

# The Hispanic Vote in the 2004 Presidential Election: Insecurity and Moral Concerns

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## Abstract

This paper examines Hispanic voting behavior in the 2004 Presidential election. This election is particularly significant, since it was the second successive presidential election in which the Republican party increased its share of the Hispanic vote. We test several competing hypotheses that may account for Republican gains amongst Hispanic voters. We contend the emphasis that Hispanic voters placed on moral values issues and national security accounted for Republican gains beyond the overall increase in Bush's vote share from 2000 to 2004. Using the best available data on Hispanic voting behavior for this election, a statewide aggregation of the National Election Pool (NEP), we find considerable support for our contention. In this election, Republicans successfully made inroads with Hispanic voters because the issues of moral values and national security weighed more heavily in Hispanics' vote decision at the aggregate level than did traditional domestic issues such as health care, education, and the economy.

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# 1 Introduction

For more than 30 years, the Hispanic electorate's support of the Democratic presidential candidate has never dropped below 60% (?).<sup>1</sup> Democrats, especially at the national level, have enjoyed strong support from Hispanic voters in the United States. However, in the 2004 presidential election, according to various exit polls, Bush's share of the Hispanic vote increased to over 40%.<sup>2</sup> There are two main theories that could explain Bush's surprisingly strong performance among Hispanics. First, the set of issues collectively referred to as 'moral values' in 2004 may have played a major part. This includes the issue of gay marriage, which gained unusual currency in 2004 with the Vermont decision to allow same-sex marriages. This also includes abortion: since most Hispanics in the United States are Catholic, and are more religious than their Anglo counterparts, Republicans had hoped that this issue could attract Hispanic voters to Republican candidates. Second, the issue of national security was quite salient in 2004. It was the first presidential election following the 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States, and it was held while the United States continued to suffer casualties in Afghanistan and Iraq. In all available polling data, Bush held a large lead over Kerry in his perceived ability to deal with national security issues. These two explanations obviously have very different political implications.

In this paper we demonstrate that the national security issues and 'moral values' dominated Hispanic voter choice in this election, relative to more typical issues featured in past presidential elections such as the state of the economy, education, or health care. On issues of terrorism, national security, and Iraq, the candidates were clearly *not* waltzing in front of a blind audience (?). After estimating a multivariate model of voter choice, we show the impact of different issues at the level of the individual voter, and we present estimates of the effect of voters' views on national security, the economy, and moral values on the aggregate election results.

In the next section we discuss past research on Hispanic political behavior, and then

we provide our hypotheses about the determinants of voter choice in this election. We then discuss our data in more depth, and present the results of our analysis. We conclude by placing our results in the broader context of research about recent presidential elections, and more specifically, about the role of Hispanic voters in contemporary elections.

## 2 Hispanic Partisanship and Issue Preferences

In every presidential election for the past thirty years, the Democratic party has won a solid majority of the votes of Hispanics and other racial minorities (?). This is primarily because the Democrats have traditionally been more sympathetic to minority groups and minority interests (Cain et al. 1991). Such allegiance is evident in the rates of support from the Black and Hispanic electorate for Democratic presidential candidates. From 1960-2002, Black support for Democratic presidential candidates was consistently between 75%-80%, and Hispanic support of Democratic presidential nominees has always been greater than 60% (?).

So why have Hispanics' partisan alliances remained so strong and stable over the past 30 years? Much of the reasoning rests in the historical experiences of Hispanics in the United States. While Hispanics overall support the Democratic party (?, ?, ?), partisan differences exist in the Hispanic electorate, based largely on voters' country of origin. The historical experiences of Mexicans and Puerto Ricans has aligned them with the Democratic party (?), while the experiences of Cubans have led them to support the Republican party (?, ?).

Beyond these historical and sociological explanations for Hispanic partisanship, efforts by Cain et al. (1991) and Alvarez and Bedolla (2003) explore other factors that influence Hispanic partisanship. Cain et al. (1991) test several hypotheses regarding the acquisition of partisanship by U.S. immigrants. They find that Hispanic partisanship is best explained by the "minority group status hypothesis", which suggests that perceived discrimination experienced by Hispanics on economic issues makes them more inclined to support the Democratic

party, since Democrats have traditionally advocated the interests of minority groups. Thus, Hispanic affiliation with the Democratic party will continue in second and third generation Hispanics not because of increased discrimination, but because being part of a minority group continues to be politically relevant. They do not find support for the “economic advancement” hypothesis, which contends that as Hispanics’ economic status increases, second and third generation are more likely to become Republicans than are first generation Hispanics.

This long affiliation with the Democratic party has not prevented Republicans from appealing to Hispanic voters. Many Republicans, especially those in the Southwest (?), believe that Hispanics’ social conservatism may realign them to the Republican party. Their main strategy has been to emphasize issues they believe will appeal to Hispanic voters. This appears to be a compelling strategy, given that issues play an important role in voters’ assessment of presidential candidates and their vote decision (Carmines and Stimson 1980; Jackson 1975; Key 1966; Page and Brody 1972; Page and Jones 1979; Pomper 1972). The issue that many expected to work in the Republicans’ favor was abortion. Alvarez and Bedolla’s (2003) research tests whether Hispanic Democrats will “convert” to the Republican party based on their pro-life position on abortion, but they find no support for this notion. Even when examining Hispanics by ethnic group, Mexican Americans, who are perceived to be the most socially conservative, are minimally effected by this issue in their probability of becoming Republican. Alvarez and Bedolla also find that higher levels of income fail to alter the party identification of Cubans and Mexicans. They found one political issue that effects Hispanic partisanship: attitudes on government health insurance. According to Alvarez and Bedolla, Cubans are 21% more likely to identify as Democrats if they favor an expansion of government health insurance, but are 25% more likely to identify as a Republican if they are against expansion.

Alvarez and Bedolla’s (2003) findings dispel the notion that the issue of abortion alone will necessarily “convert” Hispanic Democrats into Republicans. But this finding does not mean that abortion, combined with other social issues, may not play joint roles in their

vote decision. In particular, the theme of ‘moral values’ received much attention in the 2004 presidential election. This term encompassed the debate over gay marriage, and Bush and Kerry’s positions on this highly controversial issue. Since Hispanics are socially conservative, this issue was perceived to advantage Bush in his appeals to the Hispanic electorate. In a Democracy Corps survey taken in July 2004, 29% of Hispanics stated that they “would not support a candidate who is open to gay marriage.”<sup>3</sup> It seemed, then, that this issue played an important role in whom Hispanics decided to support. Concerns over terrorism and the war in Iraq also took center stage in the 2004 presidential election. Two nationwide surveys of Hispanics conducted by the Pew organization indicated that Hispanics felt that while terrorism was important, Bush should also concentrate on the economy.<sup>4</sup> So for Hispanics, along with the other salient issues of 2004, the economy and jobs were also on their list of issue priorities.

In addition to the specific issues that rose to prominence in the 2004 presidential election, voters’ ideology, partisanship, and perceptions of the economy play an important role in their vote decision (? , ? , ? , ?). Hispanics are no exception to this rule, particularly with regards to their perceptions over the economy and jobs.<sup>5</sup> Voters whose decisions are influenced by the economy evaluate the previous performance of the macroeconomy or their own personal finances under the incumbent party and tend to select the party possessing the best economic record (? , ? , ? , ? , ?). With respect to other non-economic issues it is well established that voters tend to select the candidate whose issue positions are closest to their own issue preferences (? , ?).

Surveys taken prior to the election indicated that Hispanics could have gone in either direction. We contend that the combined concern for moral values and national security weighed more heavily in their vote choice than did the issue of the economy and other domestic policy issues such as health care and education. We hypothesize that the combined magnitude of the effect of national security and moral issues on Hispanic vote choice was greater than the magnitude of the effect of domestic issues and the economy on Hispanic

vote choice. In the next section we describe in more detail the survey data we use and how we test our argument.

### 3 Survey Methodology and Research Design

This analysis uses survey data from the 2004 National Election Pool (NEP) state level exit polls.<sup>6</sup> We include those states whose Hispanic population comprises at least 6% of the total state population. Also, given our research question, we only examine those states whose exit poll survey asks voters what they believe is the “most important issue” for the election. Our sample therefore consists of voters from eight states: Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Nevada, New Mexico, New York, and New Jersey.<sup>7</sup> This sample represents approximately 57% of Hispanics in the United States, and provides us with 1807 voters of Hispanic descent.<sup>8</sup>

Exit polls are rarely used for scholarly research. However, the only dataset from the 2004 elections with sufficient Hispanic voters to test competing theories of Hispanic voter behavior are the NEP samples. Using the pooled state level exit polls provides us with a large enough sample of Hispanics to draw reliable inferences from, which would not be possible with smaller surveys such as the National Election Study. We use the aggregation of the statewide NEP samples because they provide estimates that are somewhere near the midpoint of the range of exit poll or postelection survey estimates of the Hispanic vote in this election. The NEP also includes questions sufficient to test our hypotheses.

Given that the variability across the different exit polls has been the source of some popular debate about the Hispanic vote in the aftermath of the 2004 election, we are aware that the use of this particular set of statewide exit polls may not produce point estimates of each candidate’s vote shares among Hispanic voters that are necessarily unbiased.<sup>9</sup> Since the various exit polls taken of Hispanic voters in the 2004 presidential election disagree, we cannot adjudicate which is producing unbiased estimates of the degree to which Hispanic voters supported Kerry or Bush. Rather we test competing theories that may account

for why Hispanic voters cast ballots for the two candidates on November 3, 2004. But our analysis focuses much less on inferences drawn from the aggregated point estimates of candidate vote shares than from the results of our multivariate analysis of the voting decision and the counterfactual *differences* in vote-shares based on alternative hypothetical scenarios of voter preferences. To produce consistent estimates of a multivariate analysis of vote choice we do not necessarily need a sample of voters that is representative of the population (Greene 2003).<sup>10</sup> As long as there is sufficient variation in the characteristics of the voters sampled, we can obtain consistent estimates of the model and thus evaluate competing causal theories of voter behavior. In this goal we are successful, as the NEP statewide samples provide considerable leverage for testing competing hypotheses of Hispanic voter choice in this election.

The survey questions used in our analysis pertain to the voter's demographics, opinions on the war in Iraq, their evaluation of their personal finances, and their opinion as to the "the issue that mattered most in deciding how they voted for president." Voters were also asked their party identification and ideology. Since we are interested in determining what issues influenced Hispanic voters in their vote decision, we specify a vote choice model where the dependent variable is the probability of voting for Kerry over Bush.<sup>11</sup> As our dependent variable is a binary choice between Kerry or Bush, we use logit analysis. We describe the model in greater detail when we present the estimates. To determine the importance of the explanatory variables towards vote choice, we compute predicted probabilities and first difference estimates for different values of the explanatory variables. We compute individual predicted probability estimates to test our hypothesis that the magnitude of the effect of moral issues and terrorism on the vote choice of the average Hispanic voter is greater than the magnitude of the effect of the economy on the average Hispanic voter. We also use these predicted probabilities and first difference estimates to test a number of interesting counterfactuals. If Hispanics had strongly approved of the war rather than disapproving of it, would this have substantially decreased Kerry's share of the vote among Hispanics? If Hispanics' perceptions of their personal finances been significantly worse, how much higher

would Kerry's share of the Hispanic vote have been? These counterfactuals allow us to determine which mattered more for the election outcome: moral values, national security, or the economy? The following section presents our findings.

## 4 Findings

We begin our analysis by presenting basic summary statistics on the political preferences of voters in the NEP exit poll samples, by their racial and ethnic identity. In the states included in our sample, Bush received 47.1% of the overall two-candidate vote; the exit poll estimate for the Bush vote from these states is 49.8%.<sup>12</sup> In Table ?? we present information from these statewide samples on presidential preferences, most important issue opinions, and assessments of each voter's personal finances and their opinion on the war in Iraq. First, note that our sample of voters from the statewide NEP surveys gives Bush 41.5% of support from Hispanics and Kerry 58.5% of support from Hispanics. These percentages differ from the estimates of the nationwide NEP, but are in line with the pre-election polling cited in the introduction to our paper. In these states, Hispanic voters were comparable with Asians in their support for Bush's reelection, though Hispanics were nowhere near as opposed to Bush as were Blacks (Bush received the votes of 15.7% of Black voters in these states).

[Table ?? Here]

For Hispanics, the most important issue that influenced their support for the president was the economy (22.7%), followed by terrorism (21%), moral values (18.2%) and Iraq (18%). As a point of comparison, Whites' most important issue ordering differed, with terrorism (25%), Iraq (23.3%) and moral values (22.3%) being the three most important issues that influenced their vote decision. Note that the economy ranked much lower for Whites than for Hispanics. As a way of further comparison, while all three non-White groups had a largely shared set of issue concerns, Blacks were more concerned about the economy and jobs than Hispanics (by over 10%), but Asians were somewhat more concerned than Hispanics

about both the war in Iraq and terrorism. This tables suggests that moral values may not necessarily drive Hispanics to vote Republican. Hispanic voters were significantly *less* likely to name ‘moral values’ as the most important issue than were white voters (18.2% versus 22.3%).<sup>13</sup>

Table ?? also provides a detailed portrait of the opinions of the various racial and ethnic groups towards their own pocketbook finances. Whites were more likely to say their finances were better than worse (34.9% vs. 23.7%). But Hispanics were very mixed in their assessment of their pocketbook finances, with 38.5% seeing them as about the same, 31.4% seeing them as worse, and 30.1% seeing them as better. Blacks were the most pessimistic about their personal financial situation, with 40.1% saying that it had grown worse.

While a majority of White voters (56.8%) approved of the war in Iraq, more than a majority of Hispanic voters opposed the war (52.5%). Both Asian and Black voters were even more likely to be opposed to the war, with 58.9% of Asians stating disapproval of the war and 77.5% of Blacks in opposition to the war.

Of course knowing Hispanic’s views on the issues is a precursor to knowing how they vote. In Table ?? we show how vote choice was a function of both respondent’s views on the war, and their view of their personal financial situation. First, in parentheses, we give the percentages of Hispanic voters in our sample who had the various combinations of opinions. For example, 15.7% of Hispanic voters felt that their personal financial situation had become worse *and* strongly approved of the Iraq war. The entries below those in parentheses give the percentage of Hispanic voters in each cell who voted for Kerry; thus the first cell of data in Table ?? shows that of the 15.7% with that combination of opinions, 42.4% of them supported Kerry.

[Table ?? Here]

What we see in Table ?? is the dramatic effect of these two issues on Hispanic vote choice in 2004. While few Hispanic voters are in the first row of this table (26.1%), note that

no matter what their perception of their personal finances, Hispanic voters who strongly approved of the war were also supporters of President Bush. Yet when we turn to the next row, to those who only somewhat approved of the war in Iraq, we see that if they saw their own personal finances as having worsened they are likely to be Kerry supporters (72.7% of Hispanic voters in that cell of the table supported Kerry), but if they felt their personal finances had improved they were likely to be Bush supporters (20.2% of Hispanic voters in that cell supported Kerry), more than a 50 percentage point difference moving across the columns of this particular row. But when we look at Hispanic voters who strongly disapproved of the war in Iraq, they strongly supported Kerry (over 90%), no matter how they evaluated their own financial situation.

#### **4.1 Multivariate Analysis of Hispanic Voter Choice**

In order to gauge the relative importance of issues, economic perceptions, and reactions to the Iraqi war on Hispanic voting in the 2004 presidential election, we provide estimates of our logit model of Hispanic voter choice in Table ???. Our explanatory variables control for voters' partisanship, ideology, demographics, evaluation of their personal finances, and their view of the most important issue, and their perception of the war in Iraq. We also controlled for the state the voter lives in. The demographic variables include the voter's education and income level, as well as their gender, age, and religious affiliation. We included dummy variables for whether the voter was a Protestant or Catholic.<sup>14</sup> For education we included dummy variables for no high school degree, high school degree, some college, and college degree. The excluded category are voters with post-graduate education. For income we included dummy variables for middle- and high-income voters, with low-income voters serving as the omitted category. Voters were asked to choose the most important issue from a list that included taxes, education, Iraq, terrorism, the economy, moral values, and health care. We created dummy variables for each issue. Each dummy except for 'taxes' was included in the right-hand side of the model. We also include a direct measure of voters disapproval of the

Iraq war. This is a four category response ranging from strongly-approve (1) to strongly-disapprove (4).<sup>15</sup> And finally we included voters' assessment of their personal financial situation. Additional information on the coding of the variables is available in Appendix A.<sup>16</sup>

[Table ?? Here]

As expected, we find that the coefficients of partisanship and ideology are statistically significant and signed in the expected direction. Controlling for other factors in the model, we find that Protestants are significantly less likely to vote for Kerry than are other non-Catholics. We also found that older voters, *ceteris paribus*, were less likely to vote for Kerry. None of the coefficients for education, nor any of the coefficients for income, were individually statistically significant. This is perhaps not surprising given that partisanship, ideology, and several issue preferences are included in the model.

More importantly, the estimates in Table ?? also demonstrate that issues played an important role in the way Hispanics voted in the 2004 presidential elections. The coefficients for voters' positions on the war and their evaluation of their financial situation were statistically significant. *Ceteris paribus*, voters with positive evaluations of the economy were more likely to vote for the incumbent. And the more negative a voter felt about the war in Iraq, the more likely they were to support Kerry. In addition, all of the coefficients on the "most important issue" variables are statistically significant, suggesting that the salience of specific issues to individual voters helped frame their vote choice. The issues that were positive for Kerry were health care, the economy, Iraq, and education. Voters who listed any of these as their most important issue were, *ceteris paribus*, more likely to vote for Kerry. Voters listing moral values or terrorism as their most important issue were more likely to vote for Bush, controlling for other factors in the model. This would seem to bode well for Kerry as the issues that favored him among Hispanic voters were listed as the most important issue by 6.8% (health care), 22.7% (the economy), 18% (Iraq), and 8.4% (education). The issues favoring Bush were listed as most important by 18.2% (moral values) and 21% (terrorism)

of Hispanic voters.

In order to show the impact of each explanatory variable on vote choice, thus allowing us to evaluate which factors most influenced one's vote, we compute the probability of voting for Kerry for a hypothetical voter under two circumstances: once when we define all values for our hypothetical voter at fixed positions; and then a second time after we adjust the value of only one variable for our hypothetical voter. The difference between these two estimated probabilities is the impact of changing the single variable, with all other explanatory variables held constant.<sup>17</sup> We constructed our hypothetical voter by setting all variables other than the most important issue variables to their mean or mode. Our hypothetical voter is a Democrat and ideologically moderate. She is female, Catholic, between the ages of 30-39, has some college education, an income between \$50,000-\$74,999, and saw education is the most important issue in determining her vote.

In the first seven rows of Table ?? we give the probability that our hypothetical voter supported Kerry for each of the possible most important issue responses. The first column of values gives the predicted probability of our hypothetical voter supporting Kerry if she lists the row variable as the most important issue. The second column of values gives the increase in the probability of voting for Kerry if the hypothetical voter gives the row variable as the most important issue rather than education. The third column gives the standard error of the difference reported in column two. We see that a voter who felt terrorism was the most important issue was .40 less likely to vote for Kerry than was an otherwise identical voter who felt that education was the most important issue. The corresponding difference for a voter who felt moral values was the most important issue was slightly larger (.44). Note that these are by far the largest gaps based on issue positions. Thus for those voters who were convinced that their main concerns were issues that Bush did better on, Kerry was substantially less likely to receive their votes. Alternatively, Kerry did even better among voters who ranked the salience of the economy or health care higher than the salience of education. Our hypothetical voter was .14 more likely to vote for Kerry if she thought the

economy, rather than education, was the most important issue. Thus the largest possible swing based on evaluation of issue salience is .61: if our hypothetical voter had felt moral values was the most important issue rather than thinking that health care was the most important issue, then she would have been .61 less likely to vote for Kerry.

[Table ?? Here]

We also compute predicted probabilities for different values of responses to the two questions which ask voters to provide an evaluation of their personal finances and their views of the Iraqi war. So using the same hypothetical voter as above, we estimate the predicted probability of our hypothetical voter's support for Kerry and Bush based on the three and four categories available for each question, respectively. As the estimates in Table ?? demonstrate, when our hypothetical voter's personal finances move from better to worse, her probability of supporting Kerry increases (from .49 to .87). Thus, one's perceptions of their own economic well-being factored heavily into their vote decision. However, recall that the largest swing in probability of voting for Kerry we saw based on issue salience was .61; here the largest swing based on economic perceptions is 'only' .39. In a similar pattern, our hypothetical voter's opinion on the war in Iraq also accounted for a significant part of her vote decision. As her perception of the war shifts from strong approval to strong disapproval, her probability of supporting Kerry changes from about one-third (.31) to a virtual certainty of Kerry support (.98). To say that voters' views of the Iraqi war factored into their vote choice would be an understatement. Among voters with modal characteristics and views, *only* those voters who *strongly* approved of the war were more likely to support Bush than Kerry.

These calculations demonstrate the impact of specific issues on individual voters. We saw that respondents' views on Iraq, perceptions of personal finances, and view of the most important issues were all important predictors of their vote choice. However, the more important questions concern aggregate vote shares: how would the relative vote shares of Kerry and Bush change if voters adopted different positions on these issues? In order to

test our central hypothesis, which contends that the magnitude of the effect of moral values and terrorism on Hispanic vote choice is greater than the magnitude of the effect of the economy and other domestic issues on Hispanic vote choice, it is necessary to calculate aggregate estimated vote-shares based on counterfactuals about voters' issue opinions. We compute these aggregate counterfactuals using the following procedure. We start with the logit estimates of the vote choice model, and we take 1000 draws of the parameter values from the estimated distribution. We then use these 1000 draws, and the original dataset of voters from which the parameters were estimated, to compute probabilities of Bush and Kerry support for each voter, for each of the 1000 draws. Aggregating these individual vote probabilities within each draw of the parameters gives an estimate (and standard error) for the vote share of Bush and Kerry. We then assume that the entire Hispanic electorate had a different distribution of opinions about a particular issue, and using the same 1000 draws of the parameter estimates, we recompute the probabilities that each voter in the sample would support Bush or Kerry in this counterfactual scenario. Again, within each draw we aggregate the individual probabilities into candidate vote shares. This allows us to determine how much changes in Hispanics' issue preferences or views would have affected the overall vote shares of Kerry and Bush, and to compute confidence intervals about those estimates.

We choose counterfactual conditions to correspond to our hypotheses of interest. So, the first question is: what would have happened if no voters had thought that moral concerns were the most important issues? Second, what would have happened if no voters thought that terrorism was the most important issue? In Table ??, for each issue we reset the most important issue response for every respondent choosing that issue to be some other issue. So, to determine the impact of moral values we take every respondent who said that moral values was the most important issue, and reset their most important issue response to one of the other six issues listed. We distribute these respondents among the six other issues in proportion to the distribution across the six issues given by all other respondents in the sample. We then recompute the probability of the respondent voting for Bush and Kerry. The first column of Table ?? gives the predicted vote share for Kerry under the counterfactual

condition, and the second column gives the estimated increase in Kerry's vote share (along with its standard error in parenthesis). So, looking at the last row of the table, we can see that if all voters who said that moral values was the most important issue had believed some other issue was the most important issue, then Kerry's overall vote share would have increased by 2.2 percentage points. The equivalent number for terrorism is 2.6 percentage points. We can see that the economy had a roughly similar impact to each of these issues. Had all voters who felt the economy was the most important issue felt instead that other issues were more important, then Kerry's vote share would have dropped by 2.2 percentage points. We can also see here how little traction Kerry got from education. If all respondents citing education as the most important issue had chosen another issue, Kerry's vote share would only have dropped by .4 percentage points. And finally, while the issue of health care largely influenced an individual's likelihood of supporting Kerry (the individual impact was .17), its impact on Kerry's total vote share is quite minimal. If voters shifted their positions so that health care was no longer the most important issue to them, Kerry's vote share would have decreased by less than one percentage point, .6. So despite the importance of health care on a voter's decision-making process at the individual level, its impact at the aggregate level is not nearly as great. Thus, by estimating the impact of these issues across many voters, we gain a much better understanding of the dynamics occurring in this election.

[Table ??]

We can also ask what is the *potential* impact of an issue? Here, we perform similar counterfactual calculations to those presented in Table ???. However, for each issue rather than resetting respondent's opinion so that the issue was *not* the most important issue, we reset every respondent's opinion to make the row variable the most important issue. Thus the first row of Table ??? shows that had all voters felt that the economy was the most important issue, Kerry's vote share would have been 9.1 percentage points higher. But if voters felt that education was the most important issue, Kerry's corresponding increase would have been 5.1 percentage points. If voters believed that the Iraqi war was the most important issue, Kerry's vote share would have increased by 4.6 percentage points.

[Table ?? Here]

The one issue that Kerry could have increased his vote share the most is health care; if voters felt that health care was the most important issue, Kerry's share of the vote could have increased by 11.6 percentage points. However, the reality is that only 6.8% of Latinos believed that health care was the most important issue in this election. On the other side of the coin, had all voters felt that terrorism was the most important issue, then Kerry's vote share would have dropped by 8.9 percentage points. But if all voters had felt that moral values was the most important issue, then Kerry's vote share would have fallen by 10.7 percentage points. Thus, it appears as if moral values had more power as a single issue to move the entire electorate than did any other issue. Though this only holds true under the counterfactual conditions where all voters change their issue emphasis.

But what if all those voters who responded that moral values was the most important issue had instead responded that the economy, the issue that Kerry did the best on, was the most important issue? In this case, Kerry's vote share would have increased by 3.9 percentage points. And likewise, if voters who responded that terrorism was the most important issue had instead felt that the economy was the most important issue, then Kerry's share of the Hispanic vote would have increased by 3.9 percentage points. Thus, for voters who felt that moral values and terrorism were their most important issues, a shift to the economy as being the most important issue did increase Kerry's vote share significantly. These estimates help to explain why Kerry had such a difficult time in maintaining his share of the Latino vote.

## 4.2 Further Analysis of the Iraq War and the Economy

To trace how combinations of issue opinions work in our multivariate model, we computed additional counterfactuals that focus on four scenarios:

- If Hispanic voters had all thought their personal finances were **better** and strongly

**approved** of the war.

- If Hispanic voters had all thought their personal finances were **better** and strongly **disapproved** of the war.
- If Hispanic voters had all thought their personal finances were **worse** and had strongly **disapproved** of the war.
- If Hispanic voters had all thought their personal finances were **worse** and had strongly **approved** of the war.

We present the results of these counterfactual analyses in Table ???. Examination of Table ??? helps to underscore the clear importance of these two issues for Hispanic voter choice in the 2004 presidential election. If we assume that all Hispanic voters felt their personal financial situation to be better, but then change Hispanics voters' opinion on the war, to either strongly approve or strongly disapprove, we see that 23.7% would have supported Kerry in the first scenario, while 78.1% would have supported Kerry in the second scenario. This is a difference of 54.5% between these two hypothetical scenarios. But when we hold approval of the war constant, and alter the counterfactual scenario from viewing their personal finances as better to worse, we see that 23.7% support Kerry in the first scenario, and that 51.0% support Kerry in the second scenario. There is a 27.3% difference between these two hypothetical scenarios. Thus, it is clear that while both issues were powerful predictors of Hispanic vote choice in this election, evidence from our analysis indicates that the Iraq war was a much stronger influence than one's economic evaluations.

[Table ??? here]

## 5 Concluding Remarks

As we have documented, the key to understanding the Hispanic vote in 2004 is to see that while economic concerns and other domestic issues loomed large for Hispanics, the combined

concern that many Hispanic voters had for moral values and national security trumped domestic issues and economic concerns. Our analysis demonstrates that domestic issues which traditionally advantage Democrats, such as health care and education, played a small role in this election. This is especially surprising given that Latinos typically care the most about these “bread and butter” issues, and are generally less concerned about foreign policy matters.<sup>18</sup> But for this particular election, how the candidates defined which issues rose to the forefront of the debate significantly influenced the decisions made by Hispanic voters. Thus, instead of health care, education and the economy determining the vote decision of Hispanics, the issues of moral values and terrorism dominated how Hispanic voters cast their ballots.

These insights put the explanation for the Hispanic vote in the 2004 election squarely within dominant paradigms in the political behavior literature for understanding electoral choice — issues matter, economic concerns matter, and elections revolve around how candidates prioritize issues and which positions candidates take on issues. Hispanic voters obviously perceived that they had choices, not echoes; the issues emphasized by the candidates influenced Hispanic vote choice.

But these insights also raise new questions. That foreign policy issues loomed large in the voting decisions of Hispanics in the 2004 presidential election we find of particular interest, given that foreign policy issues rarely feature prominently in studies of voting behavior, especially Hispanic voting behavior. While we obviously lack the detailed data used by Aldrich et al. (1989b), given our results, it may be that the 2004 presidential election is like other past presidential elections (1972, 1980, or 1984) where foreign policy issues were highly salient and accessible to Hispanic voters, and were issues where they perceived large differences between the two major party candidates. If so, this implies that the Hispanic electorate can respond to appeals made to them on more abstract or complex issues, as long

as they are given the necessary information to make an appropriate decision.

Also, the prominence of moral values as a priority and determinant of Hispanic voter choice is worthy of additional research. Again, without more finely-grained survey data, it is difficult to know precisely what Hispanic voters see as the moral values that concern them: is it abortion, gay marriage, school prayer, religiosity — or some combination of these and other social or value-laden issues? What were the messages that both Kerry and Bush tried to send to Hispanic voters about moral values, and what precise issues or values were they targeting? What role did other social institutions, especially churches, have in spreading moral value messages to Hispanic voters in the 2004 election? As there is little existing research on the general importance of moral values concerns in presidential election voting, not to mention their influence on Hispanic voters, this is a critical research agenda for the future (e.g., (?)).

Finally, our research also implies that the fight for the Hispanic vote will continue in 2006 and 2008, as the size of the Hispanic vote is likely to continue to increase in numerical terms and because Hispanics have issue concerns that both Democrats and Republicans can appeal to. Both parties obviously should pay attention to moral values if they want to win large numbers of Hispanic votes. However, if moral values has become an issue “owned” by the Republican party, then Democrats’ best strategy may be to restructure their campaign strategies so that voters make choices based on other domestic issues, such as health care and education. And while public opinion polls indicate that Hispanics care the most about domestic policy issues such as education, the economy and health care, this election demonstrates that candidates can successfully emphasize other issues in order to minimize the impact of these domestic issues on voter decision-making.

# Notes

<sup>1</sup>Throughout this paper we will use the term “Hispanic”, though we could just as easily have used the term “Latino” to describe voters of Hispanic or Latino identity.

<sup>2</sup>According to the national sample of the National Election Pool (NEP) exit poll, 44% of the Hispanic electorate supported George W. Bush. An independent national exit poll conducted by *The Los Angeles Times* found that 45% of the Hispanic electorate voted for Bush. The National Annenberg Election Survey estimated that 41% of the Hispanic electorate supported Bush in 2004, an increase of about 6 percentage points over the 2000 Annenberg estimate.

<sup>3</sup>Source: [http://www.democracycorps.com/reports/analyses/Bush\\_Faltering\\_Among\\_Hispanics.pdf](http://www.democracycorps.com/reports/analyses/Bush_Faltering_Among_Hispanics.pdf).

<sup>4</sup>For more information on these polls, go to <http://www.pewHispanic.org/reports>

<sup>5</sup>A poll taken by Democracy Corps in July 2004 reports that 40% of the Hispanics reported that the economy and jobs was the most important issue to them.

<sup>6</sup>The state level exit polls are distinct from the *national* NEP exit poll. For more information on the design of these exit polls, go to: <http://www.exit-poll.net/election-night/MethodsStatementStateGeneric.pdf>

<sup>7</sup>Although the state population in Texas, Connecticut, Illinois and Massachusetts contains more than 6% of Hispanics, the statewide exit polls taken in Texas and Connecticut did not include the “most important issue” question. Illinois and Massachusetts were excluded from the sample due to multicollinearity. There was not enough variation in the responses provided by the Hispanic respondents living in Massachusetts and Illinois to estimate the model that we use.

<sup>8</sup>Had Texas, Connecticut, Illinois, and Massachusetts been included in our sample, this percentage jumps to 82%. These percentages were calculated using Census data on the Hispanic population from 2003.

<sup>9</sup>For a summary of this debate, see Suro, Fry and Passel (2005).

<sup>10</sup>For example, one hypothesis about the cause of the variability in the point estimates of the various exit polls that were taken of Hispanic voters in the 2004 presidential election is that they differ due to sampling error; if so, any one of the exit polls may produce an estimate of the Bush Hispanic vote that deviates from the true population parameter, but use of such a dataset would not necessarily lead to inconsistent parameter estimates in a multivariate model of voter choice.

<sup>11</sup>Too few respondents offered a candidate choice other than Kerry and Bush for reliable analysis, thus we restricted our analysis to those respondents who reported voting for either of the two major party candidates.

<sup>12</sup>We present in Table 8 for interested readers and reviewers data from the eight states included in our analysis. Here we compare the overall unweighted exit poll estimates of the two-candidate vote, the weighted exit poll estimate, and the actual two-candidate vote as compiled from David Leip’s “Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections”

(<http://www.uselectionatlas.org/USPRESIDENT/data.php?year=2004&datatype=national&def=1&f=0>). We anticipate providing this table as supplementary online information upon publication of this paper.

<sup>13</sup>Of course ‘moral values’ could mean different things to Hispanics than it does to Anglos, thus accounting partially for differences in overall issue importance.

<sup>14</sup>The omitted category here includes all non-Christians as well as non-responses. We also estimated the model with an additional dummy variable for non-Christians, but it had no effect on the results.

<sup>15</sup>We are thus treating the variable as cardinal rather than simply ordinal. We also estimated the model with three separate dummies, thus dropping the cardinality assumption. Since the three estimated coefficients were almost perfectly linear, we report the more parsimonious model with the cardinality assumption.

<sup>16</sup>Two religion dummy variables are included: Catholic and Protestant. All other voters are treated as the omitted category.

<sup>17</sup>The calculations are performed with the CLARIFY package in STATA. See (?) for details.

<sup>18</sup>See the “Pew Hispanic Center/Kaiser Family Foundation 2004 National Survey Of Latinos: Politics and Civic Participation”, (<http://pewhispanic.org/reports/report.php?ReportID=33>).

Table 1: Vote and Issues by Race

Variable	Race or Ethnicity of Voter					All Voters
	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Other	
<b>Presidential Vote</b>						
<i>Bush</i>	55.8	15.7	41.5	41.2	39.4	49.8
<i>Kerry</i>	44.2	84.3	58.5	58.8	60.6	50.2
<b>Most Important Issue</b>						
<i>Taxes</i>	5.0	5.8	4.8	7.9	6.3	5.1
<i>Education</i>	3.3	7.1	8.4	4.0	8.8	4.5
<i>Iraq</i>	23.3	20.6	18.0	23.7	19.8	22.2
<i>Terrorism</i>	25.0	10.5	21.0	21.5	16.9	23.1
<i>Economy</i>	15.2	33.5	22.7	25.7	23.2	18.0
<i>Moral values</i>	22.3	11.7	18.2	9.7	18.0	20.5
<i>Health care</i>	6.1	10.9	6.8	7.5	7.0	6.7
<b>Financial Situation</b>						
<i>Better</i>	34.9	19.0	30.1	30.7	26.1	32.6
<i>About the same</i>	41.5	40.9	38.5	42.7	40.6	41.0
<i>Worse</i>	23.7	40.1	31.4	26.6	33.3	26.4
<b>Iraq War</b>						
<i>Strongly approve</i>	32.4	8.1	25.5	24.3	20.4	29.0
<i>Somewhat approve</i>	24.4	14.5	22.0	16.8	17.6	23.0
<i>Somewhat disapprove</i>	13.1	21.4	17.8	21.6	18.5	14.7
<i>Strongly disapprove</i>	30.1	56.1	34.7	37.3	43.5	33.3

Entries in columns 2-6 are column percentages, computed from the statewide NEP surveys used in our analysis. These estimates have been weighted using the sample weights provided by the NEP.

Table 2: Support for Kerry, by Opinions on War and Financial Perceptions

<i>Opinion on Iraqi War</i>	<i>Financial Situation</i>		
	Worse	Same	Better
Strongly Approve	(2.3%) 42.4%	(8.1%) 7.5%	(15.2%) 3.6%
Somewhat Approve	(3.8%) 72.7%	(9.8%) 36.0%	(8.5%) 20.2%
Somewhat Disapprove	(7.5%) 89.5%	(7.4%) 84.0%	(2.8%) 72.5 %
Strongly Disapprove	(17.8%) 99.5%	(13.1%) 92.5%	(3.7%) 89.6%

Entries in ( ) are the % of Hispanics in the given category. Entries not in ( ) are the % of Hispanics in the given category who voted for Kerry. These estimates have been weighted using the sample weights provided by the NEP.

Table 3: Logit Estimates: Probability of Voting for Kerry

Variable	Coefficient	(Std. Err.)
Constant	-1.69*	(0.72)
Democrat	1.25**	(0.25)
Republican	-1.46**	(0.30)
Liberal	0.54*	(0.27)
Conservative	-1.07**	(0.26)
<b>Demographics</b>		
Woman	-0.13	(0.21)
Protestant	-1.04*	(0.43)
Catholic	0.25	(0.23)
Age	-0.12*	(0.05)
No HS Degree	-0.03	(0.50)
HS Degree	-0.07	(0.40)
Some College	-0.23	(0.38)
College Degree	0.12	(0.40)
Middle-Income	0.30	(0.26)
High-Income	-0.09	(0.32)
<b>Most Important Issue<sup>a</sup></b>		
Health Care	2.10**	(0.57)
Economy	1.85**	(0.43)
Iraq	1.15**	(0.43)
Education	1.08*	(0.47)
Moral Values	-0.96*	(0.42)
Terrorism	-0.74 <sup>†</sup>	(0.41)
<b>Other Issues</b>		
Personal Finances Better	-2.15**	(0.30)
Personal Finances Same	-1.36**	(0.28)
Strongly Disapprove of Iraqi War	1.59**	(0.12)
<b>State Dummies</b>		
Arizona	-0.72 <sup>†</sup>	(0.43)
Colorado	-0.11	(0.43)
Florida	-0.61	(0.40)
Nevada	0.29	(0.43)
New Mexico	-0.73*	(0.34)
New York	0.31	(0.55)
New Jersey	-0.89 <sup>†</sup>	(0.52)
<hr/>		
N	1807	
Log-likelihood	-334.653	

<sup>a</sup> Taxes is the omitted issue.

Table 4: Predicted Probabilities and First Differences

Scenario	Hispanic Voters		
	Probability of Voting for Kerry	Marginal Impact	Standard Error
Baseline	.66	–	(–)
<b>Most Important Issue</b>			
Health Care	.83	.17	(.10)
Economy	.80	.14	(.08)
Iraq War	.68	.02	(.09)
Education	.66	–	(–)
Taxes	.42	-.24	(.11)
Terrorism	.26	-.40	(.08)
Moral Values	.22	-.44	(.09)
<b>Personal Finances</b>			
Personal Finances are Better	.49	-.18	(.06)
Personal Finances are the Same	.66	–	(–)
Personal Finances are Worse	.87	.21	(.07)
<b>Perceptions of the Iraqi War</b>			
Strongly Approve	.31	-.35	(.04)
Somewhat Approve	.66	–	(–)
Somewhat Disapprove	.90	.23	(.07)
Strongly Disapprove	.98	.31	(.11)

Entries in the second and third columns are probability estimates. They are calculated using CLARIFY for a hypothetical voter described in the text.

Table 5: Aggregate Predicted Vote Share for Different Counterfactuals  
 Respondents are Moved **Out** of the Row-Variable Category

Variable of Interest	Predicted Kerry Share of Vote <sup>a</sup>	Predicted Increase in Kerry Vote Share <sup>b</sup>
Baseline	60.0	–
Taxes Most Important Issue	60.2 (0.6)	0.2 (0.2)
Economy Most Important Issue	57.7 (0.7)	-2.3 (0.3)
Education Most Important Issue	59.6 (0.6)	-0.4 (0.2)
Iraq Most Important Issue	58.9 (0.7)	-1.1 (0.3)
Terrorism Most Important Issue	62.6 (0.7)	2.6 (0.4)
Moral Values Most Important Issue	62.2 (0.7)	2.2 (0.3)
Health Care Most Important Issue	59.4 (0.6)	-0.6 (0.1)

<sup>a</sup>Entries not in parenthesis in the second column are the estimated share of the two-party vote for Kerry under the counterfactual condition listed for the row: that all voters who actually chose the row variable as the most important issue (or, for the last row, all voters evaluate their personal finances as ‘better’) were randomly assigned to other issues.

<sup>b</sup>Entries not in parenthesis in the third column are the predicted increase (or decrease) in Kerry’s share of the two-party vote under the counterfactual scenario listed for the row.

Entries in ( ) are standard errors.

All entries computed based on 1000 draws of parameters from the model in Table ??.

Table 6: Aggregate Predicted Vote Share for Different Counterfactuals

Scenario for all Voters	Predicted Kerry Share of Vote <sup>a</sup>	Predicted Increase in Kerry Vote Share <sup>b</sup>
Economy Most Important Issue	69.5 (1.6)	9.5 (1.5)
Education Most Important Issue	65.3 (2.2)	5.3 (2.0)
Iraq Most Important Issue	64.9 (1.8)	4.9 (1.7)
Terrorism Most Important Issue	51.3 (1.7)	-8.7 (1.5)
Moral Values Most Important Issue	49.6 (1.9)	-10.4 (1.8)
Health Care Most Important Issue	71.6 (2.9)	11.6 (2.8)

<sup>a</sup>Entries not in parenthesis in the second column are the estimated share of the two-party vote for Kerry under the counterfactual condition listed for the row: that all voters list the row variable as the most important issue (or, for the last row, all voters evaluate their personal finances as ‘better’).

<sup>b</sup>Entries not in parenthesis in the third column are the predicted increase (or decrease) in Kerry’s share of the two-party vote under the counterfactual scenario listed for the row.

Entries in ( ) are standard errors.

All entries computed based on 1000 draws of parameters from the model in Table ??.

Table 7: Aggregate Predicted Vote Shares for Different Counterfactuals

Scenario for All Voters		Predicted Kerry Share of Vote <sup>a</sup>	Predicted Increase in Kerry Vote Share <sup>b</sup>
Evaluation of Personal Finances	Opinion of Iraq War		
Better	Strongly Approve	23.7 (2.9)	-39.9 (2.7)
Better	Strongly Disapprove	78.1 (2.4)	14.5 (2.3)
Worse	Strongly Disapprove	92.1 (1.7)	28.5 (1.6)
Worse	Strongly Approve	51.0 (3.4)	-12.6 (3.2)

<sup>a</sup>Entries not in parenthesis in the second column are the estimated share of the two-party vote for Kerry under the counterfactual condition listed for the row (all voters have the beliefs listed in the row).

<sup>b</sup>Entries not in parenthesis in the third column are the predicted increase (or decrease) in Kerry's share of the two-party vote under the counterfactual scenario listed for the row.

Entries in ( ) are standard errors.

All entries computed based on 1000 draws of parameters from the model in Table ??.

# Appendix

## Demographic Variables

*Religion:* Categories were protestant, catholic, Mormon, ‘other Christian’, Jewish, muslim, other, none or no-response.

*Age:* 1=18-24; 2=25-29; 3=30-39; 4=40-44; 5=45-49; 6=50-59; 7=60-64; 8=65-74; 9=75 or over

*Low Income:* income less than or equal to \$29,999.

*Middle Income:* income between \$30,000 and \$74,999.

*High Income:* income greater than \$75,000.

## Most Important Issue Variables

“Which ONE issue mattered most in deciding how you voted for **president**? (*Check only one*). Choices: 1) Taxes; 2) Education; 3) Iraq; 4) Terrorism; 5) Economy/Jobs; 6) Moral values; 7) Healthcare.

## Voters’ Perceptions on Issues

*Financial Situation:*

“Compared to four years ago, is your family’s financial situation: 1) Better today; 2) Worse today; 3) About the same.”

*Disapprove of Iraqi War:*

“How do you feel about the U.S. decision to go to war with Iraq? 1) Strongly approve; 2) Somewhat approve; 3) Somewhat disapprove; 4) Strongly disapprove.”

Table 8: Appendix - Vote Comparison to Exit Polls in Sample States

State	Unweighted Exits		Weighted Exits		Actual Outcome	
	Bush	Kerry	Bush	Kerry	Bush	Kerry
Arizona	53.3	46.7	55.0	45.0	55.3	44.7
California	45.0	55.0	45.1	54.9	45.0	55.0
Colorado	50.0	50.0	52.9	47.1	52.4	47.6
Florida	48.6	51.4	52.1	47.9	52.5	47.5
Nevada	47.0	53.1	51.0	49.0	51.3	48.7
New Jersey	39.5	60.5	46.6	53.4	46.6	53.4
New Mexico	45.1	54.9	50.6	49.4	50.4	49.6
New York	36.8	63.2	41.1	58.9	40.2	59.8
Eight State Total	46.4	53.6	49.8	50.2	47.0	53.0

Entries in the columns “Unweighted Exits” are unweighted exit poll estimates from each state’s NEP survey; those under “Weighted Exits” have been weighted by the sample weight provided with each NEP survey; those under “Actual Outcome” are each candidate’s share of the two-candidate vote. This table estimates the vote shares based on all voters in the sample states.

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