

# Hispanic Churches in American Public Life: Summary of Findings

Gastón Espinosa • Virgilio Elizondo • Jesse Miranda







## The Research

This publication presents a summary of the findings of the Hispanic Churches in American Public Life (HCAPL) research project. The HCAPL project was a three-year study, funded by a grant from The Pew Charitable Trusts, that sought to examine the impact of religion on political and civic engagement in the Latino community. Dr. Jesse Miranda of the Alianza de Ministerios Evangélicos Nacionales (AMEN) and Dr. Virgilio Elizondo of the Mexican American Cultural Center (MACC) codirected the project. Dr. Gastón Espinosa continues as project manager. The Tomás Rivera Policy Institute (TRPI) carried out national surveys and community profiles.

The complete findings of HCAPL are in process of publication by Oxford University Press.

For further information, please contact Dr. Gastón Espinosa at [gespinosa@northwestern.edu](mailto:gespinosa@northwestern.edu) or visit the HCAPL web site at [www.hcapl.org](http://www.hcapl.org).





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**The Center for the Study of Latino Religion  
was founded in 2002 within Notre Dame's  
Institute for Latino Studies to serve as  
a national center and clearinghouse for  
ecumenically focused research on the  
US Latino church, its leadership, and the  
interaction between religion and community.**

**For more information, please go to  
[www.nd.edu/~cslr](http://www.nd.edu/~cslr).**

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The three wavy lines shown here are a symbol from ancient times representing the human intellect in action. From *The Book of Signs*, collected, drawn, and explained by Rudolf Koch (London: The First Edition Club, 1930, page 8).

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## About the Researchers

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**Gastón Espinosa** is project manager and director of research of the Hispanic Churches in American Public Life research project. A graduate of Princeton Seminary and Harvard University, he took his PhD from the University of California at Santa Barbara. In 1997 he was named the Dartmouth College César Chávez Dissertation Year Fellow and in 2002 he was named the Andrew W. Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow in Latino Studies at Northwestern University.

Espinosa, Virgilio Elizondo, and Jesse Miranda are coediting and coauthoring an anthology entitled *LATINO RELIGIONS AND CIVIC ACTIVISM IN THE UNITED STATES* (Oxford) and a monograph entitled *LATINO RELIGIONS AND POLITICS IN AMERICAN PUBLIC LIFE* (Oxford).

Espinosa has won awards and fellowships from the American Academy of Religion, the Religion and American History Program at Yale University, the Louisville Institute for the Study of American Religion, and the Hispanic Theological Initiative. He has appeared on television and radio and was named the Outstanding Teaching Assistant in the Humanities and Fine Arts at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

In May 2002 Espinosa spoke at the National Hispanic Presidential Breakfast in Washington, DC, along with President George W. Bush, Senator Joseph Lieberman, and Senator Rick Santorum. In recognition of his scholarly contribution to the Latino community and American public life, the Generations Center of Princeton named him one of the nation's 100 Positive Men of Color.

**Virgilio Elizondo** is codirector of the Hispanic Churches in American Public Life research project. Currently a visiting professor in the Department of Theology and a Fellow of the Institute for Latino Studies at the University of Notre Dame, he is the founder of the Mexican American Cultural Center (MACC), through which thousands of citizens and community leaders have been introduced to Latino spirituality.



A native of San Antonio, Father Elizondo is recognized as 'The father of US Latino religious thought'. He is the author of over a dozen books on religious topics, including *CHRISTIANITY AND CULTURE* (MACC Press); *GALILEAN JOURNEY: THE MEXICAN-AMERICAN PROMISE* (Orbis Press, 1983, revised 2000); *THE FUTURE IS MESTIZO: LIFE WHERE CULTURES MEET* (University of Colorado Press, revised 2000); and *GUADALUPE: MOTHER OF THE NEW CREATION* (in its third edition within the first year of publication), with the latter given the 1997 Best Spiritual Book of the Year award by the National Catholic Press Association. His book *SAN FERNANDO CATHEDRAL: SOUL OF THE CITY*, based on the



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memory and testimonies of mestizo people of San Antonio, breaks new ground both in religious and secular studies as it explores the interplay between the Cathedral and the inhabitants of the city.

In 1997 Father Elizondo received the University of Notre Dame's highest honor, the Laetare Medal, for his "Contribution to Humanity."

Considered the leading interpreter of US Latino religion by the national and international media, he has been featured in front-page articles in the *DALLAS MORNING NEWS* and *LOS ANGELES TIMES* and in numerous periodicals. He has appeared on all major European, Latin American, and US television networks and on such programs as Ted Koppel's *NIGHTLINE*, the *MACNEIL/LEHRER NEWS HOUR* and Peter Jennings's *NEWSCAST*. Most recently Father Elizondo was honored as one of *TIME MAGAZINE*'s Top 100 Innovators, acknowledged visionaries for the new millennium (December 11, 2000 issue).

A dynamic priest, teacher, and scholar for over thirty-five years, Father Elizondo studied physical and behavioral sciences in the United States and anthropology in Asia. He holds a PhD in religious sciences from the Institut Catholique in Paris, with his major thesis on "Race Mixture, Cultural Violence, and the Gospel."



**Jesse Miranda** is codirector of the Hispanic Churches in American Public Life research project. He is founding president of the Alianza de Ministerios Evangélicos Nacionales (AMEN)—National Alliance of Evangelical Ministries, a multid denominational association of Hispanic Protestant lay and clerical leaders in the United States, Puerto Rico, Mexico, and Canada. AMEN represents twenty-seven denominations, seventy parachurch agencies, and twenty-two nationalities. Miranda is a recognized religious leader with a firm commitment to Latino civic engagement. He is an Executive Presbyter with the General Council of the Assemblies of God.

Miranda received his BA at Southern California College, a masters degree from Biola University, a Master of Science degree in School Administration from California State University, Fullerton, and a Doctorate of Ministry from Fuller Seminary. He also conducted postdoctoral studies at the University of Southern California.

His knowledge and expertise regarding Hispanic culture has been shared in two books, *THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH IN MINISTRY* (translated into ten languages) and *LIDERAZGO Y AMISTAD* [Leadership and Friendship].

He currently serves as distinguished professor and director of the Center for Urban Studies and Ethnic Leadership at Vanguard University in Costa Mesa, California.



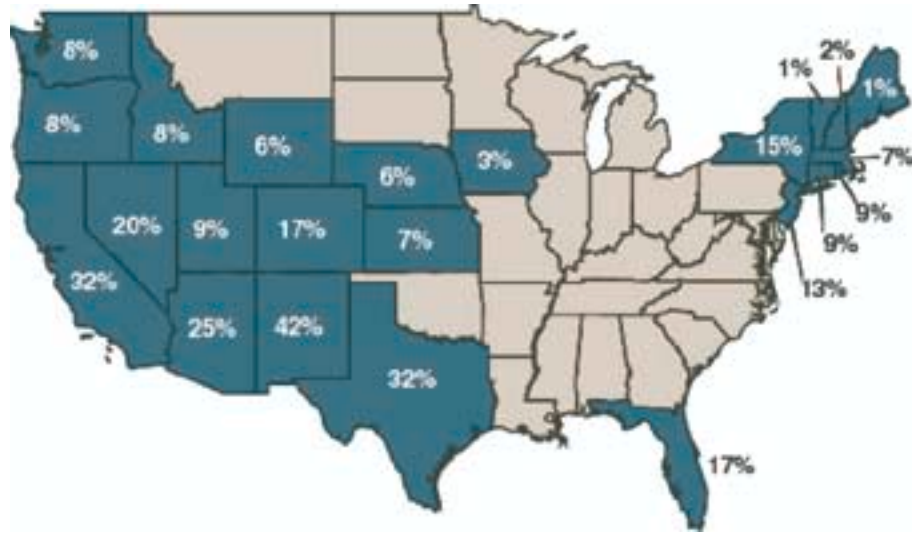
## Introduction

A quiet revolution is taking place today across the United States. According to the 2000 US Census, the Latino community has blossomed from 22.4 million persons in 1990 to 37 million in 2003. It has just surpassed the African-American community (36.4 million) as the largest minority group in the United States. Latinos are already the largest minority in 23 states.<sup>1</sup> The Latino electorate is twice

Table 1

### Latino Diaspora: 2000

23 States Where Latinos are the Largest Minority Group



the size of the Asian American and Jewish electorates and has grown from 2.4 million in 1980 to 5.7 million in 2000. Demographers and social scientists predict that this growth is only going to continue, as there are 10 million US native-born Latinos under the age of 18. If only two out of five come of age in this decade, there will be an additional 4 million new Latino voters by 2010.<sup>2</sup> However, the growth of the Latino electorate has been tempered by low election turnout.<sup>3</sup> Despite this fact, the growing political, economic, and religious clout of the Latino community was evident in the 2000 presidential election when George W. Bush and Al Gore actively courted the Latino vote by visiting churches and giving speeches in Spanish.<sup>4</sup>

Democrats and Republicans have good reason to court the Latino vote. We found that Latinos tend to be morally and ethically conservative but politically and

economically liberal. Thus each party can make the claim that they represent the Latino community. With some notable exceptions, Latino Catholics and Protestants shared similar educational, moral, and political opinions. For this reason Latino Catholics and Protestants may be able to join forces in American public life on key educational, moral, and political issues, while at the same time respecting and not having to water down their own unique theological differences and traditions. In many ways Latinos represent a kind of *nepantla* racial-ethnic community of in-betweenness in American society.<sup>5</sup> This is not to imply that Latinos are always in-between blacks and whites in their political views, for this is not always the case. And in many respects, Latinos are no different than the general population. It is simply to suggest that many times Latinos occupy a space in American politics that may increasingly enable them to help challenge and transform the liberal-conservative, black-white, Republican-Democrat divide by forcing both parties to change and adapt to the growing needs of our increasingly complex and diverse multicultural society.

## Literature Review

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Despite American presidential candidates' growing interest in the Latino vote, most scholars have overlooked the topic. This is due to the mistaken stereotype that all Latinos are Roman Catholic, and therefore politically passive, and Republican because of the party's emphasis on family values. Little has been written about the impact of religion on political and civic engagement in the Latino community.<sup>6</sup> Although Robert Fowler, Allen Hertzke, and Laura Olsen's *RELIGION AND POLITICS IN AMERICA* and Michael and Julia Corbett's *POLITICS AND RELIGION IN THE UNITED STATES* devote entire chapters to African Americans and large sections to Jews and Muslims, they devote less than one page each to Latinos. A similar lack of attention is evident in many books on Latino politics.<sup>7</sup>

In this essay, we will challenge this stereotype by exploring four sets of counterintuitive findings from the *HISPANIC CHURCHES IN AMERICAN PUBLIC LIFE* (hereafter HCAPL) national survey.<sup>8</sup> We will look at demographic shifts, political participation, political choice, and church-state debates. We will conclude by summarizing our findings. This work will highlight just a few of the findings from

our much larger and more comprehensive study entitled *LATINO RELIGIONS AND POLITICS IN AMERICAN PUBLIC LIFE* which will come out next year.

## Methodology

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The HCAPL directors conducted the largest bilingual survey in US history on Latino religions and politics. The HCAPL study was funded by a grant from The Pew Charitable Trusts.<sup>9</sup> It sought to examine the impact of religion on political and civic engagement in the Latino community and was nonsectarian and ecumenical in scope and focus.<sup>10</sup> The findings in this report are from phase one of a five-phase research project that included:

- (1) a national random-sample telephone survey of 2,310 Latinos across the United States and Puerto Rico;
- (2) a national leadership mail-out survey of 436 Latino political, civic, and religious leaders;
- (3) community profiles of 268 religious and lay leaders attending 45 congregations representing 25 religious traditions in 8 urban and rural areas;
- (4) 17 commissioned scholarly articles; and
- (5) three years of primary and secondary research.

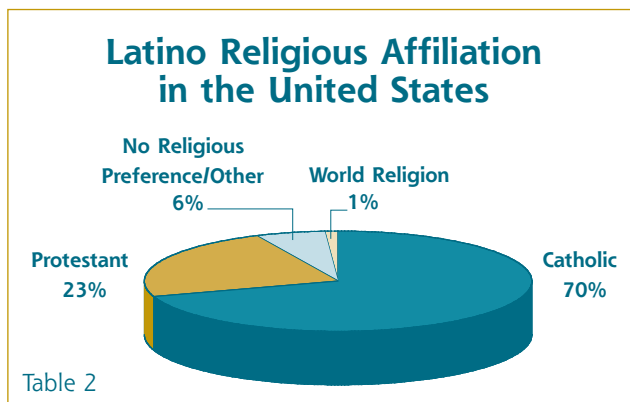
The HCAPL project contracted the Tomás Rivera Policy Institute (TRPI) to help construct, oversee, and conduct the national surveys and community profiles. The findings in this present publication are based only on the US Latino sample (n=2060).<sup>11</sup>

The national telephone survey was conducted between 21 August and 31 October 2000 in Los Angeles, San Antonio, Houston, Chicago, Miami, New York City, rural Colorado, rural Iowa, and San Juan, Puerto Rico.<sup>12</sup> Latino households in these study areas were randomly selected drawing on a two-tier approach—using samples both from the random digit dialing method in high-density Hispanic areas and from directory-listed households with Spanish surnames in low-density Hispanic areas. The resulting sample includes a primary national sample of 1,709 respondents that consists of a metropolitan base sample of 1,404 respondents and a rural sample of 305 respondents; an over-sample of Puerto Rican Islanders; and an over-sample of 351 Protestants. The total sample size was 2,310.

## Religious Profile

Any discussion of Latino religions and politics has to begin by mapping out the Latino religious marketplace. What percentage of Latinos are Christian, practitioners of other world religions, and atheists or agnostics? Our survey found that 93 percent of all Latinos self-identify as Christian, 6 percent self-identify as having no religious preference/other, 1 percent self-identify as practicing a world religion other than Christianity, and less than one-half of one percent self-identify as atheist or agnostic.<sup>13</sup>

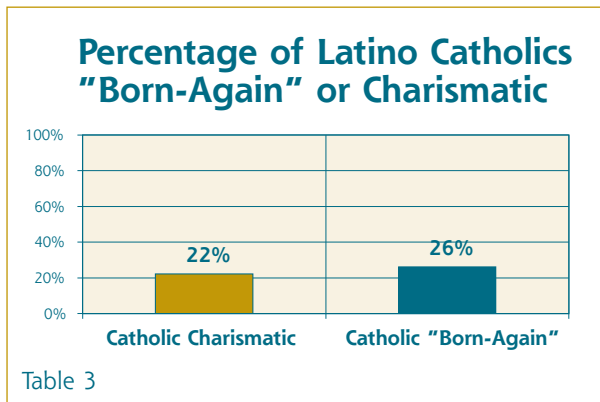
One of our most important findings is that the overall percentage of Latino Catholics has remained above the 70 percent mark. Although Greeley noted in 1988 that only 70 percent of all Latinos were



Roman Catholic and that this was likely to continue to decline over the next twenty-five years, we found that the proportion of Catholic Latinos was 70.2 percent (or 25 million) in 2002.<sup>14</sup> This percentage, however, is largely due to the significant influx of Catholics into the United States from Latin America and especially from Mexico, a country that has one of the highest rates of Catholicism in Latin America. The US Census, for example, reported that the Latino population increased by 58 percent between 1990 and 2000. The relatively high overall percentage of Catholics is also due to the creative work of a growing number of liberationist and activist Latino priests, Catholic youth programs, social programs that address the needs of the poor and immigrants, increased lay participation, and the growth in Charisma Missions and in other Catholic Charismatic movements. Furthermore, we found that more than one in four (26 percent) Catholics in our survey sample (n=1422), representing approximately 6.6 million persons, reported having had a born-again experience with Jesus Christ, something most often associated with Evangelical/Pentecostal Protestantism.<sup>15</sup> Thus, it is not surprising to find that 86 percent of these, or about

5.4 million Latino Catholics, also identified themselves as being Catholic Charismatic, or born-again and Pentecostal, Charismatic or spirit-filled.<sup>16</sup> There is little reason to doubt that many of these born-again and spirit-filled Catholics became so as a result of participating in the Charisma in Missions, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, and/or because of contact with Pentecostal or Charismatic Protestantism.<sup>17</sup>

Nonetheless, we are seeing major demographic shifts taking place among second and third generation Latinos. Our study found, for example, that the percentage of

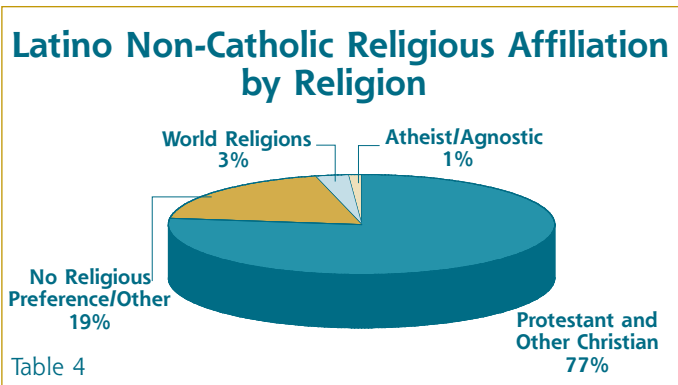


Latino Catholics drops from 74 percent among the first generation to 72 and 62 percent among the second and third generations. The percentage of Latino Protestants and other Christians simultaneously increases from less than one in six (15 percent) among the first generation to one in five (20

percent) and almost one in three (29 percent) among the second and third generations. These findings are consistent with the work of Andrew Greeley who noted that one out of seven Hispanics had left the Catholic Church in less than a quarter of a century and that as many as 600,000 Latinos may be 'defecting' from the Catholic Church every year. He warned that if this 'hemorrhaging' continues for the next twenty-five years, half of all American Hispanics will not be Catholic. Were it not for the massive influx of largely Catholic immigrants arriving in the United States over the past decade, Greeley's predictions might have already come to pass.<sup>18</sup>

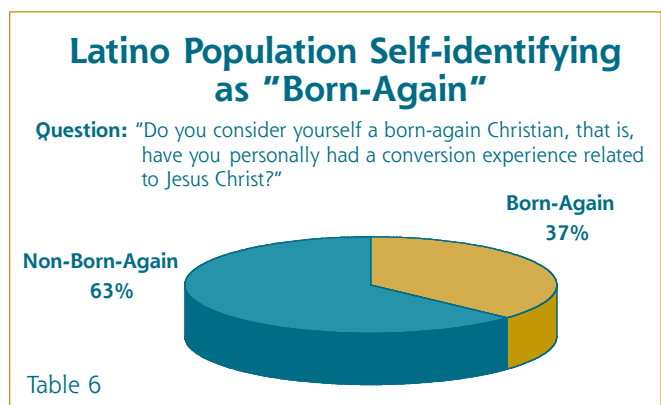
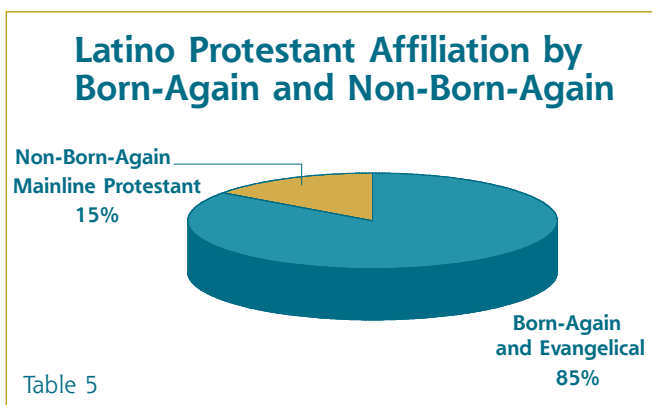
Although we knew that the numbers of Latino Protestants and other Christians were growing, we were surprised to find that there are 10.6 million (30 percent) Latino non-Catholics in the United States today. Protestants and other Christians and persons with no religious preference/other constitute approximately 23 percent (8.1 million) and 6 percent (2 million), respectively, of all Latinos. Pentecostals and Evangelicals constitute a majority of the former. The growth of Pentecostal and Evangelical Christianity was evident not only in Latino Catholicism but also in

Latino Protestantism. Our survey found that 77 percent (8.1 million) of all Latino non-Catholics are Protestant or other Christian. Of this group, 85 percent (7 million) identify as Protestant. Furthermore, 88 percent (6.2 million)



of all Latino Protestants are Evangelical or ‘born-again’ and 64 percent (4.5 million) are members of Pentecostal or Charismatic denominations or claim to be Pentecostal, Charismatic, or spirit-filled. Our findings challenge those of Andrew Greeley who stated that almost half of all Latino Protestants “belong to moderate or even liberal Protestant denominations.” We found that Latino Mainline Protestants make up 14.8 percent (1.6 million) of all Latino Protestants, of whom 43 percent (more than 666,000) claim to be born-again.<sup>19</sup> To put these findings in national perspective, there are now more Latino Protestants in the United States than Jews or Muslims or Episcopalians and Presbyterians combined. In total, there are 12.2 million (37 percent) Latino ‘born-again’ Christians in the United States, of whom 9.2 million are Pentecostal or Charismatic. In short, 28 percent of all Latinos are Pentecostal or Charismatic.

The explanation for the growth of Latino Protestant Evangelical, Pentecostal, born-again, and Catholic Charismatic Christianity is beyond the scope of this paper, but we may speculate that aggressive proselytism, indigenous clergy, churches, liturgy, prayer groups, increased pastoral and lay leadership opportunities, church planting, healing, and greater roles for women in ministry have all contributed.<sup>20</sup>





## Politics and Social Engagement

The shift towards more conservative religiosity is an important variable in shaping Latino political, civic, and social participation. This is evident in the finding that 53 percent of Latinos (67 percent Protestants and other Christians and 49 percent Catholics) indicated that religion provides a “great deal of guidance”

in their day-to-day living. Furthermore, 50 percent of all Latinos (61 percent Protestant/other Christian and 48 percent Catholic) believe that religious leaders should try to influence public affairs and a surprising 62 percent want their religious organization or church to become more involved with social, educational, and political issues. This commitment to social engagement was evident in Latino attitudes towards helping undocumented immigrants. Our survey found that 74

percent of Latinos want their churches or religious organizations to aid undocumented immigrants even when providing such help is illegal, and 61 percent believe that immigrants who arrive in the United States illegally should be eligible for government assistance such as Medicaid or Welfare.

### Latinos Find Guidance from Religion

**Question:** “Would you say religion provides a great deal, quite a bit, some, or no guidance at all in your day-to-day living?”

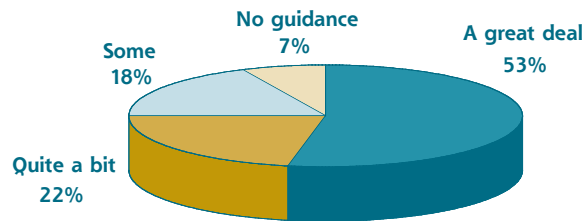
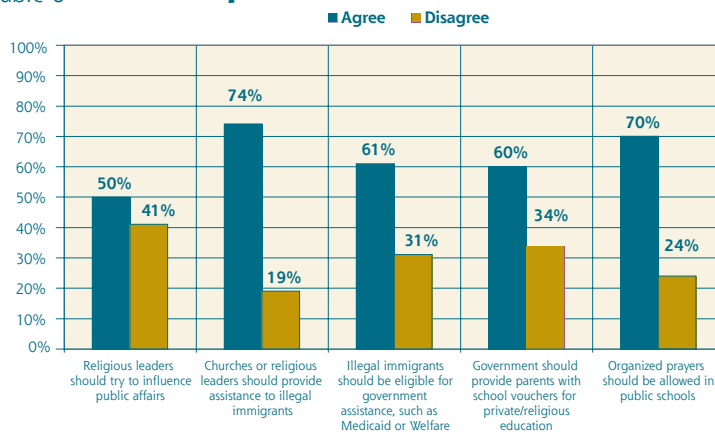


Table 7

Table 8

### Opinions on Social Issues



### Religious Leaders Encourage Public Participation

**Question:** “During the past two years, have you ever been asked by your church or one of its leaders to engage in activities on behalf of specific social, educational, or political issues?”

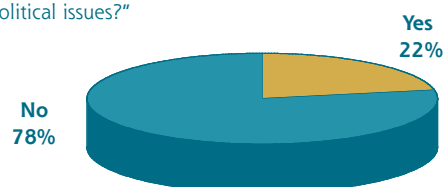
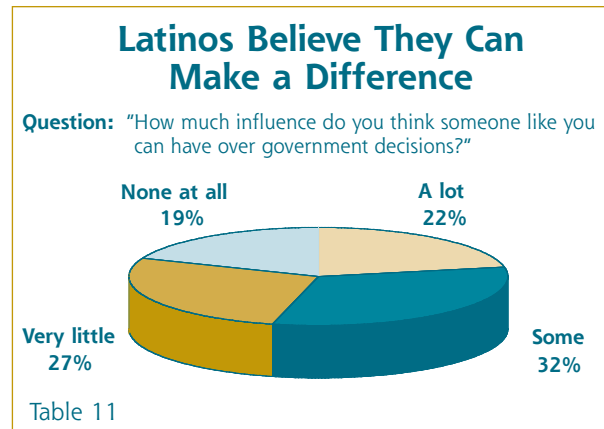
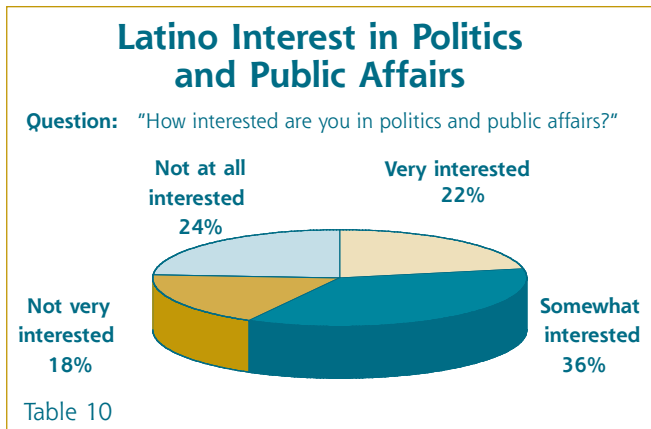


Table 9

percent of Latinos want their churches or religious organizations to aid undocumented immigrants even when providing such help is illegal, and 61 percent believe that immigrants who arrive in the United States illegally should be eligible for government assistance such as Medicaid or Welfare.

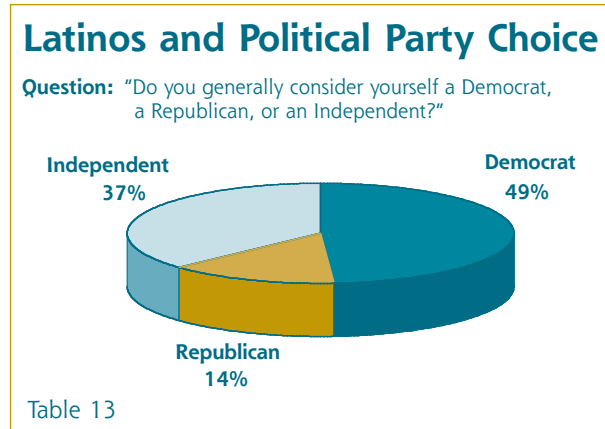
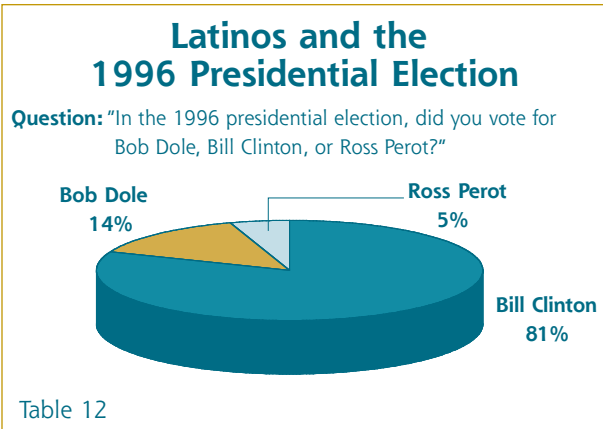


There is, however, a major disconnect between desires and action, as only 22 percent of Latinos had been asked by their church, religious organization, or leaders to engage in activities on behalf of a specific social, educational, or political issue. Clearly, the Latino population at large is much more willing to engage in action and outreach than most churches and religious leaders have hitherto realized. This is confirmed by the fact that 58 percent of Latinos expressed interest in politics and public affairs and 54 percent believe that they have some say in government decisions.

## Political Participation

The Latino demographic shift toward more Evangelical 'born-again' and Pentecostal religiosity along with their conservative cultural Latin American orientation may lead some people to believe that Latinos are lock-stock-and-barrel with the Republican Party because of its position on family values and pro-life stance on abortion. However, our survey found that although most Latino Pentecostals, Evangelicals, and Catholic Charismatics share some of the theological and moral values (e.g., on abortion and homosexuality) of their Anglo-American counterparts,<sup>21</sup> they do not tend to share their political views. In fact, as we shall see, Latinos are more likely to vote along the lines of African Americans than Anglo-Americans, even when this means going against the grain of their own larger Anglo-American theological tradition.

Our survey found that a clear majority of Latino Catholics and Protestants vote Democrat. In the 1996 presidential election 81 percent of all Latinos supported Bill Clinton (vs. 51 percent of the white Catholic vote).<sup>22</sup> Clinton received a higher



percentage of the Hispanic vote (81 percent) than either the black (78 percent), Asian (55 percent), or white (50 percent) vote.<sup>23</sup> Only 14 percent of Latinos voted for Bob Dole and 5 percent for Ross Perot. It is interesting to note that although white Catholics split their votes between Clinton and Dole, Latino Catholics overwhelmingly supported Clinton. Perhaps more startling and counterintuitive, 73 percent of Latino Protestants and non-Catholics voted for Clinton (vs. 31 percent of white Evangelicals, 37 percent of white Mainline Protestants, and 51 percent of white Catholics).<sup>24</sup>

In light of this finding we might be tempted to believe that Latinos have, like the black community, tied themselves almost exclusively to the Democratic Party. This, however, would be incorrect. In the fall of 2000 we found that only 49 percent of Latinos identified as Democrat, 14 percent as Republican, and a surprising 37 percent as politically 'independent'. There was little difference between Latino Catholics (50 percent) and Protestants and other Christians (47 percent) in party affiliation. Given that the margin of error on this particular question is plus or minus 2.3 percent, Latino Catholics and Protestants shared almost identical political affiliation.

When we broke down Latino party affiliation by religious family grouping, we found that Pentecostals and Evangelicals are only slightly less affiliated with the Democratic Party than Latino Catholics and Mainline Protestants. Among Latino Mainline Protestants 52 percent considered themselves Democrats compared to 50 percent of Catholics (vs. 13 percent Republican, 33 percent independent, 4 percent 'something else'), 48 percent of Pentecostals (vs. 20 percent Republican, 30 percent

independent, 2 percent ‘something else’), and 43 percent of Evangelicals (vs. 20 percent Republican, 32 percent independent, 5 percent ‘something else’).

The political independence and volatility of the Latino electorate manifested itself in the 2000 presidential election. Just weeks prior to the election 49 percent of Latinos said they would vote for Al Gore and 30 percent for

### Latinos and the 2000 Presidential Election

**Question:** “If this year’s presidential election were held today, would you be more likely to vote for Texas Governor George W. Bush, Vice President Al Gore, someone else, or you do not intend to vote?”

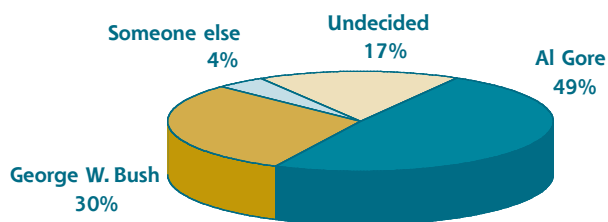


Table 14

George W. Bush—twice the number that Bob Dole attracted in 1996. When broken down by religious family grouping, we found that although Catholics (48 percent vs. 26 percent) and Mainline Protestants (51 percent vs. 20 percent) planned to cast a majority of their votes for Gore, Pentecostals split their vote between Gore and Bush (35 percent vs. 35 percent), and Evangelicals (42 percent vs. 29 percent) planned to cast a majority of their votes for Bush.

Pentecostals and Catholics showed the greatest volatility between the 1996 and the 2000 presidential election. While in 1996 they gave Clinton 69 and 82 percent of their votes respectively, in 2000 they planned to give Gore 35 and 48 percent of their votes—a 34 percent swing. Although Latino Catholics still planned to give Gore a clear majority (48 percent vs. 26 percent) of their votes, Pentecostals planned to split (35 percent vs. 35 percent) their votes between Gore and Bush. A large percentage of Latino Catholics and Protestants were still undecided. It is interesting to note that the Latino Pentecostal vote projected for Bush was identical to what later exit polls indicated that Latinos nationwide gave him on election night—35 percent.

Despite the temptation to read the 2000 election as long-term movement towards the Republican Party, we need to keep in mind that most studies indicate Latinos lean Democrat. Nationwide Gore took 62 percent of the Latino vote to Bush’s 35 percent. Gore took the Latino vote in New York (70 percent), California (67 percent), Illinois (60 percent), and Texas (54 percent) but lost it in the most

important state—Florida (61 percent in favor of Bush).<sup>25</sup> Equally illuminating and perhaps predictable, nationwide Gore took the Mexican (61 percent) and Puerto Rican (64 percent) vote while losing the Cuban (19 percent vs. 70 percent for Bush).<sup>26</sup> Recent studies conducted after the election indicate that Latino Catholics gave Gore 76 percent of their votes (vs. 24 percent for Bush) compared to Latino Protestants who gave him 67 percent (vs. 33 percent for Bush). This is in contrast to black Protestants, less observant white Evangelicals, and less observant Mainline Protestants who gave Gore 96 percent (vs. 4 percent Bush), 45 percent (55 percent Bush), and 43 percent (57 percent Bush) of their votes respectively. Latino support for Gore was located between their black and white counterparts.

What do these findings suggest? The Latino vote is more volatile, independent, and issue and personality driven than ideologically driven. They also indicate that Latino Catholics and Pentecostals, historical rivals, have much more in common politically, and as we shall see shortly socially, than hitherto believed. Finally, they may indicate that ethnic identity and socioeconomic location modify theological or denominational affiliation as a predictor of Latino voting in future elections. However, more research and analyses need to be conducted before we can draw any definitive conclusions.

## Church-State Debates

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Despite the fact that Latinos vote Democratic and support the Party's platform on many political, economic, and immigration issues, a clear majority of Latinos do not support the Democratic platform on moral and church-state positions. Indeed, the vast majority of Latinos support traditionally conservative Republican issues like prayer in school, school vouchers, and the charitable choice initiatives. Our survey found that fully 70 percent of Latinos support prayer in school (69 percent Catholic and 80 percent Protestant and Other Christian), 60 percent support school vouchers (vs. 66 percent of white Evangelicals, 54 percent of white Mainline Protestants, 64 percent of blacks, 63 percent of white Catholics, and 51 percent of Jews), 58 percent support the teaching of both creation and evolution in public schools, and 81 percent support the faith-based charitable choice initiative. Latino support for vouchers was between that of blacks and whites. On average, Latino Protestants

support school prayer and other church-state issues at a higher rate than their Catholic counterparts (80 percent Protestant and 69 percent Catholic). While this represents a major cleavage with most Mainline Protestant traditions, it is not unlike the black electorate, who support some of these measures in similar numbers.<sup>27</sup>

## Discussion and Conclusions

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What do these counterintuitive findings reveal to us about Latinos in American public life? First, we see that the overall percentage of Latino Catholics has remained above the 70 percent mark. This is largely due to the high rates of immigration over the past decade and to the fact that the vast majority of Latinos are arriving from Mexico, a country with one of the highest rates of Catholic religious affiliation in Latin America. Second, although the Latino religious marketplace is largely Christian, it is also increasingly Evangelical, Pentecostal, and Charismatic. Third, we see that Pentecostal and Charismatic religiosity is growing rapidly among historic Mainline, Evangelical, and Catholic constituencies.

Fourth, we see that the growth of conservative Christian religiosity has not necessarily translated into Republican votes, as most conservative Protestants generally support Democratic candidates. Fifth, despite their reportedly marginal social status, Latinos believe that they can make a difference in American politics. Sixth, we found that Latinos are much more interested in participating in educational, moral, social, and political issues than hitherto believed and that they want their religious leaders, organizations, and traditions to become more proactively involved in trying to influence public officials on issues of morality, society, and politics. Religious leaders have not capitalized on their parishioners' desire to become more active in public life, however. Thus, seventh, we found that religious organizations and groups can in the future serve as mobilization sites for educational, political, civic, and social participation.

Eighth, we found that the Latino vote is volatile and has a strong and growing independent streak. It is very sensitive to bread-and-butter economic, immigration, and moral issues and to how the various political parties treat Latinos in the public arena. Ninth, Latino ethnic identity appears to modify theological and

denominational identity with their white counterparts in predicting how Latinos in many religious traditions will vote. As we have seen, Latinos are more likely for economic, public policy, and social reasons to vote along the lines of their black rather than their white religious counterparts. Still, more analyses need to be conducted before we can reach definitive conclusions. Tenth, although Latinos tend to be politically progressive and vote Democrat, they clearly support traditionally pro-family and conservative Republican moral and social issues like school prayer, school vouchers, and the charitable choice initiative.

Eleventh, despite the unique character of the Latino community, it shares many of the same goals, aspirations, and sociopolitical views as a cross-section of American society. This fact, along with the lack of Latino homogeneity and low voter turnout, should caution us to avoid what Rodolfo O. de la Garza calls the myths of *el desfile de la despreciada* and *el cuento de los números*. These myths would lead us to conclude that Latinos are the decisive swing vote that will determine future elections and enable Latino politicians to overcome their Anglo counterparts because the Census figures show ‘dramatic increases’ in the Latino population. The problem with these myths is that they tend to overlook low Latino voter registration and turnout, as well as the impact that variables such as country of origin, generation, class, education, and religion have on political participation and choice.<sup>28</sup>

Twelfth, although we need to be very careful not to diminish or ignore the very real political, theological, moral, and social differences within the Latino community, we also need to be careful not to diminish or ignore the similarities. Our study found that despite all the genuine theological differences that have separated Latino Catholics and Protestants over the centuries, they do share enough in common to warrant working together on specific educational, social, and political issues for the betterment of the entire Latino community. They can achieve cooperation without watering down or compromising their theological differences and traditions.

Finally, despite the changes that are taking place today among Latinos, they seem to occupy a *nepantla* racial-ethnic space of inbetweenness in American society. Though most Latinos are by no means centrist, having strong left-of-center views in some respects, they do tend to occupy a sociopolitical space between the black and

white communities. This *nepantla* space may enable Latinos to help challenge and transform the liberal-conservative, black-white, and Republican-Democrat divide that has dominated American politics for the last half-century by forcing both parties to change and adapt to the growing needs of our increasingly diverse and multicultural society. Clearly, more research needs to be done before we can draw any definitive conclusions. A more comprehensive and definitive analysis of the impact of religion and denominational affiliation on political, civic, and social engagement in the United States and Puerto Rico will be released in our forthcoming books on Latino religions and civic activism in the United States and on Latino religions and politics in American public life.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> According to the 2000 US Census, Latinos are the largest minority group in New Mexico (42%), California (32%), Texas (32%), Arizona (25%), Nevada (20%), Colorado (17%), Florida (17%), New York (15%), New Jersey (13%), Connecticut (9%), Rhode Island (9%), Utah (9%), Oregon (8%), Washington (8%), Idaho (8%), Kansas (7%), Massachusetts (7%), Nebraska (6%), Wyoming (6%), Iowa (3%), New Hampshire (2%), Maine (1%), and Vermont (1%). Matt Barreto, Rodolfo O. de la Garza, Jongho Lee, Jaesung Rye, and Harry Pachon, *LATINO VOTER MOBILIZATION IN 2000: A GLIMPSE INTO LATINO POLICY AND VOTING PREFERENCES* (Claremont, CA: The Tomás Rivera Policy Institute, 2002), 1. I would like to thank Jongho Lee for permission to use this chart and the following demographics on voting patterns. Jongho Lee and Harry Pachon, “Impact of Religion on Political Attitudes and Participation,” unpublished paper presented at the Hispanic Churches in American Public Life national conference in Washington, DC, May 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Barreto et al., *LATINO VOTER MOBILIZATION*, op. cit. n. 1, 1; Lee and Pachon, “Impact of Religion on Political Attitudes,” op. cit. n. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Barreto et al., *LATINO VOTER MOBILIZATION*, op. cit. n. 1, 1–6.

<sup>4</sup> Barreto et al., *LATINO VOTER MOBILIZATION*, op. cit. n. 1, 1.



<sup>5</sup> *Nepantla* is an Aztec Nahuatl term that means to be ‘in the middle’ or in-between. When the Spanish padres asked why the Aztecs did not renounce their religion and culture and convert whole-heartedly to Catholicism and Spanish culture during the spiritual conquest of Mexico in the early 1500s, the Aztecs responded with the metaphor that they were *nepantla* or in the middle. They stated that they would answer neither to one faith nor the other and that they were going to embrace aspects of Spanish culture while at the same time retaining some of their ancient customs, values, and traditions. This middle or in-between status can also be applied to a sociopolitical location which is not a stage *en route* to another position. In short, a person is *nepantla*. In many respects Latinos represent a *nepantla* political community in that they both accommodate and resist certain aspects of US political society while at the same time retaining some aspects of their Latin American political, cultural, and social heritage and worldview. Furthermore, they also tend to share similar attitudes of whites and especially blacks on certain political, economic, moral and social issues. For an interesting discussion of ‘in-between’ Latino identities, see Michael Jones-Correa’s chapter on “In-between Identities: Race and Ethnicity in the American Context” in *BETWEEN TWO NATIONS: THE POLITICAL PREDICAMENT OF LATINOS IN NEW YORK CITY* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1998), 109–23. Although Jones-Correa does not specifically talk about *nepantla*, what he describes nonetheless resonates with some of what we are suggesting here. For the original use of the term *nepantla*, see Miguel León-Portillo, *BROKEN SPEARS: THE AZTEC ACCOUNT OF THE CONQUEST OF MEXICO* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992).

<sup>6</sup> Rodolfo O. de la Garza, Louis DeSipio, F. Chris García, John A. García, and Angelo Falcón, *LATINO VOICES: MEXICAN, PUERTO RICAN AND CUBAN PERSPECTIVES ON AMERICAN POLITICS* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1992); Peggy Levitt, “Two Nations under God? Latino Religious Life in the United States,” in Marcelo M. Suárez-Orozco and Mariela M. Paez, eds., *LATINOS REMAKING AMERICA* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 150–64.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Fowler, Allen D. Hertzke, and Laura Olson, *RELIGION AND POLITICS IN AMERICA* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1999); Michael and Julia Corbett, *POLITICS AND RELIGION IN THE UNITED STATES* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998); Maurilio E. Vigil, *HISPANICS IN AMERICAN POLITICS* (New York: University Press of America, 1987); Aníbal Yáñez-Chávez, ed., *SU VOTO ES SU VOZ: LATINO POLITICS IN CALIFORNIA* (San Diego: Center for US-Mexican Studies, University of California, 1996).

<sup>8</sup> For more information on the HCAPL project, see [www.hcapl.org](http://www.hcapl.org).

<sup>9</sup> For more information on The Pew Charitable Trusts, see [www.pewtrusts.com](http://www.pewtrusts.com).

<sup>10</sup>Jesse Miranda of the Alianza de Ministerios Evangélicos Nacionales (AMEN) and Vanguard University and Virgilio Elizondo of the Roman Catholic Mexican American Cultural Center (MACC) and the University of Notre Dame codirected this study. Gastón Espinosa of Northwestern University served as project manager and director of research. Virgilio Elizondo cofounded MACC in 1972 to address the spiritual, temporal, and educational needs of the Mexican American/Latino Catholic community in the United States. The center has developed into a nationally recognized Catholic institute for religious leadership that has trained more than 30,000 people from North America, South America, Europe, and Asia. It also conducts important research on Hispanic and other ethnic communities in the United States. For more information, see [www.maccsa.org](http://www.maccsa.org). AMEN was founded by Jesse Miranda and other prominent Latino Protestant clergy in 1992. The Alianza is a multid denominational association of Hispanic Protestant leaders—clergy and lay—in the United States, Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Canada. It has grown to represent 27 Latino-serving denominations and 77 parachurch organizations throughout North America. The goal of AMEN is to promote unity among leaders, churches, and parachurch organizations in the Latino community and to serve as a public voice for Latino Protestants. For more information, see [www.amenweb.org](http://www.amenweb.org).

<sup>11</sup>The Tomás Rivera Policy Institute (TRPI) is a freestanding, nonprofit policy research organization that has attained a reputation as the nation’s premier Latino think tank. Through its strong capacity to conduct primary and secondary data analyses, TRPI is uniquely positioned to fill the void in information that exists among policymakers and political leaders regarding the complexities that characterize the US Latino population. One of TRPI’s critical strengths is survey research. Harry Pachon is president and Rodolfo O. de la Garza is vice-president; Jongho Lee is director of survey research. For more information, see [www.trpi.org](http://www.trpi.org).

<sup>12</sup>The HCAPL national survey went through ten revisions over a four-month period. Eighteen scholars gave direct input into the construction of the survey framework and questions: Virgilio Elizondo, Jesse Miranda, Gastón Espinosa, Harry Pachon, Rudy de la Garza, Jongho Lee, Daisy Machado, Milagros Peña, Louis DeSipio, Allen Hertzke, David Leege, María Elena González, Donald Miller, Wade Clark Roof, Dean Hoge, Edwin Hernández, Samuel Pagán, and Elizabeth Conde-Frazier.

<sup>13</sup>Unless otherwise indicated, all statistics will be rounded to the nearest one-hundred thousand for imputed numbers over one million and to the nearest ten thousand for imputed numbers over one-hundred thousand. The national survey religious profile findings were broken down into the following religious classification system: Catholic; Mainline Protestant (e.g., Episcopalian, Methodist, Lutheran, Presbyterian, United Church of Christ, American Baptist, etc.); Pentecostal/Charismatic (e.g., Assemblies of God, Assembly of Christian Churches,

Pentecostal Church of God, etc.); Evangelical non-Pentecostal/Charismatic (e.g., Southern Baptists, Seventh-Day Adventists, etc.); New Religious Movement (e.g., Mormon, Jehovah's Witness); other world religions; no religious preference; and atheist/agnostic.

<sup>14</sup> Andrew Greeley, "Defections among Hispanics," *AMERICA* (July 30, 1988): 61-62. For his follow-up study, see Andrew Greeley, "Defections among Hispanics," *AMERICA* 177 (8) (1998): 12-15.

<sup>15</sup> Question 36 in our national survey asked: "Do you consider yourself a born-again Christian, that is, have you personally had a conversion experience related to Jesus Christ?"

<sup>16</sup> Question 24 in our national survey asked: "Do you consider yourself a Pentecostal Christian, Charismatic Christian, or spirit-filled Catholic?"

<sup>17</sup> For a discussion of the origins and development of the Latino Catholic Charismatic movement, see Gastón Espinosa, "'Let the Spirit Fly': Marilyn Kramar and the History of the Latino/a Catholic Charismatic Movement in the United States," unpublished paper, Northwestern University, 2002, pp. 1-30. For further evidence and a discussion of Latino Catholic Charismatic hymnody, see Moises Sandoval, *ON THE MOVE: A HISTORY OF THE HISPANIC CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1991), 104; Manuel Vásquez, "Charismatic Renewal among Latino Catholics," in Colleen McDannell, ed., *RELIGIONS OF THE UNITED STATES IN PRACTICE*, Vol. 2. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 346-54.

<sup>18</sup> Andrew Greeley, "Defections among Hispanics," op. cit. n. 14.

<sup>19</sup> This number is probably too high because not all Methodists (Free), Presbyterians (PCA, EPC, OPC), and Lutherans (Missouri Synod) identify as Mainline Protestant and not all non-born-again non-Catholic Christians who did not specify a denomination (340,000 or 3.2%) are Mainline Protestant. For example, a strong argument could be made for placing this latter group in the Christian new religious movement category of respondents. When these factors are taken into consideration, one could argue that the actual percentage of Latino Mainline Protestants is probably somewhere in the neighborhood of 11 to 13 percent.

<sup>20</sup> See Edwin I. Hernández, "Moving from the Cathedral to Storefront Churches: Understanding Religious Growth and Decline among Latino Protestants," in David Maldonado Jr., ed., *PROTESTANTES/PROTESTANTS: HISPANIC CHRISTIANITY WITHIN MAINLINE TRADITIONS* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 216-35. For a discussion of Latina women in ministry, see Gastón Espinosa, "'Your Daughters Shall Prophesy': A History of Women in Ministry in the Latino Pentecostal Movement in the United States," in Margaret Lamberts Bendroth and

Virginia Lieson Brereton, eds., *WOMEN AND TWENTIETH-CENTURY PROTESTANTISM* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 25–48.

<sup>21</sup> For example, our survey found that more than 65 percent of Latinos believe that “sexual relations between two adults of the same sex” is “always wrong.” Also see Fowler, Hertzke, and Olson, *RELIGION AND POLITICS IN AMERICA*, op. cit. n. 7, 96.

<sup>22</sup> For an excellent study on Latinos and the 1996 presidential election, see Rodolfo O. de la Garza and Louis DeSipio, *AWASH IN THE MAINSTREAM: LATINO POLITICS IN THE 1996 ELECTION* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1999).

<sup>23</sup> Fowler, Hertzke, and Olson, *RELIGION AND POLITICS IN AMERICA*, op. cit. n. 7, 96.

<sup>24</sup> Peter Wielhouwer with Thomas Young, “Religion in American Elections and Campaigns,” in *IN GOD WE TRUST? RELIGION AND AMERICAN POLITICAL LIFE* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House Company, 2001), 171–80; Ethics and Public Policy Center, “How the Faithful Voted: A Conversation with John C. Green and John Dilulio,” *CENTER CONVERSATIONS* 10 (March 2001): 2–3; The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *AMERICAN VIEWS ON RELIGION, POLITICS, AND PUBLIC POLICY* (Washington, DC: The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2002), 9, 11, 32; Fowler, Hertzke, and Olson, *RELIGION AND POLITICS IN AMERICA*, op. cit. n. 7, 94.

<sup>25</sup> Barreto et al., *LATINO VOTER MOBILIZATION*, op. cit. n. 1, 1; Lee and Pachon, “Impact of Religion on Political Attitudes,” op. cit. n. 1.

<sup>26</sup> Barreto et al., *LATINO VOTER MOBILIZATION*, op. cit. n. 1, 1; Lee and Pachon, “Impact of Religion on Political Attitudes,” op. cit. n. 1.

<sup>27</sup> Corwin Smidt, “Religion and American Public Opinion,” in Wielhouwer with Young, *IN GOD WE TRUST?* op. cit. n. 24, 105; The Pew Forum, *AMERICAN VIEWS*, op. cit. n. 24, 8.

<sup>28</sup> Rodolfo de la Garza, “*El Cuento de los Números* and Other Latino Political Myths,” in Yañez-Chávez, *SU VOTO ES SU VOZ*, op. cit. n. 7, 11–32.

