



SENSE OF COMMUNITY:

Latino Majorities Poll and Vote to Reduce Pollution, Protect Water & Conserve Public Lands

A research brief prepared for the Hispanic Access Foundation
Authors: Matt A. Barreto PhD and Bryan Wilcox-Archuleta

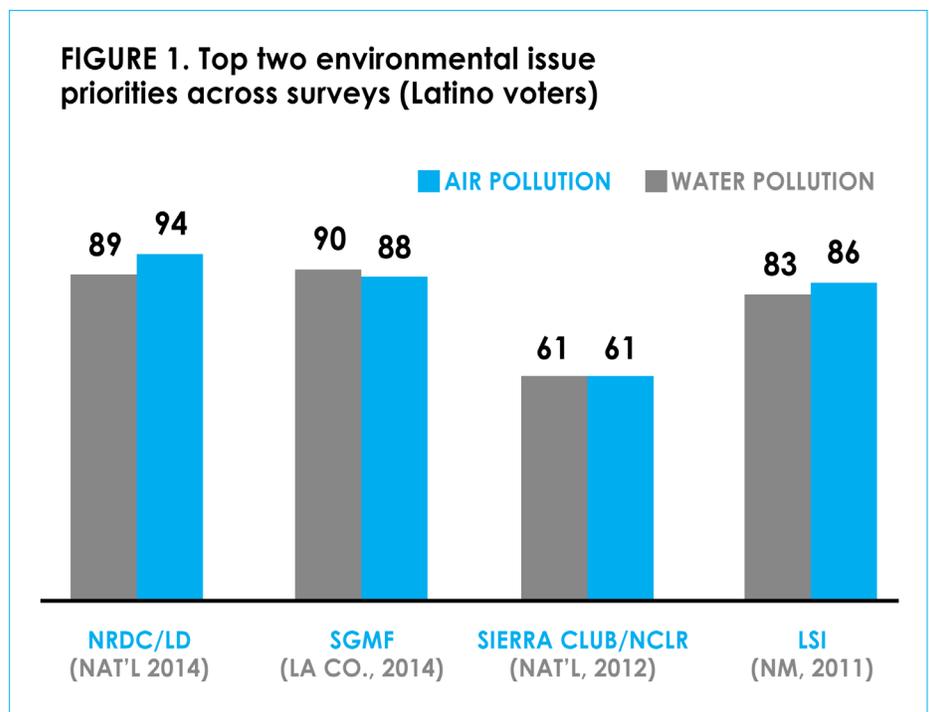


JUNE 2015

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES AND LATINO VOTERS

This report examines the importance of environmental issues for Latino voters. Over the past few years, Latino, conservation and environmental groups have all identified the importance of environmental issues for Latinos living in the United States. A 2015 New York Times article noted that Latinos demonstrate overwhelming concern for the environment. A 2014 research brief prepared by Latino Decisions for the Hispanic Access Foundation reported that clean air and water, preserving public lands, climate change, and promoting clean energy are all matters of concern for the rapidly growing Latino population. Though Latinos frequently cite environmental concerns as a top priority, relatively sparse information is available that connects their concern for the environment with their voting behavior – until now. Do Latinos’ strong concern for environmental issues line up with final vote outcomes for environmental related causes and issues?

Figure 1 highlights the findings from four different studies that asked Latino respondents how concerned they are about various issues. In each instance, Latino respondents demonstrated overwhelming concern for air and water pollution. In 2014, Latino Decisions and the NRDC found that over 85% of Latinos claimed air and water pollution were “very” or “extremely” important issues. As Figure 1 shows, Latinos’ high concern for air and water pollution are not artifacts of one or even two public opinion surveys. Their strong concerns for environmental issues are documented repeatedly and over time.



Given the importance of environmental concerns for Latinos, this report provides empirical evidence that connects Latino attitudes toward the environment with vote outcomes for environmental related initiatives. In four separate states, Latino polling on environmental concerns

closely matched the overall vote share on environmental related ballot initiatives in the 2014 midterm election. In each of these states, sizable portions of the voting bloc are Latinos and were a key factor in the success of each initiative. Policy makers and politicians should take note; environmental concerns will continue to mobilize Latino voters into the future. Looking forward to 2016, candidates that overlook environmental concerns are likely to alienate Latino voters, a growing and important portion of the voting population.

LATINO CONSERVATION VOTING IN 2014

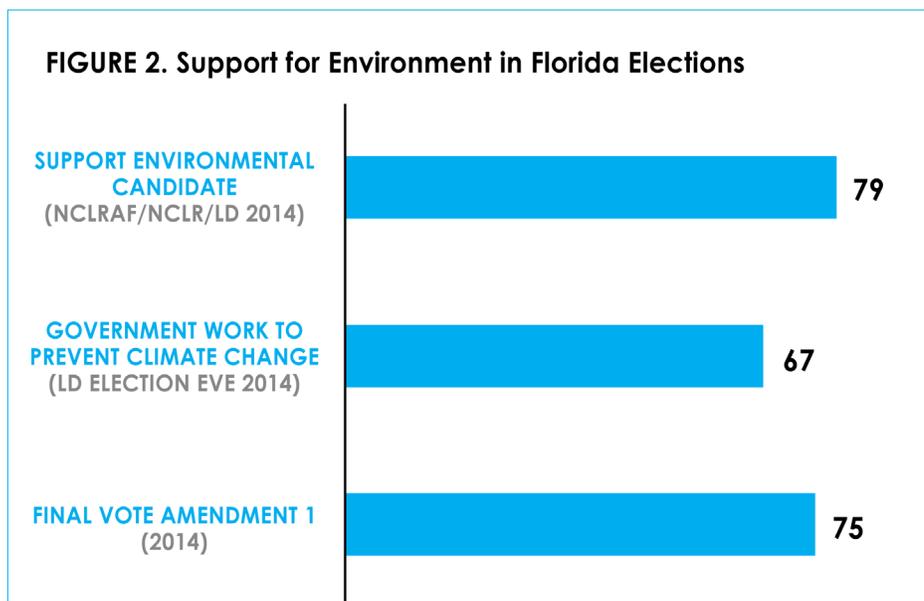
In the Latino Decisions 2014 Election Eve Poll, 80% of Latino likely voters thought it was “extremely” or “very” important for the federal government to take measures to reduce carbon pollution that is causing climate change. Despite the overwhelming support Latinos demonstrate in polling toward environmental issues, pundits and policy-makers may question if this support translates into voting behavior. Looking at recent polling numbers and comparing those numbers with voter turnout in four different environmental initiatives in the 2014 election, this report shows that Latino attitudes toward the environment indeed closely match the final vote-share on four separate environmental initiatives. This information is important as the 2016 election cycle gets underway.

In 2014, voters in Florida and California as well as voters in Bernalillo county, New Mexico and Larimer county, Colorado all voted on ballot measures directly relating to environmental protection and conservation.

FLORIDA

In Florida, the Florida Water and Land Conservation Initiative (Amendment 1) was a state constitutional amendment that was approved by voters with overwhelming margins. According to official voter registration statistics 19% of all voters in Florida are Latino. Seventy-five percent of voters statewide supported the amendment, which provided funding to protect drinking water, acquire, restore, improve and manage wetlands, fish and wildlife habitats as well as recreational lands. Latino Decisions 2014 Election Eve Poll data show that 67% of Latinos living in Florida who voted in the 2014 midterm election supported governmental intervention to reduce and prevent climate change. Nearly 7 out of 10 Latino voters in Florida were supportive of environmental concerns.

In a poll of Latinos completed in October 2014, 79% of respondents favored a candidate who supported reducing pollution over a candidate who opposed reducing pollution because it was bad for business. In other words, when heading to the polls, 8 of 10 Latinos would rather support a candidate with a strong favorable position toward the environment over a candidate who put business issues first. Figure 2 presents the final vote share and the results from the two polls discussed above.



COLORADO

In Larimer County, Colorado, home to Colorado State University and Rocky Mountain National Park, voters were asked to approve a 25-year sales tax extension to protect natural areas, open spaces, and rivers. Like the initiative in Florida, voters approved the sales tax extension overwhelmingly: 81% voted for the measure while only 19% voted against it. In Colorado, 11% of all voters are Latino. In 2014, 72% of Latinos who voted in Colorado feel the federal government should take measures to fix climate change.

FIGURE 3. Support for Environment in Colorado Elections

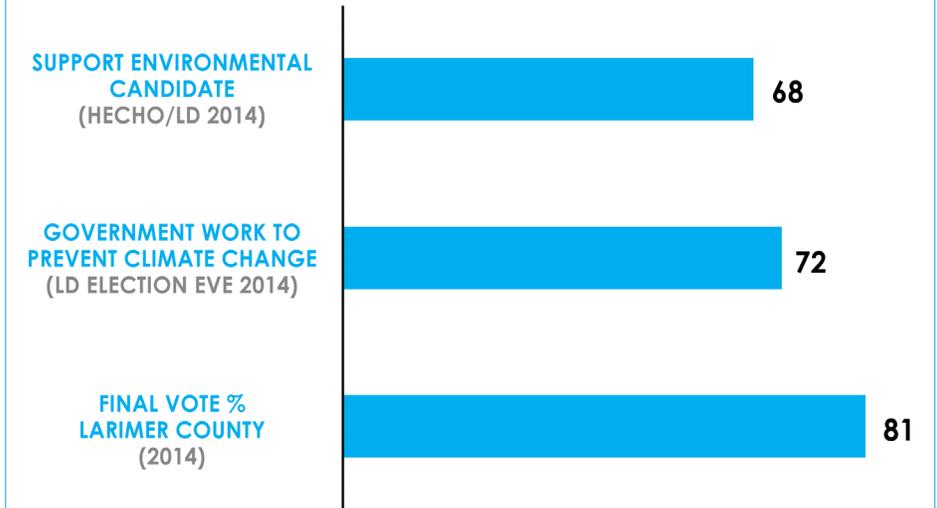


Figure 3 compares Latino support of environmental issues and the final vote share in Larimer County. As the figure shows, environmental concern among Latinos matches the final vote outcome. A 2014 HECHO/ Latino Decision poll found that 68% of Colorado Latinos would rather support an environmentally-friendly candidate compared to a more business-friendly candidate.

FIGURE 4. Support for Environment in New Mexico Elections



NEW MEXICO

Voters in Bernalillo County, New Mexico, the most populated county in the state with over 600,000 residents, were asked in the 2014 election to decide whether to approve a 15-year property tax increase for open space and natural areas. According to official voter registration statistics, 35% of

the voting bloc in New Mexico is Latino. In the November 2014 election, 72% of voters approved the measure. Given the size of the Latino voting bloc in New Mexico, support from the Latino community was crucial for electoral success.

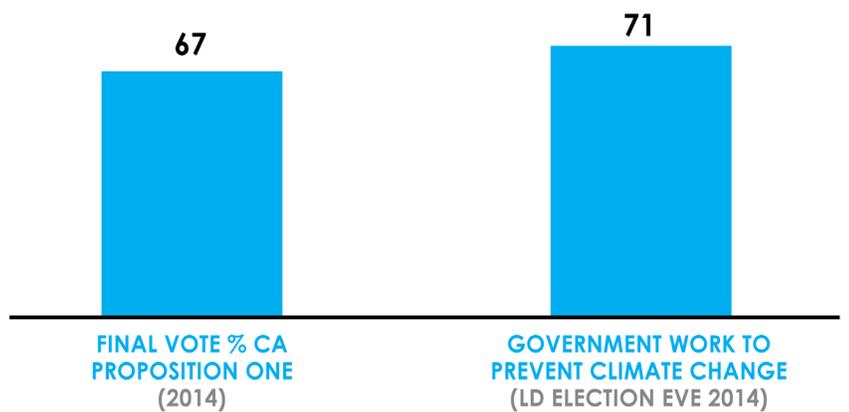
These findings are demonstrated in Figure 4. A 2014 poll conducted by Latino Decisions found 73% of Latino respondents in New Mexico thought it was very important for the government to preserve public lands and open spaces. Recent polling shows that 72% of New Mexico Latinos would vote for a candidate who requires businesses to prove new developments do not harm the environment or limit access to open space before commercial drilling on public lands.

CALIFORNIA

Twenty-five percent of all registered voters in California are Latino. In 2014, voters passed California Proposition 1, a \$7.1 billion water bond, which included \$1.5 billion for land conservation. This is the first new state funding dedicated solely to land conservation since 2006. Sixty-seven percent of voters supported this measure while only 33% voted in opposition. When asked, 76%

of Latinos who voted in the 2014 midterm election supported Proposition 1. Comparing the final vote share to Latino voting patterns shows that Latino supported the measure at a higher level than the aggregate population. With 25% of the voting bloc identifying as Latino, the passage of Proposition 1 would have been unlikely without Latino support. In addition, as Figure 5 reveals, 71% of Latino voters in 2014 support increased governmental measures to address environmental conservation and protection.

FIGURE 5. Support for Environment in California Elections



SENSE OF COMMUNITY: LATINOS VOTE FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

These four case studies provide evidence that Latino voter support of environmental related ballot measures closely matches Latino preferences toward the environment.

The environment is important to many Latinos and their families. In the 2014 HECHO/Latino Decision Poll, we see that among likely voters in New Mexico and Colorado, 66% use parks and public lands at least once per month; 36% use these lands at least once per week. The high use of public lands by Latinos as well as their general concern for environmental issues affects their politics. In fact, Latinos are more likely to support candidates who take environmental-friendly positions as well as utilize open spaces and natural areas.

2014 polling from Latino Decisions in New Mexico, Colorado, and Florida shows that Latinos are more likely to support candidates when they have environmentally friendly platforms compared to candidates who are more “pro-business” yet less concerned with the environment. As the Latino population continues to grow, policy makers and politicians will have to listen to their concerns, especially those related to the environment. Politicians and policy makers should be aware that polling data on Latinos’ views toward the environment do in fact match real outcomes. In 2014, four environmental issues were passed in areas with high Latino voting and support. In 2016, candidates looking to garner Latino voters must shape environmental friendly platforms given the importance of these issues for Latino voters. According to a 2014 research brief for the Hispanic Access Foundation, Latinos’ support for environmental and conservation issues is not divided by party identification, age, gender, or other demographics traits. In other words, among Latinos, men and women, young and old, Republican and Democrats, all come together to defend the environment and ensure it is protected for generations in the future.

.....
Environmental policy preferences of Latinos clearly match political outcomes. Ignoring protective environmental concerns is a sure way to lose Latino support in 2016 as Latino voters consistently show support for candidates that actively promote a cleaner environment and preserve public lands.
.....

Environmental policy preferences of Latinos clearly match political outcomes. Ignoring protective environmental concerns is a sure way to lose Latino support in 2016 as Latino voters consistently show support for candidates that actively promote a cleaner environment and preserve public lands.

APPENDIX: SURVEYS REFERENCED IN THIS ANALYSIS

Latino Decisions 2014 Election Eve Poll, http://www.latinodecisions.com/files/4414/1520/8142/Latino_Election_Eve_Poll_November_2014_State_Results.pdf

2014 HECHO/Latino Decisions Survey of the Colorado and New Mexico Hispanic Electorate, http://www.latinodecisions.com/files/9114/0288/9228/HECHO_Slides_2014.pdf

NCLRAF/Latino Decisions Colorado Poll, October 2014, http://www.latinodecisions.com/files/5414/1324/2935/NCLRAF_LD_Colorado_Release_October_2014.pdf

NCLRAF/Latino Decisions Florida Poll, October 2014, http://www.latinodecisions.com/files/8414/1287/2994/NCLR_NCLRAF_Florida_Toplines_Release_Oct_2014.pdf

Natural Resources Defense Council/Latino Decision Survey, January 2014, http://www.latinodecisions.com/files/7913/9043/8102/NRDC_LD_Toplines_January.pdf

Hispanic Voter Perspectives on Conservation and Environmental Issues, Hispanic Access Foundation/ Latino Decisions, 2014, http://hispanicaccess.org/sites/default/files/HAF_LatinoDecisions_ResearchBrief.pdf