



# IMMIGRATION POLICY CENTER

...providing factual information about immigration and immigrants in America

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## **Election 2008 Recap: The Electoral Landscape and What it Means for Immigration Reform**

While some might try to rewrite history, the results speak for themselves: Latino, Asian, and New American voter turnout was at an all-time high in 2008 and changed the electoral map. The power of these voters is now undeniable, and immigrant-bashing has become a losing campaign strategy. All signs indicate that the Obama administration and Congress will tackle immigration reform, and that the leadership of the Republican Party is rethinking its position on the issue. The following key points underscore the strength and growth of what may be the most important voting bloc in 21<sup>st</sup> century politics—one that now has the power to profoundly change American elections in the years to come.

### **DEMOGRAPHICS ARE DESTINY AND THE NUMBERS DON'T LIE:**

#### **Latinos Are A Rapidly Growing Share Of The Electorate, Representing Nearly 1 In 10 Voters.**

- **11 million** Latinos voted in 2008, *up* from 7.6 million in [2004](#).
- **9%** of all voters were Latinos in [2008](#).
- **50,000** Latinos turn 18 [each month](#) and hence become eligible to vote for the first time.

#### **Nationally, Republicans Are Losing Ground Among Both Latino And Asian Voters.**

- In [2008](#) McCain captured 31% of the Latino vote, in [2004](#) Bush won 44%—a decline of 13 percentage points. Among Asians, McCain captured 35% of the vote, a decline of 9 percentage points from the 44% Bush won in 2004.

#### **In Battleground States, Republicans Shed Significant Latino Support.**

- In [Florida](#), McCain received 42% of the Latino vote, down 14 percentage points from Bush's 56% in [2004](#).
- In [New Mexico](#), McCain won 30% of the Latino vote, another drop of 14 percentage points from the 44% Bush received in [2004](#).
- In [Nevada](#), McCain won only 22% of the Latino vote, a drop of 17 percentage points from Bush's 39% in [2004](#).

#### **Even A Small Latino Electorate Can Make The Difference Between Victory And Defeat In A Close Election.**

- In [Indiana](#), Obama won 50% to 49% (a [margin](#) of about 25,000 votes). A [preliminary analysis](#) found that Obama received the votes of nearly 24,000 more Latino New Americans than John McCain. Latino New Americans accounted for only 2% of the electorate.

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## LATINOS AND ASIANS CARE ABOUT IMMIGRATION

- Polling conducted before and on the day of the election for [America's Voice](#) found that, although the economy was the issue of dominant concern, **89%** of Latino immigrant voters reported that immigration was “somewhat important” or “very important” to them and their families.
- [Exit polling](#) in Chicago found that:
  - 70% of Latino voters and 46% of Asian voters said the Republican Party is “not favorable” to immigrants.
  - 66% of Latino voters identified a path to legalization for undocumented workers an important issue.

## MOST VOTERS SUPPORT COMPREHENSIVE IMMIGRATION REFORM, NOT DEPORTATION-ONLY POLICIES.

- According to [polls](#) conducted for [America's Voice](#), and a [post-election survey](#) by the NALEO Educational Fund, impreMedia, and the Latino Decisions polling firm:
  - **67% of all voters**, and 71% of Latino voters, believe that illegal immigrants “should be required to register and become legal,” rather than leaving the country or being allowed to stay only temporarily.
  - **67% of both Obama voters and McCain voters support legalization of undocumented immigrants.**
  - **57% of all voters**, and 74% of Latino voters, support comprehensive immigration reform as opposed to enforcement-only measures.
  - **64%** of Obama voters and **49%** of McCain voters favor comprehensive immigration reform.

## IMMIGRATION AS A “WEDGE” ISSUE IS DEAD: PRO-REFORM CANDIDATES TROUNCE DEPORTATION-ONLY CANDIDATES

- An [analysis](#) by [America's Voice](#) of 22 “battleground” races found that pro-immigration-reform candidates beat enforcement-only “hardliners” in 20 of the races—meaning that the hardliners were not able to turn immigration into a winning wedge issue. Pro-Reform labels were given to candidates based on their public statements and campaign platforms on immigration.
- Of the 15 House Republicans who lost their seats on November 4, ten were members of the Immigration Reform Caucus, which has opposed a path to citizenship for the country’s estimated 12 million undocumented immigrants.
  - ***Senate Sweep by Pro-Reform Candidates***—Pro-reform candidates won Senate seats in Colorado (Mark Udall-D), North Carolina (Kay Hagan-D), New Hampshire (Jeanne Shaheen-D), New Mexico (Tom Udall-D), and Oregon (Jeff Merkley-D).
  - ***House Pro-reform Candidates Win Handily***—Pro-reform candidates won House seats in Arizona’s 1<sup>st</sup> (Ann Kirkpatrick-D), 5<sup>th</sup> (Harry Mitchell-D), and 8<sup>th</sup> (Gabrielle Giffords-D) districts; California’s 11<sup>th</sup> district (Jerry McNerney-D); Colorado’s 4<sup>th</sup> district (Betsey Markey-D); Connecticut’s 4<sup>th</sup> district (Jim Himes-D); Idaho’s 1<sup>st</sup> district (Walt Minnick-D); Illinois’ 11<sup>th</sup> (Debbie Halvorson-D) and 14<sup>th</sup> districts (Bill Foster-D); New Mexico’s 2<sup>nd</sup> district (Harry Teague-D); Nevada’s 3<sup>rd</sup> district (Dina Titus-D); New York’s 29<sup>th</sup> district (Eric Massa-D); Ohio’s 1<sup>st</sup> (Steven Driehaus-D) and 16<sup>th</sup> (John Boccieri-D) districts; and Virginia’s 11<sup>th</sup> district (Gerald Connolly-D). The anti-immigrant mayor of Hazelton, Pennsylvania—Lou Barletta (R)—lost to Paul Kanjorski (D) in the 11<sup>th</sup> district.