



ISSUE 25 : MAY 2012

Latino Voters – the Democrats’ Doomsday Machine

It “spells doom for us.” That’s what Mitt Romney told a private meeting of top donors in Florida last month if Republicans can’t start doing better with Latinos.

He’s right. The Republican share of the Latino vote dropped from over 40% for George W. Bush in 2004 to 31% for John McCain in 2008. Latino voters helped turn six swing states from Bush to Obama: Colorado, Florida, Indiana, New Mexico, Nevada, and Virginia. In 2008, Latinos voted 67% for Obama. And now? According to the Pew Research Center, 67% of registered Latino voters still support Obama.

Latinos are the nation’s largest minority group, but many aren’t citizens, don’t register, or don’t vote. Only about a third of the Latino population voted for President in 2008. Latinos outnumber African-Americans nationwide, but in 2008, Latinos were 9% of the voters while African-Americans were 13%. Nevertheless, Latinos will be important in 2012 for three reasons.

First, 2012 is likely to be another close presidential election. Current polls show a dead heat between Obama and Romney. In a close election, every constituency is crucial.

Second, Latinos are an important constituency in swing states. Actually, nearly half of all Latinos in the U.S. live in California and Texas, neither of which is a swing state. But the fifteen swing states also have significant numbers of Latino voters. In nine of the swing states, the number of voting-age Latinos is greater than the winning margin in 2008. In four swing states, the increase in the Latino voting-age population from 2008 to 2012

is greater than the 2008 margin of victory.

Take Missouri, the only swing state besides his home state of Arizona that voted for McCain in 2008. McCain carried Missouri by about 4,000 votes. Missouri has gained 18,000 new Latinos 18 or older since 2008—enough to reverse the Republicans’ 2008 margin of victory even if only one third of them vote.

Third, Latinos have problems with both Romney and Obama. The fact that Obama has a big lead among Latinos right now can be explained by two things: Latino voters’ long-standing loyalty to the Democratic Party and Romney’s serious problems with Latinos.

With the exception of Cuban-Americans—who are only 3% of the U.S. Latino population—Latino support for Democrats has held up for at least forty years, mostly for economic reasons. Many Latinos have relatively low incomes and rely on government services like public schools and public hospitals. They join unions. And they do not necessarily share the deep distrust of government that is embedded in Anglo-American political culture.

Conservatives make things worse with their harsh rhetoric about illegal immigrants. “I personally have been disappointed in the way that the party’s leaders have talked about immigration,” former Attorney General Alberto Gonzalez, a Latino Republican, said. “It’s not just the message. It’s the tone of the message. It’s mean and mean-spirited. I think it’s a turn-off.”

Mitt Romney’s hawkish statements on immigration have worsened the Republicans’ Latino problem. During the primaries, Romney

LATINO VOTING-AGE POPULATION IN THE SWING STATES

Swing State	2008 Winner	2008 Margin of Victory	Change in LVAP (2008-2012)	% Change in LVAP (2008-2012)
AZ	R	+195,404	-35,254	-3%
CO	D	+214,987	+21,358	+3%
FL	D	+236,450	+284,707	+10%
IN	D	+28,391	+34,189	+17%
IA	D	+146,561	+15,115	+21%
MI	D	+823,940	+4,967	+2%
MO	R	+3,903	+17,846	+16%
NV	D	+120,909	+38,039	+9%
NH	D	+68,292	+1,852	+9%
NM	D	+125,590	+34,746	+6%
NC	D	+14,177	+78,043	+19%
OH	D	+258,897	+33,961	+18%
PA	D	+620,478	+88,656	+24%
VA	D	+234,527	+73,986	+21%
WI	D	+414,818	+24,721	+14%

Source: Charles Garcia, "Latino Voting," Garcia Trujillo, February 2012.

said he would have vetoed the DREAM act that would allow illegal immigrants brought to the U.S. as children to become citizens. He criticized the Texas law that permits some undocumented students to pay in-state college tuition. He talked about making life so difficult for illegal immigrants that they would voluntarily "self-deport." He said that Arizona's tough immigration law could be a model for the nation. If Romney tries to change his position on those issues, it will confirm his image as an opportunistic flip-flopper.

How can a candidate with that record possibly appeal to Latino voters? The economy, estupido. The unemployment rate among Latinos is two points higher than the national average. The Pew Research Center estimates that Latino families have lost two thirds of their wealth in the last few years, principally because of the collapse of the real estate market.

President Obama has his own problems with Latino voters. He has not delivered on his promise to pass immigration reform, even when Democrats held solid majorities in Congress. His Administration has deported 1.2 million illegal immigrants, including tens of thousands of parents of U.S. citizens. The chairman of the Republican Party has pledged to tell Latino voters that "you have a President that has either lied or is so grossly

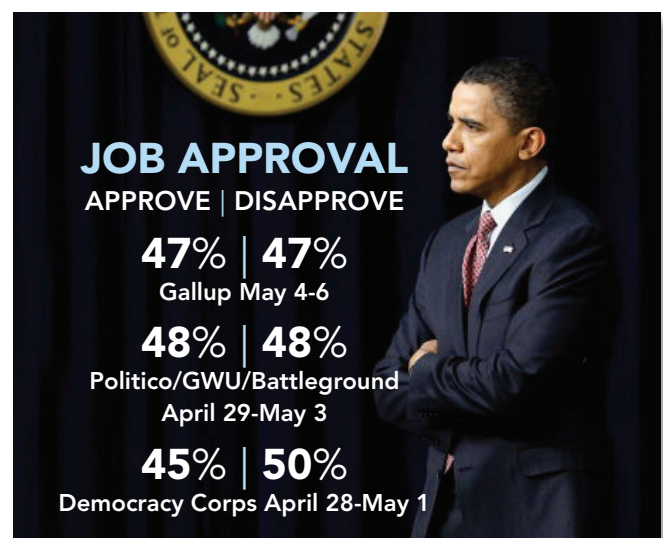
negligent in following through on his promises in regard to immigration that he shouldn't be trusted." That, from a party that is openly hostile to immigration reform.

Want to see what "doom" looks like for Republicans? Look at California. In 1994, Republican Gov. Pete Wilson embraced Proposition 187, a harshly punitive law that cut off public services for illegal immigrants. Proposition 187 passed with nearly 60% of the vote. Wilson was re-elected.

Since 1994, however, California Republicans have paid dearly for that short-lived victory (Proposition 187 was ultimately struck down by the courts). It brought a huge wave of Latino citizenship applications and voter registration. Latinos were 18% of the California vote in 2008, and they voted 74% for Obama.

After voting Republican in six straight presidential elections (1968 to 1988), California has voted consistently Democratic since 1992. The state has elected no Republican senators and only one Republican governor since 1994 (Arnold Schwarzenegger, a very atypical Republican). Even in 2010, which saw a national landslide for Republicans, Democrats swept every statewide constitutional office, 34 out of 53 House seats and maintained their majorities in the California legislature.

The man who chairs the Romney campaign in California? Former Gov. Pete Wilson. ■



Actually, Religion and Politics Do Mix

In the early 1990s, I held a post as visiting professor of American politics at a leading Jesuit university. One of the perks of that position was an invitation to tea with the Cardinal. After we exchanged pleasantries, the Cardinal asked, "Is there anything happening in American politics that I should be aware of?"

"As a matter of fact, your eminence, there is," I answered. "Since 1980, religious Americans of all faiths—fundamentalist Protestants, observant Catholics, even Orthodox Jews—have been moving toward the Republican Party. At the same time, non-religious Americans have found a home in the Democratic Party."

"This is something new in American politics," I explained. "We have never had a religious party in this country." Then I went a step too far. I added, "It bothers me that for the first time in U.S. history, we have a religious party in this country." The cardinal considered my observation and replied, "Well, you know, it bothers me that we have an irreligious party in this country." "I think I'll have more tea," I responded.

That was in 1992. What was true then is even more true now. Here is what a Gallup Poll shows about the connection between religiosity and politics:

	OBAMA	ROMNEY
Very religious Americans (41%)	37	54
Moderately religious (27%)	54	40
Non-religious (32%)	61	30

Gallup, April 25, 2012

Romney's strength is among very religious Americans, where he leads by 17 points. Obama carries the moderately religious (+14) and the non-religious (+31, or better than two to one). Romney leads among very religious Protestants (+19) and among very religious Catholics (+4). Obama carries less religious Protestants and Catholics.

Romney's Mormon faith does not appear to be affecting his appeal to religious voters. What matters to them is his Republican faith.

Have the Dogs Had Their Day?

Blue Dogs are moderate-to-conservative House Democrats who typically represent fairly conservative districts. Those districts went heavily Republican in 2010. As a result, membership in the Blue Dog caucus was cut in half—from 54 to 27.

Will the Blue Dogs come back in 2012? Not likely.

Two Pennsylvania Blue Dogs—Jason Altmire and Tim Holden—were defeated by somewhat more liberal Democrats in last month's primary. Two have resigned from Congress (Jane Harman of California and Gabrielle Giffords of Arizona). Three more Blue Dogs are retiring, one is running for the Senate, and five more are in tough races, according to the Cook Political Report.

That means the Blue Dogs could lose as many as thirteen members in 2012. Which would cut their ranks in half yet again.

The more moderate New Democratic caucus may see losses as well. Of the 42 New Democrats in the House, 34 are not in the Blue Dog caucus. Nine of those 34 seats are at risk this year.

Why are so many moderate and conservative Democrats in trouble? Mostly because they have to run in tough districts. Safe Democrats are more likely to be liberal Democrats.

	Blue Dogs	New Dems*
Elected in 2012	27	34
To Date:		
Lost Democratic primary	2	0
Running against another Incumbent in Democratic primary	0	3
Running for another office	1	4
Resigned/Retiring	5	1
Competitive race in 2012	5	3
Total 2012 Seats at Risk:	13	12

Cook Political Report, May 2012

*not in Blue Dog Caucus

BREAKING EVEN ON TARP

The latest cost calculations show the much-maligned Troubled Asset Relief Program is breaking even and may ultimately turn a profit.

\$700b

LINE OF CREDIT

- Though \$700b was originally set aside for TARP, to-date only about \$415b has actually been loaned.
- The remaining \$285b was either never obligated or never disbursed.*



\$0

COST TO TAXPAYERS

(AS OF 4/20/12)

81% (\$338b) of that \$415b debt has been paid back, and the value of collateral asset holdings — like GM and AIG stock — have grown to \$77b, making TARP's current cost to taxpayers \$0.



U.S. Treasury Department Monthly 105(a) Report, March 2012. *NOTE: The only additional money authorized is for Housing, with varying estimates of how much more may be spent (OMB \$42b; CBO \$12b). We do not project or speculate on that amount—or on the future value of assets like stocks—counting only money disbursed to-date. Free for re-use with attribution/link. © 2012 Third Way. Visit www.thirdway.org. Infographic by Bill Rapp.



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