



Hispanic Voter Perspectives on Conservation and Environmental Issues

A research brief prepared for the Hispanic Access Foundation

Latino  **Decisions**

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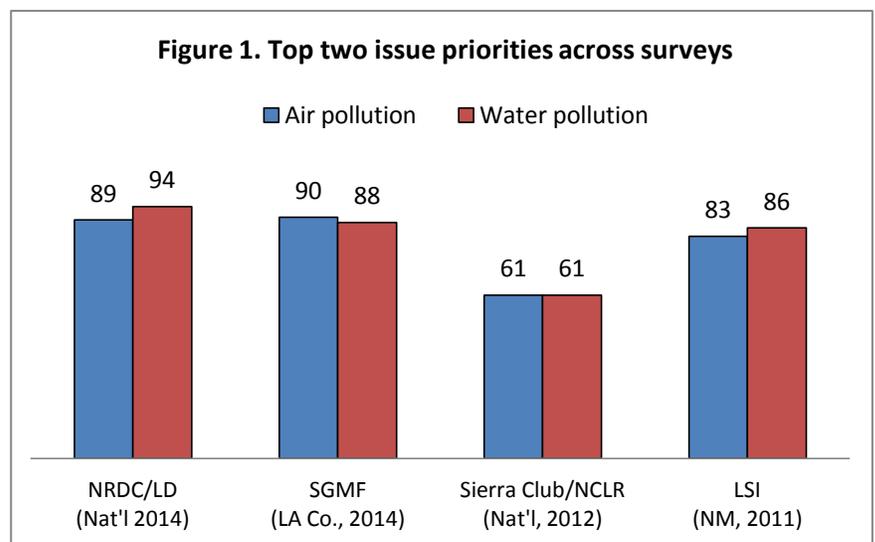
Introduction: Conservation Issues and Latino Voters

Over the last three years, conservation and environmental advocates have taken important steps to investigate the perspectives of Latino voters on a broad range of pressing issues. This research brief highlights evidence from nine different surveysⁱ of the Latino electorate conducted between 2011 and 2014. The results across these studies produce consistent results indicating that Hispanics have clear, established views on conservation and environmental issues. More specifically, Latino voters consistently articulate concern about pollution, and global warming, and are overwhelmingly supportive of a broad policy agenda actively addressing these problems. Furthermore, this segment of the electorate views economic growth as perfectly compatible with conservation and a clean-environment policy agenda. Hispanic voters want policy makers to take clean air and natural resource preservation considerations into account when making decisions about energy policy and other developments with a direct impact on the physical environment.

Issue Priorities

When it comes to policy priorities, water and air pollution are especially important to the overwhelming majority Latino voters. Four different studies asked respondents how concerned they are about various issues. In all instances, respondents expressed strong concern about air and water pollution. The

2011 LSI study of New Mexican voters finds over 80% are concerned about air and water pollution. A national survey of the Latino electorate conducted in 2012 by the Sierra Club finds over 60% of Hispanics believe the *most important* environmental issues for their families are water and air pollution. Two years later, another national study of Hispanic



voters, conducted by Latino Decisions and the NRDC, found more than 85% of Hispanics said air and water pollution were "very" or "extremely" important issues. Los Angeles County Latino voters concur, as a study completed in May 2014 finds over 85% of Hispanic voters in the region believe air and water pollution are serious problems.

To be sure, Latino voters identify several other issues as important. For example, the two national studies (Sierra Club, NRDC) find just over 70% of Hispanic voters identify climate change as a very important issue. Just over half of Latino voters in New Mexico and Los Angeles (52%) are very concerned about the loss of wildlife habitats.

Conservation is Personal

Looking at Latino attitudes on a range of conservation matters, it is clear that conservation is viewed as essential to a better quality of life. The two national polls give a big picture view on this issue. The 2014 NRDC survey shows 87% of Latino voters think protecting natural resources is an important issue for the country to address. The 2012 Sierra Club study shows even more personal nuance to this position, where 91% of Latino voters agree that "protecting land and water protects my culture, family, and community", and a nearly unanimous 95% believe outdoor activities like fishing and visiting national parks are important to their families. These sentiments run particularly strong among Hispanics in the West. For example, the 2012 Nuestro Rio study found that over 90% of Latinos in Arizona, Colorado and Nevada believe it is important for government to protect community rivers and lakes for families and the overall well-being of the environment. And, the recent 2014 HECHO survey of Colorado and New Mexico voters also found 93% of Hispanic voters in these two states believe it is important -- with 78% saying it is "very important" -- for government to protect public lands and open spaces for families and the good of the environment.

There is ample evidence the Latinos in the West and Southwest have strong ties to the region and regularly partake in outdoor activities, all of which serve to sharpen interest in conservation and clean air and water. HECHO's study of Latino voters in Colorado and New Mexico showed 82% feel strong familial connections to the land, and 63% make

recreational use of public lands in their home states. The 2014 Conservation in the West Poll produced by Colorado College found half of Hispanic voters in the West visit public lands more than five times a year. That study also showed 54% of Hispanic men in the West are sportsmen, and 43% identify as anglers or hunters. In a related finding, the San Gabriel Mountains study also showed more than half of Hispanics in Los Angeles County regularly picnic, hike, camp, and participate in a range of other outdoor sports and activities. The regional trends are especially important considering that more than half of all Hispanics (55%) in the United States reside in one of six Western and Southwestern states (Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, and Texas)ⁱⁱ. Thus, it makes perfect sense that air and water pollution issues are a priority for Hispanic voters, who are actively engaged with their environment, and personally vested in the land.

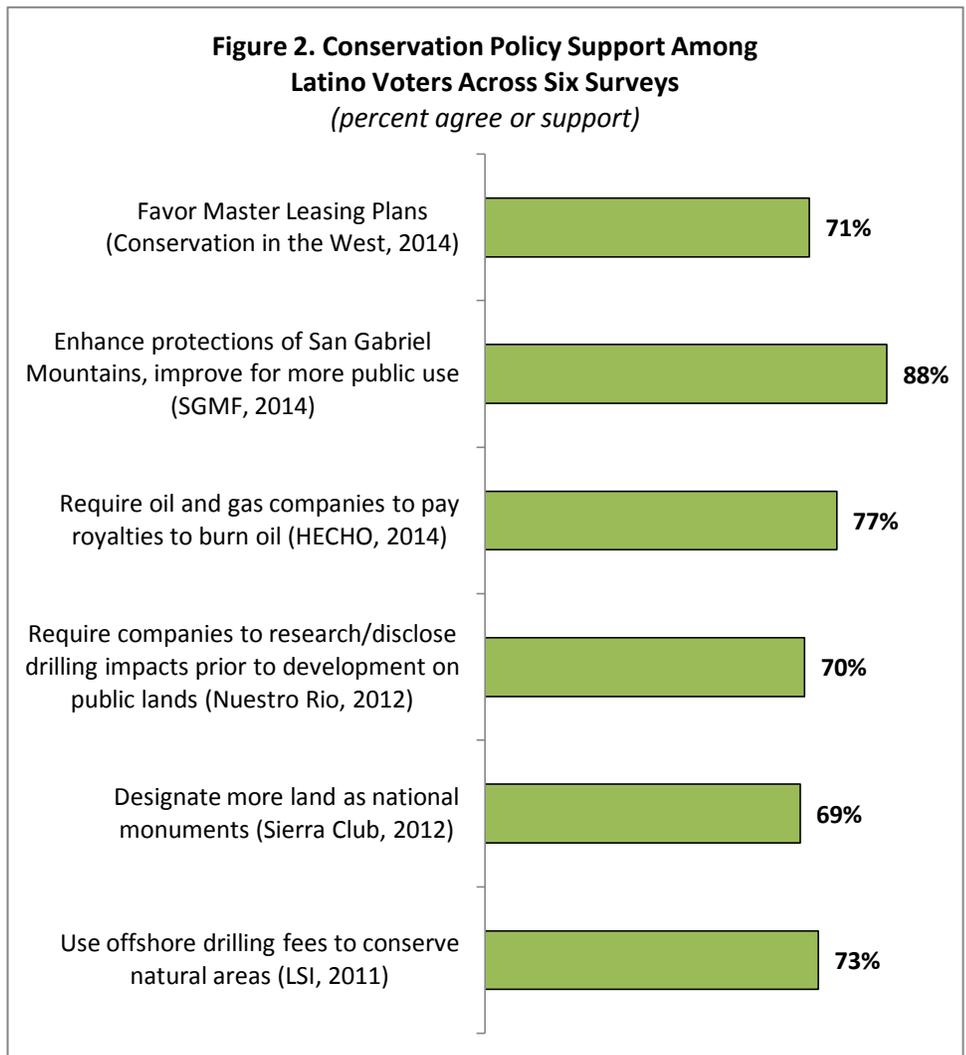
Policy and Action

Latino voters believe individuals and governments have important roles in protecting natural resources and promoting healthy, clean communities. In terms of personal actions, 58% of Hispanic voters in the 2012 Sierra Club study indicated they would be more willing to pay more on their monthly electricity bill to have their home's electricity come from clean sources; among millennials that share jumps to 63%. A similar query on the 2014 NRDC survey asked respondents how much more they would be willing to pay per month for cleaner energy. In that context, 70% of Hispanic voters indicate they are willing to absorb some amount of increase on their monthly electricity bill to reduce pollution. Interestingly, this holds true for 76% of those earning less than \$30,000 per year.

Hispanic voters also expect governments to balance environmental and economic considerations. The HECHO study shows nearly all Latino voters in New Mexico and Colorado, 95%, believe governments should consult with communities to identify land that is important to their heritage and potentially too valuable to drill. Similarly, the Conservation in the West Poll finds 77% of Hispanics oppose selling public land to reduce the federal deficit. Specific to New Mexico, the 2011 poll shows most voters, 54%, prefer that government places limits on cattle grazing to protect land from overuse.

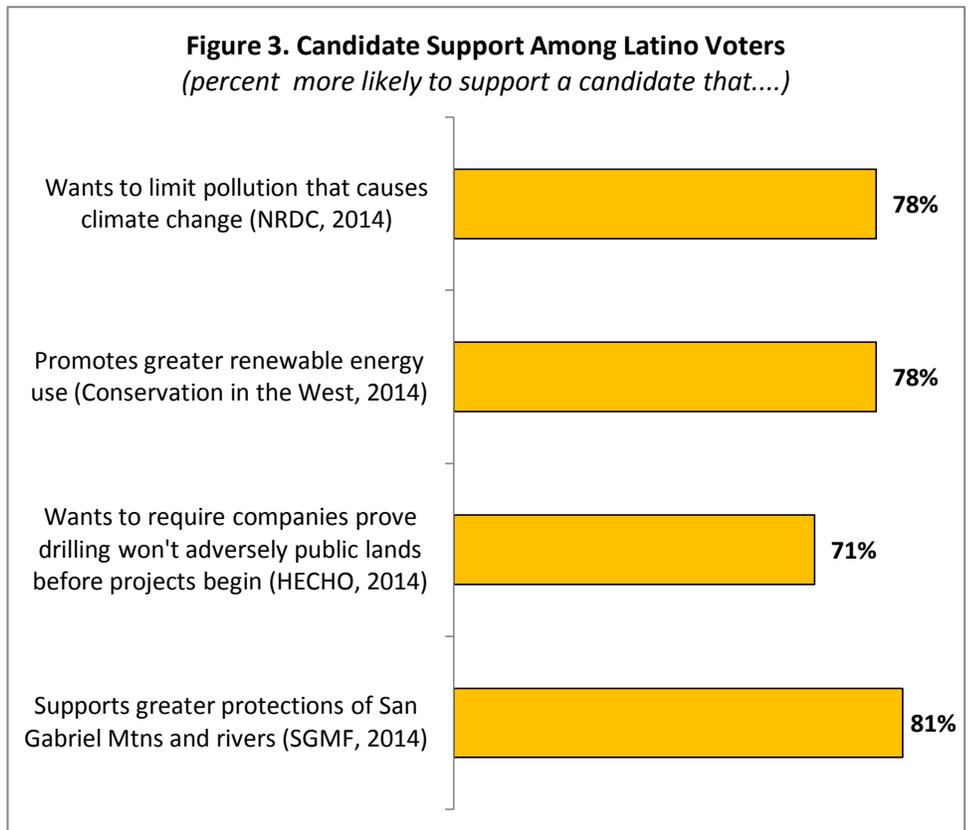
At the same time, it is important to recognize that Latino voters believe sound environmental practices can have a strong, positive economic impact. The Sierra Club study shows 90% of Latinos think protecting land and water is critical to current and future job creation, 86% believe national parks and monuments support millions of jobs to the benefit of the national economy, and 79% agree that developing a clean energy economy will create jobs that cannot be outsourced.

When it comes to policies and candidates, Hispanics consistently articulate their preference for an agenda that actively promotes a cleaner environment and preserving public lands. On a national scale, the NRDC study finds 80% support presidential action to fight carbon pollution, and 77% support such action to combat climate change. Likewise, the Sierra Club survey shows 72% believe that environmental regulations are important



to protecting families from dangerous toxins in the air and water. This sentiment is echoed in the 2013 Voces Verdes national study where 84% of Hispanic voters express support for the EPA setting safeguards to limit air pollution, and 86% favor executive action to limit pollution.

These trends are just as sharp in the state and national polling. In Colorado and New Mexico, the HECHO study shows 77% of Hispanic voters favor (with 55% "strongly" in favor) a plan that would require oil companies to pay royalties on the gas they burn to address the effects of those pollutants. There is also overwhelming support, 71%, for candidates who



support a policy requiring energy companies to provide sound evidence proving their proposed projects will not damage the environment. The Conservation in the West Poll also finds consistent preference for conservation-oriented candidates, 78% of Latinos in the West are more likely to support candidates promoting greater use of renewable energy, and 52% are much less likely to vote for a candidate who favors selling public lands to reduce the deficit. On the issue of master leasing plans (the Bureau of Land Management's new tool to assess where drilling is most appropriate in light of land conservation concerns) 71% of the Hispanic electorate favors this approach, compared to 62% of non-Hispanics in the region. The conservation-conscious voter is also found in the 2011 New Mexico study where 73% of voters believe that funds from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (royalties paid by oil and gas companies that drill offshore) should be used to conserve natural areas and clean water. Polling in Los Angeles County similarly finds 88% of Latino Angelinos support the San Gabriel proposal to expand protections for the San Gabriel Mountains in the Angeles National Forest, and 81% would be more favorable to a candidate who supported the proposal.

Concluding Observations

Climate change has dominated the headlines, and Hispanic voters certainly share concern about the phenomenon (as noted earlier, over 70% are worried about global warming), but this community clearly has interest in a wide range of environmental issues that matter to their lifestyle, health, and community livelihood. For the most part, Latinos are not divided by gender, party identification, age, or other demographic traits when it comes to environmental and conservation issues. This is evident in the very high rates of accord (i.e. there is little in-group variation/disagreement when 80% agree on a given issue). Clean air and water, preserving public lands, climate change, and promoting clean energy solutions are all matters of concern for this rapidly growing electorate. Decision makers and advocates with national and regional constituencies will need to demonstrate their attention to these concerns and policy preferences as the Latino population and electorate continues to grow into the foreseeable future.

ⁱ Surveys included in this analysis are:

1. [2011 Latino Sustainability Institute](http://www.democracyfornewmexico.com/files/lsi-pnal-survey-findings-090911---public-release.pdf) Survey of New Mexico's Hispanic Electorate.
<http://www.democracyfornewmexico.com/files/lsi-pnal-survey-findings-090911---public-release.pdf>.
2. [2012 Nuestro Rio Colorado/Latino Decisions](http://www.latinodecisions.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Nuestro_Rio_CO.pdf) Survey of Colorado Hispanic Electorate.
http://www.latinodecisions.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Nuestro_Rio_CO.pdf
3. [2012 Nuestro Rio/Latino Decisions Western State Survey](http://nuestrorio.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/News-Release-Nuestro-Rio-10-10-12-final.pdf) of Arizona, Colorado, Nevada and New Mexico Hispanic Electorate. <http://nuestrorio.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/News-Release-Nuestro-Rio-10-10-12-final.pdf>
4. [2012 Sierra Club/NCLR National Survey of the Hispanic Electorate](http://www.sierraclub.org/ecocentro/survey/).
<http://www.sierraclub.org/ecocentro/survey/>
5. [2013 Voces Verdes/Latino Decisions National Poll of the Hispanic Electorate](http://www.latinodecisions.com/blog/2013/05/07/latinos-remain-committed-to-reducing-air-pollution-and-preventing-climate-change/).
<http://www.latinodecisions.com/blog/2013/05/07/latinos-remain-committed-to-reducing-air-pollution-and-preventing-climate-change/>
6. [2014 Colorado College Conservation in the West Poll](http://www.coloradocollege.edu/other/stateoftherockies/conservationinthewest/topicreports/latino-voters.dot) of Voters in Six Western States.
<http://www.coloradocollege.edu/other/stateoftherockies/conservationinthewest/topicreports/latino-voters.dot>
7. [2014 NRDC/Latino Decisions National Survey of the Hispanic Electorate](http://www.latinodecisions.com/files/7913/9043/8102/NRDC_LD_Toplines_January.pdf).
http://www.latinodecisions.com/files/7913/9043/8102/NRDC_LD_Toplines_January.pdf
8. [2014 HECHO/Latino Decisions Survey of the Colorado and New Mexico Hispanic Electorate](http://www.latinodecisions.com/files/7913/9043/8102/NRDC_LD_Toplines_January.pdf).
http://www.latinodecisions.com/files/7913/9043/8102/NRDC_LD_Toplines_January.pdf
9. 2014 San Gabriel Mountains Forever Survey of Los Angeles County Voters.

ⁱⁱ 2012 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates