

Foreign-born Editors in New England Weigh In on an Obama Presidency

Posted December 1st, 2008

Source: EthnicNEWz.org

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What are some Latinos, Africans and Indians in the US hoping for, with Barack Obama in the White House as of Jan. 20, 2009? In their homeland countries, what changes in US foreign policy would they like? And did people in any of these countries support Republican nominee John McCain – and why?

To find out, EthnicNEWz.org spoke to four New England-based ethnic media professionals, including one who covers the African Diaspora; a Colombian who became a US citizen in June; and a permanent US resident from India who wants the right to vote:

- **Seme Ndzana**, publisher of AfricanIndependent.com in Connecticut, who is from Cameroon
- **Sujata Srinivasan**, editor of [CT Indian Life](http://CTIndianLife) newspaper in Connecticut, who is from India
- **Marcela Garcia**, editor of [El Planeta](http://ElPlaneta) newspaper in Massachusetts, who is from Mexico
- **Alfonso Acevedo**, publisher of [America News](http://AmericaNews) newspaper in Rhode Island, who is from Colombia.

EthnicNEWz.org spoke to the four media professionals (see their photos at the bottom of this page) by phone during the week following the election. Following are their condensed and edited responses.

New England Ethnic News welcomes your views. Scroll down to the bottom to post your comments – or start your own dialogue in the “SPEAK UPS” section in the left blue column.

What changes in foreign policy would people in your homeland like to see, now that Barack Obama will be the next president of the United States?

Seme Ndzana, AfricanIndependent.com: There are no specific changes; they have only expectations. He will be holding the highest office on earth. Probably what they expect is that assistance from the United States is just going to flow.

What I can say is *what* Obama himself is promising. It's huge. On Sept. 26, 2008, he made an address during a meeting for Clinton's Global Initiative, in New York. He made a lot of commitment for Africa, like ending malaria (a mosquito-borne disease that plagues African countries) and ending poverty.

Also education – he said he does not want to see kids who are not educated.

[Sujata Srinivasan](#), *CT Indian Life*: Indians are anxious to see how Obama's team handles the economic crisis that's affecting the rest of the world -- and how effectively they will manage any rescue package approved by Congress.

During Obama's campaign, he reached out to India in an exclusive interview to the press, saying that the country is a strategic partner to the US on issues ranging from terrorism to promotion of peace and stability in Asia.

He also said he would support comprehensive immigration reform, including the [H1B1 \[employment\] visa](#) program to attract individuals to the US.

And he make it clear he was against protectionism, saying that the US must find ways to make trade and globalization work for America. All of his points went down well with Indians.

[Marcela Garcia](#), *El Planeta*: I don't think Latin America is going to be a priority for Obama. [Aside from pressing issues like the war in Iraq], I think the most important issue will be the Free Trade Agreement in Colombia.

[Alfonso Acevedo](#), *America News*: Specifically – #1 – Colombians do want the TLC [the US-Colombia Free Trade Agreement, known in Spanish as the TLC, or *Tratado de Libre Comercio entre Colombia y Estados Unidos*, they want it to move forward and succeed].

Number 2, they expect to see [if] Obama's government will deal with Colombia as the Republicans did before.

How about here in the US? What changes would people in your ethnic community like to see under an Obama Administration?

[Seme Ndzana](#), *AfricanIndependent.org*: The first thing is jobs because most of us are facing discrimination in getting jobs. To get a job at Stop & Shop [supermarket] is very easy.

But when you have a master's degree in this country, it becomes sometimes harder. You may face all kinds of discrimination.

Africans are the most educated group of immigrants among immigrants coming from all countries. Sometimes they can't find jobs because they have to compete with – I hate to say it – whites.

They would like to see the problem of job security addressed. They shouldn't face discrimination

because of their accent or [country of] origin.

Sujata Srinivasan, CT Indian Life: The #1 concern, of course, would be the economy, and tighter financial regulations to prevent another meltdown from happening.

Comprehensive immigration reform and definitely healthcare reform – these are just some of the issues that Indian Americans have been talking about informally at social gatherings.

Marcela Garcia, El Planeta: Immigration reform as soon as possible – a reform that finds a path to citizenship for the estimated 12 million undocumented immigrants here in the nation. I think that's going to be the first thing they'd like to see.

Alfonso Acevedo, America News: Number one, Latinos want Obama to fix the economy. Number two, they want him to stop the war and bring the troops back to the US.

What kind of coverage did your publication or Web site devote to the presidential election?

Seme Ndzana, AfricanIndependent.com: [My site had] things that related to Africa, including Sarah Palin. This (republished) story [about Sarah Palin before she was governor of Alaska] showed a Kenyan pastor holding her head and praying that God would help her so that she becomes governor.

Obama was in Hartford before he got the Democratic nomination. I did attend [and I] also tried to explain the way his strategy works and how he was able to organize the youth to get involved in politics. Those are the things that I'm explaining. I [have] coverage in both French and English.

Sujata Srinivasan, CT Indian Life: We're going to run a story in our January issue [CT Indian Life is a monthly]. We will talk to a cross-section of Indians to get their reaction to the outcome [of the election]. We will give them a platform to voice their opinions on what they'd like to see from the new administration. The story will be available online at CTIndianLife.com.

Marcela Garcia, El Planeta: We started publishing about the election during the primaries, in February or March, I believe. This month, we devoted one page to election coverage. Our coverage was mostly on the national level and locally on the support that the Obama campaign captured in the state.

Our local election coverage was mainly in Greater Boston – in East Boston, Jamaica Plain [both are areas of Boston], and a little bit in Lawrence [a city 25 miles, or 35 km, north of Boston whose population is about about 60 percent Latino, according to the latest Census data] and Worcester [a city in Central Massachusetts, about 45 miles, or 63 km, west of Boston whose population is about 19 percent Latino].

Alfonso Acevedo, America News: I tried to be very neutral. I never tried to be one-sided. [Before the election] I had an editorial to encourage people to vote and, #2, to concentrate on the election of [candidates for] Congress more than on the election for the president. My point of view is that Congress is responsible for legislation, not the president.

My community, sometimes they are not educated about the *real* job of the legislators in the Senate or the [House of Representatives]. I educate my readers about the importance of seeing who will be elected for Congress.

The American press has been accused of being favorable to Pres.-elect Obama during his campaign. Do you think he received favorable treatment?

Seme Ndzana, AfricanIndependent.com: I don't think Obama got favorable treatment. Obama was the news. He was the scoop. Things couldn't have been otherwise. Everybody knew McCain.

McCain complained about it, but Obama – by himself – is a clean politician. He's kind of a curiosity, and that is what journalists like. Reporting on him, I think, was just normal.

Sujata Srinivasan, CT Indian Life: Absolutely. All of the op-eds were rooting for him.

Marcela Garcia, El Planeta: [Regarding major English-language newspapers or TV news coverage of the major networks] if there was a bias [in favor of] Obama, it was only to balance the conservative views of Fox News and the shows that are definitely pro-Republican. I don't think you can talk about a straight bias towards Obama in the mainstream media.

Alfonso Acevedo, America News: Not really. I thought the Republican Party has had a very bad background for the past eight years. The Republicans already had very bad publicity and media coverage. Obama just came easily to the media with new proposals, so I don't think the media had more preference for Obama. No.

Who did people in your ethnic community vote for? Are there any generalizations to describe who voted for McCain, and who voted for Obama?

Seme Ndzana, AfricanIndependent.com: They voted for Obama, absolutely. Africans feel they are *all* Obama. I don't know any Africans who said they would vote for McCain, not a single one.

Sujata Srinivasan, CT Indian Life: Nationally 53 percent of Indian Americans favored Obama,

according to the [National Asian American Survey](#). The survey also found that most Indian Americans are Democrats: 50 percent, versus 7 percent for Republican; 13 percent, independent; and 30 percent, non-partisan.

My sense is that Obama is enormously popular, not just among Indians in the US, but also among Indians in India. There is a strong Republican community among some Indian Americans though not in Connecticut.

Marcela Garcia, El Planeta: We did a lot of reporting on Tuesday, Election Day, and most of the Latinos we talked to voted for Obama, in overwhelming numbers. During the weeks leading to the election, it became hard to find a Latino voting for McCain, at least in Massachusetts.

Alfonso Acevedo, America News: Obama because Rhode Island is mostly Democratic. About 10 percent of Latino voters in Rhode Island supported McCain [which I know because] the Democratic and Republican Party [each] released information about percentages of voters who were for McCain and Obama. I called the managers of the campaigns to know about this.

How was voter turnout in your ethnic community?

Seme Ndzana, AfricanIndependent.com: Those who are US citizens who I know personally, who live all over the country, they all voted. They and their families, they all went to vote.

Sujata Srinivasan, CT Indian Life: I don't have statistics, but all the citizens in the Connecticut region who I know here voted.

I couldn't vote, by the way, [because] I'm a green card holder. I do think that's unfair [that green card holders can't vote] – it's like taxation without representation.

Marcela Garcia, El Planeta: Latinos did vote in large numbers, definitely. One district in Jamaica Plain [an area of Boston] – which has one of the largest Latino communities in Massachusetts – it was the only district whose majority of registered voters already had cast their votes in the morning. By 3 p.m., it had the largest voter turnout for any district in Massachusetts.

Alfonso Acevedo, America News: [Many Latinos came out to vote because] Rhode Island had many new Latino citizens who voted. On June 2, 2008, I myself became a new citizen [along with] 300 people – about half of them were Latino.

Many Latinos voted for the first time this year because of the Obama phenomenon. I interviewed some of them.

During the course of the campaigns of any of the presidential candidates, was there anything that turned off members of your ethnic community? Or anything that was or wasn't a central point of their campaigns that surprised people?

Seme Ndzana, AfricanIndependent.com: No, no, because Obama is like a kind of messiah. Everything that he talked about, they were things that are very important to African immigrants.

[A turnoff during the McCain campaign was] racism above all. Things that Sarah Palin, as McCain's running mate, was saying – trying to label Obama as a terrorist by association, things like that – that was clearly racist. Every African felt a lot of emotion. Many of us have been victims of racism in one way or another.

McCain himself was very prudent not to [say racist things], but people in his campaign would say "Hussein" whenever saying Obama's name, so that people would feel he is a foreigner. When that happened, we felt [personally affronted].

Many of us have encountered that kind of situation. People mispronounce our names in a way that shows that they want to let people know that we are foreigners. Also, we are used [to negative encounters] because of our accent.

Marcela Garcia, El Planeta: Of course, immigration was a big issue and the biggest topic for the Latino community. [But] it wasn't a big issue of debate between the two candidates because they were pretty much along the same lines [in their stances on immigration]. And the economy took center stage and eclipsed all other topics of debate so immigration wasn't a real [debate] issue.

Alfonso Acevedo, America News: They didn't do a lot of campaigning in this community in Rhode Island. But the first visit of Obama in Rhode Island turned up the Hispanic community.

Do you feel that presidential candidates McCain and Obama adequately reached out to your ethnic community?

Seme Ndzana, AfricanIndependent.com: Hmm. I think African communities are like African Americans. Obama proposed solutions for African American communities, so that also included African communities. I don't think African communities have specific needs.

[Regarding McCain], sometimes I heard about his immigration proposals and so on. I didn't see clearly what the benefit would have been for African immigrants.

Sujata Srinivasan, CT Indian Life: I would say "yes." Both candidates gave interviews to the Indian

media and to the ethnic media targeting Indians in the US. They had been proactive in reaching out for issues regarding the community and relations with India. During Obama's campaign, he also reached out to India in an exclusive interview to the press.

Marcela Garcia, El Planeta: Massachusetts wasn't a swing state, so you didn't see a lot of resources put into the state from *any* of the campaigns – but that's understandable. It was a clear shot for Obama. Massachusetts was going Democratic for Obama.

On a national level, I think [the Obama campaign] did a good job reaching out to the Latino community. There was an [organization] – pro-immigrant and pro-Latino, called [Sanctuary](#) – and they very actively tried to get both campaigns to answer a questionnaire on immigration. Only the Obama campaign responded.

In your home country, which of the presidential candidates did people support?

Sujata Srinivasan, CT Indian Life: I was in India [in October], where there were several polls, one of them done by the Indo-American Association – and Obama won that poll. He is enormously popular in India.

One of my nieces is named Sasha. She's 7 years old, and she's excited that her namesake will be making it to the White House [one of Obama's daughters is named Sasha]. So that's a level of awareness of Obama in India. That's a 7-year-old in India who's rooting for Obama.

Marcela Garcia, El Planeta: Obama. Obama definitely [in] Mexico. We published a short survey before the election, which showed overwhelming support for Obama over McCain in major Latin American countries.

The smallest difference in support between the two candidates was in Colombia. McCain received a little bit more support there because of the issue of the Free Trade Agreement between Colombia and the United States. McCain was for it; Obama was against it. For that reason, people had a little bit more support for McCain in Colombia.

Alfonso Acevedo, America News: In Colombia, people supported McCain. His platform was more interested in working with Latin American countries, especially Colombia.

McCain [supports] international trade with Colombia, the TLC [the US-Colombia Free Trade Agreement, known in Spanish as the TLC, or Tratado de Libre Comercio entre Colombia y Estados Unidos]. McCain is also very concerned about trying to stop narcotics exports from Colombia to North America.

Is there anything else you'd like to say?

Seme Ndzana, AfricanIndependent.org: For minorities – and most of all, for African Americans in this country – there is a need for legal aid. Every citizen should have legal assistance as a *right*.

What is destroying African American families is always the first arrest, the conviction, and all the legal problems with the justice system.

Employers can check a job applicant's legal background, and that is where most [African Americans who have experienced problems with the legal system] are done for their lives. They can't get good jobs. That is *disastrous*.

Sujata Srinivasan, CT Indian Life: We should consider extending voting privileges to permanent residents in the US. It's only fair.

CT Indian Life is the only publication of its kind targeted at Indian Americans exclusively in Connecticut. We're just over a year old.

Alfonso Acevedo, America News: The Latin American community in the United States has to be unified and try to [influence] more decisions in Congress. In another eight or 16 years, a Latino candidate may become president because – with 45 million Latinos in the United States – maybe they can have more positions in government.

source: EthnicNEWz.org

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