

## **Latinos, Religion, and the 2004 Presidential Election**

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## **Abstract**

This paper examines the influence of religion on the Latino vote for George W. Bush and John F. Kerry in the 2004 presidential election. In doing so, it will look beyond the aggregate category of “Latino,” which often masks important differences within this historically, culturally, and geographically diverse population. Instead, the paper will examine religion and vote choice not only for Latinos generally but also according to region and national-origin group. The paper finds significant and consistent levels of evangelical support for Bush, regardless of whether the Latino vote is analyzed in the aggregate, by state, or by national-origin group. In addition, there are few statistically significant differences among Catholics, the non-religious, and mainline Protestants, although the variation that does exist suggests the latter are sometimes less supportive of Bush.

## **Latinos and the 2004 Election**

Recent presidential elections have seen a number of unusual controversies. For 2000, the most important dispute involved the ‘hanging chads’ in Florida. In 2004, while the election outcome itself was resolved without undue difficulty, one contested post-election issue was the level of Latino support for George W. Bush and John F. Kerry. Along with this controversy came arguments about whether Latinos were increasingly ‘up for grabs’ politically. There was also discussion about what might be the basis for such hypothesized growth in Republican support from this traditionally Democratic constituency. This paper will discuss one such possible explanation for support for Bush in 2004 – religion.

In most presidential elections in recent memory, the media speculates early about the possible political importance of Latinos. The typical report will note the growing number of Latinos, refer to Latinos as the ‘sleeping giant’ and ask whether this is the year they will ‘awaken.’ By the end of election season, it is usually clear that Latinos were not a decisive factor. As described by DeSipio and de la Garza (2002, 398): “Despite these recurring predictions, each election is followed by a somewhat disappointing review in which the Latino promise is not met and in which ongoing problems (most notably low turnout) are advanced as easy explanations.”

True to form, the 2004 campaign did feature many breathless news reports about the potential importance of the Latino vote to the campaigns. The main difference from the usual pattern was that data about Latinos and vote choice described a population growing in importance and moving in an unexpected direction. Latino turnout was estimated to have surged from 5.9 million in 2000 to at least 7 million in 2004, and some

exit polls suggested that 44 percent of Latinos voted for Bush. Such a figure would be a record high for a Republican presidential candidate. If true, this would suggest that a key constituency of the Democratic Party – and one the party is counting on to regain majority status – could instead become part of the GOP umbrella.

Leal et al. (2005) examined the competing exit poll claims of the National Election Pool (NEP), the *Los Angeles Times*, and the Willie C. Velazquez Research Institute (WVI). The NEP found that 44 percent of Latinos voted for Bush, the *Los Angeles Times* estimated a slightly higher figure of 45 percent, while the WVI concluded that just over 31 percent of Latinos supported Bush. Leal et al. suggested that 39 or 40 percent was a more likely ballpark estimate (see also Teixeira 2004). They also pointed out that claims of increasing Latino support for GOP presidential candidates overlooks the roller coaster nature of such support during the last two decades.

Nevertheless, the media were quick to report the 44 percent figure and speculate on whether Latinos were becoming a ‘swing voter’ constituency. Such claims are not new. According to de la Garza (2004, 102), “Long before President Bush reached out to Latinos, journalists, key Republican partisans, and Latino advocates trying to manipulate both parties to their advantage have claimed that the Latino vote is up for grabs.”

Although these are important questions, this paper will not revisit such ground. Instead, it will look in more detail at the determinants of support for Bush and Kerry, specifically the much-discussed role of religion.

Some evidence from 2004 suggests that religious affiliation might have been an important component of the Latino vote. First, pre-election surveys uncovered few other clear sources of partisan differentials. In the October pre-election survey conducted by

the *Washington Post*, Univision Television, and the Tomás Rivera Policy Institute (TRPI), Latino support for Kerry was strong across socio-economic status (SES) measures. For example, levels of support did not vary substantially between those who earn less than \$25,000 or over \$50,000. As summarized by Leal et al. (2005), “with regard to education, income, age, and immigrant status, every subsection of the Latino electorate stated a vote preference lower than 35 percent for President Bush.”

The one exception to this pattern was religious affiliation. The same survey found that Catholic Latino likely voters supported Kerry over Bush by 40 points, but Protestant Latinos were 13 points more likely to favor Bush over Kerry. This was not enough to explain the NEP statistic of 44 percent Bush support; this would have required almost all Latino voters to have been Protestants, and the latter were only four percentage points most likely to have reported being mobilized to vote in October than were Catholic Latinos. This does raise the question of whether religious differences within Latino communities can lead to increased GOP support in future elections. Such statistics also bear out some previous research on religiously-based political differences among Latinos (Kosmin and Keysar 1995).

This is a slightly different question than whether there are demographic or SES differences in Latino partisan affiliation. Most research has found only modest evidence that Latinos are more likely to become Republicans as they become wealthier (Cain, Kiewiet, and Uhlaner 1992; DeSipio and de la Garza 2000; Gimpel and Kaufmann 2001; Alvarez and Garcia-Bedolla 2003), and in any case there are only a limited number of high-income Latinos.

Another argument is that issues related to religious belief, specifically abortion, will eventually lead Latinos away from the pro-choice Democratic Party and toward the pro-life GOP. However, Alvarez and Garcia-Bedolla (2003, 44) found little evidence of this: “Mexican voters who decide they want to restrict abortion become only 4% less likely to be Democratic and 3% more likely to be Republicans.” They concluded that Latino philosophies about the proper role of government are more substantially related to partisanship. Such findings help to explain the lack of evidence of Latino party switching over the decades, and why most Latinos identify with the Democrats and vote for Democratic candidates in most elections – notwithstanding the occasional presidential election with a generally popular candidate, like Reagan in 1984 and Bush in 2004.

While specific moral or religious issues may not explain Latino partisanship, the evidence noted above suggests that some other aspect of religion may play a political role. The paper will discuss whether denominational affiliation is a useful category.

### **Religion and Politics**

In light of the other papers presented at this conference, a general discussion of the political role of religion is not necessary. Nevertheless, it is useful to point out some religious dynamics that could help to explain Latino support for George W. Bush, a born-again Protestant, and John F. Kerry, a Roman Catholic.

Kohut et al. discuss the ‘three b’s’ that influence religion and politics: belonging (denomination), behaving (practices), and believing (beliefs). Which is more important to take into account? Kellstedt and Green (1993) note that beliefs and practices are shaped by institutional context and environment, and that denominational affiliation often encompasses shared beliefs, practices, and experiences. Denominational affiliation is

therefore parallel to political party – and in fact more Americans express a denominational than a partisan affiliation.

Their examination of NES data showed that not only does religious affiliation influence party identification and partisan choices, but the effect may be growing larger. It currently rivals that of traditional factors like income, education, region, and union membership. Religion may also have an important influence on whether – and not just how – people decide to participate in politics.

Kellstedt and Green (1993) noted the six religious traditions in the US: mainline Protestant, evangelical Protestant, African-American Protestant, Roman Catholic, Jewish, and secularism. The political implications of denomination have changed across American history; evangelicals used to be a Democratic constituency but today are under the GOP tent. For instance, consider the example of William Jennings Bryan, not only a three-time Democratic presidential candidate but also the prosecuting attorney for the state of Tennessee at the Scopes “monkey trial.”

Kohut et al. (2000) pointed out that white evangelical Protestants increasingly support Republican candidates while secular voters increasingly trend toward the Democrats. He noted that much of the religious energy in America was on the Democratic side in the 1960s and 1970s; many of the leaders of the Civil Rights Movement and the anti-Vietnam War movement were religiously motivated, as were some involved in the women’s movement and the environmental movement. Nevertheless, by the 1970s, “much of the energy fueling religious activism came from outspoken clergy representing the concerns of evangelical Christians” (3), largely in response to American cultural changes (some of which were wrought by earlier

movements). For instance, Fowler et al. (2004) show that evangelicals prioritize abortion and family values issues over economic issues.<sup>1</sup>

While Catholics have long been associated with the Democratic Party, they have moved toward the center in recent years (Kenski and Lockwood 1991). Wald (2003) noted that Catholics are slightly more Democratic than Republican in affiliation and voting, which belies their reported predominant conservative identification, and he finds that, “Despite the obsolescence of many of the issues that prompted Jewish and Catholic support for the Democratic party under Franklin Roosevelt, the connection has persisted” (193). Much of the change that has occurred is the result of Catholic upward SES mobility (Kenski and Lockwood 1991), and in 2004 a slight majority of Catholics may have voted for the Republican candidate for the first time.

A comparison of the first Bush elections in 1988 and 2000 illustrate some of these dynamics. In the 1988 election featuring George H.W. Bush and Michael Dukakis, Kellstedt and Green (1993) found that evangelical Protestants voted most strongly for Bush, followed by mainline Protestants, Catholics, seculars, Jews, and African-American Protestants. For instance, 70 percent of evangelicals, 54 percent of Catholics, and 21 percent of African-American Protestants reported voting for Bush. Kellstedt and Green (1993) also found similar patterns holding for overall partisanship. For 2000, Wald (2003) found the same relative ranking, although mainline Protestants “continue to move further away from their traditional Republican home” and Roman Catholics “showed continuity in their centrist location” (168). As Layman (2001) noted, evangelicals are now a central part of the GOP base.

## **Latinos: Demography and Religion**

One key development in the American politics field is the dramatic increase in the Latino population, which is reshaping the political and cultural landscape. This growth, in combination with the relative decline of the Anglo (non-Hispanic white) share of the American population, makes it increasingly difficult to understand almost any aspect of American politics without reference to Latinos.

The 2000 U.S. Census found that Latinos were becoming America's largest minority group. Although the Census Bureau in 1999 estimated that Latinos would be 11.4 percent of the population in 2000, the census revealed that they were 12.5 percent – a figure Latinos were not projected to reach until 2005. This may understate the true Latino population, as the census is an actual count, not an estimate, and many Latinos are non-citizens with incentives to avoid contact with government officials.

These figures for the first time put Latinos ahead of African Americans, who constituted 12.1 percent of the population in 1990. Given the substantial levels of immigration from Mexico, the Caribbean, and Latin America, as well as the relatively high birthrate of Latinos in the United States, this population should only continue to grow. As a result, the traditional and straightforward bifurcated black-white paradigm on racial questions is slowly changing into a more complex multi-ethnic perspective.

More recent data from the Bureau of the Census indicate that the Latino population has grown (in just three years) to 13.4 percent. Anglos currently constitute 68 percent of the U.S. population; by the year 2050, at least one in every four Americans will likely be Latino, and by the year 2100, one in every three Americans may be Latino. These changes will be magnified in states such as Texas, where one-third of the

population is already Latino. An understanding of Latinos will therefore be of critical importance as the U.S. transitions to a society in which no single ethnic or racial group is the majority. In four states, the future is now. Texas, California, Hawaii, and New Mexico already have majority-minority populations (although not necessarily majority-minority electorates), and more states are likely to join them in the years to come.

In contrast to this rapid Latino population growth, there is some stability within the Latino population in terms of religious affiliation. Approximately 70 percent of Latinos identify as Catholic, and about 20 percent are evangelicals (Hunt 2000; Kosmin and Keysar 1995). While this figure has been fairly stable for the last two decades, it is well known that some Latinos are leaving the Catholic Church in favor of evangelical and Pentecostal churches (Greeley 1994; 1997). The stability of the Catholic percentage is due to immigration from Latin America. Acculturation is associated with an increased likelihood of non-Catholic affiliation (Espinosa, Elizondo, and Miranda 2003), but this is balanced by predominantly Catholic Latino immigrants – despite some success by Protestant efforts in Latin America.

Does this evangelical tendency toward the more acculturated Latinos have political implications? The previous discussion indicates that Anglo evangelicals are more conservative across a number of moral issues and are a key component of GOP electoral coalitions. While Latino denominational choices do not necessarily imply a shift in political or moral opinions, some have noted that Latino evangelicals are more conservative than Latino Catholics on a number of social issues and were more supportive of George W. Bush in 2000 (Espinosa, Elizondo, and Miranda 2003). This parallels the more conservative orientations of Anglo evangelicals described previously.

In addition, given the lack of other substantial SES and demographic cleavages within the Latino population (aside from Cuban-American partisanship), it appears that the GOP benefits from acculturation but that continuing immigration benefits Democrats.

While conservative Catholics and evangelicals sometimes have similar moral and policy positions, they are not necessarily willing to work together in the electoral arena. Speaking of the religious right generally, Green, Rozell, and Wilcox (2003, 8) noted that “Ethnic diversity presented both a challenge and a largely untapped opportunity for the movement: in most states, black Protestants and Hispanic Catholics shared many of the religious values of the movement’s core supporters but rarely backed movement organizations.” They noted that ethnic religious communities were sometimes willing to support ballot propositions on morally-related issues but rarely Republican candidates.

Lee and Pachon (2005) examined the overall level of Latino support for Bush and Kerry in 2004 using the *Washington Post*/Univision/TRPI October pre-election survey. They found that Latino evangelicals were more supportive of Bush and were more likely to identify as Republicans than were Latino Catholics. Nevertheless, they concluded that this religious gap was not sufficient to transform Latinos into a swing constituency, as the share of Latino evangelicals was low (15 percent) and the strong majority of Latinos anticipated voting for Kerry (67 percent). In addition, Lee and Pachon (2005, 18) noted that, “Latino evangelicals have not yet been closely connected to the politics of their Anglo evangelical brothers and sisters.” For instance, over half of Latino evangelicals consider themselves Democrats or independents; while this is smaller than the 81 percent of Catholics who identify as Democrats or independents, it is far larger than the comparative Anglo evangelical figures. In addition, Latino evangelicals were not more

likely than Latino Catholics to report certainty about their vote choice, to report being politically mobilized, or to report following the presidential contest.

### **Do “Latinos” Exist?**

The above discussion of “Latino” religious affiliation and political behavior begs the question of whether a “Latino community” exists in the United States. Concepts like “Latino” or “Hispanic” are social constructions that have not necessarily been adopted by the populations in question. A number of researchers are interested in whether “Latinos” think of themselves in such pan-ethnic terms, or whether they prefer national-origin identifiers such as Mexican American or Cuban American (de la Garza et al. 1992; Jones-Correa and Leal 1996).

In response to such concerns, a number of scholars have looked in more detail within the Latino label and found a number of important differences by national-origin group. For instance, Trueba (1999, 33) noted that, “we cannot trivialize the ethnic, social, racial, and economic differences of Latino subgroups.” De la Garza and DeSipio (1994, 3) argued that the study of the aggregate Latino population:

confuses rather than clarifies our understanding because of the characteristics that distinguish the national-origin groups thus subsumed (Bean and Tienda 1987; de la Garza, Fraga, and Pachon 1988; Pachon and DeSipio 1988; Fuchs 1990). This approach fails to assess differences in political culture associated with the distinct socialization experiences within the United States and the countries of origin and neglects the link between those differences and political behavior.

A key event in this research agenda was the creation of the Latino National Political Survey (LNPS) in 1989-90, which was specifically designed to compare the political and policy attitudes of Latinos of Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Cuban descent. The investigators (de la Garza, et al. 1992, 13) found a number of important differences:

What, then, does the LNPS tell us? Particularly among citizens, it illustrates that Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans have a great deal in common, but they also differ in significant ways on important issues. Thus, there may be a Hispanic political community, but its parameters do not fit any existing presuppositions.

In his review of the above volume, Domínguez (1994) made two similar points. First, he noted that, “On question after question, the circumstances and attitudes of Cubans place themselves outside any U.S. Latino referent that might apply to the Mexicans and Puerto Ricans” (354). He nevertheless discussed “three credible scholarly claims about the appropriateness, necessity, and utility of the concept of Latino” (354).

Due to such research, it is now increasingly clear that the aggregate term “Latino” should be used with some caution. Scholars are more careful to avoid sweeping generalizations about Latino political behavior or public opinion, and much work is now focused on the experiences of particular national-origin groups. Recent population trends have also contributed to this scholarly trend. While words like “Latino” and “Hispanic” are often used interchangeably with “Mexican American,” the number of non-Mexican-origin Latinos has grown dramatically in recent decades. This is in large part due to substantial migration from Central America and the Caribbean.

The next step in this research agenda is to explore the validity of the national-origin group categories. While Latinos and Anglos may have opinion differences, this does not indicate whether the Latino category is meaningful (Leal 2002). In a similar way, opinion variation according to Latino national-origin group does not indicate that such groups are coherent entities. It is possible that aggregate national-origin data mask a number of differences within such communities, perhaps to the point that it makes little sense to discuss ‘Mexican-American opinion’ or ‘what the Cuban-American community

wants.’ This chapter takes this into account by separately examining the 2004 vote according to national-origin group and state of residence, particularly with regard to Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans.

There do exist some hints about the potential importance of variation within such groups. According to *Los Angeles Times* journalist Frank del Olmo (1987, 25), “I have found that polls attempting to gauge Latino sentiment on issues or candidates seem to be more reliable when they focus on a specific national group like Cuban Americans or Puerto Ricans, or on a particular community like San Antonio or East Los Angeles, than when they deal with Latinos as a national bloc.” This statement indicates that opinion differences might be expected not just according to group but also according to region – a proposition this chapter examines.

More generally, some scholars have noted the importance of studying variation within Latino national-origin groups. Keefe and Padilla (1987, 140), in discussing Latino and Anglo familism, wrote that, “The significant differences within the Mexican American ethnic group demonstrate the importance of conducting subgroup analyses before making generalizations for the ethnic group as a whole.” There are also indications that other Latino national-origin groups might not be unitary actors. Leal (forthcoming) found that Cuban-American opinion varies according to residence in Florida or elsewhere, while Mexican American opinion did not seem to significantly differ according to state residence. Domínguez (1994, 354) also noted that the LNPS excluded Puerto Ricans living in Puerto Rico and argued that, “it would have been valuable to compare the two Puerto Rican subpopulations.” Some comparative work on this population has taken place, particularly comparing the political participation rates of

Puerto Ricans in the U.S. and on the island (all of whom are American citizens), but less work is found on public opinion.

### **Data and Models**

This paper will test for Latino voting differences according to religious denomination. Specifically, we will test previous understandings of Latino evangelical political orientations by examining the anticipated vote for Bush and Kerry in the 2004 presidential elections.

The paper uses the 2004 Washington Post/Univision/Tomás Rivera Policy Institute pre-election survey. Conducted October 4-16, it polled via telephone 1,603 Latino registered voters in the eleven states with over 100,000 Latino registered voters: California, Texas, Florida, New York, Arizona, Illinois, New Mexico, New Jersey, Colorado, Virginia, and Massachusetts. The survey is therefore representative of 88 percent of Latino registered voters nationwide. The samples were drawn from official registered voter lists, and Latinos were identified through the U.S. Census Spanish surname list. Fieldwork was carried out by Interviewing Service of America (ISA) of Van Nuys, CA.

While the trend in scholarship is often to aggregate to the largest level, this does not necessarily make sense for all projects. While single-state studies are less common in political science today than in earlier decades, they can be as, or even more, useful than research based on a national sample depending on the specific questions and the available data (for a more detailed discussion see Nicholson-Crotty and Meier 2002). In this case, an investigation of presidential voting should take into account the Electoral College and examine opinion at the state level. In addition, as noted above, there is some evidence of

Latino opinion variation by state. There is also reason to think that the political role of the “Christian Right” varies by state (Green, Rozell, and Wilcox 2003), so the political implications of evangelical identification may not be the same from state to state.

The next section will begin by presenting aggregate data on anticipated vote choice for evangelicals, Catholics, mainline Protestants, and the secular. We will then present regressions results for respondents specifically from two Latino national-origin groups – Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans – and Latino in five states – California, Texas, Florida, New York, and a southwest group that includes New Mexico, Arizona, and Colorado. In all models, the key independent variables will be those measuring religious affiliation: evangelical, mainline Protestant, and secular, with Roman Catholic being the base case.

The religious affiliation variables are derived through two questions. The survey asked, “Regardless of whether you now attend any religious services, do you consider yourself closest to Catholic, Protestant, or something else?” Responses to this question include Catholic; Protestant; just Christian; other religious tradition or denomination; no religious preference; atheist; and agnostic. The second question asked, “Would you consider yourself a born-again or evangelical Christian or not?” Those who identified themselves as both Protestant and a born-again/evangelical Christian were categorized as evangelicals. Those who identified as a non-evangelical Protestant or just Christian were categorized as mainline Protestant. Those who responded “no religious preference,” “atheist,” or “agnostic” were classed as secular.

This is useful but not ideal classification scheme. While Catholic and secular are clear categories, evangelical and, to a larger degree, “mainline Protestant,” are open to

question. These variables, as described above, were not created through respondent identification with specific church affiliations but through responses to two questions. The variable for “mainline Protestant” therefore includes self-identified Protestants or other non-Catholic Christians who did not report a “born again” experience – which for Latinos may not be the equivalent of traditional “mainline” Protestants in Anglo communities. The limited number of Latino surveys do not include many religious questions, however, and more research is clearly need to better understand the various denominational affiliations of Latinos.

We will also include a series of political, demographic, and SES control variables in each model. These will include Bush approval; whether Bush or Kerry is more sincere in Latino outreach; assessment of national economic conditions; and demographic characteristics include education, generational status, age, gender, and income.

The baseline model for anticipated vote and partisanship is therefore as follows:

$\alpha$  (intercept)  
+  $\beta_1$  Evangelical  
+  $\beta_2$  Other Christian  
+  $\beta_3$  Non-Christian  
+  $\beta_4$  Bush approval  
+  $\beta_5$  Sincerity of Bush (and Kerry) outreach to Latinos  
+  $\beta_6$  Assessment of national economic conditions  
+  $\beta_7$  Party identification  
+  $\beta_8$  Education  
+  $\beta_9$  Generation Status  
+  $\beta_{10}$  Gender  
+  $\beta_{11}$  Puerto Rican  
+  $\beta_{12}$  Cuban American  
+  $\beta_{13}$  Income (\$25,000 - \$49,999)  
+  $\beta_{14}$  Income (\$50,000 +)  
+  $\beta_{15}$  Income (Missing)  
+  $\varepsilon$

This model is similar to the Lee and Pachon (2005) model, but it omits several highly-correlated variables that might induce multicollinearity. The generational status, gender, and national-origin variables are dummy measures. Because of some missing data, a standard income question was not used. Instead, it was divided into three variables, including a dummy for missing data, in order to keep as many respondents as possible in the models (the base case is the lowest income category).

The state models feature fewer variables in order to minimize missing data, and they also include different national-origin group control variables depending on state demographics. The national-origin group models contain various state dummy variables to take into account the varying geographic distributions of the populations.

The anticipated vote question is based on several survey items. The first simply asks, “If the 2004 presidential election were being held today, would you vote for [ROTATE: (George W. Bush and Dick Cheney, the Republicans), (John Kerry and John Edwards, the Democrats)], or Ralph Nader and Peter Camejo, the independents?” For those who answered “other,” “neither,” “would not vote,” or “don’t know,” a follow-up question asks “Which candidates are you leaning towards?” A third question enables us to ascertain those who have already voted through absentee ballots or early voting. Because this is a dummy variable, logistic regression analysis is used.

The partisanship independent variable is a five point scale. Respondents were first asked: “Do you generally consider yourself [ROTATE: (a Democrat), (a Republican)], or an independent?” Those who answered “independent” were then asked: “Do you think of yourself as closer to [ROTATE: (the Democrats) or (the Republicans)]?”

The sincerity of outreach question is worded as follows: “Which candidate, [ROTATE: (George W. Bush) or (John Kerry)], do you think has made more of a sincere effort to reach out to the Latino community?” The variable is a three point scale: 2 for Bush, 1 for either “Both candidates” or “Neither candidate,” and 0 for Kerry. Overall, 41.7 percent of Latinos said that Kerry was more sincere, 30.5 percent said Bush was more sincere, 10 percent said that neither candidate made a sincere effort, 4.1 percent said the sincerity was the same, while 13.6 percent did not know.

Approval of President Bush was assessed through the following question: “Do you approve or disapprove of the way George W. Bush is handling his job as president? [If respondent says ‘don’t know,’ probe once: “There is no right or wrong answer here, we’re just looking for your best guess. Do you approve or disapprove of the way George W. Bush is handling his job as president?” Overall, 51.4 percent of Latinos disapproved, 34.8 percent of Latinos approved, and the remaining 13.8 percent neither approved nor disapproved or did not know.

## **Results**

Table 1 shows the overall Latino vote for Bush and Kerry by religious affiliation. The results are both similar to and different from the more general understanding of how religion influences politics, as described previously. Analysis of recent presidential elections suggests that evangelicals are more likely to vote for Republican presidential candidates, mainline Protestants are second but moving toward the center, Catholics are very near the center, while the secular are the most likely to vote for Democrats.

This table suggests that evangelicals are the most supportive of Bush and the strongest Democrats are Catholics. Mainline Protestants are less supportive of Bush than

evangelicals, which is not a surprise, but the secular are ten percentage points more supportive of Bush than are Catholics.

**\*\* Insert Table 1 about Here \*\***

Table 2 more systematically evaluates this question by modeling the 2004 anticipated presidential vote in the manner described in the previous section. The first point to note is that only one religious variable is statistically significant: evangelicals were the most likely religious group to support Bush. The measures for mainline Protestants and the secular were statistically insignificant, despite their apparent varying levels of support in Table 1.

This suggests that within Latino communities, only evangelical Protestants are particularly distinct in their support for the presidential candidates. It is important to note that the models already control for partisanship, Bush approval, economic evaluations, a variety of demographic variables, and the assessment of candidate sincerity in Latino outreach efforts.

In addition, we see that Latinos with higher levels of education are more likely to support Bush. This suggests an acculturation effect, although there was no difference according to nativity. Lastly, as is often reported, Cuban Americans were particularly likely to support the GOP candidate.

As discussed above, it is not clear that an analysis of the aggregate Latino population is meaningful, even if several national-origin group variables are taken into account. Latino populations significantly differ in many important respects, and political

dynamics may also vary at the state level. The following five tables therefore model Latino anticipated support for Bush and Kerry in four states: California, Texas, New York, and Florida. In addition, we combined respondents from three states into a “southwest” category and modeled their vote in the same manner.

**\*\* Insert Tables 2 to 6 about Here \*\***

The first pattern to note is that evangelical support for Bush is strong in all but one state. With the exception of Florida, the evangelical variable is a statistically significant explanation of anticipated support for Bush. This also means that Roman Catholics, the base case in the regression, are more likely to support Kerry than are evangelicals.

The other two religious independent variables – mainline Protestants and the secular – are not generally significant. This indicates that the opinions of the latter do not differ from those of Roman Catholics once a variety of political and demographic variables are taken into account; recall that Table 1 showed secular voters were 10 points more supportive of Bush than Catholics and mainline Protestants were almost 17 points more supportive of Bush.

The one exception was Florida, where the evangelical variable was insignificant while the mainline Protestant variable was statistically significant but negatively associated with anticipated Bush support. The measures of Bush approval, economic evaluations, and partisanship were also significant and in the usual directions. This could be the result of either low evangelical support for Bush or relatively high Catholic

support in that state. An examination of the Florida data suggests relatively strong Catholic support for Bush is the explanation, but additional analysis (and datasets with more observations) is needed. Perhaps a mitigating factor for Latino Catholics in Florida is that Governor Jeb Bush, the brother of the president, converted to Catholicism.

Lastly, we examine anticipated support for Bush and Kerry in the Mexican-American and Puerto Rican communities. Due to a lack of observations, we are unable to separately model the Cuban-American vote.

**\*\* Insert Tables 7 and 8 about Here \*\***

In Table 7, we see that evangelicals are more likely to anticipate voting for Bush – as with Latinos overall in Table 2 – while mainline Protestants and the secular exhibit no unique patterns. As we might also expect, those who positively evaluate how Bush is handling his job, see the economy in a positive light, and identify as Republicans are more likely to support Bush. There do not appear to be any regional differences, although one might expect that Tejanos would have been more supportive than other Mexican Americans – especially because Bush had a relatively positive relationship with Latinos during his time as governor.

For Puerto Rican respondents, we see a slightly different pattern. While evangelicals are particularly likely to anticipate voting for Bush, the variable for mainline Protestants is statistically significant and negative. This indicates that these respondents were less likely to vote for Bush than were Catholics, who are the base case in these

models. The explanation of this effect will require additional research into the meaning of ‘mainline Protestant’ in Latino communities.

### **Conclusions**

This paper investigates the role of religion in the Latino 2004 presidential vote. It analyzes anticipated voting behavior using an October, 2004 national pre-election survey. The paper also examines the vote according to state of residence and national-origin group, two features not common to most research on Latino political behavior and public opinion. It thereby contributes to a larger literature on Latino political participation and our more general understanding of religion in American politics.

Regardless of how the Latino community is analyzed, several patterns emerge. The first is the particularly strong support for President Bush among Latino evangelicals. Such unique support was found for Latinos overall, for Mexican Americans, for Puerto Ricans, and for Latinos in four states and regions. The one exception to this rule was Florida, where the variable was statistically insignificant. While the data in this paper cannot explain this result with any certainty, it seems that the answer is not weak evangelical support for Bush but relatively high Catholic support.

In addition, there is some additional evidence than mainline Protestants are relatively less supportive of Bush even after controlling for multiple political and demographic factors. In the Florida and Puerto Rican models, the variable is statistically significant and negatively associated with anticipated support for Bush. In Florida, this is the only religious effect. Among Puerto Ricans, the mainline Protestant variable plays a role alongside evangelical support for Bush. Again, the explanation for such outcomes will require a more in-depth study of the communities in question.

Taken together, these findings indicate that the role of religion in the 2004 presidential election exhibited both similarities and differences at the state and national-origin group levels – dynamics that were not captured by the overall model. While the results document the original expectation of evangelical support for Bush, there are some differences at the state and national-origin group levels worthy of further investigation. This reflects the growing understanding that “Latinos” are diverse and may be best understood by research designs that acknowledge their divergent historical experiences and contemporary context.

Table 1

Anticipated Vote for Bush and Kerry by Religious Affiliation

	Catholic	Secular	Mainline	Evangelical
George W. Bush	26.5	36.5	43.8	63.6
John F. Kerry	73.5	63.5	56.2	36.4
Observations	1,024	104	96	198

Source: October, 2004 Washington Post/Univision/Tomás Rivera Policy Institute pre-Election Survey

Table 2

## Probit Model of Overall Bush-Kerry Support

Variables	Coefficient (Standard Error)
Evangelical	0.625 *** (0.187)
Mainline Protestant	-0.721 (0.261)
Secular	0.200 (0.382)
Bush Approval	1.054 *** (0.087)
Outreach to Latinos	0.651 *** (0.086)
Economic Evaluations	0.310 *** (0.094)
Partisanship	0.372 *** (0.045)
Education	0.112 ** (0.054)
Born in the US	0.067 (0.145)
Puerto Rican	0.034 (0.260)
Cuban American	1.247 *** (0.471)
Income (\$25 to \$50 thousand)	-0.193 (0.191)
Income (\$50 thousand +)	-0.096 (0.208)

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Income	0.041
(missing)	(0.195)
Constant	-3.830 ***
	(0.252)
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.74
Observations	1360

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\*\*\* p<.01  
\*\* p<.05  
\* p<.10

Table 3

## Probit Model of Bush-Kerry Support in California

Variables	Coefficient (Standard Error)
Evangelical	1.197 *** (0.439)
Mainline Protestant	0.290 (0.803)
Secular	-0.161 (0.893)
Bush Approval	1.437 *** (0.188)
Economic Evaluations	0.754 *** (0.189)
Partisanship	0.477 *** (0.097)
Mexican	-0.290 (0.306)
Constant	-3.892 *** (0.485)
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.74
Observations	390

\*\*\* p&lt;.01

\*\* p&lt;.05

\* p&lt;.10

Table 4

## Probit Model of Bush-Kerry Support in Texas

Variables	Coefficient (Standard Error)
Evangelical	0.491 * (0.256)
Mainline Protestant	0.352 (0.387)
Secular	0.367 (0.586)
Bush Approval	1.100 *** (0.136)
Economic Evaluations	0.030 (0.153)
Partisanship	0.471 *** (0.073)
Mexican	-0.152 (0.258)
Constant	-2.774 *** (0.331)
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.62
Observations	390

\*\*\* p&lt;.01

\*\* p&lt;.05

\* p&lt;.10

Table 5

Probit Model of Bush-Kerry Support in Florida

Variables	Coefficient (Standard Error)
Evangelical	0.867 (0.635)
Mainline Protestant	-1.162 * (0.635)
Secular	-0.170 (2.385)
Bush Approval	1.355 *** (0.315)
Economic Evaluations	0.571 * (0.317)
Partisanship	0.424 ** (0.174)
Cuban American	0.535 (0.606)
Constant	-2.815 *** (0.530)
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.79
Observations	166

\*\*\* p<.01

\*\* p<.05

\* p<.10

Table 6

Probit Model of Bush-Kerry Support in the Southwest (Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico)

Variables	Coefficient (Standard Error)
Evangelical	1.252 * (0.714)
Mainline Protestant	0.508 (0.772)
Secular	-0.941 (0.886)
Bush Approval	1.946 *** (0.425)
Economic Evaluations	0.774 ** (0.376)
Partisanship	0.107 (0.171)
Mexican	-1.022 (0.632)
Constant	-3.471 *** (0.928)
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.80
Observations	157

\*\*\* p<.01

\*\* p<.05

\* p<.10

Table 7

## Probit Model of Bush-Kerry Support in New York

Variables	Coefficient (Standard Error)
Evangelical	1.695 * (0.876)
Mainline Protestant	0.290 (1.372)
Secular	1.457 (1.101)
Bush Approval	0.711 (0.620)
Economic Evaluations	1.256 * (0.749)
Partisanship	0.692 *** (0.224)
Puerto Rican	0.318 (0.698)
Constant	-5.362 *** (1.452)
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.80
Observations	115

\*\*\* p<.01

\*\* p<.05

\* p<.10

Table 8

## Probit Model of Bush-Kerry Support for Mexican Americans

Variables	Coefficient (Standard Error)
Evangelical	0.764 *** (0.215)
Mainline Protestant	0.106 (0.321)
Secular	0.215 (0.626)
Bush Approval	1.165 *** (0.104)
Economic Evaluations	0.331 *** (0.108)
Partisanship	0.364 ** (0.053)
California	0.028 (0.233)
Texas	0.082 (0.219)
Constant	-3.137 *** (0.261)
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.65
Observations	764

\*\*\* p&lt;.01

\*\* p&lt;.05

\* p&lt;.10

Table 9

Probit Model of Bush-Kerry Support for Puerto Ricans

Variables	Coefficient (Standard Error)
Evangelical	1.117 * (0.644)
Mainline Protestant	-2.165 * (1.239)
Secular	0.003 (2.261)
Bush Approval	1.187 *** (0.371)
Economic Evaluations	0.427 (0.457)
Partisanship	0.726 *** (0.272)
New York	-1.202 * (0.640)
Constant	-3.284 *** (0.771)
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.79
Observations	166

\*\*\* p<.01

\*\* p<.05

\* p<.10

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## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, Wald (2003) notes that “culture war” arguments are too simplistic to capture the diversity of opinions across and within denominations.