

THE POLITICAL POWER OF HISPANICS, THE LATINO VOTE FOR OBAMA, AND IMMIGRATION REFORM IN THE U.S.

By
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Latinos No Longer "the Sleeping Giants" of Years Past

Contrary to what many political observers, voting demographers, and election analysts in the United States and Texas continue to report in the media, Latinos are no longer the "*sleeping giants*" of the electorate process they were traditionally perceived to be in years past. They do indeed vote and we have started to witness more proof of that in the US this decade alone - both during the 2008 November General Elections when Latinos turned out in record numbers to support President Obama in his historical win as the first minority and African-American ever to be elected President of the United States, as well as during the 2004 presidential election where one of the most tightly won national races in American history came down to the wire and was won by the slimmest of margins like never before. Republican candidate Bush beat Democratic candidate Gore, but only by the slimmest of margins, and yes, even in that race, Latinos proved to be the winning margin for Bush, as he picked up over 35% of the Latino vote, something which is high by political standards in the US. Gore took only 65% of the Hispanic vote, which in the past had traditionally been as high as 80-90% of the Latino vote, as most Latinos historically vote Democrat in the US, but even that trend is changing through the years. As most political scientists will tell you, the biggest reason for Bush's victory in 2004 was that he had finally cracked the Democratic stronghold on the Hispanic vote. So there is no doubt that that 35% Latino vote had indeed paved the way for the Bush victory, as his margin of victory was less than 1.2% over Gore, and Latinos cast 12% of the vote in 2004, but 10%

of the Latinos shifted from the Democratic column to the Republican column from the primary to the general elections when Bush won. Since Hispanics cast 12 percent of the vote in 2004, their 10-point movement to the GOP gave President Bush an additional 1.2 percent of the national vote.

Keep in mind that Bush worked very hard to win the Hispanic votes in his 2004 win. For example, he reversed traditional Republican positions opposing the interests of Latinos. Additionally, he endorsed bilingual education, reversing decades of Republican agitation for English-only policies. Moreover, he opposed benefit cuts to documented aliens and rejected the contention that the children of undocumented workers should be denied public education. He even embraced a version of amnesty that permitted illegal immigrants to gain lawful status and eventual citizenship. Furthermore, the rest of the party also began to reverse decades of anti-Latino legislation. In 1996, for example, the Republican Congress demanded tough prohibitions on disability or survivor benefits for legal immigrants who had contributed sufficiently to the Social Security system to earn their pensions had they been citizens. Under pressure from Republican governors, the GOP reversed the ban the following year. The long-term consequences of Bush's gain among Hispanics may be enormous. Beyond just winning this election, Bush may have begun to crack the unholy triple alliance of blacks, Hispanics and single women that anchors the political base of the Democratic Party.

There is no doubt that the Latino vote was one of the most instrumental, pivotal, and enormously deciding factors in those 2 national outcomes in the US alone - the Obama victory and the Bush victory - and it will continue to be more of the deciding factor in most future elections, including many in Texas. The census data is there, the statistics are evident, the numbers are convincing, and the scenario all points in the same direction. This scenario of the political power of Hispanics, the Latino vote for Obama, and comprehensive immigration reform is indeed a force to be reckoned with and certainly taken seriously in the United States - more than ever before. The growing discontent with our past political system and Latinos not being taken seriously is no longer the norm, but

rather the rule and almost a requirement for any political candidate to win a tough race in the US - and that goes for Democrats and Republicans alike.

Throughout this presentation I would like to allude to and give proper credit to what I consider some of the most premier organizations in the US that have done some great work in compiling the data, analyzing the statistics, and bringing to light this change in political climate in the US, particularly organizations like the Mexican American Legal Defense & Educational Fund (or MALDEF), the National Association of Latino Elected & Appointed Officials (or NALEO), the Southwest Voter Registration & Education Project (or SVREP), the William C. Velasquez Institute (or WCVI), and the Tomas Rivera Center (TRC), among others.

For those political pessimists who continue to believe that Latinos are still the "*sleeping giants*" and non-civic-minded citizens when it comes to election time in Texas or the US, I would like to respectfully disagree. And with much confidence indeed too, I would much rather affirm the contrary, not only because of the voting trend changes I have witnessed in recent years but also the successful election outcomes that Latinos have been so instrumental in deciding all over the country, including many in Texas and the Southwest, and especially in areas like the DFW region, North Texas, and other parts of the state that historically have not been considered Latino hot-spots or strongholds.

Yes, Latinos Elected Obama Too !!

Going back to the Obama win and the Latino vote, once again, I would like to use a parallel analogy closer to my region in Dallas and North Texas, and how Latinos are indeed making more of a difference in the outcome of elections, not only in Texas, but across the United States. When it was released in 2006, I applauded a report released by our own Texas State Senator Royce West of Dallas - an African-American lawmaker - to help prove my point. That report showed then, and still shows today, with much affirmation just how critical the Latino vote is, not only in Texas, but how pivotal it is destined to become all over the country from now on. Again, no longer can Latinos be viewed as the "*sleeping giants*," when it comes to election time. Senator West's report

indicates that the percentage of the registered adult male population in Texas who voted during the 2004 presidential election was fairly high (81%) because 3,684,000 of the 4,458,000 registered adult males voted in 2004. When it comes to Latinos in particular, the percentage rate was as significantly high (70.65%) as 1,533,000 of the 2,170,000 registered adult Latinos (males and females) voted in 2004. This data from the US Census further indicates an increase of almost 75% from two years previously (in 2002), among male and female Latino voters, indeed a significant leap that would make a major difference in most elections at any level of government - local, state, and federal alike.

Again, we can no longer view Latinos as the "*sleeping giants*," of years past. They do indeed vote, and should be taken for granted. Latinos are the future. They do participate in the electoral process indeed and will continue to do so in even greater numbers, if recent past history is any indication. According to the US Census data, the Latino community took an enormous leap in a single decade, growing by an astonishing 58% to 35.3 million individuals - that is almost 12.5% of the U.S. population. As such, there is no doubt that the Latino population will have profound political consequences. And it's not just the size of the Latino population growth, it is where it is growing. Latinos are no longer concentrated in the traditional urban areas or in the states or southwest regions we have traditionally thought of - they are also growing in suburban and rural areas, as well as in North Texas communities like Irving, Fort Worth, Arlington, Grand Prairie, Round Rock, and other similar places. In short, Latinos are emerging by leaps and bounds in more non-traditional areas and are taking a place in the political geography of many of those communities. For example, the fact that Arkansas' Latino population surged by an astounding 337%, Nevada's by 216%, and Indiana's by 117%, carries important political implications. Who would have thought those states had such significant number of Latinos living among its populace?

Latinos Carry Economic Power Too

Without a doubt, this Latino population growth has also been accompanied by economic contributions. The Latino middle class has also been growing over the past 20

years, with the Latino community now including more congressmen and congresswomen, mayors, council persons, county officials, private executives, high-spending consumers, and most significantly, registered voters. Consequently, more and more elected officials and politicians - Democrats and Republicans alike - as well as the business community are suddenly courting Latinos and scrambling to win over Latino hearts and purchasing power. In no other elections did candidates court the Latino vote as they did in the 2000, 2004, and 2008 presidential elections, respectively, where more than 7 million Latinos (or nearly 7% of the total voters) voted in 2000, over 12% voted in 2004, and over 8% voted in 2008. After years of predictions that the Latino population would some day become a significant force in politics, that is now reality - Latinos are no longer the "*sleeping giants*," of the American electorate. Latinos have woken up. They have smelled the coffee as has all of Texas and the United States of America. Latinos took the 2000 presidential elections seriously indeed; 71% of the eligible Latino voters turned out to cast ballots compared to the national average of 51% who voted. This significant rise of Latino participation in the electorate process is also clearly evident in the increasing number of Latinos being elected to local, state, and national offices every year.

Furthermore, there is growing concrete evidence and voluminous statistical data which indicates that besides a booming population and its economic contributions, another reason for the tremendous Latino increase in political power and clout has been the political mobilization and voter education efforts by Latino groups and organizations like the National Association of Latino Elected & Appointed Officials (NALEO) which held its national convention in Dallas a couple of years ago, the Mexican American Legal Defense & Educational Fund (MALDEF), the Southwest Voter Registration & Education Project (SVREP), the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), and the National Council of La Raza, among others. Coupled with this growth, are the various social obstacles that Latinos have had to face, including anti-immigrant sentiments by various elected officials, the threat of English-only legislation, the lack of adequate health care, education, and housing, among other socioeconomic ills. It is societal obstacles like these and others that have caused the Latino community to cement itself, and simultaneously

increase public awareness of the political process, voter registration, and mobilization efforts and thus increase its political power and clout. In doing so, we will continue to see Latinos and organizations encouraging more citizenship and voter registration drives, encouraging the importance of getting out the vote. There is no doubt that these efforts must remain priorities for the Latino community because the Latino population is a relatively young community. Today's Latino leaders must thus make it a priority to create more Latino leadership programs to nurture their talents and develop their skills to take on more political posts and seek higher office. In closing, we must keep in mind that the Latino community can no longer be viewed as the *"sleeping giants,"* they were traditionally pegged to be in years past. They must continue to mobilize, increase public awareness, and advocate those issues that have a direct and significant impact on the Latino community are large. Now that they have woken up and smelled the coffee, today's Latinos must continue to move forward and train younger Latinos to follow suit and show all of America and Texas, that they do indeed vote, and can indeed make a significant difference in the outcome of all elections in the future.

The Latino Vote Made the Difference First it Was Bush, Then Obama, What's Next?

In 2008, according to the William C. Velasquez Institute (WCVI), the Latino electorate grew to an estimated 12,148,790 registered voters and cast an estimated 9,701,288 votes in the November Presidential election, according to the William C. Velasquez Institute (WCVI). This represents a 79.85% turnout figure for Latino registered voters. Latinos also represented 7.43% of all votes cast in the United States in November.

Absentee and Election Day flash polls conducted by WCVI also show that record breaking Latino turnout decisively favored Illinois Senator Barack Obama over Arizona Senator John McCain in the 2008 Presidential Election. WCVI Latino voter polls show Senator Obama was supported by a 68.6% to 28.7%. This finding was further echoed by

the CNN National exit poll which found a 67% to 31% spread between Obama and McCain.

Additionally, according to WCVI's analysis of official election returns, three patterns of voting occurred in the 2008 Presidential elections:

1. Racially polarized voting predominated in seven of nine "purple" states that voted for Democrat Obama in 2008 after voting for Republican Bush in 2004. In these states, minority block voting for Obama overcame White block voting for McCain. Latino block voting was decisive in Obama's victory in New Mexico. Black block voting was decisive in Obama's victories in Ohio, Florida, Virginia, and North Carolina. Blacks and Latino block voting collectively was decisive in Obama's victories in Nevada and Indiana. In Colorado and Iowa, Barack Obama won all ethnic groups – including Whites.
2. Non-racially polarized voting predominated in the 19 "blue states" that voted for Obama in 2008 and Kerry in 2004. In 16 out of 19 of these "blue states" all major racial/ethnic groups voted for Senator Barack Obama. In three states – Maryland, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania Whites voted along racially polarized lines for Sen. John McCain. However the margin they gave McCain was more than counterbalanced by the margin minorities gave Obama;
3. Racially polarized voting predominated in all 22 "red" states that voted for McCain in 2008 and then-incumbent George Bush in 2004. White block voting for Republicans McCain and Bush overwhelmed minority block voting for Democrats Obama in 2008 and Kerry in 2004.

More broadly, aggregate data analysis shows that dramatic increases in minority voting that was more polarized for Obama in 2008 than Kerry in 2004. Conversely the data shows more modest increases in White voting that was less polarized for McCain in 2008 than it was for Bush in 2004. When analyzed through partisan lenses, Democratic voting expanded significantly in 2008 compared to 2004, while Republican voting declined modestly.

National Latino Voter Registration

The WCVI estimates that Latino voter registration in the United States grew to an estimated 12.1 million voters (*see Table 1*) for the November 2008 elections. This estimated total represents an increase of 2.8 million since 2006, or a 30.5% increase¹. This is in stark comparison to the period between November 2004 and November 2006, during which there was no growth in Latino voter registration. Overall Latino registration increased 30.5% since 2004. This represents the largest numerical increase in U.S. Latino

¹ Growth Percentage = Estimated Latino Registration Growth / 2006 Latino Registration.
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voter registration history. This boost in national Latino voter registration was driven by California and Texas, which contain an estimated 50% of the United States Latino vote. In California, Latino voter registration increased by 506,253 voters, for an increase of 18% since 2006. In Texas, Latino voter registration increased by 461, 950 voters, for an increase of 19.7% since 2006. While California and Texas are home to half of the nation’s Latino registered voters, they only made up 34% of the Latino registration growth since 2006.

Registration growth can be separated into voter registration attributed to Primary Election and voter registration attributed to the General Election. Between November 2006 and July 2008, an estimated 1.08 million Latinos registered to vote, resulting in a growth of 11.6%. WCVI estimates that since July 2008 another 1,767,464 Latinos registered to vote through the end of October, which translates into 17.0% growth rate since July.

Table 1: Estimated National, California, and Texas 2008 Latino Voter Registration, and Comparison with 2004 and 2006 Latino Voter Registration

State	2004 Latino Reg	2006 Latino Reg	2004 - 2006 Latino Reg Change	2004 - 2006 Latino Reg Change %	2008 Latino Reg	2006 - 2008 Latino Reg Change	2006 - 2008 Latino Reg Change %	Estimated Growth in U.S. LVR since 2006	Current 11/2008 U.S. LVR Estimate	Est Growth in U.S. LVR 2006 - 7/2008	Est. Growth in U.S. LVR Since 7/2008
California	2,778,55	2,763,97	-14,57	-0.50%	3,270,22	506,25	18.32%				
Texas	2,274,12	2,345,26	71,14	3.10%	2,807,21	461,95	19.70%				
CA + TX Total	5,052,67	5,109,24	56,56	1.10%	6,077,44	968,20	18.95%				
United States	9,308,000	9,304,000	-4,000	-0.004%				2,844,79	12,148,79	1,077,32	1,767,464

Notes: U.S. 2004 and 2006 Latino Registration from U.S. Census Bureau. California 2004 and 2006 Latino Registration from Political Data. Texas 2004 and 2006 Latino Registration from Texas Legislative Council. 2008 California and Texas Latino Registration compiled by applying Latino registration percentages (18.9% for California; 21.64% for Texas) as of end of September 2008 to official state total registration figures released for November 2008 General Election. July, 2008 U.S. Figures taken from WCVI analysis commissioned by Southwest Voter Registration Education Project, found on www.svrep.org.

National Latino Voter Turnout

The WCVI further estimates that 9.7 million Latinos voted in the November 2008 General Election (*see Table 2*). This means that the Latino vote was an estimated 7.43% of all votes cast. In California, 2.2 million Latinos cast votes, which represented an estimated 16.5% of the California electorate. Texas Latinos cast 1.6 million votes, which represented 20% of the Texas electorate. Together, the two states, which contain 50% of the U.S. Latino electorate, represented 39.5% of all Latino votes cast.²

² Estimated 3.8 million Latino voters in CA and TX / Total US Latino Votes Cast.
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Finally, using data from both Tables 1 and 2, we are able to determine the Latino voter turnout percentage in the United States. WCVI estimates 9,701,288 votes cast out of a total 12,148,790 Latino registered voters cast votes, which represents a turnout rate of 79.9%. This figure is down from the 2004 Presidential election, which had an 81.2% Latino turnout percentage. Slight declines in Latino turnout percentages tend to accompany large expansions in the Latino voter registration, especially when the Latino super states of Texas and California are not contested (and therefore receive little turnout investment from national campaigns as in 1996).

Table 2: Estimated National, California, and Texas 2008 Latino Voter Votes Cast			
State	2008 Total Votes Cast	2008 Latino Votes Cast Estimate	2008 Latino Percentage of Total Votes Cast
California	13,412,761	2,213,106	16.50%
Texas	8,077,795	1,615,559	20.00%
United States	130,508,123	9,701,288	7.43%

Notes: California and Texas Total Votes Cast from Unofficial Results listed on states' respective Secretary of State websites as of 12/2/08. United States Total Votes Cast sum of Votes Cast information listed on States' Official Election pages as of 12/2/08. California and Texas Latino Votes Cast derived from exit poll percentages applied to Total Votes Cast, adjusted for non-Election Day voter breakdowns. United States Latino Votes Cast derived from applying estimated turnout percentage to each State's Total Votes Cast, adjusted for non-Election Day voter breakdowns, and summing the total.

So How Did Latinos Vote?

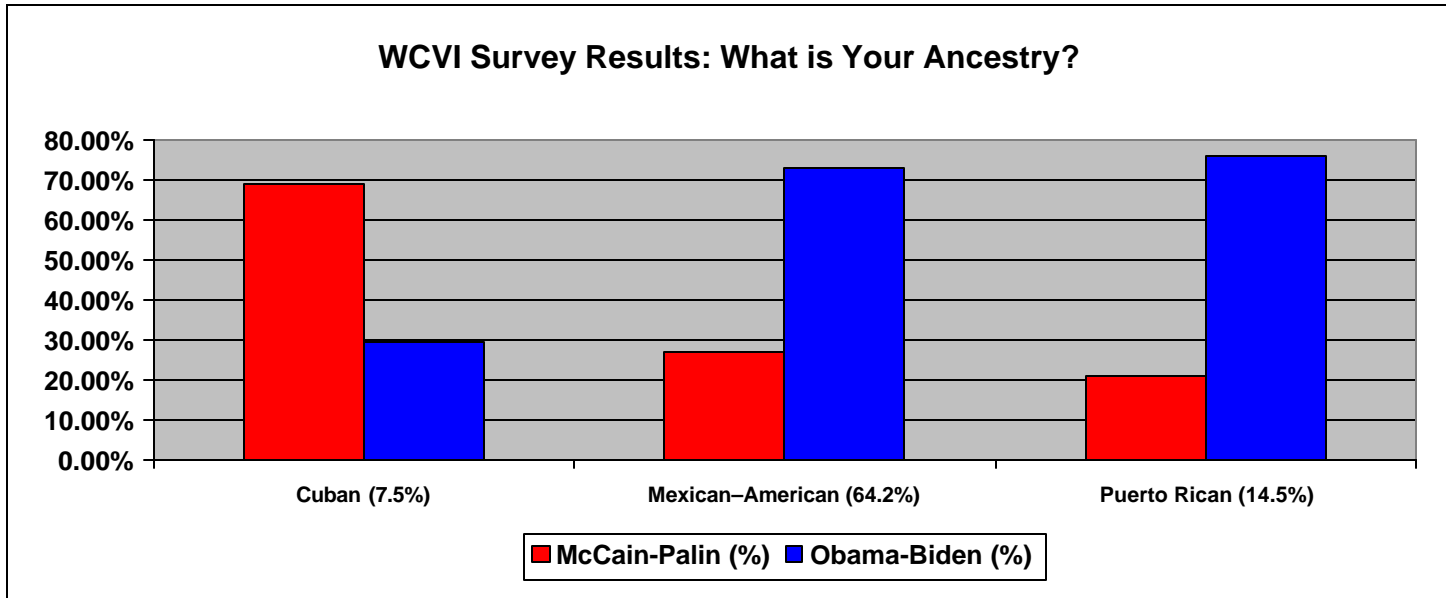
So now we ask: How did Latinos vote in 2008 for Obama? WCVI conducted its survey of Latino voters and found that Latinos supported Senator Obama over Senator McCain by about 40 points.³

For whom did you vote for President and Vice President? Republicans John McCain and Sarah Palin? Democrats Barack Obama and Joe Biden? Or one of the other candidates? <i>Por quien voto para Presidente y Vice-Presidente? ,Votaría por el republicano John McCain y Sarah Palin? ¿o el Demócrata Barack Obama y Joe Biden? ¿Alguno de los otros candidatos?</i>	
McCain – Palin	28.7%
Obama – Biden	68.6%

WCVI's survey was also able to breakdown some of the Obama/McCain vote responses into some significant cross-tabulations.

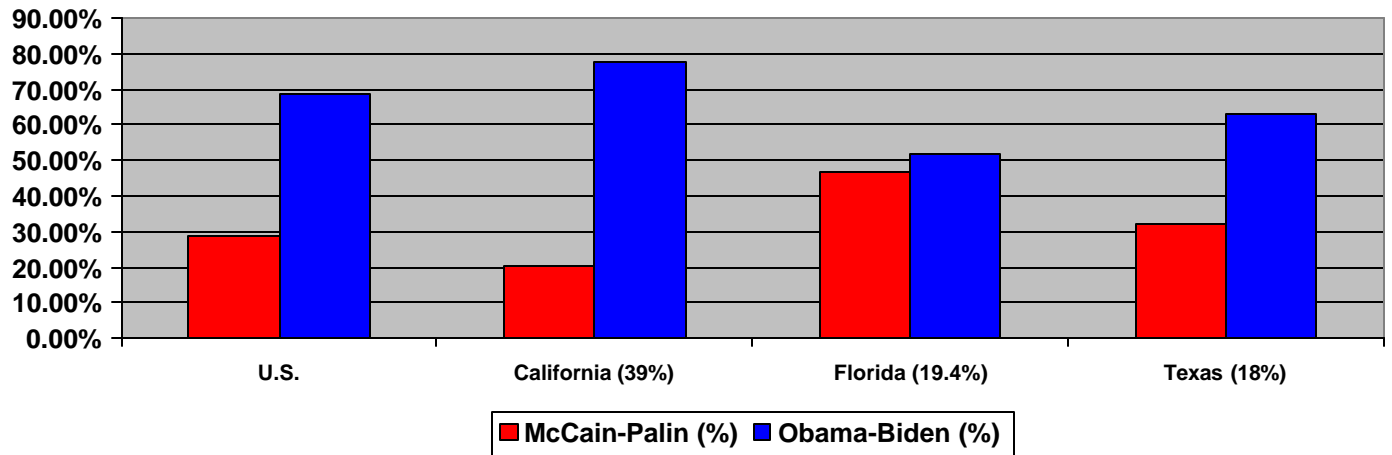
³ Methodology: The William C. Velasquez Institute (WCVI) emailed over 160,000 mostly Latino registered voters in randomly drawn precincts from the eleven States of Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Michigan, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Pennsylvania, and Texas. Emails were sent the morning of 11/4/2008 and survey gathered information until 11/8/2008. Emails for registered voters were identified using the complete voter registration databases in all the named states. The email survey had both English and Spanish translations. The survey carries a margin of error of 4.0%, with a weighted N=856.
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By ancestry, Mexican and Puerto Rican voters significantly favored Senator Obama over Senator McCain at higher rates than the national average. Latinos of Mexican decent favored Senator Obama by a 46 point margin over Senator McCain, and were by far the largest national Latino voting block. Similarly, Puerto Rican voters favored Senator Obama by over 50 points. Conversely, Cuban voters, a long traditional bloc of conservative voters, favored Senator McCain. Cubans preferred Senator McCain by nearly 40 points.



Californian Latinos favored Senator Obama well above the national Latino average. Texan Latinos voted by roughly 2-1 for Senator Obama. Florida Latinos differed from other states. Florida, with its large Cuban population, only favored Senator Obama by a narrow 4.8% margin – though this is notable since typically Florida Latinos favor Republican candidates.

WCVI Survey Results: What State Are You Registered to Vote?



Finally, the issue that mattered most to Latino voters in this Presidential Election was by far the economy. Over 57% of Latino respondents cited the Economy as the primary influence over their vote for President. A distant second in issues cited was the Iraq War, at 8.9%, followed by Abortion and the War on Terrorism.

Which one issue mattered most in deciding how you voted for President? (Choose only one of the following issues)	
¿Cual tema tiene mas importancia en decidir como vota por presidente? (Escoja solo uno de los temas)	
Economy -Jobs / La economía y trabajos	57.1%
Iraq War Policy / La política de la Guerra en Irak	8.9%
Abortion / Aborto	6.9%
War on Terrorism / Guerra contra el terrorismo	6.2%
Budget and Taxes / Presupuesto e Impuestos	4.8%
Health Care Policy / Política de salud	4.7%
National Debt / Deuda nacional	3.2%
Gay Rights / Derechos Gay	2.1%
Immigration Policy / Política migratoria	1.6%
Public Education / Educacion publica	1.4%
Gas Prices - Energy Policy / Precios del gas - Política energética	1.1%

For full WCVI Exit Poll Results and 2008 Election analysis, please visit <http://wcvl.org/data/election/latinovote2008.html>.

And Yes, Immigration Reform, Legalization & Economic Stimulus for the U.S. Go Hand-in-Hand

Contrary to what critics say, immigrants do contribute to our State's & Nation's economy

In spite of what the critics may say, think, read, or believe in - politically, philosophically, economically, or otherwise - I am of the firm belief that immigrants do

indeed contribute to our State's and our Nation's well-being and success and FINANCIALLY as well. The critics are way off base when it comes to assessing our State's and Nation's immigrant population by ignoring all the positive contributions they make to our State's and Nation's economy.

The data is replete, showing that immigrants are indeed an important part of both our Nation's and our State's demographic fabric and economic vitality. We cannot deny that. Immigrants work hard and pay taxes too. They are part of our supply and demand business setting. They shop at our stores. And they purchase goods and services like everyone else every day of the week. In short, instead of blaming immigrants for all of our Nation's woes, or using them as scapegoats when we may find ourselves in hard economic times, we should instead focus on the strengths they make to our overall demographic fabric. Additionally, we should highlight the many positive contributions that our immigrant population makes to our economy, whether it be in the labor market, our public schools, our local communities, and our tax system in general. Instead of blaming immigrants for our Nation's societal ills, including our failing public school finance system, our high health care costs, our overcrowded jails, and our high unemployment rates, we should instead focus our energy in finding ways to address the worse conditions that our Nation could be in if it were not for our immigrant population and the many contributions they are making to help us stay afloat. There is no doubt in my mind that we could be worse off without our immigrants, and there is an abundance of research studies and reliable government and professional reports to support this position. Finally, instead of using our immigrants as easy targets and scapegoats for the cause of all our financial problems and wasting their energies in refuting all the myths and misunderstandings about immigrants and immigration in general that have flooded our media in recent years, critics must wake up and smell the coffee because they are not going away.

Economically speaking, it is easy to blame immigrants for our Nation's woes, as that has been an American pastime for decades, especially during hard economic times. Recently, however, there is no substantive or significant research that shows increased anti-immigrant sentiment even after the September 11th terrorist attack. While our Nation's economy might have decreased somewhat after the tragedy, what the critics fail to

mention is that in Texas alone, survey after survey has found that is not the case at all in Texas nor across the US. For example, in Texas alone, a recent survey found that Latin American immigrant workers in Texas sent about \$3.2 billion home to their relatives back home in their native countries, but an overwhelming bulk of the dollars earned by those same immigrants (\$68 billion compared to \$3.2 billion) stayed in the Texas economy. Overall, the study found that Latin American and Caribbean immigrants sent about \$30 billion home in 2003. Additionally, the study also found that immigrants in the U.S. earned \$450 billion, and 93% stayed in the U.S. economy. Is that draining our economy? We do not think so. And it does not take a rocket scientist to make this conclusion. This study was commissioned by the Inter-American Development Bank and undertaken by the reputable firm of Bendixen and Associates.

Furthermore, according to Pia Orrenous, a senior economist at the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas, immigration was responsible for 38% of this nation's labor work force growth last year. These new immigrant workers pay taxes, buy goods and services from our local businesses, and they contribute significantly to our nation's retirement programs such as Social Security and Medicare. They do not drain them as the critics lead us to believe.

Additionally, according to the National Academy of Sciences, the total benefit to the Social Security System if immigration levels remain constant will be nearly \$2 trillion through the year 2072. Is that draining our economy? Is that taking jobs from Texans? We do not think so. These are the type of contributions that critics need to focus their energies on and highlight, rather than placing blame on our immigrants. Besides contributing to our economy, there are other undisputable facts that critics fail to mention. For example, immigrants rely disproportionately on low-wage, low-benefit jobs that other Texans or other Americans do not take to begin with. Furthermore, they fail to mention that immigrant families use benefits at much lower rates than local citizen families, and benefits are not a factor at all in immigrants migrating to the U.S. Nearly 33% of low-income native citizen families used Medicaid in 2001, compared with only 13.2% of low-income citizens. This is a matter of our own governmental priorities, not the fact that immigrants are coming here to take advantage of government benefits. Also, welfare does

not drive migration patterns, as studies tell us that between 1995-2000, the number of immigrant families with children grew four times in states with the least generous "safety nets for immigrants (including Arkansas and Texas) than in states with more generous safety nets (such as California and Massachusetts). Once again, the critics are way off base when they conclude that immigrants are the cause of our state's financial crisis. These are reliable statistics from the National Immigration Law Center (NILC).

The question often asked is: *"Is it true that immigrants take jobs away from Americans and Texans and are a drain on the economy?"* The answer is a flat out NO, and let me tell you why. According to a vast number of reputable organizations and reliable research think tank groups, including the American Civil Liberties Union, the Mexican American Legal Defense & Educational Fund (or MALDEF), the NILC, the Center for Public Policy Priorities in Austin, and many others, the answer is an **UNDISPUTABLE - NO**; immigrants DO NOT take jobs away from Americans or Texans. In fact, the contrary is true. Contrary to popular belief, immigrants do not take away jobs from American workers. Instead, they create new jobs by forming new businesses, spending their incomes on American goods and services, paying taxes and raising the productivity of U.S. businesses. Immigrants are good for the economy not the other way around. According to a U.S. Department of Labor study prepared by the Bush Administration, the perception that immigrants take jobs away from American workers is *"the most persistent fallacy about immigration in popular thought"* because it is based on the mistaken assumption that there is only a fixed number of jobs in the economy.

In closing, it is clear to see that what the critics may think, read, or believe in - politically, philosophically, economically, or otherwise - is way off base when it comes to assessing our State's immigrant population because they fail to ignore all the positive contributions they make to our State's and Nation's economy. The truth is that their position is full of myths, misunderstandings, misguided data, and unreliable statistics that do nothing more than perpetuate the ongoing problem of using our immigrant population as easy targets or scapegoats and blame them for all our nation's economic woes. To us, it is a matter of government priorities gone astray. Instead, our priorities should include

programs that will adequately address the needs of ALL average-hard-working Texans and their families, including public education, health and human services, adequate insurance coverage for average, hardworking families, jobs, and adequate tax relief, among others, rather than fund only programs that will benefit our wealthiest top 10% of Texans. That is what we need to highlight, and not use our immigrants as scapegoats.

Some Guiding Principles for Comprehensive Immigration Reform

Once again, as I made it clear previously, instead of blaming immigrants for our Nation's societal ills, including our failing public school finance system, our high health care costs, our overcrowded jails, our high unemployment rates, and other problems of society, we should instead focus our energy in finding ways to address the worse conditions that our Nation could be in if it were not for our immigrant population and the many contributions they are making to help us stay afloat. There is no doubt in my mind that we could be worse off without our immigrants, and there is an abundance of research studies and reliable government and professional reports to support this position. Additionally, instead of hearing critics continuing to use our immigrants as easy targets and scapegoats for the cause of all our financial problems and wasting their energies in refuting all the myths and misunderstandings about immigrants and immigration in general that have flooded our media in recent years, critics must wake up and smell the coffee because they are not going away. Immigrants are here to stay in the USA, and they will not go away.

As MALDEF has made it clear, we should instead continue to work with our US Congress and the White House to reach agreement on national immigration reform that will advance the Latino community's core values and their contributions to our Nation's economic vitality and further growth, and that includes our immigration segment society. As most of you have heard, in recent years, our US Congress has engaged in a contentious debate on immigration that has included proposals to convert millions of undocumented workers into "***aggravated felons***" and for a three-tiered legalization architecture that would

have required some participating immigrants to depart the United States and return at a designated point of entry. However, the only immigration-related legislation Congress has passed is the “*Secure Fence Act of 2006*,” which authorizes the construction of hundreds of miles of additional walls and fences along the U.S./Mexico border, but even that gone nowhere, and I predict will go nowhere either.

Without a doubt, every nation has the right to establish immigration policies in its national interest and the obligation to enforce them. But I agree with MALDEF, that we should all be committed to and advocate for comprehensive immigration reform that serves the nation’s economic, security, social, diplomatic, and regional needs following these guiding principles:

1. *Restore the rule of law and enhance security:* America’s security interest in immigration begins long before an individual seeks to enter the United States. Congress should forge bilateral, regional, and multi-lateral agreements to improve entry/exit systems and combat human and drug traffickers and gangs. Moreover, the United States should promote targeted investments to foster infrastructure development and labor programs abroad in order to reduce the desire of people to enter the United States illegally to seek work. These initiatives are critical supplements to sharing border intelligence and technology. For constitutional, public safety, and community reasons, U.S. cities and towns are the wrong place to conduct immigration law enforcement. Increasing the Border Patrol is a deceptively attractive solution that, without adequate supervision and training, threatens to be not just ineffective, but also counterproductive and a potential source of civil rights abuses.

2. *Provide a pathway to citizenship:* The 12 million undocumented immigrants already in the U.S. contribute significantly to key industries and regions across the nation. Immigration reform must include a pathway for legal status for those who have worked, contributed to community life, and paid appropriate taxes and fines. In order to achieve maximum participation for immigrants and family members, the process should be easy to navigate. At the same time, bureaucratic and legal obstacles should be removed to end the backlogs for family members of United States citizens and permanent residents who have waited years, sometimes decades, for their visa.

3. *America’s future workforce:* The U.S. economy depends upon a trained and ready workforce large enough to sustain economic growth. The top 25 occupations are expected to grow by eight million jobs by 2014. The U.S.-born workforce lacks the numbers to fill all the jobs. Additional legal opportunities to enter the United States with work authorization must be part of immigration reform. The Department of Homeland Security must continue to update and improve its record-keeping capacity so that employment verification is accurate and timely. Until then, the potential of computerized database pilot programs to increase employment discrimination, privacy invasions, misuse and identity theft are too serious to be ignored. In order to discourage unlawful hiring and as a matter of fundamental fairness, all workers must be afforded a fair wage, the ability to change employers, and workplace safety precautions. Existing laws must be enforced and new laws enacted to ensure that employers can not gain a competitive advantage over others by hiring workers and paying them less — or not at all — because of their immigration status.

4. *Promote citizenship and civic participation and help local communities:* Like their predecessors, today’s immigrants want to learn English. Promoting their integration into the larger society benefits the nation as a whole. Yet the wait for traditional “night school” programs can be two years in

major cities. Like MALDEF, I would support legislation and funding for adult English classes, including offering tax incentives to allow employers to facilitate worksite language and citizenship classes. And for young people, MALDEF like myself and many others, support the DREAM Act, through which higher education or military service provides an avenue for legal immigration status. At the local level, driver licenses should be granted based on driving skill to promote public safety and insurance. Similarly, local police should devote their resources to public safety and crime prevention, not immigration status.

Conclusion

In closing, all I have to say is, as I made it clear earlier is that: Yes, immigration reform, legalization & economic stimulus for the U.S. go hand-in-hand. There are not 2 ways about it. No and's, if's or but's. Our changing population demographics, voting trends, and other characteristics point in one and only one direction: **THE POLITICAL POWER OF HISPANICS, THE LATINO VOTE FOR OBAMA, AND IMMIGRATION REFORM IN THE U.S.** is now our reality, our Nation's landscape, and our current political picture, so we must make it work. As a recent paper by UCLA professor, Dr. Raúl Hinojosa-Ojeda (2009), which was commissioned by the Willie C. Velasquez Institute (WCVI), makes it abundantly clear, the economic impact of legalization makes economic sense, and the imperative of achieving justice for our immigrants with the national priority of passing a national economic stimulus bill, go hand-in-hand. Both priorities are complementary and merit immediate enactment by our US Congress and President Obama. Why, you ask?

I.) Legalization of the nation's undocumented workers is now an economic necessity, as well as a moral and civil rights imperative. Legalization increases short-term incomes, job creating consumption and net tax revenues in the low wage segments of the labor market, as well as sets the long-term foundation for an expanding middle class and a more sustainable economic recovery. The experience of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA) is very instructive in this regard, producing both wage and consumption gains, and enhanced tax-revenue collection in the midst of a recession of the late 1980's and early 1990's, as well as decades of very high rates of educational, home and small business investments by newly legalized families. If Congress and President Obama legalized the current 10-12 million undocumented persons in the U.S. an economic stimulus of \$30-36 billion in personal income, 750,000-900,000 new jobs, and \$4.5 to \$5.4 billion in net tax revenue would result!

II.) Movement now towards legalization and naturalization of the roughly twenty million legal permanent residents and undocumented persons would create local and state regional mini-booms in civic engagement. Furthermore, enabling civic participation of these previously excluded groups will substantially intensify public support for an inclusive and humane tenor with regard to immigration reform as well as public policies aimed at providing support to low income and socially disadvantaged socioeconomic profiles.

III.) The national security outcome desired by Washington, D.C. of declining undocumented

migration is attainable under existing law and there is no need for further legislation expanding security-related provisions related to undocumented migration. Indeed, we must begin to recognize that the current approach is very costly (in money, rights and lives), and increasingly yielding diminishing returns. Massive security-related expenditure growth now yields lower numbers of apprehensions as migration from Mexico to the US (both undocumented and legal) has been dropping due to security measures, the climate of repression in immigrant communities, and the declining regional economy. The unintended consequences of further pursuing the current enforcement only approach include generating a vulnerable underground economy and maintaining an artificially low wage floor, actually encouraging the demand for vulnerable undocumented workers.