



# Latino Voters in the 2008 Presidential Election:

Post-Election Survey of Latino Voters

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On November 4th, Latinos turned out in record numbers with an estimated 9.7 million Latino voters casting ballots in the Presidential Election. This marked a significant increase from the 7.6 million that the Census estimates voted in 2004. The record turnout among Latinos solidifies this emerging electorate as an important voting bloc among U.S. voters. Latino voters also helped to reshape the political map by helping President-elect Barack Obama and Democrats win key states in the Southwest, Florida, Indiana, and Virginia. As President-elect Obama and the new Democratic Congress prepare to take office in January 2009, it will be important to better understand the expectations and opinions of Latino voters. This first national survey of Latino registered voters in the November 4th Presidential Election offers a more in-depth analysis of the Latino vote in this election and its diversity across demographic subgroups.

# Summary of Findings

## The Latino Vote at the Polls

- **An historic share of Latino registered voters report casting ballots this November**— 92% of the Latino registered voters surveyed reported casting a ballot. This is a significant increase compared to the 2004 Presidential Election where, according to the Current Population Survey, 81.5% of registered Latinos voted. While some over-reporting is likely in this self-reported measure of turnout, the same methodology was used as the Current Population Survey, and the increase of 11.5 points in turnout is especially noteworthy.
- **Immigrant voters comprised a sizeable share of the Latino vote this November.** Nearly half (46%) of Latino voters were born outside of the United States or in Puerto Rico, with 39% reporting a birthplace outside the United States and 7% a birthplace in Puerto Rico.
- **New voters were a significant force in shaping the Latino vote this election.** One in every six Latino voters (15%) was voting in a Presidential election for the first time.
- **A significant share of Latino voters cast their vote early or by mail;** 40% of Latinos who cast ballots voted early, either by mail or in-person—16% and 24% respectively. However, generation did influence the likelihood of early voting. Third generation Latinos were more likely to vote early than earlier generations. Half of all third generation Latinos reported casting a ballot before Election Day. Conversely, new voters were the most likely to vote at the polls. Nearly 70% of all new Latino voters cast their ballot at the polls on Election Day.
- **Although Latino voter participation set new record highs, Spanish-speaking voters are still more likely to face a challenge in casting their vote.** Among Spanish-speaking voters, 22% said they were not able to receive voting assistance in Spanish; 26% also said that their names did not appear on the voter roster. In contrast, only 15% and 17% of all Latino voters reported either having experienced or witnessed any of these problems.

## Partisanship and Candidate Choice

- **Nearly 3 in 4 Latino registered voters in 2008 identified as “strong partisans” (70%).** Among Latino registered voters, 61% identified as Democrat, 17% Republican, and 14% Independent.
- **Beyond party identification, when asked about the party’s concern for the Latino community, support for the Republican Party declines significantly.** Only 8% of Latinos say they believe the Republican Party has more concern for the Latino community. In addition, 27% of Latino voters believe neither party is more concerned about the Latino community. This skepticism over the parties’ concern about the Latino community was more pronounced among Spanish-speakers, where 31% believe there is no difference in concern between the parties.
- **Regarding candidate choice, our survey found that Latino support for President-elect Barack Obama may have been higher than initially reported in exit poll data.** Among overall Latino voters, 72% said they voted for Obama and 25% reported voting for Senator John McCain. Candidate support did vary by demographic group, with second generation children of immigrants and Spanish speakers showing the strongest support for Obama, nearly 80%. While still receiving strong support among third generation Latinos (62%), there is a marked difference between this generation and other Latino demographic groups. Among this generation, John McCain received his strongest support, about one-third of the vote (34%).
- **Interestingly, the level of support for Barack Obama did not match reported campaign contact or exposure to campaign ads.** A significant share of third generation Latinos said they had been contacted by the campaign (46%). In comparison only 30% of immigrant Latino voters, who reported the strongest level of support, said they had been contacted by the campaign.

## Post-Election Expectations and Priorities

- **Sensitive to the current economic downturn, nearly two-thirds of Latino voters (67%) in this November's election say fixing the economy is the most important issue they expect the new President and Congress to address when they take office this January.** The economy ranked above other issues including Health Care (5%), Immigration (6%), and the War in Iraq (6%).
- **Despite the overwhelming opinion among Latino voters that fixing the economy should be the first order of business for the new Administration and Congress, expectations are still high when it comes to dealing with immigration reform.** Overall, 68% of voters say that it is extremely important (41%) or very important (27%) for the immigration issue to be addressed within the first year of the new government.
- **On the issue of specific immigration reform proposals, Latino voters, across all subgroups, strongly support a comprehensive approach that seeks to address both border security and deal with immigrants in the United States at the same time.** Nearly half, 49% of Latino voters, say they support a comprehensive approach, while 24% support proposals that would deal with immigrants first and 17% who believe we should deal with border security first.
- **On the War in Iraq, Immigrant and Spanish speaking voters feel very strongly about immediate withdrawal of U.S. forces.** Overall, 48% of all Latino voters feel that we should immediately withdraw U.S. forces from Iraq. The level of support, however, varies significantly between Immigrants (60%) and Spanish speakers (64%), and Native Born (37%) and English speakers (37%).
- **Strong support for the President-elect and the new Democratic Congress comes with high expectations on the part of Latinos to see their communities do better over the next four years.** Nearly 70% of Latino voters expect the situation for Latinos to improve under the Obama Administration. These hopes are higher among immigrant voters with 3 of every 4 indicating that they expect a better lot with Barack Obama being elected President.

## **About the Survey**

Latino Decisions interviewed 800 Latino registered voters from November 7th - 14th, in the 21 states with the largest Latino voter populations, and accounting for 93% of the Latino electorate. Voters were identified using a database of registered voters, and all respondents were confirmed to be Hispanic/Latino and currently registered to vote. The survey was available to respondents in English or Spanish, at the discretion of the Latino voter being surveyed, and all calls were completed by bilingual Latino interviewers. Overall, the survey carries a 3.5% margin of error and is meant to be nationally representative of the Latino electorate.

Latino Politics Professors Dr. Matt A. Barreto of the University of Washington and Dr. Gary M. Segura of Stanford University designed and implemented the survey as part of Latino Decisions, in conjunction with the NALEO Educational Fund and impreMedia.

The NALEO Educational Fund is the nation's leading non-partisan, non-profit organization that facilitates the full participation of Latinos in the American political process, from citizenship to public service.