



## Quotes from Leading Republicans on the Politics of Immigration

*Updated 1/13/2009*

- **President George W. Bush** told the [Washington Post](#) that “[The Republican Party] should be open-minded about big issues like immigration reform, because if we're viewed as anti-somebody -- in other words, if the party is viewed as anti-immigrant -- then another fellow may say, “Well, if they're against the immigrant, they may be against me.”
- **President George W. Bush** [in Politico](#) spoke about the need to rebuild the GOP brand. He said the party needs to embrace reform and broaden the party's outreach, especially to Hispanics. Looking back at the heated immigration debate of 2006, Bush said Republicans came off as “anti-Latino.”
- **President George W. Bush** told the [Associated Press](#) that the divisive immigration debate created an image of his party that was "Republicans don't like immigrants."
- **Senator Mel Martinez (R-FL)**, [stated on NBC's "Meet the Press"](#) that "the very divisive rhetoric of the immigration debate set a very bad tone for our brand as Republicans...there were voices within our party, frankly, which if they continue with that kind of rhetoric, anti-Hispanic rhetoric, that so much of it was heard, we're going to be relegated to minority status."
- **Karl Rove** [in Newsweek](#) said, “Hispanics dropped from 44 percent Republican in 2004 to 31 percent in 2008. The GOP won't be a majority party if it cedes the young or Hispanics to Democrats. Republicans must find a way to support secure borders, a guest-worker program and comprehensive immigration reform that strengthens citizenship, grows our economy and keeps America a welcoming nation. An anti-Hispanic attitude is suicidal. As the party of Lincoln, Republicans have a moral obligation to make our case to Hispanics, blacks and Asian-Americans who share our values. Whether we see gains in 2010 depends on it.”
- **Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice** told the [New York Times Magazine](#): “I was a major proponent of the temporary-worker program and finding some way to normalize the status for these people. I think that it goes to the core of who we are. I hear some people talking about, well, maybe there should be a timeout on legal immigration, check your last name

and see whether or not it came over on the Mayflower. Improving the economic conditions that would allow people who are clearly ambitious — if they're going to walk across the desert to get here, they're ambitious people — improving the capability of those people to stay home and contribute is the last piece of that puzzle. Comprehensive immigration reform is the one thing I wish we'd been able to do, and it's going to have to be done, and I hope it's done soon."

- **William Kristol** on [FOX News Sunday](#) said, "There's been a lot of self-inflicted damage by Republicans. Hispanics—let's take one group. Some political scientist did some calculations and told me that if Hispanics had voted in 2008 as they had done in 2004, McCain would have carried Florida, Nevada, and New Mexico. Totally self-inflicted wound by House Republicans, thinking, 'Hey, let's be really tough on immigration and let's demagogue and let's not work with President Bush to pass legislation.'"
- **Colin Powell** said in an [interview with CNN](#), "I think the party has to take a hard look at itself," Powell said in the interview, which was taped Wednesday. "There is nothing wrong with being conservative. There is nothing wrong with having socially conservative views — I don't object to that. But if the party wants to have a future in this country, it has to face some realities. In another 20 years, the majority in this country will be the minority."
- **Republican pollster Whit Ayers** said [in the Arizona Capitol Times](#). "The Hispanic vote is probably the most important swing-voter group in the American electorate over the next decade...Virtually everybody believes that America should control its borders. That's true of Hispanics and non-Hispanics. The difference is what happens to the Hispanics that are currently residing in America and the tone that is used to discuss their fate. It is very difficult to imagine Republicans performing competitively among Hispanic voters if prominent Republicans are demonizing Hispanics and threatening to throw 12 million of them out of the country."
- **Congressman Mario Diaz-Balart (R-FL)**, in [CBS News](#): "We have a very, very serious problem. It was the tone of the debate. The tone of some Republicans was offensive to the vast majority of Hispanics."
- **Senator Lindsey Graham (R-SC)** said [in the Washington Post](#): "If the [Obama] administration wants to move forward with immigration again, I stand ready to do that."
- **Frank Guerra**, Hispanic media adviser for the McCain campaign, [said in Hispanic Business](#), that Hispanic Republicans, "were turned off by the [Republican] discourse," and "the way Hispanics were being demonized." Mr. Guerra said that Republicans need to address their immigration discourse and stance and "it needs to be done in a way that does not alienate Hispanics who are here and who are voting...Because if they don't turn that sentiment around, they will continue to get this kind of low margin in the vote."

- **Hector Barajas**, communications director for the California Republican Party said in [Hispanic Business](#), "Immigration is a very important issue for Latinos. Every Latino, whether you are a U.S. citizen, whether you are the second generation, we all tend to know someone who has gone through the immigration maze."
- **Del. C. Todd Gilbert** (R-Shenandoah, Member of Virginia Commission on Immigration, and "staunchly anti-illegal immigration" Member of House of Delegates) said: "I can't totally disagree that some people are leery of the issue, because maybe it wasn't the wedge issue that some thought it would be," according to the [Washington Post](#).
- **Jim Harper**, [from the Cato Institute](#), said: "The political prescription going forward is clear. Anti-immigrant groups have vocal cords, but they don't have the voters. There is little risk to Democrats from squelching "internal enforcement" programs like E-Verify. E-Verify reeks of anti-immigrant animus, and it burdens the business sector with time-wasting red tape."
- **Jon Larson**, Republican candidate for Kentucky's District 6 Congressional seat said in the [Lexington Herald Leader](#), "...the situation will continue to be bleak until we right our ships. Democrats can expect to get more than 90 percent of African-American and about 70 percent of Hispanic votes until we change our tunes." When discussing the Latino vote, he said "Hispanic-American citizens, our largest minority, have reason to feel that they have been targeted for discrimination, along with these immigrants. Stop it. Republicans once realistically sought their support with our presidential candidate who had a 'compassionate' interest in the welfare of Hispanics, like his own sister-in-law. Join with me in welcoming Hispanics, native-born or immigrants, inviting them into our councils, into the melting pot of the descendants of wretched, weary, poor America-seekers like ourselves."
- **A Republican consultant** with decades of experience said, to the Republican Party: "[S]top being [misguided] on immigration. We are alienating huge parts of the electorate, we are turning our primaries into single issue 'hate' contests and ignoring the single fastest growing bloc of voters in the country" in an interview with [National Journal's Charlie Cook](#).
- **Rick Davis**, Chief Executive Officer of the 2008 John McCain for President campaign said at a [2008 post election panel](#), the Republican Party has "got to change its attitude versus Hispanics" in order to win in the future. Given the "really crazy things said on talk radio" in the name of the GOP, Davis said, "I don't blame Hispanics for not voting for us. California, Colorado, Texas, Florida – we can't win in these states any more."
- **Alberto Gonzales** said [in an interview with Ruben Navarrette](#), "The Republican Party has lost ground in attracting Hispanics and, given the tremendous growth of the Hispanic population, it presents a real challenge. ... Obviously, the tone has to change on certain issues like immigration."