



2010 Latino Voter Race Update: California Governor and U.S. Senate

[See [“The Power of the Latino Vote in the 2010 Elections”](#) for information on Latino voters in other states]

Latino Voter Percentage of Overall Electorate	Latino Voter Turnout 2000 (in thousands)	Latino Voter Turnout 2004	Latino Voter Turnout 2008	Growth in Latino Turnout, 2000-2008	Growth in Latino Turnout, 2004-2008
21.1%	1597	2081	2961	85.41%	42.29%

Latinos represent 21.1% of California’s registered voters and Latino turnout has increased greatly over the past decade. When Proposition 187 was enacted here in 1994, it created a backlash among Latino voters who turned against the state Republican Party that championed the measure. Since then, Republican candidates have struggled to compete with Democrats over this demographic group, which has become critical to winning statewide elections.

Governor

Current state Attorney General and former Governor Jerry Brown is the nominee for the Democrats, while former eBay CEO Meg Whitman won the Republican nomination with 64% of the vote¹ in a hard-fought victory over State Insurance Commissioner Steve Poizner, who made immigration the top issue of his campaign.

During a March 15, 2010 gubernatorial debate between the Republican candidates, Whitman and Poizner were asked if they support federal legislation which would include a pathway to citizenship for the undocumented. Poizner stated his opposition to such legislation and his support for Proposition 187, the controversial, anti-immigrant 1994 ballot measure that is widely credited for pushing California Latinos into the Democratic fold. He stated, "We have to stop illegal immigration. The only way to do it is to turn the magnets off, by ending, once and for all, all the taxpayer-funded benefits for people who are here illegally, Meg doesn't want to go that far; I support Prop. 187; she opposes it."²

After facing a relentless barrage of such criticism from Poizner, Whitman shifted her public positioning on the issue, even going so far as to name former Governor Pete Wilson—who won re-election in 1994 while championing Proposition 187 – as her campaign chairman. Wilson’s high-profile role is likely to be

an issue for Latinos. Maria Elena Durazo, head of the Los Angeles County AFL-CIO, told the *Washington Post*, "We ran against Pete Wilson for years after he was out of office. And, voilà! He's back -- he's vouching for Whitman!"³

Whitman also adopted tougher immigration rhetoric on the stump and in her campaign ads. Whitman stated, "Let me be very clear: I am 100 percent against amnesty, no exceptions. The truth is: we have not secured the border in any shape, form, or manner. My view is until we actually do secure the border and actually stop illegal immigration, we can't talk about any other solutions, and I am 100 percent against amnesty."⁴ Whitman ran an ad promising "to secure our border with absolutely no amnesty," as part of her effort to "save California,"⁵ and in another ad she promised to be "tough as nails" against illegal immigration.⁶

Poizner also attempted to use the popularity of Arizona's controversial anti-immigration law among California Republicans to carry him to victory. However, Whitman remained opposed to the Arizona law throughout the campaign. In an interview with the *Orange County Register*, Whitman said, "I think I have a better plan for California," and emphasized her desired approach to crack down on employers and secure the border. "I have sympathy for what Arizona is going through and I understand their frustration with the abject failure of the federal government," she said. "But if that law were to come before me, I would oppose it."⁷

In the general election, Whitman will face Democratic nominee Jerry Brown, who supports comprehensive immigration reform. In a 2010 interview with the *Sacramento Bee*, Brown said, "We need immigration reform...I would make that a very important priority, getting immigration reform, a path to citizenship, and regularizing this movement of people."⁸

Anticipating the increased importance of the Latino vote in the general election relative to her Republican primary, Whitman advisors told the *New York Times* that, in the general election, she "would move away from immigration to broaden her appeal."⁹ But such a shift will not come easily. Already, in one of the first ads timed for the general election, the California Nurses Association is running a Spanish-language ad highlighting Whitman's support from Wilson and her tough talk on immigration in the primary campaign.¹⁰

U.S. Senate

Democratic Senator Barbara Boxer is running for her fourth term in the U.S. Senate. Carly Fiorina, former CEO of Hewlett-Packard, won the Republican primary on June 8 with 54% of the vote.¹¹

While Senator Boxer voted for a comprehensive immigration reform bill in the Senate in 2006, she voted against cloture for a bill in 2007, largely due to her opposition to the bill's guest worker program. On her campaign website, she says she supports "comprehensive immigration reform that includes both a path to citizenship and tougher border security."¹² Senator Boxer has also routinely supported amendments to increase funding for building and extending the controversial fence at the U.S.-Mexico border.

Like Whitman, the Fiorina campaign drifted rightward on immigration over the course of the race. At first, Fiorina condemned the "racist tone" of the border debate in an interview with *Politico*.¹³ In that

same interview, Fiorina stated that “The Democrats want to use immigration as a wedge issue for the Hispanic community. Barbara Boxer, in particular, has taken the Hispanic constituency for granted, for many, many years.”

However, the campaign eventually adopted a harsher tone regarding immigration and the Arizona law. Fiorina said she was “outraged” every time she heard “the people of Arizona vilified” by Democrats. “They are trying to change the subject,” Fiorina said. “The most fundamental responsibility of the federal government is to protect its citizens...President Obama, the Department of Homeland Security, Barbara Boxer--they have all failed in this most fundamental of duties.”¹⁴ Eventually, Fiorina even publicly supported the law.¹⁵ Fiorina maintained a tough tone on immigration throughout the campaign, saying that, “illegal immigration has eroded Americans’ trust in government, threatened our national security and hurt our fellow Californians.”¹⁶

According to the *San Jose Mercury News*, Fiorina supports “controlling the border” and establishing a better temporary worker program. But she has evaded stating whether she would vote to create a path to citizenship for millions of illegal immigrants now in the country, saying, “I don’t think voters are going to tolerate a discussion of what we’re going to do next until we do what actually has to be done, period...So I’m not prepared to even discuss what we do next.”¹⁷

However, while Fiorina’s Republican primary campaign may make it difficult for her to attract significant Latino support, Senator Boxer will need to work hard to secure an intense turnout of Latino voters in the Fall. According to Mark DiCamillo, the director of The Field Poll, “low Latino and minority voter turnout could doom the Boxer and Brown campaigns.”¹⁸

¹ California Secretary of State: <http://vote.sos.ca.gov/returns/gov/59.htm>

² Carla Marinucci, “Poizner, Whitman: GOP candidates’ first debate,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 3/16/10. <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2010/03/16/MNA91CG8CB.DTL>

³ Harold Meyerson, “Calif. GOP primary winners look headed for defeat,” *Washington Post*, June 10, 2010:

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/06/09/AR2010060904870.html?hpid=opinionsbox1>.

⁴ Teddy Davis, “Meg Whitman Alters Immigration Rhetoric,” *ABC News*, 3/16/10. http://blogs.abcnews.com/thenote/2010/03/meg-whitman-alters-immigration-rhetoric-.html?utm_source=twitterfeed&utm_medium=twitter

⁵ Whitman Campaign Ad: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sg6Agk7BsdI>

⁶ Adam Nagourney, “Immigration Debate Defines GOP Race in California,” *New York Times*, June 5, 2010.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/05/us/05scalif.html?ref=us>.

⁷ Orange County Register, interview with Meg Whitman, May 7, 2010. <http://www.ocregister.com/articles/percent-247639-mail-ballots.html>.

⁸ Sacramento Bee interview with Jerry Brown: http://videos.sacbee.com/vmix_hosted_apps/p/media?id=11444479.

⁹ Adam Nagourney, “Immigration Debate Defines GOP Race in California,” *New York Times*, June 5, 2010.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/05/us/05scalif.html?ref=us>.

¹⁰ Jonathan Martin, “Calif. Nurses Target Whitman,” *Politico*, June 1, 2010: <http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0610/37995.html>

¹¹ California Secretary of State: <http://vote.sos.ca.gov/returns/ussen/59.htm>

¹² Barbara Boxer for United States Senate: <http://www.barbaraboxer.com/issues?id=0011>.

¹³ David Catanese and Josh Kraushaar, “Fiorina: ‘Racist tone’ to border debate,” *Politico*, May 1, 2010:

<http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0510/36629.html>.

¹⁴ Los Angeles Times, 5/6/10:

http://mobile.latimes.com/inf/infomo?view=webarticle&feed=a:latimes_1min&feed:c:localnews&feed:i=53635341&nopaging=1

¹⁵ Harold Meyerson, “Calif. GOP primary winners look headed for defeat,” *Washington Post*, Thursday, June 10, 2010.

http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/06/09/AR2010060904870_pf.html

¹⁶ Ruben Navarrette, “Whitman, Fiorina Pander on Immigration,” *CNN.com*, June 10, 2010:

<http://www.cnn.com/2010/OPINION/06/10/navarrette.fiorina.whitman/index.html?iref=24hours>

¹⁷ http://www.mercurynews.com/top-stories/ci_13818721.

¹⁸ “Blue California may turn red,” *L.A. Daily News*, 1/30/10: http://www.dailynews.com/news/ci_14304049