

THE LATINO VOTE IN THE 90's*

OVERVIEW

In 1996, Hispanics were the only group of American voters whose turnout at the polls increased. In 1998, Hispanic voters provided the margin of victory in races across the country, especially in California and New York. With every election, this Hispanic mobilization is likely to increase; this year it is expected that the Hispanic vote will have a significant impact at all levels, including the Presidential election.

Voting patterns in the last decade and specifically in the 1998 elections, reveal four key findings:

- (1) Latino voter turnout increased in 1998, even in the absence of racial "wedge" issues, and additional Latino officials were elected into office.
- (2) Contrary to conventional wisdom, Hispanics are not monolithically Democrats; they tend to look at individual candidates rather than party affiliation.

- (3) There are real benefits for candidates and parties that recognize the Latino community's willingness to look at individual candidates and policy agendas and real dangers, particularly in the electoral battleground states, for the candidates and parties that do not.
- (4) Superficial marketing alone will not be enough to reach this policy-sensitive group of voters.

The following discussion examines these issues in greater detail.

LATINO VOTER REGISTRATION AND TURNOUT

Latinos are one of the youngest and fastest-growing communities in the U.S., and high naturalization rates combined with political mobilization have resulted in an increase in the number of Latinos registering to vote and turning out in large numbers on election day. In addition, Latinos are concentrated in

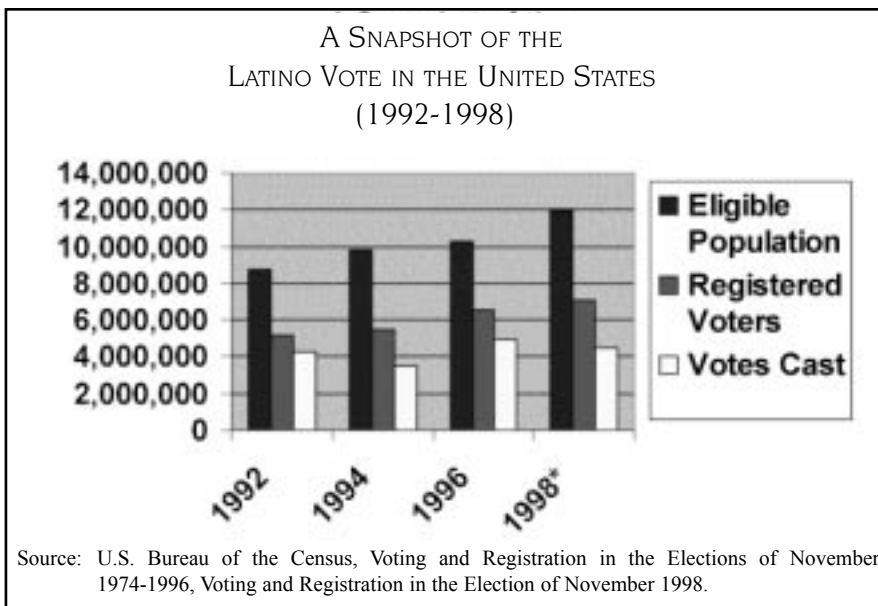
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critical states in terms of national elections, including California (10.1 million Hispanics), Texas (5.9 million), New York (2.6 million), and Florida (2.2 million).¹ Latinos are also a highly urbanized community, making their vote important for candidates running for mayor in cities such as Los Angeles, Miami, Houston, New York City or Chicago.

According to a recent Census Bureau report, there are nearly 7 million registered Latino voters in the U.S., constituting 5% of the American electorate and nearly 6% of all registered voters. The number of Latino voters grew 15.5% from 1994 to 1998, paralleling the 19.8% growth in the number of Latino adult citizens during that same time period.²

300,000 additional Latinos registered to vote, as shown in figure 1.

As figure 2 illustrates, the proportion of Latino registered voters increased from 35% in 1992 to 37% in 1998. However, the proportion of voters who cast ballots has fluctuated during this period of time. Of the 6.6 million registered Latino voters, 75% of them cast ballots in the November 96 presidential election. Latino voters constituted 5% of the total national voter turnout - the highest proportion ever for the Latino community.³ Census data reveal that in 1998, 59% of Latino registered voters turned out at the polls, in comparison to 42% of all voters. The Latino voter turnout in several key states was significant. For example, in California, Latinos were 14% of all voters in 1998, a 57% increase since 1994.⁴

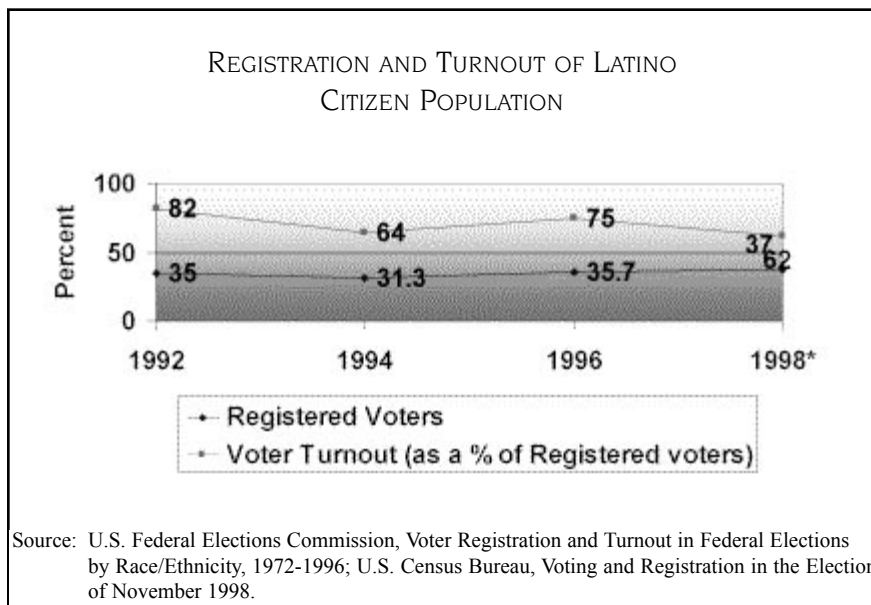


There is significant anecdotal evidence indicating that the increase in the rates of Latino naturalization, voter registration, and voter turnout was a direct result of the use of racial “wedge” issues in the 1994 and 1996 elections by Republican candidates.

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In 1996, U.S.-born and naturalized Hispanic citizens had together achieved a record 28% increase in new voter registrants. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, from 1996 to 1998,

California’s Propositions 187 and 209,⁵ along with federal welfare and immigration reform legislation, served as significant motivation for Latino residents to naturalize, register to



vote, and cast a ballot in opposition to what was perceived as a direct attack against the Hispanic American community's rights. The continuing increase in Hispanic turnout in 1998 despite the absence of major divisive issues, however, indicates that Latino voter mobilization is now based on broader social and policy issues.

LATINO ELECTED OFFICIALS ON THE RISE

Significant gains were made in the number of Latinos of both parties elected to public office in 1998, especially in California. Latinos made a strong showing of political power in electing California's first Latino Lieutenant Governor in over 100 years, Cruz Bustamante, who was also the first Latino Speaker of the California Assembly in 1996. After a difficult and controversial victory in 1996, in 1998 Loretta Sanchez (D) easily retained her seat as Representative of California's 46th Congressional District - a conservative district in Orange County. San Jose, California's third-largest city, elected Ron

Gonzales, the first Latino to be elected mayor of a major California city.

In Texas, Tony Garza became the first Republican Latino to become Railroad Commissioner, a powerful statewide office overseeing the oil and gas industry.⁶ In other states, the emergence of Latinos running for major statewide offices was also note-

worthy. There were 20 Latinos seeking election for Governor, Attorney General, Treasurer, or Controller in nine different states. In Colorado, for example, Attorney General Ken Salazar became the first Latino to hold that position. Three Latinos - Cheryl Rivera, Jose Santiago, and Jarrett Barrios - won State House of Representatives seats in Massachusetts to become the first Latinos in over a decade to serve in that state's legislature. The Michigan and Wisconsin state legislatures also welcome their first-ever Latino Representatives, Belda Garza and Pedro Colon.⁷ The potential of Latino electorates outside of "traditional" areas is increasing, and has gained national visibility as a result of strong Latino voter participation.

HISPANIC PARTY AFFILIATION

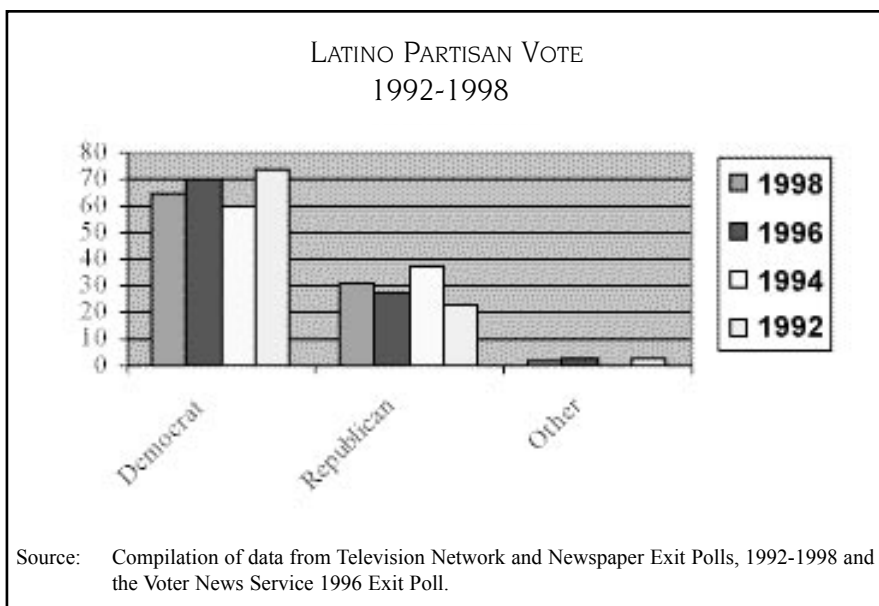
Contrary to conventional wisdom, Hispanics are not monolithically Democrats. The record of the last few years demonstrates that the Hispanic

electorate carefully scrutinizes positions taken by candidates and political parties. In the mid-1980's, encouraged by such business-oriented groups as the U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, a growing number of Hispanics voted Republican. As the data in figure 3 indi-

Clinton signed both bills, he also publicly supported efforts to ameliorate some of their harshest provisions, including benefit cuts to legal immigrants included in the welfare bill. In part as a result, Latino voter support for President Clinton increased from 60% in 1992

to 72% in 1996.⁸

Moreover, this trend was consistent across all major Latino ethnic groups. For example, Clinton's support from Florida Hispanics increased from 22% to 44% from 1992 to 1996, demonstrating that the Republican Party's harsh anti-immigrant image translated into loss of support even among traditionally



cate, while Latino voters strongly support Democratic candidates, there has also been an increase in the share of Latino voters supporting Republican candidates since 1992. In the 1994 and 1996 elections, "wedge" issues promoted by California Republican Governor Pete Wilson, including anti-immigrant and anti-affirmative Action.

In the 1995-96 legislative session, the Republican-controlled U.S. Congress enacted harsh welfare reform and immigration reform bills that many Latinos perceived to be hostile to their community's interests. Although President

Republican Cuban Americans.⁹

In 1998, though Hispanics continued to favor Democratic candidates, they also responded to Republicans whose policy agendas were consistent with their views. Undoubtedly one of the most notable Republican victories was given to incumbent Governor George W. Bush, who was re-elected with 37% of the Latino vote, according to a Southwest Voter Registration Project exit poll, and nearly half of the Hispanic vote according to other polls. According to some political analysts, Bush's large margin of victory, 69% to his Democratic challenger Garry

Mauro's 31%, would not have been possible without the high level of Latino support.¹⁰ His inclusive approach with regard to political appointments, and his moderate, pro-Hispanic positions on education and immigration, were major factors in his victory. Florida Hispanics supported Republican Governor-elect Jeb Bush, but also supported the re-election of Democratic Senator Bob Graham. Similarly, Latinos in California and New York who gave solid support to Republican mayors Richard Riordan and Rudy Giuliani the previous year overwhelmingly voted for Democrats such as incumbent Senator Barbara Boxer and newly-elected Senator Chuck Schumer. In California, Republican candidates' close ties to former Governor Wilson's anti-immigrant policies cost them Latino vote support. Polling data suggests Latino voters turnout intentionally to send a message to Republicans that Wilson-like politics were not going to be tolerated.¹¹

PLATFORM, NOT PARTY-BASED VOTING

Many, such as the Tomas Rivera Institute, have argued that Latinos' party affiliation is weak.¹² However, shifts or potential shifts in party support should not be mistaken for indecisiveness or wayward commitment. For while Latinos' party affiliation can at times be weak, their position on issues is not. Louis DeSipio, a long-time expert in Latino voting identity and behavior, attributes party commitment and swing decisions of Hispanic voters to the fact that most Latinos, regardless of party affiliation, are deeply concerned about social issues and take policy stances on government intervention that cross over party lines.¹³

As discussed above, the 1998 elections clearly demonstrated the widening influence of the Latino vote, particularly as a swing vote. In the states with the largest numbers of electoral votes, such as California, Texas, Florida, New York, and Illinois, the Latino community is not only an increasingly large proportion of the states' populations, but also has proven itself as an active and visible political component. Even in states where the Latino population is relatively small, the 1998 Latino vote had an effect. For example, in Wisconsin, Democrat Russ Feingold won his Senate seat by a margin of 2%, largely because he received an overwhelming 70% of the Latino vote. Likewise, in Nevada, after a successful campaign spent advocating issues such as improving health care and education, Democratic Senator Harry Reid received 69% of the Latino vote; he won by a margin of 409 votes. Both candidates actively sought the Latino vote and made sure that their policy agendas did not exclude or alienate the Latino community.

After decades of virtual invisibility, it is now apparent that in no future election can the Latino community or its impact as a swing vote be neglected. Candidates must factor in Hispanic policy preferences in developing their platforms and agendas if they wish to garner significant Hispanic support on election day.

OUTREACH ALONE IS NOT ENOUGH

"Using the sacred image of the Virgen de Guadalupe in political literature is not a form of outreach. Giving awards to our Hispanic leaders and patting them in the back is not outreach. Dancing the macarena, and eating tacos in front of our community is not

outreach....Simply put, outreach is not going to work in any ethnic community if the policies and/or message of our party are against the very same community they are trying to attract.”

—LUIGI CRESPO, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
REPUBLICAN NATIONAL HISPANIC ASSEMBLY

In the wake of the 1994 and 1996 election results, many Republican candidates publicly and visibly made clear their intent to increase “outreach” to the Hispanic community. But the lesson for a number of unsuccessful campaigns is that while outreach is important and necessary, outreach alone is not enough to attract Hispanic voters if the candidate’s policy positions are at odds with the Latino community’s agenda. For example, in 1998, California Republican gubernatorial candidate Dan Lungren received a paltry 17% of the Hispanic vote. Lungren, who served previously as the State Attorney General, was directly linked with discredited Gov. Pete Wilson’s policies, having defended Propositions 187 and 209 against federal and state court challenges. His extensive outreach, but seemingly weak policy positions, were not persuasive enough to attract the Latino vote.

The case of Senatorial candidate Matt Fong, who was defeated by incumbent Democratic Senator Barbara Boxer, is slightly different. Fong did not actively support the harsh anti-Latino policies of the Wilson administration. Unlike Governor Bush in Texas, however, he did not publicly or aggressively repudiate these policies. The anti-Wilson backlash among Latino voters was so powerful that his relative lack of hostility to Hispanic interests did not overcome the fact that he was running on the Republican ticket; he received a little over 20% of the Latino vote.

By contrast, those who successfully combined effective outreach with favorable policies, such as Governor George Bush in Texas and newly-elected Governor Jeb Bush in Florida, were able to attract substantial Latino support. George Bush publicly opposed the enactment of proposals similar to California Propositions 187, 209, or 227 in his state, and has had a relatively strong record of appointing and supporting Hispanics to statewide positions. His support among Hispanic Texans increased from 24% in 1994 to as much as 49% in 1998. Similarly, Jeb Bush supported restoration of the cuts in benefits to legal immigrants resulting from welfare reform, and campaigned heavily on issues like education; he received a solid 61% of Florida’s Hispanic vote.

Overall, candidates who combined effective outreach campaigns and advocated inclusive and non-divisive policy approaches with regard to education, crime, and employment garnered the Latino vote and set in place a model for future campaigns in key states with a strong Latino presence. In the end, outreach counts, but policy matters. In 1998, Hispanics were able to simultaneously consolidate a strong base of support in the Democratic Party, but also create one in the Republican Party. In this election year and beyond, in order to assure strong Latino support, candidates, regardless of party affiliation, must seek to understand the issues of importance to Latinos and make them a part of their platform. Hispanics are a growing, politically mobilized community who have shown they cannot be won on promises and should not be ignored.

APPENDIX

| STATE | PERCENT LATINO VOTE |
|---------------------|---------------------|
| CALIFORNIA | |
| GOVERNOR | |
| GRAY DAVIS (D) | 1.6% |
| DAN LUNGREN (R) | 17.25% |
| LIETENANT GOVERNOR | |
| CRUZ BUSTAMANTE (D) | 85.13% |
| TOM LESLIE (R) | 13.38% |
| U.S. SENATOR | |
| BARBARA BOXER (D) | 7.65% |
| MATT FONG (R) | 20.46% |
| TEXAS | |
| GOVERNOR | |
| GRAY MAURO (D) | 63% |
| GEORGE BUSH (R) | 37%* |
| LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR | |
| JOHN SHARP (D) | 71% |
| RICK PERRY (R) | 29% |
| ATTORNEY GENERAL | |
| JIM MATTOX (D) | 6% |
| JOHN CORNYN (R) | 24% |
| NEW YORK | |
| GOVERNOR | |
| PETER VALLONE(D) | 70% |
| GEORGE PATAKI (R) | 25% |
| U.S. SENATOR | |
| CHARLES SCHUMER (D) | 82% |
| ALFONSE D' MATO (R) | 17% |
| FLORIDA | |
| GOVERNOR | |
| BUDDY MCKAY (D) | 38% |
| JEB BUSH (R) | 61% |
| U.S. SENATOR | |
| BOB GRAHAM (D) | 65% |
| CHARLIE CRIST (R) | 35% |
| NEW MEXICO | |
| GOVERNOR | |
| MARTIN CHAVEZ(D) | 65% |
| GARY JOHNSON(R) | 33% |
| Arizona | |
| GOVERNOR | |
| PAUL JOHNSON (D) | 56% |
| JANE HULL (R) | 40% |

SOURCE: CNN Exit Poll, 11/4/98

* Washington Post Exit Poll, 11/4/98 and Southwest Voter Registration Project's Exit Poll 11/4/98 (data from exit polls varied substantially in Texas' gubernatorial election; the Washington Post exit poll was taken as the most likely average.)

1. U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Survey. Washington, DC: July 1998.
2. U.S. Bureau of the Census, Voting and Registration in the Election of November 1998, Washington, DC, August 2000.
3. "Poll Shows Democratic Gains With Key Voters," *Washington Post*, November 4, 1998.
4. U.S. Census Bureau, Projections of the Voting Age Population for States: November 1998.
5. Proposition 187 was a 1994 ballot initiative that would have denied education and public health services to undocumented immigrants, and would have required local officials, such as police officers, teachers, doctors, and nurses, to turn in anyone whom they suspect of being undocumented. While the initiative passed, its implementation has been stayed by a federal court. Proposition 209 was a 1996 ballot initiative that eliminated the use of Affirmative Action in public education, employment, and contracting.
6. Guadalupe, Patricia, "Latino Presence Packs a Wallop in Elections Nationwide," *Hispanic Link Weekly Report*, Vol.16, No.44, November 9, 1998.
7. Ibid.
8. Hernandez, Andy, *A Preliminary Report on Latino Participation in the 1996 Presidential Election*. Washington, DC: Democratic National Committee, 1996.
9. "When Numbers Spell Words," *Washington Post*, September 15, 1999.
10. "Bush Leads Statewide GOP Blitz," *Houston Chronicle*, November 4, 1998.
11. "Disheartened California GOPers Bemoan Condition of Their Party," *The Hill*, May 5, 1999.
12. "Diversity Among Hispanics Makes for Political Disunity," Hearst Washington Bureau, October 15, 1998.
13. DeSipio, Louis, *Counting on the Latino Vote*. Charlottesville, Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 1996, pp.64-66.