although it passed the House, in the fall of 2010 opposition in the Senate filibustered the bill, which meant that it failed to achieve the super majority of votes required for cloture.

Subsequent efforts to reintroduce the bill throughout 2010 and 2011 likewise failed, prompting Obama's unprecedented action in 2012. However, DACA does not provide a pathway to legal residency promised by the DREAM Act. Instead it provides temporary shelter from deportation for the cohort targeted by the DREAM Act, allowing them to get a driver's license, work and go to school lawfully in the United States so long as they are enrolled in the program. With Trump's decision to end the program their status is once again threatened.

Despite past failure of Congress to pass immigration reform, some [signals out of Washington](#) suggest the possibility for a bipartisan solution. Whether Congress will act likely depends on intense pressure from their constituents – the same pressure that [doomed Republican efforts to repeal the ACA](#) and [stalled the Muslim Ban](#). But our research raises questions about whether that outrage will materialize.

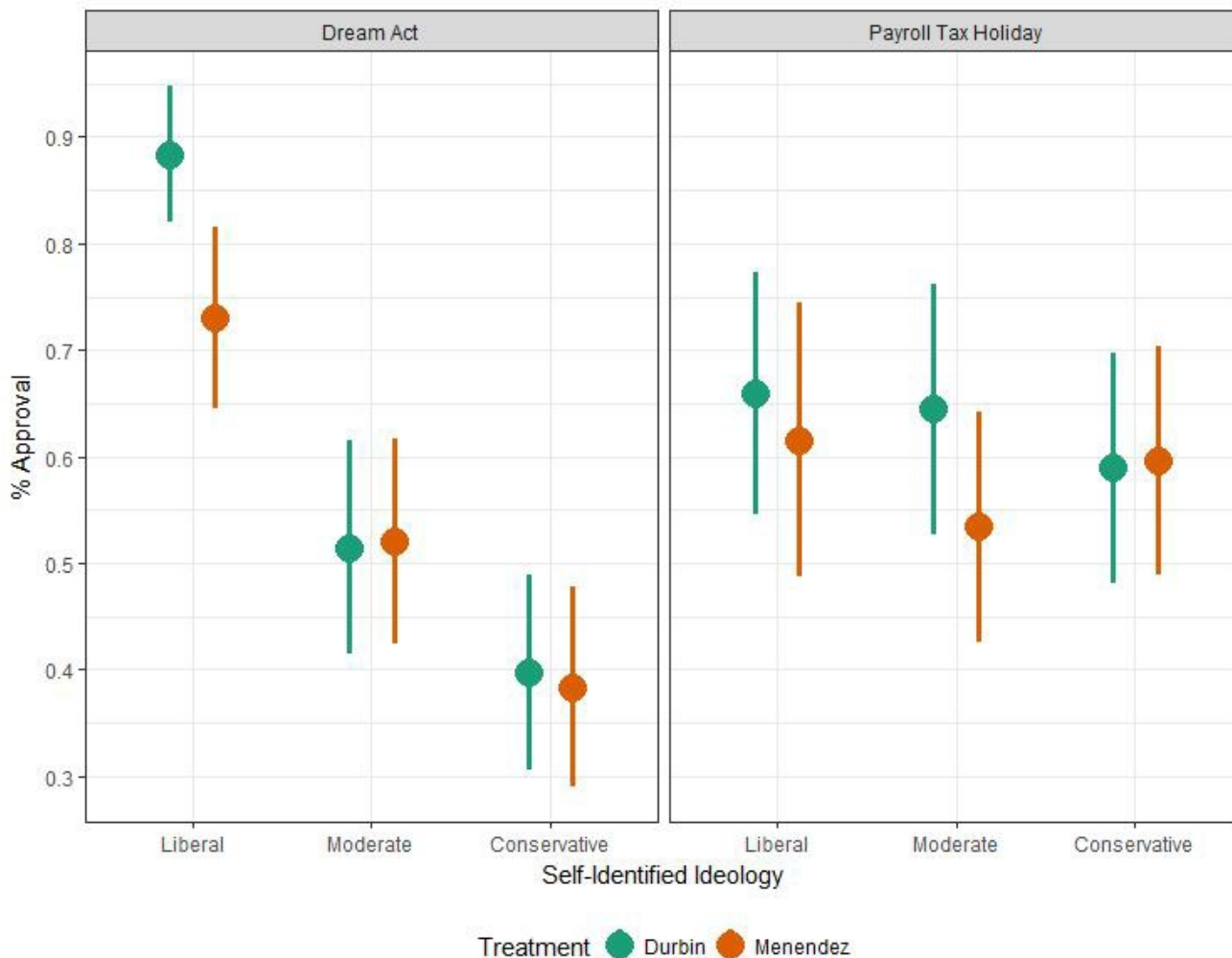


*"Protest against announced repeal of DACA" by Harrie van Veen is licensed under CC BY 2.0*

Mobilization [efforts began well in advance](#) of Trump's announcement, as ten state governors attempted to replicate their legal strategy against the Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents program, [threatening to sue](#) the Administration if they failed to rescind DACA by September. Although the elimination of DACA is [unprecedented](#), will disrupt communities across the nation, and stands to [hurt all Americans](#), our data offer reason to worry that the mobilization effort to protect DACA recipients, led by immigrant-right organizations and advocacy groups, may suffer from diminished support among white progressive Americans.

More specifically, our research embedded a unique survey experiment among registered voters in [Washington State](#) to assess the role of implicit biases among subgroups of voters. Overall, we found that self-identified white liberals were much more supportive of the DREAM Act than self-identified white moderates or conservatives. However, when liberal voters were exposed to the Hispanic Senator condition—that is, informed that a Hispanic Senator (Bob Menendez) is proposing the legislation as opposed to a white Senator (Dick Durbin) — support levels among this subgroup of respondents dropped by a statistically significant 15 percentage points (see Figure 1). We did not observe this significant disparity among moderates or conservatives presumably because of flooring effects. Since subgroups of voters could differ on various attitudinal and socioeconomic backgrounds, the results we report below hold even after accounting for such differences.

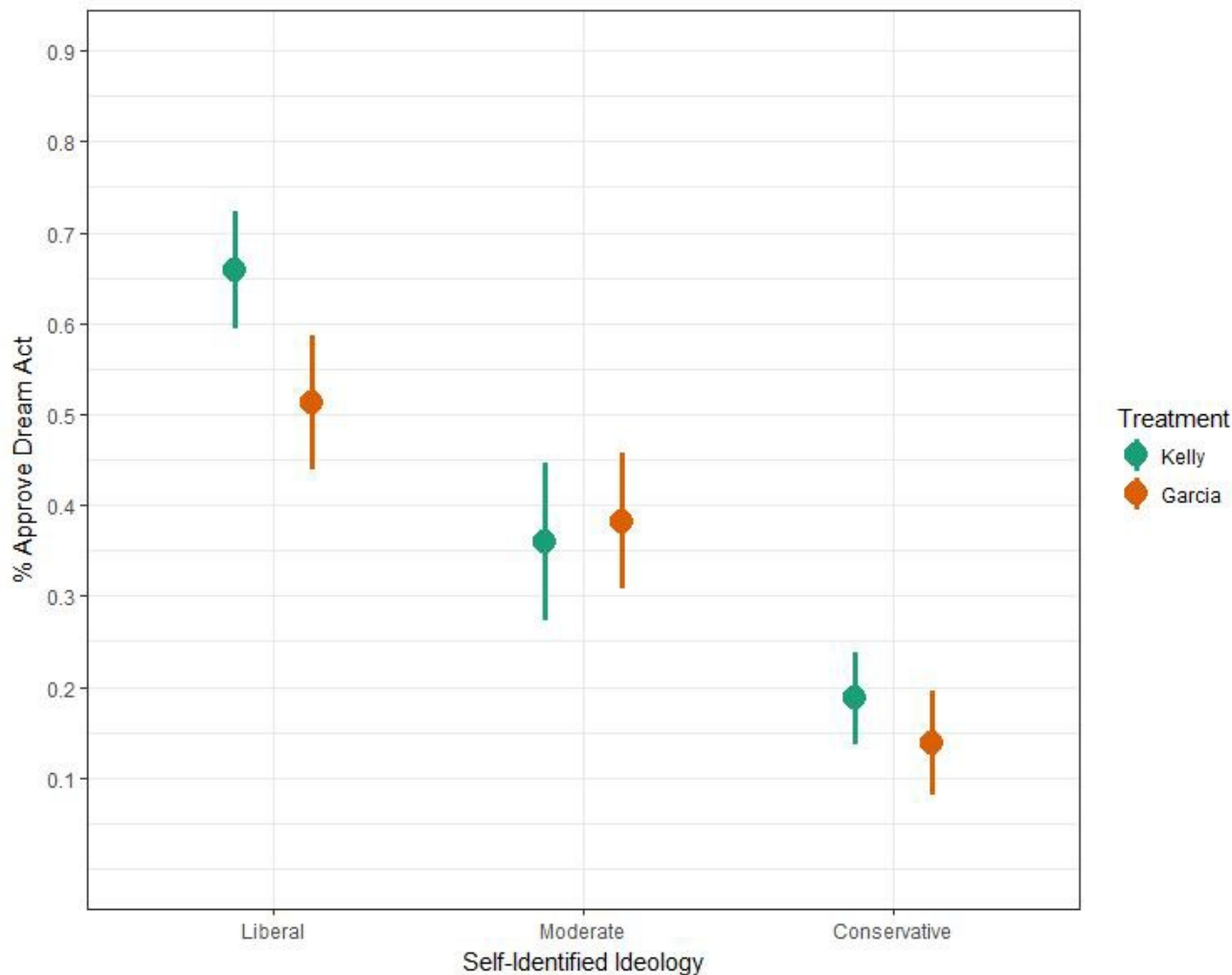
### **Figure 1 – 2012 Washington Poll Experiment Results**



Interestingly, when voters were cued with the same Senators but the policy under question changed to a non-racial consideration – “The 2011 Payroll Tax Holiday” – no disparities were found between the Bob Menendez and Dick Durbin treatments. We think that among liberal white voters the leadership of Hispanic Menendez triggers underlying racial biases. This theory is well supported by other scholarly research in cognitive psychology and political science, which finds that even among Democrats [implicit biases hurt support for minority candidates](#), and that underlying predispositions accrued from childhood [are hard to shake](#). This is particularly pernicious since if asked, many liberal whites would identify as allies in matters related to racial equality and would outright deny any accusations of racial bias.

To gain more confidence in the findings, we replicated our experiment with a national Random-Digit Dial telephone sample since the attitudes of Washington State residents are not representative of the entire U.S. population. Given that Senator Bob Menendez was involved in several controversies by 2013, we also decided to use two generic, but clearly Hispanic- and white-sounding names this time (Hector Garcia and Richard Kelly). This new experiment revealed a substantively similar pattern: self-identified white liberal respondents exposed to the Hispanic treatment condition displayed lower levels of support for the DREAM Act than those exposed to the white Senator treatment (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2 – 2013 National Sample Experiment Results**



These findings raise some concerns for mobilization efforts around DACA, indicating that implicit biases may even impact perceived allies of this policy if broad-based support is not generated by political elites and citizens from all ethnic and racial stripes.

The data suggest that while the majority of liberal white Americans support the DREAM Act and related efforts to support undocumented immigrants, Latino-only leadership has the capacity to make some citizens resistant or uncomfortable toward more inclusive proposals related to immigration. Yet, lessons from the Muslim ban and the healthcare showdown instruct that mobilization from a wide cross-section of Americans is required to protect those that policy renders vulnerable. Moreover, research finds that [widespread participation in protests against the Muslim ban](#) played an important role in shifting public opinion against it and increased feelings of inclusion and belonging among Muslim Americans. In short, it is imperative that all Americans supportive of civil and human rights show up for DACA recipients, their families and communities to pressure Congress to take swift action.

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*Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of USAPP– American Politics and Policy, nor of the London School of Economics.*

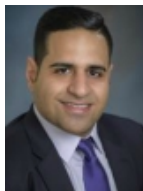
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