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RACISM, INTEREST GROUPS AND LACK OF POLITICAL INFORMATION: WHY DID MOST LATINOS NOT SUPPORT CANDIDATE BARACK OBAMA IN THE 2008 DEMOCRATIC PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARIES?

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ABSTRACT

The vast majority of Hispanics did not vote for candidate Barack Obama in the 2008 Democratic presidential primaries. Latino men and women, regardless of their age, nation of origin, income and/or educational background, overwhelmingly supported Senator Hillary Clinton throughout this historical electoral process. Senator Clinton's key victories in states like California, New York, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and New Jersey, were largely due to Latino support. She won two-thirds, or even more, of the Latino votes in most of these states. Senator Clinton also won the Hispanic vote by similar margins in Nevada, Florida, Maryland and Massachusetts. This paper explains the main

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reasons why most Latinos did not vote for Barack Obama in the Democratic primaries. The text suggests that the evidently-weak Latino support for Obama was not only due to racism and interest groups-related issues, but to a lack of political information among Latinos about his goals. The paper contributes to the debate on the actual voting behavior of Latinos, a minority group that has become a key constituency in the United States.

Key words: Latino voting behavior, racism, interest groups, presidential elections, political information and Barack Obama

RESUMEN

La mayoría de la población hispana no votó por el candidato Barack Obama en las elecciones primarias del partido Demócrata en 2008. Hombres y mujeres latinos de todos los orígenes, edades, nivel de ingresos y estudios votaron decididamente por la senadora Hillary Clinton a lo largo de dicho proceso electoral. Las victorias clave de la senadora Clinton en Estados como California, Nueva York, Texas, Nuevo México, Arizona y Nueva Jersey, se debió en gran parte al apoyo latino. Clinton ganó dos tercios, o incluso más, de los votos latinos en casi todos estos estados. Clinton también ganó el voto hispano por un margen similar en Nevada, La Florida, Maryland y Massachusetts. Este artículo explica las razones principales por las cuales la mayor parte de la población latina no votó por Barack Obama en las elecciones primarias Demócratas. El texto sugiere que el débil apoyo de los hispanos hacia Obama se debió no sólo a cuestiones relacionadas con racismo y grupos de interés, sino también a la ausencia de información política sobre las metas del candidato al interior de los latinos, un grupo minoritario que se ha convertido en parte fundamental del electorado en los Estados Unidos.

Palabras clave: Comportamiento electoral de los latinos, racismo, grupos de interés, elecciones presidenciales, información política y Barack Obama.

INTRODUCTION

A few days after the so-called «Super Tuesday» primaries, I made a trip to my country of origin, Colombia. The taxi driver who took me from Jackson Heights (Queens) to the John F. Kennedy International Airport was an Ecuadorian man about fifty years old. We started talking about American politics as soon as I told him that I was pursuing a Ph.D. degree in political science. He pointed out that he had lived in Queens for more than 20 years but had been naturalized as an American citizen only a few months ago. The man soon showed his strong support for Senator Clinton (and her husband): «*Los Clinton tienen que regresar a la Casa Blanca. Ellos*

«fueron los que más apoyaron, y seguro lo seguirán haciendo, a la gente latina en este país.» («*The Clintons have to return to the White House. They were the ones who supported the most, and will surely continue to do so, Latino people in this country*»), he said. As many Hispanic² and Non-Hispanic people do, this man clearly saw Senator Clinton's political experience as if it were the same of her husband's. No doubt this particular belief helped Senator Clinton obtain more than two-thirds of the Hispanic vote in her home state of New York as well as in the most populated states in the country, but can one assure that most Hispanics voted for her just because of the good political image of the Clintons?

The (Hispanic) taxi driver seemed to have responded to that question when he added: *«Nadie sabe bien quién es Obama. Él parece un buen hombre pero en todo caso no tiene la experiencia suficiente para liderar esta nación. Además, lo más seguro es que apoyará a los negros, lo cual no le conviene a los latinos.»* («*No one knows who Obama is. He looks like a good man but he doesn't have enough experience to lead this nation anyway. Besides, he will surely support the blacks, which is inconvenient for Latinos.*») This opinion suggests the existence of at least three relevant factors (interest groups-related issues, lack of information about Obama and racism practices) that apparently influenced the actual voting behavior of many Latinos in the 2008 Democratic presidential primaries.

Friends heard similar anecdotes while asking Hispanics how to understand the Latino vote in this electoral process. Understanding how Latinos saw/see the aforementioned factors helps comprehend their poor support for Barack Obama. This paper explains why those factors can be considered the major reasons that Latinos did not vote for candidate Obama in the 2008 Democratic primaries. In doing so, the text describes relevant statistics regarding Hispanics and the influence of the Mass Media on their voting behavior throughout this historical process.

The paper is divided into six parts: First, an introduction, in which an overview of the weak Latino support for candidate Obama is presented; second, prior relevant research and an analytical framework regarding racism practices, with interest group-related issues and the lack of political information among Latinos, is underlined; third, key aspects and statistics of both the Hispanic population and electorate are studied; fourth, the presence of the aforementioned (three) factors that help explain the current Latino voting behavior is explored; fifth, the role of the Mass Media in this electoral process is highlighted; and six; a conclusion, in which the main political challenges that candidate Barack Obama has as regards to winning nationwide the Hispanic electorate are underscored.

² The terms «Hispanic» and «Latino» are used interchangeably in this paper. The definitions regarding the Latino population are discussed in the following pages.

It should be pointed out that relevant information for this study was collected through personal interviews with fifteen Latinos³ and Americans who have worked on Hispanic issues for years. The respondents were simply asked to indicate why they believed that most Latinos did not support candidate Obama in the 2008 Democratic presidential primaries and showed a strong preference for Senator Hillary Clinton in this electoral process. Before conducting these brief interviews, I explored recently-published secondary sources (particularly reports, academic papers and press articles, in both English and Spanish, on the Latino electorate) that are appropriate for a study of this nature.

It should also be noted that the interview responses are not used to measure the core factors that are discussed in the paper. Racism can be measured through surveys of people's racial prejudices and their tendency to reject persons of African origin. Interest group-related issues and the lack of political information can be also measured by performing quantitative research on both topics. Measurements of this kind have not been produced yet as regards of the 2008 primaries. In any case, the interview responses may suggest explanations to those factors while contributing to the study of Hispanics as the strongest emerging electorate in American politics.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

There is still much research to be performed in order to explain the voting behavior of most Hispanics in the 2008 Democratic primaries. Some authors, nonetheless, have described the massive support that Senator Clinton received from the vast majority of Latinos all over the country. Two well-documented texts remain as critical sources for the study of the Latino vote in these historical primaries. The first one, *'Hispanics and the 2008 Election: A Swing Vote?'*, was written by Paul Taylor and Richard Fry (2007). Their study is as an extensively researched work that explores in detail how Latino voters, after spending the first part of this decade loosening their «strong» ties to the Democratic Party, have reversed course in the last couple of years. Taylor and Fry came to this conclusion based on a nationwide survey of the Hispanic electorate done by the Pew Hispanic Center in late 2007.⁴ They emphasize how that the «U-Turn» in Hispanic partisan allegiance occurred/occurs in the midst of the controversial debate on illegal immigration.

The second text, *'The Hispanic Vote in the 2008 Democratic Presidential Primaries'*, is perhaps the most important study that has been published (as of June 2008) on the Latino vote in these

³ These Latinos live in Washington, D.C and New York and are legal residents of the United States.

⁴ The Pew Hispanic Center is a nonpartisan research organization that seeks to improve public understanding of the diverse Hispanic population in the United States and to chronicle Latinos' growing impact on the nation. For more information on this Center, see <http://pewhispanic.org/>

primaries. This well-documented study, written by Susan Minushkin and Mark Lopez (2008), indicates how Latino voters emerged as pivotal constituency in the battle between Senators Clinton and Obama for the democratic presidential nomination. These authors also describe how Latinos showed a marked preference for Senator Hillary Clinton in the «Super Tuesday» primaries as well as in «mega-states» like Texas.

Other texts, particularly press articles written by social researchers, acknowledge that Hispanics made a significant contribution to Senator Clinton's electoral victories in the 2008 Democratic primaries. These articles are used in the paper as they help explain why most Latinos did not support Barack Obama in this process.

It should be noted that there are many academics who study racism-related practices in both the United States and Latin America. They tend to focus on how people of minority groups have been systematically excluded from relevant decision-making spaces and political institutions. Some of these author's academic works are utilized in this text to describe how the non-officially recognized racism that still exists in Latin America is present among many Latinos in the United States.

I am skeptical about explaining «Latino racism»⁵ without taking into account the history of this complex phenomenon in Latin America. One cannot grasp the presence of racism among Hispanics in the United States without studying how most of them and/or their close ancestors behaved in their countries of origin. Most Latinos followed what the Creole (white and Mestizo) elites imposed. These elites dehumanized those who were enslaved in Africa to be brought to the Americas against their will. According to Juan de Dios Mosquera (2000), the white and Mestizo elites created a new category, «the Negroes,» to dehumanize the Afro-descendant population, while spreading their racist ideology through the education and political systems.

In the early 1820s, when Independence was achieved in most of the countries of what we today call Latin America, society was divided by statute and custom into socio-racial castes, which comprised, broadly speaking, Euro-Mestizos, indigenous people, free persons of African descent, and black slaves (Mellafe 1984 and Reales 2007). These castes were ruled by white (European and Creole) people.

The term *casta* was a pejorative reference to those of «mixed blood.» Mellafe (1984) notes that the preference was to be considered Euro-Mestizo just to be close, «socio-racially» speaking, to the (white) rulers. Bribing the authorities to purchase the so-called «*pure-blood certificates*» was

⁵ Racism is always considered a grave human rights violation, regardless of the population or group that is being affected by such violation. Racism practices may have particular characteristics, however, from region to region. This is why I utilize the expression «Latino racism» in quotation marks.

also possible. This illegal operation, known as «*gracias al sacar*» («*thanks for taking that background out*»), was used not only to gain social respect but also to improve people's access to public and private benefits (Reales 2007).

It is hard to tell how many people of African and/or Indigenous origin bought those «*certificates of whiteness*,» since operations of this kind were usually hidden. Most historians suggest that the numbers of certificates sold was likely low due to lack of economic resources among Afro-descendants⁶ and indigenous persons (Reales 2001).

Throughout the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries, Latin Americans were educated under the influence of a system that excluded and discriminated against people of African and Indigenous origin, promoting racism at all levels. This (racist) environment produced self-esteem problems among some Afro-descendants and Indigenous persons who internalized racism practices. Tirado (1989), Dulitzki (2001) and Reales (2007) note that political leaders and intellectuals promoted social equality in the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries. They clarify, however, that this equality mainly referred to educated white and Mestizo people who treated Afro-descendants and Indigenous persons as inferior human beings.

One of the direct consequences of this «Latino racism» was the phenomenon of «*el blanqueamiento*» («*whitening*»). Afro-descendants utilized/utilize «*el blanqueamiento*» as a strategy to follow to ascend in the socio-racial structure (inherited from colonial times) that characterized/characterize most Latin American countries.

According to Nina de Friedemann (1992), this *whitening* was intentionally promoted by white and Mestizo elites to ignore, diminish and «invisibilize» all ethnic groups and their cultural identities. One can see this «invisibility» when looking for texts that acknowledge the crucial contribution of Afro-descendants to Latin America. Few texts recognize, for instance, that Afro-descendants were decisive to winning the wars for Independence and building the actual wealth of the region.

Academic interest in the «non-Eurocentric» history of Latin America has grown over the last fifteen years. Most Latinos, nonetheless, do not know much about the African part of their heritage. As occurs in the United States, the education system in Latin America is still, in fact,

⁶ *Afro-descendants* became a «powerful» term only after the United Nations World Conference against Racism of 2001. As Reales (2007) underscores, this concept essentially refers to those people whose ancestors lived in slavery. The term *Afro-descendant(s)* was a contemporary reaction to the racist lexicon that has historically characterized the Americas. With the recognition of their new lexicon, Afro-descendant leaders, activists and academics not only intend to eliminate that undeniable «linguistic racism» but also to defend a cultural identity and heritage that are rooted in Africa.

predominantly Eurocentric.⁷ In most Latin American nations, students continue to be educated under the influence of a system that discriminates against people of African descent and Indigenous persons, thus promoting racism towards others.

Bryan and Sanchez (2003) point out that the perpetuation of attitudes that confine most Afro-descendants to low-paid, racially-defined areas of work, where education plays a limited role in terms of advancement, can be seen as a modern version of slavery. No doubt academics should exercise caution when denying the presence of «new» forms of slavery, racism and segregation-like practices in Latin America. Although this region did not have the legal segregation system that existed in the United States until the 1960s, most of its nations approved racist laws in the Twentieth Century. This fact can be seen in the notoriously-racist immigration policies adopted throughout the region only a few decades ago.

The racist ideology, enhanced by the white and Mestizo elites in the region, made it easier for most Latin American governments to enforce (racist) laws that strongly encouraged the immigration of (white) European individuals «to improve» what they called «*the racial conditions of the nations*» (Hebe 1974 and Reales 2005).

In the context of these social (and legal) practices, racism was/is internalized by many people of mixed (ethnic) origins throughout Latin America. This allowed/allows Mestizos, in general, and Afro-descendants, in particular, to produce the aforementioned *whitening* as a strategy to follow to succeed socio-economically and politically. That is why it should not be surprising to find that nearly half (48%) of Hispanics self-identify as *white* persons in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau 2000).⁸ This state institution also underlines that less than 6% of all Latinos reported two or more «*rac*es» when responding to the (Census) question on race, and only 2% of Hispanics self-identify as black people and/or persons of African origin. Racism-related practices have always been present in the United States, and their existence may also exert a strong influence on Latinos when it comes to self-identify «racially».

Following the approach of Barbary and Urrea (2004) to racism, this phenomenon can be defined as the arbitrary naturalization of physical and cultural differences that leads certain populations to degrade specific groups and/or persons through distinct social processes. That arbitrary

⁷ This was one of the major conclusions of the 'Espacio USA - Vanguardia Latina' Conference, which was held in Washington D.C., in 2008. According to most Hispanic American and Latin American graduate students who attended this event, the education systems in both Latin America and the United States are still Eurocentric and diminish the key contribution of people of Non-European origin to the nations.

⁸ It should be recalled that most Latinos are of mixed (ethnic) origins and that the Afro-descendant population comprises at least 30% of the total population in Latin America (Reales 2005).

naturalization exists among many Latinos and tends to produce racial conflict and social tensions at all levels. What do social scientists say about this kind of conflict and the Hispanic population in the United States?

Lopez and Pantoja (2004) suggest that given the diversity of ethnic/racial groups in the United States, it might be impossible to formulate a single conceptual framework that can explain the political behavior and personal attitudes of the persons belonging to such groups. In any case, the black-white dichotomy that characterized the so-called «race relations» in the United States has changed in the last couple of decades due to the strong demographic growth and political development of the Latino population and other minority groups. Racial conflict has been present throughout this change. Lopez and Pantoja (2004) point out that this conflict has been driven by feelings of entitlement to socio-economic resources and privilege and to perceived threats members of out-groups pose to those particular entitlements. According to these authors, there are consistent studies on racial attitudes that show evidence of growing hostility and distrust among African Americans and Latinos.

Racial conflict issues and the debate on candidate Barack Obama's *race* were present in the 2008 Democratic presidential primaries.⁹ Barbara Jeanne Fields (1990) would probably say that this is due to the fact that «there is really only one race, the Negro race.» Fields notes that most people who identify themselves as *white persons* in the United States regard people of African origin as a race, but not individuals of visible European appearance.¹⁰ This is why, she emphasizes, «there are women and *black* women, and George Bush and Michael Dukakis were candidates for president, while Jesse Jackson was a *black* candidate for president.» She wrote this some twenty years ago, and her assertion still seems to be accurate, as the TV news in both English and Spanish show - on a daily basis - when referring to Barack Obama.¹¹

«Race discourses» have also been present in the formation of different interest groups in the United States and Latin America. In the American case, one can define interest groups as the mechanism for exercising the (constitutional) right of the people to work together and try to influence the government (Fiorina et al. 2007). Hispanics have exercised that right as a diverse group, in spite of the existence of the free-rider problem,¹² to mobilize people towards common

⁹ These issues are extensively explained in the last part of the paper.

¹⁰ *White persons* include those Hispanics who classify themselves as *whites*. Following the data of the last three censuses, which were held in 1980, 1990 and 2000, Logan (2003) notes that the category «*white Hispanic*» has always been the largest among Latinos. In 1980, in fact, nearly two thirds of Hispanics classified themselves as *white persons*. This figure declined to just below half of the total Latino population in 2000, as shown above. It should be added that many *non-white* people also use the (race) lexicon, as they are educated to do so.

¹¹ I have paid especial attention to CNN and Univision News throughout the 2008 electoral process.

interests. The most notorious manifestation of Latino political mobilization occurred in April and May of 2006, when more than one million Latinos participated in protests over a proposed reform to U.S. immigration policy. Although Latinos failed in achieving their goal that time, they showed their willingness to mobilize their people towards a common interest.

Despite extensive study of interest groups, there is wide academic disagreement about how influential they can be (Fiorina et al. 2007). In any case, no doubt these groups support extreme positions in some political debates and discussions, which «inevitably» inject conflict into the political process. The quest for urgent reform to U.S. immigration policy, which is a priority for most Latinos, not only has polarized the debate on legal/illegal immigration but has also fed the conflict between Latinos and African Americans, as will be argued below.

It should be underscored that academic research on the influence of interest groups on mobilizing Latino registration and voter turnout has not been explored as extensively as the study of interest groups in general (Pantoja and Woods 1999). Research on the Hispanic population and their voting behavior, nevertheless, has grown stronger over the last eight years, as is evident in the proliferation of press articles and texts indicating the relevance of the Latino vote nationwide.

Cassel (2002) wrote a well-documented study of Latino voting participation utilizing validated voting data, which is necessary to assess Hispanic turnout relative to the turnout of other groups. She concludes that the relatively low Hispanic turnout may be due to the fact that Latinos lack the political networks that motivate, for instance, African Americans to vote in distinct elections. When analyzing Hispanic turnout and voting behavior, it should also be taken into account that Hispanics tend to respond more effectively to Latino leaders than to others who ask them to vote, as Shaw, de la Garza and Lee (2000) note. How do Hispanics make electoral decisions?

Nicholson, Pantoja and Segura (2006) point out that even though scholars know much about Latino political participation, partisanship and policy preferences, little is known about how the Hispanic population makes electoral decisions. These authors explain the Hispanic vote by exploring in depth the levels of *political information* among Hispanics in California, Texas, Florida, New York and Illinois.¹³ Prior research on Latinos and political information indicates

¹² The free-rider problem suggests that people who belong to a particular group see the cost of a collective action higher than the personal benefit that the action may bring to them. *The benefit* of an action of this kind is public - even those who do not mobilize to defend their (own) interests receive it - whereas the costs of the action are personal, which make people tend to wait until others obtain *the benefit* for all. That is why Olson (1965) and Hardin (1993) underline that the bigger a given group is, the less likely the group work collectively.

¹³ According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2000), these five states have, in fact, the largest populations of Latinos. Note: Nicholson, Pantoja and Segura used the 2000 Tomas Rivera Policy Institute pre-election poll to perform their research on political information and the Latino electorate.

that Latino immigrants in California, the state with the largest Hispanic population, are more likely than both native-born Latinos and Latinos outside California to manifest higher levels of political information (Pantoja and Segura 2003).

Political information may be defined as a resource that enables its possessors to better articulate their specific political interests and goals and reward or punish leaders for their acts (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). Nicholson, Pantoja and Segura (2006) emphasize that levels of political information are critical in affecting the quality and quantity of participation.

These scholars also highlight that both Hispanic and non-Hispanic voters with high levels of political information tend to evaluate candidates using policy-based criteria whereas their counterparts with poor levels of information do not. Their provocative study concludes by pointing out that the lack of political information makes Hispanics more likely to rely on easily-obtained information, like that coming from a (pre-existing) strong relation with a political leader, to choose a candidate.

Were most Latinos well informed about candidate Barack Obama's policy preferences and campaign? Did their pre-existing relation with former President Bill Clinton play a key role in the 2008 Democratic presidential primaries? According to the Latino Mass Media and the journalists, scholars and social activists that I interviewed, both aspects were present in this historical electoral process. Latinos were ill-informed about Barack Obama's political goals and had a steadily-marked preference for the Clintons. The other two major factors that may help explain the weak support that he received from Latinos in this process are related to the presence of interest-groups issues and racism practices, as will be indicated below.

AN OVERVIEW TO THE LATINO ELECTORATE AND THE 2008 DEMOCRATIC PRIMARIES

The Latino population is growing significantly by way of immigration flows, most of it unauthorized, and high birth rates. Hispanics are, in fact, the largest minority group in the United States. Suro, Fry and Passel (2005) underscore that these demographic factors shape the relationship between the size of the total population and the size of the electorate. Their study notes that the Hispanic population grew by 5.7 million persons between 2000 and 2004 (half of the increase in the total U.S. population) but the number of eligible voters, those who were both U.S. citizens and at least 18 years old, grew only by 2.1 million. All the same, no minority group has been as heavily courted by political parties and presidential candidates as Hispanics, as they are the strongest emerging political force in American politics (Nicholson, Pantoja and Segura 2006).

As mentioned above, the terms «Hispanics» and «Latinos» are used interchangeably in this paper. Both terms refer to those people who classified themselves in one of the specific 'Spanish,

Hispanic, or Latino' categories listed on the Census 2000 questionnaire - Mexican, Mexican American, Puerto Rican, or Cuban - as well as those who said that they were «other Spanish/Hispanic/Latino». This included/includes those whose origins are from Spain, the Spanish-speaking countries of Central and/or South America, the Dominican Republic, and people identifying themselves as Spanish, Spanish-American, Hispano, and so on.¹⁴

The Hispanic population is projected to rise to 59 million by 2030 and 81 million by 2050 (Pantoja, Ramirez and Segura 2001). The largest group making up the 'growing' Latino population is composed of people of Mexican origin. In terms of geographic distribution, the states where most Hispanics live are California, Texas, Florida and New York (see Tables 1 and 2), which always play a determinant role to win the presidential election.

The U.S. Census Bureau (2006) shows that as of July 1, 2006, 44.25 million Latinos – approximately 15% of the total population of about 300 million persons – live in the United States (see Tables 1 and 2). This state institution also indicates that between 2000 and 2006 Hispanics accounted for one-half of the nation's growth, and the Latino growth rate (24.3%) was more than three times the growth rate of the total population (6.1%).

Rank	State	Population Size
1	California	13,074,156
2	Texas	8,385,139
3	Florida	3,646,499
4	New York	3,139,456
5	Illinois	1,886,933

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/hispanic/

¹⁴ According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2000), origin can be viewed as the heritage, nationality group, lineage, or country of birth of the person or the person's ancestors before their arrival in the United States. Persons who identify their origin as Latino may be of any race. Grieco and Cassidy (2001) recall that in data collection, U.S. agencies are required to use a minimum of two ethnicities: «Hispanic or Latino» and 'Not Hispanic or Latino».

Type	Number	Percent
<i>Total</i>	44,252,278	100.0
Mexican	28,339,354	64.0
Puerto Rican	3,987,947	9.0
Cuban	1,520,276	3.4
Dominican	1,217,225	2.8
Central American	3,372,090	7.6
South American	2,421,297	5.5
Other Hispanic	3,394,089	7.7

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/hispanic/

Hispanics are the nation's fastest growing minority group. As mentioned above, they make up about 15% of the U.S. population. Their electoral clout continues to be undercut, nonetheless, by the fact that many of them are ineligible to vote, either because they are not U.S. citizens or not yet 18 years old (Taylor and Fry 2007). In any case, the Latino population comprises nearly 9%, 18.2 million persons, of the eligible electorate nationwide (Univision News, 06/08/2008). If past turnout trends persist, Latinos will make up about 6.5% of those citizens who actually turn out to vote in the 2008 presidential election (Taylor and Fry 2007).

Despite these apparently-modest numbers, no doubt Latinos will play a crucial role in the 2008 presidential election, as they are strategically located on the Electoral College map. Taylor and Fry (2007) recall that Hispanics constitute a sizable share of electorate in four of the six states that President George W. Bush carried by margins of five percentage points or fewer in 2004 – New Mexico (where Latinos make up 37% of the eligible electorate), Florida (14%), Nevada (12%) and Colorado (12%). As these social researchers assert, all four states are expected to be closely contested once again in November 2008.

Based on their extensively researched work, Taylor and Fry (2007) conclude that immigration (reform) deserves special attention, as it has become the most important issue for Hispanics since the last presidential election. They note that immigration still ranks, in importance for most Americans behind education, health care, the economy and crime, but it is the only issue that has risen sharply in importance for Hispanics since 2004.¹⁵

In the «Super Tuesday» primaries on February 5 and in the Texas primary on March 4, Hispanics voted for Hillary Clinton over Barack Obama by about two-to-one. Following exit polls from

¹⁵ Taylor and Fry (2007) highlight that some 79% of Hispanic registered voters now say that immigration is an extremely important issue in the 2008 presidential race; up from 63% who said the same thing in 2004.

CNN, Minushkin and Lopez (2008) show that Senator Clinton's biggest margin of victory among Latinos was in New York, where she drew 73% of the Hispanic vote. She also won 67% of the Latino vote in California and 66% in Texas (see Table 3).

In other Hispanic-vote-rich states handily carried by Senator Clinton, such as Arizona, New Jersey, New Mexico, Massachusetts, Nevada and Puerto Rico, Hispanics were critical to her margins of victory as well. Even in Illinois, which candidate Obama won, Obama and Clinton split the Latino vote (Martinez 2008).¹⁶ Hispanics, which are the fastest-growing segment of the U.S. electorate, proved in the 2008 Democratic presidential primaries the significance of their vote at the state level, which as a matter of fact is decisive to win presidential elections in the United States, given its Electoral College system. Regarding Latinos and their growing turnout, particularly in the «mega-states» of California and Texas, Senator Robert Menendez (Democrat - New Jersey) says that «the road to the White House comes through the Hispanic community» (Martinez 2008). One could say that Senator Menendez is exaggerating when he asserts that. In any case, candidate Obama will need to connect stronger with Hispanics - as Table 3 suggests - if he wants them on his side in November during the presidential election.

Table 3. Candidate Preference in 2008		
Democratic Presidential Primaries		
HISPANIC VOTE (%)		
State	Clinton	Obama
Nevada	64	26
Florida	59	30
Arizona	55	41
California	67	32
Illinois	49	50
Massachusetts	56	36
New Jersey	68	30
New Mexico	62	36
New York	73	26
Maryland	55	45
Texas	66	32
Puerto Rico	68	32

Source: www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2008/primaries/results/epolls/

¹⁶ Candidate Obama narrowly won the Hispanic vote in his home state of Illinois on «Super Tuesday» – 50% to Senator Clinton's 49% (see Table 3).

The above figures confirm that Latinos overwhelmingly supported Senator Clinton in the 2008 Democratic presidential primaries.¹⁷ According to a detailed analysis of exit polling data, Hillary Clinton would not have won in the nation's two biggest states - California and Texas - if Hispanics had not voted so heavily in her favor (Pew Hispanic Center 2008).

Senator Clinton would probably not have carried other states like New Mexico and Arizona, without strong Latino support (Martinez 2008). The case of New Mexico deserves special attention. In a tight race, Clinton won the state by only one percentage point.¹⁸ Among Latinos, nevertheless, Clinton's winning margin of votes was about nine times as great as her overall statewide vote lead. Non-Hispanics voted for candidate Obama 56% to 41%, whereas Latinos favored Clinton 62% to 36% (Pew Hispanic Center 2008). In short, Hillary Clinton obtained the solid support of the Hispanic electorate throughout the Democratic primaries and Barack Obama only won two states in which Latinos make up about 10% of registered voters (Colorado and his home state of Illinois), both by insignificant margins. Why did most Latinos not support Obama in the primaries? I intend to answer this controversial question by relying on recently-published press articles and texts on the topic, and the opinions of fifteen Latinos and Americans who have worked on Latino issues as academics and/or activists.

THE WEAK HISPANIC SUPPORT FOR BARACK OBAMA

«Hispanics, and I want to say this very carefully, have not shown a lot of willingness or affinity to support black candidates», asserted Sergio Bendixen, Senator Clinton's pollster and Latino expert, in an interview with Ryan Lizza of the New Yorker (Rodríguez 2008). Is this statement true? Are most Hispanics traditionally reluctant («racist») to support an African American candidate like Barack Obama?

Rodríguez (2008) called this controversial statement «the Clinton's Latino spin». He assures that the spin actually worked in Nevada, where pundits embraced the idea that Latino voters simply did not like the fact that Clinton's opponent was black. Andrea Guerrero (2008) notes that statements of this kind have helped fuel racial conflict and social tensions between African Americans and Latinos. Rodríguez (2008) suggests that Senator Clinton campaign's statement is far from being true. He argues that many African American big city mayors have received broad

¹⁷ It should be noted that even though Clinton won 59% in Florida, neither candidate actively campaigned in this state because of an intra-party dispute over the timing of the primary (Minushkin and Lopez 2008).

¹⁸ For a rundown of the turnout and candidate preferences of Latinos, see www.pewhispanic.org/files/reports/

Latino support over the last couple of decades. Lovato (2008) also recalls that the nation's last African American candidate of national stature - Jesse Jackson - defied the prevailing racial logic during the presidential primaries of 1988, when his Rainbow Coalition secured almost 50% of the Latino vote in Latino-heavy counties. Lovato's press article fed the debate on the presence-absence of racism among Latinos in the Democratic primaries, as he strongly denies that «Black-Latino» tensions exist in the United States.

Distinct reactions to Lovato's opinions were posted on the Huffington Post website¹⁹ as soon as he published his controversial article. Most people recognize that the Mass Media have fueled racial tensions in the country. An anonymous reader of Lovato states, in fact, that «*Latino vs. Black is just a media invention designed to assure mutual destruction between these two minority groups*». Other readers of Lovato believe that the excellent image of the Clintons among Hispanics was the main reason why they supported Clinton, but some others argue that racism has always influenced the Hispanic electorate. The following anonymous readers (opinions) summarize various reactions to Lovato's text as follows:

1- *«It is true that A LOT of Latinos look down on black people and look up to white people. This is not a myth or a made-up fact. It's the reality. And the reason why you don't see any Latino expert saying it, is because Latinos do not want to be seen on TV admitting this or be portrayed as racist. I have many Latino friends and they constantly offend black people.»*

2- *«I don't find his article persuasive. I have no doubt that there are many Hispanics willing to vote for a black person. But this article neglects to recognize that there is intense racism against blacks in some Latino communities, and that there is equally potent racism going the other way too. These tensions have intensified greatly since 1984 and particularly in recent years with low-grade race wars happening in some inner-city neighborhoods in my native LA. (...) Pretending that it is something other than unease with blacks - like Obama's experience - that lead to the dramatically uneven voting patterns by Hispanics is unsupported by anything other than the author's conjecture. No studies. No analysis of exit polling data. Just the author's optimistic, self-serving speculation. The sad reality is that we have a long way to go in this country on race, and new Americans only complicate these difficulties. Clinton has long-planned on exploiting Latino antipathy for blacks, and the Nevada results seem to indicate this was an effective strategy in the short term, repugnant though it may be. I continue to believe a racial explanation is the most likely reason for Latino voting patterns.»*

3- *«I was in Las Vegas at one of the caucuses and what I observed was great support and enthusiasm for Hillary Clinton among Latinos, men and women. It seemed to me that two things explained the support for Hillary. One was the affection for the Clintons. They looked at the Clinton years with a positive nostalgia and both of the Clintons are viewed by them as charismatic. The second component for the women at least is that they see Hillary as strong and powerful women who, like them, have persevered and they respect her for that.»*

¹⁹ See all comments to Lovato's article on <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/>

These opinions help explain the weak Latino support for candidate Obama in the 2008 primaries. Hispanics seem to have not eradicated racism. They also seem to see the African American community as a competing minority, thus producing (interest groups) tensions and conflict. And they profoundly respect what the Clintons tried to do and/or did for them in the past, which made it easier for Senator Hillary Clinton to receive their overwhelming support throughout the Democratic primaries.

Harry Pachon and Rodolfo de la Garza (2008) underscore that researchers should pay special attention to the name recognition that the Clintons enjoy in the Hispanic community. According to these authors, even at the height of the impeachment controversy, Bill Clinton had a 70% approval rating among Hispanic voters. In contrast, they add, Barack Obama is a relatively new face and voice for all but Illinois Hispanics.

Pachon and de la Garza (2008) think that for the majority of Latinos it is the political calculus of long-established relationships what really makes the difference. They recognize, however, that some Latinos cast their votes on the basis of «race.» Rebeca Logan, Director of Public Affairs Programming for the Hispanic Communications Network, also acknowledges that an important percentage of the Hispanic population and electorate is still racist and will not like to see an African American person like Obama leading the United States.²⁰

According to Marcela Sanchez (2008), how black people are portrayed on TV shows shapes the perception of Latinos, particularly in Mexico, which is by far the largest source of Latino immigrants to the United States, as shown above. Sanchez recalls that former Mexican President Vicente Fox once said that «Mexicans are doing jobs that even blacks don't want.» Amaya Ibarquengoitia recognizes that many Latinos are still racist. She thinks that «Obama's skin color will continue to exert a strong influence on the Hispanic vote.»²¹

Karen Juanita Carrillo refers to those Latino who are racist as *stealth racists*, meaning «those people who have that subliminal instinct to marry whiter and have lighter children.»²² Based on her research on Barack Obama and Latinos, Carrillo suggested I analyze in detail the controversy caused by Afro-Latino activist Roland Roebuck with the publication of his article «*Hispanos*,

²⁰ Logan expressed her opinion on racism among Latinos in an interview with Jorge Ramos of *Univision News* on June 6, 2008.

²¹ Amaya Ibarquengoitia. Mexican graduate student and social activist. Interview with the author. Washington, D.C., April 2008.

²² Karen Juanita Carrillo. Afro-Puerto Rican journalist and human rights activist. Interview with the author. New York, April 2008. Note: Carrillo is also a blogger. She has published her articles in many online newspapers.

Racismo y Obama («*Hispanics, Racism and Obama*»). In his text, Roebuck (2008) points out that he is not at all surprised at the massive lack of support for the candidacy of Barack Obama among Latinos.

Roebuck believes that most Latinos did not support Barack Obama because «the germ of racism has completely contaminated them.»²³ It happens at such a level, he notes, that «as a group, Hispanics would not tolerate the possibility of an African American person sitting in the White House.» Roebuck concludes his controversial article by underscoring that «Latinos are from countries where they never saw indigenous or Afro-descendants given much respect. In these countries the only people in charge have always been those with whiter skin.» That is why, he argues, «many Latino immigrants come to the United States with the ingrained belief that only white people can save them.»

Frances Negrón-Muntaner (2008), a Columbia University scholar, defends Roebuck's arguments in an article entitled «*If Obama wins, Blacks will advance*,» published in NYC's *El Diario*. In her text, Negrón-Muntaner notes the presence of racism in the lack of Hispanic support for Obama. She emphasizes that many Latinos she spoke with fear that if Obama won, his policies would be focused on helping African Americans. She concludes her text by stating that, «it's not surprising that many Latinos fear that a victory of Obama would lead to an insufferable wave of racial pride and race-based arrogance among African Americans.»²⁴

Reactions of all calibers to Negrón-Muntaner's opinion text were posted on *El Diario* website. Most readers recognize the existence of racial tensions between African Americans and Hispanics, but only few of these readers call for a «multiracial» integration in the United States. The following anonymous readers (opinions)²⁵ summarize most reactions to Negrón-Muntaner's opinion piece as follows:

1- «It is ironic! We are discriminated against by white people in this country, but we are racist as well. We permanently discriminate against the African American community. In my opinion, both Hispanics and African Americans should fight together for the respect of a multiracial society in which we all can live regardless of our color.»

²³ Roebuck, Roland. 02/07/2008. «*Hispanos, Racismo y Obama*.» *Metro Latino USA*. Note: the complete article can be found at <http://www.metrolatinousa.com/>

²⁴ Negrón-Muntaner, Frances. 03/05/2008. «*Si gana Obama, los negros se van a alzar*.» *El Diario*. Note: the electronic version of this article can be found at <http://www.eldiariiony.com/noticias>

²⁵ To see all opinions visit www.eldiariiony.com/noticias/detail.aspx?section=63&id=1824681&desc=OPINION. Note: The translations are mine.

2- *«First of all, it is not surprising at all that a person with the word 'Negrón' in her last name supports the Negroes. The real problem here is that we are always competing with the Negroes and fighting for the same resources and jobs. Both groups want to be respected by the white people. We must be sincere anyway. Latinos have achieved more positive things in this country than the Negroes (...). The Negroes, in fact, don't like to work hard because they don't have to fight to come to the U.S in order to succeed. I'm not racist but Obama has not said anything about how he would make things work better. If Clinton is not the nominee, I will definitely vote for McCain.»*

The lack of political information about Obama's goals seems to be evident among the Latino community. Most opinions also show that racial tensions between Latinos and African Americans are strong due to the «competing environment» under which they live. Barack Obama himself (2006) acknowledges that in Illinois, Latinos came to dominate low-wage work that had once gone to African Americans, fueling tensions between both minority groups. He suggests, however, that people should not exaggerate when it comes to discussing the magnitude of those tensions.

Rudolf Hommes (2008), an Ivy-League educated Colombian and presidential advisor, believes that even though racial prejudices are rapidly disappearing in the United States, they still exist and affect both Hispanics and African Americans. Hommes recently published a text entitled, «*Barack Obama: el fin del racismo?*» («*Barack Obama: the End of Racism?*») in *El Tiempo*, in which he notes that one of the reasons why Democrats seem to be divided is the racist environment that still affects society in the United States.²⁶ As expected, Latino readers reacted to his article in various ways. The following anonymous readers (opinions)²⁷ help explain how some Hispanics reproduce the «Latino racism» in the United States:

1- *«Blacks are often called 'African Americans' in the United States. This euphemism should not exist. All the same, what is really important is the fact that racist practices against blacks have decreased in the last decades significantly. Many white and Latino students, for example, have black friends and they have no problem in admiring black people.»*

2- *«The behavior of the colored Americans is simply embarrassing (...) I don't want to make generalizations but most colored people hate Latinos in the United States. Colored officers, for example, like humiliating Latino immigrants at airports. Most colored Americans are lazy and irresponsible, and want everything for free. They usually are the ones who steal things at work. They discriminate against Latinos all the time and don't want to accept that this is a country of*

²⁶ Hommes, Rudolf. 06/06/2008. «*Barack Obama: el fin del racismo?*» *El Tiempo*.

²⁷ To read all opinions go to www.eltiempo.com/eltiempoimpreso/edicionimpresa/opinion/2008-06-06/. Note: the translations are mine.

immigrants. Can you imagine Obama and his colored people leading the most powerful nation of the world? The problem is not even their color; it's their mentality; and Latinos know that (...) If Hillary is not the nominee, McCain will be our best option.»

The offensive lexicon that some Latinos use when referring to the African American community, helps underscore how «Latino racism» works. Demonstrating the actual impact of racism on the Hispanic vote nationwide, however, is not an easy task for scholars and turnout experts. The opinions of journalists, graduate students, political activists and ordinary citizens on this controversial issue, nonetheless, indicates not only that racial tensions between Latinos and African Americans still exists but also that these tensions influenced/influence the actual voting behavior of many Latinos in 2008.

It should be underlined that the weak Latino support for candidate Obama seems to be also due to interest groups-related issues and the lack of political information about Obama's goals. *Racism practices, interest groups-related issues and lack of political information* were, in fact, the most common factors (causes) that the people I interviewed mentioned, when they were asked to indicate why they believed that most Latinos did not support Barack Obama in the 2008 Democratic primaries.

The following eight interviewees seem to agree with the fact that scholars should not isolate only one factor (cause)²⁸ to explain the 'poor' Hispanic support that Obama received throughout this historical electoral process.

1- «I can't say which factor is prevalent but I think there are a host of issues by which Hillary has a bigger share of the support from the Hispanic electorate than Barack Obama: name recognition, loyalty, prior cultivation of the Latino vote by the Clintons, historical rifts between the Hispanic and Black communities, and yes, racism.» (Jorge Abeledo)²⁹

2- «I definitely think that race has been a huge issue in this electoral process for all demographics. It's a bit ironic to me that most Latinos, who have steadily been drifting to the Democratic Party for the last eight or nine years, indicate that they prefer McCain to Obama (and obviously have thus far supported Hillary in the primaries). I think there is considerable resentment right now between the African-American and Latino-American communities and I don't know necessarily what to attribute it to. Perhaps the African-Americans, who were this country's largest minority group for many decades, feel threatened by the Latinos who have overtaken them. Whatever the reason is, Obama certainly has to continue to reach out to the Latino community to win in November.» (Nathan Price)³⁰

²⁸ I also believe these factors offer the best explanation for the undeniable lack of Latino support for Obama.

²⁹ Jorge Abeledo. Argentinean-American scholar. Interview with the author. Washington, D.C., April 2008.

³⁰ Nathan Price. Graduate student and (Democratic) activist. Interview with the author. New York, April 2008.

3- *«I think one cannot ignore the existence of racism among Latinos, but I also think that there is an evident lack of familiarity on the part of some Latino groups about the work that Obama has done with Hispanics. I think that in Illinois, for example, Obama has a great deal of political support, but this is very specific to the region and the nationality of origin of these constituents (mostly Mexican Americans). I also think that the rising tension between African-American and Latino communities on the West coast may be impacting support for Obama in some of these communities.» (Judith Morrison)*³¹

4- *«African Americans and Latinos have been rivals for decades in the United States. They compete for the same jobs. African Americans feel threatened by Latinos and Latinos believe that African Americans underestimate their community. No doubt this racism is still present in the U.S. Also, I believe Hillary won the Latino vote (easily) because Latinos knew her very well, whereas they did not know Obama at all.» (Sergio Gómez)*³²

5- *«Racism may be one of the factors that explain the weak Latino support for Obama in the primaries, but I strongly believe that the Latino community supports Hillary because of Bill. Bill Clinton did a lot of outreach to Latinos and I think they are both grateful and expect the same from Hillary.» (Christina Schultz)*³³

6- *«Racism and lack of information about Obama affect the Latino vote. I cannot deny such racism, as I hear racist comments from (Latino) friends all the time. In addition, African Americans and Latinos are competing groups, which also affect their vote.» (Joel Campos)*³⁴

7- *«I have read many articles about Obama and Latinos, and most of them assert that racism is affecting this electoral process. Those texts also point out that Latinos do not know much (or anything at all) about Obama. This seems to be true, as Obama did not campaign in many counties where Latinos are a strong political force. In contrast, the Latino community knows the Clintons better for obvious reasons.» (Ramnerys Molina)*³⁵

8- *«One main thing that I hear over and over is that Latinos are familiar with Senator Clinton and that Obama is new to them. However, he is just as new to the Blacks and Whites who are voting for him, so that is not a convincing argument. I do think that both racism and interest groups issues should be taken into account when analyzing the weak Latino support for Obama across the country.»(Lori Robinson)*³⁶

³¹ Judith Morrison. Expert on ethnic minorities. Interview with the author. Washington, D.C., April 2008.

³² Sergio Gómez. Correspondent for *El Tiempo*. Interview with the author. New York, May 2008.

³³ Christina Schultz. Hispanic-American researcher. Interview with the author. New York, April 2008.

³⁴ Joel Campos. Peruvian-American scholar. Interview with the author. Washington D.C., April 2008.

³⁵ Ramnerys Molina. Dominican-American scholar. Interview with the author. New York, April 2008.

³⁶ Lori Robinson. African American journalist. Interview with the author. Washington, D.C. April 2008.

Except for Tania Camacho, who thinks that «*Hispanics have fed the 'Latino racism' by reproducing (American) racist practices,*»³⁷ other interviewees do not pay much attention to the 'race issue' when indicating their thoughts about the weak Hispanic support for Obama in the Democratic presidential primaries. They believe that Senator Clinton overwhelmingly won the Latino support in these primaries essentially because of her strong commitment to reforming the health care system and the good political image that the Clintons have always had among Latinos.³⁸ A last interviewee and social activist from Colombia, Hector Villamil, suggests that «religious and conservative issues» may have also influenced the Hispanic vote in this electoral process. We should keep in mind, Villamil notes, that «*most Latinos are very conservative and they may have seen Obama as too liberal.*»³⁹

Based on the detailed analysis of press articles, academic works and other texts, I find it difficult to prove Villamil's claim, even when if it is true that many Hispanic persons are conservative and may be reluctant to elect an extremely-liberal candidate. In any case, this paper has shown that the evidently weak Latino support for Barack Obama was/is basically due to racism and interest group-related issues and to lack of political information among Hispanics about his major goals.

HISPANIC MASS MEDIA AND ELECTORAL CHALLENGES FOR BARACK OBAMA

On February 8, 2008, Nativo López, the national president of the Mexican American Political Association, said to a *Los Angeles Times* reporter: «*My prediction is that McCain will do very, very well among Latino voters.*»⁴⁰ López had just endorsed Obama when he made this statement. López predicted that John McCain will surpass President Bush's support among Latinos. Froma Harrop (2008), an expert on Latinos, supports Lopez's prediction: «*Latinos have been a Clinton constituency but they are amenable to voting for a friendly Republican.*»⁴¹

Harrop notes that the main problem for the Democratic Party is that Obama's backers are reliable Democrats, whereas Hillary Clinton's are unreliable Democrats. She underscores that

³⁷ Tania Camacho. Costa Rican Fulbright scholar. Interview with the author. New York, April 2008.

³⁸ Ana Jaure (Chilean-American activist), Rafael Villa (Colombian scholar), Alejandra Osejo (Mexican activist) and Maye Suárez (Colombian-American scholar) Note: I interviewed them by email in early May 2008.

³⁹ Héctor Villamil. Colombian social activist. Interview with the author. New York, May 2008.

⁴⁰ *Los Angeles Times*. 02/08/2008.

⁴¹ Harrop, Froma. 05/08/2008. «*A Perfect Calm for John McCain.*» www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2008/05

more than 50% of the (Clinton) Hispanic voters in Indiana, for instance, said they would not vote for Obama in the presidential election, which is a very bad sign. How may Obama overcome the lack of Latino support? Obama will need to strengthen as much as possible his relationship with both the Latino electorate and Mass Media. Martinez (2008) points out that Obama is unknown to Latinos. This journalist asserts that Obama, nevertheless, obtained the endorsement of *La Opinion*, the largest Spanish-language newspaper in the United States.

Obama needs to get the crucial support of the Latino Mass Media in order to reach the Hispanic electorate. As Subervi (2008) notes, the impact of the Hispanic Mass Media on the actual voting behavior of most Hispanics is significant, as about half of Latinos still prefer to see their news in Spanish. Obama will surely have to work, for instance, with *Univision*⁴² if he wants to see more Hispanic voters on his side by November. Finally, Obama will have to heavily rely on Senator Clinton to gain the Latino vote, while spreading his «own» idea that both Hispanics and African Americans share a host of challenges and should continue to find common cause in their politics.

CONCLUSION

In the 2008 Democratic presidential primaries, Senator Barack Obama did poorly with Hispanics - the strongest emerging political force in the United States - obtaining only about one in three of their actual votes. Obama's Democratic rival, Senator Hillary Clinton, was overwhelmingly supported by Latinos throughout the country.

Three factors help explain why the Latino population did not vote for Obama. First, racism practices among Hispanics have not yet been eradicated. This racism, which is largely imported from Latin America, has inevitably fed racial conflict and social tensions between Hispanics and African Americans. Second, Latinos tend to defend their specific interests as a group and adopt radical positions that inject more conflict into the political process. Many Latinos, in fact, see the African American community as their main competing minority. This reality occurs the other way around too. Third, the lack of information about Barack Obama's goals among Latinos is notorious. In contrast, Senator Clinton took advantage of her name recognition and long history with Latinos to win some of the most important states, including the top four states by Latino population size (California, Texas, New York and Florida) with the determinant support, of course, of the Hispanic electorate.

⁴² The Miami-based Univision network is the largest Spanish-language network in the United States and is also viewed in 13 Latin American countries, including Mexico. Univision is seen by as many Hispanic viewers as the six biggest English-language networks put together. <http://www.vdare.com/awall/ramos.htm>

Obama will need to obtain the crucial support of the Latino Mass Media in order to gain the Latino vote. The influence of the (Hispanic) Mass Media on Latino politics is strong and will probably continue to play a decisive role in the 2008 presidential election. Racism and racial tensions will not disappear by November 2008, but if Obama invites both Latinos and African Americans to find common cause and interests, he will help eliminate the social tensions and racial conflict affecting both groups.⁴³ This paper is one of the first works of its kind that gives consistent explanations to the three core factors that are discussed in the text, while contributing to the study of the Latino minority as the strongest emerging electorate in American politics.

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⁴³ As I mentioned in the first page, I wrote this article in the spring of 2008. Former Senator Barack Obama won the presidential election on November 4, 2008. Most Latino voters supported him throughout the United States. As expected, the Latino electorate played a substantive role in major victories that Obama had in decisive states like Florida. How was this change possible? Further research will be needed to accurately answer this question. In any case, researchers will have to analyze the impact of the (Media) messages that the Obama campaign sent to the Latino public in English and Spanish. As Univision News (11/09/2008) notes, Barack Obama spent more money than John Kerry and George Bush together to share information with Latinos about his political goals in order to gain their vote. Also, there can be no doubt that his political strategy was successful in terms of pointing out that all Americans, regardless of their racial, ethnic or socio-economic origin, should be united to overcome the financial crisis and other problems that the United States is currently facing. The support that the Clintons gave to Obama may have also played a crucial role for him to gain Hispanic votes. Again, there is still much research to be performed in order to explain the Hispanic voting behavior in this (historical) electoral process. Racism among Latinos and other groups has not come to an end yet in the United States, but the election of Obama represents an enormous step to eradicate this problem, and Latinos have helped demonstrate that he was right. People can change and change is possible.

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