

## **2008-2009 Immigration Update 1**

September 26, 2008

### **What the World Wants to Know**

In its September 26<sup>th</sup> edition, The New York Times asked several foreign leaders and political observers/analysts what questions they would pose to the two presidential candidates. Former Mexican President Vicente Fox raised this question related to immigration, which would be a good focus for investigation by students examining issues in the context of the election:

Free trade and immigration have made the United States the world's richest nation. But many of your country's friends worry that you may react to the current financial crisis, and to a rise in protectionist sentiment and immigrant-bashing, by turning inward. As president, would you work to allow freer movement of guest workers and trade in our hemisphere? Would you support the continuation and expansion of the North American Free Trade Agreement? Mexico is a thriving democracy that buys more goods and products from the United States than do the four leading economies of Europe combined, while President Felipe Calderón leads an all-out war on narco-traffickers to make our country safer. Given this progress, do you support the \$1.4 billion package to fight narco-terrorism that Presidents Bush and Calderón proposed last year? Shouldn't we mutually strengthen our countries, rather than feuding about issues that divide us, like immigration?

### **Obama, McCain, and Immigration**

Since their party conventions, Senators Obama and McCain have had little to say about the topic of immigration. While it is impossible to say for sure how many times they have addressed the topic, analysis of news stories and press releases on McCain's website suggest that he has talked about immigration once in September, using it as an example of his ability to work with both Democrats and Republicans. The remarks were made at an Irish-American town meeting in Scranton, Pennsylvania (<http://www.johnmccain.com/Informing/News/NewsReleases/f4bf6441-70d3-4d9f-a397-24dc1b8ce288.htm>). Analysis of news stories and press releases on Obama's website suggests he last talked about immigration policy in New Mexico in mid-August ([http://www.barackobama.com/2008/08/19/obama\\_talks\\_about\\_immigration.php](http://www.barackobama.com/2008/08/19/obama_talks_about_immigration.php)). Of course, both candidates do have official positions on immigration: McCain's can be found at <http://www.johnmccain.com/Informing/Issues/68db8157-d301-4e22-baf7-a70dd8416efa.htm>, Obama's at <http://www.barackobama.com/issues/immigration/>.

Despite the candidates' lack of attention to the issue, voters have opinions on who would best deal with immigration issues. According to an early September CNN/Opinion Research Corporation poll, registered voters believe Senator McCain would better handle the issue of illegal immigration than Senator Obama, by a margin of 54 percent to 38 percent; 6 percent think neither would do a good job, and 3 percent are

unsure who would do the best job. Numerous polls related to the election are available on the web site Polling Report (<http://www.pollingreport.com/wh08.htm>).

## **Latino Vote May Be Important Factor in `08 Election**

The percent of eligible immigrants who choose to become naturalized citizens has risen over the past year. At a recent naturalization ceremony in Denver, new citizens were being registered to vote shortly after taking the citizenship oath. Many of these voters are joining the ranks of the "Latino voting block," whose ranks organizers hope to swell even further through a massive voter registration drive kicked off on September 25. Voter registration materials will be inserted in Spanish language publications during the last weekend in September in an effort to register 1 million new Latino voters in Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, New York, and Texas.

The most recent report from the Pew Hispanic Center (<http://pewhispanic.org>) suggests that, while Latino voters are far from monolithic in their views, more Latino voters will mean more votes for Barack Obama. Although Hillary Clinton handily beat Obama among Latino voters in the primary (by approximately a 2 to 1 margin), Obama led McCain by a similar margin in the June survey. The gap in party identification among Latino voters has widened considerably since 2006, when Democrats led Republicans by 21 percentage points, a lead that has now grown to 39 percentage points.

In the 2004 presidential election, record numbers of Latinos voted (7.6 million); of those voters, over 70 percent were native-born U.S. citizens. The participation rate among Latinos still remained lower than that for whites or African-Americans. Only 47 percent of eligible Hispanics voted, while 67 percent of eligible white voters and 60 percent of eligible African American voters went to the polls. The younger average age of the Latino population and the number of Latino residents who are not citizens also mean that the Latino community has fewer eligible voters. All of these factors have reduced the influence of the Latino community in elections. Whether efforts to register Latino voters—both naturalized and natural-born citizens—and mobilize them to vote will be effective is one of "things to watch" in Election `08.

## **Department of Homeland Security Stresses Understanding of Civic Principles**

Worrying that new immigrants are not fully embracing American culture and traditions, the Office of Citizenship at the Department of Homeland Security is pursuing three strategic objectives aimed to ensure successful integration of immigrations into American civic culture:

- Enhance information and educational opportunities provided to permanent residents to support their integration and participation in American civic culture.
- Promote education and training on citizenship rights, privileges, and responsibilities for immigrants interested in becoming U.S. citizens.

- Infuse citizenship-related ceremonies and events with greater meaning and stature.

The Office's website provides a variety of educational materials for new immigrants, including a 100+ page booklet, *Welcome to the United States* available in English, Arabic, Chinese, Haitian Creole, Korean, French, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Tagalog, Urdu, and Vietnamese. The English version of this document is located at <http://www.uscis.gov/files/nativedocuments/M-618.pdf>. The site also includes flash cards for studying the civic concepts that the naturalization exam now emphasizes (for example, self-government, rule of law, separation of powers). The flash cards can be found at [http://www.uscis.gov/files/nativedocuments/M-623\\_red.pdf](http://www.uscis.gov/files/nativedocuments/M-623_red.pdf). Whether these materials meet the Office of Citizenship's goals—and indeed whether those goals are appropriate—would be interesting topics for discussion with students.

## **Immigration in Colorado Headlines**

Two recent news stories have focused attention on varied issues related to immigration in Colorado. One case involves Somali Muslim workers at Swift's meat-processing plant in Greeley. During Ramadan, the workers asked that their break time be changed to allow for required prayers at sundown. The company originally agreed to the change but later rescinded the offer (according to some reports because other workers objected to the change in the break time). More than 150 workers then stayed away from work to protest the decision, and approximately 120 were fired as a result of missing work. The situation has prompted discussion on assimilation, accommodation, religious freedom, and relations between ethnic groups. The Greeley Tribune (<http://www.greeleytribune.com>) has provided ongoing coverage of the issue. KCFR's daily program on state issues, *Colorado Matters*, aired a story on the case on September 22 (<http://www.greeleytribune.com/article/20080909/NEWS/109089983/1001>).

The second story involved a fatal car accident in which the driver who was at fault was an unauthorized migrant who had been arrested more than 12 times in the previous five years; despite this extensive arrest record, the driver, 23-year-old Francis Hernandez had never been deported. The case raised numerous questions about how local, state, and federal authorities interact in dealing with unauthorized immigrants who have been taken into custody. State law requires police to notify Immigration and Customs Enforcement when they have taken into custody a suspect they believe to be in the country illegally; local law enforcement claim, however, that is difficult to determine a person's immigration status and that ICE often fails to pick up identified suspects. Governor Ritter commented on the case on his monthly appearance on *Colorado Matters* (see URL above), saying it highlighted serious gaps in the law enforcement system's ability to deal with unauthorized immigrants who commit crimes. Meanwhile, on September 24, the Legislative Audit Committee authorized auditor Sally Symanski to research the feasibility of conducting an audit of the case. Symanski will report to the committee in November.

## **Colorado Religious, Political, and Business Leaders Demand Immigration Reform**

On September 25, 2008, Governor Ritter and a group of Colorado religious leaders representing diverse religions introduced the "Interfaith Pledge on Immigration." Cards carrying the pledge will be distributed in area churches to promote support for a humane approach to immigration reform. The pledge asks people to "publicly reject the politics of division and isolation that fan anger and hate" and commit to "work toward just, workable and humane immigration reform." Acknowledging the many issues that Congress is currently facing, Ritter argued that immigration must be a high priority for the first year of the new administration, be it a McCain or an Obama administration.

At a second event on the same day, business leaders who are part of the Colorado Employers for Immigration Reform echoed Ritter's call for reform, expressing the difficulty they have faced in staffing their businesses; they further stated their willingness to take a greater role in verifying immigration status if reform legislation made it possible for more immigrants to enter the country legally. The latter position is not supported by all business leaders in the Denver area.

For more information, see the article in the Denver Post:  
[http://www.denverpost.com/search/ci\\_10562490](http://www.denverpost.com/search/ci_10562490).

## **Ethics and Immigration**

The Markkula Center for Applied Ethics at Santa Clara University (a Jesuit university) has posted several articles on ethics and immigration, some in HTML, some as MP3s. Among those commenting on the intersection between immigration policy and ethical practice are Arizona Governor Janet Napolitano, the chief deputy attorney general of California, and various scholars. To access the articles, go to <http://www.scu.edu/ethics/articles/articles.cfm?fam=IMMI>.