

2008 National Survey of Latinos: Hispanics and the 2008 Election

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Overview

Hispanic registered voters support Democrat Barack Obama for president over Republican John McCain by 66% to 23%, according to a nationwide survey of Latinos conducted by the Pew Hispanic Center, a project of the Pew Research Center, from June 9 through July 13, 2008.

(FIGURE 1)

The presumptive Democratic nominee's strong showing in this survey represents a sharp reversal in his fortunes from the primaries, when Obama lost the Latino vote to Hillary Clinton by a margin of nearly two-to-one, giving rise to speculation in some quarters that Hispanics were disinclined to vote for a black candidate.

But in this new survey, three times more respondents said Obama's being black would help him (32%) with Latinos than said it would hurt him (11%); the majority (53%) said his race would make no difference to Latinos.

(FIGURE 2)

Obama is rated favorably by 76% of Latino registered voters, making him much more popular among that voting group than McCain (44% favorable) and President Bush (27% favorable). He now appears to be even more popular than Hillary Clinton among Latinos (73% favorable).

(FIGURE 3)

More than three quarters of Latinos who reported that they voted for Clinton in the primaries now say they are inclined to vote for Obama in the fall election, while just 8% say they are inclined to vote for McCain. This means that Obama is doing better among Hispanic Clinton supporters than he is among non-Hispanic white Clinton supporters, 70% of whom now say they have transferred their allegiance to Obama while 18% say they plan to vote for McCain, according to a recent [Pew Research Center for the People and the Press](#) survey.

Latino registered voters rank education, the cost of living, jobs and health care as the most important issues in the fall campaign, with crime lagging a bit behind those four; and the war in Iraq and immigration still farther behind. On each of these seven issues, Obama is strongly favored over McCain—by lopsided margins ranging from about three-to-one on education, health care, the economy and immigration, to about two-to-one on Iraq and on crime.

In addition to their strong support for Obama, Latino voters have moved sharply into the Democratic camp in the past two years, reversing a pro-GOP tide that had been running among Latinos earlier in the decade. Some 65% of Latino registered voters now say they identify with or lean to the Democratic Party; compared with just 26% who identify with or lean to the GOP. This 39 percentage point Democratic Party identification edge is larger than it has been at any time this decade; as recently as 2006, the partisan gap was just 21 percentage points.

(FIGURE 4)

The movement to the Democrats appears driven in part by an overall dissatisfaction with the state of the country—70% of Latino registered voters say the country is going in the wrong direction—and also with a growing view among Latinos voters that the Democratic Party is better attuned to the concerns of their community. More than half of Latino registered voters (55%) say this; while just 5% say Republicans are more concerned about Latinos.

Also, some 78% of Latino registered voters say they are following the election very or somewhat closely this year, up from the 72% who said the same thing at this stage of the 2004 campaign. These poll findings, coming on the heels of a spirited Obama-Clinton nomination fight that led to rises in the Latino share of the vote in many Democratic primaries, suggest the Hispanic community is politically energized heading into the fall election campaign.

Hispanics are one of the most sought-after voting groups in the 2008 election—not so much because of their absolute numerical strength (they comprise about 15% of the total U.S. population but only 9% of the eligible electorate), but because of their strategic placement on the Electoral College map. At least four states where Hispanics are heavily concentrated—Florida, Colorado, New Mexico and Nevada—are expected to be battlegrounds in the fall campaign.

Beyond this particular election, one of the key long-term political goals of the Bush administration during the past eight years has been to make the Republican Party competitive among Hispanics—a group that is already the nation's largest minority and that, by 2050, will comprise 29% of the nation's population, according to [projections by the Pew Hispanic Center](#).

In 2004, Bush captured 40% of the Latino vote,¹ a record for a GOP presidential candidate and roughly double the 21% that Republican presidential candidate Robert Dole had received in 1996. But in the 2006 congressional campaign, GOP

¹ There is continuing uncertainty over whether President Bush received 40% of the Hispanic vote in 2004, as indicated by the 51 state exit polls conducted on Election Day, or 44%, as indicated by the nationwide National Election Pool exit poll. Suro, Fry and Passel (2005) spell out the reasons for the differing estimates.

candidates received only 30% of the Latino vote. In short, Latinos are a fast-growing community that is strategically situated in presidential elections and that has a recent history of moving its support across party lines.

This report is based on a telephone survey of a nationally-representative sample of 2015 Hispanics ages 18 and older, 892 of whom report being registered to vote. Interviews were conducted from June 9 – July 13, 2008. The margin of error for the full sample is plus or minus 2.8 percentage points at the 95% confidence level; for registered voters the margin of error is plus or minus 4.4 percentage points. For a full description of the survey methodology, see Appendix 1.

Key findings in this report:

- Among Hispanic registered voters, 66% would vote for, or lean toward voting for, Barack Obama; 23% would vote for, or lean toward, John McCain.
- More than three-quarters (76%) of Hispanic registered voters have a favorable opinion of Obama and 73% have a favorable opinion of Clinton. In contrast, 44% of Hispanics have a favorable opinion of McCain and 27% have a favorable opinion of George W. Bush.
- More than three-in-four Hispanics who voted for Clinton in a Democratic primary or caucus this year say they would vote for, or lean toward voting for, Obama, while 8% of Clinton voters say they would vote for, or lean toward voting for, McCain.
- Latino registered voters are almost three times more likely to say the Obama's being black will help him (32%) with Hispanic voters than hurt him (11%); the majority (53%) say his race will make no difference.
- More Latino registered voters say that McCain's being white will hurt him (24%) than say it will help him (12%); they majority (58%) say his race will make no difference.
- Family and pocketbook issues, such as education (93%), the cost of living (92%), jobs (91%) and healthcare (90%), are most important to Hispanic registered voters. Fewer Hispanics say that crime (82%), the war in Iraq (75%) and immigration (75%) are extremely or very important issues to them personally.
- By a margin of more than three-to-one Hispanic registered voters believe that Obama will do a better job than McCain of dealing with education (66% versus 18%), jobs (65% versus 19%), the cost of living (64% versus 19%), health care (64% versus 19%) and immigration (59% versus 19%). They also believe, by a margin of about two-to-one, that Obama will do a

better job than McCain on crime (50% versus 26%) and the war in Iraq (58% versus 27%).

- Among Latino registered voters, 55% say that Obama is better for Hispanics, 11% say the McCain is better and 29% say that there is no difference between the candidates.
- Half of all Latino voters (50%) believe that Obama is better for immigrants, 12% believe that McCain is better and 32% say that there is no difference between the candidates.
- More than two-thirds (70%) of Latino registered voters are dissatisfied with the country's direction. In contrast, 27% of Latino voters are satisfied with the how things are going in the country.
- Nearly four-in-ten (38%) Hispanic voters say that Latinos' situation in the country has gotten worse in the past year, compared with just 18% who say it has gotten better.
- More than half of Latino voters (55%) say that the Democratic Party is better for Latinos while just 5% say that the Republican Party is better for Latinos.
- Hispanic voters increasingly identify with the Democratic Party. Among Latino registered voters who identify with either political party or who say they lean towards that party, Democrats now hold a 39 percentage point advantage, larger than at any time in the past decade, with 65% of registered voters identifying as or leaning towards the Democrats, and 26% identifying as or leaning towards the Republicans.
- Latino voters are following the presidential campaign more closely than in 2004. In 2008, 78% of Hispanic registered voters say they are following the presidential race very closely or somewhat closely compared with 72% who said this at a similar time in the 2004 race.
- About one-in-seven Latino voters (15%) say they contributed money to a candidate running for public office in the past year. Half of those who contributed money to a candidate say they did so using the internet.
- Among Hispanic registered voters, more than half (56%) say that they voted in a presidential primary or caucus this year. Almost three-quarters (74%) say they did so in a Democratic primary or caucus and 21% say they did so in a Republican primary or caucus.

About this Report

The 2008 National Survey of Latinos focuses on Hispanic registered voters' views on the presidential candidates, the presidential campaign and Hispanic political participation. The survey was conducted from June 9 – July 14, 2008 among a randomly selected, nationally representative sample of 2015 Hispanic adults, 892 of whom report that they are U.S. citizens and registered to vote. The margin of error for the full sample is plus or minus 2.8 percentage points and for registered voters 4.4 percentage points.

A Note on Terminology

The terms “Latino” and “Hispanic” are used interchangeably in this report, as are the terms “foreign born” and “immigrant.”

The terms “whites”, “blacks” and “Asians” are used to refer to the non-Hispanic components of their population.

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Hispanic Voter Participation Trends²

Because Latinos are more inclined than other Americans to either be under age 18, or non-citizens, or both, their share of the eligible electorate (8.9% in 2007) lags behind their share of the total U.S. population (15.5% in 2007). In addition, the turnout rate of Hispanic eligible voters in U.S. general elections has historically been lower than the turnout rates of black and white eligible voters. Since 1974, in presidential and midterm elections, the Latino eligible voter turnout rate has lagged behind white eligible voters by between 15 and 22 percentage points. In 2004, the last presidential election year, 47% of Latino eligible voters reported that they had voted. In contrast, 60% of black eligible voters and 67% of white eligible voters reported that they had voted in the 2004 presidential election. In 2000, a presidential election year without a presidential incumbent, the voter turnout rate among Latino eligible voters was 57%. Among white eligible voters, it was 72%, and among black eligible voters, it was 68%.

(FIGURE 5)

Similarly, voter registration trends among Latinos have lagged behind those of non-Latinos. In 2004, 58% of U.S. citizen Latinos reported that they were registered to vote, compared with a voter registration rate of 75% for whites and 69% for blacks. In 2006, a midterm election year, 54% of Latinos were registered to vote, compared to 71% for whites and 61% for blacks.

(FIGURE 6)

Participation in this year's election cycle

Latino participation appears to be on track to be higher this year than in 2004. While no overall national voter turnout rate estimates are available for the primaries, findings from state exit polls taken during the Democratic primaries show that Latino voters increased their share of the vote in many states, with especially large increases in participation in [California](#) and [Texas](#) ([Minushkin and Lopez 2008](#)). In addition, this new Pew Hispanic Center survey finds that 56% of Latino registered voters say they voted in the primaries this past spring, with 17% of registered voters reporting that they had voted for the first time.

Two-thirds of Hispanic registered voters are native born (67) and 33% are immigrants who are naturalized U.S. citizens. Younger Latinos ages 18 to 29

² These results are based on tabulations from the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey from November 2004. All voter turnout rates are for U.S. citizens ages 18 or older. Note that voter turnout rates are based on self-reports of voting activity.

comprise 25% of all Hispanic registered voters while older Hispanics ages 60 and older are 18% of all Hispanic registered voters. More than one-third (36%) of all Latino registered voters have household income of less than \$30,000, 28% have an income of \$50,000 or more. More than half (53%) have attended at least some college, but 24% do not have a high school diploma.

(TABLE 1)

Many Latinos have participated in the election to date in other ways as well. Among registered voters, 15% say that they contributed money to a candidate running for office, half of them doing so via the internet, 15% report having attended a political or campaign-related meeting, and 45% have used the internet to find information about candidates.

Also, 78% of Latino registered voters say they are following the election very closely or somewhat closely, up from 60% in October [2007](#) and 72% in July [2004](#).

Latino registered voters are as likely as other registered voters to say that they intend to vote in the November presidential election. Among Latino registered voters, 94% say that they intend to vote in this year's presidential election, compared with 95% of all registered voters who said the same thing in a recent survey by the [Pew Research Center for the People and the Press 2008](#)).

Latino Presidential Vote, 1992-2004

Over the past four presidential election cycles, Latino support for Democratic presidential candidates has ranged from 53% in 2004 to 72% in 1996. Support for Republican presidential candidates has ranged from 21% in 1996 to 40% in 2004.³

(FIGURE 7)

2008 Candidate Preference and Demographics

Support for Obama is strong across all demographic groups of Hispanic registered voters, with few significant differences by gender, age, education, income, or immigrant status.

³ There is continuing uncertainty over whether President Bush received 40% of the Hispanic vote in 2004, as indicated by the 51 state exit polls conducted on Election Day, or 44%, as indicated by the nationwide National Election Pool exit poll. Suro, Fry and Passel (2005) spell out the reasons for the differing estimates.

Religion is the only major demographic category in which there are significantly different levels of support among Hispanics. McCain has greater support among Hispanic registered voters who are Evangelical, Protestant or some other religion than among Catholics—33% versus 17%. Latino registered voters who are Evangelical, Protestant or some other religion make up 33% of all Latino registered voters. Obama has stronger support among Hispanic registered voters who are Catholic (71%) than among Latinos who are Evangelical, Protestant or some other religion (59%). Latino Catholics are 56% of all Hispanic registered voters.

Native-born U.S. citizens (65%) and naturalized citizens (68%) show similar levels of support for Barack Obama. There are no significant differences in support for Obama or McCain among Hispanic registered voters with different national origins.

Finally, Obama's support among Hispanic registered voters who preferred to be interviewed in Spanish for this survey is not very different than among those who preferred to be interviewed in English—71% compared with 64%. Overall, 73% of Hispanic registered voters preferred to be interviewed in English and 27% preferred to be interviewed in Spanish.⁴

(TABLE 2)

Candidate Preference and Race

The candidacy of Barack Obama has raised the issue of whether the country is ready for a black president as well as whether Hispanics are ready for a black president. During the Democratic primaries, many wondered whether Latinos' strong support for Clinton over Obama was somehow related to the candidates' races.⁵ However, a [Pew Hispanic Center analysis](#) of exit polls from the Super Tuesday Democratic primaries found that there was no difference in support for Hillary Clinton among Hispanic voters who said the candidate's race was important in deciding their vote (64%) and those who said that the candidate's race was *not* important in deciding their vote (63%). Similarly, there was no difference in support for Barack Obama among Hispanics who said race was important (35%) and those who said race was *not* important (35%).

⁴ For the full, nationally representative sample of Hispanics, 50% preferred to be interviewed in English and 50% in Spanish. Among the native-born in the full sample, 86% preferred English and 14% preferred Spanish. For the foreign-born in the sample, 25% preferred to be interviewed in English and 75% preferred Spanish.

⁵ See, for example, Arrillaga, Pauline, (February 10, 2008) Can Black Candidate Woo Hispanics?, [Associated Press](#); Reno, Jaime (January 26, 2008) Black Brown Divide, [Newsweek](#); Nagourney, Adam and Jennifer Steinhauer (January 15, 2008) In Obama's Pursuit of Latinos, Race Plays a Role, [The New York Times](#);

In this new survey, nearly a third (32%) of Hispanic registered voters say they believe that Obama's being black will *help* him with Hispanic voters in the general election, while about one-in-ten (11%) say they believe his race will *hurt* him. A majority (53%) says they do not believe that Obama's race will make a difference to Hispanic voters

When a parallel question was posed about the impact of McCain's being white, the results were reversed. More respondents (24%) said that being white will *hurt* McCain with Hispanic voters than said it will help him (12%). Here again, however, the majority (58%) said they believed that McCain's race would make no difference.

By heavy margins, respondents said that the candidates' races will not make a difference in deciding their own personal vote—72% said this about Obama's race and 82% said the same about McCain's race. However, 19% said that in deciding their own vote Obama's race will help him; while just 6% said it will hurt him. As for McCain, 8% said his race will hurt him and just 7% said it will help him.

(FIGURE 8)

Latino registered voters ages 18 to 29 (46%) are more likely than those ages 40 and older (25%) to say that Obama's race will help him with Hispanic voters. Hispanics ages 55 and older are more likely than Hispanics 18 to 29 to say that Obama's race will not make a difference to Hispanic voters—61% versus 40%. There are no other large differences within other demographic categories on the importance of the candidates' races for Hispanic voters.

(FIGURE 9)

Campaign Issues

Family and pocketbook issues, such as education (93%), the cost of living (92%), jobs (91%) and healthcare (90%), are extremely or very important to Hispanic registered voters. Fewer Hispanics say that crime (82%), the war in Iraq (75%) and immigration (75%) are extremely or very important issues to them personally.

(FIGURE 10)

By a margin of more than three-to-one Hispanic registered voters believe that Obama will do a better job than McCain of dealing with education (66% versus 18%), jobs (65% versus 19%), the cost of living (64% versus 19%), health care (64% versus 19%) and immigration (59% versus 19%). They also believe, by a margin of about two-to-one that Obama will do a better job than McCain on crime (50% versus 26%) and the war in Iraq (58% versus 27%).

(FIGURE 11)

Party Identification and Demographics

Hispanic voters increasingly identify with the Democratic Party. Among Latino registered voters who identify with either political party or who say they lean towards that party, Democrats now hold a 39 percentage point advantage, larger than at any time over the past decade, with 65% of registered voters identifying as or leaning towards the Democratic Party, and 26% identifying as or leaning towards the Republican party.

(FIGURE 12)

Considering those who identify with a specific political party, and excluding party-leaners, over half of all Latino registered voters identified as Democrats (51%). Just 16% of registered voters identify as Republicans, and 23% identify as independents.

(TABLE 3)

The Candidates, the Parties and Hispanic Concerns

A majority (55%) of Latino registered voters think that Obama is better for Hispanics. In contrast, just 11% say that McCain is better for Hispanics and 29% say there is no difference between the two candidates. Hispanics who are dissatisfied with the country's direction are more likely to say that Obama is better for Latinos (62%) than are Hispanics who are satisfied with the country's direction (40%). Those who are following the presidential race closely are also more likely to say that Obama is better for Latinos than are Hispanics who are not following the presidential race closely, 57% compared with 46%.

(FIGURE 13)

Within demographic categories, there are few large differences on which candidate is better for Latinos. However, men are more likely than are women to say that Obama is better for Hispanics—60% compared with 50%.

Most Hispanic registered voters also think that Obama is better for immigrants (50%), while just 12% think McCain is better and 32% who say there is no difference between the two candidates. As with which candidate is better for Latinos, there are few differences with demographic categories.

(TABLES 4 and 5)

More than half (55%) of all Latino registered voters say that the Democratic Party has more concern for Hispanics, while just 5% say that of the Republican Party and 35% say there is no difference between the two parties in their concern for Hispanics. Catholics (59%) are more likely to say that the Democratic Party has more concern for Latinos than are Evangelicals, Protestants and those who are some other religion (45%). Evangelicals, Protestants and those who are some other religion (42%) are more likely to say that there is no difference between the parties than are Catholics (32%).

(TABLE 6)

Appendix 1

The study was conducted for The Pew Hispanic Center via telephone by ICR, an independent research company. Interviews were conducted from June 9 – July 13, 2008 among a nationally representative sample of 2,015 Latino respondents age 18 and older. Of those respondents, 711 were Native born (including Puerto Rico), 1,302 were Foreign born (excluding Puerto Rico) and 892 were registered voters. The margin of error for total respondents is plus or minus 2.8 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. The margin of error for Native born respondents is plus or minus 4.8 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. The margin of error for Foreign born respondents is plus or minus 3.4 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. The margin of error for registered voters is plus or minus 4.4 percentage points.

For this survey, ICR maintained a staff of Spanish-speaking interviewers whom, when contacting a household, were able to offer respondents the option of completing the survey in Spanish or in English. A total of 710 respondents were surveyed in English and 1,248 respondents interviewed in Spanish (and another 57 equally in both languages).

Eligible Respondent

The survey was administered to any male or female age 18 and older that is of Latino origin or descent.

Field Period

The field period for this study was June 9 – July 13, 2008. The interviewing was conducted by ICR/International Communications Research in Media, PA. All interviews were conducted using the Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) system. The CATI system ensured that questions followed logical skip patterns and that the listed attributes automatically rotated, eliminating “question position” bias.

Sampling Methodology

The study employed both landline telephone exchanges and cell phone telephone exchanges. Both sample frames were stratified via the Optimal Sample Allocation sampling technique. This technique provides a highly accurate sampling frame, thereby reducing the cost per *effective* interview. In this case, we examined a list of all telephone exchanges within a target area (national, by state, etc.) and listed them based on Latino households. We then divided these exchanges into various groups, or strata.

Consequently, we used a disproportionate stratified RDD sample of Latino households. The primary stratification variables are the estimates of Latino household incidence and heritage in each NPA-NXX (area code and exchange) as provided by the GENESYS System – these estimates are derived from Claritas and are updated at the NXX level with each quarterly GENESYS database update. The basic procedure was to rank all NPA-NXXs in the US by the incidence of Latino households. For the landline frame, the sample was also run against InfoUSA and other listed databases, and then scrubbed against known Latino surnames. Any “hits” were subdivided into a ‘surname’ strata, with all other sample being put into other ‘RDD’ strata. Overall, then the study employed 8 strata:

	Landline	Cell Phone
Surname	594	--
Very High	294	--
High	187	458
Medium	134	190
Low	45	113

It is important to note that the existence of a surname strata does not mean this was a surname sample design. The sample is RDD, only telephone numbers were then divided by whether they were found to be associated with or without a Latino surname. This was done simply to increase the number of strata (thereby increasing the control we have to meet ethnic targets) and to ease administration (allowing for more effective assignment of interviewers and labor hours).

For purposes of estimation, we employed an optimal allocation scheme. This “textbook” approach allocates interviews to a stratum proportionate to the number of Latino HH, but inversely proportionate to the square root of the relative cost, the relative cost in this situation being a simple function of the incidence. As such, the number of completed interviews increases as you move from a lower incidence strata to higher incidence strata. Again, this is a known, formulaic approach to allocation that provides a starting point for discussions of sample allocation and associated costs.

Weighting and Estimation

A four-stage weighting design was executed to ensure an accurate representation of the national Hispanic population. First, an adjustment was made for all persons who were found to possess both a landline and a cell phone, as they were twice as likely to be sampled as were respondents who possessed only one phone type. Then, the sample was corrected for the disproportionality of the stratification scheme described above. Third, the sample was then corrected to reflect the known proportion that is cell-only, dual, or landline-only. NHIS and Pew data was used to project percentages that Pew felt were appropriate for the Y2007 population.

Finally, the data was put through a post-stratification sample balancing routine. The post-stratification weighting utilized national 2007 estimates from the Census' Current Population Survey, March Supplement, on gender, education, age, region, foreign/native born status, year of entry into the U.S., and Hispanic heritage.

Response Rate

The landline response rate was calculated to be 25.8% the cell phone response rate was calculated to be 38.7% and the overall response rate for this study was calculated to be 33.2% using AAPOR's RR3 formula. Following is a full disposition of the sample selected for this survey:

Eligible, Interview (Category 1)	Landline	Cell	Total
Complete	1,254	761	2,015
Eligible, non-interview (Category 2)			
Refusal	226	747	973
Physically or mentally unable/incompetent	31	8	39
Language problem	752	256	1,008
No interviewer available for needed language	5	2	7
Unknown eligibility, non-interview (Category 3)			
Always busy	794	173	967
No answer	21,187	14,648	35,835
Answering machine-don't know if household	7,533	5,669	13,202
Call blocking	67	6	73
Technical phone problems	146	79	225
No screener completed	11,353	8,851	20,204
Not eligible (Category 4)			
Fax/data line	1,903	368	2,271
Non-working number	68,733	27,288	96,021
Business, government office, other organizations	14,817	902	15,719
No eligible respondent	7,657	3,064	10,721
Quota filled	845	10,895	11,740
TOTAL	137,303	73,717	211,020