

MEMORANDUM

TO: Interested Parties
FROM: National Council of La Raza¹
DATE: November 16, 2004
SUBJ: How Did Latinos Really Vote in 2004?

Overview

Since the election on November 2, there has been considerable debate about the Latino vote. The National Election Pool (NEP) exit poll,² commissioned by major media companies and thus the most widely-cited source by the press, reported that President George W. Bush received 44% of the Latino vote, representing substantial growth from comparable exit polls of the 2000 election and a far larger percentage than most pre-election polls had predicted. A separate national exit poll by the Los Angeles Times (LAT),³ reported similar results. The New York Times (NYT) published results that, although based on NEP data, use a different interpretation of the Hispanic identifier employed by the NEP survey⁴; NYT's findings are similar to those by NEP and LAT.

These results have been challenged by a number of sources on several different grounds. Most notably, the William C. Velasquez Institute (WCVI), the research arm of the Southwest Voter Registration Education Project (SVREP), published an exit poll which found that Latinos supported Senator John Kerry by a 68%-31% margin.⁵ The purpose of this preliminary analysis is to review the available data, place it in historical context, and to offer some judgments regarding how Latinos actually voted on election day.⁶

¹ This memorandum was prepared by a team of NCLR staff including Senior Vice President Charles Kamasaki, State-Local Public Policy Director Clarissa Martinez, and Policy Analyst Jessica Muñoz. This analysis was made possible by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation of New York, through their support of NCLR's Latino Empowerment and Advocacy Project. Errors of fact or logic, and the views and opinions expressed in this analysis, are the sole responsibility of NCLR.

² Hereinafter cited as NEP; data drawn from results published on CNN's website, CNN.com/All Politics. NEP's sample included about 1,093 Latino voters.

³ Hereinafter cited as LAT; data drawn from results published on the *Los Angeles Times*'s website, latimes.com. LAT's survey includes a heavy oversample of California voters; the number of Latinos used to calculate national results is unclear.

⁴ Hereinafter cited as NYT; data drawn from "How Americans Voted: A Political Portrait," Week in Review, *New York Times*, November 7, 2004. Beginning in 2000, the NEP's predecessor organization, the Voter News Service (VNS), began identifying Hispanic voters, who can be of any race, through a two-part question similar to that used by the Bureau of the Census. Prior to 2000, the VNS used a single question to identify voters based on race and ethnicity. NYT continues to identify ethnicity based on the single question format; this reduces its sample size of Latinos but maintains comparability over time with previous VNS surveys; NYT's sample included about 820 Hispanic voters.

⁵ Hereinafter cited as WCVI/SVREP; data drawn from "Latinos Support Kerry by Substantial Margin in Presidential Contest Nationwide," press release, November 3, 2004, and related materials. WCVI/SVREP's sample included 1,179 Hispanic respondents.

⁶ Some caveats are in order. First, exit polls, like any other survey, are subject to a number of sources of error, including differential response rates, limitations of sample sizes, etc. Second, full methodologies and various cross-tabulations that could be used to confirm or question certain findings are not publicly available, and in some cases

2004 Latino Presidential Preference

Exit poll results for the 2004 election are listed in Table 1. Results from NEP, LAT, and NYT are closely aligned – all show substantial Latino support for President Bush. In addition, one organization has cited proprietary exit poll data from the Gallup organization as showing 42% Latino support for President Bush; similarly, Zogby International’s post-election exit poll showed a 58%-42% Kerry-Bush split by Hispanic voters.⁷

Table 1.			
Latino Voter Preference, 2004			
Source	% Bush (R)	% Kerry (D)	% Other
NEP	44	53	2
LAT	45	54	1
NYT	43	56*	-
WCVI/SVREP	31	68	1
<i>Sources: see footnotes</i>			
*There is a discrepancy between the data reported in the previously-cited NYT Week in Review section and data currently reported on its website. The chart entitled “The Electorate: A Political Portrait,” at www.newyorktimes.com indicates that 43% of Hispanics voted for President Bush and 58% voted for Senator Kerry. The 56% figure for Senator Kerry, reported in the Week in Review piece, and which seems the most widely cited, is used here.			

WCVI/SVREP results show much higher support for Senator Kerry, based on a sampling technique that focused on 56 precincts in 14 states, closely tracking the population distribution of Latino registered voters. These precincts and states, which represent more than 90% of the Hispanic vote, tend to be concentrated in metropolitan areas. By contrast, NEP and most other national polls select their precincts based on overall population distribution patterns, thus including larger numbers of suburban, exurban, and rural areas⁸. According to WCVI/SVREP President Antonio Gonzalez:

Network and media surveys are not designed to measure Latinos. They are designed to measure the general market. Latinos are not suburban. We’re the most urban electorate in America.... What you get when you have a general market survey is one that shows more Latinos who are Republican.⁹

either are proprietary or available only to paid subscribers. Third, the final, adjusted (“re-weighted”) results for the NEP poll have not yet been published.

⁷ Latino Coalition, “44% of Hispanics Support Bush,” press release, November 3, 2004.

⁸ In its 2004 issue brief *Hispanic Housing and Homeownership*, NCLR notes that “Latino households are equally distributed between suburbs and the central city. In 2001, 45.9% of Hispanic households were located in central cities, 45.8% in the suburbs, and 8.2% in rural areas;” according to the Census, only 23.5% of non-Hispanic Whites live in central cities.

⁹ Mike Tolson, “Latinos’ Support for Bush Debated,” *Houston Chronicle*, November 6, 2004, drawn from www.HoustonChronicle.com.

WCVI/SVREP and other critics also cite a series of methodological and other issues that raise questions about the accuracy of NEP and similar surveys. These critics note among other things that NEP's state, regional, and national tallies of Latino voters are based on inaccurate samples, are internally inconsistent, and/or implausible. For example, NEP's sample, if extrapolated to the entire electorate, could be interpreted to suggest Latino turnout rates in excess of 90%. Furthermore, adding up NEP's Latino respondents produces numbers much greater in some cases, and much lower in others, than various regional tallies. Critics note these internal inconsistencies are clear signs of methodological weaknesses. One possible explanation for this kind of discrepancy is that some significant number of votes attributed to Hispanics by NEP were misidentified. And finally, with respect to NEP, some assert that a number of its reported results are simply implausible.¹⁰

Moreover, these critics argue that the NEP results are wildly inconsistent with a series of pre-election surveys, most of which had far larger and therefore more reliable samples of Latinos. For example, independent polls of Hispanic voters by the Pew Hispanic Center/Kaiser Family Foundation and the Washington Post/Univision/Tomas Rivera Policy Institute (WP/TRPI) in July, and a follow-up WP/TRPI poll in October, showed 2-1 Hispanic support for Senator Kerry over President Bush. Democracy Corps, an organization closely identified with Democrats, reported an even greater 65%-31% split in Senator Kerry's favor among Latino voters.¹¹

Opponents counter that the NEP's results are "robust," that is, have been confirmed by several other exit polls, including the LAT, Gallup, and Zogby polls cited earlier. In addition, they assert that these polls' sampling techniques are justified because the Latino population increasingly is found in suburbs and small towns. As President Bush's political adviser Karl Rove notes:

*In order to get an accurate picture of the Hispanic population, you have to be sitting outside not just a barrio precinct on the south side of San Antonio. You've got to be sitting in a precinct in suburban Philadelphia or Des Moines, Iowa.*¹²

¹⁰ For example, NEP reports that 64% of Latinos in the South, including 59% of Hispanics in Texas, voted for President Bush, compared to 44% of Latino Texans who voted for Bush according to the 2000 VNS. Some argue this 16 percentage point jump is simply implausible. In addition, it suggests that the largely Democratic-leaning Mexican-American electorate in Texas supported the President's re-election at a higher rate than did Florida's more diverse electorate, which includes substantial numbers of Republican-leaning Cuban Americans, reported by NEP as a 56%-44% Bush-Kerry split. Furthermore, according to these critics, the NEP results would require implausibly high support rates for President Bush, in some cases exceeding 100%, in certain southern states where the Hispanic sample was too small to report separately.

¹¹ The Pew Hispanic Center/Kaiser Family Foundation national poll interviewed 2,288 Latinos over 18 years old, from April 21-June 9, 2004; The Washington Post/Univision/Tomas Rivera Policy Institute poll of 1,605 Latino registered voters living in the 11 states with the largest concentrations of Hispanic voters, interviewed July 6-16, 2004, and a follow-up poll of 1,603 Latinos in the same states, interviewed October 4-16, 2004; and Democracy Corps survey of 1,000 Hispanic likely voters, interviewed July 14-22, 2004.

¹² Jerry Kammer, "Polls at odds over whether Latinos were swing vote for Bush," *San Diego Union Tribune*, November 11, 2004. It's also worth noting that the exit poll data are continuously "re-weighted" during and after elections to account for variations in turnout from predicted models, and to conform to actual results. Exactly when, and how, these changes are made typically are not made public by the pollsters, so whether and the extent to which their samples conform to the actual population distribution of voters is not known.

With respect to various other methodological issues, they note that even Democratic-leaning experts such as Matthew Yglesias, after analyzing the data, has written that despite some “oddities”:

*...it seems to me that Bush really did get a high share of the Hispanic vote.... I see no reason to doubt this, especially because the exit polls seem to have slightly overestimated Kerry's vote share in almost every state.*¹³

Furthermore, the NEP data confirm substantial ticket-splitting by Latino voters in many states. For example, in California, NEP reports Latino voters supporting Senator Kerry over President Bush by a 63%-32% margin, and Democratic Senator Barbara Boxer by a much wider 73%-23% margin. Similarly, NEP reports that in Colorado, the Kerry-Bush margin was 68%-30%, but over 72% of Latino voters supported Democratic Senatorial candidate Ken Salazar. Similar ticket-splitting results were reported by NEP in Arizona, where both President Bush and Democratic Representative Raúl Grijalva carried heavily-Hispanic Yuma County, and in Washington state, where President Bush and Senator Kerry evenly split the Latino vote, but where Latino voters backed Democratic Senator Patty Murray's re-election bid by a 58%-32% margin.¹⁴ If the NEP and other media exit polls were uniformly biased in favor of Republicans, one might ask, why didn't this bias also show up in the same NEP results in Senate races where Latinos heavily favored Democrats?

With respect to pre-election polls, the Republican-leaning Latino Coalition touts its own survey released in mid-October which reported a 53%-44% Kerry-Bush split among Latino voters.¹⁵ It might also be noted that virtually all pre-election surveys which reported 2-1 Latino support for Senator Kerry also showed that, in comparison with other voters, a higher proportion of Hispanic voters, generally in excess of 10%, were undecided entering the final weeks of the contest. If even a modest majority of these undecided Hispanics voted for the President, and if, as the Democracy Corps has reported¹⁶, there was a “shift of downscale voters in the final week and a half” toward the President by 55%-45%, then the national NEP and other media poll results for Latino voters appear plausible.¹⁷

Hispanic Presidential Preference in Historical Context

Historically, the Hispanic vote in presidential races has varied significantly from election to election, according to most surveys, as shown in Table 2. As with all voter groups, election-to-

¹³ Matthew Yglesias, “Bush and the Hispanic Vote,” *American Prospect Online*, November 12, 2004.

¹⁴ All data cited in this section from NEP.

¹⁵ Latino Coalition, op. cit.

¹⁶ Stan Greenberg and James Carville, “Solving the Paradox of 2004,” Democracy Corps, November 9, 2004.

¹⁷ For example, if President Bush earned 35% of the nearly six million Latino votes cast in 2000, he would have entered the cycle with a base of about 2.1 million Hispanic votes. If he and Senator Kerry split the approximately two million new 2004 Latino voters about evenly, his subtotal would have grown to about 3.1 million. If one further assumes that half or more of the 10% of the Hispanic electorate that identified as “undecided” over the last few weeks of the election actually voted for the President on November 2, then President Bush would have received about 3.5 million, or 43.75%, of the total Latino vote. Although NCLR believes that this scenario is unlikely, it is certainly plausible.

election comparisons of Latinos are complicated by the presence of significant third party candidates in some but not all recent elections. The more salient factor relevant to the Hispanic electorate is its rapid growth – at least half of the Latinos who voted in 2004 were not part of the electorate in 1988. Nevertheless, the results are illuminating.

Table 2.				
Hispanic Presidential Preference, 1998-2004				
Year	Source	% Republican	% Democrat	% Other
2004		Bush	Kerry	Nader/Other
	NEP	44	53	2
	LAT	45	54	1
	NYT	43	56	-
	WCVI/SVREP	31	68	1
2000		Bush	Gore	Nader/Other
	VNS	35	62	3
	LAT	38	61	1
	NYT	31	67	2
	WCVI/SVREP	24	74	2
1996		Dole	Clinton	Perot/Other
	VNS	21	72	6
	LAT	21	71	7
	TRPI*	22	70	7
1992		Bush	Clinton	Perot/Other
	VNS	25	61	14
	LAT	27	51	21
	TRPI	23	65	12
1988		Bush	Dukakis	
	VNS	30	69	
	LAT	34	65	
	TRPI	34	65	
* The Tomas Rivera Policy Institute, hereinafter cited as TRPI, has conducted secondary analyses of exit polls and produced adjusted, re-weighted results, for the 1988-2000 period. See TRPI, "Profile of Latino Voters," October 2004; in 2000 TRPI's analysis tracked the VNS results and are thus not reported separately for that year.				

It should be noted that some media polls showed that President Ronald Reagan was supported by as much as 40% of the Hispanic vote in his 1984 re-election bid, although other polls showed markedly different results. In any event, Latino sample sizes in many national polls before the 1988 election were small and likely highly unreliable.

Not surprisingly given its urban-focused sampling methodology, WCVI/SVREP found substantially higher support for Vice President Gore in his 2000 election bid than other polls. However, except for the LAT's 1992 results, which many analysts dismiss as an "outlier," the results of the other polls in each cycle are quite consistent.¹⁸

Moreover, even though the accuracy of specific polling methodologies employed – and thus the question of how Latinos actually voted – is likely to remain a source of continuing debate, the *direction of the election-to-election changes* of the Hispanic vote in 2004 and 2000 is absolutely consistent across all polls, as seen in Table 3.

Table 3.				
Percentage Point Change in Latino Presidential Party Preference, 1992-2004				
		Republican	Democrat	Other
Year	Source	Gain/Loss	Gain/Loss	Gain/Loss
2004	NEP	+9	-9	-1
	LAT	+7	-7	--
	NYT	+12	-9	-2
	WCVI/SVREP	+7	-6	-1
2000	VNS	+14	-10	-3
	LAT	+17	-10	-6
	NYT*	+10	-5	-4
	TRPI	+13	-8	-4
1996	VNS	-4	+11	-8
	LAT	-6	+20	-14
	TRPI	-1	+7	-5
1992	VNS	-5	-8	+14
	LAT	-7	-14	+21
	TRPI	-7	-4	+12

* Compared to 1996 VNS.

Every year since 1992, all polls have shown movement in the same direction. In the 2004-to-2000 comparison, all polls show significant movement of Latino voters to President Bush. Although the magnitude of the shift differs somewhat among the polls over the years, on this issue the NEP, LAT, and WCVI/SVREP numbers all point to a similar seven- to nine-point shift toward President Bush in 2004, compared to 2000; NYT's shift is higher. Interestingly, while there was relatively little controversy regarding how Hispanics voted in 2000, in the 1996-2000

¹⁸ WCVI/SVREP initiated its national exit poll in 2000; thus results are unavailable for prior years. Prior to 2000, when VNS adopted its two-part Hispanic identifier question, NYT and VNS results were the same, and thus NYT results are not included separately for the 1988-1996 period.

comparison all polls and analyses cited report a consistent, double-digit shift of Hispanic voters to President Bush in that election.

Regardless of one's views regarding the merits of different polls' sampling techniques, the "apples-to-apples" comparison illustrated in Table 3 provides unmistakable evidence of the direction, if not necessarily the exact magnitude, of a shift in Latino voter preference toward President Bush over the last two election cycles.

Conclusions

Notwithstanding the complexity of the issues involved, and the fact that some crucial data are, as yet, unavailable, this preliminary analysis does permit three clear conclusions about the Hispanic vote in 2004.

In both 2004 and 2000, President George W. Bush attracted a substantial and increasing share of the Latino vote, compared to previous Republican Presidential candidates. Given the uncertainties inherent in exit polling and other survey research, the precise share of the Hispanic vote received by the President and Senator Kerry in 2004 will never be known, although undoubtedly it will be a subject of continuing research, analysis, and controversy. After reviewing the available data carefully, NCLR's sense is that NEP's reported 53% Kerry- 44% Bush results for Hispanic voters in 2004 are at the extreme end of plausibility. Another plausible scenario, that produces a result that can be reconciled with both the pre-election and exit polls' margins of error, is that about 59% of Latinos voted for Senator Kerry and about 39% for President Bush.¹⁹

As NCLR and other observers have indicated repeatedly, a substantial proportion of Hispanics are "swing voters" not bound to party affiliation.²⁰ The 2004 and 2000 election results should serve as a warning to those inclined to assume Hispanics are part of the "Democratic base," and who therefore take the Latino vote for granted. Similarly, the 1996 results, where the Republican candidate lost ground to the Democratic candidate, and the 1992 election, in which the Republican candidate lost Latino votes to an independent candidate, should provide little comfort to those inclined to assume that Hispanics will inevitably trend Republican.

¹⁹ The math works roughly as follows: Of the nearly 6 million Latino votes cast in 2000, assume that 62%, or about 3.72 million voted for Vice President Gore and 35%, or about 2.1 million, voted for then-Governor Bush (VNS). If the approximately two million new Hispanic voters in 2004 voted for Senator Kerry by a 55%-45% margin, and the 800,000 undecided Latino voters identified in pre-election polls broke about evenly (meaning that about 120,000 net Latino Gore voters in 2000 switched their votes to President Bush), the result would be 4.72 million Kerry voters (59%) and 3.12 million Bush voters (39%) in 2004. This seems to be the most plausible result that is consistent with the reported margins of error of both the pre-election polls and the exit polls.

²⁰ In its October 2000 Issue Brief, *The Latino Vote in the 90s*, NCLR noted that Hispanic voters, "...look at individual candidates rather than party affiliations," and documented numerous examples of "ticket splitting" by Hispanic voters in the 1994, 1996, and 1998 election cycles. In its July 2002 report, *Mobilizing the Latino Vote: Tapping the Power of the Hispanic Electorate*, NCLR warned that, "Neither party can take [its historical share of] the Latino vote for granted." NCLR's 2004 *State of Hispanic America* report, issued this February, noted the "...significant proportion of Latino voters who are not tied to either political party."

There is no question that Hispanic voter turnout in 2004 far exceeded expectations. Prior to the election, some knowledgeable observers predicted that fewer than seven million Latino voters would turn out in 2004, compared to the 5.9 million who voted in 2000.²¹ All indications are that Latino turnout was considerably higher. NEP's initial exit polls would suggest Hispanic turnout of almost nine million, which most analysts believe is implausibly high. Even NYT's use of the single question Hispanic identifier – which undercounts Hispanics according to Census experts and other analysts – would result in an estimated Latino turnout in excess of seven million.²² WCVI/SVREP estimated 2004 turnout of 7.65 million Latino voters, just under NCLR's estimate of about eight million Hispanic voters in 2004.²³ Overall, until the Census Bureau can more definitively address this question, it appears safe to assume that at least 7.5 million Latinos voted in 2004, which would represent a startling 27% increase since 2000, and more than a doubling of the Hispanic electorate since 1988.

Even this remarkable turnout is far lower than would occur if Latino voter registration and turnout rates were similar to those of Whites and African Americans.²⁴ Thus, notwithstanding record Hispanic turnout in 2004, there remains substantial room for additional growth in this electorate.

This memorandum addresses how Latinos across the nation voted in 2004. As additional data become available – including cross-tabulations of existing exit polls and new post-election surveys – NCLR will turn its attention to other questions, including how Hispanics voted in selected states, as well as the more intriguing question of why Latinos voted as they did in 2004.

²¹ TRPI, for example, forecast a turnout of 6.7 million Latinos; See TRPI, "Profile of Latino Voters," op. cit.

²² Assuming a total electorate of 117 million – including voters who "under-voted," "over-voted," or voted via provisional ballot.

²³ Essentially derived from applying the 78.6% turnout rate of Hispanic registered voters in 2000 reported by the Census Bureau to the 10.2 million estimate of registered Latino voters reported by WCVI/SVREP.

²⁴ In its July 2002 report "*Mobilizing the Latino Vote: Tapping the Power of the Hispanic Electorate*," NCLR noted that, cutting in half the voter registration gap between Hispanics and African Americans by 2004 would result in 11.3 million Latino registered voters, and doing the same for the turnout rate would lead to approximately 9.2 million Latinos casting a vote. In that report, NCLR estimated that holding registration and participation rates constant, there would have been approximately 10 million Latino registered voters in 2004, producing 7.9 million voters.