

# Hispanic Muscle in the 1996 Elections

## *How much and for whom?*

by David Simcox

Even before the votes were recounted, immigration expansionists proclaimed Democrat Loretta Sanchez Brixey's narrow victory over long-seated Republican Congressman Robert Dornan in Orange County, California as a "Hispanic backlash" against restrictionism and a warning to Republicans, and other skeptics about immigration, of growing Hispanic voting strength.

As a *New York Times* editorial observed it, the growing Asian and Hispanic electorate in Orange was looking for something more than the nostrums of the right wing — immigrant bashing did not prove to be a magic formula in the election.

Paul Gigot of the *Wall Street Journal* and Linda Chavez, in the *New York Times*, saw Sanchez's victory as a warning shot to the Republican party to back off its support for immigration reform or risk similar punishment from rising Hispanic voting power. [Editor's note: See the articles by Chavez and Gigot on pages 83 and 86 respectively.]

But other interpretations of Dornan's defeat were less tendentious. A *New York Times* reporter, diverging from the *Times'* editorialists and pundits, reported on December 18 that Sanchez's staff believed that Dornan's vulnerability stemmed from his ineffectiveness as a congressman. Sanchez, he noted, campaigned on local issues of jobs and crime, not immigration.

Columnists Jack Germond and Jules Witcover noted Dornan's loss "could not be attributed to the outpouring of Hispanic Americans alone. The

demographics of his district did not change dramatically in the past two years." Rather, they concluded, Dornan's constituents had been "surprised" by what they found out about him during his 1996 run for the Presidency.

The record hardly shows Dornan was a leading "immigrant basher." While he was often tactless toward minorities, on the Hill he was not outspoken on immigration, did not co-sponsor the House bill, and was absent for the final vote on it. *National Review* editor John O'Sullivan even called Dornan a "strong supporter of the *Wall Street Journal's* pro-immigration line."

O'Sullivan himself found that Hispanics in the 1996 elections had reverted to their traditional tendency to vote overwhelmingly Democratic — thus the Clinton administration's acquiescence in high immigration and promotion of mass naturalizations. His concern was that the Republican party might mistakenly conclude from Dornan's defeat that it could win over Hispanics from the Democratic column with a generous immigration stance of its own.<sup>1</sup>

### One Election in One District Does Not a Trend Make

The low turn-out in Sanchez's defeat of Dornan suggests his customary backers voted unenthusiastically. But the vote for Sanchez hardly indicates high Hispanic mobilization. In a district that is half Hispanic, she mustered fewer than 50,000 votes — less than half the average vote of California's successful non-Hispanic House candidates and well below most other victorious Hispanic candidates.

Beware of conclusions from a single congressional race about a presumed Hispanic backlash or about the political liabilities of restrictionism. A broader look at the election performances of major immigration reform advocates in the House suggests the opposite conclusion — support for sound

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**Table 1**  
**Election performances of Texas congressmen co-sponsoring immigration reform**  
**in 1994 and 1996, with 1992 Hispanic percentage in districts.**

Member of Congress	District % Hisp. (1992)	'94 Vote (000s)	% of '94 Total Vote	'96 Vote (000s)	% of '96 Total Vote
Smith (R)	14.1	158.3	90.0	205.8	76.0
Bryant (D)	17.9	61.3	50.0	Ran for	Senate
Bonilla (R)**	63.0	72.8	62.0	101.3	62.0
Archer (R)	11.9	Unopposed		152.0	81.0
Johnson (R)	6.0	157.0	91.0	142.3	73.0
Reyes (D)*	70.4			90.3	71.8
Stenholm (D)	17.2	83.5	54.0	99.5	52.0

\* Not a co-sponsor. Included for comparison purposes only.

\*\* Voted to table legal immigration reform.

Source of election results for this and subsequent tables:  
*New York Times*, November 7, 1994 and November 10, 1996

immigration policy remains sound politics. A broader view will also give a more accurate measure of actual Hispanic voting strength and test the underlying assumption that Hispanics are uniformly for expansion of immigration.

## **Two Hispanic Immigration Reformers Run Well**

Representative Henry Bonilla, a Republican from a Texas border district that is 63 percent Hispanic,<sup>2</sup> co-sponsored the House immigration reform bill. Bonilla went on to win 62 percent of the vote to beat a Democratic Hispanic challenger in November. While Bonilla's share of the vote was the same as in 1994, his vote total was 39 percent higher.

Democratic newcomer Silvestre Reyes rolled-up 70 percent of the vote in defeating a Hispanic rival in the 70 percent-Hispanic El Paso, Texas district. Reyes, a former senior Border Patrol official, became popular by designing and successfully executing "Operation Blockade," which has sharply cut illegal entries in the El Paso border sector.

## **Reform Co-Sponsors Run Well, Even in Hispanic-influenced Districts**

Non-Hispanic Congressmen active in pushing immigration reform suffered little damage in the

elections, even in districts with significant Hispanic minorities, particularly if the offsetting drag of an unpopular Republican presidential candidate is taken into account.

Of the 39 Congressmen co-sponsoring immigration reform in June 1995, only North Carolina Republican

Congressman Fred Heineman lost in the general election, in a district with a negligible Hispanic vote.

Lamar Smith, architect of the immigration reform bill and chairman of the House Immigration Sub-Committee, running in a south Texas district that is 14 percent Hispanic, won 30 percent more votes than in 1994, polling more than any other Texas congressional victor.

The tables on these pages compare the 1994 and 1996 election performances of Texas Congressmen who co-sponsored the House immigration reform bill.

All the candidates for House seats in Table 1 were re-elected. For those in contested elections in 1994, all increased their total vote take, but all showed some decline in their percentage of the total vote, in part reflecting a voter turnout that was about one-fifth heavier than in 1994's off-year voting. Republican candidates also suffered from lack of voter appeal at the top of their ticket.

## **Florida and California Districts Support Immigration Reform Backers**

In Florida, Republican co-sponsors McCollum, Canady and Foley were all re-elected with over 62 percent of the vote. Also winning re-election with 62 percent was Clay Shaw, a strong supporter of

**Table 2**  
**Election performance in 1994 and 1996 of California congressmen**  
**co-sponsoring immigration reform, with percent Hispanic in districts**

Member of Congress	% Hispanic in District (1992)	'94 Vote (000s)	% of '94 Total Vote	'96 Vote (000s)	% of '96 Total Vote
Gallegly (R)	30.0	99.0	66.0	98.4	59.0
Bono (R)	28.1	87.7	56.0	97.5	57.0
Rohrabacher(R)	14.8	116.2	69.0	113.8	61.0
Bilbray (R)	12.8	83.7	49.0	94.8	52.0
Moorhead (R)	20.6	75.6	52.0	Retired	
Hunter (R)	22.6	99.8	64.0	103.2	65.0
Beilenson(D) ****	13.5	84.0	49.0	Retired	
Condit (D)**	26.0	79.8	65.0	98.5	66.0
Herger (R)	6.0	131.8	64.0	131.7	61.0
Cunningham (R)	13.6	124.6	67.0	128.0	65.0
Baker (R)***	8.7	126.3	59.0	121.3	47.0
Dornan*(R)	50.0	46.4	57.0	41.3	46.0
Packard	17.2	132.3	73.0	128.1	65.0

\* Not a co-sponsor; entered for comparison purposes only

\*\* Voted to table legal immigration reform

\*\*\* Defeated

\*\*\*\* Voted against final bill

immigration reform in California.

Altogether, 34 Congressmen were rated by U.S. Border Control, a non-profit immigration reform organization, as having perfect scores in supporting immigration reform on its seven most critical votes in the 104th Congress, including the decisions to remove legal immigration reform from the bill and to make an automated worker verification system voluntary. Fourteen of them were from California. Of the 34 members, only three lost in 1996 — Baker and Seastrand in California and Metcalf in Washington state.

Was there a Hispanic tide, as colorfully predicted in some media? Did Hispanic voters turn out in bigger numbers for the House voting?

With voter registrations up among newly minted citizens,

immigration reform, though not a co-sponsor of the bill, who successfully pushed welfare cuts for immigrants in the welfare reform law he helped shepherd to enactment in 1996.

The picture was similar for California representatives who co-sponsored immigration reform. All but one were re-elected. Five out of 9 increased their share of the vote over 1994. In the five districts that are over 15 percent Hispanic, four of the non-Hispanic incumbents held or increased their share of the vote.

Elton Gallegly, in a district 30 percent Hispanic, saw his share of the vote slip from 66 percent in 1994 to 59 percent in 1996, though his vote turnout was the same. But Sonny Bono, with a Hispanic constituency almost as large as Gallegly's, gained in both percentage and number of votes. Brian Bilbray, who previously had sponsored an even more restrictive immigration bill, increased his share of the vote. These outcomes hardly show that Hispanic voters systematically punished the backers of

Hispanics increased their share of the total vote cast nationally by about one third, but from a small base. Now more than 9 percent of the U.S. population, Hispanics moved up from three percent of the vote cast in 1994 to four percent in 1996. They remain easily the most underrepresented minority group in the nation's voter turn-out. By comparison, African-Americans, with 12 percent of the total population, cast 10 percent of the vote nationally in 1996, while the Asian-American vote is proportional to the Asian share of the population.

Table 3 shows the increases between 1994 and 1996 in Hispanic turnout in the Congressional districts in seven states with Hispanic incumbents, and compares that performance with that of non-Hispanic candidates. While the percentage increases in the winning vote and total vote are generally larger than in Non-Hispanic districts, the table also makes clear that the average Hispanic contender can still win a Congressional seat with far fewer votes than his Anglo counterpart.

**Table 3**  
**Voting performances of Hispanic and Non-Hispanic Winning House Candidates**  
**Compared for 7 States with Hispanic Congressmen, 1994-1996**

Hispanic/Non-Hispanic Incumbent	Districts	1994 Winner Vote (000s)	1994 Total Vote (000s)	1996 Winner Vote (000s)	1996 Total Vote (000s)	%Total Vote Change 1994-96
<b>Arizona</b>						
Hispanic	1	59.9	96.3	78.1	115.6	20.0
Non-Hispanic	5	119.0	192.6	186.0	222.3	15.4
<b>California</b>						
Hispanic	5	45.5	70.1	57.9	82.2	17.3
Non-Hispanic	47	93.3	154.6	106.9	164.1	6.1
<b>Illinois</b>						
Hispanic	1	95.4	145.7	81.3	86.9	38.8
Non-Hispanic	19	98.2	150.5	135.8	208.3	38.4
<b>New Jersey</b>						
Hispanic	1	67.2	94.6	110.2	134.1	41.8
Non-Hispanic	12	103.5	156.7	126.9	197.6	26.1
<b>New Mexico</b>						
Hispanic	1	99.2	160.9	123.9	179.8	11.7
Non-Hispanic	2	99.7	145.8	88.6	154.6	6.0
<b>New York</b>						
Hispanic	2	47.7	50.2	72.3	78.3	56.0
Non-Hispanic	29	100.4	150.8	114.4	175.0	16.0
<b>Texas</b>						
Hispanic	6	63.7	102.4	88.4	134.8	31.6
Non-Hispanic	29	97.8	151.8	112.2	178.8	17.7
<b>Weighted Averages of the Seven States</b>						
Hispanic	16	54.1	82.0	77.7	105.0	29.4
Non-Hispanic	138	98.3	154.4	117.3	180.0	16.6

(Note: Florida has two congressional districts held by Hispanics, Cuban-American Republicans Ileana Ros-Lehtinen and Lincoln Diaz-Balart. They are not included in this chart because both were unopposed in 1994 and 1996, allowing no basis for comparison on voter turn-out.)

The lessons of the numbers are clear. Congressmen closely identified with immigration reform suffered little damage for that reason and generally performed well in the 1996 elections. The outcomes in heavily Hispanic districts show no consistent Hispanic voting patterns on candidates

because of their stand on immigration reform. Democratic Congressman Howard Berman, running in California's 26th district, which is 53 percent Hispanic, voted for the final House bill and still increased his share of the vote from 63 percent in 1994 to 66 percent in 1996.

Hispanics in general showed some gains in voting power, though they remain by far the most electorally passive of all ethnic groups. Hispanic Congressmen as a rule represent their districts with very modest mandates indeed. The three persons taking seats in the House of Representatives with the fewest votes in their favor are Congresspersons Xavier Becerra and Lucille Roybal-Allard of inner city Los Angeles and Nydia Velazquez of the Bronx.

While Hispanic candidates increased their share of the vote in their districts by nearly twice the percentage of their non-Hispanic counterparts (29.4 percent vs. 16.6 percent), even that performance becomes less impressive in light of nearly 600,000 new naturalizations since 1994, bilingual ballots, motor-voter registration, and the disproportionate percentages of citizen Hispanic youth who are now attaining voting age compared to other ethnic populations. **TSC**

<sup>1</sup> John O'Sullivan, "Electing the peoples," *National Review*, December 23, 1996.

<sup>2</sup> All Hispanic population data on congressional districts are from *Congressional Quarterly*, "Congressional Districts in the 1990s," Washington, 1993.



# Election Point and Counterpoint Number One

## A Hispanic Political Tide?

by **Linda Chavez**

**B**ob Dole received a smaller proportion of the Hispanic vote than any Republican presidential candidate in 25 years, and that is bad news for the GOP.

Hispanics are one of the fastest-growing segments of the population. About 9 percent of the population today, they will likely be the largest minority group in the United States in the next decade or two.

Hispanics are both socially conservative and increasingly

middle class, and, in recent years, far more likely than blacks to vote Republican. In 1984, Ronald Reagan won almost 40% of the Hispanic vote.

This year, however, only 21% voted for Bob Dole. His record of support for Hispanics could not overcome their growing suspicion that the GOP is becoming the anti-immigrant party.

Last year's Congressional debate on reducing legal immigration, led by Alan Simpson in the Senate and Lamar Smith in the House,

didn't help. Neither did the recently enacted limits on welfare benefits for legal immigrants, which Republicans supported. And too many Republicans have been quick to fan the nativist flames, blaming immigrants for taking American jobs and increasing crime.

Though the vast majority of Hispanic voters were born here, and though many of them share concerns about illegal immigration, they fear that increasing antipathy toward newcomers may reflect anti-

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# GOP Wizards Miss the Point on Immigration

by **Samuel Francis**

**S**omewhere over the rainbow, the wizards of the Republican party are

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gathering to ponder the real meaning of the 1996 election, and as usually happens in the Republican zone of Rainbow Land, the wizards have managed to miss the point completely. Last week, at least two wizards came up with exactly the wrong lessons for the GOP to follow on immigration reform.

Wizard Number One, Linda Chavez, chimed in with a column in *The New York Times* arguing that the party ought to shuck any inclinations it harbors of restricting immigration and "resist those who want to

continue the fight to cut back legal immigration." But of course Miss Chavez is always arguing for more immigration and less opposition to it.

Miss Chavez is sort of the Stupid Party's Chiquita Banana, the token Hispanic female whose job it is to be splashed across Republican billboards to prove the party is not as backward and benighted as its foes claim. When Miss Chavez says she's for more immigration, that's like Bob Dornan saying he's for more bombers.

Then there was Wizard

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