

Directions:

1. Mark your confusion.
2. Show evidence of a close reading. Mark up the text with questions and/or comments.
3. Write a one-page reflection on your own sheet of paper.

Can Obama Hold On to the Latino Vote?

In 2008, Hispanic voters helped make Barack Obama president. Will they now save his re-election campaign?

Source: *The Week* August 17, 2012

How important is the Latino vote in 2012?

It could be decisive. The boom in the Latino population — from 35 million in 2000 to over 50 million today — has been especially pronounced in five key swing states: Florida, Colorado, Nevada, North Carolina, and Virginia. The Latino vote is almost certain to tilt heavily Democratic, but the size of the margin could mean the difference between victory and defeat for President Obama and his Republican opponent, Mitt Romney. That's why both campaigns are wooing Hispanic voters. Obama's decision in June to halt the deportations of young immigrants illegally brought to the U.S. as children was widely seen as an attempt to please Hispanic voters, as was Romney's pledge to overhaul the green card system to allow immigrants to more easily keep their families together. But despite all the attention to Latino voters, there are real doubts that a majority of them will show up at the polls.

Why is that?

Americans of Latin American descent represent the fastest-growing demographic in the U.S., but the number of Latino voters isn't rising as quickly. Just under half of eligible Latino voters turned out to vote in 2008, compared with 66 percent of whites and 65 percent of blacks. And voter enthusiasm among Latinos is going down, not up. Hispanic voter registration actually fell from 11.6 million in 2008 to 10.9 million in 2010 and has shown few signs of picking up this year, even though the total number of eligible Latino voters has climbed to 21.7 million. "We still need to confront a registration gap that is quite significant," said University of Washington political scientist Matt A. Barreto.

What's the reason for that gap?

It's at least partly the result of the recession's hitting Latinos disproportionately hard. Median household wealth among Hispanics plummeted 66 percent between 2005 and 2009, and Latino homeowners have suffered a foreclosure rate of 11.9 percent, more than twice that of whites. "When people lose their jobs or homes, they usually have to move elsewhere," said Antonio Gonzalez, head of the Southwest Voter Registration Education Project. "When you move, you have to re-register, and we suspect that didn't happen in 2009 and '10." In addition, almost a third of eligible Hispanic voters are under 30, a demographic group with lower engagement across the board. In 2010, just 17.6 percent of young Latinos voted.

Can turnout be improved?

The Democrats have long pushed get-out-the-vote campaigns among Latinos, but now Republicans have recognized that they have to get serious about courting Hispanic voters, too. They face a challenging trend: George W. Bush captured 40 percent of the Hispanic vote in 2004, but John McCain got only 31 percent in 2008. And this year, polls indicate that Obama is crushing Romney among Hispanics, 67 percent to 23 percent. Since Latinos are projected to make up nearly 30 percent of the U.S. population by 2050, the

Republican Party will be unable to win national elections if it does not bring more of them under its tent.

Can Republicans make that happen?

In the long term, it's possible. Hispanics tend to skew conservative on many issues that define Republican voters, such as opposition to abortion, gay rights, and organized labor. But in recent years, the GOP's often harsh rhetoric about illegal immigration has turned off Latino voters. During the primary season, Romney moved right on immigration, vowing to block illegal immigrants from getting jobs and benefits so they'd "self-deport." He also promised to veto the DREAM Act, which would allow many children of illegal immigrants to apply for U.S. citizenship. "Romney has dug himself into a great big hole with Latinos on immigration," said Ana Navarro, an adviser to John McCain in 2008. That hole got deeper when Obama issued the executive order ending deportations of illegal immigrants who arrived as minors and offering them a chance to stay in the U.S. permanently.

So Hispanics will back Obama?

Yes, but the question is whether the lopsided poll numbers will hold up on Election Day. Unemployment among Latinos is 10.3 percent. Many Latino leaders have strongly criticized Obama for failing to craft a national immigration policy and for deporting a record 1.4 million illegal immigrants. With many white voters deserting the Democrats, analysts say Obama cannot win if his share of the Hispanic vote drops below 65 percent. Romney hopes to chip away at Obama's Hispanic support, especially among Cuban-Americans in the swing state of Florida. The Obama campaign, meanwhile, is counting on Hispanic voters to deliver two other critical swing states, Nevada and Colorado. "All they need is to be inspired," said Armando Navarro, a political scientist at the University of California, Riverside. "We are truly the balance of power, we are the swing vote."

Battling for el corazón of Texas

Nowhere is the Latino vote more significant in the long term than in Texas, where the Latino population has grown by 3 million in the past 10 years and one in three residents is now Hispanic. Republican presidential candidates have won this deep-red state in every election since 1976, but unless the party can improve its share of the Latino vote, Texas could turn blue within a decade. Fortunately for the GOP, it now has a rising Hispanic star in Texas — Ted Cruz, a Cuban-American attorney who was swept to victory in last month's U.S. Senate primary on a wave of Tea Party support. If he wins in November, Cruz could play a major role in attracting conservative-minded Latinos to the GOP. But Texas Democrats see a future just as promising for Julián Castro, the 37-year-old mayor of San Antonio, who has been tapped to give the keynote speech at the Democratic National Convention in September. Cruz and Castro, said Dallas Morning News columnist Wayne Slater, represent "the radically different poles that will divide — and will define — our politics for the next generation."

Possible WN topics

- What other key groups might decide this election? Why? How?
- What might Romney and Obama do to capture more Latino voters?
- Pick a line from this AoW and reflect on it