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# Results of the The New York City Latino Opinion Leaders Survey - March 23, 2015

[The NiLP Latino Policy & Politics Report](#) (Updated March 25, 2015)

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## **Introduction**

This New York City Latino Opinion Leaders Survey was conducted by the National Institute for Latino Policy over the Internet during the period March 15-20, 2015. It is a survey of 109 of the New York City subscribers to the *NiLP Latino Policy & Politics Report*. The respondents to this poll were all anonymous.

This is the influential online national information network of the National Institute for Latino Policy that represents a broad cross-section of Latino opinion leaders throughout the United States, Puerto Rico, and the US Virgin Islands. These are made up of elected officials, government officials, heads of community-based organizations and national advocacy groups, religious leaders, business leaders, academics and others. Through our National Latino Opinion Leaders Survey, this one focused on NYC, we poll this group from time to time on important issues facing the Latino community given this stratum's important role in Latino agenda-setting and framing.

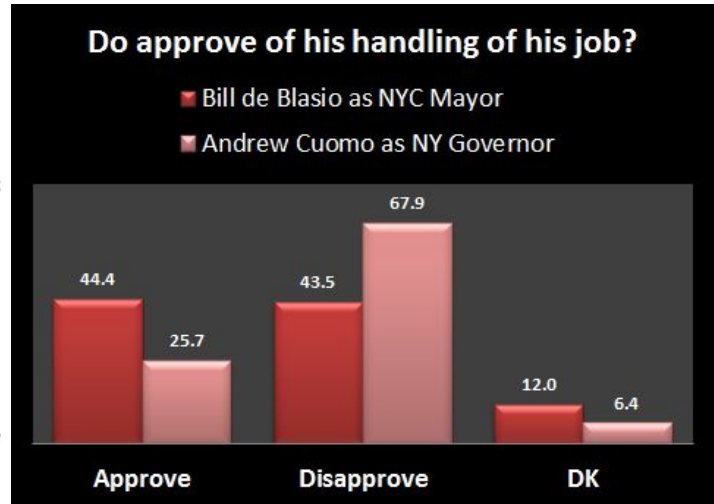
While the polling that is being conducted on Latino issues by the media and polling

[Angelo's Facebook Page](#)

organizations is of the broader community, this more select group of opinion leaders has a unique place from which to view these questions within our community. While not a scientifically generated sample of Latino elites, we expect this survey will result in useful insights on the main issues facing the Latino community in New York City today.

### Leadership

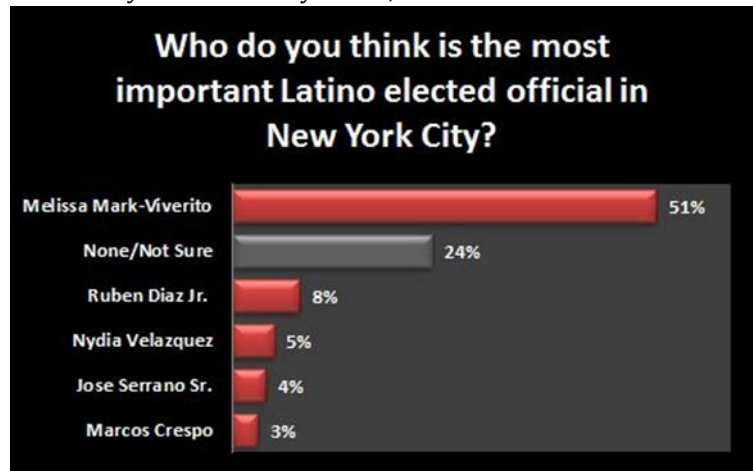
**The Mayor and Governor.** The Latino opinion leaders' view of NYC Mayor Bill de Blasio is decidedly mixed. While 44 percent approve of his handling of the job as Mayor, another 44 percent disapprove. However, their view of the Mayor is stronger than their assessment of New York Governor Andrew Cuomo, of whose job a large majority disapproves (68 percent). Mayor de Blasio received his highest approval ratings from those who consider themselves politically progressive/left (66 percent approve) and the highest disapproval ratings from conservatives (67 percent), moderates (61 percent) and liberals (57 percent).



In [a recent poll](#), Mayor de Blasio received a 54 percent approval rating from Latinos, which is very positive but significantly lower than that of Blacks, which was 78 percent. The lower Latino opinion leaders approval rating for the Mayor could be a bellwether of a possible weakening of support for him among the broader Latino community.

However, most surprising was the negative approval rating the Latino opinion leaders gave Governor Cuomo. In the same recent poll, 70 percent of Latinos approved of his handling of the job of Governor. About the same percentage of the Latino opinion leaders in our survey (68 percent) disapproved of the job he was doing. He received negative e3 ratings from those of all political orientations from conservative to progressive/left. Since our survey focuses on city issues, we cannot account for this difference, but it requires further analysis.

**Most Important Latino Elected Officials.** Within the Latino community, NYC Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito is viewed as by far the most important Latino elected official by the Latino



opinion leaders. A majority (51 percent) see her as the most important, followed by only 8 percent who named Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr., 5 percent Congresswoman Nydia Velazquez, 4 percent Congressman José Serrano and 3 percent Assemblyman Marcos Crespo. A significant 24 percent could not point to or weren't sure there was an important Latino elected official.

Mark-Viverito is the only leader holding a citywide office as Council Speaker, which provides her with greater exposure and potential power. At the time this survey was being conducted, Assemblyman Crespo had just taken over as Chair of the NYS Puerto Rican/Hispanic Legislative Task Force that oversees the Somos El Futuro Conference and was elected Chair of the Bronx Democratic Party County Committee, which could also increase his future exposure as an important Latino elected official citywide in the near future. It is interesting that all of the top Latino elected officials selected as being most important are Puerto Rican despite the increasingly diverse Latino political class in terms of national-origin. It is also of interest that of the five who were identified, four are connected to the Bronx, and among them two are women (including Mark-Viverito, the one identified as most important).

Despite being identified as by far the most important Latino elected official by the majority of Latino opinion leaders, their view of Council Speaker Mark-Viverito's job performance was mixed as it was with Mayor de Blasio, but slightly more positive. The largest percentage (43 percent) approved of the job she was doing as Speaker, compared to 34 percent who disapproved, with 23 percent stating they did not know.

**Mayor-Speaker Relationship.** A recurring issue is the relationship between the Mayor and the Council Speaker as the heads of separate branches of city government. The Latino opinion leaders are mixed on this question. The slightly largest percentage (34 percent) thinks the relationship between the Mayor and Speaker is too close and compromises the Speaker's independence. A near 31 percent feel the jury is still out on this question, while 21 percent think the relationship is close but doesn't hamper the Speaker's independence. Another 7 percent feel that they are independent enough of each other.

**The Democratic Party.** While the vast majority (78 percent) of the Latino opinion leaders are registered or affiliated with the Democratic Party, a large majority (63 percent) do not feel that their local County Democratic Party is being responsive to the Latino community, with only 15 percent feeling that it is. The Latino opinion leaders in Queens and the Bronx feel that the Democratic Party in their borough is most responsive (but only 20 and 17 percent, respectively, feel it is), while those in Staten Island (100 percent), Brooklyn (77 percent) and Manhattan (68 percent) feel it is not responsive to Latinos.

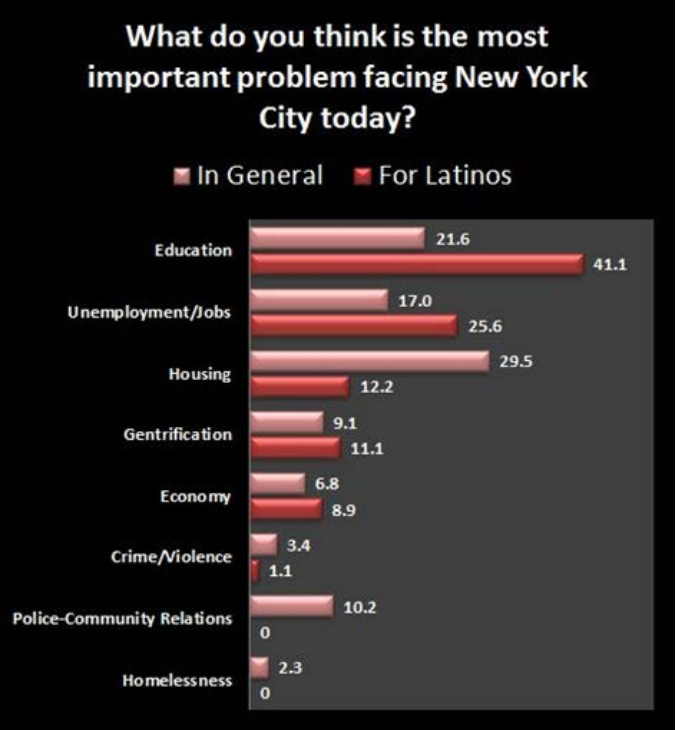
To get a sense of the depth of support there is among the Latino opinion leaders for Mayor de Blasio, they were asked whom they voted for in the September 2013 Democratic Primary for Mayor. About half (49 percent) voted for de Blasio. This was followed by a much smaller percentage recalling that they voted for Bill Thompson (12 percent), Christine Quinn (9 percent), John Liu (6 percent), Sal Albanese (1 percent) and, significantly, none recalled voting for the only Hispanic candidate, Erick Salgado. This support that de Blasio received from these Latino opinion leaders is significant given that the Latino political establishment at the time largely supported the African-American candidate, Bill Thompson, revealing a major political disconnect within the Latino community.

## Policy Issues

**Top Priority issues.** Overall, the majority (58 percent) of Latino opinion leaders are dissatisfied with the way things are going in New York City. This is in contrast to 42 percent who are satisfied.

The Latino opinion leaders were asked to identify the most important problem facing New York City in general and specifically for the Latino community. In general, they view housing as the most important problem facing New Yorkers (30 percent), followed by education (22 percent) and unemployment/jobs (17 percent). On the other hand for Latinos they identify the top problems as education first by far (41 percent), followed by unemployment/jobs (26 percent) and housing (12 percent). This indicates that policy priorities for the city as a whole and specifically for the Latino community are not necessarily the same.

It was surprising that despite all the attention police-community relations was getting in the city these past few months that this was not seen as a top issue by the Latino opinion leaders in general or for the Latino community. Only 10 percent saw police-community relations as a top concern in general, but none for the Latino community. This was the case as well for the issues of crime and violence, which only 3 percent saw this as a top problem in general and 1 percent for Latinos.



The gentrification of Latino neighborhoods is another issue that is a major concern in the Latino community, along with homelessness, as consequences of the city's housing affordability crisis. However, these were not seen as top policy concerns by the Latino opinion leaders, in general (9 percent gentrification; 2 percent homelessness) or for Latinos (11 percent gentrification; none about homelessness).

Do the policy priorities identified by the Latino opinion leaders reflect the true needs of the Latino community, or do they reveal a significant class division within the Latino community? These findings point to the need for a serious and critical discussion within the Latino community about its policy needs.

**Latino Race Relations.** Polling on race relations in New York City always focuses on Black-White relations, leaving out the role of Latinos. To get a sense of where Latinos fit within this question, the Latino opinion leaders were asked to grade the state of Latino relations in New York City with non-Latino Blacks and Whites.

The Latino opinion leaders feel that Latino-Black relations were more positive than those between Latinos and Whites. A large majority (63 percent) feel that Latino- Black relations are good, while only 41 percent feel that Latino-White relations are good.

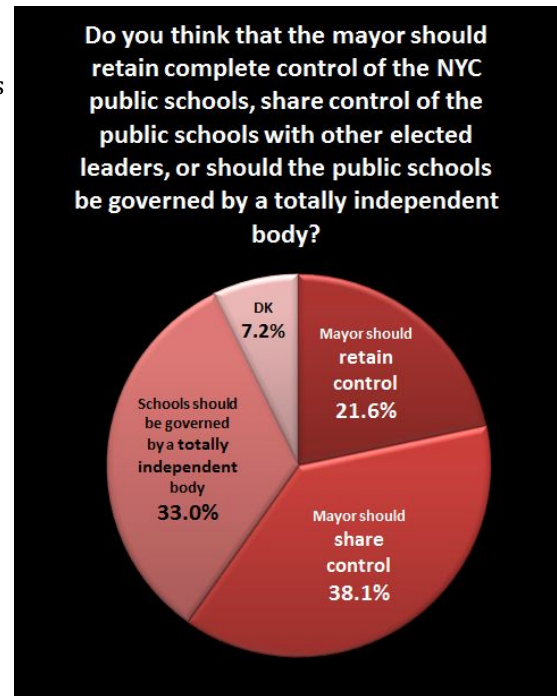
A [recent poll of New Yorkers](#) found that Latinos was mixed in their grading of the state of race relations in the city: 46 percent thought they were good, and 45 percent thought they were bad. However, as the Latino opinion leaders indicate, when Latinos are included as part of those race relations, their assessment depending on which race is being discussed.

Moreover, the racial self-identification of the Latino opinion leaders defied the more simplistic dominant Black-White binary of most polling. While the majority identified themselves as racially White (54 percent) and 12 percent as Black, 41 percent identified themselves as being of "some other race," 6 percent as American Indian and 1 percent as Asian.

**Education.** In the area of public education, the Latino opinion leaders were asked to rate the job performance of the school system's top leaders. They were mostly positive about Carmen Fariña's handling of her job as Schools Chancellor, with 41 percent approving and 21 percent disapproving. On the other hand, they were very negative about Mayor de Blasio's handling of the public schools, with 46 percent disapproving and only 19 percent approving. Perhaps an indicator of the mixed messages going to the public about the schools, fairly large percentages of the Latino opinion leaders indicated for both Fariña and the Mayor's performances with the schools that they "didn't know" (37 and 35 percent, respectively).

The issue of the continuation of Mayoral control of the public schools is coming before the State Legislature this year. Mayor de Blasio has already gone on the record before the Legislature [requesting that Mayoral control be made permanent](#). When asked about whether Mayoral control of the public schools should be continued, the majority of the Latino opinion leaders do not support its continuation. While 22 percent support continuing Mayoral control, 38 percent thought the Mayor needs to share control with other elected officials, and 33 percent felt that the schools should be controlled by a totally independent body. Given the Mayor's lack of public consultation on this issue, his position advocating permanent Mayoral control of the schools appears to be premature and a minority position, at least with the Latino opinion leaders.

Another important and controversial educational issue coming before the State Legislature is whether or not to increase the number of charter schools to be established. On this issue, about two thirds (68 percent) of the Latino opinion leaders oppose increasing the number of charter schools. Only 23 percent support the increase





while 45 percent support a decrease, and 23 percent believe the number should stay the same. In this regard, the Latino opinion leaders support Mayor de Blasio's position of opposing the increase of charter schools.

**Criminal Justice.** Asked about the top leadership of the New York Police Department, the Latino opinion leaders were very negative about their job performance. A majority (56 percent) disapprove of the job Bill Bratton is doing as Police Commissioner, with a larger majority (63 percent) disapproving of Mayor de Blasio's handling of crime in Latino neighborhoods and 66 percent disapproving of his handling of police relations with the Latino community. Close to two-thirds (64 percent) also disapprove of the job the police department is doing in general.

Close to half (48 percent) of the Latino opinion leaders feel that police brutality is a serious problem in Latino neighborhoods, and another 44 percent think it is a somewhat serious problem. An overwhelming 83 percent of the Latino opinion leaders feel that the police are tougher on Latinos than on Whites. These findings indicate that police-Latino relations are currently very poor in New York City.

However, the Latino opinion leaders were very supportive of the Mayor's decriminalization of small amounts of marijuana. Almost all (88 percent) were supportive of this measure.

**Affordable Housing.** Mayor de Blasio has announced an ambitious plan to create 200,000 new units of affordable housing. However, questions have arisen whether or not Latinos as the city's lowest income community will benefit from this initiative. The Latino opinion leaders were divided over whether the Mayor's plan will benefit the Latino community: half (50 percent) feel it will not benefit Latinos, compared to 35 percent who think it will and 16 percent who didn't know.

**Immigrant Inclusion.** On a more positive note, the Latino opinion leaders are very supportive of Mayor de Blasio's general handling of immigrant rights and inclusion. About two-thirds (65 percent) approve of his handling of immigrant issues. However, a large majority (63 percent) also support the granting of noncitizen voting to legal immigrants, a position that Mayor de Blasio [has not adopted at this point](#). The majority of progressive/left (77 percent) and liberals (61 percent) support noncitizen voting, while the majority of conservatives (67 percent) and plurality of moderates (47 percent) do not.

**Minimum Wage Increase.** The Latino opinion leaders are almost unanimous (97 percent) in supporting the rise in the minimum wage. The majority (57 percent) support raising it to \$15 per hour.

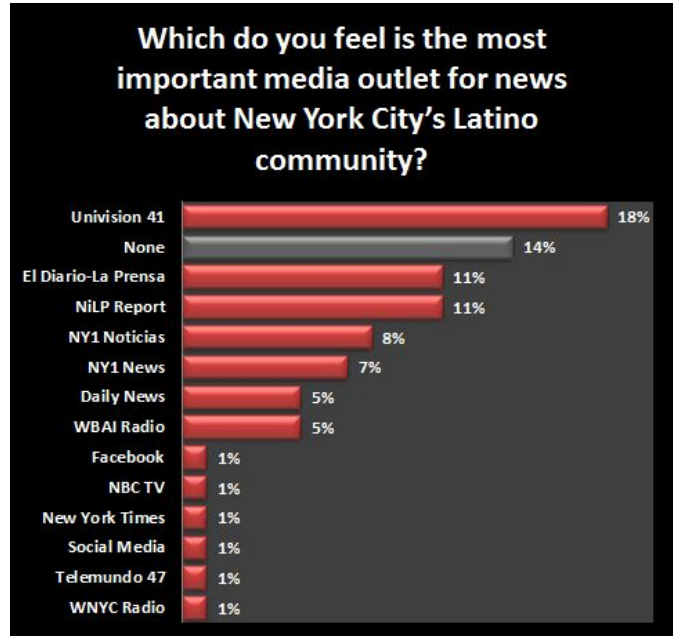
**Latino Inclusion in City Government.** The [Campaign for Fair Latino Representation](#), to which National Institute for Latino Policy acts as a technical advisor, has criticized Mayor de Blasio for his [poor record of Latino appointments to his administration](#). The Latino opinion leaders were asked if they felt this criticism was valid. Most (84 percent) feel that the criticism is valid. Asked if by raising this criticism Latino advocates are undermining the Mayor's progressive agenda, 65 percent feel it does not while 26 percent feel that it does. Those thinking most this would undermine the Mayor's progressive agenda were those who identify their general political orientation as progressive/left (38 percent), although a majority even of these (53 percent) feel it doesn't.

Asked more generally if they feel the de Blasio Administration is fully inclusive of all

communities, 82 percent of the Latino opinion leaders say it is not. Most (94 percent) feel that Latinos are the most excluded, followed by 30 percent who think it is Asians, 10 percent Blacks, and 2 percent Whites.

## Most Important Media

In order to get a sense of where the Latino opinion leaders get most of their news about the Latino community, they were asked to name which they saw as the most important media outlet for this purpose. The largest percentage (18 percent) identified Univision 41 television as most important. This was followed by 11 percent who listed *El Diario-La Prensa* newspaper, 8 percent for NY1 *Noticias*, and 7 percent for NY1 News (15 percent combined for Time Warner NY1 News in English and Spanish). The next tier, each receiving 5 percent, includes the New York Daily News and WBAI radio. Those who could not identify important media on Latinos made up 14 percent of the respondents.



## Discussion

Opinion polls of New Yorkers, for the most part, have inadequate Latino samples and frame issues in ways that ignore Latino opinion and experiences. This New York City Latino Opinion Leaders Survey is an attempt to explore Latino elite opinion on critical issues facing New York in ways that can promote more rigorous discussion and debate within the Latino community. While the findings of this survey are not generalizable to the community as a whole, they represent the views of an influential set of opinion leaders with this community that help set the framework for its issues and priorities. These findings should be seen more as a heuristic device as one might take the results of a focus group.

The results of this survey raise the following questions:

1. Despite receiving an estimated 87 percent of the Latino vote in the November 2013 Mayoral election, why is Mayor de Blasio's approval rating among Latino opinion leaders 15 months into his term so mixed? In terms of the general Latino likely voter, polls have the Mayor with majority approval levels, but they are significant lower than those he is getting from the Black community. Does Mayor de Blasio have an emerging "Latino problem" as some in the media have noted?

2. The views of the Latino opinion leaders in this survey appear very negative in terms of Latino political leadership. Besides the high-profile Council Speaker, they had difficulty in identifying what they consider important Latino elected officials and, as

largely Democrats, are very negative about the responsiveness of their county Democratic Party organizations to the Latino community. What is the basis of this disconnect from the political system and how is it affecting the political mobilization of this community?

3. Although the Latino opinion leaders are supportive of Mayor de Blasio's initiatives in terms of immigrant rights and inclusion, the decriminalization of small amounts of marijuana and support his opposition to increasing the number of charter schools, there are also a number of other important issues of which they are critical of the Mayor's positions. These include being skeptical about whether his affordable housing plan will benefit Latinos, his proposal to make Mayoral control of the public schools permanent, his lack of support for noncitizen voting, and a generally negative view of police relations with the Latino community..

4. The Mayor's proposal to the state legislature calling for the making of Mayoral control of the public schools permanent does not have the support of the Latino opinion leaders nor apparently of the general public as evidence by poll data and [public forums being held by Public Advocate Letitia James](#). It is, therefore, interesting that the Mayor would make such a proposal without any serious consultation with the public. This is especially problematic for him given the Latino opinion leaders feeling that Mayor de Blasio is doing a poor job in this handling of the public schools.

5. Although Mayor de Blasio gets high marks from the Latino opinion leaders for his initiatives concerning immigrant rights and inclusion, in keeping with this support they also advocate the adoption of noncitizen voting for legally resident immigrants. The Mayor, however, has not been supportive of this proposal. The reason for his lack of support, despite wide endorsement of the City Council of this measure, are unclear and raises questions about his commitment to the full incorporation of immigrants into the city's polity.

6. Although viewed as largely a Black issue by the media, the Latino opinion leaders also display considerable concern with the state of police-Latino community relations. Feeling that police brutality is a serious problem in the Latino community, and that the police are tougher on Latinos than on Whites, the Latino opinion leaders were very negative about the role of police and their leadership by the Mayor and Commissioner Bratton. This would indicate that problems with the city's policing policies and practices are as important in the Latino as in the Black community.

7. The identification of the most important issues facing the Latino community by the Latino opinion leaders raises questions about what policy priorities should be within this community. The results of this survey indicate that there is a difference between general policy priorities in the city versus those specific to the Latino community. The reasons for these differences and their implications for the de Blasio Administration's overall policy determinations needs further analysis and discussion.

8. Given all of these differences, the underrepresentation of Latinos in the city government work force and its policy leadership is troubling. The Latino opinion leaders agree with the Campaign for Fair Latino Representation's criticism of the Mayor's poor record of Latino appointments and this survey points to the problem of the lack of Latino policy perspectives that result in municipal decision-making.

9. The Latino opinion leaders' identification of media sources for Latino community news reveals a very thin penetration by those listed as most important. Only 18 percent identified the top media outlet, and fewer identified what were once major sources such



as El Diario-La Prensa newspaper. One interpretation of this finding could also be that there is a wider variety of news sources available today, but it appears from voluntary comments made by the respondents to the survey, that there is much dissatisfaction with the quality of media coverage of Latino issues in New York City today.

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