

12.5 Latino voters in the 2006 US mid-term elections

The relative success of Republican candidates like George W. Bush with Latino voters in the 2000, 2002 and 2004 elections in the USA led to speculation that Republicans would fare very well in the 2006 election. However, this did not turn out to be the case. Indeed, the results appeared to confirm that Latinos would continue to vote heavily Democratic. As in many other democracies, how immigration affects politics may ultimately constitute the most important effect of immigration.

In 2006, national exit polling indicated that Republican members of the House of Representatives received 30 per cent of the Latino vote, down 8 per cent from the previous mid-term elections in 2002. Republican US Senate candidates were estimated to have received 35 per cent of the Latino vote and Republican gubernatorial candidates 37 per cent (Gimpel, 2007).

The geography of the Latino population poses major problems to the Republicans as Latinos are spatially concentrated in heavily Democratic areas. The only region where Latino support for the Republicans remained unchanged in 2006 was in the South. Despite huge increases in Latino populations throughout the South in recent years, most Latino migration is to heavily Democratic areas where new voters are likely to take on prevailing political allegiances. Once acquired, party identification usually proves durable.

US mid-term elections are characterised by variable, but generally lower, turnout. The diminished Latino support for the Republican Party did not mean that the Republican majorities in the House and Senate were lost because Latino voters wanted to punish the Republicans for the impasse over immigration reform. The Latino population in tightly contested races was too small to decisively affect outcomes. Rather, Anglo-white voters decided the outcomes (Gimpel, 2007).

Contrary to the realignment thesis, immigrant Latinos favour Democrats by better than a 2:1 margin. Latino immigrants in the most Democratic counties gave Democratic gubernatorial candidates 67 per cent of their votes, Democratic Senate candidates 70 per cent and House candidates 73 per cent. If anything, the 2006 elections suggest that immigration favours the Democratic Party. Moreover, Latinos are ambivalent about immigration and do not regard immigration as the USA's most important problem (Gimpel, 2007).

Reference:

Gimpel, J. (2007) *Latino Voting in the 2006 Election: Realignment to the GOP Remains Distant*, (Washington, D.C.: Center for Immigration Studies).