



# RESURGENT REPUBLIC

## MEMORANDUM

**TO: Interested Parties**  
**FROM: Ed Gillespie, Whit Ayres, and Leslie Sanchez**  
**DATE: January 26, 2012**  
**RE: Obama Continues to Underperform Among Hispanic Voters in Florida**

In conjunction with the Hispanic Leadership Network, Resurgent Republic conducted 500 interviews with Hispanic registered voters in Florida, with full results available at [www.resurgentrepublic.com](http://www.resurgentrepublic.com). The results show that President Obama continues to underperform among Florida Hispanic voters and has done little to bolster his standing among this critical swing state demographic since our September survey last year. His level of support on the presidential generic ballot is 11 points below his 2008 performance, which alone is enough to erase his three-point margin of victory over John McCain. This reality, combined with the challenges Obama faces among other key demographic groups (non-Hispanic Independents, young voters, and seniors), means the President is on the defensive in the Sunshine State.

Republicans continue to face challenges on their party brand, and immigration reform garners wide, bipartisan approval. Yet opportunities to increase their support exist on several other issues, including education reform (like merit pay and school choice), strong concern over spending and the national debt, and overwhelming support of the state voter ID law. Proposals in these areas are very popular among Florida Hispanic voters, particularly those who were not born in the United States (who make up 59 percent of the Hispanic electorate in the state). These survey results show that Florida – and its 29 electoral votes – will be closely contested this year, and the state’s 1.4 million Hispanic voters could be the deciding factor.

### *Views of President Obama*

**1. President Obama continues to underperform among Florida Hispanics on a variety of key indicators.** President Obama defeated John McCain by 57 to 42 percent among Hispanics in Florida in 2008, and while he remains personally popular with a 52 to 41 percent favorable-unfavorable rating (less so among Independents, with a slightly negative 45 to 46 percent rating), he currently falls short of that marker in a number of areas:

- **Presidential Ballot.** Obama leads an unnamed Republican opponent by just 46 to 39 percent, and the Republican leads 37 to 35 percent among Independents. Voters who were born outside of the U.S. split at 44 percent between the two

candidates, while Obama leads among 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrants by 53 to 28 percent.

- **Deserves Reelection.** Hispanic voters say that it is time for someone else by a slim 46 to 45 percent margin, including a 48 to 41 percent margin among Independents. Cubans say it is time for someone else by 63 to 28 percent, while voters of other national origins say he deserves reelection by 52 to 39 percent.
- **Job Approval.** Voters approve of the way Obama is handling his job as President by 52 to 42 percent (including 51 to 43 percent among Independents). And while his overall job performance rating has improved somewhat since September (when it was 50 to 45 percent), he remains upside down on the economy. Voters *disapprove* of the way he is handling the economy by 51 to 43 percent (including 56 to 39 percent among Independents).

## **2. The President's support has softened among Florida Hispanics for several reasons:**

- **Weak Leadership.** Voters say that Obama has been a weaker leader than they expected by a wide 56 to 35 percent margin, including 60 to 28 percent among Independents. And this view is consistent by nationality – Cubans say he has been weaker than they expected by 63 to 24 percent, compared to 53 to 42 percent among South Americans, 52 to 42 percent among Puerto Ricans, 47 to 45 percent among Mexicans, and 55 to 32 percent among others.
- **Unfulfilled Promises.** Hispanic voters say that Obama has not delivered on the promises he made to Hispanic voters during the 2008 campaign by a 60 to 24 percent margin (up from 56 to 27 percent in September), including 65 to 20 percent among Independents. Even Democrats split at 41 percent on this question. Men are especially likely to say he has not delivered, by 65 to 22 percent, compared to 57 to 26 percent among women.
- **Misguided Policies.** Voters are divided on the impact of Obama's policies, but say they have made things worse for most Hispanic Americans by 42 to 38 percent, including 46 to 30 percent among Independents. And while Puerto Rican and South American voters say they have made things better by margins of 50 to 30 percent and 54 to 34 percent, respectively, others say they have made things worse – Cubans by 50 to 20 percent, Mexicans by 47 to 33 percent, and other nationalities by 46 to 37 percent.
- **A Worsening Situation.** By more than two-to-one, voters believe things have gotten worse, not better, for Hispanics in the United States since Obama took office: only 15 percent say things have gotten better and 38 percent say they have gotten worse, while 40 percent say they are about the same. And the most recent citizens are the most pessimistic – voters who were not born in the U.S. say things have gotten worse rather than better by 43 to 16 percent, compared to a 31 to 12 percent margin among 1<sup>st</sup> generation immigrants, and a 26 to 19 percent margin among 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrants.

- **Taking Hispanics for granted.** Voters heard the following two statements:

*Congressman A says President Obama has tried to help the Hispanic community in numerous ways, such as supporting a path to earned legal residency status and suing states like Arizona and Alabama with harsh anti-immigrant laws.*

*Congressman B says President Obama has taken support from Hispanics for granted, and used immigration as a political issue. He had two years with a Democratic Congress to make changes to immigration laws, and he failed to lead.*

Voters say that Obama has taken Hispanic support for granted by a narrow 46 to 44 percent margin, including a wide 53 to 34 percent margin among Independents. This view is strongest among voters who were not born in the U.S., who say the President has taken Hispanics for granted by 50 to 40 percent.

### ***Immigration Reform***

**1. Immigration reform is not the top issue for the overwhelming majority of Florida Hispanic voters, but they do think it is important, and believe that candidates for Congress do not focus on it enough.** Only 13 percent of Hispanics say that immigration reform is the single most important issue when determining their vote for Congress, while 32 percent say it is one of the top two or three issues, 37 percent say it is only somewhat important, and 12 percent say it is not very important. Voters born outside of the U.S. are the most likely to say it is the single most important issue (16 percent), as well as Mexicans (22 percent) and South Americans (16 percent).

Nevertheless, Hispanics want to hear candidates for Congress talk about immigration reform in their communities. Forty percent say they do not talk about it enough, 25 percent say they talk about it the right amount, and 24 percent say they talk about it too much. Again, Mexican voters are especially interested in candidates' views on the issue, with 54 percent saying they don't talk about it enough.

**2. A comprehensive strategy continues to be the preferred option for Florida Hispanics on immigration reform.** When asked their preference for immigration legislation, the top choice, among 58 percent of voters, is *“a bill that includes border security, a temporary-worker program, and earned legal status for undocumented immigrants who are already here, because any solution to the immigration problem must deal with all of the problems with our immigration system.”*

The second choice, with 20 percent support, is *“a bill that includes border security and a temporary-worker program, because we have to address the need for immigrant workers if we are ever going to get control of the border.”*

And the third choice, with just 13 percent is *“a bill that concentrates on border security but does not include a temporary-worker program or earned legalization for undocumented immigrants who are already here, because we have to secure the border first.”*

Preference for a comprehensive approach is remarkably consistent among the key subgroups, by party, ideology, age, or national origin.

### **3. Several specific immigration reform proposals have wide, bipartisan support:**

- **Allowing children of undocumented immigrants who have grown up in America to attain legal residency if they complete college or serve in the military.** Voters support this proposal (an unnamed variation of the DREAM Act) by 69 to 24 percent, including 63 to 31 percent among Republicans, 71 to 26 percent among Independents, and 73 to 18 percent among Democrats.
- **Allowing children of illegal immigrants who have graduated from an American high school to receive in-state tuition at public colleges.** Voters support this proposal by 69 to 25 percent, including 59 to 38 percent among Republicans, 64 to 30 percent among Independents, and 82 to 15 percent among Democrats.
- **Offering earned legal status to undocumented immigrants with no criminal background who meet strict guidelines like registration, paying a fine, and learning English.** Voters support this proposal by 66 to 27 percent, including 59 to 33 percent among Republicans, 62 to 32 percent among Independents, and 75 to 19 percent among Democrats.

The breadth and depth of support for these policies is noteworthy, as they have support from Hispanics regardless of gender, age, national origin, or generation.

**4. Republicans and Democrats think that the time is right to pass immigration reform, while Independents are divided.** Voters overall believe it is a good time to pass immigration reform because the system is badly broken, by 49 to 43 percent, including wider margins among Republicans and Democrats of 51 to 42 percent and 51 to 40 percent, respectively. Independents, however, are divided – 47 percent say it is a good time to pass reform, while 47 percent say it is not a good time to pass reform because the federal government should focus on getting people back to work.

**5. Republicans in Congress take more blame than Obama or the Democrats for the federal government’s failure to pass immigration reform legislation over the last few years, but Independents spread the blame around.** Forty percent of voters overall blame Republicans in Congress for the failure to pass reform, while 28 percent blame President Obama or Democrats in Congress, and 20 percent blame all three equally.

Not surprisingly, responses to this question are highly partisan. Among Republicans, 50 percent blame Obama or the Democrats, 9 percent blame Republicans, and 28 percent blame everyone. Among Democrats, 66 percent blame Republicans, 15 percent blame Obama or the Democrats, and 10 percent blame everyone. And among Independents, 34 percent blame Republicans, 26 percent blame Obama or the Democrats, and 26 percent blame everyone.

Perhaps for this reason, Republicans in Congress have a net negative 32 to 56 percent favorable-unfavorable rating among Florida Hispanics (32 to 57 percent among Independents), while Democrats in Congress have a narrowly positive 45 to 42 percent rating (40 to 46 percent among Independents).

## ***Education Reform***

### **1. Florida Hispanics, especially Independents, are receptive to conservative education reforms, many of which have already taken root in the state.**

- **Reforms Over Money.** By a slim 46 to 44 percent margin, Hispanic voters believe that education can only be improved through reforms like more school choice, teacher training and accountability, and parental involvement, rather than by investing more federal money. Republicans and Independents agree with this view, by margins of 57 to 33 percent and 48 to 37 percent, respectively, while Democrats disagree by a 61 to 34 percent margin.

Little generational difference exists on this issue, but there are differences by age, with Hispanics age 18 to 34 supporting reforms rather than more money by 56 to 35 percent. Voters with children under the age of 18, however, support investing more federal money by 54 to 40 percent, while those without children under 18 (or any children at all) prefer reforms by 48 to 40 percent.

- **Merit Pay.** Hispanics think that Florida should continue its merit pay system by 47 to 40 percent, including a 46 to 38 percent margin among Republicans and a 53 to 36 percent margin among Independents (Democrats split at 45 percent). Voters with minor children support the merit pay system by 47 to 44 percent, as do married voters by 49 to 41 percent.

By generation, voters born outside of the U.S. are the strongest supporters of a merit pay system – 48 to 40 percent – although 1<sup>st</sup> generation immigrants also support it by 49 to 43 percent. 2<sup>nd</sup>-plus generation immigrants, on the other hand, say the system should be repealed by 48 to 41 percent.

- **Private School Choice.** Private school choice is very popular among Hispanics, and these voters think Florida should continue the program by a 54 to 34 percent margin, including a 60 to 30 percent margin among Republicans, a 57 to 32 percent margin among Independents, and a 50 to 39 percent margin among Democrats. Again, this program is most popular among voters who were not born in the United States – they support it by 60 to 29 percent, compared to 46 to 41 percent among 1<sup>st</sup> generation immigrants and 51 to 45 percent among 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrants. The program is only modestly popular among parents of minor children, at 49 to 44 percent.

## ***Other Issues***

**1. Florida Hispanic voters remain pessimistic about the direction of the country, and are most concerned about the economy and jobs.** Florida Hispanics say that America is off on the wrong track by a 60 to 27 percent margin, and a combined 63

percent say that the economy (45 percent) and jobs (18 percent) are the most important issues facing the country – a sentiment consistent by demographics and ideology.

Forty-nine percent of these voters believe that the best way to improve the economy and create job opportunities for Hispanics is to “increase government investments in job training, education, and infrastructure,” while 40 percent say that it is to “limit government spending, lower taxes, and reduce excessive regulations that hurt small businesses.” Independents and Democrats agree with voters overall by margins of 51 to 37 percent and 60 to 30 percent, respectively, while Republicans disagree by 61 to 32 percent. And while majorities of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrants support more government investments to create jobs, voters who were born outside of the U.S. split at 44 percent on the issue.

**2. Hispanic voters are very concerned about the federal government’s current level of spending and debt.** Sixty-three percent of voters are very concerned about spending, and another 23 percent are somewhat concerned. Eighty-four percent of Republicans are very concerned, compared to 65 percent of Independents, and 47 percent of Democrats. And voters born outside of the U.S. are most concerned about this issue, at 63 percent, compared to 59 percent among 1<sup>st</sup> generation and 56 percent among 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrants.

**3. Hispanics overwhelmingly support Florida’s voter ID law across party lines.** The state’s requirement that registered voters show a photo identification in order to vote enjoys support from an overwhelming 89 percent of Hispanics, including 95 percent of Republicans, 91 percent of Independents, and 84 percent of Democrats.

**4. Florida Hispanics, including Cubans, think that the embargo of Cuba has failed to damage the Cuban government.** Fifty-three percent of voters say that “The embargo has failed to damage the Cuban government, and serves only to hurt economic conditions for Cuban residents. The Obama Administration’s actions to weaken the embargo by allowing travel and remittances are a step in the right direction for the Cuban people,” while 30 percent say that “The embargo has worked to isolate the Cuban government and weaken its power over Cuban residents. The embargo should continue to be enforced, and the Obama Administration’s actions to weaken it by allowing travel and remittances to Cuba are a mistake.”

A bipartisan consensus exists on this issue – Republicans agree that the embargo has failed by a 48 to 40 percent margin, compared to a 55 to 27 percent margin among Independents and a 60 to 26 percent margin among Democrats.

Even Cuban voters agree that the embargo has failed by 55 to 32 percent, compared to 52 to 33 percent among Puerto Ricans, 57 to 23 percent among South Americans, and 48 to 24 percent among Mexicans.

## ***Methodology***

This survey of 500 Hispanic voters in Florida was conducted January 16-19, 2012. Respondents were selected randomly from a listed sample of Hispanic registered voters. All respondents confirmed that they are registered to vote in the county in which they live, and are of Hispanic or Latino origin or descent. Each respondent also had a choice to take the survey in English or Spanish – 87 percent conducted the survey in English and 13 percent in Spanish. Quotas were set for county, age, and gender based on voter registration, and the sample was minimally weighted to match the partisan registration balance shown by the state Department of Elections for Hispanic voters. All calls were conducted by live interviewers.

The margin of error for responses with an even split – 50 percent for one response and 50 percent for another response – is plus or minus 4.38 percentage points for the full sample. The margin of error declines as the split in the respondents becomes less even. For example, the margin of error is plus or minus 3.80 percentage points when the 500 respondents split 75 percent for one candidate and 25 percent for the other.

The margin of error is higher for subgroups of the sample. For example, when respondents split evenly on a question the margin of error increases from 4.38 percent to 6.20 percent for subsamples of 250, and to 9.80 percent for subsamples of 100.