

# **Latino Politics in the Northeast**

## **Selected Findings from NYLARNet's 2008 Northeast Latino Survey,**

### **A Project of NYLARNet's Latino Political Barometer**

#### **Executive Summary**

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This paper reports on selected findings of a regional post-election survey of Latinos conducted by Opinion Access, Inc. on behalf of the New York Latino Research and Resources Network (NYLARNet). The telephone survey was conducted between November 13<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>, 2008 in Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island. A total of 1,232 voting age Latino citizens were interviewed. (See Appendix B for more information on methodology)

This poll is the first of NYLARNet's Latino Political Barometer (LPB), a project established in January 2008 to gauge the political attitudes, values, and behavior of Latinos in the Northeast. The long-term goal of the LPB is to generate public opinion data and analysis on topical social, economic, and political questions from a comparative perspective, focusing on Latinos. The focus on Latinos seeks to gather both aggregate and discrete data to assess and compare the political culture and behavior of Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, Cubans, Dominicans, Colombians and any other demographically significant Latino subgroup in the region.

The findings presented below compare New York to the five other states polled. Hereinafter, references to "the region" should be understood as meaning the six states surveyed. References to "the other states" mean Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island.

Even though the 2008 election was considered to be about change, for Latinos in New York change in the abstract was at the bottom of their concerns. When asked what were the first or second most important issues driving their decision to vote for president in New York State and the region, the

economy was the one issue that mattered the most in deciding how Latinos voted for president, with 36 percent using the economy as their first or second criterion in the state and 37 percent doing so in the region. (31% chose the economy and 13% chose education as their first issue). Interestingly, immigration, the financial crisis, affordable housing, and the war in Iraq mattered unevenly with only 9, 14, 4, and 16 percent respectively using each of these issues as their primary or secondary criterion for voting in New York compared to 10, 14, 4, and 16 percent in the region.

Next on the list of issues that mattered most was education, with 18 percent of Latinos in New York using it as their primary or secondary criterion to choose the presidential candidate and 21 and 19 percent doing so in the other states and the region respectively. Discretely, as the second issue that mattered most, the economy outranked education with 18% seeing it as the issue that was next most important, compared to 12% who saw education as the next most important issue.

National issues mattered the most to Latinos in New York (84%) and a clear majority favored governmental intervention to solve problems. Respondents were asked which of two statements came closest to their view, whether government should do more to solve problems or government is doing too many things better left to businesses and individuals. In New York, 72% agreed with the first statement compared to 71% in the region. An overwhelming majority of respondents in the region believe that the Democratic Party does a better job of handling issues important to Latinos (78%). In New York (81%) the proportion is higher than in the region and the other states (75%). This attitude may be subject to variation given that only 50% of Latinos in New York favor Gay marriage or civil unions between Gays. This was in November and just as opinion in this matter has fluctuated at the national level, support for Gay marriage or civil unions among Latinos could be higher or lower today. In the case of abortion only 26% of Latinos were in favor of legal abortion in all or most cases. Only 18% of Latinos defined themselves as liberal

compared to 31% defining themselves as conservative and a majority of 51% describing themselves as either moderate or choosing “don’t know/unable to pick” an ideological label.

How do Latinos in New York form their political opinions and judgments? First of all, our survey reveals an attentive electorate, with 80% reporting they followed news about the presidential campaign closely or somewhat closely. A significant majority (63%) reported reading a community/ethnic paper on a weekly basis and for 51% the main sources of news were in Spanish. Like for most Americans, however, television was their main news source (82% in New York, 84% in the other states, 83% in the region).

Is Latino attention to campaign news commensurate with political involvement? The answer is NO. Only 3% reported membership in a political club in New York ; 16% reported attending a political meeting and 11% contributed money to a political campaign. The contrast between community involvement and political involvement is not significant but in general involvement is low. Only 11% reported volunteering time to a community organization compared to 9% that reported volunteering for a political party or campaign.

Thus the portrait of Latinos in new York that emerges from these selected findings is one of a community that identifies overwhelmingly with the Democratic party and whose ideological orientation is bifurcated – predominantly liberal on the relationship between state and society but conservative on selected social issues; their conservatism is relative however. On the issue of Gay Marriage and/or civil unions for Gays New York Latinos are more liberal than Latinos in other states. The community is attentive of national politics, its judgment is shaped largely by Spanish language television, but participates little in political mobilization efforts.

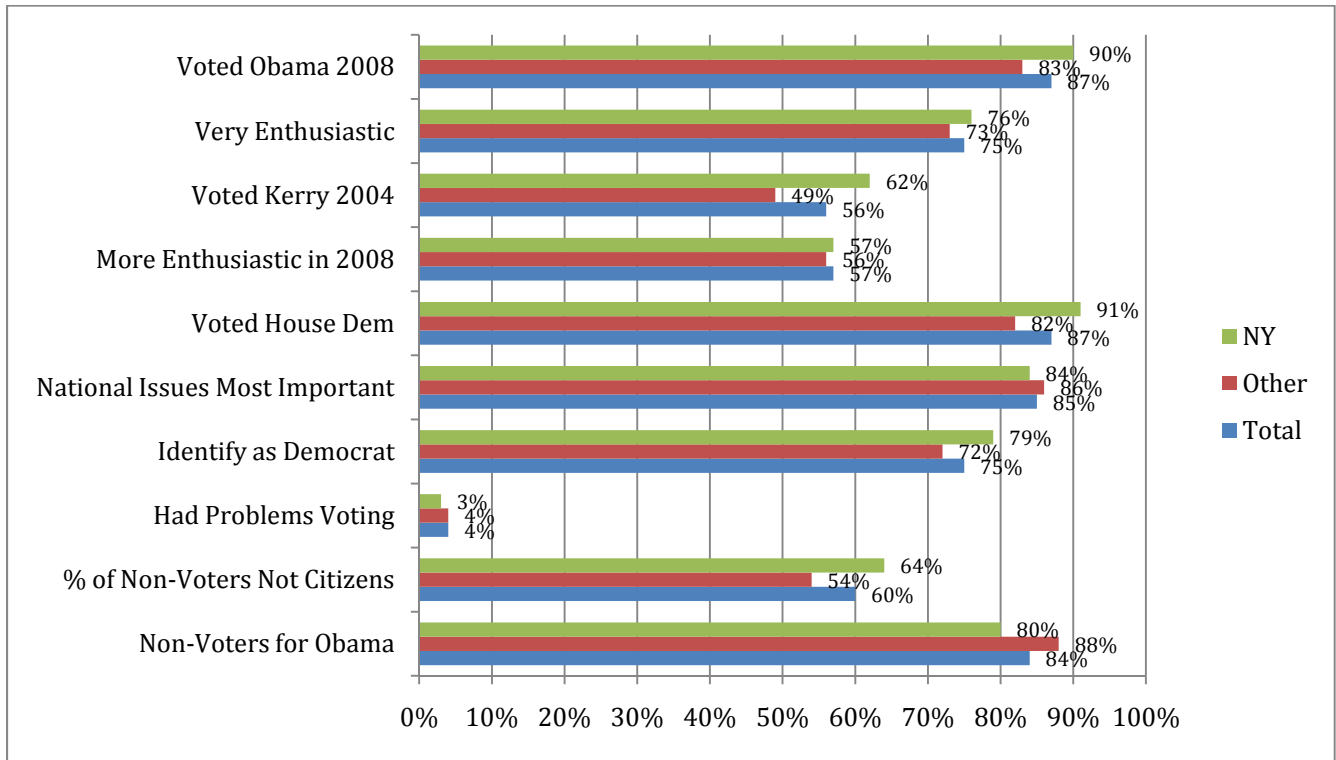
The charts included as Appendix A also show that in New York:

- The level of support for the Democratic presidential candidate in 2008 was significantly higher than in 2004—90% in 2008 compared to 62% in 2004.

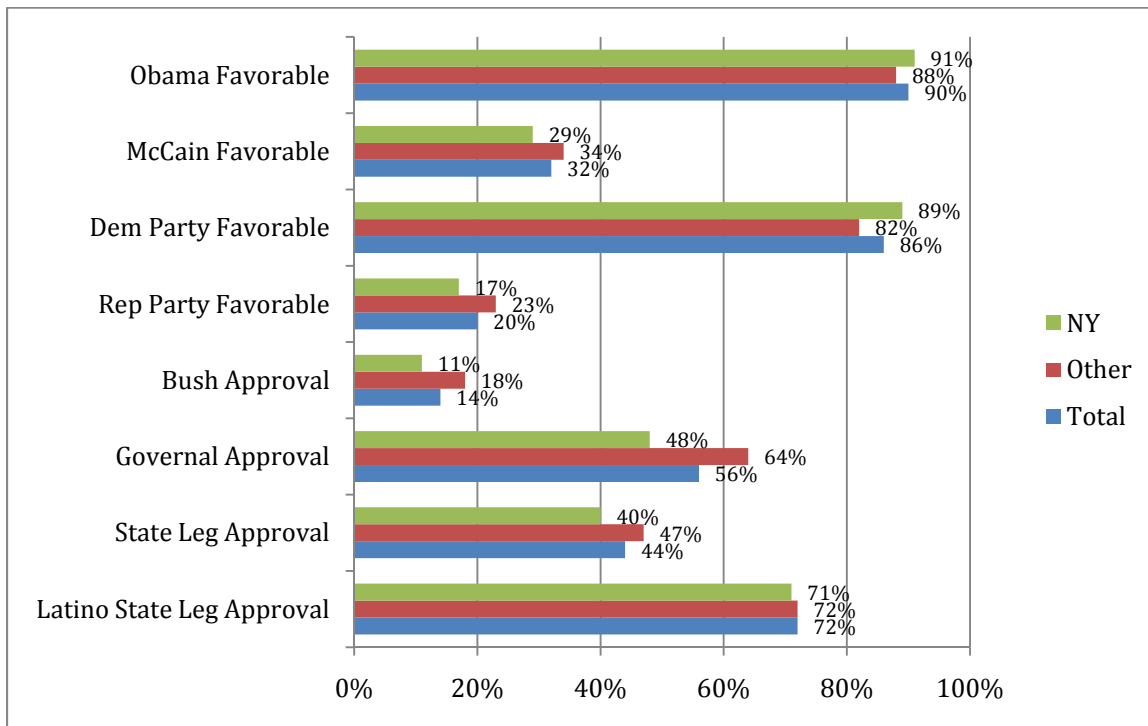
- Citizenship continues to significantly depress the potential Latino vote—64% of Latino non-voters were non-citizens.
- The approval rate of Latino state elected officials (71%) was significantly greater than the approval rate of the state legislature (40%).
- Political parties and labor unions did little to mobilize the Latino vote. Only 20% of respondents reported being contacted by a political party and 15% reported being contacted by a labor union.
- The highest rate of reported membership was in churches (35%) and the lowest was in a political club (3%).
- Descriptive representation is important to Latinos. Fifty percent (50%) agreed that a co-ethnic understands Latino issues better than another representative would.
- A majority of respondents (59%) believe that Latinos have either a lot or some things in common with African Americans and 72% believe that Latinos have a lot or some things in common among themselves.

Appendix A

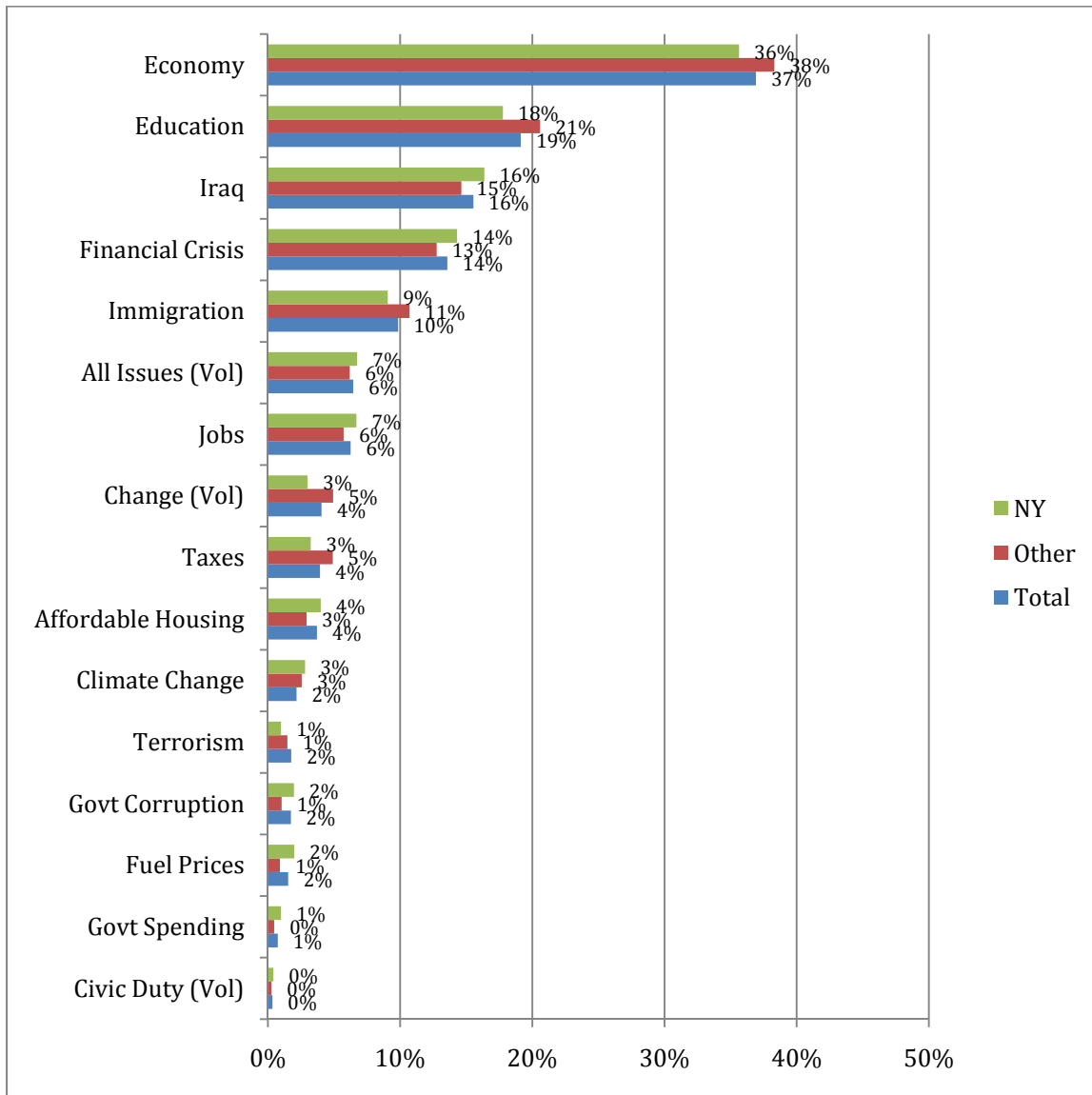
NYLARNet 2008 Northeast Latino Survey, Selected Charts



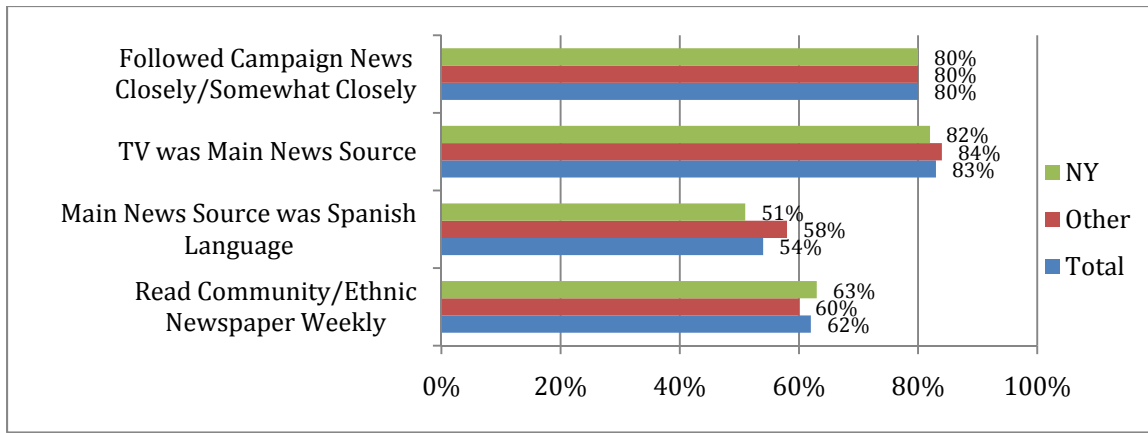
Approval and Favorability Ratings



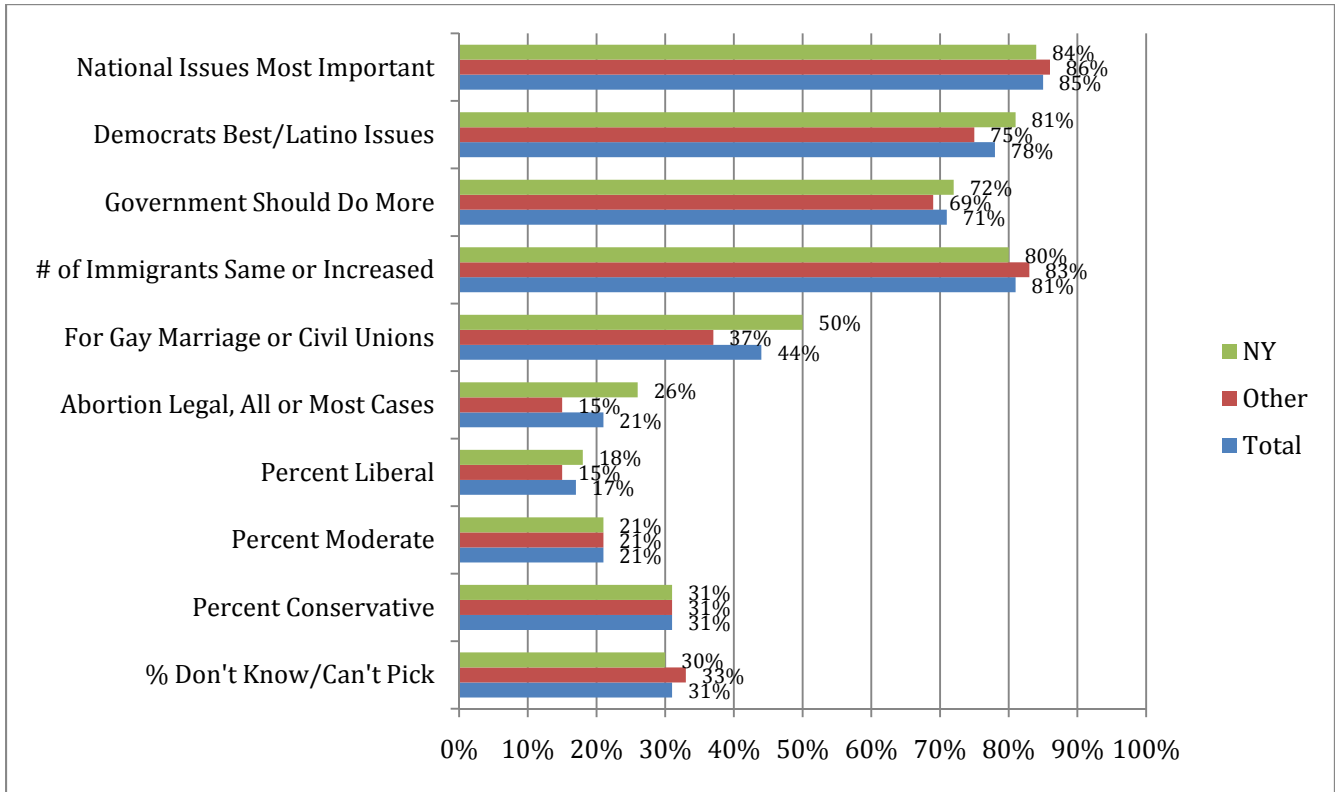
## Issues: Percent Who Rated Issue 1st or 2nd Most Important in Presidential Vote



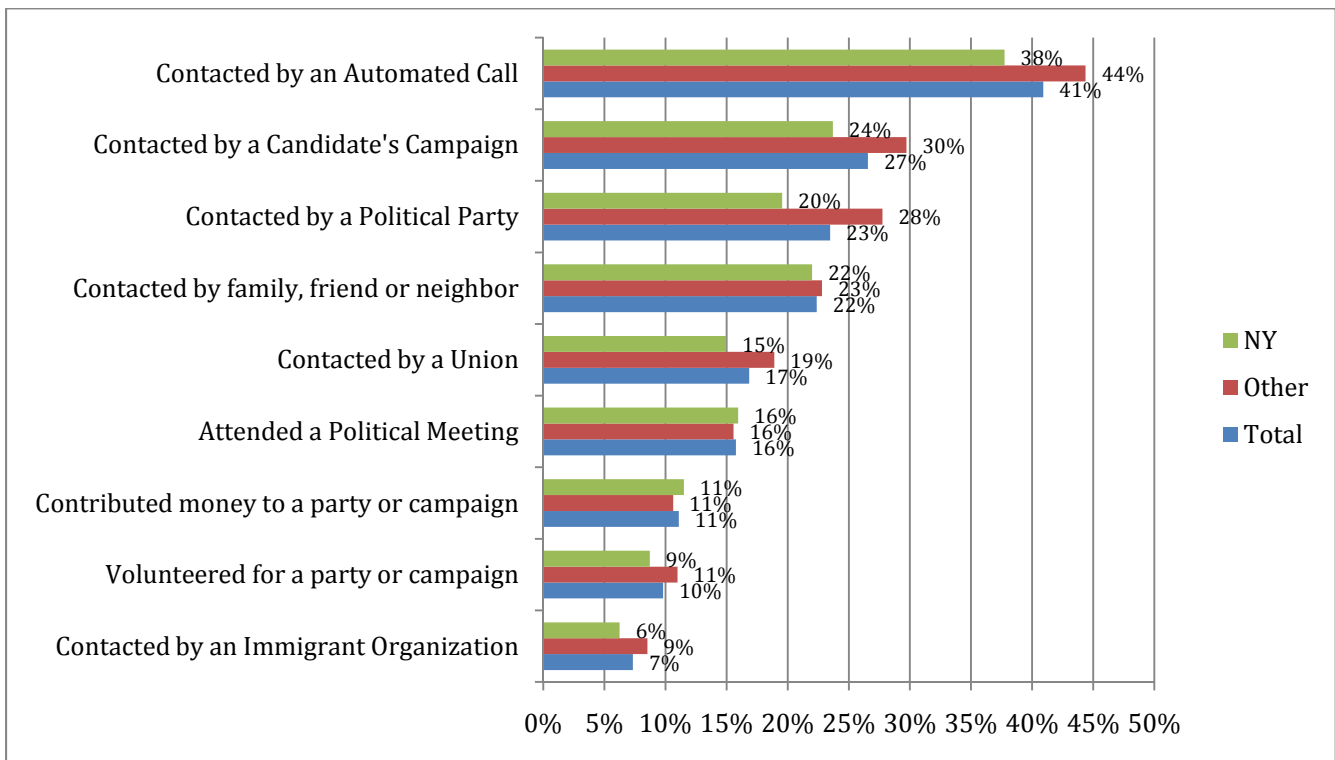
## News Consumption Patterns



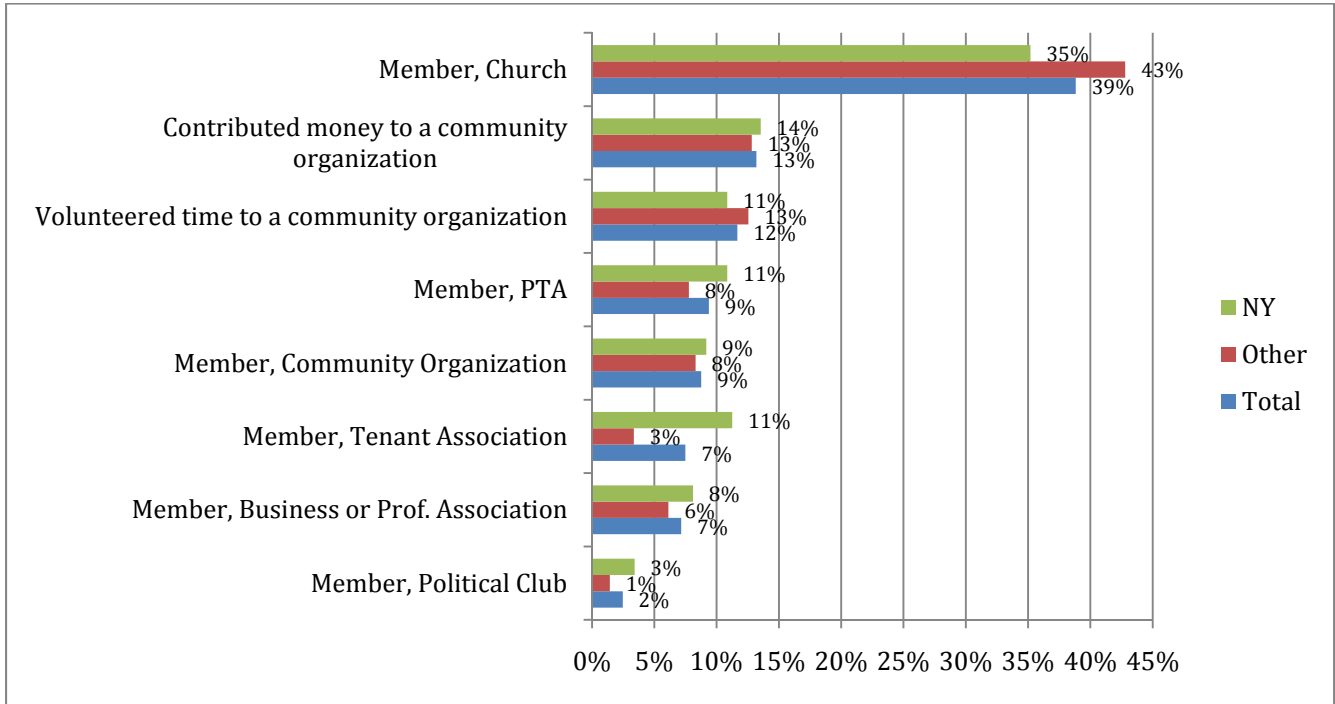
Issue Details



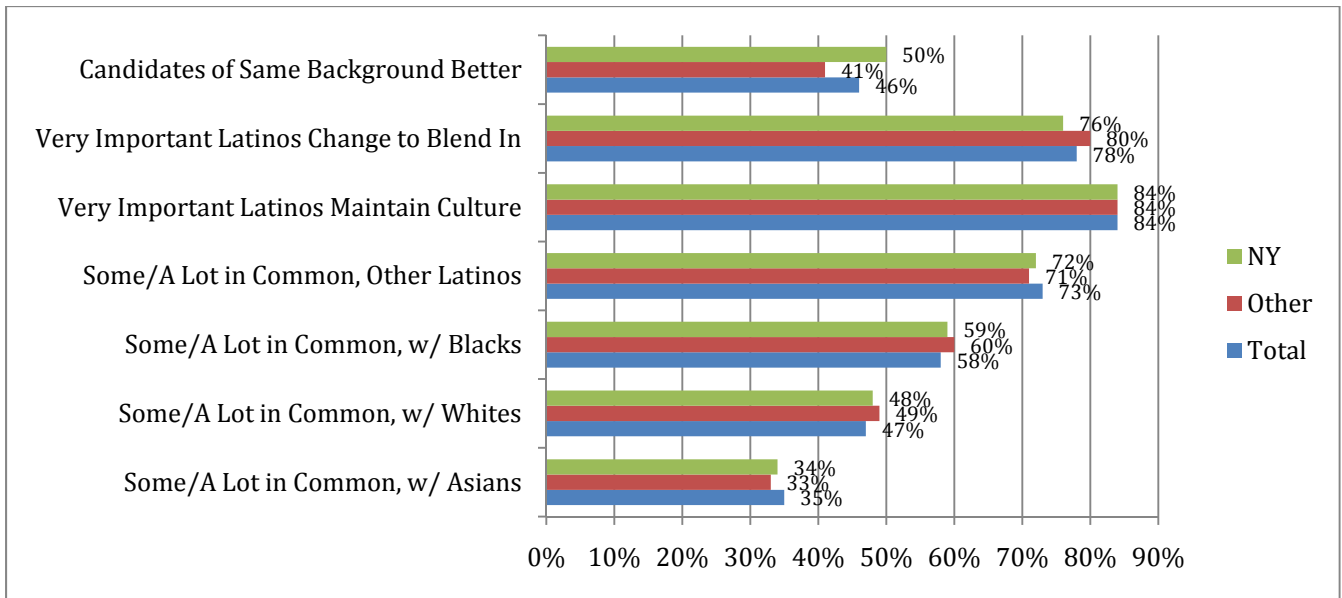
Campaign Contact or Activity



### Community Involvement



### Latino Issues



## Appendix B. NYLARNet 2008 Northeast Latino Survey Methodological Summary

The NYLARNet 2008 Northeast Latino Voter Survey is a post-election telephone survey of voting age Latinos in six Northeastern States: Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island. Survey interviewing was conducted between November 13th and 30th 2008 by Opinion Access Corp., of Long Island City, NY. A total of 1,203 respondents were interviewed, including 607 from New York State and 596 from other states in the region. Margins of error are +/- 4.0% for New York, 4.0% for the other states in the region combined, and +/- 2.8% for the region as a whole. In addition, 133 partial survey interviews are included in the survey reporting where applicable, for an AAPOR Type III response rate of 39%. Survey results presented in this report are weighted to match the survey respondents to U.S. Census demographics, by state, gender, and nation of ancestry.

Survey respondents were selected from a list sample drawn from public records including voter registration, motor vehicle registration, and telephone listings. People likely to be of Latino/Hispanic ancestry were identified using a process called "ethnication" in which surnames known to be possible indicators of Latino/Hispanic ethnicity are selected from the full list. In addition, all respondents reached were asked a screening question to indicate whether they consider themselves to be of Latino or Hispanic ancestry.

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