

## **Latino Influence in the 2014 Elections\***

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### **Abstract**

This paper examines the impact of immigration politics and Latino voters in the 2014 U.S. House and Senate elections. In contrast to 2012, Latinos influence was muted largely because of the inability of Democrats to recruit and fund quality candidates capable of challenging vulnerable Republicans, as well as declines in participation in response to the failure of comprehensive immigration reform and President Obama's decision to delay executive action to alleviate deportations of some unauthorized immigrants. As such, the analysis presented here suggests that even when immigration is a salient issue Latino political participation is conditioned upon geographic, political, and contextual factors. The failure of these variables to align in 2014 resulted in few, if any, Republicans being punished electorally for their party's handling of immigration and a missed opportunity for the Democrats to further consolidate Latinos voters.

\* Paper prepared for presentation at the Annual Meeting of the Western Political Science Association, Las Vegas, NV, April 2–4, 2015. Earlier versions of parts of this paper appeared as Damore 2015a, 2015b, 2015c, and 2015d.

In the aftermath of the 2012 presidential election, the conventional wisdom suggested that Mitt Romney's dismal performance among Latino voters not only doomed his candidacy, but also threatened the GOP's long-term electoral prospects. In response, the Republican National Committee (RNC) released the "Growth and Opportunity Project" report. With respect to Latino voters, the report noted, "Hispanic voters tell us our Party's position on immigration has become a litmus test, measuring whether we are meeting them with a welcome mat or a closed door." The following June, the U.S. Senate – with the support of 14 Republican senators – passed comprehensive immigration reform (S.744) that included a pathway to citizenship for unauthorized immigrants. Any momentum for the Republican Party to deliver on immigration reform, however, collapsed in the Republican controlled House of Representatives.

Assessing what occurred next is the focus of this effort. Specifically, I seek to examine how immigration politics and by extension, Latino political participation affected the 2014 House and U.S. Senate elections. My analysis highlights the importance of geographic, contextual, and political factors on Latino political behavior. When these factors do not align, as was the case in 2014, the influence of Latino voters is muted.

I begin by reviewing scholarship examining the importance of immigration to Latino political participation and to place the 2014 elections in context, I consider the state of immigration and Latino politics leading into 2014. Next, elections for the U.S. House of Representatives are examined to assess how the parties' responses to the macro political environment conditioned candidate emergence and resource allocation in a manner that limited Latino electoral influence. I also consider how the 2014 U.S. Senate map and the unwillingness of some Democratic candidates to embrace immigration reform provided few opportunities for

Latino voters to affect these races. In so doing, I combine data traditionally used in studies of congressional elections with data from "The 2014 Latino Decisions Election Eve Poll" and L2 Voter Mapping detailing Latino political participation. The paper concludes by assessing what the 2014 elections reveal about the contours of Latino political participation.

### **The Context of Latino Political Participation**

As Barreto et al. (2014, 173) suggest, "Attempting to separate 'Latino' politics from 'immigration' politics is a fool's errand." To be sure, Latino voters care about issues besides immigration such as economic opportunity, education, and health care. However, for many Latinos, immigration and by extension, how parties and candidates handle the issue, shapes not only how they vote, but also *whether* they vote.

An extensive literature has emerged documenting the primacy of immigration politics as a key explanatory variable affecting both the mobilization and partisan preferences of Latino voters. Most obviously, the shift among Latino voters away from Republican presidential candidates and towards Democratic presidential candidates between 2004 (when George W. Bush received 40 percent of the Latino vote) and 2012 (when Mitt Romney received 25 percent of the Latino vote) represents the biggest partisan shift among a racial or ethnic voting bloc (Barreto et. al 2014). The magnitude of this effect takes on even greater import given the growth in the Latino electorate during that period, particularly in key swing states such as Colorado, Florida, New Mexico, and Nevada that Barack Obama carried in both 2008 and 2012. Indeed, while President Obama's vote share decreased by two percentage points between 2008 and 2012, his support among Latinos increased by four points (Barreto et. al 2014).

The most obvious explanation for this shift is how the parties have handled immigration. Since the failure of President Bush's attempts to overhaul immigration during his second term, the immigration rhetoric and policy prescriptions offered by the GOP have tacked significantly to the right. This, in turn, has created a policy space that the Democrats have used strategically to mobilize Latino voters in specific contexts. For instance, prior to his 2010 reelection, U.S. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid sought unsuccessfully to attach the DREAM Act to spending legislation to send a signal to the Latino community that the Democrats cared about this Latino policy priority. Similarly, in June of 2012, President Obama used his executive authority to implement the DACA program. Prior to that polling conducted by Latino Decisions found waning enthusiasm among Latino voters for the president owing to his inability to pursue comprehensive immigration reform in his first term, as well as the record number of deportations carried out by his administration. In both instances, Latino voters responded by turning out at high levels and overwhelmingly casting their votes for Reid in 2010 and Obama in 2012.

California offers the best context to examine how immigration politics can reshape the political landscape. Prior to the mid-1990s, California was largely a Republican state, particularly in statewide elections, and longitudinal analysis of the California Field Poll by Bowler, Nicholson, and Segura (2006) found that between 1980 and 1994 Latinos were becoming less Democratic. Any hopes the Republicans had of bringing Latino voters into their coalition, however, ended abruptly. The turning point was the qualification and passage of series of ballot initiatives – Proposition 187 (1994), Proposition 209 (1996), and Proposition 227 (1998) – that respectively prohibited unauthorized immigrants from accessing government services (including education); banned affirmative action; and limited bilingual education.

For the GOP, the timing of the initiatives could not have been worse. Not only did they coincide with explosive growth in the Latino electorate, but the initiative campaigns, championed by Republican governor Peter Wilson, were racially charged and scapegoated Latinos for the state's economic ills and expanding social welfare spending. The response from the Latino community was immediate and compelling. Barreto and Woods (2002) found that between 1992 and 1998 just 10 percent of newly registered Latino voters in Los Angeles County identified as Republicans. Pantoja, Ramírez, and Segura (2001) found higher rates of turnout among naturalized Latinos during the 1990s and Barreto, Ramírez, and Wood (2005) report that the best predictor of turnout among Latino voters in California was whether they registered after Proposition 187.

Not only did Latino voters increasingly move towards the Democrats with each successive ballot measure, but the association of these initiatives with the Republican Party led to backlash against the GOP among white voters. Prior to Proposition 187 white voters favored the GOP by eight percentage points. However, after the passage of the three initiatives, the Democrats enjoyed a six-point advantage over the Republican Party among Anglo Californians (Bowler, Nicholson, and Segura 2006).

In sum, extant research demonstrates how immigration politics can affect Latino mobilization and turnout, with the primary beneficiaries of increased Latino political participation being Democratic candidates. At the same time, most of these effects have been documented in either presidential elections or U.S. Senate races in states with large and growing Latino populations and where the Democrats have made strategic investments in Latino outreach (i.e., California, Colorado, Florida, and Nevada). Moreover, these same patterns are noticeably absent

in other states with large Latino populations and salient immigration politics such as Arizona and Texas. This suggests that the ability of Latinos to influence elections may be conditional even when immigration is a salient issues. Thus, the 2014 elections offer a useful context to explore how the confluence of geographic, contextual, and political factors shape Latino political participation. Before doing so, I offer an overview of Latino and immigration politics leading into the 2014 elections.

### **Latino Politics and Immigration Leading into 2014**

As noted at the outset, one of the key takeaways from the 2012 presidential election was Latino voters were pivotal, and in some states decisive, to President Obama's reelection (see Sanchez 2015).<sup>1</sup> In response, the RNC issued its "Growth and Opportunity Project" report suggesting that little to no Latino outreach and the party's hardline views on immigration would continue to hinder the GOP's ability to attract Latino voters. In a June 2013 appearance on NBC's *Meet the Press*, South Carolina Republican Senator Lindsey Graham was even more blunt as he declared that the Republican Party is "in a demographic death spiral as a party and the only way we can get back in good graces with the Hispanic community in my view is pass comprehensive immigration reform. If you don't do that, it really doesn't matter who we run [in 2016]."

The most obvious indicator of the GOP's interest in "getting in good graces with the Hispanic community" was the constructive role that some Republicans, including Graham, played in passing comprehensive immigration reform including a pathway to citizenship out of the U.S. Senate in June of 2013. Yet, despite strong advocacy from the faith and business communities,

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<sup>1</sup> "The 2012 ImpreMedia/Latino Decisions Election Eve Poll" found a three to one advantage for President Obama among Latino voters and that Latino voters accounted for nearly six percent of President Obama's popular vote

the House never considered the legislation even though the senate bill or a close alternative likely would have passed with Democratic votes and support from some Republicans.

Perhaps in hopes of inoculating the GOP from being blamed for killing immigration reform, the House Republican leadership signaled throughout the 113<sup>th</sup> Congress that the chamber might proceed in a piece meal manner. However, for many in the rank-and-file there was little incentive to allow *any* immigration legislation to pass the House as doing so could lead to a conference report combining the senate bill with House legislation. Since conference reports must be brought up for a vote, comprehensive immigration reform could become law through a simple majority vote.

Beyond the nuances of the legislative process, House Republican opposition reflects a basic political calculation. Implementing immigration reform including a pathway to citizenship would create more Democratic voters and further expedite changes to the country's political demography that was already undercutting the party's electoral prospects in a number of localities. Moreover, with few Republican held House districts containing significant shares of Latino voters, there was little chance that Republicans would be punished electorally for failing to act. Rather, for House Republicans representing safe, homogenous districts any movement on immigration reform might engender a primary challenge where they would be forced to compete in a low-turnout, intra-party election composed of more ideological voters. As a consequence, the only votes the House took on immigration related legislation during 2014 reinforced the GOP's hardline approach (i.e., HR 5230 and HR 5272) and had no prospects of being considered in the Democratic controlled Senate.

The House Republicans' aversion to immigration reform highlights the conflict between the party's collective goals and those of individual politicians. For individual House Republicans, what might be good for the Republican Party nationally might not be good for their reelection prospects. The data in Figure 1, which summarizes the 2012 Democratic and Republican vote shares for all contested House seats, as well as the ethnic and racial composition of Democratic and Republican held House seats in the 113<sup>th</sup> Congress, tell much of the story. The average Republican held district had a voting age population that is over three quarters white. In contrast, the average Democratic House seat had 30 percent fewer voting age whites, over twice as many voting age African Americans and Asians, and nearly twice as many voting age Latinos as those held by Republicans.<sup>2</sup>

[Figure 1 About Here]

In response to House Republicans' inaction, President Obama indicated throughout the spring and summer that he would use executive authority to stem the tide of deportations. This too fell by the wayside out of concerns that executive action coming so close to the elections could harm the reelection bids of some Democratic senators. Instead, President Obama delayed doing so until late November. For both parties, short-term political considerations trumped the policy preferences of the Latino community and gave grist for America's Voice founder Frank Sharry's observation that "It's never convenient to help out Latinos" (O'Keefe 2014).

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<sup>2</sup> The GOP's successes in the 2010 election positioned the party to significantly influence the decennial redrawing of districts boundaries for the House of Representatives in a number of states. The end result was strong partisan sorting such that in 2012 winning Democrats received over two-thirds of the vote, while winning GOP House members averaged 62 percent of the vote. The larger average vote share for Democrats is a key reason why the party only gained eight seats in 2012 despite winning roughly 1.4 million more votes nationally than the GOP. In 2014, the Republicans received 51 percent of the aggregate House vote, but won 57 percent of the seats.



## **Data and Methods**

To examine how the parties' handling of immigration reform affected Latino political influence in 2014 necessitates understanding the geography of political competition and how this interacted with the parties' responses to the macro political environment. This combination of factors determined the competitiveness of individual races for the House of Representatives and the degree to which immigration was featured in U.S. Senate races; all of which shaped the degree to which Latino voters were positioned to be influential (measured in terms of turnout and partisan support). In unpacking these dynamics, I combine data from the U.S. Census with indicators of electoral competitiveness (e.g., marginality, candidate quality, and fundraising) and data assessing Latino political participation (e.g., "The 2014 Latino Decisions Election Eve Poll" and L2 Voter Mapping) to descriptively analyze the contours of Latino electoral influence in 2014.

### **2014 Elections for the House of Representatives**

The data presented in Figure 1 illustrate why incumbents of both parties often claim to be more concerned about primary challengers as opposed to a strong general election opponent from the opposition party. For Republicans who fear a challenge from the right, political expedience dictates opposition to legislation that can be depicted as being either weak on security or providing "amnesty" to undocumented immigrants. Yet, developing expectations about members' behavior in terms of average district characteristics obscures individual contexts where immigration politics may play differently.

Early in the 2014 election cycle, Latino Decisions identified 44 Republican and 58 Democratic held Latino Influence House districts (see Damore 2013). Districts were included if the 2010 Latino voting age population either exceeds or approaches the 2012 House margin of

victory or if the district was won in 2012 by the opposition party's presidential candidate.

Depending upon these factors, each district was placed into one of three tiers with the tiers capturing the electoral vulnerability of the incumbent and the degree to which the politics of immigration and the Latino electorate could be influential in 2014. Because few if any of the third tier districts were competitive, they are excluded from the analysis presented here.

In total, there were sufficient districts where Latino voters were positioned to affect majority control of the House of Representatives dependent upon the ability of the challenging party to recruit and fund quality candidates capable of engaging and mobilizing Latino voters. However, poor recruiting by the Democrats in many Latino Influence districts substantially decreased the number of contexts where Latinos and pro-immigration interests could reward or punish members of Congress for their handling of immigration.

For instance, in California's 25th district Democrat Lee Rogers failed to finish in the top two in the eight-candidate jungle primary. Instead, two Republicans were on the ballot competing to represent a district that narrowly went for Romney in 2012 and with a Latino voting age population of 32 percent. Florida best illustrates the Democrats' recruitment woes. The party had no candidate in the 13th district to oppose Republican David Jolly who narrowly won a special election the prior winter. In Florida's 10th, three candidates competed in the Democratic primary to face Daniel Webster and the Democrats struggled to recruit a quality challenger in Florida's 16th before first-time candidate and former professional football player Henry Lawrence filed to run against Vern Buchanan. All three districts were highly competitive in 2012, both at the presidential and congressional levels (see Table 1), and have Latino vote age populations ranging from seven (FL-13) to 14 percent (FL-10).

The Democrats also failed to field a candidate in North Carolina's 9<sup>th</sup> district to compete against incumbent Robert Pittenger. Pittenger ran seven points behind Romney in 2012 in a district with a small but growing Latino voting age population. In districts with retiring Democrats (NC-7 and UT-4), the Democrats fielded lackluster candidates, all but guaranteeing Republican pick-ups.

Democratic challengers who were highly touted at the start of the 2014 cycle faded. For instance, in early spring the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC) reserved advertising buys for the fall. Only nine Democrat challengers running in Republican held tier one or tier two Latino Influence districts were included. Omitted were eight candidates in the DCCC's "Red to Blue" program including three candidates running in Latino Influence districts: Erin Bilbray (NV-3), Sean Eldridge (NY-19), and Rocky Lara (NM-2).

In general, the Democrats' decision-making and patterns of resource allocation were consistent with how parties behave in an unfavorable electoral environment. Instead of trying to expand the playing field, the party protects its incumbents. As a consequence, what occurs on Election Day is largely determined by decisions made months before (Jacobson and Kernell 1983). If donors and party leaders perceive it will be a down year, they devote fewer resources to challenging vulnerable incumbents of the opposition party and more resources protecting their incumbents. The opposite holds for the party that the macro environment favors such that their party's leaders and donors seek to expand the number of districts in play through aggressive recruitment. The party is also able to provide these challengers with access to more resources since many of their most vulnerable incumbents are not being seriously challenged. The spending by Super PACs and other outside groups enhances these patterns.

The data presented in Tables 1 and 2 are consistent with these expectations. Specifically, these tables summarize the 25 Democratic (Table 1) and 24 Republican (Table 2) held tier one and tier two Latino Influence districts' demography (Latino VAP and Latino share of registered voters) and competitiveness (2012 House and presidential margin of victory); 2014 candidate fundraising and outside spending totals; and the 2014 margin of victory.<sup>3</sup>

[Tables 1 and 2 and Figure 2 About Here]

Looking first at the Democratic held seats (Table 1), excluding the three open seats (NC-7, NY-21, and UT-4, all of which were won by Republicans), except for AZ-2, all Democratic incumbents outraised their Republican challengers, as did Seth Moulton in MA-6, who defeated incumbent John Tierney in the primary. Collectively, the Democrats running in these districts raised \$72.2 million as compared to \$47.8 million for the Republican candidates (a 1.5 to 1 ratio). However, spending by outside groups either bolstering Republicans or attacking Democrats offset some of this advantage as the Republican received \$3.3 million more in outside spending.

The patterns for the Republican held tier one and tier two districts are very different (see Table 2). Because many of the Republican candidates were not seriously challenged, their fundraising totals were significantly less than those of their Democratic counterparts. Traditionally, incumbents raise and spend in response to the electoral challenges they face. Doing so ensures that a party's resources are used efficiently such that money flows to the races where it is needed instead of being hoarded by safe incumbents.

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<sup>3</sup> Data for the fundraising ratios, "Democratic Outside," and "Republican Outside" columns of Tables 1 and 2 are from OpenSecrets.org. The "Latino VAP" column uses 2010 U.S. Census data summarizing the Latino share of the voting age population in each House district, while the "Latino Registration Share" column uses data from L2 Voter Mapping capturing the Latino share of registered voters in each district. Data for the "2012 margin" and "2014 Margin" columns are from the Associated Press and data for the "Obama – Romney" column are from Daily Kos.

Even still, the ratio between Republican and Democratic fundraising was larger (1.56 to 1) in these districts as compared to in the Democratic districts. Moreover, while only one Republican candidate in the Democratic held districts raised less than \$300,000, this was the case in eight of the 22 Republican held seats contested in 2014. With few vulnerable Republicans in Latino Influence districts facing strong opposition, outside groups largely stayed out of these races. As a consequence, the total outside spending in the Republican held districts was \$36.5 million (as compared to \$98.3 million in the Democratic districts) and nearly half of this total was concentrated in CO-6 and FL-2; the latter of which was one of the three seats the Democrats flipped in 2014.

In short, the patterns in the tier one and tier two Latino Influence districts in 2014 are consistent with the "self-fulfilling" prophecy hypothesis linking expectations about the macro-political environment to decisions in individual districts. Fearing a bad electoral environment, the Democrats attempted to protect their incumbents, while the Republicans did just the opposite. The combination of stronger and better financed challengers and spending by outside group undercut the fundraising advantages of the Democratic candidates in these districts.

Meanwhile, because most Democratic candidates competing in the Republican held districts failed to mount serious campaigns and were unable to attract the support of outside groups, Republicans in these districts needed fewer resources to win these districts by larger margins than in 2012. Except for the two seats where Democrats prevailed (FL-2 and CA-31) the 2014 margin of victory for every other Republican increased as compared to 2012 and in a handful of districts these increases were sevenfold or greater.

The same cannot be said for the Democratic tier one and tier two Latino Influence districts. Democratic losses in these districts account for 10 of the 16 seats the GOP picked up in 2014 and in just nine of these districts did the Democrats increase their margin of victory as compared to 2012 (in the other six seats the margin decreased). Although "The 2014 Latino Decisions Election Eve Poll" does not disaggregate results for specific House districts (due to small district samples), nationally Latino support for Democratic House candidates decreased from 77 percent in 2012 to 69 percent in 2014 (see Figure 2), while the Republican share increased from 23 percent to 27 percent.

Certainly, some of this drop-off in Democratic support stems from differences in the composition of the 2012 and 2014 Latino electorates. Typically, the midterm electorate is older and draws more heavily from higher socio-economic voters; factors that correlate with greater Republican support. Equally important to consider though are the differences between the "Latino VAP" and "Latino Registration Share" columns in Tables 1 and 2. In only three of the 49 districts did the Latino registration share exceed the Latino voting age population and none by more than .3 percent (MI-1 and OH-6, two districts held by Republican members of the House that have small Latino populations but which were carried by Obama in 2012). Moreover, in nine of the 10 seats that switched from Democratic to Republican representation (the only exception is the heavily Latino FL-26) the difference between "Latino VAP" and "Latino Registration Share" exceeds the 2014 margin.

### **2014 Elections for the U.S. Senate**

As is detailed above, Latino electoral influence has largely been analyzed in presidential elections and to a lesser extent, in U.S. Senate elections occurring in swing states such as Florida,

Colorado, and Nevada. However, with no presidential election on the ballot in 2014, the potential influence of Latino voters was limited to U.S. Senate elections. In 2014, the Democrats held 20 of the 36 U.S. Senate seats up for election and the Republicans held the other 16. However, many of these elections occurred in states where one party holds the overwhelming advantage (e.g., Idaho, Mississippi, and Nebraska for the GOP and Hawaii, Oregon, and Rhode Island for the Democrats) and as a consequence, just ten races were considered competitive by most prominent handicappers (see Table 3).

[Table 3 and Figure 3 About Here]

Moreover, as can be seen from Table 3, which reports the Real Clear Politics (RCP) pre-election forecast, the Latino VAP, Latino registration rates and their increases since 2000, and the 2014 margin of victory (for some states the total and Latino turnout is also reported), besides Colorado, none of the competitive U.S. Senate elections occurred in states with a Latino voting age population greater than 10 percent.<sup>4</sup> As a consequence, the geography of the 2014 U.S. Senate elections provided little opportunity for Latino voters to influence outcomes. Indeed, in just three states with competitive elections (Alaska, Colorado, and North Carolina) did the "Latino VAP" and "Latino Registration Share" exceed the eventual margin and in all three cases, the Democratic candidates lost, as was the case in six of the other seven competitive U.S. Senate races in 2014.

Still and as Figure 3 summarizing the partisan vote share among Latinos for selective states and nationally as reported by "The 2014 Latino Decisions Election Eve Poll" indicates,

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<sup>4</sup> Data for the "Latino VAP" and the "Registration Increase Since 2000" come from the U.S. Census. The "Latino Registration Share," "Total Turnout," and "Latino Turnout" columns use data from L2 Voter Mapping. The "RCP Margin" column reports the Real Clear Politics October 26, 2014 polling average, while the "2014 Margin" column uses data reported by the Associated Press.

Democratic candidates (and the independent candidate in Kansas) for the U.S. Senate enjoyed strong support from Latino voters. At the same time and as we observed in the context of the House of Representatives, the national Democratic share of the Latino vote decreased from 72 percent in 2012 to 67 percent in 2014, while the Republican share increased one percent.

[Figure 4 About Here]

The race in Colorado between Democratic incumbent Mark Udall and Republican Representative Cory Gardner provides a useful example. Engagement and mobilization of Colorado Latino voters was a key factor in top of the ticket Democratic victories in 2008, 2010, and 2012 and it was expected that this pattern would continue in 2014 resulting in Udall being reelected. Despite the candidates' very different records on immigration (Udall voted for S.744 and Gardner received a zero on the National Immigration Score Card), this did not happen. Instead as the data in Figure 4 indicate, this distinction was lost on many Latino voters in Colorado. Indeed, while 46 percent of these voters knew that Udall supported comprehensive immigration reform, 48 percent were unaware of his position. Similarly, 38 percent of Latino voters knew that Gardner opposed immigration reform. However, 41 percent did not know Gardner's immigration record even though it was antithetical to the positions of most Latino voters.

Pairing these data with those presented in Table 3 and Figure 3 suggest a partial explanation for Udall's loss. Clearly, Udall did well with Latino voters, running four points better than Democrats nationally. At the same time, the difference between the Latino voting age population and the share of Colorado Latinos who are registered to vote was nearly twice as large as the eventual margin by which Gardner won. Moreover, turnout among registered Latino



voters in Colorado was 55 percent as compared to 71 percent overall. Not only did the Udall campaign fail to draw a sharp contrast on the immigration issue in the minds of many Latino voters, many potential Latino votes were left on the table owing to the underrepresentation of Latino voters in the Colorado electorate.

The U.S. Senate race in North Carolina offers a different example of immigration politics in statewide elections. Democratic incumbent Kay Hagan not only urged President Obama to delay executive action on immigration, but she, along with other vulnerable Democratic Senate incumbents Mary Landrieu of Louisiana, Mark Pryor of Arkansas, and Jeanne Shaheen of New Hampshire, supported an effort by Senate Republicans to legislatively block the president from taking action. In response, Presente Action ran Spanish-language radio ads attacking Hagan for obstructing relief from deportation for some unauthorized immigrants. In a race decided by less than two points, Hagan received the lowest level of Latino support among all Democratic U.S. Senate candidates (see Figure 3) and Latino turnout lagged 20 points behind the total electorate (see Table 3).

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

As the analysis presented above indicates, despite the potential for Latino voters to be influential in 2014, much of this potential was unrealized. This was clearly the case in elections to the House of Representatives as poor recruitment by the Democrats resulted in uncompetitive races and easy reelections for Republican incumbents. Indeed, the number of seats that the Democrats were able to pick-up in 2014 among the tier one and tier two Republican held Latino Influence districts equaled the number of districts where the party failed to field a candidate: two. Thus, the calculation by House Republicans that inaction on immigration reform would not

hurt their 2014 electoral prospects was validated in no small part by the Democrats emphasis on incumbent protection.

There also were missed outcomes in the Democratic held tier one and tier two districts. By foregoing strong challenges in tier one and tier two Republican held districts, the Democrats not only gave vulnerable Republicans passes, they also ensured that resources, particularly those controlled by Republican and conservative outside groups, would be used to target vulnerable Democratic incumbents. The spending by these groups offset most of the fundraising advantages of the Democratic incumbents, with the end result being ten Republican pick-ups among the tier one and tier two Democratic held Latino Influence districts.

Yet, even though the Democrats sought to protect their incumbents, there appears to have been little mobilization and outreach to Latino voters. In nine of the ten districts that the GOP picked-up in 2014 the margin of victory was less than the difference between the Latino voting age population and the Latino share of registered voters. The most obvious example of this is Arizona's 2<sup>nd</sup> district where Democratic incumbent Ron Barber lost to Martha McSally by 161 votes. The district has a Latino voting age population of nearly 22 percent, but Latinos constitute less than 16 percent of registered voters.

In elections to the U.S. Senate the 2014 map worked against Latino influence as there were few states featuring competitive races and significant numbers of Latino voters. Yet, even in contexts where Latino voters were positioned to be influential, the Democratic candidates were risk adverse with respect to immigration. In Colorado, Mark Udall failed to differentiate himself from his Republican opponent on the animating issue for most Latino voters, while in

North Carolina, Democrat Kay Hagan's opposition to executive action resulted in her being targeted by pro-immigration activists. In both instances the Democratic candidates narrowly lost.

Still, even though some Democrats are hesitant to discuss immigration or support immigration reform efforts during their campaigns, one of the key takeaways from "The 2014 Latino Decisions Election Eve Poll" is that for most Latino voters, immigration continues to be a salient issue. Specifically, 67 percent of Latino voters responded that immigration was either the most important or one of the most important factors in shaping their vote choice. Moreover, how the parties address the issue not only affects how Latinos vote, but if they vote. Among Latinos registered but who did not vote, 60 percent reported that the decision by President Obama to delay executive action on immigration made them less enthusiastic about the president and the Democratic Party.<sup>5</sup> Yet, an even larger share (68 percent) responded that they would be more enthusiastic about the Democratic Party in the future if President Obama were to enact an executive order limiting deportations as he did in late November.

[Figure 5 and 6 About Here]

There also is data suggesting that any lock that the Democrats might think they have on Latino voters is fragile. Not only were there declines in Latino support for Democratic House and Senate candidates in 2014 as compared to 2012, but there also was an increase in the share of Latino voters who see the Democrats as being not overly concerned with their community.

Figure 5 summarizes the responses to a question from the 2014 Latino Decisions Election Eve Poll assessing respondents' perceptions of the Democratic and Republican Parties' views toward the Latino community. Although more than twice as many respondents felt that the Democrats truly

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<sup>5</sup> Included in "The 2014 Latino Decisions Election Eve Poll" was a national sample of 200 registered Latino voters who did not vote in 2014.

care about the Latino community as compared to the GOP, this attitude is shared by less than half of Latino voters.

The poll also finds growing support for Latino political participation distinct from partisanship. Figure 6 reports the responses from the Election Eve Poll assessing why respondents voted in 2014. Nationally, more Latinos indicated that they were voting to support the Latino community as opposed to supporting the Democratic Party; a result that holds in all of the states except for Georgia and Texas. This represents a slight shift as compared to 2012 when 39 percent of Latino voters responded that they were voting to support the Democratic Party and 36 percent stated that their vote was motivated to support the Latino community.

In sum, the results of the 2014 elections suggest two important conclusions about Latino political participation. First, the ability of Latino voters to affect outcomes is shaped by a mix of political, contextual, and geographic factors. When these variables do not align, as was the case in 2014, the impact of Latino voters is muted even as the Latino electorate continues to grow and immigration is a salient issue. Second, participation in the electoral process for many Latinos requires outreach. Yet, many Latinos feel ignored by the Democrats and under attack by the Republicans. As a consequence, while the Democrats continue to receive the benefit of the doubt among many Latino voters, the party did little to consolidate Latino support in 2014.

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**Table 1: Democratic Held Tier One and Tier Two Latino Influence Districts, 2014**

Tier	District	Dem:Rep Fundraising Ratio	Dem Outside Spending	Rep Outside Spending	Latino VAP (%)	Latino Reg Share (%)	Obama - Romney	2012 Margin	2014 Margin
1	AZ-1	2.45:1	\$5,482,290	\$6,729,929	18.1	13.1	-2.5	3.7	5
1	AZ-2	.85:1	\$5,259,913	\$4,921,801	21.7	15.9	-1.5	0.8	-161 votes
1	AZ-9	2.68:1	\$1,093,971	\$60,398	22.4	14.2	4.5	4.1	12.8
1	CA-7	.85:1	\$6,493,389	\$7,082,232	13.7	12.1	4	3.4	-0.4
1	CA-26	2.12:1	\$2,184,358	\$1,366,859	38.5	27.0	10.3	5.4	1.6
1	CA-36	2.63:1	\$612,074	\$173,180	39.4	28.8	3.2	5.8	7.6
1	CA-52	1.07:1	\$4,298,236	\$3,656,501	11.5	10.9	6.4	2.4	3.2
1	CT-5	1.68:1	\$670,025	\$3,917	13.1	10.5	8.2	2.6	7
1	FL-18	3.43:1	\$1,422,149	\$6,479	12.1	11.0	-4.1	0.6	19.6
1	IL-10	1.39:1	\$3,229,694	\$6,981,668	18.1	11.0	16.4	1.2	-3.2
1	MA-6^	1.63:1	\$1,547,992	\$2,684,245	6	6.1	10.8	1.2	13.7
1	NC-7*	.04:1	\$401,762	\$30,272	7.3	2.9	-19.3	0.2	-22.3
1	NY-1	1.68:1	\$5,313,325	\$3,579,671	11.2	7.2	0.5	4.8	-9.6
1	NY-18	1.23:1	\$2,273,909	\$1,221,050	13.1	9.1	4.3	3.8	1.6
1	NY-21*	1.09:1	\$799,262	\$1,712,059	2.4	1.8	6.1	1.9	-21.7
1	TX-23	1.83:1	\$2,636,287	\$2,802,340	65.8	61.4	-2.6	4.7	-2.1
1	UT-4*	.17:1	\$82,497	\$180,858	14	6.1	-37	0.3	-3.2
2	CA-3	1.76:1	\$54,211	\$2,000	23.6	18.0	11.2	8.4	4.4
2	CA-9	19.2:1	\$12,063	\$63,704	32.7	27.0	17.7	11	4.4
2	CA-24	4.75:1	\$345,940	\$0	29	18.5	11	10	3.4
2	FL-22	9.48:1	\$0	\$0	17.7	14.8	9.5	9.2	16
2	FL-26	1.63:1	\$2,678,871	\$6,320,907	68.9	67.1	6.7	11	-3
2	IL-8	9.70:1	\$7,709	\$223,582	22.1	13.9	16.5	9.4	10.8
2	NV-4	4.71:1	\$606,150	\$1,072,596	22.9	15.9	10.7	8	-2.7
2	WA-1	3.32:1	\$0	\$0	6.7	4.3	10.8	7.8	10

\* Open seat

**Table 2: Republican Held Tier One and Tier Two Latino Influence Districts, 2014**

Tier	District	Rep:Dem Fundraising Ratio	Rep Outside Spending	Dem Outside Spending	Latino VAP (%)	Latino Reg Share (%)	Obama - Romney	2012 Margin	2014 Margin
1	CA-10	2.12:1	\$67,112	\$14,444	34.9	29.2	3.6	5.4	12.8
1	CA-31*	.21:1	\$136,187	\$2,079,482	44.4	35.5	16.6	10	-2.8
1	CO-3	4.49:1	\$2,000	\$54,211	20.6	14.8	-6	12	22.4
1	CO-6	.91:1	\$5,322,977	\$4,028,643	16.7	9.3	5.1	2	9.1
1	FL-2	.8:1	\$4,142,468	\$4,382,061	4.8	3.8	-5.8	5.4	-0.8
1	FL-10	29.9:1	\$0	\$14,196	14.2	14.1	-7.7	3.4	23.2
1	FL-16	27.9:1	\$0	\$0	8.8	6.9	-9.3	7.2	23.2
1	IN-2	2.51:1	\$5,878	\$0	6.3	3.8	-14	1.4	20.6
1	NC-9	-	-	\$0	6.6	4.3	-13.4	6.1	-
1	NV-3	2.14:1	\$1,704,346	\$163,753	13.5	13.0	0.8	7.5	24.1
1	NY-11	.82:1	\$125,133	\$3,593,825	13.9	11.9	4.3	5.4	13.3
1	NY-19	.49:1	\$2,227,809	\$8,896	5.4	4.1	6.2	5.8	30
1	NY-23	1.49:1	\$715,490	\$78,497	2.6	2.1	-1.2	3.8	25.2
1	TX-14	29.2:1	\$154	\$8,690	19.2	13.9	-19.8	8.9	25.7
2	CA-25	--	-	\$0	31.5	23.3	-1.9	9.6	-
2	IL-13	1.8:1	\$581,970	\$926,696	2.6	1.8	-0.3	0.3	17.4
2	MI-1	1.11:1	\$1,251,726	\$651,699	1.1	1.4	-8.3	0.5	6.8
2	MN-6*	8.85:1	\$5,750	\$124	1.8	1.5	-15	1.2	17.9
2	NJ-3*	3.16:1	\$1,960,014	\$1,880,989	5.6	5.1	4.6	8.8	10.7
2	NY-2	223.1:1	\$0	\$0	18.6	11.8	4.4	17	38.6
2	NY-27	-	\$0	\$10,060	1.8	1.8	-12.4	1.6	43.4
2	OH-6	2.45:1	\$32,164	\$39,310	0.7	1.0	-12.5	6.6	19.6
2	OH-16	56.2:1	\$3	\$27,743	1.5	1.4	-8.2	4	27.6
2	VA-2	1.77:1	\$208,394	\$62,778	5.7	5.6	1.5	7.6	16.2

\* Open seat



**Table 3: Competitive U.S. Senate Races, 2014**

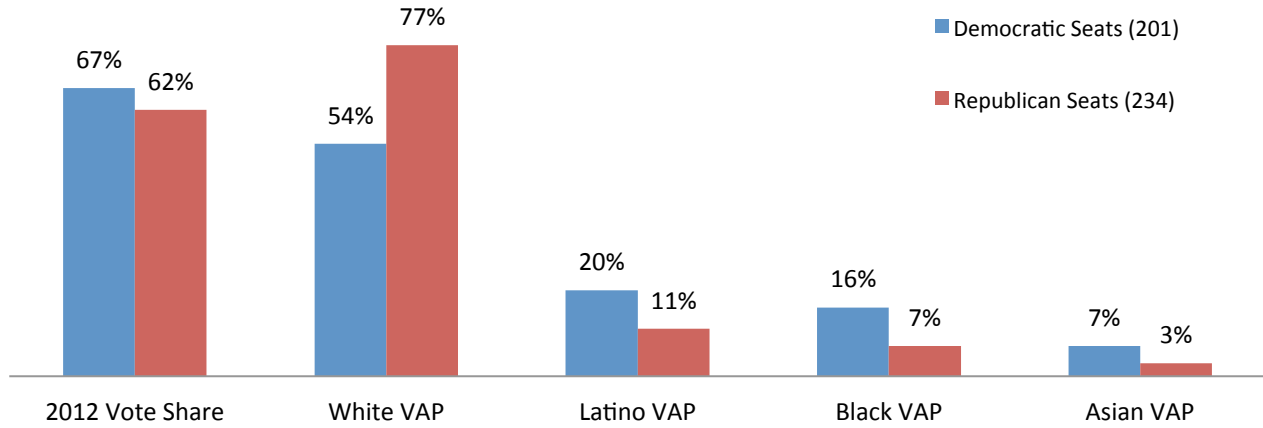
State	RCP Margin*	Latino VAP (%)	Latino Reg (%)	Reg Increase Since 2000 (%)	Total Turnout (%)	Latino Turnout (%)	2014 Margin
Colorado	R + 2.8	15.4	11.1	43	71.3	54.8	R +2.5
Kansas	I +0.6	6.1	4.5	575	58.9	35.9	R +10.8
Alaska	R +4.2	5.9	4.5	67	-	-	R +2.2
Georgia	D +0.3	4.0	3.3	438	-	-	R +7.9
North Carolina	D +1.6	3.4	3.2	271	52.0	31.9	R +1.7
Louisiana	R +4.4	3.1	3.8	50	55.4	48.8	D +1.1 <sup>#</sup>
Arkansas	R +5.0	3.0	2.3	220	61.9	40.2	R +17
Iowa	R +2.2	2.8	2.5	45	-	-	R +8.5
New Hampshire	D +2.2	2.1	2.7	275	-	-	D +3.2
Kentucky	R +4.4	1.5	1.5	5	-	-	R +15.5

\* "RCP Margin" is the Real Clear Politics October 26, 2014 polling average.

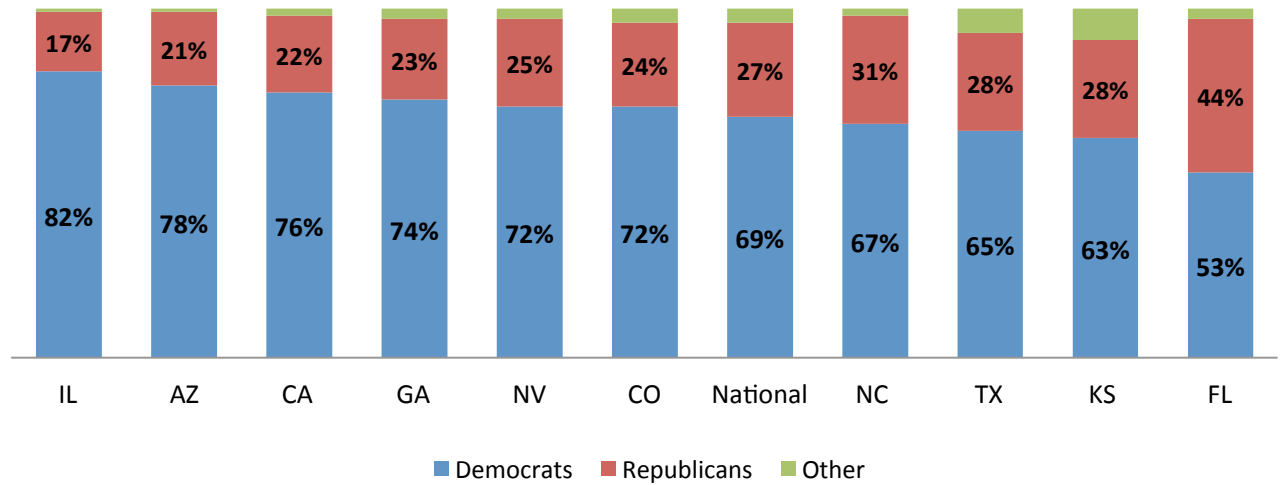
<sup>#</sup> Democratic incumbent Mary Landrieu was defeated in the December 6, 2014 run off election by Bill Cassidy.

**Figure 1: Characteristics of Democratic and Republican Held U.S. House Districts, 2012**

Data from the U.S. Census and the Associated Press

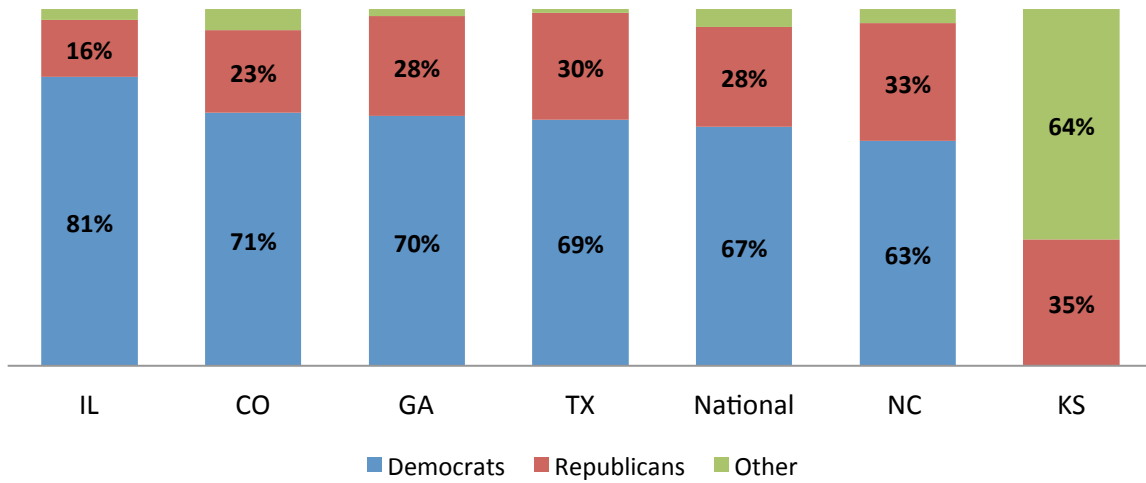


**Figure 2: Latino Vote for the House of Representatives, 2014**



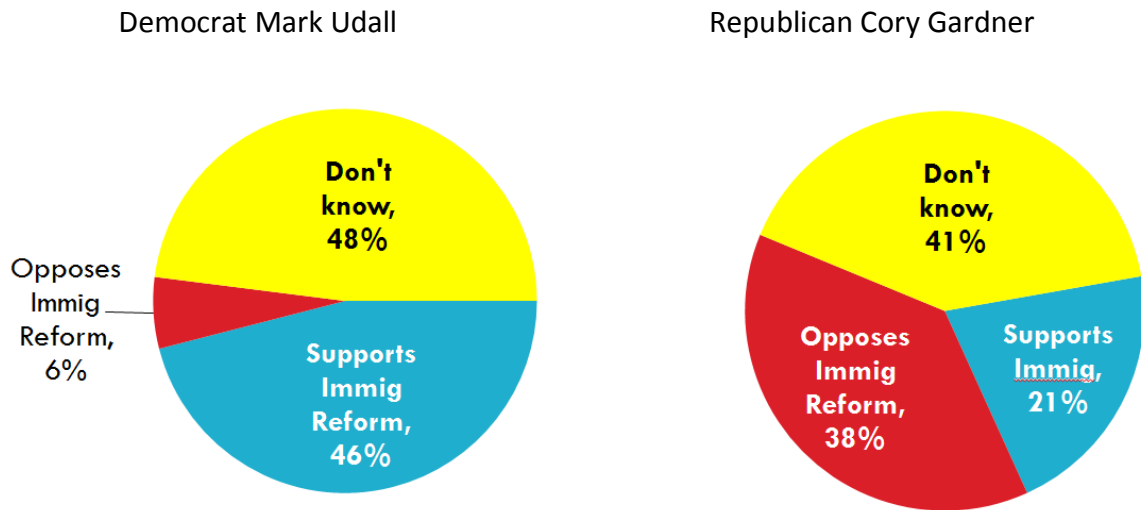
Data from Latino Decisions 2014 Election Eve Poll

**Figure 3: Latino Vote for U.S. Senate, 2014**



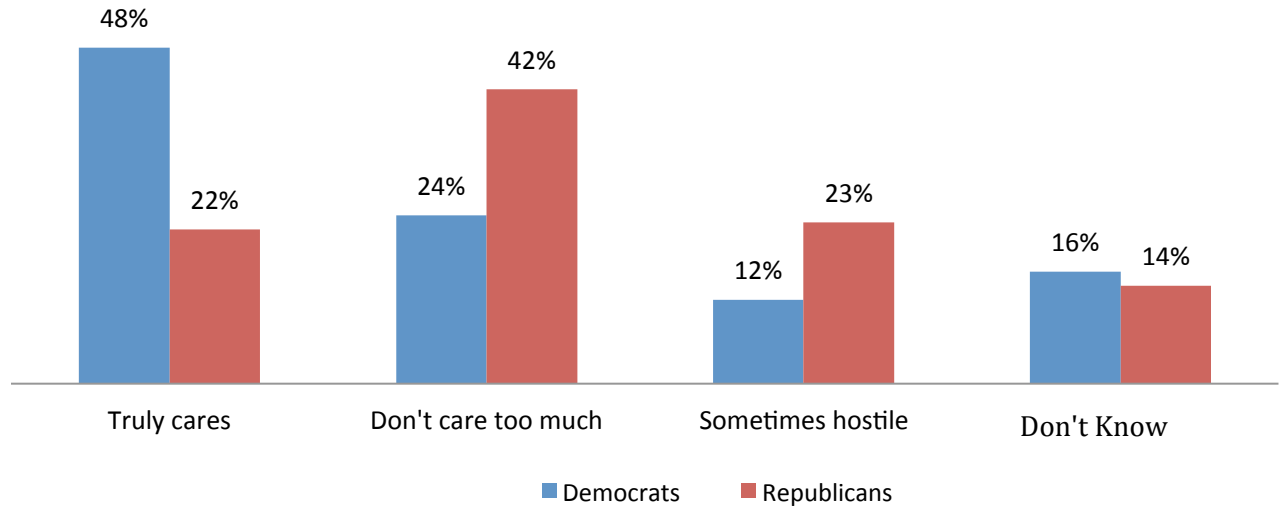
Data from Latino Decisions 2014 Election Eve Poll

**Figure 4: Latino Knowledge of Colorado Senate Candidate Positions on Immigration, 2014**



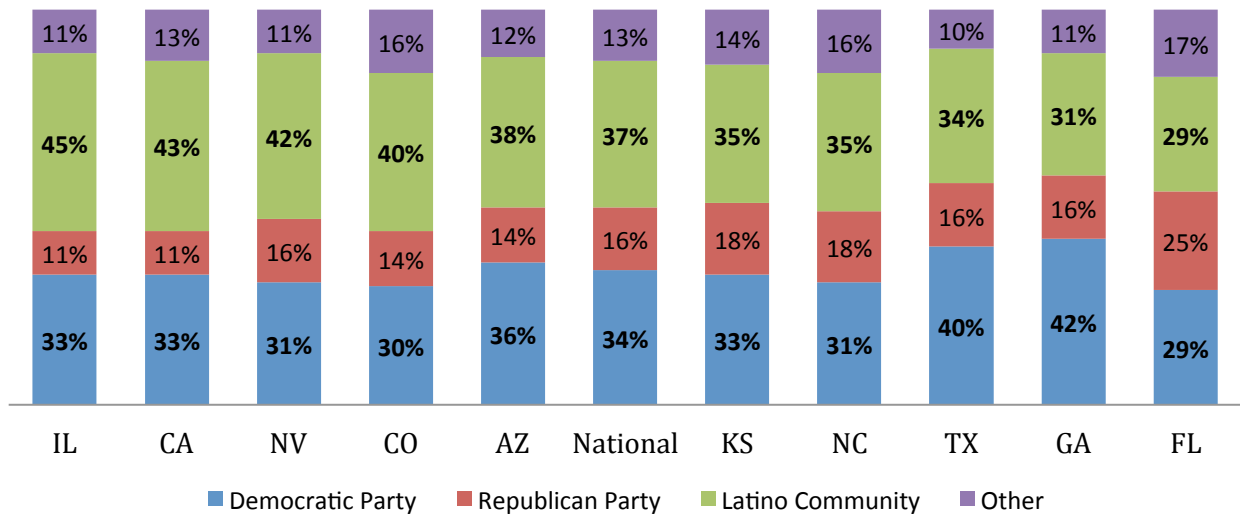
Data from Latino Decisions 2014 Election Eve Poll

**Figure 5: Views of Democratic and Republican Parties Toward the Latino Community**



Data from Latino Decisions 2014 Election Eve Poll

**Figure 6: Motivation for Voting**



Data from Latino Decisions 2014 Election Eve Poll