**The Latino Vote**

**Olivier Richomme\***

**\*** Olivier Richomme is Assistant Professor of American Civilization at Université Lyon II. He has written numerous articles on race and citizenship in the United States, and on the Obama Presidency. He has published with Vincent Michelot *Le Bilan d’Obama* at Presses de Sciences Po in 2012.

The Latino population is projected to reach 56.6 million people in 2016, representing the largest racial minority in the country (17%). This fast growing segment of the population offers a potential electorate (that is citizens over 18) of 27 million people for the upcoming presidential election. However, the number of Latinos actually casting a vote in 2012 was estimated to 11.2 million people. One of the reasons is that the registration rate for this community is fairly low and the participation is rate did not reach 50% in 2008 (49.9%) or in 2012 (48%). Registration drives are particularly important for this community and legislation impending these drives is particularly harmful. The Latino population is much younger than the rest of the country which explains its low population of people old enough of vote (and it also accounts for religion being less of a factor as new generations tend to be less religious). Besides, this population contains a lot of foreign-born immigrants (35% overall, a decreasing but still important number) that do not necessarily seek or obtain citizenship status. Despite all of this, this community is crucial for the future of American politics. First of all, the demographic evolution of this group indicates that it represents the single most important “reserves” of votes. Second, the concentration of this population in crucial battle ground states renders their courting all the more important for both parties. Third, the partisan advantage for the Democrats in the two most recent election cycles was two-to-one. This high partisan polarization goes hand in hand with high racial polarization, that is the fact that Latinos tend to vote for candidates of their community when given the opportunity. The Republican party has instrumentalized the fear of the “brownization” of the nation for short-term electoral success (voter restriction, no amnesty for illegal immigrants…) and the Democratic party has been more inclusive. Therefore these two trends have reinforced each other: more Latino candidates and appointees on the Democratic side and more Latinos voting for Democratic candidates. It will take the Republican party many election cycles to reverse that trend. The GOP has no choice but to take into consideration this evolution of the American electorate if it wants to be relevant again during the future presidential elections.

--