



# Southwest Voter Registration Education Project

## Memorandum

To: Concerned Parties

From: Antonio Gonzalez, SVREP President ([www.svrep.org](http://www.svrep.org))

Date: July 2, 2008

Re: SVREP President's Report #1 (2008): The Latino Voter Registration Surge in 2008

### Introduction

Recent time-series data gathered by William C. Velasquez Institute's (WCVI-[www.wcvi.org](http://www.wcvi.org)) Steven Ochoa, Vice President for Policy and Research from voter data services shows a recent surge of more than 500,000 net new Latino voters in California and Texas during the hotly contested Presidential primary process in the first half of 2008. Projected nationally (the two super states generally comprise 50% of all Latino voters nationwide) the California-Texas trend estimates that more than 1 million net new Latino voters have been added to the rolls as of July 1, 2008.

This 2008 surge appears to have counterbalanced recent findings by the long-awaited Census Bureau Current Population Survey on Registration and Voting for the 2006 elections that showed "no growth" in Latino voter registration across America for the first time since 1989-90 and only the third time since 1972.

These contradictory trends warrant further analysis. Following are our initial thoughts.

### The Clinton-Obama Surge in 2008: Adds Estimated 1 million new Latino voters

The intensive competition for the Democratic Presidential nomination in numerous states where Latinos are concentrated appears to have driven up Latino registration at general election rates. The new primary election order, which put Latino-oriented states earlier in the process, significantly increased opportunities for mobilization.

After reviewing time series Spanish surname counts from Political Data, Voter Contact Service and the Texas Legislative Council, WCVI’s Ochoa finds a significant surge in Latino registration 2007-08 (538,633 or 10.5% growth) after virtually no growth in 2005-06 (56,564 or 1.1% growth) in California and Texas. Given that the two Latino-oriented super-states typically comprise 50% of all U.S. Latino voter registration, and similar hot primary elections in Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, Pennsylvania, Illinois, New York, New Jersey, and Florida, Ochoa estimates that 1.077 million net new Latinos have been recently added to the rolls nationwide, for a current national total of 10.4 million.

State	2004 WCVI - PDI, TX Leg Council	2006 PDI, TX Leg Council	Number Ch	Diff 04-06	VCS, PDI - 7/1/08	Number Ch	Diff in % since 2006	Estimated Growth in National LVR since 2006	Current National LVR Estimate
California	2,778,551	2,763,975	(14,576)	-0.5%	2,987,275	223,300	8.1%		
Texas	2,274,125	2,345,265	71,140	3.1%	2,660,628	315,363	13.4%		
Total	5,052,676	5,109,240	56,564	1.1%	5,647,903	538,663	10.5%		
								1,077,326	10,400,000

Interestingly, this surge was driven by campaign/partisan entities or self-registration, a phenomenon not seen among Latinos in a primary cycle since the Kennedy-Carter contest in 1980.

### Explaining the “plateau” in 2005-06

The “Clinton-Obama” surge followed disappointing reports from the Census Bureau CPS report, in which Latino registration in 2006 slightly declined compared to 2004 (9.304 million nationwide in 2006 compared to 9.308 million in 2004). This “plateau” is the first seen since 1989-90, after 14 years of uninterrupted expansion. While the “plateau” appears to have been mitigated by the “Clinton-Obama” surge of the first half of 2008, it is important to understand why the “plateau” occurred.

Several factors explanatory factors include:

- Exclusionary voter registration laws enacted in 2003-06 in Latino-oriented states;
- Delays in Naturalization Processing;
- Demographic Churning.

During 2003-06 state legislatures and ballot initiatives enacted laws in states like Florida, Ohio, New Mexico, and Arizona making it more difficult for citizens to register to vote.

These laws were partly in reaction to perceived abuses by interest group related registration efforts (ACORN-Project Vote was repeatedly mentioned by lawmakers and complaining Secretaries of State), and partly a xenophobia-based effort to prevent alleged “illegal-alien fraud” (no proof of it existed!). These efforts were nonetheless mostly successful.

These laws cause voter registration groups to suspend activities and seek court-based remedies (court challenges failed to date). The end-results were fewer voter registration drives in the “restrictive law” states. Drives that were conducted were less fruitful and more expensive due to the new restrictions (particularly true for Florida and New Mexico).

While the 1990’s saw speedy increases in new citizen voting among Latinos, permanent residents have experienced slow-downs in the pace of citizenship acquisition since 2002. The massive, Spanish-language media driven immigrant rights marches of 2006 and subsequent organizing efforts by immigrant rights groups (NALACC, Somos America, etc.) brought in hundreds of thousands of new applications for citizenship. However, federal authorities processed citizenship applicants slowly (due to Sept. 11<sup>th</sup> era security precautions). Moreover, the “success” rate for applicants declined due to costs and new bureaucratic hurdles. By the deadline for registration in Oct. 2006, few applicants had been granted citizenship.

Finally, 2004-06 saw massive demographic churning with working middle class Latino citizens migrating within and/or out of California, Texas, Illinois, New York and New Jersey in search of affordable home-ownership opportunities. Housing reports during 2004-06 showed Phoenix, Las Vegas, San Antonio, Orlando, Denver, Albuquerque, Austin, and Dallas were destinations for massive influxes of Midwesterners, Californians, and Northeasterners, among them hundreds of thousands of Latino registered voters. These new residents of fast-growth, cheap housing, sun-belt states slowly re-registered to vote, most of them not in time for the 2006 elections.

### Final Stretch in Summer-fall: Register at Least 1 Million More Voters

Currently, various Latino organizations are positioning to conduct a massive wave of grassroots registration and turnout activities in key states. The most notable effort stems from SVREP-initiated coalitions that have built slowly through Presidential year partnerships every four years since 1996:

- Latino Vote USA, Campaign ‘96: SVREP/USHLI/HELF;
- Latino Vote 2000: SVREP/HF;
- 10-4 Campaign in 2004: SVREP/HF/LULAC/LCLAA; and
- Movimiento 10-12 Campaign in 2008: SVREP/HF/LULAC/LCLAA/NALACC/Hermandad Mexicano Latinoamericana

During 1996-2004, the coalition efforts registered around 100,000 voters for each Presidential election. In 2008 however, the various groups have taken goals of 200,000 to 300,000 new voters during summer and fall of 2008!

**SVREP has already registered more than 25,000 voters in small-scale warm-up activities based on high schools, campuses, and in churches in California, Texas, Florida, Arizona, Colorado, Washington and New Mexico during the last period.**

**We are gearing up to register and turnout another 125,000-175,000 voters in 125 key communities in California, Texas, New Mexico, Nevada, Arizona, Florida, Colorado, North Carolina, Georgia, Washington, Virginia and Oregon. A list of SVREP-target counties is attached.**

Fundraising efforts are going apace with more some \$3-4 million expected to be raised and spent.

The next big step will be the National Latino Congreso, a politics and policy convention on July 18-20 sponsored by literally hundreds of Latino Community-based organizations from across the country. This years congreso is dedicated to fundraising and mobilizing the Latino vote to maximize impact on needed policy changes in the incoming federal and state legislatures. For more information see [www.latinocongreso.org](http://www.latinocongreso.org).

LULAC, HF, NALACC, LCLAA and HMLA are fundraising and preparing mobilizations in the SVREP-targeted states, as well as New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Maryland, and Illinois. These nonpartisan activities will generate another 50,000 to 100,000 new Latino voters.

A well-organized and financed mobilization added together with results of non-Latino entities and self-registration by inspired citizens can add another 1-2 million Latino voters to the roles by November, assuming that competition among the parties and candidates continues to be hot at the Presidential, Senatorial, Congressional and local levels.

**According to Census projections, some 7-8 million Latino adult citizens are unregistered. Hence, SVREP predicts that Latino registration will end up between 11.4 and 12.4 million by the November elections.**

#### Census Bureau Results: Historic Trends Among Latinos 1972-2004

During 1972-2004 Latino voting was characterized by three different trends:

- no growth (1972-76);
- presidential cycle-driven growth (1977-1992); and

- broad-based growth (1993-2004).

During 1972-76 Latino voter registration slightly declined from 2.495 million voters in 1972 to 2.494 million voters according to Census CPS reports. Causal factors included general disillusionment with politics due to issues like the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal. Latino perceptions of electoral politics tended to see voting as an ineffective avenue for achieving representation and social change. During this era Latino leaders started forming organizations specifically intended to increase Latino voting (SVREP was founded in 1974).

During 1977-92 Latino voter registration reversed itself and became the fastest growing voter sub-group in the U.S. with an annual growth average of 165.2 thousand or 5% over the 16-year span, according to Census Bureau CPS reports.

Year	1976	1980	1984	1988	1992	16 year average growth % and N
% Latino registration growth per year		4.9%	6.8%	5.1%	3.1%	5.0%
Latino registration in millions	2494	2984	3794	4573	5137	165.2

A more detailed analysis of Latino growth patterns shows that 93.6% of growth occurred in the final two years of the four-year cycle. Registration growth was driven by voter mobilization efforts by Latino community-based groups like SVREP, MNVREP (founded 1981), Pacific-Northwest Organizing Project (founded 1987), Atreverte (founded 1986), and Industrial Areas Foundations in the 2-year Presidential cycle. Interest groups like political parties, candidates and unions (and their auxiliaries like ACORN-Project Vote and Center for Community Change) interested in growing the Latino vote began to activate as well.

Off-years	1977-78	1981-82	1985-86	1989-90	Total	Ave 4-yr. Change in Thousands	% of Total Latino Growth
Number Increase in thousands	-261	107	453	-131	168	42.00	6.4%
Presidential cycle	1979-80	1983-84	1987-88	1991-92			
Number Increase in thousands	751	703	326	695	2475	618.75	93.6%

Interestingly, Latino perceptions of elections, particularly among the native-born, changed positively. Elections gained acceptance as a comparatively effective channel for achieving change. Latino representation in elective office skyrocketed from about 1300 in 1973 to about 3500 in 1992.

During 1993-2004, Latino voting continued to be the fastest growing subgroup in America with a 5.5% annual rate of growth (or 347.6 thousand net new Latino voters per year).

Again, a closer analysis of Census Bureau CPS surveys show more consistent Latino registration growth, spread throughout the 4-year periods. Contrary to earlier patterns Latino registration showed robust growth during “off-years” (418.67 thousand per 2-year cycle), as well as “presidential” cycles (971.67 thousand per 2-year cycle).

	1993-94	1997-98	2001-02	Total	Ave Change in Thousands	% of Growth
Off-years Number Increase in thousands	336	270	650	1256	418.67	30.1%
Presidential cycle	1995-96	1999-00	2003-04			
Number Increase in thousands	1100	703	1112	2915	971.67	69.9%

Several factors explain this improved pattern:

- the “motor voter” act of 1994 created a consistent stream of younger Latino registrants in states where effectively implemented (like Texas);
- naturalized citizens entered the electorate in large numbers in the 1990’s due to the 1986 “amnesty” law, as well as citizenship organizing activities by community based groups (Hermandad Mexicana, One Stop, NALEO), churches, school districts, and unions;
- increased capacity among Latino community-based groups and elected official-related networks spurred more consistent voter engagement activities, not tied to Presidential-cycles.
- increased activities from interest groups and their auxiliaries (SEIU’s “Mi Familia” Vota, People for the American Way’s “Democracia USA”) and special interests (Spanish-language media, private sector associations, issue/constituency-based organizations) in mobilizing the Latino vote.

Once again, Latino perceptions of the electoral process in this period were that they were a comparatively effective path to representation and change. For example, by 2004 Latinos in elective office grew to about 5,000 nationwide from 3,500 in 1992.

**124 SVREP Target Counties/Regions (the # projects indicated in parenthesis)**

Arizona (20)

Maricopa (11)  
Pima (3)  
Pinal (1)  
Santa Cruz (1)  
Yuma (1)  
Cochise (1)  
Coconino (1)  
Globe (1)

California (34)

Los Angeles (18)  
Orange (1)  
San Bernardino (3)  
Riverside (2)  
Santa Barbara (2)  
Ventura (1)  
Fresno (1)  
Kern (1)  
San Diego (2)  
Imperial (1)  
San Joaquin (2)

Colorado (11)

Pueblo (2)  
Adams (1)  
Arapahoe (1)  
Denver (2)  
Larimer (1)  
Weld (1)  
San Luis Valley (2)  
Boulder (1)

New Mexico (14)

Bernalillo (2)  
Dona Ana (2)  
Santa Fe (1)  
Taos (1)  
Mckinley (2)  
Rio Arriba (1)

Valencia (1)  
Chaves (1)  
Sandoval (1)  
Eddy (1)  
Grant (1)

Texas (23)

Cameron (5)  
Hidalgo (10)  
Dallas (4)  
Harris (2)  
Nueces (1)  
El Paso (1)  
Bexar (1)

Florida (13)

Miami-Dade (10)  
Hillsborough (1)  
Orange (2)

North Carolina (1)

Eastern NC (1)

Georgia (1)

Fulton (1)

Washington (3)

Yakima Valley (3)

Oregon (1)

Salem area (1)

Nevada (1)

Clark (1)

Virginia (1)

Northern Virginia (1)