

# **Investigating the Anomaly: Latino Republican Voters in California**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The rapid rise of the Latino electorate in California has roused much attention to the study of Latinos within American politics. This project examines an often-disregarded sector of the Latino electorate—Latino Republicans. With Latinos considered solidly Democratic in their partisan orientation, little attention has been focused on those who identify with the Republican Party. Using State-Wide survey data from the Public Policy Institute of California, I investigate who Latino Republicans are in terms of demographics, ideology, and issue preferences. What distinguishes Latino Republicans and Latino Democrats? Further, how do Latino Republicans compare to white Republicans? Understating the needs of this Latino Republican population will be imperative to the future of the Republican Party in California.

## **Introduction**

American politics have been transformed by the demographic growth of the Latino population in the United States, and nowhere is this transformation more apparent than in the state of California. As of the year 2000, Latinos represent approximately 32 percent of the state's population, and with such growth their political influence has risen. In California, the Latino electorate has rapidly expanded with over one million Latinos registering to vote since 1996 (Coffin, 2003). With this growth in the Latino electorate both major parties have redirected their efforts towards the Latino population in an attempt to court these new voters.

The Latino electorate is often viewed as a monolithic voting block, and the diversity that is within the Latino vote is often overlooked. In terms of partisanship, the majority of Latinos in California are Democratic in orientation, particularly those of Mexican decent. At times though the Latino vote is oversimplified as solely Democratic. The reality is that the Latino vote is too diverse to merely view it as Democratic in political orientation.

I seek to acknowledge the true diversity of the Latino vote by examining an often-ignored sector of the Latino electorate, those that are supporters of the Republican Party in California— Latino Republicans. Using survey data I examine who Latino Republicans are in terms of demographics, ideology, and issue preferences. Secondly, I investigate what distinguishes Latino Republicans from Latino Democrats and white Republicans? Understanding who Latino Republicans are and what they stand for provides a more accurate portrait of the Latino electorate in California.

Latino Republicans have been considered somewhat of an oddity in California politics for Latinos have been largely attached to the Democratic Party. Traditionally a solid majority of the Latino electorate in California has voted in support of the Democratic Party (Alvarez and Bedolla, 2003). Latinos have joined the Democratic Party in greater numbers for Latinos' perception of the Democratic Party is

much more favorable than that of the Republican Party. Except in the case of Cubans, the Republican Party has not been viewed as representative of the needs of Latinos. Although the Latino vote can be assessed as traditionally Democratic, the Latino vote has become increasingly diversified.

With the rising presence of the Latino electorate in American politics there has been a renewed focus on Latinos within the political literature. Until the mid-1990's there was little attention focused on Latino voting behavior, but with the growth in the Latino population academic focus has been redirected towards furthering an understanding of Latino voting behavior and beliefs. It wasn't until the late 1980's that nationally representative surveys were conducted on the political values, beliefs, and attitudes of Latinos.

In recent years, there have been a series of studies studying what issues and policies affect Latino voting behavior in California. Mark Baldassare, using State-Wide Public Policy Institute of California surveys finds that most Latinos favor a larger government that is able to provide more services. Baldassare finds significant differences between Latinos and whites in terms of policy issues, with Latinos having a higher priority for issues such as higher education, health, welfare, criminal justice issues (2002). Baldassare does not provide a comparison of Latino Democrats to Latino Republicans.

Overall, very little research has been focused on Latino Republicans, specifically non-Cuban Latinos with the exception of a report published by the Latino Issues Forum. Luis Arteaga (2000) using Latino Issues Forum telephone surveys presented a report comparing Latino Democrats to Latino Republicans. He finds Latino Republicans to be a young population with a complex income distribution. Overall, scholarship analyzing Latino Republicans is scarce due in part to the political neglect that Latinos have faced within American politics, but also their relatively small numbers in California has made them difficult to investigate.

## **Methods**

I used data from the State-Wide Database at UC Berkeley to determine the number of Latinos registering with the Republican Party in California in the last decade. This data is surnamed matched data, which is somewhat problematic for identifying Latinos. Surname matched data is not the most accurate measure of identification for not everyone that has a Latino surname is necessarily Latino. Unfortunately, that is the only feasible way to obtain a measurement of voter registration by ethnicity.

The bulk of my research involved using ten months of State-Wide survey data from the Public Policy Institute of California. I combined a series of PPIC State-Wide surveys from January 2002 to September 2003. These surveys were conducted through the telephone and were given in both English and Spanish. These PPIC State-Wide Surveys are conducted, with Mark Baldassare as the principal investigator, with the purpose of providing independent information on the social, economic, and political attitudes and policy preferences of all Californians. I want to acknowledge that the PPIC bears no responsibility for the results and interpretations presented in this paper.

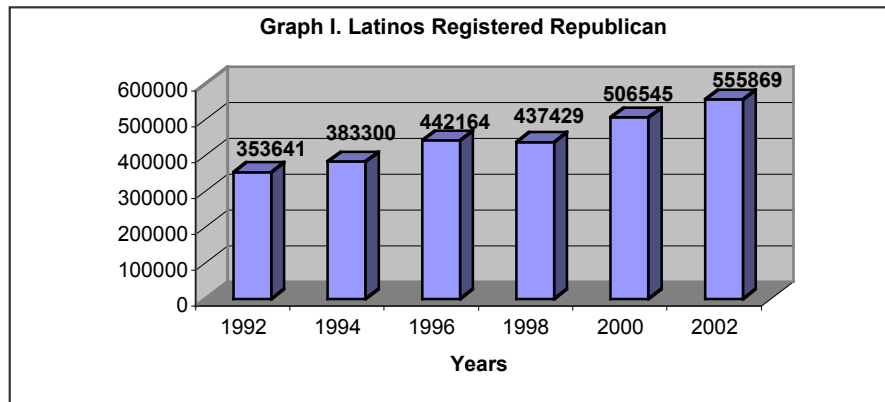
Using this survey data I focused on investigating who registered Latino Republicans are in terms of demographics, political ideology, and issue preferences, in comparison to registered Latino Democrats, white Republicans and white Democrats. By only including those that are registered to vote it narrowed the number of cases available for analysis. I was able to acquire the largest sample of Latino Republicans within the demographic variables with a total of 362 Latino Republican cases. Unfortunately, with some questions I was not able to obtain a sizeable Latino Republican sample, which did not allow for any substantive claims to be made for those specific questions. These surveys cannot be deemed as a representative sample of the Latino electorate in California for certain areas of the state are over represented specifically the Central Valley of California.

## Results—Latino Republican Registration

The number of Latinos registered Republicans has grown in the last decade, but the percent of Latinos registering Republican has remained stable. The number of Latinos registering to vote has grown tremendously within the last decade, and that growth has translated into an increase in the number of Latinos registering Republican. From 1992 to 2002 (Graph I), the number of Latinos registering for the Republican Party grew by 57 percent. Even though that growth in no way rivals the number of Latinos registering Democratic, it is still substantial growth. Although the number of Latino Republican has grown in California, the percent of Latinos registering Republican has not changed significantly. In the last decade, from 1992 to 2002, the percent of Latinos registering Republican has only fluctuated approximately two-percentage points between 19 to 21 percent. In 1994, 21.6 percent of Latinos were registered Republican. In 1998, the percent of Latinos registering Republican dropped to 19.6 percent, that decrease can largely be attributed to backlash that the Republican Party faced within the Latino population due to the inflammatory Propositions 187, 209, and 227. In 2002, the percentage of Latinos registering Republican increased to 21.2 percent. Even though the number of Latinos registering Republicans has considerably increased, the overall the percentage of the Latino electorate registering Republican has remained relatively stable.

### *Who are Latino Republicans?*

Typically Republicans are seen largely as white, affluent, older males, but Latino Republicans do not generate the same portrait. Latino Republicans broaden the traditional Republican profile in all key demographics. Understanding who Latino Republicans are in terms of age, education, and income is essential to understanding the needs and views of this population.



Source: State-Wide

Database, Surname matched Data

### *Age*

Latino Republicans appear to be a remarkably young population, a clear contrast from white Republicans. As seen in Table I, Latino Republicans and Latino Democrats have similar age distributions with both groups disproportionately representing the younger age categories. The largest sector of Latino Republicans is between the ages of 35 and 44, and overall the vast majority (70.5%) is under the age of 44. White Republicans and white Democrats show an age distribution that leans significantly older than that of Latinos. Comparing, Latino Republicans with white Republicans the difference in age distribution is quite significant. The majority of white Republicans 61.8 percent are 45 and older, while only 29.6

percent of Latino Republicans are in the same age brackets. In terms of age distributions Latino Republicans and white Republicans appear to be in opposite ends of the spectrum.

**Table. I Party Registration by Age**

	<b>Latino Republican</b>	<b>Latino Democrat</b>	<b>White Republican</b>	<b>White Democrat</b>
<b>18–24</b>	17.4%	15%	5.0%	5.0%
<b>24–34</b>	22.7	23.2	12.0	10.5
<b>35–44</b>	30.4	24.6	21.1	18.5
<b>45–54</b>	14.9	18.4	20.8	24.5
<b>55–64</b>	9.7	10.8	17.1	16.9
<b>65 +</b>	5.0	8.0	23.9	24.6
<b>Total</b>	N=362 100.0%	N=1093 100.0%	N=3349 100.0%	N=2962 100.0%

*Household Income*

Republicans are generally seen as more affluent population, but Latino Republicans tend to challenge that belief. As seen in Table II, Latino Republicans are largely in the lower to middle income brackets with a significant sector making under \$20,000 a year. Latino Republicans and Latino Democrats are similar in terms of household income, with a few points of divergence. A greater percentage of Latino Republicans (12.7%) are in the \$100,000 or more income bracket, compared to only 7.6 percent of Latino Democrats who are in that same income bracket. The largest segment of Latino Republicans is in the \$40,000 to \$59,999 income bracket, while 26.6 percent of Latino Democrats—the largest segment of Latino Democrats—report a household income of \$20,000 to \$39,999. Both white Republicans and white Democrats have a significant portion of their voters in the highest household income bracket of \$100,000 and more, with white Republicans having the highest percentage of representation within the highest income bracket with 22.2 percent. Although a higher percentage of Latino Republicans are in the highest income bracket compared to Latino Democrats, they are still significantly less affluent than whites, both Republican and Democrat.

**Table II. Party Registration by Income**

	<b>Latino Republican</b>	<b>Latino Democrat</b>	<b>White Republican</b>	<b>White Democrat</b>
<b>Under \$20,000</b>	20.5%	20.4%	8.7%	12.8%
<b>\$20–\$39,999</b>	23.5	29.6	18.7	20.8
<b>\$40–\$59,999</b>	24.1	24.3	20.8	20.9
<b>\$60–\$79,999</b>	12.8	11.5	17.7	14.8
<b>\$80– \$99,999</b>	6.3	6.6	12.0	10.6
<b>\$100,000 +</b>	12.8	7.6	22.2	20.0
<b>Total</b>	N=336 100.0%	N=1038 100.0%	N=3012 100.0%	N=2701 100.0%

### *Education*

Latino Republicans have an expansive range of educational attainment. The majority of Latino Republicans (61.1%) are college educated or have some college experience (Table III). Latino Democrats reported in similar form, although a slightly lower percentage (56%) reported having a college education or having some college experience. Latino Democrats had a somewhat higher number of respondents (16.7%) identify having no high school diploma compared with Latino Republicans. Contrastingly, only 2.8 percent of white Republicans and 4.5 percent of white Democrats reported having no high school diploma. White Republicans and white Democrats reported having higher levels of educational attainments specifically in the college graduate and postgraduate categories. Overall, the educational attainment of Latino Republicans is below that of whites, yet slightly higher than that of Latino Democrats.

**Table III. Party Registration by Education**

	<b>Latino Republican</b>	<b>Latino Democrat</b>	<b>White Republican</b>	<b>White Democrat</b>
<b>No HS diploma</b>	10.7%	16.7%	2.8%	4.5%
<b>HS Diploma</b>	28.2	27.3	17.2	17.6
<b>Some College</b>	31.2	30.5	32.8	27.6
<b>College Grad</b>	21.1	17.0	30.0	27.8
<b>Post-Graduate</b>	8.8	8.5	17.1	22.6
<b>Total</b>	N=365 100.0%	N=1095 100.0%	N=3366 100.0%	N=2962 100.0%

### **Political Profiles—Ideology**

Identifying the political ideology of Latinos has traditionally been difficult for they typically do not fall into a sole ideological identification. Mark Baldassare in previous reports from the Public Policy Institute of California coined Latinos as fiscally liberal and socially conservative (2003). In the case of Latino Republicans, when asked to identify a political ideology the majority (57%) identified themselves as conservative (Table IV). Now comparing Latino Republicans to white Republicans, a larger percentage of white Republicans (65%) identified themselves as conservative. A greater number of Latino Republicans identified as liberal than white Republicans. Interestingly, Latino Democrats had the most varied response with the largest segment of Latino Democrats (38.6%) identifying as liberal, and a significant portion (29.4%) identifying as conservative. Only 14.1 percent of white Democrats identified as conservation with the majority identifying as liberal.

**Table IV. Party Registration by Ideology**

	<b>Latino Republican</b>	<b>Latino Democrat</b>	<b>White Republican</b>	<b>White Democrat</b>
<b>Liberal</b>	16.1%	38.6%	9.1%	50.7%
<b>Moderate</b>	26.4	30.2	24.8	34.0
<b>Conservative</b>	57.0	29.4	65.0	14.1
<b>Don't Know</b>	0.5	1.8	1.0	1.2
<b>Total</b>	N=367 100.0%	N=1103 100.0%	N=3375 100.0%	N=2969 100.0%

*Role of Government*

Q. "In general, which of the following statements do you agree with more—I'd rather pay higher taxes to support a larger government that provides more services, or I'd rather pay lower taxes and have a smaller government that provides fewer services?"

**Table VI. Higher Taxes More Services vs. Lower Taxes Fewer**

	<b>Latino Rep</b>	<b>Latino Dem</b>	<b>White Rep</b>	<b>White Dem</b>
<b>Higher Taxes, more services</b>	36.8%	67.5%	14.1%	52.1%
<b>Lower Taxes, fewer services</b>	59.2	26.1	77.5	34.4
<b>Don't Know</b>	2.6	4.1	7.7	11.0
<b>Refuse</b>	1.3	2.2	0.7	2.5
<b>Total</b>	N=76 100.0%	N=268 100.0%	N=893 100.0%	N=729 100.0%

**Source: PPIC State-Wide Surveys June 2003 and September 2003**

In Table VI, when asked about preferring to pay higher taxes to support a larger government and more services, Latino Republicans solidly favored lower taxes and a smaller role of government. Only 36.9 percent of Latino Republican respondents preferred paying higher taxes for a larger government with more services (Table VI). Latino Democrats remained largely supportive of paying higher taxes (67.5%) for a larger role of government with more services. White Republicans also remained firm with 77.5 percent of respondents supporting a smaller role of government with fewer services. White Democrats grew slightly more supportive with 52.1 percent of white Democrats supporting paying higher taxes for a larger government with more services.

## Key Issues

**Table IV. Latino Republicans and Controversial Issues**

	<b>Latino Republican</b>	<b>Latino Democrat</b>	<b>White Republican</b>	<b>White Democrat</b>
“Government should pass more laws that restrict the availability of abortion”	56.3%	29.6%	34.3%	17.5%
“We have gone too far in accepting homosexuality in our society”	58.8	42.6	55.5	25.0
“Illegal immigrants and their children should be denied public services”	35.3	22.2	63.1	45.9

**Source: PPIC State-Wide Survey February 2002, number of cases vary, Latino Republicans N=16, 17, and 17 respectively**

In Table IV, Latino Republicans appear to be the strongly conservation in terms of abortion and gay rights, even more so than white Republicans. Latino Republicans, on the whole give the impression of being solidly conservative of social issues. Unfortunately, I can only provide some general impressions over how Latino Republicans feel on these issues given the small sample size available for Latino Republicans on these questions. Even with a larger sample size, I believed that Latino Republicans would still strongly favor restricting abortions and limiting gay rights.

When asked about public services to illegal immigrants they appear to break ranks with white Republicans. Latino Republicans gave a much more supportive responsive to providing services for illegal immigrants and their children, with 35.2 percent stating that illegal immigrants should be denied public services. White Republicans were 27.8 percent more likely to state that illegal immigrants and their children should be denied public services. Latino Republicans seem to provide a closer response to that of Latino Democrats with only 22.2 percent of Latino Democrats supported denying public services. These results seem to suggest that in terms of immigrant issues, Latino Republicans and Latino Democrats seem to have found a point of convergence. Latinos are commonly considered socially conservative, and Latino Republicans appear to support that belief.

### *Economic Equity*

**Table. XI. “Do you think that in California today...”**

	<b>Latino Rep</b>	<b>Latino Dem</b>	<b>White Rep</b>	<b>White Dem</b>
People have equal opportunity to get ahead	53.7%	44.6%	73.4%	45.8%
Government should do more to make sure that all Californians have an opportunity to get ahead	38.9	53.1	19.7	47.8
Both	1.9	0.6	1.3	0.2

Neither	1.9	0.6	3.0	2.7
Don't Know	3.7	1.1	2.6	3.4
Total	N=54 100.0%	N=177 100.0%	N=463 100.0%	N=408 100.0%

**Source: PPIC State-Wide Survey September 2002**

In Table IX, when asked whether people have an equal opportunity to get ahead, Latino Republicans provided relatively similar response to that of Democrats. A total of 53.7% of Latino Republicans felt that people had an equal opportunity to get ahead, that percentage was comparatively similar to Latino Democrats and white Democrats. In contrast, Latino Republicans and white Republicans gave significantly different responses with white Republicans being 19.7 percent more likely to believe that people have an equal opportunity to get ahead. Now when asked whether the government should do more to create equal opportunity, Latino Republicans give an increasingly distanced response from that of Democrats, particularly Latino Democrats. Latino Democrats were 14.2 percentage points more likely to support the government action in creating equal opportunity. There is still a significant difference in responses between Latino Republicans and white Republicans with Latino Republicans much more likely to support government action (38.9% to 19.7%). Overall, Latino Republicans are not as supportive of government action as Democrats are, but they are significantly more supportive than white Republicans.

## Discussion

Demographically, it appears that Latino Republicans challenge the typical Republican profile, and in the future that could prove problematic for the Republican Party. Latino Republicans are a very young population, even more so than Latino Democrats. The Latino population is overall a young population compared to whites, and so it is not surprising that Latino Republicans are a much younger sector of voters. In terms of educational attainment, Latino Republicans largely mirror that of the Latino population as a whole. Latinos, including Latino Republicans, have not achieved the same levels of educational attainment as whites have achieved. The needs of a younger, less educated population of Latino Republican could conflict with the needs of the older, white Republican base. In focusing on household income, Latino Republicans clearly tend to challenge the belief that Republicans are a more wealthy population. Overall, Latino Republicans household incomes are astonishingly similar to those of Latino Democrats. It is clear that it is not only the richest of Latinos joining the Republican Party.

With such a large share of Latino Republicans in the lower income brackets, it could prove to be a challenge for the Republican Party to convey a work-class agenda towards these lower-income registered voters while still preserving their more affluent supporters. By having two populations that are so different demographically, it can prove to be a point of tension in the future for the needs of these two different populations could conflict. As the number of Latino Republicans grows in California, it will be interesting to see how the party will maneuver catering to these vastly different sectors of their electorate.

Overall, Latino Republicans appear to be somewhat fluid in their political preferences not firmly aligned with the Republican base (i.e. white Republicans). Even though the majority of Latino Republicans prefer paying lower taxes for a smaller government, they aren't as united as white Republicans are over the issue. There are also indications that they have the potential to be supportive of a larger role of government. When asked whether the government should do more to ensure that all Californians have an opportunity to get ahead, almost twice as many Latino Republicans than white Republicans agreed that the government should do more. Overall, Latino Republicans do not appear to be as solidly to the right as white Republican respondents.

## Conclusions

Understanding who Latino Republicans are, and what they stand for, provides a framework on how to entice more Latinos into the Republican Party. California has traditionally been considered a largely Democratic state with Republicans fighting a losing battle in garnering votes within the state. The common notion is that as Latinos grow economically then they will increasingly become a part of the Republican ranks, but looking at how Latino Republicans are it appears that the Party does not need to limit itself to simply compete for Latinos in the upper income brackets. There is a significant portion of Latino Republicans in the lower-to-middle income range, and the Republican Party needs to acknowledge and cater to this sector of the population. They need to promote an agenda that concentrates on the needs of lower-middle income voters, and address issues like education, healthcare, and crime.

I argue that it is a moderate agenda that will attract more Latinos to the party. The Republicans Party needs to create an inclusive platform that caters to a younger, less affluent population. This will be a difficult feat for the party's established hardliners may contest such a move. The Republican Party has largely focused on promoting the shared conservative family values that they believe they share with Latinos. It does appear that Latinos, particularly Latino Republicans, are more conservative in regards to social issues, but I believe that it will require more than a promotion of shared family values to attract more Latinos to the party. The Republican Party has made a concerted effort in improving their image within the Latino population, but I believe that the party will have to make greater substantive changes.

The number of Latino Republicans has seen significant growth in the last decade, and those numbers are expected to grow in the future. Given the projected growth of the Latino population in California, and the increasing number of Latinos reaching the voting age, this growth will provide a greater incentive for the Republican Party to cater this population. In fact the Republican Party has taken active and aggressive steps to mobilize Latino candidates in an effort to gain a foothold within the Latino community. We are increasingly seeing more Latinos running for public office as Republicans particularly in the post-Arnold era of California politics. The visibility of Latinos who carry the Republican label is increasing. Latino Republicans can no longer be looked at as simply an anomaly, but as a formidable group that is establishing themselves within American politics.

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