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Immigration Politics and Electoral Consequences: Anticipating the Dynamics of Latino Vote in the 2014 Election

Abstract: The debate over comprehensive immigration reform in the summer and fall of 2013 had the potential to significantly affect future elections by, once again, reshaping the image of the Republican Party (GOP) in the eyes of Latino voters. In this effort, we explore the demographic and political origins of 2013s legislative effort and the history of immigration politics in recent decades. We examine recent polling data that suggest that movement in the GOP’s images in response to this process is possible – in both directions. Finally, we identify specific congressional districts where razor-thin margins in the past could present opportunities for both parties, depending on whether and how the immigration issue is resolved. In so doing, we identify four distinct ways in which a less hostile GOP might improve its electoral outcomes among Latino registered voters.

Keywords: Latino; immigration; voters; congressional elections

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When Bill Clinton was elected President of the US in 1993, only 3.7% of the American electorate was Latino. In 2012, the number was around 10%. Nationally, Latinos comprise 17% of the US population and most – over 85% according to census bureau numbers – are either foreign born themselves, or born to immigrant parents or grandparents. That is, an overwhelming majority of Latinos and Latino citizens are within two generations of the immigration experience.

To attempt to separate “Latino” politics from “immigration” politics is a fool’s errand. Though Latinos care about all issues other Americans care about, as illustrated in Table 1, it is clearly the case that immigration has, in recent years, sat at or near the top of the Latino agenda. Though the economic collapse of 2008 and its subsequent effects clearly drew attention to those economic concerns, as we approach the 2014 midterm elections, it is immigration that is the focus of Latino registered voters.

Table 1: Most Important Issues for Latino Registered Voters, 2012–1.

For Latinos, immigration is a priority				
What are the most important issues that the President and Congress should address?		November 2012	February 2013	June 2013
	Immigration	35%	58%	55%
	Economy/Jobs	58%	38%	35%
	Education	20%	19%	15%
	Health Care	14%	15%	14%

Source: Latino Decisions/America's Voice, June 2013 ($n=500$).

Why? Apart from their own connection to the immigration experience, why might Latino registered voters care so much about immigrants, particularly those without legal documentation? Repeated polling in the last several years by Latino Decisions and other firms have made it clear that a large share of Latino registered voters are intimately connected to those facing the immigration policy challenge. As we report in Figure 1A, in June of 2013, a stunning 67% of Latino registered voters nationwide reported knowing, personally, an undocumented person. Moreover, as Figure 1B illustrates, most of those connections are familial, with 51% of respondents who reported knowing of one or more persons without documentation identifying that this included a family member. To be clear, two-thirds of all Latino registered voters know personally individuals without documentation, and more than half of those know family members in that situation.

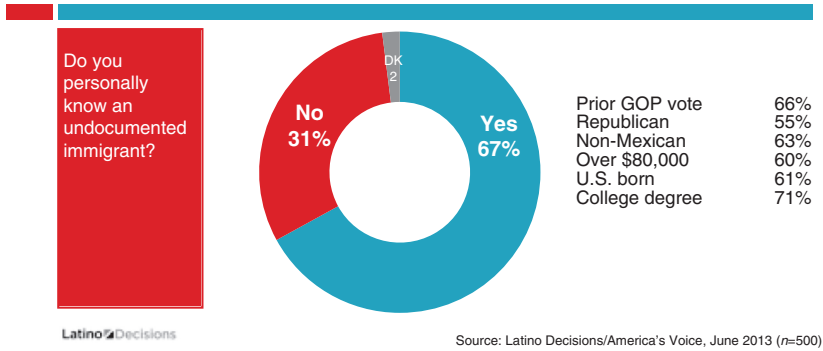
Both political parties have repeatedly misunderstood the deep and close connection between Latino citizens of the US and those immigrants so often targeted politically. This has been particularly true for the Republican Party (GOP). The political effects of this targeting are made more salient by the rapid growth in the Latino population and electorate we described earlier. Presaged by the changes in California in the late 1990s and 2000s, we explore in this paper the arc of how immigration politics has reshaped the political landscape, and how it might in the immediate future.

1 Demography, Immigration and Three Moments

1.1 The First Moment

California is a Republican state. Or at least it *WAS* a Republican state. From the end of World War II until 1994, Democrats lost every presidential election in the

A Undocumented immigrants are part of the Latino community



B Undocumented immigrants are part of the family for Latino voters

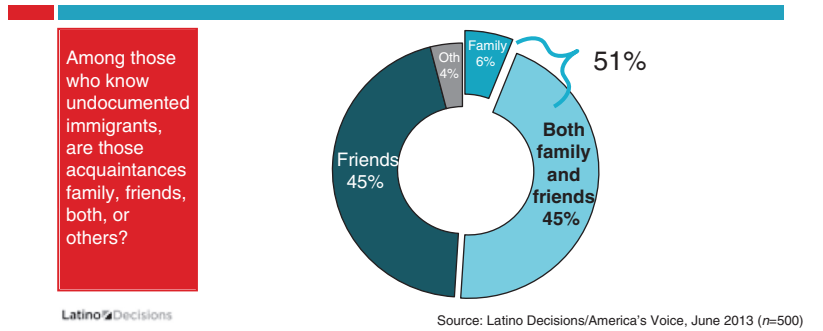


Figure 1: (A) Latino Registered Voter Connections to Undocumented Persons, 2013. (B) Nature of Relationships between Latino Registered Voters and Undocumented Persons, 2013.

state save two – the LBJ landslide over Goldwater in 1964, and Bill Clinton’s three-way-race victory in 1992. That is 10 GOP victories to just two Democratic. In gubernatorial elections, it was little better. Democrats won only four races to the GOP’s nine.

Moreover, between 1980 and 1994, the GOP was beginning to drag Latinos to the right as well. Field Poll data make it clear that Latinos in the state were less Democratic every year between 1980 and 1994 (Bowler et al. 2006). Ronald Reagan did well among Latinos in 1984 and the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 was passed by a GOP Senate and signed by a GOP president. Reagan famously quipped to pollster Lionel Sosa that “Hispanics were Republicans, they just didn’t know it.”

But 1994 was the year of Proposition 187. That initiative was a critical moment in Latino political development in the US, in that it reversed this decade-plus drift to the GOP, mobilized over a million new Latino voter registrations in California, and has shifted the state firmly to the Democratic column in subsequent elections. Moreover, that shift back to the Democrats among Latinos occurred at precisely the moment that Latino population growth accelerated in California.

Today, the Democratic Party controls every constitutional office in the state, and more than 2/3 of each chamber of the legislature. The state has voted Democratic in the last six presidential elections. In 2012, Barack Obama bested his opponent 60% to 37%, with an electoral margin of over 3 million votes. While Latinos are not alone responsible for this margin of victory, they have proven critical in shifting the state legislature and congressional delegation to the left.

1.2 The Second Moment

George W. Bush began the arduous process of brand-recovery for the GOP. As governor of Texas, he never went down the anti-immigrant path though it might have been easy for him to do so. He supported a compromise response to the Fifth Circuit's decision in *Hopwood*,¹ ensuring the continued presence of minority students in Texas higher education (pending the rehearing in *Fisher*).² His efforts as President to reach out to Hispanics were notable. It was George W. Bush who was the first president in American history to deliver an address (a weekly radio address) entirely in Spanish. Bush and his chief political advisor Karl Rove firmly believed that future GOP growth would be among Hispanics. Bush was rewarded for these efforts by Latino voters, and an estimated 40% of them voted for his reelection in 2004.

Not all Republicans were on board with the Bush-Rove strategy of outreach to Latinos. Specifically, conservative members of the House of Representatives stepped up anti-immigration efforts in the wake of the 2004 election, and in December of 2005, Congressman James Sensenbrenner authored an immigration bill (HR 4437) that would have made undocumented status a felony and, by extension, become a lifetime bar to US citizenship. The reaction was the 2006 immigration rights marches, which turned out somewhere above three million people in over 150 American cities.

¹ *Hopwood v. Texas*, 78 F.3d 932 (5th Cir. 1996).

² *Fisher v. University of Texas* (2013).

Efforts to craft a comprehensive immigration reform failed twice in the wake of these marches – first in 2006 and again in 2007. In both cases, members of the Senate got close to agreement but could not get past the opposition to move the legislation forward.

The electoral results of this failure can be tracked through the last four national elections. According to the exit polls, Latinos overwhelmingly favored Democratic nominees and congressional candidates, and by increasing margins. Going all the way back to 2006, Latino voters helped push the Democrats into majority status in both houses of Congress. Moreover, Latino voters provided vote margins in excess of the statewide totals in Colorado, New Mexico, Nevada, North Carolina, Florida and Indiana in 2008.

In the wake of the GOP nominee Mitt Romney's hard swing to the right on immigration, Latinos were pivotal again in Florida, New Mexico, Nevada and Colorado in 2012. In fact, Latino vote margins nationally exceeded the popular vote margin for President Obama's reelection effort.

Even in the GOP win in 2010, Latinos proved pivotal in the reelection of Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid in 2010, and against Sharron Angle who ran specific and vivid anti-immigrant campaign commercials. Latinos may well have saved the Senate for the Democrats, in part by securing Michael Bennett's reelection in Colorado. John McCain survived a vicious primary challenge in Arizona, in part by moving to the right on immigration. In so doing, however, he forfeited one of the few pro-immigration voices in the GOP.

1.3 The Third Moment?

The election results in 2006, 2008, 2010, and 2012, have illustrated the real electoral and political costs associated with the rhetoric and policy positions of the GOP with respect to immigration. In the wake of the 2012 election, Republican National Committee (RNC) chair Reince Priebus inaugurated a commission to recommend changes to the Party's messaging and strategy. Among their chief recommendations, the commission felt that the Party had to change its relationship with Latinos.

*"If Hispanic Americans hear that the GOP doesn't want them in the United States, they won't pay attention to our next sentence. It doesn't matter what we say about education, jobs or the economy; if Hispanics think that we do not want them here, they will close their ears to our policies. In essence, Hispanic voters tell us our Party's position on immigration has become a litmus test, measuring whether we are meeting them with a welcome mat or a closed door."*³

³ *Growth and Opportunity Project*, RNC Report, December 2012. p. 15. http://growthopp.gop.com/rnc_growth_opportunity_book_2013.pdf Last accessed August 15, 2013.

The reasons are demographic. As the fastest growing segment of the population and electorate, Latino influence is becoming more politically important at precisely the moment when GOP share of that vote is declining. While the GOP receives approximately 90% of its vote from non-Hispanic whites, that share of the population – almost 80% when Ronald Reagan was elected to the presidency – is now only 63% of the population (Table 2).

As the RNC's report suggested, some leadership in the Party felt that the immigration issue needed to go away. As a consequence, we are, today, witnessing the potential third moment, in immigration politics. The 113th Congress is considering a spate of immigration reform bills, reengaging the failed effort of 2006 and 2007. Whether or not this third moment accelerates or reverses the trends begun by Proposition 187 and reinvigorated by the Sensenbrenner bill and subsequent efforts is the central question. The outcome, we argue, hinges on the passage (or failure) of comprehensive immigration reform legislation and the degree to which Republicans are allocated a share of the credit (or blame) for the outcome.

California's history serves as an important lesson, we argue, for what is at stake in this question. The electoral map in California is radically different today than it was in 1994, and the rate of Hispanic population growth outside the state means the conditions are ripe for similar changes elsewhere. In the next two sections, we will explore what prospects this third moment of immigration contestation has for changing the electoral fortunes of Republicans nationally. We will first look at recent polling to suggest that GOP electoral success is endogenous to

Table 2: Historical Trends in White Identification in the US Census.

Year	White	Non-Hispanic White	Hispanic (any race)	Non-Hispanic and not in combination	Non-Hispanic two or more races
1800*	81.1%	–	–	–	–
1850	84.3%	–	–	–	–
1900	87.9%	–	–	–	–
1950	89.5%	–	–	–	–
1960	88.8%	–	–	–	–
1970	87.5%	83.2%	4.7%	–	–
1980	83.1%	79.6%	6.4%	–	–
1990	80.3%	75.6%	9%	–	–
2000	77.1%	70.9%	12.5%	70.4%	1.6%
2010	74.8%	65.3%	16.4%	63.7%	1.9%

Source: US Bureau of the Census.

*Source: www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0056/tab01.pdf and U.S. Census Bureau. "Overview of Race and Hispanic Origin 2010 Census Briefs." March 2011. <http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-02.pdf>.

Last Accessed June 1, 2011.

their behavior in the current debate, just as it has been in the last two decades. Second, we will examine the Congressional map in key states for 2014 to explore whether the California effect will expand as immigration politics become more contentious in places where the Latino electorate is just gaining impact. In so doing, we will offer thoughts about the critical components of Latino electoral impact.

2 Can the Immigration Reform Debate Hurt/Help the GOP?

What can recent polling tell us about whether the immigration debate will truly matter to the future prospects of the Republican Party? The evidence suggests that there IS a significant political risk for the GOP in 2014 and 2016 if comprehensive reform fails, and a substantial opportunity for improvement should the party embrace this policy change. In this section, we will examine recent Latino Decisions polling on the issue and its political effects. We will then turn our attention to the impending midterm elections.

For some advocating no policy change on the part of the GOP, the argument goes that Latinos are irretrievably Democratic and, hence, immigration reform will only make more Democrats, not persuade Latino registered voters to vote Republican. Such a claim is ahistoric and rooted more in the last four election cycles than in any long-term assessment of Latino vote preferences.

As we already indicated, somewhere near 40% of Latino voters cast ballots for President Bush in 2004. And polling data suggest that, over their lifespans, a sizable number of Latino voters have cast ballots for Republicans. As we report in Figure 2, a poll of registered Latino voters in 2013 showed that approximately half of all those answering (49%) recall casting ballots for Republican candidates. That Mitt Romney received only about a quarter of Latino votes⁴ is not an indication that there is no room for growth. The evidence suggests that almost another quarter of the Latino electorate is potentially available to a GOP candidate with the right qualities and absent the immigration albatross.

It is also worth noting that the swing from 40% to 23% (or 27%) represents the largest inter-election movement of any racial and ethnic group. While it remains true that most voters consistently cast ballots for the same party, Latino voters are far more likely to switch than any others, at least if we consider the last two decades.

⁴ The National Exit Pool survey estimated 27% of Latino ballots cast for Romney. Latino Decisions' estimate was 23%, based on their Election Eve Survey, which has better sample properties and bilingual interviewing.

Prior vote for GOP candidate

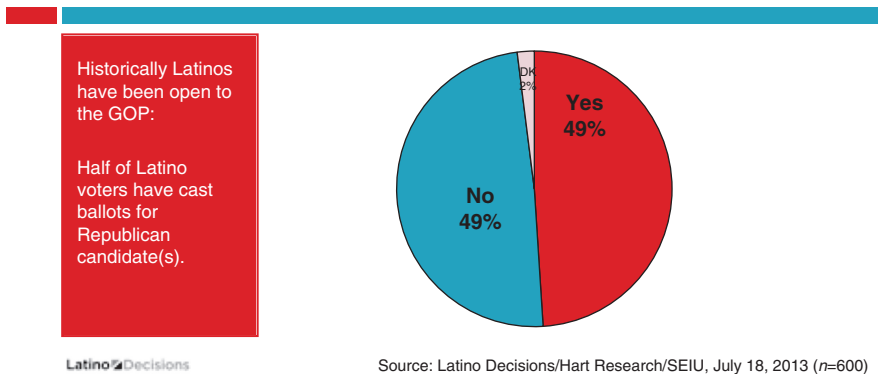


Figure 2: Share of Latino Voters with Past Self-Reported Vote for a GOP Candidate for Any Office.

That as many as half of all Latino voters have shown a willingness to vote for candidates of both parties is critical to understanding whether – and how – action on immigration might have political effects. To assess whether Latino voters felt that the immigration issue might shape or reshape their vote intentions, Latino Decisions used a split-sample experiment, asking respondents how their vote intention might change if Republicans “tried to block” or “worked to pass” comprehensive immigration reform.

The results were striking. When prompted with the possibility that the GOP might work to pass immigration reform, 34% of Latino registered voters said this would make it more likely that they would vote for a GOP candidate, compared with only 13% reporting it would make them less likely. About half said it would have no effect – a group composed of both loyal Republican and loyal Democratic voters. By 21%, the movement is decidedly toward the GOP when they work for comprehensive reform.

By comparison, blocking immigration reform has real dangers for the GOP. When prompted with this very real possibility, a whopping 59% said it made them less likely to support GOP candidates, compared with only 8% viewing this more positively. Less than 30% said such an action would have no effect.

The results in Figure 3 illustrate two important points regarding the immigration debate and GOP prospects. First, things could get worse. That is, as bad as the GOP has performed in recent elections among Latino voters, there is still room to give. Second, and perhaps more importantly, the downside from opposition is larger than the upside from action. A key conservative talking point in the summer of 2013 was that there was no benefit to GOP candidates for enacting

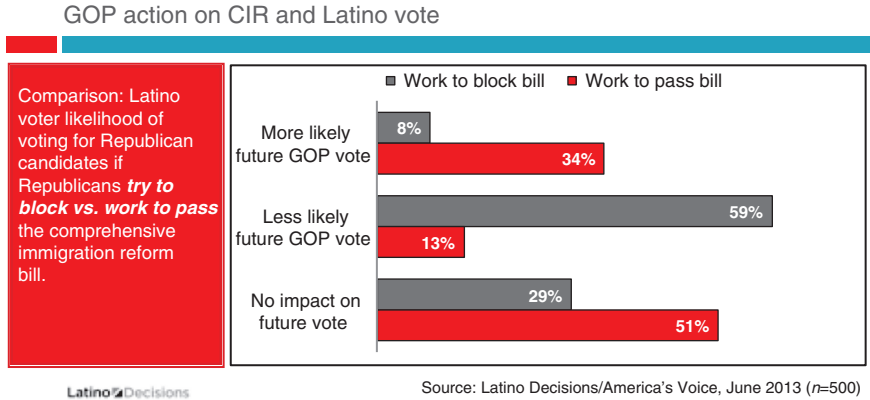


Figure 3: Potential for Growth in GOP Vote Share Among Latino Registered Voters, 2013.

immigration reform. These data suggest that there is certainly a benefit from action but, moreover, a significant cost of inaction.

Part of the political calculations around the immigration reform legislative process was whether failure of this reform effort, like those in 2006 and 2007, would be attributed fully to one political party. House GOP strategists repeatedly attempted to construct the terms of the debate around border security and whether Democrats would insist on an all-or-nothing approach which, they believed, would provide a chance to blame Democrats if no bill emerged. There is little evidence in the polling data that such an approach would work.

Figure 4 illustrates the potential attribution of blame to the two parties by Latino registered voters, should immigration reform falter. Over two-thirds (69%) of all voters surveyed would hold the GOP to blame, while only 13% would point to the Democrats, and another 11% to both parties equally. Moreover, the failure of immigration reform will have significant reputational effects on the GOP brand name. Figure 5 illustrates how voters' affective reaction to the GOP would change under the scenario of failure.

Figure 5 illustrates three key points. First, the GOP brand is poor among Latino registered voters. Their net favorability is -27, meaning that the share of voters viewing them positively is 27% smaller than those viewing the party unfavorably. Second, when prompted with the possibility of the failure of immigration reform, things get significantly worse. Favorability drops 11% (to 22%) while unfavorable views climb 13 points to 73%, creating a net favorability for the GOP of an astonishing -51.

Perhaps more telling is the third finding in Figure 5. In the left hand block we report the same figures for respondents who report having previously voted

CIR failure puts GOP at greater risk

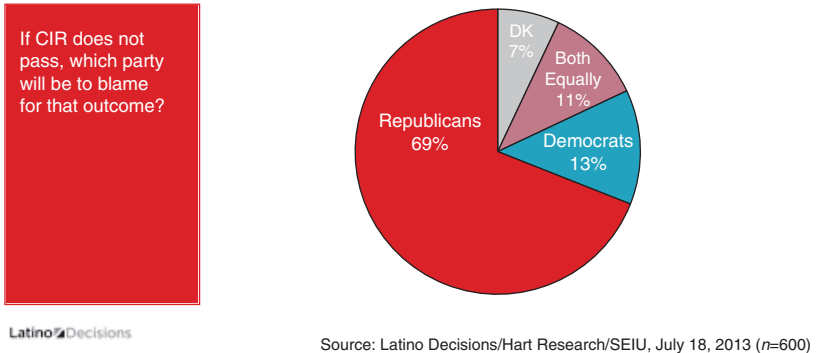


Figure 4: Partisan Blame Assessment Among Latino Voters Should Comprehensive Immigration Reform Fail, 2013.

View of Republican Party if House Blocks Immigration Reform

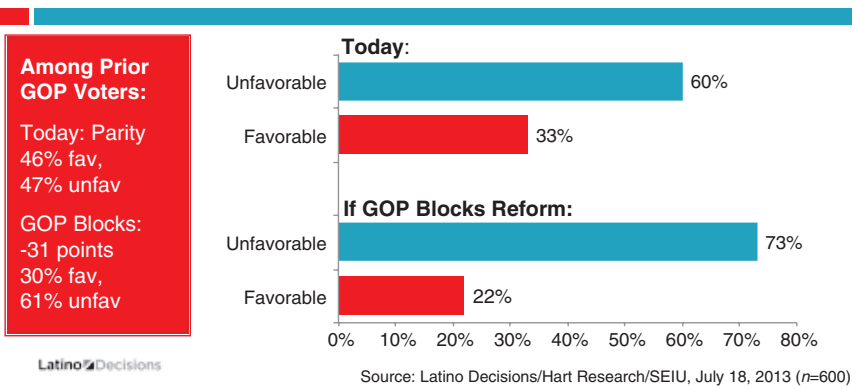


Figure 5: GOP Reputational Effects Among Latino Voters Should Comprehensive Immigration Reform Fail, 2013.

for GOP candidates. The GOP’s reputation among these voters is, not surprisingly higher. Unprompted, they have only a –1 net favorability. However, when cued with the possibility that the GOP would stop immigration reform, even among these former GOP voters, net favorability drops 30 points, to a net –31.

The polling evidence from the summer of 2013 makes clear that there is substantial opportunity for GOP electoral growth should the party embrace and advance immigration reform. But if the party is seen to be the obstacle to enacting

that legislation, the GOP would shoulder the greatest share of the blame among Latino registered voters, and significant reputation and ballot box erosion.

To what effect? While the effect on the Party's overall chances in presidential elections is, by now, well documented, the impact on House elections is less clear. Since House districts are gerrymandered to protect incumbents of both parties, one possibility is that eroding Latino support has little effect on the durability and size of the GOP's majority. It is to this question that we now turn.

2.1 House Elections 2014

This suggests that Latinos are not swing voters. While a lack of information, perhaps in combination with professional incentives, may lead some journalists and consultants to make such claims, the reality is that Latino partisanship is generally stable. (Leal et al. 2008: p. 315)

Will party choice be “generally stable” in the run up to the 2014 midterm elections as a result of immigration issue(s) and/or policy? As we suggested, there is speculation among the media and commentators about how immigration might affect partisan electoral dynamics in the states.⁵ Arguably immigration reform will be a strategic test for both parties; the party that comes out on the losing end of immigration reform in the minds of voters may wind up on the losing end in the next election. Perhaps the 2014 situation will be different than in 2006, when there were “mixed messages” and “no specific reform mandate” on the immigration issue (Ayon 2006 in Leal et al. 2008). The defining issue of the 2014 election is projected to be immigration reform and Republicans and Democrats can win or lose reelection based on their stance on immigration. Perceptions among key voter groups on immigration will be paramount.

As we have documented, immigration reform is a top priority for Latino voters. When asked how important it is that Congress passes an immigration reform bill in 2013, 64% of Latino Republicans said “very” or “extremely” important. When given the argument that immigration reform should wait until later and Congress should focus only on the economy now, 69% of Latino Republicans disagreed and said Congress should focus on both immigration reform and the economy right now. If members in the House are unable to deliver on immigration they may be in jeopardy. For Democrats, the way forward on immigration is equally important; in a hypothetical election match-up with a Republican candidate who supports a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants,

⁵ Van Le, April 16, 2013. “CBS News Examines How Immigration Reform Could Affect Latino Vote in Key States, Districts.” <http://americasvoiceonline.org/blog/cbs-news-examines-how-immigration-reform-could-affect-latino-vote-in-key-states-districts/>. Last accessed February 7, 2014.

against a Democrat who opposes citizenship and calls it “amnesty” we find that 61% of Obama voters would actually choose the pro-immigration Republican.⁶

In this section we project how the issue of immigration could impact midterm House elections, and more specifically, how the Latino vote could determine the results in particular races across the country. In the 2012 presidential election, Republicans won 234 seats in the House of Representatives and majority status; the Democrats won 201 seats. The margin for majority status in the House is 17 seats. In 2012 Latinos accounted for 10% of all voters nationwide, and projections point to continued growth in the Latino vote.

Whether Latinos will be swing voters in key states and how much of a role immigration will play is the question. Research (Leal et al. 2008: p. 315) from the 2006 midterm elections suggests Latinos were “not entirely *sui generis*” (italics in the original), nor swing voters, and further that “the issue of immigration did not appear to play an important role.” However, these same scholars do acknowledge that “Latinos did name illegal immigration as the most important issue *for Latinos*” (italics added), and they lay out a case for when Latinos could become swing voters – in situations when the winning candidate received <55% of the vote and Latinos constituted 10% or more of the electorate. Such a scenario occurred in the November 2012 election in 18 House races where the winner received <55% of the vote and Latino voters comprised more than 10% of the electorate. In those races Latinos contributed to the election of 11 new freshmen members, as well as the reelection of five redistricted incumbent members of Congress.

For present purposes, our analysis focuses on 33 congressional district seats that could be critical to determining majority status in the 2014 midterm elections; seventeen are current Democratic seats and 16 are seats currently held by Republicans. Of the Democrats, more than half of the congressional districts are in Western states – five are in California, three are in Arizona, 1 in Utah; three are in the South – in North Carolina, Florida and Texas. The remaining Democratic congressional districts are in Illinois, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and two in New York. For the Republicans the eastern portion of the country contains more than half the congressional districts that could be pivotal in 2014; four are in New York, two in Ohio, three in Florida, and Illinois, Michigan, Virginia, and New Jersey each have one. The remaining Republican congressional districts are in Colorado, Nevada, and California.

We selected these congressional districts because electoral margins were all single digit percentages in 2012 and the Latino population is growing in these areas as well.

⁶ Matt Barreto, March 21, 2013. “What the GOP has to gain – and lose – among Latinos when it comes to immigration reform.” <http://www.latinodecisions.com/blog/2013/03/21/what-the-gop-has-to-gain-and-lose-among-latinos-when-it-comes-to-immigration-reform/>. Last accessed February 7, 2014.

2.2 Republican Vulnerability

The story of Republican vulnerability is about both the growth of the Latino population and the growing consensus around the need for immigration reform.

In terms of Latino population growth, there are new “emerging states” experiencing demographic change that could alter electoral outcomes at the congressional district level in the future. Where Republicans have traditionally had partisan advantage in key congressional districts that advantage may slip away in 2014 if current issues such as immigration remain in the minds of voters.

There are nine Republican-held congressional districts that are within the margin of Latino voters; five are in states on the Eastern seaboard (NY-2, VA-1, FL-2), three are Western states (CA, CO, NV), and one is in Illinois. This is shown in Table 3; the “Margin Votes” column has the vote difference between the winning and losing candidates in the November 2012 election, the “# Latino Voters” column has the projected number of Latino voters in the district in 2014. This illustrates the potentially pivotal role Latino voters can play in these nine districts, and their ability to swing victories to either party in future elections. Additionally, it is noteworthy that two of the nine Republican legislators, Davis and Collins, are freshmen and the four incumbents, Webster, Grimm, Denham, and Buchanan, are new to their districts. Stein and Bickers (2000) point out vulnerable members are freshmen members of Congress and members whose prior margin of victory is small (below 60%).

While Latinos are not within the margin in the remaining seven congressional districts displayed in Table 3, we believe our population projections for 2014 are cautious in Ohio, New Jersey, New York, Florida, and Virginia; Latino growth rates in these emerging states are likely to exceed our modest estimates, making the hold that Republicans have on these seven districts more tenuous beyond 2014.

2.3 Democratic Vulnerability

Both major parties make claims that their agendas serve the interests of America's racial and ethnic minorities but the divergent partisan outcomes shown here suggest that only one party – the Democrats – can legitimately claim to have regularly and consistently improved the economic standing of the minority population in the last half century. In sharp contrast, minorities have experienced meager gains or even suffered losses under most Republican administrations. (Hajnal and Horowitz 2012: p. 31)

Commentators have recently suggested that Democratic lawmakers may be vulnerable if comprehensive immigration reform is *passed*. The counterfactual claim is House Democrats “face little benefit and even, paradoxically, the possibility

Table 3: Marginal Republican Congressional Districts in 2012 – Projecting 2014.

State	Cong. district	Name	Won by	Term status	2012			2014				
					Margin %	Margin votes	Winners #	Winners %	Challenger #	Challenger %	% Latino voters	# Latino voters
IL	13	Davis	R	<i>f</i>	0.30%	1002	137,034	46.50	136,032	46.20	2.96	8083
NY	27	Collins	R	<i>f</i>	1.60%	5001	161,220	50.80	156,219	49.20	2.24	7111
CO	6	Coffman	R	<i>i</i>	2.00%	7001	163,938	47.80	156,937	45.80	17.70	56,795
FL	10	Webster	R	<i>i newCD</i>	3.40%	11,075	164,649	51.70	153,574	48.30	16.07	51,138
NY	23	Reed	R	<i>i newCD</i>	3.80%	10,134	137,669	51.90	127,535	48.10	2.24	5941
OH	16	Renacci	R	<i>i newCD</i>	4.00%	14,565	185,165	52.00	170,600	48.00	2.07	7364
NY	11	Grimm	R	<i>i newCD</i>	5.40%	10,690	103,118	52.20	92,428	46.80	12.32	24,091
CA	10	Denham	R	<i>i newCD</i>	5.40%	11,331	110,265	52.70	98,934	47.30	28.35	59,308
FL	2	Southerland	R	<i>i</i>	5.40%	18,222	175,856	52.70	157,634	47.30	5.43	18,109
NY	19	Gibson	R	<i>i newCD</i>	5.80%	16,169	149,736	52.90	133,567	47.10	4.48	12,692
OH	6	Johnson	R	<i>i</i>	6.60%	20,092	164,536	53.30	144,444	46.70	4.46	13,781
FL	16	Buchanan	R	<i>i newCD</i>	7.20%	25,218	187,147	53.60	161,929	46.40	9.86	34,419
NV	3	Heck	R	<i>i</i>	7.50%	20,421	137,244	50.40	116,823	42.90	28.26	71,799
VA	2	Ringell	R	<i>i</i>	7.60%	23,683	166,231	53.80	142,548	46.20	7.95	24,548
NJ	3	Runyon	R	<i>i</i>	8.80%	28,747	174,253	53.70	145,506	44.90	6.16	19,697
MI	3	Amash	R	<i>i</i>	8.40%	27,567	171,675	52.60	144,108	44.20	8.55	26,999

of significant losses,” because “a bipartisan compromise on immigration reform might derail any attempt to retake the House if it allows the GOP to gain even a little ground with Hispanics.”⁷ This line of argument is predicated upon questionable assumptions. First is the notion that retrospective Hispanic citizen voters will attribute comprehensive immigration reform as solely or mostly due to the GOP. Second, at least some citizen voters in Democratic congressional districts will want to reward the GOP for comprehensive immigration reform by voting for the GOP candidate in the next election. On an emotional level these points may seem reasonable, however, on a political level other considerations limit the veracity of the theory. It would seem that the GOP could gain ground; irrespective of the final contents of the comprehensive immigration reform (CIR) package⁸ poll data indicates that 85% of undocumented immigrants have a family member who is a US citizen. Among these, 62% have at least one US born child, and 29% have a spouse who is a US citizen or legal permanent resident.⁹

What does it take for the GOP to yield electoral benefit? To observe this possibility requires a nuanced understanding of the Latino vote. We could argue that GOP leadership on immigration would immediately move lots of voters. However on a political level, logical and empirical inconsistencies emerge. To reward the GOP necessarily means punishing the Democrat in a district. Again, irrespective of the contents of whatever bill comes to pass – if any at all – Hispanic citizen voters support of the GOP candidate in 2014 requires a voter in a previously Democratic district to cast their ballot in favor of a candidate that is less liberal than the least liberal Democrat running (either the incumbent or a primary challenger). The vote-switching literature (a good summary is in Carrubba and Timpone 2005) does allow that individuals having different policy preferences across different levels of government might prefer Democratic congresspersons because they will “bring home the bacon” and Republican presidents because they will impose more fiscal austerity. But vote-switching behavior by the most liberal Latinos is unlikely in the same congressional district. In sum, for the ostensible “harm-to-Democrats” theory to work, second order effects would be larger than first order ones; among Liberal Latinos, that would be as surprising as it is suspicious.

7 Alex Engler 2013. <http://gppreview.com/2013/02/12/analysis-the-electoral-implications-of-immigration-reform-in-the-house-of-representatives/>. Last accessed February 7, 2014.

8 S. 744 (aka “CIR”) currently includes a 13-year path to citizenship, about \$2000 in fees, and an English language requirement. <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?c113:S.744>. Last accessed February 7, 2014.

9 Matt Baretto and Gary Segura, April 15, 2013. “Poll of undocumented immigrants reveals strong family and social connections in America.” <http://www.latinodecisions.com/blog/2013/04/15/poll-of-undocumented-immigrants-reveals-strong-family-and-social-connections-in-america/>. Last accessed February 7, 2014.

On the other hand, there are three other paths to electoral influence that could tilt in the GOP's direction. First, there is demonstrably a Latino population that is less liberal and less predisposed to Democratic vote. These voters (switchers) have a history of voting for the GOP, may not be as liberal as other Latinos, and find themselves in the Democratic column precisely because of the GOP's rhetoric on immigration and other Latino matters these last 20 years. Earlier we illustrated that almost half of all Latino registered voters have a history of having voted GOP in the past. The existence of a sizable cohort of past-GOP voters suggest that there is considerable room for growth once the impediment of immigration is removed.

In the simplest terms, if 40% of Latinos voted for George W Bush and only 23% (Latino Decisions estimate) voted for Mitt Romney, this implies that a significant share – maybe as much as 17–20% of the national Latino electorate – are movable, *absent the anti-Latino and anti-immigrant rhetoric and party image*.

Second, there is the issue of abstention. Often less examined in the immigration debate is the peril Democratic representatives may face if they fail to act or are perceived to have been ineffective. President Obama faced a significant uphill climb with Latino voters in 2012, whose enthusiasm was low given the record deportations and the failure even to propose comprehensive immigration reform legislation in the first term. This is not to say that voters were anxious to vote Republican. It is to say that they might sit on their hands and not vote at all.

Finally, the decline of hostile rhetoric from the GOP may simply result in under-mobilization for Democratic-leaning Latinos. That is, the poisonous debate over immigration these last several elections has helped to mobilize a larger share of left-leaning Latino voters to register and turnout. Even if the GOP does not persuade a meaningful share of voters to move to its column, nor do the Democrats do anything to disappoint them, simply eliminating the rhetoric and deemphasizing the issue of immigration could provide rhetorical space for GOP brand recovery. More importantly, its absence will remove the mobilizing effect the issue and rhetoric previously had, conceivably reducing Democratic vote share merely through declining enthusiasm for voting.

There is evidence of this enthusiasm gap in the record of the 2010 election. Latino Decisions weekly tracking poll showed significant improvement in enthusiasm and intended turnout *after* Sen. Harry Reid brought the Dream Act up for a vote in the Senate. That is, absent action – even unsuccessful action – the Latino electorate who might otherwise have been Democratic votes was less enthused and less likely to turn out. Action motivated enthusiasm. Alternatively, evidence is also clear that hostile GOP rhetoric motivates Latinos to the polls. Less hostility, and the passage of immigration reform, may demobilize parts of this electorate. Thus, we suggest that, for the Democrats, abstention may be the greatest risk to their Latino vote share, either due to inaction or a friendlier opposition.

The Southwest provides us with past-as-prologue for the rest of the nation. In California, Representative Brownley of the 26th congressional district won her seat in 2012 in the traditionally Republican bastion of Ventura. Brownley defeated Republican powerhouse Tony Strickland. Strickland had represented the area in both the State Senate and Assembly and had held leadership positions in the Republican Party. Brownley's winning margin of 14,209 votes was within the margin of Latino voters in the district who number more than 78,000. In the 26th congressional district, Latino voters were decisive in the Democratic victory. As a state lawmaker, Brownley had a long history of supporting issues that benefit undocumented people, including legislation authorizing Driver's Licenses for individuals ineligible for a Social Security number, in-state college tuition for undocumented immigrants, prohibition on requiring electronic employment verification, to name but a few, and she supports the federal CIR.¹⁰ Could the Democrats lose the 26th? Anything is possible, but it is unlikely generally and highly unlikely that sufficient numbers of Latinos would defect to "reward" a hypothetical Republican in 2014. But there remains the possibility that Latino turnout could decline sufficiently to imperil the incumbent, should immigration rhetoric disappear from the electoral landscape.

Texas provides another example. Texas gained four seats as a result of the 2010 census reapportionment, more than any other state, and the expectation was that all four would elect Republicans. In fact, they were designed that way. The chair of the state Senate redistricting committee, Republican Senator Kel Seliger, vowed that while the Legislature would adhere to federal civil rights law in redrawing the map, "it is going to look Republican. The only question is how Republican."¹¹ In 2014, Texans are going to redraw congressional district once again because a federal court ruled that prior maps were enacted "with discriminatory purpose" against Latinos in violation of the Voting Rights Act. In spite of that, and a subsequent federal court case, all four congressional districts elected Democrats. Representative Gallego currently holds the 23rd district seat, which he won with a vote margin within the Latino margin. Even though Gallego's margin of victory was very small (9129) in 2012, it is improbable that significant numbers of Latino voters will support a conservative candidate in 2014.

Table 4 shows that margins for all but two Democrats are <5%, and Ruiz in the 36th district of California is only slightly over at 5.80%. However, these margins do not necessarily contribute to Democratic vulnerability in future elections.

10 Project Vote Smart "Representative Julia Brownley's Voting Records on Immigration." <http://votesmart.org/candidate/key-votes/59904/julia-brownley/40/immigration#.UXWPqK2bTo>. Last accessed August 23, 2013.

11 Todd J. Gillman 2010. <http://www.dallasnews.com/news/politics/headlines/20101222-2010-census-results-give-texas-four-additional-seats-in-congress.ece>. Last accessed April 22, 2013.

Table 4: Marginal Democratic Congressional Districts in 2012 – Projecting 2014.

State	Cong. district	Name	Won by	Term status	Margin	Margin votes	Winners #	Winners # votes	Challenger #	Challenger # votes	2012		2014	
											%	votes	%	votes
NC	7	McIntyre	D	<i>i</i>	0.20	654	168,695	50.10	168,041	49.90	168,041	8.39	28,252	
UT	4	Matheson	D	<i>i new CD</i>	0.30	768	119,803	48.80	119,035	48.50	119,035	13.80	32,960	
FL	18	Murphy	D	<i>f</i>	0.60	1904	166,257	50.30	164,353	49.70	164,353	13.70	45,294	
AZ	2	Barber	D	<i>i new CD</i>	0.80	2454	147,338	50.40	144,884	49.60	144,884	24.82	72,530	
IL	10	Schneider	D	<i>f</i>	1.20	3326	133,890	50.60	130,564	49.40	130,564	18.35	48,527	
MA	6	Tierney	D	<i>i</i>	1.20	4330	180,942	48.30	176,612	47.10	176,612	5.26	18,807	
CA	52	Peters	D	<i>f</i>	2.40	6992	151,451	51.20	144,459	48.80	144,459	10.66	31,544	
CT	5	Esty	D	<i>f</i>	2.60	7461	146,098	51.30	138,637	48.70	138,637	15.72	44,760	
CA	7	Bera	D	<i>f</i>	3.40	9191	141,241	51.70	132,050	48.30	132,050	11.68	31,920	
CA	26	Brownley	D	<i>f</i>	5.40	14209	139,072	52.70	124,863	47.30	124,863	29.71	78,415	
AZ	1	Kirkpatrick	D	<i>f</i>	3.70	9180	122,774	48.80	113,594	45.10	113,594	20.71	48,952	
NY	18	Maloney	D	<i>f</i>	3.80	10796	143,845	51.90	133,049	48.10	133,049	12.43	34,418	
AZ	9	Sinema	D	<i>f</i>	4.10	10251	121,881	48.70	111,630	44.60	111,630	25.63	59,849	
TX	23	Gallego	D	<i>f</i>	4.70	9129	96,676	50.30	87,547	45.60	87,547	67.57	124,479	
NY	1	Bishop	D	<i>i</i>	4.80	13548	145,198	52.40	131,650	47.60	131,650	10.30	28,515	
CA	36	Ruiz	D	<i>f</i>	5.80	12236	110,189	52.90	97,953	47.10	97,953	31.19	64,919	
CA	33	Waxman	D	<i>i</i>	8.00	25200	171,860	54.00	146,660	46.00	146,660	10.09	32,139	

If Democrats are vulnerable, it is to other Democrats that are more liberal than Brownley and Gallego, not more conservative. In such instances Latino voters can certainly play spoiler in those districts if they decide to support other Democratic candidates in 2014. The bigger challenge for 11 of the Democrats in Table 4 is that they are first-term freshman lawmakers. There is an old Washington adage that the toughest re-election for a member of Congress is always his or her first. And two Democrats are virtual freshmen because they are incumbents in new districts; Representative Matheson in the 4th district of Utah and Representative Barber in the 2nd district of Arizona – both were victorious in 2012 by tiny margins of <1%.

3 Concluding Thoughts and Considerations

We recognize that particular election results should always be interpreted with caution, as the most important long-term factor shaping each party's electoral fortunes is the distribution of partisanship in the electorate. Nevertheless, there are intervening factors and events that can significantly alter the partisan dynamic. We have attempted to illustrate how such factors and events worked in the 2012 election and might work in the 2014 midterm election.

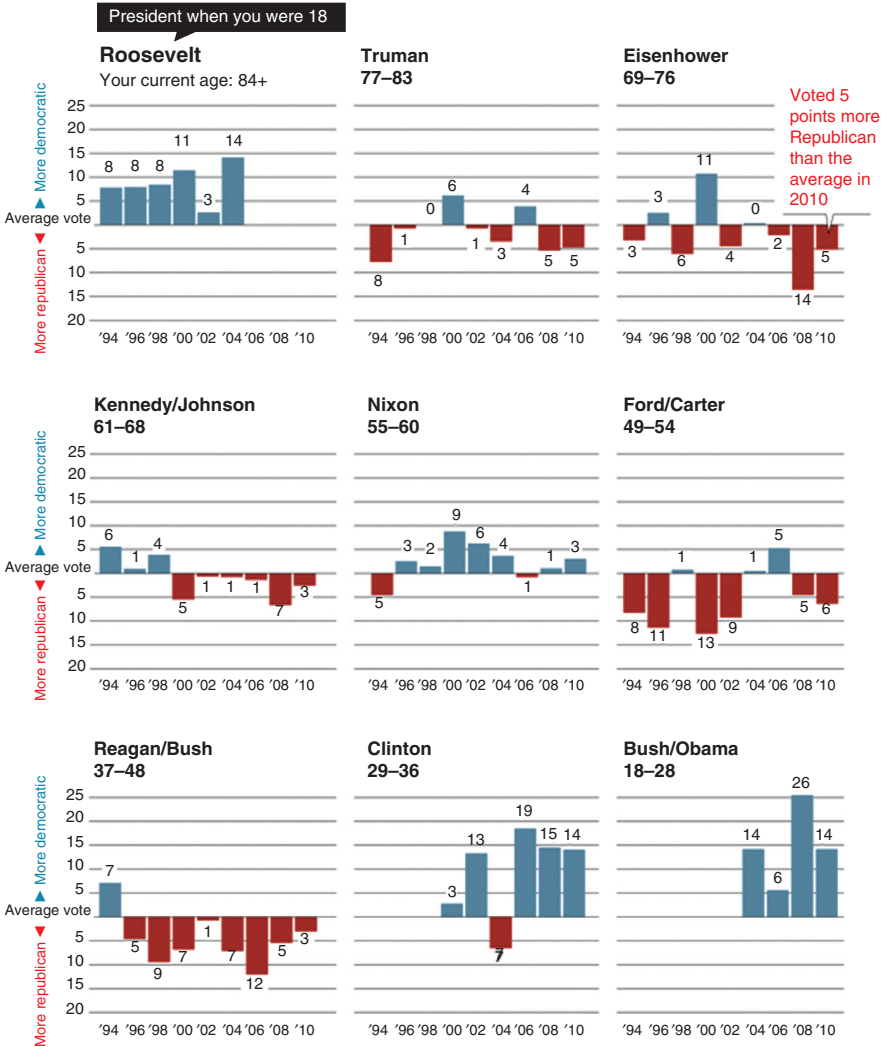
Other contravening variables might enter into the equation as well, particularly age. This potential impact of age on voting and partisanship is shown in Figure 6. "The point is, cohort replacement may not give Democrats a sizable enough long-term advantage to insulate the party from the ups-and-downs of the business cycle and other events. And that would continue to produce the fairly regular oscillation of party power that has characterized American politics for decades if not longer."¹²

Finally, Hispanic voters backed President Obama by a margin of 71 to 27, up from his 67 to 31 victory in 2008. But how much of that shift is due to the changing composition of the Latino electorate, and how much stems from preference changes among Latinos who voted in both elections? That question has important electoral implications. Findings indicate that Hispanic adults who supported McCain stuck with Romney only 65% of the time, while non-Hispanic McCain backers were with him 84% of the time. The relatively low level of Hispanic support for Governor Romney did not simply come from the changing composition of the electorate, but from changes in preferences among Latino adults as well.¹³ For the GOP to fend off electoral consequences of demographic change,

¹² John Sides 2013. "More on the Republican Re-boot: A Rejoinder." <http://themonkeycage.org/2013/03/31/more-on-the-republican-re-boot-a-rejoinder/>. Last accessed April 22, 2013.

¹³ Dan Hopkins 2012. "Shifting Voter Support, 2008–2012". <http://themonkeycage.org/2012/11/07/shifting-voter-support-2008-to-2012/>. Last accessed April 22, 2013.

How much more Democratic or Republican each group voted relative to the national average in each election



PEW RESEARCH CENTER Based on likely voters from Pew Research Center surveys conducted in the fall of each election year. Presidential vote for 1996, 2000, 2004 and 2008. Generic House vote 1994, 1998, 2002, 2006 and 2010.

Figure 6: Presidential Legacies: How Those Who Came of Age Under Different Presidents Have Voted.

Source: Pew Research Center.

they must find a way to persuade those Latino voters open to GOP voting that the age of hostility is over. The failure of immigration reform would make this all-but-impossible.

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