



California Immigrant Welfare Collaborative

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Post-Election Analysis of Immigrant Issues in the 2006 Elections

- Exit polls and voter surveys conducted on November 7th revealed that most voters rated the war in Iraq, healthcare and the economy as their top issues. Nevertheless, results of the New Americans Exit Poll, a national poll of voters in 3 major U.S. cities showed that views on the recent immigration debate resulted in support for Democrats nationwide.¹
- Nationally, Latinos moved away from the Republican Party. In 2004, the Republican Party captured 44% of the Latino vote. In 2006, this number dropped to just 26%. The Republican emphasis on border enforcement instead of comprehensive immigration reform may have contributed to the loss of support among Latinos.
- The California Governor's race was an exception to the Latino shift away from the Republican Party. While nearly 60% of California's Latino voters supported Phil Angelides, more than a third supported Arnold Schwarzenegger.² Schwarzenegger's shift to a moderate stance on immigration issues during the months leading up to the election may have positively influenced the Latino electorate.
- Despite wins for advocates for immigration reform in the House and Senate, anti-immigrant initiatives passed in Arizona and Colorado.
- There were very few competitive races in California for the state Senate and Assembly. Many pro-immigrant legislators were elected for the first time and re-elected across the state. In competitive races where immigration issues came up, results were not uniform.

National and state elections held Tuesday November 7th demonstrated a deep dissatisfaction among American voters about current political trends, including the war in Iraq, the economy, and other key issues. Although most exit polls and surveys reveal that immigration was not a top issue for most voters, did it play a role in last Tuesday's election outcome? Below is a brief analysis of the impact of immigration on the election based on news articles and exit polls released during the past week.

Immigration and National Elections

At the national level, issues such as the Iraq war and dissatisfaction with President Bush played a pivotal role in election outcomes. Exit polling conducted by the National Election Pool, a

¹ New Americans Exit Poll. Barnard College of Columbia University, the City University of New York, the Leavey Center for the Study of Los Angeles at Loyola Marymount University and the University of Washington. November 7, 2006. See <http://www.thenyic.org/templates/documentFinder.asp?did=616>

² 2006 WCVI National Exit Poll, Final Weighted National Results, November 14, 2006. William C. Velasquez Institute. See http://www.wcvi.org/press_room/press_releases/2006/exitpollresults_2006.htm

consortium of news organizations, and cited by the Washington Post found that although Republicans had hoped to capitalize on immigration, “fewer than one in three voters cited immigration as extremely important in influencing their decision, and they only narrowly favored Republican candidates.”³ Additionally, the poll found that approximately 60% of voters believe undocumented immigrants working in the United States should be offered a chance to legalize their status, a position favored by most Democrats but rejected by many hard-line Republicans in closely contested races.

A poll conducted by Newsweek found that immigration ranked fifth among concerns cited by Americans voting in the elections. The Iraq War, terrorism, health care, and the economy all outweighed immigration as issues that impacted how voters cast their ballot on November 7th.⁴ Nevertheless, a national poll conducted in New York, Los Angeles and Seattle among native-born and foreign-born voters showed that by a wide margin, voters felt that Democrats did a better job of handling the immigration issue during the last year.⁵ These results raise the possibility that immigration was important to voters, but not as Republicans had anticipated.

Immigration Hardliners Lose in Most National, Local Races but Anti-Immigrant Initiatives Pass

In general, immigration hardliners lost in races for the House and Senate across the country. Immigration2006.org, a group formed by Washington D.C. pollsters and media advisors to monitor how immigration played out in the 2006 elections, noted that in the majority of the fifteen races they monitored where immigration was a major issue discussed by the candidates, comprehensive immigration reform advocates won while immigration hardliners lost. (See www.immigration2006.org).

Still, despite Democratic wins in the House and Senate, anti-immigrant initiatives passed in two western states. Arizona voters, who voted down anti-immigrant state and Congressional candidates, approved four anti-immigrant initiatives: 1) restricting the posting of bail for undocumented immigrants, 2) denying punitive damages awards to undocumented immigrants, 3) establishing English as the official language, and 4) restricting immigrant access to state adult education and child care programs. In Colorado two anti-immigrant referendums appear to have won, 1) allowing the state to bring a lawsuit against the federal government to demand enforcement of federal immigration laws and 2) ensuring that businesses would not be able to get tax deductions if they hire undocumented immigrants.

Immigration and California Elections

Governor Schwarzenegger, Immigration and the Latino Vote

In the months before the November election for Governor, Republican Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger distanced himself from his former anti-immigrant comments by repositioning himself in the center of the immigration debate, a move that may have contributed to his election victory. In September of 2006, Governor Schwarzenegger authored a Los Angeles Times editorial urging comprehensive immigration reform with earned legalization (such as paying back taxes, learning English, etc.), while maintaining that amnesty is not the answer. Additionally, the Governor signed several state bills with a positive impact on immigrant

³ “Moderate Voters Lean Toward Democrats: Majority Disapprove of War and Bush”; The Washington Post. By Michael A. Fletcher and Jon Cohen; Wednesday, November 8, 2006; A30

⁴ “Time to Solve Immigration”, Newsweek International. By Fareed Zakaria. November 13, 2006.

⁵ New Americans Exit Poll, op cit. (conducted 11/7/06 in Seattle, New York and Los Angeles).

communities, including raising the minimum wage and making permanent a state naturalization program.

Exit polls showed 30-39% Latino voters in support of Schwarzenegger. Schwarzenegger fared much better among Latino voters than Republican candidates nationally. CNN national exit poll data showed that 73% of Latinos voted for the Democratic Party, while only 26% voted for Republican candidates⁶.

Soon after the elections, Governor Schwarzenegger maintained his moderate stance on immigration. On a trip to Mexico this past weekend, the Governor criticized Congressional legislation approving a 700-mile border fence and the President's "incomplete" plans for immigration reform.⁷ It is unclear what role Schwarzenegger will play in pushing forward comprehensive immigration reform at the federal level and pro-immigrant legislation at the state level during the coming year. However, his recent moderate stance on key immigrant issues and his open criticism of Republican immigration hardliners indicates the potential for gubernatorial leadership on immigrant issues nationally and in Sacramento.

Statewide/Local Election Results

Results a Mixed Bag for Anti-Immigrant Candidates in Statewide Races

In California, Democrats won a majority of the open seats in both the Senate and Assembly, maintaining their legislative majority. There were numerous statewide ballot initiatives, none of which focused on immigrant-related issues. Proposition 86, which would have provided state-funded health insurance to uninsured children—including immigrant children, failed. It is noteworthy, however, that Prop 86 won 48% of the vote despite more than \$60 million spent by the opposition.

Candidates campaigning on an anti-immigrant platform in California faced mixed results. Below are a few notable races.

Dick Mountjoy for U.S. Senate Loses to Incumbent Diane Feinstein - Dick Mountjoy, previously a California state Senator, listed "illegal immigration" as his signature issue on his website. He lost by a wide margin, as expected, of 59.7% to 34.9% to incumbent Senator Diane Feinstein. Mountjoy is a key supporter of efforts to place an anti-immigrant initiative restricting access to driver's licenses and public benefits for some immigrants on the California ballot.

Tom McClintock Loses to John Garamendi for Lieutenant Governor – John Garamendi (D) won 49.5% to 44.9% over Senator Tom McClintock. State Senator Tom McClintock is an ardent anti-immigrant advocate who supported Proposition 187 and sponsored unsuccessful bills rescinding undocumented students' eligibility for in-state tuition.

Shirley Horton Wins Hotly Contested Race - Shirley Horton, Republican Assembly member, ran a tight campaign for re-election in Chula Vista and the surrounding area against Maxine Sherard, a retired university professor. During the campaign, Horton accused Sherard of a soft stance on "illegal immigrants" who supposedly burden the healthcare, educational, and other local systems. Horton won narrowly, receiving 52% of the vote.

⁶ "Hispanics said adios to Republican Party"; Miami Herald; By Andres Oppenheimer; November 9, 2006.

⁷ "Governor goes south of border-Schwarzenegger talks about election results, immigration policy, his political future"; San Francisco Chronicle; By Carla Marinucci; Friday, November 10, 2006.

Mayor Alan Mansoor Wins on Anti-Immigrant Platform - Mayor Alan Monsoor and his running mate Wendy Leece easily won reelection in Costa Mesa after running on an anti-immigrant platform. During his tenure as Mayor, Mansoor pushed through a plan to allow local police to enforce federal immigration laws, shut down the city's human rights commission and day labor center, and cut funding to organizations serving Latino communities. Costa Mesa was the first city in the country to pass a measure allowing local law enforcement cooperation with immigration authorities. It is likely Mansoor will continue advancing and implementing anti-immigrant proposals in Costa Mesa.

Many Pro-Immigrant Candidates Elected to Office

There were only a handful of closely contested state Assembly and Senate seats across the state. In much of the state, candidates with a history of supporting immigrant communities easily won election or re-election. Similarly, candidates with a history of support for immigrant concerns were also winners of many statewide races including Board of Equalization and State Controller. The pro-immigrant newly elected officials listed below were either elected to their local or state seat for the first time or were in very close races.

Richard Mendoza – Artesia Councilmember Richard Mendoza won a close election against Republican former Mayor of Cerritos Grace Hu. Although immigration was not a forefront issue during the campaign, Hu received support from anti-immigrant groups seeking to restrict undocumented immigrants access to the public education system.

Blong Xiong - Blong Xiong won election to the Fresno City Council, becoming the first Hmong American in California to win a city council seat. Xiong, a staff member of the immigrant and refugee service organization Center for New Americans, talked openly during the campaign about the needs of immigrant and refugee communities.

Still undecided is the hotly contested Orange County race between Democrat Lou Correa and Republican Lynn Daucher.⁸ During her campaign, Daucher strongly supported the recently approved border fence, the use of National Guard troops along the border and the Orange County Sheriff's plan to allow sheriff deputies to enforce immigration law. Correa strongly supported immigration reform and spoke out against anti-immigrant local and state efforts. It is noteworthy that the race is so close in Orange County, a traditional conservative stronghold.

Other new or reelected legislators with a history of supporting pro-immigrant policies include Assembly Members Fiona Ma, Mike Eng, Mary Hayashi, Jim Beall, Edward Hernandez, Anna Caballero, Sandre Swanson, and Wilma Amina Carter and Senators Alex Padilla, Leland Yee, Darrell Steinberg, and Ellen Corbett.

Looking Forward – What Lies Ahead?

The change in Congressional leadership may open the door to comprehensive immigration reform legislation in the coming year. Many of the committees previously headed by immigration hardliners will now be chaired by Democrats who may be more willing to consider and pass comprehensive immigration legislation that includes provisions such as legalization, family unification, and more oversight of detention and deportation policies affecting immigrant communities. It is too early to tell however, what issues will be prioritized by Democratic leadership in the coming Congressional session.

⁸ At the writing of this piece, Daucher was leading Correa by a few hundred votes, but her lead was narrowing as votes were counted.

In addition to comprehensive immigration reform, there are a variety of federal issues affecting immigrants with potential for passage due to the Democratic majority in Congress. These include expansion of health coverage for immigrant women and children, extension of Supplemental Security Income time limits for refugees and asylees, and passage of the DREAM Act, which would allow undocumented immigrant students to regularize their status.

In California, the continued success of anti-immigrant officials and activity in very conservative areas sets a tone of intolerance and fear in regions outside the boundaries of those particular localities. At the state level, Governor Schwarzenegger's seemingly more moderate tone on immigration reform may pave the way for the introduction and passage of state level pro-immigrant policies addressing issues such as language access, access to healthcare, and improved education and English programs. It remains to be seen whether Schwarzenegger's courting of the Latino vote becomes a real attempt to shape policies that address the concerns of all immigrants and their families in California.