

Polling Memo and Summary
Pope Francis and Latino Environmental Values
2015 Environmental Attitudes Survey

Submitted to

Earthjustice and GreenLatinos



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Polling Memo and Summary: Pope Francis and Latino Environmental Values

Latino Decisions in partnership with Earthjustice and GreenLatinos conducted a national survey of Latino registered voters and their attitudes toward the environment. The survey, fielded between June 24 and July 8, is based on a national sample of 1,200 Latino registered voters who were interviewed by landline, cell and on-line in English and Spanish. The survey has a nominal margin-of-error of +/- 2.8%.

We examined the degree to which Latinos respond to environmental statements made by Pope Francis, and find:

- Over three-quarters (76 percent) of Latinos support Pope Francis's theology on environmental conservation.
- Nearly nine out of ten (87 percent) of are interested in what Pope Francis has to say about the environment.
- The pontiff's environmental messages resonate more with Latinas, immigrants, and lower-income Latinos.

This memo places these findings into the broader context of Latino religious identities and affiliations.

Is Catholicism Relevant in the Lives of Latinos?

An examination of the impact of Pope Francis's environmental messages on Latino voters presupposes that Catholicism is meaningful for Latinos. Is Catholicism relevant in the lives of Latinos? We believe so, and there is extensive evidence for this position.

Although much has been written about the rise of evangelicalism among Latinos (Espinosa 2014; Pantoja 2010), the fact remains that Catholicism is the dominant religious tradition among Latinos. According to estimates from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 68 percent of Latinos are Catholic (<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/cultural-diversity/hispanic-latino/demographics/hispanic-ministry-at-a-glance.cfm>).

More recent studies suggest that the share of Latinos who are Catholic has declined to 55 percent (<http://www.pewforum.org/2014/05/07/the-shifting-religious-identity-of-latinos-in-the-united-states/>). However, the decline in Catholicism among Latinos does not mean they are moving into other religious traditions (Gershon, Pantoja and Taylor *forthcoming*).

We contend that the decline is largely due to a lack of formal engagement by Latinos with the Catholic Church. For example, the 2006 Latino National Survey (LNS) found 25 percent of Latinos say they “seldom or never” attend church services. The LNS, with a nationally drawn random sample of 8,634 Latinos, is presently the largest national surveys of this population. Similarly, the 2013 Hispanic Values Survey (Jones, Cox, and Navarro-Rivera 2013) found that approximately 38 percent of Latinos say they “seldom or never attend” church services (Jones, Cox, and Navarro-Rivera 2013, 10).

Two general conclusions can be drawn from those data points:

1. Catholicism appears to be in decline among Latinos in the United States.
2. Religion is becoming less significant; anywhere from 25 percent to 38 percent forgo attending religious services.

Without proper context, the data points overstate the degree to which Catholicism is a declining identity among U.S. Latinos. Catholicism remains a significant cultural and social force among Latinos (Espinosa and Garcia 2008). Nearly, all major Latino cultural practices and celebrations include elements of Catholicism (Matovina 2012). Thus, Latinos may be culturally Catholic, even if they rarely attend church services. Consequently, there is reason to believe that Latinos will be attentive to messages delivered by the Pope, the head of the Catholic Church. Moreover, their level of interest may increase given that Pope Francis is from Latin America (Argentina, specifically) and frequently communicates in Spanish.

Pope Francis and Latino Environmental Values

Pope Francis has taken a progressive position on a variety of social issues, including the environment. In fact, his first papal encyclical, *Laudato Si*, [focused exclusively](#) on environmental issues. In the encyclical, Pope Francis identifies climate change as one of the most pressing environmental challenges facing this generation.

His positions on climate change and environmental conservation resonate with Latino environmental values. In the Latino Decisions/Earthjustice/GreenLatinos survey, 82 percent of Latino voters said they were somewhat to very worried about climate change. High levels of concern about a wide-range of environmental issues held throughout the study.

In the survey Latinos were asked to rate a series of statements on a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 being “strongly opposed,” 5 “neutral”, and 10 being “strongly support.” With respect to

Pope Francis, respondents were asked, “I support Pope Francis’s efforts to highlight that defending God’s creation is our moral responsibility.” Over three-quarters (76 percent) support (scores of 6 through 10) the Pope’s environmental efforts. Only 11 percent were opposed (scores of 0 to 4) and 10 percent were neutral (score of 5).

Respondents were also asked, “How interested are you in what Pope Francis has to say about our moral duty to protect the environment?” Response options were: no interest at all, very little interest, only some interest, quite a bit of interest, and a great deal of interest. Only 11 percent said they had no interest at all in what the Pope had to say on protecting the environment, while 87 percent displayed some interest (ranging from very little to a great deal) in Pope Francis’s environmental messages. The majority of respondents, 58 percent, were “quite a bit” or “a great deal” interested.

Among the groups of Latinos who said they were interested “quite a bit” and “a great deal”, were women (63 percent were interested quite a bit/a great deal), immigrants (65 percent were interested quite a bit/a great deal), and lower-income participants, making less than \$40,000 per year (71 percent were interested quite a bit/a great deal).

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Gary M. Segura, Co-Founder and Principal

Dr. Gary Segura is a co-founder and Principal at Latino Decisions. He is also Professor of Political Science at Stanford University, and Co-Principal Investigator of the American National Election Studies (ANES). He received his Ph.D. from the University of Illinois. Over the last 18 years, Segura has directed polling research that has completed over 100,000 interviews with Americans of all backgrounds on matters of social and political importance.

He has briefed members of both the U.S. House and Senate as well as senior White House officials and appeared on National Public Radio, the News Hour, Frontline, the CBS Evening News, MSNBC, and numerous other outlets. On the day after the 2010, 2012, and 2014 elections Segura led national press briefings to explain and unpack the Latino vote and his analysis was quoted in virtually every story about Latino voters in the days and weeks after each national election.

His research has been published in the most prestigious disciplinary outlets including the *American Political Science Review*, the *American Journal of Political Science*, and the *Journal of Politics*. Segura's most recent book publications include: *"The Future is Ours:" Minority Politics, Political Behavior and the Multiracial Era of American Politics*, (Congressional Quarterly Press), *Latinos in the New Millennium: An Almanac of Opinion, Behavior, and Policy Preferences* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), and *Latino America: How America's Most Dynamic Population is Poised to Transform the Politics of the Nation* (Public Affairs).

Segura has testified as an expert on political power and discrimination in both voting rights cases and LGBT civil rights cases, and has filed amicus curiae briefs on subjects as diverse as marriage equality and affirmative action. He has served as an expert witness in the two landmark LGBT rights cases of 2013, *Windsor v. United States* and *Hollingsworth v. Perry*. In 2010, he was elected a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

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At Latino decisions, Pantoja has directed all major research on Latino environmental attitudes and has provided critical insights into how and why Latinos view issues such as carbon pollution, conservation and climate change.

His academic research is published in over three-dozen journals and edited volumes. He has delivered over one hundred presentations at academic conferences and public forums. Presentations for Latino Decisions have been given at the Netroots Nation Conference, the Civil Justice Association of California meeting, the State of Arizona's Latino Vote Symposium, and the Center for American Progress. As a consultant he has carried out research for organizations such as the Center for American Progress, the National Association of Latino Elected Officials, the Natural Resources Defense Council and others.

He has authored over a dozen political blogs and co-authored the following policy reports, *Building An All-In Nation*, *A View from the American Public*, *Anti-Immigrant Politics and Lessons for the GOP from California*, and *A Closer Look at Legal Permanent Residents' (LPRs): Motivations and Barriers to Naturalization*. Dr. Pantoja frequently provides expert political commentaries for various newspapers, newsmagazines, television, and radio programs.

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