

# Analysis: One year after Romney's "self-deport," parties can't ignore immigration reform

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As legislators in Congress are deciding whether to take on immigration reform — and even more importantly, whether to support or oppose any proposed legislation — it is worth examining what happened today, exactly a year ago, says Lynn Tramonte, Deputy Director of the pro-immigration reform organization [America's Voice](#).

"Today was the day Mitt Romney first articulated his self-deportation policy at a Republican debate," said Tramonte, arguing this set in motion events leading to his loss in November, especially among Latino voters. "Back then, Mitt Romney thought self-deportation was a more humane, more pleasant-sounding alternative to mass deportation — we now have a mountain of evidence to prove that was not the case," she stated.

Tramonte and [Latino Decisions](#) co-principal and Stanford political scientist Gary Segura [presented findings from November's election](#), as well as "lessons learned."

Their takeaway? The Republican party left Latino votes "on the table" by not supporting immigration reform. At the same time, the big swing between 40 percent Latino support in the 2008 elections for George W. Bush and 27 percent Latino support for Romney (in fact, Segura says his estimates are that the Latino vote was lower) is an indication that Hispanic voters are, in Segura's words, "the most movable of the American electorate — and that should be kept in mind by both parties." He added this swing regarding GOP votes was not the case for African American or non-Latino white voters.

During the 2012 campaign, Latino Decisions asked Hispanic registered voters whether they would be more likely to support Republicans if they took the lead on immigration reform. Thirty-one percent of registered Latino voters said yes, 48 percent said it would have no effect, and only 11 percent said it would make them less likely to vote for the GOP.

"Simply taking the lead in passing comprehensive immigration reform has the potential to be a significant net positive for Republicans," said Segura.

Looking ahead at House and Senate races, Segura said the results of 2012 Democratic victories in districts in North Carolina, Arizona, Florida and even Utah and Massachusetts showed that the margin of victory was slim, and the Latino vote was pivotal. In these districts, where Latinos constitute a reasonable percentage of the vote, "Republicans could easily flip" some of these wins, says Segura, with a more inclusive message including support for immigration reform. Conversely, currently Republican districts in Illinois, New York and Colorado, for example, could represent growth for Democrats if they win Latino support.

The key question in this upcoming legislative term is whether Republican legislators will back legislation leading to immigration reform. Recently Florida Republican Senator Marco Rubio proposed a plan to allow undocumented immigrants to apply for a green card and eventually apply for citizenship, a key shift seen by many immigration reform proponents as an “opening” for substantive discussions by both parties.

[Recent polls](#) show more Americans favor a path to citizenship for the nation’s approximately 11 million undocumented. Today, Tramonte and Segura said legislators might want to heed Latinon and general public support for reform as they look at elections ahead.

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