

**Latinos deliver North Carolina for Obama!
(with Peter Siavelis and Alejandro Manrique)**

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Imagine this headline. Imagine it coming true. Latinos have an unprecedented opportunity to influence the outcome of the presidential election right here in North Carolina. While Latinos in Texas, New Mexico and Florida are used to being considered crucial swing voters, North Carolina's solid Republican voting tradition (not voting for a Democratic president since Jimmy Carter in 1976) means that rarely has the state been competitive. Now it is. And Latinos can and must make a difference. According to the Pew Hispanic center there are 120,000 eligible Latino voters in North Carolina, or about 2% of total voters. This may seem a small sum especially considering that Latinos overall make up 7% of our states' population. However, considering that recent polls show that Barack Obama and John McCain are in a virtually dead heat, this 2% could tip the scales one way or another. What better assertion of nascent Latino political power than to decide how the state's electoral votes will be allocated?

Latinos realize where their interests lie. While once a proponent of comprehensive immigration reform, John McCain has shifted his rhetoric and policy proposals to satisfy his nativist Republican base, and now sounds little different from those demanding deportation, restriction and wall-building. On economics, McCain's continuation of the eight years of the failed Bush Administrations' policies would be a disaster for the Latino community. Millions would likely lose health insurance under McCain's privatized plan and federal support for Latino health and education programs would be eliminated. There will be no significant change in policy in Iraq, further bleeding our economy in support of a costly war that has bankrupted the treasury and left nothing to improve our own aging and failing infrastructure. The McCain-Palin energy policy and the Republican duo's strong ties to oil companies will keep gas prices high, making it difficult to even afford the trip to work. On all of these issues a McCain victory would represent a step back for Latinos in our state and nation.

Across the nation as a whole as the economy tanks, the polls are shifting against the McCain-Palin ticket. If past history is any guide, the dominant Republican response to looming defeat will be to play down and dirty – bringing out the old three-card trick of deceit, fear and distraction. The Deceit Card; we will definitely be told negative things about Obama and his policies – things that will not be true – about his religion, his secret plans to raise taxes, even his friendship with terrorists old and new. The Race Card: we may even find Republicans trying to split the Democrat's winning rainbow coalition of voters. Expect them to stoke resentments in the African-American community against Latino immigrants, and in the Latino community about the dangers of a black backlash if Obama wins. The Distraction Card: we may even find them trying to cash in the machismo card – they're doing it already: marketing the ultra-conservative Governor of Alaska as some kind of radical political sex symbol. Latino voters will need to be ready for those tricks, and resistant to their appeal. They will need to remember that, no matter how many times it is implied otherwise, Obama is not a Muslim. They will need to remember that it is Obama, not McCain, who has been steadfast in his support for comprehensive immigration reform; and that it is Obama, not McCain, who will raise the minimum wage for all workers, Latino, African-American, and white. Sarah Palin may be able to wink. She can even flutter her

eyes. But new mascara does not mean new policies; and old policies are exactly what we do not need in this crucial general election.

The stakes are high this time round. The good news is that survey data shows Obama with a lead of 66% to McCain's 21% among Latinos nationwide. Let's hope that lead will be reflected in the Latino vote in North Carolina in November; and the best way to guarantee that is to vote early and to vote Democrat – all the way down the ballot from the President at the top to the judges at the bottom. Barack Obama for President, Joe Biden for Vice-President and Kay Hagan for the US Senate – now that is a progressive three-card trick that is definitely worth voting for.