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# Latinas and Electoral Politics: Expanding Participation and Power in State and National Elections

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## 5 Latinas and Electoral Politics

### Expanding Participation and Power in State and National Elections

#### INTRODUCTION

Latina and Latino<sup>1</sup> political participation in the 2012 election reached new heights, proving to be a significant factor in the electoral outcomes of several battleground states and ultimately the reelection of President Obama. Both Latinas and Latinos played pivotal roles in the 2012 election, increasing their share of the national electorate and their support for President Obama over 2008 election levels. In the end, President Obama received 71 percent of the Latina/o vote (compared with 27 percent for Mitt Romney), surpassing all previous presidential candidates with the exception of Bill Clinton, who garnered 72 percent of the Latina/o vote

<sup>1</sup> The terms *Latino* and *Hispanic* are used interchangeably by the federal government. Within the U.S. Census, the population is defined to include any person of “Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, South or Central American or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race” and reflect “self-identification by individuals according to the group or groups with which they most closely identify” (American Community Survey 2006, American Community Survey Reports 2007).

However, the inability of these designations to properly account for the complexity of persons whose ancestry stems from Latin America but are living in the United States has generated considerable debate and dissension. Central to this discourse is whether the population constitutes its own separate racial group, a coherent ethnic group, or something else. Moreover, longstanding concern about the imprecision of pan-ethnic labels has led many to gravitate to specific national origin references (i.e., Mexican American, Cuban American).

For the purposes of this chapter, I use the term *Latina/o* to mean persons with ancestral, genealogical, or cultural origins in Latin American currently residing primarily in the United States. Moreover, in describing the population at large, I use the “a/o” ending to signify the mutual presence of men and women, as opposed to the default masculine “o.” On occasions when the data are reported using the label *Hispanic* or specific national origin identifiers, I duplicate the same terms here for consistency.

**TABLE 5.1: Contrary to the patterns for other groups, a larger proportion of Latinas/os voted for Obama in 2012 than did in 2008**

	% of vote		2012		2008	
	2012	2008	Obama (%)	Romney (%)	Obama (%)	McCain (%)
Latinas/os	10	9	71	27	67	31
Whites	72	74	39	59	43	55
Blacks	13	13	93	6	95	4
Women	53	53	55	44	56	43
18–29 year olds	19	18	60	27	66	32
Independents	29	29	45	50	52	44
Total			50	48	53	46

Sources: Pew Hispanic Research Center, “Latino Voters in the 2012 Election,” and the National Election Exit Poll conducted by Edison Research.

in 1996.<sup>2</sup> In fact, among key demographic groups comprising the “new electorate” – African Americans, Latinas/os, women, younger voters, and independents – Latinas/os were the only group whose level of turnout and support for Obama substantially surpassed those of the 2008 presidential election.<sup>3</sup> Table 5.1 compares voting in 2008 and 2012 across several demographic groups and demonstrates the growth of Latina/o support for Obama. Ultimately, while President Obama’s favorability ratings were affected by a bruising first term, resulting in decreased support among key constituents and whites generally, Latina/o turnout and support for Obama, particularly in Florida, Colorado, New Mexico, and

<sup>2</sup> Data on rates of Latina/o political participation in the 2012 election draw primarily from the National Election Exit Poll conducted by Edison Research, with additional information from the Pew Hispanic Research Center and the ImpreMedia/Latino Decisions 2012 Latino Election Eve Poll. (See specifically Mark Hugo Lopez and Paul Taylor. Latino Voters in the 2012 Election. Pew Hispanic Research Center. November 7, 2012. <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2012/11/07/latino-voters-in-the-2012-election/>; Matt Barreto and Gary Segura. 2012. ImpreMedia/Latino Decisions 2012 Latino Election Eve Poll. ImpreMedia/Latino Decisions. November 7, 2012. [http://www.latinodecisions.com/files/3513/5232/9137/LEE\\_PRESENTATION\\_2012.pdf](http://www.latinodecisions.com/files/3513/5232/9137/LEE_PRESENTATION_2012.pdf). While the National Election Exit Poll continues to be the standard-bearer for news agencies like CNN and for research centers like Pew, the accuracy of their results regarding Latinos has been called into question for more than a decade. These findings are used with a degree of caution and, where possible, balanced against other data including exit polling from Impremedia/Latino Decisions and Gallup.

<sup>3</sup> Mark Hugo Lopez and Paul Taylor. 2012. Latino Voters in the 2012 Election. Pew Hispanic Research Center. November 7, 2012. <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2012/11/07/latino-voters-in-the-2012-election/>.

Nevada, were vitally important in overcoming setbacks elsewhere. As one political scientist and pollster put it, "for the first time in U.S. history, [the] Latino vote can plausibly claim to be nationally decisive."<sup>4</sup>

Latinas proved to be a key factor driving President Obama's increased support among Latinas/os. In the years leading up to the election, Latinas outpaced Latinos in rates of naturalization, and in both 2008 and 2012, larger proportions of Latinas voted in the election and supported Obama. While Obama's favorability ratings among both Latinas and Latinos were consistently strong throughout the 2012 election season, in the end Latina support outpaced that of men, with 76 percent of Latinas voting for Obama compared with 65 percent of Latino men. Tracking polls conducted in the months leading up to the election suggested other important differences between Latinas and Latinos on women's policy issues and perceptions of Republicans in Congress. These differences fueled new discussions of a "Latina/o gender gap" which, unlike previous gaps among Latinas/os, turned out to be statistically significant in states such as Colorado. In addition, the gendered nature of heated immigration policy debates and reaction to a late intervention by President Obama in the form of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals further strengthened Latina support for Obama's immigration policies.

Latinas also played a significant role in the Obama administration leading up to the election and were featured in the national election strategy teams and the party conventions. Moreover, Latinas achieved important electoral success as candidates in several national and state races, joining with their male counterparts to become the largest contingent of Latina/o members in the U.S. Congress and producing the first Latina governor. Ultimately, this suggests that while gender was significant to the campaign and women voters were an important part of the election outcomes, particular attention must be paid to how the intersection of gender and race in the lives of Latinas played a part in the 2012 election season.

In the following chapter, I examine the state of Latinas within contemporary electoral politics, paying particular attention to their role in the 2012 presidential election. Focusing on their expanded electoral strength and specific participation as voters, the emergence of a significant Latina/o gender gap, and their role as advisors and surrogates in the

<sup>4</sup> Matt Barreto and Gary Segura. 2012. *ImpreMedia/Latino Decisions 2012 Latino Election Eve Poll*. *ImpreMedia/Latino Decisions*. November 7, 2012. [www.latinodecisions.com/files/3513/5232/9137/LEE\\_PRESENTATION\\_2012.pdf](http://www.latinodecisions.com/files/3513/5232/9137/LEE_PRESENTATION_2012.pdf).

election, I argue that 2012 was a pivotal year for Latinas/os generally and Latinas in particular. Throughout the essay, I examine how Latinas' role in the 2012 election season compared and contrasted with their participation in 2008 and how this affected their overall electoral strength.

### INCREASE OF LATINA/O VOTERS: THE STATE OF THE LATINA/O ELECTORATE IN 2012

By 2010, Latinas/os comprised more than 16 percent of the total U.S. population, or approximately 50.5 million persons.<sup>5</sup> This figure represents a 43 percent increase over 2000 data and a growth of more than five million persons since 2008.<sup>6</sup> In addition, this rapid growth reflects the status of Latinas/os as the largest and fastest-growing racial/ethnic minority population in the country.<sup>7</sup> While this growth was apparent across almost every individual national origin group, the Mexican population increased by 54 percent, accounting for approximately three fourths of the total increase, followed by Puerto Ricans, who grew from 3.4 million to 4.6 million, and Cubans, who grew from 1.2 million persons in 2000 to 1.8 million by 2010.<sup>8</sup>

Latinas make up just less than half of the total Latino community, or approximately 49.3 percent of the population. More importantly, Latinas are central to the growth of the population, both as new immigrants and as mothers. That is, two factors in particular explain much of the growth of Latinas/os in the United States: a steady flow of immigrants from Latin America and a strong fertility rate among Latinas/os already in the United States. Among legal adult migrants from Latin America, women have outnumbered men since 2004, leading to the "feminization of immigration."<sup>9</sup> In addition, Latinas possess a higher fertility rate than non-Hispanic whites, with Guatemalan women and Mexican women

<sup>5</sup> Sharon R. Ennis, Merarys Rios-Vargas, and Nora G. Albert. 2011. *The Hispanic Population: 2010*. 2010 Census Briefs. U.S. Department of Commerce: United States Census Bureau. May 2011.

<sup>6</sup> Pew Hispanic Center. 2012. *Statistical Portrait of Hispanics in the United States, 2010: Table \*: Race and Ethnicity, by Sex and Age: 2010*.

<sup>7</sup> Elizabeth M. Grieco and Rachel C. Cassidy. 2001. *Overview of Race and Hispanic Origin: Census 2000 Brief*. U.S. Department of Commerce, Economics and Statistics Administration. March 2001. <http://www.census.gov/prod/2001pubs/c2kbr01-1.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> Sharon R. Ennis, Merarys Rios-Vargas, and Nora G. Albert. 2011. *The Hispanic Population*.

<sup>9</sup> Richard Fry. 2006. *Gender and Migration*. Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center. [pewhispanic.org/files/reports/64.pdf](http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/64.pdf).

**TABLE 5.2: Larger proportions of Latinas than Latinos voted for Obama in both 2012 and 2008**

	% of voters		2012		2008	
	2012	2008	Obama (%)	Romney (%)	Obama (%)	McCain (%)
Latinas	6	5	76	23	68	30
Latinos	5	4	65	33	64	33

Sources: 2012 National Election Exit Poll conducted by Edison Research and 2008 National Election Exit Poll conducted by Edison Media Research and Mitofsky International.

reporting some of the highest levels of fertility in the country.<sup>10</sup> In short, Latinas lie at the heart of these expanding demographics but are often overlooked.

Another way of examining the growth of Latinas generally is in relationship to all women in the United States. Since 2000, Latinas have been the fastest-growing female population in the country. The National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) reported that “between 2000 and 2010, the nation’s female population grew from 143.4 million to 157.0 million, an increase of 9.5 percent. During the same period, the Latina population grew from 17.1 million to 24.9 million, an increase of 45.0 percent.”<sup>11</sup>

The share of Latinas and Latinos participating in the national electorate also grew in the past decade, from approximately 8 percent in 2004 to more than 10 percent in 2012.<sup>12</sup> Latinas in particular continued to comprise a larger percentage of the electorate than Latino men, as they have in every presidential election since 1996; however, the number of Latino male voters grew at a faster pace than the number of Latina voters. Approximately 6.4 million Latinas voted in the 2012 election, constituting more than one in twelve of all female voters. As Table 5.2 demonstrates, this increase of voters, coupled with targeted outreach directed

<sup>10</sup> American Community Survey Reports. 2007. *The American Community-Hispanics: 2004*. U.S. Census Bureau. U.S. Department of Commerce. [www.census.gov/prod/2007pubs/acs-03.pdf](http://www.census.gov/prod/2007pubs/acs-03.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> Rosalind Gold. 2012. Election Profile: Latina Voters. National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials. [http://www.naleo.org/2011\\_downloads/Latina\\_NALEO\\_Profile\\_2012.pdf](http://www.naleo.org/2011_downloads/Latina_NALEO_Profile_2012.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> Lopez and Taylor. 2012. Latino Voters in the 2012 Election. See also Mark Hugo Lopez. 2008. *The Hispanic Vote in the 2008 Election*. Pew Hispanic Center. November 5, 2008. [www.pewhispanic.org/files/reports/98.pdf](http://www.pewhispanic.org/files/reports/98.pdf).



specifically at Latinas, resulted in a greater share of Latinas than Latinos voting for Obama in both 2008 and 2012.

The growing political capacity of Latinas and Latinos, while tied to resources and mobilization strategies, was also linked directly to increased rates of naturalization among the ten largest Hispanic-origin groups and the declining foreign-born population.<sup>13</sup> Specifically, between 2000 and 2010, the percentage of foreign-born persons within the Latina/o population fell from 40 percent in 2000 to 37 percent in 2010. Similarly, the percentage of foreign-born persons declined among each of the top ten Hispanic-origin groups in the same period, with the largest decline occurring among Salvadorans (from 76 percent to 62 percent).<sup>14</sup>

At the same time, the share of Hispanics with U.S. citizenship increased from 71 percent in 2000 to 74 percent in 2010, with notable spikes in the rates of naturalization in 2000, 2006, and in the months leading up to the historic 2008 election. As the Pew Hispanic Research Center notes, "Among all foreign-born Hispanics, the share holding U.S. citizenship increased from 28 percent in 2000 to 29 percent in 2010."<sup>15</sup> In this same period, Latina immigrants outpaced their male counterparts in rates of naturalization, thus overcoming a key obstacle to participation and political incorporation at a faster pace than Latinos.<sup>16</sup> In short, in 2010, a greater share of the Latina/o population in the United States held

<sup>13</sup> The ten largest Hispanic origin groups are Mexicans (who make up 65 percent of all Hispanics in the United States), Puerto Ricans (9.2 percent), Cubans (3.7 percent), Salvadorans (3.6 percent), Dominicans (3.0 percent), Guatemalans (2.2 percent), Colombians (1.9 percent), Hondurans (1.4 percent), Ecuadorians (1.3 percent), and Peruvians (1.2 percent). Collectively, these ten groups comprise 92 percent of the total U.S. Hispanic population. Seth Motel and Eileen Patten. 2012. *The 10 Largest Hispanic Origin Groups: Characteristics, Rankings, Top Counties*. Pew Research Hispanic Center, June 27, 2012. <http://www.pewhispanic.org/files/>. Seth Motel and Eileen Patten. 2012. *The 10 Largest Hispanic Origin Groups: Characteristics, Rankings, Top Counties*. Pew Research Hispanic Center, June 27, 2012. <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2012/06/27/the-10-largest-hispanic-origin-groups-characteristics-rankings-top-counties/>.

<sup>14</sup> Seth Motel and Eileen Patten. 2012. *The 10 Largest Hispanic Origin Groups: Characteristics, Rankings, Top Counties*. Pew Research Hispanic Center, June 27, 2012. <http://www.pewhispanic.org/files/2012/06/The-10-Largest-Hispanic-Origin-Groups.pdf>. See also Statistical Abstract of the U.S. 2012. Table 47. Petitions for Naturalization Filed, Persons Naturalized, and Petitions Denied: 1990–2010. <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2012/tables/12s0047.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> Seth Motel and Eileen Patten. 2012. *The 10 Largest Hispanic Origin Groups: Characteristics, Rankings, Top Counties*. Pew Research Hispanic Center, p. 5. <http://www.pewhispanic.org/files/2012/06/The-10-Largest-Hispanic-Origin-Groups.pdf>.

<sup>16</sup> Felicia Gonzales. 2008. *Hispanic Women in the United States, 2007*. Pew Hispanic Center. [pewhispanic.org/files/factsheets/42/pdf](http://www.pewhispanic.org/files/factsheets/42/pdf); Immigration Policy Center. 2010. *Immigrant Women in the United States*. Washington, DC. [www.immigrationpolicy.org/just-facts/immigration-women-united-states-portrait-demographic-diversity](http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/just-facts/immigration-women-united-states-portrait-demographic-diversity).

citizenship as compared with 2000, with the largest change taking place among Dominicans. Thus, while nationally the Democratic Party and the Obama campaign did a better job of targeted outreach and mobilization among Latina/o voters than the Republican Party and the Romney campaign did, their strategies were aided by growth of the pool of eligible voters – an increase driven by Latinas.

### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SELECT STATES TO LATINA/O ELECTORAL POWER IN 2012

The outcome of the national election and the surge of Latina/o electoral power in 2012 rested disproportionately with the outreach, mobilization, and investment of both campaigns in select states. Of particular significance to Latinas/os was the focus on Colorado, New Mexico, Nevada, and Florida. While Latinas/os reside disproportionately in large states such as California, Illinois, New Jersey, New York, and Texas, none of these states was competitive in 2012, resulting in less attention and outreach to Latinas/os in those locations. In contrast, the competitive presidential race as well as key House and Senate contests in Colorado, New Mexico, Nevada, and Florida meant that every vote counted and both campaigns expanded outreach to Latinas/os. In this context, Latinas/os emerged as important targets because they represented a critical mass of voters, because there was a high percentage of eligible non-voters among the population, and because despite their tendencies to support Democrats, as voters they remained fluid.

Latinas, particularly newly naturalized voters, those registered to vote who did not do so in the previous general election, and low-propensity voters eligible to vote but marginalized from the electoral process, became key targets of various campaigns looking to expand their mobilization strategies in these battleground states. For example, civic engagement campaigns such as *Voto Latino* (spearheaded by actress Rosario Dawson) worked in partnership with labor unions and local nonprofits in Colorado, Florida, and Nevada to mobilize young voters and Latinas through a combination of registration, fundraising, and get-out-the-vote (GOTV) efforts, coupled with expanded use of social networking and community relationships. Similarly, *Mi Familia Vota* – a civic engagement effort led by the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) – partnered with local nonprofits in several battleground states to mobilize Latino families, hoping to increase Latina participation specifically through its



efforts.<sup>17</sup> All of these advocacy organizations were active in the 2008 presidential campaign, building capacity and mobilizing Latinas to participate as both voters and candidates in battleground states. Mirroring the 2008 election, the organizations worked collaboratively with state and local campaigns (both partisan and nonpartisan) and even with the national party coordinating committees to drive turnout in 2012. Thus, in many ways the increase of Latina and Latino voters, along with the gains made by Latinas elected to state and national office, reflects the culmination of a much longer process of outreach stretching back to at least 2008 and, in many cases, to even earlier organizational mobilization.<sup>18</sup>

In Colorado, mobilization campaigns aimed at Latina and Latino voters resulted in their increased electoral presence as well as increased support for President Obama. In particular, Latina/o vote share increased from 13 percent in 2008 to 14 percent in 2012, and Latina/o support for Obama swelled from 61 percent in 2008 to 75 percent.<sup>19</sup> While Latina/o voting capacity increased in response to targeted mobilization efforts, the Latina/o proportion of the vote also grew because the Obama campaign lost support among whites (50 percent in 2008 to 44 percent in 2012) and independents (54 percent in 2008 to 45 percent in 2012) – key segments of his 2008 winning coalition.<sup>20</sup> In the end, Obama carried Colorado 51.2 percent to 46.5 percent over Mitt Romney but won by a much smaller margin than his 54 percent to 45 percent victory over John McCain in 2008.<sup>21</sup> The increased mobilization of Latina and Latino voters in Colorado also translated to a surge of Latina/o candidates elected in various

<sup>17</sup> In addition to an increased focus on Latinas, several of these campaigns increased outreach to low-propensity voters (including those nonregistered or who were eligible to vote but never voted), populations in small or rural counties, and individuals who were newly naturalized.

<sup>18</sup> For a thorough examination of contemporary Latina electoral success, particularly elections to local and state offices, see Christina Bejarano. 2013. *The Latina Advantage: Gender, Race, and Political Success*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

<sup>19</sup> Lopez and Taylor. 2012. Latino Voters in the 2012 Election.

<sup>20</sup> Estimates drawn from exit polls. CNN: Election Center. 2008. Exit Polls: Florida. <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2008/results/individual/#FLP00>; CNN: Election Center. 2012. Florida Exit Polls 2012. <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2012/>.

<sup>21</sup> Obama's 2008 victory represented an important shift, as Colorado had consistently supported Republican candidates in eight of nine previous presidential elections. However, it is important to note that Obama's 2008 victory built on the strength of an emerging Latina/o electorate (marked in 2006 by the election of Latino Representative John Salazar in the conservative 3<sup>rd</sup> Congressional district and the election of Ken Salazar to the U.S. Senate) and a bolstered Democratic party that took over both the lower house of the state legislature and the governor's office by 2008.

state races, subsequently giving Democrats control over both houses of the legislature and signaling a rise of a Latina/o political elite with agenda-setting power in the state.

Latina/o mobilization efforts in Florida paralleled campaigns in Colorado with similar effect. That is, Latina/o vote share in Florida increased from 14 percent in 2008 to 17 percent in 2012, and overall Latina/o support for Obama grew from 57 percent in 2008 to 60 percent in 2012.<sup>22</sup> Latina voters also increased their capacity (from 8 percent of the electorate in 2008 to 9 percent by 2012) and support for Obama (from 55 percent to 61 percent in 2012).<sup>23</sup> In fact, exit polls suggest that the increased support among Latinas/os in the state came disproportionately from Latina voters, as Obama lost some ground among Latino male voters (60 percent in 2008 to 58 percent in 2012). Obama also lost support among white voters in the state (42 percent in 2008 to 37 percent in 2012), while support among the state's African Americans remained consistent.<sup>24</sup> As a result, Obama's margin of victory was reduced to less than 1 percent in 2012 (50 percent to 49.1 percent) compared with the 3-point advantage he held in 2008 over John McCain (51 percent to 48 percent).<sup>25</sup>

The stories of Latina and Latino mobilization and voting in Nevada and New Mexico are a bit more complex. Latinas'/os' electoral presence in Nevada grew by 3 percent in 2012, comprising 18 percent of the state's electorate in 2012 compared to 15 percent in 2008; however, in contrast to the situations in Colorado and Florida, exit polls indicate that Obama lost support among Latinas/os in Nevada (76 percent in 2008 to 70 percent in 2012).<sup>26</sup> As in other battleground states, Latina voters increased their share of the state's electorate from 9 percent in 2008 to 10 percent in 2012, but reports from the National Election Survey indicate that fewer Latinas voted for Obama in Nevada in 2012 than in 2008 (from 76 percent to 72 percent). While fewer Latinas supported the Democratic presidential candidate in 2012, support for Republicans remained the same (21 percent), suggesting that while Latinas may have felt less enthusiasm or approval of President Obama, they were not more inclined to support

<sup>22</sup> Matt Barreto and Gary Segura. 2012. *ImpreMedia/Latino Decisions 2012 Latino Election Eve Poll*. ImpreMedia/Latino Decisions. November 7, 2012. [www.latinodecisions.com/files/3513/5232/9137/LEE.PRESENTATION.2012.pdf](http://www.latinodecisions.com/files/3513/5232/9137/LEE.PRESENTATION.2012.pdf).

<sup>23</sup> CNN: Election Center. 2008, 2012.

<sup>24</sup> Lopez and Taylor. 2012. *Latino Voters in the 2012 Election*.

<sup>25</sup> Lopez and Taylor. 2012. *Latino Voters in the 2012 Election*.

<sup>26</sup> Lopez and Taylor. 2012. *Latino Voters in the 2012 Election*.

Mitt Romney or the Republican party as an alternative.<sup>27</sup> In the end, President Obama's margin of victory shrank by half as he won the state with a 6-point lead over Romney, compared with his 12-point victory over McCain in 2008.

New Mexico has always been an important site of Latina and Latino political power, generating a consistently large electorate, electing the first Latina governor in 2010 (Republican Susana Martinez), and producing the first competitive Latino presidential candidate in 2008 (former Democratic Governor Bill Richardson). By 2012, New Mexico, like Colorado and Nevada, was a competitive battleground for Democrats and Republicans, but Democrats were steadily gaining an advantage. The election of Michelle Lujan Grisham from New Mexico's 1<sup>st</sup> Congressional District in 2012 is symbolic of the rise of Latina/o electoral strength in the state and the concomitant increase in Democratic Party power. Originally created in 1969, the 1<sup>st</sup> CD was dominated by Republicans until the first successful election of a Democrat in the district in 2008. While Lujan Grisham ran in that election, she was easily defeated in the primary by Martin Heinrich, a well-funded party insider who went on to win election to the U.S. Senate in 2012. By 2012, the district that encompasses Albuquerque and most of its suburbs leaned strongly Democratic, and Latinas/os represented 48 percent of the electorate. Reflecting the growth of Latina/o power as both voters and candidates in the district, Lujan Grisham faced off in the primary against two other Latinos – state legislators Marty Chavez and Eric Griego. After winning the primary, she went on to defeat Republican Janice Arnold-Jones, a former member of the New Mexico House of Representatives, in the November general election 59 percent to 41 percent.

The share of Latina/o voters in New Mexico's 2012 presidential election decreased (from 41 percent of the electorate in 2008 to 37 percent in 2012), and their support for Obama tapered off from 69 percent in 2008 to 64 percent in 2012. Early exit polls suggest that the loss of support occurred more prominently among Latinas, as fewer voted in 2012 (down from 25 percent in 2008 to 21 percent in 2012) and fewer supported President Obama (from 72 percent in 2008 to 67 percent in 2012). Latino male turnout and support for Obama remained virtually the same in this period.

Notably, while Latina support for President Obama decreased in New Mexico in 2012, this did not translate into greater support for Republican candidate Mitt Romney. Despite Republican Party outreach efforts in

<sup>27</sup> CNN: Election Center. 2008, 2012.

the state, only 27 percent of Latina voters supported Romney – the same percentage that voted for McCain in 2008. The relatively low unemployment rate in New Mexico and failure of Republicans to support meaningful immigration reform undoubtedly helped distance Latina voters from the party.

However, the trend toward Democratic dominance in the state was interrupted briefly by Republican gains made in the 2010 midterm election. In that year, Republican Susana Martinez was elected governor, the first female governor of New Mexico and the first Latina governor in the United States. In only the third woman-versus-woman gubernatorial race in U.S. history, Martinez defeated former Lieutenant Governor Democrat Diane Denish. Martinez, a former district attorney in the state, won the Republican nomination in a crowded five-way contest that included business and political elites – among them Pete Domenici, Jr., son of long-term New Mexico Senator Pete Domenici. She handily won the nomination, garnering 51 percent of the vote, along with the endorsement of former Alaska Governor Sarah Palin. Moreover, despite early tracking polls indicating a lead for Denish, Martinez quickly emerged in the general election as the leader, highlighting economic reform and emphasizing Denish's connections to long-time governor and political elite Bill Richardson. By late September of 2010, Martinez out-fundraised and out-spent Denish, and a concentrated mobilization and advertising campaign resulted in a swell of voter support that carried through to Election Day.

Despite supporting the Republican Party's restrictive positions on various immigration measures, Martinez was able to connect with and mobilize Latina/o supporters, who proved significant to her victory. Garnering 38 percent of the Latina/o vote in the state, Martinez earned more Latina/o support than Nevada gubernatorial candidate Brian Sandoval and nearly all other Republican gubernatorial candidates that year (with the exception of Rick Scott in Florida.) Moreover, data collected among Latina/o voters in the state indicate that Martinez's win wasn't simply a referendum on Richardson or a pattern of Democratic party discontent in a midterm election, because a sizable percentage (67 percent) of those polled said their vote was motivated by a desire to support the Republican candidate.<sup>28</sup>

Since her victory in 2010, Governor Martinez has continued to oppose various features of immigration reform, including driver's licenses for undocumented immigrants. She signed an executive order in her first

<sup>28</sup> Latino Decisions Election Eve Poll – State by State Results, November 02, 2010.

month in office rescinding “sanctuary” status for “illegal immigrants who commit crimes in New Mexico” and spoke out in support of Arizona’s restrictive measures to crack down on undocumented immigrants. However, Martinez also deviated from her Republican counterparts, openly criticizing Republican proposals to deport Mexican immigrants, including Mitt Romney’s suggestion during the 2012 campaign that the 11 to 12 million undocumented immigrants in the United States should “self-deport.” In an interview with *Newsweek*, Martinez replied to Romney’s suggestion by saying: “‘Self-deport’? What the heck does that mean? I have no doubt Hispanics have been alienated during this campaign, but now there’s an opportunity for Governor Romney to have a sincere conversation about what we can do and why.”<sup>29</sup> Governor Martinez’s comments echoed similar sentiments captured in Impremedia/Latino Decisions tracking polls, reflecting the inability of the GOP to connect with Latina/o voters in New Mexico and other battleground states. Her comments were particularly surprising given her own immigration battles in the state and rumors she was being considered as a vice presidential running mate at the time of the interview.

However, her ascension to statewide office, her ability to mobilize strong support from Latina/o voters at a time of Democrat party dominance, and her willingness to critique the more restrictive positions within the GOP on deportation of Latin American immigrants also add up to an important lesson for the future of the national Republican Party. As the party leadership regroups in the wake of resounding losses in the 2012 election cycle, one area in which there is clearly room for growth is in Latina/o outreach. The election of Susana Martinez provides evidence that it is possible to expand the base of Latina/o Republicans, both as candidates for office and as voters.

Ultimately, the net contribution of Latinas/os to President Obama’s reelection campaign was enough to overcome deficits elsewhere and secure New Mexico’s five electoral votes for Obama.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, like Latinas/os in Colorado, Florida, and Nevada, Latina voters were a crucial component of the winning coalitions in these battleground states that resulted in President Obama’s reelection. However, their presence in the 2012 elections went beyond this important contribution; Latinas also helped shape strategic decisions in both parties, a status reflected both

<sup>29</sup> Andrew Romano. 2012. Susana Martinez: What New Mexico’s Governor Can Teach the GOP. *Newsweek Magazine*.

<sup>30</sup> Lopez and Taylor. 2012. Latino Voters in the 2012 Election.

in their expanded role in the Obama administration and their leadership roles in both parties' campaign structures.

## PRESENCE WITHIN LEADERSHIP OF THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION AND 2012 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGNS

Latinas/os were important fixtures in the 2008 presidential campaigns of both Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton, serving as surrogates, advisors, and managers and providing critical endorsements, particularly during the primary races. In 2008, Latinas and Latinos were notably present as official surrogates (including labor leaders Maria Elena Durazo and Linda Chavez-Thompson; U.S. Representatives Xavier Becerra, Loretta Sanchez, and Linda Sanchez; and actresses America Ferrera and Eva Longoria for Obama; and Maria Echeveste, Supervisor Gloria Molina, activist Dolores Huerta, and Congresswoman Hilda Solis for Hillary Clinton), and as statewide leaders and key advisors. Both campaigns also benefitted from Latina/o Advisory Councils that included several high-profile Latinas such as Congresswomen Linda Sanchez, Hilda Solis, and Nydia Velasquez and labor leader Geocanda Arguell-Kline. Two of the more notable placements within the 2008 campaigns included former Transportation and Energy Secretary Federico Pena, who served as both an advisor and co-chair of Obama's transition committee after the election, and Patti Solis Doyle, who briefly served as Hillary Clinton's campaign manager, the first Latina to hold that title in a presidential campaign.<sup>31</sup>

After the election, Latinas and Latinos figured prominently among President Obama's appointments during his first term in office and within the subsequent 2012 reelection campaign. The Obama administration nominated more Latinas/os to senior government positions than any previous White House. The most significant high-ranking Latina appointments included California Congresswoman Hilda Solis as Secretary of Labor, former National Council of La Raza president Cecilia Munoz as director of the White House Domestic Policy Council, and Justice Sonia Sotomayor as the first Latina to serve on the Supreme Court.<sup>32</sup>

Attention to the increasing strength of Latina/o voters, especially within select battleground states, also prompted more Latina/o

<sup>31</sup> Christine Marie Sierra. 2010. Latinas and Electoral Politics: Movin' on Up. In *Gender and Elections: Shaping the Future of American Politics*, Second Edition, ed. Susan J. Carroll and Richard L. Fox. New York: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>32</sup> Former Colorado Senator Ken Salazar was also appointed to the Obama cabinet as Secretary of the Interior.



appointments within the 2012 Obama reelection campaign. Specifically, Katherine Archuleta, chief of staff to Secretary of Labor Hilda Solis, was appointed as the national political director of Obama for America 2012 – the first Latina to hold that position on a major presidential campaign. Other Latina leaders included Angela Barranco, who served as the national western regional director of Obama for America, and Alida Garcia, who was national Latino vote deputy director for the campaign (second to Adrian Saenz, who was director of the national Latino vote of OFA.) Additionally, in 2012, seven of the thirty-five co-chairs of Obama's reelection campaign were Latina/o, including San Antonio Mayor Julian Castro; prominent labor leader Maria Elena Durazo; former chair of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Congressman Charles A. Gonzalez; former Energy and Transportation Secretary Federico Pena; Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa; Florida activist Lynette Acosta; and actress Eva Longoria. Villaraigosa also served as chair of the 2012 Democratic National Convention Committee.

In addition to serving as a co-chair, Longoria reprised her 2008 role as an outspoken surrogate for Obama and expanded her political capacity by co-founding a new fund-raising venture aimed at Latina and Latino political elites, the Futuro Fund. The fund aimed to raise \$6 million for Obama's reelection but ultimately brought in more than \$30 million. More important, the fund signaled a new level of political impact by creating a Latina/o fund-raising network that used its clout to push the administration for commitments on immigration reform. Through her work with the fund, Longoria established herself as one of the campaign's top "bundlers" and as a Latina with national political influence. In turn, Obama named Longoria as co-chairwoman of his inaugural committee.<sup>33</sup>

Latinas were also present within the Republican presidential campaign, although their involvement on the GOP side paled in comparison to their engagement with the Democrats. Bettina Inclan was appointed as director of Hispanic outreach for the Republican National Committee, and political consultant Anna Navarro reprised her role as campaign advisor on Hispanic affairs for Romney. In addition, the Romney campaign launched a national women's coalition titled Women for Mitt, led by his wife and represented through an advisory board including Latina reality television personality Rachel Campos-Duffy (who is also the wife of

<sup>33</sup> Matea Gold. 2013, January 21. With Obama fundraising, Latinos demonstrate growing clout. *Los Angeles Times*. <http://articles.latimes.com/2013/jan/21/nation/la-na-inaug-latino-20130121>.

Wisconsin Republican congressman Sean Duffy) and Jovita Carranza, former vice president of air operations for UPS.

Latinas/os also made their mark during both the Democratic and Republican national conventions. Of particular importance was Julian Castro, mayor of San Antonio, Texas, who was the first Latino to give a keynote speech at the DNC (introduced by his twin brother, Representative Joaquin Castro) and a promising candidate for future leadership within the party. Other prominent Latinas/os who delivered remarks included Representatives Charles Gonzalez and Nydia Velasquez, who spoke to the convention on behalf of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus (of which Gonzalez is the chair), Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar, Representative Xavier Becerra, who delivered remarks as the vice chair of the Democratic caucus, and California Assembly Speaker John A. Perez. While Latino men captured many coveted speaking slots during the convention, both actress Eva Longoria and Representative Nydia Velasquez addressed the convention during prime time. (Cuban American journalist and talk show host Cristina Saralegui addressed the convention outside the featured period.) Arguably one of the most enduring, if brief, speeches of the convention came from Benita Veliz, an undocumented student from St. Mary's University and leader within the movement supporting passage of the DREAM Act:

My name is Benita Veliz, and I'm from San Antonio, Texas. Like so many Americans of all races and backgrounds, I was brought here as a child. I've been here ever since. I graduated as valedictorian of my class at the age of 16 and earned a double major at the age of 20. I know I have something to contribute to my economy and my country. I feel just as American as any of my friends and neighbors. But, I've had to live almost my entire life knowing I could be deported just because of the way I came here.<sup>34</sup>

Benita Veliz's speech marked the first time an undocumented person had addressed a national convention and the highest-profile appearance representing the student movement. Moreover, her story of success, struggle, and the pressing need for immigration reform signaled the degree to which Latina/o policy concerns were influencing the Democratic Party's positions.

<sup>34</sup> Transcript of Benita Veliz remarks as prepared for delivery, Democratic National Convention. 2012. Daily Kos. <http://www.dailykos.com/story/2012/09/05/1128253/-Transcript-of-Benita-Veliz-remarks-as-prepared-for-delivery-Democratic-National-Convention>.

The Republican National Committee selected Tampa, Florida, as its convention site, a location that drew greater attention to the established and complex Latina/o community of the state, and the program featured several prominent Latina/o speakers.<sup>35</sup> Among the most notable was Florida's Senator and rumored vice presidential candidate Marco Rubio, who introduced presidential nominee Mitt Romney. By August, Rubio had emerged as the GOP's leading voice on immigration reform and a strong contender for the 2016 election. Puerto Rico Governor Luis Fortuno, Texas Senate Republican candidate Ted Cruz, and Nevada Governor Brian Sandoval all scored prime-time speaking roles. Much like the Democratic National Convention, Latinas featured less prominently in the convention, with the exception of New Mexico Governor Susana Martinez. While Governor Martinez's role in the convention was overshadowed by tensions over the party's position on immigration reform, including her criticisms of Mitt Romney and the party's failure to mount a successful Latina/o outreach campaign, she nonetheless gave an impassioned speech that wove together elements of race and gender with a partisan critique aimed at President Obama:

Growing up I never imagined a little girl from a border town could one day become a governor. But this is America *y en America, todo es posible!* My parents taught me to never give up and to always believe that my future could be whatever I dreamt it to be . . . As the first Hispanic female governor in history, little girls they often come up to me in the grocery store or in the mall. They look and they point, and when they get the courage to come up, they ask, "Are you Susana?" and they run up and they give me a hug. And I wonder, how do you know who I am? But they do. And these are little girls. It's in moments like these when I'm reminded that we each pave a path. And for me it's about paving a path for those little girls to follow. No more barriers.<sup>36</sup>

Finally, Latinas/os were successful as candidates for national office, expanding their presence in both the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate. Owing to their electoral successes, the 113th Congress "features the largest class of Latinas/os in the U.S. House of

<sup>35</sup> Unfortunately for the RNC, the first day of the convention was postponed in the wake of Tropical Storm Isaac, resulting in several speakers being displaced or rescheduled during less prominent speaking times.

<sup>36</sup> Susana Martinez RNC speech. 2012. Politico. <http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0812/80421.html>.

**TABLE 5.3: Latinas from four states serve in the 113th Congress**

California	Grace Flores Napolitano	Democrat, District 32
	Gloria Negrete McLeod	Democrat, District 35
	Linda Sanchez	Democrat, District 38
	Lucille Roybal-Allard	Democrat, District 40
	Loretta Sanchez	Democrat, District 46
Florida	Ileana Ros-Lehtinen	Republican, District 27
New Mexico	Michelle Lujan Grisham	Democrat, District 1
New York	Nydia Velazquez	Democrat, District 7

Sources: National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO), [http://www.naleo.org/downloads/US\\_Congress\\_Table\\_2012.pdf](http://www.naleo.org/downloads/US_Congress_Table_2012.pdf).

Representatives.”<sup>37</sup> This combination of reelected Latina/o representatives coupled with newly elected members means that Latinas and Latinos will exert greater influence on the national agenda during an important moment for immigration reform. The 113<sup>th</sup> Congress features twenty-eight Latinas/os with nine new members, two of whom are Latinas: former California State Senator Gloria Negrete McLeod (D), who won in the 35th congressional district, and former New Mexico County Commissioner Michelle Lujan Grisham (D), who was elected in the first congressional district, becoming the first Latina to represent the state in the U.S. House.<sup>38</sup> These women join California Representatives Grace Flores Napolitano (D), Linda Sanchez (D), Loretta Sanchez (D), and Lucille Roybal-Allard (D), Florida Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R), and New York Representative Nydia Velazquez (D). (See Table 5.3.)

## THE LATINA GENDER GAP

While Latinas took their political participation to new heights with their leadership in the national presidential contest, it was a widening gender gap between Latinas and Latinos that bolstered Democratic mobilizing efforts in the last few months of the campaign. Tracking data from Impremedia/Latino Decisions polls showed that while both Latinas and Latinos

<sup>37</sup> National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO). 2012. Latino Candidates Make History on Election Night. November 7, 2012. <http://us1.campaign-archive1.com/?u=c1a51befb8159efb3bbd1f2620f9e16&id=995bc2c9426e-bt7gXpS6oS>.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

strongly favored Obama throughout the campaign, by mid September 2012, Obama held a 53-point lead over Romney among Latinas, compared to a 29-point lead with Hispanic men. The gender gap between Latinas and Latinos who favored Obama was 13 points, as compared to a 9-point gender gap among all voters.

This gap extended beyond Obama and Romney's favorability to the entire Republican Party, as only 20 percent of Latinas held a favorable view of the party, compared with 29 percent of Latino men. In addition, 68 percent of Latinas said they would vote Democratic in the upcoming House elections, while 59 percent of Latino men said they would vote for a Democratic candidate in these races.

Even more significant was the broad advantage that Latinas conferred on Democrats with regard to "women's issues," what political scientist Sylvia Manzano described as "the largest gap on any policy issue our polling data has ever revealed".<sup>39</sup> Specifically, when asked "who do you trust to make the right decisions and address issues of concern to women?" 78 percent of Latinas favored Democrats, while only 13 percent of Latinas favored Republicans. Similarly, 68 percent of Latino men said Democrats could better handle women's issues, while only 19 percent said they thought Republicans were better suited. In short, Latinas gave Democrats a 65-point advantage over Republicans on issues of specific concern to them.

Finally, in addition to a substantial gender gap for Obama and the Democrats, Latina responses indicated more enthusiasm for turning out; 59 percent reported being very enthusiastic about voting in the upcoming election (as compared with 51 percent of Latino men). This enthusiasm gap was a significant bolster for many Democrats, as earlier tracking and field reports suggested a lackluster response to the Obama campaign in 2012 as compared with 2008. Advisors and pundits worried openly that the lack of enthusiasm among Latinas/os could result in a poor turnout in competitive states, swinging the popular vote to Romney and the Republicans. However, Obama's action in June creating a bold new option for undocumented minors breathed new life into Latina/o support while simultaneously undermining Republican gestures toward Latinas/os

<sup>39</sup> Sylvia Manzano. 2012. The Latino gender gap: Latino voters prefer Obama by 53 point margin. *Latino Decisions*. September 17, 2012. <http://www.latinodecisions.com/blog/2012/09/17/latina-voters-prefer-obama-by-53-point-margin/>. See also Summer Ballantine. 2012. The New Gender Gap: Polls show Obama with 52 point lead among Latinas, 29 among Hispanic men. *The Houston Chronicle*.

voters through a modified DREAM act proposal floated by Florida Senator Marco Rubio.<sup>40</sup>

A significant Latino/a gender gap was also reported in the key battleground state of Colorado. A June tracking poll found a gender gap in Latina and Latino evaluations of both President Obama's job approval and support for his reelection. With respect to job approval, 76 percent of Latina voters in Colorado approved of President' Obama's performance, compared with 69 percent of Latino men. This 7-point gender gap paralleled national scores on Obama's job performance but was not statistically significant. However, when asked about their presidential candidate preference, 80 percent of Colorado Latinas indicated support for Obama over Romney, compared with 65 percent of Colorado Latino men. This 15-point gender gap was much wider than the national average, which hovered at approximately 8 percent at the time, and proved to be statistically significant.<sup>41</sup> In the end, Latina/o support for Obama in Colorado increased by more than 10 points over his margin in 2008, with 75 percent of Latinas and Latinos in the state voting for President Obama and only 23 percent supporting Mitt Romney.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>40</sup> In June 2012, President Obama used executive authority to create Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals – a policy cousin to the DREAM Act, an effort to provide paths to legalization for undocumented children in the United States. The new policy permits undocumented immigrants 30 or younger who have clean criminal records, have lived in the United States for at least five years, are in school (or are high school graduates or military veterans in good standing), and who came to the United States before age sixteen to remain in the United States without fear of deportation. For immigrants who come forward and qualify, DHS will grant deferred action – preventing their deportation through a two-year reprieve. Moreover, the policy clears the way for these young immigrants to work legally, specifically permitting them to apply for work permits and possibly to obtain other significant documents such as driver's licenses. The Pew Hispanic Center estimates that as many as 1.4 million immigrants might benefit from the new policy. The program was seen by many as a strategic move intended to undermine Republican advances toward Latina/o voters with plans for immigration reform while simultaneously mollifying critics of the Obama administration's aggressive criminal alien apprehension program that had resulted in record numbers of immigrant deportations. See Julia Preston and John H. Cushman. 2012, June 15. Obama to Permit Young Migrants to Remain in the U.S. *The New York Times*.

<sup>41</sup> Rob Preuhs. 2012. Colorado Latina/Latino Gender Gap. Latino Decisions. September 13, 2012. <http://www.latinodecisions.com/blog/2012/09/13/colorados-latinalatino-gender-gap/>.

<sup>42</sup> Lopez and Taylor. 2012. Latino Voters in the 2012 Election. As with the data on national Latina/o turnout and vote choice, there is considerable debate about the actual growth of the Latina/o vote in Colorado in 2012. Specifically in 2008, the National Election Poll reported that Obama secured 61 percent of the Latina/o vote in the state, while more comprehensive exit polls in the state reported that 67 percent of Colorado Latinas/os voted for Obama. Similarly, in 2012, NEP data indicate that 75 percent of Colorado Latinas/os supported Obama (and 23 percent Romney) as compared with 87 percent



Ultimately, examining the Latina gender gap reveals some important differences between Latina and white female voters. In particular, Susan J. Carroll in Chapter 4 of this volume traces the appearance of a national gender gap since 1980, noting that the gap typically hovers between 7 and 8 points. More importantly, the gap typically translates into a greater likelihood that female voters would support a Democratic candidate for office while male voters would more likely favor a Republican candidate. However, the gender gap among Latinas and Latinos is a far more recent phenomenon (owing in part to the more recent availability of data), but even more significantly it reflects a difference between Latinas and Latinos on the *depth* of their support for Democratic candidates and issues and not on a partisan divide, as exists among white voters. In other words, both Latinas and Latinos overwhelmingly support Democratic candidates and issues, and the tracking data compiled over the 2012 elections suggest that more than 50 percent of both Latinas and Latinos consistently preferred Obama to Romney. Despite differences in their levels of support within the party, both Latinas and Latinos also indicated a strong likelihood of voting and consistently evaluated the outreach efforts of Democrats as superior to Republicans.<sup>43</sup>

Thus, the Latino/a gender gap that appeared in the 2012 election revealed important variations in Latino/a political participation (particularly for the Democratic Party) and demonstrated the significance of simultaneous attention to both race and gender. Recent research by Latina political scientists and women of color on the Latina/o gender gap extends our understanding of this important political phenomenon, examining variations by age, generational cohort, race, national origin, and immigration status.<sup>44</sup> Utilizing an intersectional analysis, this research raises new questions about the causes and directions of the gap while heightening the profile of Latinas as political agents and advancing research on Latina political participation.

support indicated in the Impremedia/Latino Decisions exit data. In the end, the point is most significant to academics and campaign strategists, because in both studies Latinas/os overwhelmingly favored President Obama over the Republican challenger.

<sup>43</sup> Sylvia Manzano. 2012. The Latino gender gap.

<sup>44</sup> Christina Bejarano, Sylvia Manzano, and Celeste Montoya. 2011. Tracking the Latino Gender Gap: Gender Attitudes across Sex, Borders, and Generations. *Politics and Gender* (7), 521–549; Lisa Garcia Bedolla, Jessica Lavariega Monforti, and Adrian D. Pantoja. 2006. A Second Look: Is There a Latino/a Gender Gap? *Journal of Women, Politics, and Policy*, 28 (January); 147–171; Pei-te Lien. 1998. Does the Gender Gap in Political Attitudes and Behavior Vary Across Racial Groups? *Political Research Quarterly* 51 (December): 869–894.

## CONCLUSION

Latinas and Latinos played a substantial role in the 2012 national election, securing reelection for President Obama and demonstrating their power in key battleground states. Owing in large part to the showing of electoral strength, Latina/o policy preferences – especially on immigration – took center stage on the national agenda by January 2013.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, in states such as Colorado and Florida, the surge of Latina and Latino voters also gave new strength to an elected base of Latina/o elites within the state and placed Latina/o political interests on the legislative agenda.

However, the story of Latina/o electoral success is not uniform; that is, Latina/o voting power rested significantly on the mobilization and distinct voting preferences of Latinas, as demonstrated in the emerging gender gap in the elections. That is, Latina voters were disproportionately driving the increased turnout of Latina/o voters as well as the increased support for President Obama. Preferences among Latinas for humane, comprehensive immigration reform and their negative evaluation of Republicans on this issue helped explain the increased support for the President.

Finally, the story of Latina/o electoral success is also a story about targeted outreach and mobilization in the specific states of Colorado, Florida, New Mexico, and Nevada. While efforts aimed at expanding Latina/o electoral presence in those states existed long before 2012 and were strongly present in 2008, they bore new fruit in 2012, making the Latina/o vote nationally decisive for the first time in U.S. history.

<sup>45</sup> Comprehensive immigration reform became a recurring feature in the Election Night speech of President Obama, in his inauguration speech in January, and in the first State of the Union address to Congress that same month. The president also convened multiple working groups on various aspects of immigration reform in the months after the election and delivered a rousing speech outlining his plan for immigration reform in late January. Moreover, by early February 2013, both the president and a bipartisan group of senators had outlined plans for comprehensive immigration reform legislation they planned to introduce in that session of Congress. Finally, immigration reform gained so much momentum that it even featured prominently in the Republican rebuttal to the State of the Union address delivered by Senator Marco Rubio of Florida.