Racial and Ethnic Politics in the 2012 Presidential Primaries

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- Historically, issues of race have had a central role in American campaigns.

- Racial considerations communicated by campaign messages and imagery.

- Previously, racial appeals were explicit in nature.

- Now, racial messages are more subtle.
Racial Cues in Campaigns

- Racial rhetoric and imagery from candidates can activate voters’ negative racial attitudes (Valentino et. al., 2002)

- Notable examples
  - “White hands” advertisement by Jesse Helms’ 1990 North Carolina Senate campaign
  - Willie Horton advertisement by George H.W. Bush during 1988 presidential election
Rick Santorum on Welfare
Newt Gingrich and Food Stamps
Mobilizing the Base

- Comments were inconsistent with who is on public assistance
  - Iowa food stamp recipients, 9 percent are black and 84 percent are white
  - Nationally, 34 percent are white and 21 percent are black

- What was the purpose of making these comments?
  - Trigger negative racial predispositions from certain segments of their base.
The Latino Electorate

- Latinos are the largest ethnic minority group in the United States.

- Size of Latino electorate increased between 2006 and 2010 (Pew Hispanic Center).
  - Eligible voters increased from 17.3 to 21.3 million.
  - Percentage of electorate increased from 5.8 to 6.9%.

- Latino vote expected to have significant impact on general election.
Republican Candidates on Immigration

- Some Republican candidates in favor of stronger immigration policies.

- Other candidates proposed less restrictive ideas.
  - Believed to have crippled their campaigns.
Other Latino-relevant Issues

- All but Gingrich oppose the DREAM act
- All support recent voter identification laws that have been passed across the country.
**Consequences of Anti-Immigrant Rhetoric**

- May mobilize base of voters
  - Particularly in states with large Anglo-American populations

- Yet, may alienate Latino voters
  - Increasingly important population in a number of swing states
Project New America Swing State Poll, April 16-18, 2012

- **Florida**: Obama 50%, Romney 45%
- **New Mexico**: Obama 65%, Romney 25%
- **Nevada**: Obama 60%, Romney 28%
Racialized rhetoric and imagery is often used as a way to mobilize the core base of supporters. 
May also alienate candidates from key constituencies in the general election. 
As Latino electorate continues to grow, the Republican Party may be facing some serious problems.