

Rene Moraida

Dr. Raymond A. Smith

Columbia University POLS 3245.001

Posted: 9 August 2011

### **Issue Brief: Hispanic/Latino Americans and Officeholding**

#### **Key Words:**

Hispanic/Latino Americans, Officeholding, Elected Officials, Governorships, Mayor, U.S. Congress, Latino/Latina President, Marco Rubio, Latino Democrat, Latino Republican

(Note: the terms Hispanic and Latino are used interchangeably and denote the same meaning in this issue brief, though “Latino” is more common in popular usage).

#### **Description:**

This issue brief introduces some of the overall trends related to Latinos and office holding. It also lists some of the notable Latinos that have been recently elected to public office, at the mayoral level, governorship or Congressional office. This issue brief *does not* focus on U.S. Census data demographics of the Latino population nor focuses on analysis of the Latino electorate. Notable Latino Americans such as Henry Cisneros, Alberto Gonzalez, and most recently Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor have either been appointed by the President to cabinet positions or nominated for other government positions yet not elected, with the notable exception of Cisneros, who was mayor of the City of San Antonio, Texas.

#### **Key Points:**

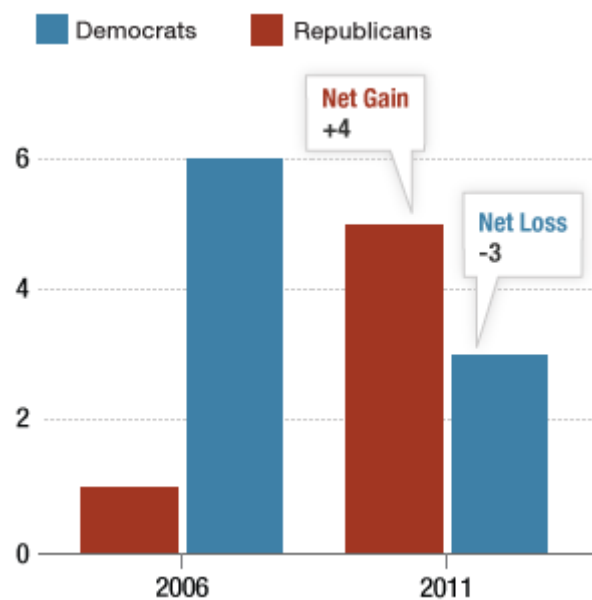
- The formal participation of Latinos in elected politics is steadily rising and the number of Hispanic Elected Officials (HEOs) are expected to increase in the future
- The numbers of Latino Democrats outnumber Latino Republicans 11-1, but Republicans are making gains
- The Hispanic elected officials (HEOs) hold office at all levels of government, and most come from states with large Latino populations. Los Angeles, the second-largest U.S. city is governed by a Mexican-American mayor
- The gender divide has made progress, we see an increase in the overall number of females seeking political office, specifically for this ethnoracial group, New Mexico currently has the first Latina governor
- The 2010 election of a young Cuban-American to the U.S. Senate, Marco Rubio, sparked immediate political chatter of a future run in presidential politics, though the country has not yet had its first Latino President.
- Overall, Latinos have small representation in the Senate but are well represented in the U.S. Congress

### **Issue Brief**

The number of Latinos holding elected office is rising. The National Association of Latino Elected Officials, or NALEO, has compiled a complete directory of Latino Elected Officials. According to NALEO, “In the last 15 years, there has been a 53% increase in the total number of Latinos serving in elected office from 3,743 in 1996 to 5,739 in 2010” (“NALEO”). As we will see below, NALEO also notes that, “Latino elected officials tended to be concentrated in the

Southwest. The top four states with the largest number of Latino elected officials were Texas, California, New Mexico, and Arizona. However, there was rapid growth in regions outside the Southwest, including Illinois, New Jersey, and states which have emerging Latino populations” (NALEO”). Thus, while we can not predict the outcome of future elections, we can forecast and hypothesize that the number of Latinos seeking elected office will grow in other areas of the country, including the Northeast, as more Latino voters migrate to those areas.

In terms of party affiliation, Latino Democratic officeholders outnumber Republicans in elected office by a margin of 11-1, according to NALEO and reported by National Public Radio (“National Public Radio”). The election of the first Hispanic to the governorship in Nevada, Brian Sandoval, and the first Latina Republican governor in New Mexico, indicate some shifts. NPR finds that “[s]ince 2006, the number of Hispanic Democratic officeholders has shrunken by nearly 2 percent. Meanwhile, the number of Hispanic Republicans in office has increased 22.5 percent” (“National Public Radio”). Image Source: NAHEO

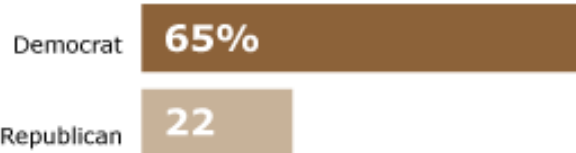


Minorities in general have had poor representation in the Senate yet the numbers are significantly larger in the U.S. House of Representatives. According to the research and advocacy group Ethnic Majority, who tracks the numbers of minorities, only two Senators of Hispanic origin are currently serving, the Democrat Robert Menezes of New Jersey and the Republican Marco Rubio of Florida. The House however, has 30 current Latino elected officials.

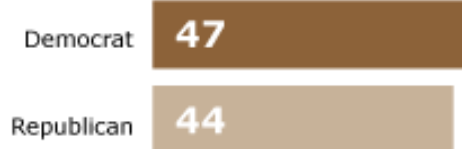
A 2010 Pew Hispanic Center poll, found that Latinos are more likely to favor Democratic candidates for Congressional office, 65 percent in favor of Democrats compared to the 22 percent for Republicans. However, identified Republican Latinos were more likely to actually go out to the polls and vote over Democrat Latinos (“Latinos and the 2010 Elections”).

### Registered Voter Preference For Congress

#### LATINOS



#### ALL



Sources: Pew Hispanic Center

Trends indicate that the number of Hispanic Elected Officials, called HEOs, by the American Political Science Association, will increase. The report finds the “Latino populations is geographically concentrated and rapidly growing in numbers. This means constituencies for Latino candidates will grow” (“Latino Participation, Partisanship and Officeholding”). Other

reasons cited for a predicted increase include single-member districts that are predominately Latino, an overall increased awareness of the Latino electorate, as well as term-limits for as created opportunities for Latinos to “win various open seats” (“Latino Participation, Partisanship and Officeholding”).

Some of the most notable Latino Americans in elected politics in the recent past and present include Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, Former New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson, New Mexico Governor Susana Martinez (the first Latina governor), Governor Brian Sandoval of Nevada (the first Hispanic governor in Nevada), and U.S. Senator Marco Rubio of Florida.



**Image Sources:**

[http://www.governor.state.nm.us/Meet\\_Governor\\_Martinez.aspx](http://www.governor.state.nm.us/Meet_Governor_Martinez.aspx) (State of New Mexico Office of the Governor)

<http://rubio.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/photo-gallery> (Office of Marco Rubio, U.S. Senator for Florida)

2002-2009-fpc.state.gov (Former New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson, courtesy U.S. Department of State)

Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa (Photo Credit Associated Press)

Graph Republican Gains, NAHEO/NPR

Graph “Registered Voter Preference for Congress” Pew Hispanic Center

#### Works Cited

National Association of Latino Elected Officials: <http://www.naleo.org/directory.html>

**Latinos and the 2010 Elections: Strong Support for Democrats; Weak Voter Motivation**

<http://pewhispanic.org/reports/report.php?ReportID=127>

“Latino Participation, Partisanship, and Office Holding” Author: Rodney Hero, F. Chris Garcia, John Garcia, Harry Parchon ,  
Issue: September 2000, Journal: PS: Political Science & Politics

<http://www.apsanet.org/imgtest/PSSept00LatinoParticipation.pdf>

**National Public Radio, “Republicans Make Gains With Latino Candidates”**

<http://www.npr.org/2011/07/25/138602984/republicans-make-gains-with-latino-candidates>

Ethnic Majority: <http://www.ethnicmajority.com/congress.htm>

#### Useful Websites

National Association of Latino Elected Officials: <http://www.naleo.org/>

Pew Hispanic Center: <http://pewhispanic.org/>

The Tomas Rivera Policy Institute: <http://www.trpi.org/>

Congressional Hispanic Caucus: <http://chc.gonzalez.house.gov/>

U.S. Census Bureau – Hispanic Population of the United States:  
<http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/hispanic/hispanic.html>

League of United Latin American Citizens: <http://lulac.org/>