

# *The Battle for Latino Voters*

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The rising importance of the Latino<sup>1</sup> voter is one of the most talked about trends in American politics, and with good reason.

In California, Latino voters are widely credited with reversing the fortunes of Democrats during the 1990s. Nationally, approximately six million Latinos cast ballots in the 2000 presidential election—5.3 percent of the vote—as turnout increased by nearly 132 percent from 1980 to 2002. Almost four million more Latinos could enter the electorate this decade.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, Latinos surpassed African-Americans in the 2000 census as America’s largest minority population, outnumbering other minorities in 23 states. Given this trend, it is little wonder that that both parties are reassessing their strategies and that the Bush White House has made reaching out to Hispanic voters a priority.

The 2000 presidential election delivered a wake-up call to Democrats that they should not take Latino voters for granted. Candidate George W. Bush, with a determined courtship effort, narrowed the Democrats’ 51-point advantage among Latino voters in the 1996 election to 27 points in 2000, according to one national poll.<sup>3</sup> And the Bush outreach efforts continue apace. Karl Rove, the president’s chief political advisor, has made no secret of the fact that cracking the Democratic hold on Hispanic voters is a central element of current GOP political strategy.

But beyond the widely recognized importance of this population juggernaut to politics, there is little understanding and plenty of misconceptions about these voters, their political preferences and allegiances, and the policy agendas that matter most to them.

This report is an overview of the growing Latino population and its implications for American politics. The report examines Latino demographics, myths about their political participation, Latino views on salient policy issues, and the implications of these factors for reaching out to Latino voters. Its findings include:

- While two out of three Latinos live in California, Texas, New York, Florida, Illinois, and New Jersey, the growing Latino electorate is more broadly dispersed. Of the 10 counties with the fastest growing Latino populations, nine are in North Carolina, Georgia, and Arkansas. This fact implies that Latino voters could potentially swing elections in many more urban, suburban, and rural districts in states that heretofore haven’t had much Latino electoral participation.
- There are two significant dampers on a greater expansion of the Latino vote. First, many legal Hispanic immigrants are not citizens and thus not eligible to vote. Others are young and are opting out of politics like other young Americans. This last fact points to a participation gap, but it is important to keep in mind that most Latino voters embody a different set of demographics than those who have not been mobilized to vote or become citizens and vote.
- Compared to the white, non-Latino majority of voters, Latino voters are younger and more likely to be married with young children. These demographics imply that the Democratic Party’s historic strength on Social Security and other retirement-related issues may be less of an advantage among

Latino voters—and may even be a disadvantage if the working age Latinos see Democrats as pandering to older voters and not reforming retirement programs to make them last for younger generations. Since being married with children is increasingly correlated with voting Republican, these demographics also suggest that Republicans may be able to make their historic dominance of defining family values work to their advantage in winning more Latinos.

- Significant cultural and political differences define Latino populations in different states. This fact implies that it would be a mistake to adopt a one-size-fits-all strategy toward Latino voters.
- A clear majority of Latino voters traditionally supports Democrats, but there are signs of an increasing split between their presidential and down-ballot preferences. The increasing split suggests that President Bush’s aggressive courtship of Hispanic voters is changing opinions, especially among first-generation Spanish speakers.
- There are significant differences between first and later generation voters in how they identify with political parties. Party identification grows increasingly Democratic by the second or third generations. This may change if President Bush continues to make rapid headway winning the support of today’s first-generation Latinos.
- In survey after survey, education is the most important issue for Latino voters, but as you move down the income scale, economy and crime become more important. This fact suggests that Latinos’ economic status plays an important role shaping their attitudes about policy.
- In a national poll, most Latinos said they identified as “working families” rather than ethnic (Mexican American, Cuban American) or pan-ethnic (Hispanic/Latino) group identifications. In the search for salient issues, it may be more useful to think of these voters as “working class” rather than Latino. The party that captures issues of concern to working families will do best at securing their allegiance.
- Although candidates who make appeals to Latino voters in Spanish win points, campaigns that take a bilingual approach do best. Therefore, focusing solely on Spanish language appeals is a mistake.
- Increased voter registration does not translate into increased voter turn out—voter registration drives, while essential, are not sufficient. These new findings suggest that the mobilization strategies that work best include personal contacts from influential Latinos.

## *Political Demography*

- I. Fact: Latinos are still geographically concentrated in a small number of states.  
Trend: Latinos are rapidly dispersing throughout the nation.**

Two out of three Latinos live in California, Texas, New York, Florida, Illinois, and New Jersey (see Table 1 in Appendix). Against this backdrop of concentration, a Latino diaspora beyond the Southwest, Florida, and the Northeast is unfolding. In 1990, 13 states had Hispanics as their ethnic largest minority of color (Figure 1). Now, as measured in 2000, Hispanics surpass African or Asian Americans in 23 of the 50 states (Figure 2).

For example, Cook County, Illinois, alone has more Latinos than the populations of the states of Arizona, Colorado, or New Mexico. Even more indicative of Latino dispersion is the fact that the top 10 counties with the fastest growing Latino populations of over ten thousand include four counties in North Carolina, three in Georgia, two in Arkansas, and one in Indiana (Table 2). Most of this population growth is due to Mexican immigration (Table 3), but significant numbers of Central Americans are now present in Southern California<sup>4</sup> and Houston, and Dominicans and Colombians are settling in New York and Miami.<sup>5</sup> These new immigrants are intermixing with older communities of Mexican Americans in

the Southwest, Cuban Americans in Florida, and Puerto Ricans in New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut.

To be sure, there are tensions among Latino sub-national groups. Strain between such groups as Cuban Americans and Colombian Americans in Miami or Dominican Americans and Puerto Ricans in New York make it difficult to ascribe a common ethnic label to identify Latinos as a whole. Nonetheless, there is also a growing sense of a pan-Hispanic identity—especially among the young—that links Latinos through language. Differences among Latin American accents and specific country vernaculars are noticeable, but the national Spanish networks—Telemundo and Univision—successfully utilize a universal Spanish in the United States. Beyond language, the intermixing of communities in the barrios, religion, a sense of cultural pride, and, for many, a fresh memory of the immigration experience also contributes to this emerging sense of shared identity.

**II. Fact: A large proportion of Latinos are too young to vote.**

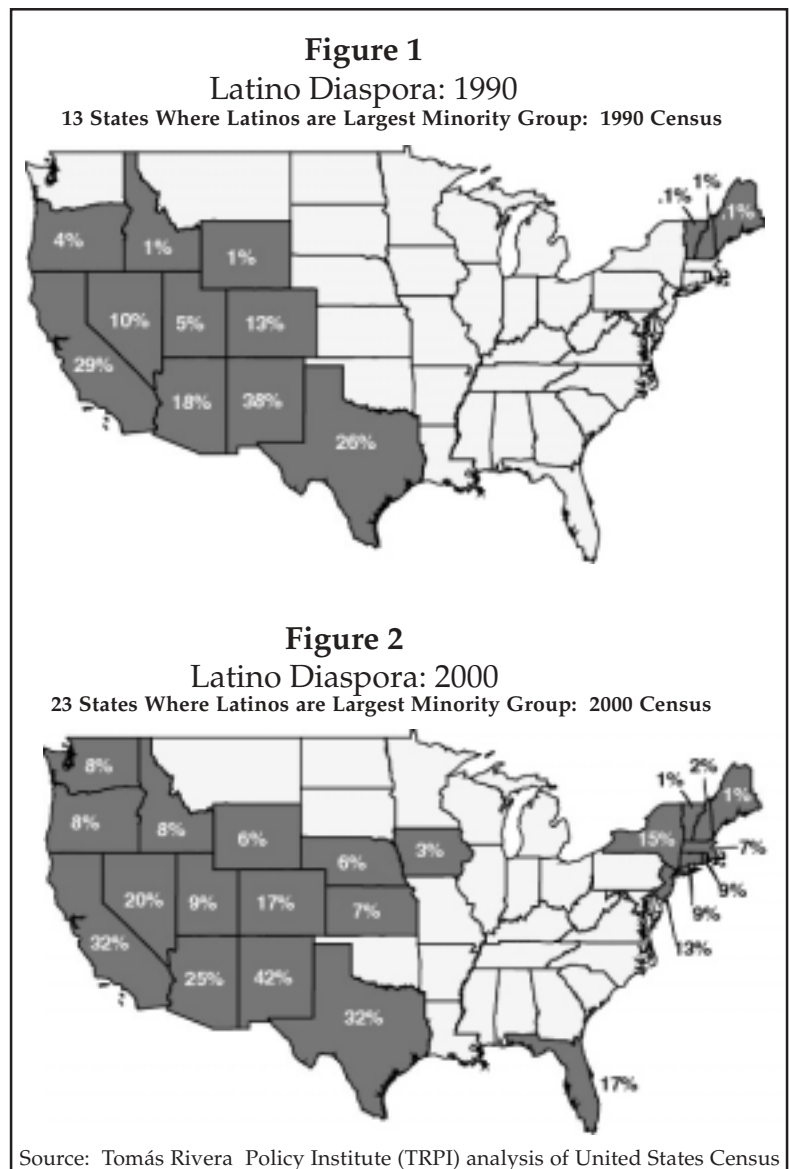
**Trend: Millions of young U.S.-born Latinos will come of age in this decade, boosting the number of voting age Latinos at a faster rate than whites, and conceivably increasing the proportion of Latino voters.**

Of the 35 million Latinos in the United States, 10 million are both U.S.-born and younger than 18.<sup>6</sup> If only two out of five of these young Hispanics come of voting age in this decade, that's four million new voting age, native-born Hispanics by the year 2010. This figure does not include the more than one million young Hispanics who are foreign born and who may become U.S. citizens in the decade through their own volition or through the action of their parents. This enormous electoral potential is tempered by the fact that young Latinos are much like other young Americans in that they are less politically active. Correspondingly, campaigns targeted on mobilizing young voters, e.g., "Rock the Vote," may have a disproportionate impact on Latinos.

**III. Fact: Large numbers of Latino adults cannot vote because they are not citizens.**

**Trend: A growing number of Latinos will be unable to participate in American politics.**

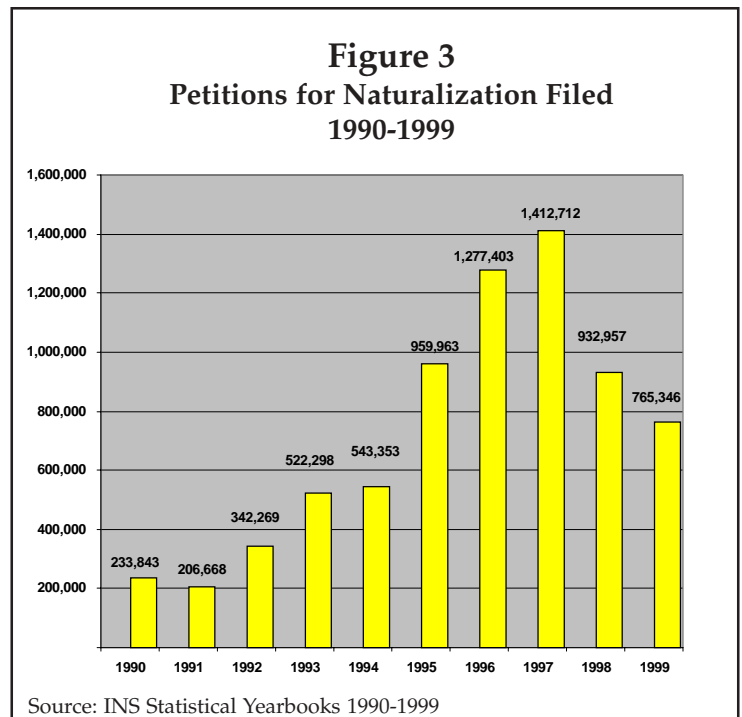
Significant numbers of foreign-born Latinos are present in all states with major Latino populations (Table 4). Thus, full Latino political electoral potential will not come about unless these immigrants become U.S. citizens.



The 1990s dramatically demonstrate what can happen when Latinos opt for naturalization. Latino naturalizations soared to an all-time high during the decade, thanks to Latino anger at the anti-immigrant rhetoric of the period, the Clinton/Gore Citizenship USA campaign, congressional passage of welfare reform, relaxation of Mexican dual nationality laws, and perhaps most significantly, the three million Latino immigrants who qualified under the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 who became eligible for U.S. citizenship by 1996<sup>7</sup> (Table 5).

The political forces that drove Latino naturalization in large measure also drove voter registration and participation. But the decline of naturalization applications in 1998 and 1999<sup>8</sup> (Figure 3) suggests that the trend may be running out of steam. One reason: The naturalization process has become more difficult as the application fee increased five-fold from less than \$50 12 years ago to \$260 in 2002. In spite of the high interest many Latino permanent residents have in becoming Americans, the pace of naturalization is slowing, with obvious consequences for the pace of increasing Latino political participation.<sup>9</sup>

The potential exists for both political parties to win Hispanic voters by championing the cause of citizenship for qualified legal immigrants. Surveys of the Hispanic legal resident population repeatedly show substantial numbers of Latino immigrants expressing allegiance to neither party or declaring themselves “independent.”<sup>10</sup> Yet, like waves of immigrants before them, these immigrants may be won over by the party that is perceived as advancing the cause of their citizenship—all the more so if efforts to facilitate naturalization are linked to voter registration and voter education campaigns.

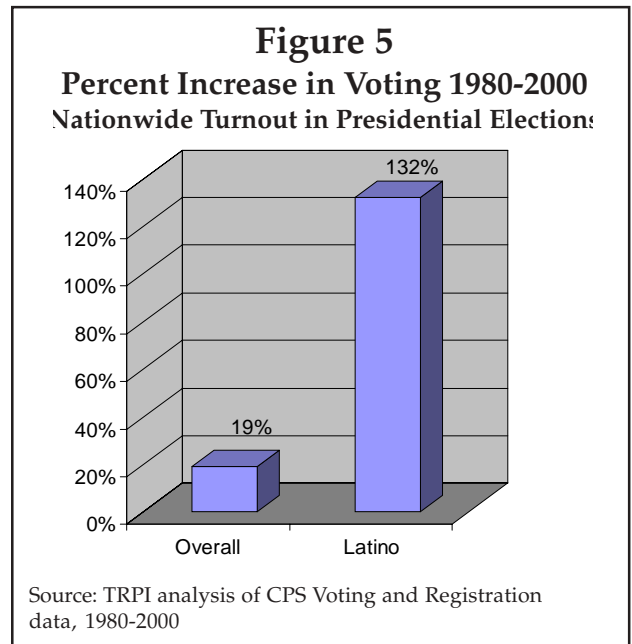
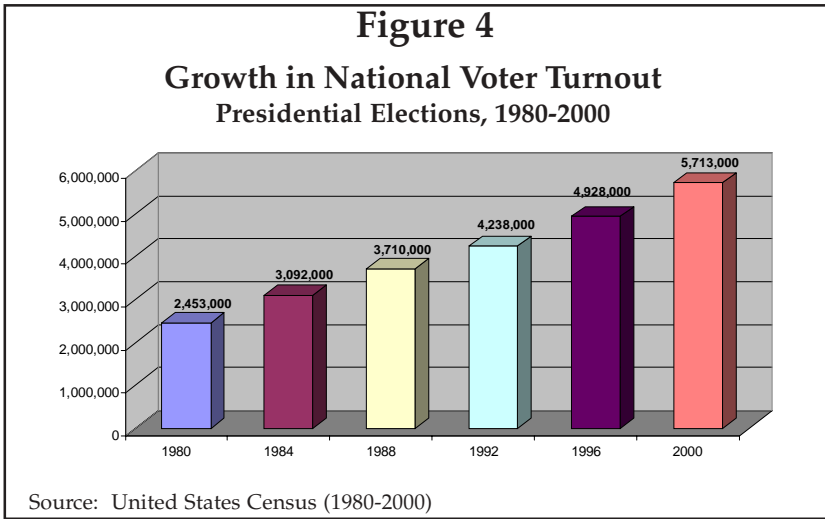


### *The Latino Voter: Image vs. Reality*

It is not surprising that misconceptions have developed about Latino voters since it is fair to say that, outside of states like Texas and New Mexico, Latinos were not politically visible at a national level until after the 1960s.<sup>11</sup>

Misconceptions continue to abound partially because polling data are still relatively scarce and frequently of poor quality. Many polls fail to question enough Latinos to make the findings accurate, and even when they do, most lack the ethnic breakdowns needed to differentiate between, for instance, Cuban-Americans whose conservatism sets them apart from Latino voters of other heritages. At the same time, even quality polls can fuel misconceptions since the Latino electorate tends to be volatile, like other groups of low-income voters who often form their opinions late in the election cycle. The bottom line is that political observers should be skeptical of surveys on Latino voters.

Although many “facts” about Latino voters are misconceived, there is some element of truth to the idea that Hispanics, despite a growing population, do not participate in the political process at the same rate as other Americans.<sup>12</sup> But accepting this fact as a key characteristic of Latino voters would miss the larger and more critical political point: Even with a smaller proportion of Latinos going to the polls, Hispanic voters are increasingly significant at the national level (Figure 4), and in selected states they constitute a substantial segment of the electorate. For example, the number of Latino voters increased by nearly 133 percent in the past 20 years in comparison to the national electorate, which has grown by only 19 percent (Figure 5).



Moreover, in selected states, the Hispanic electorate has the clear potential of being the much heralded swing vote, the support that brings the winning candidate over the top. Table 6 shows that it takes only 3.6 percent of Latino voters in California, 2.7 percent in Texas, 1.7 percent in New Mexico, and 4.4 percent in Florida to make a one percent change in a statewide election. With the potential to swing elections in this way, Latino voters will be defining a political reality in more and more states.

Who is this new Latino voter? To begin, an important fact to keep in mind is that the Latino electorate is not the same as Latinos as a whole. For example, the proportion of foreign-born Latinos is much higher (44 percent) among all Latinos than it is among the Latino electorate (27 percent). With this caveat in mind, census and survey data describe Latino voters in the following ways:

*Age*

The average age of the Latino registered voter (40 years) is more than a decade older than the average age of Latinos nationwide (28 years). Los Angeles County, a county with more than 10 percent of the nation’s overall Latino population and a primary port of entry for Mexican immigrants, is a good example of the relative maturity of Latino voters in comparison to Latinos at large. The average Los Angeles County Latino voter is 43 years of age and he/she has been registered for more than 10 years.<sup>13</sup>

Although Latino voters are older than their non-voting counterparts, the Latino electorate is considerably younger than the white, non-Latino electorate and roughly the same age as the African-American electorate. Close to three in five (57 percent) Latino registered voters are under the age of 44, compared to 45 percent of white registered voters and 56 percent of African-American registered voters. And more than one in five white registered voters is older than age 65, compared to only 14 percent of Latinos and African-Americans.

*Gender*

Women outnumber men by a greater degree among Latino registered voters (55/45) than among whites (53/47), but not nearly as much as among African-Americans (58/42). Gender disparity among Latino voters varied significantly by state in the 2000 elections. In Texas, the Latino electorate was split equally between the sexes. In California, women accounted for 57 percent of the Latino electorate, and in New York, nearly three-fifths (61 percent) of the Latino electorate was female. Given that Latino voters are relatively more likely to be women compared to white voters, it would be natural to expect Latinos to compound the oft-cited gender gap of women favoring Democrats over Republicans in presidential choice. Just the opposite is true. The gap is only 5 percent among Latinos compared to 12 percent among all women.

### *Nativity*

Nearly three out of four (72 percent) Latino voters are born in the United States, although this figure varies significantly by state—in Texas, 83 percent of the electorate is native born, in California 70 percent, and in Florida, 45 percent. The percentage of the Latino foreign-born electorate also differs depending on the survey source utilized. For example, the 2001 Hart/Lake/Bendixen poll for the AFL-CIO<sup>14</sup> shows that 40 percent of Latino voters nationwide are foreign born; a TRPI national poll in 2001 shows this figure to be 31 percent; the comparable census figure is 27 percent. Given margins of error as well as variability due to different sampling frames, it is safe to say that between one-third and two-fifths of the Latino electorate are first-generation, foreign-born voters.

### *Education*

The Latino electorate has lower education attainment rates than the white, non-Latino majority of registered voters. For example, one-quarter of the Latino electorate has less than a high school degree, compared to less than one-tenth (8.6 percent) of the white and 18 percent of the African-American electorate [the United States Census 2000]. And while high school graduates comprise similar ratios of white, African-American, and Latino electorates (31, 32, and 32 percent respectively), it is important to remember that the Latino electorate is considerably younger than the white electorate, and would therefore have higher education rates if Latinos were as likely to have a diploma as white, non-Latinos their age. Similarly, Latino higher education attainment rates are about half that of the white electorate, with 16 percent of Latino registered voters holding a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 31 percent of their white counterparts [the United States Census 2000].

### *Marital Status*

Latinos are much more likely to be part of traditional nuclear families. One in three Latinos in metropolitan areas live in households made up of two parents and their children. By comparison, only one in five whites is part of that kind of family household, and in the 2000 presidential election less than one in three (31 percent) were parents of children under age 18. Two-thirds of Hispanic voters are married (67 percent), one out of five (20 percent) are single, and only a small portion (12 percent) is divorced.

### *Income*

Latinos are significantly more likely to live in poverty than the white majority of registered voters. For example, while almost one in five (18 percent) married Latino parents is raising their children in poverty, only 4 percent of their white and 7 percent of African-Americans families live at similar levels. Roughly two in five (42 percent) Latino registered voters are part of households earning less than \$35,000, compared to 45 percent of African-Americans and 22 percent of whites, even though Latino households are often larger. Only 17 percent of the Latino electorate is part of household earning more than \$75,000, compared to 30 percent of white and 13 percent of African-American registered voters.

### *Religion*

Almost half of all Hispanic voters report attending church once or more each week, compared to 42 percent among white non-Hispanic voters.

Overall, Latino voters are more likely to be working class or poor, married with children, churchgoers, and holders of a high school diploma or less compared to the white majority of voters. In contrast to Latinos as a whole, Latino voters are more likely to be U.S.-born and older.

## ***The Future of Hispanic Partisanship***

Both political parties are making claims to the allegiance of the Hispanic voter, and have credible assertions.<sup>15</sup> Republicans argue that Hispanics have a strong work ethic and innate conservative beliefs that make them natural targets for the GOP.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, many Democrats argue that their party's positions on education, health care, and workforce development suit Hispanic voters better.

Which way will the Hispanic electorate go? Let's first turn to actual Hispanic voting preferences in recent elections.

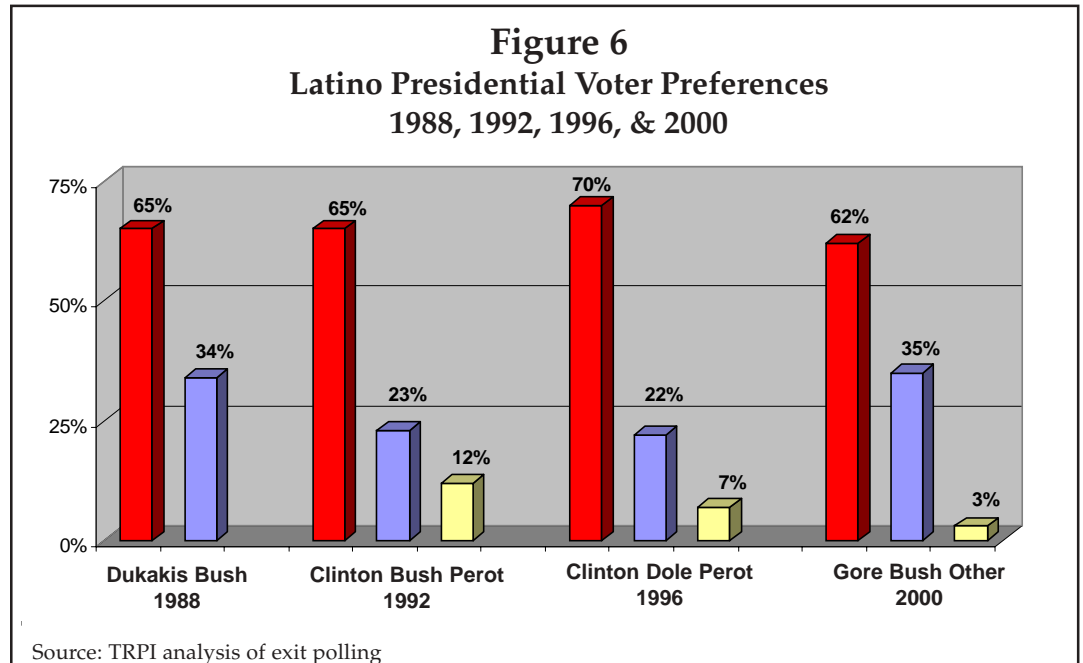
Figure 6 shows Latino presidential voting preferences in the past four elections. Democratic presidential candidates have consistently received roughly two-thirds of the Hispanic vote in the past four presidential elections—even in the lopsided election of 1988 when Michael Dukakis only received 46 percent of the national vote.

But there are important distinctions to draw within this pattern of Democratic preference. First, Latino support for the Democratic Party varies by generation. As Table 7 indicates, the lowest support for the Democratic Party is among first-generation Latinos. Correspondingly, the largest percentage of Latinos declaring themselves “independents” is among first-generation, i.e. foreign-born, naturalized Latinos. The explanation may be that first-generation Latinos simply have not had the time to anchor their political allegiances because of language issues and lack of familiarity with the political parties. By the third generation, more than half of Latinos identify as Democrats, up from one-third of the first generation. One obvious question is whether the courting of Hispanic voters by the current Republican administration will change the preferences of first-generation voters.

Second, there are significant differences within the Latino electorate, especially by region and ethnicity (Table 8). As previously noted, Cuban-Americans have maintained a wide preference for Republicans since the 1960s, which makes the Latino vote in Florida decidedly more Republican in its outlook than the national electorate. Latino voters in Texas are also relatively more conservative than Latino voters in other states. Using the ideological scores of Democratic Hispanic congressional delegations as surrogates, one can see important differences between state Hispanic electorates. The average liberalism score of the New York and California Latino delegation is 14 points higher than the Texas Democratic delegation.<sup>17</sup> Conversely, the conservatism scores are higher among Texas Hispanic Democrats (14 percent) than either California (11 percent) or New York Latino Democrats (four percent). These examples illustrate that it would be a mistake for either party to adopt a one-size-fits-all approach to Hispanic voters across the nation.

Although the national electorate is heterogeneous and complex as a whole, Table 9 shows that Latinos can be characterized as conservative or liberal on many of the salient issues. While typically conservative on issues such as school prayer, welfare, criminal justice (although suspicious of the police), and gay rights, Latinos are generally liberal on issues such as the death penalty, assistance to illegal immigrants, education, job creation, and children’s welfare. There is too much disagreement on abortion to characterize Latino voters as liberal or conservative on this issue.

One policy area with substantial agreement is education, which consistently ranks as the most important issue for Latinos across different states and ethnicities (Table 10). Jobs and the economy are also consistently top-tier issues, as are concern for race relations and discrimination. Notably, in the



Tomás Rivera Policy Institute (TRPI) survey, immigration did not rank in the top three issues although it did not focus on measuring views on immigration. Specifically, Latinos distinguish between immigration in general and “immigrant rights.” The latter, according to many surveys, ranks high among Latino concerns given the prevalence of immigrants among their ranks.

If we control for education and income, some interesting class differences emerge. For Latinos earning less than \$25,000, the economy and crime are top priorities, ranking ahead of education. Their own economic struggles in low-wage jobs, as well as a likelihood of living in high-crime areas, may account for the contrast with middle class and upscale Latinos who rank education first.

Beyond these class differences, there are critical policy differences among Latinos by generation (Figures 7 and 8). For example, support for school vouchers declines between the first and second generations, as does support for assistance to undocumented immigrants, which declines by nearly half by the third generation. Although support for prayer in public schools remains the same over the generations, support for the death penalty and abortion rights increases—pro-choice votes nearly double between the first and third generations. Similarly, later-generation Latinos are less likely to think homosexuality is “always wrong.” Such changing policy attitudes likely reflect the acculturation of Latinos to dominant American values.

<b>Figure 7</b>	
<b>Latino Generational Differences on Policy Attitudes</b>	
<u>First Generation (G1)*</u>	<u>Second Generation &amp; higher (G2+)</u>
Supportive of school vouchers	Slightly less supportive
Supportive of assistance to undocumented immigrants	Less supportive
Support School Prayer	Drops in second generation but remains the same in G3+
Oppose death penalty	Less opposed
Oppose abortion	Less opposed
Oppose gay rights	Less opposed

\* G1 Latinos may be divided into two categories. Those Latinos who migrated as adults and those who were children. In the latter category, commonly called the 1.5 generation, attitudes may more closely resemble those of G2 Latinos.

Source: TRPI surveys

<b>Figure 8</b>	
<b>Preliminary Media Outreach Strategy to Reach All Segments of the Hispanic Electorate</b>	
English language print & broadcast media	G2+ voters, Latino suburban middle income plus voters
Spanish language print & broadcast media	G1* voters, port-of-entry community voters

\* See note on G1 in Figure 8

Source: TRPI surveys

These generational differences are important given the large proportions of Hispanics who fall into different age groups. Nationally, about two out of five Latinos are first generation foreign born (44 percent); one out of three is second generation (30 percent), and one out of four is third generation or higher. Among the states, New Mexico has the highest proportion of second-generation Hispanics (87 percent) and Florida has the lowest proportion (28 percent). Within each state, these generational mixes will vary. Port of entry communities, like the Pico Union district in Los Angeles, will have significantly greater numbers of first generation Latinos than a suburban city like Whittier, California. Political attitudes will vary significantly in these two communities even though they are less than 30 miles apart.

One very critical caveat to the saliency of Latino views is the fact that they—like the general electorate—do not necessarily vote solely based on the issues. A recent national survey conducted by the Tomás Rivera Policy Institute shows a high level of incongruence (27 percent) between Latino voters’ support of issues and their support for a candidate. In other words, an individual may support gun control and yet prefer the presidential candidate who opposes this position. Similarly, the 2001 Hart/Lake/Bendixen survey found Latino attitudes toward President Bush to be much more favorable than Latino attitudes toward the GOP on a number of domestic issues.

Given all these factors, what can we predict about Hispanic partisan attachment?

First, there is no doubt that Hispanics overwhelmingly support the Democratic Party. And this support strengthens with later generations of Hispanics. Still, one cannot underestimate the impact of President Bush's Latino courtship. His highly publicized outreach to Mexico, use of Spanish, and appointment of Hispanics to highly visible administration posts may be creating a bifurcation of attitudes in the Hispanic electorate—particularly among first generation voters. Specifically, Latinos may continue in their strong support for the Democratic Party at the congressional and local levels while a segment, especially among first generation Spanish-speaking voters, supports the GOP presidential nominee. We'll know the answer soon enough.

Second, partisan attachment will not flow from a simple ideological or ethnic paradigm. Heterogeneous in their policy attitudes, Hispanics cannot easily be categorized as liberal or conservative. And, while ethnicity may be a factor in determining their vote, Table 11 shows that it is not the only factor. A national survey asking what group Latinos most identified with found that rather than having an ethnic (Mexican American, Cuban American) or pan-ethnic (Hispanic/Latino) group identification, a majority identified with "working families." This finding underscores the importance of socioeconomic issues (jobs, economic security, health insurance, and education) to many Hispanics and suggests that the party to capture the issues of concern to "working families" will have the greatest impact on winning the allegiance of Latino voters.

### *The Aspiration Agenda*

Since the Democratic Party is traditionally seen as the party of working families, Democrats have an advantage in retaining the allegiance of Latinos with a "working families" political agenda. Virtually all survey and demographic data suggest that traditional Democratic Party positions on health insurance, gun control, education, and worker retraining resonate well among Hispanics. But a political approach is key: The working families agenda should be presented in terms of providing the tools for upward mobility, not the platform for an aggrieved minority group.

Like the immigrant groups of yesteryear, many Latinos believe the Horatio Alger dream. While millions of Latino families struggle against poverty, the evidence suggests they are upwardly mobile as a group and more hopeful about their chances for the future than they are resentful about unfair discrimination in the past or present.

Many Latinos think that hard work and perseverance alone will improve both their own lives as well as the lives of their children. More than four in five Hispanics believe "no matter how poor you start out in this country, you can make it if you work hard," a recent Bendixen poll found. And while the low-income barrios that many Latinos live in do not represent ideal living conditions, life is better in the barrios than in the countries from which many Latinos or their parents originated.

Moreover, there is a growing Latino middle class fueled partly by record-breaking rates of improvement in joblessness and business ownership during the 1990s. Outpacing Americans as a whole, unemployment among Latinos fell by more than half between 1992 and 2000 (from 11.6 percent to 5.7 percent, compared to a decline from 7.5 percent to 4 percent for Americans as a whole). The number of Hispanic-owned businesses increased by some 230 percent during the 1990s, and by 1997, Latinos owned 20 percent of New Mexican businesses and roughly 15 percent of both Floridian and Texan businesses. Today, more than 2.5 million Latino families in Texas and California—again, the states with the largest Latino populations—are now middle class by U.S. census standards, earning more than \$40,000 annually. It is likely that this economic upward mobility lies behind Latinos' hopeful outlook on the future, and belief that hard work and personal responsibility will be rewarded.

Given this positive set of beliefs and outlooks, Latino voters will support an agenda based on the idea that government should reward ordinary people's hard work and personal responsibility with the tools they need to improve their lives and offer more opportunity for their children—i.e., access to health insurance, quality public education, job training, safe streets, affordable housing. This agenda of economic aspiration can ultimately be framed in terms of family values, or what it takes to provide a better life for your family. Regardless of income levels, gaining the support of Latinos—who, again, typically live in a

traditional two-parent household with children present—requires a positive agenda responsive to the needs of children and families.

Championing such a positive agenda for upward mobility also means helping Latino legal immigrants become new Americans and access the opportunities available in the economic mainstream. The great majority of Latino immigrants are not sojourners. Although there is widespread belief that many Latino immigrants are in the United States temporarily before returning to their homeland, surveys find that the vast majority of Latino legal immigrants who have lived in this country for more than five years plan to remain here. Therefore, facilitating the complete integration of Latino immigrants into American society through the naturalization process is but a first step in developing an agenda that captures the imagination of first generation Latino voters.

A bold second step would be to congressionally legislate a National Select Commission on New Americans to explore the issues immigrants face in American society. A pro-immigrant agenda should also include more support for classes that teach English as a second language to adults, educational reform, and better funding for public schools that have large numbers of immigrant children, as well as consumer protections and better opportunities for home ownership.

Bearing in mind Latinos' hopeful outlook and desire to be in the mainstream of opportunity, it would be counterproductive to take a political approach centered on Latinos as an aggrieved minority group. While it remains vital to aggressively counter discrimination, the fact that Latinos' focus on the basic tools of upward mobility (jobs, education, healthcare, and the rights and privileges of citizenship) shows that they believe it is lack of those tools—not discrimination—that largely holds them back from making a better life for themselves and their families.

### *Speaking to Latinos: To “Habla Espanol” or Not?*

The frequent use of Spanish by President Bush during his addresses to Latino audiences has received much media attention. While the practice of candidates trying out their fledging Spanish resonates well with a segment of Hispanics, this does not mean that the only way to reach them is exclusively through the use of the Spanish language.

As Table 12 demonstrates, a monolingual Spanish approach may miss large segments of the Hispanic population, especially among younger voters. English language ability differs among young and older Hispanics who speak Spanish at home. There is a 20-point difference between young Latinos (5 to 17 years of age) in their ability to speak English “very well” and older Latinos (18 to 64 years of age).

While large proportions of the Latino population are bilingual, what is often forgotten is the power of U.S. culture in Americanizing the Latino immigrant. In a national survey, 70 percent of Latino parents state that their children watch television in English, not Spanish.<sup>18</sup> There is also strong evidence that Latinos as a whole are bilingual in their media consumption. In fact, Hispanic TV-viewing habits can be segmented into three components: approximately 20 percent of the community is monolingual English viewers, 20 percent are monolingual Spanish viewers, and 60 percent watch television in both languages.

Roughly half of Hispanic voters said that the ability of a candidate to speak Spanish was a positive factor in their assessment of the candidate. Although this view does not appear to vary by ethnicity, low-income and first-generation Hispanics were the ones most likely to say that speaking Spanish was an important factor. While President Bush's positive impression gained from speaking Spanish to certain Hispanic voters should not be discounted, focusing exclusively on Spanish-language campaign ads, particularly television, would miss vital segments of the Hispanic electorate. A truly bilingual approach is needed to reach all segments of the Hispanic electorate (Figure 8).

### *Mobilizing Latinos: A Tale of Two Counties*

It is now conventional political wisdom that Gov. Pete Wilson's enthusiastic promotion of Proposition 187 (the anti-immigration initiative), while an effective short run strategy, had disastrous consequences for the Republican Party in California in the 1990s.<sup>19</sup> The issue polarized more than one million Latino

voters, who were credited with turning over the state legislature to Democrats and solidly placing the state in the Democratic column for the past two presidential elections.<sup>20</sup>

In Texas, the second largest Hispanic state, such dramatic changes did not occur. To appreciate the differences between the two states, one can examine two urban counties, Harris County in Houston, Texas, and Los Angeles County in California. As Table 13 illustrates, Latino voter registration in Harris County increased from 95,441 to over 170,000, or approximately 79 percent, between 1992 and 1998. However, turnout rates for Latinos in Harris County declined throughout this period. They dropped by almost 11 percent between the presidential elections of 1992 and 1996, and by the same amount between the off-year elections of 1994 and 1998.

In contrast, Los Angeles experienced gains in both Latino registration and voter turnout between 1994 and 2000. Table 14 shows the growth in registration and the growth in turnout among Latinos in the presidential and congressional year elections. Between 1994 and 1998, Latino voting increased by 49 percent. Similarly, the number of Latinos voting increased by 42 percent from 1996 to 2000. In both instances, actual voter turnout rates increased at the same time that the raw number of registered Latino voters increased.<sup>21</sup>

What accounts for the difference in voting turnout between the two counties? In Los Angeles County, three consecutive statewide initiatives polarizing and mobilizing the Latino community were on the ballot, Propositions 187 (anti-immigrant measure), 209 (anti-affirmative action) and 227 (anti-bilingual education). Meanwhile, organized labor initiated large-scale voter registration and get-out-the-vote drives. As a result, Latinos turned out in Los Angeles County in 2000 at nearly the same rate as voters overall, (62.9 percent Hispanic v. 65.3 percent overall.)

In Harris County, Latinos were not subjected to the same type of polarizing politics as were Latinos in California; organized labor did not engage in voter registration and GOTV to the same scale. The result? While voter registration went up in that Harris, voter turnout did not increase, and in fact, it actually declined. Barring polarizing electoral measures, such as the ones that occurred in California, what will mobilize the Hispanic electorate?

### *Latino Voter Registration and Turnout*

Voter mobilization by Latino groups, as opposed to non-ethnic voter drives, appears to be among the most effective means of getting out the Latino vote. A report by TRPI researchers indicates that Latinos who are encouraged to vote as a result of personal contacts by influential Latinos are much more likely to vote than those who are not contacted. Such voter mobilization campaigns, although expensive and time-consuming, have proven very effective.

Because such campaigns are labor intensive, however, their reach is too narrow. Table 15 indicates, for example, that fewer than 20 percent of Latino citizens were contacted in California and Florida. Citizens who are better educated and have higher incomes were most likely to be contacted, even though it is the poor and less educated who are least likely to vote. Well-designed mobilization campaigns targeting registered voters who are most unlikely to vote could have immediate and substantial results in increasing turnout.

A strategy focused on personal contact with unlikely voters runs counter to many current campaign practices that emphasize media outreach and telephone banks targeting the most likely voters. However, if the Latino vote is ever to realize its full potential, voter mobilization strategies must concentrate on native-born non-voters and newly naturalized citizens. This calls for a return to old-fashioned campaigning or “field work,” and the development of innovative ways to link recognized leaders to these potential voters. The AFL-CIO campaigns targeting newly naturalized and registered Latino voters in Los Angeles are one model to emulate.

While voter registration drives are essential, they are not sufficient. Once registered, these voters must be turned out.

Finally, we need to know more about what works. Without well-designed evaluations and benchmarking of mobilization campaigns in Latino communities, we cannot make the informed investments we need in order to maximize Latino turnout.<sup>22</sup>

## Conclusion

Three decades ago, the Latino vote was unknown at the national level. When it was referred to at the state level or local levels, it was often dismissingly stereotyped as the “sleeping giant.” Times have changed. Considering a variety of factors—nearly 5,000 Hispanic elected officials nationwide, an expected six million voters participating in the next presidential election, Latinos being the dominant minority in many states, and the strong political clout to swing statewide races in major states—the Latino political presence has undoubtedly arrived and is a political reality. To effectively reach and mobilize this community, it is necessary to have an in-depth understanding of the heterogeneity of Latino political perspectives as well as an understanding of the common issues of concern.

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## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> The terms “Hispanic” and “Latino” are used interchangeably here to refer to individuals tracing their ancestry to Spanish-speaking countries of the Western hemisphere.
- <sup>2</sup> “The United States Census 2000,” U.S. Department of Commerce, Washington, D.C., 2000.
- <sup>3</sup> Voter News Service, Exit Polls 2000.
- <sup>4</sup> Tomás Rivera Policy Institute, “Constructing the Los Angeles Area Hispanic Mosaic,” Claremont, CA., 1997.
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>6</sup> “The United States Census 2000,” U.S. Department of Commerce, Washington, D.C., 2000.
- <sup>7</sup> DeSipio, Louis, “Making Citizens or GoodCitizens? Naturalization as a Predictor of Organization and Electoral Behavior Among Latino Immigrants,” *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Science*, 18: 194-213. See also, Pachon, Harry, “Proposition 187 isn’t all that is Propelling Latinos to INS,” *The Sacramento Bee*, 1995.
- <sup>8</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, Immigration & Naturalization Service, Yearbooks 1990-1999, Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 2000.
- <sup>9</sup> Pachon, Harry and Louis DeSipio, *New Americans by Choice*, Westview Press, Boulder, CO., 1995.
- <sup>10</sup> Largely ignored by post-election analysts was the fact that most exit polls in 1992 indicate that Ross Perot gained nearly 12 percent of the Hispanic vote.
- <sup>11</sup> Moore, Joan and Harry Pachon, *Hispanics in the United States*, Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ., 1985.
- <sup>12</sup> Wolfinger, Raymond E. and Steven J. Rosenstone, *Who Votes?*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980.
- <sup>13</sup> Tomás Rivera Policy Institute, *Analysis of Los Angeles County: Registrar voting records*, 2002.
- <sup>14</sup> AFL-CIO, Latino Voters, unpublished survey conducted by Hart/Lake/Bendixen, July/August, 2001.
- <sup>15</sup> Lester, Will, “Dems see Hispanics as Key to House,” *Associated Press*, April 5, 2002. Washington, D.C., 2002.
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>17</sup> Barone, Michael with Richard Cohen, “The Almanac of American Politics,” *The National Journal*, Washington, D.C., 2002.
- <sup>18</sup> DeSipio, Louis, Banet-Weisser, Sarah, Dalton, Karen Escalante, and Federico Subermi-Veleg, *Talking Back to Television: Latinos Discuss How Television Portrays Them and the Quality of Programming Options*, Tomás Rivera Policy Institute, Claremont, CA., 1998.
- <sup>19</sup> Pantoja, Adrian D., Ricardo Ramirez and Gary M. Segura, “Citizens by Choice: Voters By Necessity: Patterns in Political Mobilization by Naturalized Latinos,” *Political Research Quarterly*, 54 (4): 751-770, 2001.
- <sup>20</sup> Segura, Gary, Pachon, Harry, and Dennis Falcon, “Dynamics of Latino Partisanship in California,” *Harvard Journal of Hispanic Policy*, v.10., 1997.
- <sup>21</sup> Garcia, F. Chris and R. O. de la Garza, *The Chicano Political Experience: Three Perspectives*, North Scituate: Duxbury Press, 1977.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid.

## Appendix

**Table 1**  
**Top 10 States with Latino Populations**

<b>State</b>	<b>State Population</b>	<b>Latino Population</b>	<b>Percentage of US Latino Population</b>	<b>Cumulative Percentage</b>
California	32,666,550	10,112,986	28.6%	28.6%
Texas	19,759,614	5,862,835	16.6%	45.3%
New York	18,175,301	2,624,928	7.4%	52.7%
Florida	14,915,980	2,243,441	6.4%	59.0%
Illinois	12,045,326	1,224,309	3.5%	62.5%
New Jersey	8,115,011	1,004,011	2.8%	65.4%
Arizona	4,668,631	1,033,822	2.9%	68.3%
New Mexico	1,736,931	700,289	2.0%	70.3%
Colorado	3,970,971	577,516	1.6%	71.9%
Massachusetts	6,147,132	377,016	1.1%	73.0%

Source: United States Census 2000

**Table 2**  
**Population Growth of Top 10 Counties with over 10,000 Latinos**

<b>County</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Latino Population in 2000</b>	<b>Numeric Change</b>	<b>Percent Change</b>	<b>Percent Latino</b>
Benton	AR	13,469	12,110	891.1%	8.8%
Forsyth	NC	19,577	17,475	831.4%	6.4%
Washington	AR	12,932	11,406	747.4%	8.2%
Durham	NC	17,039	14,985	729.6%	7.6%
Whitfield	GA	18,419	16,098	693.6%	22.1%
Gwinnett	GA	64,137	55,667	657.2%	10.9%
Mecklenberg	NC	44,871	38,178	570.4%	6.5%
Wake	NC	33,985	28,589	529.8%	5.4%
Hall	GA	27,242	22,684	529.8%	19.6%
Elkhart	IN	16,300	13,368	529.8%	8.9%

Source: TRPI analysis of 1990 and 2000 United States Census reports

**Table 3****Nationality of Latino Population, Top 10 Counties with over 10,000 Latinos**

<b>County</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Total Latino Population</b>	<b>Mexican</b>	<b>Puerto Rican</b>	<b>Central American</b>
Benton	AR	13,469	71.25%	1.66%	10.73%
Forsyth	NC	19,577	72.73%	4.72%	6.78%
Washington	AR	12,932	75.23%	1.13%	8.29%
Durham	NC	17,039	64.64%	4.43%	13.94%
Whitfield	GA	18,419	85.34%	1.35%	4.14%
Gwinnett	GA	64,137	56.15%	6.51%	9.51%
Mecklenberg	NC	44,871	54.77%	6.85%	11.85%
Wake	NC	33,985	63.12%	7.70%	8.34%
Hall	GA	27,242	83.79%	1.54%	4.08%
Elkhart	IN	16,300	81.39%	4.54%	3.62%

Source: TRPI analysis of United States Census data

**Table 4**  
**Foreign Born vs. Native Born**  
**Latino Population by State in 2000**

	<b>Total Latinos</b>	<b>Numbers of Foreign Born Latinos</b>	<b>Percentage of Foreign Born Latinos</b>	<b>Numbers of Native Born Latinos</b>	<b>Percentage of Native Born Latinos</b>
<b>United States</b>	35,300,000	15,471,000	44%	19,829,000	56%
<b>Florida</b>	2,682,715	1,920,066	72%	762,649	28%
<b>New York</b>	2,867,583	1,818,773	63%	1,048,810	37%
<b>New Jersey</b>	1,117,191	609,259	55%	507,932	45%
<b>Illinois</b>	1,530,262	691,051	45%	839,211	55%
<b>California</b>	10,966,556	4,689,596	43%	6,276,960	57%
<b>Arizona</b>	1,295,617	480,366	37%	815,251	63%
<b>Texas</b>	6,669,666	2,157,343	32%	4,512,323	68%
<b>Colorado</b>	735,601	203,643	28%	531,958	72%
<b>New Mexico</b>	765,386	97,867	13%	667,519	87%

Source: United States Census 2000

**Table 5**  
**Growth in Naturalization**  
**Persons from Selected Latin American Countries**  
**Nationalized in California and the United States**

<b>Year</b>	<b>California</b>	<b>United States</b>
<b>1990</b>	5,671	62,589
<b>1991</b>	15,629	70,222
<b>1992</b>	4,818	56,580
<b>1993</b>	8,264	87,875
<b>1994</b>	16,403	125,889
<b>1995</b>	44,121	174,542
<b>1996</b>	188,627	458,831
<b>1997</b>	89,993	244,455
<b>1998</b>	67,213	189,269
<b>1999</b>	132,560	329,916
<b>Total</b>	<b>573,299</b>	<b>1,800,168</b>

Source: INS Statistical yearbooks, 1990-1999

**Table 6**  
**Percentage of Hispanic Vote Needed**  
**for 1% Shift in Statewide Election 2000**

State	Total Votes Cast	Total Latino Votes Cast	Total Percentage of Latino Vote for 1% shift
Arizona	1,644,000	247,000	3.3%
California	11,489,000	1,597,000	3.6%
Colorado	1,633,000	158,000	5.2%
Florida	6,006,000	678,000	4.4%
Illinois	5,030,000	218,000	11.5%
New Jersey	3,374,000	179,000	9.4%
New Mexico	647,000	191,000	1.7%
New York	7,004,000	502,000	7.0%
Texas	7,005,000	1,300,000	2.7%

Source: TRPI analysis of United States Census data

**Table 7**  
**Latino Party Identification by Generation**

	Democrat	Republican	Independent
<b>G1</b>	34.2	11.4	31.8
<b>G2</b>	51.4	12	26.9
<b>G3+</b>	53.1	14.1	24.4

G1 Foreign Born Latinos

G2 Children of Immigrants

G3 Grandchildren and Beyond of Immigrants

Source: TRPI analysis of United States Census data

**Table 8**  
**Support for 2000 Presidential Candidates**

	Gore	Bush	Undecided
<b>Total</b>	55.5%	28.8%	15.7%
<b>California</b>	66.7%	16.4%	16.9%
<b>Illinois</b>	59.8%	21.5%	18.7%
<b>Texas</b>	54.5%	29.3%	16.2%
<b>New York</b>	70.1%	15.4%	14.5%
<b>Florida</b>	26.9%	61.0%	12.1%
<b>Mexican</b>	61.6%	21.7%	16.7%
<b>Puerto Rican</b>	64.1%	18.5%	17.3%
<b>Cuban</b>	19.7%	70.0%	10.3%
<b>Other</b>	56.5%	28.1%	15.4%

Source: Barreto et al., 2002

**Table 9**  
 Latino Political Views Vary

<b>Welfare</b>	Support Restrictions
<b>Crime &amp; Punishment</b>	Supportive
<b>Gay Rights</b>	Not Supportive
<b>Attitudes toward police</b>	Suspicious
<b>Immigrant rights</b>	Highly Supportive
<b>Immigration</b>	Ambivalent
<b>Abortion</b>	Ambivalent
<b>Bilingual Education</b>	Mixed
<b>Positive Government role in education</b>	Highly Supportive
<b>Positive Government role in job creation</b>	Highly Supportive
<b>Children’s issues</b>	Highly Supportive

Source: TRPI analysis of United States Census data

**Table 10**  
Issue Priority for the Latino Community in Selected States

<b>Issue</b>	<b>California</b>	<b>Illinois</b>	<b>Texas</b>	<b>New York</b>	<b>Florida</b>
<b>Education/Schools</b>	27.1%	19.5%	27.1%	20.7%	21.7%
<b>Race Relations/Discrimination</b>	10.8%	12.6%	8.2%	15.6%	14.1%
<b>Unemployment/Jobs</b>	8.6%	12.6%	15.8%	13.6%	9.5%
<b>Economy</b>	8.0%	7.8%	8.8%	6.3%	6.1%
<b>Immigration</b>	8.6%	5.7%	2.5%	5.4%	8.0%
<b>Crime</b>	7.2%	8.3%	5.1%	2.3%	4.0%
<b>Drugs</b>	3.0%	5.2%	3.7%	4.8%	2.4%
<b>Family Values</b>	1.4%	1.4%	2.8%	3.7%	2.4%
<b>Health Care</b>	1.4%	2.0%	1.7%	1.4%	1.5%
<b>Other</b>	17.7%	20.7%	19.5%	22.2%	22.3%

Source: TRPI analysis of United States Census data

**Table 11**  
Latino Self-Identification

<b>Working families</b>	46%
<b>Latinos or Hispanics</b>	43%
<b>Democrats</b>	32%
<b>Minorities</b>	22%
<b>Union members</b>	13%
<b>The elderly</b>	19%
<b>Soccer Moms</b>	18%
<b>The Christian right</b>	13%
<b>Conservatives</b>	16%
<b>Suburban families</b>	13%
<b>Republicans</b>	8%
<b>Gays and Lesbians</b>	4%
<b>Liberals</b>	1%
<b>Do Not Identify With Any</b>	11%

Source: TRPI analysis of United States Census data

**Table 12**  
English Fluency Among Spanish Speakers in the United States

		Ages 5-17	18-64	65 & over			Ages 5-17	18-64	65 & over
<b>Arizona</b>		236,999	642,519	48,778	<b>New Jersey</b>		202,283	699,474	46,597
	<b>Very well</b>	65.8%	52.7%	48.4%		<b>Very well</b>	72.3%	49.0%	36.3%
	<b>Well</b>	14.3%	14.7%	19.4%		<b>Well</b>	17.8%	19.8%	14.2%
	<b>Not well</b>	14.6%	16.4%	13.4%		<b>Not well</b>	8.0%	21.6%	23.8%
	<b>Not at all</b>	5.3%	16.2%	18.8%		<b>Not at all</b>	1.8%	9.6%	25.7%
<b>California</b>		2,152,084	5,278,067	419,572	<b>New Mexico</b>		94,142	320,832	52,933
	<b>Very well</b>	66.1%	44.0%	41.6%		<b>Very well</b>	74.4%	74.0%	52.0%
	<b>Well</b>	20.1%	18.9%	17.9%		<b>Well</b>	17.1%	13.3%	25.7%
	<b>Not well</b>	11.0%	22.4%	18.0%		<b>Not well</b>	6.4%	8.4%	12.1%
	<b>Not at all</b>	2.9%	14.8%	21.6%		<b>Not at all</b>	2.1%	4.3%	9.3%
<b>Colorado</b>		75,564	292,765	18,667	<b>New York</b>		545,325	1,655,296	160,171
	<b>Very well</b>	52.2%	49.5%	55.7%		<b>Very well</b>	71.1%	51.2%	35.4%
	<b>Well</b>	26.2%	17.7%	24.5%		<b>Well</b>	19.8%	19.5%	17.6%
	<b>Not well</b>	18.3%	19.2%	14.8%		<b>Not well</b>	7.2%	21.0%	25.8%
	<b>Not at all</b>	2.9%	13.6%	5.0%		<b>Not at all</b>	1.9%	8.2%	21.3%
<b>Florida</b>		443,769	1,597,324	264,670	<b>Texas</b>		1,269,235	3,555,993	345,893
	<b>Very well</b>	77.1%	54.8%	29.9%		<b>Very well</b>	62.7%	51.7%	37.8%
	<b>Well</b>	12.7%	17.2%	19.9%		<b>Well</b>	22.5%	17.6%	18.9%
	<b>Not well</b>	7.4%	18.8%	26.3%		<b>Not well</b>	12.3%	18.7%	18.5%
	<b>Not at all</b>	2.8%	9.2%	24.0%		<b>Not at all</b>	2.6%	11.95	24.7%
<b>Illinois</b>		319,103	850,592	46,640					
	<b>Very well</b>	66.4%	31.5%	41.9%					
	<b>Well</b>	21.0%	12.1%	19.1%					
	<b>Not well</b>	9.9%	7.2%	23.0%					
	<b>Not at all</b>	2.7%	1.8%	16.0%					

Source: TRPI analysis of United States Census data

**Table 13**  
**Latino Registration and Turnout in Harris County, 1992-1996**

<b>Presidential Elections</b>	<b>Latino Voters Registered</b>	<b>Latino Votes Cast</b>	<b>Latino Voter Turnout</b>
1992	95,441	55,412	58%
1996	151,202	71,516	47%
Change	+55,761	+16,104	-11%
<b>Congressional Elections</b>			
1994	108,121	37,484	35%
1998	170,548	41,077	24%
Change	+62,427	+3,593	-11%

Source: Tomás Rivera Policy Institute analysis of United States Census data

**Table 14**  
**Latino Registration and Turnout in Los Angeles County, 1994-2000**

<b>Presidential Elections</b>	<b>Latino Voters Registered</b>	<b>Latino Votes Cast</b>	<b>Latino Voter Turnout</b>
1996	759,350	429,083	56.5%
2000	972,520	611,362	62.9%
Change	+213,170	+182,269	+6.4%
<b>Congressional Elections</b>			
1994	600,127	241,364	40.2%
1998	841,442	358,826	42.6%
Change	+241,315	+117,462	+2.4%

Source: Tomás Rivera Policy Institute analysis of United States Census data

**Table 15**  
**Percent of Latino Voters Contacted by Organizations, by State**

State	Percent Contacted Voters
California	18%
Florida	19%
Texas	25%

Source: Tomás Rivera Policy Institute survey of 1200 Latino registered voters