

Dallas Morning News Questions

You believe Latino evangelicals are natural Republican voters. Why?

I would rather categorize Latino evangelicals as natural traditionalists or conservative voters. The Latino ethos resonates with core commitments towards the sanctity of life and traditional marriage. To the Latino family, traditional marriage represents the antidote to deviant social behavior such as drug activity, teenage pregnancy, gang involvement, high school dropout and many others.

Correspondingly, on social values, Latinos lean conservative. However, Latinos embody the quintessential independent voter or moderate electorate because in contrast to White evangelicals, Latino evangelicals expand the menu list of social justice issues that must be addressed from a biblical world view to include the alleviation of global poverty, the environment, Darfur, Aids in Africa, and immigration reform.

In other words, a typical Latino Evangelical supports the war to eradicate Al Qaeda as long as we simultaneously commit ourselves to eradicating Aids. Yes to the war on terror if we launch a second front on Global Poverty. Latinos will force the Democratic Party to shift towards the center and the Republican Party to embrace diversity and an expansion of a social justice agenda.

You're in touch with Latino evangelicals across the country. What effect will the immigration debate have on them next year?

Latino Evangelicals have risen to a level of civic activism in an unprecedented manner. Moreover, Latino Evangelicals have looked at union and political leaders who initially lead the charge for comprehensive immigration reform and declared that this is a moral and spiritual issue first; therefore, the church must lead. In prior civil, social or moral rights campaigns in our nation's history, the church spearheaded the campaigns to abolish slavery and end segregation. Such a polarizing issue in our American political and social arena must be addressed via the oracles of righteousness and justice.

In the next 15 months, Hispanic evangelical Pastors and leaders will address the immigration issue from the pulpits as a moral and biblical issue simultaneously registering members to vote. The lack of immigration reform provoked the Latino Evangelical church to launch the largest registration drive in the history of the Hispanic community. In addition, Latino evangelicals will identify politicians who exude a message of xenophobia and nativism while supporting those who embrace reconciliation and compromise.

My fear is that many Hispanic Evangelicals may boycott the National election as some sort of punitive consequence against the Republican Party for the immigration stalemate. Without Hispanic support, Bush would never have taken Florida in 2004 or 2000. Without the 44% Latino vote in 2004, The GOP would never have won. Without the Latino vote in 2008, The GOP will not win the Presidential election. However, if the Democrats present a candidate that does not resonate with the values of the Hispanic American voter, or is too liberal, Latinos may stay home instead of compromising their values or reinforcing a xenophobic platform. At the end of the day, Hispanic Evangelicals are caught between a rock and a hard place. Do we vote for xenophobia and nativism or do we sacrifice marriage and life on Isaac's altar?

Are we talking mostly new immigrants to the U.S.? If so, is there any indication they would be likely voters?

The vast majority of the 43 Million Latinos in America are legal, citizens and aware of the anti-immigrant sentiment in our nation. **New Latino Citizens understand what's at stake in 2008.**

Are there any presidential candidates that are generating a buzz among Latino evangelicals?

On the Democratic side, no one candidate seems to have mobilized the Latino base. I suspected Bill Richardson would generate a buzz due to his Hispanic roots, however, there seems to be a disconnect even with the Governor of New Mexico. On the Republican side, on paper, John McCain should be carrying the vast majority of Hispanic support. No other candidate liquidated so much political capital on immigration reform like John McCain. So much so, that his candidacy may be sacrificed on the altar of immigration reform. There is one tier 2 candidate that is beginning to stir the nests of Latino Evangelicals, Mike Huckabee. He's evangelical background and ethnic friendly trans- cultural platform resonates with many Latinos. Right now, both Clinton and Guliani are incorporating a "Don't ask, Don't tell Policy" on immigration reform.

Are the people you work with mostly in Protestant or independent churches? Or are they equally in Catholic churches? Our organization is the Hispanic National Association of Evangelicals. AS a result, we work with the Protestant Evangelical church including the largest denominations, networks, Mega Churches and independent ministries. However, on issues such as immigration, poverty, marriage, and others, we work with our Catholic brothers and sisters.

You've said immigration is a social and moral issue, not a civil rights one. What does that mean? A Civil rights movement by definition requires a disenfranchised community to demand rights guaranteed by political or governmental compacts. When the constitution was amended to address the sin of Slavery, thereafter, Jim Crow and segregation presented an egregious violation of the constitutional rights of blacks in America. Prior to the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments, the struggle to free the slaves was a moral, social and human rights struggle. After 1865, it became a Civil rights struggle. Today, the undocumented have no legal protection. However, the fight for comprehensive immigration reform transcends boundaries or political affiliation; it is a human rights, social rights and moral rights campaign.