

The Latino Electorate: Profile and Trends

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LATINO VOTE BRIEFING EDITION

The Latino Electorate: Profile and Trends*

By Lindsay Daniels and Clarissa Martinez De Castro

The Latino** community is the fastest-growing segment of the U.S. population. Hispanics now constitute 14.1% of the total U.S. population, or approximately 42.7 million people.¹ Between 1990 and 2000, Latinos experienced a growth rate of 57.9%, compared to 13.2% for the nation as a whole.² Moreover, the Latino population is becoming a national community. Traditionally concentrated in California, Texas, New York, Florida, and Illinois, the Hispanic community experienced the largest growth between 1990 and 2000 in states largely located in the South and Midwest.³

While the Latino vote has generated much attention and debate in recent election cycles, there is still substantial confusion about the Hispanic electorate, including current size and future potential, its partisan affiliations (or lack thereof), and strategies that candidates, political parties, and nonpartisan advocates could employ to increase this population's participation in the electoral process.

This statistical brief, the first in a series, provides a profile of the Latino vote, an examination of Latino voting behavior in past presidential elections and the 2006 midterm election, and recommendations for stakeholders to increase Hispanic participation in the electoral process. Future briefs in this series will take a closer look at new and emerging community-based approaches for increasing the size of this electorate and at Latino voter perspectives on various issues.

* This brief was prepared by Lindsay Daniels, Project Coordinator of NCLR's Latino Empowerment and Advocacy Project (LEAP), and Clarissa Martinez De Castro, Director of State Policy and Advocacy. In addition, Stacy Terrell, Program Assistant, provided data assistance. Charles Kamasaki, Senior Vice President; Eric Rodriguez, Director of the Policy Analysis Center; Nayda Rivera-Hernández, Senior Research Analyst; Lisa Navarrete, Vice President Office of Public Information; Raul Gonzalez, Legislative Director; and Jennifer Kadis, Director of Quality Control, provided editorial guidance. Ofelia Ardón-Jones, Production Manager/Senior Design Specialist, prepared the brief for publication. Production of this brief was made possible by funding from the Knight Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation of New York. The contents are the sole responsibility of NCLR. Permission to reproduce and distribute this information is granted as long as appropriate credit is given to NCLR.

** The terms "Hispanic" and "Latino" are used interchangeably by the U.S. Census Bureau and throughout this paper to identify persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central and South American, Dominican, Spanish, and other Hispanic descent; they may be of any race.

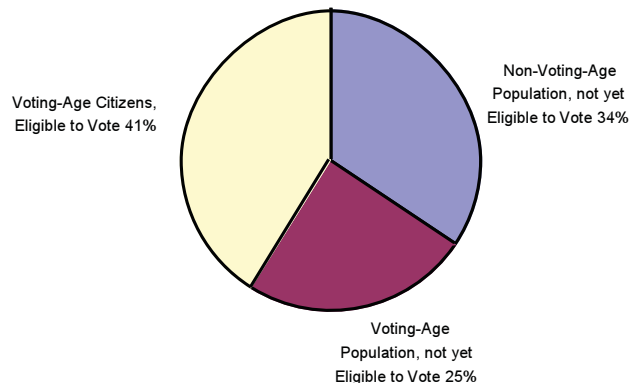
Profile of the Latino Electorate

✓ **More than 16 million Latinos are eligible to vote.** In 2004, the last year with a presidential election, the Latino population reached 40.5 million. Of those, approximately 13.9 million were of non-voting age, ten million were voting-age immigrants not yet eligible to vote, and more than 16 million were eligible to vote (see Figure 1).⁴

✓ **Registered Hispanic voters are concentrated in the states with the highest Hispanic populations, but are a growing number in other states.** In 2004, the five states with the highest number of registered Latino voters were California (2,455,000), Texas (2,170,000), Florida (924,000), New York (754,000), and Arizona (354,000).⁶ Moreover, in 2004, the states with the highest share of Latino registration as a percent of the total

FIGURE 1

Latino Population by Voting Age and Voting Eligibility (2004)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *2004 American Community Survey*, Table B05003I, Sex by Age by Citizenship Status (Hispanic or Latino). Available online at: http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/DTTable?_bm=y&-geo_id=01000US&-ds_name=ACS_2004_EST_G00_&-lang=en&-mt_name=ACS_2004_EST_G2000_B05003I&-format=&-CONTEXT=dt. Accessed February 4, 2007.

✓ **Naturalized citizens are an important segment of the Latino electorate.** Of the 16.1 million Latinos eligible to vote in 2004, 12.1 million were native-born citizens and four million were naturalized citizens.⁵

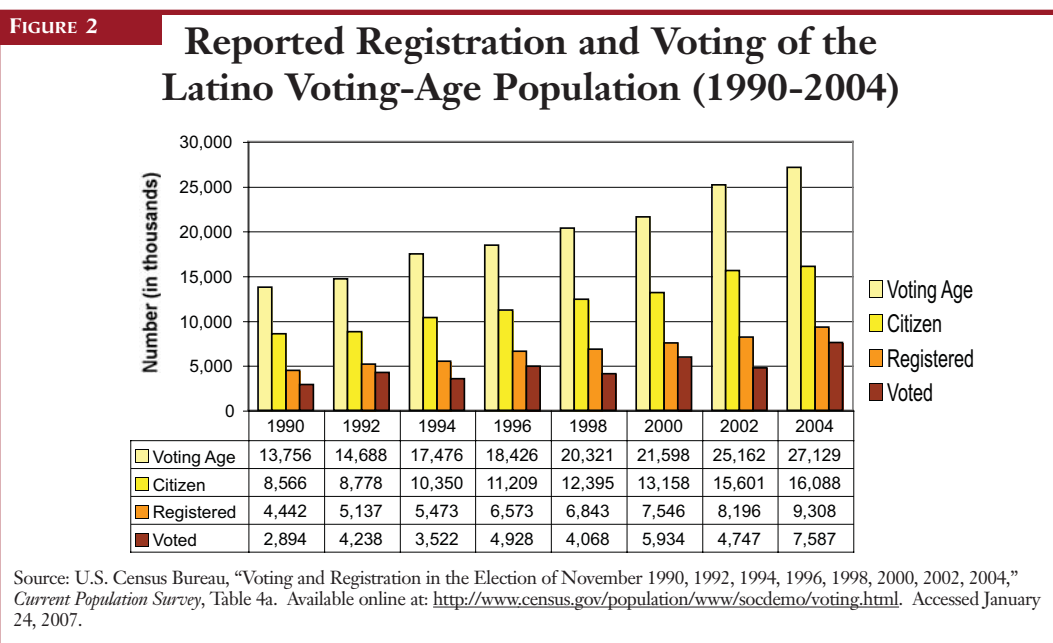
registered voter population were New Mexico (33.7%), Texas (22.4%), California (17.3%), Arizona (14.3%), and Florida (11.2%).⁷ Additionally, Hispanic population growth in “nontraditional” states – such as

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Arkansas, North Carolina, and Georgia – is also adding Hispanics to those states’ voter registration rolls. While Latino voter registration and voting rates in these areas are still modest, their growth forecasts increased Latino influence in those states’ election outcomes.

electorate. In 2004, the voting participation rates were 28%, 65.8%, and 56.3% for Latinos, Whites, and African Americans, respectively.

However, when calculating participation using the citizen voting-age population (CVAP), Latino participation increases



✓ **There is a wide voting gap between voting-age Latinos and other groups, but the gap narrows when comparing only the citizen voting-age population.** In 2004, Latinos represented 6% of the total electorate, casting 7.6 million votes that year, an increase of 27.9% over the previous presidential election. Using as a point of departure the number of voters as a percentage of the whole voting-age population (VAP) to measure the voter participation rate, the result is a very large voting gap for the Latino

considerably to 47.2%, compared to Whites and African Americans at 67.2% and 60%, respectively.⁸

Most significantly, using the population registered to vote as the baseline, the participation gap is reduced by nearly half – 81.5% of registered Latinos voted in 2004, compared to 89.4% for Whites and 87.1% for African Americans (see Figure 2).⁹

✓ **Latino youth age 18-24 experience similarly wide gaps in voting rates as the overall Latino population when**

compared to White and African

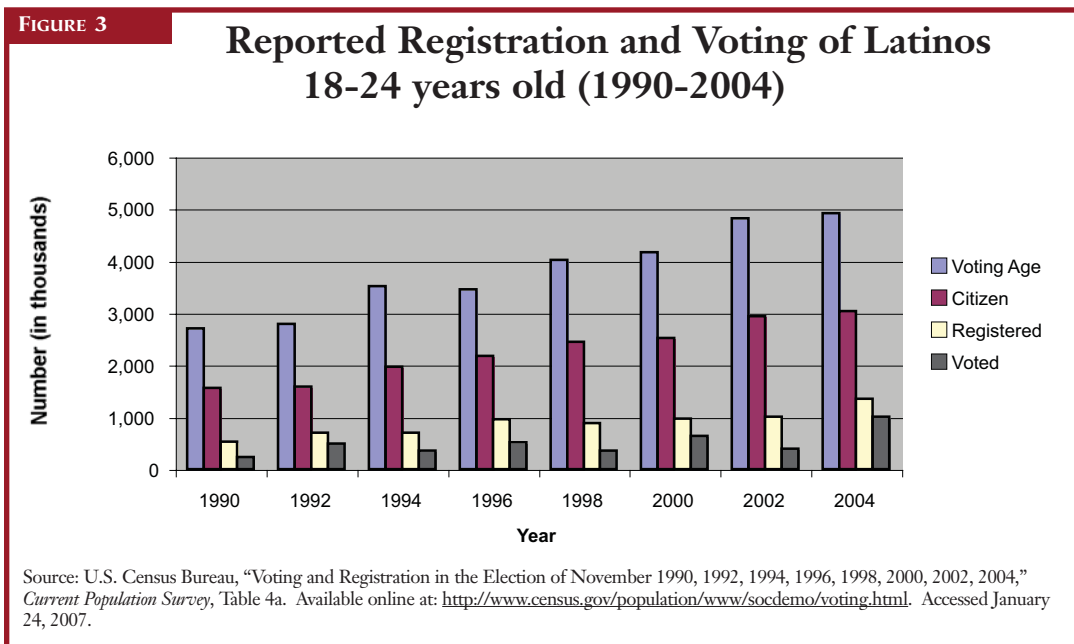
American youth. Latino youth 18-24 years old have lower voting rates than their non-Hispanic counterparts, at only 20.4% of the voting-age population (see Figure 3), compared to 48.5% for Whites and 44.1% for African Americans, and compose only 8.6% of the 18-24-year-old group vote.¹⁰

However, young Latino voters represent a relatively large share of the overall Hispanic electorate – 13.2% of all Latino voters, compared to White and African American youth at 8.4% and 12.4%, respectively – and are growing at an even faster rate than the overall Latino electorate (55.8% voter growth between the 2000 and 2004 elections).¹¹

- ✓ **Latino naturalized citizens exhibit higher voting rates than their native-born counterparts.** Although

naturalized citizens make up less than one-third of the Latino voting-eligible population (25% in 2004), their registration and voting rates have been growing at a slightly higher pace than those of native-born Latinos. In addition, voting rates for Latino naturalized citizens are consistently higher than for their native-born counterparts.¹² For example, in 2000, the rates were 50.6% for naturalized Latinos and 43.6% for native-born Latinos, and in 2004, 52.1% and 45.5%, respectively.

- ✓ **Hispanic voter registration and voter participation continue to grow.** In 2006, a substantial number of Hispanic voters were recent registrants, a number that has grown since the 2004 election. In a 2005 post-election poll, 10% of Latino registered voters had registered in



the year leading up to the 2004 election.¹³ In 2006 – a midterm election, when registration rates are known to be lower – that number grew to 16%, further proof of Latino electorate growth.¹⁴

With regard to actual votes cast, exit polls for the 2006 election reported that Hispanic voters composed an 8% share of the overall electorate, compared to 6% in 2004.¹⁵ While there are reasons to believe that this is an overestimate of the Latino share, including the limitations of the exit polling system, such polls remain the most timely and widely-cited source of information available immediately after an election and give a point of comparison for when more accurate data emerge.*

- ✓ **There is still debate about how to communicate with Latino voters.** In terms of language preference, NCLR polls show that the main source of elections information identified by registered Latino voters is English-language television, followed by Spanish-language television. For 2005, 41% of Latinos who were polled identified a preference for English-language television, while 29% identified Spanish-language television.¹⁶ In 2006, even more Latino voters relied on English-language television for elections information – at 46% – while 20% identified relying on Spanish.¹⁷

Trends in Party Affiliation and Support

According to most polling data, on average self-identified Latino registered Democrats outnumber Latino registered Republicans by a two-to-one margin. In terms of how Latinos actually vote, however, the numbers show some significant variations. These shifts have received a great deal of attention particularly in the past two election cycles, although Latinos have long shown a willingness to “split their ticket.”¹⁸ Combined with Latino population growth in highly-contested states, this has led both political parties, candidates, and other stakeholders to reconsider their traditional strategies with respect to this electorate.

- ✓ **While a majority of Latinos vote Democrat, the percentage of Latinos voting for the Democratic candidate for president has decreased relatively steadily since 1988.** Looking at presidential races between 1988 and 2004, data indicate Democratic losses in Latino support with the exception of 1996 (see Table 1 on page 6). The biggest percentage point gain for Republicans occurred in 2000, during President Bush’s first run for that office. Bush came to the race with a record of opposing anti-immigrant proposals as governor of Texas, in stark contrast with his counterpart in California,

* Exit polls, like any other survey, are subject to a number of sources of error, including differential response rates, limitations of sample sizes, etc. In addition, full methodologies and various cross-tabulations to confirm or question certain findings are not publicly available, and in some cases are either proprietary or available only to paid subscribers.

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Governor Pete Wilson. Wilson's highly-visible role in support of Proposition 187 in 1994 – the controversial ballot initiative that would have denied public benefits, including education, to undocumented

immigrants and their children and was later ruled unconstitutional – galvanized the Latino population in the state and resulted in massive Hispanic voter rejection of the Republican party.¹⁹

Table 1
Hispanic Presidential Preference (1988-2004)

Year	Source	% Republican	% Democrat	% Other
2004		Bush	Kerry	Nader/Other
	National Election Pool*	44	53	2
	Los Angeles Times (LAT)	45	54	1
	New York Times (NYT)	43	56	-
	William C. Velasquez Institute	31	68	1
2000		Bush	Gore	Nader/Other
	VNS	35	62	3
	LAT	38	61	1
	NYT	31	67	2
1996		Dole	Clinton	Perot/Other
	VNS	21	72	6
	LAT	21	71	7
	TRPI**	22	70	7
1992		Bush	Clinton	Perot/Other
	VNS	25	61	14
	LAT	27	51	21
	TRPI	23	65	12
1988		Bush	Dukakis	
	VNS	30	69	
	LAT	34	65	
	TRPI	34	65	

* On December 3, 2004, NBC issued a statement lowering Bush's share of the Hispanic vote to 40%, although NEP data were not officially edited or modified (*First Read - MSNBC.com*, December 3, 2004. Available online at: <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/6531105/>). The precursor to NEP was the Voter News Service (VNS), which was disbanded in 2003 after controversies over the 2000 and 2002 election results.

** The Tomas Rivera Policy Institute (TRPI) has conducted secondary analyses of exit polls and produced adjusted, re-weighted results for the 1988-2000 period. See TRPI, "Profile of Latino Voters," October 2004. In 2000, TRPI's analysis tracked the VNS results and is thus not reported separately for that year.

Source: *How Did Latinos Really Vote in 2004?* Washington, DC: National Council of La Raza, November 15, 2004. Revised January 15, 2005.

- ✓ **Hispanic voters support candidates based on their records and positions, not party affiliation alone.** A good case study meriting a more detailed look is California's race for governor in 2006. In Governor Schwarzenegger's reelection bid, Latino support seemed tepid leading up to the election, seemingly influenced by Schwarzenegger's tough rhetoric on immigration.²⁰ During much of the 2006 campaign the Governor reversed course and expressed support for comprehensive immigration reform, among other issues important to Hispanic voters.²¹ According to CNN exit polls, the Governor garnered 39% of the Hispanic vote that year, compared to 31% in 2003.²²
- ✓ **Hispanic voters have shown a willingness to split the ticket.** Examples of this ticket-splitting tendency have been documented in states such as Arizona, Nevada, and California. In Arizona, while 56% of Latinos voted for Democratic Senator John Kerry in the 2004 presidential race, 74% voted for Republican Senator John McCain in the Senate race. Similarly, in Nevada, although most Hispanics voted Democratic, there was a 12-point difference between support for the Republican presidential (39%) and Senate (27%) candidates. In California, there was a ten-point difference between Latino support in the Senate race (73%) and the presidential race (63%).²³ In Nevada, albeit in different years, Latino voters demonstrated strong support for Democratic Senator Harry Reid (67% in 2004) and significant support for Republican Senator John Ensign (45% in 2006).²⁴
- ✓ **Latinos are becoming a swing vote in several competitive states, including Florida.** Long considered a key Republican constituency, the Latino vote in Florida is shifting. In 2000, Latino presidential support in Florida was estimated at 65% Republican and 34% Democrat; in 2004, according to national exit polls, the corresponding figures were 56% and 44%. According to Sergio Bendixen, a Democratic pollster, a fraction of that shift in support comes from the Cuban American community, but a more significant share comes from the growing non-Cuban Latino population in Florida.²⁵ In Florida in 2006, where CNN put the Hispanic share of the vote at 11%, both gubernatorial candidates Charlie Crist (R) and Jim Davis (D) received 49% of the Latino vote, splitting Hispanic preference right down the middle.²⁶ Crist won the race by seven percentage points. These shifts demonstrate that candidates would do well to reach out to Hispanic voters whose support is not solidly rooted in one party or the other. Interestingly, despite these shifts,

Hispanic voters continue to report low levels of contact by both parties; one example is 2006, when 38% of Latinos said they were contacted by the Democratic party and 29% by the Republican party, and those numbers were even lower among young Latinos – only 36% and 19%, respectively.²⁷ In addition, the ability to swing the election toward one candidate or another is evident in other states. In addition to Florida, Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, and Nevada – where Latino voters compose an increasing share of their respective states’ electorates – small shifts in the Hispanic vote can have a significant effect in close-margin elections (see Table 2).

Latino Vote Potential

The Latino share of the population (14.1%) is not yet reflected in its share of the electorate (6%)²⁸ (see Figure 4 on page 9). Indeed, a number of observers have documented that Latinos are unlikely to constitute a share of the electorate commensurate with its share of the population for many years to come, principally due to the substantial portion of the Hispanic population ineligible to vote due to citizenship status or age. Even taking these factors into account, there are encouraging signs. For example, from 1994 to 2004, Latinos, when compared to Whites and African Americans, have consistently exhibited double-digit growth from one election to another – midterm to midterm, presidential to presidential – in voter

Table 2 Competitive Electoral States and the Role of Latino Registrants and Voters: Arizona, Colorado, Florida, New Mexico, Nevada

2000 PRESIDENTIAL RACE					2004 PRESIDENTIAL RACE				2006 GUBERNATORIAL RACE	
State	Race Results		Latino Impact in Election		Race Results		Latino Impact in Election		Race Results	
	Winner's Margin	Winner's Party	State's Registrants, % Latino	State's Voters, % Latino	Winner's Margin	Winner's Party	State's Registrants, % Latino	State's Voters, % Latino	Winner's Margin	Winner's Party
AZ	6.3%	R	16.2%	15.0%	10.5%	R	14.2%	13.2%	28%	D
CO	8.4%	R	10.2%	9.7%	4.7%	R	8.8%	7.9%	15%	D
FL	0.9%	R	11.4%	11.3%	5.0%	R	11.2%	11.2%	7%	R
NM	6.0%	D	31.9%	29.5%	0.8%	R	33.8%	33.0%	38%	D
NV	3.5%	R	7.4%	7.0%	2.6%	R	8.6%	8.3%	4%	R

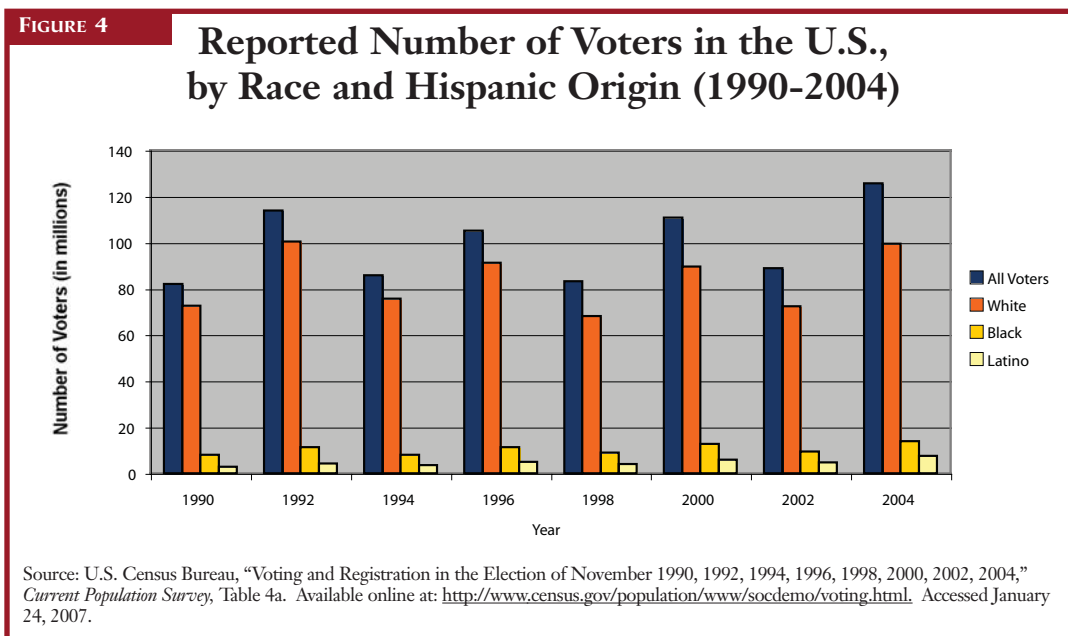
Source: Unpublished data from the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials Educational Fund, *Voces del Pueblo* program, 2007.

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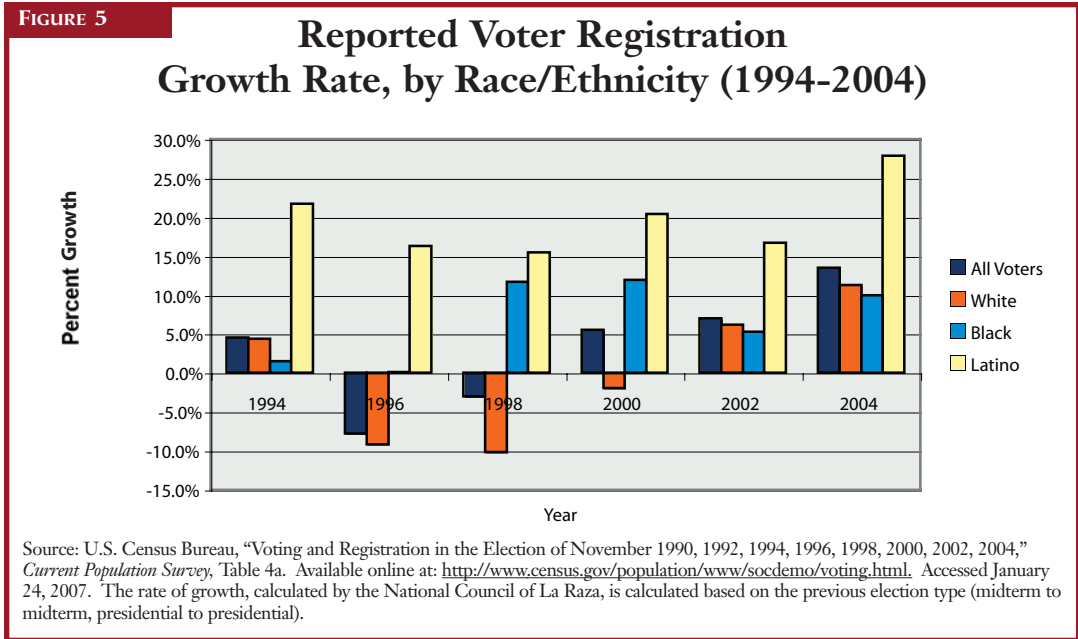
registration and voting rates.* However, data demonstrate that there is still enormous room for growth in the Hispanic electorate. Realizing this potential requires reversing the documented pattern of political underinvestment in the Hispanic community. Whereas this underinvestment has been more widely documented in the context of partisan campaign media expenditures,²⁹ it permeates all levels of electoral operations, including serious outreach and mobilization efforts undertaken by the myriad organizations involved in electoral politics. This could offer some explanation for the gaps in Latino and African American registration and voting participation, which remain even

after controlling for economic, education, and citizenship status.

- ✓ **Latinos are a growing proportion of the U.S. electorate, and their registration and voting rates are growing at a faster rate than those of other racial/ethnic groups.** Despite gaps in registration and voting rates, Latinos exhibit the highest growth rates in each of these categories compared to Whites and African Americans.
- ✓ **The percentage growth of Latinos registered to vote was three times that of Whites and four times that of African Americans between 2000 and 2004.** On the voter registration front, from 1990 to 2000, the number of

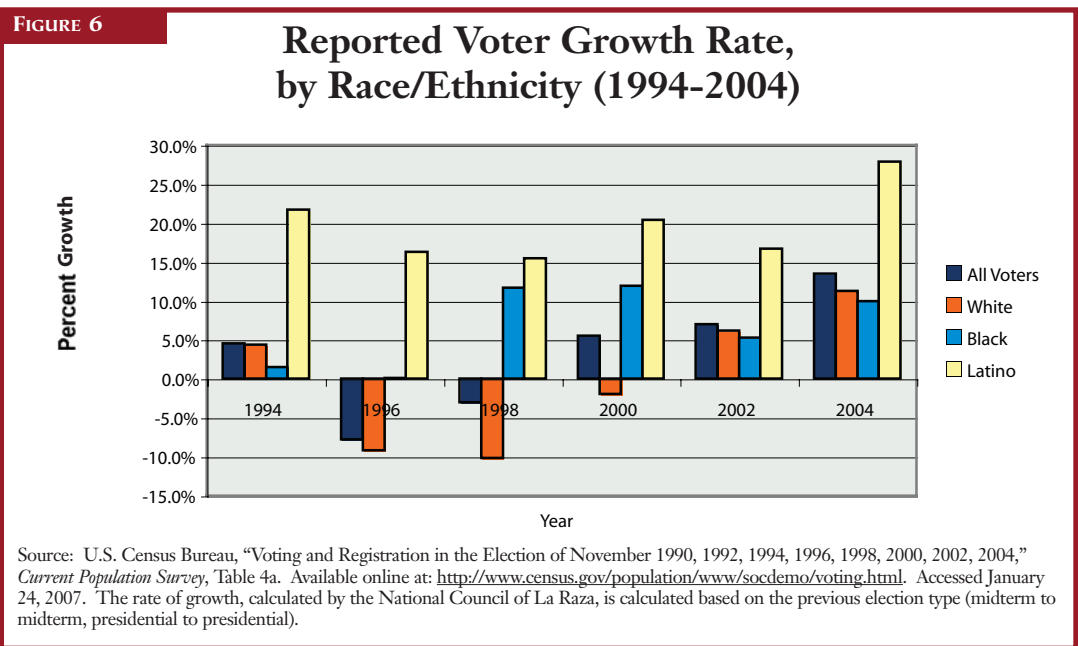


* It is well documented that younger, less-educated, and lower-income citizens vote in lower numbers than their older, better-educated, higher-income counterparts. Because both Hispanics and African Americans are relatively young populations with lower rates of educational attainment and higher poverty levels than other groups, the assumption is that closing the gaps between Latino and African American voter performance represents an attainable goal in the short to medium term.



Latinos registered to vote grew by 70%, compared to 4% for Whites and 27% for African Americans (see Figure 5). Between 2000 and 2004 alone, the number of registered Latinos grew by

23.4%, compared to 7.5% for Whites and 5.8% for African Americans.³⁰ In addition, closing the registration gap between Hispanics and African Americans by half would have resulted



in an additional 871,000 registered Latino voters in the 2004 election.³¹

- ✓ **Between 1990 and 2000, the number of Latinos casting a vote more than doubled, growing by 105%, compared to 23% for Whites and 60% for African Americans.** Between 2000 and 2004, the number of Latinos who voted grew by 27.9%, compared to 11.3% for Whites and 9.9% for African Americans (see Figure 6 on page 10).³² Closing the voting gap between Latinos and African Americans by half would have resulted in an additional one million Latino votes in that election.³³
- ✓ **Increasing citizenship rates among Latino immigrants is a key element in this electorate's expansion.** The Latino VAP includes a significant number of immigrants not yet eligible to vote. In 2004, 59.4% of the Latino VAP were citizens. Of the remaining 40.6%, it is estimated that at least 3.6 million are eligible to become citizens.³⁴ Although Latino immigrants exhibit lower naturalization rates than other immigrant groups, unprecedented spikes in citizenship applications in 2006 bode well for greater incorporation of Latino immigrants into American political life.³⁵
- ✓ **Registering young Latinos age 18-24 is another essential component of Latino electorate expansion.** The median age of Hispanics is 27.2 years, compared to 36.4 years for the nation

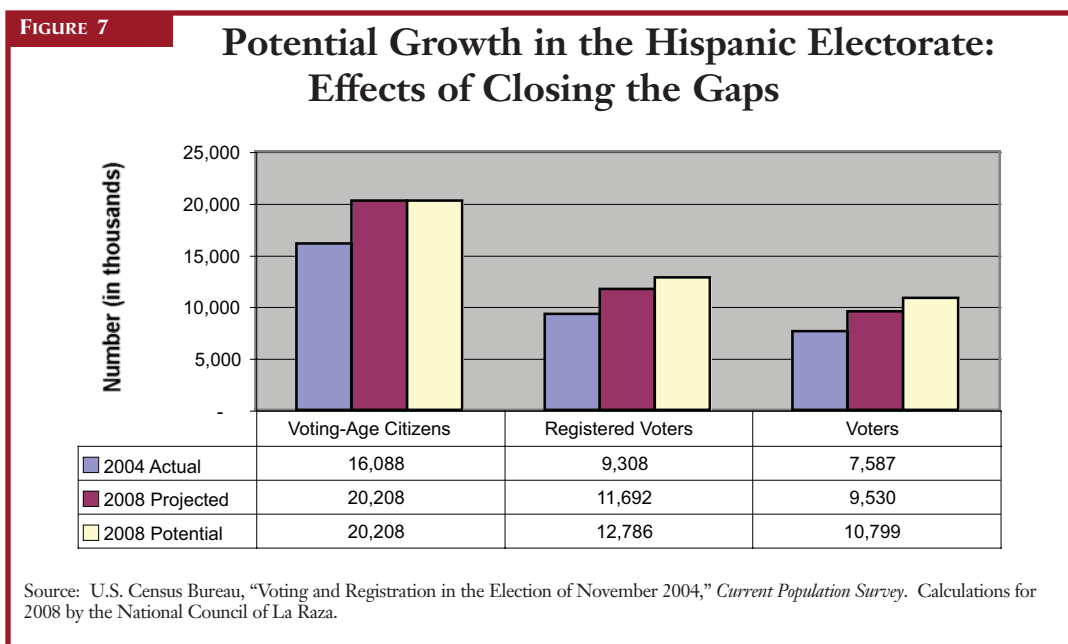
as a whole.³⁶ Every year, 425,000 Latino citizens turn 18, and among Latinos already of voting age, the proportion of those who are citizens is higher than for the overall Latino VAP.³⁷ In 2004, nearly 1.7 million of the eligible three million Latino youth (age 18-24) were unregistered.³⁸

- ✓ **The number of Latino voters could increase by 25% by 2008, but the potential is much greater.*** The following scenarios both demonstrate the potential Hispanic electorate in 2008 and beyond, and suggest key points in the process where additional intervention by stakeholders may be required to maximize the performance of the Latino electorate. For example, a simple “straight line” calculation based on 2004 U.S. Census voting and registration numbers suggests a projected increase in 2008 of 2.4 million registered Latinos, and an additional 1.9 million Latino voters compared to 2004 (25.6% increase over 2004).³⁹

If, however, registration and voting gaps between Latinos and African Americans were reduced in half, those numbers would grow substantially. If the rate of Latino citizens registered to vote rose to 63.3% in 2008 (compared to the current 57.9% for Latinos and 68.7% for African Americans) the number of potential Latinos registered would increase from a projected 2.4 million to

3.5 million. Similarly, if 84.5% of registered Latinos actually vote in 2008 (compared to the current 81.5% of Hispanics and 87.4% of African Americans), the number of Latino votes cast in 2008 would increase from a projected 9.5 million to a potential 10.8 million, an increase of 42% over 2004 (see Figure 7).⁴⁰

and shifts in voting patterns; and (3) there is substantial room for increasing Latino participation which can be achieved with greater and more strategic investments.⁴¹ Similarly, it is clear that to reach this electorate, candidates and politicians need to address the issues Latinos care about, and more research and polling is needed to



Recommendations

NCLR has previously observed that (1) there is strong evidence that Latinos judge candidates by their records and issue positions, not party affiliation alone; (2) opportunities exist for party realignment

deepen understanding of Latino issue perspectives.

Results from the last two election cycles reaffirm these findings and underline the need to advance long-term strategies rarely undertaken by traditional political campaigns, which in many ways remain the

* NCLR acknowledges that the calculations in this section do not represent sophisticated methodology – weighted population growth, naturalization rates, etc. are not factored in. However, previous NCLR reports have used similar approaches to illustrate growth potential, and these projections have been close. Calculations were made as follows: the 2008 projection was estimated by multiplying the 2004 Latino voting-age population (VAP) by its rate of growth between 2000 and 2004. That number was then multiplied by the 2004 citizen voting-age population (CVAP) percentage to arrive at the potential CVAP for 2008. Potential registration and voting numbers for 2008 were then calculated by multiplying the projected 2008 CVAP by 2004 voting and registration rates.

Engaging Latino Voters: The Issues and the Message Matter

Understanding the nuances of where Latinos stand on the issues continues to pose challenges for candidates and political campaigns. The immigration issue is perhaps the best example of this challenge. Whereas in the past many candidates viewed immigration almost as the sole issue with which to reach this community, recently several reports and some political pundits have argued that this issue is not especially important to Hispanics generally, particularly voters. However, neither view is consistent with evidence.

Multiple polls show that Latinos consistently list education, the economy/jobs, and sometimes health care at the top of their issue agendas, with immigration typically ranked lower than these other issues. Thus, candidates focusing solely on immigration are not addressing many of the Hispanic voters' principal issue concerns.

However, the potency of immigration as a "voting issue" should not be underestimated. Both polling data and Hispanic voter behavior over multiple election cycles show that immigration serves as a lens through which Latinos assess the political environment and candidate attitudes not just toward immigrants, but toward their community as a whole. For example, the Latino National Survey (LNS), undertaken from November 2005 to August 2006, found that regardless of generation or place of birth, there is near consensus among Hispanics that the greatest effect of groups such as the Minutemen has been to create more hostility toward all Latinos, not just immigrants. When the subject of immigration is part of prominent public debate, it plays a

Continued on Page 14

most powerful "mobilizing agents" in our system of democracy. While much of the focus and investment in electoral cycles tends to revolve around turnout, the most significant sources of Latino electoral growth are in segments of the population seldom touched by these efforts – immigrants eligible to naturalize and young and unregistered Latinos.

✓ **Immigrant integration and citizenship promotion strategies are essential.** In 2004, two out of five voting-age Latinos were not yet citizens. Nonetheless, new immigrants continue to tread the path of acculturation forged by their predecessors, as evidenced by the behavior of second and third generations, in spite of the fact that the positive integration of immigrants into American society and civic life is not an area where deliberate strategies are in place. If anything, rather than facilitating the process or reducing barriers to citizenship, the current system does the opposite; efforts to reduce application backlogs have stalled, revisions are under way to make the citizenship test more difficult, and application fees are being raised. In the last ten years, the citizenship application fee has increased by more than 610%,⁴² but there has been no parallel investment in improving the process or expanding the availability of civics and English classes to immigrants

who are interested in becoming U.S. citizens.⁴³

Among the most significant players in these arenas – providing English/civics classes and helping immigrants to naturalize – are community-based organizations, who must make do with little funding in an environment of increased demand. Collaboration between immigrant communities and service groups to provide citizenship assistance to eligible immigrants is on the rise, especially throughout 2006. Additionally, policy-makers in 2007 have an opportunity to strengthen immigrant integration mechanisms through passage of comprehensive immigration reform legislation, which will present opportunities to allocate new funding for English classes, provide affirmative support for civics education, and ensure additional resources for community-based efforts.

- ✓ **Investments in Latino-focused voter registration and outreach are strongly needed.** With two out of five Latino citizens not registered to vote in 2004 – a pool of 6.8 million – it is clear that voter registration remains a key component of any Latino electorate expansion strategy. In addition to running operations largely divorced from the communities they intend to mobilize, traditional campaigns are driven by at least two factors resulting in chronic underinvestment: (1) the

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Continued from Page 13

galvanizing role that profoundly influences Latino voting behavior, as the Hispanic voter backlash against California Governor Pete Wilson and other Republican candidates in the mid-1990s famously demonstrated. More contemporary evidence from multiple sources reinforces this point; the LNS found that among Latino citizens and noncitizens alike, 25% and 35%, respectively, selected “illegal immigration” when asked the question, “What do you think is THE one most important problem facing the Latino community today?”³⁸

In NCLR’s 2006 election-eve poll, 32% of likely Latino voters said that immigration was the most important issue, and 19% said it was one of the most important issues in the election. Among these likely voters, 29% stated that they, someone in their family, or a friend had participated in the rallies or marches of 2006. For Spanish-speaking voters, the comparable number was 37%, and for voters 18-24 years old, 45%.³⁹ Furthermore, virtually all polls consistently show that an overwhelming majority of Latinos support a path to legalization for undocumented immigrants, regardless of place of birth, ethnicity, age, or other factors. Thus, the data suggest that candidates, political parties, and other stakeholders who both outline their views on the broad range of salient issues and articulate a positive, pro-immigrant message are more likely to be successful in attracting Hispanic voters than those who do not.

Sources: Fraga, Luis, John Garcia, Rodney Hero, Michael Jones-Carrea, Valerie Martinez-Ebers, and Gary M. Segura. *2006 Latino National Survey*. Seattle, Washington: University of Washington, November 2005-August 2006; and NCLR/NALEO Poll of Latino Voters and the 2006 Election, conducted by Lake Research Partners and Public Opinion Strategies November 2-6, 2006. Available at: <http://www.nclr.org/content/publications/download/43355>.

greatest electoral investments are made in competitive states and districts, while Latinos either tend to be concentrated in noncompetitive states or represent small portions of the electorate in such states or districts, and (2) campaigns concentrate get-out-the-vote efforts on frequent, rather than new or infrequent, voters. With Latinos increasingly becoming a national community and exhibiting shifts in party support, all in an environment of tight electoral contests, it is possible that these investments could increase. However, much of the discussion remains limited to stepping up media outreach and which languages this outreach should be conducted in – strategies that are likely to have little direct impact on expanding the actual number of Hispanics registered to vote.

In its 2006 poll of Latino registered voters, 16% of whom were new registrants, NCLR found that the three main voter registration vehicles identified by voters were the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) (19%), mail-in systems (16%), and community registration drives (12%). If DMV were combined with other government agencies or elections offices, that category would increase to 30%. These categories varied slightly by subgroup – with DMV identified as the main venue by 18- to 24-year-olds (28%), while community drives were the main venue for voters whose

language preference is Spanish (17%). Online registration represented 2% or lower.⁴⁴ Procedures that unnecessarily inhibit voter registration, such as voter identification requirements, stand to slow Latino voter participation. Furthermore, given the reach of community registration drives, attempts to restrict these types of voter registration activities, or to rely more heavily on online strategies, are unlikely to maximize Hispanic voter registration or voting.

- ✓ **Particular attention to innovative youth outreach and voter registration strategies designed with Latinos in mind need to be advanced.** Given the youthfulness of the Latino population, reversing low participation rates among young Latinos is vital to preventing Latinos from remaining at the margins of the electoral process. In 2004, less than half of Latino citizens 18-24 years old were registered to vote. However, many investments and strategies targeting young voters tend to follow a campus-based model, and many of these are centered on four-year colleges and universities. This approach reaches some (13% of Latinos age 18-24 reported registering on campus, tied with registering by mail), but it misses the mark with most Latinos. In 2002, for example, only 10.4% of all undergraduate students were Latino, and approximately 60% of those were

in two-year, not four-year, institutions.⁴⁵ New and promising strategies include mailing registration forms to youth on their 18th birthday, and partnerships with school districts to register eligible students before they graduate from high school. Community-based organizations also have an advantage in the latter category, since they have permanent presence in communities and can build the relationships needed to forge nonpartisan partnerships.

Unleashing the Latino electoral potential requires testing and implementing new and long-term strategies that represent a break from the traditional boom-and-bust cycle around each election. These long-term strategies, which currently are being advanced mainly by community-based groups, are essential to the task of building a participation continuum – one that links eligible immigrants to citizenship, citizens to registration and voter education, and those registered to the voting booth and other means of civic engagement.

Endnotes

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