

The Hispanic Vote in the 2008 Democratic Presidential Primaries

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About this Report

The exit poll data used in this report was provided to the Pew Hispanic Center on a contractual basis by Edison Media Research and Mitofsky International. The data come from Edison/Mitofsky's National Election Pool Exit Poll Surveys of 16 states that held Democratic Party primaries on Super Tuesday, Feb. 5, 2008. These 16 exit polls were aggregated and weighted into a single dataset for Hispanic, white non-Hispanic, and black non-Hispanic voters. The sample size for the aggregated Hispanic voter dataset was 1,809 survey respondents. The sample size for the white non-Hispanic voter dataset was 11,558. And the size for the black non-Hispanic voter dataset was 3,120. The 16 states included in this aggregated analysis are Alabama, [Arizona](#), Arkansas, [California](#), Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, [Illinois](#), [Massachusetts](#), Missouri, [New Jersey](#), [New Mexico](#), [New York](#), Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Utah.

A Note on Terminology

The terms "Latino" and "Hispanic" are used interchangeably in this report. References to "whites" and "blacks" are to the non-Hispanic components of those populations.

About the Authors

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I. Overview

As the Democratic presidential nomination contest heads for a showdown in [Texas](#) on March 4, Hispanics have emerged as a potentially pivotal constituency in the battle between Sens. Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama.

They have already made a big mark in the primaries and caucuses held so far. Latinos' share of the Democratic primary vote has risen in 12 of the 15 states for which exit polling makes it possible to compare 2008 and 2004 turnout shares. And in the Super Tuesday primaries on Feb. 5, Latinos voted for Clinton over Obama by an aggregate margin of nearly two-to-one. They were especially important to Clinton in [California](#), where they comprised 30% of the turnout (up from 16% in 2004) and voted for her by a larger margin than did all voters statewide.

Since Feb. 5, however, Obama has won 10 states in a row and made deep inroads with many voting groups (including whites, lower-income voters and middle-aged voters) that had previously been strongly aligned with Clinton. It remains to be seen if Obama can make similarly big gains with Latinos.

In [Texas](#), Latinos make up 36% of the total population and 25% of the eligible electorate. A mostly Democratic-leaning constituency, Hispanic voters could account for a third or more of the turnout in the Democratic primary. (In Ohio, the other big state that holds a primary on March 4, Latinos make up just 1.5% of the eligible electorate).

Table 1
Hispanic Share of Vote and Candidate Preference in 2008
Democratic Primary and Caucus States

State	2008 Primary Date	2008 Hispanic Percent Share	HISPANIC VOTE (%)	
			Clinton	Obama
Nevada (C)	1/19	15	64	26
Florida ^o	1/29	12	59	30
Arizona ^o	2/5	18	55	41
Arkansas	2/5	2	---	---
California ^o	2/5	30	67	32
Connecticut	2/5	6	43	53
Delaware	2/5	6	---	---
Georgia	2/5	3	---	---
Illinois ^o	2/5	17	49	50
Massachusetts	2/5	5	56	36
Missouri	2/5	4	---	---
New Jersey ^o	2/5	12	68	30
New Mexico ^o (C)	2/5	35	62	36
New York	2/5	10	73	26
Oklahoma	2/5	4	---	---
Tennessee	2/5	3	---	---
Utah (C*)	2/5	7	---	---
Louisiana	2/9	4	---	---
Maryland	2/12	4	55	45
Virginia	2/12	5	46	54
Wisconsin	2/19	4	---	---

Notes: (C) indicates a caucus in 2004 and 2008. (C*) indicates a caucus in 2004 only.
^o Reported voter preferences in these states are based on exit poll analyses with Hispanic sample sizes above 120 cases. In all other states, the Hispanic sample size was smaller, and these voter preference estimates should be interpreted with caution because of large margins of error.
 --- Insufficient data
 Source: 2008 and 2004 exit poll results as reported by CNN

As the Texas showdown looms, this report examines the turnout, demographic characteristics, opinions and voting patterns of the Latino electorate in Democratic primaries and caucuses held so far in 2008.¹ Where possible, it draws comparisons and contrasts between Latino, black and white voting patterns. It also compares Latino turnout in 2008 with turnout in 2004. The report is based on an analysis of Super Tuesday exit polling data about Latinos that the Pew Hispanic Center received on a contractual basis from Edison Media Research and Mitofsky International, the firm that conducts exit poll surveys for the National Election Pool, a national consortium of media organizations.

Key findings in this report:

- In a year when the turnout in the Democratic primaries and caucuses has risen sharply across the board, Latinos have been a growing share of the turnout in 12 of the 15 states for which exit polling permits a comparison between 2008 and 2004. The most noteworthy increase came in [California](#), where Latinos were 30% of all Democratic primary voters on Feb. 5, compared with their 16% share in 2004.
- Latinos in the Super Tuesday Democratic primaries have shown a marked preference for Clinton, supporting her over Obama—63% to 35%.
- Hispanic voters in the Super Tuesday Democratic primaries were markedly younger than voters in other racial and ethnic groups. More than one-in-five Hispanic voters on Super Tuesday were ages 17 to 29, and more than half of all Hispanic voters were younger than 45 years old. By comparison, just one-third of white voters in the Super Tuesday Democratic primaries were younger than 45.
- Hispanic men and women of all ages, educational levels and incomes voted for Clinton over Obama on Super Tuesday. For example, younger Hispanics (ages 17 to 29) voted heavily for Clinton (62%) over Obama (37%) on Feb. 5, in contrast to their counterparts among whites and blacks.
- On Super Tuesday, Hispanics were more likely than whites to say that race was an important factor in deciding their vote—28% of Hispanics said this compared with 13% of whites. However, Hispanics who said that race was important voted for Clinton by about the same percentage (64%)

¹ The analysis in this report is limited to primaries and caucuses for which exit polls from the National Election Pool are available. These include the states of Nevada, Florida, Alabama, [Arizona](#), Arkansas, [California](#), Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, [Illinois](#), [Massachusetts](#), Missouri, [New Jersey](#), [New Mexico](#), [New York](#), Oklahoma, Tennessee, Utah, Louisiana, Washington state, [Maryland](#), [Virginia](#), and Wisconsin. The bulk of the analysis that follows is limited to the 16 states that held Democratic primaries on Super Tuesday, Feb. 5, 2008.

as did Hispanics who said race was not important (63%). By contrast, whites who said race was important were more likely to vote for Clinton than were other whites. And blacks who said race was important (29% of all black voters) were more likely to vote for Obama than were other blacks—87% did, compared with 80% of blacks who said race was not important.

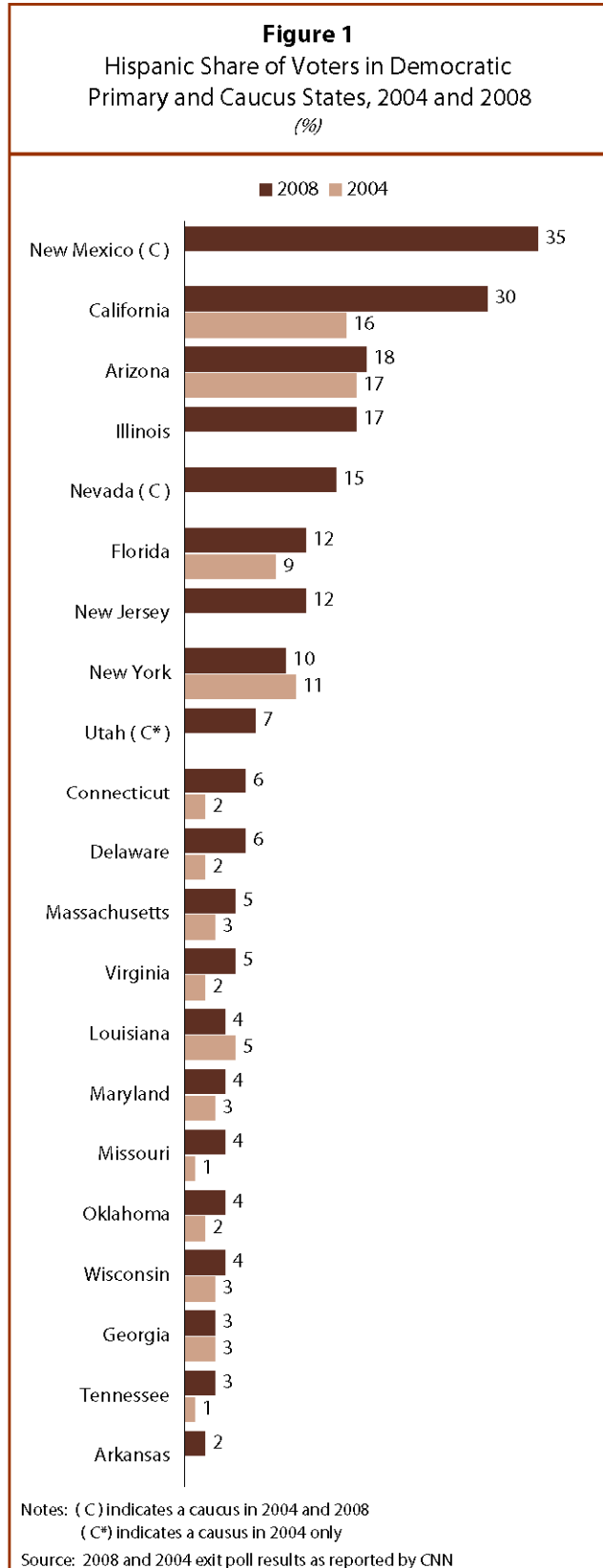
- Latinos were also more likely than whites to say that a candidate's gender was important in their voting decisions on Super Tuesday. Latinos for whom gender was important were more likely to vote for Hillary Clinton than those who said gender was not important.
- A majority of Hispanic voters on Super Tuesday (53%) said that the economy is the most important issue facing the country, a greater share than that of white voters who said the same thing (45%).

II. The Hispanic Share of the Democratic Primary Electorate

The Latino share of the Democratic primary electorate has increased this year in the context of record-breaking overall voter turnout in many of the Democratic primaries.

Some of this rise in turnout may be due to demographic growth. Nationwide, Latinos make up a larger share of the U.S. population now (15.5%) than they did in 2004 (14.3%). They also make up a growing share of the eligible electorate—8.9% in 2007, according to the Census Bureau’s Current Population Survey, compared with 8.2% in 2004. Latinos’ share of the eligible electorate has always lagged behind their share of the total population because so many are either too young to vote or are not citizens. However, as naturalizations increase and as many young U.S.-born Latinos turn 18, the Hispanic share of the eligible electorate will rise.

As noted above, the biggest increase in Latino turnout this year came in the [California](#) Democratic primary, where the share rose to 30% in 2008 from 16% in 2004. There was also a notable increase in the Hispanic share of the Florida Democratic primary vote—to 12% in 2008 from 9% in 2004. [California](#) and Florida together comprise 38% of all Hispanic eligible voters in the United States.



Other states in which the Latino share of Democratic primary and caucus voters increased are [Arizona](#), Connecticut, Delaware, [Maryland](#), [Massachusetts](#), Missouri, Oklahoma, Tennessee and [Virginia](#).

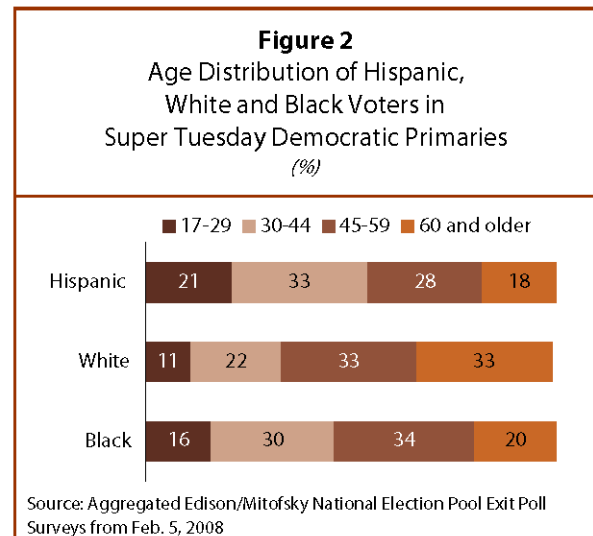
Only in [New York](#) and Louisiana did the Latino share of the Democratic primary vote decrease compared with 2004, to 10% in 2008 from 11% in 2004 in [New York](#), and to 4% in 2008 from 5% in 2004 in Louisiana.

III. Demographic Characteristics of Hispanic Voters in the Super Tuesday Democratic Primaries²

Age. Hispanic voters on Super Tuesday were much younger than white or black voters. The relative youth of the Hispanic vote is largely a reflection of the relative youth of the Hispanic population overall.³ More than one-in-five Hispanic voters on Super Tuesday were ages 17 to 29, and more than half were under 45 years of age. Fewer than one-in-five Hispanic voters were ages 60 and older.

Hispanics look particularly youthful compared with non-Hispanic white voters. Only one-in-ten white voters was ages 17 to 29 and one-in-three whites was ages 60 and older.

Education. Hispanic voters on Super Tuesday were less likely to have attended college or have a college degree than white or black voters. While 65% of Hispanics have more than a high school education, 74% of blacks and 81% of



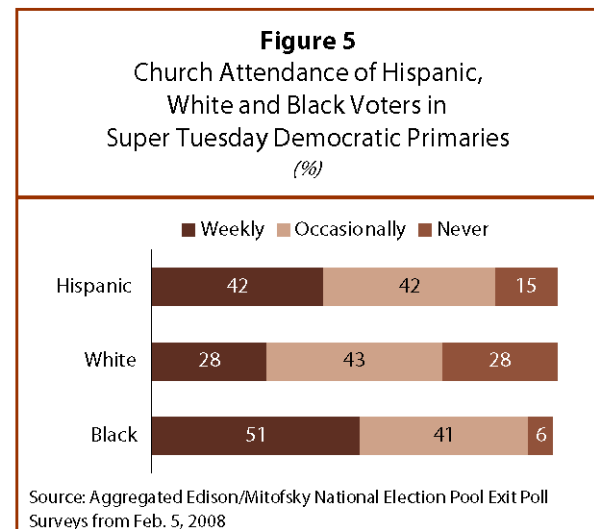
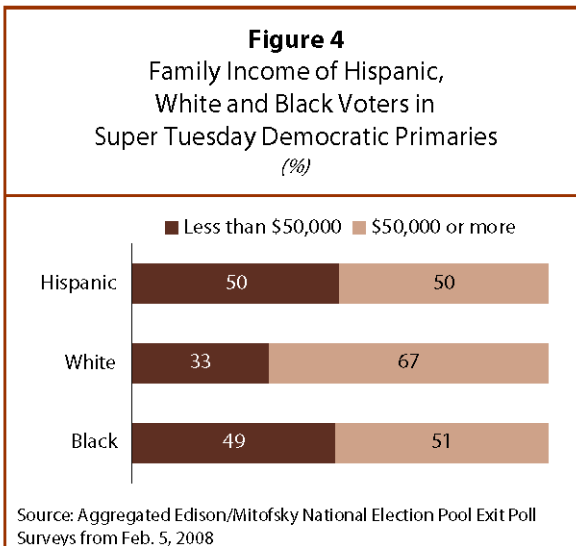
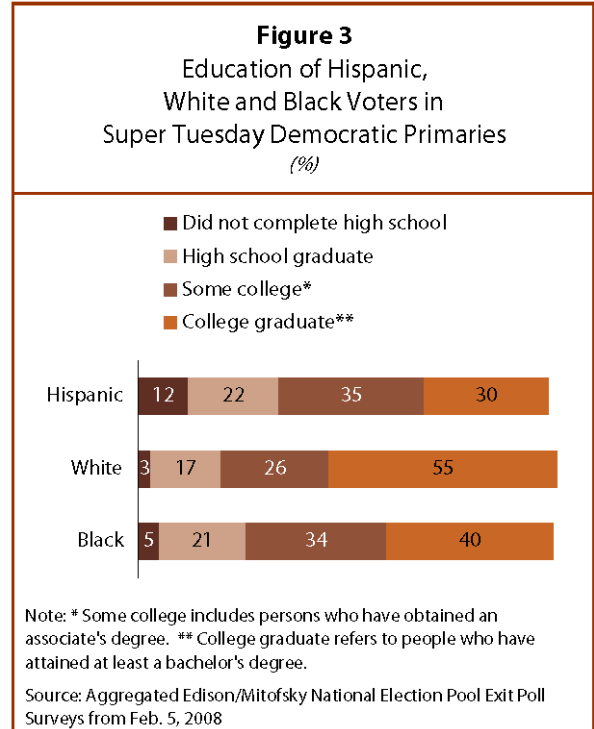
² The analysis in this section is based on Edison Media Research and Mitofsky International's National Election Pool Exit Poll Surveys of 16 states that held primaries on Super Tuesday, Feb. 5, 2008. These 16 exit polls were aggregated and weighted into a single dataset for Hispanic, white non-Hispanic, and black non-Hispanic voters. The sample size for the aggregated Hispanic voter dataset was 1,809 survey respondents. The sample size for the white non-Hispanic voter dataset was 11,588. The size for the black non-Hispanic voter dataset was 3,120. The 16 states included in this aggregated analysis are Alabama, [Arizona](#), Arkansas, [California](#), Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, [Illinois](#), [Massachusetts](#), Missouri, [New Jersey](#), [New Mexico](#), [New York](#), Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Utah.

³ Detailed demographic information on the Hispanic population can be found in the recent Pew Hispanic Center publication, [Statistical Portrait of Hispanics in the United States, 2006](#).

whites do. By contrast, 12% of Hispanics had not finished high school compared with 3% of white voters in the Super Tuesday Democratic primaries and 5% of black voters.

Income. Half of all Latinos who voted in the Super Tuesday Democratic primaries had a family income of \$50,000 or more, similar to the share of black voters. But two-thirds of white voters had this level of family income.

Church Attendance. Regular churchgoers form a sizable share of the Latino Democratic electorate. More than four-in-ten Latino voters in the Democratic primaries attended church at least weekly, while just 15% said they never attend church. Latino voters were more likely than white voters to be regular churchgoers, but less likely than black voters to go to church weekly.



IV. Hispanic Candidate Preferences in the Democratic Primaries

Nationwide, aggregated exit poll results from 16 Super Tuesday Democratic primaries show that 63% of Latinos voted for Clinton and 35% voted for Obama.

Clinton's biggest margin of victory among Latinos was in her home state of [New York](#), where she drew 73% of the Hispanic vote. She won 67% the Latino vote in [California](#). She won 59% in Florida, a state where neither candidate actively campaigned because of an intra-party dispute over the timing of the primary.

Obama narrowly won the Latino vote in his home state of [Illinois](#) on Super Tuesday—50% to Clinton's 49%.

Table 2
Hispanic Voter Preferences in Super Tuesday Democratic Primaries*, by Demographic (%)

	Total	Clinton	Obama
Hispanic vote		63	35
Gender			
Women	56	67	32
Men	44	58	40
Age			
17-29	21	62	37
30-44	33	57	42
45-59	28	65	33
60 and older	18	73	25
Educational attainment			
Did not complete high school	12	79	21
High school graduate	22	68	30
Some college**	35	60	39
College graduate	19	57	41
Postgraduate study	11	56	42
Religious service attendance			
Weekly	42	69	29
Occasionally	42	63	35
Never	15	48	50
Marital status			
Married	57	66	32
Single	43	60	39
Total family income			
Less than \$50,000	50	68	31
\$50,000 or more	50	59	40
Area population			
City over 50,000	48	60	39
Suburbs	43	66	32
Small city and rural	10	66	31

Note: Super Tuesday Aggregate Exit Poll sample size is 1,809 for Hispanics. For some questions, sample size may be smaller. * Includes Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Illinois, Massachusetts, Missouri, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oklahoma, Tennessee and Utah. ** Some college includes persons who have obtained an associate's degree.

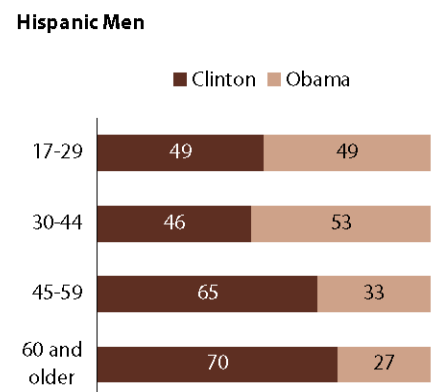
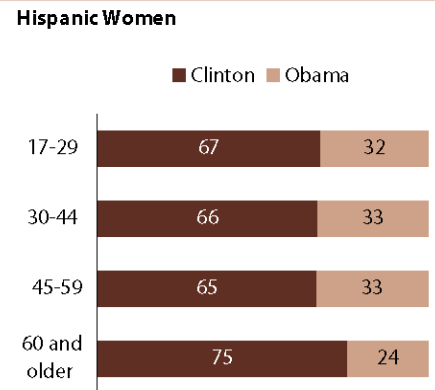
Source: Aggregated Edison/Mitofsky National Election Pool Exit Poll Surveys from Feb. 5, 2008

Clinton’s support has come from virtually all demographic components of the Hispanic Democratic primary electorate. One finding that stands out from the aggregated Super Tuesday exit polls is that Latinos ages 17 to 29 were equally likely to vote for Clinton as were Latinos overall—63% versus 62%. And, as noted above, Latinos ages 17 to 29 comprised 21% of all Latinos voting in primaries on Super Tuesday.

Hispanic women also favored Clinton on Super Tuesday—67% to 32% for Obama, with women making up 56% of the Hispanic electorate that day.

Clinton’s support among Latino women was similar across age groups. But, young Latino men ages 17 to 29 split their vote evenly between Clinton and Obama.

Figure 6
Hispanic Voting Patterns in Super Tuesday Democratic Primaries, (%)

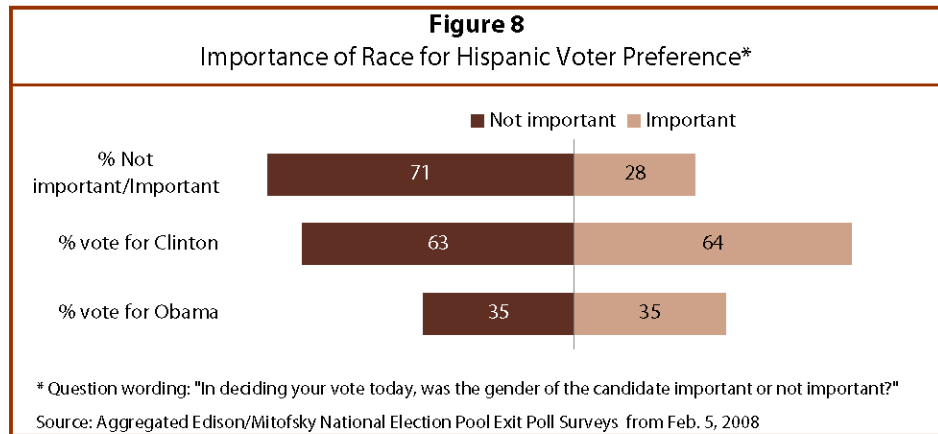
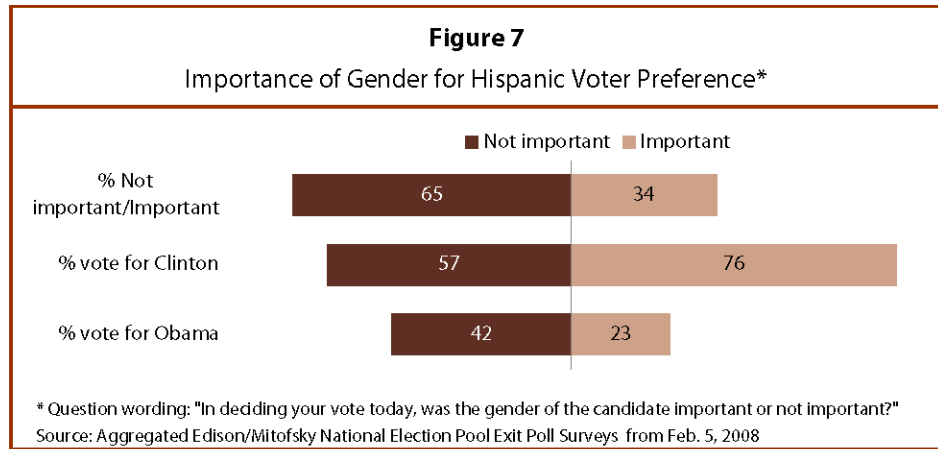


Age Distribution of Hispanic Voters by Gender

	Men	Women
17-29	15	26
30-44	35	32
45-59	30	27
60 and older	20	15

Source: Aggregated Edison/Mitofsky National Election Pool Exit Poll Surveys from Feb. 5, 2008

Race and gender played different roles among Hispanic voters on Super Tuesday. Those who said gender was an important candidate quality in deciding their vote (34% of all Latino voters) were more likely to vote for Clinton than were Hispanics overall. By contrast, those who said that race was an important factor in deciding their vote (28% of all Latino voters) voted for Clinton by the same percentage as did Hispanics overall.



The candidate preferences of Hispanics in the Super Tuesday Democratic primaries (63% for Clinton, 35% for Obama) were different from the preferences that day of whites (53% for Clinton, 41% for Obama) and of blacks (16% for Clinton, 82% for Obama). This final section considers how the Hispanic vote differed from that of white and black voters across a range of attitudes and demographic characteristics.

The economy has been foremost in the minds of many voters this primary election season, but more so among Hispanic and black voters than among whites. Yet, the importance of the economy appears to have meant something different to Hispanic voters than to white voters. Among Hispanics who said that their family is getting ahead financially, Clinton was the preferred candidate. By contrast, white voters who said they were getting ahead financially favored Obama.

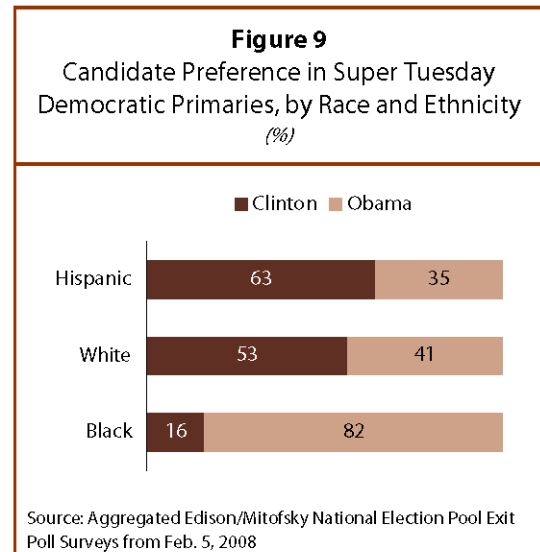


Table 3
Views of Hispanic, White and Black Voters in Super Tuesday Democratic Primaries*, by Candidate (%)

	HISPANIC			WHITE			BLACK		
	Total	Clinton	Obama	Total	Clinton	Obama	Total	Clinton	Obama
Vote by race and ethnicity		63	35		53	41		16	82
Most important issues									
The economy	53	65	34	45	58	36	54	15	82
The war in Iraq	24	57	42	33	43	52	22	17	81
Health care	21	67	30	18	60	34	21	16	83
State of the national economy									
Excellent/good	11	56	40	8	47	46	6	14	86
Not so good/poor	89	64	35	91	54	41	93	16	82
Important candidate qualities									
Can bring about needed change	46	45	54	49	35	61	68	7	92
Cares about people like me	17	60	37	12	55	31	17	21	75
Has the right experience	27	93	6	25	93	3	8	71	28
Has the best chance to win in November	7	80	19	10	45	50	5	34	65
Family financial situation									
Getting ahead financially	18	71	28	14	46	50	14	16	84
Holding steady financially	54	59	39	60	52	42	55	16	83
Falling behind financially	27	66	33	25	59	35	30	15	81

Note: Super Tuesday Aggregate Exit Poll sample size is 1,809 for Hispanics; 11,558 for whites; and 3,120 for blacks. For some questions, sample size may be smaller. * Includes Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Illinois, Massachusetts, Missouri, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oklahoma, Tennessee and Utah.

Source: Aggregated Edison/Mitofsky National Election Pool Exit Poll Surveys from Feb. 5, 2008

The candidate quality that was most important to all three groups in deciding their vote was the ability to “bring about needed change.” But this mattered less to Latinos (46%) and whites (49%) than it did to blacks (68%). Also, Latino “change” voters supported Obama by a smaller margin than did black and white “change” voters. Of those Latinos who said change was the candidate quality that mattered most, 54% voted for Obama and 46% voted for Clinton. Obama won the white “change” vote by a bigger margin—61% to Clinton’s 35%. Among black “change” voters, Obama won 92% of the votes to Hillary Clinton’s 7%.

Among both Latinos and whites, women voters have formed the base of Clinton’s support in the early primaries and on Super Tuesday. However, the gap between her support from Latino women (67%) and men (58%) was not as large as the gap between her support from white women (60%) and men (46%) was not as large as the gap between her support from white women (60%) and men (46%).

For Obama, young voters overall have been a key base of support, but as noted above, this base was smaller among Latinos than other groups on Super Tuesday. Young Latinos, ages 17 to 29, were less likely to vote for Obama than were young white and black voters on Super Tuesday—37% of Latinos versus 57% of whites and 84% of blacks.

Both Latino and white college graduates were more likely than Latinos and whites overall to vote for Obama. However, Obama split the college graduate vote among whites (49% to Clinton’s 47%), and Clinton won the vote among Latino college graduates (57% to Obama’s 41%).

Race and gender are two issues that were in the forefront of some voters’ minds on Super Tuesday, with gender appearing to have affected voting more than race did.

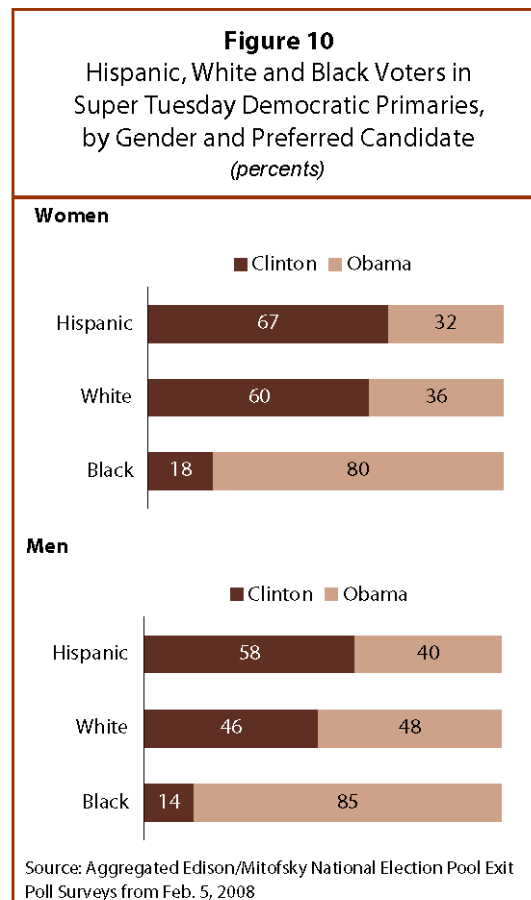


Table 4
Importance of Candidate's Race and Gender for Hispanic, White and Black Voters
in Super Tuesday Democratic Primaries*, by Candidate
(%)

	HISPANIC			WHITE			BLACK		
	Total	Clinton	Obama	Total	Clinton	Obama	Total	Clinton	Obama
Vote by race and ethnicity		63	35		53	41		16	82
Importance of candidate's gender**									
Important	34	76	23	19	70	23	23	23	77
Not important	65	57	42	80	49	46	75	13	84
Importance of candidate's race**									
Important	28	64	35	13	60	35	29	11	87
Not important	71	63	35	86	52	43	69	17	80

** Question wording: "In deciding your vote today, was the gender/race of the candidate important or not important?"

Note: Super Tuesday Aggregate Exit Poll sample size is 1,809 for Hispanics; 11,558 for whites; and 3,120 for blacks. For some questions, sample size may be smaller. * Includes Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Illinois, Massachusetts, Missouri, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oklahoma, Tennessee and Utah.

Source: Aggregated Edison/Mitofsky National Election Pool Exit Poll Surveys from Feb. 5, 2008

Latinos (34%) were more likely than whites (19%) and blacks (23%) to say that gender was important in deciding their vote. For all three groups, those who said gender was important in deciding their vote were more likely to vote for Clinton than those who said that gender was not important.

Race appears to have been less important than gender in influencing Latino voting, and race played a lesser role among Hispanics than among whites. Hispanics (28%) were more likely than whites (13%) to say that the race of a candidate is important in deciding their vote. However, Hispanic voters who said that race was important were equally likely as Hispanic voters who said that race was *not* important to have voted for Clinton—64% versus 63%. Among whites, those who said that race was important were more likely to have voted for Hillary Clinton (60%) than were those who said that race was *not* important (52%).

For more information about Hispanic voters, see the following Pew Hispanic Center reports:

[*2007 National Survey of Latinos: As Illegal Immigration Issue Heats Up, Hispanics Feel a Chill.*](#)

[*Hispanics and the 2008 Election: A Swing Vote?*](#)

[*Hispanics and the 2004 Election: Population, Electorate and Voters*](#)