

## How immigrants are redefining 'American' in Southern California

# How black, Latino and Asian American voters delivered Obama's victory

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A directional sign points the way to a polling place inside El Mercado de Los Angeles, a Mexico-style marketplace in East L.A. on November 6, 2012.

Exit polls are showing that overwhelming majorities of [Latino](#) and [Asian American voters](#) - more than 70 percent of each group - voted to re-elect President Barack Obama on Tuesday. Together with black voters, who reportedly supported Obama in even higher proportions, these voters of color are credited with carrying key states for Obama and ultimately assuring his victory over Republican challenger Mitt Romney.

Data so far has suggested that Latinos [made up 10 percent](#) of overall voters, a record number. At the same time, the non-Latino white percentage of the American electorate is [on the decline](#). Does this election signal a tipping point in the influence of voters of color - or has that happened already?

Pollster **Matt Barreto** of the [Latino Decisions](#) firm has closely tracked the attitudes of Latino voters in the runup to the election. The firm has calculated that 75 percent of Latino voters - in the same range national exit polls have estimated so far - cast votes for Obama on Tuesday. The Pew Hispanic Center estimates from its exit poll analysis that Latinos [voted 71 to 27 percent](#) for Obama over Romney.

Here Barreto weighs in with the details of what occurred, what participation from more voters of color means for future elections, and what this bodes for the future of the Republican Party.

### **M-A: So what is the takeaway from Election Day 2012?**

**Barreto:** We are finding very clear evidence of two things: One, that Latino voters voted at very high rates and that there was in fact a record turnout of Latinos across the United States, and secondly, that this was the highest ever vote for a Democrat among Latino voters.

We estimate that 75 percent of Latinos who voted voted for President Obama, that that this was very influential in key states. In states like Florida, certainly, and Nevada and Colorado, but also in states where Latinos are growing, like Virginia, that had a very close margin.

What the exit polls do is they release a number that they keep adjusting...they started at 69 percent (for Obama), then they went to 70, and now they are saying 71 percent of Latinos voted for Obama. We think that is a few points lower, but regardless, it is very clear that there was a huge Latino vote, and there was a huge Latino vote for the president.

### **M-A: What is the highest percentage of the Latino vote a presidential candidate has received in the past? And where does Romney's 24 percent place him in comparison with previous GOP candidates?**

**Barreto:** Bill Clinton, in his 1996 reelection landslide, got 72 percent (of the Latino vote) against Bob Dole. The Dole election was low, but part of the issue, you have to remember, is that in both 1992 and 1996 you had Ross Perot in there. And he was polling not a huge percentage of Latinos, but it was maybe about 10 percent or so. And so combined, the Dole and Perot numbers were better than Romney's.

The numbers we saw for Romney were really among the worst numbers for a Republican candidate. And the most important point is that if you compare it to 2004 - that was only eight years ago - George W. Bush got 40 percent. Then it went down to 31 percent for McCain, then it went down to 24 for Romney. So that means consecutive years of losing seven points, eight points, of the Latino vote. I think that's the more worrisome trend for Republicans, because it wasn't so long ago that we got 40 percent.

**M-A: How much of what occurred can we attribute to Obama's campaign strategy, including his recent turn on immigration policy? How much can we attribute it to the challenges that Republicans have faced connecting with Latinos, and with Romney's immigration stance and overall message to them?**

**Barreto:** I think that it is an absolute combination of those. I think that the president had a very good strategy, and I think that in his outreach plan, his ground game, he had a lot of Latino volunteers. There were coordinators that were reaching out, and it was very effective.

I think that at the same time, you have to take into account his June 15 deferred action announcement. Until that that point, we were finding that there still was a Latino enthusiasm gap. People were wondering what he was going to run on. And that announcement was greeted with unbelievable enthusiasm from Latinos, and that really generated what led to those high turnout numbers.

At the same time that was happening and Obama was starting to really get going, Romney continued to make errors, make ridiculous statements, say things that were at least wrong or offensive. And that all started in the Republican primaries. So I think we saw a combination of a good campaign on the Obama side coupled with a really poor campaign on the Romney side, and that's what led to these record numbers.

**M-A: What does so much voter enthusiasm from Latinos and voters of color, for a Democrat, hold for the future of the Republican Party?**

**Barreto:** I think the data from Tuesday shows very clearly that the Republicans have a major problem on their hands. We've been taking about this for a long time, and a lot of other people have been talking about it. The data now confirms that.

Only 72 percent of voters were white. That is the lowest ever, and a lot of people, including people like Gallup and Rasmussen, were estimating 75 or 76 percent white in their pre-election polls. And there was not only this increase in the Latino vote, but black voter turnout was again at record levels. The Asian American vote was huge. The exit polls reported that Asians were also over 70 percent for Obama, which would be the highest ever for the Asian vote. National numbers suggested 73 percent, that that Asians were three percent of the electorate.

So there's this combination: The Asian vote is high, and each year it is going to add another percent. The Latino vote is growing fast. And as long as the African American vote continues to turn out at high rates, in that next election in 2016, it may be down to like 69 percent white voters. At that point, if they don't make increases among blacks and Latinos and Asians, then the Republican Party is not going to win another national election.

**M-A: What can the party do in response to turn this around?**

**Barreto:** They need to find new candidates that are willing to build coalitions. They need to do significant outreach to Hispanics, but also to blacks. I mean, they can't concede 98 percent of the black vote. They need to get that back up into the high teens.

And they need to make major inroads with Asian Americans, as Asian Americans as a percentage are the fastest-growing. They can't concede those votes. If you have these groups that get into that 70 percent-plus range consistently, it will mathematically not be possible for them to win again. They need to bring the Latino and Asian numbers down into the low 60s, and they need to bring the black numbers down into the 80s.

Every year they will have to win more minorities, because the electorate gets more minority every year. So you can't create a static number, like that you've got to win 38 percent of the Latino vote or something, because every year that number goes up for Republicans. At some point, when Latinos are 51 percent of the electorate, you've got to win more votes.

**M-A: So how much credit should be given to voters of color for Obama's victory?**

**Barreto:** The minority vote was decisive for Obama in about nine states, where we found that the number of minority voters outnumbered by far the margin of victory for Obama. You start with the four states that are the most obvious: Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico and Florida. These are states where Latino voters probably by themselves swung the election to Obama. Just in those four states, that's 49 electoral college votes.

Then you have Virginia, which has a large black electorate, and a growing Asian electorate. Then you add Ohio. There is no question that the results in Ohio were a result of the black vote coming out in high numbers, and the Latino vote is growing in Ohio. So those two states, absolutely. Then there are other states that Obama won, I would say, more comfortably: Michigan, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania. They have huge black populations, and also, Pennsylvania has a very large Latino population, and Latinos are growing in Michigan and Wisconsin. The minority vote overall in Michigan, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania by itself delivered those states to Obama.

You add all those states up together and you have like 126 electoral college votes. So there is no doubt that those nine states will continue to be under the microscope. The Republicans can't afford to lose those 126 electoral college votes; they are already giving up the entire West Coast. It would be extremely difficult for them to win any future elections.

**M-A: Can it be said that we hit a tipping point this year with regard to voters of color and their political clout?**

**Barreto:** People have been asking me that a long time, and I would say the tipping point was in 2008. 2004 was the last election that the Republicans could win. Maybe it was even 2000, but 2004 was the year that Bush won the 40 percent of the Hispanic vote. But in 2008, they did awful. They did terribly among blacks and Hispanics. And in 2012, in an election that was potentially winnable, with a president who was facing poor ratings on the economy, they did awful among minorities, and they lost it. So I think that is already in the rear view mirror.

Like I said, it was 72 percent white voters this year. Then it's going to be 69, then it's going to be 66, and that point, they are doomed. 2016 is going to be way harder for (Republicans) to win if they don't significantly change their minority outreach. They have to do it with all three groups. They can't do it only by increasing the Latino vote. It won't be enough.